

Note

This ebook contains the contents of the following print volumes:

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Ninth Edition
Volume C
1865–1914

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Ninth Edition
Volume D
1914–1945

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Ninth Edition
Volume E
Literature since 1945

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LITERATURE

NINTH EDITION • VOLUME 2

1865
TO THE PRESENT

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF

AMERICAN
LITERATURE



NINTH EDITION

VOLUME C: 1865-1914

VOLUME A
American Literature, Beginnings to 1820 • GUSTAFSON

VOLUME B
American Literature 1820–1865 • LEVINE

VOLUME C
American Literature 1865–1914 • ELLIOTT

VOLUME D
American Literature 1914–1945
LOEFFELHOLZ

VOLUME E
American Literature since 1945
HUNGERFORD

Michael A. Elliott

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
EMORY UNIVERSITY

Sandra M. Gustafson

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Amy Hungerford

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
AND DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
YALE UNIVERSITY

Mary Loeffelholz

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF
**AMERICAN
LITERATURE**



NINTH EDITION

Robert S. Levine, *General Editor*

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND
DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AND
DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR-TEACHER
University of Maryland, College Park

VOLUME C: 1865–1914



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Preface to the Ninth Edition

The Ninth Edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* is the first for me as General Editor; for the Eighth Edition, I served as Associate General Editor under longstanding General Editor Nina Baym. On the occasion of a new general editorship, we have undertaken one of the most extensive revisions in our long publishing history. Three new section editors have joined the team: Sandra M. Gustafson, Professor of English and Concurrent Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame, who succeeds Wayne Franklin and Philip Gura as editor of “American Literature, Beginnings to 1820”; Michael A. Elliott, Professor of English at Emory University, who succeeds Nina Baym, Robert S. Levine, and Jeanne Campbell Reesman as editor of “American Literature, 1865–1914”; and Amy Hungerford, Professor of English and American Studies at Yale University, who succeeds Jerome Klinkowitz and Patricia B. Wallace as editor of “American Literature since 1945.” These editors join Robert S. Levine, editor of “American Literature, 1820–1865,” and Mary Loeffelholz, editor of “American Literature, 1914–1945.” Each editor, new or continuing, is a well-known expert in the relevant field or period and has ultimate responsibility for his or her section of the anthology, but we have worked closely from first to last to rethink all aspects of this new edition. Volume introductions, author headnotes, thematic clusters, annotations, illustrations, and bibliographies have all been updated and revised. We have also added a number of new authors, selections, and thematic clusters. We are excited about the outcome of our collaboration and anticipate that, like the previous eight editions, this edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* will continue to lead the field.

From the anthology’s inception in 1979, the editors have had three main aims: first, to present a rich and substantial enough variety of works to enable teachers to build courses according to their own vision of American literary history (thus, teachers are offered more authors and more selections than they will probably use in any one course); second, to make the anthology self-sufficient by featuring many works in their entirety along with extensive selections for individual authors; third, to balance traditional interests with developing critical concerns in a way that allows for the complex, rigorous, and capacious study of American literary traditions. As early as 1979, we anthologized work by Anne Bradstreet, Mary Rowlandson, Sarah Kemble Knight, Phillis Wheatley, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Booker T. Washington, Charles W. Chesnutt, Edith Wharton,

W. E. B. Du Bois, and other writers who were not yet part of a standard canon. Yet we never shortchanged writers—such as Franklin, Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner—whose work many students expected to read in their American literature courses, and whom most teachers then and now would not think of doing without.

The so-called canon wars of the 1980s and 1990s usefully initiated a review of our understanding of American literature, a review that has enlarged the number and diversity of authors now recognized as contributors to the totality of American literature. The traditional writers look different in this expanded context, and they also appear different according to which of their works are selected. Teachers and students remain committed to the idea of the literary—that writers strive to produce artifacts that are both intellectually serious and formally skillful—but believe more than ever that writers should be understood in relation to their cultural and historical situations. We address the complex interrelationships between literature and history in the volume introductions, author headnotes, chronologies, and some of the footnotes. As in previous editions, we have worked with detailed suggestions from many teachers on how best to present the authors and selections. We have gained insights as well from the students who use the anthology. Thanks to questionnaires, face-to-face and phone discussions, letters, and email, we have been able to listen to those for whom this book is intended. For the Ninth Edition, we have drawn on the careful commentary of over 240 reviewers and reworked aspects of the anthology accordingly.

Our new materials continue the work of broadening the canon by representing thirteen new writers in depth, without sacrificing widely assigned writers, many of whose selections have been reconsidered, reselected, and expanded. Our aim is always to provide extensive enough selections to do the writers justice, including complete works wherever possible. Our Ninth Edition offers complete longer works, including Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and such new and recently added works as Margaret Fuller's *The Great Lawsuit*, Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, and August Wilson's *Fences*. Two complete works—Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*—are exclusive to *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Charles Brockden Brown, Louisa May Alcott, Upton Sinclair, and Junot Díaz are among the writers added to the prior edition, and to this edition we have introduced John Rollin Ridge, Constance Fenimore Woolson, George Saunders, and Natasha Tretheway, among others. We have also expanded and in some cases reconfigured such central figures as Franklin, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Twain, and Hemingway, offering new approaches in the headnotes, along with some new selections. In fact, the headnotes and, in many cases, selections for such frequently assigned authors as William Bradford, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Lydia Maria Child, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Kate Chopin, W. E. B. Du Bois, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and William

Faulkner have been revised, updated, and in some cases entirely rewritten in light of recent scholarship. The Ninth Edition further expands its selections of women writers and writers from diverse ethnic, racial, and regional backgrounds—always with attention to the critical acclaim that recognizes their contributions to the American literary record. New and recently added writers such as Samson Occom, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, John Rollin Ridge, and Sarah Winnemucca, along with the figures represented in “Voices from Native America,” enable teachers to bring early Native American writing and oratory into their syllabi, or should they prefer, to focus on these selections as a freestanding unit leading toward the moment after 1945 when Native writers fully entered the mainstream of literary activity.

We are pleased to continue our popular innovation of topical gatherings of short texts that illuminate the cultural, historical, intellectual, and literary concerns of their respective periods. Designed to be taught in a class period or two, or used as background, each of the sixteen clusters consists of brief, carefully excerpted primary and (in one case) secondary texts, about six to ten per cluster, and an introduction. Diverse voices—many new to the anthology—highlight a range of views current when writers of a particular time period were active, and thus allow students better to understand some of the large issues that were being debated at particular historical moments. For example, in “Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature,” texts by David Walker, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimké, Sojourner Truth, James M. Whitfield, and Martin R. Delany speak to the great paradox of pre-Civil War America: the contradictory rupture between the realities of slavery and the nation’s ideals of freedom.

The Ninth Edition strengthens this feature with eight new and revised clusters attuned to the requests of teachers. To help students address the controversy over race and aesthetics in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we have revised a cluster in Volume C that shows what some of the leading critics of the past few decades thought was at stake in reading and interpreting slavery and race in Twain’s canonical novel. New to Volume A is “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression,” which includes selections by Elizabeth Ashbridge, John Woolman, and John Marrant, while Volume B offers “Science and Technology in the Pre-Civil War Nation.” Volume C newly features “Becoming American in the Gilded Age,” and we continue to include the useful “Modernist Manifestos” in Volume D. We have added to the popular “Creative Nonfiction” in Volume E new selections by David Foster Wallace and Hunter S. Thompson, who join such writers as Jamaica Kincaid and Joan Didion.

The Ninth Edition features an expanded illustration program, both of the black-and-white images, 145 of which are placed throughout the volumes, and of the color plates so popular in the last two editions. In selecting color plates—from Elizabeth Graham’s embroidered map of Washington, D.C., at the start of the nineteenth century to Jeff Wall’s “After ‘Invisible Man’” at the beginning of the twenty-first—the editors aim to provide images relevant to literary works in the anthology while depicting arts and artifacts representative of each era. In addition, graphic works—segments from the colonial children’s classic *The New-England Primer* and from Art Spiegelman’s canonical graphic novel, *Maus*, and a facsimile page of Emily

Dickinson manuscript, along with the many new illustrations—open possibilities for teaching visual texts.

Period-by-Period Revisions

Volume A, *Beginnings to 1820*. Sandra M. Gustafson, the new editor of Volume A, has substantially revised the volume. Prior editions of Volume A were broken into two historical sections, with two introductions and a dividing line at the year 1700; Gustafson has dropped that artificial divide to tell a more coherent and fluid story (in her new introduction) about the variety of American literatures during this long period. The volume continues to feature narratives by early European explorers of the North American continent as they encountered and attempted to make sense of the diverse cultures they met, and as they sought to justify their aim of claiming the territory for Europeans. These are precisely the issues foregrounded by the revised cluster “First Encounters: Early European Accounts of Native America,” which gathers writings by Hernán Cortés, Samuel de Champlain, Robert Juet, and others, including the newly added Thomas Harriot. In addition to the standing material from *The Bay Psalm Book*, we include new material by Roger Williams; additional poems by Annis Boudinot Stockton; Abigail Adams’s famous letter urging her husband to “Remember the Ladies”; an additional selection from Olaudah Equiano on his post-emancipation travels; and Charles Brockden Brown’s “Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist” (the complete “prequel” to his first novel, *Wieland*). We continue to offer the complete texts of Rowlandson’s enormously influential *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (which remains one of the most compelling works on the emergence of an “American” self), Royall Tyler’s popular play *The Contrast*, and Hannah Foster’s novel *The Coquette*, which uses a real-life tragedy to meditate on the proper role of well-bred women in the new republic and testifies to the existence of a female audience for the popular novels of the period. New to this volume is Washington Irving, a writer who looks back to colonial history and forward to Jacksonian America. The inclusion of Irving in both Volumes A and B, with one key overlapping selection, points to continuities and changes between the two volumes.

Five new and revised thematic clusters of texts highlight themes central to Volume A. In addition to “First Encounters,” we have included “Native American Oral Literature,” “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression,” “Ethnographic and Naturalist Writings,” and “Native American Eloquence: Negotiation and Resistance.” “Native American Oral Literature” features creation stories, trickster tales, oratory, and poetry from a spectrum of traditions, while “Native American Eloquence” collects speeches and accounts by Canassatego and Native American women (both new to the volume), Pontiac, Chief Logan (as cited by Thomas Jefferson), and Tecumseh, which, as a group, illustrate the centuries-long pattern of initial peaceful contact between Native Americans and whites mutating into bitter and violent conflict. This cluster, which focuses on Native Americans’ points of view, complements “First Encounters,” which focuses on European colonizers’ points of view. The Native American presence in the volume is further expanded with increased representation of Samson Occom, which

includes an excerpt from his sermon at the execution of Moses Paul, and the inclusion of Sagoyewatha in “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression.” Strategically located between the Congregationalist Protestant (or late-Puritan) Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment figure Franklin, this cluster brings together works from the perspectives of the major religious groups of the early Americas, including Quakerism (poems by Francis Daniel Pastorius, selections from autographical narratives of Elizabeth Ashbridge and John Woolman), Roman Catholicism (poems by Sor Juana, two Jesuit Relations, with biographical accounts of Father Isaac Jogues and Kateri Tekakwitha), dissenting Protestantism (Marrant), Judaism (Rebecca Samuel), and indigenous beliefs (Sagoyewatha). The new cluster “Ethnographic and Naturalist Writings” includes writings by Sarah Kemble Knight and William Byrd, along with new selections by Alexander Hamilton, William Bartram, and Hendrick Aupaumut. With this cluster, the new cluster on science and technology in Volume B, and a number of new selections and revisions in Volumes C, D, and E, the Ninth Edition pays greater attention to the impact of science on American literary traditions.

Volume B, *American Literature, 1820–1865*. Under the editorship of Robert S. Levine, this volume over the past several editions has become more diverse. Included here are the complete texts of Emerson’s *Nature*, Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, Thoreau’s *Walden*, Douglass’s *Narrative*, Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, Melville’s *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*, Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*, and Margaret Fuller’s *The Great Lawsuit*. At the same time, aware of the important role of African American writers in the period, and the omnipresence of race and slavery as literary and political themes, we have recently added two major African American writers, William Wells Brown and Frances E. W. Harper, along with Douglass’s novella *The Heroic Slave*. Thoreau’s “Plea for Captain John Brown,” a generous selection from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the cluster “Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature” also help remind students of how central slavery was to the literary and political life of the nation during this period. “Native Americans: Resistance and Removal” gathers oratory and writings—by Native Americans such as Black Hawk and whites such as Ralph Waldo Emerson—protesting Andrew Jackson’s ruthless national policy of Indian removal. Newly added is a selection from *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*, by the Native American writer John Rollin Ridge. This potboiler of a novel, set in the new state of California, emerged from the debates that began during the Indian removal period. Through the figure of the legendary Mexican bandit Murieta, who fights back against white expansionists, Ridge responds to the violence encouraged by Jackson and subsequent white leaders as they laid claim to the continent. Political themes, far from diluting the literary imagination of American authors, served to inspire some of the most memorable writing of the pre-Civil War period.

Women writers recently added to Volume B include Lydia Huntley Sigourney, the Native American writer Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, and Louisa May Alcott. Recently added prose fiction includes chapters from Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, and Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, along with Poe’s “The Black Cat” and Hawthorne’s “Wakefield.”

For the first time in the print edition, we include Melville's "Hawthorne and His Mosses" as it appeared in the 1850 *Literary World*. Poetry by Emily Dickinson is now presented in the texts established by R. W. Franklin and includes a facsimile page from Fascicle 10. For this edition we have added several poems by Dickinson that were inspired by the Civil War. Other selections added to this edition include Fanny Fern's amusing sketch "Writing 'Compositions,'" the chapter in Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* on his resistance to the slave-breaker Covey, three poems by Melville ("Dupont's Round Fight," "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," and "Art"), and Whitman's "The Sleepers."

Perhaps the most significant addition to Volume B is the cluster "Science and Technology in the Pre-Civil War Nation," with selections by the canonical writers Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and Frederick Douglass, by the scientists Jacob Bigelow and Alexander Humboldt, and by the editor-writer Harriet Farley. The cluster calls attention to the strong interest in science and technology throughout this period and should provide a rich context for reconsidering works such as Thoreau's *Walden* and Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." In an effort to underscore the importance of science and technology to Poe and Hawthorne in particular, we have added two stories that directly address these topics: Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" and Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful" (which reads nicely in relation to his "The Birth-Mark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter"). Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson are among the many other authors in Volume B who had considerable interest in science.

Volume C, *American Literature, 1865–1914*. Newly edited by Michael A. Elliott, the volume includes expanded selections of key works, as well as new ones that illustrate how many of the struggles of this period prefigure our own. In addition to complete longer works such as Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chopin's *The Awakening*, James's *Daisy Miller*, and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the Ninth Edition now includes the complete text of *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, a highly influential novella of immigrant life that depicts the pressures facing newly arrived Jews in the nation's largest metropolis. Also new is a substantial selection from Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a masterpiece of literary regionalism that portrays a remote seaside community facing change.

Americans are still reflecting on the legacy of the Civil War, and we have added two works approaching that subject from different angles. Constance Fenimore Woolson's "Rodman the Keeper" tells the story of a Union veteran who maintains a cemetery in the South. In "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," Mark Twain reflects with wit and insight on his own brief experience in the war. In the Eighth Edition, we introduced a section on the critical controversy surrounding race and the conclusion of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. That section remains as important as ever, and new additions incorporate a recent debate about the value of an expurgated edition of the novel.

We have substantially revised clusters designed to give students a sense of the cultural context of the period. New selections in "Realism and Naturalism" demonstrate what was at stake in the debate over realism, among

them a feminist response from Charlotte Perkins Gilman. “Becoming American in the Gilded Age,” a new cluster, introduces students to writing about wealth and citizenship at a time when the nation was undergoing transformation. Selections from one of Horatio Alger’s popular novels of economic uplift, Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth,” and Charles W. Chesnutt’s “The Future American” together reveal how questions about the composition of the nation both influenced the literature of this period and prefigured contemporary debates on immigration, cultural diversity, and the concentration of wealth.

The turn of the twentieth century was a time of immense literary diversity. “Voices from Native America” brings together a variety of expressive forms—oratory, memoir, ethnography—through which Native Americans sought to represent themselves. It includes new selections by Francis LaFlesche, Zitkala-Ša, and Chief Joseph. For the first time, we include the complete text of José Martí’s “Our America,” in a new translation by Martí biographer Alfred J. López. By instructor request, we have added fiction and nonfiction by African American authors: Charles W. Chesnutt’s “Po’ Sandy,” Pauline Hopkins’s “Talma Gordon,” and expanded selections from W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* and James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*.

Volume D, *American Literature 1914–1945*. Edited by Mary Loeffelholz, Volume D offers a number of complete longer works—Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (exclusive to the Norton Anthology), William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, and Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*. To these we have added Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, which replaces *Quicksand*, and Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust*. We added *Passing* in response to numerous requests from instructors and students who regard it as one of the most compelling treatments of racial passing in American literature. The novel also offers rich descriptions of the social and racial geographies of Chicago and New York City. West’s darkly comic *The Day of the Locust* similarly offers rich descriptions of the social and racial geography of Los Angeles. West’s novel can at times seem bleak and not “politically correct,” but in many ways it is the first great American novel about the film industry, and it also has much to say about the growth of California in the early decades of the twentieth century. New selections by Zora Neale Hurston (“Sweat”) and John Steinbeck (“The Chrysanthemums”) further contribute to the volume’s exploration of issues connected with racial and social geographies.

Selections by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, and Langston Hughes encourage students and teachers to contemplate the interrelation of modernist aesthetics with ethnic, regional, and popular writing. In “Modernist Manifestos,” F. T. Marinetti, Mina Loy, Ezra Pound, Willa Cather, William Carlos Williams, and Langston Hughes show how the manifesto as a form exerted a powerful influence on international modernism in all the arts. Another illuminating cluster addresses central events of the modern period. In “World War I and Its Aftermath,” writings by Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and others explore sharply divided views on the U.S. role in World War I, as well as the radicalizing effect of modern warfare—with 365,000 American casualties—on contemporary writing. We have added to this edition a chapter from Hemingway’s

first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, which speaks to the impact of the war on sexuality and gender. Other recent and new additions to Volume D include Faulkner's popular "A Rose for Emily," Katherine Anne Porter's novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Gertrude Stein's "Objects," Marianne Moore's ambitious longer poem "Marriage," poems by Edgar Lee Masters and Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Jean Toomer's "Blood Burning Moon."

Volume E, *American Literature, 1945 to the Present*. Amy Hungerford, the new editor of Volume E, has revised the volume to present a wider range of writing in poetry, prose, drama, and nonfiction. As before, the volume offers the complete texts of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (exclusive to this anthology), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Sam Shepard's *True West*, August Wilson's *Fences*, David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and Louise Glück's long poem *October*. A selection from Art Spiegelman's prize-winning *Maus* opens possibilities for teaching the graphic novel. We also include teachable stand-alone segments from influential novels by Saul Bellow (*The Adventures of Augie March*) and Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*), and, new to this edition, Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*) and Don DeLillo (*White Noise*). The selection from one of DeLillo's most celebrated novels tells what feels like a contemporary story about a nontraditional family navigating an environmental disaster in a climate saturated by mass media. Three newly added stories—Patricia Highsmith's "The Quest for *Blank Claveringi*," Philip K. Dick's "Precious Artifact," and George Saunders's "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline"—reveal the impact of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and (especially in the case of Saunders) mass media on literary fiction. Also appearing for the first time are Edward P. Jones and Lydia Davis, contemporary masters of the short story, who join such short fiction writers as Ann Beattie and Junot Díaz. Recognized literary figures in all genres, ranging from Robert Penn Warren and Elizabeth Bishop to Leslie Marmon Silko and Toni Morrison, continue to be richly represented. In response to instructors' requests, we now include Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues."

One of the most distinctive features of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature is a rich vein of African American poetry. This edition adds two contemporary poets from this living tradition: Natasha Trethewey and Tracy K. Smith. Trethewey's selections include personal and historical elegies; Smith draws on cultural materials as diverse as David Bowie's music and the history of the Hubble Space Telescope. These writers join African American poets whose work has long helped define the anthology—Rita Dove, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Audre Lorde, and others.

This edition gives even greater exposure to literary and social experimentation during the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. The work of two avant-garde playwrights joins "Postmodern Manifestos" (which pairs nicely with "Modernist Manifestos" in Volume D). Introduced to the anthology through their short, challenging pieces, Charles Ludlam and Richard Foreman cast the mechanics of performance in a new light. Reading their thought pieces in relation to the volume's complete plays helps raise new questions about how the seemingly more traditional dramatic works engage structures of time, plot, feeling, and spectatorship. To our popular cluster "Creative Nonfiction"

we have added a new selection by Joan Didion, from “Slouching Towards Bethlehem,” which showcases her revolutionary style of journalism as she comments on experiments with public performance and communal living during the 1960s. A new selection from David Foster Wallace in the same cluster pushes reportage on the Maine Lobster Festival into philosophical inquiry: how can we fairly assess the pain of other creatures? This edition also introduces poet Frank Bidart through his most famous work—*Ellen West*—in which the poet uses experimental forms of verse he pioneered during the 1970s to speak in the voice of a woman battling anorexia. Standing authors in the anthology, notably John Ashbery and Amiri Baraka, fill out the volume’s survey of radical change in the forms, and social uses, of literary art.

We are delighted to offer this revised Ninth Edition to teachers and students, and we welcome your comments.

Additional Resources from the Publisher

The Ninth Edition retains the paperback splits format, popular for its flexibility and portability. This format accommodates the many instructors who use the anthology in a two-semester survey, but allows for mixing and matching the five volumes in a variety of courses organized by period or topic, at levels from introductory to advanced. We are also pleased to offer the Ninth Edition in an ebook format. The Digital Anthologies include all the content of the print volumes, with print-corresponding page and line numbers for seamless integration into the print-digital mixed classroom. Annotations are accessible with a click or a tap, encouraging students to use them with minimal interruption to their reading of the text. The e-reading platform facilitates active reading with a powerful annotation tool and allows students to do a full-text search of the anthology and read online or off. The Digital Editions can be accessed from any computer or device with an Internet browser and are available to students at a fraction of the print price at digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9pre1865 and digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9post1865. For exam copy access to the Digital Editions and for information on making the Digital Editions available through the campus bookstore or packaging the Digital Editions with the print anthology, instructors should contact their Norton representative.

To give instructors even more flexibility, Norton is making available the full list of 254 Norton Critical Editions. A Norton Critical Edition can be included for free with either package (Volumes A and B; Volumes C, D, E) or any individual split volume. Each Norton Critical Edition gives students an authoritative, carefully annotated text accompanied by rich contextual and critical materials prepared by an expert in the subject. The publisher also offers the much-praised guide *Writing about American Literature*, by Karen Gocsik (University of California—San Diego) and Coleman Hutchison (University of Texas—Austin), free with either package or any individual split volume.

In addition to the Digital Editions, for students using *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, the publisher provides a wealth of free resources at digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9pre1865 and digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9post1865. There students will find more than seventy reading-comprehension quizzes on the period introductions and widely taught works

with extensive feedback that points them back to the text. Ideal for self-study or homework assignments, Norton's sophisticated quizzing engine allows instructors to track student results and improvement. For over thirty works in the anthology, the sites also offer Close Reading Workshops that walk students step-by-step through analysis of a literary work. Each workshop prompts students to read, reread, consider contexts, and answer questions along the way, making these perfect assignments to build close-reading skills.

The publisher also provides extensive instructor-support materials. New to the Ninth Edition is an online Interactive Instructor's Guide at iig.wwnorton.com/americanlit9/full. Invaluable for course preparation, this resource provides hundreds of teaching notes, discussion questions, and suggested resources from the much-praised *Teaching with The Norton Anthology of American Literature: A Guide for Instructors* by Edward Whitley (Lehigh University). Also at this searchable and sortable site are quizzes, images, and lecture PowerPoints for each introduction, topic cluster, and twenty-five widely taught works. A PDF of *Teaching with NAAL* is available for download at wnorton.com/instructors.

Finally, Norton Coursepacks bring high-quality digital media into a new or existing online course. The coursepack includes all the reading comprehension quizzes (customizable within the coursepack), the Writing about Literature video series, a bank of essay and exam questions, bulleted summaries of the period introductions, and "Making Connections" discussion or essay prompts to encourage students to draw connections across the anthology's authors and works. Coursepacks are available in a variety of formats, including Blackboard, Canvas, Desire2Learn, and Moodle, at no cost to instructors or students.

Editorial Procedures

As in past editions, editorial features—period introductions, headnotes, annotations, and bibliographies—are designed to be concise yet full and to give students necessary information without imposing a single interpretation. The editors have updated all apparatus in response to new scholarship: period introductions have been entirely or substantially rewritten, as have many headnotes. All selected bibliographies and each period's general-resources bibliographies, categorized by Reference Works, Histories, and Literary Criticism, have been thoroughly updated. The Ninth Edition retains three editorial features that help students place their reading in historical and cultural context—a Texts/Contexts timeline following each period introduction, a map on the front endpaper of each volume, and a chronological chart, on the back endpaper, showing the lifespans of many of the writers anthologized.

Whenever possible, our policy has been to reprint texts as they appeared in their historical moment. There is one exception: we have modernized most spellings and (very sparingly) the punctuation in Volume A on the principle that archaic spellings and typography pose unnecessary problems for beginning students. We have used square brackets to indicate titles supplied by the editors for the convenience of students. Whenever a portion of a text has been omitted, we have indicated that omission with three asterisks.

If the omitted portion is important for following the plot or argument, we give a brief summary within the text or in a footnote. After each work, we cite the date of first publication on the right; in some instances, the latter is followed by the date of a revised edition for which the author was responsible. When the date of composition is known and differs from the date of publication, we cite it on the left.

The editors have benefited from commentary offered by hundreds of teachers throughout the country. Those teachers who prepared detailed critiques, or who offered special help in preparing texts, are listed under Acknowledgments, on a separate page. We also thank the many people at Norton who contributed to the Ninth Edition: Julia Reidhead, who supervised the Ninth Edition; Marian Johnson, managing editor, college; Carly Fraser Doria, media editor; Kurt Wildermuth, Michael Fleming, Harry Haskell, Candace Levy, manuscript editors; Rachel Taylor and Ava Bramson, assistant editors; Sean Mintus, production manager; Cat Abelman, photo editor; Julie Tesser, photo researcher; Debra Morton Hoyt, art director; Tiani Kennedy, cover designer; Megan Jackson Schindel, permissions manager; and Margaret Gorenstein, who cleared permissions. We also wish to acknowledge our debt to the late George P. Brockway, former president and chairman at Norton, who invented this anthology, and to the late M. H. Abrams, Norton's advisor on English texts. All have helped us create an anthology that, more than ever, testifies to the continuing richness of American literary traditions.

ROBERT S. LEVINE, General Editor

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THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF

AMERICAN
LITERATURE



NINTH EDITION

VOLUME C: 1865-1914





American Literature

1865–1914

THE GILDED AGE

In 1873, Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner published *The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-day*. The novel, Twain's first, portrays the United States as a nation consumed by greed and corruption, a land of get-rich-quick schemes, rampant speculation, and bribery. Twain and Warner filled their pages with Americans—from country villagers to big-city dwellers—who were caught up in the fantasy of making an easy fortune, willing to sacrifice their scruples for the sake of material success. The book revealed an age that too easily mistook gilding for gold.

Commercially and critically, *The Gilded Age* enjoyed only modest success. Some readers were put off by the “pungent” satire; others thought the book was “confused and inartistic.” One reviewer compared the novel to “a salad dressing badly mixed.” But Twain and Warner’s contemporaries agreed that *The Gilded Age* had accurately captured something important, if unsettling, about the time in which they lived, and the book shaped the way that we think about this period of American life. Even today, many historians follow Twain and Warner in referring to the late nineteenth century in America as “the Gilded Age.”

Just as important, Twain and Warner’s novel reveals significant trends that were emerging in the literature of the United States in the decades following the Civil War. Rather than being concerned with introspection or the perfection of literary forms, American literature in the late nineteenth century privileged the description and documentation of a rapidly changing society—a nation undergoing tremendous changes in terms of the composition of its population, the structure of its economy, and the customs of its people. American writers scrutinized the world around them, and their observations on the page were frequently accompanied by social commentary and sometimes, as in the case of Twain, comic wit. Instead of the romantic idealism of

Children Sleeping in Mulberry Street, 1890, Jacob Riis. For more information about this image, see the color insert in this volume.

antebellum authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Gilded Age America fostered a more measured and pragmatic way of looking at the world. The role of literature, in the words of Twain's contemporary Ambrose Bierce, was to "cultivate a taste for the distasteful," to "endeavor to see things as they are, not as they ought to be."

Labels for literary and cultural periods offer a convenient shorthand for characterizing the complicated reality of any cultural moment. We use them, usually with the benefit of hindsight, to reduce the chaos of the past to some kind of narrative order. For most of the twentieth century, literary histories of the Gilded Age celebrated American authors for their willingness to present a series of increasingly distasteful truths, particularly through novels depicting the excesses and foibles of the urban environments where new fortunes were being won and lost. Mark Twain, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton, and Theodore Dreiser—all authors included in this volume—were recognized as writers who advanced an aesthetic of "realism." The editor and author William Dean Howells was identified as the leading proponent of this movement, and literary historians carefully analyzed his advocacy in the pages of magazines like the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*.

During the last three decades, scholars of American literature have been concerned that this period in American literature has been too narrowly defined. They have noted that how one defines what is "real" depends on where one sits in society—and that the authors named above were largely located in the nation's urban centers, where they focused primarily on the lives of native-born whites. Scholars have also observed that editors like Howells were in fact interested in cultivating a wider variety of perspectives, including authors from regions across the United States, immigrant writers, and African American authors. If one of the roles of literature is to "see things as they are," then our definition of literature could also expand beyond fiction and poetry to include other forms of writing—such as autobiography, sketches, and folk tales—that proliferated during this period. This volume—like every other volume of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*—employs this broader definition of literature. In addition to fiction and poetry, the texts here include oratory, social commentary, and even a few works that were originally published in languages other than English.

Literature, though, does not merely show how things are. It amuses, provokes, cajoles, and inspires. Twain was one of the fiercest critics of his time, but he was also one of its finest entertainers. His writing not only reflected the world that surrounded him, but it also played a significant role in shaping how his readers (including us) understand that world. The realism that flourished between the Civil War and World War I raises as many questions about the purpose of literature as it answers. How should literature respond to the social problems of its time? How can language capture what is real? Who gets to decide what counts as realism and what counts as fantasy? How can literature help us to understand competing perspectives on reality?

These questions remain as pertinent in our time as they were in Twain's. Many of the changes sweeping through Twain's world seem to foreshadow the struggles of our own time. The period encompassing the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth witnessed an influx of immigrants to America, questions about racial equality and racial violence, anxiety about shifting gender roles, and concerns about the accumulation and concentration of wealth. The distance between the late nineteenth century and the present is substantial and the differences between that period and ours are significant, but there are good reasons that some have called the early twenty-first century a "second Gilded Age."

RECONSTRUCTING AMERICA

The Civil War transformed the lives of the four million African Americans who obtained their freedom from slavery, but its costs were staggering. The combined death toll from the Union and Confederate armies equaled more than 620,000 soldiers—or about 2 percent of the total U.S. population. Historians have offered a conservative estimate of an additional 50,000 civilian casualties, mostly in areas that declared secession from the Union. Of those who survived battle, hundreds of thousands sustained injuries, and the fighting obliterated fields, factories, and homes in the war's path. In the face of so much destruction and suffering, the rebuilding of the United States required more than simply repairing railroads and clearing away the debris of war. The reconstruction of America also required a reimagining of what it meant to be an American.

In their quest to rebuild the United States, Americans in the post-Civil War era looked in a variety of directions for the resources needed for renewal: abroad, for immigrant populations that would provide the labor necessary for economic growth; to the west, where land, minerals, and other natural resources seemed to be abundant; and to the south, where the destruction left by the war created opportunities for entrepreneurial investors. Finally, by the turn of the twentieth century, Americans were looking to foreign lands in a new way, as the United States sought to claim its place on the world stage as an imperial power. What united these disparate energies was a drive for material prosperity—an unquestioned belief in economic progress. Signs of this creed were visible in the New York mansions constructed on Fifth Avenue; in the thrumming activity of the stockyards and market exchanges of Chicago; and in the new forms of leisure activities—amusement parks, dance halls, nickleodeons—that catered to working-class people who found they had some extra time and money to spend on pleasure.

But that prosperity came at a price. Though wages for blue- and white-collar workers rose during the late nineteenth century, the gains for laborers were far smaller than the fortunes being made and lost by the industrial capitalists who seemed to control a larger and larger share of the American economy every year. The *laissez-faire* capitalism that generated such spectacular opportunities was also fraught with risk—and the nation endured the consequences of a series of financial panics and market crashes. Though the Homestead Act of 1862 promised free or cheap acreage to every individual or family who would settle and “improve” land according to a set formula, much of the available land was donated to railroads to encourage their growth. The expansion of the railroad network was critical to the larger economic development of the United States, yet it meant that farmers found themselves at the mercy of the large corporations that transported their goods—an economic order that the writer Frank Norris characterized as a giant “octopus” that wielded its power across the land. In the end, large-scale farming took over from the family farm, increasing agricultural yields but forcing many farmers to join the swelling populations of American cities.

The rapid urbanization of the United States in the late nineteenth century permanently changed the cultural landscape of the nation. Between 1865 and the turn of the twentieth century, New York grew from a population of 500,000 to nearly 3.5 million. Chicago, with a population of only 29,000 in 1850, had more than 2 million inhabitants by 1910. Yet Upton Sinclair titled his great novel of Chicago life *The Jungle* (1906) for good reason. Urban workers often faced brutal, even dangerous, conditions, and the late nineteenth century witnessed the rise of industrial labor movements. Americans were shocked when strikes turned violent in cities such as Pittsburgh and Chicago, though ultimately neither blue-collar laborers nor small farmers were fully successful in opposing the forces of capital. Until the regulations



Golden Spike Ceremony. Joining the tracks for the first transcontinental railroad, Promontory, Utah Territory, 1869.

of the early twentieth century, legislators and other elected officials believed that the welfare of the nation required that the forces of capitalism remain unchecked. Kickbacks, bribes, and other forms of corruption further ensured that corporate and industrial interests were well-represented by politicians.

The growth of industry and the urbanization of the United States were fueled by unprecedented levels of immigration. In 1870, the U.S. population was 38.5 million; by 1910, 92 million; by 1920, 123 million. A large percentage of this increase came from the arrival of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe: Russia, Poland, Italy, and the Balkan nations. As much as these new Americans were crucial to the prosperity of the nation, they were also a source of anxiety, and the question of what it means to acquire an American identity is at the center of the final section of this volume, “Becoming American in the Gilded Age.” Throughout this period, native-born Americans, particularly whites, worried that the surge of immigrants would change the racial and religious character of the nation. From a very different perspective, immigrant writers like Abraham Cahan—a Jew fleeing the oppression of his native Belarus—told stories about newcomers to America grappling with the demands of a new language and new customs, including in his novel *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), reprinted in full in this volume. After the turn of the twentieth century, Americans found a new metaphor to describe the experience of immigrants. The hero of Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting-Pot*—first staged in the United States in 1909—proclaims: “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming!”

Not everyone, of course, wanted to melt or reform. For American Indians living in the western half of the continent, the expansion of the United States threatened their political and cultural autonomy. From the time of the earliest treaties with the United States, Native nations had agreed to cede large tracts of land with some territory specifically “reserved” for themselves. What we currently think of as Indian reservations came about as a result of President Ulysses S. Grant’s policies of the late 1860s, which sought—and mostly forced—the agreement of various Native



Ellis Island. Staff interviewing new immigrants, c. 1910. From 1892 to 1954, New York's Ellis Island was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States.

nations to limit themselves to lands designated by the federal government. In the 1880s, an organization of eastern philanthropists calling itself “Friends of the Indian” began to implement an agenda for assimilating Native Americans into the white mainstream. This organization meant well, but its methods inevitably devalued Native ways of life in favor of white schooling, white patterns of town settlement and agriculture, and above all white religion. Native writers such as Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Sioux), Francis LaFlesche (Omaha), and John Milton Oskison (Cherokee)—all in this volume—wrote about the effects of such efforts on their people. At the same time that government and missionary boarding schools were attempting to strip American Indians of their tribal cultures, the government was working to separate them from their land. In 1887, the U.S. Congress approved the Dawes Severalty Act, which set in motion a process for dissolving the communal land holdings of tribal reservations and assigning smaller parcels of land to individual Indians. The Dawes Act fragmented the collectively held tribal lands and reduced the total Native land base by some ninety million acres before the policy was abandoned in 1934.

For most white Americans, the melting pot also excluded African Americans. Of all the social conflicts that animate the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, none matches the force or complexity of the continued subjugation of black Americans during this period. After the surrender of the Confederacy, U.S. federal troops occupied its former states and attempted to make good on the promise of equality. Twelve years later, in 1877, that promise was abandoned as members of Congress worked out a deal that would break a deadlocked presidential election. In exchange for sending Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, to the White House, members of his party agreed that the federal government would withdraw soldiers from the South and appropriate funds for railroads and other infrastructure needs there. In the years that followed, this political compromise would give way to a broader cultural consensus among white Americans. Reconciliation between North and South became of paramount importance, and white Americans would avoid reopening sectional wounds by ignoring the growing political and economic

disempowerment of African Americans in the former states of the Confederacy. In spite of the genuine progress that had occurred since the Civil War, African Americans often found themselves returning to the questions that had underlain that terrible conflict. Speaking on “The Race Problem in America” at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893, the famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass faced down a crowd of hecklers. “Men talk of the Negro problem,” he declaimed. “There is no Negro problem. The problem is whether the American people have honesty enough, loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough to live up to their own Constitution.”

THE LITERARY MARKETPLACE

Douglass’s words remind us that for all that was new about post–Civil War America, there were also substantial continuities with what had come before. Writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Walt Whitman remained active and influential figures into the 1880s and the 1890s. Emily Dickinson’s most productive years as a poet occurred during the Civil War, but she would not become widely known as a poet until the 1890s, when her verses were published in heavily edited versions. Herman Melville published three books of poetry in the 1870s and 1880s, and then composed the masterful novella *Billy Budd*, which remained unpublished until long after his death in 1891.

In spite of the influence of such writers in the years following the Civil War, many American writers of this era began to understand themselves as belonging to a distinct generation. Indeed, the late nineteenth century was when scholars and critics began dividing the literature of the United States into distinct historical periods, seeking to create a coherent history of American writing. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the publication of several influential anthologies of American literature—and even the first college courses on the subject. By that time, the realm of literature—of literary writing and reading—had undergone substantial changes. The post–Civil War decades saw the United States create and import many features of the literary marketplace that we now take for granted: the standardization and proliferation of book reviewing; the circulation of best-seller lists; the growth, simultaneously, of several classes of readers, including well-educated white-collar readers, middle-class readers who attended book clubs, and increasingly literate working classes who might encounter literature through newspapers or dime novels. The commercial realm governing both author and text changed in significant ways, most crucially with the ratification of the International Copyright Act of 1891, a law supported by literary figures such as Mark Twain and William Dean Howells. The act extended copyright protection to foreign writers in the United States and enabled American authors to receive the same protection abroad.

During this period, the center of the growing publishing industry migrated from New England to New York, and commercial publishing became a more professional and specialized enterprise. As the American reading public grew, publishing houses increasingly focused on different segments of the literary marketplace and devised new methods to excite publicity and increase sales. The turn of the twentieth century fostered the rise of literary celebrity in the United States, most obviously epitomized by Mark Twain. Like later authors such as Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein, Twain became a public figure whose actions and words were reported regularly in newspapers and in the press, and he was arguably the most recognizable American in the world for several decades.

The development of the railroads and the growth of urban markets both contributed to the development of mass cultural expression in the post–Civil War United States. Readers of literature could purchase new works by subscribing to them, as

one might subscribe to a magazine, or find them in the increasing number of lending libraries—or they might encounter poems, short stories, and serialized novels in periodicals. Middle- and professional-class readers were the target audience of magazines such as the *Atlantic*, *Century*, and *Harper's*—where they could find writers such as Henry James, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Sarah Orne Jewett. In San Francisco, the *Overland Monthly* emerged as the leading western literary periodical with a regional focus; it published Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, Sui Sin Far, and Mark Twain, among others. Abraham Cahan founded the Yiddish newspaper the *Jewish Daily Forward* in 1897, and Pauline E. Hopkins serialized her sensational novels in the *Colored American Magazine*, founded in 1900. As these examples suggest, new forms of cultural expression did not translate into a single, unified reading public. For white nativists—who were worried about the increasing number of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, as well as the influence of African Americans and Asian Americans—the visible diversity of American literature exacerbated their fears about the future of their country.

FORMS OF REALISM

Nowhere was the anxiety about the state of American literature and its relationship to the American populace more on display than in the debates about literary realism that transpired in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. *Realism* was (and is) a slippery term, one that could be applied to a variety of literary projects; most commonly, it was used to refer to literary fiction that was rooted in the observation and documentation of the details of everyday life. American realists saw themselves as being influenced by the development of realist fiction in Britain and continental Europe; they looked to writers as diverse as George Eliot (England), Ivan Turgenev (Russia), and Henrik Ibsen (Norway). However, the author and editor William Dean Howells contended that literary realism had a particular function in the democratic society of the United States. Howells held that by documenting the speech and manners of a wide variety of people—representing a diversity of social classes—literary realism could foster a shared democratic culture. “Democracy in literature . . . wishes to know and to tell the truth,” he wrote. At a time when American society seemed on the verge of fracturing into divisions of class, race, and ethnicity, literature could help cultivate empathetic bonds that would hold it together. Howells continued, “Men are more alike than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity.”

A section of this volume presents several key arguments about realism and how it might be defined, including an example of the substantial criticism that Howells's vision faced. Some critics believed that realism abandoned the moral purpose of art in favor of the vulgar and commonplace; others believed that realist fiction relied too much on dull observation instead of dramatic storytelling. In spite of this opposition, Howells's ideas set the agenda for the American literary establishment in his time. Indeed, this volume is filled with writers that Howells encouraged, published, or reviewed favorably during his career. He was an early champion of his contemporaries Henry James and Mark Twain—maintaining close ties with both writers for decades—and later promoted younger writers such as Stephen Crane, Abraham Cahan, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Charles Chesnutt (all represented in this anthology). These writers, he believed, would usher in an age in which the United States could stand on the world stage as an equal to other nations as a contributor to world letters.

The interest in forms of literary realism was especially welcoming of regional writing from throughout the United States. On a practical level, regional writing

flourished with the proliferation of mass magazines, for which short stories and sketches were ideal, and which catered to urban audiences with an interest in learning about distant peoples and their cultures. By the end of the nineteenth century, virtually every region of the country had one or more “local colorists” dedicated to capturing its natural, social, and linguistic features. These works, such as Joel Chandler Harris’s plantation tales, could be suffused with nostalgia. In other cases, such as in the writing of Constance Fenimore Woolson and Charles Chesnutt about the South, or the Maine fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett, regional writers portrayed the stresses and complexities of particular locales under the pressure of tremendous change. Hamlin Garland, a visible advocate of regional writing, depicted midwestern farmers coming to terms with harsh economic truths, and Mary Wilkins Freeman explored the effects of tradition on the lives of New England women. The appetite for regional writing played a large role in launching the careers of writers from the American West. First published in 1865, Mark Twain’s tall tale from the California frontier, “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” remained his best known work for many years, and Bret Harte became a national figure in 1868 with “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” a story that explores and exploits colorful myths of the West.

Literary realism and regionalism also influenced the way that writers portrayed the lives of racial and ethnic “others”—nonwhites seen as different from the majority of American readers. Both white and African American writers, for instance, depicted black characters as speaking in a vernacular that was distinct from the speech of their white characters, and they often took advantage of white interest in African American folk beliefs. Joel Chandler Harris’s “Wonderful Tar Baby Story” (1881), told by Uncle Remus, was immensely popular, and the superstitions voiced by Jim in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) contributed to its success. Charles Chesnutt’s conjure tales offered a new take on the practice of presenting African American traditions to white readers, one that allows the reader to see an African American storyteller as much less naïve in his engagement with white audiences. The interest in vernacular speech extended to poetry as well, as Paul Laurence Dunbar manipulated the rhythms of African American speech into some of the best-known verse of his time.

In their representations of African Americans, these authors sought to depict ways of speaking that were notably different in vocabulary and pronunciation from the English spoken by their readers. To capture that difference, they represented African American voices in the form of a *dialect*—a variation of a language that is particular to a group or region. For writers, putting dialect on the page involved changing the spelling and punctuation of characters’ dialogue so that it purported to match the spoken patterns of a particular race, class, or ethnicity. This practice of writing dialogue in the form of a dialect became common in the late nineteenth century, and it extended to the representation of all those thought to be outside the mainstream society of middle- to upper-class Anglo-America. African Americans, recent immigrants, and the urban poor were all presented in literature as speaking a non-standard English. This vogue for dialect literature, which extended from newspaper sketches to literary novels, can make the writing of this period challenging for the twenty-first-century reader. But the difficulty serves a purpose. For writers like Twain, Chesnutt, and others such as Abraham Cahan and Stephen Crane, transcribing dialogue as nonstandard dialect was a means of representing the social distances that existed among their characters—distances that could have results that were comic, tragic, or both—as well as the distance these writers presumed between their characters and their middle-class readers. Indeed, it could, in fact, be part of the purpose of a work of literature that readers must struggle to understand speakers from racial or ethnic backgrounds different from their own.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the literary interest in the traditions of “the folk” was visible everywhere in American literature. When Kate Chopin sought an



A Feast Day at Acoma, Edward S. Curtis, 1904. In 1892 Curtis (1868–1952) opened a studio in Washington Territory and began to photograph local Indians. Curtis traveled widely, portraying Native people and scenes in an elegiac manner, attempting to document what he understood to be the last days of the “vanishing Indian.” Whatever his intentions, *A Feast Day at Acoma* shows a bustling scene of Pueblo people in the Southwest.

audience for her tales of rural Louisiana, she titled her volume *Bayou Folk* (1894). When W. E. B. Du Bois published his groundbreaking collection of essays about race and racism in the United States, he called the book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the publication of dialect literature, folktales, and local-color sketches coincided with the rise and professionalization of social sciences that were oriented toward the same materials. For Native Americans, the development of anthropology in the United States had particular significance. Even as American Indians were a target of assimilation campaigns to erase their languages, cultures, and religions, anthropologists were traveling the continent attempting to document those very things. Sponsored both by the federal government and by universities, the anthropologists transcribed songs, stories, and ceremonies—collecting them on the page just as they collected physical artifacts for natural history museums. Native American authors such as Zitkala-Ša could find their way into print by producing their own versions of tribal stories, a practice that continues to this day. Just as important, she and other Native writers reminded Americans that Indians would continue to persist *outside* of museums. The section of this volume on “Voices from Native America” includes a variety of textual forms that presented Indian perspectives to non-Indians during this period.

In expanding the diversity of American writing, realism did not cure any of the social ills of the Gilded Age. However, the interest in realism allowed for a more

socially engaged literature, one in which the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction could become blurred. Looking back to the Civil War, Ambrose Bierce's dark, violent tales of the conflict and Twain's comic "Private History of a Campaign That Failed" (1885) were both published alongside the more serious accounts of battles and generals; Constance Fenimore Woolson and Charles W. Chesnutt both wrote searing stories of Reconstruction at a time when the economic future of the South was a frequent topic of national discussion; and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, published in 1901, offered a blueprint for African American uplift and was instantly recognized as a masterpiece of autobiography, only to meet with a sharp rejoinder two years later by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*—a mix of memoir, polemic, social science, and fiction. The turn of the twentieth century was a time of lively, even heated, argument about the future of the nation, and literary realism was an invitation for authors to dive into those debates rather than to turn away.

THE "WOMAN QUESTION"

One such debate was about how the role of women in American life would be defined—or even whether it should be defined at all. In the post-Civil War era, females raised in middle- and professional-class homes had increasing access to secondary and even higher education. They had access to new forms of mass entertainment, and urbanization offered new forms of cultural and political activity. The consumer culture of the late nineteenth century allowed women increasing opportunity to assert their own wants and desires, and the decreasing price of magazines was coupled by an increase in the number of periodicals that sought a female readership.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, women increasingly participated in social clubs of all kinds, a movement that facilitated the discussion among women of the cultural and political issues of the moment. Women's clubs might invite speakers or select books for discussion, and the "clubwoman" could exert significant influence in a community. While women's clubs were often identified, in the popular press, with liberal attitudes about gender roles, they could also act as conservative forces—organized around traditional lines of class, religion, and race. Indeed, in the 1890s women formed separate national organizations for white and African American women's clubs. For immigrant and working-class communities, women's clubs were an opportunity to discuss the challenges of urban environments. For African American women, clubs allowed members to share in an agenda of racial advancement and to achieve the middle-class respectability often denied them in their daily lives.

The "Woman Question," to use a common phrase from this period, was actually more than a single question; it was a host of issues related to education, participation in the workforce, and the social influence of women on issues such as temperance. Although marriage and matrimony defined, in the popular imagination, the conventional roles for women of all classes, changes in the divorce laws during the 1890s fueled debates about female autonomy and the institution of marriage. The chief political issue identified with women during this period was suffrage. Proponents of female suffrage were bitterly disappointed by the 1870 ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which extended—at least in theory—the voting franchise to African American men but not to women of any race. Membership in the National Woman Suffrage Association, founded in 1869, grew dramatically in the late nineteenth century. However, the question of voting rights also fostered racial and ethnic division throughout the period, as white, native-born women often raised their claims to the ballot by deriding the fact that others

they deemed less worthy, including new immigrant and African American men, could vote. Black suffragists were often excluded from national events, and many formed their own suffrage organizations.

The quest for female suffrage would not be complete until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, but throughout the decades between the Civil War and World War I, Americans had a sense that women were claiming new forms of autonomy. At such a time, even something as ordinary as a bicycle, increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century, could become a symbol of female emancipation. (“It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance,” Susan B. Anthony famously said.) The questions and anxieties about the changing place of women in American culture reverberate throughout the texts in this volume of *The Norton Anthology*. By portraying an “American girl” attempting to navigate the world of leisure and desire, Henry James struck a nerve with the publication of *Daisy Miller* in 1879, and he returned to these themes throughout his long career as a novelist. In a different vein, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper”—a story that was quickly recognized as a classic when it was first published in 1892—depicts how the medical regime of the late nineteenth century attempted to contain the creative energies of American women. Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) and Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), published within a year of one another, both feature protagonists who attempt to achieve autonomy and fulfill their desires, with very different outcomes. Edith Wharton’s short stories, such as “The Other Two” (1904), find comedy and pathos in an upper-class world in which divorce is increasingly common.

Female writers of color wrote about many of these same issues, but they also addressed the ways in which racism created a social landscape even more challenging than that faced by their white counterparts. Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s accounts of lynching and other forms of anti-black violence revealed the cruelties that threatened the safety and well-being of all African Americans, male and female; in her autobiographical essays, Zitkala-Ša wrote about the pressures of assimilation brought to bear on Native Americans who sought an education; and Pauline Hopkins published sensational tales, like “Talma Gordon” (1900), that called into question the social fictions that upheld racial inequality. Taken together, these works reveal that categories like “race” and “gender” could mean quite distinct things to writers at the turn of the twentieth century. What all of these authors share, though, is a sense that writing had a vital function to play in helping Americans to understand the complex problems of their time.

UNSEEN FORCES

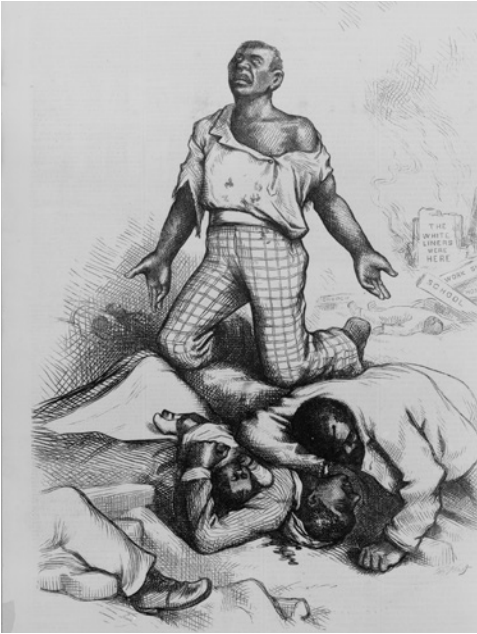
As the century neared its close, Americans increasingly felt that their society was being shaped by unseen forces beyond their control. The industrialization of the United States created large corporations that seemed to obey their own laws; engineers were harnessing the power of electricity, bringing energy to cities that were growing faster than anything Americans had previously seen; in 1895, scientists discovered how to harness X-rays to penetrate the secrets of the body; and a communications network that included telephones and telegraphs spread across the nation and the globe, delivering news at unprecedented speed. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, an American could drive an automobile, see the flickering image of a moving picture, and hear voices recorded on a phonograph—all wonders of a new age. Surrounded by the machinery and scientific advances on display at the Great Exposition in Paris in 1900, Henry Adams described himself as having “his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new.” For the sixty-two-year-old historian, the grandson and great-grandson of U.S. presidents, the turn

of the twentieth century was a time of promise and peril, unleashing “occult, super-sensual, irrational” forces that exerted the same power in the modern world that the Christian cross had wielded in the Middle Ages.

One force that changed how many Americans understood the physical and social world was the emerging theory of evolution. In *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), Charles Darwin theorized that human beings had developed over the ages from nonhuman forms of life, successfully adapting to changing environmental conditions. Darwin, a naturalist, was not interested in the competition that took place among human societies, but in the 1860s the English philosopher Herbert Spencer began using the theory of natural selection as a lens for understanding competition among people. Spencer coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” to describe this process, and Darwin even included it in later editions of *The Origin of Species*. Though relatively few Americans read Spencer himself—and even fewer actually read Darwin—ideas about evolution, natural selection, and competition would shape American thought over the next half century. As it was most often invoked, evolution could describe a social world in which progress was achieved only through ruthless competition. Given the collateral damage caused by the dramatic booms and busts of the business cycle during the late nineteenth century, it is small wonder that some of the leading American businessmen happily adopted this rhetoric to describe the value of capitalism. Andrew Carnegie, for example, argued that unrestrained competition was the equivalent of a law of nature designed to eliminate those unfit for the new economic order.

Darwinism could justify other forms of violence as well. Fear that the racial character of the United States would be contaminated by Asian blood—and therefore rendered “unfit”—was one rationale offered for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited immigration from China. White Americans believed that the forces of evolution destined American Indians to the margins of history, and this belief drove both the final nineteenth-century campaigns to eradicate Native military resistance to the United States and the Americanization efforts of self-described “Friends of the Indian.” In the South, the language of social evolution and racial competition contributed to the violent suppression of African Americans, particularly African American men. White supremacists claimed that they were protecting the purity of white women and ensuring the future of the white race as they terrorized their black neighbors through the spectacle of lynching. In this distortion of Darwinian evolution, it was all too easy to understand any form of group violence as nothing more than the expression of natural law.

In the realm of literature, American authors at the end of the nineteenth century began to grapple more explicitly with the meaning of evolution and other social forces in the development of literary *naturalism* in the United States. Naturalism grew from, and overlapped with, literary realism, but there were key differences. Like Howells and his fellow realists, literary naturalists felt that they had an obligation to bring social conflict to the page, but they found Howells and his followers too mild and too focused on the manners of the professional and upper classes. Naturalists thought that realism had left literature bloodless by failing to depict the genuine violence that they saw everywhere in the ruthless, modern world; they sought to explore how biology, environment, and other material forces shaped lives—particularly the lives of lower-class people, who had less control over their lives than those who were better off. Naturalism introduces characters from the fringes and depths of society, far from the middle class, whose lives really do spin out of control; their fates are seen to be the outcome of degenerate heredity, a sordid environment, and the bad luck that can often seem to control the lives of people without money or influence. The protagonist of Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) cannot escape the seamy violence of Manhattan’s Lower East Side; Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) compares the working-class immigrants of Chicago’s meatpacking district to the pigs that they slaughter.



Race and Reconstruction. This 1876 cartoon by Thomas Nast (1840–1902) comments on the failure of the federal government to protect African Americans in the South. The caption reads, “Is this a republican form of government? Is this protecting life, liberty, or property? Is this equal protection of the laws?” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 2, 1876.

Literary naturalists emphasized plot to a greater degree than did the realists of previous decades. Their works engaged more deliberately with romance and myth, even when the result was to deflate conventional notions of heroism, as in Crane’s Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). In the twentieth century, Jack London would take this romantic turn further with his adventure novels and stories—works that often returned to the theme of the bestial instincts that lay beneath civilization. In London’s highly popular *The Call of the Wild* (1903), the canine protagonist Buck is stolen from a California ranch and transported to Alaska, where he awakens to his primal memories of wild life and becomes transformed into the “Ghost Dog” of the wilderness. London later wrote *White Fang* (1906), a novel that reverses this movement by bringing a dog of the “savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild” into the civilization and domesticity of the south. In both cases, the drama turns on a clash between the power of social environment and the primal force of instinct.

With their emphasis on men of action—whether in the gold fields of Alaska or the stock exchanges of Chicago—the naturalist fictions of London, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Upton Sinclair portrayed a world of masculine violence. (Even Jack London’s canine protagonists are male.) For decades, some commentators in the United States had expressed concerns that “overcivilization,” thanks to the growth of professional and white-collar occupations, was leading to a kind of softness among American men. This anxiety was shaped by the growing material prosperity of the upper and professional classes, who increasingly worked in occupations that did not require physical strength, and it was also a response to the efforts by women to increase their cultural, economic, and political power. Throughout this period, cultural commentators spent considerable time and effort wringing their hands about what the fluctuating roles of men and women would mean for the future of American civilization.

THE NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE

The increasing assertiveness of American women—or the “New Woman,” to use a phrase made popular in the 1890s—made it all the more imperative to shape American manhood properly. One late-nineteenth-century movement, “muscular Christianity,” attempted to merge physical and moral development through institutions like the Young Men’s Christian Association. Indeed, a central premise of the age was that white men could best prepare themselves for the Darwinian struggle by becoming both mentally *and* physically fit. Theodore Roosevelt urged men to engage in the “strenuous life,” and he looked back on *The Winning of the West* (1889–96)—the title of his four-volume history of American expansion—as a grand drama of heroism and sacrifice. However, in the eyes of most white Americans, the West had already been “won” by the 1890s. The historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared in 1893 that the western frontier, which he regarded as crucial to the formation of America’s democratic character, no longer existed.

Having completed the work of building a U.S. empire on the North American continent, Americans looked abroad. “Idleness and luxury have made men flabby,” a contributor to the *North American Review* observed in 1894, “and the man at the head of affairs [U.S. president Grover Cleveland] is beginning to ask seriously if a great war might not help them to pull themselves together.” When the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, Americans quickly embraced what Secretary of State John Hay called the “splendid little war” in Cuba, and Roosevelt organized a volunteer regiment of “rough riders” that he could lead into combat. For those advocating imperial expansion, the Spanish–American War addressed several problems simultaneously. It gave U.S. industry access to new markets, easing fears of “overproduction”; it gave the United States the chance to establish itself as a legitimate rival to European imperial powers; and it created a new proving ground for American men. At the resolution of the conflict in 1898, the nation had acquired new territories in Puerto Rico and the Philippines, and it would acquire the territory of Hawaii that same year. One ostensible cause of the conflict was the American desire to secure Cuban independence, yet after Spain’s defeat the United States did not hurry to withdraw its troops. In effect, Cuba remained a U.S. protectorate for decades. In 1892, the Cuban patriot José Martí had written a manifesto, “Our America” (included in this volume), warning Latin America of the “giant” to their north. Martí lived in New York for more than a decade, and he understood the imperial aspirations of his temporary home all too well.

In 1899, the Filipino independence movement began to revolt against the U.S. military forces occupying the islands, and the armed conflict lasted for three years. Increasingly vocal critics founded the American Anti-Imperialist league. The anti-imperialists included figures as diverse as the industrialist Andrew Carnegie, the social worker Jane Addams, and the philosopher William James (Henry’s brother). As in any movement, participants’ motives varied. For some, the prospect of empire seemed in conflict with the principle of self-determination that they believed to be a core American value; others were, less nobly, anxious about any territorial grab that could increase the number of nonwhites living under the American flag. William Dean Howells and Mark Twain were members of the Anti-Imperialist League, and both distrusted the exercise of military power and the rhetoric of patriotism that accompanied it. In his story “Editha” (1905), Howells depicts a young woman so captivated by the romance of war that she sends her fiancé off to die in it—and suffers no regret, even after she encounters the scornful mother of the deceased. Twain, whose celebrity made his views especially newsworthy, penned several works opposing military ventures abroad, including “The War Prayer,” a story so dark in its outlook that, after a magazine rejected it for publication in 1905, he left it unpublished in

his own lifetime. Twain explained his decision in a letter to a friend: “None but the dead are permitted to tell the truth.”

With Twain’s passing in 1910, the generation of men and women who had lived through the American Civil War was passing too. By the early 1900s, the first stirrings of modernism were visible: Henry James’s deep explorations of consciousness in his late novels anticipated the prose experiments of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce; in 1912 James Weldon Johnson would publish his *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, a novel that presages the fiction of the Harlem Renaissance in its fascination with alienation and the boundaries of racial identity; and for many readers, the tight, elliptical verses of Emily Dickinson, first published in the 1890s, seem now to have more in common with the twentieth-century verse of poets like Hilda Doolittle or William Carlos Williams than with anything written in her own time. Indeed, many of the authors considered today to be significant influences on American modernism—such as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein—were already writing and publishing by the year of Twain’s death. Realism and naturalism, in other words, overlapped considerably with the artistic movements that would dominate the decades following World War I. When the United States entered the Great War in 1917, its transformation into a global power became complete; as Europe imploded, the United States exerted political and cultural power far beyond what anyone might have imagined a half century earlier, when America was coming to terms with the aftermath of its own terrible war.

AMERICAN LITERATURE 1865–1914

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1855 Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i></p> <p>1860–65 Emily Dickinson writes several hundred poems</p> <p>1865 Walt Whitman, <i>Drum-Taps</i></p> <p>1867 Mark Twain, <i>The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches</i> • Horatio Alger, <i>Ragged Dick</i></p> <p>1868 Louisa May Alcott, <i>Little Women</i></p> <p>1870 Bret Harte, <i>The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches</i></p> <p>1872 Mark Twain, <i>Roughing It</i></p> <p>1876 Charlot, “[He has filled graves with our bones]”</p> <p>1878 Henry James, <i>Daisy Miller</i></p>	<p>1860 Short-lived Pony Express runs from Missouri to California</p> <p>1861 South Carolina batteries fire on Fort Sumter, initiating the Civil War • Southern states secede from the Union and found the Confederate States of America</p> <p>1865 Civil War ends • Reconstruction begins • Lincoln assassinated • Thirteenth Amendment ratified, prohibiting slavery</p> <p>1867 United States purchases Alaska from Russia • Jesse Chisholm maps out the Chisholm Trail, connecting Texas cattle ranches to railheads in Kansas City, Cheyenne, Dodge City, and Abilene</p> <p>1868 Fourteenth Amendment passed, guaranteeing citizenship to all peoples born in the United States (exclusive of Native peoples) • Congress institutes eight-hour workday for federal employees • sweatshops, using mostly immigrant labor, begin to proliferate in cities</p> <p>1869 First transcontinental railroad completed by construction crews composed largely of Chinese laborers • Susan B. Anthony elected president of American Equal Rights Association; Elizabeth Cady Stanton elected president of National Woman Suffrage Association</p> <p>1870 Fifteenth Amendment, giving African American men the right to vote, ratified</p> <p>1871 Indian Appropriation Act ends the practice of negotiating treaties with the tribes as sovereign nations</p> <p>1872 Yellowstone, first U.S. national park, established</p> <p>1873 Economic panic; financial depression lasts until 1879</p> <p>1874 Women’s Christian Temperance Union founded in Cleveland • invention of barbed wire effectively ends the open range</p> <p>1876 Custer’s regiment defeated by the Sioux and Cheyenne at Little Big Horn River, Montana • Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone</p> <p>1877 Reconstruction ends • segregationist Jim Crow laws begin</p>

Boldface titles indicate works in the anthology.

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1879 Chief Joseph, “An Indian’s Views of Indian Affairs”</p> <p>1880 Joel Chandler Harris, <i>Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings</i> • Constance Fenimore Woolson, <i>Rodman the Keeper: Southern Sketches</i></p>	<p>1879 Thomas Edison invents the electric lightbulb • female lawyers permitted to argue before Supreme Court</p> <p>1880–1910 Massive immigration from Europe</p> <p>1881 Tuskegee Institute founded</p> <p>1882 J. D. Rockefeller organizes Standard Oil Trust • Chinese Exclusion Act instituted</p>
<p>1883 Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”</p> <p>1884 Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i></p>	<p>1884 Tailors’ strike in New York City brings national attention to sweatshops</p> <p>1886 Statue of Liberty dedicated • Haymarket Square labor riot leaves eleven dead • American Federation of Labor organized</p> <p>1887 General Allotment Act or Dawes Act permits the president to divide tribally owned lands into individual allotments to be held in trust for twenty-five years, with “surplus” lands to be sold to non-Indians. This led the Indians to lose some 90 million acres of land by the time Dawes was repealed in 1934.</p>
<p>1889 Theodore Roosevelt, <i>The Winning of the West</i> • Hamlin Garland, “Under the Lion’s Paw” • Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth”</p> <p>1890 Ambrose Bierce, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” • Emily Dickinson, <i>Poems</i></p>	<p>1890 U.S. Bureau of the Census declares the “frontier” “to be closed.” There is no more “free” or “unoccupied” land • Sitting Bull killed. Massacre of Big Foot’s Minneconjou band by federal troops at Wounded Knee Creek ends the Ghost Dance among the Sioux • Ellis Island Immigration Station opens</p>
<p>1891 José Martí, “Our America” • Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, “A New England Nun”</p> <p>1892 Anna Julia Cooper, <i>A Voice from the South</i> • Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-paper”</p> <p>1893 Stephen Crane, <i>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</i> • Frederick Jackson Turner, <i>The Significance of the Frontier</i></p>	<p>1893 World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago • economic panic and depression, set off by the collapse of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroads</p>
<p>1895 Crane, <i>Black Riders and The Red Badge of Courage</i></p> <p>1896 Paul Laurence Dunbar, <i>Lyrics of a Lowly Life</i> • James Mooney publishes <i>Ghost Dance Songs</i> • Abraham Cahan, <i>Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto</i> • Sarah Orne Jewett, <i>The Country of the Pointed Firs</i></p> <p>1897 Crane, <i>The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure</i></p>	<p>1896 <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> upholds segregated transportation</p> <p>1897–98 Klondike Gold Rush</p>

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1899 Charles Chesnutt, <i>The Conjure Woman</i> and <i>The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line</i> • Kate Chopin, <i>The Awakening</i> • Frank Norris, <i>McTeague</i></p> <p>1900 Theodore Dreiser, <i>Sister Carrie</i> • Ida B. Wells-Barnett, <i>Mob-Rule in New Orleans</i> • Pauline Hopkins, <i>Contending Forces</i> • Francis LaFlesche, <i>The Middle Five</i></p> <p>1901 Zitkala-Ša, <i>Impressions of an Indian Childhood and The School Days of an Indian Girl</i> • Norris, <i>The Octopus</i> • Jack London, “The Law of Life” • Booker T. Washington, <i>Up from Slavery</i></p> <p>1903 W. E. B. Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> • London, <i>The Call of the Wild</i></p> <p>1904 Edith Wharton, “The Other Two”</p> <p>1905 William Dean Howells, “Editha”</p> <p>1906 Upton Sinclair, <i>The Jungle</i></p> <p>1907 Henry Adams, <i>The Education of Henry Adams</i>, privately printed</p> <p>1910 Jane Addams, <i>Twenty Years at Hull-House</i> • Sui Sin Far, “Mrs. Spring Fragrance”</p> <p>1912 James Weldon Johnson, <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i></p>	<p>1898 United States annexes Hawaii</p> <p>1898–99 Spanish–American War</p> <p>1900 U.S. population exceeds seventy-five million</p> <p>1901 J. P. Morgan founds U.S. Steel Corporation • first transatlantic radio • oil discovered in Spindletop, Texas</p> <p>1903 Henry Ford founds Ford Motor Co. • Wright brothers make the first successful airplane flight • <i>The Great Train Robbery</i> is first U.S. cinematic narrative</p> <p>1904 National Child Labor Committee formed</p> <p>1905 Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies) founded</p> <p>1906 April 18: San Francisco earthquake and fire • dozens of African Americans killed in Atlanta race riots</p> <p>1908 Israel Zangwill’s “The Melting Pot” first performed</p> <p>1909 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded</p> <p>1910 Mexican Revolution</p> <p>1914 U.S. Marines invade and occupy Vera Cruz, Mexico • Panama Canal opens</p>

WALT WHITMAN

1819–1892

Walt Whitman revolutionized American poetry. Responding to Emerson's call in "The Poet" (1842) for an American bard who would address all "the facts of the animal economy, sex, nutriment, gestation, birth," he put the living, breathing, sexual body at the center of much of his poetry, challenging conventions of the day. Responding to Emerson's call for a "metre-making argument," he rejected traditions of poetic scansion and elevated diction, improvising the form that has come to be known as free verse, while adopting a wide-ranging vocabulary opening new possibilities for poetic expression. A poet of democracy, Whitman celebrated the mystical, divine potential of the individual; a poet of the urban, he wrote about the sights, sounds, and energy of the modern metropolis. In his 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, he declared that "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." On the evidence of his enormous influence on later poets—Hart Crane, Langston Hughes, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Cherrie Moraga, Adrienne Rich, and countless others, including Spain's Federico García Lorca and Chile's Pablo Neruda—Whitman not only was affectionately absorbed by his own country but remains a persistent presence in poetry throughout the world.

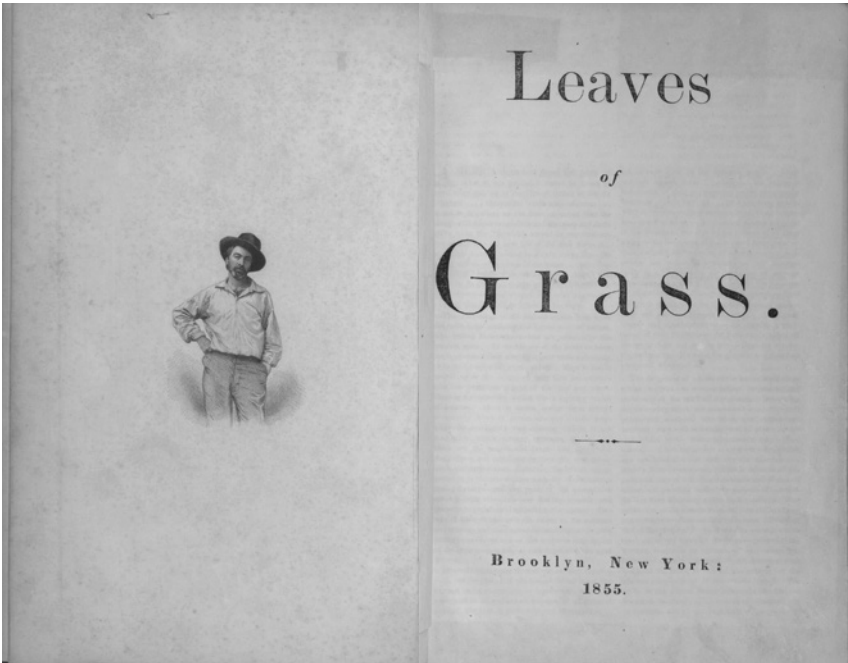
Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in West Hills, Long Island (New York), the second of eight surviving children of the Quakers Louisa Van Velsor and Walter Whitman. In 1823, Whitman's father, a farmer turned carpenter, sought to take advantage of a building boom by moving the family to Brooklyn—then a town at the western and most urbanized part of Long Island. Whitman left school when he was eleven, and was soon employed in the printing office of a newspaper; when his family moved east on Long Island in 1833, he remained in Brooklyn on his own. He began contributing pieces to newspapers in his midteens and spent five years teaching at country and small-town schools on Long Island, interrupting his teaching to start a newspaper of his own in 1838 and to work briefly on another Long Island paper. By early 1840 he had started the series "Sun-Down Papers from the Desk of a School-Master" for the Jamaica, New York, *Democrat* and was writing poems and fiction. One of his stories prophetically culminated with the dream of writing "a wonderful and ponderous book."

Just before he turned twenty-one Whitman stopped teaching, moved to Manhattan, began work at the literary weekly *New World*, and soon became editor of a Manhattan daily, the *Aurora*. He also began a political career by speaking at Democratic rallies and writing for the *Democratic Review*, the foremost magazine of the Democratic Party. He exulted in the extremes of the city, where street-gang violence was countered by the lectures of Emerson and where even a young editor could get to know the poet William Cullen Bryant, editor of the *Evening Post*. Fired from the *Aurora*, which publicly charged him with laziness, he wrote a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans, or the Inebriate*, for a one-issue extra of the *New World* late in 1842. After three years of various literary and political jobs, he returned to Brooklyn in 1845, becoming a special contributor to the Long Island *Star*, assigned to Manhattan events, included theatrical and musical performances. All through the 1840s he attended operas on his journalist's passes, and he would later say that without the "emotions, raptures, uplifts" of opera he could never have written *Leaves of Grass*. Just before he was twenty-seven he took over the editorship of the Brooklyn *Eagle*,

writing most of the literary reviews, which included books by Carlyle, Emerson, Melville, Fuller, and Goethe, among others. Like most Democrats, he was able to justify the Mexican War (1846–48) by hailing the great American mission of “peopling the New World with a noble race.” Yet at the beginning of 1848 he was fired from the *Eagle* because, like Bryant, he had become a Free-Soiler, opposed to the acquisition of more territory for slavery. Whitman served as a delegate to the Buffalo Free-Soil convention and helped to found the Free-Soil newspaper the *Brooklyn Freeman*. Around this time he began writing poetry in a serious way, experimenting with form and prosody; he published several topical poems in 1850, including “Europe,” which would later appear in *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman’s notebook fragments suggest that he began to invent the overall shape of his first volume of poetry during 1853–54. On May 15, 1855, he took out a copy-right for *Leaves of Grass*, and he spent the spring and early summer seeing his book through the press, probably setting some of the type himself. Published in Brooklyn, New York, during the first week of July, the volume, bound in dark green cloth with a sprig of grass in gilt on the cover, contained twelve untitled poems (including the initial version of “Song of Myself”), along with an exuberant preface declaring his ambition to be the American bard. In the image of Whitman on the book’s frontispiece, which was based on an 1854 daguerreotype, the bearded Whitman—rejecting the conventional suit jacket, buttoned-up shirt, and high collar of the formal studio portrait—stands with one arm akimbo, one hand in a pocket, workingman’s hat on slightly cocked head, shirt unbuttoned at the collar, looking directly at the reader. (See the image on the following page for a reproduction of the frontispiece.) The image, like the poetry itself, defied convention by aligning the poet with working people. The poems, with their absence of standard verse and stanza patterns (although strongly rhythmic and controlled by numerous poetic devices of repetition and variation), also introduced his use of “catalogs”—journalistic and encyclopedic listings—that were to become a hallmark of his style. Whitman sent out numerous presentation and review copies of his book, receiving an immediate response from Emerson, who greeted him “at the beginning of a great career.” As weeks passed, Whitman chose to publish a few anonymous reviews himself, praising *Leaves of Grass* in the *American Phrenological Journal*, for instance, as one of “the most glorious triumphs, in the known history of literature.” In October he let Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* print Emerson’s private letter of praise, and he put clippings of the letter in presentation copies to Longfellow, among others. Emerson termed Whitman’s appropriation of the letter “a strange, rude thing,” but he remained interested in meeting the poet. While Whitman was angling for reviews in England and working on expanding his book, Emerson visited him in December of 1855. Thoreau, who admired *Leaves of Grass* but found several of its poems “simply sensual,” visited him in 1856. That year also saw the appearance of the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, now with thirty-three poems, including “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” under its initial title, “Sundown Poem.”

Returning to miscellaneous journalism, Whitman edited the Brooklyn *Times* from 1857 to 1859 and published several pieces in the *Times* affirming his Free-Soiler hopes for a continued national expansion into the western territories that would not entail the expansion of slavery. In the third (1860) edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman began to group his poems thematically. For a section called “Enfans d’Adam,” later retitled “Children of Adam,” he wrote fifteen poems focused on what he termed the “amative” love of man for woman, in contrast to the “adhesive” love of man for man. Adhesive love figured in forty-five poems in a section titled “Calamus.” These two sections in the 1860 edition differ from the sections in the final 1891–92 edition, for in the intervening editions (1867, 1871, 1881) Whitman revised and regrouped some of the poems, as he would with numerous other poems in the expanded editions he would go on to publish.



Leaves of Grass. Frontispiece and title page of the first edition.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Whitman began to visit the wounded and eventually offered his services as a nurse. He started at New-York Hospital; but in early 1863, after visiting with his wounded brother George in an army camp in Virginia, he moved to Washington, D.C., and began to work at the huge open-air military hospitals there. Nursing gave Whitman a profound sense of vocation. As he wrote a friend in 1863: "I am very happy . . . I was never so beloved. I am running over with health, fat, red & sunburnt in face. I tell thee I am just the one to go to our sick boys." But ministering to tens of thousands of maimed and dying young men took its toll. He succinctly voiced his anguish in a notebook entry of 1864: "the dead, the dead, the dead, our dead." During this time he worked on a series of poems that conveyed his evolving view of the war from heroic celebration to despair at the horrifying carnage. He later wrote a chapter in his prose work *Specimen Days* (1882) titled "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books"; but incorporating the "real war" into a book of poetry became one of the dominant impulses of the *Drum-Taps* collection, which he published in 1865. After Lincoln's assassination, Whitman reissued the volume with a sequel including "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," his famous elegy for the murdered president.

As he prepared *Drum-Taps and Sequel* for publication in late 1865, Whitman was also revising *Leaves of Grass* at his desk in the Department of the Interior, where he had obtained a position as clerk. The new secretary of the interior, James Harlan, read the annotated copy and fired Whitman for writing an obscene book, objecting to Whitman's frankness about bodily functions and heterosexual love. Whitman's friend, the poet William O'Connor, found him another clerical position in the attorney general's office; and in his rage at the firing O'Connor wrote *The Good Gray Poet* (1866), identifying Whitman with Jesus and Harlan with the forces of evil. Whitman continued to rework *Leaves of Grass*, incorporating *Drum-Taps* into it in

1867, and with his friends' help continued to propagandize for its recognition as a landmark in the history of poetry. He also published essays in a number of 1867 and 1868 issues of the New York periodical *Galaxy*, which he expanded into *Democratic Vistas* (1870), a book conveying his sometimes sharply condemnatory appraisal of postwar democratic culture.

The Washington years came to an abrupt end in 1873 when Whitman suffered a paralytic stroke. His mother died a few months later, and Whitman joined his brother George's household in Camden, New Jersey, to recuperate. During the second year of his illness, the government ceased to hold his clerk job open for him, and he became dependent for a living on occasional publication in newspapers and magazines. The 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass* had involved much reworking and rearrangement, and the fifth edition (1871) continued that process, adding a new section titled "Passage to India." In 1876 Whitman privately published a prose work, *Memo-randa during the War*, and six years later he brought out *Specimen Days*, which has affinities with his early editorial accounts of strolls through the city but is even more intensely personal, the record of representative days in the life of a poet who had lived in the midst of great national events.

During the 1870s and early 1880s, Whitman was increasingly noticed by the leading writers of the time, especially in England. The English poet Algernon Swinburne sent him a poem; the poet laureate of Great Britain, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, sent him an admiring letter; and both Longfellow and Oscar Wilde visited him in Camden. In the United States, writers of a younger generation than Whitman's own began to recognize his importance as a poetic voice and organized events to support him. Despite his frail health, Whitman lectured on Thomas Paine in Philadelphia in 1877 and on Abraham Lincoln in New York in 1879 (he would continue to deliver public lectures on Lincoln until 1890). Opposition to his poetry because of its supposed immorality began to dissipate, and readers, having become accustomed over time to Whitman's poetic devices, began to recognize the poet as an artist. Still, in 1881, when the reputable Boston firm of James R. Osgood & Company printed the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the Boston district attorney threatened to prosecute on the grounds of obscenity. Ironically, when the Philadelphia firm of Rees Welsh and Company reprinted this edition in 1882, the publicity contributed to Whitman's greatest sales in his lifetime: he earned nearly \$1,500 in royalties from that edition (around \$25,000 in today's value), compared to the \$25 he had earned from the Osgood edition before the publisher withdrew it.

In 1884, the still infirm Whitman moved to a cottage at 328 Mickle Street in Camden, which he purchased for \$1,750. A year later friends and admirers, including Mark Twain and John Greenleaf Whittier, presented him with a horse and buggy for local travel. He had another stroke in 1888 and in 1890 made preparations for his death by signing a \$4,000 contract for the construction in Camden's Harleigh Cemetery of a granite mausoleum, or what he termed a "burial house," suitable for a national bard. In 1891 he did the final editing of *Complete Prose Works* (1892) and oversaw the preparations of the "deathbed" edition of the now more than three hundred poems in *Leaves of Grass* (1891–92), which was in fact a reissue of the 1881 edition with the addition of two later groups of poems, "Sands at Seventy" and "Good-bye My Fancy." Whitman died at Camden on March 26, 1892, and was buried in Harleigh Cemetery in the mausoleum he had helped design.

All of the Whitman poems reprinted here, regardless of when they were first composed and printed, are given in their final form: that of the 1891–92 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Song of Myself¹

1

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. 5

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents
the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance, 10
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

2

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with
perfumes,
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it, 15
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is
odorless,
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me. 20

The smoke of my own breath,
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of
blood and air through my lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-color'd
sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the
wind, 25
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,

1. In the 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poem later called "Song of Myself" appeared without a title and without numbered subdivisions or stanzas. For the 1856 edition, Whitman titled it "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American," and in the 1860 edition he titled it "Walt Whit-

man"; it retained that title in the 1867 and 1871 editions, and in the 1881 edition was named "Song of Myself." Whitman made numerous other changes in the poem from the first 1855 printing to the 1881 final version.

The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and
 hill-sides,
 The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and
 meeting the sun.

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth
 much? 30
 Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?
 Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
 You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns
 left,)
 You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through
 the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books, 35
 You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

3

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and
 the end,
 But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now, 40
 Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
 And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
 Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.
 Urge and urge and urge,
 Always the procreant urge of the world. 45

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and
 increase, always sex,
 Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so.

Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well entretied,²
 braced in the beams,
 Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical, 50
 I and this mystery here we stand.

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,
 Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age, 55
 Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I
 am silent, and go bathe and admire myself.

2. Cross-braced; reinforced.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,
 Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing;
 As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night,
 and withdraws at the peep of the day with stealthy tread, 60
 Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their
 plenty,
 Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization and scream at my eyes,
 That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
 And forthwith cipher³ and show me to a cent,
 Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is
 ahead? 65

4

Trippers and askers surround me,
 People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward and city I live
 in, or the nation,
 The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and new,
 My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,
 The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love, 70
 The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of
 money, or depressions or exaltations,
 Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful
 events;
 These come to me days and nights and go from me again,
 But they are not the Me myself.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am, 75
 Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,
 Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,
 Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
 Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists
 and contenders, 80
 I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait.

5

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,
 And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
 Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the
 best, 85
 Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice.

3. Calculate.

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
 How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue
 to my bare-stript heart,
 And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet. 90

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that
 pass all the argument of the earth,
 And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
 And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
 And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my
 sisters and lovers,
 And that a kelson⁴ of the creation is love, 95
 And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
 And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
 And mossy scabs of the worm fence,⁵ heap'd stones, elder, mullein and
 poke-weed.

6

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;
 How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than
 he. 100
 I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff
 woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
 A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
 Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and
 remark, and say *Whose?*

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation. 105

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
 And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
 Growing among black folks as among white,
 Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff,⁶ I give them the same, I receive
 them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves. 110

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
 It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,
 It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
 It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their
 mothers' laps,
 And here you are the mothers' laps. 115

4. A basic structural unit; a reinforcing timber bolted to the keel (backbone) of a ship.

5. Fence built of interlocking rails in a zigzag pattern.

6. From the African word *cuffee* (name for a black

male born on a Friday). "Kanuck": French Canadian (now sometimes considered pejorative). "Tuckahoe": Virginian, from eaters of the tuckahoe, an American Indian food plant.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
 Darker than the colorless beards of old men,
 Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,
 And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing. 120

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
 And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out
 of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
 And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere, 125
 The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
 And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to
 arrest it,
 And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
 And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier. 130

7

Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
 I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.

I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am
 not contain'd between my hat and boots,
 And peruse manifold objects, no two alike and every one good,
 The earth good and the stars good, and their adjuncts all good. 135

I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
 I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and
 fathomless as myself,
 (They do not know how immortal, but I know.)

Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female,
 For me those that have been boys and that love women, 140
 For me the man that is proud and feels how it stings to be slighted,
 For me the sweet-heart and the old maid, for me mothers and the mothers
 of mothers,
 For me lips that have smiled, eyes that have shed tears,
 For me children and the begetters of children.

Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale nor discarded, 145
 I see through the broadcloth and gingham whether or no,
 And am around, tenacious, acquisitive, tireless, and cannot be shaken
 away.

8

The little one sleeps in its cradle,
I lift the gauze and look a long time, and silently brush away flies with my
hand.

The youngster and the red-faced girl turn aside up the bushy hill, 150
I peeringly view them from the top.

The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
I witness the corpse with its dabbled hair, I note where the pistol has
fallen.

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the
promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of
the shod horses on the granite floor, 155

The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of snow-balls,
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of rous'd mobs,
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside borne to the hospital,
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
The excited crowd, the policeman with his star quickly working his passage
to the centre of the crowd, 160

The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,
What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall sunstruck or in fits,
What exclamations of women taken suddenly who hurry home and give
birth to babes,

What living and buried speech is always vibrating here, what howls
restrain'd by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances,
rejections with convex lips, 165

I mind them or the show or resonance of them—I come and I depart.

9

The big doors of the country barn stand open and ready,
The dried grass of the harvest-time loads the slow-drawn wagon,
The clear light plays on the brown gray and green intertinged,
The armfuls are pack'd to the sagging mow. 170

I am there, I help, I came stretch'd atop of the load,
I felt its soft jolts, one leg reclined on the other,
I jump from the cross-beams and sieze the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels and tangle my hair full of wisps.

10

Alone far in the wilds and mountains I hunt, 175
Wandering amazed at my own lightness and glee,
In the late afternoon choosing a safe spot to pass the night,
Kindling a fire and broiling the fresh-kill'd game,
Falling asleep on the gather'd leaves with my dog and gun by my side.

The Yankee clipper is under her sky-sails, she cuts the sparkle and scud, 180
My eyes settle the land, I bend at her prow or shout joyously from the deck.

The boatmen and clam-diggers arose early and stopt for me,
I tuck'd my trowser-ends in my boots and went and had a good time;
You should have been with us that day round the chowder-kettle.

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far west, the bride
was a red girl, 185
Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly smoking, they
had moccasins to their feet and large thick blankets hanging from their
shoulders,
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was drest mostly in skins, his luxuriant
beard and curls protected his neck, he held his bride by the hand,
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight locks
descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her feet.

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile, 190
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy⁷ and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruise'd feet,
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some
coarse clean clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness, 195
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

11

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly; 200
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her. 205

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from their long
hair, 210
Little streams pass'd over their bodies.

7. Limping or swaying.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge to the sun,
they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and
bending arch, 215
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

12

The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife at the
stall in the market,
I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down.⁸

Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil,
Each has his main-sledge, they are all out, there is a great heat in the
fire. 220
From the cinder-strew'd threshold I follow their movements,
The lithe sheer of their waists plays even with their massive arms,
Overhand the hammers swing, overhand so slow, overhand so sure,
They do not hasten, each man hits in his place.

13

The negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags
underneath on its tied-over chain, 225
The negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he
stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,⁹
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his
hip-band,
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat away
from his forehead,
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his
polish'd and perfect limbs.

I behold the picturesque giant and love him, and I do not stop there, 230
I go with the team also.

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as forward
sluing,¹
To niches aside and junior² bending, not a person or object missing,
Absorbing all to myself and for this song.

Oxen that rattle the yoke and chain or halt in the leafy shade, what is that
you express in your eyes? 235
It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

8. Dances familiar in popular entertainment and minstrelsy. The "shuffle" involves the sliding of feet across the floor, and the "break-down" is faster and noisier.

9. Long, heavy timber used to keep a load in place.

1. Twisting.

2. Smaller.

My tread scares the wood-drake and wood-duck on my distant and day-long
ramble.
They rise together, they slowly circle around.

I believe in those wing'd purposes,
And acknowledge red, yellow, white, playing within me, 240
And consider green and violet and the tufted crown intentional,
And do not call the tortoise unworthy because she is not something else,
And the jay in the woods never studied the gamut,³ yet trills pretty well to
me,
And the look of the bay mare shames silliness out of me.

14

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night, 245
Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close,
Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky.
The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the cat on the house-sill, the
chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats, 250
The brood of the turkey-hen and she with her half-spread wings,
I see in them and myself the same old law.
The press of my foot to the earth springs a hundred affections,
They scorn the best I can do to relate them.

I am enamour'd of growing out-doors, 255
Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods,
Of the builders and steerers of ships and the wielders of axes and mauls,
and the drivers of horses,
I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out.

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns, 260
Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,
Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
Scattering it freely forever.

15

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,
The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its
wild ascending lisp, 265
The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving
dinner,
The pilot seizes the king-pin,⁴ he heaves down with a strong arm,
The mate stands braced in the whale-boat, lance and harpoon are ready,
The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,
The deacons are ordain'd with cross'd hands at the altar, 270

3. Written notes of the scale.

4. The extended spoke of the pilot wheel, used to maintain leverage during storms.

The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,
 The farmer stops by the bars as he walks on a First-day⁵ loafe and looks at
 the oats and rye,
 The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum a confirm'd case,
 (He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's
 bed-room;)
 The jour printer⁶ with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case, 275
 He turns his quid of tobacco while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;
 The malfom'd limbs are tied to the surgeon's table,
 What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
 The quadroon⁷ girl is sold at the auction-stand, the drunkard nods by the
 bar-room stove,
 The machinist rolls up his sleeves, the policeman travels his beat, the gate-
 keeper marks who pass, 280
 The young fellow drives the express-wagon, (I love him, though I do not
 know him;)
 The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,
 The western turkey-shooting draws old and young, some lean on their
 rifles, some sit on logs,
 Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his
 piece; 285
 The groups of newly-come immigrants cover the wharf or levee, 285
 As the woolly-pates⁸ hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them from
 his saddle,
 The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners, the
 dancers bow to each other,
 The youth lies awake in the cedar-roof'd garret and harks to the musical
 rain,
 The Wolverine⁹ sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,
 The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and
 bead-bags for sale, 290
 The connoisseur peers along the exhibition-gallery with half-shut eyes bent
 sideways,
 As the deck-hands make fast the steamboat the plank is thrown for the
 shore-going passengers,
 The young sister holds out the skein while the elder sister winds it off in a
 ball, and stops now and then for the knots,
 The one-year wife is recovering and happy having a week ago borne her
 first child,
 The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her sewing-machine or in the
 factory or mill, 295
 The paving-man¹ leans on his two-handed rammer, the reporter's lead flies
 swiftly over the note-book, the sign-painter is lettering with blue and
 gold,

5. Sunday. Whitman frequently uses the numerical Quaker designations for the names of days and months. "Bars": i.e., of a rail fence.

6. I.e., a journeyman printer, or one who has passed an apprenticeship and is fully qualified for all professional work.

7. Term used at the time (often in reference to

slaves) to refer to light-complected people thought to be one-fourth black.

8. Black slaves (with stereotypical emphasis on "woolly" hair).

9. Inhabitant of Michigan.

1. Man building or repairing streets.

The canal boy trots on the tow-path, the book-keeper counts at his desk,
 the shoemaker waxes his thread,
 The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him,
 The child is baptized, the convert is making his first professions,
 The regatta is spread on the bay, the race is begun, (how the white sails
 sparkle!) 300
 The drover watching his drove sings out to them that would stray,
 The pedler sweats with his pack on his back, (the purchaser higgling about
 the odd cent;)
 The bride unrumples her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves
 slowly,
 The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,
 The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and
 pimpled neck, 305
 The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each
 other,
 (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you;)
 The President holding a cabinet council is surrounded by the great
 Secretaries,
 On the piazza walk three matrons stately and friendly with twined arms,
 The crew of the fish-smack pack repeated layers of halibut in the hold, 310
 The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle,
 As the fare-collector goes through the train he gives notice by the jingling
 of loose change,
 The floor-men are laying the floor, the tanners are tanning the roof, the
 masons are calling for mortar,
 In single file each shouldering his hod pass onward the laborers;
 Seasons pursuing each other the indescribable crowd is gather'd, it is the
 fourth of Seventh-month,² (what salutes of cannon and small arms!) 315
 Seasons pursuing each other the plougher ploughs, the mower mows, and
 the winter-grain falls in the ground;
 Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the frozen
 surface,
 The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with
 his axe,
 Flatboatmen make fast towards dusk near the cotton-wood or pecan-trees,
 Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red river or through those
 drain'd by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas, 320
 Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooch or Altamahaw,³
 Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-grandsons
 around them,
 In walls of adobie, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trappers after their
 day's sport,
 The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
 The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their time, 325
 The old husband sleeps by his wife and the young husband sleeps by his
 wife;
 And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
 And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
 And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

2. I.e., the Fourth of July.

3. Georgia rivers.

16

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise, 330
 Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
 Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
 Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine,
 One of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest
 the same,
 A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter nonchalant and hospitable
 down by the Oconee⁴ I live, 335
 A Yankee bound my own way ready for trade, my joints the limberest joints
 on earth and the sternest joints on earth,
 A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn⁵ in my deer-skin leggings, a
 Louisianian or Georgian,
 A boatman over lakes or bays or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye;⁶
 At home on Kanadian⁷ snow-shoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen off
 Newfoundland,
 At home in the fleet of ice-boats, sailing with the rest and tacking, 340
 At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine, or the Texan
 ranch,
 Comrade of Californians, comrade of free North-Westerners, (loving their
 big proportions.)
 Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen, comrade of all who shake hands and
 welcome to drink and meat,
 A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfullest,
 A novice beginning yet experient of myriads of seasons, 345
 Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion,
 A farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, sailor, quaker,
 Prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest.

 I resist any thing better than my own diversity,
 Breathe the air but leave plenty after me, 350
 And am not stuck up, and am in my place.

(The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place,
 The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their place,
 The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place.)

17

These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not
 original with me, 355
 If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing,
 If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are nothing,
 If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing.

 This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is,
 This the common air that bathes the globe. 360

4. River in central Georgia.

5. River in Nebraska.

6. Inhabitants of Indiana, Wisconsin, and Ohio,

respectively.

7. Canadian.

18

With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd
and slain persons.

Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit in which they
are won.

I beat and pound for the dead, 365
I blow through my embouchures⁸ my loudest and gayest for them.

Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes! 370
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known!

19

This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,
It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous, I make appointments
with all,
I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited, 375
The heavy-lipp'd slave is invited, the venerealee⁹ is invited;
There shall be no difference between them and the rest.

This is the press of a bashful hand, this the float and odor of hair,
This is the touch of my lips to yours, this the murmur of yearning,
This the far-off depth and height reflecting my own face, 380
This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again.

Do you guess I have some intricate purpose?
Well I have, for the Fourth-month showers have, and the mica on the side
of a rock has.

Do you take it I would astonish?
Does the daylight astonish? does the early redstart twittering through the
woods? 385
Do I astonish more than they?

This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.

20

Who goes there? hankering, gross, mystical, nude;
How is it I extract strength from the beef I eat? 390

8. Mouthpieces of musical instruments such as the cornet.

9. Someone afflicted with a venereal (sexually transmitted) disease.

What is a man anyhow? what am I? what are you?

All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own,
Else it were time lost listening to me.

I do not snivel that snivel the world over,
That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow and filth. 395

Whimpering and truckling fold with powders for invalids, conformity goes
to the fourth-remov'd,¹

I wear my hat as I please indoors or out.
Why should I pray? why should I venerate and be ceremonious?

Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair, counsel'd with doctors
and calculated close,
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my bones. 400

In all people I see myself, none more and not one a barley-corn² less,
And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them.

I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means. 405

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue³ cut with a burnt stick at
night.

I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood, 410
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content. 415

One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself,
And whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand or ten million
years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd⁴ in granite,
I laugh at what you call dissolution, 420
And I know the amplitude of time.

1. Those remote in relationship, such as "third cousin, fourth removed." "Fold with powders": a reference to the custom of wrapping a dose of medicine in a piece of paper.

2. The seed or grain of barley, but also a unit of measure equal to about one-third inch.

3. Or *curlicue*, a fancy flourish made with a

writing implement, here made in the dark with a lighted stick.

4. Carpenter's terms for a particular way of joining two boards together. A mortise is a cavity in a piece of wood into which is placed the projection (tenon) from another piece of wood.

21

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
 The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
 The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new
 tongue.

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man, 425
 And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
 And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.
 I chant the chant of dilation or pride,
 We have had ducking and deprecating about enough,
 I show that size is only development. 430

Have you outstript the rest? are you the President?
 It is a trifle, they will more than arrive there every one, and still pass on.

I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
 I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

Press close bare-bosom'd night—press close magnetic nourishing
 night! 435
 Night of south winds—night of the large few stars!
 Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
 Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
 Earth of departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt! 440
 Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
 Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
 Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
 Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
 Smile, for your lover comes. 445

Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I to you give love!
 O unspeakable passionate love.

22

You sea! I resign myself to you also—I guess what you mean,
 I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
 I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me, 450
 We must have a turn together, I undress, hurry me out of sight of the
 land,
 Cushion me soft, rock me in billowy drowse,
 Dash me with amorous wet, I can repay you.

Sea of stretch'd ground-swells,
 Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths, 455
 Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always-ready graves,
 Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,
 I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and of all phases.

Partaker of influx and efflux I, extoller of hate and conciliation,
 Extoller of amies⁵ and those that sleep in each others' arms. 460

I am he attesting sympathy,
 (Shall I make my list of things in the house and skip the house that
 supports them?)

I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of
 wickedness also.

What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?
 Evil propels me and reform of evil propels me, I stand indifferent, 465
 My gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait,
 I moisten the roots of all that has grown.

Did you fear some scrofula⁶ out of the unflagging pregnancy?
 Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be work'd over and rectified?

I find one side a balance and the antipodal side a balance, 470
 Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine,
 Thoughts and deeds of the present our rouse and early start.

This minute that comes to me over the past decillions,⁷
 There is no better than it and now.
 What behaved well in the past or behaves well to-day is not such a
 wonder, 475
 The wonder is always and always how there can be a mean man or an
 infidel.

23

Endless unfolding of words of ages!
 And mine a word of the modern, the word En-Masse.

A word of the faith that never balks,
 Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely. 480

It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,
 That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.

I accept Reality and dare not question it.
 Materialism first and last imbuing.

Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration! 485
 Fetch stoncrop mixt with cedar and branches of lilac,
 This is the lexicographer, this the chemist, this made a grammar of
 the old cartouches,⁸
 These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas,

5. Friends (French).

6. Form of tuberculosis characterized by swelling of the lymph glands.

7. The number 1 followed by thirty-three zeroes.

8. On tablets of Egyptian hieroglyphics, the ornamental area noting the name of a ruler or deity. "Stoncrop": a fleshy-leafed plant.

This is the geologist, this works with the scalpel, and this is a
mathematician.

Gentlemen, to you the first honors always! 490
Your facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling,
I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling.
Less the reminders of properties told my words,
And more the reminders they of life untold, and of freedom and extrication,
And make short account of neuters and geldings, and favor men and
women fully equipt, 495
And beat the gong of revolt, and stop with fugitives and them that plot and
conspire.

24

Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest. 500

Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!

Whoever degrades another degrades me,
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.

Through me the afflatus⁹ surging and surging, through me the current and
index. 505

I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on
the same terms.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,
Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs, 510

Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
And of the threads that connect the stars, and of wombs and of the fatherstuff,
And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
Of the deform'd, trivial, flat, foolish, despised,
Fog in the air, beetles rolling balls of dung. 515

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd.

I do not press my fingers across my mouth,
I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart, 520
Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.

9. Divine wind or spirit.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
 Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a
 miracle.

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am
 touch'd from,

The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer, 525
 This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own
 body, or any part of it,

Translucent mould of me it shall be you!

Shaded ledges and rests it shall be you!

Firm masculine colter¹ it shall be you! 530

Whatever goes to the tith² of me it shall be you!

You my rich blood! your milky stream pale strippings of my life!

Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you!

My brain it shall be your occult convolutions!

Root of wash'd sweet-flag! timorous pond-snipe! nest of guarded duplicate
 eggs! it shall be you! 535

Mix'd tussled hay of head, beard, brawn, it shall be you!

Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you!

Sun so generous it shall be you!

Vapors lighting and shading my face it shall be you!

You sweaty brooks and dews it shall be you! 540

Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you!

Broad muscular fields, branches of live oak, loving lounge in my winding
 paths, it shall be you!

Hands I have taken, face I have kiss'd, mortal I have ever touch'd, it shall
 be you.

I dote on myself, there is that lot of me and all so luscious,

Each moment and whatever happens thrills me with joy, 545

I cannot tell how my ankles bend, nor whence the cause of my faint-
 est wish,

Nor the cause of the friendship I emit, nor the cause of the friendship I
 take again.

That I walk up my stoop, I pause to consider if it really be,

A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of
 books.

To behold the day-break! 550

The little light fades the immense and diaphanous shadows,

The air tastes good to my palate.

Hefts³ of the moving world at innocent gambols silently rising freshly
 exuding,

Scooting obliquely high and low.

1. The blade at the front of a plow.

2. Cultivation or tillage of the soil.

3. Something being heaved or raised upward.

Something I cannot see puts upward libidinous prongs, 555
 Seas of bright juice suffuse heaven.
 The earth by the sky staid with, the daily close of their junction,
 The heav'd challenge from the east that moment over my head,
 The mocking taunt, See then whether you shall be master!

25

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me, 560
 If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,
 We found our own O my soul in the calm and cool of the day-break.

My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,
 With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds. 565

Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,
 It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,
Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?

Come now I will not be tantalized, you conceive too much of articulation,
 Do you not know O speech how the buds beneath you are folded? 570
 Waiting in gloom, protected by frost,
 The dirt receding before my prophetic screams,
 I underlying causes to balance them at last,
 My knowledge my live parts, it keeping tally with the meaning of all things,
 Happiness, (which whoever hears me let him or her set out in search of
 this day.) 575

My final merit I refuse you, I refuse putting from me what I really am,
 Encompass worlds, but never try to encompass me.
 I crowd your sleekest and best by simply looking toward you.

Writing and talk do not prove me,
 I carry the plenum⁴ of proof and every thing else in my face, 580
 With the hush of my lips I wholly confound the skeptic.

26

Now I will do nothing but listen,
 To accrue what I hear into this song, to let sounds contribute toward it.

I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of
 sticks cooking my meals,
 I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice, 585
 I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following,
 Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds of the day and night,
 Talkative young ones to those that like them, the loud laugh of work-people
 at their meals,

4. Fullness.

The angry base of disjointed friendship, the faint tones of the sick,
 The judge with hands tight to the desk, his pallid lips pronouncing a
 death-sentence, 590
 The heave'e'yo of stevedores unlading ships by the wharves, the refrain of
 the anchor-lifters,
 The ring of alarm-bells, the cry of fire, the whirr of swift-streaking engines
 and hose-carts with premonitory tinkles and color'd lights,
 The steam-whistle, the solid roll of the train of approaching cars,
 The slow march play'd at the head of the association marching two and
 two,
 (They go to guard some corpse, the flag-tops are draped with black muslin.) 595

I hear the violoncello ('tis the young man's heart's complaint,)
 I hear the key'd cornet, it glides quickly in through my ears,
 It shakes mad-sweet pangs through my belly and breast.

I hear the chorus, it is a grand opera,
 Ah this indeed is music—this suits me. 600

A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me,
 The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling me full.

I hear the train'd soprano (what work with hers is this?)
 The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus⁵ flies,
 It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them, 605
 It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves,
 I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath,
 Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes⁶ of death,
 At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,
 And that we call Being. 610

27

To be in any form, what is that?
 (Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come back thither.)
 If nothing lay more develop'd the quahaug⁷ in its callous shell were enough.

Mine is no callous shell,
 I have instant conductors all over me whether I pass or stop, 615
 They seize every object and lead it harmlessly through me.

I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
 To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can stand.

28

Is this then a touch? quivering me to a new identity,
 Flames and ether making a rush for my veins, 620
 Treacherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,

5. Seventh planet from the sun, thought at that time to be the outermost limit of the solar system.

6. Coils of rope.

7. Edible clam of the Atlantic coast.

My flesh and blood playing out lightning to strike what is hardly different
 from myself,
 On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,
 Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip,
 Behaving licentious toward me, taking no denial, 625
 Depriving me of my best as for a purpose,
 Unbuttoning my clothes, holding me by the bare waist,
 Deluding my confusion with the calm of the sunlight and pasture-fields,
 Immodestly sliding the fellow-senses away,
 They bribed to swap off with touch and go and graze at the edges of me, 630
 No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger,
 Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them a while,
 Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry me.

The sentries desert every other part of me,
 They have left me helpless to a red marauder, 635
 They all come to the headland to witness and assist against me.

I am given up by traitors,
 I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest
 traitor,
 I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me there.

You villain touch! what are you doing? my breath is tight in its throat, 640
 Unclench your floodgates, you are too much for me.

29

Blind loving wrestling touch, sheath'd hooded sharp-tooth'd touch!
 Did it make you ache so, leaving me?

Parting track'd by arriving, perpetual payment of perpetual loan,
 Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward. 645

Sprouts take and accumulate, stand by the curb prolific and vital,
 Landscapes projected masculine, full-sized and golden.

30

All truths wait in all things,
 They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,
 They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon, 650
 The insignificant is as big to me as any,
 (What is less or more than a touch?)

Logic and sermons never convince,
 The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

(Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so, 655
 Only what nobody denies is so.)
 A minute and a drop of me settle my brain,
 I believe the soggy clods shall become lovers and lamps,

And a compend⁸ of compends is the meat of a man or woman,
 And a summit and flower there is the feeling they have for each other, 660
 And they are to branch boundlessly out of that lesson until it becomes
 omnific,⁹
 And until one and all shall delight us, and we them.

31

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
 And the pismire¹ is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the
 wren,
 And the tree-toad is a chief-d'œuvre for the highest, 665
 And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
 And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,
 And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
 And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

I find I incorporate gneiss,² coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains,
 esculent roots, 670
 And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over,
 And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
 But call any thing back again when I desire it.
 In vain the speeding or shyness,
 In vain the plutonic rocks³ send their old heat against my approach, 675
 In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powder'd bones,
 In vain objects stand leagues off and assume manifold shapes,
 In vain the ocean settling in hollows and the great monsters lying low,
 In vain the buzzard houses herself with the sky,
 In vain the snake slides through the creepers and logs, 680
 In vain the elk takes to the inner passes of the woods,
 In vain the razor-bill'd auk sails far north to Labrador,
 I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

32

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-
 contain'd,
 I stand and look at them long and long. 685

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
 They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
 They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
 Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning
 things,
 Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of
 years ago, 690
 Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

8. I.e., a compendium, in which something is reduced to a short, essential summary.

9. All-encompassing.

1. Ant.

2. Metamorphic rock in which minerals are arranged in layers.

3. Rock of igneous (fire created) or magmatic (molten) origin; from Pluto, ruler of infernal regions.

So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their
possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them? 695

Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
Infinite and omnigenous,⁴ and the like of these among them,
Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,
Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on brotherly
terms. 700

A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.

His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him, 705
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return.

I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself out-gallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.

33

Space and Time! now I see it is true, what I guess'd at, 710
What I guess'd when I loaf'd on the grass,
What I guess'd while I lay alone in my bed,
And again as I walk'd the beach under the paling stars of the morning.

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,⁵
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents, 715
I am afoot with my vision.

By the city's quadrangular houses—in log huts, camping with lumbermen,
Along the ruts of the turnpike, along the dry gulch and rivulet bed,
Weeding my onion-patch or hoeing rows of carrots and parsnips, crossing
savannas,⁶ trailing in forests,
Prospecting, gold-digging, girdling the trees of a new purchase, 720
Scorch'd ankle-deep by the hot sand, hauling my boat down the shallow
river,
Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead, where the buck
turns furiously at the hunter,
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock, where the otter is
feeding on fish,
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,

4. Belonging to every form of life.

5. Estuaries or bays.

6. Grasslands.

Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey, where the beaver
 pats the mud with his paddle-shaped tail; 725
 Over the growing sugar, over the yellow-flower'd cotton plant, over the
 rice in its low moist field,
 Over the sharp-peak'd farm house, with its scallop'd scum and slender
 shoots from the gutters,⁷

Over the western persimmon, over the long-leav'd corn, over the delicate
 blue-flower flax,
 Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and buzzer there with
 the rest,
 Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze; 730
 Scaling mountains, pulling myself cautiously up, holding on by low
 scragged limbs,
 Walking the path worn in the grass and beat through the leaves of the
 brush,
 Where the quail is whistling betwixt the woods and the wheat-lot,
 Where the bat flies in the Seventh-month eve, where the great gold-bug⁸
 drops through the dark,
 Where the brook puts out of the roots of the old tree and flows to the
 meadow, 735
 Where cattle stand and shake away flies with the tremulous shuddering
 of their hides,
 Where the cheese-cloth hangs in the kitchen, where andirons straddle
 the hearth-slab, where cobwebs fall in festoons from the rafters;
 Where trip-hammers crash, where the press is whirling its cylinders,
 Wherever the human heart beats with terrible throes under its ribs,
 Where the pear-shaped balloon is floating aloft, (floating in it myself and
 looking composedly down,) 740
 Where the life-car⁹ is drawn on the slip-noose, where the heat hatches
 pale-green eggs in the dented sand,
 Where the she-whale swims with her calf and never forsakes it,
 Where the steam-ship trails hind-ways its long pennant of smoke,
 Where the fin of the shark cuts like a black chip out of the water,
 Where the half-burn'd brig is riding on unknown currents, 745
 Where shells grow to her slimy deck, where the dead are corrupting below;
 Where the dense-star'd flag is borne at the head of the regiments,
 Approaching Manhattan up by the long-stretching island,
 Under Niagara, the cataract falling like a veil over my countenance,
 Upon a door-step, upon the horse-block of hard wood outside, 750
 Upon the race-course, or enjoying picnics or jigs or a good game of
 baseball,
 At he-festivals, with blackguard gibes, ironical license, bull-dances,¹
 drinking, laughter,
 At the cider-mill tasting the sweets of the brown mash, sucking the juice
 through a straw,
 At apple-peelings wanting kisses for all the red fruit I find,

7. I.e., plants growing from soil lodged in house gutters and drain pipes.

8. Beetle.

9. Watertight compartment for lowering passen-

gers from a ship when emergency evacuation is required.

1. Rowdy backwoods dances for which men took male partners.

At musters, beach-parties, friendly bees,² huskings, house-raisings; 755
 Where the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams,
 weeps,
 Where the hay-rick³ stands in the barn-yard, where the dry-stalks are
 scatter'd, where the brood-cow waits in the hovel,
 Where the bull advances to do his masculine work, where the stud to the
 mare, where the cock is treading the hen,
 Where the heifers browse, where geese nip their food with short jerks,
 Where sun-down shadows lengthen over the limitless and lonesome
 prairie, 760
 Where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles far and
 near,
 Where the humming-bird shimmers, where the neck of the long-lived swan
 is curving and winding,
 Where the laughing-gull scoots by the shore, where she laughs her near-
 human laugh,
 Where bee-hives range on a gray bench in the garden half hid by the high
 weeds,
 Where band-neck'd partridges roost in a ring on the ground with their
 heads out, 765
 Where burial coaches enter the arch'd gates of a cemetery,
 Where winter wolves bark amid wastes of snow and iced trees,
 Where the yellow-crown'd heron comes to the edge of the marsh at night
 and feeds upon small crabs,
 Where the splash of swimmers and divers cools the warm noon,
 Where the katy-did works her chromatic⁴ reed on the walnut-tree over the
 well, 770
 Through patches of citrons⁵ and cucumbers with silver-wired leaves,
 Through the salt-lick or orange glade, or under conical firs,
 Through the gymnasium, through the curtain'd saloon, through the office
 or public hall;
 Pleas'd with the native and pleas'd with the foreign, pleas'd with the new
 and old,
 Pleas'd with the homely woman as well as the handsome, 775
 Pleas'd with the quakeress as she puts off her bonnet and talks melodiously,
 Pleas'd with the tune of the choir of the whitewash'd church,
 Pleas'd with the earnest words of the sweating Methodist preacher,
 impress'd seriously at the camp-meeting;
 Looking in at the shop-windows of Broadway the whole forenoon, flating
 the flesh of my nose on the thick plate glass,
 Wandering the same afternoon with my face turn'd up to the clouds, or
 down a lane or along the beach, 780
 My right and left arms round the sides of two friends, and I in the middle;
 Coming home with the silent and dark-cheek'd bush-boy, (behind me he
 rides at the drape of the day.)
 Far from the settlements studying the print of animals' feet, or the
 moccasin print,

2. Gatherings where people work while socializing with their neighbors. "Musters": assemblages of people, particularly gatherings of military troops for drill.

3. Hayrack, from which livestock eat hay.

4. In music, encompassing a full range of tones.

5. Here, small, hard-skinned watermelons.

By the cot in the hospital reaching lemonade to a feverish patient,
 Nigh the coffin'd corpse when all is still, examining with a candle; 785
 Voyaging to every port to dicker and adventure,
 Hurrying with the modern crowd as eager and fickle as any,
 Hot toward one I hate, ready in my madness to knife him,
 Solitary at midnight in my back yard, my thoughts gone from me a long
 while,
 Walking the old hills of Judæa with the beautiful gentle God by my side, 790
 Speeding through space, speeding through heaven and the stars,
 Speeding amid the seven satellites⁶ and the broad ring, and the diameter of
 eighty thousand miles,
 Speeding with tail'd meteors, throwing fire-balls like the rest,
 Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly,⁷
 Storming, enjoying, planning, loving, cautioning, 795
 Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing,
 I tread day and night such roads.

I visit the orchards of spheres and look at the product,
 And look at quintillions ripen'd and look at quintillions green.

I fly those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul, 800
 My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

I help myself to material and immaterial,
 No guard can shut me off, no law prevent me.

I anchor my ship for a little while only,
 My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me. 805

I go hunting polar furs and the seal, leaping chasms with a pike-pointed
 staff, clinging to topples of brittle and blue.⁸

I ascend to the foretruck,⁹
 I take my place late at night in the crow's-nest,
 We sail the arctic sea, it is plenty light enough,
 Through the clear atmosphere I stretch around on the wonderful
 beauty, 810
 The enormous masses of ice pass me and I pass them, the scenery is plain
 in all directions,
 The white-topt mountains show in the distance, I fling out my fancies
 toward them,
 We are approaching some great battle-field in which we are soon to be
 engaged,
 We pass the colossal outposts of the encampment, we pass with still feet
 and caution,
 Or we are entering by the suburbs some vast and ruin'd city, 815
 The blocks and fallen architecture more than all the living cities of the
 globe.

6. The then-known moons of Saturn.

7. I.e., a crescent moon, with the full moon also
 palely visible.

8. Toppled pieces of ice.

9. Highest platform of a foremast.

I am a free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires,
 I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself,
 I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

My voice is the wife's voice, the screech by the rail of the stairs, 820
 They fetch my man's body up dripping and drown'd.

I understand the large hearts of heroes,
 The courage of present times and all times,
 How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship,
 and Death chasing it up and down the storm,
 How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch, and was faithful of days
 and faithful of nights, 825
 And chalk'd in large letters on a board, *Be of good cheer, we will not desert
 you;*
 How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days and would
 not give it up,
 How he saved the drifting company at last,
 How the lank loose-gown'd women look'd when boated from the side of
 their prepared graves,
 How the silent old-faced infants and the lifted sick, and the sharp-lipp'd
 unshaved men; 830
 All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
 I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.¹

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
 The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her
 children gazing on,
 The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing,
 cover'd with sweat, 835
 The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the murderous
 buckshot and the bullets,
 All these I feel or am.

I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
 Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,
 I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my
 skin,² 840
 I fall on the weeds and stones,
 The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,
 Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
 I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the
 wounded person, 845
 My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,

1. Whitman describes the wreck of the *San Francisco*, which sailed from New York on December 22, 1853, bound for South America, and was caught in a storm a day later. The ship

drifted helplessly until early January. Over 150 died in the disaster, which was reported widely in the New York papers.

2. Dribbles down, diluted with sweat.

Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,
 Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,
 I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels, 850
 They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth.

I lie in the night air in my red shirt, the pervading hush is for my sake,
 Painless after all I lie exhausted but not so unhappy,
 White and beautiful are the faces around me, the heads are bared of their
 fire-caps,
 The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches. 855

Distant and dead resuscitate,
 They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself.

I am an old artillerist, I tell of my fort's bombardment,
 I am there again.

Again the long roll of the drummers, 860
 Again the attacking cannon, mortars,
 Again to my listening ears the cannon responsive.

I take part, I see and hear the whole,
 The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits of well-aim'd shots,
 The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip, 865
 Workmen searching after damages, making indispensable repairs,
 The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped explosion,
 The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air.

Again gurgles the mouth of my dying general, he furiously waves with his
 hand,
 He gasps through the clot *Mind not me—mind—the entrenchments.* 870

34

Now I tell what I knew in Texas in my early youth,
 (I tell not the fall of Alamo,³
 Not one escaped to tell the fall of Alamo,
 The hundred and fifty are dumb yet at Alamo,)
 'Tis the tale of the murder in cold blood of four hundred and twelve young
 men. 875

Retreating they had form'd in a hollow square with their baggage for
 breastworks,
 Nine hundred lives out of the surrounding enemy's, nine times their
 number, was the price they took in advance,
 Their colonel was wounded and their ammunition gone,

3. During the Texan Revolution of 1835–36, emigrants from the United States to Texas—at the time part of Mexico—attempted to make Texas into an independent republic. Among the battles fought in what is now the state of Texas were the defense of the Alamo (a Spanish mission church compound in San Antonio), which

fell on March 6, 1836, after a siege by Mexican forces beginning on February 23, when around two hundred men were killed—and the battle of Goliad, when some four hundred secessionist troops were killed after surrendering to the Mexicans on March 19 of the same year.

They treated for an honorable capitulation, receiv'd writing and seal, gave
up their arms and march'd back prisoners of war.

They were the glory of the race of rangers, 880
Matchless with horse, rifle, song, supper, courtship,
Large, turbulent, generous, handsome, proud, and affectionate,
Bearded, sunburnt, drest in the free costume of hunters,
Not a single one over thirty years of age.

The second First-day morning they were brought out in squads and
massacred, it was beautiful early summer, 885
The work commenced about five o'clock and was over by eight.

None obey'd the command to kneel,
Some made a mad and helpless rush, some stood stark and straight,
A few fell at once, shot in the temple or heart, the living and dead lay
together,
The maim'd and mangled dug in the dirt, the new-comers saw
them there, 890
Some half-kill'd attempted to crawl away,
These were despatch'd with bayonets or batter'd with the blunts of
muskets,
A youth not seventeen years old seiz'd his assassin till two more came to
release him,
The three were all torn and cover'd with the boy's blood.

At eleven o'clock began the burning of the bodies; 895
That is the tale of the murder of the four hundred and twelve young men.

35

Would you hear of an old-time sea-fight?⁴
Would you learn who won by the light of the moon and stars?
List to the yarn, as my grandmother's father the sailor told it to me.

Our foe was no skulk in his ship I tell you, (said he,) 900
His was the surly English pluck, and there is no tougher or truer, and never
was, and never will be;
Along the lower'd eve he came horribly raking us.
We closed with him, the yards entangled, the cannon touch'd,
My captain lash'd fast with his own hands.

We had receiv'd some eighteen pound shots under the water, 905
On our lower-gun-deck two large pieces had burst at the first fire, killing all
around and blowing up overhead.

Fighting at sun-down, fighting at dark,

4. This passage alludes to the famous Revolutionary sea battle on September 23, 1779, between the American *Bon-Homme Richard*, commanded by John Paul Jones (1747–1792), and the British *Serapis* off the coast of northern

England. When Jones was asked to surrender, he famously declared, "I have not yet begun to fight." The American ship eventually defeated the *Serapis*.

Ten o'clock at night, the full moon well up, our leaks on the gain, and five feet of water reported,
The master-at-arms loosing the prisoners confined in the after-hold to give them a chance for themselves.

The transit to and from the magazine⁵ is now stopt by the sentinels, 910
They see so many strange faces they do not know whom to trust.

Our frigate takes fire,
The other asks if we demand quarter?
If our colors are struck and the fighting done?

Now I laugh content, for I hear the voice of my little captain, 915
We have not struck, he composedly cries, *we have just begun our part of the fighting.*

Only three guns are in use,
One is directed by the captain himself against the enemy's mainmast,
Two well serv'd with grape and canister⁶ silence his musketry and clear his decks.

The tops⁷ alone second the fire of this little battery, especially the main-top, 920
They hold out bravely during the whole of the action.

Not a moment's cease,
The leaks gain fast on the pumps, the fire eats toward the powder-magazine.

One of the pumps has been shot away, it is generally thought we are sinking.

Serene stands the little captain, 925
He is not hurried, his voice is neither high nor low,
His eyes give more light to us than our battle-lanterns.

Toward twelve there in the beams of the moon they surrender to us.

36

Stretch'd and still lies the midnight,
Two great hulls motionless on the breast of the darkness, 930
Our vessel riddled and slowly sinking, preparations to pass to the one we have conquer'd,
The captain on the quarter-deck coldly giving his orders through a countenance white as a sheet,
Near by the corpse of the child that serv'd in the cabin,
The dead face of an old salt with long white hair and carefully curl'd whiskers,
The flames spite of all that can be done flickering aloft and below, 935

5. Storeroom for ammunition.

6. Grapeshot ("grape"), clusters of small iron balls, was packed inside a metal cylinder ("canis-

ter") and fired from a cannon.

7. I.e., the sailors manning the tops—platforms enclosing the heads of each mast.

The husky voices of the two or three officers yet fit for duty,
 Formless stacks of bodies and bodies by themselves, dabs of flesh upon the
 masts and spars,
 Cut of cordage, dangle of rigging, slight shock of the soothe of waves,
 Black and impassive guns, litter of powder-parcels, strong scent,
 A few large stars overhead, silent and mournful shining, 940
 Delicate sniffs of sea-breeze, smells of sedgy grass and fields by the shore,
 death-messages given in charge to survivors,
 The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnawing teeth of his saw,
 Wheeze, cluck, swash of falling blood, short wild scream, and long, dull,
 tapering groan,
 These so, these irretrievable.

37

You laggards there on guard! look to your arms! 945
 In at the conquer'd doors they crowd! I am possess'd!
 Embody all presences outlaw'd or suffering,
 See myself in prison shaped like another man,
 And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

For me the keepers of convicts shoulder their carbines and keep watch, 950
 It is I let out in the morning and barr'd at night.

Not a mutineer walks handcuff'd to jail but I am handcuff'd to him and
 walk by his side,
 (I am less the jolly one there, and more the silent one with sweat on my
 twitching lips.)

Not a youngster is taken for larceny but I go up too, and am tried and
 sentenced.

Not a cholera patient lies at the last gasp but I also lie at the last gasp, 955
 My face is ash-color'd, my sinews gnarl, away from me people retreat.

Askers embody themselves in me and I am embodied in them,
 I project my hat, sit shame-faced, and beg.

38

Enough! enough! enough!
 Somehow I have been stunn'd. Stand back! 960
 Give me a little time beyond my cuff'd head, slumbers, dreams, gaping,
 I discover myself on the verge of a usual mistake.
 That I could forget the mockers and insults!
 That I could forget the trickling tears and the blows of the bludgeons and
 hammers!
 That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and bloody
 crowning. 965

I remember now,
 I resume the overstaid fraction,

The grave of rock multiplies what has been confided to it, or to any graves,
Corpses rise, gashes heal, fastenings roll from me.

I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, one of an average unending
procession, 970

Inland and sea-coast we go, and pass all boundary lines,
Our swift ordinances on their way over the whole earth,
The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of thousands of years.

Eleves,⁸ I salute you! come forward!
Continue your annotations, continue your questionings. 975

39

The friendly and flowing savage, who is he?
Is he waiting for civilization, or past it and mastering it?

Is he some Southwesterner rais'd out-doors? is he Kanadian?
Is he from the Mississippi country? Iowa, Oregon, California?
The mountains? prairie-life, bush-life? or sailor from the sea? 980

Wherever he goes men and women accept and desire him,
They desire he should like them, touch them, speak to them, stay with them.

Behavior lawless as snow-flakes, words simple as grass, uncomb'd head,
laughter, and naiveté,
Slow-stepping feet, common features, common modes and emanations,
They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers, 985
They are wafted with the odor of his body or breath, they fly out of the
glance of his eyes.

40

Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask—lie over!
You light surfaces only, I force surfaces and depths also.

Earth! you seem to look for something at my hands,
Say, old top-knot,⁹ what do you want? 990
Man or woman, I might tell how I like you, but cannot,
And might tell what it is in me and what it is in you, but cannot,
And might tell that pining I have, that pulse of my nights and days.

Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity,
When I give I give myself. 995

You there, impotent, loose in the knees,
Open your scarf'd chops till I blow grit¹ within you,

8. Students (French).

9. An epithet common in frontier humor, deriving from the fact that some Native Americans gathered their hair into tufts at the top of the head. The poet seems to be addressing an older

Indian, perhaps picking up on the reference to "the friendly and flowing savage" of the previous stanza.

1. Courage. "Scarf'd chops": lined, worn-down jaw or face.

Spread your palms and lift the flaps of your pockets,
I am not to be denied, I compel, I have stores plenty and to spare,
And any thing I have I bestow. 1000

I do not ask who you are, that is not important to me,
You can do nothing and be nothing but what I will infold you.

To cotton-field drudge or cleaner of privies I lean,
On his right cheek I put the family kiss,
And in my soul I swear I never will deny him. 1005

On women fit for conception I start bigger and nimbler babes,
(This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant republics.)

To any one dying, thither I speed and twist the knob of the door,
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed,
Let the physician and the priest go home. 1010

I seize the descending man and raise him with resistless will,
O despairer, here is my neck,
By God, you shall not go down! hang your whole weight upon me.

I dilate you with tremendous breath, I buoy you up,
Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force,
Lovers of me, bafflers of graves. 1015

Sleep—I and they keep guard all night,
Not doubt, not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you,
I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself,
And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell you is so. 1020

41

I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs,
And for strong upright men I bring yet more needed help.

I heard what was said of the universe,
Heard it and heard it of several thousand years;
It is middling well as far as it goes—but is that all? 1025
Magnifying and applying come I,
Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters,
Taking myself the exact dimensions of Jehovah,²
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules³ his grandson,
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha,⁴ 1030

2. God of the Jews and Christians.

3. Kronos (or Cronus), in Greek mythology, was the Titan who ruled the universe until dethroned by Zeus, his son, the chief of the Olympian gods. Hercules, the son of Zeus and the mortal Alcmena, won immortality by performing twelve supposedly impossible feats.

4. The Indian sage Siddhartha Gautama (known

as "Buddha"), founder of Buddhism. "Osiris": Egyptian god who annually died and was reborn, symbolizing the fertility of nature. "Isis": Egyptian goddess of fertility and the sister and wife of Osiris. "Belus": legendary god-king of Assyria. "Brahma": in Hinduism, the divine reality in the role of the creator god.

In my portfolio placing Manito loose, Allah⁵ on a leaf, the crucifix
 engraved,
 With Odin and the hideous-faced Mexitli⁶ and every idol and image,
 Taking them all for what they are worth and not a cent more,
 Admitting they were alive and did the work of their days,
 (They bore mites as for unfledg'd birds who have now to rise and fly and
 sing for themselves,) 1035
 Accepting the rough deific sketches to fill out better in myself, bestowing
 them freely on each man and woman I see,
 Discovering as much or more in a framer framing a house,
 Putting higher claims for him there with his roll'd-up sleeves driving the
 mallet and chisel,
 Not objecting to special revelations, considering a curl of smoke or a hair
 on the back of my hand just as curious as any revelation,
 Lads ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes no less to me than
 the gods of the antique wars, 1040
 Minding their voices peal through the crash of destruction,
 Their brawny limbs passing safe over charr'd laths, their white foreheads
 whole and unhurt out of the flames;
 By the mechanic's wife with her babe at her nipple interceding for every
 person born,
 Three scythes at harvest whizzing in a row from three lusty angels with
 shirts bagg'd out at their waists,
 The snag-tooth'd hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come, 1045
 Selling all he possesses, traveling on foot to fee lawyers for his brother and
 sit by him while he is tried for forgery;
 What was strewn in the amplest strewing the square rod about me, and not
 filling the square rod then,
 The bull and the bug never worshipp'd half enough,⁷
 Dung and dirt more admirable than was dream'd,
 The supernatural of no account, myself waiting my time to be one of the
 supremes, 1050
 The day getting ready for me when I shall do as much good as the best, and
 be as prodigious;
 By my life-lumps!⁸ becoming already a creator,
 Putting myself here and now to the ambush'd womb of the shadows.

42

A call in the midst of the crowd,
 My own voice, orotund sweeping and final. 1055

Come my children,
 Come my boys and girls, my women, household and intimates,
 Now the performer launches his nerve, he has pass'd his prelude on the
 reeds within.

5. God, as named in Islam (Arabic). "Manito": nature god of the Algonquian Indians.

6. An Aztec war god. "Odin": chief Norse god.

7. As Whitman implies, the bull and the bug had

been worshiped in earlier religions, the bull in several, the scarab beetle as an Egyptian symbol of the soul.

8. Testicles.

Easily written loose-finger'd chords—I feel the thrum of your climax and close.

My head slues round on my neck, 1060
 Music rolls, but not from the organ,
 Folks are around me, but they are no household of mine.

Ever the hard unsunk ground,
 Ever the eaters and drinkers, ever the upward and downward sun, ever
 the air and the ceaseless tides,
 Ever myself and my neighbors, refreshing, wicked, real, 1065
 Ever the old inexplicable query, ever that thorn'd thumb, that breath of
 itches and thirsts,
 Ever the vexer's *hoot! hoot!* till we find where the sly one hides and bring
 him forth,
 Ever love, ever the sobbing liquid of life,
 Ever the bandage under the chin, ever the trestles⁹ of death.

Here and there with dimes on the eyes¹ walking, 1070
 To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning,
 Tickets buying, taking, selling, but in to the feast never once going,
 Many sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then the chaff for payment
 receiving,
 A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.

This is the city and I am one of the citizens, 1075
 Whatever interests the rest interests me, politics, wars, markets,
 newspapers, schools,
 The mayor and councils, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, stocks, stores,
 real estate and personal estate.

The little plentiful manikins skipping around in collars and tail'd coats,
 I am aware who they are, (they are positively not worms or fleas.)
 I acknowledge the duplicates of myself, the weakest and shallowest is
 deathless with me, 1080
 What I do and say the same waits for them,
 Every thought that flounders in me the same flounders in them.
 I know perfectly well my own egotism,
 Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,
 And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself. 1085
 Not words of routine this song of mine,
 But abruptly to question, to leap beyond yet nearer bring;
 This printed and bound book—but the printer and the printing-office boy?
 The well-taken photographs—but your wife or friend close and solid in
 your arms?
 The black ship mail'd with iron, her mighty guns in her turrets—but the
 pluck of the captain and engineers? 1090
 In the houses the dishes and fare and furniture—but the host and hostess,
 and the look out of their eyes?

9. I.e., sawhorses or similar supports holding up a coffin.

1. Coins were placed on eyelids of corpses to hold them closed until burial.

The sky up there—yet here or next door, or across the way?
 The saints and sages in history—but you yourself?
 Sermons, creeds, theology—but the fathomless human brain,
 And what is reason? and what is love? and what is life?

1095

43

I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over,
 My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,
 Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and
 modern,
 Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
 Waiting responses from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun, 1100
 Making a fetich of the first rock or stump, powowing with sticks in the
 circle of obis.²
 Helping the llama or brahmin³ as he trims the lamps of the idols,
 Dancing yet through the streets in a phallic procession, rapt and austere in
 the woods a gymnosophist,⁴
 Drinking mead from the skull-cup, to Shastas and Vedas admirant, minding
 the Koran,⁵
 Walking the teokallis,⁶ spotted with gore from the stone and knife, beating
 the serpent-skin drum, 1105
 Accepting the Gospels,⁷ accepting him that was crucified, knowing
 assuredly that he is divine,
 To the mass kneeling or the puritan's prayer rising, or sitting patiently in a
 pew,
 Ranting and frothing in my insane crisis, or waiting dead-like till my spirit
 arouses me,
 Looking forth on pavement and land, or outside of pavement and land,
 Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits. 1110
 One of that centripetal and centrifugal gang I turn and talk like a man
 leaving charges before a journey.

Down-hearted doubters dull and excluded,
 Frivolous, sullen, moping, angry, affected, dishearten'd, atheistical,
 I know every one of you, I know the sea of torment, doubt, despair and
 unbelief.

How the flukes⁸ splash! 1115
 How they contort rapid as lightning, with spasms and spouts of blood!

Be at peace bloody flukes of doubters and sullen mopers,
 I take my place among you as much as among any,

2. Magical charms, such as shells, used in African and West Indian religious practices. "Fetich": i.e., fetish; object of worship.

3. Here, also a Buddhist priest. "Llama": i.e., lama; a Buddhist monk of Tibet or Mongolia.

4. Member of an ancient Hindu ascetic sect.

5. The other worshipers include ancient warriors drinking mead (an alcoholic beverage made of fermented honey) from the skulls of defeated enemies; admiring or wondering read-

ers of the sastras (or shastras or shasters, books of Hindu law) or of the Vedas (the oldest sacred writings of Hinduism); and those attentive to the Koran (the sacred book of Islam, containing Allah's revelations to Muhammad).

6. An ancient Central American temple built on a pyramidal mound.

7. Of the New Testament of the Bible.

8. The flat parts on either side of a whale's tail; here used figuratively.

The past is the push of you, me, all, precisely the same,
 And what is yet untried and afterward is for you, me, all, precisely the
 same. 1120

I do not know what is untried and afterward,
 But I know it will in its turn prove sufficient, and cannot fail.

Each who passes is consider'd, each who stops is consider'd, not a single
 one can it fail.

It cannot fail the young man who died and was buried,
 Nor the young woman who died and was put by his side, 1125
 Nor the little child that peep'd in at the door, and then drew back and was
 never seen again,
 Nor the old man who has lived without purpose, and feels it with bitterness
 worse than gall,
 Nor him in the poor house tubercled by rum and the bad disorder,⁹

Nor the numberless slaughter'd and wreck'd, nor the brutish koboo¹ call'd
 the ordure of humanity,
 Nor the sacs merely floating with open mouths for food to slip in, 1130
 Nor any thing in the earth, or down in the oldest graves of the earth,
 Nor any thing in the myriads of spheres, nor the myriads of myriads that
 inhabit them,
 Nor the present, nor the least wisp that is known.

44

It is time to explain myself—let us stand up.

What is known I strip away, 1135
 I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown.

The clock indicates the moment—but what does eternity indicate?

We have thus far exhausted trillions of winters and summers,
 There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.
 Births have brought us richness and variety, 1140
 And other births will bring us richness and variety.

I do not call one greater and one smaller,
 That which fills its period and place is equal to any.

Were mankind murderous or jealous upon you, my brother, my sister?
 I am sorry for you, they are not murderous or jealous upon me, 1145
 All has been gentle with me, I keep no account with lamentation,
 (What have I to do with lamentation?)

I am an acme of things accomplish'd, and I an encloser of things to be.

9. I.e., syphilis.

1. Native of Sumatra.

My feet strike an apex of the apices² of the stairs,
 On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the steps, 1150
 All below duly travel'd, and still I mount and mount.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
 Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even there,
 I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
 And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.³ 1155

Long I was hugg'd close—long and long.

Immense have been the preparations for me,
 Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.

Cycles⁴ ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,
 For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings, 1160
 They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
 My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
 The long slow strata piled to rest it on, 1165
 Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
 Monstrous sauroids⁵ transported it in their mouths and deposited it with
 care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
 Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

45

O span of youth! ever-push'd elasticity! 1170
 O manhood, balanced, florid and full.
 My lovers suffocate me,
 Crowding my lips, thick in the pores of my skin,
 Jostling me through streets and public halls, coming naked to me at night,
 Crying by day *Ahoy!* from the rocks of the river, swinging and chirping
 over my head, 1175
 Calling my name from flower-beds, vines, tangled underbrush,
 Lighting on every moment of my life,
 Bussing⁶ my body with soft balsamic busses,
 Noiselessly passing handfuls out of their hearts and giving them to be
 mine.

Old age superbly rising! O welcome, ineffable grace of dying days! 1180

2. The highest points (variant plural of *apex*).

3. The "lethargic mist" (line 1154) and "fetid carbon" suggest a time before the appearance of human beings on earth.

4. Centuries.

5. Prehistoric large reptiles or dinosaurs, thought to have carried their eggs in their mouths.

6. Kissing.

Every condition promulges⁷ not only itself, it promulges what grows after
 and out of itself,
 And the dark hush promulges as much as any.

I open my scuttle⁸ at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
 And all I see multiplied as high as I can cipher edge but the rim of the
 farther systems.

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding, 1185
 Outward and outward and forever outward.

My sun has his sun and round him obediently wheels,
 He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,
 And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside them.

There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage, 1190
 If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their surfaces, were this
 moment reduced back to a pallid float,⁹ it would not avail in the long
 run,
 We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
 And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.

A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard¹
 the span or make it impatient,
 They are but parts, any thing is but a part. 1195

See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
 Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that.

My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
 The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,
 The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there. 1200

46

I know I have the best of time and space, and was never measured and
 never will be measured.
 I tramp a perpetual journey, (come listen all!)
 My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff cut from the woods,
 No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair,
 I have no chair, no church, no philosophy, 1205
 I lead no man to a dinner-table, library, exchange,²
 But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,
 My left hand hooking you round the waist,
 My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and the public road.

Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you, 1210
 You must travel it for yourself.

7. Promulgates, officially announces.

8. Roof hatch (as on a ship).

9. I.e., returned to the era before the formation

of the solar system.

1. Imperil, make hazardous.

2. Stock exchange, bank.

It is not far, it is within reach,
Perhaps you have been on it since you were born and did not know,
Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land.

Shoulder your duds dear son, and I will mine, and let us hasten forth, 1215
Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as we go.

If you tire, give me both burdens, and rest the chuff³ of your hand on my
hip,
And in due time you shall repay the same service to me,
For after we start we never lie by again.

This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at the crowded
heaven, 1220
And I said to my spirit *When we become the enfolders of those orbs,
and the pleasure and knowledge of every thing in them, shall we be
fill'd and satisfied then?*
And my spirit said *No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond.*

You are also asking me questions and I hear you,
I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.

Sit a while dear son, 1225
Here are biscuits to eat and here is milk to drink,
But as soon as you sleep and renew yourself in sweet clothes, I kiss you
with a good-by kiss and open the gate for your egress hence.

Long enough have you dream'd contemptible dreams,
Now I wash the gum from your eyes,
You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of
your life. 1230

Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore,
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,
To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me, shout, and
laughingly dash with your hair.

47

I am the teacher of athletes,
He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my
own, 1235
He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher.

The boy I love, the same becomes a man not through derived power, but in
his own right,
Wicked rather than virtuous out of conformity or fear,
Fond of his sweetheart, relishing well his steak,
Unrequited love or a slight cutting him worse than sharp steel cuts, 1240

3. The fleshy part of the palm.

First-rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's eye, to sail a skiff, to sing a
 song or play on the banjo,
 Preferring scars and the beard and faces pitted with small-pox over all
 latherers,
 And those well-tann'd to those that keep out of the sun.

I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?
 I follow you whoever you are from the present hour, 1245
 My words itch at your ears till you understand them.

I do not say these things for a dollar or to fill up the time while I wait
 for a boat,
 (It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you,
 Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.)

I swear I will never again mention love or death inside a house, 1250
 And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who
 privately stays with me in the open air.

If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,
 The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key,
 The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.

No shutter'd room or school can commune with me, 1255
 But roughs and little children better than they.

The young mechanic is closest to me, he knows me well,
 The woodman that takes his axe and jug with him shall take me with
 him all day,
 The farm-boy ploughing in the field feels good at the sound of my voice,
 In vessels that sail my words sail, I go with fishermen and seamen and love
 them. 1260

The soldier camp'd or upon the march is mine,
 On the night ere the pending battle many seek me, and I do not fail them,
 On that solemn night (it may be their last) those that know me seek me.

My face rubs to the hunter's face when he lies down alone in his blanket,
 The driver thinking of me does not mind the jolt of his wagon, 1265
 The young mother and old mother comprehend me,
 The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment and forget where they are,
 They and all would resume what I have told them.

48

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
 And I have said that the body is not more than the soul, 1270
 And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,
 And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own
 funeral drest in his shroud,
 And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick of the earth,

And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod confounds the learning
 of all times,
 And there is no trade or employment but the young man following it
 may become a hero, 1275
 And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheel'd universe,
 And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and com-
 posed before a million universes.

And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
 For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,
 (No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about
 death.) 1280

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
 Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
 I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,
 In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in
 the glass, 1285
 I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's
 name,
 And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
 Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

49

And as to you Death, and you bitter hug of mortality, it is idle to try to
 alarm me.

To his work without flinching the accoucheur⁴ comes, 1290
 I see the elder-hand pressing receiving supporting,
 I recline by the sills of the exquisite flexible doors,
 And mark the outlet, and mark the relief and escape.

And as to you Corpse I think you are good manure, but that does not
 offend me,
 I smell the white roses sweet-scented and growing, 1295
 I reach to the leafy lips, I reach to the polish'd breasts of melons.
 And as to you Life I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths,
 (No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

I hear you whispering there O stars of heaven,
 O suns—O grass of graves—O perpetual transfers and promotions, 1300
 If you do not say any thing how can I say any thing?
 Of the turbid pool that lies in the autumn forest,
 Of the moon that descends the steps of the sougning twilight,

4. Midwife (French).

Toss, sparkles of day and dusk—toss on the black stems that decay in the
 muck,
 Toss to the moaning gibberish of the dry limbs. 1305

I ascend from the moon, I ascend from the night,
 I perceive that the ghostly glimmer is noonday sunbeams reflected,
 And debouch⁵ to the steady and central from the offspring great or small.

50

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me.

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes, I sleep—I
 sleep long. 1310

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
 It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
 To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters. 1315
 Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
 It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is
 Happiness.

51

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
 And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me? 1320
 Look in my face while I snuff the sidle⁶ of evening,
 (Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

Do I contradict myself?
 Very well then I contradict myself,
 (I am large, I contain multitudes.) 1325

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.
 Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his
 supper?
 Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

5. Pour forth.

6. I.e., extinguish the last glimmers of evening.

52

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and
my loitering. 1330

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable.
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day⁷ holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk. 1335

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies,⁸ and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, 1340
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you. 1345

1855, 1881

Crossing Brooklyn Ferry¹

1

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!
Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you
are to me!

On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home,
are more curious to me than you suppose,
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me,
and more in my meditations, than you might suppose. 5

2

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one
disintegrated yet part of the scheme,

7. Wind-driven clouds, or merely the last rays of the sun.

8. Air currents. "Effuse": pour forth.

1. First published as "Sun-Down Poem" in the 2nd edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856), "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" was given its final title in 1860.

The similitudes of the past and those of the future,
 The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the
 walk in the street and the passage over the river,
 The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away, 10
 The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,
 The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,
 Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
 Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights
 of Brooklyn to the south and east, 15
 Others will see the islands large and small;
 Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour
 high,
 A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will
 see them,
 Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to
 the sea of the ebb-tide.

3

It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not, 20
 I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many
 generations hence,
 Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
 Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
 Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I
 was refresh'd,
 Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I
 stood yet was hurried, 25
 Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd
 pipes of steamboats, I look'd.

I too many and many a time cross'd the river of old,
 Watched the Twelfth-month² sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating
 with motionless wings, oscillating their bodies,
 Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in
 strong shadow,
 Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south, 30
 Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
 Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
 Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in
 the sunlit water,
 Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and south-westward,
 Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet, 35
 Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the vessels arriving,
 Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,
 Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the ships at anchor,
 The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars,

The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine
 pennants, 40
 The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot-houses,
 The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the
 wheels,
 The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset.
 The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome
 crests and glistening,
 The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite
 storehouses by the docks, 45
 On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each
 side by the barges, the hay-boat, the belated lighter,³
 On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning
 high and glaringly into the night,
 Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and yellow light over
 the tops of houses, and down into the clefts of streets.

4

These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,
 I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river, 50
 The men and women I saw were all near to me,
 Others the same—others who looked back on me because I look'd forward
 to them,
 (The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)

5

What is it then between us?
 What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us? 55
 Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not,
 I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,
 I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters
 around it,
 I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,
 In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me, 60
 In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me,
 I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,
 I too had receiv'd identity by my body,
 That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be
 of my body.

6

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall, 65
 The dark threw its patches down upon me also,
 The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious,
 My great thoughts as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre?

3. Barge used to load or unload a cargo ship.

Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,
 I am he who knew what it was to be evil, 70
 I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
 Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,
 Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,
 Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant,
 The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me, 75
 The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,
 Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these
 wanting,
 Was one with the rest, the days and haps of the rest,
 Was call'd by my nighest name by clear loud voices of young men as they
 saw me approaching or passing,
 Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh
 against me as I sat, 80
 Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public assembly, yet never
 told them a word,
 Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,
 Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,
 The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like,
 Or as small as we like, or both great and small. 85

7

Closer yet I approach you,
 What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid in my
 stores in advance,
 I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.

Who was to know what should come home to me?
 Who knows but I am enjoying this? 90
 Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for
 all you cannot see me?

8

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd
 Manhattan?
 River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?
 The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the
 belated lighter?
 What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I
 love call me promptly and loudly by my nighest name as I approach? 95
 What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that
 looks in my face?
 Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?

We understand then do we not?
 What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted?
 What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish
 is accomplish'd, is it not? 100

9

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!
 Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!
 Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me, or the men
 and women generations after me!
 Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!
 Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta!⁴ stand up, beautiful hills of
 Brooklyn! 105
 Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
 Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!
 Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!
 Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my
 highest name!
 Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress! 110
 Play the old role, the role that is great or small according as one makes it!
 Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be
 looking upon you;
 Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste with
 the hastening current;
 Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;
 Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all downcast
 eyes have time to take it from you! 115
 Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's
 head, in the sunlit water!
 Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd
 schooners, sloops, lighters!
 Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower'd at sunset!
 Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at nightfall!
 cast red and yellow light over the tops of the houses!
 Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are, 120
 You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,
 About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung our divinest aromas,
 Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient
 rivers,
 Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,
 Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting. 125

 You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,
 We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward,
 Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us,
 We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within
 us,
 We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also, 130
 You furnish your parts toward eternity,
 Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.

1856, 1881

4. Variant of Manhattan.

Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking¹

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
 Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
 Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
 Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his
 bed wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
 Down from the shower'd halo, 5
 Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were
 alive,
 Out from the patches of briars and blackberries,
 From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
 From your memories sad brother, from the fitful risings and fallings I
 heard,
 From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears, 10
 From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,
 From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,
 From the myriad thence-arous'd words,
 From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
 From such as now they start the scene revisiting, 15
 As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,
 Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
 A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,
 Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
 I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter, 20
 Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
 A reminiscence sing.

Once Paumanok,²
 When the lilac-scent was in the air and Fifth-month grass was growing,
 Up this seashore in some briars, 25
 Two feather'd guests from Alabama, two together,

And their nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with brown,
 And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,
 And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright
 eyes,
 And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing them, 30
 Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth, great sun!
While we bask, we two together.

Two together! 35
Winds blow south, or winds blow north,

1. First published as "A Child's Reminiscence" in the *New York Saturday Press* of December 24, 1859, this poem was incorporated into the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* as "A Word Out of the Sea."

Whitman continued to revise it until it reached the present form in the "Sea-Drift" section of the 1881 edition.
2. Long Island.

*Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.* 40

Till of a sudden,
May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,
One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,
Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next
Nor ever appear'd again. 45
And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea,
And at night under the full of the moon in calmer weather,
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird, 50
The solitary guest from Alabama.

*Blow! blow! blow!
Blow up sea-winds along Paumanok's shore;
I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.*

Yes, when the stars glisten'd, 55
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,
Down almost amid the slapping waves,
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears.

He call'd on his mate,
He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know. 60

Yes my brother I know,
The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note,
For more than once dimly down to the beach gliding,
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after
their sorts, 65
The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,
Listen'd long and long.

Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes.
Following you my brother. 70

*Soothe! soothe! soothe!
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close,
But my love soothes not me, not me.*

*Low hangs the moon, it rose late,
It is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.* 75

*O madly the sea pushes upon the land,
With love, with love.*

*O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?
What is that little black thing I see there in the white?* 80

*Loud! loud! loud!
Loud I call to you, my love!*

*High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,
Surely you must know who is here, is here,
You must know who I am, my love.* 85
*Low-hanging moon!
What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?
O it is the shape, the shape of my mate!
O moon do not keep her from me any longer.*

Land! land! O land! 90
*Whichever way I turn, O I think you could give me my mate back again if
you only would,
For I am almost sure I see her dimly whichever way I look.*

*O rising stars!
Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some of
you.*

O throat! O trembling throat! 95
*Sound clearer through the atmosphere!
Pierce the woods, the earth,
Somewhere listening to catch you must be the one I want.*

*Shake out carols!
Solitary here, the night's carols!* 100
*Carols of lonesome love! death's carols!
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon!
O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea!
O reckless despairing carols.*

But soft! sink low! 105
*Soft! let me just murmur,
And do you wait a moment you husky-nois'd sea,
For somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me,
So faint, I must be still, be still to listen,
But not altogether still, for then she might not come immediately to
me.* 110

*Hither my love!
Here I am! here!
With this just-sustain'd note I announce myself to you,
This gentle call is for you my love, for you.*

Do not be decoy'd elsewhere, 115
*That is the whistle of the wind, it is not my voice,
That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray,
Those are the shadows of leaves.*

O darkness! O in vain!
O I am very sick and sorrowful. 120

O brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea!
O troubled reflection in the sea!
O throat! O throbbing heart!
And I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.

O past! O happy life! O songs of joy! 125
In the air, in the woods, over fields,
Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!
But my mate no more, no more with me!
We two together no more.

The aria sinking, 130
 All else continuing, the stars shining,
 The winds blowing, the notes of the bird continuous echoing,
 With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly moaning,
 On the sands of Paumanok's shore gray and rustling,

The yellow half-moon enlarged, sagging down, drooping, the face of the
 sea almost touching, 135

The boy ecstatic, with his bare feet the waves, with his hair the atmosphere
 dallying,

The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at last tumultuously
 bursting,

The aria's meaning, the ears, the soul, swiftly depositing,
 The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,
 The colloquy there, the trio, each uttering, 140
 The undertone, the savage old mother incessantly crying,
 To the boy's soul's questions sullenly timing, some drown'd secret hissing,
 To the outsetting bard.

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,
 Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me? 145
 For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I have heard you,
 Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,
 And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more
 sorrowful than yours,
 A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to
 die.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me, 150
 O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you,
 Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,
 Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,
 Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there in
 the night,

By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon, 155
 The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,
 The unknown want, the destiny of me.

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere,
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,) 160
The word final, superior to all,
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea, 165
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
And again death, death, death, death,
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's
heart, 170
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
Death, death, death, death, death.

Which I do not forget,
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother, 175
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's gray beach,
With the thousand responsive songs at random,
My own songs awaked from that hour,
And with them the key, the word up from the waves,
The word of the sweetest song and all songs, 180
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my feet,
(Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments,
bending aside.)
The sea whisper'd me.

1859, 1881

Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night¹

Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;
When you my son and my comrade dropt at my side that day,
One look I but gave which your dear eyes return'd with a look I shall
never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine O boy, reach'd up as you lay on the
ground,
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle, 5
Till late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made my way,
Found you in death so cold dear comrade, found your body son of
responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)

1. From Whitman's Civil War poetry volume, *Drum-Taps*, first published in 1865 and incorporated into *Leaves of Grass* in 1867.

Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool blew the
 moderate night-wind,
 Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battle-field
 spreading,
 Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night, 10
 But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long I gazed,
 Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side leaning my chin
 in my hands,
 Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you dearest
 comrade—not a tear, not a word,
 Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my soldier,
 As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole, 15
 Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not save you, swift was your death,
 I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet
 again,)
 Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appear'd,
 My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,
 Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and carefully
 under feet, 20
 And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his grave, in
 his rude-dug grave I deposited,
 Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battle-field dim,
 Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)
 Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brighten'd,
 I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket, 25
 And buried him where he fell.

1865, 1867

The Wound-Dresser¹

I

An old man bending I come among new faces,
 Years looking backward resuming in answer to children,
 Come tell us old man, as from young men and maidens that love me,
 (Arous'd and angry, I'd thought to beat the alarum, and urge relentless
 war,
 But soon my fingers fail'd me, my face droop'd and I resign'd myself, 5
 To sit by the wounded and soothe them, or silently watch the dead;)
 Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions, these chances,
 Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? the other was equally
 brave;)
 Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,
 Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell us? 10
 What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics,
 Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what deepest remains?

1. From *Drum-Taps*.

2

O maidens and young men I love and that love me,
 What you ask of my days those the strangest and sudden your talking
 recalls,
 Soldier alert I arrive after a long march cover'd with sweat and dust, 15
 In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly shout in the rush
 of successful charge,
 Enter the captur'd works²—yet lo, like a swift-running river they fade,
 Pass and are gone they fade—I dwell not on soldiers' perils or soldiers' joys,
 (Both I remember well—many the hardships, few the joys, yet I was
 content.)

But in silence in dreams' projections, 20
 While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes on,
 So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the imprints off the sand,
 With hinged knees returning I enter the doors, (while for you up there,
 Whoever you are, follow without noise and be of strong heart.)

Bearing the bandages, water and sponge, 25
 Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
 Where they lie on the ground after the battle brought in,
 Where their priceless blood reddens the grass the ground,
 Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd hospital,
 To the long rows of cots up and down each side I return, 30
 To each and all one after another I draw near, not one do I miss,
 An attendant follows holding a tray, he carries a refuse pail,
 Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied, and fill'd again.

I onward go, I stop,
 With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds, 35
 I am firm with each, the pangs are sharp yet unavoidable,
 One turns to me his appealing eyes—poor boy! I never knew you,
 Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for you, if that would
 save you.

3

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
 The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,) 40
 The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I
 examine,
 Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles
 hard,
 (Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!
 In mercy come quickly.)

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, 45
 I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,

2. Fortifications.

Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side-falling head,
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump,
And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep, 50
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so
offensive,
While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and pail. 55

I am faithful, I do not give out,
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my breast a fire,
a burning flame.)

4

Thus in silence in dreams' projections,
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals, 60
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,
(Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,
Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.) 65

1865, 1881

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd¹

1

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star² early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west, 5
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!

1. Composed in the months following Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865, this elegy was printed in the fall of that year as an appendix to the recently published *Drum-Taps* volume. In the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, it and three

shorter poems were joined to make up the section *Memories of President Lincoln*.

2. Literally Venus, although it becomes associated with Lincoln himself.

O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
 O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me! 10
 O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
 Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
 With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I
 love,
 With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard, 15
 With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
 A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
 A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush, 20
 The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
 Sings by himself a song.
 Song of the bleeding throat,
 Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know,
 If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.) 25

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
 Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from
 the ground, spotting the gray debris,
 Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
 Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the
 dark-brown fields uprisen,
 Passing the apple-tree blows³ of white and pink in the orchards, 30
 Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
 Night and day journeys a coffin.⁴

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
 Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,
 With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black, 35
 With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
 With processions long and winding and the flambeaus⁵ of the night,
 With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the
 unbared heads,
 With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,

3. Blossoms.

4. The train carrying Lincoln's body for burial traveled from Washington, D.C., to Springfield,

Illinois.

5. Torches.

With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong
 and solemn, 40
 With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
 The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—where amid these you
 journey,
 With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,
 Here, coffin that slowly passes,
 I give you my sprig of lilac. 45

7

(Nor for you, for one alone,
 Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
 For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O sane and
 sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
 O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies, 50
 But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
 Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
 With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
 For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

8

O western orb sailing the heaven, 55
 Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I walk'd,
 As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
 As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,
 As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other
 stars all look'd on,)
 As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I know not
 what kept me from sleep,) 60
 As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you
 were of woe,
 As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,
 As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the
 night,
 As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad orb,
 Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone. 65

9

Sing on there in the swamp,
 O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
 I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
 But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,
 The star my departing comrade holds and detains me. 70

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
 And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
 And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?
 Sea-winds blown from east and west,
 Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there
 on the prairies meeting, 75
 These and with these and the breath of my chant,
 I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
 And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
 To adorn the burial-house of him I love? 80

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,
 With the Fourth-month⁶ eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and
 bright,
 With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun,
 burning, expanding the air,
 With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the
 trees prolific,
 In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a
 wind-dapple here and there, 85
 With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and
 shadows,
 And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,
 And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward
 returning.

12

Lo, body and soul—this land,
 My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides,
 and the ships, 90
 The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's
 shores and flashing Missouri,
 And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,
 The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,
 The gentle soft-born measureless light, 95
 The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,
 The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the stars,
 Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

6. April.

13

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
 Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes, 100
 Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
 Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
 Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender!
 O wild and loose to my soul!—O wondrous singer! 105
 You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart,)
 Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
 In the close of the day with its light and the fields of spring, and the
 farmers preparing their crops,
 In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its lakes and forests, 110
 In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds and the storms,)
 Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices
 of children and women,
 The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
 And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with
 labor,
 And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its
 meals and minutia of daily usages, 115
 And the streets how their throbbings throb'd, and the cities pent—lo,
 then and there,
 Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,
 Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,
 And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me, 120
 And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
 And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of
 companions,
 I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,
 Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
 To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still. 125

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
 The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,
 And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,
 From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still, 130
 Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,
 As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,
 And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

Come lovely and soothing death, 135
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious, 140
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all, 145
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death. 150

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star, 155
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies
wide, 160
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.

15

To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night. 165

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions. 170

And I saw askant⁷ the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,

7. Sideways, aslant.

Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw
 them,
 And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
 And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,) 175
 And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.
 I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
 And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
 I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
 But I saw they were not as was thought, 180
 They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,
 The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,
 And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
 And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

16

Passing the visions, passing the night, 185
 Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,
 Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of my soul,
 Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,
 As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the
 night,
 Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again
 bursting with joy, 190
 Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,
 As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
 Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
 I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring.
 I cease from my song for thee, 195
 From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing with
 thee,
 O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievments out of the night,
 The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
 And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul, 200
 With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,
 With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
 Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for
 the dead I loved so well,
 For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—and this for his
 dear sake,
 Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul, 205
 There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

*From Democratic Vistas*¹

* * *

Once, before the war, (Alas! I dare not say how many times the mood has come!) I, too, was fill'd with doubt and gloom. A foreigner, an acute and good man, had impressively said to me, that day—putting in form, indeed, my own observations: "I have travel'd much in the United States, and watch'd their politicians, and listen'd to the speeches of the candidates, and read the journals, and gone into the public houses, and heard the unguarded talk of men. And I have found your vaunted America honeycomb'd from top to toe with infidelism, even to itself and its own programme. I have mark'd the brazen hell-faces of secession and slavery gazing defiantly from all the windows and doorways. I have everywhere found, primarily, thieves and scalliwags arranging the nominations to offices, and sometimes filling the offices themselves. I have found the north just as full of bad stuff as the south. Of the holders of public office in the Nation or the States or their municipalities, I have found that not one in a hundred has been chosen by any spontaneous selection of the outsiders, the people, but all have been nominated and put through by little or large caucuses of the politicians, and have got in by corrupt rings and electioneering, not capacity or desert. I have noticed how the millions of sturdy farmers and mechanics are thus the helpless supple-jacks² of comparatively few politicians. And I have noticed more and more, the alarming spectacle of parties usurping the government, and openly and shamelessly wielding it for party purposes."

Sad, serious, deep truths. Yet are there other, still deeper, amply confronting, dominating truths. Over those politicians and great and little rings, and over all their insolence and wiles, and over the powerfulest parties, looms a power, too sluggish maybe, but ever holding decisions and decrees in hand, ready, with stern process, to execute them as soon as plainly needed—and at times, indeed, summarily crushing to atoms the mightiest parties, even in the hour of their pride.

In saner hours far different are the amounts of these things from what, at first sight, they appear. Though it is no doubt important who is elected governor, mayor, or legislator (and full of dismay when incompetent or vile ones get elected, as they sometimes do), there are other, quieter contingencies, infinitely more important. Shams, &c., will always be the show, like ocean's scum; enough, if waters deep and clear make up the rest. Enough, that while the piled embroider'd shoddy gaud and fraud spreads to the superficial eye, the hidden warp and weft are genuine, and will wear forever. Enough, in short, that the race, the land which could raise such as the late rebellion, could also put it down.

The average man of a land at last only is important. He, in these States, remains immortal owner and boss, deriving good uses, somehow, out of any sort of servant in office, even the basest; (certain universal requisites, and

1. First published in 1871, *Democratic Vistas* drew on two essays, "Democracy" and "Personalism," that Whitman had previously published in the *New York Galaxy* in 1867 and 1868. The text

is taken from Whitman's revised version in *Complete Prose Works* (1892).

2. Pliant walking sticks.

their settled regularity and protection, being first secured,) a nation like ours, in a sort of geological formation state, trying continually new experiments, choosing new delegations, is not served by the best men only, but sometimes more by those that provoke it—by the combats they arouse. Thus national rage, fury, discussion, &c., better than content. Thus, also, the warning signals, invaluable for after times.

What is more dramatic than the spectacle we have seen repeated, and doubtless long shall see—the popular judgment taking the successful candidates on trial in the offices—standing off, as it were, and observing them and their doings for a while, and always giving, finally, the fit, exactly due reward? I think, after all, the sublimest part of political history, and its culmination, is currently issuing from the American people. I know nothing grander, better exercise, better digestion, more positive proof of the past, the triumphant result of faith in human kind, than a well-contested American national election.

Then still the thought returns, (like the thread-passage in overtures,) giving the key and echo to these pages. When I pass to and fro, different latitudes, different seasons, beholding the crowds of the great cities, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, New Orleans, Baltimore—when I mix with these interminable swarms of alert, turbulent, good-natured, independent citizens, mechanics, clerks, young persons—at the idea of this mass of men, so fresh and free, so loving and so proud, a singular awe falls upon me. I feel, with dejection and amazement, that among our geniuses and talented writers or speakers, few or none have yet really spoken to this people, created a single image-making work for them, or absorb'd the central spirit and the idiosyncrasies which are theirs—and which, thus, in highest ranges, so far remain entirely uncelebrated, unexpress'd.

Dominion strong is the body's; dominion stronger is the mind's. What has fill'd, and fills to-day our intellect, our fancy, furnishing the standards therein, is yet foreign. The great poems, Shakspeare³ included, are poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life blood of democracy. The models of our literature, as we get it from other lands, ultramarine,⁴ have had their birth in courts, and bask'd and grown in castle sunshine; all smells of princes' favors. Of workers of a certain sort, we have indeed, plenty, contributing after their kind; many elegant, many learn'd, all complacent. But touch'd by the national test, or tried by the standards of democratic personality, they wither to ashes. I say I have not seen a single writer, artist, lecturer, or what not, that has confronted the voiceless but ever erect and active, pervading, underlying will and typic aspiration of the land, in a spirit kindred to itself. Do you call those genteel little creatures American poets? Do you term that perpetual, pistareen,⁵ paste-pot work, American art, American drama, taste, verse? I think I hear, echoed as from some mountain-top afar in the west, the scornful laugh of the Genius of these States.

Democracy, in silence, biding its time, ponders its own ideals, not of literature and art only—not of men only, but of women. The idea of the women

3. I.e., Shakespeare (19th-century variant spelling).

4. Beyond the sea.

5. Of little worth.

of America, (extricated from this daze, this fossil and unhealthy air which hangs about the word *lady*,) develop'd, raised to become the robust equals, workers, and, it may be, even practical and political deciders with the men—greater than man, we may admit, through their divine maternity, always their towering, emblematical attribute—but great, at any rate, as man, in all departments; or, rather, capable of being so, soon as they realize it, and can bring themselves to give up toys and fictions, and launch forth, as men do, amid real, independent, stormy life.

Then, as towards our thought's finalè, (and, in that, over-arching the true scholar's lesson,) we have to say there can be no complete or epical presentation of democracy in the aggregate, or anything like it, at this day, because its doctrines will only be effectually incarnated in any one branch, when, in all, their spirit is at the root and centre. Far, far, indeed, stretch, in distance, our Vistas! How much is still to be disentangled, freed! How long it takes to make this American world see that it is, in itself, the final authority and reliance!

Did you, too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name? I say democracy is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruits in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between men, and their beliefs—in religion, literature, colleges, and schools—democracy in all public and private life, and in the army and navy.⁶ I have intimated that, as a paramount scheme, it has yet few or no full realizers and believers. I do not see, either, that it owes any serious thanks to noted propagandists or champions, or has been essentially help'd, though often harm'd, by them. It has been and is carried on by all the moral forces, and by trade, finance, machinery, intercommunications, and, in fact, by all the developments of history, and can no more be stopp'd than the tides, or the earth in its orbit. Doubtless, also, it resides, crude and latent, well down in the hearts of the fair average of the American-born people, mainly in the agricultural regions. But it is not yet, there or anywhere, the fully-receiv'd, the fervid, the absolute faith.

I submit, therefore, that the fruition of democracy, on aught like a grand scale, resides altogether in the future. As, under any profound and comprehensive view of the gorgeous-composite feudal world, we see in it, through the long ages and cycles of ages, the results of a deep, integral, human and divine principle, or fountain, from which issued laws, ecclesia, manners, institutes, costumes, personalities, poems, (hitherto unequall'd,) faithfully partaking of their source, and indeed only arising either to betoken it, or to furnish parts of that varied-flowing display, whose centre was one and absolute—so, long ages hence, shall the due historian or critic make at least an equal retrospect, an equal history for the democratic principle. It too must be adorn'd, credited with its results—then, when it, with imperial power, through amplest time, has dominated mankind—has been the source and test of all the moral, esthetic, social, political, and religious expressions and

6. The whole present system of the officering and personnel of the army and navy of these States, and the spirit and letter of their trebly aristocratic rules and regulations, is a monstrous exotic, a nuisance and revolt, and belong here

just as much as orders of nobility, or the Pope's council of cardinals. I say if the present theory of our army and navy is sensible and true, then the rest of America is an unmitigated fraud [Whitman's note].

institutes of the civilized world—has begotten them in spirit and in form, and has carried them to its own unprecedented heights—has had, (it is possible,) monastics and ascetics, more numerous, more devout than the monks and priests of all previous creeds—has sway'd the ages with a breadth and rectitude tallying Nature's own—has fashion'd, systematized, and triumphantly finish'd and carried out, in its own interest, and with unparallel'd success, a new earth and a new man.

Thus we presume to write, as it were, upon things that exist not, and travel by maps yet unmade, and a blank. But the throes of birth are upon us; and we have something of this advantage in seasons of strong formations, doubts, suspense—for then the afflatus of such themes haply may fall upon us, more or less; and then, hot from surrounding war and revolution, our speech, though without polish'd coherence, and a failure by the standard called criticism, comes forth, real at least as the lightnings.

And may-be we, these days, have, too, our own reward—(for there are yet some, in all lands, worthy to be so encouraged.) Though not for us the joy of entering at the last the conquer'd city—not ours the chance ever to see with our own eyes the peerless power and splendid *eclat*⁷ of the democratic principle, arriv'd at meridian, filling the world with effulgence and majesty far beyond those of past history's kings, or all dynastic sway—there is yet, to whoever is eligible among us, the prophetic vision, the joy of being toss'd in the brave turmoil of these times—the promulgation and the path, obedient, lowly reverent to the voice, the gesture of the god, or holy ghost, which others see not, hear not—with the proud consciousness that amid whatever clouds, seductions, or heart-wearying postponements, we have never deserted, never despair'd, never abandon'd the faith.

* * *

1871, 1892

7. Brilliant success (French).

EMILY DICKINSON

1830–1886

Emily Dickinson is recognized as one of the greatest American poets, a poet who continues to exert an enormous influence on the way writers think about the possibilities of poetic craft and vocation. Little known in her own lifetime, she was first publicized in almost mythic terms as a reclusive, eccentric, death-obsessed spinster who wrote in fits and starts as the spirit moved her—the image of the woman poet at her oddest. As with all myths, this one has some truth to it, but the reality is more interesting and complicated. Though she lived in her parents' homes for all but a year of her life, she was acutely aware of current events and drew on them for some

of her poetry. Her dazzlingly complex poems—compressed statements abounding in startling imagery and marked by an extraordinary vocabulary—explore a wide range of subjects: psychic pain and joy, the relationship of self to nature, the intensely spiritual, and the intensely ordinary. Her poems about death confront its grim reality with honesty, humor, curiosity, and above all a refusal to be comforted. In her poems about religion, she expressed piety and hostility, and she was fully capable of moving within the same poem from religious consolation to a rejection of doctrinal piety and a querying of God's plans for the universe. Her many love poems seem to have emerged in part from close relationships with at least one woman and several men. It is sometimes possible to extract autobiography from her poems, but she was not a confessional poet; rather, she used personae—first-person speakers—to dramatize the various situations, moods, and perspectives she explored in her lyrics. Though each of her poems is individually short, when collected in one volume her nearly eighteen hundred surviving poems (she probably wrote hundreds more that were lost) have the feel of an epic produced by a person who devoted much of her life to her art.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830, in Amherst, Massachusetts, the second child of Emily Norcross Dickinson and Edward Dickinson. Economically, politically, and intellectually, the Dickinsons were among Amherst's most prominent families. Edward Dickinson, a lawyer, served as a state representative and a state senator. He helped found Amherst College as a Calvinist alternative to the more liberal Harvard and Yale, and was its treasurer for thirty-six years. During his term in the national House of Representatives (1853–54), Emily visited him in Washington, D.C., and stayed briefly in Philadelphia on her way home, but travel of any kind was unusual for her. She lived most of her life in the spacious Dickinson family house in Amherst called the Homestead. Among her closest friends and lifelong allies were her brother, Austin, a year and a half older than she, and her younger sister, Lavinia. In 1856, when her brother married Emily's close friend Susan Gilbert, the couple moved into what was called the Evergreens, a house next door to the Homestead, built for the newlyweds by Edward Dickinson. Neither Emily nor Lavinia married. The two women stayed with their parents, as was typical of unmarried middle- and upper-class women of the time. New England in this period had many more women than men in these groups, owing to the exodus of the male population during the California gold rush years (1849 and after) and the carnage of the Civil War. For Dickinson, home was a place of "Infinite power."

Dickinson attended Amherst Academy from 1840 through 1846, and then boarded at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary—located in South Hadley, some ten miles from Amherst—for less than a year, never completing the three-year course of study. The school, presided over by the devoutly Calvinist Mary Lyon, was especially interested in the students' religious development, and hoped that those needing to support themselves or their families would become missionaries. Students were regularly queried as to whether they "professed faith," had "hope," or were resigned to "no hope"; Dickinson remained adamantly among the small group of "no hopes." Arguably, her assertion of no hope was a matter of defiance, a refusal to capitulate to the demands of orthodoxy. A year after leaving Mount Holyoke, Dickinson, in a letter to a friend, described her failure to convert with darkly comic glee: "I am one of the lingering *bad* ones," she said. But she went on to assert that it was her very "failure" to conform to the conventional expectations of her evangelical culture that helped liberate her to think on her own—to "pause," as she put it, "and ponder, and ponder."

Once back at home, Dickinson embarked on a lifelong course of reading. Her deepest literary debts were to the Bible and classic English authors, such as Shakespeare and Milton. Through the national magazines the family subscribed to and books ordered from Boston, she encountered the full range of the English and American literature of her time, including among Americans Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Hawthorne, and Emerson. She read the novels of Charles Dickens as they appeared and knew the poems of Robert Browning and the British poet laureate,

Tennyson. But the English contemporaries who mattered most to her were the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, and above all, as an example of a successful contemporary woman poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

No one has persuasively traced the precise stages of Dickinson's artistic growth from this supposedly "somber Girl" to the young woman who, within a few years of her return from Mount Holyoke, began writing a new kind of poetry, with its distinctive voice, style, and transformation of traditional form. She found a paradoxical poetic freedom within the confines of the meter of the "fourteener"—seven-beat lines usually broken into stanzas alternating four and three beats—familiar to her from earliest childhood. This is the form of nursery rhymes, ballads, church hymns, and some classic English poetry—strongly rhythmical, easy to memorize and recite. But Dickinson veered sharply from this form's expectations. If Walt Whitman at this time was heeding Emerson's call for a "metre-making argument" by turning to an open form—as though rules did not exist—Dickinson made use of this and other familiar forms only to break their rules. She used dashes and syntactical fragments to convey her pursuit of a truth that could best be communicated indirectly; these fragments dispensed with prosy verbiage and went directly to the core. Her use of enjambment (the syntactical technique of running past the conventional stopping place of a line or a stanza break) forced her reader to learn where to pause to collect the sense before reading on, often creating dizzying ambiguities. She multiplied aural possibilities by making use of what later critics termed "off" or "slant" rhymes that, as with her metrical and syntactical experimentations, contributed to the expressive power of her poetry. Poetic forms thought to be simple, predictable, and safe were altered irrevocably by Dickinson's language experiments.

Dickinson wrote approximately half of her extant poems during the Civil War. Unsurprisingly, there has been increasing critical interest in Dickinson as a Civil War poet whose work can be read in relation to the Civil War poetry of Melville and Whitman. This edition of the *Norton Anthology* adds four poems (518, 545, 704, 1212) that appear to have been inspired by the specifics of the Civil War (battles, courage, the enormity of the carnage). There are risks to interpreting any Dickinson poem as only referring to particular events in her life or the world beyond her home, but there are also risks in overemphasizing Dickinson's isolation from current events and popular culture. In her poetry, which at times can appear to be hauntingly private, Dickinson regularly responded to her nineteenth-century world, which she engaged through her reading, conversations, and friendships, epistolary and otherwise.

Writing about religion, science, music, nature, books, and contemporary events both national and local, Dickinson often presented her poetic ideas as terse, striking definitions or propositions, or dramatic narrative scenes, in a highly abstracted moment or setting, often at the boundaries between life and death. The result was a poetry that focused on the speaker's response to a situation rather than the details of the situation itself. Her "nature" poems offer precise observations that are often as much about psychological and spiritual matters as about the specifics of nature. The sight of a familiar bird—the robin—in the poem beginning "A Bird, came down the Walk" leads to a statement about nature's strangeness rather than the expected statement about friendly animals. Whitman generally seems intoxicated by his ability to appropriate nature for his own purposes; Dickinson's nature is much more resistant to human schemes, and the poet's experiences of nature range from a sense of its hostility to an ability to become an "Inebriate of air" and "Debauchee of Dew." Openly expressive of sexual and romantic longings, her personae reject conventional gender roles. In one of her most famous poems, for instance, she imagines herself as a "Loaded Gun" with "the power to kill."

Dickinson's private letters, in particular three drafts of letters to an unidentified "Master," and dozens of love poems have convinced biographers that she fell in love a number of times; candidates include Benjamin Newton, a law clerk in her father's office; one or more married men; and Susan Gilbert Dickinson, the friend who

became her sister-in-law. The exact nature of any of these relationships is hard to determine, in part because Dickinson's letters and poems could just as easily be taken as poetic meditations on desire as writings directed to specific people. On the evidence of the approximately five hundred letters that Dickinson wrote to Susan, many of which contained drafts or copies of her latest poems, that relationship melded love, friendship, intellectual exchange, and art. One of the men she was involved with was Samuel Bowles, editor of the Springfield *Republican*, whom Dickinson described (in a letter to Bowles himself) as having "the most triumphant face out of paradise"; another was the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, whom she met in Philadelphia in 1855 and who visited her in Amherst in 1860. Evidence suggests that she was upset by his decision to move to San Francisco in 1862, but none of her letters to Wadsworth survive.

Knowing her powers as a poet, Dickinson wanted to be published, but only around a dozen poems appeared during her lifetime. She sent many poems to Bowles, perhaps hoping he would publish them in the *Republican*. Although he did publish a few, he also edited them into more conventional shape. She also sent poems to editor Josiah Holland at *Scribner's*, who chose not to publish her. She sent four poems to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a contributing editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*, after he printed "Letter to a Young Contributor" in the April 1862 issue. Her cover letter of April 15, 1862, asked him, "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" (See the two Dickinson letters to Higginson on pp. 110–11.) Higginson, like other editors, saw her formal innovations as imperfections. But he remained intrigued by Dickinson and in 1869 invited her to visit him in Boston. When she refused, he visited her in 1870. He would eventually become one of the editors of her posthumously published poetry.

But if Dickinson sought publication, she also regarded it as "the Auction / Of the Mind of Man," as she put it in poem 788; at the very least, she was unwilling to submit to the changes, which she called "surgery," imposed on her poems by editors. Some critics have argued that Dickinson's letters constituted a form of publication, for Dickinson included poems in many of her letters. Even more intriguing, beginning around 1858 Dickinson began to record her poems on white, unlined paper, in some cases marking moments of textual revision, and then folded and stacked the sheets and sewed groups of them together in what are called fascicles. She created thirty such fascicles, ranging in length from sixteen to twenty-four pages; and there is evidence that she worked at the groupings, thinking about chronology, subject matter, and specific thematic orderings within each. These fascicles were left for others to discover after her death, neatly stacked in a drawer. It can be speculated that Dickinson, realizing that her unconventional poetry would not be published in her own lifetime as written, became a sort of self-publisher. Critics remain uncertain, however, about just how self-conscious her arrangements were and argue over what is lost and gained by considering individual poems in the context of their fascicle placement. There is also debate about whether the posthumous publication of Dickinson's manuscript poetry violates the visual look of the poems—their inconsistent dashes and even some of the designs that Dickinson added to particular poems. The selections printed here include a photographic reproduction of poem 269, which can be compared to the now-standard printed version, also included here.

Dickinson's final decades were marked by health problems and a succession of losses. Beginning in the early 1860s she suffered from eye pain. She consulted with an ophthalmologist in Boston in 1864 and remained concerned about losing her vision. In 1874 her father died in a Boston hotel room after taking an injection of morphine for his pain, and one year later her mother had a stroke and would remain bedridden until her death in 1882. Her beloved eight-year-old nephew, Gilbert, died of typhoid fever in 1883, next door at the Evergreens; and in 1885, her close friend from childhood, Helen Hunt Jackson, who had asked to be Dickinson's literary executor, died suddenly in San Francisco. Dickinson's seclusion late in life may have been a response to her grief at these losses or a concern for her own health, but ultimately a focus on the

supposed eccentricity of her desire for privacy draws attention away from the huge number of poems she wrote—she may well have secluded herself so that she could follow her vocation. She died on May 15, 1886, perhaps from a kidney disorder called “Bright’s Disease,” the official diagnosis, but just as likely from hypertension.

In 1881 the astronomer David Todd, with his young wife, Mabel Loomis Todd, arrived in Amherst to direct the Amherst College Observatory. The next year, Austin Dickinson and Mabel Todd began an affair that lasted until Austin’s death in 1895. Despite this turn of events, Mabel Todd and Emily Dickinson established a friendship without actually meeting (Todd saw Dickinson once, in her coffin), and Todd decided that the poet was “in many respects a genius.” Soon after Dickinson’s death, Mabel Todd (at Emily’s sister Lavinia’s invitation) painstakingly transcribed many of her poems. The subsequent preservation and publication of her poetry and letters was initiated and carried forth by Todd. She persuaded Higginson to help her see a posthumous collection of poems into print in 1890 and a second volume of poems in 1891; she went on to publish a collection of Dickinson’s letters in 1894 and a third volume of poems in 1896. Susan Dickinson and her daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, also published a few of Dickinson’s poems in journals such as *The Century*. Though Dickinson’s poetry perplexed some critics, it impressed many others; the three volumes were popular, going through more than ten printings and selling over ten thousand copies. To make Dickinson’s violation of the laws of meter more palatable, Todd and Higginson edited some of the poems heavily. This edition of the *Norton Anthology* reprints one of Dickinson’s poems, “There’s a certain Slant of light” (320), as it was edited by Todd and Higginson so that readers can see Dickinson’s poetry as it would have been printed in the late nineteenth century.

By 1900 or so, Dickinson’s work had fallen out of favor, and had Martha Dickinson Bianchi not resumed publication of her aunt’s poetry in 1914 (she published eight volumes of Dickinson’s work between 1914 and 1937), Dickinson’s writings might never have achieved the audience they have today. Taken together, the editorial labors of Todd, Higginson, Susan Dickinson, and Bianchi set in motion the critical and textual work that would help establish Dickinson as one of the great American poets. They also made her poetry available to the American modernists, poets such as Hart Crane and Marianne Moore; Dickinson and Whitman are the nineteenth-century poets who exerted the greatest influence on American poetry to come.

The texts of the poems, and the numbering, are from R. W. Franklin’s one-volume edition, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* (1999), which draws on his three-volume variorum, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1998). The dating of Dickinson’s poetry remains uncertain. The date following each poem corresponds to Franklin’s estimate of Dickinson’s first finished draft; if the poem was published in Dickinson’s lifetime, that date is supplied as well.

39

I never lost as much but twice -
And that was in the sod.
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!

Angels - twice descending
Reimbursed my store -
Burglar! Banker - Father!
I am poor once more!

5

1858

112¹

Success is counted sweetest
 By those who ne'er succeed.
 To comprehend a nectar
 Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host 5
 Who took the Flag² today
 Can tell the definition
 So clear of Victory

As he defeated - dying -
 On whose forbidden ear 10
 The distant strains of triumph
 Burst agonized and clear!

1859, 1864

124¹

Safe in their Alabaster² Chambers -
 Untouched by Morning -
 And untouched by noon -
 Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
 Rafter of Satin and Roof of Stone - 5

Grand go the Years,
 In the Crescent above them -
 Worlds scoop their Arcs -
 And Firmaments - row -
 Diadems - drop - 10
 And Doges³ - surrender -
 Soundless as Dots,
 On a Disc of Snow.

1859, 1862

1. Dickinson published a version of this poem in the *Brooklyn Daily Union*, April 27, 1864, and it was republished in *A Masque of Poets* (1878), edited by her friend Helen Hunt Jackson. When printed in *Masque*, most reviewers thought it was by Emerson.
 2. I.e., triumphed.

1. Dickinson published a version of this poem in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, March 1, 1862.
 2. Translucent, white chalky material.
 3. Chief magistrates in the republics of Venice and Genoa from the 11th through the 16th centuries.

202

“Faith” is a fine invention
 For Gentlemen who *see!*
 But Microscopes are prudent
 In an Emergency!

1861

207

I taste a liquor never brewed -
 From Tankards scooped in Pearl -
 Not all the Frankfort Berries
 Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of air - am I -
 And Debauchee of Dew -
 Reeling - thro' endless summer days -
 From inns of molten Blue -

5

When “Landlords” turn the drunken Bee
 Out of the Foxglove’s door -
 When Butterflies - renounce their “drams” -
 I shall but drink the more!

10

Till Seraphs¹ swing their snowy Hats -
 And Saints - to windows run -
 To see the little Tippler
 Leaning against the - Sun!

15

1861

225

I’m “wife” - I’ve finished that -
 That other state -
 I’m Czar - I’m “Woman” now -
 It’s safer so -

How odd the Girl’s life looks
 Behind this soft Eclipse -
 I think that Earth feels so
 To folks in Heaven - now -

5

1. Angels.

This being comfort - then
 That other kind - was pain - 10
 But Why compare?
 I'm "Wife"! Stop there!

1861

236

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church -
 I keep it, staying at Home -
 With a Bobolink for a Chorister -
 And an Orchard, for a Dome -
 Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice¹ 5
 I, just wear my Wings -
 And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
 Our little Sexton² - sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman -
 And the sermon is never long, 10
 So instead of getting to Heaven, at last -
 I'm going, all along.

1861

269

Wild nights - Wild nights!
 Were I with thee
 Wild nights should be
 Our luxury!

Futile - the winds - 5
 To a Heart in port -
 Done with the Compass -
 Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -
 Ah - the Sea! 10
 Might I but moor - tonight -
 In thee!

1861

1. Open-sleeved ceremonial robe worn by clergymen.

2. Church custodian.

Wild nights - Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -
To a heart in port -
Come with the Compass -
Come with the Chart -!

Ringing in Eden -
Ah! the Sea!
Might - 't' be -
Tonight -
In thee!

Poem 269 of fascicle 11, from vol. 1 of *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (1981), ed. R. W. Franklin, reproduced with the permission of Harvard University Press. Dickinson's handwriting, which changed over the years, can be dated by comparison with her letters.

320

There's a certain Slant of light,
 Winter Afternoons -
 That oppresses, like the Heft
 Of Cathedral Tunes -

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us - 5
 We can find no scar,
 But internal difference -
 Where the Meanings, are -

None may teach it - Any -
 'Tis the Seal Despair - 10
 An imperial affliction
 Sent us of the Air -

When it comes, the Landscape listens -
 Shadows - hold their breath -
 When it goes, 'tis like the Distance 15
 On the look of Death -

1862

There's a certain slant of light¹

There's a certain slant of light,
 On winter afternoons,
 That oppresses, like the weight
 Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us; 5
 We can find no scar,
 But internal difference
 Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
 'T is the seal, despair, - 10
 An imperial affliction
 Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
 Shadows hold their breath;
 When it goes, 't is like the distance
 On the look of death.

1890

1. The text here shows poem 320 as it was printed in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson

and published in 1890. Note the changes that Todd and Higginson made to Dickinson's punctuation, capitalization, and even word choice.

339

I like a look of Agony,
 Because I know it's true -
 Men do not sham Convulsion,
 Nor simulate, a Throe -

The eyes glaze once - and that is Death -
 Impossible to feign
 The Beads upon the Forehead
 By homely Anguish strung.

5

1862

340

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
 And Mourners to and fro
 Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
 That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,
 A Service, like a Drum -
 Kept beating - beating - till I thought
 My mind was going numb -

5

And then I heard them lift a Box
 And creak across my Soul
 With those same Boots of Lead, again,
 Then Space - began to toll,

10

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
 And Being, but an Ear,
 And I, and Silence, some strange Race
 Wrecked, solitary, here -

15

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
 And I dropped down, and down -
 And hit a World, at every plunge,
 And Finished knowing - then -

20

1862

353

I'm ceded - I've stopped being Their's -
 The name They dropped upon my face
 With water, in the country church

Is finished using, now,
 And They can put it with my Dolls, 5
 My childhood, and the string of spools,
 I've finished threading - too -

Baptized, before, without the choice,
 But this time, consciously, Of Grace -
 Unto supremest name - 10
 Called to my Full - The Crescent dropped -
 Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
 With one - small Diadem -

My second Rank - too small the first -
 Crowned - Crowing - on my Father's breast - 15
 A half unconscious Queen -
 But this time - Adequate - Erect,
 With Will to choose,
 Or to reject,
 And I choose, just a Crown - 20

1862

359

A Bird, came down the Walk -
 He did not know I saw -
 He bit an Angle Worm in halves
 And ate the fellow, raw,

And then, he drank a Dew
 From a convenient Grass - 5
 And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
 To let a Beetle pass -

He glanced with rapid eyes,
 That hurried all abroad - 10
 They looked like frightened Beads, I thought,
 He stirred his Velvet Head. -

Like one in danger, Cautious,
 I offered him a Crumb,
 And he unrolled his feathers, 15
 And rowed him softer Home -

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
 Too silver for a seam,
 Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon,
 Leap, splashless¹ as they swim. 20

1862

1. Splashless.

372

After great pain, a formal feeling comes -
 The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs -
 The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
 And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?

The Feet, mechanical, go round - 5
 A Wooden way
 Of Ground, or Air, or Ought -
 Regardless grown,
 A Quartz contentment, like a stone -

This is the Hour of Lead - 10
 Remembered, if outlived,
 As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow -
 First - Chill - then Stupor - then the letting go -

1862

409

The Soul selects her own Society -
 Then - shuts the Door -
 To her divine Majority -
 Present no more -

Unmoved - she notes the Chariots - pausing - 5
 At her low Gate -
 Unmoved - an Emperor be kneeling
 Opon her Mat -

I've known her - from an ample nation -
 Choose One - 10
 Then - close the Valves of her attention -
 Like Stone -

1862

448

I died for Beauty - but was scarce
 Adjusted in the Tomb
 When One who died for Truth, was lain
 In an adjoining Room -

He questioned softly "Why I failed"? 5
 "For Beauty", I replied -

“And I - for Truth - Themselves are One -
We Bretheren, are”, He said -

And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night -
We talked between the Rooms - 10
Until the Moss had reached our lips -
And covered up - Our names -

1862

477

He fumbles at your Soul
As Players at the Keys -
Before they drop full Music on -
He stuns you by Degrees -

Prepares your brittle nature 5
For the ethereal Blow
By fainter Hammers - further heard -
Then nearer - Then so - slow -

Your Breath - has time to straighten -
Your Brain - to bubble cool - 10
Deals One - imperial Thunderbolt -
That scalps your naked soul -

When Winds hold Forests in their Paws -
The Universe - is still -

1862

479

Because I could not stop for Death -
He kindly stopped for me -
The Carriage held but just Ourselves -
And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He knew no haste 5
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility -

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess - in the Ring - 10
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain -
We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed Us -
The Dews drew quivering and Chill -

For only Gossamer,¹ my Gown - 15
 My Tippet - only Tulle² -

We paused before a House that seemed
 A Swelling of the Ground -
 The Roof was scarcely visible -
 The Cornice³ - in the Ground - 20

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet
 Feels shorter than the Day
 I first surmised the Horses' Heads
 Were toward Eternity -

1862

518

When I was small, a Woman died -
 Today - her Only Boy
 Went up from the Potomac¹ -
 His face all Victory

To look at her - How slowly 5
 The Seasons must have turned
 Till Bullets clipt an Angle
 And He passed quickly round -

If pride shall be in Paradise -
 Ourselves cannot decide - 10
 Of their imperial conduct -
 No person testified -

But, proud in Apparition -
 That Woman and her Boy
 Pass back and forth, before my Brain 15
 As even in the sky -

I'm confident, that Bravoes -
 Perpetual break abroad
 For Braveries, remote as this
 In Yonder Maryland² - 20

1863

1. Delicate, light fabric.

2. Thin silk. "Tippet": scarf for covering neck and shoulders.

3. Decorative molding beneath a roof.

1. River along the mid-Atlantic coast, flowing from Maryland, through Washington, D.C., and into the Virginias.

2. This specific reference may have been intended to evoke a specific battle, such as the battle of Antietam near Sharpsburg, Maryland,

where over 20,000 soldiers were killed and injured on a single day (September 17, 1862). Despite the reference to Maryland, some critics believe the poem was inspired by the death of Frazar Stearns (1840–1862), the son of Amherst College's president, who died in March 1862 at the Battle of New Bern in North Carolina. Dickinson lamented the death in a letter to her cousins Louise and Frances Norcross, referring to "brave Frazar."

519

This is my letter to the World
 That never wrote to Me -
 The simple News that Nature told -
 With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed
 To Hands I cannot see -
 For love of Her - Sweet - countrymen -
 Judge tenderly - of Me

5

1863

545

They dropped like Flakes -
 They dropped like stars -
 Like Petals from a Rose -
 When suddenly across the June
 A Wind with fingers - goes -

5

They perished in the seamless Grass -
 No eyes could find the place -
 But God can summon every face
 On his Repealless - List.

1863

591

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
 The Stillness in the Room
 Was like the Stillness in the Air -
 Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
 And Breaths were gathering firm
 For that last Onset - when the King
 Be witnessed - in the Room -

5

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
 What portion of me be
 Assignable - and then it was
 There interposed a Fly -

10

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
 Between the light - and me -
 And then the Windows failed - and then
 I could not see to see -

15

1863

598

The Brain - is wider than the Sky -
 For - put them side by side -
 The one the other will contain
 With ease - and You - beside -

The Brain is deeper than the sea - 5
 For - hold them - Blue to Blue -
 The one the other will absorb -
 As Sponges - Buckets - do -

The Brain is just the weight of God -
 For - Heft them - Pound for Pound - 10
 And they will differ - if they do -
 As Syllable from Sound -

1863

620

Much Madness is divinest Sense -
 To a discerning Eye -
 Much Sense - the starkest Madness -
 'Tis the Majority
 In this, as all, prevail - 5
 Assent - and you are sane -
 Demur - you're straightway dangerous -
 And handled with a Chain -

1863

656

I started Early - Took my Dog -
 And visited the Sea -
 The Mermaids in the Basement
 Came out to look at me -

And Frigates - in the Upper Floor 5
 Extended Hempen Hands -
 Presuming Me to be a Mouse -
 Aground - upon the Sands -

But no Man moved Me - till the Tide
 Went past my simple Shoe - 10
 And past my Apron - and my Belt
 And past my Boddice - too -

And made as He would eat me up -
 As wholly as a Dew
 Opon a Dandelion's Sleeve - 15
 And then - I started - too -

And He - He followed - close behind -
 I felt His Silver Heel
 Opon my Ancle - Then My Shoes
 Would overflow with Pearl - 20

Until We met the Solid Town -
 No One He seemed to know -
 And bowing - with a Mighty look -
 At me - The Sea withdrew -

1863

704

My Portion is Defeat - today -
 A paler luck than Victory -
 Less Paeans - fewer Bells -
 The Drums dont follow Me - with tunes -
 Defeat - a somewhat slower - means - 5
 More Arduous than Balls -

'Tis populous with Bone and stain -
 And Men too straight to stoop again -
 And Piles of solid Moan -
 And Chips of Blank - in Boyish Eyes - 10
 And scraps of Prayer -
 And Death's surprise,
 Stamped visible - in stone -

There's somewhat prouder, Over there -
 The Trumpets tell it to the Air - 15
 How different Victory
 To Him who has it - and the One
 Who to have had it, would have been
 Contenteder - to die -

1863

706

I cannot live with You -
 It would be Life -
 And Life is over there -
 Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the key to - 5
 Putting up
 Our Life - His Porcelain -
 Like a Cup -

Discarded of the Housewife -
 Quaint - or Broke - 10

A new Sevres¹ pleases -
 Old Ones crack -

I could not die - with You -
 For One must wait
 To shut the Other's Gaze down - 15
 You - could not -

And I - Could I stand by
 And see You - freeze -
 Without my Right of Frost -
 Death's privilege? 20

Nor could I rise - with You -
 Because Your Face
 Would put out Jesus' -
 That New Grace

Glow plain - and foreign 25
 On my homesick eye -
 Except that You than He
 Shone closer by -

They'd judge Us - How -
 For You - served Heaven - You know, 30
 Or sought to -
 I could not -

Because You saturated sight -
 And I had no more eyes
 For sordid excellence 35
 As Paradise

And were You lost, I would be -
 Though my name

1. Porcelain china (French), usually elaborately decorated.

Rang loudest
On the Heavenly fame - 40

And were You - saved -
And I - condemned to be
Where You were not
That self - were Hell to me -

So we must meet apart - 45
You there - I - here -
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are - and Prayer -
And that White Sustenance -
Despair - 50

1863

764

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -
In Corners - till a Day
The Owner passed - identified -
And carried Me away -

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods - 5
And now We hunt the Doe -
And every time I speak for Him
The Mountains straight reply -

And do I smile, such cordial light
Opon the Valley glow - 10
It is as a Vesuvian¹ face
Had let it's pleasure through

And when at Night - Our good Day done -
I guard My Master's Head -
'Tis better than the Eider Duck's 15
Deep Pillow - to have shared -

To foe of His - I'm deadly foe -
None stir the second time -
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye -
Or an emphatic Thumb - 20

Though I than He - may longer live
He longer must - than I -
For I have but the power to kill,
Without - the power to die -

1863

1. Reference to Mount Vesuvius, the active volcano in southern Italy that destroyed Pompeii (79 C.E.).

1096¹

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides -
You may have met him? Did you not
His notice instant is -

The Grass divides as with a Comb - 5
A spotted Shaft is seen,
And then it closes at your Feet
And opens further on -

He likes a Boggy Acre -
A Floor too cool for Corn - 10
But when a Boy and Barefoot
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it 15
It wrinkled And was gone -

Several of Nature's People
I know and they know me
I feel for them a transport
Of Cordiality 20

But never met this Fellow
Attended or alone
Without a tighter Breathing
And Zero at the Bone.

1865, 1866

1212

My Triumph lasted till the Drums
Had left the Dead alone
And then I dropped my Victory
And chastened stole along
To where the finished Faces 5
Conclusion turned on me
And then I hated Glory
And wished myself were They.

What is to be is best descried
When it has also been - 10
Could Prospect taste of Retrospect

1. Dickinson published a version of this poem in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, February 14, 1866.

The Tyrannies of Men
 Were Tenderer, diviner
 The Transitive toward -
 A Bayonet's contrition 15
 Is nothing to the Dead -

1871

1263

Tell all the truth but tell it slant -
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Children eased 5
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind -

1872

1668

Apparently with no surprise
 To any happy Flower
 The Frost beheads it at it's play -
 In accidental power -
 The blonde Assassin passes on - 5
 The Sun proceeds unmoved
 To measure off another Day
 For an Approving God -

1884

1773¹

My life closed twice before it's close;
 It yet remains to see
 If Immortality unveil
 A third event to me,

So huge, so hopeless to conceive 5
 As these that twice befell.
 Parting is all we know of heaven,
 And all we need of hell.

1. The poem was transcribed by Mabel Loomis Todd, and there is no surviving manuscript; it is difficult to determine a probable date of composition.

Letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson¹

15 April 1862

Mr Higginson,

Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?²

The Mind is so near itself—it cannot see, distinctly—and I have none to ask—

Should you think it breathed—and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude—

If I make the mistake—that you dared to tell me—would give me sincerer honor—toward you—

I enclose my name—asking you, if you please—Sir—to tell me what is true?

That you will not betray me—it is needless to ask—since Honor is it's own pawn—³

25 April 1862

Mr Higginson,

Your kindness claimed earlier gratitude—but I was ill—and write today, from my pillow:

Thank you for the surgery—it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others—as you ask—though they might not differ—

While my thought is undressed—I can make the distinction, but when I put them in the Gown—they look alike, and numb.

You asked how old I was? I made no verse—but one or two—until this winter—Sir—

I had a terror—since September—I could tell to none—and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground—because I am afraid—You inquire my Books—For Poets—I have Keats—and Mr and Mrs Browning. For Prose—Mr Ruskin - Sir Thomas Browne—and the Revelations.⁴ I went to school—but in your manner of the phrase—had no education. When a little Girl, I had a friend, who taught me Immortality—but venturing too near, himself—he never returned—Soon after, my Tutor, died⁵—and for several years, my Lexicon—was

1. Dickinson first wrote Higginson (1823–1911) on April 15, 1862, responding to his article “Letter to a Young Contributor,” which he published in the *Atlantic Monthly* earlier in the month. A contributing editor at the magazine, Higginson, who had trained at Harvard Divinity School, had recently resigned his ministry. As an editor, he was intrigued by Dickinson’s poetry, but he never offered to publish her work. In her letter of April 25, 1862, Dickinson refers to the editorial “surgery” he did on the poems she sent him. Over the next twenty-four years, she sent him many letters (including one just before she died) and nearly 100 poems. He visited her twice at her Amherst home, in 1870 and 1873. When he helped to publish the first two volumes of her poems posthumously, Higginson edited the poems, giving them more conventional rhyme

and meter. Both letters are taken from *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters* (1971), ed. Thomas H. Johnson.

2. Dickinson sent four poems with the letter, including 124, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers.”

3. Instead of signing the letter, Dickinson enclosed a card with her signature.

4. Revelation is the concluding prophetic book of the New Testament. Dickinson refers to the English poets John Keats (1795–1821), Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Robert Browning; the English art critic and social theorist John Ruskin (1819–1900); and the English physician and writer Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682).

5. The friend and tutor was probably Benjamin Franklin Newton (1821–1853), who had studied law in her father’s office during the 1840s.

my only companion—Then I found one more—but he was not contented I be his scholar—so he left the Land.⁶

You ask of my Companions Hills—Sir—and the Sundown—and a Dog—large as myself, that my Father bought me—They are better than Beings—because they know—but do not tell—and the noise in the Pool, at Noon—excels my Piano. I have a Brother and Sister—My Mother does not care for thought—and Father, too busy with his Briefs⁷—to notice what we do—He buys me many Books—but begs me not to read them—because he fears they joggle the Mind. They are religious—except me—and address an Eclipse, every morning—whom they call their “Father.” But I fear my story fatigues you—I would like to learn—Could you tell me how to grow—or is it un conveyed—like Melody—or Witchcraft?

You speak of Mr Whitman—I never read his Book⁸—but was told that he was disgraceful—

I read Miss Prescott’s “Circumstance,”⁹ but it followed me, in the Dark—so I avoided her—

Two Editors of Journals¹ came to my Father’s House, this winter—and asked me for my Mind—and when I asked them “Why,” they said I was penurious—and they, would use it for the World—

I could not weigh myself—Myself—

My size felt small—to me—I read your Chapters in the Atlantic—and experienced honor for you—I was sure you would not reject a confiding question—

Is this—Sir—what you asked me to tell you?

Your friend,
E—Dickinson.

6. Dickinson’s friend the Reverend Charles Wadsworth (1814–1882) had recently accepted a pastorate in California.

7. Legal documents.

8. The third edition of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1860.

9. Harriet Prescott Spofford’s (1835–1921) short story “Circumstance” had appeared in the May 1860 *Atlantic*.

1. Possibly Samuel Bowles (1826–1878) and J. G. Holland (1819–1881), who were both associated with the *Springfield Daily Republican*.

MARK TWAIN (SAMUEL L. CLEMENS)

1835–1910

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, the third of five children, was born on November 30, 1835, in the village of Florida, Missouri, and grew up in the somewhat larger Mississippi River town of Hannibal, Missouri—a place that he reimagined in his writing as St. Petersburg, the most famous boyscape in American literature. Twain’s father, a justice of the peace who had unsuccessfully tried to become a storekeeper, died when Twain was twelve, and from that time on Twain worked to support himself and the rest of the family. He was apprenticed to a printer, and in 1851, when his brother Orion became a publisher in Hannibal, Twain went to work for

him. But Twain soon escaped from his brother's print shop, as he was being paid virtually nothing for his work, often running the entire operation by himself. In 1853 he began three years of travel, stopping in St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Keokuk (Iowa), and Cincinnati, in each place working as an itinerant journeyman printer. In 1856 he left Cincinnati for New Orleans by steamboat, intending to go to the Amazon. He changed his plans, however, and instead apprenticed himself to Horace Bixby, a Mississippi riverboat pilot. After training for eighteen months, virtually committing the river to memory, Twain became a pilot himself. He practiced this lucrative and prestigious trade until 1861, when the Civil War virtually ended commercial river traffic.

Slavery was legal in Missouri, though the state did not join the Confederacy, and Twain may have seen brief service in a woefully unorganized Confederate militia, an experience that he later fictionalized in "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" (1885), a work included here. In 1861, as the Mississippi was being closed by Union blockades, Twain went west with his brother Orion, who had been appointed secretary of the Nevada territorial government. This move started him on the path toward his life as a humorist, lecturer, journalist, and author. In the West, Twain began writing for newspapers, first the *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City and then, after 1864, the *Californian* in San Francisco. The fashion of the time called for a pen name, and so from a columnist for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, he borrowed "Mark Twain," riverboat jargon for "two fathoms deep," or "safe water." His early writing was modeled on the humorous journalism of the day, especially that practiced by his friend and roommate in Nevada, who wrote under the pen name Dan De Quille. Also important to his development during these years were friendships with the western writer Bret Harte, the famous professional lecturer and comic Artemus Ward, and the obscure amateur raconteur Jim Gillis. Harte was particularly important to launching Twain's career. He was Twain's editor at the *Californian*, and was considered the leading writer of the city. The fastidious Harte and the slovenly Twain made an unlikely pair, but they became friends. During this time, Twain made his reputation as a lecturer and landed his first major success as a writer by skillfully retelling a well-known tall tale, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," first published in 1865. Widely reprinted across the United States, the sketch did more than introduce Twain to a national audience; it inaugurated a new chapter in the literature of the American West.

In this same year Twain signed with the *Sacramento Union* to write a series of letters covering the newly opened steamboat passenger service between San Francisco and Honolulu. In these letters he used a fictitious character, Mr. Brown, to present inelegant ideas and unorthodox views, attitudes, and information, often in impolite language. This device allowed him to say just about anything he wanted, provided he could convincingly claim he was simply reporting what others said and did. As he refined it, this deadpan technique became a staple of his lectures. Twain's first book of this period, and still one of his most popular, was *Innocents Abroad* (1869), consisting, in revised form, of the letters he wrote for the *Alta California* and *New York Tribune* during his 1867 excursion on the *Quaker City* to the Mediterranean and Holy Land. With his fare paid for by the *Alta California*, Twain, through letters to that San Francisco newspaper, provided a running account of the first great modern American tourist raid on the Old World. Twain wrote hilarious satires of his fellow passengers as well as the pretentious, decadent, and undemocratic Old World as viewed by a citizen of a young country on the rise. A characteristically impertinent note was sounded in a remark he made upon disembarking in New York: When Twain was asked for his impressions of the Holy Land, he said he knew for a fact there would be no Second Coming, for if Jesus had been there once he certainly wouldn't go back. Such scoffing drew angry editorials and speeches, publicity that helped make *Innocents Abroad* even more successful.

In *Roughing It* (1872), Twain returned to the West; he fictionally elaborated the Clemens brothers' stagecoach adventures on the way to Carson City and recounted his unsuccessful schemes for making money (including mining the Comstock lode in Virginia City) once he got there. Throughout *Roughing It*, which also covers his stint in San Francisco as a reporter and his half-hearted gold mining in the Sierra Nevada mountains, Twain debunked the idea of the West as a place where fortunes could be easily made and showed its disappointing and even brutal side. In this respect, Twain joined the group of writers who were trying to tell Eastern readers what the West was really like, while exalting in the freedom and outright craziness of western startup towns and encampments, operating far from Eastern laws, orthodoxies, and even common sense.

Twain's publishers sold *Innocents Abroad*, *Roughing It*, and most of his other books mainly by subscription, with door-to-door salespeople offering sometimes gaudy, always lavishly illustrated volumes of his books as diversion and entertainment. Though the trade was regarded as low, and though many books sold by subscription were not reviewed by the established literary and general interest magazines of the time, subscription houses accounted for nearly two-thirds of American bookselling in the 1870s. Twain's shrewd understanding of the dynamics of the publishing industry, including the importance of lining up first-rate illustrators, helped to establish him as a popular author during this time.

Twain's many travels, including later lecture tours around the globe, did not obscure the rich material of his Missouri boyhood, which ran deep in his memory and imagination. He tentatively probed this material as early as 1870 in an early version of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* called *A Boy's Manuscript*. In 1875 he wrote *Old Times on the Mississippi* in seven installments for the *Atlantic Monthly*—edited by his friend William Dean Howells, who tirelessly promoted Twain's career. The sometimes idyllic, sometimes dangerous river towns of the antebellum border states proved to be the creative landscape that would make Twain famous. He would later incorporate his magazine writing on this region into *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), completed after Twain took a monthlong steamboat trip on the Mississippi, stopping along the way to visit Hannibal. The resulting book—part history, part memoir, part travelogue—offers, among other things, a critique of the southern romanticism Twain believed had made the Civil War inevitable, a theme that would reappear in his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

Twain had married Olivia Langdon, daughter of a wealthy coal dealer from Buffalo, New York, in 1870. This entry into a higher stratum of society than he had previously known, along with his increasing fascination with wealth, created a constant struggle in his work between the conventional and the disruptive—a tension that fuels much of his best humor. In the perennially popular *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), the struggle emerges in the contrast between the entrepreneurial but entirely respectable Tom and his disreputable friend Huck. In this narrative, Twain also mingles childhood pleasures with childhood fears of the violence, terror, and death lurking at the edges of the village. This book has long been recognized as an adult classic as well as a children's book, and its publication further consolidated Twain's status as a writer of popular fiction.

Twain began *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1876 as a sequel to *Tom Sawyer*, but he put the manuscript aside for several years and finished it in 1884, when his thinking about Huck and his story had changed and matured considerably. In recent years the racial (and racist) implications of *Huck Finn* have been the subjects of critical debate, as have questions about the racial beliefs of the author. (For more on the critical controversy, see the selections in "Race and the Ending of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" immediately following the novel.) Similar questions have been raised about gender and sexuality in Twain's life and work. In Twain's own day *Huck Finn* was banned in many libraries and schools around the country and denounced

in pulpits—not for its racial content but for its supposedly encouraging boys to swear, smoke, and run away. Nevertheless, *Huck Finn* has enjoyed extraordinary popularity since its publication. It broke literary ground as a novel written in the vernacular and established the vernacular's capacity to yield high art. Its unpretentious, colloquial, yet poetic style, its wide-ranging humor, its embodiment of the enduring and widely shared dream of innocence and freedom, and its recording of a vanished way of life in the pre-Civil War Mississippi Valley have made the book popular from the moment of its publication: *Huck Finn* sold 51,000 copies in its first fourteen months, compared to *Tom Sawyer*'s 25,000 in the same period. Ernest Hemingway once called it the source of “all modern American literature.”

Twain's next novel was also successful, but *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) is marked by an even sharper satiric bite. The novel describes sixth-century Arthurian England as seen through the eyes of a crafty “Yankee,” Hank Morgan, who is transported back thirteen centuries and tries to “introduce,” in Twain's words, the “great and beneficent civilization of the nineteenth century” into the chivalric and decidedly undemocratic world of Camelot. But Hank's “Gilded Age” schemes end in their own destruction and the massacre of thousands of knights. *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) similarly offers a dark and troubling view of nineteenth-century American values. Set in a Mississippi River town of the 1830s, the novel follows the tragic consequences of switching two babies at birth—one free, one slave, and both children of the same white, slave-owning father. The novel provides an intense, sometimes chaotic meditation on the absurdities of defining individuals in relation to race; on the impact on personality and fate of labels like “white” and “black”; and on biological, legal, and social descriptions of human identity.

In the time following the completion of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain experienced a series of calamities. His spectacularly poor judgment as an investor—combined with the panic of 1893—led to his bankruptcy. His health turned bad; his youngest daughter, Jean, was diagnosed as epileptic; his oldest daughter, Susy, died of meningitis while he was away; and his wife, Livy, began to decline into permanent invalidism. For several years writing was both agonized labor and necessary therapy. The results of these circumstances were a travel book, *Following the Equator* (1897), which records the round-the-world lecture tour that Twain undertook to pay off debts; a sardonically brilliant short story that interrogates middle-class American morality, “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” (1900); an embittered treatise on humanity's foibles, follies, and venality, *What Is Man?* (1906); and the bleakly despairing novel *The Mysterious Stranger*, first published in an inaccurate and unauthorized version by Albert Bigelow Paine, Twain's first biographer, in 1916. Scholars continue to study the large bulk of Twain's unfinished or (until recently) unpublished writings and have called for reevaluation of his work from the decade after 1895. His late writings, most of which Twain declined to see published while he lived, reveal a darkening worldview and an upwelling of anger against orthodoxies of every sort, including organized religious belief and international capitalism and colonialism.

In his later years, Twain, by now an international celebrity, found himself consulted by the press on every subject of general interest. He became an outspoken opponent of U.S. and European imperialism, a stance he shared with Howells. Though Twain's views on political, military, and social subjects were often acerbic, it was only to his best friends that he confessed the depth of his disillusionment. Much of this bitterness informs such published works as “To a Person Sitting in Darkness” (1901), “The United States of Lyncherdom” (1901), and “King Leopold's Soliloquy” (1905), as well as other writings unpublished in his lifetime, such as “The War Prayer,” an acid commentary on the practice of praying for military victory.

In 1906, Twain embarked on a scheme to dictate his autobiography. He would allow himself to wander freely through his reminiscences—often speaking from bed—to produce a kind of “diary and history combined.” An important part of Twain's

project was that the full product would not be available until 100 years after his death, so that he could speak freely of his subjects without fear of hurting their feelings or reputation. Though he published excerpts while still alive, he stuck to this broader plan. The first volume of *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* appeared in 2010 and immediately became a bestseller. Twain's appeal endures because of his deep understanding of the culture that produced him; he remains America's most celebrated humorist and its most caustic critic. As his friend Howells observed, Twain was unlike any of his contemporaries in American letters: "Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes—I knew them all and all the rest of our sages, poets, seers, critics, humorists; they were like one another and like other literary men; but Clemens was sole, incomparable, the Lincoln of our literature."

The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County¹

In compliance with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and inquired after my friend's friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. I have a lurking suspicion that *Leonidas W. Smiley* is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous *Jim Smiley*, and he would go to work and bore me to death with some exasperating reminiscence of him as long and as tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was the design, it succeeded.

I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably by the barroom stove of the dilapidated tavern in the decayed mining camp of Angel's, and I noticed that he was fat and bald-headed, and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity upon his tranquil countenance. He roused up, and gave me good-day. I told him a friend of mine had commissioned me to make some inquiries about a cherished companion of his boyhood named *Leonidas W. Smiley*—*Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley*, a young minister of the Gospel, who he had heard was at one time a resident of Angel's Camp. I added that if Mr. Wheeler could tell me anything about this Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, I would feel under many obligations to him.

Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner and blockaded me there with his chair, and then sat down and reeled off the monotonous narrative which follows this paragraph. He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned his initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that, so far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in *finesse*. I let him go on in his own way, and never interrupted him once.

1. The story first appeared in the *New York Saturday Press* of November 18, 1865, and was subsequently revised several times. The source of the text is the version published in *Mark Twain's*

Sketches, New and Old (1875). In a note, Twain instructs his readers that "Calaveras" is pronounced *Cal-e-VA-ras*.

Rev. Leonidas W. H'm, Reverend Le—well, there was a feller here once by the name of *Jim Smiley*, in the winter of '49—or may be it was the spring of '50—I don't recollect exactly, somehow, though what makes me think it was one or the other is because I remember the big flume¹ warn't finished when he first come to the camp; but any way, he was the curiosesest man about always betting on anything that turned up you ever see, if he could get anybody to bet on the other side; and if he couldn't he'd change sides. Any way that suited the other man would suit *him*—any way just so's he got a bet, *he* was satisfied. But still he was lucky, uncommon lucky; he most always come out winner. He was always ready and laying for a chance; there couldn't be no solit'ry thing mentioned but that feller'd offer to bet on it, and take ary side you please, as I was just telling you. If there was a horse-race, you'd find him flush or you'd find him busted at the end of it; if there was a dog-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a cat-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a chicken-fight, he'd bet on it; why, if there was two birds setting on a fence, he would bet you which one would fly first; or if there was a camp-meeting, he would be there reg'lar to bet on Parson Walker, which he judged to be the best exhorter about here, and so he was too, and a good man. If he even see a straddle-bug start to go anywheres, he would bet you how long it would take him to get to—to wherever he was going to, and if you took him up, he would foller that straddle-bug to Mexico but what he would find out where he was bound for and how long he was on the road. Lots of the boys here has seen that Smiley, and can tell you about him. Why, it never made no difference to *him*—he'd bet on *any* thing—the dangdest feller. Parson Walker's wife laid very sick once, for a good while, and it seemed as if they warn't going to save her; but one morning he come in, and Smiley up and asked him how she was, and he said she was considerable better—thank the Lord for his inf'nite mercy—and coming on so smart that with the blessing of Providence she'd get well yet; and Smiley, before he thought says, "Well, I'll resk two-and-a-half she don't anyway."

Thish-yer Smiley had a mare—the boys called her the fifteen-minute nag, but that was only in fun, you know, because of course she was faster than that—and he used to win money on that horse, for all she was so slow and always had the asthma, or the distemper, or the consumption, or something of that kind. They used to give her two or three hundred yards start, and then pass her under way; but always at the fag end of the race she'd get excited and desperate-like, and come cavorting and straddling up, and scattering her legs around limber, sometimes in the air, and sometimes out to one side among the fences, and kicking up m-o-r-e dust and raising m-o-r-e racket with her coughing and sneezing and blowing her nose—and *always* fetch up at the stand just about a neck ahead, as near as you could cipher it down.

And he had a little small bull-pup, that to look at him you'd think he warn't worth a cent but to set around and look ornery and lay for a chance to steal something. But as soon as money was up on him he was a different dog; his under-jaw'd begin to stick out like the fo'castle² of a steamboat, and his teeth would uncover and shine like the furnaces. And a dog might tackle him and bully-rag him, and bite him, and throw him over his shoulder two or three

1. A narrow channel filled with water, used for conveying logs or timber.

2. The forecandle is the forward part of a ship's upper deck.

times, and Andrew Jackson—which was the name of the pup—Andrew Jackson would never let on but what *he* was satisfied, and hadn't expected nothing else—and the bets being doubled and doubled on the other side all the time, till the money was all up; and then all of a sudden he would grab that other dog jest by the j'int of his hind leg and freeze to it—not chaw, you understand, but only just grip and hang on till they throwed up the sponge, if it was a year. Smiley always come out winner on that pup, till he harnessed a dog once that didn't have no hind legs, because they'd been sawed off in a circular saw, and when the thing had gone along far enough, and the money was all up, and he come to make a snatch for his pet holt, he see in a minute how he's been imposed on, and how the other dog had him in the door, so to speak, and he 'peared surprised, and then he looked sorter discouraged-like, and didn't try no more to win the fight, and so he got shucked out bad. He give Smiley a look, as much as to say his heart was broke, and it was *his* fault, for putting up a dog that hadn't no hind legs for him to take holt of, which was his main dependence in a fight, and then he limped off a piece and laid down and died. It was a good pup, was that Andrew Jackson, and would have made a name for hisself if he'd lived, for the stuff was in him and he had genius—I know it, because he hadn't no opportunities to speak of, and it don't stand to reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances if he hadn't no talent. It always makes me feel sorry when I think of that last fight of his'n, and the way it turned out.

Well, thish-yer Smiley had rat-tarriers, and chicken cocks, and tomcats and all them kind of things, till you couldn't rest, and you couldn't fetch nothing for him to bet on but he'd match you. He ketched a frog one day, and took him home, and said he cal'lated to educate him; and so he never done nothing for three months but set in his back yard and learn that frog to jump. And you bet you he *did* learn him, too. He'd give him a little punch behind, and the next minute you'd see that frog whirling in the air like a doughnut—see him turn one summerset, or may be a couple, if he got a good start, and come down flat-footed and all right, like a cat. He got him up so in the matter of ketching flies, and kep' him in practice so constant, that he'd nail a fly every time as fur as he could see him. Smiley said all a frog wanted was education, and he could do 'most anything—and I believe him. Why, I've seen him set Dan'l Webster³ down here on this floor—Dan'l Webster was the name of the frog—and sing out, “Flies, Dan'l, flies!” and quicker'n you could wink he'd spring straight up and snake a fly off'n the counter there, and flop down on the floor ag'in as solid as a gob of mud, and fall to scratching the side of his head with his hind foot as indifferent as if he hadn't no idea he'd been doin' any more'n any frog might do. You never see a frog so modest and straightfor'ard as he was, for all he was so gifted. And when it come to fair and square jumping on a dead level, he could get over more ground at one straddle than any animal of his breed you ever see. Jumping on a dead level was his strong suit, you understand; and when it come to that, Smiley would ante up money on him as long as he had a red. Smiley was monstrous proud of his frog, and well he might be, for fellers

3. The name of a noted American senator, statesman, and orator (1782–1852).

that had traveled and been everywheres all said he laid over any frog that ever *they* see.

Well, Smiley kep' the beast in a little lattice box, and he used to fetch him down town sometimes and lay for a bet. One day a feller—a stranger in the camp, he was—come acrost him with his box, and says:

“What might it be that you've got in the box?”

And Smiley says, sorter indifferent-like, “It might be a parrot, or it might be a canary, maybe, but it ain't—it's only just a frog.”

And the feller took it, and looked at it careful, and turned it round this way and that, and says, “H'm—so 'tis. Well, what's *he* good for?”

“Well,” Smiley says, easy and careless, “he's good enough for *one* thing, I should judge—he can outjump any frog in Calaveras county.”

The feller took the box again, and took another long, particular look, and give it back to Smiley, and says, very deliberate, “Well,” he says, “I don't see no p'int about that frog that's any better'n any other frog.”

“Maybe you don't,” Smiley says. “Maybe you understand frogs and maybe you don't understand 'em; maybe you've had experience, and maybe you ain't only an amature, as it were. Anyways, I've got *my* opinion and I'll resk forty dollars that he can outjump any frog in Calaveras county.”

And the feller studied a minute, and then says, kinder sad like, “Well, I'm only a stranger here, and I ain't got no frog; but if I had a frog, I'd bet you.”

And then Smiley says, “That's all right—that's all right—if you'll hold my box a minute, I'll go and get you a frog.” And so the feller took the box, and put up his forty dollars along with Smiley's, and set down to wait.

So he set there a good while thinking and thinking to hisself, and then he got the frog out and prized his mouth open and took a teaspoon and filled him full of quail shot—filled him pretty near up to his chin—and set him on the floor. Smiley he went to the swamp and slopped around in the mud for a long time, and finally he ketched a frog, and fetched him in, and give him to this feller, and says:

“Now, if you're ready, set him alongside of Dan'l, with his forepaws just even with Dan'l's, and I'll give the word.” Then he says, “One—two—three-*git!*” and him and the feller touched up the frogs from behind, and the new frog hopped off lively, but Dan'l give a heave, and hysted up his shoulders—so—like a Frenchman, but it warn't no use—he couldn't budge; he was planted as solid as a church, and he couldn't no more stir than if he was anchored out. Smiley was a good deal surprised, and he was disgusted too, but he didn't have no idea what the matter was, of course.

The feller took the money and started away; and when he was going out at the door, he sorter jerked his thumb over his shoulder—so—at Dan'l, and says again, very deliberate, “Well,” he says, “I don't see no p'int about that frog that's any better'n any other frog.”

Smiley he stood scratching his head and looking down at Dan'l a long time, and at last he says, “I do wonder what in the nation that frog throw'd off for—I wonder if there ain't something the matter with him—he 'pears to look mighty baggy, somehow.” And he ketched Dan'l by the nap of the neck, and hefted him, and says, “Why blame my cats if he don't weigh five pound!” and turned him upside down and he belched out a double handful of shot. And then he see how it was, and he was the maddest man—he set the frog down and took out after that feller, but he never ketched him. And——”

[Here Simon Wheeler heard his name called from the front yard, and got up to see what was wanted.] And turning to me as he moved away, he said: “Just set where you are, stranger, and rest easy—I ain’t going to be gone a second.”

But, by your leave, I did not think that a continuation of the history of the enterprising vagabond *Jim* Smiley would be likely to afford me much information concerning the *Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley*, and so I started away.

At the door I met the sociable Wheeler returning, and he button-holed me and recommenced:

“Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that didn’t have no tail, only jest a short stump like a bannanner, and——”

However, lacking both time and inclination, I did not wait to hear about the afflicted cow, but took my leave.

1865, 1867

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn¹

(*Tom Sawyer's Comrade*)

Scene: The Mississippi Valley

Time: Forty to Fifty Years Ago²

NOTICE

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR
PER G. G., CHIEF OF ORDNANCE.

Explanatory

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary “Pike-County”³ dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guess-work; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

1. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was first published in England in December 1884. The text printed here is a corrected version of the first American edition of 1885.

2. I.e., between 1835 and 1845—well before the Civil War.

3. Pike County, Missouri.



Huck. E. W. Kemble's illustration of Huckleberry Finn on the frontispiece of the first edition (1884).

I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.

THE AUTHOR

Chapter I

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,"⁴ but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book—which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, as I said before.

Now the way that the book winds up, is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece—all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up.

4. Published in 1876.

Well, Judge Thatcher, he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us a dollar a day apiece, all the year round—more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas, she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer, I lit out. I got into my old rags, and my sugar-hogshead⁵ again, and was free and satisfied. But Tom Sawyer, he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back.

The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them. That is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers;⁶ and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by-and-by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him; because I don't take no stock in dead people.

Pretty soon I wanted to smoke, and asked the widow to let me. But she wouldn't. She said it was a mean practice and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more. That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it. Here she was a bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone, you see, yet finding a power of fault with me for doing a thing that had some good in it. And she took snuff too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself.

Her sister, Miss Watson, a tolerable slim old maid, with goggles on, had just come to live with her, and took a set at me now, with a spelling-book. She worked me middling hard for about an hour, and then the widow made her ease up. I couldn't stood it much longer. Then for an hour it was deadly dull, and I was fidgety. Miss Watson would say, "Don't put your feet up there, Huckleberry"; and "don't scrunch up like that, Huckleberry—set up straight"; and pretty soon she would say, "Don't gap and stretch like that, Huckleberry—why don't you try to behave?" Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad, then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular. She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn't say it for the whole world; *she* was going to live so as to go to

5. A large barrel.

6. Pharaoh's daughter discovered the infant Moses floating in the Nile in a basket woven from bul-

rushes (Exodus 2). She adopted him into the royal family just as the widow has adopted Huck.

the good place. Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn't do no good.

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever.⁷ So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and, she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.

Miss Watson she kept pecking at me, and it got tiresome and lonesome. By-and-by they fetched the niggers⁸ in and had prayers, and then everybody was off to bed. I went up to my room with a piece of candle and put it on the table. Then I set down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn't no use. I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars was shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. Then away out in the woods I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood, and so can't rest easy in its grave and has to go about that way every night grieving. I got so down-hearted and scared, I did wish I had some company. Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it was all shriveled up. I didn't need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the clothes off of me. I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away. But I hadn't no confidence. You do that when you've lost a horse-shoe that you've found, instead of nailing it up over the door, but I hadn't ever heard anybody say it was any way to keep off bad luck when you'd killed a spider.

I set down again, a shaking all over, and got out my pipe for a smoke; for the house was all as still as death, now, and so the widow wouldn't know. Well, after a long time I heard the clock away off in the town go boom—boom—boom—twelve licks—and all still again—stillier than ever. Pretty soon I heard a twig snap, down in the dark amongst the trees—something was a stirring. I set still and listened. Directly I could just barely hear a “*me-yow! me-yow!*” down there. That was good! Says I, “*me-yow! me-yow!*” as soft as I could, and then I put out the light and scrambled out of the window onto the shed. Then I slipped down to the ground and crawled in amongst the trees, and sure enough there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me.

7. Conventional conceptions of the Christian heaven were satirized early and late in Twain's writings.

8. This word is now unacceptable, but at the time of this novel's setting (before the Civil War) it was a common, though vulgar, term among

whites without the powerfully negative connotations it has since acquired. For debate on the racial politics of *Huckleberry Finn*, see the selections in “Critical Controversy: Race and the Ending of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,” pp. 303–18.

Chapter II

We went tip-toeing along a path amongst the trees back towards the end of the widow's garden, stooping down so as the branches wouldn't scrape our heads. When we was passing by the kitchen I fell over a root and made a noise. We scrouched down and laid still. Miss Watson's big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him. He got up and stretched his neck out about a minute, listening. Then he says,

"Who dah?"

He listened some more; then he come tip-toeing down and stood right between us; we could a touched him, nearly. Well, likely it was minutes and minutes that there warn't a sound, and we all there so close together. There was a place on my ankle that got to itching; but I dasn't scratch it; and then my ear begun to itch; and next my back, right between my shoulders. Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. Well, I've noticed that thing plenty of times since. If you are with the quality, or at a funeral, or trying to go to sleep when you ain't sleepy—if you are anywheres where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will itch all over in upwards of a thousand places. Pretty soon Jim says:

"Say—who is you? Whar is you? Dog my cats ef I didn' hear sumf'n. Well, I knows what I's gwyne to do. I's gwyne to set down here and listen tell I hears it agin."

So he set down on the ground betwixt me and Tom. He leaned his back up against a tree, and stretched his legs out till one of them most touched one of mine. My nose begun to itch. It itched till the tears come into my eyes. But I dasn't scratch. Then it begun to itch on the inside. Next I got to itching underneath. I didn't know how I was going to set still. This miserableness went on as much as six or seven minutes; but it seemed a sight longer than that. I was itching in eleven different places now. I reckoned I couldn't stand it more'n a minute longer, but I set my teeth hard and got ready to try. Just then Jim begun to breathe heavy; next he begun to snore—and then I was pretty soon comfortable again.

Tom he made a sign to me—kind of a little noise with his mouth—and we went creeping away on our hands and knees. When we was ten foot off, Tom whispered to me and wanted to tie Jim to the tree for fun; but I said no; he might wake and make a disturbance, and then they'd find out I warn't in. Then Tom said he hadn't got candles enough, and he would slip in the kitchen and get some more. I didn't want him to try. I said Jim might wake up and come. But Tom wanted to resk it; so we slid in there and got three candles, and Tom laid five cents on the table for pay. Then we got out, and I was in a sweat to get away; but nothing would do Tom but he must crawl to where Jim was, on his hands and knees, and play something on him. I waited, and it seemed a good while, everything was so still and lonesome.

As soon as Tom was back, we cut along the path, around the garden fence, and by-and-by fetched up on the steep top of the hill the other side of the house. Tom said he slipped Jim's hat off of his head and hung it on a limb right over him, and Jim stirred a little, but he didn't wake. Afterwards Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again and hung his hat on

a limb to show who done it. And next time Jim told it he said they rode him down to New Orleans; and after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by-and-by he said they rode him all over the world, and tired him most to death, and his back was all over saddle-boils. Jim was monstrous proud about it, and he got so he wouldn't hardly notice the other niggers. Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country. Strange niggers⁹ would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. Niggers is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'bout witches?" and that nigger was corked up and had to take a back seat. Jim always kept that five-center piece around his neck with a string and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands and told him he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to, just by saying something to it; but he never told what it was he said to it. Niggers would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of the five-center piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hands on it. Jim was most ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches.

Well, when Tom and me got to the edge of the hill-top, we looked away down into the village¹ and could see three or four lights twinkling, where there was sick folks, may be; and the stars over us was sparkling ever so fine; and down by the village was the river, a whole mile broad, and awful still and grand. We went down the hill and found Jo Harper, and Ben Rogers, and two or three more of the boys, hid in the old tanyard. So we unhitched a skiff and pulled down the river two mile and a half, to the big scar on the hill-side, and went ashore.

We went to a clump of bushes, and Tom made everybody swear to keep the secret, and then showed them a hole in the hill, right in the thickest part of the bushes. Then we lit the candles and crawled in on our hands and knees. We went about two hundred yards, and then the cave opened up. Tom poked about amongst the passages and pretty soon ducked under a wall where you wouldn't a noticed that there was a hole. We went along a narrow place and got into a kind of room, all damp and sweaty and cold, and there we stopped. Tom says:

"Now we'll start this band of robbers and call it Tom Sawyer's Gang. Everybody that wants to join has got to take an oath, and write his name in blood."

Everybody was willing. So Tom got out a sheet of paper that he had wrote the oath on, and read it. It swore every boy to stick to the band, and never tell any of the secrets; and if anybody done anything to any boy in the band, whichever boy was ordered to kill that person and his family must do it, and he mustn't eat and he mustn't sleep till he had killed them and hacked a cross in their breasts, which was the sign of the band. And nobody that didn't belong to the band could use that mark, and if he did he must be sued; and

9. Those who did not live in the immediate area.
1. The village, called St. Petersburg here and

in *Tom Sawyer*, is modeled on Hannibal, Missouri.

if he done it again he must be killed. And if anybody that belonged to the band told the secrets, he must have his throat cut, and then have his carcass burnt up and the ashes scattered all around, and his name blotted off of the list with blood and never mentioned again by the gang, but have a curse put on it and be forgot, forever.

Everybody said it was a real beautiful oath, and asked Tom if he got it out of his own head. He said, some of it, but the rest was out of pirate books, and robber books, and every gang that was high-toned had it.

Some thought it would be good to kill the *families* of boys that told the secrets. Tom said it was a good idea, so he took a pencil and wrote it in. Then Ben Rogers says:

"Here's Huck Finn, he hain't got no family—what you going to do 'bout him?"

"Well, hain't he got a father?" says Tom Sawyer.

"Yes, he's got a father, but you can't never find him, these days. He used to lay drunk with the hogs in the tanyard, but he hain't been seen in these parts for a year or more."

They talked it over, and they was going to rule me out, because they said every boy must have a family or somebody to kill, or else it wouldn't be fair and square for the others. Well, nobody could think of anything to do—everybody was stumped, and set still. I was most ready to cry; but all at once I thought of a way, and so I offered them Miss Watson—they could kill her. Everybody said:

"Oh, she'll do, she'll do. That's all right. Huck can come in."

Then they all stuck a pin in their fingers to get blood to sign with, and I made my mark on the paper.

"Now," says Ben Rogers, "what's the line of business of this Gang?"

"Nothing only robbery and murder," Tom said.

"But who are we going to rob? houses—or cattle—or—"

"Stuff! stealing cattle and such things ain't robbery, it's burglary," says Tom Sawyer. "We ain't burglars. That ain't no sort of style. We are highwaymen. We stop stages and carriages on the road, with masks on, and kill the people and take their watches and money."

"Must we always kill the people?"

"Oh, certainly. It's best. Some authorities think different, but mostly it's considered best to kill them. Except some that you bring to the cave here and keep them till they're ransomed."

"Ransomed? What's that?"

"I don't know. But that's what they do. I've seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do."

"But how can we do it if we don't know what it is?"

"Why blame it all, we've *got* to do it. Don't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up?"

"Oh, that's all very fine to *say*, Tom Sawyer, but how in the nation² are these fellows going to be ransomed if we don't know how to do it to them? that's the thing *I* want to get at. Now what do you *reckon* it is?"

“Well I don’t know. But per’aps if we keep them till they’re ransomed, it means that we keep them till they’re dead.”

“Now, that’s something *like*. That’ll answer. Why couldn’t you said that before? We’ll keep them till they’re ransomed to death—and a bothersome lot they’ll be, too, eating up everything and always trying to get loose.”

“How you talk, Ben Rogers. How can they get loose when there’s a guard over them, ready to shoot them down if they move a peg?”

“A guard. Well, that *is* good. So somebody’s got to set up all night and never get any sleep, just so as to watch them. I think that’s foolishness. Why can’t a body take a club and ransom them as soon as they get here?”

“Because it ain’t in the books so—that’s why. Now Ben Rogers, do you want to do things regular, or don’t you?—that’s the idea. Don’t you reckon that the people that made the books knows what’s the correct thing to do? Do you reckon *you* can learn ’em anything? Not by a good deal. No, sir, we’ll just go on and ransom them in the regular way.”

“All right. I don’t mind; but I say it’s a fool way, anyhow. Say—do we kill the women, too?”

“Well, Ben Rogers, if I was as ignorant as you I wouldn’t let on. Kill the women? No—nobody ever saw anything in the books like that. You fetch them to the cave, and you’re always as polite as pie to them; and by-and-by they fall in love with you and never want to go home any more.”

“Well, if that’s the way, I’m agreed, but I don’t take no stock in it. Mighty soon we’ll have the cave so cluttered up with women, and fellows waiting to be ransomed, that there won’t be no place for the robbers. But go ahead, I ain’t got nothing to say.”

Little Tommy Barnes was asleep, now, and when they waked him up he was scared, and cried, and said he wanted to go home to his ma, and didn’t want to be a robber any more.

So they all made fun of him, and called him cry-baby, and that made him mad, and he said he would go straight and tell all the secrets. But Tom give him five cents to keep quiet, and said we would all go home and meet next week and rob somebody and kill some people.

Ben Rogers said he couldn’t get out much, only Sundays, and so he wanted to begin next Sunday; but all the boys said it would be wicked to do it on Sunday, and that settled the thing. They agreed to get together and fix a day as soon as they could, and then we elected Tom Sawyer first captain and Jo Harper second captain of the Gang, and so started home.

I clumb up the shed and crept into my window just before day was breaking. My new clothes was all greased up and clayey, and I was dog-tired.

Chapter III

Well, I got a good going-over in the morning, from old Miss Watson, on account of my clothes; but the widow she didn’t scold, but only cleaned off the grease and clay and looked so sorry that I thought I would behave a while if I could. Then Miss Watson she took me in the closet³ and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I

3. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet” (Matthew 6.6) is apparently the admonition Miss Watson has in mind.

would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By-and-by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way.

I set down, one time, back in the woods, and had a long think about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuff-box that was stole? Why can't Miss Watson fat up? No, says I to myself, there ain't nothing in it. I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was "spiritual gifts." This was too many for me, but she told me what she meant—I must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself. This was including Miss Watson, as I took it. I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no advantage about it—except for the other people—so at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it any more, but just let it go. Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about Providence in a way to make a boy's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see that there was two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him any more. I thought it all out, and reckoned I would belong to the widow's, if he wanted me, though I couldn't make out how he was agoing to be any better off then than what he was before, seeing I was so ignorant and so kind of low-down and ornery.

Pap he hadn't been seen for more than a year, and that was comfortable for me; I didn't want to see him no more. He used to always whale me when he was sober and could get his hands on me; though I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around. Well, about this time he was found in the river drowned, about twelve mile above town, so people said. They judged it was him, anyway; said this drowned man was just his size, and was ragged, and had uncommon long hair—which was all like pap—but they couldn't make nothing out of the face, because it had been in the water so long it warn't much like a face at all. They said he was floating on his back in the water. They took him and buried him on the bank. But I warn't comfortable long, because I happened to think of something. I knowed mighty well that a drowned man don't float on his back, but on his face. So I knowed, then, that this warn't pap, but a woman dressed up in a man's clothes. So I was uncomfortable again. I judged the old man would turn up again by-and-by, though I wished he wouldn't.

We played robber now and then about a month, and then I resigned. All the boys did. We hadn't robbed nobody, we hadn't killed any people, but only just pretended. We used to hop out of the woods and go charging down on hog-drovers and women in carts taking garden stuff to market, but we never hived⁴ any of them. Tom Sawyer called the hogs "ingots," and he called the turnips and stuff "julery" and we would go to the cave and pow-wow over

4. Captured, secured.

what we had done and how many people we had killed and marked. But I couldn't see no profit in it. One time Tom sent a boy to run about town with a blazing stick, which he called a slogan (which was the sign for the Gang to get together), and then he said he had got secret news by his spies that next day a whole parcel of Spanish merchants and rich A-rabs was going to camp in Cave Hollow with two hundred elephants, and six hundred camels, and over a thousand "sumter" mules,⁵ all loaded with di'monds, and they didn't have only a guard of four hundred soldiers, and so we would lay in ambuscade, as he called it, and kill the lot and scoop the things. He said we must slick up our swords and guns, and get ready. He never could go after even a turnip-cart but he must have the swords and guns all scoured up for it; though they was only lath and broom-sticks, and you might scour at them till you rotted and then they warn't worth a mouthful of ashes more than what they was before. I didn't believe we could lick such a crowd of Spaniards and A-rabs, but I wanted to see the camels and elephants, so I was on hand next day, Saturday, in the ambuscade; and when we got the word, we rushed out of the woods and down the hill. But there warn't no Spaniards and A-rabs, and there warn't no camels nor no elephants. It warn't anything but a Sunday-school picnic, and only a primer-class at that. We busted it up, and chased the children up the hollow; but we never got anything but some doughnuts and jam, though Ben Rogers got a rag doll, and Jo Harper got a hymn-book and a tract; and then the teacher charged in and made us drop everything and cut. I didn't see no di'monds, and I told Tom Sawyer so. He said there was loads of them there, anyway; and he said there was A-rabs there, too, and elephants and things. I said, why couldn't we see them, then? He said if I warn't so ignorant, but had read a book called "Don Quixote,"⁶ I would know without asking. He said it was all done by enchantment. He said there was hundreds of soldiers there, and elephants and treasure, and so on, but we had enemies which he called magicians, and they had turned the whole thing into an infant Sunday school, just out of spite. I said, all right, then the thing for us to do was to go for the magicians. Tom Sawyer said I was a numskull.

"Why," says he, "a magician could call up a lot of genies, and they would hash you up like nothing before you could say Jack Robinson. They are as tall as a tree and as big around as a church."

"Well," I says, "s'pose we got some genies to help *us*—can't we lick the other crowd then?"

"How you going to get them?"

"I don't know. How do *they* get them?"

"Why they rub an old tin lamp or an iron ring, and then the genies come tearing in, with the thunder and lightning a-ripping around and the smoke a-rolling, and everything they're told to do they up and do it. They don't think nothing of pulling a shot tower⁷ up by the roots, and belting a Sunday-school superintendent over the head with it—or any other man."

"Who makes them tear around so?"

5. Pack mules.

6. Tom is here alluding to stories in *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* (1838–41) and to the hero

in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605).

7. A device in which gunshot was formed by dripping molten lead into water.

“Why, whoever rubs the lamp or the ring. They belong to whoever rubs the lamp or the ring, and they’ve got to do whatever he says. If he tells them to build a palace forty miles long, out of di’monds, and fill it full of chewing gum, or whatever you want, and fetch an emperor’s daughter from China for you to marry, they’ve got to do it—and they’ve got to do it before sun-up next morning, too. And more—they’ve got to waltz that palace around over the country whenever you want it, you understand.”

“Well,” says I, “I think they are a pack of flatheads for not keeping the palace themselves ’stead of fooling them away like that. And what’s more—if I was one of them I would see a man in Jericho before I would drop my business and come to him for the rubbing of an old tin lamp.”

“How you talk, Huck Finn. Why, you’d *have* to come when he rubbed it, whether you wanted to or not.”

“What, and I as high as a tree and as big as a church? All right, then; I *would* come; but I lay I’d make that man climb the highest tree there was in the country.”

“Shucks, it ain’t no use to talk to you, Huck Finn. You don’t seem to know anything, somehow—perfect sap-head.”

I thought all this over for two or three days, and then I reckoned I would see if there was anything in it. I got an old tin lamp and an iron ring and went out in the woods and rubbed and rubbed till I sweat like an Injun,⁸ calculating to build a palace and sell it; but it warn’t no use, none of the genies come. So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer’s lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday school.

Chapter IV

Well, three or four months run along, and it was well into the winter, now. I had been to school most all the time, and could spell, and read, and write just a little, and could say the multiplication table up to six times seven is thirty-five, and I don’t reckon I could ever get any further than that if I was to live forever. I don’t take no stock in mathematics, anyway.

At first I hated the school, but by-and-by I got so I could stand it. Whenever I got uncommon tired I played hookey, and the hiding I got next day done me good and cheered me up. So the longer I went to school the easier it got to be. I was getting sort of used to the widow’s ways, too, and they warn’t so raspy on me. Living in a house, and sleeping in a bed, pulled on me pretty tight, mostly, but before the cold weather I used to slide out and sleep in the woods, sometimes, and so that was a rest to me. I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit. The widow said I was coming along slow but sure, and doing very satisfactory. She said she warn’t ashamed of me.

One morning I happened to turn over the salt-cellar at breakfast. I reached for some of it as quick as I could, to throw over my left shoulder and keep off the bad luck, but Miss Watson was in ahead of me, and crossed me off. She says, “Take your hands away, Huckleberry—what a mess you are always

8. Common, vulgar term for “Indian,” used frequently in Huck’s time.

making.” The widow put in a good word for me, but that warn’t going to keep off the bad luck, I knowed that well enough. I started out, after breakfast, feeling worried and shaky, and wondering where it was going to fall on me, and what it was going to be. There is ways to keep off some kinds of bad luck, but this wasn’t one of them kind; so I never tried to do anything, but just poked along low-spirited and on the watch-out.

I went down the front garden and clumb over the stile,⁹ where you go through the high board fence. There was an inch of new snow on the ground, and I seen somebody’s tracks. They had come up from the quarry and stood around the stile a while, and then went on around the garden fence. It was funny they hadn’t come in, after standing around so. I couldn’t make it out. It was very curious, somehow. I was going to follow around, but I stooped down to look at the tracks first. I didn’t notice anything at first, but next I did. There was a cross in the left boot-heel made with big nails, to keep off the devil.

I was up in a second and shinning down the hill. I looked over my shoulder every now and then, but I didn’t see nobody. I was at Judge Thatcher’s as quick as I could get there. He said:

“Why, my boy, you are all out of breath. Did you come for your interest?”

“No sir,” I says; “is there some for me?”

“Oh, yes, a half-yearly is in, last night. Over a hundred and fifty dollars. Quite a fortune for you. You better let me invest it along with your six thousand, because if you take it you’ll spend it.”

“No sir,” I says, “I don’t want to spend it. I don’t want it at all—nor the six thousand, nuther. I want you to take it; I want to give it to you—the six thousand and all.”

He looked surprised. He couldn’t seem to make it out. He says:

“Why, what can you mean, my boy?”

I says, “Don’t you ask me no questions about it, please. You’ll take it—won’t you?”

He says:

“Well I’m puzzled. Is something the matter?”

“Please take it,” says I, “and don’t ask me nothing—then I won’t have to tell no lies.”

He studied a while, and then he says:

“Oho-o. I think I see. You want to *sell* all your property to me—not give it. That’s the correct idea.”

Then he wrote something on a paper and read it over, and says:

“There—you see it says ‘for a consideration.’ That means I have bought it of you and paid you for it. Here’s a dollar for you. Now, you sign it.”

So I signed it, and left.

Miss Watson’s nigger, Jim, had a hair-ball¹ as big as your fist, which had been took out of the fourth stomach of an ox, and he used to do magic with it. He said there was a spirit inside of it, and it knowed everything. So I went to him that night and told him pap was here again, for I found his tracks in the snow. What I wanted to know, was, what he was going to do, and was he going to stay? Jim got out his hair-ball, and said something over it, and then

9. Steps that flank and straddle a fence.

1. Clump of hair found in an animal’s stomach; believed by Jim and Huck to have magical powers.

he held it up and dropped it on the floor. It fell pretty solid, and only rolled about an inch. Jim tried it again, and then another time, and it acted just the same. Jim got down on his knees and put his ear against it and listened. But it warn't no use; he said it wouldn't talk. He said sometimes it wouldn't talk without money. I told him I had an old slick counterfeit quarter that warn't no good because the brass showed through the silver a little, and it wouldn't pass nohow, even if the brass didn't show, because it was so slick it felt greasy, and so that would tell on it every time. (I reckoned I wouldn't say nothing about the dollar I got from the judge.) I said it was pretty bad money, but maybe the hair-ball would take it, because maybe it wouldn't know the difference. Jim smelt it, and bit it, and rubbed it, and said he would manage so the hair-ball would think it was good. He said he would split open a raw Irish potato and stick the quarter in between and keep it there all night, and next morning you couldn't see no brass, and it wouldn't feel greasy no more, and so anybody in town would take it in a minute, let alone a hair-ball. Well, I knowed a potato would do that, before, but I had forgot it.

Jim put the quarter under the hair-ball and got down and listened again. This time he said the hair-ball was all right. He said it would tell my whole fortune if I wanted it to. I says, go on. So the hair-ball talked to Jim, and Jim told it to me. He says:

"Yo' ole father doan' know, yit, what he's a-gwyne to do. Sometimes he spec he'll go 'way, en den agin he spec he'll stay. De bes' way is to res' easy en let de ole man take his own way. Dey's two angels hoverin' roun' 'bout him. One uv 'em is white en shiny, en 'tother one is black. De white one gits him to go right, a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up. A body can't tell, yit, which one gwyne to fetch him at de las'. But you is all right. You gwyne to have considable trouble in yo' life, en considable joy. Sometimes you gwyne to git hurt, en sometimes you gwyne to git sick; but every time you's gwyne to git well agin. Dey's two gals flyin' 'bout you in yo' life. One uv 'em's light en 'tother one is dark. One is rich en 'tother is po'. You's gwyne to marry de po' one fust en de rich one by-en-by. You wants to keep 'way fum de water as much as you kin, en don't run no resk, 'kase it's down in de bills² dat you's gwyne to git hung."

When I lit my candle and went up to my room that night, there set pap, his own self!

Chapter V

I had shut the door to. Then I turned around, and there he was. I used to be scared of him all the time, he tanned me so much. I reckoned I was scared now, too; but in a minute I see I was mistaken. That is, after the first jolt, as you may say, when my breath sort of hitched—he being so unexpected; but right away after, I see I warn't scared of him worth bothering about.

He was most fifty, and he looked it. His hair was long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through like he was behind vines. It was all black, no gray; so was his long, mixed-up whiskers. There warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white;

not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl—a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white. As for his clothes—just rags, that was all. He had one ankle resting on 'tother knee; the boot on that foot was busted, and two of his toes stuck through, and he worked them now and then. His hat was laying on the floor; an old black slouch with the top caved in, like a lid.

I stood a-looking at him; he set there a-looking at me, with his chair tilted back a little. I set the candle down. I noticed the window was up; so he had clumb in by the shed. He kept a-looking me all over. By-and-by he says:

"Starchy clothes—very. You think you're a good deal of a big-bug, *don't* you?"

"Maybe I am, maybe I ain't," I says.

"Don't you give me none o' your lip," says he. "You've put on considerable many frills since I been away. I'll take you down a peg before I get done with you. You're educated, too, they say; can read and write. You think you're better'n your father, now, don't you, because he can't? *I'll* take it out of you. Who told you you might meddle with such hifalut'n foolishness, hey?—who told you you could?"

"The widow. She told me."

"The widow, hey?—and who told the widow she could put in her shovel about a thing that ain't none of her business?"

"Nobody never told her."

"Well, I'll learn her how to meddle. And looky here—you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what *he* is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't, before *they* died. *I* can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this. I ain't the man to stand it—you hear? Say—lemme hear you read."

I took up a book and begun something about General Washington and the wars. When I'd read about a half a minute, he fetched the book a whack with his hand and knocked it across the house. He says:

"It's so. You can do it. I had my doubts when you told me. Now looky here; you stop that putting on frills. I won't have it. I'll lay for you, my smarty; and if I catch you about that school I'll tan you good. First you know you'll get religion, too. I never see such a son."

He took up a little blue and yaller picture of some cows and a boy, and says:

"What's this?"

"It's something they give me for learning my lessons good."

He tore it up, and says—

"I'll give you something better—I'll give you a cowhide."³

He set there a-mumbling and a-growling a minute, and then he says—

"*Ain't* you a sweet-scented dandy, though? A bed; and bedclothes; and a look'n-glass; and a piece of carpet on the floor—and your own father got to sleep with the hogs in the tanyard. I never see such a son. I bet I'll take some

3. A beating with a cowhide whip.

o' these frills out o' you before I'm done with you. Why there ain't no end to your airs—they say you're rich. Hey?—how's that?"

"They lie—that's how."

"Looky here—mind how you talk to me; I'm a-standing about all I can stand, now—so don't gimme no sass. I've been in town two days, and I hain't heard nothing but about you bein' rich. I heard about it away down the river, too. That's why I come. You git me that money to-morrow—I want it."

"I hain't got no money."

"It's a lie. Judge Thatcher's got it. You git it. I want it."

"I hain't got no money, I tell you. You ask Judge Thatcher; he'll tell you the same."

"All right. I'll ask him; and I'll make him pungle,⁴ too, or I'll know the reason why. Say—how much you got in your pocket? I want it."

"I hain't got only a dollar, and I want that to—"

"It don't make no difference what you want it for—you just shell it out."

He took it and bit it to see if it was good, and then he said he was going down town to get some whiskey; said he hadn't had a drink all day. When he had got out on the shed, he put his head in again, and cussed me for putting on frills and trying to be better than him; and when I reckoned he was gone, he come back and put his head in again, and told me to mind about that school, because he was going to lay for me and lick me if I didn't drop that.

Next day he was drunk, and he went to Judge Thatcher's and bullyragged him and tried to make him give up the money, but he couldn't, and then he swore he'd make the law force him.

The judge and the widow went to law to get the court to take me away from him and let one of them be my guardian; but it was a new judge that had just come, and he didn't know the old man; so he said courts mustn't interfere and separate families if they could help it; said he'd druther not take a child away from its father. So Judge Thatcher and the widow had to quit on the business.

That pleased the old man till he couldn't rest. He said he'd cowhide me till I was black and blue if I didn't raise some money for him. I borrowed three dollars from Judge Thatcher, and pap took it and got drunk and went a-blowing around and cussing and whooping and carrying on; and he kept it up all over town, with a tin pan, till most midnight; then they jailed him, and next day they had him before court, and jailed him again for a week. But he said *he* was satisfied; said he was boss of his son, and he'd make it warm for *him*.

When he got out the new judge said he was agoing to make a man of him. So he took him to his own house, and dressed him up clean and nice, and had him to breakfast and dinner and supper with the family, and was just old pie to him, so to speak. And after supper he talked to him about temperance and such things till the old man cried, and said he'd been a fool, and fooled away his life; but now he was agoing to turn over a new leaf and be a man nobody wouldn't be ashamed of, and he hoped the judge would help him and not look down on him. The judge said he could hug him for them words; so *he* cried, and his wife she cried again; pap said he'd been a man that had always been misunderstood before, and the judge said he believed

4. Pay.

it. The old man said that what a man wanted that was down, was sympathy; and the judge said it was so; so they cried again. And when it was bedtime, the old man rose up and held out his hand, and says:

“Look at it gentlemen, and ladies all; take ahoid of it; shake it. There’s a hand that was the hand of a hog; but it ain’t so no more; it’s the hand of a man that’s started in on a new life, and ’ll die before he’ll go back. You mark them words—don’t forget I said them. It’s a clean hand now; shake it—don’t be afeard.”

So they shook it, one after the other, all around, and cried. The judge’s wife she kissed it. Then the old man he signed a pledge—made his mark. The judge said it was the holiest time on record, or something like that. Then they tucked the old man into a beautiful room, which was the spare room, and in the night sometime he got powerful thirsty and clumb out onto the porch-roof and slid down a stanchion and traded his new coat for a jug of forty-rod,⁵ and clumb back again and had a good old time; and towards daylight he crawled out again, drunk as a fiddler, and rolled off the porch and broke his left arm in two places and was almost froze to death when somebody found him after sun-up. And when they come to look at that spare room, they had to take soundings before they could navigate it.

The judge he felt kind of sore. He said he reckoned a body could reform the ole man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn’t know no other way.

Chapter VI

Well, pretty soon the old man was up and around again, and then he went for Judge Thatcher in the courts to make him give up that money, and he went for me, too, for not stopping school. He caught me a couple of times and thrashed me, but I went to school just the same, and dodged him or out-run him most of the time. I didn’t want to go to school much, before, but I reckoned I’d go now to spite pap. That law trial was a slow business; appeared like they warn’t ever going to get started on it; so every now and then I’d borrow two or three dollars off of the judge for him, to keep from getting a cowhiding. Every time he got money he got drunk; and every time he got drunk he raised Cain around town; and every time he raised Cain he got jailed. He was just suited—this kind of thing was right in his line.

He got to hanging around the widow’s too much, and so she told him at last, that if he didn’t quit using⁶ around there she would make trouble for him. Well, *wasn’t* he mad? He said he would show who was Huck Finn’s boss. So he watched out for me one day in the spring, and caught me, and took me up the river about three mile, in a skiff, and crossed over to the Illinois shore where it was woody and there warn’t no houses but an old log hut in a place where the timber was so thick you couldn’t find it if you didn’t know where it was.

He kept me with him all the time, and I never got a chance to run off. We lived in that old cabin, and he always locked the door and put the key under his head, nights. He had a gun which he had stole, I reckon, and we fished and hunted, and that was what we lived on. Every little while he locked me

5. Home-distilled whiskey strong enough to knock a person forty rods, or 220 yards.

6. Loitering.

in and went down to the store, three miles, to the ferry, and traded fish and game for whiskey and fetched it home and got drunk and had a good time, and licked me. The widow she found out where I was, by-and-by, and she sent a man over to try to get hold of me, but pap drove him off with the gun, and it warn't long after that till I was used to being where I was, and liked it, all but the cowhide part.

It was kind of lazy and jolly, laying off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, and no books nor study. Two months or more run along, and my clothes got to be all rags and dirt, and I didn't see how I'd ever got to like it so well at the widow's, where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothering over a book and have old Miss Watson pecking at you all the time. I didn't want to go back no more. I had stopped cussing, because the widow didn't like it; but now I took to it again because pap hadn't no objections. It was pretty good times up in the woods there, take it all around.

But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts. He got to going away so much, too, and locking me in. Once he locked me in and was gone three days. It was dreadful lonesome. I judged he had got drowned and I wasn't ever going to get out any more. I was scared. I made up my mind I would fix up some way to leave there. I had tried to get out of that cabin many a time, but I couldn't find no way. There warn't a window to it big enough for a dog to get through. I couldn't get up the chimbley, it was too narrow. The door was thick solid oak slabs. Pap was pretty careful not to leave a knife or anything in the cabin when he was away; I reckon I had hunted the place over as much as a hundred times; well, I was 'most all the time at it, because it was about the only way to put in the time. But this time I found something at last; I found an old rusty wood-saw without any handle; it was laid in between a rafter and the clapboards of the roof. I greased it up and went to work. There was an old horse-blanket nailed against the logs at the far end of the cabin behind the table, to keep the wind from blowing through the chinks and putting the candle out. I got under the table and raised the blanket and went to work to saw a section of the big bottom log out, big enough to let me through. Well, it was a good long job, but I was getting towards the end of it when I heard pap's gun in the woods. I got rid of the signs of my work, and dropped the blanket and hid my saw, and pretty soon pap come in.

Pap warn't in a good humor—so he was his natural self. He said he was down to town, and everything was going wrong. His lawyer said he reckoned he would win his lawsuit and get the money, if they ever got started on the trial; but then there was ways to put it off a long time, and Judge Thatcher knowed how to do it. And he said people allowed there'd be another trial to get me away from him and give me to the widow for my guardian, and they guessed it would win, this time. This shook me up considerable, because I didn't want to go back to the widow's any more and be so cramped up and sivilized, as they called it. Then the old man got to cussing, and cussed everything and everybody he could think of, and then cussed them all over again to make sure he hadn't skipped any, and after that he polished off with a kind of general cuss all round, including a considerable parcel of people which he didn't know the names of, and so called them what's-his-name, when he got to them, and went right along with his cussing.

He said he would like to see the widow get me. He said he would watch out, and if they tried to come any such game on him he knowed of a place six or seven mile off, to stow me in, where they might hunt till they dropped and they couldn't find me. That made me pretty uneasy again, but only for a minute; I reckoned I wouldn't stay on hand till he got that chance.

The old man made me go to the skiff and fetch the things he had got. There was a fifty-pound sack of corn meal, and a side of bacon, ammunition, and a four-gallon jug of whiskey, and an old book and two newspapers for wadding, besides some tow.⁷ I toted up a load, and went back and set down on the bow of the skiff to rest. I thought it all over, and I reckoned I would walk off with the gun and some lines, and take to the woods when I run away. I guessed I wouldn't stay in one place, but just tramp right across the country, mostly night times, and hunt and fish to keep alive, and so get so far away that the old man nor the widow couldn't ever find me any more. I judged I would saw out and leave that night if pap got drunk enough, and I reckoned he would. I got so full of it I didn't notice how long I was staying, till the old man hollered and asked me whether I was asleep or drowned.

I got the things all up to the cabin, and then it was about dark. While I was cooking supper the old man took a swig or two and got sort of warmed up, and went to ripping again. He had been drunk over in town, and laid in the gutter all night, and he was a sight to look at. A body would a thought he was Adam, he was just all mud.⁸ Whenever his liquor begun to work, he most always went for the govment. This time he says:

"Call this a govment! why, just look at it and see what it's like. Here's the law a-standing ready to take a man's son away from him—a man's own son, which he has had all the trouble and all the anxiety and all the expense of raising. Yes, just as that man has got that son raised at last, and ready to go to work and begin to do suthin' for *him* and give him a rest, the law up and goes for him. And they call *that* govment! That ain't all, nuther. The law backs that old Judge Thatcher up and helps him to keep me out o' my property. Here's what the law does. The law takes a man worth six thousand dollars and upards, and jams him into an old trap of a cabin like this, and lets him go round in clothes that ain't fitten for a hog. They call that govment! A man can't get his rights in a govment like this. Sometimes I've a mighty notion to just leave the country for good and all. Yes, and I *told* 'em so: I told old Thatcher so to his face. Lots of 'em heard me, and can tell what I said. Says I, for two cents I'd leave the blamed country and never come anear it agin. Them's the very words. I says, look at my hat—if you call it a hat—but the lid raises up and the rest of it goes down till it's below my chin, and then it ain't rightly a hat at all, but more like my head was shoved up through a jint o' stove-pipe. Look at it, says I—such a hat for me to wear—one of the wealthiest men in this town, if I could git my rights.

"Oh, yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why, looky here. There was a free nigger there, from Ohio; a mulatter,⁹ most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine clothes as what he had; and

7. Cheap rope. "Wadding": material (here paper) used to pack the gunpowder in a rifle.

8. God created Adam from earth in Genesis 2.7.

9. Mulatto, of mixed white and black ancestry. Ohio was a free state.

he had a gold watch and chain and a silver-headed cane—the awfulest old gray-headed nabob¹ in the State. And what do you think? they said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed every thing. And that ain't the wust. They said he could *vote*, when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drewed out. I says I'll never vote agin. Them's the very words I said; they all heard me; and the country may rot for all me—I'll never vote agin as long as I live. And to see the cool way of that nigger—why, he wouldn't a give me the road if I hadn't shoved him out o' the way. I says to the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold?—that's what I want to know. And what do you reckon they said? Why, they said he couldn't be sold till he'd been in the State six months, and he hadn't been there that long yet. There, now—that's a specimen. They call that a govment that can't sell a free nigger till he's been in the State six months. Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment, and yet's got to set stock-still for six whole months before it can take ahold of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger, and²—”

Pap was agoing on so, he never noticed where his old limber legs was taking him to, so he went head over heels over the tub of salt pork, and barked both shins, and the rest of his speech was all the hottest kind of language—mostly hove at the nigger and the govment, though he give the tub some, too, all along, here and there. He hopped around the cabin considerble, first on one leg and then on the other, holding first one shin and then the other one, and at last he let out with his left foot all of a sudden and fetched the tub a rattling kick. But it warn't good judgment, because that was the boot that had a couple of his toes leaking out of the front end of it; so now he raised a howl that fairly made a body's hair raise, and down he went in the dirt, and rolled there, and held his toes; and the cussing he done then laid over anything he had ever done previous. He said so his own self, afterwards. He had heard old Sowberry Hagan in his best days, and he said it laid over him, too; but I reckon that was sort of piling it on, maybe.

After supper pap took the jug, and said he had enough whiskey there for two drunks and one delirium tremens. That was always his word. I judged he would be blind drunk in about an hour, an then I would steal the key, or saw myself out, one or 'tother. He drank, and drank, and tumbled down on his blankets, by-and-by; but luck didn't run my way. He didn't go sound asleep, but was uneasy. He groaned, and moaned, and thrashed around this way and that, for a long time. At last I got so sleepy I couldn't keep my eyes open, all I could do, and so before I knowed what I was about I was sound asleep, and the candle burning.

I don't know how long I was asleep, but all of a sudden there was an awful scream and I was up. There was pap, looking wild and skipping around every which way and yelling about snakes. He said they was crawling up his legs;

1. Someone of conspicuous wealth.

2. Missouri's original constitution prohibited the entrance of freed slaves and mulattoes into the state, but the second Missouri Compromise of 1820 deleted the provision. In the 1830s and

1840s, however, increasingly strict antiblack laws were passed, and by 1850 a black person without freedom papers could be sold downriver with a mere sworn statement of ownership from a white man.

and then he would give a jump and scream, and say one had bit him on the cheek—but I couldn't see no snakes. He started to run round and round the cabin, hollering "take him off! take him off! he's biting me on the neck!" I never see a man look so wild in the eyes. Pretty soon he was all fagged³ out, and fell down panting; then he rolled over and over, wonderful fast, kicking things every which way, and striking and grabbing at the air with his hands, and screaming, and saying there was devils ahold of him. He wore out, by-and-by, and laid still a while, moaning. Then he laid stiller, and didn't make a sound. I could hear the owls and the wolves, away off in the woods, and it seemed terrible still. He was laying over by the corner. By-and-by he raised up, part way, and listened, with his head to one side. He says very low:

"Tramp—tramp—tramp; that's the dead; tramp—tramp—tramp; they're coming after me; but I won't go—Oh, they're here! don't touch me—don't! hands off—they're cold; let go—Oh, let a poor devil alone!"

Then he went down on all fours and crawled off begging them to let him alone, and he rolled himself up in his blanket and wallowed in under the old pine table, still a-begging; and then he went to crying. I could hear him through the blanket.

By-and-by he rolled out and jumped up on his feet looking wild, and he see me and went for me. He chased me round and round the place, with a clasp-knife, calling me the Angel of Death and saying he would kill me and then I couldn't come for him no more. I begged, and told him I was only Huck, but he laughed *such* a screechy laugh, and roared and cussed, and kept on chasing me up. Once when I turned short and dodged under his arm he made a grab and got me by the jacket between my shoulders, and I thought I was gone; but I skid out of the jacket quick as lightning, and saved myself. Pretty soon he was all tired out, and dropped down with his back against the door, and said he would rest a minute and then kill me. He put his knife under him, and said he would sleep and get strong, and then he would see who was who.

So he dozed off, pretty soon. By-and-by I got the old split bottom⁴ chair and clumb up, as easy as I could, not to make any noise, and got down the gun. I slipped the ramrod down it to make sure it was loaded, and then I laid it across the turnip barrel, pointing towards pap, and set down behind it to wait for him to stir. And how slow and still the time did drag along.

Chapter VII

"Git up! what you 'bout!"

I opened my eyes and looked around, trying to make out where I was. It was after sun-up, and I had been sound asleep. Pap was standing over me, looking sour—and sick, too. He says—

"What you doin' with this gun?"

I judged he didn't know nothing about what he had been doing, so I says:

"Somebody tried to get in, so I was laying for him."

"Why didn't you roust me out?"

"Well I tried to, but I couldn't; I couldn't budge you."

3. Tired.

4. I.e., splint-bottom, made by interweaving thin strips of wood.

“Well, all right. Don’t stand there palavering all day, but out with you and see if there’s a fish on the lines for breakfast. I’ll be along in a minute.”

He unlocked the door and I cleared out, up the river bank. I noticed some pieces of limbs and such things floating down, and a sprinkling of bark; so I knowed the river had begun to rise. I reckoned I would have great times, now, if I was over at the town. The June rise used to be always luck for me; because as soon as that rise begins, here comes cord-wood floating down, and pieces of log rafts—sometimes a dozen logs together; so all you have to do is to catch them and sell them to the wood yards and the sawmill.

I went along up the bank with one eye out for pap and ’tother one out for what the rise might fetch along. Well, all at once, here comes a canoe; just a beauty, too, about thirteen or fourteen foot long, riding high like a duck. I shot head first off of the bank, like a frog, clothes and all on, and struck out for the canoe. I just expected there’d be somebody laying down in it, because people often done that to fool folks, and when a chap had pulled a skiff out most to it they’d raise up and laugh at him. But it warn’t so this time. It was a drift-canoe, sure enough, and I clumb in and paddled her ashore. Thinks I, the old man will be glad when he sees this—she’s worth ten dollars. But when I got to shore pap wasn’t in sight yet, and as I was running her into a little creek like a gully, all hung over with vines and willows, I struck another idea; I judged I’d hide her good, and then, stead of taking to the woods when I run off, I’d go down the river about fifty mile and camp in one place for good, and not have such a rough time tramping on foot.

It was pretty close to the shanty, and I thought I heard the old man coming, all the time; but I got her hid; and then I out and looked around a bunch of willows, and there was the old man down the path apiece just drawing a bead on a bird with his gun. So he hadn’t seen anything.

When he got along, I was hard at it taking up a “trot” line.⁵ He abused me a little for being so slow, but I told him I fell in the river and that was what made me so long. I knowed he would see I was wet, and then he would be asking questions. We got five catfish off of the lines and went home.

While we laid off, after breakfast, to sleep up, both of us being about wore out, I got to thinking that if I could fix up some way to keep pap and the widow from trying to follow me, it would be a certainer thing than trusting to luck to get far enough off before they missed me; you see, all kinds of things might happen. Well, I didn’t see no way for a while, but by-and-by pap raised up a minute, to drink another barrel of water, and he says:

“Another time a man comes a-prowling round here, you roust me out, you hear? That man warn’t here for no good. I’d a shot him. Next time, you roust me out, you hear?”

Then he dropped down and went to sleep again—but what he had been saying give me the very idea I wanted. I says to myself, I can fix it now so nobody won’t think of following me.

About twelve o’clock we turned out and went along up the bank. The river was coming up pretty fast, and lots of drift-wood going by on the rise. By-and-by, along comes part of a log raft—nine logs fast together. We went out with the skiff and towed it ashore. Then we had dinner. Anybody but pap

5. A long fishing line fastened across a stream; to this line several shorter baited lines are attached.

would a waited and seen the day through, so as to catch more stuff; but that warn't pap's style. Nine logs was enough for one time; he must shove right over to town and sell. So he locked me in and took the skiff and started off towing the raft about half-past three. I judged he wouldn't come back that night. I waited till I reckoned he had got a good start, then I out with my saw and went to work on that log again. Before he was 'tother side of the river I was out of the hole; him and his raft was just a speck on the water away off yonder.

I took the sack of corn meal and took it to where the canoe was hid, and shoved the vines and branches apart and put it in; then I done the same with the side of bacon; then the whiskey jug; I took all the coffee and sugar there was, and all the ammunition; I took the wadding; I took the bucket and gourd, I took a dipper and a tin cup, and my old saw and two blankets, and the skillet and the coffee-pot. I took fish-lines and matches and other things—everything that was worth a cent. I cleaned out the place. I wanted an axe, but there wasn't any, only the one out at the wood pile, and I knowed why I was going to leave that. I fetched out the gun, and now I was done.

I had wore the ground a good deal, crawling out of the hole and dragging out so many things. So I fixed that as good as I could from the outside by scattering dust on the place, which covered up the smoothness and the saw-dust. Then I fixed the piece of log back into its place, and put two rocks under it and one against it to hold it there,—for it was bent up at the place, and didn't quite touch ground. If you stood four or five foot away and didn't know it was sawed, you wouldn't ever notice it; and besides, this was the back of the cabin and it warn't likely anybody would go fooling around there.

It was all grass clear to the canoe; so I hadn't left a track. I followed around to see. I stood on the bank and looked out over the river. All safe. So I took the gun and went up a piece into the woods and was hunting around for some birds, when I see a wild pig; hogs soon went wild in them bottoms after they had got away from the prairie farms. I shot this fellow and took him into camp.

I took the axe and smashed in the door—I beat it and hacked it considerable, a-doing it. I fetched the pig in and took him back nearly to the table and hacked into his throat with the ax, and laid him down on the ground to bleed—I say ground, because it *was* ground—hard packed, and no boards. Well, next I took an old sack and put a lot of big rocks in it,—all I could drag—and I started it from the pig and dragged it to the door and through the woods down to the river and dumped it in, and down it sunk, out of sight. You could easy see that something had been dragged over the ground. I did wish Tom Sawyer was there, I knowed he would take an interest in this kind of business, and throw in the fancy touches. Nobody could spread himself like Tom Sawyer in such a thing as that.

Well, last I pulled out some of my hair, and bloodied the ax good, and stuck it on the back side, and slung the ax in the corner. Then I took up the pig and held him to my breast with my jacket (so he couldn't drip) till I got a good piece below the house and then dumped him into the river. Now I thought of something else. So I went and got the bag of meal and my old saw out of the canoe and fetched them to the house. I took the bag to where it used to stand, and ripped a hole in the bottom of it with the saw, for there warn't no knives and forks on the place—pap done everything with his clasp-knife, about the cooking. Then I carried the sack about a hundred yards across the grass and through the willows east of the house, to a shallow lake

that was five mile wide and full of rushes—and ducks too, you might say, in the season. There was a slough or a creek leading out of it on the other side, that went miles away, I don't know where, but it didn't go to the river. The meal sifted out and made a little track all the way to the lake. I dropped pap's whetstone there too, so as to look like it had been done by accident. Then I tied up the rip in the meal sack with a string, so it wouldn't leak no more, and took it and my saw to the canoe again.

It was about dark, now; so I dropped the canoe down the river under some willows that hung over the bank, and waited for the moon to rise. I made fast to a willow; then I took a bite to eat, and by-and-by laid down in the canoe to smoke a pipe and lay out a plan. I says to myself, they'll follow the track of that sackful of rocks to the shore and then drag the river for me. And they'll follow that meal track to the lake and go browsing down the creek that leads out of it to find the robbers that killed me and took the things. They won't ever hunt the river for anything but my dead carcass. They'll soon get tired of that, and won't bother no more about me. All right; I can stop anywhere I want to. Jackson's Island⁶ is good enough for me; I know that island pretty well, and nobody ever comes there. And then I can paddle over to town, nights, and slink around and pick up things I want. Jackson's Island's the place.

I was pretty tired, and the first thing I knowed, I was asleep. When I woke up I didn't know where I was, for a minute. I set up and looked around, a little scared. Then I remembered. The river looked miles and miles across. The moon was so bright I could a counted the drift logs that went a slipping along, black and still, hundreds of yards out from shore. Everything was dead quiet, and it looked late, and *smelt* late. You know what I mean—I don't know the words to put it in.

I took a good gap and a stretch, and was just going to unhitch and start, when I heard a sound away over the water. I listened. Pretty soon I made it out. It was that dull kind of a regular sound that comes from oars working in rowlocks when it's a still night. I peeped out through the willow branches, and there it was—a skiff, away across the water. I couldn't tell how many was in it. It kept a-coming, and when it was abreast of me I see there warn't but one man in it. Thinks I, maybe it's pap, though I warn't expecting him. He dropped below me, with the current, and by-and-by he come a-swinging up shore in the easy water, and he went by so close I could a reached out the gun and touched him. Well, it *was* pap, sure enough—and sober, too, by the way he laid to his oars.

I didn't lose no time. The next minute I was a-spinning down stream soft but quick in the shade of the bank. I made two mile and a half, and then struck out a quarter of a mile or more towards the middle of the river, because pretty soon I would be passing the ferry landing and people might see me and hail me. I got out amongst the drift-wood and then laid down in the bottom of the canoe and let her float. I laid there and had a good rest and a smoke out of my pipe, looking away into the sky, not a cloud in it. The sky looks ever so deep when you lay down on your back in the moonshine; I never knowed it before. And how far a body can hear on the water such

6. The same island that serves for an adventure in *Tom Sawyer* (ch. 13).

nights! I heard people talking at the ferry landing. I heard what they said, too, every word of it. One man said it was getting towards the long days and the short nights, now. "Tother one said *this* warn't one of the short ones, he reckoned—and then they laughed, and he said it over again and they laughed again; then they waked up another fellow and told him, and laughed, but he didn't laugh; he ripped out something brisk and said let him alone. The first fellow said he 'lowed to tell it to his old woman—she would think it was pretty good; but he said that warn't nothing to some things he had said in his time. I heard one man say it was nearly three o'clock, and he hoped daylight wouldn't wait more than about a week longer. After that, the talk got further and further away, and I couldn't make out the words any more, but I could hear the mumble; and now and then a laugh, too, but it seemed a long ways off.

I was away below the ferry now. I rose up and there was Jackson's Island, about two mile and a half down stream, heavy-timbered and standing up out of the middle of the river, big and dark and solid, like a steamboat without any lights. There warn't any signs of the bar at the head—it was all under water, now.

It didn't take me long to get there. I shot past the head at a ripping rate, the current was so swift, and then I got into the dead water and landed on the side towards the Illinois shore. I run the canoe into a deep dent in the bank that I knowed about; I had to part the willow branches to get in; and when I made fast nobody could a seen the canoe from the outside.

I went up and set down on a log at the head of the island and looked out on the big river and the black driftwood, and away over to the town, three mile away, where there was three or four lights twinkling. A monstrous big lumber raft was about a mile up stream, coming along down, with a lantern in the middle of it. I watched it come creeping down, and when it was most abreast of where I stood I heard a man say, "Stern oars, there! heave her head to stabboard!"⁷ I heard that just as plain as if the man was by my side.

There was a little gray in the sky, now; so I stepped into the woods and laid down for a nap before breakfast.

Chapter VIII

The sun was up so high when I waked, that I judged it was after eight o'clock. I laid there in the grass and the cool shade, thinking about things and feeling rested and ruther comfortable and satisfied. I could see the sun out at one or two holes, but mostly it was big trees all about, and gloomy in there amongst them. There was freckled places on the ground where the light sifted down through the leaves, and the freckled places swapped about a little, showing there was a little breeze up there. A couple of squirrels set on a limb and jabbered at me very friendly.

I was powerful lazy and comfortable—didn't want to get up and cook breakfast. Well, I was dozing off again, when I thinks I hears a deep sound of "boom!" away up the river. I rouses up and rests on my elbow and listens; pretty soon I hears it again. I hopped up and went and looked out at a hole

7. Starboard, the right-hand side of a boat, facing forward.

in the leaves, and I see a bunch of smoke laying on the water a long ways up—about abreast the ferry. And there was the ferry-boat full of people, floating along down. I knowed what was the matter, now. “Boom!” I see the white smoke squirt out of the ferry-boat’s side. You see, they was firing cannon over the water, trying to make my carcass come to the top.

I was pretty hungry, but it warn’t going to do for me to start a fire, because they might see the smoke. So I set there and watched the cannon-smoke and listened to the boom. The river was a mile wide, there, and it always looks pretty on a summer morning—so I was having a good enough time seeing them hunt for my remainders, if I only had a bite to eat. Well, then I happened to think how they always put quicksilver⁸ in loaves of bread and float them off because they always go right to the drowned carcass and stop there. So says I, I’ll keep a lookout, and if any of them’s floating around after me, I’ll give them a show. I changed to the Illinois edge of the island to see what luck I could have, and I warn’t disappointed. A big double loaf come along, and I most got it, with a long stick, but my foot slipped and she floated out further. Of course I was where the current set in the closest to the shore—I knowed enough for that. But by-and-by along comes another one, and this time I won. I took out the plug and shook out the little dab of quicksilver, and set my teeth in. It was “baker’s bread”—what the quality eat—none of your low-down corn-pone.⁹

I got a good place amongst the leaves, and set there on a log, munching the bread and watching the ferry-boat, and very well satisfied. And then something struck me. I says, now I reckon the widow or the parson or somebody prayed that this bread would find me, and here it has gone and done it. So there ain’t no doubt but there is something in that thing. That is, there’s something in it when a body like the widow or the parson prays, but it don’t work for me, and I reckon it don’t work for only just the right kind.

I lit a pipe and had a good long smoke and went on watching. The ferry-boat was floating with the current, and I allowed I’d have a chance to see who was aboard when she come along, because she would come in close, where the bread did. When she’d got pretty well along down towards me, I put out my pipe and went to where I fished out the bread, and laid down behind a log on the bank in a little open place. Where the log forked I could peep through.

By-and-by she came along, and she drifted in so close that they could a run out a plank and walked ashore. Most everybody was on the boat. Pap, and Judge Thatcher, and Bessie Thatcher, and Jo Harper, and Tom Sawyer, and his old Aunt Polly, and Sid and Mary, and plenty more. Everybody was talking about the murder, but the captain broke in and says:

“Look sharp, now; the current sets in the closest here, and maybe he’s washed ashore and got tangled amongst the brush at the water’s edge. I hope so, anyway.”

I didn’t hope so. They all crowded up and leaned over the rails, nearly in my face, and kept still, watching with all their might. I could see them first-rate, but they couldn’t see me. Then the captain sung out:

8. Mercury.

9. Corn bread.

“Stand away!” and the cannon let off such a blast right before me that it made me deaf with the noise and pretty near blind with the smoke, and I judged I was gone. If they’d a had some bullets in, I reckon they’d a got the corpse they was after. Well, I see I warn’t hurt, thanks to goodness. The boat floated on and went out of sight around the shoulder of the island. I could hear the booming, now and then, further and further off, and by-and-by after an hour, I didn’t hear it no more. The island was three mile long. I judged they had got to the foot, and was giving it up. But they didn’t yet a while. They turned around the foot of the island and started up the channel on the Missouri side, under steam, and booming once in a while as they went. I crossed over to that side and watched them. When they got abreast the head of the island they quit shooting and dropped over to the Missouri shore and went home to the town.

I knowed I was all right now. Nobody else would come a-hunting after me. I got my traps out of the canoe and made me a nice camp in the thick woods. I made a kind of a tent out of my blankets to put my things under so the rain couldn’t get at them. I caught a cat fish and haggled him open with my saw, and towards sundown I started my camp fire and had supper. Then I set out a line to catch some fish for breakfast.

When it was dark I set by my camp fire smoking, and feeling pretty satisfied; but by-and-by it got sort of lonesome, and so I went and set on the bank and listened to the currents washing along, and counted the stars and drift-logs and rafts that come down, and then went to bed; there ain’t no better way to put in time when you are lonesome; you can’t stay so, you soon get over it.

And so for three days and nights. No difference—just the same thing. But the next day I went exploring around down through the island. I was boss of it; it all belonged to me, so to say, and I wanted to know all about it; but mainly I wanted to put in the time. I found plenty strawberries, ripe and prime; and green summer-grapes, and green razberries; and the green blackberries was just beginning to show. They would all come handy by-and-by, I judged.

Well, I went fooling along in the deep woods till I judged I warn’t far from the foot of the island. I had my gun along, but I hadn’t shot nothing; it was for protection; thought I would kill some game nigh home. About this time I mighty near stepped on a good sized snake, and it went sliding off through the grass and flowers, and I after it, trying to get a shot at it. I clipped along, and all of sudden I bounded right on to the ashes of a camp fire that was still smoking.

My heart jumped up amongst my lungs. I never waited for to look further, but uncocked my gun and went sneaking back on my tip-toes as fast as ever I could. Every now and then I stopped a second, amongst the thick leaves, and listened; but my breath come so hard I couldn’t hear nothing else. I slunk along another piece further, then listened again; and so on, and so on; if I see a stump, I took it for a man; if I trod on a stick and broke it, it made me feel like a person had cut one of my breaths in two and I only got half, and the short half, too.

When I got to camp I warn’t feeling very brash, there warn’t much sand in my craw;¹ but I says, this ain’t no time to be fooling around. So I got all my traps into my canoe again so as to have them out of sight, and I put out

1. Slang for not feeling very brave.

the fire and scattered the ashes around to look like an old last year's camp, and then clumb a tree.

I reckon I was up in the tree two hours; but I didn't see nothing, I didn't hear nothing—I only *thought* I heard and seen as much as a thousand things. Well, I couldn't stay up there forever; so at last I got down, but I kept in the thick woods and on the lookout all the time. All I could get to eat was berries and what was left over from breakfast.

By the time it was night I was pretty hungry. So when it was good and dark, I slid out from shore before moonrise and paddled over to the Illinois bank—about a quarter of a mile. I went out in the woods and cooked a supper, and I had about made up my mind I would stay there all night, when I hear a *plunkety-plunk, plunkety-plunk*, and says to myself, horses coming; and next I hear people's voices. I got everything into the canoe as quick as I could, and then went creeping through the woods to see what I could find out. I hadn't got far when I hear a man say:

"We'd better camp here, if we can find a good place; the horses is about beat out. Let's look around."²

I didn't wait, but shoved out and paddled away easy. I tied up in the old place, and reckoned I would sleep in the canoe.

I didn't sleep much. I couldn't, somehow, for thinking. And every time I waked up I thought somebody had me by the neck. So the sleep didn't do me no good. By-and-by I says to myself, I can't live this way; I'm agoing to find out who it is that's here on the island with me; I'll find it out or bust. Well, I felt better, right off.

So I took my paddle and slid out from shore just a step or two, and then let the canoe drop along down amongst the shadows. The moon was shining, and outside of the shadows it made it most as light as day. I poked along well onto an hour, everything still as rocks and sound asleep. Well by this time I was most down to the foot of the island. A little ripply, cool breeze begun to blow, and that was as good as saying the night was about done. I give her a turn with the paddle and brung her nose to shore; then I got my gun and slipped out and into the edge of the woods. I set down there on a log and looked out through the leaves. I see the moon go off watch and the darkness begin to blanket the river. But in a little while I see a pale streak over the tree-tops, and knowed the day was coming. So I took my gun and slipped off towards where I had run across that camp fire, stopping every minute or two to listen. But I hadn't no luck, somehow; I couldn't seem to find the place. But by-and-by, sure enough, I caught a glimpse of fire, away through the trees. I went for it, cautious and slow. By-and-by I was close enough to have a look, and there laid a man on the ground. It most give me the fan-tods.³ He had a blanket around his head, and his head was nearly in the fire. I set there behind a clump of bushes, in about six foot of him, and kept my eyes on him steady. It was getting gray daylight, now. Pretty soon he gapped, and stretched himself, and hove off the blanket, and it was Miss Watson's Jim! I bet I was glad to see him. I says:

"Hello, Jim!" and skipped out.

2. Apparently this episode is a vestige of an early conception of the novel involving Pap in a murder plot and court trial.

3. A state of tension, uneasiness, or nervousness—what we might now call "the willies."

He bounced up and stared at me wild. Then he drops down on his knees, and puts his hands together and says:

“Doan’ hurt me—don’t! I hain’t ever done no harm to a ghos’. I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for ‘em. You go en git in de river agin, whah you b’longs, en doan’ do nuffn to Ole Jim, ‘at ‘uz awluz yo’ fren’.”

Well, I warn’t long making him understand I warn’t dead. I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn’t lonesome, now. I told him I warn’t afraid of *him* telling the people where I was. I talked along, but he only set there and looked at me; never said nothing. Then I says:

“It’s good daylight. Let’s get breakfast. Make up your camp fire good.”

“What’s de use er makin’ up de camp fire to cook strawbries en sich truck? But you got a gun, hain’t you? Den we kin git sumfn better den strawbries.”

“Strawberries and such truck,” I says. “Is that what you live on?”

“I couldn’ git nuffn else,” he says.

“Why, how long you been on the island, Jim?”

“I come heah de night arter you’s killed.”

“What, all that time?”

“Yes-indeedy.”

“And ain’t you had nothing but that kind of rubbage to eat?”

“No, sah—nuffn else.”

“Well, you must be most starved, ain’t you?”

“I reck’n I could eat a hoss. I think I could. How long you ben on de islan’?”

“Since the night I got killed.”

“No! W’y, what has you lived on? But you got a gun. Oh, yes, you got a gun. Dat’s good. Now you kill sumfn en I’ll make up de fire.”

So we went over to where the canoe was, and while he built a fire in a grassy open place amongst the trees, I fetched meal and bacon and coffee, and coffee-pot and frying-pan, and sugar and tin cups, and the nigger was set back considerable, because he reckoned it was all done with witchcraft. I caught a good big cat-fish, too, and Jim cleaned him with his knife, and fried him.

When breakfast was ready, we lolled on the grass and eat it smoking hot. Jim laid it in with all his might, for he was most about starved. Then when we had got pretty well stuffed, we laid off and lazied.

By-and-by Jim says:

“But looky here, Huck, who wuz it dat ‘uz killed in dat shanty, ef it warn’t you?”

Then I told him the whole thing, and he said it was smart. He said Tom Sawyer couldn’t get up no better plan than what I had. Then I says:

“How do you come to be here, Jim, and how’d you get here?”

He looked pretty uneasy, and didn’t say nothing for a minute. Then he says:

“Maybe I better not tell.”

“Why, Jim?”

“Well, dey’s reasons. But you wouldn’t tell on me ef I ‘uz to tell you, would you, Huck?”

“Blamed if I would, Jim.”

“Well, I b’lieve you, Huck. I—I *run off*.”

“Jim!”

“But mind, you said you wouldn’t tell—you know you said you wouldn’t tell, Huck.”

“Well, I did. I said I wouldn’t, and I’ll stick to it. Honest *injun* I will. People would call me a low down Ablitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don’t make no difference. I ain’t agoing to tell, and I ain’t agoing back there anyways. So now, le’s know all about it.”

“Well, you see, it ’uz dis way. Ole Missus—dat’s Miss Watson—she pecks on me all de time, en treats me pooty rough, but she awluz said she wouldn’t sell me down to Orleans. But I noticed dey wuz a nigger trader roun’ de place considable, lately, en I begin to git oneasy. Well, one night I creeps to de do’, pooty late, en de do’ warn’t quite shet, en I hear ole missus tell de widder she gwyne to sell me down to Orleans, but she didn’t want to, but she could git eight hund’d dollars for me, en it ’uz sich a big stack o’ money she couldn’t resis’. De widder she try to git her to say she wouldn’t do it, but I never waited to hear de res’. I lit out mighty quick, I tell you.

“I tuck out en shin down de hill en ’spec to steal a skift ’long de sho’ som’ers ’bove de town, but dey wuz people a-stirrin’ yit, so I hid in de ole tumble-down cooper shop on de bank to wait for everybody to go ’way. Well, I wuz dah all night. Dey wuz somebody roun’ all de time. ’Long ’bout six in de mawnin’, skifts begin to go by, en ’bout eight or nine every skift dat went ’long wuz talkin’ ’bout how yo’ pap come over to de town en say you’s killed. Dese las’ skifts wuz full o’ ladies en genlmen agoin’ over for to see de place. Sometimes dey’d pull up at de sho’ en take a res’ b’fo’ dey started acrost, so by de talk I got to know all ’bout de killin’. I ’uz powerful sorry you’s killed, Huck, but I ain’t no mo’, now.

“I laid dah under de shavins all day. I ’uz hungry, but I warn’t afeared; bekase I knowed ole missus en de widder wuz goin’ to start to de camp-meetn’ right arter breakfas’ en be gone all day, en dey knows I goes off wid de cattle ’bout daylight, so dey wouldn’t ’spec to see me roun’ de place, en so dey wouldn’t miss me tell arter dark in de evenin’. De yuther servants wouldn’t miss me, kase dey’d shin out en take holiday, soon as de ole folks ’uz out’n de way.

“Well, when it come dark I tuck out up de river road, en went ’bout two mile er more to whah dey warn’t no houses. I’d made up my mind ’bout what I’s agwyne to do. You see ef I kep’ on tryin’ to git away afoot, de dogs ’ud track me; ef I stole a skift to cross over, dey’d miss dat skift, you see, en dey’d know ’bout whah I’d lan’ on de yuther side en whah to pick up my track. So I says, a raff is what I’s arter; it doan’ *make* no track.

“I see a light a-comin’ roun’ de p’int, bymeby, so I wade’ in en shove’ a log ahead o’ me, en swum more’n half-way acrost de river, en got in ’mongst de drift-wood, en kep’ my head down low, en kinder swum agin de current tell de raff come along. Den I swum to de stern uv it, en tuck aholt. It clouded up en ’uz pooty dark for a little while. So I clumb up en laid down on de planks. De men ’uz all ’way yonder in de middle, whah de lantern wuz. De river wuz arisin’ en dey wuz a good current; so I reck’n’d ’at by fo’ in de mawnin’ I’d be twenty-five mile down de river, en den I’d slip in, jis’ b’fo’ daylight, en swim asho’ en take to de woods on de Illinois side.⁴

4. Though Illinois was not a slave state, by state law any black person without freedom papers could be arrested and subjected to forced labor.

Jim’s chances for escape would be improved if he went down the Mississippi and then up the Ohio.

“But I didn’ have no luck. When we ’uz mos’ down to de head er de islan’, a man begin to come aft wid de lantern. I see it warn’t no use fer to wait, so I slid overboard, en struck out fer de islan’. Well, I had a notion I could lan’ mos’ anywhers, but I couldn’—bank too bluff. I ’uz mos’ to de foot er de islan’ b’fo’ I foun’ a good place. I went into de woods en jedged I wouldn’ fool wid raffs no mo’, long as dey move de lantern roun’ so. I had my pipe en a plug er dog-leg,⁵ en some matches in my cap, en dey warn’t wet, so I ’uz all right.”

“And so you ain’t had no meat nor bread to eat all this time? Why didn’t you get mud-turkles?”

“How you gwyne to git’m? You can’t slip up on um en grab um; en how’s a body gwyne to hit um wid a rock? How could a body do it in de night? en I warn’t gwyne to show myself on de bank in de daytime.”

“Well, that’s so. You’ve had to keep in the woods all the time, of course. Did you hear ’em shooting the cannon?”

“Oh, yes. I knowed dey was arter you. I see um go by heah; watched um thoo de bushes.”

Some young birds come along, flying a yard or two at a time and lighting. Jim said it was a sign it was going to rain. He said it was a sign when young chickens flew that way, and so he reckoned it was the same way when young birds done it. I was going to catch some of them, but Jim wouldn’t let me. He said it was death. He said his father laid mighty sick once, and some of them catthed a bird, and his old granny said his father would die, and he did.

And Jim said you mustn’t count the things you are going to cook for dinner, because that would bring bad luck. The same if you shook the table-cloth after sundown. And he said if a man owned a bee-hive, and that man died, the bees must be told about it before sun-up next morning, or else the bees would all weaken down and quit work and die. Jim said bees wouldn’t sting idiots; but I didn’t believe that, because I had tried them lots of times myself, and they wouldn’t sting me.

I had heard about some of these things before, but not all of them. Jim knowed all kinds of signs. He said he knowed most everything. I said it looked to me like all the signs was about bad luck, and so I asked him if there warn’t any good-luck signs. He says:

“Mighty few—an’ *dey* ain’ no use to a body. What you want to know when good luck’s a-comin’ for? want to keep it off?” And he said: “Ef you’s got hairy arms en a hairy breas’, it’s a sign dat you’s agwyne to be rich. Well, dey’s some use in a sign like dat, ’kase it’s so fur ahead. You see, maybe you’s got to be po’ a long time fust, en so you might git discourage’ en kill yo’sef ’f you didn’ know by de sign dat you gwyne to be rich bymeby.”

“Have you got hairy arms and a hairy breast, Jim?”

“What’s de use to ax dat question? don’ you see I has?”

“Well, are you rich?”

“No, but I ben rich wunst, and gwyne to be rich agin. Wunst I had foteen dollars, but I tuck to specalat’n’, en got busted out.”

“What did you speculate in, Jim?”

“Well, fust I tackled stock.”

“What kind of stock?”

5. Cheap tobacco.

“Why, live stock. Cattle, you know. I put ten dollars in a cow. But I ain’t gwyne to resk no mo’ money in stock. De cow up ’n’ died on my han’s.”

“So you lost the ten dollars.”

“No, I didn’ lose it all. I on’y los’ ’bout nine of it. I sole de hide en taller for a dollar en ten cents.”

“You had five dollars and ten cents left. Did you speculate any more?”

“Yes. You know dat one-laigged nigger dat b’longs to old Misto Bradish? well, he sot up a bank, en say anybody dat put in a dollar would git fo’ dollars mo’ at de en’ er de year. Well, all de niggers went in, but dey didn’ have much. I wuz de on’y one dat had much. So I stuck out for mo’ dan fo’ dollars, en I said ’f I didn’ git it I’d start a bank myself. Well o’ course dat nigger want’ to keep me out er de business, bekase he say dey warn’t business ’nough for two banks, so he say I could put in my five dollars en he pay me thirty-five at de en’ er de year.

“So I done it. Den I reck’n’d I’d inves’ de thirty-five dollars right off en keep things a-movin’. Dey wuz a nigger name’ Bob, dat had ketched a wood-flat,⁶ en his marster didn’ know it; en I bought it off’n him en told him to take de thirty-five dollars when de en’ er de year come; but somebody stole de wood-flat dat night, en nex’ day de one-laigged nigger say de bank ’s busted. So dey didn’ none uv us git no money.”

“What did you do with the ten cents, Jim?”

“Well, I ’uz gwyne to spen’ it, but I had a dream, en de dream tole me to give it to a nigger name’ Balum—Balum’s Ass⁷ dey call him for short, he’s one er dem chuckle-heads, you know. But he’s lucky, dey say, en I see I warn’t lucky. De dream say let Balum inves’ de ten cents en he’d make a raise for me. Well, Balum he tuck de money, en when he wuz in church he hear de preacher say dat whoever give to de po’ len’ to de Lord, en boun’ to git his money back a hund’d times. So Balum he tuck en give de ten cents to de po’, en laid low to see what wuz gwyne to come of it.”

“Well, what did come of it, Jim?”

“Nuffn never come of it. I couldn’ manage to k’leck dat money no way; en Balum he couldn’. I ain’ gwyne to len’ no mo’ money ’dout I see de security. Boun’ to git yo’ money back a hund’d times, de preacher says! Ef I could git de ten cents back, I’d call it squah, en be glad er de chanst.”

“Well, it’s all right anyway, Jim, long as you’re going to be rich again some time or other.”

“Yes—en I’s rich now, come to look at it. I owns mysef, en I’s wuth eight hund’d dollars. I wisht I had de money, I wouldn’ want no mo’.”

Chapter IX

I wanted to go and look at a place right about the middle of the island, that I’d found when I was exploring; so we started, and soon got to it, because the island was only three miles long and a quarter of a mile wide.

6. A flat-bottomed boat used to transport timber.

7. In the Old Testament, God’s avenging angel interrupts the journey of Balaam, a prophet, to curse the Israelites by standing in his path. Balaam is blind to the angel’s presence, but his

donkey sees the angel clearly and swerves off the road. The donkey receives the power to speak and complains to Balaam of its treatment (Numbers 22).

This place was a tolerable long steep hill or ridge, about forty foot high. We had a rough time getting to the top, the sides was so steep and the bushes so thick. We tramped and clumb around all over it, and by-and-by found a good big cavern in the rock, most up to the top on the side towards Illinois. The cavern was as big as two or three rooms bunched together, and Jim could stand up straight in it. It was cool in there. Jim was for putting our traps in there, right away, but I said we didn't want to be climbing up and down there all the time.

Jim said if we had the canoe hid in a good place, and had all the traps in the cavern, we could rush there if anybody was to come to the island, and they would never find us without dogs. And besides, he said them little birds had said it was going to rain, and did I want the things to get wet?

So we went back and got the canoe and paddled up abreast the cavern, and lugged all the traps up there. Then we hunted up a place close by to hide the canoe in, amongst the thick willows. We took some fish off of the lines and set them again, and begun to get ready for dinner.

The door of the cavern was big enough to roll a hoghead in, and on one side of the door the floor stuck out a little bit and was flat and a good place to build a fire on. So we built it there and cooked dinner.

We spread the blankets inside for a carpet, and eat our dinner in there. We put all the other things handy at the back of the cavern. Pretty soon it darkened up and begun to thunder and lighten; so the birds was right about it. Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely; and the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spiderwebby; and here would come a blast of wind that would bend the trees down and turn up the pale underside of the leaves; and then a perfect ripper of a gust would follow along and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild; and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest—*fst!* it was as bright as glory and you'd have a little glimpse of tree-tops a-plunging about, away off yonder in the storm, hundreds of yards further than you could see before; dark as sin again in a second, and now you'd hear the thunder let go with an awful crash and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling down the sky towards the under side of the world, like rolling empty barrels down stairs, where it's long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know.

"Jim, this is nice," I says. "I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here. Pass me along another hunk of fish and some hot cornbread."

"Well, you wouldn' a ben here, 'f it hadn' a ben for Jim. You'd a ben down dah in de woods widout any dinner, en gittn' mos' drowned, too, dat you would, honey. Chickens knows when its gwyne to rain, en so do de birds, chile."

The river went on raising and raising for ten or twelve days, till at last it was over the banks. The water was three or four foot deep on the island in the low places and on the Illinois bottom. On that side it was a good many miles wide; but on the Missouri side it was the same old distance across—a half a mile—because the Missouri shore was just a wall of high bluffs.

Daytimes we paddled all over the island in the canoe. It was mighty cool and shady in the deep woods even if the sun was blazing outside. We went winding in and out amongst the trees; and sometimes the vines hung so thick

we had to back away and go some other way. Well, on every old broken-down tree, you could see rabbits, and snakes, and such things; and when the island had been overflowed a day or two, they got so tame, on account of being hungry, that you could paddle right up and put your hand on them if you wanted to; but not the snakes and turtles—they would slide off in the water. The ridge our cavern was in, was full of them. We could a had pets enough if we'd wanted them.

One night we caught a little section of a lumber raft—nice pine planks. It was twelve foot wide and about fifteen or sixteen foot long, and the top stood above water six or seven inches, a solid level floor. We could see sawlogs go by in the daylight, sometimes, but we let them go; we didn't show ourselves in daylight.

Another night, when we was up at the head of the island, just before daylight, here comes a frame house down, on the west side. She was a two-story, and tilted over, considerable. We paddled out and got aboard—clumb in at an up-stairs window. But it was too dark to see yet, so we made the canoe fast and set in her to wait for daylight.

The light begun to come before we got to the foot of the island. Then we looked in at the window. We could make out a bed, and a table, and two old chairs, and lots of things around about on the floor; and there was clothes hanging against the wall. There was something laying on the floor in the far corner that looked like a man. So Jim says.

“Hello, you!”

But it didn't budge. So I hollered again, and then Jim says:

“De man ain' asleep—he's dead. You hold still—I'll go en see.”

He went and bent down and looked, and says:

“It's a dead man. Yes, indeedy; naked, too. He's ben shot in de back. I reck'n he's ben dead two er three days. Come in, Huck, but doan' look at his face—it's too gashly.”

I didn't look at him at all. Jim threw some old rags over him, but he needn't done it; I didn't want to see him. There was heaps of old greasy cards scattered around over the floor, and old whiskey bottles, and a couple of masks made out of black cloth; and all over the walls was the ignorantest kind of words and pictures, made with charcoal. There was two old dirty calico dresses, and a sun-bonnet, and some women's under-clothes, hanging against the wall, and some men's clothing, too. We put the lot into the canoe; it might come good. There was a boy's old speckled straw hat on the floor; I took that too. And there was a bottle that had had milk in it; and it had a rag stopper for a baby to suck. We would a took the bottle, but it was broke. There was a seedy old chest, and an old hair trunk with the hinges broke. They stood open, but there warn't nothing left in them that was any account. The way things was scattered about, we reckoned the people left in a hurry and warn't fixed so as to carry off most of their stuff.

We got an old tin lantern, and a butcher-knife without any handle, and a bran-new Barlow knife⁸ worth two bits in any store, and a lot of tallow candles, and a tin candlestick, and a gourd, and a tin cup, and a ratty old bed-quilt off the bed, and a reticule with needles and pins and beeswax and

8. Pocketknife with one blade, named for the inventor.

buttons and thread and all such truck in it, and a hatchet and some nails, and a fish-line as thick as my little finger, with some monstrous hooks on it, and a roll of buckskin, and a leather dog-collar, and a horse-shoe, and some vials of medicine that didn't have no label on them; and just as we was leaving I found a tolerable good curry-comb, and Jim he found a ratty old fiddle-bow, and a wooden leg. The straps was broke off of it, but barring that, it was a good enough leg, though it was too long for me and not long enough for Jim, and we couldn't find the other one, though we hunted all around.

And so, take it all around, we made a good haul. When we was ready to shove off, we was a quarter of a mile below the island, and it was pretty broad day; so I made Jim lay down in the canoe and cover up with the quilt, because if he set up, people could tell he was a nigger a good ways off. I paddled over to the Illinois shore, and drifted down most a half a mile doing it. I crept up the dead water under the bank, and hadn't no accidents and didn't see nobody. We got home all safe.

Chapter X

After breakfast I wanted to talk about the dead man and guess out how he come to be killed, but Jim didn't want to. He said it would fetch bad luck; and besides, he said, he might come and ha'nt us; he said a man that warn't buried was more likely to go a-ha'nting around than one that was planted and comfortable. That sounded pretty reasonable, so I didn't say no more; but I couldn't keep from studying over it and wishing I knowed who shot the man, and what they done it for.

We rummaged the clothes we'd got, and found eight dollars in silver sewed up in the lining of an old blanket overcoat. Jim said he reckoned the people in that house stole the coat, because if they'd a knowed the money was there they wouldn't a left it. I said I reckoned they killed him, too; but Jim didn't want to talk about that. I says:

"Now, you think it's bad luck; but what did you say when I fetched in the snake-skin that I found on the top of the ridge day before yesterday? You said it was the worst bad luck in the world to touch a snake-skin with my hands. Well, here's your bad luck! We've raked in all this truck and eight dollars besides. I wish we could have some bad luck like this every day, Jim."

"Never you mind, honey, never you mind. Don't you git too peart.⁹ It's a-comin'. Mind I tell you, it's a-comin'."

It did come, too. It was Tuesday that we had that talk. Well, after dinner Friday, we was laying around in the grass at the upper end of the ridge, and got out of tobacco. I went to the cavern to get some, and found a rattlesnake in there. I killed him, and curled him up on the foot of Jim's blanket, ever so natural, thinking there'd be some fun when Jim found him there. Well, by night I forgot all about the snake, and when Jim flung himself down on the blanket while I struck a light, the snake's mate was there, and bit him.

He jumped up yelling, and the first thing the light showed was the varmint curled up and ready for another spring. I laid him out in a second with a stick, and Jim grabbed pap's whiskey jug and began to pour it down.

9. Impertinent.

He was barefooted, and the snake bit him right on the heel. That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that whenever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there and curls around it. Jim told me to chop off the snake's head and throw it away, and then skin the body and roast a piece of it. I done it, and he eat it and said it would help cure him. He made me take off the rattles and tie them around his wrist, too. He said that that would help. Then I slid out quiet and throwed the snakes clear away amongst the bushes; for I warn't going to let Jim find out it was all my fault, not if I could help it.

Jim sucked and sucked at the jug, and now and then he got out of his head and pitched around and yelled; but every time he come to himself he went to sucking at the jug again. His foot swelled up pretty big, and so did his leg; but by-and-by the drunk begun to come, and so I judged he was all right; but I'd druther been bit with a snake than pap's whiskey.

Jim was laid up for four days and nights. Then the swelling was all gone and he was around again. I made up my mind I wouldn't ever take aolt of a snake-skin again with my hands, now that I see what had come of it. Jim said he reckoned I would believe him next time. And he said that handling a snake-skin was such awful bad luck that maybe we hadn't got to the end of it yet. He said he druther see the new moon over his left shoulder as much as a thousand times than take up a snake-skin in his hand. Well, I was getting to feel that way myself, though I've always reckoned that looking at the new moon over your left shoulder is one of the carelessest and foolishest things a body can do. Old Hank Bunker done it once, and bragged about it; and in less than two years he got drunk and fell off of the shot tower and spread himself out so that he was just a kind of layer, as you may say; and they slid him edgeways between two barn doors for a coffin, and buried him so, so they say, but I didn't see it. Pap told me. But anyway, it all come of looking at the moon that way, like a fool.

Well, the days went along, and the river went down between its banks again; and about the first thing we done was to bait one of the big hooks with a skinned rabbit and set it and catch a cat-fish that was as big as a man, being six foot two inches long, and weighed over two hundred pounds. We couldn't handle him, of course; he would a flung us into Illinois. We just set there and watched him rip and tear around till he drowned. We found a brass button in his stomach, and a round ball, and lots of rubbage. We split the ball open with the hatchet, and there was a spool in it. Jim said he'd had it there a long time, to coat it over so and make a ball of it. It was as big a fish as was ever catched in the Mississippi, I reckon. Jim said he hadn't ever seen a bigger one. He would a been worth a good deal over at the village. They peddle out such a fish as that by the pound in the market house there; everybody buys some of him; his meat's as white as snow and makes a good fry.

Next morning I said it was getting slow and dull, and I wanted to get a stirring up, some way. I said I reckoned I would slip over the river and find out what was going on. Jim liked that notion; but he said I must go in the dark and look sharp. Then he studied it over and said, couldn't I put on some of them old things and dress up like a girl? That was a good notion, too. So we shortened up one of the calico gowns and I turned up my trowser-legs to my knees and got into it. Jim hitched it behind with the hooks, and it was a fair fit. I put on the sun-bonnet and tied it under my chin, and then for a body to look in and see my face was like looking down a joint of stove-pipe. Jim said

nobody would know me, even in the daytime, hardly. I practiced around all day to get the hang of the things, and by-and-by I could do pretty well in them, only Jim said I didn't walk like a girl; and he said I must quit pulling up my gown to get at my britches pocket. I took notice, and done better.

I started up the Illinois shore in the canoe just after dark.

I started across to the town from a little below the ferry landing, and the drift of the current fetched me in at the bottom of the town. I tied up and started along the bank. There was a light burning in a little shanty that hadn't been lived in for a long time, and I wondered who had took up quarters there. I slipped up and peeped in at the window. There was a woman about forty year old in there, knitting by a candle that was on a pine table. I didn't know her face; she was a stranger, for you couldn't start a face in that town that I didn't know. Now this was lucky, because I was weakening; I was getting afraid I had come; people might know my voice and find me out. But if this woman had been in such a little town two days she could tell me all I wanted to know; so I knocked at the door, and made up my mind I wouldn't forget I was a girl.

Chapter XI

"Come in," says the woman, and I did. She says:

"Take a cheer."

I done it. She looked me all over with her little shiny eyes, and says:

"What might your name be?"

"Sarah Williams."

"Where 'bouts do you live? In this neighborhood?"

"No'm. In Hookerville, seven mile below. I've walked all the way and I'm all tired out."

"Hungry, too, I reckon. I'll find you something."

"No'm, I ain't hungry. I was so hungry I had to stop two mile below here at a farm; so I ain't hungry no more. It's what makes me so late. My mother's down sick, and out of money and everything, and I come to tell my uncle Abner Moore. He lives at the upper end of the town, she says. I hain't ever been here before. Do you know him?"

"No; but I don't know everybody yet. I haven't lived here quite two weeks. It's a considerable ways to the upper end of the town. You better stay here all night. Take off your bonnet."

"No," I says, "I'll rest a while, I reckon, and go on. I ain't afeard of the dark."

She said she wouldn't let me go by myself, but her husband would be in by-and-by, maybe in a hour and a half, and she'd send him along with me. Then she got to talking about her husband, and about her relations up the river, and her relations down the river, and how much better off they used to was, and how they didn't know but they'd made a mistake coming to our town, instead of letting well alone—and so on and so on, till I was afeard I had made a mistake coming to her to find out what was going on in the town; but by-and-by she dropped onto pap and the murder, and then I was pretty willing to let her clatter right along. She told about me and Tom Sawyer finding the six thousand dollars (only she got it ten) and all about pap and what a hard lot he was, and what a hard lot I was, and at last she got down to where I was murdered. I says:

"Who done it? We've heard considerable about these goings on, down in Hookerville, but we don't know who 'twas that killed Huck Finn."

"Well, I reckon there's a right smart chance of people *here* that'd like to know who killed him. Some thinks old Finn done it himself."

"No—is that so?"

"Most everybody thought it at first. He'll never know how nigh he come to getting lynched. But before night they changed around and judged it was done by a runaway nigger named Jim."

"Why *he*—"

I stopped. I reckoned I better keep still. She run on, and never noticed I had put in at all.

"The nigger run off the very night Huck Finn was killed. So there's a reward out for him—three hundred dollars. And there's a reward out for old Finn too—two hundred dollars. You see, he come to town the morning after the murder, and told about it, and was out with 'em on the ferry-boat hunt, and right away after he up and left. Before night they wanted to lynch him, but he was gone, you see. Well, next day they found out the nigger was gone; they found out he hadn't ben seen sence ten o'clock the night the murder was done. So then they put it on him, you see, and while they was full of it, next day back comes old Finn and went boohooing to Judge Thatcher to get money to hunt for the nigger all over Illinois with. The judge give him some, and that evening he got drunk and was around till after midnight with a couple of mighty hard looking strangers, and then went off with them. Well, he hain't come back sence, and they ain't looking for him back till this thing blows over a little, for people thinks now that he killed his boy and fixed things so folks would think robbers done it, and then he'd get Huck's money without having to bother a long time with a lawsuit. People do say he warn't any too good to do it. Oh, he's sly, I reckon. If he don't come back for a year, he'll be all right. You can't prove anything on him, you know; everything will be quieted down then, and he'll walk into Huck's money as easy as nothing."

"Yes, I reckon so, 'm. I don't see nothing in the way of it. Has everybody quit thinking the nigger done it?"

"Oh no, not everybody. A good many thinks he done it. But they'll get the nigger pretty soon, now, and maybe they can scare it out of him."

"Why, are they after him yet?"

"Well, you're innocent, ain't you! Does three hundred dollars lay round every day for people to pick up? Some folks thinks the nigger ain't far from here. I'm one of them—but I hain't talked it around. A few days ago I was talking with an old couple that lives next door in the log shanty, and they happened to say hardly anybody ever goes to that island over yonder that they call Jackson's Island. Don't anybody live there? says I. No, nobody, says they. I didn't say any more, but I done some thinking. I was pretty near certain I'd seen smoke over there, about the head of the island, a day or two before that, so I says to myself, like as not that nigger's hiding over there; anyway, says I, it's worth the trouble to give the place a hunt. I hain't seen any smoke sence, so I reckon maybe he's gone, if it was him; but husband's going over to see—him and another man. He was gone up the river; but he got back to-day and I told him as soon as he got here two hours ago."

I had got so uneasy I couldn't set still. I had to do something with my hands; so I took up a needle off of the table and went to threading it. My hands shook and I was making a bad job of it. When the woman stopped talking, I looked up, and she was looking at me pretty curious, and smiling a little. I put down the needle and thread and let on to be interested—and I was, too—and says:

"Three hundred dollars is a power of money. I wish my mother could get it. Is your husband going over there to-night?"

"Oh, yes. He went up town with the man I was telling you of, to get a boat and see if they could borrow another gun. They'll go over after midnight."

"Couldn't they see better if they was to wait till daytime?"

"Yes. And couldn't the nigger see better too? After midnight he'll likely be asleep, and they can slip around through the woods and hunt up his camp fire all the better for the dark, if he's got one."

"I didn't think of that."

The woman kept looking at me pretty curious, and I didn't feel a bit comfortable. Pretty soon she says:

"What did you say your name was, honey?"

"M—Mary Williams."

Somehow it didn't seem to me that I said it was Mary before, so I didn't look up; seemed to me I said it was Sarah; so I felt sort of cornered, and was afeared maybe I was looking it, too. I wished the woman would say something more; the longer she set still, the uneasier I was. But now she says:

"Honey, I thought you said it was Sarah when you first come in?"

"Oh, yes'm, I did. Sarah Mary Williams. Sarah's my first name. Some calls me Sarah, some calls me Mary."

"Oh, that's the way of it?"

"Yes'm."

I was feeling better, then, but I wished I was out of there, anyway. I couldn't look up yet.

Well, the woman fell to talking about how hard times was, and how poor they had to live, and how the rats was as free as if they owned the place, and so forth, and so on, and then I got easy again. She was right about the rats. You'd see one stick his nose out of a hole in the corner every little while. She said she had to have things handy to throw at them when she was alone, or they wouldn't give her no peace. She showed me a bar of lead, twisted up into a knot, and she said she was a good shot with it generly, but she'd wrenched her arm a day or two ago, and didn't know whether she could throw true, now. But she watched for a chance, and directly she banged away at a rat, but she missed him wide, and said "Ouch!" it hurt her arm so. Then she told me to try for the next one. I wanted to be getting away before the old man got back, but of course I didn't let on. I got the thing, and the first rat that showed his nose I let drive, and if he'd a stayed where he was he'd a been a tolerable sick rat. She said that that was first-rate, and she reckoned I would hive¹ the next one. She went and got the lump of lead and fetched it back and brought along a hank of yarn, which she wanted me to help her with. I held up my two hands and she put the hank over them and went on talking about her and her husband's matters. But she broke off to say:

1. Get.

“Keep your eye on the rats. You better have the lead in your lap, handy.”

So she dropped the lump into my lap, just at that moment, and I clapped my legs together on it and she went on talking. But only about a minute. Then she took off the hank and looked me straight in the face, but very pleasant, and says:

“Come, now—what’s your real name?”

“Wh-what, mum?”

“What’s your real name? Is it Bill, or Tom, or Bob?—or what is it?”

I reckon I shook like a leaf, and I didn’t know hardly what to do. But I says:

“Please to don’t poke fun at a poor girl like me, mum. If I’m in the way, here I’ll—”

“No, you won’t. Set down and stay where you are. I ain’t going to hurt you, and I ain’t going to tell on you, nuther. You just tell me your secret, and trust me. I’ll keep it; and what’s more, I’ll help you. So’ll my old man, if you want him to. You see, you’re a run-away ’prentice—that’s all. It ain’t anything. There ain’t any harm in it. You’ve been treated bad, and you made up your mind to cut. Bless you, child, I wouldn’t tell on you. Tell me all about it, now—that’s a good boy.”

So I said it wouldn’t be no use to try to play it any longer, and I would just make a clean breast and tell her everything, but she mustn’t go back on her promise. Then I told her my father and mother was dead, and the law had bound me out to a mean old farmer in the country thirty mile back from the river, and he treated me so bad I couldn’t stand it no longer; he went away to be gone a couple of days, and so I took my chance and stole some of his daughter’s old clothes, and cleared out, and I had been three nights coming the thirty miles; I traveled nights, and hid daytimes and slept, and the bag of bread and meat I carried from home lasted me all the way and I had a plenty. I said I believed my uncle Abner Moore would take care of me, and so that was why I struck out for this town of Goshen.

“Goshen, child? This ain’t Goshen. This is St. Petersburg. Goshen’s ten mile further up the river. Who told you this was Goshen?”

“Why, a man I met at day-break this morning, just as I was going to turn into the woods for my regular sleep. He told me when the roads forked I must take the right hand, and five mile would fetch me to Goshen.”

“He was drunk I reckon. He told you just exactly wrong.”

“Well, he did act like he was drunk, but it ain’t no matter now. I got to be moving along. I’ll fetch Goshen before day-light.”

“Hold on a minute. I’ll put you up a snack to eat. You might want it.”

So she put me up a snack, and says:

“Say—when a cow’s laying down, which end of her gets up first? Answer me up prompt, now—don’t stop to study over it. Which end gets up first?”

“The hind end, mum.”

“Well, then, a horse?”

“The for’ard end, mum.”

“Which side of a tree does the most moss grow on?”

“North side.”

“If fifteen cows is browsing on a hillside, how many of them eats with their heads pointed the same direction?”

“The whole fifteen, mum.”

“Well, I reckon you *have* lived in the country. I thought maybe you was trying to hocus me again. What’s your real name, now?”

“George Peters, mum.”

“Well, try to remember it, George. Don’t forget and tell me it’s Elexander before you go, and then get out by saying it’s George Elexander when I catch you. And don’t go about women in that old calico. You do a girl tolerable poor, but you might fool men, maybe. Bless you, child, when you set out to thread a needle, don’t hold the thread still and fetch the needle up to it; hold the needle still and poke the thread at it—that’s the way a woman most always does; but a man always does ’tother way. And when you throw at a rat or anything, hitch yourself up a tip-toe, and fetch your hand up over your head as awkward as you can, and miss your rat about six or seven foot. Throw stiff-armed from the shoulder, like there was a pivot there for it to turn on—like a girl; not from the wrist and elbow, with your arm out to one side, like a boy. And mind you, when a girl tries to catch anything in her lap, she throws her knees apart; she don’t clap them together, the way you did when you catched the lump of lead. Why, I spotted you for a boy when you was threading the needle; and I contrived the other things just to make certain. Now trot along to your uncle, Sarah Mary Williams George Elexander Peters, and if you get into trouble you send word to Mrs. Judith Loftus, which is me, and I’ll do what I can to get you out of it. Keep the river road, all the way, and next time you tramp, take shoes and socks with you. The river road’s a rocky one, and your feet ’ll be in a condition when you get to Goshen, I reckon.”

I went up the bank about fifty yards, and then I doubled on my tracks and slipped back to where my canoe was, a good piece below the house. I jumped in and was off in a hurry. I went up stream far enough to make the head of the island, and then started across. I took off the sun-bonnet, for I didn’t want no blinders on, then. When I was about the middle, I hear the clock begin to strike; so I stops and listens; the sound come faint over the water, but clear—eleven. When I struck the head of the island I never waited to blow, though I was most winded, but I shoved right into the timber where my old camp used to be, and started a good fire there on a high-and-dry spot.

Then I jumped in the canoe and dug out for our place a mile and a half below, as hard as I could go. I landed, and slopped through the timber and up the ridge and into the cavern. There Jim laid, sound asleep on the ground. I roused him out and says:

“Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain’t a minute to lose. They’re after us!”

Jim never asked no questions, he never said a word; but the way he worked for the next half an hour showed about how he was scared. By that time everything we had in the world was on our raft and she was ready to be shoved out from the willow cove where she was hid. We put out the camp fire at the cavern the first thing, and didn’t show a candle outside after that.

I took the canoe out from shore a little piece and took a look, but if there was a boat around I couldn’t see it, for stars and shadows ain’t good to see by. Then we got out the raft and slipped along down in the shade, past the foot of the island dead still, never saying a word.

Chapter XII

It must a been close onto one o'clock when we got below the island at last, and the raft did seem to go mighty slow. If a boat was to come along, we was going to take to the canoe and break for the Illinois shore; and it was well a boat didn't come, for we hadn't ever thought to put the gun into the canoe, or a fishing-line or anything to eat. We was in ruther too much of a sweat to think of so many things. It warn't good judgment to put *everything* on the raft.

If the men went to the island, I just expect they found the camp fire I built, and watched it all night for Jim to come. Anyways, they stayed away from us, and if my building the fire never fooled them it warn't no fault of mine. I played it as low-down on them as I could.

When the first streak of day begun to show, we tied up to a tow-head in a big bend on the Illinois side, and hacked off cotton-wood branches with the hatchet and covered up the raft with them so she looked like there had been a cave-in in the bank there. A tow-head is a sand-bar that has cotton-woods on it as thick as harrow-teeth.

We had mountains on the Missouri shore and heavy timber on the Illinois side, and the channel was down the Missouri shore at that place, so we warn't afraid of anybody running across us. We laid there all day and watched the rafts and steamboats spin down the Missouri shore, and up-bound steamboats fight the big river in the middle. I told Jim all about the time I had jabbering with that woman; and Jim said she was a smart one, and if she was to start after us herself *she* wouldn't set down and watch a camp fire—no, sir, she'd fetch a dog. Well, then, I said, why couldn't she tell her husband to fetch a dog? Jim said he bet she did think of it by the time the men was ready to start, and he believed they must a gone up town to get a dog and so they lost all that time, or else we wouldn't be here on a tow-head sixteen or seventeen mile below the village—no, indeedy, we would be in that same old town again. So I said I didn't care what was the reason they didn't get us, as long as they didn't.

When it was beginning to come on dark, we poked our heads out of the cottonwood thicket and looked up, and down, and across; nothing in sight; so Jim took up some of the top planks of the raft and built a snug wigwam to get under in blazing weather and rainy, and to keep the things dry. Jim made a floor for the wigwam, and raised it a foot or more above the level of the raft, so now the blankets and all the traps was out of the reach of steamboat waves. Right in the middle of the wigwam we made a layer of dirt about five or six inches deep with a frame around it for to hold it to its place; this was to build a fire on in sloppy weather or chilly; the wigwam would keep it from being seen. We made an extra steering oar, too, because one of the others might get broke, on a snag or something. We fixed up a short forked stick to hang the old lantern on; because we must always light the lantern whenever we see a steamboat coming down stream, to keep from getting run over; but we wouldn't have to light it up for upstream boats unless we see we was in what they call "crossing;" for the river was pretty high yet, very low banks being still a little under water; so up-bound boats didn't always run the channel, but hunted easy water.

This second night we run between seven and eight hours, with a current that was making over four mile an hour. We caught fish, and talked, and

we took a swim now and then to keep off sleepiness. It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn't ever feel like talking loud, and it warn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of a low chuckle. We had mighty good weather, as a general thing, and nothing ever happened to us at all, that night, nor the next, nor the next.

Every night we passed towns, some of them away up on black hillsides, nothing but just a shiny bed of lights, not a house could you see. The fifth night we passed St. Louis, and it was like the whole world lit up. In St. Petersburg they used to say there was twenty or thirty thousand people in St. Louis,² but I never believed it till I see that wonderful spread of lights at two o'clock that still night. There warn't a sound there; everybody was asleep.

Every night now, I used to slip ashore, towards ten o'clock, at some little village, and buy ten or fifteen cents' worth of meal or bacon or other stuff to eat; and sometimes I lifted a chicken that warn't roosting comfortable, and took him along. Pap always said, take a chicken when you get a chance, because if you don't want him yourself you can easy find somebody that does, and a good deed ain't ever forgot. I never see pap when he didn't want the chicken himself, but that is what he used to say, anyway.

Mornings, before daylight, I slipped into corn fields and borrowed a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn, or things of that kind. Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. Jim said he reckoned the widow was partly right and pap was partly right; so the best way would be for us to pick out two or three things from the list and say we wouldn't borrow them any more—then he reckoned it wouldn't be no harm to borrow the others. So we talked it over all one night, drifting along down the river, trying to make up our minds whether to drop the watermelons, or the cantelopes, or the mushmelons, or what. But towards daylight we got it all settled satisfactory, and concluded to drop crabapples and p'simmons. We warn't feeling just right, before that, but it was all comfortable now. I was glad the way it come out, too, because crabapples ain't ever good, and the p'simmons wouldn't be ripe for two or three months yet.

We shot a water-fowl, now and then, that got up too early in the morning or didn't go to bed early enough in the evening. Take it all around, we lived pretty high.

The fifth night below St. Louis we had a big storm after midnight, with a power of thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down in a solid sheet. We stayed in the wigwam and let the raft take care of itself. When the lightning glared out we could see a big straight river ahead, and high rocky bluffs on both sides. By-and-by says I, "Hel-lo Jim, looky yonder!" It was a steamboat that had killed herself on a rock. We was drifting straight down for her. The lightning showed her very distinct. She was leaning over, with part of her upper deck above water, and you could see every little chimbly-guy³ clean and clear, and a chair by the big bell, with an old slouch hat hanging on the back of it when the flashes come.

2. St. Louis is 170 miles down the Mississippi from Hannibal.

3. Wire used to steady the chimney stacks.

Well, it being away in the night, and stormy, and all so mysterious-like, I felt just the way any other boy would a felt when I see that wreck laying there so mournful and lonesome in the middle of the river. I wanted to get aboard of her and slink around a little, and see what there was there. So I says:

“Le’s land on her, Jim.”

But Jim was dead against it, at first. He says:

“I doan’ want to go fool’n ’long er no wrack. We’s doin’ blame’ well, en we better let blame’ well alone, as de good book says. Like as not dey’s a watchman on dat wrack.”

“Watchman your grandmother,” I says; “there ain’t nothing to watch but the texas⁴ and the pilot-house; and do you reckon anybody’s going to resk his life for a texas and a pilot-house such a night as this, when it’s likely to break up and wash off down the river any minute?” Jim couldn’t say nothing to that, so he didn’t try. “And besides,” I says, “we might borrow something worth having, out of the captain’s stateroom. Seegars, I bet you—and cost five cents apiece, solid cash. Steamboat captains is always rich, and get sixty dollars a month, and *they* don’t care a cent what a thing costs, you know, long as they want it. Stick a candle in your pocket; I can’t rest, Jim, till we give her a rummaging. Do you reckon Tom Sawyer would ever go by this thing? Not for pie, he wouldn’t. He’d call it an adventure—that’s what he’d call it; and he’d land on that wreck if it was his last act. And wouldn’t he throw style into it?—wouldn’t he spread himself, nor nothing? Why, you’d think it was Christopher C’lumbus discovering Kingdom-Come. I wish Tom Sawyer *was* here.”

Jim he grumbled a little, but give in. He said we mustn’t talk any more than we could help, and then talk mighty low. The lightning showed us the wreck again, just in time, and we fetched the starboard derrick,⁵ and made fast there.

The deck was high out, here. We went sneaking down the slope of it to lab-board, in the dark, towards the texas, feeling our way slow with our feet, and spreading our hands out to fend off the guys, for it was so dark we couldn’t see no sign of them. Pretty soon we struck the forward end of the skylight, and clumb onto it; and the next step fetched us in front of the captain’s door, which was open, and by Jimminy, away down through the texas-hall we see a light! and all in the same second we seem to hear low voices in yonder!

Jim whispered and said he was feeling powerful sick, and told me to come along. I says, all right; and was going to start for the raft; but just then I heard a voice wail out and say:

“Oh, please don’t, boys; I swear I won’t ever tell!”

Another voice said, pretty loud:

“It’s a lie, Jim Turner. You’ve acted this way before. You always want more’n your share of the truck and you’ve always got it, too, because you’ve swore ’t if you didn’t you’d tell. But this time you’ve said it jest one time too many. You’re the meanest, treacherousest hound in this country.”

By this time Jim was gone for the raft. I was just a-biling with curiosity; and I says to myself, Tom Sawyer wouldn’t back out now, and so I won’t

4. The large cabin on the top deck located just behind or beneath the pilothouse; it serves as

officers’ quarters.

5. Boom for lifting cargo.

either; I'm agoing to see what's going on here. So I dropped on my hands and knees, in the little passage, and crept aft in the dark, till there warn't but about one stateroom betwixt me and the cross-hall of the texas. Then, in there I see a man stretched on the floor and tied hand and foot, and two men standing over him, and one of them had a dim lantern in his hand, and the other one had a pistol. This one kept pointing the pistol at the man's head on the floor and saying—

"I'd *like* to! And I orter, too, a mean skunk!"

The man on the floor would shrivel up, and say: "Oh, please don't, Bill—I hain't ever goin' to tell."

And every time he said that, the man with the lantern would laugh and say:

"'Deed you *ain't*! You never said no truer thing 'n that, you bet you." And once he said, "Hear him beg! and yit if we hadn't got the best of him and tied him, he'd a killed us both. And what *for*? Jist for noth'n. Jist because we stood on our *rights*—that's what for. But I lay you ain't agoin' to threaten nobody any more, Jim Turner. Put *up* that pistol, Bill."

Bill says:

"I don't want to, Jake Packard. I'm for killin' him—and didn't he kill old Hatfield jist the same way—and don't he deserve it?"

"But I don't *want* him killed, and I've got my reasons for it."

"Bless yo' heart for them words, Jake Packard! I'll never forgit you, long's I live!" says the man on the floor, sort of blubbering.

Packard didn't take no notice of that, but hung up his lantern on a nail, and started towards where I was, there in the dark, and motioned Bill to come. I crawfished⁶ as fast as I could, about two yards, but the boat slanted so that I couldn't make very good time; so to keep from getting run over and caught I crawled into a stateroom on the upper side. The man come a-pawing along in the dark, and when Packard got to my stateroom, he says:

"Here—come in here."

And in he come, and Bill after him. But before they got in, I was up in the upper berth, cornered, and sorry I come. Then they stood there, with their hands on the ledge of the berth, and talked. I couldn't see them, but I could tell where they was, by the whiskey they'd been having. I was glad I didn't drink whiskey; but it wouldn't made much difference, anyway, because most of the time they couldn't a treed me because I didn't breathe. I was too scared. And besides, a body *couldn't* breathe, and hear such talk. They talked low and earnest. Bill wanted to kill Turner. He says:

"He's said he'll tell, and he will. If we was to give both our shares to him *now*, it wouldn't make no difference after the row, and the way we've served him. Shore's you're born, he'll turn State's evidence; now you hear *me*. I'm for putting him out of his troubles."

"So'm I," says Packard, very quiet.

"Blame it, I'd sorter begun to think you wasn't. Well, then, that's all right. Les' go and do it."

"Hold on a minute; I hain't had my say yit. You listen to me. Shooting's good, but there's quieter ways if the thing's *got* to be done. But what I say, is this; it ain't good sense to go court'n around after a halter,⁷ if you can git at

6. Crept backward on all fours.

7. Hangman's noose.

what you're up to in some way that's jist as good and at the same time don't bring you into no resks. Ain't that so?"

"You bet it is. But how you goin' to manage it this time?"

"Well, my idea is this: we'll rustle around and gether up whatever pickins we've overlooked in the staterooms, and shove for shore and hide the truck. Then we'll wait. Now I say it ain't agoin' to be more 'n two hours befo' this wrack breaks up and washes off down the river. See? He'll be drowned, and won't have nobody to blame for it but his own self. I reckon that's a considerable sight better'n killin' of him. I'm unfavorable to killin' a man as long as you can git around it; it ain't good sense, it ain't good morals. Ain't I right?"

"Yes—I reck'n you are. But s'pose she *don't* break up and wash off?"

"Well, we can wait the two hours, anyway, and see, can't we?"

"All right, then; come along."

So they started, and I lit out, all in a cold sweat, and scrambled forward. It was dark as pitch there; but I said in a kind of a coarse whisper, "Jim!" and he answered up, right at my elbow, with a sort of a moan, and I says:

"Quick, Jim, it ain't no time for fooling around and moaning; there's a gang of murderers in yonder, and if we don't hunt up their boat and set her drifting down the river so these fellows can't get away from the wreck, there's one of 'em going to be in a bad fix. But if we find their boat we can put *all* of 'em in a bad fix—for the Sheriff 'll get 'em. Quick—hurry! I'll hunt the lab-board side, you hunt the stabboard. You start at the raft, and—"

"Oh, my lordy, lordy! *Raf'*? Dey ain' no raf' no mo', she done broke loose en gone!—'en here we is!"

Chapter XIII

Well, I caught my breath and most fainted. Shut up on a wreck with such a gang as that! But it warn't no time to be sentimentering. We'd *got* to find that boat, now—had to have it for ourselves. So we went a-quaking and down the stabboard side, and slow work it was, too—seemed a week before we got to the stern. No sign of a boat. Jim said he didn't believe he could go any further—so scared he hadn't hardly any strength left, he said. But I said come on, if we get left on this wreck, we are in a fix, sure. So on we prowled, again. We struck for the stern of the texas, and found it, and then scabbled along forwards on the skylight, hanging on from shutter to shutter, for the edge of the skylight was in the water. When we got pretty close to the cross-hall door there was the skiff, sure enough! I could just barely see her. I felt ever so thankful. In another second I would a been aboard of her; but just then the door opened. One of the men stuck his head out, only about a couple of foot from me, and I thought I was gone; but he jerked it in again, and says:

"Heave that blame lantern out o' sight, Bill!"

He flung a bag of something into the boat, and then got in himself, and set down. It was Packard. Then Bill *he* come out and got in. Packard says, in a low voice:

"All ready—shove off!"

I couldn't hardly hang onto the shutters, I was so weak. But Bill says:

"Hold on—'d you go through him?"

"No. Didn't you?"

“No. So he’s got his share o’ the cash, yet.”

“Well, then, come along—no use to take truck and leave money.”

“Say—won’t he suspicion what we’re up to?”

“Maybe he won’t. But we got to have it anyway. Come along.” So they got out and went in.

The door slammed to, because it was on the careened side; and in a half second I was in the boat, and Jim come a tumbling after me. I out with my knife and cut the rope, and away we went!

We didn’t touch an oar, and we didn’t speak nor whisper, nor hardly even breathe. We went gliding swift along, dead silent, past the tip of the paddle-box, and past the stern; then in a second or two more we was a hundred yards below the wreck, and the darkness soaked her up, every last sign of her, and we was safe, and knowed it.

When we was three or four hundred yards down stream, we see the lantern show like a little spark at the texas door, for a second, and we knowed by that that the rascals had missed their boat, and was beginning to understand that they was in just as much trouble, now, as Jim Turner was.

Then Jim manned the oars, and we took out after our raft. Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men—I reckon I hadn’t had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain’t no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself, yet, and then how would I like it? So says I to Jim:

“The first light we see, we’ll land a hundred yards below it or above it, in a place where it’s a good hiding-place for you and the skiff, and then I’ll go and fix up some kind of a yarn, and get somebody to go for that gang and get them out of their scrape, so they can be hung when their time comes.”

But that idea was a failure; for pretty soon it begun to storm again, and this time worse than ever. The rain poured down, and never a light showed; everybody in bed, I reckon. We boomed along down the river, watching for lights and watching for our raft. After a long time the rain let up, but the clouds staid, and the lightning kept whimpering, and by-and-by a flash showed us a black thing ahead, floating, and we made for it.

It was the raft, and mighty glad was we to get aboard of it again. We seen a light, now, away down to the right, on shore. So I said I would go for it. The skiff was half full of plunder which that gang had stole, there on the wreck. We hustled it onto the raft in a pile, and I told Jim to float along down, and show a light when he judged he had gone about two mile, and keep it burning till I come; then I manned my oars and shoved for the light. As I got down towards it, three or four more showed—up on a hillside. It was a village. I closed in above the shore-light, and laid on my oars and floated. As I went by, I see it was a lantern hanging on the jackstaff of a double-hull ferry-boat. I skimmed around for the watchman, a-wondering whereabouts he slept; and by-and-by I found him roosting on the bits,⁸ forward, with his head down between his knees. I give his shoulder two or three little shoves, and begun to cry.

He stirred up, in a kind of startlish way; but when he see it was only me, he took a good gap and stretch, and then he says:

“Hello, what’s up? Don’t cry, bub. What’s the trouble?”

8. Vertical wooden posts to which cables can be secured.

I says:

“Pap, and mam, and sis, and—”

Then I broke down. He says:

“Oh, dang it, now, *don't* take on so, we all has to have our troubles and this'n 'll come out all right. What's the matter with 'em?”

“They're—they're—are you the watchman of the boat?”

“Yes,” he says, kind of pretty-well-satisfied like. “I'm the captain and the owner, and the mate, and the pilot, and watchman, and head deck-hand; and sometimes I'm the freight and passengers. I ain't as rich as old Jim Hornback, and I can't be so blame' generous and good to Tom, Dick and Harry as what he is, and slam around money the way he does; but I've told him a many a time 't I wouldn't trade places with him; for, says I, a sailor's life's the life for me, and I'm derned if *I'd* live two mile out o' town, where there ain't nothing ever goin' on, not for all his spondulicks⁹ and as much more on top of it. Says I—”

I broke in and says:

“They're in an awful peck of trouble, and—”

“*Who* is?”

“Why, pap, and mam, and sis, and Miss Hooker; and if you'd take your ferry-boat and go up there—”

“Up where? Where are they?”

“On the wreck.”

“What wreck?”

“Why, there ain't but one.”

“What, you don't mean the *Walter Scott*?”¹

“Yes.”

“Good land! what are they doin' *there*, for gracious sakes?”

“Well, they didn't go there a-purpose.”

“I bet they didn't! Why, great goodness, there ain't no chance for 'em if they don't git off mighty quick! Why, how in the nation did they ever git into such a scrape?”

“Easy enough. Miss Hooker was a-visiting, up there to the town—”

“Yes, Booth's Landing—go on.”

“She was a-visiting, there at Booth's Landing, and just in the edge of the evening she started over with her nigger woman in the horse-ferry, to stay all night at her friend's house, Miss *What-you-may-call* her, I disremember her name, and they lost their steering-oar, and swung around and went a-floating down, stern-first, about two mile, and saddle-baggsed² on the wreck, and the ferry man and the nigger woman and the horses was all lost, but Miss Hooker she made a grab and got aboard the wreck. Well, about an hour after dark, we come along down in our trading-scow, and it was so dark we didn't notice the wreck till we was right on it; and so *we* saddle-baggsed; but all of us was saved but Bill Whipple—and oh, he *was* the best cretur!—I most wish't it had been me, I do.”

9. Money (slang).

1. Twain blamed the feudalistic fantasies of the pre-Civil War South on the romantic novels of Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832). He expressed himself most vividly on this subject in *Life on the*

Mississippi (ch. 46), where he observes: “Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.”

2. Broken and doubled around the wreck.

“My George! It’s the beatenest thing I ever struck. And *then* what did you all do?”

“Well, we hollered and took on, but it’s so wide there, we couldn’t make nobody hear. So pap said somebody got to get ashore and get help somehow. I was the only one that could swim, so I made a dash for it, and Miss Hooker she said if I didn’t strike help sooner, come here and hunt up her uncle, and he’d fix the thing. I made the land about a mile below, and been fooling along ever since, trying to get people to do something, but they said, ‘What, in such a night and such a current? there ain’t no sense in it; go for the steam-ferry.’ Now if you’ll go, and—”

“By Jackson, I’d *like* to, and blame it I don’t know but I will; but who in the dingnation’s agoin’ to *pay* for it? Do you reckon your pap—”

“Why *that’s* all right. Miss Hooker she told me, *particular*, that her uncle Hornback—”

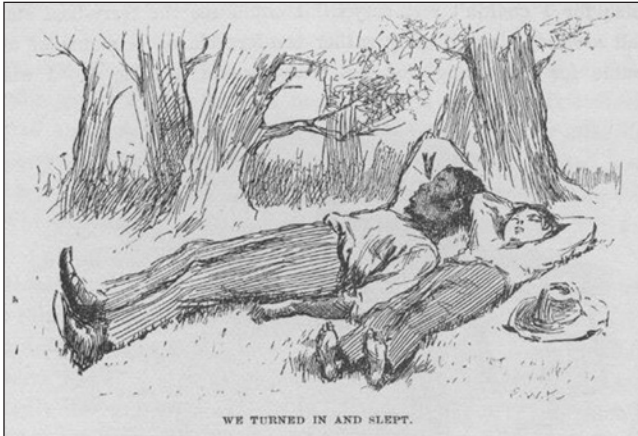
“Great guns! is *he* her uncle? Look here, you break for that light over yonder-way, and turn out west when you git there, and about a quarter of a mile out you’ll come to the tavern; tell ‘em to dart you out to Jim Hornback’s and he’ll foot the bill. And don’t you fool around any, because he’ll want to know the news. Tell him I’ll have his niece all safe before he can get to town. Hump yourself, now; I’m agoing up around the corner here, to roust out my engineer.”

I struck for the light, but as soon as he turned the corner I went back and got into my skiff and bailed her out and then pulled up shore in the easy water about six hundred yards, and tucked myself in among some woodboats; for I couldn’t rest easy till I could see the ferry-boat start. But take it all around, I was feeling ruther comfortable on accounts of taking all this trouble for that gang, for not many would a done it. I wished the widow knowed about it. I judged she would be proud of me for helping these rapscallions, because rapscallions and dead beats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in.

Well, before long, here comes the wreck, dim and dusky, sliding along down! A kind of cold shiver went through me, and then I struck out for her. She was very deep, and I see in a minute there warn’t much chance for anybody being alive in her. I pulled all around her and hollered a little, but there wasn’t any answer; all dead still. I felt a little bit heavy-hearted about the gang, but not much, for I reckoned if they could stand it, I could.

Then here comes the ferry-boat; so I shoved for the middle of the river on a long down-stream slant; and when I judged I was out of eye-reach, I laid on my oars, and looked back and see her go and smell around the wreck for Miss Hooker’s remainders, because the captain would know her uncle Hornback would want them; and then pretty soon the ferry-boat give it up and went for shore, and I laid into my work and went a-booming down the river.

It did seem a powerful long time before Jim’s light showed up; and when it did show, it looked like it was a thousand mile off. By the time I got there the sky was beginning to get a little gray in the east; so we struck for an island, and hid the raft, and sunk the skiff, and turned in and slept like dead people.



“We turned in and slept.” E. W. Kemble illustration from the first edition (1884).

Chapter XIV

By-and-by, when we got up, we turned over the truck the gang had stole off of the wreck, and found boots, and blankets, and clothes, and all sorts of other things, and a lot of books, and a spyglass, and three boxes of seegars. We hadn't ever been this rich before, in neither of our lives. The seegars was prime. We laid off all the afternoon in the woods talking, and me reading the books, and having a general good time. I told Jim all about what happened inside the wreck, and at the ferry-boat; and I said these kinds of things was adventures; but he said he didn't want no more adventures. He said that when I went in the texas and he crawled back to get on the raft and found her gone, he nearly died; because he judged it was all up with *him*, anyway it could be fixed; for if he didn't get saved he would get drowned; and if he did get saved, whoever saved him would send him back home so as to get the reward, and then Miss Watson would sell him South, sure. Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger.

I read considerable to Jim about kings, and dukes, and earls, and such, and how gaudy they dressed, and how much style they put on, and called each other your majesty, and your grace, and your lordship, and so on, 'stead of mister; and Jim's eyes bugged out, and he was interested. He says:

“I didn't know dey was so many un um. I hain't hearn 'bout none un um, skasely, but ole King Sollermun, unless you counts dem kings dat's in a pack er k'yards. How much do a king git?”

“Get?” I says; “why, they get a thousand dollars a month if they want it; they can have just as much as they want; everything belongs to them.”

“*Ain'* dat gay? En what dey got to do, Huck?”

“*They* don't do nothing! Why how you talk. They just set around.”

“No—is dat so?”

“Of course it is. They just set around. Except maybe when there 's a war; then they go to the war. But other times they just lazy around; or go hawking—just hawking and sp—Sh!—d' you hear a noise?”

We skipped out and looked; but it warn't nothing but the flutter of a steamboat's wheel, away down coming around the point; so we come back.

"Yes," says I, "and other times, when things is dull, they fuss with the parlyment; and if everybody don't go just so he whacks their heads off. But mostly they hang round the harem."

"Roun' de which?"

"Harem."

"What's de harem?"

"The place where he keep his wives. Don't you know about the harem? Solomon had one; he had about a million wives."

"Why, yes, dat's so; I—I'd done forgot it. A harem's a bo'd'n-house, I reckon. Mos' likely dey has rackety times in de nussery. En I reckon de wives quarrels considerable; en dat 'crease de racket. Yit dey say Sollermun de wises' man dat ever live.' I doan' take no stock in dat. Bekase why: would a wise man want to live in de mids' er sich a blimblammin' all de time? No—'deed he wouldn't. A wise man 'ud take en buil' a biler-factory; en den he could shet *down* de biler-factory when he want to res'."

"Well, but he *was* the wisest man, anyway; because the widow she told me so, her own self."

"I doan k'yer what de widder say, he *warn'* no wise man, nuther. He had some er de dad-fetchedes' ways I ever see. Does you know 'bout dat chile dat he 'uz gwyne to chop in two?"³

"Yes, the widow told me all about it."

"*Well*, den! Warn' dat de beatenes' notion in de worl'? You jes' take en look at it a minute. Dah's de stump, dah—dat's one er de women; heah's you—dat's de yuther one; I's Sollermun; en dish-yer dollar bill's de chile. Bofe un you claims it. What does I do? Does I shin aroun' mongs' de neighbors en fine out which un you de bill do b'long to, en han' it over to de right one, all safe en soun', de way dat anybody dat had any gumption would? No—I take en whack de bill in *two*, en give half un it to you, en de yuther half to de yuther woman. Dat's de way Sollermun was gwyne to do wid de chile. Now I want to ask you: what's de use er dat half a bill?—can't buy noth'n wid it. En what use is a half a chile? I wouldn' give a dern for a million un um."

"But hang it, Jim, you've clean missed the point—blame it, you've missed it a thousand mile."

"Who? Me? Go 'long. Doan' talk to *me* 'bout yo' pints. I reckon I knows sense when I sees it; en dey ain' no sense in sich doin's as dat. De 'spute warn't 'bout a half a chile, de 'spute was 'bout a whole chile; en de man dat think he kin settle a 'spute 'bout a whole chile wid a half a chile, doan' know enough to come in out'n de rain. Doan' talk to me 'bout Sollermun, Huck, I knows him by de back."

"But I tell you you don't get the point."

"Blame de pint! I reckon I knows what I knows. En mine you, de *real* pint is down funder—it's down deeper. It lays in de way Sollermun was

3. In 1 Kings 3:16–28. When two women appeared before him claiming to be the mother of the same infant, Solomon ordered the child cut in two, expecting the real mother to object. The

real mother pleaded with him to save the baby and to give it to the other woman, who had maliciously agreed to Solomon's original plan.

raised. You take a man dat's got on'y one er two children; is dat man gwyne to be waseful o' chillen? No, he ain't; he can't 'ford it. *He* know how to value 'em. But you take a man dat's got 'bout five million chillen runnin' roun' de house, en it's diffunt. *He* as soon chop a chile in two as a cat. Dey's plenty mo'. A chile er two, mo' er less, warn't no consekens to Sollermun, dad fetch him!"

I never see such a nigger. If he got a notion in his head once, there warn't no getting it out again. He was the most down on Solomon of any nigger I ever see. So I went to talking about other kings, and let Solomon slide. I told about Louis Sixteenth that got his head cut off in France long time ago; and about his little boy the dolphin,⁴ that would a been a king, but they took and shut him up in jail, and some say he died there.

"Po' little chap."

"But some says he got out and got away, and come to America."

"Dat's good! But he'll be pooty lonesome—dey ain' no kings here, is dey, Huck?"

"No."

"Den he cain't git no situation. What he gwyne to do?"

"Well, I don't know. Some of them gets on the police, and some of them learns people how to talk French."

"Why, Huck, doan' de French people talk de same way we does?"

"No, Jim; you couldn't understand a word they said—not a single word."

"Well now, I be ding-busted! How do dat come?"

"I don't know; but it's so. I got some of their jabber out of a book. Spose a man was to come to you and say *Polly-voo-franzy*—what would you think?"

"I wouldn't think nuff'n; I'd take en bust him over de head. Dat is, if he warn't white. I wouldn't 'low no nigger to call me dat."

"Shucks, it ain't calling you anything. It's only saying do you know how to talk French?"

"Well, den, why couldn't he *say* it?"

"Why, he *is* a-saying it. That's a Frenchman's *way* of saying it."

"Well, it's a blame' ridiclous way, en I doan' want to hear no mo' 'bout it. Dey ain' no sense in it."

"Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do?"

"No, a cat don't."

"Well, does a cow?"

"No, a cow don't, nuther."

"Does a cat talk like a cow, or a cow talk like a cat?"

"No, dey don't."

"It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?"

"'Course."

"And ain't it natural and right for a cat and a cow to talk different from *us*?"

"Why, mos' sholy it is."

"Well, then, why ain't it natural and right for a *Frenchman* to talk different from us? You answer me that."

4. The Dauphin, Louis Charles, next in line of the succession to the throne, was eight years old when his father, Louis XVI, was beheaded (1793). Though the boy died in prison, probably in 1795,

legends of his escape to America (and elsewhere) persisted, and Twain owned a book on the subject by Horace W. Fuller: *Imposters and Adventurers, Noted French Trials* (1882).

“Is a cat a man, Huck?”

“No.”

“Well, den, dey ain’t no sense in a cat talkin’ like a man. Is a cow a man?—er is a cow a cat?”

“No, she ain’t either of them.”

“Well, den, she ain’ got no business to talk like either one er the yuther of ’em. Is a Frenchman a man?”

“Yes.”

“Well, den! Dad blame it, why doan’ he *talk* like a man? You answer me *dat!*”

I see it warn’t no use wasting words—you can’t learn a nigger to argue. So I quit.

Chapter XV

We judged that three nights more would fetch us to Cairo,⁵ at the bottom of Illinois, where the Ohio River comes in, and that was what we was after. We would sell the raft and get on a steamboat and go way up the Ohio amongst the free States, and then be out of trouble.⁶

Well, the second night a fog begun to come on, and we made for a tow-head to tie to, for it wouldn’t do to try to run in fog; but when I paddled ahead in the canoe, with the line, to make fast, there warn’t anything but little saplings to tie to. I passed the line around one of them right on the edge of the cut bank, but there was a stiff current, and the raft come booming down so lively she tore it out by the roots and away she went. I see the fog closing down, and it made me so sick and scared I couldn’t budge for most a half a minute it seemed to me—and then there warn’t no raft in sight; you couldn’t see twenty yards. I jumped into the canoe and run back to the stern and grabbed the paddle and set her back a stroke. But she didn’t come. I was in such a hurry I hadn’t untied her. I got up and tried to untie her, but I was so excited my hands shook so I couldn’t hardly do anything with them.

As soon as I got started I took out after the raft, hot and heavy, right down the tow-head. That was all right as far as it went, but the tow-head warn’t sixty yards long, and the minute I flew by the foot of it I shot out into the solid white fog, and hadn’t no more idea which way I was going than a dead man.

Thinks I, it won’t do to paddle; first I know I’ll run into the bank or a tow-head or something; I got to set still and float, and yet it’s mighty fidgety business to have to hold your hands still at such a time. I whooped and listened. Away down there, somewheres, I hears a small whoop, and up comes my spirits. I went tearing after it, listening sharp to hear it again. The next time it come, I see I warn’t heading for it but heading away to the right of it. And the next time, I was heading away to the left of it—and not gaining on it much, either, for I was flying around, this way and that and ’tother, but it was going straight ahead all the time.

5. Pronounced *CAY-ro*, the town is 364 miles from Hannibal, 194 miles from St. Louis.

6. Southern Illinois was proslavery in sentiment. The state, moreover, had a system of indentured labor, not unlike slavery, to which a black person without proof of free status might

be subjected. Although even in the “free” states there were similar dangers for Jim, the chances of his making his way to freedom and safety in Canada from Ohio or Pennsylvania would be much greater.

I did wish the fool would think to beat a tin pan, and beat it all the time, but he never did, and it was the still places between the whoops that was making the trouble for me. Well, I fought along, and directly I hears the whoops *behind* me. I was tangled good, now. That was somebody's else's whoop, or else I was turned around.

I threw the paddle down. I heard the whoop again; it was behind me yet, but in a different place; it kept coming, and kept changing its place, and I kept answering, till by-and-by it was in front of me again and I knowed the current had swung the canoe's head down stream and I was all right, if that was Jim and not some other raftsmen hollering. I couldn't tell nothing about voices in a fog, for nothing don't look natural nor sound natural in a fog.

The whooping went on, and in about a minute I come a booming down on a cut bank⁷ with smoky ghosts of big trees on it, and the current throwed me off to the left and shot by, amongst a lot of snags that fairly roared, the current was tearing by them so swift.

In another second or two it was solid white and still again. I set perfectly still, then, listening to my heart thump, and I reckon I didn't draw a breath while it thumped a hundred.

I just give up, then. I knowed what the matter was. That cut bank was an island, and Jim had gone down 'tother side of it. It warn't no tow-head, that you could float by in ten minutes. It had the big timber of a regular island; it might be five or six mile long and more than a half a mile wide.

I kept quiet, with my ears cocked, about fifteen minutes, I reckon. I was floating along, of course, four or five mile an hour; but you don't ever think of that. No, you *feel* like you are laying dead still on the water; and if a little glimpse of a snag slips by, you don't think to yourself how fast *you're* going, but you catch your breath and think, my! how that snag's tearing along. If you think it ain't dismal and lonesome out in a fog that way, by yourself, in the night, you try it once—you'll see.

Next, for about a half an hour, I whoops now and then; at last I hears the answer a long ways off, and tries to follow it, but I couldn't do it, and directly I judged I'd got into a nest of tow-heads, for I had little dim glimpses of them on both sides of me, sometimes just a narrow channel between; and some that I couldn't see, I knowed was there, because I'd hear the wash of the current against the old dead brush and trash that hung over the banks. Well, I warn't long losing the whoops, down amongst the tow-heads; and I only tried to chase them a little while, anyway, because it was worse than chasing a Jack-o-lantern. You never knowed a sound dodge around so, and swap places so quick and so much.

I had to claw away from the bank pretty lively, four or five times, to keep from knocking the islands out of the river; and so I judged the raft must be butting into the bank every now and then, or else it would get further ahead and clear out of hearing—it was floating a little faster than what I was.

Well, I seemed to be in the open river again, by-and-by, but I couldn't hear no sign of a whoop nowheres. I reckoned Jim had fetched up on a snag, maybe, and it was all up with him. I was good and tired, so I laid down in

7. Steep bank carved out by the force of the current.

the canoe and said I wouldn't bother no more. I didn't want to go to sleep, of course; but I was so sleepy I couldn't help it; so I thought I would take just one little cat-nap.

But I reckon it was more than a cat-nap, for when I waked up the stars was shining bright, the fog was all gone, and I was spinning down a big bend stern first. First I didn't know where I was; I thought I was dreaming; and when things begun to come back to me, they seemed to come up dim out of last week.

It was a monstrous big river here, with the tallest and the thickest kind of timber on both banks; just a solid wall, as well as I could see, by the stars. I looked away down stream, and seen a black speck on the water. I took out after it; but when I got to it it warn't nothing but a couple of saw-logs made fast together. Then I see another speck, and chased that; then another, and this time I was right. It was the raft.

When I got to it Jim was setting there with his head down between his knees, asleep, with his right arm hanging over the steering oar. The other oar was smashed off, and the raft was littered up with leaves and branches and dirt. So she'd had a rough time.

I made fast and laid down under Jim's nose on the raft, and begun to gap, and stretch my fists out against Jim, and says:

"Hello, Jim, have I been asleep? Why didn't you stir me up?"

"Goodness gracious, is dat you, Huck? En you ain' dead—you ain' drowned—you's back agin? It's too good for true, honey, it's too good for true. Lemme look at you, chile, lemme feel o' you. No, you ain' dead? you's back agin, 'live en soun', jis de same ole Huck—de same ole Huck, thanks to goodness!"

"What's the matter with you, Jim? You been a drinking?"

"Drinkin'? Has I ben a drinkin'? Has I had a chance to be a drinkin'?"

"Well, then, what makes you talk so wild?"

"How does I talk wild?"

"*How?* why, haint you been talking about my coming back, and all that stuff, as if I'd been gone away?"

"Huck—Huck Finn, you look me in de eye; look me in de eye. *Hain't* you ben gone away?"

"Gone away? Why, what in the nation do you mean? *I hain't* been gone anywhere. Where would I go to?"

"Well, looky here, boss, dey's sumf'n wrong, dey is. Is I *me*, or who is I? Is I heah, or whah is I? Now dat's what I wants to know?"

"Well, I think you're here, plain enough, but I think you're a tangle-headed old fool, Jim."

"I is, is I? Well you answer me dis. Didn't you tote out de line in de canoe, fer to make fas' to de tow-head?"

"No, I didn't. What tow-head? I hain't seen no tow-head."

"You hain't seen no tow-head? Looky here—didn't de line pull loose en de raf' go a hummin' down de river, en leave you en de canoe behine in de fog?"

"What fog?"

"Why *de* fog. De fog dat's ben aroun' all night. En didn't you whoop, en didn't I whoop, tell we got mix' up in de islands en one un us got 'los' en 'tother one was jis' as good as los', 'kase he didn' know whah he wuz? En didn't I bust up agin a lot er dem islands en have a turrible time en mos' git drowned? Now ain' dat so, boss—ain't it so? You answer me dat."

“Well, this is too many for me, Jim. I hain’t seen no fog, nor no islands, nor no troubles, nor nothing. I been setting here talking with you all night till you went to sleep about ten minutes ago, and I reckon I done the same. You couldn’t a got drunk in that time, so of course you’ve been dreaming.”

“Dad fetch it, how is I gwyne to dream all dat in ten minutes?”

“Well, hang it all, you did dream it, because there didn’t any of it happen.”

“But Huck, it’s all jis’ as plain to me as—”

“It don’t make no difference how plain it is, there ain’t nothing in it. I know, because I’ve been here all the time.”

Jim didn’t say nothing for about five minutes, but set there studying over it. Then he says:

“Well, den, I reck’n I did dream it, Huck; but dog my cats ef it ain’t de powerfulest dream I ever see. En I hain’t ever had no dream b’fo’ dat’s tired me like dis one.”

“Oh, well, that’s all right, because a dream does tire a body like everything, sometimes. But this one was a staving⁸ dream—tell me all about it, Jim.”

So Jim went to work and told me the whole thing right through, just as it happened, only he painted it up considerable. Then he said he must start in and “ ’terpret” it, because it was sent for a warning. He said the first tow-head stood for a man that would try to do us some good, but the current was another man that would get us away from him. The whoops was warnings that would come to us every now and then, and if we didn’t try hard to make out to understand them they’d just take us into bad luck, ’stead of keeping us out of it. The lot of tow-heads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of mean folks, but if we minded our business and didn’t talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free States, and wouldn’t have no more trouble.

It had clouded up pretty dark just after I got onto the raft, but it was clearing up again, now.

“Oh, well, that’s all interpreted well enough, as far as it goes, Jim,” I says; “but what does *these* things stand for?”

It was the leaves and rubbish on the raft, and the smashed oar. You could see them first rate, now.

Jim looked at the trash, and then looked at me, and back at the trash again. He had got the dream fixed so strong in his head that he couldn’t seem to shake it loose and get the facts back into its place again, right away. But when he did get the thing straightened around, he looked at me steady, without ever smiling, and says:

“What do dey stan’ for? I’s gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin’ for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos’ broke bekase you wuz los’, en I didn’ k’yer no mo’ what become er me en de raf’. En when I wake up en fine you back agin’, all safe en soun’, de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss’ yo’ foot I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin’ ’bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ’em ashamed.”

8. Vivid, compelling.

Then he got up slow, and walked to the wigwam, and went in there, without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back.

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger—but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way.

Chapter XVI

We slept most all day, and started out at night, a little ways behind a monstrous long raft that was as long going by as a procession. She had four long sweeps⁹ at each end, so we judged she carried as many as thirty men, likely. She had five big wigwams aboard, wide apart, and an open camp fire in the middle, and a tall flagpole at each end. There was a power of style about her. It *amounted* to something being a raftsman on such a craft as that.

We went drifting down into a big bend, and the night clouded up and got hot. The river was very wide, and was walled with solid timber on both sides; you couldn't see a break in it hardly ever, or a light. We talked about Cairo, and wondered whether we would know it when we got to it. I said likely we wouldn't, because I had heard say there warn't but about a dozen houses there, and if they didn't happen to have them lit up, how was we going to know we was passing a town? Jim said if the two big rivers joined together there, that would show. But I said maybe we might think we was passing the foot of an island and coming into the same old river again. That disturbed Jim—and me too. So the question was, what to do? I said, paddle ashore the first time a light showed, and tell them pap was behind, coming along with a trading-scow, and was a green hand at the business, and wanted to know how far it was to Cairo. Jim thought it was a good idea, so we took a smoke on it and waited.

There warn't nothing to do, now, but to look out sharp for the town, and not pass it without seeing it. He said he'd be mighty sure to see it, because he'd be a free man the minute he seen it, but if he missed it he'd be in the slave country again and no more show for freedom. Every little while he jumps up and says:

“Dah she is!”

But it warn't. It was Jack-o-lanterns, or lightning-bugs; so he set down again, and went to watching, same as before. Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom. Well, I can tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too, to hear him, because I begun to get it through my head that he *was* most free—and who was to blame for it? Why, *me*. I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me so I couldn't rest; I couldn't stay still in one place. It hadn't ever come home to me before, what this thing was that I was doing. But now it did; and it staid with me, and scorched me more and more. I tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame, because I didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn't no use, conscience up and says, every time, “But you knowed he was running for

9. Long oars used chiefly for steering.

his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody." That was so—I couldn't get around that, noway. That was where it pinched. Conscience says to me, "What had poor Miss Watson done to you, that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you, that you could treat her so mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book, she tried to learn you your manners, she tried to be good to you every way she knowed how. *That's* what she done."

I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing myself to myself, and Jim was fidgeting up and down past me. We neither of us could keep still. Every time he danced around and says, "Dah's Cairo!" it went through me like a shot, and I thought if it *was* Cairo I reckoned I would die of miserableness.

Jim talked out loud all the time while I was talking to myself. He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free State he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them.

It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying, "give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell." Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm.

I was sorry to hear Jim say that, it was such a lowering of him. My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, until at last I says to it, "Let up on me—it ain't too late, yet—I'll paddle ashore at the first light, and tell." I felt easy, and happy, and light as a feather, right off. All my troubles was gone. I went to looking out sharp for a light, and sort of singing to myself. By-and-by one showed. Jim sings out:

"We's safe, Huck, we's safe! Jump up and crack yo' heels, dat's de good ole Cairo at las', I jis knows it!"

I says:

"I'll take the canoe and go see, Jim. It mightn't be, you know."

He jumped and got the canoe ready, and put his old coat in the bottom for me to set on, and give me the paddle; and as I shoved off, he says:

"Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de *only* fren' ole Jim's got now."

I was paddling off, all in a sweat to tell on him; but when he says this, it seemed to kind of take the tuck all out of me. I went along slow then, and I warn't right down certain whether I was glad I started or whether I warn't. When I was fifty yards off, Jim says:

"Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim."

Well, I just felt sick. But I says, I *got* to do it—I can't get *out* of it. Right then, along comes a skiff with two men in it, with guns, and they stopped and I stopped. One of them says:

“What’s that, yonder?”

“A piece of raft,” I says.

“Do you belong on it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Any men on it?”

“Only one, sir.”

“Well, there’s five niggers run off to-night, up yonder above the head of the bend. Is your man white or black?”

I didn’t answer up prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn’t come. I tried, for a second or two, to brace up and out with it, but I warn’t man enough—hadn’t the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says—

“He’s white.”

“I reckon we’ll go and see for ourselves.”

“I wish you would,” says I, “because it’s pap that’s there, and maybe you’d help me tow the raft ashore where the light is. He’s sick—and so is mam and Mary Ann.”

“Oh, the devil! we’re in a hurry, boy. But I s’pose we’ve got to. Come—buckle to your paddle, and let’s get along.”

I buckled to my paddle and they laid to their oars. When we had made a stroke or two, I says:

“Pap’ll be mighty much obleeged to you, I can tell you. Everybody goes away when I want them to help me tow the raft ashore, and I can’t do it myself.”

“Well, that’s infernal mean. Odd, too. Say, boy, what’s the matter with your father?”

“It’s the—a—the—well, it ain’t anything, much.”

They stopped pulling. It warn’t but a mighty little ways to the raft, now. One says:

“Boy, that’s a lie. What is the matter with your pap? Answer up square, now, and it’ll be the better for you.”

“I will, sir, I will, honest—but don’t leave us, please. It’s the—the—gentlemen, if you’ll only pull ahead, and let me heave you the head-line you won’t have to come a-near the raft—please do.”

“Set her back, John, set her back!” says one. They backed water. “Keep away, boy—keep to looard.¹ Confound it, I just expect the wind has blowed it to us. Your pap’s got the small-pox,² and you know it precious well. Why didn’t you come out and say so? Do you want to spread it all over?”

“Well,” says I, a-blubbering, “I’ve told everybody before, and then they just went away and left us.”

“Poor devil, there’s something in that. We are right down sorry for you, but we—well, hang it, we don’t want the small-pox, you see. Look here, I’ll tell you what to do. Don’t you try to land by yourself, or you’ll smash everything to pieces. You float along down about twenty miles and you’ll come to a town on the left-hand side of the river. It will be long after sun-up, then, and when you ask for help, you tell them your folks are all down with chills and fever. Don’t be a fool again, and let people guess what is the

1. I.e., leeward, or downwind.

2. A highly infectious, often fatal disease.

matter. Now we're trying to do you a kindness; so you just put twenty miles between us, that's a good boy. It wouldn't do any good to land yonder where the light is—it's only a wood-yard. Say—I reckon your father's poor, and I'm bound to say he's in pretty hard luck. Here—I'll put a twenty dollar gold piece on this board, and you get it when it floats by. I feel mighty mean to leave you, but my kingdom! it won't do to fool with small-pox, don't you see?"

"Hold on, Parker," says the other man, "here's a twenty to put on the board for me. Good-bye boy, you do as Mr. Parker told you, and you'll be all right."

"That's so, my boy—good-bye, good-bye. If you see any runaway niggers, you get help and nab them, and you can make some money by it."

"Good-bye, sir," says I, "I won't let no runaway niggers get by me if I can help it."

They went off, and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get *started* right when he's little, ain't got no show—when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat. Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on,—s'pose you'd a done right and give Jim up; would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad—I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time.

I went into the wigwag; Jim warn't there. I looked all around; he warn't anywhere. I says:

"Jim!"

"Here I is, Huck. Is dey out o' sight yit? Don't talk loud."

He was in the river, under the stern oar, with just his nose out. I told him they was out of sight, so he come aboard. He says:

"I was a-listenin' to all de talk, en I slips into de river en was gwyne to shove for sho' if dey come aboard. Den I was gwyne to swim to de raf' agin when dey was gone. But lawsy, how you did fool 'em, Huck! Dat *wuz* de smartes' dodge! I tell you, chile, I 'speck it save' ole Jim—ole Jim ain' gwyne to forgit you for dat, honey."

Then we talked about the money. It was a pretty good raise, twenty dollars apiece. Jim said we could take deck passage on a steamboat now, and the money would last us as far as we wanted to go in the free States. He said twenty mile more warn't far for the raft to go, but he wished we was already there.

Towards daybreak we tied up, and Jim was mighty particular about hiding the raft good. Then he worked all day fixing things in bundles, and getting all ready to quit rafting.

That night about ten we hove in sight of the lights of a town away down in a left-hand bend.

I went off in the canoe, to ask about it. Pretty soon I found a man out in the river with a skiff, setting a trot-line. I ranged up and says:

"Mister, is that town Cairo?"

"Cairo? no. You must be a blame' fool."

"What town is it, mister?"

"If you want to know, go and find out. If you stay here botherin' around me for about a half a minute longer, you'll get something you won't want."

I paddled to the raft. Jim was awful disappointed, but I said never mind, Cairo would be the next place, I reckoned.

We passed another town before daylight, and I was going out again; but it was high ground, so I didn't go. No high ground about Cairo, Jim said. I had forgot it. We laid up for the day, on a tow-head tolerable close to the left-hand bank. I begun to suspicion something. So did Jim. I says:

"Maybe we went by Cairo in the fog that night."

He says:

"Doan' less' talk about it, Huck. Po' niggers can't have no luck. I awluz 'spected dat rattle-snake skin warn't done wid it's work."

"I wish I'd never seen that snake-skin, Jim—I do wish I'd never laid eyes on it."

"It ain't yo' fault, Huck; you didn't know. Don't you blame yo'sef 'bout it."

When it was daylight, here was the clear Ohio water in shore, sure enough, and outside was the old regular Muddy! So it was all up with Cairo.³

We talked it all over. It wouldn't do to take to the shore; we couldn't take the raft up the stream, of course. There warn't no way but to wait for dark, and start back in the canoe and take the chances. So we slept all day amongst the cotton-wood thicket, so as to be fresh for the work, and when we went back to the raft about dark the canoe was gone!

We didn't say a word for a good while. There warn't anything to say. We both knowed well enough it was some more work of the rattle-snake skin; so what was the use to talk about it? It would only look like we was finding fault, and that would be bound to fetch more bad luck—and keep on fetchin' it, too, till we knowed enough to keep still.

By-and-by we talked about what we better do, and found there warn't no way but just to go along down with the raft till we got a chance to buy a canoe to go back in. We warn't going to borrow it when there warn't anybody around, the way pap would do, for that might set people after us.

So we shoved out, after dark, on the raft.⁴

Anybody that don't believe yet, that it's foolishness to handle a snake-skin, after all that that snake-skin done for us, will believe it now, if they read on and see what more it done for us.

The place to buy canoes is off of rafts laying up at shore. But we didn't see no rafts laying up; so we went along during three hours and more. Well, the night got gray, and ruther thick, which is the next meanest thing to fog. You can't tell the shape of the river, and you can't see no distance. It got to be very

3. The "Muddy" here refers to the sediment carried by the Mississippi River. Cairo is located at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Therefore, this combination of clear (Ohio) and muddy (Mississippi) water tells Huck and Jim that they have passed Cairo and lost the opportunity to sell the raft and travel up the Ohio by steamboat to freedom.

4. Twain was "stuck" at this point in the writing of the novel and put the 400-page manuscript

aside for approximately three years. In the winter of 1879–80 he added the two chapters dealing with the feud (XVII and XVIII) and then the three chapters (XIX–XXI) in which the king and duke enter the story and for a time dominate the action. The novel was not completed until 1883, when Twain wrote the last half of it in a few months of concentrated work. As late as 1882, he was not confident he would ever complete the book.

late and still, and then along comes a steamboat up the river. We lit the lantern, and judged she would see it. Up-stream boats didn't generly come close to us; they go out and follow the bars and hunt for easy water under the reefs; but nights like this they bull right up the channel against the whole river.

We could hear her pounding along, but we didn't see her good till she was close. She aimed right for us. Often they do that and try to see how close they can come without touching; sometimes the wheel bites off a sweep, and then the pilot sticks his head out and laughs, and thinks he's mighty smart. Well, here she comes, and we said she was going to try to shave us; but she didn't seem to be sheering off a bit. She was a big one, and she was coming in a hurry, too, looking like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it; but all of a sudden she bulged out, big and scary, with a long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth, and her monstrous bows and guards hanging right over us. There was a yell at us, and a jingling of bells to stop the engines, a pow-wow of cussing, and whistling of steam—and as Jim went overboard on one side and I on the other, she come smashing straight through the raft.

I dived—and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a thirty-foot wheel had got to go over me, and I wanted it to have plenty of room. I could always stay under water a minute; this time I reckon I staid under water a minute and a half. Then I bounced for the top in a hurry, for I was nearly busting. I popped out to my arm-pits and blowed the water out of my nose, and puffed a bit. Of course there was a booming current; and of course that boat started her engines again ten seconds after she stopped them, for they never cared much for raftsmen; so now she was churning along up the river, out of sight in the thick weather, though I could hear her.

I sung out for Jim about a dozen times, but I didn't get any answer; so I grabbed a plank that touched me while I was "treading water," and struck out for shore, shoving it ahead of me. But I made out to see that the drift of the current was towards the left-hand shore,⁵ which meant that I was in a crossing; so I changed off and went that way.

It was one of these long, slanting, two-mile crossings; so I was a good long time in getting over. I made a safe landing, and clum up the bank. I couldn't see but a little ways, but I went poking along over rough ground for a quarter of a mile or more, and then I run across a big old-fashioned double log house before I noticed it. I was going to rush by and get away, but a lot of dogs jumped out and went to howling and barking at me, and I knowed better than to move another peg.

Chapter XVII

In about half a minute somebody spoke out of a window, without putting his head out, and says:

"Be done, boys! Who's there?"

I says:

"It's me."

"Who's me?"

5. Kentucky, where the feud in chapters XVII and XVIII is set.

“George Jackson, sir.”

“What do you want?”

“I don’t want nothing, sir. I only want to go along by, but the dogs won’t let me.”

“What are you prowling around here this time of night, for—hey?”

“I warn’t prowling around, sir; I fell overboard off of the steamboat.”

“Oh, you did, did you? Strike a light there, somebody. What did you say your name was?”

“George Jackson, sir. I’m only a boy.”

“Look here; if you’re telling the truth, you needn’t be afraid—nobody’ll hurt you. But don’t try to budge; stand right where you are. Rouse our Bob and Tom, some of you, and fetch the guns. George Jackson, is there anybody with you?”

“No, sir, nobody.”

I heard the people stirring around in the house, now, and see a light. The man sung out:

“Snatch that light away, Betsy, you old fool—ain’t you got any sense? Put it on the floor behind the front door. Bob, if you and Tom are ready, take your places.”

“All ready.”

“Now, George Jackson, do you know the Shepherdsons?”

“No, sir—I never heard of them.”

“Well, that may be so, and it mayn’t. Now, all ready. Step forward, George Jackson. And mind, don’t you hurry—come mighty slow. If there’s anybody with you, let him keep back—if he shows himself he’ll be shot. Come along, now. Come slow; push the door open, yourself—just enough to squeeze in, d’ you hear?”

I didn’t hurry, I couldn’t if I’d a wanted to. I took one slow step at a time, and there warn’t a sound, only I thought I could hear my heart. The dogs were as still as the humans, but they followed a little behind me. When I got to the three log door-steps, I heard them unlocking and unbarring and unbolting. I put my hand on the door and pushed it a little and a little more, till somebody said, “There, that’s enough—put your head in.” I done it, but I judged they would take it off.

The candle was on the floor, and there they all was, looking at me, and me at them, for about a quarter of a minute. Three big men with guns pointed at me, which made me wince, I tell you; the oldest, gray and about sixty, the other two thirty or more—all of them fine and handsome—and the sweetest old gray-headed lady, and back of her two young women which I couldn’t see right well. The old gentleman says:

“There—I reckon it’s all right. Come in.”

As soon as I was in, the old gentleman he locked the door and barred it and bolted it, and told the young men to come in with their guns, and they all went in a big parlor that had a new rag carpet on the floor, and got together in a corner that was out of range of the front windows—there warn’t none on the side. They held the candle, and took a good look at me, and all said, “Why *he* ain’t a Shepherdson—no, there ain’t any Shepherdson about him.” Then the old man said he hoped I wouldn’t mind being searched for arms, because he didn’t mean no harm by it—it was only to make sure. So he didn’t pry into my pockets, but only felt outside with his hands, and said it was all

right. He told me to make myself easy and at home, and tell all about myself; but the old lady says:

“Why bless you, Saul, the poor thing’s as wet as he can be; and don’t you reckon it may be he’s hungry?”

“True for you, Rachel—I forgot.”

So the old lady says:

“Betsy” (this was a nigger woman), “you fly around and get him something to eat, as quick as you can, poor thing; and one of you girls go and wake up Buck and tell him—Oh, here he is himself. Buck, take this little stranger and get the wet clothes off from him and dress him up in some of yours that’s dry.”

Buck looked about as old as me—thirteen or fourteen⁶ or along there, though he was a little bigger than me. He hadn’t on anything but a shirt, and he was very frowsy-headed. He come in gaping and digging one fist into his eyes, and he was dragging a gun along with the other one. He says:

“Ain’t they no Shepherds around?”

They said, no, ’twas a false alarm.

“Well,” he says, “if they’d a ben some, I reckon I’d a got one.”

They all laughed, and Bob says:

“Why, Buck, they might have scalped us all, you’ve been so slow in coming.”

“Well, nobody come after me, and it ain’t right. I’m always kep’ down; I don’t get no show.”

“Never mind, Buck, my boy,” says the old man, “you’ll have show enough, all in good time, don’t you fret about that. Go ’long with you now, and do as your mother told you.”

When we got up stairs to his room, he got me a coarse shirt and a round-about⁷ and pants of his, and I put them on. While I was at it he asked me what my name was, but before I could tell him, he started to telling me about a blue jay and a young rabbit he had caught in the woods day before yesterday, and he asked me where Moses was when the candle went out. I said I didn’t know; I hadn’t heard about it before, no way.

“Well, guess,” he says.

“How’m I going to guess,” says I, “when I never heard tell about it before?”

“But you can guess, can’t you? It’s just as easy.”

“Which candle?” I says.

“Why, any candle,” he says.

“I don’t know where he was,” says I; “where was he?”

“Why he was in the *dark*! That’s where he was!”

“Well, if you knowed where he was, what did you ask me for?”

“Why, blame it, it’s a riddle, don’t you see? Say, how long are you going to stay here? You got to stay always. We can just have booming times—they don’t have no school now. Do you own a dog? I’ve got a dog—and he’ll go in the river and bring out chips that you throw in. Do you like to comb up, Sundays, and all that kind of foolishness? You bet I don’t, but ma she makes me. Confound these ole britches, I reckon I’d better put ’em on, but I’d rather not, it’s so warm. Are you all ready? All right—come along, old hoss.”

6. In a notebook entry, Twain identifies Huck as “a boy of 14.”

7. Short, close-fitting jacket.

Cold corn-pone, cold corn-beef, butter and butter-milk—that is what they had for me down there, and there ain't nothing better that ever I've come across yet. Buck and his ma and all of them smoked cob pipes, except the nigger woman, which was gone, and the two young women. They all smoked and talked, and I eat and talked. The young women had quilts around them, and their hair down their backs. They all asked me questions, and I told them how pap and me and all the family was living on a little farm down at the bottom of Arkansaw, and my sister Mary Ann run off and got married and never was heard of no more, and Bill went to hunt them and he warn't heard of no more, and Tom and Mort died, and then there warn't nobody but just me and pap left, and he was just trimmed down to nothing, on account of his troubles; so when he died I took what there was left, because the farm didn't belong to us, and started up the river, deck passage, and fell overboard; and that was how I come to be here. So they said I could have a home there as long as I wanted it. Then it was most daylight, and everybody went to bed, and I went to bed with Buck, and when I waked up in the morning, drat it all, I had forgot what my name was. So I laid there about an hour trying to think and when Buck waked up, I says:

“Can you spell, Buck?”

“Yes,” he says.

“I bet you can't spell my name,” says I.

“I bet you what you dare I can,” says he.

“All right,” says I, “go ahead.”

“G-o-r-g-e J-a-x-o-n—there now,” he says.

“Well,” says I, “you done it, but I didn't think you could. It ain't no slouch of a name to spell—right off without studying.”

I set it down, private, because somebody might want *me* to spell it, next, and so I wanted to be handy with it and rattle it off like I was used to it.

It was a mighty nice family, and a mighty nice house, too. I hadn't seen no house out in the country before that was so nice and had so much style. It didn't have an iron latch on the front door, nor a wooden one with a buckskin string, but a brass knob to turn, the same as houses in a town. There warn't no bed in the parlor, not a sign of a bed; but heaps of parlors in towns has beds in them. There was a big fireplace that was bricked on the bottom, and the bricks was kept clean and red by pouring water on them and scrubbing them with another brick; sometimes they washed them over with red water-paint that they call Spanish-brown, same as they do in town. They had big brass dog-irons that could hold up a saw-log.⁸ There was a clock on the middle of the mantel-piece, with a picture of a town painted on the bottom half of the glass front, and a round place in the middle of it for the sun, and you could see the pendulum swing behind it. It was beautiful to hear that clock tick; and sometimes when one of these peddlers had been along and scoured her up and got her in good shape, she would start in and strike a hundred and fifty before she got tuckered out. They wouldn't took any money for her.

Well, there was a big outlandish parrot on each side of the clock, made out of something like chalk, and painted up gaudy. By one of the parrots was a cat made of crockery, and a crockery dog by the other; and when you

8. A log large enough to be sawed into planks.

pressed down on them they squeaked, but didn't open their mouths nor look different nor interested. They squeaked through underneath. There was a couple of big wild-turkey-wing fans spread out behind those things. On a table in the middle of the room was a kind of a lovely crockery basket that had apples and oranges and peaches and grapes piled up in it which was much redder and yellower and prettier than real ones is, but they warn't real because you could see where pieces had got chipped off and showed the white chalk or whatever it was, underneath.

This table had a cover made out of beautiful oil-cloth, with a red and blue spread-eagle painted on it, and a painted border all around. It come all the way from Philadelphia, they said. There was some books too, piled up perfectly exact, on each corner of the table. One was a big family Bible, full of pictures. One was "Pilgrim's Progress," about a man that left his family it didn't say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough. Another was "Friendship's Offering," full of beautiful stuff and poetry; but I didn't read the poetry. Another was Henry Clay's Speeches, and another was Dr. Gunn's Family Medicine, which told you all about what to do if a body was sick or dead. There was a Hymn Book, and a lot of other books.⁹ And there was nice split-bottom chairs, and perfectly sound, too—not bagged down in the middle and busted, like an old basket.

They had pictures hung on the walls—mainly Washingtons and Lafayettes, and battles, and Highland Marys, and one called "Signing the Declaration."¹ There was some that they called crayons, which one of the daughters which was dead made her own self when she was only fifteen years old. They was different from any pictures I ever see before; blacker, mostly, than is common. One was a woman in a slim black dress, belted small under the armpits, with bulges like a cabbage in the middle of the sleeves, and a large black scoop-shovel bonnet with a black veil, and white slim ankles crossed about with black tape, and very wee black slippers, like a chisel, and she was leaning pensive on a tombstone on her right elbow, under a weeping willow, and her other hand hanging down her side holding a white handkerchief and a reticule, and underneath the picture it said "Shall I Never See Thee More Alas." Another one was a young lady with her hair all combed up straight to the top of her head, and knotted there in front of a comb like a chair-back, and she was crying into a handkerchief and had a dead bird laying on its back in her other hand with its heels up, and underneath the picture it said "I Shall Never Hear Thy Sweet Chirrup More Alas." There was one where a young lady was at a window looking up at the moon, and tears running down her cheeks; and she had an open letter in one hand with black sealing-wax showing on one edge of it, and she was mashing a locket with a chain to it against her mouth, and underneath the picture it said "And Art Thou Gone

9. The neatly stacked, unread books are meant to define the values and tastes of the time and place. The Bible, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), and the hymn book establish Calvinistic piety; the speeches of the Kentucky politician Henry Clay (1777–1852) convey political orthodoxy; Gunn's *Domestic Medicine* (1830) suggests popular notions of science and medical practice. *Friendship's Offering* was a popular gift book.

1. Painting in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda by John Trumbull (1756–1843), completed in 1819 and widely reproduced during the antebellum period. "Highland Mary" depicts the Scottish poet Robert Burns's first love, who died a few months after they met. He memorialized her in several poems, especially "To Mary in Heaven" (1792).

Yes Thou Art Gone Alas.” These was all nice pictures, I reckon, but I didn’t somehow seem to take to them, because if ever I was down a little, they always give me the fan-tods. Everybody was sorry she died, because she had laid out a lot more of these pictures to do, and a body could see by what she had done what they had lost. But I reckoned, that with her disposition, she was having a better time in the graveyard. She was at work on what they said was her greatest picture when she took sick, and every day and every night it was her prayer to be allowed to live till she got it done, but she never got the chance. It was a picture of a young woman in a long white gown, standing on the rail of a bridge all ready to jump off, with her hair all down her back, and looking up to the moon, with the tears running down her face, and she had two arms folded across her breast, and two arms stretched out in front, and two more reaching up towards the moon—and the idea was, to see which pair would look best and then scratch out all the other arms; but, as I was saying, she died before she got her mind made up, and now they kept this picture over the head of the bed in her room, and every time her birthday come they hung flowers on it. Other times it was hid with a little curtain. The young woman in the picture had a kind of a nice sweet face, but there was so many arms it made her look too spidery, seemed to me.

This young girl kept a scrap-book when she was alive, and used to paste obituaries and accidents and cases of patient suffering in it out of the *Presbyterian Observer*, and write poetry after them out of her own head. It was very good poetry.² This is what she wrote about a boy by the name of Stephen Dowling Bots that fell down a well and was drowned:

ODE TO STEPHEN DOWLING BOTS, DEC’D

And did young Stephen sicken,
 And did young Stephen die?
 And did the sad hearts thicken,
 And did the mourners cry?

No; such was not the fate of
 Young Stephen Dowling Bots;
 Though sad hearts round him thickened,
 ’Twas not from sickness’ shots.

No whooping-cough did rack his frame,
 Nor measles drear, with spots;
 Not these impaired the sacred name
 Of Stephen Dowling Bots.

Despised love struck not with woe
 That head of curly knots,
 Nor stomach troubles laid him low,
 Young Stephen Dowling Bots.

2. This parody derives in particular from two poems by “The Sweet Singer of Michigan,” Julia A. Moore (1847–1920), whose sentimental poetry was popular at the time Twain was writing *Huck Finn*. In one of the two poems, “Little Lib-

bie,” the heroine “was choked on a piece of beef.” The graveyard and obituary (or “sadful”) schools of popular poetry are much older and more widespread.

O no. Then list with tearful eye,
 Whilst I his fate do tell.
 His soul did from this cold world fly,
 By falling down a well.

They got him out and emptied him;
 Alas it was too late;
 His spirit was gone for to sport aloft
 In the realms of the good and great.

If Emmeline Grangerford could make poetry like that before she was fourteen, there ain't no telling what she could a done by-and-by. Buck said she could rattle off poetry like nothing. She didn't ever have to stop to think. He said she would slap down a line, and if she couldn't find anything to rhyme with it she would just scratch it out and slap down another one, and go ahead. She warn't particular, she could write about anything you choose to give her to write about, just so it was sadful. Every time a man died, or a woman died, or a child died, she would be on hand with her "tribute" before he was cold. She called them tributes. The neighbors said it was the doctor first, then Emmeline, then the undertaker—the undertaker never got in ahead of Emmeline but once, and then she hung fire³ on a rhyme for the dead person's name, which was Whistler. She warn't ever the same, after that; she never complained, but she kind of pined away and did not live long. Poor thing, many's the time I made myself go up to the little room that used to be hers and get out her poor old scrapbook and read in it when her pictures had been aggravating me and I had soured on her a little. I liked all the family, dead ones and all, and warn't going to let anything come between us. Poor Emmeline made poetry about all the dead people when she was alive, and it didn't seem right that there warn't nobody to make some about her, now she was gone; so I tried to sweat out a verse or two myself, but I couldn't seem to make it go, somehow. They kept Emmeline's room trim and nice and all the things fixed in it just the way she liked to have them when she was alive, and nobody ever slept there. The old lady took care of the room herself, though there was plenty of niggers, and she sewed there a good deal and read her Bible there, mostly.

Well, as I was saying about the parlor, there was beautiful curtains on the windows: white, with pictures painted on them, of castles with vines all down the walls, and cattle coming down to drink. There was a little old piano, too, that had tin pans in it, I reckon, and nothing was ever so lovely as to hear the young ladies sing, "The Last Link is Broken" and play "The Battle of Prague"⁴ on it. The walls of all the rooms was plastered, and most had carpets on the floors, and the whole house was whitewashed on the outside.

It was a double house, and the big open place betwixt them was roofed and floored, and sometimes the table was set there in the middle of the day, and it was a cool, comfortable place. Nothing couldn't be better. And warn't the cooking good, and just bushels of it too!

3. Was delayed by, or "hung up." The term comes from an unexpected delay between the trigger of a firearm and its firing—a more common problem in older firearms.

4. A bloody story told in clichéd style, written by

the Czech composer Franz Kotsvara (1750–1791) in about 1788; Twain first heard it in 1878. William Clifton's *The Last Link Is Broken* was published about 1840.

Chapter XVIII

Col. Grangerford was a gentleman, you see. He was a gentleman all over; and so was his family. He was well born, as the saying is, and that's worth as much in a man as it is in a horse, so the Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied that she was of the first aristocracy in our town; and pap he always said it, too, though he warn't no more quality than a mudcat,⁵ himself. Col. Grangerford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish-paly complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres; he was clean-shaved every morning, all over his thin face, and he had the thinnest kind of lips, and the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose, and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you, as you may say. His forehead was high, and his hair was black and straight, and hung to his shoulders. His hands was long and thin, and every day of his life he put on a clean shirt and a full suit from head to foot made out of linen so white it hurt your eyes to look at it; and on Sundays he wore a blue tail-coat with brass buttons on it. He carried a mahogany cane with a silver head to it. There warn't no frivolishness about him, not a bit, and he warn't ever loud. He was as kind as he could be—you could feel that, you know, and so you had confidence. Sometimes he smiled, and it was good to see; but when he straightened himself up like a liberty-pole,⁶ and the lightning begun to flicker out from under his eyebrows you wanted to climb a tree first, and find out what the matter was afterwards. He didn't ever have to tell anybody to mind their manners—everybody was always good mannered where he was. Everybody loved to have him around, too; he was sunshine most always—I mean he made it seem like good weather. When he turned into a cloud-bank it was awful dark for a half a minute and that was enough; there wouldn't nothing go wrong again for a week.

When him and the old lady come down in the morning, all the family got up out of their chairs and give them good-day, and didn't set down again till they had set down. Then Tom and Bob went to the sideboard where the decanters was, and mixed a glass of bitters and handed it to him, and he held it in his hand and waited till Tom's and Bob's was mixed, and then they bowed and said "Our duty to you, sir, and madam;" and *they* bowed the least bit in the world and said thank you, and so they drank, all three, and Bob and Tom poured a spoonful of water on the sugar and the mite of whiskey or apple brandy in the bottom of their tumblers, and give it to me and Buck, and we drank to the old people too.

Bob was the oldest, and Tom next. Tall, beautiful men with very broad shoulders and brown faces, and long black hair and black eyes. They dressed in white linen from head to foot, like the old gentleman, and wore broad Panama hats.⁷

Then there was Miss Charlotte, she was twenty-five, and tall and proud and grand, but as good as she could be, when she warn't stirred up; but when

5. General term for a number of species of catfish; in this context the lowliest and least esteemed.

6. A tall pole, like a flagpole, on which an ensign

or "liberty cap" might be raised as a signal.

7. A brimmed straw hat, originally made in Ecuador and shipped through the Panama isthmus.

she was, she had a look that would make you wilt in your tracks, like her father. She was beautiful.

So was her sister, Miss Sophia, but it was a different kind. She was gentle and sweet, like a dove, and she was only twenty.

Each person had their own nigger to wait on them—Buck, too. My nigger had a monstrous easy time, because I warn't used to having anybody do anything for me, but Buck's was on the jump most of the time.

This was all there was of the family, now; but there used to be more—three sons; they got killed; and Emmeline that died.

The old gentleman owned a lot of farms, and over a hundred niggers. Sometimes a stack of people would come there, horseback, from ten or fifteen miles around, and stay five or six days, and have such junketings round about and on the river, and dances and picnics in the woods, day-times, and balls at the house, nights. These people was mostly kin-folks of the family. The men brought their guns with them. It was a handsome lot of quality, I tell you.

There was another clan of aristocracy around there—five or six families—mostly of the name of Shepherdson. They was as high-toned, and well born, and rich and grand, as the tribe of Grangerfords. The Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords used the same steamboat landing, which was about two mile above our house; so sometimes when I went up there with a lot of our folks I used to see a lot of Shepherdsons there, on their fine horses.

One day Buck and me was away out in the woods, hunting, and heard a horse coming. We was crossing the road. Buck says:

“Quick! Jump for the woods!”

We done it, and then peeped down the woods through the leaves. Pretty soon a splendid young man come galloping down the road, setting his horse easy and looking like a soldier. He had his gun across his pommel. I had seen him before. It was young Harney Shepherdson. I heard Buck's gun go off at my ear, and Harney's hat tumbled off from his head. He grabbed his gun and rode straight to the place where we was hid. But we didn't wait. We started through the woods on a run. The woods warn't thick, so I looked over my shoulder, to dodge the bullet, and twice I seen Harney cover Buck with his gun; and then he rode away the way he come—to get his hat, I reckon, but I couldn't see. We never stopped running till we got home. The old gentleman's eyes blazed a minute—'twas pleasure, mainly, I judged—then his face sort of smoothed down, and he says, kind of gentle:

“I don't like that shooting from behind a bush. Why didn't you step into the road, my boy?”

“The Shepherdsons don't, father. They always take advantage.”

Miss Charlotte she held her head up like a queen while Buck was telling his tale, and her nostrils spread and her eyes snapped. The two young men looked dark, but never said nothing. Miss Sophia she turned pale, but the color come back when she found the man warn't hurt.

Soon as I could get Buck down by the corn-cribs under the trees by ourselves, I says:

“Did you want to kill him, Buck?”

“Well, I bet I did.”

“What did he do to you?”

“Him? He never done nothing to me.”

"Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?"

"Why nothing—only it's on account of the feud."

"What's a feud?"

"Why, where was you raised? Don't you know what a feud is?"

"Never heard of it before—tell me about it."

"Well," says Buck, "a feud is this way. A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man's brother kills *him*; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the *cousins* chip in—and by-and-by everybody's killed off, and there ain't no more feud. But it's kind of slow, and takes a long time."

"Has this one been going on long, Buck?"

"Well I should *reckon*! it started thirty year ago, or som'ers along there. There was trouble 'bout something and then a lawsuit to settle it; and the suit went agin one of the men, and so he up and shot the man that won the suit—which he would naturally do, of course. Anybody would."

"What was the trouble about, Buck?—land?"

"I reckon maybe—I don't know."

"Well, who done the shooting?—was it a Grangerford or a Shepherdson?"

"Laws, how do *I* know? it was so long ago."

"Don't anybody know?"

"Oh, yes, pa knows, I reckon, and some of the other old folks; but they don't know, now, what the row was about in the first place."

"Has there been many killed, Buck?"

"Yes—right smart chance of funerals. But they don't always kill. Pa's got a few buck-shot in him; but he don't mind it 'cuz he don't weigh much anyway. Bob's been carved up some with a bowie, and Tom's been hurt once or twice."

"Has anybody been killed this year, Buck?"

"Yes, we got one and they got one. 'Bout three months ago, my cousin Bud, fourteen year old, was riding through the woods, on t'other side of the river, and didn't have no weapon with him, which was blame' foolishness, and in a lonesome place he hears a horse a-coming behind him, and sees old Baldy Shepherdson a-linkin' after him with his gun in his hand and his white hair a-flying in the wind; and 'stead of jumping off and taking to the brush, Bud 'lowed he could outrun him; so they had it, nip and tuck, for five mile or more, the old man a-gaining all the time; so at last Bud seen it warn't any use, so he stopped and faced around so as to have the bullet holes in front, you know, and the old man he rode up and shot him down. But he didn't git much chance to enjoy his luck, for inside of a week our folks laid *him* out."

"I reckon that old man was a coward, Buck."

"I reckon he *warn't* a coward. Not by a blame' sight. There ain't a coward amongst them Shepherdsons—not a one. And there ain't no cowards amongst the Grangerfords, either. Why, that old man kep' up his end in a fight one day, for a half an hour, against three Grangerfords, and come out winner. They was all a-horseback; he lit off of his horse and got behind a little wood-pile, and kep' his horse before him to stop the bullets; but the Grangerfords staid on their horses and capered around the old man, and peppered away at him, and he peppered away at them. Him and his horse both went home pretty leaky and crippled, but the Grangerfords had to be *fetched* home—and one of 'em was dead, and another died the next day. No, sir, if a body's

out hunting for cowards, he don't want to fool away any time amongst them Shepherdsons, becuz they don't breed any of that *kind*."

Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching—all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith, and good works, and free grace, and preforeordination,⁸ and I don't know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet.

About an hour after dinner everybody was dozing around, some in their chairs and some in their rooms, and it got to be pretty dull. Buck and a dog was stretched out on the grass in the sun, sound asleep. I went up to our room, and judged I would take a nap myself. I found that sweet Miss Sophia standing in her door, which was next to ours, and she took me in her room and shut the door very soft, and asked me if I liked her, and I said I did; and she asked me if I would do something for her and not tell anybody, and I said I would. Then she said she'd forgot her Testament, and left it in the seat at church, between two other books and would I slip out quiet and go there and fetch it to her, and not say nothing to nobody. I said I would. So I slid out and slipped off up the road, and there warn't anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two, for there warn't any lock on the door, and hogs like a puncheon floor⁹ in summer-time because it's cool. If you notice, most folks don't go to church only when they've got to; but a hog is different.

Says I to myself something's up—it ain't natural for a girl to be in such a sweat about a Testament; so I give it a shake, and out drops a little piece of paper with "*Half-past two*" wrote on it with a pencil. I ransacked it, but couldn't find anything else. I couldn't make anything out of that, so I put the paper in the book again, and when I got home and up stairs, there was Miss Sophia in her door waiting for me. She pulled me in and shut the door; then she looked in the Testament till she found the paper, and as soon as she read it she looked glad; and before a body could think, she grabbed me and give me a squeeze, and said I was the best boy in the world, and not to tell anybody. She was mighty red in the face, for a minute, and her eyes lighted up and it made her powerful pretty. I was a good deal astonished, but when I got my breath I asked her what the paper was about, and she asked me if I had read it, and I said no, and she asked me if I could read writing, and I told her "no, only coarse-hand,"¹ and then she said the paper warn't anything but a book-mark to keep her place, and I might go and play now.

I went off down to the river, studying over this thing, and pretty soon I noticed that my nigger was following along behind. When we was out of sight of the house, he looked back and around a second, and then comes a-running, and says:

"Mars Jawge, if you'll come down into de swamp, I'll show you a whole stack o' water-moccasins."

8. Huck combines the closely related Presbyterian terms *predestination* and *foreordination*.

9. A crude floor made from log slabs in which

the flat side is turned up and the rounded side is set in the dirt.

1. Block printing.

Thinks I, that's mighty curious; he said that yesterday. He oughter know a body don't love water-moccasins enough to go around hunting for them. What is he up to anyway? So I says—

"All right, trot ahead."

I followed a half a mile, then he struck out over the swamp and waded ankle deep as much as another half mile. We come to a little flat piece of land which was dry and very thick with trees and bushes and vines, and he says—

"You shove right in dah, jist a few steps, Mars Jawge, dah's whah dey is. I's seed 'm befo', I don't k'yer to see 'em no mo'."

Then he slopped right along and went away, and pretty soon the trees hid him. I poked into the place a-ways, and come to a little open patch as big as a bedroom, all hung around with vines, and found a man laying there asleep—and by jings it was my old Jim!

I waked him up, and I reckoned it was going to be a grand surprise to him to see me again, but it warn't. He nearly cried, he was so glad, but he warn't surprised. Said he swum along behind me, that night, and heard me yell every time, but dasn't answer, because he didn't want nobody to pick *him* up, and take him into slavery again. Says he—

"I got hurt a little, en couldn't swim fas', so I wuz a considable ways behine you, towards de las'; when you landed I reck'ned I could ketch up wid you on de lan' 'dout havin' to shout at you, but when I see dat house I begin to go slow. I 'uz off too fur to hear what dey say to you—I wuz 'fraid o' de dogs—but when it 'uz all quiet again, I knowed you's in de house, so I struck out for de woods to wait for day. Early in de mawnin' some er de niggers come along, gwyne to de fields, en dey tuck me en showed me dis place, whah de dogs can't track me on accounts o' de water, en dey brings me truck to eat every night, en tells me how you's a gitt'n along."

"Why didn't you tell my Jack to fetch me here sooner, Jim?"

"Well, 'twarn't no use to a-sturb you, Huck, tell we could do sumfn—but we's all right, now. I ben a-buyin' pots en pans en vittles, as I got a chanst, en a patchin' up de raf', nights, when—"

"*What* raft, Jim?"

"Our ole raf'."

"You mean to say our old raft warn't smashed all to flinders?"

"No, she warn't. She was tore up a good deal—one en' of her was—but dey warn't no great harm done, on'y our traps was mos' all los'. Ef we hadn' dive' so deep en swum so fur under water, en de night hadn' ben so dark, en we warn't so sk'yerd, en ben sich punkin-heads, as de sayin' is, we'd a seed de raf'. But it's jis' as well we didn't, 'kase now she's all fixed up agin mos' as good as new, en we's got a new lot o' stuff, too, in de place o' what 'uz los'."

"Why, how did you get hold of the raft again, Jim—did you catch her?"

"How I gwyne to ketch her, en I out in de woods? No, some er de niggers foun' her ketched on a snag, along heah in de ben', en dey hid her in a crick, 'mongst de willows, en dey wuz so much jawin' 'bout which un 'um she b'long to de mos', dat I come to heah 'bout it pooty soon, so I ups en settles de trouble by tellin' um she don't b'long to none uv um, but to you en me; en I ast 'm if dey gwyne to grab a young white genlman's propaty, en git a hid'n for it? Den I gin 'm ten cents apiece, en dey 'uz mighty well satisfied, en wisht some mo' raf's 'ud come along en make 'm rich agin. Dey's mighty good to

me, dese niggers is, en whatever I wants 'm to do fur me, I doan' have to ast 'm twice, honey. Dat Jack's a good nigger, en pooty smart."

"Yes, he is. He ain't ever told me you was here; told me to come, and he'd show me a lot of water-moccasins. If anything happens, *he* ain't mixed up in it. He can say he never seen us together, and it'll be the truth."

I don't want to talk much about the next day. I reckon I'll cut it pretty short. I waked up about dawn, and was agoing to turn over and go to sleep again, when I noticed how still it was—didn't seem to be anybody stirring. That warn't usual. Next I noticed that Buck was up and gone. Well, I gets up, a-wondering, and goes down stairs—nobody around; everything as still as a mouse. Just the same outside; thinks I, what does it mean? Down by the wood-pile I comes across my Jack, and says:

"What's it all about?"

Says he:

"Don't you know, Mars Jawge?"

"No," says I, "I don't."

"Well, den, Miss Sophia's run off! 'deed she has. She run off in de night, sometime—nobody don't know jis' when—run off to git married to dat young Harney Shepherdson, you know—leastways, so dey 'spec. De fambly foun' it out, 'bout half an hour ago—maybe a little mo'—en' I *tell* you dey warn't no time los'. Sich another hurryin' up guns en hosses *you* never see! De women folks has gone for to stir up de relations, en ole Mars Saul en de boys tuck dey guns en rode up de river road for to try to ketch dat young man en kill him 'fo' he kin git acrost de river wid Miss Sophia. I reck'n dey's gwyne to be mighty rough times."

"Buck went off 'thout waking me up."

"Well I reck'n he *did*! Dey warn't gwyne to mix you up in it. Mars Buck he loaded up his gun en 'lowed he's gwyne to fetch home a Shepherdson or bust. Well, dey'll be plenty un 'm dah, I reck'n, en you bet you he'll fetch one ef he gits a chanst."

I took up the river road as hard as I could put. By-and-by I begin to hear guns a good ways off. When I come in sight of the log store and the wood-pile where the steamboats land, I worked along under the trees and brush till I got to a good place, and then I clumb up into the forks of a cotton-wood that was out of reach, and watched. There was a wood-rank four foot high,² a little ways in front of the tree, and first I was going to hide behind that; but maybe it was luckier I didn't.

There was four or five men cavorting around on their horses in the open place before the log store, cussing and yelling, and trying to get at a couple of young chaps that was behind the wood-rank alongside of the steamboat landing—but they couldn't come it. Every time one of them showed himself on the river side of the wood-pile he got shot at. The two boys was squatting back to back behind the pile, so they could watch both ways.

By-and-by the men stopped cavorting around and yelling. They started riding towards the store; then up gets one of the boys, draws a steady bead over the wood-rank, and drops one of them out of his saddle. All the men jumped off of their horses and grabbed the hurt one and started to carry

2. Half a cord of stacked firewood.

him to the store; and that minute the two boys started on the run. They got half-way to the tree I was in before the men noticed. Then the men see them, and jumped on their horses and took out after them. They gained on the boys, but it didn't do no good, the boys had too good a start; they got to the wood-pile that was in front of my tree, and slipped in behind it, and so they had the bulge³ on the men again. One of the boys was Buck, and the other was a slim young chap about nineteen years old.

The men ripped around awhile, and then rode away. As soon as they was out of sight, I sung out to Buck and told him. He didn't know what to make of my voice coming out of the tree, at first. He was awful surprised. He told me to watch out sharp and let him know when the men come in sight again; said they was up to some devilment or other—wouldn't be gone long. I wished I was out of that tree, but I dasn't come down. Buck began to cry and rip, and 'lowed that him and his cousin Joe (that was the other young chap) would make up for this day, yet. He said his father and his two brothers was killed, and two or three of the enemy. Said the Shepherdsons laid for them, in ambush. Buck said his father and brothers ought to waited for their relations—the Shepherdsons was too strong for them. I asked him what was become of young Harney and Miss Sophia. He said they'd got across the river and was safe. I was glad of that; but the way Buck did take on because he didn't manage to kill Harney that day he shot at him—I hain't ever heard anything like it.

All of a sudden, bang! bang! bang! goes three or four guns—the men had slipped around through the woods and come in from behind without their horses! The boys jumped for the river—both of them hurt—and as they swum down the current the men run along the bank shooting at them and singing out, "Kill them, kill them!" It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree. I ain't agoing to tell *all* that happened!—it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them—lots of times I dream about them.

I staid in the tree till it begun to get dark, afraid to come down. Sometimes I heard guns away off in the woods; and twice I seen little gangs of men gallop past the log store with guns; so I reckoned the trouble was still agoing on. I was mighty downhearted; so I made up my mind I wouldn't ever go anear that house again, because I reckoned I was to blame, somehow. I judged that that piece of paper meant that Miss Sophia was to meet Harney somewheres at half-past two and run off; and I judged I ought to told her father about that paper and the curious way she acted, and then maybe he would a locked her up and this awful mess wouldn't ever happened.

When I got down out of the tree, I crept along down the river bank a piece, and found the two bodies laying in the edge of the water, and tugged at them till I got them ashore; then I covered up their faces, and got away as quick as I could. I cried a little when I was covering up Buck's face, for he was mighty good to me.

It was just dark, now. I never went near the house, but struck through the woods and made for the swamp. Jim warn't on his island, so I tramped off in a hurry for the crick, and crowded through the willows, red-hot to jump aboard and get out of that awful country—the raft was gone! My souls, but

3. Upper hand.

I was scared! I couldn't get my breath for most a minute. Then I raised a yell. A voice not twenty-five foot from me, says—

“Good lan'! is dat you, honey? Doan' make no noise.”

It was Jim's voice—nothing ever sounded so good before. I run along the bank a piece and got aboard, and Jim he grabbed me and hugged me, he was so glad to see me. He says—

“Laws bless you, chile, I 'uz right down sho' you's dead agin. Jack's been heah, he say he reck'n you's ben shot, kase you didn' come home no mo'; so I's jes' dis minute a startin' de raf' down towards de mouf er de crick, so's to be all ready for to shove out en leave soon as Jack comes agin en tells me for certain you *is* dead. Lawsy, I's mighty glad to git you back agin, honey.”

I says—

“All right—that's mighty good; they won't find me, and they'll think I've been killed, and floated down the river—there's something up there that'll help them to think so—so don't you lose no time, Jim, but just shove off for the big water as fast as ever you can.”

I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. Then we hung up our signal lantern, and judged that we was free and safe once more. I hadn't had a bite to eat since yesterday; so Jim he got out some corn-dodgers⁴ and buttermilk, and pork and cabbage, and greens—there ain't nothing in the world so good, when it's cooked right—and whilst I eat my supper we talked, and had a good time. I was powerful glad to get away from the feuds, and so was Jim to get away from the swamp. We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.

Chapter XIX

Two or three days and nights went by; I reckon I might say they swum by, they slid along so quiet and smooth and lovely. Here is the way we put in the time. It was a monstrous big river down there—sometimes a mile and a half wide; we run nights, and laid up and hid day-times; soon as night was most gone, we stopped navigating and tied up—nearly always in the dead water under a tow-head; and then cut young cottonwoods and willows and hid the raft with them. Then we set out the lines. Next we slid into the river and had a swim, so as to freshen up and cool off; then we set down on the sandy bottom where the water was about knee deep, and watched the daylight come. Not a sound, anywheres—perfectly still—just like the whole world was asleep, only sometimes the bull-frogs a-cluttering, maybe. The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line—that was the woods on t'other side—you couldn't make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness, spreading around; then the river softened up, away off, and warn't black any more, but gray; you could see little dark spots drifting along, ever so far away—trading scows, and such things; and long black streaks—rafts; sometimes you could hear a sweep screaming; or jumbled up voices, it was so still, and sounds come so far; and by-and-by you could see a streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak

4. Hard cornmeal rolls or cakes.

that there's a snag there in a swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way; and you see the mist curl up off of the water, and the east reddens up, and the river, and you make out a log cabin in the edge of the woods, away on the bank on t'other side of the river, being a wood-yard, likely, and piled by them cheats so you can throw a dog through it any-where;⁵ then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell, on account of the woods and the flowers; but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get pretty rank; and next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun, and the song-birds just going it!

A little smoke couldn't be noticed, now, so we would take some fish off of the lines, and cook up a hot breakfast. And afterwards we would watch the lonesomeness of the river, and kind of lazy along, and by-and-by lazy off to sleep. Wake up, by-and-by, and look to see what done it, and maybe see a steamboat coughing along up stream, so far off towards the other side you couldn't tell nothing about her only whether she was stern-wheel or side-wheel; then for about an hour there wouldn't be nothing to hear nor nothing to see—just solid lonesomeness. Next you'd see a raft sliding by, away off yonder, and maybe a galoot⁶ on it chopping, because they're almost always doing it on a raft; you'd see the ax flash, and come down—you don't hear nothing; you see that ax go up again, and by the time it's above the man's head, then you hear the *k'chunk!*—it had took all that time to come over the water. So we would put in the day, lazying around, listening to the stillness. Once there was a thick fog, and the rafts and things that went by was beating tin pans so the steamboats wouldn't run over them. A scow or a raft went by so close we could hear them talking and cussing and laughing—heard them plain; but we couldn't see no sign of them; it made you feel crawly, it was like spirits carrying on that way in the air. Jim said he believed it was spirits; but I says:

“No, spirits wouldn't say, ‘dern the dern fog.’”

Soon as it was night, out we shoved; when we got her out to about the middle, we let her alone, and let her float wherever the current wanted her to; then we lit the pipes, and dangled our legs in the water and talked about all kinds of things—we was always naked, day and night, whenever the mosquitoes would let us—the new clothes Buck's folks made for me was too good to be comfortable, and besides I didn't go much on clothes, nohow.

Sometimes we'd have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time. Yonder was the banks and the islands, across the water; and maybe a spark—which was a candle in a cabin window—and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two—on a raft or a scow, you know; and maybe you could hear a fiddle or a song coming over from one of them crafts. It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened—Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened; I judged it would have took too long to *make* so many. Jim said the moon could a *laid* them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most

5. Stacks of wood in this yard were sold by their volume, gaps and holes included.

6. Awkward, ungainly person (slang).

as many, so of course it could be done. We used to watch the stars that fell, too, and see them streak down. Jim allowed they'd got spoiled and was hove out of the nest.

Once or twice of a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimbleys, and they would rain down in the river and look awful pretty; then she would turn a corner and her lights would wink out and her pow-wow shut off and leave the river still again; and by-and-by her waves would get to us, a long time after she was gone, and joggle the raft a bit, and after that you wouldn't hear nothing for you couldn't tell how long, except maybe frogs or something.

After midnight the people on shore went to bed, and then for two or three hours the shores was black—no more sparks in the cabin windows. These sparks was our clock—the first one that showed again meant morning was coming, so we hunted a place to hide and tie up, right away.

One morning about day-break, I found a canoe and crossed over a chute⁷ to the main shore—it was only two hundred yards—and paddled about a mile up a crick amongst the cypress woods, to see if I couldn't get some berries. Just as I was passing a place where a kind of a cow-path crossed the crick, here comes a couple of men tearing up the path as tight as they could foot it. I thought I was a goner, for whenever anybody was after anybody I judged it was *me*—or maybe Jim. I was about to dig out from there in a hurry, but they was pretty close to me then, and sung out and begged me to save their lives—said they hadn't been doing nothing, and was being chased for it—said there was men and dogs a-coming. They wanted to jump right in, but I says—

“Don't you do it. I don't hear the dogs and horses yet; you've got time to crowd through the brush and get up the crick a little ways; then you take to the water and wade down to me and get in—that'll throw the dogs off the scent.”

They done it, and soon as they was aboard I lit out for our tow-head, and in about five or ten minutes we heard the dogs and the men away off, shouting. We heard them come along towards the crick, but couldn't see them; they seemed to stop and fool around a while; then, as we got further and further away all the time, we couldn't hardly hear them at all; by the time we had left a mile of woods behind us and struck the river, everything was quiet, and we paddled over to the tow-head and hid in the cotton-woods and was safe.

One of these fellows was about seventy, or upwards, and had a bald head and very gray whiskers. He had an old battered-up slouch hat on, and a greasy blue woolen shirt, and ragged old blue jeans britches stuffed into his boot tops, and home-knit galluses⁸—no, he only had one. He had an old long-tailed blue jeans coat with slick brass buttons, flung over his arm, and both of them had big fat ratty-looking carpet-bags.

The other fellow was about thirty and dressed about as ornery. After breakfast we all laid off and talked, and the first thing that come out was that these chaps didn't know one another.

“What got you into trouble?” says the baldhead to t'other chap.

7. A narrow channel with swift-flowing water.

8. Suspenders.

“Well, I’d been selling an article to take the tartar off the teeth—and it does take it off, too, and generly the enamel along with it—but I staid about one night longer than I ought to, and was just in the act of sliding out when I ran across you on the trail this side of town, and you told me they were coming, and begged me to help you to get off. So I told you I was expecting trouble myself and would scatter out *with* you. That’s the whole yarn—what’s yourn?”

“Well, I’d ben a-runnin’ a little temperance revival⁹ thar, ’bout a week, and was the pet of the women-folks, big and little, for I was makin’ it mighty warm for the rummies, I *tell* you, and takin’ as much as five or six dollars a night—ten cents a head, children and niggers free—and business a growin’ all the time; when somehow or another a little report got around, last night, that I had a way of puttin’ in my time with a private jug, on the sly. A nigger roused me out this mornin’, and told me the people was getherin’ on the quiet, with their dogs and horses, and they’d be along pretty soon and give me ’bout half an hour’s start, and then run me down, if they could; and if they got me they’d tar and feather me and ride me on a rail, sure. I didn’t wait for no breakfast—I warn’t hungry.”

“Old man,” says the young one, “I reckon we might double-team it together; what do you think?”

“I ain’t undisposed. What’s your line—mainly?”

“Jour printer,¹ by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theatre-actor—tragedy, you know; take a turn at mesmerism and phrenology,² when there’s a chance; teach singing-geography³ school for a change; sling a lecture, sometimes—oh, I do lots of things—most anything that comes handy, so it ain’t work. What’s your lay?”⁴

“I’ve done considerable in the doctoring way in my time. Layin’ on o’ hands⁵ is my best holt—for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things; and I k’n tell a fortune pretty good, when I’ve got somebody along to find out the facts for me. Preachin’s my line, too; and workin’ camp-meetin’s; and missionaryin’ around.”

Nobody never said anything for a while; then the young man hove a sigh and says—

“Alas!”

“What ’re you alassin’ about?” says the baldhead.

“To think I should have lived to be leading such a life, and be degraded down into such company.” And he begun to wipe the corner of his eye with a rag.

“Dern your skin, ain’t the company good enough for you?” says the baldhead, pretty pert and uppish.

“Yes, it *is* good enough for me; it’s as good as I deserve; for who fetched me so low, when I was so high? *I* did myself. I don’t blame *you*, gentlemen—far from it; I don’t blame anybody. I deserve it all. Let the cold world do its worst; one thing I know—there’s a grave somewhere for me. The world may go on just as its always done, and take everything from me—loved

9. A religious gathering aimed at producing commitment to a life without alcoholic beverages.

1. A journeyman printer (not yet a salaried master-printer), who worked by the day.

2. The study of the shape of the skull as an indicator of intelligence and character. “Mesmer-

ism”: a form of hypnotism.

3. Chants or rhymes that allowed the singers to memorize geographic facts such as rivers, capitals, mountains, etc.

4. Work, in the sense here of hustle or scheme.

5. Faith healing.

ones, property, everything—but it can't take that. Some day I'll lie down in it and forget it all, and my poor broken heart will be at rest." He went on a-wiping.

"Drot your pore broken heart," says the baldhead; "what are you heaving your pore broken heart at *us f'r*? *We* hain't done nothing."

"No, I know you haven't. I ain't blaming you, gentlemen. I brought myself down—yes, I did it myself. It's right I should suffer—perfectly right—I don't make any moan."

"Brought you down from whar? Whar was you brought down from?"

"Ah, you would not believe me; the world never believes—let it pass—'tis no matter. The secret of my birth—"

"The secret of your birth? Do you mean to say—"

"Gentlemen," says the young man, very solemn, "I will reveal it to you, for I feel I may have confidence in you. By rights I am a duke!"

Jim's eyes bugged out when he heard that; and I reckon mine did, too. Then the baldhead says: "No! you can't mean it?"

"Yes. My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second son of the late duke seized the title and estates—the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant—I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater; and here am I, forlorn, torn from my high estate, hunted of men, despised by the cold world, ragged, worn, heart-broken, and degraded to the companionship of felons on a raft!"

Jim pitied him ever so much, and so did I. We tried to comfort him, but he said it warn't much use, he couldn't be much comforted; said if we was a mind to acknowledge him, that would do him more good than most anything else; so we said we would, if he would tell us how. He said we ought to bow, when we spoke to him, and say "Your Grace," or "My Lord," or "Your Lordship"—and he wouldn't mind it if we called him plain "Bridgewater," which he said was a title, anyway, and not a name; and one of us ought to wait on him at dinner, and do any little thing for him he wanted done.

Well, that was all easy, so we done it. All through dinner Jim stood around and waited on him, and says, "Will yo' Grace have some o' dis, or some o' dat?" and so on, and a body could see it was mighty pleasing to him.

But the old man got pretty silent, by-and-by—didn't have much to say, and didn't look pretty comfortable over all that petting that was going on around that duke. He seemed to have something on his mind. So, along in the afternoon, he says:

"Looky here, Bilgewater,"⁶ he says, "I'm nation sorry for you, but you ain't the only person that's had troubles like that."

"No?"

"No, you ain't. You ain't the only person that's ben snaked down wrongfully out'n a high place."

"Alas!"

"No, you ain't the only person that's had a secret of his birth." And by jings, *he* begins to cry.

"Hold! What do you mean?"

6. This corruption of "Bridgewater" refers to the water that collects at the bottom of a boat, the bilge.

“Bilgewater, kin I trust you?” says the old man, still sort of sobbing.

“To the bitter death!” He took the old man by the hand and squeezed it, and says, “The secret of your being: speak!”

“Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin!”⁷

You bet you Jim and me stared, this time. Then the duke says:

“You are what?”

“Yes, my friend, it is too true—your eyes is lookin’ at this very moment on the pore disappeared Dauphin, Looy the Seventeen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antonette.”

“You! At your age! No! You mean you’re the late Charlemagne;⁸ you must be six or seven hundred years old, at the very least.”

“Trouble has done it, Bilgewater, trouble has done it; trouble has brung these gray hairs and this premature balditude. Yes, gentlemen, you see before you, in blue jeans and misery, the wanderin’, exiled, trampled-on and sufferin’ rightful King of France.”

Well, he cried and took on so, that me and Jim didn’t know hardly what to do, we was so sorry—and so glad and proud we’d got him with us, too. So we set in, like we done before with the duke, and tried to comfort *him*. But he said it warn’t no use, nothing but to be dead and done with it all could do him any good; though he said it often made him feel easier and better for a while if people treated him according to his rights, and got down on one knee to speak to him, and always called him “Your Majesty,” and waited on him first at meals, and didn’t set down in his presence till he asked them. So Jim and me set to majestyin’ him, and doing this and that and t’other for him, and standing up till he told us we might set down. This done him heaps of good, and so he got cheerful and comfortable. But the duke kind of soured on him, and didn’t look a bit satisfied with the way things was going; still, the king acted real friendly towards him, and said the duke’s great-grandfather and all the other Dukes of Bilgewater was a good deal thought of by *his* father and was allowed to come to the palace considerable; but the duke staid huffy a good while, till by-and-by the king says:

“Like as not we got to be together a blamed long time, on this h-yer raft, Bilgewater, and so what’s the use o’ your bein’ sour? It’ll only make things oncomfortable. It ain’t my fault I warn’t born a duke, it ain’t your fault you warn’t born a king—so what’s the use to worry? Make the best o’ things the way you find ’em, says I—that’s my motto. This ain’t no bad thing that we’ve struck here—plenty grub and an easy life—come, give us your hand, Duke, and less all be friends.”

The duke done it, and Jim and me was pretty glad to see it. It took away all the uncomfortableness, and we felt mighty good over it, because it would a been a miserable business to have any unfriendliness on the raft; for what you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others.

It didn’t take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn’t no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on; kept it to myself; it’s the best way; then you don’t have no quarrels, and don’t get into no trouble. If they wanted us to call them

7. The Dauphin, born in 1785, would have been in his mid-fifties or sixties had he survived.

8. Charlemagne (742–814), emperor of the West (800–814).

kings and dukes, I hadn't no objections, 'long as it would keep peace in the family; and it warn't no use to tell Jim, so I didn't tell him. If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way.

Chapter XX

They asked us considerable many questions; wanted to know what we covered up the raft that way for, and laid by in the daytime instead of running—was Jim a runaway nigger? Says I—

“Goodness sakes, would a runaway nigger run *south*?”

No, they allowed he wouldn't. I had to account for things some way, so I says:

“My folks was living in Pike County, in Missouri, where I was born, and they all died off but me and pa and my brother Ike. Pa, he 'lowed he'd break up and go down and live with Uncle Ben, who's got a little one-horse place on the river, forty-four mile below Orleans. Pa was pretty poor, and had some debts; so when he'd squared up there warn't nothing left but sixteen dollars and our nigger, Jim. That warn't enough to take us fourteen hundred mile, deck passage nor no other way. Well, when the river rose, pa had a streak of luck one day; he ketched this piece of a raft; so we reckoned we'd go down to Orleans on it. Pa's luck didn't hold out; a steamboat run over the forrard corner of the raft, one night, and we all went overboard and dove under the wheel; Jim and me come up, all right, but pa was drunk, and Ike was only four years old, so they never come up no more. Well, for the next day or two we had considerable trouble, because people was always coming out in skiffs and trying to take Jim away from me, saying they believed he was a runaway nigger. We don't run day-times no more, now; nights they don't bother us.”

The duke says—

“Leave me alone to cipher out a way so we can run in the daytime if we want to. I'll think the thing over—I'll invent a plan that'll fix it. We'll let it alone for to-day, because of course we don't want to go by that town yonder in daylight—it mightn't be healthy.”

Towards night it begun to darken up and look like rain; the heat lightning was squirting around, low down in the sky, and the leaves was beginning to shiver—it was going to be pretty ugly, it was easy to see that. So the duke and the king went to overhauling our wigwam, to see what the beds was like. My bed was a straw tick⁹—better than Jim's, which was a corn-shuck tick; there's always cobs around about in a shuck tick, and they poke into you and hurt; and when you roll over, the dry shucks sound like you was rolling over in a pile of dead leaves; it makes such a rustling that you wake up. Well, the duke allowed he would take my bed; but the king allowed he wouldn't. He says—

“I should a reckoned the difference in rank would a sejested to you that a corn-shuck bed warn't just fitten for me to sleep on. Your Grace'll take the shuck bed yourself.”

Jim and me was in a sweat again, for a minute, being afraid there was going to be some more trouble amongst them; so we was pretty glad when the duke says—

9. Mattress.

“ ’Tis my fate to be always ground into the mire under the iron heel of oppression. Misfortune has broken my once haughty spirit; I yield, I submit; ’tis my fate. I am alone in the world—let me suffer; I can bear it.”

We got away as soon as it was good and dark. The king told us to stand well out towards the middle of the river, and not show a light till we got a long ways below the town. We come in sight of the little bunch of lights by-and-by—that was the town, you know—and slid by, about a half a mile out, all right. When we was three-quarters of a mile below, we hoisted up our signal lantern; and about ten o’clock it come on to rain and blow and thunder and lighten like everything; so the king told us to both stay on watch till the weather got better; then him and the duke crawled into the wigwam and turned in for the night. It was my watch below, till twelve, but I wouldn’t a turned in, anyway, if I’d had a bed; because a body don’t see such a storm as that every day in the week, not by a long sight. My souls, how the wind did scream along! And every second or two there’d come a glare that lit up the white-caps for a half a mile around, and you’d see the islands looking dusty through the rain, and the trees thrashing around in the wind; then comes a *h-wack!*—bum! bum! bumble-umble-um-bum-bum-bum-bum—and the thunder would go rumbling and grumbling away, and quit—and then *rip* comes another flash and another sock-dolager.¹ The waves most washed me off the raft, sometimes, but I hadn’t any clothes on, and didn’t mind. We didn’t have no trouble about snags; the lightning was glaring and fluttering around so constant that we could see them plenty soon enough to throw her head this way or that and miss them.

I had the middle watch, you know, but I was pretty sleepy by that time, so Jim he said he would stand the first half of it for me; he was always mighty good, that way, Jim was. I crawled into the wigwam, but the king and the duke had their legs sprawled around so there warn’t no show for me; so I laid outside—I didn’t mind the rain, because it was warm, and the waves warn’t running so high, now. About two they come up again, though, and Jim was going to call me, but he changed his mind because he reckoned they warn’t high enough yet to do any harm; but he was mistaken about that, for pretty soon all of a sudden along comes a regular ripper, and washed me overboard. It most killed Jim a-laughing. He was the easiest nigger to laugh that ever was, anyway.

I took the watch, and Jim he laid down and snored away; and by-and-by the storm let up for good and all; and the first cabin-light that showed, I roused him out and we slid the raft into hiding-quarters for the day.

The king got out an old ratty deck of cards, after breakfast, and him and the duke played seven-up a while, five cents a game. Then they got tired of it, and allowed they would “lay out a campaign,” as they called it. The duke went down into his carpet-bag and fetched up a lot of little printed bills, and read them out loud. One bill said “The celebrated Dr. Armand de Montalban of Paris,” would “lecture on the Science of Phrenology” at such and such a place, on the blank day of blank, at ten cents admission, and “furnish charts of character at twenty-five cents apiece.” The duke said that was *him*. In another bill he was the “world renowned Shakspearean tragedian, Garrick

1. Something exceptionally strong or climactic (slang).

the Younger,² of Drury Lane, London.” In other bills he had a lot of other names and done other wonderful things, like finding water and gold with a “divining rod,” “dissipating witch-spells,” and so on. By-and-by he says—

“But the histrionic muse is the darling. Have you ever trod the boards, Royalty?”

“No,” says the king.

“You shall, then, before you’re three days older, Fallen Grandeur,” says the duke. “The first good town we come to, we’ll hire a hall and do the sword-fight in Richard III. and the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet. How does that strike you?”

“I’m in, up to the hub, for anything that will pay, Bilgewater, but you see I don’t know nothing about play-actn’, and hain’t ever seen much of it. I was too small when pap used to have ’em at the palace. Do you reckon you can learn me?”

“Easy!”

“All right. I’m jist a-freezn’ for something fresh, anyway. Less commence, right away.”

So the duke he told him all about who Romeo was, and who Juliet was, and said he was used to being Romeo, so the king could be Juliet.

“But if Juliet’s such a young gal, Duke, my peeled head and my white whiskers is goin’ to look oncommon odd on her, maybe.”

“No, don’t you worry—these country jakes won’t ever think of that. Besides, you know, you’ll be in costume, and that makes all the difference in the world; Juliet’s in a balcony, enjoying the moonlight before she goes to bed, and she’s got on her night-gown and her ruffled night-cap. Here are the costumes for the parts.”

He got out two or three curtain-calico suits, which he said was meedyevil armor for Richard III. and t’other chap, and a long white cotton night-shirt and a ruffled night-cap to match. The king was satisfied; so the duke got out his book and read the parts over in the most splendid spread-eagle way, prancing around and acting at the same time, to show how it had got to be done; then he give the book to the king and told him to get his part by heart.

There was a little one-horse town about three mile down the bend, and after dinner the duke said he had ciphered out his idea about how to run in daylight without it being dangersome for Jim; so he allowed he would go down to the town and fix that thing. The king allowed he would go too, and see if he couldn’t strike something. We was out of coffee, so Jim said I better go along with them in the canoe and get some.

When we got there, there warn’t nobody stirring; streets empty, and perfectly dead and still, like Sunday. We found a sick nigger sunning himself in a back yard, and he said everybody that warn’t too young or too sick or too old, was gone to camp-meeting, about two mile back in the woods. The king got the directions, and allowed he’d go and work that camp-meeting for all it was worth, and I might go, too.³

2. David Garrick (1717–1779) was a famous tragedian at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, London.

3. Notoriously easy pickings for confidence men, camp meetings are extended outdoor evangelical meetings.

The duke said what he was after was a printing office. We found it; a little bit of a concern, up over a carpenter shop—carpenters and printers all gone to the meeting, and no doors locked. It was a dirty, littered-up place, and had ink marks, and handbills with pictures of horses and runaway niggers on them, all over the walls. The duke shed his coat and said he was all right, now. So me and the king lit out for the camp-meeting.

We got there in about a half an hour, fairly dripping, for it was a most awful hot day. There was as much as a thousand people there, from twenty mile around. The woods was full of teams and wagons, hitched everywheres, feeding out of the wagon troughs and stomping to keep off the flies. There was sheds made out of poles and roofed over with branches, where they had lemonade and gingerbread to sell, and piles of watermelons and green corn and such-like truck.

The preaching was going on under the same kinds of sheds, only they was bigger and held crowds of people. The benches was made out of outside slabs of logs, with holes bored in the round side to drive sticks into for legs. They didn't have no backs. The preachers had high platforms to stand on, at one end of the sheds. The women had on sunbonnets; and some had linsey-woolsey frocks, some gingham ones, and a few of the young ones had on calico. Some of the young men was barefooted, and some of the children didn't have on any clothes but just a tow-linen⁴ shirt. Some of the old women was knitting, and some of the young folks was courting on the sly.

The first shed we come to, the preacher was lining out a hymn. He lined out two lines, everybody sung it, and it was kind of grand to hear it, there was so many of them and they done it in such a rousing way; then he lined out two more for them to sing—and so on. The people woke up more and more, and sung louder and louder; and towards the end, some begun to groan, and some begun to shout. Then the preacher begun to preach; and begun in earnest, too; and went weaving first to one side of the platform and then the other, and then a leaning down over the front of it, with his arms and his body going all the time, and shouting his words out with all his might; and every now and then he would hold up his Bible and spread it open, and kind of pass it around this way and that, shouting, "It's the brazen serpent in the wilderness! Look upon it and live!" And people would shout out, "Glory!—A-a-men!" And so he went on, and the people groaning and crying and saying amen:

"Oh, come to the mourners' bench!⁵ come, black with sin! (*amen!*) come, sick and sore! (*amen!*) come, lame and halt, and blind! (*amen!*) come, pore and needy, sunk in shame! (*a-a-men!*) come all that's worn, and soiled, and suffering!—come with a broken spirit! come with a contrite heart! come in your rags and sin and dirt! the waters that cleanse is free, the door of heaven stands open—oh, enter in and be at rest!" (*a-a-men! glory, glory hallelujah!*)

And so on. You couldn't make out what the preacher said, any more, on account of the shouting and crying. Folks got up, everywheres in the crowd, and worked their way, just by main strength, to the mourners' bench,

4. Coarse linen cloth. "Linsey-woolsey": cheap, often homespun, unpatterned cloth composed of wool and flax. "Gingham" and "calico" are inex-

pensive, store-bought printed cotton.

5. Front-row pews filled by penitents.

with the tears running down their faces; and when all the mourners had got up there to the front benches in a crowd, they sung, and shouted, and flung themselves down on the straw, just crazy and wild.

Well, the first I knowed, the king got agoing; and you could hear him over everybody; and next he went a-charging up on to the platform and the preacher he begged him to speak to the people, and he done it. He told them he was a pirate—been a pirate for thirty years, out in the Indian Ocean, and his crew was thinned out considerable, last spring, in a fight, and he was home now, to take out some fresh men, and thanks to goodness he'd been robbed last night, and put ashore off of a steamboat without a cent, and he was glad of it, it was the blessedest thing that ever happened to him, because he was a changed man now, and happy for the first time in his life; and poor as he was, he was going to start right off and work his way back to the Indian Ocean and put in the rest of his life trying to turn the pirates into the true path; for he could do it better than anybody else, being acquainted with all the pirate crews in that ocean; and though it would take him a long time to get there, without money, he would get there anyway, and every time he convinced a pirate he would say to him, "Don't you thank me, don't you give me no credit, it all belongs to them dear people in Pokeville camp-meeting, natural brothers and benefactors of the race—and that dear preacher there, the truest friend a pirate ever had!"

And then he busted into tears, and so did everybody. Then somebody sings out, "Take up a collection for him, take up a collection!" Well, a half a dozen made a jump to do it, but somebody sings out, "Let *him* pass the hat around!" Then everybody said it, the preacher too.

So the king went all through the crowd with his hat, swabbing his eyes, and blessing the people and praising them and thanking them for being so good to the poor pirates away off there; and every little while the prettiest kind of girls, with the tears running down their cheeks, would up and ask him would he let them kiss him, for to remember him by; and he always done it; and some of them he hugged and kissed as many as five or six times—and he was invited to stay a week; and everybody wanted him to live in their houses, and said they'd think it was an honor; but he said as this was the last day of the camp-meeting he couldn't do no good, and besides he was in a sweat to get to the Indian Ocean right off and go to work on the pirates.

When we got back to the raft and he come to count up, he found he had collected eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents. And then he had fetched away a three-gallon jug of whiskey, too, that he found under a wagon when we was starting home through the woods. The king said, take it all around, it laid over any day he'd ever put in in the missionarying line. He said it warn't no use talking, heathens don't amount to shucks, alongside of pirates, to work a camp-meeting with.

The duke was thinking *he'd* been doing pretty well, till the king come to show up, but after that he didn't think so so much. He had set up and printed off two little jobs for farmers, in that printing office—horse bills—and took the money, four dollars. And he had got in ten dollars worth of advertisements for the paper, which he said he would put in for four dollars if they would pay in advance—so they done it. The price of the paper was two dollars a year, but he took in three subscriptions for half a dollar apiece on condition of them paying him in advance; they were going to pay in cord-wood and

onions, as usual, but he said he had just bought the concern and knocked down the price as low as he could afford it, and was going to run it for cash. He set up a little piece of poetry, which he made, himself, out of his own head—three verses—kind of sweet and saddish—the name of it was, “Yes, crush, cold world, this breaking heart”—and he left that all set up and ready to print in the paper and didn’t charge nothing for it. Well, he took in nine dollars and a half, and said he’d done a pretty square day’s work for it.

Then he showed us another little job he’d printed and hadn’t charged for, because it was for us. It had a picture of a runaway nigger, with a bundle on a stick, over his shoulder, and “\$200 reward” under it. The reading was all about Jim, and just described him to a dot. It said he run away from St. Jacques’ plantation, forty mile below New Orleans, last winter, and likely went north, and whoever would catch him and send him back, he could have the reward and expenses.

“Now,” says the duke, “after to-night we can run in the daytime if we want to. Whenever we see anybody coming, we can tie Jim hand and foot with a rope, and lay him in the wigwam and show this handbill and say we captured him up the river, and were too poor to travel on a steamboat, so we got this little raft on credit from our friends and are going down to get the reward. Handcuffs and chains would look still better on Jim, but it wouldn’t go well with the story of us being so poor. Too much like jewelry. Ropes are the correct thing—we must preserve the unities,⁶ as we say on the boards.”

We all said the duke was pretty smart, and there couldn’t be no trouble about running daytimes. We judged we could make miles enough that night to get out of the reach of the pow-wow we reckoned the duke’s work in the printing office was going to make in that little town—then we could boom right along, if we wanted to.

We laid low and kept still, and never shoved out till nearly ten o’clock; then we slid by, pretty wide away from the town, and didn’t hoist our lantern till we was clear out of sight of it.

When Jim called me to take the watch at four in the morning, he says—

“Huck, does you reck’n we gwyne to run acrost any mo’ kings on dis trip?”

“No,” I says, “I reckon not.”

“Well,” says he, “dat’s all right, den. I doan’ mine one er two kings, but dat’s enough. Dis one’s powerful drunk, en de duke ain’ much better.”

I found Jim had been trying to get him to talk French, so he could hear what it was like; but he said he had been in this country so long, and had so much trouble, he’d forgot it.

Chapter XXI

It was after sun-up, now, but we went right on, and didn’t tie up. The king and the duke turned out, by-and-by, looking pretty rusty; but after they’d jumped overboard and took a swim, it chippered them up a good deal. After breakfast the king he took a seat on a corner of the raft, and pulled off his boots and rolled up his britches, and let his legs dangle in the water, so as

6. Of time, place, and action in classical drama; here the duke is using the term to mean “consistent with the rest of our story.”

to be comfortable, and lit his pipe, and went to getting his Romeo and Juliet by heart. When he had got it pretty good, him and the duke begun to practice it together. The duke had to learn him over and over again, how to say every speech; and he made him sigh, and put his hand on his heart, and after while he said he done it pretty well; “only,” he says, “you mustn’t bellow out *Romeo!* that way, like a bull—you must say it soft, and sick, and languishy, so—R-o-o-meo! that is the idea; for Juliet’s a dear sweet mere child of a girl, you know, and she don’t bray like a jackass.”

Well, next they got out a couple of long swords that the duke made out of oak laths, and begun to practice the sword-fight—the duke called himself Richard III.; and the way they laid on, and pranced around the raft was grand to see. But by-and-by the king tripped and fell overboard, and after that they took a rest, and had a talk about all kinds of adventures they’d had in other times along the river.

After dinner, the duke says:

“Well, Capet,⁷ we’ll want to make this a first-class show, you know, so I guess we’ll add a little more to it. We want a little something to answer encores with, anyway.”

“What’s onkores, Bilgewater?”

The duke told him, and then says:

“I’ll answer by doing the Highland fling or the sailor’s hornpipe; and you—well, let me see—oh, I’ve got it—you can do Hamlet’s soliloquy.”

“Hamlet’s which?”

“Hamlet’s soliloquy, you know; the most celebrated thing in Shakespeare. Ah, it’s sublime, sublime! Always fetches the house. I haven’t got it in the book—I’ve only got one volume—but I reckon I can piece it out from memory. I’ll just walk up and down a minute, and see if I can call it back from recollection’s vaults.”

So he went to marching up and down, thinking, and frowning horrible every now and then; then he would hoist up his eyebrows; next he would squeeze his hand on his forehead and stagger back and kind of moan; next he would sigh, and next he’d let on to drop a tear. It was beautiful to see him. By-and-by he got it. He told us to give attention. Then he strikes a most noble attitude, with one leg shoved forwards, and his arms stretched away up, and his head tilted back, looking up at the sky; and then he begins to rip and rave and grit his teeth; and after that, all through his speech he howled, and spread around, and swelled up his chest, and just knocked the spots out of any acting ever I see before. This is the speech—I learned it, easy enough, while he was learning it to the king:⁸

To be, or not to be; that is the bare bodkin
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would fardels bear, till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane,
But that the fear of something after death
Murders the innocent sleep,
Great nature’s second course,

7. The family name of Louis XVI, who was guillotined in 1793.

8. The comical garbling of Shakespeare was another stock-in-trade of the southwestern

humorists in whose tradition Twain follows. The soliloquy is composed chiefly of phrases from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, but Twain also draws on several other plays.

And makes us rather sling the arrows of outrageous fortune
 Than fly to others that we know not of.
 There's the respect must give us pause:
 Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The law's delay, and the quietus which his pangs might take,
 In the dead waste and middle of the night, when churchyards yawn
 In customary suits of solemn black,
 But that the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns,
 Breathes forth contagion on the world,
 And thus the native hue of resolution, like the poor cat i' the adage,
 Is sicklied o'er with care,
 And all the clouds that lowered o'er our housetops,
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action.
 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. But soft you, the fair Ophelia:
 Ope not thy ponderous and marble jaws,
 But get thee to a nunnery—go!

Well, the old man he liked that speech, and he mighty soon got it so he could do it first rate. It seemed like he was just born for it; and when he had his hand in and was excited, it was perfectly lovely the way he would rip and tear and rair up behind when he was getting it off.

The first chance we got, the duke he had some show bills printed; and after that, for two or three days as we floated along, the raft was a most uncommon lively place, for there warn't nothing but sword-fighting and rehearsing—as the duke called it—going on all the time. One morning, when we was pretty well down the State of Arkansaw, we come in sight of a little one-horse town in a big bend; so we tied up about three-quarters of a mile above it, in the mouth of a crick which was shut in like a tunnel by the cypress trees, and all of us but Jim took the canoe and went down there to see if there was any chance in that place for our show.

We struck it mighty lucky; there was going to be a circus there that afternoon, and the country people was already beginning to come in, in all kinds of old shackly wagons, and on horses. The circus would leave before night, so our show would have a pretty good chance. The duke he hired the court house, and we went around and stuck up our bills. They read like this:

Shaksperean Revival!!!
 Wonderful Attraction!
 For One Night Only!
 The world renowned tragedians,
 David Garrick the younger, of Drury Lane Theatre, London,
 and
 Edmund Kean the elder,⁹ of the Royal Haymarket Theatre, White-
 chapel, Pudding Lane, Piccadilly, London, and the

9. Here, as elsewhere, the duke garbles the facts. Garrick, Edmund Kean (1787–1833), and Charles John Kean (1811–1868) were all famous tragedians at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, London.

Royal Continental Theatres, in their sublime
 Shakspearean Spectacle entitled
 The Balcony Scene
 in
 Romeo and Juliet!!!

Romeo Mr. Garrick.

Juliet Mr. Kean.

Assisted by the whole strength of the company!
 New costumes, new scenery, new appointments!

Also:

The thrilling, masterly, and blood-curdling
 Broad-sword conflict
 In Richard III.!!!

Richard III Mr. Garrick.

Richmond Mr. Kean.

also:

(by special request,)

Hamlet's Immortal Soliloquy!!

By the Illustrious Kean!

Done by him 300 consecutive nights in Paris!

For One Night Only,

On account of imperative European engagements!

Admission 25 cents; children and servants, 10 cents.

Then we went loafing around the town. The stores and houses was most all old shackly dried-up frame concerns that hadn't ever been painted; they was set up three or four foot above ground on stilts, so as to be out of reach of the water when the river was overflowed. The houses had little gardens around them, but they didn't seem to raise hardly anything in them but jimpsion weeds, and sunflowers, and ash-piles, and old curled-up boots and shoes, and pieces of bottles, and rags, and played-out tin-ware. The fences was made of different kinds of boards, nailed on at different times; and they leaned every which-way, and had gates that didn't generly have but one hinge—a leather one. Some of the fences had been whitewashed, some time or another, but the duke said it was in Clumbus's time, like enough. There was generly hogs in the garden, and people driving them out.

All the stores was along one street. They had white-domestic awnings¹ in front, and the country people hitched their horses to the awning-posts. There was empty dry-goods boxes under the awnings, and loafers roosting on them all day long, whittling them with their Barlow knives; and chawing tobacco, and gaping and yawning and stretching—a mighty ornery lot. They generly had on yellow straw hats most as wide as an umbrella, but didn't wear no coats nor waistcoats; they called one another Bill, and Buck, and Hank, and Joe, and Andy, and talked lazy and drawly, and used considerable many cuss-words. There was as many as one loafer leaning up against every awning-post, and he most always had his hands in his britches pockets, except when he fetched them out to lend a chaw of tobacco or scratch. What a body was hearing amongst them, all the time was—

1. Awnings made from canvas.

“Gimme a chaw ’v tobacker, Hank.”

“Cain’t—I hain’t got but one chaw left. Ask Bill.”

Maybe Bill he gives him a chaw; maybe he lies and says he ain’t got none. Some of them kinds of loafers never has a cent in the world, nor a chaw of tobacco of their own. They get all their chawing by borrowing—they say to a fellow, “I wisht you’d len’ me a chaw, Jack, I jist this minute give Ben Thompson the last chaw I had”—which is a lie, pretty much every time; it don’t fool anybody but a stranger; but Jack ain’t no stranger, so he says—

“You give him a chaw, did you? so did your sister’s cat’s grandmother. You pay me back the chaws you’ve awready borry’d off’n me, Lafe Buckner, then I’ll loan you one or two ton of it, and won’t charge you no back intrust, nuther.”

“Well, I *did* pay you back some of it wunst.”

“Yes, you did—’bout six chaws. You borry’d store tobacker and paid back nigger-head.”²

Store tobacco is flat black plug, but these fellows mostly chaws the natural leaf twisted. When they borrow a chaw, they don’t generly cut it off with a knife, but they set the plug in between their teeth, and gnaw with their teeth and tug at the plug with their hands till they get it in two—then sometimes the one that owns the tobacco looks mournful at it when it’s handed back, and says, sarcastic—

“Here, gimme the *chaw*, and you take the *plug*.”

All the streets and lanes was just mud, they warn’t nothing else *but* mud—as black as tar, and nigh about a foot deep in some places; and two or three inches deep in *all* the places. The hogs loafed and grunted around, everywhere. You’d see a muddy sow and a litter of pigs come lazying along the street and whollop herself right down in the way, where folks had to walk around her, and she’d stretch out, and shut her eyes, and wave her ears, whilst the pigs was milking her, and look as happy as if she was on salary. And pretty soon you’d hear a loafer sing out, “Hi! so boy! sick him, Tige!” and away the sow would go, squealing most horrible, with a dog or two swinging to each ear, and three or four dozen more a-coming; and then you would see all the loafers get up and watch the thing out of sight, and laugh at the fun and look grateful for the noise. Then they’d settle back again till there was a dog-fight. There couldn’t anything wake them up all over, and make them happy all over, like a dog-fight—unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death.

On the river front some of the houses was sticking out over the bank, and they was bowed and bent, and about ready to tumble in. The people had moved out of them. The bank was caved away under one corner of some others, and that corner was hanging over. People lived in them yet, but it was dangbersome, because sometimes a strip of land as wide as a house caves in at a time. Sometimes a belt of land a quarter of a mile deep will start in and cave along and cave along till it all caves into the river in one summer. Such a town as that has to be always moving back, and back, and back, because the river’s always gnawing at it.

The nearer it got to noon that day, the thicker and thicker was the wagons and horses in the streets, and more coming all the time. Families fetched

2. This racist term describes an inferior form of tobacco.

their dinners with them, from the country, and eat them in the wagons. There was considerable whiskey drinking going on, and I seen three fights. By-and-by somebody sings out—

“Here comes old Boggs!—in from the country for his little old monthly drunk—here he comes, boys!”

All the loafers looked glad—I reckoned they was used to having fun out of Boggs. One of them says—

“Wonder who he’s a gwyne to chaw up this time. If he’d a chawed up all the men he’s ben a gwyne to chaw up in the last twenty year, he’d have considerable reputation, now.”

Another one says, “I wisht old Boggs’d threaten me, ’cuz then I’d know I warn’t gwyne to die for a thousan’ year.”

Boggs comes a-tearing along on his horse, whooping and yelling like an Injun, and singing out—

“Cler the track, thar. I’m on the war-path, and the price uv coffins is a gwyne to raise.”

He was drunk, and weaving about in his saddle; he was over fifty year old, and had a very red face. Everybody yelled at him, and laughed at him, and sassed him, and he sassed back, and said he’d attend to them and lay them out in their regular turns, but he couldn’t wait now, because he’d come to town to kill old Colonel Sherburn, and his motto was, “meat first, and spoon vittles to top off on.”

He see me, and rode up and says—

“Whar’d you come f’m, boy? You prepared to die?”

Then he rode on. I was scared; but a man says—

“He don’t mean nothing; he’s always a carryin’ on like that, when he’s drunk. He’s the best-naturedest old fool in Arkansaw—never hurt nobody, drunk nor sober.”

Boggs rode up before the biggest store in town and bent his head down so he could see under the curtain of the awning, and yells—

“Come out here, Sherburn! Come out and meet the man you’ve swindled. You’re the houn’ I’m after, and I’m a gwyne to have you, too!”

And so he went on, calling Sherburn everything he could lay his tongue to, and the whole street packed with people listening and laughing and going on. By-and-by a proud-looking man about fifty-five—and he was a heap the best dressed man in that town, too—steps out of the store, and the crowd drops back on each side to let him come. He says to Boggs, mighty ca’m and slow—he says:

“I’m tired of this; but I’ll endure it till one o’clock. Till one o’clock, mind—no longer. If you open your mouth against me only once, after that time, you can’t travel so far but I will find you.”

Then he turns and goes in. The crowd looked mighty sober; nobody stirred, and there warn’t no more laughing. Boggs rode off blackguarding Sherburn as loud as he could yell, all down the street; and pretty soon back he comes and stops before the store, still keeping it up. Some men crowded around him and tried to get him to shut up, but he wouldn’t; they told him it would be one o’clock in about fifteen minutes, and so he *must* go home—he must go right away. But it didn’t do no good. He cussed away, with all his might, and threwed his hat down in the mud and rode over it, and pretty soon away he went a-raging down the street again, with his gray hair a-flying. Everybody

that could get a chance at him tried their best to coax him off of his horse so they could lock him up and get him sober; but it warn't no use—up the street he would tear again, and give Sherburn another cussing. By-and-by somebody says—

“Go for his daughter!—quick, go for his daughter; sometimes he'll listen to her. If anybody can persuade him, she can.”

So somebody started on a run. I walked down street a ways, and stopped. In about five or ten minutes, here comes Boggs again—but not on his horse. He was a-reeling across the street towards me, bareheaded, with a friend on both sides of him aholt of his arms and hurrying him along. He was quiet, and looked uneasy; and he warn't hanging back any, but was doing some of the hurrying himself. Somebody sings out—

“Boggs!”

I looked over there to see who said it, and it was that Colonel Sherburn. He was standing perfectly still, in the street, and had a pistol raised in his right hand—not aiming it, but holding it out with the barrel tilted up towards the sky. The same second I see a young girl coming on the run, and two men with her. Boggs and the men turned round, to see who called him, and when they see the pistol the men jumped to one side, and the pistol barrel come down slow and steady to a level—both barrels cocked. Boggs throws up both of his hands, and says, “O Lord, don't shoot!” Bang! goes the first shot, and he staggers back clawing at the air—bang! goes the second one, and he tumbles backwards onto the ground, heavy and solid, with his arms spread out. That young girl screamed out, and comes rushing, and down she throws herself on her father, crying, and saying, “Oh, he's killed him, he's killed him!” The crowd closed up around them, and shouldered and jammed one another, with their necks stretched, trying to see, and people on the inside trying to shove them back, and shouting, “Back, back! give him air, give him air!”

Colonel Sherburn he tossed his pistol onto the ground, and turned around on his heels and walked off.

They took Boggs to a little drug store, the crowd pressing around, just the same, and the whole town following, and I rushed and got a good place at the window, where I was close to him and could see in. They laid him on the floor, and put one large Bible under his head, and opened another one and spread it on his breast—but they tore open his shirt first, and I seen where one of the bullets went in. He made about a dozen long gasps, his breast lifting the Bible up when he drew in his breath, and letting it down again when he breathed it out—and after that he laid still; he was dead.³ Then they pulled his daughter away from him, screaming and crying, and took her off. She was about sixteen, and very sweet and gentle-looking, but awful pale and scared.

Well, pretty soon the whole town was there, squirming and scrouging and pushing and shoving to get at the window and have a look, but people that had the places wouldn't give them up, and folks behind them was saying all the time, “Say, now, you've looked enough, you fellows; 'taint right and 'taint fair, for you to stay thar all the time, and never give nobody a chance; other folks has their rights as well as you.”

3. Twain had witnessed a shooting very much like this one when he was ten years old. His father was the presiding judge at the trial, which ended in acquittal.

There was considerable jawing back, so I slid out, thinking maybe there was going to be trouble. The streets was full, and everybody was excited. Everybody that seen the shooting was telling how it happened, and there was a big crowd packed around each one of these fellows, stretching their necks and listening. One long lanky man, with long hair and a big white fur stove-pipe hat on the back of his head, and a crooked-handled cane, marked out the places on the ground where Boggs stood, and where Sherburn stood, and the people following him around from one place to t'other and watching everything he done, and bobbing their heads to show they understood, and stooping a little and resting their hands on their thighs to watch him mark the places on the ground with his cane; and then he stood up straight and stiff where Sherburn had stood, frowning and having his hat-brim down over his eyes, and sung out, "Boggs!" and then fetched his cane down slow to a level, and says "Bang!" staggered backwards, says "Bang!" again, and fell down flat on his back. The people that had seen the thing said he done it perfect; said it was just exactly the way it all happened. Then as much as a dozen people got out their bottles and treated him.

Well, by-and-by somebody said Sherburn ought to be lynched. In about a minute everybody was saying it; so away they went, mad and yelling, and snatching down every clothes-line they come to, to do the hanging with.

Chapter XXII

They swarmed up the street towards Sherburn's house, a-whooping and yelling and raging like Injuns, and everything had to clear the way or get run over and tromped to mush, and it was awful to see. Children was heeling it ahead of the mob, screaming and trying to get out of the way; and every window along the road was full of women's heads, and there was nigger boys in every tree, and bucks and wenches looking over every fence; and as soon as the mob would get nearly to them they would break and skaddle back out of reach. Lots of the women and girls was crying and taking on, scared most to death.

They swarmed up in front of Sherburn's palings as thick as they could jam together, and you couldn't hear yourself think for the noise. It was a little twenty-foot yard. Some sung out "Tear down the fence! tear down the fence!" Then there was a racket of ripping and tearing and smashing, and down she goes, and the front wall of the crowd begins to roll in like a wave.

Just then Sherburn steps out on to the roof of his little front porch, with a double-barrel gun in his hand, and takes his stand, perfectly ca'm and deliberate, not saying a word. The racket stopped, and the wave sucked back.

Sherburn never said a word—just stood there, looking down. The stillness was awful creepy and uncomfortable. Sherburn run his eye slow along the crowd; and wherever it struck, the people tried a little to outgaze him, but they couldn't; they dropped their eyes and looked sneaky. Then pretty soon Sherburn sort of laughed; not the pleasant kind, but the kind that makes you feel like when you are eating bread that's got sand in it.

Then he says, slow and scornful:

"The idea of *you* lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a *man*! Because you're brave enough to tar and feather poor friendless cast-out women that come along here, did

that make you think you had grit enough to lay your hands on a *man*? Why, a *man's* safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—as long as it's day-time and you're not behind him.

“Do I know you? I know you clear through. I was born and raised in the South, and I've lived in the North; so I know the average all around. The average man's a coward. In the North he lets anybody walk over him that wants to, and goes home and prays for a humble spirit to bear it. In the South one man, all by himself, has stopped a stage full of men, in the day-time, and robbed the lot. Your newspapers call you a brave people so much that you think you *are* braver than any other people—whereas you're just *as* brave, and no braver. Why don't your juries hang murderers? Because they're afraid the man's friends will shoot them in the back, in the dark—and it's just what they *would* do.

“So they always acquit; and then a *man* goes in the night, with a hundred masked cowards at his back, and lynches the rascal. Your mistake is, that you didn't bring a man with you; that's one mistake, and the other is that you didn't come in the dark, and fetch your masks. You brought *part* of a man—Buck Harkness, there—and if you hadn't had him to start you, you'd a taken it out in blowing.

“You didn't want to come. The average man don't like trouble and danger. *You* don't like trouble and danger. But if only *half* a man—like Buck Harkness, there—shouts ‘Lynch him, lynch him!’ you're afraid to back down—afraid you'll be found out to be what you are—*cowards*—and so you raise a yell, and hang yourselves onto that half-a-man's coat tail, and come raging up here, swearing what big things you're going to do. The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is—a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any *man* at the head of it, is *beneath* pitifulness. Now the thing for *you* to do, is to droop your tails and go home and crawl in a hole. If any real lynching's going to be done, it will be done in the dark, Southern fashion; and when they come they'll bring their masks, and fetch a *man* along. Now *leave*—and take your half-a-man with you”—tossing his gun up across his left arm and cocking it, when he says this.

The crowd washed back sudden, and then broke all apart and went tearing off every which way, and Buck Harkness he heeled it after them, looking tolerable cheap. I could a staid, if I'd a wanted to, but I didn't want to.

I went to the circus, and loafed around the back side till the watchman went by, and then dived in under the tent. I had my twenty-dollar gold piece and some other money, but I reckoned I better save it, because there ain't no telling how soon you are going to need it, away from home and amongst strangers, that way. You can't be too careful. I ain't opposed to spending money on circuses, when there ain't no other way, but there ain't no use in *wasting* it on them.

It was a real bully circus. It was the splendidest sight that ever was, when they all come riding in, two and two, a gentleman and lady, side by side, the men just in their drawers and under-shirts, and no shoes nor stirrups, and resting their hands on their thighs, easy and comfortable—there must a' been twenty of them—and every lady with a lovely complexion, and perfectly beautiful, and looking just like a gang of real sure-enough queens, and

dressed in clothes that cost millions of dollars, and just littered with diamonds. It was a powerful fine sight; I never see anything so lovely. And then one by one they got up and stood, and went a-weaving around the ring so gentle and wavy and graceful, the men looking ever so tall and airy and straight, with their heads bobbing and skimming along, away up there under the tent-roof, and every lady's rose-leafy dress flapping soft and silky around her hips, and she looking like the most loveliest parasol.

And then faster and faster they went, all of them dancing, first one foot stuck out in the air and then the other, the horses leaning more and more, and the ring-master going round and round the centre-pole, cracking his whip and shouting "hi!—hi!" and the clown cracking jokes behind him; and by-and-by all hands dropped the reins, and every lady put her knuckles on her hips and every gentlemen folded his arms, and then how the horses did lean over and hump themselves! And so, one after the other they all skipped off into the ring, and made the sweetest bow I ever see, and then scampered out, and everybody clapped their hands and went just about wild.

Well, all through the circus they done the most astonishing things; and all the time that clown carried on so it most killed the people. The ring-master couldn't ever say a word to him but he was back at him quick as a wink with the funniest things a body ever said; and how he ever *could* think of so many of them, and so sudden and so pat, was what I couldn't noway understand. Why, I couldn't a thought of them in a year. And by-and-by a drunk man tried to get into the ring—said he wanted to ride; said he could ride as well as anybody that ever was. They argued and tried to keep him out, but he wouldn't listen, and the whole show come to a standstill. Then the people begun to holler at him and make fun of him, and that made him mad, and he begun to rip and tear; so that stirred up the people, and a lot of men began to pile down off of the benches and swarm towards the ring, saying "Knock him down! throw him out!" and one or two women begun to scream. So, then, the ring-master he made a little speech, and said he hoped there wouldn't be no disturbance, and if the man would promise he wouldn't make no more trouble, he would let him ride, if he thought he could stay on the horse. So everybody laughed and said all right, and the man got on. The minute he was on, the horse begun to rip and tear and jump and cavort around, with two circus men hanging onto his bridle trying to hold him, and the drunk man hanging onto his neck, and his heels flying in the air every jump, and the whole crowd of people standing up shouting and laughing till the tears rolled down. And at last, sure enough, all the circus men could do, the horse broke loose, and away he went like the very nation, round and round the ring, with that sot laying down on him and hanging to his neck, with first one leg hanging most to the ground on one side, and then t'other one on t'other side, and the people just crazy. It warn't funny to me, though; I was all of a tremble to see his danger. But pretty soon he struggled up astraddle and grabbed the bridle, a-reeling this way and that; and the next minute he sprung up and dropped the bridle and stood! and the horse agoing like a house afire too. He just stood up there, a-sailing around as easy and comfortable as if he warn't ever drunk in his life—and then he begun to pull off his clothes and sling them. He shed them so thick they kind of clogged up the air, and altogether he shed seventeen suits. And then, there he was, slim and handsome, and dressed the gaudiest and prettiest you ever

saw, and he lit into that horse with his whip and made him fairly hum—and finally skipped off, and made his bow and danced off to the dressing-room, and everybody just a-howling with pleasure and astonishment.

Then the ring-master he see how he had been fooled, and he *was* the sick-est ring-master you ever see, I reckon. Why, it was one of his own men! He had got up that joke all out of his own head, and never let on to nobody. Well, I felt sheepish enough, to be took in so, but I wouldn't a been in that ring-master's place, not for a thousand dollars. I don't know; there may be bullier circuses than what that one was, but I never struck them yet. Anyways it was plenty good enough for *me*; and wherever I run across it, it can have all of *my* custom, everytime.

Well, that night we had *our* show; but there warn't only about twelve people there; just enough to pay expenses. And they laughed all the time, and that made the duke mad; and everybody left, anyway, before the show was over, but one boy which was asleep. So the duke said these Arkansaw lunkheads couldn't come up to Shakspeare; what they wanted was low comedy—and may be something ruther worse than low comedy, he reckoned. He said he could size their style. So next morning he got some big sheets of wrapping-paper and some black paint, and drew off some handbills and stuck them up all over the village. The bills said:

AT THE COURT HOUSE!

FOR 3 NIGHTS ONLY!

The World-Renowned Tragedians
DAVID GARRICK THE YOUNGER

AND

EDMUND KEAN THE ELDER!
Of the London and Continental
Theatres,

In their Thrilling Tragedy of
THE KING'S CAMELOPARD⁴

OR

THE ROYAL NONESUCH!!!

Admission 50 cents.

Then at the bottom was the biggest line of all—which said:

LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED.

“There,” says he, “if that line don't fetch them, I don't know Arkansaw!”

Chapter XXIII

Well, all day him and the king was hard at it, rigging up a stage, and a curtain, and a row of candles for footlights; and that night the house was jam full of men in no time. When the place couldn't hold no more, the duke he quit tending door and went around the back way and come onto the stage and stood up before the curtain, and made a little speech, and praised up this tragedy, and said it was the most thrillingest one that ever was; and so

4. An archaic name for a giraffe, but also describes a legendary spotted beast the size of a camel.

he went on a-bragging about the tragedy and about Edmund Kean the Elder, which was to play the main principal part in it; and at last when he'd got everybody's expectations up high enough, he rolled up the curtain, and the next minute the king come a-prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, as splendid as a rainbow. And—but never mind the rest of his outfit, it was just wild, but it was awful funny. The people most killed themselves laughing; and when the king got done capering, and capered off behind the scenes, they roared and clapped and stormed and haw-hawed till he come back and done it over again; and after that, they made him do it another time. Well, it would a made a cow laugh to see the shines that old idiot cut.

Then the duke he lets the curtain down, and bows to the people, and says the great tragedy will be performed only two nights more, on accounts of pressing London engagements, where the seats is all sold aready for it in Drury Lane; and then he makes them another bow, and says if he has succeeded in pleasing them and instructing them, he will be deeply obleeged if they will mention it to their friends and get them to come and see it.

Twenty people sings out:

"What, is it over? Is that *all*?"

The duke says yes. Then there was a fine time. Everybody sings out "sold,"⁵ and rose up mad, and was agoing for that stage and them tragedians. But a big fine-looking man jumps up on a bench, and shouts:

"Hold on! Just a word, gentlemen." They stopped to listen. "We are sold—mighty badly sold. But we don't want to be the laughing-stock of this whole town, I reckon, and never hear the last of this thing as long as we live. *No*. What we want, is to go out of here quiet, and talk this show up, and sell the *rest* of the town! Then we'll all be in the same boat. Ain't that sensible?" ("You bet it is!—the jedge is right!" everybody sings out.) "All right, then—not a word about any sell. Go along home, and advise everybody to come and see the tragedy."

Next day you couldn't hear nothing around that town but how splendid that show was. House was jammed again, that night, and we sold this crowd the same way. When me and the king and the duke got home to the raft, we all had a supper; and by-and-by, about midnight, they made Jim and me back her out and float her down the middle of the river and fetch her in and hide her about two mile below town.

The third night the house was crammed again—and they warn't newcomers, this time, but people that was at the show the other two nights. I stood by the duke at the door, and I see that every man that went in had his pockets bulging, or something muffled up under his coat—and I see it warn't no perfumery neither, not by a long sight. I smelt sickly eggs by the barrel, and rotten cabbages, and such things; and if I know the signs of a dead cat being around, and I bet I do, there was sixty-four of them went in. I shoved in there for a minute, but it was too various for me, I couldn't stand it. Well, when the place couldn't hold no more people, the duke he give a fellow a quarter and told him to tend door for him a minute, and then he started around for the stage door, I after him; but the minute we turned the corner and was in the dark, he says:

5. Cheated.

“Walk fast, now, till you get away from the houses, and then shin for the raft like the dickens was after you!”

I done it, and he done the same. We struck the raft at the same time, and in less than two seconds we was gliding down stream, all dark and still, and edging towards the middle of the river, nobody saying a word. I reckoned the poor king was in for a gaudy time of it with the audience; but nothing of the sort; pretty soon he crawls out from under the wigwam, and says:

“Well, how’d the old thing pan out this time, Duke?”

He hadn’t been up town at all.

We never showed a light till we was about ten mile below that village. Then we lit up and had a supper, and the king and the duke fairly laughed their bones loose over the way they’d served them people. The duke says:

“Greenhorns, flatheads! I knew the first house would keep mum and let the rest of the town get roped in; and I knew they’d lay for us the third night, and consider it was *their* turn now. Well, it *is* their turn, and I’d give something to know how much they’d take for it. I *would* just like to know how they’re putting in their opportunity. They can turn it into a picnic, if they want to—they brought plenty provisions.”

Them rapsCALLIONS took in four hundred and sixty-five dollars in that three nights. I never see money hauled in by the wagon-load like that, before.

By-and-by, when they was asleep and snoring, Jim says:

“Don’t it ’sprise you, de way dem kings carries on, Huck?”

“No,” I says, “it don’t.”

“Why don’t it, Huck?”

“Well, it don’t, because it’s in the breed. I reckon they’re all alike.”

“But, Huck, dese kings o’ ourn is reglar rapsCALLIONS; dat’s jist what dey is; dey’s reglar rapsCALLIONS.”

“Well, that’s what I’m a-saying; all kings is mostly rapsCALLIONS, as fur as I can make out.”

“Is dat so?”

“You read about them once—you’ll see. Look at Henry the Eight; this’n ’s a Sunday-School Superintendent to *him*. And look at Charles Second, and Louis Fourteen, and Louis Fifteen, and James Second, and Edward Second, and Richard Third, and forty more; besides all them Saxon heptarchies that used to rip around so in old times and raise Cain. My, you ought to seen old Henry the Eight when he was in bloom. He *was* a blossom. He used to marry a new wife every day, and chop off her head next morning. And he would do it just as indifferent as if he was ordering up eggs. ‘Fetch up Nell Gwynn,’ he says. They fetch her up. Next morning, ‘Chop off her head!’ And they chop it off. ‘Fetch up Jane Shore,’ he says; and up she comes. Next morning ‘Chop off her head’—and they chop it off. ‘Ring up Fair Rosamun.’ Fair Rosamun answers the bell. Next morning, ‘Chop off her head.’ And he made every one of them tell him a tale every night; and he kept that up till he had hogged a thousand and one tales that way, and then he put them all in a book, and called it Domesday Book—which was a good name and stated the case. You don’t know kings, Jim, but I know them; and this old rip of ourn is one of the cleanest I’ve struck in history. Well, Henry he takes a notion he wants to get up some trouble with this country. How does he go at it—give notice?—give the country a show? No. All of sudden he heaves all the tea in Boston Harbor overboard, and whacks out a declaration of indepen-

dence, and dares them to come on. That was *his* style—he never give anybody a chance. He had suspicions of his father, the Duke of Wellington. Well, what did he do?—ask him to show up? No—drownded him in a butt of mamsey, like a cat. Spose people left money laying around where he was—what did he do? He collared it. Spose he contracted to do a thing; and you paid him, and didn't set down there and see that he done it—what did he do? He always done the other thing. Spose he opened his mouth—what then? If he didn't shut it up powerful quick, he'd lose a lie, every time. That's the kind of a bug Henry was; and if we'd a had him along 'stead of our kings, he'd a fooled that town a heap worse than ourn done. I don't say that ourn is lambs, because they ain't, when you come right down to the cold facts; but they ain't nothing to *that* old ram, anyway. All I say is, kings is kings, and you got to make allowances. Take them all around, they're a mighty ornery lot. It's the way they're raised.”⁶

“But dis one do *smell* so like de nation, Huck.”

“Well, they all do, Jim. *We* can't help the way a king smells; history don't tell no way.”

“Now de duke, he's a tolerable likely man, in some ways.”

“Yes, a duke's different. But not very different. This one's a middling hard lot, for a duke. When he's drunk, there ain't no near-sighted man could tell him from a king.”

“Well, anyways, I doan' hanker for no mo' un um, Huck. Dese is all I kin stan'.”

“It's the way I feel, too, Jim. But we've got them on our hands, and we got to remember what they are, and make allowances. Sometimes I wish we could hear of a country that's out of kings.”

What was the use to tell Jim these warn't real kings and dukes? It wouldn't a done no good; and besides, it was just as I said; you couldn't tell them from the real kind.

I went to sleep, and Jim didn't call me when it was my turn. He often done that. When I waked up, just at day-break, he was setting there with his head down betwixt his knees, moaning and mourning to himself. I didn't take notice, nor let on. I knowed what it was about. He was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so. He was often moaning and mourning that way, nights, when he judged I was asleep, and saying “Po' little 'Lizabeth! po' little Johnny! its mighty hard; I spec' I ain't ever gwyne to see you no mo', no mo'!” He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was.

But this time I somehow got to talking to him about his wife and young ones; and by-and-by he says:

“What makes me feel so bad dis time, 'uz bekase I hear sumpn over yonder on de bank like a whack, er a slam, while ago, en it mine me er de time I treat my little 'Lizabeth so ornery. She warn't on'y 'bout fo' year ole, en she tuck de sk'yarlet-fever, en had a powful rough spell; but she got well, en one day she was a-stannin' aroun', en I says to her, I says:

6. Huck's “history” of kingly behavior is a hodgepodge of fact and fiction, drawn from English and American history.

“‘Shet de do’.

“She never done it; jis’ stood dar, kiner smilin’ up at me. It make me mad; en I says agin, mighty loud, I says:

“‘Doan’ you hear me?—shet de do!’

“She jis’ stood de same way, kiner smilin’ up. I was a-bilin’! I says:

“‘I lay I *make* you mine!’

“En wid dat I fetch’ her a slap side de head dat sont her a-sprawlin’. Den I went into de yuther room, en ’uz gone ’bout ten minutes; en when I come back, dah was dat do’ a-stannin’ open *yit*, en dat chile stannin’ mos’ right in it, a-lookin’ down and mournin’, en de tears runnin’ down. My, but I *wuz* mad, I was agwyne for de chile, but jis’ den—it was a do’ dat open innerds—jis’ den, ’long come de wind en slam it to, behine de chile, *ker-blam!*—en my lan’, de chile never move’! My breff mos’ hop outer me; en I feel so—so—I doan’ know *how* I feel. I crope out, all a-tremblin’, en crope aroun’ en open de do’ easy en slow, en poke my head in behine de chile, sof’ en still, en all uv a sudden, I says *pow!* jis’ as loud as I could yell. *She never budge!* Oh, Huck, I bust out a-cryin’ en grab her up in my arms, en say, ‘Oh, de po’ little thing! de Lord God Almighty fogive po’ ole Jim, kaze he never gwyne to fogive hissself as long’s he live!’ Oh, she was plumb deaf en dumb, Huck, plumb deaf en dumb—en I’d ben a’treat’n her so!”

Chapter XXIV

Next day, towards night, we laid up under a little willow tow-head out in the middle, where there was a village on each side of the river, and the duke and the king begun to lay out a plan for working them towns. Jim he spoke to the duke, and said he hoped it wouldn’t take but a few hours, because it got mighty heavy and tiresome to him when he had to lay all day in the wigwam tied with the rope. You see, when we left him all alone we had to tie him, because if anybody happened on him all by himself and not tied, it wouldn’t look much like he was a runaway nigger, you know. So the duke said it *was* kind of hard to have to lay roped all day, and he’d cipher out some way to get around it.

He was uncommon bright, the duke was, and he soon struck it. He dressed Jim up in King Lear’s outfit—it was a long curtain-calico gown, and a white horse-hair wig and whiskers; and then he took his theatre-paint and painted Jim’s face and hands and ears and neck all over a dead bull solid blue, like a man that’s been drowned nine days. Blamed if he warn’t the horriblemest looking outrage I ever see. Then the duke took and wrote out a sign on a shingle so—

Sick Arab—but harmless when not out of his head.

And he nailed that shingle to a lath, and stood the lath up four or five foot in front of the wigwam. Jim was satisfied. He said it was a sight better than laying tied a couple of years every day and trembling all over every time there was a sound. The duke told him to make himself free and easy, and if anybody ever come meddlin’ around, he must hop out of the wigwam, and carry on a little, and fetch a howl or two like a wild beast, and he reckoned they would light out and leave him alone. Which was sound enough judg-

ment; but you take the average man, and he wouldn't wait for him to howl. Why, he didn't only look like he was dead, he looked considerable more than that.

These rapsallions wanted to try the Nonesuch again, because there was so much money in it, but they judged it wouldn't be safe, because maybe the news might a worked along down by this time. They couldn't hit no project that suited, exactly; so at last the duke said he reckoned he'd lay off and work his brains an hour or two and see if he couldn't put up something on the Arkansaw village; and the king he allowed he would drop over to t'other village, without any plan, but just trust in Providence to lead him the profitable way—meaning the devil, I reckon. We had all bought store clothes where we stopped last; and now the king put his'n on, and he told me to put mine on. I done it, of course. The king's duds was all black, and he did look real swell and starchy. I never knowed how clothes could change a body before. Why, before, he looked like the orneriest old rip that ever was; but now, when he'd take off his new white beaver⁷ and make a bow and do a smile, he looked that grand and good and pious that you'd say he had walked right out of the ark, and maybe was old Leviticus⁸ himself. Jim cleaned up the canoe, and I got my paddle ready. There was a big steamboat laying at the shore away up under the point, about three mile above town—been there a couple of hours, taking on freight. Says the king:

“Seein' how I'm dressed, I reckon maybe I better arrive down from St. Louis or Cincinnati, or some other big place. Go for the steamboat, Huckleberry; we'll come down to the village on her.”

I didn't have to be ordered twice, to go and take a steamboat ride. I fetched the shore a half a mile above the village, and then went scooting along the bluff bank in the easy water. Pretty soon we come to a nice innocent-looking young country jake setting on a log swabbing the sweat off of his face, for it was powerful warm weather; and he had a couple of big carpet-bags by him.

“Run her nose in shore,” says the king. I done it. “Wher' you bound for, young man?”

“For the steamboat; going to Orleans.”

“Git aboard,” says the king. “Hold on a minute, my servant 'll he'p you with them bags. Jump out and he'p the gentleman, Adolphus”—meaning me, I see.

I done so, and then we all three started on again. The young chap was mighty thankful; said it was tough work toting his baggage such weather. He asked the king where he was going, and the king told him he'd come down the river and landed at the other village this morning, and now he was going up a few mile to see an old friend on a farm up there. The young fellow says:

“When I first see you, I says to myself, ‘It's Mr. Wilks, sure, and he come mighty near getting here in time.’ But then I says again, ‘No, I reckon it ain't him, or else he wouldn't be paddling up the river.’ You *ain't* him, are you?”

7. Hat.

8. The third book of the Old Testament is here confused with Noah.

"No, my name's Blodgett—Elexander Blodgett—*Reverend* Elexander Blodgett, I spose I must say, as I'm one o' the Lord's poor servants. But still I'm jist as able to be sorry for Mr. Wilks for not arriving in time, all the same, if he's missed anything by it—which I hope he hasn't."

"Well, he don't miss any property by it, because he'll get that all right; but he's missed seeing his brother Peter die—which he mayn't mind, nobody can tell as to that—but his brother would a give anything in this world to see *him* before he died; never talked about nothing else all these three weeks; hadn't seen him since they was boys together—and hadn't ever seen his brother William at all—that's the deaf and dumb one—William ain't more than thirty or thirty-five. Peter and George was the only ones that come out here; George was the married brother; him and his wife both died last year. Harvey and William's the only ones that's left now; and, as I was saying, they haven't got here in time."

"Did anybody send 'em word?"

"Oh, yes; a month or two ago, when Peter was first took; because Peter said then that he sorter felt like he warn't going to get well this time. You see, he was pretty old, and George's g'irls was too young to be much company for him, except Mary Jane the red-headed one; and so he was kinder lonesome after George and his wife died, and didn't seem to care much to live. He most desperately wanted to see Harvey—and William too, for that matter—because he was one of them kind that can't bear to make a will. He left a letter behind for Harvey, and said he'd told in it where his money was hid, and how he wanted the rest of the property divided up so George's g'irls would be all right—for George didn't leave nothing. And that letter was all they could get him to put a pen to."

"Why do you reckon Harvey don't come? Wher' does he live?"

"Oh, he lives in England—Sheffield—preaches there—hasn't ever been in this country. He hasn't had any too much time—and besides he mightn't a got the letter at all, you know."

"Too bad, too bad he couldn't a lived to see his brothers, poor soul. You going to Orleans, you say?"

"Yes, but that ain't only a part of it. I'm going in a ship, next Wednesday, for Ryo Janeero,⁹ where my uncle lives."

"It's a pretty long journey. But it'll be lovely; I wisht I was agoing. Is Mary Jane the oldest? How old is the others?"

"Mary Jane's nineteen, Susan's fifteen, and Joanna's about fourteen—that's the one that gives herself to good works and has a hare-lip."¹

"Poor things! to be left alone in the cold world so."

"Well, they could be worse off. Old Peter had friends, and they ain't going to let them come to no harm. There's Hobson, the Babtis' preacher; and Deacon Lot Hovey, and Ben Rucker, and Abner Shackelford, and Levi Bell, the lawyer; and Dr. Robinson, and their wives, and the widow Bartley, and—well, there's a lot of them; but these are the ones that Peter was thickest with, and used to write about sometimes, when he wrote home; so Harvey'll know where to look for friends when he gets here."

9. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

1. An outdated term for a cleft palate.

Well, the old man he went on asking questions till he just fairly emptied that young fellow. Blamed if he didn't inquire about everybody and everything in that blessed town, and all about all the Wilkses; and about Peter's business—which was a tanner; and about George's—which was a carpenter; and about Harvey's—which was a dissenting² minister, and so on, and so on. Then he says:

"What did you want to walk all the way up to the steamboat for?"

"Because she's a big Orleans boat, and I was afeard she mightn't stop there. When they're deep they won't stop for a hail. A Cincinnati boat will, but this is a St. Louis one."

"Was Peter Wilks well off?"

"Oh, yes, pretty well off. He had houses and land, and it's reckoned he left three or four thousand in cash hid up som'ers."

"When did you say he died?"

"I didn't say, but it was last night."

"Funeral to-morrow, likely?"

"Yes, 'bout the middle of the day."

"Well, it's all terrible sad; but we've all got to go, one time or another. So what we want to do is to be prepared; then we're all right."

"Yes, sir, it's the best way. Ma used to always say that."

When we struck the boat, she was about done loading, and pretty soon she got off. The king never said nothing about going aboard, so I lost my ride, after all. When the boat was gone, the king made me paddle up another mile to a lonesome place, and then he got ashore, and says:

"Now hustle back, right off, and fetch the duke up here, and the new carpet-bags. And if he's gone over to t'other side, go over there and git him. And tell him to git himself up regardless. Shove along, now."

I see what *he* was up to; but I never said nothing, of course. When I got back with the duke, we hid the canoe and then they set down on a log, and the king told him everything, just like the young fellow had said it—every last word of it. And all the time he was a doing it, he tried to talk like an Englishman; and he done it pretty well too, for a slouch. I can't imitate him, and so I ain't agoing to try to; but he really done it pretty good. Then he says:

"How are you on the deaf and dumb, Bilgewater?"

The duke said, leave him alone for that; said he had played a deaf and dumb person on the histrionic boards. So then they waited for a steamboat.

About the middle of the afternoon a couple of little boats come along, but they didn't come from high enough up the river; but at last there was a big one, and they hailed her. She sent out her yawl, and we went aboard, and she was from Cincinnati; and when they found we only wanted to go four or five mile, they was booming mad, and give us a cussing, and said they wouldn't land us. But the king was ca'm. He says:

"If gentlemen kin afford to pay a dollar a mile apiece, to be took on and put off in a yawl, a steamboat kin afford to carry 'em, can't it?"

So they softened down and said it was all right; and when we got to the village, they yawled us ashore. About two dozen men flocked down, when they see the yawl a coming; and when the king says—

2. Dissenting ministers belonged to Christian denominations that had separated from the Church of England.

“Kin any of you gentlemen tell me wher’ Mr. Peter Wilks lives?” they give a glance at one another, and nodded their heads, as much as to say, “What d’ I tell you?” Then one of them says, kind of soft and gentle:

“I’m sorry, sir, but the best we can do is to tell you where he *did* live yesterday evening.”

Sudden as winking, the ornery old cretur went all to smash, and fell up against the man, and put his chin on his shoulder, and cried down his back, and says:

“Alas, alas, our poor brother—gone, and we never got to see him; oh, it’s too, *too* hard!”

Then he turns around, blubbering, and makes a lot of idiotic signs to the duke on his hands, and blamed if *he* didn’t drop a carpet-bag and bust out a-crying. If they warn’t the beatenest lot, them two frauds, that ever I struck.

Well, the men gathered around, and sympathized with them, and said all sorts of kind things to them, and carried their carpet-bags up the hill for them, and let them lean on them and cry, and told the king all about his brother’s last moments, and the king he told it all over again on his hands to the duke, and both of them took on about that dead tanner like they’d lost the twelve disciples. Well, if ever I struck anything like it, I’m a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race.

Chapter XXV

The news was all over town in two minutes, and you could see the people tearing down on the run, from every which way, some of them putting on their coats as they come. Pretty soon we was in the middle of a crowd, and the noise of the tramping was like a soldier-march. The windows and dooryards was full; and every minute somebody would say, over a fence:

“Is it *them!*”

And somebody trotting along with the gang would answer back and say:

“You bet it is.”

When we got to the house, the street in front of it was packed, and the three girls was standing in the door. Mary Jane *was* red-headed, and that don’t make no difference, she was most awful beautiful, and her face and her eyes was all lit up like glory, she was so glad her uncles was come. The king he spread his arms, and Mary Jane she jumped for them, and the hare-lip jumped for the duke, and there they *had* it! Everybody most, leastways women, cried for joy to see them meet again at last and have such good times.

Then the king he hunched the duke, private—I see him do it—and then he looked around and see the coffin, over in the corner on two chairs; so then, him and the duke, with a hand across each other’s shoulder, and t’other hand to their eyes, walked slow and solemn over there, everybody dropping back to give them room, and all the talk and noise stopping, people saying “Sh!” and all the men taking their hats off and drooping their heads, so you could a heard a pin fall. And when they got there, they bent over and looked in the coffin, and took one sight, and then they bust out a crying so you could a heard them to Orleans, most; and then they put their arms around each other’s necks, and hung their chins over each other’s shoulders; and then for three minutes, or maybe four, I never see two men leak the way they done. And mind you, everybody was doing the same; and the place was that damp I never see anything

like it. Then one of them got on one side of the coffin, and t'other on t'other side, and they kneeled down and rested their foreheads on the coffin, and let on to pray all to theirselves. Well, when it come to that, it worked the crowd like you never see anything like it, and so everybody broke down and went to sobbing right out loud—the poor girls, too; and every woman, nearly, went up to the girls, without saying a word, and kissed them, solemn, on the forehead, and then put their hand on their head, and looked up towards the sky, with the tears running down, and then busted out and went off sobbing and swabbing, and give the next woman a show. I never see anything so disgusting.

Well, by-and-by the king he gets up and comes forward a little, and works himself up and slobbers out a speech, all full of tears and flapdoodle about its being a sore trial for him and his poor brother to lose the diseased, and to miss seeing diseased alive, after the long journey of four thousand mile, but it's a trial that's sweetened and sanctified to us by this dear sympathy and these holy tears, and so he thanks them out of his heart and out of his brother's heart, because out of their mouths they can't, words being too weak and cold, and all that kind of rot and slush, till it was just sickening; and then he blubbers out a pious goody-goody Amen, and turns himself loose and goes to crying fit to bust.

And the minute the words was out of his mouth somebody over in the crowd struck up the doxolojer,³ and everybody joined in with all their might, and it just warmed you up and made you feel as good as church letting out. Music is a good thing; and after all that soul-butter and hogwash, I never see it freshen up things so, and sound so honest and bully.

Then the king begins to work his jaw again, and says how him and his nieces would be glad if a few of the main principal friends of the family would take supper here with them this evening, and help set up with the ashes of the diseased; and says if his poor brother laying yonder could speak, he knows who he would name, for they was names that was very dear to him, and mentioned often in his letters; and so he will name the same, to-wit, as follows, vizz:—Rev. Mr. Hobson, and Deacon Lot Hovey, and Mr. Ben Rucker, and Abner Shackelford, and Levi Bell, and Dr. Robinson, and their wives, and the widow Bartley.

Rev. Hobson and Dr. Robinson was down to the end of the town, a-hunting together; that is, I mean the doctor was shipping a sick man to t'other world, and the preacher was pinting him right. Lawyer Bell was away up to Louisville on some business. But the rest was on hand, and so they all come and shook hands with the king and thanked him and talked to him; and then they shook hands with the duke, and didn't say nothing but just kept a-smiling and bobbing their heads like a passel of sapheads whilst he made all sorts of signs with his hands and said "Goo-goo—goo-goo-goo," all the time, like a baby that can't talk.

So the king he blatted along, and managed to inquire about pretty much everybody and dog in town, by his name, and mentioned all sorts of little things that happened one time or another in the town, or to George's family,

3. I.e., doxology, or hymn of praise to God. The particular doxology referred to here begins "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

or to Peter; and he always let on that Peter wrote him the things, but that was a lie, he got every blessed one of them out of that young flathead that we canoed up to the steamboat.

Then Mary Jane she fetched the letter her father left behind, and the king he read it out loud and cried over it. It give the dwelling-house and three thousand dollars, gold, to the girls; and it give the tanyard (which was doing a good business), along with some other houses and land (worth about seven thousand), and three thousand dollars in gold to Harvey and William, and told where the six thousand cash was hid, down cellar. So these two frauds said they'd go and fetch it up, and have everything square and above-board; and told me to come with a candle. We shut the cellar door behind us, and when they found the bag they spilt it out on the floor, and it was a lovely sight, all them yallerboys.⁴ My, the way the king's eyes did shine! He slaps the duke on the shoulder, and says:

"Oh, *this* ain't bully, nor noth'n! Oh, no, I reckon not! Why, Biljy, it beats the Nonesuch, *don't* it!"

The duke allowed it did. They pawed the yaller-boys, and sifted them through their fingers and let them jingle down on the floor; and the king says:

"It ain't no use talkin'; bein' brothers to a rich dead man, and representatives of furrin heirs that's got left, is the line for you and me, Bilge. Thish-yer comes of trust'n to Providence. It's the best way, in the long run. I've tried 'em all, and ther' ain't no better way."

Most everybody would a been satisfied with the pile, and took it on trust; but no, they must count it. So they counts it, and it comes out four hundred and fifteen dollars short. Says the king:

"Dern him, I wonder what he done with that four hundred and fifteen dollars?"

They worried over that a while, and ransacked all around for it. Then the duke says:

"Well, he was a pretty sick man, and likely he made a mistake—I reckon that's the way of it. The best way's to let it go, and keep still about it. We can spare it."

"Oh, shucks, yes, we can *spare* it. I don't k'yer noth'n 'bout that—it's the *count* I'm thinkin' about. We want to be awful square and open and above-board, here, you know. We want to lug this h'yer money up stairs and count it before everybody—then ther' ain't noth'n suspicious. But when the dead man says ther's six thous'n dollars, you know, we don't want to—"

"Hold on," says the duke. "Less make up the deffisit"—and he begun to haul out yallerboys out of his pocket.

"It's a most amaz'n good idea, duke—you *have* got a rattlin' clever head on you," says the king. "Blest if the old Nonesuch ain't a heppin' us out agin"—and *he* begun to haul out yallerjackets and stack them up.

It most busted them, but they made up the six thousand clean and clear.

"Say," says the duke, "I got another idea. Le's go up stairs and count this money, and then take and *give it to the girls.*"

"Good land, duke, lemme hug you! It's the most dazzling idea 'at ever a man struck. You have cert'nly got the most astonishin' head I ever see. Oh,

4. Gold coins.

this is the boss dodge,⁵ ther' ain't no mistake 'bout it. Let 'em fetch along their suspicions now, if they want to—this'll lay 'em out."

When we got up stairs, everybody gathered around the table, and the king he counted it and stacked it up, three hundred dollars in a pile—twenty elegant little piles. Everybody looked hungry at it, and licked their chops. Then they raked it into the bag again, and I see the king begin to swell himself up for another speech. He says:

"Friends all, my poor brother that lays yonder, has done generous by them that's left behind in the vale of sorrers. He has done generous by these-yer poor little lambs that he loved and sheltered, and that's left fatherless and motherless. Yes, and we that knowed him, knows that he would a done *more* generous by 'em if he hadn't been afeard o' woundin' his dear William and me. Now, *wouldn't* he? Ther' ain't no question 'bout it, in *my* mind. Well, then—what kind o' brothers would it be, that 'd stand in his way at sech a time? And what kind o' uncles would it be that 'd rob—yes, *rob*—sech poor sweet lambs as these 'at he loved so, at sech a time? If I know William—and I *think* I do—he—well, I'll jest ask him." He turns around and begins to make a lot of signs to the duke with his hands; and the duke he looks at him stupid and leather-headed a while, then all of sudden he seems to catch his meaning, and jumps for the king, goo-gooing with all his might for joy, and hugs him about fifteen times before he lets up. Then the king says, "I knowed it; I reckon *that* 'll convince anybody the way *he* feels about it. Here, Mary Jane, Susan, Joanner, take the money—take it *all*. It's the gift of him that lays yonder, cold but joyful."

Mary Jane she went for him, Susan and the hare-lip went for the duke, and then such another hugging and kissing I never see yet. And everybody crowded up with the tears in their eyes, and most shook the hands off of them frauds, saying all the time:

"You *dear* good souls!—how *lovely*!—how *could* you!"

Well, then, pretty soon all hands got to talking about the diseased again, and how good he was, and what a loss he was, and all that; and before long a big iron-jawed man worked himself in there from outside, and stood a listening and looking, and not saying anything; and nobody saying anything to him either, because the king was talking and they was all busy listening. The king was saying—in the middle of something he'd started in on—

"—they bein' partickler friends o' the diseased. That's why they're invited here this evenin'; but to-morrow we want *all* to come—everybody; for he respected everybody, he liked everybody, and so it's fitten that his funeral orgies sh'd be public."

And so he went a-mooning on and on, liking to hear himself talk, and every little while he fetched in his funeral orgies again, till the duke he couldn't stand it no more; so he writes on a little scrap of paper, "*obsequies*, you old fool," and folds it up and goes to goo-gooing and reaching it over people's heads to him. The king he reads it, and puts it in his pocket, and says:

5. Best confidence trick.

“Poor William, afflicted as he is, his *heart's* aluz right. Asks me to invite everybody to come to the funeral—wants me to make 'em all welcome. But he needn't a worried—it was jest what I was at.”

Then he weaves along again, perfectly ca'm, and goes to dropping in his funeral orgies again every now and then, just like he done before. And when he done it the third time, he says:

“I say orgies, not because it's the common term, because it ain't—obsequies bein' the common term—but because orgies is the right term. Obsequies ain't used in England no more, now—it's gone out. We say orgies now, in England. Orgies is better, because it means the thing you're after, more exact. It's a word that's made up out'n the Greek *orgo*, outside, open, abroad; and the Hebrew *jeesum*, to plant, cover up; hence *inter*. So, you see, funeral orgies is an open er public funeral.”⁶

He was the *worst* I ever struck. Well, the iron-jawed man he laughed right in his face. Everybody was shocked. Everybody says, “Why *doctor!*” and Abner Shackleford says:

“Why, Robinson, hain't you heard the news? This is Harvey Wilks.”

The king he smiled eager, and shoved out his flapper, and says:

“*Is* it my poor brother's dear good friend and physician? I—”

“Keep your hands off of me!” says the doctor. “*You* talk like an Englishman—*don't* you? It's the worse imitation I ever heard. *You* Peter Wilks's brother. You're a fraud, that's what you are!”

Well, how they all took on! They crowded around the doctor, and tried to quiet him down, and tried to explain to him, and tell him how Harvey'd showed in forty ways that he *was* Harvey, and knowed everybody by name, and the names of the very dogs, and begged and *begged* him not to hurt Harvey's feelings and the poor girls' feelings, and all that; but it warn't no use, he stormed right along, and said any man that pretended to be an Englishman and couldn't imitate the lingo no better than what he did, was a fraud and a liar. The poor girls was hanging to the king and crying; and all of a sudden the doctor ups and turns on *them*. He says:

“I was your father's friend, and I'm your friend; and I warn you *as* a friend, and an honest one, that wants to protect you and keep you out of harm and trouble, to turn your backs on that scoundrel, and have nothing to do with him, the ignorant tramp, with his idiotic Greek and Hebrew as he calls it. He is the thinnest kind of an impostor—has come here with a lot of empty names and facts which he has picked up somewheres, and you take them for *proofs*, and are helped to fool yourselves by these foolish friends here, who ought to know better. Mary Jane Wilks, you know me for your friend, and for your unselfish friend, too. Now listen to me; turn this pitiful rascal out—I *beg* you to do it. Will you?”

Mary Jane straightened herself up, and my, but she was handsome! She says:

“*Here* is my answer.” She hove up the bag of money and put it in the king's hands, and says, “Take this six thousand dollars, and invest it for me and my sisters any way you want to, and don't give us no receipt for it.”

6. The comic etymology was a stock-in-trade of the southwestern humorists and is still popular in comedy routines.

Then she put her arm around the king on one side, and Susan and the hare-lip done the same on the other. Everybody clapped their hands and stomped on the floor like a perfect storm, whilst the king held up his head and smiled proud. The doctor says:

“All right, I wash *my* hands of the matter. But I warn you all that a time’s coming when you’re going to feel sick whenever you think of this day”—and away he went.

“All right, doctor,” says the king, kinder mocking him, “we’ll try and get ‘em to send for you”—which made them all laugh, and they said it was a prime good hit.

Chapter XXVI

Well, when they was all gone, the king he asks Mary Jane how they was off for spare rooms, and she said she had one spare room, which would do for Uncle William, and she’d give her own room to Uncle Harvey, which was a little bigger, and she would turn into the room with her sisters and sleep on a cot; and up garret was a little cubby, with a pallet in it. The king said the cubby would do for his valley—meaning me.

So Mary Jane took us up, and she showed them their rooms, which was plain but nice. She said she’d have her frocks and a lot of other traps took out of her room if they was in Uncle Harvey’s way, but he said they warn’t. The frocks was hung along the wall, and before them was a curtain made out of calico that hung down to the floor. There was an old hair trunk in one corner, and a guitar box in another, and all sorts of little knickknacks and jimcracks around, like girls brisken up a room with. The king said it was all the more homely and more pleasanter for these fixings, and so don’t disturb them. The duke’s room was pretty small, but plenty good enough, and so was my cubby.

That night they had a big supper, and all them men and women was there, and I stood behind the king and the duke’s chairs and waited on them, and the niggers waited on the rest. Mary Jane she set at the head of the table, with Susan along side of her, and said how bad the biscuits was, and how mean the preserves was, and how ornery and tough the fried chickens was—and all that kind of rot, the way women always do for to force out compliments; and the people all knowed everything was tip-top, and said so—said “How *do* you get biscuits to brown so nice?” and “Where, for the land’s sake *did* you get these amaz’n pickles?” and all that kind of humbug talky-talk, just the way people always does at a supper, you know.

And when it was all done, me and the hare-lip had supper in the kitchen off of the leavings, whilst the others was helping the niggers clean up the things. The hare-lip she got to pumping me about England, and blest if I didn’t think the ice was getting mighty thin, sometimes. She says:

“Did you ever see the king?”

“Who? William Fourth?⁷ Well, I bet I have—he goes to our church.” I knowed he was dead years ago, but I never let on. So when I says he goes to our church, she says:

7. William IV of England (1765–1837) became king in 1830.

“What—regular?”

“Yes—regular. His pew’s right over opposite ourn—on ’tother side the pulpit.”

“I thought he lived in London?”

“Well, he does. Where *would* he live?”

“But I thought *you* lived in Sheffield?”⁸

I see I was up a stump. I had to let on to get choked with a chicken bone, so as to get time to think how to get down again. Then I says:

“I mean he goes to our church regular when he’s in Sheffield. That’s only in the summer-time, when he comes there to take the sea baths.”

“Why, how you talk—Sheffield ain’t on the sea.”

“Well, who said it was?”

“Why, you did.”

“I *didn’t*, nuther.”

“You did!”

“I didn’t.”

“You did.”

“I never said nothing of the kind.”

“Well, what *did* you say, then?”

“Said he come to take the sea *baths*—that’s what I said.”

“Well, then! how’s he going to take the sea baths if it ain’t on the sea?”

“Looky here,” I says, “did you ever see any Congress water?”⁹

“Yes.”

“Well, did you have to go to Congress to get it?”

“Why, no.”

“Well, neither does William Fourth have to go to the sea to get a sea bath.”

“How does he get it, then?”

“Gets it the way people down here gets Congress water—in barrels. There in the palace at Sheffield they’ve got furnaces, and he wants his water hot. They can’t bile that amount of water away off there at the sea. They haven’t got no conveniences for it.”

“Oh, I see, now. You might a said that in the first place and saved time.”

When she said that, I see I was out of the woods again, and so I was comfortable and glad. Next, she says:

“Do you go to church, too?”

“Yes—regular.”

“Where do you set?”

“Why, in our pew.”

“*Whose* pew?”

“Why, *ourn*—your Uncle Harvey’s.”

“His’n? What does *he* want with a pew?”

“Wants it to set in. What did you *reckon* he wanted with it?”

“Why, I thought he’d be in the pulpit.”

Rot him, I forgot he was a preacher. I see I was up a stump again, so I played another chicken bone and got another think. Then I says:

“Blame it, do you suppose there ain’t but one preacher to a church?”

“Why, what do they want with more?”

8. Industrial city north of London and many miles from the sea.

9. Famous mineral water from the Congress Spring in Saratoga Springs, New York.

"What!—to preach before a king? I never see such a girl as you. They don't have no less than seventeen."

"Seventeen! My land! Why, I wouldn't set out such a string as that, not if I *never* got to glory. It must take 'em a week."

"Shucks, they don't *all* of 'em preach the same day—only *one* of 'em."

"Well, then, what does the rest of 'em do?"

"Oh, nothing much. Loll around, pass the plate—and one thing or another. But mainly they don't do nothing."

"Well, then, what are they *for*?"

"Why, they're for *style*. Don't you know nothing?"

"Well, I don't *want* to know no such foolishness as that. How is servants treated in England? Do they treat 'em better 'n we treat our niggers?"

"No! A servant ain't nobody there. They treat them worse than dogs."

"Don't they give 'em holidays, the way we do, Christmas and New Year's week, and Fourth of July?"

"Oh, just listen! A body could tell *you* hain't ever been to England, by that. Why, Hare-l—why, Joanna, they never see a holiday from year's end to year's end; never go to the circus, nor theatre, nor nigger shows¹ nor nowheres."

"Nor church?"

"Nor church."

"But *you* always went to church."

Well, I was gone up again. I forgot I was the old man's servant. But next minute I whirled in on a kind of an explanation how a valley was different from a common servant, and *had* to go to church whether he wanted to or not, and set with the family, on account of it's being the law. But I didn't do it pretty good, and when I got done I see she warn't satisfied. She says:

"Honest injun, now, hain't you been telling me a lot of lies?"

"Honest injun," says I.

"None of it at all?"

"None of it at all. Not a lie in it," says I.

"Lay your hand on this book and say it."

I see it warn't nothing but a dictionary, so I laid my hand on it and said it. So then she looked a little better satisfied, and says:

"Well, then, I'll believe some of it; but I hope to gracious if I'll believe the rest."

"What is it you won't believe, Joe?" says Mary Jane, stepping in with Susan behind her. "It ain't right nor kind for you to talk so to him, and him a stranger and so far from his people. How would you like to be treated so?"

"That's always your way, Maim—always sailing in to help somebody before they're hurt. I hain't done nothing to him. He's told some stretchers, I reckon; and I said I wouldn't swallow it all; and that's every bit and grain I *did* say. I reckon he can stand a little thing like that, can't he?"

"I don't care whether 'twas little or whether 'twas big, he's here in our house and a stranger, and it wasn't good of you to say it. If you was in his place, it would make you feel ashamed; and so you ought'nt to say a thing to another person that will make *them* feel ashamed."

1. Minstrel shows.

“Why, Maim, he said—”

“It don’t make no difference what he *said*—that ain’t the thing. The thing is for you to treat him *kind*, and not be saying things to make him remember he ain’t in his own country and amongst his own folks.”

I says to myself, *this* is a girl that I’m letting that old reptle rob her of her money!

Then Susan *she* waltzed in; and if you’ll believe me, she did give Hare-lip hark from the tomb!²

Says I to myself, And this is *another* one that I’m letting him rob her of her money!

Then Mary Jane she took another inning, and went in sweet and lovely again—which was her way—but when she got done there warn’t hardly anything left o’ poor Hare-lip. So she hollered.

“All right, then,” says the other girls, “you just ask his pardon.”

She done it, too. And she done it beautiful. She done it so beautiful it was good to hear; and I wished I could tell her a thousand lies, so she could do it again.

I says to myself, this is *another* one that I’m letting him rob her of her money. And when she got through, they all jest laid theirselves out to make me feel at home and know I was amongst friends. I felt so ornery and low down and mean, that I says to myself, My mind’s made up; I’ll hive that money for them or bust.

So then I lit out—for bed, I said, meaning some time or another. When I got by myself, I went to thinking the thing over. I says to myself, shall I go to that doctor, private, and blow on these frauds? No—that won’t do. He might tell who told him; then the king and the duke would make it warm for me. Shall I go, private, and tell Mary Jane? No—I dasn’t do it. Her face would give them a hint, sure; they’ve got the money, and they’d slide right out and get away with it. If she was to fetch in help, I’d get mixed up in the business, before it was done with, I judge. No, there ain’t no good way but one. I got to steal that money, somehow; and I got to steal it some way that they won’t suspicion that I done it. They’ve got a good thing, here; and they ain’t agoing to leave till they’ve played this family and this town for all they’re worth, so I’ll find a chance time enough. I’ll steal it, and hide it; and by-and-by, when I’m away down the river, I’ll write a letter and tell Mary Jane where it’s hid. But I better hive it to-night, if I can, because the doctor maybe hasn’t let up as much as he lets on he has; he might scare them out of here, yet.

So, thinks I, I’ll go and search them rooms. Up stairs the hall was dark, but I found the duke’s room, and started to paw around it with my hands; but I recollected it wouldn’t be much like the king to let anybody else take care of that money but his own self; so then I went to his room and begun to paw around there. But I see I couldn’t do nothing without a candle, and I dasn’t light one, of course. So I judged I’d got to do the other thing—lay for them, and eavesdrop. About that time, I hears their footsteps coming, and was going to skip under the bed; I reached for it, but it wasn’t where I thought it would be; but I touched the curtain that hid Mary Jane’s frocks,

2. A scolding. The phrase refers to a hymn, “Hark! From the Tomb a Doleful Sound,” by Isaac Watts (1674–1748).

so I jumped in behind that and snuggled in amongst the gowns, and stood there perfectly still.

They come in and shut the door; and the first thing the duke done was to get down and look under the bed. Then I was glad I hadn't found the bed when I wanted it. And yet, you know, it's kind of natural to hide under the bed when you are up to anything private. They sets down, then, and the king says:

"Well, what is it? and cut it middlin' short, because it's better for us to be down there a whoopin'-up the mournin', than up here givin' 'em a chance to talk us over."

"Well, this is it, Capet. I ain't easy; I ain't comfortable. That doctor lays on my mind. I wanted to know your plans. I've got a notion, and I think it's a sound one."

"What is it, duke?"

"That we better glide out of this, before three in the morning, and clip it down the river with what we've got. Specially, seeing we got it so easy—*given* back to us, flung at our heads, as you may say, when of course we allowed to have to steal it back. I'm for knocking off and lighting out."

That made me feel pretty bad. About an hour or two ago, it would a been a little different, but now it made me feel bad and disappointed. The king rips out and says:

"What! And not sell out the rest o' the property? March off like a passel o' fools and leave eight or nine thous'n dollars' worth o' property layin' around jest sufferin' to be scooped in?—and all good salable stuff, too."

The duke he grumbled; said the bag of gold was enough, and he didn't want to go no deeper—didn't want to rob a lot of orphans of *everything* they had.

"Why, how you talk!" says the king. "We shan't rob 'em of nothing at all but jest this money. The people that *buys* the property is the sufferers; because as soon's it's found out 'at we didn't own it—which won't be long after we've slid—the sale won't be valid, and it'll all go back to the estate. These-yer orphans 'll git their house back agin, and that's enough for *them*; they're young and sry, and k'n easy earn a livin'. *They* ain't agoing to suffer. Why, jest think—there's thous'n's and thous'n's that ain't nigh so well off. Bless you, *they* ain't got noth'n to complain of."

Well, the king he talked him blind; so at last he give in, and said all right, but said he believed it was blame foolishness to stay, and that doctor hangin' over them. But the king says:

"Cuss the doctor! What do we k'yer for *him*? Hain't we got all the fools in town on our side? and ain't that a big enough majority in any town?"

So they got ready to go down stairs again. The duke says:

"I don't think we put that money in a good place."

That cheered me up. I'd begun to think I warn't going to get a hint of no kind to help me. The king says:

"Why?"

"Because Mary Jane 'll be in mourning from this out; and first you know the nigger that does up the rooms will get an order to box these duds up and put 'em away; and do you reckon a nigger can run across money and not borrow some of it?"

"Your head's level, agin, duke," says the king; and he come a fumbling under the curtain two or three foot from where I was. I stuck tight to the

wall, and kept mighty still, though quivery; and I wondered what them fellows would say to me if they caught me; and I tried to think what I'd better do if they did catch me. But the king he got the bag before I could think more than about a half a thought, and he never suspicioned I was around. They took and shoved the bag through a rip in the straw tick that was under the feather bed, and crammed it in a foot or two amongst the straw and said it was all right, now, because a nigger only makes up the feather bed, and don't turn over the straw tick only about twice a year, and so it warn't in no danger of getting stole, now.

But I knowed better. I had it out of there before they was halfway down stairs. I groped along up to my cubby, and hid it there till I could get a chance to do better. I judged I better hide it outside of the house somewheres, because if they missed it they would give the house a good ransacking. I knowed that very well. Then I turned in, with my clothes all on; but I couldn't a gone to sleep, if I'd a wanted to, I was in such a sweat to get through with the business. By-and-by I heard the king and the duke come up; so I rolled off of my pallet and laid with my chin at the top of my ladder and waited to see if anything was going to happen. But nothing did.

So I held on till all the late sounds had quit and the early ones hadn't begun, yet; and then I slipped down the ladder.

Chapter XXVII

I crept to their doors and listened; they was snoring, so I tip-toed along, and got down stairs all right. There warn't a sound anywheres. I peeped through a crack of the dining-room door, and see the men that was watching the corpse all sound asleep on their chairs. The door was open into the parlor, where the corpse was laying, and there was a candle in both rooms, I passed along, and the parlor door was open; but I see there warn't nobody in there but the remainders of Peter; so I shoved on by; but the front door was locked, and the key wasn't there. Just then I heard somebody coming down the stairs, back behind me. I run in the parlor, and took a swift look around, and the only place I see to hide the bag was in the coffin. The lid was shoved along about a foot, showing the dead man's face down in there, with a wet cloth over it, and his shroud on. I tucked the money-bag in under the lid, just down beyond where his hands was crossed, which made me creep, they was so cold, and then I run back across the room and in behind the door.

The person coming was Mary Jane. She went to the coffin, very soft, and kneeled down and looked in; then she put up her handkerchief and I see she begun to cry, though I couldn't hear her, and her back was to me. I slid out, and as I passed the dining-room I thought I'd make sure them watchers hadn't seen me; so I looked through the crack and everything was all right. They hadn't stirred.

I slipped up to bed, feeling ruther blue, on accounts of the thing playing out that way after I had took so much trouble and run so much resk about it. Says I, if it could stay where it is, all right; because when we get down the river a hundred mile or two, I could write back to Mary Jane, and she could dig him up again and get it; but that ain't the thing that's going to happen;

the thing that's going to happen is, the money 'll be found when they come to screw on the lid. Then the king 'll get it again, and it 'll be a long day before he gives anybody another chance to smouch it from him. Of course I *wanted* to slide down and get it out of there, but I dasn't try it. Every minute it was getting earlier, now, and pretty soon some of them watchers would begin to stir, and I might get caught—caught with six thousand dollars in my hands that nobody hadn't hired me to take care of. I don't wish to be mixed up in no such business as that, I says to myself.

When I got down stairs in the morning, the parlor was shut up, and the watchers was gone. There warn't nobody around but the family and the widow Bartley and our tribe. I watched their faces to see if anything had been happening, but I couldn't tell.

Towards the middle of the day the undertaker come, with his man, and they set the coffin in the middle of the room on a couple of chairs, and then set all our chairs in rows, and borrowed more from the neighbors till the hall and the parlor and the dining-room was full. I see the coffin lid was the way it was before, but I dasn't go to look in under it, with folks around.

Then the people begun to flock in, and the beats and the girls took seats in the front row at the head of the coffin, and for a half an hour the people filed around slow, in single rank, and looked down at the dead man's face a minute, and some dropped in a tear, and it was all very still and solemn, only the girls and the beats holding handkerchiefs to their eyes and keeping their heads bent, and sobbing a little. There warn't no other sound but the scraping of the feet on the floor, and blowing noses—because people always blows them more at a funeral than they do at other places except church.

When the place was packed full, the undertaker he slid around in his black gloves with his softy soothing ways, putting on the last touches, and getting people and things all shipshape and comfortable, and making no more sound than a cat. He never spoke; he moved people around, he squeezed in late ones, he opened up passage-ways, and done it all with nods, and signs with his hands. Then he took his place over against the wall. He was the softest, glidingest, stealthiest man I ever see; and there warn't no more smile to him than there is to a ham.

They had borrowed a melodeum³—a sick one; and when everything was ready, a young woman set down and worked it, and it was pretty skreeky and colicky, and everybody joined in and sung, and Peter was the only one that had a good thing, according to my notion. Then the Reverend Hobson opened up, slow and solemn, and begun to talk; and straight off the most outrageous row busted out in the cellar a body ever heard; it was only one dog, but he made a most powerful racket, and he kept it up, right along; the parson he had to stand there, over the coffin, and wait—you couldn't hear yourself think. It was right down awkward, and nobody didn't seem to know what to do. But pretty soon they see that long-legged undertaker make a sign to the preacher as much as to say, "Don't you worry—just depend on me." Then he stooped down and begun to glide along the wall, just his shoulders showing

3. A melodeon, small keyboard organ.

over the people's heads. So he glided along, and the pow-wow and racket getting more and more outrageous all the time; and at last, when he had gone around two sides of the room, he disappears down cellar. Then, in about two seconds we heard a whack, and the dog he finished up with a most amazing howl or two, and then everything was dead still, and the parson begun his solemn talk where he left off. In a minute or two here comes this undertaker's back and shoulders gliding along the wall again; and so he glided, and glided, around three sides of the room, and then rose up, and shaded his mouth with his hands, and stretched his neck out towards the preacher, over the people's heads, and says, in a kind of a coarse whisper, "*He had a rat!*" Then he drooped down and glided along the wall again to his place. You could see it was a great satisfaction to the people, because naturally they wanted to know. A little thing like that don't cost nothing, and it's just the little things that makes a man to be looked up to and liked. There warn't no more popular man in town than what that undertaker was.

Well, the funeral sermon was very good, but pison long and tiresome; and then the king he shoved in and got off some of his usual rubbage, and at last the job was through, and the undertaker begun to sneak up on the coffin with his screw-driver. I was in a sweat then, and watched him pretty keen. But he never meddled at all; just slid the lid along, as soft as mush, and screwed it down tight and fast. So there I was! I didn't know whether the money was in there, or not. So, says I, spose somebody has hogged that bag on the sly?—now how do I know whether to write to Mary Jane or not? 'Spose she dug him up and didn't find nothing—what would she think of me? Blame it, I says, I might get hunted up and jailed; I'd better lay low and keep dark, and not write at all; the thing's awful mixed, now; trying to better it, I've worsened it a hundred times, and I wish to goodness I'd just let it alone, dad fetch the whole business!

They buried him, and we come back home, and I went to watching faces again—I couldn't help it, and I couldn't rest easy. But nothing come of it; the faces didn't tell me nothing.

The king he visited around, in the evening, and sweetened every body up, and made himself ever so friendly; and he give out the idea that his congregation over in England would be in a sweat about him, so he must hurry and settle up the estate right away, and leave for home. He was very sorry he was so pushed, and so was everybody; they wished he could stay longer, but they said they could see it couldn't be done. And he said of course him and William would take the girls home with them; and that pleased everybody too, because then the girls would be well fixed, and amongst their own relations; and it pleased the girls, too—tickled them so they clean forgot they ever had a trouble in the world; and told him to sell out as quick as he wanted to, they would be ready. Them poor things was that glad and happy it made my heart ache to see them getting fooled and lied to so, but I didn't see no safe way for me to chip in and change the general tune.

Well, blamed if the king didn't bill the house and the niggers and all the property for auction straight off—sale two days after the funeral; but anybody could buy private beforehand if they wanted to.

So the next day after the funeral, along about noontime, the girls' joy got the first jolt; a couple of nigger traders come along, and the king sold them

the niggers reasonable, for three-day drafts⁴ as they called it, and away they went, the two sons up the river to Memphis, and their mother down the river to Orleans. I thought them poor girls and them niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around each other, and took on so it most made me down sick to see it. The girls said they hadn't ever dreamed of seeing the family separated or sold away from the town. I can't ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying; and I reckon I couldn't a stood it all but would a had to bust out and tell on our gang if I hadn't knowed the sale warn't no account and the niggers would be back home in a week or two.

The thing made a big stir in the town, too, and a good many come out flatfooted and said it was scandalous to separate the mother and the children that way. It injured the frauds some; but the old fool he bulled right along, spite of all the duke could say or do, and I tell you the duke was powerful uneasy.

Next day was auction day. About broad-day in the morning, the king and the duke come up in the garret and woke me up, and I see by their look that there was trouble. The king says:

"Was you in my room night before last?"

"No, your majesty"—which was the way I always called him when nobody but our gang warn't around.

"Was you in there yisterday er last night?"

"No, your majesty."

"Honor bright, now—no lies."

"Honor bright, your majesty, I'm telling you the truth. I hain't been anear your room since Miss Mary Jane took you and the duke and showed it to you."

The duke says:

"Have you seen anybody else go in there?"

"No, your grace, not as I remember, I believe."

"Stop and think."

I studied a while, and see my chance, then I says:

"Well, I see the niggers go in there several times."

Both of them give a little jump; and looked like they hadn't ever expected it, and then like they *had*. Then the duke says:

"What, *all* of them?"

"No—leastways not all at once. That is, I don't think I ever see them all come *out* at once but just one time."

"Hello—when was that?"

"It was the day we had the funeral. In the morning. It warn't early, because I overslept. I was just starting down the ladder, and I see them."

"Well, go on, *go* on—what did they do? How'd they act?"

"They didn't do nothing. And they didn't act anyway, much, as fur as I see. They tip-toed away; so I seen, easy enough, that they'd shoved in there to do up your majesty's room, or something, sposing you was up; and found

4. Bank drafts or checks payable three days later.

you *warn't* up, and so they was hoping to slide out of the way of trouble without waking you up, if they hadn't already waked you up."

"Great guns, *this* is a go!" says the king; and both of them looked pretty sick, and tolerable silly. They stood there a thinking and scratching their heads, a minute, and then the duke he bust into a kind of a little raspy chuckle, and says:

"It does beat all, how neat the niggers played their hand. They let on to be sorry they was going out of this region! and I believed they *was* sorry. And so did you, and so did everybody. Don't ever tell *me* any more that a nigger ain't got any histrionic talent. Why, the way they played that thing, it would fool *anybody*. In my opinion there's a fortune in 'em. If I had capital and a theatre, I wouldn't want a better lay out than that—and here we've gone and sold 'em for a song. Yes, and ain't privileged to sing the song, yet. Say, where is that song?—that draft."

"In the bank for to be collected. Where *would* it be?"

"Well, *that's* all right then, thank goodness."

Says I, kind of timid-like:

"Is something gone wrong?"

The king whirls on me and rips out:

"None o' your business! You keep your head shet, and mind y'r own affairs—if you got any. Long as you're in this town, don't you forgit *that*, you hear?" Then he says to the duke, "We got to jest swaller it, and say noth'n: mum's the word for *us*."

As they was starting down the ladder, the duke he chuckles again, and says:

"Quick sales *and* small profits! It's a good business—yes."

The king snarls around on him and says,

"I was trying to do for the best, in sellin' 'm out so quick. If the profits has turned out to be none, lackin' considable, and none to carry, is it my fault any more'n it's yourn?"

"Well, *they'd* be in this house yet, and we *wouldn't* if I could a got my advice listened to."

The king sassed back, as much as was safe for him, and then swapped around and lit into *me* again. He give me down the banks⁵ for not coming and *telling* him I see the niggers come out of his room acting that way—said any fool would a *knowed* something was up. And then waltzed in and cussed *himself* a while; and said it all come of him not laying late and taking his natural rest that morning, and he'd be blamed if he'd ever do it again. So they went off a jawing; and I felt dreadful glad I'd worked it all off onto the niggers and yet hadn't done the niggers no harm by it.

Chapter XXVIII

By-and-by it was getting-up time; so I come down the ladder and started for down stairs, but as I come to the girls' room, the door was open, and I see Mary Jane setting by her old hair trunk, which was open and she'd been packing things in it—getting ready to go to England. But she had stopped

5. To scream insults or criticism (slang).

now, with a folded gown in her lap, and had her face in her hands, crying. I felt awful bad to see it; of course anybody would. I went in there, and says:

"Miss Mary Jane, you can't abear to see people in trouble, and *I* can't—most always. Tell me about it."

So she done it. And it was the niggers—I just expected it. She said the beautiful trip to England was most about spoiled for her; she didn't know *how* she was ever going to be happy there, knowing the mother and the children warn't ever going to see each other no more—and then busted out bitterer than ever, and flung up her hands, and says:

"Oh, dear, dear, to think they ain't *ever* going to see each other any more!"

"But they *will*—and inside of two weeks—and I *know* it!" says I.

Laws it was out before I could think!—and before I could budge, she throws her arms around my neck, and told me to say it *again*, say it *again*, say it *again*!

I see I had spoke too sudden, and said too much, and was in a close place. I asked her to let me think a minute; and she set there, very impatient and excited, and handsome, but looking kind of happy and eased-up, like a person that's had a tooth pulled out. So I went to studying it out. I says to myself, I reckon a body that ups and tells the truth when he is in a tight place, is taking considerable many resks, though I ain't had no experience, and can't say for certain; but it looks so to me, anyway; and yet here's a case where I'm blest if it don't look to me like the truth is better, and actuly *safer*, than pa lie. I must lay it by in my mind, and think it over some time or other, it's so kind of strange and unregular. I never see nothing like it. Well, I says to myself at last, I'm agoing to chance it; I'll up and tell the truth this time, though it does seem most like setting down on a kag of powder and touching it off just to see where you'll go to. Then I says:

"Miss Mary Jane, is there any place out of town a little ways, where you could go and stay three or four days?"

"Yes—Mr. Lothrop's. Why?"

"Never mind why, yet. If I'll tell you how I know the niggers will see each other again—inside of two weeks—here in this house—and *prove* how I know it—will you go to Mr. Lothrop's and stay four days?"

"Four days!" she says; "I'll stay a year!"

"All right," I says, "I don't want nothing more out of *you* than just your word—I druther have it than another man's kiss-the-Bible." She smiled, and reddened up very sweet, and I says, "If you don't mind it, I'll shut the door—and bolt it."

Then I come back and set down again, and says:

"Don't you holler. Just set still, and take it like a man. I got to tell the truth, and you want to brace up, Miss Mary, because it's a bad kind, and going to be hard to take, but there ain't no help for it. These uncles of yourn ain't no uncles at all—they're a couple of frauds—regular dead-beats. There, now we're over the worst of it—you can stand the rest middling easy."

It jolted her up like everything, of course; but I was over the shoal water now, so I went right along, her eyes a blazing higher and higher all the time, and told her every blame thing, from where we first struck that young fool going up to the steamboat, clear through to where she flung herself onto the king's breast at the front door and he kissed her sixteen or seventeen times—and then up she jumps, with her face afire like sunset, and says:

"The brute! Come—don't waste a minute—not a *second*—we'll have them tarred and feathered, and flung in the river!"⁶

Says I;

"Cert'nly. But do you mean, *before* you go to Mr. Lothrop's, or—"

"Oh," she says, "what am I *thinking* about!" she says, and set right down again. "Don't mind what I said—please don't—you *won't*, now, *will* you?" Laying her silky hand on mine in that kind of a way that I said I would die first. "I never thought, I was so stirred up," she says; "now go on, and I won't do so any more. You tell me what to do, and whatever you say, I'll do it."

"Well," I says, "it's a rough gang, them two frauds, and I'm fixed so I got to travel with them a while longer, whether I want to or not—I druther not tell you *why*—and if you was to blow on them this town would get me out of their claws, and *I'd* be all right, but there'd be another person that you don't know about who'd be in big trouble. Well, we got to save *him*, hain't we? Of course. Well, then, we won't blow on them."

Saying them words put a good idea in my head. I see how maybe I could get me and Jim rid of the frauds; get them jailed here, and then leave. But I didn't want to run the raft in day-time, without anybody aboard to answer questions but me; so I didn't want the plan to begin working till pretty late to-night. I says:

"Miss Mary Jane, I'll tell you what we'll do—and you won't have to stay at Mr. Lothrop's so long, nuther. How fur is it?"

"A little short of four miles—right out in the country, back here."

"Well, that'll answer. Now you go along out there, and lay low till nine or half-past, to-night, and then get them to fetch you home again—tell them you've thought of something. If you get here before eleven, put a candle in this window, and if I don't turn up, wait *till* eleven, and *then* if I don't turn up it means I'm gone, and out of the way, and safe. Then you come out and spread the news around, and get these beats jailed."

"Good," she says, "I'll do it."

"And if it just happens so that I don't get away, but get took up along with them, you must up and say I told you the whole thing beforehand, and you must stand by me all you can."

"Stand by you, indeed I will. They sha'n't touch a hair of your head!" she says, and I see her nostrils spread and her eyes snap when she said it, too.

"If I get away, I sha'n't be here," I says, "to prove these rapscallions ain't your uncles, and I couldn't do it if I *was* here. I could swear they was beats and bummers, that's all; though that's worth something. Well, there's others can do that better than what I can—and they're people that ain't going to be doubted as quick as I'd be. I'll tell you how to find them. Gimme a pencil and a piece of paper. There—'*Royal Nonesuch, Bricksville.*' Put it away, and don't lose it. When the court wants to find out something about these two, let them send up to Bricksville and say they've got the men that played the Royal Nonesuch, and ask for some witnesses—why, you'll have that entire town down here before you can hardly wink, Miss Mary. And they'll come a-biling, too."

6. The victim of this fairly commonplace mob punishment was tied to a rail, smeared with hot tar, and covered with feathers. Then the victim would be ridden out of town on the rail to the jeers of the mob.

I judged we had got everything fixed about right, now. So I says:

"Just let the auction go right along, and don't worry. Nobody don't have to pay for the things they buy till a whole day after the auction, on accounts of the short notice, and they ain't going out of this till they get that money—and the way we've fixed it the sale ain't going to count, and they ain't going to *get* no money. It's just like the way it was with the niggers—it warn't no sale, and the niggers will be back before long. Why, they can't collect the money for the *niggers*, yet—they're in the worst kind of a fix, Miss Mary."

"Well," she says, "I'll run down to breakfast now, and then I'll start straight for Mr. Lothrop's."

"Deed, *that* ain't the ticket, Miss Mary Jane," I says, "by no manner of means; go *before* breakfast."

"Why?"

"What did you reckon I wanted you to go at all for, Miss Mary?"

"Well, I never thought—and come to think, I don't know. What was it?"

"Why, it's because you ain't one of these leather-face people. I don't want no better book than what your face is. A body can set down and read it off like coarse paint. Do you reckon you can go and face your uncles, when they come to kiss you good-morning, and never—"

"There, there, don't! Yes, I'll go before breakfast—I'll be glad to. And leave my sisters with them?"

"Yes—never mind about them. They've got to stand it yet a while. They might suspicion something if all of you was to go. I don't want you to see them, nor your sisters, nor nobody in this town—if a neighbor was to ask how is your uncles this morning, your face would tell something. No, you go right along, Miss Mary Jane, and I'll fix it with all of them. I'll tell Miss Susan to give your love to your uncles and say you've went away for a few hours for to get a little rest and change, or to see a friend, and you'll be back to-night or early in the morning."

"Gone to see a friend is all right, but I won't have my love given to them."

"Well, then, it sha'n't be." It was well enough to tell *her* so—no harm in it. It was only a little thing to do, and no trouble; and it's the little things that smoothes people's roads the most, down here below; it would make Mary Jane comfortable, and it wouldn't cost nothing. Then I says: "There's one more thing—that bag of money."

"Well, they've got that; and it makes me feel pretty silly to think *how* they got it."

"No, you're out, there. They hain't got it."

"Why, who's got it?"

"I wish I knowed, but I don't. I *had* it, because I stole it from them: and I stole it to give to you; and I know where I hid it, but I'm afraid it ain't there no more. I'm awful sorry, Miss Mary Jane, I'm just as sorry as I can be; but I done the best I could; I did, honest. I come nigh getting caught, and I had to shove it into the first place I come to, and run—and it warn't a good place."

"Oh, stop blaming yourself—it's too bad to do it, and I won't allow it—you couldn't help it; it wasn't your fault. Where did you hide it?"

I didn't want to set her to thinking about her troubles again; and I couldn't seem to get my mouth to tell her what would make her see that corpse laying

in the coffin with that bag of money on his stomach. So for a minute I didn't say nothing—then I says:

"I'd ruther not *tell* you where I put it, Miss Mary Jane, if you don't mind letting me off; but I'll write it for you on a piece of paper, and you can read it along the road to Mr. Lothrop's; if you want to. Do you reckon that'll do?"

"Oh, yes."

So I wrote: "I put it in the coffin. It was in there when you was crying there, away in the night. I was behind the door, and I was mighty sorry for you, Miss Mary Jane."

It made my eyes water a little, to remember her crying there all by herself in the night, and them devils laying there right under her own roof, shaming her and robbing her; and when I folded it up and give it to her, I see the water come into her eyes, too; and she shook me by the hand, hard, and says:

"*Good-bye*—I'm going to do everything just as you've told me; and if I don't ever see you again, I sha'n't ever forget you, and I'll think of you a many and a many a time, and I'll *pray* for you, too!"—and she was gone.

Pray for me! I reckoned if she knowed me she'd take a job that was more nearer her size. But I bet she done it, just the same—she was just that kind. She had the grit to pray for Judus if she took the notion—there warn't no backdown to her, I judge. You may say what you want to, but in my opinion she had more sand in her than any girl I ever see; in my opinion she was just full of sand.⁷ It sounds like flattery, but it ain't no flattery. And when it comes to beauty—and goodness too—she lays over them all. I hain't ever seen her since that time that I see her go out of that door; no, I hain't ever seen her since, but I reckon I've thought of her a many and a many a million times, and of her saying she would pray for me; and if ever I'd a thought it would do any good for me to pray for *her*, blamed if I wouldn't a done it or bust.

Well, Mary Jane she lit out the back way, I reckon; because nobody see her go. When I struck Susan and the hare-lip, I says:

"What's the name of them people over on t'other side of the river that you all goes to see sometimes?"

They says:

"There's several; but it's the Proctors, mainly."

"That's the name," I says; "I most forgot it. Well, Miss Mary Jane she told me to tell you she's gone over there in a dreadful hurry—one of them's sick."

"Which one?"

"I don't know; leastways I kinder forget; but I think it's—"

"Sakes alive, I hope it ain't *Hanner*?"

"I'm sorry to say it," I says, "but Hanner's the very one."

"My goodness—and she so well only last week! Is she took bad?"

"It ain't no name for it. They set up with her all night, Miss Mary Jane said, and they don't think she'll last many hours."

"Only think of that, now! What's the matter with her!"

I couldn't think of anything reasonable, right off that way, so I says:

7. Courage.

“Mumps.”

“Mumps your granny! They don’t set up with people that’s got the mumps.”

“They don’t, don’t they? You better bet they do with *these* mumps. These mumps is different. It’s a new kind, Miss Mary Jane said.”

“How’s it a new kind?”

“Because it’s mixed up with other things.”

“What other things?”

“Well, measles, and whooping-cough, and erysiplas, and consumption, and yaller janders, and brain fever, and I don’t know what all.”

“My land! And they call it the *mumps*?”

“That’s what Miss Mary Jane said.”

“Well, what in the nation do they call it the *mumps* for?”

“Why, because it *is* the mumps. That’s what it starts with.”

“Well, ther’ ain’t no sense in it. A body might stump his toe, and take pison, and fall down the well, and break his neck, and bust his brains out, and somebody come along and ask what killed him, and some numskull up and say, ‘Why, he stumped his *toe*.’ Would ther’ be any sense in that? *No*. And ther’ ain’t no sense in *this*, nuther. Is it ketching?”

“Is it *ketching*? Why, how you talk. Is a *harrow* catching?—in the dark? If you don’t hitch onto one tooth, you’re bound to on another, ain’t you? And you can’t get away with that tooth without fetching the whole harrow along, can you? Well, these kind of mumps is a kind of a harrow, as you may say—and it ain’t no slouch of a harrow, nuther, you come to get it hitched on good.”

“Well, it’s awful, *I* think,” says the hare-lip. “I’ll go to Uncle Harvey and—”

“Oh, yes,” *I* says, “*I would*. Of *course* I would. I wouldn’t lose no time.”

“Well, why wouldn’t you?”

“Just look at it a minute, and maybe you can see. Hain’t your uncles obleeged to get along home to England as fast as they can? And do you reckon they’d be mean enough to go off and leave you to go all that journey by yourselves? *You* know they’ll wait for you. So fur, so good. Your uncle Harvey’s a preacher, ain’t he? Very well, then; is a *preacher* going to deceive a steamboat clerk? is he going to deceive a *ship clerk*?—so as to get them to let Miss Mary Jane go aboard? Now *you* know he ain’t. What *will* he do, then? Why, he’ll say, ‘It’s a great pity, but my church matters has got to get along the best way they can; for my niece has been exposed to the dreadful pluribus-unum⁸ mumps, and so it’s my bounden duty to set down here and wait the three months it takes to show on her if she’s got it.’ But never mind, if you think it’s best to tell your uncle Harvey—”

“Shucks, and stay fooling around here when we could all be having good times in England whilst we was waiting to find out whether Mary Jane’s got it or not? Why, you talk like a muggins.”⁹

“Well, anyway, maybe you better tell some of the neighbors.”

“Listen at that, now. You do beat all, for natural stupidity. Can’t you *see* that *they’d* go and tell? Ther’ ain’t no way but just to not tell anybody at *all*.”

“Well, maybe you’re right—yes, I judge you *are* right.”

8. Huck reaches for the handiest Latin phrase he could be expected to know; meaning “out of

many, one” (the motto of the United States).
9. A fool.

“But I reckon we ought to tell Uncle Harvey she’s gone out a while, anyway, so he wont be uneasy about her?”

“Yes, Miss Mary Jane she wanted you to do that. She says, ‘Tell them to give Uncle Harvey and William my love and a kiss, and say I’ve run over the river to see Mr.—Mr.—what *is* the name of that rich family your uncle Peter used to think so much of?—I mean the one that—”

“Why, you must mean the Apthorps, ain’t it?”

“Of course; bother them kind of names, a body can’t ever seem to remember them, half the time, somehow. Yes, she said, say she has run over for to ask the Apthorps to be sure and come to the auction and buy this house, because she allowed her uncle Peter would ruther they had it than anybody else; and she’s going to stick to them till they say they’ll come, and then, if she ain’t too tired, she’s coming home; and if she is, she’ll be home in the morning anyway. She said, don’t say nothing about the Proctors, but only about the Apthorps—which’ll be perfectly true, because she *is* going there to speak about their buying the house; I know it, because she told me so, herself.”

“All right,” they said, and cleared out to lay for their uncles, and give them the love and the kisses, and tell them the message.

Everything was all right now. The girls wouldn’t say nothing because they wanted to go to England; and the king and the duke would ruther Mary Jane was off working for the auction than around in reach of Doctor Robinson. I felt very good; I judged I had done it pretty neat—I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn’t a done it no neater himself. Of course he would a throwed more style into it, but I can’t do that very handy, not being brung up to it.

Well, they held the auction in the public square, along towards the end of the afternoon, and it strung along, and strung along, and the old man he was on hand and looking his level piousness, up there longside of the auctioneer, and chipping in a little Scripture, now and then, or a little goody-goody saying, of some kind, and the duke he was around goo-gooing for sympathy all he knowed how, and just spreading himself generly.

But by-and-by the thing dragged through, and everything was sold. Everything but a little old trifling lot in the graveyard. So they’d got to work *that* off—I never see such a girafft¹ as the king was for wanting to swallow *everything*. Well, whilst they was at it, a steamboat landed, and in about two minutes up comes a crowd a whooping and yelling and laughing and carrying on, and singing out:

“*Here’s* your opposition line! here’s your two sets o’ heirs to old Peter Wilks—and you pays your money and you takes your choice!”

Chapter XXIX

They was fetching a very nice looking old gentleman along, and a nice looking younger one, with his right arm in a sling. And my souls, how the people yelled, and laughed, and kept it up. But I didn’t see no joke about it, and I judged it would strain the duke and the king some to see any. I reckoned

1. Giraffe.

they'd turn pale. But no, nary a pale did *they* turn. The duke he never let on he suspicioned what was up, but just went a goo-gooing around, happy and satisfied, like a jug that's googling out buttermilk; and as for the king, he just gazed and gazed down sorrowful on them newcomers like it give him the stomach-ache in his very heart to think there could be such frauds and rascals in the world. Oh, he done it admirable. Lots of the principal people gathered around the king, to let him see they was on his side. That old gentleman that had just come looked all puzzled to death. Pretty soon he begun to speak, and I see, straight off, he pronounced *like* an Englishman, not the king's way, though the king's *was* pretty good, for an imitation. I can't give the old gent's words, nor I can't imitate him; but he turned around to the crowd, and says, about like this:

"This is a surprise to me which I wasn't looking for; and I'll acknowledge, candid and frank, I ain't very well fixed to meet it and answer it; for my brother and me has had misfortunes, he's broke his arm, and our baggage got put off at a town above here, last night in the night by a mistake. I am Peter Wilks's brother Harvey, and this is his brother William, which can't hear nor speak—and can't even make signs to amount to much, now 't he's only got one hand to work them with. We are who we say we are; and in a day or two, when I get the baggage, I can prove it. But, up till then, I won't say nothing more, but go to the hotel and wait."

So him and the new dummy² started off; and the king he laughs, and blethers out:

"Broke his arm—*very* likely *ain't* it?—and very convenient, too, for a fraud that's got to make signs, and hain't learnt how. Lost their baggage! That's *mighty* good!—and mighty ingenious—under the *circumstances!*"

So he laughed again; and so did everybody else, except three or four, or maybe half a dozen. One of these was that doctor; another one was a sharp looking gentleman, with a carpet-bag of the old-fashioned kind made out of carpet-stuff, that had just come off of the steamboat and was talking to him in a low voice, and glancing towards the king now and then and nodding their heads—it was Levi Bell, the lawyer that was gone up to Louisville; and another one was a big rough husky that come along and listened to all the old gentleman said, and was listening to the king now. And when the king got done, this husky up and says:

"Say, looky here; if you are Harvey Wilks, when'd you come to this town?"

"The day before the funeral, friend," says the king.

"But what time o' day?"

"In the evenin'—'bout an hour er two before sundown."

"*How'd* you come?"

"I come down on the *Susan Powell*, from Cincinnati."

"Well, then, how'd you come to be up at the Pint in the *mornin'*—in a canoe?"

"I warn't up at the Pint in the mornin'."

"It's a lie."

2. A person who can't hear or speak.

Several of them jumped for him and begged him not to talk that way to an old man and a preacher.

“Preacher be hanged, he’s a fraud and a lair. He was up at the Pint that mornin’. I live up there, don’t I? Well, I was up there, and he was up there. I *see* him there. He come in a canoe, along with Tim Collins and a boy.”

The doctor he up and says:

“Would you know the boy again if you was to see him, Hines?”

“I reckon I would, but I don’t know. Why, yonder he is, now. I know him perfectly easy.”

It was me he pointed at. The doctor says:

“Neighbors. I don’t know whether the new couple is frauds or not; but if *these* two ain’t frauds, I am an idiot, that’s all. I think it’s our duty to see that they don’t get away from here till we’ve looked into this thing. Come along, Hines; come along, the rest of you. We’ll take these fellows to the tavern and affront them with t’other couple, and I reckon we’ll find out *something* before we get through.”

It was nuts for the crowd, though maybe not for the king’s friends; so we all started. It was about sundown. The doctor he led me along by the hand, and was plenty kind enough, but he never let *go* my hand.

We all got in a big room in the hotel, and lit up some candles, and fetched in the new couple. First, the doctor says:

“I don’t wish to be too hard on these two men, but *I* think they’re frauds, and they may have complices that we don’t know nothing about. If they have, won’t the complices get away with that bag of gold Peter Wilks left? It ain’t unlikely. If these men ain’t frauds, they won’t object to sending for that money and letting us keep it till they prove they’re all right—ain’t that so?”

Everybody agreed to that. So I judged they had our gang in a pretty tight place, right at the outstart. But the king he only looked sorrowful, and says:

“Gentlemen, I wish the money was there, for I ain’t got no disposition to throw anything in the way of a fair, open, out-and-out investigation o’ this misable business; but alas, the money ain’t there; you k’n send and see, if you want to.”

“Where is it, then?”

“Well, when my niece give it to me to keep for her, I took and hid it inside o’ the straw tick o’ my bed, not wishin’ to bank it for the few days we’d be here, and considerin’ the bed a safe place, we not bein’ used to niggers, and suppos’n’ ’em honest, like servants in England. The niggers stole it the very next mornin’ after I had went down stairs; and when I sold ’em, I hadn’t missed the money yit, so they got clean away with it. My servant here k’n tell you ’bout it gentlemen.”

The doctor and several said “Shucks!” and I see nobody didn’t altogether believe him. One man asked me if I see the niggers steal it. I said no, but I see them sneaking out of the room and hustling away, and I never thought nothing, only I reckoned they was afraid they had waked up my master and was trying to get away before he made trouble with them. That was all they asked me. Then the doctor whirls on me and says:

“Are *you* English too?”

I says yes; and him and some others laughed, and said, “Stuff!”

Well, then they sailed in on the general investigation, and there we had it, up and down, hour in, hour out, and nobody never said a word about supper,

nor ever seemed to think about it—and so they kept it up, and kept it up; and it *was* the worst mixed-up thing you ever see. They made the king tell his yarn, and they made the old gentleman tell his'n; and anybody but a lot of prejudiced chuckleheads would a *seen* that the old gentleman was spinning truth and t'other one lies. And by-and-by they had me up to tell what I knowed. The king he give me a left-handed look out of the corner of his eye, and so I knowed enough to talk on the right side. I begun to tell about Sheffield, and how we lived there, and all about the English Wilkses, and so on; but I didn't get pretty fur till the doctor begun to laugh; and Levi Bell, the lawyer says:

"Set down, my boy, I wouldn't strain myself, if I was you. I reckon you ain't used to lying, it don't seem to come handy; what you want is practice. You do it pretty awkward."

I didn't care nothing for the compliment, but I was glad to be let off, anyway.

The doctor he started to say something, and turns and says:

"If you'd been in town at first, Levi Bell—"

The king broke in and reached out his hand, and says:

"Why, is this my poor dead brother's old friend that he's wrote so often about?"

The lawyer and him shook hands, and the lawyer smiled and looked pleased, and they talked right along a while, and then got to one side and talked low; and at last the lawyer speaks up and says:

"That'll fix it. I'll take the order and send it, along with your brother's, and then they'll know it's all right."

So they got some paper and a pen, and the king he set down and twisted his head to one side, and chawed his tongue, and scrawled off something; and then they give the pen to the duke—and then for the first time, the duke looked sick. But he took the pen and wrote. So then the lawyer turns to the new old gentleman and says:

"You and your brother please write a line or two and sign your names."

The old gentleman wrote, but nobody couldn't read it. The lawyer looked powerful astonished, and says:

"Well, it beats *me*"—and snaked a lot of old letters out of his pocket, and examined them, and then examined the old man's writing, and then *them* again; and then says: "These old letters is from Harvey Wilks; and here's *these* two's handwritings, and anybody can see *they* didn't write them" (the king and the duke looked sold and foolish, I tell you, to see how the lawyer had took them in), "and here's *this* old gentleman's handwriting, and anybody can tell, easy enough, *he* didn't write them—fact is, the scratches he makes ain't properly *writing*, at all. Now here's some letters from—"

The new old gentleman says:

"If you please, let me explain. Nobody can read my hand but my brother there—so he copies for me. It's *his* hand you've got there, not mine."

"*Well!*" says the lawyer, "this is a state of things. I've got some of William's letters too; so if you'll get him to write a line or so we can com—"

"He *can't* write with his left hand," says the old gentleman. "If he could use his right hand, you would see that he wrote his own letters and mine too. Look at both, please—they're by the same hand."

The lawyer done it, and says:

"I believe it's so—and if it ain't so, there's a heap stronger resemblance than I'd noticed before, anyway. Well, well, well! I thought we was right on the track of a slution, but it's gone to grass, partly. But anyway, *one* thing is proved—*these* two ain't either of 'em Wilkses"—and he wagged his head towards the king and the duke.

Well, what do you think?—that muleheaded old fool wouldn't give in *then!* Indeed he wouldn't. Said it warn't no fair test. Said his brother William was the cussedest joker in the world, and hadn't *tried* to write—*he* see William was going to play one of his jokes the minute he put the pen to paper. And so he warmed up and went warbling and warbling right along, till he was actuly beginning to believe what he was saying, *himself*—but pretty soon the new old gentleman broke in, and says:

"I've thought of something. Is there anybody here that helped to lay out my br—helped to lay out the late Peter Wilks for burying?"

"Yes," says somebody, "me and Ab Turner done it. We're both here."

Then the old man turns towards the king, and says:

"Peraps this gentleman can tell me what was tatoood on his breast?"

Blamed if the king didn't have to brace up mighty quick, or he'd a squshed down like a bluff bank that the river has cut under, it took him so sudden—and mind you, it was a thing that was calculated to make most *anybody* sqush to get fetched such a solid one as that without any notice—because how was *he* going to know what was tatoood on the man? He whitened a little; he couldn't help it; and it was mighty still in there, and everybody bending a little forwards and gazing at him. Says I to myself, *Now* he'll throw up the sponge—there ain't no more use. Well, did he? A body can't hardly believe it, but he didn't. I reckon he thought he'd keep the thing up till he tired them people out, so they'd thin out, and him and the duke could break loose and get away. Anyway, he set there, and pretty soon he begun to smile, and says:

"Mf! It's a *very* tough question, *ain't* it! *Yes*, sir, I k'n tell you what's tatoood on his breast. It's jest a small, thin, blue arrow—that's what it is; and if you don't look clost, you can't see it. *Now* what do you say—hey?"

Well, *I* never see anything like that old blister for clean out-and-out cheek.

The new old gentleman turns brisk towards Ab Turner and his pard, and his eye lights up like he judged he'd got the king *this* time, and says:

"There—you've heard what he said! Was there any such mark on Peter Wilks's breast?"

Both of them spoke up and says:

"We didn't see no such mark."

"Good!" says the old gentleman. "Now, what you *did* see on his breast was a small dim P, and a B (which is an initial he dropped when he was young), and a W, with dashes between them, so: P—B—W"—and he marked them that way on a piece of paper. "Come—ain't that what you saw?"

Both of them spoke up again, and says:

"No, we *didn't*. We never seen any marks at all."

Well, everybody *was* in a state of mind, now; and they sings out:

"The whole *bilin'* of 'm 's frauds! Le's duck 'em! le's drown 'em! le's ride 'em on a rail!" and everybody was whooping at once, and there was a rattling pow-wow. But the lawyer he jumps on the table and yells, and says:

“Gentlemen—gentlemen! Hear me just a word—just a *single* word—if you PLEASE! There’s one way yet—let’s go and dig up the corpse and look.”

That took them.

“Hooray!” they all shouted, and was starting right off; but the lawyer and the doctor sung out:

“Hold on, hold on! Collar all these four men and the boy, and fetch *them* along, too!”

“We’ll do it!” they all shouted: “and if we don’t find them marks we’ll lynch the whole gang!”

I was scared, now, I tell you. But there warn’t no getting away, you know. They gripped us all, and marched us right along, straight for the graveyard, which was a mile and a half down the river, and the whole town at our heels, for we made noise enough, and it was only nine in the evening.

As we went by our house I wished I hadn’t sent Mary Jane out of town; because now if I could tip her the wink, she’d light out and save me, and blow on our dead-beats.

Well, we swarmed along down the river road, just carrying on like wild-cats; and to make it more scary, the sky was darkening up, and the lightning beginning to wink and flutter, and the wind to shiver amongst the leaves. This was the most awful trouble and most dangersome I ever was in; and I was kinder stunned; everything was going so different from what I had allowed for; stead of being fixed so I could take my own time, if I wanted to, and see all the fun, and have Mary Jane at my back to save me and set me free when the close-fit come, here was nothing in the world betwixt me and sudden death but just them tatoo-marks. If they didn’t find them—

I couldn’t bear to think about it; and yet, somehow, I couldn’t think about nothing else. It got darker and darker, and it was a beautiful time to give the crowd the slip; but that big husky had me by the wrist—Hines—and a body might as well try to give Goliath³ the slip. He dragged me right along, he was so excited; and I had to run to keep up.

When they got there they swarmed into the graveyard and washed over it like an overflow. And when they got to the grave, they found they had about a hundred times as many shovels as they wanted, but nobody hadn’t thought to fetch a lantern. But they sailed into digging, anyway, by the flicker of the lightning, and sent a man to the nearest house a half a mile off, to borrow one.

So they dug and dug, like everything; and it got awful dark, and the rain started, and the wind swished and swushed along, and the lightning come brisker and brisker, and the thunder boomed; but them people never took no notice of it, they was so full of this business; and one minute you could see everything and every face in that big crowd, and the shovelfuls of dirt sailing up out of the grave, and the next second the dark wiped it all out, and you couldn’t see nothing at all.

At last they got out the coffin, and begun to unscrew the lid, and then such another crowding, and shouldering, and shoving as there was, to scrouge in and get a sight, you never see; and in the dark, that way, it was awful.

3. Goliath, a Philistine giant who challenged the Israelites. In 1 Samuel, David, a young shepherd, accepts his challenge and kills him with a stone thrown from a sling.

Hines he hurt my wrist dreadful, pulling and tugging so, and I reckon he clean forgot I was in the world, he was so excited and panting.

All of a sudden the lightning let go a perfect sluice of white glare, and somebody sings out:

“By the living jingo, here’s the bag of gold on his breast!”

Hines let out a whoop, like everybody else, and dropped my wrist and give a big surge to bust his way in and get a look, and the way I lit out and shinned for the road in the dark, there ain’t nobody can tell.

I had the road all to myself, and I fairly flew—leastways I had it all to myself except the solid dark, and the now-and-then glares, and the buzzing of the rain, and the thrashing of the wind, and the splitting of the thunder; and sure as you are born I did clip it along!

When I struck the town, I see there warn’t nobody out in the storm, so I never hunted for no back streets, but humped it straight through the main one; and when I begun to get towards our house I aimed my eye and set it. No light there; the house all dark—which made me feel sorry and disappointed, I didn’t know why. But at last, just as I was sailing by, *flash* comes the light in Mary Jane’s window! and my heart swelled up sudden, like to bust; and the same second the house and all was behind me in the dark, and wasn’t ever going to be before me no more in this world. She *was* the best girl I ever see, and had the most sand.

The minute I was far enough above the town to see I could make the tow-head, I begun to look sharp for a boat to borrow; and the first time the lightning showed me one that wasn’t chained, I snatched it and shoved. It was a canoe, and warn’t fastened with nothing but a rope. The tow-head was a rattling big distance off, away out there in the middle of the river, but I didn’t lose no time; and when I struck the raft at last, I was so fagged I would a just laid down to blow and gasp if I could afforded it. But I didn’t. As I sprung aboard I sung out:

“Out with you Jim, and set her loose! Glory be to goodness, we’re shut of them!”

Jim lit out, and was a coming for me with both arms spread, he was so full of joy; but when I glimpsed him in the lightning, my heart shot up in my mouth, and I went overboard backwards; for I forgot he was old King Lear and a drowned A-rab all in one, and it most scared the livers and lights out of me. But Jim fished me out, and was going to hug me and bless me, and so on, he was so glad I was back and we was shut of the king and the duke, but I says:

“Not now—have it for breakfast, have it for breakfast! Cut loose and let her slide!”

So, in two seconds, away we went, a sliding down the river, and it *did* seem so good to be free again and all by ourselves on the big river and nobody to bother us. I had to skip around a bit, and jump up and crack my heels a few times, I couldn’t help it; but about the third crack, I noticed a sound that I knowed mighty well—and held my breath and listened and waited—and sure enough, when the next flash busted out over the water, here they come!—and just a laying to their oars and making their skiff hum! It was the king and the duke.

So I wilted right down onto the planks, then, and give up; and it was all I could do to keep from crying.

Chapter XXX

When they got aboard, the king went for me, and shook me by the collar, and says:

“Tryin’ to give us the slip, was ye, you pup! Tired of our company—hey!”

I says:

“No, your majesty, we warn’t—*please* don’t, your majesty!”

“Quick, then, and tell us what *was* your idea, or I’ll shake the insides out o’ you!”

“Honest, I’ll tell you everything, just as it happened, your majesty. The man that had aholt of me was very good to me, and kept saying he had a boy about as big as me that died last year, and he was sorry to see a boy in such a dangerous fix; and when they was all took by surprise by finding the gold, and made a rush for the coffin, he lets go of me and whispers, ‘Heel it, now, or they’ll hang ye, sure!’ and I lit out. It didn’t seem no good for *me* to stay—I couldn’t do nothing, and I didn’t want to be hung if I could get away. So I never stopped running till I found the canoe; and when I got here I told Jim to hurry, or they’d catch me and hang me yet, and said I was afeard you and the duke wasn’t alive, now, and I was awful sorry, and so was Jim, and was awful glad when we see you coming, you may ask Jim if I didn’t.”

Jim said it was so; and the king told him to shut up, and said, “Oh, yes, it’s *mighty* likely!” and shook me up again, and said he reckoned he’d drowned me. But the duke says:

“Leggo the boy, you old idiot! Would *you* a done any different? Did you inquire around for *him*, when you got loose? *I* don’t remember it.”

So the king let go of me, and begun to cuss that town and everybody in it. But the duke says:

“You better a blame sight give *yourself* a good cussing, for you’re the one that’s entitled to it most. You hain’t done a thing, from the start, that had any sense in it, except coming out so cool and cheeky with that imaginary blue-arrow mark. That *was* bright—it was right down bully; and it was the thing that saved us. For if it hadn’t been for that, they’d a jailed us till them Englishmen’s baggage come—and then—the penitentiary, you bet! But that trick took ’em to the graveyard, and the gold done us a still bigger kindness; for if the excited fools hadn’t let go all holts and made that rush to get a look, we’d a slept in our cravats⁴ to-night—cravats warranted to *wear*, too—longer than *we’d* need ’em.”

They was still a minute—thinking—then the king says, kind of absent-minded like:

“Mf! And we reckoned the *niggers* stole it!”

That made me squirm!

“Yes,” says the duke, kinder slow, and deliberate, and sarcastic, “*We* did.” After about a half a minute, the king drawls out:

“Leastways—I did.”

The duke says, the same way:

“On the contrary—I did.”

The king kind of ruffles up, and says:

4. Nooses from a hanging.

"Looky here, Bilgewater, what'r you referrin' to?"

The duke says, pretty brisk:

"When it comes to that, maybe you'll let me ask, what was *you* referring to?"

"Shucks!" says the king, very sarcastic; "but *I* don't know—maybe you was asleep, and didn't know what you was about."

The duke bristles right up, now, and says:

"Oh, let *up* on this cussed nonsense—do you take me for a blame' fool? Don't you reckon *I* know who hid that money in that coffin?"

"Yes, sir! I know you *do* know—because you done it yourself!"

"It's a lie!"—and the duke went for him. The king sings out:

"Take y'r hands off!—leggo my throat!—I take it all back!"

The duke says:

"Well, you just own up, first, that you *did* hide that money there, intending to give me the slip one of these days, and come back and dig it up, and have it all to yourself."

"Wait jest a minute, duke—answer me this one question, honest and fair; if you didn't put the money there, say it, and I'll b'lieve you, and take back everything I said."

"You old scoundrel, I didn't, and you know I didn't. There, now!"

"Well, then, I b'lieve you. But answer me only jest this one more—now *don't* git mad; didn't you have it in your *mind* to hook the money and hide it?"

The duke never said nothing for a little bit; then he says:

"Well—I don't care if I *did*, I didn't *do* it, anyway. But you not only had it in mind to do it, but you *done* it."

"I wisht I may never die if I done it, duke, and that's honest. I won't say I warn't *goin'* to do it, because I *was*; but you—I mean somebody—got in ahead o' me."

"It's a lie! You done it, and you got to *say* you done it, or—"

The king begun to gurgle, and then he gasps out:

"'Nough!—I *own up*!"

I was very glad to hear him say that, it made me feel much more easier than what I was feeling before. So the duke took his hands off, and says:

"If you ever deny it again, I'll drown you. It's *well* for you to set there and blubber like a baby—it's fitten for you, after the way you've acted. I never see such an old ostrich for wanting to gobble everything—and I a trusting you all the time, like you was my own father. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to stand by and hear it saddled onto a lot of poor niggers and you never say a word for 'em. It makes me feel ridiculous to think I was soft enough to *believe* that rubbish. Cuss you, I can see, now, why you was so anxious to make up the deffersit—you wanted to get what money I'd got out of the Nonesuch and one thing or another, and scoop it *all*!"

The king says, timid, and still a snuffling:

"Why, duke, it was you that said make up the deffersit, it warn't me."

"Dry up! I don't want to hear no more *out* of you!" says the duke. "And *now* you see what you *got* by it. They've got all their own money back, and all of *ourn* but a shekel⁵ or two, *besides*. G'long to bed—and don't you deffersit *me* no more deffersits, long 's *you* live!"

5. Coin of ancient Israel used here colloquially to suggest a coin of low value.

So the king sneaked into the wigwam, and took to his bottle for comfort; and before long the duke tackled *his* bottle; and so in about a half an hour they was as thick as thieves again, and the tighter they got, the lovinger they got; and went off a snoring in each other's arms. They both got powerful mellow, but I noticed the king didn't get mellow enough to forget to remember to not deny about hiding the money-bag again. That made me feel easy and satisfied. Of course when they got to snoring, we had a long gabble, and I told Jim everything.

Chapter XXXI

We dasn't stop again at any town, for days and days; kept right along down the river. We was down south in the warm weather, now, and a mighty long ways from home. We begun to come to trees with Spanish moss on them, hanging down from the limbs like long gray beards. It was the first I ever see it growing, and it made the woods look solemn and dismal. So now the frauds reckoned they was out of danger, and they begun to work the villages again.

First they done a lecture on temperance; but they didn't make enough for them both to get drunk on. Then in another village they started a dancing school; but they didn't know no more how to dance than a kangaroo does; so the first prance they made, the general public jumped in and pranced them out of town. Another time they tried a go at yellocution; but they didn't yellocute long till the audience got up and give them a solid good cussing and made them skip out. They tackled missionarying, and mesmerizing, and doctoring, and telling fortunes, and a little of everything; but they couldn't seem to have no luck. So at last they got just about dead broke, and laid around the raft, as she floated along, thinking, and thinking, and never saying nothing, by the half a day at a time, and dreadful blue and desperate.

And at last they took a change, and begun to lay their heads together in the wigwam and talk low and confidential two or three hours at a time. Jim and me got uneasy. We didn't like the look of it. We judged they was studying up some kind of worse deviltry than ever. We turned it over and over, and at last we made up our minds they was going to break into somebody's house or store, or was going into the counterfeit-money business, or something. So then we was pretty scared, and made up an agreement that we wouldn't have nothing in the world to do with such actions, and if we ever got the least show we would give them the cold shake, and clear out and leave them behind. Well, early one morning we hid the raft in a good safe place about two mile below a little bit of a shabby village, named Pikesville, and the king he went ashore, and told us all to stay hid whilst he went up to town and smelt around to see if anybody had got any wind of the Royal None-such there yet. ("House to rob, you *mean*," says I to myself; "and when you get through robbing it you'll come back here and wonder what's become of me and Jim and the raft—and you'll have to take it out in wondering.") And he said if he warn't back by midday, the duke and me would know it was all right, and we was to come along.

So we staid where we was. The duke he fretted and sweated around, and was in a mighty sour way. He scolded us for everything, and we couldn't seem to do nothing right; he found fault with every little thing. Something was

a-brewing, sure. I was good and glad when midday come and no king; we could have a change, anyway—and maybe a chance for *the* change, on top of it. So me and the duke went up to the village, and hunted around there for the king, and by-and-by we found him in the back room of a little low doggerly,⁶ very tight, and a lot of loafers bullyragging him for sport, and he a cussing and threatening with all his might, and so tight he couldn't walk, and couldn't do nothing to them. The duke he begun to abuse him for an old fool, and the king begun to sass back; and the minute they was fairly at it, I lit out, and shook the reefs out of my hind legs, and spun down the river road like a deer—for I see our chance; and I made up my mind that it would be a long day before they ever see me and Jim again. I got down there all out of breath but loaded up with joy, and sung out—

“Set her loose, Jim, we're all right, now!”

But there warn't no answer, and nobody come out of the wigwam. Jim was gone! I set up a shout—and then another—and then another one; and run this way and that in the woods, whooping and screeching; but it warn't no use—old Jim was gone. Then I set down and cried; I couldn't help it. But I couldn't set still long. Pretty soon I went out on the road, trying to think what I better do, and I run across a boy walking, and asked him if he'd seen a strange nigger, dressed so and so, and he says:

“Yes.”

“Whereabouts?” says I.

“Down to Silas Phelps's place, two mile below here. He's a runaway nigger, and they've got him. Was you looking for him?”

“You bet I ain't! I run across him in the woods about an hour or two ago, and he said if I hollered he'd cut my livers out—and told me to lay down and stay where I was; and I done it. Been there ever since; afeard to come out.”

“Well,” he says, “you needn't be afraid no more, becuz they've got him. He run off f'm down South, som'ers.”

“It's a good job they got him.”

“Well, I *reckon*! There's two hundred dollars reward on him. It's like picking up money out'n the road.”

“Yes, it is—and I could a had it if I'd been big enough; I see him *first*. Who nailed him?”

“It was an old fellow—a stranger—and he sold out his chance in him for forty dollars, becuz he's got to go up the river and can't wait. Think o' that, now! You bet *I'd* wait, if it was seven year.”

“That's me, every time,” says I. “But maybe his chance ain't worth no more than that, if he'll sell it so cheap. Maybe there's something ain't straight about it.”

“But it *is*, though—straight as a string. I see the handbill myself. It tells all about him, to a dot—paints him like a picture, and tells the plantation he's frum, below *Newrleans*. No-siree-*bob*, they ain't no trouble 'bout *that* speculation, you bet you. Say, gimme a chaw tobacker, won't ye?”

I didn't have none, so he left. I went to the raft, and set down in the wigwam to think. But I couldn't come to nothing. I thought till I wore my head sore, but I couldn't see no way out of the trouble. After all this long journey,

6. Cheap barroom.

and after all we'd done for them scoundrels, here was it all come to nothing, everything all busted up and ruined, because they could have the heart to serve Jim such a trick as that, and make him a slave again all his life, and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars.

Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was, as long as he'd *got* to be a slave, and so I'd better write a letter to Tom Sawyer and tell him to tell Miss Watson where he was. But I soon give up that notion, for two things: she'd be mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her, and so she'd sell him straight down the river again; and if she didn't, everybody naturally despises an ungrateful nigger, and they'd make Jim feel it all the time, and so he'd feel ornery and disgraced. And then think of *me*! It would get all around, that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was to ever see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't agoing to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared. Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself, by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame; but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday school, you could a gone to it; and if you'd a done it they'd a learnt you, there, that people that acts as I'd been acting about the nigger goes to everlasting fire."

It made me shiver. And I about made up my mind to pray; and see if I couldn't try to quit being the kind of a boy I was, and be better. So I kneeled down. But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? It warn't no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from *me*, neither. I knowed very well why they wouldn't come. It was because my heart warn't right; it was because I warn't square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting *on* to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie—and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out.

So I was full of trouble, full as I could be; and didn't know what to do. At last I had an idea; and I says, I'll go and write the letter—and *then* see if I can pray. Why, it was astonishing, the way I felt as light as a feather, right straight off, and my troubles all gone. So I got a piece of paper and a pencil, all glad and excited, and set down and wrote:

Miss Watson your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send.

Huck Finn.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking—thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"—and tore it up.

It was awful thoughts, and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head; and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter, I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog.

Then I set to thinking over how to get at it, and turned over considerable many ways in my mind; and at last fixed up a plan that suited me. So then I took the bearings of a woody island that was down the river a piece, and as soon as it was fairly dark I crept out with my raft and went for it, and hid it there, and then turned in. I slept the night through, and got up before it was light, and had my breakfast, and put on my store clothes, and tied up some others and one thing or another in a bundle, and took the canoe and cleared for shore. I landed below where I judged was Phelps's place, and hid my bundle in the woods, and then filled up the canoe with water, and loaded rocks into her and sunk her where I could find her again when I wanted her, about a quarter of a mile below a little steam sawmill that was on the bank.

Then I struck up the road, and when I passed the mill I see a sign on it, "Phelps's Sawmill," and when I come to the farmhouses, two or three hundred yards further along, I kept my eyes peeled, but didn't see nobody around, though it was good daylight, now. But I didn't mind, because I didn't want to see nobody just yet—I only wanted to get the lay of the land. According to my plan, I was going to turn up there from the village, not from below. So I just took a look, and shoved along, straight for town. Well, the very first man I see, when I got there, was the duke. He was sticking up a bill for the Royal Nonesuch—three-night performance—like that other time. *They* had the cheek, them frauds! I was right on him, before I could shirk. He looked astonished, and says:

"Hel-lo! Where'd *you* come from?" Then he says, kind of glad and eager, "Where's the raft?—got her in a good place?"

I says:

"Why, that's just what I was agoing to ask your grace."

Then he didn't look so joyful—and says:

"What was your idea for asking *me*?" he says.

"Well," I says, "when I see the king in that doggery yesterday, I says to myself, we can't get him home for hours, till he's soberer; so I went a loafing around town to put in the time, and wait. A man up and offered me ten cents to help him pull a skiff over the river and back to fetch a sheep, and so I went along; but when we was dragging him to the boat, and the man left me aholt of the rope and went behind him to shove him along, he was too strong for me, and jerked loose and run, and we after him. We didn't have no dog, and so we had to chase him all over the country till we tired him out. We never got him till dark, then we fetched him over, and I started down for the raft. When I got there and see it was gone, I says to myself, 'they've got into trouble and had to leave; and they've took my nigger, which is the only nigger I've got in the world, and now I'm in a strange country, and ain't got no property no more, nor nothing, and no way to make my living'; so I set down and cried. I slept in the woods all night. But what *did* become of the raft then?—and Jim, poor Jim!"

"Blamed if *I* know—that is, what's become of the raft. That old fool had made a trade and got forty dollars, and when we found him in the doggery the loafers had matched half dollars with him and got every cent but what he'd spent for whiskey; and when I got him home late last night and found the raft gone, we said, 'That little rascal has stole our raft and shook us, and run off down the river.'"

"I wouldn't shake my *nigger*, would I?—the only nigger I had in the world, and the only property."

"We never thought of that. Fact is, I reckon we'd come to consider him *our* nigger; yes, we did consider him so—goodness knows we had trouble enough for him. So when we see the raft was gone, and we flat broke, there warn't anything for it but to try the Royal Nonesuch another shake. And I've pegged along ever since, dry as a powderhorn. Where's that ten cents? Give it here."

I had considerable money, so I give him ten cents, but begged him to spend it for something to eat, and give me some, because it was all the money I had, and I hadn't had nothing to eat since yesterday. He never said nothing. The next minute he whirls on me and says:

"Do you reckon that nigger would blow on us? We'd skin him if he done that!"

"How can he blow? Hain't he run off?"

"No! That old fool sold him, and never divided with me, and the money's gone."

"Sold him?" I says, and begun to cry; "why, he was *my* nigger, and that was my money. Where is he?—I want my nigger."

"Well, you can't *get* your nigger, that's all—so dry up your blubbering. Looky here—do you think *you'd* venture to blow on us? Blamed if I think I'd trust you. Why, if you was to blow on us—"

He stopped, but I never see the duke look so ugly out of his eyes before. I went on a-whimpering, and says:

"I don't want to blow on nobody; and I ain't got no time to blow, nohow. I got to turn out and find my nigger."

He looked kinder bothered, and stood there with his bills fluttering on his arm, thinking, and wrinkling up his forehead. At last he says:

"I'll tell you something. We got to be here three days. If you'll promise you won't blow, and won't let the nigger blow, I'll tell you where to find him."

So I promised, and he says:

"A farmer by the name of Silas Ph—" and then he stopped. You see he started to tell me the truth; but when he stopped, that way, and begun to study and think again, I reckoned he was changing his mind. And so he was. He wouldn't trust me; he wanted to make sure of having me out of the way the whole three days. So pretty soon he says: "The man that bought him is named Abram Foster—Abram G. Foster—and he lives forty mile back here in the country, on the road to Lafayette."

"All right," I says, "I can walk it in three days. And I'll start this very afternoon."

"No you won't, you'll start *now*; and don't you lose any time about it, neither, nor do any gabbling by the way. Just keep a tight tongue in your head and move right along, and then you won't get into trouble with *us*, d'ye hear?"

That was the order I wanted, and that was the one I played for. I wanted to be left free to work my plans.

"So clear out," he says; "and you can tell Mr. Foster whatever you want to. Maybe you can get him to believe that Jim *is* your nigger—some idiots don't require documents—leastways I've heard there's such down South here. And when you tell him the handbill and the reward's bogus, maybe he'll believe you when you explain to him what the idea was for getting 'em out. Go 'long, now, and tell him anything you want to; but mind you don't work your jaw any *between* here and there."

So I left, and struck for the back country. I didn't look around, but I kinder felt like he was watching me. But I knowed I could tire him out at that. I went straight out in the country as much as a mile, before I stopped; then I doubled back through the woods towards Phelps's. I reckoned I better start in on my plan straight off, without fooling around, because I wanted to stop Jim's mouth till these fellows could get away. I didn't want no trouble with their kind. I'd seen all I wanted to of them, and wanted to get entirely shut off of them.

Chapter XXXII

When I got there it was all still and Sunday-like, and hot and sunshiny—the hands was gone to the fields; and there was them kind of faint dronings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody's dead and gone; and if a breeze fans along and quivers the leaves, it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like it's spirits whispering—spirits that's been dead ever so many years—and you always think they're talking about *you*. As a general thing it makes a body wish *he* was dead, too, and done with it all.

Phelps's was one of these little one-horse cotton plantations; and they all look alike. A rail fence round a two-acre yard; a stile, made out of logs sawed off and up-ended, in steps, like barrels of a different length, to climb over

the fence with, and for the women to stand on when they are going to jump onto a horse; some sickly grass-patches in the big yard, but mostly it was bare and smooth, like an old hat with the nap rubbed off; big double log house for the white folks—hewed logs, with the chinks stopped up with mud or mortar, and these mud-stripes been whitewashed some time or another; round-log kitchen, with a big broad, open but roofed passage joining it to the house; log smoke-house back of the kitchen; three little log nigger-cabins in a row t'other side the smokehouse; one little hut all by itself away down against the back fence, and some outbuildings down a piece the other side; ash-hopper,⁷ and big kettle to bile soap in, by the little hut; bench by the kitchen door, with bucket of water and a gourd; hound asleep there, in the sun; more hounds asleep, round about; about three shade-trees away off in a corner; some currant bushes and gooseberry bushes in one place by the fence; outside of the fence a garden and a water-melon patch; then the cotton fields begins; and after the fields, the woods.

I went around and clumb over the back stile by the ash-hopper, and started for the kitchen. When I got a little ways, I heard the dim hum of a spinning-wheel wailing along up and sinking along down again; and then I knowed for certain I wished I was dead—for that *is* the lonesomest sound in the whole world.

I went right along, not fixing up any particular plan, but just trusting to Providence to put the right words in my mouth when the time come; for I'd noticed that Providence always did put the right words in my mouth, if I left it alone.

When I got half-way, first one hound and then another got up and went for me, and of course I stopped and faced them, and kept still. And such another pow-wow as they made! In a quarter of a minute I was a kind of a hub of a wheel, as you may say—spokes made out of dogs—circle of fifteen of them packed together around me, with their necks and noses stretched up towards me, a barking and howling; and more a coming; you could see them sailing over fences and around corners from everywheres.

A nigger woman come tearing out of the kitchen with a rolling-pin in her hand, singing out, “Begone! *you* Tige! *you* Spot! begone, sah!” and she fetched first one and then another of them a clip and sent him howling, and then the rest followed; and the next second, half of them come back, wagging their tails around me and making friends with me. There ain't no harm in a hound, nohow.

And behind the woman comes a little nigger girl and two little nigger boys, without anything on but tow-linen shirts, and they hung onto their mother's gown, and peeped out from behind her at me, bashful, the way they always do. And here comes the white woman running from the house, about forty-five or fifty year old, bare-headed, and her spinning-stick in her hand; and behind her comes her little white children, acting the same way the little niggers was doing. She was smiling all over so she could hardly stand—and says:

“It's *you*, at last!—*ain't* it?”

I out with a “Yes'm,” before I thought.

7. A container for lye used in making soap.

She grabbed me and hugged me tight; and then gripped me by both hands and shook and shook; and the tears come in her eyes, and run down over; and she couldn't seem to hug and shake enough, and kept saying, "You don't look as much like your mother as I reckoned you would, but law sakes, I don't care for that, I'm *so* glad to see you! Dear, dear, it does seem like I could eat you up! Children, it's your cousin Tom!—tell him howdy."

But they ducked their heads, and put their fingers in their mouths, and hid behind her. So she run on:

"Lize, hurry up and get him a hot breakfast, right away—or did you get your breakfast on the boat?"

I said I had got it on the boat. So then she started for the house, leading me by the hand, and the children tagging after. When we got there, she set me down in a split-bottomed chair, and set herself down on a little low stool in front of me, holding both of my hands, and says:

"Now I can have a *good* look at you; and laws-a-me, I've been hungry for it a many and a many a time, all these long years, and it's come at last! We been expecting you a couple of days and more. What's kep' you?—boat get aground?"

"Yes'm—she—"

"Don't say yes'm—say Aunt Sally. Where'd she get aground?"

I didn't rightly know what to say, because I didn't know whether the boat would be coming up the river or down. But I go a good deal on instinct; and my instinct said she would be coming up—from down toward Orleans. That didn't help me much, though; for I didn't know the names of bars down that way. I see I'd got to invent a bar, or forget the name of the one we got aground on—or—Now I struck an idea, and fetched it out:

"It warn't the grounding—that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder-head."

"Good gracious! anybody hurt?"

"No'm. Killed a nigger."

"Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt. Two years ago last Christmas, your uncle Silas was coming up from New Orleans on the old *Lally Rook*,⁸ and she blowed out a cylinder-head and crippled a man. And I think he died afterwards. He was a Babbit. Your uncle Silas knowed a family in Baton Rouge that knowed his people very well. Yes, I remember, now he *did* die. Mortification⁹ set in, and they had to amputate him. But it didn't save him. Yes, it was mortification—that was it. He turned blue all over, and died in the hope of a glorious resurrection. They say he was a sight to look at. Your uncle's been up to the town every day to fetch you. And he's gone again, not more'n an hour ago; he'll be back any minute, now. You must a met him on the road, didn't you?—oldish man, with a—"

"No, I didn't see nobody, Aunt Sally. The boat landed just at daylight, and I left my baggage on the wharf-boat and went looking around the town and out a piece in the country, to put in the time and not get here too soon; and so I come down the back way."

"Who'd you give the baggage to?"

8. "Lalla Rookh" (1817), a popular Romantic poem by the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779–1852).

9. Gangrene.

"Nobody."

"Why, child, it'll be stole!"

"Not where *I* hid it I reckon it won't," I says.

"How'd you get your breakfast so early on the boat?"

It was kinder thin ice, but I says:

"The captain see me standing around, and told me I better have something to eat before I went ashore; so he took me in the texas to the officers' lunch, and give me all I wanted."

I was getting so uneasy I couldn't listen good. I had my mind on the children all the time; I wanted to get them out to one side, and pump them a little, and find out who I was. But I couldn't get no show, Mrs. Phelps kept it up and run on so. Pretty soon she made the cold chills streak all down my back, because she says:

"But here we're a running on this way, and you hain't told me a word about Sis, nor any of them. Now I'll rest my works a little, and you start up yourn; just tell me *everything*—tell me all about 'm all—every one of 'm; and how they are, and what they're doing, and what they told you to tell me; and every last thing you can think of."

Well, I see I was up a stump—and up it good. Providence had stood by me this fur, all right, but I was hard and tight aground, now. I see it warn't a bit of use to try to go ahead—I'd *got* to throw up my hand. So I says to myself, here's another place where I got to resk the truth. I opened my mouth to begin; but she grabbed me and hustled me in behind the bed, and says:

"Here he comes! stick your head down lower—there, that'll do; you can't be seen, now. Don't you let on you're here. I'll play a joke on him. Children, don't you say a word."

I see I was in a fix, now. But it warn't no use to worry; there warn't nothing to do but just hold still, and try to be ready to stand from under when the lightning struck.

I had just one little glimpse of the old gentleman when he come in, then the bed hid him. Mrs. Phelps she jumps for him and says:

"Has he come?"

"No," says her husband.

"Good-ness gracious!" she says, "what in the world *can* have become of him?"

"I can't imagine," says the old gentleman; "and I must say, it makes me dreadful uneasy."

"Uneasy!" she says, "I'm ready to go distracted! He *must* a come; and you've missed him along the road. I *know* it's so—something *tells* me so."

"Why Sally, I *couldn't* miss him along the road—*you* know that."

"But oh, dear, dear, what *will* Sis say! He must a come! You must a missed him. He—"

"Oh, don't distress me any more'n I'm already distressed. I don't know what in the world to make of it. I'm at my wit's end, and I don't mind acknowledging 't I'm right down scared. But there's no hope that he's come; for he *couldn't* come and me miss him. Sally, it's terrible—just terrible—something's happened to the boat, sure!"

"Why, Silas! Look yonder!—up the road!—ain't that somebody coming?"

He sprung to the window at the head of the bed, and that give Mrs. Phelps the chance she wanted. She stooped down quick, at the foot of the bed, and give me a pull, and out I come; and when he turned back from the window,

there she stood, a-beaming and a-smiling like a house afire, and I standing pretty meek and sweaty alongside. The old gentleman stared, and says:

“Why, who’s that?”

“Who do you reckon ’t is?”

“I hain’t no idea. Who *is* it?”

“It’s *Tom Sawyer!*”

By jings, I most slumped through the floor. But there warn’t no time to swap knives;¹ the old man grabbed me by the hand and shook, and kept on shaking; and all the time, how the woman did dance around and laugh and cry; and then how they both did fire off questions about Sid, and Mary, and the rest of the tribe.

But if they was joyful, it warn’t nothing to what I was; for it was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was. Well, they froze to me for two hours; and at last when my chin was so tired it couldn’t hardly go, any more, I had told them more about my family—I mean the Sawyer family—than ever happened to any six Sawyer families. And I explained all about how we blowed out a cylinder-head at the mouth of the White River² and it took us three days to fix it. Which was all right, and worked first rate; because *they* didn’t know but what it would take three days to fix it. If I’d a called it a bolt-head it would a done just as well.

Now I was feeling pretty comfortable all down one side, and pretty uncomfortable all up the other. Being Tom Sawyer was easy and comfortable; and it stayed easy and comfortable till by-and-by I hear a steamboat coughing along down the river—then I says to myself, spouse Tom Sawyer come down on that boat?—and spouse he steps in here, any minute, and sings out my name before I can throw him a wink to keep quiet? Well, I couldn’t *have* it that way—it wouldn’t do at all. I must go up the road and waylay him. So I told the folks I reckoned I would go up to the town and fetch down my baggage. The old gentleman was for going along with me, but I said no, I could drive the horse myself, and I druther he wouldn’t take no trouble about me.

Chapter XXXIII

So I started for town, in the wagon, and when I was half-way I see a wagon coming, and sure enough it was Tom Sawyer, and I stopped and waited till he come along. I says “Hold on!” and it stopped alongside, and his mouth opened up like a trunk, and staid so; and he swallowed two or three times like a person that’s got a dry throat, and then says:

“I hain’t ever done you no harm. You know that. So then, what you want to come back and ha’nt *me* for?”

I says:

“I hain’t come back—I hain’t been *gone*.”

When he heard my voice, it righted him up some, but he warn’t quite satisfied yet. He says:

“Don’t you play nothing on me, because I wouldn’t on you. Honest injun, now, you ain’t a ghost?”

1. I.e., change plans.

2. The White River meets the Mississippi in Desha County, Arkansas.

“Honest injun, I ain’t,” I says.

“Well—I—I—well, that ought to settle it, of course; but I can’t somehow seem to understand it, no way. Looky here, warn’t you ever murdered *at all*?”

“No. I warn’t ever murdered at all—I played it on them. You come in here and feel of me if you don’t believe me.”

So he done it; and it satisfied him; and he was that glad to see me again, he didn’t know what to do. And he wanted to know all about it right off; because it was a grand adventure, and mysterious, and so it hit him where he lived. But I said, leave it along till by-and-by; and told his driver to wait, and we drove off a little piece, and I told him the kind of a fix I was in, and what did he reckon we better do? He said, let him alone a minute, and don’t disturb him. So he thought and thought, and pretty soon he says:

“It’s all right, I’ve got it. Take my trunk in your wagon, and let on it’s your’n; and you turn back and fool along slow, so as to get to the house about the time you ought to; and I’ll go towards town a piece, and take a fresh start, and get there a quarter or a half an hour after you; and you needn’t let on to know me, at first.”

I says:

“All right; but wait a minute. There’s one more thing—a thing that *nobody* don’t know but me. And that is, there’s a nigger here that I’m trying to steal out of slavery—and his name is *Jim*—old Miss Watson’s Jim.”

He says:

“What! Why Jim is—”

He stopped and went to studying. I says:

“I know what you’ll say. You’ll say it’s dirty low-down business; but what if it is?—*I’m* low down; and I’m agoing to steal him, and I want you to keep mum and not let on. Will you?”

His eye lit up, and he says:

“I’ll *help* you steal him!”

Well, I let go all holts then, like I was shot. It was the most astonishing speech I ever heard—and I’m bound to say Tom Sawyer fell, considerable, in my estimation. Only I couldn’t believe it. Tom Sawyer a *nigger stealer*!

“Oh, shucks,” I says, “you’re joking.”

“I ain’t joking, either.”

“Well, then,” I says, “joking or no joking, if you hear anything said about a runaway nigger, don’t forget to remember that *you* don’t know nothing about him, and *I* don’t know nothing about him.”

Then we took the trunk and put it in my wagon, and he drove off his way, and I drove mine. But of course I forgot all about driving slow, on accounts of being glad and full of thinking; so I got home a heap too quick for that length of trip. The old gentleman was at the door, and he says:

“Why, this is wonderful. Who ever would a thought it was in that mare to do it. I wish we’d a timed her. And she hain’t sweated a hair—not a hair. It’s wonderful. Why, I wouldn’t take a hundred dollars for that horse now; I wouldn’t, honest; and yet I’d a sold her for fifteen before, and thought ’twas all she was worth.”

That’s all he said. He was the innocentest, best old soul I ever see. But it warn’t surprising; because he warn’t only just a farmer, he was a preacher, too, and had a little one-horse log church down back of the plantation, which he built it himself at his own expense, for a church and school-house, and

never charged nothing for his preaching, and it was worth it, too. There was plenty other farmer-preachers like that, and done the same way, down South.

In about half an hour Tom's wagon drove up to the front stile, and Aunt Sally she see it through the window because it was only about fifty yards, and says:

"Why, there's somebody come! I wonder who 'tis? Why, I do believe it's a stranger. Jimmy" (that's one of the children), "run and tell Lize to put on another plate for dinner."

Everybody made a rush for the front door, because, of course, a stranger don't come *every* year, and so he lays over the yaller fever, for interest, when he does come. Tom was over the stile and starting for the house; the wagon was spinning up the road for the village, and we was all bunched in the front door. Tom had his store clothes on, and an audience—and that was always nuts for Tom Sawyer. In them circumstances it warn't no trouble to him to throw in an amount of style that was suitable. He warn't a boy to meeky along up that yard like a sheep; no, he come ca'm and important, like the ram. When he got afront of us, he lifts his hat ever so gracious and dainty, like it was the lid of a box that had butterflies asleep in it and he didn't want to disturb them, and says:

"Mr. Archibald Nichols, I presume?"

"No, my boy," says the old gentleman, "I'm sorry to say 't your driver has deceived you; Nichols's place is down a matter of three mile more. Come in, come in."

Tom he took a look back over his shoulder, and says, "Too late—he's out of sight."

"Yes, he's gone, my son, and you must come in and eat your dinner with us; and then we'll hitch up and take you down to Nichols's."

"Oh, I *can't* make you so much trouble; I couldn't think of it. I'll walk—I don't mind the distance."

"But we won't *let* you walk—it wouldn't be Southern hospitality to do it. Come right in."

"Oh, *do*," says Aunt Sally; "it ain't a bit of trouble to us, not a bit in the world. You *must* stay. It's a long, dusty three mile, and we *can't* let you walk. And besides, I've already told 'em to put on another plate, when I see you coming; so you mustn't disappoint us. Come right in, and make yourself at home."

So Tom he thanked them very hearty and handsome, and let himself be persuaded, and come in; and when he was in, he said he was a stranger from Hicksville, Ohio, and his name was William Thompson—and he made another bow.

Well, he run on, and on, and on, making up stuff about Hicksville and everybody in it he could invent, and I getting a little nervous, and wondering how this was going to help me out of my scrape; and at last, still talking along, he reached over and kissed Aunt Sally right on the mouth, and then settled back again in his chair, comfortable, and was going on talking; but she jumped up and wiped it off with the back of her hand, and says:

"You owdacious puppy!"

He looked kind of hurt, and says:

"I'm surprised at you, m'am."

"You're s'rp—Why, what do you reckon I am? I've a good notion to take and—say, what do you mean by kissing me?"

He looked kind of humble, and says:

"I didn't mean nothing, m'am. I didn't mean no harm. I—I—thought you'd like it."

"Why, you born fool!" She took up the spinning-stick, and it looked like it was all she could do to keep from giving him a crack with it. "What made you think I'd like it?"

"Well, I don't know. Only, they—they—told me you would."

"They told you I would. Whoever told you's *another* lunatic. I never heard the beat of it. Who's *they*?"

"Why—everybody. They all said so, m'am."

It was all she could do to hold in; and her eyes snapped, and her fingers worked like she wanted to scratch him; and she says:

"Who's everybody? Out with their names—or ther'll be an idiot short."

He got up and looked distressed, and fumbled his hat, and says:

"I'm sorry, and I warn't expecting it. They told me to. They all told me to. They all said kiss her; and said she'll like it. They all said it—every one of them. But I'm sorry, m'am, and I won't do it no more—I won't, honest."

"You won't, won't you? Well, I sh'd *reckon* you won't!"

"No'm, I'm honest about it; I won't ever do it again. Till you ask me."

"Till I *ask* you! Well, I never see the beat of it in my born days! I lay you'll be the Methusalem-numskull³ of creation before ever I ask you—or the likes of you."

"Well," he says, "it does surprise me so. I can't make it out, somehow. They said you would, and I thought you would. But—" He stopped and looked around slow, like he wished he could run across a friendly eye, somewhere's; and fetched up on the old gentleman's, and says, "Didn't *you* think she'd like me to kiss her, sir?"

"Why, no, I—I—well, no, I b'lieve I didn't."

Then he looks on around, the same way, to me—and says:

"Tom, didn't *you* think Aunt Sally 'd open out her arms and say, 'Sid Sawyer—'"

"My land!" she says, breaking in and jumping for him, "you impudent young rascal, to fool a body so—" and was going to hug him, but he fended her off, and says:

"No, not till you've asked me, first."

So she didn't lose no time, but asked him; and hugged him and kissed him, over and over again, and then turned him over to the old man, and he took what was left. And after they got a little quiet again, she says:

"Why, dear me, I never see such a surprise. We warn't looking for *you*, at all, but only Tom. Sis never wrote to me about anybody coming but him."

"It's because it warn't *intended* for any of us to come but Tom," he says; "but I begged and begged, and at the last minute she let me come, too; so, coming down the river, me and Tom thought it would be a first-rate surprise for him to come here to the house first, and for me to by-and-by tag along and drop in and let on to be a stranger. But it was a mistake, Aunt Sally. This ain't no healthy place for a stranger to come."

3. Methuselah was a biblical patriarch said to have lived 969 years.

“No—not impudent whelps, Sid. You ought to had your jaws boxed; I hain’t been so put out since I don’t know when. But I don’t care, I don’t mind the terms—I’d be willing to stand a thousand such jokes to have you here. Well, to think of that performance! I don’t deny it, I was most petrified⁴ with astonishment when you give me that smack.”

We had dinner out in that broad open passage betwixt the house and the kitchen; and there was things enough on that table for seven families—and all hot, too; none of your flabby tough meat that’s laid in a cupboard in a damp cellar all night and tastes like a hunk of old cold cannibal in the morning. Uncle Silas he asked a pretty long blessing over it, but it was worth it; and it didn’t cool it a bit, neither, the way I’ve seen them kind of interruptions do, lots of times.

There was a considerable good deal of talk, all the afternoon, and me and Tom was on the lookout all the time, but it warn’t no use, they didn’t happen to say nothing about any runaway nigger, and we was afraid to try to work up to it. But at supper, at night, one of the little boys says:

“Pa, mayn’t Tom and Sid and me go to the show?”

“No,” says the old man, “I reckon there ain’t going to be any; and you couldn’t go if there was; because the runaway nigger told Burton and me all about that scandalous show, and Burton said he would tell the people; so I reckon they’ve drove the owdacious loafers out of town before this time.”

So there it was!—but *I* couldn’t help it. Tom and me was to sleep in the same room and bed; so, being tired, we bid good-night and went up to bed, right after supper, and clumb out of the window and down the lightning-rod, and shoved for the town; for I didn’t believe anybody was going to give the king and the duke a hint, and so, if I didn’t hurry up and give them one they’d get into trouble sure.

On the road Tom he told me all about how it was reckoned I was murdered, and how pap disappeared, pretty soon, and didn’t come back no more, and what a stir there was when Jim run away; and I told Tom all about our Royal Nonesuch rascallions, and as much of the raft-voyage as I had time to; and as we struck into the town and up through the middle of it—it was as much as half-after eight, then—here comes a raging rush of people, with torches, and an awful whooping and yelling, and banging tin pans and blowing horns; and we jumped to one side to let them go by; and as they went by, I see they had the king and the duke astraddle of a rail—that is, I knowed it *was* the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn’t look like nothing in the world that was human—just looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes. Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn’t ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another.

We see we was too late—couldn’t do no good. We asked some stragglers about it, and they said everybody went to the show looking very innocent; and laid low and kept dark till the poor old king was in the middle of his cavortings on the stage; then somebody give a signal, and the house rose up and went for them.

4. Petrified or stunned.

So we poked along back home, and I warn't feeling so brash as I was before, but kind of ornery, and humble, and to blame, somehow—though *I* hadn't done anything. But that's always the way; it don't make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him *anyway*. If I had a yaller dog that didn't know no more than a person's conscience does, I would pison him. It takes up more room than all the rest of a person's insides, and yet ain't no good, nohow. Tom Sawyer he says the same.

Chapter XXXIV

We stopped talking, and got to thinking. By-and-by Tom says:

"Looky here, Huck, what fools we are, to not think of it before! I bet I know where Jim is."

"No! Where?"

"In that hut down by the ash-hopper. Why, looky here. When we was at dinner, didn't you see a nigger man go in there with some vittles?"

"Yes."

"What did you think the vittles was for?"

"For a dog."

"So'd I. Well, it wasn't for a dog."

"Why?"

"Because part of it was watermelon."

"So it was—I noticed it. Well, it does beat all, that I never thought about a dog not eating watermelon. It shows how a body can see and don't see at the same time."

"Well, the nigger unlocked the padlock when he went in, and he locked it again when he come out. He fetched uncle a key, about the time we got up from table—same key, I bet. Watermelon shows man, lock shows prisoner; and it ain't likely there's two prisoners on such a little plantation, and where the people's all so kind and good. Jim's the prisoner. All right—I'm glad we found it out detective fashion; I wouldn't give shucks for any other way. Now you work your mind and study out a plan to steal Jim, and I will study out one, too; and we'll take the one we like the best."

What a head for just a boy to have! If I had Tom Sawyer's head, I wouldn't trade it off to be a duke, nor mate of a steamboat, nor clown in a circus, nor nothing I can think of. I went to thinking out a plan, but only just to be doing something; I knowed very well where the right plan was going to come from. Pretty soon, Tom says:

"Ready?"

"Yes," I says.

"All right—bring it out."

"My plan is this," I says. "We can easy find out if it's Jim in there. Then get up my canoe to-morrow night, and fetch my raft over from the island. Then the first dark night that comes, steal the key out of the old man's britches, after he goes to bed, and shove off down the river on the raft, with Jim, hiding daytimes and running nights, the way me and Jim used to do before. Wouldn't that plan work?"

"*Work?* Why cert'nly, it would work, like rats a fighting. But it's too blame' simple; there ain't nothing *to* it. What's the good of a plan that ain't no more

trouble than that? It's as mild as goose-milk. Why, Huck, it wouldn't make no more talk than breaking into a soap factory."

I never said nothing, because I warn't expecting nothing different; but I knowed mighty well that whenever he got *his* plan ready it wouldn't have none of them objections to it.

And it didn't. He told me what it was, and I see in a minute it was worth fifteen of mine, for style, and would make Jim just as free a man as mine would, and maybe get us all killed besides. So I was satisfied, and said we would waltz in on it. I needn't tell what it was, here, because I knowed it wouldn't stay the way it was. I knowed he would be changing it around, every which way, as we went along, and heaving in new bullinesses wherever he got a chance. And that is what he done.

Well, one thing was dead sure; and that was, that Tom Sawyer was in earnest and was actuly going to help steal that nigger out of slavery. That was the thing that was too many for me. Here was a boy that was respectable, and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without any more pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I *couldn't* understand it, no way at all. It was outrageous, and I knowed I ought to just up and tell him so; and so be his true friend, and let him quit the thing right where he was, and save himself. And I *did* start to tell him; but he shut me up, and says:

"Don't you reckon I know what I'm about? Don't I generly know what I'm about?"

"Yes."

"Didn't I *say* I was going to help steal the nigger?"

"Yes."

"*Well* then."

That's all he said, and that's all I said. It warn't no use to say any more; because when he said he'd do a thing, he always done it. But I couldn't make out how he was willing to go into this thing; so I just let it go, and never bothered no more about it. If he was bound to have it so, I couldn't help it.

When we got home, the house was all dark and still; so we went on down to the hut by the ash-hopper, for to examine it. We went through the yard, so as to see what the hounds would do. They knowed us, and didn't make no more noise than country dogs is always doing when anything comes by in the night. When we got to the cabin, we took a look at the front and the two sides; and on the side I warn't acquainted with—which was the north side—we found a square window-hole, up tolerable high, with just one stout board nailed across it. I says:

"Here's the ticket. This hole's big enough for Jim to get through, if we wrench off the board."

Tom says:

"It's as simple as tit-tat-toe, three-in-a-row, and as easy as playing hooky. I should *hope* we can find a way that's a little more complicated than *that*, Huck Finn."

"Well, then," I says, "how'll it do to saw him out, the way I done before I was murdered, that time?"

"That's more *like*," he says, "It's real mysterious, and troublesome, and good," he says; "but I bet we can find a way that's twice as long. There ain't no hurry; le's keep on looking around."

Betwixt the hut and the fence, on the back side, was a lean-to, that joined the hut at the eaves, and was made out of plank. It was as long as the hut, but narrow—only about six foot wide. The door to it was at the south end, and was padlocked. Tom he went to the soap kettle, and searched around and fetched back the iron thing they lift the lid with; so he took it and prized out one of the staples. The chain fell down, and we opened the door and went in, and shut it, and struck a match, and see the shed was only built against the cabin and hadn't no connection with it; and there warn't no floor to the shed, nor nothing in it but some old rusty played-out hoes, and spades, and picks, and a crippled plow. The match went out, and so did we, and shoved in the staple again, and the door was locked as good as ever. Tom was joyful. He says:

"Now we're all right. We'll *dig* him out. It'll take about a week!"

Then we started for the house, and I went in the back door—you only have to pull a buckskin latch-string, they don't fasten the doors—but that warn't romantical enough for Tom Sawyer: no way would do him but he must climb up the lightning-rod. But after he got up half-way about three times, and missed fire and fell every time, and the last time most busted his brains out, he thought he'd got to give it up; but after he rested, he allowed he would give her one more turn for luck, and this time he made the trip.

In the morning we was up at break of day, and down to the nigger cabins to pet the dogs and make friends with the nigger that fed Jim—if it *was* Jim that was being fed. The niggers was just getting through breakfast and starting for the fields; and Jim's nigger was piling up a tin pan with bread and meat and things; and whilst the other was leaving, the key come from the house.

This nigger had a good-natured, chuckle-headed face, and his wool was all tied up in little bunches with thread. That was to keep witches off. He said the witches was pestering him awful, these nights, and making him see all kinds of strange things, and hear all kinds of strange words and noises, and he didn't believe he was ever witched so long, before, in his life. He got so worked up, and got to running on so about his troubles, he forgot all about what he'd been agoing to do. So Tom says:

"What's the vittles for? Going to feed the dogs?"

The nigger kind of smiled around graduly over his face, like when you heave a brickbat in a mud puddle, and he says:

"Yes, Mars Sid, *a* dog. Cur'us dog too. Does you want to go en look at 'im?"

"Yes."

I hunched Tom, and whispers:

"You goin', right here in the day-break? *That* warn't the plan."

"No, it warn't—but it's the plan *now*."

So, drat him, we went along, but I didn't like it much. When we got in, we couldn't hardly see anything, it was so dark; but Jim was there, sure enough, and could see us; and he sings out:

"Why, *Huck!* En good *lan!* ain' dat Misto Tom?"

I just knowed how it would be; I just expected it. *I* didn't know nothing to do; and if I had, I couldn't done it; because that nigger busted in and says:

"Why, de gracious sakes! do he know you genlmen?"

We could see pretty well, now. Tom he looked at the nigger, steady and kind of wondering, and says:

"Does *who* know us?"

"Why, dish-yer runaway nigger."

"I don't reckon he does; but what put that into your head?"

"What *put* it dar? Didn' he jis' dis minute sing out like he knowed you?"

Tom says, in a puzzled-up kind of way:

"Well, that's mighty curious. *Who* sung out? *When* did he sing out? *What* did he sing out?" And turns to me, perfectly ca'm, and says, "Did *you* hear anybody sing out?"

Of course there warn't nothing to be said but the one thing; so I says:

"No; I ain't heard nobody say nothing."

Then he turns to Jim, and looks him over like he never see him before; and says:

"Did you sing out?"

"No, sah," says Jim; "*I* hain't said nothing, sah."

"Not a word?"

"No, sah, I hain't said a word."

"Did you ever see us before?"

"No, sah; not as *I* knows on."

So Tom turns to the nigger, which was looking wild and distressed, and says, kind of severe:

"What do you reckon's the matter with you, anyway? What made you think somebody sung out?"

"Oh, it's de dad-blame' witches, sah, en I wisht I was dead, I do. Dey's awluz at it, sah, en dey do mos' kill me, dey sk'yers me so. Please to don't tell nobody 'bout it sah, er old Mars Silas he'll scole me; 'kase he say dey *ain't* no witches. I jis' wish to goodness he was heah now—*den* what would he say! I jis' bet he couldn' fine no way to git aroun' it *dis* time. But it's awluz jis' so; people dat's *sot*, stays sot; dey won't look into nothn' en fine it out f'r deyselves, en when *you* fine it out en tell um 'bout it, dey doan' b'lieve you."

Tom give him a dime, and said we wouldn't tell nobody; and told him to buy some more thread to tie up his wool with; and then looks at Jim, and says:

"I wonder if Uncle Silas is going to hang this nigger. If I was to catch a nigger that was ungrateful enough to run away, *I* wouldn't give him up, I'd hang him." And whilst the nigger stepped to the door to look at the dime and bite it to see if it was good, he whispers to Jim and says:

"Don't ever let on to know us. And if you hear any digging going on nights, it's us: we're going to set you free."

Jim only had time to grab us by the hand and squeeze it, then the nigger come back, and we said we'd come again some time if the nigger wanted us to; and he said he would, more particular if it was dark, because the witches went for him mostly in the dark, and it was good to have folks around then.

Chapter XXXV

It would be most an hour, yet, till breakfast, so we left, and struck down into the woods; because Tom said we got to have *some* light to see how to dig by, and a lantern makes too much, and might get us into trouble; what we must have was a lot of them rotten chunks that's called fox-fire⁵ and just makes a soft kind of a glow when you lay them in a dark place. We fetched an armful and hid it in the weeds, and set down to rest, and Tom says, kind of dissatisfied:

"Blame it, this whole thing is just as easy and awkward as it can be. And so it makes it so rotten difficult to get up a difficult plan. There ain't no watchman to be drugged—now there *ought* to be a watchman. There ain't even a dog to give a sleeping-mixture to. And there's Jim chained by one leg, with a ten-foot chain, to the leg of his bed; why, all you got to do is to lift up the bedstead and slip off the chain. And Uncle Silas he trusts everybody; sends the key to the punkin-headed nigger, and don't send nobody to watch the nigger. Jim could a got out of that window hole before this, only there wouldn't be no use trying to travel with a ten-foot chain on his leg. Why, drat it, Huck, it's the stupidest arrangement I ever see. You got to invent *all* the difficulties. Well, we can't help it, we got to do the best we can with the materials we've got. Anyhow, there's one thing—there's more honor in getting him out through a lot of difficulties and dangers, where there warn't one of them furnished to you by the people who it was their duty to furnish them, and you had to contrive them all out of your own head. Now look at just that one thing of the lantern. When you come down to the cold facts, we simply got to *let on* that a lantern's resky. Why, we could work with a torchlight procession if we wanted to, *I* believe. Now, whilst I think of it, we got to hunt up something to make a saw out of, the first chance we get."

"What do we want of a saw?"

"What do we *want* of it? Hain't we got to saw the leg of Jim's bed off, so as to get the chain loose?"

"Why, you just said a body could lift up the bedstead and slip the chain off."

"Well, if that ain't just like you, Huck Finn. You *can* get up the infant-schooliest ways of going at a thing. Why, hain't you ever read any books at all?—Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV.⁶ nor none of them heroes? Whoever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an old-maidy way as that? No; the way all the best authorities does, is to saw the bedleg in two, and leave it just so, and swallow the sawdust, so it can't be found, and put some dirt and grease around the sawed place so the very keenest seneskal⁷ can't see no sign of it's being sawed, and thinks the bedleg is perfectly sound. Then, the night you're ready, fetch the leg a kick, down she goes; slip off your chain, and there you are. Nothing to do but hitch your rope-ladder to the battlements, shin down it, break your leg in the moat—because a rope-ladder is nineteen foot too short, you know—and there's your

5. Phosphorescent glow of fungus on rotting wood.

6. Baron Friedrich von der Trenck (1726–1794), an Austrian soldier, and Henry IV of France (1553–1610), military heroes. Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571), an artist, and Giovanni Jacopo

Casanova (1725–1798) were both famous lovers. All four were involved in daring escape attempts.

7. Seneschal, powerful official in the service of medieval nobles.

horses and your trusty vassles, and they scoop you up and fling you across a saddle and away you go, to your native Langudoc, or Navarre,⁸ or wherever it is. It's gaudy, Huck. I wish there was a moat to this cabin. If we get time, the night of the escape, we'll dig one."

I says:

"What do we want of a moat, when we're going to snake him out from under the cabin?"

But he never heard me. He had forgot me and everything else. He had his chin in his hand, thinking. Pretty soon, he sighs, and shakes his head; then sighs again, and says:

"No, it wouldn't do—there ain't necessity enough for it."

"For what?" I says.

"Why, to saw Jim's leg off," he says.

"Good land!" I says, "why, there ain't *no* necessity for it. And what would you want to saw his leg off for, anyway?"

"Well, some of the best authorities has done it. They couldn't get the chain off, so they just cut their hand off, and shoved. And a leg would be better still. But we got to let that go. There ain't necessity enough in this case; and besides, Jim's a nigger and wouldn't understand the reasons for it, and how it's the custom in Europe, so we'll let it go. But there's one thing—he can have a rope-ladder; we can tear up our sheets and make him a rope-ladder easy enough. And we can send it to him in a pie; it's mostly done that way. And I've et worse pies."

"Why, Tom Sawyer, how you talk," I says; "Jim ain't got no use for a rope-ladder."

"He *has* got use for it. How *you* talk, you better say; you don't know nothing about it. He's *got* to have a rope ladder; they all do."

"What in the nation can he *do* with it?"

"*Do* with it? He can hide it in his bed, can't he? That's what they all do; and he's got to, too. Huck, you don't ever seem to want to do anything that's regular; you want to be starting something fresh all the time. Spose he *don't* do nothing with it? ain't it there in his bed, for a clew, after he's gone? and don't you reckon they'll want clews? Of course they will. And you wouldn't leave them any? That would be a *pretty* howdy-do *wouldn't* it! I never heard of such a thing."

"Well," I says, "if it's in the regulations, and he's got to have it, all right, let him have it; because I don't wish to go back on no regulations; but there's one thing, Tom Sawyer—if we go tearing up our sheets to make Jim a rope-ladder, we're going to get into trouble with Aunt Sally, just as sure as you're born. Now, the way I look at it, a hickry-bark ladder don't cost nothing, and don't waste nothing, and is just as good to load up a pie with, and hide in a straw tick, as any rag ladder you can start; and as for Jim, he hain't had no experience, and so *he* don't care what kind of a—"

"Oh, shucks, Huck Finn, if I was as ignorant as you, I'd keep still—that's what *I'd* do. Who ever heard of a state prisoner escaping by a hickry-bark ladder? Why, it's perfectly ridiculous."

"Well, all right, Tom, fix it your own way; but if you'll take my advice, you'll let me borrow a sheet off of the clothes-line."

8. Provinces in France and Spain, respectively.

He said that would do. And that give him another idea, and he says:

“Borrow a shirt, too.”

“What do we want of a shirt, Tom?”

“Want it for Jim to keep a journal on.”

“Journal your granny—*Jim* can’t write.”

“Spose he *can’t* write—he can make marks on the shirt, can’t he, if we make him a pen out of an old pewter spoon or a piece of an old iron barrel-hoop?”

“Why, Tom, we can pull a feather out of a goose and make him a better one; and quicker, too.”

“*Prisoners* don’t have geese running around the donjon-keep to pull pens out of, you muggins. They *always* make their pens out of the hardest, toughest, troublesomest piece of old brass candlestick or something like that they can get their hands on; and it takes them weeks and weeks, and months and months to file it out, too, because they’ve got to do it by rubbing it on the wall. They wouldn’t use a goose-quill if they had it. It ain’t regular.”

“Well, then, what’ll we make him the ink out of?”

“Many makes it out of iron-rust and tears; but that’s the common sort and women; the best authorities uses their own blood. Jim can do that; and when he wants to send any little common ordinary mysterious message to let the world know where he’s captivated, he can write it on the bottom of a tin plate with a fork and throw it out of the window. The Iron Mask⁹ always done that, and it’s a blame’ good way, too.”

“Jim ain’t got no tin plates. They feed him in a pan.”

“That ain’t anything; we can get him some.”

“Can’t nobody *read* his plates.”

“That ain’t got nothing to *do* with it, Huck Finn. All *he’s* got to do is to write on the plate and throw it out. You don’t *have* to be able to read it. Why, half the time you can’t read anything a prisoner writes on a tin plate, or anywhere else.”

“Well, then, what’s the sense in wasting the plates?”

“Why, blame it all, it ain’t the *prisoner’s* plates.”

“But it’s *somebody’s* plates, ain’t it?”

“Well, spos’n it is? What does the *prisoner* care whose—”

He broke off there, because we heard the breakfast-horn blowing. So we cleared out for the house.

Along during that morning I borrowed a sheet and a white shirt off of the clothes-line; and I found an old sack and put them in it, and we went down and got the fox-fire, and put that in too. I called it borrowing, because that was what pap always called it; but Tom said it warn’t borrowing, it was stealing. He said we was representing prisoners; and prisoners don’t care how they get a thing so they get it, and nobody don’t blame them for it, either. It ain’t no crime in a prisoner to steal the thing he needs to get away with, Tom said; it’s his right; and so, as long as we was representing a prisoner, we had a perfect right to steal anything on this place we had the least use for, to get ourselves out of prison with. He said if we warn’t prisoners it would be a very different thing, and nobody but a mean ornery person would steal when he warn’t a prisoner. So we allowed we would steal everything there

9. The chief character in Alexandre Dumas’s novel *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* (1848–50), part of which was translated into English as *The Man in the Iron Mask*.

was that come handy. And yet he made a mighty fuss, one day, after that, when I stole a watermelon out of the nigger patch and eat it; and he made me go and give the niggers a dime, without telling them what it was for. Tom said that what he meant was, we could steal anything we *needed*. Well, I says, I needed the watermelon. But he said I didn't need it to get out of prison with, there's where the difference was. He said if I'd a wanted it to hide a knife in, and smuggle it to Jim to kill the seneskal with, it would a been all right. So I let it go at that, though I couldn't see no advantage in my representing a prisoner, if I got to set down and chaw over a lot of gold-leaf distinctions like that, every time I see a chance to hog a watermelon.

Well, as I was saying, we waited that morning till everybody was settled down to business, and nobody in sight around the yard; then Tom he carried the sack into the lean-to whilst I stood off a piece to keep watch. By-and-by he come out, and we went and set down on the wood-pile, to talk. He says:

"Everything's all right, now, except tools; and that's easy fixed."

"Tools?" I says.

"Yes."

"Tools for what?"

"Why, to dig with. We ain't agoing to *gnaw* him out, are we?"

"Ain't them old crippled picks and things in there good enough to dig a nigger out with?" I says.

He turns on me looking pitying enough to make a body cry, and says:

"Huck Finn, did you *ever* hear of a prisoner having picks and shovels, and all the modern conveniences in his wardrobe to dig himself out with? Now I want to ask you—if you got any reasonableness in you at all—what kind of a show would *that* give him to be a hero? Why, they might as well lend him the key, and done with it. Picks and shovels—why they wouldn't furnish 'em to a king."

"Well, then," I says, "if we don't want the picks and shovels, what do we want?"

"A couple of case-knives."¹

"To dig the foundations out from under that cabin with?"

"Yes."

"Confound it, it's foolish, Tom."

"It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the *right* way—and it's the regular way. And there ain't no *other* way, that ever I heard of, and I've read all the books that gives any information about these things. They always dig out with a case-knife—and not through dirt, mind you; generly it's through solid rock. And it takes them weeks and weeks and weeks, and for ever and ever. Why, look at one of them prisoners in the bottom dungeon of the Castle Deef,² in the harbor of Marseilles, that dug himself out that way; how long was *he* at it, you reckon?"

"I don't know."

"Well, guess."

"I don't know. A month and a half?"

1. Ordinary kitchen knives.

2. The hero of Alexandre Dumas's popular Romantic novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) was held prisoner at the Château d'If, a

castle built by Francis I in 1524 on a small island in Marseilles harbor and used for many years as a state prison.

“*Thirty-seven year*—and he come out in China. *That’s* the kind. I wish the bottom of *this* fortress was solid rock.”

“*Jim* don’t know nobody in China.”

“What’s *that* got to do with it? Neither did that other fellow. But you’re always a-wandering off on a side issue. Why can’t you stick to the main point?”

“All right—I don’t care where he comes out, so he *comes* out; and *Jim* don’t, either, I reckon. But there’s one thing, anyway—*Jim’s* too old to be dug out with a case-knife. He won’t last.”

“Yes he will *last*, too. You don’t reckon it’s going to take thirty-seven years to dig out through a *dirt* foundation, do you?”

“How long will it take, Tom?”

“Well, we can’t resk being as long as we ought to, because it mayn’t take very long for Uncle Silas to hear from down there by New Orleans. He’ll hear *Jim* ain’t from there. Then his next move will be to advertise *Jim*, or something like that. So we can’t resk being as long digging him out as we ought to. By rights I reckon we ought to be a couple of years; but we can’t. Things being so uncertain, what I recommend is this: that we really dig right in, as quick as we can; and after that, we can *let on*, to ourselves, that we was at it thirty-seven years. Then we can snatch him out and rush him away the first time there’s an alarm. Yes, I reckon that’ll be the best way.”

“Now, there’s *sense* in that,” I says. “Letting on don’t cost nothing; letting on ain’t no trouble; and if it’s any object, I don’t mind letting on we was at it a hundred and fifty year. It wouldn’t strain me none, after I got my hand in. So I’ll mosey along now, and smouch a couple of case-knives.”

“Smouch three,” he says; “we want one to make a saw out of.”

“Tom, if it ain’t unregular and irreligious to sejest it,” I says, “there’s an old rusty saw-blade around yonder sticking under the weatherboarding behind the smoke-house.”

He looked kind of weary and discouraged-like, and says:

“It ain’t no use to try to learn you nothing, Huck. Run along and smouch the knives—three of them.” So I done it.

Chapter XXXVI

As soon as we reckoned everybody was asleep, that night, we went down the lightning-rod, and shut ourselves up in the lean-to, and got out our pile of fox-fire, and went to work. We cleared everything out of the way, about four or five foot along the middle of the bottom log. Tom said he was right behind *Jim’s* bed now, and we’d dig in under it, and when we got through there couldn’t nobody in the cabin ever know there was any hole there, because *Jim’s* counterpin³ hung down most to the ground, and you’d have to raise it up and look under to see the hole. So we dug and dug, with case-knives, till most midnight; and then we was dog-tired, and our hands was blistered, and yet you couldn’t see we’d done anything, hardly. At last I says:

“This ain’t no thirty-seven year job, this is a thirty-eight year job, Tom Sawyer.”

3. Counterpane or bedspread.

He never said nothing. But he sighed, and pretty soon he stopped digging, and then for a good little while I knowed he was thinking. Then he says:

"It ain't no use, Huck, it ain't agoing to work. If we was prisoners it would, because then we'd have as many years as we wanted, and no hurry; and we wouldn't get but a few minutes to dig, every day, while they was changing watches, and so our hands wouldn't get blistered, and we could keep it up right along, year in and year out, and do it right, and the way it ought to be done. But *we* can't fool along, we got to rush; we ain't got no time to spare. If we was to put in another night this way, we'd have to knock off for a week to let our hands get well—couldn't touch a case-knife with them sooner."

"Well, then, what we going to do, Tom?"

"I'll tell you. It ain't right, and it ain't moral, and I wouldn't like it to get out—but there ain't only just the one way; we got to dig him out with the picks, and *let on* it's case-knives."

"*Now you're talking!*" I says; "your head gets leveler and leveler all the time, Tom Sawyer," I says. "Picks is the thing, moral or no moral; and as for me, I don't care shucks for the morality of it, nohow. When I start in to steal a nigger, or a watermelon, or a Sunday-school book, I ain't no ways particular how it's done so it's done. What I want is my nigger; or what I want is my watermelon; or what I want is my Sunday-school book; and if a pick's the handiest thing, that's the thing I'm agoing to dig that nigger or that watermelon or that Sunday-school book out with; and I don't give a dead rat what the authorities thinks about it nuther."

"Well," he says, "there's excuse for picks and letting-on in a case like this; if it warn't so, I wouldn't approve of it, nor I wouldn't stand by and see the rules broke—because right is right, and wrong is wrong, and a body ain't got no business doing wrong when he ain't ignorant and knows better. It might answer for *you* to dig Jim out with a pick, *without* any letting-on, because you don't know no better; but it wouldn't for me, because I do know better. Gimme a case-knife."

He had his own by him, but I handed him mine. He flung it down, and says: "Gimme a *case-knife*."

I didn't know just what to do—but then I thought. I scratched around amongst the old tools, and got a pick-ax and give it to him, and he took it and went to work, and never said a word.

He was always just that particular. Full of principle.

So then I got a shovel, and then we picked and shoveled, turn about, and made the fur fly. We stuck to it about a half an hour, which was as long as we could stand up; but we had a good deal of a hole to show for it. When I got up stairs, I looked out at the window and see Tom doing his level best with the lightning-rod, but he couldn't come it, his hands was so sore. At last he says:

"It ain't no use, it can't be done. What you reckon I better do? Can't you think up no way?"

"Yes," I says, "but I reckon it ain't regular. Come up the stairs, and let on it's a lightning-rod."

So he done it.

Next day Tom stole a pewter spoon and a brass candlestick in the house, for to make some pens for Jim out of, and six tallow candles; and I hung around the nigger cabins, and laid for a chance, and stole three tin plates. Tom said it wasn't enough; but I said nobody wouldn't ever see the plates

that Jim threw out, because they'd fall in the dog-fennel and jimpsion weeds under the window-hole—then we could tote them back and he could use them over again. So Tom was satisfied. Then he says:

“Now, the thing to study out is, how to get the things to Jim.”

“Take them in through the hole,” I says, “when we get it done.”

He only just looked scornful, and said something about nobody ever heard of such an idiotic idea, and then he went to studying. By-and-by he said he had ciphered out two or three ways, but there warn't no need to decide on any of them yet. Said we'd got to post Jim first.

That night we went down the lightning-rod a little after ten, and took one of the candles along, and listened under the window-hole, and heard Jim snoring; so we pitched it in, and it didn't wake him. Then we whirled in with the pick and shovel, and in about two hours and a half the job was done. We crept in under Jim's bed and into the cabin, and pawed around and found the candle and lit it, and stood over Jim a while, and found him looking hearty and healthy, and then we woke him up gentle and gradual. He was so glad to see us he most cried; and called us honey, and all the pet names he could think of; and was for having us hunt up a cold chisel to cut the chain off of his leg with, right away, and clearing out without losing any time. But Tom he showed him how unregular it would be, and set down and told him all about our plans, and how we could alter them in a minute any time there was an alarm; and not to be the least afraid, because we would see he got away, *sure*. So Jim he said it was all right, and we set there and talked over old times a while, and then Tom asked a lot of questions, and when Jim told him Uncle Silas come in every day or two to pray with him, and Aunt Sally come in to see if he was comfortable and had plenty to eat, and both of them was kind as they could be, Tom says:

“Now I know how to fix it. We'll send you some things by them.”

I said, “Don't do nothing of the kind; it's one of the most jackass ideas I ever struck;” but he never paid no attention to me; went right on. It was his way when he'd got his plans set.

So he told Jim how we'd have to smuggle in the rope-ladder pie, and other large things, by Nat, the nigger that fed him, and he must be on the look-out, and not be surprised, and not let Nat see him open them; and we would put small things in uncle's coat pockets and he must steal them out; and we would tie things to aunt's apron strings or put them in her apron pocket, if we got a chance; and told him what they would be and what they was for. And told him how to keep a journal on the shirt with his blood, and all that. He told him everything. Jim he couldn't see no sense in the most of it, but he allowed we was white folks and knowed better than him; so he was satisfied, and said he would do it all just as Tom said.

Jim had plenty corn-cob pipes and tobacco; so we had a right down good sociable time; then we crawled out through the hole, and so home to bed, with hands that looked like they'd been chewed. Tom was in high spirits. He said it was the best fun he ever had in his life, and the most intellectual; and said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it. He said that in that way it could be strung out to as much as eighty year, and would be the best time on record. And he said it would make us all celebrated that had a hand in it.

In the morning we went out to the wood-pile and chopped up the brass candlestick into handy sizes, and Tom put them and the pewter spoon in his pocket. Then we went to the nigger cabins, and while I got Nat's notice off, Tom shoved a piece of candlestick into the middle of a corn-pone that was in Jim's pan, and we went along with Nat to see how it would work, and it just worked noble; when Jim bit into it it most mashed all his teeth out; and there warn't ever anything could a worked better. Tom said so himself. Jim he never let on but what it was only just a piece of rock or something like that that's always getting into bread, you know; but after that he never bit into nothing but what he jabbed his fork into it in three or four places, first.

And whilst we was a standing there in the dimmish light, here comes a couple of the hounds bulging in, from under Jim's bed; and they kept on piling in till there was eleven of them, and there warn't hardly room in there to get your breath. By jings, we forgot to fasten that lean-to door. The nigger Nat he only just hollered "witches!" once, and kneeled over onto the floor amongst the dogs, and begun to groan like he was dying. Tom jerked the door open and flung out a slab of Jim's meat, and the dogs went for it, and in two seconds he was out himself and back again and shut the door, and I knowed he'd fixed the other door too. Then he went to work on the nigger, coaxing him and petting him, and asking him if he'd been imagining he saw something again. He raised up, and blinked his eyes around, and says:

"Mars Sid, you'll say I's a fool, but if I didn't b'lieve I see most a million dogs, er devils, er some'n, I wisht I may die right heah in dese tracks. I did, mos' sholy. Mars Sid, I *felt* um—I *felt* um, sah; dey was all over me. Dad fetch it, I jis' wisht I could git my han's on one er dem witches jis' wunst—on'y jis' wunst—it's all I'd ast. But mos'ly I wisht dey'd lemme 'lone, I does."

Tom says:

"Well, I tell you what *I* think. What makes them come here just at this runaway nigger's breakfast-time? It's because they're hungry; that's the reason. You make them a witch pie; that's the thing for *you* to do."

"But my lan', Mars Sid, how's I gwyne to make 'm a witch pie? I doan' know how to make it. I hain't ever hearn er sich a thing b'fo'."

"Well, then, I'll have to make it myself."

"Will you do it, honey?—will you? I'll wusshup de groun' und' yo' foot, I will!"

"All right, I'll do it, seeing it's you, and you've been good to us and showed us the runaway nigger. But you got to be mighty careful. When we come around, you turn your back; and then whatever we've put in the pan, don't you let on you see it at all. And don't you look, when Jim unloads the pan—something might happen, I don't know what. And above all, don't you *handle* the witch-things."

"*Hannel* 'm Mars Sid? What is you a talkin' 'bout? I wouldn' lay de weight er my finger on um, not f'r ten hund'd thous'n' billion dollars, I wouldn't."

Chapter XXXVII

That was all fixed. So then we went away and went to the rubbage-pile in the back yard where they keep the old boots, and rags, and pieces of bottles, and wore-out tin things, and all such truck, and scratched around and found an old tin washpan and stopped up the holes as well as we could, to bake

the pie in, and took it down cellar and stole it full of flour, and started for breakfast and found a couple of shingle-nails that Tom said would be handy for a prisoner to scabble his name and sorrows on the dungeon walls with, and dropped one of them in Aunt Sally's apron pocket which was hanging on a chair, and t'other we stuck in the band of Uncle Silas's hat, which was on the bureau, because we heard the children say their pa and ma was going to the runaway nigger's house this morning, and then went to breakfast, and Tom dropped the pewter spoon in Uncle Silas's coat pocket, and Aunt Sally wasn't come yet, so we had to wait a little while.

And when she come she was hot, and red, and cross, and couldn't hardly wait for the blessing; and then she went to sluicing out coffee with one hand and cracking the handiest child's head with her thimble with the other, and says:

"I've hunted high, and I've hunted low, and it does beat all, what *has* become of your other shirt."

My heart fell down amongst my lungs and livers and things, and a hard piece of corn-crust started down my throat after it and got met on the road with a cough and was shot across the table and took one of the children in the eye and curled him up like a fishing-worm, and let a cry out of him the size of a war-whoop, and Tom he turned kinder blue around the gills, and it all amounted to a considerable state of things for about a quarter of a minute or as much as that, and I would a sold out for half price if there was a bidder. But after that we was all right again—it was the sudden surprise of it that knocked us so kind of cold. Uncle Silas he says:

"It's most uncommon curious, I can't understand it. I know perfectly well I took it *off*, because——"

"Because you hain't got but one on. Just *listen* at the man! I know you took it off, and know it by a better way than your wool-gathering memory, too, because it was on the clo'es-line yesterday—I see it there myself. But it's gone—that's the long and the short of it, and you'll just have to change to a red flann'l one till I can get time to make a new one. And it'll be the third I've made in two years; it just keeps a body on the jump to keep you in shirts; and whatever you do manage to *do* with 'm all, is more'n I can make out. A body'd think you *would* learn to take some sort of care of 'em, at your time of life."

"I know it, Sally, and I do try all I can. But it oughtn't to be altogether my fault, because you know I don't see them nor have nothing to do with them except when they're on me; and I don't believe I've ever lost one of them *off* of me."

"Well, it ain't *your* fault if you haven't, Silas—you'd a done it if you could, I reckon. And the shirt ain't all that's gone, nuther. Ther's a spoon gone; and *that* ain't all. There was ten, and now ther's only nine. The calf got the shirt I reckon, but the calf never took the spoon, *that's* certain."

"Why, what else is gone, Sally?"

"Ther's six *candles* gone—that's what. The rats could a got the candles, and I reckon they did; I wonder they don't walk off with the whole place, the way you're always going to stop their holes and don't do it; and if they warn't fools they'd sleep in your hair, Silas—you'd never find it out; but you can't lay the *spoon* on the rats, and that I *know*."

"Well, Sally, I'm in fault, and I acknowledge it; I've been remiss; but I won't let to-morrow go by without stopping up them holes."

“Oh, I wouldn’t hurry, next year’ll do. Matilda Angelina Araminta *Phelps!*”

Whack comes the thimble, and the child snatches her claws out of the sugar-bowl without fooling around any. Just then, the nigger woman steps onto the passage, and says:

“Missus, dey’s a sheet gone.”

“A *sheet* gone! Well, for land’s sake!”

“I’ll stop up them holes *to-day*,” says Uncle Silas, looking sorrowful.

“Oh, *do* shet up!—spose the rats took the *sheet*? *Where’s* it gone, Lize?”

“Clah to goodness I hain’t no notion, Miss Sally. She wuz on de clo’s-line yistiddy, but she done gone; she ain’ dah no mo’, now.”

“I reckon the world *is* coming to an end. I *never* see the beat of it, in all my born days. A shirt, and a sheet, and a spoon, and six can—”

“Missus,” comes a young yaller wench, “dey’s a brass candlestick miss’n.”

“Cler out from here, you hussy, er I’ll take a skillet to ye!”

Well, she was just a biling. I begun to lay for a chance; I reckoned I would sneak out and go for the woods till the weather moderated. She kept a raging right along, running her insurrection all by herself, and everybody else mighty meek and quiet; and at last Uncle Silas, looking kind of foolish, fishes up that spoon out of his pocket. She stopped, with her mouth open and her hands up, and as for me, I wished I was in Jerusalem or somewheres. But not long; because she says:

“It’s *just* as I expected. So you had it in your pocket all the time; and like as not you’ve got the other things there, too. How’d it get there?”

“I reely don’t know, Sally,” he says, kind of apologizing, “or you know I would tell. I was a-studying over my text in Acts Seventeen,⁴ before breakfast, and I reckon I put it in there, not noticing, meaning to put my Testament in, and it must be so, because my Testament ain’t in, but I’ll go and see, and if the Testament is where I had it, I’ll know I didn’t put it in, and that will show that I laid the Testament down and took up the spoon, and——”

“Oh, for the land’s sake! Give a body a rest! Go ’long now, the whole kit and biling of ye; and don’t come nigh me again till I’ve got back my peace of mind.”

I’d a heard her, if she’d a said it to herself, let alone speaking it out; and I’d a got up and obeyed her, if I’d a been dead. As we was passing through the setting-room, the old man he took up his hat, and the shingle-nail fell out on the floor, and he just merely picked it up and laid it on the mantel-shelf, and never said nothing, and went out. Tom see him do it, and remembered about the spoon, and says:

“Well, it ain’t no use to send things by *him* no more, he ain’t reliable.” Then he says: “But he done us a good turn with the spoon, anyway, without knowing it, and so we’ll go and do him one without *him* knowing it—stop up his rat-holes.”

There was a noble good lot of them, down cellar, and it took us a whole hour, but we done the job tight and good, and ship-shape. Then we heard steps on the stairs, and blowed out our light, and hid; and here comes the old man, with a candle in one hand and a bundle of stuff in t’other, looking as absent-minded as year before last. He went a mooning around, first to

4. In Acts 17, Paul’s preaching to the Athenians berates both their false gods and snobbery; verse 29 declares that “we are all God’s offspring.”

one rat-hole and then another, till he'd been to them all. Then he stood about five minutes, picking tallow-drip off of his candle and thinking. Then he turns off slow and dreamy towards the stairs, saying:

"Well, for the life of me I can't remember when I done it. I could show her now that I warn't to blame on account of the rats. But never mind—let it go. I reckon it wouldn't do no good."

And so he went on a mumbling up stairs, and then we left. He was a mighty nice old man. And always is.

Tom was a good deal bothered about what to do for a spoon, but he said we'd got to have it; so he took a think. When he had ciphered it out, he told me how we was to do; then we went and waited around the spoon-basket till we see Aunt Sally coming, and then Tom went to counting the spoons and laying them out to one side, and I slip one of them up my sleeve, and Tom says:

"Why, Aunt Sally, there ain't but nine spoons, *yet*."

She says:

"Go 'long to your play, and don't bother me. I know better, I counted 'm myself."

"Well, I've counted them twice, Aunty, and I can't make but nine."

She looked out of all patience, but of course she come to count—anybody would.

"I declare to gracious ther' *ain't* but nine!" she says. "Why, what in the world—plague *take* the things, I'll count 'm again."

So I slipped back the one I had, and when she got done counting, she says:

"Hang the troublesome rubbage, ther's *ten* now!" and she looked huffy and bothered both. But Tom says:

"Why, Aunty I don't think there's ten."

"You numskull, didn't you see me *count* 'm?"

"I know, but—"

"Well, I'll count 'm *again*."

So I smouched one, and they come out nine same as the other time. Well, she *was* in a tearing way—just a trembling all over, she was so mad. But she counted and counted, till she got that addled she'd start to count-in the *basket* for a spoon, sometimes; and so, three times they come out right, and three times they come out wrong. Then she grabbed up the basket and slammed it across the house and knocked the cat galley-west;⁵ and she said cle'r out and let her have some peace, and if we come bothering around her again betwixt that and dinner, she'd skin us. So we had the odd spoon; and dropped it in her apron pocket whilst she was giving us our sailing-orders, and Jim got it all right, along with her shingle-nail, before noon. We was very well satisfied with the business, and Tom allowed it was worth twice the trouble it took, because he said *now* she couldn't ever count them spoons twice alike again to save her life; and wouldn't believe she'd counted them right, if she *did*; and said that after she'd about counted her head off, for the last three days, he judged she'd give it up and offer to kill anybody that wanted her to ever count them any more.

So we put the sheet back on the line, that night, and stole one out of her closet; and kept on putting it back and stealing it again, for a couple of days,

5. Into confusion.

till she didn't know how many sheets she had, any more, and said she didn't *care*, and warn't agoing to bullyrag⁶ the rest of her soul out about it, and wouldn't count them again not to save her life, she druther die first.

So we was all right now, as to the shirt and the sheet and the spoon and the candles, by the help of the calf and the rats and the mixed-up counting; and as to the candlestick, it warn't no consequence, it would blow over by-and-by.

But that pie was a job; we had no end of trouble with that pie. We fixed it up away down in the woods, and cooked it there; and we got it done at last, and very satisfactory, too; but not all in one day; and we had to use up three washpans full of flour, before we got through, and we got burnt pretty much all over, in places, and eyes put out with the smoke; because, you see, we didn't want nothing but a crust, and we couldn't prop it up right, and she would always cave in. But of course we thought of the right way at last; which was to cook the ladder, too, in the pie. So then we laid in with Jim, the second night, and tore up the sheet all in little strings, and twisted them together, and long before daylight we had a lovely rope, that you could a hung a person with. We let on it took nine months to make it.

And in the forenoon we took it down to the woods, but it wouldn't go in the pie. Being made of a whole sheet, that way, there was rope enough for forty pies, if we'd a wanted them, and plenty left over for soup, or sausage, or anything you choose. We could a had a whole dinner.

But we didn't need it. All we needed was just enough for the pie, and so we threwed the rest away. We didn't cook none of the pies in the washpan, afraid the solder would melt; but Uncle Silas he had a noble brass warming-pan which he thought considerable of, because it belonged to one of his ancestors with a long wooden handle that come over from England with William the Conqueror in the *Mayflower*⁷ or one of them early ships and was hid away up garret with a lot of other old pots and things that was valuable, not on account of being any account because they warn't, but on account of them being relicts, you know, and we snaked her out, private, and took her down there, but she failed on the first pies, because we didn't know how, but she come up smiling on the last one. We took and lined her with dough, and set her in the coals, and loaded her up with rag-rope, and put on a dough roof, and shut down the lid, and put hot embers on top, and stood off five foot, with the long handle, cool and comfortable, and in fifteen minutes she turned out a pie that was a satisfaction to look at. But the person that et it would want to fetch a couple of kags of toothpicks along, for if that rope-ladder wouldn't cramp him down to business, I don't know nothing what I'm talking about, and lay him in enough stomach-ache to last him till next time, too.

Nat didn't look, when we put the witch-pie in Jim's pan; and we put the three tin plates in the bottom of the pan under the vittles; and so Jim got everything all right, and as soon as he was by himself he busted into the pie and hid the rope-ladder inside of his straw tick, and scratched some marks on a tin plate and throwed it out of the window-hole.

6. To nag mercilessly.

7. William the Conqueror lived in the 11th

century. The *Mayflower* made its crossing in 1620.

Chapter XXXVIII

Making them pens was a distressid-tough job, and so was the saw; and Jim allowed the inscription was going to be the toughest of all. That's the one which the prisoner has to scrabble on the wall. But we had to have it; Tom said we'd *got* to; there warn't no case of a state prisoner not scrabbling his inscription to leave behind, and his coat of arms.

"Look at Lady Jane Grey," he says; "look at Gilford Dudley; look at old Northumberland!⁸ Why, Huck, spose it *is* considerable trouble?—what you going to do?—how you going to get around it? Jim's *got* to do his inscription and coat of arms. They all do."

Jim says:

"Why, Mars Tom, I hain't got no coat o' arms; I hain't got nuffn but dish-er old shirt, en you knows I got to keep de journal on dat."

"Oh, you don't understand, Jim; a coat of arms is very different."

"Well," I says, "Jim's right, anyway, when he says he hain't got no coat of arms, because he hain't."

"I reckon *I* knowed that," Tom says, "but you bet he'll have one before he goes out of this—because he's going out *right*, and there ain't going to be no flaws in his record."

So whilst me and Jim filed away at the pens on a brickbat⁹ apiece, Jim a making his'n out of the brass and I making mine out of the spoon, Tom set to work to think out the coat of arms. By-and-by he said he'd struck so many good ones he didn't hardly know which to take, but there was one which he reckoned he'd decide on. He says:

"On the scutcheon¹ we'll have a bend *or* in the dexter base, a saltire *murrey* in the fess, with a dog, couchant, for common charge, and under his foot a chain embattled, for slavery, with a chevron *vert* in a chief engrailed, and three invected lines on a field *azure*, with the nombril points rampant on a dancette indented; crest, a runaway nigger, *sable*, with his bundle over his shoulder on a bar sinister; and a couple of gules for supporters, which is you and me; motto, *Maggiore fretta, minore atto*. Got it out of a book—means, the more haste, the less speed."

"Geewhillikins," I says, "but what does the rest of it mean?"

"We ain't got no time to bother over that," he says, "we got to dig in like all git-out."

"Well, anyway," I says, "what's *some* of it? What's a fess?"

"A fess—a fess is—you don't need to know what a fess is. I'll show him how to make it when he gets to it."

"Shucks, Tom," I says, "I think you might tell a person. What's a bar sinister?"

"Oh, *I* don't know. But he's got to have it. All the nobility does."

That was just his way. If it didn't suit him to explain a thing to you, he wouldn't do it. You might pump at him a week, it wouldn't make no difference.

8. The story of Lady Jane Grey (1537–1554), her husband, Guildford Dudley, and his father, the duke of Northumberland, was told in W. H. Ainsworth's romance *The Tower of London* (1840). The duke was at work carving a poem on the wall of his cell when the executioners came for him.

9. A fragment of brick.

1. An escutcheon is the shield-shaped surface on which a coat of arms is inscribed. The details are expressed in the technical terminology of heraldry.

He'd got all that coat of arms business fixed, so now he started in to finish up the rest of that part of the work, which was to plan out a mournful inscription—said Jim got to have one, like they all done. He made up a lot, and wrote them out on a paper, and read them off, so:

1. *Here a captive heart busted.*
2. *Here a poor prisoner, forsook by the world and friends, fretted out his sorrowful life.*
3. *Here a lonely heart broke, and a worn spirit went to its rest, after thirty-seven years of solitary captivity.*
4. *Here, homeless and friendless, after thirty-seven years of bitter captivity, perished a noble stranger, natural son of Louis XIV.*

Tom's voice trembled, whilst he was reading them, and he most broke down. When he got done, he couldn't no way make up his mind which one for Jim to scabble onto the wall, they was all so good; but at last he allowed he would let him scabble them all on. Jim said it would take him a year to scabble such a lot of truck onto the logs with a nail, and he didn't know how to make letters, besides; but Tom said he would block them out for him, and then he wouldn't have nothing to do but just follow the lines. Then pretty soon he says:

"Come to think, the logs ain't agoing to do; they don't have log walls in a dungeon: we got to dig the inscriptions into a rock. We'll fetch a rock."

Jim said the rock was worse than the logs; he said it would take him such a pison long time to dig them into a rock, he wouldn't ever get out. But Tom said he would let me help him do it. Then he took a look to see how me and Jim was getting along with the pens. It was most pesky tedious hard work and slow, and didn't give my hands no show to get well of the sores, and we didn't seem to make no headway, hardly. So Tom says:

"I know how to fix it. We got to have a rock for the coat of arms and mournful inscriptions, and we can kill two birds with that same rock. There's a gaudy big grindstone down at the mill, and we'll smouch it, and carve the things on it, and file out the pens and the saw on it, too."

It warn't no slouch of an idea; and it warn't no slouch of a grindstone nuther; but we allowed we'd tackle it. It warn't quite midnight, yet, so we cleared out for the mill, leaving Jim at work. We smouched the grindstone, and set out to roll her home, but it was a most nation tough job. Sometimes, do what we could, we couldn't keep her from falling over, and she come mighty near mashing us, every time. Tom said she was going to get one of us, sure, before we got through. We got her half way; and then we was plumb played out, and most drownded with sweat. We see it warn't no use, we got to go and fetch Jim. So he raised up his bed and slid the chain off of the bed-leg, and wrapt it round and round his neck, and we crawled out through our hole and down there, and Jim and me laid into that grindstone and walked her along like nothing; and Tom superintended. He could out-superintend any boy I ever see. He knowed how to do every-thing.

Our hole was pretty big, but it warn't big enough to get the grindstone through; but Jim he took the pick and soon made it big enough. Then Tom marked out them things on it with the nail, and set Jim to work on them,

with the nail for a chisel and an iron bolt from the rubbage in the lean-to for a hammer, and told him to work till the rest of his candle quit on him, and then he could go to bed, and hide the grindstone under his straw tick and sleep on it. Then we helped him fix his chain back on the bed-leg, and was ready for bed ourselves. But Tom thought of something, and says:

“You got any spiders in here, Jim?”

“No, sah, thanks to goodness I hain’t, Mars Tom.”

“All right, we’ll get you some.”

“But bless you, honey, I doan’ *want* none. I’s afeard un um. I jis’ s soon have rattlesnakes aroun’.”

Tom thought a minute or two, and says:

“It’s a good idea. And I reckon it’s been done. It *must* a been done; it stands to reason. Yes, it’s a prime good idea. Where could you keep it?”

“Keep what, Mars Tom?”

“Why, a rattlesnake.”

“De goodness gracious alive, Mars Tom! Why, if dey was a rattlesnake to come in heah, I’d take en bust right out thoo dat log wall, I would, wid my head.”

“Why, Jim, you wouldn’t be afraid of it, after a little. You could tame it.”

“*Tame* it!”

“Yes—easy enough. Every animal is grateful for kindness and petting, and they wouldn’t *think* of hurting a person that pets them. Any book will tell you that. You try—that’s all I ask; just try for two or three days. Why, you can get him so, in a little while, that he’ll love you; and sleep with you; and won’t stay away from you a minute; and will let you wrap him round your neck and put his head in your mouth.”

“*Please*, Mars Tom—*doan’* talk so! I can’t *stan’* it! He’d *let* me shove his head in my mouf—fer a favor, hain’t it? I lay he’d wait a pow’ful long time ’fo’ I *ast* him. En mo’ en dat, I doan’ *want* him to sleep wid me.”

“Jim, don’t act so foolish. A prisoner’s *got* to have some kind of a dumb pet, and if a rattlesnake hain’t ever been tried, why, there’s more glory to be gained in your being the first to ever try it than any other way you could ever think of to save your life.”

“Why, Mars Tom, I doan’ *want* no sich glory. Snake take ’n bite Jim’s chin off, den *whah* is de glory? No, sah, I doan’ want no sich doin’s.”

“Blame it, can’t you *try*? I only *want* you to try—you needn’t keep it up if it don’t work.”

“But de trouble all *done*, ef de snake bite me while I’s a tryin’ him. Mars Tom, I’s willin’ to tackle mos’ anything ’at ain’t onreasonable, but ef you en Huck fetches a rattlesnake in heah for me to tame, I’s gwyne to *leave*, dat’s *shore*.”

“Well, then, let it go, let it go, if you’re so bullheaded about it. We can get you some garter-snakes and you can tie some buttons on their tails, and let on they’re rattlesnakes, and I reckon that’ll have to do.”

“I k’n stan’ *dem*, Mars Tom, but blame’ ’f I couldn’t get along widout um, I tell you dat. I never knowed b’fo’, ’t was so much bother and trouble to be a prisoner.”

“Well, it *always* is, when it’s done right. You got any rats around here?”

“No, sah, I hain’t seed none.”

“Well, we’ll get you some rats.”

“Why, Mars Tom, I doan’ *want* no rats. Dey’s de dad-blamedest creturs to sturb a body, en rustle roun’ over ’im, en bite his feet, when he’s tryin’ to

sleep, I ever see. So, sah, gimme g'yarther-snakes, 'f I's got to have 'm, but doan' gimme no rats. I ain' got not use f'r um, skasely."

"But Jim, you *got* to have 'em—they all do. So don't make no more fuss about it. Prisoners ain't ever without rats. There ain't no instance of it. And they train them, and pet them, and learn them tricks, and they get to be as sociable as flies. But you got to play music to them. You got anything to play music on?"

"I ain't got nuffn but a coase comb en a piece o' paper, en a juice-harp; but I reck'n dey wouldn't take no stock in a juice-harp."

"Yes, they would. *They* don't care what kind of music 'tis. A jews-harp's² plenty good enough for a rat. All animals likes music—in a prison they dote on it. Specially, painful music; and you can't get no other kind out of a jews-harp. It always interests them; they come out to see what's the matter with you. Yes, you're all right; you're fixed very well. You want to set on your bed, nights, before you go to sleep, and early in the mornings, and play your jews-harp; play *The Last Link is Broken*³—that's the thing that'll scoop a rat, quicker'n anything else: and when you've played about two minutes, you'll see all the rats, and the snakes, and spiders, and things begin to feel worried about you, and come. And they'll just fairly swarm over you, and have a noble good time."

"Yes, *dey* will, I reckon, Mars Tom, but what kine er time is *Jim* havin'? Blest if I kin see de pint. But I'll do it ef I got to. I reckon I better keep de animals satisfied, en not have no trouble in de house."

Tom waited to think over, and see if there wasn't nothing else; and pretty soon he says:

"Oh—there's one thing I forgot. Could you raise a flower here, do you reckon?"

"I doan' know but maybe I could, Mars Tom; but it's tolable dark in heah, en I ain' got no use f'r no flower, nohow, en she'd be a pow'ful sight o' trouble."

"Well, you try it, anyway. Some other prisoners has done it."

"One er dem big cat-tail-lookin' mullen-stalks would grow in heah, Mars Tom, I reckon, but she wouldn' be wuth half de trouble she'd coss."

"Don't you believe it. We'll fetch you a little one, and you plant it in the corner, over there, and raise it. And don't call it mullen, call it *Pitchiola*—that's its right name, when it's in a prison.⁴ And you want to water it with your tears."

"Why, I got plenty spring water, Mars Tom."

"You don't *want* spring water; you want to water it with your tears. It's the way they always do."

"Why, Mars Tom, I lay I kin raise one er dem mullen-stalks twyste wid spring water whiles another man's a *start'n* one wid tears."

"That ain't the idea. You *got* to do it with tears."

"She'll die on my han's, Mars Tom, she sholy will; kase I doan' skasely ever cry."

2. Also known as a mouth harp and by other names, a small instrument that the player holds between his or her teeth and produces notes by striking a metal tongue. Despite this name, it has no particular connection to Judaism or the Jewish people; rather, the name is a corruption

of *jaw's harp*.

3. A popular love song of this time.

4. *Picciola* (1836) was a popular romantic novel by Xavier Saintine (pseudonym for Joseph Xavier Boniface, 1798–1865), in which a plant helps a prisoner survive.

So Tom was stumped. But he studied it over, and then said Jim would have to worry along the best he could with an onion. He promised he would go to the nigger cabins and drop one, private, in Jim's coffee-pot, in the morning. Jim said he would "jis' 's soon have tobacker in his coffee;" and found so much fault with it, and with the work and bother of raising the mullen, and jews-harping the rats, and petting and flattering up the snakes and spiders and things, on top of all the other work he had to do on pens, and inscriptions, and journals, and things, which made it more trouble and worry and responsibility to be a prisoner than anything he ever undertook, that Tom most lost all patience with him; and said he was just loadened down with more gaudier chances than a prisoner ever had in the world to make a name for himself, and yet he didn't know enough to appreciate them, and they was just about wasted on him. So Jim he was sorry, and said he wouldn't behave so no more, and then me and Tom shoved for bed.

Chapter XXXIX

In the morning we went up to the village and bought a wire rat trap and fetched it down, and unstopped the best rat hole, and in about an hour we had fifteen of the bulliest kind of ones; and then we took it and put it in a safe place under Aunt Sally's bed. But while we was gone for spiders, little Thomas Franklin Benjamin Jefferson Elexander Phelps found it there, and opened the door of it to see if the rats would come out, and they did; and Aunt Sally she come in, and when we got back she was standing on top of the bed raising Cain, and the rats was doing what they could to keep off the dull times for her. So she took and dusted us both with the hickry, and we was as much as two hours catching another fifteen or sixteen, drat that meddlesome cub, and they warn't the likeliest, nuther, because the first haul was the pick of the flock. I never see a likelier lot of rats than what that first haul was.

We got a splendid stock of sorted spiders, and bugs, and frogs, and caterpillars, and one thing or another; and we like-to got a hornet's nest, but we didn't. The family was at home. We didn't give it right up, but staid with them as long as we could; because we allowed we'd tire them out or they'd got to tire us out, and they done it. Then we got allycumpain⁵ and rubbed on the places, and was pretty near all right again, but couldn't set down convenient. And so we went for the snakes, and grabbed a couple of dozen garters and house-snakes, and put them in a bag, and put it in our room, and by that time it was supper time, and a rattling good honest day's work; and hungry?—oh, no I reckon not! And there warn't a blessed snake up there, when we went back—we didn't half tie the sack, and they worked out, somehow, and left. But it didn't matter much, because they was still on the premises somewheres. So we judged we could get some of them again. No, there warn't no real scarcity of snakes about the house for a considerble spell. You'd see them dripping from the rafters and places, every now and then; and they generly landed in your plate, or down the back of your neck, and most of the time where you didn't want them. Well, they was handsome, and striped, and there warn't no harm in a million of them; but that never

5. Elecampane is an herb that Tom and Huck are using to relieve the pain of the hornet stings.

made no difference to Aunt Sally, she despised snakes, be the breed what they might, and she couldn't stand them no way you could fix it; and every time one of them flopped down on her, it didn't make no difference what she was doing, she would just lay that work down and light out. I never see such a woman. And you could hear her whoop to Jericho. You couldn't get her to take ahold of one of them with the tongs. And if she turned over and found one in bed, she would scramble out and lift a howl that you would think the house was afire. She disturbed the old man so, that he said he could most wish there hadn't ever been no snakes created. Why, after every last snake had been gone clear out of the house for as much as a week, Aunt Sally warn't over it yet; she warn't near over it; when she was setting thinking about something, you could touch her on the back of her neck with a feather and she would jump right out of her stockings. It was very curious. But Tom said all women was just so. He said they was made that way; for some reason or other.

We got a licking every time one of our snakes come in her way; and she allowed these lickings warn't nothing to what she would do if we ever loaded up the place again with them. I didn't mind the lickings, because they didn't amount to nothing; but I minded the trouble we had, to lay in another lot. But we got them laid in, and all the other things; and you never see a cabin as blithesome as Jim's was when they'd all swarm out for music and go for him. Jim didn't like the spiders, and the spiders didn't like Jim; and so they'd lay for him and make it mighty warm for him. And he said that between the rats, and the snakes, and the grindstone, there warn't no room in bed for him, skasely; and when there was, a body couldn't sleep, it was so lively, and it was always lively, he said, because *they* never all slept at one time, but took turn about, so when the snakes was asleep the rats was on deck, and when the rats turned in the snakes come on watch, so he always had one gang under him, in his way, and t'other gang having a circus over him, and if he got up to hunt a new place, the spiders would take a chance at him as he crossed over. He said if he ever got out, this time, he wouldn't ever be a prisoner again, not for a salary.

Well, by the end of three weeks, everything was in pretty good shape. The shirt was sent in early, in a pie, and every time a rat bit Jim he would get up and write a little in his journal whilst the ink was fresh; the pens was made, the inscriptions and so on was all carved on the grindstone; the bed-leg was sawed in two, and we had et up the sawdust, and it give us a most amazing stomach-ache. We reckoned we was all going to die, but didn't. It was the most undigestible sawdust I ever see; and Tom said the same. But as I was saying, we'd got all the work done, now, at last; and we was all pretty much fagged out, too, but mainly Jim. The old man had wrote a couple of times to the plantation below Orleans to come and get their runaway nigger, but hadn't got no answer, because there warn't no such plantation; so he allowed he would advertise Jim in the St. Louis and New Orleans papers; and when he mentioned the St. Louis ones, it give me the cold shivers, and I see we hadn't no time to lose. So Tom said, now for the nonnamous letters.

"What's them?" I says.

"Warnings to the people that something is up. Sometimes it's done one way, sometimes another. But there's always somebody spying around, that gives notice to the governor of the castle. When Louis XVI was going to light

out of the Tooleries,⁶ a servant girl done it. It's a very good way, and so is the nonnamous letters. We'll use them both. And it's usual for the prisoner's mother to change clothes with him, and she stays in, and he slides out in her clothes. We'll do that too."

"But looky here, Tom, what do we want to *warn* anybody for, that something's up? Let them find it out for themselves—it's their lookout."

"Yes, I know; but you can't depend on them. It's the way they've acted from the very start—left us to do *everything*. They're so confiding and mullet-headed they don't take notice of nothing at all. So if we don't *give* them notice, there won't be nobody nor nothing to interfere with us, and so after all our hard work and trouble this escape 'll go off perfectly flat: won't amount to nothing—won't be nothing *to* it."

"Well, as for me, Tom, that's the way I'd like."

"Shucks," he says, and looked disgusted. So I says:

"But I ain't going to make no complaint. Anyway that suits you suits me. What you going to do about the servant-girl?"

"You'll be her. You slide in, in the middle of the night, and hook that yaller girl's frock."

"Why, Tom, that'll make trouble next morning; because of course she prob'ly hain't got any but that one."

"I know; but you don't want it but fifteen minutes, to carry the nonnamous letter and shove it under the front door."

"All right, then, I'll do it; but I could carry it just as handy in my own togs."

"You wouldn't look like a servant-girl *then*, would you?"

"No, but there won't be nobody to see what I look like, *anyway*."

"That ain't got nothing to do with it. The thing for us to do, is just to do our *duty*, and not worry about whether anybody *sees* us do it or not. Hain't you got no principle at all?"

"All right, I ain't saying nothing; I'm the servant-girl. Who's Jim's mother?"

"I'm his mother. I'll hook a gown from Aunt Sally."

"Well, then, you'll have to stay in the cabin when me and Jim leaves."

"Not much. I'll stuff Jim's clothes full of straw and lay it on his bed to represent his mother in disguise: and Jim 'll take Aunt Sally's gown off of me and wear it, and we'll all evade together. When a prisoner of style escapes, it's called an evasion. It's always called so when a king escapes, f'rinstance. And the same with a king's son; it don't make no difference whether he's a natural one or an unnatural one."

So Tom he wrote the nonnamous letter, and I smouched the yaller wench's frock, that night, and put it on, and shoved it under the front door, the way Tom told me to. It said:

Beware, Trouble is brewing. Keep a sharp lookout.

UNKNOWN FRIEND.

Next night we stuck a picture which Tom drew in blood, of a skull and crossbones, on the front door; and next night another one of a coffin, on the back door. I never see a family in such a sweat. They couldn't a been worse scared if the place had a been full of ghosts laying for them behind

6. Twain probably read this episode of the Tuileries, a palace in Paris, in Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837).

everything and under the beds and shivering through the air. If a door banged, Aunt Sally she jumped, and said “ouch!” if anything fell, she jumped and said “ouch!” if you happened to touch her, when she warn’t noticing, she done the same; she couldn’t face noway and be satisfied, because she allowed there was something behind her every time—so she was always a whirling around, sudden, and saying “ouch,” and before she’d get two-thirds around, she’d whirl back again, and say it again; and she was afraid to go to bed, but she dasn’t set up. So the thing was working very well, Tom said; he said he never see a thing work more satisfactory. He said it showed it was done right.

So he said, now for the grand bulge! So the very next morning at the streak of dawn we got another letter ready, and was wondering what we better do with it, because we heard them say at supper they was going to have a nigger on watch at both doors all night. Tom he went down the lightning-rod to spy around; and the nigger at the back door was asleep, and he stuck it in the back of his neck and come back. This letter said:

Don't betray me, I wish to be your friend. There is a desprate gang of cut-throats from over in the Ingean Territory⁷ going to steal your runaway nigger to-night, and they have been trying to scare you so as you will stay in the house and not bother them. I am one of the gang, but have got religgion and wish to quit it and lead a honest life again, and will betray the helish design. They will sneak down from northards, along the fence, at midnight exact, with a false key, and go in the nigger's cabin to get him. I am to be off a piece and blow a tin horn if I see any danger; but stead of that, I will BA like a sheep soon as they get in and not blow at all; then whilst they are getting his chains loose, you slip there and lock them in, and can kill them at your leasure. Don't do anything but just the way I am telling you, if you do they will suspicion something and raise whoopjamboreehoo. I do not wish any reward but to know I have done the right thing.

UNKNOWN FRIEND.

Chapter XL

We was feeling pretty good, after breakfast, and took my canoe and went over the river a fishing, with a lunch, and had a good time, and took a look at the raft and found her all right, and got home late to supper, and found them in such a sweat and worry they didn’t know which end they was standing on, and made us go right off to bed the minute we was done supper, and wouldn’t tell us what the trouble was, and never let on a word about the new letter, but didn’t need to, because we knowed as much about it as anybody did, and as soon as we was half up stairs and her back was turned, we slid for the cellar cupboard and loaded up a good lunch and took it up to our room and went to bed, and got up about half-past eleven, and Tom put on Aunt Sally’s dress that he stole and was going to start with the lunch, but says:

“Where’s the butter?”

“I laid out a hunk of it,” I says, “on a piece of a corn-pone.”

“Well, you *left* it laid out, then—it ain’t here.”

7. Indian country; part of Oklahoma reserved for Native Americans beginning in the 1830s. Because federal law did not apply there, outlaws used it as a base of operations throughout the 19th century.

"We can get along without it," I says.

"We can get along *with* it, too," he says; "just you slide down cellar and fetch it. And then mosey right down the lightning-rod and come along. I'll go and stuff the straw into Jim's clothes to represent his mother in disguise, and be ready to *ba* like a sheep and shove soon as you get there."

So out he went, and down cellar went I. The hunk of butter, big as a person's fist, was where I had left it, so I took up the slab of corn-pone with it on, and blowed out my light, and started up stairs, very stealthy, and got up to the main floor all right, but here comes Aunt Sally with a candle, and I clapped the truck in my hat, and clapped my hat on my head, and the next second she see me; and she says:

"You been down cellar?"

"Yes'm."

"What you been doing down there?"

"Noth'n."

"Noth'n!"

"No'm."

"Well, then, what possessed you to go down there, this time of night?"

"I don't know'm."

"You don't *know*? Don't answer me that way, Tom, I want to know what you been *doing* down there?"

"I hain't been doing a single thing, Aunt Sally, I hope to gracious if I have."

I reckoned she'd let me go, now, and as a generl thing she would; but I spose there was so many strange things going on she was just in a sweat about every little thing that warn't yard-stick straight; so she says, very decided:

"You just march into that setting-room and stay there till I come. You been up to something you no business to, and I lay I'll find out what it is before *I'm* done with you."

So she went away as I opened the door and walked into the setting-room. My, but there was a crowd there! Fifteen farmers, and every one of them had a gun. I was most powerful sick, and slunk to a chair and set down. They was setting around, some of them talking a little, in a low voice, and all of them fidgety and uneasy, but trying to look like they warn't; but I knowed they was, because they was always taking off their hats, and putting them on, and scratching their heads, and changing their seats, and fumbling with their buttons. I warn't easy myself, but I didn't take my hat off, all the same.

I did wish Aunt Sally would come, and get done with me, and lick me, if she wanted to, and let me get away and tell Tom how we'd overdone this thing, and what a thundering hornet's nest we'd got ourselves into, so we could stop fooling around, straight off, and clear out with Jim before these rips got out of patience and come for us.

At last she come, and begun to ask me questions, but I *couldn't* answer them straight, I didn't know which end of me was up; because these men was in such a fidget now, that some was wanting to start right *now* and lay for them desperadoes, and saying it warn't but a few minutes to midnight; and others was trying to get them to hold on and wait for the sheep-signal; and here was aunty pegging away at the questions, and me a shaking all over and ready to sink down in my tracks I was that scared; and the place getting hotter and hotter, and the butter beginning to melt and run down my neck and behind my ears: and pretty soon, when one of them says, "*I'm* for going

and getting in the cabin *first*, and right *now*, and catching them when they come," I most dropped; and a streak of butter came a trickling down my forehead, and Aunt Sally she see it, and turns white as a sheet, and says:

"For the land's sake what is the matter with the child!—he's got the brain fever⁸ as shore as you're born, and they're oozing out!"

And everybody runs to see, and she snatches off my hat, and out comes the bread, and what was left of the butter, and she grabbed me, and hugged me, and says:

"Oh, what a turn you did give me! and how glad and grateful I am it ain't no worse; for luck's against us, and it never rains but it pours, and when I see that truck I thought we'd lost you, for I knowed by the color and all, it was just like your brains would be if—Dear, dear, whyd'nt you *tell* me that was what you'd been down there for, *I* wouldn't a cared. Now cler out to bed, and don't lemme see no more of you till morning!"

I was up stairs in a second, and down the lightning-rod in another one, and shinning through the dark for the lean-to. I couldn't hardly get my words out, I was so anxious; but I told Tom as quick as I could, we must jump for it, now, and not a minute to lose—the house full of men, yonder, with guns!

His eyes just blazed; and he says:

"No!—is that so? *Ain't* it bully! Why, Huck, if it was to do over again, I bet I could fetch two hundred! If we could put it off till—"

"Hurry! *Hurry!*" I says. "Where's Jim?"

"Right at your elbow; if you reach out your arm you can touch him. He's dressed, and everything's ready. Now we'll slide out and give the sheep-signal."

But then we heard the tramp of men, coming to the door, and heard them begin to fumble with the padlock; and heard a man say:

"I *told* you we'd be too soon; they haven't come—the door is locked. Here, I'll lock some of you into the cabin and you lay for 'em in the dark and kill 'em when they come; and the rest scatter around a piece, and listen if you can hear 'em coming."

So in they come, but couldn't see us in the dark, and most trod on us whilst we was hustling to get under the bed. But we got under all right, and out through the hole, swift but soft—Jim first, me next, and Tom last, which was according to Tom's orders. Now we was in the lean-to, and heard trappings close by outside. So we crept to the door, and Tom stopped us there and put his eye to the crack, but couldn't make out nothing, it was so dark; and whispered and said he would listen for the steps to get further, and when he nudged us Jim must glide out first, and him last. So he set his ear to the crack and listened, and listened, and listened, and the steps a scraping around, out there, all the time; and at last he nudged us, and we slid out, and stooped down, not breathing, and not making the least noise, and slipped stealthy towards the fence, in Injun file, and got to it, all right, and me and Jim over it; but Tom's britches catched fast on a splinter on the top rail, and then he hear the steps coming, so he had to pull loose, which snapped the splinter and made a noise; and as he dropped in our tracks and started, somebody sings out:

"Who's that? Answer, or I'll shoot!"

8. A common term for diseases related to inflammation of the brain.

But we didn't answer; we just unfurled our heels and shoved. Then there was a rush, and a *bang, bang, bang!* and the bullets fairly whizzed around us! We heard them sing out:

"Here they are! They've broke for the river! after 'em, boys! And turn loose the dogs!"

So here they come, full tilt. We could hear them, because they wore boots, and yelled, but we didn't wear no boots, and didn't yell. We was in the path to the mill; and when they got pretty close onto us, we dodged into the bush and let them go by, and then dropped in behind them. They'd had all the dogs shut up, so they wouldn't scare off the robbers; but by this time somebody had let them loose, and here they come, making pow-wow enough for a million; but they was our dogs; so we stopped in our tracks till they caught up; and when they see it warn't nobody but us, and no excitement to offer them, they only just said howdy, and tore right ahead towards the shouting and clattering; and then we up steam again and whizzed along after them till we was nearly to the mill, and then struck up through the bush to where my canoe was tied, and hopped in and pulled for dear life towards the middle of the river, but didn't make no more noise than we was obleeged to. Then we struck out, easy and comfortable, for the island where my raft was; and we could hear them yelling and barking at each other all up and down the bank, till we was so far away the sounds got dim and died out. And when we stepped onto the raft, I says:

"Now, old Jim, you're a free man *again*, and I bet you won't ever be a slave no more."

"En a mighty good job it wuz, too, Huck. It 'uz planned beautiful, en it 'uz *done* beautiful; en dey aint' *nobody* kin git up a plan dat's mo' mixed-up en splendid den what dat one wuz."

We was all as glad as we could be, but Tom was the gladdest of all, because he had a bullet in the calf of his leg.

When me and Jim heard that, we didn't feel so brash as what we did before. It was hurting him considerble, and bleeding; so we laid him in the wigwam and tore up one of the duke's shirts for to bandage him, but he says:

"Gimme the rags, I can do it myself. Don't stop, now; don't fool around here, and the evasion booming along so handsome; man the sweeps, and set her loose! Boys, we done it elegant!—'deed we did. I wish *we'd* a had the handling of Louis XVI, there wouldn't a been no 'Son of Saint Louis, ascend to heaven!'⁹ wrote down in *his* biography: no, sir, we'd a whooped him over the *border*—that's what we'd a done with *him*—and done it just as slick as nothing at all, too. Man the sweeps—man the sweeps!"

But me and Jim was consulting—and thinking. And after we'd thought a minute, I says:

"Say it, Jim."

So he says:

"Well, den, dis is de way it look to me, Huck. Ef it wuz *him* dat 'uz bein' sot free, en one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine 'bout a doctor f'r to save dis one?' Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat? You *bet* he wouldn't! *Well*, den, is *Jim* gwyne to say it?

9. Taken from the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle's rendering of the king's execution in *The French Revolution* (1837).

No, sah—I doan' budge a step out'n dis place, 'dout a *doctor*; not if its forty year!"

I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say—so it was all right, now, and I told Tom I was agoing for a doctor. He raised considerble row about it, but me and Jim stuck to it and wouldn't budge; so he was for crawling out and setting the raft loose himself; but we wouldn't let him. Then he give us a piece of his mind—but it didn't do no good.

So when he see me getting the canoe ready, he says:

"Well, then, if you're bound to go, I'll tell you the way to do, when you get to the village. Shut the door, and blindfold the doctor tight and fast, and make him swear to be silent as the grave, and put a purse full of gold in his hand, and then take and lead him all around the back alleys and everywheres, in the dark, and then fetch him here in the canoe, in a roundabout way amongst the islands, and search him and take his chalk away from him, and don't give it back to him till you get him back to the village, or else he will chalk this raft so he can find it again. It's the way they all do."

So I said I would, and left, and Jim was to hide in the woods when he see the doctor coming, till he was gone again.

Chapter XLI

The doctor was an old man; a very nice, kind-looking old man, when I got him up. I told him me and my brother was over on Spanish Island hunting, yesterday afternoon, and camped on a piece of a raft we found, and about midnight he must a kicked his gun in his dreams, for it went off and shot him in the leg, and we wanted him to go over there and fix it and not say nothing about it, nor let anybody know, because we wanted to come home this evening, and surprise the folks.

"Who is your folks?" he says.

"The Phelpses, down yonder."

"Oh," he says. And after a minute, he says: "How'd you say he got shot?"

"He had a dream," I says, "and it shot him."

"Singular dream," he says.

So he lit up his lantern, and got his saddle-bags, and we started. But when he see the canoe, he didn't like the look of her—said she was big enough for one, but didn't look pretty safe for two. I says:

"Oh, you needn't be afeard, sir, she carried the three of us, easy enough."

"What three?"

"Why, me and Sid, and—and—and *the guns*; that's what I mean."

"Oh," he says.

But he put his foot on the gunnel, and rocked her; and shook his head, and said he reckoned he'd look around for a bigger one. But they was all locked and chained; so he took my canoe, and said for me to wait till he come back, or I could hunt around further, or maybe I better go down home and get them ready for the surprise, if I wanted to. But I said I didn't; so I told him just how to find the raft, and then he started.

I struck an idea, pretty soon. I says to myself, spos'n he can't fix that leg just in three shakes of a sheep's tail, as the saying is? spos'n it takes him three or four days? What are we going to do?—lay around there till he lets the cat out of the bag? No, sir, I know what *I'll* do. I'll wait, and when he

comes back, if he says he's got to go any more, I'll get him down there, too, if I swim; and we'll take and tie him, and keep him, and shove out down the river; and when Tom's done with him, we'll give him what it's worth, or all we got, and then let him get shore.

So then I crept into a lumber pile to get some sleep; and next time I waked up the sun was away up over my head! I shot out and went for the doctor's house, but they told me he'd gone away in the night, some time or other, and warn't back yet. Well, thinks I, that looks powerful bad for *Tom*, and I'll dig out for the island, right off. So away I shoved, and turned the corner, and nearly rammed my head into Uncle Silas's stomach! He says:

"Why, Tom! Where you been, all this time, you rascal?"

"I hain't been nowhere," I says, "only just hunting for the runaway nigger—me and Sid."

"Why, where ever did you go?" he says. "Your aunt's been mighty uneasy."

"She needn't," I says, "because we was all right. We followed the men and the dogs, but they out-run us, and we lost them; but we thought we heard them on the water, so we got a canoe and took out after them, and crossed over but couldn't find nothing of them; so we cruised along up-shore till we got kind of tired and beat out; and tied up the canoe and went to sleep, and never waked up till about an hour ago, then we paddled over here to hear the news, and Sid's at the post-office to see what he can hear, and I'm a branching out to get something to eat for us, and then we're going home."

So then we went to the post-office to get "Sid"; but just as I suspicioned, he warn't there; so the old man he got a letter out of the office, and we waited a while longer but Sid didn't come; so the old man said come along, let Sid foot it home, or canoe-it, when he got done fooling around—but we would ride. I couldn't get him to let me stay and wait for Sid; and he said there warn't no use in it, and I must come along, and let Aunt Sally see we was all right.

When we got home, Aunt Sally was that glad to see me she laughed and cried both, and hugged me, and give me one of them lickings of hern that don't amount to shucks, and said she'd serve Sid the same when he come.

And the place was plumb full of farmers and farmers' wives, to dinner; and such another clack a body never heard. Old Mrs. Hotchkiss was the worst; her tongue was agoing all the time. She says:

"Well, Sister Phelps, I've ransacked that-air cabin over an' I b'lieve the nigger was crazy. I says so to Sister Damrell—didn't I, Sister Damrell?—s'I, he's crazy, s'I—them's the very words I said. You all hearn me: he's crazy, s'I; everything shows it, s'I. Look at that-air grindstone, s'I; want to tell *me*'t any cretur 'ts in his right mind 's agoin' to scrabble all them crazy things onto a grindstone, s'I? Here sich 'n' sich a person busted his heart; 'n' here so 'n' so pegged along for thirty-seven year, 'n' all that—natcher! son o' Louis somebody, 'n' sich everlast'n rubbish. He's plumb crazy, s'I; it's what I says in the fust place, it's what I says in the middle, 'n' it's what I says last 'n' all the time—the nigger's crazy—crazy's Nebokoodneezer,¹ s'I."

"An' look at that-air ladder made out'n rags, Sister Hotchkiss," says old Mrs. Damrell, "what in the name o'goodness *could* he ever want of—"

1. Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 B.C.E.), king of Babylon, is described in Daniel 4.33 as going mad and eating grass.

"The very words I was a-sayin' no longer ago th'n this minute to Sister Utterback, 'n' she'll tell you so herself. Sh-she, look at that-air rag ladder, sh-she; 'n' s'I, yes, *look* at it, s'I—what *could* he a wanted of it, s'I. Sh-she, Sister Hotchkiss, sh-she—"

"But how in the nation'd they ever *git* that grindstone *in* there, *anyway*? 'n' who dug that-air *hole*? 'n' who—"

"My very *words*, Brer Penrod! I was a-sayin'—pass that-air sasser o' m'lasses, won't ye?—I was a-sayin' to Sister Dunlap, jist this minute, how *did* they git that grindstone in there, s'I. Without *help*, mind you—'thout *help*! *Thar's* wher' tis. Don't tell *me*, s'I; there *wuz* help, s'I; 'n' ther' wuz a *plenty* help, too, s'I; ther's ben a *dozen* a-helpin' that nigger, 'n' I lay I'd skin every last nigger on this place, but *I'd* find out who done it, s'I; 'n' moreover, s'I—"

"A *dozen* says you!—*forty* couldn't a done everything that's been done. Look at them case-knife saws and things, how tedious they've been made; look at that bed-leg sawed off with 'em, a week's work for six men; look at that nigger made out'n straw on the bed; and look at—"

"You may *well* say it, Brer Hightower! It's jist as I was a-sayin' to Brer Phelps, his own self. S'e, what do *you* think of it, Sister Hotchkiss, s'e? think o' what, Brer Phelps, s'I? think o' that bed-leg sawed off that a way, s'e? *think* of it, s'I? I lay it never sawed *itself* off, s'I—somebody sawed it, s'I; that's my opinion, take it or leave it, it mayn't be no 'count, s'I, but sich as 't is, it's my opinion, s'I, 'n' if anybody k'n start a better one, s'I, let him *do* it, s'I, that's all. I says to Sister Dunlap, s'I—"

"Why, dog my cats, they must a ben a house-full o' niggers in there every night for four weeks, to a done all that work, Sister Phelps. Look at that shirt—every last inch of it kivered over with secret African writ'n done with blood! Must a ben a raft uv 'm at it right along, all the time, amost. Why, I'd give two dollars to have it read to me; 'n' as for the niggers that wrote it, I 'low I'd take 'n' lash 'm t'll—"

"People to *help* him, Brother Marples! Well, I reckon you'd *think* so, if you'd a been in this house for a while back. Why, they've stole everything they could lay their hands on—and we a watching, all the time, mind you. They stole that shirt right off o' the line! and as for that sheet they made the rag ladder out of ther' ain't no telling how many times they *didn't* steal that; and flour, and candles, and candlesticks, and spoons, and the old-warming-pan, and most a thousand things that I disremember, now, and my new calico dress; and me, and Silas, and my Sid and Tom on the constant watch day *and* night, as I was a telling you, and not a one of us could catch hide nor hair, nor sight nor sound of them; and here at the last minute, lo and behold you, they slides right in under our noses, and fools us, and not only fools *us* but the Injun Territory robbers too, and actuly gets *away* with that nigger, safe and sound, and that with sixteen men and twenty-two dogs right on their very heels at that very time! I tell you, it just bangs anything I ever *heard* of. Why, *sperits* couldn't a done better, and been no smarter. And I reckon they must a *been* sperits—because, *you* know our dogs, and ther' ain't no better; well, them dogs never even got on the *track* of 'm, once! You explain *that* to me, if you can!—*any* of you!"

"Well, it does beat—"

"Laws alive, I never—"

"So help me, I wouldn't a be—"

"House thieves as well as—"

"Goodnessgracioussakes, I'd a ben afeard to *live* in sich a—"

"'Fraid to *live*!—why, I was that scared I dasn't hardly go to bed, or get up, or lay down, or *set* down, Sister Ridgeway. Why, they'd steal the very—why, goodness sakes, you can guess what kind of a fluster *I* was in by the time midnight come, last night. I hope to gracious if I warn't afraid they'd steal some o' the family! I was just to that pass, I didn't have no reasoning faculties no more. It looks foolish enough, *now*, in the day-time; but I says to myself, there's my two poor boys asleep, 'way up stairs in that lonesome room, and I declare to goodness I was that uneasy 't I crep' up there and locked 'em in! I *did*. And anybody would. Because, you know, when you get scared, that way, and it keeps running on, and getting worse and worse, all the time, and your wits gets to addling, and you get to doing all sorts o' wild things, and by-and-by you think to yourself, spos'n *I* was a boy, and was away up there, and the door ain't locked, and you—" She stopped, looking kind of wondering, and then she turned her head around slow, and when her eye lit on me—I got up and took a walk.

Says I to myself, I can explain better how we come to not be in that room this morning, if I go out to one side and study over it a little. So I done it. But I dasn't go fur, or she'd a sent for me. And when it was late in the day, the people all went, and then I come in and told her the noise and shooting waked up me and "Sid," and the door was locked, and we wanted to see the fun, so we went down the lightning-rod, and both of us got hurt a little, and we didn't never want to try *that* no more. And then I went on and told her all what I told Uncle Silas before; and then she said she'd forgive us, and maybe it was all right enough anyway, and about what a body might expect of boys, for all boys was a pretty harum-scarum lot, as fur as she could see; and so, as long as no harm hadn't come of it, she judged she better put in her time being grateful we was alive and well and she had us still, stead of fretting over what was past and done. So then she kissed me, and patted me on the head, and dropped into a kind of a brown study; and pretty soon jumps up, and says:

"Why, lawsamercy, it's most night, and Sid not come yet! What *has* become of that boy?"

I see my chance; so I skips up and says:

"I'll run right up to town and get him," I says.

"No, you won't," she says. "You'll stay right wher' you are; *one's* enough to be lost at a time. If he ain't here to supper, your uncle 'll go."

Well, he warn't there to supper; so right after supper uncle went.

He come back about ten, a little bit uneasy; hadn't run across Tom's track. Aunt Sally was a good *deal* uneasy; but Uncle Silas he said there warn't no occasion to be—boys will be boys, he said, and you'll see this one turn up in the morning, all sound and right. So she had to be satisfied. But she said she'd set up for him a while, anyway, and keep a light burning, so he could see it.

And then when I went up to bed she come up with me and fetched her candle, and tucked me in, and mothered me so good I felt mean, and like I couldn't look her in the face; and she set down on the bed and talked with me a long time, and said what a splendid boy Sid was, and didn't seem to want to ever stop talking about him; and kept asking me every now and then, if I reckoned he could a got lost, or hurt, or maybe drownded, and might be

laying at this minute, somewheres, suffering or dead, and she not by him to help him, and so the tears would drip down, silent, and I would tell her that Sid was all right, and would be home in the morning, sure; and she would squeeze my hand, or maybe kiss me, and tell me to say it again, and keep on saying it, because it done her good, and she was in so much trouble. And when she was going away, she looked down in my eyes, so steady and gentle, and says:

“The door ain’t going to be locked, Tom; and there’s the window and the rod; but you’ll be good, *won’t* you? And you won’t go? For *my* sake.”

Laws knows I *wanted* to go, bad enough, to see about Tom, and was all intending to go; but after that, I wouldn’t a went, not for kingdoms.

But she was on my mind, and Tom was on my mind; so I slept very restless. And twice I went down the rod, away in the night, and slipped around front, and see her setting there by her candle in the window with her eyes towards the road and the tears in them; and I wished I could do something for her, but I couldn’t, only to swear that I wouldn’t never do nothing to grieve her any more. And the third time, I waked up at dawn, and slid down, and she was there yet, and her candle was most out, and her old gray head was resting on her hand, and she was asleep.

Chapter XLII

The old man was up town again, before breakfast, but couldn’t get no track of Tom; and both of them set at the table, thinking, and not saying nothing, and looking mournful, and their coffee getting cold, and not eating anything. And by-and-by the old man says:

“Did I give you the letter?”

“What letter?”

“The one I got yesterday out of the post-office.”

“No, you didn’t give me no letter.”

“Well, I must a forgot it.”

So he rummaged his pockets, and then went off somewheres where he had laid it down, and fetched it, and give it to her. She says:

“Why, it’s from St. Petersburg—it’s from Sis.”

I allowed another walk would do me good; but I couldn’t stir. But before she could break it open, she dropped it and run—for she see something. And so did I. It was Tom Sawyer on a mattress; and that old doctor; and Jim, in *her* calico dress, with his hands tied behind him; and a lot of people. I hid the letter behind the first thing that come handy, and rushed. She flung herself at Tom, crying, and says:

“Oh, he’s dead, he’s dead, I know he’s dead!”

And Tom he turned his head a little, and muttered something or other, which showed he warn’t in his right mind; then she flung up her hands and says:

“He’s alive, thank God! And that’s enough!” and she snatched a kiss of him, and flew for the house to get the bed ready, and scattering orders right and left at the niggers and everybody else, as fast as her tongue could go, every jump of the way.

I followed the men to see what they was going to do with Jim; and the old doctor and Uncle Silas followed after Tom into the house. The men was very huffy, and some of them wanted to hang Jim, for an example to all the other

niggers around there, so they wouldn't be trying to run away, like Jim done, and making such a raft of trouble, and keeping a whole family scared most to death for days and nights. But the others said, don't do it, it wouldn't answer at all, he ain't our nigger, and his owner would turn up and make us pay for him, sure. So that cooled them down a little, because the people that's always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hain't done just right, is always the very ones that ain't the most anxious to pay for him when they've got their satisfaction out of him.

They cussed Jim considerable, though, and give him a cuff or two, side the head, once in a while, but Jim never said nothing, and he never let on to know me, and they took him to the same cabin, and put his own clothes on him, and chained him again, and not to no bed-leg, this time, but to a big staple drove into the bottom log, and chained his hands, too, and both legs, and said he warn't to have nothing but bread and water to eat, after this, till his owner come or he was sold at auction, because he didn't come in a certain length of time, and filled up our hole, and said a couple of farmers with guns must stand watch around about the cabin every night, and a bulldog tied to the door in the day time; and about this time they was through with the job and was tapering off with a kind of generl good-bye cussing, and then the old doctor comes and takes a look and says:

"Don't be no rougher on him than you're obleeged to, because he ain't a bad nigger. When I got to where I found the boy, I see I couldn't cut the bullet out without some help, and he warn't in no condition for me to leave, to go and get help; and he got a little worse and a little worse, and after a long time he went out of his head, and wouldn't let me come anigh him, any more, and said if I chalked his raft he'd kill me, and no end of wild foolishness like that, and I see I couldn't do anything at all with him; so I says, I got to have *help*, somehow; and the minute I says it, out crawls this nigger from somewheres, and says he'll help, and he done it, too, and done it very well. Of course I judged he must be a runaway nigger, and there I *was!* and there I had to stick, right straight along all the rest of the day, and all night. It was a fix, I tell you! I had a couple of patients with the chills, and of course I'd of liked to run up to town and see them, but I dasn't, because the nigger might get away, and then I'd be to blame; and yet never a skiff come close enough for me to hail. So there I had to stick, plumb till daylight this morning; and I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was resking his freedom to do it, and was all tired out, too, and I see plain enough he'd been worked main hard, lately. I liked the nigger for that; I tell you, gentlemen, a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars—and kind treatment, too. I had everything I needed, and the boy was doing as well there as he would a done at home—better, maybe, because it was so quiet; but there I *was*, with both of 'm on my hands; and there I had to stick, till about dawn this morning; then some men in a skiff come by, and as good luck would have it, the nigger was setting by the pallet with his head propped on his knees, sound asleep; so I motioned them in, quiet, and they slipped up on him and grabbed him and tied him before he knowed what he was about, and we never had no trouble. And the boy being in a kind of a flighty sleep, too, we muffled the oars and hitched the raft on, and towed her over very nice and quiet, and the nigger never made the least row nor said a word, from the start. He ain't no bad nigger, gentlemen; that's what I think about him."

Somebody says:

“Well, it sounds very good, doctor, I’m obleeged to say.”

Then the others softened up a little, too, and I was mighty thankful to that old doctor for doing Jim that good turn; and I was glad it was according to my judgment of him, too; because I thought he had a good heart in him and was a good man, the first time I see him. Then they all agreed that Jim had acted very well, and was deserving to have some notice took of it, and reward. So every one of them promised, right out and hearty, that they wouldn’t cuss him no more.

Then they come out and locked him up. I hoped they was going to say he could have one or two of the chains took off, because they was rotten heavy, or could have meat and greens with his bread and water, but they didn’t think of it, and I reckoned it warn’t best for me to mix in, but I judged I’d get the doctor’s yarn to Aunt Sally, somehow or other, as soon as I’d got through the breakers that was laying just ahead of me. Explanations, I mean, of how I forgot to mention about Sid being shot, when I was telling how him and me put in that dratted night paddling around hunting the runaway nigger.

But I had plenty time. Aunt Sally she stuck to the sick-room all day and all night; and every time I see Uncle Silas mooning around, I dodged him.

Next morning I heard Tom was a good deal better, and they said Aunt Sally was gone to get a nap. So I slips to the sick-room, and if I found him awake I reckoned we could put up a yarn for the family that would wash. But he was sleeping, and sleeping very peaceful, too; and pale, not fire-faced the way he was when he come. So I set down and laid for him to wake. In about a half an hour, Aunt Sally comes gliding in, and there I was, up a stump again! She motioned me to be still, and set down by me, and begun to whisper, and said we could all be joyful now, because all the symptoms was first rate, and he’d been sleeping like that for ever so long, and looking better and peacefuller all the time, and ten to one he’d wake up in his right mind.

So we set there watching, and by-and-by he stirs a bit, and opened his eyes very natural, and takes a look, and says:

“Hello, why I’m at *home*! How’s that? Where’s the raft?”

“It’s all right,” I says.

“And *Jim*?”

“The same,” I says, but couldn’t say it pretty brash. But he never noticed, but says:

“Good! Splendid! *Now* we’re all right and safe! Did you tell Aunty?”

I was about to say yes; but she chipped in and says:

“About what, Sid?”

“Why, about the way the whole thing was done.”

“What whole thing?”

“Why, *the* whole thing. There ain’t but one; how we set the runaway nigger free—me and Tom.”

“Good land! Set the run—What *is* the child talking about! Dear, dear, out of his head again!”

“No, I ain’t out of my *HEAD*; I know all what I’m talking about. We *did* set him free—me and Tom. We laid out to do it, and we *done* it. And we done it elegant, too.” He’d got a start, and she never checked him up, just set and stared and stared, and let him clip along, and I see it warn’t no use for *me* to put in. “Why, Aunty, it cost us a power of work—weeks of it—hours and

hours, every night, whilst you was all asleep. And we had to steal candles, and the sheet, and the shirt, and your dress, and spoons, and tin plates, and case-knives, and the warming-pan, and the grindstone, and flour, and just no end of things, and you can't think what work it was to make the saws, and pens, and inscriptions, and one thing or another, and you can't think *half* the fun it was. And we had to make up the pictures of coffins and things, and nonnamous letters from the robbers, and get up and down the lightning-rod, and dig the hole into the cabin, and make the rope-ladder and send it in cooked up in a pie, and send in spoons and things to work with, in your apron pocket"—

"Mercy sakes!"

—"and load up the cabin with rats and snakes and so on, for company for Jim; and then you kept Tom here so long with the butter in his hat that you come near spiling the whole business, because the men come before we was out of the cabin, and we had to rush, and they heard us and let drive at us, and I got my share, and we dodged out of the path and let them go by, and when the dogs come they warn't interested in us, but went for the most noise, and we got our canoe, and made for the raft, and was all safe, and Jim was a free man, and we done it all by ourselves, and *wasn't* it bully, Aunty!"

"Well, I never heard the likes of it in all my born days! So it was *you*, you little rapsCALLIONS, that's been making all this trouble, and turn everybody's wits clean inside out and scared us all most to death. I've as good a notion as ever I had in my life, to take it out o' you this very minute. To think, here I've been, night after night, a—*you* just get well once, you young scamp, and I lay I'll tan the Old Harry² out o' both o' ye!"

But Tom, he *was* so proud and joyful, he just *couldn't* hold in, and his tongue just *went* it—she a-chipping in, and spitting fire all along, and both of them going it at once, like a cat-convention; and she says:

"*Well*, you get all the enjoyment you can out of it *now*, for mind I tell you if I catch you meddling with him again—"

"Meddling with *who*?" Tom says, dropping his smile and looking surprised.

"With *who*? Why, the runaway nigger, of course. Who'd you reckon?"

Tom looks at me very grave, and says:

"Tom, didn't you just tell me he was all right? Hasn't he got away?"

"*Him*?" says Aunt Sally; "the runaway nigger? 'Deed he hasn't. They've got him back, safe and sound, and he's in that cabin again, on bread and water, and loaded down with chains, till he's claimed or sold!"

Tom rose square up in bed, with his eye hot, and his nostrils opening and shutting like gills, and sings out to me:

"They hain't no *right* to shut him up! *Shove!*—and don't you lose a minute. Turn him loose! he ain't no slave; he's as free as any cretur that walks this earth!"

"What *does* the child mean?"

"I mean every word I *say*, Aunt Sally, and if somebody don't go, *I'll* go. I've knowed him all his life, and so has Tom, there. Old Miss Watson died two months ago, and she was ashamed she ever was going to sell him down the river, and *said* so; and she set him free in her will."

2. The devil.

“Then what on earth did *you* want to set him free for, seeing he was already free?”

“Well, that *is* a question, I must say; and *just* like women! Why, I wanted the *adventure* of it; and I’d a waded neck-deep in blood to—goodness alive, AUNT POLLY!”³

If she warn’t standing right there, just inside the door, looking as sweet and contented as an angel half-full of pie, I wish I may never!

Aunt Sally jumped for her, and most hugged the head off of her, and cried over her, and I found a good enough place for me under the bed, for it was getting pretty sultry for *us*, seemed to me. And I peeped out, and in a little while Tom’s Aunt Polly shook herself loose and stood there looking across at Tom over her spectacles—kind of grinding him into the earth, you know. And then she says:

“Yes, you *better* turn y’r head away—I would if I was you, Tom.”

“Oh, deary me!” says Aunt Sally; “*is* he changed so? Why, that ain’t *Tom* it’s Sid; Tom’s—Tom’s—why, where is Tom? He was here a minute ago.”

“You mean where’s Huck *Finn*—that’s what you mean! I reckon I hain’t raised such a scamp as my Tom all these years, not to know him when I *see* him. That *would* be a pretty howdy-do. Come out from under the bed, Huck Finn.”

So I done it. But not feeling brash.

Aunt Sally she was one of the mixed-apest looking persons I ever see; except one, and that was Uncle Silas, when he come in, and they told it all to him. It kind of made him drunk, as you may say, and he didn’t know nothing at all the rest of the day, and preached a prayer-meeting sermon that night that give him a rattling reputation, because the oldest man in the world couldn’t a understood it. So Tom’s Aunt Polly, she told all about who I was, and what; and I had to up and tell how I was in such a tight place that when Mrs. Phelps took me for Tom Sawyer—she chipped in and says, “Oh, go on and call me Aunt Sally, I’m used to it, now, and ’tain’t no need to change”—that when Aunt Sally took me for Tom Sawyer, I had to stand it—that warn’t no other way, and I knowed he wouldn’t mind, because it would be nuts for him, being a mystery, and he’d make an adventure out of it and be perfectly satisfied. And so it turned out, and he let on to be Sid, and made things as soft as he could for me.

And his Aunt Polly she said Tom was right about old Miss Watson setting Jim free in her will; and so, sure enough, Tom Sawyer had gone and took all that trouble and bother to set a free nigger free! and I couldn’t ever understand, before, until that minute and that talk, how he *could* help a body set a nigger free, with his bringing-up.

Well, Aunt Polly she said that when Aunt Sally wrote to her that Tom and Sid had come, all right and safe, she says to herself:

“Look at that, now! I might have expected it, letting him go off that way without anybody to watch him. So now I got to go and trapse all the way down the river, eleven hundred mile, and find out what that creetur’s up to, *this* time; as long as I couldn’t seem to get any answer out of you about it.”

3. Tom Sawyer’s aunt and guardian, who appears in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

"Why, I never heard nothing from you," says Aunt Sally.

"Well, I wonder! Why, I wrote to you twice, to ask you what you could mean by Sid being here."

"Well, I never got 'em, Sis."

Aunt Polly, she turns around slow and severe, and says:

"You, Tom!"

"Well—*what?*" he says, kind of pettish.

"Don't you what *me*, you impudent thing—hand out them letters."

"What letters?"

"*Them* letters. I be bound, if I have to take ahold of you I'll—"

"They're in the trunk. There, now. And they're just the same as they was when I got them out of the office. I hain't looked into them, I hain't touched them. But I knowed they'd make trouble, and I thought if you warn't in no hurry, I'd—"

"Well, you *do* need skinning, there ain't no mistake about it. And I wrote another one to tell you I was coming; and I spose he—"

"No, it come yesterday; I hain't read it yet, but *it's* all right, I've got that one."

I wanted to offer to bet two dollars she hadn't, but I reckoned maybe it was just as safe to not to. So I never said nothing.

Chapter the Last

The first time I caught Tom, private, I asked him what was his idea, time of the evasion?—what it was he'd planned to do if the evasion worked all right and he managed to set a nigger free that was already free before? And he said, what he had planned in his head, from the start, if we got Jim out all safe, was for us to run him down the river, on the raft, and have adventures plumb to the mouth of the river, and then tell him about his being free, and take him back up home on a steamboat, in style, and pay him for his lost time, and write word ahead and get out all the niggers around, and have them waltz him into town with a torchlight procession and a brass band, and then he would be a hero, and so would we. But I reckoned it was about as well the way it was.

We had Jim out of the chains in no time, and when Aunt Polly and Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally found out how good he helped the doctor nurse Tom, they made a heap of fuss over him, and fixed him up prime, and give him all he wanted to eat, and a good time, and nothing to do. And we had him up to the sickroom; and had a high talk; and Tom give Jim forty dollars for being prisoner for us so patient, and doing it up so good, and Jim was pleased most to death, and busted out, and says:

"*Dah*, now, Huck, what I tell you?—what I tell you up dah on Jackson islan'? I *tole* you I got a hairy breas', en what's de sign un it; en I *tole* you I ben rich wunst, en gwineter to be rich *agin*; en it's come true; en heah she *is!* *Dah*, now! doan' talk to *me*—signs is *signs*, mine I tell you; en I knowed jjs' 's well 'at I 'uz gwineter be rich agin as I's a stannin' heah dis minute!"

And then Tom he talked along, and talked along, and says, le's all three slide out of here, one of these nights, and get an outfit, and go for howling adventures amongst the Injuns, over in the Territory, for a couple of weeks or two; and I says, all right, that suits me, but I ain't got no money for to buy the outfit, and I reckon I couldn't get none from home, because it's likely pap's been back before now, and got it all away from Judge Thatcher and drunk it up.

“No he hain’t,” Tom says; “it’s all there, yet—six thousand dollars and more; and your pap hain’t ever been back since. Hadn’t when I come away, anyhow.”

Jim says, kind of solemn:

“He ain’t a comin’ back no mo’, Huck.”

I says:

“Why, Jim?”

“Nemmine why, Huck—but he ain’t comin’ back no mo’.”

But I kept at him; so at last he says:

“Doan’ you ’member de house dat was float’n down de river, en dey wuz a man in dah, kivered up, en I went in en unkivered him and didn’ let you come in? Well, den, you k’n git yo’ money when you wants it; kase dat wuz him.”

Tom’s most well, now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is, and so there ain’t nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I’d a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t agoing to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can’t stand it. I been there before.

THE END. YOURS TRULY, HUCK FINN.

Critical Controversy: Race and the Ending of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Celebrated by Ernest Hemingway as the source of all modern American literature, and regarded by many as a great American novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has always been controversial. In Twain's day it was criticized for taking as its hero a boy who smoked, loafed, and preferred the company of a runaway slave to Sunday School. Banned in some school districts and denounced by some scholars and teachers as racist, it has been defended by others as a powerful attack on racism. Its lengthy and ambiguous final section, when the plot to free Jim gives way to an account of Tom Sawyer's pranks, has also provoked controversy. This short selection of critical writings provides a sampling of modern debate on the novel.

Below are the conflicting voices of literary critics and novelists on Jim as a character, on Huck's relationship with Jim, on the use of the "n-word," on race in general, and on the problematic ending. Some of the writers here are sharply critical of the book for what they see as its failure to follow through on its initial premise, that Jim is an admirable character whose drive for freedom expresses a basic human need. Others argue that there is no such failure, that the book maintains its attack on those who deny Jim's status as a human being. The controversy is possible because Twain's ironic humor makes his own position difficult to identify. Leo Marx thinks Jim's drive for freedom is trivialized by an ending in which Huck becomes Tom Sawyer's yes-man. Julius Lester criticizes the book's depiction of Jim along the same lines, arguing that Jim becomes more of a minstrel-show figure than the admirable person he had earlier been. Jane Smiley, also disturbed by Twain's depiction of this black character, proposes Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as a better model for American literature. In contrast, David L. Smith argues that the novel undercuts racist discourse with a trenchant critique of nineteenth-century conceptions of "the Negro." Toni Morrison offers insights into her own experience of reading the novel a number of times over many years, concluding that *Huckleberry Finn* is a classic in part because of the powerful way that it raises but does not answer questions about race, culture, character, and nation. Finally, Alan Gribben explains his decision to create a new edition of the novel, published in 2011, that replaces its most infamous racial epithet with the word "slave"; Michiko Kakutani, writing in the *New York Times*, argues that Gribben's substitution whitewashes the "harsh historical realities" that Twain's novel portrays.

LEO MARX

*From Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn*¹

* * *

I believe that the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* makes so many readers uneasy because they rightly sense that it jeopardizes the significance of the entire novel. To take seriously what happens at the Phelps farm is to take lightly the entire downstream journey. What is the meaning of the journey? With this question all discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* must begin. It is true that the voyage down the river has many aspects of a boy's idyl. We owe much of its hold upon our imagination to the enchanting image of the raft's unhurried drift with the current. The leisure, the absence of constraint, the beauty of the river—all these things delight us. "It's lovely to live on a raft." And the multitudinous life of the great valley we see through Huck's eyes has a fascination of its own. Then, of course, there is humor—laughter so spontaneous, so free of the bitterness present almost everywhere in American humor that readers often forget how grim a spectacle of human existence Huck contemplates. Humor in this novel flows from a bright joy of life as remote from our world as living on a raft.

Yet along with the idyllic and the epic and the funny in *Huckleberry Finn*, there is a coil of meaning which does for the disparate elements of the novel what a spring does for a watch. The meaning is not in the least obscure. It is made explicit again and again. The very words with which Clemens launches Huck and Jim upon their voyage indicate that theirs is not a boy's lark but a quest for freedom. From the electrifying moment when Huck comes back to Jackson's Island and rouses Jim with the news that a search party is on the way, we are meant to believe that Huck is enlisted in the cause of freedom. "Git up and hump yourself, Jim!" he cries. "There ain't a minute to lose. They're after us!" What particularly counts here is the *us*. No one is after Huck; no one but Jim knows he is alive. In that small word Clemens compresses the exhilarating power of Huck's instinctive humanity. His unpremeditated identification with Jim's flight from slavery is an unforgettable moment in American experience, and it may be said at once that any culmination of the journey which detracts from the urgency and dignity with which it begins will necessarily be unsatisfactory. Huck realizes this himself, and says so when, much later, he comes back to the raft after discovering that the Duke and the King have sold Jim:

After all this long journey . . . here it was all come to nothing, everything all busted up and ruined, because they could have the heart to serve Jim such a trick as that, and make him a slave again all his life, and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars.

1. From *American Scholar* 22 (1953): 423–40. A pioneering scholar in the field of American studies, Leo Marx (b. 1919) is best known as the author of *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964). The title

of this essay refers to admiring introductions to *Huckleberry Finn* (1948 and 1950, respectively) written by the critic Lionel Trilling (1905–1975) and the poet T. S. Eliot (1888–1965).



Out of bondage. E. W. Kemble's illustration for the final chapter of the first edition (1884).

Huck knows that the journey will have been a failure unless it takes Jim to freedom. It is true that we do discover, in the end, that Jim is free, but we also find out that the journey was not the means by which he finally reached freedom.

The most obvious thing wrong with the ending, then, is the flimsy contrivance by which Clemens frees Jim. In the end we not only discover that Jim has been a free man for two months, but that his freedom has been granted by old Miss Watson. If this were only a mechanical device for terminating the action, it might not call for much comment. But it is more than that: it is a significant clue to the import of the last ten chapters. Remember who Miss Watson is. She is the Widow's sister whom Huck introduces in the first pages of the novel. It is she who keeps "pecking" at Huck, who tries to teach him to spell and to pray and to keep his feet off the furniture. She is an ardent proselytizer for piety and good manners, and her greed provides the occasion for the journey in the first place. She is Jim's owner, and he decides to flee only when he realizes that she is about to break her word (she cannot resist a slave trader's offer of eight hundred dollars) and sell him down the river away from his family.

Miss Watson, in short, is the Enemy. If we except a predilection for physical violence, she exhibits all the outstanding traits of the valley society. She pronounces the polite lies of civilization that suffocate Huck's spirit. The freedom which Jim seeks, and which Huck and Jim temporarily enjoy aboard the raft, is accordingly freedom *from* everything for which Miss Watson stands. Indeed, the very intensity of the novel derives from the discordance between the aspirations of the fugitives and the respectable code for which she is a spokesman. Therefore her regeneration, of which the deathbed freeing of Jim is the unconvincing sign, hints a resolution of the novel's essential conflict. Perhaps because this device most transparently reveals that shift in point of view which he could not avoid, and which is less easily discerned elsewhere in the concluding chapters, Clemens plays it down. He makes little attempt to account for Miss Watson's change of heart, a change particularly surprising in view of Jim's brazen escape.

* * *

Huckleberry Finn is a masterpiece because it brings Western humor to perfection and yet transcends the narrow limits of its conventions. But the ending does not. During the final extravaganza we are forced to put aside many of the mature emotions evoked earlier by the vivid rendering of Jim's fear of capture, the tenderness of Huck's and Jim's regard for each other, and Huck's excruciating moments of wavering between honesty and respectability. None of these emotions are called forth by the anticlimactic final sequence. I do not mean to suggest that the inclusion of low comedy per se is a flaw in *Huckleberry Finn*. One does not object to the shenanigans of the rogues; there is ample precedent for the place of extravagant humor even in works of high seriousness. But here the case differs from most which come to mind: the major characters themselves are forced to play low comedy roles. Moreover, the most serious motive in the novel, Jim's yearning for freedom, is made the object of nonsense. The conclusion, in short, is farce, but the rest of the novel is not.

* * *

Tom reappears. Soon Huck has fallen almost completely under his sway once more, and we are asked to believe that the boy who felt pity for the rogues is now capable of making Jim's capture the occasion for a game. He becomes Tom's helpless accomplice, submissive and gullible. No wonder that Clemens has Huck remark, when Huck first realizes Aunt Sally has mistaken him for Tom, that "it was like being born again." Exactly. In the end, Huck regresses to the subordinate role in which he had first appeared in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Most of those traits which made him so appealing a hero now disappear. He had never, for example, found pain or misfortune amusing.

* * *

What I have been saying is that the flimsy devices of plot, the discordant farcical tone, and the disintegration of the major characters all betray the failure of the ending.

* * *

JULIUS LESTER

*From Morality and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*¹

* * *

The novel plays with black reality from the moment Jim runs away and does not immediately seek his freedom. It defies logic that Jim did not know Illinois was a free state. Yet, Twain wants us not only to believe he didn't, but to accept as credible that a runaway slave would sail *south* down the Mississippi River, the only route to freedom he knew being at Cairo, Illinois, where the Ohio River meets the Mississippi. If Jim knew that the Ohio met the Mississippi at Cairo, how could he not have known of the closer proximity of freedom to the east in Illinois or north in Iowa? If the reader must suspend intelligence to accept this, intelligence has to be dispensed with altogether to believe that Jim, having unknowingly passed the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, would continue down the river and go deeper and deeper into the heart of slave country. A century of white readers have accepted this as credible, a grim reminder of the abysmal feelings of superiority with which whites are burdened.

The least we expect of a novel is that it be credible, if not wholly in fact then in emotion, for it is emotions that are the true subject matter of fiction. As Jim floats down the river further and further into slave country without anxiety about his fate, without making the least effort to reverse matters, we leave the realm of factual and emotional credibility and enter the all too familiar one of white fantasy in which blacks have all the humanity of Cabbage Patch dolls.

* * *

The depth of Twain's contempt for blacks is not revealed fully until Tom Sawyer clears up something that had confused Huck. When Huck first proposed freeing Jim, he was surprised that Tom agreed readily. The reason Tom did so is because he knew all the while that Miss Watson had freed Jim when she died two months before.

Once again credibility is slain. Early in the novel Jim's disappearance from the town coincides with Huck's. Huck, having manufactured "evidence" of his "murder" to cover his escape, learns that the townspeople believe that Jim killed him. Yet, we are now to believe that an old white lady would free a black slave suspected of murdering a white child. White people might want to believe such fairy tales about themselves, but blacks know better.

But this is not the nadir of Twain's contempt, because when Aunt Sally asks Tom why he wanted to free Jim, knowing he was already free, Tom replies: "Well, that *is* a question, I must say; and *just* like women! Why, I wanted the *adventure* of it . . ." (Ch. 42). Now Huck understands why Tom was so eager to help Jim "escape."

1. From the *Mark Twain Journal* 22 (1984): 43–46. A professor at the University of Massachusetts for over thirty years, Julius Lester (b. 1939) is an award-winning author of books for children and adults.

Tom goes on to explain that his plan was “for us to run him down the river on the raft, and have adventures plumb to the mouth of the river.” Then he and Huck would tell Jim he was free and take him “back up home on a steamboat, in style, and pay him for his lost time.” They would tell everyone they were coming and “get out all the niggers around, and have them waltz him into town with a torchlight procession and a brass-band, and then he would be a hero, and so would we” (“Chapter the Last”).

There is no honor here: * * * Jim is a plaything, an excuse for “the *adventure* of it,” to be used as it suits the fancies of the white folk, whether that fancy be a journey on a raft down the river or a torch-light parade. What Jim clearly is not is a human being, and this is emphasized by the fact that Miss Watson’s will frees Jim but makes no mention of his wife and children.

Twain doesn’t care about the lives the slaves actually lived. Because he doesn’t care, he devalues the world.

DAVID L. SMITH

*From Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse*¹

In July 1876, exactly one century after the American Declaration of Independence, Mark Twain began writing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a novel that illustrates trenchantly the social limitations that American “civilization” imposes on individual freedom. The book takes special note of ways in which racism impinges upon the lives of Afro-Americans, even when they are legally “free.” It is therefore ironic that *Huckleberry Finn* has often been attacked and even censored as a racist work. I would argue, on the contrary, that except for Melville’s work, *Huckleberry Finn* is without peer among major Euro-American novels for its explicitly antiracist stance. Those who brand the book racist generally do so without having considered the specific form of racial discourse to which the novel responds. Furthermore, *Huckleberry Finn* offers much more than the typical liberal defenses of “human dignity” and protests against cruelty. Though it contains some such elements, it is more fundamentally a critique of those socially constituted fictions—most notably romanticism, religion, and the concept of “the Negro”—which serve to justify and disguise selfish, cruel, and exploitative behavior.

When I speak of “racial discourse,” I mean more than simply attitudes about race or conventions of talking about race. Most importantly, I mean that race itself is a discursive formation which delimits social relations on the basis of alleged physical differences. “Race” is a strategy for relegating a segment of the population to a permanent inferior status. It functions by insisting that each “race” has specific, definitive, inherent behavioral tendencies and capacities which distinguish it from other races. Though scientifically specious, race has

1. From *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, ed. James S. Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis (1992), 103–20. David L. Smith is a professor at Williams College.

been powerfully effective as an ideology and as a form of social definition that serves the interests of Euro-American hegemony. In America, race has been deployed against numerous groups, including Native Americans, Jews, Asians, and even—for brief periods—an assortment of European immigrants.

For obvious reasons, however, the primary emphasis historically has been on defining “the Negro” as a deviant from Euro-American norms. “Race” in America means white supremacy and black inferiority, and “the Negro,” a socially constituted fiction, is a generalized, one-dimensional surrogate for the historical reality of Afro-American people. It is this reified fiction that Twain attacks in *Huckleberry Finn*.

Twain adopts a strategy of subversion in his attack on race. That is, he focuses on a number of commonplaces associated with “the Negro” and then systematically dramatizes their inadequacy. He uses the term “nigger,” and he shows Jim engaging in superstitious behavior. Yet he portrays Jim as a compassionate, shrewd, thoughtful, self-sacrificing, and even wise man. Indeed, his portrayal of Jim contradicts every claim presented in Jefferson’s description of “the Negro.”² Jim is cautious, he gives excellent advice, he suffers persistent anguish over separation from his wife and children, and he even sacrifices his own sleep so that Huck may rest. Jim, in short, exhibits all the qualities that “the Negro” supposedly lacks. Twain’s conclusions do more than merely subvert the justifications of slavery, which was already long since abolished. Twain began his book during the final disintegration of Reconstruction, and his satire on antebellum southern bigotry is also an implicit response to the Negrophobic climate of the post-Reconstruction era. It is troubling, therefore, that so many readers have completely misunderstood Twain’s subtle attack on racism.

Twain’s use of the term “nigger” has provoked some readers to reject the novel. As one of the most offensive words in our vocabulary, “nigger” remains heavily shrouded in taboo. A careful assessment of this term within the context of American racial discourse, however, will allow us to understand the particular way in which the author uses it. If we attend closely to Twain’s use of the word, we may find in it not just a trigger to outrage but, more important, a means of understanding the precise nature of American racism and Mark Twain’s attack on it.

Most obviously, Twain uses “nigger” throughout the book as a synonym for “slave.” There is ample evidence from other sources that this corresponds to one usage common during the antebellum period. We first encounter it in reference to “Miss Watson’s big nigger, named Jim” (chap. 2). This usage, like the term “nigger stealer,” clearly designates the “nigger” as an item of property: a commodity, a slave. This passage also provides the only apparent textual justification for the common critical practice of labeling Jim “Nigger Jim,” as if “nigger” were a part of his proper name. This loathsome habit goes back at least as far as Albert Bigelow Paine’s biography of Twain (1912). In any case, “nigger” in this sense connotes an inferior, even subhuman, creature who is properly owned by and subservient to Euro-Americans.

2. A reference to Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Query XIV.

Both Huck and Jim use the word in this sense. For example, when Huck fabricates his tale about the riverboat accident, the following exchange occurs between him and Aunt Sally:

“Good gracious! anybody hurt?”

“No’m. Killed a nigger.”

“Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt.” (Chap. 32)

Huck has never met Aunt Sally prior to this scene, and in spinning a lie which this stranger will find unobjectionable, he correctly assumes that the common notion of Negro subhumanity will be appropriate. Huck’s offhand remark is intended to exploit Aunt Sally’s attitudes, not to express Huck’s own. A nigger, Aunt Sally confirms, is not a person. Yet this exchange is hilarious precisely because we know that Huck is playing on her glib and conventional bigotry. We know that Huck’s relationship to Jim has already invalidated for him such obtuse racial notions. The conception of the “nigger” is a socially constituted and sanctioned fiction, and it is just as false and absurd as Huck’s explicit fabrication, which Aunt Sally also swallows whole.

In fact, the exchange between Huck and Aunt Sally reveals a great deal about how racial discourse operates. Its function is to promulgate a conception of “the Negro” as a subhuman and expendable creature who is by definition feeble-minded, immoral, lazy, and superstitious. One crucial purpose of this social fiction is to justify the abuse and exploitation of Afro-American people by substituting the essentialist fiction of “Negroism” for the actual character of individual Afro-Americans. Hence, in racial discourse every Afro-American becomes just another instance of “the Negro”—just another “nigger.” Twain recognizes this invidious tendency of race thinking, however, and he takes every opportunity to expose the mismatch between racial abstractions and real human beings.

* * *

As a serious critic of American society, Twain recognized that racial discourse depends upon the deployment of a system of stereotypes which constitute “the Negro” as fundamentally different from and inferior to Euro-Americans. As with his handling of “nigger,” Twain’s strategy with racial stereotypes is to elaborate them in order to undermine them. To be sure, those critics are correct who have argued that Twain uses this narrative to reveal Jim’s humanity. Jim, however, is just one individual. Twain uses the narrative to expose the cruelty and hollowness of that racial discourse which exists only to obscure the humanity of *all* Afro-American people.

JANE SMILEY

*From Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's "Masterpiece"*¹

* * *

As with all bad endings, the problem really lies at the beginning, and at the beginning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* neither Huck nor Twain takes Jim's desire for freedom at all seriously; that is, they do not accord it the respect that a man's passion deserves. The sign of this is that not only do the two never cross the Mississippi to Illinois, a free state, but they hardly even consider it. In both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, the Jackson's Island scenes show that such a crossing, even in secret, is both possible and routine, and even though it would present legal difficulties for an escaped slave, these would certainly pose no more hardship than locating the mouth of the Ohio and then finding passage up it. It is true that there could have been slave catchers in pursuit (though the novel ostensibly takes place in the 1840s and the Fugitive Slave Act was not passed until 1850), but Twain's moral failure, once Huck and Jim link up, is never even to account for their choice to go down the river rather than across it. What this reveals is that for all his lip service to real attachment between white boy and black man, Twain really saw Jim as no more than Huck's sidekick, homoerotic or otherwise. All the claims that are routinely made for the book's humanitarian power are, in the end, simply absurd. Jim is never autonomous, never has a vote, always finds his purposes subordinate to Huck's, and, like every good sidekick, he never minds. He grows ever more passive and also more affectionate as Huck and the Duke and the Dauphin and Tom (and Twain) make ever more use of him for their own purposes. But this use they make of him is not supplementary; it is integral to Twain's whole conception of the novel. Twain thinks that Huck's affection is a good enough reward for Jim.

The sort of meretricious critical reasoning that has raised Huck's paltry good intentions to a "strategy of subversion" (David L. Smith) and a "convincing indictment of slavery" (Eliot)² precisely mirrors the same sort of meretricious reasoning that white people use to convince themselves that they are not "racist." If Huck *feels* positive toward Jim, and *loves* him, and *thinks* of him as a man, then that's enough. He doesn't actually have to act in accordance with his feelings. White Americans always think racism is a feeling, and they reject it or they embrace it. To most Americans, it seems more honorable and nicer to reject it, so they do, but they almost invariably fail to understand that how they *feel* means very little to black Americans, who understand racism as a way of structuring American culture, American politics, and the American economy. To invest *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with "greatness" is to underwrite a very simplistic and evasive theory

1. From *Harper's Magazine* (January 1996): 61–67. Jane Smiley (b. 1949) won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *A Thousand Acres* (1991).

2. See T. S. Eliot's "The Boy and the River: Without Beginning or End," his introduction to a 1950 edition of *Huckleberry Finn*.

of what racism is and to promulgate it, philosophically, in schools and the media as well as in academic journals. Surely the discomfort of many readers, black and white, and the censorship battles that have dogged *Huck Finn* in the last twenty years are understandable in this context. No matter how often the critics “place in context” Huck’s use of the word “nigger,” they can never excuse or fully hide the deeper racism of the novel—the way Twain and Huck use Jim because they really don’t care enough about his desire for freedom to let that desire change their plans. And to give credit to Huck suggests that the only racial insight Americans of the nineteenth or twentieth century are capable of is a recognition of the obvious—that blacks, slave and free, are human.

Ernest Hemingway, thinking of himself, as always, once said that all American literature grew out of *Huck Finn*. It undoubtedly would have been better for American literature, and American culture, if our literature had grown out of one of the best-selling novels of all time, another American work of the nineteenth century, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which for its portrayal of an array of thoughtful, autonomous, and passionate black characters leaves *Huck Finn* far behind. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published in 1852, when Twain was seventeen, still living in Hannibal and contributing to his brother’s newspapers.

* * *

I would rather my children read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, even though it is far more vivid in its depiction of cruelty than *Huck Finn*, and this is because Stowe’s novel is clearly and unmistakably a tragedy. No whitewash, no secrets, but evil, suffering, imagination, endurance, and redemption—just like life. Like little Eva, who eagerly but fearfully listens to the stories of the slaves that her family tries to keep from her, our children want to know what is going on, what has gone on, and what we intend to do about it. If “great” literature has any purpose, it is to help us face up to our responsibilities instead of enabling us to avoid them once again by lighting out for the territory.

TONI MORRISON

*From Introduction to Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*¹

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In the early eighties I read *Huckleberry Finn* again, provoked, I believe, by demands to remove the novel from the libraries and required reading lists of public schools. These efforts were based, it seemed to me, on a narrow notion of how to handle the offense Mark Twain’s use of the term “nigger” would occasion for black students and the corrosive effect it would have on white ones. It struck me as a purist yet elementary kind of censorship

1. From “Introduction,” *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xxxi–xli. Toni Morrison (b. 1931) is the

author of *Beloved* (1987) and other novels; in 1993 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

designed to appease adults rather than educate children. Amputate the problem, band-aid the solution. A serious comprehensive discussion of the term by an intelligent teacher certainly would have benefited my eighth-grade class and would have spared all of us (a few blacks, many whites—mostly second-generation immigrant children) some grief. Name calling is a plague of childhood and a learned activity ripe for discussion as soon as it surfaces. Embarrassing as it had been to hear the dread word spoken, and therefore sanctioned, in class, my experience of Jim's epithet had little to do with my initial nervousness the book had caused. Reading "nigger" hundreds of times embarrassed, bored, annoyed—but did not faze me. In this latest reading I was curious about the source of my alarm—my sense that danger lingered after the story ended. I was powerfully attracted to the combination of delight and fearful agitation lying entwined like crossed fingers in the pages. And it was significant that this novel which had given so much pleasure to young readers was also complicated territory for sophisticated scholars.

Usually the divide is substantial: if a story that pleased us as novice readers does not disintegrate as we grow older, it maintains its value only in its retelling for other novices or to summon uncapturable pleasure as playback. Also, the books that academic critics find consistently rewarding are works only partially available to the minds of young readers. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* manages to close that divide, and one of the reasons it requires no leap is that in addition to the reverence the novel stimulates is its ability to transform its contradictions into fruitful complexities and to seem to be deliberately cooperating in the controversy it has excited. The brilliance of *Huckleberry Finn* is that it *is* the argument it raises.

My 1980s reading, therefore, was an effort to track the unease, nail it down, and learn in so doing the nature of my troubled relationship to this classic American work. * * *

If the emotional environment into which Twain places his protagonist is dangerous, then the leading question the novel poses for me is, What does Huck need to live without terror, melancholy and suicidal thoughts? The answer, of course, is Jim. When Huck is among society—whether respectable or deviant, rich or poor—he is alert to and consumed by its deception, its illogic, its scariness. Yet he is depressed by himself and sees nature more often as fearful. But when he and Jim become the only "we," the anxiety is outside, not within. ". . . we would watch the lonesomeness of the river . . . for about an hour . . . just solid lonesomeness." Unmanageable terror gives way to a pastoral, idyllic, intimate timelessness minus the hierarchy of age, status or adult control. It has never seemed to me that, in contrast to the entrapment and menace of the shore, the river itself provides this solace. The consolation, the healing properties Huck longs for, is made possible by Jim's active, highly vocal affection. It is in Jim's company that the dread of contemplated nature disappears, that even storms are beautiful and sublime, that real talk—comic, pointed, sad—takes place. Talk so free of lies it produces an aura of restfulness and peace unavailable anywhere else in the novel.* * *

So there will be no "adventures" without Jim. The risk is too great. To Huck and to the novel. When the end does come, when Jim is finally, tortuously, unnecessarily freed, able now to be a father to his own children, Huck runs. Not back to the town—even if it is safe now—but a further run, for the "territory." And if there are complications out there in the world, Huck,

we are to assume, is certainly ready for them. He has had a first-rate education in social and individual responsibility, and it is interesting to note that the lessons of his growing but secret activism begin to be punctuated by speech, not silence, by moves toward truth, rather than quick lies.

* * *

The source of my unease reading this amazing, troubling book now seems clear: an imperfect coming to terms with three matters Twain addresses—Huck Finn’s estrangement, soleness and morbidity as an outcast child; the disproportionate sadness at the center of Jim’s and his relationship; and the secrecy in which Huck’s engagement with (rather than escape from) a racist society is necessarily conducted. It is also clear that the rewards of my effort to come to terms have been abundant. My alarm, aroused by Twain’s precise rendering of childhood’s fear of death and abandonment, remains—as it should. It has been extremely worthwhile slogging through Jim’s shame and humiliation to recognize the sadness, the tragic implications at the center of his relationship with Huck. My fury at the maze of deceit, the risk of personal harm that a white child is forced to negotiate in a race-inflected society, is dissipated by the exquisite uses to which Twain puts that maze, that risk.

Yet the larger question, the danger that sifts from the novel’s last page, is whether Huck, minus Jim, will be able to stay those three monsters as he enters the “territory.” Will that undefined space, so falsely imagined as “open,” be free of social chaos, personal morbidity, and further moral complications embedded in adulthood and citizenship? Will it be free not only of nightmare fathers but of dream fathers too? Twain did not write Huck there. He imagined instead a reunion—Huck, Jim and Tom, soaring in a balloon over Egypt.

For a hundred years, the argument that this novel *is* has been identified, reidentified, examined, waged and advanced. What it cannot be is dismissed. It is classic literature, which is to say it heaves, manifests and lasts.

ALAN GRIBBEN

*From Introduction to the NewSouth Edition*¹

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The n-word possessed, then as now, demeaning implications more vile than almost any insult that can be applied to other racial groups. There is no equivalent slur in the English language. As a result, with every passing decade this affront appears to gain rather than lose its impact. Even at the

1. From the Introduction to the NewSouth edition of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*, published in 2011. Alan Gribben, a professor of English at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama, produced an edition of Twain’s most famous novels that replaced racial

slurs with language that is more acceptable by twenty-first-century standards. For instance, he substituted “slave” for “nigger” and “Indian” for “Injun.” Gribben’s edition was deeply controversial and widely criticized for its alteration of Twain’s language.

level of college and graduate school, students are capable of resenting textual encounters with this racial appellation. In the 1870s and 1880s, of course, Twain scarcely had to concern himself about the feelings of African American or Native American readers. These population groups were too occupied with trying, in the one case, to recover from the degradation of slavery and the institution of Jim Crow segregation policies, and, in the other case, to survive the onslaught of settlers and buffalo-hunters who had decimated their ways of life, than to bother about objectionable vocabulary choices in two popular books.

* * *

Through a succession of firsthand experiences, this editor gradually concluded that an epithet-free edition of Twain's books is necessary today. For nearly forty years I have led college classes, bookstore forums, and library reading groups in detailed discussions of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* in California, Texas, New York, and Alabama, and I always refrained from uttering the racial slurs spoken by numerous characters, including Tom and Huck. I invariably substituted the word "slave" for Twain's ubiquitous n-word whenever I read any passages aloud. Students and audience members seemed to prefer this expedient, and I could detect a visible sense of relief each time, as though a nagging problem with the text had been addressed. Indeed, numerous communities currently ban *Huckleberry Finn* as required reading in public schools owing to its offensive racial language and have quietly moved the title to voluntary reading lists. The American Library Association lists the novel as one of the most frequently challenged books across the nation.

* * *

During the 1980s, educator John H. Wallace unleashed a fierce and protracted dispute by denouncing *Huckleberry Finn* as "the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written." In 1984 I had to walk past a picket line of African American parents outside a scholarly conference in Pennsylvania that was commemorating, among other achievements in American humor, the upcoming centenary anniversary of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. James S. Leonard, then the editor of the newsletter for the Mark Twain Circle of America, conceded in 2001 that the racist language and unflattering stereotypes of slaves in *Huckleberry Finn* can constitute "real problems" in certain classroom settings. Another scholar, Jonathan Arac, has urged that students be prompted to read other, more unequivocally abolitionist works rather than this one novel that has been consecrated as the mandatory literary statement about American slavery. The once-incontestable belief that the reading of this book at multiple levels of schooling ought to be essential for every American citizen's education is cracking around the edges.

My personal turning point on the journey toward this present NewSouth Edition was a lecture tour I undertook in Alabama in 2009. I had written the introduction for an edition of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* designed to interest younger readers in older American literature. The volume was published by NewSouth Books for a consortium of Alabama libraries in connection with the "Big Read," an initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts. As I traveled around the state and spoke about the

novel to reading groups of adults and teenagers in small towns like Valley, Dadeville, Prattville, Eufaula, Wetumpka, and Talladega, and in larger cities like Montgomery and Birmingham, I followed my customary habit of substituting the word “slave” when reading the characters’ dialogue aloud. In several towns I was taken aside after my talk by earnest middle and high school teachers who lamented the fact that they no longer felt justified in assigning either of Twain’s boy books because of the hurtful n-word. Here was further proof that this single debasing label is overwhelming every other consideration about *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, whereas what these novels have to offer readers hardly depends upon that one indefensible slur.

MICHIKO KAKUTANI

Light Out, Huck, They Still Want to Sivilize You¹

“All modern American literature,” Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.”

Being an iconic classic, however, hasn’t protected *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from being banned, bowdlerized, and bleeped. It hasn’t protected the novel from being cleaned up, updated, and “improved.”

A new effort to sanitize *Huckleberry Finn* comes from Alan Gribben, a professor of English at Auburn University, at Montgomery, Alabama, who has produced a new edition of Twain’s novel that replaces the word “nigger” with “slave.” *Nigger*, which appears in the book more than 200 times, was a common racial epithet in the antebellum South, used by Twain as part of his characters’ vernacular speech and as a reflection of mid-nineteenth-century social attitudes along the Mississippi River.

Mr. Gribben has said he worried that the N-word had resulted in the novel falling off reading lists, and that he thought his edition would be welcomed by schoolteachers and university instructors who wanted to spare “the reader from a racial slur that never seems to lose its vitriol.” Never mind that today *nigger* is used by many rappers, who have reclaimed the word from its ugly past. Never mind that attaching the epithet *slave* to the character Jim—who has run away in a bid for freedom—effectively labels him as property, as the very thing he is trying to escape.

Controversies over *Huckleberry Finn* occur with predictable regularity. In 2009, just before Barack Obama’s inauguration, a high school teacher named John Foley wrote a guest column in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in which he asserted that *Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* don’t belong on the curriculum anymore. “The time has arrived to update the literature we use in high school classrooms,” he wrote. “Barack

1. Michiko Kakutani is a Pulitzer Prize-winning book critic for the *New York Times*, where this article appeared in 2011.

Obama is president-elect of the United States, and novels that use the 'N-word' repeatedly need to go."

Haven't we learned by now that removing books from the curriculum just deprives children of exposure to classic works of literature? Worse, it relieves teachers of the fundamental responsibility of putting such books in context—of helping students understand that *Huckleberry Finn* actually stands as a powerful indictment of slavery (with Nigger Jim its most noble character), of using its contested language as an opportunity to explore the painful complexities of race relations in this country. To censor or redact books on school reading lists is a form of denial: shutting the door on harsh historical realities—whitewashing them or pretending they do not exist.

Mr. Gribben's effort to update *Huckleberry Finn* (published in an edition with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by NewSouth Books), like Mr. Foley's assertion that it's an old book and "we're ready for new," ratifies the narcissistic contemporary belief that art should be inoffensive and accessible; that books, plays, and poetry from other times and places should somehow be made to conform to today's democratic ideals. It's like the politically correct efforts in the eighties to exile great authors like Conrad and Melville from the canon because their work does not feature enough women or projects colonialist attitudes.

Authors' original texts should be sacrosanct intellectual property, whether a book is a classic or not. Tampering with a writer's words underscores both editors' extraordinary hubris and a cavalier attitude embraced by more and more people in this day of mash-ups, sampling, and digital books—the attitude that all texts are fungible, that readers are entitled to alter as they please, that the very idea of authorship is old-fashioned.

Efforts to sanitize classic literature have a long, undistinguished history. Everything from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* have been challenged or have suffered at the hands of uptight editors. There have even been purified versions of the Bible (all that sex and violence!). Sometimes the urge to expurgate (if not outright ban) comes from the right, evangelicals and conservatives, worried about blasphemy, profane language, and sexual innuendo. Fundamentalist groups, for instance, have tried to have dictionaries banned because of definitions offered for words like *hot*, *tail*, *ball*, and *nuts*.

In other cases the drive to sanitize comes from the left, eager to impose its own multicultural, feminist worldviews and worried about offending religious or ethnic groups. Michael Radford's 2004 film version of *The Merchant of Venice* (starring Al Pacino) revised the play to elide potentially offensive material, serving up a nicer, more sympathetic Shylock and blunting tough questions about anti-Semitism. More absurdly, a British theater company in 2002 changed the title of its production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to *The Bellringer of Notre Dame*.

Whether it comes from conservatives or liberals, there is a patronizing Big Brother aspect to these literary fumigations. We, the censors, need to protect you, the naïve, delicate reader. We, the editors, need to police writers (even those from other eras), who might have penned something that might be offensive to someone sometime.

Although it's hard to imagine a theater company today using one of Shakespeare adaptations—say, changing “Out, damned spot! Out, I say!” in *Macbeth* to “out, crimson spot!”—the language police are staging a comeback. Not just with an expurgated *Huckleberry Finn* but with political efforts to clamp down on objectionable language. Last year the *Boston Globe* reported that California lawmakers first voted for, then tabled a resolution declaring a No Cuss Week, that South Carolina had debated a sweeping anti-profanity bill, and that conservative groups like the Parents Television Council have complained about vulgarities creeping into family-hour shows on network television.

But while James V. O'Connor, author of the book *Cuss Control*, argues that people can and should find word substitutions, even his own Web site grants Rhett Butler a “poetic license” exemption in *Gone With the Wind*. “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a hoot”² Now that's damnable.

2. The original line of dialogue from *Gone With the Wind* (1936)—made famous by Clark Gable in the 1939 film adaptation—is “Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.”

The Private History of a Campaign That Failed¹

You have heard from a great many people who did something in the war; is it not fair and right that you listen a little moment to one who started out to do something in it, but didn't? Thousands entered the war, got just a taste of it, and then stepped out again, permanently. These, by their very numbers, are respectable, and are therefore entitled to a sort of voice,—not a loud one, but a modest one; not a boastful one, but an apologetic one. They ought not to be allowed much space among better people—people who did something—I grant that; but they ought at least to be allowed to state why they didn't do anything, and also to explain the process by which they didn't do anything. Surely this kind of light must have a sort of value.

Out West there was a good deal of confusion in men's minds during the first months of the great trouble—a good deal of unsettledness, of leaning first this way, then that, then the other way. It was hard for us to get our bearings. I call to mind an instance of this. I was piloting on the Mississippi when the news came that South Carolina had gone out of the Union on the 20th of December, 1860. My pilot-mate was a New Yorker. He was strong for the Union; so was I. But he would not listen to me with any patience; my loyalty was smirched, to his eye, because my father had owned slaves. I said, in palliation of this dark fact, that I had heard my father say, some years before he died, that slavery was a great wrong, and that he would free the solitary negro he then owned if he could think it right to give away the property of the family when he was so straitened in means. My mate retorted that a mere impulse was nothing—anybody could pretend to a good impulse;

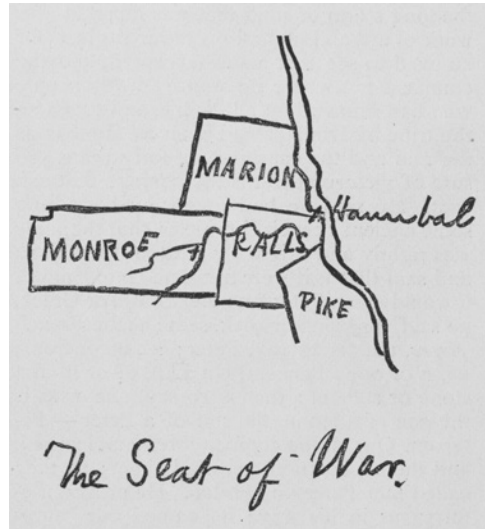
1. A mixture of fact and fiction, this account was composed by Twain at the invitation of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, which was

publishing a series on Civil War “Battles and Leaders.” The story appeared in the December 1885 issue of the magazine, the source of this text.

and went on decrying my Unionism and libeling my ancestry. A month later the secession atmosphere had considerably thickened on the Lower Mississippi, and I became a rebel; so did he. We were together in New Orleans, the 26th of January, when Louisiana went out of the Union. He did his full share of the rebel shouting, but was bitterly opposed to letting me do mine. He said that I came of bad stock—of a father who had been willing to set slaves free. In the following summer he was piloting a Federal gun-boat and shouting for the Union again, and I was in the Confederate army. I held his note for some borrowed money. He was one of the most upright men I ever knew; but he repudiated that note without hesitation, because I was a rebel, and the son of a man who owned slaves.

In that summer—of 1861—the first wash of the wave of war broke upon the shores of Missouri. Our State was invaded by the Union forces. They took possession of St. Louis, Jefferson Barracks,² and some other points. The Governor, Claib Jackson,³ issued his proclamation calling out fifty thousand militia to repel the invader.

I was visiting in the small town where my boyhood had been spent—Hannibal, Marion County. Several of us got together in a secret place by night and formed ourselves into a military company. One Tom Lyman, a young fellow of a good deal of spirit but of no military experience, was made captain; I was made second lieutenant. We had no first lieutenant; I do not know why; it was long ago. There were fifteen of us. By the advice of an innocent connected with the organization, we called ourselves the Marion Rangers. I do not remember that any one found fault with the name. I did not; I thought it sounded quite well. The young fellow who proposed this title was perhaps a fair sample of the kind of stuff we were made of. He was young, ignorant, good-natured, well-meaning, trivial, full of romance, and given to reading chivalric novels and singing forlorn love-ditties. He had some pathetic little nickel-plated aristocratic instincts, and detested his name, which was Dunlap; detested it, partly because it was nearly as common in that region as Smith, but mainly because it had a plebeian sound to



The Seat of War. Twain drew this map to accompany the original publication of his "Private History." Narratives of the Civil War were frequently accompanied by maps to show their geographic locations.

2. A military installation on the banks of the Mississippi River.

3. Claiborne Fox Jackson (1806–1862) became

governor of Missouri in 1861. As Twain's account suggests, he sympathized with the Confederacy and secession.

his ear. So he tried to ennoble it by writing it in this way: *d'Unlap*. That contented his eye, but left his ear unsatisfied, for people gave the new name the same old pronunciation—emphasis on the front end of it. He then did the bravest thing that can be imagined,—a thing to make one shiver when one remembers how the world is given to resenting shams and affectations; he began to write his name so: *d' Un Lap*. And he waited patiently through the long storm of mud that was flung at this work of art, and he had his reward at last; for he lived to see that name accepted, and the emphasis put where he wanted it, by people who had known him all his life, and to whom the tribe of Dunlaps had been as familiar as the rain and the sunshine for forty years. So sure of victory at last is the courage that can wait. He said he had found, by consulting some ancient French chronicles, that the name was rightly and originally written *d'Un Lap*; and said that if it were translated into English it would mean Peterson: *Lap*, Latin or Greek, he said, for stone or rock, same as the French *pierre*, that is to say, Peter; *d'*, of or from; *un*, a or one; hence, *d'Un Lap*, of or from a stone or a Peter; that is to say, one who is the son of a stone, the son of a Peter—Peterson. Our militia company were not learned, and the explanation confused them; so they called him Peterson Dunlap. He proved useful to us in his way; he named our camps for us, and he generally struck a name that was “no slouch,” as the boys said.

That is one sample of us. Another was Ed Stevens, son of the town jeweler,—trim-built, handsome, graceful, neat as a cat; bright, educated, but given over entirely to fun. There was nothing serious in life to him. As far as he was concerned, this military expedition of ours was simply a holiday. I should say that about half of us looked upon it in the same way; not consciously, perhaps, but unconsciously. We did not think; we were not capable of it. As for myself, I was full of unreasoning joy to be done with turning out of bed at midnight and four in the morning, for a while; grateful to have a change, new scenes, new occupations, a new interest. In my thoughts that was as far as I went; I did not go into the details; as a rule one doesn't at twenty-four.

Another sample was Smith, the blacksmith's apprentice. This vast donkey had some pluck, of a slow and sluggish nature, but a soft heart; at one time he would knock a horse down for some impropriety, and at another he would get homesick and cry. However, he had one ultimate credit to his account which some of us hadn't: he stuck to the war, and was killed in battle at last.

Jo Bowers, another sample, was a huge, good-natured, flax-headed lubber; lazy, sentimental, full of harmless brag, a grumbler by nature; an experienced, industrious, ambitious, and often quite picturesque liar, and yet not a successful one, for he had had no intelligent training, but was allowed to come up just any way. This life was serious enough to him, and seldom satisfactory. But he was a good fellow anyway, and the boys all liked him. He was made orderly sergeant; Stevens was made corporal.

These samples will answer—and they are quite fair ones. Well, this herd of cattle started for the war. What could you expect of them? They did as well as they knew how, but really what was justly to be expected of them? Nothing, I should say. That is what they did.

We waited for a dark night, for caution and secrecy were necessary; then, toward midnight, we stole in couples and from various directions to the Griffith place, beyond the town; from that point we set out together on foot. Hannibal lies at the extreme southeastern corner of Marion County, on the

Mississippi River; our objective point was the hamlet of New London, ten miles away, in Ralls County.

The first hour was all fun, all idle nonsense and laughter. But that could not be kept up. The steady trudging came to be like work; the play had somehow oozed out of it; the stillness of the woods and the somberness of the night began to throw a depressing influence over the spirits of the boys, and presently the talking died out and each person shut himself up in his own thoughts. During the last half of the second hour nobody said a word.

Now we approached a log farm-house where, according to report, there was a guard of five Union soldiers. Lyman called a halt; and there, in the deep gloom of the overhanging branches, he began to whisper a plan of assault upon that house, which made the gloom more depressing than it was before. It was a crucial moment; we realized, with a cold suddenness, that here was no jest—we were standing face to face with actual war. We were equal to the occasion. In our response there was no hesitation, no indecision: we said that if Lyman wanted to meddle with those soldiers, he could go ahead and do it; but if he waited for us to follow him, he would wait a long time.

Lyman urged, pleaded, tried to shame us, but it had no effect. Our course was plain, our minds were made up: we would flank the farm-house—go out around. And that is what we did.

We struck into the woods and entered upon a rough time, stumbling over roots, getting tangled in vines, and torn by briars. At last we reached an open place in a safe region, and sat down, blown and hot, to cool off and nurse our scratches and bruises. Lyman was annoyed, but the rest of us were cheerful; we had flanked the farm-house, we had made our first military movement, and it was a success; we had nothing to fret about, we were feeling just the other way. Horse-play and laughing began again; the expedition was become a holiday frolic once more.

Then we had two more hours of dull trudging and ultimate silence and depression; then, about dawn, we straggled into New London, soiled, heel-blistered, fagged⁴ with our little march, and all of us except Stevens in a sour and raspy humor and privately down on the war. We stacked our shabby old shot-guns in Colonel Ralls's barn, and then went in a body and breakfasted with that veteran of the Mexican war. Afterwards he took us to a distant meadow, and there in the shade of a tree we listened to an old-fashioned speech from him, full of gunpowder and glory, full of that adjective-piling, mixed metaphor, and windy declamation which was regarded as eloquence in that ancient time and that remote region; and then he swore us on the Bible to be faithful to the State of Missouri and drive all invaders from her soil, no matter whence they might come or under what flag they might march. This mixed us considerably, and we could not make out just what service we were embarked in; but Colonel Ralls, the practiced politician and phrase-juggler, was not similarly in doubt; he knew quite clearly that he had invested us in the cause of the Southern Confederacy. He closed the solemnities by belting around me the sword which his neighbor, Colonel Brown, had worn at Buena Vista and Molino del Rey;⁵ and he accompanied this act with another impressive blast.

4. Tired.

5. Key battles of the U.S.-Mexico War; both occurred in 1847.

Then we formed in line of battle and marched four miles to a shady and pleasant piece of woods on the border of the far-reaching expanses of a flowery prairie. It was an enchanting region for war—our kind of war.

We pierced the forest about half a mile, and took up a strong position, with some low, rocky, and wooded hills behind us, and a purling, limpid creek in front. Straightway half the command were in swimming, and the other half fishing. The ass with the French name gave this position a romantic title, but it was too long, so the boys shortened and simplified it to Camp Ralls.

We occupied an old maple-sugar camp, whose half-rotted troughs were still propped against the trees. A long corn-crib served for sleeping quarters for the battalion. On our left, half a mile away, was Mason's farm and house; and he was a friend to the cause. Shortly after noon the farmers began to arrive from several directions, with mules and horses for our use, and these they lent us for as long as the war might last, which they judged would be about three months. The animals were of all sizes, all colors, and all breeds. They were mainly young and frisky, and nobody in the command could stay on them long at a time; for we were town boys, and ignorant of horsemanship. The creature that fell to my share was a very small mule, and yet so quick and active that it could throw me without difficulty; and it did this whenever I got on it. Then it would bray—stretching its neck out, laying its ears back, and spreading its jaws till you could see down to its works. It was a disagreeable animal, in every way. If I took it by the bridle and tried to lead it off the grounds, it would sit down and brace back, and no one could budge it. However, I was not entirely destitute of military resources, and I did presently manage to spoil this game; for I had seen many a steamboat aground in my time, and knew a trick or two which even a grounded mule would be obliged to respect. There was a well by the corn-crib; so I substituted thirty fathom of rope for the bridle, and fetched him home with the windlass.

I will anticipate here sufficiently to say that we did learn to ride, after some days' practice, but never well. We could not learn to like our animals; they were not choice ones, and most of them had annoying peculiarities of one kind or another. Stevens's horse would carry him, when he was not noticing, under the huge excrescences which form on the trunks of oak-trees, and wipe him out of the saddle; in this way Stevens got several bad hurts. Sergeant Bowers's horse was very large and tall, with slim, long legs, and looked like a railroad bridge. His size enabled him to reach all about, and as far as he wanted to, with his head; so he was always biting Bowers's legs. On the march, in the sun, Bowers slept a good deal; and as soon as the horse recognized that he was asleep he would reach around and bite him on the leg. His legs were black and blue with bites. This was the only thing that could ever make him swear, but this always did; whenever the horse bit him he always swore, and of course Stevens, who laughed at everything, laughed at this, and would even get into such convulsions over it as to lose his balance and fall off his horse; and then Bowers, already irritated by the pain of the horse-bite, would resent the laughter with hard language, and there would be a quarrel; so that horse made no end of trouble and bad blood in the command.

However, I will get back to where I was—our first afternoon in the sugar-camp. The sugar-troughs came very handy as horse-troughs, and we had plenty of corn to fill them with. I ordered Sergeant Bowers to feed my mule; but he said that if I reckoned he went to war to be dry-nurse to a mule, it

wouldn't take me very long to find out my mistake. I believed that this was insubordination, but I was full of uncertainties about everything military, and so I let the thing pass, and went and ordered Smith, the blacksmith's apprentice, to feed the mule; but he merely gave me a large, cold, sarcastic grin, such as an ostensibly seven-year-old horse gives you when you lift his lip and find he is fourteen, and turned his back on me. I then went to the captain, and asked if it was not right and proper and military for me to have an orderly. He said it was, but as there was only one orderly in the corps, it was but right that he himself should have Bowers on his staff. Bowers said he wouldn't serve on anybody's staff; and if anybody thought he could make him, let him try it. So, of course, the thing had to be dropped; there was no other way.

Next, nobody would cook; it was considered a degradation; so we had no dinner. We lazied the rest of the pleasant afternoon away, some dozing under the trees, some smoking cob-pipes and talking sweethearts and war, some playing games. By late suppertime all hands were famished; and to meet the difficulty all hands turned to, on an equal footing, and gathered wood, built fires, and cooked the meal. Afterward everything was smooth for a while; then trouble broke out between the corporal and the sergeant, each claiming to rank the other. Nobody knew which was the higher office; so Lyman had to settle the matter by making the rank of both officers equal. The commander of an ignorant crew like that has many troubles and vexations which probably do not occur in the regular army at all. However, with the song-singing and yarn-spinning around the camp-fire, everything presently became serene again; and by and by we raked the corn down level in one end of the crib, and all went to bed on it, tying a horse to the door, so that he would neigh if any one tried to get in.⁶

We had some horsemanship drill every forenoon; then, afternoons, we rode off here and there in squads a few miles, and visited the farmer's girls, and had a youthful good time, and got an honest good dinner or supper, and then home again to camp, happy and content.

For a time, life was idly delicious, it was perfect; there was nothing to mar it. Then came some farmers with an alarm one day. They said it was rumored that the enemy were advancing in our direction, from over Hyde's prairie. The result was a sharp stir among us, and general consternation. It was a rude awakening from our pleasant trance. The rumor was but a rumor—nothing definite about it; so, in the confusion, we did not know which way to retreat. Lyman was for not retreating at all, in these uncertain circumstances; but he found that if he tried to maintain that attitude he would fare badly, for the command were in no humor to put up with insubordination. So he yielded the point and called a council of war—to consist of himself and the three other officers; but the privates made such a fuss about being left out, that we had to allow them to be present. I mean we had to allow them to remain, for they were already present, and doing the most of the talking too. The question was, which way to retreat; but all were so flurried

6. It was always my impression that that was always what the horse was there for, and I know it was the impression of at least one other of the command, for we talked about it at the time, and admired the military ingenuity of the device; but when I was out West three years ago, I was told by Mr. A. G. Fuqua, a member of our company, that

the horse was his, that the leaving him tied at the door was a matter of mere forgetfulness, and that to attribute it to intelligent invention was to give him quite too much credit. In support of his position, he called my attention to the suggestive fact that the artifice was not employed again. I had not thought of that before [*Twain's note*].

that nobody seemed to have even a guess to offer. Except Lyman. He explained in a few calm words, that inasmuch as the enemy were approaching from over Hyde's prairie, our course was simple: all we had to do was not to retreat *toward* him; any other direction would answer our needs perfectly. Everybody saw in a moment how true this was, and how wise; so Lyman got a great many compliments. It was now decided that we should fall back on Mason's farm.

It was after dark by this time, and as we could not know how soon the enemy might arrive, it did not seem best to try to take the horses and things with us; so we only took the guns and ammunition, and started at once. The route was very rough and hilly and rocky, and presently the night grew very black and rain began to fall; so we had a troublesome time of it, struggling and stumbling along in the dark; and soon some person slipped and fell, and then the next person behind stumbled over him and fell, and so did the rest, one after the other; and then Bowers came with the keg of powder in his arms, whilst the command were all mixed together, arms and legs, on the muddy slope; and so he fell, of course, with the keg, and this started the whole detachment down the hill in a body, and they landed in the brook at the bottom in a pile, and each that was undermost pulling the hair and scratching and biting those that were on top of him; and those that were being scratched and bitten scratching and biting the rest in their turn, and all saying they would die before they would ever go to war again if they ever got out of this brook this time, and the invader might rot for all they cared, and the country along with him—and all such talk as that, which was dismal to hear and take part in, in such smothered, low voices, and such a grisly dark place and so wet, and the enemy may be coming any moment.

The keg of powder was lost, and the guns too; so the growling and complaining continued straight along whilst the brigade pawed around the pasty hillside and slopped around in the brook hunting for these things; consequently we lost considerable time at this; and then we heard a sound, and held our breath and listened, and it seemed to be the enemy coming, though it could have been a cow, for it had a cough like a cow; but we did not wait, but left a couple of guns behind and struck out for Mason's again as briskly as we could scramble along in the dark. But we got lost presently among the rugged little ravines, and wasted a deal of time finding the way again, so it was after nine when we reached Mason's stile⁷ at last; and then before we could open our mouths to give the countersign, several dogs came bounding over the fence, with great riot and noise, and each of them took a soldier by the slack of his trousers and began to back away with him. We could not shoot the dogs without endangering the persons they were attached to; so we had to look on, helpless, at what was perhaps the most mortifying spectacle of the civil war. There was light enough, and to spare, for the Masons had now run out on the porch with candles in their hands. The old man and his son came and undid the dogs without difficulty, all but Bowers's; but they couldn't undo his dog, they didn't know his combination; he was of the bull kind, and seemed to be set with a Yale time-lock;⁸ but they got him

7. Stairs straddling a fence.

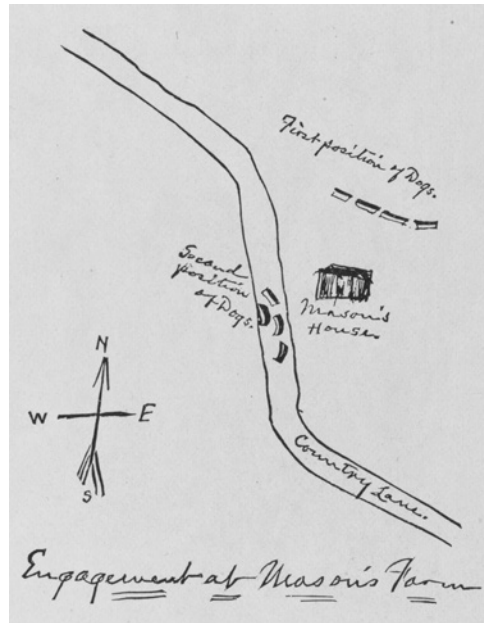
8. Based in Connecticut, the Yale and Towne Company offered time locks for high-security

containers, such as bank vaults. Time locks will not release until a pre-set time.

loose at last with some scalding water, of which Bowers got his share and returned thanks. Peterson Dunlap afterwards made up a fine name for this engagement, and also for the night march which preceded it, but both have long ago faded out of my memory.

We now went into the house, and they began to ask us a world of questions, whereby it presently came out that we did not know anything concerning who or what we were running from; so the old gentleman made himself very frank, and said we were a curious breed of soldiers, and guessed we could be depended on to end up the war in time, because no government could stand the expense of the shoe-leather we should cost it trying to follow us around. "Marion Rangers! Good name, b'gosh!" said he. And wanted to know why we hadn't had a picket-guard⁹ at the place where the road entered the prairie, and why we hadn't sent out a scouting party to spy out the enemy and bring us an account of his strength, and so on, before jumping up and stampeding out of a strong position upon a mere vague rumor—and so on and so forth, till he made us all feel shabbier than the dogs had done, not half so enthusiastically welcome. So we went to bed shamed and low-spirited; except Stevens. Soon Stevens began to devise a garment for Bowers which could be made to automatically display his battle-scars to the grateful, or conceal them from the envious, according to his occasions; but Bowers was in no humor for this, so there was a fight, and when it was over Stevens had some battle-scars of his own to think about.

Then we got a little sleep. But after all we had gone through, our activities were not over for the night; for about two o'clock in the morning we heard a shout of warning from down the lane, accompanied by a chorus from all the dogs, and in a moment everybody was up and flying around to find out what the alarm was about. The alarmist was a horseman who gave notice that a detachment of Union soldiers was on its way from Hannibal with orders to capture and hang any bands like ours which it could find, and said we had no time to lose. Farmer Mason was in a flurry this time, himself. He hurried us out of the house with all haste, and sent one of his negroes with



Engagement at Mason's Farm. Twain drew this illustration for the original publication of "Private History." It mimics the diagrams of opposing forces that frequently accompanied descriptions of battle in magazines like the *Century*.

9. A guard placed apart from the main company of soldiers to observe a particular location.

us to show us where to hide ourselves and our tell-tale guns among the ravines half a mile away. It was raining heavily.

We struck down the lane, then across some rocky pasture-land which offered good advantages for stumbling; consequently we were down in the mud most of the time, and every time a man went down he blackguarded the war, and the people that started it, and everybody connected with it, and gave himself the master dose of all for being so foolish as to go into it. At last we reached the wooded mouth of a ravine, and there we huddled ourselves under the streaming trees, and sent the negro back home. It was a dismal and heart-breaking time. We were like to be drowned with the rain, deafened with the howling wind and the booming thunder, and blinded by the lightning. It was indeed a wild night. The drenching we were getting was misery enough, but a deeper misery still was the reflection that the halter¹ might end us before we were a day older. A death of this shameful sort had not occurred to us as being among the possibilities of war. It took the romance all out of the campaign, and turned our dreams of glory into a repulsive nightmare. As for doubting that so barbarous an order had been given, not one of us did that.

The long night wore itself out at last, and then the negro came to us with the news that the alarm had manifestly been a false one, and that breakfast would soon be ready. Straightway we were lighted-hearted again, and the world was bright, and life as full of hope and promise as ever—for we were young then. How long ago that was! Twenty-four years.

The mongrel child of philology named the night's refuge Camp Devastation, and no soul objected. The Masons gave us a Missouri country breakfast, in Missourian abundance, and we needed it: hot biscuits; hot "wheat bread" prettily criss-crossed in a lattice pattern on top; hot corn pone;² fried chicken; bacon, coffee, eggs, milk, buttermilk, etc.;—and the world may be confidently challenged to furnish the equal to such a breakfast, as it is cooked in the South.

We stayed several days at Mason's; and after all these years the memory of the dullness, the stillness and lifelessness of that slumberous farm-house still oppresses my spirit as with a sense of the presence of death and mourning. There was nothing to do, nothing to think about; there was no interest in life. The male part of the household were away in the fields all day, the women were busy and out of our sight; there was no sound but the plaintive wailing of a spinning-wheel, forever moaning out from some distant room,—the most lonesome sound in nature, a sound steeped and sodden with homesickness and the emptiness of life. The family went to bed about dark every night, and as we were not invited to intrude any new customs, we naturally followed theirs. Those nights were a hundred years long to youths accustomed to being up till twelve. We lay awake and miserable till that hour every time, and grew old and decrepit waiting through the still eternities for the clock-strikes. This was no place for town boys. So at last it was with something very like joy that we received news that the enemy were on our track again. With a new birth of the old warrior spirit, we sprang to our places in line of battle and fell back on Camp Ralls.

Captain Lyman had taken a hint from Mason's talk, and he now gave orders that our camp should be guarded against surprise by the posting of

1. Moose.

2. Cornbread.

pickets. I was ordered to place a picket at the forks of the road in Hyde's prairie. Night shut down black and threatening. I told Sergeant Bowers to go out to that place and stay till midnight; and, just as I was expecting, he said he wouldn't do it. I tried to get others to go, but all refused. Some excused themselves on account of the weather; but the rest were frank enough to say they wouldn't go in any kind of weather. This kind of thing sounds odd now, and impossible, but there was no surprise in it at the time. On the contrary, it seemed a perfectly natural thing to do. There were scores of little camps scattered over Missouri where the same thing was happening. These camps were composed of young men who had been born and reared to a sturdy independence, and who did not know what it meant to be ordered around by Tom, Dick, and Harry, whom they had known familiarly all their lives, in the village or on the farm. It is quite within the probabilities that this same thing was happening all over the South. James Redpath³ recognized the justice of this assumption, and furnished the following instance in support of it. During a short stay in East Tennessee he was in a citizen colonel's tent one day, talking, when a big private appeared at the door, and without salute or other circumlocution said to the colonel:

"Say, Jim, I'm a-goin' home for a few days."

"What for?"

"Well, I hain't b'en there for a right smart while, and I'd like to see how things is comin' on."

"How long are you going to be gone?"

"'Bout two weeks."

"Well, don't be gone longer than that; and get back sooner if you can."

That was all, and the citizen officer resumed his conversation where the private had broken it off. This was in the first months of the war, of course. The camps in our part of Missouri were under Brigadier-General Thomas H. Harris.⁴ He was a townsman of ours, a first-rate fellow, and well liked; but we had all familiarly known him as the sole and modest-salaried operator in our telegraph office, where he had to send about one dispatch a week in ordinary times, and two when there was a rush of business; consequently, when he appeared in our midst one day, on the wing, and delivered a military command of some sort, in a large military fashion, nobody was surprised at the response which he got from the assembled soldiery:

"Oh, now, what'll you take to *don't*, Tom Harris!"

It was quite the natural thing. One might justly imagine that we were hopeless material for war. And so we seemed, in our ignorant state; but there were those among us who afterward learned the grim trade; learned to obey like machines; became valuable soldiers; fought all through the war, and came out at the end with excellent records. One of the very boys who refused to go out on picket duty that night, and called me an ass for thinking he would expose himself to danger in such a foolhardy way, had become distinguished for intrepidity before he was a year older.

3. Antislavery activist and journalist (1833–1891) who founded an important lyceum bureau—essentially a lecturer-booking agency. Twain was among his clients.

4. Twain errs in the middle initial here, as he

refers to Thomas Alexander Harris (1826–1895), who served as brigadier general of the Missouri State Guard and then represented Missouri in the First Confederate Congress.

I did secure my picket that night—not by authority, but by diplomacy. I got Bowers to go, by agreeing to exchange ranks with him for the time being, and go along and stand the watch with him as his subordinate. We staid out there a couple of dreary hours in the pitchy darkness and the rain, with nothing to modify the dreariness but Bowers's monotonous growling at the war and the weather; then we began to nod, and presently found it next to impossible to stay in the saddle; so we gave up the tedious job, and went back to the camp without waiting for the relief guard. We rode into camp without interruption or objection from anybody, and the enemy could have done the same, for there were no sentries. Everybody was asleep; at midnight there was nobody to send out another picket, so none was sent. We never tried to establish a watch at night again, as far as I remember, but we generally kept a picket out in the daytime.

In that camp the whole command slept on the corn in the big corn-crib; and there was usually a general row before morning, for the place was full of rats, and they would scramble over the boys' bodies and faces, annoying and irritating everybody; and now and then they would bite someone's toe, and the person who owned the toe would start up and magnify his English and begin to throw corn in the dark. The ears were half as heavy as bricks, and when they struck they hurt. The persons struck would respond, and inside of five minutes every man would be locked in a death-grip with his neighbor. There was a grievous deal of blood shed in the corn-crib, but this was all that was spilt while I was in the war. No, that is not quite true. But for one circumstance it would have been all. I will come to that now.

Our scares were frequent. Every few days rumors would come that the enemy were approaching. In these cases we always fell back on some other camp of ours; we never staid where we were. But the rumors always turned out to be false; so at last even we began to grow indifferent to them. One night a negro was sent to our corn-crib with the same old warning: the enemy was hovering in our neighborhood. We all said let him hover. We resolved to stay still and be comfortable. It was a fine warlike resolution, and no doubt we all felt the stir of it in our veins—for a moment. We had been having a very jolly time, that was full of horse-play and school-boy hilarity; but that cooled down now, and presently the fast-waning fire of forced jokes and forced laughs died out altogether, and the company became silent. Silent and nervous. And soon uneasy—worried—apprehensive. We had said we would stay, and we were committed. We could have been persuaded to go, but there was nobody brave enough to suggest it. An almost noiseless movement presently began in the dark, by a general but unvoiced impulse. When the movement was completed, each man knew that he was not the only person who had crept to the front wall and had his eye at a crack between the logs. No, we were all there; all there with our hearts in our throats, and staring out toward the sugar-troughs where the forest foot-path came through. It was late, and there was a deep woodsy stillness everywhere. There was a veiled moonlight, which was only just strong enough to enable us to mark the general shape of objects. Presently a muffled sound caught our ears, and we recognized it as the hoof-beats of a horse or horses. And right away a figure appeared in the forest path; it could have been made of smoke, its mass had so little sharpness of outline. It was a man on horseback; and it seemed to me that there were others behind him. I got hold of a gun in the dark, and

pushed it through a crack between the logs, hardly knowing what I was doing, I was so dazed with fright. Somebody said "Fire!" I pulled the trigger. I seemed to see a hundred flashes and hear a hundred reports, then I saw the man fall down out of the saddle. My first feeling was of surprised gratification; my first impulse was an apprentice-sportsman's impulse to run and pick up his game. Somebody said, hardly audibly, "Good—we've got him!—wait for the rest." But the rest did not come. We waited—listened—still no more came. There was not a sound, not the whisper of a leaf; just perfect stillness; an uncanny kind of stillness, which was all the more uncanny on account of the damp, earthy, late-night smells now rising and pervading it. Then, wondering, we crept stealthily out, and approached the man. When we got to him the moon revealed him distinctly. He was lying on his back, with his arms abroad; his mouth was open and his chest heaving with long gasps, and his white shirt-front was all splashed with blood. The thought shot through me that I was a murderer; that I had killed a man—a man who had never done me any harm. That was the coldest sensation that ever went through my marrow. I was down by him in a moment, helplessly stroking his forehead; and I would have given anything then—my own life freely—to make him again what he had been five minutes before. And all the boys seemed to be feeling in the same way; they hung over him, full of pitying interest, and tried all they could to help him, and said all sorts of regretful things. They had forgotten all about the enemy; they thought only of this one forlorn unit of the foe. Once my imagination persuaded me that the dying man gave me a reproachful look out of his shadowy eyes, and it seemed to me that I could rather he had stabbed me than done that. He muttered and mumbled like a dreamer in his sleep, about his wife and his child; and I thought with a new despair, "This thing that I have done does not end with him; it falls upon *them* too, and they never did me any harm, any more than he."

In a little while the man was dead. He was killed in war; killed in fair and legitimate war; killed in battle, as you may say; and yet he was as sincerely mourned by the opposing force as if he had been their brother. The boys stood there a half hour sorrowing over him, and recalling the details of the tragedy, and wondering who he might be, and if he were a spy, and saying that if it were to do over again they would not hurt him unless he attacked them first. It soon came out that mine was not the only shot fired; there were five others,—a division of the guilt which was a grateful relief to me, since it in some degree lightened and diminished the burden I was carrying. There were six shots fired at once; but I was not in my right mind at the time, and my heated imagination had magnified my one shot into a volley.

The man was not in uniform, and was not armed. He was a stranger in the country; that was all we ever found out about him. The thought of him got to preying upon me every night; I could not get rid of it. I could not drive it away, the taking of that unoffending life seemed such a wanton thing. And it seemed an epitome of war; that all war must be just that—the killing of strangers against whom you feel no personal animosity; strangers whom, in other circumstances, you would help if you found them in trouble, and who would help you if you needed it. My campaign was spoiled. It seemed to me that I was not rightly equipped for this awful business; that war was intended for men, and I for a child's nurse. I resolved to retire from this avocation of sham soldiery while I could save some remnant of my self-respect. These morbid thoughts

clung to me against reason; for at bottom I did not believe I had touched that man. The law of probabilities decreed me guiltless of his blood; for in all my small experience with guns I had never hit anything I had tried to hit, and I knew I had done my best to hit him. Yet there was no solace in the thought. Against a diseased imagination, demonstration goes for nothing.

The rest of my war experience was of a piece with what I have already told of it. We kept monotonously falling back upon one camp or another, and eating up the country. I marvel now at the patience of the farmers and their families. They ought to have shot us; on the contrary, they were as hospitably kind and courteous to us as if we had deserved it. In one of these camps we found Ab Grimes,⁵ an Upper Mississippi pilot, who afterwards became famous as a dare-devil rebel spy, whose career bristled with desperate adventures. The look and style of his comrades suggested that they had not come into the war to play, and their deeds made good the conjecture later. They were fine horsemen and good revolver-shots; but their favorite arm was the lasso. Each had one at his pommel, and could snatch a man out of the saddle with it every time, on a full gallop, at any reasonable distance.

In another camp the chief was a fierce and profane old blacksmith of sixty, and he had furnished his twenty recruits with gigantic home-made bowie-knives, to be swung with the two hands, like the *machetes* of the Isthmus.⁶ It was a grisly spectacle to see that earnest band practicing their murderous cuts and slashes under the eye of that remorseless old fanatic.

The last camp which we fell back upon was in a hollow near the village of Florida, where I was born—in Monroe County. Here we were warned, one day, that a Union colonel was sweeping down on us with a whole regiment at his heels. This looked decidedly serious. Our boys went apart and consulted; then we went back and told the other companies present that the war was a disappointment to us and we were going to disband. They were getting ready, themselves, to fall back on some place or other, and were only waiting for General Tom Harris, who was expected to arrive at any moment; so they tried to persuade us to wait a little while, but the majority of us said no, we were accustomed to falling back, and didn't need any of Tom Harris's help; we could get along perfectly well without him—and save time too. So about half of our fifteen, including myself, mounted and left on the instant; the others yielded to persuasion and staid—staid through the war.

An hour later we met General Harris on the road, with two or three people in his company—his staff, probably, but we could not tell; none of them were in uniform; uniforms had not come into vogue among us yet. Harris ordered us back; but we told him there was a Union colonel coming with a whole regiment in his wake, and it looked as if there was going to be a disturbance; so we had concluded to go home. He raged a little, but it was of no use; our minds were made up. We had done our share; had killed one man, exterminated one army, such as it was; let him go and kill the rest, and that would end the war. I did not see that brisk young general again until last year; then he was wearing white hair and whiskers.

In time I came to know that Union colonel whose coming frightened me out of the war and crippled the Southern cause to that extent—General

5. Grimes (1834–1911) survived the war and later wrote his own memoir, published posthumously in 1926 as *Absalom Grimes, Confederate*

Mail Runner.

6. Panama. "Bowie-knives": large hunting knives.

Grant. I came within a few hours of seeing him when he was as unknown as I was myself; at a time when anybody could have said, "Grant?—Ulysses S. Grant? I do not remember hearing the name before." It seems difficult to realize that there was once a time when such a remark could be rationally made; but there *was*, and I was within a few miles of the place and the occasion too, though proceeding in the other direction.

The thoughtful will not throw this war-paper of mine lightly aside as being valueless. It has this value: it is a not unfair picture of what went on in many and many a militia camp in the first months of the rebellion, when the green recruits were without discipline, without the steadying and heartening influence of trained leaders; when all their circumstances were new and strange, and charged with exaggerated terrors, and before the invaluable experience of actual collision in the field had turned them from rabbits into soldiers. If this side of the picture of that early day has not before been put into history, then history has been to that degree incomplete, for it had and has its rightful place there. There was more Bull Run material scattered through the early camps of this country than exhibited itself at Bull Run.⁷ And yet it learned its trade presently, and helped to fight the great battles later. I could have become a soldier myself, if I had waited. I had got part of it learned; I knew more about retreating than the man that invented retreating.

1885

Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences¹

The Pathfinder and *The Deerslayer* stand at the head of Cooper's novels as artistic creations. There are others of his works which contain parts as perfect as are to be found in these, and scenes even more thrilling. Not one can be compared with either of them as a finished whole.

The defects in both of these tales are comparatively slight. They were pure works of art.—*Prof. Lounsbury*.

The five tales reveal an extraordinary fulness of invention.

. . . One of the very greatest characters in fiction, "Natty Bumppo." . . .

The craft of the woodsman, the tricks of the trapper, all the delicate art of the forest, were familiar to Cooper from his youth up.—*Prof. Brander Matthews*.

Cooper is the greatest artist in the domain of romantic fiction yet produced by America.—*Wilkie Collins*.²



7. The first major battle of the Civil War, fought on July 21, 1861, in northern Virginia.

1. James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) is best known for his series of historical novels in which the hero is variously called Leatherstocking, Natty Bumppo, Hawkeye, and Deerslayer. The novels are *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841). This essay was first

published in July 1895 in *North American Review*, the source of the text, and later in the collection *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays* (1897).

2. William Wilkie Collins (1824–1889), English novelist; Thomas Raynesford Lounsbury (1838–1915), American scholar and editor, professor at Yale University; James Brander Matthews (1852–1929), American educator and author, professor at Columbia University.

It seems to me that it was far from right for the Professor of English Literature in Yale, the Professor of English Literature in Columbia, and Wilkie Collins, to deliver opinions on Cooper's literature without having read some of it. It would have been much more decorous to keep silent and let persons talk who have read Cooper.

Cooper's art has some defects. In one place in *Deerslayer*, and in the restricted space of two-thirds of a page, Cooper has scored 114 offences against literary art out of a possible 115. It breaks the record.

There are nineteen rules governing literary art in the domain of romantic fiction—some say twenty-two. In *Deerslayer* Cooper violated eighteen of them. These eighteen require:

1. That a tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere. But the *Deerslayer* tale accomplishes nothing and arrives in the air.

2. They require that the episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of the tale, and shall help to develop it. But as the *Deerslayer* tale is not a tale, and accomplishes nothing and arrives nowhere, the episodes have no rightful place in the work, since there was nothing for them to develop.

3. They require that the personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and that always the reader shall be able to tell the corpses from the others. But this detail has often been overlooked in the *Deerslayer* tale.

4. They require that the personages in a tale, both dead and alive, shall exhibit a sufficient excuse for being there. But this detail also has been overlooked in the *Deerslayer* tale.

5. They require that when the personages of a tale deal in conversation, the talk shall sound like human talk, and be talk such as human beings would be likely to talk in the given circumstances, and have a discoverable meaning, also a discoverable purpose, and a show of relevancy, and remain in the neighborhood of the subject in hand, and be interesting to the reader, and help out the tale, and stop when the people cannot think of anything more to say. But this requirement has been ignored from the beginning of the *Deerslayer* tale to the end of it.

6. They require that when the author describes the character of a personage in his tale, the conduct and conversation of that personage shall justify said description. But this law gets little or no attention in the *Deerslayer* tale, as "Natty Bumppo's" case will amply prove.

7. They require that when a personage talks like an illustrated, gilt-edged, tree-calf, hand-tooled, seven-dollar Friendship's Offering³ in the beginning of a paragraph, he shall not talk like a negro minstrel in the end of it. But this rule is flung down and danced upon in the *Deerslayer* tale.

8. They require that crass stupidities shall not be played upon the reader as "the craft of the woodsman, the delicate art of the forest," by either the author or the people in the tale. But this rule is persistently violated in the *Deerslayer* tale.

9. They require that the personages of a tale shall confine themselves to possibilities and let miracles alone; or, if they venture a miracle, the author must so plausibly set it forth as to make it look possible and reasonable. But these rules are not respected in the *Deerslayer* tale.

3. I.e., like one of the then-popular, expensive, illustrated literary miscellanies, or collections of writings on various subjects ("tree-calf" was leather chemically treated to produce a treelike design).

10. They require that the author shall make the reader feel a deep interest in the personages of his tale and in their fate; and that he shall make the reader love the good people in the tale and hate the bad ones. But the reader of the *Deerslayer* tale dislikes the good people in it, is indifferent to the others, and wishes they would all get drowned together.

11. They require that the characters in a tale shall be so clearly defined that the reader can tell beforehand what each will do in a given emergency. But in the *Deerslayer* tale this rule is vacated.

In addition to these large rules there are some little ones. These require that the author shall

12. Say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near it.

13. Use the right word, not its second cousin.

14. Eschew surplusage.

15. Not omit necessary details.

16. Avoid slovenliness of form.

17. Use good grammar.

18. Employ a simple and straightforward style.

Even these seven are coldly and persistently violated in the *Deerslayer* tale.

Cooper's gift in the way of invention was not a rich endowment; but such as it was he liked to work it, he was pleased with the effects, and indeed he did some quite sweet things with it. In his little box of stage properties he kept six or eight cunning devices, tricks, artifices for his savages and woodsmen to deceive and circumvent each other with, and he was never so happy as when he was working these innocent things and seeing them go. A favorite one was to make a moccasined person tread in the tracks of the moccasined enemy, and thus hide his own trail. Cooper wore out barrels and barrels of moccasins in working that trick. Another stage-property that he pulled out of his box pretty frequently was his broken twig. He prized his broken twig above all the rest of his effects, and worked it the hardest. It is a restful chapter in any book of his when somebody doesn't step on a dry twig and alarm all the reds and whites for two hundred yards around. Every time a Cooper person is in peril, and absolute silence is worth four dollars a minute, he is sure to step on a dry twig. There may be a hundred handier things to step on, but that wouldn't satisfy Cooper. Cooper requires him to turn out and find a dry twig; and if he can't do it, go and borrow one. In fact the Leather Stocking Series ought to have been called the Broken Twig Series.

I am sorry there is not room to put in a few dozen instances of the delicate art of the forest, as practiced by Natty Bumppo and some of the other Cooperian experts. Perhaps we may venture two or three samples. Cooper was a sailor—a naval officer; yet he gravely tells us how a vessel, driving toward a lee shore⁴ in a gale, is steered for a particular spot by her skipper because he knows of an *undertow* there which will hold her back against the gale and save her. For just pure woodcraft, or sailor-craft, or whatever it is, isn't that neat? For several years Cooper was daily in the society of artillery, and he ought to have noticed that when a cannon ball strikes the ground it either buries itself or skips a hundred feet or so; skips again a hundred

4. Shore that is protected from the wind.

feet or so—and so on, till it finally gets tired and rolls. Now in one place he loses some “females”—as he always calls women—in the edge of a wood near a plain at night in a fog, on purpose to give Bumpo a chance to show off the delicate art of the forest before the reader. These mislaid people are hunting for a fort. They hear a cannon-blast, and a cannon-ball presently comes rolling into the wood and stops at their feet. To the females this suggests nothing. The case is very different with the admirable Bumpo. I wish I may never know peace again if he doesn't strike out promptly and *follow the track* of that cannon-ball across the plain through the dense fog and find the fort. Isn't it a daisy? If Cooper had any real knowledge of Nature's ways of doing things, he had a most delicate art in concealing the fact. For instance: one of his acute Indian experts, Chingachgook⁵ (pronounced Chicago, I think), has lost the trail of a person he is tracking through the forest. Apparently that trail is hopelessly lost. Neither you nor I could ever have guessed out the way to find it. It was very different with Chicago. Chicago was not stumped for long. He turned a running stream out of its course, and there, in the slush in its old bed, were that person's moccasin-tracks. The current did not wash them away, as it would have done in all other like cases—no, even the eternal laws of Nature have to vacate when Cooper wants to put up a delicate job of woodcraft on the reader.

We must be a little wary when Brander Matthews tells us that Cooper's books “reveal an extraordinary fulness of invention.” As a rule, I am quite willing to accept Brander Matthews's literary judgments and applaud his lucid and graceful phrasing of them; but that particular statement needs to be taken with a few tons of salt. Bless your heart, Cooper hadn't any more invention than a horse; and I don't mean a high-class horse, either; I mean a clothes-horse. It would be very difficult to find a really clever “situation” in Cooper's books; and still more difficult to find one of any kind which he has failed to render absurd by his handling of it. Look at the episodes of “the caves;” and at the celebrated scuffle between Maqua and those others on the table-land a few days later; and at Hurry Harry's queer water-transit from the castle to the ark; and at Deerslayer's half hour with his first corpse; and at the quarrel between Hurry Harry and Deerslayer later; and at—but choose for yourself; you can't go amiss.

If Cooper had been an observer, his inventive faculty would have worked better, not more interestingly, but more rationally, more plausibly. Cooper's proudest creations in the way of “situations” suffer noticeably from the absence of the observer's protecting gift. Cooper's eye was splendidly inaccurate. Cooper seldom saw anything correctly. He saw nearly all things as through a glass eye, darkly.⁶ Of course a man who cannot see the commonest little everyday matters accurately is working at a disadvantage when he is constructing a “situation.” In the *Deerslayer* tale Cooper has a stream which is fifty feet wide, where it flows out of a lake; it presently narrows to twenty as it meanders along for no given reason, and yet, when a stream acts like that it ought to be required to explain itself. Fourteen pages later the width of the brook's outlet from the lake has suddenly shrunk thirty feet, and become “the narrowest part of the stream.” This shrinkage is

5. Natty Bumpo's Indian friend.

6. Humorous turn of the biblical “through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13.12).

not accounted for. The stream has bends in it, a sure indication that it has alluvial banks, and cuts them; yet these bends are only thirty and fifty feet long. If Cooper had been a nice⁷ and punctilious observer he would have noticed that the bends were oftener nine hundred feet long than short of it.

Cooper made the exit of that stream fifty feet wide in the first place, for no particular reason; in the second place, he narrowed it to less than twenty to accommodate some Indians. He bends a "sapling" to the form of an arch over this narrow passage, and conceals six Indians in its foliage. They are "laying" for a settler's scow or ark which is coming up the stream on its way to the lake; it is being hauled against the stiff current by a rope whose stationary end is anchored in the lake; its rate of progress cannot be more than a mile an hour. Cooper describes the ark, but pretty obscurely. In the matter of dimensions "it was little more than a modern canal boat." Let us guess, then, that it was about 140 feet long. It was of "greater breadth than common." Let us guess, then, that it was about sixteen feet wide. This leviathan had been prowling down bends which were but a third as long as itself, and scraping between banks where it had only two feet of space to spare on each side. We cannot too much admire this miracle. A low-roofed log dwelling occupies "two-third's of the ark's length"—a dwelling ninety feet long and sixteen feet wide, let us say—a kind of vestibule train. The dwelling has two rooms—each forty-five feet long and sixteen feet wide, let us guess. One of them is the bed-room of the Hutter girls, Judith and Hetty; the other is the parlor, in the day time, at night it is papa's bed chamber. The ark is arriving at the stream's exit, now, whose width has been reduced to less than twenty feet to accommodate the Indians—say to eighteen. There is a foot to spare on each side of the boat. Did the Indians notice that there was going to be a tight squeeze there? Did they notice that they could make money by climbing down out of that arched sapling and just stepping aboard when the ark scraped by? No; other Indians would have noticed these things, but Cooper's Indians never notice anything. Cooper thinks they are marvellous creatures for noticing, but he was almost always in error about his Indians. There was seldom a sane one among them.

The ark is 140 feet long; the dwelling is 90 feet long. The idea of the Indians is to drop softly and secretly from the arched sapling to the dwelling as the ark creeps along under it at the rate of a mile an hour, and butcher the family. It will take the ark a minute and a half to pass under. It will take the 90-foot dwelling a minute to pass under. Now, then, what did the six Indians do? It would take you thirty years to guess, and even then you would have to give it up, I believe. Therefore, I will tell you what the Indians did. Their chief, a person of quite extraordinary intellect for a Cooper Indian, warily watched the canal boat as it squeezed along under him, and when he had got his calculations fined down to exactly the right shade, as he judged, he let go and dropped. And *missed the house!* That is actually what he did. He missed the house, and landed in the stern of the scow. It was not much of a fall, yet it knocked him silly. He lay there unconscious. If the house had been 97 feet long, he would have made the trip. The fault was Cooper's, not his. The error lay in the construction of the house. Cooper was no architect.

7. Meticulous.

There still remained in the roost five Indians. The boat has passed under and is now out of their reach. Let me explain what the five did—you would not be able to reason it out for yourself. No. 1 jumped for the boat, but fell in the water astern of it. Then No. 2 jumped for the boat, but fell in the water still further astern of it. Then No. 3 jumped for the boat, and fell a good way astern of it. Then No. 4 jumped for the boat, and fell in the water *away* astern. Then even No. 5 made a jump for the boat—for he was a Cooper Indian. In the matter of intellect, the difference between a Cooper Indian and the Indian that stands in front of the cigar shop is not spacious. The scow episode is really a sublime burst of invention; but it does not thrill, because the inaccuracy of the details throws a sort of air of fictitiousness and general improbability over it. This comes of Cooper's inadequacy as an observer.

The reader will find some examples of Cooper's high talent for inaccurate observation in the account of the shooting match in *The Pathfinder*. "A common wrought nail was driven lightly into the target, its head having been first touched with paint." The color of the paint is not stated—an important omission, but Cooper deals freely in important omissions. No, after all, it was not an important omission; for this nail head is *a hundred yards* from the marksmen and could not be seen by them at that distance no matter what its color might be. How far can the best eyes see a common house fly? A hundred yards? It is quite impossible. Very well, eyes that cannot see a house fly that is a hundred yards away cannot see an ordinary nail head at that distance, for the size of the two objects is the same. It takes a keen eye to see a fly or a nail head at fifty yards—one hundred and fifty feet. Can the reader do it?

The nail was lightly driven, its head painted, and game called. Then the Cooper miracles began. The bullet of the first marksman chipped an edge of the nail head; the next man's bullet drove the nail a little way into the target—and removed all the paint. Haven't the miracles gone far enough now? Not to suit Cooper; for the purpose of this whole scheme is to show off his prodigy, Deerslayer-Hawkeye-Long-Rifle-Leather-Stocking-Pathfinder-Bumppo before the ladies.

"Be all ready to clench it, boys!" cried out Pathfinder, stepping into his friend's tracks the instant they were vacant. "Never mind a new nail; I can see that, though the paint is gone, and what I can see, I can hit at a hundred yards, though it were only a mosquitos's eye. Be ready to clench!"

The rifle cracked, the bullet sped its way and the head of the nail was buried in the wood, covered by the piece of flattened lead.

There, you see, is a man who could hunt flies with a rifle, and command a ducal salary in a Wild West show to-day, if we had him back with us.

The recorded feat is certainly surprising, just as it stands; but it is not surprising enough for Cooper. Cooper adds a touch. He has made Pathfinder do this miracle with another man's rifle, and not only that, but Pathfinder did not have even the advantage of loading it himself. He had everything against him, and yet he made that impossible shot, and not only made it, but did it with absolute confidence, saying, "Be ready to clench." Now a person like that would have undertaken that same feat with a brickbat, and with Cooper to help he would have achieved it, too.

Pathfinder showed off handsomely that day before the ladies. His very first feat was a thing which no Wild West show can touch. He was standing with the group of marksmen, observing—a hundred yards from the target, mind: one Jasper raised his rifle and drove the centre of the bull's-eye. Then the quartermaster fired. The target exhibited no result this time. There was a laugh. "It's a dead miss," said Major Lundie. Pathfinder waited an impressive moment or two, then said in that calm, indifferent, know-it-all way of his, "No, Major—he has covered Jasper's bullet, as will be seen if any one will take the trouble to examine the target."

Wasn't it remarkable! How *could* he see that little pellet fly through the air and enter that distant bullet-hole? Yet that is what he did; for nothing is impossible to a Cooper person. Did any of those people have any deep-seated doubts about this thing? No; for that would imply sanity, and these were all Cooper people.

The respect for Pathfinder's skill and for his *quickness and accuracy of sight* (the italics are mine) was so profound and general, that the instant he made this declaration the spectators began to distrust their own opinions, and a dozen rushed to the target in order to ascertain the fact. There, sure enough, it was found that the quartermaster's bullet had gone through the hole made by Jasper's, and that, too, so accurately as to require a minute examination to be certain of the circumstance, which, however, was soon clearly established by discovering one bullet over the other in the stump against which the target was placed.

They made a "minute" examination; but never mind, how could they know that there were two bullets in that hole without digging the latest one out? for neither probe nor eyesight could prove the presence of any more than one bullet. Did they dig? No; as we shall see. It is the Pathfinder's turn now; he steps out before the ladies, takes aim, and fires.

But alas! here is a disappointment; an incredible, an unimaginable disappointment—for the target's aspect is unchanged; there is nothing there but that same old bullet hole!

"If one dared to hint at such a thing," cried Major Duncan, "I should say that the Pathfinder has also missed the target."

As nobody had missed it yet, the "also" was not necessary; but never mind about that, for the Pathfinder is going to speak.

"No, no, Major," said he, confidently, "that *would* be a risky declaration. I didn't load the piece, and can't say what was in it, but if it was lead, you will find the bullet driving down those of the Quartermaster and Jasper, else is not my name Pathfinder."

A shout from the target announced the truth of this assertion.

Is the miracle sufficient as it stands? Not for Cooper. The Pathfinder speaks again, as he "now slowly advances towards the stage occupied by the females:"

"That's not all, boys, that's not all; if you find the target touched at all, I'll own to a miss. The Quartermaster cut the wood, but you'll find no wood cut by that last messenger."

The miracle is at last complete. He knew—doubtless *saw*—at the distance of a hundred yards—that his bullet had passed into the hole *without fraying the edges*. There were now three bullets in that one hole—three bullets imbedded processionally in the body of the stump back of the target. Everybody knew this—somehow or other—and yet nobody had dug any of them out to make sure. Cooper is not a close observer, but he is interesting. He is certainly always that, no matter what happens. And he is more interesting when he is not noticing what he is about than when he is. This is a considerable merit.

The conversations in the Cooper books have a curious sound in our modern ears. To believe that such talk really ever came out of people's mouths would be to believe that there was a time when time was of no value to a person who thought he had something to say; when it was the custom to spread a two-minute remark out to ten; when a man's mouth was a rolling-mill, and busied itself all day long in turning four-foot pigs⁸ of thought into thirty-foot bars of conversational railroad iron by attenuation; when subjects were seldom faithfully stuck to, but the talk wandered all around and arrived nowhere; when conversations consisted mainly of irrelevances, with here and there a relevancy, a relevancy with an embarrassed look, as not being able to explain how it got there.

Cooper was certainly not a master in the construction of dialogue. Inaccurate observation defeated him here as it defeated him in so many other enterprises of his. He even failed to notice that the man who talks corrupt English six days in the week must and will talk it on the seventh, and can't help himself. In the *Deerslayer* story he lets Deerslayer talk the showiest kind of book talk sometimes, and at other times the basest of base dialects. For instance, when some one asks him if he has a sweetheart, and if so, where she abides, this is his majestic answer:

“She's in the forest—hanging from the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain—in the dew on the open grass—the clouds that float about in the blue heavens—the birds that sing in the woods—the sweet springs where I slake my thirst—and in all the other glorious gifts that come from God's Providence!”

And he preceded that, a little before, with this:

“It consarns me as all things that touches a fri'nd consarns a fri'nd.”

And this is another of his remarks:

“If I was Injun born, now, I might tell of this, or carry in the scalp and boast of the expl'ite afore the whole tribe; or if my inimy had only been a bear”—and so on.

We cannot imagine such a thing as a veteran Scotch Commander-in-Chief, comporting himself in the field like a windy melodramatic actor, but Cooper could. On one occasion Alice and Cora were being chased by the French through a fog in the neighborhood of their father's fort:

“*Point de quartier aux coquins!*”⁹ cried an eager pursuer, who seemed to direct the operations of the enemy.

8. Crudely molded pieces of iron.

9. No quarter for the rascals! (French).

"Stand firm and be ready, my gallant 60ths!" suddenly exclaimed a voice above them; "wait to see the enemy; fire low, and sweep the glacis."¹

"Father! father!" exclaimed a piercing cry from out the mist; "it is I! Alice! thy own Elsie! spare, O! save your daughters!"

"Hold!" shouted the former speaker, in the awful tones of parental agony, the sound reaching even to the woods, and rolling back in solemn echo. "'Tis she! God has restored me my children! Throw open the sally-port;² to the field, 60ths, to the field; pull not a trigger, lest ye kill my lambs! Drive off these dogs of France with your steel."

Cooper's word-sense was singularly dull. When a person has a poor ear for music he will flat and sharp right along without knowing it. He keeps near the tune, but it is *not* the tune. When a person has a poor ear for words, the result is a literary flattening and sharpening; you perceive what he is intending to say, but you also perceive that he doesn't *say* it. This is Cooper. He was not a word-musician. His ear was satisfied with the *approximate* word. I will furnish some circumstantial evidence in support of this charge. My instances are gathered from half a dozen pages of the tale called *Deerslayer*. He uses "verbal," for "oral"; "precision," for "facility"; "phenomena," for "marvels"; "necessary," for "predetermined"; "unsophisticated," for "primitive"; "preparation," for "expectancy"; "rebuked," for "subdued"; "dependent on," for "resulting from"; "fact," for "condition"; "fact," for "conjecture"; "precaution," for "caution"; "explain," for "determine"; "mortified," for "disappointed"; "meretricious," for "factitious"; "materially," for "considerably"; "decreasing," for "deepening"; "increasing," for "disappearing"; "embedded," for "enclosed"; "treacherous," for "hostile"; "stood," for "stooped"; "softened," for "replaced"; "rejoined," for "remarked"; "situation," for "condition"; "different," for "differing"; "insensible," for "unsentient"; "brevity," for "celerity"; "distrusted," for "suspicious"; "mental imbecility," for "imbecility"; "eyes," for "sight"; "counteracting," for "opposing"; "funeral obsequies," for "obsequies."

There have been daring people in the world who claimed that Cooper could write English, but they are all dead now—all dead but Lounsbury. I don't remember that Lounsbury makes the claim in so many words, still he makes it, for he says that *Deerslayer* is a "pure work of art." Pure, in that connection, means faultless—faultless in all details—and language is a detail. If Mr. Lounsbury had only compared Cooper's English with the English which he writes himself—but it is plain that he didn't; and so it is likely that he imagines until this day that Cooper's is as clean and compact as his own. Now I feel sure, deep down in my heart, that Cooper wrote about the poorest English that exists in our language, and that the English of *Deerslayer* is the very worst than even Cooper ever wrote.

I may be mistaken, but it does seem to me that *Deerslayer* is not a work of art in any sense; it does seem to me that it is destitute of every detail that goes to the making of a work of art; in truth, it seems to me that *Deerslayer* is just simply a literary *delirium tremens*.³

A work of art? It has no invention; it has no order, system, sequence, or result; it has no lifelikeness, no thrill, no stir, no seeming of reality; its char-

1. Slope that runs downward from a fortification.
2. Gate or passage in a fortified place for use by troops making a raid or other expedition.

3. Latin for "shaking frenzy," a condition caused by alcohol withdrawal in chronic alcoholics.

acters are confusedly drawn, and by their acts and words they prove that they are not the sort of people the author claims that they are; its humor is pathetic; its pathos is funny; its conversations are—oh! indescribable; its love-scenes odious; its English a crime against the language.

Counting these out, what is left is Art. I think we must all admit that.

1895

The War Prayer¹

It was a time of great and exalting excitement. The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism; the drums were beating, the bands playing, the toy pistols popping, the bunched fire-crackers hissing and spluttering; on every hand and far down the receding and fading spread of roofs and balconies a fluttering wilderness of flags flashed in the sun; daily the young volunteers marched down the wide avenue gay and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung by; nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest deeps of their hearts, and which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down their cheeks the while; in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles, beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpouring of fervid eloquence which moved every listener. It was indeed a glad and gracious time, and the half dozen rash spirits that ventured to disapprove of the war and cast a doubt upon its righteousness straightway got such a stern and angry warning that for their personal safety's sake they quickly shrank out of sight and offended no more in that way.

Sunday morning came—next day the battalions would leave for the front; the church was filled; the volunteers were there, their young faces alight with martial dreams—visions of the stern advance, the gathering momentum, the rushing charge, the flashing sabers, the flight of the foe, the tumult, the enveloping smoke, the fierce pursuit, the surrender!—them home from the war, bronzed heroes, welcomed, adored, submerged in golden seas of glory! With the volunteers sat their dear ones, proud, happy, and envied by the neighbors and friends who had no sons and brothers to send forth to the field of honor, there to win for the flag, or, failing, die the noblest of noble deaths. The service proceeded; a war chapter from the Old Testament was read; the first prayer was said; it was followed by an organ burst that shook the building, and with one impulse the house rose, with glowing eyes and beating hearts, and poured out that tremendous invocation—

“God the all-terrible! Thou who ordainest,
Thunder thy clarion and lightning thy sword!”

1. Written as early as 1905, during the Philippine-American War, but considered unsuitable for publication in Twain's day, “The War Prayer” first

appeared posthumously in Albert Bigelow Paine's collection of Twain's writings, *Europe and Elsewhere* (1923), published by Harper & Brothers.

Then came the “long” prayer. None could remember the like of it for passionate pleading and moving and beautiful language. The burden of its supplication was, that an ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory—

An aged stranger entered and moved with slow and noiseless step up the main aisle, his eyes fixed upon the minister, his long body clothed in a robe that reached to his feet, his head bare, his white hair descending in a frothy cataract to his shoulders, his seamy face unnaturally pale, pale even to ghastliness. With all eyes following him and wondering, he made his silent way; without pausing, he ascended to the preacher’s side and stood there, waiting. With shut lids the preacher, unconscious of his presence, continued his moving prayer, and at last finished it with the words, uttered in fervent appeal, “Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord our God, Father and Protector of our land and flag!”

The stranger touched his arm, motioned him to step aside—which the startled minister did—and took his place. During some moments he surveyed the spellbound audience with solemn eyes, in which burned an uncanny light; then in a deep voice he said:

“I come from the Throne—bearing a message from Almighty God!” The words smote the house with a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention. “He has heard the prayer of His servant your shepherd, and will grant it if such shall be your desire after I, His messenger, shall have explained to you its import—that is to say, its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of—except he pause and think.

“God’s servant and yours has prayed his prayer. Has he paused and taken thought? Is it one prayer? No, it is two—one uttered, the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him Who heareth all supplications, the spoken and the unspoken. Ponder this—keep it in mind. If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time. If you pray for the blessing of rain upon your crop which needs it, by that act you are possibly praying for a curse upon some neighbor’s crop which may not need rain and can be injured by it.

“You have heard your servant’s prayer—the uttered part of it. I am commissioned of God to put into words the other part of it—that part which the pastor—and also you in your hearts—fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard these words: ‘Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!’ That is sufficient. The *whole* of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results which follow victory—*must* follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God the Father fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

“O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be Thou near them! With them—in spirit—we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God,

help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.”

(*After a pause.*) “Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak! The messenger of the Most High waits.”

It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.

1905

1923

BRET HARTE

1836–1902

Francis Bret[t] Harte was born August 25, 1836, in Albany, New York, of English, Dutch, and Jewish descent. His father, Henry, a schoolteacher, died in 1845, and nine years later, Harte followed his mother, Elizabeth Rebecca, and his elder sister and brother to Oakland, California. When he turned twenty-one, he left to seek employment farther north in California, where he worked for a time for a stage-coach express company (he claimed that he “rode shotgun”) and also as a miner, teacher, tutor, pharmacist’s clerk, and printer. From 1858 to 1860 he set type and served as an editorial assistant on the staff of the Uniontown *Northern Californian*. In late February 1860, while the editor-in-chief was out of town, Harte wrote an editorial expressing outrage over the massacre in nearby Eureka of sixty Native Americans, mostly women and children, by a small gang of white vigilantes. After the appearance of the editorial, his life was apparently threatened, and within a month he left for San Francisco.

Harte quickly found a job setting type for *The Golden Era*, a monthly magazine, and soon began contributing poems, stories, and sketches, many under the pseudonym “The Bohemian.” Harte’s career as a writer was confirmed in 1868 when he became the first editor of the newly established *Overland Monthly*, a publication that quickly became influential throughout the United States as the representative journal of the burgeoning, often unruly culture of the Pacific coast. In the second issue, Harte published “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” which made him a national celeb-

rity. In this story, as elsewhere, Harte's success rested on his ability to portray distinctive characters whom he connected to the western settings.

Harte's popularity and influence could be felt throughout the late-nineteenth-century boom in regional or local color writing, fiction that situates its characters in carefully drawn local environments. Writing primarily for readers who were generally distant from its terrain or people, Harte helped to create a compelling vision of the West through a combination of romantic adventure and gritty realism. Perhaps what most distinguished him from other writers who exploited the myths of the Wild West is an ironic perspective that often went undetected by readers unfamiliar with California. His writing frequently challenged the dime-novel treatment of the West, with its chivalrous heroes and black-hearted villains, by focusing on characters—stagedrivers, miners, schoolmarms—who never quite made their fortune in the California gold rush. In 1870, Harte published a collection called "*The Luck of Roaring Camp*" and *Other Sketches*, which included works from *The Golden Era* and *Overland Monthly*. This popular book established many ideas about the West that were later circulated in various forms by other western writers, including Mark Twain, Joaquin Miller, Ambrose Bierce, and, later, Jack London.

Harte, who had married Anna Griswold in 1862, left San Francisco early in 1871 at the height of his fame in hopes that his literary reputation would grow even more in the East. After a cross-country journey that was covered by the daily press, the publisher James T. Fields offered Harte the unheard-of sum of ten thousand dollars to write twelve or more poems and sketches to be published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Every Saturday* magazines during the course of the year. Unfortunately, Harte did not produce much writing in the twelve months following, and his contract was not renewed. At the same time, his drinking was harming his lecturing career, which was already shaky due to performances that some saw as "dandified" and not at all those of a rugged western character. Whenever Harte departed from his standard western stories, he was castigated by critics, and so remained trapped in formula and self-parody. Within a few years after his lucrative contract ended, Harte was desperate and nearly penniless.

The last three decades of Harte's life constitute a decline in his personal and literary fortunes. His novel *Gabriel Conroy* (1876) sold well but was slammed by the critics, and though his two plays, *Two Men of Sandy Bar* (1876) and (with Mark Twain) *Ah Sin* (1877), were produced, neither was successful. In 1878 Harte moved to Europe when he was appointed consul to Krefeld, Prussia; in 1880 he took up the consulship in Glasgow, Scotland. But when Grover Cleveland became president in 1885, Harte lost his post. Though his American audience waned, Harte's English readers continued to receive his work favorably until his death in May 1902. Today he is still regarded as one of the progenitors of the literature of the American West—a figure who challenged the supremacy of eastern publishers, expanded the literary terrain of the nation, and set the stage for a more capacious view of American literature.

The Luck of Roaring Camp¹

There was commotion in Roaring Camp. It could not have been a fight, for in 1850 that was not novel enough to have called together the entire settlement. The ditches and claims were not only deserted, but "Tuttle's grocery" had contributed its gamblers, who, it will be remembered, calmly continued

1. First appearing in 1868 in *Overland Monthly*, the tale was reprinted by Osgood of Boston in 1870 in "*The Luck of Roaring Camp*" and *Other*

Sketches and by Houghton Mifflin in 1878 in "*The Luck of Roaring Camp*" and *Other Tales*; the present text is taken from the 1878 revision.

their game the day that French Pete and Kanaka Joe² shot each other to death over the bar in the front room. The whole camp was collected before a rude cabin on the outer edge of the clearing. Conversation was carried on in a low tone, but the name of a woman was frequently repeated. It was a name familiar enough in the camp,—“Cherokee Sal.”

Perhaps the less said of her the better. She was a coarse and, it is to be feared, a very sinful woman. But at that time she was the only woman in Roaring Camp, and was just then lying in sore extremity, when she most needed the ministrations of her own sex. Dissolute, abandoned, and irreclaimable, she was yet suffering a martyrdom hard enough to bear even when veiled by sympathizing womanhood, but now terrible in her loneliness. The primal curse had come to her in that original isolation which must have made the punishment of the first transgression so dreadful. It was, perhaps, part of the expiation of her sin that, at a moment when she most lacked her sex's intuitive tenderness and care, she met only the half-contemptuous faces of her masculine associates. Yet a few of the spectators were, I think, touched by her sufferings. Sandy Tipton thought it was “rough on Sal,” and, in the contemplation of her condition, for a moment rose superior to the fact that he had an ace and two bowers³ in his sleeve.

It will be seen also that the situation was novel. Deaths were by no means uncommon in Roaring Camp, but a birth was a new thing. People had been dismissed the camp effectively, finally, and with no possibility of return; but this was the first time that anybody had been introduced *ab initio*.⁴ Hence the excitement.

“You go in there, Stumpy,” said a prominent citizen known as “Kentuck,” addressing one of the loungers. “Go in there, and see what you kin do. You've had experience in them things.”

Perhaps there was a fitness in the selection. Stumpy, in other climes, had been the putative head of two families; in fact, it was owing to some legal informality in these proceedings that Roaring Camp—a city of refuge—was indebted to his company. The crowd approved the choice, and Stumpy was wise enough to bow to the majority. The door closed on the extempore surgeon and midwife, and Roaring Camp sat down outside, smoked its pipe, and awaited the issue.

The assemblage numbered about a hundred men. One or two of these were actual fugitives from justice, some were criminal, and all were reckless. Physically they exhibited no indication of their past lives and character. The greatest scamp had a Raphael⁵ face, with a profusion of blonde hair; Oakhurst, a gambler, had the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet; the coolest and most courageous man was scarcely over five feet in height, with a soft voice and an embarrassed, timid manner. The term “roughs” applied to them was a distinction rather than a definition. Perhaps in the minor details of fingers, toes, ears, etc., the camp may have been deficient, but these slight omissions did not detract from their aggregate force. The strongest man had but three fingers on his right hand; the best shot had but one eye.

2. Hawaiian word for adult man, used (nonpejoratively) by both Hawaiians and Americans at the time.

3. In the card game euchre, jacks of the trump suit or the other suit of the same color.

4. From the beginning (Latin).

5. Raffaello Sanzio (1483–1520), painter and architect of the Italian High Renaissance, best known for his Madonnas.

Such was the physical aspect of the men that were dispersed around the cabin. The camp lay in a triangular valley between two hills and a river. The only outlet was a steep trail over the summit of a hill that faced the cabin, now illuminated by the rising moon. The suffering woman might have seen it from the rude bunk whereon she lay,—seen it winding like a silver thread until it was lost in the stars above.

A fire of withered pine boughs added sociability to the gathering. By degrees the natural levity of Roaring Camp returned. Bets were freely offered and taken regarding the result. Three to five that “Sal would get through with it;” even that the child would survive; side bets as to the sex and complexion of the coming stranger. In the midst of an excited discussion an exclamation came from those nearest the door, and the camp stopped to listen. Above the swaying and moaning of the pines, the swift rush of the river, and the crackling of the fire rose a sharp, querulous cry,—a cry unlike anything heard before in the camp. The pines stopped moaning, the river ceased to rush, and the fire to crackle. It seemed as if Nature had stopped to listen too.

The camp rose to its feet as one man! It was proposed to explode a barrel of gunpowder; but in consideration of the situation of the mother, better counsels prevailed, and only a few revolvers were discharged; for whether owing to the rude surgery of the camp, or some other reason, Cherokee Sal was sinking fast. Within an hour she had climbed, as it were, that rugged road that led to the stars, and so passed out of Roaring Camp, its sin and shame, forever. I do not think that the announcement disturbed them much, except in speculation as to the fate of the child. “Can he live now?” was asked of Stumpy. The answer was doubtful. The only other being of Cherokee Sal’s sex and maternal condition in the settlement was an ass. There was some conjecture as to fitness, but the experiment was tried. It was less problematical than the ancient treatment of Romulus and Remus,⁶ and apparently as successful.

When these details were completed, which exhausted another hour, the door was opened, and the anxious crowd of men, who had already formed themselves into a queue, entered in single file. Beside the low bunk or shelf, on which the figure of the mother was starkly outlined below the blankets, stood a pine table. On this a candle-box was placed, and within it, swathed in staring red flannel, lay the last arrival at Roaring Camp. Beside the candle-box was placed a hat. Its use was soon indicated. “Gentlemen,” said Stumpy, with a singular mixture of authority and *ex officio*⁷ complacency,—“gentlemen will please pass in at the front door, round the table, and out at the back door. Them as wishes to contribute anything toward the orphan will find a hat handy.” The first man entered with his hat on; he uncovered, however, as he looked about him, and so unconsciously set an example to the next. In such communities good and bad actions are catching. As the procession filed in comments were audible,—criticisms addressed perhaps rather to Stumpy in the character of showman: “Is that him?” “Mighty small specimen;”

6. Twin brothers Romulus and Remus, traditionally honored as founders of Rome, were sons of Mars and Rhea, daughter of King Numitor of Alba Longa. When Numitor’s brother Amulius deposed him, he made Rhea a Vestal Virgin (and thus forbidden to marry). But when Mars fell in love with

her and she bore him the twins, Amulius, fearing they would grow up to overthrow him, left them by the banks of the River Tiber to fend for themselves; they were found by a she-wolf who took pity on them and fed them with her milk.

7. By virtue of one’s office, or position (Latin).

"Hasn't more'n got the color;" "Ain't bigger nor a derringer." The contributions were as characteristic: A silver tobacco box; a doubloon; a navy revolver, silver mounted; a gold specimen; a very beautifully embroidered lady's handkerchief (from Oakhurst the gambler); a diamond breastpin; a diamond ring (suggested by the pin, with the remark from the giver that he "saw that pin and went two diamonds better"); a slung-shot; a Bible (contributor not detected); a golden spur; a silver teaspoon (the initials: I regret to a say, were not the giver's); a pair of surgeon's shears; a lancet;⁸ Bank of England note for £5; and about \$200 in loose gold and silver coin. During these proceedings Stumpy maintained a silence as impassive as the dead on his left, a gravity as inscrutable as that of the newly born on his right. Only one incident occurred to break the monotony of the curious procession. As Kentuck bent over the candle-box half curiously, the child turned, and, in a spasm of pain, caught at his groping finger, and held it fast for a moment. Kentuck looked foolish and embarrassed. Something like a blush tried to assert itself in his weather-beaten cheek. "The d—d little cuss!" he said, as he extricated his finger, with perhaps more tenderness and care than he might have been deemed capable of showing. He held that finger a little apart from its fellows as he went out, and examined it curiously. The examination provoked the same original remark in regard to the child. In fact, he seemed to enjoy repeating it. "He rastled with my finger," he remarked to Tipton, holding up the member, "the d—d little cuss!"

It was four o'clock before the camp sought repose. A light burnt in the cabin where the watchers sat, for Stumpy did not go to bed that night. Nor did Kentuck. He drank quite freely, and related with great gusto his experience, invariably ending with his characteristic condemnation of the newcomer. It seemed to relieve him of any unjust implication of sentiment, and Kentuck had the weaknesses of the nobler sex. When everybody else had gone to bed, he walked down to the river and whistled reflectingly. Then he walked up the gulch past the cabin, still whistling with demonstrative unconcern. At a large redwood-tree he paused and retraced his steps, and again passed the cabin. Halfway down to the river's bank he again paused, and then returned and knocked at the door. It was opened by Stumpy. "How goes it?" said Kentuck, looking past Stumpy toward the candle-box. "All serene!" replied Stumpy. "Anything up?" "Nothing." There was a pause—an embarrassing one—Stumpy still holding the door. Then Kentuck had recourse to his finger, which he held up to Stumpy. "Rastled with it,—the d—d little cuss," he said, and retired.

The next day Cherokee Sal had such rude sepulture as Roaring Camp afforded. After her body had been committed to the hillside, there was a formal meeting of the camp to discuss what should be done with her infant. A resolution to adopt it was unanimous and enthusiastic. But an animated discussion in regard to the manner and feasibility of providing for its wants at once sprang up. It was remarkable that the argument partook of none of those fierce personalities with which discussions were usually conducted at Roaring Camp. Tipton proposed that they should send the child to Red Dog,—a distance of forty miles,—where female attention could be procured.

8. A small surgical knife.

But the unlucky suggestion met with fierce and unanimous opposition. It was evident that no plan which entailed parting from their new acquisition would for a moment be entertained. "Besides," said Tom Ryder, "them fellows at Red Dog would swap it, and ring in somebody else on us."⁹ A disbelief in the honesty of other camps prevailed at Roaring Camp, as in other places.

The introduction of a female nurse in the camp also met with objection. It was argued that no decent woman could be prevailed to accept Roaring Camp as her home, and the speaker urged that "they did n't want any more of the other kind." This unkind allusion to the defunct mother, harsh as it may seem, was the first spasm of propriety,—the first symptom of the camp's regeneration. Stumpy advanced nothing. Perhaps he felt a certain delicacy in interfering with the selection of a possible successor in office. But when questioned, he averred stoutly that he and "Jinny"—the mammal before alluded to—could manage to rear the child. There was something original, independent, and heroic about the plan that pleased the camp. Stumpy was retained. Certain articles were sent for to Sacramento. "Mind," said the treasurer, as he pressed a bag of gold-dust into the expressman's hand, "the best that can be got,—lace, you know, and filigree-work and frills,—d—n the cost!"

Strange to say, the child thrived. Perhaps the invigorating climate of the mountain camp was compensation for material deficiencies. Nature took the foundling to her broader breast. In that rare atmosphere of the Sierra foothills,—that air pungent with balsamic odor, that ethereal cordial at once bracing and exhilarating,—he may have found food and nourishment, or a subtle chemistry that transmuted ass's milk to lime and phosphorus.¹ Stumpy inclined to the belief that it was the latter and good nursing. "Me and that ass," he would say, "has been father and mother to him! Don't you," he would add, apostrophizing the helpless bundle before him, "never go back on us."

By the time he was a month old the necessity of giving him a name became apparent. He had generally been known as "The Kid," "Stumpy's Boy," "The Coyote" (an allusion to his vocal powers), and even by Kentuck's endearing diminutive of "The d—d little cuss." But these were felt to be vague and unsatisfactory, and were at last dismissed under another influence. Gamblers and adventurers are generally superstitious, and Oakhurst one day declared that the baby had brought "the luck" to Roaring Camp. It was certain that of late they had been successful. "Luck" was the name agreed upon, with the prefix of Tommy for greater convenience. No allusion was made to the mother, and the father was unknown. "It's better," said the philosophical Oakhurst, "to take a fresh deal all round. Call him Luck, and start him fair." A day was accordingly set apart for the christening. What was meant by this ceremony the reader may imagine who has already gathered some idea of the reckless irreverence of Roaring Camp. The master of ceremonies was one "Boston," a noted wag, and the occasion seemed to promise the greatest facetiousness. This ingenious satirist had spent two days in preparing a burlesque of the Church service, with pointed local allusions. The choir was properly trained, and Sandy Tipton was to stand godfather. But after the procession had marched to the grove with music and

9. That is, Tom fears that the men of Red Dog might substitute another baby for theirs.

1. Both lime and phosphorus are used as fertil-

izer, and both are generally white; the suggestion is that the ass's milk would help the child's bones grow strong.

banners, and the child had been deposited before a mock altar, Stumpy stepped before the expectant crowd. "It ain't my style to spoil fun, boys," said the little man, stoutly eyeing the faces around him, "but it strikes me that this thing ain't exactly on the squar. It's playing it pretty low down on this yer baby to ring in fun on him that he ain't goin' to understand. And ef there's goin' to be any godfathers round, I'd like to see who's got any better rights than me." A silence followed Stumpy's speech. To the credit of all humorists be it said that the first man to acknowledge its justice was the satirist thus stopped of his fun. "But," said Stumpy, quickly following up his advantage, "we're here for a christening, and we'll have it. I proclaim you Thomas Luck, according to the laws of the United States and the State of California, so help me God." It was the first time that the name of the Deity had been otherwise uttered than profanely in the camp. The form of christening was perhaps even more ludicrous than the satirist had conceived; but strangely enough, nobody saw it and nobody laughed. "Tommy" was christened as seriously as he would have been under a Christian roof, and cried and was comforted in as orthodox fashion.

And so the work of regeneration began in Roaring Camp. Almost perceptibly a change came over the settlement. The cabin assigned to "Tommy Luck"—or "The Luck," as he was more frequently called—first showed signs of improvement. It was kept scrupulously clean and whitewashed. Then it was boarded, clothed, and papered. The rosewood cradle, packed eighty miles by mule, had, in Stumpy's way of putting it, "sorter killed the rest of the furniture." So the rehabilitation of the cabin became a necessity. The men who were in the habit of lounging in at Stumpy's to see "how 'The Luck' got on" seemed to appreciate the change, and in self-defense the rival establishment of "Tuttle's grocery" bestirred itself and imported a carpet and mirrors. The reflections of the latter on the appearance of Roaring Camp tended to produce stricter habits of personal cleanliness. Again Stumpy imposed a kind of quarantine upon those who aspired to the honor and privilege of holding The Luck. It was a cruel mortification to Kentuck—who, in the carelessness of a large nature and the habits of frontier life, had begun to regard all garments as a second cuticle, which, like a snake's, only sloughed off through decay—to be debarred this privilege from certain prudential reasons. Yet such was the subtle influence of innovation that he thereafter appeared regularly every afternoon in a clean shirt and face still shining from his ablutions. Nor were moral and social sanitary laws neglected. "Tommy," who was supposed to spend his whole existence in a persistent attempt to repose, must not be disturbed by noise. The shouting and yelling, which had gained the camp its infelicitous title, were not permitted within hearing distance of Stumpy's. The men conversed in whispers or smoked with Indian gravity. Profanity was tacitly given up in these sacred precincts, and throughout the camp a popular form of expletive, known as "D—n the luck!" and "Curse the luck!" was abandoned, as having a new personal bearing. Vocal music was not interdicted, being supposed to have a soothing, tranquilizing quality; and one song, sung by "Man-o'-War Jack," an English sailor from her Majesty's Australian colonies, was quite popular as a lullaby. It was a lugubrious recital of the exploits of "the Arethusa,² Seventy-four," in a muffled

2. In Greek mythology, a nymph who was transformed into a fountain; the name is a popular one for ships, as in the song described here.

minor, ending with a prolonged dying fall at the burden of each verse, "On b-oo-o-ard of the Arethusa." It was a fine sight to see Jack holding The Luck, rocking from side to side as if with the motion of a ship, and crooning forth this naval ditty. Either through the peculiar rocking of Jack or the length of his song,—it contained ninety stanzas, and was continued with conscientious deliberation to the bitter end,—the lullaby generally had the desired effect. At such times the men would lie at full length under the trees in the soft summer twilight, smoking their pipes and drinking in the melodious utterances. An indistinct idea that this was pastoral happiness pervaded the camp. "This 'ere kind o' think," said the Cockney Simmons, meditatively reclining on his elbow, "is 'ev'ingly." It reminded him of Greenwich.³

On the long summer days The Luck was usually carried to the gulch from whence the golden store of Roaring Camp was taken. There, on a blanket spread over pine boughs, he would lie while the men were working in the ditches below. Latterly there was a rude attempt to decorate this bower with flowers and sweet-smelling shrubs, and generally some one would bring him a cluster of wild honeysuckles, azaleas, or the painted blossoms of Las Mari-posas. The men had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were beauty and significance in these trifles, which they had so long trodden carelessly beneath their feet. A flake of glittering mica, a fragment of variegated quartz, a bright pebble from the bed of the creek, became beautiful to eyes thus cleared and strengthened, and were invariably put aside for The Luck. It was wonderful how many treasures the woods and hillsides yielded that "would do for Tommy." Surrounded by playthings such as never child out of fairy-land had before, it is to be hoped that Tommy was content. He appeared to be serenely happy, albeit there was an infantine gravity about him, a contemplative light in his round gray eyes, that sometimes worried Stumpy. He was always tractable and quiet, and it is recorded that once, having crept beyond his "corral,"—a hedge of tessellated pine boughs, which surrounded his bed,—he dropped over the bank on his head in the soft earth, and remained with his mottled legs in the air in that position for at least five minutes with unflinching gravity. He was extricated without a murmur. I hesitate to record the many other instances of his sagacity, which rest, unfortunately, upon the statements of prejudiced friends. Some of them were not without a tinge of superstition. "I crep' up the bank just now," said Kentuck one day, in a breathless state of excitement, "and dern my skin if he wasn't a-talking to a jaybird as was a-sittin' on his lap. There they was, just as free and sociable as anything you please, a-jawin' at each other just like two cherrybums." Howbeit, whether creeping over the pine boughs or lying lazily on his back blinking at the leaves above him, to him the birds sang, the squirrels chattered, and the flowers bloomed. Nature was his nurse and playfellow. For him she would let slip between the leaves golden shafts of sunlight that fell just within his grasp; she would send wandering breezes to visit him with the balm of bay and resinous gum; to him the tall redwoods nodded familiarly and sleepily, the bumblebees buzzed, and the rooks cawed a slumbrous accompaniment.

Such was the golden summer of Roaring Camp. They were "flush times," and the luck was with them. The claims had yielded enormously. The camp

3. A town on the Thames River in England, birthplace of Henry VIII and site of the Royal Naval College, venerated by seafarers for its keeping of official, or Greenwich Mean, time.

was jealous of its privileges and looked suspiciously on strangers. No encouragement was given to immigration, and, to make their seclusion more perfect, the land on either side of the mountain wall that surrounded the camp they duly preëmpted. This, and a reputation for singular proficiency with the revolver, kept the reserve of Roaring Camp inviolate. The expressman—their only connecting link with the surrounding world—sometimes told wonderful stories of the camp. He would say, “They’ve a street up there in ‘Roaring’ that would lay over any street in Red Dog. They’ve got vines and flowers round their houses, and they wash themselves twice a day. But they’re mighty rough on strangers, and they worship an Ingin baby.”

With the prosperity of the camp came a desire for further improvement. It was proposed to build a hotel in the following spring, and to invite one or two decent families to reside there for the sake of The Luck, who might perhaps profit by female companionship. The sacrifice that this concession to the sex cost these men, who were fiercely skeptical in regard to its general virtue and usefulness, can only be accounted for by their affection for Tommy. A few still held out. But the resolve could not be carried into effect for three months, and the minority meekly yielded in the hope that something might turn up to prevent it. And it did.

The winter of 1851 will long be remembered in the foothills. The snow lay deep on the Sierras, and every mountain creek became a river, and every river a lake. Each gorge and gulch was transformed into a tumultuous watercourse that descended the hillsides, tearing down giant trees and scattering its drift and débris along the plain. Red Dog had been twice under water, and Roaring Camp had been forewarned. “Water put the gold into them gulches,” said Stumpy. “It’s been here once and will be here again!” And that night the North Fork suddenly leaped over its banks and swept up the triangular valley of Roaring Camp.

In the confusion of rushing water, crashing trees, and crackling timber, and the darkness which seemed to flow with the water and blot out the fair valley, but little could be done to collect the scattered camp. When the morning broke, the cabin of Stumpy, nearest the river-bank, was gone. Higher up the gulch they found the body of its unlucky owner; but the pride, the hope, the joy, The Luck, of Roaring Camp had disappeared. They were returning with sad hearts when a shout from the bank recalled them.

It was a relief-boat from down the river. They had picked up, they said, a man and an infant, nearly exhausted, about two miles below. Did anybody know them, and did they belong here?

It needed but a glance to show them Kentuck lying there, cruelly crushed and bruised, but still holding The Luck of Roaring Camp in his arms. As they bent over the strangely assorted pair, they saw that the child was cold and pulseless. “He is dead,” said one. Kentuck opened his eyes. “Dead?” he repeated feebly. “Yes, my man, and you are dying too.” A smile lit the eyes of the expiring Kentuck. “Dying!” he repeated; “he’s a-taking me with him. Tell the boys I’ve got The Luck with me now;” and the strong man, clinging to the frail babe as a drowning man is said to cling to a straw, drifted away into the shadowy river that flows forever to the unknown sea.

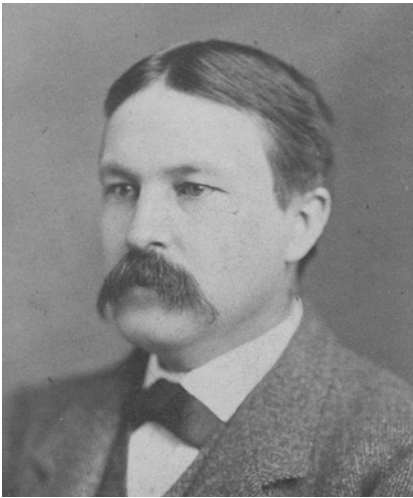
WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

1837–1920

As a novelist, playwright, critic, essayist, reviewer, poet, and editor, William Dean Howells was always in the public eye, and his influence during the 1880s and 1890s on a growing middle-class readership was incalculable. Known at the height of his career as “the Dean of American Letters,” Howells carefully balanced the traditional and the innovative through his promotion of a new American realism. In the “Editor’s Study” essays he wrote for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* starting in 1886, Howells attacked sentimentality of thought and feeling, which he believed presented readers with a false representation of the moral and ethical choices that they would face in their own lives. He believed that realism “was nothing more or less than the truthful treatment of material,” especially the motives and actions of *ordinary* men and women. A selection from these influential essays appears in the “Realism and Naturalism” section on pages 956–60 in this volume.

Howells was born in Martinsville, Ohio, on March 1, 1837, and had little formal schooling, assisting his father—a newspaper publisher and printer—from a very early age. As a teenager he was writing for newspapers in Columbus and Cincinnati, becoming city editor of the *Ohio State Journal* in 1858. During 1859–60, Howells’s essays, poems, and reviews appeared in such national publications as the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Saturday Press*. His increasingly national visibility as an author and active supporter of the Republican Party in Columbus helped him to land the job of writing Abraham Lincoln’s campaign biography, which appeared in 1860. In that year, with the money he earned from the biography, he made a literary pilgrimage to New England—the center of American literary culture at that time—where he was welcomed by such figures as James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. When Lincoln became president in 1861, he appointed Howells as U.S. consul to Venice. There Howells wrote a series of travel letters, eventually published as *Venetian Life* (1866). In December 1862, he married Elinor Mead, with whom he would have three children. Returning to America after the Civil War, he worked briefly for the *Nation* in New York City until James T. Fields offered him the assistant editorship of Boston’s *Atlantic Monthly*. In effect, Howells assumed control of the magazine from the very beginning, and he succeeded officially to the editorship in 1871, a position he held until 1881.

Howells had been finding his way as a novelist during his ten years as editor, publishing seven novels during that timespan, beginning with *Their Wedding Journey* (1871). These early novels are short, uncomplicated linear narratives that deliberately avoid the exaggerated characterizations and plots of romantic fiction in favor of a more ordinary realism. Howells came into his own as a novelist in the 1880s, after he left the *Atlantic Monthly*. *A Modern Instance* (1882) examines psychic, familial, and social disintegration under the pressure of the secularization and urbanization of post-Civil War America, which would become one of Howells’s central subjects for the rest of his career. In 1885 Howells published his most famous novel, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which traces the economic collapse (and moral journey) of Silas Lapham, a typical American entrepreneur who has built a paint manufacturing company out of a combination of hard work, sheer luck, and shady business dealings. Within a year of its publication, Howells was profoundly affected by Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy’s ideas of nonviolence, Spartan living, and economic equality and, at great risk to his reputation, publicly defended the “Haymarket



William Dean Howells, c. 1871, when he became editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

tighter, more psychologically focused *An Imperative Duty* (1892), which depicts racial passing; and the utopian romance *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894). Howells publicly opposed the Spanish–American War (1898), which was presented by its supporters as an unselfish effort to liberate Cuba from Spain, but which Howells feared was actually about U.S. expansionists’ designs on Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and other Spanish colonial possessions. In “Editha” (1905), Howells characteristically explores the moral failure of individuals who have been corrupted by their culture’s worst values. Though the Spanish–American War is not specifically mentioned in the story, its satire of romantic conceptions of battlefield glory and the rush to war responded to the political moment.

In the course of his lifelong career as a literary authority, Howells was international in outlook and promoted such European contemporaries as Ivan Turgenev, Benito Perez Caldós, Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, Émile Zola, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. In the constant stream of reviews he wrote over five decades, he also supported many younger American writers and early on recognized and publicized the work of talented African American and women writers, including Paul Dunbar, Charles Chesnut, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Edith Wharton, and Emily Dickinson. He actively promoted the careers of such emerging realists and naturalists as Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland, and Frank Norris, and from the 1860s on was the friend and literary champion of both Henry James and Mark Twain. Given the astonishing roster of writers whom Howells knew and promoted, it is easy to forget that his advocacy of literary realism and his belief in the social value of fiction were often the target of ridicule from his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century.

By the time Howells died of pneumonia in 1920, he had served for thirteen years as the first president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was himself a national institution. For rebels and iconoclasts of the 1930s, Howellsian realism stood for literary conservatism. Frank Norris set the tone for this criticism when he called Howells’s novels “teacup tragedies.” Indeed, Howells’ fiction often seems tame in its focus on the white middle-class, but he strongly believed that fiction could make its greatest contribution by telling stories of everyday life. An outspoken cultural critic and novelistic innovator, Howells focused his passions and intellect on a wide array of contemporary issues in politics and art, regularly revealing his fascination with the lives of Americans of all backgrounds.

Anarchists,” a group of Chicago workers, several of whom were executed without clear proof of their participation in a bombing at a public demonstration in May 1886.

In 1891 Howells moved from Boston to New York to assume the editorship of the *Cosmopolitan*, which he hoped to make into a forum for his increasingly radical political views; he resigned in 1893 when he failed to gain support for his political agenda from the magazine’s wealthy owner. As a fiction writer, he had begun to offer more direct political explorations of social and economic injustice in novels such as the sprawling *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), which depicts class and ethnic conflict in New York City from the perspective of an editor who has moved from Boston to New York and appreciates the city as an outsider; the

Editha¹

The air was thick with the war feeling,² like the electricity of a storm which has not yet burst. Editha sat looking out into the hot spring afternoon, with her lips parted, and panting with the intensity of the question whether she could let him go. She had decided that she could not let him stay, when she saw him at the end of the still leafless avenue, making slowly up towards the house, with his head down and his figure relaxed. She ran impatiently out on the veranda, to the edge of the steps, and imperatively demanded greater haste of him with her will before she called aloud to him: "George!"

He had quickened his pace in mystical response to her mystical urgency, before he could have heard her; now he looked up and answered, "Well?"

"Oh, how united we are!" she exulted, and then she swooped down the steps to him. "What is it?" she cried.

"It's war," he said, and he pulled her up to him and kissed her.

She kissed him back intensely, but irrelevantly, as to their passion, and uttered from deep in her throat. "How glorious!"

"It's war," he repeated, without consenting to her sense of it; and she did not know just what to think at first. She never knew what to think of him; that made his mystery, his charm. All through their courtship, which was contemporaneous with the growth of the war feeling, she had been puzzled by his want of seriousness about it. He seemed to despise it even more than he abhorred it. She could have understood his abhorring any sort of bloodshed; that would have been a survival of his old life when he thought he would be a minister, and before he changed and took up the law. But making light of a cause so high and noble seemed to show a want of earnestness at the core of his being. Not but that she felt herself able to cope with a congenital defect of that sort, and make his love for her save him from himself. Now perhaps the miracle was already wrought in him. In the presence of the tremendous fact that he announced, all triviality seemed to have gone out of him; she began to feel that. He sank down on the top step, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, while she poured out upon him her question of the origin and authenticity of his news.

All the while, in her duplex emotioning, she was aware that now at the very beginning she must put a guard upon herself against urging him, by any word or act, to take the part that her whole soul willed him to take, for the completion of her ideal of him. He was very nearly perfect as he was, and he must be allowed to perfect himself. But he was peculiar, and he might very well be reasoned out of his peculiarity. Before her reasoning went her emotioning: her nature pulling upon his nature, her womanhood upon his manhood, without her knowing the means she was using to the end she was willing. She had always supposed that the man who won her would have done something to win her; she did not know what, but something. George Gearson had simply asked her for her love, on the way home from a concert, and she gave her love to him, without, as it were, thinking. But now, it flashed upon

1. First printed in the January 1905 issue of *Harper's Monthly*, the source of the present text.

2. Presumably the "war fever" preceding the

Spanish-American War (1898), which Howells opposed.

her, if he could do something worthy to *have* won her—be a hero, *her* hero—it would be even better than if he had done it before asking her; it would be grander. Besides, she had believed in the war from the beginning.

“But don’t you see, dearest,” she said, “that it wouldn’t have come to this, if it hadn’t been in the order of Providence? And I call any war glorious that is for the liberation of people who have been struggling for years against the cruelest oppression. Don’t you think so, too?”

“I suppose so,” he returned, languidly. “But war! Is it glorious to break the peace of the world?”

“That ignoble peace! It was no peace at all, with that crime and shame at our very gates.” She was conscious of parroting the current phrases of the newspapers, but it was no time to pick and choose her words. She must sacrifice anything to the high ideal she had for him, and after a good deal of rapid argument she ended with the climax: “But now it doesn’t matter about the how or why. Since the war has come, all that is gone. There are no two sides, any more. There is nothing now but our country.”

He sat with his eyes closed and his head leant back against the veranda, and he said with a vague smile, as if musing aloud, “Our country—right or wrong.”³

“Yes, right or wrong!” she returned, fervidly. “I’ll go and get you some lemonade.” She rose rustling, and whisked away; when she came back with two tall glasses of clouded liquid, on a tray, and the ice clucking in them, he still sat as she had left him, and she said as if there had been no interruption: “But there is no question of wrong in this case. I call it a sacred war. A war for liberty, and humanity, if ever there was one. And I know you will see it just as I do, yet.”

He took half the lemonade at a gulp, and he answered as he set the glass down: “I know you always have the highest ideal. When I differ from you, I ought to doubt myself.”

A generous sob rose in Editha’s throat for the humility of a man, so very nearly perfect, who was willing to put himself below her.

Besides, she felt, more subliminally, that he was never so near slipping through her fingers as when he took that meek way.

“You shall not say that! Only, for once I happen to be right.” She seized his hand in her two hands, and poured her soul from her eyes into his. “Don’t you think so?” she entreated him.

He released his hand and drank the rest of his lemonade, and she added, “Have mine, too,” but he shook his head in answering, “I’ve no business to think so, unless I act so, too.”

Her heart stopped a beat before it pulsed on with leaps that she felt in her neck. She had noticed that strange thing in men: they seemed to feel bound to do what they believed, and not think a thing was finished when they said it, as girls did. She knew what was in his mind, but she pretended not, and she said, “Oh, I am not sure,” and then faltered.

He went on as if to himself without apparently heeding her. “There’s only one way of proving one’s faith in a thing like this.”

She could not say that she understood, but she did understand.

3. Part of a toast given by American naval officer Stephen Decatur (1779–1820): “Our country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country right or wrong.”

He went on again. "If I believed—if I felt as you do about this war—Do you wish me to feel as you do?"

Now she was really not sure; so she said, "George, I don't know what you mean."

He seemed to muse away from her as before. "There is a sort of fascination in it. I suppose that at the bottom of his heart every man would like at times to have his courage tested, to see how he would act."

"How can you talk in that ghastly way?"

"It *is* rather morbid. Still, that's what it comes to, unless you're swept away by ambition, or driven by conviction. I haven't the conviction or the ambition, and the other thing is what it comes to with me. I ought to have been a preacher, after all; then I couldn't have asked it of myself, as I must, now I'm a lawyer. And you believe it's a holy war, Editha?" he suddenly addressed her. "Oh, I know you do! But you wish me to believe so, too?"

She hardly knew whether he was mocking or not, in the ironical way he always had with her plainer mind. But the only thing was to be outspoken with him.

"George, I wish you to believe whatever you think is true, at any and every cost. If I've tried to talk you into anything, I take it all back."

"Oh, I know that, Editha. I know how sincere you are, and how—I wish I had your undoubting spirit! I'll think it over; I'd like to believe as you do. But I don't, now; I don't, indeed. It isn't this war alone; though this seems peculiarly wanton and needless; but it's every war—so stupid; it makes me sick. Why shouldn't this thing have been settled reasonably?"

"Because," she said, very throatily again, "God meant it to be war."

"You think it was God? Yes, I suppose that is what people will say."

"Do you suppose it would have been war if God hadn't meant it?"

"I don't know. Sometimes it seems as if God had put this world into men's keeping to work it as they pleased."

"Now, George, that is blasphemy."

"Well, I won't blaspheme. I'll try to believe in your pocket Providence," he said, and then he rose to go.

"Why don't you stay to dinner?" Dinner at Balcom's Works was at one o'clock.

"I'll come back to supper, if you'll let me. Perhaps I shall bring you a convert."

"Well, you may come back, on that condition."

"All right. If I don't come, you'll understand."

He went away without kissing her, and she felt it a suspension of their engagement. It all interested her intensely; she was undergoing a tremendous experience, and she was being equal to it. While she stood looking after him, her mother came out through one of the long windows, on to the veranda, with a catlike softness and vagueness.

"Why didn't he stay to dinner?"

"Because—because—war has been declared," Editha pronounced, without turning.

Her mother said, "Oh, my!" and then said nothing more until she had sat down in one of the large Shaker chairs⁴ and rocked herself for some time.

4. Sturdy unadorned chairs made by the Shaker sect.

Then she closed whatever tacit passage of thought there had been in her mind with the spoken words: "Well, I hope *he* won't go."

"And *I* hope *he will*," the girl said, and confronted her mother with a stormy exaltation that would have frightened any creature less unimpressionable than a cat.

Her mother rocked herself again for an interval of cogitation. What she arrived at in speech was: "Well, I guess you've done a wicked thing, Editha Balcom."

The girl said, as she passed indoors through the same window her mother had come out by: "I haven't done anything—yet."

In her room, she put together all her letters and gifts from Gearson, down to the withered petals of the first flower he had offered, with that timidity of his veiled in that irony of his. In the heart of the packet she enshrined her engagement ring which she had restored to the pretty box he had brought it her in. Then she sat down, if not calmly yet strongly, and wrote:

"GEORGE:—I understood—when you left me. But I think we had better emphasize your meaning that if we cannot be one in everything we had better be one in nothing. So I am sending these things for your keeping till you have made up your mind.

"I shall always love you, and therefore I shall never marry any one else. But the man I marry must love his country first of all, and be able to say to me,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more."⁵

"There is no honor above America with me. In this great hour there is no other honor.

"Your heart will make my words clear to you. I had never expected to say so much, but it has come upon me that I must say the utmost.

EDITHA"

She thought she had worded her letter well, worded it in a way that could not be bettered; all had been implied and nothing expressed.

She had it ready to send with the packet she had tied with red, white, and blue ribbon, when it occurred to her that she was not just to him, that she was not giving him a fair chance. He had said he would go and think it over, and she was not waiting. She was pushing, threatening, compelling. That was not a woman's part. She must leave him free, free, free. She could not accept for her country or herself a forced sacrifice.

In writing her letter she had satisfied the impulse from which it sprang; she could well afford to wait till he had thought it over. She put the packet and the letter by, and rested serene in the consciousness of having done what was laid upon her by her love itself to do, and yet used patience, mercy, justice.

She had her reward. Gearson did not come to tea, but she had given him till morning, when, late at night there came up from the village the sound of a fife and drum with a tumult of voices, in shouting, singing, and laugh-

5. From "Lucasta, Going to the Wars," by the English poet Richard Lovelace (1618–1658).

ing. The noise drew nearer and nearer; it reached the street end of the avenue; there it silenced itself, and one voice, the voice she knew best, rose over the silence. It fell; the air was filled with cheers; the fife and drum struck up, with the shouting, singing, and laughing again, but now retreating; and a single figure came hurrying up the avenue.

She ran down to meet her lover and clung to him. He was very gay, and he put his arm round her with a boisterous laugh. "Well, you must call me Captain, now; or Cap, if you prefer; that's what the boys call me. Yes, we've had a meeting at the town hall, and everybody has volunteered; and they selected me for captain, and I'm going to the war, the big war, the glorious war, the holy war ordained by the pocket Providence that blesses butchery. Come along; let's tell the whole family about it. Call them from their downy beds, father, mother, Aunt Hitty, and all the folks!"

But when they mounted the veranda steps he did not wait for a larger audience; he poured the story out upon Editha alone.

"There was a lot of speaking, and then some of the fools set up a shout for me. It was all going one way, and I thought it would be a good joke to sprinkle a little cold water on them. But you can't do that with a crowd that adores you. The first thing I knew I was sprinkling hell-fire on them. 'Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war.'⁶ That was the style. Now that it had come to the fight, there were no two parties; there was one country, and the thing was to fight the fight to a finish as quick as possible. I suggested volunteering then and there, and I wrote my name first of all on the roster. Then they elected me—that's all. I wish I had some ice-water!"

She left him walking up and down the veranda, while she ran for the ice-pitcher and a goblet, and when she came back he was still walking up and down, shouting the story he had told her to her father and mother, who had come out more sketchily dressed than they commonly were by day. He drank goblet after goblet of the ice-water without noticing who was giving it, and kept on talking, and laughing through his talk wildly. "It's astonishing," he said, "how well the worse reason looks when you try to make it appear the better. Why, I believe I was the first convert to the war in that crowd tonight! I never thought I should like to kill a man; but now, I shouldn't care; and the smokeless powder lets you see the man drop that you kill. It's all for the country! What a thing it is to have a country that *can't* be wrong, but if it is, is right, anyway!"

Editha had a great, vital thought, an inspiration. She set down the ice-pitcher on the veranda floor, and ran up-stairs and got the letter she had written him. When at last he noisily bade her father and mother, "Well, good night. I forgot I woke you up; I sha'n't want any sleep myself," she followed him down the avenue to the gate. There, after the whirling words that seemed to fly away from her thoughts and refuse to serve them, she made a last effort to solemnize the moment that seemed so crazy, and pressed the letter she had written upon him.

"What's this?" he said. "Want me to mail it?"

"No, no. It's for you. I wrote it after you went this morning. Keep it—keep it—and read it sometime—" She thought, and then her inspiration came:

6. From Antony's soliloquy after the murder of Caesar, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (3.1.274).

“Read it if ever you doubt what you’ve done, or fear that I regret your having done it. Read it after you’ve started.”

They strained each other in embraces that seemed as ineffective as their words, and he kissed her face with quick, hot breaths that were so unlike him, that made her feel as if she had lost her old lover and found a stranger in his place. The stranger said: “What a gorgeous flower you are, with your red hair, and your blue eyes that look black now, and your face with the color painted out by the white moonshine! Let me hold you under my chin, to see whether I love blood, you tiger-lily!” Then he laughed Gearson’s laugh, and released her, scared and giddy. Within her willfulness she had been frightened by a sense of subtler force in him, and mystically mastered as she had never been before.

She ran all the way back to the house, and mounted the steps panting. Her mother and father were talking of the great affair. Her mother said: “Wa’n’t Mr. Gearson in rather of an excited state of mind? Didn’t you think he acted curious?”

“Well, not for a man who’d just been elected captain and had to set ‘em up for the whole of Company A,” her father chuckled back.

“What in the world do you mean, Mr. Balcom? Oh! There’s Editha!” She offered to follow the girl indoors.

“Don’t come, mother!” Editha called, vanishing.

Mrs. Balcom remained to reproach her husband. “I don’t see much of anything to laugh at.”

“Well, it’s catching. Caught it from Gearson. I guess it won’t be much of a war, and I guess Gearson don’t think so, either. The other fellows will back down as soon as they see we mean it. I wouldn’t lose any sleep over it. I’m going back to bed, myself.”

Gearson came again next afternoon, looking pale, and rather sick, but quite himself, even to his languid irony. “I guess I’d better tell you, Editha, that I consecrated myself to your god of battles last night by pouring too many libations to him down my own throat. But I’m all right now. One has to carry off the excitement, somehow.”

“Promise me,” she commanded, “that you’ll never touch it again!”

“What! Not let the cannikin clink? Not let the soldier drink?⁷ Well, I promise.”

“You don’t belong to yourself now; you don’t even belong to *me*. You belong to your country, and you have a sacred charge to keep yourself strong and well for your country’s sake. I have been thinking, thinking all night and all day long.”

“You look as if you had been crying a little, too,” he said with his queer smile.

“That’s all past. I’ve been thinking, and worshipping *you*. Don’t you suppose I know all that you’ve been through, to come to this? I’ve followed you every step from your old theories and opinions.”

“Well, you’ve had a long row to hoe.”

“And I know you’ve done this from the highest motives—”

““Oh, there won’t be much pettifogging to do till this cruel war is—”

7. Allusion to Shakespeare’s *Othello* (2.3.64–68), in which Iago sings a soldier’s drinking song.

“And you haven’t simply done it for my sake. I couldn’t respect you if you had.”

“Well, then we’ll say I haven’t. A man that hasn’t got his own respect intact wants the respect of all the other people he can corner. But we won’t go into that. I’m in for the thing now, and we’ve got to face our future. My idea is that this isn’t going to be a very protracted struggle; we shall just scare the enemy to death before it comes to a fight at all. But we must provide for contingencies, Editha. If anything happens to me—”

“Oh, George!” She clung to him sobbing.

“I don’t want you to feel foolishly bound to my memory. I should hate that, wherever I happened to be.”

“I am yours, for time and eternity—time and eternity.” She liked the words; they satisfied her famine for phrases.

“Well, say eternity; that’s all right; but time’s another thing; and I’m talking about time. But there is something! My mother! If anything happens—”

She winced, and he laughed. “You’re not the bold soldier-girl of yesterday!” Then he sobered. “If anything happens, I want you to help my mother out. She won’t like my doing this thing. She brought me up to think war a fool thing as well as a bad thing. My father was in the civil war, all through it; lost his arm in it.” She thrilled with the sense of the arm round her; what if that should be lost? He laughed as if divining her: “Oh, it doesn’t run in the family, as far as I know!” Then he added, gravely: “He came home with misgivings about war, and they grew on him. I guess he and mother agreed between them that I was to be brought up in his final mind about it; but that was before my time. I only knew him from my mother’s report of him and his opinions; I don’t know whether they were hers first; but they were hers last. This will be a blow to her. I shall have to write and tell her—”

He stopped, and she asked: “Would you like me to write too, George?”

“I don’t believe that would do. No, I’ll do the writing. She’ll understand a little if I say that I thought the way to minimize it was to make war on the largest possible scale at once—that I felt I must have been helping on the war somehow if I hadn’t helped keep it from coming, and I knew I hadn’t; when it came, I had no right to stay out of it.”

Whether his sophistries satisfied him or not, they satisfied her. She clung to his breast, and whispered, with closed eyes and quivering lips: “Yes, yes, yes!”

“But if anything should happen, you might go to her, and see what you could do for her. You know? It’s rather far off; she can’t leave her chair—”

“Oh, I’ll go, if it’s the ends of the earth! But nothing will happen! Nothing *can!* I—”

She felt herself lifted with his rising, and Gearson was saying, with his arm still round her, to her father: “Well, we’re off at once, Mr. Balcom. We’re to be formally accepted at the capital, and then bunched up with the rest somehow, and sent into camp somewhere, and got to the front as soon as possible. We all want to be in the van,⁸ of course; we’re the first company to report to the Governor. I came to tell Editha, but I hadn’t got round to it.”

She saw him again for a moment at the capital, in the station, just before the train started southward with his regiment. He looked well, in his

8. Short for vanguard, the foremost division of an army.

uniform, and very soldierly, but somehow girlish, too, with his clean-shaven face and slim figure. The manly eyes and the strong voice satisfied her, and his preoccupation with some unexpected details of duty flattered her. Other girls were weeping and bemoaning themselves, but she felt a sort of noble distinction in the abstraction, the almost unconsciousness, with which they parted. Only at the last moment he said: "Don't forget my mother. It mayn't be such a walk-over as I supposed," and he laughed at the notion.

He waved his hand to her as the train moved off—she knew it among a score of hands that were waved to other girls from the platform of the car, for it held a letter which she knew was hers. Then he went inside the car to read it, doubtless, and she did not see him again. But she felt safe for him through the strength of what she called her love. What she called her God, always speaking the name in a deep voice and with the implication of a mutual understanding, would watch over him and keep him and bring him back to her. If with an empty sleeve, then he should have three arms instead of two, for both of hers should be his for life. She did not see, though, why she should always be thinking of the arm his father had lost.

There were not many letters from him, but they were such as she could have wished, and she put her whole strength into making hers such as she imagined he could have wished, glorifying and supporting him. She wrote to his mother glorifying him as their hero, but the brief answer she got was merely to the effect that Mrs. Gearson was not well enough to write herself, and thanking her for her letter by the hand of someone who called herself "Yrs truly, Mrs. W. J. Andrews."

Editha determined not to be hurt, but to write again quite as if the answer had been all she expected. But before it seemed as if she could have written, there came news of the first skirmish, and in the list of the killed, which was telegraphed as a trifling loss on our side, was Gearson's name. There was a frantic time of trying to make out that it might be, must be, some other Gearson; but the name and the company and the regiment, and the State were too definitely given.

Then there was a lapse into depths out of which it seemed as if she never could rise again; then a lift into clouds far above all grief, black clouds, that blotted out the sun, but where she soared with him, with George, George! She had the fever that she expected of herself, but she did not die in it; she was not even delirious, and it did not last long. When she was well enough to leave her bed, her one thought was of George's mother, of his strangely worded wish that she should go to her and see what she could do for her. In the exaltation of the duty laid upon her—it buoyed her up instead of burdening her—she rapidly recovered.

Her father went with her on the long railroad journey from northern New York to western Iowa; he had business out at Davenport, and he said he could just as well go then as any other time; and he went with her to the little country town where George's mother lived in a little house on the edge of illimitable corn-fields, under trees pushed to a top of the rolling prairie. George's father had settled there after the civil war, as so many other old soldiers had done; but they were Eastern people, and Editha fancied touches of the East in the June rose overhanging the front door, and the garden with early summer flowers stretching from the gate of the paling fence.

It was very low inside the house, and so dim, with the closed blinds, that they could scarcely see one another: Editha tall and black in her crapes which filled the air with the smell of their dyes; her father standing decorously apart with his hat on his forearm, as at funerals; a woman rested in a deep arm-chair, and the woman who had let the strangers in stood behind the chair.

The seated woman turned her head round and up, and asked the woman behind her chair: "*Who* did you say?"

Editha, if she had done what she expected of herself, would have gone down on her knees at the feet of the seated figure and said, "I am George's Editha," for answer.

But instead of her own voice she heard that other woman's voice, saying: "Well, I don't know as I *did* get the name just right. I guess I'll have to make a little more light in here," and she went and pushed two of the shutters ajar.

Then Editha's father said, in his public will-now-address-a-few-remarks tone: "My name is Balcom, ma'am—Junius H. Balcom, of Balcom's Works, New York; my daughter—"

"Oh!" the seated woman broke in, with a powerful voice, the voice that always surprised Editha from Gearson's slender frame. "Let me see you! Stand round where the light can strike on your face," and Editha dumbly obeyed. "So, you're Editha Balcom," she sighed.

"Yes," Editha said, more like a culprit than a comforter.

"What did you come for?" Mrs. Gearson asked.

Editha's face quivered and her knees shook. "I came—because—because George—" She could go no further.

"Yes," the mother said, "he told me he had asked you to come if he got killed. You didn't expect that, I suppose, when you sent him."

"I would rather have died myself than done it!" Editha said with more truth in her deep voice than she ordinarily found in it. "I tried to leave him free—"

"Yes, that letter of yours, that came back with his other things, left him free."

Editha saw now where George's irony came from.

"It was not to be read before—unless—until—I told him so," she faltered.

"Of course, he wouldn't read a letter of yours, under the circumstances, till he thought you wanted him to. Been sick?" the woman abruptly demanded.

"Very sick." Editha said, with self-pity.

"Daughter's life," her father interposed, "was almost despaired of, at one time."

Mrs. Gearson gave him no heed. "I suppose you would have been glad to die, such a brave person as you! I don't believe *he* was glad to die. He was always a timid boy, that way; he was afraid of a good many things; but if he was afraid he did what he made up his mind to. I suppose he made up his mind to go, but I knew what it cost him, by what it cost me when I heard of it. I had been through *one* war before. When you sent him you didn't expect he would get killed."

The voice seemed to compassionate Editha, and it was time. "No," she huskily murmured.

"No, girls don't; women don't, when they give their men up to their country. They think they'll come marching back, somehow, just as gay as they went, or if it's an empty sleeve, or even an empty pantaloon, it's all the more glory, and they're so much the prouder of them, poor things!"

The tears began to run down Editha's face; she had not wept till then; but it was now such a relief to be understood that the tears came.

"No, you didn't expect him to get killed," Mrs. Gearson repeated in a voice which was startlingly like George's again. "You just expected him to kill some one else, some of those foreigners, that weren't there because they had any say about it, but because they had to be there, poor wretches—conscripts, or whatever they call 'em. You thought it would be all right for my George, *your* George, to kill the sons of those miserable mothers and the husbands of those girls that you would never see the faces of." The woman lifted her powerful voice in a psalmlike note. "I thank my God he didn't live to do it! I thank my God they killed him first, and that he ain't livin' with their blood on his hands!" She dropped her eyes, which she had raised with her voice, and glared at Editha. "What you got that black on for?" She lifted herself by her powerful arms so high that her helpless body seemed to hang limp its full length. "Take it off, take it off, before I tear it from your back!"

The lady who was passing the summer near Balcom's Works was sketching Editha's beauty, which lent itself wonderfully to the effects of a colorist. It had come to that confidence which is rather apt to grow between artist and sitter, and Editha told her everything.

"To think of your having such a tragedy in your life!" the lady said. She added: "I suppose there are people who feel that way about war. But when you consider the good this war has done—how much it has done for the country! I can't understand such people, for my part. And when you had come all the way out there to console her—got up out of a sick-bed! Well!"

"I think," Editha said, magnanimously, "she wasn't quite in her right mind; and so did papa."

"Yes," the lady said, looking at Editha's lips in nature and then at her lips in art, and giving an empirical touch to them in the picture. "But how dreadful of her! How perfectly—excuse me—how *vulgar*!"

A light broke upon Editha in the darkness which she felt had been without a gleam of brightness for weeks and months. The mystery that had bewildered her was solved by the word; and from that moment she rose from grovelling in shame and self-pity, and began to live again in the ideal.

1905

HENRY ADAMS

1838–1918

Henry Adams's great-grandfather John Adams was second president of the United States; his grandfather John Quincy Adams was sixth president; and his father, Charles Francis Adams, was a distinguished political leader and diplomat. Despite Adams's lifelong penchant for self-deprecation, his own achievements

as a scholar, teacher, novelist, editor, and cultural historian are worthy of his eminent forebears, for they have earned him an important place in American intellectual and literary history.

Adams was born in Boston, on Beacon Hill, and spent his childhood in the constant presence of renowned politicians, artists, and intellectuals; the index to his autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, is virtually an “International Who Was Who” of the time. He studied at Harvard and after graduating he traveled in Europe; in 1860 he returned to America to become private secretary to his father, a position he held for nine years, first in Washington, when the elder Adams was elected to Congress, then in London, where his father served as U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James.

In 1870, after a brief career as a freelance journalist, he accepted a position as assistant professor of medieval history at Harvard, doubting his own fitness for the job. In the same period he undertook the editorship of the *North American Review*, using this position to criticize the major political parties of this period concerning uncontrolled expansion and widespread government corruption. He sardonically remarked of his two vocations that “a professor commonly became a pedagogue or a pedant; an editor became an authority on advertising.” By all accounts other than his own, however, he served both the college and the journal well before he gave up both positions in the late 1870s to settle in Washington to devote his time to historical research.

Adams’s new career as historian did not begin auspiciously. His 1879 biography of Albert Gallatin, Thomas Jefferson’s secretary of the treasury, and his subsequent biography of the flamboyant congressman John Randolph (1882), were not successful with his professional colleagues or with the public. Adams’s research for these biographies led him to produce a broader history of this period: *The History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (1889–91). The nine-volume work, which took almost nine years to complete, is still a standard account of the early national period. During these years Adams also published two novels: *Democracy* in 1880, which Adams published anonymously, and *Esther* in 1884, which Adams published under a pseudonym. Both novels stirred considerable interest when they appeared and continue to attract readers who find, in the first work, a penetrating account of the corruption of government by business interests and, in the second, a prescient representation of the effect of scientific thought on traditional religious belief.

Adams’s life was profoundly changed by the suicide, in 1885, of his much-loved wife, Marian Hooper, who was despondent over her father’s death. After a decade of mourning, a trip to northern France in the summer of 1895 stirred his intellectual curiosity and reignited his creative energies. What most struck the world-weary Adams that summer was the severe and majestic harmony of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Norman and Gothic cathedrals he visited, particularly the one at Chartres. *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (privately printed in 1904; published 1913) not only provided illuminating discussions of the literary and architectural monuments of the period but examined the powerful spiritual forces that lay behind those achievements. During this time, he began to identify the images that represented to Adams a historical decline from medieval unity to the confusion and incoherence of the early twentieth century. Paradoxically, telling this story of decline served to renew Adams’s spirits and brought his work to the attention of a wider public.

In *The Education of Henry Adams*, an autobiography narrated in the third person, Adams describes the influence of his family, his schools, and various social institutions on his intellect. With self-deprecation and sarcasm, Adams downplays his own achievements and emphasizes the degree to which he has been poorly prepared for a world of rapid change; he ironically offers his own “failures” as a negative example to young men of the time. The book also constitutes a meditation on the forces remaking, as Adams saw it, a world informed by its spiritual heritage into a new one

dominated by science, industry, and technology. “The Virgin and the Dynamo,” in which “the historian” (as Adams calls himself) visits the Paris exposition of 1900, is the best-known chapter of *The Education*, and it dramatizes this historical shift through the pair of images named in the chapter’s title. The Virgin Mary represents the forces that once held together the civilization of the West; and the powerful new engines displayed at the exposition represent forces so powerful that the human mind cannot comprehend their true power.

The Education is primarily a literary work, not a biography or a history. (It omits many crucial details of Adams’s life, including his marriage and the death of his wife.) Despite Adams’s nineteenth-century upbringing and his deep interest in history, the book feels quite modern in the author’s concern about his ability to contend with the increasing pace of social change. At a moment of optimism about the future that might unfold in the new, twentieth century, *The Education* sounds a countervailing note. Its final chapter (dated 1905) warns that the disintegrative forces unleashed by science threaten to destroy the world within a generation.

Adams first printed *The Education* in 1906 and distributed it privately. The book was first printed commercially in 1918, just after Adams’s death at the age of eighty, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize the following year. For more than a century, readers of *The Education* have been attracted to more than Adams’s ironic sense of humor in describing his own life as a series of missteps. In the time that has passed since the book first appeared, Adams’s sense of being displaced in his own time by the pace and power of technological change continues to seem prophetic.

From The Education of Henry Adams¹

Chapter XXV. *The Dynamo and the Virgin*

Until the Great Exposition of 1900² closed its doors in November, Adams haunted it, aching to absorb knowledge, and helpless to find it. He would have liked to know how much of it could have been grasped by the best-informed man in the world. While he was thus meditating chaos, Langley³ came by, and showed it to him. At Langley’s behest, the Exhibition dropped its superfluous rags and stripped itself to the skin, for Langley knew what to study, and why, and how; while Adams might as well have stood outside in the night, staring at the Milky Way. Yet Langley said nothing new, and taught nothing that one might not have learned from Lord Bacon,⁴ three hundred years before; but though one should have known the “Advancement of Science” as well as one knew the “Comedy of Errors,”⁵ the literary knowledge counted for nothing until some teacher should show how to apply it. Bacon took a vast deal of trouble in teaching King James I⁶ and his subjects, American or other, towards the year 1620, that true science was the development or economy of forces; yet an elderly American in 1900 knew neither the formula nor the forces; or even so much as to say to himself that his historical

1. The selections from *The Education* reprint the Houghton Mifflin Riverside Edition text established by Ernest Samuels. Adams made a gift of the book’s copyright to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1918, the year the first edition of the book was publicly sold.

2. The World’s Fair held in Paris from April through November.

3. Samuel P. Langley (1834–1906), American astronomer and inventor, in 1896, of the first airplane to fly successfully.

4. Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626), English natural philosopher, author of *The Advancement of Learning* (1605).

5. Early Shakespearean comedy (1594).

6. King of England (1603–25).



The Gallery of Machines was constructed for the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris. Henry Adams visited the expanded gallery during the 1900 Exposition.

business in the Exposition concerned only the economics or developments of force since 1893, when he began to study at Chicago.⁷

Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts. Adams had looked at most of the accumulations of art in the storehouses called Art Museums; yet he did not know how to look at the art exhibits of 1900. He had studied Karl Marx⁸ and his doctrines of history with profound attention, yet he could not apply them at Paris. Langley, with the ease of a great master of experiment, threw out of the field every exhibit that did not reveal a new application of force, and naturally threw out, to begin with, almost the whole art exhibit. Equally, he ignored almost the whole industrial exhibit. He led his pupil directly to the forces. His chief interest was in new motors to make his airship feasible, and he taught Adams the astonishing complexities of the new Daimler⁹ motor, and of the automobile, which, since 1893, had become a nightmare at a hundred kilometres an hour, almost as destructive as the electric tram which was only ten years older; and threatening to become as terrible as the locomotive steam-engine itself, which was almost exactly Adams's own age.

Then he showed his scholar the great hall of dynamos, and explained how little he knew about electricity or force of any kind, even of his own special

7. The subject of Ch. 22 of *The Education*. The Chicago Exposition of 1893 first stimulated Adams's interest in the "economy of forces."

8. German social philosopher (1818–1883) and architect of modern socialism and communism; he formulated his theories on the principle of

"dialectical materialism."

9. Gottlieb Daimler (1834–1900), German engineer, inventor of the high-speed internal combustion engine and an early developer of the automobile.

sun, which spouted heat in inconceivable volume, but which, as far as he knew, might spout less or more, at any time, for all the certainty he felt in it. To him, the dynamo itself was but an ingenious channel for conveying somewhere the heat latent in a few tons of poor coal hidden in a dirty engine-house carefully kept out of sight; but to Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within arm's-length at some vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring—scarcely humming an audible warning to stand a hair's-breadth further for respect of power—while it would not wake the baby lying close against its frame. Before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the national expression of man before silent and infinite force. Among the thousand symbols of ultimate energy, the dynamo was not so human as some, but it was the most expressive.

Yet the dynamo, next to the steam-engine, was the most familiar of exhibits. For Adams's object its value lay chiefly in its occult mechanism. Between the dynamo in the gallery of machines and the engine-house outside, the break of continuity amounted to abysmal fracture for a historian's objects. No more relation could he discover between the steam and the electric current than between the Cross and the cathedral. The forces were interchangeable if not reversible, but he could see only an absolute *fiat* in electricity as in faith. Langley could not help him. Indeed, Langley seemed to be worried by the same trouble, for he constantly repeated that the new forces were anarchical, and especially that he was not responsible for the new rays, that were little short of parricidal in their wicked spirit towards science. His own rays,¹ with which he had doubled the solar spectrum, were altogether harmless and beneficent; but Radium denied its God²—or, what was to Langley the same thing, denied the truths of his Science. The force was wholly new.

A historian who asked only to learn enough to be as futile as Langley or Kelvin,³ made rapid progress under this teaching, and mixed himself up in the tangle of ideas until he achieved a sort of Paradise of ignorance vastly consoling to his fatigued senses. He wrapped himself in vibrations and rays which were new, and he would have hugged Marconi and Branly⁴ had he met them, as he hugged the dynamo; while he lost his arithmetic in trying to figure out the equation between the discoveries and the economies of force. The economies, like the discoveries, were absolute, supersensual, occult; incapable of expression in horse-power. What mathematical equivalent could he suggest as the value of a Branly coherer? Frozen air, or the electric furnace, had some scale of measurement, no doubt, if somebody could invent a thermometer adequate to the purpose; but X-rays⁵ had played

1. Langley had invented the bolometer, with which he was able to measure intensities of invisible heat rays in the infrared spectrum.

2. Because radium, first isolated by the Curies in 1898, underwent spontaneous transformation through radioactive emission, it did not fit prevailing scientific distinctions between matter and energy.

3. William Thomson, Baron Kelvin (1824–1907), English mathematician and physicist known

especially for his work in thermodynamics and electrodynamics.

4. Édouard Branly (1844–1940), French physicist and inventor, in 1890, of the Branly "coherer" for detecting radio waves. Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1937), Italian inventor of radio telegraphy in 1895.

5. Wilhelm Roentgen (1845–1923) discovered X-rays in 1895.

no part whatever in man's consciousness, and the atom itself had figured only as a fiction of thought. In these seven years man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old. He had entered a supersensual world, in which he could measure nothing except by chance collisions of movements imperceptible to his senses, perhaps even imperceptible to his instruments, but perceptible to each other, and so to some known ray at the end of the scale. Langley seemed prepared for anything, even for an indeterminable number of universes interfused—physics stark mad in metaphysics.

Historians undertake to arrange sequences,—called stories, or histories—assuming in silence a relation of cause and effect. These assumptions, hidden in the depths of dusty libraries, have been astounding, but commonly unconscious and childlike; so much so, that if any captious critic were to drag them to light, historians would probably reply, with one voice, that they had never supposed themselves required to know what they were talking about. Adams, for one, had toiled in vain to find out what he meant. He had even published a dozen volumes of American history for no other purpose than to satisfy himself whether, by the severest process of stating, with the least possible comment, such facts as seemed sure, in such order as seemed rigorously consequent, he could fix for a familiar moment a necessary sequence of human movement. The result had satisfied him as little as at Harvard College. Where he saw sequence, other men saw something quite different, and no one saw the same unit of measure. He cared little about his experiments and less about his statesmen, who seemed to him quite as ignorant as himself and, as a rule, no more honest; but he insisted on a relation of sequence, and if he could not reach it by one method, he would try as many methods as science knew. Satisfied that the sequence of men led to nothing and that the sequence of their society could lead no further, while the mere sequence of time was artificial, and the sequence of thought was chaos, he turned at last to the sequence of force; and thus it happened that, after ten years' pursuit, he found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines at the Great Exposition of 1900, his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new.

Since no one else showed much concern, an elderly person without other cares had no need to betray alarm. The year 1900 was not the first to upset schoolmasters. Copernicus and Galileo⁶ had broken many professorial necks about 1600; Columbus had stood the world on its head towards 1500; but the nearest approach to the revolution of 1900 was that of 310, when Constantine set up the Cross.⁷ The rays that Langley disowned, as well as those which he fathered, were occult, supersensual, irrational; they were a revelation of mysterious energy like that of the Cross; they were what, in terms of mediæval science, were called immediate modes of the divine substance.

The historian was thus reduced to his last resources. Clearly if he was bound to reduce all these forces to a common value, this common value

6. Galileo (1564–1642), Italian astronomer and developer of the refracting telescope, was condemned by the Inquisition for espousing the beliefs of the Polish astronomer Copernicus (1473–1543), who asserted that the earth rotated

around the sun.

7. Constantine the Great (288?–337), Roman emperor, issued the Edict of Milan in 313 proclaiming toleration of Christians, which paved the way for the ascendancy of Christianity.

could have no measure but that of their attraction on his own mind. He must treat them as they had been felt; as convertible, reversible, interchangeable attractions on thought. He made up his mind to venture it; he would risk translating rays into faith. Such a reversible process would vastly amuse a chemist, but the chemist could not deny that he, or some of his fellow physicists, could feel the force of both. When Adams was a boy in Boston, the best chemist in the place had probably never heard of Venus except by way of scandal, or of the Virgin except as idolatry;⁸ neither had he heard of dynamos or automobiles or radium; yet his mind was ready to feel the force of all, though the rays were unborn and the women were dead.

Here opened another totally new education, which promised to be by far the most hazardous of all. The knife-edge along which he must crawl, like Sir Lancelot⁹ in the twelfth century, divided two kingdoms of force which had nothing in common but attraction. They were as different as a magnet is from gravitation, supposing one knew what a magnet was, or gravitation, or love. The force of the Virgin was still felt at Lourdes,¹ and seemed to be as potent as X-rays; but in America neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force—at most as sentiment. No American had ever been truly afraid of either.

This problem in dynamics gravely perplexed an American historian. The Woman had once been supreme; in France she still seemed potent, not merely as a sentiment, but as a force. Why was she unknown in America? For evidently America was ashamed of her, and she was ashamed of herself, otherwise they would not have strewn fig-leaves so profusely all over her.² When she was a true force, she was ignorant of fig-leaves, but the monthly-magazine-made American female had not a feature that would have been recognized by Adam. The trait was notorious, and often humorous, but any one brought up among Puritans knew that sex was sin. In any previous age, sex was strength. Neither art nor beauty was needed. Every one, even among Puritans, knew that neither Diana of the Ephesians³ nor any of the Oriental goddesses was worshipped for her beauty. She was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction—the greatest and most mysterious of all energies; all she needed was to be fecund. Singularly enough, not one of Adams's many schools of education had ever drawn his attention to the opening lines of Lucretius,⁴ though they were perhaps the finest in all Latin literature, where the poet invoked Venus exactly as Dante invoked the Virgin:—

“Quae quoniam rerum naturam *sola* gubernas.”

The Venus of Epicurean philosophy survived in the Virgin of the Schools:—

8. That is, the druggist knew of Venus only through selling medication for venereal disease, and because Boston was largely Protestant, he would have heard of the Virgin only as the object of idolatrous worship.

9. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*, the hero has to crawl across a bridge made of a single sword to enter a castle and rescue Guinevere.

1. A famous shrine in France known for its

miraculous cures; the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared to a peasant girl there in 1858.

2. I.e., to conceal sexual organs and sensuality.

3. The shrine at Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor was dedicated to Artemis, a virgin goddess and mother figure.

4. Lucretius (c. 99–55 B.C.E.), in “On the Nature of Things” 1.21: “And since ’tis *thou* / Venus alone / Guidest the Cosmos” (trans. W. E. Leonard).

“Donna, sei tanto grande, e tanto vali,
 Che qual vuol grazia, e a te non ricorre,
 Sua disianza vuol volar senz’ ali.”⁵

All this was to American thought as though it had never existed. The true American knew something of the facts, but nothing of the feelings; he read the letter, but he never felt the law. Before this historical chasm, a mind like that of Adams felt itself helpless; he turned from the Virgin to the Dynamo as though he were a Branly coherer. On one side, at the Louvre and at Chartres, as he knew by the record of work actually done and still before his eyes, was the highest energy ever known to man, the creator of four-fifths of his noblest art, exercising vastly more attraction over the human mind than all the steam-engines and dynamos ever dreamed of; and yet this energy was unknown to the American mind. An American Virgin would never dare command; an American Venus would never dare exist.

The question, which to any plain American of the nineteenth century seemed as remote as it did to Adams, drew him almost violently to study, once it was posed; and on this point Langleys were as useless as though they were Herbert Spencers⁶ or dynamos. The idea survived only as art. There one turned as naturally as though the artist were himself a woman. Adams began to ponder, asking himself whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done; but he could think only of Walt Whitman; Bret Harte,⁷ as far as the magazines would let him venture; and one or two painters, for the flesh-tones. All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force; to them, Eve was a tender flower, and Herodias⁸ an unfeminine horror. American art, like the American language and American education, was as far as possible sexless.⁹ Society regarded this victory over sex as its greatest triumph, and the historian readily admitted it, since the moral issue, for the moment, did not concern one who was studying the relations of unmoral force. He cared nothing for the sex of the dynamo until he could measure its energy.

Vaguely seeking a clue, he wandered through the art exhibit, and, in his stroll, stopped almost every day before St. Gaudens’s¹ General Sherman, which had been given the central post of honor. St. Gaudens himself was in Paris, putting on the work his usual interminable last touches, and listening to the usual contradictory suggestions of brother sculptors. Of all the American artists who gave to American art whatever life it breathed in the seventies, St. Gaudens was perhaps the most sympathetic, but certainly the most inarticulate. General Grant or Don Cameron² had scarcely less instinct of

5. The Virgin of the Schools is a reference to medieval scholastic philosophers. The lines from Dante translate as follows:

Lady, thou art so great and hath such worth,
 that if there be who would have grace yet betaketh
 not himself to thee, his longing seeketh
 to fly without wings (*Paradiso* 33, trans.
 Carlyle-Wicksteed).

6. Nineteenth-century English philosopher and popularizer of Darwinian evolutionary principles. Adams ironically suggests that Spencer’s explanations were too general and abstract to explain this primal force.

7. Harte (1836–1902) sympathetically portrayed

prostitutes in such stories as “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” and “Miggles.” Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) treated sex boldly and was much criticized on that account.

8. The wife of King Herod; she collaborated with her daughter Salome in arranging the beheading of John the Baptist.

9. Just as the American language is not inflected for gender, so American education was coeducational and in Adams’s day entirely excluded sex as a subject from the curriculum.

1. Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), American sculptor.

2. Senator James Donald Cameron (1833–1918), secretary of war under President Grant.

rhetoric than he. All the others—the Hunts, Richardson, John La Farge, Stanford White³—were exuberant; only St. Gaudens could never discuss or dilate on an emotion, or suggest artistic arguments for giving to his work the forms that he felt. He never laid down the law, or affected the despot, or became brutalized like Whistler⁴ by the brutalities of his world. He required no incense; he was no egoist; his simplicity of thought was excessive; he could not imitate, or give any form but his own to the creations of his hand. No one felt more strongly than he the strength of other men, but the idea that they could affect him never stirred an image in his mind.

This summer his health was poor and his spirits were low. For such a temper, Adams was not the best companion, since his own gaiety was not *folle*;⁵ but he risked going now and then to the studio on Mont Parnasse to draw him out for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne,⁶ or dinner as pleased his moods, and in return St. Gaudens sometimes let Adams go about in his company.

Once St. Gaudens took him down to Amiens, with a party of Frenchmen, to see the cathedral. Not until they found themselves actually studying the sculpture of the western portal, did it dawn on Adams's mind that, for his purposes, St. Gaudens on the spot had more interest to him than the cathedral itself. Great men before great monuments express great truths, provided they are not taken too solemnly. Adams never tired of quoting the supreme phrase of his idol Gibbon, before the Gothic cathedrals: "I darted a contemptuous look on the stately monuments of superstition."⁷ Even in the footnotes of his history, Gibbon had never inserted a bit of humor more human than this, and one would have paid largely for a photograph of the fat little historian, on the background of Notre Dame of Amiens, trying to persuade his readers—perhaps himself—that he was darting a contemptuous look on the stately monument, for which he felt in fact the respect which every man of his vast study and active mind always feels before objects worthy of it; but besides the humor, one felt also the relation. Gibbon ignored the Virgin, because in 1789 religious monuments were out of fashion. In 1900 his remark sounded fresh and simple as the green fields to ears that had heard a hundred years of other remarks, mostly no more fresh and certainly less simple. Without malice, one might find it more instructive than a whole lecture of Ruskin.⁸ One sees what one brings, and at that moment Gibbon brought the French Revolution. Ruskin brought reaction against the Revolution. St. Gaudens had passed beyond all. He liked the Stately monuments much more than he liked Gibbon or Ruskin; he loved their dignity; their unity; their scale; their lines; their lights and shadows; their decorative sculpture; but he was even less conscious than they of the force that created it all—the Virgin, the Woman—by whose genius "the stately monuments of superstition" were built, through which she was expressed. He would have seen more meaning

3. American architect (1853–1906). William Morris Hunt (1824–1879), painter, and his younger brother Richard Morris Hunt (1828–1895), architect. Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886), architect. La Farge (1835–1910), muralist and maker of stained-glass windows.

4. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), American painter and lithographer.

5. Excessive (French).

6. A large wooded park on the outskirts of Paris. "Mont Parnasse": a Paris Left Bank district frequented by artists and writers.

7. Apparently Adams's adaptation of a passage in Gibbon's French journal for February 21, 1763.

8. John Ruskin (1819–1900), English art critic and social reformer, famous for his highly imaginative interpretations of great works of the Italian Renaissance.

in Isis⁹ with the cow's horns, at Edfoo, who expressed the same thought. The art remained, but the energy was lost even upon the artist.

Yet in mind and person St. Gaudens was a survival of the 1500s; he bore the stamp of the Renaissance, and should have carried an image of the Virgin round his neck, or stuck in his hat, like Louis XI.¹ In mere time he was a lost soul that had strayed by chance into the twentieth century, and forgotten where it came from. He writhed and cursed at his ignorance, much as Adams did at his own, but in the opposite sense. St. Gaudens was a child of Benvenuto Cellini,² smothered in an American cradle. Adams was a quintessence of Boston, devoured by curiosity to think like Benvenuto. St. Gaudens's art was starved from birth, and Adams's instinct was blighted from babyhood. Each had but half of a nature, and when they came together before the Virgin of Amiens they ought both to have felt in her the force that made them one; but it was not so. To Adams she became more than ever a channel of force; to St. Gaudens she remained as before a channel of taste.

For a symbol of power St. Gaudens instinctively preferred the horse, as was plain in his horse and Victory of the Sherman monument. Doubtless Sherman also felt it so. The attitude was so American that, for at least forty years, Adams had never realized that any other could be in sound taste. How many years had he taken to admit a notion of what Michael Angelo and Rubens³ were driving at? He could not say; but he knew that only since 1895 had he begun to feel the Virgin or Venus as force, and not everywhere even so. At Chartres—perhaps at Lourdes—possibly at Cnidus⁴ if one could still find there the divinely naked Aphrodite of Praxiteles—but otherwise one must look for force to the goddesses of Indian mythology. The idea died out long ago in the German and English stock. St. Gaudens at Amiens was hardly less sensitive to the force of the female energy than Matthew Arnold at the Grande Chartreuse.⁵ Neither of them felt goddesses as power—only as reflected emotion, human expression, beauty, purity, taste, scarcely even as sympathy. They felt a railway train as power; yet they, and all other artists, constantly complained that the power embodied in a railway train could never be embodied in art. All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres.

Yet in mechanics, whatever the mechanics might think, both energies acted as interchangeable forces on man, and by action on man all known force may be measured. Indeed, few men of science measured force in any other way. After once admitting that a straight line was the shortest distance between two points, no serious mathematician cared to deny anything that suited his convenience, and rejected no symbol, unproved or unproveable,

9. Egyptian earth-mother goddess. Adams visited Edfu, the site of the best-preserved temple in Egypt, in 1872–73 and in 1893.

1. A pious French king (1423–1483) who often disguised himself as a pilgrim and wore an old felt hat decorated with the lead statuette of a saint.

2. Italian sculptor and goldsmith (1500–1571), author of a famous autobiography.

3. Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), 17th-century Flemish painter. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), Italian sculptor, painter, architect, and

poet of the High Renaissance. Both are known for their exceptional renderings of the human body.

4. Cnidus, or Cnidus, is an ancient city in Asia Minor, site of the most famous of the statues of Aphrodite by Praxiteles (c. 370–330 B.C.E.); only a copy survives, in the Vatican.

5. Arnold's poem "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" (1855) invokes the Virgin Mary in mourning the loss of faith formerly held by ascetic Carthusian monks.

that helped him to accomplish work. The symbol was force, as a compass-needle or a triangle was force, as the mechanist might prove by losing it, and nothing could be gained by ignoring their value. Symbol or energy, the Virgin had acted as the greatest force the Western world ever felt, and had drawn man's activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done; the historian's business was to follow the track of the energy; to find where it came from and where it went to; its complex source and shifting channels; its values, equivalents, conversions. It could scarcely be more complex than radium; it could hardly be deflected, diverted, polarized, absorbed more perplexingly than other radiant matter. Adams knew nothing about any of them, but as a mathematical problem of influence on human progress, though all were occult, all reacted on his mind, and he rather inclined to think the Virgin easiest to handle.

The pursuit turned out to be long and tortuous, leading at last into the vast forests of scholastic science. From Zeno to Descartes, hand in hand with Thomas Aquinas, Montaigne, and Pascal,⁶ one stumbled as stupidly as though one were still a German student of 1860. Only with the instinct of despair could one force one's self into this old thicket of ignorance after having been repulsed at a score of entrances more promising and more popular. Thus far, no path had led anywhere, unless perhaps to an exceedingly modest living. Forty-five years of study had proved to be quite futile for the pursuit of power; one controlled no more force in 1900 than in 1850, although the amount of force controlled by society had enormously increased. The secret of education still hid itself somewhere behind ignorance, and one fumbled over it as feebly as ever. In such labyrinths, the staff is a force almost more necessary than the legs; the pen becomes a sort of blind-man's dog, to keep him from falling into the gutters. The pen works for itself, and acts like a hand, modelling the plastic material over and over again to the form that suits it best. The form is never arbitrary, but is a sort of growth like crystallization, as any artist knows too well; for often the pencil or pen runs into side-paths and shapelessness, loses its relations, stops or is bogged. Then it has to return on its trail, and recover, if it can, its line of force. The result of a year's work depends more on what is struck out than on what is left in; on the sequence of the main lines of thought, than on their play or variety. Compelled once more to lean heavily on this support, Adams covered more thousands of pages with figures as formal as though they were algebra, laboriously striking out, altering, burning, experimenting, until the year had expired, the Exposition had long been closed, and winter drawing to its end, before he sailed from Cherbourg, on January 19, 1901, for home.

1907, 1918

6. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French philosopher. Probably Zeno of Citium (c. 366–264 B.C.E.), Greek philosopher. René Descartes (1596–1650), French philosopher. Aquinas (1225?–1274), Italian philosopher and theologian

who is the subject of the last chapter of Adams's *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*. Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–1592), French essayist and skeptical philosopher.

CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON

1840–1894

By the time of her death, in 1894, Constance Fenimore Woolson had published four novels and over fifty short stories, and she had acquired a reputation among the first rank of American writers of literary realism. Over the course of her life, she had traveled to and written about a variety of American regions—from the upper Midwest to the South—and become an observer, like her friend Henry James, of Americans abroad in Europe. Few of her contemporaries matched her range or enjoyed the consistency of her success.

Woolson was born in 1840 in New Hampshire, but she was raised in Cleveland, Ohio, where her family relocated when Woolson was still an infant. Her father participated in the growth of the industrial Midwest as a partner in a foundry that manufactured stoves, and Woolson had the opportunity to accompany him on business travel throughout the region. She was educated in the Cleveland Female Seminary, and then spent a year in New York at a finishing school.

In 1869 Woolson's father died, a loss that continued to reverberate throughout her life. In the aftermath, Woolson began writing stories and sketches, seeking a means to support herself and her mother. In doing so, she began to prominently feature her middle name—a token of her familial connection to James Fenimore Cooper, her granduncle. By 1870, she was publishing her work in leading magazines such as *Harper's* and *Putnam's*. Soon after, she began traveling to the South, spending winters in Florida, where she sought a climate more conducive to her mother's health. Her first collection of stories, *Castile Nowhere: Lake Country Sketches* (1875), brought together her writing about the upper Midwest, and *Rodman the Keeper: Southern Sketches* (1880) focused on the American South. Though she would publish four novels, all first serialized in *Harper's*, most readers find her greatest achievements in these short stories, where her abilities as a careful observer of the subtleties of place and mind come to the fore.

Woolson continued to travel widely in the South until the death of her mother in 1879. Crushed by the loss, she left for Europe, where she would live for the remainder of her life, spending time in England, France, Switzerland, and especially Italy. During one of her Italian stays she met Henry James, and the two began a close, enduring friendship. James read and commented on Woolson's work, and he clearly regarded her as belonging to a small set of literary equals. Unfortunately for their biographers, the two made a pact to burn their mutual correspondence. As she traveled, Woolson continued to manage her literary career through a network of American editors, and her writing was well received. She maintained a remarkably productive career even as she faced increasing health problems of her own: the gradual loss of her hearing, bouts of intense depression, and a series of other illnesses in the early 1890s. She was living in Venice in early 1894 when she suffered a severe case of influenza. She was found dead on the snowy pavement beneath the open window of her third-story apartment. Though her family was convinced that the fall was accidental, most biographers believe otherwise.

The genesis of "Rodman the Keeper" came from Woolson's visit to a Union cemetery in Salisbury, North Carolina, near Asheville. The title character is a veteran charged with overseeing the graves of comrades buried on the site of a Confederate prison. Rodman interacts both with unrepentant Southerners clinging to vestiges of their gentility and with an African American population that regards the Union

graves as sacrosanct. Like many stories set in the South during this time, Woolson's is deeply concerned with the potential of reconciliation between North and South, as well as the former slaves whose fate remained uncertain. When it was later published in book form, a reviewer called the story "one of the few artistically perfect tales that the history of the Civil War has inspired."

Rodman the Keeper¹

"Keeper of what? Keeper of the dead. Well, it is easier to keep the dead than the living; and as for the gloom of the thing, the living among whom I have been lately were not a hilarious set."

John Rodman sat in the door-way and looked out over his domain. The little cottage behind him was empty of life save himself alone. In one room the slender appointments provided by government for the keeper, who being still alive must sleep and eat, made the bareness doubly bare; in the other the desk and the great ledgers, the ink and pens, the register, the loud-ticking clock on the wall, and the flag folded on a shelf, were all for the kept, whose names, in hastily written, blotted rolls of manuscript, were waiting to be transcribed in the new red-bound ledgers in the keeper's best handwriting day by day, while the clock was to tell him the hour when the flag must rise over the mounds where reposed the bodies of fourteen thousand United States soldiers,—who had languished where once stood the prison-pens, on the opposite slopes now fair and peaceful in the sunset; who had fallen by the way in long marches to and fro under the burning sun; who had fought and died on the many battle-fields that reddened the beautiful State, stretching from the peaks of the marble mountains in the smoky west down to the sea-islands of the ocean border. The last rim of the sun's red ball had sunk below the horizon line, and the western sky glowed with deep rose-color, which faded away above into pink, into the salmon-tint, into shades of that far-away heavenly emerald which the brush of the earthly artist can never reproduce, but which is found sometimes in the iridescent heart of the opal. The small town, a mile distant, stood turning its back on the cemetery; but the keeper could see the pleasant, rambling old mansions, each with its rose-garden and neglected outlying fields, the empty negro quarters falling into ruin, and everything just as it stood when on that April morning the first gun was fired on Sumter;² apparently not a nail added, not a brushful of paint applied, not a fallen brick replaced, or latch or lock repaired. The keeper had noted these things as he strolled through the town, but not with surprise; for he had seen the South in its first estate, when, fresh, strong, and fired with enthusiasm, he too had marched away from his village home with the colors flying above and the girls waving their handkerchiefs behind, as the regiment, a thousand strong, filed down the dusty road. That regiment, a weak, scarred two hundred, came back a year later with lagging step and colors tattered and scorched, and the girls could

1. "Rodman the Keeper" was first published in March 1877 in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the source of this text.

2. The bombardment of the federal Fort Sumter in South Carolina in April 1861 is generally recognized as the beginning of the Civil War.

not wave their handkerchiefs, wet and sodden with tears. But the keeper, his wound healed, had gone again; and he had seen with his New England eyes the magnificence and the carelessness of the South, her splendor and negligence, her wealth and thriftlessness, as through Virginia and the fair Carolinas, across Georgia and into sunny Florida, he had marched month by month, first a lieutenant, then captain, and finally major and colonel, as death mowed down those above him, and he and his good conduct were left; everywhere magnificence went hand in hand with neglect, and he had said so as chance now and then threw a conversation in his path.

"We have no such shiftless ways," he would remark, after he had furtively supplied his prisoner with hard-tack³ and coffee.

"And no such grand ones either," Johnny Reb⁴ would reply, if he was a man of spirit; and generally he was.

The Yankee, forced to acknowledge the truth of this statement, qualified it by observing that he would rather have more thrift with a little less grandeur; whereupon the other answered that *he* would not; and there the conversation rested. So now ex-Colonel Rodman, keeper of the national cemetery, viewed the little town in its second estate with philosophic eyes. He no longer felt warming within him his early temptations to put in the missing nail or pick up the rusting axe; "for, if they did these things in a green tree, what will they do in a dry?" he thought.⁵ "It is part of a great problem now working itself out; I am not here to tend the living, but the dead."

Whereupon, as he walked among the long mounds, a voice seemed to rise from the still ranks below: "While ye have time, do good to men," it said. "Behold, we are beyond your care." But the keeper did not heed.

This still evening in early February he looked out over the level waste. The little town stood in the lowlands; there were no hills from whence cometh help,⁶—calm heights that lift the soul above earth and its cares; no river to lead the aspirations of the children outward towards the great sea. Everything was monotonous, and the only spirit that rose above the waste was a bitterness for the gained and sorrow for the lost cause. The keeper was the only man whose presence personated the former in their sight, and upon him therefore, as representative, the bitterness fell, not in words, but in averted looks, in sudden silences when he approached, in withdrawals and avoidance, until he lived and moved in a vacuum; wherever he went there was presently no one save himself; the very shop-keeper who sold him sugar seemed turned into a man of wood, and took his money reluctantly, although the shilling gained stood perhaps for that day's family dinner. So Rodman withdrew himself, and came and went among them no more; the broad acres of his domain gave him as much exercise as his shattered ankle could bear; he ordered his few supplies by the quantity,⁷ and began the life of a solitary, his island marked out by the massive granite wall with which the United States government has carefully surrounded those sad Southern cemeteries of hers; sad, not so much from the number of the mounds representing youth and strength cut off in their bloom, for that is but the fortune of war, as for

3. Simple cracker or biscuit that was a staple food for soldiers.

4. Nickname for a Confederate soldier.

5. Cf. Luke 23:31—"For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

6. An allusion to Psalm 121, which begins: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

7. In bulk.

the complete isolation which marks them. "Strangers in a strange land"⁸ is the thought of all who, coming and going to and from Florida, turn aside here and there to stand for a moment among the closely ranged graves which seem already a part of the past, that near past which in our rushing American life is even now so far away. The government work was completed before the keeper came; the lines of the trenches were defined by low granite copings, and the comparatively few single mounds were headed by trim little white boards bearing generally the word "unknown," but here and there a name and an age, in most cases a boy from some far-away Northern State; "twenty-one," "twenty-two," said the inscriptions; the dates were those dark years among the sixties, measured now more than by anything else in the number of maidens widowed in heart, and women widowed indeed, who sit still and remember, while the world rushes by. At sunrise the keeper ran up the stars and stripes, and so precise were his ideas of the accessories belonging to the place that from his own small store of money he had taken enough, by stinting himself, to buy a second flag for stormy weather, so that, rain or not, the colors should float over the dead. This was not patriotism so-called, or rather miscalled, it was not sentimental fancy, it was not zeal or triumph; it was simply a sense of the fitness of things, a conscientiousness which had in it nothing of religion, unless indeed a man's endeavor to live up to his own ideal of his duty be a religion. The same feeling led the keeper to spend hours in copying the rolls. "John Andrew Warren, Company G, Eighth New Hampshire Infantry," he repeated, as he slowly wrote the name, giving "John Andrew" clear, bold capitals and a lettering impossible to mistake; "died August 15, 1863, aged twenty-two years. He came from the prison-pen yonder, and lies somewhere in those trenches, I suppose. Now then, John Andrew, don't fancy I am sorrowing for you; no doubt you are better off than I am at this very moment. But none the less, John Andrew, shall pen, ink, and hand do their duty to you. For that I am here."

Infinite pains and labor went into these records of the dead; one hair's-breadth error, and the whole page was replaced by a new one. The same spirit kept the grass carefully away from the low coping of the trenches, kept the graveled paths smooth and the mounds green, and the bare little cottage neat as a man-of-war;⁹ when the keeper cooked his dinner, the door towards the east, where the dead lay, was scrupulously closed, nor was it opened until everything was in perfect order again. At sunset the flag was lowered, and then it was the keeper's habit to walk slowly up and down the path until the shadows veiled the mounds on each side, and there was nothing save the peaceful green of earth. "So time will efface our little lives and sorrows," he mused, "and we shall be as nothing in the indistinguishable past." Yet none the less did he fulfill the duties of every day and hour with exactness. "At least they shall not say that I was lacking," he murmured to himself as he thought vaguely of the future beyond these graves. Who "they" were, it would have troubled him to formulate, since he was one of the many sons whom New England in this generation sends forth with a belief composed entirely of negatives. As the season advanced, he worked all day in the sunshine. "My garden looks well," he said. "I like this cemetery because it is the original

8. In Exodus 2, Moses declares, "I have been a stranger in a strange land."

9. Warship.

resting-place of the dead who lie beneath. They were not brought here from distant places, gathered up by contract, numbered and described like so much merchandise; their first repose has not been broken, their peace has been undisturbed. Hasty burials the prison authorities gave them; the thin, starved bodies were tumbled into the trenches by men almost as starved, for the whole State went hungry in those dark days. There were not many prayers, no tears, as the dead-carts went the rounds. But the prayers had been said, and the tears had fallen, while the poor fellows were still alive in the pens yonder; and when at last death came, it was like a release. They suffered long; and I for one believe that therefore shall their rest be long,—long and sweet.”

After a time began the rain, the soft, persistent, gray rain of the Southern lowlands, and he stayed within and copied another thousand names into the ledger. He would not allow himself the companionship of a dog lest the creature should bark at night and disturb the quiet. There was no one to hear save himself, and it would have been a friendly sound as he lay awake on his narrow iron bed, but it seemed to him against the spirit of the place. He would not smoke, although he had the soldier’s fondness for a pipe. Many a dreary evening, beneath a hastily built shelter of boughs, when the rain poured down and everything was comfortless, he had found solace in the curling smoke; but now it seemed to him that it would be incongruous, and at times he almost felt as if it would be selfish too. “They cannot smoke, you know, down there under the wet grass,” he thought, as standing at the window he looked towards the ranks of the mounds stretching across the eastern end from side to side; “my parade-ground,” he called it. And then he would smile at his own fancies, draw the curtain to, shut out the rain and the night, light his lamp, and go to work on the ledgers again. Some of the names lingered in his memory; he felt as if he had known the men who bore them, as if they had been boys together and were friends even now although separated for a time. “James Marvin, Company B, Fifth Maine. The Fifth Maine was in the seven days’ battle.¹ I say, do you remember that retreat down the Quaker church road, and the way Phil Kearney² held the rearguard firm?” And over the whole seven days he wandered with his mute friend, who remembered everything and everybody in the most satisfactory way. One of the little head-boards in the parade-ground attracted him peculiarly because the name inscribed was his own: “——Rodman, Company A, One Hundred and Sixth New York.”

“I remember that regiment; it came from the extreme northern part of the State; Blank Rodman must have melted down here, coming as he did from the half-arctic region along the St. Lawrence. I wonder what he thought of the first hot day, say in South Carolina, along those simmering rice-fields.” He grew into the habit of pausing for a moment by the side of this grave every morning and evening. “Blank Rodman. It might easily have been John. And then, where should I be?”

But Blank Rodman remained silent, and the keeper, after pulling up a weed or two and trimming the grass over his relative, went off to his duties

1. The Seven Days Battle—or Seven Days Campaign—was a series of six battles fought over the week of June 25 to July 1, 1862, east of

Richmond, Virginia.

2. Union general (1815–1862) who died at the Battle of Chantilly.

again. "I am convinced that Blank is a relative," he said to himself; "distant, perhaps, but still a kinsman."

One April day the heat was almost insupportable; but the sun's rays were not those brazen beams that sometimes in Northern cities burn the air and scorch the pavements to a white heat; rather were they soft and still; the moist earth exhaled her richness, not a leaf stirred, and the whole level country seemed sitting in a hot vapor-bath. In the early dawn the keeper had performed his outdoor tasks, but all day he remained almost without stirring in his chair between two windows, striving to exist. At high noon out came a little black bringing his supplies from the town, whistling and shuffling along, gay as a lark; the keeper watched him coming slowly down the white road, loitering by the way in the hot blaze, stopping to turn a somersault or two, to dangle over a bridge rail, to execute various impromptu capers all by himself. He reached the gate at last entered, and having come all the way up the path in a hornpipe step, he set down his basket at the door to indulge in one long and final double-shuffle before knocking. "Stop that!" said the keeper through the closed blinds. The little darkey darted back; but as nothing further came out of the window,—a boot, for instance, or some other stray missile,—he took courage, showed his ivories, and drew near again. "Do you suppose I am going to have you stirring up the heat in that way?" demanded the keeper.

The little black grinned, but made no reply, unless smoothing the hot white sand with his black toes could be construed as such; he now removed his rimless hat and made a bow.

"Is it, or is it not warm?" asked the keeper, as a naturalist might inquire of a salamander, not referring to his own so much as to the salamander's ideas on the subject.

"Dunno, mars',"³ replied the little black.

"How do *you* feel?"

" 'Spects I feel all right, mars'."

The keeper gave up the investigation, and presented to the salamander a nickel cent. "I suppose there is no such thing as a cool spring in all this melting country," he said.

But the salamander indicated with his thumb a clump of trees on the green plain north of the cemetery. "Ole Mars' Ward's place,—cole spring dah." He then departed, breaking into a run after he had passed the gate, his ample mouth watering at the thought of a certain chunk of taffy at the mercantile establishment kept by aunt Dinah in a corner of her one-roomed cabin. At sunset the keeper went thirstily out with a tin pail on his arm, in search of the cold spring. "If it could only be like the spring down under the rocks where I used to drink when I was a boy!" he thought. He had never walked in that direction before. Indeed, now that he had abandoned the town, he seldom went beyond the walls of the cemetery. An old road led across to the clump of trees, through fields run to waste, and following it he came to the place, a deserted house with tumble-down fences and over-grown garden, the out-buildings indicating that once upon a time there were many servants and a prosperous master. The house was of wood, large on the ground, with encircling piazzas; across the front door rough bars had been nailed, and the closed blinds were protected in the same manner; from long

3. That is, "master," used as a term of respect.

want of paint the clapboards were gray and mossy, and the floor of the piazza had fallen in here and there from decay. The keeper decided that his cemetery was a much more cheerful place than this, and then he looked around for the spring. Behind the house the ground sloped down; it must be there. He went around and came suddenly upon a man lying on an old rug outside of a back door. "Excuse me. I thought nobody lived here," he said.

"Nobody does," replied the man; "I am not much of a body, am I?"

His left arm was gone, and his face was thin and worn with long illness; he closed his eyes after speaking, as though the few words had exhausted him.

"I came for water from a cold spring you have here, somewhere," pursued the keeper, contemplating the wreck before him with the interest of one who has himself been severely wounded and knows the long, weary pain. The man waved his hand towards the slope without unclosing his eyes, and Rodman went off with his pail and found a little shady hollow, once curbed and paved with white pebbles, but now neglected, like all the place. The water was cold, however, deliciously cold; he filled his pail and thought that perhaps after all he would exert himself to make coffee, now that the sun was down; it would taste better made of this cold water. When he came up the slope the man's eyes were open.

"Have some water?" asked Rodman.

"Yes; there's a gourd inside."

The keeper entered, and found himself in a large, bare room; in one corner was some straw covered with an old counterpane, in another a table and chair; a kettle hung in the deep fireplace, and a few dishes stood on a shelf; by the door on a nail hung a gourd; he filled it and gave it to the host of this desolate abode. The man drank with eagerness. "Pomp⁴ has gone to town," he said, "and I could not get down to the spring to-day, I have had so much pain."

"And when will Pomp return?"

"He should be here now; he is very late to-night."

"Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you; he will soon be here."

The keeper looked out over the waste; there was no one in sight. He was not a man of any especial kindness,—he had himself been too hardly treated in life for that,—but he could not find it in his heart to leave this helpless creature all alone with night so near. So he sat down on the doorstep. "I will rest awhile," he said, not asking but announcing it. The man had turned away and closed his eyes again, and they both remained silent, busy with their own thoughts; for each had recognized the ex-soldier, Northern and Southern, in portions of the old uniforms, and in the accent. The war and its memories were still very near to the maimed, poverty-stricken Confederate; and the other knew that they were, and did not obtrude himself.

Twilight fell, and no one came.

"Let me get you something," said Rodman; for the face looked ghastly as the fever abated. The other refused. Darkness came; still, no one.

"Look here," said Rodman, rising; "I have been wounded myself, was in hospital for months; I know how you feel,—you must have food; a cup of tea, now, and a slice of toast, brown and thin."

4. Short for Pompey, a common slave name. Like many slave names, Pompey contained a classical reference, in this case to the Roman statesman Pompey the Great (106–48 B.C.E.).

"I have not tasted tea or wheaten bread for weeks," answered the man; his voice died off into a wail, as though feebleness and pain had drawn the cry from him in spite of himself. Rodman lighted a match; there was no candle, only a piece of pitch-pine stuck in an iron socket on the wall; he set fire to this primitive torch and looked around.

"There is nothing there," said the man outside, making an effort to speak carelessly; "my servant went to town for supplies. Do not trouble yourself to wait; he will come presently, and—and—I want nothing."

But Rodman saw through proud poverty's lie; he knew that irregular quavering of the voice, and that trembling of the hand; the poor fellow had but one to tremble. He continued his search; but the bare room gave back nothing, not a crumb.

"Well, if you are not hungry," he said briskly, "I am, hungry as a bear; and I'll tell you what I am going to do. I live not far from here, and I live all alone too, I haven't a servant as you have; let me take supper here with you, just for a change, and if your servant comes, so much the better, he can wait upon us. I'll run over and bring back the things."

He was gone without waiting for reply; the shattered ankle made good time over the waste, and soon returned, limping a little but bravely hastening, while on a tray came the keeper's best supplies, Irish potatoes, corned beef, wheaten bread, butter, and coffee,—for he would not eat the hot biscuits, the corn-cake, the bacon and hominy of the country, and constantly made little New England meals for himself in his prejudiced little kitchen. The pine torch flared in the door-way; a breeze had come down from the far mountains and cooled the air. Rodman kindled a fire on the cavernous hearth, filled the kettle, found a saucepan, and commenced operations, while the other lay outside and watched every movement in the lighted room.

"All ready; let me help you in. Here we are now; fried potatoes, cold beef, mustard, toast, butter, and tea. Eat, man; and the next time I am laid up, you shall come over and cook for me."

Hunger conquered, and the other ate, ate as he had not eaten for months. As he was finishing a second cup of tea, a slow step came around the house; it was the missing Pomp, an old negro, bent and shriveled, who carried a bag of meal and some bacon in his basket. "That is what they live on," thought the keeper.

He took leave without more words. "I suppose now I can be allowed to go home in peace," he grumbled to conscience. The negro followed him across what was once the lawn. "Fin' Mars' Ward mighty low," he said apologetically, as he swung open the gate which still hung between its posts, although the fence was down, "but I hurried an' hurried as fas' as I could; it's mighty fur to de town. Proud to see you, sah; hope you'll come again. Fine fambly, de Wards, sah, befo' de war."

"How long has he been in this state?" asked the keeper.

"Ever sence one ob de las' battles, sah; but he's worse sence we come yer, 'bout a mont' back."

"Who owns the house? Is there no one to see to him? has he no friends?"

"House b'long to Mars' Ward's uncle; fine place once, befo' de war; he's dead now, and dah's nobuddy but Miss Bettina, an' she's gone off somewhuz. Propah place, sah, fur Mars' Ward,—own uncle's house," said the old slave, loyally striving to maintain the family dignity even then.

"Are there no better rooms,—no furniture?"

"Sartin; but—but Miss Bettina, she took de keys; she didn't know we was comin'"—

"You had better send for Miss Bettina, I think," said the keeper, starting homeward with his tray, washing his hands, as it were, of any future responsibility in the affair.

The next day he worked in his garden, for clouds veiled the sun and exercise was possible; but, nevertheless, he could not forget the white face on the old rug. "Pshaw!" he said to himself, "haven't I seen tumble-down old houses and battered human beings before this?"

At evening came a violent thunderstorm, and the splendor of the heavens was terrible. "We have chained you, mighty spirit," thought the keeper as he watched the lightning, "and some time we shall learn the laws of the winds and foretell the storms; then, prayers will no more be offered in churches to alter the weather than they would be offered now to alter an eclipse. Yet back of the lightning and the wind lies the power of the great Creator, just the same."

But still, into his musings crept, with shadowy persistence, the white face on the rug.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, "if white faces are going around as ghosts, how about the fourteen thousand white faces that went under the sod down yonder? If they could arise and walk, the whole State would be filled and no more carpet-baggers⁵ needed." So, having balanced the one with the fourteen thousand, he went to bed.

Daylight brought rain,—still, soft, gray rain; the next morning showed the same, and the third likewise, the nights keeping up their part with low-down clouds and steady pattering on the roof. "If there was a river here, we should have a flood," thought the keeper, drumming idly on his window-pane. Memory brought back the steep New England hill-sides shedding their rain into the brooks, which grew in a night to torrents and filled the rivers so that they overflowed their banks; then, suddenly, an old house in a sunken corner of a waste rose before his eyes, and he seemed to see the rain dropping from a moldy ceiling on the straw where a white face lay.

"Really, I have nothing else to do, you know," he remarked in an apologetic way to himself, as he and his umbrella went along the old road; and he repeated the remark as he entered the room where the man lay, just as he had fancied, on the damp straw.

"The weather *is* unpleasant," said the man. "Pomp, bring a chair."

Pomp brought one, the only one, and the visitor sat down. A fire smoldered on the hearth and puffed out acrid smoke now and then, as if the rain had clogged the soot in the long-neglected chimney; from the streaked ceiling oozing drops fell with a dull splash into little pools on the decayed floor; the door would not close; the broken panes were stopped with rags, as if the old servant had tried to keep out the damp; in the ashes a corn-cake was baking.

"I am afraid you have not been so well during these long rainy days," said the keeper, scanning the face on the straw.

5. A derogatory term for Northerners who sought their fortunes in the South after the Civil War.

"My old enemy, rheumatism," answered the man; "the first sunshine will drive it away."

They talked awhile, or rather the keeper talked, for the other seemed hardly able to speak, as the waves of pain swept over him; then the visitor went outside and called Pomp out. "Is there any one to help him, or not?" he asked impatiently.

"Fine fambly, befo' de war," began Pomp.

"Never mind all that; is there anyone to help him now,—yes or no?"

"No," said the old black with a burst of despairing truthfulness; "Miss Bettina, she's as poor as Mars' Ward, an' dere's no one else. He's had noth'n but hard corn-cake for three days, an' he can't swaller it no more."

The next morning saw Ward De Rosset lying on the white pallet in the keeper's cottage, and old Pomp, marveling at the cleanliness all around him, installed as nurse. A strange asylum for a Confederate soldier, was it not? But he knew nothing of the change, which he would have fought with his last breath if consciousness had remained; returning fever, however, had absorbed his senses, and then it was that the keeper and the slave had borne him slowly across the waste, resting many times, but accomplishing the journey at last.

That evening John Rodman, strolling to and fro in the dusky twilight, paused alongside of the other Rodman. "I do not want him here, and that is the plain truth," he said, pursuing the current of his thoughts. "He fills the house; he and Pomp together disturb all my ways. He'll be ready to fling a brick at me too, when his senses come back; small thanks shall I have for lying on the floor, giving up all my comforts, and, what is more, riding over the spirit of the place with a vengeance!" He threw himself down on the grass beside the mound and lay looking up towards the stars, which were coming out, one by one, in the deep blue of the Southern night. "With a vengeance, did I say? That is it exactly,—the vengeance of kindness. The poor fellow has suffered horribly in body and in estate, and now ironical Fortune throws him in my way as if saying, 'Let us see how far your selfishness will yield.' This is not a question of magnanimity; there is no magnanimity about it, for the war is over, and you Northerners have gained every point for which you fought; this is merely a question between man and man; it would be the same if the sufferer was a poor Federal,⁶ one of the carpet-baggers, whom you despise so, for instance, or a pagan Chinaman. And Fortune is right; don't you think so, Blank Rodman? I put it to you, now, to one who has suffered the extreme rigor of the other side,—those prison-pens yonder."

Whereupon Blank Rodman answered that he had fought for a great cause and that he knew it, although a plain man and not given to speech-making; he was not one of those who had sat safely at home all through the war, and now belittled it and made light of its issues. (Here a murmur came up from the long line of the trenches, as though all the dead had cried out.) But now the points for which he had fought being gained, and strife ended, it was the plain duty of every man to encourage peace. For his part he bore no malice; he was glad the poor Confederate was up in the cottage, and he did not think any the less of the keeper for bringing him there. He would like to add

6. That is, a Union soldier.

that he thought more of him; but he was sorry to say that he was well aware what an effort it was, and how almost grudgingly the charity began.

If Blank Rodman did not say this, at least the keeper imagined that he did. "That is what he would have said," he thought. "I am glad you do not object," he added, pretending to himself that he had not noticed the rest of the remark.

"We do not object to the brave soldier who honestly fought for his cause, even though he fought on the other side," answered Blank Rodman for the whole fourteen thousand. "But never let a coward, a double-face, or a flippant-tongued idler walk over our heads. It would make us rise in our graves!"

And the keeper seemed to see a shadowy pageant sweep by,—gaunt soldiers with white faces, arming anew against the subtle product of peace: men who said, "It was nothing! Behold, we saw it with our eyes!"—stay-at-home eyes.

The third day the fever abated, and Ward De Rosset noticed his surroundings. Old Pomp acknowledged that he had been moved, but veiled the locality: "To a friend's house, Mars' Ward."

"But I have no friends, now, Pomp," said the weak voice.

Pomp was very much amused at the absurdity of this. "No friend! Mars' Ward no friend!" He was obliged to go out of the room to hide his laughter. The sick man lay feebly thinking that the bed was cool and fresh, and the closed green blinds pleasant; his thin fingers stroked the linen sheet, and his eyes wandered from object to object. The only thing that broke the rule of bare utility in the simple room was a square of white drawing-paper on the wall, upon which was inscribed in ornamental text the following verse:—

"Toujours femme varie,
Bien fou qui s'y fie;
Une femme souvent
N'est qu'une plume au vent."⁷

With the persistency of illness the eyes and mind of Ward De Rosset went over and over this distich;⁸ he knew something of French, but was unequal to the effort of translating; the rhymes alone caught his vagrant fancy. "Toujours femme varie," he said to himself over and over again, and when the keeper entered, he said it to him.

"Certainly," answered the keeper; "bien fou qui s'y fie. How do you find yourself, this morning?"

"I have not found myself at all, so far. Is this your house?"

"Yes."

"Pomp told me I was in a friend's house," observed the sick man, vaguely.

"Well, it isn't an enemy's. Had any breakfast? No? Better not talk, then."

He went to the detached shed which served for a kitchen, upset all Pomp's clumsy arrangements, and ordered him outside; then he set to work and prepared a delicate breakfast with his best skill. The sick man eagerly eyed the tray as he entered. "Better have your hands and face sponged off, I think," said Rodman; and then he propped him up skillfully, and left him to his repast. The grass needed mowing on the parade-ground; he shouldered his

7. "Woman often varies / The fool is he who trusts her; / A woman is often / A feather in the wind" (French). These lines are sung by the French monarch King Francis I in Victor Hugo's

play *The King Amuses Himself* (1832). The first couplet, in particular, is frequently attributed to Francis I (1494–1547).

8. Couplet.

scythe and started down the path, viciously kicking the gravel to and fro as he walked. "Wasn't solitude your principal idea, John Rodman, when you applied for this place?" he demanded of himself; "how much of it are you likely to have with sick men, and sick men's servants, and so forth?"

The "and so forth," thrown in as a rhetorical climax, turned into reality and arrived bodily upon the scene,—a climax indeed; one afternoon, returning late to the cottage, he found a girl sitting by the pallet,—a girl young and dimpled and dewy, one of the creamy roses of the South that, even in the bud, are richer in color and luxuriance than any Northern flower. He saw her through the door, and paused; distressed old Pomp met him and beckoned him cautiously outside. "Miss Bettina," he whispered gutturally, "she's come back from somewhuz, an' she's awful mad 'cause Mars' Ward's here. I tole her all 'bout 'em,—de leaks an' de rheumatiz an' de hard corn-cake, but she done gone scole me; an' Mars' Ward, he know now whar he is, an' he mad too."

"Is the girl a fool?" said Rodman. He was just beginning to rally a little. He stalked into the room and confronted her. "I have the honor of addressing"—
"Miss Ward."

"And I am John Rodman, keeper of the national cemetery."

This she ignored entirely; it was as though he had said, "I am John Jones, the coachman." Coachmen were useful in their way; but their names were unimportant.

The keeper sat down and looked at his new visitor. The little creature fairly radiated scorn; her pretty head was thrown back, her eyes, dark brown fringed with long dark lashes, hardly deigned a glance; she spoke to him as though he was something to be paid and dismissed like any other mechanic.

"We are indebted to you for some days' board, I believe, keeper, medicines, I presume, and general attendance; my cousin will be removed to-day to our own residence; I wish to pay now what he owes."

The keeper saw that her dress was old and faded; the small black shawl had evidently been washed and many times mended; the old-fashioned knitted purse she held in her hand was lank with long famine.

"Very well," he said, "if you choose to treat a kindness in that way, I consider five dollars a day none too much for the annoyance, expense, and trouble I have suffered. Let me see; five days,—or is it six? Yes—thirty dollars, Miss Ward."

He looked at her steadily; she flushed; "The money will be sent to you," she began haughtily; then, hesitatingly, "I must ask a little time"—

"Oh, Betty, Betty, you know you cannot pay it. Why try to disguise—But that does not excuse *you* for bringing me here," said the sick man, turning towards his host with an attempt to speak fiercely, which ended in a faltering quaver.

All this time the old slave stood anxiously outside of the door; in the pauses they could hear his feet shuffling as he waited for the decision of his superiors. The keeper rose and threw open the blinds of the window that looked out on the distant parade-ground. "Bringing you here," he repeated; "*here*; that is my offense, is it? There they lie, fourteen thousand brave men and true. Could they come back to earth, they would be the first to pity and aid you, now that you are down. So would it be with you if the case were reversed; for a soldier is generous to a soldier. It was not your own heart that spoke

then; it was the small venom of a woman, that here, as everywhere through the South, is playing its rancorous part.”

The sick man gazed out through the window, seeing for the first time the far-spreading ranks of the dead. He was very weak, and the keeper’s words had touched him; his eyes were suffused with tears. But Miss Ward rose with a flashing glance. She turned her back full upon the keeper and ignored his very existence. “I will take you home immediately, Ward,—this very evening,” she said.

“A nice comfortable place for a sick man,” commented the keeper, scornfully. “I am going out now, De Rosset, to prepare your supper; you had better have one good meal before you go.”

He disappeared; but as he went he heard the sick man say, deprecatingly, “It isn’t very comfortable over at the old house now, indeed it isn’t, Betty; I suffered”—and the girl’s passionate outburst in reply. Then he closed his door and set to work.

When he returned, half an hour later, Ward was lying back exhausted on the pillows, and his cousin sat leaning her head upon her hand; she had been weeping, and she looked very desolate, he noticed, sitting there in what was to her an enemy’s country. Hunger is a strong master, however, especially when allied to weakness; and the sick man ate with eagerness.

“I must go back,” said the girl, rising. “A wagon will be sent out for you, Ward; Pomp will help you.”

But Ward had gained a little strength as well as obstinacy with the nourishing food. “Not to-night,” he said.

“Yes; to-night.”

“But I cannot go to-night; you are unreasonable, Bettina. To-morrow will do as well, if go I must.”

“If go you must! You do not want to go, then—to go to our own home—and with me”—Her voice broke; she turned towards the door.

The keeper stepped forward: “This is all nonsense, Miss Ward,” he said, “and you know it. Your cousin is in no state to be moved. Wait a week or two, and he can go in safety. But do not dare to offer me your money again; my kindness was to the soldier, not to the man, and as such he can accept it. Come out and see him as often as you please. I shall not intrude upon you. Pomp, take the lady home.”

And the lady went.

Then began a remarkable existence for the four: a Confederate soldier lying ill in the keeper’s cottage of a national cemetery, a rampant little rebel coming out daily to a place which was to her anathema-maranatha,⁹ a cynical, misanthropic keeper sleeping on the floor and enduring every variety of discomfort for a man he never saw before,—a man belonging to an idle, arrogant class he detested,—and an old black freedman allowing himself to be taught the alphabet in order to gain permission to wait on his master,—master no longer in law,—with all the devotion of his loving old heart. For the keeper had announced to Pomp that he must learn his alphabet or go; after all these years of theory, he, as a New Englander, could not stand by

9. Accursed; “anathema-maranatha” was used as an intensified form of the word “anathema,” as both words appear together in the text of 1 Corinthians.

and see precious knowledge shut from the black man. So he opened it; and mighty dull work he found it.

Ward De Rosset did not rally as rapidly as they expected. The white-haired doctor from the town rode out on horseback, pacing slowly up the graveled roadway with a scowl on his brow, casting, as he dismounted, a furtive glance down towards the parade-ground. His horse and his coat were alike old and worn, and his broad shoulders were bent with long service in the miserably provided Confederate hospitals, where he had striven to do his duty through every day and every night of those shadowed years. Cursing the incompetency in high places, cursing the mismanagement of the entire medical department of the Confederate army, cursing the recklessness and indifference which left the men suffering for want of proper hospitals and hospital stores, he yet went on resolutely doing his best with the poor means in his control until the last. Then he came home, he and his old horse, and went the rounds again, he prescribing for whooping-cough or measles, and *Dobbin*¹ waiting outside; the only difference was that fees were small and good meals scarce for both, not only for the man but for the beast. The doctor sat down and chatted awhile kindly with De Rosset, whose father and uncle had been dear friends of his in the bright, prosperous days; then he left a few harmless medicines and rose to go, his gaze resting a moment on Miss Ward, then on Pomp, as if he were hesitating. But he said nothing until on the walk outside he met the keeper, and recognized a person to whom he could tell the truth. "There is nothing to be done; he may recover, he may not; it is a question of strength, merely. He needs no medicines, only nourishing food, rest, and careful tendance."

"He shall have them," answered the keeper, briefly. And then the old gentleman mounted his horse and rode away, his first and last visit to a national cemetery.

"National!" he said to himself,—*"national!"*

All talk of moving De Rosset ceased, but Miss Ward moved into the old house. There was not much to move: herself, her one trunk, and Mari, a black attendant, whose name probably began life as Maria, since the accent still dwelt on the curtailed last syllable. The keeper went there once, and once only, and then it was an errand for the sick man, whose fancies came sometimes at inconvenient hours,—when Pomp had gone to town, for instance. On this occasion the keeper entered the mockery of a gate and knocked at the front door, from which the bars had been removed; the piazza still showed its decaying planks, but quick-growing summer vines had been planted, and were now encircling the old pillars and veiling all defects with their greenery. It was a woman's pathetic effort to cover up what cannot be covered—poverty. The blinds on one side were open and white curtains waved to and fro in the breeze; into this room he was ushered by Mari. Matting lay on the floor, streaked here and there ominously by the dampness from the near ground. The furniture was of dark mahogany, handsome in its day: chairs, a heavy pier table with low-down glass, into which no one by any possibility could look unless he had eyes in his ankles, a sofa with a stiff round pillow of hair-cloth under each curved end, and a mirror with a compartment framed off at the top, containing a picture of shepherds and shep-

1. Common name for a horse.

herdresses, and lambs with blue ribbons around their necks, all enjoying themselves in the most natural and life-like manner. Flowers stood on the high mantelpiece, but their fragrance could not overcome the faint odor of the damp straw-matting. On a table were books, a life of General Lee,² and three or four shabby little volumes printed at the South during the war, waifs of prose and poetry of that highly wrought, richly colored style which seems indigenous to Southern soil.

"Some way, the whole thing reminds me of a funeral," thought the keeper.

Miss Ward entered, and the room bloomed at once; at least, that is what a lover would have said. Rodman, however, merely noticed that she bloomed, and not the room, and he said to himself that she would not bloom long, if she continued to live in such a moldy place. Their conversation in these days was excessively polite, shortened to the extreme minimum possible, and conducted without the aid of the eyes, at least on one side. Rodman had discovered that Miss Ward never looked at him, and so he did not look at her, that is, not often; he was human, however, and she was delightfully pretty. On this occasion they exchanged exactly five sentences, and then he departed, but not before his quick eyes had discovered that the rest of the house was in even worse condition than this parlor, which, by the way, Miss Ward considered quite a grand apartment; she had been down near the coast, trying to teach school, and there the desolation was far greater than here, both armies having passed back and forward over the ground, foragers out, and the torch at work more than once.

"Will there ever come a change for the better?" thought the keeper, as he walked homeward. "What an enormous stone has got to be rolled up hill! But at least, John Rodman, *you* need not go to work at it; *you* are not called upon to lend your shoulder."

None the less, however, did he call out Pomp that very afternoon and sternly teach him "E" and "F," using the smooth white sand for a blackboard, and a stick for chalk. Pomp's primer was a government placard hanging on the wall of the office. It read as follows:—

IN THIS CEMETERY EXPOSE THE REMAINS
OF
FOURTEEN THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED AND
TWENTY-ONE
UNITED STATES SOLDIERS.

"Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream;
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem

"Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not written of the soul!"³

2. Robert E. Lee (1807–1870), chief commander of Confederate forces during the Civil War.

3. The opening lines of "A Psalm of Life" by

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882). In the original, the final line of the quotation reads, "Was not spoken of the soul."

“The only known instance of the government’s condescending to poetry,” the keeper had thought, when he first read this placard. It was placed there for the instruction and edification of visitors, but no visitors coming, he took the liberty of using it as a primer for Pomp. The large letters served the purpose admirably, and Pomp learned the entire quotation; what he thought of it has not transpired. Miss Ward came over daily to see her cousin. At first she brought him soups and various concoctions from her own kitchen,—the leaky cavern, once the dining room, where the soldier had taken refuge after his last dismissal from hospital; but the keeper’s soups were richer, and free from the taint of smoke; his martial laws of neatness even disorderly old Pomp dared not disobey, and the sick man soon learned the difference. He thanked the girl, who came bringing the dishes over carefully in her own dimpled hands, and then, when she was gone, he sent them untasted away. By chance Miss Ward learned this, and wept bitter tears over it; she continued to come, but her poor little soups and jellies she brought no more.

One morning in May the keeper was working near the flag-staff, when his eyes fell upon a procession coming down the road which led from the town and turning towards the cemetery; no one ever came that way, what could it mean? It drew near, entered the gate, and showed itself to be negroes walking two and two, old uncles and aunties, young men and girls, and even little children, all dressed in their best; a very poor best, sometimes gravely ludicrous imitations of “ole mars,” or “ole miss,” sometimes mere rags bravely patched together and adorned with a strip of black calico or rosette of black ribbon; not one was without a badge of mourning. All carried flowers, common blossoms from the little gardens behind the cabins that stretched around the town on the outskirts,—the new forlorn cabins with their chimneys of piled stones and ragged patches of corn; each little darkey had his bouquet and marched solemnly along, rolling his eyes around, but without even the beginning of a smile, while the elders moved forward with gravity, the bubbling, irrepressible gayety of the negro subdued by the newborn dignity of the freedman.

“Memorial Day,”⁴ thought the keeper; “I had forgotten it.”

“Will you do us de hono’, sah, to take de head ob de processio’, sah?” said the leader, with a ceremonious bow. Now the keeper had not much sympathy with the strewing of flowers, North or South; he had seen the beautiful ceremony more than once turned into a political demonstration; here, however, in this small, isolated, interior town, there was nothing of that kind; the whole population of white faces laid their roses and wept true tears on the graves of their lost ones in the village churchyard when the Southern Memorial Day came round, and just as naturally the whole population of black faces went out to the national cemetery with their flowers on the day when, throughout the North, spring blossoms were laid on the graves of the soldiers, from the little Maine village to the stretching ranks of Arlington, from Greenwood⁵ to the far western burial-places of San Francisco. The

4. Originally called “Decoration Day,” Memorial Day was established after the Civil War as an occasion to decorate the graves of the Union soldiers who had died in the conflict. By the end of the 1860s, the practice was observed at hundreds of cemeteries. As the story suggests, some cities

and states in the former Confederacy observed their own Memorial Day on a different date.

5. Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. “Arlington”: Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C., that is the site of the principal U.S. military cemetery.

keeper joined the procession and led the way to the parade-ground. As they approached the trenches, the leader began singing and all joined. "Swing low, sweet chariot," sang the freedmen, and their hymn rose and fell with strange, sweet harmony,—one of those wild, unwritten melodies which the North heard with surprise and marveling when, after the war, bands of singers came to their cities and sang the songs of slavery, in order to gain for their children the coveted education. "Swing low, sweet chariot," sang the freedmen, and two by two they passed along, strewing the graves with flowers till all the green was dotted with color. It was a pathetic sight to see some of the old men and women, ignorant field-hands, bent, dull-eyed, and past the possibility of education even in its simplest forms, carefully placing their poor flowers to the best advantage. They knew dimly that the men who lay beneath those mounds had done something wonderful for them and for their children, and so they came bringing their blossoms, with little intelligence but with much love.

The ceremony over, they retired; as he turned, the keeper caught a glimpse of Miss Ward's face at the window.

"Hope we 's not makin' too free, sah," said the leader, as the procession, with many a bow and scrape, took leave, "but we 's kep' de day now two years, sah, befo' you came, sah, an' we 's teachin' de chil'en to keep it, sah."

The keeper returned to the cottage. "Not a white face," he said.

"Certainly not," replied Miss Ward, crisply.

"I know some graves at the North, Miss Ward, graves of Southern soldiers, and I know some Northern women who do not scorn to lay a few flowers on the lonely mounds as they pass by with their blossoms on our Memorial Day."

"You are fortunate. They must be angels. We have no angels here."

"I am inclined to believe you are right," said the keeper.

That night old Pomp, who had remained invisible in the kitchen during the ceremony, stole away in the twilight and came back with a few flowers; Rodman saw him going down towards the parade-ground, and watched. The old man had but a few blossoms; he arranged them hastily on the mounds with many a furtive glance towards the house, and then stole back, satisfied; he had performed his part.

Ward De Rosset lay on his pallet, apparently unchanged; he seemed neither stronger nor weaker. He had grown childishly dependent upon his host, and wearied for him, as the Scotch say; but Rodman withstood his fancies, and gave him only the evenings, when Miss Bettina was not there. One afternoon, however, it rained so violently that he was forced to seek shelter; he set himself to work on the ledgers; he was on the ninth thousand now. But the sick man heard his step in the outer room, and called in his weak voice, "Rodman,—Rodman." After a time he went in, and it ended in his staying, for the patient was nervous and irritable, and he pitied the nurse, who seemed able to please him in nothing. De Rosset turned with a sigh of relief towards the strong hands that lifted him readily, towards the composed manner, towards the man's voice that seemed to bring a breeze from outside into the close room; animated, cheered, he talked volubly. The keeper listened, answered once in a while, and quietly took the rest of the afternoon into his own hands. Miss Ward yielded to the silent change, leaned back, and closed her eyes. She looked exhausted and for the first time pallid; the loosened dark hair curled in little rings about her temples, and her lips

were parted as though she was too tired to close them; for hers were not the thin, straight lips that shut tight naturally, like the straight line of a closed box. The sick man talked on. "Come, Rodman," he said, after a while, "I have read that lying verse of yours over at least ten thousand and fifty-nine times; please tell me its history; I want to have something definite to think of when I read it for the ten thousand and sixtieth."

"Toujours femme varie,
 Bien fou qui s'y fie;
 Une femme souvent
 N'est qu'une plume au vent,"

read the keeper slowly, with his execrable English accent. "Well, I don't know that I have any objection to telling the story. I am not sure but that it will do me good to hear it all over myself in plain language again."

"Then it concerns yourself," said De Rosset; "so much the better. I hope it will be, as the children say, the truth, and long."

"It will be the truth, but not long. When the war broke out I was twenty-eight years old, living with my mother on our farm in New England. My father and two brothers had died and left me the homestead, otherwise I should have broken away and sought fortune farther westward, where the lands are better and life is more free. But mother loved the house, the fields, and every crooked tree. She was alone, and so I stayed with her. In the centre of the village green stood the square, white meeting-house, and near by the small cottage where the pastor lived; the minister's daughter, Mary, was my promised wife. Mary was a slender little creature with a profusion of pale flaxen hair, large, serious blue eyes, and small, delicate features; she was timid almost to a fault; her voice was low and gentle. She was not eighteen, and we were to wait a year. The war came, and I volunteered, of course, and marched away; we wrote to each other often; my letters were full of the camp and skirmishes; hers told of the village, how the widow Brown had fallen ill, and how it was feared that Squire Stafford's boys were lapsing into evil ways. Then came the day when my regiment marched to the field of its slaughter, and soon after our shattered remnant went home. Mary cried over me, and came out every day to the farmhouse with her bunches of violets; she read aloud to me from her good little books, and I used to lie and watch her profile bending over the page, with the light falling on her flaxen hair low down against the small, white throat. Then my wound healed, and I went again, this time for three years; and Mary's father blessed me, and said that when peace came he would call me son, but not before, for these were no times for marrying or giving in marriage. He was a good man, a red-hot abolitionist, and a roaring lion as regards temperance; but nature had made him so small in body that no one was much frightened when he roared. I said that I went for three years; but eight years have passed and I have never been back to the village. First, mother died. Then Mary turned false. I sold the farm by letter and lost the money three months afterwards in an unfortunate investment; my health failed. Like many another Northern soldier I remembered the healing climate of the South; its soft airs came back to me when the snow lay deep on the fields and the sharp wind whistled around the poor tavern where the moneyless, half-crippled volunteer sat coughing by the fire. I applied for this place and obtained it. That is all."

"But it is not all," said the sick man, raising himself on his elbow; "you have not told half yet, nor anything at all about the French verse."

"Oh—that? There was a little Frenchman staying at the hotel; he had formerly been a dancing-master, and was full of dry, withered conceits, although he looked like a thin and bilious old ape dressed as a man. He taught me, or tried to teach me, various wise sayings, among them this one, which pleased my fancy so much that I gave him twenty-five cents to write it out in large text for me."

"*Toujours femme varie,*" repeated De Rosset; "but you don't really think so, do you, Rodman?"

"I do. But they cannot help it; it is their nature. I beg your pardon, Miss Ward. I was speaking as though you were not here."

Miss Ward's eyelids barely acknowledged his existence; that was all. But some time after she remarked to her cousin that it was only in New England that one found that pale flaxen hair.

June was waning, when suddenly the summons came; Ward De Rosset died. He was unconscious towards the last, and death, in the guise of sleep, bore away his soul. They carried him home to the old house, and from there the funeral started, a few family carriages, dingy and battered, following the hearse, for death revived the old neighborhood feeling; that honor at least they could pay,—the sonless mothers and the widows who lived shut up in the old houses with everything falling into ruin around them, brooding over the past. The keeper watched the small procession as it passed his gate on its way to the churchyard in the village. "There he goes, poor fellow, his sufferings over at last," he said; and then he set the cottage in order and began the old solitary life again.

He saw Miss Ward but once.

It was a breathless evening in August when the moonlight flooded the level country. He had started but to stroll across the waste, but the mood changed, and climbing over the eastern wall he had walked back to the flag-staff, and now lay at its foot gazing up into the infinite sky. A step sounded on the gravel walk; he turned his face that way and recognized Miss Ward. With confident step she passed the dark cottage, and brushed his arm with her robe as he lay unseen in the shadow. She went down towards the parade-ground, and his eyes followed her. Softly outlined in the moonlight she moved to and fro among the mounds, pausing often, and once he thought she knelt. Then slowly she returned, and he raised himself and waited; she saw him, started, then paused.

"I thought you were away," she said; "Pomp told me so."

"You set him to watch me?"

"Yes. I wished to come here once, and I did not wish to meet you."

"Why did you wish to come?"

"Because Ward was here—and because—because—never mind. It is enough that I wished to walk once among those mounds."

"And pray there?"

"Well,—and if I did!" said the girl, defiantly.

Rodman stood facing her, with his arms folded; his eyes rested on her face; he said nothing.

"I am going away to-morrow," began Miss Ward again, assuming with an effort her old, pulseless manner. "I have sold the place, and I shall never return, I think; I am going far away."

"Where?"

"To Tennessee."

"That is not so very far," said the keeper, smiling.

"There I shall begin a new existence," pursued the voice, ignoring the comment.

"You have scarcely begun the old; you are hardly more than a child, now. What are you going to do in Tennessee?"

"Teach."

"Have you relatives there?"

"No."

"A miserable life,—a hard, lonely, loveless life," said Rodman; "God help the woman who must be that dreary thing, a teacher from necessity."

Miss Ward turned swiftly, but the keeper kept by her side. He saw the tears glittering on her eyelashes, and his voice softened. "Do not leave me in anger," he said; "I should not have spoken so, although indeed it was the truth. Walk back with me to the cottage, and take your last look at the room where poor Ward died, and then I will go with you to your home."

"No; Pomp is waiting at the gate," said the girl, almost inarticulately.

"Very well; to the gate, then."

They went towards the cottage in silence; the keeper threw open the door. "Go in," he said. "I will wait outside."

The girl entered and went into the inner room; throwing herself down upon her knees at the bedside, "O Ward, Ward," she sobbed, "I am all alone in the world now, Ward, all alone!" She buried her face in her hands and gave way to a passion of tears; and the keeper could not help but hear as he waited outside. Then the desolate little creature rose and came forth, putting on, as she did so, her poor armor of pride. The keeper had not moved from the doorstep. Now, he turned his face. "Before you go,—go away forever from this place,—will you write your name in my register," he said, "the visitors' register? The government had it prepared for the throngs who would visit these graves; but with the exception of the blacks, who cannot write, no one has come, and the register is empty. Will you write your name? Yet do not write it unless you can think gently of the men who lie there under the grass; I believe you do think gently of them, else why have you come of your own accord to stand by the side of their graves?" As he said this, he looked fixedly at her.

Miss Ward did not answer; but neither did she write.

"Very well," said the keeper; "come away. You will not, I see."

"I cannot! Shall I, Bettina Ward, set my name down in black and white as a visitor to this cemetery, where lie fourteen thousand of the soldiers who killed my father, my three brothers, my cousins; who brought desolation upon all our house, and ruin upon all our neighborhood, all our State, and all our country?—for the South *is* our country, and not your icy North. Shall I forget these things? Never! Sooner let my right hand wither by my side! I was but a child; yet I remember the tears of my mother, and the grief of all around us. There was not a house where there was not one dead."

"It is true," answered the keeper; "at the South, all went."

"Grief covers our land."

"Yes; for a mighty wrong brings ever in its train a mighty sorrow."

Miss Ward turned upon him fiercely. "Do you, who have lived among us, dare to pretend that the state of our servants is not worse this moment than it ever was before?"

"Transition."

"A horrible transition!"

"Horrible, but inevitable; education will be the savior. Had I fifty millions to spend on the South to-morrow, every cent should go for schools, and for schools alone."

"For the negroes, I suppose," said the girl with a bitter scorn.

"For the negroes, and for the whites also," answered John Rodman gravely. "The lack of general education is painfully apparent everywhere throughout the South; it is from that cause more than any other that your beautiful country now lies desolate."

"Desolate,—desolate indeed," said Miss Ward.⁵

They walked down to the gate together in silence. "Good-by," said John, holding out his hand; "you will give me yours or not as you choose, but I will not have it as a favor."

She gave it.

"I hope that life will grow brighter to you as the years pass. May God bless you."

He dropped her hand; she turned, and passed through the gateway; then, he sprang after her. "Nothing can change you," he said; "I know it, I have known it all along; you are part of your country, part of the time, part of the bitter hour through which she is passing. Nothing can change you; if it could, you would not be what you are, and I should not— But you cannot change. Good-by, Bettina, poor little child; good-by. Follow your path out into the world. Yet do not think, dear, that I have not seen—have not understood."

He bent and kissed her hand; then he was gone, and she went on alone.

A week later the keeper strolled over towards the old house. It was twilight, but the new owner was still at work. He was one of those sandy-haired, energetic Maine men, who, probably on the principle of extremes, were often found through the South, making new homes for themselves in the pleasant land.

"Pulling down the old house, are you?" said the keeper, leaning idly on the gate, which was already flanked by a new fence.

"Yes," replied the Maine man, pausing; "it was only an old shell, just ready to tumble on our heads. You're the keeper over yonder, an't you?" (He already knew everybody within a circle of five miles.)

"Yes. I think I should like those vines if you have no use for them," said Rodman, pointing to the uprooted greenery that once screened the old piazza.

"Wuth about twenty-five cents, I guess," said the Maine man, handing them over.

1877

5. When Woolson reprinted this story for book publication, the text omitted this fierce exchange about the "transition" and the state of education in the South.

AMBROSE BIERCE

1842–c. 1914

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce was born on June 24, 1842, in Meigs County, Ohio, the tenth of thirteen children. After the family moved to Indiana, he attended school and then struck out on his own at age fifteen. He worked as a printer's apprentice for a newspaper in Indiana, spent a term at a military school in Kentucky, and enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War. Bierce saw action in some of the bloodiest battles of the war, including Shiloh, Chickamauga, and the Atlanta campaign. In 1864, at Kennesaw Mountain, he was struck in the temple by a bullet that miraculously lodged beneath the skin without penetrating the skull. In his *Devil's Dictionary*, Bierce would later define war as a "by-product of the arts of peace" and peace as "a period of cheating between two periods of fighting"—an unsentimental attitude that carried over to his fiction about the war including the bitter war narrative "Chickamauga" (1889) and the suspenseful "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890).

When the war ended, Bierce moved to San Francisco to begin the journalistic career he followed for the rest of his life. San Francisco in the late 1860s and 1870s was becoming home to a journalism-based literary culture, as writers worked to make the West better known to eastern readers and to counter the image of the "wild West," so popular in dime-novel fiction, by showing San Francisco as the center of a cultivated society. Bierce married in 1872 and he went with his wife to England for four years, where he continued to hone his literary skills. Returning to San Francisco in 1875, he made a reputation through his newspaper columns as a satirist of elegance and bite. From 1886 to 1906, he was employed by William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*, and many of his best-known stories and essays appeared first in the *Examiner*. He published the story collections *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891) and *Can Such Things Be?* (1893), and then, while working as a correspondent in Washington, D.C., began collecting his witticisms from newspaper columns dating back to the 1880s into book form. This volume was first published in 1906 as *The Cynic's Word Book*. Between 1909 and 1912 his collected works came out in twelve volumes, and the *Word Book* appeared under Bierce's preferred title, *The Devil's Dictionary*.

Bierce and his wife separated in 1888 and divorced five years later. They had three children; one of his two sons seems to have been shot to death in 1889 in a brawl over a woman, and the other died from alcoholism-related pneumonia in 1913. In that year, Bierce went to Mexico and disappeared. It is supposed that he planned to take part in the Mexican Revolution on the side of pro-democracy rebels led by the general Pancho Villa, a cause endorsed by some politically engaged Americans of the era (but not by the U.S. government).

Among writers active after the Civil War, Bierce was known as the most consistently pessimistic; he was called "Bitter Bierce" by many. His stories merged the hallucinatory and the paranormal with everyday events, attempting to catch the intensity of extreme human experience. Rejecting the national preference for optimism and happy endings, he strove to produce essays, fiction, and commentaries that would remain in his readers' minds as much for the tight pungency of his prose style as for the ideas that motivated them. In both of the stories included here, Bierce turns to extraordinary observers—a condemned man preparing to die and a child who has stumbled into the horrors of combat—to tell stories of the Civil War stripped of their usual patina of glory and nobility.

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge¹

I

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in Northern Alabama, looking down into the swift waters twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head, and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers² supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him, and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant, who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the centre of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity crowned with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway of the slope between bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who, when he comes announced, is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his dress, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a mustache and pointed beard but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in

1. First published in the *San Francisco Examiner* on July 13, 1890, this story was subsequently reprinted as part of the collection *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), the source of the text

printed here.

2. The wooden cross-braces supporting railroad tracks.

one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of people, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former, the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods, and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it, the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

II

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner, and, like other slave owners, a politician he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant

army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth,³ and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was gone to fetch the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order, and built a stockade on the other bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles?"

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

"Only a picket post⁴ half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man—a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband, and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge, he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of

3. Corinth, Mississippi, fell to the Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant following the

Battle of Shiloh on April 6 and 7, 1862.
4. Guard post.

pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the blackness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. “To be hanged and drowned,” he thought, “that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.”

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. “Put it back, put it back!” He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon flies’ wings, the strokes of the water spiders’ legs, like oars

which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him; the captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye, and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging and enforcing tranquillity in the men—with what accurately-measured intervals fell those cruel words:

“Attention, company. . . . Shoulder arms. . . . Ready. . . . Aim. . . . Fire.”

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley, and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm, and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down stream—nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

“The officer,” he reasoned, “will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!”

An appalling plash within two yards of him, followed by a loud, rushing sound, *diminuendo*,⁵ which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort

5. In music, diminishing (Italian).

and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water, which curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water, he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

“They will not do that again,” he thought; “the next time they will use a charge of grape.⁶ I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. It is a good gun.”

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration which made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like gold, like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of aeolian harps.⁷ He had no wish to perfect his escape, was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whizz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman’s road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the great trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

6. Grapeshot, a cluster of small iron balls used as a cannon charge.

7. Stringed instruments activated by the wind

(Aeolus was the keeper of the winds in classical mythology).

His neck was in pain, and, lifting his hand to it, he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue! He could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he fell asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her, he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him, with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

1890, 1891

Chickamauga¹

One sunny autumn afternoon a child strayed away from its rude home in a small field and entered a forest unobserved. It was happy in a new sense of freedom from control—happy in the opportunity of exploration and adventure; for this child's spirit, in bodies of its ancestors, had for many thousands of years been trained to memorable feats of discovery and conquest—victories in battles whose critical moments were centuries, whose victors' camps were cities of hewn stone. From the cradle of its race it had conquered its way through two continents, and, passing a great sea, had penetrated a third, there to be born to war and dominion as a heritage.

The child was a boy, aged about six years, the son of a poor planter. In his younger manhood the father had been a soldier, had fought against naked savages, and followed the flag of his country into the capital of a civilized race to the far South. In the peaceful life of a planter the warrior-fire survived; once kindled it is never extinguished. The man loved military books and pictures, and the boy had understood enough to make himself a wooden sword, though even the eye of his father would hardly have known it for what it was. This weapon he now bore bravely, as became the son of an heroic race, and, pausing now and again in the sunny space of the forest, assumed with some exaggeration, the postures of aggression and defense that he had

1. First published on January 20, 1889, in the *San Francisco Examiner*, the story was reprinted in the collection *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), the source of the text printed here. Chick-

amauga was one of the bloodiest single-day battles of the Civil War, a costly Union defeat along a creek south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, on September 19, 1863.



Chickamauga. “The Battle of Chickamauga; Thomas’s Men Repulsing the Charge of the Rebels.” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 21, 1863.

been taught by the engraver’s art. Made reckless by the ease with which he overcame invisible foes attempting to stay his advance, he committed the common enough military error of pushing the pursuit to a dangerous extreme, until he found himself upon the margin of a wide but shallow brook, whose rapid waters barred his direct advance against the flying foe that had crossed with illogical ease. But the intrepid victor was not to be baffled; the spirit of the race which had passed the great sea burned unconquerable in that small breast and would not be denied. Finding a place where some boulders in the bed of the stream lay but a step or a leap apart, he made his way across and fell again upon the rear guard of his imaginary foe, putting all to the sword.

Now that the battle had been won, prudence required that he withdraw to his base of operations. Alas! like many a mightier conqueror, and like one, the mightiest, he could not

curb the lust for war,
Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star.²

Advancing from the bank of the creek, he suddenly found himself confronted with a new and more formidable enemy; in the path that he was following, bolt upright, with ears erect and paws suspended before it, sat a rabbit. With a startled cry the child turned and fled, he knew not in what direction, calling with inarticulate cries for his mother, weeping, stumbling, his tender skin cruelly torn by brambles, his little heart beating hard with terror—breathless, blind with tears—lost in the forest! Then, for more than

2. From Canto 3 of Byron’s poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–18), these lines refer to Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo.

an hour, he wandered with erring feet through the tangled undergrowth, till at last, overcome by fatigue, he lay down in a narrow space between two rocks, within a few yards of the stream, and, still grasping his toy sword, no longer a weapon but a companion, sobbed himself to sleep. The wood birds sang merrily above his head; the squirrels, whisking their bravery of tail, ran barking from tree to tree, unconscious of the pity of it, and somewhere far away was a strange, muffled thunder, as if the partridges were drumming in celebration of nature's victory over the son of her immemorial enslavers. And back at the little plantation, where white men and black were hastily searching the fields and hedges in alarm, a mother's heart was breaking for her missing child.

Hours passed, and then the little sleeper rose to his feet. The chill of the evening was in his limbs, the fear of the gloom in his heart. But he had rested, and he no longer wept. With some blind instinct which impelled to action he struggled through the undergrowth about him and came to a more open ground—on his right the brook, to the left a gentle acclivity studded with infrequent trees; over all the gathering gloom of twilight. A thin, ghostly mist rose along the water. It frightened and repelled him; instead of recrossing, in the direction whence he had come, he turned his back upon it, and went forward toward the dark inclosing wood. Suddenly he saw before him a strange moving object which he took to be some large animal—a dog, a pig—he could not name it; perhaps it was a bear. He had seen pictures of bears, but knew of nothing to their discredit, and had vaguely wished to meet one. But something in form or movement of this object—something in the awkwardness of its approach—told him that it was not a bear, and curiosity was stayed by fear. He stood still, and as it came slowly on, gained courage every moment, for he saw that at least it had not the long, menacing ears of the rabbit. Possibly his impressionable mind was half conscious of something familiar in its shambling, awkward gait. Before it had approached near enough to resolve his doubts, he saw that it was followed by another and another. To right and to left were many more; the whole open space about him was alive with them—all moving toward the brook.

They were men. They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging useless at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by foot in the same direction. Singly, in pairs, and in little groups, they came on through the gloom, some halting now and again while others crept slowly past them, then resuming their movement. They came by dozens and by hundreds; as far on either hand as one could see in the deepening gloom they extended and the black wood behind them appeared to be inexhaustible. The very ground seemed in motion toward the creek. Occasionally one who had paused did not again go on, but lay motionless. He was dead. Some, pausing, made strange gestures with their hands, erected their arms and lowered them again, clasped their heads; spread their palms upward, as men are sometimes seen to do in public prayer.

Not all of this did the child note; it is what would have been noted by an older observer; he saw little but that these were men, yet crept like babes. Being men, they were not terrible, though some of them were unfamiliarly clad. He moved among them freely, going from one to another and peering

into their faces with childish curiosity. All their faces were singularly white and many were streaked and gouted with red. Something in this—something too, perhaps, in their grotesque attitudes and movements—reminded him of the painted clown whom he had seen last summer in the circus, and he laughed as he watched them. But on and ever on they crept, these maimed and bleeding men, as heedless as he of the dramatic contrast between his laughter and their own ghastly gravity. To him it was a merry spectacle. He had seen his father's negroes creep upon their hands and knees for his amusement—had ridden them so, "making believe" they were his horses. He now approached one of these crawling figures from behind and with an agile movement mounted it astride. The man sank upon his breast, recovered, flung the small boy fiercely to the ground as an unbroken colt might have done, then turned upon him a face that lacked a lower jaw—from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone. The unnatural prominence of nose, the absence of chin, the fierce eyes, gave this man the appearance of a great bird of prey crimsoned in throat and breast by the blood of its quarry. The man rose to his knees, the child to his feet. The man shook his fist at the child; the child, terrified at last, ran to a tree near by, got upon the farther side of it, and took a more serious view of the situation. And so the uncanny multitude dragged itself slowly and painfully along in hideous pantomime—moved forward down the slope like a swarm of great black beetles, with never a sound of going—in silence profound, absolute.

Instead of darkening, the haunted landscape began to brighten. Through the belt of trees beyond the brook shone a strange red light, the trunks and branches of the trees making a black lacework against it. It struck the creeping figures and gave them monstrous shadows, which caricatured their movements on the lit grass. It fell upon their faces, touching their whiteness with a ruddy tinge, accentuating the stains with which so many of them were freaked and maculated.³ It sparkled on buttons and bits of metal in their clothing. Instinctively the child turned toward the growing splendor and moved down the slope with his horrible companions; in a few moments had passed the foremost of the throng—not much of a feat, considering his advantages. He placed himself in the lead, his wooden sword still in hand, and solemnly directed the march, conforming his pace to theirs and occasionally turning as if to see that his forces did not straggle. Surely such a leader never before had such a following.

Scattered about upon the ground now slowly narrowing by the encroachment of this awful march to water, were certain articles to which, in the leader's mind, were coupled no significant associations; an occasional blanket, tightly rolled lengthwise, doubled and the ends bound together with a string; a heavy knapsack here, and there a broken musket—such things, in short, as are found in the rear of retreating troops, the "spoor"⁴ of men flying from their hunters. Everywhere near the creek, which here had a margin of lowland, the earth was trodden into mud by the feet of men and horses. An observer of better experience in the use of his eyes would have noticed that these footprints pointed in both directions; the ground had been twice passed

3. Spotted, blemished. "Freaked": streaked or flecked.

4. The track, trail, or droppings of a wild animal.

over—in advance and in retreat. A few hours before, these desperate, stricken men, with their more fortunate and now distant comrades, had penetrated the forest in thousands. Their successive battalions, breaking into swarms and reforming in lines, had passed the child on every side—had almost trodden on him as he slept. The rustle and murmur of their march had not awakened him. Almost within a stone's throw of where he lay they had fought a battle; but all unheard by him were the roar of the musketry, the shock of the cannon, “the thunder of the captains and the shouting.”⁵ He had slept through it all, grasping his little wooden sword with perhaps a tighter clutch in unconscious sympathy with his martial environment, but as heedless of the grandeur of the struggle as the dead who had died to make the glory.

The fire beyond the belt of woods on the farther side of the creek, reflected to earth from the canopy of its own smoke, was now suffusing the whole landscape. It transformed the sinuous line of mist to the vapor of gold. The water gleamed with dashes of red, and red, too, were many of the stones protruding above the surface. But that was blood; the less desperately wounded had stained them in crossing. On them, too, the child now crossed with eager steps; he was going to the fire. As he stood upon the farther bank, he turned about to look at the companions of his march. The advance was arriving at the creek. The stronger had already drawn themselves to the brink and plunged their faces in the flood. Three or four who lay without motion appeared to have no heads. At this the child's eyes expanded with wonder; even his hospitable understanding could not accept a phenomenon implying such vitality as that. After slaking their thirst these men had not the strength to back away from the water, nor to keep their heads above it. They were drowned. In rear of these the open spaces of the forest showed the leader as many formless figures of his grim command as at first; but not nearly so many were in motion. He waved his cap for their encouragement and smilingly pointed with his weapon in the direction of the guiding light—a pillar of fire to this strange exodus.

Confident of the fidelity of his forces, he now entered the belt of woods, passed through it easily in the red illumination, climbed a fence, ran across a field, turning now and again to coquette with his responsive shadow, and so approached the blazing ruin of a dwelling. Desolation everywhere. In all the wide glare not a living thing was visible. He cared nothing for that; the spectacle pleased, and he danced with glee in imitation of the wavering flames. He ran about collecting fuel, but every object that he found was too heavy for him to cast in from the distance to which the heat limited his approach. In despair he flung in his sword—a surrender to the superior forces of nature. His military career was at an end.

Shifting his position, his eyes fell upon some outbuildings which had an oddly familiar appearance, as if he had dreamed of them. He stood considering them with wonder, when suddenly the entire plantation, with its inclosing forest, seemed to turn as if upon a pivot. His little world swung half around; the points of the compass were reversed. He recognized the blazing building as his own home!

For a moment he stood stupefied by the power of the revelation, then ran with stumbling feet, making a half circuit of the ruin. There, conspicuous

5. Job 39.25.

in the light of the conflagration, lay the dead body of a woman—the white face turned upward, the hands thrown out and clutched full of grass, the clothing deranged, the long dark hair in tangles and full of clotted blood. The greater part of the forehead was torn away, and from the jagged hole the brain protruded, overflowing the temple, a frothy mass of gray, crowned with clusters of crimson bubbles—the work of a shell!

The child moved his little hands, making wild, uncertain gestures. He uttered a series of inarticulate and indescribable cries—something between the chattering of an ape and the gobbling of a turkey—a startling, soulless, unholy sound, the language of a devil. The child was a deaf mute.

Then he stood motionless, with quivering lips, looking down upon the wreck.

1889, 1891

HENRY JAMES

1843–1916

As a young man Henry James set out to be a “literary master” in the European sense. His writings, the product of more than half a century as a publishing author, include tales, novellas, novels, plays, autobiographies, criticism, travel pieces, letters, reviews, and biographies—altogether perhaps as many as one hundred volumes, a prodigious output even by late-nineteenth-century standards. The recognition of his importance as well as his wide influence as novelist and critic increased in the years between the world wars, when James’s fiction was recognized as a forerunner of transatlantic literary modernism. Since that time James has been firmly established as one of America’s greatest novelists and critics, a subtle psychological realist, and an unsurpassed literary stylist.

Henry James was born in New York City on April 15, 1843. His father was a religious philosopher who had inherited enough wealth for his family to live comfortably and travel without his needing to earn an income; his mother, Mary Robertson Walsh James, like many women of her day, stayed home and was the family mainstay. James’s older brother, William, would become America’s first notable psychologist and one of its most influential philosophers. The family also included two younger brothers and a sister, Alice, herself a perceptive observer and diarist. First taken to Europe as an infant, James spent his boyhood in a then almost bucolic Washington Square in New York City until, when he was twelve, the family once again left for the Continent. His father wanted the children to have a rich, “sensuous education,” and during the next four years, with stays in England, Switzerland, and France, he brought them to galleries, libraries, museums, and (of special interest to James) theaters. James’s formal schooling was unsystematic, but he mastered French well enough to begin a lifelong study of its literature, and from childhood on he was fascinated by the literary and historical traditions in Europe that, as he later lamented in *Hawthorne* (1879), he believed were mostly absent in the United States.

James early developed what he described in *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) as the “practice of wondering and dawdling and gaping.” This memoir also tells about a

“horrid even if obscure hurt” that he suffered while fighting a stable fire in his late teens. The exact nature of this injury and its consequences have been the subject of intense speculation by biographers and critics, and it probably prevented James from serving in the Civil War. By this time, James’s interest in literature and in writing had intensified; before he reached the age of twenty-one he was publishing reviews and stories in some of the leading American journals—the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *North American Review*, the *Galaxy*, and the *Nation*. He attended Harvard Law School briefly in 1862 but then decided that literature was his calling. He settled permanently in England in 1876 (after moving back and forth between America and Europe and after trial residences in France and Italy). James never married, and in recent decades the portrayal of sexual desire in his fiction and the question of his own sexual orientation have engaged his critics and biographers. He maintained close ties with his family, including William’s children. He kept up a large correspondence, was extremely sociable, and knew most of his contemporaries in the arts. His prodigious creative energy was invested for more than fifty years in what he called the “sacred rage” of his art.

Leon Edel’s influential, multi-volume biography of James, published from 1953 to 1972, divides James’s mature literary career into three phases. In the first, which culminated with *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), James felt his way toward and appropriated the so-called international theme—the drama, comic and tragic, of Americans in Europe and occasionally of Europeans in America. In the second period, he experimented with diverse themes and forms—initially in novels dealing explicitly with the social and political currents of the 1870s and 1880s, such as *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), then in writing for the theater, and finally in shorter fictions exploring the relationship of artists to society and the troubled psyches of oppressed children, as in *What Maisie Knew* (1897). In his last period, the so-called major phase, which culminated with *The Golden Bowl* (1904), he returned to international and cosmopolitan subjects in elaborately complex narratives of great epistemological and moral challenge to readers.

Three of his earliest books, *A Passionate Pilgrim* (stories), *Transatlantic Sketches* (travel pieces), and *Roderick Hudson* (a novel), were published in 1875. *The American* (1877) was James’s first successful extended treatment of the naïve young American in conflict with the traditions, customs, and values of the Old World. *Daisy Miller* (1878), with its portrayal of the “new” American girl, brought him widespread popularity, so much so that the name of the title character became used frequently in contemporary debates about the role of women in the United States. In this fictional “study,” as it was originally subtitled, a stubbornly naïve American girl willfully resists European (and American) social mores. These works show James as neither a national patriot nor a resentful émigré but a true cosmopolitan concerned with exploring American national character as it is tested by cultural displacement. In *Daisy Miller* in particular, James’s skillful use of the limited point



Henry James in the early 1890s.

of view depicts a young American man who is himself limited by self-absorption and class position—and who is thus unable to see Daisy for who she is. In *Daisy Miller* and other works written during the 1870s, James was already developing the hallmarks of his later works. The drama of his fiction became increasingly concerned with the question of knowledge, whether characters' knowledge of each other or readers' struggles with deliberately limited information.

Despite their appeal, the relatively simple characters of Christopher Newman (*The American*) and Daisy Miller evoke romance, melodrama, and pathos more than psychological complexity and genuine tragedy, which required for James a broader canvas. In the character and career of Isabel Archer he found the focus for one of his most influential works on the international theme, *The Portrait of a Lady*. Here, the complex inner lives of his American characters are rendered with greater depth and stylistic innovation. The last third of *Portrait* depicts the heroine's awakened understanding and her attempts to escape her miserable marriage without sacrificing her principles or harming other people she cares about. James's tendency to have his main characters sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of principle has been criticized by some for its rejection of self-expression. But in *Portrait* and other of his works, James elucidates his belief that renunciation is a form of self-expression. During this same period, James formulated his own views on "The Art of Fiction" (1884) in a polemical essay that is reprinted in the "Realism and Naturalism" section of this volume.

From 1885 to 1890 James was largely occupied by writing *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and *The Tragic Muse* (1889). These novels of reformers, radicals, and revolutionaries are better appreciated, perhaps, in our time than they were in his. Out of a sense of artistic challenge as well as financial need, James attempted to regain the popularity of *Daisy Miller* and earn money by turning dramatist. Between 1890 and 1895 he wrote seven plays; two were produced, and both were painful public failures for their author, leading him into a period of intense self-doubt. Between 1895 and 1900 he returned to fiction, especially to experimental works with three dominant subjects that he often combined: misunderstood or troubled writers and artists; ghosts and apparitions; and doomed or threatened children and adolescents. (The latter two themes conjoin to powerful effect in *The Turn of the Screw* [1898].) "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903, 1909) depicts the life of an egocentric man whose obsessive concern over the vague prospect of personal disaster destroys his chances for love and life in the present. Some of James's biographers have linked the guilt in this tale to the suicide of the writer Constance Fenimore Woolson in 1894, which she may have resorted to partly out of unrequited (and entirely unrecognized) love for James. More recently, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and other critics have linked the character's lack of interest in women to repressed homosexuality. However it is interpreted, "The Beast in the Jungle" remains a chilling tale of a failed life.

In his last three great novels—*The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904)—James experimented further with representing the complexity and uncertainty of human consciousness. All three of these books return to the international theme, but with a new and remorseless insight into how people make their own realities through their perceptions, impressions, and inner motivations. American innocence, at this point, becomes only a willful refusal to see, while awareness of one's own character as well as others' provides the wisdom to escape the designs that lead to disaster—though disaster is rarely thwarted in time, and we are usually left both with insight and with the knowledge that it has come "too late." James's remedy for unhappiness is sometimes more unhappiness, but more importantly the willingness to entertain diverse points of view on moral struggles. His treatment of such an extraordinarily complex theme allows him an unparalleled richness of syntax, sentence structure, metaphoric webs, symbols, characterization, point of view, and organizing rhythms. The world of these late novels

is the one James defined in “The Art of Fiction” (1884) as representing “the very atmosphere of the mind.” Though they found only a limited readership in James’s own time, these dramas of perception are widely considered to be James’s most influential contribution to the craft of fiction. He became, in the words of Joseph Conrad, “the historian of fine consciences.”

When James was not writing fiction, he often wrote about it—either his own or others’. He was, as he noted in a letter, “a critical, a *non-naïf*, a questioning, worrying reader.” His inquiries into the achievement of other writers—preserved in such volumes as *French Poets and Novelists* (1878), *Partial Portraits* (1888), and *Notes on Novelists* (1914)—are remarkable for their breadth, balance, and acuteness. More broadly theoretical than his reviews or essays on individual writers, “The Art of Fiction” (an excerpt from which appears later in this volume) encapsulates James’s central aesthetic conceptions. Calling attention to the unparalleled opportunities open to the artist of fiction and the beauty of the novel form, James also insists that “the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer” and that “no good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind.” James left no better record than this essay of his always twinned concerns over the moral and formal qualities of fiction, of the relationship between aesthetic and moral perception.

James was an extremely self-conscious writer, and his *Complete Notebooks*, edited and published in 1987, reveal a subtle, intense mind in the act of discovering subjects, methods, and principles. The prefaces he wrote for Scribner’s lavish twenty-four-volume New York Edition (1907–9) of his extensively revised novels and tales contain James’s final analyses of the works he considered to best represent his achievement—not to mention the extensive revisions themselves. As the culmination of a lifetime of reflection on the art of fiction, they provide extraordinary accounts of the origins and growth of his major writings and exquisite analyses of the fictional problems each work posed.

During his 1904–5 visit to the United States, his first after nearly twenty years, James traveled extensively and lectured in his native land and in Canada. The chief result of this visit was *The American Scene* (1907). This “absolutely personal” book explores the profound changes that occurred in America between the Civil War and World War I, the period James characterized as the “Age of the Mistake.” The same richness of personal rumination is found in three other autobiographical reminiscences he wrote later in life: *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), and the fragmentary and posthumously published *The Middle Years* (1917).

Henry James became a naturalized British subject out of impatience with America’s reluctance to enter World War I. Starting in 1915, he involved himself in war-relief work. He was awarded the British Order of Merit in 1916. Despite their considerable difficulty, most of James’s novels and tales have remained in print. The rich depth of his work—especially his incisive psychological renderings of *why* people do the things they do, or *don’t* do the things they might or even ought to do—has continued to attract readers and scholars. As a writer who was born an American citizen and died British, and as an author whose writing has been celebrated both as the pinnacle of literary realism and an early example of modernist fiction, James eludes easy categorization. The social world that he describes may seem distant from our own, but his fiction still commands attention, both because of his stylistic prowess and because of the complexity of his insights. The short works included in this volume all show, in different ways, James’s ability to create a landscape of ambiguity and doubt, where easy moral judgments become unsettled.

Daisy Miller: A Study¹

I

At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel. There are, indeed, many hotels; for the entertainment of tourists is the business of the place, which, as many travelers will remember, is seated upon the edge of a remarkably blue lake²—a lake that it behoves every tourist to visit. The shore of the lake presents an unbroken array of establishments of this order, of every category, from the “grand hotel” of the newest fashion, with a chalk-white front, a hundred balconies, and a dozen flags flying from its roof, to the little Swiss *pension*³ of an elder day, with its name inscribed in German-looking lettering upon a pink or yellow wall, and an awkward summer-house in the angle of the garden. One of the hotels at Vevey, however, is famous, even classical, being distinguished from many of its upstart neighbors by an air both of luxury and of maturity. In this region, in the month of June, American travelers are extremely numerous; it may be said, indeed, that Vevey assumes at this period some of the characteristics of an American watering-place. There are sights and sounds which evoke a vision, an echo, of Newport and Saratoga.⁴ There is a flitting hither and thither of “stylish” young girls, a rustling of muslin flounces, a rattle of dance-music in the morning hours, a sound of high-pitched voices at all times. You receive an impression of these things at the excellent inn of the “Trois Couronnes,”⁵ and are transported in fancy to the Ocean House or to Congress Hall. But at the “Trois Couronnes,” it must be added, there are other features that are much at variance with these suggestions: neat German waiters, who look like secretaries of legation; Russian princesses sitting in the garden; little Polish boys walking about, held by the hand, with their governors; a view of the snowy crest of the Dent du Midi and the picturesque towers of the Castle of Chillon.⁶

I hardly know whether it was the analogies or the differences that were uppermost in the mind of a young American, who, two or three years ago, sat in the garden of the “Trois Couronnes,” looking about him, rather idly, at some of the graceful objects I have mentioned. It was a beautiful summer morning, and in whatever fashion the young American looked at things, they must have seemed to him charming. He had come from Geneva the day before, by the little steamer, to see his aunt, who was staying at the hotel—Geneva having been for a long time his place of residence. But his aunt had a headache—his aunt had almost always a headache—and now she was shut up in her room, smelling camphor,⁷ so that he was at liberty to wander about. He was some seven-and-twenty years of age; when his friends spoke of him, they usually said that he was at Geneva, “studying.” When his

1. First published in the *Cornhill Magazine* 37 (June–July 1878). The text reprinted here follows the first British book edition, published by Macmillan in 1879.

2. Lac Léman, or Lake Geneva.

3. Boardinghouse.

4. Newport, Rhode Island, and Saratoga, New York, resort areas for the rich, where the Ocean

House and Congress Hall hotels are located.

5. Three Crowns (French).

6. Medieval castle on an island in Lake Geneva, famous as the setting for Byron's poem “The Prisoner of Chillon” (1816). “Dent du Midi”: the highest peak in a mountain group in the Swiss Alps.

7. An aromatic substance made from bark and wood, used at the time for the relief of minor pain.



Daisy Miller. This illustration by Harry McVickar appeared as the frontispiece to the 1892 edition of *Daisy Miller*, which was published by Harper and Brothers.

enemies spoke of him they said—but, after all, he had no enemies; he was an extremely amiable fellow, and universally liked. What I should say is, simply, that when certain persons spoke of him they affirmed that the reason of his spending so much time at Geneva was that he was extremely devoted to a lady who lived there—a foreign lady—a person older than himself. Very few Americans—indeed I think none—had ever seen this lady, about whom there were some singular stories. But Winterbourne had an old attachment for the little metropolis of Calvinism;⁸ he had been put to school there as a

8. I.e., Geneva, where the French Protestant reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) attempted to establish a community based on his theological beliefs.

boy, and he had afterwards gone to college there—circumstances which had led to his forming a great many youthful friendships. Many of these he had kept, and they were a source of great satisfaction to him.

After knocking at his aunt's door and learning that she was indisposed, he had taken a walk about the town, and then he had come in to his breakfast. He had now finished his breakfast, but he was drinking a small cup of coffee, which had been served to him on a little table in the garden by one of the waiters who looked like an *attaché*.⁹ At last he finished his coffee and lit a cigarette. Presently a small boy came walking along the path—an urchin of nine or ten. The child, who was diminutive for his years, had an aged expression of countenance, a pale complexion, and sharp little features. He was dressed in knickerbockers, with red stockings, which displayed his poor little spindleshanks;¹ he also wore a brilliant red cravat. He carried in his hand a long alpenstock,² the sharp point of which he thrust into everything that he approached—the flower-beds, the garden-benches, the trains of the ladies' dresses. In front of Winterbourne he paused, looking at him with a pair of bright, penetrating little eyes.

"Will you give me a lump of sugar?" he asked, in a sharp, hard little voice—a voice immature, and yet, somehow, not young.

Winterbourne glanced at the small table near him, on which his coffee-service rested, and saw that several morsels of sugar remained. "Yes, you may take one," he answered; "but I don't think sugar is good for little boys."

This little boy stepped forward and carefully selected three of the coveted fragments, two of which he buried in the pocket to his knickerbockers, depositing the other as promptly in another place. He poked his alpenstock, lance-fashion, into Winterbourne's bench, and tried to crack the lump of sugar with his teeth.

"Oh, blazes; it's har-r-d!" he exclaimed, pronouncing the adjective in a peculiar manner.

Winterbourne had immediately perceived that he might have the honor of claiming him as a fellow-countryman. "Take care you don't hurt your teeth," he said, paternally.

"I haven't got any teeth to hurt. They have all come out. I have only got seven teeth. My mother counted them last night, and one came out right afterwards. She said she'd slap me if any more came out. I can't help it. It's this old Europe. It's the climate that makes them come out. In America they didn't come out. It's these hotels."

Winterbourne was much amused. "If you eat three lumps of sugar, your mother will certainly slap you," he said.

"She's got to give me some candy, then," rejoined his young interlocutor. "I can't get any candy here—any American candy. American candy's the best candy."

"And are American little boys the best little boys?" asked Winterbourne.

"I don't know. I'm an American boy," said the child.

"I see you are one of the best!" laughed Winterbourne.

"Are you an American man?" pursued this vivacious infant. And then, on Winterbourne's affirmative reply—"American men are the best," he declared.

9. I.e., like a member of the diplomatic corps.

2. Walking stick.

1. Legs.

His companion thanked him for the compliment; and the child, who had now got astride of his alpenstock, stood looking about him, while he attacked a second lump of sugar. Winterbourne wondered if he himself had been like this in his infancy, for he had been brought to Europe at about this age.

"Here comes my sister!" cried the child, in a moment. "She's an American girl."

Winterbourne looked along the path and saw a beautiful young lady advancing. "American girls are the best girls," he said, cheerfully, to his young companion.

"My sister ain't the best!" the child declared. "She's always blowing³ at me."

"I imagine that is your fault, not hers," said Winterbourne. The young lady meanwhile had drawn near. She was dressed in white muslin, with a hundred frills and flounces, and knots of pale-colored ribbon. She was bare-headed; but she balanced in her hand a large parasol, with a deep border of embroidery; and she was strikingly, admirably pretty. "How pretty they are!" thought Winterbourne, straightening himself in his seat, as if he were prepared to rise.

The young lady paused in front of his bench, near the parapet of the garden, which overlooked the lake. The little boy had now converted his alpenstock into a vaulting-pole, by the aid of which he was springing about in the gravel, and kicking it up not a little.

"Randolph," said the young lady, "what *are* you doing?"

"I'm going up the Alps," replied Randolph. "This is the way!" And he gave another little jump, scattering the pebbles about Winterbourne's ears.

"That's the way they come down," said Winterbourne.

"He's an American man!" cried Randolph, in his little hard voice.

The young lady gave no heed to this announcement, but looked straight at her brother. "Well, I guess you had better be quiet," she simply observed.

It seemed to Winterbourne that he had been in a manner presented. He got up and stepped slowly towards the young girl, throwing away his cigarette. "This little boy and I have made acquaintance," he said, with great civility. In Geneva, as he had been perfectly aware, a young man was not at liberty to speak to a young unmarried lady except under certain rarely-occurring conditions; but here at Vevey, what conditions could be better than these?—a pretty American girl coming and standing in front of you in a garden. This pretty American girl, however, on hearing Winterbourne's observation, simply glanced at him; she then turned her head and looked over the parapet, at the lake and the opposite mountains. He wondered whether he had gone too far; but he decided that he must advance farther, rather than retreat. While he was thinking of something else to say, the young lady turned to the little boy again.

"I should like to know where you got that pole," she said.

"I bought it!" responded Randolph.

"You don't mean to say you're going to take it to Italy!"

"Yes, I am going to take it to Italy!" the child declared.

The young girl glanced over the front of her dress, and smoothed out a knot or two of ribbon. Then she rested her eyes upon the prospect again. "Well, I guess you had better leave it somewhere," she said, after a moment.

3. Nagging.

"Are you going to Italy?" Winterbourne inquired, in a tone of great respect. The young lady glanced at him again.

"Yes, sir," she replied. And she said nothing more.

"Are you—a—going over the Simplon?"⁴ Winterbourne pursued, a little embarrassed.

"I don't know," she said, "I suppose it's some mountain. Randolph, what mountain are we going over?"

"Going where?" the child demanded.

"To Italy," Winterbourne explained.

"I don't know," said Randolph. "I don't want to go to Italy. I want to go to America."

"Oh, Italy is a beautiful place!" rejoined the young man.

"Can you get candy there?" Randolph loudly inquired.

"I hope not," said his sister. "I guess you have had enough candy, and mother thinks so too."

"I haven't had any for ever so long—for a hundred weeks!" cried the boy, still jumping about.

The young lady inspected her flounces and smoothed her ribbons again; and Winterbourne presently risked an observation upon the beauty of the view. He was ceasing to be embarrassed, for he had begun to perceive that she was not in the least embarrassed herself. There had not been the slightest alteration in her charming complexion; she was evidently neither offended nor fluttered. If she looked another way when he spoke to her, and seemed not particularly to hear him, this was simply her habit, her manner. Yet, as he talked a little more, and pointed out some of the objects of interest in the view, with which she appeared quite unacquainted, she gradually gave him more of the benefit of her glance; and then he saw that this glance was perfectly direct and unshrinking. It was not, however, what would have been called an immodest glance, for the young girl's eyes were singularly honest and fresh. They were wonderfully pretty eyes; and, indeed, Winterbourne had not seen for a long time anything prettier than his fair countrywoman's various features—her complexion, her nose, her ears, her teeth. He had a great relish for feminine beauty; he was addicted to observing and analyzing it; and as regards this young lady's face he made several observations. It was not at all insipid, but it was not exactly expressive; and though it was eminently delicate, Winterbourne mentally accused it—very forgivingly—of a want of finish. He thought it very possible that Master Randolph's sister was a coquette; he was sure she had a spirit of her own; but in her bright, sweet, superficial little visage there was no mockery, no irony. Before long it became obvious that she was much disposed towards conversation. She told him that they were going to Rome for the winter—she and her mother and Randolph. She asked him if he was a "real American"; she wouldn't have taken him for one; he seemed more like a German—this was said after a little hesitation, especially when he spoke. Winterbourne, laughing, answered that he had met Germans who spoke like Americans; but that he had not, so far as he remembered, met an American who spoke like a German. Then he asked her if she would not be more comfortable in sitting upon the bench which he had just quitted. She answered that she liked standing up and walk-

4. A mountain pass in the Alps between Switzerland and Italy.

ing about; but she presently sat down. She told him she was from New York State—"if you know where that is." Winterbourne learned more about her by catching hold of her small, slippery brother and making him stand a few minutes by his side.

"Tell me your name, my boy," he said.

"Randolph C. Miller," said the boy, sharply. "And I'll tell you her name"; and he leveled his alpenstock at his sister.

"You had better wait till you are asked!" said this young lady, calmly.

"I should like very much to know your name," said Winterbourne.

"Her name is Daisy Miller!" cried the child. "But that isn't her real name; that isn't her name on her cards."

"It's a pity you haven't got one of my cards!" said Miss Miller.

"Her real name is Annie P. Miller," the boy went on.

"Ask him *his* name," said his sister, indicating Winterbourne.

But on this point Randolph seemed perfectly indifferent; he continued to supply information with regard to his own family. "My father's name is Ezra B. Miller," he announced. "My father ain't in Europe; my father's in a better place than Europe."

Winterbourne imagined for a moment that this was the manner in which the child had been taught to intimate that Mr. Miller had been removed to the sphere of celestial rewards. But Randolph immediately added, "My father's in Schenectady. He's got a big business. My father's rich, you bet."

"Well!" ejaculated Miss Miller, lowering her parasol and looking at the embroidered border. Winterbourne presently released the child, who departed, dragging his alpenstock along the path. "He doesn't like Europe," said the young girl. "He wants to go back."

"To Schenectady, you mean?"

"Yes; he wants to go right home. He hasn't got any boys here. There is one boy here, but he always goes round with a teacher; they won't let him play."

"And your brother hasn't any teacher?" Winterbourne inquired.

"Mother thought of getting him one, to travel round with us. There was a lady told her of a very good teacher; an American lady—perhaps you know her—Mrs. Sanders. I think she came from Boston. She told her of this teacher, and we thought of getting him to travel round with us. But Randolph said he didn't want a teacher traveling round with us. He said he wouldn't have lessons when he was in the cars.⁵ And we *are* in the cars about half the time. There was an English lady we met in the cars—I think her name was Miss Featherstone; perhaps you know her. She wanted to know why I didn't give Randolph lessons—give him 'instruction,' she called it. I guess he could give me more instruction than I could give him. He's very smart."

"Yes," said Winterbourne; "he seems very smart."

"Mother's going to get a teacher for him as soon as we get to Italy. Can you get good teachers in Italy?"

"Very good, I should think," said Winterbourne.

"Or else she's going to find some school. He ought to learn some more. He's only nine. He's going to college." And in this way Miss Miller continued to converse upon the affairs of her family, and upon other topics. She

5. Railway cars.

sat there with her extremely pretty hands, ornamented with very brilliant rings, folded in her lap, and with her pretty eyes now resting upon those of Winterbourne, now wandering over the garden, the people who passed by, and the beautiful view. She talked to Winterbourne as if she had known him a long time. He found it very pleasant. It was many years since he heard a young girl talk so much. It might have been said of this unknown young lady, who had come and sat down beside him upon a bench, that she chattered. She was very quiet, she sat in a charming tranquil attitude; but her lips and her eyes were constantly moving. She had a soft, slender, agreeable voice, and her tone was decidedly sociable. She gave Winterbourne a history of her movements and intentions, and those of her mother and brother, in Europe, and enumerated, in particular, the various hotels at which they had stopped. "That English lady in the cars," she said—"Miss Featherstone—asked me if we didn't all live in hotels in America. I told her I had never been in so many hotels in my life as since I came to Europe. I have never seen so many—it's nothing but hotels." But Miss Miller did not make this remark with a querulous accent; she appeared to be in the best humor with everything. She declared that the hotels were very good, when once you got used to their ways, and that Europe was perfectly sweet. She was not disappointed—not a bit. Perhaps it was because she had heard so much about it before. She had ever so many intimate friends that had been there ever so many times. And then she had had ever so many dresses and things from Paris. Whenever she put on a Paris dress she felt as if she were in Europe.

"It was a kind of wishing-cap," said Winterbourne.

"Yes," said Miss Miller, without examining this analogy; "it always made me wish I was here. But I needn't have done that for dresses. I am sure they send all the pretty ones to America; you see the most frightful things here. The only thing I don't like," she proceeded, "is the society. There isn't any society; or, if there is, I don't know where it keeps itself. Do you? I suppose there is some society somewhere, but I haven't seen anything of it. I'm very fond of society, and I have always had a great deal of it. I don't mean only in Schenectady, but in New York. I used to go to New York every winter. In New York I had lots of society. Last winter I had seventeen dinners given me; and three of them were by gentlemen," added Daisy Miller. "I have more friends in New York than in Schenectady—more gentlemen friends; and more young lady friends too," she resumed in a moment. She paused again for an instant; she was looking at Winterbourne with all her prettiness in her lively eyes and in her light, slightly monotonous smile. "I have always had," she said, "a great deal of gentlemen's society."

Poor Winterbourne was amused, perplexed, and decidedly charmed. He had never yet heard a young girl express herself in just this fashion; never, at least, save in cases where to say such things seemed a kind of demonstrative evidence of a certain laxity of deportment. And yet was he to accuse Miss Daisy Miller of actual or potential *inconduite*,⁶ as they said at Geneva? He felt that he had lived at Geneva so long that he had lost a good deal; he had become dishabituated to the American tone. Never, indeed, since he had grown old enough to appreciate things, had he encountered a young American girl of so pronounced a type as this. Certainly she was very charming;

6. Misconduct (French).

but how deucedly sociable! Was she simply a pretty girl from New York State—were they all like that, the pretty girls who had a good deal of gentlemen's society? Or was she also a designing, an audacious, an unscrupulous young person? Winterbourne had lost his instinct in this matter, and his reason could not help him. Miss Daisy Miller looked extremely innocent. Some people had told him that, after all, American girls were exceedingly innocent; and others had told him that, after all, they were not. He was inclined to think Miss Daisy Miller was a flirt—a pretty American flirt. He had never, as yet, had any relations with young ladies of this category. He had known, here in Europe, two or three women—persons older than Miss Daisy Miller, and provided, for respectability's sake, with husbands—who were great coquettes—dangerous, terrible women, with whom one's relations were liable to take a serious turn. But this young girl was not a coquette in that sense; she was very unsophisticated; she was only a pretty American flirt. Winterbourne was almost grateful for having found the formula that applied to Miss Daisy Miller. He leaned back in his seat; he remarked to himself that she had the most charming nose he had ever seen; he wondered what were the regular conditions and limitations of one's intercourse with a pretty American flirt. It presently became apparent that he was on the way to learn.

"Have you been to that old castle?" asked the young girl, pointing with her parasol to the far-gleaming walls of the Château de Chillon.

"Yes, formerly, more than once," said Winterbourne. "You too, I suppose, have seen it?"

"No; we haven't been there. I want to go there dreadfully. Of course I mean to go there. I wouldn't go away from here without having seen that old castle."

"It's a very pretty excursion," said Winterbourne, "and very easy to make. You can drive, you know, or you can go by the little steamer."

"You can go in the cars," said Miss Miller.

"Yes; you can go in the cars," Winterbourne assented.

"Our courier⁷ says they take you right up to the castle," the young girl continued. "We were going last week; but my mother gave out. She suffers dreadfully from dyspepsia. She said she couldn't go. Randolph wouldn't go either; he says he doesn't think much of old castles. But I guess we'll go this week, if we can get Randolph."

"Your brother is not interested in ancient monuments?" Winterbourne inquired, smiling.

"He says he don't care much about old castles. He's only nine. He wants to stay at the hotel. Mother's afraid to leave him alone, and the courier won't stay with him; so we haven't been to many places. But it will be too bad if we don't go up there." And Miss Miller pointed again at the Château de Chillon.

"I should think it might be arranged," said Winterbourne. "Couldn't you get some one to stay—for the afternoon—with Randolph?"

Miss Miller looked at him a moment; and then, very placidly—"I wish *you* would stay with him!" she said.

Winterbourne hesitated a moment. "I would much rather go to Chillon with you."

7. Social guide.

“With me?” asked the young girl, with the same placidity.

She didn’t rise, blushing, as a young girl at Geneva would have done; and yet Winterbourne, conscious that he had been very bold, thought it possible she was offended. “With your mother,” he answered very respectfully.

But it seemed that both his audacity and his respect were lost upon Miss Daisy Miller. “I guess my mother won’t go, after all,” she said. “She don’t like to ride round in the afternoon. But did you really mean what you said just now; that you would like to go up there?”

“Most earnestly,” Winterbourne declared.

“Then we may arrange it. If mother will stay with Randolph, I guess Eugenio will.”

“Eugenio?” the young man inquired.

“Eugenio’s our courier. He doesn’t like to stay with Randolph; he’s the most fastidious man I ever saw. But he’s a splendid courier. I guess he’ll stay at home with Randolph if mother does, and then we can go to the castle.”

Winterbourne reflected for an instant as lucidly as possible—“we” could only mean Miss Daisy Miller and himself. This programme seemed almost too agreeable for credence; he felt as if he ought to kiss the young lady’s hand. Possibly he would have done so—and quite spoiled the project; but at this moment another person—presumably Eugenio—appeared. A tall, handsome man, with superb whiskers, wearing a velvet morning-coat and a brilliant watch-chain, approached Miss Miller, looking sharply at her companion. “Oh, Eugenio!” said Miss Miller, with the friendliest accent.

Eugenio had looked at Winterbourne from head to foot; he now bowed gravely to the young lady. “I have the honor to inform mademoiselle that luncheon is upon the table.”

Miss Miller slowly rose. “See here, Eugenio,” she said. “I’m going to that old castle, any way.”

“To the Château de Chillon, mademoiselle?” the courier inquired. “Mademoiselle had made arrangements?” he added, in a tone which struck Winterbourne as very impertinent.

Eugenio’s tone apparently threw, even to Miss Miller’s own apprehension, a slightly ironical light upon the young girl’s situation. She turned to Winterbourne, blushing a little—a very little. “You won’t back out?” she said.

“I shall not be happy till we go!” he protested.

“And you are staying in this hotel?” she went on. “And you are really an American?”

The courier stood looking at Winterbourne, offensively. The young man, at least, thought his manner of looking an offence to Miss Miller; it conveyed an imputation that she “picked up” acquaintances. “I shall have the honor of presenting to you a person who will tell you all about me,” he said smiling, and referring to his aunt.

“Oh well, we’ll go some day,” said Miss Miller. And she gave him a smile and turned away. She put up her parasol and walked back to the inn beside Eugenio. Winterbourne stood looking after her; and as she moved away, drawing her muslin furbelows over the gravel, said to himself that she had the *tournure*⁸ of a princess.

8. Grace, poise (French).

II

He had, however, engaged to do more than proved feasible, in promising to present his aunt, Mrs. Costello, to Miss Daisy Miller. As soon as the former lady had got better of her headache he waited upon her in her apartment; and, after the proper inquiries in regard to her health, he asked her if she had observed, in the hotel, an American family—a mamma, a daughter, and a little boy.

“And a courier?” said Mrs. Costello. “Oh, yes, I have observed them. Seen them—heard them—and kept out of their way.” Mrs. Costello was a widow with a fortune; a person of much distinction, who frequently intimated that, if she were not so dreadfully liable to sick-headaches, she would probably have left a deeper impress upon her time. She had a long pale face, a high nose, and a great deal of very striking white hair, which she wore in large puffs and *rouleaux*⁹ over the top of her head. She had two sons married in New York, and another who was now in Europe. This young man was amusing himself at Homburg,¹ and, though he was on his travels, was rarely perceived to visit any particular city at the moment selected by his mother for her own appearance there. Her nephew, who had come up to Vevey expressly to see her, was therefore more attentive than those who, as she said, were nearer to her. He had imbibed at Geneva the idea that one must always be attentive to one’s aunt. Mrs. Costello had not seen him for many years, and she was greatly pleased with him, manifesting her approbation by initiating him into many of the secrets of that social sway which, as she gave him to understand, she exerted in the American capital. She admitted that she was very exclusive; but, if he were acquainted with New York, he would see that one had to be. And her picture of the minutely hierarchical constitution of the society of that city, which she presented to him in many different lights, was, to Winterbourne’s imagination, almost oppressively striking.

He immediately perceived, from her tone, that Miss Daisy Miller’s place in the social scale was low. “I am afraid you don’t approve of them,” he said.

“They are very common,” Mrs. Costello declared. “They are the sort of Americans that one does one’s duty by not—not accepting.”

“Ah, you don’t accept them?” said the young man.

“I can’t, my dear Frederick. I would if I could, but I can’t.”

“The young girl is very pretty,” said Winterbourne, in a moment.

“Of course she’s pretty. But she is very common.”

“I see what you mean, of course,” said Winterbourne, after another pause.

“She has that charming look that they all have,” his aunt resumed. “I can’t think where they pick it up; and she dresses in perfection—no, you don’t know how well she dresses. I can’t think where they get their taste.”

“But, my dear aunt, she is not, after all, a Comanche savage.”

“She is a young lady,” said Mrs. Costello, “who has an intimacy with her mamma’s courier?”

“An intimacy with the courier?” the young man demanded.

“Oh, the mother is just as bad! They treat the courier like a familiar friend—like a gentleman. I shouldn’t wonder if he dines with them. Very likely they have never seen a man with such good manners, such fine clothes,

9. Rolls, coils (French).

1. A resort in Germany.

so like a gentleman. He probably corresponds to the young lady's idea of a Count. He sits with them in the garden, in the evening. I think he smokes."

Winterbourne listened with interest to these disclosures; they helped him to make up his mind about Miss Daisy. Evidently she was rather wild. "Well," he said, "I am not a courier, and yet she was very charming to me."

"You had better have said at first," said Mrs. Costello with dignity, "that you had made her acquaintance."

"We simply met in the garden, and we talked a bit."

"*Tout bonnement!*² And pray what did you say?"

"I said I should take the liberty of introducing her to my admirable aunt."

"I am much obliged to you."

"It was to guarantee my respectability," said Winterbourne.

"And pray who is to guarantee hers?"

"Ah, you are cruel!" said the young man. "She's a very nice girl."

"You don't say that as if you believed it," Mrs. Costello observed.

"She is completely uncultivated," Winterbourne went on. "But she is wonderfully pretty, and, in short, she is very nice. To prove that I believe it, I am going to take her to the Château de Chillon."

"You two are going off there together? I should say it proved just the contrary. How long had you known her, may I ask, when this interesting project was formed. You haven't been twenty-four hours in the house."

"I had known her half-an-hour!" said Winterbourne, smiling.

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Costello. "What a dreadful girl!"

Her nephew was silent for some moments.

"You really think, then," he began earnestly, and with a desire for trustworthy information—"you really think that—" But he paused again.

"Think what, sir," said his aunt.

"That she is the sort of young lady who expects a man—sooner or later—to carry her off?"

"I haven't the least idea what such young ladies expect a man to do. But I really think that you had better not meddle with little American girls that are uncultivated, as you call them. You have lived too long out of the country. You will be sure to make some great mistake. You are too innocent."

"My dear aunt, I am not so innocent," said Winterbourne, smiling and curling his moustache.

"You are too guilty, then?"

Winterbourne continued to curl his moustache, meditatively. "You won't let the poor girl know you then?" he asked at last.

"Is it literally true that she is going to the Château de Chillon with you?"

"I think that she fully intends it."

"Then, my dear Frederick," said Mrs. Costello, "I must decline the honor of her acquaintance. I am an old woman, but I am not too old—thank Heaven—to be shocked!"

"But don't they all do these things—the young girls in America?" Winterbourne inquired.

Mrs. Costello stared a moment. "I should like to see my granddaughters do them!" she declared, grimly.

2. Quite simply! (French).

This seemed to throw some light upon the matter, for Winterbourne remembered to have heard that his pretty cousins in New York were “tremendous flirts.” If, therefore, Miss Daisy Miller exceeded the liberal license allowed to these young ladies, it was probable that anything might be expected of her. Winterbourne was impatient to see her again, and he was vexed with himself that, by instinct, he should not appreciate her justly.

Though he was impatient to see her, he hardly knew what he should say to her about his aunt’s refusal to become acquainted with her; but he discovered, promptly enough, that with Miss Daisy Miller there was no great need of walking on tiptoe. He found her that evening in the garden, wandering about in the warm starlight, like an indolent sylph, and swinging to and fro the largest fan he had ever beheld. It was ten o’clock. He had dined with his aunt, had been sitting with her since dinner, and had just taken leave of her till the morrow. Miss Daisy Miller seemed very glad to see him; she declared it was the longest evening she had ever passed.

“Have you been all alone?” he asked.

“I have been walking round with mother. But mother gets tired walking round,” she answered.

“Has she gone to bed?”

“No; she doesn’t like to go to bed,” said the young girl. “She doesn’t sleep—not three hours. She says she doesn’t know how she lives. She’s dreadfully nervous. I guess she sleeps more than she thinks. She’s gone somewhere after Randolph; she wants to try to get him to go to bed. He doesn’t like to go to bed.”

“Let us hope she will persuade him,” observed Winterbourne.

“She will talk to him all she can; but he doesn’t like her to talk to him,” said Miss Daisy, opening her fan. “She’s going to try to get Eugenio to talk to him. But he isn’t afraid of Eugenio. Eugenio’s a splendid courier, but he can’t make much impression on Randolph! I don’t believe he’ll go to bed before eleven.” It appeared that Randolph’s vigil was in fact triumphantly prolonged, for Winterbourne strolled about with the young girl for some time without meeting her mother. “I have been looking round for that lady you want to introduce me to,” his companion resumed. “She’s your aunt.” Then, on Winterbourne’s admitting the fact, and expressing some curiosity as to how she had learned it, she said she had heard all about Mrs. Costello from the chambermaid. She was very quiet and very *comme il faut*; she wore white puffs; she spoke to no one, and she never dined at the *table d’hôte*.³ Every two days she had a headache. “I think that’s a lovely description, headache and all!” said Miss Daisy, chattering along in her thin, gay voice. “I want to know her ever so much. I know just what *your* aunt would be; I know I should like her. She would be very exclusive. I like a lady to be exclusive; I’m dying to be exclusive myself. Well, we *are* exclusive, mother and I. We don’t speak to every one—or they don’t speak to us. I suppose it’s about the same thing. Any way, I shall be ever so glad to know your aunt.”

Winterbourne was embarrassed. “She would be most happy,” he said, “but I am afraid those headaches will interfere.”

The young girl looked at him through the dusk. “But I suppose she doesn’t have a headache every day,” she said, sympathetically.

3. A common table for guests in a restaurant or hotel (French). “*Comme il faut*”: well mannered (French).

Winterbourne was silent a moment. "She tells me she does," he answered at last—not knowing what to say.

Miss Daisy Miller stopped and stood looking at him. Her prettiness was still visible in the darkness; she was opening and closing her enormous fan. "She doesn't want to know me!" she said suddenly. "Why don't you say so? You needn't be afraid. I'm not afraid!" And she gave a little laugh.

Winterbourne fancied there was a tremor in her voice; he was touched, shocked, mortified by it. "My dear young lady," he protested, "she knows no one. It's her wretched health."

The young girl walked on a few steps, laughing still. "You needn't be afraid," she repeated. "Why should she want to know me?" Then she paused again; she was close to the parapet of the garden, and in front of her was the starlit lake. There was a vague sheen upon its surface, and in the distance were dimly-seen mountain forms. Daisy Miller looked out upon the mysterious prospect, and then she gave another little laugh. "Gracious! she is exclusive!" she said. Winterbourne wondered whether she was seriously wounded, and for a moment almost wished that her sense of injury might be such as to make it becoming in him to attempt to reassure and comfort her. He had a pleasant sense that she would be very approachable for consolatory purposes. He felt then, for the instant, quite ready to sacrifice his aunt, conversationally; to admit that she was a proud, rude woman, and to declare that they needn't mind her. But before he had time to commit himself to this perilous mixture of gallantry and impiety, the young lady, resuming her walk, gave an exclamation in quite another tone. "Well; here's mother! I guess she hasn't got Randolph to go to bed." The figure of a lady appeared, at a distance, very indistinct in the darkness, and advancing with a slow and wavering movement. Suddenly it seemed to pause.

"Are you sure it is your mother? Can you distinguish her in this thick dusk?" Winterbourne asked.

"Well!" cried Miss Daisy Miller, with a laugh, "I guess I know my own mother. And when she has got on my shawl, too! She is always wearing my things."

The lady in question, ceasing to advance, hovered vaguely about the spot at which she had checked her steps.

"I am afraid your mother doesn't see you," said Winterbourne. "Or perhaps," he added—thinking, with Miss Miller, the joke permissible—"perhaps she feels guilty about your shawl."

"Oh, it's a fearful old thing!" the young girl replied, serenely. "I told her she could wear it. She won't come here, because she sees you."

"Ah, then," said Winterbourne, "I had better leave you."

"Oh, no; come on!" urged Miss Daisy Miller.

"I'm afraid your mother doesn't approve of my walking with you."

Miss Miller gave him a serious glance. "It isn't for me; it's for you—that is, it's for *her*. Well; I don't know who it's for! But mother doesn't like any of my gentlemen friends. She's right down timid. She always makes a fuss if I introduce a gentleman. But I *do* introduce them—almost always. If I didn't introduce my gentlemen friends to mother," the young girl added, in her little soft, flat monotone, "I shouldn't think I was natural."

"To introduce me," said Winterbourne, "you must know my name." And he proceeded to pronounce it.

"Oh, dear; I can't say all that!" said his companion, with a laugh. But by this time they had come up to Mrs. Miller, who, as they drew near, walked to the parapet of the garden and leaned upon it, looking intently at the lake and turning her back upon them. "Mother!" said the young girl, in a tone of decision. Upon this the elderly lady turned round. "Mr. Winterbourne," said Miss Daisy Miller, introducing the young man very frankly and prettily. "Common" she was, as Mrs. Costello had pronounced her; yet it was a wonder to Winterbourne that, with her commonness, she had a singularly delicate grace.

Her mother was a small, spare, light person, with a wandering eye, a very exiguous nose, and a large forehead, decorated with a certain amount of thin, much-frizzled hair. Like her daughter, Mrs. Miller was dressed with extreme elegance; she had enormous diamonds in her ears. So far as Winterbourne could observe, she gave him no greeting—she certainly was not looking at him. Daisy was near her, pulling her shawl straight. "What are you doing, poking round here?" this young lady inquired; but by no means with that harshness of accent which her choice of words may imply.

"I don't know," said her mother, turning towards the lake again.

"I shouldn't think you'd want that shawl!" Daisy exclaimed.

"Well—I do!" her mother answered, with a little laugh.

"Did you get Randolph to go to bed?" asked the young girl.

"No; I couldn't induce him," said Mrs. Miller, very gently. "He wants to talk to the waiter. He likes to talk to that waiter."

"I was telling Mr. Winterbourne," the young girl went on; and to the young man's ear her tone might have indicated that she had been uttering his name all her life.

"Oh, yes!" said Winterbourne; "I have the pleasure of knowing your son."

Randolph's mamma was silent; she turned her attention to the lake. But at last she spoke. "Well, I don't see how he lives!"

"Anyhow, it isn't so bad as it was at Dover,"⁴ said Daisy Miller.

"And what occurred at Dover?" Winterbourne asked.

"He wouldn't go to bed at all. I guess he sat up all night—in the public parlour. He wasn't in bed at twelve o'clock: I know that."

"It was half-past twelve," declared Mrs. Miller, with mild emphasis.

"Does he sleep much during the day?" Winterbourne demanded.

"I guess he doesn't sleep much," Daisy rejoined.

"I wish he would!" said her mother. "It seems as if he couldn't."

"I think he's real tiresome," Daisy pursued.

Then, for some moments, there was silence. "Well, Daisy Miller," said the elder lady, presently, "I shouldn't think you'd want to talk against your own brother!"

"Well, he *is* tiresome, mother," said Daisy, quite without the asperity of a retort.

"He's only nine," urged Mrs. Miller.

"Well, he wouldn't go to that castle," said the young girl. "I'm going there with Mr. Winterbourne."

To this announcement, very placidly made, Daisy's mamma offered no response. Winterbourne took for granted that she deeply disapproved of the

4. English coastal town, across from France.

projected excursion; but he said to himself that she was a simple, easily managed person, and that a few deferential protestations would take the edge from her displeasure. "Yes," he began; "your daughter has kindly allowed me the honor of being her guide."

Mrs. Miller's wandering eyes attached themselves, with a sort of appealing air, to Daisy, who, however, strolled a few steps farther, gently humming to herself. "I presume you will go in the cars," said her mother.

"Yes; or in the boat," said Winterbourne.

"Well, of course, I don't know," Mrs. Miller rejoined. "I have never been to that castle."

"It is a pity you shouldn't go," said Winterbourne, beginning to feel reassured as to her opposition. And yet he was quite prepared to find that, as a matter of course, she meant to accompany her daughter.

"We've been thinking ever so much about going," she pursued; "but it seems as if we couldn't. Of course Daisy—she wants to go round. But there's a lady here—I don't know her name—she says she shouldn't think we'd want to go to see castles *here*; she should think we'd want to wait till we got to Italy. It seems as if there would be so many there," continued Mrs. Miller, with an air of increasing confidence. "Of course, we only want to see the principal ones. We visited several in England," she presently added.

"Ah, yes! in England there are beautiful castles," said Winterbourne. "But Chillon, here, is very well worth seeing."

"Well, if Daisy feels up to it—," said Mrs. Miller, in a tone impregnated with a sense of the magnitude of the enterprise. "It seems as if there was nothing she wouldn't undertake."

"Oh, I think she'll enjoy it!" Winterbourne declared. And he desired more and more to make it a certainty that he was to have the privilege of a *tête-à-tête*⁵ with the young lady, who was still strolling along in front of them, softly vocalizing. "You are not disposed, madam," he inquired, "to undertake it yourself?"

Daisy's mother looked at him, an instant, askance, and then walked forward in silence. Then—"I guess she had better go alone," she said, simply.

Winterbourne observed to himself that this was a very different type of maternity from that of the vigilant matrons who massed themselves in the forefront of social intercourse in the dark old city at the other end of the lake. But his meditations were interrupted by hearing his name very distinctly pronounced by Mrs. Miller's unprotected daughter.

"Mr. Winterbourne!" murmured Daisy.

"Mademoiselle!" said the young man.

"Don't you want to take me out in a boat?"

"At present?" he asked.

"Of course!" said Daisy.

"Well, Annie Miller!" exclaimed her mother.

"I beg you, madam, to let her go," said Winterbourne, ardently; for he had never yet enjoyed the sensation of guiding through the summer starlight a skiff freighted with a fresh and beautiful young girl.

"I shouldn't think she'd want to," said her mother. "I should think she'd rather go indoors."

5. Private talk (French).

"I'm sure Mr. Winterbourne wants to take me," Daisy declared. "He's so awfully devoted!"

"I will row you over to Chillon, in the starlight."

"I don't believe it!" said Daisy.

"Well!" ejaculated the elderly lady again.

"You haven't spoken to me for half-an-hour," her daughter went on.

"I have been having some very pleasant conversation with your mother," said Winterbourne.

"Well; I want you to take me out in a boat!" Daisy repeated. They had all stopped, and she had turned round and was looking at Winterbourne. Her face wore a charming smile, her pretty eyes were gleaming, she was swinging her great fan about. No; it's impossible to be prettier than that, thought Winterbourne.

"There are half-a-dozen boats moored at that landing-place," he said, pointing to certain steps which descended from the garden to the lake. "If you will do me the honor to accept my arm, we will go and select one of them."

Daisy stood there smiling; she threw back her head and gave a little light laugh. "I like a gentleman to be formal!" she declared.

"I assure you it's a formal offer."

"I was bound I would make you say something," Daisy went on.

"You see it's not very difficult," said Winterbourne. "But I am afraid you are chaffing me."

"I think not, sir," remarked Mrs. Miller, very gently.

"Do, then, let me give you a row," he said to the young girl.

"It's quite lovely, the way you say that!" said Daisy.

"It will be still more lovely to do it."

"Yes, it would be lovely!" said Daisy. But she made no movement to accompany him; she only stood there laughing.

"I should think you had better find out what time it is," interposed her mother.

"It is eleven o'clock, madam," said a voice, with a foreign accent, out of the neighboring darkness; and Winterbourne, turning, perceived the florid personage who was in attendance upon the two ladies. He had apparently just approached.

"Oh, Eugenio," said Daisy, "I am going out in a boat!"

Eugenio bowed. "At eleven o'clock, mademoiselle?"

"I am going with Mr. Winterbourne. This very minute."

"Do tell her she can't," said Mrs. Miller to the courier.

"I think you had better not go out in a boat, mademoiselle," Eugenio declared.

Winterbourne wished to Heaven this pretty girl were not so familiar with her courier; but he said nothing.

"I suppose you don't think it's proper!" Daisy exclaimed, "Eugenio doesn't think anything's proper."

"I am at your service," said Winterbourne.

"Does mademoiselle propose to go alone?" asked Eugenio of Mrs. Miller.

"Oh, no; with this gentleman!" answered Daisy's mamma.

The courier looked for a moment at Winterbourne—the latter thought he was smiling—and then, solemnly, with a bow, "As mademoiselle pleases!" he said.

"Oh, I hoped you would make a fuss!" said Daisy. "I don't care to go now."

"I myself shall make a fuss if you don't go," said Winterbourne.

"That's all I want—a little fuss!" And the young girl began to laugh again.

"Mr. Randolph has gone to bed!" the courier announced, frigidly.

"Oh, Daisy; now we can go!" said Mrs. Miller.

Daisy turned away from Winterbourne, looking at him, smiling and fanning herself. "Good night," she said; "I hope you are disappointed, or disgusted, or something!"

He looked at her, taking the hand she offered him. "I am puzzled," he answered.

"Well; I hope it won't keep you awake!" she said, very smartly; and, under the escort of the privileged Eugenio, the two ladies passed towards the house.

Winterbourne stood looking after them; he was indeed puzzled. He lingered beside the lake for a quarter of an hour, turning over the mystery of the young girl's sudden familiarities and caprices. But the only very definite conclusion he came to was that he should enjoy deucedly "going off" with her somewhere.

Two days afterwards he went off with her to the Castle of Chillon. He waited for her in the large hall of the hotel, where the couriers, the servants, the foreign tourists were lounging about and staring. It was not the place he would have chosen, but she had appointed it. She came tripping downstairs, buttoning her long gloves, squeezing her folded parasol against her pretty figure, dressed in the perfection of a soberly elegant travelling-costume. Winterbourne was a man of imagination and, as our ancestors used to say, of sensibility; as he looked at her dress and, on the great staircase, her little rapid, confiding step, he felt as if there were something romantic going forward. He could have believed he was going to elope with her. He passed out with her among all the idle people that were assembled there; they were all looking at her very hard; she had begun to chatter as soon as she joined him. Winterbourne's preference had been that they should be conveyed to Chillon in a carriage; but she expressed a lively wish to go in the little steamer; she declared that she had a passion for steamboats. There was always such a lovely breeze upon the water, and you saw such lots of people. The sail was not long, but Winterbourne's companion found time to say a great many things. To the young man himself their little excursion was so much of an escapade—an adventure—that, even allowing for her habitual sense of freedom, he had some expectation of seeing her regard it in the same way. But it must be confessed that, in this particular, he was disappointed. Daisy Miller was extremely animated, she was in charming spirits; but she was apparently not at all excited; she was not fluttered; she avoided neither his eyes nor those of any one else; she blushed neither when she looked at him nor when she saw that people were looking at her. People continued to look at her a great deal, and Winterbourne took much satisfaction in his pretty companion's distinguished air. He had been a little afraid that she would talk loud, laugh overmuch, and even, perhaps, desire to move about the boat a good deal. But he quite forgot his fears; he sat smiling, with his eyes upon her face, while, without moving from her place, she delivered herself of a great number of original reflections. It was the most charming garrulity he had ever heard. He had assented to the idea that she was "common"; but was she so, after all, or was he simply getting used to her commonness? Her

conversation was chiefly of what metaphysicians term the objective cast; but every now and then it took a subjective turn.

"What on *earth* are you so grave about?" she suddenly demanded, fixing her agreeable eyes upon Winterbourne's.

"Am I grave?" he asked. "I had an idea I was grinning from ear to ear."

"You look as if you were taking me to a funeral. If that's a grin, your ears are very near together."

"Should you like me to dance a hornpipe⁶ on the deck?"

"Pray do, and I'll carry round your hat. It will pay the expenses of our journey."

"I never was better pleased in my life," murmured Winterbourne.

She looked at him a moment, and then burst into a little laugh. "I like to make you say those things! You're a queer mixture!"

In the castle, after they had landed, the subjective element decidedly prevailed. Daisy tripped about the vaulted chambers, rustled her skirts in the corkscrew staircases, flirted back with a pretty little cry and a shudder from the edge of the *oubliettes*,⁷ and turned a singularly well-shaped ear to everything that Winterbourne told her about the place. But he saw that she cared very little for feudal antiquities, and that the dusky traditions of Chillon made but a slight impression upon her. They had the good fortune to have been able to walk about without other companionship than that of the custodian; and Winterbourne arranged with this functionary that they should not be hurried—that they should linger and pause wherever they chose. The custodian interpreted the bargain generously—Winterbourne, on his side, had been generous—and ended by leaving them quite to themselves. Miss Miller's observations were not remarkable for logical consistency; for anything she wanted to say she was sure to find a pretext. She found a great many pretexts in the rugged embrasures of Chillon for asking Winterbourne sudden questions about himself—his family, his previous history, his tastes, his habits, his intentions—and for supplying information upon corresponding points in her own personality. Of her own tastes, habits, and intentions Miss Miller was prepared to give the most definite, and indeed the most favourable, account.

"Well; I hope you know enough!" she said to her companion, after he had told her the history of the unhappy Bonivard.⁸ "I never saw a man that knew so much!" The history of Bonivard had evidently, as they say, gone into one ear and out of the other. But Daisy went on to say that she wished Winterbourne would travel with them and "go round" with them; they might know something, in that case. "Don't you want to come and teach Randolph?" she asked. Winterbourne said that nothing could possibly please him so much; but that he had unfortunately other occupations. "Other occupations? I don't believe it!" said Miss Daisy. "What do you mean? You are not in business." The young man admitted that he was not in business; but he had engagements which, even within a day or two, would force him to go back to Geneva. "Oh, bother!" she said. "I don't believe it!" and she began to talk about something else. But a few moments later, when he was

6. An English dance similar to the jig.

7. Secret pitlike dungeons with an opening only at the top; places where one is forgotten (French).

8. Hero of Byron's poem "The Prisoner of Chil-

lon"; François de Bonivard (1496–1570), Swiss patriot and martyr, was confined for seven years in the Castle of Chillon.

pointing out to her the pretty design of an antique fireplace, she broke out irrelevantly, "You don't mean to say you are going back to Geneva?"

"It is a melancholy fact that I shall have to return to Geneva to-morrow."

"Well, Mr. Winterbourne," said Daisy; "I think you're horrid!"

"Oh, don't say such dreadful things!" said Winterbourne—"just at the last."

"The last!" cried the young girl; "I call it the first. I have half a mind to leave you here and go straight back to the hotel alone." And for the next ten minutes she did nothing but call him horrid. Poor Winterbourne was fairly bewildered; no young lady had as yet done him the honor to be so agitated by the announcement of his movements. His companion, after this, ceased to pay any attention to the curiosities of Chillon or the beauties of the lake; she opened fire upon the mysterious charmer in Geneva, whom she appeared to have instantly taken it for granted that he was hurrying back to see. How did Miss Daisy Miller know that there was a charmer in Geneva? Winterbourne, who denied the existence of such a person, was quite unable to discover; and he was divided between amazement at the rapidity of her induction and amusement at the frankness of her *persiflage*.⁹ She seemed to him, in all this, an extraordinary mixture of innocence and crudity. "Does she never allow you more than three days at a time?" asked Daisy, ironically. "Doesn't she give you a vacation in summer? There's no one so hard worked but they can get leave to go off somewhere at this season. I suppose, if you stay another day, she'll come after you in the boat. Do wait over till Friday, and I will go down to the landing to see her arrive!" Winterbourne began to think he had been wrong to feel disappointed in the temper in which the young lady had embarked. If he had missed the personal accent, the personal accent was now making its appearance. It sounded very distinctly, at last, in her telling him she would stop "teasing" him if he would promise her solemnly to come down to Rome in the winter.

"That's not a difficult promise to make," said Winterbourne. "My aunt has taken an apartment in Rome for the winter, and has already asked me to come and see her."

"I don't want you to come for your aunt," said Daisy; "I want you to come for me." And this was the only allusion that the young man was ever to hear her make to his invidious kinswoman. He declared that, at any rate, he would certainly come. After this Daisy stopped teasing. Winterbourne took a carriage, and they drove back to Vevey in the dusk; the young girl was very quiet.

In the evening Winterbourne mentioned to Mrs. Costello that he had spent the afternoon at Chillon, with Miss Daisy Miller.

"The Americans—of the courier?" asked this lady.

"Ah, happily," said Winterbourne, "the courier stayed at home."

"She went with you all alone?"

"All alone."

Mrs. Costello sniffed a little at her smelling-bottle. "And that," she exclaimed, "is the young person you wanted me to know!"

9. Frivolous, bantering talk (French).

III

Winterbourne, who had returned to Geneva the day after his excursion to Chillon, went to Rome towards the end of January. His aunt had been established there for several weeks, and he had received a couple of letters from her. "Those people you were so devoted to last summer at Vevey have turned up here, courier and all," she wrote. "They seem to have made several acquaintances, but the courier continues to be the most *intime*. The young lady, however, is also very intimate with some third-rate Italians, with whom she rackets about in a way that makes much talk. Bring me that pretty novel of Cherbuliez's¹—'Paule Méré'—and don't come later than the 23rd."

In the natural course of events, Winterbourne, on arriving in Rome, would presently have ascertained Mrs. Miller's address at the American banker's and have gone to pay his compliments to Miss Daisy. "After what happened at Vevey I certainly think I may call upon them," he said to Mrs. Costello.

"If, after what happens—at Vevey and everywhere—you desire to keep up the acquaintance, you are very welcome. Of course a man may know every one. Men are welcome to the privilege!"

"Pray what is it that happens—here, for instance?" Winterbourne demanded.

"The girl goes about alone with her foreigners. As to what happens farther, you must apply elsewhere for information. She has picked up half-a-dozen of the regular Roman fortune-hunters, and she takes them about to people's houses. When she comes to a party she brings with her a gentleman with a good deal of manner and a wonderful moustache."

"And where is the mother?"

"I haven't the least idea. They are very dreadful people."

Winterbourne meditated a moment. "They are very ignorant—very innocent only. Depend upon it they are not bad."

"They are hopelessly vulgar," said Mrs. Costello. "Whether or no being hopelessly vulgar is being 'bad' is a question for the metaphysicians. They are bad enough to dislike, at any rate; and for this short life that is quite enough."

The news that Daisy Miller was surrounded by half-a-dozen wonderful moustaches checked Winterbourne's impulse to go straightway to see her. He had perhaps not definitely flattered himself that he had made an inefaceable impression upon her heart, but he was annoyed at hearing of a state of affairs so little in harmony with an image that had lately flitted in and out of his own meditations; the image of a very pretty girl looking out of an old Roman window and asking herself urgently when Mr. Winterbourne would arrive. If, however, he determined to wait a little before reminding Miss Miller of his claims to her consideration, he went very soon to call upon two or three other friends. One of these friends was an American lady who had spent several winters at Geneva, when she had placed her children at school. She was a very accomplished woman and she lived in the Via Gregoriana.² Winterbourne found her in a little crimson drawing-room, on a third floor; the room was filled with southern sunshine. He had not been there

1. Victor Cherbuliez (1829–1899), which James spelled "Cherbuliex," a popular French novelist of Swiss origin. His 1865 novel *Paule Méré* focused

on a young woman who violates Geneva's social conventions.

2. A fashionable street in Rome.

ten minutes when the servant came in, announcing "Madame Mila!" This announcement was presently followed by the entrance of little Randolph Miller, who stopped in the middle of the room and stood staring at Winterbourne. An instant later his pretty sister crossed the threshold; and then, after a considerable interval, Mrs. Miller slowly advanced.

"I know you!" said Randolph.

"I'm sure you know a great many things," exclaimed Winterbourne, taking him by the hand. "How is your education coming on?"

Daisy was exchanging greetings very prettily with her hostess; but when she heard Winterbourne's voice she quickly turned her head. "Well, I declare!" she said.

"I told you I should come, you know," Winterbourne rejoined smiling.

"Well—I didn't believe it," said Miss Daisy.

"I am much obliged to you," laughed the young man.

"You might have come to see me!" said Daisy.

"I arrived only yesterday."

"I don't believe that!" the young girl declared.

Winterbourne turned with a protesting smile to her mother; but this lady evaded his glance, and seating herself, fixed her eyes upon her son. "We've got a bigger place than this," said Randolph. "It's all gold on the walls."

Mrs. Miller turned uneasily in her chair. "I told you if I were to bring you, you would say something!" she murmured.

"I told *you*!" Randolph exclaimed. "I tell *you*, sir!" he added jocosely, giving Winterbourne a thump on the knee. "It is bigger, too!"

Daisy had entered upon a lively conversation with her hostess; Winterbourne judged it becoming to address a few words to her mother. "I hope you have been well since we parted at Vevey," he said.

Mrs. Miller now certainly looked at him—at his chin. "Not very well, sir," she answered.

"She's got the dyspepsia," said Randolph. "I've got it too. Father's got it. I've got it worst!"

This announcement, instead of embarrassing Mrs. Miller, seemed to relieve her. "I suffer from the liver," she said. "I think it's the climate; it's less bracing than Schenectady, especially in the winter season. I don't know whether you know we reside at Schenectady. I was saying to Daisy that I certainly hadn't found any one like Dr. Davis, and I didn't believe I should. Oh, at Schenectady, he stands first; they think everything of him. He has so much to do, and yet there was nothing he wouldn't do for me. He said he never saw anything like my dyspepsia, but he was bound to cure it. I'm sure there was nothing he wouldn't try. He was just going to try something new when we came off. Mr. Miller wanted Daisy to see Europe for herself. But I wrote to Mr. Miller that it seems as if I couldn't get on without Dr. Davis. At Schenectady he stands at the very top; and there's a great deal of sickness there, too. It affects my sleep."

Winterbourne had a good deal of pathological gossip with Dr. Davis's patient, during which Daisy chattered unremittingly to her own companion. The young man asked Mrs. Miller how she was pleased with Rome. "Well, I must say I am disappointed," she answered. "We had heard so much about it; I suppose we had heard too much. But we couldn't help that. We had been led to expect something different."

"Ah, wait a little, and you will become very fond of it," said Winterbourne.

"I hate it worse and worse every day!" cried Randolph.

"You are like the infant Hannibal,"³ said Winterbourne.

"No, I ain't!" Randolph declared, at a venture.

"You are not much like an infant," said his mother. "But we have seen places," she resumed, "that I should put a long way before Rome." And in reply to Winterbourne's interrogation, "There's Zurich," she observed; "I think Zurich is lovely; and we hadn't heard half so much about it."

"The best place we've seen is the City of Richmond!" said Randolph.

"He means the ship," his mother explained. "We crossed in that ship. Randolph had a good time on the City of Richmond."

"It's the best place I've seen," the child repeated. "Only it was turned the wrong way."

"Well, we've got to turn the right way some time," said Mrs. Miller, with a little laugh. Winterbourne expressed the hope that her daughter at least found some gratification in Rome, and she declared that Daisy was quite carried away. "It's on account of the society—the society's splendid. She goes round everywhere; she has made a great number of acquaintances. Of course she goes round more than I do. I must say they have been very sociable; they have taken her right in. And then she knows a great many gentlemen. Oh, she thinks there's nothing like Rome. Of course, it's a great deal pleasanter for a young lady if she knows plenty of gentlemen."

By this time Daisy had turned her attention again to Winterbourne. "I've been telling Mrs. Walker how mean you were!" the young girl announced.

"And what is the evidence you have offered?" asked Winterbourne, rather annoyed at Miss Miller's want of appreciation of the zeal of an admirer who on his way down to Rome had stopped neither at Bologna nor at Florence, simply because of a certain sentimental impatience. He remembered that a cynical compatriot had once told him that American women—the pretty ones, and this gave a largeness to the axiom—were at once the most exacting in the world and the least endowed with a sense of indebtedness.

"Why, you were awfully mean at Vevey," said Daisy. "You wouldn't do anything. You wouldn't stay there when I asked you."

"My dearest young lady," cried Winterbourne, with eloquence, "have I come all the way to Rome to encounter your reproaches?"

"Just hear him say that!" said Daisy to her hostess, giving a twist to a bow on this lady's dress. "Did you ever hear anything so quaint?"

"So quaint, my dear?" murmured Mrs. Walker, in the tone of a partisan of Winterbourne.

"Well, I don't know," said Daisy, fingering Mrs. Walker's ribbons. "Mrs. Walker, I want to tell you something."

"Mother-r," interposed Randolph, with his rough ends to his words, "I tell you you've got to go. Eugenio'll raise something!"

"I'm not afraid of Eugenio," said Daisy, with a toss of her head. "Look here, Mrs. Walker," she went on, "you know I'm coming to your party."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"I've got a lovely dress."

3. The Carthaginian general (247–183 B.C.E.), from his infancy, had a lifelong hatred of Rome.

"I am very sure of that."

"But I want to ask a favor—permission to bring a friend."

"I shall be happy to see any of your friends," said Mrs. Walker, turning with a smile to Mrs. Miller.

"Oh, they are not my friends," answered Daisy's mamma, smiling shyly, in her own fashion. "I never spoke to them!"

"It's an intimate friend of mine—Mr. Giovanelli," said Daisy, without a tremor in her clear little voice or a shadow on her brilliant little face.

Mrs. Walker was silent a moment, she gave a rapid glance at Winterbourne. "I shall be glad to see Mr. Giovanelli," she then said.

"He's an Italian," Daisy pursued, with the prettiest serenity. "He's a great friend of mine—he's the handsomest man in the world—except Mr. Winterbourne! He knows plenty of Italians, but he wants to know some Americans. He thinks ever so much of Americans. He's tremendously clever. He's perfectly lovely!"

It was settled that this brilliant personage should be brought to Mrs. Walker's party, and then Mrs. Miller prepared to take her leave. "I guess we'll go back to the hotel," she said.

"You may go back to the hotel, mother, but I'm going to take a walk," said Daisy.

"She's going to walk with Mr. Giovanelli," Randolph proclaimed.

"I am going to the Pincio,"⁴ said Daisy, smiling.

"Alone, my dear at this hour?" Mrs. Walker asked. The afternoon was drawing to a close—it was the hour for the throng of carriages and of contemplative pedestrians. "I don't think it's safe, my dear," said Mrs. Walker.

"Neither do I," subjoined Mrs. Miller. "You'll get the fever⁵ as sure as you live. Remember what Dr. Davis told you!"

"Give her some medicine before she goes," said Randolph.

The company had risen to its feet; Daisy, still showing her pretty teeth, bent over and kissed her hostess. "Mrs. Walker, you are too perfect," she said. "I'm not going alone; I am going to meet a friend."

"Your friend won't keep you from getting the fever," Mrs. Miller observed.

"Is it Mr. Giovanelli?" asked the hostess.

Winterbourne was watching the girl; at this question his attention quickened. She stood there smiling and smoothing her bonnet-ribbons; she glanced at Winterbourne. Then, while she glanced and smiled, she answered without a shade of hesitation, "Mr. Giovanelli—the beautiful Giovanelli."

"My dear young friend," said Mrs. Walker, taking her hand, pleadingly, "don't walk off to the Pincio at this hour to meet a beautiful Italian."

"Well, he speaks English," said Mrs. Miller.

"Gracious me!" Daisy exclaimed, "I don't want to do anything improper. There's an easy way to settle it." She continued to glance at Winterbourne. "The Pincio is only a hundred yards distant, and if Mr. Winterbourne were as polite as he pretends he would offer to walk with me!"

Winterbourne's politeness hastened to affirm itself, and the young girl gave him gracious leave to accompany her. They passed downstairs before her mother, and at the door Winterbourne perceived Mrs. Miller's carriage drawn

4. The Pincian Hill, offering a fine view of Rome.

5. Malaria, whose means of transmission (the

mosquito) was unknown in James's day, but which was associated with damp, dark places.

up, with the ornamental courier whose acquaintance he had made at Vevey seated within. "Good-bye, Eugenio!" cried Daisy, "I'm going to take a walk." The distance from the Via Gregoriana to the beautiful garden at the other end of the Pincian Hill is, in fact, rapidly traversed. As the day was splendid, however, and the concourse of vehicles, walkers, and loungers numerous, the young Americans found their progress much delayed. This fact was highly agreeable to Winterbourne, in spite of his consciousness of his singular situation. The slow-moving, idly-gazing Roman crowd bestowed much attention upon the extremely pretty young foreign lady who was passing through it upon his arm; and he wondered what on earth had been in Daisy's mind when she proposed to expose herself, unattended, to its appreciation. His own mission, to her sense, apparently, was to consign her to the hands of Mr. Giovanelli; but Winterbourne, at once annoyed and gratified, resolved that he would do no such thing.

"Why haven't you been to see me?" asked Daisy. "You can't get out of that."

"I have had the honor of telling you that I have only just stepped out of the train."

"You must have stayed in the train a good while after it stopped!" cried the young girl, with her little laugh. "I suppose you were asleep. You have had time to go to see Mrs. Walker."

"I knew Mrs. Walker—" Winterbourne began to explain.

"I knew where you knew her. You knew her at Geneva. She told me so. Well, you knew me at Vevey. That's just as good. So you ought to have come." She asked him no other question than this; she began to prattle about her own affairs. "We've got splendid rooms at the hotel; Eugenio says they're the best rooms in Rome. We are going to stay all winter—if we don't die of the fever; and I guess we'll stay then. It's a great deal nicer than I thought; I thought it would be fearfully quiet; I was sure it would be awfully poky. I was sure we should be going round all the time with one of those dreadful old men that explain about the pictures and things. But we only had about a week of that, and now I'm enjoying myself. I know ever so many people, and they are all so charming. The society's extremely select. There are all kinds—English, and Germans, and Italians. I think I like the English best. I like their style of conversation. But there are some lovely Americans. I never saw anything so hospitable. There's something or other every day. There's not much dancing; but I must say I never thought dancing was everything. I was always fond of conversation. I guess I shall have plenty at Mrs. Walker's—her rooms are so small." When they had passed the gate of the Pincian Gardens, Miss Miller began to wonder where Mr. Giovanelli might be. "We had better go straight to that place in front," she said, "where you look at the view."

"I certainly shall not help you to find him," Winterbourne declared.

"Then I shall find him without you," said Miss Daisy.

"You certainly won't leave me!" cried Winterbourne.

She burst into her little laugh. "Are you afraid you'll get lost—or run over? But there's Giovanelli, leaning against that tree. He's staring at the women in the carriages: did you ever see anything so cool?"

Winterbourne perceived at some distance a little man standing with folded arms, nursing his cane. He had a handsome face, an artfully poised hat, a glass in one eye, and a nosegay in his button-hole. Winterbourne looked at him a moment and then said, "Do you mean to speak to that man?"

"Do I mean to speak to him? Why, you don't suppose I mean to communicate by signs?"

"Pray understand, then," said Winterbourne, "that I intend to remain with you."

Daisy stopped and looked at him, without a sign of troubled consciousness in her face; with nothing but the presence of her charming eyes and her happy dimples. "Well, she's a cool one!" thought the young man.

"I don't like the way you say that," said Daisy. "It's too imperious."

"I beg your pardon if I say it wrong. The main point is to give you an idea of my meaning."

The young girl looked at him more gravely, but with eyes that were prettier than ever. "I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me, or to interfere with anything I do."

"I think you have made a mistake," said Winterbourne. "You should sometimes listen to a gentleman—the right one?"

Daisy began to laugh again, "I do nothing but listen to gentlemen!" she exclaimed. "Tell me if Mr. Giovanelli is the right one?"

The gentleman with the nosegay in his bosom had now perceived our two friends, and was approaching the young girl with obsequious rapidity. He bowed to Winterbourne as well as to the latter's companion; he had a brilliant smile, an intelligent eye; Winterbourne thought him not a bad-looking fellow. But he nevertheless said to Daisy—"No, he's not the right one."

Daisy evidently had a natural talent for performing introductions; she mentioned the name of each of her companions to the other. She strolled along with one of them on each side of her; Mr. Giovanelli, who spoke English very cleverly—Winterbourne afterwards learned that he had practiced the idiom upon a great many American heiresses—addressed her a great deal of very polite nonsense; he was extremely urbane, and the young American, who said nothing, reflected upon that profundity of Italian cleverness which enables people to appear more gracious in proportion as they are more acutely disappointed. Giovanelli, of course, had counted upon something more intimate; he had not bargained for a party of three. But he kept his temper in a manner which suggested far-stretching intentions. Winterbourne flattered himself that he had taken his measure. "He is not a gentleman," said the young American; "he is only a clever imitation of one. He is a music-master, or a penny-a-liner,⁶ or a third-rate artist. Damn his good looks!" Mr. Giovanelli had certainly a very pretty face; but Winterbourne felt a superior indignation at his own lovely fellow-countrywoman's not knowing the difference between a spurious gentleman and a real one. Giovanelli chattered and jested and made himself wonderfully agreeable. It was true that if he was an imitation the imitation was very skillful. "Nevertheless," Winterbourne said to himself, "a nice girl ought to know!" And then he came back to the question whether this was in fact a nice girl. Would a nice girl—even allowing for her being a little American flirt—make a rendezvous with a presumably low-lived foreigner? The rendezvous in this case, indeed, had been in broad daylight, and in the most crowded corner of Rome; but was it not impossible to regard the choice of these circumstances as a proof of extreme cynicism? Singular though it may seem, Winterbourne was

6. Hack writer.

vexed that the young girl, in joining her *amoroso*,⁷ should not appear more impatient of his own company, and he was vexed because of his inclination. It was impossible to regard her as a perfectly well-conducted young lady; she was wanting in a certain indispensable delicacy. It would therefore simplify matters greatly to be able to treat her as the object of one of those sentiments which are called by romancers “lawless passions.” That she should seem to wish to get rid of him would help him to think more lightly of her, and to be able to think more lightly of her would make her much less perplexing. But Daisy, on this occasion, continued to present herself as an inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence.

She had been walking some quarter of an hour, attended by her two cavaliers, and responding in a tone of very childish gaiety, as it seemed to Winterbourne, to the pretty speeches of Mr. Giovanelli, when a carriage that had detached itself from the revolving train drew up beside the path. At the same moment Winterbourne perceived that his friend Mrs. Walker—the lady whose house he had lately left—was seated in the vehicle and was beckoning to him. Leaving Miss Miller’s side, he hastened to obey her summons. Mrs. Walker was flushed; she wore an excited air. “It is really too dreadful,” she said. “That girl must not do this sort of thing. She must not walk here with you two men. Fifty people have noticed her.”

Winterbourne raised his eyebrows. “I think it’s a pity to make too much fuss about it.”

“It’s a pity to let the girl ruin herself!”

“She is very innocent,” said Winterbourne.

“She’s very crazy!” cried Mrs. Walker. “Did you ever see anything so imbecile as her mother? After you had all left me, just now, I could not sit still for thinking of it. It seemed too pitiful, not even to attempt to save her. I ordered the carriage and put on my bonnet, and came here as quickly as possible. Thank heaven I have found you!”

“What do you propose to do with us?” asked Winterbourne, smiling.

“To ask her to get in, to drive her about here for half-an-hour, so that the world may see she is not running absolutely wild, and then to take her safely home.”

“I don’t think it’s a very happy thought,” said Winterbourne; “but you can try.”

Mrs. Walker tried. The young man went in pursuit of Miss Miller, who had simply nodded and smiled at his interlocutrix in the carriage and had gone her way with her own companion. Daisy, on learning that Mrs. Walker wished to speak to her, retraced her steps with a perfect good grace and with Mr. Giovanelli at her side. She declared that she was delighted to have a chance to present this gentleman to Mrs. Walker. She immediately achieved the introduction, and declared that she had never in her life seen anything so lovely as Mrs. Walker’s carriage-rug.

“I am glad you admire it,” said this lady, smiling sweetly. “Will you get in and let me put it over you?”

“Oh, no, thank you,” said Daisy. “I shall admire it much more as I see you driving round with it.”

“Do get in and drive with me,” said Mrs. Walker.

7. Lover (Italian).

"That would be charming, but it's so enchanting just as I am!" and Daisy gave a brilliant glance at the gentlemen on either side of her.

"It may be enchanting, dear child, but it is not the custom here," urged Mrs. Walker, leaning forward in her victoria⁸ with her hands devoutly clasped.

"Well, it ought to be, then!" said Daisy. "If I didn't walk I should expire."

"You should walk with your mother, dear," cried the lady from Geneva, losing patience.

"With my mother dear!" exclaimed the young girl. Winterbourne saw that she scented interference. "My mother never walked ten steps in her life. And then, you know," she added with a laugh, "I am more than five years old."

"You are old enough to be more reasonable. You are old enough, dear Miss Miller, to be talked about."

Daisy looked at Mrs. Walker, smiling intensely. "Talked about? What do you mean?"

"Come into my carriage and I will tell you."

Daisy turned her quickened glance again from one of the gentlemen beside her to the other. Mr. Giovanelli was bowing to and fro, rubbing down his gloves and laughing very agreeably; Winterbourne thought it a most unpleasant scene. "I don't think I want to know what you mean," said Daisy presently. "I don't think I should like it."

Winterbourne wished that Mrs. Walker would tuck in her carriage-rug and drive away; but this lady did not enjoy being defied, as she afterwards told him. "Should you prefer being thought a very reckless girl?" she demanded.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Daisy. She looked again at Mr. Giovanelli, then she turned to Winterbourne. There was a little pink flush in her cheek; she was tremendously pretty. "Does Mr. Winterbourne think," she asked slowly, smiling, throwing back her head and glancing at him from head to foot, "that—to save my reputation—I ought to get into the carriage?"

Winterbourne colored; for an instant he hesitated greatly. It seemed so strange to hear her speak that way of her "reputation." But he himself, in fact, must speak in accordance with gallantry. The finest gallantry, here, was simply to tell her the truth; and the truth, for Winterbourne, as the few indications I have been able to give have made him known to the reader, was that Daisy Miller should take Mrs. Walker's advice. He looked at her exquisite prettiness; and then he said very gently, "I think you should get into the carriage."

Daisy gave a violent laugh. "I never heard anything so stiff! If this is improper, Mrs. Walker," she pursued, "then I am all improper, and you must give me up. Good-bye; I hope you'll have a lovely ride!" and, with Mr. Giovanelli, who made a triumphantly obsequious salute, she turned away.

Mrs. Walker sat looking after her, and there were tears in Mrs. Walker's eyes. "Get in here, sir," she said to Winterbourne, indicating the place beside her. The young man answered that he felt bound to accompany Miss Miller; whereupon Mrs. Walker declared that if he refused her this favor she would never speak to him again. She was evidently in earnest. Winterbourne overtook Daisy and her companion and, offering the young girl his hand, told

8. A horse-drawn carriage for two with a raised seat in front for the driver.

her that Mrs. Walker had made an imperious claim upon his society. He expected that in answer she would say something rather free, something to commit herself still farther to that "recklessness" from which Mrs. Walker had so charitably endeavored to dissuade her. But she only shook his hand, hardly looking at him, while Mr. Giovanelli bade him farewell with a too emphatic flourish of the hat.

Winterbourne was not in the best possible humor as he took his seat in Mrs. Walker's victoria. "That was not clever of you," he said candidly, while the vehicle mingled again with the throng of carriages.

"In such a case," his companion answered, "I don't wish to be clever, I wish to be *earnest!*"

"Well, your earnestness has only offended her and put her off."

"It has happened very well," said Mrs. Walker. "If she is so perfectly determined to compromise herself, the sooner one knows it the better; one can act accordingly."

"I suspect she meant no harm," Winterbourne rejoined.

"So I thought a month ago. But she has been going too far."

"What has she been doing?"

"Everything that is not done here. Flirting with any man she could pick up; sitting in corners with mysterious Italians; dancing all the evening with the same partners; receiving visits at eleven o'clock at night. Her mother goes away when visitors come."

"But her brother," said Winterbourne, laughing, "sits up till midnight."

"He must be edified by what he sees. I'm told that at their hotel every one is talking about her, and that a smile goes round among the servants when a gentleman comes and asks for Miss Miller."

"The servants be hanged!" said Winterbourne angrily. "The poor girl's only fault," he presently added, "is that she is very uncultivated."

"She is naturally indelicate," Mrs. Walker declared. "Take that example this morning. How long had you known her at Vevey?"

"A couple of days."

"Fancy, then, her making it a personal matter that you should have left the place!"

Winterbourne was silent for some moments; then he said, "I suspect, Mrs. Walker, that you and I have lived too long at Geneva!" And he added a request that she should inform him with what particular design she had made him enter her carriage.

"I wished to beg you to cease your relations with Miss Miller—not to flirt with her—to give her no farther opportunity to expose herself—to let her alone, in short."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Winterbourne. "I like her extremely."

"All the more reason that you shouldn't help her to make a scandal."

"There shall be nothing scandalous in my attentions to her."

"There certainly will be in the way she takes them. But I have said what I had on my conscience," Mrs. Walker pursued. "If you wish to rejoin the young lady I will put you down. Here, by-the-way, you have a chance."

The carriage was traversing that part of the Pincian Garden which overhangs the wall of Rome and overlooks the beautiful Villa Borghese.⁹ It is

9. Seventeenth-century palace.

bordered by a large parapet, near which there are several seats. One of the seats, at a distance, was occupied by a gentleman and a lady, towards whom Mrs. Walker gave a toss of her head. At the same moment these persons rose and walked towards the parapet. Winterbourne had asked the coachman to stop; he now descended from the carriage. His companion looked at him a moment in silence; then, while he raised his hat, she drove majestically away. Winterbourne stood there; he had turned his eyes towards Daisy and her cavalier. They evidently saw no one; they were too deeply occupied with each other. When they reached the low garden-wall they stood a moment looking off at the great flat-topped pine-clusters of the Villa Borghese; then Giovanelli seated himself familiarly upon the broad ledge of the wall. The western sun in the opposite sky sent out a brilliant shaft through a couple of cloud-bars; whereupon Daisy's companion took her parasol out of her hands and opened it. She came a little nearer and he held the parasol over her; then, still holding it, he let it rest upon her shoulder, so that both of their heads were hidden from Winterbourne. This young man lingered a moment, then he began to walk. But he walked—not towards the couple with the parasol; towards the residence of his aunt, Mrs. Costello.

IV

He flattered himself on the following day that there was no smiling among the servants when he, at least, asked for Mrs. Miller at her hotel. This lady and her daughter, however, were not at home; and on the next day, after repeating his visit, Winterbourne again had the misfortune not to find them. Mrs. Walker's party took place on the evening of the third day, and in spite of the frigidity of his last interview with the hostess, Winterbourne was among the guests. Mrs. Walker was one of those American ladies who, while residing abroad, make a point, in their own phrase, of studying European society; and she had on this occasion collected several specimens of her diversely-born fellow-mortals to serve, as it were, as text-books. When Winterbourne arrived Daisy Miller was not there; but in a few moments he saw her mother come in alone, very shyly and ruefully. Mrs. Miller's hair, above her exposed-looking temples, was more frizzled than ever. As she approached Mrs. Walker, Winterbourne also drew near.

"You see I've come all alone," said poor Mrs. Miller. "I'm so frightened; I don't know what to do; it's the first time I've ever been to a party alone—especially in this country. I wanted to bring Randolph or Eugenio, or someone, but Daisy just pushed me off by myself. I ain't used to going round alone."

"And does not your daughter intend to favor us with her society?" demanded Mrs. Walker, impressively.

"Well, Daisy's all dressed," said Mrs. Miller, with that accent of the passionate, if not of the philosophic, historian with which she always recorded the current incidents of her daughter's career. "She's got dressed on purpose before dinner. But she's got a friend of hers there; that gentleman—the Italian—that she wanted to bring. They've got going at the piano; it seems as if they couldn't leave off. Mr. Giovanelli sings splendidly. But I guess they'll come before very long," concluded Mrs. Miller hopefully.

"I'm sorry she should come—in that way," said Mrs. Walker.

"Well, I told her that there was no use in her getting dressed before dinner if she was going to wait three hours," responded Daisy's mamma. "I didn't see the use of her putting on such a dress as that to sit round with Mr. Giovanelli."

"This is most horrible!" said Mrs. Walker, turning away and addressing herself to Winterbourne. "*Elle s'affiche*.¹ It's her revenge for my having ventured to remonstrate with her. When she comes I shall not speak to her."

Daisy came after eleven o'clock, but she was not, on such an occasion, a young lady to wait to be spoken to. She rustled forward in radiant loveliness, smiling and chattering, carrying a large bouquet and attended by Mr. Giovanelli. Every one stopped talking, and turned and looked at her. She came straight to Mrs. Walker. "I'm afraid you thought I never was coming, so I sent mother off to tell you. I wanted to make Mr. Giovanelli practice some things before he came; you know he sings beautifully, and I want you to ask him to sing. This is Mr. Giovanelli; you know I introduced him to you; he's got the most lovely voice and he knows the most charming set of songs. I made him go over them this evening, on purpose; we had the greatest time at the hotel." Of all this Daisy delivered herself with the sweetest, brightest audibleness, looking now at her hostess and now round the room, while she gave a series of little pats, round her shoulders, to the edges of her dress. "Is there anyone I know?" she asked.

"I think every one knows you!" said Mrs. Walker pregnantly, and she gave a very cursory greeting to Mr. Giovanelli. This gentleman bore himself gallantly. He smiled and bowed and showed his white teeth, he curled his moustaches and rolled his eyes, and performed all the proper functions of a handsome Italian at an evening party. He sang, very prettily, half-a-dozen songs, though Mrs. Walker afterwards declared that she had been quite unable to find out who asked him. It was apparently not Daisy who had given him his orders. Daisy sat at a distance from the piano, and though she had publicly, as it were, professed a high admiration for his singing, talked, not inaudibly, while it was going on.

"It's a pity these rooms are so small; we can't dance," she said to Winterbourne, as if she had seen him five minutes before.

"I am not sorry we can't dance," Winterbourne answered; "I don't dance."

"Of course you don't dance; you're too stiff," said Miss Daisy. "I hope you enjoyed your drive with Mrs. Walker."

"No, I didn't enjoy it; I preferred walking with you."

"We paired off, that was much better," said Daisy. "But did you ever hear anything so cool as Mrs. Walker's wanting me to get into her carriage and drop poor Mr. Giovanelli; and under the pretext that it was proper? People have different ideas! It would have been most unkind; he had been talking about that walk for ten days."

"He should not have talked about it at all," said Winterbourne; "he would never have proposed to a young lady of this country to walk about the streets with him."

"About the streets?" cried Daisy, with her pretty stare. "Where then would he have proposed to her to walk? The Pincio is not the streets, either; and I, thank goodness, am not a young lady of this country. The young ladies of

1. She's making a spectacle of herself (French).

this country have a dreadfully pokey time of it, so far as I can learn; I don't see why I should change my habits for *them*."

"I am afraid your habits are those of a flirt," said Winterbourne gravely.

"Of course they are," she cried, giving him her little smiling stare again. "I'm a fearful, frightful flirt! Did you ever hear of a nice girl that was not? But I suppose you will tell me now that I am not a nice girl."

"You're a very nice girl, but I wish you would flirt with me, and me only," said Winterbourne.

"Ah! thank you, thank you very much; you are the last man I should think of flirting with. As I have had the pleasure of informing you, you are too stiff."

"You say that too often," said Winterbourne.

Daisy gave a delighted laugh. "If I could have the sweet hope of making you angry, I would say it again."

"Don't do that; when I am angry I'm stiffer than ever. But if you won't flirt with me, do cease at least to flirt with your friend at the piano; they don't understand that sort of thing here."

"I thought they understood nothing else!" exclaimed Daisy.

"Not in young unmarried women."

"It seems to me much more proper in young unmarried women than in old married ones," Daisy declared.

"Well," said Winterbourne, "when you deal with natives you must go by the custom of the place. Flirting is a purely American custom; it doesn't exist here. So when you show yourself in public with Mr. Giovanelli and without your mother—"

"Gracious! Poor mother!" interposed Daisy.

"Though you may be flirting, Mr. Giovanelli is not; he means something else."

"He isn't preaching, at any rate," said Daisy with vivacity. "And if you want very much to know, we are neither of us flirting; we are too good friends for that; we are very intimate friends."

"Ah," rejoined Winterbourne, "if you are in love with each other it is another affair."

She had allowed him up to this point to talk so frankly that he had no expectation of shocking her by this ejaculation; but she immediately got up, blushing visibly, and leaving him to exclaim mentally that little American flirts were the queerest creatures in the world. "Mr. Giovanelli, at least," she said, giving her interlocutor a single glance, "never says such very disagreeable things to me."

Winterbourne was bewildered; he stood staring. Mr. Giovanelli had finished singing; he left the piano and came over to Daisy. "Won't you come into the other room and have some tea?" he asked, bending before her with his decorative smile.

Daisy turned to Winterbourne, beginning to smile again. He was still more perplexed, for this inconsequent smile made nothing clear, though it seemed to prove, indeed, that she had a sweetness and softness that reverted instinctively to the pardon of offences. "It has never occurred to Mr. Winterbourne to offer me any tea," she said, with her little tormenting manner.

"I have offered you advice," Winterbourne rejoined.

"I prefer weak tea!" cried Daisy, and she went off with the brilliant Giovanelli. She sat with him in the adjoining room, in the embrasure of the

window, for the rest of the evening. There was an interesting performance at the piano, but neither of these young people gave heed to it. When Daisy came to take leave of Mrs. Walker, this lady conscientiously repaired the weakness of which she had been guilty at the moment of the young girl's arrival. She turned her back straight upon Miss Miller and left her to depart with what grace she might. Winterbourne was standing near the door; he saw it all. Daisy turned very pale and looked at her mother, but Mrs. Miller was humbly unconscious of any violation of the usual social forms. She appeared, indeed, to have felt an incongruous impulse to draw attention to her own striking observance of them. "Good night, Mrs. Walker," she said; "we've had a beautiful evening. You see if I let Daisy come to parties without me, I don't want her to go away without me." Daisy turned away, looking with a pale, grave face at the circle near the door; Winterbourne saw that, for the first moment, she was too much shocked and puzzled even for indignation. He on his side was greatly touched.

"That was very cruel," he said to Mrs. Walker.

"She never enters my drawing-room again," replied his hostess.

Since Winterbourne was not to meet her in Mrs. Walker's drawing-room, he went as often as possible to Mrs. Miller's hotel. The ladies were rarely at home, but when he found them the devoted Giovanelli was always present. Very often the polished little Roman was in the drawing-room with Daisy alone, Mrs. Miller being apparently constantly of the opinion that discretion is the better part of surveillance. Winterbourne noted, at first with surprise, that Daisy on these occasions was never embarrassed or annoyed by his own entrance; but he very presently began to feel that she had no more surprises for him; the unexpected in her behavior was the only thing to expect. She showed no displeasure at her *tête-à-tête* with Giovanelli being interrupted; she could chatter as freshly and freely with two gentlemen as with one; there was always, in her conversation, the same odd mixture of audacity and puerility. Winterbourne remarked to himself that if she was seriously interested in Giovanelli it was very singular that she should not take more trouble to preserve the sanctity of their interviews, and he liked her the more for her innocent-looking indifference and her apparently inexhaustible good humor. He could hardly have said why, but she seemed to him a girl who would never be jealous. At the risk of exciting a somewhat derisive smile on the reader's part, I may affirm that with regard to the women who had hitherto interested him it very often seemed to Winterbourne among the possibilities that, given certain contingencies, he should be afraid—literally afraid—of these ladies. He had a pleasant sense that he should never be afraid of Daisy Miller. It must be added that this sentiment was not altogether flattering to Daisy; it was part of his conviction, or rather of his apprehension, that she would prove a very light young person.

But she was evidently very much interested in Giovanelli. She looked at him whenever he spoke; she was perpetually telling him to do this and to do that; she was constantly "chaffing" and abusing him. She appeared completely to have forgotten that Winterbourne had said anything to displease her at Mrs. Walker's little party. One Sunday afternoon, having gone to St. Peter's² with his aunt, Winterbourne perceived Daisy strolling about the

2. Ornate Renaissance church in Vatican City, and the worldwide center of Catholic observances.

great church in company with the inevitable Giovanelli. Presently he pointed out the young girl and her cavalier to Mrs. Costello. This lady looked at them a moment through her eyeglasses, and then she said:

"That's what makes you so pensive in these days, eh?"

"I had not the least idea I was pensive," said the young man.

"You are very much preoccupied, you are thinking of something."

"And what is it," he asked, "that you accuse me of thinking of?"

"Of that young lady's, Miss Baker's, Miss Chandler's—what's her name?—Miss Miller's intrigue with that little barber's block."³

"Do you call it an intrigue," Winterbourne asked—"an affair that goes on with such peculiar publicity?"

"That's their folly," said Mrs. Costello, "it's not their merit."

"No," rejoined Winterbourne, with something of that pensiveness to which his aunt had alluded. "I don't believe that there is anything to be called an intrigue."

"I have heard a dozen people speak of it; they say she is quite carried away by him."

"They are certainly very intimate," said Winterbourne.

Mrs. Costello inspected the young couple again with her optical instrument. "He is very handsome. One easily sees how it is. She thinks him the most elegant man in the world, the finest gentleman. She has never seen anything like him; he is better even than the courier. It was the courier probably who introduced him, and if he succeeds in marrying the young lady, the courier will come in for a magnificent commission."

"I don't believe she thinks of marrying him," said Winterbourne, "and I don't believe he hopes to marry her."

"You may be very sure she thinks of nothing. She goes on from day to day, from hour to hour, as they did in the Golden Age. I can imagine nothing more vulgar. And at the same time," added Mrs. Costello, "depend upon it that she may tell you any moment that she is 'engaged.'"

"I think that is more than Giovanelli expects," said Winterbourne.

"Who is Giovanelli?"

"The little Italian. I have asked questions about him and learned something. He is apparently a perfectly respectable little man. I believe he is in a small way a *cavaliere avvocato*.⁴ But he doesn't move in what are called the first circles. I think it is really not absolutely impossible that the courier introduced him. He is evidently immensely charmed with Miss Miller. If she thinks him the finest gentleman in the world, he, on his side, has never found himself in personal contact with such splendor, such opulence, such expensiveness, as this young lady's. And then she must seem to him wonderfully pretty and interesting. I rather doubt whether he dreams of marrying her. That must appear to him too impossible a piece of luck. He has nothing but his handsome face to offer, and there is a substantial Mr. Miller in that mysterious land of dollars. Giovanelli knows that he hasn't a title to offer. If he were only a count or a *marchese*!⁵ He must wonder at his luck at the way they have taken him up."

3. A dandy.

4. Lawyer (Italian). "*Cavaliere*": a term of respect.

5. Marquis (Italian).

“He accounts for it by his handsome face, and thinks Miss Miller a young lady *qui se passe ses fantaisies!*”⁶ said Mrs. Costello.

“It is very true,” Winterbourne pursued, “that Daisy and her mamma have not yet risen to that stage of—what shall I call it?—of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a *marchese* begins. I believe that they are intellectually incapable of that conception.”

“Ah! but the *cavalier* can’t believe it,” said Mrs. Costello.

Of the observation excited by Daisy’s “intrigue,” Winterbourne gathered that day at St. Peter’s sufficient evidence. A dozen of the American colonists in Rome came to talk with Mrs. Costello, who sat on a little portable stool at the base of one of the great pilasters. The vesper-service was going forward in splendid chants and organ-tones in the adjacent choir, and meanwhile, between Mrs. Costello and her friends, there was a great deal said about poor little Miss Miller’s going really “too far.” Winterbourne was not pleased with what he heard; but when, coming out upon the great steps of the church, he saw Daisy, who had emerged before him, get into an open cab with her accomplice and roll away through the cynical streets of Rome, he could not deny to himself that she was going very far indeed. He felt very sorry for her—not exactly that he believed that she had completely lost her head, but because it was painful to hear so much that was pretty and undefended and natural assigned to a vulgar place among the categories of disorder. He made an attempt after this to give a hint to Mrs. Miller. He met one day in the Corso⁷ a friend—a tourist like himself—who had just come out of the Doria Palace, where he had been walking through the beautiful gallery. His friend talked for a moment about the superb portrait of Innocent X. by Velasquez,⁸ which hangs in one of the cabinets of the palace, and then said, “And in the same cabinet, by-the-way, I had the pleasure of contemplating a picture of a different kind—that pretty American girl whom you pointed out to me last week.” In answer to Winterbourne’s inquiries, his friend narrated that the pretty American girl—prettier than ever—was seated with a companion in the secluded nook in which the great papal portrait is enshrined.

“Who was her companion?” asked Winterbourne.

“A little Italian with a bouquet in his button-hole. The girl is delightfully pretty, but I thought I understood from you the other day that she was a young lady *du meilleur monde.*”⁹

“So she is!” answered Winterbourne; and having assured himself that his informant had seen Daisy and her companion but five minutes before, he jumped into a cab and went to call on Mrs. Miller. She was at home; but she apologized to him for receiving him in Daisy’s absence.

“She’s gone out somewhere with Mr. Giovanelli,” said Mrs. Miller. “She’s always going round with Mr. Giovanelli.”

“I have noticed that they are very intimate,” Winterbourne observed.

“Oh! it seems as if they couldn’t live without each other!” said Mrs. Miller. “Well, he’s a real gentleman, anyhow. I keep telling Daisy she’s engaged!”

“And what does Daisy say?”

6. Who is indulging her whims (French).

7. Via del Corso: main street in Central Rome.

8. Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velásquez (1599–1660), Spanish painter. Velásquez’s painting of

Pope Innocent X is exhibited in a small gallery of the Doria Palace.

9. Of the better society (French).

“Oh, she says she isn’t engaged. But she might as well be!” this impartial parent resumed. “She goes on as if she was. But I’ve made Mr. Giovanelli promise to tell me, if *she* doesn’t. I should want to write to Mr. Miller about it—shouldn’t you?”

Winterbourne replied that he certainly should; and the state of mind of Daisy’s mamma struck him as so unprecedented in the annals of parental vigilance that he gave up as utterly irrelevant the attempt to place her upon her guard.

After this Daisy was never at home, and Winterbourne ceased to meet her at the houses of their common acquaintances, because, as he perceived, these shrewd people had quite made up their minds that she was going too far. They ceased to invite her, and they intimated that they desired to express to observant Europeans the great truth that, though Miss Daisy Miller was a young American lady, her behavior was not representative—was regarded by her compatriots as abnormal. Winterbourne wondered how she felt about all the cold shoulders that were turned towards her, and sometimes it annoyed him to suspect that she did not feel at all. He said to himself that she was too light and childish, too uncultivated and unreasoning, too provincial, to have reflected upon her ostracism or even to have perceived it. Then at other moments he believed that she carried about in her elegant and irresponsible little organism a defiant, passionate, perfectly observant consciousness of the impression she produced. He asked himself whether Daisy’s defiance came from the consciousness of innocence or from her being, essentially, a young person of the reckless class. It must be admitted that holding oneself to a belief in Daisy’s “innocence” came to seem to Winterbourne more and more a matter of fine-spun gallantry. As I have already had occasion to relate, he was angry at finding himself reduced to chopping logic about this young lady; he was vexed at his want of instinctive certitude as to how far her eccentricities were generic, national, and how far they were personal. From either view of them he had somehow missed her, and now it was too late. She was “carried away” by Mr. Giovanelli.

A few days after his brief interview with her mother, he encountered her in that beautiful abode of flowering desolation known as the Palace of the Cæsars. The early Roman spring had filled the air with bloom and perfume, and the rugged surface of the Palatine¹ was muffled with tender verdure. Daisy was strolling along the top of one of those great mounds of ruin that are embanked with mossy marble and paved with monumental inscriptions. It seemed to him that Rome had never been so lovely as just then. He stood looking off at the enchanting harmony of line and color that remotely encircles the city, inhaling the softly humid odors and feeling the freshness of the year and the antiquity of the place reaffirm themselves in mysterious interfusion. It seemed to him also that Daisy had never looked so pretty; but this had been an observation of his whenever he met her. Giovanelli was at her side, and Giovanelli, too, wore an aspect of even unwonted brilliancy.

“Well,” said Daisy, “I should think you would be lonesome!”

“Lonesome?” asked Winterbourne.

“You are always going round by yourself. Can’t you get any one to walk with you?”

1. A park on a hill in the center of Rome, with palatial ruins and historical monuments.

"I am not so fortunate," said Winterbourne, "as your companion."

Giovanelli, from the first, had treated Winterbourne with distinguished politeness; he listened with a deferential air to his remarks; he laughed, punctiliously, at his pleasantries; he seemed disposed to testify to his belief that Winterbourne was a superior young man. He carried himself in no degree like a jealous wooer; he had obviously a great deal of tact; he had no objection to your expecting a little humility of him. It even seemed to Winterbourne at times that Giovanelli would find a certain mental relief in being able to have a private understanding with him—to say to him, as an intelligent man, that, bless you, *he* knew how extraordinary was this young lady, and didn't flatter himself with delusive—or at least *too* delusive—hopes of matrimony and dollars. On this occasion he strolled away from his companion to pluck a sprig of almond blossom, which he carefully arranged in his button-hole.

"I know why you say that," said Daisy, watching Giovanelli. "Because you think I go round too much with *him!*" And she nodded at her attendant.

"Everyone thinks so—if you care to know," said Winterbourne.

"Of course I care to know!" Daisy exclaimed seriously. "But I don't believe it. They are only pretending to be shocked. They don't really care a straw what I do. Besides, I don't go round so much."

"I think you will find they do care. They will show it—disagreeably."

Daisy looked at him a moment. "How—disagreeably?"

"Haven't you noticed anything?" Winterbourne asked.

"I have noticed you. But I noticed you were as stiff as an umbrella the first time I saw you."

"You will find I am not so stiff as several others," said Winterbourne, smiling.

"How shall I find it?"

"By going to see the others."

"What will they do to me?"

"They will give you the cold shoulder. Do you know what that means?"

Daisy was looking at him intently; she began to color. "Do you mean as Mrs. Walker did the other night?"

"Exactly!" said Winterbourne.

She looked away at Giovanelli, who was decorating himself with his almond-blossom. Then looking back at Winterbourne—"I shouldn't think you would let people be so unkind!" she said.

"How can I help it?" he asked.

"I should think you would say something."

"I do say something"; and he paused a moment. "I say that your mother tells me that she believes you are engaged."

"Well, she does," said Daisy very simply.

Winterbourne began to laugh. "And does Randolph believe it?" he asked.

"I guess Randolph doesn't believe anything," said Daisy. Randolph's scepticism excited Winterbourne to farther hilarity, and he observed that Giovanelli was coming back to them. Daisy, observing it too, addressed herself again to her countryman. "Since you have mentioned it," she said, "I *am* engaged." . . . Winterbourne looked at her; he had stopped laughing. "You don't believe it!" she added.

He was silent a moment; and then, "Yes, I believe it!" he said.

"Oh, no, you don't," she answered. "Well, then—I am not!"

The young girl and her cicerone² were on their way to the gate of the enclosure, so that Winterbourne, who had but lately entered, presently took leave of them. A week afterwards he went to dine at a beautiful villa on the Cælian Hill,³ and, on arriving, dismissed his hired vehicle. The evening was charming, and he promised himself the satisfaction of walking home beneath the Arch of Constantine and past the vaguely-lighted monuments of the Forum.⁴ There was a waning moon in the sky, and her radiance was not brilliant, but she was veiled in a thin cloud-curtain which seemed to diffuse and equalize it. When, on his return from the villa (it was eleven o'clock), Winterbourne approached the dusky circle of the Colosseum,⁵ it occurred to him, as a lover of the picturesque, that the interior, in the pale moonshine, would be well worth a glance. He turned aside and walked to one of the empty arches, near which, as he observed, an open carriage—one of the little Roman street-cabs—was stationed. Then he passed in among the cavernous shadows of the great structure, and emerged upon the clear and silent arena. The place had never seemed to him more impressive. One-half of the gigantic circus was in deep shade; the other was sleeping in the luminous dusk. As he stood there he began to murmur Byron's famous lines, out of "Manfred";⁶ but before he had finished his quotation he remembered that if nocturnal meditations in the Colosseum are recommended by the poets, they are deprecated by the doctors. The historic atmosphere was there, certainly; but the historic atmosphere, scientifically considered, was not better than a villainous miasma. Winterbourne walked to the middle of the arena, to take a more general glance, intending thereafter to make a hasty retreat. The great cross in the center was covered with shadow; it was only as he drew near it that he made it out distinctly. Then he saw that two persons were stationed upon the low steps which formed its base. One of these was a woman, seated; her companion was standing in front of her.

Presently the sound of the woman's voice came to him distinctly in the warm night air. "Well, he looks at us as one of the old lions or tigers may have looked at the Christian martyrs!" These were the words he heard, in the familiar accent of Miss Daisy Miller.

"Let us hope he is not very hungry," responded the ingenious Giovanelli. "He will have to take me first; you will serve for dessert!"

Winterbourne stopped, with a sort of horror; and, it must be added, with a sort of relief. It was as if a sudden illumination had been flashed upon the ambiguity of Daisy's behavior and the riddle had become easy to read. She was a young lady whom a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect. He stood there looking at her—looking at her companion, and not reflecting that though he saw them vaguely, he himself must have been more

2. Guide (Italian).

3. One of the seven hills upon which ancient Rome had been built.

4. Ruins of the governmental and religious center of ancient Rome. "Arch of Constantine": built in the fourth century to celebrate a key military victory of Rome's first Christian emperor.

5. Ancient Roman amphitheater, known for its battles between gladiators and public executions of Christians.

6. Byron's 1817 dramatic poem contains the fol-

lowing lines: ". . . the night / Hath been to me a more familiar face / Than that of man; and in her starry shade / Of dim and solitary loveliness, / I learn'd the language of another world. / I do remember me, that in my youth, / When I was wandering,—upon such a night / I stood within the Colosseum's wall, / 'Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome; / The trees which grew along the broken arches / Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars / Shone through the rents of ruin. . . ."

brightly visible. He felt angry with himself that he had bothered so much about the right way of regarding Miss Daisy Miller. Then, as he was going to advance again, he checked himself; not from the fear that he was doing her injustice, but from a sense of the danger of appearing unbecomingly exhilarated by this sudden revulsion from cautious criticism. He turned away towards the entrance of the place; but as he did so he heard Daisy speak again.

"Why, it was Mr. Winterbourne! He saw me—and he cuts me!"

What a clever little reprobate she was, and how smartly she played an injured innocence! But he wouldn't cut her. Winterbourne came forward again, and went towards the great cross. Daisy had got up; Giovanelli lifted his hat. Winterbourne had now begun to think simply of the craziness, from a sanitary point of view, of a delicate young girl lounging away the evening in this nest of malaria. What if she *were* a clever little reprobate? that was no reason for her dying of the *perniciosa*.⁷ "How long have you been there?" he asked, almost brutally.

Daisy, lovely in the flattering moonlight, looked at him a moment. Then—"All the evening," she answered gently. . . . "I never saw anything so pretty."

"I am afraid," said Winterbourne, "that you will not think Roman fever very pretty. This is the way people catch it. I wonder," he added, turning to Giovanelli, "that you, a native Roman, should countenance such a terrible indiscretion."

"Ah," said the handsome native, "for myself, I am not afraid."

"Neither am I—for you! I am speaking for this young lady."

Giovanelli lifted his well-shaped eyebrows and showed his brilliant teeth. But he took Winterbourne's rebuke with docility. "I told the Signorina it was a grave indiscretion; but when was the Signorina ever prudent?"

"I never was sick, and I don't mean to be!" the Signorina declared. "I don't look like much, but I'm healthy! I was bound to see the Colosseum by moonlight; I shouldn't have wanted to go home without that; and we have had the most beautiful time, haven't we, Mr. Giovanelli! If there has been any danger, Eugenio can give me some pills. He has got some splendid pills."

"I should advise you," said Winterbourne, "to drive home as fast as possible and take one!"

"What you say is very wise," Giovanelli rejoined. "I will go and make sure the carriage is at hand." And he went forward rapidly.

Daisy followed with Winterbourne. He kept looking at her; she seemed not in the least embarrassed. Winterbourne said nothing; Daisy chattered about the beauty of the place. "Well, I *have* seen the Colosseum by moonlight!" she exclaimed. "That's one good thing." Then, noticing Winterbourne's silence, she asked him why he didn't speak. He made no answer; he only began to laugh. They passed under one of the dark archways; Giovanelli was in front with the carriage. Here Daisy stopped a moment, looking at the young American. "*Did* you believe I was engaged the other day?" she asked.

"It doesn't matter what I believed the other day," said Winterbourne, still laughing.

"Well, what do you believe now?"

"I believe that it makes very little difference whether you are engaged or not!"

7. Malaria (Italian).

He felt the young girl's pretty eyes fixed upon him through the thick gloom of the archway; she was apparently going to answer. But Giovanelli hurried her forward. "Quick, quick," he said; "if we get in by midnight we are quite safe."

Daisy took her seat in the carriage, and the fortunate Italian placed himself beside her. "Don't forget Eugenio's pills!" said Winterbourne, as he lifted his hat.

"I don't care," said Daisy, in a little strange tone, "whether I have Roman fever or not!" Upon this the cab-driver cracked his whip, and they rolled away over the desultory patches of the antique pavement.

Winterbourne—to do him justice, as it were—mentioned to no one that he had encountered Miss Miller, at midnight, in the Colosseum with a gentleman; but nevertheless, a couple of days later, the fact of her having been there under these circumstances was known to every member of the little American circle, and commented accordingly. Winterbourne reflected that they had of course known it at the hotel, and that, after Daisy's return, there had been an exchange of jokes between the porter and the cab-driver. But the young man was conscious at the same moment that it had ceased to be a matter of serious regret to him that the little American flirt should be "talked about" by low-minded menials. These people, a day or two later, had serious information to give: the little American flirt was alarmingly ill. Winterbourne, when the rumor came to him, immediately went to the hotel for more news. He found that two or three charitable friends had preceded him, and that they were being entertained in Mrs. Miller's salon by Randolph.

"It's going round at night," said Randolph—"that's what made her sick. She's always going round at midnight. I shouldn't think she'd want to—it's so plaguey dark. You can't see anything here at night, except when there's a moon. In America there's always a moon!" Mrs. Miller was invisible; she was now, at least, giving her daughter the advantage of her society. It was evident that Daisy was dangerously ill.

Winterbourne went often to ask for news of her, and once he saw Mrs. Miller, who, though deeply alarmed, was—rather to his surprise—perfectly composed, and, as it appeared, a most efficient and judicious nurse. She talked a good deal about Dr. Davis, but Winterbourne paid her the compliment of saying to himself that she was not, after all, such a monstrous goose. "Daisy spoke of you the other day," she said to him. "Half the time she doesn't know what she's saying, but that time I think she did. She gave me a message: she told me to tell you. She told me to tell you that she never was engaged to that handsome Italian. I am sure I am very glad; Mr. Giovanelli hasn't been near us since she was taken ill. I thought he was so much of a gentleman; but I don't call that very polite! A lady told me that he was afraid I was angry with him for taking Daisy round at night. Well, so I am; but I suppose he knows I'm a lady. I would scorn to scold him. Any way, she says she's not engaged. I don't know why she wanted you to know; but she said to me three times—'Mind you tell Mr. Winterbourne.' And then she told me to ask if you remembered the time you went to that castle, in Switzerland. But I said I wouldn't give any such messages as that. Only, if she is not engaged, I'm sure I'm glad to know it."

But, as Winterbourne had said, it mattered very little. A week after this the poor girl died; it had been a terrible case of the fever. Daisy's grave was

in the little Protestant cemetery, in an angle of the wall of imperial Rome, beneath the cypresses and the thick spring-flowers. Winterbourne stood there beside it, with a number of other mourners; a number larger than the scandal excited by the young lady's career would have led you to expect. Near him stood Giovanelli, who came nearer still before Winterbourne turned away. Giovanelli was very pale; on this occasion he had no flower in his button-hole; he seemed to wish to say something. At last he said, "She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable." And then he added in a moment, "And she was the most innocent."

Winterbourne looked at him, and presently repeated his words, "And the most innocent?"

"The most innocent!"

Winterbourne felt sore and angry. "Why the devil," he asked, "did you take her to that fatal place?"

Mr. Giovanelli's urbanity was apparently imperturbable. He looked on the ground a moment, and then he said, "For myself, I had no fear; and she wanted to go."

"That was no reason!" Winterbourne declared.

The subtle Roman again dropped his eyes. "If she had lived, I should have got nothing. She would never have married me, I am sure."

"She would never have married you?"

"For a moment I hoped so. But no, I am sure."

Winterbourne listened to him; he stood staring at the raw protuberance among the April daisies. When he turned away again Mr. Giovanelli, with his light slow step, had retired.

Winterbourne almost immediately left Rome; but the following summer he again met his aunt, Mrs. Costello, at Vevey. Mrs. Costello was fond of Vevey. In the interval Winterbourne had often thought of Daisy Miller and her mystifying manners. One day he spoke of her to his aunt—said it was on his conscience that he had done her injustice.

"I am sure I don't know," said Mrs. Costello. "How did your injustice affect her?"

"She sent me a message before her death which I didn't understand at the time. But I have understood it since. She would have appreciated one's esteem."

"Is that a modest way," asked Mrs. Costello, "of saying that she would have reciprocated one's affection?"

Winterbourne offered no answer to this question; but he presently said, "You were right in that remark that you made last summer. I was booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts."

Nevertheless, he went back to live at Geneva, whence there continue to come the most contradictory accounts of his motives of sojourn: a report that he is "studying" hard—an intimation that he is much interested in a very clever foreign lady.

The Real Thing¹

I

When the porter's wife, who used to answer the house-bell, announced "A gentleman and a lady, sir" I had, as I often had in those days—the wish being father to the thought—an immediate vision of sitters. Sitters my visitors in this case proved to be; but not in the sense I should have preferred. There was nothing at first however to indicate that they mightn't have come for a portrait. The gentleman, a man of fifty, very high and very straight, with a moustache slightly grizzled and a dark grey walking-coat admirably fitted, both of which I noted professionally—I don't mean as a barber or yet as a tailor—would have struck me as a celebrity if celebrities often were striking. It was a truth of which I had for some time been conscious that a figure with a good deal of frontage was, as one might say, almost never a public institution. A glance at the lady helped to remind me of this paradoxical law: she also looked too distinguished to be a "personality." Moreover one would scarcely come across two variations together.

Neither of the pair immediately spoke—they only prolonged the preliminary gaze suggesting that each wished to give the other a chance. They were visibly shy; they stood there letting me take them in—which, as I afterwards perceived, was the most practical thing they could have done. In this way their embarrassment served their cause. I had seen people painfully reluctant to mention that they desired anything so gross as to be represented on canvas; but the scruples of my new friends appeared almost insurmountable. Yet the gentleman might have said "I should like a portrait of my wife," and the lady might have said "I should like a portrait of my husband." Perhaps they weren't husband and wife—this naturally would make the matter more delicate. Perhaps they wished to be done together—in which case they ought to have brought a third person to break the news.

"We come from Mr. Rivet," the lady finally said with a dim smile that had the effect of a moist sponge passed over a "sunk"² piece of painting, as well as of a vague allusion to vanished beauty. She was as tall and straight, in her degree, as her companion, and with ten years less to carry. She looked as sad as a woman could look whose face was not charged with expression; that is her tinted oval mask showed waste as an exposed surface shows friction. The hand of time had played over her freely, but to an effect of elimination. She was slim and stiff, and so well-dressed, in dark blue cloth, with lappets³ and pockets and buttons, that it was clear she employed the same tailor as her husband. The couple had an indefinable air of prosperous thrift—they evidently got a good deal of luxury for their money. If I was to be one of their luxuries it would behove me to consider my terms.

"Ah Claude Rivet recommended me?" I echoed; and I added that it was very kind of him, though I could reflect that, as he only painted landscape, this wasn't a sacrifice.

1. This "little gem of bright, quick vivid form," as James called it, first appeared in the April 16, 1892, issue of *Black and White*; then in *The Real Thing and Other Tales* (1893); and finally in Vol. 18 (1909) of the New York edition, the

source of the text printed here.

2. When colors lose their brilliance after they have dried on the canvas, they are said to have "sunk in."

3. Decorative flaps or folds.

The lady looked very hard at the gentleman, and the gentleman looked round the room. Then staring at the floor a moment and stroking his moustache, he rested his pleasant eyes on me with the remark: "He said you were the right one."

"I try to be, when people want to sit."

"Yes, we should like to," said the lady anxiously.

"Do you mean together?"

My visitors exchanged a glance. "If you could do anything with *me* I suppose it would be double," the gentleman stammered.

"Oh yes, there's naturally a higher charge for two figures than for one."

"We should like to make it pay," the husband confessed.

"That's very good of you," I returned, appreciating so unwonted a sympathy—for I supposed he meant pay the artist.

A sense of strangeness seemed to draw on the lady.

"We mean for the illustrations—Mr. Rivet said you might put one in."

"Put in—an illustration?" I was equally confused.

"Sketch her off, you know," said the gentleman, colouring.

It was only then that I understood the service Claude Rivet had rendered me; he had told them how I worked in black-and-white, for magazines, for storybooks, for sketches of contemporary life, and consequently had copious employment for models. These things were true, but it was not less true—I may confess it now; whether because the aspiration was to lead to everything or to nothing I leave the reader to guess—that I couldn't get the honours, to say nothing of the emoluments, of a great painter of portraits out of my head. My "illustrations" were my pot-boilers; I looked to a different branch of art—far and away the most interesting it had always seemed to me—to perpetuate my fame. There was no shame in looking to it also to make my fortune; but that fortune was by so much further from being made from the moment my visitors wished to be "done" for nothing. I was disappointed; for in the pictorial sense I had immediately *seen* them. I had seized their type—I had already settled what I would do with it. Something that wouldn't absolutely have pleased them, I afterwards reflected.

"Ah you're—you're—a—?" I began as soon as I had mastered my surprise. I couldn't bring out the dingy word "models": it seemed so little to fit the case.

"We haven't had much practice," said the lady.

"We've got to *do* something, and we've thought that an artist in your line might perhaps make something of us," her husband threw off. He further mentioned that they didn't know many artists and that they had gone first, on the off-chance—he painted views of course, but sometimes put in figures; perhaps I remembered—to Mr. Rivet, whom they had met a few years before at a place in Norfolk where he was sketching.

"We used to sketch a little ourselves," the lady hinted.

"It's very awkward, but we absolutely *must* do something," her husband went on.

"Of course we're not so *very* young," she admitted with a wan smile.

With the remark that I might as well know something more about them the husband had handed me a card extracted from a neat new pocket-book—their appurtenances were all of the freshest—and inscribed with the words "Major Monarch." Impressive as these words were they didn't carry my

knowledge much further; but my visitor presently added: "I've left the army and we've had the misfortune to lose our money. In fact our means are dreadfully small."

"It's awfully trying—a regular strain," said Mrs. Monarch.

They evidently wished to be discreet—to take care not to swagger because they were gentlefolk. I felt them willing to recognise this as something of a drawback, at the same time that I guessed at an underlying sense—their consolation in adversity—that they *had* their points. They certainly had; but these advantages struck me as preponderantly social; such for instance as would help to make a drawing-room look well. However, a drawing-room was always, or ought to be, a picture.

In consequence of his wife's allusion to their age Major Monarch observed: "Naturally it's more for the figure that we thought of going in. We can still hold ourselves up." On the instant I saw that the figure was indeed their strong point. His "naturally" didn't sound vain, but it lighted up the question. "*She* has the best one," he continued, nodding at his wife with a pleasant after-dinner absence of circumlocution. I could only reply, as if we were in fact sitting over our wine, that this didn't prevent his own from being very good; which led him in turn to make answer: "We thought that if you ever have to do people like us we might be something like it. *She* particularly—for a lady in a book, you know."

I was so amused by them that, to get more of it, I did my best to take their point of view; and though it was an embarrassment to find myself appraising physically, as if they were animals on hire or useful blacks, a pair whom I should have expected to meet only in one of the relations in which criticism is tacit, I looked at Mrs. Monarch judiciously enough to be able to exclaim after a moment with conviction: "Oh yes, a lady in a book!" She was singularly like a bad illustration.

"We'll stand up, if you like," said the Major; and he raised himself before me with a really grand air.

I could take his measure at a glance—he was six feet two and a perfect gentleman. It would have paid any club in process of formation and in want of a stamp to engage him at a salary to stand in the principal window. What struck me at once was that in coming to me they had rather missed their vocation; they could surely have been turned to better account for advertising purposes. I couldn't of course see the thing in detail, but I could see them make somebody's fortune—I don't mean their own. There was something in them for a waistcoat-maker, an hotel-keeper or a soap-vendor. I could imagine "We always use it" pinned on their bosoms with the greatest effect; I had a vision of the brilliancy with which they would launch a table d'hôte.⁴

Mrs. Monarch sat still, not from pride but from shyness, and presently her husband said to her; "Get up, my dear, and show how smart you are." She obeyed, but she had no need to get up to show it. She walked to the end of the studio and then came back blushing, her fluttered eyes on the partner of her appeal. I was reminded of an incident I had accidentally had a glimpse of in Paris—being with a friend there, a dramatist about to produce a play, when an actress came to him to ask to be entrusted with a part. She went through her paces before him, walked up and down as Mrs. Monarch

4. Host's table (French); a common dining table for guests at a hotel.

was doing. Mrs. Monarch did it quite as well, but I abstained from applauding. It was very odd to see such people apply for such poor pay. She looked as if she had ten thousand a year. Her husband had used the word that described her: she was in the London current jargon essentially and typically “smart.” Her figure was, in the same order of ideas, conspicuously and irreproachably “good.” For a woman of her age her waist was surprisingly small; her elbow moreover had the orthodox crook. She held her head at the conventional angle, but why did she come to *me*? She ought to have tried on jackets at a big shop. I feared my visitors were not only destitute but “artistic”—which would be a great complication. When she sat down again I thanked her, observing that what a draughtsman most valued in his model was the faculty of keeping quiet.

“Oh *she* can keep quiet,” said Major Monarch. Then he added jocosely: “I’ve always kept her quiet.”

“I’m not a nasty fidget, am I?” It was going to wring tears from me, I felt, the way she hid her head, ostrich-like, in the other broad bosom.

The owner of this expanse addressed his answer to me. “Perhaps it isn’t out of place to mention—because we ought to be quite business-like, oughtn’t we?—that when I married her she was known as the Beautiful Statue.”

“Oh dear!” said Mrs. Monarch ruefully.

“Of course I should want a certain amount of expression,” I rejoined.

“Of *course!*”—and I had never heard such unanimity.

“And then I suppose you know that you’ll get awfully tired.”

“Oh we *never* get tired!” they eagerly cried.

“Have you had any kind of practice?”

They hesitated—they looked at each other. “We’ve been photographed—*immensely*,” said Mrs. Monarch.

“She means the fellows have asked us themselves,” added the Major.

“I see—because you’re so good-looking.”

“I don’t know what they thought, but they were always after us.”

“We always got our photographs for nothing,” smiled Mrs. Monarch.

“We might have brought some, my dear,” her husband remarked.

“I’m not sure we have any left. We’ve given quantities away,” she explained to me.

“With our autographs and that sort of thing,” said the Major.

“Are they to be got in the shops?” I enquired as a harmless pleasantry.

“Oh yes, *hers*—they used to be.”

“Not now,” said Mrs. Monarch with her eyes on the floor.

II

I could fancy the “sort of thing” they put on the presentation copies of their photographs, and I was sure they wrote a beautiful hand. It was odd how quickly I was sure of everything that concerned them. If they were now so poor as to have to earn shillings and pence they could never have had much of a margin. Their good looks had been their capital, and they had good-humouredly made the most of the career that this resource marked out for them. It was in their faces, the blankness, the deep intellectual repose of the twenty years of country-house visiting that had given them pleasant intonations. I could see the sunny drawing-rooms, sprinkled with periodicals

she didn't read, in which Mrs. Monarch had continuously sat; I could see the wet shrubberies in which she had walked, equipped to admiration for either exercise. I could see the rich covers⁵ the Major had helped to shoot and the wonderful garments in which, late at night, he repaired to the smoking-room to talk about them. I could imagine their leggings and waterproofs, their knowing tweeds and rugs, their rolls of sticks and cases of tackle and neat umbrellas; and I could evoke the exact appearance of their servants and the compact variety of their luggage on the platforms of country stations.

They gave small tips, but they were liked; they didn't do anything themselves, but they were welcome. They looked so well everywhere; they gratified the general relish for stature, complexion and "form." They knew it without fatuity or vulgarity, and they respected themselves in consequence. They weren't superficial; they were thorough and kept themselves up—it had been their line. People with such a taste for activity had to have some line. I could feel how even in a dull house they could have been counted on for the joy of life. At present something had happened—it didn't matter what, their little income had grown less, it had grown least—and they had to do something for pocket-money. Their friends could like them, I made out, without liking to support them. There was something about them that represented credit—their clothes, their manners, their type; but if credit is a large empty pocket in which an occasional chink reverberates, the chink at least must be audible. What they wanted of me was to help to make it so. Fortunately they had no children—I soon divined that. They would also perhaps wish our relations to be kept secret: this was why it was "for the figure"—the reproduction of the face would betray them.

I liked them—I felt, quite as their friends must have done—they were so simple; and I had no objection to them if they would suit. But somehow with all their perfections I didn't easily believe in them. After all they were amateurs, and the ruling passion of my life was the detestation of the amateur. Combined with this was another perversity—an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question. There were other considerations, the first of which was that I already had two or three recruits in use, notably a young person with big feet, in alpaca, from Kilburn, who for a couple of years had come to me regularly for my illustrations and with whom I was still—perhaps ignobly—satisfied. I frankly explained to my visitors how the case stood, but they had taken more precautions than I supposed. They had reasoned out their opportunity, for Claude Rivet had told them of the projected *édition de luxe* of one of the writers of our day—the rarest of the novelists—who, long neglected by the multitudinous vulgar and dearly prized by the attentive (need I mention Philip Vincent?) had had the happy fortune of seeing, late in life, the dawn and then the full light of a higher criticism; an estimate in which on the part of the public there was something really of expiation. The edition preparing, planned by a publisher of taste, was practically an act of high reparation; the wood-cuts with which it was to be enriched were the hom-

5. Game birds.

age of English art to one of the most independent representatives of English letters. Major and Mrs. Monarch confessed to me they had hoped I might be able to work *them* into my branch of the enterprise. They knew I was to do the first of the books, "Rutland Ramsay," but I had to make clear to them that my participation in the rest of the affair—this first book was to be a test—must depend on the satisfaction I should give. If this should be limited my employers would drop me with scarce common forms. It was therefore a crisis for me, and naturally I was making special preparations, looking about for new people, should they be necessary, and securing the best types. I admitted however that I should like to settle down to two or three good models who would do for everything.

"Should we have often to—a—put on special clothes?" Mrs. Monarch timidly demanded.

"Dear yes—that's half the business."

"And should we be expected to supply our own costumes?"

"Oh no; I've got a lot of things. A painter's models put on—or put off—anything he likes."

"And you mean—a—the same?"

"The same?"

Mrs. Monarch looked at her husband again.

"Oh she was just wondering," he explained, "if the costumes are in *general* use." I had to confess that they were, and I mentioned further that some of them—I had a lot of genuine greasy last-century things—had served their time, a hundred years ago, on living world-stained men and women; on figures not perhaps so far removed, in that vanished world, from *their* type, the Monarchs', *quoi!*⁶ of a breeched and bewigged age. "We'll put on anything that *fits*," said the Major.

"Oh I arrange that—they fit in the pictures."

"I'm afraid I should do better for the modern books. I'd come as you like," said Mrs. Monarch.

"She has got a lot of clothes at home: they might do for contemporary life," her husband continued.

"Oh I can fancy scenes in which you'd be quite natural." And indeed I could see the slipshod rearrangements of stale properties—the stories I tried to produce pictures for without the exasperation of reading them—whose sandy tracts the good lady might help to people. But I had to return to the fact that for this sort of work—the daily mechanical grind—I was already equipped: the people I was working with were fully adequate.

"We only thought we might be more like *some* characters," said Mrs. Monarch mildly, getting up.

Her husband also rose; he stood looking at me with a dim wistfulness that was touching in so fine a man. "Wouldn't it be rather a pull sometimes to have—a—to have—?" He hung fire;⁷ he wanted me to help him by phrasing what he meant. But I couldn't—I didn't know. So he brought it out awkwardly: "The *real* thing; a gentleman, you know, or a lady." I was quite ready to give a general assent—I admitted that there was a great deal in that. This encouraged Major Monarch to say, following up his appeal with an unacted

6. What! (French).

7. Delayed. The term comes from an unexpected

delay between the triggering of a firearm and its firing—a common problem in older firearms.

gulp: "It's awfully hard—we've tried everything." The gulp was communicative; it proved too much for his wife. Before I knew it Mrs. Monarch had dropped again upon a divan and burst into tears. Her husband sat down beside her, holding one of her hands; whereupon she quickly dried her eyes with the other, while I felt embarrassed as she looked up at me. "There isn't a confounded job I haven't applied for—waited for—prayed for. You can fancy we'd be pretty bad first. Secretaryships and that sort of thing? You might as well ask for a peerage. I'd be *anything*—I'm strong; a messenger or a coal-heaver. I'd put on a gold-laced cap and open carriage-doors in front of the haberdasher's; I'd hang about a station to carry portmanteaux;⁸ I'd be a postman. But they won't *look* at you; there are thousands as good as yourself already on the ground. *Gentlemen*, poor beggars, who've drunk their wine, who've kept their hunters!"

I was as reassuring as I knew how to be, and my visitors were presently on their feet again while, for the experiment, we agreed on an hour. We were discussing it when the door opened and Miss Churm came in with a wet umbrella. Miss Churm had to take the omnibus to Maida Vale⁹ and then walk half a mile. She looked a trifle blowsy and slightly splashed. I scarcely ever saw her come in without thinking afresh how odd it was that, being so little in herself, she should yet be so much in others. She was a meagre little Miss Churm, but was such an ample heroine of romance. She was only a freckled cockney,¹ but she could represent everything, from a fine lady to a shepherdess; she had the faculty as she might have had a fine voice or long hair. She couldn't spell and she loved beer, but she had two or three "points," and practice, and a knack, and mother-wit, and a whimsical sensibility, and a love of the theatre, and seven sisters, and not an ounce of respect, especially for the *h*. The first thing my visitors saw was that her umbrella was wet, and in their spotless perfection they visibly winced at it. The rain had come on since their arrival.

"I'm all in a soak; there *was* a mess of people in the 'bus. I wish you lived near a stytion," said Miss Churm. I requested her to get ready as quickly as possible, and she passed into the room in which she always changed her dress. But before going out she asked me what she was to get into this time.

"It's the Russian princess, don't you know?" I answered; "the one with the 'golden eyes,' in black velvet, for the long thing in the *Cheapside*."²

"Golden eyes? *I say!*" cried Miss Churm, while my companions watched her with intensity as she withdrew. She always arranged herself, when she was late, before I could turn around; and I kept my visitors a little on purpose, so that they might get an idea, from seeing her, what would be expected of themselves. I mentioned that she was quite my notion of an excellent model—she was really very clever.

"Do you think she looks like a Russian princess?" Major Monarch asked with lurking alarm.

"When I make her, yes."

"Oh if you have to *make* her—!" he reasoned, not without point.

"That's the most you can ask. There are so many who are not makeable."

8. Large suitcases.

9. Residential district in West London.

1. Native of London, especially the East End. The cockney dialect is known for dropping *h*'s;

e.g., *hair* would be pronounced *air*.

2. Imaginary magazine named after a main business street in London.

“Well now, *here’s* a lady”—and with a persuasive smile he passed his arm into his wife’s—“who’s already made!”

“Oh I’m not a Russian princess,” Mrs. Monarch protested a little coldly. I could see she had known some and didn’t like them. There at once was a complication of a kind I never had to fear with Miss Churm.

This young lady came back in black velvet—the gown was rather rusty and very low on her lean shoulders—and with a Japanese fan in her red hands. I reminded her that in the scene I was doing she had to look over some one’s head. “I forget whose it is; but it doesn’t matter. Just look over a head.”

“I’d rather look over a stove,” said Miss Churm; and she took her station near the fire. She fell into position, settled herself into a tall attitude, gave a certain backward inclination to her head and a certain forward droop to her fan, and looked, at least to my prejudiced sense, distinguished and charming, foreign and dangerous. We left her looking so while I went downstairs with Major and Mrs. Monarch.

“I believe I could come about as near it as that,” said Mrs. Monarch.

“Oh, you think she’s shabby, but you must allow for the alchemy of art.”

However, they went off with an evident increase of comfort founded on their demonstrable advantage in being the real thing. I could fancy them shuddering over Miss Churm. She was very droll about them when I went back, for I told her what they wanted.

“Well, if *she* can sit I’ll tyke to bookkeeping,” said my model.

“She’s very ladylike,” I replied as an innocent form of aggravation.

“So much the worse for *you*. That means she can’t turn round.”

“She’ll do for the fashionable novels.”

“Oh yes, she’ll *do* for them!” my model humorously declared. “Ain’t they bad enough without her?” I had often sociably denounced them to Miss Churm.

III

It was for the elucidation of a mystery in one of these works that I first tried Mrs. Monarch. Her husband came with her, to be useful if necessary—it was sufficiently clear that as a general thing he would prefer to come with her. At first I wondered if this were for “propriety’s” sake—if he were going to be jealous and meddling. The idea was too tiresome, and if it had been confirmed it would speedily have brought our acquaintance to a close. But I soon saw there was nothing in it and that if he accompanied Mrs. Monarch it was—in addition to the chance of being wanted—simply because he had nothing else to do. When they were separate his occupation was gone and they never *had* been separate. I judged rightly that in their awkward situation their close union was their main comfort and that this union had no weak spot. It was a real marriage, an encouragement to the hesitating, a nut for pessimists to crack. Their address was humble—I remember afterwards thinking it had been the only thing about them that was really professional—and I could fancy the lamentable lodgings in which the Major would have been left alone. He could sit there more or less grimly with his wife—he couldn’t sit there anyhow without her.

He had too much tact to try and make himself agreeable when he couldn’t be useful; so when I was too absorbed in my work to talk he simply sat and

waited. But I liked to hear him talk—it made my work, when not interrupting it, less mechanical, less special. To listen to him was to combine the excitement of going out with the economy of staying at home. There was only one hindrance—that I seemed not to know any of the people this brilliant couple had known. I think he wondered extremely, during the term of our intercourse, whom the deuce I *did* know. He hadn't a stray sixpence of an idea to fumble for, so we didn't spin it very fine; we confined ourselves to questions of leather and even of liquor—saddlers and breeches-makers and how to get excellent claret cheap—and matters like “good trains” and the habits of small game. His lore on these last subjects was astonishing—he managed to interweave the station-master with the ornithologist. When he couldn't talk about greater things he could talk cheerfully about smaller, and since I couldn't accompany him into reminiscences of the fashionable world he could lower the conversation without a visible effort to my level.

So earnest a desire to please was touching in a man who could so easily have knocked one down. He looked after the fire and had an opinion on the draught of the stove without my asking him, and I could see that he thought many of my arrangements not half knowing. I remember telling him that if I were only rich I'd offer him a salary to come and teach me how to live. Sometimes he gave a random sigh of which the essence might have been: “Give me even such a bare old barrack as *this*, and I'd do something with it!” When I wanted to use him he came alone; which was an illustration of the superior courage of women. His wife could bear her solitary second floor, and she was in general more discreet; showing by various small reserves that she was alive to the propriety of keeping our relations markedly professional—not letting them slide into sociability. She wished it to remain clear that she and the Major were employed, not cultivated, and if she approved of me as a superior, who could be kept in his place, she never thought me quite good enough for an equal.

She sat with great intensity, giving the whole of her mind to it, and was capable of remaining for an hour almost as motionless as before a photographer's lens. I could see she had been photographed often, but somehow the very habit that made her good for that purpose unfitted her for mine. At first I was extremely pleased with her ladylike air, and it was a satisfaction, on coming to follow her lines, to see how good they were and how far they could lead the pencil. But after a little skirmishing I began to find her too insurmountably stiff; do what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph. Her figure had no variety of expression—she herself had no sense of variety. You may say that this was my business and was only a question of placing her. Yet I placed her in every conceivable position and she managed to obliterate their differences. She was always a lady certainly, and into the bargain was always the same lady. She was the real thing, but always the same thing. There were moments when I rather writhed under the serenity of her confidence that she *was* the real thing. All her dealings with me and all her husband's were an implication that this was lucky for *me*. Meanwhile I found myself trying to invent types that approached her own, instead of making her own transform itself—in the clever way that was not impossible for instance to poor Miss Churm. Arrange as I would and take the precautions I would, she always came out, in my pictures, too tall—landing me in the dilemma of having represented a fas-

cinating woman as seven feet high, which (out of respect perhaps to my own very much scantier inches) was far from my idea of such a personage.

The case was worse with the Major—nothing I could do would keep *him* down, so that he became useful only for representation of brawny giants. I adored variety and range, I cherished human accidents, the illustrative note; I wanted to characterise closely, and the thing in the world I most hated was the danger of being ridden by a type. I had quarrelled with some of my friends about it; I had parted company with them for maintaining that one *had* to be, and that if the type was beautiful—witness Raphael and Leonardo³—the servitude was only a gain. I was neither Leonardo nor Raphael—I might only be a presumptuous young modern searcher; but I held that everything was to be sacrificed sooner than character. When they claimed that the obsessional form could easily *be* character I retorted, perhaps superficially, “Whose?” It couldn’t be everybody’s—it might end in being nobody’s.

After I had drawn Mrs. Monarch a dozen times I felt surer even than before that the value of such a model as Miss Churm resided precisely in the fact that she had no positive stamp, combined of course with the other fact that what she did have was a curious and inexplicable talent for imitation. Her usual appearance was like a curtain which she could draw up at request for a capital performance. This performance was simply suggestive; but it was a word to the wise—it was vivid and pretty. Sometimes even I thought it, though she was plain herself, too insipidly pretty; I made it a reproach to her that the figures drawn from her were monotonously (*bête-ment*,⁴ as we used to say) graceful. Nothing made her more angry: it was so much her pride to feel she could sit for characters that had nothing in common with each other. She would accuse me at such moments of taking away her “reputytion.”

It suffered a certain shrinkage, this queer quantity, from the repeated visits of my new friends. Miss Churm was greatly in demand, never in want of employment, so I had no scruple in putting her off occasionally, to try them more at my ease. It was certainly amusing at first to do the real thing—it was amusing to do Major Monarch’s trousers. There *were* the real thing, even if he did come out colossal. It was amusing to do his wife’s back hair—it was so mathematically neat—and the particular “smart” tension of her tight stays. She lent herself especially to positions in which the face was somewhat averted or blurred; she abounded in ladylike back views and *profils perdus*.⁵ When she stood erect she took naturally one of the attitudes in which court-painters represent queens and princesses; so that I found myself wondering whether, to draw out this accomplishment, I couldn’t get the editor of the *Cheapside* to publish a really royal romance, “A Tale of Buckingham Palace.” Sometimes however the real thing and the make-believe came into contact; by which I mean that Miss Churm, keeping an appointment or coming to make one on days when I had much work in hand, encountered her invidious rivals. The encounter was not on their part, for they noticed her no more than if she had been the housemaid; not from intentional loftiness, but simply because as yet, professionally, they didn’t know how to fraternise,

3. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Florentine painter, sculptor, architect, and engineer. Raffaello Santi or Sanzio (1483–1520), Italian painter.

4. Unthinkingly (French).

5. Lost profiles (French); poses in which the subject turns away.

as I could imagine they would have liked—or at least that the Major would. They couldn't talk about the omnibus—they always walked; and they didn't know what else to try—she wasn't interested in good trains or cheap claret. Besides, they must have felt—in the air—that she was amused at them, secretly derisive of their ever knowing how. She wasn't a person to conceal the limits of her faith if she had had a chance to show them. On the other hand Mrs. Monarch didn't think her tidy; for why else did she take pains to say to me—it was going out of the way, for Mrs. Monarch—that she didn't like dirty women?

One day when my young lady happened to be present with my other sitters—she even dropped in, when it was convenient, for a chat—I asked her to be so good as to lend a hand in getting tea, a service with which she was familiar and which was one of a class that, living as I did in a small way, with slender domestic resources, I often appealed to my models to render. They liked to lay hands on my property, to break the sitting, and sometimes the china—it made them feel Bohemian. The next time I saw Miss Churm after this incident she surprised me greatly by making a scene about it—she accused me of having wished to humiliate her. She hadn't resented the outrage at the time, but had seemed obliging and amused, enjoying the comedy of asking Mrs. Monarch, who sat vague and silent, whether she would have cream and sugar, and putting an exaggerated simper into the question. She had tried intonations—as if she too wished to pass for the real thing—till I was afraid my other visitors would take offence.

Oh they were determined not to do this, and their touching patience was the measure of their great need. They would sit by the hour, uncomplaining, till I was ready to use them; they would come back on the chance of being wanted and would walk away cheerfully if it failed. I used to go to the door with them to see in what magnificent order they retreated. I tried to find other employment for them—I introduced them to several artists. But they didn't "take," for reasons I could appreciate, and I became rather anxiously aware that after such disappointments they fell back upon me with a heavier weight. They did me the honour to think me most *their* form. They weren't romantic enough for the painters, and in those days there were few serious workers in black-and-white. Besides, they had an eye to the great job I had mentioned to them—they had secretly set their hearts on supplying the right essence for my pictorial vindication of our fine novelist. They knew that for this undertaking I should want no costume-effects, none of the frippery of past ages—that it was a case in which everything would be contemporary and satirical and presumably genteel. If I could work them into it their future would be assured, for the labour would of course be long and the occupation steady.

One day Mrs. Monarch came without her husband—she explained his absence by his having had to go to the City.⁶ While she sat there in her usual relaxed majesty there came at the door a knock which I immediately recognised as the subdued appeal of a model out of work. It was followed by the entrance of a young man whom I at once saw to be a foreigner and who proved in fact an Italian acquainted with no English word but my name,

6. London. The "City" also specifically means the old part of London around St. Paul's Cathedral, especially the financial and legal institutions there.

which he uttered in a way that made it seem to include all others. I hadn't then visited his country, nor was I proficient in his tongue; but as he was not so meanly constituted—what Italian is?—as to depend only on that member for expression he conveyed to me, in familiar but graceful mimicry, that he was in search of exactly the employment in which the lady before me was engaged. I was not struck with him at first, and while I continued to draw I dropped few signs of interest or encouragement. He stood his ground however—not importunately, but with a dumb dog-like fidelity in his eyes that amounted to innocent impudence, the manner of a devoted servant—he might have been in the house for years—unjustly suspected. Suddenly it struck me that this very attitude and expression made a picture; whereupon I told him to sit down and wait till I should be free. There was another picture in the way he obeyed me, and I observed as I worked that there were others still in the way he looked wonderingly, with his head thrown back, about the high studio. He might have been crossing himself in Saint Peter's. Before I finished I said to myself "The fellow's a bankrupt orange-monger, but a treasure."

When Mrs. Monarch withdrew he passed across the room like a flash to open the door for her, standing there with the rapt pure gaze of the young Dante spellbound by the young Beatrice.⁷ As I never insisted, in such situations, on the blankness of the British domestic, I reflected that he had the making of a servant—and I needed one, but couldn't pay him to be only that—as well as of a model; in short I resolved to adopt my bright adventurer if he would agree to officiate in the double capacity. He jumped at my offer, and in the event my rashness—for I had really known nothing about him—wasn't brought home to me. He proved a sympathetic though a desultory ministrant, and had in a wonderful degree the *sentiment de la pose*.⁸ It was uncultivated, instinctive, a part of the happy instinct that had guided him to my door and helped him to spell out my name on the card nailed to it. He had had no other introduction to me than a guess, from the shape of my high north window, seen outside, that my place was a studio and that as a studio it would contain an artist. He had wandered to England in search of fortune, like other itinerants, and had embarked, with a partner and a small green hand-cart, on the sale of penny ices. The ices had melted away and the partner had dissolved in their train. My young man wore tight yellow trousers with reddish stripes and his name was Oronte. He was sallow but fair, and when I put him into some old clothes of my own he looked like an Englishman. He was as good as Miss Churm, who could look, when requested, like an Italian.

IV

I thought Mrs. Monarch's face slightly convulsed when, on her coming back with her husband, she found Oronte installed. It was strange to have to recognise in a scrap of a lazzarone⁹ a competitor to her magnificent Major. It

7. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Italian poet, first saw Beatrice Portinari when they were both nine. Though he saw her only a few times, she made a lasting impression on him and became his ideal, his life's inspiration, and the direct

agent of his salvation (as his greatest work, *The Divine Comedy*, makes clear).

8. Instinct for striking poses (French).

9. Beggar (Italian).

was she who scented danger first, for the Major was anecdotically unconscious. But Oronte gave us tea, with a hundred eager confusions—he had never been concerned in so queer a process—and I think she thought better of me for having at last an “establishment.” They saw a couple of drawings that I had made of the establishment, and Mrs. Monarch hinted that it never would have struck her he had sat for them. “Now the drawings you make from *us*, they look exactly like us,” she reminded me, smiling in triumph; and I recognised that this was indeed just their defect. When I drew the Monarchs I couldn’t anyhow get away from them—get into the character I wanted to represent; and I hadn’t the least desire my model should be discoverable in my picture. Miss Churm never was, and Mrs. Monarch thought I hid her, very properly, because she was vulgar; whereas if she was lost it was only as the dead who go to heaven are lost—in the gain of an angel the more.

By this time I had got a certain start with “Rutland Ramsay,” the first novel in the great projected series; that is I had produced a dozen drawings, several with the help of the Major and his wife, and I had sent them in for approval. My understanding with the publishers, as I have already hinted, had been that I was to be left to do my work, in this particular case, as I liked, with the whole book committed to me; but my connexion with the rest of the series was only contingent. There were moments when, frankly, it *was* a comfort to have the real thing under one’s hand; for there were characters in “Rutland Ramsay” that were very much like it. There were people presumably as erect as the Major and women of as good a fashion as Mrs. Monarch. There was a great deal of country-house life—treated, it is true, in a fine fanciful ironical generalised way—and there was a considerable implication of knickerbockers and kilts.¹ There were certain things I had to settle at the outset; such things for instance as the exact appearance of the hero and the particular bloom and figure of the heroine. The author of course gave me a lead, but there was a margin for interpretation. I took the Monarchs into my confidence, I told them frankly what I was about, I mentioned my embarrassments and alternatives. “Oh take *him!*” Mrs. Monarch murmured sweetly, looking at her husband; and “What could you want better than my wife?” the Major enquired with the comfortable candour that now prevailed between us.

I wasn’t obliged to answer these remarks—I was only obliged to place my sitters. I wasn’t easy in mind, and I postponed a little timidly perhaps the solving of my question. The book was a large canvas, the other figures were numerous, and I worked off at first some of the episodes in which the hero and the heroine were not concerned. When once I had set *them* up I should have to stick to them—I couldn’t make my young man seven feet high in one place and five feet nine in another. I inclined on the whole to the latter measurement, though the Major more than once reminded me that *he* looked about as young as any one. It was indeed quite possible to arrange him, for the figure, so that it would have been difficult to detect his age. After the spontaneous Oronte had been with me a month, and after I had given him to understand several times over that his native exuberance would presently constitute an insurmountable barrier to our further intercourse, I waked to a sense of his heroic capacity. He was only five feet seven, but the remain-

1. Knickerbockers (close-fitting short pants gathered at the knee) and kilts (knee-length pleated skirts, usually of tartan, worn by Scottish men) suggest a rural, outdoor attire.

ing inches were latent. I tried him almost secretly at first, for I was really rather afraid of the judgment my other models would pass on such a choice. If they regarded Miss Churm as little better than a snare what would they think of the representation by a person so little the real thing as an Italian street-vendor of a protagonist formed by a public school?

If I went a little in fear of them it wasn't because they bullied me, because they had got an oppressive foothold, but because in their really pathetic decorum and mysteriously permanent newness they counted on me so intensely. I was therefore very glad when Jack Hawley came home: he was always of such good counsel. He painted badly himself, but there was no one like him for putting his finger on the place. He had been absent from England for a year; he had been somewhere—I don't remember where—to get a fresh eye. I was in a good deal of dread of any such organ, but we were old friends; he had been away for months and a sense of emptiness was creeping into my life. I hadn't dodged a missile for a year.

He came back with a fresh eye, but with the same old black velvet blouse, and the first evening he spent in my studio we smoked cigarettes till the small hours. He had done no work himself, he had only got the eye; so the field was clear for the production of my little things. He wanted to see what I had produced for the *Cheapside*, but he was disappointed in the exhibition. That at least seemed the meaning of two or three comprehensive groans which, as he lounged on my big divan, his leg folded under him, looking at my latest drawings, issued from his lips with the smoke of the cigarette.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"What's the matter with *you*?"

"Nothing save that I'm mystified."

"You are indeed. You're quite off the hinge. What's the meaning of this new fad?" And he tossed me, with visible irreverence, a drawing in which I happened to have depicted both my elegant models. I asked if he didn't think it good, and he replied that it struck him as execrable, given the sort of thing I had always represented myself to him as wishing to arrive at; but I let that pass—I was so anxious to see exactly what he meant. The two figures in the picture looked colossal, but I supposed this was *not* what he meant, inasmuch as, for aught he knew the contrary, I might have been trying for some such effect. I maintained that I was working exactly in the same way as when he last had done me the honour to tell me I might do something some day. "Well, there's a screw loose somewhere," he answered; "wait a bit and I'll discover it." I depended upon him to do so: where else was the fresh eye? But he produced at last nothing more luminous than "I don't know—I don't like your types." This was lame for a critic who had never consented to discuss with me anything but the question of execution, the direction of strokes and the mystery of values.

"In the drawings you've been looking at I think my types are very handsome."

"Oh they won't do!"

"I've been working with new models."

"I see you have. *They* won't do."

"Are you very sure of that?"

"Absolutely—they're stupid."

"You mean *I* am—for I ought to get round that."

"You *can't*—with such people. Who are they?"

I told him, so far as was necessary, and he concluded heartlessly: "*Ce sont des gens qu'il faut mettre à la porte.*"²

"You've never seen them; they're awfully good"—I flew to their defence.

"Not seen them? Why all this recent work of yours drops to pieces with them. It's all I want to see of them."

"No one else has said anything against it—the *Cheapside* people are pleased."

"Everyone else is an ass, and the *Cheapside* people the biggest asses of all. Come, don't pretend at this time of day to have pretty illusions about the public, especially about publishers and editors. It's not for *such* animals you work—it's for those who know, *coloro che sanno*;³ so keep straight for *me* if you can't keep straight for yourself. There was a certain sort of thing you used to try for—and a very good thing it was. But this twaddle isn't *in* it." When I talked with Hawley later about "Rutland Ramsay" and its possible successors he declared that I must get back into my boat again or I should go to the bottom. His voice in short was the voice of warning.

I noted the warning, but I didn't turn my friends out of doors. They bored me a good deal; but the very fact that they bored me admonished me not to sacrifice them—if there was anything to be done with them—simply to irritation. As I look back at this phase they seem to me to have pervaded my life not a little. I have a vision of them as most of the time in my studio, seated against the wall on an old velvet bench to be out of the way, and resembling the while a pair of patient courtiers in a royal ante-chamber. I'm convinced that during the coldest weeks of the winter they held their ground because it saved them fire. Their newness was losing its gloss, and it was impossible not to feel them objects of charity. Whenever Miss Churm arrived they went away, and after I was fairly launched in "Rutland Ramsay" Miss Churm arrived pretty often. They managed to express to me tacitly that they supposed I wanted her for the low life of the book, and I let them suppose it, since they had attempted to study the work—it was lying about the studio—without discovering that it dealt only with the highest circles. They had dipped into the most brilliant of our novelists without deciphering many passages. I still took an hour from them, now and again, in spite of Jack Hawley's warning: it would be time enough to dismiss them, if dismissal should be necessary, when the rigour of the season was over. Hawley had made their acquaintance—he had met them at my fireside—and thought them a ridiculous pair. Learning that he was a painter they tried to approach him, to show him too that they were the real thing; but he looked at them, across the big room, as if they were miles away: they were a compendium of everything he most objected to in the social system of his country. Such people as that, all convention and patent-leather, with ejaculations that stopped conversation, had no business in a studio. A studio was a place to learn to see, and how could you see through a pair of feather-beds?

The main inconvenience I suffered at their hands was that at first I was shy of letting it break upon them that my artful little servant had begun to sit to me for "Rutland Ramsay." They knew I had been odd enough—they

2. Such people should be shown the door (French).

3. A misquotation of a phrase Dante applied to Aristotle in *The Divine Comedy*, "Inferno," 4.131,

which reads, "*el maestro di color che sanno*," literally, "the master of those who know."

were prepared by this time to allow oddity to artists—to pick a foreign vagabond out of the streets when I might have had a person with whiskers and credentials, but it was some time before they learned how high I rated his accomplishments. They found him in an attitude more than once, but they never doubted I was doing him as an organ-grinder. There were several things they never guessed, and one of them was that for a striking scene in the novel, in which a footman briefly figured, it occurred to me to make use of Major Monarch as the menial. I kept putting this off, I didn't like to ask him to don the livery—besides the difficulty of finding a livery to fit him. At last, one day late in the winter, when I was at work on the despised Oronte, who caught one's idea on the wing, and was in the glow of feeling myself go very straight, they came in, the Major and his wife, with their society laugh about nothing (there was less and less to laugh at); came in like country-callers—they always reminded me of that—who have walked across the park after church and are presently persuaded to stay to luncheon. Luncheon was over, but they could stay to tea—I knew they wanted it. The fit was on me, however, and I couldn't let my ardour cool and my work wait, with the fading daylight, while my model prepared it. So I asked Mrs. Monarch if she would mind laying it out—a request which for an instant brought all the blood to her face. Her eyes were on her husband's for a second, and some mute telegraphy passed between them. Their folly was over the next instant; his cheerful shrewdness put an end to it. So far from pitying their wounded pride, I must add, I was moved to give it as complete a lesson as I could. They bustled about together and got out the cups and saucers and made the kettle boil. I know they felt as if they were waiting on my servant, and when the tea was prepared I said: "He'll have a cup, please—he's tired." Mrs. Monarch brought him one where he stood, and he took it from her as if he had been a gentleman at a party squeezing a crush-hat with an elbow.

Then it came over me that she had made a great effort for me—made it with a kind of nobleness—and that I owed her a compensation. Each time I saw her after this I wondered what the compensation could be. I couldn't go on doing the wrong thing to oblige them. Oh it *was* the wrong thing, the stamp of the work for which they sat—Hawley was not the only person to say it now. I sent in a large number of the drawings I had made for "Rutland Ramsay," and I received a warning that was more to the point than Hawley's. The artistic adviser of the house for which I was working was of opinion that many of my illustrations were not what had been looked for. Most of these illustrations were the subjects in which the Monarchs had figured. Without going into the question of what *had* been looked for, I had to face the fact that at this rate I shouldn't get the other books to do. I hurled myself in despair on Miss Churm—I put her through all her paces. I not only adopted Oronte publicly as my hero, but one morning when the Major looked in to see if I didn't require him to finish a *Cheapside* figure for which he had begun to sit the week before, I told him I had changed my mind—I'd do the drawing from my man. At this my visitor turned pale and stood looking at me. "Is *he* your idea of an English gentleman?" he asked.

I was disappointed, I was nervous, I wanted to get on with my work; so I replied with irritation: "Oh my dear Major—I can't be ruined for *you!*"

It was a horrid speech, but he stood another moment—after which, without a word, he quitted the studio. I drew a long breath, for I said to myself

that I shouldn't see him again. I hadn't told him definitely that I was in danger of having my work rejected, but I was vexed at his not having felt the catastrophe in the air, read with me the moral of our fruitless collaboration, the lesson that in the deceptive atmosphere of art even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic.

I didn't owe my friends money, but I did see them again. They reappeared together three days later, and, given all the other facts, there was something tragic in that one. It was a clear proof they could find nothing else in life to do. They had threshed the matter out in a dismal conference—they had digested the bad news that they were not in for the series. If they weren't useful to me even for the *Cheapside* their function seemed difficult to determine, and I could only judge at first that they had come, forgivingly, decorously, to take a last leave. This made me rejoice in secret that I had little leisure for a scene; for I had placed both my other models in position together and I was pegging away at a drawing from which I hoped to derive glory. It had been suggested by the passage in which Rutland Ramsay, drawing up a chair to Artemisia's piano-stool, says extraordinary things to her while she ostensibly fingers out a difficult piece of music. I had done Miss Churm at the piano before—it was an attitude in which she knew how to take on an absolutely poetic grace. I wished the two figures to “compose” together with intensity, and my little Italian had entered perfectly into my conception. The pair were vividly before me, the piano had been pulled out; it was a charming show of blended youth and murmured love, which I had only to catch and keep. My visitors stood and looked at it, and I was friendly to them over my shoulder.

They made no response, but I was used to silent company and went on with my work, only a little disconcerted—even though exhilarated by the sense that *this* was at least the ideal thing—at not having got rid of them after all. Presently I heard Mrs. Monarch's sweet voice beside or rather above me: “I wish her hair were a little better done.” I looked up and she was staring with a strange fixedness at Miss Churm, whose back was turned to her. “Do you mind my just touching it?” she went on—a question which made me spring up for an instant as with the instinctive fear that she might do the young lady a harm. But she quieted me with a glance I shall never forget—I confess I should like to have been able to paint *that*—and went for a moment to my model. She spoke to her softly, laying a hand on her shoulder and bending over her; and as the girl, understanding, gratefully assented, she disposed her rough curls, with a few quick passes, in such a way as to make Miss Churm's head twice as charming. It was one of the most heroic personal services I've ever seen rendered. Then Mrs. Monarch turned away with a low sigh and, looking about her as if for something to do, stooped to the floor with a noble humility and picked up a dirty rag that had dropped out of my paint-box.

The Major meanwhile had also been looking for something to do, and, wandering to the other end of the studio, saw before him my breakfast-things neglected, unremoved. “I say, can't I be useful *here*?” he called out to me with an irrepressible quaver. I assented with a laugh that I fear was awkward, and for the next ten minutes, while I worked, I heard the light clatter of china and the tinkle of spoons and glass. Mrs. Monarch assisted her husband—they washed up my crockery, they put it away. They wandered off

into my little scullery, and I afterwards found that they had cleaned my knives and that my slender stock of plate had an unprecedented surface. When it came over me, the latent eloquence of what they were doing, I confess that my drawing was blurred for a moment—the picture swam. They had accepted their failure, but they couldn't accept their fate. They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal; but they didn't want to starve. If my servants were my models, then my models might be my servants. They would reverse the parts—the others would sit for the ladies and gentlemen and *they* would do the work. They would still be in the studio—it was an intense dumb appeal to me not to turn them out. "Take us on," they wanted to say—"we'll do *anything*."

My pencil dropped from my hand; my sitting was spoiled and I got rid of my sitters, who were also evidently rather mystified and awestruck. Then, alone with the Major and his wife I had a most uncomfortable moment. He put their prayer into a single sentence: "I say, you know—just let *us* do for you, can't you?" I couldn't—it was dreadful to see them emptying my slops; but I pretended I could, to oblige them, for about a week. Then I gave them a sum of money to go away, and I never saw them again. I obtained the remaining books, but my friend Hawley repeats that Major and Mrs. Monarch did me a permanent harm, got me into false ways. If it be true I'm content to have paid the price—for the memory.

1892, 1909

The Beast in the Jungle¹

I

What determined the speech that startled him in the course of their encounter scarcely matters, being probably but some words spoken by himself quite without intention—spoken as they lingered and slowly moved together after their renewal of acquaintance. He had been conveyed by friends an hour or two before to the house at which she was staying; the party of visitors at the other house, of whom he was one, and thanks to whom it was his theory, as always, that he was lost in the crowd, had been invited over to luncheon. There had been after luncheon much dispersal, all in the interest of the original motive, a view of Weatherend itself and the fine things, intrinsic features, pictures, heirlooms, treasures of all the arts, that made the place almost famous; and the great rooms were so numerous that guests could wander at their will, hang back from the principal group and in cases where they took such matters with the last seriousness give themselves up to mysterious appreciations and measurements. There were persons to be observed, singly or in couples, bending toward objects in out-of-the-way corners with their hands on their knees and their heads nodding quite as

1. James initially recorded the idea for this story in 1895, but it first appeared in the collection *The Better Sort* (1903). It was reprinted, with

minor revisions, in the *Altar of the Dead* volume of the New York edition, Vol. 17 (1909), the source of the text printed here.

with the emphasis of an excited sense of smell. When they were two they either mingled their sounds of ecstasy or melted into silences of even deeper import, so that there were aspects of the occasion that gave it for Marcher much the air of the “look round,” previous to a sale highly advertised, that excites or quenches, as may be, the dream of acquisition. The dream of acquisition at Weatherend would have had to be wild indeed, and John Marcher found himself, among such suggestions, disconcerted almost equally by the presence of those who knew too much and by that of those who knew nothing. The great rooms caused so much poetry and history to press upon him that he needed some straying apart to feel in a proper relation with them, though this impulse was not, as happened, like the gloating of some of his companions, to be compared to the movements of a dog sniffing a cupboard. It had an issue promptly enough in a direction that was not to have been calculated.

It led, briefly, in the course of the October afternoon, to his closer meeting with May Bartram, whose face, a reminder, yet not quite a remembrance, as they sat much separated at a very long table, had begun merely by troubling him rather pleasantly. It affected him as the sequel of something of which he had lost the beginning. He knew it, and for the time quite welcomed it, as a continuation, but didn't know what it continued, which was an interest or an amusement the greater as he was also somehow aware—yet without a direct sign from her—that the young woman herself hadn't lost the thread. She hadn't lost it, but she wouldn't give it back to him, he saw, without some putting forth of his hand for it; and he not only saw that, but saw several things more, things odd enough in the light of the fact that at the moment some accident of grouping brought them face to face he was still merely fumbling with the idea that any contact between them in the past would have had no importance. If it had had no importance he scarcely knew why his actual impression of her should so seem to have so much; the answer to which, however, was that in such a life as they all appeared to be leading for the moment one could but take things as they came. He was satisfied, without in the least being able to say why, that this young lady might roughly have ranked in the house as a poor relation; satisfied also that she was not there on a brief visit, but was more or less a part of the establishment—almost a working, a remunerated part. Didn't she enjoy at periods a protection that she paid for by helping, among other services, to show the place and explain it, deal with the tiresome people, answer questions about the dates of the building, the styles of the furniture, the authorship of the pictures, the favourite haunts of the ghost? It wasn't that she looked as if you could have given her shillings—it was impossible to look less so. Yet when she finally drifted toward him, distinctly handsome, though ever so much older—older than when he had seen her before—it might have been as an effect of her guessing that he had, within the couple of hours, devoted more imagination to her than to all the others put together, and had thereby penetrated to a kind of truth that the others were too stupid for. She *was* there on harder terms than any one; she was there as a consequence of things suffered, one way and another, in the interval of years; and she remembered him very much as she was remembered—only a good deal better.

By the time they at last thus came to speech they were alone in one of the rooms—remarkable for a fine portrait over the chimney-place—out of which

their friends had passed, and the charm of it was that even before they had spoken they had practically arranged with each other to stay behind for talk. The charm, happily, was in other things too—partly in there being scarce a spot at Weatherend without something to stay behind for. It was in the way the autumn day looked into the high windows as it waned; the way the red light, breaking at the close from under a low sombre sky, reached out in a long shaft and played over old wainscots, old tapestry, old gold, old colour. It was most of all perhaps in the way she came to him as if, since she had been turned on to deal with the simpler sort, he might, should he choose to keep the whole thing down, just take her mild attention for a part of her general business. As soon as he heard her voice, however, the gap was filled up and the missing link supplied; the slight irony he divined in her attitude lost its advantage. He almost jumped at it to get there before her. “I met you years and years ago in Rome. I remember all about it.” She confessed to disappointment—she had been so sure he didn’t; and to prove how well he did he began to pour forth the particular recollections that popped up as he called for them. Her face and her voice, all at his service now, worked the miracle—the impression operating like the torch of a lamplighter who touches into flame, one by one, a long row of gas-jets. Marcher flattered himself the illumination was brilliant, yet he was really still more pleased on her showing him, with amusement, that in his haste to make everything right he had got most things rather wrong. It hadn’t been at Rome—it had been at Naples; and it hadn’t been eight years before—it had been more nearly ten. She hadn’t been, either, with her uncle and aunt, but with her mother and her brother; in addition to which it was not with the Pemples *he* had been, but with the Boyers, coming down in their company from Rome—a point on which she insisted, a little to his confusion, and as to which she had her evidence in hand. The Boyers she had known, but didn’t know the Pemples, though she had heard of them, and it was the people he was with who had made them acquainted. The incident of the thunderstorm that had raged round them with such violence as to drive them for refuge into an excavation—this incident had not occurred at the Palace of the Cæsars, but at Pompeii,² on an occasion when they had been present there at an important find.

He accepted her amendments, he enjoyed her corrections, though the moral of them was, she pointed out, that he *really* didn’t remember the least thing about her; and he only felt it as a drawback that when all was made strictly historic there didn’t appear much of anything left. They lingered together still, she neglecting her office—for from the moment he was so clever she had no proper right to him—and both neglecting the house, just waiting as to see if a memory or two more wouldn’t again breathe on them. It hadn’t taken them many minutes, after all, to put down on the table, like the cards of a pack, those that constituted their respective hands; only what came out was that the pack was unfortunately not perfect—that the past, invoked, invited, encouraged, could give them, naturally, no more than it had. It had made them anciently meet—her at twenty, him at twenty-five; but nothing was so strange, they seemed to say to each other, as that, while so occupied, it hadn’t done a little more for them. They looked at each other as with the feeling of an occasion missed; the present would have been so

2. Pompeii is near Naples, not Rome.

much better if the other, in the far distance, in the foreign land, hadn't been so stupidly meagre. There weren't apparently, all counted, more than a dozen little old things that had succeeded in coming to pass between them; trivialities of youth, simplicities of freshness, stupidities of ignorance, small possible germs, but too deeply buried—too deeply (didn't it seem?) to sprout after so many years. Marcher could only feel he ought to have rendered her some service—saved her from a capsized boat in the Bay or at least recovered her dressing-bag, filched from her cab in the streets of Naples by a *lazzarone*³ with a stiletto. Or it would have been nice if he could have been taken with fever all alone at his hotel, and she could have come to look after him, to write to his people, to drive him out in convalescence. *Then* they would be in possession of the something or other that their actual show seemed to lack. It yet somehow presented itself, this show, as too good to be spoiled; so that they were reduced for a few minutes more to wondering a little helplessly why—since they seemed to know a certain number of the same people—their reunion had been so long averted. They didn't use that name for it, but their delay from minute to minute to join the others was a kind of confession that they didn't quite want it to be a failure. Their attempted supposition of reasons for their not having met but showed how little they knew of each other. There came in fact a moment when Marcher felt a positive pang. It was vain to pretend she was an old friend, for all the communities were wanting, in spite of which it was as an old friend that he saw she would have suited him. He had new ones enough—was surrounded with them for instance on the stage of the other house; as a new one he probably wouldn't have so much as noticed her. He would have liked to invent something, get her to make-believe with him that some passage of a romantic or critical kind *had* originally occurred. He was really almost reaching out in imagination—as against time—for something that would do, and saying to himself that if it didn't come this sketch of a fresh start would show for quite awkwardly bungled. They would separate, and now for no second or no third chance. They would have tried and not succeeded. Then it was, just at the turn, as he afterwards made it out to himself, that, everything else failing, she herself decided to take up the case and, as it were, save the situation. He felt as soon as she spoke that she had been consciously keeping back what she said and hoping to get on without it; a scruple in her that immensely touched him when, by the end of three or four minutes more, he was able to measure it. What she brought out, at any rate, quite cleared the air and supplied the link—the link it was so odd he should frivolously have managed to lose.

“You know you told me something I've never forgotten and that again and again has made me think of you since; it was that tremendously hot day when we went to Sorrento,⁴ across the bay, for the breeze. What I allude to was what you said to me, on the way back, as we sat under the awning of the boat enjoying the cool. Have you forgotten?”

He had forgotten and was even more surprised than ashamed. But the great thing was that he saw in this no vulgar reminder of any “sweet” speech. The vanity of women had long memories, but she was making no claim on him of a compliment or a mistake. With another woman, a totally different

3. Beggar (Italian).

4. Resort town across the bay from Naples.

one, he might have feared the recall possibly of even some imbecile “offer.” So, in having to say that he had indeed forgotten, he was conscious rather of a loss than of a gain; he already saw an interest in the matter of her mention. “I try to think—but I give it up. Yet I remember the Sorrento day.”

“I’m not very sure you do,” May Bartram after a moment said; “and I’m not very sure I ought to want you to. It’s dreadful to bring a person back at any time to what he was ten years before. If you’ve lived away from it,” she smiled, “so much the better.”

“Ah if *you* haven’t why should I?” he asked.

“Lived away, you mean, from what I myself was?”

“From what *I* was. I was of course an ass,” Marcher went on; “but I would rather know from you just the sort of ass I was than—from the moment you have something in your mind—not know anything.”

Still, however, she hesitated. “But if you’ve completely ceased to be that sort—?”

“Why I can then all the more bear to know. Besides, perhaps I haven’t.”

“Perhaps. Yet if you haven’t,” she added. “I should suppose you’d remember. Not indeed that *I* in the least connect with my impression the invidious name you use. If I had only thought you foolish,” she explained, “the thing I speak of wouldn’t so have remained with me. It was about yourself.” She waited as if it might come to him; but as, only meeting her eyes in wonder, he gave no sign, she burnt her ships.⁵ “Has it ever happened?”

Then it was that, while he continued to stare, a light broke for him and the blood slowly came to his face, which began to burn with recognition. “Do you mean I told you—?” But he faltered, lest what came to him shouldn’t be right, lest he should only give himself away.

“It was something about yourself that it was natural one shouldn’t forget—that is if one remembered you at all. That’s why I ask you,” she smiled, “if the thing you then spoke of has ever come to pass?”

Oh then he saw, but he was lost in wonder and found himself embarrassed. This, he also saw, made her sorry for him, as if her allusion had been a mistake. It took him but a moment, however, to feel it hadn’t been, much as it had been a surprise. After the first little shock of it her knowledge on the contrary began, even if rather strangely, to taste sweet to him. She was the only other person in the world then who would have it, and she had had it all these years, while the fact of his having so breathed his secret had unaccountably faded from him. No wonder they couldn’t have met as if nothing had happened. “I judge,” he finally said, “that I know what you mean. Only I had strangely enough lost any sense of having taken you so far into my confidence.”

“Is it because you’ve taken so many others as well?”

“I’ve taken nobody. Not a creature since then.”

“So that I’m the only person who knows?”

“The only person in the world.”

“Well,” she quickly replied, “I myself have never spoken. I’ve never, never repeated of you what you told me.” She looked at him so that he perfectly believed her. Their eyes met over it in such a way that he was without a doubt. “And I never will.”

5. I.e., proceeded boldly; “burned her bridges.”

She spoke with an earnestness that, as if almost excessive, put him at ease about her possible derision. Somehow the whole question was a new luxury to him—that is from the moment she was in possession. If she didn't take the sarcastic view she clearly took the sympathetic, and that was what he had had, in all the long time, from no one whomsoever. What he felt was that he couldn't at present have begun to tell her, and yet could profit perhaps exquisitely by the accident of having done so of old. "Please don't then. We're just right as it is."

"Oh I am," she laughed, "if you are!" To which she added: "Then you do still feel in the same way?"

It was impossible he shouldn't take to himself that she was really interested, though it all kept coming as perfect surprise. He had thought of himself so long as abominably alone, and lo he wasn't alone a bit. He hadn't been, it appeared, for an hour—since those moments on the Sorrento boat. It was *she* who had been, he seemed to see as he looked at her—she who had been made so by the graceless fact of his lapse of fidelity. To tell her what he had told her—what had it been but to ask something of her? something that she had given, in her charity, without his having, by a remembrance, by a return of the spirit, failing another encounter, so much as thanked her. What he had asked of her had been simply at first not to laugh at him. She had beautifully not done so for ten years, and she was not doing so now. So he had endless gratitude to make up. Only for that he must see just how he had figured to her. "What, exactly, was the account I gave—?"

"Of the way you did feel? Well, it was very simple. You said you had had from your earliest time, as the deepest thing within you, the sense of being kept for something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen to you, that you had in your bones the foreboding and the conviction of, and that would perhaps overwhelm you."

"Do you call that very simple?" John Marcher asked.

She thought a moment. "It was perhaps because I seemed, as you spoke, to understand it."

"You do understand it?" he eagerly asked.

Again she kept her kind eyes on him. "You still have the belief?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed helplessly. There was too much to say.

"Whatever it's to be," she clearly made out, "it hasn't yet come."

He shook his head in complete surrender now. "It hasn't yet come. Only, you know, it isn't anything I'm to *do*, to achieve in the world, to be distinguished or admired for. I'm not such an ass as *that*. It would be much better, no doubt, if I were."

"It's to be something you're merely to suffer?"

"Well, say to wait for—to have to meet, to face, to see suddenly break out in my life; possibly destroying all further consciousness, possibly annihilating me; possibly, on the other hand, only altering everything, striking at the root of all my world and leaving me to the consequences, however they shape themselves."

She took this in, but the light in her eyes continued for him not to be that of mockery. "Isn't what you describe perhaps but the expectation—or at any rate the sense of danger, familiar to so many people—of falling in love?"

John Marcher wondered. "Did you ask me that before?"

"No—I wasn't so free-and-easy then. But it's what strikes me now."

"Of course," he said after a moment, "it strikes you. Of course it strikes *me*. Of course what's in store for me may be no more than that. The only thing is," he went on, "that I think if it had been that I should by this time know."

"Do you mean because you've *been* in love?" And then as he but looked at her in silence: "You've been in love, and it hasn't meant such a cataclysm, hasn't proved the great affair?"

"Here I am, you see. It hasn't been overwhelming."

"Then it hasn't been love," said May Bartram.

"Well, I at least thought it was. I took it for that—I've taken it till now. It was agreeable, it was delightful, it was miserable," he explained. "But it wasn't strange. It wasn't what *my* affair's to be."

"You want something all to yourself—something that nobody else knows or *has* known?"

"It isn't a question of what I 'want'—God knows I don't want anything. It's only a question of the apprehension that haunts me—that I live with day by day."

He said this so lucidly and consistently that he could see it further impose itself. If she hadn't been interested before she'd have been interested now. "Is it a sense of coming violence?"

Evidently now too again he liked to talk of it. "I don't think of it as—when it does come—necessarily violent. I only think of it as natural and as of course above all un mistakeable. I think of it simply as *the* thing. *The* thing will of itself appear natural."

"Then how will it appear strange?"

Marcher bethought himself. "It won't—to *me*."

"To whom then?"

"Well," he replied, smiling at last, "say to you."

"Oh then I'm to be present?"

"Why you *are* present—since you know."

"I see." She turned it over. "But I mean at the catastrophe."⁶

At this, for a minute, their lightness gave way to their gravity; it was as if the long look they exchanged held them together. "It will only depend on yourself—if you'll watch with me."

"Are you afraid?" she asked.

"Don't leave me *now*," he went on.

"Are you afraid?" she repeated.

"Do you think me simply out of my mind?" he pursued instead of answering. "Do I merely strike you as a harmless lunatic?"

"No," said May Bartram. "I understand you. I believe you."

"You mean you feel how my obsession—poor old thing!—may correspond to some possible reality?"

"To some possible reality."

"Then you *will* watch with me?"

She hesitated, then for the third time put her question. "Are you afraid?"

"Did I tell you I was—at Naples?"

"No, you said nothing about it."

"Then I don't know. And I should *like* to know," said John Marcher. "You'll tell me yourself whether you think so. If you'll watch with me you'll see."

6. Final event, usually of a play, and not necessarily catastrophic.

“Very good then.” They had been moving by this time across the room, and at the door, before passing out, they paused as for the full wind-up of their understanding. “I’ll watch with you,” said May Bartram.

II

The fact that she “knew”—knew and yet neither chaffed him nor betrayed him—had in a short time begun to constitute between them a goodly bond, which became more marked when, within the year that followed their afternoon at Weatherend, the opportunities for meeting multiplied. The event that thus promoted these occasions was the death of the ancient lady her great-aunt, under whose wing, since losing her mother, she had to such an extent found shelter, and who, though but the widowed mother of the new successor to the property, had succeeded—thanks to a high tone and a high temper—in not forfeiting the supreme position at the great house. The deposition of this personage arrived but with her death, which, followed by many changes, made in particular a difference for the young woman in whom Marcher’s expert attention had recognised from the first a dependent with a pride that might ache though it didn’t bristle. Nothing for a long time had made him easier than the thought that the aching must have been much soothed by Miss Bartram’s now finding herself able to set up a small home in London. She had acquired property, to an amount that made that luxury just possible, under her aunt’s extremely complicated will, and when the whole matter began to be straightened out, which indeed took time, she let him know that the happy issue was at last in view. He had seen her again before that day, both because she had more than once accompanied the ancient lady to town and because he had paid another visit to the friends who so conveniently made of Weatherend one of the charms of their own hospitality. These friends had taken him back there; he had achieved there again with Miss Bartram some quiet detachment; and he had in London succeeded in persuading her to more than one brief absence from her aunt. They went together, on these latter occasions, to the National Gallery and the South Kensington Museum,⁷ where, among vivid reminders, they talked of Italy at large—not now attempting to recover, as at first, the taste of their youth and their ignorance. That recovery, the first day at Weatherend, had served its purpose well, had given them quite enough; so that they were, to Marcher’s sense, no longer hovering about the headwaters of their stream, but had felt their boat pushed sharply off and down the current.

They were literally afloat together; for our gentleman this was marked, quite as marked as that the fortunate cause of it was just the buried treasure of her knowledge. He had with his own hands dug up this little hoard, brought to light—that is to within reach of the dim day constituted by their discretions and privacies—the object of value the hiding-place of which he had, after putting it into the ground himself, so strangely, so long forgotten. The rare luck of his having again just stumbled on the spot made him indifferent to any other question; he would doubtless have devoted more time to the odd accident of his lapse of memory if he hadn’t been moved to devote

7. Art museums in London; the South Kensington Museum is now called the Victoria and Albert Museum.

so much to the sweetness, the comfort, as he felt, for the future, that this accident itself had helped to keep fresh. It had never entered into his plan that any one should "know," and mainly for the reason that it wasn't in him to tell any one. That would have been impossible, for nothing but the amusement of a cold world would have waited on it. Since, however, a mysterious fate had opened his mouth betimes, in spite of him, he would count that a compensation and profit by it to the utmost. That the right person *should* know tempered the asperity of his secret more even than his shyness had permitted him to imagine; and May Bartram was clearly right, because—well, because there she was. Her knowledge simply settled it; he would have been sure enough by this time had she been wrong. There was that in his situation, no doubt, that disposed him too much to see her as a mere confidant, taking all her light for him from the fact—the fact only—of her interest in his predicament; from her mercy, sympathy, seriousness, her consent not to regard him as the funniest of the funny. Aware, in fine, that her price for him was just in her giving him this constant sense of his being admirably spared, he was careful to remember that she had also a life of her own, with things that might happen to *her*, things that in friendship one should likewise take account of. Something fairly remarkable came to pass with him, for that matter, in this connexion—something represented by a certain passage of his consciousness, in the suddenest way, from one extreme to the other.

He had thought himself, so long as nobody knew, the most disinterested person in the world, carrying his concentrated burden, his perpetual suspense, ever so quietly, holding his tongue about it, giving others no glimpse of it nor of its effect upon his life, asking of them no allowance and only making on his side all those that were asked. He hadn't disturbed people with the queerness of their having to know a haunted man, though he had had moments of rather special temptation on hearing them say they were forsooth "unsettled." If they were as unsettled as he was—he who had never been settled for an hour in his life—they would know what it meant. Yet it wasn't, all the same, for him to make them, and he listened to them civilly enough. This was why he had such good—though possibly such rather colourless—manners; this was why, above all, he could regard himself, in a greedy world, as decently—as in fact perhaps even a little sublimely—unselfish. Our point is accordingly that he valued this character quite sufficiently to measure his present danger of letting it lapse, against which he promised himself to be much on his guard. He was quite ready, none the less, to be selfish just a little, since surely no more charming occasion for it had come to him. "Just a little," in a word, was just as much as Miss Bartram, taking one day with another, would let him. He never would be in the least coercive, and would keep well before him the lines on which consideration for her—the very highest—ought to proceed. He would thoroughly establish the heads under which her affairs, her requirements, her peculiarities—he went so far as to give them the latitude of that name—would come into their intercourse. All this naturally was a sign of how much he took the intercourse itself for granted. There was nothing more to be done about *that*. It simply existed; had sprung into being with her first penetrating question to him in the autumn light there at Weatherend. The real form it should have taken on the basis that stood out large was the form of their marrying. But the devil in this was that the very basis itself put marrying out of

the question. His conviction, his apprehension, his obsession, in short, wasn't a privilege he could invite a woman to share; and that consequence of it was precisely what was the matter with him. Something or other lay in wait for him, amid the twists and the turns of the months and the years, like a crouching beast in the jungle. It signified little whether the crouching beast were destined to slay him or to be slain. The definite point was the inevitable spring of the creature; and the definite lesson from that was that a man of feeling didn't cause himself to be accompanied by a lady on a tiger-hunt. Such was the image under which he had ended by figuring his life.

They had at first, none the less, in the scattered hours spent together, made no allusion to that view of it; which was a sign he was handsomely alert to give that he didn't expect, that he in fact didn't care, always to be talking about it. Such a feature in one's outlook was really like a hump on one's back. The difference it made every minute of the day existed quite independently of discussion. One discussed of course *like* a hunchback, for there was always, if nothing else, the hunchback face. That remained, and she was watching him; but people watched best, as a general thing, in silence, so that such would be predominantly the manner of their vigil. Yet he didn't want, at the same time, to be tense and solemn; tense and solemn was what he imagined he too much showed for with other people. The thing to be, with the one person who knew, was easy and natural—to make the reference rather than be seeming to avoid it, to avoid it rather than be seeming to make it, and to keep it, in any case, familiar, facetious even, rather than pedantic and portentous. Some such consideration as the latter was doubtless in his mind for instance when he wrote pleasantly to Miss Bartram that perhaps the great thing he had so long felt as in the lap of the gods was no more than this circumstance, which touched him so nearly, of her acquiring a house in London. It was the first allusion they had yet again made, needing any other hitherto so little; but when she replied, after having given him the news, that she was by no means satisfied with such a trifle as the climax to so special a suspense, she almost set him wondering if she hadn't even a larger conception of singularity for him than he had for himself. He was at all events destined to become aware little by little, as time went by, that she was all the while looking at his life, judging it, measuring it, in the light of the thing she knew, which grew to be at last, with the consecration of the years, never mentioned between them save as “the real truth” about him. That had always been his own form of reference to it, but she adopted the form so quietly that, looking back at the end of a period, he knew there was no moment at which it was traceable that she had, as he might say, got inside his idea, or exchanged the attitude of beautifully indulging for that of still more beautifully believing him.

It was always open to him to accuse her of seeing him but as the most harmless of maniacs, and this, in the long run—since it covered so much ground—was his easiest description of their friendship. He had a screw loose for her, but she liked him in spite of it and was practically, against the rest of the world, his kind wise keeper, unremunerated but fairly amused and, in the absence of other near ties, not disreputably occupied. The rest of the world of course thought him queer, but she, she only, knew how, and above all why, queer; which was precisely what enabled her to dispose the concealing veil in the right folds. She took his gaiety from him—since it had to pass

with them for gaiety—as she took everything else; but she certainly so far justified by her unerring touch his finer sense of the degree to which he had ended by convincing her. *She* at least never spoke of the secret of his life except as “the real truth about you,” and she had in fact a wonderful way of making it seem, as such, the secret of her own life too. That was in fine how he so constantly felt her as allowing for him; he couldn’t on the whole call it anything else. He allowed for himself, but she, exactly, allowed still more; partly because, better placed for a sight of the matter, she traced his unhappy perversion through reaches of its course into which he could scarce follow it. He knew how he felt, but, besides knowing that, she knew how he *looked* as well; he knew each of the things of importance he was insidiously kept from doing, but she could add up the amount they made, understand how much, with a lighter weight on his spirit, he might have done, and thereby establish how, clever as he was, he fell short. Above all she was in the secret of the difference between the forms he went through—those of his little office under Government,⁸ those of caring for his modest patrimony, for his library, for his garden in the country, for the people in London whose invitations he accepted and repaid—and the detachment that reigned beneath them and that made of all behaviour, all that could in the least be called behaviour, a long act of dissimulation. What it had come to was that he wore a mask painted with the social simper, out of the eyeholes of which there looked eyes of an expression not in the least matching the other features. This the stupid world, even after years, had never more than half-discovered. It was only May Bartram who had, and she achieved, by an art indescribable, the feat of at once—or perhaps it was only alternately—meeting the eyes from in front and mingling her own vision, as from over his shoulder, with their peep through the apertures.

So while they grew older together she did watch with him, and so she let this association give shape and colour to her own existence. Beneath *her* forms as well detachment had learned to sit, and behaviour had become for her, in the social sense, a false account of herself. There was but one account of her that would have been true all the while and that she could give straight to nobody, least of all to John Marcher. Her whole attitude was a virtual statement, but the perception of that only seemed called to take its place for him as one of the many things necessarily crowded out of his consciousness. If she had moreover, like himself, to make sacrifices to their real truth, it was to be granted that her compensation might have affected her as more prompt and more natural. They had long periods, in this London time, during which, when they were together, a stranger might have listened to them without in the least pricking up his ears; on the other hand the real truth was equally liable at any moment to rise to the surface, and the auditor would then have wondered indeed what they were talking about. They had from an early hour made up their mind that society was, luckily, unintelligent, and the margin allowed them by this had fairly become one of their commonplaces. Yet there were still moments when the situation turned almost fresh—usually under the effect of some expression drawn from herself. Her expressions doubtless repeated themselves, but her intervals were generous. “What saves us, you know, is that we answer so completely to so usual an

8. I.e., his position as a minor government official.

appearance: that of the man and woman whose friendship has become such a daily habit—or almost—as to be at last indispensable.” That for instance was a remark she had frequently enough had occasion to make, though she had given it at different times different developments. What we are especially concerned with is the turn it happened to take from her one afternoon when he had come to see her in honour of her birthday. This anniversary had fallen on a Sunday, at a season of thick fog and general outward gloom; but he had brought her his customary offering, having known her now long enough to have established a hundred small traditions. It was one of his proofs to himself, the present he made her on her birthday, that he hadn’t sunk into real selfishness. It was mostly nothing more than a small trinket, but it was always fine of its kind, and he was regularly careful to pay for it more than he thought he could afford. “Our habit saves you at least, don’t you see? because it makes you, after all, for the vulgar, indistinguishable from other men. What’s the most inveterate mark of men in general? Why the capacity to spend endless time with dull women—to spend it I won’t say without being bored, but without minding that they are, without being driven off at a tangent by it; which comes to the same thing. I’m your dull woman, a part of the daily bread for which you pray at church. That covers your tracks more than anything.”

“And what covers yours?” asked Marcher, whom his dull woman could mostly to this extent amuse. “I see of course what you mean by your saving me, in this way and that, so far as other people are concerned—I’ve seen it all along. Only what is it that saves *you*? I often think, you know, of that.”

She looked as if she sometimes thought of that too, but rather in a different way. “Where other people, you mean, are concerned?”

“Well, you’re really so in with me, you know—as a sort of result of my being so in with yourself. I mean of my having such an immense regard for you, being so tremendously mindful of all you’ve done for me. I sometimes ask myself if it’s quite fair. Fair I mean to have so involved and—since one may say it—interested you. I almost feel as if you hadn’t really had time to do anything else.”

“Anything else but be interested?” she asked. “Ah what else does one ever want to be? If I’ve been ‘watching’ with you, as we long ago agreed I was to do, watching’s always in itself an absorption.”

“Oh certainly,” John Marcher said, “if you hadn’t had your curiosity—! Only doesn’t it sometimes come to you as time goes on that your curiosity isn’t being particularly repaid?”

May Bartram had a pause. “Do you ask that, by any chance, because you feel at all that yours isn’t? I mean because you have to wait so long.”

Oh he understood what she meant! “For the thing to happen that never does happen? For the beast to jump out? No, I’m just where I was about it. It isn’t a matter as to which I can *choose*, I can decide for a change. It isn’t one as to which there *can* be a change. It’s in the lap of the gods. One’s in the hands of one’s law—there one is. As to the form the law will take, the way it will operate, that’s its own affair.”

“Yes,” Miss Bartram replied; “of course one’s fate’s coming, of course it *has* come in its own form and its own way, all the while. Only, you know, the form and the way in your case were to have been—well, something so exceptional and, as one may say, so particularly *your* own.”

Something in this made him look at her with suspicion. "You say 'were to have been,' as if in your heart you had begun to doubt."

"Oh!" she vaguely protested.

"As if you believed," he went on, "that nothing will now take place."

She shook her head slowly but rather inscrutably. "You're far from my thought."

He continued to look at her. "What then is the matter with you?"

"Well," she said after another wait, "the matter with me is simply that I'm more sure than ever my curiosity, as you call it, will be but too well repaid."

They were frankly grave now; he had got up from his seat, had turned once more about the little drawing-room to which, year after year, he brought his inevitable topic; in which he had, as he might have said, tasted their intimate community with every sauce, where every object was as familiar to him as the things of his own house and the very carpets were worn with his fitful walk very much as the desks in old counting-houses are worn by the elbows of generations of clerks. The generations of his nervous moods had been at work there, and the place was the written history of his whole middle life. Under the impression of what his friend had just said he knew himself, for some reason, more aware of these things; which made him, after a moment, stop again before her. "Is it possibly that you've grown afraid?"

"Afraid?" He thought, as she repeated the word, that his question had made her, a little, change colour; so that, lest he should have touched on a truth, he explained very kindly: "You remember that that was what you asked *me* long ago—that first day at Weatherend."

"Oh yes, and you told me you didn't know—that I was to see for myself. We've said little about it since, even in so long a time."

"Precisely," Marcher interposed—"quite as if it were too delicate a matter for us to make free with. Quite as if we might find, on pressure, that I *am* afraid. For then," he said, "we shouldn't, should we? quite know what to do."

She had for the time no answer to his question. "There have been days when I thought you were. Only, of course," she added, "there have been days when we have thought almost anything."

"Everything. Oh!" Marcher softly groaned as with a gasp, half-spent, at the face, more uncovered just then than it had been for a long while, of the imagination always with them. It had always had its incalculable moments of glaring out, quite as with the very eyes of the very Beast, and, used as he was to them, they could still draw from him the tribute of a sigh that rose from the depths of his being. All they had thought, first and last, rolled over him; the past seemed to have been reduced to mere barren speculation. This in fact was what the place had just struck him as so full of—the simplification of everything but the state of suspense. That remained only by seeming to hang in the void surrounding it. Even his original fear, if fear it had been, had lost itself in the desert. "I judge, however," he continued, "that you see I'm not afraid now."

"What I see, as I make it out, is that you've achieved something almost unprecedented in the way of getting used to danger. Living with it so long and so closely you've lost your sense of it; you know it's there, but you're indifferent, and you cease even, as of old, to have to whistle in the dark. Considering what the danger is," May Bartram wound up, "I'm bound to say I don't think your attitude could well be surpassed."

John Marcher faintly smiled. "It's heroic?"

"Certainly—call it that."

It was what he would have liked indeed to call it. "I *am* then a man of courage?"

"That's what you were to show me."

He still, however, wondered. "But doesn't the man of courage know what he's afraid of—or *not* afraid of? I don't know *that*, you see. I don't focus it. I can't name it. I only know I'm exposed."

"Yes, but exposed—how shall I say?—so directly. So intimately. That's surely enough."

"Enough to make you feel then—as what we may call the end and the upshot of our watch—that I'm not afraid?"

"You're not afraid. But it isn't," she said, "the end of our watch. That is it isn't the end of yours. You've everything still to see."

"Then why haven't *you*?" he asked. He had had, all along, to-day, the sense of her keeping something back, and he still had it. As this was his first impression of that it quite made a date. The case was the more marked as she didn't at first answer; which in turn made him go on. "You know something I don't." Then his voice, for that of a man of courage, trembled a little. "You know what's to happen." Her silence, with the face she showed, was almost a confession—it made him sure. "You know, and you're afraid to tell me. It's so bad that you're afraid I'll find out."

All this might be true, for she did look as if, unexpectedly to her, he had crossed some mystic line that she had secretly drawn round her. Yet she might, after all, not have worried; and the real climax was that he himself, at all events, needn't. "You'll never find out."

III

It was all to have made, none the less, as I have said, a date; which came out in the fact that again and again, even after long intervals, other things that passed between them wore in relation to this hour but the character of recalls and results. Its immediate effect had been indeed rather to lighten insistence—almost to provoke a reaction; as if their topic had dropped by its own weight and as if moreover, for that matter, Marcher had been visited by one of his occasional warnings against egotism. He had kept up, he felt, and very decently on the whole, his consciousness of the importance of not being selfish, and it was true that he had never sinned in that direction without promptly enough trying to press the scales the other way. He often repaired his fault, the season permitting, by inviting his friend to accompany him to the opera; and it not infrequently thus happened that, to show he didn't wish her to have but one sort of food for her mind, he was the cause of her appearing there with him a dozen nights in the month. It even happened that, seeing her home at such times, he occasionally went in with her to finish, as he called it, the evening, and, the better to make his point, sat down to the frugal but always careful little supper that awaited his pleasure. His point was made, he thought, by his not eternally insisting with her on himself; made for instance, at such hours, when it befell that, her piano at hand and each of them familiar with it, they went over passages of the opera together. It chanced to be on one of these occasions, however, that he

reminded her of her not having answered a certain question he had put to her during the talk that had taken place between them on her last birthday. "What is it that saves *you*?"—saved her, he meant, from that appearance of variation from the usual human type. If he had practically escaped remark, as she pretended, by doing, in the most important particular, what most men do—find the answer to life in patching up an alliance of a sort with a woman no better than himself—how had she escaped it, and how could the alliance, such as it was, since they must suppose it had been more or less noticed, have failed to make her rather positively talked about?

"I never said," May Bartram replied, "that it hadn't made me a good deal talked about."

"Ah well then you're not 'saved.'"

"It hasn't been a question for me. If you've had your woman I've had," she said, "my man."

"And you mean that makes you all right?"

Oh it was always as if there were so much to say! "I don't know why it shouldn't make me—humanly, which is what we're speaking of—as right as it makes you."

"I see," Marcher returned. "'Humanly,' no doubt, as showing that you're living for something. Not, that is, just for me and my secret."

May Bartram smiled. "I don't pretend it exactly shows that I'm not living for you. It's my intimacy with you that's in question."

He laughed as he saw what she meant. "Yes, but since, as you say, I'm only, so far as people make out, ordinary, you're—aren't you?—no more than ordinary either. You help me to pass for a man like another. So if I *am*, as I understand you, you're not compromised. Is that it?"

She had another of her waits, but she spoke clearly enough. "That's it. It's all that concerns me—to help you to pass for a man like another."

He was careful to acknowledge the remark handsomely. "How kind, how beautiful, you are to me! How shall I ever repay you?"

She had her last grave pause, as if there might be a choice of ways. But she chose. "By going on as you are."

It was into this going on as he was that they relapsed, and really for so long a time that the day inevitably came for a further sounding of their depths. These depths, constantly bridged over by a structure firm enough in spite of its lightness and of its occasional oscillation in the somewhat vertiginous air, invited on occasion, in the interest of their nerves, a dropping of the plummet and a measurement of the abyss. A difference had been made moreover, once for all, by the fact that she had all the while not appeared to feel the need of rebutting his charge of an idea within her that she didn't dare to express—a charge uttered just before one of the fullest of their later discussions ended. It had come up for him then that she "knew" something and that what she knew was bad—too bad to tell him. When he had spoken of it as visibly so bad that she was afraid he might find it out, her reply had left the matter too equivocal to be let alone and yet, for Marcher's special sensibility, almost too formidable again to touch. He circled about it at a distance that alternately narrowed and widened and that still wasn't much affected by the consciousness in him that there was nothing she could "know," after all, any better than he did. She had no source of knowledge he hadn't equally—except of course that she might have finer nerves. That

was what women had where they were interested; they made out things, where people were concerned, that the people often couldn't have made out for themselves. Their nerves, their sensibility, their imagination, were conductors and revealers, and the beauty of May Bartram was in particular that she had given herself so to his case. He felt in these days what, oddly enough, he had never felt before, the growth of a dread of losing her by some catastrophe—some catastrophe that yet wouldn't at all be *the* catastrophe: partly because she had almost of a sudden begun to strike him as more useful to him than ever yet, and partly by reason of an appearance of uncertainty in her health, coincident and equally new. It was characteristic of the inner detachment he had hitherto so successfully cultivated and to which our whole account of him is a reference, it was characteristic that his complications, such as they were, had never yet seemed so as at this crisis to thicken about him, even to the point of making him ask himself if he were, by any chance, of a truth, within sight or sound, within touch or reach, within the immediate jurisdiction, of the thing that waited.

When the day came, as come it had to, that his friend confessed to him her fear of a deep disorder in her blood, he felt somehow the shadow of a change and the chill of a shock. He immediately began to imagine aggravations and disasters, and above all to think of her peril as the direct menace for himself of personal privation. This indeed gave him one of those partial recoveries of equanimity that were agreeable to him—it showed him that what was still first in his mind was the loss she herself might suffer. “What if she should have to die before knowing, before seeing—?” It would have been brutal, in the early stages of her trouble, to put that question to her; but it had immediately sounded for him to his own concern, and the possibility was what most made him sorry for her. If she did “know,” moreover, in the sense of her having had some—what should he think?—mystical irresistible light, this would make the matter not better, but worse, inasmuch as her original adoption of his own curiosity had quite become the basis of her life. She had been living to see what would *be* to be seen, and it would quite lacerate her to have to give up before the accomplishment of the vision. These reflexions, as I say, quickened his generosity; yet, make them as he might, he saw himself, with the lapse of the period, more and more disconcerted. It lapsed for him with a strange steady sweep, and the oddest oddity was that it gave him, independently of the threat of much inconvenience, almost the only positive surprise his career, if career it could be called, had yet offered him. She kept the house as she had never done; he had to go to her to see her—she could meet him nowhere now, though there was scarce a corner of their loved old London in which she hadn't in the past, at one time or another, done so; and he found her always seated by her fire in the deep old-fashioned chair she was less and less able to leave. He had been struck one day, after an absence exceeding his usual measure, with her suddenly looking much older to him than he had ever thought of her being; then he recognised that the suddenness was all on his side—he had just simply and suddenly noticed. She looked older because inevitably, after so many years, she was old, or almost; which was of course true in still greater measure of her companion. If she was old, or almost, John Marcher assuredly was, and yet it was her showing of the lesson, not his own, that brought the truth home to him. His surprises began here; when once they had begun they

multiplied; they came rather with a rush: it was as if, in the oddest way in the world, they had all been kept back, sown in a thick cluster, for the late afternoon of life, the time at which for people in general the unexpected has died out.

One of them was that he should have caught himself—for he *had* so done—*really* wondering if the great accident would take form now as nothing more than his being condemned to see this charming woman, this admirable friend, pass away from him. He had never so unreservedly qualified her as while confronted in thought with such a possibility; in spite of which there was small doubt for him that as an answer to his long riddle the mere effacement of even so fine a feature of his situation would be an abject anticlimax. It would represent, as connected with his past attitude, a drop of dignity under the shadow of which his existence could only become the most grotesque of failures. He had been far from holding it a failure—long as he had waited for the appearance that was to make it a success. He had waited for quite another thing, not for such a thing as that. The breath of his good faith came short, however, as he recognised how long he had waited, or how long at least his companion had. That she, at all events, might be recorded as having waited in vain—this affected him sharply, and all the more because of his at first having done little more than amuse himself with the idea. It grew more grave as the gravity of her condition grew, and the state of mind it produced in him, which he himself ended by watching as if it had been some definite disfigurement of his outer person, may pass for another of his surprises. This conjoined itself still with another, the really stupefying consciousness of a question that he would have allowed to shape itself had he dared. What did everything mean—what, that is, did *she* mean, she and her vain waiting and her probable death and the soundless admonition of it all—unless that, at this time of day, it was simply, it was overwhelmingly too late? He had never at any stage of his queer consciousness admitted the whisper of such a correction; he had never till within these last few months been so false to his conviction as not to hold that what was to come to him had time, whether *he* struck himself as having it or not. That at last, at last, he certainly hadn't it, to speak of, or had it but in the scantiest measure—such, soon enough, as things went with him, became the inference with which his old obsession had to reckon: and this it was not helped to do by the more and more confirmed appearance that the great vagueness casting the long shadow in which he had lived had, to attest itself, almost no margin left. Since it was in Time that he was to have met his fate, so it was in Time that his fate was to have acted; and as he waked up to the sense of no longer being young, which was exactly the sense of being stale, just as that, in turn, was the sense of being weak, he waked up to another matter beside. It all hung together; they were subject, he and the great vagueness, to an equal and indivisible law. When the possibilities themselves had accordingly turned stale, when the secret of the gods had grown faint, had perhaps even quite evaporated, that, and that only, was failure. It wouldn't have been failure to be bankrupt, dishonoured, pilloried, hanged; it was failure not to be anything. And so, in the dark valley into which his path had taken its unlooked-for twist, he wondered not a little as he groped. He didn't care what awful crash might overtake him, with what ignominy or what monstrosity he might yet be associated—since he wasn't after all too utterly old to suffer—if

it would only be decently proportionate to the posture he had kept, all his life, in the threatened presence of it. He had but one desire left—that he shouldn't have been “sold.”

IV

Then it was that, one afternoon, while the spring of the year was young and new she met all in her own way his frankest betrayal of these alarms. He had gone in late to see her, but evening hadn't settled and she was presented to him in that long fresh light of waning April days which affects us often with a sadness sharper than the greyest hours of autumn. The week had been warm, the spring was supposed to have begun early, and May Bartram sat, for the first time in the year, without a fire; a fact that, to Marcher's sense, gave the scene of which she formed part a smooth and ultimate look, an air of knowing, in its immaculate order and cold meaningless cheer, that it would never see a fire again. Her own aspect—he could scarce have said why—intensified this note. Almost as white as wax, with the marks and signs in her face as numerous and as fine as if they had been etched by a needle, with soft white draperies relieved by a faded green scarf on the delicate tone of which the years had further refined, she was the picture of a serene and exquisite but impenetrable sphinx, whose head, or indeed all whose person, might have been powdered with silver. She was a sphinx, yet with her white petals and green fronds she might have been a lily too—only an artificial lily, wonderfully imitated and constantly kept, without dust or stain, though not exempt from a slight droop and a complexity of faint creases, under some clear glass bell. The perfection of household care, of high polish and finish, always reigned in her rooms, but they now looked most as if everything had been wound up, tucked in, put away, so that she might sit with folded hands and with nothing more to do. She was “out of it,” to Marcher's vision; her work was over; she communicated with him as across some gulf or from some island of rest that she had already reached, and it made him feel strangely abandoned. Was it—or rather wasn't it—that if for so long she had been watching with him the answer to their question must have swum into her ken and taken on its name, so that her occupation was verily gone? He had as much as charged her with this in saying to her, many months before, that she even then knew something she was keeping from him. It was a point he had never since ventured to press, vaguely fearing as he did that it might become a difference, perhaps a disagreement, between them. He had in this later time turned nervous, which was what he in all the other years had never been; and the oddity was that his nervousness should have waited till he had begun to doubt, should have held off so long as he was sure. There was something, it seemed to him, that the wrong word would bring down on his head, something that would so at least ease off his tension. But he wanted not to speak the wrong word; that would make everything ugly. He wanted the knowledge he lacked to drop on him, if drop it could, by its own august weight. If she was to forsake him it was surely for her to take leave. This was why he didn't directly ask her again what she knew; but it was also why, approaching the matter from another side, he said to her in the course of his visit: “What do you regard as the very worst that at this time of day *can* happen to me?”

He had asked her that in the past often enough; they had, with the odd irregular rhythm of their intensities and avoidances, exchanged ideas about it and then had seen the ideas washed away by cool intervals, washed like figures traced in sea-sand. It had ever been the mark of their talk that the oldest allusions in it required but a little dismissal and reaction to come out again, sounding for the hour as new. She could thus at present meet his enquiry quite freshly and patiently. "Oh yes, I've repeatedly thought, only it always seemed to me of old that I couldn't quite make up my mind. I thought of dreadful things, between which it was difficult to choose; and so must you have done."

"Rather! I feel now as if I had scarce done anything else. I appear to myself to have spent my life in thinking of nothing *but* dreadful things. A great many of them I've at different times named to you, but there were others I couldn't name."

"They were too, too dreadful?"

"Too, too dreadful—some of them."

She looked at him a minute, and there came to him as he met it an inconsequent sense that her eyes, when one got their full clearness, were still as beautiful as they had been in youth, only beautiful with a strange cold light—a light that somehow was a part of the effect, if it wasn't rather a part of the cause, of the pale hard sweetness of the season and the hour. "And yet," she said at last, "there are horrors we've mentioned."

It deepened the strangeness to see her, as such a figure in such a picture, talk of "horrors," but she was to do in a few minutes something stranger yet—though even of this he was to take the full measure but afterwards—and the note of it already trembled. It was, for the matter of that, one of the signs that her eyes were having again the high flicker of their prime. He had to admit, however, what she said. "Oh yes, there were times when we did go far." He caught himself in the act of speaking as if it all were over. Well, he wished it were; and the consummation depended for him clearly more and more on his friend.

But she had now a soft smile. "Oh far—!"

It was oddly ironic. "Do you mean you're prepared to go further?"

She was frail and ancient and charming as she continued to look at him, yet it was rather as if she had lost the thread. "Do you consider that we went far?"

"Why I thought it the point you were just making—that we *had* looked most things in the face."

"Including each other?" She still smiled. "But you're quite right. We've had together great imaginations, often great fears; but some of them have been unspoken."

"Then the worst—we haven't faced that. I *could* face it, I believe, if I knew what you think it. I feel," he explained, "as if I had lost my power to conceive such things." And he wondered if he looked as blank as he sounded. "It's spent."

"Then why do you assume," she asked, "that mine isn't?"

"Because you've given me signs to the contrary. It isn't a question for you of conceiving, imagining, comparing. It isn't a question now of choosing." At last he came out with it. "You know something I don't. You've shown me that before."

These last words had affected her, he made out in a moment, exceedingly, and she spoke with firmness. "I've shown you, my dear, nothing."

He shook his head. "You can't hide it."

"Oh, oh!" May Bartram sounded over what she couldn't hide. It was almost a smothered groan.

"You admitted it months ago, when I spoke of it to you as of something you were afraid I should find out. Your answer was that I couldn't, that I wouldn't, and I don't pretend I have. But you had something therefore in mind, and I now see how it must have been, how it still is, the possibility that, of all possibilities, has settled itself for you as the worst. This," he went on, "is why I appeal to you. I'm only afraid of ignorance to-day—I'm not afraid of knowledge." And then as for a while she said nothing: "What makes me sure is that I see in your face and feel here, in this air and amid these appearances, that you're out of it. You've done. You've had your experience. You leave me to my fate."

Well, she listened, motionless and white in her chair, as on a decision to be made, so that her manner was fairly an avowal, though still, with a small fine inner stiffness, an imperfect surrender. "It *would* be the worst," she finally let herself say. "I mean the thing I've never said."

It hushed him a moment. "More monstrous than all the monstrosities we've named?"

"More monstrous. Isn't that what you sufficiently express," she asked, "in calling it the worst?"

Marcher thought. "Assuredly—if you mean, as I do, something that includes all the loss and all the shame that are thinkable."

"It would if it *should* happen," said May Bartram. "What we're speaking of, remember, is only my idea."

"It's your belief," Marcher returned. "That's enough for me. I feel your beliefs are right. Therefore if, having this one, you give me no more light on it, you abandon me."

"No, no!" she repeated. "I'm with you—don't you see?—still." And as to make it more vivid to him she rose from her chair—a movement she seldom risked in these days—and showed herself, all draped and all soft, in her fairness and slimmness. "I haven't forsaken you."

It was really, in its effort against weakness, a generous assurance, and had the success of the impulse not, happily, been great, it would have touched him to pain more than to pleasure. But the cold charm in her eyes had spread, as she hovered before him, to all the rest of her person, so that it was for the minute almost a recovery of youth. He couldn't pity her for that; he could only take her as she showed—as capable even yet of helping him. It was as if, at the same time, her light might at any instant go out; wherefore he must make the most of it. There passed before him with intensity the three or four things he wanted most to know; but the question that came of itself to his lips really covered the others. "Then tell me if I shall consciously suffer."

She promptly shook her head. "Never!"

It confirmed the authority he imputed to her, and it produced on him an extraordinary effect. "Well, what's better than that? Do you call that the worst?"

"You think nothing is better?" she asked.

She seemed to mean something so special that he again sharply wondered, though still with the dawn of a prospect of relief. "Why not, if one doesn't

know?" After which, as their eyes, over his question, met in a silence, the dawn deepened and something to his purpose came prodigiously out of her very face. His own, as he took it in, suddenly flushed to the forehead, and he gasped with the force of a perception to which, on the instant, everything fitted. The sound of his gasp filled the air; then he became articulate. "I see—if I don't suffer!"

In her own look, however, was doubt. "You see what?"

"Why what you mean—what you've always meant."

She again shook her head. "What I mean isn't what I've always meant. It's different."

"It's something new?"

She hung back from it a little. "Something new. It's not what you think. I see what you think."

His divination drew breath then; only her correction might be wrong. "It isn't that I *am* a blockhead?" he asked between faintness and grimness. "It isn't that it's all a mistake."

"A mistake?" she pityingly echoed. *That* possibility, for her, he saw, would be monstrous; and if she guaranteed him the immunity from pain it would accordingly not be what she had in mind. "Oh no," she declared; "it's nothing of that sort. You've been right."

Yet he couldn't help asking himself if she weren't, thus pressed, speaking but to save him. It seemed to him he should be most in a hole if his history should prove all a platitude. "Are you telling me the truth, so that I shan't have been a bigger idiot than I can bear to know? I *haven't* lived with a vain imagination, in the most besotted illusion? I haven't waited but to see the door shut in my face?"

She shook her head again. "However the case stands *that* isn't the truth. Whatever the reality, it *is* a reality. The door isn't shut. The door's open," said May Bartram.

"Then something's to come?"

She waited once again, always with her cold sweet eyes on him. "It's never too late." She had, with her gliding step, diminished the distance between them, and she stood nearer to him, close to him, a minute, as if still charged with the unspoken. Her movement might have been for some finer emphasis of what she was at once hesitating and deciding to say. He had been standing by the chimney-piece, fireless and sparsely adorned, a small perfect old French clock and two morsels of rosy Dresden⁹ constituting all its furniture; and her hand grasped the shelf while she kept him waiting, grasped it a little as for support and encouragement. She only kept him waiting, however; that is he only waited. It had become suddenly, from her movement and attitude, beautiful and vivid to him that she had something more to give him; her wasted face delicately shone with it—it glittered almost as with the white lustre of silver in her expression. She was right, incontestably, for what he saw in her face was the truth, and strangely, without consequence, while their talk of it as dreadful was still in the air, she appeared to present it as inordinately soft. This, prompting bewilderment, made him but gape the more gratefully for her revelation, so that they continued for some minutes silent, her face shining at him, her contact imponderably pressing,

9. Fine German porcelain.

and his stare all kind but all expectant. The end, none the less, was that what he had expected failed to come to him. Something else took place instead, which seemed to consist at first in the mere closing of her eyes. She gave way at the same instant to a slow fine shudder, and though he remained staring—though he stared in fact but the harder—turned off and regained her chair. It was the end of what she had been intending, but it left him thinking only of that.

“Well, you don’t say—?”

She had touched in her passage a bell near the chimney and had sunk back strangely pale. “I’m afraid I’m too ill.”

“Too ill to tell me?” It sprang up sharp to him, and almost to his lips, the fear she might die without giving him light. He checked himself in time from so expressing his question, but she answered as if she had heard the words.

“Don’t you know—now?”

“‘Now’—?” She had spoken as if some difference had been made within the moment. But her maid, quickly obedient to her bell, was already with them. “I know nothing.” And he was afterwards to say to himself that he must have spoken with odious impatience, such an impatience as to show that, supremely disconcerted, he washed his hands of the whole question.

“Oh!” said May Bartram.

“Are you in pain?” he asked as the woman went to her.

“No,” said May Bartram.

Her maid, who had put an arm round her as if to take her to her room, fixed on him eyes that appealingly contradicted her; in spite of which, however, he showed once more his mystification. “What then has happened?”

She was once more, with her companion’s help, on her feet, and, feeling withdrawal imposed on him, he had blankly found his hat and gloves and had reached the door. Yet he waited for her answer. “What *was* to,” she said.

V

He came back the next day, but she was then unable to see him, and as it was literally the first time this had occurred in the long stretch of their acquaintance he turned away, defeated and sore, almost angry—or feeling at least that such a break in their custom was really the beginning of the end—and wandered alone with his thoughts, especially with the one he was least able to keep down. She was dying and he would lose her; she was dying and his life would end. He stopped in the Park, into which he had passed, and stared before him at his recurrent doubt. Away from her the doubt pressed again; in her presence he had believed her, but as he felt his forlornness he threw himself into the explanation that, nearest at hand, had most of a miserable warmth for him and least of a cold torment. She had deceived him to save him—to put him off with something in which he should be able to rest. What could the thing that was to happen to him be, after all, but just this thing that had begun to happen? Her dying, her death, his consequent solitude—*that* was what he had figured as the Beast in the Jungle, that was what had been in the lap of the gods. He had had her word for it as he left her—what else on earth could she have meant? It wasn’t a thing of a monstrous order; not a fate rare and distinguished; not a stroke of fortune that overwhelmed and immortalised; it had only the stamp of the

common doom. But poor Marcher at this hour judged the common doom sufficient. It would serve his turn, and even as the consummation of infinite waiting he would bend his pride to accept it. He sat down on a bench in the twilight. He hadn't been a fool. Something had *been*, as she had said, to come. Before he rose indeed it had quite struck him that the final fact really matched with the long avenue through which he had had to reach it. As sharing his suspense and as giving herself all, giving her life, to bring it to an end, she had come with him every step of the way. He had lived by her aid, and to leave her behind would be cruelly, damnably to miss her. What could be more overwhelming than that?

Well, he was to know within the week, for though she kept him a while at bay, left him restless and wretched during a series of days on each of which he asked about her only again to have to turn away, she ended his trial by receiving him where she had always received him. Yet she had been brought out at some hazard into the presence of so many of the things that were, consciously, vainly, half their past, and there was scant service left in the gentleness of her mere desire, all too visible, to check his obsession and wind up his long trouble. That was clearly what she wanted, the one thing more for her own peace while she could still put out her hand. He was so affected by her state that, once seated by her chair, he was moved to let everything go; it was she herself therefore who brought him back, took up again, before she dismissed him, her last word of the other time. She showed how she wished to leave their business in order. "I'm not sure you understood. You've nothing to wait for more. It *has* come."

Oh how he looked at her! "Really?"

"Really."

"The thing that, as you said, *was* to?"

"The thing that we began in our youth to watch for."

Face to face with her once more he believed her; it was a claim to which he had so abjectly little to oppose. "You mean that it has come as a positive definite occurrence, with a name and a date?"

"Positive. Definite. I don't know about the 'name,' but oh with a date!"

He found himself again too helplessly at sea. "But come in the night—come and passed me by?"

May Bartram had her strange faint smile. "Oh no, it hasn't passed you by!"

"But if I haven't been aware of it and it hasn't touched me—?"

"Ah your not being aware of it"—and she seemed to hesitate an instant to deal with this—"your not being aware of it is the strangeness *in* the strangeness. It's the wonder *of* the wonder." She spoke as with the softness almost of a sick child, yet now at last, at the end of all, with the perfect straightness of a sibyl. She visibly knew that she knew, and the effect on him was of something co-ordinate, in its high character, with the law that had ruled him. It was the true voice of the law; so on her lips would the law itself have sounded. "It *has* touched you," she went on. "It has done its office. It has made you all its own."

"So utterly without my knowing it?"

"So utterly without your knowing it." His hand, as he leaned to her, was on the arm of her chair, and, dimly smiling always now, she placed her own on it. "It's enough if *I* know it."

"Oh!" he confusedly breathed, as she herself of late so often had done.

"What I long ago said is true. You'll never know now, and I think you ought to be content. You've *had* it," said May Bartram.

"But had what?"

"Why what was to have marked you out. The proof of your law. It has acted. I'm too glad," she then bravely added, "to have been able to see what it's *not*."

He continued to attach his eyes to her, and with the sense that it was all beyond him, and that *she* was too, he would still have sharply challenged her hadn't he so felt it an abuse of her weakness to do more than take devoutly what she gave him, take it hushed as to a revelation. If he did speak, it was out of the foreknowledge of his loneliness to come. "If you're glad of what it's 'not' it might then have been worse?"

She turned her eyes away, she looked straight before her; with which after a moment: "Well, you know our fears."

He wondered. "It's something then we never feared?"

On this slowly she turned to him. "Did we ever dream, with all our dreams, that we should sit and talk of it thus?"

He tried for a little to make out that they had; but it was as if their dreams, numberless enough, were in solution in some thick cold mist through which thought lost itself. "It might have been that we couldn't talk?"

"Well"—she did her best for him—"not from this side. This, you see," she said, "is the *other* side."

"I think," poor Marcher returned, "that all sides are the same to me." Then, however, as she gently shook her head in correction: "We mightn't, as it were, have got across—?"

"To where we are—no. We're *here*"—she made her weak emphasis.

"And much good does it do us!" was her friend's frank comment.

"It does us the good it can. It does us the good that *it* isn't here. It's past. It's behind," said May Bartram. "Before—" but her voice dropped.

He had got up, not to tire her, but it was hard to combat his yearning. She after all told him nothing but that his light had failed—which he knew well enough without her. "Before—?" he blankly echoed.

"Before, you see, it was always to *come*. That kept it present."

"Oh I don't care what comes now! Besides," Marcher added, "it seems to me I liked it better present, as you say, than I can like it absent with *your* absence."

"Oh mine!"—and her pale hands made light of it.

"With the absence of everything." He had a dreadful sense of standing there before her for—so far as anything but this proved, this bottomless drop was concerned—the last time of their life. It rested on him with a weight he felt he could scarce bear, and this weight it apparently was that still pressed out what remained in him of speakable protest. "I believe you; but I can't begin to pretend I understand. *Nothing*, for me, is past; nothing *will* pass till I pass myself, which I pray my stars may be as soon as possible. Say, however," he added, "that I've eaten my cake, as you contend, to the last crumb—how can the thing I've never felt at all be the thing I was marked out to feel?"

She met him perhaps less directly, but she met him unperturbed. "You take your 'feelings' for granted. You were to suffer your fate. That was not necessarily to know it."

"How in the world—when what is such knowledge but suffering?"

She looked up at him a while in silence. "No—you don't understand."

"I suffer," said John Marcher.

"Don't, don't!"

"How can I help at least *that*?"

"*Don't!*" May Bartram repeated.

She spoke it in a tone so special, in spite of her weakness, that he stared an instant—stared as if some light, hitherto hidden, had shimmered across his vision. Darkness again closed over it, but the gleam had already become for him an idea. "Because I haven't the right—?"

"Don't *know*—when you needn't," she mercifully urged. "You needn't—for we shouldn't."

"Shouldn't?" If he could but know what she meant!

"No—it's too much."

"Too much?" he still asked but, with a mystification that was the next moment of a sudden to give way. Her words, if they meant something, affected him in this light—the light also of her wasted face—as meaning *all*, and the sense of what knowledge had been for herself came over him with a rush which broke through into a question. "Is it of that then you're dying?"

She but watched him, gravely at first, as to see, with this, where he was, and she might have seen something or feared something that moved her sympathy. "I would live for you still—if I could." Her eyes closed for a little, as if, withdrawn into herself, she were for a last time trying. "But I can't!" she said as she raised them again to take leave of him.

She couldn't indeed, as but too promptly and sharply appeared, and he had no vision of her after this that was anything, but darkness and doom. They had parted for ever in that strange talk; access to her chamber of pain, rigidly guarded, was almost wholly forbidden him; he was feeling now moreover, in the face of doctors, nurses, the two or three relatives attracted doubtless by the presumption of what she had to "leave," how few were the rights, as they were called in such cases, that he had to put forward, and how odd it might even seem that their intimacy shouldn't have given him more of them. The stupidest fourth cousin had more, even though she had been nothing in such a person's life. She had been a feature of features in *his*, for what else was it to have been so indispensable? Strange beyond saying were the ways of existence, baffling for him the anomaly of his lack, as he felt it to be, of producible claim. A woman might have been, as it were, everything to him, and it might yet present him in no connexion that any one seemed held to recognise. If this was the case in these closing weeks it was the case more sharply on the occasion of the last offices rendered, in the great grey London cemetery, to what had been mortal, to what had been precious, in his friend. The concourse at her grave was not numerous, but he saw himself treated as scarce more nearly concerned with it than if there had been a thousand others. He was in short from this moment face to face with the fact that he was to profit extraordinarily little by the interest May Bartram had taken in him. He couldn't quite have said what he expected, but he hadn't surely expected this approach to a double privation. Not only had her interest failed him, but he seemed to feel himself unattended—and for a reason he couldn't seize—by the distinction, the dignity, the propriety, if nothing else, of the man markedly bereaved. It was as if in the view of

society he had not *been* markedly bereaved, as if there still failed some sign or proof of it, and as if none the less his character could never be affirmed nor the deficiency ever made up. There were moments as the weeks went by when he would have liked, by some almost aggressive act, to take his stand on the intimacy of his loss, in order that it *might* be questioned and his retort, to the relief of his spirit, so recorded; but the moments of an irritation more helpless followed fast on these, the moments during which, turning things over with a good conscience but with a bare horizon, he found himself wondering if he oughtn't to have begun, so to speak, further back.

He found himself wondering at many things, and this last speculation had others to keep it company. What could he have done, after all, in her lifetime, without giving them both, as it were, away? He couldn't have made known she was watching him, for that would have published the superstition of the Beast. This was what closed his mouth now—now that the Jungle had been threshed to vacancy and that the Beast had stolen away. It sounded too foolish and too flat; the difference for him in this particular, the extinction in his life of the element of suspense, was such as in fact to surprise him. He could scarce have said what the effect resembled; the abrupt cessation, the positive prohibition, of music perhaps, more than anything else, in some place all adjusted and all accustomed to sonority and to attention. If he could at any rate have conceived lifting the veil from his image at some moment of the past (what had he done, after all, if not lift it to *her*?) so to do this today, to talk to people at large of the Jungle cleared and confide to them that he now felt it as safe, would have been not only to see them listen as to a goodwife's tale, but really to hear himself tell one. What it presently came to in truth was that poor Marcher waded through his beaten grass, where no life stirred, where no breath sounded, where no evil eye seemed to gleam from a possible lair, very much as if vaguely looking for the Beast, and still more as if acutely missing it. He walked about in an existence that had grown strangely more spacious, and, stopping fitfully in places where the undergrowth of life struck him as closer, asked himself yearningly, wondered secretly and sorely, if it would have lurked here or there. It would have at all events *sprung*; what was at least complete was his belief in the truth of the assurance given him. The change from his old sense to his new was absolute and final: what was to happen *had* so absolutely and finally happened that he was as little able to know a fear for his future as to know a hope; so absent in short was any question of anything still to come. He was to live entirely with the other question, that of his unidentified past, that of his having to see his fortune impenetrably muffled and masked.

The torment of this vision became then his occupation; he couldn't perhaps have consented to live but for the possibility of guessing. She had told him, his friend, not to guess; she had forbidden him, so far as he might, to know, and she had even in a sort denied the power in him to learn: which were so many things, precisely, to deprive him of rest. It wasn't that he wanted, he argued for fairness, that anything past and done should repeat itself; it was only that he shouldn't, as an anticlimax, have been taken sleeping so sound as not to be able to win back by an effort of thought the lost stuff of consciousness. He declared to himself at moments that he would either win it back or have done with consciousness for ever; he made this idea his one motive in fine, made it so much his passion that none other, to

compare with it, seemed ever to have touched him. The lost stuff of consciousness became thus for him as a strayed or stolen child to an unappeasable father; he hunted it up and down very much as if he were knocking at doors and enquiring of the police. This was the spirit in which, inevitably, he set himself to travel; he started on a journey that was to be as long as he could make it; it danced before him that, as the other side of the globe couldn't possibly have less to say to him, it might, by a possibility of suggestion, have more. Before he quitted London, however, he made a pilgrimage to May Bartram's grave, took his way to it through the endless avenues of the grim suburban metropolis, sought it out in the wilderness of tombs, and, though he had come but for the renewal of the act of farewell, found himself, when he had at last stood by it, beguiled into long intensities. He stood for an hour, powerless to turn away and yet powerless to penetrate the darkness of death; fixing with his eyes her inscribed name and date, beating his forehead against the fact of the secret they kept, drawing his breath, while he waited, as if some sense would in pity of him rise from the stones. He kneeled on the stones, however, in vain; they kept what they concealed; and if the face of the tomb did become a face for him it was because her two names became a pair of eyes that didn't know him. He gave them a last long look, but no palest light broke.

VI

He stayed away, after this, for a year; he visited the depths of Asia, spending himself on scenes of romantic interest, of superlative sanctity; but what was present to him everywhere was that for a man who had known what *he* had known the world was vulgar and vain. The state of mind in which he had lived for so many years shone out to him, in reflexion, as a light that coloured and refined, a light beside which the glow of the East was garish cheap and thin. The terrible truth was that he had lost—with everything else—a distinction as well; the things he saw couldn't help being common when he had become common to look at them. He was simply now one of them himself—he was in the dust, without a peg for the sense of difference; and there were hours when, before the temples of gods and the sepulchres of kings, his spirit turned for nobleness of association to the barely discriminated slab in the London suburb. That had become for him, and more intensely with time and distance, his one witness of a past glory. It was all that was left to him for proof or pride, yet the past glories of Pharaohs were nothing to him as he thought of it. Small wonder then that he came back to it on the morrow of his return. He was drawn there this time as irresistibly as the other, yet with a confidence, almost, that was doubtless the effect of the many months that had elapsed. He had lived, in spite of himself, into his change of feeling, and in wandering over the earth had wandered, as might be said, from the circumference to the centre of his desert. He had settled to his safety and accepted perforce his extinction; figuring to himself, with some colour, in the likeness of certain little old men he remembered to have seen, of whom, all meagre and wizened as they might look, it was related that they had in their time fought twenty duels or been loved by ten princesses. They indeed had been wondrous for others while he was but wondrous for himself; which, however, was exactly the cause of his haste to renew the wonder by getting

back, as he might put it, into his own presence. That had quickened his steps and checked his delay. If his visit was prompt it was because he had been separated so long from the part of himself that alone he now valued.

It's accordingly not false to say that he reached his goal with a certain elation and stood there again with a certain assurance. The creature beneath the sod *knew* of his rare experience, so that, strangely now, the place had lost for him its mere blankness of expression. It met him in mildness—not, as before, in mockery; it wore for him the air of conscious greeting that we find, after absence, in things that have closely belonged to us and which seem to confess of themselves to the connexion. The plot of ground, the graven tablet, the tended flowers affected him so as belonging to him that he resembled for the hour a contented landlord reviewing a piece of property. Whatever had happened—well, had happened. He had not come back this time with the vanity of that question, his former worrying “What, *what?*” now practically so spent. Yet he would none the less never again so cut himself off from the spot; he would come back to it every month, for if he did nothing else by its aid he at least held up his head. It thus grew for him, in the oddest way, a positive resource; he carried out his idea of periodical returns, which took their place at last among the most inveterate of his habits. What it all amounted to, oddly enough, was that in his finally so simplified world this garden of death gave him the few square feet of earth on which he could still most live. It was as if, being nothing anywhere else for any one, nothing even for himself, he were just everything here, and if not for a crowd of witnesses or indeed for any witness but John Marcher, then by clear right of the register that he could scan like an open page. The open page was the tomb of his friend, and *there* were the facts of the past, there the truth of his life, there the backward reaches in which he could lose himself. He did this from time to time with such effect that he seemed to wander through the old years with his hand in the arm of a companion who was, in the most extraordinary manner, his other, his younger self; and to wander, which was more extraordinary yet, round and round a third presence—not wandering she, but stationary, still, whose eyes, turning with his revolution, never ceased to follow him, and whose seat was his point, so to speak, of orientation. Thus in short he settled to live—feeding all on the sense that he once *had* lived, and dependent on it not alone for a support but for an identity.

It sufficed him in its way for months and the year elapsed; it would doubtless even have carried him further but for an accident, superficially slight, which moved him, quite in another direction, with a force beyond any of his impressions of Egypt or of India. It was a thing of the merest chance—the turn, as he afterwards felt, of a hair, though he was indeed to live to believe that if light hadn't come to him in this particular fashion it would still have come in another. He was to live to believe this, I say, though he was not to live, I may not less definitely mention, to do much else. We allow him at any rate the benefit of the conviction, struggling up for him at the end, that, whatever might have happened or not happened, he would have come round of himself to the light. The incident of an autumn day had put the match to the train laid from of old by his misery. With the light before him he knew that even of late his ache had only been smothered. It was strangely drugged, but it throbbed; at the touch it began to bleed. And the touch, in the event, was the face of a fellow mortal. This face, one grey afternoon when the leaves

were thick in the alleys, looked into Marcher's own, at the cemetery, with an expression like the cut of a blade. He felt it, that is, so deep down that he winced at the steady thrust. The person who so mutely assaulted him was a figure he had noticed, on reaching his own goal, absorbed by a grave a short distance away, a grave apparently fresh, so that the emotion of the visitor would probably match it for frankness. This face alone forbade further attention, though during the time he stayed he remained vaguely conscious of his neighbour, a middle-aged man apparently, in mourning, whose bowed back, among the clustered monuments and mortuary yews, was constantly presented. Marcher's theory that these were elements in contact with which he himself revived, had suffered, on this occasion, it may be granted, a marked, an excessive check. The autumn day was dire for him as none had recently been, and he rested with a heaviness he had not yet known on the low stone table that bore May Bartram's name. He rested without power to move, as if some spring in him, some spell vouchsafed, had suddenly been broken for ever. If he could have done that moment as he wanted he would simply have stretched himself on the slab that was ready to take him, treating it as a place prepared to receive his last sleep. What in all the wide world had he now to keep awake for? He stared before him with the question, and it was then that, as one of the cemetery walks passed near him, he caught the shock of the face.

His neighbour at the other grave had withdrawn, as he himself, with force enough in him, would have done by now, and was advancing along the path on his way to one of the gates. This brought him close, and his pace was slow, so that—and all the more as there was a kind of hunger in his look—the two men were for a minute directly confronted. Marcher knew him at once for one of the deeply stricken—a perception so sharp that nothing else in the picture comparatively lived, neither his dress, his age, nor his presumable character and class; nothing lived but the deep ravage of the features he showed. He *showed* them—that was the point; he was moved, as he passed, by some impulse that was either a signal for sympathy or, more possibly, a challenge to an opposed sorrow. He might already have been aware of our friend, might at some previous hour have noticed in him the smooth habit of the scene, with which the state of his own senses so scantily consorted, and might thereby have been stirred as by an overt discord. What Marcher was at all events conscious of was in the first place that the image of scarred passion presented to him was conscious too—of something that profaned the air; and in the second that, roused, startled, shocked, he was yet the next moment looking after it, as it went, with envy. The most extraordinary thing that had happened to him—though he had given that name to other matters as well—took place, after his immediate vague stare, as a consequence of this impression. The stranger passed, but the raw glare of his grief remained, making our friend wonder in pity what wrong, what wound it expressed, what injury not to be healed. What had the man *had*, to make him by the loss of it so bleed and yet live?

Something—and this reached him with a pang—that *he*, John Marcher, hadn't; the proof of which was precisely John Marcher's arid end. No passion had ever touched him, for this was what passion meant; he had survived and maundered and pined, but where had been *his* deep ravage? The extraordinary thing we speak of was the sudden rush of the result of this

question. The sight that had just met his eyes named to him, as in letters of quick flame, something he had utterly, insanely missed, and what he had missed made these things a train of fire, made them mark themselves in an anguish of inward throbs. He had seen *outside* of his life, not learned it within, the way a woman was mourned when she had been loved for herself: such was the force of his conviction of the meaning of the stranger's face, which still flared for him as a smoky torch. It hadn't come to him, the knowledge, on the wings of experience; it had brushed him, jostled him, upset him, with the disrespect of chance, the insolence of accident. Now that the illumination had begun, however, it blazed to the zenith, and what he presently stood there gazing at was the sounded void of his life. He gazed, he drew breath, in pain; he turned in his dismay, and, turning, he had before him in sharper incision than ever the open page of his story. The name on the table smote him as the passage of his neighbour had done, and what it said to him, full in the face, was that *she* was what he had missed. This was the awful thought, the answer to all the past, the vision at the dread clearness of which he grew as cold as the stone beneath him. Everything fell together, confessed, explained, overwhelmed; leaving him most of all stupefied at the blindness he had cherished. The fate he had been marked for he had met with a vengeance—he had emptied the cup to the lees; he had been the man of his time, *the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened. That was the rare stroke—that was his visitation. So he saw it, as we say, in pale horror, while the pieces fitted and fitted. So *she* had seen it while he didn't, and so she served at this hour to drive the truth home. It was the truth, vivid and monstrous, that all the while he had waited the wait was itself his portion. This the companion of his vigil had at a given moment made out, and she had then offered him the chance to baffle his doom. One's doom, however, was never baffled, and on the day she told him his own had come down she had seen him but stupidly stare at the escape she offered him.

The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived. *She* had lived—who could say now with what passion?—since she had loved him for himself; whereas he had never thought of her (ah, how it hugely glared at him!) but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use. Her spoken words came back to him—the chain stretched and stretched. The Beast had lurked indeed, and the Beast, at its hour, had sprung; it had sprung in that twilight of the cold April when, pale, ill, wasted, but all beautiful, and perhaps even then recoverable, she had risen from her chair to stand before him and let him imaginably guess. It had sprung as he didn't guess; it had sprung as she hopelessly turned from him, and the mark, by the time he left her, had fallen where it *was* to fall. He had justified his fear and achieved his fate; he had failed, with the last exactitude, of all he was to fail of; and a moan now rose to his lips as he remembered she had prayed he mightn't know. This horror of waking—*this* was knowledge, knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes seemed to freeze. Through them, none the less, he tried to fix it and hold it; he kept it there before him so that he might feel the pain. That at least, belated and bitter, had something of the taste of life. But the bitterness suddenly sickened him, and it was as if, horribly, he saw, in the truth, in the cruelty of his image, what had been appointed and done. He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking

Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him. His eyes darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, face down, on the tomb.

1901

1903, 1909

SARAH WINNEMUCCA

c. 1844–1891

Sarah Winnemucca, or Thocmetony (“shell flower”), was a northern Paiute woman born in about 1844 in western Nevada. Her mother, Tuboitony (“lettuce flower”), was the daughter of Captain Truckee, a prominent man among his people whose friendly attitude toward white settlers was based on his belief in traditional stories the Paiutes shared with other desert peoples regarding a “lost white brother” who would one day return. Sarah’s father, known as Old Winnemucca, was a Paiute chief. When Captain Truckee crossed into California in the 1850s to work on Spanish-owned ranches, he took Sarah and her mother with him. In California, Sarah learned some Spanish and became fluent enough in English to serve later as an interpreter for the American military. Throughout her adult life, Sarah Winnemucca worked on behalf of the northern Paiutes by means of lectures, writing, and direct encounters with government officials.

Sarah Winnemucca first gained public notice in 1864 when she appeared with her father and other family members on the streets of Virginia City, Nevada, in theatrical performances dramatizing the dire situation of Paiutes who had been displaced by the Virginia City gold rush of 1859. Her first publication was a letter describing Paiute suffering that appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1870. She attracted a national audience in 1878, at the end of the Bannock War. The Bannock Indians of the California Sierras, whose territory was adjacent to that of the Paiutes, had taken up arms against the encroaching whites. Many Paiutes joined with the Bannocks. At the conclusion of hostilities, many Paiutes who had not fought were imprisoned with the Bannocks and their Paiute allies on the Yakima Reservation in the Washington Territory. Winnemucca lectured on the Paiute cause in San Francisco, and she made the trip to Washington, D.C., to plead with President Rutherford B. Hayes and Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz. Despite her efforts, the conditions for the Paiutes only worsened. In 1883, Winnemucca embarked on a lecture tour to the East, speaking in New York, Baltimore, and Boston, where her audience included the poet John Greenleaf Whittier and the senator from Massachusetts, Henry Dawes.

In Boston, Winnemucca met Mary Mann, widow of the prominent educator Horace Mann, and her sister, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, a reformer who, decades before, had opposed Cherokee removal. It was while staying in Boston with the sisters that she wrote most of her autobiography, which Mary Mann edited. *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* was privately printed in 1883. In it, Winnemucca recounts the events of her life in the context of Paiute culture and history—giving readers the chance to understand Paiute lifeways, the threats posed by white Americans, and Paiute resistance to those threats. She published the book under the name of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, a name reflecting her 1881 marriage to Lewis

Hopkins, whom she had wed in San Francisco despite a law prohibiting Indian–white unions. Unfortunately, Hopkins, who had been discharged by the Army as a person of “no character,” was addicted to gambling and apparently drank heavily. These unsavory qualities, and the fact that Winnemucca had had more than one white husband before him, made it possible for her opponents to attack her morals. At the same time, her work for the army was criticized both by white opponents of army policy and by skeptical natives. Thus her book concludes with an “Appendix” containing testimonials to her character (the first, from Major General O. O. Howard, for whom she had worked during the Bannock War, affirms that Winnemucca’s “conduct was always good”), as well as testimonials to the justice and accuracy of her accounts of and pleas for the Paiute people.

The book’s authenticity has also been questioned, for it has been suggested that it was mostly written by Mary Mann, though in many places it uses material from Sarah Winnemucca’s own lectures. In her preface to *Life Among the Piutes*, Mary Mann states that her editing consisted of no more than “copying the original manuscript in correct orthography and punctuation, with occasional emendations by the author”; she called the book “an heroic act on the part of the writer.” Mary Mann’s judgment that *Life Among the Piutes* was “the first outbreak of the American Indian in human literature . . . to tell the truth” holds up today.

Near the end of her life, Winnemucca, with her brother Natchez, opened a school for Indian children in Nevada called the Peabody Indian School, supported by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, with whom Winnemucca had developed a deep friendship. But not even Peabody could persuade eastern senators to vote an appropriation for Indian education, and the school closed in 1888. Winnemucca then went to live with her sister, Elma, at Henry’s Lake, Idaho, where she died in 1891.

Our selections from *Life Among the Piutes* are from chapter I, “First Meeting of Piutes and Whites,” chapter II, “Domestic and Social Moralities,” and chapter VIII, “The Yakima Affair,” which ends the book. In this last chapter, Winnemucca clearly presents her own role as a Paiute activist deeply concerned with the future of her people.

From Life Among the Piutes

From Chapter I. First Meeting of Piutes and Whites

I was born somewhere near 1844, but am not sure of the precise time. I was a very small child when the first white people came into our country. They came like a lion, yes, like a roaring lion, and have continued so ever since, and I have never forgotten their first coming. My people were scattered at that time over nearly all the territory now known as Nevada. My grandfather was chief of the entire Piute nation, and was camped near Humboldt Lake, with a small portion of his tribe, when a party travelling eastward from California was seen coming. When the news was brought to my grandfather, he asked what they looked like? When told that they had hair on their faces, and were white, he jumped up and clasped his hands together, and cried aloud,—“My white brothers,—my long-looked-for white brothers have come at last!”

He immediately gathered some of his leading men, and went to the place where the party had gone into camp. Arriving near them, he was commanded to halt in a manner that was readily understood without an interpreter. Grandpa at once made signs of friendship by throwing down his robe and throwing up his arms to show them he had no weapons; but in vain,—they kept him at a distance. He knew not what to do. He had expected so much

pleasure in welcoming his white brothers to the best in the land, that after looking at them sorrowfully for a little while, he came away quite unhappy. But he would not give them up so easily. He took some of his most trustworthy men and followed them day after day, camping near them at night, and travelling in sight of them by day, hoping in this way to gain their confidence. But he was disappointed, poor dear old soul!

I can imagine his feelings, for I have drank deeply from the same cup. When I think of my past life, and the bitter trials I have endured, I can scarcely believe I live, and yet I do; and, with the help of Him who notes the sparrow's fall, I mean to fight for my down-trodden race while life lasts.

Seeing they would not trust him, my grandfather left them, saying, "Perhaps they will come again next year." Then he summoned his whole people, and told them this tradition:—

"In the beginning of the world there were only four, two girls and two boys. Our forefather and mother were only two, and we are their children. You all know that a great while ago there was a happy family in this world. One girl and one boy were dark and the others were white. For a time they got along together without quarrelling, but soon they disagreed, and there was trouble. They were cross to one another and fought, and our parents were very much grieved. They prayed that their children might learn better, but it did not do any good; and afterwards the whole household was made so unhappy that the father and mother saw that they must separate their children; and then our father took the dark boy and girl, and the white boy and girl, and asked them, 'Why are you so cruel to each other?' They hung down their heads, and would not speak. They were ashamed. He said to them, 'Have I not been kind to you all, and given you everything your hearts wished for? You do not have to hunt and kill your own game to live upon. You see, my dear children, I have power to call whatsoever kind of game we want to eat; and I also have the power to separate my dear children, if they are not good to each other.' So he separated his children by a word. He said, 'Depart from each other, you cruel children;—go across the mighty ocean and do not seek each other's lives.'

"So the light girl and boy disappeared by that one word, and their parents saw them no more, and they were grieved, although they knew their children were happy. And by-and-by the dark children grew into a large nation; and we believe it is the one we belong to, and that the nation that sprung from the white children will some time send some one to meet us and heal all the old trouble. Now, the white people we saw a few days ago must certainly be our white brothers, and I want to welcome them. I want to love them as I love all of you. But they would not let me; they were afraid. But they will come again, and I want you one and all to promise that, should I not live to welcome them myself, you will not hurt a hair on their heads, but welcome them as I tried to do."

How good of him to try and heal the wound, and how vain were his efforts! My people had never seen a white man, and yet they existed, and were a strong race. The people promised as he wished, and they all went back to their work.

* * *

That same fall, after my grandfather came home, he told my father to take charge of his people and hold the tribe, as he was going back to California

with as many of his people as he could get to go with him. So my father took his place as Chief of the Piutes, and had it as long as he lived. Then my grandfather started back to California again with about thirty families. That same fall, very late, the emigrants kept coming. It was this time that our white brothers first came amongst us. They could not get over the mountains, so they had to live with us. It was on Carson River, where the great Carson City stands now. You call my people bloodseeking. My people did not seek to kill them, nor did they steal their horses,—no, no, far from it. During the winter my people helped them. They gave them such as they had to eat. They did not hold out their hands and say:—

“You can’t have anything to eat unless you pay me.” No,—no such word was used by us savages at that time; and the persons I am speaking of are living yet; they could speak for us if they choose to do so.

The following spring, before my grandfather returned home, there was a great excitement among my people on account of fearful news coming from different tribes, that the people whom they called their white brothers were killing everybody that came in their way, and all the Indian tribes had gone into the mountains to save their lives. So my father told all his people to go into the mountains and hunt and lay up food for the coming winter. Then we all went into the mountains. There was a fearful story they told us children. Our mothers told us that the whites were killing everybody and eating them.¹ So we were all afraid of them. Every dust that we could see blowing in the valleys we would say it was the white people. In the late fall my father told his people to go to the rivers and fish, and we all went to Humboldt River, and the women went to work gathering wild seed, which they grind between the rocks. The stones are round, big enough to hold in the hands. The women did this when they got back, and when they had gathered all they could they put it in one place and covered it with grass, and then over the grass mud. After it is covered it looks like an Indian wigwam.

Oh, what a fright we all got one morning to hear some white people were coming. Every one ran as best they could. My poor mother was left with my little sister and me. Oh, I never can forget it. My poor mother was carrying my little sister on her back, and trying to make me run; but I was so frightened I could not move my feet, and while my poor mother was trying to get me along my aunt overtook us, and she said to my mother: “Let us bury our girls, or we shall all be killed and eaten up.” So they went to work and buried us, and told us if we heard any noise not to cry out, for if we did they would surely kill us and eat us. So our mothers buried me and my cousin, planted sage bushes over our faces to keep the sun from burning them, and there we were left all day.

Oh, can any one imagine my feelings *buried alive*, thinking every minute that I was to be unburied and eaten up by the people that my grandfather loved so much? With my heart throbbing, and not daring to breathe, we lay there all day. It seemed that the night would never come. Thanks be to God! the night came at last. Oh, how I cried and said: “Oh, father, have you

1. The reference is to a group of emigrants to California known as the Donner Party. Cut off by a storm in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in mid-December of 1846, with their rations almost gone, the group sent a party on snowshoes to seek

help. Several of the party died, and the survivors resorted to cannibalism; cannibalism also occurred among those who had stayed behind. Captain Truckee knew of these events. Winnemucca refers to them later in the chapter as well.

forgotten me? Are you never coming for me?" I cried so I thought my very heartstrings would break.

At last we heard some whispering. We did not dare to whisper to each other, so we lay still. I could hear their footsteps coming nearer and nearer. I thought my heart was coming right out of my mouth. Then I heard my mother say, "T is right here!" Oh, can any one in this world ever imagine what were my feelings when I was dug up by my poor mother and father? My cousin and I were once more happy in our mothers' and fathers' care, and we were taken to where all the rest were.

I was once buried alive; but my second burial shall be for ever, where no father or mother will come and dig me up. It shall not be with throbbing heart that I shall listen for coming footsteps. I shall be in the sweet rest of peace,—I, the chieftain's weary daughter.

Well, while we were in the mountains hiding, the people that my grandfather called our white brothers came along to where our winter supplies were. They set everything we had left on fire. It was a fearful sight. It was all we had for the winter, and it was all burnt during that night. My father took some of his men during the night to try and save some of it, but they could not; it had burnt down before they got there.

These were the last white men that came along that fall. My people talked fearfully that winter about those they called our white brothers. My people said they had something like awful thunder and lightning, and with that they killed everything that came in their way.

This whole band of white people perished in the mountains, for it was too late to cross them. We could have saved them, only my people were afraid of them. We never knew who they were, or where they came from. So, poor things, they must have suffered fearfully, for they all starved there. The snow was too deep.

Early in the following spring, my father told all his people to go to the mountains, for there would be a great emigration that summer. He told them he had had a wonderful dream, and wanted to tell them all about it.

He said, "Within ten days come together at the sink of Carson, and I will tell you my dream."

The sub-chiefs went everywhere to tell their people what my father had told them to say; and when the time came we all went to the sink of Carson.

Just about noon, while we were on the way, a great many of our men came to meet us, all on their horses. Oh, what a beautiful song they sang for my father as they came near us! We passed them, and they followed us, and as we came near to the encampment, every man, woman, and child were out looking for us. They had a place all ready for us. Oh, how happy everybody was! One could hear laughter everywhere, and songs were sung by happy women and children.

My father stood up and told his people to be merry and happy for five days. It is a rule among our people always to have five days to settle anything.² My father told them to dance at night, and that the men should hunt rabbits and fish, and some were to have games of football, or any kind of sport or playthings they wished, and the women could do the same, as they had

2. Five is the pattern number for Winnemucca's people, although a few paragraphs below an important dream of her father's takes place not on five but on three nights.

nothing else to do. My people were so happy during the five days,—the women ran races, and the men ran races on foot and on horses.

My father got up very early one morning, and told his people the time had come,—that we could no longer be happy as of old, as the white people we called our brothers had brought a great trouble and sorrow among us already. He went on and said,—

“These white people must be a great nation, as they have houses that move.³ It is wonderful to see them move along. I fear we will suffer greatly by their coming to our country; they come for no good to us, although my father said they were our brothers, but they do not seem to think we are like them. What do you all think about it? Maybe I am wrong. My dear children, there is something telling me that I am not wrong, because I am sure they have minds like us, and think as we do; and I know that they were doing wrong when they set fire to our winter supplies. They surely knew it was our food.”

And this was the first wrong done to us by our white brothers.

Now comes the end of our merrymaking.

Then my father told his people his fearful dream, as he called it. He said,—

“I dreamt this same thing three nights,—the very same. I saw the greatest emigration that has yet been through our country. I looked North and South and East and West, and saw nothing but dust, and I heard a great weeping. I saw women crying, and I also saw my men shot down by the white people. They were killing my people with something that made a great noise like thunder and lightning, and I saw the blood streaming from the mouths of my men that lay all around me. I saw it as if it was real. Oh, my dear children! You may all think it is only a dream,—nevertheless, I feel that it will come to pass. And to avoid bloodshed, we must all go to the mountains during the summer, or till my father comes back from California. He will then tell us what to do. Let us keep away from the emigrant roads and stay in the mountains all summer. There are to be a great many pine-nuts this summer, and we can lay up great supplies for the coming winter, and if the emigrants don’t come too early, we can take a run down and fish for a month, and lay up dried fish. I know we can dry a great many in a month, and young men can go into the valleys on hunting excursions, and kill as many rabbits as they can. In that way we can live in the mountains all summer and all winter too.”

So ended my father’s dream. During that day one could see old women getting together talking over what they had heard my father say. They said,—

“It is true what our great chief has said, for it was shown to him by a higher power. It is not a dream. Oh, it surely will come to pass. We shall no longer be a happy people, as we now are; we shall no longer go here and there as of old; we shall no longer build our big fires as a signal to our friends, for we shall always be afraid of being seen by those bad people.”

“Surely they don’t eat people?”

“Yes, they do eat people, because they ate each other up in the mountains last winter.”

This was the talk among the old women during the day.

“Oh, how grieved we are! Oh, where will it end?”

* * *

3. The reference might be to covered wagons but is more likely to railway cars.

From *Chapter II. Domestic and Social Moralities*

Our children are very carefully taught to be good. Their parents tell them stories, traditions of old times, even of the first mother of the human race; and love stories, stories of giants, and fables; and when they ask if these last stories are true, they answer, "Oh, it is only coyote," which means that they are make-believe stories. Coyote is the name of a mean, crafty little animal, half wolf, half dog, and stands for everything low. It is the greatest term of reproach one Indian has for another. Indians do not swear,—they have no words for swearing till they learn them of white men. The worst they call each is bad or coyote; but they are very sincere with one another, and if they think each other in the wrong they say so.

We are taught to love everybody. We don't need to be taught to love our fathers and mothers. We love them without being told to. Our tenth cousin is as near to us as our first cousin; and we don't marry into our relations. Our young women are not allowed to talk to any young man that is not their cousin, except at the festive dances, when both are dressed in their best clothes, adorned with beads, feathers or shells, and stand alternately in the ring and take hold of hands. These are very pleasant occasions to all the young people.

Many years ago, when my people were happier than they are now, they used to celebrate the Festival of Flowers in the spring. I have been to three of them only in the course of my life.

Oh, with what eagerness we girls used to watch every spring for the time when we could meet with our hearts' delight, the young men, whom in civilized life you call beaux. We would all go in company to see if the flowers we were named for were yet in bloom, for almost all the girls are named for flowers. We talked about them in our wigwams, as if we were the flowers, saying, "Oh, I saw myself today in full bloom!" We would talk all the evening in this way in our families with such delight, and such beautiful thoughts of the happy day when we should meet with those who admired us and would help us to sing our flower-songs which we made up as we sang. But we were always sorry for those that were not named after some flower, because we knew they could not join in the flower-songs like ourselves, who were named for flowers of all kinds.

At last one evening came a beautiful voice, which made every girl's heart throb with happiness. It was the chief, and every one hushed to hear what he said to-day.

"My dear daughters, we are told that you have seen yourselves in the hills and in the valleys, in full bloom. Five days from to-day your festival day will come. I know every young man's heart stops beating while I am talking. I know how it was with me many years ago. I used to wish the Flower Festival would come every day. Dear young men and young women, you are saying, 'Why put it off five days?' But you all know that is our rule. It gives you time to think, and to show your sweetheart your flower."

All the girls who have flower-names dance along together, and those who have not go together also. Our fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers make a place for us where we can dance. Each one gathers the flower she is named for, and then all weave them into wreaths and crowns and scarfs, and dress up in them.

Some girls are named for rocks and are called rock-girls, and they find some pretty rocks which they carry; each one such a rock as she is named for, or whatever she is named for. If she cannot, she can take a branch of sage-brush, or a bunch of rye-grass, which have no flower.

They all go marching along, each girl in turn singing of herself; but she is not a girl any more,—she is a flower singing. She sings of herself, and her sweetheart, dancing along by her side, helps her sing the song she makes.

I will repeat what we say of ourselves. "I, Sarah Winnemucca, am a shell-flower, such as I wear on my dress. My name is Thocmetony. I am so beautiful! Who will come and dance with me while I am so beautiful? Oh, come and be happy with me! I shall be beautiful while the earth lasts. Somebody will always admire me; and who will come and be happy with me in the Spirit-land? I shall be beautiful forever there. Yes, I shall be more beautiful than my shell-flower, my Thocmetony! Then, come, oh come, and dance and be happy with me!" The young men sing with us as they dance beside us.

Our parents are waiting for us somewhere to welcome us home. And then we praise the sage-brush and the rye-grass that have no flower, and the pretty rocks that some are named for; and then we present our beautiful flowers to these companions who could carry none. And so all are happy; and that closes the beautiful day.

My people have been so unhappy for a long time they wish now to *disin-crease*, instead of multiply. The mothers are afraid to have more children, for fear they shall have daughters, who are not safe even in their mother's presence.

* * *

Our boys are introduced to manhood by their hunting of deer and mountain-sheep. Before they are fifteen or sixteen, they hunt only small game, like rabbits, hares, fowls, etc. They never eat what they kill themselves, but only what their father or elder brothers kill. When a boy becomes strong enough to use larger bows made of sinew, and arrows that are ornamented with eagle-feathers, for the first time, he kills game that is large, a deer or an antelope, or a mountain-sheep. Then he brings home the hide, and his father cuts it into a long coil which is wound into a loop, and the boy takes his quiver and throws it on his back as if he was going on a hunt, and takes his bow and arrows in his hand. Then his father throws the loop over him, and he jumps through it. This he does five times. Now for the first time he eats the flesh of the animal he has killed, and from that time he eats whatever he kills but he has always been faithful to his parents' command not to eat what he has killed before. He can now do whatever he likes, for now he is a man, and no longer considered a boy. If there is a war he can go to it; but the Piutes, and other tribes west of the Rocky Mountains, are not fond of going to war. I never saw a war-dance but once. It is always the whites that begin the wars, for their own selfish purposes. The government does not take care to send the good men; there are a plenty who would take pains to see and understand the chiefs and learn their characters, and their good will to the whites. But the whites have not waited to find out how good the Indians were, and what ideas they had of God, just like those of Jesus, who called him Father, just as my people do, and told men to do to others as they would be done by, just as my people teach their children to do. My people teach their children never

to make fun of any one, no matter how they look. If you see your brother or sister doing something wrong, look away, or go away from them. If you make fun of bad persons, you make yourself beneath them. Be kind to all, both poor and rich, and feed all that come to your wigwam, and your name can be spoken of by every one far and near. In this way you will make many friends for yourself. Be kind both to bad and good, for you don't know your own heart. This is the way my people teach their children. It was handed down from father to son for many generations. I never in my life saw our children rude as I have seen white children and grown people in the streets.

The chief's tent is the largest tent, and it is the council-tent, where every one goes who wants advice. In the evenings the head men go there to discuss everything, for the chiefs do not rule like tyrants; they discuss everything with their people, as a father would in his family. Often they sit up all night. They discuss the doings of all, if they need to be advised. If a boy is not doing well they talk that over, and if the women are interested they can share in the talks. If there is not room enough inside, they all go out of doors, and make a great circle. The men are in the inner circle, for there would be too much smoke for the women inside. The men never talk without smoking first. The women sit behind them in another circle, and if the children wish to hear, they can be there too. The women know as much as the men do, and their advice is often asked. We have a republic as well as you. The council-tent is our Congress, and anybody can speak who has anything to say, women and all. They are always interested in what their husbands are doing and thinking about. And they take some part even in the wars. They are always near at hand when fighting is going on, ready to snatch their husbands up and carry them off if wounded or killed. One splendid woman that my brother Lee married after his first wife died, went out into the battle-field after her uncle was killed, and went into the front ranks and cheered the men on. Her uncle's horse was dressed in a splendid robe made of eagles' feathers and she snatched it off and swung it in the face of the enemy, who always carry off everything they find, as much as to say, "You can't have that—I have it safe"; and she staid and took her uncle's place, as brave as any of the men. It means something when the women promise their fathers to make their husbands *themselves*. They faithfully keep with them in all the dangers they can share. They not only take care of their children together, but they do everything together; and when they grow blind, which I am sorry to say is very common, for the smoke they live in destroys their eyes at last, they take sweet care of one another. Marriage is a sweet thing when people love each other. If women could go into your Congress I think justice would soon be done to the Indians.

* * *

From *Chapter VIII. The Yakima Affair*

* * *

We then went down, and Major Cochran met us at the door and said, "Sarah, are you sick? You look so badly."

I said, "No."

He then replied, "Sarah, I am heartily sorry for you, but we cannot help it. We are ordered to take your people to Yakima Reservation."⁴

It was just a little before Christmas. My people were only given one week to get ready in.

I said, "What! In this cold winter and in all this snow, and my people have so many little children? Why, they will all die. Oh, what can the President be thinking about? Oh, tell me, what is he? Is he man or beast? Yes, he must be a beast; if he has no feeling for my people, surely he ought to have some for the soldiers."

"I have never seen a president in my life and I want to know whether he is made of wood or rock, for I cannot for once think that he can be a human being. No human being would do such a thing as that,—send people across a fearful mountain in midwinter."

I was told not to say anything till three days before starting. Every night I imagined I could see the thing called President. He had long ears, he had big eyes and long legs, and a head like a bull-frog or something like that. I could not think of anything that could be so inhuman as to do such a thing,—send people across mountains with snow so deep.

Mattie and I got all the furs we could; we had fur caps, fur gloves, and fur overshoes.

At last the time arrived. The commanding-officer told me to tell Leggins to come to him.⁵ I did so. He came, and Major Cochrane told me to tell him that he wanted him to tell which of the Bannock men were the worst, or which was the leader in the war. Leggins told him, and counted out twelve men to him. After this talk, Major Cochrane asked me to go and tell these men to come up to the office. They were Oytes, Bannock Joe, Captain Bearskin, Paddy Cap, Boss, Big John, Eagle Eye, Charley, D. E. Johnson, Beads, and Oytes' son-in-law, called Surger. An officer was sent with me. I called out the men by their names. They all came out to me. I said to Oytes,—

"Your soldier-father wants you all to go up to see him."

We went up, and Oytes asked me many things.

We had to go right by the guard-house. Just as we got near it, the soldier on guard came out and headed us off and took the men and put them into the guard-house. After they were put in there the soldiers told me to tell them they must not try to get away, or they would be shot.

"We put you in here for safe-keeping," they said. "The citizens are coming over here from Canyon City to arrest you all, and we don't want them to take you; that is why we put you in here."

Ten soldiers were sent down to guard the whole encampment,—not Leggins' band, only Oytes' and the Bannocks. I was then ordered to tell them to get ready to go to Yakima Reservation.

Oh, how sad they were! Women cried and blamed their husbands for going with the Bannocks; but Leggins and his band were told they

4. This is Captain (not Major) M. A. Cochran (Winnemucca spells it "Cochrane" just below), who is the post commander at Fort Harney, Oregon. Sarah is with her close friend, Mattie, whom she will refer to as her "sister" a few paragraphs below. A number of Paiute people had been taken to Fort Harney after the conclusion of the Bannock War in 1878. They were expecting to be

returned to the Malheur Reservation in Oregon, where many had been for some time. Here, Winnemucca learns that her people are to be sent far away, to the Yakima Reservation in Washington State.

5. Leggins was the leader of Winnemucca's father's band. These Paiutes did not join the Bannocks. They were nonetheless sent to Washington.

were not going with the prisoners of war, and that he was not going at all.

Then Leggins moved down the creek about two miles. At night some would get out and go off. Brother Lee⁶ and Leggins were sent out to bring them back again. One afternoon Mattie and I were sent out to get five women who got away during the night, and an officer was sent with us. We were riding very fast, and my sister Mattie's horse jumped on one side and threw her off and hurt her. The blood ran out of her mouth, and I thought she would die right off; but, poor dear, she went on, for an ambulance was at our command. She had great suffering during our journey.

Oh, for shame! You who are educated by a Christian government in the art of war; the practice of whose profession makes you natural enemies of the savages, so called by you. Yes, you, who call yourselves the great civilization; you who have knelt upon Plymouth Rock, covenanting with God to make this land the home of the free and the brave. Ah, then you rise from your bended knees and seizing the welcoming hands of those who are the owners of this land, which you are not, your carbines rise upon the bleak shore, and your so-called civilization sweeps inland from the ocean wave; but, oh, my God! leaving its pathway marked by crimson lines of blood, and strewn by the bones of two races, the inheritor and the invader; and I am crying out to you for justice,—yes, pleading for the far-off plains of the West, for the dusky mourner, whose tears of love are pleading for her husband, or for their children, who are sent far away from them. Your Christian minister will hold my people against their will; not because he loves them,—no, far from it,—but because it puts money in his pockets.

Now we are ready to start for Yakima. Fifty wagons were brought, and citizens were to take us there. Some of the wagons cost the government from ten dollars to fifteen dollars per day. We got to Canyon City, and while we camped there Captain Winters got a telegram from Washington, telling him he must take Leggins' band too. So we had to wait for them to overtake us. While we were waiting, our dear good father and mother, Mr. Charles W. Parrish,⁷ came with his wife and children to see us. My people threw their arms round him and his wife, crying, "Oh, our father and mother, if you had staid with us we would not suffer this."

Poor Mrs. Parrish could not stop her tears at seeing the people who once loved her, the children whom she had taught,—yes, the savage children who once called her their white-lily mother, the children who used to bring her wild flowers, with happy faces, now ragged, no clothes whatever. They all cried out to him and his wife, saying, "Oh, good father and mother, talk for us! Don't let them take us away; take us back to our home!" He told them he could do nothing for them. They asked him where his brother, Sam Parrish, was. He told them he was a long way off; and then they bade us good-by, and that was the last they saw of him.

* * *

1883

6. Winnemucca's half-brother.
7. Charles Parrish had been the government Indian agent at the Malheur Reservation. As is

apparent, Winnemucca thought extremely well of Parrish and his wife.

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

1848?–1908

Joel Chandler Harris was born in Eatonville, Georgia, in the 1840s; biographers differ as to whether he was born in 1845, 1846, or 1848. His mother, Mary Harris, came from a middle-class family in a neighboring county; his father was a day laborer who abandoned mother and child shortly after Harris was born. One of Eatonville's leading citizens, Andrew Reid, provided a small cottage for Mary Harris and her infant son, and soon Mary's mother and grandmother joined them.

In 1862, at age fourteen, Harris went to work as a printer's apprentice on Joseph Addison Turner's newly established newspaper, the *Countryman*. Turner owned Turnwold, a thousand-acre plantation nine miles from Eatonville, and was intensely loyal to plantation life and the recently established Confederacy. But Turner's deepest ambitions were literary rather than political; he wanted to become a force in establishing Georgia and the South as important literary centers. Turner encouraged Harris to make use of his large library, which included classic English writers as well as southern authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and Henry Timrod. He also served as a kind of tutor as Harris began to graduate from setting type to making contributions to the *Countryman* with short punning pieces and reviews.

On April 20, 1873, Harris married Esther La Rose, with whom he would have nine children, losing three to childhood illnesses. To avoid a yellow fever epidemic, he brought his family from Savannah to Atlanta in 1876 in what turned out to be a permanent move. He went to work for the *Atlanta Constitution* as an associate editor and started a column called "Round About in Georgia." He wrote his first Uncle Remus story for the issue of October 26, 1876; others followed, and his first Uncle Remus book, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, was published in 1881. Five more collections of Remus stories and poems were published over the next twenty-five years. For these hugely popular stories, Harris drew on his Turnwold experience as a fascinated listener to black folklore and storytelling, a tradition that drew on a mixture of mostly African and some European sources. These stories worked with figures who appear in multiple folk traditions from across the world: the wise storyteller, the wily predator, and the trickster—a supposedly weak victim who outwits the predator every time.

Harris became a charter member of the American Folklore Society, established in 1888, and was an active collector of oral tales. Increasingly, he depended on "informants" for stories he would then adapt to his purposes. In the years following the publication of his first book, Harris published twenty more volumes of tales, sketches, novels, and children's stories featuring a wide range of characters both fanciful and real. Even though Harris was a working journalist for forty years and wrote editorials and essays on the issues of his day—especially on the need for the North and South to come together after the Civil War—little of this work matches the artistry or impact of the tales of Uncle Remus. The reception of Harris's tales became contested in the century after his death, with some writers (such as Ralph Ellison) praising him for conveying the comedy and subversiveness of African American storytellers and others (such as Alice Walker) arguing that he engaged in cultural appropriation or indulged in plantation nostalgia. Regardless, no one disputes the deep popularity of Harris's Uncle Remus at the turn of the twentieth century, or Harris's influence on the representation of oral storytelling in American literature.

The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story¹

“Didn’t the fox *never* catch the rabbit, Uncle Remus?” asked the little boy the next evening.

“He come mighty nigh it, honey, sho’s you bawn—Brer Fox did. One day atter Brer Rabbit fool ’im wid dat calamus root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got ’im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentime, en fix up a contrapshun wat he call a Tar-Baby, en he tuck dish yer Tar-Baby en he sot ’er in de big road, en den he lay off in de bushes fer ter see wat de news wuz gwineter be. En he didn’t hatter wait long, nudder, kaze bimeby here come Brer Rabbit pacin’ down de road—lippity-clippity, clippity-lippity—dez ez sassy ez a jay-bird. Brer Fox, he lay low. Brer Rabbit come prancin’ ’long twel he spy de Tar-Baby, en den he fotch up on his behime legs like he wuz ’stonished. De Tar-Baby, she sot dar, she did, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

“‘Mawnin!’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee—‘nice wedder dis mawnin’,’ sezee.

“‘Tar-Baby ain’t sayin’ nothin’, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

“‘How duz yo’ sym’tums seem ter segashuate?’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

“‘Brer Fox, he wink his eye slow, en lay low, en de Tar-Baby, she ain’t sayin’ nothin’.

“‘How you come on, den? Is you deaf?’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. ‘Kaze if you is, I kin holler louder,’ sezee.

“‘Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

“‘Youer stuck up, dat’s w’at you is,’ says Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘’en I’m gwineter kyore you, dat’s w’at I’m a gwineter do,’ sezee.

“‘Brer Fox, he sorter chuckle in his stummuck, he did, but Tar-Baby ain’t sayin’ nothin’.

“‘I’m gwineter larn you howter talk ter ’specttubble fokes ef hit’s de las’ ack’, sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. ‘’Ef you don’t take off dat hat en tell me howdy, I’m gwineter bus’ you wide open,’ sezee.

“‘Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

“‘Brer Rabbit keep on axin’ ’im, en de Tar-Baby, she keep on sayin’ nothin’, twel present’y Brer Rabbit draw back wid his fis’, he did, en blip he tuck ’er side er de head. Right dar’s whar he broke his merlasses jug. His fis’ stuck, en he can’t pull loose. De tar hilt ’im. But Tar-Baby, she stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

“‘Ef you don’t lemme loose, I’ll knock you agin,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, en wid dat he fotch ’er a wipe wid de udder han’, en dat stuck. Tar-Baby, she ain’t sayin’ nothin’, en Brer Fox, he lay low.

“‘Tu’n me loose, fo’ I kick de natal stuffin’ outen you,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, but de Tar-Baby, she ain’t sayin’ nothin. She des hilt on, en den Brer Rabbit lose de use er his feet in de same way. Brer Fox, he lay low. Den Brer Rabbit squall out dat ef de Tar-Baby don’t tu’n ’im loose he butt ’er crank-sided. En den he butted, en his head got stuck. Den Brer Fox, he sa’ntered fort’, lookin’ des ez innercent ez wunner yo’ mammy’s mockin’-birds.

“‘Howdy, Brer Rabbit,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee. ‘You look sorter stuck up dis mawnin’,’ sezee, en den he rolled on de groun’, en laughed en laughed twel

1. First published in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (New York: D. Appleton, 1881) and reprinted in a modern edition edited by Robert Hemenway (Penguin, 1982), the source of the present texts.

he couldn't laugh no mo'. 'I speck you'll take dinner wid me dis time, Brer Rabbit. I done laid in some calamus root, en I ain't gwineter take no skuse,' sez Brer Fox, sezee."

Here Uncle Remus paused, and drew a two-pound yam out of the ashes.

"Did the fox eat the rabbit?" asked the little boy to whom the story had been told.

"Dat's all de fur de tale goes," replied the old man. "He mout, en den agin he moutent. Some say Judge B'ar come 'long en loosed 'im—some say he didn't. I hear Miss Sally callin'. You better run 'long."

1881

How Mr. Rabbit Was Too Sharp for Mr. Fox¹

"Uncle Remus," said the little boy one evening, when he had found the old man with little or nothing to do, "did the fox kill and eat the rabbit when he caught him with the Tar-Baby?"

"Law, honey, ain't I tell you 'bout dat?" replied the old darkey, chuckling slyly. "I 'clar ter grashus I ought er tole you dat, but ole man Nod² wuz ridin' on my eyeleds 'twel a leetle mo'n I'd a dis'member'd my own name, en den on to dat here come yo' mammy hollerin' atter you.

"W'at I tell you w'en I fus' begin? I tole you Brer Rabbit wuz a monstus soon³ beas'; leas'ways dat's w'at I laid out fer ter tell you. Well, den, honey, don't you go en make no udder kalkalashuns, kaze in dem days Brer Rabbit en his fambly wuz at de head er de gang w'en enny racket wuz on han', en dar dey stayed. 'Fo' you begins fer ter wipe yo' eyes 'bout Brer Rabbit, you wait en see whar'bouts Brer Rabbit gwineter fetch up at. But dat's needer yer ner dar.

"W'en Brer Fox fine Brer Rabbit mixt up wid de Tar-Baby, he feel mighty good, en he roll on de groun' en laff. Bimeby he up'n say, sezee:

"'Well, I speck I got you dis time, Brer Rabbit,' sezee; 'maybe I ain't, but I speck I is. You been runnin' roun' here sassin' atter me a mighty long time, but I speck you done come ter de een' er de row. You bin cuttin' up yo' capers en bouncin' 'roun' in dis naberhood ontwel you come ter b'leeve yo'se'f de boss er de whole gang. En den youer allers some'rs whar you got no bizness,' sez Brer Fox, sezee. 'Who ax you fer ter come en strike up a 'quaintence wid dish yer Tar-Baby? En who stuck you up dar whar you iz? Nobody in de roun' worril. You des tuck en jam yo'se'f on dat Tar-Baby widout waitin' fer enny invite,' sez Brer Fox, sezee, 'en dar you is, en dar you'll stay twel I fixes up a bresh-pile and fires her up, kaze I'm gwineter bobbycue you dis day, sho,' sez Brer Fox, sezee.

"Den Brer Rabbit talk mighty 'umble.

"I don't keer w'at you do wid me, Brer Fox,' sezee, 'so you don't fling me in dat brier-patch. Roas' me, Brer Fox,' sezee, 'but don't fling me in dat brier-patch,' sezee.

1. This tale takes up where "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story" left off; in the earlier story Brer Fox coaxes Brer Rabbit into being trapped in the sticky surface of a doll that Brer Fox has molded

from tar and set in the road.

2. Folk image of sleep.

3. Dialect for quick or fast, speedy.

“‘Hit’s so much trouble fer ter kindle a fire,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘dat I speck I’ll hatter hang you,’ sezee.

“‘Hang me des ez high ez you please, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘but do fer de Lord’s sake don’t fling me in that brier-patch,’ sezee.

“‘I ain’t got no string,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en now I speck I’ll hatter drown you,’ sezee.

“‘Drown me des ez deep ez you please, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘but do don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee.

“‘Dey ain’t no water nigh,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en now I speck I’ll hatter skin you,’ sezee.

“‘Skin me, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘snatch out my eyeballs, t’ar out my years by de roots, en cut off my legs,’ sezee, ‘but do please, Brer Fox, don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee.

“Co’s e Brer Fox wanter hurt Brer Rabbit bad ez he kin, so he cotch ’im by de behime legs en slung ’im right in de middle er de brier-patch. Dar was a considerbul flutter whar Brer Rabbit struck de bushes, en Brer Fox sorter hang ’roun’ fer ter see w’at wuz gwineter happen. Bimeby he hear somebody call ’im, en way up de hill he see Brer Rabbit settin’ cross-legged on a chinkapin log⁴ koamin’ de pitch outen his har wid a chip. Den Brer Fox know dat he bin swop off mighty bad. Brer Rabbit wuz bleedzed⁵ fer ter fling back some er his sass, en he holler out:

“‘Bred en bawn in a brier-patch, Brer Fox—bred en bawn in a brier-patch!’ en wid dat he skip out des ez lively ez a cricket in de embers.”

1881

4. Log of a dwarf chestnut tree.

5. Obligated.

EMMA LAZARUS

1849–1887

Since 1903, Emma Lazarus’s sonnet “The New Colossus” has been on public view inside the base of the Statue of Liberty; its last several lines, especially “huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” have become part of the national vocabulary through which Americans describe the ideals of their nation.

Lazarus was born in New York City on July 22, 1849, to Moses Lazarus, a wealthy sugar refiner, and Esther Nathan Lazarus, both from families long resident in New York. Her father’s family were Sephardic Jews from Portugal who had settled in New York while it was New Amsterdam. She grew up in luxury in Manhattan and summered in fashionable Newport, Rhode Island. Educated by tutors in three modern languages and literatures besides English, Lazarus was precocious, and when her father paid for the publication of *Poems and Translations . . . Written between the Ages of Fourteen and Sixteen* in 1866, she sent copies to several well-known poets, among them Ralph Waldo Emerson, who politely offered to be her “professor” in stylistic matters. In addition to Emerson, Lazarus came to know many American

writers of the time, and her enthusiasm for Whitman, Thoreau, and other American writers culminated in her short manifesto “American Literature” (1881).

Early in her literary life, Lazarus identified with the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, who had felt both at home in and estranged from a Christian society and non-Hebraic literature. Though Lazarus had written such poems as “In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport,” her intellectual efforts into the early 1880s focused on the continuities and distinctions between American and English literature. But in 1882, horrified that newspapers were minimizing Russian atrocities against Jews, Lazarus fashioned herself into a Jewish spokeswoman on international themes as they affected American national policy on immigration. Her essay “Russian Christianity *versus* Modern Judaism,” published in the *Century* in 1882, describes the reign of “murder, rape, arson” during which tens of thousands of Jewish families in Eastern Europe had been reduced “to homeless beggary.” That November, playing on Paul’s New Testament letter, she began serial publication in the *American Hebrew* of “An Epistle to the Hebrew.” There she urged American Jews to become more, not less, “tribal,” and to recognize that their freedom depended upon the freedom of Jews in Russia and elsewhere. The following year, in “The Jewish Problem,” Lazarus spoke out as an early Zionist, echoing the fervent determination of George Eliot’s title character in *Daniel Deronda* to make the Jews “a nation again.” And she began visiting the “undesirable” new immigrants detained on Ward’s Island in the East River, those deemed too destitute or too infirm to be allowed into American society. In 1883 she founded the Society for the Improvement and Colonization of Eastern European Jews.

Lazarus’s poetry combines free-flowing, often powerful imagery with a careful attention to poetic form. Those qualities are on display in “The New Colossus,” which Lazarus composed in 1883 as part of a fundraising effort to support the building of the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. The statue, a gift from France to the United States, had been conceived as a memorial to France’s aid of the colonies during the American Revolution. In hailing the female figure as the “Mother of Exiles,” Lazarus redefined the “mighty woman with a torch” into the national welcomer of “huddled masses” seeking refuge. Building on her own knowledge of immigrants arriving in New York Harbor, she redefined the significance of the statue away from the past and toward the future.

Lazarus traveled to Europe in 1883 and 1885, meeting several famous poets, including Robert Browning. Her death, from cancer, in 1887 cut short a remarkable career, and her reputation was solidified the following year, when her sisters posthumously published *The Poems of Emma Lazarus*.

In the Jewish Synagogue at Newport¹

Here, where the noises of the busy town,
The ocean’s plunge and roar can enter not,
We stand and gaze around with tearful awe,
And muse upon the consecrated spot.

No signs of life are here: the very prayers
Inscribed around are in a language dead;²

5

1. The text is from *Admetus and Other Poems* (1871), where it is dated “July 1867.” It is a companion piece to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s similarly meditative “The Jewish Cemetery at Newport,” about the cemetery attached to the Touro Synagogue, the oldest in the United States,

dating from 1763. The synagogue was closed during the years that Lazarus summured in Newport at her family’s country house.

2. “Dead” because at that time Hebrew was not used in everyday life.

The light of the “perpetual lamp”³ is spent
 That an undying radiance was to shed.

What prayers were in this temple offered up,
 Wrung from sad hearts that knew no joy on earth, 10
 By these lone exiles of a thousand years,
 From the fair sunrise land that gave them birth!

Now as we gaze, in this new world of light,⁴
 Upon this relic of the days of old,
 The present vanishes, and tropic bloom 15
 And Eastern towns and temples we behold.

Again we see the patriarch⁵ with his flocks,
 The purple seas, the hot blue sky o’erhead,
 The slaves of Egypt,—omens, mysteries,—
 Dark fleeing hosts by flaming angels led,⁶ 20

A wondrous light upon a sky-kissed mount,⁷
 A man who reads Jehovah’s written law,
 ’Midst blinding glory and effulgence rare,
 Unto a people prone with reverent awe.

The pride of luxury’s barbaric pomp, 25
 In the rich court of royal Solomon—⁸
 Alas! we wake: one scene alone remains—
 The exiles by the streams of Babylon.⁹

Our softened voices send us back again
 But mournful echoes through the empty hall; 30
 Our footsteps have a strange unnatural sound,
 And with unwonted gentleness they fall.

The weary ones, the sad, the suffering,
 All found their comfort in the holy place,
 And children’s gladness and men’s gratitude 35
 Took voice and mingled in the chant of praise.

The funeral and the marriage, now, alas!
 We know not which is sadder to recall;
 For youth and happiness have followed age,
 And green grass lieth gently over all. 40

3. In a synagogue, the light above the ark which holds the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

4. The United States.

5. Abraham (Genesis 24.35), his son Isaac, or Isaac’s sons. Lazarus is not striving for specificity but evoking images of Jewish history.

6. The enslavement of Jews in Egypt is described in Exodus 1. After the Hebrews crossed the Red Sea, a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire

by night led them through the desert (Exodus 13.21–22).

7. Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34).

8. Solomon’s magnificence is described in 1 Kings 4; the building of the First Temple (in Jerusalem) is described in 1 Kings 5–8.

9. The First Temple was destroyed around 588–586 B.C.E. and the Jews exiled to Babylon, the site of the modern Hilla, in Iraq, south of Baghdad.

Nathless¹ the sacred shrine is holy yet,
 With its lone floors where reverent feet once trod.
 Take off your shoes as by the burning bush,
 Before the mystery of death and God.

1867

1871

1492¹

Thou two-faced year, Mother of Change and Fate,
 Didst weep when Spain cast forth with flaming sword,
 The children of the prophets of the Lord,
 Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate.
 Hounded from sea to sea, from state to state, 5
 The West² refused them, and the East abhorred.
 No anchorage the known world could afford,
 Close-locked was every port, barred every gate.³
 Then smiling, thou unveil'dst, O two-faced year,
 A virgin world where doors of sunset part, 10
 Saying, "Ho, all who weary, enter here!
 There falls each ancient barrier that the art
 Of race or creed or rank devised, to rear
 Grim bulwarked hatred between heart and heart!"

1883

1888

The New Colossus¹

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,²
 With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
 Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
 A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
 Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name 5
 Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
 Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
 The air-bridged harbor that twin cities³ frame.
 "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
 With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor, 10

1. Nevertheless (poetic archaism).

1. This poem, reprinted from *Poems* (1888), acknowledges two events in Spain in 1492. Early in the year King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella drove from Spain all Jews who would not convert to Catholicism. A few months later they invested in Christopher Columbus's voyage into the Atlantic in the hope of establishing a new trade route to the East Indies.

2. Northern Europe, as opposed to the eastern Mediterranean.

3. The Jews expelled from Spain spread out over the Mediterranean region, many being robbed, many dying of the plague, some being enslaved,

some murdered.

1. The footnote to the 1888 *Poems of Emma Lazarus*, the source of the present text, reads "Written in aid of Bartholdi Pedestal Fund, 1883." The sculpture was by Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi (1834–1904).

2. The gigantic statue of the sun god, Helios, created by the sculptor Chares of Lindos, loomed over the harbor of the Greek island of Rhodes for several decades before being destroyed in an earthquake in 225 B.C.E. Later reports exaggerated the size, saying that the legs of the statue straddled the harbor.

3. New York City and Jersey City, New Jersey.

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

1883

1888

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

1849–1909

When Sarah Orne Jewett was born in South Berwick, Maine, in 1849, the town and region she would memorialize in her fiction were already changing rapidly. Her grandfather had been a sea captain, shipowner, and merchant, and as a child she was exposed to the bustle of this small inland port. By the end of the Civil War, however, textile mills and a cannery had largely replaced agriculture, shipbuilding, and logging as the economic base of the community, and the arrival of French Canadian and Irish immigrants brought greater ethnic diversity to the area. The stable, secure, and remote small town Jewett knew and loved as a child was experiencing the economic, technological, and demographic pressures that transformed much of America in her lifetime.

Jewett and her two sisters led happy and generally carefree childhoods. Their father was a kindly, hardworking obstetrician who encouraged Jewett's reading. As a small child she accompanied him on his horse-and-buggy rounds, meeting the rural people who would later populate her fiction. Jewett loved her father deeply, and some of her strong feelings for him are invested in *A Country Doctor* (1884), a novel that also celebrates the independence of its female protagonist. Jewett's relationship with her mother was less intense; it was not until her mother became an invalid in the 1880s that mother and daughter became close. As Jewett confessed in a letter to editor and friend Thomas Bailey Aldrich: "I never felt so near to my mother . . . as I have since she died."

In part inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel about Maine seacoast life, *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862), Jewett began to write and publish verse and stories in her teens. One of her first efforts was accepted for publication in 1869 by William Dean Howells—then assistant editor for the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*. In her early twenties, encouraged by Howells, she wrote a group of stories and sketches about a fictional coastal town in Maine to which she gave the name Deephaven; she published her first collection of short pieces in 1877 under that title. With the publication of this book, she entered the company of the many post-Civil War regional writers who were depicting the topographies, people, speech patterns, and modes of life of the nation's distinctive regions as they came under pressure from modernizing forces.

From the late 1870s on, Jewett was part of a circle of prominent writers, artists, and editors who lived in or near Boston. The relationship between Jewett and Annie Adams Fields, the wife of the highly influential editor and publisher James T. Fields, was the most important of her many friendships with men and women. Though they had known each other since the late 1870s, it was not until Annie Fields's husband died in 1881 that they established a bond that was to sustain both women until

Jewett's death in 1909. During the winter months, Jewett lived at Fields's house in Boston and in the spring and summer was often to be found at Fields's oceanside home a few miles north of Boston in Manchester-by-the-Sea. Jewett maintained her residence in South Berwick, and she and Fields would spend time together there as well. Their relationship, common at the turn of the century among single women who lived and traveled together, was often called a "Boston marriage." Scholars interested in the nineteenth-century history of same-sex desire have frequently turned both to Jewett's biography and to her fiction, where deep, emotionally complicated attachments between women figure prominently.

Jewett reached artistic maturity with the publication of *A White Heron and Other Stories* in 1886; later collections of sketches and stories include *The King of Folly Island* (1888), *A Native of Winby* (1893), and *The Life of Nancy* (1895). In these works the local landscape, people, and dialect are recorded with understanding and sympathy. In "A White Heron," reprinted here, a young girl's conflicted loyalties to her conception of herself in nature and to the world of men she will soon encounter are memorably and sensitively drawn. Long-time residents of these small Maine communities make up the bulk of Jewett's fiction, including her most enduring work, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). This book is comprised of a series of linked sketches filtered through the consciousness of a summer visitor, much like the person Jewett had become. In this work, bits and pieces of the lives of a small group of men and women are quilted into a unified impression of life in a once-prosperous shipping village. The strong older women who survive in the region form a female community that, for many critics, is a hallmark of New England regionalism. The chapters of the book reproduced here introduce the summer visitor and the community of Dunnet Landing—as well as its history of maritime activity through the figure of Captain Littlepage. The book was well received, and Jewett would go on to publish four additional stories set in Dunnet Landing. Before her death in 1909, Jewett met the admiring Willa Cather, who would celebrate and edit Jewett's work in the decades to come. For Cather, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* ranked with *The Scarlet Letter* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a landmark of American literature.

A White Heron¹

I

The woods were already filled with shadows one June evening, just before eight o'clock, though a bright sunset still glimmered faintly among the trunks of the trees. A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that. They were going away from whatever light there was, and striking deep into the woods, but their feet were familiar with the path, and it was no matter whether their eyes could see it or not.

There was hardly a night the summer through when the old cow could be found waiting at the pasture bars; on the contrary, it was her greatest pleasure to hide herself away among the high huckleberry bushes, and though she wore a loud bell she had made the discovery that if one stood perfectly still it would not ring. So Sylvia had to hunt for her until she found her, and

1. First published in book form in *A White Heron and Other Stories* (1886), the source of the text printed here.

call Co'! Co'! with never an answering Moo, until her childish patience was quite spent. If the creature had not given good milk and plenty of it, the case would have seemed very different to her owners. Besides, Sylvia had all the time there was, and very little use to make of it. Sometimes in pleasant weather it was a consolation to look upon the cow's pranks as an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek, and as the child had no playmates she lent herself to this amusement with a good deal of zest. Though this chase had been so long that the wary animal herself had given an unusual signal of her whereabouts, Sylvia had only laughed when she came upon Mistress Moolly at the swamp-side, and urged her affectionately homeward with a twig of birch leaves. The old cow was not inclined to wander farther, she even turned in the right direction for once as they left the pasture, and stepped along the road at a good pace. She was quite ready to be milked now, and seldom stopped to browse. Sylvia wondered what her grandmother would say because they were so late. It was a great while since she had left home at half past five o'clock, but everybody knew the difficulty of making this errand a short one. Mrs. Tilley had chased the horned torment too many summer evenings herself to blame any one else for lingering, and was only thankful as she waited that she had Sylvia, nowadays, to give such valuable assistance. The good woman suspected that Sylvia loitered occasionally on her own account; there never was such a child for straying about out-of-doors since the world was made! Everybody said that it was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town, but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm. She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched geranium that belonged to a town neighbor.

"'Afraid of folks,'" old Mrs. Tilley said to herself, with a smile, after she had made the unlikely choice of Sylvia from her daughter's houseful of children, and was returning to the farm. "'Afraid of folks,' they said! I guess she won't be troubled no great with 'em up to the old place!" When they reached the door of the lonely house and stopped to unlock it, and the cat came to purr loudly, and rub against them, a deserted pussy, indeed, but fat with young robins, Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home.

The companions followed the shady woodroad, the cow taking slow steps, and the child very fast ones. The cow stopped long at the brook to drink, as if the pasture were not half a swamp, and Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She waded on through the brook as the cow moved away, and listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure. There was a stirring in the great boughs overhead. They were full of little birds and beasts that seemed to be wide awake, and going about their world, or else saying good-night to each other in sleepy twitters. Sylvia herself felt sleepy as she walked along. However, it was not much farther to the house, and the air was soft and sweet. She was not often in the woods so late as this, and it made her feel as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the moving leaves. She was just thinking how long it seemed since she first came to the farm a year ago, and wondering if everything went on in the noisy town just the same as when she was there; the thought of the great

red-faced boy who used to chase and frighten her made her hurry along the path to escape from the shadow of the trees.

Suddenly this little woods-girl is horror-stricken to hear a clear whistle not very far away. Not a bird's whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness, but a boy's whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive. Sylvia left the cow to whatever sad fate might await her, and stepped discreetly aside into the bushes, but she was just too late. The enemy had discovered her, and called out in a very cheerful and persuasive tone, "Halloa, little girl, how far is it to the road?" and trembling Sylvia answered almost inaudibly, "A good ways."

She did not dare to look boldly at the tall young man, who carried a gun over his shoulder, but she came out of her bush and again followed the cow, while he walked alongside.

"I have been hunting for some birds," the stranger said kindly, "and I have lost my way, and need a friend very much. Don't be afraid," he added gallantly. "Speak up and tell me what your name is, and whether you think I can spend the night at your house, and go out gunning early in the morning."

Sylvia was more alarmed than before. Would not her grandmother consider her much to blame? But who could have foreseen such an accident as this? It did not seem to be her fault, and she hung her head as if the stem of it were broken, but managed to answer "Sylvy," with much effort when her companion again asked her name.

Mrs. Tilley was standing in the doorway when the trio came into view. The cow gave a loud moo by way of explanation.

"Yes, you'd better speak up for yourself, you old trial! Where'd she tucked herself away this time, Sylvy?" But Sylvia kept an awed silence; she knew by instinct that her grandmother did not comprehend the gravity of the situation. She must be mistaking the stranger for one of the farmer-lads of the region.

The young man stood his gun beside the door, and dropped a lumpy game-bag beside it; then he bade Mrs. Tilley good-evening, and repeated his wayfarer's story, and asked if he could have a night's lodging.

"Put me anywhere you like," he said. "I must be off early in the morning, before day; but I am very hungry, indeed. You can give me some milk at any rate, that's plain."

"Dear sakes, yes," responded the hostess, whose long slumbering hospitality seemed to be easily awakened. "You might fare better if you went out to the main road a mile or so, but you're welcome to what we've got. I'll milk right off, and you make yourself at home. You can sleep on husks or feathers," she proffered graciously. "I raised them all myself. There's good pasturing for geese just below here towards the ma'sh. Now step round and set a plate for the gentleman, Sylvy!" And Sylvia promptly stepped. She was glad to have something to do, and she was hungry herself.

It was a surprise to find so clean and comfortable a little dwelling in this New England wilderness. The young man had known the horrors of its most primitive housekeeping, and the dreary squalor of that level of society which does not rebel at the companionship of hens. This was the best thrift of an old-fashioned farmstead, though on such a small scale that it seemed like a hermitage. He listened eagerly to the old woman's quaint talk, he watched Sylvia's pale face and shining gray eyes with ever growing enthusiasm, and

insisted that this was the best supper he had eaten for a month, and afterward the new-made friends sat down in the door-way together while the moon came up.

Soon it would be berry-time, and Sylvia was a great help at picking. The cow was a good milker, though a plaguy thing to keep track of, the hostess gossiped frankly, adding presently that she had buried four children, so Sylvia's mother, and a son (who might be dead) in California were all the children she had left. "Dan, my boy, was a great hand to go gunning," she explained sadly. "I never wanted for pa'tridges or gray squer'ls while he was to home. He's been a great wand'rer, I expect, and he's no hand to write letters. There, I don't blame him, I'd ha' seen the world myself if it had been so I could.

"Sylvia takes after him," the grandmother continued affectionately, after a minute's pause. "There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creaturs counts her one o' themselves. Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o' her hands, and all sorts o' birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds to bangeing² here, and I believe she'd 'a' scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst 'em, if I hadn't kep' watch. Anything but crows, I tell her, I'm willin' to help support—though Dan he had a tamed one o' them that did seem to have reason same as folks. It was round here a good spell after he went away. Dan an' his father they didn't hitch,—but he never held up his head ag'in after Dan had dared him an' gone off."

The guest did not notice this hint of family sorrows in his eager interest in something else.

"So Sylvy knows all about birds, does she?" he exclaimed, as he looked round at the little girl who sat, very demure but increasingly sleepy, in the moonlight. "I am making a collection of birds myself. I have been at it ever since I was a boy." (Mrs. Tilley smiled.) "There are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found."

"Do you cage 'em up?" asked Mrs. Tilley doubtfully, in response to this enthusiastic announcement.

"Oh, no, they're stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them," said the ornithologist, "and I have shot or snared every one myself. I caught a glimpse of a white heron three miles from here on Saturday, and I have followed it in this direction. They have never been found in this district at all.³ The little white heron, it is," and he turned again to look at Sylvia with the hope of discovering that the rare bird was one of her acquaintances.

But Sylvia was watching a hop-toad in the narrow footpath.

"You would know the heron if you saw it," the stranger continued eagerly. "A queer tall white bird with soft feathers and long thin legs. And it would have a nest perhaps in the top of a high tree, made of sticks, something like a hawk's nest."

Sylvia's heart gave a wild beat; she knew that strange white bird, and had once stolen softly near where it stood in some bright green swamp grass, away over at the other side of the woods. There was an open place where

2. Hanging around.

3. Several species of herons were endangered

during Jewett's time because hat-makers sought their dramatic wing feathers.

the sunshine always seemed strangely yellow and hot, where tall, nodding rushes grew, and her grandmother had warned her that she might sink in the soft black mud underneath and never be heard of more. Not far beyond were the salt marshes just this side the sea itself, which Sylvia wondered and dreamed about, but never had seen, whose great voice could sometimes be heard above the noise of the woods on stormy nights.

"I can't think of anything I should like so much as to find that heron's nest," the handsome stranger was saying. "I would give ten dollars to anybody who could show it to me," he added desperately, "and I mean to spend my whole vacation hunting for it if need be. Perhaps it was only migrating, or had been chased out of its own region by some bird of prey."

Mrs. Tilley gave amazed attention to all this, but Sylvia still watched the toad, not divining, as she might have done at some calmer time, that the creature wished to get to its hole under the door-step, and was much hindered by the unusual spectators at that hour of the evening. No amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy.

The next day the young sportsman hovered about the woods, and Sylvia kept him company, having lost her first fear of the friendly lad, who proved to be most kind and sympathetic. He told her many things about the birds and what they knew and where they lived and what they did with themselves. And he gave her a jack-knife, which she thought as great a treasure as if she were a desert-islander. All day long he did not once make her troubled or afraid except when he brought down some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough. Sylvia would have liked him vastly better without his gun; she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much. But as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love. Some premonition of that great power stirred and swayed these young creatures who traversed the solemn woodlands with soft-footed silent care. They stopped to listen to a bird's song; they pressed forward again eagerly, parting the branches,—speaking to each other rarely and in whispers; the young man going first and Sylvia following, fascinated, a few steps behind, with her gray eyes dark with excitement.

She grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive, but she did not lead the guest, she only followed, and there was no such thing as speaking first. The sound of her own unquestioned voice would have terrified her,—it was hard enough to answer yes or no when there was need of that. At last evening began to fall, and they drove the cow home together, and Sylvia smiled with pleasure when they came to the place where she heard the whistle and was afraid only the night before.

II

Half a mile from home, at the farther edge of the woods, where the land was highest, a great pine-tree stood, the last of its generation. Whether it was left for a boundary mark, or for what reason, no one could say; the wood-choppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago, and a

whole forest of sturdy trees, pines and oaks and maples, had grown again. But the stately head of this old pine towered above them all and made a landmark for sea and shore miles and miles away. Sylvia knew it well. She had always believed that whoever climbed to the top of it could see the ocean; and the little girl had often laid her hand on the great rough trunk and looked up wistfully at those dark boughs that the wind always stirred, no matter how hot and still the air might be below. Now she thought of the tree with a new excitement, for why, if one climbed it at break of day, could not one see all the world, and easily discover from whence the white heron flew, and mark the place, and find the hidden nest?

What a spirit of adventure, what wild ambition! What fancied triumph and delight and glory for the later morning when she could make known the secret! It was almost too real and too great for the childish heart to bear.

All night the door of the little house stood open and the whippoorwills came and sang upon the very step. The young sportsman and his old hostess were sound asleep, but Sylvia's great design kept her broad awake and watching. She forgot to think of sleep. The short summer night seemed as long as the winter darkness, and at last when the whippoorwills ceased, and she was afraid the morning would after all come too soon, she stole out of the house and followed the pasture path through the woods, hastening toward the open ground beyond, listening with a sense of comfort and companionship to the drowsy twitter of a half-awakened bird, whose perch she had jarred in passing. Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest!

There was the huge tree asleep yet in the paling moonlight, and small and silly Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it, with tingling, eager blood coursing the channels of her whole frame, with her bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird's claws to the monstrous ladder reaching up, up, almost to the sky itself. First she must mount the white oak tree that grew alongside, where she was almost lost among the dark branches and the green leaves heavy and wet with dew; a bird fluttered off its nest, and a red squirrel ran to and fro and scolded pettishly at the harmless housebreaker. Sylvia felt her way easily. She had often climbed there, and knew that higher still one of the oak's upper branches chafed against the pine trunk, just where its lower boughs were set close together. There, when she made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin.

She crept out along the swaying oak limb at last, and took the daring step across into the old pine-tree. The way was harder than she thought; she must reach far and hold fast, the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff as she went round and round the tree's great stem, higher and higher upward. The sparrows and robins in the woods below were beginning to wake and twitter to the dawn, yet it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree, and the child knew that she must hurry if her project were to be of any use.

The tree seemed to lengthen itself out as she went up, and to reach farther and farther upward. It was like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth; it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit winding its way from higher

branch to branch. Who knows how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way! The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of the solitary gray-eyed child. And the tree stood still and frowned away the winds that June morning while the dawn grew bright in the east.

Sylvia's face was like a pale star, if one had seen it from the ground, when the last thorny bough was past, and she stood trembling and tired but wholly triumphant, high in the tree-top. Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions. How low they looked in the air from that height when one had only seen them before far up, and dark against the blue sky. Their gray feathers were as soft as moths; they seemed only a little way from the tree, and Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds. Westward, the woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there were church steeples, and white villages; truly it was a vast and awesome world!

The birds sang louder and louder. At last the sun came up bewilderingly bright. Sylvia could see the white sails of ships out at sea, and the clouds that were purple and rose-colored and yellow at first began to fade away. Where was the white heron's nest in the sea of green branches, and was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having climbed to such a giddy height? Now look down again, Sylvia, where the green marsh is set among the shining birches and dark hemlocks; there where you saw the white heron once you will see him again; look, look! a white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours, and cries back to his mate on the nest, and plumes his feathers for the new day!

The child gives a long sigh a minute later when a company of shouting cat-birds comes also to the tree, and vexed by their fluttering and lawlessness the solemn heron goes away. She knows his secret now, the wild, light, slender bird that floats and wavers, and goes back like an arrow presently to his home in the green world beneath. Then Sylvia, well satisfied, makes her perilous way down again, not daring to look far below the branch she stands on, ready to cry sometimes because her fingers ache and her lamed feet slip. Wondering over and over again what the stranger would say to her, and what he would think when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest.

"Sylvy, Sylvy!" called the busy old grandmother again and again, but nobody answered, and the small husk bed was empty and Sylvia had disappeared.

The guest waked from a dream, and remembering his day's pleasure hurried to dress himself that might it sooner begin. He was sure from the way the shy little girl looked once or twice yesterday that she had at least seen the white heron, and now she must really be made to tell. Here she comes now, paler than ever, and her worn old frock is torn and tattered, and smeared

with pine pitch. The grandmother and the sportsman stand in the door together and question her, and the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh.

But Sylvia does not speak after all, though the old grandmother fretfully rebukes her, and the young man's kind, appealing eyes are looking straight in her own. He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell.

No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away.

Dear loyalty, that suffered a sharp pang as the guest went away disappointed later in the day, that could have served and followed him and loved him as a dog loves! Many a night Sylvia heard the echo of his whistle haunting the pasture path as she came home with the loitering cow. She forgot even her sorrow at the sharp report of his gun and the sight of thrushes and sparrows dropping silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood. Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been,—who can tell? Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember! Bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!

1886

*From The Country of the Pointed Firs*¹

I

THE RETURN

There was something about the coast town of Dunnet which made it seem more attractive than other maritime villages of eastern Maine. Perhaps it was the simple fact of acquaintance with that neighborhood which made it so attaching, and gave such interest to the rocky shore and dark woods, and the few houses which seemed to be securely wedged and tree-nailed in among the ledges² by the Landing. These houses made the most of their seaward view, and there was a gayety and determined floweriness in their bits of garden ground; the small-paned high windows in the peaks of their steep gables were like knowing eyes that watched the harbor and the far sea-line beyond, or looked northward all along the shore and its background of

1. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* was published first in serial form in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1896, and then later that year in book form by Houghton Mifflin, the source of this text.

2. Exposed bedrock, common throughout northern New England. "Tree-nailed": joined with wooden pegs.

spruces and balsam firs. When one really knows a village like this and its surroundings, it is like becoming acquainted with a single person. The process of falling in love at first sight is as final as it is swift in such a case, but the growth of true friendship may be a lifelong affair.

After a first brief visit made two or three summers before in the course of a yachting cruise, a lover of Dunnet Landing returned to find the unchanged shores of the pointed firs, the same quaintness of the village with its elaborate conventionalities; all that mixture of remoteness, and childish certainty of being the centre of civilization of which her affectionate dreams had told. One evening in June, a single passenger landed upon the steamboat wharf. The tide was high, there was a fine crowd of spectators, and the younger portion of the company followed her with subdued excitement up the narrow street of the salt-aired, white-clapboarded little town.

II

MRS. TODD

Later, there was only one fault to find with this choice of a summer lodging-place, and that was its complete lack of seclusion. At first the tiny house of Mrs. Almira Todd, which stood with its end to the street, appeared to be retired and sheltered enough from the busy world, behind its bushy bit of a green garden, in which all the blooming things, two or three gay hollyhocks and some London-pride,³ were pushed back against the gray-shingled wall. It was a queer little garden and puzzling to a stranger, the few flowers being put at a disadvantage by so much greenery; but the discovery was soon made that Mrs. Todd was an ardent lover of herbs, both wild and tame, and the sea-breezes blew into the low end-window of the house laden with not only sweet-brier and sweet-mary, but balm and sage and borage and mint, wormwood and southernwood.⁴ If Mrs. Todd had occasion to step into the far corner of her herb plot, she trod heavily upon thyme, and made its fragrant presence known with all the rest. Being a very large person, her full skirts brushed and bent almost every slender stalk that her feet missed. You could always tell when she was stepping about there, even when you were half awake in the morning, and learned to know, in the course of a few weeks' experience, in exactly which corner of the garden she might be.

At one side of this herb plot were other growths of a rustic pharmacopœia,⁵ great treasures and rarities among the commoner herbs. There were some strange and pungent odors that roused a dim sense and remembrance of something in the forgotten past. Some of these might once have belonged to sacred and mystic rites, and have had some occult knowledge handed with them down the centuries; but now they pertained only to humble compounds brewed at intervals with molasses or vinegar or spirits in a small caldron on Mrs. Todd's kitchen stove. They were dispensed to suffering neighbors, who usually came at night as if by stealth, bringing their own ancient-looking vials to be filled. One nostrum was called the Indian remedy, and its price

3. Flowering garden plants.

4. Sweet-brier, sweet-mary, balm, sage, borage, mint, wormwood, and southernwood are all plants with medicinal properties. The names of

plants and herbs recur frequently throughout the narrative.

5. A stock of drugs.

was but fifteen cents; the whispered directions could be heard as customers passed the windows. With most remedies the purchaser was allowed to depart unadmonished from the kitchen, Mrs. Todd being a wise saver of steps; but with certain vials she gave cautions, standing in the doorway, and there were other doses which had to be accompanied on their healing way as far as the gate, while she muttered long chapters of directions, and kept up an air of secrecy and importance to the last. It may not have been only the common ails of humanity with which she tried to cope; it seemed sometimes as if love and hate and jealousy and adverse winds at sea might also find their proper remedies among the curious wild-looking plants in Mrs. Todd's garden.

The village doctor and this learned herbalist were upon the best of terms. The good man may have counted upon the unfavorable effect of certain potions which he should find his opportunity in counteracting; at any rate, he now and then stopped and exchanged greetings with Mrs. Todd over the picket fence. The conversation became at once professional after the briefest preliminaries, and he would stand twirling a sweet-scented sprig in his fingers, and make suggestive jokes, perhaps about her faith in a too persistent course of thoroughwort elixir, in which my landlady professed such firm belief as sometimes to endanger the life and usefulness of worthy neighbors.

To arrive at this quietest of seaside villages late in June, when the busy herb-gathering season was just beginning, was also to arrive in the early prime of Mrs. Todd's activity in the brewing of old-fashioned spruce beer. This cooling and refreshing drink had been brought to wonderful perfection through a long series of experiments; it had won immense local fame, and the supplies for its manufacture were always giving out and having to be replenished. For various reasons, the seclusion and uninterrupted days which had been looked forward to proved to be very rare in this otherwise delightful corner of the world. My hostess and I had made our shrewd business agreement on the basis of a simple cold luncheon at noon, and liberal restitution in the matter of hot suppers, to provide for which the lodger might sometimes be seen hurrying down the road, late in the day, with cunner line⁶ in hand. It was soon found that this arrangement made large allowance for Mrs. Todd's slow herb-gathering progresses through woods and pastures. The spruce-beer customers were pretty steady in hot weather, and there were many demands for different soothing syrups and elixirs with which the unwise curiosity of my early residence had made me acquainted. Knowing Mrs. Todd to be a widow, who had little beside this slender business and the income from one hungry lodger to maintain her, one's energies and even interest were quickly bestowed, until it became a matter of course that she should go afield every pleasant day, and that the lodger should answer all peremptory knocks at the side door.

In taking an occasional wisdom-giving stroll in Mrs. Todd's company, and in acting as business partner during her frequent absences, I found the July days fly fast, and it was not until I felt myself confronted with too great pride and pleasure in the display, one night, of two dollars and twenty-seven cents which I had taken in during the day, that I remembered a long piece of writing, sadly belated now, which I was bound to do. To have been patted kindly on the shoulder and called "darlin'," to have been offered a surprise of early mushrooms for supper, to have had all the glory of making two dollars and

6. Tackle for catching wrasse, a small fish common along the shore of Maine.

twenty-seven cents in a single day, and then to renounce it all and withdraw from these pleasant successes, needed much resolution. Literary employments are so vexed with uncertainties at best, and it was not until the voice of conscience sounded louder in my ears than the sea on the nearest pebble beach that I said unkind words of withdrawal to Mrs. Todd. She only became more wistfully affectionate than ever in her expressions, and looked as disappointed as I expected when I frankly told her that I could no longer enjoy the pleasure of what we called "seein' folks." I felt that I was cruel to a whole neighborhood in curtailing her liberty in this most important season for harvesting the different wild herbs that were so much counted upon to ease their winter ails.

"Well, dear," she said sorrowfully, "I've took great advantage o' your bein' here. I ain't had such a season for years, but I have never had nobody I could so trust. All you lack is a few qualities, but with time you'd gain judgment an' experience, an' be very able in the business. I'd stand right here an' say it to anybody."

Mrs. Todd and I were not separated or estranged by the change in our business relations; on the contrary, a deeper intimacy seemed to begin. I do not know what herb of the night it was that used sometimes to send out a penetrating odor late in the evening, after the dew had fallen, and the moon was high, and the cool air came up from the sea. Then Mrs. Todd would feel that she must talk to somebody, and I was only too glad to listen. We both fell under the spell, and she either stood outside the window, or made an errand to my sitting-room, and told, it might be very commonplace news of the day, or, as happened one misty summer night, all that lay deepest in her heart. It was in this way that I came to know that she had loved one who was far above her.

"No, dear, him I speak of could never think of me," she said. "When we was young together his mother didn't favor the match, an' done everything she could to part us; and folks thought we both married well, but 't wa'n't what either one of us wanted most; an' now we're left alone again, an' might have had each other all the time. He was above bein' a seafarin' man, an' prospered more than most; he come of a high family, an' my lot was plain an' hardworkin'. I ain't seen him for some years; he's forgot our youthful feelin's, I expect, but a woman's heart is different; them feelin's comes back when you think you've done with 'em, as sure as spring comes with the year. An' I've always had ways of hearin' about him."

She stood in the centre of a braided rug, and its rings of black and gray seemed to circle about her feet in the dim light. Her height and massiveness in the low room gave her the look of a huge sibyl,⁷ while the strange fragrance of the mysterious herb blew in from the little garden.

III

THE SCHOOLHOUSE

For some days after this, Mrs. Todd's customers came and went past my windows, and, haying-time being nearly over, strangers began to arrive from

7. A prophetess.

the inland country, such was her widespread reputation. Sometimes I saw a pale young creature like a white windflower left over into midsummer, upon whose face consumption⁸ had set its bright and wistful mark; but oftener two stout, hard-worked women from the farms came together, and detailed their symptoms to Mrs. Todd in loud and cheerful voices, combining the satisfactions of a friendly gossip with the medical opportunity. They seemed to give much from their own store of therapeutic learning. I became aware of the school in which my landlady had strengthened her natural gift; but hers was always the governing mind, and the final command, "Take of hy'sop⁹ one handful" (or whatever herb it was), was received in respectful silence. One afternoon, when I had listened,—it was impossible not to listen, with cottonless ears,—and then laughed and listened again, with an idle pen in my hand, during a particularly spirited and personal conversation, I reached for my hat, and, taking blotting-book¹ and all under my arm, I resolutely fled further temptation, and walked out past the fragrant green garden and up the dusty road. The way went straight uphill, and presently I stopped and turned to look back.

The tide was in, the wide harbor was surrounded by its dark woods, and the small wooden houses stood as near as they could get to the landing. Mrs. Todd's was the last house on the way inland. The gray ledges of the rocky shore were well covered with sod in most places, and the pasture bay-berry and wild roses grew thick among them. I could see the higher inland country and the scattered farms. On the brink of the hill stood a little white schoolhouse, much wind-blown and weather-beaten, which was a landmark to seagoing folk; from its door there was a most beautiful view of sea and shore. The summer vacation now prevailed, and after finding the door unfastened, and taking a long look through one of the seaward windows, and reflecting afterward for some time in a shady place near by among the bay-berry bushes, I returned to the chief place of business in the village, and, to the amusement of two of the selectmen, brothers and autocrats of Dunnet Landing, I hired the schoolhouse for the rest of the vacation for fifty cents a week.

Selfish as it may appear, the retired situation seemed to possess great advantages, and I spent many days there quite undisturbed, with the sea-breeze blowing through the small, high windows and swaying the heavy outside shutters to and fro. I hung my hat and luncheon-basket on an entry nail as if I were a small scholar, but I sat at the teacher's desk as if I were that great authority, with all the timid empty benches in rows before me. Now and then an idle sheep came and stood for a long time looking in at the door. At sundown I went back, feeling most businesslike, down toward the village again, and usually met the flavor, not of the herb garden, but of Mrs. Todd's hot supper, halfway up the hill. On the nights when there were evening meetings or other public exercises that demanded her presence we had tea very early, and I was welcomed back as if from a long absence.

Once or twice I feigned excuses for staying at home, while Mrs. Todd made distant excursions, and came home late, with both hands full and a heavily laden apron. This was in pennyroyal time, and when the rare lobelia was in

8. Any wasting illness, usually tuberculosis.

9. Hyssop, a medicinal herb taken particularly

for colds or coughs.

1. A book of thick paper used for blotting ink.

its prime and the elecampane was coming on.² One day she appeared at the schoolhouse itself, partly out of amused curiosity about my industries; but she explained that there was no tansy³ in the neighborhood with such snap to it as some that grew about the schoolhouse lot. Being scuffed down all the spring made it grow so much the better, like some folks that had it hard in their youth, and were bound to make the most of themselves before they died.

IV

AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE WINDOW

One day I reached the schoolhouse very late, owing to attendance upon the funeral of an acquaintance and neighbor, with whose sad decline in health I had been familiar, and whose last days both the doctor and Mrs. Todd had tried in vain to ease. The services had taken place at one o'clock, and now, at quarter past two, I stood at the schoolhouse window, looking down at the procession as it went along the lower road close to the shore. It was a walking funeral, and even at that distance I could recognize most of the mourners as they went their solemn way. Mrs. Begg had been very much respected, and there was a large company of friends following to her grave. She had been brought up on one of the neighboring farms, and each of the few times that I had seen her she professed great dissatisfaction with town life. The people lived too close together for her liking, at the Landing, and she could not get used to the constant sound of the sea. She had lived to lament three seafaring husbands, and her house was decorated with West Indian curiosities, specimens of conch shells and fine coral which they had brought home from their voyages in lumber-laden ships. Mrs. Todd had told me all our neighbor's history. They had been girls together, and, to use her own phrase, had "both seen trouble till they knew the best and worst on 't." I could see the sorrowful, large figure of Mrs. Todd as I stood at the window. She made a break in the procession by walking slowly and keeping the after-part of it back. She held a handkerchief to her eyes, and I knew, with a pang of sympathy, that hers was not affected grief.

Beside her, after much difficulty, I recognized the one strange and unrelated person in all the company, an old man who had always been mysterious to me. I could see his thin, bending figure. He wore a narrow, long-tailed coat and walked with a stick, and had the same "cant to leeward⁴" as the wind-bent trees on the height above.

This was Captain Littlepage, whom I had seen only once or twice before, sitting pale and old behind a closed window; never out of doors until now. Mrs. Todd always shook her head gravely when I asked a question, and said that he wasn't what he had been once, and seemed to class him with her other secrets. He might have belonged with a simple⁵ which grew in a certain slug-haunted corner of the garden, whose use she could never be betrayed into telling me, though I saw her cutting the tops by moonlight once, as if it were a charm, and not a medicine, like the great fading bloodroot⁶ leaves.

2. Pennyroyal, lobelia, and elecampane are all medicinal herbs.

3. Another medicinal herb; the name comes from the ancient Greek word for "immortality."

4. Nautical term for the side sheltered from the wind.

5. Another term for a plant that can be used for medicinal purposes. A simple remedy is effective by itself, as distinct from a compound, which requires several ingredients.

6. Flowering plant with medicinal properties.

I could see that she was trying to keep pace with the old captain's lighter steps. He looked like an aged grasshopper of some strange human variety. Behind this pair was a short, impatient, little person, who kept the captain's house, and gave it what Mrs. Todd and others believed to be no proper sort of care. She was usually called "that Mari' Harris" in subdued conversation between intimates, but they treated her with anxious civility when they met her face to face.

The bay-sheltered islands and the great sea beyond stretched away to the far horizon southward and eastward; the little procession in the foreground looked futile and helpless on the edge of the rocky shore. It was a glorious day early in July, with a clear, high sky; there were no clouds, there was no noise of the sea. The song sparrows sang and sang, as if with joyous knowledge of immortality, and contempt for those who could so pettily concern themselves with death. I stood watching until the funeral procession had crept round a shoulder of the slope below and disappeared from the great landscape as if it had gone into a cave.

An hour later I was busy at my work. Now and then a bee blundered in and took me for an enemy; but there was a useful stick upon the teacher's desk, and I rapped to call the bees to order as if they were unruly scholars, or waved them away from their riots over the ink, which I had bought at the Landing store, and discovered too late to be scented with bergamot,⁷ as if to refresh the labors of anxious scribes. One anxious scribe felt very dull that day; a sheep-bell tinkled near by, and called her wandering wits after it. The sentences failed to catch these lovely summer cadences. For the first time I began to wish for a companion and for news from the outer world, which had been, half unconsciously, forgotten. Watching the funeral gave one a sort of pain. I began to wonder if I ought not to have walked with the rest, instead of hurrying away at the end of the services. Perhaps the Sunday gown I had put on for the occasion was making this disastrous change of feeling, but I had now made myself and my friends remember that I did not really belong to Dunnet Landing.

I sighed, and turned to the half-written page again.

V

CAPTAIN LITTLEPAGE

It was a long time after this; an hour was very long in that coast town where nothing stole away the shortest minute. I had lost myself completely in work, when I heard footsteps outside. There was a steep footpath between the upper and the lower road, which I climbed to shorten the way, as the children had taught me, but I believed that Mrs. Todd would find it inaccessible, unless she had occasion to seek me in great haste. I wrote on, feeling like a besieged miser of time, while the footsteps came nearer, and the sheep-bell tinkled away in haste as if some one had shaken a stick in its wearer's face. Then I looked, and saw Captain Littlepage passing the nearest window; the next moment he tapped politely at the door.

"Come in, sir," I said, rising to meet him; and he entered, bowing with much courtesy. I stepped down from the desk and offered him a chair by

7. Aromatic, medicinal herb also known as bee balm.

the window, where he seated himself at once, being sadly spent by his climb. I returned to my fixed seat behind the teacher's desk, which gave him the lower place of a scholar.

"You ought to have the place of honor, Captain Littlepage," I said.

"A happy, rural seat of various views,"⁸

he quoted, as he gazed out into the sunshine and up the long wooded shore. Then he glanced at me, and looked all about him as pleased as a child.

"My quotation was from *Paradise Lost*: the greatest of poems, I suppose you know?" and I nodded. "There's nothing that ranks, to my mind, with *Paradise Lost*; it's all lofty, all lofty," he continued. "Shakespeare was a great poet; he copied life, but you have to put up with a great deal of low talk."

I now remembered that Mrs. Todd had told me one day that Captain Littlepage had overset his mind with too much reading; she had also made dark reference to his having "spells" of some unexplainable nature. I could not help wondering what errand had brought him out in search of me. There was something quite charming in his appearance: it was a face thin and delicate with refinement, but worn into appealing lines, as if he had suffered from loneliness and misapprehension. He looked, with his careful precision of dress, as if he were the object of cherishing care on the part of elderly unmarried sisters, but I knew Mari' Harris to be a very commonplace, inelegant person, who would have no such standards; it was plain that the captain was his own attentive valet. He sat looking at me expectantly. I could not help thinking that, with his queer head and length of thinness, he was made to hop along the road of life rather than to walk. The captain was very grave indeed, and I bade my inward spirit keep close to discretion.

"Poor Mrs. Begg has gone," I ventured to say. I still wore my Sunday gown by way of showing respect.

"She has gone," said the captain,—“very easy at the last, I was informed; she slipped away as if she were glad of the opportunity.”

I thought of the Countess of Carberry,⁹ and felt that history repeated itself.

"She was one of the old stock," continued Captain Littlepage, with touching sincerity. "She was very much looked up to in this town, and will be missed."

I wondered, as I looked at him, if he had sprung from a line of ministers; he had the refinement of look and air of command which are the heritage of the old ecclesiastical families of New England. But as Darwin says in his autobiography, "there is no such king as a sea-captain; he is greater even than a king or a schoolmaster!"¹

Captain Littlepage moved his chair out of the wake of the sunshine, and still sat looking at me. I began to be very eager to know upon what errand he had come.

8. As Captain Littlepage explains, the quotation is from book 4 of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667); the line occurs in the description of Eden.

9. Frances, Countess of Carberry, died in 1650; the Anglican bishop Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) delivered a sermon reporting that, because Frances believed she had achieved salvation, she welcomed death, and so died "without the violence

of sickness . . . as if she had done it voluntarily and by design."

1. Jewett misquotes from a letter reprinted in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, published by Darwin's son, Francis, in 1887. The original sentence states that "captains of men-of-war are the greatest men going, far greater than kings or schoolmasters."

"It may be found out some o' these days," he said earnestly. "We may know it all, the next step; where Mrs. Begg is now, for instance. Certainty, not conjecture, is what we all desire."

"I suppose we shall know it all some day," said I.

"We shall know it while yet below," insisted the captain, with a flush of impatience on his thin cheeks. "We have not looked for truth in the right direction. I know what I speak of; those who have laughed at me little know how much reason my ideas are based upon." He waved his hand toward the village below. "In that handful of houses they fancy that they comprehend the universe."

I smiled, and waited for him to go on.

"I am an old man, as you can see," he continued, "and I have been a ship-master² the greater part of my life,—forty-three years in all. You may not think it, but I am above eighty years of age."

He did not look so old, and I hastened to say so.

"You must have left the sea a good many years ago, then, Captain Littlepage?" I said.

"I should have been serviceable at least five or six years more," he answered. "My acquaintance with certain—my experience upon a certain occasion, I might say, gave rise to prejudice. I do not mind telling you that I chanced to learn of one of the greatest discoveries that man has ever made."

Now we were approaching dangerous ground, but a sudden sense of his sufferings at the hands of the ignorant came to my help, and I asked to hear more with all the deference I really felt. A swallow flew into the schoolhouse at this moment as if a kingbird were after it, and beat itself against the walls for a minute, and escaped again to the open air; but Captain Littlepage took no notice whatever of the flurry.

"I had a valuable cargo of general merchandise from the London docks to Fort Churchill,³ a station of the old company on Hudson's Bay," said the captain earnestly. "We were delayed in lading, and baffled by head winds and a heavy tumbling sea all the way north-about and across. Then the fog kept us off the coast; and when I made port at last, it was too late to delay in those northern waters with such a vessel and such a crew as I had. They cared for nothing, and idled me into a fit of sickness; but my first mate was a good, excellent man, with no more idea of being frozen in there until spring than I had, so we made what speed we could to get clear of Hudson's Bay and off the coast. I owned an eighth of the vessel, and he owned a sixteenth of her. She was a full-rigged ship, called the *Minerva*, but she was getting old and leaky. I meant it should be my last v'y'ge in her, and so it proved. She had been an excellent vessel in her day. Of the cowards aboard her I can't say so much."

"Then you were wrecked?" I asked, as he made a long pause.

"I wa'n't caught astern o' the lighter⁴ by any fault of mine," said the captain gloomily. "We left Fort Churchill and run out into the Bay with a light pair o' heels⁵; but I had been vexed to death with their red-tape rigging at the company's office, and chilled with stayin' on deck an' tryin' to hurry up

2. Commander of a ship.

3. On the west shore of Hudson Bay, in Manitoba, Canada.

4. Lagging behind, late; the phrase refers to the

"lighter," a slow-moving ship used for moving cargo.

5. Moving quickly.

things, and when we were well out o' sight o' land, headin' for Hudson's Straits, I had a bad turn o' some sort o' fever, and had to stay below. The days were getting short, and we made good runs, all well on board but me, and the crew done their work by dint of hard driving."

I began to find this unexpected narrative a little dull. Captain Littlepage spoke with a kind of slow correctness that lacked the longshore high flavor⁶ to which I had grown used; but I listened respectfully while he explained the winds having become contrary, and talked on in a dreary sort of way about his voyage, the bad weather, and the disadvantages he was under in the lightness of his ship, which bounced about like a chip in a bucket, and would not answer the rudder or properly respond to the most careful setting of sails.

"So there we were blowin' along anyways," he complained; but looking at me at this moment, and seeing that my thoughts were unkindly wandering, he ceased to speak.

"It was a hard life at sea in those days, I am sure," said I, with redoubled interest.

"It was a dog's life," said the poor old gentleman, quite reassured, "but it made men of those who followed it. I see a change for the worse even in our own town here; full of loafers now, small and poor as 't is, who once would have followed the sea, every lazy soul of 'em. There is no occupation so fit for just that class o' men who never get beyond the fo'cas'le.⁷ I view it, in addition, that a community narrows down and grows dreadful ignorant when it is shut up to its own affairs, and gets no knowledge of the outside world except from a cheap, unprincipled newspaper. In the old days, a good part o' the best men here knew a hundred ports and something of the way folks lived in them. They saw the world for themselves, and like's not their wives and children saw it with them. They may not have had the best of knowledge to carry with 'em sight-seein', but they were some acquainted with foreign lands an' their laws, an' could see outside the battle for town clerk here in Dunnet; they got some sense o' proportion. Yes, they lived more dignified, and their houses were better within an' without. Shipping's a terrible loss to this part o' New England from a social point o' view, ma'am."

"I have thought of that myself," I returned, with my interest quite awakened. "It accounts for the change in a great many things,—the sad disappearance of sea-captains,—doesn't it?"

"A shipmaster was apt to get the habit of reading," said my companion, brightening still more, and taking on a most touching air of unreserve. "A captain is not expected to be familiar with his crew, and for company's sake in dull days and nights he turns to his book. Most of us old shipmasters came to know 'most everything about something; one would take to readin' on farming topics, and some were great on medicine,—but Lord help their poor crews!—or some were all for history, and now and then there'd be one like me that gave his time to the poets. I was well acquainted with a shipmaster that was all for bees an' bee-keepin'; and if you met him in port and went aboard, he'd sit and talk a terrible while about their havin' so much information, and the money that could be made out of keepin' 'em. He was one

6. The local, coastal manner of speaking.

7. Always remain common sailors, living in the forecabin (the forward part of the ship), and

never become ship officers (whose quarters were in the stern).

of the smartest captains that ever sailed the seas, but they used to call the Newcastle, a great bark he commanded for many years, Tuttle's beehive. There was old Cap'n Jameson: he had notions of Solomon's Temple,⁸ and made a very handsome little model of the same, right from the Scripture measurements, same's other sailors make little ships and design new tricks of rigging and all that. No, there's nothing to take the place of shipping in a place like ours. These bicycles offend me dreadfully; they don't afford no real opportunities of experience such as a man gained on a voyage. No: when folks left home in the old days they left it to some purpose, and when they got home they stayed there and had some pride in it. There's no large-minded way of thinking now: the worst have got to be best and rule everything; we're all turned upside down and going back year by year."

"Oh no, Captain Littlepage, I hope not," said I, trying to soothe his feelings.

There was a silence in the schoolhouse, but we could hear the noise of the water on a beach below. It sounded like the strange warning wave that gives notice of the turn of the tide. A late golden robin, with the most joyful and eager of voices, was singing close by in a thicket of wild roses.

VI

THE WAITING PLACE

"How did you manage with the rest of that rough voyage on the *Minerva*?" I asked.

"I shall be glad to explain to you," said Captain Littlepage, forgetting his grievances for the moment. "If I had a map at hand I could explain better. We were driven to and fro 'way up toward what we used to call Parry's Discoveries,⁹ and lost our bearings. It was thick and foggy, and at last I lost my ship; she drove on a rock, and we managed to get ashore on what I took to be a barren island, the few of us that were left alive. When she first struck, the sea was somewhat calmer than it had been, and most of the crew, against orders, manned the long-boat and put off in a hurry, and were never heard of more. Our own boat upset, but the carpenter kept himself and me above water, and we drifted in. I had no strength to call upon after my recent fever, and laid down to die; but he found the tracks of a man and dog the second day, and got along the shore to one of those far missionary stations that the Moravians¹ support. They were very poor themselves, and in distress; 't was a useless place. There were but few Esquimaux left in that region. There we remained for some time, and I became acquainted with strange events."

The captain lifted his head and gave me a questioning glance. I could not help noticing that the dulled look in his eyes had gone, and there was instead a clear intentness that made them seem dark and piercing.

"There was a supply ship expected, and the pastor, an excellent Christian man, made no doubt that we should get passage in her. He was hoping that orders would come to break up the station; but everything was uncertain,

8. The first holy temple in ancient Jerusalem, destroyed in 586 B.C.E.

9. A reference to Arctic explorer William Edward Parry (1790–1855).

1. Protestant denomination that established missions in Inuit (or Eskimo) lands beginning in the eighteenth century.

and we got on the best we could for a while. We fished, and helped the people in other ways; there was no other way of paying our debts. I was taken to the pastor's house until I got better; but they were crowded, and I felt myself in the way, and made excuse to join with an old seaman, a Scotchman, who had built him a warm cabin, and had room in it for another. He was looked upon with regard, and had stood by the pastor in some troubles with the people. He had been on one of those English exploring parties that found one end of the road to the north pole, but never could find the other. We lived like dogs in a kennel, on so you'd thought if you had seen the hut from the outside; but the main thing was to keep warm; there were piles of birdskins to lie on, and he'd made him a good bunk, and there was another for me. 'T was dreadful dreary waitin' there; we begun to think the supply steamer was lost, and my poor ship broke up and strewed herself all along the shore. We got to watching on the headlands; my men and me knew the people were short of supplies and had to pinch themselves. It ought to read in the Bible, 'Man cannot live by fish alone,' if they'd told the truth of things; 't ain't bread that wears the worst on you!² First part of the time, old Gaffett, that I lived with, seemed speechless, and I didn't know what to make of him, nor he of me, I dare say; but as we got acquainted, I found he'd been through more disasters than I had, and bad troubles that wa'n't going to let him live a great while. It used to ease his mind to talk to an understanding person, so we used to sit and talk together all day, if it rained or blew so that we couldn't get out. I'd got a bad blow on the back of my head at the time we came ashore, and it pained me at times, and my strength was broken, anyway; I've never been so able since."

Captain Littlepage fell into a reverie.

"Then I had the good of my reading," he explained presently. "I had no books; the pastor spoke but little English, and all his books were foreign; but I used to say over all I could remember. The old poets little knew what comfort they could be to a man. I was well acquainted with the works of Milton, but up there it did seem to me as if Shakespeare was the king; he has his sea terms very accurate, and some beautiful passages were calming to the mind. I could say them over until I shed tears; there was nothing beautiful to me in that place but the stars above and those passages of verse.

"Gaffett was always brooding and brooding, and talking to himself; he was afraid he should never get away, and it preyed upon his mind. He thought when I got home I could interest the scientific men in his discovery: but they're all taken up with their own notions; some didn't even take pains to answer the letters I wrote. You observe that I said this crippled man Gaffett had been shipped on a voyage of discovery. I now tell you that the ship was lost on its return, and only Gaffett and two officers were saved off the Greenland coast, and he had knowledge later that those men never got back to England; the brig they shipped on was run down in the night. So no other living soul had the facts, and he gave them to me. There is a strange sort of a country 'way up north beyond the ice, and strange folks living in it. Gaffett believed it was the next world to this."

2. The Bible states in three places (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, and Luke 4:4) that "Man shall not live by bread alone."

“What do you mean, Captain Littlepage?” I exclaimed. The old man was bending forward and whispering; he looked over this shoulder before he spoke the last sentence.

“To hear old Gaffett tell about it was something awful,” he said, going on with his story quite steadily after the moment of excitement had passed. “ ’T was first a tale of dogs and sledges, and cold and wind and snow. Then they begun to find the ice grow rotten; they had been frozen in, and got into a current flowing north, far up beyond Fox Channel,³ and they took to their boats when the ship got crushed, and this warm current took them out of sight of the ice, and into a great open sea; and they still followed it due north, just the very way they had planned to go. Then they struck a coast that wasn’t laid down or charted, but the cliffs were such that no boat could land until they found a bay and struck across under sail to the other side where the shore looked lower; they were scant of provisions and out of water, but they got sight of something that looked like a great town. ‘For God’s sake, Gaffett!’ said I, the first time he told me. ‘You don’t mean a town two degrees farther north than ships had ever been?’ for he’d got their course marked on an old chart that he’d pieced out at the top; but he insisted upon it, and told it over and over again, to be sure I had it straight to carry to those who would be interested. There was no snow and ice, he said, after they had sailed some days with that warm current, which seemed to come right from under the ice that they’d been pinched up in and had been crossing on foot for weeks.”

“But what about the town?” I asked. “Did they get to the town?”

“They did,” said the captain, “and found inhabitants; ’t was an awful condition of things. It appeared, as near as Gaffett could express it, like a place where there was neither living nor dead. They could see the place when they were approaching it by sea pretty near like any town, and thick with habitations; but all at once they lost sight of it altogether, and when they got close inshore they could see the shapes of folks, but they never could get near them,—all blowing gray figures that would pass along alone, or sometimes gathered in companies as if they were watching. The men were frightened at first, but the shapes never came near them,—it was as if they blew back; and at last they all got bold and went ashore, and found birds’ eggs and sea fowl, like any wild northern spot where creatures were tame and folks had never been, and there was good water. Gaffett said that he and another man came near one o’ the fog-shaped men that was going along slow with the look of a pack on his back, among the rocks, an’ they chased him; but, Lord! he flittered away out o’ sight like a leaf the wind takes with it, or a piece of cobweb. They would make as if they talked together, but there was no sound of voices, and ‘they acted as if they didn’t see us, but only felt us coming towards them,’ says Gaffett one day, trying to tell the particulars. They couldn’t see the town when they were ashore. One day the captain and the doctor were gone till night up across the high land where the town had seemed to be, and they came back at night beat out and white as ashes, and wrote and wrote all next day in their notebooks, and whispered together full of excitement, and they were sharp-spoken with the men when they offered to ask any questions.

“Then there came a day,” said Captain Littlepage, leaning toward me with a strange look in his eyes, and whispering quickly. “The men all swore they

3. I.e., Foxe Channel, which runs north from Hudson Bay and connects to Foxe Basin.

wouldn't stay any longer; the man on watch early in the morning gave the alarm, and they all put off in the boat and got a little way out to sea. Those folks, or whatever they were, come about 'em like bats; all at once they raised incessant armies, and come as if to drive 'em back to sea. They stood thick at the edge o' the water like the ridges o' grim war; no thought o' flight, none of retreat. Sometimes a standing fight, then soaring on main wing tormented all the air.⁴ And when they'd got the boat out o' reach o' danger, Gaffett said they looked back, and there was the town again, standing up just as they'd seen it first, comin' on the coast. Say what you might, they all believed 't was a kind of waiting-place between this world an' the next."

The captain had sprung to his feet in his excitement, and made excited gestures, but he still whispered huskily.

"Sit down, sir," I said as quietly as I could, and he sank into his chair quite spent.

"Gaffett thought the officers were hurrying home to report and to fit out a new expedition when they were all lost. At the time, the men got orders not to talk over what they had seen," the old man explained presently in a more natural tone.

"Weren't they all starving, and wasn't it a mirage or something of that sort?" I ventured to ask. But he looked at me blankly.

"Gaffett had got so that his mind ran on nothing else," he went on. "The ship's surgeon let fall an opinion to the captain, one day, that 't was some condition o' the light and the magnetic currents that let them see those folks. 'T wa'n't a right-feeling part of the world, anyway; they had to battle with the compass to make it serve, an' everything seemed to go wrong. Gaffett had worked it out in his own mind that they was all common ghosts, but the conditions were unusual favorable for seeing them. He was always talking about the Ge'graphical Society, but he never took proper steps, as I view it now, and stayed right there at the mission. He was a good deal crippled, and thought they'd confine him in some jail of a hospital. He said he was waiting to find the right men to tell, somebody bound north. Once in a while they stopped there to leave a mail or something. He was set in his notions, and let two or three proper explorin' expeditions go by him because he didn't like their looks; but when I was there he had got restless, fearin' he might be taken away or something. He had all his directions written out straight as a string to give the right ones. I wanted him to trust 'em to me, so I might have something to show, but he wouldn't. I suppose he's dead now. I wrote to him, an' I done all I could. 'T will be a great exploit some o' these days."

I assented absent-mindedly, thinking more just then of my companion's alert, determined look and the seafaring, ready aspect that had come to his face; but at this moment there fell a sudden change, and the old, pathetic, scholarly look returned. Behind me hung a map of North America, and I saw, as I turned a little, that his eyes were fixed upon the northernmost regions and their careful recent outlines with a look of bewilderment.

1896

4. Several phrases in these sentences—such as “raised incessant armies,” “ridges of grim war,” and “soaring on the main wing[,] tormented all

the air”—appear in book 6 of *Paradise Lost*, which describes the battle between Heaven's angels and Satan's army.

KATE CHOPIN

1850–1904

The Irish immigrant father of Katherine O’Flaherty, known to us now as the author Kate Chopin, was a successful businessman who died in a train wreck when his daughter was five years old. The family enjoyed a high place in St. Louis society; and her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother were active, pious Catholics of French heritage. Chopin grew up in the company of loving, intelligent, independent women—all of whom had been widowed at a young age and none of whom had remarried. Chopin’s strong-willed great-grandmother, moreover, was a compelling and tireless storyteller who may have influenced Chopin’s later development as a writer of short fiction and novels.

Chopin was nine years old when she entered St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart, but she was already well read in English and French authors. By the time she graduated from the academy in 1868, the nuns of the Academy had instructed her further in literature, history, and science. But it was French writers who most strongly influenced Chopin. She read and admired French classical authors as well as more contemporary figures such as Gustave Flaubert, Madame de Staël, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant. What she said of Maupassant as a writer she might have said of herself: “Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw.” Whether focusing on St. Louis, New Orleans, or the Louisiana countryside, she described the tension between individual erotic inclination and the constraints placed on desire—especially on women’s sexual desire—by traditional social mores. She described directly and without moral judgment the challenge of women to the male-dominated culture that limited all aspects of women’s lives—even the lives of comfortably situated women—and tried to control their psyches as well. Her new, modern perspectives, especially on female sexuality, paralleled those of Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser.

At the age of nineteen she married Oscar Chopin and spent the next decade in New Orleans, where her husband first prospered, then failed, as a cotton broker. They lived for a few years in Cloutierville, a village in northwest Louisiana near Natchitoches, where her husband opened a general store and managed a family cotton plantation. He died in 1883 from swamp fever (probably malaria), and a year later she returned to St. Louis permanently. Then her mother died, in 1885, and at the age of thirty-five Chopin was left essentially alone to raise her six young children. Having recognized the marketplace for “local color,” or regional, fiction, Chopin decided to fashion a literary career out of her experiences with the cultural diversity of Louisiana. She depicted Cajuns, descendants of French immigrants who arrived in Louisiana after being deported from Canada in the eighteenth century, as well as French Creoles, elite members of Louisiana society whose ancestry included the French and Spanish colonists of the region. Both groups distinguished themselves from the more recently arrived Americans.

Chopin claimed that she wrote on impulse, that she was “completely at the mercy of unconscious selection” of subject, and that “the polishing up process . . . always proved disastrous.” In the relatively few years of her writing career—scarcely more than a decade—she completed three novels, more than 150 stories and sketches, and a substantial body of poetry, reviews, and criticism. (She also translated the stories

of Maupassant, but did little to publish them.) A first novel, *At Fault*, was self-published in 1890, but it was her stories of Louisiana rural life, especially in the collection *Bayou Folk* (1894), that won her national recognition. A second collection of stories, *A Night in Acadie*, was published three years later and increased her reputation as a local colorist. Chopin, who wrote about her own time, did not concern herself with the prewar South, but stories such as “Desirée’s Baby” reveal the pernicious residues of an outdated social ideology. At the same time, the influence of French fiction on her work showed in stories that were much more erotic—and guilt-free—than the American norm. Her awareness of a disconnect between her work and American culture may explain why she did not submit “The Storm” for publication; it was not published until 1969 as part of Per Seyersted’s edition of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*.

Chopin’s major work, *The Awakening*, was published in 1899. The novel, which traces the sensual and sexual coming to consciousness of a young woman, predictably aroused hostility among contemporary reviewers. Edna Pontellier is not a “new woman” demanding social, economic, and political equality; instead she can appear to be an unrepentant (if ultimately psychologically confused) sensualist, leading some critics to charge that the book was “essentially vulgar” and “unhealthily introspective and morbid in feeling.” (Even Willa Cather, in her review of *The Awakening*, wondered why Chopin “devoted so exquisite and sensitive, well-governed a style to so trite and sordid a theme.”) But the readers who objected to Edna’s behavior missed Chopin’s portrayal of Edna’s psychological turmoil. Though some commentators found much to praise in *The Awakening*, Chopin’s only published response to reviews of the novel was to claim, “I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company.” In the years following publication of the novel, Chopin’s health deteriorated, and she wrote little. After her death, Chopin fell into obscurity for over a half a century, and it was not until the 1970s that *The Awakening* and a number of her stories came to be recognized as among the major achievements of turn-of-the-century American literary culture.

Desirée’s Baby¹

As the day was pleasant, Madame Valmondé drove over to L’Abri to see Désirée and the baby.

It made her laugh to think of Désirée with a baby. Why, it seemed but yesterday that Désirée was little more than a baby herself; when Monsieur in riding through the gateway of Valmondé had found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar.

The little one awoke in his arms and began to cry for “Dada.” That was as much as she could do or say. Some people thought she might have strayed there of her own accord, for she was of the toddling age. The prevailing belief was that she had been purposely left by a party of Texans, whose canvas-covered wagon, late in the day, had crossed the ferry that Coton Maïs kept, just below the plantation. In time Madame Valmondé abandoned every speculation but the one that Désirée had been sent to her by a beneficent Providence to be the child of her affection, seeing that she was without

1. The story was first published in the January 4, 1893, *Vogue* as “The Father of Désirée’s Baby—The Lover of Mentine,” and then included in

Bayou Folk (1894) with its present title. The text is taken from Per Seyersted’s edition of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (1969).

child of the flesh. For the girl grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere,—the idol of Valmondé.

It was no wonder, when she stood one day against the stone pillar in whose shadow she had lain asleep, eighteen years before, that Armand Aubigny riding by and seeing her there, had fallen in love with her. That was the way all the Aubignys fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot. The wonder was that he had not loved her before; for he had known her since his father brought him home from Paris, a boy of eight, after his mother died there. The passion that awoke in him that day, when he saw her at the gate, swept along like an avalanche, or like a prairie fire, or like anything that drives headlong over all obstacles.

Monsieur Valmondé grew practical and wanted things well considered: that is, the girl's obscure origin. Armand looked into her eyes and did not care. He was reminded that she was nameless. What did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana? He ordered the *corbeille*² from Paris, and contained himself with what patience he could until it arrived; then they were married.

Madame Valmondé had not seen Désirée and the baby for four weeks. When she reached L'Abri she shuddered at the first sight of it, as she always did. It was a sad looking place, which for many years had not known the gentle presence of a mistress, old Monsieur Aubigny having married and buried his wife in France, and she having loved her own land too well ever to leave it. The roof came down steep and black like a cowl, reaching out beyond the wide galleries that encircled the yellow stuccoed house. Big, solemn oaks grew close to it, and their thick-leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall. Young Aubigny's rule was a strict one, too, and under it his negroes had forgotten how to be gay, as they had been during the old master's easy-going and indulgent lifetime.

The young mother was recovering slowly, and lay full length, in her soft white muslins and laces, upon a couch. The baby was beside her, upon her arm, where he had fallen asleep, at her breast. The yellow³ nurse woman sat beside a window fanning herself.

Madame Valmondé bent her portly figure over Désirée and kissed her, holding her an instant tenderly in her arms. Then she turned to the child.

"This is not the baby!" she exclaimed, in startled tones. French was the language spoken at Valmondé in those days.

"I knew you would be astonished," laughed Désirée, "at the way he has grown. The little *cochon de lait*!⁴ Look at his legs, mamma, and his hands and fingernails,—real finger-nails. Zandrine had to cut them this morning. Isn't it true, Zandrine?"

The woman bowed her turbaned head majestically, "Mais si,⁵ Madame."

"And the way he cries," went on Désirée, "is deafening. Armand heard him the other day as far away as La Blanche's cabin."

Madame Valmondé had never removed her eyes from the child. She lifted it and walked with it over to the window that was lightest. She scanned the baby narrowly, then looked as searchingly at Zandrine, whose face was turned to gaze across the fields.

2. Basket (French), short for *corbeille de mariage*: lavish wedding gifts from bridegroom to bride, traditionally presented in a wicker basket.

3. Anachronistic, generally pejorative term for a

lightly complected African American.

4. Literally, a "pig in milk" (French); the term applies to a Cajun method of roasting pork.

5. Absolutely, yes (French).

“Yes, the child has grown, has changed,” said Madame Valmondé, slowly, as she replaced it beside its mother. “What does Armand say?”

Désirée’s face became suffused with a glow that was happiness itself.

“Oh, Armand is the proudest father in the parish, I believe, chiefly because it is a boy, to bear his name; though he says not,—that he would have loved a girl as well. But I know it is n’t true. I know he says that to please me. And mamma,” she added, drawing Madame Valmondé’s head down to her, and speaking in a whisper, “he has n’t punished one of them—not one of them—since baby is born. Even Négrillon, who pretended to have burnt his leg that he might rest from work—he only laughed, and said Négrillon was a great scamp. Oh, mamma, I’m so happy; it frightens me.”

What Désirée said was true. Marriage, and later the birth of his son had softened Armand Aubigny’s imperious and exacting nature greatly. This was what made the gentle Désirée so happy, for she loved him desperately. When he frowned she trembled, but loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God. But Armand’s dark, handsome face had not often been disfigured by frowns since the day he fell in love with her.

When the baby was about three months old, Désirée awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace. It was at first too subtle to grasp. It had only been a disquieting suggestion; an air of mystery among the blacks; unexpected visits from far-off neighbors who could hardly account for their coming. Then a strange, an awful change in her husband’s manner, which she dared not ask him to explain. When he spoke to her, it was with averted eyes, from which the old love-light seemed to have gone out. He absented himself from home; and when there, avoided her presence and that of her child, without excuse. And the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves. Désirée was miserable enough to die.

She sat in her room, one hot afternoon, in her *peignoir*,⁶ listlessly drawing through her fingers the strands of her long, silky brown hair that hung about her shoulders. The baby, half naked, lay asleep upon her own great mahogany bed, that was like a sumptuous throne, with its satin-lined half-canopy. One of La Blanche’s little quadron⁷ boys—half naked too—stood fanning the child slowly with a fan of peacock feathers. Désirée’s eyes had been fixed absently and sadly upon the baby, while she was striving to penetrate the threatening mist that she felt closing about her. She looked from her child to the boy who stood beside him, and back again; over and over. “Ah!” It was a cry that she could not help; which she was not conscious of having uttered. The blood turned like ice in her veins, and a clammy moisture gathered upon her face.

She tried to speak to the little quadron boy; but no sound would come, at first. When he heard his name uttered, he looked up, and his mistress was pointing to the door. He laid aside the great, soft fan, and obediently stole away, over the polished floor, on his bare tiptoes.

She stayed motionless, with gaze riveted upon her child, and her face the picture of fright.

6. Woman’s dressing gown (French).

7. Term used in the nineteenth century (less often in the twentieth century) for people

thought to be one-fourth black; more generally, “quadron,” like “mulatto,” was used for light-skinned people of mixed racial ancestry.

Presently her husband entered the room, and without noticing her, went to a table and began to search among some papers which covered it.

"Armand," she called to him, in a voice which must have stabbed him, if he was human. But he did not notice. "Armand," she said again. Then she rose and tottered towards him. "Armand," she panted once more, clutching his arm, "look at our child. What does it mean? tell me."

He coldly but gently loosened her fingers from about his arm and thrust the hand away from him. "Tell me what it means!" she cried despairingly.

"It means," he answered lightly, "that the child is not white; it means that you are not white."

A quick conception of all that this accusation meant for her nerved her with unwonted courage to deny it. "It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair," seizing his wrist. "Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand," she laughed hysterically.

"As white as La Blanche's," he returned cruelly; and went away leaving her alone with their child.

When she could hold a pen in her hand, she sent a despairing letter to Madame Valmondé.

"My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me I am not white. For God's sake tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy, and live."

The answer that came was as brief:

"My own Désirée: Come home to Valmondé; back to your mother who loves you. Come with your child."

When the letter reached Désirée she went with it to her husband's study, and laid it open upon the desk before which he sat. She was like a stone image: silent, white, motionless after she placed it there.

In silence he ran his cold eyes over the written words. He said nothing. "Shall I go, Armand?" she asked in tones sharp with agonized suspense.

"Yes, go."

"Do you want me to go?"

"Yes, I want you to go."

He thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife's soul. Moreover he no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name.

She turned away like one stunned by a blow, and walked slowly towards the door, hoping he would call her back.

"Good-by, Armand," she moaned.

He did not answer her. That was his last blow at fate.

Désirée went in search of her child. Zandrine was pacing the somber gallery with it. She took the little one from the nurse's arms with no word of explanation, and descending the steps, walked away, under the live-oak branches.

It was an October afternoon; the sun was just sinking. Out in the still fields the negroes were picking cotton.

Désirée had not changed the thin white garment nor the slippers which she wore. Her hair was uncovered and the sun's rays brought a golden gleam from its brown meshes. She did not take the broad, beaten road which led

to the far-off plantation of Valmondé. She walked across a deserted field, where the stubble bruised her tender feet, so delicately shod, and tore her thin gown to shreds.

She disappeared among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she did not come back again.

Some weeks later there was a curious scene enacted at L'Abri. In the centre of the smoothly swept back yard was a great bonfire. Armand Aubigny sat in the wide hallway that commanded a view of the spectacle; and it was he who dealt out to a half dozen negroes the material which kept this fire ablaze.

A graceful cradle of willow, with all its dainty furbishings, was laid upon the pyre, which had already been fed with the richness of a priceless *layette*.⁸ Then there were silk gowns, and velvet and satin ones added to these; laces, too, and embroideries; bonnets and gloves; for the *corbeille* had been of rare quality.

The last thing to go was a tiny bundle of letters; innocent little scribblings that Désirée had sent to him during the days of their espousal. There was the remnant of one back in the drawer from which he took them. But it was not Désirée's; it was part of an old letter from his mother to his father. He read it. She was thanking God for the blessing of her husband's love:—

"But, above all," she wrote, "night and day, I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery."

1893

1894

The Story of an Hour¹

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

8. A set of clothes for a newborn child (French).
1. The story was first published in the April 19, 1894, *Vogue* as "The Dream of an Hour," and then reprinted in the January 5, 1895, *St. Louis*

Life with its present title. The text is taken from Per Seyersted's edition of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (1969).

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

1894

1895

The Storm

*A Sequel to "The 'Cadian Ball"*¹

I

The leaves were so still that even Bibi thought it was going to rain. Bobinôt, who was accustomed to converse on terms of perfect equality with his little son, called the child's attention to certain sombre clouds that were rolling with sinister intention from the west, accompanied by a sullen, threatening roar. They were at Friedheimer's store and decided to remain there till the storm had passed. They sat within the door on two empty kegs. Bibi was four years old and looked very wise.

"Mama'll be 'fraid, yes," he suggested with blinking eyes.

"She'll shut the house. Maybe she got Sylvie helpin' her this evenin'," Bobinôt responded reassuringly.

"No; she ent got Sylvie. Sylvie was helpin' her yistiday," piped Bibi.

Bobinôt arose and going across to the counter purchased a can of shrimps, of which Calixta was very fond. Then he returned to his perch on the keg

1. Chopin's notebooks show that this story was written on July 18, 1898, just six months after she had submitted *The Awakening* to a publisher. As its subtitle indicates, it was intended as a sequel to her tale "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1892).

"The Storm" was apparently never submitted for publication and did not see print until the publication of Per Seyersted's edition of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* in 1969, the basis for the text printed here.

and sat stolidly holding the can of shrimps while the storm burst. It shook the wooden store and seemed to be ripping furrows in the distant field. Bibi laid his little hand on his father's knee and was not afraid.

II

Calixta, at home, felt no uneasiness for their safety. She sat at a side window sewing furiously on a sewing machine. She was greatly occupied and did not notice the approaching storm. But she felt very warm and often stopped to mop her face on which the perspiration gathered in beads. She unfastened her white *sacque*² at the throat. It began to grow dark, and suddenly realizing the situation she got up hurriedly and went about closing windows and doors.

Out on the small front gallery she had hung Bobinôt's Sunday clothes to dry and she hastened out to gather them before the rain fell. As she stepped outside, Alcée Laballière rode in at the gate. She had not seen him very often since her marriage, and never alone. She stood there with Bobinôt's coat in her hands, and the big rain drops began to fall. Alcée rode his horse under the shelter of a side projection where the chickens had huddled and there were plows and a harrow piled up in the corner.

"May I come and wait on your gallery till the storm is over, Calixta?" he asked.

"Come 'long in, M'sieur Alcée."

His voice and her own startled her as if from a trance, and she seized Bobinôt's vest. Alcée, mounting to the porch, grabbed the trousers and snatched Bibi's braided jacket that was about to be carried away by a sudden gust of wind. He expressed an intention to remain outside, but it was soon apparent that he might as well have been out in the open: the water beat in upon the boards in driving sheets, and he went inside, closing the door after him. It was even necessary to put something beneath the door to keep the water out.

"My! what a rain! It's good two years sence it rain' like that," exclaimed Calixta as she rolled up a piece of bagging and Alcée helped her to thrust it beneath the crack.

She was a little fuller of figure than five years before when she married; but she had lost nothing of her vivacity. Her blue eyes still retained their melting quality; and her yellow hair, disheveled by the wind and rain, kinked more stubbornly than ever about her ears and temples.

The rain beat upon the low, shingled roof with a force and clatter that threatened to break an entrance and deluge them there. They were in the dining room—the sitting room—the general utility room. Adjoining was her bed room, with Bibi's couch along side her own. The door stood open, and the room with its white, monumental bed, its closed shutters, looked dim and mysterious.

Alcée flung himself into a rocker and Calixta nervously began to gather up from the floor the lengths of a cotton sheet which she had been sewing.

"If this keeps up, *Dieu sait* if the levees³ goin' to stan' it!" she exclaimed.

2. Loose-fitting dress.

3. Built-up earthen banks designed to keep the

river from flooding the surrounding land. "*Dieu sait*": God knows (French).

"What have you got to do with the levees?"

"I got enough to do! An' there's Bobinôt with Bibi out in that storm—if he only didn' left Friedheimer's!"

"Let us hope, Calixta, that Bobinôt's got sense enough to come in out of a cyclone."

She went and stood at the window with a greatly disturbed look on her face. She wiped the frame that was clouded with moisture. It was stiflingly hot. Alcée got up and joined her at the window, looking over her shoulder. The rain was coming down in sheets obscuring the view of far-off cabins and enveloping the distant wood in a gray mist. The playing of the lightning was incessant. A bolt struck a tall chinaberry tree at the edge of the field. It filled all visible space with a blinding glare and the crash seemed to invade the very boards they stood upon.

Calixta put her hands to her eyes, and with a cry, staggered backward. Alcée's arm encircled her, and for an instant he drew her close and spasmodically to him.

"*Bonté!*"⁴ she cried, releasing herself from his encircling arm and retreating from the window, "the house'll go next! If I only knew w'ere Bibi was!" She would not compose herself; she would not be seated. Alcée clasped her shoulders and looked into her face. The contact of her warm, palpitating body when he had unthinkingly drawn her into his arms, had aroused all the old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh.

"Calixta," he said, "don't be frightened. Nothing can happen. The house is too low to be struck, with so many tall trees standing about. There! aren't you going to be quiet? say, aren't you?" He pushed her hair back from her face that was warm and steaming. Her lips were as red and moist as pomegranate seed. Her white neck and a glimpse of her full, firm bosom disturbed him powerfully. As she glanced up at him the fear in her liquid blue eyes had given place to a drowsy gleam that unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire. He looked down into her eyes and there was nothing for him to do but to gather her lips in a kiss. It reminded him of Assumption.⁵

"Do you remember—in Assumption, Calixta?" he asked in a low voice broken by passion. Oh! she remembered; for in Assumption he had kissed her and kissed and kissed her; until his senses would well nigh fail, and to save her he would resort to a desperate flight. If she was not an immaculate dove in those days, she was still inviolate; a passionate creature whose very defenselessness had made her defense, against which his honor forbade him to prevail. Now—well, now—her lips seemed in a manner free to be tasted, as well as her round, white throat and her whiter breasts.

They did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms. She was a revelation in that dim, mysterious chamber; as white as the couch she lay upon. Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world.

The generous abundance of her passion, without guile or trickery, was like a white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached.

4. Goodness! (French).

5. I.e., Assumption Parish, Louisiana, the setting for "At the 'Cadian Ball."

When he touched her breasts they gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy, inviting his lips. Her mouth was a fountain of delight. And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life's mystery.

He stayed cushioned upon her, breathless, dazed, enervated, with his heart beating like a hammer upon her. With one hand she clasped his head, her lips lightly touching his forehead. The other hand stroked with a soothing rhythm his muscular shoulders.

The growl of the thunder was distant and passing away. The rain beat softly upon the shingles, inviting them to drowsiness and sleep. But they dared not yield.

III

The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems. Calixta, on the gallery, watched Alcée ride away. He turned and smiled at her with a beaming face; and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud.

Bobinôt and Bibi, trudging home, stopped without at the cistern to make themselves presentable.

"My! Bibi, w'at will yo' mama say! You ought to be ashame'. You oughta' put on those good pants. Look at 'em! An' that mud on yo' collar! How you got that mud on yo' collar, Bibi? I never saw such a boy!" Bibi was the picture of pathetic resignation. Bobinôt was the embodiment of serious solicitude as he strove to remove from his own person and his son's the signs of their tramp over heavy roads and through wet fields. He scraped the mud off Bibi's bare legs and feet with a stick and carefully removed all traces from his heavy brogans. Then, prepared for the worst—the meeting with an over-scrupulous housewife, they entered cautiously at the back door.

Calixta was preparing supper. She had set the table and was dripping coffee at the hearth. She sprang up as they came in.

"Oh, Bobinôt! You back! My! but I was uneasy. W'ere you been during the rain? An' Bibi? he ain't wet? he ain't hurt?" She had clasped Bibi and was kissing him effusively. Bobinôt's explanations and apologies which he had been composing all along the way, died on his lips as Calixta felt him to see if he were dry, and seemed to express nothing but satisfaction at their safe return.

"I brought you some shrimps, Calixta," offered Bobinôt, hauling the can from his ample side pocket and laying it on the table.

"Shrimps! Oh, Bobinôt! you too good fo' anything!" and she gave him a smacking kiss on the cheek that resounded, "*J'vous répons*,⁶ we'll have a fea's' to night! umph-umph!"

Bobinôt and Bibi began to relax and enjoy themselves, and when the three seated themselves at table they laughed much and so loud that anyone might have heard them as far away as Laballière's.

IV

Alcée Laballière wrote to his wife, Clarisse, that night. It was a loving letter, full of tender solicitude. He told her not to hurry back, but if she and

6. I promise you (French).

the babies liked it at Biloxi, to stay a month longer. He was getting on nicely; and though he missed them, he was willing to bear the separation a while longer—realizing that their health and pleasure were the first things to be considered.

v

As for Clarisse, she was charmed upon receiving her husband's letter. She and the babies were doing well. The society was agreeable; many of her old friends and acquaintances were at the bay. And the first free breath since her marriage seemed to restore the pleasant liberty of her maiden days. Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while.

So the storm passed and every one was happy.

1898

1969

The Awakening¹

I

A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

"Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!² That's all right!"

He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence.

Mr. Pontellier, unable to read his newspaper with any degree of comfort, arose with an expression and an exclamation of disgust. He walked down the gallery and across the narrow "bridges" which connected the Lebrun cottages one with the other. He had been seated before the door of the main house. The parrot and the mocking-bird were the property of Madame Lebrun, and they had the right to make all the noise they wished. Mr. Pontellier had the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased to be entertaining.

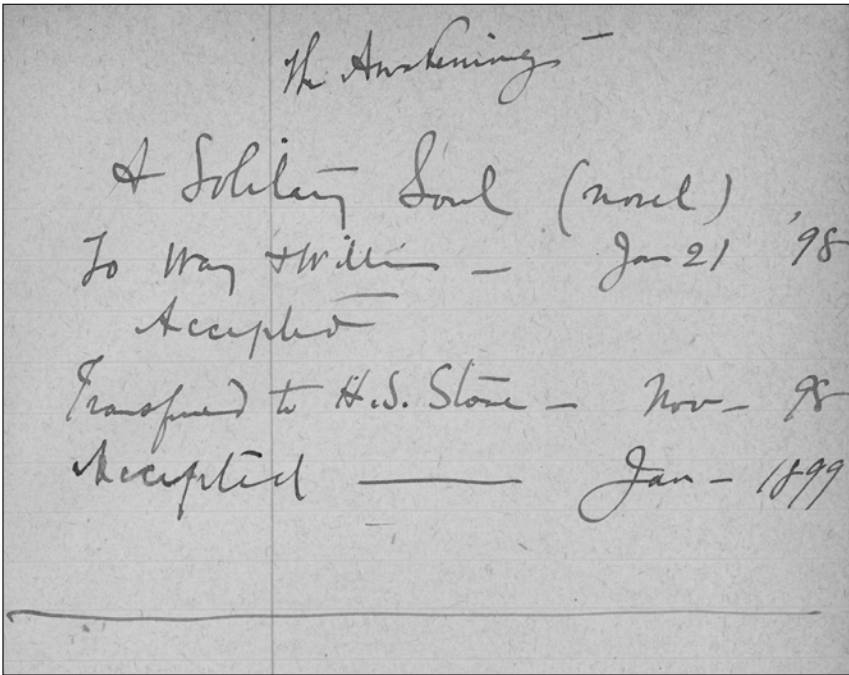
He stopped before the door of his own cottage, which was the fourth one from the main building and next to the last. Seating himself in a wicker rocker which was there, he once more applied himself to the task of reading the newspaper. The day was Sunday; the paper was a day old. The Sunday papers had not yet reached Grand Isle.³ He was already acquainted with the market reports, and he glanced restlessly over the editorials and bits of news which he had not had time to read before quitting New Orleans the day before.

Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and rather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed.

1. This text is that of the first edition, published by Herbert S. Stone & Company, New York and Chicago, 1899.

2. Go away! Go away! For God's sake! (French).

3. A resort island, fifty miles south of New Orleans, between the Gulf of Mexico and Caminada Bay.



A page from Kate Chopin's notebook where she recorded an alternative title to *The Awakening*: "A Solitary Soul."

Once in a while he withdrew his glance from the newspaper and looked about him. There was more noise than ever over at the house. The main building was called "the house," to distinguish it from the cottages. The chattering and whistling birds were still at it. Two young girls, the Farival twins, were playing a duet from "Zampa"⁴ upon the piano. Madame Lebrun was bustling in and out, giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions in an equally high voice to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside. She was a fresh, pretty woman, clad always in white with elbow sleeves. Her starched skirts crinkled as she came and went. Farther down, before one of the cottages, a lady in black was walking demurely up and down, telling her beads. A good many persons of the *pension* had gone over to the *Chênrière Caminada* in Beaudalet's lugger⁵ to hear mass. Some young people were out under the water-oaks playing croquet. Mr. Pontellier's two children were there—sturdy little fellows of four and five. A quadroon⁶ nurse followed them about with a far-away, meditative air.

Mr. Pontellier finally lit a cigar and began to smoke, letting the paper drag idly from his hand. He fixed his gaze upon a white sunshade⁷ that was advancing at snail's pace from the beach. He could see it plainly between the gaunt trunks of the water-oaks and across the stretch of yellow camomile. The gulf

4. Romantic opera by Louis Hérold (1791–1833).
5. Passenger boat. "*Pension*": a bed-and-board hotel. "*Chênrière Caminada*": an island between Grande Isle and the Louisiana coast.

6. Term used in the 19th century (less often in the 20th century) for people thought to be one-fourth black.

7. I.e., parasol.

looked far away, melting hazily into the blue of the horizon. The sunshade continued to approach slowly. Beneath its pink-lined shelter were his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun. When they reached the cottage, the two seated themselves with some appearance of fatigue upon the step of the porch, facing each other, each leaning against a supporting post.

"What folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!" exclaimed Mr. Pontellier. He himself had taken a plunge at daylight. That was why the morning seemed long to him.

"You are burnt beyond recognition," he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage. She held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically, drawing up her lawn⁸ sleeves above the wrists. Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped them upon her fingers; then clasping her knees, she looked across at Robert and began to laugh. The rings sparkled upon her fingers. He sent back an answering smile.

"What is it?" asked Pontellier, looking lazily and amused from one to the other. It was some utter nonsense; some adventure out there in the water, and they both tried to relate it at once. It did not seem half so amusing when told. They realized this, and so did Mr. Pontellier. He yawned and stretched himself. Then he got up, saying he had half a mind to go over to Klein's hotel⁹ and play a game of billiards.

"Come go along, Lebrun," he proposed to Robert. But Robert admitted quite frankly that he preferred to stay where he was and talk to Mrs. Pontellier.

"Well, send him about his business when he bores you, Edna," instructed her husband as he prepared to leave.

"Here, take the umbrella," she exclaimed, holding it out to him. He accepted the sunshade, and lifting it over his head descended the steps and walked away.

"Coming back to dinner?" his wife called after him. He halted a moment and shrugged his shoulders. He felt in his vest pocket; there was a ten-dollar bill there. He did not know; perhaps he would return for the early dinner and perhaps he would not. It all depended upon the company which he found over at Klein's and the size of "the game." He did not say this, but she understood it, and laughed, nodding good-by to him.

Both children wanted to follow their father when they saw him starting out. He kissed them and promised to bring them back bonbons and peanuts.

II

Mrs. Pontellier's eyes were quick and bright; they were a yellowish brown, about the color of her hair. She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought.

8. Fine linen or sheer muslin.

9. Probably based on Krantz's Hotel, a well-known establishment of the time.

Her eyebrows were a shade darker than her hair. They were thick and almost horizontal, emphasizing the depth of her eyes. She was rather handsome than beautiful. Her face was captivating by reason of a certain frankness of expression and a contradictory subtle play of features. Her manner was engaging.

Robert rolled a cigarette. He smoked cigarettes because he could not afford cigars, he said. He had a cigar in his pocket which Mr. Pontellier had presented him with, and he was saving it for his after-dinner smoke.

This seemed quite proper and natural on his part. In coloring he was not unlike his companion. A clean-shaven face made the resemblance more pronounced than it would otherwise have been. There rested no shadow of care upon his open countenance. His eyes gathered in and reflected the light and languor of the summer day.

Mrs. Pontellier reached over for a palmleaf fan that lay on the porch and began to fan herself, while Robert sent between his lips light puffs from his cigarette. They chatted incessantly: about the things around them; their amusing adventure out in the water—it had again assumed its entertaining aspect; about the wind, the trees, the people who had gone to the *Chênère*; about the children playing croquet under the oaks, and the Farival twins, who were now performing the overture to “The Poet and the Peasant.”¹

Robert talked a good deal about himself. He was very young, and did not know any better. Mrs. Pontellier talked a little about herself for the same reason. Each was interested in what the other said. Robert spoke of his intention to go to Mexico in the autumn, where fortune awaited him. He was always intending to go to Mexico, but some way never got there. Meanwhile he held on to his modest position in a mercantile house in New Orleans, where an equal familiarity with English, French and Spanish gave him no small value as a clerk and correspondent.

He was spending his summer vacation, as he always did, with his mother at Grand Isle. In former times, before Robert could remember, “the house” had been a summer luxury of the Lebruns. Now, flanked by its dozen or more cottages, which were always filled with exclusive visitors from the “*Quartier Français*,”² it enabled Madame Lebrun to maintain the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright.

Mrs. Pontellier talked about her father’s Mississippi plantation and her girlhood home in the old Kentucky blue-grass country. She was an American woman, with a small infusion of French which seemed to have been lost in dilution. She read a letter from her sister, who was away in the East, and who had engaged herself to be married. Robert was interested, and wanted to know what manner of girls the sisters were, what the father was like, and how long the mother had been dead.

When Mrs. Pontellier folded the letter it was time for her to dress for the early dinner.

“I see Léonce isn’t coming back,” she said, with a glance in the direction whence her husband had disappeared. Robert supposed he was not, as there were a good many New Orleans club men over at Klein’s.

1. An operetta by the Austrian composer Franz von Suppé (1819–1895).

2. The French Quarter of New Orleans, settled

by the French in the early 1700s and occupied by wealthy, older families.

When Mrs. Pontellier left him to enter her room, the young man descended the steps and strolled over toward the croquet players, where, during the half-hour before dinner, he amused himself with the little Pontellier children, who were very fond of him.

III

It was eleven o'clock that night when Mr. Pontellier returned from Klein's hotel. He was in an excellent humor, in high spirits, and very talkative. His entrance awoke his wife, who was in bed and fast asleep when he came in. He talked to her while he undressed, telling her anecdotes and bits of news and gossip that he had gathered during the day. From his trousers pockets he took a fistful of crumpled bank notes and a good deal of silver coin, which he piled on the bureau indiscriminately with keys, knife, handkerchief, and whatever else happened to be in his pockets. She was overcome with sleep, and answered him with little half utterances.

He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him and valued so little his conversation.

Mr. Pontellier had forgotten the bonbons and peanuts for the boys. Notwithstanding he loved them very much, and went into the adjoining room where they slept to take a look at them and make sure that they were resting comfortably. The result of his investigation was far from satisfactory. He turned and shifted the youngsters about in bed. One of them began to kick and talk about a basket full of crabs.

Mr. Pontellier returned to his wife with the information that Raoul had a high fever and needed looking after. Then he lit a cigar and went and sat near the open door to smoke it.

Mrs. Pontellier was quite sure Raoul had no fever. He had gone to bed perfectly well, she said, and nothing had ailed him all day. Mr. Pontellier was too well acquainted with fever symptoms to be mistaken. He assured her the child was consuming³ at that moment in the next room.

He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. He talked in a monotonous, insistent way.

Mrs. Pontellier sprang out of bed and went into the next room. She soon came back and sat on the edge of the bed, leaning her head down on the pillow. She said nothing, and refused to answer her husband when he questioned her. When his cigar was smoked out he went to bed, and in half a minute he was fast asleep.

Mrs. Pontellier was by that time thoroughly awake. She began to cry a little, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her *peignoir*.⁴ Blowing out the candle, which her husband had left burning, she slipped her bare feet into

3. Feverish; wasting away.

4. Woman's dressing gown (French).

a pair of satin *mules* at the foot of the bed and went out on the porch, where she sat down in the wicker chair and began to rock gently to and fro.

It was then past midnight. The cottages were all dark. A single faint light gleamed out from the hallway of the house. There was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak, and the everlasting voice of the sea, that was not uplifted at that soft hour. It broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night.

The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier's eyes that the damp sleeve of her *peignoir* no longer served to dry them. She was holding the back of her chair with one hand; her loose sleeve had slipped almost to the shoulder of her uplifted arm. Turning, she thrust her face, steaming and wet, into the bend of her arm, and she went on crying there, not caring any longer to dry her face, her eyes, her arms. She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood.

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. She was just having a good cry all to herself. The mosquitoes made merry over her, biting her firm, round arms and nipping at her bare insteps.

The little stinging, buzzing imps succeeded in dispelling a mood which might have held her there in the darkness half a night longer.

The following morning Mr. Pontellier was up in good time to take the rockaway⁵ which was to convey him to the steamer at the wharf. He was returning to the city to his business, and they would not see him again at the Island till the coming Saturday. He had regained his composure, which seemed to have been somewhat impaired the night before. He was eager to be gone, as he looked forward to a lively week in Carondelet Street.⁶

Mr. Pontellier gave his wife half the money which he had brought away from Klein's hotel the evening before. She liked money as well as most women, and accepted it with no little satisfaction.

"It will buy a handsome wedding present for Sister Janet!" she exclaimed, smoothing out the bills as she counted them one by one.

"Oh! we'll treat Sister Janet better than that, my dear," he laughed, as he prepared to kiss her good-by.

The boys were tumbling about, clinging to his legs, imploring that numerous things be brought back to them. Mr. Pontellier was a great favorite, and ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say good-by to him. His wife stood smiling and waving, the boys shouting, as he disappeared in the old rockaway down the sandy road.

5. A four-wheeled carriage (manufactured in Rockaway, New Jersey).

6. New Orleans's equivalent of Wall Street, and the location of the Cotton Exchange.

A few days later a box arrived for Mrs. Pontellier from New Orleans. It was from her husband. It was filled with *friandises*,⁷ with luscious and toothsome bits—the finest of fruits, *patés*, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bonbons in abundance.

Mrs. Pontellier was always very generous with the contents of such a box; she was quite used to receiving them when away from home. The *patés* and fruit were brought to the dining-room; the bonbons were passed around. And the ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily, all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better.

IV

It would have been a difficult matter for Mr. Pontellier to define to his own satisfaction or any one else's wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children. It was something which he felt rather than perceived, and he never voiced the feeling without subsequent regret and ample atonement.

If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing. Tots as they were, they pulled together and stood their ground in childish battles with doubled fists and uplifted voices, which usually prevailed against the other mother-tots. The quadron nurse was looked upon as a huge encumbrance, only good to button up waists and panties and to brush and part hair; since it seemed to be a law of society that hair must be parted and brushed.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.

Many of them were delicious in the rôle; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm. If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. There was nothing subtle or hidden about her charms; her beauty was all there, flaming and apparent: the spun-gold hair that comb nor confining pin could restrain; the blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires; two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them. She was growing a little stout, but it did not seem to detract an iota from the grace of every step, pose, gesture. One would not have wanted her white neck a mite less full or her beautiful arms more slender. Never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she threaded her needle or adjusted her gold thimble to her taper⁸ middle finger as she sewed away on the little night-drawers or fashioned a bodice or a bib.

7. Delicacies (French).

8. Tapered.

Madame Ratignolle was very fond of Mrs. Pontellier, and often she took her sewing and went over to sit with her in the afternoons. She was sitting there the afternoon of the day the box arrived from New Orleans. She had possession of the rocker, and she was busily engaged in sewing upon a diminutive pair of night-drawers.

She had brought the pattern of the drawers for Mrs. Pontellier to cut out—a marvel of construction, fashioned to enclose a baby's body so effectually that only two small eyes might look out from the garment, like an Eskimo's. They were designed for winter wear, when treacherous drafts came down chimneys and insidious currents of deadly cold found their way through keyholes.

Mrs. Pontellier's mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the subject of her summer meditations. But she did not want to appear unamiable and uninterested, so she had brought forth newspapers which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and under Madame Ratignolle's directions she had cut a pattern of the impervious garment.

Robert was there, seated as he had been the Sunday before, and Mrs. Pontellier also occupied her former position on the upper step, leaning listlessly against the post. Beside her was a box of bonbons, which she held out at intervals to Madame Ratignolle.

That lady seemed at a loss to make a selection, but finally settled upon a stick of nugat, wondering if it were not too rich; whether it could possibly hurt her. Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one. She was always talking about her "condition." Her "condition" was in no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation.

Robert started to reassure her, asserting that he had known a lady who had subsisted upon nugat during the entire—but seeing the color mount into Mrs. Pontellier's face he checked himself and changed the subject.

Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole,⁹ was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun's. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable.

Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her *accouchements*,¹ withholding no intimate detail. She was growing accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks. Oftener than once her coming had interrupted the droll story with which Robert was entertaining some amused group of married women.

9. A person descended from the original French and Spanish settlers of New Orleans, thus, at this

time, an aristocrat.

1. The birth of one of her children (French).

A book had gone the rounds of the *pension*. When it came her turn to read it, she did so with profound astonishment. She felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude, though none of the others had done so—to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps. It was openly criticised and freely discussed at table. Mrs. Pontellier gave over being astonished, and concluded that wonders would never cease.

V

They formed a congenial group sitting there that summer afternoon—Madame Ratignolle sewing away, often stopping to relate a story or incident with much expressive gesture of her perfect hands; Robert and Mrs. Pontellier sitting idle, exchanging occasional words, glances or smiles which indicated a certain advanced stage of intimacy and *camaraderie*.

He had lived in her shadow during the past month. No one thought anything of it. Many had predicted that Robert would devote himself to Mrs. Pontellier when he arrived. Since the age of fifteen, which was eleven years before, Robert each summer at Grand Isle had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman.

For two consecutive seasons he lived in the sunlight of Mademoiselle Duvigné's presence. But she died between summers; then Robert posed as an inconsolable, prostrating himself at the feet of Madame Ratignolle for whatever crumbs of sympathy and comfort she might be pleased to vouchsafe.

Mrs. Pontellier liked to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna.

"Could any one fathom the cruelty beneath that fair exterior?" murmured Robert. "She knew that I adored her once, and she let me adore her. It was 'Robert, come; go; stand up; sit down; do this; do that; see if the baby sleeps; my thimble, please, that I left God knows where. Come and read Daudet² to me while I sew.'"

"*Par exemple!*³ I never had to ask. You were always there under my feet, like a troublesome cat."

"You mean like an adoring dog. And just as soon as Ratignolle appeared on the scene, then it *was* like a dog, '*Passez! Adieu! Allez vous-en!*'"⁴

"Perhaps I feared to make Alphonse jealous," she interjoined, with excessive naïveté. That made them all laugh. The right hand jealous of the left! The heart jealous of the soul! But for that matter, the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse.

Meanwhile Robert, addressing Mrs. Pontellier, continued to tell of his one time hopeless passion for Madame Ratignolle; of sleepless nights, of consuming flames till the very sea sizzled when he took his daily plunge. While the lady at the needle kept up a little running, contemptuous comment:

2. Alphonse Daudet (1840–1887), French novelist.

3. Literally, "for example" (French); here, "For

goodness' sake!"

4. Go on! Good-bye! Go away! (French).

*"Blagueur—farceur—gros bête, va!"*⁵

He never assumed this serio-comic tone when alone with Mrs. Pontellier. She never knew precisely what to make of it; at that moment it was impossible for her to guess how much of it was jest and what proportion was earnest. It was understood that he had often spoken words of love to Madame Ratignolle, without any thought of being taken seriously. Mrs. Pontellier was glad he had not assumed a similar rôle toward herself. It would have been unacceptable and annoying.

Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.

She had long wished to try herself on Madame Ratignolle. Never had that lady seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color.

Robert crossed over and seated himself upon the step below Mrs. Pontellier, that he might watch her work. She handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which came, not from long and close acquaintance with them, but from a natural aptitude. Robert followed her work with close attention, giving forth little ejaculatory expressions of appreciation in French, which he addressed to Madame Ratignolle.

*"Mais ce n'est pas mal! Elle s'y connaît, elle a de la force, oui."*⁶

During his oblivious attention he once quietly rested his head against Mrs. Pontellier's arm. As gently she repulsed him. Once again he repeated the offense. She could not but believe it to be thoughtlessness on his part; yet that was no reason she should submit to it. She did not remonstrate, except again to repulse him quietly but firmly. He offered no apology.

The picture completed bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle. She was greatly disappointed to find that it did not look like her. But it was a fair enough piece of work, and in many respects satisfying.

Mrs. Pontellier evidently did not think so. After surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface, and crumpled the paper between her hands.

The youngsters came tumbling up the steps, the quadrone following at the respectful distance which they required her to observe. Mrs. Pontellier made them carry her paints and things into the house. She sought to detain them for a little talk and some pleasantry. But they were greatly in earnest. They had only come to investigate the contents of the bonbon box. They accepted without murmuring what she chose to give them, each holding out two chubby hands scoop-like, in the vain hope that they might be filled; and then away they went.

The sun was low in the west, and the breeze soft and languorous that came up from the south, charged with the seductive odor of the sea. Children, freshly befurbeled,⁷ were gathering for their games under the oaks. Their voices were high and penetrating.

Madame Ratignolle folded her sewing, placing thimble, scissors and thread all neatly together in the roll, which she pinned securely. She complained of

5. Liar—joker—silly, come off it! (French).

6. Not bad at all! She knows what she's doing,

she has talent (French).

7. Dressed up in petticoats.

faintness. Mrs. Pontellier flew for the cologne water and a fan. She bathed Madame Ratignolle's face with cologne, while Robert plied the fan with unnecessary vigor.

The spell was soon over, and Mrs. Pontellier could not help wondering if there were not a little imagination responsible for its origin, for the rose tint had never faded from her friend's face.

She stood watching the fair woman walk down the long line of galleries with the grace and majesty which queens are sometimes supposed to possess. Her little ones ran to meet her. Two of them clung about her white skirts, the third she took from its nurse and with a thousand endearments bore it along in her own fond, encircling arms. Though, as everybody well knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin!

"Are you going bathing?" asked Robert of Mrs. Pontellier. It was not so much a question as a reminder.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a tone of indecision. "I'm tired; I think not." Her glance wandered from his face away toward the Gulf, whose sonorous murmur reached her like a loving but imperative entreaty.

"Oh, come!" he insisted. "You mustn't miss your bath. Come on. The water must be delicious; it will not hurt you. Come."

He reached up for her big, rough straw hat that hung on a peg outside the door, and put it on her head. They descended the steps, and walked away together toward the beach. The sun was low in the west and the breeze was soft and warm.

VI

Edna Pontellier could not have told why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, and in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her.

A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,—the light which, showing the way, forbids it.

At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight—perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman.

But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

VII

Mrs. Pontellier was not a woman given to confidences, a characteristic hitherto contrary to her nature. Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.

That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her. There may have been—there must have been—influences, both subtle and apparent, working in their several ways to induce her to do this; but the most obvious was the influence of Adèle Ratignolle. The excessive physical charm of the Creole had first attracted her, for Edna had a sensuous susceptibility to beauty. Then the candor of the woman's whole existence, which every one might read, and which formed so striking a contrast to her own habitual reserve—this might have furnished a link. Who can tell what metals the gods use in forging the subtle bond which we call sympathy, which we might as well call love.

The two women went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm, under the huge white sunshade. Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind, though she could not induce her to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework, which Adèle begged to be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert.

The walk to the beach was no inconsiderable one, consisting as it did of a long, sandy path, upon which a sporadic and tangled growth that bordered it on either side made frequent and unexpected inroads. There were acres of yellow camomile reaching out on either hand. Further away still, vegetable gardens abounded, with frequent small plantations of orange or lemon trees intervening. The dark green clusters glistened from afar in the sun.

The women were both of goodly height, Madame Ratignolle possessing the more feminine and matronly figure. The charm of Edna Pontellier's physique stole insensibly upon you. The lines of her body were long, clean and symmetrical; it was a body which occasionally fell into splendid poses; there was no suggestion of the trim, stereotyped fashion-plate about it. A casual and indiscriminating observer, in passing, might not cast a second glance upon the figure. But with more feeling and discernment he would have recognized the noble beauty of its modeling, and the graceful severity of poise and movement, which made Edna Pontellier different from the crowd.

She wore a cool muslin that morning—white, with a waving vertical line of brown running through it; also a white linen collar and the big straw hat which she had taken from the peg outside the door. The hat rested any way on her yellow-brown hair, that waved a little, was heavy, and clung close to her head.

Madame Ratignolle, more careful of her complexion, had twined a gauze veil about her head. She wore doeskin gloves, white gauntlets that protected her wrists. She was dressed in pure white, with a fluffiness of ruffles that became her. The draperies and fluttering things which she wore suited her rich, luxuriant beauty as a greater severity of line could not have done.

There were a number of bath-houses along the beach, of rough but solid construction, built with small, protecting galleries facing the water. Each

house consisted of two compartments, and each family at Lebrun's possessed a compartment for itself, fitted out with all the essential paraphernalia of the bath and whatever other conveniences the owners might desire. The two women had no intention of bathing; they had just strolled down to the beach for a walk and to be alone and near the water. The Pontellier and Ratignolle compartments adjoined one another under the same roof.

Mrs. Pontellier had brought down her key through force of habit. Unlocking the door of her bath-room she went inside, and soon emerged, bringing a rug,⁸ which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and two huge hair pillows covered with crash,⁹ which she placed against the front of the building.

The two seated themselves there in the shade of the porch, side by side, with their backs against the pillows and their feet extended. Madame Ratignolle removed her veil, wiped her face with a rather delicate handkerchief, and fanned herself with the fan which she always carried suspended somewhere about her person by a long, narrow ribbon. Edna removed her collar and opened her dress at the throat. She took the fan from Madame Ratignolle and began to fan both herself and her companion. It was very warm, and for a while they did nothing but exchange remarks about the heat, the sun, the glare. But there was a breeze blowing, a choppy stiff wind that whipped the water into froth. It fluttered the skirts of the two women and kept them for a while engaged in adjusting, readjusting, tucking in, securing hair-pins and hat-pins. A few persons were sporting some distance away in the water. The beach was very still of human sound at that hour. The lady in black was reading her morning devotions on the porch of a neighboring bath-house. Two young lovers were exchanging their hearts' yearnings beneath the children's tent, which they had found unoccupied.

Edna Pontellier, casting her eyes about had finally kept them at rest upon the sea. The day was clear and carried the gaze out as far as the blue sky went; there were a few white clouds suspended idly over the horizon. A lateen¹ sail was visible in the direction of Cat Island, and others to the south seemed almost motionless in the far distance.

"Of whom—of what are you thinking?" asked Adèle of her companion, whose countenance she had been watching with a little amused attention, arrested by the absorbed expression which seemed to have seized and fixed every feature into a statuesque repose.

"Nothing," returned Mrs. Pontellier, with a start, adding at once: "How stupid! But it seems to me it is the reply we make instinctively to such a question. Let me see," she went on, throwing back her head and narrowing her fine eyes till they shone like two vivid points of light. "Let me see. I was really not conscious of thinking of anything; but perhaps I can retrace my thoughts."

"Oh! never mind!" laughed Madame Ratignolle. "I am not quite so exacting. I will let you off this time. It is really too hot to think, especially to think about thinking."

"But for the fun of it," persisted Edna. "First of all, the sight of the water stretching so far away, those motionless sails against the blue sky, made a delicious picture that I just wanted to sit and look at. The hot wind beating

8. Blanket.

9. Heavy linen fabric.

1. Triangular sail extended by a long spar that is slung to a usually low mast.

in my face made me think—without any connection that I can trace—of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. Oh, I see the connection now!”

“Where were you going that day in Kentucky, walking through the grass?”

“I don’t remember now. I was just walking diagonally across a big field. My sun-bonnet obstructed the view. I could see only the stretch of green before me, and I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don’t remember whether I was frightened or pleased. I must have been entertained.

“Likely as not it was Sunday,” she laughed; “and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of.”

“And have you been running away from prayers ever since, *ma chère*?” asked Madame Ratignolle, amused.

“No! oh, no!” Edna hastened to say. “I was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question. On the contrary, during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve and until—until—why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it—just driven along by habit. But do you know,” she broke off, turning her quick eyes upon Madame Ratignolle and leaning forward a little so as to bring her face quite close to that of her companion, “sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided.”

Madame Ratignolle laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier, which was near her. Seeing that the hand was not withdrawn, she clasped it firmly and warmly. She even stroked it a little, fondly, with the other hand, murmuring in an undertone, “*Pauvre chérie*.”²

The action was at first a little confusing to Edna, but she soon lent herself readily to the Creole’s gentle caress. She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others. She and her younger sister, Janet, had quarreled a good deal through force of unfortunate habit. Her older sister, Margaret, was matronly and dignified, probably from having assumed matronly and house-wifely responsibilities too early in life, their mother having died when they were quite young. Margaret was not effusive; she was practical. Edna had had an occasional girl friend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type—the self-contained. She never realized that the reserve of her own character had much, perhaps everything, to do with this. Her most intimate friend at school had been one of rather exceptional intellectual gifts, who wrote fine-sounding essays, which Edna admired and strove to imitate; and with her she talked and glowed over the English classics, and sometimes held religious and political controversies.

Edna often wondered at one propensity which sometimes had inwardly disturbed her without causing any outward show or manifestation on her part. At a very early age—perhaps it was when she traversed the ocean of waving grass—she remembered that she had been passionately enamored

2. Poor dear (French).

of a dignified and sad-eyed cavalry officer who visited her father in Kentucky. She could not leave his presence when he was there, nor remove her eyes from his face, which was something like Napoleon's, with a lock of black hair falling across the forehead. But the cavalry officer melted imperceptibly out of her existence.

At another time her affections were deeply engaged by a young gentleman who visited a lady on a neighboring plantation. It was after they went to Mississippi to live. The young man was engaged to be married to the young lady, and they sometimes called upon Margaret, driving over of afternoons in a buggy. Edna was a little miss, just merging into her teens; and the realization that she herself was nothing, nothing, nothing to the engaged young man was a bitter affliction to her. But he, too, went the way of dreams.

She was a grown young woman when she was overtaken by what she supposed to be the climax of her fate. It was when the face and figure of a great tragedian³ began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses. The persistence of the infatuation lent it an aspect of genuineness. The hopelessness of it colored it with the lofty tones of a great passion.

The picture of the tragedian stood enframed upon her desk. Any one may possess the portrait of a tragedian without exciting suspicion or comment. (This was a sinister reflection which she cherished.) In the presence of others she expressed admiration for his exalted gifts, as she handed the photograph around and dwelt upon the fidelity of the likeness. When alone she sometimes picked it up and kissed the cold glass passionately.

Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and an ardor which left nothing to be desired. He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. Add to this the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic, and we need seek no further for the motives which led her to accept Monsieur Pontellier for her husband.

The acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian, was not for her in this world. As the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her, she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams.

But it was not long before the tragedian had gone to join the cavalry officer and the engaged young man and a few others; and Edna found herself face to face with the realities. She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution.

She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense

3. Perhaps Edwin Booth (1833–1893), the Shakespearean actor particularly acclaimed for his Hamlet.

longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her.

Edna did not reveal so much as all this to Madame Ratignolle that summer day when they sat with faces turned to the sea. But a good part of it escaped her. She had put her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder. She was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom.

There was the sound of approaching voices. It was Robert, surrounded by a troop of children, searching for them. The two little Pontelliers were with him, and he carried Madame Ratignolle's little girl in his arms. There were other children beside, and two nursemaids followed, looking disagreeable and resigned.

The women at once rose and began to shake out their draperies and relax their muscles. Mrs. Pontellier threw the cushions and rug into the bathhouse. The children all scampered off to the awning, and they stood there in a line, gazing upon the intruding lovers, still exchanging their vows and sighs. The lovers got up, with only a silent protest, and walked slowly away somewhere else.

The children possessed themselves of the tent, and Mrs. Pontellier went over to join them.

Madame Ratignolle begged Robert to accompany her to the house; she complained of cramp in her limbs and stiffness of the joints. She leaned draggingly upon his arm as they walked.

VIII

"Do me a favor, Robert," spoke the pretty woman at his side, almost as soon as she and Robert had started on their slow, homeward way. She looked up in his face, leaning on his arm beneath the encircling shadow of the umbrella which he had lifted.

"Granted; as many as you like," he returned, glancing down into her eyes that were full of thoughtfulness and some speculation.

"I only ask for one; let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, with a sudden, boyish laugh. "*Voilà que Madame Ratignolle est jalouse!*"⁴

"Nonsense! I'm in earnest; I mean what I say. Let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

"Why?" he asked; himself growing serious at his companion's solicitation.

"She is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously."

His face flushed with annoyance, and taking off his soft hat he began to beat it impatiently against his leg as he walked. "Why shouldn't she take me seriously?" he demanded sharply. "Am I a comedian, a clown, a jack-in-the-box? Why shouldn't she? You Creoles! I have no patience with you! Am I always to be regarded as a feature of an amusing programme? I hope Mrs. Pontellier does take me seriously. I hope she has discernment enough to find in me something besides the *blagueur*.⁵ If I thought there was any doubt—"

4. So, Madame Ratignolle is jealous! (French).

5. Bluffer, faker (French).

"Oh, enough, Robert!" she broke into his heated outburst. "You are not thinking of what you are saying. You speak with about as little reflection as we might expect from one of those children down there playing in the sand. If your attentions to any married women here were ever offered with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the gentleman we all know you to be, and you would be unfit to associate with the wives and daughters of the people who trust you."

Madame Ratignolle had spoken what she believed to be the law and the gospel. The young man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Oh! well! That isn't it," slamming his hat down vehemently upon his head. "You ought to feel that such things are not flattering to say to a fellow."

"Should our whole intercourse consist of an exchange of compliments? *Ma foi!*"⁶

"It isn't pleasant to have a woman tell you—" he went on, unheedingly, but breaking off suddenly: "Now if I were like Arobin—you remember Alcée Arobin and that story of the consul's wife at Biloxi?"⁷ And he related the story of Alcée Arobin and the consul's wife; and another about the tenor of the French Opera,⁸ who received letters which should never have been written; and still other stories, grave and gay, till Mrs. Pontellier and her possible propensity for taking young men seriously was apparently forgotten.

Madame Ratignolle, when they had regained her cottage, went in to take the hour's rest which she considered helpful. Before leaving her, Robert begged her pardon for the impatience—he called it rudeness—with which he had received her well-meant caution.

"You made one mistake, Adèle," he said, with a light smile; "there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking me seriously. You should have warned me against taking myself seriously. Your advice might then have carried some weight and given me subject for some reflection. *Au revoir*. But you look tired," he added, solicitously. "Would you like a cup of bouillon? Shall I stir you a toddy? Let me mix you a toddy with a drop of Angostura."⁹

She acceded to the suggestion of bouillon, which was grateful and acceptable. He went himself to the kitchen, which was a building apart from the cottages and lying to the rear of the house. And he himself brought her the golden-brown bouillon, in a dainty Sèvres¹ cup, with a flaky cracker or two on the saucer.

She thrust a bare, white arm from the curtain which shielded her open door, and received the cup from his hands. She told him he was a *bon garçon*,² and she meant it. Robert thanked her and turned away toward "the house."

The lovers were just entering the grounds of the *pension*. They were leaning toward each other as the water-oaks bent from the sea. There was not a particle of earth beneath their feet. Their heads might have been turned upside-down, so absolutely did they tread upon blue ether. The lady in black, creeping behind them, looked a trifle paler and more jaded than usual. There was no sign of Mrs. Pontellier and the children. Robert scanned the distance for any such apparition. They would doubtless remain away till the dinner hour. The young man ascended to his mother's room. It was situated at the top of the

6. For heaven's sake! (French).

7. A coastal resort town in Mississippi near New Orleans.

8. The French Opera in New Orleans.

9. Aromatic bitters.

1. Fine porcelain made in Sèvres, France.

2. The French phrase means both "good guy" and "good waiter."

house, made up of odd angles and a queer, sloping ceiling. Two broad dormer windows looked out toward the Gulf, and as far across it as a man's eye might reach. The furnishings of the room were light, cool, and practical.

Madame Lebrun was busily engaged at the sewing-machine. A little black girl sat on the floor, and with her hands worked the treadle of the machine. The Creole woman does not take any chances which may be avoided of imperiling her health.

Robert went over and seated himself on the broad sill of one of the dormer windows. He took a book from his pocket and began energetically to read it, judging by the precision and frequency with which he turned the leaves. The sewing-machine made a resounding clatter in the room; it was of a ponderous, by-gone make. In the lulls, Robert and his mother exchanged bits of desultory conversation.

"Where is Mrs. Pontellier?"

"Down at the beach with the children."

"I promised to lend her the Goncourt.³ Don't forget to take it down when you go; it's there on the bookshelf over the small table." Clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! for the next five or eight minutes.

"Where is Victor going with the rockaway?"

"The rockaway? Victor?"

"Yes; down there in front. He seems to be getting ready to drive away somewhere."

"Call him." Clatter, clatter!

Robert uttered a shrill, piercing whistle which might have been heard back at the wharf.

"He won't look up."

Madame Lebrun flew to the window. She called "Victor!" She waved a handkerchief and called again. The young fellow below got into the vehicle and started the horse off at a gallop.

Madame Lebrun went back to the machine, crimson with annoyance. Victor was the younger son and brother—a *tête montée*,⁴ with a temper which invited violence and a will which no ax could break.

"Whenever you say the word I'm ready to thrash any amount of reason into him that he's able to hold."

"If your father had only lived!" Clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! It was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life.

"What do you hear from Montel?" Montel was a middle-aged gentleman whose vain ambition and desire for the past twenty years had been to fill the void which Monsieur Lebrun's taking off had left in the Lebrun household. Clatter, clatter, bang, clatter!

"I have a letter somewhere," looking in the machine drawer and finding the letter in the bottom of the work-basket. "He says to tell you he will be in Vera Cruz⁵ the beginning of next month"—clatter, clatter!—"and if you still have the intention of joining him"—bang! clatter, clatter, bang!

3. Novel by the French writer Edmond de Goncourt (1822–1896).

4. Impulsive character (French).

5. City in the state of Vera Cruz, Mexico, on the Gulf of Mexico.

“Why didn’t you tell me so before, mother? You know I wanted—” Clatter, clatter, clatter!

“Do you see Mrs. Pontellier starting back with the children? She will be in late to luncheon again. She never starts to get ready for luncheon till the last minute.” Clatter, clatter! “Where are you going?”

“Where did you say the Goncourt was?”

IX

Every light in the hall was ablaze; every lamp turned as high as it could be without smoking the chimney or threatening explosion. The lamps were fixed at intervals against the wall, encircling the whole room. Some one had gathered orange and lemon branches and with these fashioned graceful festoons between. The dark green of the branches stood out and glistened against the white muslin curtains which draped the windows, and which puffed, floated, and flapped at the capricious will of a stiff breeze that swept up from the Gulf.

It was Saturday night a few weeks after the intimate conversation held between Robert and Madame Ratignolle on their way from the beach. An unusual number of husbands, fathers, and friends had come down to stay over Sunday; and they were being suitably entertained by their families, with the material help of Madame Lebrun. The dining tables had all been removed to one end of the hall, and the chairs ranged about in rows and in clusters. Each little family group had had its say and exchanged its domestic gossip earlier in the evening. There was now an apparent disposition to relax; to widen the circle of confidences and give a more general tone to the conversation.

Many of the children had been permitted to sit up beyond their usual bedtime. A small band of them were lying on their stomachs on the floor looking at the colored sheets of the comic papers which Mr. Pontellier had brought down. The little Pontellier boys were permitting them to do so, and making their authority felt.

Music, dancing, and a recitation or two were the entertainments furnished, or rather, offered. But there was nothing systematic about the programme, no appearance of prearrangement nor even premeditation.

At an early hour in the evening the Farival twins were prevailed upon to play the piano. They were girls of fourteen, always clad in the Virgin’s colors, blue and white, having been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin at their baptism. They played a duet from “Zampa,” and at the earnest solicitation of every one present followed it with the overture to “The Poet and the Peasant.”⁶

“*Allez vous-en! Sapristi!*” shrieked the parrot outside the door. He was the only being present who possessed sufficient candor to admit that he was not listening to these gracious performances for the first time that summer. Old Monsieur Farival, grandfather of the twins, grew indignant over the interruption, and insisted upon having the bird removed and consigned to regions of darkness. Victor Lebrun objected; and his decrees were as immutable as those of Fate. The parrot fortunately offered no further interruption to the

6. Comic operetta by Austrian composer Franz von Suppé (1819–1895).

entertainment, the whole venom of his nature apparently having been cherished up and hurled against the twins in that one impetuous outburst.

Later a young brother and sister gave recitations, which every one present had heard many times at winter evening entertainments in the city.

A little girl performed a skirt dance in the center of the floor. The mother played her accompaniments and at the same time watched her daughter with greedy admiration and nervous apprehension. She need have had no apprehension. The child was mistress of the situation. She had been properly dressed for the occasion in black tulle and black silk tights. Her little neck and arms were bare, and her hair, artificially crimped, stood out like fluffy black plumes over her head. Her poses were full of grace, and her little black-shod toes twinkled as they shot out and upward with a rapidity and a suddenness which were bewildering.

But there was no reason why every one should not dance. Madame Ratignolle could not, so it was she who gaily consented to play for the others. She played very well, keeping excellent waltz time and infusing an expression into the strains which was indeed inspiring. She was keeping up her music on account of the children, she said; because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive.

Almost every one danced but the twins, who could not be induced to separate during the brief period when one or the other should be whirling around the room in the arms of a man. They might have danced together, but they did not think of it.

The children were sent to bed. Some went submissively; others with shrieks and protests as they were dragged away. They had been permitted to sit up till after the ice-cream, which naturally marked the limit of human indulgence.

The ice-cream was passed around with cake—gold and silver cake arranged on platters in alternate slices; it had been made and frozen during the afternoon back of the kitchen by two black women, under the supervision of Victor. It was pronounced a great success—excellent if it had only contained a little less vanilla or a little more sugar, if it had been frozen a degree harder, and if the salt might have been kept out of portions of it. Victor was proud of his achievement, and went about recommending it and urging every one to partake of it to excess.

After Mrs. Pontellier had danced twice with her husband, once with Robert, and once with Monsieur Ratignolle, who was thin and tall and swayed like a reed in the wind when he danced, she went out on the gallery and seated herself on the low window-sill, where she commanded a view of all that went on in the hall and could look out toward the Gulf. There was a soft effulgence in the east. The moon was coming up, and its mystic shimmer was casting a million lights across the distant, restless water.

“Would you like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play?” asked Robert, coming out on the porch where she was. Of course Edna would like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play; but she feared it would be useless to entreat her.

“I’ll ask her,” he said. “I’ll tell her that you want to hear her. She likes you. She will come.” He turned and hurried away to one of the far cottages, where Mademoiselle Reisz was shuffling away. She was dragging a chair in and out of her room, and at intervals objecting to the crying of a baby, which a nurse

in the adjoining cottage was endeavoring to put to sleep. She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others. Robert prevailed upon her without any too great difficulty.

She entered the hall with him during a lull in the dance. She made an awkward, imperious little bow as she went in. She was a homely woman, with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed. She had absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a batch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair.

"Ask Mrs. Pontellier what she would like to hear me play," she requested of Robert. She sat perfectly still before the piano, not touching the keys, while Robert carried her message to Edna at the window. A general air of surprise and genuine satisfaction fell upon every one as they saw the pianist enter. There was a settling down, and a prevailing air of expectancy everywhere. Edna was a trifle embarrassed at being thus signaled out for the imperious little woman's favor. She would not dare to choose, and begged that Mademoiselle Reisz would please herself in her selections.

Edna was what she herself called very fond of music. Musical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in her mind. She sometimes liked to sit in the room of mornings when Madame Ratignolle played or practiced. One piece which that lady played Edna had entitled "Solitude."⁷ It was a short, plaintive, minor strain. The name of the piece was something else, but she called it "Solitude." When she heard it there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him.

Another piece called to her mind a dainty young woman clad in an Empire gown, taking mincing dancing steps as she came down a long avenue between tall hedges. Again, another reminded her of children at play, and still another of nothing on earth but a demure lady stroking a cat.

The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth.

She waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her.

Mademoiselle had finished. She arose, and bowing her stiff, lofty bow, she went away, stopping for neither thanks nor applause. As she passed along the gallery she patted Edna upon the shoulder.

"Well, how did you like my music?" she asked. The young woman was unable to answer; she pressed the hand of the pianist convulsively. Mademoiselle Reisz perceived her agitation and even her tears. She patted her again upon the shoulder as she said:

7. Probably the Prelude in E Minor (op. 28, no. 4), by Polish composer Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849).

"You are the only one worth playing for. Those others? Bah!" and she went shuffling and sidling on down the gallery toward her room.

But she was mistaken about "those others." Her playing had aroused a fever of enthusiasm. "What passion!" "What an artist!" "I have always said no one could play Chopin like Mademoiselle Reisz!" "That last prelude! Bon Dieu! It shakes a man!"

It was growing late, and there was a general disposition to disband. But some one, perhaps it was Robert, thought of a bath⁸ at that mystic hour and under that mystic moon.

X

At all events Robert proposed it, and there was not a dissenting voice. There was not one but was ready to follow when he led the way. He did not lead the way, however, he directed the way; and he himself loitered behind with the lovers, who had betrayed a disposition to linger and hold themselves apart. He walked between them, whether with malicious or mischievous intent was not wholly clear, even to himself.

The Pontelliers and Ratignolles walked ahead; the women leaning upon the arms of their husbands. Edna could hear Robert's voice behind them, and could sometimes hear what he said. She wondered why he did not join them. It was unlike him not to. Of late he had sometimes held away from her for an entire day, redoubling his devotion upon the next and the next, as though to make up for hours that had been lost. She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from her, just as one misses the sun on a cloudy day without having thought much about the sun when it was shining.

The people walked in little groups toward the beach. They talked and laughed; some of them sang. There was a band playing down at Klein's hotel, and the strains reached them faintly, tempered by the distance. There were strange, rare odors abroad—a tangle of the sea smell and of weeds and damp, new-plowed earth, mingled with the heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms somewhere near. But the night sat lightly upon the sea and the land. There was no weight of darkness; there were no shadows. The white light of the moon had fallen upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep.

Most of them walked into the water as though into a native element. The sea was quiet now, and swelled lazily in broad billows that melted into one another and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents.

Edna had attempted all summer to learn to swim. She had received instructions from both the men and women; in some instances from the children. Robert had pursued a system of lessons almost daily; and he was nearly at the point of discouragement in realizing the futility of his efforts. A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her.

But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water.

8. Swim.

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.

Her unlooked-for achievement was the subject of wonder, applause, and admiration. Each one congratulated himself that his special teachings had accomplished this desired end.

"How easy it is!" she thought. "It is nothing," she said aloud; "why did I not discover before that it was nothing. Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby!" She would not join the groups in their sports and bouts, but intoxicated with her newly conquered power, she swam out alone.

She turned her face seaward to gather in an impression of space and solitude, which the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky, conveyed to her excited fancy. As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself.

Once she turned and looked toward the shore, toward the people she had left there. She had not gone any great distance—that is, what would have been a great distance for an experienced swimmer. But to her unaccustomed vision the stretch of water behind her assumed the aspect of a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome.

A quick vision of death smote her soul, and for a second of time appalled and enfeebled her senses. But by an effort she rallied her staggering faculties and managed to regain the land.

She made no mention of her encounter with death and her flash of terror, except to say to her husband, "I thought I should have perished out there alone."

"You were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you," he told her.

Edna went at once to the bath-house, and she had put on her dry clothes and was ready to return home before the others had left the water. She started to walk away alone. They all called to her and shouted to her. She waved a dissenting hand, and went on, paying no further heed to their renewed cries which sought to detain her.

"Sometimes I am tempted to think that Mrs. Pontellier is capricious," said Madame Lebrun, who was amusing herself immensely and feared that Edna's abrupt departure might put an end to the pleasure.

"I know she is," assented Mr. Pontellier; "sometimes, not often."

Edna had not traversed a quarter of the distance on her way home before she was overtaken by Robert.

"Did you think I was afraid?" she asked him, without a shade of annoyance.

"No; I knew you weren't afraid."

"Then why did you come? Why didn't you stay out there with the others?"

"I never thought of it."

"Thought of what?"

"Of anything. What difference does it make?"

"I'm very tired," she uttered, complainingly.

"I know you are."

"You don't know anything about it. Why should you know? I never was so exhausted in my life. But it isn't unpleasant. A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them. Don't mind what I'm saying; I am just thinking aloud. I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz's playing moved me to-night. I wonder if any night on

earth will ever again be like this one. It is like a night in a dream. The people about me are like some uncanny, half-human beings. There must be spirits abroad to-night."

"There are," whispered Robert. "Didn't you know this was the twenty-eighth of August?"

"The twenty-eighth of August?"

"Yes. On the twenty-eighth of August, at the hour of midnight, and if the moon is shining—the moon must be shining—a spirit that has haunted these shores for ages rises up from the Gulf. With its own penetrating vision the spirit seeks some one mortal worthy to hold him company, worthy of being exalted for a few hours into realms of the semi-celestials. His search has always hitherto been fruitless, and he has sunk back, disheartened, into the sea. But to-night he found Mrs. Pontellier. Perhaps he will never wholly release her from the spell. Perhaps she will never again suffer a poor, unworthy earthling to walk in the shadow of her divine presence."

"Don't banter me," she said, wounded at what appeared to be his flippancy. He did not mind the entreaty, but the tone with its delicate note of pathos was like a reproach. He could not explain; he could not tell her that he had penetrated her mood and understood. He said nothing except to offer her his arm, for, by her own admission, she was exhausted. She had been walking alone with her arms hanging limp, letting her white skirts trail along the dewy path. She took his arm, but she did not lean upon it. She let her hand lie listlessly, as though her thoughts were elsewhere—somewhere in advance of her body, and she was striving to overtake them.

Robert assisted her into the hammock which swung from the post before her door out to the trunk of a tree.

"Will you stay out here and wait for Mr. Pontellier?" he asked.

"I'll stay out here. Good-night."

"Shall I get you a pillow?"

"There's one here," she said, feeling about, for they were in the shadow.

"It must be soiled; the children have been tumbling it about."

"No matter." And having discovered the pillow, she adjusted it beneath her head. She extended herself in the hammock with a deep breath of relief. She was not a supercilious or an over-dainty woman. She was not much given to reclining in the hammock, and when she did so it was with no catlike suggestion of voluptuous ease, but with a beneficent repose which seemed to invade her whole body.

"Shall I stay with you till Mr. Pontellier comes?" asked Robert, seating himself on the outer edge of one of the steps and taking hold of the hammock rope which was fastened to the post.

"If you wish. Don't swing the hammock. Will you get my white shawl which I left on the window-sill over at the house?"

"Are you chilly?"

"No; but I shall be presently."

"Presently?" he laughed. "Do you know what time it is? How long are you going to stay out here?"

"I don't know. Will you get the shawl?"

"Of course I will," he said, rising. He went over to the house, walking along the grass. She watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight. It was past midnight. It was very quiet.

When he returned with the shawl she took it and kept it in her hand. She did not put it around her.

"Did you say I should stay till Mr. Pontellier came back?"

"I said you might if you wished to."

He seated himself again and rolled a cigarette, which he smoked in silence. Neither did Mrs. Pontellier speak. No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire.

When the voices of the bathers were heard approaching, Robert said good-night. She did not answer him. He thought she was asleep. Again she watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight as he walked away.

XI

"What are you doing out here, Edna? I thought I should find you in bed," said her husband, when he discovered her lying there. He had walked out with Madame Lebrun and left her at the house. His wife did not reply.

"Are you asleep?" he asked, bending down close to look at her.

"No." Her eyes gleamed bright and intense, with no sleepy shadows, as they looked into his.

"Do you know it is past one o'clock? Come on," and he mounted the steps and went into their room.

"Edna!" called Mr. Pontellier from within, after a few moments had gone by.

"Don't wait for me," she answered. He thrust his head through the door.

"You will take cold out there," he said, irritably. "What folly is this? Why don't you come in?"

"It isn't cold; I have my shawl."

"The mosquitoes will devour you."

"There are no mosquitoes."

She heard him moving about the room; every sound indicating impatience and irritation. Another time she would have gone in at his request. She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire; not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us.

"Edna, dear, are you not coming in soon?" he asked again, this time fondly, with a note of entreaty.

"No; I am going to stay out here."

"This is more than folly," he blurted out. "I can't permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly."

With a writhing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did.

"Léonce, go to bed," she said. "I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you."

Mr. Pontellier had prepared for bed, but he slipped on an extra garment. He opened a bottle of wine, of which he kept a small and select supply in a buffet of his own. He drank a glass of the wine and went out on the gallery and offered a glass to his wife. She did not wish any. He drew up the rocker, hoisted his slippers on the rail, and proceeded to smoke a cigar. He smoked two cigars; then he went inside and drank another glass of wine. Mrs. Pontellier again declined to accept a glass when it was offered to her. Mr. Pontellier once more seated himself with elevated feet, and after a reasonable interval of time smoked some more cigars.

Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream, to feel again the realities pressing into her soul. The physical need for sleep began to overtake her; the exuberance which had sustained and exalted her spirit left her helpless and yielding to the conditions which crowded her in.

The stillest hour of the night had come, the hour before dawn, when the world seems to hold its breath. The moon hung low, and had turned from silver to copper in the sleeping sky. The old owl no longer hooted, and the water-oaks had ceased to moan as they bent their heads.

Edna arose, cramped from lying so long and still in the hammock. She tottered up the steps, clutching feebly at the post before passing into the house.

"Are you coming in, Léonce?" She asked, turning her face toward her husband.

"Yes, dear," he answered, with a glance following a misty puff of smoke. "Just as soon as I have finished my cigar."

XII

She slept but a few hours. They were troubled and feverish hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible, that eluded her, leaving only an impression upon her half-awakened senses of something unattainable. She was up and dressed in the cool of the early morning. The air was invigorating and steadied somewhat her faculties. However, she was not seeking refreshment or help from any source, either external or from within. She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility.

Most of the people at that early hour were still in bed and asleep. A few, who intended to go over to the *Chênrière* for mass, were moving about. The lovers, who had laid their plans the night before, were already strolling toward the wharf. The lady in black, with her Sunday prayer book, velvet and gold-clasped, and her Sunday silver beads, was following them at no great distance. Old Monsieur Farival was up, and was more than half inclined to do anything that suggested itself. He put on his big straw hat, and taking his umbrella from the stand in the hall, followed the lady in black, never overtaking her.

The little negro girl who worked Madame Lebrun's sewing-machine was sweeping the galleries with long, absent-minded strokes of the broom. Edna sent her up into the house to awaken Robert.

"Tell him I am going to the *Chênrière*. The boat is ready; tell him to hurry."

He had soon joined her. She had never sent for him before. She had never asked for him. She had never seemed to want him before. She did not appear

conscious that she had done anything unusual in commanding his presence. He was apparently equally unconscious of anything extraordinary in the situation. But his face was suffused with a quiet glow when he met her.

They went together back to the kitchen to drink coffee. There was no time to wait for any nicety of service. They stood outside the window and the cook passed them their coffee and a roll, which they drank and ate from the window-sill. Edna said it tasted good. She had not thought of coffee nor of anything. He told her he had often noticed that she lacked forethought.

"Wasn't it enough to think of going to the *Chênrière* and waking you up?" she laughed. "Do I have to think of everything?—as Léonce says when he's in a bad humor. I don't blame him; he'd never be in a bad humor if it weren't for me."

They took a short cut across the sands. At a distance they could see the curious procession moving toward the wharf—the lovers, shoulder to shoulder, creeping; the lady in black, gaining steadily upon them; old Monsieur Farival, losing ground inch by inch, and a young barefooted Spanish girl, with a red kerchief on her head and a basket on her arm, bringing up the rear.

Robert knew the girl, and he talked to her a little in the boat. No one present understood what they said. Her name was Mariequita. She had a round, sly, piquant face and pretty black eyes. Her hands were small, and she kept them folded over the handle of her basket. Her feet were broad and coarse. She did not strive to hide them. Edna looked at her feet, and noticed the sand and slime between her brown toes.

Beaudelet grumbled because Mariequita was there, taking up so much room. In reality he was annoyed at having old Monsieur Farival, who considered himself the better sailor of the two. But he would not quarrel with so old a man as Monsieur Farival, so he quarreled with Mariequita. The girl was deprecatory at one moment, appealing to Robert. She was saucy the next, moving her head up and down, making "eyes" at Robert and making "mouths" at Beaudelet.

The lovers were all alone. They saw nothing, they heard nothing. The lady in black was counting her beads for the third time. Old Monsieur Farival talked incessantly of what he knew about handling a boat, and of what Beaudelet did not know on the same subject.

Edna liked it all. She looked Mariequita up and down, from her ugly brown toes to her pretty black eyes, and back again.

"Why does she look at me like that?" inquired the girl of Robert.

"Maybe she thinks you are pretty. Shall I ask her?"

"No. Is she your sweetheart?"

"She's a married lady, and has two children."

"Oh! well! Francisco ran away with Sylvano's wife, who had four children. They took all his money and one of the children and stole his boat."

"Shut up!"

"Does she understand?"

"Oh, hush!"

"Are those two married over there—leaning on each other?"

"Of course not," laughed Robert.

"Of course not," echoed Mariequita, with a serious, confirmatory bob of the head.

The sun was high up and beginning to bite. The swift breeze seemed to Edna to bury the sting of it into the pores of her face and hands. Robert held his umbrella over her.

As they went cutting sidewise through the water, the sails bellied taut, with the wind filling and overflowing them. Old Monsieur Farival laughed sardonically at something as he looked at the sails, and Beaufort swore at the old man under his breath.

Sailing across the bay to the *Chênière Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening—had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails. Robert spoke to her incessantly; he no longer noticed Mariequita. The girl had shrimps in her bamboo basket. They were covered with Spanish moss. She beat the moss impatiently, and muttered to herself sullenly.

“Let us go to Grande Terre⁹ to-morrow?” said Robert in a low voice.

“What shall we do there?”

“Climb up the hill to the old fort and look at the little wriggling gold snakes, and watch the lizards sun themselves.”

She gazed away toward Grande Terre and thought she would like to be alone there with Robert, in the sun, listening to the ocean’s roar and watching the slimy lizards writhe in and out among the ruins of the old fort.

“And the next day or the next we can sail to the Bayou Brulow,”¹¹ he went on.

“What shall we do there?”

“Anything—cast bait for fish.”

“No; we’ll go back to Grande Terre. Let the fish alone.”

“We’ll go wherever you like,” he said. “I’ll have Tonie come over and help me patch and trim my boat. We shall not need Beaufort nor any one. Are you afraid of the pirogue?”²

“Oh, no.”

“Then I’ll take you some night in the pirogue when the moon shines. Maybe your Gulf spirit will whisper to you in which of these islands the treasures are hidden—direct you to the very spot, perhaps.”

“And in a day we should be rich!” she laughed. “I’d give it all to you, the pirate gold and every bit of treasure we could dig up. I think you would know how to spend it. Pirate gold isn’t a thing to be hoarded or utilized. It is something to squander and throw to the four winds, for the fun of seeing the golden specks fly.”

“We’d share it, and scatter it together,” he said. His face flushed.

They all went together up to the quaint little Gothic church of Our Lady of Lourdes, gleaming all brown and yellow with paint in the sun’s glare.

Only Beaufort remained behind, tinkering at his boat, and Mariequita walked away with her basket of shrimps, casting a look of childish ill-humor and reproach at Robert from the corner of her eye.

9. An island adjacent to Grand Isle.

1. Bayou Brulow (or Bruleau) was the nearest to Grand Isle of a series of villages built on stilts or platforms in large marshy areas called *bayous*,

inhabited by Acadians, descendants of French Canadians expelled from Nova Scotia in 1755.

2. Canoe (French).

XIII

A feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service. Her head began to ache, and the lights on the altar swayed before her eyes. Another time she might have made an effort to regain her composure; but her one thought was to quit the stifling atmosphere of the church and reach the open air. She arose, climbing over Robert's feet with a muttered apology. Old Monsieur Farival, flurried, curious, stood up, but upon seeing that Robert had followed Mrs. Pontellier, he sank back into his seat. He whispered an anxious inquiry of the lady in black, who did not notice him or reply, but kept her eyes fastened upon the pages of her velvet prayer-book.

"I felt giddy and almost overcome," Edna said, lifting her hands instinctively to her head and pushing her straw hat up from her forehead. "I couldn't have stayed through the service." They were outside in the shadow of the church. Robert was full of solicitude.

"It was folly to have thought of going in the first place, let alone staying. Come over to Madame Antoine's; you can rest there." He took her arm and led her away, looking anxiously and continuously down into her face.

How still it was, with only the voice of the sea whispering through the reeds that grew in the salt-water pools! The long line of little gray, weather-beaten houses nestled peacefully among the orange trees. It must always have been God's day on that low, drowsy island, Edna thought. They stopped, leaning over a jagged fence made of sea-drift, to ask for water. A youth, a mild-faced Acadian, was drawing water from the cistern, which was nothing more than a rusty buoy, with an opening on one side, sunk in the ground. The water which the youth handed to them in a tin pail was not cold to taste, but it was cool to her heated face, and it greatly revived and refreshed her.

Madame Antoine's cot³ was at the far end of the village. She welcomed them with all the native hospitality, as she would have opened her door to let the sunlight in. She was fat, and walked heavily and clumsily across the floor. She could speak no English, but when Robert made her understand that the lady who accompanied him was ill and desired to rest, she was all eagerness to make Edna feel at home and to dispose of her comfortably.

The whole place was immaculately clean, and the big, four-posted bed, snow-white, invited one to repose. It stood in a small side room which looked out across a narrow grass plot toward the shed, where there was a disabled boat lying keel upward.

Madame Antoine had not gone to mass. Her son Tonie had, but she supposed he would soon be back, and she invited Robert to be seated and wait for him. But he went and sat outside the door and smoked. Madame Antoine busied herself in the large front room preparing dinner. She was boiling mullets⁴ over a few red coals in the huge fireplace.

Edna, left alone in the little side room, loosened her clothes, removing the greater part of them. She bathed her face, her neck and arms in the basin that stood between the windows. She took off her shoes and stockings and stretched herself in the very center of the high, white bed. How luxurious it felt to rest thus in a strange, quaint bed, with its sweet country odor of laurel lingering about the sheets and mattress! She stretched her strong limbs

3. Cottage.

4. Small fish.

that ached a little. She ran her fingers through her loosened hair for a while. She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh. She clasped her hands easily above her head, and it was thus she fell asleep.

She slept lightly at first, half awake and drowsily attentive to the things about her. She could hear Madame Antoine's heavy, scraping tread as she walked back and forth on the sanded floor. Some chickens were clucking outside the windows, scratching for bits of gravel in the grass. Later she half heard the voices of Robert and Tonie talking under the shed. She did not stir. Even her eyelids rested numb and heavily over her sleepy eyes. The voices went on—Tonie's slow, Acadian drawl, Robert's quick, soft, smooth French. She understood French imperfectly unless directly addressed, and the voices were only part of the other drowsy, muffled sounds lulling her senses.

When Edna awoke it was with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly. The voices were hushed under the shed. Madame Antoine's step was no longer to be heard in the adjoining room. Even the chickens had gone elsewhere to scratch and cluck. The mosquito bar was drawn over her; the old woman had come in while she slept and let down the bar. Edna arose quietly from the bed, and looking between the curtains of the window, she saw by the slanting rays of the sun that the afternoon was far advanced. Robert was out there under the shed, reclining in the shade against the sloping keel of the overturned boat. He was reading from a book. Tonie was no longer with him. She wondered what had become of the rest of the party. She peeped out at him two or three times as she stood washing herself in the little basin between the windows.

Madame Antoine had laid some coarse, clean towels upon a chair, and had placed a box of *poudre de riz*⁵ within easy reach. Edna dabbed the powder upon her nose and cheeks as she looked at herself closely in the little distorted mirror which hung on the wall above the basin. Her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed.

When she had completed her toilet she walked into the adjoining room. She was very hungry. No one was there. But there was a cloth spread upon the table that stood against the wall, and a cover was laid for one, with a crusty brown loaf and a bottle of wine beside the plate. Edna bit a piece from the brown loaf, tearing it with her strong, white teeth. She poured some of the wine into the glass and drank it down. Then she went softly out of doors, and plucking an orange from the low-hanging bough of a tree, threw it at Robert, who did not know she was awake and up.

An illumination broke over his whole face when he saw her and joined her under the orange tree.

"How many years have I slept?" she inquired. "The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics. How many ages ago did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? and when did our people from Grand Isle disappear from the earth?"

He familiarly adjusted a ruffle upon her shoulder.

"You have slept precisely one hundred years. I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed read-

5. Talcum powder (French).

ing a book. The only evil I couldn't prevent was to keep a broiled fowl from drying up."

"If it had turned to stone, still will I eat it," said Edna, moving with him into the house. "But really, what has become of Monsieur Farival and the others?"

"Gone hours ago. When they found that you were sleeping they thought it best not to awake you. Any way, I wouldn't have let them. What was I here for?"

"I wonder if Léonce will be uneasy!" she speculated, as she seated herself at table.

"Of course not; he knows you are with me," Robert replied, as he busied himself among sundry pans and covered dishes which had been left standing on the hearth.

"Where are Madame Antoine and her son?" asked Edna.

"Gone to Vespers,⁶ and to visit some friends, I believe. I am to take you back in Tonie's boat whenever you are ready to go."

He stirred the smoldering ashes till the broiled fowl began to sizzle afresh. He served her with no mean repast, dripping the coffee anew and sharing it with her. Madame Antoine had cooked little else than the mullets, but while Edna slept Robert had foraged the island. He was childishly gratified to discover her appetite, and to see the relish with which she ate the food which he had procured for her.

"Shall we go right away?" she asked, after draining her glass and brushing together the crumbs of the crusty loaf.

"The sun isn't as low as it will be in two hours," he answered.

"The sun will be gone in two hours."

"Well, let it go; who cares!"

They waited a good while under the orange trees, till Madame Antoine came back, panting, waddling, with a thousand apologies to explain her absence. Tonie did not dare to return. He was shy, and would not willingly face any woman except his mother.

It was very pleasant to stay there under the orange trees, while the sun dipped lower and lower, turning the western sky to flaming copper and gold. The shadows lengthened and crept out like stealthy, grotesque monsters across the grass.

Edna and Robert both sat upon the ground—that is, he lay upon the ground beside her, occasionally picking at the hem of her muslin gown.

Madame Antoine seated her fat body, broad and squat, upon a bench beside the door. She had been talking all the afternoon, and had wound herself up to the story-telling pitch.

And what stories she told them! But twice in her life she had left the *Chênrière Caminada*, and then for the briefest span. All her years she had squatted and waddled there upon the island, gathering legends of the Baratarians⁷ and the sea. The night came on, with the moon to lighten it. Edna could hear the whispering voices of dead men and the click of muffled gold.

When she and Robert stepped into Tonie's boat, with the red lateen sail, misty spirit forms were prowling in the shadows and among the reeds, and upon the water were phantom ships, speeding to cover.

6. Evening church service.

7. Pirates, most notably the legendary Jean

Lafitte (c. 1776–c. 1823), who operated in the area of Barataria Bay in southeastern Louisiana.

XIV

The youngest boy, Etienne, had been very naughty, Madame Ratignolle said, as she delivered him into the hands of his mother. He had been unwilling to go to bed and had made a scene; whereupon she had taken charge of him and pacified him as well as she could. Raoul had been in bed and asleep for two hours.

The youngster was in his long white nightgown, that kept tripping him up as Madame Ratignolle led him along by the hand. With the other chubby fist he rubbed his eyes, which were heavy with sleep and ill humor. Edna took him in her arms, and seating herself in the rocker, began to coddle and caress him, calling him all manner of tender names, soothing him to sleep.

It was not more than nine o'clock. No one had yet gone to bed but the children.

Léonce had been very uneasy at first, Madame Ratignolle said, and had wanted to start at once for the *Chênrière*. But Monsieur Farival had assured him that his wife was only overcome with sleep and fatigue, that Tonie would bring her safely back later in the day; and he had thus been dissuaded from crossing the bay. He had gone over to Klein's, looking up some cotton broker whom he wished to see in regard to securities, exchanges, stocks, bonds, or something of the sort, Madame Ratignolle did not remember what. He said he would not remain away late. She herself was suffering from heat and oppression, she said. She carried a bottle of salts and a large fan. She would not consent to remain with Edna, for Monsieur Ratignolle was alone, and he detested above all things to be left alone.

When Etienne had fallen asleep Edna bore him into the back room, and Robert went and lifted the mosquito bar that she might lay the child comfortably in his bed. The quadron had vanished. When they emerged from the cottage Robert bade Edna good-night.

"Do you know we have been together the whole livelong day, Robert—since early this morning?" she said at parting.

"All but the hundred years when you were sleeping. Good-night."

He pressed her hand and went away in the direction of the beach. He did not join any of the others, but walked alone toward the Gulf.

Edna stayed outside, awaiting her husband's return. She had no desire to sleep or to retire; nor did she feel like going over to sit with the Ratignolles, or to join Madame Lebrun and a group whose animated voices reached her as they sat in conversation before the house. She let her mind wander back over her stay at Grand Isle; and she tried to discover wherein this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life. She could only realize that she herself—her present self—was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect.

She wondered why Robert had gone away and left her. It did not occur to her to think he might have grown tired of being with her the livelong day. She was not tired, and she felt that he was not. She regretted that he had gone. It was so much more natural to have him stay, when he was not absolutely required to leave her.

As Edna waited for her husband she sang low a little song that Robert had sung as they crossed the bay. It began with “Ah! *Si tu savais*,” and every verse ended with “*si tu savais*.”⁸

Robert’s voice was not pretentious. It was musical and true. The voice, the notes, the whole refrain haunted her memory.

XV

When Edna entered the dining-room one evening a little late, as was her habit, an unusually animated conversation seemed to be going on. Several persons were talking at once, and Victor’s voice was predominating, even over that of his mother. Edna had returned late from her bath, had dressed in some haste, and her face was flushed. Her head, set off by her dainty white gown, suggested a rich, rare blossom. She took her seat at table between old Monsieur Farival and Madame Ratignolle.

As she seated herself and was about to begin to eat her soup, which had been served when she entered the room, several persons informed her simultaneously that Robert was going to Mexico. She laid her spoon down and looked about her bewildered. He had been with her, reading to her all the morning, and had never even mentioned such a place as Mexico. She had not seen him during the afternoon; she had heard some one say he was at the house, upstairs with his mother. This she had thought nothing of, though she was surprised when he did not join her later in the afternoon, when she went down to the beach.

She looked across at him, where he sat beside Madame Lebrun, who presided. Edna’s face was a blank picture of bewilderment, which she never thought of disguising. He lifted his eyebrows with the pretext of a smile as he returned her glance. He looked embarrassed and uneasy.

“When is he going?” she asked of everybody in general, as if Robert were not there to answer for himself.

“To-night!” “This very evening!” “Did you ever!” “What possesses him!” some of the replies she gathered, uttered simultaneously in French and English.

“Impossible!” she exclaimed. “How can a person start off from Grand Isle to Mexico at a moment’s notice, as if he were going over to Klein’s or to the wharf or down to the beach?”

“I said all along I was going to Mexico; I’ve been saying so for years!” cried Robert, in an excited and irritable tone, with the air of a man defending himself against a swarm of stinging insects.

Madame Lebrun knocked on the table with her knife handle.

“Please let Robert explain why he is going, and why he is going to-night,” she called out. “Really, this table is getting to be more and more like Bedlam⁹ every day, with everybody talking at once. Sometimes—I hope God will forgive me—but positively, sometimes I wish Victor would lose the power of speech.”

8. “Couldst Thou But Know” (French), a song written by Michael William Balfe (1808–1870), does not contain the quoted words.

9. Asylum in London for the insane; any such place of noise and confusion.

Victor laughed sardonically as he thanked his mother for her holy wish, of which he failed to see the benefit to anybody, except that it might afford her a more ample opportunity and license to talk herself.

Monsieur Farival thought that Victor should have been taken out in mid-ocean in his earliest youth and drowned. Victor thought there would be more logic in thus disposing of old people with an established claim for making themselves universally obnoxious. Madame Lebrun grew a trifle hysterical; Robert called his brother some sharp, hard names.

"There's nothing much to explain, mother," he said: though he explained, nevertheless—looking chiefly at Edna—that he could only meet the gentleman whom he intended to join at Vera Cruz by taking such and such a steamer, which left New Orleans on such a day; that Beaudelet was going out with his lugger-load of vegetables that night, which gave him an opportunity of reaching the city and making his vessel in time.

"But when did you make up your mind to all this?" demanded Monsieur Farival.

"This afternoon," returned Robert, with a shade of annoyance.

"At what time this afternoon?" persisted the old gentleman, with nagging determination, as if he were cross-questioning a criminal in a court of justice.

"At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Farival," Robert replied, in a high voice and with a lofty air, which reminded Edna of some gentleman on the stage.

She had forced herself to eat most of her soup, and now she was picking the flaky bits of a *court bouillon*¹ with her fork.

The lovers were profiting by the general conversation on Mexico to speak in whispers of matters which they rightly considered were interesting to no one but themselves. The lady in black had once received a pair of prayer-beads of curious workmanship from Mexico, with very special indulgence² attached to them, but she had never been able to ascertain whether the indulgence extended outside the Mexican border. Father Fochel of the Cathedral had attempted to explain it; but he had not done so to her satisfaction. And she begged that Robert would interest himself, and discover, if possible, whether she was entitled to the indulgence accompanying the remarkably curious Mexican prayer-beads.

Madame Ratignolle hoped that Robert would exercise extreme caution in dealing with the Mexicans, who, she considered, were a treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful. She trusted she did them no injustice in thus condemning them as a race. She had known personally but one Mexican, who made and sold excellent tamales, and whom she would have trusted implicitly, so soft-spoken was he. One day he was arrested for stabbing his wife. She never knew whether he had been hanged or not.

Victor had grown hilarious, and was attempting to tell an anecdote about a Mexican girl who served chocolate one winter in a restaurant in Dauphine Street.³ No one would listen to him but old Monsieur Farival, who went into convulsions over the droll story.

1. Broth in which fish is poached (French).

2. According to Roman Catholic belief, some religious articles, through contact with a holy person or a special blessing, had the power to

take away part of the punishment that would otherwise be meted out to the sinner after death.

3. In the French Quarter.

Edna wondered if they had all gone mad, to be talking and clamoring at that rate. She herself could think of nothing to say about Mexico or the Mexicans.

"At what time do you leave?" she asked Robert.

"At ten," he told her. "Beaudelet wants to wait for the moon."

"Are you all ready to go?"

"Quite ready. I shall only take a handbag, and shall pack my trunk in the city."

He turned to answer some question put to him by his mother, and Edna, having finished her black coffee, left the table.

She went directly to her room. The little cottage was close and stuffy after leaving the outer air. But she did not mind; there appeared to be a hundred different things demanding her attention indoors. She began to set the toilet-stand to rights, grumbling at the negligence of the quadroom, who was in the adjoining room putting the children to bed. She gathered together stray garments that were hanging on the backs of chairs, and put each where it belonged in closet or bureau drawer. She changed her gown for a more comfortable and commodious wrapper. She rearranged her hair, combing and brushing it with unusual energy. Then she went in and assisted the quadroom in getting the boys to bed.

They were very playful and inclined to talk—to do anything but lie quiet and go to sleep. Edna sent the quadroom away to her supper and told her she need not return. Then she sat and told the children a story. Instead of soothing it excited them, and added to their wakefulness. She left them in heated argument, speculating about the conclusion of the tale which their mother promised to finish the following night.

The little black girl came in to say that Madame Lebrun would like to have Mrs. Pontellier go and sit with them over at the house till Mr. Robert went away. Edna returned answer that she had already undressed, that she did not feel quite well, but perhaps she would go over to the house later. She started to dress again, and got as far advanced as to remove her *peignoir*. But changing her mind once more she resumed the *peignoir*, and went outside and sat down before her door. She was overheated and irritable, and fanned herself energetically for a while. Madame Ratignolle came down to discover what was the matter.

"All that noise and confusion at the table must have upset me," replied Edna, "and moreover, I hate shocks and surprises. The idea of Robert starting off in such a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were a matter of life and death! Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me."

"Yes," agreed Madame Ratignolle. "I think it was showing us all—you especially—very little consideration. It wouldn't have surprised me in any of the others; those Lebruns are all given to heroics. But I must say I should never have expected such a thing from Robert. Are you not coming down? Come on, dear; it doesn't look friendly."

"No," said Edna, a little sullenly. "I can't go to the trouble of dressing again; I don't feel like it."

"You needn't dress; you look all right; fasten a belt around your waist. Just look at me!"

"No," persisted Edna; "but you go on. Madame Lebrun might be offended if we both stayed away."

Madame Ratignolle kissed Edna good-night, and went away, being in truth rather desirous of joining in the general and animated conversation which was still in progress concerning Mexico and the Mexicans.

Somewhat later Robert came up, carrying his hand-bag.

"Aren't you feeling well?" he asked.

"Oh, well enough. Are you going right away?"

He lit a match and looked at his watch. "In twenty minutes," he said. The sudden and brief flare of the match emphasized the darkness for a while. He sat down upon a stool which the children had left out on the porch.

"Get a chair," said Edna.

"This will do," he replied. He put on his soft hat and nervously took it off again, and wiping his face with his handkerchief, complained of the heat.

"Take the fan," said Edna, offering it to him.

"Oh, no! Thank you. It does no good; you have to stop fanning some time, and feel all the more uncomfortable afterward."

"That's one of the ridiculous things which men always say. I have never known one to speak otherwise of fanning. How long will you be gone?"

"Forever, perhaps. I don't know. It depends upon a good many things."

"Well, in case it shouldn't be forever, how long will it be?"

"I don't know."

"This seems to me perfectly preposterous and uncalled for. I don't like it. I don't understand your motive for silence and mystery, never saying a word to me about it this morning." He remained silent, not offering to defend himself. He only said, after a moment:

"Don't part from me in an ill-humor. I never knew you to be out of patience with me before."

"I don't want to part in any ill-humor," said she. "But can't you understand? I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. You don't even offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter."

"So was I," he blurted. "Perhaps that's the—" He stood up suddenly and held out his hand. "Good-by, my dear Mrs. Pontellier; good-by. You won't—I hope you won't completely forget me." She clung to his hand, striving to detain him.

"Write to me when you get there, won't you, Robert?" she entreated.

"I will, thank you. Good-by."

How unlike Robert! The merest acquaintance would have said something more emphatic than "I will, thank you; good-by," to such a request.

He had evidently already taken leave of the people over at the house, for he descended the steps and went to join Beaudet, who was out there with an oar across his shoulder waiting for Robert. They walked away in the darkness. She could only hear Beaudet's voice; Robert had apparently not even spoken a word of greeting to his companion.

Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively, striving to hold back and to hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another, the emotion which was troubling—tearing—her. Her eyes were brimming with tears.

For the first time she recognized anew the symptoms of infatuation which she felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of

the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.

XVI

“Do you miss your friend greatly?” asked Mademoiselle Reisz one morning as she came creeping up behind Edna, who had just left her cottage on her way to the beach. She spent much of her time in the water since she had acquired finally the art of swimming. As their stay at Grand Isle drew near its close, she felt that she could not give too much time to a diversion which afforded her the only real pleasurable moments that she knew. When Mademoiselle Reisz came and touched her upon the shoulder and spoke to her, the woman seemed to echo the thought which was ever in Edna’s mind; or, better, the feeling which constantly possessed her.

Robert’s going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing. She sought him everywhere—in others whom she induced to talk about him. She went up in the mornings to Madame Lebrun’s room, braving the clatter of the old sewing-machine. She sat there and chatted at intervals as Robert had done. She gazed around the room at the pictures and photographs hanging upon the wall, and discovered in some corner an old family album, which she examined with the keenest interest, appealing to Madame Lebrun for enlightenment concerning the many figures and faces which she discovered between its pages.

There was a picture of Madame Lebrun with Robert as a baby, seated in her lap, a round-faced infant with a fist in his mouth. The eyes alone in the baby suggested the man. And that was he also in kilts, at the age of five, wearing long curls and holding a whip in his hand. It made Edna laugh, and she laughed, too, at the portrait in his first long trousers; while another interested her, taken when he left for college, looking thin, long-faced, with eyes full of fire, ambition and great intentions. But there was no recent picture, none which suggested the Robert who had gone away five days ago, leaving a void and wilderness behind him.

“Oh, Robert stopped having his pictures taken when he had to pay for them himself! He found wiser use for his money, he says,” explained Madame Lebrun. She had a letter from him, written before he left New Orleans. Edna wished to see the letter, and Madame Lebrun told her to look for it either on the table or the dresser, or perhaps it was on the mantelpiece.

The letter was on the bookshelf. It possessed the greatest interest and attraction for Edna; the envelope, its size and shape, the postmark, the handwriting. She examined every detail of the outside before opening it. There were only a few lines, setting forth that he would leave the city that afternoon, that he had packed his trunk in good shape, that he was well, and sent her his love and begged to be affectionately remembered to all. There was no special message to Edna except a postscript saying that if Mrs. Pontellier

desired to finish the book which he had been reading to her, his mother would find it in his room, among other books there on the table. Edna experienced a pang of jealousy because he had written to his mother rather than to her.

Every one seemed to take for granted that she missed him. Even her husband, when he came down the Saturday following Robert's departure, expressed regret that he had gone.

"How do you get on without him, Edna?" he asked.

"It's very dull without him," she admitted. Mr. Pontellier had seen Robert in the city, and Edna asked him a dozen questions or more. Where had they met? On Carondelet Street, in the morning. They had gone "in" and had a drink and a cigar together. What had they talked about? Chiefly about his prospects in Mexico, which Mr. Pontellier thought were promising. How did he look? How did he seem—grave, or gay, or how? Quite cheerful, and wholly taken up with the idea of his trip, which Mr. Pontellier found altogether natural in a young fellow about to seek fortune and adventure in a strange, queer country.

Edna tapped her foot impatiently, and wondered why the children persisted in playing in the sun when they might be under the trees. She went down and led them out of the sun, scolding the quadron for not being more attentive.

It did not strike her as in the least grotesque that she should be making of Robert the object of conversation and leading her husband to speak of him. The sentiment which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel. She had all her life long been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles. They belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself. Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for any one. Then had followed a rather heated argument; the two women did not appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language. Edna tried to appease her friend, to explain.

"I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me."

"I don't know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential," said Madame Ratignolle, cheerfully; "but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that—your Bible tells you so. I'm sure I couldn't do more than that."

"Oh, yes you could!" laughed Edna.

She was not surprised at Mademoiselle Reisz's question the morning that lady, following her to the beach, tapped her on the shoulder and asked if she did not greatly miss her young friend.

"Oh, good morning, Mademoiselle; it is you? Why, of course I miss Robert. Are you going down to bathe?"

"Why should I go down to bathe at the very end of the season when I haven't been in the surf all summer?" replied the woman, disagreeably.

"I beg your pardon," offered Edna, in some embarrassment, for she should have remembered that Mademoiselle Reisz's avoidance of the water had

furnished a theme for much pleasantry. Some among them thought it was on account of her false hair, or the dread of getting the violets wet, while others attributed it to the natural aversion for water sometimes believed to accompany the artistic temperament. Mademoiselle offered Edna some chocolates in a paper bag, which she took from her pocket, by way of showing that she bore no ill feeling. She habitually ate chocolates for their sustaining quality; they contained much nutriment in small compass, she said. They saved her from starvation, as Madame Lebrun's table was utterly impossible; and no one save so impertinent a woman as Madame Lebrun could think of offering such food to people and requiring them to pay for it.

"She must feel very lonely without her son," said Edna, desiring to change the subject. "Her favorite son, too. It must have been quite hard to let him go."

Mademoiselle laughed maliciously.

"Her favorite son! Oh dear! Who could have been imposing such a tale upon you? Aline Lebrun lives for Victor, and for Victor alone. She has spoiled him into the worthless creature he is. She worships him and the ground he walks on. Robert is very well in a way, to give up all the money he can earn to the family, and keep the barest pittance for himself. Favorite son, indeed! I miss the poor fellow myself, my dear. I liked to see him and to hear him about the place—the only Lebrun who is worth a pinch of salt. He comes to see me often in the city. I like to play to him. That Victor! hanging would be too good for him. It's a wonder Robert hasn't beaten him to death long ago."

"I thought he had great patience with his brother," offered Edna, glad to be talking about Robert, no matter what was said.

"Oh! he thrashed him well enough a year or two ago," said Mademoiselle. "It was about a Spanish girl, whom Victor considered that he had some sort of claim upon. He met Robert one day talking to the girl, or walking with her, or bathing with her, or carrying her basket—I don't remember what;—and he became so insulting and abusive that Robert gave him a thrashing on the spot that has kept him comparatively in order for a good while. It's about time he was getting another."

"Was her name Mariequita?" asked Edna.

"Mariequita—yes, that was it. Mariequita. I had forgotten. Oh, she's a sly one, and a bad one, that Mariequita!"

Edna looked down at Mademoiselle Reisz and wondered how she could have listened to her venom so long. For some reason she felt depressed, almost unhappy. She had not intended to go into the water; but she donned her bathing suit, and left Mademoiselle alone, seated under the shade of the children's tent. The water was growing cooler as the season advanced. Edna plunged and swam about with an abandon that thrilled and invigorated her. She remained a long time in the water, half hoping that Mademoiselle Reisz would not wait for her.

But Mademoiselle waited. She was very amiable during the walk back, and raved much over Edna's appearance in her bathing suit. She talked about music. She hoped that Edna would go to see her in the city, and wrote her address with the stub of a pencil on a piece of card which she found in her pocket.

"When do you leave?" asked Edna.

"Next Monday; and you?"

“The following week,” answered Edna, adding, “It has been a pleasant summer, hasn’t it, Mademoiselle?”

“Well,” agreed Mademoiselle Reisz, with a shrug, “rather pleasant, if it hadn’t been for the mosquitoes and the Farival twins.”

XVII

The Pontelliers possessed a very charming home on Esplanade Street⁴ in New Orleans. It was a large, double cottage, with a broad front veranda, whose round, fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green. In the yard, which was kept scrupulously neat, were flowers and plants of every description which flourishes in South Louisiana. Within doors the appointments were perfect after the conventional type. The softest carpets and rugs covered the floors; rich and tasteful draperies hung at doors and windows. There were paintings, selected with judgment and discrimination, upon the walls. The cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which daily appeared upon the table were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr. Pontellier.

Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain—no matter what—after he had bought it and placed it among his household goods.

On Tuesday afternoons—Tuesday being Mrs. Pontellier’s reception day⁵—there was a constant stream of callers—women who came in carriages or in the street cars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted. A light-colored mulatto boy, in dress coat and bearing a diminutive silver tray for the reception of cards, admitted them. A maid, in white fluted cap, offered the callers liqueur, coffee, or chocolate, as they might desire. Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, remained in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors. Men sometimes called in the evening with their wives.

This had been the programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before. Certain evenings during the week she and her husband attended the opera or sometimes the play.

Mr. Pontellier left his home in the mornings between nine and ten o’clock, and rarely returned before half-past six or seven in the evening—dinner being served at half-past seven.

He and his wife seated themselves at table on Tuesday evening, a few weeks after their return from Grand Isle. They were alone together. The boys were being put to bed; the patter of their bare, escaping feet could be heard occasionally, as well as the pursuing voice of the quadroon, lifted in mild protest and entreaty. Mrs. Pontellier did not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown; she was in ordinary house dress. Mr. Pontellier, who was observant about such things, noticed it, as he served the soup and handed it to the boy in waiting.

4. The most exclusive address of the Creole aristocracy; it was a street of palatial homes shaded by oaks, palms, and magnolias.

5. A day once a week when a woman was expected to be at home to receive visitors.

“Tired out, Edna? Whom did you have? Many callers?” he asked. He tasted his soup and began to season it with pepper, salt, vinegar, mustard—everything within reach.

“There were a good many,” replied Edna, who was eating her soup with evident satisfaction. “I found their cards when I got home; I was out.”

“Out!” exclaimed her husband, with something like genuine consternation in his voice as he laid down the vinegar cruet and looked at her through his glasses. “Why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday? What did you have to do?”

“Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out.”

“Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse,” said her husband, somewhat appeased, as he added a dash of cayenne pepper to the soup.

“No, I left no excuse. I told Joe to say I was out, that was all.”

“Why, my dear, I should think you’d understand by this time that people don’t do such things; we’ve got to observe *les convenances*⁶ if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession. If you felt that you had to leave home this afternoon, you should have left some suitable explanation for your absence.

“This soup is really impossible; it’s strange that woman hasn’t learned yet to make a decent soup. Any free-lunch stand in town serves a better one. Was Mrs. Belthrop here?”

“Bring the tray with the cards, Joe. I don’t remember who was here.”

The boy retired and returned after a moment, bringing the tiny silver tray, which was covered with ladies’ visiting cards. He handed it to Mrs. Pontellier.

“Give it to Mr. Pontellier,” she said.

Joe offered the tray to Mr. Pontellier, and removed the soup.

Mr. Pontellier scanned the names of his wife’s callers, reading some of them aloud, with comments as he read.

“The Misses Delasidas.’ I worked a big deal in futures⁷ for their father this morning; nice girls; it’s time they were getting married. ‘Mrs. Belthrop.’ I tell you what it is, Edna; you can’t afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop. Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is worth a good, round sum to me. You’d better write her a note. ‘Mrs. James Highcamp.’ Hugh! the less you have to do with Mrs. Highcamp, the better. ‘Madame Laforcé.’ Came all the way from Carrolton,⁸ too, poor old soul. ‘Miss Wiggs,’ ‘Mrs. Eleanor Boltons.’” He pushed the cards aside.

“Mercy!” exclaimed Edna, who had been fuming. “Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?”

“I’m not making any fuss over it. But it’s just such seeming trifles that we’ve got to take seriously; such things count.”

The fish was scorched. Mr. Pontellier would not touch it. Edna said she did not mind a little scorched taste. The roast was in some way not to his fancy, and he did not like the manner in which the vegetables were served.

“It seems to me,” he said, “we spend money enough in this house to procure at least one meal a day which a man could eat and retain his self-respect.”

“You used to think the cook was a treasure,” returned Edna, indifferently.

6. Proprieties, social conventions (French).

7. Commodities bought and sold for delivery at a future time and thus a form of speculation.

8. Village to the west of New Orleans, later absorbed by the city.

"Perhaps she was when she first came; but cooks are only human. They need looking after, like any other class of persons that you employ. Suppose I didn't look after the clerks in my office, just let them run things their own way; they'd soon make a nice mess of me and my business."

"Where are you going?" asked Edna, seeing that her husband arose from table without having eaten a morsel except a taste of the highly-seasoned soup.

"I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night." He went into the hall, took his hat and stick from the stand, and left the house.

She was somewhat familiar with such scenes. They had often made her very unhappy. On a few previous occasions she had been completely deprived of any desire to finish her dinner. Sometimes she had gone into the kitchen to administer a tardy rebuke to the cook. Once she went to her room and studied the cookbook during an entire evening, finally writing out a menu for the week, which left her harrassed with a feeling that, after all, she had accomplished no good that was worth the name.

But that evening Edna finished her dinner alone, with forced deliberation. Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire that lighted them. After finishing her dinner she went to her room, having instructed the boy to tell any other callers that she was indisposed.

It was a large, beautiful room, rich and picturesque in the soft, dim light which the maid had turned low. She went and stood at an open window and looked out upon the deep tangle of the garden below. All the mystery and witchery of the night seemed to have gathered there amid the perfumes and the dusky and tortuous outlines of flowers and foliage. She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods. But the voices were not soothing that came to her from the darkness and the sky above and the stars. They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope. She turned back into the room and began to walk to and fro down its whole length, without stopping, without resting. She carried in her hands a thin handkerchief, which she tore into ribbons, rolled into a ball, and flung from her. Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet.

In a sweeping passion she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear.

A maid, alarmed at the din of breaking glass, entered the room to discover what was the matter.

"A vase fell upon the hearth," said Edna. "Never mind; leave it till morning."

"Oh! you might get some of the glass in your feet, ma'am," insisted the young woman, picking up bits of the broken vase that were scattered upon the carpet. "And here's your ring, ma'am, under the chair."

Edna held out her hand, and taking the ring, slipped it upon her finger.

XVIII

The following morning Mr. Pontellier, upon leaving for his office, asked Edna if she would not meet him in town in order to look at some new fixtures for the library.

"I hardly think we need new fixtures, Léonce. Don't let us get anything new; you are too extravagant. I don't believe you ever think of saving or putting by."

"The way to become rich is to make money, my dear Edna, not to save it," he said. He regretted that she did not feel inclined to go with him and select new fixtures. He kissed her good-by, and told her she was not looking well and must take care of herself. She was unusually pale and very quiet.

She stood on the front veranda as he quitted the house, and absently picked a few sprays of jessamine⁹ that grew upon a trellis near by. She inhaled the odor of the blossoms and thrust them into the bosom of her white morning gown. The boys were dragging along the banquette¹ a small "express wagon," which they had filled with blocks and sticks. The quadron was following them with little quick steps, having assumed a fictitious animation and alacrity for the occasion. A fruit vender was crying his wares in the street.

Edna looked straight before her with a self-absorbed expression upon her face. She felt no interest in anything about her. The street, the children, the fruit vender, the flowers growing there under her eyes, were all part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic.

She went back into the house. She had thought of speaking to the cook concerning her blunders of the previous night; but Mr. Pontellier had saved her that disagreeable mission, for which she was so poorly fitted. Mr. Pontellier's arguments were usually convincing with those whom he employed. He left home feeling quite sure that he and Edna would sit down that evening, and possibly a few subsequent evenings, to a dinner deserving of the name.

Edna spent an hour or two in looking over some of her old sketches. She could see their shortcomings and defects, which were glaring in her eyes. She tried to work a little, but found she was not in the humor. Finally she gathered together a few of the sketches—those which she considered the least discreditable; and she carried them with her when, a little later, she dressed and left the house. She looked handsome and distinguished in her street gown. The tan of the seashore had left her face, and her forehead was smooth, white, and polished beneath her heavy, yellow-brown hair. There were a few freckles on her face, and a small, dark mole near the under lip and one on the temple, half-hidden in her hair.

As Edna walked along the street she was thinking of Robert. She was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing.

Edna was on her way to Madame Ratignolle's. Their intimacy, begun at Grand Isle, had not declined, and they had seen each other with some frequency since their return to the city. The Ratignolles lived at no great distance from Edna's home, on the corner of a side street, where Monsieur

9. Jasmine.

1. Sidewalk (French).

Ratignolle owned and conducted a drug store which enjoyed a steady and prosperous trade. His father had been in the business before him, and Monsieur Ratignolle stood well in the community and bore an enviable reputation for integrity and clear-headedness. His family lived in commodious apartments over the store, having an entrance on the side within the *porte cochère*.² There was something which Edna thought very French, very foreign, about their whole manner of living. In the large and pleasant salon which extended across the width of the house, the Ratignolles entertained their friends once a fortnight with a *soirée musicale*,³ sometimes diversified by card-playing. There was a friend who played upon the 'cello. One brought his flute and another his violin, while there were some who sang and a number who performed upon the piano with various degrees of taste and agility. The Ratignolles' *soirées musicales* were widely known, and it was considered a privilege to be invited to them.

Edna found her friend engaged in assorting the clothes which had returned that morning from the laundry. She at once abandoned her occupation upon seeing Edna, who had been ushered without ceremony into her presence.

"'Cité can do it as well as I; it is really her business," she explained to Edna, who apologized for interrupting her. And she summoned a young black woman, whom she instructed, in French, to be very careful in checking off the list which she handed her. She told her to notice particularly if a fine linen handkerchief of Monsieur Ratignolle's, which was missing last week, had been returned; and to be sure to set to one side such pieces as required mending and darning.

Then placing an arm around Edna's waist, she led her to the front of the house, to the salon, where it was cool and sweet with the odor of great roses that stood upon the hearth in jars.

Madame Ratignolle looked more beautiful than ever there at home, in a negligé which left her arms almost wholly bare and exposed the rich, melting curves of her white throat.

"Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day," said Edna with a smile when they were seated. She produced the roll of sketches and started to unfold them. "I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something. What do you think of them? Do you think it worth while to take it up again and study some more? I might study for a while with Laid-pore."

She knew that Madame Ratignolle's opinion in such a matter would be next to valueless, that she herself had not alone decided, but determined; but she sought the words and praise and encouragement that would help her to put heart into her venture.

"Your talent is immense, dear!"

"Nonsense!" protested Edna, well pleased.

"Immense, I tell you," persisted Madame Ratignolle, surveying the sketches one by one, at close range, then holding them at arm's length, narrowing her eyes, and dropping her head on one side. "Surely, this Bavarian peasant is worthy of framing; and this basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike. One might almost be tempted to reach out a hand and take one."

2. In America, a porch under which a car or carriage may be driven to protect travelers alighting

or boarding (French).

3. An evening of music (French).

Edna could not control a feeling which bordered upon complacency at her friend's praise, even realizing, as she did, its true worth. She retained a few of the sketches, and gave all the rest to Madame Ratignolle, who appreciated the gift far beyond its value and proudly exhibited the pictures to her husband when he came up from the store a little later for his midday dinner.

Mr. Ratignolle was one of those men who are called the salt of the earth. His cheerfulness was unbounded, and it was matched by his goodness of heart, his broad charity, and common sense. He and his wife spoke English with an accent which was only discernible through its un-English emphasis and a certain carefulness and deliberation. Edna's husband spoke English with no accent whatever. The Ratignolles understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union.

As Edna seated herself at table with them she thought, "Better a dinner of herbs,"⁴ though it did not take her long to discover that was no dinner of herbs, but a delicious repast, simple, choice, and in every way satisfying.

Monsieur Ratignolle was delighted to see her, though he found her looking not so well as at Grand Isle, and he advised a tonic. He talked a good deal on various topics, a little politics, some city news and neighborhood gossip. He spoke with an animation and earnestness that gave an exaggerated importance to every syllable he uttered. His wife was keenly interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen, chiming in, taking the words out of his mouth.

Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle,—a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium. Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium." It had crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression.

XIX

Edna could not help but think that it was very foolish, very childish, to have stamped upon her wedding ring and smashed the crystal vase upon the tiles. She was visited by no more outbursts, moving her to such futile expedients. She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household *en bonne ménagère*,⁵ going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.

Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line

4. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled [fattened] ox and hatred therewith"

(Proverbs 15.7).

5. As a good housewife (French).

of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.

"It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier⁶ days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family."

"I feel like painting," answered Edna. "Perhaps I shan't always feel like it."

"Then in God's name paint! but don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything go else to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter."

"She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go."

"On account of what, then?"

"Oh! I don't know. Let me alone; you bother me."

It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.

Her husband let her alone as she requested, and went away to his office. Edna went up to her atelier—a bright room in the top of the house. She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree. For a time she had the whole household enrolled in the service of art. The boys posed for her. They thought it amusing at first, but the occupation soon lost its attractiveness when they discovered that it was not a game arranged especially for their entertainment. The quadrone sat for hours before Edna's palette, patient as a savage, while the housemaid took charge of the children, and the drawing-room went undusted. But the house-maid, too, served her term as model when Edna perceived that the young woman's back and shoulders were molded on classic lines, and that her hair, loosened from its confining cap, became an inspiration. While Edna worked she sometimes sang low the little air, "*Ah! si tu savais!*"

It moved her with recollections. She could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail. She could see the glint of the moon upon the bay, and could feel the soft, gusty beating of the hot south wind. A subtle current of desire passed through her body, weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn.

There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in. And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested.

There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,—when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms

6. Artist's studio.

struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood.

XX

It was during such a mood that Edna hunted up Mademoiselle Reisz. She had not forgotten the rather disagreeable impression left upon her by their last interview; but she nevertheless felt a desire to see her—above all, to listen while she played upon the piano. Quite early in the afternoon she started upon her quest for the pianist. Unfortunately she had mislaid or lost Mademoiselle Reisz's card, and looking up her address in the city directory, she found that the woman lived on Bienville Street,⁷ some distance away. The directory which fell into her hands was a year or more old, however, and upon reaching the number indicated, Edna discovered that the house was occupied by a respectable family of mulattoes who had *chambres garnies*⁸ to let. They had been living there for six months, and knew absolutely nothing of a Mademoiselle Reisz. In fact, they knew nothing of any of their neighbors; their lodgers were all people of the highest distinction, they assured Edna. She did not linger to discuss class distinctions with Madame Pouponne, but hastened to a neighboring grocery store, feeling sure that Mademoiselle would have left her address with the proprietor.

He knew Mademoiselle Reisz a good deal better than he wanted to know her, he informed his questioner. In truth, he did not want to know her at all, anything concerning her—the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street. He thanked heaven she had left the neighborhood, and was equally thankful that he did not know where she had gone.

Edna's desire to see Mademoiselle Reisz had increased tenfold since these unlooked-for obstacles had arisen to thwart it. She was wondering who could give her the information she sought, when it suddenly occurred to her that Madame Lebrun would be the one most likely to do so. She knew it was useless to ask Madame Ratignolle, who was on the most distant terms with the musician, and preferred to know nothing concerning her. She had once been almost as emphatic in expressing herself upon the subject as the corner grocer.

Edna knew that Madame Lebrun had returned to the city, for it was the middle of November. And she also knew where the Lebruns lived, on Chartres Street.⁹

Their home from the outside looked like a prison, with iron bars before the door and lower windows. The iron bars were a relic of the old *régime*,¹ and no one had ever thought of dislodging them. At the side was a high fence enclosing the garden. A gate or door opening upon the street was locked. Edna rang the bell at this side garden gate, and stood upon the banquette, waiting to be admitted.

It was Victor who opened the gate for her. A black woman, wiping her hands upon her apron, was close at his heels. Before she saw them Edna could hear them in altercation, the woman—plainly an anomaly—claiming the right to be allowed to perform her duties, one of which was to answer the bell.

7. On the opposite side of the French Quarter from the Pontelliers' house.

8. Furnished rooms (French).

9. In the heart of the French Quarter.

1. I.e., the Spanish regime (1766–1803).

Victor was surprised and delighted to see Mrs. Pontellier, and he made no attempt to conceal either his astonishment or his delight. He was a dark-browed, good-looking youngster of nineteen, greatly resembling his mother, but with ten times her impetuosity. He instructed the black woman to go at once and inform Madame Lebrun that Mrs. Pontellier desired to see her. The woman grumbled a refusal to do part of her duty when she had not been permitted to do it all, and started back to her interrupted task of weeding the garden. Whereupon Victor administered a rebuke in the form of a volley of abuse, which owing to its rapidity and incoherence, was all but incomprehensible to Edna. Whatever it was, the rebuke was convincing, for the woman dropped her hoe and went mumbling into the house.

Edna did not wish to enter. It was very pleasant there on the side porch, where there were chairs, a wicker lounge, and a small table. She seated herself, for she was tired from her long tramp; and she began to rock gently and smooth out the folds of her silk parasol. Victor drew up his chair beside her. He at once explained that the black woman's offensive conduct was all due to imperfect training, as he was not there to take her in hand. He had only come up from the island the morning before, and expected to return next day. He stayed all winter at the island; he lived there, and kept the place in order and got things ready for the summer visitors.

But a man needed occasional relaxation, he informed Mrs. Pontellier, and every now and again he drummed up a pretext to bring him to the city. My! but he had had a time of it the evening before! He wouldn't want his mother to know, and he began to talk in a whisper. He was scintillant with recollections. Of course, he couldn't think of telling Mrs. Pontellier all about it, she being a woman and not comprehending such things. But it all began with a girl peeping and smiling at him through the shutters as he passed by. Oh! but she was a beauty! Certainly he smiled back, and went up and talked to her. Mrs. Pontellier did not know him if she supposed he was one to let an opportunity like that escape him. Despite herself, the youngster amused her. She must have betrayed in her look some degree of interest or entertainment. The boy grew more daring, and Mrs. Pontellier might have found herself, in a little while, listening to a highly colored story but for the timely appearance of Madame Lebrun.

That lady was still clad in white, according to her custom of the summer. Her eyes beamed an effusive welcome. Would not Mrs. Pontellier go inside? Would she partake of some refreshment? Why had she not been there before? How was that dear Mr. Pontellier and how were those sweet children? Has Mrs. Pontellier ever known such a warm November?

Victor went and reclined on the wicker lounge behind his mother's chair, where he commanded a view of Edna's face. He had taken her parasol from her hands while he spoke to her, and he now lifted it and twirled it above him as he lay on his back. When Madame Lebrun complained that it was so dull coming back to the city; that she saw so few people now; that even Victor, when he came up from the island for a day or two, had so much to occupy him and engage his time, then it was that the youth went into contortions on the lounge and winked mischievously at Edna. She somehow felt like a confederate in crime, and tried to look severe and disapproving.

There had been but two letters from Robert, with little in them, they told her. Victor said it was really not worth while to go inside for the letters, when

his mother entreated him to go in search of them. He remembered the contents, which in truth he rattled off very glibly when put to the test.

One letter was written from Vera Cruz and the other from the City of Mexico. He had met Montel, who was doing everything toward his advancement. So far, the financial situation was no improvement over the one he had left in New Orleans, but of course the prospects were vastly better. He wrote of the City of Mexico, the buildings, the people and their habits, the conditions of life which he found there. He sent his love to the family. He inclosed a check to his mother, and hoped she would affectionately remember him to all his friends. That was about the substance of the two letters. Edna felt that if there had been a message for her, she would have received it. The despondent frame of mind in which she had left home began again to overtake her, and she remembered that she wished to find Mademoiselle Reisz.

Madame Lebrun knew where Mademoiselle Reisz lived. She gave Edna the address, regretting that she would not consent to stay and spend the remainder of the afternoon, and pay a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz some other day. The afternoon was already well advanced.

Victor escorted her out upon the banquette, lifted her parasol, and held it over her while he walked to the car² with her. He entreated her to bear in mind that the disclosures of the afternoon were strictly confidential. She laughed and bantered him a little, remembering too late that she should have been dignified and reserved.

"How handsome Mrs. Pontellier looked!" said Madame Lebrun to her son.

"Ravishing!" he admitted. "The city atmosphere has improved her. Some way she doesn't seem like the same woman."

XXI

Some people contended that the reason Mademoiselle Reisz always chose apartments up under the roof was to discourage the approach of beggars, peddlars and callers. There were plenty of windows in her little front room. They were for the most part dingy, but as they were nearly always open it did not make so much difference. They often admitted into the room a good deal of smoke and soot; but at the same time all the light and air that there was came through them. From her windows could be seen the crescent of the river, the masts of ships and the big chimneys of the Mississippi steamers. A magnificent piano crowded the apartment. In the next room she slept, and in the third and last she harbored a gasoline stove on which she cooked her meals when disinclined to descend to the neighboring restaurant. It was there also that she ate, keeping her belongings in a rare old buffet, dingy and battered from a hundred years of use.

When Edna knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's front room door and entered, she discovered that person standing beside the window, engaged in mending or patching an old prunella gaiter.³ The little musician laughed all over when she saw Edna. Her laugh consisted of a contortion of the face and all the muscles of the body. She seemed strikingly homely, standing there in the afternoon light. She still wore the shabby lace and the artificial bunch of violets on the side of her head.

2. Streetcar.

3. A cloth button shoe with leather soles.

"So you remembered me at last," said Mademoiselle. "I had said to myself, 'Ah, bah! she will never come.'"

"Did you want me to come?" asked Edna with a smile.

"I had not thought much about it," answered Mademoiselle. The two had seated themselves on a little bumpy sofa which stood against the wall. "I am glad, however, that you came. I have the water boiling back there, and was just about to make some coffee. You will drink a cup with me. And how is *la belle dame*?⁴ Always handsome! always healthy! always contented!" She took Edna's hand between her strong wiry fingers, holding it loosely without warmth, and executing a sort of double theme upon the back and palm.

"Yes," she went on; "I sometimes thought: 'She will never come. She promised as those women in society always do, without meaning it. She will not come.' For I really don't believe you like me, Mrs. Pontellier."

"I don't know whether I like you or not," replied Edna, gazing down at the little woman with a quizzical look.

The candor of Mrs. Pontellier's admission greatly pleased Mademoiselle Reisz. She expressed her gratification by repairing forthwith to the region of the gasoline stove and rewarding her guest with the promised cup of coffee. The coffee and the biscuit accompanying it proved very acceptable to Edna, who had declined refreshment at Madame Lebrun's and was now beginning to feel hungry. Mademoiselle set the tray which she brought in upon a small table near at hand, and seated herself once again on the lumpy sofa.

"I have had a letter from your friend," she remarked, as she poured a little cream into Edna's cup and handed it to her.

"My friend?"

"Yes, your friend Robert. He wrote to me from the City of Mexico."

"Wrote to *you*?" repeated Edna in amazement, stirring her coffee absently.

"Yes, to me. Why not? Don't stir all the warmth out of your coffee; drink it. Though the letter might as well have been sent to you; it was nothing but Mrs. Pontellier from beginning to end."

"Let me see it," requested the young woman, entreatingly.

"No; a letter concerns no one but the person who writes it and the one to whom it is written."

"Haven't you just said it concerned me from beginning to end?"

"It was written about you, not to you. 'Have you seen Mrs. Pontellier? How is she looking?' he asks. 'As Mrs. Pontellier says,' or 'as Mrs. Pontellier once said.' 'If Mrs. Pontellier should call upon you, play for her that Impromptu of Chopin's, my favorite. I heard it here a day or two ago, but not as you play it. I should like to know how it affects her,' and so on, as if he supposed we were constantly in each other's society."

"Let me see the letter."

"Oh, no."

"Have you answered it?"

"No."

"Let me see the letter."

"No, and again, no."

"Then play the Impromptu for me."

4. The lovely lady (French).

"It is growing late; what time do you have to be home?"

"Time doesn't concern me. Your question seems a little rude. Play the Impromptu."

"But you have told me nothing of yourself. What are you doing?"

"Painting!" laughed Edna. "I am becoming an artist. Think of it!"

"Ah! an artist! You have pretensions, Madame."

"Why pretensions? Do you think I could not become an artist?"

"I do not know you well enough to say. I do not know your talent or your temperament. To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul."

"What do you mean by the courageous soul?"

"Courageous, *ma foi!*⁵ The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies."

"Show me the letter and play for me the Impromptu. You see that I have persistence. Does that quality count for anything in art?"

"It counts with a foolish old woman whom you have captivated," replied Mademoiselle, with her wriggling laugh.

The letter was right there at hand in the drawer of the little table upon which Edna had just placed her coffee cup. Mademoiselle opened the drawer and drew forth the letter, the topmost one. She placed it in Edna's hands, and without further comment arose and went to the piano.

Mademoiselle played a soft interlude. It was an improvisation. She sat low at the instrument, and the lines of her body settled into ungraceful curves and angles that gave it an appearance of deformity. Gradually and imperceptibly the interlude melted into the soft opening minor chords of the Chopin Impromptu.

Edna did not know when the Impromptu began or ended. She sat in the sofa corner reading Robert's letter by the fading light. Mademoiselle had glided from the Chopin into the quivering love-notes of Isolde's song,⁶ and back again to the Impromptu with its soulful and poignant longing.

The shadows deepened in the little room. The music grew strange and fantastic—turbulent, insistent, plaintive and soft with entreaty. The shadows grew deeper. The music filled the room. It floated out upon the night, over the housetops, the crescent of the river, losing itself in the silence of the upper air.

Edna was sobbing, just as she had wept one midnight at Grand Isle when strange, new voices awoke in her. She arose in some agitation to take her departure. "May I come again, Mademoiselle?" she asked at the threshold.

"Come whenever you feel like it. Be careful; the stairs and landings are dark; don't stumble."

Mademoiselle reëntered and lit a candle. Robert's letter was on the floor. She stooped and picked it up. It was crumpled and damp with tears. Mademoiselle smoothed the letter out, restored it to the envelope, and replaced it in the table drawer.

5. Indeed! (French).

6. From Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1857–59), based on a medieval legend of

ill-fated love. Isolde's *Liebstod* (Love-death) is sung as she bids her dead lover farewell and falls dead herself in his arms.

XXII

One morning on his way into town Mr. Pontellier stopped at the house of his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandelet. The Doctor was a semi-retired physician, resting, as the saying is, upon his laurels. He bore a reputation for wisdom rather than skill—leaving the active practice of medicine to his assistants and younger contemporaries—and was much sought for in matters of consultation. A few families, united to him by bonds of friendship, he still attended when they required the services of a physician. The Pontelliers were among these.

Mr. Pontellier found the Doctor reading at the open window of his study. His house stood rather far back from the street, in the center of a delightful garden, so that it was quiet and peaceful at the old gentleman's study window. He was a great reader. He stared up disapprovingly over his eye-glasses as Mr. Pontellier entered, wondering who had the temerity to disturb him at that hour of the morning.

"Ah, Pontellier! Not sick, I hope. Come and have a seat. What news do you bring this morning?" He was quite portly, with a profusion of gray hair, and small blue eyes which age had robbed of much of their brightness but none of their penetration.

"Oh! I'm never sick, Doctor. You know that I come of tough fiber—of that old Creole race of Pontelliers that dry up and finally blow away. I came to consult—no, not precisely to consult—to talk to you about Edna. I don't know what ails her."

"Madame Pontellier not well?" marveled the Doctor. "Why I saw her—I think it was a week ago—walking along Canal Street,⁷ the picture of health, it seemed to me."

"Yes, yes; she seems quite well," said Mr. Pontellier, leaning forward and whirling his stick between his two hands; "but she doesn't act well. She's odd, she's not like herself. I can't make her out, and I thought perhaps you'd help me."

"How does she act?" inquired the doctor.

"Well, it isn't easy to explain," said Mr. Pontellier, throwing himself back in his chair. "She lets the housekeeping go to the dickens."

"Well, well; women are not all alike, my dear Pontellier. We've got to consider—"

"I know that; I told you I couldn't explain. Her whole attitude—toward me and everybody and everything—has changed. You know I have a quick temper, but I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me," he went on nervously. "She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women; and—you understand—we meet in the morning at the breakfast table."

The old gentleman lifted his shaggy eyebrows, protruded his thick nether lip, and tapped the arms of his chair with his cushioned finger-tips.

"What have you been doing to her, Pontellier?"

7. The main street of downtown New Orleans, separating the old French city from the new American section.

“Doing! *Parbleu!*”⁸

“Has she,” asked the Doctor, with a smile, “has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women—superspiritual superior beings? My wife has been telling me about them.”

“That’s the trouble,” broke in Mr. Pontellier, “she hasn’t been associating with any one. She has abandoned her Tuesdays at home, has thrown over all her acquaintances, and goes tramping about by herself, moping in the street-cars, getting in after dark. I tell you she’s peculiar. I don’t like it; I feel a little worried over it.”

This was a new aspect for the Doctor. “Nothing hereditary?” he asked, seriously. “Nothing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?”

“Oh, no, indeed! She comes of sound old Presbyterian Kentucky stock. The old gentleman, her father, I have heard, used to atone for his week-day sins with his Sunday devotions. I know for a fact, that his race horses literally ran away with the prettiest bit of Kentucky farming land I ever laid eyes upon. Margaret—you know Margaret—she has all the Presbyterianism undiluted. And the youngest is something of a vixen. By the way, she gets married in a couple of weeks from now.”

“Send your wife up to the wedding,” exclaimed the Doctor, foreseeing a happy solution. “Let her stay among her own people for a while; it will do her good.”

“That’s what I want her to do. She won’t go to the marriage. She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband!” exclaimed Mr. Pontellier, fuming anew at the recollection.

“Pontellier,” said the Doctor, after a moment’s reflection, “let your wife alone for a while. Don’t bother her, and don’t let her bother you. Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism—a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or causes which you and I needn’t try to fathom. But it will pass happily over, especially if you let her alone. Send her around to see me.”

“Oh! I couldn’t do that; there’d be no reason for it,” objected Mr. Pontellier.

“Then I’ll go around and see her,” said the Doctor. “I’ll drop in to dinner some evening *en bon ami*.”⁹

“Do! by all means,” urged Mr. Pontellier. “What evening will you come? Say Thursday. Will you come Thursday?” he asked, rising to take his leave.

“Very well; Thursday. My wife may possibly have some engagement for me Thursday. In case she has, I shall let you know. Otherwise, you may expect me.”

Mr. Pontellier turned before leaving to say:

“I am going to New York on business very soon. I have a big scheme on hand, and want to be on the field proper to pull the ropes and handle the ribbons.¹ We’ll let you in on the inside if you say so, Doctor,” he laughed.

8. For heaven’s sake! (French).

9. As a friend (French).

1. I.e., the reins.

"No, I thank you, my dear sir," returned the Doctor. "I leave such ventures to you younger men with the fever of life still in your blood."

"What I wanted to say," continued Mr. Pontellier, with his hand on the knob; "I may have to be absent a good while. Would you advise me to take Edna along?"

"By all means, if she wishes to go. If not, leave her here. Don't contradict her. The mood will pass, I assure you. It may take a month, two, three months—possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience."

"Well, good-by, *à jeudi*,"² said Mr. Pontellier, as he let himself out.

The Doctor would have liked during the course of conversation to ask, "Is there any man in the case?" but he knew his Creole too well to make such a blunder as that.

He did not resume his book immediately, but sat for a while meditatively looking out into the garden.

XXIII

Edna's father was in the city, and had been with them several days. She was not very warmly or deeply attached to him, but they had certain tastes in common, and when together they were companionable. His coming was in the nature of a welcome disturbance; it seemed to furnish a new direction for her emotions.

He had come to purchase a wedding gift for his daughter, Janet, and an outfit for himself in which he might make a creditable appearance at her marriage. Mr. Pontellier had selected the bridal gift, as every one immediately connected with him always deferred to his taste in such matters. And his suggestions on the question of dress—which too often assumes the nature of a problem—were of inestimable value to his father-in-law. But for the past few days the old gentleman had been upon Edna's hands, and in his society she was becoming acquainted with a new set of sensations. He had been a colonel in the Confederate army, and still maintained, with the title, the military bearing which had always accompanied it. His hair and mustache were white and silky, emphasizing the rugged bronze of his face. He was tall and thin, and wore his coats padded, which gave a fictitious breadth and depth to his shoulders and chest. Edna and her father looked very distinguished together, and excited a good deal of notice during their perambulations. Upon his arrival she began by introducing him to her atelier and making a sketch of him. He took the whole matter very seriously. If her talent had been ten-fold greater than it was, it would not have surprised him, convinced as he was that he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability, which only depended upon their own efforts to be directed toward successful achievement.

Before her pencil he sat rigid and unflinching, as he had faced the cannon's mouth in days gone by. He resented the intrusion of the children, who gaped with wondering eyes at him, sitting so stiff up there in their mother's bright atelier. When they drew near he motioned them away with an expressive action of the foot, loath to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his rigid shoulders.

2. Until Thursday (French).

Edna, anxious to entertain him, invited Mademoiselle Reisz to meet him, having promised him a treat in her piano playing; but Mademoiselle declined the invitation. So together they attended a *soirée musicale* at the Ratignolles'. Monsieur and Madame Ratignolle made much of the Colonel, installing him as the guest of honor and engaging him at once to dine with them the following Sunday, or any day which he might select. Madame coquetted with him in the most captivating and naïve manner, with eyes, gestures, and a profusion of compliments, till the Colonel's old head felt thirty years younger on his padded shoulders. Edna marveled, not comprehending. She herself was almost devoid of coquetry.

There were one or two men whom she observed at the *soirée musicale*; but she would never have felt moved to any kittenish display to attract their notice—to any feline or feminine wiles to express herself toward them. Their personality attracted her in an agreeable way. Her fancy selected them, and she was glad when a lull in the music gave them an opportunity to meet her and talk with her. Often on the street the glance of strange eyes had lingered in her memory, and sometimes had disturbed her.

Mr. Pontellier did not attend these *soirées musicales*. He considered them *bourgeois*,³ and found more diversion at the club. To Madame Ratignolle he said the music dispensed at her *soirées* was too “heavy,” too far beyond his untrained comprehension. His excuse flattered her. But she disapproved of Mr. Pontellier's club, and she was frank enough to tell Edna so.

“It's a pity Mr. Pontellier doesn't stay home more in the evenings. I think you would be more—well, if you don't mind my saying it—more united, if he did.”

“Oh! dear no!” said Edna, with a blank look in her eyes. “What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other.”

She had not much of anything to say to her father, for that matter; but he did not antagonize her. She discovered that he interested her, though she realized that he might not interest her long; and for the first time in her life she felt as if she were thoroughly acquainted with him. He kept her busy serving him and ministering to his wants. It amused her to do so. She would not permit a servant or one of the children to do anything for him which she might do herself. Her husband noticed, and thought it was the expression of a deep filial attachment which he had never suspected.

The Colonel drank numerous “toddies” during the course of the day, which left him, however, imperturbed. He was an expert at concocting strong drinks. He had even invented some, to which he had given fantastic names, and for whose manufacture he required diverse ingredients that it devolved upon Edna to procure for him.

When Doctor Mandelet dined with the Pontelliers on Thursday he could discern in Mrs. Pontellier no trace of that morbid condition which her husband had reported to him. She was excited and in a manner radiant. She and her father had been to the race course, and their thoughts when they seated themselves at table were still occupied with the events of the afternoon, and their talk was still of the track. The Doctor had not kept pace with turf affairs. He had certain recollections of racing in what he called “the good old times” when the Leconte stables⁴ flourished, and he drew

3. Middle-class; here, meaning “common.”

4. New Orleans was a celebrated racing center

before the Civil War, boasting four racetracks. Leconte was the name of a famous racehorse.

upon this fund of memories so that he might not be left out and seem wholly devoid of the modern spirit. But he failed to impose upon the Colonel, and was even far from impressing him with this trumped-up knowledge of bygone days. Edna had staked her father on his last venture, with the most gratifying results to both of them. Besides, they had met some very charming people, according to the Colonel's impressions. Mrs. Mortimer Merriman and Mrs. James Highcamp, who were there with Alcée Arobin, had joined them and had enlivened the hours in a fashion that warmed him to think of.

Mr. Pontellier himself had no particular leaning toward horse-racing, and was even rather inclined to discourage it as a pastime, especially when he considered the fate of that blue-grass farm in Kentucky. He endeavored, in a general way, to express a particular disapproval, and only succeeded in arousing the ire and opposition of his father-in-law. A pretty dispute followed, in which Edna warmly espoused her father's cause and the Doctor remained neutral.

He observed his hostess attentively from under his shaggy brows, and noted a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who, for the moment, seemed palpitant with the forces of life. Her speech was warm and energetic. There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun.

The dinner was excellent. The claret was warm and the champagne was cold, and under their beneficent influence the threatened unpleasantness melted and vanished with the fumes of the wine.

Mr. Pontellier warmed up and grew reminiscent. He told some amusing plantation experiences, recollections of old Iberville and his youth, when he hunted 'possum in company with some friendly ducky; thrashed the pecan trees, shot the grosbec,⁵ and roamed the woods and fields in mischievous idleness.

The Colonel, with little sense of humor and of the fitness of things, related a somber episode of those dark and bitter days, in which he had acted a conspicuous part and always formed a central figure. Nor was the Doctor happier in his selection, when he told the old, ever new and curious story of the waning of a woman's love, seeking strange, new channels, only to return to its legitimate source after days of fierce unrest. It was one of the many little human documents which had been unfolded to him during his long career as a physician. The story did not seem especially to impress Edna. She had one of her own to tell, of a woman who paddled away with her lover one night in a pirogue and never came back. They were lost amid the Baratarian Islands, and no one ever heard of them or found trace of them from that day to this. It was a pure invention. She said that Madame Antoine had related it to her. That, also, was an invention. Perhaps it was a dream she had had. But every glowing word seemed real to those who listened. They could feel the hot breath of the Southern night; they could hear the long sweep of the pirogue through the glistening moonlit water, the beating of birds' wings, rising startled from among the reeds in the salt-water pools; they could see the faces of the lovers, pale, close together, rapt in oblivious forgetfulness, drifting into the unknown.

5. Game bird distinguished by its large (*gros*) bill.

The champagne was cold, and its subtle fumes played fantastic tricks with Edna's memory that night.

Outside, away from the glow of the fire and the soft lamplight, the night was chill and murky. The Doctor doubled his old-fashioned cloak across his breast as he strode home through the darkness. He knew his fellow-creatures better than most men; knew that inner life which so seldom unfolds itself to unanointed eyes. He was sorry he had accepted Pontellier's invitation. He was growing old, and beginning to need rest and an imperturbed spirit. He did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him.

"I hope it isn't Arobin," he muttered to himself as he walked. "I hope to heaven it isn't Alcée Arobin."

XXIV

Edna and her father had a warm, and almost violent dispute upon the subject of her refusal to attend her sister's wedding. Mr. Pontellier declined to interfere, to interpose either his influence or his authority. He was following Doctor Mandelet's advice, and letting her do as she liked. The Colonel reproached his daughter for her lack of filial kindness and respect, her want of sisterly affection and womanly consideration. His arguments were labored and unconvincing. He doubted if Janet would accept any excuse—forgetting that Edna had offered none. He doubted if Janet would ever speak to her again, and he was sure Margaret would not.

Edna was glad to be rid of her father when he finally took himself off with his wedding garments and his bridal gifts, with his padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his "toddlies" and ponderous oaths.

Mr. Pontellier followed him closely. He meant to stop at the wedding on his way to New York and endeavor by every means which money and love could devise to atone somewhat for Edna's incomprehensible action.

"You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce," asserted the Colonel. "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it."

The Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave. Mr. Pontellier had a vague suspicion of it which he thought it needless to mention at that late day.

Edna was not so consciously gratified at her husband's leaving home as she had been over the departure of her father. As the day approached when he was to leave her for a comparatively long stay, she grew melting and affectionate, remembering his many acts of consideration and his repeated expressions of an ardent attachment. She was solicitous about his health and his welfare. She bustled around, looking after his clothing, thinking about heavy underwear, quite as Madame Ratignolle would have done under similar circumstances. She cried when he went away, calling him her dear, good friend, and she was quite certain she would grow lonely before very long and go to join him in New York.

But after all, a radiant peace settled upon her when she at last found herself alone. Even the children were gone. Old Madame Pontellier had come herself and carried them off to Iberville with their quadron. The old madame did not venture to say she was afraid they would be neglected during Léonce's absence; she hardly ventured to think so. She was hungry for

them—even a little fierce in her attachment. She did not want them to be wholly “children of the pavement,” she always said when begging to have them for a space. She wished them to know the country, with its streams, its fields, its woods, its freedom, so delicious to the young. She wished them to taste something of the life their father had lived and known and loved when he, too, was a little child.

When Edna was at last alone, she breathed a big, genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her. She walked all through the house, from one room to another, as if inspecting it for the first time. She tried the various chairs and lounges, as if she had never sat and reclined upon them before. And she perambulated around the outside of the house, investigating, looking to see if windows and shutters were secure and in order. The flowers were like new acquaintances; she approached them in a familiar spirit, and made herself at home among them. The garden walks were damp, and Edna called to the maid to bring out her rubber sandals. And there she stayed, and stooped, digging around the plants, trimming, picking dead, dry leaves. The children’s little dog came out, interfering, getting in her way. She scolded him, laughing at him, played with him. The garden smelled so good and looked so pretty in the afternoon sunlight. Edna plucked all the bright flowers she could find, and went into the house with them, she and the little dog.

Even the kitchen assumed a sudden interesting character which she had never before perceived. She went in to give directions to the cook, to say that the butcher would have to bring much less meat, that they would require only half their usual quantity of bread, of milk and groceries. She told the cook that she herself would be greatly occupied during Mr. Pontellier’s absence, and she begged her to take all thought and responsibility of the larder upon her own shoulders.

That night Edna dined alone. The candelabra, with a few candles in the center of the table, gave all the light she needed. Outside the circle of light in which she sat, the large dining-room looked solemn and shadowy. The cook, placed upon her mettle, served a delicious repast—a luscious tenderloin broiled à point.⁶ The wine tasted good; the marron glacé⁷ seemed to be just what she wanted. It was so pleasant, too, to dine in a comfortable peignoir.

She thought a little sentimentally about Léonce and the children, and wondered what they were doing. As she gave a dainty scrap or two to the doggie, she talked intimately to him about Etienne and Raoul. He was beside himself with astonishment and delight over these companionable advances, and showed his appreciation by his little quick, snappy barks and a lively agitation.

Then Edna sat in the library after dinner and read Emerson⁸ until she grew sleepy. She realized that she had neglected her reading, and determined to start anew upon a course of improving studies, now that her time was completely her own to do with as she liked.

After a refreshing bath, Edna went to bed. And as she snuggled comfortably beneath the eiderdown a sense of restfulness invaded her, such as she had not known before.

6. Medium rare (French).

7. Glazed chestnuts (French).

8. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), American philosopher, essayist, and poet.

XXV

When the weather was dark and cloudy Edna could not work. She needed the sun to mellow and temper her mood to the sticking point. She had reached a stage when she seemed to be no longer feeling her way, working, when in the humor, with sureness and ease. And being devoid of ambition, and striving not toward accomplishment, she drew satisfaction from the work in itself.

On rainy or melancholy days Edna went out and sought the society of the friends she had made at Grand Isle. Or else she stayed indoors and nursed a mood with which she was becoming too familiar for her own comfort and peace of mind. It was not despair; but it seemed to her as if life were passing by, leaving its promise broken and unfulfilled. Yet there were other days when she listened, was led on and deceived by fresh promises which her youth held out to her.

She went again to the races, and again. Alcée Arobin and Mrs. Highcamp called for her one bright afternoon in Arobin's drag.⁹ Mrs. Highcamp was a worldly but unaffected, intelligent, slim, tall blonde woman in the forties, with an indifferent manner and blue eyes that stared. She had a daughter who served her as a pretext for cultivating the society of young men of fashion. Alcée Arobin was one of them. He was a familiar figure at the race course, the opera, the fashionable clubs. There was a perpetual smile in his eyes, which seldom failed to awaken a corresponding cheerfulness in any one who looked into them and listened to his good-humored voice. His manner was quiet, and at times a little insolent. He possessed a good figure, a pleasing face, not overburdened with depth of thought or feeling; and his dress was that of the conventional man of fashion.

He admired Edna extravagantly, after meeting her at the races with her father. He had met her before on other occasions, but she had seemed to him unapproachable until that day. It was at his instigation that Mrs. Highcamp called to ask her to go with them to the Jockey Club¹ to witness the turf event of the season.

There were possibly a few track men out there who knew the race horse as well as Edna, but there was certainly none who knew it better. She sat between her two companions as one having authority to speak. She laughed at Arobin's pretensions, and deplored Mrs. Highcamp's ignorance. The race horse was a friend and intimate associate of her childhood. The atmosphere of the stables and the breath of the blue grass paddock revived in her memory and lingered in her nostrils. She did not perceive that she was talking like her father as the sleek geldings ambled in review before them. She played for very high stakes, and fortune favored her. The fever of the game flamed in her cheeks and eyes, and it got into her blood and into her brain like an intoxicant. People turned their heads to look at her, and more than one lent an attentive ear to her utterances, hoping thereby to secure the elusive but ever-desired "tip." Arobin caught the contagion of excitement which drew him to Edna like a magnet. Mrs. Highcamp remained, as usual, unmoved, with her indifferent stare and uplifted eyebrows.

9. Heavy coach drawn by four horses.

1. The New Louisiana Jockey Club, an exclusive social club.

Edna stayed and dined with Mrs. Highcamp upon being urged to do so. Arobin also remained and sent away his drag.

The dinner was quiet and uninteresting, save for the cheerful efforts of Arobin to enliven things. Mrs. Highcamp deplored the absence of her daughter from the races, and tried to convey to her what she had missed by going to the “Dante² reading” instead of joining them. The girl held a geranium leaf up to her nose and said nothing, but looked knowing and noncommittal. Mr. Highcamp was a plain, bald-headed man, who only talked under compulsion. He was unresponsive. Mrs. Highcamp was full of delicate courtesy and consideration toward her husband. She addressed most of her conversation to him at table. They sat in the library after dinner and read the evening papers together under the drop-light;³ while the younger people went into the drawing-room near by and talked. Miss Highcamp played some selections from Grieg⁴ upon the piano. She seemed to have apprehended all of the composer’s coldness and none of his poetry. While Edna listened she could not help wondering if she had lost her taste for music.

When the time came for her to go home, Mr. Highcamp grunted a lame offer to escort her, looking down at his slippered feet with tactless concern. It was Arobin who took her home. The car ride was long, and it was late when they reached Esplanade Street. Arobin asked permission to enter for a second to light his cigarette—his match safe⁵ was empty. He filled his match safe, but did not light his cigarette until he left her, after she had expressed her willingness to go to the races with him again.

Edna was neither tired nor sleepy. She was hungry again, for the Highcamp dinner, though of excellent quality, had lacked abundance. She rummaged in the larder and brought forth a slice of “Gruyère”⁶ and some crackers. She opened a bottle of beer which she found in the ice-box. Edna felt extremely restless and excited. She vacantly hummed a fantastic tune as she poked at the wood embers on the hearth and munched a cracker.

She wanted something to happen—something, anything; she did not know what. She regretted that she had not made Arobin stay a half hour to talk over the horses with her. She counted the money she had won. But there was nothing else to do, so she went to bed, and tossed there for hours in a sort of monotonous agitation.

In the middle of the night she remembered that she had forgotten to write her regular letter to her husband; and she decided to do so next day and tell him about her afternoon at the Jockey Club. She lay wide awake composing a letter which was nothing like the one which she wrote the next day. When the maid awoke her in the morning Edna was dreaming of Mr. Highcamp playing the piano at the entrance of a music store on Canal Street, while his wife was saying to Alcée Arobin, as they boarded an Esplanade Street car:

“What a pity that so much talent has been neglected! but I must go.”

When, a few days later, Alcée Arobin again called for Edna in his drag, Mrs. Highcamp was not with him. He said they would pick her up. But as the lady had not been apprised of his intention of picking her up, she was not at home. The daughter was just leaving the house to attend the meeting

2. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Italian poet, author of *The Divine Comedy*.

3. Gas lamp that could be lowered for reading.

4. Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), Norwegian com-

poser.

5. Box for friction matches.

6. A Swiss cheese.

of a branch Folk Lore Society,⁷ and regretted that she could not accompany them. Arobin appeared nonplused, and asked Edna if there were any one else she cared to ask.

She did not deem it worth while to go in search of any of the fashionable acquaintances from whom she had withdrawn herself. She thought of Madame Ratignolle, but knew that her fair friend did not leave the house, except to take a languid walk around the block with her husband after night-fall. Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed at such a request from Edna. Madame Lebrun might have enjoyed the outing, but for some reason Edna did not want her. So they went alone, she and Arobin.

The afternoon was intensely interesting to her. The excitement came back upon her like a remittent fever. Her talk grew familiar and confidential. It was no labor to become intimate with Arobin. His manner invited easy confidence. The preliminary stage of becoming acquainted was one which he always endeavored to ignore when a pretty and engaging woman was concerned.

He stayed and dined with Edna. He stayed and sat beside the wood fire. They laughed and talked; and before it was time to go he was telling her how different life might have been if he had known her years before. With ingenuous frankness he spoke of what a wicked, ill-disciplined boy he had been, and impulsively drew up his cuff to exhibit upon his wrist the scar from a saber cut which he had received in a duel outside of Paris when he was nineteen. She touched his hand as she scanned the red cicatrice⁸ on the inside of his white wrist. A quick impulse that was somewhat spasmodic impelled her fingers to close in a sort of clutch upon his hand. He felt the pressure of her pointed nails in the flesh of his palm.

She arose hastily and walked toward the mantel.

"The sight of a wound or scar always agitates and sickens me," she said. "I shouldn't have looked at it."

"I beg your pardon," he entreated, following her; "it never occurred to me that it might be repulsive."

He stood close to her, and the effrontery in his eyes repelled the old, vanishing self in her, yet drew all her awakening sensuousness. He saw enough in her face to impel him to take her hand and hold it while he said his lingering good night.

"Will you go to the races again?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I've had enough of the races. I don't want to lose all the money I've won, and I've got to work when the weather is bright, instead of—"

"Yes; work; to be sure. You promised to show me your work. What morning may I come up to your atelier? To-morrow?"

"No!"

"Day after?"

"No, no."

"Oh, please don't refuse me! I know something of such things. I might help you with a stray suggestion or two."

"No. Good night. Why don't you go after you have said good night? I don't like you," she went on in a high, excited pitch, attempting to draw away her

7. The New Orleans Association of the American Folklore Society, founded by Alcée Fortier of

Tulane University, was active from 1892 to 1895.
8. Scar.

hand. She felt that her words lacked dignity and sincerity, and she knew that he felt it.

"I'm sorry you don't like me. I'm sorry I offended you. How have I offended you? What have I done? Can't you forgive me?" And he bent and pressed his lips upon her hand as if he wished never more to withdraw them.

"Mr. Arobin," she complained, "I'm greatly upset by the excitement of the afternoon; I'm not myself. My manner must have misled you in some way. I wish you to go, please." She spoke in a monotonous, dull tone. He took his hat from the table, and stood with eyes turned from her, looking into the dying fire. For a moment or two he kept an impressive silence.

"Your manner has not misled me, Mrs. Pontellier," he said finally. "My own emotions have done that. I couldn't help it. When I'm near you, how could I help it? Don't think anything of it, don't bother, please. You see, I go when you command me. If you wish me to stay away, I shall do so. If you let me come back, I—oh! you will let me come back?"

He cast one appealing glance at her, to which she made no response. Alcée Arobin's manner was so genuine that it often deceived even himself.

Edna did not care or think whether it were genuine or not. When she was alone she looked mechanically at the back of her hand which he had kissed so warmly. Then she leaned her head down on the mantelpiece. She felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour. The thought was passing vaguely through her mind, "What would he think?"

She did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse.

She lit a candle and went up to her room. Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her.

She slept a languorous sleep, interwoven with vanishing dreams.

XXVI

Alcée Arobin wrote Edna an elaborate note of apology, palpitant with sincerity. It embarrassed her; for in a cooler, quieter moment it appeared to her absurd that she should have taken his action so seriously, so dramatically. She felt sure that the significance of the whole occurrence had lain in her own self-consciousness. If she ignored his note it would give undue importance to a trivial affair. If she replied to it in a serious spirit it would still leave in his mind the impression that she had in a susceptible moment yielded to his influence. After all, it was no great matter to have one's hand kissed. She was provoked at his having written the apology. She answered in as light and bantering a spirit as she fancied it deserved, and said she would be glad to have him look in upon her at work whenever he felt the inclination and his business gave him the opportunity.

He responded at once by presenting himself at her home with all his disarming naïveté. And then there was scarcely a day which followed that she did not see him or was not reminded of him. He was prolific in pretexts. His

attitude became one of good-humored subservience and tacit adoration. He was ready at all times to submit to her moods, which were as often kind as they were cold. She grew accustomed to him. They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees, and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her.

There was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna's senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz. It was then, in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna's spirit and set it free.

It was misty, with heavy, lowering atmosphere, one afternoon, when Edna climbed the stairs to the pianist's apartments under the roof. Her clothes were dripping with moisture. She felt chilled and pinched as she entered the room. Mademoiselle was poking at a rusty stove that smoked a little and warmed the room indifferently. She was endeavoring to heat a pot of chocolate on the stove. The room looked cheerless and dingy to Edna as she entered. A bust of Beethoven, covered with a hood of dust, scowled at her from the mantelpiece.

"Ah! here comes the sunlight!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, rising from her knees before the stove. "Now it will be warm and bright enough; I can let the fire alone."

She closed the stove door with a bang, and approaching, assisted in removing Edna's dripping mackintosh.

"You are cold; you look miserable. The chocolate will soon be hot. But would you rather have a taste of brandy? I have scarcely touched the bottle which you brought me for my cold." A piece of red flannel was wrapped around Mademoiselle's throat; a stiff neck compelled her to hold her head on one side.

"I will take some brandy," said Edna, shivering as she removed her gloves and overshoes. She drank the liquor from the glass as a man would have done. Then flinging herself upon the uncomfortable sofa she said, "Mademoiselle, I am going to move away from my house on Esplanade Street."

"Ah!" ejaculated the musician, neither surprised nor especially interested. Nothing ever seemed to astonish her very much. She was endeavoring to adjust the bunch of violets which had become loose from its fastening in her hair. Edna drew her down upon the sofa and taking a pin from her own hair, secured the shabby artificial flowers in their accustomed place.

"Aren't you astonished?"

"Passably. Where are you going? To New York? to Iberville? to your father in Mississippi? where?"

"Just two steps away," laughed Edna, "in a little four-room house around the corner. It looks so cozy, so inviting and restful, whenever I pass by; and it's for rent. I'm tired looking after that big house. It never seemed like mine, anyway—like home. It's too much trouble. I have to keep too many servants. I am tired bothering with them."

"That is not your true reason, *ma belle*. There is no use in telling me lies. I don't know your reason, but you have not told me the truth." Edna did not protest or endeavor to justify herself.

"The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason?"

"They are your husband's," returned Mademoiselle, with a shrug and a malicious elevation of the eyebrows.

"Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: It is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by driblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laidpore. I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence."

"What does your husband say?"

"I have not told him yet. I only thought of it this morning. He will think I am demented, no doubt. Perhaps you think so."

Mademoiselle shook her head slowly. "Your reason is not yet clear to me," she said.

Neither was it quite clear to Edna herself; but it unfolded itself as she sat for a while in silence. Instinct had prompted her to put away her husband's bounty in casting off her allegiance. She did not know how it would be when he returned. There would have to be an understanding, an explanation. Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt, but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself.

"I shall give a grand dinner before I leave the old house!" Edna exclaimed. "You will have to come to it, Mademoiselle. I will give you everything that you like to eat and to drink. We shall sing and laugh and be merry for once." And she uttered a sigh that came from the very depths of her being.

If Mademoiselle happened to have received a letter from Robert during the interval of Edna's visits, she would give her the letter unsolicited. And she would seat herself at the piano and play as her humor prompted her while the young woman read the letter.

The little stove was roaring; it was red-hot, and the chocolate in the tin sizzled and sputtered. Edna went forward and opened the stove door, and Mademoiselle rising, took a letter from under the bust of Beethoven and handed it to Edna.

"Another! so soon!" she exclaimed, her eyes filled with delight. "Tell me, Mademoiselle, does he know that I see his letters?"

"Never in the world! He would be angry and would never write to me again if he thought so. Does he write to you? Never a line. Does he send you a message? Never a word. It is because he loves you, poor fool, and is trying to forget you, since you are not free to listen to him or to belong to him."

"Why do you show me his letters, then?"

"Haven't you begged for them? Can I refuse you anything? Oh! you cannot deceive me," and Mademoiselle approached her beloved instrument and began to play. Edna did not at once read the letter. She sat holding it in her hand, while the music penetrated her whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul. It prepared her for joy and exultation.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, letting the letter fall to the floor. "Why did you not tell me?" She went and grasped Mademoiselle's hands up from the keys. "Oh! unkind! malicious! Why did you not tell me?"

"That he was coming back? No great news, *ma foi*. I wonder he did not come long ago."

"But when, when?" cried Edna, impatiently. "He does not say when."

"He says, 'very soon.' You know as much about it as I do; it is all in the letter."

"But why? Why is he coming? Oh, if I thought—" and she snatched the letters from the floor and turned the pages this way and that way, looking for the reason, which was left untold.

"If I were young and in love with a man," said Mademoiselle, turning on the stool and pressing her wiry hands between her knees as she looked down at Edna, who sat on the floor holding the letter, "it seems to me he would have to be some *grand esprit*,⁹ a man with lofty aims and ability to reach them; one who stood high enough to attract the notice of his fellow-men. It seems to me if I were young and in love I should never deem a man of ordinary caliber worthy of my devotion."

"Now it is you who are telling lies and seeking to deceive me, Mademoiselle; or else you have never been in love, and know nothing about it. Why," went on Edna, clasping her knees and looking up into Mademoiselle's twisted face, "do you suppose a woman knows why she loves? Does she select? Does she say to herself: 'Go to! Here is a distinguished statesman with presidential possibilities; I shall proceed to fall in love with him.' Or, 'I shall set my heart upon this musician, whose fame is on every tongue?' Or, 'This financier, who controls the world's money markets?'"

"You are purposely misunderstanding me, *ma reine*.¹ Are you in love with Robert?"

"Yes," said Edna. It was the first time she had admitted it, and a glow overspread her face, blotching it with red spots.

"Why?" asked her companion. "Why do you love him when you ought not to?"

Edna, with a motion or two, dragged herself on her knees before Mademoiselle Reisz, who took the glowing face between her two hands.

"Why? Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin, and a little finger which he can't straighten from having played baseball too energetically in his youth. Because—"

"Because you do, in short," laughed Mademoiselle. "What will you do when he comes back?" she asked.

"Do? Nothing, except feel glad and happy to be alive."

She was already glad and happy to be alive at the mere thought of his return. The murky, lowering sky, which had depressed her a few hours before, seemed bracing and invigorating as she splashed through the streets on her way home.

She stopped at a confectioner's and ordered a huge box of bonbons for the children in Iberville. She slipped a card in the box, on which she scribbled a tender message and sent an abundance of kisses.

Before dinner in the evening Edna wrote a charming letter to her husband, telling him of her intention to move for a while into the little house

9. Literally, "grand spirit" (French); here, noble soul.

1. My queen (French).

around the block, and to give a farewell dinner before leaving, regretting that he was not there to share it, to help her out with the menu and assist her in entertaining the guests. Her letter was brilliant and brimming with cheerfulness.

XXVII

"What is the matter with you?" asked Arobin that evening. "I never found you in such a happy mood." Edna was tired by that time, and was reclining on the lounge before the fire.

"Don't you know the weather prophet has told us we shall see the sun pretty soon?"

"Well, that ought to be reason enough," he acquiesced. "You wouldn't give me another if I sat here all night imploring you." He sat close to her on a low tabouret,² and as he spoke his fingers lightly touched the hair that fell a little over her forehead. She liked the touch of his fingers through her hair, and closed her eyes sensitively.

"One of these days," she said, "I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think—try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don't know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am. I must think about it."

"Don't. What's the use? Why should you bother thinking about it when I can tell you what manner of woman you are." His fingers strayed occasionally down to her warm, smooth cheeks and firm chin, which was growing a little full and double.

"Oh, yes! You will tell me that I am adorable; everything that is captivating. Spare yourself the effort."

"No; I shan't tell you anything of the sort, though I shouldn't be lying if I did."

"Do you know Mademoiselle Reisz?" she asked irrelevantly.

"The pianist? I know her by sight. I've heard her play."

"She says queer things sometimes in a bantering way that you don't notice at the time and you feel yourself thinking about afterward."

"For instance?"

"Well, for instance, when I left her today, she put her arms around me and felt my shoulder blades, to see if my wings were strong, she said. 'The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth.'"

"Whither would you soar?"

"I'm not thinking of any extraordinary flights. I only half comprehend her."

"I've heard she's partially demented," said Arobin.

"She seems to me wonderfully sane," Edna replied.

"I'm told she's extremely disagreeable and unpleasant. Why have you introduced her at a moment when I desired to talk of you?"

"Oh! talk of me if you like," cried Edna, clasping her hands beneath her head; "but let me think of something else while you do."

2. Cylindrical seat or stool without arms or back.

"I'm jealous of your thoughts to-night. They're making you a little kinder than usual; but some way I feel as if they were wandering, as if they were not here with me." She only looked at him and smiled. His eyes were very near. He leaned upon the lounge with an arm extended across her, while the other hand still rested upon her hair. They continued silently to look into each other's eyes. When he leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to hers.

It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire.

XXVIII

Edna cried a little that night after Arobin left her. It was only one phase of the multitudinous emotions which had assailed her. There was with her an overwhelming feeling of irresponsibility. There was the shock of the unexpected and the unaccustomed. There was her husband's reproach looking at her from external things around her which he had provided for her external existence. There was Robert's reproach making itself felt by a quicker, fiercer, more overpowering love, which had awakened within her toward him. Above all, there was understanding. She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to look upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality. But among the conflicting sensations which assailed her, there was neither shame nor remorse. There was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips.

XXIX

Without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna hastened her preparations for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving into the little house around the block. A feverish anxiety attended her every action in that direction. There was no moment of deliberation, no interval of repose between the thought and its fulfillment. Early upon the morning following those hours passed in Arobin's society, Edna set about securing her new abode and hurrying her arrangements for occupying it. Within the precincts of her home she felt like one who has entered and lingered within the portals of some forbidden temple in which a thousand muffled voices bade her begone.

Whatever was her own in the house, everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and meager deficiencies from her own resources.

Arobin found her with rolled sleeves, working in company with the housemaid when he looked in during the afternoon. She was splendid and robust, and had never appeared handsomer than in the old blue gown, with a red silk handkerchief knotted at random around her head to protect her hair from the dust. She was mounted upon a high stepladder, unhooking a picture from the wall when he entered. He had found the front door open, and had followed his ring by walking in unceremoniously.

"Come down!" he said. "Do you want kill yourself?" She greeted him with affected carelessness, and appeared absorbed in her occupation.

If he had expected to find her languishing, reproachful, or indulging in sentimental tears, he must have been greatly surprised.

He was no doubt prepared for any emergency, ready for any one of the foregoing attitudes, just as he bent himself easily and naturally to the situation which confronted him.

"Please come down," he insisted, holding the ladder and looking up at her.

"No," she answered; "Ellen is afraid to mount the ladder. Joe is working over at the 'pigeon house'—that's the name Ellen gives it, because it's so small and looks like a pigeon house³—and some one has to do this."

Arobin pulled off his coat, and expressed himself ready and willing to tempt fate in her place. Ellen brought him one of her dust-caps, and went into contortions of mirth, which she found it impossible to control, when she saw him put it on before the mirror as grotesquely as he could. Edna herself could not refrain from smiling when she fastened it at his request. So it was he who in turn mounted the ladder, unhooking pictures and curtains, and dislodging ornaments as Edna directed. When he had finished he took off his dust-cap and went out to wash his hands.

Edna was sitting on the tabouret, idly brushing the tips of a feather duster along the carpet when he came in again.

"Is there anything more you will let me do?" he asked.

"That is all," she answered. "Ellen can manage the rest." She kept the young woman occupied in the drawing-room, unwilling to be left alone with Arobin.

"What about the dinner?" he asked; "the grand event, the *coup d'état*?"⁴

"It will be day after to-morrow. Why do you call it the '*coup d'état*?' Oh! it will be very fine; all my best of everything—crystal, silver and gold. Sèvres, flowers, music, and champagne to swim in. I'll let Léonce pay the bills. I wonder what he'll say when he sees the bills."

"And you ask me why I call it a *coup d'état*?" Arobin had put on his coat, and he stood before her and asked if his cravat was plumb. She told him it was, looking no higher than the tip of his collar.

"When do you go to the 'pigeon house?'—with all due acknowledgment to Ellen."

"Day after to-morrow, after the dinner. I shall sleep there."

"Ellen, will you very kindly get me a glass of water?" asked Arobin. "The dust in the curtains, if you will pardon me for hinting such a thing, has parched my throat to a crisp."

"While Ellen gets the water," said Edna, rising, "I will say good-by and let you go. I must get rid of this grime, and I have a million things to do and think of."

"When shall I see you?" asked Arobin, seeking to detain her, the maid having left the room.

"At the dinner, of course. You are invited."

"Not before?—not to-night or to-morrow morning or to-morrow noon or night? or the day after morning or noon? Can't you see yourself, without my telling you, what an eternity it is?"

He had followed her into the hall and to the foot of the stairway, looking up at her as she mounted with her face half turned to him.

3. A house for domesticated birds kept for show or sport.

4. Sudden, unexpected overthrow of a government (French).

“Not an instant sooner,” she said. But she laughed and looked at him with eyes that at once gave him courage to wait and made it torture to wait.

XXX

Though Edna had spoken of the dinner as a very grand affair, it was in truth a very small affair and very select, in so much as the guests invited were few and were selected with discrimination. She had counted upon an even dozen seating themselves at her round mahogany board, forgetting for the moment that Madame Ratignolle was to the last degree *souffrante*⁵ and unrepresentable, and not foreseeing that Madame Lebrun would send a thousand regrets at the last moment. So there were only ten, after all, which made a cozy, comfortable number.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Merriman, a pretty, vivacious little woman in the thirties; her husband, a jovial fellow, something of a shallow-pate, who laughed a good deal at other people's witticisms, and had thereby made himself extremely popular. Mrs. Highcamp had accompanied them. Of course, there was Alcée Arobin; and Mademoiselle Reisz had consented to come. Edna had sent her a fresh bunch of violets with black lace trimmings for her hair. Monsieur Ratignolle brought himself and his wife's excuses. Victor Lebrun, who happened to be in the city, bent upon relaxation, had accepted with alacrity. There was a Miss Mayblunt, no longer in her teens, who looked at the world through lorgnettes and with the keenest interest. It was thought and said that she was intellectual; it was suspected of her that she wrote under a *nom de guerre*.⁶ She had come with a gentleman by the name of Gouvernail, connected with one of the daily papers, of whom nothing special could be said, except that he was observant and seemed quiet and inoffensive. Edna herself made the tenth, and at half-past eight they seated themselves at table, Arobin and Monsieur Ratignolle on either side of their hostess.

Mrs. Highcamp sat between Arobin and Victor Lebrun. Then came Mrs. Merriman, Mr. Gouvernail, Miss Mayblunt, Mr. Merriman, and Mademoiselle Reisz next to Monsieur Ratignolle.

There was something extremely gorgeous about the appearance of the table, an effect of splendor conveyed by a cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work. There were wax candles in massive brass candelabra, burning softly under yellow silk shades; full, fragrant roses, yellow and red, abounded. There were silver and gold, as she had said there would be, and crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore.

The ordinary stiff dining chairs had been discarded for the occasion and replaced by the most commodious and luxurious which could be collected throughout the house. Mademoiselle Reisz, being exceedingly diminutive, was elevated upon cushions, as small children are sometimes hoisted at table upon bulky volumes.

“Something new, Edna?” exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, with lorgnette directed toward a magnificent cluster of diamonds that sparkled, that almost sputtered, in Edna's hair, just over the center of her forehead.

5. Ill (French).

6. Pseudonym (French).

“Quite new; ‘brand’ new, in fact; a present from my husband. It arrived this morning from New York. I may as well admit that this is my birthday, and that I am twenty-nine. In good time I expect you to drink my health. Meanwhile, I shall ask you to begin with this cocktail, composed—would you say ‘composed?’” with an appeal to Miss Mayblunt—“composed by my father in honor of Sister Janet’s wedding.”

Before each guest stood a tiny glass that looked and sparkled like a garnet gem.

“Then, all things considered,” spoke Arobin, “it might not be amiss to start out by drinking the Colonel’s health in the cocktail which he composed, on the birthday of the most charming of women—the daughter whom he invented.”

Mr. Merriman’s laugh at this sally was such a genuine outburst and so contagious that it started the dinner with an agreeable swing that never slackened.

Miss Mayblunt begged to be allowed to keep her cocktail untouched before her, just to look at. The color was marvelous! She could compare it to nothing she had ever seen, and the garnet lights which it emitted were unspeakably rare. She pronounced the Colonel an artist, and stuck to it.

Monsieur Ratignolle was prepared to take things seriously; the *mets*, and *entre-mets*,⁷ the service, the decorations, even the people. He looked up from his pompono⁸ and inquired of Arobin if he were related to the gentleman of that name who formed one of the firm of Laitner and Arobin, lawyers. The young man admitted that Laitner was a warm personal friend, who permitted Arobin’s name to decorate the firm’s letterheads and to appear upon a shingle that graced Perdido Street.

“There are so many inquisitive people and institutions abounding,” said Arobin, “that one is really forced as a matter of convenience these days to assume the virtue of an occupation if he has it not.”

Monsieur Ratignolle stared a little, and turned to ask Mademoiselle Reisz if she considered the symphony concerts up to the standard which had been set the previous winter. Mademoiselle Reisz answered Monsieur Ratignolle in French, which Edna thought a little rude, under the circumstances, but characteristic. Mademoiselle had only disagreeable things to say of the symphony concerts, and insulting remarks to make of all the musicians of New Orleans, singly and collectively. All her interest seemed to be centered upon the delicacies placed before her.

Mr. Merriman said that Mr. Arobin’s remark about inquisitive people reminded him of a man from Waco⁹ the other day at the St. Charles Hotel—but as Mr. Merriman’s stories were always lame and lacking point, his wife seldom permitted him to complete them. She interrupted him to ask if he remembered the name of the author whose book she had bought the week before to send to a friend in Geneva. She was talking “books” with Mr. Gouvernail and trying to draw from him his opinion upon current literary topics. Her husband told the story of the Waco man privately to Miss Mayblunt, who pretended to be greatly amused and to think it extremely clever.

7. Main course and side dishes (French).

8. Pompano, fish of the southern Atlantic and

Gulf coasts of North America.

9. A town in Texas.

Mrs. Highcamp hung with languid but unaffected interest upon the warm and impetuous volubility of her left-hand neighbor, Victor Lebrun. Her attention was never for a moment withdrawn from him after seating herself at table; and when he turned to Mrs. Merriman, who was prettier and more vivacious than Mrs. Highcamp, she waited with easy indifference for an opportunity to reclaim his attention. There was the occasional sound of music, of mandolins, sufficiently removed to be an agreeable accompaniment rather than an interruption to the conversation. Outside the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain could be heard; the sound penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine that came through the open windows.

The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her skin, without the glow, the myriad living tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh. There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone.

But as she sat there amid her guests, she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition. It was something which announced itself; a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords wailed. There came over her the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of the beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable.

The moments glided on, while a feeling of good fellowship passed around the circle like a mystic cord, holding and binding these people together with jest and laughter. Monsieur Ratignolle was the first to break the pleasant charm. At ten o'clock he excused himself. Madame Ratignolle was waiting for him at home. She was *bien souffrante*,¹ and she was filled with vague dread, which only her husband's presence could allay.

Mademoiselle Reisz arose with Monsieur Ratignolle, who offered to escort her to the car. She had eaten well; she had tasted the good, rich wines, and they must have turned her head, for she bowed pleasantly to all as she withdrew from table. She kissed Edna upon the shoulder, and whispered: "*Bonne nuit, ma reine; soyez sage.*"² She had been a little bewildered upon rising, or rather, descending from her cushions, and Monsieur Ratignolle gallantly took her arm and led her away.

Mrs. Highcamp was weaving a garland of roses, yellow and red. When she had finished the garland, she laid it lightly upon Victor's black curls. He was reclining far back in the luxurious chair, holding a glass of champagne to the light.

As if a magician's wand had touched him, the garland of roses transformed him into a vision of Oriental beauty. His cheeks were the color of crushed grapes, and his dusky eyes glowed with a languishing fire.

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed Arobin.

But Mrs. Highcamp had one more touch to add to the picture. She took from the back of her chair a white silken scarf, with which she had covered

1. Very ill (French).

2. Good night, my love; be good (French).

her shoulders in the early part of the evening. She draped it across the boy in graceful folds, and in a way to conceal his black, conventional evening dress. He did not seem to mind what she did to him, only smiled, showing a faint gleam of white teeth, while he continued to gaze with narrowing eyes at the light through his glass of champagne.

"Oh! to be able to paint in color rather than in words!" exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, losing herself in a rhapsodic dream as she looked at him.

"There was a graven image of Desire
Painted with red blood on a ground of gold."³

murmured Gouvernail, under his breath.

The effect of the wine upon Victor was, to change his accustomed volubility into silence. He seemed to have abandoned himself to a reverie, and to be seeing pleasing visions in the amber bead.

"Sing," entreated Mrs. Highcamp. "Won't you sing to us?"

"Let him alone," said Arobin.

"He's posing," offered Mr. Merriman; "let him have it out."

"I believe he's paralyzed," laughed Mrs. Merriman. And leaning over the youth's chair, she took the glass from his hand and held it to his lips. He sipped the wine slowly, and when he had drained the glass she laid it upon the table and wiped his lips with her little filmy handkerchief.

"Yes, I'll sing for you," he said, turning in his chair toward Mrs. Highcamp. He clasped his hands behind his head, and looking up at the ceiling began to hum a little, trying his voice like a musician tuning an instrument. Then, looking at Edna, he began to sing:

"Ah! si tu savais!"

"Stop!" she cried, "don't sing that. I don't want you to sing it," and she laid her glass so impetuously and blindly upon the table as to shatter it against a caraffe. The wine spilled over Arobin's legs and some of it trickled down upon Mrs. Highcamp's black gauze gown. Victor had lost all idea of courtesy, or else he thought his hostess was not in earnest, for he laughed and went on:

"Ah! si tu savais
Ce que tes yeux me disent"—⁴

"Oh! you mustn't! you mustn't," exclaimed Edna, and pushing back her chair she got up, and going behind him placed her hand over his mouth. He kissed the soft palm that pressed upon his lips.

"No, no, I won't, Mrs. Pontellier. I didn't know you meant it," looking up at her with caressing eyes. The touch of his lips was like a pleasing sting to her hand. She lifted the garland of roses from his head and flung it across the room.

"Come, Victor; you've posed long enough. Give Mrs. Highcamp her scarf."

Mrs. Highcamp undraped the scarf from about him with her own hands. Miss Mayblunt and Mr. Gouvernail suddenly conceived the notion that it was time to say good night. And Mr. and Mrs. Merriman wondered how it could be so late.

3. Lines from the sonnet "A Cameo," by A. C. Swinburne (1837–1909).

4. "Ah! If you knew / What your eyes are saying to me—" (French).

Before parting from Victor, Mrs. Highcamp invited him to call upon her daughter, who she knew would be charmed to meet him and talk French and sing French songs with him. Victor expressed his desire and intention to call upon Mrs. Highcamp at the first opportunity which presented itself. He asked if Arobin were going his way. Arobin was not.

The mandolin players had long since stolen away. A profound stillness had fallen upon the broad, beautiful street. The voices of Edna's disbanding guests jarred like a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night.

XXXI

"Well?" questioned Arobin, who had remained with Edna after the others had departed.

"Well," she reiterated, and stood up, stretching her arms, and feeling the need to relax her muscles after having been so long seated.

"What next?" he asked.

"The servants are all gone. They left when the musicians did. I have dismissed them. The house has to be closed and locked, and I shall trot around to the pigeon house, and shall send Celestine over in the morning to straighten things up."

He looked around, and began to turn out some of the lights.

"What about upstairs?" he inquired.

"I think it is all right; but there may be a window or two unlatched. We had better look; you might take a candle and see. And bring me my wrap and hat on the foot of the bed in the middle room."

He went up with the light, and Edna began closing doors and windows. She hated to shut in the smoke and the fumes of the wine. Arobin found her cape and hat, which he brought down and helped her to put on.

When everything was secured and the lights put out, they left through the front door, Arobin locking it and taking the key, which he carried for Edna. He helped her down the steps.

"Will you have a spray of jessamine?" he asked, breaking off a few blossoms as he passed.

"No; I don't want anything."

She seemed disheartened, and had nothing to say. She took his arm, which he offered her, holding up the weight of her satin train with the other hand. She looked down, noticing the black line of his leg moving in and out so close to her against the yellow shimmer of her gown. There was the whistle of a railway train somewhere in the distance, and the midnight bells were ringing. They met no one in their short walk.

The "pigeon-house" stood behind a locked gate, and a shallow *parterre*⁵ that had been somewhat neglected. There was a small front porch, upon which a long window and the front door opened. The door opened directly into the parlor; there was no side entry. Back in the yard was a room for servants, in which old Celestine had been ensconced.

Edna had left a lamp burning low upon the table. She had succeeded in making the room look habitable and homelike. There were some books on the table and a lounge near at hand. On the floor was a fresh matting,

5. Ornamental garden (French).

covered with a rug or two; and on the walls hung a few tasteful pictures. But the room was filled with flowers. These were a surprise to her. Arobin had sent them, and had had Celestine distribute them during Edna's absence. Her bedroom was adjoining, and across a small passage were the dining-room and kitchen.

Edna seated herself with every appearance of discomfort.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Yes, and chilled and miserable. I feel as if I had been wound up to a certain pitch—too tight—and something inside of me had snapped." She rested her head against the table upon her bare arm.

"You want to rest," he said, "and to be quiet. I'll go; I'll leave you and let you rest."

"Yes," she replied.

He stood up beside her and smoothed her hair with his soft magnetic hand. His touch conveyed to her a certain physical comfort. She could have fallen quietly asleep there if he had continued to pass his hand over her hair. He brushed the hair upward from the nape of her neck.

"I hope you will feel better and happier in the morning," he said. "You have tried to do too much in the past few days. The dinner was the last straw; you might have dispensed with it."

"Yes," she admitted; "it was stupid."

"No, it was delightful; but it has worn you out." His hand had strayed to her beautiful shoulders, and he could feel the response of her flesh to his touch. He seated himself beside her and kissed her lightly upon the shoulder.

"I thought you were going away," she said, in an uneven voice.

"I am, after I have said good night."

"Good night," she murmured.

He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties.

XXXII

When Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife's intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. She had given reasons which he was unwilling to acknowledge as adequate. He hoped she had not acted upon her rash impulse; and he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say. He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered this warning; that was a thing which would never have entered into his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity. It might get noised about that the Pontelliers had met with reverses, and were forced to conduct their *ménage*⁶ on a humbler scale than heretofore. It might do incalculable mischief to his business prospects.

But remembering Edna's whimsical turn of mind of late, and foreseeing that she had immediately acted upon her impetuous determination, he grasped the situation with his usual promptness and handled it with his well-known business tact and cleverness.

6. Household (French).

The same mail which brought to Edna his letter of disapproval carried instructions—the most minute instructions—to a well-known architect concerning the remodeling of his home, changes which he had long contemplated, and which he desired carried forward during his temporary absence.

Expert and reliable packers and movers were engaged to convey the furniture, carpets, pictures—everything movable, in short—to places of security. And in an incredibly short time the Pontellier house was turned over to the artisans. There was to be an addition—a small snuggery; there was to be frescoing, and hardwood flooring was to be put into such rooms as had not yet been subjected to this improvement.

Furthermore, in one of the daily papers appeared a brief notice to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier were contemplating a summer sojourn abroad, and that their handsome residence on Esplanade Street was undergoing sumptuous alterations, and would not be ready for occupancy until their return. Mr. Pontellier had saved appearances!

Edna admired the skill of his maneuver, and avoided any occasion to balk his intentions. When the situation as set forth by Mr. Pontellier was accepted and taken for granted, she was apparently satisfied that it should be so.

The pigeon-house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to “feed upon opinion” when her own soul had invited her.

After a little while, a few days, in fact, Edna went up and spent a week with her children in Iberville. They were delicious February days, with all the summer’s promise hovering in the air.

How glad she was to see the children! She wept for very pleasure when she felt their little arms clasping her; their hard, ruddy cheeks pressed against her own glowing cheeks. She looked into their faces with hungry eyes that could not be satisfied with looking. And what stories they had to tell their mother! About the pigs, the cows, the mules! About riding to the mill behind Gluglu; fishing back in the lake with their Uncle Jasper; picking pecans with Lidie’s little black brood, and hauling chips in their express wagon. It was a thousand times more fun to haul real chips for old lame Susie’s real fire than to drag painted blocks along the banquette on Esplanade Street!

She went with them herself to see the pigs and the cows, to look at the darkies laying the cane, to thrash the pecan trees, and catch fish in the back lake. She lived with them a whole week long, giving them all of herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence. They listened, breathless, when she told them the house in Esplanade Street was crowded with workmen, hammering, nailing, sawing, and filling the place with clatter. They wanted to know where their bed was; what had been done with their rocking-horse; and where did Joe sleep, and where had Ellen gone, and the cook? But, above all, they were fired with a desire to see the little house around the block. Was there any place to play? Were there any boys next door? Raoul, with pessimistic foreboding, was convinced that there were only

girls next door. Where would they sleep, and where would papa sleep? She told them the fairies would fix it all right.

The old Madame was charmed with Edna's visit, and showered all manner of delicate attentions upon her. She was delighted to know that the Esplanade Street house was in a dismantled condition. It gave her the promise and pretext to keep the children indefinitely.

It was with a wrench and a pang that Edna left her children. She carried away with her the sound of their voices and the touch of their cheeks. All along the journey homeward their presence lingered with her like the memory of a delicious song. But by the time she had regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul. She was again alone.

XXXIII

It happened sometimes when Edna went to see Mademoiselle Reisz that the little musician was absent, giving a lesson or making some small necessary household purchase. The key was always left in a secret hiding-place in the entry, which Edna knew. If Mademoiselle happened to be away, Edna would usually enter and wait for her return.

When she knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's door one afternoon there was no response; so unlocking the door, as usual, she entered and found the apartment deserted, as she had expected. Her day had been quite filled up, and it was for a rest, for a refuge, and to talk about Robert, that she sought out her friend.

She had worked at her canvas—a young Italian character study—all the morning, completing the work without the model; but there had been many interruptions, some incident to her modest housekeeping, and others of a social nature.

Madame Ratignolle had dragged herself over, avoiding the too public thoroughfares, she said. She complained that Edna had neglected her much of late. Besides, she was consumed with curiosity to see the little house and the manner in which it was conducted. She wanted to hear all about the dinner party; Monsieur Ratignolle had left *so* early. What had happened after he left? The champagne and grapes which Edna sent over were *too* delicious. She had so little appetite; they had refreshed and toned her stomach. Where on earth was she going to put Mr. Pontellier in that little house, and the boys? And then she made Edna promise to go to her when her hour of trial overtook her.

"At any time—any time of the day or night, dear," Edna assured her.

Before leaving Madame Ratignolle said:

"In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone. Why don't you have some one come and stay with you? Wouldn't Mademoiselle Reisz come?"

"No; she wouldn't wish to come, and I shouldn't want her always with me."

"Well, the reason—you know how evil-minded the world is—some one was talking of Alcée Arobin visiting you. Of course, it wouldn't matter if Mr. Arobin had not such a dreadful reputation. Monsieur Ratignolle was telling me that his attentions alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name."

“Does he boast of his successes?” asked Edna, indifferently, squinting at her picture.

“No, I think not. I believe he is a decent fellow as far as that goes. But his character is so well known among the men. I shan’t be able to come back and see you; it was very, very imprudent today.”

“Mind the step!” cried Edna.

“Don’t neglect me,” entreated Madame Ratignolle; “and don’t mind what I said about Arobin, or having some one to stay with you.”

“Of course not,” Edna laughed, “You may say anything you like to me.” They kissed each other good-bye. Madame Ratignolle had not far to go, and Edna stood on the porch a while watching her walk down the street.

Then in the afternoon Mrs. Merriman and Mrs. Highcamp had made their “party call.” Edna felt that they might have dispensed with the formality. They had also come to invite her to play *vingt-et-un*⁷ one evening at Mrs. Merriman’s. She was asked to go early, to dinner, and Mr. Merriman or Mr. Arobin would take her home. Edna accepted in a half-hearted way. She sometimes felt very tired of Mrs. Highcamp and Mrs. Merriman.

Late in the afternoon she sought refuge with Mademoiselle Reisz, and stayed there alone, waiting for her, feeling a kind of repose invade her with the very atmosphere of the shabby, unpretentious little room.

Edna sat at the window, which looked out over the house-tops and across the river. The window frame was filled with pots of flowers, and she sat and picked the dry leaves from a rose geranium. The day was warm, and the breeze which blew from the river was very pleasant. She removed her hat and laid it on the piano. She went on picking the leaves and digging around the plants with her hat pin. Once she thought she heard Mademoiselle Reisz approaching. But it was a young black girl, who came in, bringing a small bundle of laundry, which she deposited in the adjoining room, and went away.

Edna seated herself at the piano, and softly picked out with one hand the bars of a piece of music which lay open before her. A half-hour went by. There was the occasional sound of people going and coming in the lower hall. She was growing interested in her occupation of picking out the aria, when there was a second rap at the door. She vaguely wondered what these people did when they found Mademoiselle’s door locked.

“Come in,” she called, turning her face toward the door. And this time it was Robert Lebrun who presented himself. She attempted to rise; she could not have done so without betraying the agitation which mastered her at sight of him, so she fell back upon the stool, only exclaiming, “Why Robert!”

He came and clasped her hand, seemingly without knowing what he was saying or doing.

“Mrs. Pontellier! How do you happen—oh! how well you look! Is Mademoiselle Reisz not here? I never expected to see you.”

“When did you come back?” asked Edna in an unsteady voice, wiping her face with her handkerchief. She seemed ill at ease on the piano stool, and he begged her to take the chair by the window. She did so, mechanically, while he seated himself on the stool.

“I returned day before yesterday,” he answered, while he leaned his arm on the keys, bringing forth a crash of discordant sound.

7. Twenty-one (French), a card game.

"Day before yesterday!" she repeated, aloud, and went on thinking to herself, "day before yesterday," in a sort of an uncomprehending way. She had pictured him seeking her at the very first hour, and he had lived under the same sky since day before yesterday; while only by accident had he stumbled upon her. Mademoiselle must have lied when she said, "Poor fool, he loves you."

"Day before yesterday," she repeated, breaking off a spray of Mademoiselle's geranium; "then if you had not met me here to-day you wouldn't—when—that is, didn't you mean to come and see me?"

"Of course, I should have gone to see you. There have been so many things—" he turned the leaves of Mademoiselle's music nervously. "I started in at once yesterday with the old firm. After all there is as much chance for me here as there was there—that is, I might find it profitable some day. The Mexicans were not very congenial."

So he had come back because the Mexicans were not congenial; because business was as profitable here as there; because of any reason, and not because he cared to be near her. She remembered the day she sat on the floor, turning the pages of his letter, seeking the reason which was left untold.

She had not noticed how he looked—only feeling his presence; but she turned deliberately and observed him. After all, he had been absent but a few months, and was not changed. His hair—the color of hers—waved back from his temples in the same way as before. His skin was not more burned than it had been at Grand Isle. She found in his eyes, when he looked at her for one silent moment, the same tender caress, with an added warmth and entreaty which had not been there before—the same glance which had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them.

A hundred times Edna had pictured Robert's return, and imagined their first meeting. It was usually at her home, whither he had sought her out at once. She always fancied him expressing or betraying in some way his love for her. And here, the reality was that they sat ten feet apart, she at the window, crushing geranium leaves in her hand and smelling them, he twirling around on the piano stool, saying:

"I was very much surprised to hear of Mr. Pontellier's absence; it's a wonder Mademoiselle Reisz did not tell me; and your moving—mother told me yesterday. I should think you would have gone to New York with him, or to Iberville with the children, rather than be bothered here with housekeeping. And you are going abroad, too, I hear. We shan't have you at Grand Isle next summer; it won't seem—do you see much of Mademoiselle Reisz? She often spoke of you in the few letters she wrote."

"Do you remember that you promised to write to me when you went away?" A flush overspread his whole face.

"I couldn't believe that my letters would be of any interest to you."

"That is an excuse; it isn't the truth." Edna reached for her hat on the piano. She adjusted it, sticking the hat pin through the heavy coil of hair with some deliberation.

"Are you not going to wait for Mademoiselle Reisz?" asked Robert.

"No; I have found when she is absent this long, she is liable not to come back till late." She drew on her gloves, and Robert picked up his hat.

"Won't you wait for her?" asked Edna.

"Not if you think she will not be back till late," adding, as if suddenly aware of some discourtesy in his speech, "and I should miss the pleasure of walking

home with you." Edna locked the door and put the key back in its hiding place.

They went together, picking their way across muddy streets and sidewalks encumbered with the cheap display of small tradesmen. Part of the distance they rode in the car, and after disembarking, passed the Pontellier mansion, which looked broken and half torn asunder. Robert had never known the house, and looked at it with interest.

"I never knew you in your home," he remarked.

"I am glad you did not."

"Why?" She did not answer. They went on around the corner, and it seemed as if her dreams were coming true after all, when he followed her into the little house.

"You must stay and dine with me, Robert. You see I am all alone, and it is so long since I have seen you. There is so much I want to ask you."

She took off her hat and gloves. He stood irresolute, making some excuse about his mother who expected him; he even muttered something about an engagement. She struck a match and lit the lamp on the table; it was growing dusk. When he saw her face in the lamplight, looking pained, with all the soft lines gone out of it, he threw his hat aside and seated himself.

"Oh! you know I want to stay if you will let me!" he exclaimed. All the softness came back. She laughed, and went and put her hand on his shoulder.

"This is the first moment you have seemed like the old Robert. I'll go tell Celestine." She hurried away to tell Celestine to set an extra place. She even sent her off in search of some added delicacy which she had not thought of for herself. And she recommended great care in dripping the coffee and having the omelet done to a proper turn.

When she reëntered, Robert was turning over magazines, sketches, and things that lay upon the table in great disorder. He picked up a photograph, and exclaimed:

"Alcée Arobin! What on earth is his picture doing here?"

"I tried to make a sketch of his head one day," answered Edna, "and he thought the photograph might help me. It was at the other house. I thought it had been left there. I must have picked it up with my drawing materials."

"I should think you would give it back to him if you have finished with it."

"Oh! I have a great many such photographs. I never think of returning them. They don't amount to anything." Robert kept on looking at the picture.

"It seems to me—do you think his head worth drawing? Is he a friend of Mr. Pontellier's? You never said you knew him."

"He isn't a friend of Mr. Pontellier's; he's a friend of mine. I always knew him—that is, it is only of late that I know him pretty well. But I'd rather talk about you, and know what you have been seeing and doing and feeling out there in Mexico." Robert threw aside the picture.

"I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the *Chênrière*; the old fort at Grande Terre. I've been working like a machine, and feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting."

She leaned her head upon her hand to shade her eyes from the light.

"And what have you been seeing and doing and feeling all these days?" he asked.

"I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the *Chênrière Caminada*; the old sunny fort at Grande Terre.

I've been working with little more comprehension than a machine, and still feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting."

"Mrs. Pontellier, you are cruel," he said, with feeling, closing his eyes and resting his head back in his chair. They remained in silence till old Celestine announced dinner.

XXXIV

The dining-room was very small. Edna's round mahogany would have almost filled it. As it was there was but a step or two from the little table to the kitchen, to the mantel, the small buffet, and the side door that opened out on the narrow brick-paved yard.

A certain degree of ceremony settled upon them with the announcement of dinner. There was no return to personalities. Robert related incidents of his sojourn in Mexico, and Edna talked of events likely to interest him, which had occurred during his absence. The dinner was of ordinary quality, except for the few delicacies which she had sent out to purchase. Old Celestine, with a bandana *tignon*⁸ twisted about her head, hobbled in and out, taking a personal interest in everything; and she lingered occasionally to talk *patois*⁹ with Robert, whom she had known as a boy.

He went out to a neighboring cigar stand to purchase cigarette papers, and when he came back he found that Celestine had served the black coffee in the parlor.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have come back," he said. "When you are tired of me, tell me to go."

"You never tire me. You must have forgotten the hours and hours at Grand Isle in which we grew accustomed to each other and used to being together."

"I have forgotten nothing at Grand Isle," he said, not looking at her, but rolling a cigarette. His tobacco pouch, which he laid upon the table, was a fantastic embroidered silk affair, evidently the handiwork of a woman.

"You used to carry your tobacco in a rubber pouch," said Edna, picking up the pouch and examining the needlework.

"Yes; it was lost."

"Where did you buy this one? In Mexico?"

"It was given to me by a Vera Cruz girl; they are very generous," he replied, striking a match and lighting his cigarette.

"They are very handsome, I suppose, those Mexican women; very picturesque, with their black eyes and their lace scarfs."

"Some are; others are hideous. Just as you find women everywhere."

"What was she like—the one who gave you the pouch? You must have known her very well."

"She was very ordinary. She wasn't of the slightest importance. I knew her well enough."

"Did you visit at her house? Was it interesting? I should like to know and hear about the people you met, and the impressions they made on you."

8. Archaic form of the word *chignon*, a "coil of hair" or a "bun." She has her hair tied up with a scarf.

9. A dialect; here, the archaic French mixed with English, Spanish, German, and American Indian words spoken by the descendants of the Acadians.

"There are some people who leave impressions not so lasting as the imprint of an oar upon the water."

"Was she such a one?"

"It would be ungenerous for me to admit that she was of that order and kind." He thrust the pouch back in his pocket, as if to put away the subject with the trifle which had brought it up.

Arobin dropped in with a message from Mrs. Merriman, to say that the card party was postponed on account of the illness of one of her children.

"How do you do, Arobin?" said Robert, rising from the obscurity.

"Oh! Lebrun. To be sure! I heard yesterday you were back. How did they treat you down in Mexico?"

"Fairly well."

"But not well enough to keep you there. Stunning girls, though, in Mexico. I thought I should never get away from Vera Cruz when I was down there a couple of years ago."

"Did they embroider slippers and tobacco pouches and hat-bands and things for you?" asked Edna.

"Oh! my! no! I didn't get so deep in their regard. I fear they made more impression on me than I made on them."

"You were less fortunate than Robert, then."

"I am always less fortunate than Robert. Has he been imparting tender confidences?"

"I've been imposing myself long enough," said Robert, rising, and shaking hands with Edna. "Please convey my regards to Mr. Pontellier when you write."

He shook hands with Arobin and went away.

"Fine fellow, that Lebrun," said Arobin when Robert had gone. "I never heard you speak of him."

"I knew him last summer at Grand Isle," she replied. "Here is that photograph of yours. Don't you want it?"

"What do I want with it? Throw it away." She threw it back on the table.

"I'm not going to Mrs. Merriman's," she said. "If you see her, tell her so. But perhaps I had better write. I think I shall write now, and say that I am sorry her child is sick, and tell her not to count on me."

"It would be a good scheme," acquiesced Arobin. "I don't blame you; stupid lot!"

Edna opened the blotter, and having procured paper and pen, began to write the note. Arobin lit a cigar and read the evening paper, which he had in his pocket.

"What is the date?" she asked. He told her.

"Will you mail this for me when you go out?"

"Certainly." He read to her little bits out of the newspaper, while she straightened things on the table.

"What do you want to do?" he asked, throwing aside the paper. "Do you want to go out for a walk or a drive or anything? It would be a fine night to drive."

"No; I don't want to do anything but just be quiet. You go away and amuse yourself. Don't stay."

"I'll go away if I must; but I shan't amuse myself. You know that I only live when I am near you."

He stood up to bid her good night.

"Is that one of the things you always say to women?"

"I have said it before, but I don't think I ever came so near meaning it," he answered with a smile. There were no warm lights in her eyes; only a dreamy, absent look.

"Good night, I adore you. Sleep well," he said, and he kissed her hand and went away.

She stayed alone in a kind of reverie—a sort of stupor. Step by step she lived over every instant of the time she had been with Robert after he had entered Mademoiselle Reisz's door. She recalled his words, his looks. How few and meager they had been for her hungry heart! A vision—a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico.

XXXV

The morning was full of sunlight and hope. Edna could see before her no denial—only the promise of excessive joy. She lay in bed awake, with bright eyes full of speculation. "He loves you, poor fool." If she could but get that conviction firmly fixed in her mind, what mattered about the rest? She felt she had been childish and unwise the night before in giving herself over to despondency. She recapitulated the motives which no doubt explained Robert's reserve. They were not insurmountable; they would not hold if he really loved her; they could not hold against her own passion, which he must come to realize in time. She pictured him going to his business that morning. She even saw how he was dressed; how he walked down one street, and turned the corner of another; saw him bending over his desk, talking to people who entered the office, going to his lunch, and perhaps watching for her on the street. He would come to her in the afternoon or evening, sit and roll his cigarette, talk a little, and go away as he had done the night before. But how delicious it would be to have him there with her! She would have no regrets, nor seek to penetrate his reserve if he still chose to wear it.

Edna ate her breakfast only half dressed. The maid brought her a delicious printed scrawl from Raoul, expressing his love, asking her to send him some bonbons, and telling her they had found that morning ten tiny white pigs all lying in a row beside Lidie's big white pig.

A letter also came from her husband, saying he hoped to be back early in March, and then they would get ready for that journey abroad which he had promised her so long, which he felt now fully able to afford; he felt able to travel as people should, without any thought of small economies—thanks to his recent speculations in Wall Street.

Much to her surprise she received a note from Arobin, written at midnight from the club. It was to say good morning to her, to hope that she had slept well, to assure her of his devotion, which he trusted she in some faintest manner returned.

All these letters were pleasing to her. She answered the children in a cheerful frame of mind, promising them bonbons, and congratulating them upon their happy find of the little pigs.

She answered her husband with friendly evasiveness,—not with any fixed design to mislead him, only because all sense of reality had gone out of her life; she had abandoned herself to Fate, and awaited the consequences with indifference.

To Arobin's note she made no reply. She put it under Celestine's stove-lid.

Edna worked several hours with much spirit. She saw no one but a picture dealer, who asked her if it were true that she was going abroad to study in Paris.

She said possibly she might, and he negotiated with her for some Parisian studies to reach him in time for the holiday trade in December.

Robert did not come that day. She was keenly disappointed. He did not come the following day, nor the next. Each morning she awoke with hope, and each night she was a prey to despondency. She was tempted to seek him out. But far from yielding to the impulse, she avoided any occasion which might throw her in his way. She did not go to Mademoiselle Reisz's nor pass by Madame Lebrun's, as she might have done if he had still been in Mexico.

When Arobin, one night, urged her to drive with him, she went—out to the lake, on the Shell Road.¹ His horses were full of mettle, and even a little unmanageable. She liked the rapid gait at which they spun along, and the quick, sharp sound of the horses' hoofs on the hard road. They did not stop anywhere to eat or to drink. Arobin was not needlessly imprudent. But they ate and they drank when they regained Edna's little dining-room—which was comparatively early in the evening.

It was late when he left her. It was getting to be more than a passing whim with Arobin to see her and be with her. He had detected the latent sensuality, which unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature's requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom.

There was no despondency when she fell asleep that night; nor was there hope when she awoke in the morning.

XXXVI

There was a garden out in the suburbs; a small, leafy corner, with a few green tables under the orange trees. An old cat slept all day on the stone step in the sun, and an old *mulatresse*² slept her idle hours away in her chair at the open window, till some one happened to knock on one of the green tables. She had milk and cream cheese to sell, and bread and butter. There was no one who could make such excellent coffee or fry a chicken so golden brown as she.

The place was too modest to attract the attention of people of fashion, and so quiet as to have escaped the notice of those in search of pleasure and dissipation. Edna had discovered it accidentally one day when the high-board gate stood ajar. She caught sight of a little green table, blotched with the checkered sunlight that filtered through the quivering leaves overhead. Within she had found the slumbering *mulatresse*, the drowsy cat, and a glass of milk which reminded her of the milk she had tasted in Iberville.

She often stopped there during her perambulations; sometimes taking a book with her, and sitting an hour or two under the trees when she found

1. A road along Lake Pontchartrain, a favorite for testing the speed of horses.

2. Female mulatto (French); a female of mixed racial ancestry.

the place deserted. Once or twice she took a quiet dinner there alone, having instructed Celestine beforehand to prepare no dinner at home. It was the last place in the city where she would have expected to meet any one she knew.

Still she was not astonished when, as she was partaking of a modest dinner late in the afternoon, looking into an open book, stroking the cat, which had made friends with her—she was not greatly astonished to see Robert come in at the tall garden gate.

“I am destined to see you only by accident,” she said, shoving the cat off the chair beside her. He was surprised, ill at ease, almost embarrassed at meeting her thus so unexpectedly.

“Do you come here often?” he asked.

“I almost live here,” she said.

“I used to drop in very often for a cup of Catiche’s good coffee. This is the first time since I came back.”

“She’ll bring you a plate, and you will share my dinner. There’s always enough for two—even three.” Edna had intended to be indifferent and as reserved as he when she met him; she had reached the determination by a laborious train of reasoning, incident to one of her despondent moods. But her resolve melted when she saw him before her, seated there beside her in the little garden, as if a designing Providence had led him into her path.

“Why have you kept away from me, Robert?” she asked, closing the book that lay open upon the table.

“Why are you so personal, Mrs. Pontellier? Why do you force me to idiotic subterfuges?” he exclaimed with sudden warmth. “I suppose there’s no use telling you I’ve been very busy, or that I’ve been sick, or that I’ve been to see you and not found you at home. Please let me off with any one of those excuses.”

“You are the embodiment of selfishness,” she said. “You save yourself something—I don’t know what—but there is some selfish motive, and in sparing yourself you never consider for a moment what I think, or how I feel your neglect and indifference. I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself. It doesn’t matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like.”

“No; I only think you cruel, as I said the other day. Maybe not intentionally cruel; but you seem to be forcing me into disclosures which can result in nothing; as if you would have me bare a wound for the pleasure of looking at it, without the intention or power of healing it.”

“I’m spoiling your dinner, Robert; never mind what I say. You haven’t eaten a morsel.”

“I only came in for a cup of coffee.” His sensitive face was all disfigured with excitement.

“Isn’t this a delightful place?” she remarked. “I am so glad it has never actually been discovered. It is so quiet, so sweet here. Do you notice there is scarcely a sound to be heard? It’s so out of the way; and a good walk from the car. However, I don’t mind walking. I always feel so sorry for women who don’t like to walk; they miss so much—so many rare little glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of life on the whole.

“Catiche’s coffee is always hot. I don’t know how she manages it, here in the open air. Celestine’s coffee gets cold bringing it from the kitchen to the

dining-room. Three lumps! How can you drink it so sweet? Take some of the cress with your chop; it's so biting and crisp. Then there's the advantage of being able to smoke with your coffee out here. Now, in the city—aren't you going to smoke?"

"After a while," he said, laying a cigar on the table.

"Who gave it to you?" she laughed.

"I bought it. I suppose I'm getting reckless; I bought a whole box." She was determined not to be personal again and make him uncomfortable.

The cat made friends with him, and climbed into his lap when he smoked his cigar. He stroked her silky fur, and talked a little about her. He looked at Edna's book, which he had read; and he told her the end, to save her the trouble of wading through it, he said.

Again he accompanied her back to her home; and it was after dusk when they reached the little "pigeon-house." She did not ask him to remain, which he was grateful for, as it permitted him to stay without the discomfort of blundering through an excuse which he had no intention of considering. He helped her to light the lamp; then she went into her room to take off her hat and to bathe her face and hands.

When she came back Robert was not examining the pictures and magazines as before; he sat off in the shadow, leaning his head back on the chair as if in a reverie. Edna lingered a moment beside the table, arranging the books there. Then she went across the room to where he sat. She bent over the arm of his chair and called his name.

"Robert," she said, "are you asleep?"

"No," he answered, looking up at her.

She leaned over and kissed him—a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being—then she moved away from him. He followed, and took her in his arms, just holding her close to him. She put her hand up to his face and pressed his cheek against her own. The action was full of love and tenderness. He sought her lips again. Then he drew her down upon the sofa beside him and held her hand in both of his.

"Now you know," he said, "now you know what I have been fighting against since last summer at Grand Isle; what drove me away and drove me back again."

"Why have you been fighting against it?" she asked. Her face glowed with soft lights.

"Why? Because you were not free; you were Léonce Pontellier's wife. I couldn't help loving you if you were ten times his wife, but so long as I went away from you and kept away I could help telling you so." She put her free hand up to his shoulder, and then against his cheek, rubbing it softly. He kissed her again. His face was warm and flushed.

"There in Mexico I was thinking of you all the time, and longing for you."

"But not writing to me," she interrupted.

"Something put into my head that you cared for me; and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild dream of your some way becoming my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Religion, loyalty, everything would give way if only you cared."

"Then you must have forgotten that I was Léonce Pontellier's wife."

"Oh! I was demented, dreaming of wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free, we have heard of such things."

"Yes, we have heard of such things."

"I came back full of vague, mad intentions. And when I got here—"

"When you got here you never came near me!" She was still caressing his cheek.

"I realized what a cur I was to dream of such a thing, even if you had been willing."

She took his face between her hands and looked into it as if she would never withdraw her eyes more. She kissed him on the forehead, the eyes, the cheeks, and the lips.

"You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both."

His face grew a little white. "What do you mean?" he asked.

There was a knock at the door. Old Celestine came in to say that Madame Ratignolle's servant had come around the back way with a message that Madame had been taken sick and begged Mrs. Pontellier to go to her immediately.

"Yes, yes," said Edna, rising: "I promised. Tell her yes—to wait for me. I'll go back with her."

"Let me walk over with you," offered Robert.

"No," she said; "I will go with the servant." She went into her room to put on her hat, and when she came in again she sat once more upon the sofa beside him. He had not stirred. She put her arms about his neck.

"Good-by, my sweet Robert. Tell me good-by." He kissed her with a degree of passion which had not before entered into his caress, and strained her to him.

"I love you," she whispered, "only you; no one but you. It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. Oh! you have made me so unhappy with your indifference. Oh! I have suffered, suffered! Now you are here we shall love each other, my Robert. We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence. I must go to my friend; but you will wait for me? No matter how late; you will wait for me, Robert?"

"Don't go; don't go! Oh! Edna, stay with me," he pleaded. "Why should you go? Stay with me, stay with me."

"I shall come back as soon as I can; I shall find you here." She buried her face in his neck, and said good-by again. Her seductive voice, together with his great love for her, had enthralled his senses, had deprived him of every impulse but the longing to hold her and keep her.

XXXVII

Edna looked in at the drug store. Monsieur Ratignolle was putting up a mixture himself, very carefully, dropping a red liquid into a tiny glass. He was grateful to Edna for having come; her presence would be a comfort to his wife. Madame Ratignolle's sister, who had always been with her at such trying times, had not been able to come up from the plantation, and Adèle had been inconsolable until Mrs. Pontellier so kindly promised to come to her.

The nurse had been with them at night for the past week, as she lived a great distance away. And Dr. Mandelet had been coming and going all the afternoon. They were then looking for him any moment.

Edna hastened upstairs by a private stairway that led from the rear of the store to the apartments above. The children were all sleeping in a back room. Madame Ratignolle was in the salon, whither she had strayed in her suffering impatience. She sat on the sofa, clad in an ample white *peignoir*, holding a handkerchief tight in her hand with a nervous clutch. Her face was drawn and pinched, her sweet blue eyes haggard and unnatural. All her beautiful hair had been drawn back and plaited. It lay in a long braid on the sofa pillow, coiled like a golden serpent. The nurse, a comfortable looking *Griffe*³ woman in white apron and cap, was urging her to return to her bedroom.

"There is no use, there is no use," she said at once to Edna. "We must get rid of Mandelet; he is getting too old and careless. He said he would be here at half-past seven; now it must be eight. See what time it is, Joséphine."

The woman was possessed of a cheerful nature, and refused to take any situation too seriously, especially a situation with which she was so familiar. She urged Madame to have courage and patience. But Madame only set her teeth hard into her under lip, and Edna saw the sweat gather in beads on her white forehead. After a moment or two she uttered a profound sigh and wiped her face with the handkerchief rolled in a ball. She appeared exhausted. The nurse gave her a fresh handkerchief, sprinkled with cologne water.

"This is too much!" she cried. "Mandélet ought to be killed! Where is Alphonse? Is it possible I am to be abandoned like this—neglected by every one!"

"Neglected, indeed!" exclaimed the nurse. Wasn't she there? And here was Mrs. Pontellier leaving, no doubt, a pleasant evening at home to devote to her? And wasn't Monsieur Ratignolle coming that very instant through the hall? And Joséphine was quite sure she had heard Doctor Mandelet's coupé. Yes, there it was, down at the door.

Adèle consented to go back to her room. She sat on the edge of a little low couch next to her bed.

Doctor Mandelet paid no attention to Madame Ratignolle's upbraidings. He was accustomed to them at such times, and was too well convinced of her loyalty to doubt it.

He was glad to see Edna, and wanted her to go with him into the salon and entertain him. But Madame Ratignolle would not consent that Edna should leave her for an instant. Between agonizing moments, she chatted a little, and said it took her mind off her sufferings.

Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go.

She began to wish she had not come; her presence was not necessary. She might have invented a pretext for staying away; she might even invent a

3. A French term that, at the time, referred to someone regarded as three-fourths black.

pretext now for going. But Edna did not go. With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture.

She was still stunned and speechless with emotion when later she leaned over her friend to kiss her and softly say good-by. Adèle, pressing her cheek, whispered in an exhausted voice: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!"

XXXVIII

Edna still felt dazed when she got outside in the open air. The Doctor's coupé had returned for him and stood before the *porte cochère*. She did not wish to enter the coupé, and told Doctor Mandelet she would walk; she was not afraid, and would go alone. He directed his carriage to meet him at Mrs. Pontellier's, and he started to walk home with her.

Up—away up, over the narrow street between the tall houses, the stars were blazing. The air was mild and caressing, but cool with the breath of spring and the night. They walked slowly, the Doctor with a heavy, measured tread and his hands behind him; Edna, in an absent-minded way, as she had walked one night at Grand Isle, as if her thoughts had gone ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them.

"You shouldn't have been there, Mrs. Pontellier," he said. "That was no place for you. Adèle is full of whims at such times. There were a dozen women she might have had with her, unimpressionable women. I felt that it was cruel, cruel. You shouldn't have gone."

"Oh, well!" she answered, indifferently. "I don't know that it matters after all. One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better."

"When is Léonce coming back?"

"Quite soon. Some time in March."

"And you are going abroad?"

"Perhaps—no, I am not going. I'm not going to be forced into doing things. I don't want to go abroad. I want to be let alone. Nobody has any right—except children, perhaps—and even then, it seems to me—or it did seem—" She felt that her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly.

"The trouble is," sighed the Doctor, grasping her meaning intuitively, "that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost."

"Yes," she said. "The years that are gone seem like dreams—if one might go on sleeping and dreaming—but to wake up and find—oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life."

"It seems to me, my dear child," said the Doctor at parting, holding her hand, "you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you. I know I would understand, and I tell you there are not many who would—not many, my dear."

“Some way I don’t feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. Don’t think I am ungrateful or that I don’t appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don’t want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others—but no matter—still, I shouldn’t want to trample upon the little lives. Oh! I don’t know what I’m saying, Doctor. Good night. Don’t blame me for anything.”

“Yes, I will blame you if you don’t come and see me soon. We will talk of things you never have dreamt of talking about before. It will do us both good. I don’t want you to blame yourself, whatever comes. Good night, my child.”

She let herself in at the gate, but instead of entering she sat upon the step of the porch. The night was quiet and soothing. All the tearing emotion of the last few hours seemed to fall away from her like a somber, uncomfortable garment, which she had but to loosen to be rid of. She went back to that hour before Adèle had sent for her; and her senses kindled afresh in thinking of Robert’s words, the pressure of his arms, and the feeling of his lips upon her own. She could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one. His expression of love had already given him to her in part. When she thought that he was there at hand, waiting for her, she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy. It was so late; he would be asleep perhaps. She would awaken him with a kiss. She hoped he would be asleep that she might arouse him with her caresses.

Still, she remembered Adèle’s voice whispering, “Think of the children, think of them.” She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound—but not to-night. To-morrow would be time to think of everything.

Robert was not waiting for her in the little parlor. He was nowhere at hand. The house was empty. But he had scrawled on a piece of paper that lay in the lamplight:

“I love you. Good-by—because I love you.”

Edna grew faint when she read the words. She went and sat on the sofa. Then she stretched herself out there, never uttering a sound. She did not sleep. She did not go to bed. The lamp sputtered and went out. She was still awake in the morning, when Celestine unlocked the kitchen door and came in to light the fire.

XXXIX

Victor, with hammer and nails and scraps of scantling,⁴ was patching a corner of one of the galleries. Mariequita sat near by, dangling her legs, watching him work, and handing him nails from the tool-box. The sun was beating down upon them. The girl had covered her head with her apron folded into a square pad. They had been talking for an hour or more. She was never tired of hearing Victor describe the dinner at Mrs. Pontellier’s. He exaggerated every detail, making it appear a veritable Lucilleian⁵ feast. The flowers were in tubs, he said. The champagne was quaffed from huge golden gob-

4. Small pieces of lumber.

5. Chopin apparently means *Lucullan*, after the

1st-century B.C.E. Roman general Lucius Licinius Lucullus, who was noted for his lavish banquets.

lets. Venus⁶ rising from the foam could have presented no more entrancing a spectacle than Mrs. Pontellier, blazing with beauty and diamonds at the head of the board, while the other women were all of them youthful houris⁷ possessed of incomparable charms.

She got it into her head that Victor was in love with Mrs. Pontellier, and he gave her evasive answers, framed so as to confirm her belief. She grew sullen and cried a little, threatening to go off and leave him to his fine ladies. There were a dozen men crazy about her at the *Chênrière*; and since it was the fashion to be in love with married people, why, she could run away any time she liked to New Orleans with Céline's husband.

Céline's husband was a fool, a coward, and a pig, and to prove it to her, Victor intended to hammer his head into a jelly the next time he encountered him. This assurance was very consoling to Mariequita. She dried her eyes, and grew cheerful at the prospect.

They were still talking of the dinner and the allurements of city life when Mrs. Pontellier herself slipped around the corner of the house. The two youngsters stayed dumb with amazement before what they considered to be an apparition. But it was really she in flesh and blood, looking tired and a little travel-stained.

"I walked up from the wharf," she said, "and heard the hammering. I supposed it was you, mending the porch. It's a good thing. I was always tripping over those loose planks last summer. How dreary and deserted everything looks!"

It took Victor some little time to comprehend that she had come in Beaudelaire's lugger, that she had come alone, and for no purpose but to rest.

"There's nothing fixed up yet, you see. I'll give you my room; it's the only place."

"Any corner will do," she assured him.

"And if you can stand Philomel's cooking," he went on, "though I might try to get her mother while you are here. Do you think she would come?" turning to Mariequita.

Mariequita thought that perhaps Philomel's mother might come for a few days, and money enough.

Beholding Mrs. Pontellier make her appearance, the girl had at once suspected a lovers' rendezvous. But Victor's astonishment was so genuine, and Mrs. Pontellier's indifference so apparent, that the disturbing notion did not lodge long in her brain. She contemplated with the greatest interest this woman who gave the most sumptuous dinners in America, and who had all the men in New Orleans at her feet.

"What time will you have dinner?" asked Edna. "I'm very hungry; but don't get anything extra."

"I'll have it ready in little or no time," he said, bustling and packing away his tools. "You may go to my room to brush up and rest yourself. Mariequita will show you."

"Thank you," said Edna. "But, do you know, I have a notion to go down to the beach and take a good wash and even a little swim, before dinner?"

"The water is too cold!" they both exclaimed. "Don't think of it."

6. Roman goddess of love and beauty, daughter of Jupiter and Dione, sprang from sea foam at birth.

7. Virgin nymphs, everlastingly young and beautiful.

“Well, I might go down and try—dip my toes in. Why, it seems to me the sun is hot enough to have warmed the very depths of the ocean. Could you get me a couple of towels? I’d better go right away, so as to be back in time. It would be a little too chilly if I waited till this afternoon.”

Mariequita ran over to Victor’s room, and returned with some towels, which she gave to Edna.

“I hope you have fish for dinner,” said Edna, as she started to walk away; “but don’t do anything extra if you haven’t.”

“Run and find Philomel’s mother,” Victor instructed the girl. “I’ll go to the kitchen and see what I can do. By Gimminy! Women have no consideration! She might have sent me word.”

Edna walked on down to the beach rather mechanically, not noticing anything special except that the sun was hot. She was not dwelling upon any particular train of thought. She had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning.

She had said over and over to herself: “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn’t matter about Léonce Pontellier—but Raoul and Etienne!” She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children.

Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach.

The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.

Edna had found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

She put it on, leaving her clothing in the bath-house. But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end.

Her arms and legs were growing tired.

She thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew! "And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies."

Exhaustion was pressing upon and over-powering her.

"Good-by—because, I love you." He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand. Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had seen him—but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

1899

MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

1852–1930

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, who won literary acclaim for her depiction of New England village life, was born on October 31, 1852, in Randolph, Massachusetts, a small town twenty miles south of Boston. She was frequently ill in a household that knew sickness all too well: two other Wilkins children died before they reached three years of age; her sister Anne only lived to be seventeen. Freeman's parents were pious Christians and orthodox in following the prescriptions of the Congregationalist denomination; she was thus subject to a strict code of behavior. When she became a writer, Freeman would frequently dramatize the constraints of religious belief, the legacy of confining traditions, and especially the impact of orthodoxy on the inner lives of women.

In 1867, Freeman's father became part owner of a dry-goods store in Brattleboro, Vermont, where she graduated from high school. In 1870 she entered Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, which Emily Dickinson had attended two decades earlier. Like Dickinson, Freeman left after a year in which she resisted the school's pressure on all students to offer public testimony as to their Christian commitment. She finished her formal education with a year at West Brattleboro Seminary, though the reading and discussions with her friend Evelyn Sawyer about the novels and poetry of Europe and America were probably more important than her schoolwork in developing her literary taste.

After the failure of her father's business in 1876, Freeman's family moved into the Brattleboro home of the Reverend Thomas Pickman Tyler, where her mother became housekeeper. Poverty was hard for the Wilkinsons to bear, especially because their Puritan heritage led them to believe that it was a punishment for sin. Freeman's mother died in 1880, her father three years later, leaving Freeman alone at the age of twenty-eight, with a legacy of less than one thousand dollars.

Fortunately, she had begun to sell poems and stories to such leading magazines as *Harper's Bazaar*, and by the mid-1880s Freeman had a ready market for her work. As soon as she achieved a measure of economic independence, she returned to Randolph, where she lived with her childhood friend Mary Wales. Her early stories, especially those gathered and published in *A Humble Romance* (1887), are set in the Vermont countryside. She wrote in a preface to one edition of these stories that the characters are generalized "studies of the descendants of the Massachusetts Bay colonists, in whom can still be seen traces of those features of will and conscience, so strong as to be almost exaggerations and deformities, which characterized their ancestors." More specifically, the title story dramatizes a theme Freeman was to return to frequently: the potential for unpredictable revolt in outwardly meek and downtrodden natures, such as that of the central character in "The Revolt of 'Mother.'"

"*A New England Nun*" and *Other Stories*, which appeared in 1891, contains several of her best stories, most notably the title story, which illustrates Freeman's deep interest in the social restrictions placed on women and the resulting rebelliousness. In addition to providing a vivid sense of place, local dialect, and personality types, Freeman also offers in her best work insight into the individual psychology and interior life that results when confining, inherited codes of tradition are subject to the pressure of a rapidly changing secular and urban world. Freeman's interest in how women, individually and collectively, assert their power to overturn an exhausted Puritan patriarchy resonated with readers throughout the United States, where the role of women was being hotly debated during the turn of the twentieth century.

Freeman continued to write for another three decades. Although she is best known today for her New England short stories, she also wrote plays and a number of successful novels—including *Pembroke* (1894) and *The Shoulders of Atlas* (1908). She was both prolific and wide-ranging: her work includes historical fiction, stories of the occult, novels depicting labor unrest, and even a book of animal tales. She married Dr. Charles Freeman in 1902, when she was forty-nine, and moved to Metuchen, New Jersey; after a few happy years, her husband's drinking developed into destructive alcoholism, and he had to be institutionalized in 1920. In 1926, Freeman was awarded the W. D. Howells medal for fiction by the American Academy of Arts and Letters and she was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, honors rarely bestowed on women writers or regionalists at that time.

A New England Nun¹

It was late in the afternoon, and the light was waning. There was a difference in the look of the tree shadows out in the yard. Somewhere in the distance cows were lowing and a little bell was tinkling; now and then a farm-wagon tilted by, and the dust flew; some blue-shirted laborers with shovels over their shoulders plodded past; little swarms of flies were dancing up and down before the peoples' faces in the soft air. There seemed to be a gentle stir arising over everything for the mere sake of subsidence—a very premonition of rest and hush and night.

1. From "A New England Nun" and *Other Stories* (1891), the source of the text printed here.

This soft diurnal commotion was over Louisa Ellis also. She had been peacefully sewing at her sitting-room window all the afternoon. Now she quilted her needle carefully into her work, which she folded precisely, and laid in a basket with her thimble and thread and scissors. Louisa Ellis could not remember that ever in her life she had mislaid one of these little feminine appurtenances, which had become, from long use and constant association, a very part of her personality.

Louisa tied a green apron round her waist, and got out a flat straw hat with a green ribbon. Then she went into the garden with a little blue crockery bowl, to pick some currants for her tea. After the currants were picked she sat on the back door-step and stemmed them, collecting the stems carefully in her apron, and afterwards throwing them into the hen-coop. She looked sharply at the grass beside the step to see if any had fallen there.

Louisa was slow and still in her movements; it took her a long time to prepare her tea; but when ready it was set forth with as much grace as if she had been a veritable guest to her own self. The little square table stood exactly in the centre of the kitchen, and was covered with a starched linen cloth whose border pattern of flowers glistened. Louisa had a damask napkin on her tea-tray, where were arranged a cut-glass tumbler full of teaspoons, a silver cream-pitcher, a china sugar-bowl, and one pink china cup and saucer. Louisa used china every day—something which none of her neighbors did. They whispered about it among themselves. Their daily tables were laid with common crockery, their sets of best china stayed in the parlor closet, and Louisa Ellis was no richer nor better bred than they. Still she would use the china. She had for her supper a glass dish full of sugared currants, a plate of little cakes, and one of light white biscuits. Also a leaf or two of lettuce, which she cut up daintily. Louisa was very fond of lettuce, which she raised to perfection in her little garden. She ate quite heartily, though in a delicate, pecking way; it seemed almost surprising that any considerable bulk of the food should vanish.

After tea she filled a plate with nicely baked thin corn-cakes, and carried them out into the back-yard.

“Cæsar!” she called. “Cæsar! Cæsar!”

There was a little rush, and the clank of a chain, and a large yellow-and-white dog appeared at the door of his tiny hut, which was half hidden among the tall grasses and flowers. Louisa patted him and gave him the corn-cakes. Then she returned to the house and washed the tea-things, polishing the china carefully. The twilight had deepened; the chorus of the frogs floated in at the open window wonderfully loud and shrill, and once in a while a long sharp drone from a tree-toad pierced it. Louisa took off her green gingham apron, disclosing a shorter one of pink and white print. She lighted her lamp, and sat down again with her sewing.

In about half an hour Joe Dagget came. She heard his heavy step on the walk, and rose and took off her pink-and-white apron. Under that was still another—white linen with a little cambric edging on the bottom; that was Louisa’s company apron. She never wore it without her calico sewing apron over it unless she had a guest. She had barely folded the pink and white one with methodical haste and laid it in a table-drawer when the door opened and Joe Dagget entered.

He seemed to fill up the whole room. A little yellow canary that had been asleep in his green cage at the south window woke up and fluttered wildly,

beating his little yellow wings against the wires. He always did so when Joe Dagget came into the room.

“Good-evening,” said Louisa. She extended her hand with a kind of solemn cordiality.

“Good-evening, Louisa,” returned the man, in a loud voice.

She placed a chair for him, and they sat facing each other, with the table between them. He sat bolt-upright, toeing out his heavy feet squarely, glancing with a good-humored uneasiness around the room. She sat gently erect, folding her slender hands in her white-linen lap.

“Been a pleasant day,” remarked Dagget.

“Real pleasant,” Louisa assented, softly. “Have you been haying?” she asked, after a little while.

“Yes, I’ve been haying all day, down in the ten-acre lot. Pretty hot work.”

“It must be.”

“Yes, it’s pretty hot work in the sun.”

“Is your mother well to-day?”

“Yes, mother’s pretty well.”

“I suppose Lily Dyer’s with her now?”

Dagget colored. “Yes, she’s with her,” he answered, slowly.

He was not very young, but there was a boyish look about his large face. Louisa was not quite as old as he, her face was fairer and smoother, but she gave people the impression of being older.

“I suppose she’s a good deal of help to your mother,” she said, further.

“I guess she is; I don’t know how mother’d get along without her,” said Dagget, with a sort of embarrassed warmth.

“She looks like a real capable girl. She’s pretty-looking too,” remarked Louisa.

“Yes, she is pretty fair looking.”

Presently Dagget began fingering the books on the table. There was a square red autograph album, and a *Young Lady’s Gift-Book*² which had belonged to Louisa’s mother. He took them up one after the other and opened them; then laid them down again, the album on the *Gift-Book*.

Louisa kept eying them with mild uneasiness. Finally she rose and changed the position of the books, putting the album underneath. That was the way they had been arranged in the first place.

Dagget gave an awkward little laugh. “Now what difference did it make which book was on top?” said he.

Louisa looked at him with a deprecating smile. “I always keep them that way,” murmured she.

“You do beat everything,” said Dagget, trying to laugh again. His large face was flushed.

He remained about an hour longer, then rose to take leave. Going out, he stumbled over a rug, and trying to recover himself, hit Louisa’s work-basket on the table, and knocked it on the floor.

He looked at Louisa, then at the rolling spools; he ducked himself awkwardly toward them, but she stopped him. “Never mind,” said she; “I’ll pick them up after you’re gone.”

2. Popular annual miscellanies, containing stories, essays, and poems, usually with a polite or moral tone. They were lavishly printed and decorated for use as Christmas or New Year’s gifts.

She spoke with a mild stiffness. Either she was a little disturbed, or his nervousness affected her, and made her seem constrained in her effort to reassure him.

When Joe Dagget was outside he drew in the sweet evening air with a sigh, and felt much as an innocent and perfectly well-intentioned bear might after his exit from a china shop.

Louisa, on her part, felt much as the kind-hearted, long-suffering owner of the china shop might have done after the exit of the bear.

She tied on the pink, then the green apron, picked up all the scattered treasures and replaced them in her work-basket, and straightened the rug. Then she set the lamp on the floor, and began sharply examining the carpet. She even rubbed her fingers over it, and looked at them.

“He’s tracked in a good deal of dust,” she murmured. “I thought he must have.”

Louisa got a dust-pan and brush, and swept Joe Dagget’s track carefully.

If he could have known it, it would have increased his perplexity and uneasiness, although it would not have disturbed his loyalty in the least. He came twice a week to see Louisa Ellis, and every time, sitting there in her delicately sweet room, he felt as if surrounded by a hedge of lace. He was afraid to stir lest he should put a clumsy foot or hand through the fairy web, and he had always the consciousness that Louisa was watching fearfully lest he should.

Still the lace and Louisa commanded perforce his perfect respect and patience and loyalty. They were to be married in a month, after a singular courtship which had lasted for a matter of fifteen years. For fourteen out of the fifteen years the two had not once seen each other, and they had seldom exchanged letters. Joe had been all those years in Australia, where he had gone to make his fortune, and where he had stayed until he made it. He would have stayed fifty years if it had taken so long, and come home feeble and tottering, or never come home at all, to marry Louisa.

But the fortune had been made in the fourteen years, and he had come home now to marry the woman who had been patiently and unquestioningly waiting for him all that time.

Shortly after they were engaged he had announced to Louisa his determination to strike out into new fields, and secure a competency³ before they should be married. She had listened and assented with the sweet serenity which never failed her, not even when her lover set forth on that long and uncertain journey. Joe, buoyed up as he was by his sturdy determination, broke down a little at the last, but Louisa kissed him with a mild blush, and said good-by.

“It won’t be for long,” poor Joe had said, huskily; but it was for fourteen years.

In that length of time much had happened. Louisa’s mother and brother had died, and she was all alone in the world. But greatest happening of all—a subtle happening which both were too simple to understand—Louisa’s feet had turned into a path, smooth maybe under a calm, serene sky, but so straight and unswerving that it could only meet a check at her grave, and so narrow that there was no room for any one at her side.

3. Income or savings sufficient to support a certain standard of living.

Louisa's first emotion when Joe Dagget came home (he had not apprised her of his coming) was consternation, although she would not admit it to herself, and he never dreamed of it. Fifteen years ago she had been in love with him—at least she considered herself to be. Just at that time, gently acquiescing with and falling into the natural drift of girlhood, she had seen marriage ahead as a reasonable feature and a probable desirability of life. She had listened with calm docility to her mother's views upon the subject. Her mother was remarkable for her cool sense and sweet, even temperament. She talked wisely to her daughter when Joe Dagget presented himself, and Louisa accepted him with no hesitation. He was the first lover she had ever had.

She had been faithful to him all these years. She had never dreamed of the possibility of marrying any one else. Her life, especially for the last seven years, had been full of a pleasant peace, she had never felt discontented nor impatient over her lover's absence; still she had always looked forward to his return and their marriage as the inevitable conclusion of things. However, she had fallen into a way of placing it so far in the future that it was almost equal to placing it over the boundaries of another life.

When Joe came she had been expecting him, and expecting to be married for fourteen years, but she was as much surprised and taken aback as if she had never thought of it.

Joe's consternation came later. He eyed Louisa with an instant confirmation of his old admiration. She had changed but little. She still kept her pretty manner and soft grace, and was, he considered, every whit as attractive as ever. As for himself, his stint⁴ was done; he had turned his face away from fortune-seeking, and the old winds of romance whistled as loud and sweet as ever through his ears. All the song which he had been wont to hear in them was Louisa; he had for a long time a loyal belief that he heard it still, but finally it seemed to him that although the winds sang always that one song, it had another name. But for Louisa the wind had never more than murmured; now it had gone down, and everything was still. She listened for a little while with half-wistful attention; then she turned quietly away and went to work on her wedding clothes.

Joe had made some extensive and quite magnificent alterations in his house. It was the old homestead; the newly-married couple would live there, for Joe could not desert his mother, who refused to leave her old home. So Louisa must leave hers. Every morning, rising and going about among her neat maidenly possessions, she felt as one looking her last upon the faces of dear friends. It was true that in a measure she could take them with her, but, robbed of their old environments, they would appear in such new guises that they would almost cease to be themselves. Then there were some peculiar features of her happy solitary life which she would probably be obliged to relinquish altogether. Sterner tasks than these graceful but half-needless ones would probably devolve upon her. There would be a large house to care for; there would be company to entertain; there would be Joe's rigours and feeble old mother to wait upon; and it would be contrary to all thrifty village traditions for her to keep more than one servant. Louisa had a little still, and she used to occupy herself pleasantly in summer weather with distilling the sweet and aromatic essences from roses and peppermint and spearmint. By-and-by

4. I.e., "stint," task.

her still must be laid away. Her store of essences was already considerable, and there would be no time for her to distil for the mere pleasure of it. Then Joe's mother would think it foolishness; she had already hinted her opinion in the matter. Louisa dearly loved to sew a linen seam, not always for use, but for the simple, mild pleasure which she took in it. She would have been loath to confess how more than once she had ripped a seam for the mere delight of sewing it together again. Sitting at her window during long sweet afternoons, drawing her needle gently through the dainty fabric, she was peace itself. But there was small chance of such foolish comfort in the future. Joe's mother, domineering, shrewd old matron that she was even in her old age, and very likely even Joe himself, with his honest masculine rudeness, would laugh and frown down all these pretty but senseless old maiden ways.

Louisa had almost the enthusiasm of an artist over the mere order and cleanliness of her solitary home. She had throbs of genuine triumph at the sight of the window-panes which she had polished until they shone like jewels. She gloated gently over her orderly bureau-drawers, with their exquisitely folded contents redolent with lavender and sweet clover and very purity. Could she be sure of the endurance of even this? She had visions, so startling that she half repudiated them as indelicate, of coarse masculine belongings strewn about in endless litter; of dust and disorder arising necessarily from a coarse masculine presence in the midst of all this delicate harmony.

Among her forebodings of disturbance, not the least was with regard to Cæsar. Cæsar was a veritable hermit of a dog. For the greater part of his life he had dwelt in his secluded hut, shut out from the society of his kind and all innocent canine joys. Never had Cæsar since his early youth watched at a woodchuck's hole; never had he known the delights of a stray bone at a neighbor's kitchen door. And it was all on account of a sin committed when hardly out of his puppyhood. No one knew the possible depth of remorse of which this mild-visaged, altogether innocent-looking old dog might be capable; but whether or not he had encountered remorse, he had encountered a full measure of righteous retribution. Old Cæsar seldom lifted up his voice in a growl or a bark; he was fat and sleepy; there were yellow rings which looked like spectacles around his dim old eyes; but there was a neighbor who bore on his hand the imprint of several of Cæsar's sharp white youthful teeth, and for that he had lived at the end of a chain, all alone in a little hut, for fourteen years. The neighbor, who was choleric and smarting with the pain of his wound, had demanded either Cæsar's death or complete ostracism. So Louisa's brother, to whom the dog had belonged, had built him his little kennel and tied him up. It was now fourteen years since, in a flood of youthful spirits, he had inflicted that memorable bite, and with the exception of short excursions, always at the end of the chain, under the strict guardianship of his master or Louisa, the old dog had remained a close prisoner. It is doubtful if, with his limited ambition, he took much pride in the fact, but it is certain that he was possessed of considerable cheap fame. He was regarded by all the children in the village and by many adults as a very monster of ferocity. St. George's dragon⁵ could hardly have surpassed in evil repute Louisa Ellis's old yellow dog. Mothers charged their children with solemn emphasis

5. The story of St. George (patron saint of England) and the dragon is an allegorical expression of the triumph of the Christian hero over evil.

not to go too near him, and the children listened and believed greedily, with a fascinated appetite for terror, and ran by Louisa's house stealthily, with many sidelong and backward glances at the terrible dog. If perchance he sounded a hoarse bark, there was a panic. Wayfarers chancing into Louisa's yard eyed him with respect, and inquired if the chain were stout. Cæsar at large might have seemed a very ordinary dog, and excited no comment whatever; chained, his reputation overshadowed him, so that he lost his own proper outlines and looked darkly vague and enormous. Joe Dagget, however, with his good-humored sense and shrewdness, saw him as he was. He strode valiantly up to him and patted him on the head, in spite of Louisa's soft clamor of warning, and even attempted to set him loose. Louisa grew so alarmed that he desisted, but kept announcing his opinion in the matter quite forcibly at intervals. "There ain't a better-natured dog in town," he would say, "and it's downright cruel to keep him tied up there. Some day I'm going to take him out."

Louisa had very little hope that he would not, one of these days, when their interests and possessions should be more completely fused in one. She pictured to herself Cæsar on the rampage through the quiet and unguarded village. She saw innocent children bleeding in his path. She was herself very fond of the old dog, because he had belonged to her dead brother, and he was always very gentle with her; still she had great faith in his ferocity. She always warned people not to go too near him. She fed him on ascetic fare of corn-mush and cakes, and never fired his dangerous temper with heating and sanguinary diet of flesh and bones. Louisa looked at the old dog munching his simple fare, and thought of her approaching marriage and trembled. Still no anticipation of disorder and confusion in lieu of sweet peace and harmony, no forebodings of Cæsar on the rampage, no wild fluttering of her little yellow canary, were sufficient to turn her a hair's-breadth. Joe Dagget had been fond of her and working for her all these years. It was not for her, whatever came to pass, to prove untrue and break his heart. She put the exquisite little stitches into her wedding-garments, and the time went on until it was only a week before her wedding-day. It was a Tuesday evening, and the wedding was to be a week from Wednesday.

There was a full moon that night. About nine o'clock Louisa strolled down the road a little way. There were harvest-fields on either hand, bordered by low stone walls. Luxuriant clumps of bushes grew beside the wall, and trees—wild cherry and old apple-trees—at intervals. Presently Louisa sat down on the wall and looked about her with mildly sorrowful reflectiveness. Tall shrubs of blueberry and meadow-sweet, all woven together and tangled with blackberry vines and horsebriers, shut her in on either side. She had a little clear space between. Opposite her, on the other side of the road, was a spreading tree; the moon shone between its boughs, and the leaves twinkled like silver. The road was bespread with a beautiful shifting dapple of silver and shadow; the air was full of a mysterious sweetness. "I wonder if it's wild grapes?" murmured Louisa. She sat there some time. She was just thinking of rising, when she heard footsteps and low voices, and remained quiet. It was a lonely place, and she felt a little timid. She thought she would keep still in the shadow and let the persons, whoever they might be, pass her.

But just before they reached her the voices ceased, and the footsteps. She understood that their owners had also found seats upon the stone wall. She

was wondering if she could not steal away unobserved, when the voice broke the stillness. It was Joe Dagget's. She sat still and listened.

The voice was announced by a loud sigh, which was as familiar as itself. "Well," said Dagget, "you've made up your mind, then, I suppose?"

"Yes," returned another voice; "I'm going day after to-morrow."

"That's Lily Dyer," thought Louisa to herself. The voice embodied itself in her mind. She saw a girl tall and full-figured, with a firm, fair face, looking fairer and firmer in the moonlight, her strong yellow hair braided in a close knot. A girl full of a calm rustic strength and bloom, with a masterful way which might have beseeemed a princess. Lily Dyer was a favorite with the village folk; she had just the qualities to arouse the admiration. She was good and handsome and smart. Louisa had often heard her praises sounded.

"Well," said Joe Dagget, "I ain't got a word to say."

"I don't know what you could say," returned Lily Dyer.

"Not a word to say," repeated Joe, drawing out the words heavily. Then there was silence. "I ain't sorry," he began at last, "that that happened yesterday—that we kind of let on how we felt to each other. I guess it's just as well we knew. Of course I can't do anything any different. I'm going right on an' get married next week. I ain't going back on a woman that's waited for me fourteen years, an' break her heart."

"If you should jilt her to-morrow, I wouldn't have you," spoke up the girl, with sudden vehemence.

"Well, I ain't going to give you the chance," said he; "but I don't believe you would, either."

"You'd see I wouldn't. Honor's honor, an' right's right. An' I'd never think anything of any man that went against 'em for me or any other girl; you'd find that out, Joe Dagget."

"Well, you'll find out fast enough that I ain't going against 'em for you or any other girl," returned he. Their voices sounded almost as if they were angry with each other. Louisa was listening eagerly.

"I'm sorry you feel as if you must go away," said Joe, "but I don't know but it's best."

"Of course it's best. I hope you and I have got common-sense."

"Well, I suppose you're right." Suddenly Joe's voice got an undertone of tenderness. "Say, Lily," said he, "I'll get along well enough myself, but I can't bear to think—You don't suppose you're going to fret much over it?"

"I guess you'll find out I sha'n't fret much over a married man."

"Well, I hope you won't—I hope you won't, Lily. God knows I do. And—I hope—one of these days—you'll—come across somebody else—"

"I don't see any reason why I shouldn't." Suddenly her tone changed. She spoke in a sweet, clear voice, so loud that she could have been heard across the street. "No, Joe Dagget," said she, "I'll never marry any other man as long as I live. I've got good sense, an' I ain't going to break my heart nor make a fool of myself; but I'm never going to be married, you can be sure of that. I ain't that sort of a girl to feel this way twice."

Louisa heard an exclamation and a soft commotion behind the bushes; then Lily spoke again—the voice sounded as if she had risen. "This must be put a stop to," said she. "We've stayed here long enough. I'm going home."

Louisa sat there in a daze, listening to their retreating steps. After a while she got up and slunk softly home herself. The next day she did her housework

methodically; that was as much a matter of course as breathing; but she did not sew on her wedding-clothes. She sat at her window and meditated. In the evening Joe came. Louisa Ellis had never known that she had any diplomacy in her, but when she came to look for it that night she found it, although meek of its kind, among her little feminine weapons. Even now she could hardly believe that she had heard aright, and that she would not do Joe a terrible injury should she break her troth-plight. She wanted to sound him without betraying too soon her own inclinations in the matter. She did it successfully, and they finally came to an understanding; but it was a difficult thing, for he was as afraid of betraying himself as she.

She never mentioned Lily Dyer. She simply said that while she had no cause of complaint against him, she had lived so long in one way that she shrank from making a change.

“Well, I never shrank, Louisa,” said Dagget. “I’m going to be honest enough to say that I think maybe it’s better this way; but if you’d wanted to keep on, I’d have stuck to you till my dying day. I hope you know that.”

“Yes, I do,” said she.

That night she and Joe parted more tenderly than they had done for a long time. Standing in the door, holding each other’s hands, a last great wave of regretful memory swept over them.

“Well, this ain’t the way we’ve thought it was all going to end, is it, Louisa?” said Joe.

She shook her head. There was a little quiver on her placid face.

“You let me know if there’s ever anything I can do for you,” said he. “I ain’t ever going to forget you, Louisa.” Then he kissed her, and went down the path.

Louisa, all alone by herself that night, wept a little, she hardly knew why; but the next morning, on waking, she felt like a queen who, after fearing lest her domain be wrested away from her, sees it firmly insured in her possession.

Now the tall weeds and grasses might cluster around Cæsar’s little hermit hut, the snow might fall on its roof year in and year out, but he never would go on a rampage through the unguarded village. Now the little canary might turn itself into a peaceful yellow ball night after night, and have no need to wake and flutter with wild terror against its bars. Louisa could sew linen seams, and distil roses, and dust and polish and fold away in lavender, as long as she listed. That afternoon she sat with her needle-work at the window, and felt fairly steeped in peace. Lily Dyer, tall and erect and blooming, went past; but she felt no qualm. If Louisa Ellis had sold her birthright she did not know it, the taste of the pottage⁶ was so delicious, and had been her sole satisfaction for so long. Serenity and placid narrowness had become to her as the birthright itself. She gazed ahead through a long reach of future days strung together like pearls in a rosary, every one like the others, and all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness. Outside was the fervid summer afternoon; the air was filled with the sounds of the busy harvest of men and birds and bees; there were halloos,

6. In Genesis 25, Esau sells his birthright as oldest son of Isaac and Rebekah to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of pottage (lentil stew).

metallic clatterings, sweet calls, and long hummings. Louisa sat, prayerfully numbering her days, like an uncloistered nun.

1891

The Revolt of "Mother"¹

"Father!"

"What is it?"

"What are them men diggin' over there in the field for?"

There was a sudden dropping and enlarging of the lower part of the old man's face, as if some heavy weight had settled therein; he shut his mouth tight, and went on harnessing the great bay mare. He hustled the collar on to her neck with a jerk.

"Father!"

The old man slapped the saddle upon the mare's back.

"Look here, father, I want to know what them men are diggin' over in the field for, an' I'm goin' to know."

"I wish you'd go into the house, mother, an' 'tend to your own affairs," the old man said then. He ran his words together, and his speech was almost as inarticulate as a growl.

But the woman understood; it was her most native tongue. "I ain't goin' into the house till you tell me what them men are doin' over there in the field," said she.

Then she stood waiting. She was a small woman, short and straight-waisted like a child in her brown cotton gown. Her forehead was mild and benevolent between the smooth curves of gray hair; there were meek downward lines about her nose and mouth; but her eyes, fixed upon the old man, looked as if the meekness had been the result of her own will, never of the will of another.

They were in the barn, standing before the wide open doors. The spring air, full of the smell of growing grass and unseen blossoms, came in their faces. The deep yard in front was littered with farm wagons and piles of wood; on the edges, close to the fence and the house, the grass was a vivid green, and there were some dandelions.

The old man glanced doggedly at his wife as he tightened the last buckles on the harness. She looked as immovable to him as one of the rocks in his pasture-land, bound to the earth with generations of blackberry vines. He slapped the reins over the horse, and started forth from the barn.

"Father!" said she.

The old man pulled up. "What is it?"

"I want to know what them men are diggin' over there in that field for."

"They're diggin' a cellar, I s'pose, if you've got to know."

"A cellar for what?"

"A barn."

"A barn? You ain't goin' to build a barn over there where we was goin' to have a house, father?"

1. First published in *"A New England Nun" and Other Stories* (1891), the source of the text printed here.

The old man said not another word. He hurried the horse into the farm wagon, and clattered out of the yard, jouncing as sturdily on his seat as a boy.

The woman stood a moment looking after him, then she went out of the barn across a corner of the yard to the house. The house, standing at right angles with the great barn and a long reach of sheds and out-buildings, was infinitesimal compared with them. It was scarcely as commodious for people as the little boxes under the barn eaves were for doves.

A pretty girl's face, pink and delicate as a flower, was looking out of one of the house windows. She was watching three men who were digging over in the field which bounded the yard near the road line. She turned quietly when the woman entered.

"What are they digging for, mother?" said she. "Did he tell you?"

"They're diggin' for—a cellar for a new barn."

"Oh, mother, he ain't going to build another barn?"

"That's what he says."

A boy stood before the kitchen glass combing his hair. He combed slowly and painstakingly, arranging his brown hair in a smooth hillock over his forehead. He did not seem to pay any attention to the conversation.

"Sammy, did you know father was going to build a new barn?" asked the girl.

The boy combed assiduously.

"Sammy!"

He turned, and showed a face like his father's under his smooth crest of hair. "Yes, I s'pose I did," he said, reluctantly.

"How long have you known it?" asked his mother.

"'Bout three months, I guess."

"Why didn't you tell of it?"

"Didn't think 'twould do no good."

"I don't see what father wants another barn for," said the girl, in her sweet, slow voice. She turned again to the window, and stared out at the digging men in the field. Her tender, sweet face was full of a gentle distress. Her forehead was as bald and innocent as a baby's, with the light hair strained back from it in a row of curl-papers. She was quite large, but her soft curves did not look as if they covered muscles.

Her mother looked sternly at the boy. "Is he goin' to buy more cows?" said she.

The boy did not reply; he was tying his shoes.

"Sammy, I want you to tell me if he's goin' to buy more cows."

"I s'pose he is."

"How many?"

"Four, I guess."

His mother said nothing more. She went up into the pantry, and there was a clatter of dishes. The boy got his cap from a nail behind the door, took an old arithmetic from the shelf, and started for school. He was lightly built, but clumsy. He went out of the yard with a curious spring in his hips, that made his loose home-made jacket tilt up in the rear.

The girl went to the sink, and began to wash the dishes that were piled up there. Her mother came promptly out of the pantry, and shoved her aside. "You wipe 'em," said she; "I'll wash. There's a good many this mornin'."

The mother plunged her hands vigorously into the water, the girl wiped the plates slowly and dreamily. "Mother," said she, "don't you think it's too

bad father's going to build that new barn, much as we need a decent house to live in?"

Her mother scrubbed a dish fiercely. "You ain't found out yet we're women-folks, Nanny Penn," said she. "You ain't seen enough of men-folks yet to. One of these days you'll find it out, an' then you'll know that we know only what men-folks think we do, so far as any use of it goes, an' how we'd ought to reckon men-folks in with Providence, an' not complain of what they do any more than we do of the weather."

"I don't care; I don't believe George is anything like that, anyhow," said Nanny. Her delicate face flushed pink, her lips pouted softly, as if she were going to cry.

"You wait an' see. I guess George Eastman ain't no better than other men. You hadn't ought to judge father, though. He can't help it, 'cause he don't look at things jest the way we do. An' we've been pretty comfortable here, after all. The roof don't leak—ain't never but once—that's one thing. Father's kept it shingled right up."

"I do wish we had a parlor."

"I guess it won't hurt George Eastman any to come to see you in a nice clean kitchen. I guess a good many girls don't have as good a place as this. Nobody's ever heard me complain."

"I ain't complained either, mother."

"Well, I don't think you'd better, a good father an' a good home as you've got. S'pose your father made you go out an' work for your livin'? Lots of girls have to that ain't no stronger an' better able to than you be."

Sarah Penn washed the frying-pan with a conclusive air. She scrubbed the outside of it as faithfully as the inside. She was a masterly keeper of her box of a house. Her one living-room never seemed to have in it any of the dust which the friction of life with inanimate matter produces. She swept, and there seemed to be no dirt to go before the broom; she cleaned, and one could see no difference. She was like an artist so perfect that he has apparently no art. To-day she got out a mixing bowl and a board, and rolled some pies, and there was no more flour upon her than upon her daughter who was doing finer work. Nanny was to be married in the fall, and she was sewing on some white cambric and embroidery. She sewed industriously while her mother cooked, her soft milk-white hands and wrists showed whiter than her delicate work.

"We must have the stove moved out in the shed before long," said Mrs. Penn. "Talk about not havin' things, it's been a real blessin' to be able to put a stove up in that shed in hot weather. Father did one good thing when he fixed that stove-pipe out there."

Sarah Penn's face as she rolled her pies had that expression of meek vigor which might have characterized one of the New Testament saints. She was making mince-pies. Her husband, Adoniram Penn, liked them better than any other kind. She baked twice a week. Adoniram often liked a piece of pie between meals. She hurried this morning. It had been later than usual when she began, and she wanted to have a pie baked for dinner. However deep a resentment she might be forced to hold against her husband, she would never fail in sedulous attention to his wants.

Nobility of character manifests itself at loop-holes when it is not provided with large doors. Sarah Penn's showed itself to-day in flaky dishes of pastry.

So she made the pies faithfully, while across the table she could see, when she glanced up from her work, the sight that rankled in her patient and steadfast soul—the digging of the cellar of the new barn in the place where Adoniram forty years ago had promised her their new house should stand.

The pies were done for dinner. Adoniram and Sammy were home a few minutes after twelve o'clock. The dinner was eaten with serious haste. There was never much conversation at the table in the Penn family. Adoniram asked a blessing, and they ate promptly, then rose up and went about their work.

Sammy went back to school, taking soft sly lopes out of the yard like a rabbit. He wanted a game of marbles before school, and feared his father would give him some chores to do. Adoniram hastened to the door and called after him, but he was out of sight.

"I don't see what you let him go for, mother," said he. "I wanted him to help me unload that wood."

Adoniram went to work out in the yard unloading wood from the wagon. Sarah put away the dinner dishes, while Nanny took down her curl-papers and changed her dress. She was going down to the store to buy some more embroidery and thread.

When Nanny was gone, Mrs. Penn went to the door. "Father!" she called. "Well, what is it!"

"I want to see you jest a minute, father."

"I can't leave this wood nohow. I've got to git it unloaded an' go for a load of gravel afore two o'clock. Sammy had ought to helped me. You hadn't ought to let him go to school so early."

"I want to see you jest a minute."

"I tell ye I can't, nohow, mother."

"Father, you come here." Sarah Penn stood in the door like a queen; she held her head as if it bore a crown; there was that patience which makes authority royal in her voice. Adoniram went.

Mrs. Penn led the way into the kitchen, and pointed to a chair. "Sit down, father," said she; "I've got somethin' I want to say to you."

He sat down heavily; his face was quite stolid, but he looked at her with restive eyes. "Well, what is it, mother?"

"I want to know what you're buildin' that new barn for, father?"

"I ain't got nothin' to say about it."

"It can't be you think you need another barn?"

"I tell ye I ain't got nothin' to say about it, mother; an' I ain't goin' to say nothin'."

"Be you goin' to buy more cows?"

Adoniram did not reply; he shut his mouth tight.

"I know you be, as well as I want to. Now, father, look here"—Sarah Penn had not sat down; she stood before her husband in the humble fashion of a Scripture woman²—"I'm goin' to talk real plain to you; I never have sence I married you, but I'm goin' to now. I ain't never complained, an' I ain't goin' to complain now, but I'm goin' to talk plain. You see this room here, father; you look at it well. You see there ain't no carpet on the floor, an' you see the paper is all dirty, an' droppin' off the walls. We ain't had no new paper on it for ten year, an' then I put it on myself, an' it didn't cost but ninepence a

2. That is, a woman who is patient and obedient to her husband.

roll. You see this room, father; it's all the one I've had to work in an' eat in an' sit in sence we was married. There ain't another woman in the whole town whose husband ain't got half the means you have but what's got better. It's all the room Nanny's got to have her company in; an' there ain't one of her mates but what's got better, an' their fathers not so able as hers is. It's all the room she'll have to be married in. What would you have thought, father, if we had had our weddin' in a room no better than this? I was married in my mother's parlor, with a carpet on the floor, an' stuffed furniture, an' a mahogany card-table. An' this is all the room my daughter will have to be married in. Look here, father!"

Sarah Penn went across the room as though it were a tragic stage. She flung open a door and disclosed a tiny bedroom, only large enough for a bed and bureau, with a path between. "There, father," said she—"there's all the room I've had to sleep in forty year. All my children were born there—the two that died, an' the two that's livin'. I was sick with a fever there."

She stepped to another door and opened it. It led into the small, ill-lighted pantry. "Here," said she, "is all the buttery³ I've got—every place I've got for my dishes, to set away my victuals in, an' to keep my milk-pans in. Father, I've been takin' care of the milk of six cows in this place, an' now you're goin' to build a new barn, an' keep more cows, an' give me more to do in it."

She threw open another door. A narrow crooked flight of stairs wound upward from it. "There, father," said she, "I want you to look at the stairs that go up to them two unfinished chambers that are all the places our son an' daughter have had to sleep in all their lives. There ain't a prettier girl in town nor a more ladylike one than Nanny, an' that's the place she has to sleep in. It ain't so good as your horse's stall; it ain't so warm an' tight."

Sarah Penn went back and stood before her husband. "Now, father," said she, "I want to know if you think you're doin' right an' accordin' to what you profess. Here, when we was married, forty year ago, you promised me faithful that we should have a new house built in that lot over in the field before the year was out. You said you had money enough, an' you wouldn't ask me to live in no such place as this. It is forty year now, an' you've been makin' more money, an' I've been savin' of it for you ever since, an' you ain't built no house yet. You've built sheds an' cow-houses an' one new barn, an' now you're goin' to build another. Father, I want to know if you think it's right. You're lodgin' your dumb beasts better than you are your own flesh an' blood. I want to know if you think it's right."

"I ain't got nothin' to say."

"You can't say nothin' without ownin' it ain't right, father. An' there's another thing—I ain't complained; I've got along forty year, an' I s'pose I should forty more, if it wa'n't for that—if we don't have another house. Nanny she can't live with us after she's married. She'll have to go somewheres else to live away from us, an' it don't seem as if I could have it so, noways, father. She wa'n't ever strong. She's got considerable color, but there wa'n't never any backbone to her. I've always took the heft of everything off her, an' she ain't fit to keep house an' do everything herself. She'll be all worn out inside a year. Think of her doin' all the washin' an' ironin' an' bakin' with them soft white hands an' arms, an' sweepin'! I can't have it so, noways, father."

3. Pantry.

Mrs. Penn's face was burning; her mild eyes gleamed. She had pleaded her little cause like a Webster;⁴ she had ranged from severity to pathos; but her opponent employed that obstinate silence which makes eloquence futile with mocking echoes. Adoniram arose clumsily.

"Father, ain't you got nothin' to say?" said Mrs. Penn.

"I've got to go off after that load of gravel. I can't stan' here talkin' all day."

"Father, won't you think it over, an' have a house built there instead of a barn?"

"I ain't got nothin' to say."

Adoniram shuffled out. Mrs. Penn went into her bedroom. When she came out, her eyes were red. She had a roll of unbleached cotton cloth. She spread it out on the kitchen table, and began cutting out some shirts for her husband. The men over in the field had a team to help them this afternoon; she could hear their halloos. She had a scanty pattern for the shirts; she had to plan and piece the sleeves.

Nanny came home with her embroidery, and sat down with her needle-work. She had taken down her curl-papers, and there was a soft roll of fair hair like an aureole over her forehead; her face was as delicately fine and clear as porcelain. Suddenly she looked up, and the tender red flamed all over her face and neck. "Mother," said she.

"What say?"

"I've been thinking—I don't see how we're goin' to have any—wedding in this room. I'd be ashamed to have his folks come if we didn't have anybody else."

"Mebbe we can have some new paper before then; I can put it on. I guess you won't have no call to be ashamed of your belongin's."

"We might have the wedding in the new barn," said Nanny, with gentle pettehness. "Why, mother, what makes you look so?"

Mrs. Penn had started, and was staring at her with a curious expression. She turned again to her work, and spread out a pattern carefully on the cloth. "Nothin'," said she.

Presently Adoniram clattered out of the yard in his two-wheeled dump cart, standing as proudly upright as a Roman charioteer. Mrs. Penn opened the door and stood there a minute looking out; the halloos of the men sounded louder.

It seemed to her all through the spring months that she heard nothing but the halloos and the noises of the saws and hammers. The new barn grew fast. It was a fine edifice for this little village. Men came on pleasant Sundays, in their meeting suits and clean shirt bosoms, and stood around it admiringly. Mrs. Penn did not speak of it, and Adoniram did not mention it to her, although sometimes, upon a return from inspecting it, he bore himself with injured dignity.

"It's a strange thing how your mother feels about the new barn," he said, confidentially, to Sammy one day.

Sammy only grunted after an odd fashion for a boy; he had learned it from his father.

The barn was all completed ready for use by the third week in July. Adoniram had planned to move his stock in on Wednesday; on Tuesday he received a letter which changed his plans. He came in with it early in the morning.

4. Daniel Webster (1782–1852), American statesman and celebrated orator.

"Sammy's been to the post-office," said he, "an' I've got a letter from Hiram." Hiram was Mrs. Penn's brother, who lived in Vermont.

"Well," said Mrs. Penn, "what does he say about the folks?"

"I guess they're all right. He says he thinks if I come up country right off there's a chance to buy jest the kind of horse I want." He stared reflectively out of the window at the new barn.

Mrs. Penn was making pies. She went on clapping the rolling-pin into the crust, although she was very pale, and her heart beat loudly.

"I dun' know but what I'd better go," said Adoniram. "I hate to go off jest now, right in the midst of hayin', but the ten-acre lot's cut, an' I guess Rufus an' the others can git along without me three or four days. I can't get a horse round here to suit me, nohow, an' I've got to have another for all the wood-haulin' in the fall. I told Hiram to watch out, an' if he got wind of a good horse to let me know. I guess I'd better go."

"I'll get out your clean shirt an' collar," said Mrs. Penn calmly.

She laid out Adoniram's Sunday suit and his clean clothes on the bed in the little bedroom. She got his shaving-water and razor ready. At last she buttoned on his collar and fastened his black cravat.

Adoniram never wore his collar and cravat except on extra occasions. He held his head high, with a rasped dignity. When he was all ready, with his coat and hat brushed, and a lunch of pie and cheese in a paper bag, he hesitated on the threshold of the door. He looked at his wife, and his manner was defiantly apologetic. "If them cows come to-day, Sammy can drive 'em into the new barn," said he; "an' when they bring the hay up, they can pitch it in there."

"Well," replied Mrs. Penn.

Adoniram set his shaven face ahead and started. When he had cleared the door-step, he turned and looked back with a kind of nervous solemnity. "I shall be back by Saturday if nothin' happens," said he.

"Do be careful, father," returned his wife.

She stood in the door with Nanny at her elbow and watched him out of sight. Her eyes had a strange, doubtful expression in them; her peaceful forehead was contracted. She went in, and about her baking again. Nanny sat sewing. Her wedding-day was drawing nearer, and she was getting pale and thin with her steady sewing. Her mother kept glancing at her.

"Have you got that pain in your side this mornin'?" she asked.

"A little."

Mrs. Penn's face, as she worked, changed, her perplexed forehead smoothed, her eyes were steady, her lips firmly set. She formed a maxim for herself, although incoherently with her unlettered thoughts. "Unsolicited opportunities are the guide-posts of the Lord to the new roads of life," she repeated in effect, and she made up her mind to her course of action.

"S'posin' I *had* wrote to Hiram," she muttered once, when she was in the pantry—"s'posin' I had wrote, an' asked him if he knew of any horse? But I didn't, an' father's goin' wa'n't none of my doin'. It looks like a providence." Her voice rang out quite loud at the last.

"What you talkin' about, mother?" called Nanny.

"Nothin'."

Mrs. Penn hurried her baking; at eleven o'clock it was all done. The load of hay from the west field came slowly down the cart track, and drew up at the new barn. Mrs. Penn ran out. "Stop!" she screamed—"stop!"

The men stopped and looked; Sammy upreared from the top of the load, and stared at his mother.

“Stop!” she cried out again. “Don’t you put the hay in that barn; put it in the old one.”

“Why, he said to put it in here,” returned one of the haymakers, wonderingly. He was a young man, a neighbor’s son, whom Adoniram hired by the year to help on the farm.

“Don’t you put the hay in the new barn; there’s room enough in the old one, ain’t there?” said Mrs. Penn.

“Room enough,” returned the hired man, in his thick, rustic tones. “Didn’t need the new barn, nohow, far as room’s concerned. Well, I s’pose he changed his mind.” He took hold of the horses’ bridles.

Mrs. Penn went back to the house. Soon the kitchen windows were darkened, and a fragrance like warm honey came into the room.

Nanny laid down her work. “I thought father wanted them to put the hay into the new barn?” she said, wonderingly.

“It’s all right,” replied her mother.

Sammy slid down from the load of hay, and came in to see if dinner was ready.

“I ain’t goin’ to get a regular dinner to-day, as long as father’s gone,” said his mother. “I’ve let the fire go out. You can have some bread an’ milk an’ pie. I thought we could get along.” She set out some bowls of milk, some bread, and a pie on the kitchen table. “You’d better eat your dinner now,” said she. “You might jest as well get through with it. I want you to help me afterward.”

Nanny and Sammy stared at each other. There was something strange in their mother’s manner. Mrs. Penn did not eat anything herself. She went into the pantry, and they heard her moving dishes while they ate. Presently she came out with a pile of plates. She got the clothes-basket out of the shed, and packed them in it. Nanny and Sammy watched. She brought out cups and saucers, and put them in with the plates.

“What you goin’ to do, mother?” inquired Nanny, in a timid voice. A sense of something unusual made her tremble, as if it were a ghost. Sammy rolled his eyes over his pie.

“You’ll see what I’m goin’ to do,” replied Mrs. Penn. “If you’re through, Nanny, I want you to go up-stairs an’ pack up your things; an’ I want you, Sammy, to help me take down the bed in the bedroom.”

“Oh, mother, what for?” gasped Nanny.

“You’ll see.”

During the next few hours a feat was performed by this simple, pious New England mother which was equal in its way to Wolfe’s storming of the Heights of Abraham.⁵ It took no more genius and audacity of bravery for Wolfe to cheer his wondering soldiers up those steep precipices, under the sleeping eyes of the enemy, than for Sarah Penn, at the head of her children, to move all their little household goods into the new barn while her husband was away.

Nanny and Sammy followed their mother’s instructions without a murmur; indeed, they were overawed. There is a certain uncanny and superhu-

5. James Wolfe (1727–1759), British general, led the arduous expedition to capture Quebec from the French. He died in his hour of victory on

September 13, 1759, after he and his troops had surmounted the steep cliffs and defeated the French on the Plains of Abraham near Quebec.

man quality about all such purely original undertakings as their mother's was to them. Nanny went back and forth with her light loads, and Sammy tugged with sober energy.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the little house in which the Penns had lived for forty years had emptied itself into the new barn.

Every builder builds somewhat for unknown purposes, and is in a measure a prophet. The architect of Adoniram Penn's barn, while he designed it for the comfort of four-footed animals, had planned better than he knew for the comfort of humans. Sarah Penn saw at a glance its possibilities. Those great box-stalls, with quilts hung before them, would make better bedrooms than the one she had occupied for forty years, and there was a tight carriage-room. The harness room, with its chimney and shelves, would make a kitchen of her dreams. The great middle space would make a parlor, by-and-by, fit for a palace. Up stairs there was as much room as down. With partitions and windows, what a house would there be! Sarah looked at the row of stanchions⁶ before the allotted space for cows, and reflected that she would have her front entry there.

At six o'clock the stove was up in the harness-room, the kettle was boiling, and the table set for tea. It looked almost as homelike as the abandoned house across the yard had ever done. The young hired man milked, and Sarah directed him calmly to bring the milk to the new barn. He came gaping, dropping little blots of foam from the brimming pails on the grass. Before the next morning he had spread the story of Adoniram Penn's wife moving into the new barn all over the little village. Men assembled in the store and talked it over, women with shawls over their heads scuttled into each other's houses before their work was done. Any deviation from the ordinary course of life in this quiet town was enough to stop all progress in it. Everybody paused to look at the staid, independent figure on the side track. There was a difference of opinion with regard to her. Some held her to be insane; some, of lawless and rebellious spirit.

Friday the minister went to see her. It was in the forenoon, and she was at the barn door shelling pease for dinner. She looked up and returned his salutation with dignity, then she went on with her work. She did not invite him in. The saintly expression of her face remained fixed, but there was an angry flush over it.

The minister stood awkwardly before her, and talked. She handled the pease as if they were bullets. At last she looked up, and her eyes showed the spirit that her meek front had covered for a lifetime.

"There ain't no use talkin', Mr. Hersey," said she. "I've thought it all over an' over, an' I believe I'm doin' what's right. I've made it the subject of prayer, an' it's betwixt me an' the Lord an' Adoniram. There ain't no call for nobody else to worry about it."

"Well, of course, if you have brought it to the Lord in prayer, and feel satisfied that you are doing right, Mrs. Penn," said the minister, helplessly. His thin gray-bearded face was pathetic. He was a sickly man; his youthful confidence had cooled; he had to scourge himself up to some of his pastoral duties as relentlessly as a Catholic ascetic, and then he was prostrated by the smart.

6. Upright supports that fit loosely around a cow's neck and limit the animal's forward and backward movement.

"I think it's right jest as much as I think it was right for our forefathers to come over from the old country 'cause they didn't have what belonged to 'em," said Mrs. Penn. She arose. The barn threshold might have been Plymouth Rock from her bearing. "I don't doubt you mean well, Mr. Hersey," said she, "but there are things people hadn't ought to interfere with. I've been a member of the church for over forty year. I've got my own mind an' my own feet, an' I'm goin' to think my own thoughts an' go my own ways, an' nobody but the Lord is goin' to dictate to me unless I've a mind to have him. Won't you come in an' set down? How is Mis' Hersey?"

"She is well, I thank you," replied the minister. He added some more perplexed apologetic remarks; then he retreated.

He could expound the intricacies of every character study in the Scriptures, he was competent to grasp the Pilgrim Fathers and all historical innovators, but Sarah Penn was beyond him. He could deal with primal cases, but parallel ones worsted him. But, after all, although it was aside from his province, he wondered more how Adoniram Penn would deal with his wife than how the Lord would. Everybody shared the wonder. When Adoniram's four new cows arrived, Sarah ordered three to be put in the old barn, the other in the house shed where the cooking-stove had stood. That added to the excitement. It was whispered that all four cows were domiciled in the house.

Towards sunset on Saturday, when Adoniram was expected home, there was a knot of men in the road near the new barn. The hired man had milked, but he still hung around the premises. Sarah Penn had supper all ready. There was brown-bread and baked beans and a custard pie; it was the supper that Adoniram loved on a Saturday night. She had on a clean calico, and she bore herself imperturbably. Nanny and Sammy kept close at her heels. Their eyes were large, and Nanny was full of nervous tremors. Still there was to them more pleasant excitement than anything else. An inborn confidence in their mother over their father asserted itself.

Sammy looked out of the harness-room window. "There he is," he announced, in an awed whisper. He and Nanny peeped around the casing. Mrs. Penn kept on about her work. The children watched Adoniram leave the new horse standing in the drive while he went to the house door. It was fastened. Then he went around to the shed. That door was seldom locked, even when the family was away. The thought how her father would be confronted by the cow flashed upon Nanny. There was a hysterical sob in her throat. Adoniram emerged from the shed and stood looking about in a dazed fashion. His lips moved; he was saying something, but they could not hear what it was. The hired man was peeping around a corner of the old barn, but nobody saw him.

Adoniram took the new horse by the bridle and led him across the yard to the new barn. Nanny and Sammy slunk close to their mother. The barn doors rolled back, and there stood Adoniram, with the long mild face of the great Canadian farm horse looking over his shoulder.

Nanny kept behind her mother, but Sammy stepped suddenly forward, and stood in front of her.

Adoniram stared at the group. "What on airth you all down here for?" said he. "What's the matter over to the house?"

"We've come here to live, father," said Sammy. His shrill voice quavered out bravely.

"What"—Adoniram sniffed—"what is it smells like cookin'?" said he. He stepped forward and looked in the open door of the harness-room. Then he turned to his wife. His old bristling face was pale and frightened. "What on airth does this mean, mother?" he gasped.

"You come in here, father," said Sarah. She led the way into the harness-room and shut the door. "Now, father," said she, "you needn't be scared. I ain't crazy. There ain't nothin' to be upset over. But we've come here to live, an' we're goin' to live here. We've got jest as good a right here as new horses an' cows. The house wa'n't fit for us to live in any longer, an' I made up my mind I wa'n't goin' to stay there. I've done my duty by you forty year, an' I'm goin' to do it now; but I'm goin' to live here. You've got to put in some windows and partitions; an' you'll have to buy some furniture."

"Why, mother!" the old man gasped.

"You'd better take your coat off an' get washed—there's the wash-basin—an' then we'll have supper."

"Why, mother!"

Sammy went past the window, leading the new horse to the old barn. The old man saw him, and shook his head speechlessly. He tried to take off his coat, but his arms seemed to lack the power. His wife helped him. She poured some water into the tin basin, and put in a piece of soap. She got the comb and brush, and smoothed his thin gray hair after he had washed. Then she put the beans, the hot bread, and tea on the table. Sammy came in, and the family drew up. Adoniram sat looking dazedly at his plate, and they waited.

"Ain't you goin' to ask a blessin', father?" said Sarah.

And the old man bent his head and mumbled.

All through the meal he stopped eating at intervals, and stared furtively at his wife; but he ate well. The home food tasted good to him, and his old frame was too sturdily healthy to be affected by his mind. But after supper he went out, and sat down on the step of the smaller door at the right of the barn, through which he had meant his Jerseys to pass in stately file, but which Sarah designed for her front house door, and he leaned his head on his hands.

After the supper dishes were cleared away and the milk-pans washed, Sarah went out to him. The twilight was deepening. There was a clear green glow in the sky. Before them stretched the smooth level of field; in the distance was a cluster of hay-stacks like the huts of a village; the air was very cool and calm and sweet. The landscape might have been an ideal one of peace.

Sarah bent over and touched her husband on one of his thin, sinewy shoulders. "Father!"

The old man's shoulders heaved: he was weeping.

"Why, don't do so, father," said Sarah.

"I'll—put up the—partitions, an'—everything you—want, mother."

Sarah put her apron up to her face; she was overcome by her own triumph.

Adoniram was like a fortress whose walls had no active resistance, and went down the instant the right besieging tools were used. "Why, mother," he said, hoarsely, "I hadn't no idee you was so set on't as all this comes to."

Voices from Native America

In the post–Civil War era, the United States accelerated a set of policies and practices designed to eradicate Native American nations as distinct cultures and sovereign political entities. Through the military, the United States confronted those tribal peoples who refused to recognize its authority and confine themselves to reservations. This same objective also animated the so-called friends of the Indian, who funded missions, schools, and other programs to assimilate American Indians into the ways of white America. With the policy of allotment, passed by Congress and signed into law in 1887, white reformers sought to divide communally held reservation land among individual landowners, a practice that devastated the land holdings of many tribes before it was abandoned in 1934. The white Americans behind these assimilation efforts considered themselves deeply sympathetic to Native Americans, and they believed that the path they prescribed offered Natives their best chance for survival; their aim, in the words Richard Henry Pratt, head of the famous Carlisle Indian Boarding School, was to “kill the Indian and save the man.”

Even as they were being dispossessed of their land and their cultures, American Indians and their traditions remained a source of fascination for white Americans. In Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show, for instance, Plains Indians thrilled spectators across America and Europe by engaging in mock combat before their very eyes. During this same period, anthropologists worked diligently to document and collect artifacts from tribal cultures that they presumed would soon disappear. Their work included recording, translating, and publishing the verbal expressions of American Indians—narratives, songs, speeches, and rituals. Perhaps the most important sponsor of this textual publication was the U.S. government itself, which created the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1879 for precisely that purpose. The Bureau employed the flamboyant Frank Hamilton Cushing (1857–1900), who adopted the dress of the Zuni Indians with whom he lived, as well as more staid social scientists, who produced volume after volume documenting tribal customs and language. This interest in the speech and storytelling of Native Americans fit well with the literary sensibility of the period, when realist writers were publishing volumes of local-color stories and vernacular folktales.

This section brings together a selection of works to illustrate how American Indians sought to represent themselves—and how they found themselves represented—under the competing pressures of military conflict, cultural assimilation, and anthropological curiosity. It begins with a short selection of oratory, an important mode of verbal art in the historical relationship of tribal peoples to the United States. American Indian oratory traditionally marked occasions in the calendrical and ceremonial year; oratory also served as a means of deliberation and decision making for tribal councils. In their relationships with white settlers and colonists, Native Americans adapted their oratorical practices to negotiations over land, governance, and the movement of their peoples. Some texts derive from well-documented occasions with translators present, while others (like those ascribed in the 1960s and 1970s to Chief Sealth, also known as Chief Seattle) are mostly fabrications. We must read these texts with a note of caution, therefore, particularly Chief Joseph’s famous address, which was surely the work of many hands.

By the turn of the twentieth century, readers could also find works written by American Indians who spoke and wrote primarily in English. These writers took advantage of the same curiosity about Native peoples that brought Americans to the

Wild West show or to natural history museums to present their audiences with a wide range of American Indian experiences. On the one hand, they depicted the richness of traditional tribal cultures by offering their own translations of oral traditions; on the other, through autobiography and fiction they demonstrated the challenges facing Native Americans who sought to learn and adopt the ways of white Americans while retaining their indigenous identities. Writers such as Zitkala-Ša (Yankton Sioux) and Francis LaFlesche (Omaha) published in multiple genres, and they advocated in different ways over the course of their careers for the rights of American Indians.

This section also includes songs originally published by the Bureau of American Ethnology to document the Ghost Dance, a religious movement in which many Plains tribes participated during 1889 and 1890. The Ghost Dance promised a restoration of tribal freedoms and values that had been assaulted through decades of colonialism, and hundreds of its Lakota Sioux followers subsequently became victims of the U.S. Army in the Wounded Knee massacre, still remembered as one of the cruelest acts of violence in American history. The section concludes with two narrative responses to the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee representing two very different perspectives: the Oglala Sioux holy man Nicholas Black Elk, who recalled the Ghost Dance decades later in *Black Elk Speaks*, and the Santee Sioux writer Charles Alexander Eastman, who saw the victims of Wounded Knee firsthand as a physician.

For some white Americans, the bloodshed at Wounded Knee represented the closing act in a drama of Native resistance to U.S. colonialism. However, the works presented here illustrate some of the strategies through which American Indians have maintained their sense of tribal identity in the face of extraordinary obstacles. In spite of the best efforts, many of them well intentioned, by white Americans of the late nineteenth century, American Indians have in fact survived *as Indians* into the twenty-first century—an outcome that Richard Henry Pratt would never have thought possible.

SMOHALLA

The religious leader who came to be known as Smohalla (c. 1815–1895), The Preacher, was born sometime around 1815 on the east bank of the Columbia River in what would become the territory and later the state of Washington. As a youth he engaged in a vision quest to the sacred mountain of La Lac, where, he said, he had “died,” been transported to the spirit world, and encountered *Nami Piap*, the Creator, who gave him instructions as to how he and his tribe should live. By 1850 he had achieved prominence as a warrior and a medicine person of power. He fought against the whites in the unsuccessful Yakima Wars of 1855–56, after which he completely renounced violent resistance.

Later, while mourning the death of his daughter, Smohalla underwent a second “death” and visit to the Creator that provided him with further teaching—that the people were not to disturb the earth by farming or by dividing it into parcels—and also instruction in the performance of a sacred dance and of many songs. As other, earlier Native prophets had taught, and as Wovoka (c. 1856–1932), the Paiute spiritual leader, soon would teach, Smohalla urged those who would listen to avoid the ways of the whites; Indians were not to wear their clothes, adopt their agricultural



Smohalla. Ethnographer and photographer James Mooney (1861–1921) did not provide a source or date for this photograph, but it most likely comes from 1884, when Major J. W. MacMurray visited Smohalla and his people at Priest Rapids on the Columbia River. Smohalla is in white, just to the right of center. Those around him are his chief adherents.

practices, or drink their strong liquor. The world would end soon, but those who followed these teachings, sang the songs, and did the proper dances would be resurrected, along with the old ways of the people.

There was to be one more “death” for Smohalla. This occurred around 1860 when Moses, the chief of an upriver tribe, having come to believe that Smohalla was making “medicine” to threaten his life, provoked a quarrel and beat Smohalla so badly that he was left for dead. Yet he recovered and then traveled throughout the western United States and Mexico. Smohalla’s accurate prediction of a powerful earthquake felt throughout the Pacific Northwest in 1872 further confirmed his powers and added to his influence as a religious leader and prophet.

In 1884, Major J. W. MacMurray was sent by General Nelson Miles, commander of the Department of the Columbia, to investigate Smohalla’s religious beliefs, understand his influences, and learn more about the grievances of the Indians in his region. MacMurray found Smohalla to “be the brake and the wheel of progress of his people,” reporting that “he advised them to resist any of the advances of civilization, as improper for a true Indian, and the violation of the faith of their ancestors.” MacMurray notes that he “listened for several days to all that was said to [him] through an interpreter in whom the Indians had confidence.” He presented Smohalla’s comments in a January 19, 1886, speech at the Albany Institute, the source of the text that follows. Parentheses in the text have been inserted by MacMurray.

Comments to Major MacMurray

Smohalla explained:

“This is my flag and it represents the world. God told me to look after my people—all are my people. There are four ways in the world—north and south and east and west. I have been all those ways. This is the center, I live here; the red spot is my heart; everybody can see it. The yellow grass grows everywhere around this place. The green mountains are far away all around the world! There is only water beyond, salt water. The blue (referring to the blue cloth strip) is the sky, and the star is the north star. That star never changes; it is always in the same place. I keep my heart on that star; I never change.”

To Major MacMurray, Smohalla replied saying * * * he did not like this new law; it was against nature. I will tell you about it. Once the world was all water, and God lived alone; he was lonesome, he had no place to put his foot; so he scratched the sand up from the bottom, and made the land and he made rocks, and he made trees, and he made a man, and the man was winged and could go anywhere. The man was lonesome, and God made a woman. They ate fish from the water, and God made the deer and other animals, and he sent the man to hunt, and told the woman to cook the meat and to dress the skins. Many more men and women grew up, and they lived on the banks of the great river whose waters were full of salmon. The mountains contained much game, and there were buffalo on the plains. There were so many people that the stronger ones sometimes oppressed the weak and drove them from the best fisheries, which they claimed as their own. They fought, and nearly all were killed, and their bones are to be seen in the sand hills yet. God was very angry at this, and he took away their wings and commanded that the lands and fisheries should be common to all who lived upon them. That they were never to be marked off or divided, but that the people should enjoy the fruits that God planted in the land and the animals that lived upon it, and the fishes in the water. God said he was the father, and the earth was the mother of mankind; that nature was the law; that the animals and fish and plants obeyed nature, and that man only was sinful. This is the old law.

I know all kinds of men. *First there were my people* (the Indians) God made them first. Then he made a *Frenchman* (referring to the Canadian Voyageurs of the Hudson Bay Company), and then he made a *priest* (priests were with these expeditions of the Hudson Bay Company). A long time after that came “*Boston man*” (Americans came in 1796 into the river in the ship *Columbia* from Boston). And then “*King George men*” (English soldiers). Bye and bye came “black man” (negroes), and last he made a *Chinaman* with a tail.¹ He is of no account, and he has to work all the time.

All these are new people; only the Indians are of the old stock. After awhile, when God is ready, he will drive away all the people except the people who have obeyed his laws.

1. Smohalla might have encountered Chinese laborers while in California and Nevada. The notion that Chinese men have a tail comes from the fact that many wore their long hair in a queue or braid.

Those who cut up the lands or sign papers for lands will be defrauded of their rights, and will be punished by God's anger.

Moses² was bad. God did not love him. He sold his people's houses and the graves of their dead. It is a bad word that comes from Washington. It is not a good law that would take my people away from me to make them sin against the laws of God. You ask me to plough the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest.

You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I can not enter her body to be born again.

You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men, but how dare I cut off my mother's hair?

It is a bad law and my people can not obey it. I want my people to stay with me here. All the dead men will come to life again; their spirits will come to their bodies again. We must wait here, in the homes of our fathers, and be ready to meet them in the bosom of our mother.

1886

2. The Sinkiuse-Columbia leader who had beaten Smohalla and left him for dead.

CHARLOT

Slemhakkah, or Bear Claw, known as Charlot (c. 1831–1900), succeeded his father as a principal chief of the Kalispel band of the Flathead Indians, whose traditional homelands were in present-day Idaho, northwest Montana, and northeast Washington.

In 1855, Charlot's father signed a treaty with the federal government ceding a large portion of Flathead land on the condition that his people's reservation be located in the Bitterroot Valley of western Montana. The government, however, assigned them land elsewhere. Some Flathead people agreed to settle on the Kalispel and Colville reservations in Washington and the Jocko reservation in Montana. Charlot refused to go and continued to live with his people in the Bitterroot region. In 1872, under government pressure, some of the Bitterroot Kalispels moved to the Jocko reservation, but Charlot continued to resist nonviolently. He held out peacefully against the whites until 1890, when troops were sent in to force the last of his band onto the Jocko reservation, where Charlot died ten years later.

In 1876, the government of the Montana Territory considered a proposal requiring Indians on reservations to pay taxes. Charlot spoke to this issue, and his speech, a strong condemnation of the white people's greed, was reported in the *Missoula* (Montana) *Missoulian*. The text below is the entirety of Charlot's speech (translated, though with what accuracy it is not possible to say, from the Salish language) as reported under the headline "Indian Taxation, Recent Speech of a Flathead Chief Presenting the Question from an Indian Standpoint." This powerful critique of white Americans appeared as the nation was celebrating the centennial of U.S. independence, and as the federal government was at war with those Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Indians who followed Sitting Bull—a conflict that would soon lead to the defeat of George Armstrong Custer at the Little Bighorn. The fact that a Montana newspaper would print such a scathing speech at such a time is itself extraordinary.

[He has filled graves with our bones]¹

Yes, my people, the white man wants us to pay him. He comes in his intent, and says we must pay him—pay him for our own—for the things we have from our God and our forefathers; for things he never owned, and never gave us. What law or right is that? What shame or what charity? The Indian says that a woman is more shameless than a man;² but the white man has less shame than our women. Since our forefathers first beheld him, more than seven times ten winters have snowed and melted. Most of them like those snows have dissolved away. Their spirits went whither they came; his, they say, go there too. Do they meet and see us here[?] Can he blush before his Maker, or is he forever dead[?] Is his prayer his promise—a trust of the wind? Is it a sound without sense? Is it a thing whose life is a foul thing? And is he not foul? He has filled graves with our bones. His horses, his cattle, his sheep, his men, his women have a rot. Does not his breath, his gums, stink? His jaws lose their teeth, and he stamps them with false ones; yet he is not ashamed. No, no; his course is destruction; he spoils what the Spirit who gave us this country made beautiful and clean. But that is not enough; he wants us to pay him besides his enslaving our country. Yes, and our people, besides, that degradation of a tribe who never were his enemies. What is he? Who sent him here? We were happy when he first came; since then we often saw him, always heard him and of him. We first thought he came from the light;³ but he comes like the dusk of the evening now, not like the dawn of the morning. He comes like a day that has passed, and night enters our future with him.

To take and to lie should be burnt on his forehead, as he burns the sides of my stolen horses with his own name. Had Heaven's Chief burnt him with some mark⁴ to refuse him, we might have refused him[.] No; we did not refuse him in his weakness; in his poverty we fed, we cherished him—yes, befriended him, and showed [him] the fords and defiles of our lands. Yet we did think his face was concealed with hair, and that he often smiled like a rabbit in his own beard. A long-tailed, skulking thing, fond of flat lands, and soft grass and woods.

Did he not feast us with our own cattle, on our own land, yes, on our own plain by the cold spring? Did he not invite our hands to his papers;⁵ did he not promise before the sun, and before the eye that put fire in it,⁶ and to the name of both, and in the name of his own Chief,⁷ promise us what he promised—to give us what he has not given; to do what he knew he would never do. Now, because he lied, and because he yet lies, without friendship, manhood, justice, or charity, he wants us to give him money—pay him more.

1. From the *Missoula* (Montana) *Missoulian* (1876).

2. A statement fairly typical of male-centered cultures, Indian and non-Indian, vaguely parallel to such Western proverbial wisdom as "Vanity, thy name is woman."

3. I.e., from the east, where the sun rises.

4. References both to the Euro-American practice of branding horses and cattle and, perhaps,

to Cain, who bore a mark that would identify him as a murderer (of his brother Abel).

5. I.e., ask that the Flatheads make their mark on treaties.

6. Possibly a reference to the God of Genesis, who created the sun.

7. Probably the president of the United States, the "chief" of the whites.

When shall he be satisfied? A roving skulk,⁸ first; a natural liar, next; and, withal, a murderer, a tyrant.

To confirm his purpose; to make the trees and stones and his own people hear him, he whispers soldiers, lock houses and iron chains.⁹ My people, we are poor; we are fatherless. The white man fathers this doom—yes, this curse on us and on the few that may yet see a few days more. He, the cause of our ruin, is his own snake, which he says stole on his mother in her own country to lie to her.¹ He says his story is that man was rejected and cast off. Why did we not reject him forever? He says one of his virgins had a son nailed to death on two cross sticks to save him. Were all of them dead then when that young man died, we would be all safe now and our country our own.

But he lives to persist; yes, the rascal is also an unsatisfied beggar, and his hangman and swine² follow his walk. Pay him money! Did he inquire, how? No, no; his meanness ropes his charity, his avarice wives³ his envy, his race breeds to extort. Did he speak at all like a friend? He saw a few horses and some cows, and many tens of rails,⁴ with the few of us that own them. His envy thereon baited to the quick. Why thus? Because he himself says he is in a big debt, and wants us to help him pay it. His avarice put him in debt, and he wants us to pay him for it and be his fools. Did he ask how many a helpless widow, how many a fatherless child, how many a blind and naked thing fare a little of that little we have[?] Did he—in a destroying night when the mountains and the firmaments [*sic*] put their faces together to freeze us—did he inquire if we had a spare rag of a blanket to save his lost and perishing steps to our fires? No, no; cold he is, you know, and merciless. Four times in one shivering night I last winter knew the old one-eyed Indian, Keneth [*sic*], that gray man of full seven tens of winters, was refused shelter in four of the white man's houses on his way in that bad night; yet the aged, blinded man was turned out to his fate. No, no; he is cold and merciless, haughty and overbearing. Look at him, and he looks at you—how? His fishy eye scans you as the why-oops⁵ do the shelled blue cock. He is cold, and stealth and envy are with him, and fit him as do his hands and feet. We owe him nothing; he owes us more than he will pay, yet says there is a God.

I know another aged Indian, with his only daughter and wife alone in their lodge. He had a few beaver skins and four or five poor horses—all he had. The light [? print unclear] was bad, and held every stream in thick ice; the earth was white; the stars burned nearer us as if to pity us, but the more they burned the more stood the hair of the deer on end with cold, nor heeded they the frost-bursting barks of the willows. Two of the white man's people came to the lodge, lost and freezing pitifully. They fared well inside that lodge. The old wife and only daughter unbound and put [? print unclear] off their frozen shoes; gave them new ones, and crushed sage bark rind to put therein to keep

8. One who “skulked” about Indian lands. In violation of treaties, settlers encroached on Indian lands, and when the Native Americans retaliated, the state and/or federal government usually intervened to protect the settlers who were violating laws negotiated and passed by that same government.

9. I.e., the white people threaten by hinting at the intervention of soldiers and at imprisonment in chains.

1. Reference to the story of Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden.

2. Pig farming, a practice introduced by the Euro-Americans, was apparently as strange and repugnant to some American Indians as death by hanging, also introduced by Euro-Americans.

3. I.e., is married to. “Ropes”: constrains.

4. Fence rails.

5. Unidentified, but probably a Salish word for an animal that preys on the blue cock.

their feet smooth and warm. She gave them warm soup; boiled deer meat, and boiled beaver. They were saved; their safety returned to make them live. After a while they would not stop; they would go. They went away. Mind you; remember well: at midnight they returned. [M]urdered the old father, and his daughter and her mother asleep, took the beaver skins and horses, and left. Next day, the first and only Indian they met, a fine young man, they killed, put his body under the ice and rode away on his horse.

Yet, they say we are not good. Will he tell his own crimes? No, no; his crimes to us are left untold. But the Desolator bawls and cries the dangers of the country from us, the few left of us. Other tribes kill and ravish his women and stake his children, and eat his steers, and he gives them blankets and sugar for it. We, the poor Flatheads, who never troubled him, he wants now to distress and make poorer.

I have more to say, my people; but this much I have said, and chose [close?] to hear your minds about this payment. We never begot laws or rights to ask it. His laws never gave us a blade nor a tree, nor a duck; nor a grouse, nor a trout. No; like the wolverine that steals your *cache*, how often does he come: You know he comes as long as he lives, and takes more and more, and dirties what he leaves.

1876

CHIEF JOSEPH

In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat, better known as Chief Joseph (c. 1840–1904), first gained fame among white Americans in the 1870s through his military leadership of a band of Nez Percé (or Nimíipuu) Indians who resisted the federal government—and then for the eloquent speech attributed to him upon his surrender. Even though Joseph may have been the best-known Native American orator of his own time, it is not clear whether his surrender speech or the other addresses attributed to him accurately represent his own words. Still, even though it may not be wholly authentic as an indigenous expression, the widely circulated “An Indian’s Views of Indian Affairs,” reprinted here, reveals something about the place of Indians in the American imagination of the late nineteenth century.

Joseph was born in the Willowa Valley of what is currently northeastern Oregon. His father was a tribal leader who received the name Joseph when he was baptized by a missionary, and the two were often referred to as Joseph the Elder and Joseph the Younger. After the death of his father, Joseph succeeded him as a leader, and he continued his father’s practice of resisting white settlement on their traditional land. Joseph’s people were among those Nez Percé Indians who repeatedly refused to recognize treaties that would relocate them elsewhere. In 1877, the tension between settlers and these Nez Percé bands became open warfare between the Nez Percé and the U.S. Army. During the ensuing conflict, Joseph was credited as the mastermind of a set of skillful maneuvers as he led approximately 750 followers over 1,500 miles of U.S. territory in a daring attempt to elude capture by federal troops, who greatly outnumbered them. The clashes between the Nez Percé resistance and the U.S. Army were widely reported throughout the United States, and the speech that Joseph allegedly delivered on his eventual surrender became instantly elevated

as a classic of American oratory. The concluding lines could be interpreted as a romantic elegy for the Indians that most whites thought would soon disappear from the nation: “Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.”

Whether Joseph ever uttered these words or anything like them, he definitely believed that he had extracted a promise from the U.S. officer to whom he had surrendered, General Nelson Miles, that the members of Joseph’s band would be returned to their own land. Instead, they were transported first to Fort Leavenworth, in Kansas, and then to the Indian Territory of Oklahoma, suffering illness and death in the process. In 1879, Joseph traveled to Washington to plea for the return of the Nez Percé to their land; in addition to meeting with many leaders, Joseph made a well-received address in Lincoln Hall. Subsequently, the *North American Review* published “An Indian’s Views of Indian’s Affairs” as a transcript of that speech, which was then distributed widely in pamphlet form. In fact, the written product seems likely to have been composed after the speaking event, with Joseph working extensively with both an interpreter and the journal’s editor. Regardless, it offers a powerful account of indigenous resistance to American colonialism.

*From An Indian’s Views of Indian Affairs*¹

* * *

At last I was granted permission to come to Washington and bring my friend Yellow Bull and our interpreter with me. I am glad we came. I have shaken hands with a great many friends, but there are some things I want to know which no one seems able to explain. I can not understand how the Government sends a man out to fight us, as it did General Miles, and then breaks his word.² Such a Government has something wrong about it. I can not understand why so many chiefs are allowed to talk so many different ways, and promise so many different things. I have seen the Great Father Chief (the President), the next Great Chief (Secretary of the Interior), the Commissioner Chief (Hayt), the Law Chief (General Butler),³ and many other law chiefs (Congressmen), and they all say they are my friends, and that I shall have justice, but while their mouths all talk right I do not understand why nothing is done for my people. I have heard talk and talk, but nothing is done. Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country, now overrun by white men. They do not protect my father’s grave. They do not pay for all my horses and cattle. Good words will not give me back my children. Good words will not make good the promise of your War Chief General Miles. Good words will not give my people good health and stop them from dying. Good words will not get my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves. I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promi-

1. From the *North American Review* (1879).

2. When Joseph surrendered to General Nelson Miles (1839–1925), it was under an agreement that the U.S. government would return his Nez Percé followers to their own reservation. Instead, they were transported in unheated rail cars first

to Fort Leavenworth, in Kansas, and then to the Oklahoma Indian Territory.

3. Benjamin Butler (1818–1893), a former Civil War general and powerful Massachusetts congressman; Ezra A. Hayt (1823–1902), Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

ses. There has been too much talking by men who had no right to talk. Too many misrepresentations have been made, too many misunderstandings have come up between the white men about the Indians. If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases. If you tie a horse to a stake, do you expect he will grow fat? If you pen an Indian up on a small spot of earth, and compel him to stay there, he will not be contented, nor will he grow and prosper. I have asked some of the great white chiefs where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please. They can not tell me.

I only ask of the Government to be treated as all other men are treated. If I can not go to my own home, let me have a home in some country where my people will not die so fast. I would like to go to Bitter Root Valley.⁴ There my people would be healthy; where they are now they are dying. Three have died since I left my camp to come to Washington.

When I think of our condition my heart is heavy. I see men of my race treated as outlaws and driven from country to country, or shot down like animals.

I know that my race must change. We can not hold our own with the white men as we are. We only ask an even chance to live as other men live. We ask to be recognized as men. We ask that the same law shall work alike on all men. If the Indian breaks the law, punish him by the law. If the white man breaks the law, punish him also.

Let me be a free man—free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself—and I will obey every law, or submit to the penalty.

Whenever the white man treats the Indian as they treat each other, then we will have no more wars. We shall all be alike—brothers of one father and one mother, with one sky above us and one country around us, and one government for all. Then the Great Spirit Chief who rules above will smile upon this land, and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands from the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race are waiting and praying. I hope that no more groans of wounded men and women will ever go to the ear of the Great Spirit Chief above, and that all people may be one people.

In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat has spoken for his people.

4. Located in southwestern Montana.

FRANCIS LAFLESCHE

Born and raised in an influential Omaha Indian family, Francis LaFlesche (1857–1932) grew up learning the traditions of his people as well as the ways of European American settlers. His father, Joseph Flesche (also known as *Inshta'maza* or *Iron Eye*), was one of the principal chiefs of the Omahas; he later helped found a settlement of log houses and farms that more traditional Omahas referred to as “the village of make-believe white men.” Francis’s elder half-sister, *Susette* (also known as *Bright Eyes*), became an outspoken advocate for Native land rights and gained national attention in the late 1870s through a speaking tour of the eastern United States. Francis accompanied her on that tour, making contacts that yielded him employment at the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington. In the 1880s, LaFlesche began working with anthropologist Alice C. Fletcher, and the two developed a professional and personal relationship that extended over three decades. They collaborated on landmark studies of Omaha culture, and Fletcher eventually adopted LaFlesche as her son.

The Middle Five, published in 1900, is LaFlesche’s memoir of his time at the Presbyterian boarding school near his home. It is written as a series of sketches that depict LaFlesche and his friends trying to negotiate and learn the ways of the “White-chests” who run the mission. LaFlesche writes with gentle humor about the escapades of his comrades, but he also is a keen observer of the challenges that assimilation posed for the Omaha students and their families. In the chapter included here, one boy tells a traditional tribal origin story, another responds with the biblical story of Genesis, and the boys try to understand the relationship between the two narratives.

*From The Middle Five*¹

Chapter VII. The Splinter, the Thorn, and the Rib

“Oh! oh! oh! Aunt, that hurts. Oh!”

“Keep still, now, keep still! You have a big stick in your toe, and I must take it out. If you keep pulling like that, I might run the point of this awl² into your foot.”

I lay flat on my back on the ground with my sore foot in the lap of this good woman whom I called Aunt, while she probed the wound to withdraw a splinter. After considerable wincing on my part, the cause of my agony was removed and held to view. The splinter was long and very large; the relief was great, and already I felt as though I could walk without limping. The kind woman took from her work-bag a bit of root, chewed it, and put it on my sore toe; then she bandaged the foot with a piece of white cloth which also came from the handy bag.

My Aunt laid the splinter on a piece of wood and cut it into fine bits, just as I had seen men cut tobacco for smoking. “Now,” said she, as she scattered the bits in every direction, “that thing cannot do any more harm. But what is this?” she asked, holding the old bandage up between the tips of her thumb

1. This text is taken from the first publication, in 1900, by Small, Maynard and Company.

2. A pointed tool typically used in working with wood or leather.

and index finger of her right hand, and in her left the bit of pork that had been tied on my toe.

"Why, Aunt," I replied, "that thing in your right hand is the old bandage, and that in your left is the pig-fat that was put on my toe."

"Why did they put pig-fat on your poor sore toe; who put it on? Bah! It's nasty!" she exclaimed, as she threw it away as far as she could.

"The white woman who takes care of the children at the school put it on to draw the splinter out."

"To draw the splinter out!" she repeated in a tone of contempt. Then she tossed up her fine head, gave shouts of laughter, and said between the paroxysms; "Oh! this is funny! This is funny! Your White-chests³ might as well hitch a bit of pig-fat to their wagon and expect it to draw a load up the hill! And how long has this pig-fat been tied on your foot?"

"About four days."

"Without bathing the foot and renewing the bandages?"

"Yes."

"If this white woman takes as much care of the other children as she has of you,—I'm sorry for them. No children of mine should be placed under her care,—if I had any."

My Aunt gathered her awl, knife, and other little things into her work-bag; I looked all about to see if any boys were watching, then I put my arms around her dear neck and kissed her.

"Are you going to see my mother today?" When she answered yes, I said, "Tell her to come and see me,—very soon."

"I will; but don't keep her running over here all the time," and she started to go. She had not gone very far when she turned and shouted to me, "Wash your foot to-morrow morning and turn the bandage over. You will be well in a day or two."

A boy passing by cried out, "Bell has rung!" and I limped into the school-room to attend the afternoon session.

When school was out, Lester suggested that we go on the hill to sit and talk. Turning to me, he asked if I could walk as far as that; I assured him that I could, so I hobbled along with the boys up the hill. We found a beautiful grassy spot, and three of us—Lester, Warren, and I—lay down and looked up into the deep blue sky. Brush sat near by, carving a horse's head out of a piece of oak. Clouds lazily floated far above.

"Say, Lester," I called, "you take that one that looks like a buffalo; Warren, you take that one that is shaped like a bear; and I will take this one that's like a man smoking a pipe. Now, let's rub them out!"

So, fixing our eyes upon the clouds, we began rubbing the palms of our hands together.

"Mine is getting smaller, right away, now!" cried Warren.

"Mine too!" echoed Lester.

Brush gave us a look of disgust, and said, "Boys, I think you are the biggest fools I ever saw,—rubbing out clouds, the idea!"

But we rubbed away, and paid no attention to the contemptuous glances our friend gave us. My hands began to come down lower and lower; and then I felt myself rising from the ground, higher and higher I went, just like a big

3. Missionaries, so-called because they wear "stiff white shirts," as another boy explains in the book.

bird, and suddenly landed on a heavy black cloud. I looked down; there were the boys still rubbing away, and Brush still carving. I could see the winding river far below and the birds flitting about. I wondered what it all meant. I felt the cloud moving away with me; the boys were growing smaller and smaller, and I noticed that I was passing over the Indian village. Where is the cloud going with me, and will it ever stop? I heard a sound that seemed familiar to me,—is it a bell? Could there be bells in the cloud? I asked myself.

“Wake up, you fools! Supper-bell has rung! Rubbing out clouds, were you!” said Brush, in derisive tones.

Warren sat up, blinking his eyes, and asked, “Where are we?”

That night, when the boys had settled down in their beds and Gray-beard⁴ had gone downstairs, Edwin asked, “Boys, where’ve you been this afternoon? You came to supper late; Gray-beard looked hard at you.”

“We’ve been up the hill,” I answered; “I told the boys to hurry along and leave me; but they wouldn’t.”

“Who was that Indian woman talking to you before dinner-time?”

“That was my aunt; she saw me when she was going by, and she made me sit down and she looked at my foot. She took a great big splinter out of my toe. My! it hurt.”

“You’re going to get well now. Why didn’t you put that splinter in some buffalo hair, then’t would’ve turned into a baby.”

“Nonsense!” said Brush, “who ever heard of such a thing.”

“There’s a story like that,” replied Edwin.

“Tell that story! tell that story!” cried the boys in chorus.

“But you don’t listen; you go to sleep, or you ask fool questions and stop me.”

“We won’t stop you; we’re going to lie awake.”

“All right. I’ll tell you that story. Say ‘ong!’ pretty soon, then I’ll know you’re awake.”

We all snuggled down, then in chorus cried, “Ong!” and Edwin began:

“Way long time ago, four brothers lived on earth. Good hunters, they shot straight, killed deer, buffalo, elk, and all kinds of animals. They got plenty of meat and skins. One night, the youngest man came home very lame; his foot was all swelled up; he had to use his bow for a cane, and he was groaning, groaning all the time. He lay down and was real sick, one, two, three days. The other men, they went hunting. When they were gone, the youngest man got up, took his knife, cut open his toe, and took out a big thorn, a great big—”

Whack! whack! whack! Quick as a flash the boys put their feet against the foot-board and pulled the bedclothes taut so that the rest of the blows fell harmless upon us. We had been surprised by Gray-beard. Edwin, in his earnestness, and in his belief that a foreign language can be better understood when spoken loudly, had been shouting his story in a voice that reached Gray-beard and woke him up. After warning us against loud talking, the old man went downstairs as stealthily as he had come.

“Well, boys,” said Brush, “that come like a cyclone, didn’t it?”

We all agreed that it did.

“Frank, did he hurt your foot?” asked Warren.

4. The boys’ “teacher and disciplinarian,” as LaFlesche explains elsewhere.

"No, the boys kept the quilt up, so he couldn't hit me."

"What did I say last?" asked Edwin.

"You said," I reminded him, "that he cut open his toe and took out a big thorn."

"Oh, yes," he continued; "he took out a big thorn, a great big thorn. He wanted to show it to his brothers, so he pulled out some buffalo hair from his robe and put the thorn inside and laid it away, way back in the middle of the tent. Then he went after some water to wash his foot. When he was coming back, he heard something crying like everything; not like raccoon, not like any kind of bird or animal, something different. He stood still and listened; it sounded like coming from inside the tent! So he went slow, easy, and looked in the tent; there was something moving and crying loud. Then the young man went inside the tent, and he saw a baby, a little girl baby, and no thorn. He knew that thorn had turned into a girl baby, crying like everything. The young man was very glad; he danced on his one well foot; he took up the girl baby in his big arms and moved like a tree when the wind blows, and he sang soft, and the girl baby shut her eyes and went to sleep, e-a-s-y,—just like you!"

"No! We ain't asleep. Go on."

"Well, those big brothers came home, and they were all very glad. They took the girl baby all round. Then the oldest brother, he said, 'She is going to be our sister. I wish she would grow right up and run round the tent.' Then he lifted her four times, and the girl baby grew quick, and ran round the tent, talking. Then another brother, he said, 'I wish my sister would grow up and get big enough to go after water.' Then he lifted the little girl four times, and she got big enough to go after water. Then the next one, he said, 'I wish my sister would grow big enough to make moccasins and cook and make lots of things.' Then he lifted her four times, and the girl grew right up and knew how to make lots of things. Then the youngest man, he said, 'I wish my sister grown up woman now.' Then he lifted her four times, and she was a big woman right away. So in one night that thorn girl baby grew up, and she was the first woman."

"Why!" said Brush, "that's just like the Bible story of Adam and Eve. You remember it says, that Adam was the first man God made, and He put him in a big garden full of flowers and trees. He told him he could eat everything there except the berries of only one tree, and He showed him that tree. God made Adam go to sleep, and then He cut open his side and took out one rib, and out of that bone He made a woman, and He named her Eve."

"Did He whittle that rib bone just like you whittle a piece of wood and make men, and horses, and dogs, and other things?" asked Lester.

"Yes, I think He did. Then in that garden there were elephants, and lions, and tigers, and camels, and lots of other animals; but they didn't eat each other up. God gave Adam the camels to ride, so he wouldn't get tired. Camels ride easy, easier than a horse. You know a horse goes trot! trot! trot! and makes your stomach ache; but a camel goes just as e-a-s-y, like rocking, like that boat, you know, when we went on the river and the wind blew, and the boat went up and down. Why, you know, the difference is just like this: you ride in a big wagon and it shakes you like everything; you ride in the superintendent's carriage, and it rides just as easy as anything."

“How do you know?” broke in Warren. “You never rode a camel, and you never rode in the superintendent’s carriage.”

“Yes, I have too. I’ve ridden in the superintendent’s carriage that time I went to interpret for him down to the big village. I rode with him in his carriage.”

“You boys said you wouldn’t stop my story,” protested Edwin, yawning.

“Say, Brush,” I asked, “when that bone was whittled, and it became Eve, what did she do?”

“Well, one morning she went down to the creek to swim, and, just as she was going to step into the water by a big willow-tree, she saw a snake in the tree with a man’s head on, and the snake—”

“It wasn’t a snake,” interrupted Warren; “it was the serpent, the Sunday-school teacher said so.”

“Well it’s the same thing,—the snake and the serpent is the same thing.”

“No, they’re not. The serpent is the kind that’s poisonous, like the rattle-snake; and the snake is like those that don’t poison, like the garter-snake and the bull-snake.”

“Brush, go on with your story,” I broke in impatiently. “Don’t mind Warren; he doesn’t know anything!”

“No, he doesn’t. Well, the serpent was Satan, and Sa—”

“How can Satan be a serpent and a snake?” asked Lester. “First you said it was a snake; then you said it was a serpent; now you say it was Satan!”

“You boys are bothering my story all the time. I’m going to stop.”

“Go on, Brush,” I urged; “don’t mind those boys; what do they know? They’re all way back in the Second Reader, and you are in the Fifth, and I am in the Third.”⁵

“All right, I’ll go on; I don’t care what they say. Well, the Devil spoke to Eve and said—”

“Your snake has turned into a Devil now,” sneered Edwin. “Boys, why don’t you let me go on with my story; Brush doesn’t know how to tell a story.”

“Yes, I do too. Boys, you don’t know anything; you don’t know that the Devil and Satan and the serpent and the snake are the same thing; they’re all the same. If you would listen when the teacher talks to you in the school-room, and when the minister speaks to us in the chapel, you would learn something. All you got to do is to listen, but you don’t. When you are forced to sit still, you go to sleep; and when you are awake you tickle those that are asleep with straws, or stick pins in them. How are you going to learn anything when you do like that? You must listen; that’s what I’m doing. I want to know all about these things so I can be a preacher when I get big. I’m going to wear a long black coat, and a vest that buttons up to the throat, and I’m going to wear a white collar, and a pair of boots that squeaks and reaches to my knees, and—”

“Edwin, go on with your story, I want to hear that,” called Warren.

“He’s asleep,” said I.

“Only last Sunday,” resumed Brush, “the minister told us that the Devil went about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may de—de— What’s the rest of that word, Frank?”

“Vour.”

5. McGuffey Readers were commonly used textbooks that advanced from the First Reader to the Sixth.

“Yes, ’vour, devour. The Devil went about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.”⁶

“Bully for you, Brush!” exclaimed Lester. “That’s good; you didn’t cough big though, like the preacher does.”

“Don’t make fun of the old man, boys, he is here to help us; he wants to do us good.”

“Yes,” answered Warren; “I guess he wanted to do you good last week, when he switched your back for you!”

“I think I deserved it.”

“No, you didn’t. You didn’t do anything; you only threw Phil Sheridan⁷ down and made his nose bleed.”

“I shouldn’t have done it. I saw a good chance and I did it, and the old man was looking at me. Now, boys, what did the preacher mean when he said the Devil went around like a roaring lion?”

“I s’pose,” said Edwin, “he means the Devil is like some of our big medicine men who can turn themselves into deer and elk, and any kind of animal, and the Devil can change himself into a hungry, howling lion and—”

“And into a Satan,” suggested Lester.

“And into a serpent,” added Warren.

“Into a snake,” I chimed in.

“And put a man’s head on!” ejaculated Edwin.

“And talk to women when they go swimming!” said Lester, with a laugh.

“There’s no use talking to you boys. I’m going to sleep,” and Brush turned over.

One by one, sleep overcame these boys. Brush made a peculiar noise as he breathed, and Lester puffed away like a steamboat.

A whippoorwill sang in one of the cotton-wood-trees near the corner of the house. Fainter and fainter grew the sound, and so the day passed into yesterday, and the morrow began to dawn.

1900

6. A reference to a passage from the New Testament: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5.8).

7. In his introduction to *The Middle Five*, LaFlesche explains that the missionaries gave their Indian students English names, and in doing so

frequently borrowed from national figures or from the Bible. There is some irony in naming an Omaha boy after Philip Sheridan (1831–1888), a Civil War general who, during the time depicted in the book, commanded the U.S. military forces in conflict against the tribes of the Plains.

ZITKALA-ŠA (GERTRUDE SIMMONS BONNIN)

One of the leading American Indian intellectuals of her time, Zitkala-Ša (1876–1938) was born as Gertrude Simmons on the Yankton Sioux reservation. Later, she chose for herself the name Zitkala-Ša, meaning Red Bird, and she used that name in a series of autobiographical articles that she wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* at the turn of the twentieth century. These articles, portions of which appear elsewhere in this volume, document Zitkala-Ša’s childhood and educational experiences,

including the intense pressure to speak English and to adopt other cultural practices of white American society. The articles generated substantial interest among the magazine's readers, and their popularity generated new writing and speaking opportunities for Zitkala-Ša. Soon after, she published the book *Old Indian Legends* (1901), a collection of traditional Sioux stories as retold by Zitkala-Ša in her own style. A number of similar volumes—both by American Indians and white anthropologists—were published during this period, a sign of the continuing interest in Native storytelling among non-Native readers. Most of the stories that Zitkala-Ša includes in *Old Indian Legends* feature Iktomi, a trickster who can appear both as a spider and as a human. Zitkala-Ša calls Iktomi “a wily fellow” whose “hands are always kept in mischief.” In “Iktomi and the Fawn,” Iktomi’s desire to become something that he is not has a particular resonance for an age in which American Indians and others were under tremendous pressure to change their ways of living.

Iktomi and the Fawn¹

In one of his wanderings through the wooded lands, Iktomi saw a rare bird sitting high in a tree-top. Its long fan-like tail feathers had caught all the beautiful colors of the rainbow. Handsome in the glistening summer sun sat the bird of rainbow plumage. Iktomi hurried hither with his eyes fast on the bird.

He stood beneath the tree looking long and wistfully at the peacock’s bright feathers. At length he heaved a sigh and began: “Oh, I wish I had such pretty feathers! How I wish I were not I! If only I were a handsome feathered creature how happy I would be! I’d be so glad to sit upon a very high tree and bask in the summer sun like you!” said he suddenly, pointing his bony finger up toward the peacock, who was eyeing the stranger below, turning his head from side to side.

“I beg of you make me into a bird with green and purple feathers like yours!” implored Iktomi, tired now of playing the brave in beaded buckskins. The peacock then spoke to Iktomi: “I have a magic power. My touch will change you in a moment into the most beautiful peacock if you can keep one condition.”

“Yes! yes!” shouted Iktomi, jumping up and down, patting his lips with his palm, which caused his voice to vibrate in a peculiar fashion. “Yes! yes! I could keep ten conditions if only you would change me into a bird with long, bright tail feathers. Oh, I am so ugly! I am so tired of being myself! Change me! Do!”

Hereupon the peacock spread out both his wings, and scarce moving them, he sailed slowly down upon the ground. Right beside Iktomi he alighted. Very low in Iktomi’s ear the peacock whispered, “Are you willing to keep one condition, though hard it be?”

“Yes! yes! I’ve told you ten of them if need be!” exclaimed Iktomi, with some impatience.

“Then I pronounce you a handsome feathered bird. No longer are you Iktomi the mischief-maker.” Saying this the peacock touched Iktomi with the tips of his wings.

1. First published in 1901 in *Old Indian Legends*, from which this text is taken.

Iktomi vanished at the touch. There stood beneath the tree two handsome peacocks. While one of the pair strutted about with a head turned aside as if dazzled by his own bright-tinted tail feathers, the other bird soared slowly upward. He sat quiet and unconscious of his gay plumage. He seemed content to perch there on a large limb in the warm sunshine.

After a little while the vain peacock, dizzy with his bright colors, spread out his wings and lit on the same branch with the elder bird.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "how hard to fly! Brightly tinted feathers are handsome, but I wish they were light enough to fly!" Just there the elder bird interrupted him. "That is the one condition. Never try to fly like other birds. Upon the day you try to fly you shall be changed into your former self."

"Oh, what a shame that bright feathers cannot fly into the sky!" cried the peacock. Already he grew restless. He longed to soar through space. He yearned to fly above the trees high upward to the sun.

"Oh, there I see a flock of birds flying thither! Oh! oh!" said he, flapping his wings, "I must try my wings! I am tired of bright tail feathers. I want to try my wings."

"No, no!" clucked the elder bird. The flock of chattering birds flew by with whirring wings. "Oop! oop!" called some to their mates.

Possessed by an irrepressible impulse the Iktomi peacock called out, "Hě!² I want to come! Wait for me!" and with that he gave a lunge into the air. The flock of flying feathers wheeled about and lowered over the tree whence came the peacock's cry. Only one rare bird sat on the tree, and beneath, on the ground, stood a brave in brown buckskins.

"I am my old self again!" groaned Iktomi in a sad voice. "Make me over, pretty bird. Try me this once again!" he pleaded in vain.

"Old Iktomi wants to fly! Ah! We cannot wait for him!" sang the birds as they flew away.

Muttering unhappy vows to himself, Iktomi had not gone far when he chanced upon a bunch of long slender arrows. One by one they rose in the air and shot a straight line over the prairie. Others shot up into the blue sky and were soon lost to sight. Only one was left. He was making ready for his flight when Iktomi rushed upon him and wailed, "I want to be an arrow! Make me into an arrow! I want to pierce the Blue overhead. I want to strike yonder summer sun in its center. Make me into an arrow!"

"Can you keep a condition? One condition, though hard it be?" the arrow turned to ask.

"Yes! yes!" shouted Iktomi, delighted.

Hereupon the slender arrow tapped him gently with his sharp flint beak. There was no Iktomi, but two arrows stood ready to fly. "Now, young arrow, this is the one condition. Your flight must always be in a straight line. Never turn a curve nor jump about like a young fawn," said the arrow magician. He spoke slowly and sternly.

At once he set about to teach the new arrow how to shoot in a long straight line.

"This is the way to pierce the Blue overhead," said he; and off he spun high into the sky.

2. An exclamation in the Lakota language, such as "There!"

While he was gone a herd of deer came trotting by. Behind them played the young fawns together. They frolicked about like kittens. They bounced on all fours like balls. Then they pitched forward, kicking their heels in the air. The Iktomi arrow watched them so happy on the ground. Looking quickly up into the sky, he said in his heart, "The magician is out of sight. I'll just romp and frolic with these fawns until he returns. Fawns! Friends, do not fear me. I want to jump and leap with you. I long to be happy as you are," said he. The young fawns stopped with stiff legs and stared at the speaking arrow with large brown wondering eyes. "See! I can jump as well as you!" went on Iktomi. He gave one tiny leap like a fawn. All of a sudden the fawns snorted with extended nostrils at what they beheld. There among them stood Iktomi in brown buckskins, and the strange talking arrow was gone.

"Oh! I am myself. My old self!" cried Iktomi, pinching himself and plucking imaginary pieces out of his jacket.

"Hin-hin-hin!³ I wanted to fly!"

The real arrow now returned to the earth. He alighted very near Iktomi. From the high sky he had seen the fawns playing on the green. He had seen Iktomi make his one leap, and the charm was broken. Iktomi became his former self.

"Arrow, my friend, change me once more!" begged Iktomi.

"No, no more," replied the arrow. Then away he shot through the air in the direction his comrades had flown.

By this time the fawns gathered close around Iktomi. They poked their noses at him trying to know who he was.

Iktomi's tears were like a spring shower. A new desire dried them quickly away. Stepping boldly to the largest fawn, he looked closely at the little brown spots all over the furry face.

"Oh, fawn! What beautiful brown spots on your face! Fawn, dear little fawn, can you tell me how those brown spots were made on your face?"

"Yes," said the fawn. "When I was very, very small, my mother marked them on my face with a red hot fire. She dug a large hole in the ground and made a soft bed of grass and twigs in it. Then she placed me gently there. She covered me over with dry sweet grass and piled dry cedars on top. From a neighbor's fire she brought hither a red, red ember. This she tucked carefully in at my head. This is how the brown spots were made on my face."

"Now, fawn, my friend, will you do the same for me? Won't you mark my face with brown, brown spots just like yours?" asked Iktomi, always eager to be like other people.

"Yes. I can dig the ground and fill it with dry grass and sticks. If you will jump into the pit, I'll cover you with sweet smelling grass and cedar wood," answered the fawn.

"Say," interrupted Ikto,⁴ "will you be sure to cover me with a great deal of dry grass and twigs? You will make sure that the spots will be as brown as those you wear."

"Oh, yes. I'll pile up grass and willows once oftener than my mother did."

"Now let us dig the hole, pull the grass, and gather sticks," cried Iktomi in glee.

3. No, No, No! (Lakota).

4. A shorter name for Iktomi.

Thus with his own hands he aids in making his grave. After the hole was dug and cushioned with grass, Iktomi, muttering something about brown spots, leaped down into it. Lengthwise, flat on his back, he lay. While the fawn covered him over with cedars, a far-away voice came up through them, "Brown, brown spots to wear forever!" A red ember was tucked under the dry grass. Off scampered the fawns after their mothers; and when a great distance away they looked backward. They saw a blue smoke rising, writhing upward till it vanished in the blue ether.

"Is that Iktomi's spirit?" asked one fawn of another.

"No! I think he would jump out before he could burn into smoke and cinders," answered his comrade.

1901

THE GHOST DANCE SONGS AND THE WOUNDED KNEE MASSACRE

The Ghost Dance was a pan-tribal religious movement that spread throughout the Plains in 1889 and 1890 and that, at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, provoked one of the bloodiest confrontations in the history of U.S. treatment of Native Americans. Throughout the nineteenth century, tribal prophets spoke of visions with instructions on how American Indians could restore their peoples from the ravages of colonialism. On January 1, 1889, during a total eclipse of the sun, a Paiute man named Wovoka or Jack Wilson experienced such a vision in which he was transported to the land of spirits. There, he saw the dead—Paiutes, other Indians, and whites as well—and received instruction on how Indians must live in order to be reunited with the dead in a world where the old ways would be revived. Indians were to be honest, work hard, and adopt a generally accommodating relation to the whites. They were also to perform a series of dances for five nights—the Ghost Dance religion among the Paiutes was known as *nanigukwa*, to dance in a circle—and to sing songs that would be revealed to those who fell into trances.

Word of the Ghost Dance spread. Tribes throughout the plains—including the Arapahos, the Cheyennes, and the Lakota Sioux—sent emissaries to visit Wovoka. In the spring of 1890, Lakota travelers returned to reservations in South Dakota, and noted leaders such as Short Bull, Red Cloud, and Sitting Bull became either adherents of the Ghost Dance or permitted their followers to become practitioners. As rumors about the Ghost Dance spread, federal agents became alarmed that the religious revival would lead to a military outbreak. White journalists portrayed the Ghost Dance as a frenzied activity, and they reported that Wovoka and others had suggested that the Ghost Dance promoted a vision of an Indian world without whites. As part of their efforts to rein in the Ghost Dance movements, Indian police working for the United States went to arrest Sitting Bull on December 15, 1890, and ended up shooting and killing him in the process.

Two weeks later, at Wounded Knee Creek, soldiers from the U.S. Seventh Cavalry (George Armstrong Custer's former command) surrounded a band of Miniconjou Sioux Indians who had been Ghost Dance adherents. As the soldiers attempted to disarm the warriors, a scuffle led to an exchange of gunfire, and the federal troops began shooting indiscriminately into the camp—and firing the powerful Hotchkiss guns that had been trained on the Indians. Nearly 300 Indians were killed in the



Arapaho Ghost Dance Shirt. After the emissaries sent to visit Wovoka returned with glowing reports, the Arapahos became the first adherents of the Ghost Dance on the plains. Wovoka had described special shirts to be worn while performing the Dance, and this is one made by the Arapahos. It is unclear whether the shirts, as some said, were supposed to make the wearer impervious to bullets or only to enhance the power of the Dance.

ensuing Wounded Knee Massacre, including dozens of women and children who attempted to escape to a nearby ravine. After this singular episode of violence, the Ghost Dance lost many adherents, but it was practiced into the twentieth century on several tribal reservations.

The anthropologist James Mooney (1861–1921), who worked for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology, transcribed, translated, and published Ghost Dance songs from seven different tribal nations in *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. Three of these Ghost Dance songs are reprinted here. The first two songs come from the Arapahos, whose songs were highly regarded and often borrowed by other tribes, and they have been recently retranslated by Jeffrey Anderson. In the first song, “Flat Pipe” is not a proper name; rather, the Flat Pipe is a sacred object given to the tribe by Turtle in the ancient time of the world’s beginning, after he brought the earth up from beneath the waters. The pipe usually was brought out only on special occa-

sions by its designated, priestly keeper. That it speaks here to the singer, as Anderson notes, is a break from tradition, perhaps a sign of the deep needs and great hopes of the people at this time. (The repeated “Eiyohei’eiyei” are vocables that have no specific semantic meaning; they serve to fill out the rhythm.) In the second song, the phrase “Our Father” may refer to the prophet Wovoka, but it is also an appeal to the Creator Spirit or Great Mystery of Arapaho religion.

The third song here comes from the Cheyennes, neighbors to and allies of the Arapahos. In many Ghost Dance songs grieving mothers sing in order to be reunited with their children who have died. This is the case in the Cheyenne song composed by Mo’ki, or “Little Woman.” Mo’ki and her husband had lost a first child soon after birth, and then a son at about the age of four. The deeply grieving parents hoped the Ghost Dance would reunite them with their children. Attending one of the dances, Mo’ki fell into a trance and met her children in the spirit land. In the song, she portrays herself as the Crow Woman, traditionally a messenger from the spirit world.

[Flat Pipe is telling me]

Se’ücooo hei’towuuneinoo—Eiyohei’eiyei
 Flat Pipe is telling me. Eiyohei’eiyei.
Se’ücooo hei’towuuneinoo.—Eiyohei’eiyei
 Flat Pipe is telling me. Eiyohei’eiyei.
Heisonoonin—Yohei’eiyei 5
 Our Father. Yohei’eiyei.
Heisonoonin—Yohei’eiyei,
 Our Father. Yohei’eiyei,
Hootniizoowuce’woohonoteino’—Eiyohei’eiyei
 We shall surely be put together again. Eiyohei’eiyei! 10
Hootniizoowuce’woohonoteino’—Eiyohei’eiyei
 We shall surely be put together again. Eiyohei’eiyei!
Heisoomoin—Eiyohei’eiyei.
 Our Father. Eiyohei’eiyei!
Heisonoonin—Eiyohei’eiyei, 15
 Our Father. Eiyohei’eiyei!

[Father, have pity on me]

Neixoo nehcih’owouunoni
 Father, have pity on me!
Neixoo nehcih’owouunoni
 Father, have pity on me!
Woow, biixonokooyeinoo 5
 Now, I am wailing-fasting-thirsting.
Woow, biixonokooyeinoo
 Now, I am wailing-fasting-thirsting.
Hoowuuni biizitii
 There is no food. 10
Hoowuuni biizitii
 There is no food.

[The Crow Woman]

A'guga'-īhi,
 A'guga'-īhi.
 Tsi'shistā'hi'sihi',
 Tsi'shistā'hi'sihi'.
 I'hoo'tsihi', 5
 I'hoo'tsihi'.
 Tsītāwo'tāhi'.
 Tsītāwo'tāhi',
 Hi'nisa'nūhi',
 Hi'nisa'nūhi'. 10
 Tsītāwo'mohu',
 Tsītāwo'mohu'.

TRANSLATION

The Crow Woman—
 The Crow Woman—
 To her home,
 To her home,
 She is going, 5
 She is going.
 She will see it,
 She will see it.
 Her children,
 Her children. 10
 She will see them,
 She will see them.

NICHOLAS BLACK ELK AND JOHN G. NEIHARDT

The product of a collaboration between Nicholas Black Elk (1863–1950), a Lakota warrior, healer, and holy man and John G. Neihardt (1881–1973), a Nebraska poet, *Black Elk Speaks* was published in 1932. The book has enjoyed tremendous popularity since it was republished in 1961, though more recent scholars have questioned how much of the volume represents Neihardt's creativity rather than Black Elk's own words and thinking. In the book, Black Elk tells of visions he had at the ages of five and nine, the latter so powerful and detailed that it would give purpose to his entire life. He was directed in his vision to preserve his Oglala Lakota (Sioux) people and their traditional lifeways from the invading white Americans. Hoping to learn more about whites, Black Elk joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1886, traveling first to New York by train, and then to Europe by steamer for a tour. (The show featured mock battles between Indians and cavalry.) When Black Elk returned in 1889, he learned that his younger brother and sister had died, and soon after his father, too, passed away. Not only was this a difficult time for him personally, but also for his Lakota people. "Our people," said Black Elk, "were pitiful and in despair."

Upon first hearing rumors of the Ghost Dance, Black Elk was skeptical. Then, listening to the positive reports from tribesmen who had traveled to meet Wovoka, he changed his mind. Because he found so much overlap between his own vision and Wovoka's, he eventually participated in the Ghost Dance movement. Looking back some forty years later, however, Black Elk judged his participation to have been an error; he believed he should have relied strictly on his own great vision, and avoided the Ghost Dance movement that ended so badly for the Lakota.

Black Elk Speaks

XXI

THE MESSIAH

There was hunger among my people before I went away across the big water,¹ because the Wasichus did not give us all the food they promised in the Black Hills treaty.² They made that treaty themselves; our people did not want it and did not make it. Yet the Wasichus who made it had given us less than half as much as they promised. So the people were hungry before I went away.

But it was worse when I came back. My people looked pitiful. There was a big drouth, and the rivers and creeks seemed to be dying. Nothing would grow that the people had planted, and the Wasichus had been sending less cattle and other food than ever before. The Wasichus had slaughtered all the bison and shut us up in pens. It looked as though we might all starve to death. We could not eat lies, and there was nothing we could do.

And now the Wasichus had made another treaty to take away from us about half the land we had left. Our people did not want this treaty either, but Three Stars came and made the treaty just the same, because the Wasichus wanted our land between the Smoky Earth and the Good River. So the flood of Wasichus, dirty with bad deeds, gnawed away half of the island that was left to us. When Three Stars came to kill us on the Rosebud, Crazy Horse whipped him and drove him back.³ But when he came this time without any soldiers, he whipped us and drove us back. We were penned up and could do nothing.

All the time I was away from home across the big water, my power was gone, and I was like a dead man moving around most of the time. I could hardly remember my vision,⁴ and when I did remember, it seemed like a dim dream.

Just after I came back, some people asked me to cure a sick person, and I was afraid the power would not come back to me; but it did. So I went on helping the sick, and there were many, for the measles had come among the people who were already weak because of hunger. There were more sick

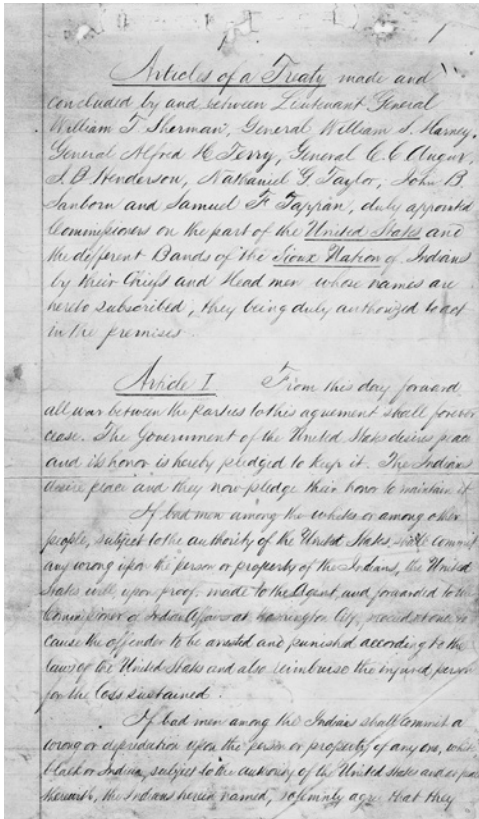
1. Black Elk crossed the Atlantic—"the big water"—with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in 1889.

2. In 1868, the Sioux signed the Black Hills or Fort Laramie Treaty with the United States, guaranteeing them ownership of the Black Hills of South Dakota, but reducing their lands to what was called "the Great Sioux Reservation." The Treaty also provided for government distribution of rations to the Lakota. After gold was discovered in the Black Hills, the government seized the area in 1877. Government rations to the Sioux declined over the years, and were cut in half in 1889 when the "other treaty" Black Elk refers to was pressed upon the

Indians by "Three Stars," as Black Elk calls him just below, General George Crook. This divided the Great Reservation into six smaller reservations, and opened nine million acres of what had been Indian land to white settlement. "Wasichus": the "whites." This has nothing to do with color or ethnicity. In Black Elk's time it had the connotation of "fat eaters," or those who take the best part of the animal.

3. The Battle of the Rosebud, June 17, 1876, was part of the campaign that included the Battle of the Little Bighorn, at which Black Elk was present.

4. As he recounts in his autobiography, he experienced a great vision at age nine.



The Black Hills or Fort Laramie Treaty. This treaty, signed by the Lakota Sioux in 1868, guaranteed them ownership of the Black Hills of South Dakota in return for a reduction of their reservation lands. The treaty also stated that the government would provide rations for the Sioux. These often did not come. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1877, the government seized the area, contrary to treaty provisions.

people that winter when the whooping cough came and killed little children who did not have enough to eat.

So it was. Our people were pitiful and in despair.

But early that summer when I came back from across the big water (1889) strange news had come from the west, and the people had been talking and talking about it. They were talking about it when I came home, and that was the first I had heard of it. This news came to the Ogalalas first of all, and I heard that it came to us from the Shoshones and Blue Clouds (Arapahoes). Some believed it and some did not believe. It was hard to believe; and when I first heard of it, I thought it was only foolish talk that somebody had started somewhere. This news said that out yonder in the west at a place near where the great mountains (The Sierras) stand before you come to the big water, there was a sacred man among the Paiutes who had talked to the Great Spirit in a vision, and the Great Spirit had told him how to save the Indian peoples and make the Wasichus disappear and bring back all the bison and the people who were dead and how there would be a new earth. Before I came back, the people had got together to talk about this and they had sent three men, Good Thunder, Brave Bear and Yellow Breast, to see this sacred man with their own eyes and learn if the story about him was true. So these three men had made the long journey west, and in the fall after I came home, they returned to the Ogalalas with wonderful things to tell.

There was a big meeting at the head of White Clay Creek, not far from Pine Ridge, when they came back, but I did not go over there to hear, because I did not yet believe. I thought maybe it was only the despair that made people believe, just as a man who is starving may dream of plenty of everything good to eat.

I did not go over to the meeting, but I heard all they had to tell. These three men all said the same thing, and they were good men. They said that they traveled far until they came to a great flat valley near the last great mountains before the big water, and there they saw the Wanekia,⁵ who was the son of the Great Spirit, and they talked to him. Wasichus called him Jack Wilson, but his name was Wovoka. He told them that there was another world coming, just like a cloud. It would come in a whirlwind out of the west and would crush out everything on this world, which was old and dying. In that other world there was plenty of meat, just like old times; and in that world all the dead Indians were alive, and all the bison that had ever been killed were roaming around again.

This sacred man gave some sacred red paint and two eagle feathers to Good Thunder. The people must put this paint on their faces and they must dance a ghost dance that the sacred man taught to Good Thunder, Yellow Breast, and Brave Bear. If they did this, they could get on this other world when it came, and the Wasichus would not be able to get on, and so they would disappear. When he gave the two eagle feathers to Good Thunder, the sacred man said: "Receive these eagle feathers and behold them, for my father will cause these to bring your people back to him."

This was all that was heard the whole winter.

When I heard this about the red paint and the eagle feathers and about bringing the people back to the Great Spirit, it made me think hard. I had had a great vision that was to bring the people back into the nation's hoop, and maybe this sacred man had had the same vision and it was going to come true, so that the people would get back on the red road. Maybe I was not meant to do this myself, but if I helped with the power that was given me, the tree might bloom again and the people prosper. This was in my mind all that winter, but I did not know what vision the sacred man out there had seen, and I wished I could talk to him and find out. This was sitting deeper in my mind every day, and it was a very bad winter, with much hunger and sickness.

My father died in the first part of the winter from the bad sickness that many people had. This made me very sad. Everything good seemed to be going away. My younger brother and sister had died before I came home, and now I was fatherless in this world. But I still had my mother. I was working in a store for the Wasichus so that I could get something for her to eat, and I just kept on working there and thinking about what Good Thunder, Yellow Breast, and Brave Bear had told; but I did not feel sure yet.

During that winter the people wanted to hear some more about this sacred man and the new world coming, so they sent more men out there to learn what they could. Good Thunder and Yellow Breast, with two others, went from Pine Ridge. Some went with them from other agencies, and two of these were Kicking Bear and Short Bull. News came back from these men as they traveled west, and it seemed that everywhere people believed all that

5. Neihardt translates "Wanekia" as "One Who Makes Live." The English word *Messiah*, as in the title of Black Elk's chapter, is also a likely translation, as is "Son of God."

we had heard, and more. Letters came back telling us this. I kept on working in the store and helping sick people with my power.

Then it was spring (1890), and I heard that these men had all come back from the west and that they said it was all true. I did not go to this meeting either, but I heard the gossip that was everywhere now, and people said it was really the son of the Great Spirit who was out there; that when he came to the Wasichus a long time ago, they had killed him; but he was coming to the Indians this time,⁶ and there would not be any Wasichus in the new world that would come like a cloud in a whirlwind and crush out the old earth that was dying. This they said would happen after one more winter, when the grasses were appearing (1891).

I heard many wonderful things about the Wanekia that these men had seen and heard, and they were good men. He could make animals talk, and once while they were with him he made a spirit vision, and they all saw it. They saw a big water, and beyond it was a beautiful green land where all the Indians that had ever lived and the bison and the other animals were all coming home together. Then the Wanekia, they said, made the vision go out, because it was not yet time for this to happen. After another winter it would happen, when the grasses were appearing.

And once, they said, the Wanekia held out his hat for them to look into; and when they did this, all but one saw there the whole world and all that was wonderful. But that one could see only the inside of the hat, they said.

Good Thunder himself told me that, with the power of the Wanekia, he had gone to a bison skin tepee; and there his son, who had been dead a long time, was living with his wife, and they had a long talk together.

This was not like my great vision, and I just went on working in the store. I was puzzled and did not know what to think.

Afterwhile I heard that north of Pine Ridge at the head of Cheyenne Creek, Kicking Bear had held the first ghost dance,⁷ and that people who danced had seen their dead relatives and talked to them. The next thing I heard was that they were dancing on Wounded Knee Creek just below Manderson.

I did not believe yet, but I wanted to find out things, because all this was sitting more and more strongly in my heart since my father died. Something seemed to tell me to go and see. For awhile I kept from going, but at last I could not any more. So I got on my horse and went to this ghost dance on Wounded Knee Creek below Manderson.

I was surprised, and could hardly believe what I saw; because so much of my vision seemed to be in it. The dancers, both women and men, were holding hands in a big circle, and in the center of the circle they had a tree painted red with most of its branches cut off and some dead leaves on it. This was exactly like the part of my vision where the holy tree was dying, and the circle of the men and women holding hands was like the sacred hoop that should have power to make the tree to bloom again. I saw too that the sacred articles the people had offered were scarlet, as in my vision, and all their faces were painted red. Also, they used the pipe and the eagle feathers. I sat there looking on and feeling sad. It all seemed to be from my great vision somehow and I had done nothing yet to make the tree to bloom.

6. Wovoka sometimes did encourage the belief that he was the returned Christ.

7. This probably would have been in August 1890.

Then all at once great happiness overcame me, and it all took hold of me right there. This was to remind me to get to work at once and help to bring my people back into the sacred hoop, that they might again walk the red road in a sacred manner pleasing to the Powers of the Universe that are One Power. I remembered how the spirits had taken me to the center of the earth and shown me the good things, and how my people should prosper. I remembered how the Six Grandfathers⁸ had told me that through their power I should make my people live and the holy tree should bloom. I believed my vision was coming true at last, and happiness overcame me.

When I went to the dance, I went only to see and to learn what the people believed; but now I was going to stay and use the power that had been given me. The dance was over for that day, but they would dance again next day, and I would dance with them.

1932

8. Powerful spirit beings whom Black Elk had seen in his great vision.

CHARLES ALEXANDER EASTMAN

Charles Alexander Eastman (1858–1939) was the youngest of five children of Many-Lightnings, a Santee Sioux Indian, and a white woman, Mary Eastman, daughter of Seth Eastman, the well-known painter of Indian subjects. In 1862, Many-Lightnings took part in the Minnesota Sioux uprising against white settlers, after which he fled with his family to Canada to escape arrest by the U.S. government. Although he was captured by pursuing troops, his wife and children managed to cross the border safely. Assuming that Many-Lightnings would be executed, his family remained among the Canadian Sioux, and, until his eleventh year, Eastman, then known as Ohíye S'a, led a traditional Sioux life. But Many-Lightnings had not been executed, and in 1869, now a Christian convert who had taken the name of Jacob Eastman, he came for his son, renamed him Charles Alexander Eastman, and set him to acquiring an education.

After attending mission schools, Eastman continued his education on scholarship at Dartmouth College and the Boston University School of Medicine. His first post was as a physician at Pine Ridge Agency in 1890. There, the acculturated Christian doctor soon found himself ministering to wounded Ghost Dancers, his fellow Sioux. After a career as a government consultant and an author, in the last years of his life Eastman largely withdrew from public affairs, spending much of the 1930s living simply in a cabin in the woods of Ontario. This move from civilization to the deep woods brought him full circle from his most widely read book, his 1916 autobiography, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*.

From the Deep Woods to Civilization¹

From *Chapter VII. The Ghost Dance War*

A religious craze such as that of 1890–91 was a thing foreign to the Indian philosophy.² I recalled that a hundred years before, on the overthrow of the

1. The text reprinted here is from the first edition (1916).

2. Contrary to Eastman's statement that move-

ments like the Ghost Dance are "foreign to the Indian philosophy," there was a Paiute Ghost Dance in the 1870s and other messianic movements.

Algonquin nations, a somewhat similar faith was evolved by the astute Delaware prophet, brother to Tecumseh.³ It meant that the last hope of race entity had departed, and my people were groping blindly after spiritual relief in their bewilderment and misery. I believe that the first prophets of the “Red Christ” were innocent enough and that the people generally were sincere, but there were doubtless some who went into it for self-advertisement, and who introduced new and fantastic features to attract the crowd.

The ghost dancers had gradually concentrated on the Medicine Root creek and the edge of the “Bad Lands,”⁴ and they were still further isolated by a new order from the agent, calling in all those who had not adhered to the new religion. Several thousand of these “friendlies” were soon encamped on the White Clay creek, close by the agency. It was near the middle of December, with weather unusually mild for that season. The dancers held that there would be no snow so long as their rites continued.

* * *

I scarcely knew at the time, but gradually learned afterward, that the Sioux had many grievances and causes for profound discontent, which lay back of and were more or less closely related to the ghost dance craze and the prevailing restlessness and excitement. Rations had been cut from time to time; the people were insufficiently fed, and their protests and appeals were disregarded. Never was more ruthless fraud and graft practiced upon a defenseless people than upon these poor natives by the politicians! Never were there more worthless “scraps of paper” anywhere in the world than many of the Indian treaties and Government documents! Sickness was prevalent and the death rate alarming, especially among the children. Trouble from all these causes had for some time been developing, but might have been checked by humane and conciliatory measures. The “Messiah craze” in itself was scarcely a source of danger, and one might almost as well call upon the army to suppress Billy Sunday⁵ and his hysterical followers. Other tribes than the Sioux who adopted the new religion were let alone, and the craze died a natural death in the course of a few months.

* * *

[Someone called out] “the soldiers are here!” I looked along the White Clay creek toward the little railroad town of Rushville, Nebraska, twenty-five miles away, and just as the sun rose above the knife-edged ridges black with stunted pine, I perceived a moving cloud of dust that marked the trail of the Ninth Cavalry. There was instant commotion among the camps of friendly Indians. Many women and children were coming in to the agency for refuge, evidently fearing that the dreaded soldiers might attack their villages by mistake. Some who had not heard of their impending arrival hurried to the offices to ask what it meant. I assured those who appealed to me that

3. Tecumseh (1768–1813) was a Shawnee Indian war chief who fostered a pan-Indian alliance to fight the United States in the Ohio Valley and northwestern territories; his younger brother was a prophet, known as Tenskwatawa or “The Open Door” (1768–1836), who preached that Indians should return to their traditional ways

and unite in a unified resistance to encroaching Americans.

4. An area of stark terrain about fifty miles northwest of the Pine Ridge agency in South Dakota.

5. William Ashley Sunday (1862–1935), a popular American evangelist.

the troops were here only to preserve order, but their suspicions were not easily allayed.

As the cavalry came nearer, we saw that they were colored troopers, wearing buffalo overcoats and muskrat caps; the Indians with their quick wit called them "buffalo soldiers." They halted, and established their temporary camp in the open space before the agency enclosure. The news had already gone out through the length and breadth of the reservation, and the wildest rumors were in circulation. Indian scouts might be seen upon every hill top, closely watching the military encampment.

At this juncture came the startling news from Fort Yates, some two hundred and fifty miles to the north of us, that Sitting Bull⁶ had been killed by Indian police while resisting arrest, and a number of his men with him, as well as several of the police. We next heard that the remnant of his band had fled in our direction, and soon afterward, that they had been joined by Big Foot's⁷ band from the western part of Cheyenne River agency, which lay directly in their road. United States troops continued to gather at strategic points, and of course the press seized upon the opportunity to enlarge upon the strained situation and predict an "Indian uprising." The reporters were among us, and managed to secure much "news" that no one else ever heard of. Border towns were fortified and cowboys and militia gathered in readiness to protect them against the "red devils." Certain classes of the frontier population industriously fomented the excitement for what there was in it for them, since much money is apt to be spent at such times. As for the poor Indians, they were quite as badly scared as the whites and perhaps with more reason.

* * *

On the day following the Wounded Knee massacre there was a blizzard, in the midst of which I was ordered out with several Indian police, to look for a policeman who was reported to have been wounded and left some two miles from the agency. We did not find him. This was the only time during the whole affair that I carried a weapon; a friend lent me a revolver which I put in my overcoat pocket, and it was lost on the ride. On the third day it cleared, and the ground was covered with an inch or two of fresh snow. We had feared that some of the Indian wounded might have been left on the field, and a number of us volunteered to go and see. I was placed in charge of the expedition of about a hundred civilians, ten or fifteen of whom were white men. We were supplied with wagons in which to convey any whom we might find still alive. Of course a photographer and several reporters were of the party.

Fully three miles from the scene of the massacre we found the body of a woman completely covered with a blanket of snow, and from this point on we found them scattered along as they had been relentlessly hunted down and slaughtered while fleeing for their lives. Some of our people discovered relatives or friends among the dead, and there was much wailing and mourning. When we reached the spot where the Indian camp had stood, among

6. A Hunkpapa Lakota holy man (1831–1890) who led the Lakota and Cheyenne in resistance to the United States for much of his life. After his surrender in 1881, Sitting Bull traveled with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show; at the time of his death, he was living on the Standing Rock reservation.

7. A leader of the Miniconjou band of the Lakota Sioux, Big Foot (c. 1826–1890), also known as Spotted Elk, was quite ill with pneumonia at this time, and he was killed in the fighting of the Wounded Knee Massacre.

the fragments of burned tents and other belongings we saw the frozen bodies lying close together or piled one upon another. I counted eighty bodies of men who had been in the council and who were almost as helpless as the women and babes when the deadly fire began, for nearly all their guns had been taken from them. A reckless and desperate young Indian fired the first shot when the search for weapons was well under way, and immediately the troops opened fire from all sides, killing not only unarmed men, women, and children, but their own comrades who stood opposite them, for the camp was entirely surrounded.

It took all of my nerve to keep my composure in the face of this spectacle, and of the excitement and grief of my Indian companions, nearly every one of whom was crying aloud or singing his death song. The white men became very nervous, but I set them to examining and uncovering every body to see if one were living. Although they had been lying untended in the snow and cold for two days and nights, a number had survived. Among them I found a baby of about a year old warmly wrapped and entirely unhurt. I brought her in, and she was afterward adopted and educated by an army officer. One man who was severely wounded begged me to fill his pipe. When we brought him into the chapel he was welcomed by his wife and daughters with cries of joy, but he died a day or two later.

Under a wagon I discovered an old woman, totally blind and entirely helpless. A few had managed to crawl away to some place of shelter, and we found in a log store near by several who were badly hurt and others who had died after reaching there. After we had dispatched several wagon loads to the agency, we observed groups of warriors watching us from adjacent buttes; probably friends of the victims who had come there for the same purpose as ourselves. A majority of our party, fearing an attack, insisted that some one ride back to the agency for an escort of soldiers, and as mine was the best horse, it fell to me to go. I covered the eighteen miles in quick time and was not interfered with in any way, although if the Indians had meant mischief they could easily have picked me off from any of the ravines and gulches.

All this was a severe ordeal for one who had so lately put all his faith in the Christian love and lofty ideals of the white man. Yet I passed no hasty judgment, and was thankful that I might be of some service and relieve even a small part of the suffering. An appeal published in a Boston paper brought us liberal supplies of much needed clothing, and linen for dressings. We worked on. Bishop Hare of South Dakota visited us, and was overcome by faintness when he entered his mission chapel, thus transformed into a rude hospital.

After some days of extreme tension, and weeks of anxiety, the "hostiles," so called, were at last induced to come in and submit to a general disarmament. Father Jutz, the Catholic missionary, had gone bravely among them and used all his influence toward a peaceful settlement. The troops were all recalled and took part in a grand review before General Miles, no doubt intended to impress the Indians with their superior force.

* * *

JOSÉ MARTÍ

1853–1895

The Cuban poet, essayist, and revolutionary José Martí holds a special place in the literary and political histories of North America. Since the time of his death, he has become recognized not only for his vision of an independent Cuba, but also for the perceptive, often poetic, manner in which he observed the United States and its many contradictions. Martí was born in Cuba to Spanish immigrant parents who struggled economically throughout their lives. As a teen, he was attracted to the cause of Cuban independence, and he wrote on its behalf after the outbreak of the Ten Years' War (1868–1878), an ultimately unsuccessful rebellion against Spanish rule. In late 1869, he was arrested for his political activities and sentenced to six years of hard labor—a sentence that was later commuted to exile in Spain.

In 1875, Martí left Spain and spent time in Mexico and Guatemala, where he developed his skills as journalist and became involved in the politics of those nations. At the conclusion of the Ten Years' War, a general amnesty allowed Martí to return to Cuba, but he was arrested again for his political activities in support of independence. Once more, he was sent in exile to Spain. Martí managed to win his release and, after a brief stop in Paris, he arrived in New York in January 1880. He would spend most of the rest of his life based in New York, dividing his time between assignments as a correspondent for Latin American newspapers and political activities with pro-independence Cubans. Renowned for his oratorical skills, he became recognized as the civilian leader of the independence movement. Martí's success as a political leader was tied to his ability to unite once-divided factions, and he played an important role in welcoming Afro-Cubans—including the predominantly black cigar workers in New York and Florida—into the independence movement. In 1895, he returned to Cuba with a military insurgency aimed at achieving Cuban independence, and he died in battle at the age of forty-two. The war would drag on for three years before the United States intervened, an outcome that would have confirmed Martí's suspicions about the imperial designs of Cuba's northern neighbor on the island.

Given the energy and force of his political work, Martí's accomplishments as a writer are formidable. He published two volumes of poetry in his lifetime—*Ismaelillo* (1882) and *Versos sencillos* (1891)—and a third was published posthumously. He was identified with the literary movement of *modernismo*, which criticized the crass materialism of modernity through an emphasis on the intellect and aesthetics. Many readers consider Martí's greatest literary success, however, to be the essays and columns that he wrote about the United States during his years in New York. These *crónicas*, or chronicles, were published both in New York periodicals and some of the most important newspapers of Latin America. Martí was fascinated by the United States, and his topics reflected his omnivorous interests. He introduced his readers to Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Edgar Allan Poe. He reported on the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, and the opulence of Gilded Age New York. He also reported on much more disturbing events—including violence against striking laborers, the lynching of African Americans, and the assassination of President James A. Garfield. Martí's style combined vivid, literary imagery with first-person reportage, even when he was describing events far from New York that he described by rewriting the eyewitness accounts of others.

Martí was in a position to describe the post-Reconstruction emergence of the United States as an economic and political global power. Like many of his

contemporaries, Martí found much to admire in the United States: its democratic aspirations, the industry and creativity of its people, its technological success. But he also provided a portrait of economic and racial inequality that was troubling. Equally important, Martí came to fear that the United States' quest for hemispheric dominance represented a grave threat to Cuban independence, and to all of Latin America. "Our America," Martí's best-known and most frequently reprinted essay, vigorously and dramatically articulates Martí's concerns. Originally written in anticipation of a hemispheric conference on monetary policy, the essay urges his fellow Latin Americans to steel themselves against "giants with seven-league boots" bearing down on them from the north. "Our America" offers a vision of Pan-American unity through identification with the indigenous history of the Americas and a rejection of both European and U.S. imperialism. With its cascade of imagery and dramatic rhetoric, Martí's writing embodies a convergence between politics and poetics in ways that remain deeply influential.

Our America¹

The vain villager believes the entire world to be his village, and so long as he can remain as mayor, or torment the rival who stole his woman, or see his savings grow, believes all is well in the universe, knowing nothing of the giants who wear seven-league boots² and can crush him underfoot, nor of the battling comets that traverse the skies in their sleep, engulfing worlds. What remains of the village in America must awaken. These times are not for sleeping in a nightcap, but with weapons for pillows, like Juan de Castellanos's³ men: weapons of judgment, which conquer all others. Barricades of ideas are worth more than barricades of stone.

There is no prow that can cleave a cloud of ideas. A vigorous idea, brandished before the world at the right time, stops, like the mystical flag of the Final Judgment, a squadron of battleships. Nations that do not know each other should hasten to do so, as men who would fight together. Those who wave their fists, like jealous brothers who both want the same land, or the modest homeowner who envies his neighbor's finer house, should join hands, so as to become one. Those who, protected by a criminal tradition, severed, with a sword stained by the blood of his own veins, the lands of a defeated brother, the brother punished beyond his faults, ought to return those lands to his brother, if they do not wish the people to call them thieves. Debts of honor are not claimed by an honest man in money, at so much per slap. We can no longer be a people of leaves, living on the air, our tops heavy with blooms, crackling or buzzing at the whim of the sun's caress, or tossed and thrashed by the storm. The trees must form ranks, to stop the advance of the seven-league giant! It is time for roll call, for marching together, and we must advance in close ranks, like the silver in the veins of the Andes.

1. "Our America" was first published in Spanish as "Nuestra América" in *La Revista Ilustrada* on January 10, 1891. Translation by Alfred J. López.

2. Boots that, in European folktales, allow the wearer to walk seven leagues with each step.

3. Spanish poet and soldier (1522–1607) who was among the earliest conquistadores. The ref-

erence is to a line from Castellanos's epic poem *Elegias de varones ilustres de Indias* [*Elegy of Illustrious Men of the Indies*]: "Las duras armas eran los colchones, / El almohada blanda la rodena" ["Hard rifles were their mattresses, / Their soft pillow a buckler"].

Only those born prematurely lack courage. Those who lack faith in their country are seven-month men. Because they lack courage themselves, they would deny it to others. The higher branch is too difficult for their puny arms—arms with painted nails and bracelets, the arms of Madrid or Paris—and they say the tree cannot be climbed. We must load up the ships with these harmful insects, who gnaw at the bone of the nation that feeds them. If they are Parisians or Madridians, let them go to the Prado, with its street-lamps, or to Tortoni's⁴ for a sherbet. These carpenter's sons, who are ashamed that their fathers are carpenters! Those born in America, who are ashamed of the mother who raised them because she wears an Indian apron, and disown—the scoundrels!—their sick mother, and leave her alone in her sickbed! So, who is a man? He who stays with his mother, to cure her illness, or he who sets her to work, unseen, and lives from her labor on rotted lands, with a worm for a necktie, cursing the breast that carried him, bearing the sign of the traitor on the back of his paper frockcoat? These sons of our America, which would be saved by its Indians, and is changing for the better; those deserters who take up arms in the army of a North America that drowns its Indians in blood and is changing for the worse! Those delicate creatures, who are men and do not want to do men's work! Did the Washington who made this land for them go to live in England, with the English, in the years when he saw them come against his own country? Those skeptical of honor, who drag it across foreign soil, as did those skeptical of the French Revolution, dancing and smacking their lips, and slurring their r's!

But in what country can men take more pride than in the sorrowful republics of our America, raised among the silent masses of Indians, to the sound of battle between the book and the priest's candle, upon the bloody arms of a hundred apostles? Never before in history have such advanced and unified nations arisen from such disparate elements. The arrogant man believes that the earth was made to serve as his pedestal, because he has a facile pen or colorful words, and he accuses his native land of being incompetent and irredeemable, because its virgin jungles do not provide him means of traveling the world, riding Persian ponies and spilling champagne. But the fault lies not in the rising country, which seeks forms suitable to it and a useful greatness, but in those who would rule unique nations, of a singular and violent composition, with laws inherited from four centuries of free practice in the United States, from nineteen centuries of monarchy in France. A decree from Hamilton⁵ will not stop the plainsman's charging colt. No phrase from Sieyès⁶ will quicken the sluggish blood of the Indian race. Real conditions, wherever one governs, must be addressed if one is to govern well; and the successful governor in America is not the one who can govern the Germans or the French, but the one who knows of what elements his country is made, and how to go about guiding them together, to arrive, by methods and institutions native to the country, at that desirable state where every man knows himself and works, and enjoys all the abundance that Nature

4. One of Paris's most fashionable cafés; the Paseo del Prado is one of Madrid's main boulevards and landmarks.

5. U.S. founding father (1755–1804) and the nation's first secretary of the treasury.

6. Emmanuel Sieyès (1748–1836) was a leading figure of the French Revolution and among the instigators of the Coup de 18 Brumaire in 1799 that brought Napoleon Bonaparte to power.

has given to all who fertilize it with their toil and defend it with their lives. Government should be born from the nation. The spirit of the government should be that of the nation. Its form should be in agreement with the nation's own character. Government is nothing more than the balancing of the nation's natural elements.

That is why in America, the imported book has been defeated by the natural man. Natural men have defeated the artificial lettered men. The indigenuous mestizo has defeated the exotic creole.⁷ The struggle is not between civilization and barbarism, but between false erudition and nature. The natural man is good, and he respects and values the superior intellect, so long as it does not use his compliance against him, or offend him with indifference, a thing the natural man does not forgive, as he would reclaim by force the respect of whoever hurts his sensibility or harms his interests. It is by this conformity with its disdained natural elements that America's tyrants have risen to power; and they have fallen when they betrayed them. The republics have purged tyrannies of their incapacity to recognize the nation's true elements, to derive the structure of government from them and govern with them. In a new nation, "Governor" means "creator."

In countries composed of educated and uneducated elements, the uneducated will rule, due to their habit of attacking and resolving their doubts with their fists wherever the educated have not mastered the art of government. The uneducated masses are lazy, and timid in matters of intelligence, and want to be governed well. But if government hurts them, they shake it off and govern themselves. How are governors to emerge from the universities, if there is no university in America that teaches the rudiments of the art of government, which is the analysis of those elements peculiar to the peoples of America? Our youth go out into the world, and glimpse it through Yankee or French glasses, aspiring to lead a people they do not know. Entry to a political career should be denied to those unfamiliar with the rudiments of politics. A contest's top prize should not go to the best ode, but to the best study of conditions in the country where one lives. In the newspapers, in the classroom, in the academy, the study of the country's true conditions should be carried forward. To know them is enough, without blindfolds or ambiguities; for whoever sets aside, by intention or forgetfulness, part of the truth, eventually falls because of the truth they lacked, which neglected grows, and topples whatever is built without it. Solving the problem after understanding its elements is easier than solving it without knowing them. The natural man comes, indignant and strong, and overthrows the accumulated justice of books, because it is not administered in accordance with the manifest needs of the nation. To know is to solve. To know the country, and to govern it in accordance with this knowledge, is the only way to liberate it from tyranny. The European university must yield to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas forward, should be learned by heart, even if that of the Greek Archons⁸ is not. Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours. We need it more. Nationalist politicians must replace exotic ones. Onto our republics may be grafted the world; but the

7. Someone born of European descent in the Americas. "Mestizo": someone born of mixed racial descent (usually combining European and

indigenous ancestry) in the Americas.

8. Leadership positions in ancient Greece.

trunk must be that of our republics. And silence! vanquished pedant; for there is no country in which men can take more pride than our sorrowful American republics.

With our feet upon a rosary, our head white and our body mottled Indian and creole, we came, undaunted, into the world of nations. Under the banner of the Virgin, we set out to win our freedom.⁹ A priest, a few lieutenants and a woman raise a republic in Mexico, upon the shoulders of Indians.¹ A Spanish Canon, under cover of his cloak, teaches French liberty to a few magnificent students, who in turn install as leader of Central America's forces against Spain a Spanish general.² With their monarchical habits, the Sun on their chest, Venezuelans in the North and Argentinians in the South set out to build nations. When the two heroes collided, their clash threatening to shake the continent, one, and not the lesser, handed over the reins.³ And as heroism in peacetime is the rarer, because it is less glorious than in war; as it is easier for a man to die with honor than to think with reason; as governing in times of impassioned, united feelings is easier than managing diverse, arrogant, exotic, ambitious ideas when the fighting is over; as the forces crushed in the epic battle undermined, with the feline cautiousness of the species and the weight of reality, the edifice that had raised, in the coarse and singular regions of our mestizo America, among the bare-legged peoples and Parisian frock coats, the flag of nations nurtured by wise governance in the continual practice of reason and liberty; as the colonies' hierarchical composition resisted the democratic organization of the Republic, or the cravat-wearing capitals left the countryside in its horsehide boots standing in the doorway, or the bookish redeemers did not understand that the revolution that triumphed with the soul of the earth, unleashed by the voice of the savior, must be governed with the soul of the earth, not against it or without it, America began to suffer, and suffers today, the fatigue of accommodating the discordant and hostile elements inherited from a despotic and wicked colonizer, and the imported ideas and forms that have been postponing, by their lack of local reality, the logical form of government. The continent, disjointed for three centuries by a regime that denied the right of men to exercise their reason, embarked, disregarding the ignorant who had helped redeem it, upon a government based on reason: the reason of all in what concerns all, and not the academic reason of the few over the rural reason of others. The problem of independence was not the change of forms, but the change of spirit.

Common cause had to be formed with the oppressed, in order to protect a system opposed to the interests and governing habits of the oppressors. The tiger, frightened away by the flash of gunfire, returns at night to the site of its prey. It dies with flames shooting from its eyes, clawing the air. Its

9. The Virgin of Guadalupe, a 16th-century image of the Virgin Mary housed in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, became a nationalist icon during the Mexican War of Independence (1810–21).

1. The reference is to Fr. Miguel Hidalgo (1753–1811), a Catholic priest who launched the war for Mexican Independence in 1810. His movement consisted largely of native Indians, and was ably assisted by Josefa Ortíz de Domínguez (1768–1829), the wife of the mayor of nearby Querétaro.

2. Fray José Antonio Liendo y Goicoechea (1735–1814) was a renowned Jesuit educator, theologian, and mentor to several students who went on to play major roles in winning Central American independence from Spain.

3. Beginning in 1810, two distinct revolutionary movements swept South America, led respectively by Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) in the north and José de San Martín (1778–1850) in the south. In 1822, San Martín ceded power to Bolívar and left the continent.

approach is unheard, but it comes on velvet paws. When the prey awakens, the tiger is upon her. The colony lived on within the republic; and our America is recovering from its grave errors—from the arrogance of its capital cities, from the blind triumph of its scorned peasants, from the excessive importation of foreign ideas and formulas, from the iniquitous and impolitic disdain for the native race—by the superior virtue, fertilized through necessary bloodshed, of the republic that struggles against the colony. The tiger lurks, behind every tree, crouching in every corner. It will die, claws in the air, flames shooting from its eyes.

But “these countries shall be saved,” as announced the Argentinian Rivadavia,⁴ whose sin was refinement during crude times; a silk sheath is not appropriate for a machete, nor should the spear be left behind in a country won with the spear, for it grows angry and stands at the door of Iturbide’s Congress demanding that “they make the blond one emperor.”⁵ These countries will be saved because, with the genius for moderation that seems to prevail, by the serene harmony of Nature, in the continent of light, and by the influence of the critical reading that has replaced ideas of guesswork and phalanstery⁶ soaked up by the previous generation, there is now being born to America, in these real times, the real man.

We were a vision, with an athlete’s chest, a fop’s hands, and a child’s forehead. We were a masquerade, in English pants, a Parisian vest, North American overcoat, and a Spanish bullfighter’s hat. The Indian, silent, would circle around us, and go off to the hills, to the mountaintop, to baptize his children. The stalked Negro sang in the night the music of his soul, alone and unknown, among the waves and the beasts. The peasant, the creator, would turn, blind with rage, against the scornful city, against his own creature. We wore epaulets and robes, in countries that came into the world with sandals on our feet and a headband upon our heads. The genius would have been to unite, with generosity of heart and with the founders’ audacity, the headband and the scholar’s robe; to undam the sluggish Indian; to make room for the capable Negro; to fit freedom to the bodies of those who rose up and triumphed for it. But what we had was the judge, and the general, and the scholar, and the clergyman. Our angelic youth, as from the arms of an octopus, flung themselves to heaven, only to fall in futile glory, their heads crowned with clouds. The natural people, with the force of instinct, blind with triumph, overran the gilded staffs of their rulers. Neither the European book, nor the Yankee book, held the key to the Latin American enigma. Hatred was tried, and the countries diminished with each passing year. Weary of useless hate, of the struggle of the book against the sword, of reason against the priest’s candle, of city against country, of the impossible empire of divided urban castes over the natural nation, tempestuous or inert, one begins, almost unknowingly, to try love. The nations stand, and greet one another. “What are we like?” they ask; and one to the other they begin explaining

4. Bernardino Rivadavia (1780–1845) was an Argentinian general and politician who was elected the nation’s first president in 1826. He was forced to resign a year later.

5. Agustín de Iturbide (1783–1824) was a Mexican general who became president of Mexico in 1821. After a year of political tensions with the Mexican Congress, Iturbide, with both popular

and military support, was crowned constitutional emperor of Mexico in 1822. Although the Congress, cowed by Iturbide’s popularity and military power, ratified the proclamation, a revolution soon broke out and forced Iturbide to abdicate.

6. System of small, self-sufficient communities, as envisioned by French social reformer Charles Fourier (1772–1837).

what they are. When a problem arises in Cojimar, they do not seek the solution in Danzig.⁷ The frock-coats are still French, but the thinking starts to be American. The youth of America roll up their sleeves, plunge their hands into the dough, and make it rise with the leavening of their sweat. They understand that there is too much imitation, and that their salvation lies in creating. "Create" is this generation's password. Wine from plantains; and if it is sour, it is still our wine! It is understood that the forms of a country's government must adapt to its natural elements; that absolute ideas, in order not to fall into the error of rigidity, must inhabit relative forms; that liberty, in order to be viable, must be sincere and full; that if the republic does not open its arms to all and move forward with all, the republic dies. The tiger within entered through the crack, and so will the tiger without. The general holds the cavalry's pace to that of the infantry. Or if he leaves the infantry behind, the enemy will surround the cavalry. Strategy is politics. Nations must live by self-criticism, because criticism is health; but with a single heart and a single mind. To reach down to the unfortunate and lift them in our arms! With a fiery heart to thaw this congealed America! To cast, bubbling and churning, the nation's natural blood through its veins! On our feet, with the workers' joyful eyes, the new men of America stand and salute each other from one country to the other. Natural statesmen emerge from the direct study of Nature. They read to apply, but not to copy. Economists study the problem at its roots. Orators become more temperate. Dramatists bring native characters to the stage. Universities discuss viable subjects. Poetry shears off its Zorrillesque⁸ mane and hangs its bright red vest upon the glorious tree. The prose, sparkling and fine, is laden with ideas. Governors, in the Indian republics, learn to speak Indian.

America is saving itself from all her dangers. Upon some republics the octopus sleeps. Others, by the law of equilibrium, are marching to the sea, to recover, with a mad and sublime haste, the lost centuries. Yet others, forgetting that Juárez⁹ rode in a mule-drawn carriage, hitch their coach to the wind with a soap-bubble for a coachman; poisonous luxury, the enemy of freedom, corrupts the frivolous and opens the door to the foreigner. Others will ascend, with the epic spirit of threatened freedom, to a virile character. Others breed, in rapacious war against their neighbor, the military that may devour them. But our America runs, perhaps, another risk, which comes not from within, but from the different origins, methods and interests that divide the two continents. The hour is near at which an enterprising and vigorous nation that does not know her, and disdains her, will approach and demand intimate relations with her. And as virile nations, which are self-made by the rifle and the law, love, and only love, other virile nations; as the time for rampant ambition, from which North America may perhaps be saved by the prevailing of that which is purest in its blood, or into which it may be cast by its vengeful and sordid masses, its tradition of conquest and the interests of a clever leader, is not yet so near, even to the most apprehensive eye, that there is not time yet for the test of pride, constant and discreet, to confront and divert it; as North America's sense of decorum as a republic, before the

7. The German name for the Polish city of Gdansk; Cojimar is a small village in Cuba.

8. José Zorrilla (1817–1893) was a Mexican romantic poet known for his distinctive long hair.

9. Benito Juárez (1806–1872), one of Mexico's most beloved politicians, served two terms as president (1857–63 and 1867–72).

watchful peoples of the Universe, places upon it a brake that must not be released by puerile provocation or ostentatious arrogance, or the patricidal discord of our America, her urgent duty is to show herself as she is, one in soul and intent, swift conqueror of a suffocating past, stained only by the nourishing blood of hands that battled against ruin and veins left pierced by our former masters. The disdain of a formidable neighbor, who does not know her, is our America's greatest danger; and it is urgent, for the day of their meeting is near, that this neighbor know her, and know her soon, so as not to disdain her. Out of ignorance it may, perhaps, covet her. Out of respect, once it comes to know her, it would then remove its hands. One must have faith in the best of humanity and distrust what is worst in it. One must give the best every opportunity, that it may show itself and prevail over the worst. If not, the worst will prevail. Nations should reserve a special punishment for those who incite useless hatreds; and another for those who do not reveal the truth until it is too late.

There is no racial hatred, because there are no races. Weak minds, lamp-lit minds, string together and rehash bookshop races, which the just traveler and cordial observer seek in vain in the justice of Nature, where the universal identity of mankind springs forth in victorious love and turbulent desire. The soul emanates, equally and eternally, from bodies diverse in form and in color. He sins against Humanity who foments and spreads disagreement and hate among the races. But in the kneading together of peoples there are condensed, in the nearness of other diverse peoples, peculiar and active characteristics, of ideas and of habits, of expansion and acquisition, of vanity and avarice, that in a latent state of national preoccupation could, in a period of internal disorder or precipitation of the nation's accumulated character, transform into a grave threat for those neighboring lands, isolated and weak, that the strong nation declares perishable and inferior. To think is to serve. Nor should we assume, out of a villager's loathing, some innate and fatal wickedness in the continent's fair-haired nation because it does not speak our language, nor live as we do, nor resemble us in its political blemishes, which are different from ours; nor esteem hot-tempered, olive-skinned men, nor look charitably, from its still uncertain eminence, upon those whom, less favored by History, raise to heroic heights the path of the republics; nor should we conceal the obvious facts of the problem that could be resolved, for the peace of the centuries, by timely study and the tacit and urgent unity of the continental soul. For the unanimous hymn is already ringing out; the present generation is bearing hard-working America upon its shoulders, along the path laid by its sublime forefathers; from the Rio Bravo¹ to the Straits of Magellan, seated upon the condor's back, the Great Zemi² has scattered, across the romantic nations of the continent and the sorrowful islands of the sea, the seed of the new America!

1891

1. That is, the Rio Grande, which forms the border between Texas and Mexico.

2. A deity of the Taino, an indigenous Caribbean

people. Zemis were associated with the spirits of illustrious ancestors, such as deceased tribal chiefs.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

1856–1915

Between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of World War I, no one influenced the public discourse about race relations in the United States more than Booker Taliaferro Washington, arguably the most visible African American leader in the United States during this time. Washington advocated for the economic uplift of African Americans through an educational program of vocational training and for their peaceful incorporation into the American credo of hard work and upward mobility. His works have been contrasted with the dynamic and often sharply critical efforts of Frederick Douglass (whose mantle of leadership Washington sought to assume) and the intellectual and professional initiatives of the fiercely independent W. E. B. Du Bois.

Washington's birth date is uncertain; as an adult he selected April 5, 1856. His mother was born a slave in Hale's Ford, Virginia (now West Virginia); his father was a white man whose identity is unknown. As a boy, he had, like most slaves, only a first name, and it was not until he entered school that he adopted the surname Washington, which was the first name of Washington Ferguson, a slave whom his mother had married. Washington's account of his early life describes his deprivation and struggle in moving detail. At the end of the Civil War, when he was nine years old, he accompanied his mother to Malden, West Virginia, to join his stepfather, who had found work there in a salt furnace. From 1865 to 1872, Washington worked as a salt packer, coal miner, and house servant while attending school in the off-hours and thus beginning to satisfy his "intense longing" to learn to read and write. In 1872, he set out on a five hundred-mile, month-long journey by rail, cart, and foot to reach Hampton, Virginia, where he would attend the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a school established by the American Missionary Association to train African Americans as teachers. There Washington paid his way by working as a janitor. In the quasi-military atmosphere of the school, he was drilled in the values of cleanliness, thrift, and diligent labor that became central to his life and educational philosophy.

After graduating from Hampton in 1875 with honors and a certificate to teach in a trade school, Washington returned to Malden and found work with a local school. He studied for a while at Wayland Seminary and in 1878 was hired by Samuel Armstrong, the principal of Hampton, to teach in a program for Native Americans. Then, in 1881, he became the first principal of what was to become the Tuskegee Institute, a school established by the Alabama legislature to train African American men and women in agricultural and mechanical trades and teaching. Tuskegee began with thirty students, and Washington, the staff, and the students constructed the school buildings from bricks they made themselves. But through his considerable powers as a conciliator and fund-raiser, and aided by publicity that highlighted his goals of instilling Christian virtues and encouraging simple, disciplined living among the students, Washington soon developed Tuskegee into a thriving institution.

Washington emerged as a national figure in 1895 as the result of a short speech, included below as part of his autobiography, to a crowd of two thousand at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895. In the speech, popularly known as the "Atlanta Compromise," Washington argued that African Americans should defer the quest for immediate, full equality in return for basic economic opportunities. "In all things that are purely social," he declared, "we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all



Booker T. Washington. Washington in his office at Tuskegee Institute, c. 1905.

things essential to mutual progress.” This formulation suggested that economic uplift could coexist with segregation, an approach that appealed to many whites and even some blacks across the nation. The immense popularity of Washington’s rhetoric reveals much about the context of the years between 1885 and 1910, when some thirty-five hundred African Americans were lynched and when, following the end of Reconstruction, most southern states effectively disenfranchised African Americans. Even such militant African American leaders as Du Bois and T. Thomas Fortune initially praised the speech and supported the philosophy of conciliation that was its pragmatic basis. Their opposition to Washington did not develop until several years later, when they felt it was again time to insist on civil, social, and political equality for all African Americans.

Washington believed in rewarding deserving individuals rather than in policies treating African Americans as a group. His writings argue that success should be measured not so much by the position a person has reached as by the obstacles overcome while trying to succeed. In his work he instructs African Americans to emulate the proverbial ship captain who urged his crew to “cast down your buckets where you are” even though they were still at sea, and who thus found fresh water at the mouth of a river. Washington argued that by seeking improvement African Americans would inevitably rise as individuals. Yet he also urged whites not to judge African American children against white children until they had had a chance to catch up in school. In short, Washington proposed a middle ground wherein African Americans would raise themselves by individual effort and white Americans would appreciate the efforts being made and judge accordingly.

In the years following the Atlanta speech, Washington was sometimes referred to as the “Moses of his race,” and he worked to consolidate that position. Nothing did more to enhance this mythic stature than his autobiography, *Up from Slavery* (1901), a masterpiece of the genre that was widely praised in the United States and read in translation around the world. The early chapters included here reveal the physical and psychological realities of Washington’s origins, realities that were shared by many of the slaves set “free” at the conclusion of the Civil War. Later chapters show Washington at the peak of his success as an African American spokesperson,

particularly as a master of rhetoric that allowed him to appear both as sincerely humble and as a force to be reckoned with—a man of selfless industry and one of considerable political know-how. *Up from Slavery* is important as a literary production and as a record of a time, place, and person. The autobiography carefully constructs the public figure of Washington, who presents himself as a plainspoken truth-teller rather than a shrewd master of rhetoric, metaphor, and narrative. Even those who have criticized Washington's assimilationist political message have admired the power of his craft—and no critic denies that his message played a substantial role in the shape of African American education in the twentieth century. Washington was awarded an honorary degree by Harvard University, invited to dine by President Theodore Roosevelt, and widely consulted on policy questions by white political and business leaders. On November 5, 1915, Washington was taken ill and entered St. Luke's Hospital in New York City; diagnosed with arteriosclerosis, he was told that he did not have long to live. He traveled to Tuskegee, where he died on November 14. Over eight thousand people attended his funeral, which was held in the Tuskegee Institute Chapel.

*From Up from Slavery*¹

Chapter I. A Slave among Slaves

I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia. I am not quite sure of the exact place or exact date of my birth, but at any rate I suspect I must have been born somewhere and at some time. As nearly as I have been able to learn, I was born near a cross-roads post-office called Hale's Ford, and the year was 1858 or 1859.² I do not know the month or the day. The earliest impressions I can now recall are of the plantation and the slave quarters—the latter being the part of the plantation where the slaves had their cabins.

My life had its beginning in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings. This was so, however, not because my owners were especially cruel, for they were not, as compared with many others. I was born in a typical log cabin, about fourteen by sixteen feet square. In this cabin I lived with my mother and a brother and sister till after the Civil War, when we were all declared free.

Of my ancestry I know almost nothing. In the slave quarters, and even later, I heard whispered conversations among the coloured people of the tortures which the slaves, including, no doubt, my ancestors on my mother's side, suffered in the middle passage of the slave ship while being conveyed from Africa to America. I have been unsuccessful in securing any information that would throw any accurate light upon the history of my family beyond my mother. She, I remember, had a half-brother and a half-sister. In the days of slavery not very much attention was given to family history and family records—that is, black family records. My mother, I suppose, attracted the attention of a purchaser who was afterward my owner and hers. Her addition

1. Published serially in *Outlook* from November 3, 1900, to February 23, 1901, *Up from Slavery* was first published in book form by Doubleday, Page and Company (1901), the source of the text printed here.

2. The first volume of Louis H. Harlan's biography, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901*, establishes Washington's date of birth as 1856.

to the slave family attracted about as much attention as the purchase of a new horse or cow. Of my father I know even less than of my mother. I do not even know his name. I have heard reports to the effect that he was a white man who lived on one of the near-by plantations. Whoever he was, I never heard of his taking the least interest in me or providing in any way for my rearing. But I do not find especial fault with him. He was simply another unfortunate victim of the institution which the Nation unhappily had engrafted upon it at that time.

The cabin was not only our living-place, but was also used as the kitchen for the plantation. My mother was the plantation cook. The cabin was without glass windows; it had only openings in the side which let in the light, and also the cold, chilly air of winter. There was a door to the cabin—that is, something that was called a door—but the uncertain hinges by which it was hung, and the large cracks in it, to say nothing of the fact that it was too small, made the room a very uncomfortable one. In addition to these openings there was, in the lower right-hand corner of the room, the “cat-hole,”—a contrivance which almost every mansion or cabin in Virginia possessed during the ante-bellum period. The “cat-hole” was a square opening, about seven by eight inches, provided for the purpose of letting the cat pass in and out of the house at will during the night. In the case of our particular cabin I could never understand the necessity for this convenience, since there were at least a half-dozen other places in the cabin that would have accommodated the cats. There was no wooden floor in our cabin, the naked earth being used as a floor. In the centre of the earthen floor there was a large, deep opening covered with boards, which was used as a place in which to store sweet potatoes during the winter. An impression of this potato-hole is very distinctly engraved upon my memory, because I recall that during the process of putting the potatoes in or taking them out I would often come into possession of one or two, which I roasted and thoroughly enjoyed. There was no cooking-stove on our plantation, and all the cooking for the whites and slaves my mother had to do over an open fireplace, mostly in pots and “skillets.” While the poorly built cabin caused us to suffer with cold in the winter, the heat from the open fireplace in summer was equally trying.

The early years of my life, which were spent in the little cabin, were not very different from those of thousands of other slaves. My mother, of course, had little time in which to give attention to the training of her children during the day. She snatched a few moments for our care in the early morning before her work began, and at night after the day’s work was done. One of my earliest recollections is that of my mother cooking a chicken late at night, and awakening her children for the purpose of feeding them. How or where she got it I do not know. I presume, however, it was procured from our owner’s farm. Some people may call this theft. If such a thing were to happen now, I should condemn it as theft myself. But taking place at the time it did, and for the reason that it did, no one could ever make me believe that my mother was guilty of thieving. She was simply a victim of the system of slavery. I cannot remember having slept in a bed until after our family was declared free by the Emancipation Proclamation.³ Three children—John,

3. Issued on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation declared free all slaves in states in rebellion against the United States but exempted

border slave states and all or part of three Confederate states controlled by the Union Army.

my older brother, Amanda, my sister, and myself—had a pallet on the dirt floor, or, to be more correct, we slept in and on a bundle of filthy rags laid upon the dirt floor.

I was asked not long ago to tell something about the sports and pastimes that I engaged in during my youth. Until that question was asked it had never occurred to me that there was no period of my life that was devoted to play. From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour; though I think I would now be a more useful man if I had had time for sports. During the period that I spent in slavery I was not large enough to be of much service, still I was occupied most of the time in cleaning the yards, carrying water to the men in the fields, or going to the mill, to which I used to take the corn, once a week, to be ground. The mill was about three miles from the plantation. This work I always dreaded. The heavy bag of corn would be thrown across the back of the horse, and the corn divided about evenly on each side; but in some way, almost without exception, on these trips, the corn would so shift as to become unbalanced and would fall off the horse, and often I would fall with it. As I was not strong enough to reload the corn upon the horse, I would have to wait, sometimes for many hours, till a chance passer-by came along who would help me out of my trouble. The hours while waiting for some one were usually spent in crying. The time consumed in this way made me late in reaching the mill, and by the time I got my corn ground and reached home it would be far into the night. The road was a lonely one, and often led through dense forests. I was always frightened. The woods were said to be full of soldiers who had deserted from the army, and I had been told that the first thing a deserter did to a Negro boy when he found him alone was to cut off his ears. Besides, when I was late in getting home I knew I would always get a severe scolding or a flogging.

I had no schooling whatever while I was a slave, though I remember on several occasions I went as far as the schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books. The picture of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise.

So far as I can now recall, the first knowledge that I got of the fact that we were slaves, and that freedom of the slaves was being discussed, was early one morning before day, when I was awakened by my mother kneeling over her children and fervently praying that Lincoln and his armies might be successful, and that one day she and her children might be free. In this connection I have never been able to understand how the slaves throughout the South, completely ignorant as were the masses so far as books or newspapers were concerned, were able to keep themselves so accurately and completely informed about the great National questions that were agitating the country. From the time that Garrison, Lovejoy,⁴ and others began to agitate for freedom, the slaves throughout the South kept in close touch with the progress of the movement. Though I was a mere child during the preparation

4. Elijah P. Lovejoy (1802–1837), antislavery editor who was murdered by a mob while attempting to defend his press in Alton, Illinois. William

Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), editor of the *Liberator*—the leading antislavery newspaper—and leader of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

for the Civil War and during the war itself, I now recall the many late-at-night whispered discussions that I heard my mother and the other slaves on the plantation indulge in. These discussions showed that they understood the situation, and that they kept themselves informed of events by what was termed the "grape-vine" telegraph.

During the campaign when Lincoln was first a candidate for the Presidency, the slaves on our far-off plantation, miles from any railroad or large city or daily newspaper, knew what the issues involved were. When war was begun between the North and the South, every slave on our plantation felt and knew that, though other issues were discussed, the primal one was that of slavery. Even the most ignorant members of my race on the remote plantations felt in their hearts, with a certainty that admitted of no doubt, that the freedom of the slaves would be the one great result of the war, if the Northern armies conquered. Every success of the Federal armies and every defeat of the Confederate forces was watched with the keenest and most intense interest. Often the slaves got knowledge of the results of great battles before the white people received it. This news was usually gotten from the coloured man who was sent to the post-office for the mail. In our case the post-office was about three miles from the plantation, and the mail came once or twice a week. The man who was sent to the office would linger about the place long enough to get the drift of the conversation from the group of white people who naturally congregated there, after receiving their mail, to discuss the latest news. The mail-carrier on his way back to our master's house would as naturally retail the news that he had secured among the slaves, and in this way they often heard of important events before the white people at the "big house," as the master's house was called.

I cannot remember a single instance during my childhood or early boyhood when our entire family sat down to the table together, and God's blessing was asked, and the family ate a meal in a civilized manner. On the plantation in Virginia, and even later, meals were gotten by the children very much as dumb animals get theirs. It was a piece of bread here and a scrap of meat there. It was a cup of milk at one time and some potatoes at another. Sometimes a portion of our family would eat out of the skillet or pot, while some one else would eat from a tin plate held on the knees, and often using nothing but the hands with which to hold the food. When I had grown to sufficient size, I was required to go to the "big house" at meal-times to fan the flies from the table by means of a large set of paper fans operated by a pulley. Naturally much of the conversation of the white people turned upon the subject of freedom and the war, and I absorbed a good deal of it. I remember that at one time I saw two of my young mistresses and some lady visitors eating ginger-cakes, in the yard. At that time those cakes seemed to me to be absolutely the most tempting and desirable things that I had ever seen; and I then and there resolved that, if I ever got free, the height of my ambition would be reached if I could get to the point where I could secure and eat ginger-cakes in the way that I saw those ladies doing.

Of course as the war was prolonged the white people, in many cases, often found it difficult to secure food for themselves. I think the slaves felt the deprivation less than the whites, because the usual diet for the slaves was corn bread and pork, and these could be raised on the plantation; but coffee, tea, sugar, and other articles which the whites had been accustomed to

use could not be raised on the plantation, and the conditions brought about by the war frequently made it impossible to secure these things. The whites were often in great straits. Parched corn was used for coffee, and a kind of black molasses was used instead of sugar. Many times nothing was used to sweeten the so-called tea and coffee.

The first pair of shoes that I recall wearing were wooden ones. They had rough leather on the top, but the bottoms, which were about an inch thick, were of wood. When I walked they made a fearful noise, and besides this they were very inconvenient, since there was no yielding to the natural pressure of the foot. In wearing them one presented an exceedingly awkward appearance. The most trying ordeal that I was forced to endure as a slave boy, however, was the wearing of a flax⁵ shirt. In the portion of Virginia where I lived it was common to use flax as part of the clothing for the slaves. That part of the flax from which our clothing was made was largely the refuse, which of course was the cheapest and roughest part. I can scarcely imagine any torture, except, perhaps, the pulling of a tooth, that is equal to that caused by putting on a new flax shirt for the first time. It is almost equal to the feeling that one would experience if he had a dozen or more chestnut burrs, or a hundred small pin-points, in contact with his flesh. Even to this day I can recall accurately the tortures that I underwent when putting on one of these garments. The fact that my flesh was soft and tender added to the pain. But I had no choice. I had to wear the flax shirt or none; and had it been left to me to choose, I should have chosen to wear no covering. In connection with the flax shirt, my brother John, who is several years older than I am, performed one of the most generous acts that I ever heard of one slave relative doing for another. On several occasions when I was being forced to wear a new flax shirt, he generously agreed to put it on in my stead and wear it for several days, till it was "broken in." Until I had grown to be quite a youth this single garment was all that I wore.

One may get the idea, from what I have said, that there was bitter feeling toward the white people on the part of my race, because of the fact that most of the white population was away fighting in a war which would result in keeping the Negro in slavery if the South was successful. In the case of the slaves on our place this was not true, and it was not true of any large portion of the slave population in the South where the Negro was treated with anything like decency. During the Civil War one of my young masters was killed, and two were severely wounded. I recall the feeling of sorrow which existed among the slaves when they heard of the death of "Mars' Billy." It was no sham sorrow, but real. Some of the slaves had nursed "Mars' Billy"; others had played with him when he was a child. "Mars' Billy" had begged for mercy in the case of others when the overseer or master was thrashing them. The sorrow in the slave quarter was only second to that in the "big house." When the two young masters were brought home wounded, the sympathy of the slaves was shown in many ways. They were just as anxious to assist in the nursing as the family relatives of the wounded. Some of the slaves would even beg for the privilege of sitting up at night to nurse their wounded masters. This tenderness and sympathy on the part of those held

5. A coarse fiber used for cloth and rope, flax was the chief material of clothing in the United States until cotton came into widespread use in

the early 19th century with the introduction of the cotton gin and industrial textile manufacturing methods.

in bondage was a result of their kindly and generous nature. In order to defend and protect the women and children who were left on the plantations when the white males went to war, the slaves would have laid down their lives. The slave who was selected to sleep in the "big house" during the absence of the males was considered to have the place of honour. Any one attempting to harm "young Mistress" or "old Mistress" during the night would have had to cross the dead body of the slave to do so. I do not know how many have noticed it, but I think that it will be found to be true that there are few instances, either in slavery or freedom, in which a member of my race has been known to betray a specific trust.

As a rule, not only did the members of my race entertain no feelings of bitterness against the whites before and during the war, but there are many instances of Negroes tenderly caring for their former masters and mistresses who for some reason have become poor and dependent since the war. I know of instances where the former masters of slaves have for years been supplied with money by their former slaves to keep them from suffering. I have known of still other cases in which the former slaves have assisted in the education of the descendants of their former owners. I know of a case on a large plantation in the South in which a young white man, the son of the former owner of the estate, has become so reduced in purse and self-control by reason of drink that he is a pitiable creature; and yet, notwithstanding the poverty of the coloured people themselves on this plantation, they have for years supplied this young white man with the necessities of life. One sends him a little coffee or sugar, another a little meat, and so on. Nothing that the coloured people possess is too good for the son of "old Mars' Tom," who will perhaps never be permitted to suffer while any remain on the place who knew directly or indirectly of "old Mars' Tom."

I have said that there are few instances of a member of my race betraying a specific trust. One of the best illustrations of this which I know of is in the case of an ex-slave from Virginia whom I met not long ago in a little town in the state of Ohio. I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labour where and for whom he pleased. Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some three hundred dollars. Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands. In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay the debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise.

From some things that I have said one may get the idea that some of the slaves did not want freedom. This is not true. I have never seen one who did not want to be free, or one who would return to slavery.

I pity from the bottom of my heart any nation or body of people that is so unfortunate as to get entangled in the net of slavery. I have long since ceased to cherish any spirit of bitterness against the Southern white people on

account of the enslavement of my race. No one section of our country was wholly responsible for its introduction, and, besides, it was recognized and protected for years by the General Government. Having once got its tentacles fastened on to the economic and social life of the Republic, it was no easy matter for the country to relieve itself of the institution. Then, when we rid ourselves of prejudice, or racial feeling, and look facts in the face, we must acknowledge that, notwithstanding the cruelty and moral wrong of slavery, the ten million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestors went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe. This is so to such an extent that Negroes in this country, who themselves or whose forefathers went through the school of slavery, are constantly returning to Africa as missionaries to enlighten those who remained in the fatherland. This I say, not to justify slavery—on the other hand, I condemn it as an institution, as we all know that in America it was established for selfish and financial reasons, and not from a missionary motive—but to call attention to a fact, and to show how Providence so often uses men and institutions to accomplish a purpose. When persons ask me in these days how, in the midst of what sometimes seem hopelessly discouraging conditions, I can have such faith in the future of my race in this country, I remind them of the wilderness through which and out of which, a good Providence has already led us.

Ever since I have been old enough to think for myself, I have entertained the idea that, notwithstanding the cruel wrongs inflicted upon us, the black man got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did. The hurtful influences of the institution were not by any means confined to the Negro. This was fully illustrated by the life upon our own plantation. The whole machinery of slavery was so constructed as to cause labour, as a rule, to be looked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority. Hence labour was something that both races on the slave plantation sought to escape. The slave system on our place, in a large measure, took the spirit of self-reliance and self-help out of the white people. My old master had many boys and girls, but not one, so far as I know, ever mastered a single trade or special line of productive industry. The girls were not taught to cook, sew, or to take care of the house. All of this was left to the slaves. The slaves, of course, had little personal interest in the life of the plantation, and their ignorance prevented them from learning how to do things in the most improved and thorough manner. As a result of the system, fences were out of repair, gates were hanging half off the hinges, doors creaked, window-panes were out, plastering had fallen but was not replaced, weeds grew in the yard. As a rule, there was food for whites and blacks, but inside the house, and on the dining-room table, there was wanting that delicacy and refinement of touch and finish which can make a home the most convenient, comfortable, and attractive place in the world. Withal there was a waste of food and other materials which was sad. When freedom came, the slaves were almost as well fitted to begin life anew as the master, except in the matter of book-learning and ownership of property. The slave owner and his sons had mastered no special industry. They unconsciously had imbibed the feeling that manual labour was not the proper thing for them. On the other hand, the slaves, in many

cases, had mastered some handicraft, and none were ashamed, and few unwilling, to labour.

Finally the war closed, and the day of freedom came. It was a momentous and eventful day to all upon our plantation. We had been expecting it. Freedom was in the air, and had been for months. Deserting soldiers returning to their homes were to be seen every day. Others who had been discharged, or whose regiments had been paroled, were constantly passing near our place. The "grape-vine telegraph" was kept busy night and day. The news and mutterings of great events were swiftly carried from one plantation to another. In the fear of "Yankee" invasions, the silverware and other valuables were taken from the "big house," buried in the woods, and guarded by trusted slaves. Woe be to any one who would have attempted to disturb the buried treasure. The slaves would give the Yankee soldiers food, drink, clothing—anything but that which had been specifically intrusted to their care and honour. As the great day drew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the "freedom" in these songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually threw off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the "freedom" in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world. The night before the eventful day, word was sent to the slave quarters to the effect that something unusual was going to take place at the "big house" the next morning. There was little, if any, sleep that night. All was excitement and expectancy. Early the next morning word was sent to all the slaves, old and young, to gather at the house. In company with my mother, brother, and sister, and a large number of other slaves, I went to the master's house. All of our master's family were either standing or seated on the veranda of the house, where they could see what was to take place and hear what was said. There was a feeling of deep interest, or perhaps sadness, on their faces, but not bitterness. As I now recall the impression they made upon me, they did not at the moment seem to be sad because of the loss of property, but rather because of parting with those whom they had reared and who were in many ways very close to them. The most distinct thing that I now recall in connection with the scene was that some man who seemed to be a stranger (a United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing that she would never live to see.

For some minutes there was great rejoicing, and thanksgiving, and wild scenes of ecstasy. But there was no feeling of bitterness. In fact, there was pity among the slaves for our former owners. The wild rejoicing on the part of the emancipated coloured people lasted but for a brief period, for I noticed that by the time they returned to their cabins there was a change in their feelings. The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed

to take possession of them. It was very much like suddenly turning a youth of ten or twelve years out into the world to provide for himself. In a few hours the great questions with which the Anglo-Saxon race had been grappling for centuries had been thrown upon these people to be solved. These were the questions of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters? To some it seemed that, now that they were in actual possession of it, freedom was a more serious thing than they had expected to find it. Some of the slaves were seventy or eighty years old; their best days were gone. They had no strength with which to earn a living in a strange place and among strange people, even if they had been sure where to find a new place of abode. To this class the problem seemed especially hard. Besides, deep down in their hearts there was a strange and peculiar attachment to "old Marster" and "old Missus," and to their children, which they found it hard to think of breaking off. With these they had spent in some cases nearly a half-century, and it was no light thing to think of parting. Gradually, one by one, stealthily at first, the older slaves began to wander from the slave quarters back to the "big house" to have a whispered conversation with their former owners as to the future.

Chapter II. Boyhood Days

After the coming of freedom there were two points upon which practically all the people on our place were agreed, and I find that this was generally true throughout the South: that they must change their names, and that they must leave the old plantation for at least a few days or weeks in order that they might really feel sure that they were free.

In some way a feeling got among the coloured people that it was far from proper for them to bear the surname of their former owners, and a great many of them took other surnames. This was one of the first signs of freedom. When they were slaves, a coloured person was simply called "John" or "Susan." There was seldom occasion for more than the use of the one name. If "John" or "Susan" belonged to a white man by the name of "Hatcher," sometimes he was called "John Hatcher," or as often "Hatcher's John." But there was a feeling that "John Hatcher" or "Hatcher's John" was not the proper title by which to denote a freeman; and so in many cases "John Hatcher" was changed to "John S. Lincoln" or "John S. Sherman," the initial "S" standing for no name, it being simply a part of what the coloured man proudly called his "entitles."

As I have stated, most of the coloured people left the old plantation for a short while at least, so as to be sure, it seemed, that they could leave and try their freedom on to see how it felt. After they had remained away for a time, many of the older slaves, especially, returned to their old homes and made some kind of contract with their former owners by which they remained on the estate.

My mother's husband, who was the stepfather of my brother John and myself, did not belong to the same owners as did my mother. In fact, he seldom came to our plantation. I remember seeing him there perhaps once a year, that being about Christmas time. In some way, during the war, by

running away and following the Federal soldiers, it seems, he found his way into the new state of West Virginia. As soon as freedom was declared, he sent for my mother to come to the Kanawha Valley, in West Virginia. At that time a journey from Virginia over the mountains to West Virginia was rather a tedious and in some cases a painful undertaking. What little clothing and few household goods we had were placed in a cart, but the children walked the greater portion of the distance, which was several hundred miles.

I do not think any of us ever had been very far from the plantation, and the taking of a long journey into another state was quite an event. The parting from our former owners and the members of our own race on the plantation was a serious occasion. From the time of our parting till their death we kept up a correspondence with the older members of the family, and in later years we have kept in touch with those who were the younger members. We were several weeks making the trip, and most of the time we slept in the open air and did our cooking over a log fire out-of-doors. One night I recall that we camped near an abandoned log cabin, and my mother decided to build a fire in that for cooking, and afterward to make a "pallet" on the floor for our sleeping. Just as the fire had gotten well started a large black snake fully a yard and a half long dropped down the chimney and ran out on the floor. Of course we at once abandoned that cabin. Finally we reached our destination—a little town called Malden, which is about five miles from Charleston, the present capital of the state.

At that time salt-mining was the great industry in that part of West Virginia, and the little town of Malden was right in the midst of the salt-furnaces. My stepfather had already secured a job at a salt-furnace, and he had also secured a little cabin for us to live in. Our new house was no better than the one we had left on the old plantation in Virginia. In fact, in one respect it was worse. Notwithstanding the poor condition of our plantation cabin, we were at all times sure of pure air. Our new home was in the midst of a cluster of cabins crowded closely together, and as there were no sanitary regulations, the filth about the cabins was often intolerable. Some of our neighbours were coloured people, and some were the poorest and most ignorant and degraded white people. It was a motley mixture. Drinking, gambling, quarrels, fights, and shockingly immoral practices were frequent. All who lived in the little town were in one way or another connected with the salt business. Though I was a mere child, my stepfather put me and my brother at work in one of the furnaces. Often I began work as early as four o'clock in the morning.

The first thing I ever learned in the way of book knowledge was while working in this salt-furnace. Each salt-packer had his barrels marked with a certain number. The number allotted to my stepfather was "18." At the close of the day's work the boss of the packers would come around and put "18" on each of our barrels, and I soon learned to recognize that figure wherever I saw it, and after a while got to the point where I could make that figure, though I knew nothing about any other figures or letters.

From the time that I can remember having any thoughts about anything, I recall that I had an intense longing to learn to read. I determined, when quite a small child, that, if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to enable me to read common books and newspapers. Soon after we got settled in some manner in our new cabin in

West Virginia, I induced my mother to get hold of a book for me. How or where she got it I do not know, but in some way she procured an old copy of Webster's⁶ "blue-back" spelling-book, which contained the alphabet, followed by such meaningless words as "ab," "ba," "ca," "da." I began at once to devour this book, and I think that it was the first one I ever had in my hands. I had learned from somebody that the way to begin to read was to learn the alphabet, so I tried in all the ways I could think of to learn it,—all of course without a teacher, for I could find no one to teach me. At that time there was not a single member of my race anywhere near us who could read, and I was too timid to approach any of the white people. In some way, within a few weeks, I mastered the greater portion of the alphabet. In all my efforts to learn to read my mother shared fully my ambition, and sympathized with me and aided me in every way that she could. Though she was totally ignorant, so far as mere book knowledge was concerned, she had high ambitions for her children, and a large fund of good, hard, common sense which seemed to enable her to meet and master every situation. If I have done anything in life worth attention, I feel sure that I inherited the disposition from my mother.

In the midst of my struggles and longing for an education, a young coloured boy who had learned to read in the state of Ohio came to Malden. As soon as the coloured people found out that he could read, a newspaper was secured, and at the close of nearly every day's work this young man would be surrounded by a group of men and women who were anxious to hear him read the news contained in the papers. How I used to envy this man! He seemed to me to be the one young man in all the world who ought to be satisfied with his attainments.

About this time the question of having some kind of a school opened for the coloured children in the village began to be discussed by members of the race. As it would be the first school for Negro children that had ever been opened in that part of Virginia, it was, of course, to be a great event, and the discussion excited the widest interest. The most perplexing question was where to find a teacher. The young man from Ohio who had learned to read the papers was considered, but his age was against him. In the midst of the discussion about a teacher, another young coloured man from Ohio, who had been a soldier, in some way found his way into town. It was soon learned that he possessed considerable education, and he was engaged by the coloured people to teach their first school. As yet no free schools had been started for coloured people in that section, hence each family agreed to pay a certain amount per month, with the understanding that the teacher was to "board 'round"—that is, spend a day with each family. This was not bad for the teacher, for each family tried to provide the very best on the day the teacher was to be its guest. I recall that I looked forward with an anxious appetite to the "teacher's day" at our little cabin.

This experience of a whole race beginning to go to school for the first time, presents one of the most interesting studies that has ever occurred in connection with the development of any race. Few people who were not right in the midst of the scenes can form any exact idea of the intense desire which

6. Noah Webster (1758–1843), the famous lexicographer, was the author of the most widely used spelling books in the United States.

the people of my race showed for an education. As I have stated, it was a whole race trying to go to school. Few were too young, and none too old, to make the attempt to learn. As fast as any kind of teachers could be secured, not only were day-schools filled, but night-schools as well. The great ambition of the older people was to try to learn to read the Bible before they died. With this end in view, men and women who were fifty or seventy-five years old would often be found in the night-school. Sunday-schools were formed soon after freedom, but the principal book studied in the Sunday-school was the spelling-book. Day-school, night-school, Sunday-school, were always crowded, and often many had to be turned away for want of room.

The opening of the school in the Kanawha Valley, however, brought to me one of the keenest disappointments that I ever experienced. I had been working in a salt-furnace for several months, and my stepfather had discovered that I had a financial value, and so, when the school opened, he decided that he could not spare me from my work. This decision seemed to cloud my every ambition. The disappointment was made all the more severe by reason of the fact that my place of work was where I could see the happy children passing to and from school, mornings and afternoons. Despite this disappointment, however, I determined that I would learn something, anyway. I applied myself with greater earnestness than ever to the mastering of what was in the "blue-back" speller.

My mother sympathized with me in my disappointment, and sought to comfort me in all the ways she could, and to help me find a way to learn. After a while I succeeded in making arrangements with the teacher to give me some lessons at night, after the day's work was done. These night lessons were so welcome that I think I learned more at night than the other children did during the day. My own experiences in the night-school gave me faith in the night-school idea, with which, in after years, I had to do both at Hampton and Tuskegee.⁷ But my boyish heart was still set upon going to the day-school, and I let no opportunity slip to push my case. Finally I won, and was permitted to go to the school in the day for a few months, with the understanding that I was to rise early in the morning and work in the furnace till nine o'clock, and return immediately after school closed in the afternoon for at least two more hours of work.

The schoolhouse was some distance from the furnace, and as I had to work till nine o'clock, and the school opened at nine, I found myself in a difficulty. School would always be begun before I reached it, and sometimes my class had recited. To get around this difficulty I yielded to a temptation for which most people, I suppose, will condemn me; but since it is a fact, I might as well state it. I have great faith in the power and influence of facts. It is seldom that anything is permanently gained by holding back a fact. There was a large clock in a little office in the furnace. This clock, of course, all the hundred or more workmen depended upon to regulate their hours of beginning and ending the day's work. I got the idea that the way for me to reach school on time was to move the clock hands from half-past eight up to the nine o'clock mark. This I found myself doing morning after morning, till the furnace "boss" discovered that something was wrong, and locked the

7. The Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a school for African Americans that Washington led as its first principal, beginning in 1881. "Hampton":

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, in Virginia, where Washington was a student.

clock in a case. I did not mean to inconvenience anybody. I simply meant to reach that schoolhouse in time.

When, however, I found myself at the school for the first time, I also found myself confronted with two other difficulties. In the first place, I found that all of the other children wore hats or caps on their heads, and I had neither hat nor cap. In fact, I do not remember that up to the time of going to school I had ever worn any kind of covering upon my head, nor do I recall that either I or anybody else had even thought anything about the need of covering for my head. But, of course, when I saw how all the other boys were dressed, I began to feel quite uncomfortable. As usual, I put the case before my mother, and she explained to me that she had no money with which to buy a "store hat," which was a rather new institution at that time among the members of my race and was considered quite the thing for young and old to own, but that she would find a way to help me out of the difficulty. She accordingly got two pieces of "homespun" (jeans) and sewed them together, and I was soon the proud possessor of my first cap.

The lesson that my mother taught me in this has always remained with me, and I have tried as best I could to teach it to others. I have always felt proud, whenever I think of the incident, that my mother had strength of character enough not to be led into the temptation of seeming to be that which she was not—of trying to impress my schoolmates and others with the fact that she was able to buy me a "store hat" when she was not. I have always felt proud that she refused to go into debt for that which she did not have the money to pay for. Since that time I have owned many kinds of caps and hats, but never one of which I have felt so proud as of the cap made of the two pieces of cloth sewed together by my mother. I have noted the fact, but without satisfaction, I need not add, that several of the boys who began their careers with "store hats" and who were my schoolmates and used to join in the sport that was made of me because I had only a "homespun" cap, have ended their careers in the penitentiary, while others are not able now to buy any kind of hat.

My second difficulty was with regard to my name, or rather *a* name. From the time when I could remember anything, I had been called simply "Booker." Before going to school it had never occurred to me that it was needful or appropriate to have an additional name. When I heard the school-roll called, I noticed that all of the children had at least two names, and some of them indulged in what seemed to me the extravagance of having three. I was in deep perplexity, because I knew that the teacher would demand of me at least two names, and I had only one. By the time the occasion came for the enrolling of my name, an idea occurred to me which I thought would make me equal to the situation; and so, when the teacher asked me what my full name was, I calmly told him "Booker Washington," as if I had been called by that name all my life; and by that name I have since been known. Later in my life I found that my mother had given me the name of "Booker Taliaferro" soon after I was born, but in some way that part of my name seemed to disappear and for a long while was forgotten, but as soon as I found out about it I revived it, and made my full name "Booker Taliaferro Washington." I think there are not many men in our country who have had the privilege of naming themselves in the way that I have.

More than once I have tried to picture myself in the position of a boy or man with an honoured and distinguished ancestry which I could trace back

through a period of hundreds of years, and who had not only inherited a name, but fortune and a proud family homestead; and yet I have sometimes had the feeling that if I had inherited these, and had been a member of a more popular race, I should have been inclined to yield to the temptation of depending upon my ancestry and my colour to do that for me which I should do for myself. Years ago I resolved that because I had no ancestry myself I would leave a record of which my children would be proud, and which might encourage them to still higher effort.

The world should not pass judgment upon the Negro, and especially the Negro youth, too quickly or too harshly. The Negro boy has obstacles, discouragements, and temptations to battle with that are little known to those not situated as he is. When a white boy undertakes a task, it is taken for granted that he will succeed. On the other hand, people are usually surprised if the Negro boy does not fail. In a word, the Negro youth starts out with the presumption against him.

The influence of ancestry, however, is important in helping forward any individual or race, if too much reliance is not placed upon it. Those who constantly direct attention to the Negro youth's moral weaknesses, and compare his advancement with that of white youths, do not consider the influence of the memories which cling about the old family homesteads. I have no idea, as I have stated elsewhere, who my grandmother was. I have, or have had, uncles and aunts and cousins, but I have no knowledge as to where most of them are. My case will illustrate that of hundreds of thousands of black people in every part of our country. The very fact that the white boy is conscious that, if he fails in life, he will disgrace the whole family record, extending back through many generations, is of tremendous value in helping him to resist temptations. The fact that the individual has behind and surrounding him proud family history and connection serves as a stimulus to help him to overcome obstacles when striving for success.

The time that I was permitted to attend school during the day was short, and my attendance was irregular. It was not long before I had to stop attending day-school altogether, and devote all of my time again to work. I resorted to the night-school again. In fact, the greater part of the education I secured in my boyhood was gathered through the night-school after my day's work was done. I had difficulty often in securing a satisfactory teacher. Sometimes, after I had secured some one to teach me at night, I would find, much to my disappointment, that the teacher knew but little more than I did. Often I would have to walk several miles at night in order to recite my night-school lessons. There was never a time in my youth, no matter how dark and discouraging the days might be, when one resolve did not continually remain with me, and that was a determination to secure an education at any cost.

Soon after we moved to West Virginia, my mother adopted into our family, notwithstanding our poverty, an orphan boy, to whom afterward we gave the name of James B. Washington. He has ever since remained a member of the family.

After I had worked in the salt-furnace for some time, work was secured for me in a coal-mine which was operated mainly for the purpose of securing fuel for the salt-furnace. Work in the coal-mine I always dreaded. One reason for this was that any one who worked in a coal-mine was always

unclean, at least while at work, and it was a very hard job to get one's skin clean after the day's work was over. Then it was fully a mile from the opening of the coal-mine to the face of the coal, and all, of course, was in the blackest darkness. I do not believe that one ever experiences anywhere else such darkness as he does in a coal-mine. The mine was divided into a large number of different "rooms" or departments, and, as I never was able to learn the location of all these "rooms," I many times found myself lost in the mine. To add to the horror of being lost, sometimes my light would go out, and then, if I did not happen to have a match, I would wander about in the darkness until by chance I found some one to give me a light. The work was not only hard, but it was dangerous. There was always the danger of being blown to pieces by a premature explosion of powder, or of being crushed by falling slate. Accidents from one or the other of these causes were frequently occurring, and this kept me in constant fear. Many children of the tenderest years were compelled then, as is now true I fear, in most coal-mining districts, to spend a large part of their lives in these coal-mines, with little opportunity to get an education; and, what is worse, I have often noted that, as a rule, young boys who begin life in a coal-mine are often physically and mentally dwarfed. They soon lose ambition to do anything else than to continue as a coal-miner.

In those days, and later as a young man, I used to try to picture in my imagination the feelings and ambitions of a white boy with absolutely no limit placed upon his aspirations and activities. I used to envy the white boy who had no obstacles placed in the way of his becoming a Congressman, Governor, Bishop, or President by reason of the accident of his birth or race. I used to picture the way that I would act under such circumstances; how I would begin at the bottom and keep rising until I reached the highest round of success.

In later years, I confess that I do not envy the white boy as I once did. I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed. Looked at from this standpoint, I almost reach the conclusion that often the Negro boy's birth and connection with an unpopular race is an advantage, so far as real life is concerned. With few exceptions, the Negro youth must work harder and must perform his tasks even better than a white youth in order to secure recognition. But out of the hard and unusual struggle through which he is compelled to pass, he gets a strength, a confidence, that one misses whose pathway is comparatively smooth by reason of birth and race.

From any point of view, I had rather be what I am, a member of the Negro race, than be able to claim membership with the most favoured of any other race. I have always been made sad when I have heard members of any race claiming rights and privileges, or certain badges of distinction, on the ground simply that they were members of this or that race, regardless of their own individual worth or attainments. I have been made to feel sad for such persons because I am conscious of the fact that mere connection with what is known as a superior race will not permanently carry an individual forward unless he has individual worth, and mere connection with what is regarded as an inferior race will not finally hold an individual back if he possesses intrinsic, individual merit. Every persecuted individual and race should get

much consolation out of the great human law, which is universal and eternal, that merit, no matter under what skin found, is, in the long run, recognized and rewarded. This I have said here, not to call attention to myself as an individual, but to the race to which I am proud to belong.

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Chapter XIV. The Atlanta Exposition Address

The Atlanta Exposition,⁸ at which I had been asked to make an address as a representative of the Negro race, as stated in the last chapter, was opened with a short address from Governor Bullock.⁹ After other interesting exercises, including an invocation from Bishop Nelson, of Georgia, a dedicatory ode by Albert Howell, Jr., and addresses by the President of the Exposition and Mrs. Joseph Thompson, the President of the Woman's Board, Governor Bullock introduced me with the words, "We have with us to-day a representative of Negro enterprise and Negro civilization."

When I arose to speak, there was considerable cheering, especially from the coloured people. As I remember it now, the thing that was uppermost in my mind was the desire to say something that would cement the friendship of the races and bring about hearty coöperation between them. So far as my outward surroundings were concerned, the only thing that I recall distinctly now is that when I got up, I saw thousands of eyes looking intently into my face. The following is the address which I delivered:—

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Board of Directors and Citizens:

One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. No enterprise seeking the material, civil, or moral welfare of this section can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success. I but convey to you, Mr. President and Directors, the sentiment of the masses of my race when I say that in no way have the value and manhood of the American Negro been more fittingly and generously recognized than by the managers of this magnificent Exposition at every stage of its progress. It is a recognition that will do more to cement the friendship of the two races than any occurrence since the dawn of our freedom.

Not only this, but the opportunity here afforded will awaken among us a new era of industrial progress. Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden.

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back,

8. Opening on September 18, 1895, the Cotton States and International Exposition was a major southern trade fair.

9. Rufus Bullock (1834–1907) served as Georgia governor from 1868 to 1871. A northern-born businessman, he was widely reviled as a carpet-bagger and targeted by white supremacists

because of his support for African American political equality. Bullock was accused of corruption and fled the state upon resigning his office. He returned to Atlanta in 1876, stood trial, and after being acquitted of all charges he went on to become one of Atlanta's most prominent businessmen.

“Cast down your bucket where you are.” A second time the signal, “Water, water; send us water!” ran up from the distressed vessel, and was answered, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbour, I would say: “Cast down your bucket where you are”—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent than in emphasizing this chance. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides. Cast down your bucket among these people who have, without strikes and labour wars, tilled your fields, cleared your forests, builded your railroads and cities, and brought forth treasures from the bowels of the earth, and helped make possible this magnificent representation of the progress of the South. Casting down your bucket among my people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and to education of head, hand, and heart, and you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories. While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen. As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching by the sick-bed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in

defence of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.

There is no defence or security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. If anywhere there are efforts tending to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro, let these efforts be turned into stimulating, encouraging, and making him the most useful and intelligent citizen. Effort or means so invested will pay a thousand per cent interest. These efforts will be twice blessed—"blessing him that gives and him that takes."¹

There is no escape through law of man or God from the inevitable:—

"The laws of changeless justice bind
Oppressor with oppressed;
And close as sin and suffering joined
We march to fate abreast."²

Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance and crime of the South, or one-third its intelligence and progress; we shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic.

Gentlemen of the Exposition, as we present to you our humble effort at an exhibition of our progress, you must not expect overmuch. Starting thirty years ago with ownership here and there in a few quilts and pumpkins and chickens (gathered from miscellaneous sources), remember the path that has led from these to the inventions and production of agricultural implements, buggies, steam-engines, newspapers, books, statuary, carving, paintings, the management of drug-stores and banks, has not been trodden without contact with thorns and thistles. While we take pride in what we exhibit as a result of our independent efforts, we do not for a moment forget that our part in this exhibition would fall far short of your expectations but for the constant help that has come to our educational life, not only from the Southern states, but especially from Northern philanthropists, who have made their gifts a constant stream of blessing and encouragement.

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now

1. "It blesseth him that gives and him that takes" (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* 3.1.167).

2. From "Song of the Negro Boatman" (1861), by

the Massachusetts poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892).

is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.

In conclusion, may I repeat that nothing in thirty years has given us more hope and encouragement, and drawn us so near to you of the white race, as this opportunity offered by the Exposition; and here bending, as it were, over the altar that represents the results of the struggles of your race and mine, both starting practically empty-handed three decades ago, I pledge that in your effort to work out the great and intricate problem which God has laid at the doors of the South, you shall have at all times the patient, sympathetic help of my race; only let this be constantly in mind, that, while from representations in these buildings of the product of field, of forest, of mine, of factory, letters, and art, much good will come, yet far above and beyond material benefits will be that higher good, that, let us pray God, will come, in a blotting out of sectional differences and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice, in a willing obedience among all classes to the mandates of law. This, this, coupled with our material prosperity, will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth.

The first thing that I remember, after I had finished speaking, was that Governor Bullock rushed across the platform and took me by the hand, and that others did the same. I received so many and such hearty congratulations that I found it difficult to get out of the building. I did not appreciate to any degree, however, the impression which my address seemed to have made, until the next morning, when I went into the business part of the city. As soon as I was recognized, I was surprised to find myself pointed out and surrounded by a crowd of men who wished to shake hands with me. This was kept up on every street on to which I went, to an extent which embarrassed me so much that I went back to my boarding-place. The next morning I returned to Tuskegee. At the station in Atlanta, and at almost all of the stations at which the train stopped between the city and Tuskegee, I found a crowd of people anxious to shake hands with me.

The papers in all the parts of the United States published the address in full, and for months afterward there were complimentary editorial references to it. Mr. Clark Howell, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, telegraphed to a New York paper, among other words, the following, "I do not exaggerate when I say that Professor Booker T. Washington's address yesterday was one of the most notable speeches, both as to character and as to the warmth of its reception, ever delivered to a Southern audience. The address was a revelation. The whole speech is a platform upon which blacks and whites can stand with full justice to each other."

The Boston *Transcript* said editorially: "The speech of Booker T. Washington at the Atlanta Exposition, this week, seems to have dwarfed all the other proceedings and the Exposition itself. The sensation that it has caused in the press has never been equalled."

I very soon began receiving all kinds of propositions from lecture bureaus, and editors of magazines and papers, to take the lecture platform, and to write articles. One lecture bureau offered me fifty thousand dollars, or two hundred dollars a night and expenses, if I would place my services at its

disposal for a given period. To all these communications I replied that my life-work was at Tuskegee; and that whenever I spoke it must be in the interests of the Tuskegee school and my race, and that I would enter into no arrangements that seemed to place a mere commercial value upon my services.

Some days after its delivery I sent a copy of my address to the President of the United States, the Hon. Grover Cleveland.³ I received from him the following autograph reply:—

Gray Gables
Buzzard's Bay, Mass., October 6, 1895

Booker T. Washington, Esq.:

My Dear Sir: I thank you for sending me a copy of your address delivered at the Atlanta Exposition.

I thank you with much enthusiasm for making the address. I have read it with intense interest, and I think the Exposition would be fully justified if it did not do more than furnish the opportunity for its delivery. Your words cannot fail to delight and encourage all who wish well for your race; and if our coloured fellow-citizens do not from your utterances father new hope and form new determinations to gain every valuable advantage offered them by their citizenship, it will be strange indeed. Yours very truly,

Grover Cleveland

Later I met Mr. Cleveland, for the first time, when, as President, he visited the Atlanta Exposition. At the request of myself and others he consented to spend an hour in the Negro Building, for the purpose of inspecting the Negro exhibit and of giving the coloured people in attendance an opportunity to shake hands with him. As soon as I met Mr. Cleveland I became impressed with his simplicity, greatness, and rugged honesty. I have met him many times since then, both at public functions and at his private residence in Princeton, and the more I see of him the more I admire him. When he visited the Negro Building in Atlanta he seemed to give himself up wholly, for that hour, to the coloured people. He seemed to be as careful to shake hands with some old coloured "auntie" clad partially in rags, and to take as much pleasure in doing so, as if he were greeting some millionaire. Many of the coloured people took advantage of the occasion to get him to write his name in a book or on a slip of paper. He was as careful and patient in doing this as if he were putting his signature to some great state document.

Mr. Cleveland has not only shown his friendship for me in many personal ways, but has always consented to do anything I have asked of him for our school. This he has done, whether it was to make a personal donation or to use his influence in securing the donations of others. Judging from my personal acquaintance with Mr. Cleveland, I do not believe that he is conscious of possessing any colour prejudice. He is too great for that. In my contact with people I find that, as a rule, it is only the little, narrow people who live for themselves, who never read good books, who do not travel, who never open up their souls in a way to permit them to come into contact with other

3. American politician (1837–1908), twenty-second (1885–89) and twenty-fourth (1893–97) president of the United States.

souls—with the great outside world. No man whose vision is bounded by colour can come into contact with what is highest and best in the world. In meeting men, in many places, I have found that the happiest people are those who do the most for others; the most miserable are those who do the least. I have also found that few things, if any, are capable of making one so blind and narrow as race prejudice. I often say to our students, in the course of my talks to them on Sunday evenings in the chapel, that the longer I live and the more experience I have of the world, the more I am convinced that, after all, the one thing that is most worth living for—and dying for, if need be—is the opportunity of making some one else more happy and more useful.

The coloured people and the coloured newspapers at first seemed to be greatly pleased with the character of my Atlanta address, as well as with its reception. But after the first burst of enthusiasm began to die away, and the coloured people began reading the speech in cold type, some of them seemed to feel that they had been hypnotized. They seemed to feel that I had been too liberal in my remarks toward the Southern whites, and that I had not spoken out strongly enough for what they termed the “rights” of the race. For a while there was a reaction, so far as a certain element of my own race was concerned, but later these reactionary ones seemed to have been won over to my way of believing and acting.

While speaking of changes in public sentiment, I recall that about ten years after the school at Tuskegee was established, I had an experience that I shall never forget. Dr. Lyman Abbott, then the pastor of Plymouth Church, and also editor of the *Outlook*⁴ (then the *Christian Union*), asked me to write a letter for his paper giving my opinion of the exact condition, mental and moral of the coloured ministers in the South, as based upon my observations. I wrote the letter, giving the exact facts as I conceived them to be. The picture painted was a rather black one—or, since I am black, shall I say “white”? It could not be otherwise with a race but a few years out of slavery, a race which had not had time or opportunity to produce a competent ministry.

What I said soon reached every Negro minister in the country, I think, and the letters of condemnation which I received from them were not few. I think that for a year after the publication of this article every association and every conference or religious body of any kind, of my race, that met, did not fail before adjourning to pass a resolution condemning me, or calling upon me to retract or modify what I had said. Many of these organizations went so far in their resolutions as to advise parents to cease sending their children to Tuskegee. One association even appointed a “missionary” whose duty it was to warn the people against sending their children to Tuskegee. This missionary had a son in the school, and I noticed that, whatever the “missionary” might have said or done with regard to others, he was careful not to take his son away from the institution. Many of the coloured papers, especially those that were the organs of religious bodies, joined in the general chorus of condemnation or demands for retraction.

During the whole time of the excitement, and through all the criticism, I did not utter a word of explanation or retraction. I knew that I was right, and that time and the sober second thought of the people would vindicate me. It was not long before the bishops and other church leaders began to

4. The weekly magazine that first published *Up from Slavery* in serial form.

make a careful investigation of the conditions of the ministry, and they found out that I was right. In fact, the oldest and most influential bishop in one branch of the Methodist Church said that my words were far too mild. Very soon public sentiment began making itself felt, in demanding a purifying of the ministry. While this is not yet complete by any means, I think I may say, without egotism, and I have been told by many of our most influential ministers, that my words had much to do with starting a demand for the placing of a higher type of men in the pulpit. I have had the satisfaction of having many who once condemned me thank me heartily for my frank words.

The change of the attitude of the Negro ministry, so far as regards myself, is so complete that at the present time I have no warmer friends among any class than I have among the clergymen. The improvement in the character and life of the Negro ministers is one of the most gratifying evidences of the progress of the race. My experience with them, as well as other events in my life, convince me that the thing to do, when one feels sure that he has said or done the right thing, and is condemned, is to stand still and keep quiet. If he is right, time will show it.

In the midst of the discussion which was going on concerning my Atlanta speech, I received a letter which I give below, from Dr. Gilman, the President of Johns Hopkins University,⁵ who had been made chairman of the judges of award in connection with the Atlanta Exposition:—

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore
President's Office, September 30, 1895

Dear Mr. Washington: Would it be agreeable to you to be one of the Judges of Award in the Department of Education at Atlanta? If so, I shall be glad to place your name upon the list. A line by telegraph will be welcomed. Yours very truly,

D. C. Gilman

I think I was even more surprised to receive this invitation than I had been to receive the invitation to speak at the opening of the Exposition. It was to be a part of my duty, as one of the jurors, to pass not only upon the exhibits of the coloured schools, but also upon those of the white schools. I accepted the position, and spent a month in Atlanta in performance of the duties which it entailed. The board of jurors was a large one, consisting in all of sixty members. It was about equally divided between Southern white people and Northern white people. Among them were college presidents, leading scientists and men of letters, and specialists in many subjects. When the group of jurors to which I was assigned met for organization, Mr. Thomas Nelson Page,⁶ who was one of the number, moved that I be made secretary of that division, and the motion was unanimously adopted. Nearly half of our division were Southern people. In performing my duties in the inspection of the exhibits of white schools I was in every case treated with respect, and at the close of our labours I parted from my associates with regret.

5. As President of Johns Hopkins from 1875 to 1901, Daniel Coit Gilman (1831–1908) exerted tremendous influence on American higher education.

6. Popular Virginia diplomat and author (1853–1922), best known for *In Ole Virginia* (1887).

I am often asked to express myself more freely than I do upon the political condition and the political future of my race. These recollections of my experience in Atlanta give me the opportunity to do so briefly. My own belief is, although I have never before said so in so many words, that the time will come when the Negro in the South will be accorded all the political rights which his ability, character, and material possessions entitle him to. I think, though, that the opportunity to freely exercise such political rights will not come in any large degree through outside or artificial forcing, but will be accorded to the Negro by the Southern white people themselves, and that they will protect him in the exercise of those rights. Just as soon as the South gets over the old feeling that it is being forced by “foreigners,” or “aliens,” to do something which it does not want to do, I believe that the change in the direction that I have indicated is going to begin. In fact, there are indications that it is already beginning in a slight degree.

Let me illustrate my meaning. Suppose that some months before the opening of the Atlanta Exposition there had been a general demand from the press and public platform outside the South that a Negro be given a place on the opening programme, and that a Negro be placed upon the board of jurors of award. Would any such recognition of the race have taken place? I do not think so. The Atlanta officials went as far as they did because they felt it to be a pleasure, as well as a duty, to reward what they considered merit in the Negro race. Say what we will, there is something in human nature which we cannot blot out, which makes one man, in the end, recognize and reward merit in another, regardless of colour or race.

I believe it is the duty of the Negro—as the greater part of the race is already doing—to deport himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending upon the slow but sure influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights. I think that the according of the full exercise of political rights is going to be a matter of natural, slow growth, not an over-night, gourd-vine affair. I do not believe that the Negro should cease voting, for a man cannot learn the exercise of self-government by ceasing to vote, any more than a boy can learn to swim by keeping out of the water, but I do believe that in his voting he should more and more be influenced by those of intelligence and character who are his next-door neighbours.

I know coloured men who, through the encouragement, help, and advice of Southern white people, have accumulated thousands of dollars' worth of property, but who, at the same time, would never think of going to those same persons for advice concerning the casting of their ballots. This, it seems to me, is unwise and unreasonable, and should cease. In saying this I do not mean that the Negro should truckle, or not vote from principle, for the instant he ceases to vote from principle he loses the confidence and respect of the Southern white man even.

I do not believe that any state should make a law that permits an ignorant and poverty-stricken white man to vote, and prevents a black man in the same condition from voting. Such a law is not only unjust, but it will react, as all unjust laws do, in time; for the effect of such a law is to encourage the Negro to secure education and property, and at the same time it encourages the white man to remain in ignorance and poverty. I believe that in time, through the operation of intelligence and friendly race relations, all cheating

at the ballot-box in the South will cease. It will become apparent that the white man who begins by cheating a Negro out of his ballot soon learns to cheat a white man out of his, and that the man who does this ends his career of dishonesty by the theft of property or by some equally serious crime. In my opinion, the time will come when the South will encourage all of its citizens to vote. It will see that it pays better, from every standpoint, to have healthy, vigorous life than to have that political stagnation which always results when one-half of the population has no share and no interest in the Government.

As a rule, I believe in universal, free suffrage, but I believe that in the South we are confronted with peculiar conditions that justify the protection of the ballot in many of the states, for a while at least, either by an educational test, a property test, or by both combined; but whatever tests are required, they should be made to apply with equal and exact justice to both races.

1901

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT

1858–1932

In his short fiction and novels, Charles W. Chesnutt created a provocative, engaging body of writing that challenged some of the most entrenched social conventions of his time. With humor and wit, Chesnutt consistently confronted the logic of racial identification and hierarchy in the United States. His career is also instructive for what it reveals about both the opportunities available to African American writers at the turn of the twentieth century and the obstacles that they faced in finding an audience for their work.

Charles Waddell Chesnutt was born on June 20, 1858, in Cleveland, Ohio. His parents were free-born blacks from North Carolina; his father served in the Union Army and after the Civil War moved his family back to Fayetteville, North Carolina. Chesnutt went to a school established by the Freedman's Bureau during Reconstruction and worked as a teacher, school principal, newspaper reporter, and accountant. He married Susan Perry, a Fayetteville schoolteacher, in 1878; they had four children. During the late 1870s, Chesnutt declared in his journal his intention to move to the North and "strike for an entering wedge in the literary world." In 1883 he returned to Cleveland and began work as a legal stenographer, passing the Ohio bar exam in 1887. That same year the *Atlantic Monthly* published "The Goophered Grapevine," the first of a group of stories in the regional-dialect folktale tradition earlier made nationally popular by Joel Chandler Harris. Chesnutt's contemporaries would have recognized the trappings of the story—including the figure of a storytelling former slave and the emphasis on authenticity in language, customs, and setting. Perceptive readers then and now, though, also find in "The Goophered Grapevine" a sophisticated, often ironic, reworking of the plantation tale tradition that emphasizes the cruelty of slavery, the power of its legacy, and the slipperiness of power relations between the races. In both "The Goophered Grapevine" and "Po' Sandy," published the following year, the new owners of a former plantation must

contend with the complex history of human bondage that has shaped the land and its people. In the former slave Julius McAdoo, Chesnutt portrays a master storyteller who cannily deploys his art for white auditors struggling to understand the human landscape of the South during Reconstruction.

With age and fame Chesnutt became more direct in his exploration of the psychological and historical implications of racial thinking in the United States. Chesnutt was himself light-skinned but had never tried to hide his racial identity; it was not until 1899, however, the year he began to write full-time, that he revealed himself to his readers as a black man. In that year, his dialect stories set in rural North Carolina were gathered and published as *The Conjure Woman*. Conjure (or hoodoo) is the name given to a set of folk beliefs that combine Caribbean and West African healing and spiritual practices with elements of Christian belief. Practitioners of conjure are thought to know how to get in touch with and direct the powers of nature to make something happen—or to keep something from happening. Two other books by Chesnutt appeared in 1899: a collection of mostly non-dialect and urban stories titled *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* and a biography of Frederick Douglass. A number of Chesnutt's stories written in the 1890s dealt with the psychological and social tensions of light-skinned blacks attempting to pass as whites. "The Wife of His Youth," included here, affirms the importance of upwardly mobile, light-complected blacks remembering and honoring their collective past. A second story from that collection, "The Passing of Grandison," shows the limits of whites' understanding of the African American desire for freedom.

Chesnutt's first novel, *The House behind the Cedars* (1900), focuses on interracial relationships between men and women in the South, exploring some of the same issues that he discusses in "The Future American" (1900)—an essay included in the "Becoming American in the Gilded Age" section of this volume. Though Chesnutt argued that the laws prohibiting interracial marriage were both illogical and absurd, he also understood the powerful, violent response that interracial unions provoked among many white Southerners. These themes are central to *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), his most ambitious novel, which culminates in a massacre of blacks based on the Wilmington (North Carolina) Riot of 1898. Chesnutt's third novel on the problem of race relations in the post-Civil War South, *The Colonel's Dream* (1905), depicts the failed efforts of the reform-minded Colonel Henry French to institute modernizing economic practices and to challenge white supremacy in a small southern town. Despite the overwhelming pessimism of the novel, Chesnutt dedicated it to "the great number of those who are seeking, in whatever manner or degree, from near at hand or far away, to bring the forces of enlightenment to bear upon the vexed problems which harass the South." The novel received few reviews and sold poorly.

Early in his career, in 1880, Chesnutt had recorded in his journal his youthful ambitions as a writer:

The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism—I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of the American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it.

With his shrewd depictions of racial thinking in the South, and particularly of the fluidity of the color line, Chesnutt emerged as the first great short-story writer in the African American tradition, and as the first African American fiction writer to be taken seriously in the white press. However, by the time he began composing *The Colonel's Dream*, Chesnutt realized that the reading public did not embrace his work in numbers sufficient for him to support his family. Chesnutt continued to write, but publishers became uninterested in his work; recent years have seen the

posthumous first publications of four Chesnutt novels that he left in manuscript form at his death. In his own time, Chesnutt remained esteemed among black writers and readers as a pioneering author committed to representing racial issues in all their historical and social complexity. In 1928 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People awarded him the Spingarn Medal for his groundbreaking contribution “as a literary artist depicting the life and struggles of Americans of Negro descent.” Chesnutt has since come to be widely recognized as one of the most powerful literary artists of the color line.

The Goophered Grapevine¹

About ten years ago my wife was in poor health, and our family doctor, in whose skill and honesty I had implicit confidence, advised a change of climate. I was engaged in grape-culture in northern Ohio, and decided to look for a location suitable for carrying on the same business in some Southern State. I wrote to a cousin who had gone into the turpentine business in central North Carolina, and he assured me that no better place could be found in the South than the State and neighborhood in which he lived: climate and soil were all that could be asked for, and land could be bought for a mere song. A cordial invitation to visit him while I looked into the matter was accepted. We found the weather delightful at that season, the end of the summer, and were most hospitably entertained. Our host placed a horse and buggy at our disposal, and himself acted as guide until I got somewhat familiar with the country.

I went several times to look at a place which I thought might suit me. It had been at one time a thriving plantation, but shiftless cultivation had well-nigh exhausted the soil. There had been a vineyard of some extent on the place, but it had not been attended to since the war, and had fallen into utter neglect. The vines—here partly supported by decayed and broken-down arbors, there twining themselves among the branches of the slender saplings which had sprung up among them—grew in wild and unpruned luxuriance, and the few scanty grapes which they bore were the undisputed prey of the first comer. The site was admirably adapted to grape-raising; the soil, with a little attention, could not have been better; and with the native grape, the luscious scuppernong, mainly to rely upon, I felt sure that I could introduce and cultivate successfully a number of other varieties.

One day I went over with my wife, to show her the place. We drove between the decayed gate-posts—the gate itself had long since disappeared—and up the straight, sandy lane to the open space where a dwelling-house had once stood. But the house had fallen a victim to the fortunes of war, and nothing remained of it except the brick pillars upon which the sills had rested. We alighted, and walked about the place for a while; but on Annie’s complaining of weariness I led the way back to the yard, where a pine log, lying under a spreading elm, formed a shady though somewhat hard seat. One end of the log was already occupied by a venerable-looking colored man. He held

1. First published in the August 1887 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the source of the text reprinted here. A revised version of the story later appeared

in the collection *The Conjure Woman* (1899). “Goophered”: bewitched, hexed (as in voodoo).

on his knees a hat full of grapes, over which he was smacking his lips with great gusto, and a pile of grape-skins near him indicated that the performance was no new thing. He respectfully rose as we approached, and was moving away, when I begged him to keep his seat.

"Don't let us disturb you," I said. "There's plenty of room for us all."

He resumed his seat with somewhat of embarrassment.

"Do you live around here?" I asked, anxious to put him at his ease.

"Yas, suh. I lives des ober yander, behine de nex' san'-hill, on de Lumber-ton plank-road."

"Do you know anything about the time when this vineyard was cultivated?"

"Lawd bless yer, suh, I knows all about it. Dey ain' na'er a man in dis settlement w'at won' tell yer ole Julius McAdoo 'uz bawn an' raise' on dis yer same plantation. Is you de Norv'n gemman w'at's gwine ter buy de ole vimya'd?"

"I am looking at it," I replied; "but I don't know that I shall care to buy unless I can be reasonably sure of making something out of it."

"Well, suh, you is a stranger ter me, en I is a stranger ter you, en we is bofe strangers ter one anudder, but 'f I 'uz in yo' place, I wouldn' buy dis vimya'd."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, I dunner whe'r you b'lieves in cunj'in er not,—some er de w'ite folks don't, er says dey don't,—but de truf er de matter is dat dis yer old vimya'd is goophered."

"Is what?" I asked, not grasping the meaning of this unfamiliar word.

"Is goophered, cunju'd, bewitch'."

He imparted this information with such solemn earnestness, and with such an air of confidential mystery, that I felt somewhat interested, while Annie was evidently much impressed, and drew closer to me.

"How do you know it is bewitched?" I asked.

"I wouldn' spec' fer you ter b'lieve me 'less you know all 'bout de fac's. But ef you en young miss dere doan' min' lis'n'in' ter a ole nigger run on a minute er two while you er restin', I kin 'splain to yer how it all happen'."

We assured him that we would be glad to hear how it all happened, and he began to tell us. At first the current of his memory—or imagination—seemed somewhat sluggish; but as his embarrassment wore off, his language flowed more freely, and the story acquired perspective and coherence. As he became more and more absorbed in the narrative, his eyes assumed a dreamy expression, and he seemed to lose sight of his auditors, and to be living over again in monologue his life on the old plantation.

"Ole Mars Dugal' McAdoo bought dis place long many years befo' de wah, en I 'member well w'en he sot out all dis yer part er de plantation in scuppernon's. De vimes growed monst'us fas', en Mars Dugal' made a thousan' gallon er scuppernon' wine eve'y year.

"Now, ef dey's an'thing a nigger lub, nex' ter 'possum, en chick'n, en water-millyums, it's scuppernon's. Dey ain' niffin dat kin stan' up side'n de scuppernon' fer sweetness; sugar ain't a suckumstance ter scuppernon'. W'en de season is nigh 'bout ober, en de grapes begin ter swivel up des a little wid de wrinkles er ole age,—w'en de skin git sof' en brown,—den de scuppernon' make you smack yo' lip en roll yo' eye en wush fer mo'; so I reckon it ain' very 'stonishin' dat niggers lub scuppernon'.

“Dey wuz a sight er niggers in de naberhood er de vimya’d. Dere wuz ole Mars Henry Brayboy’s niggers, en ole Mars Dunkin McLean’s niggers, en Mars Dugal’s own niggers; den dey wuz a settlement er free niggers en po’ buckrahs² down by de Wim’l’ton Road, en Mars Dugal’ had de only vimya’d in de naberhood. I reckon it ain’ so much so nowadays, but befo’ de wah, in slab’ry times, er nigger didn’ mine goin’ fi’ er ten mile in a night, w’en dey wuz sump’n good ter eat at de yuther een.

“So atter a w’ile Mars Dugal’ begin ter miss his scuppernon’s. Co’s’e he ‘cuse’ de niggers er it, but dey all ‘nied it ter de las’. Mars Dugal’ sot spring guns en steel traps, en he en de oberseah sot up nights once’t er twice’t, tel one night Mars Dugal’—he ‘uz a monst’us keerless man—got his leg shot full er cow-peas.³ But somehow er nudder dey couldn’ nebber ketch none er de niggers. I dunner how it happen, but it happen des like I tell yer, en de grapes kep’ on a-goin des de same.

“But bimeby ole Mars Dugal’ fix’ up a plan ter stop it. Dey ‘uz a cunjuh ‘ooman livin’ down mongs’ de free niggers on de Wim’l’ton Road, en all de darkies fum Rockfish ter Beaver Crick wuz feared uv her. She could wuk de mos’ powerfuller’ kind er goopher,—could make people hab fits er rheumatiz, er make ‘em des dwinel away en die; en dey say she went out ridin’ de niggers at night, for she wuz a witch ‘sides bein’ a cunjuh ‘ooman. Mars Dugal’ hearn ‘bout Aun’ Peggy’s doin’s, en begun ter ‘flect whe’r er no he couldn’ git her ter he’p him keep de niggers off’n de grapevimes. One day in de spring er de year, ole miss pack’ up a basket er chick’n en poun’-cake, en a bottle er scuppernon’ wine, en Mars Dugal’ tuk it in his buggy en driv ober ter Aun’ Peggy’s cabin. He tuk de basket in, en had a long talk wid Aun’ Peggy. De nex’ day Aun’ Peggy come up ter de vimya’d. De niggers seed her slippin’ ‘roun’, en dey soon foun’ out what she ‘uz doin’ dere. Mars Dugal’ had hi’ed her ter goopher de grapevimes. She sa’ntered ‘roun’ mongs’ de vimes, en tuk a leaf fum dis one, en a grape-hull fum dat one, en a grape-seed fum anudder one; en den a little twig fum here, en a little pinch er dirt fum dere,—en put it all in a big black bottle, wid a snake’s toof en a speckle’ hen’s gall en some ha’rs fum a black cat’s tail, en den fill’ de bottle wid scuppernon’ wine. W’en she got de goopher all ready en fix’, she tuk ‘n went out in de woods en buried it under de root uv a red oak tree, en den come back en tole one er de niggers she done goopher de grapevimes, en a’er a nigger w’at eat dem grapes ‘ud be sho ter die inside’n twel’ mont’s.

“Atter dat de niggers let de scuppernons’ lone, en Mars Dugal’ didn’ hab no ‘casion ter fine no mo’ fault; en de season wuz mos’ gone, w’en a strange gemman stop at de plantation one night ter see Mars Dugal’ on some business; en his coachman, seein’ de scuppernon’s growin’ so nice en sweet, slip ‘roun behine de smoke-house, en et all de scuppernon’s he could hole. Nobody didn’ notice it at de time, but dat night, on de way home, de gemman’s hoss runned away en kill’ de coachman. W’en we hearn de noos, Aun’ Lucy, de cook, she up ‘n say she seed de strange nigger eat’n er de scuppernon’s behind de smoke-house; en den we knowed de goopher had b’en er wukkin. Den one er de nigger chilluns runned away fum de quarters one day, en got in de scuppernon’s, en died de nex’ week. W’ite folks say he die’ er de fevuh, but

2. White men (regional slang).

3. Black-eyed peas, used here to fill shotgun shells as less-than-lethal ammunition.

de niggers knowed it wuz de goopher. So you k'n be sho de darkies didn' hab much ter do wid dem scuppernon' vimes.

"W'en de scuppernon' season 'uz ober fer dat year, Mars Dugal' foun' he had made fifteen hund'ed gallon er wine; en one er de niggers hearn him laffin' wid de oberseah fit ter kill, en sayin' dem fifteen hund'ed gallon er wine wuz monst'us good intrus' on de ten dollars he laid out on de vimya'd. So I 'low ez he paid Aun' Peggy ten dollars fer to goopher de grapevimes.

"De goopher didn' wuk no mo' tel de nex' summer, w'en 'long to'ds de middle er de season one er de fiel' han's died; en ez dat lef' Mars Dugal' sho't er han's, he went off ter town fer ter buy anudder. He fotch de noo nigger home wid 'im. He wuz er ole nigger, er de color er a gingy-cake, en ball ez a hoss-apple on de top er his head. He wuz a peart ole nigger, do', en could do a big day's wuk.

"Now it happen dat one er de niggers on de nex' plantation, one er ole Mars Henry Brayboy's niggers, had runned away de day befo', en tuk ter de swamp, en ole Mars Dugal' en some er de yuther nabor w'ite folks had gone out wid dere guns en dere dogs fer ter he'p 'em hunt fer de nigger; en de han's on our own plantation wuz all so flusterated dat we fuhgot ter tell de noo han' 'bout de goopher on de scuppernon' vimes. Co'se he smell de grapes en see de vimes, an atter dahk de fus' thing he done wuz ter slip off ter de grapevimes 'dout sayin' nuffin ter nobody. Nex' mawnin' he tole some er de niggers 'bout de fine bait er scuppernon' he et de night befo'.

"W'en dey tole 'im 'bout de goopher on de grapevimes, he 'uz dat tarrified dat he turn pale, en look des like he gwine ter die right in his tracks. De oberseah come up en axed w'at 'uz de matter; en w'en dey tol 'im Henry be'n eatin' er de scuppernon's, en got de goopher on 'im, he gin Henry a big drink er w'iskey, en 'low dat de nex' rainy day he take 'im ober ter Aun' Peggy's, en see ef she wouldn' take de goopher off'n him, seein' ez he didn't know nuffin erbout it tel he done et de grapes.

"Sho nuff, it rain de nex' day, en de oberseah went ober ter Aun' Peggy's wid Henry. En Aun' Peggy say dat bein' ez Henry didn' know 'bout de goopher, en et de grapes in ign'ance er de quinceconces, she reckon she mought be able fer ter take de goopher off'n him. So she fotch out er bottle wid some cunjuh medicine in it, en po'd some out in a go'd fer Henry ter drink. He manage ter git it down; he say it tas'e like whiskey wid sump'n bitter in it. She 'lowed dat 'ud keep de goopher off'n him tel de spring; but w'en de sap begin ter rise in de grapevimes he ha ter come en see her agin, en she tell him w'at e's ter do.

"Nex' spring, w'en de sap commence' ter rise in de scuppernon' vime, Henry tuk a ham one night. Whar'd he git de ham? *I* doan know; dey wa'nt no hams on de plantation 'cep'n w'at 'uz in de smoke-house, but *I* never see Henry 'bout de smoke-house. But ez *I* wuz a-sayin', he tuk de ham ober ter Aun' Peggy's; en Aun' Peggy tole 'im dat w'en Mars Dugal' begin ter prume de grapevimes, he mus' go en take 'n scrape off de sap whar it ooze out'n de cut een's er de vimes, en 'n'int his ball head wid it; en ef he do dat once't a year de goopher wouldn' wuk agin 'im long ez he done it. En bein' ez he fotch her de ham, she fix' it so he kin eat all de scuppernon' he want.

"So Henry 'n'int his head wid de sap out'n de big grapevime des ha'f way 'twix' de quarters en de big house, en de goopher nebber wuk agin him dat summer. But de beatenes' thing you eber see happen ter Henry. Up ter dat

time he wuz ez ball ez a sweeten' 'tater, but des ez soon ez de young leaves begun ter come out on de grapevimes de ha'r begun ter grow out on Henry's head, en by de middle er de summer he had de bigges' head er ha'r on de plantation. Befo' dat, Henry had tol'able good ha'r 'roun' de aidges, but soon ez de young grapes begun ter come Henry's ha'r begun ter quirl all up in little balls, des like dis yer reg'lar grapy ha'r, en by de time de grapes got ripe his head look des like a bunch er grapes. Combin' it didn' do no good; he wuk at it ha'f de night wid er Jim Crow,⁴ en think he git it straighten' out, but in de mawnin' de grapes 'ud be dere des de same. So he gin it up, en tried ter keep de grapes down by havin' his ha'r cut sho't.

"But dat wa'nt de quares' thing 'bout de goopher. When Henry come ter de plantation, he wuz gittin' a little ole an stiff in de j'int's. But dat summer he got des ez spray en libely ez any young nigger on de plantation; fac' he got so biggity dat Mars Jackson, de oberseah, ha' ter th'eaten ter whip 'im, ef he didn' stop cuttin' up his didos⁵ en behave hisse'f. But de mos' cur'ouses' thing happen' in de fall, when de sap begin ter go down in de grapevimes. Fus', when de grapes 'uz gethered, de knots begun ter straighten out'n Henry's h'ar; en w'en de leaves begin ter fall, Henry's ha'r begin ter drap out; en w'en de vimes 'uz b'ar, Henry's head wuz baller'n it wuz in de spring, en he begin ter git ole en stiff in de j'int's ag'in, en paid no mo' tention ter de gals dyoin' er de whole winter. En nex' spring, w'en he rub de sap on ag'in, he got young ag'in, en so soopl en libely dat none er de young niggers on de plantation could n' jump, ner dance, ner hoe ez much cotton ez Henry. But in de fall er de year his grapes begun ter straighten out, en his j'int's ter git stiff, en his ha'r drap off, en de rheumatiz begin ter wrastle wid 'im.

"Now, ef you'd a knowed ole Mars Dugal' McAdoo, you'd a knowed dat it ha' ter be a mighty rainy day when he could n' fine sump'n fer his niggers ter do, en it ha' ter be a mighty little hole he couldn' crawl thoo, en ha' ter be a monst'us cloudy night w'en a dollar git by him in de dahkness; en w'en he see how Henry git young in de spring en ole in de fall, he 'lowered ter hisse'f ez how he could make mo' money outen Henry dan by wukkin' him in de cotton fiel'. 'Long de nex' spring, atter de sap commence' ter rise, en Henry 'n'int 'is head en commence fer ter git young en soopl, Mars Dugal' up'n tuk Henry ter town, en sole 'im fer fifteen hunder' dollars. Co'se de man w'at bought Henry didn' know nuffin 'bout de goopher, en Mars Dugal' didn' see no 'casion fer ter tell 'im. Long to'ds de fall, w'en de sap went down, Henry begin ter git ole again same ez yuzhal, en his noo marster begin ter git skeered les'n he gwine ter lose his fifteen-hunder'-dollar nigger. He sent fer a mighty fine doctor, but de med'cine didn' 'pear ter do no good; de goopher had a good holt. Henry tole de doctor 'bout de goopher, but de doctor des laff at 'im.

"One day in de winter Mars Dugal' went ter town, en wuz santerin' 'long de Main Street, when who should he meet but Henry's noo marster. Dey said 'Hoddy,' en Mars Dugal' ax 'im ter hab a seegyar; en atter dey run on awhile 'about de craps en de weather, Mars Dugal' ax 'im, sorter keerless, like ez ef he des thought of it,—

"'How you like de nigger I sole you las' spring?'

4. A small card, resembling a curry-comb in construction, and used by negroes in the rural

districts instead of a comb [Chesnutt's note].
5. Behaving in a silly or mischievous way.

“Henry’s marster shuck his head en knock de ashes off’n his seegyar.

“Spec’ I made a bad bahgin when I bought dat nigger. Henry done good wuk all de summer, but sence de fall set in he ’pears ter be sorter pinin’ away. Dey ain’ nuffin pertickler de matter wid ’im—leastways de doctor say so—’cep’n’ a tech er de rheumatiz; but his ha’r is all fell out, en ef he don’t pick up his strenk mighty soon, I spec’ I’m gwine ter lose ’im.’

“Dey smoked on awhile, en bimeby ole mars say, ‘Well, a bahgin’s a bahgin, but you en me is good fren’s, en I doan wan’ ter see you lose all de money you paid fer dat digger; en ef w’at you say is so, en I ain’t ’sputin’ it, he ain’t wuf much now. I spec’s you wukked him too ha’d dis summer, er e’se de swamps down here don’t agree wid de san’-hill nigger. So you des lemme know, en ef he gits any wusser I’ll be willin’ ter gib yer five hund’ed dollars fer ’im, en take my chances on his livin’.’

“Sho nuff, when Henry begun ter draw up wid de rheumatiz en it look like he gwine ter die fer sho, his noo marster sen’ fer Mars Dugal’, en Mars Dugal’ gin him what he promus, en brung Henry home ag’in. He tuk good keer uv ’im dyoin’ er de winter,—give ’im w’iskey ter rub his rheumatiz, en terbacker ter smoke, en all he want ter eat,—’caze a nigger w’at he could make a thousand’ dollars a year off’n didn’ grow on eve’y huckleberry bush.

“Nex’ spring, w’en de sap ris en Henry’s ha’r commence’ ter sprout, Mars Dugal’ sole ’im ag’in, down in Robeson County dis time; en he kep’ dat sellin’ business up fer five year er mo’. Henry nebber say nuffin ’bout de goopher ter his noo marsters, ’caze he knew he gwine ter be tuk good keer uv de nex’ winter, w’en Mars Dugal’ buy him back. En Mars Dugal’ made ’nuff money off’n Henry ter buy anudder plantation ober on Beaver Crick.

“But long ’bout de een’ er dat five year dey come a stranger ter stop at de plantation. De fus’ day he ’us dere he went out wid Mars Dugal’ en spent all de mawnin’ lookin’ ober de vimya’d, en atter dinner dey spent all de evenin’ playin’ kya’ds. De niggers soon ’skiver’ dat he wuz a Yankee, en dat he come down ter Norf C’lina fer ter learn de w’ite folks how to raise grapes en make wine. He promus Mars Dugal’ he cud make de grapevimes ba’r twice’t ez many grapes, en dat de noo wine-press he wuz a-sellin’ would make mo’ d’n twice’t ez many gallons er wine. En ole Mars Dugal’ des drunk it all in, des ’peared ter be bewitched wid dat Yankee. W’en de darkies see dat Yankee runnin’ ’roun de vimya’d en diggin’ under de grapevimes, dey shuk dere heads, en ’lowed dat dey feared Mars Dugal’ losin’ his min’. Mars Dugal’ had all de dirt dug away fum under de roots er all de scuppernon’ vimes, an’ let ’em stan’ dat away fer a week er mo’. Den dat Yankee made de niggers fix up a mixtry er lime en ashes en manyo,⁶ en po’ it roun’ de roots er de grapevimes. Den he ’vise’ Mars Dugal’ fer ter trim de vimes close’t, en Mars Dugal’ tuck ’n done eve’ything de Yankee tole him ter do. Dyoin’ all er dis time, mind yer, ’e wuz libbin’ off’n de fat er de lan’, at de big house, en playin’ kyards wid Mars Dugal’ eve’y night; en dey say Mars Dugal’ los’ mo’n a thousand’ dollars dyoin’ er de week dat Yankee wuz a runnin’ de grapevimes.

“W’en de sap ris nex’ spring, old Henry ’n’inted his head ez yuzhal, en his ha’r commence’ ter grow des de same ez it done eve’y year. De scuppernon’ vimes growed monst’s fas’, en de leaves wuz greener en thicker dan dey eber be’n dyowin my rememb’ance; en Henry’s ha’r growed out thicker dan eber,

6. Manure.

en he 'peared ter git younger 'n younger, en soopler 'n soopler; en seein' ez he wuz sho't er han's dat spring, havin' tuk in consid'able noo groun', Mars Dugal' 'cluded he would n' sell Henry 'tel he git de crap in en de cotton chop'. So he kep' Henry on de plantation.

"But 'long 'bout time fer de grapes ter come on de scuppernon' vimes, dey 'peared ter come a change ober dem; de leaves wivered en swivel' up, en de young grapes turn' yaller, en bimeby eve'ybody on de plantation could see dat de whole vimya'd wuz dyin'. Mars Dugal' tuck'n water de vimes en done all he could, but 't wan' no use: dat Yankee done bus' de watermilliyum. One time de vimes picked up a bit, en Mars Dugal' thought dey wuz gwine ter come out ag'in; but dat Yankee done dug too close unde' de roots, en prune de branches too close ter de vime, en all dat lime en ashes done burn' de life outen de vimes, en dey des kep' a with'in' en a swivelin'.

"All dis time de goopher wuz a-wukkin'. W'en de vimes commence' ter wither, Henry commence' ter complain er his rheumatiz, en when de leaves begin ter dry up his ha'r commence' ter drap out. When de vimes fresh up a bit Henry 'ud git peart agin, en when de vimes wither agin Henry 'ud git ole agin, en des kep' gittin' mo' en mo' fitten fer nuffin; he des pined away, en fine'ly tuk ter his cabin; en when de big vime whar he got de sap ter 'n'int his head withered en turned yaller en died, Henry died too,—des went out sorter like a cannell. Dey didn't 'pear ter be nuffin de matter wid 'im, cep'n' de rheumatiz, but his strenk des dwinel' away, 'tel he didn' hab ernuff lef' ter draw his bref. De goopher had got de under holt, en th'owed Henry fer good en all dat time.

"Mars Dugal' tuk on might'ly 'bout losin' his vimes en his nigger in de same year; en he swo' dat ef he could git holt er dat Yankee he'd wear 'im ter a frazzle, en den chaw up de frazzle; en he'd done it, too, for Mars Dugal' 'uz a monst'us brash man w'en he once git started. He sot de vimya'd out ober agin, but it wuz th'ee er fo' year befo' de vimes got ter b'arin' any scuppernon's.

"W'en de wah broke out, Mars Dugal' raise' a comp'ny, en went off ter fight de Yankees. He say he wuz mighty glad dat wah come, en he des want ter kill a Yankee fer eve'y dollar he los' 'long er dat grape-raisin' Yankee. En I 'spec' he would a done it, too, ef de Yankees hadn' s'picioned sump'n, en killed him fus'. Atter de s'render ole miss move' ter town, de niggers all scattered 'way fum de plantation, en de vimya'd ain' be'n cultervated sence."

"Is that story true?" asked Annie, doubtfully, but seriously, as the old man concluded his narrative.

"It's des ez true ez I'm a-settin' here, miss. Dey's a easy way ter prove it: I kin lead de way right ter Henry's grave ober yander in de plantation buryin'-groun'. En I tell yer w'at, marster, I wouldn' 'vise yer to buy dis yer ole vimya'd, 'caze de goopher's on it yit, en dey ain' no tellin' w'en it's gwine ter crap out."

"But I thought you said all the old vines died."

"Dey did 'pear ter die, but a few ov 'em come out ag'in, en is mixed in mongs' de yuthers. I ain' skeered ter eat de grapes, 'caze I knows de old vimes fum de noo ones; but wid strangers dey ain' no tellin' w'at might happen. I wouldn' 'vise yer ter buy dis vimya'd."

I bought the vineyard, nevertheless, and it has been for a long time in a thriving condition, and is referred to by the local press as a striking illustration of the opportunities open to Northern capital in the development of

Southern industries. The luscious scuppernong holds first rank among our grapes, though we cultivate a great many other varieties, and our income from grapes packed and shipped to the Northern markets is quite considerable. I have not noticed any developments of the goopher in the vineyard, although I have a mild suspicion that our colored assistants do not suffer from want of grapes during the season.

I found, when I bought the vineyard, that Uncle Julius had occupied a cabin on the place for many years, and derived a respectable revenue from the neglected grapevines. This, doubtless, accounted for his advice to me not to buy the vineyard, though whether it inspired the goopher story I am unable to state. I believe, however, that the wages I pay him for his services are more than an equivalent for anything he lost by the sale of the vineyard.

1887

Po' Sandy¹

On the northeast corner of my vineyard in central North Carolina, and fronting on the Lumberton plank-road, there stood a small frame house, of the simplest construction. It was built of pine lumber, and contained but one room, to which one window gave light and one door admission. Its weather-beaten sides revealed a virgin innocence of paint. Against one end of the house, and occupying half its width, there stood a huge brick chimney: the crumbling mortar had left large cracks between the bricks; the bricks themselves had begun to scale off in large flakes, leaving the chimney sprinkled with unsightly blotches. These evidences of decay were but partially concealed by a creeping vine, which extended its slender branches hither and thither in an ambitious but futile attempt to cover the whole chimney. The wooden shutter, which had once protected the unglazed window, had fallen from its hinges, and lay rotting in the rank grass and jimson-weeds beneath. This building, I learned when I bought the place, had been used as a school-house for several years prior to the breaking out of the war, since which time it had remained unoccupied, save when some stray cow or vagrant hog had sought shelter within its walls from the chill rains and nipping winds of winter.

One day my wife requested me to build her a new kitchen. The house erected by us, when we first came to live upon the vineyard, contained a very conveniently arranged kitchen; but for some occult reason my wife wanted a kitchen in the back yard, apart from the dwelling-house, after the usual Southern fashion. Of course I had to build it.

To save expense, I decided to tear down the old school-house, and use the lumber, which was in a good state of preservation, in the construction of the new kitchen. Before demolishing the old house, however, I made an estimate of the amount of material contained in it, and found that I would have to buy several hundred feet of new lumber in order to build the new kitchen according to my wife's plan.

1. First published in the May 1888 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the source of the text reprinted here. A revised version of the story later appeared in the collection *The Conjure Woman* (1899).

One morning old Julius McAdoo, our colored coachman, harnessed the gray mare to the rockaway, and drove my wife and me over to the saw-mill from which I meant to order the new lumber. We drove down the long lane which led from our house to the plank-road; following the plank-road for about a mile, we turned into a road running through the forest and across the swamp to the sawmill beyond. Our carriage jolted over the half-rotted corduroy road² which traversed the swamp, and then climbed the long hill leading to the saw-mill. When we reached the mill, the foreman had gone over to a neighboring farm-house, probably to smoke or gossip, and we were compelled to await his return before we could transact our business. We remained seated in the carriage, a few rods from the mill, and watched the leisurely movements of the millhands. We had not waited long before a huge pine log was placed in position, the machinery of the mill was set in motion, and the circular saw began to eat its way through the log, with a loud whirr which resounded throughout the vicinity of the mill. The sound rose and fell in a sort of rhythmic cadence, which, heard from where we sat, was not unpleasing, and not loud enough to prevent conversation. When the saw started on its second journey through the log, Julius observed, in a lugubrious tone, and with a perceptible shudder:—

“Ugh! but dat des do cuddle my blood!”

“What’s the matter, Uncle Julius?” inquired my wife, who is of a very sympathetic turn of mind. “Does the noise affect your nerves?”

“No, Miss Annie,” replied the old man, with emotion, “I ain’ narvous; but dat saw, a-cuttin’ en grindin’ thoo dat stick er timber, en moanin’, en groanin’, en sweekin’, kyars my ’memb’ance back ter ole times, en ’min’s me er po’ Sandy.” The pathetic intonation with which he lengthened out the “po’ Sandy” touched a responsive chord in our own hearts.

“And who was poor Sandy?” asked my wife, who takes a deep interest in the stories of plantation life which she hears from the lips of the older colored people. Some of these stories are quaintly humorous; others wildly extravagant, revealing the Oriental cast of the negro’s imagination; while others, poured freely into the sympathetic ear of a Northern-bred woman, disclose many a tragic incident of the darker side of slavery.

“Sandy,” said Julius, in reply to my wife’s question, “was a nigger w’at user b’long ter ole Mars³ Marrabo McSwayne. Mars Marrabo’s place wuz on de yuther side’n de swamp, right nex’ ter yo’ place. Sandy wuz a monst’us good nigger, en could do so many things erbout a plantation, en alluz ’ten’ ter his wuk so well, dat w’en Mars Marrabo’s chillums growed up en married off, dey all un ’em wanted dey daddy fer ter gin ’em Sandy fer a weddin’ present. But Mars Marrabo knowed de res’ would n’ be satisfied ef he gin Sandy ter a’er one un ’em; so w’en dey wuz all done married, he fix it by ’lowin’ one er his chilluns ter take Sandy fer a mont’ er so, en den ernudder for a mont’ er so, en so on dat erway tel dey had an had ’im de same lenk er time; en den dey would all take him roun’ ag’in, ’cep’n oncet in a w’ile w’en Mars Marrabo would len’ ’im ter some er his yuther kinfolks ’roun’ de country, w’en dey wuz short er han’s; tel bimeby⁴ it go so Sandy did n’ hardly knowed whar he wuz gwine ter stay fum one week’s een ter de yuther.

2. A road made with logs placed perpendicular to the direction of the road, usually in damp or swampy areas.

3. Master.

4. By and by; before long.

"One time w'en Sandy wuz lent out ez yushal, a spekilater come erlong wid a lot er niggers, en Mars Marrabo swap' Sandy's wife off fer a noo 'oman. W'en Sandy come back, Mars Marrabo gin 'im a dollar, en 'lowed he wuz monst'us sorry fer ter break up de fambly, but de spekilater had gin 'im big boot, en times wuz hard en money skase, en so he wuz bleedst⁵ ter make de trade. Sandy tuk on some 'bout losin' his wife, but he soon seed dey want no use cryin' ober spilt merlasses; en bein' ez he lacked de looks er de noo 'ooman, he tuk up wid her atter she b'n on de plantation a mont' er so.

"Sandy en his noo wife got on mighty well tergedder, en de niggers all 'mence' ter talk about how lovin' dey wuz. W'en Tenie wuz tuk sick oncet, Sandy useter set up all night wid 'er, en den go ter wuk in de mawnin' des lack he had his reg'lar sleep; en Tenie would 'a done anythin' in de worl' for her Sandy.

"Sandy en Tenie had n' b'en libbin' tergedder fer mo' d'n two mont's befo' Mars Marrabo's old uncle, w'at libbed down in Robeson County, sent up ter fine out ef Mars Marrabo could n' len' 'im er hire 'im a good han' fer a mont' er so. Sandy's marster wuz one er dese yer easy-gwine folks w'at wanter please eve'ybody, en he says yas, he could len' 'im Sandy. En Mars Marrabo tole Sandy fer ter git ready ter go down ter Robeson nex' day, fer ter stay a mont' er so.

"Hit wuz monst'us hard on Sandy fer ter take 'im 'way fum Tenie. Hit wuz so fur down ter Robeson dat he did n' hab no chance er comin' back ter see her tel de time wuz up; he would n' a' mine comin' ten er fifteen mile at night ter see Tenie, but Mars Marrabo's uncle's plantation wuz mo' d'n forty mile off. Sandy wuz mighty sad en cas' down atter w'at Mars Marrabo tole 'im, en he says ter Tenie, sezee:—

"I'm gittin monstus ti'ed er dish yer gwine roun' so much. Here I is lent ter Mars Jeems dis mont', en I got ter do so-en-so; en ter Mars Archie de nex' mont', en I got ter do so-en-so; den I got ter go ter Miss Jinnie's: en hit's Sandy dis en Sandy dat, en Sandy yer en Sandy dere, tel it 'pears ter me I ain' got no home, ner no marster, ner no mistiss, ner no nuffin'. I can't eben keep a wife: my yuther ole 'oman wuz sole away widout my gittin' a chance fer ter tell her good-by; en now I got ter go off en leab you, Tenie, en I dunno whe'r I'm eber gwine ter see yer ag'in er no. I wisht I wuz a tree, er a stump, er a rock, er sump'n w'at could stay on de plantation fer a w'ile.'

"Atter Sandy got thoo talkin', Tenie did n' say naer word, but des sot dere by de fier, studyin' en studyin'. Bimeby she up'n says:—

"Sandy, is I eber tole you I wuz a cunjuh-'ooman?'⁶

"Co'se Sandy had n' nebber drempt' er nuffin lack dat, en he made a great miration w'en he hear w'at Tenie say. Bimeby Tenie went on:—

"I ain' goophered⁷ nobody, ner done no cunjuh-wuk fer fifteen year er mo; en w'en I got religion I made up my mine I would n' wuk no mo' gopher. But dey is some things I doan b'lieve it's no sin fer ter do; en ef you doan wanter be sent roun' fum pillar ter pos', en ef you doan wanter go down ter Robeson, I kin fix things so yer won't haf ter. Ef you'll des say de word, I kin turn yer ter w'ateber yer wanter be, en yer kin stay right whar yer wanter, ez long ez yer mineter.'

5. Obligated.

6. Conjure woman; voodoo sorceress.

7. Hexed; bewitched.

“Sandy say he doan keer; he’s willin’ fer ter do anythin’ fer ter stay close ter Tenie. Den Tenie ax’im ef he doan wanter be turnt inter a rabbit.

“Sandy say, ‘No, do dogs mout git atter me.’

“‘Shill I turn yer ter a wolf?’ sez Tenie.

“‘No, eve’ybody’s skeered er a wolf, en I doan want nobody ter be skeered er me.’

“‘Shill I turn yer ter a mawkin’-bird?’

“‘No, a hawk mout ketch me. I wanter be turnt inter sump’n w’at ’ll stay in one place.’

“‘I kin turn yer ter a tree,’ sez Tenie. ‘You won’t hab no mouf ner years, but I kin turn yer back oncet in a w’ile, so yer kin git sump’n ter eat, en hear w’at ’s gwine on.’

“Well, Sandy say dat ’ll do. En so Tenie tuk ’im down by de aidge er de swamp, not fur fum de quarters, en turnt ’im inter a big pine-tree, en sot ’im out mongs’ some yuther trees. En de nex’ mawnin’, ez some er de fiel’ han’s wuz gwine long dere, dey seed a tree w’at dey did n’ ’member er habbin’ seed befo; it wuz monst’us quare, en dey wuz bleedst ter ’low dat dey had n’ ’membered right, er e’s one er de saplin’s had be’n growin’ monst’us fas’.

“W’en Mars Marrabo ’skiver’ dat Sandy wuz gone, he ’lowed Sandy had runned away. He got de dogs out, but de las’ place dey could track Sandy ter wuz de foot er dat pine-tree. En dere de dogs stood en barked, en bayed, en pawed at de tree, en tried ter climb up on it; en w’en dey wuz tuk roun’ thoo de swamp ter look fer de scent, dey broke loose en made fer dat tree ag’in. It wuz de beatenis’ thing de w’ite folks eber hearn of, en Mars Marrabo ’lowed dat Sandy must a’ clim’ up on de tree en jump’ off on a mule er sump’n, en rid fur ’nuff fer ter spile de scent. Mars Marrabo wanted ter ’cuse some er de yuther niggers er heppin Sandy off, but dey all ’nied it ter de las’; en eve’ybody knowed Tenie sot too much by Sandy fer ter he’p ’im run away whar she could n’ nebber see ’im no mo’.

“W’en Sandy had be’n gone long ’nuff fer folks ter think he done got clean away, Tenie useter go down ter de woods at night en turn ’im back, en den dey’d slip up ter de cabin en set by de fire en talk. But dey ha’ ter be monst’us keerful, er e’s somebody would a seed ’em, en dat would a spile de whole thing; so Tenie alluz turnt Sandy back in de mawnin’ early, befo’ anybody wuz a-stirrin’.

“But Sandy did n’ git erlong widout his trials en tribberlations. One day a woodpecker come erlong en ’mence’ ter peck at de tree; en de nex’ time Sandy wuz turnt back he had a little roun’ hole in his arm, des lack a sharp stick be’n stuck in it. Atter dat Tenie sot a sparer-hawk fer ter watch de tree; en w’en de woodpecker come erlong nex’ mawnin’ fer ter finish his nes’, he got gobble’ up mos’ fo’ he stuck his bill in de bark.

“Nudder time, Mars Marrabo sent a nigger out in de woods fer ter chop tuppertime boxes.⁸ De man chop a box in dish yer tree, en hack’ de bark up two er th’ee feet, fer ter let de tuppertime run. De nex’ time Sandy wuz turnt back he had a big skyar on his lef’ leg, des lack it be’n skunt; en it tuk Tenie nigh ’bout all night fer ter fix a mixtry ter kyo it up. Atter dat, Tenie set a hawnet fer ter watch de tree; en w’en de nigger come back ag’in fer ter cut

8. Wide incisions to allow for the collection of pine resin, which is distilled to make turpentine.

ernudder box on de yuther side'n de tree, de hawnet stung 'im so hard dat de ax slip en cut his foot nigh 'bout off.

"W'en Tenie see so many things happenin' ter de tree, she 'cluded she'd ha'ter turn Sandy ter sump'n e'se; en atter studyin' de matter ober, en talkin' wid Sandy one ebenin', she made up her mine fer ter fix up a goopher mix-try w'at would turn herse'f en Sandy ter foxes, er sump'n, so dey could run away en go some'rs whar dey could be free en lib lack w'ite folks.

"But dey ain' no tellin' w'at 's gwine ter happen in dis word. Tenie had got de night sot fer her in Sandy ter run away, w'en dat ve'y day one er Mars Marrabo's sons rid up ter de big house in his buggy, en say his wife wuz monst'us sick, en he want his mammy ter len' 'im a 'ooman fer ter nuss his wife. Tenie's mistiss say sen' Tenie; she wuz a good nuss. Young mars wuz in a tarrible hurry fer ter git back home. Tenie wuz washin' at de big house dat day, en her mistiss say she should go right 'long wid her young marster. Tenie tried ter make some 'scuse fer ter git away en hide tel night, w'en she would have eve'ything fix' up fer her en Sandy; she say she wanter go ter her cabin fer ter git her bonnet. Her mistiss say it doan matter 'bout de bonnet; her head-hank-cher wuz good 'nuff. Den Tenie say she wanter git her bes' frock; her mistiss say no, she doan need no mo' frock, en w'en dat one got dirty she could git a clean one whar she wuz gwine. So Tenie had ter git in de buggy en go 'long wid young Mars Dunkin ter his plantation, w'ich wuz mo' d'n twenty mile away; en dey want no chance er her seein' Sandy no mo' tel she come back home. De po' gal felt monst'us bad erbout de way things wuz gwine on, en she knowed Sandy mus' be a wond'r'in' why she did n' come en turn 'im back no mo'.

"W'iles Tenie wuz away nussin' young Mars Dunkin's wife, Mars Marrabo tuk a notion fer ter buil' 'im a noo kitchen; en bein' ez he had lots er timber on his place, he begun ter look 'roun' fer a tree ter hab de lumber sawed out'n. En I dunno how it come to be so, but he happen fer ter hit on de ve'y tree w'at Sandy wuz turnt inter. Tenie wuz gone, en dey wa'n't nobody ner nuffin' fer ter watch de tree.

"De two men w'at cut de tree down say dey nebber had sech a time wid a tree befo': dey axes would glansh off, en did n' 'pear ter make no progress thoo de wood; en of all de creakin', en shakin', en wobblin' you eber see, dat tree done it w'en it commence' ter fall. It wuz de beatenis'⁹ thing!

"W'en dey got de tree all trim' up, dey chain it up ter a timber waggin, en start fer de saw-mill. But dey had a hard time gittin' de log dere: fus' dey got stuck in de mud w'en dey wuz gwine crosst de swamp, en it wuz two er th'ee hours befo' dey could git out. W'en dey start' on ag'in, de chain kep' a-comin' loose, en dey had ter keep a-stoppin' en a-stoppin' fer ter hitch de log up ag'in. W'en dey commence' ter climb de hill ter de saw-mill, de log broke loose, en roll down de hill en in mongs' de trees, en hit tuk nigh 'bout half a day mo' ter git it haul' up ter de saw-mill.

"De nex' mawnin' atter de day de tree wuz haul' ter de saw-mill, Tenie come home. W'en she got back ter her cabin, de fus' thing she done wuz ter run down ter de woods en see how Sandy wuz gittin' on. W'en she seed de stump standin' dere, wid de sap runnin' out'n it, en de limbs layin' scattered roun', she nigh 'bout went out'n her mine. She run ter her cabin, en got her

9. Beatingest; damnest.

goopher mixtry, en den foller de track er de timber waggin ter de saw-mill. She knowed Sandy could n' lib mo' d'n a minute er so ef she turn' him back, fer he wuz all chop' up so he'd a be'n bleedst ter die. But she wanted ter turn 'im back long ernuff fer ter 'splain ter 'im dat she had n' went off a-purpose, en lef' 'im ter be chop' down en sawed up. She did n' want Sandy ter die wid no hard feelin's to'ds her.

"De han's at de saw-mill had des got de big log on de kerridge, en wuz startin' up de saw, w'en dey seed a 'oman runnin up de hill, all out er bref, cryin' en gwine on des lack she wuz plumb 'stracted. It wuz Tenie; she come right inter de mill, en th'owed herse'f on de log, right in front er de saw, a-hollerin' en cryin' ter her Sandy ter fergib her, en not ter think hard er her, fer it wa'n't no fault er hern. Den Tenie membered de tree did n' hab no years, en she wuz gittin' ready fer ter wuk her goopher mixtry so ez ter turn Sandy back, w'en de mill-hands kotch holt er her en tied her arms wid a rope, en fasten' her to one er de posts in de saw-mill; en den dey started de saw up ag'in, en cut de log up inter bo'ds en scantlin's¹ right befo' her eyes. But it wuz mighty hard wuk; fer of all de sweekin', en moanin', en groanin', dat log done it w'iles de saw wuz a-cuttin' thoo it. De saw wuz one er dese yer ole-timey, up-en-down saws, en hit tuk longer dem days ter saw a log 'en it do now. Dey greased de saw, but dat did n' stop de fuss; hit kep' right on, tel finely dey got de log all sawed up.

"W'en de oberseah w'at run de saw-mill come fum brekfas', de han's up en tell him 'bout de crazy 'ooman—ez dey s'posed she wuz—w'at had come runnin' in de saw-mill, a-hollerin' en gwine on, en tried ter th'ow herse'f befo' de saw. En de oberseah sent two er th'ee er de han's fer ter take Tenie back ter her marster's plantation.

"Tenie 'peared ter be out'n her mine fer a long time, en her marster ha' ter lock her up in de smoke-'ouse tel she got ober her spells. Mars Marrabo wuz monst'us mad, en hit would a made yo' flesh crawl fer ter hear him cuss, caze he say de spekulater w'at he got Tenie fum had fooled 'im by wukkin' a crazy 'oman off on him. Wiles Tenie wuz lock up in de smoke-'ouse, Mars Marrabo tuk n' haul de lumber fum de saw-mill, en put up his noo kitchen.

"W'en Tenie got quiet' down, so she could be 'lowed ter go 'roun' de plantation, she up'n tole her marster all erbout Sandy en de pine-tree; en w'en Mars Marrabo hearn it, he 'lowed she wuz de wuss 'stracted nigger he eber hearn of. He did n' know w'at ter do wid Tenie: fus' he thought he 'd put her in de po'-house; but finely, seein' ez she did n' do no harm ter nobody ner nuffin', but des went roun' moanin', en groanin', en shakin' her head, he 'cluded ter let her stay on de plantation en nuss de little nigger chilluns w'en dey mam-mies wuz ter wuk in de cotton-fiel'.

"De noo kitchen Mars Marrabo buil' wuz n' much use, fer it had n' be'n put up long befo' de niggers 'mence' ter notice quare things erbout it. Dey could hear sump'n moanin' en groanin' 'bout de kitchen in de night-time, en w'en de win' would blow dey could hear sump'n a-hollerin' en sweekin' lack hit wuz in great pain en sufferin'. En hit got so atter a w'ile dat hit wuz all Mars Marrabo's wife could do ter git a 'ooman ter stay in de kitchen in de daytime long ernuff ter do de cookin'; en dey wa'n't naer nigger on de plantation w'at would n' rudder take forty dan ter go 'bout dat kitchen atter

1. Boards and scantlings (small pieces of lumber).

dark,—dat is, 'cep'n Tenie; she did n' pear ter mine de ha'nts.² She useter slip 'roun' at night, en set on de kitchen steps, en lean up agin de do'-jamb, en run on ter herse'f wid some kine er foolishness w'at nobody could n' make out; fer Mars Marrabo had th'eaten' ter sen' her off'n de plantation ef she say anything ter any er de yuther niggers 'bout de pine-tree. But somehow er nudder de niggers foun' out all 'bout it, en dey all knowed de kitchen wuz ha'nted by Sandy's sperrit. En bimeby hit got so Mars Marrabo's wife herse'f wuz skeered ter go out in de yard atter dark.

"W'en it come ter dat, Mars Marrabo tuk n' to' de kitchen down, en use' de lumber fer ter buil' dat ole school-'ouse w'at youer talkin' 'bout pullin' down. De school-'ouse wuz n' use' 'cep'n' in de daytime, en on dark nights folks gwine 'long de road would hear quare soun's en see quare things. Po' ole Tenie useter go down dere at night, en wander 'roun' de school-'ouse; en de niggers all 'lowed she went fer ter talk wid Sandy's sperrit. En one winter mawnin', w'en one er de boys went ter school early fer ter start de fire, w'at should he fine but po' ole Tenie, layin' on de flo', stiff, en cole, en dead. Griefe did n' 'pear' ter be nuffin' pertickler de matter wid her,—she had des grieve' herse'f ter def fer her Sandy. Mars Marrabo did n' shed no tears. He thought Tenie wuz crazy, en dey wa'n't no tellin' w'at she mout do nex'; en dey ain' much room in dis worl' fer crazy w'ite folks, let 'lone a crazy nigger.

"Hit wa'n't long atter dat befo' Mars Marrabo sole a piece er his track er lan' ter Mars Dugal' McAdoo,—*my* ole marster,—en dat's how de ole school-house happen to be on yo' place. W'en de wah broke out, de school stop', en de ole school-'ouse be'n stannin' empty ever sence,—dat is, 'cep'n' fer de ha'nts. En folks sez dat de ole school-'ouse, er any yuther house w'at got any er dat lumber in it w'at wuz sawed out'n de tree w'at Sandy wuz turnt inter, is gwine ter be ha'nted tel de las' piece er plank is rotted en crumble' inter dus'."

Annie had listened to this gruesome narrative with strained attention.

"What a system it was," she exclaimed, when Julius had finished, "under which such things were possible!"

"What things?" I asked, in amazement. "Are you seriously considering the possibility of a man's being turned into a tree?"

"Oh, no," she replied quickly, "not that;" and then she added absently, and with a dim look in her fine eyes, "Poor Tenie!"

We ordered the lumber, and returned home. That night, after we had gone to bed, and my wife had to all appearances been sound asleep for half an hour, she startled me out of an incipient doze by exclaiming suddenly,—

"John, I don't believe I want my new kitchen built out of the lumber in that old school-house."

"You would n't for a moment allow yourself," I replied, with some asperity, "to be influenced by that absurdly impossible yarn which Julius was spinning to-day?"

"I know the story is absurd," she replied dreamily, "and I am not so silly as to believe it. But I don't think I should ever be able to take any pleasure in that kitchen if it were built out of that lumber. Besides, I think the kitchen would look better and last longer if the lumber were all new."

2. Haints; that is, haunts or ghosts. "Forty": a punishment of forty lashes with a whip.

Of course she had her way. I bought the new lumber, though not without grumbling. A week or two later I was called away from home on business. On my return, after an absence of several days, my wife remarked to me,—

“John, there has been a split in the Sandy Run Colored Baptist Church, on the temperance question. About half the members have come out from the main body, and set up for themselves. Uncle Julius is one of the seceders, and he came to me yesterday and asked if they might not hold their meetings in the old school-house for the present.”

“I hope you didn’t let the old rascal have it,” I returned, with some warmth. I had just received a bill for the new lumber I had bought.

“Well,” she replied, “I could not refuse him the use of the house for so good a purpose.”

“And I’ll venture to say,” I continued, “that you subscribed something toward the support of the new church?”

She did not attempt to deny it.

“What are they going to do about the ghost?” I asked, somewhat curious to know how Julius would get around this obstacle.

“Oh,” replied Annie, “Uncle Julius says that ghosts never disturb religious worship, but that if Sandy’s spirit *should* happen to stray into meeting by mistake, no doubt the preaching would do it good.”

1888

The Wife of His Youth¹

I

Mr. Ryder was going to give a ball. There were several reasons why this was an opportune time for such an event.

Mr. Ryder might aptly be called the dean of the Blue Veins. The original Blue Veins were a little society of colored persons organized in a certain Northern city shortly after the war. Its purpose was to establish and maintain correct social standards among a people whose social condition presented almost unlimited room for improvement. By accident, combined perhaps with some natural affinity, the society consisted of individuals who were, generally speaking, more white than black. Some envious outsider made the suggestion that no one was eligible for membership who was not white enough to show blue veins. The suggestion was readily adopted by those who were not of the favored few, and since that time the society, though possessing a longer and more pretentious name, had been known far and wide as the “Blue Vein Society,” and its members as the “Blue Veins.”

The Blue Veins did not allow that any such requirement existed for admission to their circle, but, on the contrary, declared that character and culture were the only things considered; and that if most of their members were light-colored, it was because such persons, as a rule, had had better opportunities to qualify themselves for membership. Opinions differed, too, as to

1. First published in the July 1898 issue of the *Atlantic* and reprinted in the collection “*The Wife of His Youth*” and *Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899), the source of the text printed here.

the usefulness of the society. There were those who had been known to assail it violently as a glaring example of the very prejudice from which the colored race had suffered most; and later, when such critics had succeeded in getting on the inside, they had been heard to maintain with zeal and earnestness that the society was a life-boat, an anchor, a bulwark and a shield,—a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, to guide their people through the social wilderness. Another alleged prerequisite for Blue Vein membership was that of free birth; and while there was really no such requirement, it is doubtless true that very few of the members would have been unable to meet it if there had been. If there were one or two of the older members who had come up from the South and from slavery, their history presented enough romantic circumstances to rob their servile origin of its grosser aspects.

While there were no such tests of eligibility, it is true that the Blue Veins had their notions on these subjects, and that not all of them were equally liberal in regard to the things they collectively disclaimed. Mr. Ryder was one of the most conservative. Though he had not been among the founders of the society, but had come in some years later, his genius for social leadership was such that he had speedily become its recognized adviser and head, the custodian of its standards, and the preserver of its traditions. He shaped its social policy, was active in providing for its entertainment, and when the interest fell off, as it sometimes did, he fanned the embers until they burst again into a cheerful flame.

There were still other reasons for his popularity. While he was not as white as some of the Blue Veins, his appearance was such as to confer distinction upon them. His features were of a refined type, his hair was almost straight; he was always neatly dressed; his manners were irreproachable, and his morals above suspicion. He had come to Groveland a young man, and obtaining employment in the office of a railroad company as messenger had in time worked himself up to the position of stationery clerk, having charge of the distribution of the office supplies for the whole company. Although the lack of early training had hindered the orderly development of a naturally fine mind, it had not prevented him from doing a great deal of reading or from forming decidedly literary tastes. Poetry was his passion. He could repeat whole pages of the great English poets; and if his pronunciation was sometimes faulty, his eye, his voice, his gestures, would respond to the changing sentiment with a precision that revealed a poetic soul and disarmed criticism. He was economical, and had saved money; he owned and occupied a very comfortable house on a respectable street. His residence was handsomely furnished, containing among other things a good library, especially rich in poetry, a piano, and some choice engravings. He generally shared his house with some young couple, who looked after his wants and were company for him; for Mr. Ryder was a single man. In the early days of his connection with the Blue Veins he had been regarded as quite a catch, and young ladies and their mothers had manœuvred with much ingenuity to capture him. Not, however, until Mrs. Molly Dixon visited Groveland had any woman ever made him wish to change his condition to that of a married man.

Mrs. Dixon had come to Groveland from Washington in the spring, and before the summer was over she had won Mr. Ryder's heart. She possessed many attractive qualities. She was much younger than he; in fact, he was old enough to have been her father, though no one knew exactly how old he

was. She was whiter than he, and better educated. She had moved in the best colored society of the country, at Washington, and had taught in the schools of that city. Such a superior person had been eagerly welcomed to the Blue Vein Society, and had taken a leading part in its activities. Mr. Ryder had at first been attracted by her charms of person, for she was very good looking and not over twenty-five; then by her refined manners and the vivacity of her wit. Her husband had been a government clerk, and at his death had left a considerable life insurance. She was visiting friends in Groveland, and, finding the town and the people to her liking, had prolonged her stay indefinitely. She had not seemed displeased at Mr. Ryder's attentions, but on the contrary had given him every proper encouragement; indeed, a younger and less cautious man would long since have spoken. But he had made up his mind, and had only to determine the time when he would ask her to be his wife. He decided to give a ball in her honor, and at some time during the evening of the ball to offer her his heart and hand. He had no special fears about the outcome, but, with a little touch of romance, he wanted the surroundings to be in harmony with his own feelings when he should have received the answer he expected.

Mr. Ryder resolved that this ball should mark an epoch in the social history of Groveland. He knew, of course,—no one could know better,—the entertainments that had taken place in past years, and what must be done to surpass them. His ball must be worthy of the lady in whose honor it was to be given, and must, by the quality of its guests, set an example for the future. He had observed of late a growing liberality, almost a laxity, in social matters, even among members of his own set, and had several times been forced to meet in a social way persons whose complexions and callings in life were hardly up to the standard which he considered proper for the society to maintain. He had a theory of his own.

"I have no race prejudice," he would say, "but we people of mixed blood are ground between the upper and the nether millstone. Our fate lies between absorption by the white race and extinction in the black. The one doesn't want us yet, but may take us in time. The other would welcome us, but it would be for us a backward step. 'With malice towards none, with charity for all,'² we must do the best we can for ourselves and those who are to follow us. Self-preservation is the first law of nature."

His ball would serve by its exclusiveness to counteract leveling tendencies, and his marriage with Mrs. Dixon would help to further the upward process of absorption he had been wishing and waiting for.

II

The ball was to take place on Friday night. The house had been put in order, the carpets covered with canvas, the halls and stairs decorated with palms and potted plants; and in the afternoon Mr. Ryder sat on his front porch, which the shade of a vine running up over a wire netting made a cool and pleasant lounging place. He expected to respond to the toast "The Ladies" at the supper, and from a volume of Tennyson—his favorite poet—was fortifying

2. From Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address (1865).

himself with apt quotations. The volume was open at “A Dream of Fair Women.”³ His eyes fell on these lines, and he read them aloud to judge better of their effect:—

“At length I saw a lady within call,
 Stillter than chisell’d marble, standing there;
 A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
 And most divinely fair.”

He marked the verse, and turning the page read the stanza beginning,—

“O sweet pale Margaret,
 O rare pale Margaret.”⁴

He weighed the passage a moment, and decided that it would not do. Mrs. Dixon was the palest lady he expected at the ball, and she was of a rather ruddy complexion, and of lively disposition and buxom build. So he ran over the leaves until his eye rested on the description of Queen Guinevere:⁵—

“She seem’d a part of joyous Spring;
 A gown of grass-green silk she wore,
 Buckled with golden clasps before;
 A light-green tuft of plumes she bore
 Closed in a golden ring.

• • • • •

“She look’d so lovely, as she sway’d
 The rein with dainty finger-tips,
 A man had given all other bliss,
 And all his worldly worth for this,
 To waste his whole heart in one kiss
 Upon her perfect lips.”

As Mr. Ryder murmured these words audibly, with an appreciative thrill, he heard the latch of his gate click, and a light foot-fall sounding on the steps. He turned his head, and saw a woman standing before his door.

She was a little woman, not five feet tall, and proportioned to her height. Although she stood erect, and looked around her with very bright and restless eyes, she seemed quite old; for her face was crossed and recrossed with a hundred wrinkles, and around the edges of her bonnet could be seen protruding here and there a tuft of short gray wool. She wore a blue calico gown of ancient cut, a little red shawl fastened around her shoulders with an old-fashioned brass brooch, and a large bonnet profusely ornamented with faded red and yellow artificial flowers. And she was very black,—so black that her toothless gums, revealed when she opened her mouth to speak, were not red, but blue. She looked like a bit of the old plantation life, summoned up from the past by the wave of a magician’s wand, as the poet’s fancy had called into being the gracious shapes of which Mr. Ryder had just been reading.

3. Poem by the English writer Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), published in 1832.

4. From Tennyson’s “Margaret” (1832).

5. Wife of the legendary King Arthur, described in the stanzas that follow from Tennyson’s “Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere” (1842).

He rose from his chair and came over to where she stood.

“Good-afternoon, madam,” he said.

“Good-evenin’, suh,” she answered, ducking suddenly with a quaint curtsy. Her voice was shrill and piping, but softened somewhat by age. “Is dis yere whar Mistuh Ryduh lib, suh?” she asked, looking around her doubtfully, and glancing into the open windows, through which some of the preparations for the evening were visible.

“Yes,” he replied, with an air of kindly patronage, unconsciously flattered by her manner, “I am Mr. Ryder. Did you want to see me?”

“Yas, suh, ef I ain’t ’sturbin’ of you too much.”

“Not at all. Have a seat over here behind the vine, where it is cool. What can I do for you?”

“ ’Scuse me, suh,” she continued, when she had sat down on the edge of a chair, “ ’scuse me, suh, I’s lookin’ for my husban’. I heerd you wuz a big man an’ had libbed heah a long time, an’ I ’lowed you wouldn’t min’ ef I’d come roun’ an’ ax you ef you’d ever heerd of a merlatter⁶ man by de name er Sam Taylor ’quirin’ roun’ in de chu’ches ermongs’ de people fer his wife ’Liza Jane?”

Mr. Ryder seemed to think for a moment.

“There used to be many such cases right after the war,” he said, “but it has been so long that I have forgotten them. There are very few now. But tell me your story, and it may refresh my memory.”

She sat back farther in her chair so as to be more comfortable, and folded her withered hands in her lap.

“My name’s ’Liza,” she began, “ ’Liza Jane. W’en I wuz young I us’ter b’long ter Marse Bob Smif, down in ole Missoura. I wuz bawn down dere. W’en I wuz a gal I wuz married ter a man named Jim. But Jim died, an’ after dat I married a merlatter man named Sam Taylor. Sam wuz free-bawn, but his mammy and daddy died, an’ de w’ite folks ’prenticed him ter my marster fer ter work fer ’im ’tel he wuz growed up. Sam worked in de fiel’, an’ I wuz de cook. One day Ma’y Ann, ole miss’s maid, came rushin’ out ter de kitchen, an’ says she, ‘ ’Liza Jane, ole marse gwine sell yo’ Sam down de ribber.’

“‘Go way f’m yere,’ says I; ‘my husban’ ’s free!’

“‘Don’ make no diff’ence. I heerd ole marse tell ole miss he wuz gwine take yo’ Sam ’way wid ’im ter-morrow, fer he needed money, an’ he knowed whar he could git a t’ousan’ dollars fer Sam an’ no questions axed.’

“W’en Sam come home f’m de fiel’ dat night, I tole him ’bout ole marse gwine steal ’im, an’ Sam run erway. His time wuz mos’ up, an’ he swo’ dat w’en he wuz twenty-one he would come back an’ he’p me run erway, er else save up de money ter buy my freedom. An’ I know he’d ’a’ done it, fer he thought a heap er me, Sam did. But w’en he come back he didn’ fin’ me, fer I wuzn’ dere. Ole marse had heerd dat I warned Sam, so he had me whip’ an’ sol’ down de ribber.

“Den de wah broke out, an’ w’en it wuz ober de cullud folks wuz scattered. I went back ter de ole home; but Sam wuzn’ dere, an’ I couldn’ l’arn nuffin’ ’bout ’im. But I knowed he’d be’n dere to look for me an’ hadn’ foun’ me, an’ had gone erway ter hunt fer me.

6. Mulatto.

"'T's be'n lookin' fer 'im eber sence," she added simply, as though twenty-five years were but a couple of weeks, "an' I knows he's be'n lookin' fer me. Fer he sot a heap er sto' by me, Sam did, an' I know he's be'n huntin' fer me all dese years,—'less'n he's be'n sick er sump'n, so he couldn' work, er out'n his head, so he couldn' 'member his promise. I went back down de ribber, fer I 'lowed he'd gone down dere lookin' fer me. I's be'n ter Noo Orleens, an' Atlanty, an' Charleston, an' Richmon'; an' w'en I'd be'n all ober de Souf I come ter de Norf. Fer I knows I'll fin' 'im some er dese days," she added softly, "er he'll fin' me, an' den we'll bofe be as happy in freedom as we wuz in de ole days befo' de wah." A smile stole over her withered countenance as she paused a moment, and her bright eyes softened into a far-away look.

This was the substance of the old woman's story. She had wandered a little here and there. Mr. Ryder was looking at her curiously when she finished.

"How have you lived all these years?" he asked.

"Cookin', suh. I's a good cook. Does you know anybody w'at needs a good cook, suh? I's stoppin' wid a cullud fam'ly round' de corner yonder 'tel I kin git a place."

"Do you really expect to find your husband? He may be dead long ago."

She shook her head emphatically. "Oh no, he ain' dead. De signs an' de tokens tells me. I drempt three nights runnin' on'y dis las' week dat I foun' him."

"He may have married another woman. Your slave marriage would not have prevented him, for you never lived with him after the war, and without that your marriage doesn't count."⁷

"Wouldn' make no diff'ence wid Sam. He wouldn' marry no yuther 'ooman 'tel he foun' out 'bout me. I knows it," she added. "Sump'n's be'n tellin' me all dese years dat I's gwine fin' Sam 'fo' I dies."

"Perhaps he's outgrown you, and climbed up in the world where he wouldn't care to have you find him."

"No, indeed, suh," she replied, "Sam ain' dat kin' er man. He wuz good ter me, Sam wuz, but he wuzn' much good ter nobody e'se, fer he wuz one er de triflin'es' han's on de plantation. I 'spec's ter haf ter suppo't 'im w'en I fin' 'im, fer he nebber would work 'less'n he had ter. But den he wuz free, an' he didn' git no pay fer his work, an' I don' blame 'im much. Mebbe he's done better sence he run erway, but I ain' 'spectin' much."

"You may have passed him on the street a hundred times during the twenty-five years, and not have known him; time works great changes."

She smiled incredulously. "I'd know 'im 'mong's a hund'ed men. Fer dey wuz n' no yuther merlatter man like my man Sam, an' I couldn' be mistook. I's toted his picture roun' wid me twenty-five years."

"May I see it?" asked Mr. Ryder. "It might help me to remember whether I have seen the original."

As she drew a small parcel from her bosom he saw that it was fastened to a string that went around her neck. Removing several wrappers, she brought to light an old-fashioned daguerreotype in a black case. He looked long and intently at the portrait. It was faded with time, but the features were still distinct, and it was easy to see what manner of man it had represented.

7. Slave marriages had no legal standing in the pre-Civil War South.

He closed the case, and with a slow movement handed it back to her.

"I don't know of any man in town who goes by that name," he said, "nor have I heard of any one making such inquiries. But if you will leave me your address, I will give the matter some attention, and if I find out anything I will let you know."

She gave him the number of a house in the neighborhood, and went away, after thanking him warmly.

He wrote the address on the fly-leaf of the volume of Tennyson, and, when she had gone, rose to his feet and stood looking after her curiously. As she walked down the street with mincing step, he saw several persons whom she passed turn and look back at her with a smile of kindly amusement. When she had turned the corner, he went upstairs to his bedroom, and stood for a long time before the mirror of his dressing-case, gazing thoughtfully at the reflection of his own face.

III

At eight o'clock the ballroom was a blaze of light and the guests had begun to assemble; for there was a literary programme and some routine business of the society to be gone through with before the dancing. A black servant in evening dress waited at the door and directed the guests to the dressing-rooms.

The occasion was long memorable among the colored people of the city; not alone for the dress and display, but for the high average of intelligence and culture that distinguished the gathering as a whole. There were a number of school-teachers, several young doctors, three or four lawyers, some professional singers, an editor, a lieutenant in the United States army spending his furlough in the city, and others in various polite callings; these were colored, though most of them would not have attracted even a casual glance because of any marked difference from white people. Most of the ladies were in evening costume, and dress coats and dancing pumps were the rule among the men. A band of string music, stationed in an alcove behind a row of palms, played popular airs while the guests were gathering.

The dancing began at half past nine. At eleven o'clock supper was served. Mr. Ryder had left the ballroom some little time before the intermission, but reappeared at the supper-table. The spread was worthy of the occasion, and the guests did full justice to it. When the coffee had been served, the toast-master, Mr. Solomon Sadler, rapped for order. He made a brief introductory speech, complimenting host and guests, and then presented in their order the toasts of the evening. They were responded to with a very fair display of after-dinner wit.

"The last toast," said the toast-master, when he reached the end of the list, "is one which must appeal to us all. There is no one of us of the sterner sex who is not at some time dependent upon woman,—in infancy for protection, in manhood for companionship, in old age for care and comforting. Our good host has been trying to live alone, but the fair faces I see around me to-night prove that he too is largely dependent upon the gentler sex for most that makes life worth living,—the society and love of friends,—and rumor is at fault if he does not soon yield entire subjection to one of them. Mr. Ryder will now respond to the toast,—The Ladies."

There was a pensive look in Mr. Ryder's eyes as he took the floor and adjusted his eye-glasses. He began by speaking of woman as the gift of Heaven to man, and after some general observations on the relations of the sexes he said: "But perhaps the quality which most distinguishes woman is her fidelity and devotion to those she loves. History is full of examples, but has recorded none more striking than one which only to-day came under my notice."

He then related, simply but effectively, the story told by his visitor of the afternoon. He gave it in the same soft dialect, which came readily to his lips, while the company listened attentively and sympathetically. For the story had awakened a responsive thrill in many hearts. There were some present who had seen, and others who had heard their fathers and grandfathers tell, the wrongs and sufferings of this past generation, and all of them still felt, in their darker moments, the shadow hanging over them. Mr. Ryder went on:—

"Such devotion and confidence are rare even among women. There are many who would have searched a year, some who would have waited five years, a few who might have hoped ten years; but for twenty-five years this woman has retained her affection for and her faith in a man she has not seen or heard of in all that time.

"She came to me to-day in the hope that I might be able to help her find this long-lost husband. And when she was gone I gave my fancy rein, and imagined a case I will put to you.

"Suppose that this husband, soon after his escape, had learned that his wife had been sold away, and that such inquiries as he could make brought no information of her whereabouts. Suppose that he was young, and she much older than he; that he was light, and she was black; that their marriage was a slave marriage, and legally binding only if they chose to make it so after the war. Suppose, too, that he made his way to the North, as some of us have done, and there, where he had larger opportunities, had improved them, and had in the course of all these years grown to be as different from the ignorant boy who ran away from fear of slavery as the day is from the night. Suppose, even, that he had qualified himself, by industry, by thrift, and by study, to win the friendship and be considered worthy the society of such people as these I see around me to-night, gracing my board and filling my heart with gladness; for I am old enough to remember the day when such a gathering would not have been possible in this land. Suppose, too, that, as the years went by, this man's memory of the past grew more and more indistinct, until at last it was rarely, except in his dreams, that any image of this bygone period rose before his mind. And then suppose that accident should bring to his knowledge the fact that the wife of his youth, the wife he had left behind him,—not one who had walked by his side and kept pace with him in his upward struggle, but one upon whom advancing years and a laborious life had set their mark,—was alive and seeking him, but that he was absolutely safe from recognition or discovery, unless he chose to reveal himself. My friends, what would the man do? I will presume that he was one who loved honor, and tried to deal justly with all men. I will even carry the case further, and suppose that perhaps he had set his heart upon another, whom he had hoped to call his own. What would he do, or rather what ought he to do, in such a crisis of a lifetime?

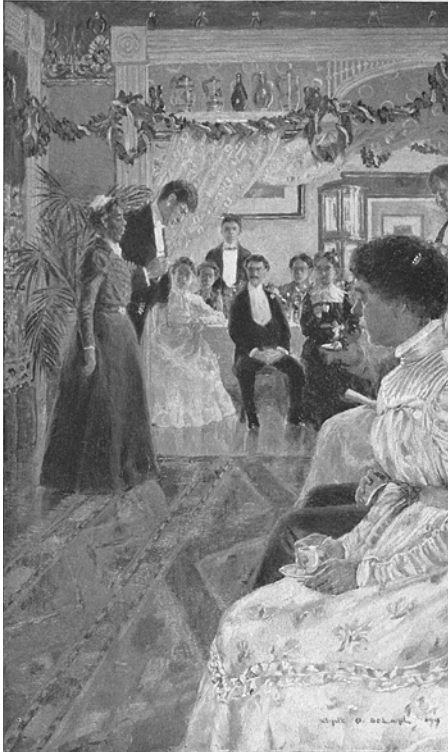
“It seemed to me that he might hesitate, and I imagined that I was an old friend, a near friend, and that he had come to me for advice; and I argued the case with him. I tried to discuss it impartially. After we had looked upon the matter from every point of view, I said to him, in words that we all know:—

“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”⁸

Then, finally, I put the question to him, ‘Shall you acknowledge her?’

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, friends and companions, I ask you, what should he have done?”

There was something in Mr. Ryder’s voice that stirred the hearts of those who sat around him. It suggested more than mere sympathy with an imaginary situation; it seemed rather in the nature of a personal appeal. It was observed, too, that his look rested more especially upon Mrs. Dixon, with a mingled expression of renunciation and inquiry.



“This is the woman, and I am the man.”

Clyde O. DeLand’s illustration for the first book publication (1899) of “The Wife of His Youth.”

She had listened, with parted lips and streaming eyes. She was the first to speak: “He should have acknowledged her.”

“Yes,” they all echoed, “he should have acknowledged her.”

“My friends and companions,” responded Mr. Ryder, “I thank you, one and all. It is the answer I expected, for I knew your hearts.”

He turned and walked toward the closed door of an adjoining room, while every eye followed him in wondering curiosity. He came back in a moment, leading by the hand his visitor of the afternoon, who stood startled and trembling at the sudden plunge into this scene of brilliant gayety. She was neatly dressed in gray, and wore the white cap of an elderly woman.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “this is the woman, and I am the man, whose story I have told you. Permit me to introduce to you the wife of my youth.”

1899

8. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.3.

The Passing of Grandison¹

I

When it is said that it was done to please a woman, there ought perhaps to be enough said to explain anything; for what a man will not do to please a woman is yet to be discovered. Nevertheless, it might be well to state a few preliminary facts to make it clear why young Dick Owens tried to run one of his father's negro men off to Canada.

In the early fifties, when the growth of anti-slavery sentiment and the constant drain of fugitive slaves into the North had so alarmed the slaveholders of the border States as to lead to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law,² a young white man from Ohio, moved by compassion for the sufferings of a certain bondman who happened to have a "hard master," essayed to help the slave to freedom. The attempt was discovered and frustrated; the abductor was tried and convicted for slave-stealing, and sentenced to a term of imprisonment in the penitentiary. His death, after the expiration of only a small part of the sentence, from cholera contracted while nursing stricken fellow prisoners, lent to the case a melancholy interest that made it famous in anti-slavery annals.

Dick Owens had attended the trial. He was a youth of about twenty-two, intelligent, handsome, and amiable, but extremely indolent, in a graceful and gentlemanly way; or, as old Judge Fenderson put it more than once, he was lazy as the Devil,—a mere figure of speech, of course, and not one that did justice to the Enemy of Mankind. When asked why he never did anything serious, Dick would good-naturedly reply, with a well-modulated drawl, that he didn't have to. His father was rich; there was but one other child, an unmarried daughter, who because of poor health would probably never marry, and Dick was therefore heir presumptive to a large estate. Wealth or social position he did not need to seek, for he was born to both. Charity Lomax had shamed him into studying law, but notwithstanding an hour or so a day spent at old Judge Fenderson's office, he did not make remarkable headway in his legal studies.

"What Dick needs," said the judge, who was fond of tropes,³ as became a scholar, and of horses, as was befitting a Kentuckian, "is the whip of necessity, or the spur of ambition. If he had either, he would soon need the snaffle⁴ to hold him back."

But all Dick required, in fact, to prompt him to the most remarkable thing he accomplished before he was twenty-five, was a mere suggestion from Charity Lomax. The story was never really known to but two persons until after the war, when it came out because it was a good story and there was no particular reason for its concealment.

Young Owens had attended the trial of this slave-stealer, or martyr,—either or both,—and, when it was over, had gone to call on Charity Lomax, and, while they sat on the veranda after sundown, had told her all about the

1. First published in "*The Wife of His Youth*" and *Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899), the source of the text printed here.

2. The most controversial provision of the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law made it

a federal crime to assist in a slave escape, and mandated the return to their owners of any slaves who had escaped to the free states.

3. Figures of speech.

4. Bit or restraint for a horse.

trial. He was a good talker, as his career in later years disclosed, and described the proceedings very graphically.

"I confess," he admitted, "that while my principles were against the prisoner, my sympathies were on his side. It appeared that he was of good family, and that he had an old father and mother, respectable people, dependent upon him for support and comfort in their declining years. He had been led into the matter by pity for a negro whose master ought to have been run out of the county long ago for abusing his slaves. If it had been merely a question of old Sam Briggs's negro, nobody would have cared anything about it. But father and the rest of them stood on the principle of the thing, and told the judge so, and the fellow was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary."

Miss Lomax had listened with lively interest.

"I've always hated old Sam Briggs," she said emphatically, "ever since the time he broke a negro's leg with a piece of cordwood. When I hear of a cruel deed it makes the Quaker blood that came from my grandmother assert itself. Personally I wish that all Sam Briggs's negroes would run away. As for the young man, I regard him as a hero. He dared something for humanity. I could love a man who would take such chances for the sake of others."

"Could you love me, Charity, if I did something heroic?"

"You never will, Dick. You're too lazy for any use. You'll never do anything harder than playing cards or fox-hunting."

"Oh, come now, sweetheart! I've been courting you for a year, and it's the hardest work imaginable. Are you never going to love me?" he pleaded.

His hand sought hers, but she drew it back beyond his reach.

"I'll never love you, Dick Owens, until you have done something. When that time comes, I'll think about it."

"But it takes so long to do anything worth mentioning, and I don't want to wait. One must read two years to become a lawyer, and work five more to make a reputation. We shall both be gray by then."

"Oh, I don't know," she rejoined. "it doesn't require a lifetime for a man to prove that he is a man. This one did something, or at least tried to."

"Well, I'm willing to attempt as much as any other man. What do you want me to do, sweetheart? Give me a test."

"Oh, dear me!" said Charity, "I don't care what you *do*, so you do *something*. Really, come to think of it, why should I care whether you do anything or not?"

"I'm sure I don't know why you should, Charity," rejoined Dick humbly, "for I'm aware that I'm not worthy of it."

"Except that I do hate," she added, relenting slightly, "to see a really clever man so utterly lazy and good for nothing."

"Thank you, my dear; a word of praise from you has sharpened my wits already. I have an idea! Will you love me if I run a negro off to Canada?"

"What nonsense!" said Charity scornfully. "You must be losing your wits. Steal another man's slave, indeed, while your father owns a hundred!"

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that," responded Dick lightly; "I'll run off one of the old man's; we've got too many anyway. It may not be quite as difficult as the other man found it, but it will be just as unlawful, and will demonstrate what I am capable of."

"Seeing's believing," replied Charity. "Of course, what you are talking about now is merely absurd. I'm going away for three weeks, to visit my aunt in Tennessee. If you're able to tell me, when I return, that you've done something to prove your quality, I'll—well, you may come and tell me about it."

II

Young Owens got up about nine o'clock next morning, and while making his toilet put some questions to his personal attendant, a rather bright looking young mulatto of about his own age.

"Tom," said Dick.

"Yes, Mars Dick," responded the servant.

"I'm going on a trip North. Would you like to go with me?"

Now, if there was anything that Tom would have liked to make, it was a trip North. It was something he had long contemplated in the abstract, but had never been able to muster up sufficient courage to attempt in the concrete. He was prudent enough, however, to dissemble his feelings.

"I wouldn't min' it, Mars Dick, ez long ez you'd take keer er me an' fetch me home all right."

Tom's eyes belied his words, however, and his young master felt well assured that Tom needed only a good opportunity to make him run away. Having a comfortable home, and a dismal prospect in case of failure, Tom was not likely to take any desperate chances; but young Owens was satisfied that in a free State but little persuasion would be required to lead Tom astray. With a very logical and characteristic desire to gain his end with the least necessary expenditure of effort, he decided to take Tom with him, if his father did not object.

Colonel Owens had left the house when Dick went to breakfast, so Dick did not see his father till luncheon.

"Father," he remarked casually to the colonel over the fried chicken, "I'm feeling a trifle run down. I imagine my health would be improved somewhat by a little travel and change of scene."

"Why don't you take a trip North?" suggested his father. The colonel added to paternal affection a considerable respect for his son as the heir of a large estate. He himself had been "raised" in comparative poverty, and had laid the foundations of his fortune by hard work; and while he despised the ladder by which he had climbed, he could not entirely forget it, and unconsciously manifested, in his intercourse with his son, some of the poor man's deference toward the wealthy and well-born.

"I think I'll adopt your suggestion, sir," replied the son, "and run up to New York; and after I've been there awhile I may go on to Boston for a week or so. I've never been there, you know."

"There are some matters you can talk over with my factor⁵ in New York," rejoined the colonel, "and while you are up there among the Yankees, I hope you'll keep your eyes and ears open to find out what the rascally abolitionists are saying and doing. They're becoming altogether too active for our

5. A broker, in this case for cotton.

comfort, and entirely too many ungrateful niggers are running away. I hope the conviction of that fellow yesterday may discourage the rest of the breed. I'd just like to catch any one trying to run off one of my darkeys. He'd get short shrift; I don't think any Court would have a chance to try him."

"They are a pestiferous lot," assented Dick, "and dangerous to our institutions. But say, father, if I go North I shall want to take Tom with me."

Now, the colonel, while a very indulgent father, had pronounced views on the subject of negroes, having studied them, as he often said, for a great many years, and, as he asserted oftener still, understanding them perfectly. It is scarcely worth while to say, either, that he valued more highly than if he had inherited them the slaves he had toiled and schemed for.

"I don't think it safe to take Tom up North," he declared, with promptness and decision. "He's a good enough boy, but too smart to trust among those low-down abolitionists. I strongly suspect him of having learned to read, though I can't imagine how. I saw him with a newspaper the other day, and while he pretended to be looking at a woodcut, I'm almost sure he was reading the paper. I think it by no means safe to take him."

Dick did not insist, because he knew it was useless. The colonel would have obliged his son in any other matter, but his negroes were the outward and visible sign of his wealth and station, and therefore sacred to him.

"Whom do you think it safe to take?" asked Dick. "I suppose I'll have to have a body-servant."

"What's the matter with Grandison?" suggested the colonel. "He's handy enough, and I reckon we can trust him. He's too fond of good eating, to risk losing his regular meals; besides, he's sweet on your mother's maid, Betty, and I've promised to let 'em get married before long. I'll have Grandison up, and we'll talk to him. Here, you boy Jack," called the colonel to a yellow youth in the next room who was catching flies and pulling their wings off to pass the time, "go down to the barn and tell Grandison to come here."

"Grandison," said the colonel, when the negro stood before him, hat in hand.

"Yas, marster."

"Haven't I always treated you right?"

"Yas, marster."

"Haven't you always got all you wanted to eat?"

"Yas, marster."

"And as much whiskey and tobacco as was good for you, Grandison?"

"Y-a-s, marster."

"I should just like to know, Grandison, whether you don't think yourself a great deal better off than those poor free negroes down by the plank road, with no kind master to look after them and no mistress to give them medicine when they're sick and—and—"

"Well, I sh'd jes' reckon I is better off, suh, dan dem low-down free niggers, suh! Ef anybody ax 'em who dey b'long ter, dey has ter say nobody, er e'se lie erbout it. Anybody ax me who I b'longs ter, I ain' got no 'casion ter be shame' ter tell 'em, no, suh, 'deed I ain', suh!"

The colonel was beaming. This was true gratitude, and his feudal heart thrilled at such appreciative homage. What cold-blooded, heartless mon-

sters they were who would break up this blissful relationship of kindly protection on the one hand, of wise subordination and loyal dependence on the other! The colonel always became indignant at the mere thought of such wickedness.

"Grandison," the colonel continued, "your young master Dick is going North for a few weeks, and I am thinking of letting him take you along. I shall send you on this trip, Grandison, in order that you may take care of your young master. He will need some one to wait on him, and no one can ever do it so well as one of the boys brought up with him on the old plantation. I am going to trust him in your hands, and I'm sure you'll do your duty faithfully, and bring him back home safe and sound—to old Kentucky."

Grandison grinned. "Oh yas, marster, I'll take keer er young Mars Dick."

"I want to warn you, though, Grandison," continued the colonel impressively, "against these cussed abolitionists, who try to entice servants from their comfortable homes and their indulgent masters, from the blue skies, the green fields, and the warm sunlight of their southern home, and send them away off yonder to Canada, a dreary country, where the woods are full of wildcats and wolves and bears, where the snow lies up to the eaves of the houses for six months of the year, and the cold is so severe that it freezes your breath and curdles your blood; and where, when runaway niggers get sick and can't work, they are turned out to starve and die, unloved and uncared for. I reckon, Grandison, that you have too much sense to permit yourself to be led astray by any such foolish and wicked people."

"'Deed, suh, I would n' low none er dem cussed, low-down abolitioners ter come nigh me, suh. I'd—I'd—would I be 'lowed ter hit 'em, suh?"

"Certainly, Grandison," replied the colonel, chuckling, "hit 'em, as hard as you can. I reckon they'd rather like it. Begad, I believe they would! It would serve 'em right to be hit by a nigger!"

"Er ef I did n't hit 'em, suh," continued Grandison reflectively, "I'd tell Mars Dick, en *he'd* fix 'em. He'd smash de face off'n 'em, suh, I jes' knows he would."

"Oh yes, Grandison, your young master will protect you. You need fear no harm while he is near."

"Dey won't try ter steal me, will dey, marster?" asked the negro, with sudden alarm.

"I don't know, Grandison," replied the colonel, lighting a fresh cigar. "They're a desperate set of lunatics, and there's no telling what they may resort to. But if you stick close to your young master, and remember always that he is your best friend, and understands your real needs, and has your true interests at heart, and if you will be careful to avoid strangers who try to talk to you, you'll stand a fair chance of getting back to your home and your friends. And if you please your master Dick, he'll buy you a present, and a string of beads for Betty to wear when you and she get married in the fall."

"Thanky, marster, thanky, suh," replied Grandison, oozing gratitude at every pore; "you is a good marster, to be sho', suh; yas, 'deed you is. You kin jes' bet me and Mars Dick gwine git 'long jes' lack I wuz own boy ter Mars Dick. En it won't be my fault ef he don' want me fer his boy all de time, w'en we come back home ag'in."

"All right, Grandison, you may go now. You needn't work any more to-day, and here's a piece of tobacco for you off my own plug."

"Thanky, marster, thanky, marster! You is de bes' marster any nigger ever had in dis worl'." And Grandison bowed and scraped and disappeared round the corner, his jaws closing around a large section of the colonel's best tobacco.

"You may take Grandison," said the colonel to his son. "I allow he's abolitionist-proof."

III

Richard Owens, Esq., and servant, from Kentucky, registered at the fashionable New York hostelry for Southerners in those days, a hotel where an atmosphere congenial to Southern institutions was sedulously maintained. But there were negro waiters in the dining-room, and mulatto bell-boys, and Dick had no doubt that Grandison, with the native gregariousness and garrulousness of his race, would foregather and palaver with them sooner or later, and Dick hoped that they would speedily inoculate him with the virus of freedom. For it was not Dick's intention to say anything to his servant about his plan to free him, for obvious reasons. To mention one of them, if Grandison should go away, and by legal process be recaptured, his young master's part in the matter would doubtless become known, which would be embarrassing to Dick, to say the least. If, on the other hand, he should merely give Grandison sufficient latitude, he had no doubt he would eventually lose him. For while not exactly skeptical about Grandison's perfervid loyalty, Dick had been a somewhat keen observer of human nature, in his own indolent way, and based his expectations upon the force of the example and argument that his servant could scarcely fail to encounter. Grandison should have a fair chance to become free by his own initiative; if it should become necessary to adopt other measures to get rid of him, it would be time enough to act when the necessity arose; and Dick Owens was not the youth to take needless trouble.

The young master renewed some acquaintances and made others, and spent a week or two very pleasantly in the best society of the metropolis, easily accessible to a wealthy, well-bred young Southerner, with proper introductions. Young women smiled on him, and young men of convivial habits pressed their hospitalities; but the memory of Charity's sweet, strong face and clear blue eyes made him proof against the blandishments of the one sex and the persuasions of the other. Meanwhile he kept Grandison supplied with pocket-money, and left him mainly to his own devices. Every night when Dick came in he hoped he might have to wait upon himself, and every morning he looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of making his toilet unaided. His hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment, for every night when he came in Grandison was on hand with a bootjack,⁶ and a night-cap mixed for his young master as the colonel had taught him to mix it, and every morning Grandison appeared with his master's boots blacked and his clothes brushed, and laid his linen out for the day.

6. Device for removing close-fitting boots.

“Grandison,” said Dick one morning, after finishing his toilet, “this is the chance of your life to go around among your own people and see how they live. Have you met any of them?”

“Yas, suh, I’s seen some of ’em. But I don’ keer nuffin fer ’em, suh. Dey’re diffe’nt f’m de niggers down ou’ way. Dey ’lows dey’re free, but dey ain’ got sense ’nuff ter know dey ain’ half as well off as dey would be down Souf, whar dey’d be ’preciated.”

When two weeks had passed without any apparent effect of evil example upon Grandison, Dick resolved to go on to Boston, where he thought the atmosphere might prove more favorable to his ends. After he had been at the Revere House⁷ for a day or two without losing Grandison, he decided upon slightly different tactics.

Having ascertained from a city directory the addresses of several well-known abolitionists, he wrote them each a letter something like this:—

DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER:—

A wicked slaveholder from Kentucky, stopping at the Revere House, has dared to insult the liberty-loving people of Boston by bringing his slave into their midst. Shall this be tolerated? Or shall steps be taken in the name of liberty to rescue a fellow-man from bondage? For obvious reasons I can only sign myself,

A FRIEND OF HUMANITY.

That his letter might have an opportunity to prove effective, Dick made it a point to send Grandison away from the hotel on various errands. On one of these occasions Dick watched him for quite a distance down the street. Grandison had scarcely left the hotel when a long-haired, sharp-featured man came out behind him, followed him, soon overtook him, and kept along beside him until they turned the next corner. Dick’s hopes were roused by this spectacle, but sank correspondingly when Grandison returned to the hotel. As Grandison said nothing about the encounter, Dick hoped there might be some self-consciousness behind this unexpected reticence, the results of which might develop later on.

But Grandison was on hand again when his master came back to the hotel at night, and was in attendance again in the morning, with hot water, to assist at his master’s toilet. Dick sent him on further errands from day to day, and upon one occasion came squarely up to him—inadvertently of course—while Grandison was engaged in conversation with a young white man in clerical garb. When Grandison saw Dick approaching, he edged away from the preacher and hastened toward his master, with a very evident expression of relief upon his countenance.

“Mars Dick,” he said, “dese yer abolitioners is jes’ pesterin’ de life out er me tryin’ ter git me ter run away. I don’ pay no ’tention ter ’em, but dey riles me so sometimes dat I’m feared I’ll hit some of ’em some er dese days, an’ dat mought git me inter trouble. I ain’ said nuffin’ ter you ’bout it, Mars Dick, fer I did n’ wanter ’sturb yo’ min’; but I don’ like it, suh; no, suh, I don’! Is we gwine back home ’fo’ long, Mars Dick?”

7. Prestigious 19th-century Boston hotel, known for hosting famous guests.

"We'll be going back soon enough," replied Dick somewhat shortly, while he inwardly cursed the stupidity of a slave who could be free and would not, and registered a secret vow that if he were unable to get rid of Grandison without assassinating him, and were therefore compelled to take him back to Kentucky, he would see that Grandison got a taste of an article of slavery that would make him regret his wasted opportunities. Meanwhile he determined to tempt his servant yet more strongly.

"Grandison," he said next morning, "I'm going away for a day or two, but I shall leave you here. I shall lock up a hundred dollars in this drawer and give you the key. If you need any of it, use it and enjoy yourself,—spend it all if you like,—for this is probably the last chance you'll have for some time to be in a free State, and you'd better enjoy your liberty while you may."

When he came back a couple of days later and found the faithful Grandison at his post, and the hundred dollars intact, Dick felt seriously annoyed. His vexation was increased by the fact that he could not express his feelings adequately. He did not even scold Grandison; how could he, indeed, find fault with one who so sensibly recognized his true place in the economy of civilization, and kept it with such touching fidelity?

"I can't say a thing to him," groaned Dick. "He deserves a leather medal, made out of his own hide tanned. I reckon I'll write to father and let him know what a model servant he has given me."

He wrote his father a letter which made the colonel swell with pride and pleasure. "I really think," the colonel observed to one of his friends, "that Dick ought to have the nigger interviewed by the Boston papers, so that they may see how contented and happy our darkeys really are."

Dick also wrote a long letter to Charity Lomax, in which he said, among many other things, that if she knew how hard he was working, and under what difficulties, to accomplish something serious for her sake, she would no longer keep him in suspense, but overwhelm him with love and admiration.

Having thus exhausted without result the more obvious methods of getting rid of Grandison, and diplomacy having also proved a failure, Dick was forced to consider more radical measures. Of course he might run away himself, and abandon Grandison, but this would be merely to leave him in the United States, where he was still a slave, and where, with his notions of loyalty, he would speedily be reclaimed. It was necessary, in order to accomplish the purpose of his trip to the North, to leave Grandison permanently in Canada, where he would be legally free.

"I might extend my trip to Canada," he reflected, "but that would be too palpable. I have it! I'll visit Niagara Falls on the way home, and lose him on the Canadian side. When he once realizes that he is actually free, I'll warrant that he'll stay."

So the next day saw them westward bound, and in due course of time, by the somewhat slow conveyances of the period, they found themselves at Niagara. Dick walked and drove about the Falls for several days, taking Grandison along with him on most occasions. One morning they stood on the Canadian side, watching the wild whirl of the waters below them.

"Grandison," said Dick, raising his voice above the roar of the cataract, "do you know where you are now?"

"T's wid you, Mars Dick; dat's all I keers."

"You are now in Canada, Grandison, where your people go when they run away from their masters. If you wished, Grandison, you might walk away from me this very minute, and I could not lay my hand upon you to take you back."

Grandison looked around uneasily.

"Let's go back ober de ribber, Mars Dick. I's feared I'll lose you ovuh heah, an' den I won' hab no marster, an' won't nebber be able to git back home no mo'."

Discouraged, but not yet hopeless, Dick said, a few minutes later,—

"Grandison, I'm going up the road a bit, to the inn over yonder. You stay here until I return. I'll not be gone a great while."

Grandison's eyes opened wide and he looked somewhat fearful.

"Is dey any er dem dadblasted abolitioners roun' heah, Mars Dick?"

"I don't imagine that there are," replied his master, hoping there might be. "But I'm not afraid of *your* running away, Grandison. I only wish I were," he added to himself.

Dick walked leisurely down the road to where the whitewashed inn, built of stone, with true British solidity, loomed up through the trees by the roadside. Arrived there he ordered a glass of ale and a sandwich, and took a seat at a table by a window, from which he could see Grandison in the distance. For a while he hoped that the seed he had sown might have fallen on fertile ground, and that Grandison, relieved from the restraining power of a master's eye, and finding himself in a free country, might get up and walk away; but the hope was vain, for Grandison remained faithfully at his post, awaiting his master's return. He had seated himself on a broad flat stone, and, turning his eyes away from the grand and awe-inspiring spectacle that lay close at hand, was looking anxiously toward the inn where his master sat cursing his ill-timed fidelity.

By and by a girl came into the room to serve his order, and Dick very naturally glanced at her; and as she was young and pretty and remained in attendance, it was some minutes before he looked for Grandison. When he did so his faithful servant had disappeared.

To pay his reckoning and go away without the change was a matter quickly accomplished. Retracing his footsteps toward the Falls, he saw, to his great disgust, as he approached the spot where he had left Grandison, the familiar form of his servant stretched out on the ground, his face to the sun, his mouth open, sleeping the time away, oblivious alike to the grandeur of the scenery, the thunderous roar of the cataract, or the insidious voice of sentiment.

"Grandison," soliloquized his master, as he stood gazing down at his ebony encumbrance, "I do not deserve to be an American citizen; I ought not to have the advantages I possess over you; and I certainly am not worthy of Charity Lomax, if I am not smart enough to get rid of you. I have an idea! You shall yet be free, and I will be the instrument of your deliverance. Sleep on, faithful and affectionate servitor, and dream of the blue grass and the bright skies of old Kentucky, for it is only in your dreams that you will ever see them again!"

Dick retraced his footsteps toward the inn. The young woman chanced to look out of the window and saw the handsome young gentleman she had

waited on a few minutes before, standing in the road a short distance away, apparently engaged in earnest conversation with a colored man employed as hostler⁸ for the inn. She thought she saw something pass from the white man to the other, but at that moment her duties called her away from the window, and when she looked out again the young gentleman had disappeared, and the hostler, with two other young men of the neighborhood, one white and one colored, were walking rapidly towards the Falls.

IV

Dick made the journey homeward alone, and as rapidly as the conveyances of the day would permit. As he drew near home his conduct in going back without Grandison took on a more serious aspect than it had borne at any previous time, and although he had prepared the colonel by a letter sent several days ahead, there was still the prospect of a bad quarter of an hour with him; not, indeed, that his father would upbraid him, but he was likely to make searching inquiries. And notwithstanding the vein of quiet recklessness that had carried Dick through his preposterous scheme, he was a very poor liar, having rarely had occasion or inclination to tell anything but the truth. Any reluctance to meet his father was more than offset, however, by a stronger force drawing him homeward, for Charity Lomax must long since have returned from her visit to her aunt in Tennessee.

Dick got off easier than he had expected. He told a straight story, and a truthful one, so far as it went.

The colonel raged at first, but rage soon subsided into anger, and anger moderated into annoyance, and annoyance into a sort of garrulous sense of injury. The colonel thought he had been hardly used; he had trusted this negro, and he had broken faith. Yet, after all, he did not blame Grandison so much as he did the abolitionists, who were undoubtedly at the bottom of it.

As for Charity Lomax, Dick told her, privately of course, that he had run his father's man, Grandison, off to Canada, and left him there.

"Oh, Dick," she had said with shuddering alarm, "what have you done? If they knew it they'd send you to the penitentiary, like they did that Yankee."

"But they don't know it," he had replied seriously; adding, with an injured tone, "you don't seem to appreciate my heroism like you did that of the Yankee; perhaps it's because I wasn't caught and sent to the penitentiary. I thought you wanted me to do it."

"Why, Dick Owens!" she exclaimed. "You know I never dreamed of any such outrageous proceeding."

"But I presume I'll have to marry you," she concluded, after some insistence on Dick's part, "if only to take care of you. You are too reckless for anything; and a man who goes chasing all over the North, being entertained by New York and Boston society and having negroes to throw away, needs some one to look after him."

8. Attendant for travelers' horses.

“It’s a most remarkable thing,” replied Dick fervently, “that your views correspond exactly with my profoundest convictions. It proves beyond question that we were made for one another.”

They were married three weeks later. As each of them had just returned from a journey, they spent their honeymoon at home.

A week after the wedding they were seated, one afternoon, on the piazza of the colonel’s house, where Dick had taken his bride, when a negro from the yard ran down the lane and threw open the big gate for the colonel’s buggy to enter. The colonel was not alone. Beside him, ragged and travel-stained, bowed with weariness, and upon his face a haggard look that told of hardship and privation, sat the lost Grandison.

The colonel alighted at the steps.

“Take the lines, Tom,” he said to the man who had opened the gate, “and drive round to the barn. Help Grandison down,—poor devil, he’s so stiff he can hardly move!—and get a tub of water and wash him and rub him down, and feed him, and give him a big drink of whiskey, and then let him come round and see his young master and his new mistress.”

The colonel’s face wore an expression compounded of joy and indignation,—joy at the restoration of a valuable piece of property; indignation for reasons he proceeded to state.

“It’s astounding, the depths of depravity the human heart is capable of! I was coming along the road three miles away, when I heard some one call me from the roadside. I pulled up the mare, and who should come out of the woods but Grandison. The poor nigger could hardly crawl along, with the help of a broken limb. I was never more astonished in my life. You could have knocked me down with a feather. He seemed pretty far gone,—he could hardly talk above a whisper,—and I had to give him a mouthful of whiskey to brace him up so he could tell his story. It’s just as I thought from the beginning, Dick; Grandison had no notion of running away; he knew when he was well off, and where his friends were. All the persuasions of abolition liars and runaway niggers did not move him. But the desperation of those fanatics knew no bounds; their guilty consciences gave them no rest. They got the notion somehow that Grandison belonged to a nigger-catcher, and had been brought North as a spy to help capture ungrateful runaway servants. They actually kidnapped him—just think of it!—and gagged him and bound him and threw him rudely into a wagon, and carried him into the gloomy depths of a Canadian forest, and locked him in a lonely hut, and fed him on bread and water for three weeks. One of the scoundrels wanted to kill him, and persuaded the others that it ought to be done; but they got to quarreling about how they should do it, and before they had their minds made up Grandison escaped, and, keeping his back steadily to the North Star, made his way, after suffering incredible hardships, back to the old plantation, back to his master, his friends, and his home. Why, it’s as good as one of Scott’s novels! Mr. Simms⁹ or some other one of our Southern authors ought to write it up.”

9. William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870), one of the antebellum South’s most admired writers. Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), British author whose historical novels were immensely popular in the South.

“Don’t you think, sir,” suggested Dick, who had calmly smoked his cigar throughout the colonel’s animated recital, “that that kidnapping yarn sounds a little improbable? Isn’t there some more likely explanation?”

“Nonsense, Dick; it’s the gospel truth! Those infernal abolitionists are capable of anything—everything! Just think of their locking the poor, faithful nigger up, beating him, kicking him, depriving him of his liberty, keeping him on bread and water for three long, lonesome weeks, and he all the time pining for the old plantation!”

There were almost tears in the colonel’s eyes at the picture of Grandison’s sufferings that he conjured up. Dick still professed to be slightly skeptical, and met Charity’s severely questioning eye with bland unconsciousness.

The colonel killed the fatted calf¹ for Grandison, and for two or three weeks the returned wanderer’s life was a slave’s dream of pleasure. His fame spread throughout the county, and the colonel gave him a permanent place among the house servants, where he could always have him conveniently at hand to relate his adventures to admiring visitors.

About three weeks after Grandison’s return the colonel’s faith in sable humanity was rudely shaken, and its foundations almost broken up. He came near losing his belief in the fidelity of the negro to his master,—the servile virtue most highly prized and most sedulously cultivated by the colonel and his kind. One Monday morning Grandison was missing. And not only Grandison, but his wife, Betty the maid; his mother, aunt Eunice; his father, uncle Ike; his brothers, Tom and John, and his little sister Elsie, were likewise absent from the plantation; and a hurried search and inquiry in the neighborhood resulted in no information as to their whereabouts. So much valuable property could not be lost without an effort to recover it, and the wholesale nature of the transaction carried consternation to the hearts of those whose ledgers were chiefly bound in black. Extremely energetic measures were taken by the colonel and his friends. The fugitives were traced, and followed from point to point, on their northward run through Ohio. Several times the hunters were close upon their heels, but the magnitude of the escaping party begot unusual vigilance on the part of those who sympathized with the fugitives, and strangely enough, the underground railroad² seemed to have had its tracks cleared and signals set for this particular train. Once, twice, the colonel thought he had them, but they slipped through his fingers.

One last glimpse he caught of his vanishing property, as he stood, accompanied by a United States marshal, on a wharf at a port on the south shore of Lake Erie. On the stern of a small steamboat which was receding rapidly from the wharf, with her nose pointing toward Canada, there stood a group of familiar dark faces, and the look they cast backward was not one of longing for the fleshpots of Egypt.³ The colonel saw Grandison point him out to one of the crew of the vessel, who waved his hand derisively toward the colonel. The latter shook his fist impotently—and the incident was closed.

1899

1. When the prodigal son of Jesus’ parable returned home from a life of dissipation, his joyful father butchered a calf for a special feast (Luke 15.11–32).

2. The safe havens in the homes of abolitionists along the dangerous escape route from the

South to Canada.

3. When the fleeing Israelites began to starve in the desert, they complained to Moses that they preferred the full pots of meat they had had as slaves in Egypt (Exodus 16.2–3).

PAULINE ELIZABETH HOPKINS

1859–1930

As an author and editor, Pauline E. Hopkins played a significant role in the development of African American literature in the United States. Like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Hopkins was an outspoken journalist, but she was also a gifted storyteller whose fiction mingles suspenseful, even sensational story lines with forceful analysis of turn-of-the-century debates on race. Unlike Booker T. Washington, Hopkins was suspicious of political accommodation with whites as long as blacks were subjected to Jim Crow segregationist practices and remained vulnerable to lynching and other acts of racist violence. She believed that fiction in particular could play a crucial role in encouraging African Americans to continue their struggle for civil rights in the United States, while taking pride in their larger diasporic connections to blacks of the southern Americas and Africa. Hopkins wrote in the introduction to one of her novels, “Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political, and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lies dormant in our history, and, as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race.”

Hopkins was born in Portland, Maine, the only child of Sarah A. Allen and Benjamin Northrup, members of prominent African American families based in Exeter, New Hampshire, and Providence, Rhode Island, respectively. Her forebears included the Reverends Nathaniel and Thomas Paul, founders of the first Baptist church in Boston for blacks, their activist sister Susan Paul, and the poet James M. Whitfield. The family moved to Boston when Hopkins was ready for school, and she was encouraged to become involved with the intellectual and cultural life of black Boston. As a teen, she was recognized for her writing in an essay contest, and she received the prize from no less a figure than William Wells Brown, the formerly enslaved author and abolitionist. Hopkins also performed with her family, which had established the Hopkins Colored Troubadours, as an actress, singer, and musician. Several years after graduating from the Girls' High School, an integrated public school in Boston, her play *The Slaves' Escape; or, the Underground Railroad* was performed in Boston in 1880 by her family's theatrical company. Inspired by the group of African American women whom W. E. B. Du Bois would call “the New Women of Color” of the “Black Brahmin” class of Boston, Hopkins during the 1880s and 1890s participated in various literary and reading societies, gave lectures on black history, and joined the National Association of Colored Women when it was founded in 1896. To support herself, she took a job as a stenographer for the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, work she continued until 1900, when she helped to found the *Colored American Magazine*, a journal aiming to make literature relevant to African Americans' political and intellectual advancement.

The turn of the twentieth century was a period of unprecedented literary activity by African American artists such as Charles W. Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar. At this time, Hopkins began writing in earnest as well, producing a large corpus of writing in prose that included short fiction, history, and biographical sketches. In 1900 she published her first and best-known novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900). While working at the

Colored American Magazine, initially as editor of the Women's Department and then as literary editor, Hopkins published in the journal a number of essays and short stories as well as three serialized novels: *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901); *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902); and *Of One Blood; or, the Hidden Self* (1902). Hopkins's four novels focus on African American female protagonists and are often melodramatic, with surprising twists and an interest in the supernatural and occult. Her fiction borrows from the traditions of sentiment and sensation, with plots that, as in "Talma Gordon," frequently turn on secret family histories and mysterious, unsolved crimes. Like her contemporary Chesnutt, she uses these narrative devices to stir readers into rethinking the assumptions that supported racial inequality and even the concept of race itself—a provocation that continues to bring new readers to her fiction.

Hopkins's association with the *Colored American Magazine* ended in 1904 when Booker T. Washington gained control of the journal and had her fired because of her resistance to his accommodationist approach to race relations. Hopkins complained in a letter to a friend about "the revengeful tactics of Mr. Washington's men." The loss of her job at the *Colored American Magazine* made Hopkins considerably less visible as a literary presence. But she continued to work in journalism, and in 1905 she cofounded her own publishing company, P. E. Hopkins and Co.; its only book, published the same year, was her *Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by Its Descendants—With an Epilogue*. She cofounded and became an editor at the *New Era Magazine* in 1916, but the journal failed. She worked as a stenographer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for many years, with her achievements as an editor, publisher, and writer going virtually unrecognized in her lifetime. In the late 1980s, Oxford University Press republished Hopkins's novels as part of the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, an event that generated a new audience for her fiction among contemporary readers.

Talma Gordon¹

The Canterbury Club of Boston was holding its regular monthly meeting at the palatial Beacon-street residence of Dr. William Thornton, expert medical practitioner and specialist. All the members were present, because some rare opinions were to be aired by men of profound thought on a question of vital importance to the life of the Republic, and because the club celebrated its anniversary in a home usually closed to society. The Doctor's winters, since his marriage, were passed at his summer home near his celebrated sanatorium. This winter found him in town with his wife and two boys. We had heard much of the beauty of the former, who was entirely unknown to social life, and about whose life and marriage we felt sure a romantic interest attached. The Doctor himself was too bright a luminary of the professional world to remain long hidden without creating comment. We had accepted the invitation to dine with alacrity, knowing that we should be welcomed to a banquet that would feast both eye and palate; but we had not

1. Originally published in the October 1900 issue of the *Colored American Magazine*, from which the present text is taken.

been favored by even a glimpse of the hostess. The subject for discussion was: "Expansion: Its Effect upon the Future Development of the Anglo-Saxon throughout the World."

Dinner was over, but we still sat about the social board discussing the question of the hour. The Hon. Herbert Clapp, eminent jurist and politician, had painted in glowing colors the advantages to be gained by the increase of wealth and the exalted position which expansion would give the United States in the councils of the great governments of the world. In smoothly flowing sentences marshalled in rhetorical order, with compact ideas, and incisive argument, he drew an effective picture with all the persuasive eloquence of the trained orator.

Joseph Whitman, the theologian of world-wide fame, accepted the arguments of Mr. Clapp, but subordinated all to the great opportunity which expansion would give to the religious enthusiast. None could doubt the sincerity of this man, who looked once into the idealized face on which heaven had set the seal of consecration.

Various opinions were advanced by the twenty-five men present, but the host said nothing; he glanced from one to another with a look of amusement in his shrewd gray-blue eyes. "Wonderful eyes," said his patients who came under their magic spell. "A wonderful man and a wonderful mind," agreed his contemporaries, as they heard in amazement of some great cure of chronic or malignant disease which approached the supernatural.

"What do you think of this question, Doctor?" finally asked the president, turning to the silent host.

"Your arguments are good; they would convince almost anyone."

"But not Doctor Thornton," laughed the theologian.

"I acquiesce which ever way the result turns. Still, I like to view both sides of a question. We have considered but one tonight. Did you ever think that in spite of our prejudices against amalgamation,² some of our descendants, indeed many of them, will inevitably intermarry among those far-off tribes of dark-skinned peoples, if they become a part of this great Union?"

"Among the lower classes that may occur, but not to any great extent," remarked a college president.

"My experience teaches me that it will occur among all classes, and to an appalling extent," replied the Doctor.

"You don't believe in intermarriage with other races?"

"Yes, most emphatically, when they possess decent moral development and physical perfection, for then we develop a superior being in the progeny born of the intermarriage. But if we are not ready to receive and assimilate the new material which will be brought to mingle with our pure Anglo-Saxon stream, we should call a halt in our expansion policy."

"I must confess, Doctor, that in the idea of amalgamation you present a new thought to my mind. Will you not favor us with a few of your main points?" asked the president of the club, breaking the silence which followed the Doctor's remarks.

2. Intermarriage and reproduction between members of different racial or ethnic groups.

“Yes, Doctor, give us your theories on the subject. We may not agree with you, but we are all open to conviction.”

The Doctor removed the half-consumed cigar from his lips, drank what remained in his glass of the choice Burgundy, and leaning back in his chair contemplated the earnest faces before him.

“We may make laws, but laws are but straws in the hands of Omnipotence.

‘There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.’³

And no man may combat fate. Given a man, propinquity, opportunity, fascinating femininity, and there you are. Black, white, green, yellow—nothing will prevent intermarriage. Position, wealth, family, friends—all sink into insignificance before the God-implanted instinct that made Adam, awakening from a deep sleep and finding the woman beside him, accept Eve as bone of his bone; he cared not nor questioned whence she came. So it is with the sons of Adam ever since, through the law of heredity which makes us all one common family. And so it will be with us in our re-formation of this old Republic. Perhaps I can make my meaning clearer by illustration, and with your permission I will tell you a story which came under my observation as a practitioner.

“Doubtless all of you heard of the terrible tragedy which occurred at Gordonville, Mass., some years ago, when Capt. Jonathan Gordon, his wife, and little son were murdered. I suppose that I am the only man on this side the Atlantic, outside of the police, who can tell you the true story of that crime.

“I knew Captain Gordon well; it was through his persuasions that I bought a place in Gordonville and settled down to spending my summers in that charming rural neighborhood. I had rendered the Captain what he was pleased to call valuable medical help, and I became his family physician. Captain Gordon was a retired sea captain, formerly engaged in the East India trade. All his ancestors had been such; but when the bottom fell out of that business he established the Gordonville Mills with his first wife’s money, and settled down as a money-making manufacturer of cotton cloth. The Gordons were old New England Puritans who had come over in the *Mayflower*; they had owned Gordon Hall for more than a hundred years. It was a baronial-like pile of granite with towers, standing on a hill which commanded a superb view of Massachusetts Bay and the surrounding country. I imagine the Gordon star was under a cloud about the time Captain Jonathan married his first wife, Miss Isabel Franklin of Boston, who brought to him the money which mended the broken fortunes of the Gordon house, and restored this old Puritan stock to its rightful position. In the person of Captain Gordon the austerity of manner and indomitable will-power that he had inherited were combined with a temper that brooked no contradiction.

“The first wife died at the birth of her third child, leaving him two daughters, Jeannette and Talma. Very soon after her death the Captain married again. I have heard it rumored that the Gordon girls did not get on very

3. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.

well with their stepmother. She was a woman with no fortune of her own, and envied the large portion left by the first Mrs. Gordon to her daughters.

“Jeannette was tall, dark, and stern like her father; Talma was like her dead mother, and possessed of great talent, so great that her father sent her to the American Academy at Rome, to develop the gift. It was the hottest of July days when her friends were bidden to an afternoon party on the lawn and a dance in the evening, to welcome Talma Gordon among them again. I watched her as she moved about among her guests, a fairylike blonde in floating white draperies, her face a study in delicate changing tints, like the heart of a flower, sparkling in smiles about the mouth to end in merry laughter in the clear blue eyes. There were all the subtle allurements of birth, wealth and culture about the exquisite creature:

‘Smiling, frowning evermore,
Thou art perfect in love-lore,
Ever varying Madeline,’⁴

quoted a celebrated writer as he stood apart with me, gazing upon the scene before us. He sighed as he looked at the girl.

“Doctor, there is genius and passion in her face. Sometime our little friend will do wonderful things. But is it desirable to be singled out for special blessings by the gods? Genius always carries with it intense capacity for suffering: “Whom the gods love die young.”

“Ah,” I replied, ‘do not name death and Talma Gordon together. Cease your dismal croakings; such talk is rank heresy.’

“The dazzling daylight dropped slowly into summer twilight. The merriment continued; more guests arrived; the great dancing pagoda built for the occasion was lighted by myriads of Japanese lanterns. The strains from the band grew sweeter and sweeter, and ‘all went merry as a marriage bell.’⁵ It was a rare treat to have this party at Gordon Hall, for Captain Jonathan was not given to hospitality. We broke up shortly before midnight, with expressions of delight from all the guests.

“I was a bachelor then, without ties. Captain Gordon insisted upon my having a bed at the Hall. I did not fall asleep readily; there seemed to be something in the air that forbade it. I was still awake when a distant clock struck the second hour of the morning. Suddenly the heavens were lighted by a sheet of ghastly light; a terrific midsummer thunderstorm was breaking over the sleeping town. A lurid flash lit up all the landscape, painting the trees in grotesque shapes against the murky sky, and defining clearly the sullen blackness of the waters of the bay breaking in grandeur against the rocky coast. I had arisen and put back the draperies from the windows, to have an unobstructed view of the grand scene. A low muttering coming nearer and nearer, a terrific roar, and then a tremendous downpour. The storm had burst.

“Now the uncanny howling of a dog mingled with the rattling volleys of thunder. I heard the opening and closing of doors; the servants were about looking after things. It was impossible to sleep. The lightning was more vivid. There was a blinding flash of a greenish-white tinge mingled with the crash

4. From “Madeline,” by English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892).

5. From “Eve of Waterloo,” by English poet Lord Byron (1788–1824).

of falling timbers. Then before my startled gaze arose columns of red flames reflected against the sky. 'Heaven help us!' I cried; 'it is the left tower; it has been struck and is on fire!'

"I hurried on my clothes and stepped into the corridor; the girls were there before me. Jeannette came up to me instantly with anxious face. 'Oh, Doctor Thornton, what shall we do? Papa and Mamma and little Johnny are in the old left tower. It is on fire. I have knocked and knocked, but get no answer.'

"'Don't be alarmed,' said I soothingly. 'Jenkins, ring the alarm bell,' I continued, turning to the butler who was standing near; 'the rest follow me. We will force the entrance to the Captain's room.'

"Instantly, it seemed to me, the bell boomed out upon the now silent air, for the storm had died down as quickly as it arose: and as our little procession paused before the entrance to the old left tower, we could distinguish the sound of the fire engines already on their way from the village.

"The door resisted all our efforts; there seemed to be a barrier against it which nothing could move. The flames were gaining headway. Still the same deathly silence within the rooms.

"'Oh, will they never get here?' cried Talma, ringing her hands in terror. Jeannette said nothing, but her face was ashen. The servants were huddled together in a panic-stricken group. I can never tell you what a relief it was when we heard the first sound of the firemen's voices, saw their quick movements, and heard the ringing of the axes with which they cut away every obstacle to our entrance to the rooms. The neighbors who had just enjoyed the hospitality of the house were now gathered around offering all the assistance in their power. In less than fifteen minutes the fire was out, and the men began to bear the unconscious inmates from the ruins. They carried them to the pagoda so lately the scene of mirth and pleasure, and I took up my station there, ready to assume my professional duties. The Captain was nearest me; and as I stooped to make the necessary examination I reeled away from the ghastly sight which confronted me—*gentlemen, across the Captain's throat was a deep gash that severed the jugular vein!*"

The Doctor paused, and the hand with which he refilled his glass trembled violently.

"'What is it, Doctor?' cried the men gathering about me.

"'Take the women away; this is murder!'

"'Murder!' cried Jeannette, as she fell against the side of the pagoda.

"'Murder!' screamed Talma, staring at me as if unable to grasp my meaning.

"I continued my examination of the bodies, and found that the same thing had happened to Mrs. Gordon and to little Johnny.

"The police were notified; and when the sun rose over the dripping town he found them in charge of Gordon Hall, the servants standing in excited knots talking over the crime, the friends of the family confounded, and the two girls trying to comfort each other and realize the terrible misfortune that had overtaken them.

"Nothing in the rooms of the left tower seemed to have been disturbed. The door of communication between the rooms of the husband and wife was open, as they had arranged it for the night. Little Johnny's crib was placed beside his mother's bed. In it he was found as though never awakened by the storm. It was quite evident that the assassin was no common ruffian.

The chief gave strict orders for a watch to be kept on all strangers or suspicious characters who were seen in the neighborhood. He made inquiries among the servants, seeing each one separately, but there was nothing gained from them. No one had heard anything suspicious; all had been awakened by the storm. The chief was puzzled. Here was a triple crime for which no motive could be assigned.

“What do you think of it?” I asked him, as we stood together on the lawn.

“It is my opinion that the deed was committed by one of the higher classes, which makes the mystery more difficult to solve. I tell you, Doctor, there are mysteries that never come to light, and this, I think, is one of them.”

“While we were talking Jenkins, the butler, an old and trusted servant, came up to the chief and saluted respectfully. ‘Want to speak with me, Jenkins?’ he asked. The man nodded, and they walked away together.

“The story of the inquest was short, but appalling. It was shown that Talma had been allowed to go abroad to study because she and Mrs. Gordon did not get on well together. From the testimony of Jenkins it seemed that Talma and her father had quarrelled bitterly about her lover, a young artist whom she had met at Rome, who was unknown to fame, and very poor. There had been terrible things said by each, and threats even had passed, all of which now rose up in judgment against the unhappy girl. The examination of the family solicitor revealed the fact that Captain Gordon intended to leave his daughters only a small annuity, the bulk of the fortune going to his son Jonathan, junior. This was a monstrous injustice, as everyone felt. In vain Talma protested her innocence. Someone must have done it. No one would be benefited so much by these deaths as she and her sister. Moreover, the will, together with other papers, was nowhere to be found. Not the slightest clue bearing upon the disturbing elements in this family, if any there were, was to be found. As the only surviving relatives, Jeannette and Talma became joint heirs to an immense fortune, which only for the bloody tragedy just enacted would, in all probability, have passed them by. Here was the motive. The case was very black against Talma. The foreman stood up. The silence was intense: ‘We find that Capt. Jonathan Gordon, Mary E. Gordon, and Jonathan Gordon, junior, all deceased, came to their deaths by means of a knife or other sharp instrument in the hands of Talma Gordon.’ The girl was like one stricken with death. The flower-like mouth was drawn and pinched; the great sapphire-blue eyes were black with passionate anguish, terror, and despair. She was placed in jail to await her trial at the fall session of the criminal court. The excitement in the hitherto quiet town rose to fever heat. Many points in the evidence seemed incomplete to thinking men. The weapon could not be found, nor could it be divined what had become of it. No reason could be given for the murder except the quarrel between Talma and her father and the ill will which existed between the girl and her stepmother.

“When the trial was called Jeannette sat beside Talma in the prisoner’s dock; both were arrayed in deepest mourning. Talma was pale and careworn, but seemed uplifted, spiritualized, as it were. Upon Jeannette the full realization of her sister’s peril seemed to weigh heavily. She had changed much too: hollow cheeks, tottering steps, eyes blazing with fever, all suggestive of rapid and premature decay. From far-off Italy Edward Turner, growing famous in the art world, came to stand beside his girl-love in this hour of anguish.

“The trial was a memorable one. No additional evidence had been collected to strengthen the prosecution; when the attorney-general rose to open the case against Talma he knew, as everyone else did, that he could not convict solely on the evidence adduced. What was given did not always bear upon the case, and brought out strange stories of Captain Jonathan’s methods. Tales were told of sailors who had sworn to take his life, in revenge for injuries inflicted upon them by his hand. One or two clues were followed, but without avail. The judge summed up the evidence impartially, giving the prisoner the benefit of the doubt. The points in hand furnished valuable collateral evidence, but were not direct proof. Although the moral presumption was against the prisoner, legal evidence was lacking to actually convict. The jury found the prisoner ‘Not Guilty,’ owing to the fact that the evidence was entirely circumstantial. The verdict was received in painful silence; then a murmur of discontent ran through the great crowd.

“‘She must have done it,’ said one; ‘who else has been benefited by the horrible deed?’

“‘A poor woman would not have fared so well at the hands of the jury, nor a homely one either, for that matter,’ said another.

“The great Gordon trial was ended; innocent or guilty, Talma Gordon could not be tried again. She was free; but her liberty, with blasted prospects and fair fame gone forever, was valueless to her. She seemed to have but one object in her mind: to find the murderer or murderers of her parents and half-brother. By her direction the shrewdest of detectives were employed and money flowed like water, but to no purpose; the Gordon tragedy remained a mystery. I had consented to act as one of the trustees of the immense Gordon estates and business interests, and by my advice the Misses Gordon went abroad. A year later I received a letter from Edward Turner, saying that Jeannette Gordon had died suddenly at Rome, and that Talma, after refusing all his entreaties for an early marriage, had disappeared, leaving no clue as to her whereabouts. I could give the poor fellow no comfort, although I had been duly notified of the death of Jeannette by Talma, in a letter telling me where to forward her remittances, and at the same time requesting me to keep her present residence secret, especially from Edward.

“I had established a sanitarium for the cure of chronic diseases at Gordonville, and absorbed in the cares of my profession I gave little thought to the Gordons. I seemed fated to be involved in mysteries.

“A man claiming to be an Englishman, and fresh from the California gold fields, engaged board and professional service at my retreat. I found him suffering in the grasp of the tubercle⁶ fiend—the last stages. He called himself Simon Cameron. Seldom have I seen so fascinating and wicked a face. The lines of the mouth were cruel, the eyes cold and sharp, the smile mocking and evil. He had money in plenty but seemed to have no friends, for he had received no letters and had had no visitors in the time he had been with us. He was an enigma to me; and his nationality puzzled me, for of course I did not believe his story of being English. The peaceful influence of the house seemed to sooth him in a measure, and make his last steps to the mysterious valley⁷ as easy as possible. For a time he improved, and would sit or walk

6. Tuberculosis.

7. Alludes to the “valley of death” (Psalm 23).

about the grounds and sing sweet songs for the pleasure of the other inmates. Strange to say, his malady only affected his voice at times. He sang quaint songs in a silvery tenor of great purity and sweetness that was delicious to the listening ear:

‘A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail
And bends the gallant mast;
And bends the gallant mast, my Boys;
While like the eagle free,
Away the good ship flies, and leaves
Old England on the lea.’⁸

“There are few singers on the lyric stage who could surpass Simon Cameron.

“One night, a few weeks after Cameron’s arrival, I sat in my office making up my accounts when the door opened and closed; I glanced up, expecting to see a servant. A lady advanced toward me. She threw back her veil, and then I saw that Talma Gordon, or her ghost, stood before me. After the first excitement of our meeting was over, she told me she had come direct from Paris, to place herself in my care. I had studied her attentively during the first moments of our meeting, and I felt that she was right; unless something unforeseen happened to arouse her from the stupor into which she seemed to have fallen, the last Gordon was doomed to an early death. The next day I told her I had cabled Edward Turner to come to her.

“‘It will do no good; I cannot marry him,’ was her only comment.

“‘Have you no feeling of pity for that faithful fellow?’ I asked her sternly, provoked by her seeming indifference. I shall never forget the varied emotions depicted on her speaking face. Fully revealed to my gaze was the sight of a human soul tortured beyond the point of endurance; suffering all things, enduring all things, in the silent agony of despair.

“In a few days Edward arrived and Talma consented to see him and explain her refusal to keep her promise to him. ‘You must be present, Doctor; it is due your long, tried friendship to know that I have not been fickle, but have acted from the best and strongest motives.’

“I shall never forget that day. It was directly after lunch that we met in the library. I was greatly excited, expecting I knew not what. Edward was agitated, too. Talma was the only calm one. She handed me what seemed to be a letter, with the request that I would read it. Even now I think I can repeat every word of the document, so indelibly are the words engraved upon my mind:

MY DARLING SISTER TALMA: When you read these lines I shall be no more, for I shall not live to see your life blasted by the same knowledge that has blighted mine.

One evening, about a year before your expected return from Rome, I climbed into a hammock in one corner of the veranda outside the

8. From “Sea Song,” by Scottish poet Allan Cunningham (1784–1842).

breakfast-room windows, intending to spend the twilight hours in lazy comfort, for it was very hot, enervating August weather. I fell asleep. I was awakened by voices. Because of the heat the rooms had been left in semi-darkness. As I lay there, lazily enjoying the beauty of the perfect summer night, my wandering thoughts were arrested by words spoken by our father to Mrs. Gordon, for they were the occupants of the breakfast-room.

“Never fear, Mary; Johnny shall have it all—money, houses, land and business.”

“But if you do go first, Jonathan, what will happen if the girls contest the will? People will think that they ought to have the money as it appears to be theirs by law. I never could survive the terrible disgrace of the story.”

“Don’t borrow trouble; all you would need to do would be to show them papers I have drawn up, and they would be glad to take their annuity and say nothing. After all, I do not think it is so bad. Jeannette can teach; Talma can paint; six hundred dollars a year is quite enough for them.”

I had been somewhat mystified by the conversation until now. This last remark solved the riddle. What could he mean? teach, paint, six hundred a year! With my usual impetuosity I sprang from my resting-place, and in a moment stood in the room confronting my father, and asking what he meant. I could see plainly that both were disconcerted by my unexpected appearance.

“Ah, wretched girl! you have been listening. But what could I expect of your mother’s daughter?”

At these words I felt the indignant blood rush to my head in a torrent. So it had been all my life. Before you could remember, Talma, I had felt my little heart swell with anger at the disparaging hints and slurs concerning our mother. Now was my time. I determined that tonight I would know why she was looked upon as an outcast, and her children subjected to every humiliation. So I replied to my father in bitter anger:

“I was not listening; I fell asleep in the hammock. What do you mean by a paltry six hundred a year each to Talma and to me? ‘My mother’s daughter’ demands an explanation from you, sir, of the meaning of the monstrous injustice that you have always practised toward my sister and me.”

“Speak more respectfully to your father, Jeannette,” broke in Mrs. Gordon.

“How is it, madam, that you look for respect from one whom you have delighted to torment ever since you came into this most unhappy family?”

“Hush, both of you,” said Captain Gordon, who seemed to have recovered from the dismay into which my sudden appearance and passionate words had plunged him. “I think I may as well tell you as to wait. Since you know so much you may as well know the whole miserable story.” He motioned me to a seat. I could see that he was deeply agitated. I seated myself in a chair he pointed out, in wonder and expectation,—expectation of I knew not what. I trembled. This was a supreme moment in my life; I felt it. The air was heavy with the intense stillness that had

settled over us as the common sounds of day gave place to the early quiet of the rural evening. I could see Mrs. Gordon's face as she sat within the radius of the lighted hallway. There was a smile of triumph upon it. I clinched my hands and bit my lips until the blood came, in the effort to keep from screaming. What was I about to hear? At last he spoke:

"I was disappointed at your birth, and also at the birth of Talma. I wanted a male heir. When I knew that I should again be a father I was torn by hope and fear, but I comforted myself with the thought that luck would be with me in the birth of the third child. When the doctor brought me word that a son was born to the house of Gordon, I was wild with delight, and did not notice his disturbed countenance. In the midst of my joy he said to me:

'Captain Gordon, there is something strange about this birth. I want you to see this child.'

Quelling my exultation I followed him to the nursery, and there, lying in the cradle, I saw a child dark as a mulatto, with the characteristic features of the Negro! I was stunned. Gradually it dawned upon me that there was something radically wrong. I turned to the doctor for an explanation.

'There is but one explanation, Captain Gordon; there is Negro blood in the child.'

'There is no Negro blood in my veins,' I said proudly. Then I paused—*the mother!*—I glanced at the doctor. He was watching me intently. The same thought was in his mind. I must have lived a thousand years in that cursed five seconds that I stood there confronting the physician and trying to think. 'Come,' said I to him, 'let us end this suspense.' Without thinking of consequences, I hurried away to your mother and accused her of infidelity to her marriage vows. I raved like a madman. Your mother fell into convulsions; her life was despaired of. I sent for Mr. and Mrs. Franklin, and then I learned the truth. They were childless. One year while on a Southern tour, they befriended an octoroon⁹ girl who had been abandoned by her white lover. Her child was a beautiful girl baby. They, being Northern born, thought little of caste distinction because the child showed no trace of Negro blood. They determined to adopt it. They went abroad, secretly sending back word to their friends at a proper time, of the birth of a little daughter. No one doubted the truth of the statement. They made Isabel their heiress, and all went well until the birth of your brother. Your mother and the unfortunate babe died. This is the story which, if known, would bring dire disgrace upon the Gordon family.

To appease my righteous wrath, Mr. Franklin left a codicil to his will by which all the property is left at my disposal save a small annuity to you and your sister."

I sat there after he had finished his story, stunned by what I had heard. I understood, now, Mrs. Gordon's half contemptuous toleration and lack of consideration for us both. As I rose from my seat to leave the room, I said to Captain Gordon:

9. Term for a person of one-eighth African or African American ancestry.

“Still, in spite of all, sir, I am a Gordon, legally born. I will not tamely give up my birthright.”

I left that room a broken-hearted girl, filled with a desire for revenge upon this man, my father, who, by his manner disowned us without regret. Not once in that remarkable interview did he speak of our mother as his wife. He quietly repudiated her and us with all the cold cruelty of relentless caste prejudice. I heard the treatment of your lover’s proposal; I knew why Captain Gordon’s consent to your marriage was withheld.

The night of the reception and dance was the chance for which I had waited, planned and watched. I crept from my window into the ivy-vines, and down, down, until I stood upon the window-sill of Captain Gordon’s room in the old left tower. How did I do it, you ask? I do not know. The house was silent after the revel; the darkness of the gathering storm favored me, too. The lawyer was there that day. The will was signed and put safely away among my father’s papers. I was determined to have the will and the other documents bearing upon the case, and I would have revenge, too, for the cruelties we had suffered. With the old East Indian dagger firmly grasped I entered the room and found—that my revenge had been forestalled! The horror of the discovery I made that night restored me to reason and a realization of the crime I meditated. Scarce knowing what I did, I sought and found the papers, and crept back to my room as I had come. Do you wonder that my disease is past medical aid?”

“I looked at Edward as I finished. He sat, his face covered with his hands. Finally he looked up with a glance of haggard despair: ‘God! Doctor, but this is too much. I could stand the stigma of murder, but add to that the pollution of Negro blood! No man is brave enough to face such a situation.’

“‘It is as I thought it would be,’ said Talma sadly, while the tears poured over her white face. ‘I do not blame you, Edward.’

“He rose from his chair, wrung my hand in a convulsive clasp, turned to Talma and bowed profoundly, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, hesitated, turned, paused, bowed again, and abruptly left the room. So those two who had been lovers, parted. I turned to Talma, expecting her to give way. She smiled a pitiful smile, and said: ‘You see, Doctor, I knew best.’

“From that on she failed rapidly. I was restless. If only I could rouse her to an interest in life, she might live to old age. So rich, so young, so beautiful, so talented, so pure; I grew savage thinking of the injustice of the world. I had not reckoned on the power that never sleeps. Something was about to happen.

“On visiting Cameron next morning I found him approaching the end. He had been sinking for a week very rapidly. As I sat by the bedside holding his emaciated hand, he fixed his bright, wicked eyes on me, and asked: ‘How long have I got to live?’

“‘Candidly, but a few hours.’

“‘Thank you; well, I want death; I am not afraid to die. Doctor, Cameron is not my name.’

“‘I never supposed it was.’

“No? You are sharper than I thought. I heard all your talk yesterday with Talma Gordon. Curse the whole race!”

“He clasped his bony fingers around my arm and gasped: ‘*I murdered the Gordons!*’

“Had I the pen of a Dumas¹ I could not paint Cameron as he told his story. It is a question with me whether this wheeling planet, home of the suffering, doubting, dying, may not hold worse agonies on its smiling surface than those of the conventional hell. I sent for Talma and a lawyer. We gave him stimulants, and then with broken intervals of coughing and prostration we got the story of the Gordon murder. I give it to you in a few words:

“I am an East Indian, but my name does not matter, Cameron is as good as any. There is many a soul crying in heaven and hell for vengeance on Jonathan Gordon. Gold was his idol; and many a good man walked the plank, and many a gallant ship was stripped of her treasure, to satisfy his lust for gold. His blackest crime was the murder of my father, who was his friend, and had sailed with him for many a year as mate. One night these two went ashore together to bury their treasure. My father never returned from that expedition. His body was afterward found with a bullet through the heart on the shore where the vessel stopped that night. It was the custom then among pirates for the captain to kill the men who helped bury their treasure. Captain Gordon was no better than a pirate. An East Indian never forgets, and I swore by my mother’s deathbed to hunt Captain Gordon down until I had avenged my father’s murder. I had the plans of the Gordon estate, and fixed on the night of the reception in honor of Talma as the time for my vengeance. There is a secret entrance from the shore to the chambers where Captain Gordon slept; no one knew of it save the Captain and trusted members of his crew. My mother gave me the plans, and entrance and escape were easy.”

“So the great mystery was solved. In a few hours Cameron was no more. We placed the confession in the hands of the police, and there the matter ended.”

“But what became of Talma Gordon?” questioned the president. “Did she die?”

“Gentlemen,” said the Doctor, rising to his feet and sweeping the faces of the company with his eagle gaze, “gentlemen, if you will follow me to the drawing-room, I shall have much pleasure in introducing you to my wife—*nee* Talma Gordon.”

1900

1. Alexandre Dumas was the name of a popular French playwright and novelist (1802–1870), as well as the name of his son (1824–1895). Notably, the genealogy of the Dumas family included an enslaved African woman.

HAMLIN GARLAND

1860–1940

Hannibal Hamlin Garland, born in rural poverty, was self-educated and ambitious; he wished to leave behind the hard life he had known as a boy and young man growing up on a succession of desolate midwestern farms from Wisconsin to the Dakotas. In 1884, he migrated to Boston, where, after a period of loneliness and economic struggle, he was befriended by such influential literary figures as Oliver Wendell Holmes and William Dean Howells and began to earn a living as a teacher, lecturer, and writer. It was not until the late 1880s, however, that Garland gained public attention with his short-story collection *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891). Stirred by what he heard when traveling to his family farm and other midwestern locales, Garland wrote fiction that unsentimentally depicted the day-to-day lives of the farmers—and especially of their wives. These works frequently display a strong reformist impulse: the meagerness of these silently heroic lives could be made more fruitful and loving, Garland believed, if the economic system was more humane. This is the thesis of his most famous story, “Under the Lion’s Paw,” which Garland proudly read to tax-reform groups in several U.S. cities. He devoutly believed that “if you would raise the standard of art in America you must raise the standard of living.” Garland’s conception of realism—he called it “veritism” in *Crumbling Idols* (1894)—entailed, as this story demonstrates, an allegiance to the accurate representation of outer surfaces, however grim, and inner truths, however somber. Garland connected the literary practice of realism with a commitment to social justice. He believed in the responsibility of a writer to act as a responsible and compassionate member of a greater community. (An excerpt from *Crumbling Idols*, the book in which Garland most fully explained his ideas about literature, is included in the “Realism and Naturalism” section elsewhere in this volume.)

Justice for Garland applied equally to women, and he was active in feminist reform movements, especially in this early period of his life. *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), perhaps his best longer fiction, tells the story of the female protagonist’s attempt to escape the physical drudgery and spiritual emptiness of farm life by going off to college and then becoming a writer in Chicago. Unable to attract an audience for such an unsentimental plot, from 1896 to 1916 Garland turned out popular romantic adventure novels set in the Rocky Mountains. The best of them—*The Captain of the Gray Horse Troop* (1902), *Hesper* (1903), and *Cavanaugh, Forest Ranger* (1910)—contain realistic descriptions and a muted note of reformist propaganda, but they are in essence polite and romantic.

During the late 1890s, Garland began to write autobiographically, a stream of his writing that sustained his literary reputation through 1930, when he moved to California from New York. He eventually wrote four autobiographical volumes: *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), *A Daughter of the Middle Border* (1921), *Trail-Makers of the Middle Border* (1928), and *Roadside Meetings* (1930). Together with Garland’s earlier writing, in which he converts his anger over the oppression of people he loved into powerful fiction, these works offer a portrayal of the lives of rural Americans as they contend with larger forces beyond their control. Garland’s fiction proved influential because of his belief that fiction should register the ways that American lives are rooted in the landscapes that they inhabit, as well as his commitment to representing the dignity of Americans living far from the nation’s urban centers.

Under the Lion's Paw¹

I

It was the last of autumn and first day of winter coming together. All day long the ploughmen on their prairie farms had moved to and fro on their wide level fields through the falling snow, which melted as it fell, wetting them to the skin—all day, notwithstanding the frequent squalls of snow, the dripping, desolate clouds, and the muck of the furrows, black and tenacious as tar.

Under their dripping harnesses the horses swung to and fro silently, with that marvelous uncomplaining patience which marks the horse. All day the wild-geese, honking wildly, as they sprawled sidewise down the wind, seemed to be fleeing from an enemy behind, and with neck out-thrust and wings extended, sailed down the wind, soon lost to sight.

Yet the ploughman behind his plough, though the snow lay on his ragged great-coat, and the cold clinging mud rose on his heavy boots, fettering him like gyves,² whistled in the very beard of the gale. As day passed, the snow, ceasing to melt, lay along the ploughed land, and lodged in the depth of the stubble, till on each slow round the last furrow stood out black and shining as jet between the ploughed land and the gray stubble.

When night began to fall, and the geese, flying low, began to alight invisibly in the near corn field, Stephen Council was still at work "finishing a land." He rode on his sulky-plough³ when going with the wind, but walked when facing it. Sitting bent and cold but cheery under his slouch hat, he talked encouragingly to his weary four-in-hand.

"Come round there, boys!—round agin! We got t' finish this land. Come in there, Dan! *Stiddy*, Kate!—stiddy! None o' y'r tantrums, Kittie. It's purty tuff, but got a be did. *Tchk! tchk!* Step along, Pete! Don't let Kate git y'r single-tree⁴ on the wheel. *Once* more!"

They seemed to know what he meant, and that this was the last round, for they worked with greater vigor than before.

"Once more, boys, an' sez I, oats an' a nice warm stall, an' sleep f'r all."

By the time the last furrow was turned on the land it was too dark to see the house, and the snow was changing to rain again. The tired and hungry man could see the light from the kitchen shining through the leafless hedge, and lifting a great shout, he yelled, "*Supper* f'r a half a dozen!"

It was nearly eight o'clock by the time he had finished his chores and started for supper. He was picking his way carefully through the mud, when the tall form of a man loomed up before him with a premonitory cough.

"Waddy ye want?" was the rather startled question of the farmer.

"Well, ye see," began the stranger, in a deprecating tone, "we'd like t' git in f'r the night. We've tried every house f'r the last two miles, but they hadn't any room f'r us. My wife's jest about sick, 'n' the children are cold and hungry—"

1. This story first appeared in *Harper's Weekly* 33 (September 7, 1889), the source of the text printed here.

2. Shackles.

3. Plow with wheels and a seat for the driver.

4. Pivoted swinging bar to which the straps of a harness are fastened and by which a vehicle or implement is drawn; also called a "whiffletree."

“Oh, y’ want a stay all night, eh?”

“Yes, sir; it ’ud be a great accom—”

“Waal, I don’t make it a practice t’ turn anybuddy away hungry, not on sech nights as this. Drive right in. We ’ain’t got much, but sech as it is—”

But the stranger had disappeared. And soon his steaming, weary team, with drooping heads and swinging single-trees, moved past the well on to the block beside the path. Council stood at the side of the “schooner” and helped the children out—two little half-sleeping children—and then a small woman with a babe in her arms.

“There ye go!” he shouted, jovially, to the children. “Now we’re all right. Run right along to the house there, an’ tell Mam’ Council you wants sumptin’ t’ eat. Right this way, Mis’—Keep right off t’ the right there. I’ll go an’ git a lantern. Come,” he said to the dazed and silent group at his side.

“Mother,” he shouted, as he neared the fragrant and warmly lighted kitchen, “here are some wayfarers an’ folks who need sumptin’ t’ eat an’ a place t’ snooze,” he ended, pushing them all in.

Mrs. Council, a large, jolly, rather coarse-looking woman, took the children in her arms. “Come right in, you little rabbits. ’Most asleep, hay? Now here’s a drink o’ milk f’r each o’ ye. I’ll have s’m’ tea in a minute. Take off y’r things and set up t’ the fire.”

While she set the children to drinking milk, Council got out his lantern and went out to the barn to help the stranger about his team, where his loud, hearty voice could be heard as it came and went between the hay-mow and the stalls.

The woman came to light as a small, timid, and discouraged-looking woman, but still pretty, in a thin and sorrowful way.

“Land sakes! An’ you’ve travelled all the way from Clear Lake t’ day in this mud! Waal! waal! No wunder you’re all tired out. Don’t wait f’r the men, Mis’—” She hesitated, waiting for the name.

“Haskins.”

“Mis’ Haskins, set right up to the table an’ take a good swig o’ that tea, whilst I make y’ s’m’ toast. It’s green tea, an’ it’s good. I tell Council as I git older I don’t seem t’ enjoy Young Hyson n’r gunpowder.⁵ I want the reel green tea, jest as it comes off’n the vines. Seems t’ have more heart in it some way. Don’t s’pose it has. Council says it’s all in m’ eye.”

Going on in this easy way, she soon had the children filled with bread and milk and the woman thoroughly at home, eating some toast and sweet melon pickles, and sipping the tea.

“See the little rats!” she laughed at the children. “They’re full as they can stick now, and they want to go to bed. Now don’t git up, Mis’ Haskins; set right where you are, an’ let me look after ’em. I know all about young ones, though I *am* all alone now. Jane went an’ married last fall. But, as I tell Council, it’s lucky we keep our health. Set right *there*, Mis’ Haskins; I won’t have you stir a finger.”

5. Young Hyson and gunpowder are green teas that have been dried for export.

It was an unmeasured pleasure to sit there in the warm, homely kitchen, the jovial chatter of the housewife driving out and holding at bay the groll of the impotent, cheated wind.

The little woman's eyes filled with tears, which fell down upon the sleeping baby in her arms. The world was not so desolate and cold and hopeless, after all.

"Now I hope Council won't stop out there and talk politics all night. He's the greatest man to talk politics an' read the *Tribune*. How old is it?"

She broke off and peered down at the face of the babe.

"Two months 'n' five days," said the mother, with a mother's exactness.

"Ye don't say! I want t' know! The dear little pudzy-wudzy," she went on, stirring it up in the neighborhood of the ribs with her fat forefinger.

"Pooty tough on 'oo to go gallavant'n' 'cross lots this way."

"Yes, that's so; a man can't lift a mountain," said Council, entering the door. "Sarah, this is Mr. Haskins, from Kansas. He's been eat up 'n' drove out by grasshoppers."

"Glad t' see yeh! Pa, empty that wash-basin, 'n' give him a chance t' wash."

Haskins was a tall man, with a thin, gloomy face. His hair was a reddish brown, like his coat, and seemed equally faded by the wind and sun. And his sallow face, though hard and set, was pathetic somehow. You would have felt that he had suffered much by the line of his mouth showing under his thin yellow mustache.

"Hain't Ike got home yet, Sairy?"

"Hain't seen 'im."

"W-a-a-l, set right up, Mr. Haskins; wade right into what we've got; 'tain't much, but we manage t' live on it—least I do; *she* gits fat on it," laughed Council, pointing his thumb at his wife.

After supper, while the women put the children to bed, Haskins and Council talked on, seated near the huge cooking stove, the steam rising from their wet clothing. In the Western fashion Council told as much of his own life as he drew from his guest. He asked but few questions; but by-and-by the story of Haskins's struggles and defeat came out. The story was a terrible one, but he told it quietly, seated with his elbows on his knees, gazing most of the time at the hearth.

"I didn't like the looks of the country, anyhow," Haskins said, partly rising and glancing at his wife. "I was ust t' northern Ingyannie,⁶ where we hav' lots of timber 'n' lots of rain, 'n' I didn't like the looks o' that dry prairie. What galled me the worst was goin' s' far away acrosst so much fine land layin' all through here vacant."

"And the 'hoppers eat ye four years hand running, did they?"

"Eat! They wiped us out. They chawed everything that was green. They jest set around waitin' f'r us to die t' eat us too. My God! I ust t' dream of 'em sitt'n' 'round on the bedpost, six feet long, workin' their jaws. They eet the fork handles. They got worse 'n' worse, till they jest rolled on one another, piled up like snow in winter. Well, it ain't no use; if I was t' talk all winter I couldn't tell nawthin'. But all the while I couldn't help thinkin' of all that

6. Indiana.

land back here that nobuddy was usin, that I ought a had 'stead o' bein 'out there in that cussed country."

"Waal, why didn't ye stop an' settle here?" asked Ike, who had come in and was eating his supper.

"Fer the simple reason that you fellers wantid ten 'r fifteen dollars an acre fer the bare land, and I hadn't no money fer that kind o' thing."

"Yes, I do my own work," Mrs. Council was heard to say in the pause which followed. "I'm a-gettin' purty heavy t' be on m' laigs all day, but we can't afford t' hire, so I keep rackin' around somehow, like a foundered horse. S'lame—I tell Council he can't tell *how* lame I am, f'r I'm jest as lame in one laig as t'other." And the good soul laughed at the joke on herself as she took a handful of flour and dusted the biscuit board to keep the dough from sticking.

"Well, I hain't *never* been very strong," said Mrs. Haskins. "Our folks was Canadians an' small-boned, and then since my last child I hain't got up again fairly. I don't like t' complain—Tim has about all he can bear now—but they was days this week when I jest wanted to lay right down an' die."

"Waal, now, I'll tell ye," said Council, from his side of the stove, silencing everybody with his good-natured roar, "I'd go down and *see* Butler *anyway*, if I was you. I guess he'd let you have his place purty cheap; the farm's all run down. He's ben anxious t' let t' somebuddy next year. It 'ud be a good chance fer you. Anyhow, you go to bed, and sleep like a babe. I've got some ploughin' t' do anyhow, an' we'll see if somethin' can't be done about your case. Ike, you go out an' see if the horses is all right, an' I'll show the folks t' bed."

When the tired husband and wife were lying under the generous quilts of the spare bed, Haskins listened a moment to the wind in the eaves, and then said, with a slow and solemn tone,

"There are people in this world who are good enough t' be angels, an' only haff t' die to *be* angels."

II

Jim Butler was one of those men called in the West "land poor." Early in the history of Rock River he had come into the town and started in the grocery business in a small way, occupying a small building in a mean part of the town. At this period of his life he earned all he got, and was up early and late, sorting beans, working over butter, and carting his goods to and from the station. But a change came over him at the end of the second year, when he sold a lot of land for four times what he paid for it. From that time forward he believed in land speculation as the surest way of getting rich. Every cent he could save or spare from his trade he put into land at forced sale, or mortgages on land, which were "just as good as the wheat," he was accustomed to say.

Farm after farm fell into his hands, until he was recognized as one of the leading land-owners of the county. His mortgages were scattered all over Cedar County, and as they slowly but surely fell in, he sought usually to retain the former owner as tenant.

He was not ready to foreclose; indeed, he had the name of being one of the "easiest" men in the town. He let the debtor off again and again, extending the time whenever possible.

"I don't want y'r land," he said. "All I'm after is the int'rest on my money—that's all. Now if y' want 'o stay on the farm, why, I'll give y' a good chance. I can't have the land layin' vacant." And in many cases the owner remained as tenant.

In the mean time he had sold his store; he couldn't spend time in it; he was mainly occupied now with sitting around town on rainy days, smoking and "gassin' with the boys," or in riding to and from his farms. In fishing-time he fished a good deal. Doc Grimes, Ben Ashley, and Cal Cheatham were his cronies on these fishing excursions or hunting trips in the time of chickens or partridges. In winter they went to northern Wisconsin to shoot deer.

In spite of all these signs of easy life, Butler persisted in saying he "hadn't money enough to pay taxes on his land," and was careful to convey the impression that he was poor in spite of his twenty farms. At one time he was said to be worth fifty thousand dollars, but land had been a little slow of sale of late, so that he was not worth so much. A fine farm, known as the Higley place, had fallen into his hands in the usual way the previous year, and he had not been able to find a tenant for it. Poor Higley, after working himself nearly to death on it, in the attempt to lift the mortgage, had gone off to Dakota, leaving the farm and his curse to Butler.

This was the farm that Council advised Haskins to apply for, and the next day Council hitched up his team and drove down-town to see Butler.

"You jest lem *me* do the talkin'," he said. "We'll find him wearin' out his pants on some salt barrel somewears; and if he thought you *wanted* a place, he'd sock it to you hot and heavy. You jest keep quiet; I'll fix 'im."

Butler was seated in Ben Ashley's store, telling "fish yarns," when Council sauntered in casually.

"Hello, But! lyin' agin, hay?"

"Hello, Steve! how goes it?"

"Oh, so-so. Too dang much rain these days. I thought it was goin' t' freeze up f'r good last night. Tight squeak if I git m' ploughin' done. How's farmin' with *you* these days?"

"Bad. Ploughin' ain't half done."

"It 'ud be a religious idee f'r you t' go out and take a hand y'rself."

"I don't haff to," said Butler, with a wink.

"Got anybody on the Higley place?"

"No. Know of anybody?"

"Waal, no; not eggsackly. I've got a relation back t' Michigan who's ben hot an' cold on the idee o' comin' West f'r some time. *Might* come if he could git a good lay-out. What do you talk on the farm?"

"Well, I d' know. I'll rent it on shares, or I'll rent it money rent."

"Waal, how much money, say?"

"Well, say ten per cent on the price—\$250."

"Waal, that ain't bad. Wait on 'im till 'e thrashes?"

Haskins listened eagerly to this important question, but Council was coolly eating a dried apple which he had speared out of a barrel with his knife. Butler studied him carefully.

“Well, knocks me out o’ twenty-five dollars interest.”

“My relation ’ll need all he’s got t’ git his crops in,” said Council, in the same indifferent way.

“Well, all right; *say wait*,” concluded Butler.

“All right; this is the man. Haskins, this is Mr. Butler—no relation to Ben⁷—the hardest-working man in Cedar County.”

On the way home, Haskins said: “I ain’t much better off. I’d like that farm; it’s a good farm, but it’s all run down, an’ so ’m I. I could make a good farm of it if I had half a show. But I can’t stock it n’r seed it.”

“Waal, now, don’t you worry,” roared Council, in his ear. “We’ll pull y’ through somehow till next harvest. He’s agreed t’ hire it ploughed, an’ you can earn a hundred dollars ploughin’, an’ y’ c’n git the seed o’ me, an’ pay me back when y’ can.”

Haskins was silent with emotion, but at last he said, “I ’ain’t got nothin’ t’ live on.”

“Now don’t you worry ’bout that. You jest make your head-quarters at ol’ Steve Council’s. Mother ’ll take a pile o’ comfort in havin’ y’r wife an’ children ’round. Y’see Jane’s married off lately, an’ Ike’s away a good ’eal, so we’ll be darn glad t’ have ye stop with us this winter. Nex’ spring we’ll see if y’ can’t git a start agin;” and he chirruped to the team, which sprang forward with the rumbling, clattering wagon.

“Say, looky here, Council, you can’t do this. I never saw—” shouted Haskins in his neighbor’s ear.

Council moved about uneasily in his seat, and stopped his stammering gratitude by saying: “Hold on now; don’t make such a fuss over a little thing. When I see a man down, an’ things all on top of ’im, I jest like t’ kick ’em off an’ help ’im up. That’s the kind of religion I got, an’ it’s about the *only* kind.”

They rode the rest of the way home in silence. And when the red light of the lamp shone out into the darkness of the cold and windy night, and he thought of this refuge for his children and wife, Haskins could have put his arm around the neck of his burly companion and squeezed him like a lover; but he contented himself with saying, “Steve Council, you’ll git y’r pay f’r this some day.”

“Don’t want any pay. My religion ain’t run on such business principles.”

The wind was growing colder, and the ground was covered with a white frost, as they turned into the gate of the Council farm, and the children came rushing out, shouting, “Papa’s come!” They hardly looked like the same children who had sat at the table the night before. Their torpidity under the influence of sunshine and Mother Council had given way to a sort of spasmodic cheerfulness, as insects in winter revive when laid on the hearth.

7. Presumably a reference to Benjamin Butler (1818–1893), a Union general during the Civil War who then played a major role in national politics as a member of Congress and governor of Massachusetts.

III

Haskins worked like a fiend, and his wife, like the heroic little woman that she was, bore also uncomplainingly the most terrible burdens. They rose early and toiled without intermission till the darkness fell on the plain, then tumbled into bed, every bone and muscle aching with fatigue, to rise with the sun the next morning to the same round of the same ferocity of labor.

The eldest boy, now nine years old, drove a team all through the spring, ploughing and seeding, milked the cows, and did chores innumerable, in most ways taking the place of a man; an infinitely pathetic but common figure—this boy—on the American farm, where there is no law against child labor. To see him in his coarse clothing, his huge boots, and his ragged cap, as he stogged with a pail of water from the well, or trudged in the cold and cheerless dawn out into the frosty field behind his team, gave the city-bred visitor a sharp pang of sympathetic pain. Yet Haskins loved his boy, and would have saved him from this if he could, but he could not.

By June the first year the result of such Herculean toil began to show on the farm. The yard was cleaned up and sown to grass, the garden ploughed and planted, and the house mended. Council had given them four of his cows.

"Take'em an' run 'em on shares. I don't want a milk s' many. Ike's away s' much now, Sat'd'ys an' Sund'ys, I can't stand the bother anyhow."

Other men, seeing the confidence of Council in the new-comer, had sold him tools on time; and as he was really an able farmer, he soon had round him many evidences of his care and thrift. At the advice of Council he had taken the farm for three years, with the privilege of rerenting or buying at the end of the term.

"It's a good bargain, an' y' want 'o nail it," said Council. "If you have any kind ov a crop, you can pay half y'r debts, an' keep seed an' bread."

The new hope which now sprang up in the heart of Haskins and his wife grew great almost as a pain by the time the wide field of wheat began to wave and rustle and swirl in the winds of July. Day after day he would snatch a few moments after supper to go and look at it.

"Have ye seen the wheat t'-day, Nettie?" he asked one night as he rose from supper.

"No, Tim, I 'ain't had time."

"Well, take time now. Le's go look at it."

She threw an old hat on her head—Tommy's hat—and looking almost pretty in her thin sad way, went out with her husband to the hedge.

"Ain't it grand, Nettie? Just look at it."

It was grand. Level, russet here and there, heavy-headed, wide as a lake, and full of multitudinous whispers and gleams of health, it stretched away before the gazers like the fabled field of the cloth of gold.

"Oh, I think—I *hope* we'll have a good crop, Tim; and oh, how good the people have been to us!"

"Yes; I don't know where we'd be t'-day if it hadn't a ben f'r Council and his wife."

"They're the best people in the world," said the little woman, with a great sob of gratitude.

“We’ll be into that field on Monday, sure,” said Haskins, gripping the rail on the fence as if already at the work of the harvest.

The harvest came bounteous, glorious, but the winds came and blew it into tangles, and the rain matted it here and there close to the ground, increasing the work of gathering it threefold.

Oh, how they toiled in those glorious days! Clothing dripping with sweat, arms aching, filled with briars, fingers raw and bleeding, backs broken with the weight of heavy bundles, Haskins and his man toiled on. Tommy drove the harvester while his father and a hired man bound on the machine. In this way they cut ten acres every day, and almost every night after supper, when the hand went to bed, Haskins returned to the field, shocking⁸ the bound grain in the light of the moon. Many a night he worked till he staggered with utter fatigue; worked till his anxious wife came out to call him in to rest and lunch.

At the same time she cooked for the men, took care of the children, washed and ironed, milked the cows at night, made the butter, and sometimes fed the horses and watered them while her husband kept at the shocking. No slave in the Roman galleys could have toiled so frightfully and lived, for this man *thought* himself a freeman, and that he was working for his wife and babes.

When he sank into his bed with a deep groan of relief, too tired to change his grimy, dripping clothing, he felt that he was getting nearer and nearer to a home of his own, and pushing the wolf of want a little further from his door.

There is no despair so deep as the despair of a homeless man or woman. To roam the roads of the country or the streets of the city, to feel there is no rood of ground on which the feet can rest, to halt weary and hungry outside lighted windows and hear laughter and song within—these are the hungers and rebellions that drive men to crime and women to shame.

It was the memory of this homelessness, and the fear of its coming again, that spurred Timothy Haskins and Nettie, his wife, to such ferocious labor during that first year.

IV

“ ‘M, yes; ‘m, yes; first-rate,” said Butler, as his eye took in the neat garden, the pigpen, and the well-filled barn-yard. “You’re git’n’ quite a stock around yer. Done well, eh?”

Haskins was showing Butler around the place. He had not seen it for a year, having spent the year in Washington and Boston with Ashley, his brother-in-law, who had been elected to Congress.

“Yes, I’ve laid out a good deal of money during the last three years. I’ve paid out three hundred dollars f’r fencin’.”

“Um—h’m! I see, I see,” said Butler, while Haskins went on.

“The kitchen there cost two hundred; the barn ‘ain’t cost much in money, but I’ve put a lot o’ time on it. I’ve dug a new well, and I—”

“Yes, yes. I see! You’ve done well. Stalk worth a thousand dollars,” said Butler, picking his teeth with a straw.

8. Gathering and piling grain.

"About that," said Haskins, modestly. "We begin to feel 's if we wuz git'n' a home f'r ourselves; but we've worked hard. I tell ye we begin to feel it, Mr. Butler, and we're goin' t' begin t' ease up purty soon. We've been kind o' plannin' a trip back t' *her* folks after the fall ploughin's done."

"Eggs-actly!" said Butler, who was evidently thinking of something else. "I suppose you've kind o' kalklated on stayin' here three years more?"

"Well, yes. Fact is, I think I c'n buy the farm this fall, if you'll give me a reasonable show."

"Um—m! What do you call a reasonable show?"

"Waal; say a quarter down and three years' time."

Butler looked at the huge stacks of wheat which filled the yard, over which the chickens were fluttering and crawling, catching grasshoppers, and out of which the crickets were singing innumera-ly. He smiled in a peculiar way as he said, "Oh, I won't be hard on yeh. But what did you expect to pay f'r the place?"

"Why, about what you offered it for before, twenty-five hundred dollars, or *possibly* three thousand," he added, quickly, as he saw the owner shake his head.

"This farm is worth five thousand and five hundred dollars," said Butler, in a careless but decided voice.

"*What!*" almost shrieked the astounded Haskins. "What's that? Five thousand? Why, that's double what you offered it for three years ago."

"Of course; and it's worth it. It was all run down then; now it's in good shape. You've laid out fifteen hundred dollars in improvements, according to your own story."

"But *you* had nothin' t' do about that. It's my work an' my money."

"You bet it was; but it's my land."

"But what's to pay me for all?"

"'Ain't you had the use of 'em?" replied Butler, smiling calmly into his face.

Haskins was like a man struck on the head with a sand-bag; he couldn't think, he stammered as he tried to say: "But—I never 'd git the use. You'd rob me. More'n that: you agreed—you promised that I could buy or rent at the end of three years at—"

"That's all right. But I didn't say I'd let you carry off the improvements, nor that I'd go on renting the farm at two-fifty. The land is doubled in value, it don't matter how; it don't enter into the question; an' now you can pay me five hundred dollars a year rent, or take it on your own terms at fifty-five hundred, or—git out."

He was turning away, when Haskins, the sweat pouring from his face, fronted him, saying again:

"But *you've* done nothing to make it so. You hain't added a cent. I put it all there myself, expectin' to buy. I worked an' sweat to improve it. I was workin' f'r myself an' babes."

"Well, why didn't you buy when I offered to sell? What y' kickin' about?"

"I'm kickin' about payin' you twice f'r my own things—my own fences, my own kitchen, my own garden."

Butler laughed. "You're too green t' eat, young feller. *Your* improvements! The law will sing another tune."

"But I trusted your word."

"Never trust anybody, my friend. Besides, I didn't promise not to do this thing. Why, man, don't look at me like that. Don't take me for a thief. It's the law. The reg'lar thing. Everybody does it."

"I don't care if they do. It's stealin' jest the same. You take three thousand dollars of my money. The work o' my hands and my wife's." He broke down at this point. He was not a strong man mentally. He could face hardship, ceaseless toil, but he could not face the cold and sneering face of Butler.

"But I don't take it," said Butler, coolly. "All you've got to do is to go on jest as you've been a-doin', or give me a thousand dollars down, and a mortgage at ten percent on the rest."

Haskins sat down blindly on a bundle of oats near by, and with staring eyes and drooping head went over the situation. He was under the lion's paw. He felt a horrible numbness in his heart and limbs. He was hid in a mist, and there was no path out.

Butler walked about, looking at the huge stacks of grain, and pulling now and again a few handfuls out, shelling the heads in his hands and blowing the chaff away. He hummed a little tune as he did so. He had an accommodating air of waiting.

Haskins was in the midst of the terrible toil of the last year. He was walking again in the rain and the mud behind his plough, he felt the dust and dirt of the threshing. The ferocious husking-time, with its cutting wind and biting, clinging snows, lay hard upon him. Then he thought of his wife, how she had cheerfully cooked and baked, without holiday and without rest.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired the cool, mocking, insinuating voice of Butler.

"I think you're a thief and a liar," shouted Haskins, leaping up. "A black-hearted houn'!" Butler's smile maddened him; with a sudden leap he caught a fork in his hands, and whirled it in the air. "You'll never rob another man, damn ye!" he grated through his teeth, a look of pitiless ferocity in his aching eyes.

Butler shrank and quivered, expecting the blow; stood, held hypnotized by the eyes of the man he had a moment before despised—a man transformed into an avenging demon. But in the deadly hush between the lift of the weapon and its fall there came a gush of faint, childish laughter, and then across the range of his vision, far away and dim, he saw the sun-bright head of his baby girl, as, with the pretty tottering run of a two-year-old, she moved across the grass of the door-yard. His hands relaxed; the fork fell to the ground; his head lowered.

"Make out y'r deed an' morgige, an' git off'n my land, an' don't ye never cross my line again; if y' do, I'll kill ye."

Butler backed away from the man in wild haste, and climbing into his buggy with trembling limbs, drove off down the road, leaving Haskins seated dumbly on the sunny pile of sheaves, his head sunk into his hands.

ABRAHAM CAHAN

1860–1951

As an author and editor, Abraham Cahan became one of the most significant chroniclers of the experiences of immigrants entering the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly the difficult, often painful process of “Americanization” for Jews from eastern and central Europe. A Lithuanian Jew who arrived in New York in the 1880s, he participated in one of the most dramatic periods of immigration in American history, and then brought the lives of his fellow immigrants to the page in a relatively small but important body of fiction.

Cahan was born into an Orthodox Jewish family in a village a few miles from Vilna, Lithuania, then a part of the Russian Empire. He was educated as a youth first in Hebrew schools and then in a *yeshiva*—a seminary for studies in Jewish law and commentaries on it. His absorption in traditional Jewish studies gave way in his teens to an equally passionate engagement with secular subjects, especially literature and social theory. As a student at the Vilna Teacher Training Institute, he was among a small group of young men who read and discussed such subversive works as Nikolai Chernishevsky’s radical utopian novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863). Ultimately more influential was his reading of Tolstoy and other Russian writers; Anton Chekov (1860–1904), who wrote short stories and plays, became his favorite. Although Cahan was neither a leader nor an active conspirator in efforts to overthrow the czarist regime, his lodgings were searched twice during his first year as a teacher, and he had good reason to be concerned about the possibilities of arrest and imprisonment.

The attempt to suppress dissent that brought Cahan and other intellectuals under suspicion (it was considered a revolutionary act simply to be in possession of prohibited writings) was one consequence of the assassination of Czar Alexander II in March 1881. More important was the rising intensity of Russian anti-Semitism, including increasingly murderous pogroms—organized massacres—carried out against Jewish settlements. These and an enforced lifelong conscription into the czar’s army for Jewish men led to a massive emigration out of the Russian Empire, including an eventual two million who settled in the United States by 1924.

Within two months of his arrival in the United States in 1882, Cahan gave what he believed to be the first socialist speech in America to be delivered in Yiddish—a sort of creole language constituted by German dialects and vocabularies from Hebrew, Slavic, and European languages. Yiddish was the primary spoken language for many Jews of Europe and the Russian Empire, and over the course of the nineteenth century it became an increasingly printed language as well—a language of popular media and the arts. In the United States, as time went on, Yiddish also acquired a distinctively Jewish American vocabulary. Cahan soon helped organize the first Jewish tailors’ union; taught English at night to immigrants at the Young Men’s Hebrew Association; and began his career as editor and journalist with Yiddish, Russian, and English papers.

In 1897, Cahan was active in founding the *Jewish Daily Forward*, a Yiddish-language newspaper he edited, with some short interruptions, for nearly fifty years. Under his leadership, the *Forward* became the most successful non-English

newspaper in the United States, and it was often considered the leading Yiddish newspaper in the world. At its height, the *Forward* had a circulation of a quarter million and was read by perhaps a million people altogether. Cahan's editorial policy was designed to help Jewish immigrants make the transition from the often medieval conditions of the European ghettos and *shtetls* to the new realities of a rapidly industrializing democracy. The *Forward* combined news, information, cultural commentary, and reviews with short stories, including work of I. J. Singer and Sholem Asch. It included features such as "A *Bintel Brief*" (A Bundle of Letters), which printed anonymous letters from subscribers together with authoritative advice from the editor.

Between 1892 and 1917, Cahan turned his attention to writing fiction in English. He had met novelist and critic William Dean Howells while the latter was researching the unionization of New York sweatshops for a novel of his own. Howells encouraged Cahan, who soon after composed his first novel, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*. Cahan, though, had difficulty finding a publisher for the book, so he then rewrote it in Yiddish under the title *Yankel der Yankee*. The Yiddish version ran in installments in *Arbeiter Tzeitung*, the socialist newspaper of the Jewish labor union; the English version was then published by Appleton in 1896.

The novel, printed here in its complete English version, tells the story of working-class immigrant Jake Podkovnik, who attempts to embrace the New World by throwing off the trappings of the Old, including the wife who follows him to New York. The novel's depiction of working-class immigrant life and its incorporation of American Yiddish won many admirers. However, in his memoir Cahan also noted that there were critics within the Jewish community who believed that he should "have chosen for my tale a more important and more likeable type than Yekl—that I should have shown the Americans a prettier sample of our own Quarter—an educated, interesting idealist, for example, one who sacrifices his own advantage for the common good."

Cahan, though, refused to compromise his artistic vision, and he was encouraged by the generally favorable reception of the novel. He wrote more short stories and published a collection in 1898 titled "*The Imported Bridegroom*" and *Other Stories of the New York Ghetto*. His later masterpiece was the novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), an account of the garment industry and the people who work in it. This book established Cahan as a progenitor of Jewish American writers as diverse as Michael Gold, Henry Roth, Saul Bellow, and Alfred Kazin. The rich tapestry of this intensely realistic account of turn-of-the-twentieth-century New York is at once a Jewish novel, a novel about the always difficult process of Americanization, and a more universal story of self-estrangement and social alienation. Both as a journalist and as a writer of fiction, Abraham Cahan was deeply influential because he understood the profound complexities of immigrant and Jewish life in the United States. His writing about the pressures of assimilation and the formation of ethnic identity remain prescient of issues that Americans still face today.

Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto¹

Chapter I

JAKE AND YEKL²

The operatives of the cloak-shop in which Jake was employed had been idle all the morning. It was after twelve o'clock and the "boss" had not yet returned from Broadway, whither he had betaken himself two or three hours before in quest of work. The little sweltering assemblage—for it was an oppressive day in midsummer—beguiled their suspense variously. A rabbinical-looking man of thirty, who sat with the back of his chair tilted against his sewing machine, was intent upon an English newspaper. Every little while he would remove it from his eyes—showing a dyspeptic face fringed with a thin growth of dark beard—to consult the cumbrous dictionary on his knees. Two young lads, one seated on the frame of the next machine and the other standing, were boasting to one another of their respective intimacies with the leading actors of the Jewish stage. The board of a third machine, in a corner of the same wall, supported an open copy of a socialist magazine in Yiddish, over which a cadaverous young man absorbedly swayed to and fro droning in the Talmudical intonation.³ A middle-aged operative, with huge red side whiskers, who was perched on the presser's table in the corner opposite, was mending his own coat. While the thick-set presser and all the three women of the shop, occupying the three machines ranged against an adjoining wall, formed an attentive audience to an impromptu lecture upon the comparative merits of Boston and New York by Jake.

He had been speaking for some time. He stood in the middle of the overcrowded stuffy room with his long but well-shaped legs wide apart, his bulky round head aslant, and one of his bared mighty arms akimbo. He spoke in Boston Yiddish, that is to say, in Yiddish more copiously spiced with mutilated English than is the language of the metropolitan Ghetto⁴ in which our story lies. He had a deep and rather harsh voice, and his r's could do credit to the thickest Irish brogue.⁵

"When I was in Boston," he went on, with a contemptuous mien intended for the American metropolis, "I knew a *feller*,⁶ so he was a *preticly* friend of John Shullivan's.⁷ He is a Christian, that feller is, and yet the two of us lived

1. *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* was first published in book form in 1896 by D. Appleton and Company, the source of this text.

2. As the chapter makes clear, Jake and Yekl are in fact the same person. A Russian-born Jew, Yekl Podkovnik is the birth name of the protagonist, who adopts the name Jake after arriving in the United States. The change in his name is symbolic of many important transformations that he experiences as an immigrant. As the novel opens, Jake (or Yekl) has been in the United States for three years. He boasts outwardly to his fellow immigrants about his accomplishments in navigating American life, but he is secretly anxious about the promise he has made to bring his wife (Gitl) and son (Yosselé)—still living in Russia—to join him in this new country.

3. The Talmud is, after the Bible, the central

text of Judaism and Jewish law; it is the subject of extensive rabbinical interpretation.

4. The term *ghetto* originated in 16th-century Venice; it designated the district where Jews were required to live. In the centuries that followed, other European cities created their own ghettos. In time, the term came to mean any urban neighborhood with a high concentration of Jews, even if, as in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, they were not legally required to live there.

5. Accent.

6. English words incorporated in the Yiddish of the characters of this narrative are given in italics [Cahan's note].

7. John L. Sullivan (1858–1918) was a heavy-weight boxing champion and among the most famous American athletes of his time.

like brothers. May I be unable to move from this spot if we did not. How, then, would you have it? Like here, in New York, where the Jews are a *lot of greenhornsh*⁸ and can not speak a word of English? Over there every Jew speaks English like a stream.”

“Say, Dzake,” the presser broke in, “John Sullivan is *tzampion* no longer, is he?”

“Oh, no! Not always is it holiday!” Jake responded, with what he considered a Yankee jerk of his head. “Why, don’t you know? Jimmie Corbett *leaked* him, and Jimmie *leaked* Cholly Meetchel, too.⁹ *You can betch you’ bootsh!* Johnnie could not leak Chollie, *becaush* he is a big *bluffer*, Chollie is,” he pursued, his clean-shaven florid face beaming with enthusiasm for his subject, and with pride in the diminutive proper nouns he flaunted. “But Jimmie *pundished* him. *Oh, didn’t he knock him out off shight!* He came near making a meat ball of him”—with a chuckle. “He *tzettled* him in three *roynds*. I knew a feller who had seen the fight.”

“What is a *rawnd*, Dzake?” the presser inquired.

Jake’s answer to the question carried him into a minute exposition of “right-handers,” “left-handers,” “sending to sleep,” “first blood,” and other commodities of the fistic business. He must have treated the subject rather too scientifically, however, for his female listeners obviously paid more attention to what he did in the course of the boxing match, which he had now and then, by way of illustration, with the thick air of the room, than to the verbal part of his lecture. Nay, even the performances of his brawny arms and magnificent form did not charm them as much as he thought they did. For a display of manly force, when connected—even though in a purely imaginary way—with acts of violence, has little attraction for a “daughter of the Ghetto.” Much more interest did those arms and form command on their own merits. Nor was his chubby high-colored face neglected. True, there was a suggestion of the bulldog in its make up; but this effect was lost upon the feminine portion of Jake’s audience, for his features, illuminated by a pair of eager eyes of a hazel hue, and shaded by a thick crop of dark hair, were, after all, rather pleasing than otherwise. Strongly Semitic naturally, they became still more so each time they were brightened up by his good-natured boyish smile. Indeed, Jake’s very nose, which was fleshy and pear-shaped and decidedly not Jewish (although not decidedly anything else), seemed to join the Mosaic faith, and even his shaven upper lip¹ looked penitent, as soon as that smile of his made its appearance.

“Nice fun that!” observed the side-whiskered man, who had stopped sewing to follow Jake’s exhibition. “Fighting—like drunken *moujiks*² in Russia!”

“Tarrarra-boom-de-ay!” was Jake’s merry retort; and for an exclamation mark he puffed up his cheeks into a balloon, and exploded it by a “*pawncck*” of his formidable fist.

“Look, I beg you, look at his dog’s tricks!” the other said in disgust.

8. Greenhorns. A key word in this novel, a *greenhorn* is an inexperienced newcomer.

9. James John “Gentleman Jim” Corbett (1866–1933) knocked out the defending champion Sullivan in the 21st round of an 1892 fight. He successfully defended his title against British

boxer Charley Mitchell (1861–1918) in 1894.

1. In Orthodox Judaism, shaving the face with a razor is prohibited.

2. Usually transcribed “muzhik,” a common rural dweller, a peasant (Russian).

“Horse’s head that you are!” Jake rejoined good-humoredly. “Do you mean to tell me that a moujik understands how to *fight*? A disease he does! He only knows how to strike like a bear [Jake adapted his voice and gesticulation to the idea of clumsiness], *an’ dot’sh ull!*³ What does he *care* where his paw will land, so he strikes. *But* here one must observe *rulesh* [rules].”⁴

At this point Meester Bernstein—for so the rabbinical-looking man was usually addressed by his shopmates—looked up from his dictionary.

“Can’t you see?” he interposed, with an air of assumed gravity as he turned to Jake’s opponent, “America is an educated country, so they won’t even break bones without grammar. They tear each other’s sides according to ‘right and left,’⁵ you know.” This was a thrust at Jake’s right-handers and left-handers, which had interfered with Bernstein’s reading. “Nevertheless,” the latter proceeded, when the outburst of laughter which greeted his witticism had subsided, “I do think that a burly Russian peasant would, without a bit of grammar, crunch the bones of Corbett himself; and he would not *charge* him a cent for it, either.”

“*Is dot sho?*” Jake retorted, somewhat nonplussed. “*I betch you* he would not. The peasant would lie bleeding like a hog before he had time to turn around.”

“*But* they might kill each other in that way, *ain’t it*, Jake?” asked a comely, milk-faced blonde whose name was Fanny. She was celebrated for her lengthy tirades, mostly in a plaintive, nagging strain, and delivered in her quiet, piping voice, and had accordingly been dubbed “The Preacher.”

“Oh, that will happen but very seldom,” Jake returned rather glumly.

The theatrical pair broke off their boasting match to join in the debate, which soon included all except the socialist; the former two, together with the two girls and the presser, espousing the American cause, while Malke the widow and “De Viskes”⁶ sided with Bernstein.

“Let it be as you say,” said the leader of the minority, withdrawing from the contest to resume his newspaper. “My grandma’s last care it is who can fight best.”

“Nice pleasure, *anyhull*,” remarked the widow. “*Never min’*, we shall see how it will lie in his head when he has a wife and children to *support*.”

Jake colored. “What does a *chicken* know about these things?” he said irascibly.

Bernstein again could not help intervening. “And you, Jake, can not do without ‘these things,’ can you? Indeed, I do not see how you manage to live without them.”

“Don’t you like it? I do,” Jake declared tartly. “Once I live in America,” he pursued, on the defensive, “I want to know that I live in America. *Dot’sh a’ kin’ a man I am!*⁷ One must not be a *greenhorn*. Here a Jew is as good as a Gentile. How, then, would you have it? The way it is in Russia, where a Jew is afraid to stand within four ells of a Christian?”⁸

3. And that’s all!

4. Here, and elsewhere, glosses in square brackets were provided by Cahan and appear in the original text.

5. A term relating to the Hebrew equivalent of the letter *s*, whose pronunciation depends upon the right or left position of a mark over it [Cahan’s note].

6. The Whiskers. This is the nickname for the “middle-aged” man described as having “huge red side whiskers,” or sideburns.

7. That’s the kind of man I am!

8. An ell is an ancient unit of measurement derived from the distance between a man’s elbow and the tip of his fingers, roughly eighteen inches. Four ells would therefore be about six feet.

“Are there no other Christians than *fighters* in America?” Bernstein objected with an amused smile. “Why don’t you look for the educated ones?”

“Do you mean to say the *fighters* are not *ejecate*?⁹ Better than you, *anyhoy*,” Jake said with a Yankee wink, followed by his Semitic smile. “Here you read the papers, and yet *I’ll betch you* you don’t know that Corbett *findished college*.”

“I never read about fighters,” Bernstein replied with a bored gesture, and turned to his paper.

“Then say that you don’t know, and *dot’sh ull!*”

Bernstein made no reply. In his heart Jake respected him, and was now anxious to vindicate his tastes in the judgment of his scholarly shopmate and in his own.

“*Alla right*, let it be as you say; the *fighters* are not *ejecate*. No, not a bit!” he said ironically, continuing to address himself to Bernstein. “But what will you say to *baseball*? All *college boys* and *tony peoplesh* play it,” he concluded triumphantly. Bernstein remained silent, his eyes riveted to his newspaper. “Ah, you don’t answer, *shee?*” said Jake, feeling put out.

The awkward pause which followed was relieved by one of the playgoers who wanted to know whether it was true that to pitch a ball required more skill than to catch one.

“*Sure!* You must know how to *peetch*,” Jake rejoined with the cloud lingering on his brow, as he lukewarmly delivered an imaginary ball.

“And I, for my part, don’t see what wisdom there is to it,” said the presser with a shrug. “I think I could throw, too.”

“He can do everything!” laughingly remarked a girl named Pessé.

“How hard can you hit?” Jake demanded sarcastically, somewhat warming up to the subject.

“As hard as you at any time.”

“*I betch you a dullar to you’ ten shent*¹ you can not,” Jake answered, and at the same moment he fished out a handful of coin from his trousers pocket and challengingly presented it close to his interlocutor’s nose.

“There he goes!—betting!” the presser exclaimed, drawing slightly back. “For my part, your *pitzers* and *catzers* may all lie in the earth. A nice entertainment, indeed! Just like little children—playing ball! And yet people say America is a *smart* country. I don’t see it.”

“*F caush* you don’t, *becaush* you are a bedraggled *greenhorn*, afraid to budge out of Heshter Shtreet.”² As Jake thus vented his bad humour on his adversary, he cast a glance at Bernstein, as if anxious to attract his attention and to re-engage him in the discussion.

“Look at the Yankee!” the presser shot back.

“More of a one than you, *anyhoy*.”

“He thinks that *shaving* one’s mustache makes a Yankee!”

Jake turned white with rage.

“*Pon my vord*, I’ll ride into his mug and give such a *shaving* and planing to his pig’s snout that he will have to pick up his teeth.”

“That’s all you are good for.”

9. Educated.

1. I’ll bet you a dollar to your ten cents; i.e., I will give you betting odds of ten to one.

2. Hester Street, on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, was well known as a center of the Jewish immigrant community.

"Better don't answer him, Jake," said Fanny, intimately.

"Oh, I came near forgetting that he has somebody to take his part!" snapped the presser.

The girl's milky face became a fiery red, and she retorted in vituperative Yiddish from that vocabulary which is the undivided possession of her sex. The presser jerked out an innuendo still more far-reaching than his first. Jake, with bloodshot eyes, leaped at the offender, and catching him by the front of his waistcoat, was aiming one of those bearlike blows which but a short while ago he had decried in the moujik, when Bernstein sprang to his side and tore him away, Pessé placing herself between the two enemies.

"Don't get excited," Bernstein coaxed him.

"Better don't soil your hands," Fanny added.

After a slight pause Bernstein could not forbear a remark which he had stubbornly repressed while Jake was challenging him to a debate on the education of baseball players: "Look here, Jake; since fighters and baseball men are all educated, then why don't you try to become so? Instead of *spending* your money on fights, dancing, and things like that, would it not be better if you paid it to a teacher?"

Jake flew into a fresh passion. "*Never min'* what I do with my money," he said; "I don't steal it from you, do I? Rejoice that you keep tormenting your books. Much does he know! Learning, learning, and learning, and still he can not speak English. I don't learn and yet I speak quicker than you!"

A deep blush of wounded vanity mounted to Bernstein's sallow cheek. "*Ull right, ull right!*" he cut the conversation short, and took up the newspaper.

Another nervous silence fell upon the group. Jake felt wretched. He uttered an English oath, which in his heart he directed against himself as much as against his sedate companion, and fell to frowning upon the leg of a machine.

"Will you go by Joe to-night?" asked Fanny in English, speaking in an undertone. Joe was a dancing master. She was sure Jake intended to call at his "academy" that evening, and she put the question only in order to help him out of his sour mood.

"No," said Jake, morosely.

"Vy, to-day is Vensday."

"And without you I don't know it!" he snarled in Yiddish.

The finisher girl blushed deeply and refrained from any response.

"He does look like a *regely*³ Yankee, doesn't he?" Pessé whispered to her after a little.

"Go and ask him!"

"Go and hang yourself together with him! Such a nasty preacher! Did you ever hear—one dares not say a word to the noblewoman!"

At this juncture the boss, a dwarfish little Jew, with a vivid pair of eyes and a shaggy black beard, darted into the chamber.

"It is *no used!*" he said with a gesture of despair. "There is not a stitch of work, if only for a cure. Look, look how they have lowered their noses!" he

3. Regular.

then added with a triumphant grin. “*Vell*, I shall not be teasing you. ‘Pity living things!’ The expressman is *darn stess*.⁴ I would not go till I saw him *start*, and then I caught a car. No other *boss* could get a single jacket even if he fell upon his knees. *Vell*, do you appreciate it at least? Not much, ay?”

The presser rushed out of the room and presently came back laden with bundles of cut cloth which he threw down on the table. A wild scramble ensued. The presser looked on indifferently. The three finisher women, who had awaited the advent of the bundles as eagerly as the men, now calmly put on their hats. They knew that their part of the work wouldn’t come before three o’clock, and so, overjoyed by the certainty of employment for at least another day or two, they departed till that hour.

“Look at the rush they are making! Just like the locusts of Egypt!”⁵ the boss cried half sternly and half with self-complacent humour, as he shielded the treasure with both his arms from all except “*De Viskes*” and Jake—the two being what is called in sweat-shop parlance, “*chance-mentshen*,” i.e., favorites. “Don’t be snatching and catching like that,” the boss went on. “You may burn your fingers. Go to your machines, I say! The soup will be served in separate plates. Never fear, it won’t get cold.”

The hands at last desisted gingerly, Jake and the whiskered operator carrying off two of the largest bundles. The others went to their machines empty-handed and remained seated, their hungry glances riveted to the booty, until they, too, were provided.

The little boss distributed the bundles with dignified deliberation. In point of fact, he was no less impatient to have the work started than any of his employees. But in him the feeling was overridden by a kind of malicious pleasure which he took in their eagerness and in the demonstration of his power over the men, some of whom he knew to have enjoyed a more comfortable past than himself. The machines of Jake and “*De Viskes*” led off in a duet, which presently became a trio, and in another few minutes the floor was fairly dancing to the ear-piercing discords of the whole frantic sextet.

In the excitement of the scene called forth by the appearance of the bundles, Jake’s gloomy mood had melted away. Nevertheless, while his machine was delivering its first shrill staccatos, his heart recited a vow: “As soon as I get my pay I shall call on the installment man and give him a deposit for a ticket.” The prospective ticket was to be for a passage across the Atlantic from Hamburg to New York. And as the notion of it passed through Jake’s mind it evoked there the image of a dark-eyed young woman with a babe in her lap. However, as the sewing machine throbbed and writhed under Jake’s lusty kicks, it seemed to be swiftly carrying him away from the apparition which had the effect of receding, as a wayside object does from the passenger of a flying train, until it lost itself in a misty distance, other visions emerging in its place.

It was some three years before the opening of this story that Jake had last beheld that very image in the flesh. But then at that period of his life

4. Downstairs.

5. In Exodus 10, locusts are one of the ten plagues

unleashed by God to persuade the Egyptians to release the Israelites from slavery.

he had not even suspected the existence of a name like Jake, being known to himself and to all Povodye—a town in, northwestern Russia—as Yekl or Yekelé.

It was not as a deserter from military service that he had shaken off the dust of that town where he had passed the first twenty-two years of his life. As the only son of aged parents he had been exempt from the duty of bearing arms. Jake may have forgotten it, but his mother still frequently recurs to the day when he came rushing home, panting for breath, with the “red certificate” assuring his immunity in his hand. She nearly fainted for happiness. And when, stroking his dishevelled sidelocks with her bony hand and feasting her eye on his chubby face, she whispered, “My recovered child! God be blessed for his mercy!” there was a joyous tear in his eye as well as in hers. Well does she remember how she gently spat on his forehead three times to avert the effect of a possible evil eye on her “flourishing tree of a boy,” and how his father standing by made merry over what he called her crazy womanish tricks, and said she had better fetch some brandy in honour of the glad event.

But if Yekl was averse to wearing a soldier’s uniform on his own person he was none the less fond of seeing it on others. His ruling passion, even after he had become a husband and a father, was to watch the soldiers drilling on the square in front of the whitewashed barracks near which stood his father’s smithy. From a cheder⁶ boy he showed a knack at placing himself on terms of familiarity with the Jewish members of the local regiment, whose uniforms struck terror into the hearts of his schoolmates. He would often play truant to attend a military parade; no lad in town knew so many Russian words or was as well versed in army terminology as Yekelé “Beril the blacksmith’s”; and after he had left cheder, while working his father’s bellows, Yekl would vary synagogue airs with martial song.

Three years had passed since Yekl had for the last time set his eyes on the white-washed barracks and on his father’s rickety smithy, which, for reasons indirectly connected with the Government’s redoubled discrimination against the sons of Israel,⁷ had become inadequate to support two families; three years since that beautiful summer morning when he had mounted the spacious *kibitka*⁸ which was to carry him to the frontier-bound train; since, hurried by the driver, he had leaned out of the wagon to kiss his half-year-old son good-bye amid the heart-rending lamentations of his wife, the tremulous “Go in good health!” of his father, and the startled screams of the neighbours who rushed to the relief of his fainting mother. The broken Russian learned among the Povodye soldiers he had exchanged for English of a corresponding quality,⁹ and the bellows for a sewing machine—a change of weapons in the battle of life which had been brought about both by Yekl’s tender religious feelings and robust legs. He had been shocked by the very notion of seeking employment at his old trade in a city where it is in the hands of Christians, and consequently involves a violation of the Mosaic Sabbath.¹ On the other hand, his legs had been thought by his early American advisers eminently fitted for the treadle. Unlike New York, the Jewish

6. A school where Jewish children are instructed in the Old Testament or the Talmud [Cahan’s note].

7. That is, Jews.

8. A Russian type of closed carriage.

9. As a Jew in Russia, Yekl would have grown up speaking Yiddish.

1. Saturday; at this time, most businesses observed a six-day workweek that included Saturday.

sweat-shops of Boston keep in line, as a rule, with the Christian factories in observing Sunday as the only day of rest. There is, however, even in Boston a lingering minority of bosses—more particularly in the “pants”-making branch—who abide by the Sabbath of their fathers. Accordingly, it was under one of these that Yekl had first been initiated into the sweatshop world.

Subsequently Jake, following numerous examples, had given up “pants” for the more remunerative cloaks, and having rapidly attained skill in his new trade he had moved to New York, the centre of the cloak-making industry.

Soon after his arrival in Boston his religious scruples had followed in the wake of his former first name; and if he was still free from work on Saturdays he found many another way of “desecrating the Sabbath.”

Three years had intervened since he had first set foot on American soil, and the thought of ever having been a Yekl would bring to Jake’s lips a smile of patronizing commiseration for his former self. As to his Russian family name, which was Podkovnik, Jake’s friends had such rare use for it that by mere negligence it had been left intact.

Chapter II

THE NEW YORK GHETTO

It was after seven in the evening when Jake finished his last jacket. Some of the operators had laid down their work before, while others cast an envious glance on him as he was dressing to leave, and fell to their machines with reluctantly redoubled energy. Fanny was a week worker and her time had been up at seven; but on this occasion her toilet² had taken an uncommonly long time, and she was not ready until Jake got up from his chair. Then she left the room rather suddenly and with a demonstrative “Good-night all!”

When Jake reached the street he found her on the sidewalk, making a pretense of brushing one of her sleeves with the cuff of the other.

“So kvick?” she asked, raising her head in feigned surprise.

“You cull dot kvick?” he returned grimly. “Good-bye!”

“Say, ain’t you goin’ to dance to-night, really?” she queried shamefacedly.

“I tol’ you I vouldn’t.”

“What does *she* want of me?” he complained to himself proceeding on his way. He grew conscious of his low spirits, and, tracing them with some effort to their source, he became gloomier still. “No more fun for me!” he decided. “I shall get them over here and begin a new life.”

After supper, which he had taken, as usual, at his lodgings, he went out for a walk. He was firmly determined to keep himself from visiting Joe Peltner’s dancing academy, and accordingly he took a direction opposite to Suffolk Street, where that establishment was situated. Having

2. Before the introduction of indoor plumbing, *toilet* referred to the daily ritual of grooming and getting dressed. “Week worker”: someone paid a

weekly wage, in contrast with a piece worker, who would be paid per the number of items that he or she completed.

passed a few blocks, however, his feet, contrary to his will, turned into a side street and thence into one leading to Suffolk. "I shall only drop in to tell Joe that I can not sell any of his ball tickets, and return them," he attempted to deceive his own conscience. Hailing this pretext with delight he quickened his pace as much as the overcrowded sidewalks would allow.

He had to pick and nudge his way through dense swarms of bedraggled half-naked humanity; past garbage barrels rearing their overflowing contents in sickening piles, and lining the streets in malicious suggestion of rows of trees; underneath tiers and tiers of fire escapes, barricaded and festooned with mattresses, pillows, and featherbeds not yet gathered in for the night. The pent-in sultry atmosphere was laden with nausea and pierced with a discordant and, as it were, plaintive buzz. Supper had been despatched in a hurry, and the teeming populations of the cyclopic³ tenement houses were out in full force "for fresh air," as even these people will say in mental quotation marks.

Suffolk Street is in the very thick of the battle for breath. For it lies in the heart of that part of the East Side which has within the last two or three decades become the Ghetto of the American metropolis, and, indeed, the metropolis of the Ghettos of the world. It is one of the most densely populated spots on the face of the earth—a seething human sea fed by streams, streamlets, and rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centres of Europe. Hardly a block but shelters Jews from every nook and corner of Russia, Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Roumania; Lithuanian Jews, Volhynian Jews, south Russian Jews, Bessarabian Jews; Jews crowded out of the "pale of Jewish settlement";⁴ Russified Jews expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kieff, or Saratoff; Jewish runaways from justice; Jewish refugees from crying political and economical injustice; people torn from a hard-gained foothold in life and from deep-rooted attachments by the caprice of intolerance or the wiles of demagoguery—innocent scapegoats of a guilty Government for its outraged populace to misspend its blind fury upon; students shut out of the Russian universities, and come to these shores in quest of learning; artisans, merchants, teachers, rabbis, artists, beggars—all come in search of fortune. Nor is there a tenement house but harbours in its bosom specimens of all the whimsical metamorphoses wrought upon the children of Israel of the great modern exodus by the vicissitudes of life in this their Promised Land of to-day. You find there Jews born to plenty, whom the new conditions have delivered up to the clutches of penury; Jews reared in the straits of need, who have here risen to prosperity; good people morally degraded in the struggle for success amid an unwonted environment; moral outcasts lifted from the mire, purified, and imbued with self-respect; educated men and women with their intellectual polish tarnished in the inclement weather of adversity; ignorant sons of toil grown

3. A reference to the Cyclops of Greek mythology. Presumably, the narrow tenement buildings have only one "eye"—or window—in the front and no ventilation on the sides, which is why the residents must walk outdoors for "fresh air" on a warm afternoon.

4. The territory of Imperial Russia designated for permanent Jewish settlement, from the late 18th to the early 20th century. "Volhynian": from a region of central and Eastern Europe encompassing parts of present-day Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus.

enlightened—in fine,⁵ people with all sorts of antecedents, tastes, habits, inclinations, and speaking all sorts of subdialects of the same jargon, thrown pellmell into one social caldron—a human hodgepodge with its components parts changed but not yet fused into one homogeneous whole.

And so the “stoops,” sidewalks, and pavements of Suffolk Street were thronged with panting, chattering, or frisking multitudes. In one spot the scene received a kind of weird picturesqueness from children dancing on the pavement to the strident music hurled out into the tumultuous din from a row of the open and brightly illuminated windows of what appeared to be a new tenement house. Some of the young women on the sidewalk opposite raised a longing eye to these windows, for floating by through the dazzling light within were young women like themselves with masculine arms round their waists.

As the spectacle caught Jake’s eye his heart gave a leap. He violently pushed his way through the waltzing swarm, and dived into the half-dark corridor of the house whence the music issued. Presently he found himself on the threshold and in the overpowering air of a spacious oblong chamber, alive with a damp-haired, dishevelled, reeking crowd—an uproarious human vortex, whirling to the squeaky notes of a violin and the thumping of a piano. The room was, judging by its untidy, once-white-washed walls and the uncouth wooden pillars supporting its bare ceiling, more accustomed to the whirl of sewing machines than to the noises which filled it at the present moment. It took up the whole of the first floor of a five-story house built for large sweat-shops, and until recently it had served its original purpose as faithfully as the four upper floors, which were still the daily scenes of feverish industry. At the further end of the room there was now a marble soda fountain in charge of an unkempt boy. A stocky young man with a black entanglement of coarse curly hair was bustling about among the dancers. Now and then he would pause with his eyes bent upon some two pairs of feet, and fall to clapping time and drawling out in a preoccupied sing-song: “Von, two, tree! Leeft you’ feet! Don’t so kvick—sloy, sloy! Von, two, tree, von, two, tree!” This was Professor Peltner himself, whose curly hair, by the way, had more to do with the success of his institution than his stumpy legs, which, according to the unanimous dictum of his male pupils, moved about “like a *regely* pair of bears.”

The throng showed but a very scant sprinkling of plump cheeks and shapely figures in a multitude of haggard faces and flaccid forms. Nearly all were in their work-a-day clothes, very few of the men sporting a wilted white shirt front. And while the general effect of the kaleidoscope was one of boisterous hilarity, many of the individual couples somehow had the air of being engaged in hard toil rather than as if they were dancing for amusement. The faces of some of these bore a wondering martyrlike expression, as who should say, “What have we done to be knocked about in this manner?” For the rest, there were all sorts of attitudes and miens in the whirling crowd. One young fellow, for example, seemed to be threatening vengeance to the ceiling, while his partner was all but exultantly exclaiming: “Lord of the universe! What a world this be!” Another maiden looked as if she kept murmuring, “You don’t

5. That is, in the end (Latin), in sum.

say!" whereas her cavalier mutely ejaculated, "Glad to try my best, your noble birth!"—after the fashion of a Russian soldier.

The prevailing stature of the assemblage was rather below medium. This does not include the dozen or two of undergrown lasses of fourteen or thirteen who had come surreptitiously, and—to allay the suspicion of their mothers—in their white aprons. They accordingly had only these articles to check at the hat box, and hence the nickname of "apron-check ladies," by which this truant contingent was known at Joe's academy. So that as Jake now stood in the doorway with an orphaned collar button glistening out of the band of his collarless shirt front and an affected expression of *ennui*⁶ overshadowing his face, his strapping figure towered over the circling throng before him. He was immediately noticed and became the target for hellos, smiles, winks, and all manner of pleasantry: "Vot you stand like dot? You vont to loin dantz?"⁷ or "You a detectiff?" or "You vont a job?" or, again, "Is it hot anawff for you?" To all of which Jake returned an invariable "Yep!" each time resuming his bored mien.

As he thus gazed at the dancers, a feeling of envy came over him. "Look at them!" he said to himself begrudgingly. "How merry they are! Such *shnoozes*,⁸ they can hardly set a foot well, and yet they are free, while I am a married man. But wait till you get married, too," he prospectively avenged himself on Joe's pupils; "we shall see how you will then dance and jump!"

Presently a wave of Joe's hand brought the music and the trampling to a pause. The girls at once took their seats on the "ladies' bench," while the bulk of the men retired to the side reserved for "gents only." Several apparent post-graduates nonchalantly overstepped the boundary line, and, nothing daunted by the professor's repeated "Zents to de right an' lades to the left!" unrestrainedly kept their girls chuckling. At all events, Joe soon desisted, his attention being diverted by the soda department of his business. "Sawda!" he sang out. "Ull kin's!⁹ Sam, you ought ashamed you'selv; vy don'tz you treat you' lada?"

In the meantime Jake was the centre of a growing bevy of both sexes. He refused to unbend and to enter into their facetious mood, and his morose air became the topic of their persiflage.

By-and-bye Joe came scuttling up to his side. "Goot-evenig, Dzake!" he greeted him; "I didn't seen you at ull! Say, Dzake, I'll take care dis site an' you take care dot site—ull right?"

"Alla right!" Jake responded gruffly. "Gentsh, getch you partnesh, hawrry up!" he commanded in another instant.

The sentence was echoed by the dancing master, who then blew on his whistle a prolonged shrill warble, and once again the floor was set straining under some two hundred pounding, gliding, or scraping feet.

"Don' bee 'fraid. Gu right aheat an' getch you partner!" Jake went on yelling right and left. "Don' be 'shamed, Mish Cohen. Dansh mit dot gentlemarn!"¹ he said, as he unceremoniously encircled Miss Cohen's waist with "dot gentlemern's" arm. "Cholly! vot's de madder mitch you? You do hop

6. Boredom (French).

7. The characters are speaking English: Why do you stand like that? You want to learn to dance?

8. Meaning "snoozers," or dullards (Yiddish).

9. All kinds!

1. Dance with that gentleman!

like a Cossack, as true as I am a Jew," he added, indulging in a momentary lapse into Yiddish. English was the official language of the academy, where it was broken and mispronounced in as many different ways as there were Yiddish dialects represented in that institution. "Dot'sh de vay, look!" With which Jake seized from Charley a lanky fourteen-year-old Miss Jacobs, and proceeded to set an example of correct waltzing, much to the unconcealed delight of the girl, who let her head rest on his breast with an air of reverential gratitude and bliss, and to the embarrassment of her cavalier, who looked at the evolutions of Jake's feet without seeing.

Presently Jake was beckoned away to a corner by Joe, whereupon Miss Jacobs, looking daggers at the little professor, sulked off to a distant seat.

"Dzake, do me a faver; hask Mamie to gib dot feller a couple a dantzes," Joe said imploringly, pointing to an ungainly young man who was timidly viewing the pandemonium-like spectacle from the further end of the "gent's bench." "I hasked 'er myself, but se don' vonted. He's a beesness man, you 'destan', an' he kan a lot o' fellers an' I vonted make him satetzfiet."²

"Dot monkey?" said Jake. "Vot you talkin' aboyt! She wouldn't lishn to me neider, honeshit."

"Say dot you don' vonted and dot's ull."³

"Alla right; I'm goin' to ashk her, but I know it wouldn't be of naw used."

"Never min', you hask 'er foist. You know se wouldn't refuse *you*!" Joe urged, with a knowing grin.

"Hoy much vill you bet she will refushes shaw?" Jake rejoined with insincere vehemence, as he whipped out a handful of change.

"Vot kin' foon a man you are!⁴ Ulle-ways like to bet!" said Joe, deprecatingly. 'F cuss it depend mit vot kin' a mout' you vill hask, you 'destan'?"

"By gum, Jaw! Vot you take me for? Ven I shay I ashk, I ashk. You know I don' like no monkey beeshnesh. Ven I promish anytink I do it shquare, dot'sh a kin' a man *I* am!" And once more protesting his firm conviction that Mamie would disregard his request, he started to prove that she would not.

He had to traverse nearly the entire length of the hall, and, notwithstanding that he was compelled to steer clear of the dancers, he contrived to effect the passage at the swellest of his gaits, which means that he jauntily bobbed and lurched, after the manner of a blacksmith tugging at the bellows, and held up his enormous bullet head as if he were bidding defiance to the whole world. Finally he paused in front of a girl with a superabundance of pitch-black side bangs and with a pert, ill-natured, pretty face of the most strikingly Semitic cast in the whole gathering. She looked twenty-three or more, was inclined to plumpness, and her shrewd deep dark eyes gleamed out of a warm gipsy complexion. Jake found her seated in a fatigued attitude on a chair near the piano.

"Good-evenig, Mamie!" he said, bowing with mock gallantry.

"Rats!"

"Shay, Mamie, give dot feller a tvisht,⁵ vill you?"

2. I asked her myself, but she don't want to. He's a businessman, you understand, and he knows a lot of fellows and I want to make him satisfied.

3. Say that you don't want to and that's all.

4. What kind of funny man (that is, fool or buffoon) are you?

5. A twist, i.e., a turn around the dance floor.

"Dot slob again? Joe must tink if you ask me I'll get scared, ain't it? Go and tell him he is too fresh," she said with a contemptuous grimace. Like the majority of the girls of the academy, Mamie's English was a much nearer approach to a justification of its name than the gibberish spoken by the men.

Jake felt routed; but he put a bold face on it and broke out with studied resentment:

"Vot you kickin' aboyt, anyhoy? Jaw don' mean notin' at ull. If you don' vonted never min', an' dot'sh ull. It don' cut a figger, shee?"⁶ And he feignedly turned to go.

"Look how kvick he gets excited!" she said, surrenderingly.

"I ain't get ekshitet⁷ at ull; but vot'sh de used a makin' monkey beesnesh?" he retorted with triumphant acerbity.

"You are a monkey you'self," she returned with a playful pout.

The compliment was acknowledged by one of Jake's blandest grins.

"An' you are a monkey from monkeyland," he said. "Vill you dansh mit dot feller?"

"Rats! Vot vill you give me?"

"Vot should I give you?" he asked impatiently.

"Vill you treat?"

"Treat? Ger-rr oyt!" he replied with a sweeping kick at space.

"Den I von't dance."

"Alla right. I'll treat you mit a coupel a waltch."⁸

"Is dot so? You must really tink I am swooning to dance vit you," she said, dividing the remark between both jargons.

"Look at her, look! she is a *regely* getzke:⁹ one must take off one's cap to speak to her. Don't you always say you like to *dansh* with me *becush* I am a good *dansher*?"

"You must tink you are a peach of a dancer, ain' it? Bennie can dance a — sight better dan you," she recurred to her English.

"Alla right!" he said tartly. "So you don' vonted?"

"O sugar! He is getting' mad again. Vell, who is de getzke, me or you? All right, I'll dance vid de slob. But it's only becuss you ask me, mind you!" she added fawningly.

"Dot'sh alla right!" he rejoined, with an affectation of gravity, concealing his triumph. "But you makin' too much fush. I like to shpeak plain, shee? Dot'sh a kin' a man *I* am."

The next two waltzes Mamie danced with the ungainly novice, taking exaggerated pains with him. Then came a lancers,¹ Joe calling out the successive movements huckster fashion. His command was followed by less than half of the class, however, for the greater part preferred to avail themselves of the same music for waltzing. Jake was bent upon giving Mamie what he called a "sholid good time"; and, as she shared his view that a square or fancy dance was as flimsy an affair as a stick of candy, they joined or, rather, led the seceding majority. They spun along with all-forgetful gusto; every little while he

6. What are you kicking about, anyhow? Joe don't mean nothing at all. If you don't want to, never mind, and that's all. It don't cut a figure (matter much), see?

7. Excited.

8. A couple of walzes.

9. Crucifix [Cahan's note].

1. A popular variation of the quadrille.

lifted her on his powerful arm and gave her a “mill,”² he yelping and she squeaking for sheer ecstasy, as he did so; and throughout the performance his face and his whole figure seemed to be exclaiming, “Dot’sh a kin’ a man I am!”

Several waifs stood in a cluster admiring or begrudging the antics of the star couple. Among these was lanky Miss Jacobs and Fanny the Preacher, who had shortly before made her appearance in the hall, and now stood pale and forlorn by the “apron-check” girl’s side.

“Look at the way she is stickin’ to him!” the little girl observed with envious venom, her gaze riveted to Mamie, whose shapely head was at this moment reclining on Jake’s shoulders, with her eyes half shut, as if melting in a transport of bliss.

Fanny felt cut to the quick.

“You are jealous, ain’t you?” she jerked out.

“Who, me? Vy should I be jealous?” Miss Jacobs protested, colouring. “On my part let them both go to —. *You* must be jealous. Here, here! See how your eyes are creeping out looking! Here, here!” she teased her offender in Yiddish, poking her little finger at her as she spoke.

“Will you shut your scurvy mouth, little piece of ugliness, you? Such a piggish apron check!” poor Fanny burst out under breath, tears starting to her eyes.

“Such a nasty little runt!” another girl chimed in.

“Such a little cricket already knows what ‘jealous’ is!” a third of the bystanders put in. “You had better go home or your mamma will give you a spanking.” Where at the little cricket made a retort, which had better be left unrecorded.

“To think of a bit of a flea like that having so much *cheek*! Here is America for you!”

“America for a country and ‘*dod’ll do*’ [that’ll do] for a language!” observed one of the young men of the group, indulging one of the stereotype jokes of the Ghetto.

The passage at arms drew Jake’s attention to the little knot of spectators, and his eye fell on Fanny. Whereupon he summarily relinquished his partner on the floor, and advanced toward his shopmate, who, seeing him approach, hastened to retreat to the girls’ bench, where she remained seated with a drooping head.

“Hello, Fanny!” he shouted briskly, coming up in front of her.

“Hello!” she returned rigidly, her eyes fixed on the dirty floor.

“Come, give ush a tvisht, vill you?”

“But you ain’t goin’ by Joe to-night!” she answered, with a withering curl of her lip, her glance still on the ground. “Go to your lady, she’ll be mad atch you.”

“I didn’t vonted to gu here, honesht, Fanny. I o’ly come to tell Jaw shome-tin’,³ an’ dot’sh ull,” he said guiltily.

“Why should you apologize?” she addressed the tip of her shoe in her mother tongue. “As if he was obliged to apologize to me! *For my part* you can *dance* with her day and night. *Vot do I care?* As if I *cared*! I have only

2. Twirled her like a windmill.

3. I only came to tell Joe something.

come to see what a *bluffer* you are. Do you think I am a *fool*? As *smart* as your Mamie, *anyway*. As if I had not known he wanted to make me stay at home! What are you afraid of? Am I in your way then? As if I was in his way! What business have I to be in your way? Who is in your way?"

While she was thus speaking in her voluble, querulous, harassing manner, Jake stood with his hands in his trousers' pockets, in an attitude of mock attention. Then, suddenly losing patience, he said:

"*Dot'sh alla right!* You will finish your sermon afterward. And in the meantime *lesh have a valtz*⁴ from the land of *valtzes!*" With which he forcibly dragged her off her seat, catching her round the waist.

"But I don't need it, I don't wish it! Go to your Mamie!" she protested, struggling. "I tell you I don't need it, I don't—" The rest of the sentence was choked off by her violent breathing; for by this time she was spinning with Jake like a top. After another moment's pretense at struggling to free herself she succumbed, and presently clung to her partner, the picture of triumph and beatitude.

Meanwhile Mamie had walked up to Joe's side, and without much difficulty caused him to abandon the lancers party to themselves, and to resume with her the waltz which Jake had so abruptly broken off.

In the course of the following intermission she diplomatically seated herself beside her rival, and paraded her tranquility of mind by accosting her with a question on shop matters. Fanny was not blind to the manœuvre, but her exultation was all the greater for it, and she participated in the ensuing conversation with exuberant geniality.

By-and-bye they were joined by Jake.

"Vell, vill you treat, Jake?" said Mamie.

"Vot you vant, a kish?" he replied, putting his offer in action as well as in language.

Mamie slapped his arm.

"May the Angel of Death kiss you!" said her lips in Yiddish. "Try again!" her glowing face overruled them in a dialect of its own.

Fanny laughed.

"Once I am *treating*, both *ladas* must be *treated* alike, *ain' it?*" remarked the gallant, and again he proved himself as good as his word, although Fanny struggled with greater energy and ostensibly with more real indignation.

"But vy don't you treat, you stingy loafer you?"

"Vot elsh you vant? A peench?" He was again on the point of suiting the action to the word, but Mamie contrived to repay the pinch before she had received it, and added a generous piece of profanity into the bargain. Whereupon there ensued a scuffle of a character which defies description in more senses than one.

Nevertheless Jake marched his two "ladas" up to the marble fountain, and regaled them with two cents' worth of soda each.

An hour or so later, when Jake got out into the street, his breast pocket was loaded with a fresh batch of "Professor Peltner's Grand Annual Ball" tickets, and his two arms—with Mamie and Fanny respectively.

4. Let's have a waltz.

“As soon as I get my wages I’ll call on the installment agent and give him a deposit for a steamship ticket,” presently glimmered through his mind, as he adjusted his hold upon the two girls, snugly gathering them to his sides.

Chapter III

IN THE GRIP OF HIS PAST

Jake had never even vaguely abandoned the idea of supplying his wife and child with the means of coming to join him. He was more or less prompt in remitting her monthly allowance of ten rubles, and the visit to the draft and passage office had become part of the routine of his life. It had the invariable effect of arousing his dormant scruples, and he hardly ever left the office without ascertaining the price of a steerage voyage from Hamburg to New York. But no sooner did he emerge from the dingy basement into the noisy scenes of Essex Street, than he would consciously let his mind wander off to other topics.

Formerly, during the early part of his sojourn in Boston, his landing place, where some of his townfolk resided and where he had passed his first two years in America, he used to mention his Gitl and his Yosselé so frequently and so enthusiastically, that some wags among the Hanover Street⁵ tailors would sing “Yekl and wife and the baby” to the tune of Molly and I and the Baby.⁶ In the natural course of things, however, these retrospective effusions gradually became far between, and since he had shifted his abode to New York he carefully avoided all reference to his antecedents. The Jewish quarter of the metropolis, which is a vast and compact city within a city, offers its denizens incomparably fewer chances of contact with the English-speaking portion of the population than any of the three separate Ghettos of Boston. As a consequence, since Jake’s advent to New York his passion for American sport had considerably cooled off. And, to make up for this, his enthusiastic nature before long found vent in dancing and in a general life of gallantry. His proved knack with the gentle sex had turned his head and now cost him all his leisure time. Still, he would occasionally attend some variety show in which boxing was the main drawing card, and somehow managed to keep track of the salient events of the sporting world generally. Judging from his unstaid habits and happy-go-lucky abandon to the pleasures of life, his present associates took it for granted that he was single, and instead of twitting him with the feigned assumption that he had deserted a family—a piece of burlesque as old as the Ghetto—they would quiz him as to which of his girls he was “dead struck” on, and as to the day fixed for the wedding. On more than one such occasion he had on the tip of his tongue the seemingly jocular question, “How do you know I am not married already?” But he never let the sentence cross his lips, and would, instead, observe facetiously that he was not “shtruck on nu goil,”⁷ and that he was dead struck on all of them in “whulshale.”⁸ “I hate retail beesnesh, shee? Dot’sh a’ kin’ a man I am!” One day, in the course of an intimate conversation with Joe, Jake, dropping into a philosophical mood, remarked:

5. A street in the Boston garment district.

6. Title of a popular song in the 1890s.

7. Stuck on no girl.

8. Wholesale.

“It’s something like a baker, *ain’t it?* The more *cakes* he has the less he likes them. You and I have a *lot* of girls; that’s why we don’t *care* for any one of them.”

But if his attachment for the girls of his acquaintance collectively was not coupled with a quivering of his heart for any individual Mamie, or Fanny, or Sarah, it did not, on the other hand, preclude a certain lingering tenderness for his wife. But then his wife had long since ceased to be what she had been of yore. From a reality she had gradually become transmuted into a fancy. During the three years since he had set foot on the soil, where a “shister⁹ becomes a mister and a mister a shister,” he had lived so much more than three years—so much more, in fact, than in all the twenty-two years of his previous life—that his Russian past appeared to him a dream and his wife and child, together with his former self, fellow-characters in a charming tale, which he was neither willing to banish from his memory nor able to reconcile with the actualities of his American present. The question of how to effect this reconciliation, and of causing Gitl and little Yosselé to step out of the thickening haze of reminiscence and to take their stand by his side as living parts of his daily life, was a fretful subject from the consideration of which he cowardly shrank. He wished he could both import his family and continue his present mode of life. At the bottom of his soul he wondered why this should not be feasible. But he knew that it was not, and his heart would sink at the notion of forfeiting the lion’s share of attentions for which he came in at the hands of those who lionized him. Moreover, how will he look people in the face in view of the lie he has been acting? He longed for an interminable respite. But as sooner or later the minds of his acquaintances were bound to become disabused, and he would have to face it all out anyway, he was many a time on the point of making a clean breast of it, and failed to do so for a mere lack of nerve, each time letting himself off on the plea that a week or two before his wife’s arrival would be a more auspicious occasion for the disclosure.

Neither Jake nor his wife nor his parents could write even Yiddish, although both he and his old father read fluently the punctuated Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Prayer-book.¹ Their correspondence had therefore to be carried on by proxy, and, as a consequence, at longer intervals than would have been the case otherwise. The missives which he received differed materially in length, style, and degree of illiteracy as well as in point of penmanship; but they all agreed in containing glowing encomiums of little Yosselé, exhorting Yekl not to stray from the path of righteousness, and reproachfully asking whether he ever meant to send the ticket. The latter point had an exasperating effect on Jake. There were times, however, when it would touch his heart and elicit from him his threadbare vow to send the ticket at once. But then he never had money enough to redeem it. And, to tell the truth, at the bottom of his heart he was at such moments rather glad of his poverty. At all events, the man who wrote Jake’s letters had a standing order to reply in the sharpest terms at his command that Yekl did not spend

9. Yiddish for shoemaker [Cahan’s note].

1. Yiddish was the spoken language of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe, and in the 19th century also (written with Hebrew letters) became a lan-

guage of printed literature. By contrast, for European Jews of the 19th century, Hebrew was the language of scripture.

his money on drink; that America was not the land they took it for, where one could “scoop gold by the skirtful;” that Gitl need not fear lest he meant to desert her, and that as soon as he had saved enough to pay her way and to set up a decent establishment she would be sure to get the ticket.

Jake’s scribe was an old Jew who kept a little stand on Pitt Street, which is one of the thoroughfares and market places of the Galician² quarter of the Ghetto, and where Jake was unlikely to come upon any people of his acquaintance. The old man scraped together his livelihood by selling Yiddish newspapers and cigarettes, and writing letters for a charge varying, according to the length of the epistle, from five to ten cents. Each time Jake received a letter he would take it to the Galician, who would first read it to him (for an extra remuneration of one cent) and then proceed to pen five cents’ worth of rhetoric, which might have been printed and forwarded one copy at a time for all the additions or alterations Jake ever caused to be made in it.

“What else shall I write?” the old man would ask his patron, after having written and read aloud the first dozen lines, which Jake had come to know by heart.

“How do I know?” Jake would respond. “It is you who can write; so you ought to understand what else to write.”

And the scribe would go on to write what he had written on almost every previous occasion. Jake would keep the letter in his pocket until he had spare United States money enough to convert into ten rubles, and then he would betake himself to the draft office and have the amount, together with the well-crumpled epistle, forwarded to Povodye.

And so it went month in and month out.

The first letter which reached Jake after the scene at Joe Peltner’s dancing academy came so unusually close upon its predecessor that he received it from his landlady’s hand with a throb of misgiving. He had always labored under the presentiment that some unknown enemies—for he had none that he could name—would some day discover his wife’s address and anonymously represent him to her as contemplating another marriage, in order to bring Gitl down upon him unawares. His first thought accordingly was that this letter was the outcome of such a conspiracy. “Or maybe there is some death in the family?” he next reflected, half with terror and half with a feeling almost amounting to reassurance.

When the cigarette vender unfolded the letter he found it to be of such unusual length that he stipulated an additional cent for the reading of it.

“*Alla right*, hurry up now!” Jake said, grinding his teeth on a mumbled English oath.

“*Righd evay! Righd evay!*” the old fellow returned jubilantly, as he hastily adjusted his spectacles and addressed himself to his task.

The letter had evidently been penned by some one laying claim to Hebrew scholarship and ambitious to impress the New World with it; for it was quite replete with poetic digressions, strained and twisted to suit some quotation

2. Galicia is a region of Spain—far from the eastern European lands where Jake and most of the other characters originate.

from the Bible. And what with this unstinted verbosity, which was Greek to Jake, one or two interruptions by the old man's customers, and interpretations necessitated by difference of dialect, a quarter of an hour had elapsed before the scribe realized the trend of what he was reading.

Then he suddenly gave a start, as if shocked.

"Vot'sh a madder? Vot'sh a madder?"

"*Vot's der madder?* What should be the *madder?* Wait—a—I don't know what I can do"—he halted in perplexity.

"Any bad news?" Jake inquired, turning pale. "Speak out!"

"Speak out! It is all very well for you to say 'speak out.' You forget that one is a piece of Jew," he faltered, hinting at the orthodox custom which enjoins a child of Israel from being the messenger of sad tidings.

"Don't *bodder* a head!"³ Jake shouted savagely. "I have paid you, haven't I?"

"Say, young man, you need not be so angry," the other said, resentfully. "Half of the letter I have read, have I not? so I shall refund you one cent and leave me in peace." He took to fumbling in his pockets for the coin, with apparent reluctance.

"Tell me what is the matter," Jake entreated, with clinched fists. "Is anybody dead? Do tell me now."

"*Vell*, since you know it already, I may as well tell you," said the scribe cunningly, glad to retain the cent and Jake's patronage. "It is your father who has been freed; may he have a bright paradise."

"Ha?" Jake asked aghast, with a wide gape.

The Galician resumed the reading in solemn, doleful accents. The melancholy passage was followed by a jeremiad⁴ upon the penniless condition of the family and Jake's duty to send the ticket without further procrastination. As to his mother, she preferred the Povodye graveyard to a watery sepulcher, and hoped that her beloved and only son, the apple of her eye, whom she had been awake nights to bring up to manhood, and so forth, would not forget her.

"So now they will be here for sure, and there can be no more delay!" was Jake's first distinct thought. "Poor father!" he inwardly exclaimed the next moment, with deep anguish. His native home came back to him with a vividness which it had not had in his mind for a long time.

"Was he an old man?" the scribe queried sympathetically.

"About seventy," Jake answered, bursting into tears.

"Seventy? Then he had lived to a good old age. May no one depart younger," the old man observed, by way of "consoling the bereaved."

As Jake's tears instantly ran dry he fell to wringing his hands and moaning.

"Good-night!" he presently said, taking leave. "I'll see you to-morrow, if God be pleased."

"Good-night!" the scribe returned with heartfelt condolence.

As he was directing his steps to his lodgings Jake wondered why he did not weep. He felt that this was the proper thing for a man in his situation to do, and he endeavoured to inspire himself with emotions befitting the occasion. But his thoughts teasingly gamboled about among the people and things

3. Don't bother your head!

4. A rant or angry (in the manner of Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible) lamentation.

of the street. By-and-bye, however, he became sensible of his mental eye being fixed upon the big fleshy mole on his father's scantily bearded face. He recalled the old man's carriage, the melancholy nod of his head, his deep sigh upon taking snuff from the time-honoured birch bark which Jake had known as long as himself; and his heart writhed with pity and with the acutest pangs of homesickness. "And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day. And the heavens and the earth were finished."⁵ As the Hebrew words of the Sanctification of the Sabbath resounded in Jake's ears, in his father's senile treble, he could see his gaunt figure swaying over a pair of Sabbath loaves.⁶ It is Friday night. The little room, made tidy for the day of rest and faintly illuminated by the mysterious light of two tallow candles rising from freshly burnished candlesticks, is pervaded by a benign, reposeful warmth and a general air of peace and solemnity. There, seated by the side of the head of the little family and within easy reach of the huge brick oven, is his old mother, flushed with fatigue, and with an effort keeping her drowsy eyes open to attend, with a devout mien, her husband's prayer. Opposite to her, by the window, is Yekl, the present Jake, awaiting his turn to chant the same words in the holy tongue, and impatiently thinking of the repast to come after it. Besides the three of them there is no one else in the chamber, for Jake visioned the fascinating scene as he had known it for almost twenty years, and not as it had appeared during the short period since the family had been joined by Gitl and subsequently by Yosselé.

Suddenly he felt himself a child, the only and pampered son of a doting mother. He was overcome with a heart-wringing consciousness of being an orphan, and his soul was filled with a keen sense of desolation and self-pity. And thereupon everything around him—the rows of gigantic tenement houses, the hum and buzz of the scurrying pedestrians, the jingling horse cars—all suddenly grew alien and incomprehensible to Jake. Ah, if he could return to his old home and old days, and have his father recite Sanctification again, and sit by his side, opposite to mother, and receive from her hand a plate of reeking *tzimess*,⁷ as of yore! Poor mother! He *will* not forget her—But what is the Italian playing on that organ, anyhow? Ah, it is the new waltz! By the way, this is Monday and they are dancing at Joe's now and he is not there. "I shall not go there to-night, nor any other night," he commiserated himself, his reveries for the first time since he had left the Pitt Street cigarette stand passing to his wife and child. Her image now stood out in high relief with the multitudinous noisy scene at Joe's academy for a discordant, disquieting background, amid which there vaguely defined itself the reproachful saintlike visage of the deceased. "I will begin a new life!" he vowed to himself.

He strove to remember the child's features, but could only muster the faintest recollection—scarcely anything beyond a general symbol—a red little thing smiling, as he, Jake, tickles it under its tiny chin. Yet Jake's finger at this moment seemed to feel the soft touch of that little chin, and it sent through him a thrill of fatherly affection to which he had long been a stranger. Gitl, on the other hand, loomed up in all the individual sweetness

5. Genesis 1:31.

6. In the Jewish tradition, meals on the Sabbath include a blessing said over two loaves of bread.

7. A kind of dessert made of carrots or turnips [Cahan's note].

of her rustic face. He beheld her kindly mouth opening wide—rather too wide, but all the lovelier for it—as she spoke; her prominent red gums, her little black eyes. He could distinctly hear her voice with her peculiar lisp, as one summer morning she had burst into the house and, clapping her hands in despair, she had cried, “A weeping to me! They yellow rooster is gone!” or, as coming into the smithy she would say: “Father-in-law, mother-in-law calls you to dinner. Hurry up, Yekl, dinner is ready.” And although this was all he could recall her saying, Jake thought himself retentive of every word she had ever uttered in his presence. His heart went out to Gitl and her environment, and he was seized with a yearning tenderness that made him feel like crying. “I would not exchange her little finger for all the American *ladas*,” he soliloquized, comparing Gitl in his mind with the dancing-school girls of his circle. It now filled him with disgust to think of the morals of some of them, although it was from his own sinful experience that he knew them to be of a rather loose character.

He reached his lodgings in a devout mood, and before going to bed he was about to say his prayers. Not having said them for nearly three years, however, he found, to his dismay, that he could no longer do it by heart. His landlady had a prayer-book, but, unfortunately, she kept it locked in the bureau, and she was now asleep, as was everybody else in the house. Jake reluctantly undressed and went to bed on the kitchen lounge, where he usually slept.

When a boy, his mother had taught him to believe that to go to sleep at night without having recited the bed prayer rendered one liable to be visited and choked in bed by some ghost. Later, when he had grown up, and yet before he had left his birthplace, he had come to set down this earnest belief of his good old mother as a piece of womanish superstition, while since he had settled in America he had hardly ever had an occasion to so much as think of bed prayers. Nevertheless, as he now lay vaguely listening to the weird ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece over the stove, and at the same time desultorily brooding upon his father's death, the old belief suddenly arose in his mind and filled him with mortal terror. He tried to persuade himself that it was a silly notion worthy of womenfolk, and even affected to laugh at it audibly. But all in vain. “Cho-king! Cho-king! Cho-king!” went the clock, and the form of a man in white burial clothes never ceased gleaming in his face. He resolutely turned to the wall, and, pulling the blanket over his head, he huddled himself snugly up for instantaneous sleep. But presently he felt the cold grip of a pair of hands about his throat, and he even mentally stuck out his tongue, as one does while being strangled.

With a fast-beating heart Jake finally jumped off the lounge, and gently knocked at the door of his landlady's bedroom.

“*Eshcoosh me, mishesh*,⁸ be so kind as to lend me your prayer-book. I want to say the night prayer,” he addressed her imploringly.

The old woman took it for a cruel practical joke, and flew into a passion.

“Are you crazy or drunk? A nice time to make fun!”

8. Excuse me, missus (ma'am).

And it was not until he had said with suppliant vehemence, “May I as surely be alive as my father is dead!” and she had subjected him to a cross-examination, that she expressed sympathy and went to produce the keys.

Chapter IV

THE MEETING

A few weeks later, on a Saturday morning, Jake, with an unfolded telegram in his hand, stood in front of one of the desks at the Immigration Bureau of Ellis Island. He was freshly shaven and clipped, smartly dressed in his best clothes and ball shoes, and, in spite of the sickly expression of shamefacedness and anxiety which distorted his features, he looked younger than usual.

All the way to the island he had been in a flurry of joyous anticipation. The prospect of meeting his dear wife and child, and, incidentally, of showing off his swell attire to her, had thrown him into a fever of impatience. But on entering the big shed he had caught a distant glimpse of Gitl and Yosselé through the railing separating the detained immigrants from their visitors, and his heart had sunk at the sight of his wife’s uncouth and un-American appearance. She was slovenly dressed in a brown jacket and skirt of grotesque cut, and her hair was concealed under a voluminous wig of a pitch-black hue.⁹ This she had put on just before leaving the steamer, both “in honour of the Sabbath” and by way of sprucing herself up for the great event. Since Yekl had left home she had gained considerably in the measurement of her waist. The wig, however, made her seem stouter and as though shorter than she would have appeared without it. It also added at least five years to her looks. But she was aware neither of this nor of the fact that in New York even a Jewess of her station and orthodox breeding is accustomed to blink at the wickedness of displaying her natural hair, and that none but an elderly matron may wear a wig without being the occasional target for snowballs or stones. She was naturally dark of complexion, and the nine or ten days spent at sea had covered her face with a deep bronze, which combined with her prominent cheek bones, inky little eyes, and, above all, the smooth black wig, to lend her resemblance to a squaw.

Jake had no sooner caught sight of her than he had averted his face, as if loth to rest his eyes on her, in the presence of the surging crowd around him, before it was inevitable. He dared not even survey that crowd to see whether it contained any acquaintance of his, and he vaguely wished that her release were delayed indefinitely.

Presently the officer behind the desk took the telegram from him, and in another little while Gitl, hugging Yosselé with one arm and a bulging parcel with the other, emerged from a side door.

“Yekl!” she screamed out in a piteous high key, as if crying for mercy.

“Dot’sh alla right!” he returned in English, with a wan smile and unconscious of what he was saying. His wandering eyes and dazed mind were striving to fix themselves upon the stern functionary and the questions he bethought himself of asking before finally releasing his prisoners. The contrast between Gitl and Jake was so striking that the officer wanted to make

9. Traditional Jewish law requires married women to cover their hair; in recent centuries, many have done so with wigs.

sure—partly as a matter of official duty and partly for the fun of the thing—that the two were actually man and wife.

“*Oi* a lamentation upon me! He shaves his beard!” Gitl ejaculated to herself as she scrutinized her husband. “Yosselé, look! Here is *taté!*”¹

But Yosselé did not care to look at *taté*. Instead, he turned his frightened little eyes—precise copies of Jake’s—and buried them in his mother’s cheek.

When Gitl was finally discharged she made to fling herself on Jake. But he checked her by seizing both loads from her arms. He started for a distant and deserted corner of the room, bidding her follow. For a moment the boy looked stunned, then he burst out crying and fell to kicking his father’s chest with might and main, his reddened little face appealingly turned to Gitl. Jake continuing his way tried to kiss his son into toleration, but the little fellow proved too nimble for him. It was in vain that Gitl, scurrying behind, kept expostulating with Yosselé: “Why, it is *taté!*” *Taté* was forced to capitulate before the march was brought to its end.

At length, when the secluded corner had been reached, and Jake and Gitl had set down their burdens, husband and wife flew into mutual embrace and fell to kissing each other. The performance had an effect of something done to order, which, it must be owned, was far from being belied by the state of their minds at the moment. Their kisses imparted the taste of mutual estrangement to both. In Jake’s case the sensation was quickened by the strong steerage odours which were emitted by Gitl’s person, and he involuntarily recoiled.

“You look like a *poritz*,”² she said shyly.

“How are you? How is mother?”

“How should she be? So, so. She sends you her love,” Gitl mumbled out.

“How long was father ill?”

“Maybe a month. He cost us health enough.”

He proceeded to make advances to Yosselé, she appealing to the child in his behalf. For a moment the sight of her, as they were both crouching before the boy, precipitated a wave of thrilling memories on Jake and made him feel in his old environment. Presently, however, the illusion took wing and here he was, Jake the Yankee, with this bonnetless, wigged, dowdyish little greenhorn by his side. That she was his wife, nay, that he was a married man at all, seemed incredible to him. The sturdy, thriving urchin had at first inspired him with pride; but as he now cast another side glance at Gitl’s wig he lost all interest in him, and began to regard him, together with his mother, as one great obstacle dropped from heaven, as it were, in his way.

Gitl, on her part, was overcome with a feeling akin to awe. She, too, could not get herself to realize that this stylish young man—shaved and dressed as in *Povodye* is only some young nobleman—was Yekl, her own Yekl, who had all these three years never been absent from her mind. And while she was once more examining Jake’s blue diagonal cutaway, glossy stand-up collar, the white four-in-hand necktie, coquettishly tucked away in the bosom of his starched shirt, and, above all, his patent leather shoes, she was at the same time mentally scanning the Yekl of three years before. The latter alone was hers, and she felt like crying to the image to come back to her and let her be *his* wife.

1. Daddy (Yiddish).

2. Yiddish for nobleman [Cahan’s note].

Presently, when they had got up and Jake was plying her with perfunctory questions, she chanced to recognize a certain movement of his upper lip—an old trick of his. It was as if she had suddenly discovered her own Yekl in an apparent stranger, and, with another pitiful outcry, she fell on his breast.

“Don’t!” he said, with patient gentleness, pushing away her arms. “Here everything is so different.”

She coloured deeply.

“They don’t wear wigs here,” he ventured to add.

“What then?” she asked, perplexedly.

“You will see. It is quite another world.”

“Shall I take it off, then? I have a nice Saturday kerchief,” she faltered. “It is of silk—I bought it at Kalmen’s for a bargain. It is still brand new.”

“Here one does not wear even a kerchief.”

“How then? Do they go about with their own hair?” she queried in ill-disguised bewilderment.

“*Vell, alla right*, put it on, quick!”

As she set about undoing her parcel, she bade him face about and screen her, so that neither he nor any stranger could see her bareheaded while she was replacing the wig by the kerchief. He obeyed. All the while the operation lasted he stood with his gaze on the floor, gnashing his teeth with disgust and shame, or hissing some Bowery oath.

“Is this better?” she asked bashfully, when her hair and part of her forehead were hidden under a kerchief of flaming blue and yellow, whose end dangled down her back.

The kerchief had a rejuvenating effect. But Jake thought that it made her look like an Italian woman of Mulberry Street on Sunday.

“*Alla right*, leave it be for the present,” he said in despair, reflecting that the wig would have been the lesser evil of the two.

When they reached the city Gitl was shocked to see him lead the way to a horse car.

“*Oi woe is me!* Why, it is Sabbath!”³ she gasped.

He irately essayed to explain that a car, being an uncommon sort of vehicle, riding in it implied no violation of the holy day. But this she sturdily met by reference to railroads. Besides, she had seen horse cars while stopping in Hamburg, and knew that no orthodox Jew would use them on the seventh day. At length Jake, losing all self-control, fiercely commanded her not to make him the laughing-stock of the people on the street and to get in without further ado. As to the sin of the matter he was willing to take it all upon himself. Completely dismayed by his stern manner, amid the strange, uproarious, forbidding surroundings, Gitl yielded.

As the horses started she uttered a groan of consternation and remained looking aghast and with a violently throbbing heart. If she had been a culprit on the way to the gallows she could not have been more terrified than she was now at this her first ride on the day of rest.

3. As an interpretation of the commandment to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest, traditional Jewish law would prohibit the riding of a horse-drawn carriage (or railroad) on the Sabbath.

The conductor came up for their fares. Jake handed him a ten-cent piece, and raising two fingers, he roared out: "Two! He ain' no maur as tree years, de liddle feller!" And so great was the impression which his dashing manner and his English produced on Gitl, that for some time it relieved her mind and she even forgot to be shocked by the sight of her husband handling coin on the Sabbath.

Having thus paraded himself before his wife, Jake all at once grew kindly disposed toward her.

"You must be hungry?" he asked.

"Not at all! Where do you eat your *varimess*?"⁴

"Don't say *varimess*," he corrected her complaisantly; "here it is called *dinner*."

"*Dinner*?⁵ And what if one becomes fatter?" she confusedly ventured an irresistible pun.

This was the way in which Gitl came to receive her first lesson in the five or six score English words and phrases which the omnivorous Jewish jargon has absorbed in the Ghettos of English-speaking countries.

Chapter V

A PATERFAMILIAS⁶

It was early in the afternoon of Gitl's second Wednesday in the New World. Jake, Bernstein and Charley, their two boarders, were at work. Yosselé was sound asleep in the lodgers' double bed, in the smallest of the three tiny rooms which the family rented on the second floor of one of a row of brand-new tenement houses. Gitl was by herself in the little front room which served the quadruple purpose of kitchen, dining room, sitting room, and parlour. She wore a skirt and a loose jacket of white Russian calico, decorated with huge gay figures, and her dark hair was only half covered by a bandana of red and yellow. This was Gitl's compromise between her conscience and her husband. She panted to yield to Jake's demands completely but could not nerve herself up to going about "in her own hair, like a Gentile woman." Even the expostulations of Mrs. Kavarsky—the childless middle-aged woman who occupied with her husband the three rooms across the narrow hallway—failed to prevail upon her. Nevertheless Jake, succumbing to Mrs. Kavarsky's annoying solicitations, had bought his wife a cheap high-crowned hat, utterly unfit to be worn over her voluminous wig, and even a corset. Gitl could not be coaxed into accompanying them to the store; but the eloquent neighbor had persuaded Jake that her presence at the transaction was not indispensable after all.

"Leave it to me," she said; "I know what will become her and what won't. I'll get her a hat that will make a Fifth Avenue lady of her, and you shall see if she does not give in. If she is then not *satetzfiet* to go with her own hair, *vell!*" What then would take place Mrs. Kavarsky left unsaid.

The hat and the corset had been lying in the house now three days, and the neighbour's predictions had not yet come true, save for Gitl's prying once

4. Yiddish for dinner [Cahan's note].

5. Yiddish for thinner [Cahan's note].

6. The male head of a household or family (Latin); the term was first used in ancient Rome.

or twice into the pasteboard boxes in which those articles lay, otherwise unmolested, on the shelf over her bed.

The door was open. Gitl stood toying with the knob of the electric bell, and deriving much delight from the way the street door latch kept clicking under her magic touch two flights above. Finally she wearied of her diversion, and shutting the door she went to take a look at Yosselé. She found him fast asleep, and, as she was retracing her steps through her own and Jake's bedroom, her eye fell upon the paper boxes. She got up on the edge of her bed and, lifting the cover from the hatbox, she took a prolonged look at its contents. All at once her face brightened up with temptation. She went to fasten the hallway door of the kitchen on its latch, and then regaining the bedroom shut herself in. After a lapse of some ten or fifteen minutes she re-emerged, attired in her brown holiday dress in which she had first confronted Jake on Ellis Island, and with the tall black straw hat on her head. Walking on tiptoe, as though about to commit a crime, she crossed over to the looking-glass. Then she paused, her eyes on the door, to listen for possible footsteps. Hearing none she faced the glass. "Quite a *panenke!*"⁷ she thought to herself, all aglow with excitement, a smile, at once shamefaced and beatific, melting her features. She turned to the right, then to the left, to view herself in profile, as she had seen Mrs. Kavarsky do, and drew back a step to ascertain the effect of the corset. To tell the truth, the corset proved utterly impotent against the baggy shapelessness of the Povodye garment. Yet Gitl found it to work wonders, and readily pardoned it for the very uncomfortable sensation which it caused her. She viewed herself again and again, and was in a flutter both of ecstasy and alarm when there came a timid rap on the door. Trembling all over, she scampered on tiptoe back into the bedroom, and after a little she returned in her calico dress and bandana kerchief. The knock at the door had apparently been produced by some peddler or beggar, for it was not repeated. Yet so violent was Gitl's agitation that she had to sit down on the haircloth lounge for breath and to regain composure.

"What is it they call this?" she presently asked herself, gazing at the bare boards of the floor. "Floor!" she recalled, much to her self-satisfaction. "And that?" she further examined herself, as she fixed her glance on the ceiling. This time the answer was slow in coming, and her heart grew faint. "And what was it Yekl called that?"—transferring her eyes to the window. "Veen—neev—veenda," she at last uttered exultantly. The evening before she had happened to call it *fentzter*,⁸ in spite of Jake's repeated corrections.

"Can't you say *veenda*?" he had growled. "What a peasant head! Other *greenhornsh* learn to speak American *shtyle* very fast; and she—one might tell her the same word eighty thousand times, and it is *nu used*."⁹

"*Es is of'n veenda mein ich*,"¹ she hastened to set herself right.

She blushed as she said it, but at the moment she attached no importance to the matter and took no more notice of it. Now, however, Jake's tone of voice, as he had rebuked her backwardness in picking up American Yiddish, came back to her and she grew dejected.

7. A young noblewoman [Cahan's note].

8. Window (Yiddish).

9. Not used.

1. It is on the window, I meant to say [Cahan's note].

She was getting used to her husband, in whom her own Yekl and Jake the stranger were by degrees merging themselves into one undivided being. When the hour of his coming from work drew near she would every little while consult the clock and become impatient with the slow progress of its hands; although mixed with this impatience there was a feeling of apprehension lest the supper, prepared as it was under culinary conditions entirely new to her, should fail to please Jake and the boarders. She had even become accustomed to address her husband as Jake without reddening in the face; and, what is more, was getting to tolerate herself being called by him Goitie (Gertie)—a word phonetically akin to Yiddish for Gentile. For the rest she was too inexperienced and too simple-hearted naturally to comment upon his manner toward her. She had not altogether overcome her awe of him, but as he showed her occasional marks of kindness she was upon the whole rather content with her new situation. Now, however, as she thus sat in solitude, with his harsh voice ringing in her ears and his icy look before her, a feeling of suspicion darkened her soul. She recalled other scenes where he had looked and spoken as he had done the night before. "He must hate me! A pain upon me!" she concluded with a fallen heart. She wondered whether his demeanour toward her was like that of other people who hated their wives. She remembered a woman of her native village who was known to be thus afflicted, and she dropped her head in a fit of despair. At one moment she took a firm resolve to pluck up courage and cast away the kerchief and the wig; but at the next she reflected that God would be sure to punish her for the terrible sin, so that instead of winning Jake's love the change would increase his hatred for her. It flashed upon her mind to call upon some "good Jew" to pray for the return of his favour, or to seek some old Polish beggar woman who could prescribe a love potion. But then, alas! who knows whether there are in this terrible America any good Jews or beggar women with love potions at all! Better she had never known this "black year" of a country! Here everybody says she is green. What an ugly word to apply to people!

She had never been green at home, and here she had suddenly become so. What do they mean by it, anyhow? Verily, one might turn green and yellow and gray while young in such a dreadful place. Her heart was wrung with the most excruciating pangs of homesickness. And as she thus sat brooding and listlessly surveying her new surroundings—the iron stove, the stationary washtubs, the window opening vertically, the fire escape, the yellowish broom with its painted handle—things which she had never dreamed of at her birthplace—these objects seemed to stare at her haughtily and inspired her with fright. Even the burnished cup of the electric bell knob looked contemptuously and seemed to call her "Greenhorn! Greenhorn!" "Lord of the world! Where am I?" she whispered with tears in her voice.

The dreary solitude terrified her, and she instinctively rose to take refuge at Yosselé's bedside. As she got up, a vague doubt came over her whether she should find there her child at all. But Yosselé was found safe and sound enough. He was rubbing his eyes and announcing the advent of his famous appetite. She seized him in her arms and covered his warm cheeks with fervent kisses which did her aching heart good. And by-and-bye, as she admiringly watched the boy making savage inroads into a generous slice of rye bread, she thought of Jake's affection for the child; whereupon things began to assume a brighter aspect, and she presently set about preparing supper

with a lighter heart, although her countenance for some time retained its mournful woe-be-gone expression.

Meanwhile Jake sat at his machine merrily pushing away at a cloak and singing to it some of the popular American songs of the day.

The sensation caused by the arrival of his wife and child had nearly blown over. Peltner's dancing school he had not visited since a week or two previous to Gitl's landing. As to the scene which had greeted him in the shop after the stirring news had first reached it, he had faced it out with much more courage and got over it with much less difficulty than he had anticipated.

"Did I ever tell you I was a *tzingle² man*?" he laughingly defended himself, though blushing crimson, against his shopmates' taunts. "And am I obliged to give you a *report* whether my wife has come or not? You are not worth mentioning her name to, *anyhoy*."

The boss then suggested that Jake celebrate the event with two pints of beer, the motion being seconded by the presser, who volunteered to fetch the beverage. Jake obeyed with alacrity, and if there had still lingered any trace of awkwardness in his position it was soon washed away by the foaming liquid.

As a matter of fact, Fanny's embarrassment was much greater than Jake's. The stupefying news was broken to her on the very day of Gitl's arrival. After passing a sleepless night she felt that she could not bring herself to face Jake in the presence of her other shopmates, to whom her feelings for him were an open secret. As luck would have it, it was Sunday, the beginning of a new working week in the metropolitan Ghetto, and she went to look for a job in another place.

Jake at once congratulated himself upon her absence and missed her. But then he equally missed the company of Mamie and of all the other dancing-school girls, whose society and attentions now more than ever seemed to him necessities of his life. They haunted his mind day and night; he almost never beheld them in his imagination except as clustering together with his fellow-cavaliers and making merry over him and his wife; and the vision pierced his heart with shame and jealousy. All his achievements seemed wiped out by a sudden stroke of ill fate. He thought himself a martyr, an innocent exile from a world to which he belonged by right; and he frequently felt the sobs of self-pity mounting to his throat. For several minutes at a time, while kicking at his treadle, he would see, reddening before him, Gitl's bandana kerchief and her prominent gums, or hear an un-American piece of Yiddish pronounced with Gitl's peculiar lisp—that very lisp, which three years ago he used to mimic fondly, but which now grated on his nerves and was apt to make his face twitch with sheer disgust, insomuch that he often found a vicious relief in mocking that lisp of hers audibly over his work. But can it be that he is doomed for life? No! no! he would revolt, conscious at the same time that there was really no escape. "Ah, may she be killed, the horrid greenhorn! he would gasp to himself in a paroxysm of despair. And then he would bewail his lost youth, and curse all Russia for his premature marriage. Presently, however, he would recall the plump, spunky face of his son who bore

such close resemblance to himself, to whom he was growing more strongly attached every day, and who was getting to prefer his company to his mother's; and thereupon his heart would soften toward Gitl, and he would gradually feel the qualms of pity and remorse, and make a vow to treat her kindly. "Never min'," he would at such instances say in his heart, "she will *oyshgreen*³ herself and I shall get used to her. She is a — *shight*⁴ better than all the dancing-school girls." And he would inspire himself with respect for her spotless purity, and take comfort in the fact of her spotless purity, and take comfort in the fact of her being a model housewife, undiverted from her duties by any thoughts of balls or picnics. And despite a deeper consciousness which exposed his readiness to sacrifice it all at any time, he would work himself into a dignified feeling as the head of a household and the father of a promising son, and soothe himself with the additional consolation that sooner or later the other fellows of Joe's academy would also be married.

On the Wednesday in question Jake and his shopmates had warded off a reduction of wages by threatening a strike, and were accordingly in high feather. And so Jake and Bernstein came home in unusually good spirits. Little Joey—for such was Yosselé's name now—with whom his father's plays were for the most part of an athletic character, welcomed Jake by a challenge for a pugilistic encounter, and the way he said "Coom a fight!"⁵ and held out his little fists so delighted Mr. Podkovnik, Sr., that upon ordering Gitl to serve supper he vouchsafed a fillip on the tip of her nose.

While she was hurriedly setting the table, Jake took to describing to Charley his employer's defeat. "You should have seen how he looked, the cockroach!" he said. "He became as pale as the wall and his teeth were chattering as if he had been shaken up with fever, '*pon my void*.'⁶ And how quiet he became all of a sudden, as if he could not count two! One might apply him to an ulcer, so soft was he—ha-ha-ha!" he laughed, looking to Bernstein, who smiled assent.

At last supper was announced. Bernstein donned his hat, and did not sit down to the repast before he had performed his ablutions and whispered a short prayer. As he did so Jake and Charley interchanged a wink. As to themselves, they dispensed with all devotional preliminaries, and took their seats with uncovered heads. Gitl also washed her fingers and said the prayer, and as she handed Yosselé his first slice of bread she did not release it before he had recited the benediction.

Bernstein, who, as a rule, looked daggers at his meal, this time received his plate of *borshtch*⁷—his favourite dish—with a radiant face; and as he ate he pronounced it a masterpiece, and lavished compliments on the artist.

"It's a long time since I tasted such a borshtch! Simply a vivifier! It melts in every limb!" he kept rhapsodizing, between mouthfuls. "It ought to be sent to the Chicago Exposition.⁸ The *misses* would get a medal."

"A *regely* European borshtch!" Charley chimed in. "It is worth ten cents a spoonful, '*pon mine vort*!'"

3. A verb coined from the Yiddish, *oys*, out, and the English *green*, and signifying to cease being green [Cahan's note].

4. As common in printed texts from this era, a dash substitutes for a vulgar word. The full expression is "a damn sight."

5. Come and fight!

6. Upon my word.

7. A sour soup of cabbage and beets [Cahan's note].

8. The World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893.

“Go away! You are only making fun of me,” Gitl declared, beaming with pride. “What is there to be laughing at? I make it as well as I can,” she added demurely.

“Let him who is laughing laugh with teeth,” jested Charlie. “I tell you it is a—” The remainder of the sentence was submerged in a mouthful of the vivifying semi-liquid.

“*Alla right!*” Jake bethought himself. “*Charge* him ten *shent* for each spoonful. Mr. Bernstein, you shall be kind enough to be the *bookkeeper*. But if you don’t pay, Chollie, I’ll get out a *tzommes* [summons] from *court*.”

Whereat the little kitchen rang with laughter, in which all participated except Bernstein. Even Joey, or Yosselé, joined in the general outburst of merriment. Otherwise he was busily engaged cramming borshtch into his mouth, and, in passing, also into his nose, with both his plump hands for a pair of spoons. From time to time he would interrupt operations to make a wry face and, blinking, his eyes, to lisp out rapturously, “Sour!”

“Look—may you live long—do look; he is laughing, too!” Gitl called attention to Yosselé’s bespattered face. “To think of such a crumb having as much sense as that!” She was positive that he appreciated his father’s witticism, although she herself understood it but vaguely.

“May he know evil no better than he knows what he is laughing at,” Jake objected, with a fatherly mien. “What makes you laugh, Joey?” The boy had no time to spare for an answer, being too busy licking his emptied plate. “Look at the soldier’s appetite he has, *de feller!* Joey, hoy you like *de borshtch?* *Alla right?*” Jake asked in English.

“*Awrr-ra rr-right!*” Joey pealed out his sturdy rustic r’s, which he had mastered shortly before taking leave of his doting grandmother.

“See how well he speaks English?” Jake said, facetiously. “A — *shight* better than his mamma, *anyway*.”

Gitl, who was in the meantime serving the meat, coloured, but took the remark in good part.

“*I tell ye* he is growing to be President ‘Nited States,” Charlie interposed.

“*Greenhorn* that you are! A President must be American born,” Jake explained, self-consciously. “Ain’t it, Mr. Bernstein?”

“It’s a pity, then, that he was not born in this country,” Bernstein replied, his eye enviously fixed now on Gitl, now at the child, on whose plate she was at this moment carving a piece of meat into tiny morsels. “*Vell*, if he cannot be a President of the United States, he may be one of a synagogue, so he is a president.”

“Don’t you worry for his sake,” Gitl put in, delighted with the attention her son was absorbing. “He does not need to be a pesdent; he is growing to be a rabbi; don’t be making fun of him.” And she turned her head to kiss the future rabbi.

“Who is making fun?” Bernstein demurred. “I wish I had a boy like him.”

“Get married and you will have one,” said Gitl, beamingly.

“*Shay*, Mr. Bernstein, how about your *shadchen?*”⁹ Jake queried. He gave a laugh, but forthwith checked it, remaining with an embarrassed grin on his face, as though anxious to swallow the question. Bernstein

9. A matrimonial agent [Cahan’s note].

blushed to the roots of his hair, and bent an irate glance on his plate, but held his peace.

His reserved manner, if not his superior education, held Bernstein's shop-mates at a respectful distance from him, and, as a rule, rendered him proof against their badinage, although behind his back they would indulge an occasional joke on his inferiority as a workman, and—while they were at it—on his dyspepsia, his books, and staid, methodical habit. Recently, however, they had got wind of his clandestine visits to a marriage broker's, and the temptation to chaff him on the subject had proved resistless, all the more so because Bernstein, whose leading foible was his well-controlled vanity, was quick to take offence in general, and on this matter in particular. As to Jake, he was by no means averse to having a laugh at somebody else's expense; but since Bernstein had become his boarder he felt that he could not afford to wound his pride. Hence his regret and anxiety at his allusion to the matrimonial agent.

After supper Charlie went out for the evening, while Bernstein retired to their little bedroom. Gitl busied herself with the dishes, and Jake took to romping about with Joey and had a hearty laugh with him. He was beginning to tire of the boy's company and to feel lonesome generally, when there was a knock at the door.

"Coom in!" Gitl hastened to say somewhat coquettishly, flourishing her proficiency in American manners, as she raised her head from the pot in her hands.

"Coom in!" repeated Joey.

The door flew open, and in came Mamie, preceded by a cloud of cologne odours. She was apparently dressed for some occasion of state, for she was powdered and straight-laced and resplendent in a waist of blazing red, gaudily trimmed, and with puff sleeves, each wider than the vast expanse of white straw, surmounted with a whole forest of ostrich feathers, which adorned her head. One of her gloved hands held the huge hoop-shaped yellowish handle of a blue parasol.

"Good-evenin', Jake!" she said, with ostentatious vivacity.

"Good-evenin', Mamie!" Jake returned, jumping to his feet and violently reddening, as if suddenly pricked. "Mish Fein, my vife! My vife, Mish Fein!"

Miss Fein made a stately bow, primly biting her lip as she did so. Gitl, with the pot in her hands, stood staring sheepishly, at a loss what to do.

"Say 'I'm glyad to meeche you,'" Jake urged her, confusedly.

The English phrase was more than Gitl could venture to echo.

"She is still *green*," Jake apologized for her, in Yiddish.

"*Never min'*, she will soon *oysgreen* herself," Mamie remarked, with patronizing affability.

"The *lada* is an acquaintance of mine," Jake explained bashfully, his hand feeling the few days' growth of beard on his chin.

Gitl instinctively scented an enemy in the visitor, and eyed her with an uneasy gaze. Nevertheless she mustered a hospitable air, and drawing up the rocking chair, she said, with shamefaced cordiality: "Sit down; why should you be standing? You may be seated for the same money."

In the conversation which followed Mamie did most of the talking. With a nervous volubility often broken by an irrelevant giggle, and violently rocking with her chair, she expatiated on the charms of America, prophesying

that her hostess would bless the day of her arrival on its soil, and went off in ecstasies over Joey. She spoke with an overdone American accent in the dialect of the Polish Jews, affectedly Germanized and profusely interspersed with English, so that Gitl, whose mother tongue was Lithuanian Yiddish, could scarcely catch the meaning of one half of her flood of garrulity. And as she thus rattled on, she now examined the room, now surveyed Gitl from head to foot, now fixed her with a look of studied sarcasm, followed by a side glance at Jake, which seemed to say, "Woe to you, what a rag of a wife yours is!" Whenever Gitl ventured a timid remark, Mamie would nod assent with dignified amiability, and thereupon imitate a smile, broad yet fleeting, which she had seen performed by some uptown ladies.

Jake stared at the lamp with a faint simper, scarcely following the caller's words. His head swam with embarrassment. The consciousness of Gitl's unattractive appearance made him sick with shame and vexation, and his eyes carefully avoided her bandana, as a culprit schoolboy does the evidence of his offence.

"You mush vant you twenty-five dollars," he presently nerved himself up to say in English, breaking an awkward pause.

"I should cough!" Mamie rejoined.

"In a couple a veeksh, Mamie, as sure as my name is Jake."

"In a couple o' veeks! No, sirree! I mus' have my money at oncet. I don' know vere you vill get it, dough. Vy, a married man!"—with a chuckle. "You got a —— of a lot o' t'ings to pay for. You took de foinitsha by a custom peddler,¹ ain' it? But what a —— do I care? I vant my money. I voiked hard enough for it."

"Don shpeak English. She'll t'ink I don' knu vot ve shpeakin'," he besought her, in accents which implied intimacy between the two of them and a common aloofness from Gitl.

"Vot d'I care vot she t'inks? She's your vife, ain' it? Vell, she mus' know ev'ryt'ing. Dot's right! A husban' dass'n't hide not'ink from his vife!"—with another chuckle and another look of deadly sarcasm at Gitl. "I can say de same in Jewish——"

"Shurr-r up, Mamie!" he interrupted her, gaspingly.

"Don'tch you like it, lump it! A vife mus'n't be skinned like a strange lady, see?" she pursued inexorably. "O'ly a strange goil a feller might bluff dot he ain' married, and skin her out of twenty-five dollars." In point of fact, he had never directly given himself out for a single man to her. But it did not even occur to him to defend himself on that score.

"Mamie! Ma-a-mie! Shtop! I'll pay you ev'ry shent. Shpeak Jewish, please!" he implored, as if for life.

"You'r' afraid of her? Dot's right! Dot's right! Dot's nice! All religious peoples is afraid of deir vifes. But vy didn' you say you vas married from de sta't, an' dot you vant money to send for dem?" she tortured him, with a lingering arch leer.

"For Chris' shake, Mamie!" he entreated her, wincingly. "Shtop to shpeak English, an' shpeak shomet'ing differen'ch. I'll shee you—vere can I shee you?"

1. A door-to-door seller of goods.

"You von't come by Joe no more?" she asked, with sudden interest and even solicitude.

"You t'ink indeed I'm 'frait? If I wanted I can gu dere more ash I ushed to gudere. But vere can I findsh you?"

"I guess you know vere I'm livin', don'ch you? So kvick you forget? Vot a sho't mind you got! Vill you come? Never min', I know you are only bluffin', an' dot's all."

"I'll come, ash sure ash I leev."

"Vill you? All right. But if you don' come an' pay me at least ten dollars for a sta't, you'll see!"

In the meanwhile Gitl, poor thing, sat pale and horror-stuck. Mamie's perfumes somehow terrified her. She was racked with jealousy and all sorts of suspicions, which she vainly struggled to disguise. She could see that they were having a heated altercation, and that Jake was begging about something or other, and was generally the under dog in the parley. Ever and anon she strained her ears in the effort to fasten some of the incomprehensible sounds in her memory, that she might subsequently parrot them over to Mrs. Kavarsky, and ascertain their meaning. But, alas! the attempt proved futile; "never min'" and "all right" being all she could catch.

Mamie concluded her visit by presenting Joey with the imposing sum of five cents.

"What do you say? Say 'danks, sir!'" Gitl prompted the boy.

"Shay t'ank you, ma'am!" Jake over-ruled her. "'Shir' is said to a gentlemarn."

"Good-night!" Mamie sang out, as she majestically opened the door.

"Good-night!" Jake returned, with a burning face.

"Good-night!" Gitl and Joey chimed in duet.

"Say 'cull again!'"

"Cullye gain!"

"Good-night!" Mamie said once more, as she bowed herself out of the door with what she considered an exquisitely "tony" smile.

The guest's exit was succeeded by a momentary silence. Jake felt as if his face and ears were on fire.

"We used to work in the same shop," he presently said.

"Is that the way a seamstress dresses in America?" Gitl inquired. "It is not for nothing that it is called the golden land," she added, with timid irony.

"She must be going to a ball," he explained, at the same moment casting a glance at the looking-glass.

The word "ball" had an imposing ring for Gitl's ears. At home she had heard it used in connection with the sumptuous life of the Russian or Polish nobility, but had never formed a clear idea of its meaning.

"She looks a veritable *panenke*,"² she remarked, with hidden sarcasm. "Was she born here?"

"Nu, but she has been very long here. She speaks English like one American born. We are used to speak in English when we talk *shop*. She came to ask me about a *job*."

2. A young noblewoman [Cahan's note].

Gitl reflected that with Bernstein Jake was in the habit of talking shop in Yiddish, although the boarder could even read English books, which her husband could not do.

Chapter VI

CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER CASES

Jake was left by Mamie in a state of unspeakable misery. He felt discomfited, crushed, the universal butt of ridicule. Her perfumes lingered in his nostrils, taking his breath away. Her venomous gaze stung his heart. She seemed to him elevated above the social plane upon which he had recently (though the interval appeared very long) stood by her side, nay, upon which he had had her at his beck and call; while he was degraded, as it were, wallowing in a mire, from which he yearningly looked up to his former equals, vainly begging for recognition. An uncontrollable desire took possession of him to run after her, to have an explanation, and to swear that he was the same Jake and as much of a Yankee and a gallant as ever. But here was his wife fixing him with a timid, piteous look, which at once exasperated and cowed him; and he dared not stir out of the house, as though nailed by that look of hers to the spot.

He lay down on the lounge, and shut his eyes. Gitl dutifully brought him a pillow. As she adjusted it under his head the touch of her hand on his face made him shrink, as if at the contact with a reptile. He was anxious to flee from his wretched self into oblivion, and his wish was soon gratified, the combined effect of a hard day's work and a plentiful and well-relished supper plunging him into a heavy sleep.

While his snores resounded in the little kitchen, Gitl put the child to bed, and then passed with noiseless step into the boarders' room. The door was ajar and she entered it without knocking, as was her wont. She found Bernstein bent over a book, with a ponderous dictionary by its side. A kerosene lamp with a red shade, occupying nearly all the remaining space on the table, spread a lurid mysterious light. Gitl asked the studious cloakmaker whether he knew a Polish girl named Mamie Fein.

"Mamie Fein? No. Why?" said Bernstein, with his index finger on the passage he had been reading, and his eyes on Gitl's plumpish cheek, bathed in the roseate light.

"Nothing. May not one ask?"

"What is the matter? Speak out! Are you afraid to tell me?" he insisted.

"What should be the matter? She was here. A nice *lada*."

"Your husband knows many nice *ladies*," he said, with a faint but significant smile. And immediately regretting the remark he went on to smooth it down by characterizing Jake as an honest and good-natured fellow.

"You ought to think yourself fortunate in having him for your husband," he added.

"Yes, but what did you mean by what you said first?" she demanded, with an anxious air.

"What did I mean? What should I have meant? I meant what I said. 'F *cou'se* he knows many girls. But who does not? You know there are always girls in the shops where we work. Never fear, Jake has nothing to do with them."

“Who says I fear! Did I say I did? Why should I?”

Encouraged by the cheering effect which his words were obviously having on the credulous, unsophisticated woman, he pursued: “May no Jewish daughter have a worse husband. Be easy, be easy. I tell you he is melting away for you. He never looked as happy as he does since you came.”

“Go away! You must be making fun of me!” she said, beaming with delight.

“Don’t you believe me? Why, are you not a pretty young woman?” he remarked, with an oily look in his eye.

The crimson came into her cheek, and she lowered her glance.

“Stop making fun of me, I beg you,” she said softly. “Is it true?”

“Is what true? That you are a pretty young woman? Take a looking-glass and see for yourself.”

“Strange man that you are!” she returned, with confused deprecation. “I mean what you said before about Jake,” she faltered.

“Oh, about Jake! Then say so,” he jested. “Really he loves you as life.”

“How do you know?” she queried, wistfully.

“How do I know!” he repeated, with an amused smile. “As if one could not see!”

“But he never told you himself!”

“How do you know he did not? You have guessed wrongly, see! He did, lots of times,” he concluded gravely, touched by the anxiety of the poor woman.

She left Bernstein’s room all thrilling with joy, and repentant for her excess of communicativeness. “A wife must not tell other people what happens to her husband,” she lectured herself, in the best of humours. Still, the words “Your husband knows many nice *ladas*,” kept echoing at the bottom of her soul, and in another few minutes she was at Mrs. Kavarsky’s, confidentially describing Mamie’s visit as well as her talk with the boarder, omitting nothing save the latter’s compliments to her looks.

Mrs. Kavarsky was an eccentric, scraggy little woman, with a vehement manner and no end of words and gesticulations. Her dry face was full of warts and surmounted by a chaotic mass of ringlets and curls of a faded brown. None too tidy about her person, and rather slattern in general appearance, she zealously kept up the over-scrupulous cleanliness for which the fame of her apartments reached far and wide. Her neighbours and town-folk pronounced her crazy but “with a heart of diamond,” that is to say, the diametrical opposite of the precious stone in point of hardness, and resembling it in the general sense of excellence of quality. She was neighbourly enough, and as she was the most prosperous and her establishment the best equipped in the whole tenement, many a woman would come to borrow some cooking utensil or other, or even a few dollars on rent day, which Mrs. Kavarsky always started by refusing in the most pointed terms, and almost always finished by granting.

She started to listen to Gitl’s report with a fierce mien which gradually thawed into a sage smile. When the young neighbour had rested her case, she first nodded her head, as who should say, “What fools this young generation be!” and then burst out:

“Do you know what *I* have to tell you? Guess!”

Gitl thought Heaven knows what revelations awaited her.

“That you are a lump of horse and a greenhorn and nothing else!” (Gitl felt much relieved.) “That piece of ugliness should *try* and come to *my* house!

Then she would know the price of a pound of evil. I should open the door and—*march* to eighty black years! Let her go to where she came from! America is not Russia, thanked be the Lord of the world. Here one must only know how to handle a husband. Here a husband must remember ‘*ladas foist*’—but then you do not even know what that means!” she exclaimed, with a despairing wave of her hand.

“What does it mean?” Gitl inquired, pensively.

“What does it mean? What should it mean? It means but too well, *never min’*. It means that when a husband does not *behabe* as he should, one does not stroke his cheeks for it. A prohibition upon me if one does. If the wife is no greenhorn she gets him shoved into the oven, over there, across the river.”

“You mean they send him to prison?”

“Where else—to the theatre?” Mrs. Kavarsky mocked her furiously.

“A weeping to me!” Gitl said, with horror. “May God save me from such things!”

In due course Mrs. Kavarsky arrived at the subject of head-gear, and for the third or fourth time she elicited from her pupil a promise to discard the kerchief and to sell the wig.

“No wonder he does hate you, seeing you in that horrid rag, which makes a grandma of you. Drop it, I tell you! Drop it so that no survivor nor any refugee is left of it. If you don’t obey me this time, dare not cross my threshold any more, do you hear?” she thundered. “One might as well talk to the wall as to her!” she proceeded, actually addressing herself to the opposite wall of her kitchen, and referring to her interlocutrice in the third person. “I am working and working for her, and here she appreciates it as much as the cat. Fiel!” With which the irate lady averted her face in disgust.

“I shall take it off; now for sure—as sure as this is Wednesday,” said Gitl, beseechingly.

Mrs. Kavarsky turned back to her pacified.

“Remember now! If you *deshepointn* [disappoint] me this time, well!—look at me! I should think I was no Gentile woman, either. I am as pious as you *anyhull*, and come from no mean family, either. You know I hate to boast; *but* my father—peace be upon him!—was fit to be a rabbi. *Vell*, and yet I am not afraid to go with my own hair. May no greater sins be committed! Then it would be *never min’* enough. Plenty of time for putting on the patch [meaning the wig] when I get old; *but* as long as I am young, I am young *an’ dot’s ull!* It can not be helped; when one lives in an *edzecate* country, one must live like *edzecate peoples*. As they play, so one dances, as the saying is. But I think it is time for you to be going. Go, my little kitten,” Mrs. Kavarsky said, suddenly lapsing into accents of the most tender affection. “He may be up by this time and wanting *tea*. Go, my little lamb, go and *try* to make yourself agreeable to him and the Uppermost will help. In America one must take care not to displease a husband. Here one is to-day in New York and to-morrow in Chicago; do you understand? As if there were any shame or decency here! A father is no father, a wife, no wife—*not’ing!* Go now, my baby! Go and throw away your rag and be a nice woman, and everything will be *ull right.*” And so hurrying Gitl to go, she detained her with ever a fresh torrent of loquacity for another ten minutes, till the young woman, standing on pins and needles and scarcely lending an ear, plucked up courage to plead her household duties and take a hasty departure.

She found Jake fast asleep. It was after eleven when he slowly awoke. He got up with a heavy burden on his soul—a vague sense of having met with some horrible rebuff. In his semiconsciousness he was unaware, however, of his wife's and son's existence and of the change which their advent had produced in his life, feeling himself the same free bird that he had been a fortnight ago. He stared about the room, as if wondering where he was. Noticing Gitl, who at that moment came out of the bedroom, he instantly realized the situation, recalling Mamie, hat, perfumes, and all, and his heart sank within him. The atmosphere of the room became stifling to him. After sitting on the ounge for some time with a drooping head, he was tempted to fling himself on the pillow again, but instead of doing so he slipped on his hat and coat and went out.

Gitl was used to his goings and comings without explanation. Yet this time his slam of the door sent a sharp pang through her heart. She had no doubt but that he was bending his steps to another interview with the Polish witch, as she mentally branded Miss Fein.

Nor was she mistaken, for Jake did start, mechanically, in the direction of Chrystie Street, where Mamie lodged. He felt sure that she was away to some ball, but the very house in which she roomed seemed to draw him with magnetic force. Moreover, he had a lurking hope that he might, after all, find her about the building. Ah, if by a stroke of good luck he came upon her on the street! All he wished was to have a talk, and that for the sole purpose of amending her unfavourable impression of him. Then he would never so much as think of Mamie, for, indeed, she was hateful to him, he persuaded himself.

Arrived at his destination, and failing to find Mamie on the sidewalk, he was tempted to wait till she came from the ball, when he was seized with a sudden sense of the impropriety of his expedition, and he forthwith returned home, deciding in his mind, as he walked, to move with his wife and child to Chicago.

Meanwhile Mamie lay brooding in her cot-bed in the parlour, which she shared with her landlady's two daughters. She was in the most wretched frame of mind, ineffectually struggling to fall asleep. She had made her way down the stairs leading from the Podkovniks with a violently palpitating heart. She had been bound for no more imposing a place than Joe's academy, and before repairing thither she had had to betake herself home to change her stately toilet for a humbler attire. For, as a matter of fact, it was expressly for her visit to the Podkovniks that she had thus pranked herself out,³ and that would have been much too gorgeous an appearance to make at Joe's establishment on one of its regular dancing evenings. Having changed her toilet she did call at Joe's; but so full was her mind of Jake and his wife and, accordingly, she was so irritable, that in the middle of a quadrille she picked a quarrel with the dancing master, and abruptly left the hall.

The next day Jake's work fared badly. When it was at last over he did not go direct home as usual, but first repaired to Mamie's. He found her with her

3. Adorned herself, got dressed up.

landlady in the kitchen. She looked careworn and was in a white blouse which lent her face a convalescent, touching effect.

“Good-eveni’g, Mrs. Bunetzky! Good-eveni’g, Mamie!” he fairly roared, as he playfully filliped his hat backward. And after addressing a pleasantry or two to the mistress of the house, he boldly proposed to her boarder to go out with him for a talk. For a moment Mamie hesitated, fearing lest her landlady had become aware of the existence of a Mrs. Podkovnik; but instantly flinging all considerations to the wind, she followed him out into the street.

“You’sh afraid I wouldn’t pay you, Mamie?” he began, with bravado, in spite of his intention to start on a different line, he knew not exactly which.

Mamie was no less disappointed by the opening of the conversation than he. “I ain’t afraid a bit,” she answered, sullenly.

“Do you think my *kshpenshesh*⁴ are larger now?” he resumed in Yiddish. “May I lose as much through sickness. On the contrary, I *shpend* even much less than I used to. We have two nice boarders—I keep them only for company’s sake—and I have a *shteada job*—a *puddin’ of a job*. I shall have still more money to *shpend outshite*,” he added, falteringly.

“Outside?”—and she burst into an artificial laugh which sent the blood to Jake’s face.

“Why, do you think I sha’n’t go to Joe’s, nor to the theatre, nor anywhere any more? Still oftener than before! *Hoy much vill you bet?*”

“*Rats!* A married man, a papa go to a dancing school! Not unless your wife drags along with you and never lets go of your skirts,” she said sneeringly, adding the declaration that Jake’s “bluffs” gave her a “regula’ pain in de neck.”

Jake, writhing under her lashes, protested his freedom as emphatically as he could; but it only served to whet Mamie’s spite, and against her will she went on twitting him as a henpecked husband and an old-fashioned Jew. Finally she reverted to the subject of his debt, whereupon he took fire, and after an interchange of threats and some quite forcible language they parted company.



From that evening the spectre of Mamie dressed in her white blouse almost unremittingly preyed on Jake’s mind. The mournful sneer which had lit her pale, invalid-looking face on their last interview, when she wore that blouse, relentlessly stared down into his heart; gnawed at it with tantalizing deliberation; “drew out his soul,” as he once put it to himself, dropping his arms and head in despair. “Is this what they call love?” he wondered, thinking of the strange, hitherto unexperienced kind of malady, which seemed to be gradually consuming his whole being. He felt as if Mamie had breathed a delicious poison into his veins, which was now taking effect, spreading a devouring fire through his soul, and kindling him with a frantic thirst for more of the same virus. His features became distended, as it were, and acquired a feverish effect; his eyes had a pitiable, beseeching look, like those of a child in the period of teething.

He grew more irritable with Gitl every day, the energy failing him to dissemble his hatred for her. There were moments when, in his hopeless crav-

4. Expenses.

ing for the presence of Mamie, he would consciously seek refuge in a feeling of compunction and of pity for his wife; and on several such occasions he made an effort to take an affectionate tone with her. But the unnatural sound of his voice each time only accentuated to himself the depth of his repugnance, while the hysterical promptness of her answers, the servile gratitude which trembled in her voice and shone out of her radiant face would, at such instances, make him breathless with rage. Poor Gitl! she strained every effort to please him; she tried to charm him by all the simple-minded little coquetries she knew, by every art which her artless brain could invent; and only succeeded in making herself more offensive than ever.

As to Jake's feelings for Joey, they now alternated between periods of indifference and gusts of exaggerated affection; while, in some instances, when the boy let himself be fondled by his mother or returned her caresses in his childish way, he would appear to Jake as siding with his enemy, and share with Gitl his father's odium.

One afternoon, shortly after Jake's interview with Mamie in front of the Chrystie Street tenement house, Fanny called on Gitl.

"Are you Mrs. Podkovnik?" she inquired, with an embarrassed air.

"Yes; why?" Mrs. Podkovnik replied, turning pale. "She is come to tell me that Jake has eloped with that Polish girl," flashed upon her overwrought mind. At the same moment Fanny, sizing her up, exclaimed inwardly, "So this is the kind of woman she is, poor thing!"

"Nothing. I *just* want to speak to you," the visitor uttered, mysteriously.

"What is it?"

"As I say, nothing at all. Is there nobody else in the house?" Fanny demanded, looking about.

"May I not live till to-morrow if there is a living soul except my boy, and he is asleep. You may speak; never fear. But first tell me who you are; do not take ill my question. Be seated."

The girl's appearance and manner began to inspire Gitl with confidence.

"My name is Rosy—Rosy Blank," said Fanny, as she took a seat on the further end of the lounge. "*F cou'se*, you don't know me, how should you? But I know you well enough, never mind that we have never seen each other before. I used to work with your husband in one shop. I have come to tell you such an important thing! You must know it. It makes no difference that you don't know who I am. May God grant me as good a year as my friendship is for you."

"Something about Jake?" Gitl blurted out, all anxiety, and instantly regretted the question.

"How did you guess? About Jake it is! About him and somebody else. But see how you did guess! Swear that you won't tell anybody that I have been here."

"May I be left speechless, may my arms and legs be paralyzed, if I ever say a word!" Gitl recited vehemently, thrilling with anxiety and impatience. "So it is! they have eloped!" she added in her heart, seating herself close to her caller. "A darkness upon my years!" What will become of me and Yos-sel e now?"

"Remember, now, not a word, either to Jake or to anybody else in the world. I had a mountain of *trouble* before I found out where you lived, and I *stopped*

work on purpose to come and speak to you. As true as you see me alive. I wanted to call when I was sure to find you alone, you understand. Is there really nobody about?" And after a preliminary glance at the door and exacting another oath of discretion from Mrs. Podkovnik, Fanny began in an undertone:

"There is a girl; well, her name is Mamie; well, she and your husband used to go to the same dancing school—that is a place where *fellers* and *ladies* learn to dance," she explained. "I go there, too; but I know your husband from the shop."

"But that *lada* has also worked in the same shop with him, hasn't she?" Gitl broke in, with a desolate look in her eye.

"Why, did Jake tell you she had?" Fanny asked in surprise.

"No, not at all, not at all! I am just asking. May I be sick if I know anything."

"The idea! How could they work together, seeing that she is a shirtmaker and he a cloakmaker. Ah, if you knew what a witch she is! She has set her mind on your husband, and is bound to take him away from you. She hitched on to him long ago. But since you came I thought she would have God in her heart, and be ashamed of people. Not she! She be ashamed! You may sling a cat into her face and she won't mind it. The black year knows where she grew up. I tell you there is not a girl in the whole dancing school but can not bear the sight of that Polish lizard!"

"Why, do they meet and kiss?" Gitl moaned out. "Tell me, do tell me all, my little crown, keep nothing from me, tell me my whole dark lot."

"*Ull right*, but be sure not to speak to anybody. I'll tell you the truth: My name is not Rosy Blank at all. It is Fanny Scutelsky. You see, I am telling you the whole truth. The other evening they stood near the house where she *boards*, on Chrystie Street; so they were looking into each other's eyes and talking like a pair of little doves. A *lady* who is a *particla* friend of mine saw them; so she says a child could have guessed that she was making love to him and *trying* to get him away from you. *'F cou'se* it is none of my *business*. Is it my *business*, then? What do *I care*? It is only *becuss* I pity you. It is like the nature I have; I can not bear to see anybody in trouble. Other people would not *care*, but I do. Such is my nature. So I thought to myself I must go and tell Mrs. Podkovnik all about it, in order that she might know what to do."

For several moments Gitl sat speechless, her head hung down, and her bosom heaving rapidly. Then she fell to swaying her frame sidewise, and vehemently wringing her hands.

"*Oi! Oi!* Little mother! A pain to me!" she moaned. "What is to be done? Lord of the world, what is to be done? Come to the rescue! People, do take pity, come to the rescue!" She broke into a fit of low sobbing, which shook her whole form and was followed by a torrent of tears.

Whereupon Fanny also burst out crying, and falling upon Gitl's shoulder she murmured: "My little heart! you don't know what a friend I am to you! Oh, if you knew what a serpent that Polish thief is!"

Chapter VII

MRS. KAVARSKY'S COUP D'ÉTAT

It was not until after supper time that Gitl could see Mrs. Kavarsky; for the neighbour's husband was in the installment business, and she generally spent

all day in helping him with his collections as well as canvassing for new customers. When Gitl came in to unburden herself of Fanny's revelations, she found her confidante out of sorts. Something had gone wrong in Mrs. Kavarsky's affairs, and, while she was perfectly aware that she had only herself to blame, she had laid it all to her husband and had nagged him out of the house before he had quite finished his supper.

She listened to her neighbour's story with a bored and impatient air, and when Gitl had concluded and paused for her opinion, she remarked languidly: "It serves you right! It is all *becuss* you will not throw away that ugly kerchief of yours. What is the use of your asking my advice?"

"*Oi!* I think even that wouldn't help it now," Gitl rejoined, forlornly. "The Uppermost knows what drug she had charmed him with. A cholera into her, Lord of the world!" she added, fiercely.

Mrs. Kavarsky lost her temper.

"Say, will you stop talking nonsense?" she shouted savagely. "No wonder your husband does not *care* for you, seeing these stupid greenhornlike notions of yours."

"How then could she have bewitched him, the witch that she is? Tell me, little heart, little crown, do tell me! Take pity and be a mother to me. I am so lonely and——" Heartrending sobs choked her voice.

"What shall I tell you? that you are a blockhead? *Oi! Oi! Oi!*" she mocked her. "Will the crying help you? *Ull right*, cry away!"

"But what shall I do?" Gitl pleaded, wiping her tears. "It may drive me mad. I won't wear the kerchief any more. I swear this is the last day," she added, propitiatingly.

"*Dot's right!* When you talk like a man I like you. And now sit still and listen to what an older person and a business woman has to tell you. In the first place, who knows what that girl—Jennie, Fannie, Shmennie, Yomzedemennie—whatever you may call her—is after?" The last two names Mrs. Kavarsky invented by poetical license to complete the rhyme and for the greater emphasis of her contempt. "In the second place, *asposel* [supposing] he did talk to that Polish piece of disturbance. *Vell*, what of it? It is all over with the world, isn't it? The mourner's prayer is to be said after it, I declare! A married man stood talking to a girl! Just think of it! May no greater evil befall any Yiddish daughter. This is not Europe where one dares not say a word to a strange woman! *Nu, sir!*"

"What, then, is the matter with him? At home he would hardly ever leave my side, and never ceased looking into my eyes. Woe is me, what America has brought me to!" And again her grief broke out into a flood of tears.

This time Mrs. Kavarsky was moved.

"Don't be crying, my child; he may come in for you," she said, affectionately. "Believe me you are making a mountain out of a fly—you are imagining too much."

"*Oi*, as my ill luck would have it, it is all but too true. Have I no eyes, then? He mocks at everything I say or do; he cannot bear the touch of my hand. America *has* made a mountain of ashes out of me. Really, a curse upon Columbus!" she ejaculated mournfully, quoting in all earnestness a current joke of the Ghetto.

Mrs. Kavarsky was too deeply touched to laugh. She proceeded to examine her pupil, in whispers, upon certain details, and thereupon her interest

in Gitl's answers gradually superseded her commiseration for the unhappy woman.

"And how does he behave toward the boy?" she absently inquired, after a melancholy pause.

"Would he were as kind to me!"

"Then it is *ull right!* Such things will happen between man and wife. It is all *humbuk*.⁵ It will all come right, and you will some day be the happiest woman in the world. You shall see. Remember that Mrs. Kavarsky has told you so. And in the meantime stop crying. A husband hates a sniveler for a wife. You know the story of Jacob and Leah, as it stands written in the Holy Five Books, don't you? Her eyes became red with weeping, and Jacob, our father, did not *care* for her on that account.⁶ Do you understand?"

All at once Mrs. Kavarsky bit her lip, her countenance brightening up with a sudden inspiration. At the next instant she made a lunge at Gitl's head, and off went the kerchief. Gitl started with a cry, at the same moment covering her head with both hands.

"Take off your hands! Take them off at once, I say!" the other shrieked, her eyes flashing fire and her feet performing an Irish jig.

Gitl obeyed for sheer terror. Then, pushing her toward the sink, Mrs. Kavarsky said peremptorily: "You shall wash off your silly tears and I'll arrange your hair, and from his day on there shall be no kerchief, do you hear?"

Gitl offered but feeble resistance, just enough to set herself right before her own conscience. She washed herself quietly, and when her friend set about combing her hair, she submitted to the operation without a murmur, save for uttering a painful hiss each time there came a particularly violent tug at the comb; for, indeed, Mrs. Kavarsky plied her weapon rather energetically and with a bloodthirsty air, as if inflicting punishment. And while she was thus attacking Gitl's luxurious raven locks she kept growling, as glibly as the progress of the comb would allow, and modulating her voice to its movements: "Believe me you are a lump of hunchback, *sure*; you may—may depend up-upon it! Tell me, now, do you ever comb yourself? You have raised quite a *plica*,⁷ the black year take it! Another woman would thank God for such beau-beautiful hair, and here she keeps it hidden and makes a bugbear of herself—a *regele monkey!*" she concluded, gnashing her teeth at the stout resistance with which her implement was at that moment grappling.

Gitl's heart swelled with delight, but she modestly kept silent.

Suddenly Mrs. Kavarsky paused thoughtfully, as if conceiving a new idea. In another moment a pair of scissors and curling irons appeared on the scene. At the sight of this Gitl's blood ran chill, and when the scissors gave their first click in her hair she felt as though her heart snapped. Nevertheless, she endured it all without a protest, blindly trusting that these instruments of torture would help reinstall her in Jake's good graces.

5. Humbug.

6. In Genesis 29, Jacob falls in love with Rachel, but through the deception of her father, first marries her sister, Leah. Jacob eventually marries Rachel as well and has children with both wives. Leah is described as having "weak"

(sometimes translated as "tender") eyes, which some commentators have taken to mean that her eyes showed signs of weeping, leading Jacob to prefer Rachel.

7. The Polish *plica* was a plait in which the hair was matted together as with dreadlocks.

At last, when all was ready and she found herself adorned with a pair of rich side bangs, she was taken in front of the mirror, and ordered to hail the transformation with joy. She viewed herself with an unsteady glance, as if her own face struck her as unfamiliar and forbidding. However, the change pleased her as much as it startled her.

"Do you really think he will like it?" she inquired with piteous eagerness, in a fever of conflicting emotions.

"If he does not, I shall refund your money!" her guardian snarled, in high glee.

For a moment or so Mrs. Kavarsky paused to admire the effect of her art. Then, in a sudden transport of enthusiasm, she sprang upon her ward, and with an "Oi, a health to you!" she smacked a hearty kiss on her burning cheek.

"And now come, piece of wretch!" So saying, Mrs. Kavarsky grasped Gitl by the wrist, and forcibly convoyed her into her husband's presence.

The two boarders were out, Jake being alone with Joey. He was seated at the table, facing the door, with the boy on his knees.

"*Goot-evenik*, Mr. Podkvnnik! Look what I have brought you: a brand new wife!" Mrs. Kavarsky said, pointing at her charge, who stood faintly struggling to disengage her hand from her escort's tight grip, her eyes looking to the ground and her cheeks a vivid crimson.

Gitl's unwonted appearance impressed Jake as something unseemly and meretricious. The sight of her revolted him.

"It becomes her like a—a—a wet cat," he faltered out with a venomous smile, choking down a much stronger simile which would have conveyed his impression with much more precision, but which he dared not apply to his own wife.

The boy's first impulse upon the entrance of his mother had been to run up to her side and to greet her merrily; but he, too, was shocked by the change in her aspect, and he remained where he was, looking from her to Jake in blank surprise.

"Go away, you don't mean it!" Mrs. Kavarsky remonstrated distressedly, at the same moment releasing her prisoner, who forthwith dived into the bedroom to bury her face in a pillow, and to give way to a stream of tears. Then she made a few steps toward Jake, and speaking in an undertone she proceeded to take him to task. "Another man would consider himself happy to have such a wife," she said. "Such a quiet, honest woman! And such a housewife! Why, look at the way she keeps everything—like a fiddle. It is simply a treat to come into your house. I do declare you sin!"

"What do I do to her?" he protested morosely, cursing the intruder in his heart.

"Who says you do? Mercy and peace! Only—you understand—how shall I say it?—she is only a young woman; *vell*, so she imagines that you do not *care* for her as much as you used to. Come, Mr. Podkvnnik, you know you are a sensible man! I have always thought you one—you may ask my husband. Really you ought to be ashamed of yourself. A prohibition upon me if I could ever have believed it of you. Do you think a stylish girl would make you a better wife? If you do, you are grievously mistaken. What are they good for, the hussies? To darken the life of a husband? That, I admit, they are

really great hands at. They only know how to squander his money for a new hat or rag every Monday and Thursday, and to tramp around with other men, fie upon the abominations! May no good Jew know them!”

Her innuendo struck Mrs. Kavarisky as extremely ingenious, and, egged on by the dogged silence of her auditor, she ventured a step further.

“Do you mean to tell me,” she went on, emphasizing each word, and shaking her whole body with melodramatic defiance, “that you would be better off with a *dantzin'-school* girl?”

“A *danshin'-shchool* girl?” Jake repeated, turning ashen pale, and fixing his inquisitress with a distant gaze. “Who says I care for a *danshin'-shchool* girl?” he bellowed, as he let down the boy and started to his feet red as a cockscomb. “It was she who told you that, was it?”

Joey had tripped up to the lounge where he now stood watching his father with a stare in which there was more curiosity than fright.

The little woman lowered her crest. “Not at all! God be with you!” she said quickly, in a tone of abject cowardice, and involuntarily shrinking before the ferocious attitude of Jake’s strapping figure. “Who? What? When? I did not mean anything at all, *sure*. Gitl *never* said a word to me. A prohibition if she did. Come, Mr. Podkovnik, why should you get *ektzited*?” she pursued, beginning to recover her presence of mind. “By-the-bye—I came near forgetting—how about the boarder you promised to get me; do you remember, Mr. Podkovnik?”

“Talk away a toothache⁸ for your grandma, not for me. Who told her about *danshin'* girls?” he thundered again, re-enforcing the ejaculation with an English oath, and bringing down a violent fist on the table as he did so.

At this Gitl’s sobs made themselves heard from the bedroom. They lashed Jake into a still greater fury.

“What is she whimpering about, the piece of stench! *Alla right*, I do hate her; I can not bear the sight of her; and let her do what she likes. *I don' care!*”

“Mr. Podkovnik! To think of a *smat* man like you talking in this way!”

“Dot’sh *alla right!*” he said, somewhat relenting. “I don’t *care* for any *danshin'* girls. It is a — lie! It was that scabby *greenhorn* who must have taken it into her head. I don’t *care* for anybody; not for her certainly”—pointing to the bedroom. “I am an *American feller*, a *Yankee*—that’s what I am. What punishment is due to me, then, if I can not stand a *shnooza*⁹ like her? It is *nu ushed*; I can not live with her, even if she stand one foot on heaven and one on earth. Let her take everything”—with a wave at the household effects “and I shall pay her as much *cash* as she asks—I am willing to break stones to pay her—provided she agrees to a divorce.”

The word had no sooner left his lips than Gitl burst out of the darkness of her retreat, her bangs dishevelled, her face stained and flushed with weeping and rage, and her eyes, still suffused with tears, flashing fire.

“May you and your Polish harlot be jumping out of your skins and chafing with wounds as long as you will have to wait for a divorce!” she exploded. “He thinks I don’t know how they stand together near her house making love to each other!”

Her unprecedented show of pugnacity took him aback.

8. Chatter nonsense.

9. Snoozer, a dullard.

"Look at the Cossack of straw!" he said quietly, with a forced smile. "Such a piece of cholera!" he added, as if speaking to himself, as he resumed his seat. "I wonder who tells her all these fibs?"

Gitl broke into a fresh flood of tears.

"Vell, what do you want now?" Mrs. Kavarsky said, addressing herself to her. "He says it is a lie. I told you you take all sorts of silly notions into your head."

"Ach, would it were a lie!" Gitl answered between her sobs.

At this juncture the boy stepped up to his mother's side, and nestled against her skirt. She clasped his head with both her hands, as though gratefully accepting an offer of succour against an assailant. And then, for the vague purpose of wounding Jake's feelings, she took the child in her arms, and huddling him close to her bosom, she half turned from her husband, as much as to say, "We two are making common cause against you." Jake was cut to the quick. He kept his glance fixed on the reddened, tear-stained profile of her nose, and, choking with hate, he was going to say, "For my part, hang yourself together with him!" But he had self-mastery enough to repress the exclamation, confining himself to a disdainful smile.

"Children, children! Woe, how you do sin!" Mrs. Kavarsky sermonized. "Come now, obey an older person. Whoever takes notice of such trifles? You have had a quarrel? *ull right!* And now make peace. Have an embrace and a good kiss and *dot's ull! Hurry yup*, Mr. Podkovnik! Don't be ashamed!" she beckoned to him, her countenance wreathed in voluptuous smiles in anticipation of the love scene about to enact itself before her eyes. Mr. Podkovnik failing to hurry up, however, she went on disappointedly: "Why, Mr. Podkovnik! Look at the boy the Uppermost has given you. Would he might send me one like him. Really, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Vot you kickin' aboyt, anyhoy?" Jake suddenly fired out, in English. "Min' jou on businesh an' dot'sh ull," he added indignantly, averting his head.

Mrs. Kavarsky grew as red as a boiled lobster.

"Vo—vo—vot *you* keeck aboyt?" she panted, drawing herself up and putting her arms akimbo. "He must think I, too, can be scared by his English. I declare my shirt has turned linen for fright! I was in America while you were hauling away at the bellows in Povodye; do you know it?"

"Are you going out of my house or not?" roared Jake, jumping to his feet.

"And if I am not, what will you do? Will you call a *politzman*? *Ull right*, do. That is just what I want. I shall tell him I can not leave her alone with a murderer like you, for fear you might kill her and the boy, so that you might dawdle around with that Polish wench of yours. Here you have it!" Saying which, she put her thumb between her index and third finger—the Russian version of the well-known gesture of contempt—presenting it to her adversary together with a generous portion of her tongue.

Jake's first impulse was to strike the meddlesome woman. As he started toward her, however, he changed his mind. "*Alla right*, you may remain with her!" he said, rushing up to the clothes rack, and slipping on his coat and hat. "*Alla right*," he repeated with broken breath, "we shall see!" And with a frantic bang of the door he disappeared.

The fresh autumn air of the street at once produced its salutary effect on his overexcited nerves. As he grew more collected he felt himself in a most awkward muddle. He cursed his outbreak of temper, and wished the next

few days were over and the breach healed. In his abject misery he thought of suicide, of fleeing to Chicago or St. Louis, all of which passed through his mind in a stream of the most irrelevant and the most frivolous reminiscences. He was burning to go back, but the nerve failing him to face Mrs. Kavarsky, he wondered where he was going to pass the night. It was too cold to be tramping about till it was time to go to work, and he had not change enough to pay for a night's rest in a lodging house; so in his despair he fulminated against Gitl and, above all, against her tutoress. Having passed as far as the limits of the Ghetto he took a homeward course by a parallel street, knowing all the while that he would lack the courage to enter his house. When he came within sight of it he again turned back, yearningly thinking of the cozy little home behind him, and invoking maledictions upon Gitl for enjoying it now while he was exposed to the chill air without the prospect of shelter for the night. As he thus sauntered reluctantly about he meditated upon the scenes coming in his way, and upon the thousand and one things which they brought to his mind. At the same time his heart was thirsting for Mamie, and he felt himself a wretched outcast, the target of ridicule—a martyr paying the penalty of sins, which he failed to recognise as sins, or of which, at any rate, he could not hold himself culpable.

Yes, he will go to Chicago, or to Baltimore, or, better still, to England. He pictured to himself the sensation it would produce and Gitl's despair. "It will serve her right. What does she want of me?" he said to himself, reveling in a sense of revenge. But then it was such a pity to part with Joey! Whereupon, in his reverie, Jake beheld himself stealing into his house in the dead of night, and kidnapping the boy. And what would Mamie say? Would she not be sorry to have him disappear? Can it be that she does not care for him any longer? She seemed to. But that was before she knew him to be a married man. And again his heart uttered curses against Gitl. Ah, if Mamie did still care for him, and fainted upon hearing of his flight, and then could not sleep, and ran around wringing her hands and raving like mad! It would serve *her* right, too! She should have come to tell him she loved him instead of making that scene at his house and taking a derisive tone with him upon the occasion of his visit to her. Still, should she come to join him in London, he would receive her, he decided magnanimously. They speak English in London, and have cloak shops like here. So he would be no greenhorn there, and wouldn't they be happy—he, Mamie, and little Joey! Or, supposing his wife suddenly died, so that he could legally marry Mamie and remain in New York—

A mad desire took hold of him to see the Polish girl, and he involuntarily took the way to her lodging. What is he going to say to her? Well, he will beg her not to be angry for his failure to pay his debt, take her into his confidence on the subject of his proposed flight, and promise to send her every cent from London. And while he was perfectly aware that he had neither the money to take him across the Atlantic nor the heart to forsake Gitl and Joey, and that Mamie would never let him leave New York without paying her twenty-five dollars, he started out on a run in the direction of Chrystie Street. Would she might offer to join him in his flight! She must have money enough for two passage tickets, the rogue. Wouldn't it be nice to be with her on the steamer! he thought, as he wrathfully brushed apart a group of street urchins impeding his way.

Chapter VIII

A HOUSETOP IDYL

Jake found Mamie on the sidewalk in front of the tenement house where she lodged. As he came rushing up to her side, she was pensively rehearsing a waltz step.

"Mamie, come shomeversh!¹ I got to shpeak to you a lot," he gasped out.

"Vot's de madder?" she demanded, startled by his excited manner.

"This is not the place for speaking," he rejoined vehemently, in Yiddish. "Let us go to the Grand Street dock or to Seventh Street park. There we can speak so that nobody overhears us."

"I bet you he is going to ask me to run away with him," she prophesied to herself; and in her feverish impatience to hear him out she proposed to go on the roof, which, the evening being cool, she knew to be deserted.

When they reached the top of the house they found it overhung with rows of half-dried linen, held together with wooden clothespins and trembling to the fresh autumn breeze. Overhead, fleecy clouds were floating across a starry blue sky, now concealing and now exposing to view a pallid crescent of new moon. Coming from the street below there was a muffled, mysterious hum ever and anon drowned in the clatter and jingle of a passing horse car. A lurid, exceedingly uncanny sort of idyl it was; and in the midst of it there was something extremely weird and gruesome in those stretches of wavering, fitfully silvered white, to Jake's overtaxed mind vaguely suggesting the burial clothes of the inmates of a Jewish graveyard.

After picking and diving their way beneath the trembling lines of underwear, pillowcases, sheets, and what not, they paused in front of a tall chimney pot. Jake, in a medley of superstitious terror, infatuation, and bashfulness, was at a loss how to begin and, indeed, what to say. Feeling that it would be easy for him to break into tears he instinctively chose this as the only way out of his predicament.

"Vot's de madder, Jake? Speak out!" she said, with motherly harshness.

He now wished to say something, although he still knew not what; but his sobs once called into play were past his control.

"She must give you *trouble*," the girl added softly, after a slight pause, her excitement growing with every moment.

"Ach, Mamielé!" he at length exclaimed, resolutely wiping his tears with his handkerchief. "My life has become so dark and bitter to me, I might as well put a rope around my neck."

"Does she eat you?"

"Let her go to all lamentations! Somebody told her I go around with you."

"But you know it is a lie! Some one must have seen us the other evening when we were standing downstairs. You had better not come here, then. When you have some money, you will send it to me," she concluded, between genuine sympathy and an intention to draw him out.

"Ach, don't say that, Mamie. What is the good of my life without you? I don't sleep nights. Since she came I began to understand how dear you are to me. I can not tell it so well," he said, pointing to his heart.

1. Somewhere.

"Yes, *but* before she came you didn't *care* for me!" she declared, laboring to disguise the exultation which made her heart dance.

"I always did, Mamie. May I drop from this roof and break hand and foot if I did not."

A flood of wan light struck Mamie full in her swarthy face, suffusing it with ivory effulgence, out of which her deep dark eyes gleamed with a kind of unearthly luster.

Jake stood enraptured. He took her by the hand, but she instantly withdrew it, edging away a step. His touch somehow restored her to calm self-possession, and even kindled a certain thirst for revenge in her heart.

"It is not what it used to be, Jake," she said in tones of complaisant earnestness. "Now that I know you are a married man it is all gone. Yes, Jake, it is all gone! You should have cared for me when she was still there. Then you could have gone to a rabbi and sent her a writ of divorce. It is too late now, Jake."

"It is not too late!" he protested, tremulously. "I will get a divorce, *anyhoy*. And if you don't take me I will hang myself," he added, imploringly.

"On a burned straw?"² she retorted, with a cruel chuckle.

"It is all very well for you to laugh. But if you could enter my heart and see how I *shuffer!*"

"Woe is me! I don't see how you will stand it," she mocked him. And abruptly assuming a grave tone, she pursued vehemently: "But I don't understand; since you sent her tickets and money, you must like her."

Jake explained that he had all along intended to send her rabbinical divorce papers instead of a passage ticket, and that it had been his old mother who had pestered him, with her tear-stained letters, into acting contrary to his will.

"*All right,*" Mamie resumed, with a dubious smile; "but why don't you go to Fanny, or Beckie, or Beilké the 'Black Cat'? You used to care for them more than for me. Why should you just come to me?"

Jake answered by characterizing the girls she had mentioned in terms rather too high-scented for print, protesting his loathing for them. Whereupon she subjected him to a rigid cross-examination as to his past conduct toward herself and her rivals; and although he managed to explain matters to her inward satisfaction, owing, chiefly, to a predisposition on her own part to credit his assertions on the subject, she could not help continuing obdurate and in a spiteful, vindictive mood.

"All you say is not worth a penny, and it is too late, *anyway,*" was her verdict. "You have a wife and a child; better go home and be a father to your *boy.*" Her last words were uttered with some approach to sincerity, and she was mentally beginning to give herself credit for magnanimity and pious self-denial. She would have regretted her exhortation, however, had she been aware of its effect on her listener; for her mention of the boy and appeal to Jake as a father aroused in him a lively sense of the wrong he was doing. Moreover, while she was speaking his attention had been attracted to a loosened pillowcase ominously fluttering and flapping a yard or two off. The figure of his dead father, attired in burial linen, arose to his mind.

2. Mocking reference to the Yiddish idiom "to burn like a straw roof," meaning to burn quickly and completely, like the pangs of infatuation.

"You don' wanted? Alla right, you be shorry," he said half-heartedly, turning to go.

"Hol' on!" she checked him, irritably.

"How are you going to *fix* it? Are you *sure* she will take a divorce?"

"Will she have a choice then? She will have to take it. I won't live with her *anyhoy*," he replied, his passion once more welling up in his soul. "Mamie, my treasure, my glory!" he exclaimed, in tremulous accents. "Say that you are *shatichfied*; my heart will become lighter." Saying which, he strained her to his bosom, and fell to raining fervent kisses on her face. At first she made a faint attempt at freeing herself, and then suddenly clasping him with mad force she pressed her lips to his in a fury of passion.

The pillowcase flapped aloud, ever more sternly, warningly, portentously.

Jake cast an involuntary side glance at it. His spell of passion was broken and supplanted by a spell of benumbing terror. He had an impulse to withdraw his arms from the girl; but, instead, he clung to her all the faster, as if for shelter from the ghostlike thing.

With a last frantic hug Mamie relaxed her hold. "Remember now, Jake!" she then said, in a queer hollow voice. "Now it is all *settled*. Maybe you are making fun of me? If you are, you are playing with fire. Death to me—death to you!" she added, menacingly.

He wished to say something to reassure her, but his tongue seemed grown fast to his palate.

"Am I to blame?" she continued with ghastly vehemence, sobs ringing in her voice. "Who asked you to come? Did I lure you from her, then? I should sooner have thrown myself into the river than taken away somebody else's husband. You say yourself that you would not live with her, *anyway*. But now it is all gone. Just try to leave me now!" And giving vent to her tears, she added, "Do you think my heart is no heart?"

A thrill of joyous pity shot through his frame. Once again he caught her to his heart, and in a voice quivering with tenderness he murmured: "Don't be uneasy, my dear, my gold, my pearl, my consolation! I will let my throat be cut, into fire or water will I go, for your sake."

"Dot's all right," she returned, musingly. "But how are you going to get rid of her? You von't go back on me, vill you?" she asked in English.

"*Me?* May I not be able to get away from this spot. Can it be that you still distrust me?"

"Swear!"

"How else shall I swear?"

"By your father, peace upon him."

"May my father as surely have a bright paradise," he said, with a show of alacrity, his mind fixed on the loosened pillowcase. "*Vell*, are you *shatichfied* now?"

"All right," she answered, in a matter-of-fact way, and as if only half satisfied. "But do you think she will take money?"

"But I have none."

"Nobody asks you if you have. But would she take it, if you had?"

"If I had! I am sure she would take it; she would have to, for what would she gain if she did not?"

"Are you *sure?*"

"*F* *cush!*"

"*Ach*, but, after all, why did you not tell me you liked me before she came?" she said testily, stamping her foot.

"Again!" he exclaimed, wincing.

"*All right*; wait."

She turned to go somewhere, but checked herself, and facing about, she exacted an additional oath of allegiance. After which she went to the other side of the chimney. When she returned she held one of her arms behind her.

"You will not let yourself be talked away from me?"

He swore.

"Not even if your father came to you from the other world—if he came to you in a dream, I mean—and told you to drop me?"

Again he swore.

"And you really don't care for Fanny?"

And again he swore.

"Nor for Beckie?"

The ordeal was too much, and he begged her to desist. But she wouldn't, and so, chafing under inexorable cross-examinations, he had to swear again and again that he had never cared for any of Joe's female pupils or assistants except Mamie.

At last she relented.

"Look, piece of loafer you!" she then said, holding out an open bank book to his eyes. "But what is the *use*? It is not light enough, and you can not read, *anyway*. You can eat, *dot's all*. *Vell*, you could make out figures, couldn't you? There are three hundred and forty dollars," she proceeded, pointing to the balance line, which represented the savings, for a marriage portion, of five years' hard toil. "It should be three hundred and sixty-five, but then for the twenty-five dollars you owe me I may as well light a mourner's candle, *ain' it?*"

When she had started to produce the bank book from her bosom he had surmised her intent, and while she was gone he was making guesses as to the magnitude of the sum to her credit. His most liberal estimate, however, had been a hundred and fifty dollars; so that the revelation of the actual figure completely overwhelmed him. He listened to her with a broad grin, and when she paused he burst out:

"Mamielé, you know what? Let us run away!"

"You are a fool!" she overruled him, as she tucked the bank book under her jacket. "I have a better plan. But tell me the truth, did you not guess I had money? Now you need not fear to tell me all."

He swore that he had not even dreamt that she possessed a bank account. How could he? And was it not because he had suspected the existence of such an account that he had come to declare his love to her and not to Fanny, or Beckie, or the "Black Cat"? No, may he be thunderstruck if it was. What does she take him for? On his part she is free to give the money away or throw it into the river. He will become a boss, and take her penniless, for he can not live without her; she is lodged in his heart; she is the only woman he ever cared for.

"Oh, but why did you not tell me all this long ago?" With which, speaking like the complete mistress of the situation that she was, she proceeded to expound a project, which had shaped itself in her lovelorn mind, hypothetically, during the previous few days, when she had been writhing in despair of ever having an occasion to put it into practice. Jake was to take refuge with her married sister in Philadelphia until Gitl was brought to terms. In

the meantime some chum of his, nominated by Mamie and acting under her orders, would carry on negotiations. The State divorce, as she had already taken pains to ascertain, would cost fifty dollars; the rabbinical divorce would take five or eight dollars more. Two hundred dollars would be deposited with some Canal Street banker, to be paid to Gitl when the whole procedure was brought to a successful termination. If she can be got to accept less, so much the better; if not, Jake and Mamie will get along, anyhow. When they are married they will open a dancing school.

To all of which Jake kept nodding approval, once or twice interrupting her with a demonstration of enthusiasm. As to the fate of his boy, Mamie deliberately circumvented all reference to the subject. Several times Jake was tempted to declare his ardent desire to have the child with them, and that Mamie should like him and be a mother to him; for had she not herself found him a bright and nice fellow? His heart bled at the thought of having to part with Joey. But somehow the courage failed him to touch upon the question. He saw himself helplessly entangled in something foreboding no good. He felt between the devil and the deep sea, as the phrase goes; and unnerved by the whole situation and completely in the shop girl's power, he was glad to be relieved from all initiative—whether forward or backward—to shut his eyes, as it were, and, leaning upon Mamie's strong arm, let himself be led by her in whatever direction she chose.

"Do you know, Jake?—now I may as well tell you," the girl pursued, *à propos* of the prospective dancing school; "do you know that Joe has been *bodering* me to marry him? And he did not know I had a cent, either."

"An' you didn' vanted?" Jake asked, joyfully.

"Sure! I knew all along Jakie was my predestined match," she replied, drawing his bulky head to her lips. And following the operation by a sound twirl of his ear, she added: "Only he is a great lump of hog, Jakie is. But a heart is a clock: it told me I would have you some day. I could have got *lots* of suitors—may the two of us have as many thousands of dollars—and *business people*, too. Do you see what I am doing for you? Do you deserve it, *monkey you?*"

"Never *min'*, you shall see what a *danshin' shchool* I *shta't*. If I don't take away every *shcholar* from Jaw, my name won't be Jake. Won't he squirm!" he exclaimed, with childish ardour.

"Dot's all right; but foist *min'* dot you don' go back on me!"

An hour or two later Mamie with Jake by her side stood in front of the little window in the ferryhouse of the Pennsylvania Railroad, buying one ticket for the midnight train for Philadelphia.

"Min' je, Jake," she said anxiously a little after, as she handed him the ticket. "This is as good as a marriage certificate, do you understand?" And the two hurried off to the boat in a meager stream of other passengers.

Chapter IX

THE PARTING

It was on a bright frosty morning in the following January, in the kitchen of Rabbi Aaronovitz, on the third floor of a rickety old tenement house, that

Jake and Gitl, for the first time since his flight, came face to face. It was also to be their last meeting as husband and wife.

The low-ceiled room was fairly crowded with men and women. Besides the principal actors in the scene, the rabbi, the scribe, and the witnesses, and, as a matter of course, Mrs. Kavarsky, there was the rabbi's wife, their two children, and an envoy from Mamie, charged to look after the fortitude of Jake's nerve. Gitl, extremely careworn and haggard, was "in her own hair," thatched with a broad-brimmed winter hat of a brown colour, and in a jacket of black beaver. The rustic, "greenhornlike" expression was completely gone from her face and manner, and, although she now looked bewildered and as if terror-stricken, there was noticeable about her a suggestion of that peculiar air of self-confidence with which a few months' life in America is sure to stamp the looks and bearing of every immigrant. Jake, flushed and plainly nervous and fidgety, made repeated attempts to conceal his state of mind now by screwing up a grim face, now by giving his enormous head a haughty posture, now by talking aloud to his escort.

The tedious preliminaries were as trying to the rabbi as they were to Jake and Gitl. However, the venerable old man discharged his duty of dissuading the young couple from their contemplated step as scrupulously as he dared in view of his wife's signals to desist and not to risk the fee. Gitl, prompted by Mrs. Kavarsky, responded to all questions with an air of dazed resignation, while Jake, ever conscious of his guard's glance, gave his answers with bravado. At last the scribe, a gaunt middle-aged man, with an expression of countenance at once devout and businesslike, set about his task. Whereupon Mrs. Aaronovitz heaved a sigh of relief, and forthwith banished her two boys into the parlour.

An imposing stillness fell over the room. Little by little, however, it was broken, at first by whispers and then by an unrestrained hum. The rabbi, in a velvet skullcap, faded and besprinkled with down, presided with pious dignity, though apparently ill at ease, at the head of the table. Alternately stroking his yellowish-gray beard and curling his scanty side locks, he kept his eyes on the open book before him, now and then stealing a glance at the other end of the table, where the scribe was rapturously drawing the square characters of the holy tongue.³

Gitl carefully looked away from Jake. But he invincibly haunted her mind, rendering her deaf to Mrs. Kavarsky's incessant buzz. His presence terrified her, and at the same time it melted her soul in a fire, torturing yet sweet, which impelled her at one moment to throw herself upon him and scratch out his eyes, and at another to prostrate herself at his feet and kiss them in a flood of tears.

Jake, on the other hand, eyed Gitl quite frequently, with a kind of malicious curiosity. Her general Americanized make up, and, above all, that broad-brimmed, rather fussy, hat of hers, nettled him. It seemed to defy him, and as if devised for that express purpose. Every time she and her adviser caught his eye, a feeling of devouring hate for both would rise in his heart. He was panting to see his son; and, while he was thoroughly alive to the impossibility of making a child the witness of a divorce scene between father

3. A Jewish bill of divorce, called a *get*, is drawn up in Hebrew.

and mother, yet, in his fury, he interpreted their failure to bring Joey with them as another piece of malice.

"Ready!" the scribe at length called out, getting up with the document in his hand, and turning it over to the rabbi.

The rest of the assemblage also rose from their seats, and clustered round Jake and Gitl, who had taken places on either side of the old man. A beam of hard, cold sunlight, filtering in through a grimy window-pane and falling lurid upon the rabbi's wrinkled brow, enhanced the impressiveness of the spectacle. A momentary pause ensued, stern, weird, and casting a spell of awe over most of the bystanders, not excluding the rabbi. Mrs. Kavarsky even gave a shudder and gulped down a sob.

"Young woman!" Rabbi Aaronovitz began, with bashful serenity, "here is the writ of divorce all ready. Now thou mayst still change thy mind."

Mrs. Aaronovitz anxiously watched Gitl, who answered by a shake of her head.

"Mind thee, I tell thee once again," the old man pursued, gently. "Thou must accept this divorce with the same free will and readiness with which thou hast married thy husband. Should there be the slightest objection hidden in thy heart, the divorce is null and void. Dost thou understand?"

"Say that you are *saesfied*," whispered Mrs. Kavarsky.

"*Ull ride*, I am *saesfiet*," murmured Gitl, looking down on the table.

"Witnesses, hear ye what this young woman says? That she accepts the divorce of her own free will," the rabbi exclaimed solemnly, as if reading the Talmud.

"Then I must also tell you once more," he then addressed himself to Jake as well as to Gitl, "that this divorce is good only upon condition that you are also divorced by the Government of the land—by the court—do you understand? So it stands written in the separate paper which you get. Do you understand what I say?"

"*Dot'sh alla right*," Jake said, with ostentatious ease of manner. "I have already told you that the *dvosh* of the *court* is already *fikshed*,⁴ haven't I?" he added, even angrily.

Now came the culminating act of the drama. Gitl was affectionately urged to hold out her hands, bringing them together at an angle, so as to form a receptacle for the fateful piece of paper. She obeyed mechanically, her cheeks turning ghastly pale. Jake, also pale to his lips, his brows contracted, received the paper, and obeying directions, approached the woman who in the eye of the Law of Moses was still his wife. And then, repeating word for word after the rabbi, he said:

"Here is thy divorce. Take thy divorce. And by this divorce thou art separated from me and free for all other men!"

Gitl scarcely understood the meaning of the formula, though each Hebrew word was followed by its Yiddish translation. Her arms shook so that they had to be supported by Mrs. Kavarsky and by one of the witnesses.

At last Jake deposited the writ and instantly drew back.

Gitl closed her hands upon the paper as she had been instructed; but at the same moment she gave a violent tremble, and with a heartrending groan fell on the witness in a fainting swoon.

4. The divorce of the court is already fixed.

In the ensuing commotion Jake slipped out of the room, presently followed by Mamie's ambassador, who had remained behind to pay the bill.

Gitl was soon brought to by Mrs. Kavarsky and the mistress of the house. For a moment or so she sat staring about her, when, suddenly awakening to the meaning of the ordeal she had just been through, and finding Jake gone, she clapped her hands and burst into a fit of sobbing.

Meanwhile the rabbi had once again perused the writ, and having caused the witnesses to do likewise, he made two diagonal slits in the paper.

"You must not forget, my daughter," he said to the young woman, who was at that moment crying as if her heart would break, "that you dare not marry again before ninety-one days, counting from to-day, go by; while you—where is he, the young man? Gone?" he asked with a frustrated smile and growing pale.

"You want him badly, don't you?" growled Mrs. Kavarsky. "Let him go I know where, the every-evil-in-him that he is!"

Mrs. Aaronovitz telegraphing to her husband that the money was safe in her pocket, he remarked sheepishly: "*He* may wed even to-day." Whereupon Gitl's sobs became still more violent, and she fell to nodding her head and wringing her hands.

"What are you crying about, foolish face that you are!" Mrs. Kavarsky fired out. "Another woman would thank God for having at last got rid of the lump of leavened bread. What say you, rabbi? A rowdy, a sinner of Israel, a *regely loifer*,⁵ may no good Jew know him! *Never min'*, the Name, be It blessed, will send you your destined one, and a fine, learned, respectable man, too," she added significantly.

Her words had an instantaneous effect. Gitl at once composed herself, and fell to drying her eyes.

Quick to catch Mrs. Kavarsky's hint, the rabbi's wife took her aside and asked eagerly:

"Why, has she got a suitor?"

"What is the *differentz*? You need not fear; when there is a wedding canopy⁶ I shall employ no other man than your husband," was Mrs. Kavarsky's self-important but good-natured reply.

Chapter X

A DEFEATED VICTOR

When Gitl, accompanied by her friend, reached home, they were followed into the former's apartments by a batch of neighbours, one of them with Joey in tow. The moment the young woman found herself in her kitchen she collapsed, sinking down on the lounge. The room seemed to have assumed a novel aspect, which brought home to her afresh that the bond between her and Jake was now at last broken forever and beyond repair. The appalling fact was still further accentuated in her consciousness when she caught sight of the boy.

5. Regular loafer.

6. Traditionally, a Jewish couple stands under a

chuppah, or wedding canopy, during the wedding ceremony.

“Joieyelé! Joeyinké! Birdie! Little kitten!”—with which she seized him in her arms, and, kissing him all over, burst into tears. Then shaking with the child backward and forward, and intoning her words as Jewish women do over a grave, she went on: “Ai, you have no papa any more, Joieyelé! Yoselé, little crown, you will never see him again! He is dead, *taté* is!” Whereupon Yoselé, following his mother’s example, let loose his stentorian voice.

“*Shurr-r up!*” Mrs. Kavarsky whispered, stamping her foot. “You want Mr. Bernstein to leave you, too, do you? No more is wanted than that he should get wind of your crying.”

“Nobody will tell him,” one of the neighbours put in, resentfully. “But, *anyhull*, what is the *used* crying?”

“Ask her, the piece of hunchback!” said Mrs. Kavarsky. “Another woman would dance for joy, and here she is whining, the cudgel. What is it you are sniveling about? That you have got rid of an unclean bone and a dunce, and that you are going to marry a young man of silk who is fit to be a rabbi, and is as *smart* and *ejecate* as a lawyer? You would have got a match like that in Povodye, would you? I dare say a man like Mr. Bernstein would not have spoken to you there. You ought to say Psalms⁷ for your coming to America. It is only here that it is possible for a blacksmith’s wife to marry a learned man, who is a blessing both for God and people. And yet you are not *sares-fied!* Cry away! If Bernstein refuses to go under the wedding canopy, Mrs. Kavarsky will no more *bodder* her head about you, depend upon it. It is not enough for her that I neglect *business* on her account,” she appealed to the bystanders.

“Really, what are you crying about, Mrs. Podkovnik?” one of the neighbours interposed. “You ought to bless the hour when you became free.”

All of which haranguing only served to stimulate Gitl’s demonstration of grief. Having let down the boy, she went on clapping her hands, swaying in all directions, and wailing.

The truth must be told, however, that she was now continuing her lamentations by the mere force of inertia, and as if enjoying the very process of the thing. For, indeed, at the bottom of her heart she felt herself far from desolate, being conscious of the existence of a man who was to take care of her and her child, and even relishing the prospect of the new life in store for her. Already on her way from the rabbi’s house, while her soul was full of Jake and the Polish girl, there had fluttered through her imagination a picture of the grocery business which she and Bernstein were to start with the money paid to her by Jake.



While Gitl thus sat swaying and wringing her hands, Jake, Mamie, her emisory at the divorce proceeding, and another mutual friend, were passengers on a Third Avenue cable car, all bound for the mayor’s office. While Gitl was indulging herself in an exhibition of grief, her recent husband was flaunting a hilarious mood. He did feel a great burden to have rolled off his heart, and the proximity of Mamie, on the other hand, caressed his soul. He was tempted to catch her in his arms, and cover her glowing cheeks with kisses.

7. A book of the Hebrew Bible, here used as a synonym for prayers.

But in his inmost heart he was the reverse of eager to reach the City Hall. He was painfully reluctant to part with his long-coveted freedom so soon after it had at last been attained, and before he had had time to relish it. Still worse than this thirst for a taste of liberty was a feeling which was now gaining upon him, that, instead of a conqueror, he had emerged from the rabbi's house the victim of an ignominious defeat. If he could now have seen Gitl in her paroxysm of anguish, his heart would perhaps have swelled with a sense of his triumph, and Mamie would have appeared to him the embodiment of his future happiness. Instead of this he beheld her, Bernstein, Yoselé, and Mrs. Kavarsky celebrating their victory and bandying jokes at his expense. Their future seemed bright with joy, while his own loomed dark and impenetrable. What if he should now dash into Gitl's apartments and, declaring his authority as husband, father, and lord of the house, fiercely eject the strangers, take Yoselé in his arms, and sternly command Gitl to mind her household duties?

But the distance between him and the mayor's office was dwindling fast. Each time the car came to a halt he wished the pause could be prolonged indefinitely; and when it resumed its progress, the violent lurch it gave was accompanied by a corresponding sensation in his heart.

1896

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

1860–1935

Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived much of her life on the margins of a society whose economic assumptions about and social definitions of women she vigorously repudiated. Out of her resistance to conventional values that she described as “masculinist,” Gilman produced the large body of polemical writing and self-consciously feminist fiction that made her a leading theoretician, speaker, and writer on women's issues of her time.

Charlotte Anna Perkins was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on July 3, 1860. Her father, Frederic Beecher Perkins, belonged to the famous New England Beecher family, which included theologian Lyman Beecher, minister Henry Ward Beecher, and the novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe. Her mother was Mary A. Fitch, whose family had lived in Rhode Island since the middle of the seventeenth century. When Gilman's father deserted his family and left for San Francisco shortly after her birth, her mother returned to Providence, Rhode Island, where she supported herself and her two children with great difficulty. She apparently withheld from them all physical expressions of love, hoping to prevent their later disillusionment over broken relationships. Given these circumstances, it is easy to understand why in her autobiography Gilman described her childhood as painful and lonely.

Between 1880 and her marriage in May 1884 to Charles Stetson, a promising Providence artist, Gilman supported herself in Providence as a governess, art teacher, and designer of greeting cards. During those years she had increasingly become aware

of the injustices inflicted on women, and she had begun to write poems—one in defense of prostitutes—in which she developed her own views on women's rights. She entered into the marriage reluctantly, anticipating the difficulties of reconciling her ambition to be a writer with the demands of being a wife, mother, and housekeeper. Within eleven months, their only child, Katharine, was born; following the birth, Gilman became increasingly despondent, and marital tensions increased. Believing that Gilman needed rest and willpower to overcome her depression, her husband and mother persuaded her to go to Philadelphia for treatment by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the most famous American neurologist of the day. A specialist in women's "nervous" disorders, Mitchell usually prescribed a "rest cure" consisting of total bedrest for several weeks and limited intellectual activity thereafter. As Gilman put it in "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper?'" (1913), this treatment led her to "the edge of madness" before she drew back by returning to her life as a writer and frequent contributor to the Boston *Woman's Journal*. A few years later Gilman wrote her most famous story. Writing, however, did not keep Gilman from suffering all her life from extended periods of depression.

In 1888, convinced that her marriage threatened her sanity, Gilman moved with her daughter to Pasadena, California, and in 1894 she was granted a divorce. Her former husband promptly married her best friend, the writer Grace Ellery Channing, and not long thereafter Gilman sent her daughter east to live with them. Such actions generated much publicity and hostile criticism in the press, but nothing kept Gilman from pursuing her double career as a writer and lecturer on women, labor, and social organization. In these years she was particularly influenced by the sociologist Lester Ward and the utopian novelist Edward Bellamy.

In 1898 Gilman published *Women and Economics*, the book that earned her immediate celebrity and is still considered her most important nonfiction work. This powerful feminist manifesto argues that women's economic dependency on men has stunted the growth of the entire human species. For instance, she contended that because of the dependency of women on men for food and shelter, the sexual and maternal aspects of their personalities had been developed excessively and to the detriment of their other productive capacities. To free women to develop in a more balanced and socially constructive way, Gilman urged such reforms as centralized nurseries (in *Concerning Children*, 1900) and professionally staffed collective kitchens (in *The Home*, 1904). Later, in *The Man-Made World* (1911)—reprinted partly in the "Realism and Naturalism" section of this volume—Gilman contrasted the competitiveness and aggressiveness of men with the cooperativeness and nurturance of women; she posited that until women played a larger part in national and international life, social injustice and war would continue to characterize industrialized societies. Similarly, in *His Religion and Hers* (1923) Gilman predicted that only when women influenced theology would the fear of death and punishment cease to be central to religious institutions and practices.

Gilman's poetry and fiction, primarily written when she was well past forty, extended her feminist inquiry into the role of gender in social organization. Her stories and her utopian novels—such as *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Herland* (1915), and *With Her in Ourland* (1916)—offer vivid dramatizations of the social ills (and their potential remedies) that result from a competitive economic system in which women are subordinate to men and accept their subordination. In *Herland*, for instance, Gilman offers a vision of an all-female society in which caring women collectively raise children (reproduced by parthenogenesis) in a world that is both prosperous and ecologically sound.

Gilman committed suicide in 1935 after being diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Her vast corpus of writing influenced feminism for generations, and her works offer intellectual historians a remarkable window into questions of gender and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "The Yellow Wall-Paper" remains Gilman's most widely read and discussed literary work, immediately regarded as a masterpiece by her contemporaries and, more recently, rediscovered by new generations of readers.

The Yellow Wall-paper¹

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency²—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is—and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

1. The complete and complex textual history of the extant fair copy manuscript and seven editions of the story during Gilman's lifetime is available in Julie Bates Dock's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). Dock's volume also contains a detailed textual apparatus and notes, a variety of background material, early

reviews, and other commentary. Professor Dock and Pennsylvania State University Press have kindly granted permission to use her eclectic critical edition of this story.

2. *Hysteria* was a term used to describe a wide variety of symptoms, thought to be particularly prevalent among women, that indicated emotional disturbance or dysfunction. Depression, anxiety, excitability, and vague somatic complaints were among the conditions treated as “hysteria.”

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a *draught*, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word.

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wall-paper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wall-paper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

"You know the place is doing you good," he said, "and really, dear, I don't care to renovate the house just for a three months' rental."

"Then do let us go downstairs," I said, "there are such pretty rooms there."

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as any one need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I'm really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big, old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a play-room they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wall-paper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother³—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely shaded winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wall-paper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!



Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

3. Proverbs 18.24: "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell⁴ in the fall.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worth while to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wall-paper. Perhaps *because* of the wall-paper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of “debased Romanesque” with *delirium tremens*⁵—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze,⁶ and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the crosslights fade and low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common centre and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap I guess.



4. Silas Weir Mitchell (1829–1914), American physician, novelist, and specialist in nerve disorders, popularized the “rest cure” in the management of hysteria, nervous breakdowns, and related disorders. A friend of W. D. Howells, he was the model for the nerve specialist in Howells’s novel *The Shadow of a Dream* (1890).

5. Latin for “shaking frenzy,” a condition caused by alcohol withdrawal in chronic alcoholics. “Debased Romanesque”: degraded version of a medieval decorative style characterized by ornamental complexity and repeated motifs and figures.

6. An ornamental border at the top of the wall.

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wall-paper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

• • • • •

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wall-paper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

“What is it, little girl?” he said. “Don’t go walking about like that—you’ll get cold.”

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

“Why, darling!” said he, “our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can’t see how to leave before.

“The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you.”

“I don’t weigh a bit more,” said I, “nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!”

“Bless her little heart!” said he with a big hug, “she shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let’s improve the shining hours⁷ by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!”

“And you won’t go away?” I asked gloomily.

“Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better!”

“Better in body perhaps—” I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

“My darling,” said he, “I beg of you, for my sake and for our child’s sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?”

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn’t, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.



On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

7. In his poem “Against Idleness and Mischief,” Isaac Watts (1674–1748) writes:

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for you see I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—O no!

The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper—she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

• • • • •

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall-paper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was *because* of the wall-paper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

• • • • •

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wall-paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first—and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful, I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

• • • • •

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

• • • • •

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her, she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

• • • • •

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it.



Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John had to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing!—but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it to-day!

We go away to-morrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not *alive*!

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs to-night, and take the boat home to-morrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will *not* move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides, I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John, dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed—"Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing!"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

1892



"Now why should that man have fainted?" Joseph Henry Hatfield's illustration from the original magazine publication of "The Yellow Wall-paper," *New England Magazine*, January 1892.

Why I Wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”?¹

Many and many a reader has asked that. When the story first came out, in the *New England Magazine* about 1891,² a Boston physician made protest in *The Transcript*. Such a story ought not to be written, he said; it was enough to drive anyone mad to read it.

Another physician, in Kansas I think, wrote to say that it was the best description of incipient insanity he had ever seen, and—begging my pardon—had I been there?

Now the story of the story is this:

For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia—and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist³ in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to “live as domestic a life as far as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,” and “never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived.” This was in 1887.

I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over.

Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend,⁴ I cast the noted specialist’s advice to the winds and went to work again—work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite; ultimately recovering some measure of power.

Being naturally moved to rejoicing by this narrow escape, I wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper,” with its embellishments and additions to carry out the ideal (I never had hallucinations or objections to my mural decorations) and sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad. He never acknowledged it.

The little book is valued by alienists⁵ and as a good specimen of one kind of literature. It has to my knowledge saved one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered.

But the best result is this. Many years later I was told that the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia⁶ since reading “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.

1913

1. First published in the *Forerunner* (October 1913), the source of the text printed here.

2. The correct date is January 1892.

3. Silas Weir Mitchell; see n. 4, p. 848.

4. This is almost certainly the writer Grace Channing (1862–1937). Channing and Gilman

had been friends since they were teenagers; in 1894, after Gilman and Charles Stetson were divorced, Channing and Stetson married.

5. Those who treat diseases of the mind.

6. A medical condition believed to be caused by the exhaustion of the nervous system.

EDITH WHARTON

1862–1937

Few novelists in American literary history have enjoyed the combination of commercial success and critical acclaim that Edith Wharton earned during her lifetime. As someone raised in the nineteenth century who became a major writer in the twentieth, Wharton cultivated a sensibility poised on the cusp between the traditions of the past and the shock of the modern. She is well-known for her portrayal of the moneyed classes of old New York, epitomized by the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Age of Innocence* (1920); other works, like *Ethan Frome* (1911), depict village life in New England that seems relatively untouched by modernity. However, in Wharton's fiction conventions rarely withstand careful scrutiny; fortunes fail, marriages crumble, traditions once thought comforting become painfully confining. Wharton's recent biographer, Hermione Lee, calls Wharton's mode of fiction "compassionate realism"—a style of sympathetic observation of her characters that leaves room for satiric commentary on the world in which they live.

Edith Newbold Jones was born in New York City on January 24, 1862, into a patriarchal, moneyed, and rather rigid family that, like others in its small circle, disdained and feared the drastic changes in American society brought on by the rapid pace of industrialization and increasing immigration after the Civil War. She spent much of her youth in Europe with her family, and later remarked that she felt like an exile in America after the age of ten. In 1885 she married the Bostonian Edward Wharton, a social equal thirteen years her senior who never provided her with intellectual companionship. Though they lived together (in New York; Newport, Rhode Island; Lenox, Massachusetts; and Paris) for twenty-eight years, the marriage was not a happy one. Her success as a writer provided her with both the financial resources to maintain her standard of living despite her husband's poor business judgment and the means to cultivate the relationships with other intellectuals that would sustain her. Wharton engaged in an affair with Morton Fullerton, an expatriate journalist, from 1906 to 1909; she and her husband divorced in 1913, after he began to show signs of mental illness.

Wharton had begun to write as a teenager. By the age of fifteen, she had written (in secret) a thirty-thousand-word novella titled *Fast and Loose*. She had also composed a substantial amount of lyric poetry, and her practice of writing both fiction and verse would continue throughout her writing life. In 1889, she successfully submitted poems to *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, and the *Century*—her first foray into a commercial magazine market that would be crucial to her future success. However, it was not until Wharton was in her late thirties—in the late 1890s—that she fully embraced authorship as a career. She wrote in a variety of genres, publishing short stories, travel literature, works on design and architecture, and historical fiction. The 1905 publication of *The House of Mirth* brought her to the attention of a wide and appreciative public, establishing her place in the literary landscape. The novel was highly successful in its serial publication in *Scribner's Magazine* as well as in book form, and *The House of Mirth* forever linked Wharton to its setting and themes: the old aristocracy of New York, the struggle of characters trapped by social forces, and especially the challenges that faced women attempting to secure financial and social security amidst a shifting terrain of regulation. The novel tells the story of the beautiful Lily Bart, trained to be a decorative upper-class wife but ultimately unwilling to sell herself as merchandise. In *The Custom of the Country* (1913), which Wharton



Edith Wharton, 1905.

considered her masterpiece, a ruthless midwesterner, Undine Spragg, makes her way up the social ladder, stepping on Americans and Europeans alike in her pursuit of money and the power that goes with it.

With her interest in the lives of leisured elite and her portrayal of Americans abroad, Wharton was frequently compared by reviewers and critics to Henry James—a pairing that continued to shape critical studies of her work after her death. James was Wharton's senior by more than twenty years, and the two enjoyed an intellectual and social relationship that was important to both. It was James, in fact, who suggested that Wharton focus on “the American subject” just as she was preparing to compose *House of Mirth*. However, Wharton also found the

repeated comparison of her fiction to James's—which began with her first volume of short stories—to be deeply annoying. (In one letter from 1904, she complained that the “continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James” left her feeling “rather hopeless.”) Like James, Wharton was interested in the manners and motives of upper-class Americans, but the differences are significant. Wharton was less interested than James in the kind of narrative impressionism that he employed in his final novels to explore consciousness; and by comparison with James's, Wharton's fiction is generally more driven by plot and action, including the rising and falling fortunes of her characters. Moreover, Wharton enjoyed a popularity that James never reached. Indeed, in 1912 Wharton even directed her publisher, Charles Scribner, to divert secretly some of her own royalties into a large advance for her aging friend.

By this time, Wharton had taken up permanent residence in France, where she spent the rest of her life. During World War I, Wharton organized relief efforts for the refugees and orphans displaced by the advance of the German army and was active in many other committees and organizations dealing with the devastation wrought by the war. She was relentless in her fundraising, and even edited *The Book of the Homeless* (1916), a collection of literary works and art by international artists, to generate further financial support for French charities. Wharton also wrote extensively about her visits to the front line; she published a collection of these dispatches and would later write two war novels: *The Marne* (1918) and *A Son at the Front* (1923). Wharton's literary output was truly prolific: she produced more than eighty short stories, twenty-two novellas and novels, and three volumes of poetry. Though the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Age of Innocence* is the last of her best-known novels, she published consistently until the time of her death, continuing to enjoy a wide readership. She published an autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, in 1934.

Wharton's achievements as a novelist have overshadowed her mastery of the short-story form, where she often achieves in a handful of pages a depth of characterization and incident more often realized in much longer novels. Included here are works that represent themes to which she repeatedly returned; “The Other Two” (1904) explores the new age of divorce, while “Roman Fever” (1934) concerns a lifelong rivalry between two leisure-class women, a long-buried secret of illicit love, and the tensions between the old world and new. Considered together, they reveal the shrewdness of Wharton's social chronicles and her ability to deliver penetrating insight into a world that was rapidly changing around her.

The Other Two¹

I

Waythorn, on the drawing-room hearth, waited for his wife to come down to dinner.

It was their first night under his own roof, and he was surprised at his thrill of boyish agitation. He was not so old, to be sure—his glass gave him little more than the five-and-thirty years to which his wife confessed—but he had fancied himself already in the temperate zone; yet here he was listening for her step with a tender sense of all it symbolized, with some old trail of verse about the garlanded nuptial doorposts floating through his enjoyment of the pleasant room and the good dinner just beyond it.

They had been hastily recalled from their honeymoon by the illness of Lily Haskett, the child of Mrs. Waythorn's first marriage. The little girl, at Waythorn's desire, had been transferred to his house on the day of her mother's wedding, and the doctor, on their arrival, broke the news that she was ill with typhoid, but declared that all the symptoms were favorable. Lily could show twelve years of unblemished health, and the case promised to be a light one. The nurse spoke as reassuringly, and after a moment of alarm Mrs. Waythorn had adjusted herself to the situation. She was very fond of Lily—her affection for the child had perhaps been her decisive charm in Waythorn's eyes—but she had the perfectly balanced nerves which her little girl had inherited, and no woman ever wasted less tissue in unproductive worry. Waythorn was therefore quite prepared to see her come in presently, a little late because of a last look at Lily, but as serene and well-appointed as if her good-night kiss had been laid on the brow of health. Her composure was restful to him; it acted as ballast to his somewhat unstable sensibilities. As he pictured her bending over the child's bed he thought how soothing her presence must be in illness: her very step would prognosticate recovery.

His own life had been a gray one, from temperament rather than circumstance, and he had been drawn to her by the unperturbed gaiety which kept her fresh and elastic at an age when most women's activities are growing either slack or febrile. He knew what was said about her; for, popular as she was, there had always been a faint undercurrent of detraction. When she had appeared in New York, nine or ten years earlier, as the pretty Mrs. Haskett whom Gus Varick had unearthed somewhere—was it in Pittsburgh or Utica?—society, while promptly accepting her, had reserved the right to cast a doubt on its own indiscrimination. Inquiry, however, established her undoubted connection with a socially reigning family, and explained her recent divorce as the natural result of a runaway match at seventeen; and as nothing was known of Mr. Haskett it was easy to believe the worst of him.

Alice Haskett's remarriage with Gus Varick was a passport to the set whose recognition she coveted, and for a few years the Varicks were the most popular couple in town. Unfortunately the alliance was brief and stormy, and this time the husband had his champions. Still, even Varick's staunchest supporters admitted that he was not meant for matrimony, and Mrs. Varick's grievances were of a nature to bear the inspection of the New York courts. A

1. First appeared in *Collier's Weekly* (February 1904).

New York divorce is in itself a diploma of virtue, and in the semiwidowhood of this second separation Mrs. Varick took on an air of sanctity, and was allowed to confide her wrongs to some of the most scrupulous ears in town. But when it was known that she was to marry Waythorn there was a momentary reaction. Her best friends would have preferred to see her remain in the role of the injured wife, which was as becoming to her as crepe to a rosy complexion. True, a decent time had elapsed, and it was not even suggested that Waythorn had supplanted his predecessor. People shook their heads over him, however, and one grudging friend, to whom he affirmed that he took the step with his eyes open, replied oracularly: "Yes—and with your ears shut."

Waythorn could afford to smile at these innuendoes. In the Wall Street phrase, he had "discounted" them. He knew that society has not yet adapted itself to the consequences of divorce, and that till the adaptation takes place every woman who uses the freedom the law accords her must be her own social justification. Waythorn had an amused confidence in his wife's ability to justify herself. His expectations were fulfilled, and before the wedding took place Alice Varick's group had rallied openly to her support. She took it all imperturbably; she had a way of surmounting obstacles without seeming to be aware of them, and Waythorn looked back with wonder at the trivialities over which he had worn his nerves thin. He had the sense of having found refuge in a richer, warmer nature than his own, and his satisfaction, at the moment, was humorously summed up in the thought that his wife, when she had done all she could for Lily, would not be ashamed to come down and enjoy a good dinner.

The anticipation of such enjoyment was not, however, the sentiment expressed by Mrs. Waythorn's charming face when she presently joined him. Though she had put on her most engaging tea gown she had neglected to assume the smile that went with it, and Waythorn thought he had never seen her look so nearly worried.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is anything wrong with Lily?"

"No; I've just been in and she's still sleeping." Mrs. Waythorn hesitated. "But something tiresome has happened."

He had taken her two hands, and now perceived that he was crushing a paper between them.

"This letter?"

"Yes—Mr. Haskett has written—I mean his lawyer has written."

Waythorn felt himself flush uncomfortably. He dropped his wife's hands.

"What about?"

"About seeing Lily. You know the courts—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted nervously.

Nothing was known about Haskett in New York. He was vaguely supposed to have remained in the outer darkness from which his wife had been rescued, and Waythorn was one of the few who were aware that he had given up his business in Utica and followed her to New York in order to be near his little girl. In the days of his wooing, Waythorn had often met Lily on the doorstep, rosy and smiling, on her way "to see papa."

"I am so sorry," Mrs. Waythorn murmured.

He roused himself. "What does he want?"

"He wants to see her. You know she goes to him once a week."

"Well—he doesn't expect her to go to him now, does he?"

"No—he has heard of her illness; but he expects to come here."

"Here?"

Mrs. Waythorn reddened under his gaze. They looked away from each other.

"I'm afraid he has the right. . . . You'll see. . . ." She made a proffer of the letter.

Waythorn moved away with a gesture of refusal. He stood staring about the softly-lighted room, which a moment before had seemed so full of bridal intimacy.

"I'm so sorry," she repeated. "If Lily could have been moved—"

"That's out of the question," he returned impatiently.

"I suppose so."

Her lip was beginning to tremble, and he felt himself a brute.

"He must come, of course," he said. "When is—his day?"

"I'm afraid—tomorrow."

"Very well. Send a note in the morning."

The butler entered to announce dinner.

Waythorn turned to his wife. "Come—you must be tired. It's beastly, but try to forget about it," he said, drawing her hand through his arm.

"You're so good, dear. I'll try," she whispered back.

Her face cleared at once, and as she looked at him across the flowers, between the rosy candleshades, he saw her lips waver back into a smile.

"How pretty everything is!" she sighed luxuriously.

He turned to the butler. "The champagne at once, please. Mrs. Waythorn is tired."

In a moment or two their eyes met above the sparkling glasses. Her own were quite clear and untroubled: he saw that she had obeyed his injunction and forgotten.

II

Waythorn, the next morning, went downtown earlier than usual. Haskett was not likely to come till the afternoon, but the instinct of flight drove him forth. He meant to stay away all day—he had thoughts of dining at his club. As his door closed behind him he reflected that before he opened it again it would have admitted another man who had as much right to enter it as himself, and the thought filled him with a physical repugnance.

He caught the elevator at the employees' hour, and found himself crushed between two layers of pendulous humanity. At Eighth Street the man facing him wriggled out, and another took his place. Waythorn glanced up and saw that it was Gus Varick. The men were so close together that it was impossible to ignore the smile of recognition on Varick's handsome overblown face. And after all—why not? They had always been on good terms, and Varick had been divorced before Waythorn's attentions to his wife began. The two exchanged a word on the perennial grievance of the congested trains, and when a seat at their side was miraculously left empty the instinct of self-preservation made Waythorn slip into it after Varick.

The latter drew the stout man's breath of relief. "Lord—I was beginning to feel like a pressed flower." He leaned back, looking unconcernedly at Waythorn. "Sorry to hear that Sellers is knocked out again."

"Sellers?" echoed Waythorn, starting at his partner's name.

Varick looked surprised. "You didn't know he was laid up with the gout?"

"No. I've been away—I only got back last night." Waythorn felt himself reddening in anticipation of the other's smile.

"Ah—yes; to be sure. And Sellers' attack came on two days ago. I'm afraid he's pretty bad. Very awkward for me, as it happens, because he was just putting through a rather important thing for me."

"Ah?" Waythorn wondered vaguely since when Varick had been dealing in "important things." Hitherto he had dabbled only in the shallow pools of speculation, with which Waythorn's office did not usually concern itself.

It occurred to him that Varick might be talking at random, to relieve the strain of their propinquity. That strain was becoming momentarily more apparent to Waythorn, and when, at Cortlandt Street, he caught sight of an acquaintance and had a sudden vision of the picture he and Varick must present to an initiated eye, he jumped up with a muttered excuse.

"I hope you'll find Sellers better," said Varick civilly, and he stammered back: "If I can be of any use to you—" and let the departing crowd sweep him to the platform.

At his office he heard that Sellers was in fact ill with the gout, and would probably not be able to leave the house for some weeks.

"I'm sorry it should have happened so, Mr. Waythorn," the senior clerk said with affable significance. "Mr. Sellers was very much upset at the idea of giving you such a lot of extra work just now."

"Oh, that's no matter," said Waythorn hastily. He secretly welcomed the pressure of additional business, and was glad to think that, when the day's work was over, he would have to call at his partner's on the way home.

He was late for luncheon, and turned in at the nearest restaurant instead of going to his club. The place was full, and the waiter hurried him to the back of the room to capture the only vacant table. In the cloud of cigar smoke Waythorn did not at once distinguish his neighbors: but presently, looking about him, he saw Varick seated a few feet off. This time, luckily, they were too far apart for conversation, and Varick, who faced another way, had probably not even seen him; but there was an irony in their renewed nearness.

Varick was said to be fond of good living, and as Waythorn sat dispatching his hurried luncheon he looked across half enviously at the other's leisurely degustation of his meal. When Waythorn first saw him he had been helping himself with critical deliberation to a bit of Camembert at the ideal point of liquefaction, and now, the cheese removed, he was just pouring his *café double* from its little two-storied earthen pot. He poured slowly, his ruddy profile bent over the task, and one beringed white hand steadying the lid of the coffeepot; then he stretched his other hand to the decanter of cognac at his elbow, filled a liqueur glass, took a tentative sip, and poured the brandy into his coffee cup.

Waythorn watched him in a kind of fascination. What was he thinking of—only of the flavor of the coffee and the liqueur? Had the morning's meeting left no more trace in his thoughts than on his face? Had his wife so completely passed out of his life that even this odd encounter with her present husband, within a week after her remarriage, was no more than an inci-

dent in his day? And as Waythorn mused, another idea struck him: had Haskett ever met Varick as Varick and he had just met? The recollection of Haskett perturbed him, and he rose and left the restaurant, taking a circuitous way out to escape the placid irony of Varick's nod.

It was after seven when Waythorn reached home. He thought the footman who opened the door looked at him oddly.

"How is Miss Lily?" he asked in haste.

"Doing very well, sir. A gentleman—"

"Tell Barlow to put off dinner for half an hour," Waythorn cut him off, hurrying upstairs.

He went straight to his room and dressed without seeing his wife. When he reached the drawing room she was there, fresh and radiant. Lily's day had been good; the doctor was not coming back that evening.

At dinner Waythorn told her of Sellers' illness and of the resulting complications. She listened sympathetically, adjuring him not to let himself be overworked, and asking vague feminine questions about the routine of the office. Then she gave him the chronicle of Lily's day; quoted the nurse and doctor, and told him who had called to inquire. He had never seen her more serene and unruffled. It struck him, with a curious pang, that she was very happy in being with him, so happy that she found a childish pleasure in rehearsing the trivial incidents of her day.

After dinner they went to the library, and the servant put the coffee and liqueurs on a low table before her and left the room. She looked singularly soft and girlish in her rosy-pale dress, against the dark leather of one of his bachelor armchairs. A day earlier the contrast would have charmed him.

He turned away now, choosing a cigar with affected deliberation.

"Did Haskett come?" he asked, with his back to her.

"Oh, yes—he came."

"You didn't see him, of course?"

She hesitated a moment. "I let the nurse see him."

That was all. There was nothing more to ask. He swung round toward her, applying a match to his cigar. Well, the thing was over for a week, at any rate. He would try not to think of it. She looked up at him, a trifle rosier than usual, with a smile in her eyes.

"Ready for your coffee, dear?"

He leaned against the mantelpiece, watching her as she lifted the coffee-pot. The lamplight struck a gleam from her bracelets and tipped her soft hair with brightness. How light and slender she was, and how each gesture flowed into the next! She seemed a creature all compact of harmonies. As the thought of Haskett receded, Waythorn felt himself yielding again to the joy of possession. They were his, those white hands with their flitting motions, his the light haze of hair, the lips and eyes. . . .

She set down the coffee-pot, and reaching for the decanter of cognac, measured off a liqueur glass and poured it into his cup.

Waythorn uttered a sudden exclamation.

"What is the matter?" she said, startled.

"Nothing; only—I don't take cognac in my coffee."

"Oh, how stupid of me," she cried.

Their eyes met, and she blushed a sudden agonized red.

III

Ten days later, Mr. Sellers, still housebound, asked Waythorn to call on his way downtown.

The senior partner, with his swaddled foot propped up by the fire, greeted his associate with an air of embarrassment.

"I'm sorry, my dear fellow; I've got to ask you to do an awkward thing for me."

Waythorn waited, and the other went on, after a pause apparently given to the arrangement of his phrases: "The fact is, when I was knocked out I had just gone into a rather complicated piece of business for—Gus Varick."

"Well?" said Waythorn, with an attempt to put him at his ease.

"Well—it's this way: Varick came to me the day before my attack. He had evidently had an inside tip from somebody, and had made about a hundred thousand. He came to me for advice, and I suggested his going in with Vanderlyn."

"Oh, the deuce!" Waythorn exclaimed. He saw in a flash what had happened. The investment was an alluring one, but required negotiation. He listened quietly while Sellers put the case before him, and, the statement ended, he said: "You think I ought to see Varick?"

"I'm afraid I can't as yet. The doctor is obdurate. And this thing can't wait. I hate to ask you, but no one else in the office knows the ins and outs of it."

Waythorn stood silent. He did not care a farthing for the success of Varick's venture, but the honor of the office was to be considered, and he could hardly refuse to oblige his partner.

"Very well," he said, "I'll do it."

That afternoon, apprised by telephone, Varick called at the office. Waythorn, waiting in his private room, wondered what the others thought of it. The newspapers, at the time of Mrs. Waythorn's marriage, had acquainted their readers with every detail of her previous matrimonial ventures, and Waythorn could fancy the clerks smiling behind Varick's back as he was ushered in.

Varick bore himself admirably. He was easy without being undignified, and Waythorn was conscious of cutting a much less impressive figure. Varick had no experience of business, and the talk prolonged itself for nearly an hour while Waythorn set forth with scrupulous precision the details of the proposed transaction.

"I'm awfully obliged to you," Varick said as he rose. "The fact is I'm not used to having much money to look after, and I don't want to make an ass of myself—" He smiled, and Waythorn could not help noticing that there was something pleasant about his smile. "It feels uncommonly queer to have enough cash to pay one's bills. I'd have sold my soul for it a few years ago!"

Waythorn winced at the allusion. He had heard it rumored that a lack of funds had been one of the determining causes of the Varick separation, but it did not occur to him that Varick's words were intentional. It seemed more likely that the desire to keep clear of embarrassing topics had fatally drawn him into one. Waythorn did not wish to be outdone in civility.

"We'll do the best we can for you," he said. "I think this is a good thing you're in."

"Oh, I'm sure it's immense. It's awfully good of you—" Varick broke off, embarrassed. "I suppose the thing's settled now—but if—"

“If anything happens before Sellers is about, I’ll see you again,” said Waythorn quietly. He was glad, in the end, to appear the more self-possessed of the two.

The course of Lily’s illness ran smooth, and as the days passed Waythorn grew used to the idea of Haskett’s weekly visit. The first time the day came round, he stayed out late, and questioned his wife as to the visit on his return. She replied at once that Haskett had merely seen the nurse downstairs, as the doctor did not wish anyone in the child’s sickroom till after the crisis.

The following week Waythorn was again conscious of the recurrence of the day, but had forgotten it by the time he came home to dinner. The crisis of the disease came a few days later, with a rapid decline of fever, and the little girl was pronounced out of danger. In the rejoicing which ensued the thought of Haskett passed out of Waythorn’s mind, and one afternoon, letting himself into the house with a latchkey, he went straight to his library without noticing a shabby hat and umbrella in the hall.

In the library he found a small effaced-looking man with a thinnish gray beard sitting on the edge of a chair. The stranger might have been a piano tuner, or one of those mysteriously efficient persons who are summoned in emergencies to adjust some detail of the domestic machinery. He blinked at Waythorn through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and said mildly: “Mr. Waythorn, I presume? I am Lily’s father.”

Waythorn flushed. “Oh—” he stammered uncomfortably. He broke off, disliking to appear rude. Inwardly he was trying to adjust the actual Haskett to the image of him projected by his wife’s reminiscences. Waythorn had been allowed to infer that Alice’s first husband was a brute.

“I am sorry to intrude,” said Haskett, with his over-the-counter politeness.

“Don’t mention it,” returned Waythorn, collecting himself. “I suppose the nurse has been told?”

“I presume so. I can wait,” said Haskett. He had a resigned way of speaking, as though life had worn down his natural powers of resistance.

Waythorn stood on the threshold, nervously pulling off his gloves.

“I’m sorry you’ve been detained. I will send for the nurse,” he said; and as he opened the door he added with an effort: “I’m glad we can give you a good report of Lily.” He winced as the *we* slipped out, but Haskett seemed not to notice it.

“Thank you, Mr. Waythorn, It’s been an anxious time for me.”

“Ah, well, that’s past. Soon she’ll be able to go to you.” Waythorn nodded and passed out.

In his own room he flung himself down with a groan. He hated the womanish sensibility which made him suffer so acutely from the grotesque chances of life. He had known when he married that his wife’s former husbands were both living, and that amid the multiplied contacts of modern existence there were a thousand chances to one that he would run against one or the other, yet he found himself as much disturbed by his brief encounter with Haskett as though the law had not obligingly removed all difficulties in the way of their meeting.

Waythorn sprang up and began to pace the room nervously. He had not suffered half as much from his two meetings with Varick. It was Haskett’s presence in his own house that made the situation so intolerable. He stood still, hearing steps in the passage.

“This way, please,” he heard the nurse say. Haskett was being taken upstairs, then: not a corner of the house but was open to him. Waythorn dropped into another chair, staring vaguely ahead of him. On his dressing table stood a photograph of Alice, taken when he had first known her. She was Alice Varick then—how fine and exquisite he had thought her! Those were Varick’s pearls about her neck. At Waythorn’s insistence they had been returned before her marriage. Had Haskett ever given her any trinkets—and what had become of them, Waythorn wondered? He realized suddenly that he knew very little of Haskett’s past or present situation; but from the man’s appearance and manner of speech he could reconstruct with curious precision the surroundings of Alice’s first marriage. And it startled him to think that she had, in the background of her life, a phase of existence so different from anything with which he had connected her. Varick, whatever his faults, was a gentleman, in the conventional, traditional sense of the term: the sense which at that moment seemed, oddly enough, to have most meaning to Waythorn. He and Varick had the same social habits, spoke the same language, understood the same allusions. But this other man . . . it was grotesquely uppermost in Waythorn’s mind that Haskett had worn a made-up tie attached with an elastic. Why should that ridiculous detail symbolize the whole man? Waythorn was exasperated by his own paltriness, but the fact of the tie expanded, forced itself on him, became as it were the key to Alice’s past. He could see her, as Mrs. Haskett, sitting in a “front parlor” furnished in plush, with a pianola, and copy of *Ben-Hur*² on the center table. He could see her going to the theater with Haskett—or perhaps even to a “Church Sociable”—she in a “picture hat” and Haskett in a black frock coat, a little creased, with the made-up tie on an elastic. On the way home they would stop and look at the illuminated shop windows, lingering over the photographs of New York actresses. On Sunday afternoons Haskett would take her for a walk, pushing Lily ahead of them in a white enameled perambulator, and Waythorn had a vision of the people they would stop and talk to. He could fancy how pretty Alice must have looked, in a dress adroitly constructed from the hints of a New York fashion paper, and how she must have looked down on the other women, chafing at her life, and secretly feeling that she belonged in a bigger place.

For the moment his foremost thought was one of wonder at the way in which she had shed the phase of existence which her marriage with Haskett implied. It was as if her whole aspect, every gesture, every inflection, every allusion, were a studied negation of that period of her life. If she had denied being married to Haskett she could hardly have stood more convicted of duplicity than in this obliteration of the self which had been his wife.

Waythorn started up, checking himself in the analysis of her motives. What right had he to create a fantastic effigy of her and then pass judgment on it? She had spoken vaguely of her first marriage as unhappy, had hinted, with becoming reticence, that Haskett had wrought havoc among her young illusions. . . . It was a pity for Waythorn’s peace of mind that Haskett’s very inoffensiveness shed a new light on the nature of those illusions. A man would rather think that his wife has been brutalized by her first husband than that the process has been reversed.

2. *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880) was an extremely popular novel by Lew Wallace (1827–1905).

IV

“Mr. Waythorn, I don’t like that French governess of Lily’s.”

Haskett, subdued and apologetic, stood before Waythorn in the library, revolving his shabby hat in his hand.

Waythorn, surprised in his armchair over the evening paper, stared back perplexedly at his visitor.

“You’ll excuse my asking to see you,” Haskett continued. “But this is my last visit, and I thought if I could have a word with you it would be a better way than writing to Mrs. Waythorn’s lawyer.”

Waythorn rose uneasily. He did not like the French governess either; but that was irrelevant.

“I am not so sure of that,” he returned stiffly; “but since you wish it I will give your message to—my wife.” He always hesitated over the possessive pronoun in addressing Haskett.

The latter sighed. “I don’t know as that will help much. She didn’t like it when I spoke to her.”

Waythorn turned red. “When did you see her?” he asked.

“Not since the first day I came to see Lily—right after she was taken sick. I remarked to her then that I didn’t like the governess.”

Waythorn made no answer. He remembered distinctly that, after that first visit, he had asked his wife if she had seen Haskett. She had lied to him then, but she had respected his wishes since; and the incident cast a curious light on her character. He was sure she would not have seen Haskett that first day if she had divined that Waythorn would object, and the fact that she did not divine it was almost as disagreeable to the latter as the discovery that she had lied to him.

“I don’t like the woman,” Haskett was repeating with mild persistency. “She ain’t straight, Mr. Waythorn—she’ll teach the child to be underhand. I’ve noticed a change in Lily—she’s too anxious to please—and she don’t always tell the truth. She used to be the straightest child, Mr. Waythorn—” He broke off, his voice a little thick. “Not but what I want her to have a stylish education,” he ended.

Waythorn was touched. “I’m sorry, Mr. Haskett; but frankly, I don’t quite see what I can do.”

Haskett hesitated. Then he laid his hat on the table, and advanced to the hearthrug, on which Waythorn was standing. There was nothing aggressive in his manner, but he had the solemnity of a timid man resolved on a decisive measure.

“There’s just one thing you can do, Mr. Waythorn,” he said. “You can remind Mrs. Waythorn that, by the decree of the courts, I am entitled to have a voice in Lily’s bringing-up.” He paused, and went on more deprecatingly: “I’m not the kind to talk about enforcing my rights, Mr. Waythorn. I don’t know as I think a man is entitled to rights he hasn’t known how to hold on to; but this business of the child is different. I’ve never let go there—and I never mean to.”

The scene left Waythorn deeply shaken. Shamefacedly, in indirect ways, he had been finding out about Haskett; and all that he had learned was favorable. The little man, in order to be near his daughter, had sold out his share in a

profitable business in Utica, and accepted a modest clerkship in a New York manufacturing house. He boarded in a shabby street and had few acquaintances. His passion for Lily filled his life. Waythorn felt that this exploration of Haskett was like groping about with a dark lantern in his wife's past; but he saw now that there were recesses his lantern had not explored. He had never inquired into the exact circumstances of his wife's first matrimonial rupture. On the surface all had been fair. It was she who had obtained the divorce, and the court had given her the child. But Waythorn knew how many ambiguities such a verdict might cover. The mere fact that Haskett retained a right over his daughter implied an unsuspected compromise. Waythorn was an idealist. He always refused to recognize unpleasant contingencies till he found himself confronted with them, and then he saw them followed by a spectral train of consequences. His next days were thus haunted, and he determined to try to lay the ghosts by conjuring them up in his wife's presence.

When he repeated Haskett's request a flame of anger passed over her face; but she subdued it instantly and spoke with a slight quiver of outraged motherhood.

"It is very ungentlemanly of him," she said.

The word grated on Waythorn. "That is neither here nor there. It's a bare question of rights."

She murmured: "It's not as if he could ever be a help to Lily—"

Waythorn flushed. This was even less to his taste. "The question is," he repeated, "what authority has he over her?"

She looked downward, twisting herself a little in her seat. "I am willing to see him—I thought you objected," she faltered.

In a flash he understood that she knew the extent of Haskett's claims. Perhaps it was not the first time she had resisted them.

"My objecting has nothing to do with it," he said coldly; "if Haskett has a right to be consulted you must consult him."

She burst into tears, and he saw that she expected him to regard her as a victim.

Haskett did not abuse his rights. Waythorn had felt miserably sure that he would not. But the governess was dismissed, and from time to time the little man demanded an interview with Alice. After the first outburst she accepted the situation with her usual adaptability. Haskett had once reminded Waythorn of the piano tuner, and Mrs. Waythorn, after a month or two, appeared to class him with that domestic familiar. Waythorn could not but respect the father's tenacity. At first he had tried to cultivate the suspicion that Haskett might be "up to" something, that he had an object in securing a foothold in the house. But in his heart Waythorn was sure of Haskett's single-mindedness; he even guessed in the latter a mild contempt for such advantages as his relation with the Waythorns might offer. Haskett's sincerity of purpose made him invulnerable, and his successor had to accept him as a lien on the property.

Mr. Sellers was sent to Europe to recover from his gout, and Varick's affairs hung on Waythorn's hands. The negotiations were prolonged and complicated; they necessitated frequent conferences between the two men, and the interests of the firm forbade Waythorn's suggesting that his client should transfer his business to another office.

Varick appeared well in the transaction. In moments of relaxation his coarse streak appeared, and Waythorn dreaded his geniality; but in the office he was concise and clear-headed, with a flattering deference to Waythorn's judgment. Their business relations being so affably established, it would have been absurd for the two men to ignore each other in society. The first time they met in a drawing room, Varick took up their intercourse in the same easy key, and his hostess' grateful glance obliged Waythorn to respond to it. After that they ran across each other frequently, and one evening at a ball Waythorn, wandering through the remoter rooms, came upon Varick seated beside his wife. She colored a little, and faltered in what she was saying; but Varick nodded to Waythorn without rising, and the latter strolled on.

In the carriage, on the way home, he broke out nervously: "I didn't know you spoke to Varick."

Her voice trembled a little. "It's the first time—he happened to be standing near me; I didn't know what to do. It's so awkward, meeting everywhere—and he said you had been very kind about some business."

"That's different," said Waythorn.

She paused a moment. "I'll do just as you wish," she returned pliantly. "I thought it would be less awkward to speak to him when we meet."

Her pliancy was beginning to sicken him. Had she really no will of her own—no theory about her relation to these men? She had accepted Haskett—did she mean to accept Varick? It was "less awkward," as she had said, and her instinct was to evade difficulties or to circumvent them. With sudden vividness Waythorn saw how the instinct had developed. She was "as easy as an old shoe"—a shoe that too many feet had worn. Her elasticity was the result of tension in too many different directions. Alice Haskett—Alice Varick—Alice Waythorn—she had been each in turn, and had left hanging to each name a little of her privacy, a little of her personality, a little of the inmost self where the unknown god abides.

"Yes—it's better to speak to Varick," said Waythorn wearily.

V

The winter wore on, and society took advantage of the Waythorns' acceptance of Varick. Harassed hostesses were grateful to them for bridging over a social difficulty, and Mrs. Waythorn was held up as a miracle of good taste. Some experimental spirits could not resist the diversion of throwing Varick and his former wife together, and there were those who thought he found a zest in the propinquity. But Mrs. Waythorn's conduct remained irreproachable. She neither avoided Varick nor sought him out. Even Waythorn could not but admit that she had discovered the solution of the newest social problem.

He had married her without giving much thought to that problem. He had fancied that a woman can shed her past like a man. But now he saw that Alice was bound to hers both by the circumstances which forced her into continued relation with it, and by the traces it had left on her nature. With grim irony Waythorn compared himself to a member of a syndicate. He held so many shares in his wife's personality and his predecessors were his partners in the business. If there had been any element of passion in the transaction he would have felt less deteriorated by it. The fact that Alice took her change of husbands like a change of weather reduced the situation to

mediocrity. He could have forgiven her for blunders, for excesses; for resisting Haskett, for yielding to Varick; for anything but her acquiescence and her tact. She reminded him of a juggler tossing knives; but the knives were blunt and she knew they would never cut her.

And then, gradually, habit formed a protecting surface for his sensibilities. If he paid for each day's comfort with the small change of his illusions, he grew daily to value the comfort more and set less store upon the coin. He had drifted into a dulling propinquity with Haskett and Varick and he took refuge in the cheap revenge of satirizing the situation. He even began to reckon up the advantages which accrued from it, to ask himself if it were not better to own a third of a wife who knew how to make a man happy than a whole one who had lacked opportunity to acquire the art. For it *was* an art, and made up, like all others, of concessions, eliminations and embellishments; of lights judiciously thrown and shadows skillfully softened. His wife knew exactly how to manage the lights, and he knew exactly to what training she owed her skill. He even tried to trace the source of his obligations, to discriminate between the influences which had combined to produce his domestic happiness: he perceived that Haskett's commonness had made Alice worship good breeding, while Varick's liberal construction of the marriage bond had taught her to value the conjugal virtues; so that he was directly indebted to his predecessors for the devotion which made his life easy if not inspiring.

From this phase he passed into that of complete acceptance. He ceased to satirize himself because time dulled the irony of the situation and the joke lost its humor with its sting. Even the sight of Haskett's hat on the hall table had ceased to touch the springs of epigram. The hat was often seen there now, for it had been decided that it was better for Lily's father to visit her than for the little girl to go to his boardinghouse. Waythorn, having acquiesced in this arrangement, had been surprised to find how little difference it made. Haskett was never obtrusive, and the few visitors who met him on the stairs were unaware of his identity. Waythorn did not know how often he saw Alice, but with himself Haskett was seldom in contact.

One afternoon, however, he learned on entering that Lily's father was waiting to see him. In the library he found Haskett occupying a chair in his usual provisional way. Waythorn always felt grateful to him for not leaning back.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Waythorn," he said rising. "I wanted to see Mrs. Waythorn about Lily, and your man asked me to wait here till she came in."

"Of course," said Waythorn, remembering that a sudden leak had that morning given over the drawing room to the plumbers.

He opened his cigar case and held it out to his visitor, and Haskett's acceptance seemed to mark a fresh stage in their intercourse. The spring evening was chilly, and Waythorn invited his guest to draw up his chair to the fire. He meant to find an excuse to leave Haskett in a moment; but he was tired and cold, and after all the little man no longer jarred on him.

The two were enclosed in the intimacy of their blended cigar smoke when the door opened and Varick walked into the room. Waythorn rose abruptly. It was the first time that Varick had come to the house, and the surprise of seeing him, combined with the singular inopportuneness of his arrival, gave

a new edge to Waythorn's blunted sensibilities. He stared at his visitor without speaking.

Varick seemed too preoccupied to notice his host's embarrassment.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed in his most expansive tone, "I must apologize for tumbling in on you in this way, but I was too late to catch you downtown, and so I thought—"

He stopped short, catching sight of Haskett, and his sanguine color deepened to a flush which spread vividly under his scant blond hair. But in a moment he recovered himself and nodded slightly. Haskett returned the bow in silence, and Waythorn was still groping for speech when the footman came in carrying a tea table.

The intrusion offered a welcome vent to Waythorn's nerves. "What the deuce are you bringing this here for?" he said sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the plumbers are still in the drawing room, and Mrs. Waythorn said she would have tea in the library." The footman's perfectly respectful tone implied a reflection on Waythorn's reasonableness.

"Oh, very well," said the latter resignedly, and the footman proceeded to open the folding tea table and set out its complicated appointments. While this interminable process continued the three men stood motionless, watching it with a fascinated stare, till Waythorn, to break the silence, said to Varick, "Won't you have a cigar?"

He held out the case he had just tendered to Haskett, and Varick helped himself with a smile. Waythorn looked about for a match, and finding none, proffered a light from his own cigar. Haskett, in the background, held his ground mildly, examining his cigar tip now and then, and stepping forward at the right moment to knock its ashes into the fire.

The footman at last withdrew, and Varick immediately began: "If I could just say half a word to you about this business—"

"Certainly," stammered Waythorn; "in the dining room—"

But as he placed his hand on the door it opened from without, and his wife appeared on the threshold.

She came in fresh and smiling, in her street dress and hat, shedding a fragrance from the boa which she loosened in advancing.

"Shall we have tea in here, dear?" she began; and then she caught sight of Varick. Her smile deepened, veiling a slight tremor of surprise.

"Why, how do you do?" she said with a distinct note of pleasure.

As she shook hands with Varick she saw Haskett standing behind him. Her smile faded for a moment, but she recalled it quickly, with a scarcely perceptible side glance at Waythorn.

"How do you do, Mr. Haskett?" she said, and shook hands with him a shade less cordially.

The three men stood awkwardly before her, till Varick, always the most self-possessed, dashed into an explanatory phrase.

"We—I had to see Waythorn a moment on business," he stammered, bricked from chin to nape.

Haskett stepped forward with his air of mild obstinacy. "I am sorry to intrude; but you appointed five o'clock—" he directed his resigned glance to the timepiece on the mantel.

She swept aside their embarrassment with a charming gesture of hospitality.

"I'm so sorry—I'm always late; but the afternoon was so lovely." She stood drawing off her gloves, propitiatory and graceful, diffusing about her a sense of ease and familiarity in which the situation lost its grotesqueness. "But before talking business," she added brightly, "I'm sure everyone wants a cup of tea."

She dropped into her low chair by the tea table, and the two visitors, as if drawn by her smile, advanced to receive the cups she held out.

She glanced about for Waythorn, and he took the third cup with a laugh.

1904

Roman Fever¹

I

From the table at which they had been lunching two American ladies of ripe but well-cared-for middle age moved across the lofty terrace of the Roman restaurant and, leaning on its parapet, looked first at each other, and then down on the outspread glories of the Palatine² and the Forum, with the same expression of vague but benevolent approval.

As they leaned there a girlish voice echoed up gaily from the stairs leading to the court below. "Well, come along, then," it cried, not to them but to an invisible companion, "and let's leave the young things to their knitting"; and a voice as fresh laughed back: "Oh, look here, Babs, not actually *knitting*—" "Well, I mean figuratively," rejoined the first. "After all, we haven't left our poor parents much else to do. . . ." and at that point the turn of the stairs engulfed the dialogue.

The two ladies looked at each other again, this time with a tinge of smiling embarrassment, and the smaller and paler one shook her head and colored slightly.

"Barbara!" she murmured, sending an unheard rebuke after the mocking voice in the stairway.

The other lady, who was fuller, and higher in color, with a small determined nose supported by vigorous black eyebrows, gave a good-humored laugh. "That's what our daughters think of us!"

Her companion replied by a deprecating gesture. "Not of us individually. We must remember that. It's just the collective modern idea of Mothers. And you see—" Half-guiltily she drew from her handsomely mounted black handbag a twist of crimson silk run through by two fine knitting needles. "One never knows," she murmured. "The new system has certainly given us a good deal of time to kill; and sometimes I get tired just looking—even at this." Her gesture was now addressed to the stupendous scene at their feet.

The dark lady laughed again, and they both relapsed upon the view, contemplating it in silence, with a sort of diffused serenity which might have been borrowed from the spring effulgence of the Roman skies. The luncheon hour was long past, and the two had their end of the vast terrace to themselves. At its opposite extremity a few groups, detained by a lingering look at

1. First printed in *Liberty* magazine in 1934.

2. Palatine Hill: a park in the center of Rome, with palatial ruins and historical monuments.

the outspread city, were gathering up guidebooks and fumbling for tips. The last of them scattered, and the two ladies were alone on the air-washed height.

“Well, I don’t see why we shouldn’t just stay here,” said Mrs. Slade, the lady of the high color and energetic brows. Two derelict basket chairs stood near, and she pushed them into the angle of the parapet, and settled herself in one, her gaze upon the Palatine. “After all, it’s still the most beautiful view in the world.”

“It always will be, to me,” assented her friend Mrs. Ansley, with so slight a stress on the “me” that Mrs. Slade, though she noticed it, wondered if it were not merely accidental, like the random underlinings of old-fashioned letter writers.

“Grace Ansley was always old-fashioned,” she thought; and added aloud, with a retrospective smile: “It’s a view we’ve both been familiar with for a good many years. When we first met here we were younger than our girls are now. You remember?”

“Oh, yes, I remember,” murmured Mrs. Ansley, with the same undefinable stress. “There’s that headwaiter wondering,” she interpolated. She was evidently far less sure than her companion of herself and of her rights in the world.

“I’ll cure him of wondering,” said Mrs. Slade, stretching her hand toward a bag as discreetly opulent-looking as Mrs. Ansley’s. Signing to the headwaiter, she explained that she and her friend were old lovers of Rome, and would like to spend the end of the afternoon looking down on the view—that is, if it did not disturb the service? The headwaiter, bowing over her gratuity, assured her that the ladies were most welcome, and would be still more so if they would condescend to remain for dinner. A full-moon night, they would remember. . . .

Mrs. Slade’s black brows drew together, as though references to the moon were out of place and even unwelcome. But she smiled away her frown as the headwaiter retreated. “Well, why not? We might do worse. There’s no knowing, I suppose, when the girls will be back. Do you even know back from *where*? I don’t!”

Mrs. Ansley again colored slightly. “I think those young Italian aviators we met at the Embassy invited them to fly to Tarquinia³ for tea. I suppose they’ll want to wait and fly back by moonlight.”

“Moonlight—moonlight! What a part it still plays. Do you suppose they’re as sentimental as we were?”

“I’ve come to the conclusion that I don’t in the least know what they are,” said Mrs. Ansley. “And perhaps we didn’t know much more about each other.”

“No; perhaps we didn’t.”

Her friend gave her a shy glance. “I never should have supposed you were sentimental, Alida.”

“Well, perhaps I wasn’t.” Mrs. Slade drew her lids together in retrospect; and for a few moments the two ladies, who had been intimate since childhood, reflected how little they knew each other. Each one, of course, had a label ready to attach to the other’s name; Mrs. Delphin Slade, for instance, would have told herself, or anyone who asked her, that Mrs. Horace Ansley,

3. An ancient Etruscan city in the province of Viterbo, Lazio, Italy, famous for resisting Roman rule.

twenty-five years ago, had been exquisitely lovely—no, you wouldn't believe it, would you? . . . though, of course, still charming, distinguished. . . . Well, as a girl she had been exquisite; far more beautiful than her daughter Barbara, though certainly Babs, according to the new standards at any rate, was more effective—had more *edge*, as they say. Funny where she got it, with those two nullities as parents. Yes; Horace Ansley was—well, just the duplicate of his wife. Museum specimens of old New York. Good-looking, irreproachable, exemplary. Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley had lived opposite each other—actually as well as figuratively—for years. When the drawing-room curtains in No. 20 East 73rd Street were renewed, No. 23, across the way, was always aware of it. And of all the movings, buyings, travels, anniversaries, illnesses—the tame chronicle of an estimable pair. Little of it escaped Mrs. Slade. But she had grown bored with it by the time her husband made his big *coup* in Wall Street, and when they bought in upper Park Avenue⁴ had already begun to think: "I'd rather live opposite a speakeasy⁵ for a change; at least one might see it raided." The idea of seeing Grace raided was so amusing that (before the move) she launched it at a woman's lunch. It made a hit, and went the rounds—she sometimes wondered if it had crossed the street, and reached Mrs. Ansley. She hoped not, but didn't much mind. Those were the days when respectability was at a discount, and it did the irreproachable no harm to laugh at them a little.

A few years later, and not many months apart, both ladies lost their husbands. There was an appropriate exchange of wreaths and condolences, and a brief renewal of intimacy in the half-shadow of their mourning; and now, after another interval, they had run across each other in Rome, at the same hotel, each of them the modest appendage of a salient daughter. The similarity of their lot had again drawn them together, lending itself to mild jokes, and the mutual confession that, if in old days it must have been tiring to "keep up" with daughters, it was now, at times, a little dull not to.

No doubt, Mrs. Slade reflected, she felt her unemployment more than poor Grace ever would. It was a big drop from being the wife of Delphin Slade to being his widow. She had always regarded herself (with a certain conjugal pride) as his equal in social gifts, as contributing her full share to the making of the exceptional couple they were: but the difference after his death was irremediable. As the wife of the famous corporation lawyer, always with an international case or two on hand, every day brought its exciting and unexpected obligation: the impromptu entertaining of eminent colleagues from abroad, the hurried dashes on legal business to London, Paris or Rome, where the entertaining was so handsomely reciprocated; the amusement of hearing in her wake: "What, that handsome woman with the good clothes and the eyes is Mrs. Slade—the Slade's wife? Really? Generally the wives of celebrities are such frumps."

Yes; being *the* Slade's widow was a dullish business after that. In living up to such a husband all her faculties had been engaged; now she had only her daughter to live up to, for the son who seemed to have inherited his father's gifts had died suddenly in boyhood. She had fought through that agony because her husband was there, to be helped and to help; now, after the

4. Park Avenue would have been a more expensive and exclusive address.

5. During Prohibition, an establishment that illegally sold alcoholic beverages.

father's death, the thought of the boy had become unbearable. There was nothing left but to mother her daughter; and dear Jenny was such a perfect daughter that she needed no excessive mothering. "Now with Babs Ansley I don't know that I *should* be so quiet," Mrs. Slade sometimes half-enuviously reflected; but Jenny, who was younger than her brilliant friend, was that rare accident, an extremely pretty girl who somehow made youth and prettiness seem as safe as their absence. It was all perplexing—and to Mrs. Slade a little boring. She wished that Jenny would fall in love—with the wrong man, even; that she might have to be watched, out-manuevered, rescued. And instead, it was Jenny who watched her mother, kept her out of drafts, made sure that she had taken her tonic. . . .

Mrs. Ansley was much less articulate than her friend, and her mental portrait of Mrs. Slade was slighter, and drawn with fainter touches. "Alida Slade's awfully brilliant; but not as brilliant as she thinks," would have summed it up; though she would have added, for the enlightenment of strangers, that Mrs. Slade had been an extremely dashing girl; much more so than her daughter, who was pretty, of course, and clever in a way, but had none of her mother's—well, "vividness," someone had once called it. Mrs. Ansley would take up current words like this, and cite them in quotation marks, as unheard-of audacities. No; Jenny was not like her mother. Sometimes Mrs. Ansley thought Alida Slade was disappointed; on the whole she had had a sad life. Full of failures and mistakes; Mrs. Ansley had always been rather sorry for her. . . .

So these two ladies visualized each other, each through the wrong end of her little telescope.

II

For a long time they continued to sit side by side without speaking. It seemed as though, to both, there was a relief in laying down their somewhat futile activities in the presence of the vast Memento Mori which faced them. Mrs. Slade sat quite still, her eyes fixed on the golden slope of the Palace of the Caesars,⁶ and after a while Mrs. Ansley ceased to fidget with her bag, and she too sank into meditation. Like many intimate friends, the two ladies had never before had occasion to be silent together, and Mrs. Ansley was slightly embarrassed by what seemed, after so many years, a new stage in their intimacy, and one with which she did not yet know how to deal.

Suddenly the air was full of that deep clangor of bells which periodically covers Rome with a roof of silver. Mrs. Slade glanced at her wristwatch. "Five o'clock already," she said, as though surprised.

Mrs. Ansley suggested interrogatively: "There's bridge at the Embassy at five." For a long time Mrs. Slade did not answer. She appeared to be lost in contemplation, and Mrs. Ansley thought the remark had escaped her. But after a while she said, as if speaking out of a dream: "Bridge, did you say? Not unless you want to. . . . But I don't think I will, you know."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Ansley hastened to assure her. "I don't care to at all. It's so lovely here; and so full of old memories, as you say." She settled herself in

6. Remains of imperial palaces on the Palatine Hill in Rome. "Memento Mori": "Remember you will die" (Latin); here, the phrase refers to the visible ruins of ancient Rome.

her chair, and almost furtively drew forth her knitting. Mrs. Slade took sideways note of this activity, but her own beautifully cared-for hands remained motionless on her knee.

"I was just thinking," she said slowly, "what different things Rome stands for to each generation of travelers. To our grandmothers, Roman fever;⁷ to our mothers, sentimental dangers—how we used to be guarded!—to our daughters, no more dangers than the middle of Main Street. They don't know it—but how much they're missing!"

The long golden light was beginning to pale, and Mrs. Ansley lifted her knitting a little closer to her eyes. "Yes; how we were guarded!"

"I always used to think," Mrs. Slade continued, "that our mothers had a much more difficult job than our grandmothers. When Roman fever stalked the streets it must have been comparatively easy to gather in the girls at the danger hour; but when you and I were young, with such beauty calling us, and the spice of disobedience thrown in, and no worse risk than catching cold during the cool hour after sunset, the mothers used to be put to it to keep us in—didn't they?"

She turned again toward Mrs. Ansley, but the latter had reached a delicate point in her knitting. "One, two, three—slip two; yes, they must have been," she assented, without looking up.

Mrs. Slade's eyes rested on her with a deepened attention. "She can knit—in the face of *this!* How like her. . . ."

Mrs. Slade leaned back, brooding, her eyes ranging from the ruins which faced her to the long green hollow of the Forum, the fading glow of the church fronts beyond it, and the outlying immensity of the Colosseum.⁸ Suddenly she thought: "It's all very well to say that our girls have done away with sentiment and moonlight. But if Babs Ansley isn't out to catch that young aviator—the one who's a Marchese⁹—then I don't know anything. And Jenny has no chance beside her. I know that too. I wonder if that's why Grace Ansley likes the two girls to go everywhere together? My poor Jenny as a foil—!" Mrs. Slade gave a hardly audible laugh, and at the sound Mrs. Ansley dropped her knitting.

"Yes—?"

"I—oh, nothing. I was only thinking how your Babs carries everything before her. That Campolieri boy is one of the best matches in Rome. Don't look so innocent, my dear—you know he is. And I was wondering, ever so respectfully, you understand . . . wondering how two such exemplary characters as you and Horace had managed to produce anything quite so dynamic." Mrs. Slade laughed again, with a touch of asperity.

Mrs. Ansley's hands lay inert across her needles. She looked straight out at the great accumulated wreckage of passion and splendor at her feet. But her small profile was almost expressionless. At length she said: "I think you overrate Babs, my dear."

Mrs. Slade's tone grew easier. "No; I don't. I appreciate her. And perhaps envy you. Oh, my girl's perfect; if I were a chronic invalid I'd—well, I think I'd rather be in Jenny's hands. There must be times . . . but there! I always

7. Malaria.

8. Ancient Roman amphitheater, known for its battles between gladiators and public executions

of Christians.

9. That is, a marquis, a member of Italian nobility.

wanted a brilliant daughter . . . and never quite understood why I got an angel instead.”

Mrs. Ansley echoed her laugh in a faint murmur. “Babs is an angel too.”

“Of course—of course! But she’s got rainbow wings. Well, they’re wandering by the sea with their young men; and here we sit . . . and it all brings back the past a little too acutely.”

Mrs. Ansley had resumed her knitting. One might almost have imagined (if one had known her less well, Mrs. Slade reflected) that, for her also, too many memories rose from the lengthening shadows of those august ruins. But no; she was simply absorbed in her work. What was there for her to worry about? She knew that Babs would almost certainly come back engaged to the extremely eligible Campolieri. “And she’ll sell the New York house, and settle down near them in Rome, and never be in their way . . . she’s much too tactful. But she’ll have an excellent cook, and just the right people in for bridge and cocktails . . . and a perfectly peaceful old age among her grandchildren.”

Mrs. Slade broke off this prophetic flight with a recoil of self-disgust. There was no one of whom she had less right to think unkindly than of Grace Ansley. Would she never cure herself of envying her? Perhaps she had begun too long ago.

She stood up and leaned against the parapet, filling her troubled eyes with the tranquilizing magic of the hour. But instead of tranquilizing her the sight seemed to increase her exasperation. Her gaze turned toward the Colosseum. Already its golden flank was drowned in purple shadow, and above it the sky curved crystal clear, without light or color. It was the moment when afternoon and evening hang balanced in mid-heaven.

Mrs. Slade turned back and laid her hand on her friend’s arm. The gesture was so abrupt that Mrs. Ansley looked up, startled.

“The sun’s set. You’re not afraid, my dear?”

“Afraid—?”

“Of Roman fever or pneumonia? I remember how ill you were that winter. As a girl you had a very delicate throat, hadn’t you?”

“Oh, we’re all right up here. Down below, in the Forum, it does get deathly cold, all of a sudden . . . but not here.”

“Ah, of course you know because you had to be so careful.” Mrs. Slade turned back to the parapet. She thought: “I must make one more effort not to hate her.” Aloud she said: “Whenever I look at the Forum from up here, I remember that story about a great-aunt of yours, wasn’t she? A dreadfully wicked great-aunt?”

“Oh, yes; great-aunt Harriet. The one who was supposed to have sent her young sister out to the Forum after sunset to gather a night-blooming flower for her album. All our great-aunts and grandmothers used to have albums of dried flowers.”

Mrs. Slade nodded. “But she really sent her because they were in love with the same man—”

“Well, that was the family tradition. They said Aunt Harriet confessed it years afterward. At any rate, the poor little sister caught the fever and died. Mother used to frighten us with the story when we were children.”

“And you frightened *me* with it, that winter when you and I were here as girls. The winter I was engaged to Delphin.”

Mrs. Ansley gave a faint laugh. "Oh, did I? Really frightened you? I don't believe you're easily frightened."

"Not often; but I was then. I was easily frightened because I was too happy. I wonder if you know what that means?"

"I—yes . . ." Mrs. Ansley faltered.

"Well, I suppose that was why the story of your wicked aunt made such an impression on me. And I thought: 'There's no more Roman fever, but the Forum is deathly cold after sunset—especially after a hot day. And the Colosseum's even colder and damper.'"

"The Colosseum—?"

"Yes. It wasn't easy to get in, after the gates were locked for the night. Far from easy. Still, in those days it could be managed; it *was* managed, often. Lovers met there who couldn't meet elsewhere. You knew that?"

"I—I dare say. I don't remember."

"You don't remember? You don't remember going to visit some ruins or other one evening, just after dark, and catching a bad chill? You were supposed to have gone to see the moon rise. People always said that expedition was what caused your illness."

There was a moment's silence; then Mrs. Ansley rejoined: "Did they? It was all so long ago."

"Yes. And you got well again—so it didn't matter. But I suppose it struck your friends—the reason given for your illness, I mean—because everybody knew you were so prudent on account of your throat, and your mother took such care of you. . . . You *had* been out late sight-seeing, hadn't you, that night?"

"Perhaps I had. The most prudent girls aren't always prudent. What made you think of it now?"

Mrs. Slade seemed to have no answer ready. But after a moment she broke out: "Because I simply can't bear it any longer—!"

Mrs. Ansley lifted her head quickly. Her eyes were wide and very pale. "Can't bear what?"

"Why—your not knowing that I've always known why you went."

"Why I went—?"

"Yes. You think I'm bluffing, don't you? Well, you went to meet the man I was engaged to—and I can repeat every word of the letter that took you there."

While Mrs. Slade spoke Mrs. Ansley had risen unsteadily to her feet. Her bag, her knitting and gloves, slid in a panic-stricken heap to the ground. She looked at Mrs. Slade as though she were looking at a ghost.

"No, no—don't," she faltered out.

"Why not? Listen, if you don't believe me. 'My one darling, things can't go on like this. I must see you alone. Come to the Colosseum immediately after dark tomorrow. There will be somebody to let you in. No one whom you need fear will suspect'—but perhaps you've forgotten what the letter said?"

Mrs. Ansley met the challenge with an unexpected composure. Steadying herself against the chair she looked at her friend, and replied: "No; I know it by heart too."

"And the signature? 'Only *your* D.S.' Was that it? I'm right, am I? That was the letter that took you out that evening after dark?"

Mrs. Ansley was still looking at her. It seemed to Mrs. Slade that a slow struggle was going on behind the voluntarily controlled mask of her small quiet face. "I shouldn't have thought she had herself so well in hand," Mrs. Slade reflected, almost resentfully. But at this moment Mrs. Ansley spoke. "I don't know how you knew. I burnt that letter at once."

"Yes; you would, naturally—you're so prudent!" The sneer was open now. "And if you burnt the letter you're wondering how on earth I know what was in it. That's it, isn't it?"

Mrs. Slade waited, but Mrs. Ansley did not speak.

"Well, my dear, I know what was in that letter because I wrote it!"

"You wrote it?"

"Yes."

The two women stood for a minute staring at each other in the last golden light. Then Mrs. Ansley dropped back into her chair. "Oh," she murmured, and covered her face with her hands.

Mrs. Slade waited nervously for another word or movement. None came, and at length she broke out: "I horrify you."

Mrs. Ansley's hands dropped to her knee. The face they uncovered was streaked with tears. "I wasn't thinking of you. I was thinking—it was the only letter I ever had from him!"

"And I wrote it. Yes; I wrote it! But I was the girl he was engaged to. Did you happen to remember that?"

Mrs. Ansley's head drooped again. "I'm not trying to excuse myself . . . I remembered. . . ."

"And still you went?"

"Still I went."

Mrs. Slade stood looking down on the small bowed figure at her side. The flame of her wrath had already sunk, and she wondered why she had ever thought there would be any satisfaction in inflicting so purposeless a wound on her friend. But she had to justify herself.

"You do understand? I'd found out—and I hated you, hated you. I knew you were in love with Delphin—and I was afraid; afraid of you, of your quiet ways, your sweetness . . . your . . . well, I wanted you out of the way, that's all. Just for a few weeks; just till I was sure of him. So in a blind fury I wrote that letter . . . I don't know why I'm telling you now."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Ansley slowly, "it's because you've always gone on hating me."

"Perhaps. Or because I wanted to get the whole thing off my mind." She paused. "I'm glad you destroyed the letter. Of course I never thought you'd die."

Mrs. Ansley relapsed into silence, and Mrs. Slade, leaning above her, was conscious of a strange sense of isolation, of being cut off from the warm current of human communion. "You think me a monster!"

"I don't know. . . . It was the only letter I had, and you say he didn't write it?"

"Ah, how you care for him still!"

"I cared for that memory," said Mrs. Ansley.

Mrs. Slade continued to look down on her. She seemed physically reduced by the blow—as if, when she got up, the wind might scatter her like a puff of dust. Mrs. Slade's jealousy suddenly leapt up again at the sight. All these years the woman had been living on that letter. How she must have loved

him, to treasure the mere memory of its ashes! The letter of the man her friend was engaged to. Wasn't it she who was the monster?

"You tried your best to get him away from me, didn't you? But you failed; and I kept him. That's all."

"Yes. That's all."

"I wish now I hadn't told you. I'd no idea you'd feel about it as you do; I thought you'd be amused. It all happened so long ago, as you say; and you must do me the justice to remember that I had no reason to think you'd ever taken it seriously. How could I, when you were married to Horace Ansley two months afterward? As soon as you could get out of bed your mother rushed you off to Florence and married you. People were rather surprised—they wondered at its being done so quickly; but I thought I knew. I had an idea you did it out of *pique*—to be able to say you'd got ahead of Delphin and me. Girls have such silly reasons for doing the most serious things. And your marrying so soon convinced me that you'd never really cared."

"Yes. I suppose it would," Mrs. Ansley assented.

The clear heaven overhead was emptied of all its gold. Dusk spread over it, abruptly darkening the Seven Hills.¹ Here and there lights began to twinkle through the foliage at their feet. Steps were coming and going on the deserted terrace—waiters looking out of the doorway at the head of the stairs, then reappearing with trays and napkins and flasks of wine. Tables were moved, chairs straightened. A feeble string of electric lights flickered out. Some vases of faded flowers were carried away, and brought back replenished. A stout lady in a dust coat suddenly appeared, asking in broken Italian if anyone had seen the elastic band which held together her tattered Baedeker. She poked with her stick under the table at which she had lunched, the waiters assisting.

The corner where Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley sat was still shadowy and deserted. For a long time neither of them spoke. At length Mrs. Slade began again: "I suppose I did it as a sort of joke—"

"A joke?"

"Well, girls are ferocious sometimes, you know. Girls in love especially. And I remember laughing to myself all that evening at the idea that you were waiting around there in the dark, dodging out of sight, listening for every sound, trying to get in.—Of course I was upset when I heard you were so ill afterward."

Mrs. Ansley had not moved for a long time. But now she turned slowly toward her companion. "But I didn't wait. He'd arranged everything. He was there. We were let in at once," she said.

Mrs. Slade sprang up from her leaning position. "Delphin there? They let you in?—Ah, now you're lying!" she burst out with violence.

Mrs. Ansley's voice grew clearer, and full of surprise. "But of course he was there. Naturally he came—"

"Came? How did he know he'd find you there? You must be raving!"

Mrs. Ansley hesitated, as though reflecting. "But I answered the letter. I told him I'd be there. So he came."

1. The Seven Hills of Rome east of the Tiber River form the heart of the city.

Mrs. Slade flung her hands up to her face. “Oh, God—you answered! I never thought of your answering. . . .”

“It’s odd you never thought of it, if you wrote the letter.”

“Yes. I was blind with rage.”

Mrs. Ansley rose, and drew her fur scarf about her. “It is cold here. We’d better go . . . I’m sorry for you,” she said, as she clasped the fur about her throat.

The unexpected words sent a pang through Mrs. Slade. “Yes; we’d better go.” She gathered up her bag and cloak. “I don’t know why you should be sorry for me,” she muttered.

Mrs. Ansley stood looking away from her toward the dusky secret mass of the Colosseum. “Well—because I didn’t have to wait that night.”

Mrs. Slade gave an unquiet laugh. “Yes; I was beaten there. But I oughtn’t to begrudge it to you, I suppose. At the end of all these years. After all, I had everything; I had him for twenty-five years. And you had nothing but that one letter that he didn’t write.”

Mrs. Slade was again silent. At length she turned toward the door of the terrace. She took a step, and turned back, facing her companion.

“I had Barbara,” she said, and began to move ahead of Mrs. Slade toward the stairway.

1934

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT

1862–1931

Ida Belle Wells was born to enslaved parents in Holly Springs, Mississippi, fifty miles southeast of Memphis. Her father’s carpentry skills and her mother’s fame as a cook gave them high status among slave workers. They had eight children, of whom Ida was the second. Both parents and two of the children died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1878, a moment Wells describes in her posthumously published autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, as the moment when “life became a reality to me.” As friends and relatives planned to separate the children, sixteen-year-old Ida resolved to keep the family together and honor her parents’ memory, which she did by going to work as a teacher and raising all five siblings.

Wells attended Shaw University (now called Rust College) and in 1884 moved to Memphis to help her aunt raise her youngest sisters and take teacher-training courses at Fisk University. Soon after her arrival she was told by a conductor on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad to give up her seat in the ladies’ car for a white man, and he then ordered her into the smoky, crowded “Jim Crow” car. She refused, whereupon he seized her. As she recalls in her autobiography, “I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand . . . and he didn’t try it again by himself. He went forward and got the baggageman and another man to help him and of course they succeeded in dragging me out.” As the white passengers applauded, Wells was forcibly removed from the train. She filed a lawsuit against the railroad that proved ulti-



Ida B. Wells, c. 1893.

(1894) and “Mob Rule in New Orleans” (1900). During the 1890s, she also began working with Frederick Douglass. Douglass aided Wells in her writing career, and Wells, in turn, influenced Douglass’s speeches on the topic of lynching. The two collaborated on a widely circulated pamphlet protesting the absence of African American culture in the exhibits of the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893.

Wells’s writing against the horrors of antiblack violence blended investigative journalism with what today we might call media criticism, as Wells revealed how racial prejudice and a thirst for sensation could shape the way that violence was portrayed white-owned newspapers. The potency of this combination is evident in the portions of “Mob Rule” reprinted here, which reveal as much about the shortcomings of the journalistic record as about the racial violence that gripped New Orleans in July 1900. Despite threats on her life, Wells persisted in writing and speaking at home and abroad. She participated in national suffragist marches and, with Jane Addams, founder of the social settlement Hull-House on Chicago’s Near West Side, she successfully blocked the establishment of segregated schools in Chicago.

In 1895, Wells married Ferdinand L. Barnett, the editor of the *Conservator*, one of Chicago’s early black newspapers. The couple had several children. In 1906, Wells was one of two African American women to help found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and, in 1910, she formed the Negro Fellowship League on Chicago’s South Side, a refuge for travelers from the South. In her autobiography, Wells wrote that everything she had done was “because our youth are entitled to the facts of race history which only the participants can give.” In 1930, she ran for the Illinois State Legislature and lost. She died a year later, after a lifetime of crusading for social justice.

mately unsuccessful—but the incident ignited her career as a journalist. Her columns about these events were reprinted by African American and Christian newspapers across the country, where they gained a large following. By 1889 she had become a partner in a newspaper called the *Free Speech and Headlight*.

In 1892, three of Wells’s black friends, who owned a small grocery, were lynched by white men seeking to protect the business of their own grocery stores. Wells helped organize a boycott of white-owned businesses and denounced the lynch mob in *Free Speech*, but she had to leave Memphis for Chicago when her life was threatened. In Chicago, she continued to speak out against injustice and violence towards black people, especially lynching. Her pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892) was followed by *A Red Record*

From Mob Rule in New Orleans¹

Shot an Officer

The bloodiest week which New Orleans has known since the massacre of the Italians in 1892² was ushered in Monday, July 24th, by the inexcusable and unprovoked assault upon two colored men by police officers of New Orleans. Fortified by the assurance born of long experience in the New Orleans service, three policemen, Sergeant Aucoin, Officer Mora and Officer Cantrelle, observing two colored men sitting on doorsteps on Dryades street, between Washington avenue and 6th streets,³ determined, without a shadow of authority, to arrest them. One of the colored men was named Robert Charles, the other was a lad of nineteen named Leonard Pierce. The colored men had left their homes, a few blocks distant, about an hour prior, and had been sitting upon the doorsteps for a short time talking together. They had not broken the peace in any way whatever, no warrant was in the policemen's hands justifying their arrest, and no crime had been committed of which they were the suspects. The policemen, however, secure in the firm belief that they could do anything to a Negro that they wished, approached the two men, and in less than three minutes from the time they accosted them attempted to put both colored men under arrest. The younger of the two men, Pierce, submitted to arrest, for the officer, Cantrelle, who accosted him, put his gun in the young man's face ready to blow his brains out if he moved. The other colored man, Charles, was made the victim of a savage attack by Officer Mora, who used a billet⁴ and then drew a gun and tried to kill Charles. Charles drew his gun nearly as quickly as the policeman, and began a duel in the street, in which both participants were shot. The policeman got the worst of the duel, and fell helpless to the sidewalk, Charles made his escape. Cantrelle took Pierce, his captive, to the police station, to which place Mora, the wounded officer, was also taken, and a man hunt at once instituted for Charles, the wounded fugitive.

In any law-abiding community Charles would have been justified in delivering himself up immediately to the properly constituted authorities and asking a trial by a jury of his peers. He could have been certain that in resisting an unwarranted arrest he had a right to defend his life, even to the point of taking one in that defense, but Charles knew that his arrest in New Orleans, even for defending his life, meant nothing short of a long term in the penitentiary, and still more probable death by lynching at the hands of a cowardly mob. He very bravely determined to protect his life as long as he had breath in his body and strength to draw a hair trigger on his would-be murderers. How well he was justified in that belief is well shown by the newspaper accounts which were given of this transaction. Without a single line of

1. "Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to Death, the Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive, Other Lynching Statistics" was first published as a pamphlet by Wells-Barnett in Chicago in 1900; it describes the events of July 1900, sometimes known as the "Robert Charles riots." The pamphlet was reprinted in *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors, A Red Record, Mob Rule in New Orleans* (1969), the

source of the text printed here.

2. On March 14, 1891, in New Orleans, eleven Italian immigrants were killed by a lynch mob of more than 6,000 after a court found them not guilty in the murder of a police superintendent.

3. The streets named in Barnett's article are all in downtown New Orleans.

4. Billy club.

evidence to justify the assertion, the New Orleans daily papers at once declared that both Pierce and Charles were desperadoes, that they were contemplating a burglary and that they began the assault upon the policemen. It is interesting to note how the two leading papers of New Orleans, the *Picayune* and the *Times-Democrat*, exert themselves to justify the policemen in the absolutely unprovoked attack upon the two colored men. As these two papers did all in their power to give an excuse for the action of the policemen, it is interesting to note their versions. The *Times-Democrat* of Tuesday morning, the 25th, says:

Two blacks, who are desperate men, and no doubt will be proven burglars, made it interesting and dangerous for three bluecoats on Dryades street, between Washington avenue and Sixth street, the Negroes using pistols first and dropping Patrolman Mora. But the desperate darkies did not go free, for the taller of the two, Robinson, is badly wounded and under cover, while Leonard Pierce is in jail.

For a long time that particular neighborhood has been troubled with bad Negroes, and the neighbors were complaining to the Sixth Precinct police about them. But of late Pierce and Robinson had been camping on a door step on the street, and the people regarded their actions as suspicious. It got to such a point that some of the residents were afraid to go to bed, and last night this was told Sergeant Aucoin, who was rounding up his men. He had just picked up Officers Mora and Cantrell, on Washington avenue and Dryades street, and catching a glimpse of the blacks on the steps, he said he would go over and warn the men to get away from the street. So the patrolmen followed, and Sergeant Aucoin asked the smaller fellow, Pierce, if he lived there. The answer was short and impertinent, the black saying he did not, and with that both Pierce and Robinson drew up to their full height.

For the moment the sergeant did not think that the Negroes meant to fight, and he was on the point of ordering them away when Robinson slipped his pistol from his pocket. Pierce had his revolver out, too, and he fired twice, point blank at the sergeant, and just then Robinson began shooting at the patrolmen. In a second or so the policemen and blacks were fighting with their revolvers, the sergeant having a duel with Pierce, while Cantrell and Mora drew their line of fire on Robinson, who was working his revolver for all he was worth. One of his shots took Mora in the right hip, another caught his index finger on the right hand, and a third struck the small finger of the left hand. Poor Mora was done for; he could not fight any more, but Cantrell kept up his fire, being answered by the big black. Pierce's revolver broke down, the cartridges snapping, and he threw up his hands, begging for quarter.

The sergeant lowered his pistol and some citizens ran over to where the shooting was going on. One of the bullets that went at Robinson caught him in the breast and he began running, turning on Sixth street, with Cantrell behind him, shooting every few steps. He was loading his revolver again, but did not use it after the start he took, and in a little while, Officer Cantrell lost the man in the darkness.

Pierce was made a prisoner and hurried to the Sixth Precinct police station, where he was charged with shooting and wounding. The ser-

geant sent for an ambulance, and Mora was taken to the hospital, the wound in the hip being serious.

A search was made for Robinson, but he could not be found, and even at 2 o'clock this morning Captain Day, with Sergeant Aucoin and Corporals Perrier and Trenchard, with a good squad of men, were beating the weeds for the black.

The New Orleans *Picayune* of the same date described the occurrence, and from its account one would think it was an entirely different affair. Both of the two accounts cannot be true, and the unquestioned fact is that neither of them sets out the facts as they occurred. Both accounts attempt to fix the beginning of hostilities upon the colored men, but both were compelled to admit that the colored men were sitting on the doorsteps quietly conversing with one another when the three policemen went up and accosted them. The *Times-Democrat* unguardedly states that one of the two colored men tried to run away; that Mora seized him and then drew his billy and struck him on the head; that Charles broke away from him and started to run, after which the shooting began. The *Picayune*, however, declares that Pierce began the firing and that his two shots point blank at Aucoin were the first shots of the fight. As a matter of fact, Pierce never fired a single shot before he was covered by Aucoin's revolver. Charles and the officers did all the shooting. The *Picayune's* account is as follows:

Patrolman Mora was shot in the right hip and dangerously wounded last night at 11:30 o'clock in Dryades street, between Washington and Sixth, by two Negroes, who were sitting on a door step in the neighborhood.

The shooting of Patrolman Mora brings to memory the fact that he was one of the partners of Patrolman Trimp, who was shot by a Negro soldier of the United States government during the progress of the Spanish-American war. The shooting of Mora by the Negro last night is a very simple story. At the hour mentioned, three Negro women noticed two suspicious men sitting on a door step in the above locality. The women saw the two men making an apparent inspection of the building. As they told the story, they saw the men look over the fence and examine the window blinds, and they paid particular attention to the make-up of the building, which was a two-story affair. About that time Sergeant J. C. Aucoin and Officers Mora and J. D. Cantrell hove in sight. The women hailed them and described to them the suspicious actions of the two Negroes, who were still sitting on the step. The trio of blue-coats, on hearing the facts, at once crossed the street and accosted the men. The latter answered that they were waiting for a friend whom they were expecting. Not satisfied with this answer, the sergeant asked them where they lived, and they replied "down town," but could not designate the locality. To other questions put by the officers the larger of the two Negroes replied that they had been in town just three days.

As this reply was made, the larger man sprang to his feet, and Patrolman Mora, seeing that he was about to run away, seized him. The Negro took a firm hold on the officer, and a scuffle ensued. Mora, noting that he was not being assisted by his brother officers, drew his billy and struck the Negro on the head. The blow had but little effect upon the man, for

he broke away and started down the street. When about ten feet away, the Negro drew his revolver and opened fire on the officer, firing three or four shots. The third shot struck Mora in the right hip, and was subsequently found to have taken an upward course. Although badly wounded, Mora drew his pistol and returned the fire. At his third shot the Negro was noticed to stagger, but he did not fall. He continued his flight. At this moment Sergeant Aucoin seized the other Negro, who proved to be a youth, Leon Pierce. As soon as Officer Mora was shot he sank to the sidewalk, and the other officer ran to the nearest telephone, and sent in a call for the ambulance. Upon its arrival the wounded officer was placed in it and conveyed to the hospital. An examination by the house surgeon revealed the fact that the bullet had taken an upward course. In the opinion of the surgeon the wound was a dangerous one.

But the best proof of the fact that the officers accosted the two colored men and without any warrant or other justification attempted to arrest them, and did actually seize and begin to club one of them, is shown by Officer Mora's own statement. The officer was wounded and had every reason in the world to make his side of the story as good as possible. His statement was made to a *Picayune* reporter and the same was published on the 25th inst.,⁵ and is as follows:

I was in the neighborhood of Dryades and Washington streets, with Sergeant Aucoin and Officer Cantrell, when three Negro women came up and told us that there were two suspicious-looking Negroes sitting on a step on Dryades street, between Washington and Sixth. We went to the place indicated and found two Negroes. We interrogated them as to who they were, what they were doing and how long they had been here. They replied that they were working for some one and had been in town three days. At about this stage the larger of the two Negroes got up and I grabbed him. The Negro pulled, but I held fast, and he finally pulled me into the street. Here I began using my billet, and the Negro jerked from my grasp and ran. He then pulled a gun and fired. I pulled my gun and returned the fire, each of us firing about three shots. I saw the Negro stumble several times, and I thought I had shot him, but he ran away and I don't know whether any of my shots took effect. Sergeant Aucoin in the meantime held the other man fast. The man was about ten feet from me when he fired, and the three Negresses who told us about the men stood away about twenty-five feet from the shooting.

Thus far in the proceeding the Monday night episode results in Officer Mora lying in the station wounded in the hip; Leonard Pierce, one of the colored men, locked up in the station, and Robert Charles, the other colored man, a fugitive, wounded in the leg and sought for by the entire police force of New Orleans. Not sought for, however, to be placed under arrest and given a fair trial and punished if found guilty according to the law of the land, but sought for by a host of enraged, vindictive and fearless officers, who were coolly ordered to kill him on sight. This order is shown by the *Picayune* of the 26th inst., in which the following statement appears:

5. Short for *instant*, here meaning "in the present month."

In talking to the sergeant about the case, the captain asked about the Negro's fighting ability, and the sergeant answered that Charles, though he called him Robinson then, was a desperate man, and it would be best to shoot him before he was given a chance to draw his pistol upon any of the officers.

This instruction was given before anybody had been killed, and the only evidence that Charles was a desperate man lay in the fact that he had refused to be beaten over the head by Officer Mora for sitting on a step quietly conversing with a friend. Charles resisted an absolutely unlawful attack, and a gun fight followed. Both Mora and Charles were shot, but because Mora was white and Charles was black, Charles was at once declared to be a desperado, made an outlaw, and subsequently a price put upon his head and the mob authorized to shoot him like a dog, on sight.

The New Orleans *Picayune* of Wednesday morning said:

But he has gone, perhaps to the swamps, and the disappointment of the bluecoats in not getting the murderer is expressed in their curses, each man swearing that the signal to halt that will be offered Charles will be a shot.

In that same column of the *Picayune* it was said:

Hundreds of policemen were about; each corner was guarded by a squad, commanded either by a sergeant or a corporal, and every man had the word to shoot the Negro as soon as he was sighted. He was a desperate black and would be given no chance to take more life.

Legal sanction was given to the mob or any man of the mob to kill Charles at sight by the Mayor of New Orleans, who publicly proclaimed a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars, not for the arrest of Charles, not at all, but the reward was offered for Charles' body, "dead or alive." The advertisement was as follows:

\$250 REWARD.

Under the authority vested in me by law, I hereby offer, in the name of the city of New Orleans, \$250 reward for the capture and delivery, dead or alive, to the authorities of the city, the body of the Negro murderer,

ROBERT CHARLES,

who, on Tuesday morning, July 24, shot and killed
Police Captain John T. Day and Patrolman Peter J. Lamb, and wounded
Patrolman August T. Mora.

PAUL CAPDEVIELLE, Mayor.

This authority, given by the sergeant to kill Charles on sight, would have been no news to Charles, nor to any colored man in New Orleans, who, for any purpose whatever, even to save his life, raised his hand against a white man. It is now, even as it was in the days of slavery, an unpardonable sin for a Negro to resist a white man, no matter how unjust or unprovoked the white man's attack may be. Charles knew this, and knowing to be captured meant to be killed, he resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

The next step in the terrible tragedy occurred between 2:30 and 5 o'clock Tuesday morning, about four hours after the affair on Dryades street. The man hunt, which had been inaugurated soon after Officer Mora had been carried to the station, succeeded in running down Robert Charles, the wounded fugitive, and located him at 2023 4th street. It was nearly 2 o'clock in the morning when a large detail of police surrounded the block with the intent to kill Charles on sight. Capt. Day had charge of the squad of police. Charles, the wounded man, was in his house when the police arrived, fully prepared, as results afterward showed, to die in his own home. Capt. Day started for Charles' room. As soon as Charles got sight of him there was a flash, a report, and Day fell dead in his tracks. In another instant Charles was standing in the door, and seeing Patrolman Peter J. Lamb, he drew his gun, and Lamb fell dead. Two other officers, Sergeant Aucoin and Officer Trenchard, who were in the squad, seeing their comrades, Day and Lamb, fall dead, concluded to raise the siege, and both disappeared into an adjoining house, where they blew out their lights so that their cowardly carcasses could be safe from Charles' deadly aim. The calibre of their courage is well shown by the fact that they concluded to save themselves from any harm by remaining prisoners in that dark room until daybreak, out of reach of Charles' deadly rifle. Sergeant Aucoin, who had been so brave a few hours before when seeing the two colored men sitting on the steps talking together on Dryades street, and supposing that neither was armed, now showed his true calibre. Now he knew that Charles had a gun and was brave enough to use it, so he hid himself in a room two hours while Charles deliberately walked out of his room and into the street after killing both Lamb and Day. It is also shown, as further evidence of the bravery of some of New Orleans' "finest," that one of them, seeing Capt. Day fall, ran seven blocks before he stopped, afterwards giving the excuse that he was hunting for a patrol box.

At daybreak the officers felt safe to renew the attack upon Charles, so they broke into his room, only to find that—what they probably very well knew—he had gone. It appears that he made his escape by crawling through a hole in the ceiling to a little attic in his house. Here he found that he could not escape except by a window which led into an alley which had no opening on 4th street. He scaled the fence and was soon out of reach.

It was now 5 o'clock Tuesday morning, and a general alarm was given. Sergeant Aucoin and Corporal Trenchard, having received a new supply of courage by returning daylight, renewed their effort to capture the man that they had allowed to escape in the darkness. Citizens were called upon to participate in the man hunt and New Orleans was soon the scene of terrible excitement. Officers were present everywhere, and colored men were arrested on all sides upon the pretext that they were impertinent and "game niggers." An instance is mentioned in the *Times-Democrat* of the 25th and shows the treatment which unoffending colored men received at the hands of some of the officers. This instance shows Corporal Trenchard, who displayed such remarkable bravery on Monday night in dodging Charles' revolver, in his true light. It shows how brave a white man is when he has a gun attacking a Negro who is a helpless prisoner. The account is as follows:

The police made some arrests in the neighborhood of the killing of the two officers. Mobs of young darkies gathered everywhere. These

Negroes talked and joked about the affair, and many of them were for starting a race war on the spot. It was not until several of these little gangs amalgamated and started demonstrations that the police commenced to act. Nearly a dozen arrests were made within an hour, and everybody in the vicinity was in a tremor of excitement.

It was about 1 o'clock that the Negroes on Fourth street became very noisy, and George Meyers, who lives on Sixth street, near Rampart, appeared to be one of the prime movers in a little riot that was rapidly developing. Policeman Exnicios and Sheridan placed him under arrest, and owing to the fact that the patrol wagon had just left with a number of prisoners, they walked him toward St. Charles avenue in order to get a conveyance to take him to the Sixth Precinct station.

A huge crowd of Negroes followed the officers and their prisoners. Between Dryades and Baronne, on Sixth, Corporal Trenchard met the trio. He had his pistol in his hand and he came on them running. The Negroes in the wake of the officers and prisoner took to flight immediately. Some disappeared through gates and some over fences and into yards, for Trenchard, visibly excited, was waving his revolver in the air and was threatening to shoot. He joined the officers in their walk toward St. Charles street, and the way he acted led the white people who were witnessing the affair to believe that his prisoner was the wanted Negro. At every step he would punch him or hit him with the barrel of his pistol, and the onlookers cried, "Lynch him!" "Kill him!" and other expressions until the spectators were thoroughly wrought up. At St. Charles street Trenchard desisted, and, calling an empty ice wagon, threw the Negro into the body of the vehicle and ordered Officer Exnicios to take him to the Sixth Precinct station.

The ride to the station was a wild one. Exnicios had all he could do to watch his prisoner. A gang climbed into the wagon and administered a terrible thrashing to the black en route. It took a half hour to reach the police station, for the mule that was drawing the wagon was not overly fast. When the station was reached a mob of nearly 200 howling white youths was awaiting it. The noise they made was something terrible. Meyers was howling for mercy before he reached the ground. The mob dragged him from the wagon, the officer with him. Then began a torrent of abuse for the unfortunate prisoner.

The station door was but thirty feet away, but it took Exnicios nearly five minutes to fight his way through the mob to the door. There were no other officers present, and the station seemed to be deserted. Neither the doorman nor the clerk paid any attention to the noise on the outside. As the result, the maddened crowd wrought their vengeance on the Negro. He was punched, kicked, bruised and torn. The clothes were ripped from his back, while his face after that few minutes was unrecognizable.

This was the treatment accorded and permitted to a helpless prisoner because he was black. All day Wednesday the man hunt continued. The excitement caused by the deaths of Day and Lamb became intense. The officers of the law knew they were trailing a man whose aim was deadly and whose courage they had never seen surpassed. Commenting upon the

marksmanship of the man which the paper styled a fiend, the *Times-Democrat* of Wednesday said:

One of the extraordinary features of the tragedy was the marksmanship displayed by the Negro desperado. His aim was deadly and his coolness must have been something phenomenal. The two shots that killed Captain Day and Patrolman Lamb struck their victims in the head, a circumstance remarkable enough in itself, considering the suddenness and fury of the onslaught and the darkness that reigned in the alley way.

Later on Charles fired at Corporal Perrier, who was standing at least seventy-five yards away. The murderer appeared at the gate, took lightning aim along the side of the house, and sent a bullet whizzing past the officer's ear. It was a close shave, and a few inches' deflection would no doubt have added a fourth victim to the list.

At the time of the affray there is good reason to believe that Charles was seriously wounded, and at any event he had lost quantities of blood. His situation was as critical as it is possible to imagine, yet he shot like an expert in a target range. The circumstance shows the desperate character of the fiend, and his terrible dexterity with weapons makes him one of the most formidable monsters that has ever been loose upon the community.

Wednesday New Orleans was in the hands of a mob. Charles, still sought for and still defending himself, had killed four policemen, and everybody knew that he intended to die fighting. Unable to vent its vindictiveness and bloodthirsty vengeance upon Charles, the mob turned its attention to other colored men who happened to get in the path of its fury. Even colored women, as has happened many times before, were assaulted and beaten and killed by the brutal hoodlums who thronged the streets. The reign of absolute lawlessness began about 8 o'clock Wednesday night. The mob gathered near the Lee statue⁶ and was soon making its way to the place where the officers had been shot by Charles.

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The first colored man to meet death at the hands of the mob was a passenger on a street car. The mob had broken itself into fragments after its disappointment at the jail, each fragment looking for a Negro to kill. The bloodthirsty cruelty of one crowd is thus described by the *Times-Democrat*:

"We will get a Nigger down here, you bet!" was the yelling boast that went up from a thousand throats, and for the first time the march of the mob was directed toward the downtown sections. The words of the rioters were prophetic, for just as Canal street was reached a car on the Villere line came along.

"Stop that car!" cried half a hundred men. The advance guard, heeding the injunction, rushed up to the slowly moving car, and several, seizing the trolley, jerked it down.

"Here's a Negro!" said half a dozen men who sprang upon the car.

6. In central New Orleans, a statue in honor of Robert E. Lee.

"The car was full of passengers at the time, among them several women. When the trolley was pulled down and the car thrown in total darkness, the latter began to scream, and for a moment or so it looked as if the life of every person in the car was in peril, for some of the crowd with demoniacal yells of "There he goes!" began to fire their weapons indiscriminately. The passengers in the car hastily jumped to the ground and joined the crowd, as it was evidently the safest place to be.

"Where's that Nigger?" was the query passed along the line, and with that the search began in earnest. The Negro, after jumping off the car, lost himself for a few moments in the crowd, but after a brief search he was again located. The slight delay seemed, if possible, only to whet the desire of the bloodthirsty crowd, for the reappearance of the Negro was the signal for a chorus of screams and pistol shots directed at the fugitive. With the speed of a deer, the man ran straight from the corner of Canal and Villere to Customhouse street. The pursuers, closely following, kept up a running fire, but notwithstanding the fact that they were right at the Negro's heels their aim was poor and their bullets went wide of the mark.

The Negro, on reaching Customhouse street, darted from the sidewalk out into the middle of the street. This was the worst maneuver that he could have made, as it brought him directly under the light from an arc lamp, located on a nearby corner. When the Negro came plainly in view of the foremost of the closely following mob they directed a volley at him. Half a dozen pistols flashed simultaneously, and one of the bullets evidently found its mark, for the Negro stopped short, threw up his hands, wavered for a moment, and then started to run again. This stop, slight as it was, proved fatal to the Negro's chances, for he had not gotten twenty steps farther when several of the men in advance of the others reached his side. A burly fellow, grabbing him with one hand, dealt him a terrible blow on the head with the other. The wounded man sank to the ground. The crowd pressed around him and began to beat him and stamp him. The men in the rear pressed forward and those beating the man were shoved forward. The half-dead Negro, when he was freed from his assailants, crawled over to the gutter. The men behind, however, stopped pushing when those in front yelled, "We've got him," and then it was that the attack on the bleeding Negro was resumed. A vicious kick directed at the Negro's head sent him into the gutter, and for a moment the body sank from view beneath the muddy, slimy water. "Pull him out; don't let him drown," was the cry, and instantly several of the men around the half-drowned Negro bent down and drew the body out. Twisting the body around they drew the head and shoulders up on the street, while from the waist down the Negro's body remained under the water. As soon as the crowd saw that the Negro was still alive they again began to beat and kick him. Every few moments they would stop and striking matches look into the man's face to see if he still lived. To better see if he was dead they would stick lighted matches to his eyes. Finally, believing he was dead, they left him and started out to look for other Negroes. Just about this time some one yelled, "He ain't dead," and the men came back and renewed the attack. While the men were beating and pounding the prostrate form with stones and sticks a man in the crowd ran up, and

crying, "I'll fix the d—— Negro," poked the muzzle of a pistol almost against the body and fired. This shot must have ended the man's life, for he lay like a stone, and realizing that they were wasting energy in further attacks, the men left their victim lying in the street.

The same paper, on the same day, July 26th, describes the brutal butchery of an aged colored man early in the morning:

Baptiste Philo, a Negro, 75 years of age, was a victim of mob violence at Kerlerec and North Peters streets about 2:30 o'clock this morning. The old man is employed about the French Market, and was on his way there when he was met by a crowd and desperately shot. The old man found his way to the Third Precinct police station, where it was found that he had received a ghastly wound in the abdomen. The ambulance was summoned and he was conveyed to the Charity Hospital. The students pronounced the wound fatal after a superficial examination.

Mob rule continued Thursday, its violence increasing every hour, until 2 p.m., when the climax seemed to be reached. The fact that colored men and women had been made the victims of brutal mobs, chased through the streets, killed upon the highways and butchered in their homes, did not call the best element in New Orleans to active exertion in behalf of law and order. The killing of a few Negroes more or less by irresponsible mobs does not cut much figure in Louisiana. But when the reign of mob law exerts a depressing influence upon the stock market and city securities begin to show unsteady standing in money centers, then the strong arm of the good white people of the South asserts itself and order is quickly brought out of chaos.

It was so with New Orleans on that Thursday. The better element of the white citizens began to realize that New Orleans in the hands of a mob would not prove a promising investment for Eastern capital, so the better element began to stir itself, not for the purpose of punishing the brutality against the Negroes who had been beaten, or bringing to justice the murderers of those who had been killed, but for the purpose of saving the city's credit.

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With the financial credit of the city at stake, the good citizens rushed to the rescue, and soon the Mayor was able to mobilize a posse of 1,000 willing men to assist the police in maintaining order, but rioting still continued in different sections of the city. Colored men and women were beaten, chased and shot whenever they made their appearance upon the street. Late in the night a most despicable piece of villainy occurred on Rousseau street, where an aged colored woman was killed by the mob. The *Times-Democrat* thus describes the murder:

Hannah Mabry, an old Negress, was shot and desperately wounded shortly after midnight this morning while sleeping in her home at No. 1929 Rousseau street. It was the work of a mob, and was evidently well planned so far as escape was concerned, for the place was reached by police officers and a squad of the volunteer police within a very short time after the reports of the shots, but not a prisoner was secured. The square was surrounded, but the mob had scattered in several directions, and, the darkness of the neighborhood aiding them, not one was taken.

At the time the mob made the attack on the little house there were also in it David Mabry, the 62-year-old husband of the wounded woman; her son, Harry Mabry; his wife, Fannie, and an infant child. The young couple with their babe could not be found after the whole affair was over, and they either escaped or were hustled off by the mob. A careful search of the whole neighborhood was made, but no trace of them could be found.

The little place occupied by the Mabry family is an old cottage on the swamp side of Rousseau street. It is furnished with slat shutters to both doors and windows. These shutters had been pulled off by the mob and the volleys fired through the glass doors. The younger Mabrys, father, mother and child, were asleep in the first room at the time. Hannah Mabry and her old husband were sleeping in the next room. The old couple occupied the same bed, and it is miraculous that the old man did not share the fate of his spouse.

Officer Bitterwolf, who was one of the first on the scene, said that he was about a block and a half away with Officers Fordyce and Sweeney. There were about twenty shots fired, and the trio raced to the cottage. They saw twenty or thirty men running down Rousseau street. Chase was given and the crowd turned toward the river and scattered into several vacant lots in the neighborhood.

The volunteer police stationed at the Sixth Precinct had about five blocks to run before they arrived. They also moved on the reports of the firing, and in a remarkably short time the square was surrounded, but no one could be taken. As they ran to the scene they were assailed on every hand with vile epithets and the accusation of "Nigger lovers."

Rousseau street, where the cottage is situated, is a particularly dark spot, and no doubt the members of the mob were well acquainted with the neighborhood, for the officers said that they seemed to sink into the earth, so completely and quickly did they disappear after they had completed their work, which was complete with the firing of the volley.

Hannah Mabry was taken to the Charity Hospital in the ambulance, where it was found on examination that she had been shot through the right lung, and that the wound was a particularly serious one.

Her old husband was found in the little wrecked home well nigh distracted with fear and grief. It was he who informed the police that at the time of the assault the younger Mabrys occupied the front room. As he ran about the little home as well as his feeble condition would permit he severely lacerated his feet on the glass broken from the windows and door. He was escorted to the Sixth Precinct station, where he was properly cared for. He could not realize why his little family had been so murderously attacked, and was inconsolable when his wife was driven off in the ambulance piteously moaning in her pain.

* * *

Death of Charles

Friday witnessed the final act in the bloody drama begun by the three police officers, Aucoin, Mora and Cantrelle. Betrayed into the hands of the police,

Charles, who had already sent two of his would-be murderers to their death, made a last stand in a small building, 1210 Saratoga street, and, still defying his pursuers, fought a mob of twenty thousand people, single-handed and alone, killing three more men, mortally wounding two more and seriously wounding nine others. Unable to get to him in his stronghold, the besiegers set fire to his house of refuge. While the building was burning Charles was shooting, and every crack of his death-dealing rifle added another victim to the price which he had placed upon his own life. Finally, when fire and smoke became too much for flesh and blood to stand, the long sought for fugitive appeared in the door, rifle in hand, to charge the countless guns that were drawn upon him. With a courage which was indescribable, he raised his gun to fire again, but this time it failed, for a hundred shots riddled his body, and he fell dead face fronting to the mob. This last scene in the terrible drama is thus described in the *Times-Democrat* of July 26th:

Early yesterday afternoon, at 3 o'clock or thereabouts, Police Sergeant Gabriel Porteus was instructed by Chief Gaster to go to a house at No. 1210 Saratoga street, and search it for the fugitive murderer, Robert Charles. A private 'tip' had been received at the headquarters that the fiend was hiding somewhere on the premises.

Sergeant Porteus took with him Corporal John R. Lally and Officers Zeigel and Essey. The house to which they were directed is a small, double frame cottage, standing flush with Saratoga street, near the corner of Clio. It has two street entrances and two rooms on each side, one in front and one in the rear. It belongs to the type of cheap little dwellings commonly tenanted by Negroes.

Sergeant Porteus left Zeigel and Essey to guard the outside and went with Corporal Lally to the rear house, where he found Jackson and his wife in the large room on the left. What immediately ensued is only known by the Negroes. They say the sergeant began to question them about their lodgers and finally asked them whether they knew anything about Robert Charles. They strenuously denied all knowledge of his whereabouts.

The Negroes lied. At that very moment the hunted and desperate murderer lay concealed not a dozen feet away. Near the rear, left-hand corner of the room is a closet or pantry, about three feet deep, and perhaps eight feet long. The door was open and Charles was crouching, Winchester⁷ in hand, in the dark further end.

Near the closet door was a bucket of water, and Jackson says that Sergeant Porteus walked toward it to get a drink. At the next moment a shot rang out and the brave officer fell dead. Lally was shot directly afterward. Exactly how and where will never be known, but the probabilities are that the black fiend sent a bullet into him before he recovered from his surprise at the sudden onslaught. Then the murderer dashed out of the back door and disappeared.

The neighborhood was already agog with the tragic events of the two preceding days, and the sound of the shots was a signal for wild and instant excitement. In a few moments a crowd had gathered and people were pouring in by the hundred from every point of the compass. Jackson

7. A hunting rifle.

and his wife had fled and at first nobody knew what had happened, but the surmise that Charles had recommenced his bloody work was on every tongue and soon some of the bolder found their way to the house in the rear. There the bleeding forms of the two policemen told the story.

Lally was still breathing, and a priest was sent for to administer the last rites. Father Fitzgerald responded, and while he was bending over the dying man the outside throng was rushing wildly through the surrounding yards and passageways searching for the murderer. "Where is he?" "What has become of him?" were the questions on every lip.

Suddenly the answer came in a shot from the room directly overhead. It was fired through a window facing Saratoga street, and the bullet struck down a young man named Alfred J. Bloomfield, who was standing in the narrow passage-way between the two houses. He fell on his knees and a second bullet stretched him dead.

When he fled from the closet Charles took refuge in the upper story of the house. There are four windows on that floor, two facing toward Saratoga street and two toward Rampart. The murderer kicked several breaches in the frail central partition, so he could rush from side to side, and like a trapped beast, prepared to make his last stand.

Nobody had dreamed that he was still in the house, and when Bloomfield was shot there was a headlong stampede. It was some minutes before the exact situation was understood. Then rifles and pistols began to speak, and a hail of bullets poured against the blind frontage of the old house. Every one hunted some coign of vantage, and many climbed to adjacent roofs. Soon the glass of the four upper windows was shattered by flying lead. The fusillade sounded like a battle, and the excitement upon the streets was indescribable.

Throughout all this hideous uproar Charles seems to have retained a certain diabolical coolness. He kept himself mostly out of sight, but now and then he thrust the gleaming barrel of his rifle through one of the shattered window panes and fired at his besiegers. He worked the weapon with incredible rapidity, discharging from three to five cartridges each time before leaping back to a place of safety. These replies came from all four windows indiscriminately, and showed that he was keeping a close watch in every direction. His wonderful marksmanship never failed him for a moment, and when he missed it was always by the narrowest margin only.

On the Rampart street side of the house there are several sheds, commanding an excellent range of the upper story. Detective Littleton, Andrew Van Kuren of the Workhouse force and several others climbed upon one of these and opened fire on the upper windows, shooting whenever they could catch a glimpse of the assassin. Charles responded with his rifle, and presently Van Kuren climbed down to find a better position. He was crossing the end of the shed when he was killed.

Another of Charles' bullets found its billet in the body of Frank Evans, an ex-member of the police force. He was on the Rampart street side firing whenever he had an opportunity. Officer J. W. Bofill and A. S. Leclerc were also wounded in the fusillade.

While the events thus briefly outlined were transpiring time was a-wing, and the cooler-headed in the crowd began to realize that some

quick and desperate expedient must be adopted to insure the capture of the fiend and to avert what might be a still greater tragedy than any yet enacted. For nearly two hours the desperate monster had held his besiegers at bay, darkness would soon be at hand and no one could predict what might occur if he made a dash for liberty in the dark.

At this critical juncture it was suggested that the house be fired. The plan came as an inspiration, and was adopted as the only solution of the situation. The wretched old rookery counted for nothing against the possible continued sacrifice of human life, and steps were immediately taken to apply the torch. The fire department had been summoned to the scene soon after the shooting began; its officers were warned to be ready to prevent a spread of the conflagration, and several men rushed into the lower right-hand room and started a blaze in one corner.

They first fired an old mattress, and soon smoke was pouring out in dense volumes. It filled the interior of the ramshackle structure, and it was evident that the upper story would soon become untenable. An interval of tense excitement followed, and all eyes were strained for a glimpse of the murderer when he emerged.

Then came the thrilling climax. Smoked out of his den, the desperate fiend descended the stairs and entered the lower room. Some say he dashed into the yard, glaring around vainly for some avenue of escape; but, however that may be, he was soon a few moments later moving about behind the lower windows. A dozen shots were sent through the wall in the hope of reaching him, but he escaped unscathed. Then suddenly the door on the right was flung open and he dashed out. With head lowered and rifle raised ready to fire on the instant, Charles dashed straight for the rear door of the front cottage. To reach it he had to traverse a little walk shaded by a vine-clad arbor. In the back room, with a cocked revolver in his hand, was Dr. C. A. Noiret, a young medical student, who was aiding the citizens' posse. As he sprang through the door Charles fired a shot, and the bullet whizzed past the doctor's head. Before it could be repeated Noiret's pistol cracked and the murderer reeled, turned half around and fell on his back. The doctor sent another ball into his body as he struck the floor, and half a dozen men, swarming into the room from the front, riddled the corpse with bullets.

Private Adolph Anderson of the Connell Rifles was the first man to announce the death of the wretch. He rushed to the street door, shouted the news to the crowd, and a moment later the bleeding body was dragged to the pavement and made the target of a score of pistols. It was shot, kicked and beaten almost out of semblance to humanity.

The limp dead body was dropped at the edge of the sidewalk and from there dragged to the muddy roadway by half a hundred hands. There in the road more shots were fired into the body. Corporal Trenchard, a brother-in-law of Porteus, led the shooting into the inanimate clay. With each shot there was a cheer for the work that had been done and curses and imprecations on the inanimate mass of riddled flesh that was once Robert Charles.

Cries of "Burn him! Burn him!" were heard from Clio street all the way to Erato street, and it was with difficulty that the crowd was

restrained from totally destroying the wretched dead body. Some of those who agitated burning even secured a large vessel of kerosene, which had previously been brought to the scene for the purpose of firing Charles' refuge, and for a time it looked as though this vengeance might be wreaked on the body. The officers, however, restrained this move, although they were powerless to prevent the stamping and kicking of the body by the enraged crowd.

After the infuriated citizens had vented their spleen on the body of the dead Negro it was loaded into the patrol wagon. The police raised the body of the heavy black from the ground and literally chucked it into the space on the floor of the wagon between the seats. They threw it with a curse hissed more than uttered and born of the bitterness which was rankling in their breasts at the thought of Charles having taken so wantonly the lives of four of the best of their fellow-officers.

When the murderer's body landed in the wagon it fell in such a position that the hideously mutilated head, kicked, stamped and crushed, hung over the end.

As the wagon moved off, the followers, who were protesting against its being carried off, declaring that it should be burned, poked and struck it with sticks, beating it into such a condition that it was utterly impossible to tell what the man ever looked like.

As the patrol wagon rushed through the rough street, jerking and swaying from one side of the thoroughfare to the other, the gory, mud-smearred head swayed and swung and jerked about in a sickening manner, the dark blood dripping on the steps and spattering the body of the wagon and the trousers of the policemen standing on the step.

Mob Brutality

The brutality of the mob was further shown by the unspeakable cruelty with which it beat, shot and stabbed to death an unoffending colored man, name unknown, who happened to be walking on the street with no thought that he would be set upon and killed simply because he was a colored man. The *Times-Democrat's* description of the outrage is as follows:

While the fight between the Negro desperado and the citizens was in progress yesterday afternoon at Clio and Saratoga streets another tragedy was being enacted downtown in the French quarter, but it was a very one-sided affair. The object of the white man's wrath was, of course, a Negro, but, unlike Charles, he showed no fight, but tried to escape from the furious mob which was pursuing him, and which finally put an end to his existence in a most cruel manner.

The Negro, whom no one seemed to know—at any rate no one could be found in the vicinity of the killing who could tell who he was—was walking along the levee, as near as could be learned, when he was attacked by a number of white longshoremen or screwmen.⁸ For what reason, if there was any reason other than the fact that he was a Negro,

8. Longshoremen loaded and unloaded ships. Screwmen were longshoremen who loaded and unloaded bales of cotton.

could not be learned, and immediately they pounced upon him he broke ground and started on a desperate run for his life.

The hunted Negro started off the levee toward the French Vegetable Market, changed his course out the sidewalk toward Gallatin street. The angry, yelling mob was close at his heels, and increasing steadily as each block was traversed. At Gallatin street he turned up that thoroughfare, doubled back into North Peters street and ran into the rear of No. 1216 of that street, which is occupied by Chris Reuter as a commission store and residence.

He rushed frantically through the place and out on to the gallery on the Gallatin street side. From this gallery he jumped to the street and fell flat on his back on the sidewalk. Springing to his feet as soon as possible, with a leaden hail fired by the angry mob whistling about him, he turned to his merciless pursuers in an appealing way, and, throwing up one hand, told them not to shoot any more, that they could take him as he was.

But the hail of lead continued, and the unfortunate Negro finally dropped to the sidewalk, mortally wounded. The mob then rushed upon him, still continuing the fusillade, and upon reaching his body a number of Italians, who had joined the howling mob, reached down and stabbed him in the back and buttock with big knives. Others fired shots into his head until his teeth were shot out, three shots having been fired into his mouth. There were bullet wounds all over his body.

Others who witnessed the affair declared that the man was fired at as he was running up the stairs leading to the living apartments above the store, and that after jumping to the sidewalk and being knocked down by a bullet he jumped up and ran across the street, then ran back and tried to get back into the commission store. The Italians, it is said, were all drunk, and had been shooting firecrackers. Tiring of this, they began shooting at Negroes, and when the unfortunate man who was killed ran by they joined in the chase.

No one was arrested for the shooting, the neighborhood having been deserted by the police, who were sent up to the place where Charles was fighting so desperately. No one could or would give the names of any of those who had participated in the chase and the killing, nor could any one be found who knew who the Negro was. The patrol wagon was called and the terribly mutilated body sent to the morgue and the coroner notified.

The murdered Negro was copper colored, about 5 feet 11 inches in height, about 35 years of age, and was dressed in blue overalls and a brown slouch hat. At 10:30 o'clock the vicinity of the French Market was very quiet. Squads of special officers were patrolling the neighborhood, and there did not seem to be any prospects of disorder.

During the entire time the mob held the city in its hands and went about holding up street cars and searching them, taking from them colored men to assault, shoot and kill, chasing colored men upon the public square, through alleys and into houses of anybody who would take them in, breaking into the homes of defenseless colored men and women and beating aged and decrepit men and women to death, the police and the legally-constituted authorities showed plainly where their sympathies were, for in no case reported through the daily papers does there appear the arrest, trial and con-

viction of one of the mob for any of the brutalities which occurred. The ringleaders of the mob were at no time disguised. Men were chased, beaten and killed by white brutes, who boasted of their crimes, and the murderers still walk the streets of New Orleans, well known and absolutely exempt from prosecution. Not only were they exempt from prosecution by the police while the town was in the hands of the mob, but even now that law and order is supposed to resume control, these men, well known, are not now, nor ever will be, called to account for the unspeakable brutalities of that terrible week. On the other hand, the colored men who were beaten by the police and dragged into the station for purposes of intimidation, were quickly called up before the courts and fined or sent to jail upon the statement of the police.

* * *

Shocking Brutality

The whole city was at the mercy of the mob and the display of brutality was a disgrace to civilization. One instance is described in the *Picayune* as follows:

A smaller party detached itself from the mob at Washington and Rampart streets, and started down the latter thoroughfare. One of the foremost spied a Negro, and immediately there was a rush for the unfortunate black man. With the sticks they had torn from fences on the line of march the young outlaws attacked the black and clubbed him unmercifully, acting more like demons than human beings. After being severely beaten over the head, the Negro started to run with the whole gang at his heels. Several revolvers were brought into play and pumped their lead at the refugee. The Negro made rapid progress and took refuge behind the blinds of a little cottage in Rampart street, but he had been seen, and the mob hauled him from his hiding place and again commenced beating him. There were more this time, some twenty or thirty, all armed with sticks and heavy clubs, and under their incessant blows the Negro could not last long. He begged for mercy, and his cries were most pitiful, but a mob has no heart, and his cries were only answered with more blows.

"For God's sake, boss, I ain't done nothin'. Don't kill me. I swear I ain't done nothin'."

The white brutes turned

A DEAF EAR TO THE PITIING CRIES

of the black wretch and the drubbing continued. The cries subsided into moans, and soon the black swooned away into unconsciousness. Still not content with their heartless work, they pulled the Negro out and kicked him into the gutter. For the time those who had beaten the black seemed satisfied and left him groaning in the gutter, but others came up, and, regretting that they had not had a hand in the affair, they determined to evidence their bravery to their fellows and beat the man while he was in the gutter, hurling rocks and stones at his black form. One thoughtless white brute, worse even than the black slayer of the police officers, thought to make himself a hero in the eyes of his fellows and fired his revolver repeatedly into the helpless wretch. It was dark and

the fellow probably aimed carelessly. After firing three or four shots he also left without knowing what extent of injury he inflicted on the black wretch who was left lying in the gutter.

* * *

A Gray-Haired Victim

The bloodthirsty barbarians, having tasted blood, continued their hunt and soon ran across an old man of 75 years. His life had been spent in hard work about the French Market, and he was well known as an unoffending, peaceable and industrious old man.

But that made no difference to the mob. He was a Negro, and with a fiendishness that was worse than that of cannibals they beat his life out. The report says:

There was another gang of men parading the streets in the lower part of the city, looking for any stray Negro who might be on the streets. As they neared the corner of Dauphine and Kerlerec, a square below Esplanade avenue, they came upon Baptiste Thilo, an aged Negro, who works in the French Market.

Thilo for years has been employed by the butchers and fish merchants to carry baskets from the stalls to the wagons, and unload the wagons as they arrive in the morning. He was on his way to the market, when the mob came upon him. One of the gang struck the old Negro, and as he fell, another in the crowd, supposed to be a young fellow, fired a shot. The bullet entered the body just below the right nipple.

As the Negro fell the crowd looked into his face and they discovered then that the victim was very old. The young man who did the shooting said: 'Oh, he is an old Negro. I'm sorry that I shot him.'

This is all the old Negro received in the way of consolation.

He was left where he fell, but later staggered to his feet and made his way to the third precinct station. There the police summoned the ambulance and the students pronounced the wound very dangerous. He was carried to the hospital as rapidly as possible.

There was no arrest.

Just before daybreak the mob found another victim. He, too, was on his way to market, driving a meat wagon. But little is told of his treatment, nothing more than the following brief statement:

At nearly 3 o'clock this morning a report was sent to the Third Precinct station that a Negro was lying on the sidewalk at the corner of Decatur and St. Philip. The man had been pulled off of a meat wagon and riddled with bullets.

When the police arrived he was insensible and apparently dying. The ambulance students attended the Negro and pronounced the wounds fatal.

There was nothing found which would lead to the discovery of his identity.

* * *

Was Charles a Desperado?

The press of the country has united in declaring that Robert Charles was a desperado. As usual, when dealing with a Negro, he is assumed to be guilty because he is charged. Even the most conservative of journals refuse to ask evidence to prove that the dead man was a criminal, and that his life had been given over to law-breaking. The minute that the news was flashed across the country that he had shot a white man it was at once declared that he was a fiend incarnate, and that when he was killed the community would be ridden of a black-hearted desperado.

The reporters of the New Orleans papers, who were in the best position to trace the record of this man's life, made every possible effort to find evidence to prove that he was a villain unhung. With all the resources at their command, and inspired by intense interest to paint him as black a villain as possible, these reporters signally failed to disclose a single indictment which charged Robert Charles with a crime. Because they failed to find any legal evidence that Charles was a lawbreaker and desperado his accusers gave full license to their imagination and distorted the facts that they had obtained, in every way possible, to prove a course of criminality, which the records absolutely refuse to show.

Charles had his first encounter with the police Monday night, in which he was shot in the street duel which was begun by the police after Officer Mora had beaten Charles three or four times over the head with his billy in an attempt to make an illegal arrest. In defending himself against the combined attack of two officers with a billy and their guns upon him, Charles shot Officer Mora and escaped.

Early Tuesday morning Charles was traced to Dryades street by officers who were instructed to kill him on sight. There, again defending himself, he shot and killed two officers. This, of course, in the eyes of the American press, made him a desperado. The New Orleans press, in substantiating the charges that he was a desperado, make statements which will be interesting to examine.

In the first place the New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, of July 25th, calls Charles a "ravisher and a daredevil." It says that from all sources that could be searched "the testimony was cumulative that the character of the murderer, Robert Charles, is that of a daredevil and a fiend in human form." Then in the same article it says:

The belongings of Robert Charles which were found in his room were a complete index to the character of the man. Although the room and its contents were in a state of chaos on account of the frenzied search for clues by officers and citizens, an examination of his personal effects revealed the mental state of the murderer and the rancor in his heart toward the Caucasian race. Never was the adage, "A little learning is a dangerous thing," better exemplified than in the case of the negro who shot to death the two officers.

His room was searched, and the evidence upon which the charge that he was a desperado consisted of pamphlets in support of Negro emigration to Liberia.⁹

9. Founded by Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), a Jamaican-born publisher, journalist, entrepreneur, and crusader for black nationalism, the "back-to-Africa" movement encouraged people

of African ancestry to emigrate to Africa. Liberia was one of the countries Garvey urged his followers to consider as their new homeland.

On his mantel-piece there was found a bullet mold and an outfit for reloading cartridges. There were also two pistol scabbards and a bottle of cocaine. The other evidences that Charles was a desperado the writer described as follows:

In his room were found negro periodicals and other "race" propaganda, most of which was in the interest of the negro's emigration to Liberia. There were *Police Gazettes* strewn about his room and other papers of a similar character. Well-worn text-books, bearing his name written in his own scrawling handwriting, and well-filled copybooks found in his trunk showed that he had burnt the midnight oil, and was desirous of improving himself intellectually in order that he might conquer the hated white race. Much of the literature found among his chattels was of a superlatively vituperative character, and attacked the white race in unstinted language and asserted the equal rights of the Negro.

Charles was evidently the local agent of the "Voice of Missions," a "religious" paper, published at Atlanta, as great bundles of that sheet were found. It is edited by one Bishop Turner,¹ and seems to be the official organ of all haters of the white race. Its editorials are anarchistic in the extreme, and urge upon the negro that the sooner he realizes that he is as good as the white man the better it will be for him. The following verses were clipped from the journal; they were marked "till forbidden," and appeared in several successive numbers:

OUR SENTIMENTS.

H. M. T.

My country, 'tis of thee,
Dear land of Africa,
Of thee we sing.
Land where our fathers died,
Land of the Negro's pride,
God's truth shall ring.

My native country, thee,
Land of the black and free,
Thy name I love;
To see thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and matchless hills,
Like that above.

When all thy slanderous ghouls,
In the bosom of sheol,²
Forgotten lie,
Thy monumental name shall live,
And suns thy royal brow shall gild,
Upheaved to heaven high,
O'ertopping thrones.

1. African Methodist Episcopal bishop and former chaplain to the Union Army, Henry M. Turner (1834–1915) criticized U.S. imperialism and racism as an outspoken African emigrationist. He was the editor of the *Voice of Missions*,

which disseminated his views on the need for the international solidarity of blacks.

2. In the Old Testament, place in the depths of the Earth where the dead go.

There were no valuables in his room, and if he was a professional thief he had his headquarters for storing his plunder at some other place than his room on Fourth street. Nothing was found in his room that could lead to the belief that he was a thief, except fifty or more small bits of soap. The inference was that every place he visited he took all of the soap lying around, as all of the bits were well worn and had seen long service on the washstand.

His wearing apparel was little more than rags, and financially he was evidently not in a flourishing condition. He was in no sense a skilled workman, and his room showed, in fact, that he was nothing more than a laborer.

The "philosopher in the garret" was a dirty wretch, and his room, his bedding and his clothing were nasty and filthy beyond belief. His object in life seemed to have been the discomfiture of the white race, and to this purpose he devoted himself with zeal. He declared himself to be a "patriot," and wished to be the Moses of his race.

Under the title of "The Making of a Monster," the reporter attempts to give "something of the personality of the arch-fiend, Charles." Giving his imagination full vent, the writer says:

It is only natural that the deepest interest should attach to the personality of Robert Charles. What manner of man was this fiend incarnate? What conditions developed him? Who were his preceptors? From what ancestral strain, if any, did he derive his ferocious hatred of the whites, his cunning, his brute courage, the apostolic zeal which he displayed in spreading the propaganda of African equality? These are questions involving one of the most remarkable psychological problems of modern times.

* * *

According to the further investigations of this reporter, Charles was also agent for Bishop Turner's "Voice of Missions," the colored missionary organ of the African Methodist Church, edited by H. M. Turner, of Atlanta, Georgia. Concerning his service as agent for the "Voice of Missions," the reporter says:

He secured a number of subscribers and visited them once a month to collect the installments. In order to insure regular payments it was necessary to keep up enthusiasm, which was prone to wane, and Charles consequently became an active and continual preacher of the propaganda of hatred. Whatever may have been his private sentiments at the outset, this constant harping on one string must eventually have had a powerful effect upon his own mind.

Exactly how he received his remuneration is uncertain, but he told several of his friends that he got a "big commission." Incidentally he solicited subscribers for a Negro paper called the Voice of the Missions, and when he struck a negro who did not want to go to Africa himself, he begged contributions for the "good of the cause."

In the course of time Charles developed into a fanatic on the subject of the Negro oppression and neglected business to indulge in wild tirades whenever he could find a listener. He became more anxious to make

converts than to obtain subscribers, and the more conservative darkies began to get afraid of him. Meanwhile he got into touch with certain agitators in the North and made himself a distributing agent for their literature, a great deal of which he gave away. Making money was a secondary consideration to "the cause."

One of the most enthusiastic advocates of the Liberian scheme is the colored Bishop H. M. Turner, of Atlanta. Turner is a man of unusual ability, has been over to Africa personally several times, and has made himself conspicuous by denouncing laws which he claimed discriminated against the blacks. Charles was one of the bishop's disciples and evidence has been found that seems to indicate they were in correspondence.

This was all that the *Times-Democrat's* reporters could find after the most diligent search to prove that Charles was the fiend incarnate which the press of New Orleans and elsewhere declared him to be.

The reporters of the New Orleans *Picayune* were no more successful than their brethren of the *Times-Democrat*. They, too, were compelled to substitute fiction for facts in their attempt to prove Charles a desperado. In the issue of the 26th of July it was said that Charles was well-known in Vicksburg, and was there a consort of thieves. They mentioned that a man named Benson Blake was killed in 1894 or 1895, and that four Negroes were captured, and two escaped. Of the two escaped they claim that Charles was one. The four Negroes who were captured were put in jail, and as usual, in the high state of civilization which characterizes Mississippi, the right of the person accused of crime to an indictment by legal process and a legal trial by jury was considered an useless formality if the accused happened to be black. A mob went to the jail that night, the four colored men were delivered to the mob, and all four were hanged in the court-house yard. The reporters evidently assumed that Charles was guilty, if, in fact, he was ever there, because the other four men were lynched. They did not consider it was a fact of any importance that Charles was never indicted. They called him a murderer on general principles.

Died in Self-Defense

The life, character and death of Robert Charles challenges the thoughtful consideration of all fair-minded people. In the frenzy of the moment, when nearly a dozen men lay dead, the victims of his unerring and death-dealing aim, it was natural for a prejudiced press and for citizens in private life to denounce him as a desperado and a murderer. But sea depths are not measured when the ocean rages, nor can absolute justice be determined while public opinion is lashed into fury. There must be calmness to insure correctness of judgment. The fury of the hour must abate before we can deal justly with any man or any cause.

That Charles was not a desperado is amply shown by the discussion in the preceding chapter. The darkest pictures which the reporters could paint of Charles were quoted freely, so that the public might find upon what grounds the press declared him to be a lawbreaker. Unquestionably the grounds are wholly insufficient. Not a line of evidence has been presented to prove that Charles was the fiend which the first reports of the New Orleans [press] charge him to be.

Nothing more should be required to establish his good reputation, for the rule is universal that a reputation must be assumed to be good until it is proved bad. But that rule does not apply to the Negro, for as soon as he is suspected the public judgment immediately determines that he is guilty of whatever crime he stands charged. For this reason, as a matter of duty to the race, and the simple justice to the memory of Charles, an investigation has been made of the life and character of Charles before the fatal affray which led to his death.

Robert Charles was not an educated man. He was a student who faithfully investigated all the phases of oppression from which his race has suffered. That he was a student is amply shown by the *Times-Democrat* report of the 25th, which says:

Well-worn text-books, bearing his name written in his own scrawling handwriting, and well-filled copy-books found in his trunk, showed that he had burned the midnight oil, and desired to improve himself intellectually in order that he might conquer the hated white race.

From this quotation it will be seen that he spent the hours after days of hard toil in trying to improve himself, both in the study of text-books and in writing.

He knew that he was a student of a problem which required all the intelligence that a man could command, and he was burning his midnight oil gathering knowledge that he might better be able to come to an intelligent solution. To his aid in the study of this problem he sought the aid of a Christian newspaper, *The Voice of Missions*, the organ of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He was in communication with its editor, who is a bishop, and is known all over this country as a man of learning, a lover of justice and the defender of law and order. Charles could receive from Bishop Turner not a word of encouragement to be other than an earnest, tireless and God-fearing student of the complex problems which affected the race.

For further help and assistance in his studies, Charles turned to an organization which has existed and flourished for many years, at all times managed by men of high Christian standing and absolute integrity. These men believe and preach a doctrine that the best interests of the Negro will be subserved by an emigration from America back to the Fatherland, and they do all they can to spread the doctrine of emigration and to give material assistance to those who desire to leave America and make their future homes in Africa. This organization is known as "The International Migration Society." It has its headquarters in Birmingham, Alabama. From this place it issues pamphlets, some of which were found in the home of Robert Charles, and which pamphlets the reporters of the New Orleans papers declare to be incendiary and dangerous in their doctrine and teaching.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Copies of any and all of them may be secured by writing to D. J. Flummer³ who is President and in charge of the home office in Birmingham, Alabama. Three of the pamphlets found in Charles' room are named respectively:

3. In 1895, under the auspices of the International Migration Society, Flummer chartered a steamer to sail from Savannah with two hundred southern blacks planning to be colonists in Monrovia, Liberia.

First, "Prospectus of the Liberian Colonization Society;" which pamphlet in a few brief pages tells of the work of the society, plans, prices and terms of transportation of colored people who choose to go to Africa. These pages are followed by a short, conservative discussion of the Negro question, and close with an argument that Africa furnishes the best asylum for the oppressed Negroes in this country.

The second pamphlet is entitled "Christian Civilization of Africa." This is a brief statement of the advantages of the Republic of Liberia, and an argument in support of the superior conditions which colored people may attain to by leaving the South and settling in Liberia.

The third pamphlet is entitled "The Negro and Liberia." This is a larger document than the other two, and treats more exhaustively the question of emigration, but from the first page to the last there is not an incendiary line or sentence. There is not even a suggestion of violence in all of its thirty-two pages, and not a word which could not be preached from every pulpit in the land.

If it is true that the workman is known by his tools, certainly no harm could ever come from the doctrines which were preached by Charles or the papers and pamphlets distributed by him. Nothing ever written in the "Voice of Missions," and nothing ever published in the pamphlets above alluded to in the remotest way suggest that a peaceable man should turn lawbreaker, or that any man should dye his hands in his brother's blood.

In order to secure as far as possible positive information about the life and character of Robert Charles, it was plain that the best course to pursue was to communicate with those with whom he had sustained business relations. Accordingly a letter was forwarded to Mr. D. J. Flummer, who is president of the colonization society, in which letter he was asked to state in reply what information he had of the life and character of Robert Charles. The result was a very prompt letter in response, the text of which is as follows:

Birmingham, Ala., Aug. 21, 1900.

Mrs. Ida B. Wells Barnett, Chicago, Ill.:

Dear Madam—Replying to your favor of recent date requesting me to write you giving such information as I may have concerning the life, habits and character of Robert Charles, who recently shot and killed police officers in New Orleans, I wish to say that my knowledge of him is only such as I have gained from his business connection with the International Migration Society during the past five or six years, during which time I was president of the society.

He having learned that the purpose of this society was to colonize the colored people in Liberia, West Africa, and thereby lessen or destroy the friction and prejudice existing in this country between the two races, set about earnestly and faithfully distributing the literature that we issued from time to time. He always appeared to be mild but earnest in his advocacy of emigration, and never to my knowledge used any method or means that would in the least appear unreasonable, and had always kept within the bounds of law and order in advocating emigration.

The work he performed for this society was all gratuitous, and apparently prompted from his love of humanity, and desires to be instrumental in building up a Negro Nationality in Africa.

If he ever violated a law before the killing of the policemen, I do not know of it. Yours very truly,

D. J. Flummer.

Besides this statement, Mr. Flummer enclosed a letter received by the Society two days before the tragedy at New Orleans. This letter was written by Robert Charles, and it attests his devotion to the cause of emigration which he had espoused. Memoranda on the margin of the letter show that the order was filled by mailing the pamphlets. It is very probable that these were the identical pamphlets which were found by the mob which broke into the room of Robert Charles and seized upon these harmless documents and declared they were sufficient evidence to prove Charles a desperado. In the light of subsequent events the letter of Charles, which follows, sounds like a voice from the tomb:

New Orleans, July 30, 1900.

Mr. D. J. Flummer:

Dear Sir—I received your last pamphlets and they are all given out. I want you to send me some more, and I enclose you the stamps. I think I will go over in Greenville, Miss., and give my people some pamphlets over there. Yours truly,

Robert Charles.

The latest word of information comes from New Orleans from a man who knew Charles intimately for six years. For obvious reasons, his name is withheld. In answer to a letter sent him he answers as follows:

New Orleans, Aug. 23, 1900.

Mrs. Ida B. Wells Barnett:

Dear Madam—It affords me great pleasure to inform you as far as I know of Robert Charles. I have been acquainted with him about six years in this city. He never has, as I know, given any trouble to anyone. He was quiet and a peaceful man and was very frank in speaking. He was too much of a hero to die; few can be found to equal him. I am very sorry to say that I do not know anything of his birthplace, nor his parents, but enclosed find letter from his uncle, from which you may find more information. You will also find one of the circulars in which Charles was in possession of which was styled as a crazy document. Let me say, until our preachers preach this document we will always be slaves. If you can help circulate this “crazy” doctrine I would be glad to have you do so, for I shall never rest until I get to that heaven on earth; that is, the west coast of Africa, in Liberia.

With best wishes to you I still remain, as always, for the good of the race,

By only those whose anger and vindictiveness warp their judgment is Robert Charles a desperado. Their word is not supported by the statement of a single fact which justifies their judgment, and no criminal record shows that he was ever indicted for any offense, much less convicted of crime. On the contrary, his work for many years had been with Christian people, circulating emigration pamphlets and active as agent for a mission publication. Men who knew him say that he was a law-abiding, quiet, industrious, peaceable man. So he lived.

So he lived and so he would have died had not he raised his hand to resent unprovoked assault and unlawful arrest that fateful Monday night. That made him an outlaw, and being a man of courage he decided to die with his face to the foe. The white people of this country may charge that he was a desperado, but to the people of his own race Robert Charles will always be regarded as the hero of New Orleans.

* * *

1900

SUI SIN FAR (EDITH MAUD EATON)

1865–1914

Writing at a time when Chinese were the target of both official exclusion and unofficial vitriol, Sui Sin Far is believed to be the first author of Chinese descent to publish in English in the United States. The second of sixteen children, fourteen of whom lived to adulthood, Far was born Edith Maud Eaton in Macclesfield, England, to a Chinese mother raised in England and a white English father from a well-to-do family. Her father, Edward Eaton, formerly a merchant, became alienated from his English family not long after his marriage to Grace Trefusus and struggled thereafter to earn a living as a landscape painter. When Far was seven the family moved first to New York State and then to Montreal. The family's fortunes began to decline when Far was eleven, and along with other siblings she was withdrawn from school to help support her parents and the younger children by selling, on the street, her father's paintings and her own crocheted lace. She continued to support family members for the rest of her life, though her income as a stenographer and freelance journalist barely covered her own modest needs, even as her health was always fragile, partly as a result of childhood rheumatic fever.

Sui Sin Far and her sister Winnifred were published while they were teenagers; two other sisters became painters, and another sister became the first Chinese American lawyer in Chicago. Winnifred, who wrote under the Japanese-sounding pseudonym Onoto Watanna, published the first Asian American novel, *Miss Nume of Japan*, in 1899, and was popular for many years as the author of sentimental and melodramatic novels.

Though Sui Sin Far began her writing career in Montreal, it was not until 1896, after she moved back to the United States, that she adopted her pseudonym, a literal translation of the symbol for waterlily as water fairy flower, or, more generally, bulbs that can sprout and bloom in water. That same year she published her first story, in the American literary magazine *Fly Leaf*. From 1898 to 1909 she lived chiefly in Seattle, where her work as a journalist took her into the city's thriving Chinatown, a frequent setting for her stories. Far also lived briefly in San Francisco and other western U.S. cities, and she spent the final years of her life in Boston. Her stories, essays, and articles were published in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States, though her correspondence reveals the challenge of negotiating the literary marketplace faced by a Chinese American writer.

“Mrs. Spring Fragrance” was first published in *Hampton's Magazine* in January 1910. In 1912 it became the title story for the only book Sui Sin Far published, containing thirty-seven stories, articles, and sketches focusing on Chinese immigrants in late nineteenth-century America. The stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, set mainly in Seattle, often involve conflict within well-off merchant immigrant families when members of a family differ over the desirability or even the possibility of cultural assimilation in their new nation. One spouse is usually more devoted to traditional values than the other, while children are typically more eager to assimilate than their parents. As in “Mrs. Spring Fragrance,” Far’s stories frequently take place against a backdrop of an era when anti-Chinese prejudice was institutionalized through U.S. immigration policy. Like others writing about the pressures of Americanization, Sui Sin Far addresses questions of cultural identity, racism, and intergenerational conflict—all issues that have remained important to Asian American fiction in the century since her work first appeared.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance¹

I

When Mrs. Spring Fragrance first arrived in Seattle, she was unacquainted with even one word of the American language. Five years later her husband, speaking of her, said: “There are no more American words for her learning.” And everyone who knew Mrs. Spring Fragrance agreed with Mr. Spring Fragrance.

Mr. Spring Fragrance, whose business name was Sing Yook, was a young curio merchant. Though conservatively Chinese in many respects, he was at the same time what is called by the Westerners, “Americanized.” Mrs. Spring Fragrance was even more “Americanized.”

Next door to the Spring Fragnances lived the Chin Yuens. Mrs. Chin Yuen was much older than Mrs. Spring Fragrance; but she had a daughter of eighteen with whom Mrs. Spring Fragrance was on terms of great friendship. The daughter was a pretty girl whose Chinese name was Mai Gwi Far (a rose) and whose American name was Laura. Nearly everybody called her Laura, even her parents and Chinese friends. Laura had a sweetheart, a youth named Kai Tzu. Kai Tzu, who was American-born, and as ruddy and stalwart as any young Westerner, was noted amongst baseball players as one of the finest pitchers on the Coast. He could also sing, “Drink to me only with thine eyes,”² to Laura’s piano accompaniment.

Now the only person who knew that Kai Tzu loved Laura and that Laura loved Kai Tzu, was Mrs. Spring Fragrance. The reason for this was that, although the Chin Yuen parents lived in a house furnished in American style, and wore American clothes, yet they religiously observed many Chinese customs, and their ideals of life were the ideals of their Chinese forefathers. Therefore, they had betrothed their daughter, Laura, at the age of fifteen, to the eldest son of the Chinese Government school-teacher in San Francisco. The time for the consummation of the betrothal was approaching.

1. The story was first published in the January 1910 *Hampton's Magazine*, based in New York City, and then republished in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Stories* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg,

1912), from which this text is taken.

2. Popular English folk song, which drew on Ben Jonson’s (1572–1637) 1616 poem “Song to Celia.”

Laura was with Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Mrs. Spring Fragrance was trying to cheer her.

"I had such a pretty walk today," said she. "I crossed the banks above the beach and came back by the long road. In the green grass the daffodils were blowing, in the cottage gardens the currant bushes were flowering, and in the air was the perfume of the wallflower. I wished, Laura, that you were with me."

Laura burst into tears. "That is the walk," she sobbed, "Kai Tzu and I so love; but never, ah, never, can we take it together again."

"Now, Little Sister," comforted Mrs. Spring Fragrance, "you really must not grieve like that. Is there not a beautiful American poem written by a noble American named Tennyson, which says:

" 'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all?"³

Mrs. Spring Fragrance was unaware that Mr. Spring Fragrance, having returned from the city, tired with the day's business, had thrown himself down on the bamboo settee on the veranda, and that although his eyes were engaged in scanning the pages of the *Chinese World*,⁴ his ears could not help receiving the words which were borne to him through the open window.

" 'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all,"

repeated Mr. Spring Fragrance. Not wishing to hear more of the secret talk of women, he arose and sauntered around the veranda to the other side of the house. Two pigeons circled around his head. He felt in his pocket for a li-chi⁵ which he usually carried for their pecking. His fingers touched a little box. It contained a jadestone pendant, which Mrs. Spring Fragrance had particularly admired the last time she was down town. It was the fifth anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Spring Fragrance's wedding day.

Mr. Spring Fragrance pressed the little box down into the depths of his pocket.

A young man came out of the back door of the house at Mr. Spring Fragrance's left. The Chin Yuen house was at his right.

"Good evening," said the young man. "Good evening," returned Mr. Spring Fragrance. He stepped down from his porch and went and leaned over the railing which separated this yard from the yard in which stood the young man.

"Will you please tell me," said Mr. Spring Fragrance, "the meaning of two lines of an American verse which I have heard?"

"Certainly," returned the young man with a genial smile. He was a star student at the University of Washington, and had not the slightest doubt that he could explain the meaning of all things in the universe.

"Well," said Mr. Spring Fragrance, "it is this:

" 'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

3. From the English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson's (1809–1892) *In Memoriam* (1850), an elegy for his beloved friend Arthur Hallam: "I hold it true, whate'er befall; / I feel it, when I sorrow most; / 'Tis better to have loved and lost / Than

never to have loved at all" (canto 27, 13–16).

4. A newspaper published in San Francisco's Chinatown at the time in which the story is set.

5. Commonly spelled "lychee," this edible fruit is native to China.

"Ah!" responded the young man with an air of profound wisdom. "That, Mr. Spring Fragrance, means that it is a good thing to love anyway—even if we can't get what we love, or, as the poet tells us, lose what we love. Of course, one needs experience to feel the truth of this teaching."

The young man smiled pensively and reminiscently. More than a dozen young maidens "loved and lost" were passing before his mind's eye.

"The truth of the teaching!" echoed Mr. Spring Fragrance, a little testily. "There is no truth in it whatever. It is disobedient to reason. Is it not better to have what you do not love than to love what you do not have?"

"That depends," answered the young man, "upon temperament."

"I thank you. Good evening," said Mr. Spring Fragrance. He turned away to muse upon the unwisdom of the American way of looking at things.

Meanwhile, inside the house, Laura was refusing to be comforted.

"Ah, no! no!" cried she. "If I had not gone to school with Kai Tzu, nor talked nor walked with him, nor played the accompaniments to his songs, then I might consider with complacency, or at least without horror, my approaching marriage with the son of Man You. But as it is—oh, as it is—!"

The girl rocked herself to and fro in heartfelt grief.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance knelt down beside her, and clasping her arms around her neck, cried in sympathy:

"Little Sister, oh, Little Sister! Dry your tears—do not despair. A moon has yet to pass before the marriage can take place. Who knows what the stars may have to say to one another during its passing? A little bird has whispered to me—"

For a long time Mrs. Spring Fragrance talked. For a long time Laura listened. When the girl arose to go, there was a bright light in her eyes.

II

Mrs. Spring Fragrance, in San Francisco on a visit to her cousin, the wife of the herb doctor of Clay Street, was having a good time. She was invited everywhere that the wife of an honorable Chinese merchant could go. There was much to see and hear, including more than a dozen babies who had been born in the families of her friends since she last visited the city of the Golden Gate. Mrs. Spring Fragrance loved babies. She had had two herself, but both had been transplanted into the spirit land before the completion of even one moon. There were also many dinners and theatre-parties given in her honor. It was at one of the theatre-parties that Mrs. Spring Fragrance met Ah Oi, a young girl who had the reputation of being the prettiest Chinese girl in San Francisco, and the naughtiest. In spite of gossip, however, Mrs. Spring Fragrance took a great fancy to Ah Oi and invited her to a tête-à-tête picnic on the following day. This invitation Ah Oi joyfully accepted. She was a sort of bird girl and never felt so happy as when out in the park or woods.

On the day after the picnic Mrs. Spring Fragrance wrote to Laura Chin Yuen thus:

MY PRECIOUS LAURA,—May the bamboo ever wave. Next week I accompany Ah Oi to the beautiful town of San José. There will we be met by the son of the Illustrious Teacher, and in a little Mission, presided over by a benevolent American priest, the little Ah Oi and the son

of the Illustrious Teacher will be joined together in love and harmony—two pieces of music made to complete one another.

The Son of the Illustrious Teacher, having been through an American Hall of Learning, is well able to provide for his orphan bride and fears not the displeasure of his parents, now that he is assured that your grief at his loss will not be inconsolable. He wishes me to waft to you and to Kai Tzu—and the little Ah Oi joins with him—ten thousand rainbow wishes for your happiness.

My respects to your honorable parents, and to yourself, the heart of your loving friend,

JADE SPRING FRAGRANCE

To Mr. Spring Fragrance, Mrs. Spring Fragrance also indited a letter:

GREAT AND HONORED MAN,—Greeting from your plum blossom,⁶ who is desirous of hiding herself from the sun of your presence for a week of seven days more. My honorable cousin is preparing for the Fifth Moon Festival, and wishes me to compound for the occasion some American “fudge,” for which delectable sweet, made by my clumsy hands, you have sometimes shown a slight prejudice. I am enjoying a most agreeable visit, and American friends, as also our own, strive benevolently for the accomplishment of my pleasure. Mrs. Samuel Smith, an American lady, known to my cousin, asked for my accompaniment to a magniloquent lecture the other evening. The subject was “America, the Protector of China!” It was most exhilarating, and the effect of so much expression of benevolence leads me to beg of you to forget to remember that the barber charges you one dollar for a shave while he humbly submits to the American man a bill of fifteen cents. And murmur no more because your honored elder brother, on a visit to this country, is detained under the roof-tree of this great Government instead of under your own humble roof.⁷ Console him with the reflection that he is protected under the wing of the Eagle, the Emblem of Liberty. What is the loss of ten hundred years or ten thousand times ten dollars compared with the happiness of knowing oneself so securely sheltered? All of this I have learned from Mrs. Samuel Smith, who is as brilliant and great of mind as one of your own superior sex.

For me it is sufficient to know that the Golden Gate Park is most enchanting, and the seals on the rock at the Cliff House⁸ extremely entertaining and amiable. There is much feasting and merry-making under the lanterns in honor of your Stupid Thorn.

I have purchased for your smoking a pipe with an amber mouth. It is said to be very sweet to the lips and to emit a cloud of smoke fit for the gods to inhale.

6. The plum blossom is the Chinese flower of virtue. It has been adopted by the Japanese, just in the same way as they have adopted the Chinese national flower, the chrysanthemum [Sui Sin Far's note].

7. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 mandated the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, with few exceptions. Even Chinese who claimed U.S. citi-

zenship were frequently held for lengthy detentions when entering the country. The act was repealed in 1943.

8. Famous restaurant on the Pacific shore at Point Lobos in San Francisco; it opened in 1863 and, because of its spectacular setting, became a favorite of locals and visitors.

Awaiting, by the wonderful wire of the telegram message, your gracious permission to remain for the celebration of the Fifth Moon Festival and the making of American "fudge," I continue for ten thousand times ten thousand years,

Your ever loving and obedient woman,

JADE

P.S. Forget not to care for the cat, the birds, and the flowers. Do not eat too quickly nor fan too vigorously now that the weather is warming.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance smiled as she folded this last epistle. Even if he were old-fashioned, there was never a husband so good and kind as hers. Only on one occasion since their marriage had he slighted her wishes. That was when, on the last anniversary of their wedding, she had signified a desire for a certain jadestone pendant, and he had failed to satisfy that desire.

But Mrs Spring Fragrance, being of a happy nature, and disposed to look upon the bright side of things, did not allow her mind to dwell upon the jade-stone pendant. Instead, she gazed complacently down upon her bejeweled fingers and folded in with her letter to Mr. Spring Fragrance a bright little sheaf of condensed love.

III

Mr. Spring Fragrance sat on his doorstep. He had been reading two letters, one from Mrs. Spring Fragrance, and the other from an elderly bachelor cousin in San Francisco. The one from the elderly bachelor cousin was a business letter, but contained the following postscript:

Tsen Hing, the son of the Government schoolmaster, seems to be much in the company of your young wife. He is a good-looking youth, and pardon me, my dear cousin; but if women are allowed to stray at will from under their husbands' mulberry roofs, what is to prevent them from becoming butterflies?

"Sing Foon is old and cynical," said Mr. Spring Fragrance to himself. "Why should I pay any attention to him? This is America, where a man may speak to a woman, and a woman listen, without any thought of evil."

He destroyed his cousin's letter and re-read his wife's. Then he became very thoughtful. Was the making of American fudge sufficient reason for a wife to wish to remain a week longer in a city where her husband was not?

The young man who lived in the next house came out to water the lawn.

"Good evening," said he. "Any news from Mrs. Spring Fragrance?"

"She is having a very good time," returned Mr. Spring Fragrance.

"Glad to hear it. I think you told me she was to return the end of this week."

"I have changed my mind about her," said Mr. Spring Fragrance. "I am bidding her remain a week longer, as I wish to give a smoking party during her absence. I hope I may have the pleasure of your company."

"I shall be delighted," returned the young fellow. "But, Mr. Spring Fragrance, don't invite any other white fellows. If you do not I shall be able to get in a scoop. You know, I'm a sort of honorary reporter for the *Gleaner*."⁹

"Very well," absently answered Mr. Spring Fragrance.

"Of course, your friend the Consul will be present. I shall call it 'A high-class Chinese stag party!'"

In spite of his melancholy mood, Mr. Spring Fragrance smiled.

"Everything is 'high-class' in America," he observed.

"Sure!" cheerfully assented the young man. "Haven't you ever heard that all Americans are princes and princesses, and just as soon as a foreigner puts his foot upon our shores, he also becomes of the nobility—I mean, the royal family."

"What about my brother in the Detention Pen?" dryly inquired Mr. Spring Fragrance.

"Now, you've got me," said the young man, rubbing his head. "Well, that is a shame—a beastly shame," as the Englishman says. But understand, old fellow, we that are real Americans are up against that—even more than you. It is against our principles."

"I offer the real Americans my consolations that they should be compelled to do that which is against their principles."

"Oh, well, it will all come right some day. We're not a bad sort, you know. Think of the indemnity money returned to the Dragon by Uncle Sam."¹

Mr. Spring Fragrance puffed his pipe in silence for some moments. More than politics was troubling his mind.

At last he spoke. "Love," said he, slowly and distinctly, "comes before the wedding in this country, does it not?"

"Yes, certainly."

Young Carman knew Mr. Spring Fragrance well enough to receive with calmness his most astounding queries.

"Presuming," continued Mr. Spring Fragrance—"presuming that some friend of your father's, living—presuming—in England—has a daughter that he arranges with your father to be your wife. Presuming that you have never seen that daughter, but that you marry her, knowing her not. Presuming that she marries you, knowing you not.—After she marries you and knows you, will that woman love you?"

"Emphatically, no," answered the young man.

"That is the way it would be in America—that the woman who marries the man like that—would not love him?"

"Yes, that is the way it would be in America. Love, in this country, must be free, or it is not love at all."

"In China, it is different!" mused Mr. Spring Fragrance.

"Oh, yes, I have no doubt that in China it is different."

"But the love is in the heart all the same," went on Mr. Spring Fragrance.

9. Perhaps a reference to the *Weekly Gleaner*, a Jewish American newspaper in San Francisco that began publication in 1857, but "*Gleaner*" was also the generic name of a number of other newspapers.

1. Historically, the dragon was the symbol of the emperor of China, as Uncle Sam is a symbol of the United States. In the aftermath of the Boxer

Rebellion (1898–1901), a protest against Western imperialism, the Chinese government agreed to pay reparations to several foreign powers. The United States returned a portion of what it received in the form of the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program, which provided financial support for Chinese students studying in America.

"Yes, all the same. Everybody falls in love some time or another. Some"—pensively—"many times."

Mr. Spring Fragrance arose.

"I must go down town," said he.

As he walked down the street he recalled the remark of a business acquaintance who had met his wife and had had some conversation with her: "She is just like an American woman."

He had felt somewhat flattered when this remark had been made. He looked upon it as a compliment to his wife's cleverness; but it rankled in his mind as he entered the telegraph office. If his wife was becoming as an American woman, would it not be possible for her to love as an American woman—a man to whom she was not married? There also floated in his memory the verse which his wife had quoted to the daughter of Chin Yuen. When the telegraph clerk handed him a blank, he wrote this message:

"Remain as you wish, but remember that 'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all."

When Mrs. Spring Fragrance received this message, her laughter tinkled like falling water. How droll! How delightful! Here was her husband quoting American poetry in a telegram. Perhaps he had been reading her American poetry books since she had left him! She hoped so. They would lead him to understand her sympathy for her dear Laura and Kai Tzu. She need no longer keep from him their secret. How joyful! It had been such a hardship to refrain from confiding in him before. But discreetness had been most necessary, seeing that Mr. Spring Fragrance entertained as old-fashioned notions concerning marriage as did the Chin Yuen parents. Strange that that should be so, since he had fallen in love with her picture before *ever* he had seen her, just as she had fallen in love with his! And when the marriage veil was lifted and each beheld the other for the first time in the flesh, there had been no disillusion—no lessening of the respect and affection, which those who had brought about the marriage had inspired in each young heart.

Mr. Spring Fragrance began to wish she could fall asleep and wake to find the week flown, and she in her own little home pouring tea for Mr. Spring Fragrance.

IV

Mr. Spring Fragrance was walking to business with Mr. Chin Yuen. As they walked they talked.

"Yes," said Mr. Chin Yuen, "the old order is passing away, and the new order is taking its place, even with us who are Chinese. I have finally consented to give my daughter in marriage to young Kai Tzu."

Mr. Spring Fragrance expressed surprise. He had understood that the marriage between his neighbor's daughter and the San Francisco school-teacher's son was all arranged.

"So 'twas," answered Mr. Chin Yuen; "but it seems the young renegade, without consultation or advice, has placed his affections upon some untrustworthy female, and is so under her influence that he refuses to fulfil his parents' promise to me for him."

"So!" said Mr. Spring Fragrance. The shadow on his brow deepened.

"But," said Mr. Chin Yuen, with affable resignation, "it is all ordained by Heaven. Our daughter, as the wife of Kai Tzu, for whom she has long had a loving feeling, will not now be compelled to dwell with a mother-in-law and where her own mother is not. For that, we are thankful, as she is our only one and the conditions of life in this Western country are not as in China. Moreover, Kai Tzu, though not so much of a scholar as the teacher's son, has a keen eye for business and that, in America, is certainly much more desirable than scholarship. What do you think?"

"Eh! What!" exclaimed Mr. Spring Fragrance. The latter part of his companion's remarks had been lost upon him.

That day the shadow which had been following Mr. Spring Fragrance ever since he had heard his wife quote, " 'Tis better to have loved," etc., became so heavy and deep that he quite lost himself within it.

At home in the evening he fed the cat, the bird, and the flowers. Then, seating himself in a carved black chair—a present from his wife on his last birthday—he took out his pipe and smoked. The cat jumped into his lap. He stroked it softly and tenderly. It had been much fondled by Mrs. Spring Fragrance, and Mr. Spring Fragrance was under the impression that it missed her. "Poor thing!" said he. "I suppose you want her back!" When he arose to go to bed he placed the animal carefully on the floor, and thus apostrophized it:

"O Wise and Silent One, your mistress returns to you, but her heart she leaves behind her, with the Tommies in San Francisco."

The Wise and Silent One made no reply. He was not a jealous cat.

Mr. Spring Fragrance slept not that night; the next morning he ate not. Three days and three nights without sleep and food went by.

There was a springlike freshness in the air on the day that Mrs. Spring Fragrance came home. The skies overhead were as blue as Puget Sound stretching its gleaming length toward the mighty Pacific, and all the beautiful green world seemed to be throbbing with springing life.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance was never so radiant.

"Oh," she cried light-heartedly, "is it not lovely to see the sun shining so clear, and everything so bright to welcome me?"

Mr. Spring Fragrance made no response. It was the morning after the fourth sleepless night.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance noticed his silence, also his grave face.

"Everything—everyone is glad to see me but you," she declared, half seriously, half jestingly.

Mr. Spring Fragrance set down her valise. They had just entered the house.

"If my wife is glad to see me," he quietly replied, "I also am glad to see her!"

Summoning their servant boy, he bade him look after Mrs. Spring Fragrance's comfort.

"I must be at the store in half an hour," said he, looking at his watch. "There is some very important business requiring attention."

"What is the business?" inquired Mrs. Spring Fragrance, her lip quivering with disappointment.

"I cannot just explain to you," answered her husband.

Mrs. Spring Fragrance looked up into his face with honest and earnest eyes. There was something in his manner, in the tone of her husband's voice, which touched her.

"Yen," said she, "you do not look well. You are not well. What is it?"

Something arose in Mr. Spring Fragrance's throat which prevented him from replying.

"O darling one! O sweetest one!" cried a girl's joyous voice. Laura Chin Yuen ran into the room and threw her arms around Mrs. Spring Fragrance's neck.

"I spied you from the window," said Laura, "and I couldn't rest until I told you. We are to be married next week, Kai Tzu and I. And all through you, all through you—the sweetest jade jewel in the world!"

Mr. Spring Fragrance passed out of the room.

"So the son of the Government teacher and little Happy Love are already married," Laura went on, relieving Mrs. Spring Fragrance of her cloak, her hat, and her folding fan.

Mr. Spring Fragrance paused upon the doorstep.

"Sit down, Little Sister, and I will tell you all about it," said Mrs. Spring Fragrance, forgetting her husband for a moment.

When Laura Chin Yuen had danced away, Mr. Spring Fragrance came in and hung up his hat.

"You got back very soon," said Mrs. Spring Fragrance, covertly wiping away the tears which had begun to fall as soon as she thought herself alone.

"I did not go," answered Mr. Spring Fragrance. "I have been listening to you and Laura."

"But if the business is very important, do not you think you should attend to it?" anxiously queried Mrs. Spring Fragrance.

"It is not important to me now," returned Mr. Spring Fragrance. "I would prefer to hear again about Ah Oi and Man You and Laura and Kai Tzu."

"How lovely of you to say that!" exclaimed Mrs. Spring Fragrance, who was easily made happy. And she began to chat away to her husband in the friendliest and wifeliest fashion possible. When she had finished she asked him if he were not glad to hear that those who loved as did the young lovers whose secrets she had been keeping, were to be united; and he replied that indeed he was; that he would like every man to be as happy with a wife as he himself had ever been and ever would be.

"You did not always talk like that," said Mrs. Spring Fragrance slyly. "You must have been reading my American poetry books!"

"American poetry!" ejaculated Mr. Spring Fragrance almost fiercely, "American poetry is detestable, *abhorrible!*"

"Why! why!" exclaimed Mrs. Spring Fragrance, more and more surprised.

But the only explanation which Mr. Spring Fragrance vouchsafed was a jadestone pendant.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

1868–1963

No writer of the early twentieth century surpasses the influence of W. E. B. Du Bois on how Americans think, study, and talk about race in the United States. Unabashedly intellectual and political, Du Bois modeled practices that shaped the African American intelligentsia of the twentieth century, and his ideas contributed to the vocabulary that we still use to address questions of racial difference and inequality. As a writer, Du Bois was prolific and wide-ranging, and his influence on African American literature, philosophy, and political thought is still visible.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. After his father deserted his family, Du Bois's mother—Mary Burghardt Du Bois—raised him with the help of her extended family. Du Bois attended predominantly white schools and churches as a child, and he later wrote that he did not experience discrimination as a child. In 1885, Du Bois traveled to the South for the first time, to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, earning bachelor's degree in 1888. He then applied to Harvard University, where he earned a second bachelor's degree in 1890 and a master's degree in 1891. Before returning to Harvard to complete his doctorate, he studied at the University of Berlin (1892–94), where his studies influenced his thinking about both race and history. In 1895, he received his Ph.D. from Harvard, and his doctoral dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870*, was published the following year as the first volume in the Harvard Historical Studies series. By the time Du Bois completed his graduate studies his accomplishments were already considerable, but he could not secure an appointment at a major research university. He taught first instead at Wilberforce College in Ohio, at that time a small, poor, black college. There he offered Greek, Latin, German, and English—subjects far removed from his real interest in the emerging field of sociology. After spending a year at the University of Pennsylvania, where he did the research for *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), considered to be the first sociological monograph on an African American community, Du Bois moved to Atlanta University in 1897. There, over the following thirteen years, he produced a steady stream of important studies of African American life. Dedicated to the rigorous, scholarly examination of the so-called Negro problem, Du Bois increasingly understood his scholarship and his activism to be intertwined. Writing for national publications such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Dial*, Du Bois urged Americans to face the devastation that racial inequality was wreaking on the lives of African Americans.

Collecting several of these essays and adding new material, Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a book of signal importance in American intellectual history. The book combines autobiography, social science, political commentary, musicology, and even fiction to explore the implications of its dramatic and prophetic announcement that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.” In the first chapter, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” Du Bois introduces a key concept that would inform his thinking for the rest of his career—the notion of the “twoness” of African Americans. “One ever feels his twoness,” Du Bois asserts, “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” This foundational observation described what Du Bois named “double-consciousness.” Another of Du Bois's important ideas was the “Talented Tenth,” the



W. E. B. Du Bois in his office at Atlanta University, c. 1905.

title of an essay he published as the second chapter of *The Negro Problem* (1903). By this phrase he meant a college-educated elite that could provide leadership for African Americans after Reconstruction. In this regard, the chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* that particularly caused a stir when the volume was first published was the one that challenged—coolly and without rancor—the enormous authority and power that had accumulated in the hands of one black spokesman, Booker T. Washington. Washington had founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to train African Americans in basic agricultural and mechanical skills and had gained national prominence with his Atlanta Exposition speech in 1895. His address seemed to many people to accept disenfranchisement and segregation and settle for a low level of education in exchange for white “toleration” and economic cooperation. Although Du Bois had initially joined in the general approval of this kind of racial accommodation, by the early 1900s he had begun to reject Washington’s position, and with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* his public defiance of Washington put the two men in lasting opposition. The almost immediate repudiation of *The Souls of Black Folk* by Washington’s allies reinforced Du Bois’s emerging radicalism; he became a leader in the Niagara Movement (1905), which aggressively demanded for African Americans the same civil rights enjoyed by white Americans.

In 1910 Du Bois left Atlanta for New York, where he served for the next quarter of a century as editor of the *Crisis*, the official publication of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization he helped create. Through this publication Du Bois reached an increasingly large audience—one hundred thousand by 1919—with powerful messages that argued the need for black development and white social enlightenment. He also continued to write in a variety of genres, including a novel about the southern cotton industry, *The Quest of the Golden Fleece* (1911); a massive historical study of *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935); and a full-length autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn: An Autobiography* (1940).

Frustrated by the lack of fundamental change and progress in the condition of African Americans, after 1920 Du Bois shifted his attention from the reform of race relations in America through research and political legislation to the search for longer-range worldwide economic solutions to the international problems of inequity among the races. He began a steady movement toward Pan-African and socialist

perspectives that led to his joining the U.S. Communist Party in 1961 and, in the year of his death, becoming a citizen of Ghana. During these forty years he was extremely active as a politician, organizer, and diplomat, and he continued as a powerful writer of poetry, fiction, autobiography, essays, and scholarly works. When, in his last major speech, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of Du Bois as “one of the most remarkable men of our time,” he was uttering the verdict of history.

*From The Souls of Black Folk*¹

The Forethought

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.

I pray you, then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there.

I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive. First, in two chapters I have tried to show what Emancipation meant to them, and what was its aftermath. In a third chapter I have pointed out the slow rise of personal leadership, and criticised candidly the leader who bears the chief burden of his race to-day. Then, in two other chapters I have sketched in swift outline the two worlds within and without the Veil, and thus have come to the central problem of training men for life. Venturing now into deeper detail, I have in two chapters studied the struggles of the massed millions of the black peasantry, and in another have sought to make clear the present relations of the sons of master and man.

Leaving, then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls. All this I have ended with a tale twice told but seldom written.

Some of these thoughts of mine have seen the light before in other guise. For kindly consenting to their republication here, in altered and extended form, I must thank the publishers of *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The World's Work*, *The Dial*, *The New World*, and the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

Before each chapter, as now printed, stands a bar of the Sorrow Songs,²—some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from black souls in the dark past. And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?

W. E. B. DU B.

ATLANTA, GA., Feb. 1, 1903.

1. *The Souls of Black Folk*, a compilation of nine previously printed and five unpublished essays, appeared first as a book in 1903, the source of

the text printed here.

2. Du Bois's term for spirituals composed by southern slaves.

I. Of Our Spiritual Strivings

O water, voice of my heart, crying in the sand,
 All night long crying with a mournful cry,
 As I lie and listen, and cannot understand
 The voice of my heart in my side or the voice of the sea,
 O water, crying for rest, is it I, is it I?
 All night long the water is crying to me.

Unresting water, there shall never be rest
 Till the last moon droop and the last tide fail,
 And the fire of the end begin to burn in the west;
 And the heart shall be weary and wonder and cry like the sea,
 All life long crying without avail,
 As the water all night long is crying to me.

ARTHUR SYMONS³



Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville;⁴ or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic⁵ to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in

3. English poet (1865–1945); the quotation is from “The Crying of Water” (1902). The music is an excerpt from the spiritual “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.”

4. Civil War battle in Virginia, June 26, 1862,

resulting in heavy Confederate losses.

5. Mountain ranges partly in western Massachusetts, where Du Bois grew up. The Housatonic is a river in western Massachusetts.

common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head,—some way. With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above.

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,⁶—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten. The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness. Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness,—it is the contradiction of double aims. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to

6. In some folk traditions, a baby born with a caul—a membrane covering the face—is thought to be fortunate or to have special powers; likewise, a seventh son is often of special significance in folk traditions.

escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause. By the poverty and ignorance of his people, the Negro minister or doctor was tempted toward quackery and demagogy; and by the criticism of the other world, toward ideals that made him ashamed of his lowly tasks. The would-be black *savant*⁷ was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood. The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people. This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people,—has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.

Away back in the days of bondage they thought to see in one divine event the end of all doubt and disappointment; few men ever worshipped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries. To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites. In song and exhortation swelled one refrain—Liberty; in his tears and curses the God he implored had Freedom in his right hand. At last it came,—suddenly, fearfully, like a dream. With one wild carnival of blood and passion came the message in his own plaintive cadences:—

“Shout, O children!
Shout, you’re free!
For God has bought your liberty!”⁸

Years have passed away since then,—ten, twenty, forty; forty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development, and yet the swarthy spectre sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation’s feast. In vain do we cry to this our vastest social problem:—

“Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble!”⁹

The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people,—a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people.

The first decade was merely a prolongation of the vain search for freedom, the boon that seemed ever barely to elude their grasp,—like a tantalizing

7. Learned person.

8. Lines from a spiritual; the source has not

been identified.

9. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 3.2.99.

will-o'-the-wisp, maddening and misleading the headless host. The holocaust of war, the terrors of the Ku-Klux Klan, the lies of carpetbaggers,¹ the disorganization of industry, and the contradictory advice of friends and foes, left the bewildered serf with no new watchword beyond the old cry for freedom. As the time flew, however, he began to grasp a new idea. The ideal of liberty demanded for its attainment powerful means, and these the Fifteenth Amendment² gave him. The ballot, which before he had looked upon as a visible sign of freedom, he now regarded as the chief means of gaining and perfecting the liberty with which war had partially endowed him. And why not? Had not votes made war and emancipated millions? Had not votes enfranchised the freedmen? Was anything impossible to a power that had done all this? A million black men started with renewed zeal to vote themselves into the kingdom. So the decade flew away, the revolution of 1876³ came, and left the half-free serf weary, wondering, but still inspired. Slowly but steadily, in the following years, a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power,—a powerful movement, the rise of another ideal to guide the unguided, another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day. It was the ideal of “book-learning”; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic⁴ letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan;⁵ longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life.

Up the new path the advance guard toiled, slowly, heavily, doggedly; only those who have watched and guided the faltering feet, the misty minds, the dull understandings, of the dark pupils of these schools know how faithfully, how piteously, this people strove to learn. It was weary work. The cold statistician wrote down the inches of progress here and there, noted also where here and there a foot had slipped or some one had fallen. To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the Canaan was always dim and far away. If, however, the vistas disclosed as yet no goal, no resting-place, little but flattery and criticism, the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself,—darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. For the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. He felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors. To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land

1. Used as an epithet in the South to describe Northerners who came to the South during Reconstruction to make money by exploiting conditions created by the devastation of the Civil War. Many carried luggage made of carpet materials. “Ku Klux Klan”: a secretive and often violent white supremacist society founded in the South shortly after the Civil War.

2. Amendment to the Constitution passed in 1870 to guarantee and protect the voting rights of African American men.

3. Congressional opposition to the continuation of Reconstruction policies and programs after the national elections of 1876.

4. Indecipherable and mystical.

5. The Promised Land of the Israelites.

of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance,—not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities; the accumulated sloth and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries shackled his hands and feet. Nor was his burden all poverty and ignorance. The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home.

A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems. But alas! while sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair. Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defence of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime, the “higher” against the “lower” races. To which the Negro cries Amen! and swears that to so much of this strange prejudice as is founded on just homage to civilization, culture, righteousness, and progress, he humbly bows and meekly does obeisance. But before that nameless prejudice that leaps beyond all this he stands helpless, dismayed, and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and the boisterous welcoming of the worse, the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain for everything black, from Toussaint⁶ to the devil,—before this there rises a sickening despair that would disarm and discourage any nation save that black host to whom “discouragement” is an unwritten word.

But the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate. Whisperings and portents came borne upon the four winds: Lo! we are diseased and dying, cried the dark hosts; we cannot write, our voting is vain; what need of education, since we must always cook and serve? And the Nation echoed and enforced this self-criticism, saying: Be content to be servants, and nothing more; what need of higher culture for half-men? Away with the black man’s ballot, by force or fraud,—and behold the suicide of a race! Nevertheless, out of the evil came something of good,—the more careful adjustment of education to real life, the clearer perception of the Negroes’ social responsibilities, and the sobering realization of the meaning of progress.

So dawned the time of *Sturm und Drang*:⁷ storm and stress to-day rocks our little boat on the mad waters of the world-sea; there is within and without the sound of conflict, the burning of body and rending of soul; inspiration strives with doubt, and faith with vain questionings. The bright ideals of the past,—physical freedom, political power, the training of brains and the training of hands,—all these in turn have waxed and waned, until even the last grows dim and overcast. Are they all wrong,—all false? No, not that,

6. Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803), slave-born Haitian soldier, patriot, and martyr to the

liberation of Haiti from foreign control.
7. Storm and stress (German).

but each alone was over-simple and incomplete,—the dreams of a credulous race-childhood, or the fond imaginings of the other world which does not know and does not want to know our power. To be really true, all these ideals must be melted and welded into one. The training of the schools we need to-day more than ever,—the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts. The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defence,—else what shall save us from a second slavery? Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek,—the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire. Work, culture, liberty,—all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed: there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folk-lore are Indian and African; and, all in all, we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness. Will America be poorer if she replace her brutal dyspeptic blundering with light-hearted but determined Negro humility? or her coarse and cruel wit with loving jovial good-humor? or her vulgar music with the soul of the Sorrow Songs?

Merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro Problem, and the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this the land of their fathers' fathers, and in the name of human opportunity.

And now what I have briefly sketched in large outline let me on coming pages tell again in many ways, with loving emphasis and deeper detail, that men may listen to the striving in the souls of black folk.

* * *

III. Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others⁸

From birth till death enslaved; in word, in deed, unmanned!

• • • • •

Hereditary bondsmen! Know ye not
Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?

—BYRON⁹



Easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876¹ is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington. It began at the time when war memories and ideals were rapidly passing; a day of astonishing commercial development was dawning; a sense of doubt and hesitation overtook the freedmen's sons,—then it was that his leading began. Mr. Washington came, with a simple definite programme, at the psychological moment when the nation was a little ashamed of having bestowed so much sentiment on Negroes, and was concentrating its energies on Dollars. His programme of industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights, was not wholly original; the Free Negroes from 1830 up to war-time had striven to build industrial schools, and the American Missionary Association had from the first taught various trades; and Price² and others had sought a way of honorable alliance with the best of the Southerners. But Mr. Washington first indissolubly linked these things; he put enthusiasm, unlimited energy, and perfect faith into this programme, and changed it from a by-path into a veritable Way of Life. And the tale of the methods by which he did this is a fascinating study of human life.

It startled the nation to hear a Negro advocating such a programme after many decades of bitter complaint; it startled and won the applause of the South, it interested and won the admiration of the North; and after a confused murmur of protest, it silenced if it did not convert the Negroes themselves.

8. *Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others* was first published in *Guardian*, July 27, 1902, and then collected in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) founded and helped build Tuskegee Institute, a black college in Alabama, and became a powerful leader of and spokesman for black Americans, especially after his address at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895.

9. The epigraph is from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), Canto 2, 74.710, 76.720–21, by George Gordon, Lord Byron (1758–1824). The music is from the refrain of a black spiritual titled "A Great

Camp-Meetin' in de Promised Land" (also called "There's a Great Camp Meeting" and "Walk Together Children"). The words of the refrain set to this music are

Going to mourn and never tire—
mourn and never tire, mourn and never tire.

1. Reconstruction ended in 1876; federal troops were withdrawn from the South, and black political power was essentially destroyed.

2. Joseph Charles Price (1854–1893), influential southern black educator and civil rights leader.

To gain the sympathy and cooperation of the various elements comprising the white South was Mr. Washington's first task; and this, at the time Tuskegee was founded, seemed, for a black man, well-nigh impossible. And yet ten years later it was done in the word spoken at Atlanta: "In all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." This "Atlanta Compromise"³ is by all odds the most notable thing in Mr. Washington's career. The South interpreted it in different ways: the radicals received it as a complete surrender of the demand for civil and political equality; the conservatives, as a generously conceived working basis for mutual understanding. So both approved it, and to-day its author is certainly the most distinguished Southerner since Jefferson Davis, and the one with the largest personal following.

Next to this achievement comes Mr. Washington's work in gaining place and consideration in the North. Others less shrewd and tactful had formerly essayed to sit on these two stools and had fallen between them; but as Mr. Washington knew the heart of the South from birth and training, so by singular insight he intuitively grasped the spirit of the age which was dominating the North. And so thoroughly did he learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities.⁴ One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this.

And yet this very singleness of vision and thorough oneness with his age is a mark of the successful man. It is as though Nature must needs make men narrow in order to give them force. So Mr. Washington's cult has gained unquestioning followers, his work has wonderfully prospered, his friends are legion, and his enemies are confounded. To-day he stands as the one recognized spokesman of his ten million fellows, and one of the most notable figures in a nation of seventy millions. One hesitates, therefore, to criticise a life which, beginning with so little, has done so much. And yet the time is come when one may speak in all sincerity and utter courtesy of the mistakes and shortcomings of Mr. Washington's career, as well as of his triumphs, without being thought captious or envious, and without forgetting that it is easier to do ill than well in the world.

The criticism that has hitherto met Mr. Washington has not always been of this broad character. In the South especially has he had to walk warily to avoid the harshest judgments,—and naturally so, for he is dealing with the one subject of deepest sensitiveness to that section. Twice—once when at the Chicago celebration of the Spanish-American War he alluded to the color-prejudice that is "eating away the vitals of the South," and once when

3. In a speech at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895, Washington in effect traded political, civil, and social rights for blacks for the promise of vocational-training schools and jobs. His purpose was to reduce racial tension in the South while providing a stable black labor force whose skills would provide job security. The speech appears in chapter XIV of Washington's *Up from Slavery*, reprinted on pages 716–19 of this volume.

4. In Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), chap-

ter VIII, "Teaching School in a Stable and a Hen-House," there is a passage on the absurdity of knowledge not practically useful:

In fact, one of the saddest things I saw during the month of travel which I have described was a young man, who had attended some high school, sitting down in a one-room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him, and weeds in the yard and garden, engaged in studying French grammar.

he dined with President Roosevelt⁵—has the resulting Southern criticism been violent enough to threaten seriously his popularity. In the North the feeling has several times forced itself into words, that Mr. Washington's counsels of submission overlooked certain elements of true manhood, and that his educational programme was unnecessarily narrow. Usually, however, such criticism has not found open expression, although, too, the spiritual sons of the Abolitionists have not been prepared to acknowledge that the schools founded before Tuskegee,⁶ by men of broad ideals and self-sacrificing spirit, were wholly failures or worthy of ridicule. While, then, criticism has not failed to follow Mr. Washington, yet the prevailing public opinion of the land has been but too willing to deliver the solution of a wearisome problem into his hands, and say, "If that is all you and your race ask, take it."

Among his own people, however, Mr. Washington has encountered the strongest and most lasting opposition, amounting at times to bitterness, and even to-day continuing strong and insistent even though largely silenced in outward expression by the public opinion of the nation. Some of this opposition is, of course, mere envy; the disappointment of displaced demagogues and the spite of narrow minds. But aside from this, there is among educated and thoughtful colored men in all parts of the land a feeling of deep regret, sorrow, and apprehension at the wide currency and ascendancy which some of Mr. Washington's theories have gained. These same men admire his sincerity of purpose, and are willing to forgive much to honest endeavor which is doing something worth the doing. They coöperate with Mr. Washington as far as they conscientiously can; and, indeed, it is no ordinary tribute to this man's tact and power that, steering as he must between so many diverse interests and opinions, he so largely retains the respect of all.

But the hushing of the criticism of honest opponents is a dangerous thing. It leads some of the best of the critics to unfortunate silence and paralysis of effort, and others to burst into speech so passionately and intemperately as to lose listeners. Honest and earnest criticism from those whose interests are most nearly touched,—criticism of writers by readers, of government by those governed, of leaders by those led,—this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society. If the best of the American Negroes receive by outer pressure a leader whom they had not recognized before, manifestly there is here a certain palpable gain. Yet there is also irreparable loss,—a loss of that peculiarly valuable education which a group receives when by search and criticism it finds and commissions its own leaders. The way in which this is done is at once the most elementary and the nicest problem of social growth. History is but the record of such group-leadership; and yet how infinitely changeable is its type and character! And of all types and kinds, what can be more instructive than the leadership of a group within a group?—that curious double movement where real progress may be negative and actual advance be relative retrogression. All this is the social student's inspiration and despair.

5. Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), twenty-sixth president of the United States (1901–09). Washington's dining with him at the White House in 1901 caused controversy around the country.

6. The Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a school for African Americans that Washington led beginning in 1881.

Now in the past the American Negro has had instructive experience in the choosing of group leaders, founding thus a peculiar dynasty which in the light of present conditions is worth while studying. When sticks and stones and beasts form the sole environment of a people, their attitude is largely one of determined opposition to and conquest of natural forces. But when to earth and brute is added an environment of men and ideas, then the attitude of the imprisoned group may take three main forms,—a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or, finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite environing opinion. The influence of all of these attitudes at various times can be traced in the history of the American Negro, and in the evolution of his successive leaders.

Before 1750, while the fire of African freedom still burned in the veins of the slaves, there was in all leadership or attempted leadership but the one motive of revolt and revenge,—typified in the terrible Maroons, the Danish blacks, and Cato⁷ of Stono, and veiling all the Americas in fear of insurrection. The liberalizing tendencies of the latter half of the eighteenth century brought, along with kindlier relations between black and white, thoughts of ultimate adjustment and assimilation. Such aspiration was especially voiced in the earnest songs of Phyllis, in the martyrdom of Attucks, the fighting of Salem and Poor, the intellectual accomplishments of Banneker and Derham, and the political demands of the Cuffes.⁸

Stern financial and social stress after the war cooled much of the previous humanitarian ardor. The disappointment and impatience of the Negroes at the persistence of slavery and serfdom voiced itself in two movements. The slaves in the South, aroused undoubtedly by vague rumors of the Haytian revolt, made three fierce attempts at insurrection,—in 1800 under Gabriel in Virginia, in 1822 under Vesey in Carolina, and in 1831 again in Virginia under the terrible Nat Turner.⁹ In the Free States, on the other hand, a new and curious attempt at self-development was made. In Philadelphia and New York color-prescription led to a withdrawal of Negro communicants from white churches and the formation of a peculiar socio-religious institution among the Negroes known as the African Church,—an organization still living and controlling in its various branches over a million of men.

7. The leader of the Stono, South Carolina, slave revolt of September 9, 1739, in which twenty-five whites were killed. "Maroons": fugitive slaves from the West Indies and Guiana in the 17th and 18th centuries, or their descendants. Many of the slaves in the Danish West Indies revolted in 1733 because of the lack of sufficient food.

8. Paul Cuffe (1759–1817) organized to resettle free blacks in African colonies. A champion of civil rights for free blacks in Massachusetts, he took thirty-eight blacks to Africa in 1815 at his own expense. Phyllis (or Phillis) Wheatley (c. 1753–1784), black slave and poet. Crispus Attucks (c. 1723–1770) was killed in the Boston massacre. Peter Salem (d. 1816), black patriot who killed Major Pitcairn in the battle of Bunker Hill. Salem Poor (b. 1747), a black soldier who fought at Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and White Plains. Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806), a black

mathematician who also studied astronomy. James Derham (b. 1762), the first recognized black physician in America; born a slave, he learned medicine from his physician master, bought his freedom in 1783, and by 1788 was one of the foremost physicians of New Orleans.

9. A slave (1800–1831), he led the Southampton insurrection in 1831, during which approximately sixty whites and more than a hundred slaves were killed or executed. Gabriel (1775?–1800) conspired to attack Richmond, Virginia, with a thousand other slaves on August 30, 1800; but a storm forced a suspension of the mission and two slaves betrayed the conspiracy. On October 7, Gabriel and fifteen others were hanged. Denmark Vesey (c. 1767–1822) purchased his freedom in 1800; he led an unsuccessful uprising in 1822 and was hanged.

Walker's wild appeal¹ against the trend of the times showed how the world was changing after the coming of the cotton-gin. By 1830 slavery seemed hopelessly fastened on the South, and the slaves thoroughly cowed into submission. The free Negroes of the North, inspired by the mulatto immigrants from the West Indies, began to change the basis of their demands; they recognized the slavery of slaves, but insisted that they themselves were freemen, and sought assimilation and amalgamation with the nation on the same terms with other men. Thus, Forten and Purvis of Philadelphia, Shad of Wilmington, Du Bois of New Haven, Barbadoes² of Boston, and others, strove singly and together as men, they said, not as slaves; as "people of color," not as "Negroes." The trend of the times, however, refused them recognition save in individual and exceptional cases, considered them as one with all the despised blacks, and they soon found themselves striving to keep even the rights they formerly had of voting and working and moving as freemen. Schemes of migration and colonization arose among them; but these they refused to entertain, and they eventually turned to the Abolition movement as a final refuge.

Here, led by Remond, Nell, Wells-Brown, and Douglass,³ a new period of self-assertion and self-development dawned. To be sure, ultimate freedom and assimilation was the ideal before the leaders, but the assertion of the manhood rights of the Negro by himself was the main reliance, and John Brown's raid was the extreme of its logic. After the war and emancipation, the great form of Frederick Douglass, the greatest of American Negro leaders, still led the host. Self-assertion, especially in political lines, was the main programme, and behind Douglass came Elliot, Bruce, and Langston, and the Reconstruction politicians, and, less conspicuous but of greater social significance Alexander Crummell and Bishop Daniel Payne.⁴

Then came the Revolution of 1876, the suppression of the Negro votes, the changing and shifting of ideals, and the seeking of new lights in the great night. Douglass, in his old age, still bravely stood for the ideals of his early manhood,—ultimate assimilation *through* self-assertion, and on no other terms. For a time Price arose as a new leader, destined, it seemed, not to

1. A revolutionary and eloquent antislavery pamphlet by the black leader David Walker (1785–1830).

2. James G. Barbadoes was one of those present at the first National Negro Convention along with Forten, Purvis, Shadd, and others. James Forten (1766–1842), black civic leader and philanthropist. Robert Purvis (1810–1898), abolitionist, helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and was the president of the Underground Railway. Abraham Shadd, abolitionist, was on the first board of managers of the American Anti-Slavery Society, a delegate from Delaware for the first National Negro Convention (1830), and president of the third one in 1833. Alexander Du Bois (1803–1887), paternal grandfather of W. E. B. Du Bois, helped form the Negro Episcopal Parish of St. Luke in 1847 and was the senior warden there.

3. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), abolitionist and orator and born a slave, was U.S. minister to Haiti and U.S. marshal of the District of Columbia. Charles Lenox Remond (1810–1873), black

leader. William Cooper Nell (1816–1874), abolitionist, writer, and first African American to hold office under the government of the United States (clerk in the post office). Through his efforts equal school privileges were obtained for black children in Boston. William Wells Brown (1814–1884) published *Clotel* in 1853, the first novel by a black American, and *The Escape* in 1858, the first play by a black American.

4. Daniel Alexander Payne (1811–1893), bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church and president of Wilberforce University (1863–76). Robert Brown Elliot (1842–1884), black politician, graduate of Eton, South Carolina congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives. Blanche K. Bruce (1841–1898), born a slave, first black man to serve a full term in the U.S. Senate (1875–81). John Mercer Langston (1829–1897), congressman, lawyer, diplomat, educator, born a slave. Crummell (1819–1898), clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal church, missionary in Liberia for twenty years and then in Washington, D.C.

give up, but to re-state the old ideals in a form less repugnant to the white South. But he passed away in his prime. Then came the new leader. Nearly all the former ones had become leaders by the silent suffrage of their fellows, had sought to lead their own people alone, and were usually, save Douglass, little known outside their race. But Booker T. Washington arose as essentially the leader not of one race but of two,—a compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro. Naturally the Negroes resented, at first bitterly, signs of compromise which surrendered their civil and political rights, even though this was to be exchanged for larger chances of economic development. The rich and dominating North, however, was not only weary of the race problem, but was investing largely in Southern enterprises, and welcomed any method of peaceful coöperation. Thus, by national opinion, the Negroes began to recognize Mr. Washington's leadership; and the voice of criticism was hushed.

Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission; but adjustment at such a peculiar time as to make his programme unique. This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life. Moreover, this is an age when the more advanced races are coming in closer contact with the less developed races, and the race-feeling is therefore intensified; and Mr. Washington's programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races. Again, in our own land, the reaction from the sentiment of war time has given impetus to race-prejudice against Negroes, and Mr. Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens. In other periods of intensified prejudice all the Negro's tendency to self-assertion has been called forth; at this period a policy of submission is advocated. In the history of nearly all other races and peoples the doctrine preached at such crises has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses, and that a people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing.

In answer to this, it has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things,—

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,

Third, higher education of Negro youth,—

and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South. This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years. As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

These movements are not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington's teachings; but his propoganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment. The question then comes: Is it possible,

and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meagre chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic *No*. And Mr. Washington thus faces the triple paradox of his career:

1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workingmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage.

2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run.

3. He advocates common-school⁵ and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but neither the Negro common-schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates.

This triple paradox in Mr. Washington's position is the object of criticism by two classes of colored Americans. One class is spiritually descended from Toussaint the Savior,⁶ through Gabriel, Vesey, and Turner, and they represent the attitude of revolt and revenge; they hate the white South blindly and distrust the white race generally, and so far as they agree on definite action, think that the Negro's only hope lies in emigration beyond the borders of the United States. And yet, by the irony of fate, nothing has more effectually made this programme seem hopeless than the recent course of the United States toward weaker and darker peoples in the West Indies, Hawaii, and the Philippines,—for where in the world may we go and be safe from lying and brute force?

The other class of Negroes who cannot agree with Mr. Washington has hitherto said little aloud. They deprecate the sight of scattered counsels, of internal disagreement; and especially they dislike making their just criticism of a useful and earnest man an excuse for a general discharge of venom from small-minded opponents. Nevertheless, the questions involved are so fundamental and serious that it is difficult to see how men like the Grimkes, Kelly Miller, J. W. E. Bowen⁷ and other representatives of this group, can much longer be silent. Such men feel in conscience bound to ask of this nation three things:

1. The right to vote.
2. Civic equality.
3. The education of youth according to ability.

They acknowledge Mr. Washington's invaluable service in counselling patience and courtesy in such demands; they do not ask that ignorant black men vote when ignorant whites are debarred, or that any reasonable restrictions in the suffrage should not be applied; they know that the low

5. A free public school offering courses at pre-college level.

6. Toussaint L'Ouverture; see n. 6, p. 925.

7. John Wesley Edward Bowen (1855-?), Methodist clergyman and educator, president of Gammon Theological Seminary of Atlanta.

Archibald Grimké (1849-1930) and Francis Grimké (1850-1937), American civic leaders concerned with African American affairs. Miller (1863-1939), dean of Howard University, lectured on the race problem.

social level of the mass of the race is responsible for much discrimination against it, but they also know, and the nation knows, that relentless color-prejudice is more often a cause than a result of the Negro's degradation; they seek the abatement of this relic of barbarism, and not its systematic encouragement and pampering by all agencies of social power from the Associated Press to the Church of Christ. They advocate, with Mr. Washington, a broad system of Negro common schools supplemented by thorough industrial training; but they are surprised that a man of Mr. Washington's insight cannot see that no such educational system ever has rested or can rest on any other basis than that of the well-equipped college and university, and they insist that there is a demand for a few such institutions throughout the South to train the best of the Negro youth as teachers, professional men, and leaders.

This group of men honor Mr. Washington for his attitude of conciliation toward the white South; they accept the "Atlanta Compromise" in its broadest interpretation; they recognize, with him, many signs of promise, many men of high purpose and fair judgment, in this section; they know that no easy task has been laid upon a region already tottering under heavy burdens. But, nevertheless, they insist that the way to truth and right lies in straight-forward honesty, not in indiscriminate flattery; in praising those of the South who do well and criticising uncompromisingly those who do ill; in taking advantage of the opportunities at hand and urging their fellows to do the same, but at the same time in remembering that only a firm adherence to their higher ideals and aspirations will ever keep those ideals within the realm of possibility. They do not expect that the free right to vote, to enjoy civic rights, and to be educated, will come in a moment; they do not expect to see the bias and prejudices of years disappear at the blast of a trumpet; but they are absolutely certain that the way for a people to gain their reasonable rights is not by voluntarily throwing them away and insisting that they do not want them; that the way for a people to gain respect is not by continually belittling and ridiculing themselves; that, on the contrary, Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys.

In failing thus to state plainly and unequivocally the legitimate demands of their people, even at the cost of opposing an honored leader, the thinking classes of American Negroes would shirk a heavy responsibility,—a responsibility to themselves, a responsibility to the struggling masses, a responsibility to the darker races of men whose future depends so largely on this American experiment, but especially a responsibility to this nation,—this common Fatherland. It is wrong to encourage a man or a people in evil-doing; it is wrong to aid and abet a national crime simply because it is unpopular not to do so. The growing spirit of kindness and reconciliation between the North and South after the frightful differences of a generation ago ought to be a source of deep congratulation to all, and especially to those whose mistreatment caused the war; but if that reconciliation is to be marked by the industrial slavery and civic death of those same black men, with permanent legislation into a position of inferiority, then those black men, if they are really men, are called upon by every consideration of patriotism and loy-

alty to oppose such a course by all civilized methods, even though such opposition involves disagreement with Mr. Booker T. Washington. We have no right to sit silently by while the inevitable seeds are sown for a harvest of disaster to our children, black and white.

First, it is the duty of black men to judge the South discriminatingly. The present generation of Southerners are not responsible for the past, and they should not be blindly hated or blamed for it. Furthermore, to no class is the indiscriminate endorsement of the recent course of the South toward Negroes more nauseating than to the best thought of the South. The South is not “solid”;⁸ it is a land in the ferment of social change, wherein forces of all kinds are fighting for supremacy; and to praise the ill the South is to-day perpetrating is just as wrong as to condemn the good. Discriminating and broad-minded criticism is what the South needs,—needs it for the sake of her own white sons and daughters, and for the insurance of robust, healthy mental and moral development.

To-day even the attitude of the Southern whites toward the blacks is not, as so many assume, in all cases the same; the ignorant Southerner hates the Negro, the workingmen fear his competition, the money-makers wish to use him as a laborer, some of the educated see a menace in his upward development, while others—usually the sons of the masters—wish to help him to rise. National opinion has enabled this last class to maintain the Negro common schools, and to protect the Negro partially in property, life, and limb. Through the pressure of the money-makers, the Negro is in danger of being reduced to semi-slavery, especially in the country districts; the workingmen, and those of the educated who fear the Negro, have united to disfranchise him, and some have urged his deportation; while the passions of the ignorant are easily aroused to lynch and abuse any black man. To praise this intricate whirl of thought and prejudice is nonsense; to inveigh indiscriminately against “the South” is unjust; but to use the same breath in praising Governor Aycock, exposing Senator Morgan, arguing with Mr. Thomas Nelson Page, and denouncing Senator Ben Tillman⁹ is not only sane, but the imperative duty of thinking black men.

It would be unjust to Mr. Washington not to acknowledge that in several instances he has opposed movements in the South which were unjust to the Negro; he sent memorials to the Louisiana and Alabama constitutional conventions, he has spoken against lynching, and in other ways has openly or silently set his influence against sinister schemes and unfortunate happenings. Notwithstanding this, it is equally true to assert that on the whole

8. The “solid South” referred to the supposedly unified support of white Southerners for the Democratic party, offering the Democrats a “solid” voting block. The phrase was popularized during the 1876 election that proved to be the end of Reconstruction.

9. Benjamin Ryan Tillman (1847–1918), governor of South Carolina (1890–94) and U.S. Senator (1895–1918), served as the chairman on the committee on suffrage (during the South Carolina constitutional convention) and framed the article providing for an educational and property qualification for voting, thus eliminating the black vote.

He presented the views of the southern extremists on the race question, justified lynching in cases of rape and the use of force to disenfranchise blacks, and advocated the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment. Charles Brantley Aycock (1859–1912), governor of North Carolina (1901–05). Edwin Denison Morgan (1811–1883), governor of New York (1859–63) and U.S. senator (1863–69), voted with the minority in President Andrew Johnson’s veto of the Freedman’s Bureau bill and for Johnson’s conviction. Page (1853–1922), American novelist and diplomat, did much to build up romantic legends of the southern plantation.

the distinct impression left by Mr. Washington's propaganda is, first, that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro's degradation; secondly, that the prime cause of the Negro's failure to rise more quickly is his wrong education in the past; and, thirdly, that his future rise depends primarily on his own efforts. Each of these propositions is a dangerous half-truth. The supplementary truths must never be lost sight of: first, slavery and race-prejudice are potent if not sufficient causes of the Negro's position; second, industrial and common-school training were necessarily slow in planting because they had to await the black teachers trained by higher institutions,—it being extremely doubtful if any essentially different development was possible, and certainly a Tuskegee was unthinkable before 1880; and, third, while it is a great truth to say that the Negro must strive and strive mightily to help himself, it is equally true that unless his striving be not simply seconded, but rather aroused and encouraged, by the initiative of the richer and wiser environing group, he cannot hope for great success.

In his failure to realize and impress this last point, Mr. Washington is especially to be criticised. His doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators; when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs.

The South ought to be led, by candid and honest criticism, to assert her better self and do her full duty to the race she has cruelly wronged and is still wronging. The North—her co-partner in guilt—cannot salve her conscience by plastering it with gold. We cannot settle this problem by diplomacy and suaveness, by "policy" alone. If worse come to worst, can the moral fibre of this country survive the slow throttling and murder of nine millions of men?

The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,—a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader. So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him, rejoicing in his honors and glorying in the strength of this Joshua called of God and of man to lead the headless host. But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

XIII. *Of the Coming of John*¹

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
Beside the River-sea?
They bring the human heart wherein
No nightly calm can be;
That droppeth never with the wind,
Nor drieth with the dew;
O calm it, God; thy calm is broad
To cover spirits too.
The river floweth on.

MRS. BROWNING²

Carlisle Street runs westward from the centre of Johnstown, across a great black bridge, down a hill and up again, by little shops and meat-markets, past single-storied homes, until suddenly it stops against a wide green lawn. It is a broad, restful place, with two large buildings outlined against the west. When at evening the winds come swelling from the east, and the great pall of the city's smoke hangs wearily above the valley, then the red west glows like a dreamland down Carlisle Street, and, at the tolling of the supper-bell, throws the passing forms of students in dark silhouette against the sky. Tall and black, they move slowly by, and seem in the sinister light to flit before the city like dim warning ghosts. Perhaps they are; for this is Wells Institute,³ and these black students have few dealings with the white city below.

And if you will notice, night after night, there is one dark form that ever hurries last and late toward the twinkling lights of Swain Hall,—for Jones is never on time. A long, straggling fellow he is, brown and hard-haired, who seems to be growing straight out of his clothes, and walks with a half-apologetic roll. He used perpetually to set the quiet dining-room into waves of merriment, as he stole to his place after the bell had tapped for prayers; he seemed so perfectly awkward. And yet one glance at his face made one forgive him much,—that broad, good-natured smile in which lay no bit of art or artifice, but seemed just bubbling good-nature and genuine satisfaction with the world.

1. This chapter is the only work of fiction in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Other than New York, Du Bois uses fictional place names throughout the story. Johnstown, where the story opens, may be loosely modeled on Nashville, Tennessee (where Du Bois attended college at Fisk University) or Atlanta, Georgia (where Du Bois taught). Though there is a river in Georgia named the Altamaha, it is clear that, in describing the location of John's

upbringing, Du Bois did not seek to identify a particular town.

2. The epigraph is from "A Romance of the Ganges" (1838) by English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861). The music is from the spiritual "You May Bury Me in the East," also known as "I'll Hear the Trumpet Sound"—a song whose lyrics include images of Judgment Day.

3. A fictional institute of higher education.

He came to us from Altamaha, away down there beneath the gnarled oaks of Southeastern Georgia, where the sea croons to the sands and the sands listen till they sink half drowned beneath the waters, rising only here and there in long, low islands. The white folk of Altamaha voted John a good boy,—fine plough-hand, good in the rice-fields, handy everywhere, and always good-natured and respectful. But they shook their heads when his mother wanted to send him off to school. "It'll spoil him,—ruin him," they said; and they talked as though they knew. But full half the black folk followed him proudly to the station, and carried his queer little trunk and many bundles. And there they shook and shook hands, and the girls kissed him shyly and the boys clapped him on the back. So the train came, and he pinched his little sister lovingly, and put his great arms about his mother's neck, and then was away with a puff and a roar into the great yellow world that flamed and flared about the doubtful pilgrim. Up the coast they hurried, past the squares and palmettos of Savannah, through the cotton-fields and through the weary night, to Millville, and came with the morning to the noise and bustle of Johnstown.

And they that stood behind, that morning in Altamaha, and watched the train as it noisily bore playmate and brother and son away to the world, had thereafter one ever-recurring world,—“When John comes.” Then what parties were to be, and what speaking in the churches; what new furniture in the front room,—perhaps even a new front room; and there would be a new schoolhouse, with John as teacher; and then perhaps a big wedding; all this and more—when John comes. But the white people shook their heads.

At first he was coming at Christmas-time,—but the vacation proved too short; and then, the next summer,—but times were hard and schooling costly, and so, instead, he worked in Johnstown. And so it drifted to the next summer, and the next,—till playmates scattered, and mother grew gray, and sister went up to the Judge's kitchen to work. And still the legend lingered,—“When John comes.”

Up at the Judge's they rather liked this refrain; for they too had a John—a fair-haired, smooth-faced boy, who had played many a long summer's day to its close with his darker namesake. “Yes, sir! John is at Princeton, sir,” said the broad-shouldered gray-haired Judge every morning as he marched down to the post-office. “Showing the Yankees what a Southern gentleman can do,” he added; and strode home again with his letters and papers. Up at the great pillared house they lingered long over the Princeton letter,—the Judge and his frail wife, his sister and growing daughters. “It'll make a man of him,” said the Judge, “college is the place.” And then he asked the shy little waitress, “Well, Jennie, how's your John?” and added reflectively, “Too bad, too bad your mother sent him off,—it will spoil him.” And the waitress wondered.

Thus in the far-away Southern village the world lay waiting, half consciously, the coming of two young men, and dreamed in an inarticulate way of new things that would be done and new thoughts that all would think. And yet it was singular that few thought of two Johns,—for the black folk thought of one John, and he was black; and the white folk thought of another John, and he was white. And neither world thought the other world's thought, save with a vague unrest.

Up in Johnstown, at the Institute, we were long puzzled at the case of John Jones. For a long time the clay seemed unfit for any sort of moulding.

He was loud and boisterous, always laughing and singing, and never able to work consecutively at anything. He did not know how to study; he had no idea of thoroughness; and with his tardiness, carelessness, and appalling good-humor, we were sore perplexed. One night we sat in faculty-meeting, worried and serious; for Jones was in trouble again. This last escapade was too much, and so we solemnly voted "that Jones, on account of repeated disorder and inattention to work, be suspended for the rest of the term."

It seemed to us that the first time life ever struck Jones as a really serious thing was when the Dean told him he must leave school. He stared at the gray-haired man blankly, with great eyes. "Why,—why," he faltered, "but—I haven't graduated!" Then the Dean slowly and clearly explained, reminding him of the tardiness and the carelessness, of the poor lessons and neglected work, of the noise and disorder, until the fellow hung his head in confusion. Then he said quickly, "But you won't tell mammy and sister,—you won't write mammy, now will you? For if you won't I'll go out into the city and work, and come back next term and show you something." So the Dean promised faithfully, and John shouldered his little trunk, giving neither word nor look to the giggling boys, and walked down Carlisle Street to the great city, with sober eyes and a set and serious face.

Perhaps we imagined it, but somehow it seemed to us that the serious look that crept over his boyish face that afternoon never left it again. When he came back to us he went to work with all his rugged strength. It was a hard struggle, for things did not come easily to him,—few crowding memories of early life and teaching came to help him on his new way; but all the world toward which he strove was of his own building, and he builded slow and hard. As the light dawned lingeringly on his new creations, he sat rapt and silent before the vision, or wandered alone over the green campus peering through and beyond the world of men into a world of thought. And the thoughts at times puzzled him sorely; he could not see just why the circle was not square, and carried it out fifty-six decimal places one midnight,—would have gone further, indeed, had not the matron rapped for lights out. He caught terrible colds lying on his back in the meadows of nights, trying to think out the solar system; he had grave doubts as to the ethics of the Fall of Rome, and strongly suspected the Germans of being thieves and rascals, despite his text-books; he pondered long over every new Greek word, and wondered why this meant that and why it couldn't mean something else, and how it must have felt to think all things in Greek. So he thought and puzzled along for himself,—pausing perplexed where others skipped merrily, and walking steadily through the difficulties where the rest stopped and surrendered.

Thus he grew in body and soul, and with him his clothes seemed to grow and arrange themselves; coat sleeves got longer, cuffs appeared, and collars got less soiled. Now and then his boots shone, and a new dignity crept into his walk. And we who saw daily a new thoughtfulness growing in his eyes began to expect something of this plodding boy. Thus he passed out of the preparatory school into college, and we who watched him felt four more years of change, which almost transformed the tall, grave man who bowed to us commencement morning. He had left his queer thought-world and come back to a world of motion and of men. He looked now for the first time

sharply about him, and wondered he had seen so little before. He grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed now the oppression that had not seemed oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural, restraints and slights that in his boyhood days had gone unnoticed or been greeted with a laugh. He felt angry now when men did not call him "Mister," he clenched his hands at the "Jim Crow" cars, and chafed at the color-line that hemmed in him and his. A tinge of sarcasm crept into his speech, and a vague bitterness into his life; and he sat long hours wondering and planning a way around these crooked things. Daily he found himself shrinking from the choked and narrow life of his native town. And yet he always planned to go back to Altamaha,—always planned to work there. Still, more and more as the day approached he hesitated with a nameless dread; and even the day after graduation he seized with eagerness the offer of the Dean to send him North with the quartette during the summer vacation, to sing for the Institute. A breath of air before the plunge, he said to himself in half apology.

It was a bright September afternoon, and the streets of New York were brilliant with moving men. They reminded John of the sea, as he sat in the square and watched them, so changelessly changing, so bright and dark, so grave and gay. He scanned their rich and faultless clothes, the way they carried their hands, the shape of their hats; he peered into the hurrying carriages. Then, leaning back with a sigh, he said, "This is the World." The notion suddenly seized him to see where the world was going; since many of the richer and brighter seemed hurrying all one way. So when a tall, light-haired young man and a little talkative lady came by, he rose half hesitatingly and followed them. Up the street they went, past stores and gay shops, across a broad square, until with a hundred others they entered the high portal of a great building.

He was pushed toward the ticket-office with the others, and felt in his pocket for the new five-dollar bill he had hoarded. There seemed really no time for hesitation, so he drew it bravely out, passed it to the busy clerk, and received simply a ticket but no change. When at last he realized that he had paid five dollars to enter he knew not what, he stood stock-still amazed. "Be careful," said a low voice behind him; "you must not lynch the colored gentleman simply because he's in your way," and a girl looked up roguishly into the eyes of her fair-haired escort. A shade of annoyance passed over the escort's face. "You *will* not understand us at the South," he said half impatiently, as if continuing an argument. "With all your professions, one never sees in the North so cordial and intimate relations between white and black as are everyday occurrences with us. Why, I remember my closest playfellow in boyhood was a little Negro named after me, and surely no two,—*well!*" The man stopped short and flushed to the roots of his hair, for there directly beside his reserved orchestra chairs sat the Negro he had stumbled over in the hallway. He hesitated and grew pale with anger, called the usher and gave him his card, with a few peremptory words, and slowly sat down. The lady deftly changed the subject.

All this John did not see, for he sat in a half-maze minding the scene about him; the delicate beauty of the hall, the faint perfume, the moving myriad of men, the rich clothing and low hum of talking seemed all a part of a world so different from his, so strangely more beautiful than anything he had known, that he sat in dreamland, and started when, after a hush, rose high and

clear the music of Lohengrin's swan.⁴ The infinite beauty of the wail lingered and swept through every muscle of his frame, and put it all a-tune. He closed his eyes and grasped the elbows of the chair, touching unwittingly the lady's arm. And the lady drew away. A deep longing swelled in all his heart to rise with that clear music out of the dirt and dust of that low life that held him prisoned and befouled. If he could only live up in the free air where birds sang and setting suns had no touch of blood! Who had called him to be the slave and butt of all? And if he had called, what right had he to call when a world like this lay open before men?

Then the movement changed, and fuller, mightier harmony swelled away. He looked thoughtfully across the hall, and wondered why the beautiful gray-haired woman looked so listless, and what the little man could be whispering about. He would not like to be listless and idle, he thought, for he felt with the music the movement of power within him. If he but had some master-work, some life-service, hard,—aye, bitter hard, but without the cringing and sickening servility, without the cruel hurt that hardened his heart and soul. When at last a soft sorrow crept across the violins, there came to him the vision of a far-off home,—the great eyes of his sister, and the dark drawn face of his mother. And his heart sank below the waters, even as the sea-sand sinks by the shores of Altamaha, only to be lifted aloft again with that last ethereal wail of the swan that quivered and faded away into the sky.

It left John sitting so silent and rapt that he did not for sometime notice the usher tapping him lightly on the shoulder and saying politely. "Will you step this way, please, sir?" A little surprised, he arose quickly at the last tap, and, turning to leave his seat, looked full into the face of the fair-haired young man. For the first time the young man recognized his dark boyhood playmate, and John knew that it was the Judge's son. The white John started, lifted his hand, and then froze into his chair; the black John smiled lightly, then grimly, and followed the usher down the aisle. The manager was sorry, very, very sorry,—but he explained that some mistake had been made in selling the gentleman a seat already disposed of; he would refund the money, of course,—and indeed felt the matter keenly, and so forth, and—before he had finished John was gone, walking hurriedly across the square and down the broad streets, and as he passed the park he buttoned his coat and said, "John Jones, you're a natural-born fool." Then he went to his lodgings and wrote a letter, and tore it up; he wrote another, and threw it in the fire. Then he seized a scrap of paper and wrote: "Dear Mother and Sister—I am coming—John."

"Perhaps," said John, as he settled himself on the train, "perhaps I am to blame myself in struggling against my manifest destiny simply because it looks hard and unpleasant. Here is my duty to Altamaha plain before me; perhaps they'll let me help settle the Negro problems there,—perhaps they won't. 'I will go in to the King, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.'⁵ And then he mused and dreamed, and planned a life-work; and the train flew south.

4. In the opera *Lohengrin*, by the German composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883), a knight travels on a swan-drawn boat to defend the honor of the Duchess Elsa, who has been falsely accused of murdering her brother, Godfrey. Later, it is revealed that the swan is in fact her brother, who

has been enchanted by a sorceress.

5. In the Book of Esther, the Jewish Queen Esther speaks these words as she prepares to face the king of the Persians, Ahasuerus, who has decreed the extermination of the Jews (Esther 4:16).

Down in Altamaha, after seven long years, all the world knew John was coming. The homes were scrubbed and scoured,—above all, one; the gardens and yards had an unwonted trimness, and Jennie bought a newingham. With some finesse and negotiation, all the dark Methodists and Presbyterians were induced to join in a monster welcome at the Baptist Church; and as the day drew near, warm discussions arose on every corner as to the exact extent and nature of John's accomplishments. It was noon-tide on a gray and cloudy day when he came. The black town flocked to the depot, with a little of the white at the edges,—a happy throng, with "Good-mawnings" and "Howdys" and laughing and joking and jostling. Mother sat yonder in the window watching; but sister Jennie stood on the platform, nervously fingering her dress,—tall and lithe, with soft brown skin and loving eyes peering from out a tangled wilderness of hair. John rose gloomily as the train stopped, for he was thinking of the "Jim Crow" car; he stepped to the platform, and paused: a little dingy station, a black crowd gaudy and dirty, a half-mile of dilapidated shanties along a stragglng ditch of mud. An overwhelming sense of the sordidness and narrowness of it all seized him; he looked in vain for his mother, kissed coldly the tall, strange girl who called him brother, spoke a short, dry word here and there; then, lingering neither for hand-shaking nor gossip, started silently up the street, raising his hat merely to the last eager old aunty, to her openmouthed astonishment. The people were distinctly bewildered. This silent, cold man,—was this John? Where was his smile and hearty hand-grasp? "'Peared kind o' down in the mouf," said the Methodist preacher thoughtfully. "Seemed monstus stuck up," complained a Baptist sister. But the white postmaster from the edge of the crowd expressed the opinion of his folks plainly. "That damn Nigger," said he, as he shouldered the mail and arranged his tobacco, "has gone North and got plum full o' fool notions; but they won't work in Altamaha." And the crowd melted away.

The meeting of welcome at the Baptist Church was a failure. Rain spoiled the barbecue, and thunder turned the milk in the ice-cream. When the speaking came at night, the house was crowded to overflowing. The three preachers had especially prepared themselves, but somehow John's manner seemed to throw a blanket over everything,—he seemed so cold and preoccupied, and had so strange an air of restraint that the Methodist brother could not warm up to his theme and elicited not a single "Amen"; the Presbyterian prayer was but feebly responded to, and even the Baptist preacher, though he wakened faint enthusiasm, got so mixed up in his favorite sentence that he had to close it by stopping fully fifteen minutes sooner than he meant. The people moved uneasily in their seats as John rose to reply. He spoke slowly and methodically. The age, he said, demanded new ideas; we were far different from those men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,—with broader ideas of human brotherhood and destiny. Then he spoke of the rise of charity and popular education, and particularly of the spread of wealth and work. The question was, then, he added reflectively, looking at the low discolored ceiling, what part the Negroes of this land would take in the striving of the new century. He sketched in vague outline the new Industrial School that might rise among these pines, he spoke in detail of the charitable and philanthropic work that might be organized, of money that might be saved for banks and business. Finally he urged unity,

and deprecated especially religious and denominational bickering. "To-day," he said, with a smile, "the world cares little whether a man be Baptist or Methodist, or indeed a churchman at all, so long as he is good and true. What difference does it make whether a man be baptized in river or wash-bowl, or not at all? Let's leave all that littleness, and look higher." Then, thinking of nothing else, he slowly sat down. A painful hush seized that crowded mass. Little had they understood of what he said, for he spoke an unknown tongue, save the last word about baptism; that they knew, and they sat very still while the clock ticked. Then at last a low suppressed snarl came from the Amen corner, and an old bent man arose, walked over the seats, and climbed straight up into the pulpit. He was wrinkled and black, with scant gray and tufted hair; his voice and hands shook as with palsy; but on his face lay the intense rapt look of the religious fanatic. He seized the Bible with his rough, huge hands; twice he raised it inarticulate, and then fairly burst into words, with rude and awful eloquence. He quivered, swayed, and bent; then rose aloft in perfect majesty, till the people moaned and wept, wailed and shouted, and a wild shrieking arose from the corners where all the pent-up feeling of the hour gathered itself and rushed into the air. John never knew clearly what the old man said; he only felt himself held up to scorn and scathing denunciation for trampling on the true Religion, and he realized with amazement that all unknowingly he had put rough, rude hands on something this little world held sacred. He arose silently, and passed out into the night. Down toward the sea he went, in the fitful starlight, half-conscious of the girl who followed timidly after him. When at last he stood upon the bluff, he turned to his little sister and looked upon her sorrowfully, remembering with sudden pain how little thought he had given her. He put his arm about her and let her passion of tears spend itself on his shoulder.

Long they stood together, peering over the gray unresting water.

"John," she said, "does it make every one—unhappy when they study and learn lots of things?"

He paused and smiled. "I am afraid it does," he said.

"And, John, are you glad you studied?"

"Yes," came the answer, slowly but positively.

She watched the flickering lights upon the sea, and said thoughtfully, "I wish I was unhappy,—and—and," putting both arms about his neck, "I think I am, a little, John."

It was several days later that John walked up to the Judge's house to ask for the privilege of teaching the Negro school. The Judge himself met him at the front door, stared a little hard at him, and said brusquely, "Go 'round to the kitchen door, John, and wait." Sitting on the kitchen steps, John stared at the corn, thoroughly perplexed. What on earth had come over him? Every step he made offended some one. He had come to save his people, and before he left the depot he had hurt them. He sought to teach them at the church, and had outraged their deepest feelings. He had schooled himself to be respectful to the Judge, and then blundered into his front door. And all the time he had meant right,—and yet, and yet, somehow he found it so hard and strange to fit his old surroundings again, to find his place in the world about him. He could not remember that he used to have any difficulty in the past, when life was glad and gay. The world seemed smooth and easy

then. Perhaps,—but his sister came to the kitchen door just then and said the Judge awaited him.

The Judge sat in the dining-room amid his morning's mail, and he did not ask John to sit down. He plunged squarely into the business. "You've come for the school, I suppose. Well, John, I want to speak to you plainly. You know I'm a friend to your people. I've helped you and your family, and would have done more if you hadn't got the notion of going off. Now I like the colored people, and sympathize with all their reasonable aspirations; but you and I both know, John, that in this country the Negro must remain subordinate, and can never expect to be the equal of white men. In their place, your people can be honest and respectful; and God knows, I'll do what I can to help them. But when they want to reverse nature, and rule white men, and marry white women, and sit in my parlor, then, by God! we'll hold them under if we have to lynch every Nigger in the land. Now, John, the question is, are you, with your education and Northern notions, going to accept the situation and teach the darkies to be faithful servants and laborers as your fathers were,—I knew your father, John, he belonged to my brother, and he was a good Nigger. Well—well, are you going to be like him, or are you going to try to put fool ideas of rising and equality into these folks' heads, and make them discontented and unhappy?"

"I am going to accept the situation, Judge Henderson," answered John, with a brevity that did not escape the keen old man. He hesitated a moment, and then said shortly, "Very well,—we'll try you awhile. Good-morning."

It was a full month after the opening of the Negro school that the other John came home, tall, gay, and headstrong. The mother wept, the sisters sang. The whole white town was glad. A proud man was the Judge, and it was a goodly sight to see the two swinging down Main Street together. And yet all did not go smoothly between them, for the younger man could not and did not veil his contempt for the little town, and plainly had his heart set on New York. Now the one cherished ambition of the Judge was to see his son mayor of Altamaha, representative to the legislature, and—who could say?—governor of Georgia. So the argument often waxed hot between them. "Good heavens, father," the younger man would say after dinner, as he lighted a cigar and stood by the fireplace, "you surely don't expect a young fellow like me to settle down permanently in this—this God-forgotten town with nothing but mud and Negroes?" "I did," the Judge would answer laconically; and on this particular day it seemed from the gathering scowl that he was about to add something more emphatic, but neighbors had already begun to drop in to admire his son, and the conversation drifted.

"Heah that John is livenin' things up at the darky school," volunteered the postmaster, after a pause.

"What now?" asked the Judge, sharply.

"Oh, nothin' in particulah,—just his almighty air and uppish ways. B'lieve I did heah somethin' about his givin' talks on the French Revolution, equality, and such like. He's what I call a dangerous Nigger."

"Have you heard him say anything out of the way?"

"Why, no,—but Sally, our girl, told my wife a lot of rot. Then, too, I don't need to heah: a Nigger what won't say 'sir' to a white man, or—"

"Who is this John?" interrupted the son.

"Why, it's little black John, Peggy's son,—your old playfellow."

The young man's face flushed angrily, and then he laughed.

"Oh," said he, "it's the darky that tried to force himself into a seat beside the lady I was escorting—"

But Judge Henderson waited to hear no more. He had been nettled all day, and now at this he rose with a half-smothered oath, took his hat and cane, and walked straight to the schoolhouse.

For John, it had been a long, hard pull to get things started in the rickety old shanty that sheltered his school. The Negroes were rent into factions for and against him, the parents were careless, the children irregular and dirty, and books, pencils, and slates largely missing. Nevertheless, he struggled hopefully on, and seemed to see at last some glimmering of dawn. The attendance was larger and the children were a shade cleaner this week. Even the booby class⁶ in reading showed a little comforting progress. So John settled himself with renewed patience this afternoon.

"Now, Mandy," he said cheerfully, "that's better; but you mustn't chop your words up so: 'If—the—man—goes.' Why, your little brother even wouldn't tell a story that way, now would he?"

"Naw, suh, he cain't talk."

"All right; now let's try again: 'If the man—'"

"John!"

The whole school started in surprise, and the teacher half arose, as the red, angry face of the Judge appeared in the open doorway.

"John, this school is closed. You children can go home and get to work. The white people of Altamaha are not spending their money on black folks to have their heads crammed with impudence and lies. Clear out! I'll lock the door myself."

Up at the great pillared house the tall young son wandered aimlessly about after his father's abrupt departure. In the house there was little to interest him; the books were old and stale, the local newspaper flat, and the women had retired with headaches and sewing. He tried a nap, but it was too warm. So he sauntered out into the fields, complaining disconsolately, "Good Lord! how long will this imprisonment last!" He was not a bad fellow,—just a little spoiled and self-indulgent, and as headstrong as his proud father. He seemed a young man pleasant to look upon, as he sat on the great black stump at the edge of the pines idly swinging his legs and smoking. "Why, there isn't even a girl worth getting up a respectable flirtation with," he growled. Just then his eye caught a tall, willowy figure hurrying toward him on the narrow path. He looked with interest at first, and then burst into a laugh as he said, "Well, I declare, if it isn't Jennie, the little brown kitchen-maid! Why, I never noticed before what a trim little body she is. Hello, Jennie! Why, you haven't kissed me since I came home," he said gaily. The young girl stared at him in surprise and confusion,—faltered something inarticulate, and attempted to pass. But a wilful mood had seized the young idler, and he caught at her arm. Frightened, she slipped by; and half mischievously he turned and ran after her through the tall pines.

Yonder, toward the sea, at the end of the path, came John slowly, with his head down. He had turned wearily homeward from the schoolhouse; then, thinking to shield his mother from the blow, started to meet his sister as

6. The least-advanced class.

she came from work and break the news of his dismissal to her. "I'll go away," he said slowly; "I'll go away and find work, and send for them. I cannot live here longer." And then the fierce, buried anger surged up into his throat. He waved his arms and hurried wildly up the path.

The great brown sea lay silent. The air scarce breathed. The dying day bathed the twisted oaks and mighty pines in black and gold. There came from the wind no warning, not a whisper from the cloudless sky. There was only a black man hurrying on with an ache in his heart, seeing neither sun nor sea, but starting as from a dream at the frightened cry that woke the pines, to see his dark sister struggling in the arms of a tall and fair-haired man.

He said not a word, but, seizing a fallen limb, struck him with all the pent-up hatred of his great black arm; and the body lay white and still beneath the pines, all bathed in sunshine and in blood. John looked at it dreamily, then walked back to the house briskly, and said in a soft voice, "Mammy, I'm going away,—I'm going to be free."

She gazed at him dimly and faltered, "No'th, honey, is yo' gwine No'th agin?"

He looked out where the North Star glistened pale above the waters, and said, "Yes, mammy, I'm going—North."

Then, without another word, he went out into the narrow lane, up by the straight pines, to the same winding path, and seated himself on the great black stump, looking at the blood where the body had lain. Yonder in the gray past he had played with that dead boy, romping together under the solemn trees. The night deepened; he thought of the boys at Johnstown. He wondered how Brown had turned out, and Carey? And Jones,—Jones? Why *he* was Jones, and he wondered what they would all say when they knew, when they knew, in that great long dining-room with its hundreds of merry eyes. Then as the sheen of the starlight stole over him, he thought of the gilded ceiling of that vast concert hall, and heard stealing toward him the faint sweet music of the swan. Hark! was it music, or the hurry and shouting of men? Yes, surely! Clear and high the faint sweet melody rose and fluttered like a living thing, so that the very earth trembled as with the tramp of horses and murmur of angry men.

He leaned back and smiled toward the sea, whence rose the strange melody, away from the dark shadows where lay the noise of horses galloping, galloping on. With an effort he roused himself, bent forward, and looked steadily down the pathway, softly humming the "Song of the Bride,"—

"Freudig geführt, ziehet dahin."⁷

Amid the trees in the dim morning twilight he watched their shadows dancing and heard their horses thundering toward him, until at last they came sweeping like a storm, and he saw in front that haggard white-haired man, whose eyes flashed red with fury. Oh, how he pitied him,—pitied him,—and wondered if he had the coiling twisted rope. Then, as the storm burst round him, he rose slowly to his feet and turned his closed eyes toward the Sea.

And the world whistled in his ears.

7. Joyfully led, enter within (German); a modified version of the "Wedding Song" from Act III of Wagner's *Lohengrin*.

XIV. *Of the Sorrow Songs*

I walk through the churchyard
 To lay this body down;
 I know moon-rise, I know star-rise;
 I walk in the moonlight, I walk in the starlight;
 I'll lie in the grave and stretch out my arms,
 I'll go to judgment in the evening of the day,
 And my soul and thy soul shall meet that day,
 When I lay this body down.

NEGRO SONG⁸

They that walked in darkness sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—for they were weary at heart. And so before each thought that I have written in this book I have set a phrase, a haunting echo of these weird old songs in which the soul of the black slave spoke to men. Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine. Then in after years when I came to Nashville I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall⁹ seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of them rose for me morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past.

Little of beauty has America given the world save the rude grandeur God himself stamped on her bosom; the human spirit in this new world has expressed itself in vigor and ingenuity rather than in beauty. And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.

Away back in the thirties¹ the melody of these slave songs stirred the nation, but the songs were soon half forgotten. Some, like “Near the lake where drooped the willow,” passed into current airs and their source was forgotten; others were caricatured on the “minstrel” stage and their memory died away. Then in war-time came the singular Port Royal experiment after the capture of Hilton Head,² and perhaps for the first time the North met the Southern slave

8. From the spiritual “Lay This Body Down.”

9. The central building on the campus of Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee, built with funds raised by the Jubilee Singers. (In the biblical tradition, *Jubilee* signifies a year of grace and atonement that includes the freeing of slaves.)

1. That is, the 1830s.

2. After the Battle of Port Royal, off the coast of South Carolina, in 1861, Confederate troops abandoned Fort Walker, located on Hilton Head, upon which formerly enslaved African Americans there were organized by Union military officials into an experimental work force designed to show that free labor was superior to enslaved labor.

face to face and heart to heart with no third witness. The Sea Islands of the Carolinas, where they met, were filled with a black folk of primitive type, touched and moulded less by the world about them than any others outside the Black Belt. Their appearance was uncouth, their language funny,³ but their hearts were human and their singing stirred men with a mighty power. Thomas Wentworth Higginson hastened to tell of these songs, and Miss McKim⁴ and others urged upon the world their rare beauty. But the world listened only half credulously until the Fisk Jubilee Singers⁵ sang the slave songs so deeply into the world's heart that it can never wholly forget them again.

There was once a blacksmith's son born at Cadiz, New York, who in the changes of time taught school in Ohio and helped defend Cincinnati from Kirby Smith.⁶ Then he fought at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg⁷ and finally served in the Freedman's Bureau at Nashville. Here he formed a Sunday-school class of black children in 1866, and sang with them and taught them to sing. And then they taught him to sing, and when once the glory of the Jubilee songs passed into the soul of George L. White,⁸ he knew his life-work was to let those Negroes sing to the world as they had sung to him. So in 1871 the pilgrimage of the Fisk Jubilee Singers began. North to Cincinnati they rode,—four half-clothed black boys and five girl-women,—led by a man with a cause and a purpose. They stopped at Wilberforce, the oldest of Negro schools, where a black bishop blessed them. Then they went, fighting cold and starvation, shut out of hotels, and cheerfully sneered at, ever northward; and ever the magic of their song kept thrilling hearts, until a burst of applause in the Congregational Council at Oberlin revealed them to the world. They came to New York and Henry Ward Beecher⁹ dared to welcome them, even though the metropolitan dailies sneered at his "Nigger Minstrels." So their songs conquered till they sang across the land and across the sea, before Queen and Kaiser, in Scotland and Ireland, Holland and Switzerland. Seven years they sang, and brought back a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to found Fisk University.

Since their day they have been imitated—sometimes well, by the singers of Hampton and Atlanta,¹ sometimes ill, by straggling quartettes. Caricature has sought again to spoil the quaint beauty of the music, and has filled the air with many debased melodies which vulgar ears scarce know from the real. But the true Negro folk-song still lives in the hearts of those who have heard them truly sung and in the hearts of the Negro people.

What are these songs, and what do they mean? I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the

3. Many of the inhabitants of the Sea Islands, located off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, spoke (and still speak to this day) a creole language called Gullah, based on English and a number of African languages.

4. Lucy McKim Garrison (1842–1877) collected slave songs in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and co-edited *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867); Higginson (1823–1911), commanded the first regiment of African American soldiers in the Civil War, and later commented on spirituals in his memoir *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1870).

5. A well-known singing group comprised of former slaves, organized in 1871 to raise funds for

Fisk University.

6. Confederate general (1824–1893).

7. Chancellorsville, Virginia, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, were sites of well-known Civil War battles.

8. White (1838–1895), the treasurer of Fisk University, organized and led the Jubilee Singers.

9. One of the most famous clergymen of his time, Beecher (1813–1887) was a staunch antislavery advocate and the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

1. A reference to other institutions devoted to African American education in Hampton, Virginia, and Atlanta, Georgia.

world. They tell us in these eager days that life was joyous to the black slave, careless² and happy. I can easily believe this of some, of many. But not all the past South, though it rose from the dead, can gainsay the heart-touching witness of these songs. They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways.

The songs are indeed the siftings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words, and in it we can trace here and there signs of development. My grandfather's grandmother was seized by an evil Dutch trader two centuries ago; and coming to the valleys of the Hudson and Housatonic, black, little, and lithe, she shivered and shrank in the harsh north winds, looked longingly at the hills, and often crooned a heathen melody to the child between her knees, thus:

Do ba - na co - ba, ge - ne me, ge - ne me!

Do ba - na co - ba, ge - ne me, ge - ne me!

Ben d' nu - li, nu - li, nu - li, nu - li, ben d' le.

The child sang it to his children and they to their children's children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.

This was primitive African music; it may be seen in larger form in the strange chant which heralds "The Coming of John":

"You may bury me in the East,
 You may bury me in the West,
 But I'll hear the trumpet sound in that morning,"

—the voice of exile.

Ten master songs, more or less, one may pluck from this forest of melody—songs of undoubted Negro origin and wide popular currency, and songs peculiarly characteristic of the slave. One of these I have just mentioned. Another whose strains begin this book is "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen." When, struck with a sudden poverty, the United States refused to fulfil its promises of land to the freedmen, a brigadier-general went down to the Sea Islands to carry the news. An old woman on the outskirts of the throng began singing this song; all the mass joined with her, swaying. And the soldier wept.

The third song is the cradle-song of death which all men know,—
 "Swing low, sweet chariot,"—whose bars begin the life story of "Alexander

2. That is, carefree.

Crummell.³ Then there is the song of many waters, “Roll, Jordan, roll,” a mighty chorus with minor cadences. There were many songs of the fugitive like that which opens “The Wings of Atalanta,” and the more familiar “Been a-listening.” The seventh is the song of the End and the Beginning—“My Lord, what a mourning! when the stars begin to fall”; a strain of this is placed before “The Dawn of Freedom.” The song of groping—“My way’s cloudy”—begins “The Meaning of Progress”; the ninth is the song of this chapter—“Wrestlin’ Jacob, the day is a-breaking,”—a pæan of hopeful strife. The last master song is the song of songs—“Steal away,”—sprung from “The Faith of the Fathers.”

There are many others of the Negro folk-songs as striking and characteristic as these, as, for instance, the three strains in the third, eighth, and ninth chapters; and others I am sure could easily make a selection on more scientific principles. There are, too, songs that seem to me a step removed from the more primitive types: there is the maze-like medley, “Bright sparkles,” one phrase of which heads “The Black Belt”; the Easter carol, “Dust, dust and ashes”; the dirge, “My mother’s took her flight and gone home”; and that burst of melody hovering over “The Passing of the First-Born”—“I hope my mother will be there in that beautiful world on high.”

These represent a third step in the development of the slave song, of which “You may bury me in the East” is the first, and songs like “March on” (chapter six) and “Steal away” are the second. The first is African music, the second Afro-American, while the third is a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land. The result is still distinctively Negro and the method of blending original, but the elements are both Negro and Caucasian. One might go further and find a fourth step in this development, where the songs of white America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody, as “Swanee River” and “Old Black Joe.”⁴ Side by side, too, with the growth has gone the debasements and imitations—the Negro “minstrel” songs, many of the “gospel” hymns, and some of the contemporary “coon” songs,—a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro melodies.

In these songs, I have said, the slave spoke to the world. Such a message is naturally veiled and half articulate. Words and music have lost each other and new and cant phrases of a dimly understood theology have displaced the older sentiment. Once in a while we catch a strange word of an unknown tongue, as the “Mighty Myo,” which figures as a river of death; more often slight words or mere doggerel are joined to music of singular sweetness. Purely secular songs are few in number, partly because many of them were turned into hymns by a change of words, partly because the frolics were seldom heard by the stranger, and the music less often caught. Of nearly all the songs, however, the music is distinctly sorrowful. The ten master songs I have mentioned tell in word and music of trouble and exile, of strife and hiding; they grope toward some unseen power and sigh for rest in the End.

The words that are left to us are not without interest, and, cleared of evident dross, they conceal much of real poetry and meaning beneath conven-

3. Chapter XII of *Souls of Black Folk* is “Of Alexander Crummell”; Crummell (1819–1898), an African American, was an influential Episcopalian priest and philosopher. Throughout this

paragraph and the next, Du Bois refers to other chapters in *Souls of Black Folk*, explaining the songs that he has chosen as epigraphs.

4. Popular songs by Stephen Foster (1826–1864).

tional theology and unmeaning rhapsody. Like all primitive folk, the slave stood near to Nature's heart. Life was a "rough and rolling sea" like the brown Atlantic of the Sea Islands; the "Wilderness" was the home of God, and the "lonesome valley" led to the way of life. "Winter'll soon be over," was the picture of life and death to a tropical imagination. The sudden wild thunderstorms of the South awed and impressed the Negroes,—at times the rumbling seemed to them "mournful," at times imperious:

"My Lord calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds it in my soul."⁵

The monotonous toil and exposure is painted in many words. One sees the ploughmen in the hot, moist furrow, singing:

"Dere's no rain to wet you,
Dere's no sun to burn you,
Oh, push along, believer,
I want to go home."

The bowed and bent old man cries, with thrice-repeated wail:

"O Lord, keep me from sinking down,"

and he rebukes the devil of doubt who can whisper:

"Jesus is dead and God's gone away."

Yet the soul-hunger is there, the restlessness of the savage, the wail of the wanderer, and the plaint is put in one little phrase:



My soul wants some thing that's new, that's new . . .

Over the inner thoughts of the slaves and their relations one with another the shadow of fear ever hung, so that we get but glimpses here and there, and also with them, eloquent omissions and silences. Mother and child are sung, but seldom father; fugitive and weary wanderer call for pity and affection, but there is little of wooing and wedding; the rocks and the mountains are well known, but home is unknown. Strange blending of love and helplessness sings through the refrain:

"Yonder's my ole mudder,
Been waggin' at de hill so long;
'Bout time she cross over,
Git home bime-by."

Elsewhere comes the cry of the "motherless" and the "Farewell, farewell, my only child."

5. Here and in the pages that follow, Du Bois quotes from a series of spirituals, including "Steal Away," "There's No Rain to Wet You," "Keep Me from Sinking Down," "My Soul Wants Something That's New," "O'er the Crossing," "Poor Rosy,"

"Dust and Ashes," "There's a Little Wheel A-Turnin'," "My Lord, What a Morning," "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore," and "Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveler."

Love-songs are scarce and fall into two categories—the frivolous and light, and the sad. Of deep successful love there is ominous silence, and in one of the oldest of these songs there is a depth of history and meaning:



Poor Ro - sy, poor gal; Poor Ro - sy.
 poor gal; Ro - sy break my poor heart.
 Heav'n shall - a - be my home.

A black woman said of the song, “It can’t be sung without a full heart and a troubled sperrit.” The same voice sings here that sings in the German folk-song:

“Jetz Geh i’ an’s brunele, trink’ aber net.”⁶

Of death the Negro showed little fear, but talked of it familiarly and even fondly as simply a crossing of the waters, perhaps—who knows?—back to his ancient forests again. Later days transfigured his fatalism, and amid the dust and dirt the toiler sang:

“Dust, dust and ashes, fly over my grave,
 But the Lord shall bear my spirit home.”

The things evidently borrowed from the surrounding world undergo characteristic change when they enter the mouth of the slave. Especially is this true of Bible phrases. “Weep, O captive daughter of Zion,” is quaintly turned into “Zion, weep-a-low,” and the wheels of Ezekiel are turned every way in the mystic dreaming of the slave, till he says:

“There’s a little wheel a-turnin’ in-a-my heart.”

As in olden time, the words of these hymns were improvised by some leading minstrel of the religious band. The circumstances of the gathering, however, the rhythm of the songs, and the limitations of allowable thought, confined the poetry for the most part to single or double lines, and they seldom were expanded to quatrains or longer tales, although there are some few examples of sustained efforts, chiefly paraphrases of the Bible. Three short series of verses have always attracted me,—the one that heads this chapter, of one line of which Thomas Wentworth Higginson has fittingly said, “Never, it seems to me, since man first lived and suffered was his infinite longing for peace uttered more plaintively.” The second and third are descriptions of the Last Judgment,—the one a late improvisation, with some traces of outside influence:

“Oh, the stars in the elements are falling,
 And the moon drips away into blood,

6. Now I’m going to the well, but I’m not going to drink (German).

And the ransomed of the Lord are returning unto God,
Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

And the other earlier and homelier picture from the low coast lands:

“Michael, haul the boat ashore,
Then you’ll hear the horn they blow,
Then you’ll hear the trumpet sound,
Trumpet sound the world around,
Trumpet sound for rich and poor,
Trumpet sound the Jubilee,
Trumpet sound for you and me.”

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?

The silently growing assumption of this age is that the probation of races is past, and that the backward races of to-day are of proven inefficiency and not worth the saving. Such an assumption is the arrogance of peoples irreverent toward Time and ignorant of the deeds of men. A thousand years ago such an assumption, easily possible, would have made it difficult for the Teuton to prove his right to life. Two thousand years ago such dogmatism, readily welcome, would have scouted⁷ the idea of blond races ever leading civilization. So woe-fully unorganized is sociological knowledge that the meaning of progress, the meaning of “swift” and “slow” in human doing, and the limits of human perfectability, are veiled, unanswered sphinxes on the shores of science. Why should Æschylus⁸ have sung two thousand years before Shakespeare was born? Why has civilization flourished in Europe, and flickered, flamed, and died in Africa? So long as the world stands meekly dumb before such questions, shall this nation proclaim its ignorance and unhallowed prejudices by denying freedom of opportunity to those who brought the Sorrow Songs to the Seats of the Mighty?

Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song—soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit. Around us the history of the land has centred for thrice a hundred years; out of the nation’s heart we have called all that was best to throttle and subdue all that was worst; fire and blood, prayer and sacrifice, have billowed over this people, and they have found peace only in the altars of the God of Right. Nor has our gift of the Spirit been merely passive. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice,

7. Mocked; scorned.

8. Greek dramatist (525–456 B.C.E.), author of *Agamemnon*, *Prometheus Bound*, and many other plays, most of which are now lost.

Mercy, and Truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people?

Even so is the hope that sang in the songs of my fathers well sung. If somewhere in this whirl and chaos of things there dwells Eternal Good, pitiful yet masterful, then anon in His good time America shall rend the Veil and the prisoned shall go free. Free, free as the sunshine trickling down the morning into these high windows of mine, free as yonder fresh young voices welling up to me from the caverns of brick and mortar below—swelling with song, instinct with life, tremulous treble and darkening bass. My children, my little children, are singing to the sunshine, and thus they sing:

Let us cheer the wea - ry trav - el - ler,

Cheer the wea - ry trav - el - ler, Let us

cheer the wea - ry trav - el - ler A -

- long the heav - en - ly way.

And the traveller girds himself, and sets his face toward the Morning, and goes his way.

Realism and Naturalism

Realism and *naturalism* are closely related terms in American literary history, terms that authors, editors, and critics used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when debating the purpose of literature, the role of literature in a democratic society, and the future of literary expression. Both terms were used to describe a rejection of the past—to make the claim that writers in the current generation were doing something new and distinct from their predecessors. Because these terms were used so widely, and for such different purposes, they are slippery and elastic. Sometimes they are used interchangeably; sometimes they appear as opposites. Because they are such close cousins, realism and naturalism can be better understood as a set of attitudes and tendencies rather than as clearly distinct literary periods or categories.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, realism was commonly identified as an emerging force in American fiction, both novels and short stories. Realism implies a rejection of romantic, heroic, exaggerated, and idealistic views of life in favor of detailed, accurate descriptions of the everyday. The characters are presented as ordinary people involved in the normal moral dilemmas of life. Some proponents of realism (and indeed some of its opponents) understood American realism to be an adaptation that borrowed from the best of European fiction. However, because realism focused on the manners and speech of common people, some also believed that realism could play a special role in the United States by representing a variety of populations with accuracy and sympathy. In this way, literature would both reflect and cultivate a democratic society.

Realism was more of a label of convenience for critics than a coherent movement. The works considered then and now as realist diverge in significant ways. Mark Twain's fiction employed regional and class dialects to comic effect—often with a sharp satiric edge. Henry James extended his dramas of upper-class life into the flow of interior thoughts, pushing realism towards stream of consciousness and other characteristics of literary modernism. In her depiction of coastal Maine, Sarah Orne Jewett emphasized how a way of life could be deeply rooted in a landscape and its history—while Abraham Cahan turned similar attention to the lives of working-class Jews in New York.

In spite of this diversity, naturalists asserted that realists focused too narrowly on the middle and professional classes. They claimed that the lives of the poor and the marginalized required a more dramatic form of literature to depict the powerful forces that were shaping American life at the turn of the twentieth century. Naturalists frequently drew on social interpretations of Darwinian evolution, which they employed as a lens to understand the struggles that they saw around them, particularly economic contests between capital and labor. They were frequently pessimistic about the ability of contemporary society to deliver justice, because they understood the human world as driven by animal instincts that lay barely beneath the surface of polite society. In Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), the narrator observes, "Our civilisation is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason."

With this interest in the primal forces driving human conflict, naturalist fiction frequently relies on plots with incidents of dramatic violence. Naturalistic subject matter ranges from Stephen Crane's awed and terrified Union soldier in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), to Frank Norris's and Upton Sinclair's exposés of the power of capitalism in *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Jungle* (1906), to the portraits

of psychopathic characters in Norris's *McTeague* (1899) and Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf* (1904). Like *The Octopus*, London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) was at once a profoundly naturalistic novel and an intensely romantic fable; in London's fiction, though human nature seems inevitably to go wrong, it may be saved in rugged environments where "civilized" notions such as self-gain are no longer useful. By asking questions about the fundamental laws of humanity and human progress, naturalist fiction provided a means of deep inquiry into the meaning of human existence in a world that could be both hostile and cruel.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

The influence of William Dean Howells (1837–1920) went far beyond the impact of his own novels. As the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, he could select, encourage, and promote those writers he considered to be examples of literary realism, which he called "the only literary movement of our time that has any vitality in it." Howells believed that realism would combine artistic achievement and a sense of ethical purpose, allowing literature to fulfill an important mission by representing true portraits of a society and its people. In particular, Howells described literary realism as an antidote to the sentimental romance, which he believed to be dangerous; romance, he believed, depicted characters making choices that could or should not be replicated by their readers.

Howells also believed that literary realism could help hold together an American society increasingly fractured by social class and ethnicity. Realism would do so through the close observation of speech and habits. Howells's own fiction largely depicted the people he knew best: the white, urban professional class. But as an editor and reviewer he supported regional and local-color writers from throughout the United States, as well as writers from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. "Democracy in literature," Howells wrote, "wishes to know and to tell the truth, confident that consolation and delight are there. . . . Men are more alike than unlike one another: let us make them know one another better, that they may be all humbled and strengthened with a sense of their fraternity."

This section contains selections from Howells's "Editor's Study" column, which he published in *Harper's* from 1886 to 1892. In these columns, Howells surveyed the literary developments of his time, both in the United States and abroad, and championed his own literary values. In these excerpts, Howells takes aim at novels that "flatter the passions" and "weaken the mental fibre" of their readers. The test of literature, he writes, is in its ability to represent the real, not the ideal, in art—an argument he makes, comically, by ridiculing an artist who would prefer an artificial, "romantic card-board grasshopper" to an actual insect found in nature. The time is coming, Howells portends, when readers will judge all literature, both past and present, by its ability to present "the simple, the natural, and the honest."

From Editor's Study¹

* * *

Without taking them too seriously, it still must be owned that the “gaudy hero and heroine” are to blame for a great deal of harm in the world. That heroine long taught by example, if not precept, that Love, or the passion or fancy she mistook for it, was the chief interest of a life which is really concerned with a great many other things; that it was lasting in the way she knew it; that it was worthy of every sacrifice, and was altogether a finer thing than prudence, obedience, reason; that love alone was glorious and beautiful, and these were mean and ugly in comparison with it. More lately she has begun to idolize and illustrate Duty, and she is hardly less mischievous in this new rôle, opposing duty, as she did love, to prudence, obedience, and reason. The stock hero, whom, if we met him, we could not fail to see was a most deplorable person, has undoubtedly imposed himself upon the victims of the fiction habit as admirable. With him, too, love was and is the great affair, whether in its old romantic phase of chivalrous achievement or manifold suffering for love's sake, or its more recent development of the “virile,” the bullying, and the brutal, or its still more recent agonies of self-sacrifice, as idle and useless as the moral experiences of the insane asylums. With his vain posturing and his ridiculous splendor he is really a painted barbarian, the prey of his passions and his delusions, full of obsolete ideals, and the motives and ethics of a savage, which the guilty author of his being does his best—or his worst—in spite of his own light and knowledge, to foist upon the reader as something generous and noble. We are not merely bringing this charge against that sort of fiction which is beneath literature and outside of it, “the shoreless lakes of ditch-water,”² whose miasms fill the air below the empyrean where the great ones sit; but we are accusing the work of some of the most famous, who have, in this instance or in that, sinned against the truth, which can alone exalt and purify men. We do not say that they have constantly done so, or even commonly done so; but that they have done so at all marks them as of the past, to be read with the due historical allowance for their epoch and their conditions. For we believe that, while inferior writers will and must continue to imitate them in their foibles and their errors, no one hereafter will be able to achieve greatness who is false to humanity, either in its facts or its duties. The light of civilization has already broken even upon the novel, and no conscientious man can now set about painting an image of life without perpetual question of the verity of his work, and without feeling bound to distinguish so clearly that no reader of his may be misled, between what is right and what is wrong, what is noble and what is base, what is health and what is perdition, in the actions and the characters he portrays.

The fiction that aims merely to entertain—the fiction that is to serious fiction as the *opéra bouffe*,³ the ballet, and the pantomime are to the true

1. These excerpts from Howells's “Editor's Study” columns first appeared in *Harper's Monthly* in April and December 1887.

2. The quoted phrase comes from the Scottish essayist, historian, and critic Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), and it refers to historical papers he

used in compiling an edition of the letters and speeches of the English soldier and statesman Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658).

3. Comic opera (French), sometimes used to refer to the broader category of light opera.

drama—need not feel the burden of this obligation so deeply; but even such fiction will not be gay or trivial to any reader's hurt, and criticism will hold it to account if it passes from painting to teaching folly.

More and more not only the criticism which prints its opinions, but the infinitely vaster and powerfuler criticism which thinks and feels them merely, will make this demand. For our own part we confess that we do not care to judge any work of the imagination without first of all applying this test to it. We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true?—true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women? This truth, which necessarily includes the highest morality and the highest artistry—this truth given, the book *cannot* be wicked and cannot be weak; and without it all graces of style and feats of invention and cunning of construction are so many superfluities of naughtiness. It is well for the truth to have all these, and shine in them, but for falsehood they are merely meretricious, the bedizenment of the wanton; they atone for nothing, they count for nothing. But in fact they come naturally of truth, and grace it without solicitation; they are added unto it. In the whole range of fiction we know of no *true* picture of life—that is, of human nature—which is not also a masterpiece of literature, full of divine and natural beauty. It may have no touch or tint of this special civilization or of that; it had *better* have this local color well ascertained; but the truth is deeper and finer than aspects, and if the book is true to what men and women know of one another's souls it will be true enough, and it will be great and beautiful. It is the conception of literature as something apart from life, super-finely aloof, which makes it really unimportant to the great mass of mankind, without a message or a meaning for them; and it is the notion that a novel may be false in its portrayal of causes and effects that makes literary art contemptible even to those whom it amuses that forbids them to regard the novelist as a serious or right-minded person. If they do not in some moment of indignation cry out against all novels, as our correspondent does, they remain besotted in the fume of the delusions purveyed to them, with no higher feeling for the author than such maudlin affection as the *habitué* of an opium-joint perhaps knows for the attendant who fills his pipe with the drug.

* * *

The time is coming, we trust, when each new author, each new artist, will be considered, not in his proportion to any other author or artist, but in his relation to the human nature, known to us all, which it is his privilege, his high duty, to interpret. "The true standard of the artist is in every man's power" already, as Burke says; Michelangelo's "light of the piazza," the glance of the common eye, is and always was the best light on a statue; Goethe's "boys and blackbirds"⁴ have in all ages been the real connoisseurs of berries; but hitherto the mass of common men have been afraid to apply their own simplicity, naturalness, and honesty to the appreciation of the beauti-

4. In *From My Life: Poetry and Truth* (1811–1830), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) remarks that to know the taste of berries and cherries, one should ask the boys and the birds. "As Burke says": slight misquotation from *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) by Edmund Burke

(1599–1658). "Light of the piazza": from a comment attributed to the Italian artist Michelangelo (1474–1564), who was advising a fellow sculptor not to worry about how a work appeared in his studio, but to be concerned about how it would look in the public outdoors.

ful. They have always cast about for the instruction of some one who professed to know better, and who browbeat wholesome common-sense into the self-distrust that ends in sophistication. They have fallen generally to the worst of this bad species, and have been "amused and misled" (how pretty that quaint old use of *amuse* is!) "by the false lights" of critical vanity and self-righteousness. They have been taught to compare what they see and what they read, not with the things that they have observed and known, but with the things that some other artist or writer has done. Especially if they have themselves the artistic impulse in any direction they are taught to form themselves, not upon life, but upon the masters who became masters only by forming themselves upon life. The seeds of death are planted in them, and they can produce only the still-born, the academic. They are not told to take their work into the public square and see if it seems true to the chance passer, but to test it by the work of the very men who refused and decried any other test of their own work. The young writer who attempts to report the phrase and carriage of every-day life, who tries to tell just how he has heard men talk and seen them look, is made to feel guilty of something low and unworthy by the stupid people who would like to have him show how Shakespeare's men talked and looked, or Scott's, or Thackeray's, or Balzac's, or Hawthorne's, or Dickens's;⁵ he is instructed to idealize his personages, that is, to take the life-likeness out of them, and put the literary-likeness into them. He is approached in the spirit of the wretched pedantry into which learning, much or little, always decays when it withdraws itself and stands apart from experience in an attitude of imagined superiority, and which would say with the same confidence to the scientist: "I see that you are looking at a grasshopper there which you have found in the grass, and I suppose you intend to describe it. Now don't waste your time and sin against culture in *that* way. I've got a grasshopper here, which has been evolved at considerable pains and expense out of the grasshopper in general; in fact, it's a type. It's made up of wire and cardboard, very prettily painted in a conventional tint, and it's perfectly indestructible. It isn't very much like a real grasshopper, but it's a great deal nicer, and it's served to represent the notion of a grasshopper ever since man emerged from barbarism. You may say that it's artificial. Well, it is artificial; but then it's ideal too; and what you want to do is to cultivate the ideal. You'll find the books full of my kind of grasshopper, and scarcely a trace of yours in any of them. The thing that you are proposing to do is commonplace; but if you say that it isn't commonplace, for the very reason that it hasn't been done before, you'll have to admit that it's photographic."

As we said, we hope the time is coming when not only the artist, but the common, average man, who always "has the standard of the arts in his power," will have also the courage to apply it, and will reject the ideal grasshopper wherever he finds it, in science, in literature, in art, because it is not "simple, natural, and honest," because it is not like a real grasshopper. But we will own that we think the time is yet far off, and that the people who have been brought up on the ideal grasshopper, the heroic

5. British novelists Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863), French novelist Honoré de Balzac (1779–1850),

American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864), and British novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870).

grasshopper, the impassioned grasshopper, the self-devoted, adventurous, good old romantic card-board grasshopper, must die out before the simple, honest, and natural grasshopper can have a fair field. We are in no haste to compass the end of these good people, whom we find in the mean time very amusing. It is delightful to meet one of them, either in print or out of it—some sweet elderly lady or excellent gentleman whose youth was pastured on the literature of thirty or forty years ago—and to witness the confidence with which they preach their favorite authors as all the law and the prophets. They have commonly read little or nothing since, or, if they have, they have judged it by a standard taken from these authors, and never dreamt of judging it by nature; they are destitute of the documents in the case of the later writers; they suppose that Balzac was the beginning of realism, and that Zola⁶ is its wicked end; they are quite ignorant, but they are ready to talk you down, if you differ from them, with an assumption of knowledge sufficient for any occasion. The horror, the resentment, with which they receive any question of their very peccable literary saints is to be matched only by the frenzy of the *Saturday Review*⁷ in defending the British aristocracy; you descend at once very far in the moral and social scale, and anything short of offensive personality is too good for you; it is expressed to you that you are one to be avoided, and put down even a little lower than you have naturally fallen.

These worthy persons are not to blame; it is part of their intellectual mission to represent the petrification of taste, and to preserve an image of a smaller and cruder and emptier world than we now live in, a world which was feeling its way toward the simple, the natural, the honest, but was a good deal “amused and misled” by lights now no longer mistakable for heavenly luminaries. They belong to a time, just passing away, when certain authors were considered authorities in certain kinds, when they must be accepted entire and not questioned in any particular. Now we are beginning to see and to say that no author is an authority except in those moments when he held his ear close to Nature’s lips and caught her very accent. These moments are not continuous with any authors in the past, and they are rare with all. Therefore we are not afraid to say now that the greatest classics are sometimes not at all great, and that we can profit by them only when we hold them, like our meanest contemporaries, to a strict accounting, and verify their work by the standard of the arts which we all have in our power, the simple, the natural, and the honest.

1887

6. French writer Émile Zola (1840–1902), whose work was widely considered the leading example of literary naturalism. Because Zola’s fiction

depicted working-class subjects and characters such as prostitutes, it was highly controversial.

7. Weekly newspaper published in London.

HENRY JAMES

Perhaps the most famous description of realism in the novel is Henry James's essay "The Art of Fiction," in which James (1843–1916) dismisses all prescriptions for novelistic success. James was writing in response to the English novelist and critic Walter Besant, who had proposed that the good novel had to be overtly moral. James offered a rebuttal that rejected all categorical requirements of the novel: "I am quite at a loss to imagine anything (at any rate in this matter of fiction) that people *ought* to like or to dislike. Selection will be sure to take care of itself, for it has a constant motive behind it. That motive is simply experience." The great novelist, James writes, will be keenly attuned to the environment and able to deduce larger truths by understanding the meaning of small details. Typically, the examples that he cites—the novelist who observes a single Parisian meal, the young man who decides against entering a church—are not "extraordinary or startling incidents." Rather, James's interest is in fine-grained ambiguity; his idea of consciousness—a sort of spiderweb of "the very atmosphere of the mind"—means that the question of the "moral" in a work of fiction is irrelevant. James contends that "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. . . . No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind."

*From The Art of Fiction*¹

* * *

It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of it, and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nose-gay should be composed, that is another affair. It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience; to our suppositious aspirant such a declaration might savour of mockery. What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen. I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that

1. First published in *Longman's Magazine* 4 (September 1884), then in James's *Partial Portraits* (1888); reprinted in *Selected Literary Criticism* by Henry James (1968), from which this text is taken.

she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur*,² some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her direct personal impression, and she turned out her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, 'Write from experience and experience only', I should feel that this was rather a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, 'Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!'

* * *

A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. The critic who over the close texture of a finished work shall pretend to trace a geography of items will mark some frontiers as artificial, I fear, as any that have been known to history. There is an old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident which must have cost many a smile to the intending fabulist who was keen about his work. It appears to me as little to the point as the equally celebrated distinction between the novel and the romance—to answer as little to any reality. There are bad novels and good novels, as there are bad pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning, and I can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as I can imagine speaking of a picture of character. When one says picture one says of character, when one says novel one says of incident, and the terms may be transposed at will. What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is *not* of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it? It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character. If you say you don't see it (character in *that—allons*

2. Minister, pastor (French).

done!),³ this is exactly what the artist who has reason of his own for thinking he *does* see it undertakes to show you. When a young man makes up his mind that he has not faith enough after all to enter the church as he intended, that is an incident, though you may not hurry to the end of the chapter to see whether perhaps he doesn't change once more. I do not say that these are extraordinary or startling incidents. I do not pretend to estimate the degree of interest proceeding from them, for this will depend upon the skill of the painter. It sounds almost puerile to say that some incidents are intrinsically much more important than others, and I need not take this precaution after having professed my sympathy for the major ones in remarking that the only classification of the novel that I can understand is into that which has life and that which has it not.

* * *

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground: if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illuminate for him many of the mysteries of 'purpose'.

* * *

1884

3. Let's go! (French).

HAMLIN GARLAND

Raised on midwestern farms, Hamlin Garland (1860–1940) earned a national reputation with his short-story collection *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891). He later wrote a novel about the challenges facing rural women—*Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895)—as well as several more popular adventure novels and autobiographical volumes. In his early career, Garland was a fierce critic of the American tax system, which he believed to be unfair to small farmers. After moving to Boston in 1884, Garland became acquainted with Howells, and he wrote several articles supporting literary realism, or to use his preferred term, “veritism.” (He complained that “realism” had “been indiscriminately applied to everything.”) Garland collected these articles and extended the work into a book, *Crumbling Idols* (1894), in which he argued that “American literature must be faithful to American conditions.” Garland believed that the cultural elites of the eastern United States were still trapped by their desire to imitate Europe and that realism, especially when adopted by writers of the Midwest and the West, was the key to American literary independence. In “Local Color in Art,” Garland argues for the beauty of literature that is “rooted in the soil” of its particular place and time; he tells a story about the gradual flowering of this mode of literary production in the United States.

*From Local Color in Art*¹

Local color in fiction is demonstrably the life of fiction. It is the native element, the differentiating element. It corresponds to the endless and vital charm of individual peculiarity. It is the differences which interest us; the similarities do not please, do not forever stimulate and feed as do the differences. Literature would die of dry rot if it chronicled the similarities only, or even largely.

* * *

It has taken the United States longer to achieve independence of English critics than it took to free itself from old-world political and economic rule. Its political freedom was won, not by its gentlemen and scholars, but by its yeomanry; and in the same way our national literature will come in its fullness when the common American rises spontaneously to the expression of his concept of life.

The fatal blight upon most American art has been, and is to-day, its imitative quality, which has kept it characterless and factitious,—a forced rose-culture rather than the free flowering of native plants.

Our writers despised or feared the home market. They rested their immortality upon the “universal theme,” which was a theme of no interest to the public and of small interest to themselves.

During the first century and a half, our literature had very little national color. It was quite like the utterance of corresponding classes in England. But at length Bryant and Cooper felt the influence of our mighty forests and prairies. Whittier uttered something of New England boy-life, and Thoreau prodded about among newly discovered wonders, and the American literature got its first start.²

Under the influence of Cooper came the stories of wild life from Texas, from Ohio, and from Illinois. The wild, rough settlements could not produce smooth and cultured poems or stories; they only furnished forth rough-and-ready anecdotes, but in these stories there were hints of something fine and strong and native.

As the settlements increased in size, as the pressure of the forest and the wild beast grew less, expression rose to a higher plane; men softened in speech and manner. All preparations were being made for a local literature raised to the level of art.

The Pacific slope was first in the line. By the exceptional interest which the world took in the life of the gold fields, and by the forward urge which seems always to surprise the pessimist and the scholiast, two young men were plunged into that wild life, led across the plains set in the shadow of Mount Shasta,³ and local literature received its first great marked, decided impetus.

1. “Local Color in Art” was published as part of Garland’s 1894 book, *Crumbling Idols*, from which this text is taken.

2. This paragraph refers to American writers: poet William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), novelist James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851), poet John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892), and essayist Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862).

3. A peak in northern California, the second-highest mountain in the Cascade range. “Scholiast”: a scholar who annotates and comments on texts, particularly ancient or classical literature. “Two young men”: presumably a reference to California writers Joaquin Miller (1837–1913) and Bret Harte (1836–1902).

To-day we have in America, at last, a group of writers who have no suspicion of imitation laid upon them. Whatever faults they may be supposed to have, they are at any rate, themselves. American critics can depend upon a characteristic American literature of fiction and the drama from these people.

The corn has flowered, and the cotton-boll has broken into speech.

Local color—what is it? It means that the writer spontaneously reflects the life which goes on around him. It is natural and unstrained art.

* * *

I assert it is the most natural thing in the world for a man to love his native land and his native, intimate surroundings. Born into a web of circumstances, enmeshed in common life, the youthful artist begins to think. All the associations of that childhood and the love-life of youth combine to make that web of common affairs, threads of silver and beads of gold; the near-at-hand things are the dearest and sweetest after all.

As the reader will see, I am using local color to mean something more than a forced study of the picturesque scenery of a State.

Local color in a novel means that it has such quality of texture and background that it could not have been written in any other place or by any one else than a native.

It means a statement of life as indigenous as the plant-growth. It means that the picturesque shall not be seen by the author,—that every tree and bird and mountain shall be dear and companionable and necessary, not picturesque; the tourist cannot write the local novel.

From this it follows that local color must not be put in for the sake of local color. It must go in, it *will* go in, because the writer naturally carries it with him half unconsciously, or conscious only of its significance, its interest to him.

He must not stop to think whether it will interest the reader or not. He must be loyal to himself, and put it in because he loves it. If he is an artist, he will make his reader feel it through his own emotion.

* * *

1894

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER

William Roscoe Thayer (1859–1923) was a biographer, historian, and critic whose books included works on Italian history, the history of literature, and political figures such as George Washington and Theodore Roosevelt. He edited *Harvard Graduate's Magazine* for over two decades, and in 1918 he became the first president of the American Historical Association. In “The New Story-Tellers and the Doom of Realism,” he takes aim squarely at advocates of literary realism, whom he calls “Epidermists,” because their focus on life extends no deeper than the surface or the skin. Naming William Dean Howells as his chief example, Thayer argues that realism has ignored the desires of readers by applying a “scientific

method” to literature. Like science, Thayer writes, literary realism has attempted an impartial, accurate record of every detail, no matter how small—an approach that neglects the importance of the imagination in interpreting the human condition. At the time that he wrote the article, Thayer could point to the popularity of the adventure novels of the English author Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) as a sign that realism was already passing out of fashion. Soon, Thayer predicted, literary realism would be forgotten as a minor, and unfortunate, “fad.”

From The New Story-Tellers and the Doom of Realism¹

* * *

And now Realism—a movement which, but for the deep matters it involves, we might call a fad—is on the wane. It has been the logical outcome of our age, whose characteristic is analysis. Our modern science, abandoning the search for the Absolute, has been scrutinizing every atom, to weigh and name it, and to discover its relations with its neighbors. “Relativity” has been the watchword. Science literally knows neither great nor small: it examines the microbe and Sirius² with equal interest; it draws no distinction between beauty and ugliness—having no preference for the toadstool or the rose, the sculpin³ or the trout: it is impartial; it seeks only to know. By observation and experiment, by advancing from the known to the unknown, science has begun to make the first accurate inventory of the substances, laws, and properties of the world of matter. Its achievements have already been stupendous. Its methods have dominated all the other works in our time; it was inevitable that they should encroach on the sphere of art and of literature.

Arguing from analogy the Realist persuaded himself that the only means for attaining perfect accuracy in fiction must be experiment and observation, which had brought such rich returns to Science. He disdained anything except an exact reproduction of real life—hence his name, Realist. To him, as to the man of science, there should be, he declared, neither beauty nor ugliness, great nor small, goodness nor evil; he was impartial; he eliminated the personal equation; he would make his mind as unprejudiced as a photographic plate. To Pyrrhonism⁴ so thoroughgoing, considerations of interest and charm appealed no more than did considerations of morals or of beauty. The Realist frankly announced that the precise record of the humblest mind was just as important as one of Shakespeare’s mind would be. So we have been regaled by our English and American Realists with interminable inspection and introspection of commonplace intellects; and if we have yawned, we have been told that we were still poisoned with Romanticism, and still had a childish desire to read about persons with high titles, moving in the upper circles. Realism, we were assured, was the application of democratic principles to fiction. When, on the other hand, the foreign Realists dealt chiefly in moral filth, we were chidden for our squeamishness, and informed that, since depravity exists, the Realist is in duty bound to make impartial studies of it.

1. “The New Story-Tellers and the Doom of Realism” was published in the December 1894 issue of *Forum*, the source of this text.

2. The Dog Star, the brightest star in the night sky.

3. Small, bottom-dwelling fish.

4. An ancient Greek school of skeptics, who suspended judgment on every proposition.

I need not point out that such doctrines reduce literature, art, and morals to anarchy. The “scientific method,” applied in this way, is not the method for portraying human nature. Only the human can understand, and consequently interpret, the human: how, therefore, shall a man who boasts that he has *dehumanized* himself so that his mind is as impartial as a photographic plate, enabling him to look on his fellow-beings without preferring the good to the bad, the beautiful to the ugly,—how shall he be qualified to speak for the race which does discriminate, does prefer, does feel? The camera sees only the outside; the Realist sees no more, and so it would be more appropriate to call him “Epidermist,” one who investigates only the surface, the cuticle of life,—usually with a preference for very dirty skin.

And, in truth, he deceives himself as to the extent of his scientific impartiality. He, too, has to select; he cannot set down every trivial thought, cannot measure every freckle. His work is fiction—a consideration which he had forgotten. But since he is forced to select, he cannot escape being judged by the same canons as all other artists. Do they not all aim at representing life? Is *Silas Lapham*⁵ produced by Epidermist methods, more real than *Shylock* or *Hamlet*? Will he be thought so three hundred years hence, or will he seem odd and antiquated, a mere fashion, like the cut of old garments? Only the human can understand and interpret the human; and our Epidermists also will, in time, perceive that not by relying on the phonograph and kodak⁶ can they come to know the heart of man. They have mistaken the dead actual for reality, the show of the moment for the essence, the letter for the spirit.

By the imagination have all the highest creations of art and literature been produced, and the general truths of science and morals been discovered: for the imagination is that supreme faculty in man which beholds reality; it is the faculty, furthermore, which synthetizes, which vivifies, which constructs. The Epidermist, whose forte is analysis, discarding the imagination, has hoped by accumulating masses of details to produce as sure an effect of reality, as genius produces by using a few essentials. Yet, merely in the matter of illusion, this is an inferior method: if Mr. Kipling, for instance, can in a paragraph illude his readers to the extent he desires, whereas it takes Mr. Howells or Mr. James ten pages to produce an illusion, the chances are ten to one against Epidermism as a means of literary expression.⁷

That heaping up of minute details which is proper in scientific investigation has influenced immensely all our intellectual processes for the past fifty years. There was a time when theology was the absorbing interest, and even non-theological works of that time, the fiction and poetry, are inevitably saturated with theology. We can detect it plainly and can pronounce it just so far a detriment to the novel or poem in which we find it. So science has permeated our time, encroaching upon, and inevitably vitiating, departments over which it has no jurisdiction. The multitude has been willing to accept the products of Epidermism, because its own imagination has been dulled, and it has come to suppose that observation and experiment were the only methods by which truth can be discovered. Hence the tanks of *real* water

5. The title character of William Dean Howells's novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885).

6. That is, photograph.

7. The comparison is between the popular Brit-

ish writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), author of *Kim* and *The Jungle Book*, and the American realists Howells and Henry James.

and the *real* burglars and the *real* fire-engines in our recent plays, and hence the predominance of Realism in fiction.

But the knell of the Epidermists has sounded. The novels that are everywhere in demand are the novels with a story. Individually, they may be good or bad—it matters not: the significant fact is that the public taste has turned, and that that instinct which is as old as the children of Adam and Eve, the instinct for a story, has reasserted itself.

Realism, therefore, has been a phase, indicating the decadence of fiction, and not, as the Epidermists themselves believed, its regeneration. It represents the period during which fiction has been enslaved by scientific methods, a period when the imagination has lain dormant, and other—lower—faculties have essayed to do her work.

* * *

1894

FRANK NORRIS

The novelist Frank Norris (1870–1902)—whose career was cut short when he died from a ruptured appendix at the age of thirty-two—was one of the most visible proponents of literary naturalism in the United States. In several essays, he disputed the version of realism that Howells practiced. His chief example of naturalism was the fiction of the French writer Émile Zola, whom Norris believed to be a model in his literary representation of the force and vigor of modern life. In “A Plea for Romantic Fiction,” first published in 1901, Norris contended that the realism of Howells was bloodless and dull in its depiction of middle-class life. His characterization of realism as “the drama of a broken teacup” proved to be influential as a way of distinguishing between the literary realists of last two decades of the nineteenth century and the naturalists of the early twentieth. “A Plea for Romantic Fiction” was included in Norris’s posthumously published book *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (1903).

A Plea for Romantic Fiction¹

Let us at the start make a distinction. Observe that one speaks of Romanticism and not of sentimentalism. One claims that the latter is as distinct from the former as is that other form of art which is called Realism. Romance has been often put upon and overburdened by being forced to bear the onus of abuse that by right should fall to sentiment; but the two should be kept very distinct, for a very high and illustrious place will be claimed for Romance, while sentiment will be handed down the scullery stairs.

1. First published in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 18, 1901; reprinted in *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* by Frank Norris, 2nd ed. (1997), from which this text is taken.

Many people today are composing mere sentimentalism, and calling it and causing it to be called Romance, so with those who are too busy to think much upon these subjects, but who none the less love honest literature, Romance has fallen into disrepute. Consider now the cut-and-thrust stories. They are labelled Romances, and it is very easy to get the impression that Romance must be an affair of cloaks and daggers, or moonlight and golden hair. But this is not so at all. The true Romance is a more serious business than this. It is not merely a conjurer's trick box, full of flimsy quackeries, tinsel and clap traps, meant only to amuse, and relying upon deception to do even that. Is it not something better than this? Can we not see in it an instrument, keen, finely tempered, flawless—an instrument with which we may go straight through the clothes and tissues and wrappings of flesh down deep into the red, living heart of things?

Is all this too subtle, too merely speculative and intrinsic, too *précieuse*² and nice and “literary”? Devoutly one hopes the contrary. So much is made of so-called Romanticism in present-day fiction, that the subject seems worthy of discussion, and a protest against the misuse of a really noble and honest formula of literature appears to be timely—misuse, that is, in the sense of limited use. Let us suppose for the moment that a Romance can be made out of the cut-and-thrust business. Good Heavens, are there no other things that are romantic, even in this—falsely, falsely called—humdrum world of today? Why should it be that so soon as the novelist addresses himself—seriously—to the consideration of contemporary life he must abandon Romance and take up that harsh, loveless, colorless, blunt tool called Realism?

Now, let us understand at once what is meant by Romance and what by Realism. Romance—I take it—is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life. According to this definition, then, Romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely—as for instance, the novels of M. Zola. (Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is, on the contrary, the very head of Romanticists.) Also, Realism, used as it sometimes is as a term of reproach, need not be in the remotest sense or degree offensive, but on the other hand respectable as a church and proper as a deacon—as, for instance, the novels of Mr. Howells.

The reason why one claims so much for Romance, and quarrels so pointedly with Realism, is that Realism stultifies itself. It notes only the surface of things. For it Beauty is not even skin-deep, but only a geometrical plane, without dimensions of depth, a mere outside. Realism is very excellent so far as it goes, but it goes no farther than the Realist himself can actually see, or actually hear. Realism is minute, it is the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner. It is the visit to my neighbor's house, a formal visit, from which I may draw no conclusions. I see my neighbor and his friends—very, oh, such very! probable people—and that is all. Realism bows upon the doormat and goes away and says to me, as we link arms on the sidewalk: “That is life.” And I say it is not. It is not, as you would very well see if you took Romance with you to call upon your neighbor.

2. Precious (French); overly refined.

Lately you have been taking Romance a weary journey across the water—ages and the flood of years—and haling her into the fusty, musty, worm-eaten, moth-riddled, rust-corroded “Grandes Salles”³ of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and she has found the drama of a bygone age for you there. But would you take her across the street to your neighbor’s front parlor (with the *bisque* fisher boy⁴ on the mantel and the photograph of Niagara Falls on glass hanging in the front window); would you introduce her there? Not you. Would you take a walk with her on Fifth avenue, or Beacon street, or Michigan avenue?⁵ No indeed. Would you choose her for a companion of a morning spent in Wall Street, or an afternoon in the Waldorf-Astoria?⁶ You just guess you would not.

She would be out of place, you say, inappropriate. She might be awkward in my neighbor’s front parlor, and knock over the little *bisque* fisher boy. Well, she might. If she did, you might find underneath the base of the statuette, hidden away, tucked away—what? God knows. But something which would be a complete revelation of my neighbor’s secretest life.

So you think Romance would stop in the front parlor and discuss medicated flannels and mineral waters with the ladies?⁷ Not for more than five minutes. She would be off upstairs with you, prying, peeping, peering into the closets of the bedrooms, into the nursery, into the sitting-room; yes, and into that little iron box screwed to the lower shelf of the closet in the library; and into those compartments and pigeonholes of the *secrétaire*⁸ in the study. She would find a heartache (maybe) between the pillows of the mistress’s bed, and a memory carefully secreted in the master’s deedbox.⁹ She would come upon a great hope amid the books and papers of the study table of the young man’s room, and—perhaps—who knows—an affair, or, great heavens, an intrigue, in the scented ribbons and gloves and hairpins of the young lady’s bureau. And she would pick here a little and there a little, making up a bag of hopes and fears, and a package of joys and sorrows—great ones, mind you—and then come down to the front door, and stepping out into the street, hand you the bags and package, and say to you—“That is Life!”

Romance does very well in the castles of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance chateaux, and she has the *entrée* there and is very well received. That is all well and good. But let us protest against limiting her to such places and such times. You will find her, I grant you, in the *chatelaine*’s¹ chamber and the dungeon of the man-at-arms; but, if you choose to look for her, you will find her equally at home in the brownstone house on the corner and in the office building downtown. And this very day, in this very hour, she is sitting among the rags and wretchedness, the dirt and despair of the tenements of the East Side² of New York

“What?” I hear you say, “look for Romance—the lady of the silken robes and golden crown, our beautiful, chaste maiden of soft voice and gentle eyes—look for her among the vicious ruffians, male and female, of Allen

3. Great ballrooms or auditoriums (French).

4. Inexpensive imitation of costly porcelain figurines.

5. Streets in New York City, Boston, and Chicago, respectively.

6. Luxury hotel in New York City.

7. Flannels were used to apply warm liquors to the body for the purpose of easing pain by relax-

ing the skin. Mineral waters were bathed in or drunk as curatives for many medical conditions at this time.

8. Desk (French).

9. Lockbox for money or valuables.

1. Wife of an estate owner (French).

2. A working-class neighborhood in Manhattan identified with its immigrant populations.

Street and Mulberry Bend?”³ I tell you she is there, and to your shame be it said you will not know her in those surroundings. You, the aristocrats, who demand the fine linen and the purple in your fiction; you, the sensitive, the delicate, who will associate with your Romance only so long as she wears a silken gown. You will not follow her to the slums, for you believe that Romance should only amuse and entertain you, singing you sweet songs and touching the harp of silver strings with rosy-tipped fingers. If haply she should call to you from the squalor of a dive, or the awful degradation of a disorderly house,⁴ crying: “Look! listen! This, too, is life. These, too, are my children, look at them, know them and, knowing, help!” Should she call thus, you would stop your ears; you would avert your eyes, and you would answer, “Come from there, Romance. Your place is not there!” And you would make of her a harlequin, a tumbler,⁵ a sword dancer, when, as a matter of fact, she should be by right divine a teacher sent from God.

She will not always wear a robe of silk, the gold crown, the jeweled shoon,⁶ will not always sweep the silver harp. An iron note is hers if so she choose, and coarse garments, and stained hands; and, meeting her thus, it is for you to know her as she passes—know her for the same young queen of the blue mantle and lilies.⁷ She can teach you, if you will be humble to learn. Teach you by showing. God help you, if at last you take from Romance her mission of teaching, if you do not believe that she has a purpose, a nobler purpose and a mightier than mere amusement, mere entertainment. Let Realism do the entertaining with its meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wall paper and haircloth sofas, stopping with these, going no deeper than it sees, choosing the ordinary, the untroubled, the commonplace.

But to Romance belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man. You, the indolent, must not always be amused. What matter the silken clothes, what matter the prince’s houses? Romance, too, is a teacher, and if—throwing aside the purple—she wears the camel’s hair and feeds upon the locusts,⁸ it is to cry aloud unto the people, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight his path.”

1901

3. Streets in Lower Manhattan associated with the “Five Points Slum,” known during Norris’s time as a center of violence and crime.

4. A house of prostitution.

5. Clown or buffoon; acrobat or gymnast.

6. Archaic plural of “shoe.”

7. Details frequently seen in depictions of the Virgin Mary.

8. Reference to John the Baptist’s self-imposed exile in the wilderness and prophecies of the future (see especially Matthew 3, 11, 14).

JACK LONDON

Jack London’s essay “What Life Means to Me” was published in *Cosmopolitan* in March 1906 as part of a series in which the magazine invited American writers to contribute articles on this theme. London (1876–1916) had been warned by the socialist and poet Edwin Markham that the Hearst Corporation, the powerful publisher that owned *Cosmopolitan*, would never print an attack on American

capitalism, but the article appeared as London wrote it. London wryly remarked to Markham that “special writers like myself are paid well for expanding their own untrammelled views,” because these views will sell magazines. London’s second wife, Charmian Kittredge London, later described this essay as his “most impassioned committal of himself as a rebel toward the shames and uncleanness of the capitalist system.” “What Life Means to Me,” written during the socialist phase of London’s development, is one of his strongest expressions of the relation between the naturalistic elements of his fiction and his gritty origins and struggles for survival within urban poverty and an exploitative class system.

*From What Life Means to Me*¹

I was born in the working-class. Early I discovered enthusiasm, ambition, and ideals; and to satisfy these became the problem of my child-life. My environment was crude and rough and raw. I had no outlook, but an uplook rather. My place in society was at the bottom. Here life offered nothing but sordidness and wretchedness, both of the flesh and the spirit; for here flesh and spirit were alike starved and tormented.

Above me towered the colossal edifice of society, and to my mind the only way out was up. Into this edifice I early resolved to climb. Up above, men wore black clothes and boiled shirts, and women dressed in beautiful gowns. Also, there were good things to eat, and there was plenty to eat. This much for the flesh. Then there were the things of the spirit. Up above me, I knew, were unselfishnesses of the spirit, clean and noble thinking, keen intellectual living. I knew all this because I read “Seaside Library” novels,² in which, with the exception of the villains and adventuresses, all men and women thought beautiful thoughts, spoke a beautiful tongue, and performed glorious deeds. In short, as I accepted the rising of the sun, I accepted that up above me was all that was fine and noble and gracious, all that gave decency and dignity to life, all that made life worth living and that remunerated one for his travail and misery.

* * *

I was a sailor before the mast, a longshoreman, a roustabout;³ I worked in canneries, and factories, and laundries; I mowed lawns, and cleaned carpets, and washed windows. And I never got the full product of my toil. I looked at the daughter of the cannery owner, in her carriage, and knew that it was my muscle, in part, that helped drag along that carriage on its rubber tires. I looked at the son of the factory owner, going to college, and knew that it was my muscle that helped, in part, to pay for the wine and good fellowship he enjoyed.

But I did not resent this. It was all in the game. They were the strong. Very well, I was strong. I would carve my way to a place amongst them and make money out of the muscles of other men. I was not afraid of work. I loved hard work. I would pitch in and work harder than ever and eventually become a pillar of society.

1. First published in *Cosmopolitan* 41 (March 1906); reprinted in *Revolution and Other Essays* by Jack London (1909), from which this text is taken.

2. Inexpensive novel series published by George

Munro, New York, from 1877 to 1882.

3. Dockworker. “Sailor before the mast”: a common seaman; not an officer.

And just then, as luck would have it, I found an employer that was of the same mind. I was willing to work, and he was more than willing that I should work. I thought I was learning a trade. In reality, I had displaced two men. I thought he was making an electrician out of me; as a matter of fact, he was making fifty dollars per month out of me. The two men I had displaced had received forty dollars each per month; I was doing the work of both for thirty dollars per month.

This employer worked me nearly to death. A man may love oysters, but too many oysters will disincline him toward that particular diet. And so with me. Too much work sickened me. I did not wish ever to see work again. I fled from work. I became a tramp, begging my way from door to door, wandering over the United States and sweating bloody sweats in slums and prisons.

I had been born in the working-class, and I was now, at the age of eighteen, beneath the point at which I had started. I was down in the cellar of society, down in the subterranean depths of misery about which it is neither nice nor proper to speak. I was in the pit, the abyss, the human cess-pool, the shambles and the charnel-house of our civilization. This is the part of the edifice of society that society chooses to ignore. Lack of space compels me here to ignore it, and I shall say only that the things I there saw gave me a terrible scare.

I was scared into thinking. I saw the naked simplicities of the complicated civilization in which I lived. Life was a matter of food and shelter. In order to get food and shelter men sold things. The merchant sold shoes, the politician sold his manhood, and the representative of the people, with exceptions, of course, sold his trust; while nearly all sold their honor. Women, too, whether on the street or in the holy bond of wedlock, were prone to sell their flesh. All things were commodities, all people bought and sold. The one commodity that labor had to sell was muscle. The honor of labor had no price in the market-place. Labor had muscle, and muscle alone, to sell.

But there was a difference, a vital difference. Shoes and trust and honor had a way of renewing themselves. They were imperishable stocks. Muscle, on the other hand, did not renew. As the shoe merchant sold shoes, he continued to replenish his stock. But there was no way of replenishing the laborer's stock of muscle. The more he sold of his muscle, the less of it remained to him. It was his one commodity, and each day his stock of it diminished. In the end, if he did not die before, he sold out and put up his shutters. He was a muscle bankrupt, and nothing remained to him but to go down into the cellar of society and perish miserably.

I learned, further, that brain was likewise a commodity. It, too, was different from muscle. A brain seller was only at his prime when he was fifty or sixty years old, and his wares were fetching higher prices than ever. But a laborer was worked out or broken down at forty-five or fifty. I had been in the cellar of society, and I did not like the place as a habitation. The pipes and drains were unsanitary, and the air was bad to breathe. If I could not live on the parlor floor of society, I could, at any rate, have a try at the attic. It was true, the diet there was slim, but the air at least was pure. So I resolved to sell no more muscle, and to become a vender of brains.

Then began a frantic pursuit of knowledge. I returned to California and opened the books. While thus equipping myself to become a brain merchant,

it was inevitable that I should delve into sociology. There I found, in a certain class of books, scientifically formulated, the simple sociological concepts I had already worked out for myself. Other and greater minds, before I was born, had worked out all that I had thought and a vast deal more. I discovered that I was a socialist.

The socialists were revolutionists, inasmuch as they struggled to overthrow the society of the present, and out of the material to build the society of the future. I, too, was a socialist and a revolutionist. I joined the groups of working-class and intellectual revolutionists, and for the first time came into intellectual living. Here I found keen-flashing intellects and brilliant wits; for here I met strong and alert-brained, withal horny-handed, members of the working-class; unfrocked preachers too wide in their Christianity for any congregation of Mammon-worshippers; professors broken on the wheel of university subservience to the ruling class and flung out because they were quick with knowledge which they strove to apply to the affairs of mankind.

Here I found, also, warm faith in the human, glowing idealism, sweetnesses of unselfishness, renunciation, and martyrdom—all the splendid, stinging things of the spirit. Here life was clean, noble, and alive. Here life rehabilitated itself, became wonderful and glorious; and I was glad to be alive. I was in touch with great souls who exalted flesh and spirit over dollars and cents, and to whom the thin wail of the starved slum child meant more than all the pomp and circumstance of commercial expansion and world empire. All about me were nobleness of purpose and heroism of effort, and my days and nights were sunshine and starshine, all fire and dew, with before my eyes, ever burning and blazing, the Holy Grail, Christ's own Grail, the warm human, long-suffering and maltreated, but to be rescued and saved at the last.

* * *

1906, 1909

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN

Tired of being rejected by editors and publishers who found her feminist provocations too controversial, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935) founded the *Forerunner* magazine in 1909. By that point, she had already published her most famous literary work, “The Yellow Wall-paper” (1892), as well as several important works of nonfiction, including the seminal *Women and Economics* (1898). Gilman published the *Forerunner* as a monthly magazine for seven years, and during that time it was essentially a one-woman operation. It included serialized novels and treatises, as well as commentary, poetry, humor, and even an advice column—all written by Gilman herself. The magazine’s circulation was small, but it found readers as far away as Australia and India. “Masculine Literature” appeared as part of a larger work that focused on the damage that men had inflicted on the world through their emphasis on aggression and competition. In her discussion of literature, Gilman contends that literary authors have focused too much on the domain of men, to the detriment of both art and society. Her argument can be understood, in part, as a

reaction to the tendency in literary naturalism to focus on virile action and brute force. In calling for literature to represent the lives of women in their full complexity and nuance, Gilman presents her own case for a kind of literary realism.

*From Masculine Literature*¹

* * *

If the beehive produced literature, the bee's fiction would be rich and broad, full of the complex tasks of comb-building and filling, the care and feeding of the young, the guardian-service of the queen; and far beyond that it would spread to the blue glory of the summer sky, the fresh winds, the endless beauty and sweetness of a thousand thousand flowers. It would treat of the vast fecundity of motherhood, the educative and selective processes of the group-mothers, and the passion of loyalty, of social service, which holds the hive together.

But if the drones wrote fiction, it would have no subject matter save the feasting, of many; and the nuptial flight, of one.

To the male, as such, this mating instinct is frankly the major interest of life; even the belligerent instincts are second to it. To the male, as such, it is for all its intensity, but a passing interest. In nature's economy, his is but a temporary devotion, hers the slow processes of life's fulfillment.

In humanity we have long since, not outgrown, but overgrown, this stage of feeling. In *Human Parentage* even the mother's share begins to pale beside that ever-growing Social love and care, which guards and guides the children of to-day.

The art of literature in this main form of fiction is far too great a thing to be wholly governed by one dominant note. As life widened and intensified, the artist, if great enough, has transcended sex; and in the mightier works of the real masters, we find fiction treating of life, life in general, in all its complex relationships, and refusing to be held longer to the rigid canons of an androcentric past.

That was the power of Balzac²—he took in more than this one field. That was the universal appeal of Dickens;³ he wrote of people, all kinds of people, doing all kinds of things. As you recall with pleasure some preferred novel of this general favorite, you find yourself looking narrowly for the "love story" in it. It is there—for it is part of life; but it does not dominate the whole scene—any more than it does in life.

The thought of the world is made and handed out to us in the main. The makers of books are the makers of thoughts and feelings for the people in general. Fiction is the most popular form in which this world-food is taken. If it were true, it would teach us life easily, swiftly, truly; teach not by preaching but by truly re-presenting; and we should grow up becoming acquainted with a far wider range of life in books than could even be ours in person. Then meeting life in reality we should be wise—and not be disappointed.

1. "Masculine Literature" was published as a chapter of *Our Androcentric Culture; or, The Man-Made World*, which was first serialized in Gilman's monthly magazine the *Forerunner* in 1910 and then published in book form in

1911. The text reprinted here comes from the book publication.

2. French novelist Honoré de Balzac (1779–1850).

3. British novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870).

As it is, our great sea of fiction is steeped and dyed and flavored all one way. A young man faces life—the seventy year stretch, remember, and is given book upon book wherein one set of feelings is continually vocalized and overestimated. He reads forever of love, good love and bad love, natural and unnatural, legitimate and illegitimate; with the unavoidable inference that there is nothing else going on.

If he is a healthy young man he breaks loose from the whole thing, despises “love stories” and takes up life as he finds it. But what impression he does receive from fiction is a false one, and he suffers without knowing it from lack of the truer, broader views of life it failed to give him.

A young woman faces life—the seventy year stretch remember; and is given the same books—with restrictions. Remember the remark of Rochefoucauld,⁴ “There are thirty good stories in the world and twenty-nine cannot be told to women.” There is a certain broad field of literature so grossly androcentric that for very shame men have tried to keep it to themselves. But in a milder form, the spades all named teaspoons, or at the worst appearing as trowels—the young woman is given the same fiction. Love and love and love—from “first sight” to marriage. There it stops—just the fluttering ribbon of announcement—“and lived happily ever after.”

Is that kind of fiction any sort of picture of a woman’s life? Fiction, under our androcentric culture, has not given any true picture of woman’s life, very little of human life, and a disproportioned section of man’s life.

As we daily grow more human, both of us, this noble art is changing for the better so fast that a short lifetime can mark the growth. New fields are opening and new laborers are working in them. But it is no swift and easy matter to disabuse the race mind from attitudes and habits inculcated for a thousand years. What we have been fed upon so long we are well used to, what we are used to we like, what we like we think is good and proper.

* * *

1910, 1911

4. François de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680), a French author of maxims and other witticisms.

FRANK NORRIS

1870–1902

Influenced by the French writer Émile Zola, Frank Norris identified with the philosophy of literary naturalism, and during his relatively brief career focused his fiction on the challenges faced by the working classes. He was born Benjamin Franklin Norris in Chicago; his well-to-do family moved to San Francisco when he was fourteen. After attending school in Paris, the University of California, and Harvard,

Norris served as a war correspondent for *McClure's Magazine* in South Africa (1895–96) and Cuba (1898). He wrote for and helped edit the San Francisco literary magazine the *Wave* (1896–97), becoming a member of San Francisco's Bohemian Club, which brought together businessmen and artists. In 1899 he moved to New York City and joined the publishing firm of Doubleday & Page as an editor. During his time at Doubleday, Norris made the controversial decision to publish Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*—a book regarded now as a masterpiece but one that scandalized some readers in its time because of its treatment of extramarital sexuality.

In Norris's first literary success, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899), the main character deteriorates under the pressure of economic, romantic, and finally natural disasters, ending up dying of thirst in California's Death Valley. Like other naturalists, Norris applied the tenets of Darwinian evolution to his depiction of human society, and his fiction showed that violent instincts lay beneath the veneer of civilization. In Norris's fiction, extreme circumstances frequently lead common people to act from their worst, animal tendencies. After completing *McTeague*, Norris began working on a trilogy of novels following California's wheat crop from the fields where it was harvested on through the economic system in which it became a commodity for financiers. He completed two of the three novels of his projected trilogy, *The Epic of Wheat*, before his death at the age of thirty-two from a ruptured appendix. *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1901) centers on the struggle of farmers against the railroad which sets the rates for transporting their wheat to market; and the posthumously published *The Pit* (1903) focuses on the Chicago grain market. "A Deal in Wheat," included here, is a short story that presents a miniature version of *The Pit*. In writing about the chicanery of the financial markets and their impact, Norris drew on actual events that occurred in the Chicago Board of Trade in 1897 and 1898. For many readers in Norris's time, his account of the collateral damage caused by financial speculation would have been all too familiar.

The Responsibilities of the Novelist (1903), a collection of essays, contains Norris's idealistic views on the role of the naturalist writer; a brief excerpt appears in the "Realism and Naturalism" section elsewhere in this volume. Despite their claims for a sort of scientific objectivity in their character depictions, naturalists like Norris frequently romanticized their heroes' struggles and advocated social reforms that would give workers more power. Naturalist fiction like Norris's is often balanced on a knife's edge. On the one hand, his work portrays the forces that generate inequality and injustice as so complex and powerful that it would seem impossible to resist them. On the other hand, these same novels express hope for changes that would improve the lives of the working classes and the destitute. This creative tension between pessimism and optimism fuels the narrative engine of naturalist fiction, and it is one reason that the fiction of Norris and his contemporaries continues to attract new readers.

A Deal in Wheat¹

I

THE BEAR²—WHEAT AT SIXTY-TWO

As Sam Lewiston backed the horse into the shafts of his buckboard and began hitching the tugs to the whiffletree,³ his wife came out from the

1. First published in the August 1902 issue of *Everybody's Magazine*, this story was reprinted in *A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories of the New and Old West* (1903), the source of this text.

2. In a financial market, a "bear" is a trader who

stands to profit from a decline in prices.

3. A swinging bar that attaches a harness to a vehicle. "Buckboard": a four-wheeled wagon, usually with a seat for the driver. "Tugs": leather straps on a harness.

kitchen door of the house and drew near, and stood for some time at the horse's head, her arms folded and her apron rolled around them. For a long moment neither spoke. They had talked over the situation so long and so comprehensively the night before that there seemed to be nothing more to say.

The time was late in the summer, the place a ranch in southwestern Kansas, and Lewiston and his wife were two of a vast population of farmers, wheat growers, who at that moment were passing through a crisis—a crisis that at any moment might culminate in tragedy. Wheat was down to sixty-six.⁴

At length Emma Lewiston spoke.

"Well," she hazarded, looking vaguely out across the ranch toward the horizon, leagues distant; "well, Sam, there's always that offer of brother Joe's. We can quit—and go to Chicago—if the worst comes."

"And give up!" exclaimed Lewiston, running the lines through the turrets.⁵ "Leave the ranch! Give up! After all these years!"

His wife made no reply for the moment. Lewiston climbed into the buckboard and gathered up the lines. "Well, here goes for the last try, Emmie," he said. "Good-by, girl. Maybe things will look better in town to-day."

"Maybe," she said gravely. She kissed her husband good-by and stood for some time looking after the buckboard traveling toward the town in a moving pillar of dust.

"I don't know," she murmured at length; "I don't know just how we're going to make out."

When he reached town, Lewiston tied the horse to the iron railing in front of the Odd Fellows' Hall,⁶ the ground floor of which was occupied by the post-office, and went across the street and up the stairway of a building of brick and granite—quite the most pretentious structure of the town—and knocked at a door upon the first landing. The door was furnished with a pane of frosted glass, on which, in gold letters, was inscribed, "Bridges & Co., Grain Dealers."

Bridges himself, a middle-aged man who wore a velvet skull-cap and who was smoking a Pittsburg stogie, met the farmer at the counter and the two exchanged perfunctory greetings.

"Well," said Lewiston, tentatively, after awhile.

"Well, Lewiston," said the other, "I can't take that wheat of yours at any better than sixty-two."

"Sixty-two."

"It's the Chicago price that does it, Lewiston. Truslow is bearing the stuff for all he's worth. It's Truslow and the bear clique that stick the knife into us. The price broke again this morning. We've just got a wire."

"Good heavens," murmured Lewiston, looking vaguely from side to side. "That—that ruins me. I *can't* carry my grain any longer—what with storage charges and—and——Bridges, I don't see just how I'm going to make out. Sixty-two cents a bushel! Why, man, what with this and with that it's cost me nearly a dollar a bushel to raise that wheat, and now Truslow——"

He turned away abruptly with a quick gesture of infinite discouragement.

4. Trading at 66 cents per bushel.

5. Rings attached to swivels, part of the harness on a wagon.

6. The Independent Order of the Odd Fellows

was the largest fraternal organization in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, with lodges across the nation.

He went down the stairs, and making his way to where his buckboard was hitched, got in, and, with eyes vacant, the reins slipping and sliding in his limp, half-open hands, drove slowly back to the ranch. His wife had seen him coming, and met him as he drew up before the barn.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Emmie," he said as he got out of the buckboard, laying his arm across her shoulder, "Emmie, I guess we'll take up with Joe's offer. We'll go to Chicago. We're cleaned out!"

II

THE BULL⁷—WHEAT AT A DOLLAR-TEN

. . . —and said Party of the Second Part further covenants and agrees to merchandise such wheat in foreign ports, it being understood and agreed between the Party of the First Part and the Party of the Second Part that the wheat hereinbefore mentioned is released and sold to the Party of the Second Part for export purposes only, and not for consumption or distribution within the boundaries of the United States of America or of Canada.

"Now, Mr. Gates, if you will sign for Mr. Truslow I guess that'll be all," remarked Hornung when he had finished reading.

Hornung affixed his signature to the two documents and passed them over to Gates, who signed for his principal and client, Truslow—or, as he had been called ever since he had gone into the fight against Hornung's corner⁸—the Great Bear. Hornung's secretary was called in and witnessed the signatures, and Gates thrust the contract into his Gladstone bag⁹ and stood up, smoothing his hat.

"You will deliver the warehouse receipts for the grain," began Gates.

"I'll send a messenger to Truslow's office before noon," interrupted Hornung. "You can pay by certified check through the Illinois Trust people."

When the other had taken himself off, Hornung sat for some moments gazing abstractedly toward his office windows, thinking over the whole matter. He had just agreed to release to Truslow, at the rate of one dollar and ten cents per bushel, one hundred thousand out of the two million and odd bushels of wheat that he, Hornung, controlled, or actually owned. And for the moment he was wondering if, after all, he had done wisely in going the Great Bear to actual financial death. He had made him pay one hundred thousand dollars.¹ Truslow was good for this amount. Would it not have been better to have put a prohibitive figure on the grain and forced the Bear into bankruptcy? True, Hornung would then be without his enemy's money, but Truslow would have been eliminated from the situation, and that—so Hornung told himself—was always a consummation most devoutly, strenuously and diligently to be striven for.² Truslow once dead was dead, but the Bear was never more dangerous than when desperate.

7. In a financial market, a "bull" is a trader who stands to profit from an increase in prices.

8. I.e., cornering the market, owning a large enough stake in a commodity or stock so as to be able to manipulate its price.

9. A small, deep suitcase named for British prime minister William Gladstone (1809–1898).

1. A bear typically takes out a contract for a commodity or stock, hopes the price of that commod-

ity or stock declines, then fulfills the contract by buying the commodity or stock. Truslow therefore needs to buy wheat in order to meet these obligations, and Hornung is selling it to him at a very high price.

2. In the famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet says of death, "Tis a consummation / Devoutly to be wished."

"But so long as he can't get *wheat*," muttered Hornung at the end of his reflections, "he can't hurt me. And he can't get it. That I *know*."

For Hornung controlled the situation. So far back as the February of that year an "unknown bull" had been making his presence felt on the floor of the Board of Trade. By the middle of March the commercial reports of the daily press had begun to speak of "the powerful bull clique"; a few weeks later that legendary condition of affairs implied and epitomized in the magic words "Dollar Wheat" had been attained, and by the first of April, when the price had been boosted to one dollar and ten cents a bushel, Hornung had disclosed his hand, and in place of mere rumours, the definite and authoritative news that May wheat had been cornered in the Chicago pit went flashing around the world from Liverpool to Odessa and from Duluth to Buenos Ayres.

It was—so the veteran operators were persuaded—Truslow himself who had made Hornung's corner possible. The Great Bear had for once overreached himself, and, believing himself all-powerful, had hammered the price just the fatal fraction too far down. Wheat had gone to sixty-two—for the time, and under the circumstances, an abnormal price. When the reaction came it was tremendous. Hornung saw his chance, seized it, and in a few months had turned the tables, had cornered the product, and virtually driven the bear clique out of the pit.

On the same day that the delivery of the hundred thousand bushels was made to Truslow, Hornung met his broker at his lunch club.

"Well," said the latter, "I see you let go that line of stuff to Truslow."

Hornung nodded; but the broker added:

"Remember, I was against it from the very beginning. I know we've cleared up over a hundred thou'. I would have fifty times preferred to have lost twice that and *smashed Truslow dead*. Bet you what you like he makes us pay for it somehow."

"Huh!" grunted his principal. "How about insurance, and warehouse charges, and carrying expenses on that lot? Guess we'd have had to pay those, too, if we'd held on."

But the other put up his chin, unwilling to be persuaded. "I won't sleep easy," he declared, "till Truslow is busted."

III

THE PIT³

Just as Going mounted the steps on the edge of the pit the great gong struck, a roar of a hundred voices developed with the swiftness of successive explosions, the rush of a hundred men surging downward to the centre of the pit filled the air with the stamp and grind of feet, a hundred hands in eager strenuous gestures tossed upward from out the brown of the crowd, the official reporter in his cage on the margin of the pit leaned far forward with straining ear to catch the opening bid, and another day of battle was begun.

Since the sale of the hundred thousand bushels of wheat to Truslow the "Hornung crowd" had steadily shouldered the price higher until on this par-

3. Nickname for the trading floor of a futures or stock exchange; refers here to the Chicago Board of Trade, where this chapter is set. Norris used *The Pit* as the title of his 1903 novel about commodity trading.

ticular morning it stood at one dollar and a half. That was Hornung's price. No one else had any grain to sell.

But not ten minutes after the opening, Going was surprised out of all countenance to hear shouted from the other side of the pit these words:

"Sell May⁴ at one-fifty."

Going was for the moment touching elbows with Kimbark on one side and with Merriam on the other, all three belonging to the "Hornung crowd." Their answering challenge of "Sold" was as the voice of one man. They did not pause to reflect upon the strangeness of the circumstance. (That was for afterward.) Their response to the offer was as unconscious as reflex action and almost as rapid, and before the pit was well aware of what had happened the transaction of one thousand bushels was down upon Going's trading-card and fifteen hundred dollars had changed hands. But here was a marvel—the whole available supply of wheat cornered, Hornung master of the situation, invincible, unassailable; yet behold a man willing to sell, a Bear bold enough to raise his head.

"That was Kennedy, wasn't it, who made that offer?" asked Kimbark, as Going noted down the trade—"Kennedy, that new man?"

"Yes; who do you suppose he's selling for; who's willing to go short at this stage of the game?"

"Maybe he ain't short."

"Short! Great heavens, man; where'd he get the stuff?"

"Blamed if I know. We can account for every handful of May. Steady! Oh, there he goes again."

"Sell a thousand May at one-fifty," vociferated the bear-broker, throwing out his hand, one finger raised to indicate the number of "contracts" offered. This time it was evident that he was attacking the Hornung crowd deliberately, for, ignoring the jam of traders that swept toward him, he looked across the pit to where Going and Kimbark were shouting "Sold! Sold!" and nodded his head.

A second time Going made memoranda of the trade, and either the Hornung holdings were increased by two thousand bushels of May wheat or the Hornung bank account swelled by at least three thousand dollars of some unknown short's money.

Of late—so sure was the bull crowd of its position—no one had even thought of glancing at the inspection sheet on the bulletin board. But now one of Going's messengers hurried up to him with the announcement that this sheet showed receipts at Chicago for that morning of twenty-five thousand bushels, and not credited to Hornung. Some one had got hold of a line of wheat overlooked by the "clique" and was dumping it upon them.

"Wire the Chief," said Going over his shoulder to Merriam. This one struggled out of the crowd, and on a telegraph blank scribbled:

"Strong bear movement—New man—Kennedy—Selling in lots of five contracts—Chicago receipts twenty-five thousand."

The message was despatched, and in a few moments the answer came back, laconic, of military terseness:

"Support the market."

4. That is, May wheat; the month refers to the time when the wheat will be delivered.

And Going obeyed, Merriam and Kimbark following, the new broker fairly throwing the wheat at them in thousand-bushel lots.

"Sell May at 'fifty; sell May; sell May." A moment's indecision, an instant's hesitation, the first faint suggestion of weakness, and the market would have broken under them. But for the better part of four hours they stood their ground, taking all that was offered, in constant communication with the Chief, and from time to time stimulated and steadied by his brief, unvarying command: "Support the market."

At the close of the session they had bought in the twenty-five thousand bushels of May. Hornung's position was as stable as a rock, and the price closed even with the opening figure—one dollar and a half.

But the morning's work was the talk of all La Salle Street. Who was back of the raid? What was the meaning of this unexpected selling? For weeks the pit trading had been merely nominal. Truslow, the Great Bear, from whom the most serious attack might have been expected, had gone to his country seat at Geneva Lake, in Wisconsin, declaring himself to be out of the market entirely. He went bass-fishing every day.

IV

THE BELT LINE

On a certain day toward the middle of the month, at a time when the mysterious Bear had unloaded some eighty thousand bushels upon Hornung, a conference⁵ was held in the library of Hornung's home. His broker attended it, and also a clean-faced, bright-eyed individual whose name of Cyrus Ryder might have been found upon the pay-roll of a rather well-known detective agency. For upward of half an hour after the conference began the detective spoke, the other two listening attentively, gravely.

"Then, last of all," concluded Ryder, "I made out I was a hobo, and began stealing rides on the Belt Line Railroad. Know the road? It just circles Chicago. Truslow owns it. Yes? Well, then I began to catch on. I noticed that cars of certain numbers—thirty-one nought thirty-four, thirty-two one ninety—well, the numbers don't matter, but anyhow, these cars were always switched onto the sidings by Mr. Truslow's main elevator D soon as they came in. The wheat was shunted in, and they were pulled out again. Well, I spotted one car and stole a ride on her. Say, look here, *that car went right around the city on the Belt, and came back to D again, and the same wheat in her all the time.* The grain was reinspected—it was raw, I tell you—and the warehouse receipts made out just as though the stuff had come in from Kansas or Iowa."

"The same wheat all the time!" interrupted Hornung.

"The same wheat—your wheat, that you sold to Truslow."

"Great snakes!" ejaculated Hornung's broker. "Truslow never took it abroad at all."

"Took it abroad! Say, he's just been running it around Chicago, like the supers in 'Shenandoah,'⁶ round an' round, so you'd think it was a new lot, an' selling it back to you again."

5. Meeting.

6. Popular play about the Civil War by Bronson Howard (1842–1908). "Supers": i.e., extras, actors

who rotated throughout the play to give the semblance of armies.

"No wonder we couldn't account for so much wheat."

"Bought it from us at one-ten, and made us buy it back—our own wheat—at one-fifty."

Hornung and his broker looked at each other in silence for a moment. Then all at once Hornung struck the arm of his chair with his fist and exploded in a roar of laughter. The broker stared for one bewildered moment, then followed his example.

"Sold! Sold!" shouted Hornung almost gleefully. "Upon my soul it's as good as a Gilbert and Sullivan⁷ show. And we—Oh, Lord! Billy, shake on it, and hats off to my distinguished friend, Truslow. He'll be President some day. Hey! What? Prosecute him? Not I."

"He's done us out of a neat hatful of dollars for all that," observed the broker, suddenly grave.

"Billy, it's worth the price."

"We've got to make it up somehow."

"Well, tell you what. We were going to boost the price to one seventy-five next week, and make that our settlement figure."

"Can't do it now. Can't afford it."

"No. Here; we'll let out a big link; we'll put wheat at two dollars, and let it go at that."

"Two it is, then," said the broker.

V

THE BREAD LINE

The street was very dark and absolutely deserted. It was a district on the "South Side," not far from the Chicago River, given up largely to wholesale stores, and after nightfall was empty of all life. The echoes slept but lightly hereabouts, and the slightest footfall, the faintest noise, woke them upon the instant and sent them clamouring up and down the length of the pavement between the iron shuttered fronts. The only light visible came from the side door of a certain "Vienna" bakery, where at one o'clock in the morning loaves of bread were given away to any who should ask. Every evening about nine o'clock the outcasts began to gather about the side door. The stragglers came in rapidly, and the line—the "bread line," as it was called—began to form. By midnight it was usually some hundred yards in length, stretching almost the entire length of the block.

Toward ten in the evening, his coat collar turned up against the fine drizzle that pervaded the air, his hands in his pockets, his elbows gripping his sides, Sam Lewiston came up and silently took his place at the end of the line.

Unable to conduct his farm upon a paying basis at the time when Truslow, the "Great Bear," had sent the price of grain down to sixty-two cents a bushel, Lewiston had turned over his entire property to his creditors, and, leaving Kansas for good, had abandoned farming, and had left his wife at her sister's boardinghouse in Topeka with the understanding that she was to join him in Chicago so soon as he had found a steady job. Then he had

7. Librettist W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911) and composer Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900), both English, created a series of highly popular comic operas.

come to Chicago and had turned workman. His brother Joe conducted a small hat factory on Archer Avenue, and for a time he found there a meager employment. But difficulties had occurred, times were bad,⁸ the hat factory was involved in debts, the repealing of a certain import duty on manufactured felt overcrowded the home market with cheap Belgian and French products, and in the end his brother had assigned⁹ and gone to Milwaukee.

Thrown out of work, Lewiston drifted aimlessly about Chicago, from pillar to post, working a little, earning here a dollar, there a dime, but always sinking, sinking, till at last the ooze of the lowest bottom dragged at his feet and the rush of the great ebb went over him and engulfed him and shut him out from the light, and a park bench became his home and the "bread line" his chief makeshift of subsistence.

He stood now in the enfolding drizzle, sodden, stupefied with fatigue. Before and behind stretched the line. There was no talking. There was no sound. The street was empty. It was so still that the passing of a cable-car in the adjoining thoroughfare grated like prolonged rolling explosions, beginning and ending at immeasurable distances. The drizzle descended incessantly. After a long time midnight struck.

There was something ominous and gravely impressive in this interminable line of dark figures, close-pressed, soundless; a crowd, yet absolutely still; a close-packed, silent file, waiting, waiting in the vast deserted night-ridden street; waiting without a word, without a movement, there under the night and under the slow-moving mists of rain.

Few in the crowd were professional beggars. Most of them were workmen, long since out of work, forced into idleness by long-continued "hard times," by ill luck, by sickness. To them the "bread line" was a godsend. At least they could not starve. Between jobs here in the end was something to hold them up—a small platform, as it were, above the sweep of black water, where for a moment they might pause and take breath before the plunge.

The period of waiting on this night of rain seemed endless to those silent, hungry men; but at length there was a stir. The line moved. The side door opened. Ah, at last! They were going to hand out the bread.

But instead of the usual white-aproned undercook with his crowded hampers there now appeared in the doorway a new man—a young fellow who looked like a bookkeeper's assistant. He bore in his hand a placard, which he tacked to the outside of the door. Then he disappeared within the bakery, locking the door after him.

A shudder of poignant despair, an unformed, inarticulate sense of calamity, seemed to run from end to end of the line. What had happened? Those in the rear, unable to read the placard, surged forward, a sense of bitter disappointment clutching at their hearts.

The line broke up, disintegrated into a shapeless throng—a throng that crowded forward and collected in front of the shut door whereon the placard was affixed. Lewiston, with the others, pushed forward. On the placard he read these words:

8. The U.S. economy suffered a severe depression following a financial collapse known as the

Panic of 1893.

9. Surrendered his assets; declared bankruptcy.

“Owing to the fact that the price of grain has been increased to two dollars a bushel, there will be no distribution of bread from this bakery until further notice.”

Lewiston turned away, dumb, bewildered. Till morning he walked the streets, going on without purpose, without direction. But now at last his luck had turned. Overnight the wheel of his fortunes had creaked and swung upon its axis, and before noon he had found a job in the street-cleaning brigade. In the course of time he rose to be first shift-boss, then deputy inspector, then inspector, promoted to the dignity of driving in a red wagon with rubber tires and drawing a salary instead of mere wages. The wife was sent for and a new start made.

But Lewiston never forgot. Dimly he began to see the significance of things. Caught once in the cogs and wheels of a great and terrible engine, he had seen—none better—its workings. Of all the men who had vainly stood in the “bread line” on that rainy night in early summer, he, perhaps, had been the only one who had struggled up to the surface again. How many others had gone down in the great ebb? Grim question; he dared not think how many.

He had seen the two ends of a great wheat operation—a battle between Bear and Bull. The stories (subsequently published in the city’s press) of Truslow’s countermove in selling Hornung his own wheat, supplied the unseen section. The farmer—he who raised the wheat—was ruined upon one hand; the working-man—he who consumed it—was ruined upon the other. But between the two, the great operators, who never saw the wheat they traded in, bought and sold the world’s food, gambled in the nourishment of entire nations, practised their tricks, their chicanery and oblique shifty “deals,” were reconciled in their differences, and went on through their appointed way, jovial, contented, enthroned, and unassailable.

1902

THEODORE DREISER

1871–1945

Theodore Dreiser’s uncompromising portraits of American society—including frank discussions of sexuality, money, and social class—earned him a substantial following in the first half of the twentieth century, and they continue to attract a widespread readership. With more than twenty books to his name at the time of his death, Dreiser was a prolific author with a long career that stretched from the turn of the twentieth century through the Great Depression. He remains best known for his novels, which ask readers to consider the precise relationship between their complex characters and the carefully described social environments that they inhabit.

Theodore Herman Albert Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on August 17, 1871, the eleventh of thirteen children. His German-born father was stern, emotionally distant, and unsuccessful in providing for his large family. Dreiser later called him “mentally a little weak” and drew upon him as the prototype for the failed

men who appear so frequently in Dreiser's novels. Dreiser's mother, by contrast, was steadfastly devoted to the well-being of her children; she was, Dreiser claimed, the only person who ever loved him enough. She, too, appears in fictionalized form in many of Dreiser's books.

Dreiser's unhappy childhood haunted him throughout his life. The large family moved from house to house in Indiana dogged by poverty, insecurity, and internal divisions. One of his brothers became a famous popular songwriter under the name Paul Dresser, but other siblings lived turbulent lives that not only defied their father's rigid morality but placed them on the margins of respectable society altogether. Dreiser as a youth was ungainly, confused, shy, and full of vague yearnings like those of most of his fictional protagonists, male and female.

From the age of fifteen Dreiser was on his own, earning meager support from a variety of menial jobs. A high school teacher staked him to a year at Indiana University in 1889, but Dreiser's real education began in 1892, when persistence and good luck led to his first newspaper job with the *Chicago Globe*. Over the next decade, as an itinerant journalist for several different newspapers, Dreiser slowly groped his way to authorship. He tested what he had learned, from his experience and his reporting, against what he was learning from his independent reading of, among others, Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, and Herbert Spencer, late nineteenth-century scientists and social scientists who lent support to the view that nature and society had no divine sanction. Generally speaking, these thinkers agreed that human beings, just as much as other life-forms, were participants in an evolutionary process in which only those who adapted successfully to their environments survive. Spencer in particular argued that human consciousness was itself a product of evolutionary processes and that it entailed the adaptive capacity for altruism and various forms of social cooperation. This tension between, on the one hand, deterministic "chemisms" (as Dreiser called them) and, on the other, the potential for friendship and the improvement of social institutions appears in Dreiser's fiction throughout his writing career. Early on, Dreiser emphasized the mechanistic side of this tension, while in later phases—in his fiction and in his social writings—he appeared to balance his more pessimistic views with a belief in the possibilities of social justice.

Sister Carrie (1900), Dreiser's first novel, two chapters of which are included here, tells the story of Carrie Meeber, a country girl from Wisconsin who comes to Chicago, attracted by the excitement that rapidly growing urban centers held for so many young people in the late 1800s, but even more by the possibility of supporting herself, especially given the meager opportunities in her small rural town. In Chicago she is seduced first by a traveling salesman, Charles Drouet, then by George Hurstwood, a married middle-aged manager of a stylish saloon patronized by wealthy men. Eager to elope with Carrie, Hurstwood steals ten thousand dollars from the safe in the bar; then he and Carrie flee to New York, where, unable to find a job equivalent to the one he gave up, he deteriorates while she begins a successful career on the stage.

Sister Carrie depicts social transgressions by characters who feel no remorse and largely escape punishment, and it is candid about sexual relationships. The novel was virtually suppressed by its first publisher, who printed but refused to promote the book. Later, in 1907, it was reissued by another publisher, and the novel began finding a wider audience that recognized its achievement. *Sister Carrie* remains powerful because it addresses so many issues that remain pressing in our contemporary moment: class mobility, immigration, urban life, the challenge facing women who seek independence and control of their sexuality, the pressure to succeed in American society, and celebrity culture.

In the first years of the twentieth century Dreiser suffered a nervous breakdown. With the help of his brother Paul, he recovered and by 1904 was on the way to several successful years as an editor, the last of them as editorial director of the Butterick Publishing Company. In 1910 he resigned to write *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), one of his best-known novels and the first of a long succession of books that marked his turn

to writing as a full-time career. This novel, about the doomed love between a rich man and a poor woman, takes seriously the reality of gentleness, selflessness, and loyalty, though in the end materialism and the pressures associated with wealth and social position carry the day.

In *The Financier* (1912), *The Titan* (1914), and *The Stoic* (not published until 1947), Dreiser shifted from the pathos of helpless protagonists to the power of those unusual individuals who assume dominant roles in business and society. The protagonist of this “Trilogy of Desire” (as Dreiser described it), Frank Cowperwood, is modeled after the Chicago speculator Charles T. Yerkes. These novels of the businessman as buccaneer incorporated, even more than *Sister Carrie*, explicit discussions of sexual energy and desire—and how that longing becomes entangled with money and social class.

The power of desire—its force and insatiability—is one of the recurring themes of Dreiser’s fiction. In *An American Tragedy* (1925), Dreiser’s best-selling and most acclaimed novel, sexual and financial desires collide. The novel is based on a much-publicized murder in upstate New York in 1906. Clyde Griffiths is a poor boy from the provinces who dreams of a life of luxury and status. When his prospect for marrying the wealthy Sondra Finchley is threatened by the pregnant Roberta Alden, a factory worker with whom he has had a relationship, Clyde plans to murder her. He takes Roberta out boating, but at the last moment finds himself unable to carry out his plan. Then when she approaches him, he physically rebuffs her, causing the boat to capsize and causing her to drown after all. Did he kill her or not? The second half of the book follows Clyde’s arrest, his trial, his imprisonment, and his eventual execution. The novel was an immediate best seller and confirmed Dreiser’s status as one of the leading writers of his time.

During the last two decades of his life, Dreiser turned to polemical writing as well as other genres—poetry, travel books, and autobiography, including *Dawn* (1931), the first volume in the projected but uncompleted *A History of Myself*. He visited the Soviet Union in 1927 and published *Dreiser Looks at Russia* the following year. In the 1930s, like many American intellectuals and writers, Dreiser was increasingly attracted by the philosophical program of the Communist party. Unable to believe in traditional religious credos, yet unable to give up his strong sense of justice, he continued to seek a way to reconcile his determinism with his compassionate sense of life’s mysteries.

From *Sister Carrie*¹

Chapter I

When Caroline Meeber boarded the afternoon train for Chicago her total outfit consisted of a small trunk, which was checked in the baggage car, a cheap imitation alligator skin satchel holding some minor details of the toilet, a small lunch in a paper box and a yellow leather snap purse, containing her ticket, a scrap of paper with her sister’s address in Van Buren Street,² and four dollars in money. It was in August, 1889. She was eighteen years of age, bright, timid and full of the illusions of ignorance and youth. Whatever touch of regret at parting characterized her thoughts it was certainly not for advantages now being given up. A gush of tears at her mother’s fare-

1. First published by Doubleday & Page (1900), from which this text is taken.

2. East-west Chicago street that, roughly, divides the city in half.

well kiss, a touch in the throat when the cars clacked by the flour mill where her father worked by the day, a pathetic sigh as the familiar green environs of the village passed in review, and the threads which bound her so lightly to girlhood and home were irretrievably broken.

To be sure she was not conscious of any of this. Any change, however great, might be remedied. There was always the next station where one might descend and return. There was the great city, bound more closely by these very trains which came up daily. Columbia City was not so very far away, even once she was in Chicago. What pray is a few hours—a hundred miles? She could go back. And then her sister was there. She looked at the little slip bearing the latter's address and wondered. She gazed at the green landscape now passing in swift review until her swifter thoughts replaced its impression with vague conjectures of what Chicago might be. Since infancy her ears had been full of its fame. Once the family had thought of moving there. If she secured good employment they might come now. Anyhow it was vast. There were lights and sounds and a roar of things. People were rich. There were vast depots. This on-rushing train was merely speeding to get there.

When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility. The city has its cunning wiles no less than the infinitely smaller and more human tempter. There are large forces which allure, with all the soulfulness of expression possible in the most cultured human. The gleam of a thousand lights is often as effective, to all moral intents and purposes, as the persuasive light in a wooing and fascinating eye. Half the undoing of the unsophisticated and natural mind is accomplished by forces wholly superhuman. A blare of sound, a roar of life, a vast array of human hives appeal to the astonished senses in equivocal terms. Without a counselor at hand to whisper cautious interpretations, what falsehoods may not these things breathe into the unguarded ear! Unrecognized for what they are, their beauty, like music, too often relaxes, then weakens, then perverts the simplest human perceptions.

Caroline, or "Sister Carrie" as she had been half affectionately termed by the family, was possessed of a mind rudimentary in its power of observation and analysis. Self-interest with her was high, but not strong. It was nevertheless her guiding characteristic. Warm with the fancies of youth, pretty with the insipid prettiness of the formative period, possessed of a figure which tended toward eventual shapeliness and an eye alight with certain native intelligence, she was a fair example of the middle American class—two generations removed from the emigrant. Books were beyond her interest—knowledge a sealed book. In the intuitive graces she was still crude. She could scarcely toss her head gracefully. Her hands were almost ineffectual for the same reason. The feet, though small, were set flatly. And yet she was interested in her charms, quick to understand the keener pleasures of life, ambitious to gain in material things. A half-equipped little knight she was, venturing to reconnoitre the mysterious city and dreaming wild dreams of some vague, far-off supremacy which should make it prey and subject, the proper penitent, grovelling at a woman's slipper.

"That," said a voice in her ear, "is one of the prettiest little resorts in Wisconsin."

"Is it?" she answered nervously.

The train was just pulling out of Waukesha.³ For some time she had been conscious of a man behind. She felt him observing her mass of hair. He had been fidgeting, and with natural intuition she felt a certain interest growing in that quarter. Her maidenly reserve and a certain sense of what was conventional under the circumstances called her to forestall and deny this familiarity, but the daring and magnetism of the individual, born of past experience and triumphs, prevailed. She answered.

He leaned forward to put his elbows upon the back of her seat and proceeded to make himself volubly agreeable.

"Yes, that's a great resort for Chicago people. The hotels are swell. You are not familiar with this part of the country, are you?"

"Oh yes I am," answered Carrie. "That is, I live at Columbia City. I have never been through here though."

"And so this is your first visit to Chicago," he observed.

All the time she was conscious of certain features out of the side of her eye. Flush, colorful cheeks, a light mustache, a gray fedora hat. She now turned and looked upon him in full, the instincts of self-protection and coquetry mingling confusedly in her brain.

"I didn't say that," she said.

"Oh," he answered in a very pleasing way and with an assumed air of mistake. "I thought you did."

Here was a type of the traveling canvasser for a manufacturing house—a class which at that time was first being dubbed by the slang of the day "drummers."⁴ He came within the meaning of a still newer term which had sprung into general use among Americans in 1880, and which concisely expressed the thought of one whose dress or manners are such as to impress strongly the fancy, or elicit the admiration, of susceptible young women—a "masher." His clothes were of an impressive character, the suit being cut of a striped and crossed pattern of brown wool, very popular at that time. It was what has since become known as a business suit. The low crotch of the vest revealed a stiff shirt bosom of white and pink stripes, surmounted by a high white collar about which was fastened a tie of distinct pattern. From his coat sleeves protruded a pair of linen cuffs of the same material as the shirt and fastened with large gold-plate buttons set with the common yellow agates known as "cat's-eyes." His fingers bore several rings, one the ever-enduring heavy seal, and from his vest dangled a neat gold watch chain from which was suspended the secret insignia of the Order of Elks.⁵ The whole suit was rather tight-fitting and was finished off with broad-soled tan shoes, highly polished, and the grey felt hat, then denominated "fedora," before mentioned. He was, for the order of intellect represented, attractive; and whatever he had to recommend him, you may be sure was not lost upon Carrie, in this her first glance.

Lest this order of individual should permanently pass, let me put down some of the most striking characteristics of his most successful manner and method. Good clothes of course were the first essential, the things without which he was nothing. A strong physical nature actuated by a keen desire

3. A city in Wisconsin about 100 miles north of Chicago on Lake Michigan.

4. "Canvassers" and "drummers" are salesmen.

5. A fraternal organization.

for the feminine was the next. A mind free of any consideration of the problems or forces of the world and actuated not by greed but an insatiable love of variable pleasure—woman—pleasure. His method was always simple. Its principal element was daring, backed of course by an intense desire and admiration for the sex. Let him meet with a young woman twice and upon the third meeting he would walk up and straighten her necktie for her and perhaps address her by her first name. If an attractive woman should deign a glance of interest in passing him upon the street he would run up, seize her by the hand in feigned acquaintanceship and convince her that they had met before, providing of course that his pleasing way interested her in knowing him further. In the great department stores he was at his ease in capturing the attention of some young woman, while waiting for the cash boy to come back with his change. In such cases, by those little wiles common to the type, he would find out the girl's name, her favorite flower, where a note would reach her, and perhaps pursue the delicate task of friendship until it proved unpromising for the one aim in view, when it would be relinquished.

He would do very well with more pretentious women, though the burden of expense was a slight deterrent. Upon entering a parlor car at St. Paul, for instance, he would select a chair next to the most promising bit of femininity and soon inquire if she cared to have the shade lowered. Before the train cleared the yards he would have the porter bring her a footstool. At the next lull in his conversational progress he would find her something to read, and from then on by dint of compliment gently insinuated, personal narrative, exaggeration and service, he would win her tolerance and mayhap regard.

Those who have ever delved into the depths of a woman's conscience must, at some time or other, have come upon that mystery of mysteries—the moral significance, to her, of clothes. A woman should some day write the complete philosophy of that subject. No matter how young she is, it is one of the things she wholly comprehends. There is an indescribably faint line in the matter of man's apparel which somehow divides for her those who are worth glancing at and those who are not. Once an individual has passed this faint line on the way downward he will get no glance from her. There is another line at which the dress of a man will cause her to study her own. This line the individual at her elbow now marked for Carrie. She became conscious of an inequality. Her own plain blue dress with its black cotton tape trimmings realized itself to her imagination as shabby. She felt the worn state of her shoes.

He mistook this thought wave, which caused her to withdraw her glance and turn for relief to the landscape outside, for some little gain his grace had brought him.

"Let's see," he went on. "I know quite a number of people in your town—Morgenroth the clothier and Gibson the dry-goods man."

"Oh, do you," she interrupted, aroused by memories of longings the displays in the latter's establishment had cost her.

At last he had a clue to her interest and followed it up deftly. In a few minutes he had come about into her seat. He talked of sales of clothing, his travels, Chicago and the amusements of that city.

"If you are going there you will enjoy it immensely. Have you relatives?"

"I am going to visit my sister," she explained.

"You want to see Lincoln Park," he said, "and Michigan Avenue.⁶ They are putting up great buildings there. It's a second New York, great. So much to see—theatres, crowds, fine houses—oh you'll like that."

There was a little ache in her fancy of all he described. Her insignificance in the presence of so much magnificence faintly affected her. She realized that hers was not to be a round of pleasure, and yet there was something promising in all the material prospect he set forth. There was something satisfactory in the attention of this individual with his good clothes. She could not help smiling as he told her of some popular actress she reminded him of. She was not silly and yet attention of this sort had its weight.

"You will be in Chicago some little time, won't you?" he observed, at one turn of the now easy conversation.

"I don't know," said Carrie vaguely—a flash vision of the possibility of her not securing employment rising in her mind.

"Several weeks anyhow," he said, looking steadily into her eyes.

There was much more passing now than the mere words indicated. He recognized the indescribable thing that made for fascination and beauty in her. She realized that she was of interest to him from the one standpoint which a woman both delights in and fears. Her manner was simple, though, for the very reason that she had not yet learned the many little affectations with which women conceal their true feelings—some things she did appear bold. A clever companion, had she ever had one, would have warned her never to look a man in the eyes so steadily.

"Why do you ask?" she said.

"Well, I'm going to be there several weeks. I'm going to study stock at our place and get new samples. I might show you 'round."

"I don't know whether you can or not—I mean I don't know whether I can. I shall be living with my sister and—"

"Well, if she minds, we'll fix that." He took out his pencil and a little pocket note book, as if it were all settled. "What is your address there?"

She fumbled her purse, which contained the address slip.

He reached down in his hip pocket and took out a fat purse. It was filled with slips of paper, some mileage books, a roll of green-backs and so on. It impressed her deeply. Such a purse had never been carried by any man who had ever been attentive to her before. Indeed a man who traveled, who was brisk and experienced and of the world, had never come within such close range before. The purse, the shiny tan shoes, the smart new suit and the *air* with which he did things built up for her a dim world of fortune around him of which he was the centre. It disposed her pleasantly toward all he might do.

He took out a neat business card on which was engraved "Bartlett, Caryoe and Company," and down in the left-hand corner "Chas. H. Drouet."

"That's me," he said, putting the card in her hand and touching his name. "It's pronounced 'Drew-eh.' Our family was French on my father's side."

She looked at it while he put up his purse. Then he got out a letter from a bunch in his coat pocket.

"This is the house I travel for," he went on, pointing to a picture on it—"corner of State and Lake." There was pride in his voice. He felt that it

6. A fashionable street of stores, office buildings, and the Art Institute. "Lincoln Park": a large lakefront park, home to a zoo and other attractions.

was something to be connected with such a place, and he made her feel that way.

“What is your address?” he began again, fixing his pencil to write.

She looked at his hand.

“Carrie Meeber,” she said slowly, “354 West Van Buren St., care S. C. Hanson.”

He wrote it carefully down and got out the purse again. “You’ll be at home if I come around Monday night?” he said.

“I think so,” she answered.

How true it is that words are but vague shadows of the volumes we mean. Little audible links they are, chaining together great inaudible feelings and purposes. Here were these two, bandying little phrases, drawing purses, looking at cards and both unconscious of how inarticulate all their real feelings were. Neither was wise enough to be sure of the working of the mind of the other. He could not tell how his luring succeeded. She could not realize that she was drifting, until he secured her address. Now she felt that she had yielded something—he, that he had gained a victory. Already they felt that they were somehow associated. Already he took control in directing the conversation. His words were easy. Her manner was relaxed.

They were nearing Chicago. Already the signs were numerous. Trains flashed by them. Across wide stretches of flat open prairie they could see lines of telegraph poles stalking across the fields toward the great city. Away off there were indications of suburban towns, some big smoke stacks towering high in the air. Frequently there were two-story frame houses standing out in the open fields, without fence or trees, outposts of the approaching army of homes.

To the child, the genius with imagination, or the wholly untraveled, the approach to a great city for the first time is a wonderful thing. Particularly if it be evening—that mystic period between the glare and the gloom of the world when life is changing from one sphere or condition to another. Ah, the promise of the night. What does it not hold for the weary. What old illusion of hope is not here forever repeated! Says the soul of the toiler to itself, “I shall soon be free. I shall be in the ways and the hosts of the merry. The streets, the lamp, the lighted chamber set for dining are for me. The theatres, the halls, the parties, the ways of rest and the paths of song—these are mine in the night.” Though all humanity be still enclosed in the shops, the thrill runs abroad. It is in the air. The dullest feel something which they may not always express or describe. It is the lifting of the burden of toil.

Sister Carrie gazed out of the window. Her companion, affected by her wonder, so contagious are all things, felt anew some interest in the city and pointed out the marvels. Already vast net-works of tracks—the sign and insignia of Chicago—stretched on either hand. There were thousands of cars and a clangor of engine bells. At the sides of this traffic stream stood dingy houses, smoky mills, tall elevators⁷ Through the interstices, evidences of the stretching city could be seen. Street cars waited at crossings for the train to go by. Gatemen toiled at wooden arms which closed the streets. Bells clanged, the rails clacked, whistles sounded afar off.

7. Grain elevators.

"This is North-West Chicago," said Drouet. "This is the Chicago River," and he pointed to a little muddy creek, crowded with the huge, masted wanderers from far-off waters nosing the black, posted banks. With a puff, a clang and a clatter of rails it was gone. "Chicago is getting to be a great town," he went on. "It's a wonder. You'll find lots to see here."

She did not hear this very well. Her heart was troubled by a kind of terror. The fact that she was alone, away from home, rushing into a great sea of life and endeavor, began to tell. She could not help but feel a little choked for breath—a little sick as her heart beat so fast. She half closed her eyes and tried to think it was nothing, that Columbia City was only a little way off.

"Chicago!—Chicago!" called the brakeman, slamming open the door. They were rushing into a more crowded yard, alive with the clatter and clang of life. She began to gather up her poor little grip and closed her hand firmly upon her purse. Drouet arose, kicked his legs to straighten his trousers and seized his clean yellow grip.

"I suppose your people will be here to meet you," he said. "Let me carry your grip."

"Oh no," she said. "I'd rather you wouldn't. I'd rather you wouldn't be with me when I meet my sister."

"All right," he said in all kindness. "I'll be near, though, in case she isn't here, and take you out there safely."

"You're so kind," said Carrie, feeling the goodness of such attention in her strange situation.

"Chicago!" called the brakeman, drawing the word out long. They were under a great shadowy train shed, where lamps were already beginning to shine out, with passenger cars all about and the train moving at a snail's pace. The people in the car were all up and crowding about the door.

"Well, here we are," said Drouet, leading the way to the door. "Goodbye," he said, "till I see you Monday."

"Goodbye," she said, taking his proffered hand.

"Remember I'll be looking till you find your sister."

She smiled into his eyes.

They filed out and he affected to take no notice of her. A lean-faced, rather commonplace woman recognized Carrie on the platform and hurried forward.

"Why Sister Carrie!" she began and there was a perfunctory embrace of welcome.

Carrie realized the change of affectional atmosphere at once. Amid all the maze, uproar and novelty, she felt cold reality taking her by the hand. No world of light and merriment. No round of amusement. Her sister carried with her much of the grimness of shift and toil.

"Why, how are all the folks at home"—she began—"how is Father, and Mother?"

Carrie answered, but was looking away. Down the aisle toward the gate leading into the waiting room and the street stood Drouet. He was looking back. When he saw that she saw him and was safe with her sister he turned to go, sending back the shadow of a smile. Only Carrie saw it. She felt something lost to her when he moved away. When he disappeared she felt his absence thoroughly. With her sister she was much alone, a lone figure in a tossing, thoughtless sea.

* * *

Chapter III

Once across the river and into the wholesale district, she glanced about her for some likely door at which to apply. As she contemplated the wide windows and imposing signs, she became conscious of being gazed upon and understood for what she was—a wage-seeker. She had never done this thing before and lacked courage. To avoid conspicuity and a certain indefinable shame she felt at being caught spying about for some place where she might apply for a position, she quickened her steps and assumed an air of indifference supposedly common to one upon an errand. In this way she passed many manufacturing and wholesale houses without once glancing in. At last, after several blocks of walking, she felt that this would not do, and began to look about again, though without relaxing her pace. A little way on she saw a great door which for some reason attracted her attention. It was ornamented by a small brass sign, and seemed to be the entrance to a vast hive of six or seven floors. “Perhaps,” she thought, “they may want some one” and crossed over to enter, screwing up her courage to the sticking point as she went. When she came within a score of feet of the desired goal, she observed a young gentleman in a grey check suit, fumbling his watch-charm and looking out. That he had anything to do with the concern she could not tell, but because he happened to be looking in her direction, her weakening heart misgave her and she hurried by, too overcome with shame to enter in. After several blocks of walking, in which the uproar of the streets and the novelty of the situation had time to wear away the effect of this, her first defeat, she again looked about. Over the way stood a great six-story structure labeled “Storm and King,” which she viewed with rising hope. It was a wholesale dry goods concern and employed women. She could see them moving about now and then upon the upper floors. This place she decided to enter, no matter what. She crossed over and walked directly toward the entrance. As she did so two men came out and paused in the door. A telegraph messenger in blue dashed past her and up the few steps which graced the entrance and disappeared. Several pedestrians out of the hurrying throng which filled the sidewalks passed about her as she paused, hesitating. She looked helplessly around and then, seeing herself observed, retreated. It was too difficult a task. She could not go past them.

So severe a defeat told sadly upon her nerves. She could scarcely understand her weakness and yet she could not think of gazing inquiringly about upon the surrounding scene. Her feet carried her mechanically forward, every foot of her progress being a satisfactory portion of a flight which she gladly made. Block after block passed by. Upon street lamps at the various corners she read names such as Madison, Monroe, La Salle, Clark, Dearborn, State,⁸ and still she went, her feet beginning to tire upon the broad stone flagging. She was pleased in part that the streets were bright and clean. The morning sun shining down with steadily increasing warmth made the shady side of the streets pleasantly cool. She looked at the blue sky overhead with more realization of its charm than had ever come to her before.

8. Major downtown streets between the Chicago River and Lake Michigan.

Her cowardice began to trouble her in a way. She turned back along the street she had come, resolving to hunt up Storm and King and enter in. On the way she encountered a great wholesale shoe company, through the broad plate windows of which she saw an enclosed executive department, hidden by frosted glass. Without this enclosure, but just within the street entrance, sat a grey-haired gentleman at a small table, with a large open ledger of some kind before him. She walked by this institution several times hesitating, but finding herself unobserved she eventually gathered sufficient courage to falter past the screen door and stand humbly waiting.

"Well, young lady," observed the old gentleman looking at her somewhat kindly—"what is it you wish?"

"I am, that is, do you—I mean, do you need any help?" she stammered.

"Not just at present," he answered smiling. "Not just at present. Come in sometime next week. Occasionally we need some one."

She received the answer in silence and backed awkwardly out. The pleasant nature of her reception rather astonished her. She had expected that it would be more difficult, that something cold and harsh would be said—she knew not what. That she had not been put to shame and made to feel her unfortunate position seemed remarkable. She did not realize that it was just this which made her experience easy, but the result was the same. She felt greatly relieved.

Somewhat encouraged, she ventured into another large structure. It was a clothing company, and more people were in evidence—well-dressed men of forty and more, surrounded by brass railings and employed variously.

An office boy approached her.

"Who is it you wish to see?" he asked.

"I want to see the manager," she returned.

He ran away and spoke to one of a group of three men who were conferring together. One broke off and came towards her.

"Well?" he said, coldly. The greeting drove all courage from her at once.

"Do you need any help?" she stammered.

"No," he replied abruptly and turned upon his heel.

She went foolishly out, the office boy deferentially swinging the door for her, and gladly sank into the obscuring crowd. It was a severe set-back to her recently pleased mental state.

Now she walked quite aimlessly for a time, turning here and there, seeing one great company after another but finding no courage to prosecute her single inquiry. High noon came and with it hunger. She hunted out an unassuming restaurant and entered but was disturbed to find that the prices were exorbitant for the size of her purse. A bowl of soup was all that she could feel herself able to afford, and with this quickly eaten she went out again. It restored her strength somewhat and made her moderately bold to pursue the search.

In walking a few blocks to fix upon some probable place she again encountered the firm of Storm and King and this time managed to enter. Some gentlemen were conferring close at hand but took no notice of her. She was left standing, gazing nervously upon the floor, her confusion and mental distress momentarily increasing until at last she was ready to turn and hurry eagerly away. When the limit of her distress had been nearly reached she was beckoned to by a man at one of the many desks within the nearby railing.

"Who is it you wish to see?" he inquired.

"Why any one, if you please," she answered. "I am looking for something to do."

"Oh, you want to see Mr. McManus," he returned. "Sit down!" and he pointed to a chair against the neighboring wall. He went on leisurely writing until after a time a short stout gentleman came in from the street.

"Mr. McManus," called the man at the desk, "this young woman wants to see you."

The short gentleman turned about towards Carrie, and she arose and came forward.

"What can I do for you, Miss," he inquired surveying her curiously.

"I want to know if I can get a position," she inquired.

"As what?" he asked.

"Not as anything in particular," she faltered. "I—"

"Have you ever had any experience in the wholesale dry goods business?" he questioned.

"No sir," she replied.

"Are you a stenographer or typewriter?"

"No sir."

"Well we haven't anything here," he said. "We employ only experienced help."

She began to step backward toward the door, when something about her plaintive face attracted him.

"Have you ever worked at anything before?" he inquired.

"No sir," she said.

"Well now, it's hardly possible that you would get anything to do in a wholesale house of this kind. Have you tried the department stores?"

She acknowledged that she had not.

"Well, if I were you," he said, looking at her rather genially, "I would try the department stores. They often need young women as clerks."

"Thank you," she said, her whole nature relieved by this spark of friendly interest.

"Yes," he said, as she moved toward the door, "you try the department stores," and off he went.

At that time the department store was in its earliest form of successful operation and there were not many. The first three in the United States, established about 1884, were in Chicago. Carrie was familiar with the names of several through the advertisements in the "Daily News," and now proceeded to seek them. The words of Mr. McManus had somehow managed to restore her courage, which had fallen low, and she dared to hope that this new line would offer her something in the way of employment. Some time she spent in wandering up and down thinking to encounter the buildings by chance, so readily is the mind, bent upon prosecuting a hard but needful errand, eased by that self-deception which the semblance of search without the reality gives. At last she inquired of a police officer and was directed to proceed "two blocks up" where she would find The Fair.⁹ Following his advice she reached that institution and entered.

9. Discount department store, founded in 1874.

The nature of these vast retail combinations, should they ever permanently disappear, will form an interesting chapter in the commercial history of our nation. Such a flowering out of a modest trade principle the world had never witnessed up to that time. They were along the line of the most effective retail organization, with hundreds of stores coordinated into one, and laid out upon the most imposing and economic basis. They were handsome, bustling, successful affairs, with a host of clerks and a swarm of patrons. Carrie passed along the busy aisles, much affected by the remarkable displays of trinkets, dress goods, shoes, stationery, jewelry. Each separate counter was a show place of dazzling interest and attraction. She could not help feeling the claim of each trinket and valuable upon her personally and yet she did not stop. There was nothing there which she could not have used—nothing which she did not long to own. The dainty slippers and stockings, the delicately frilled skirts and petticoats, the laces, ribbons, hair-combs, purses, all touched her with individual desire, and she felt keenly the fact that not any of these things were in the range of her purchase. She was a work-seeker, an outcast without employment, one whom the average employé could tell at a glance was poor and in need of a situation.

It must not be thought that anyone could have mistaken her for a nervous, sensitive, high-strung nature, cast unduly upon a cold, calculating and unpoetic world. Such certainly she was not. But women are peculiarly sensitive to the personal adornment or equipment of their person, even the dull-est, and particularly is this true of the young. Your bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked maiden, over whom a poet might well rave for the flowerlike expression of her countenance and the lissome and dainty grace of her body, may reasonably be dead to every evidence of the artistic and poetic in the unrelated evidences of life, and yet not lack in material appreciation. Never, it might be said, does she fail in this. With her the bloom of a rose may pass unappreciated, but the bloom of a fold of silk, never. If nothing in the heavens, or the earth, or the waters, could elicit her fancy or delight her from its spiritual or artistic side, think not that the material would be lost. The glint of a buckle, the hue of a precious stone, the faintest tints of the watered silk, these she would divine and qualify as readily as your poet if not more so. The creak, the rustle, the glow—the least and best of the graven or spun—, these she would perceive and appreciate—if not because of some fashionable or hearsay quality, then on account of their true beauty, their innate fitness in any order of harmony, their place in the magical order and sequence of dress.

Not only did Carrie feel the drag of desire for all of this which was new and pleasing in apparel for women, but she noticed, too, with a touch at the heart, the fine ladies who elbowed and ignored her, brushing past in utter disregard of her presence, themselves eagerly enlisted in the materials which the store contained. Carrie was not familiar with the appearance of her more fortunate sisters of the city. Neither had she before known the nature and appearance of the shop girls, with whom she now compared poorly. They were pretty in the main, some even handsome, with a certain independence and toss of indifference which added, in the case of the more favored, a certain piquancy. Their clothes were neat, in many instances fine, and wherever she encountered the eye of one, it was only to recognize in it a keen analysis of her own position—her individual shortcomings of dress and that

shadow of *manner* which she thought must hang about her and make clear to all who and what she was. A flame of envy lighted in her heart. She realized in a dim way how much the city held—wealth, fashion, ease—every adornment for women, and she longed for dress and beauty with a whole and fulsome heart.

On the second floor were the managerial offices, to which after some inquiry she was now directed. There she found other girls ahead of her, applicants like herself, but with more of that self-satisfied and independent air which experience of the city lends—girls who scrutinized her in a painful manner. After a wait of perhaps three-quarters of an hour she was called in turn.

“Now,” said a sharp, quick-mannered Jew who was sitting at a roll-top desk near the window—“have you ever worked in any other store?”

“No sir,” said Carrie.

“Oh, you haven’t,” he said, eyeing her keenly.

“No sir,” she replied.

“Well, we prefer young women just now with some experience. I guess we can’t use you.”

Carrie stood waiting a moment, hardly certain whether the interview had terminated.

“Don’t wait!” he exclaimed. “Remember we are very busy here.”

Carrie began to move quickly to the door.

“Hold on,” he said, calling her back. “Give me your name and address. We want girls occasionally.”

When she had gotten safely out again into the street she could scarcely restrain tears. It was not so much the particular rebuff which she had just experienced, but the whole abashing trend of the day. She was tired and rather over-played upon in the nerves. She abandoned the thought of appealing to the other department stores and now wandered on, feeling a certain safety and relief in mingling with the crowd.

In her indifferent wandering she turned into Jackson Street, not far from the river, and was keeping her way along the south side of that imposing thoroughfare, when a piece of wrapping paper written on with marking ink and tacked upon a door attracted her attention. It read “Girls wanted—wrappers and stitchers.” She hesitated for the moment, thinking surely to go in, but upon further consideration the added qualifications of “wrappers and stitchers” deterred her. She had no idea of what that meant. Most probably she would need to be experienced in it. She walked on a little way, mentally balancing as to whether or not to apply. Necessity triumphed however and she returned.

The entrance, which opened into a small hall, led to an elevator shaft, the elevator of which was up. It was a dingy affair, being used both as a freight and passenger entrance, and the woodwork was marked and splintered by the heavy boxes which were tumbled in and out, at intervals. A frowzy-headed German-American, about fourteen years of age, operated the elevator in his shirt sleeves and bare feet. His face was considerably marked with grease and dirt.

When the elevator stopped, the boy leisurely raised a protecting arm of wood and by grace of his superior privilege admitted her.

“Wear do you want go?” he inquired.

"I want to see the manager," she replied.

"Wot manager?" he returned, surveying her caustically.

"Is there more than one?" she asked. "I thought it was all one firm."

"Naw," said the youth. "Der's six different people. Want to see Spiegelheim?"

"I don't know," answered Carrie. She colored a little as she began to feel the necessity of explaining. "I want to see whoever put up that sign."

"Dot's Spiegelheim," said the boy. "Fort floor." Therewith he proudly turned to his task of pulling the rope, and the elevator ascended.

The firm of Spiegelheim and Co., makers of boys' caps, occupied one floor of fifty feet in width and some eighty feet in depth. It was a place rather dingly lighted, the darkest portions having incandescent lights, filled in part with machines and part with workbenches. At the latter labored quite a company of girls and some men. The former were drabby looking creatures, stained in face with oil and dust, clad in thin shapeless cotton dresses, and shod with more or less worn shoes. Many of them had their sleeves rolled up, revealing bare arms, and in some cases, owing to heat, their dresses were open at the neck. They were, a fair type of nearly the lowest order of shop girls,—careless, rather slouchy, and more or less pale from confinement. They were not timid however, were rich in curiosity and strong in daring and slang.

Carrie looked about her, very much disturbed and quite sure that she did not want to work here. Aside from making her uncomfortable by sidelong glances, no one paid her the least attention. She waited until the whole department was aware of her presence. Then some word was sent round and a foreman in an apron and shirt sleeves, the latter rolled up to his shoulders, approached.

"Do you want to see me?" he asked.

"Do you need any help?" said Carrie, already learning directness of address.

"Do you know how to stitch caps?" he returned.

"No sir," she replied.

"Have you ever had any experience at this kind of work?" he inquired.

She owned that she hadn't.

"Well," said the foreman, scratching his ear meditatively, "we do need a stitcher. We like experienced help though. We've hardly got time to break people in." He paused and looked away out of the window. "We might, though, put you at finishing," he concluded reflectively.

"How much do you pay a week?" ventured Carrie, emboldened by a certain softness in the man's manner and his simplicity of address.

"Three and a half," he answered.

"Oh," she was about to exclaim, but checked herself, and allowed her thoughts to die without expression.

"We're not exactly in need of anybody," he went on vaguely, looking her over as one would a package. "You can come Monday morning though," he added, "and I'll put you to work."

"Thank you," said Carrie weakly.

"If you come, bring an apron," he added.

He walked away and left her standing by the elevator, never so much as inquiring her name.

While the appearance of the shop and the announcement of the price paid per week operated very much as a blow to Carrie's fancy, the fact that work of any kind, after so rude a round of experience, was offered her,

was gratifying. She could not begin to believe that she would take the place, modest as her aspirations were. She had been used to better than that. Her mere experience and the free out-of-doors life of the country caused her nature to revolt at such confinement. Dirt had never been her share. Her sister's flat was clean. This place was grimy and low; the girls were careless and hardened. They must be bad-minded and -hearted, she imagined. Still a place had been offered her. Surely Chicago was not so bad if she could find one place in one day. She might find another and better later.

Her subsequent experiences were not of a reassuring nature, however. From all the more pleasing or imposing places she was turned away abruptly with the most chilling formality. In others where she applied, only the experienced were required. She met with painful rebuffs, the most trying of which had been in a cloak manufacturing house, where she had gone to the fourth floor to inquire.

"No, no," said the foreman, a rough, heavy-built individual who looked after a miserably lighted work shop, "we don't want anyone. Don't come here."

In another factory she was leered upon by a most sensual-faced individual who endeavored to turn the natural questions of the inquiry into a personal interview, asking all sorts of embarrassing questions and endeavoring to satisfy himself evidently that she was of loose enough morals to suit his purpose. In that case she had been relieved enough to get away and found the busy, indifferent streets to be again a soothing refuge.

With the wane of the afternoon went her hopes, her courage and her strength. She had been astonishingly persistent. So earnest an effort was well deserving of a better reward. On every hand, to her fatigued senses, the great business portion grew larger, harder, more stolid in its indifference. It seemed as if it was all closed to her, that the struggle was too fierce for her to hope to do anything at all. Men and women hurried by in long, shifting lines. She felt the flow of the tide of effort and interest, felt her own helplessness without quite realizing the wisp on the tide that she was. She cast about vainly for some possible place to apply but found no door which she had the courage to enter. It would be the same thing all over. The old humiliation of her pleas rewarded by curt denial. Sick at heart and in body, she turned to the west, the direction of Minnie's flat, which she had now fixed in mind, and began that wearisome, baffled retreat which the seeker for employment at nightfall too often makes. In passing through Fifth Avenue, south towards Van Buren Street, where she intended to take a car, she passed the door of a large wholesale shoe house, through the plate glass window of which she could see a middle-aged gentleman sitting at a small desk. One of those forlorn impulses which often grow out of a fixed sense of defeat, the last sprouting of a baffled and uprooted growth of ideas, seized upon her. She walked deliberately through the door and up to the gentleman who looked at her weary face with partially awakened interest.

"What is it?" he said.

"Can you give me something to do?" asked Carrie.

"Now I really don't know," he said kindly. "What kind of work is it you want—you're not a typewriter, are you?"

"Oh, no," answered Carrie.

"Well, we only employ book keepers and typewriters here. You might go round to the side and inquire upstairs. They did want some help upstairs a few days ago. Ask for Mr. Brown."

She hastened around to the side entrance and was taken up by the elevator to the fourth floor.

"Call Mr. Brown, Willie," said the elevator man to a boy near by.

Willie went off and presently returned with the information that Mr. Brown said she should sit down and that he would be around in a little while.

It was a portion of a stock room which gave no idea of the general character of the floor, and Carrie could form no opinion of the nature of the work.

"So you want something to do," said Mr. Brown, after he inquired concerning the nature of her errand. "Have you ever been employed in a shoe factory before?"

"No sir," said Carrie.

"What is your name?" he inquired, and being informed, "Well, I don't know as I have anything for you. Would you work for four and a half a week?"

Carrie was too worn by defeat not to feel that it was considerable. She had not expected that he would offer her less than six. She acquiesced, however, and he took her name and address.

"Well," he said finally—"you report here at eight o'clock Monday morning. I think I can find something for you to do."

He left her revived by the possibilities, sure that she had found something to do at last. Instantly the blood crept warmly over her body. Her nervous tension relaxed. She walked out into the busy street and discovered a new atmosphere. Behold, the throng was moving with a lightsome step. She noticed that men and women were smiling. Scraps of conversation and notes of laughter floated to her. The air was light. People were already pouring out of the buildings, their labor ended for the day. She noticed that they were pleased, and thoughts of her sister's home, and the meal that would be awaiting her, quickened her steps. She hurried on, tired perhaps, but no longer weary of foot. What would not Minnie say! Ah, long the winter in Chicago—the lights, the crowd, the amusement. This was a great, pleasing metropolis after all. Her new firm was a goodly institution. Its windows were of huge plate glass. She could probably do well there. Thoughts of Drouet returned, of the things he had told her. She now felt that life was better. That it was livelier, sprightlier. She boarded a car in the best of sprits, feeling her blood still flowing pleasantly. She would live in Chicago, her mind kept saying to itself. She would have a better time than she ever had before—she would be happy.

STEPHEN CRANE

1871–1900

Shortly after the death of Stephen Crane at the age of twenty-eight, the future novelist Willa Cather asked, “Was ever so much experience and achievement crowded into such space of time?” Indeed, Crane’s brief, hectic career of literary celebrity seems in retrospect to be incomparable in its intensity and contradiction. He eschewed convention and lived the life of a penniless artist, yet he sought the approval of the literary establishment. He was a journalist who could spend months composing a single short story. Crane’s attention to the rhythms of speech and quotidian detail earned him the praise of literary realists, while his skepticism of moral judgment would make him a favorite of a later generation of modernists.

Crane was born in 1871 in Newark, New Jersey, the youngest of fourteen children (nine of whom survived to adulthood). His family was rooted in the traditions of reform Christianity. On his mother’s side were generations of Methodist ministers, and his father was a Methodist minister as well. Crane would not follow in this tradition, eventually rejecting the religious faith of his family and its moral judgments. He instead developed an interest in the military, shaped in part by stories of ancestors who served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. After his father’s death in 1880, Crane attended a Methodist boarding school and considered applying to West Point, the U.S. Military Academy. Though he later decided against the military—briefly attending Lafayette College and Syracuse University in a thoroughly undistinguished academic career—his fascination with warfare fueled his imagination.

At the age of nineteen, Crane left college to move to New York, where he divided his time between the seedy apartments of his artist friends and the home of his brother, Edmund, in nearby Lake View, New Jersey. He accepted a variety of journalistic assignments even as he worked on his own sketches of urban life. In 1893, Crane published his first book—*Maggie, A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*—at his own expense, going so far as to hire four men to advertise the book by reading it on the elevated train. The short novel, included here in its entirety, earned praise from both Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells for its revealing portrayal of the urban poor and its deployment of carefully crafted dialect. The story of Maggie—a tenement girl who seems driven by powerful forces into prostitution—was not a commercial success, however. The book did not sell well in Crane’s lifetime, even when it was later republished by a more prestigious publishing house after Crane became better known.

By contrast, Crane’s next novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), made him a literary celebrity. Crane was prompted in part by the vogue in the 1880s and ’90s for magazine articles about Civil War battles and generals, articles that emphasized the movements of troops and strategies of war but that frequently said little about the experiences of enlisted men. He reportedly remarked to a friend, “I wonder that *some* of these fellows don’t tell how they *felt* in those scraps!” *The Red Badge of Courage* emphasizes that feeling, staging a psychological drama of complexity and ambiguity. The protagonist, Henry Fleming, is as much antihero as hero, a man who experiences neither the glory nor the valor of war but rather profound alienation.

The Red Badge of Courage was first syndicated in newspapers in December 1894 to immediate acclaim, and the same syndication company hired him early in 1895 as a roving reporter in the American West and Mexico, experiences that would give him the material for several of his finest tales, including “The Blue Hotel” (1898).



Stephen Crane as a war correspondent in Athens, Greece, 1897, posing for a studio photograph.

That same year, Crane published his first volume of poetry, *The Black Riders and Other Lines*. Predictably, Garland and Howells responded favorably to Crane's spare, original, unflinchingly honest poetry. Garland, for instance, later remarked that his poems "carried the sting and compression of Emily Dickinson's verse," which had finally in that decade become widely available for the first time. Although Crane's experimental, philosophical verse failed to win a large audience, in the decades after his death reviewers would regard it as a forerunner of the Imagist movement led by Hilda Doolittle, Ezra Pound, and Amy Lowell.

Crane's life took a major turn in the fall of 1896, after the *New York Journal* hired him to report on that city's notorious Tenderloin district, famous for its night life of drugs, prostitution, and corruption. After leaving a hashish parlor, Crane challenged the wrongful arrest of a prostitute—and then appeared in court to defend her. The events made headlines, and the scandal chased Crane from New York. He left the city that winter to report on the insurrection in Cuba, where rebels were fighting for independence from Spain. On his way to Cuba he met Cora Howorth Taylor, the proprietor of a bordello in Jacksonville, Florida, with whom would live for the last three years of his life. Crane successfully arranged transport to Cuba, only to face disaster: on January 2, 1897, Crane's ship, *The Commodore*, sank off the coast of Florida. His report of this harrowing adventure was published a few days later in the *New York Press*. More significantly, the experience led to his composition of one of the best-known and most widely reprinted of all American stories, "The Open Boat." This story, like *The Red Badge of Courage*, reveals Crane's characteristic subject matter—the physical, emotional, and intellectual responses of people under extreme pressure, nature's indifference to the fate of humanity, and the difficulty of

arriving at moral judgment. Like *Maggie*, “The Open Boat” locates Crane within the currents of American literary naturalism with Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser—all contemporaries who were not well known to him.

In stories like “The Open Boat” and “The Blue Hotel,” Crane achieved his mature style, one characterized by irony and brevity, qualities later associated with the literary modernism of Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, and Ernest Hemingway. His career in many ways demonstrates the limits of categories such as realism, naturalism, and modernism. But Crane’s writing also offers a way of understanding the continuities among these literary movements. After all, Crane deliberately sought the approbation of figures like Garland and Howells, whom he treated sympathetically in his journalism and who, in turn, esteemed his work highly. At the same time, younger authors like Hemingway—who considered Crane one of the three “good writers” of American literature—could find in Crane seeds of their own literary endeavors.

The final years of Crane’s life were a flurry of frenetic activity and financial free-fall. He became a war correspondent, covering first the Greco-Turkish War and then later the U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1898. During the same period, he and Cora Taylor settled in England, where Crane became acquainted with Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, and Henry James. Crane suffered from both tuberculosis and chronic debt, and his health rapidly declined while he engaged in furious attempts to earn money through his writing. In 1899 he drafted thirteen stories set in the fictional town Whilomville, and he published his second volume of poetry, *War Is Kind*, as well as the novel *Active Service* and the American edition of “*The Monster*” and *Other Stories*. “The Monster” is a daring exploration of the hypocrisy and cruelty of racial prejudice. During a Christmas party that year Crane nearly died of a lung hemorrhage. Surviving only a few months, he summoned the strength to write a series of nine articles on great battles and completed the first twenty-five chapters of the novel *The O’Ruddy*. In spite of Cora’s hopes for a miraculous cure, and the generous assistance of his friends, Crane died on June 5, 1900, in Badenweiler, Germany.

Maggie: A Girl of the Streets¹

Chapter I

A very little boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honor of *Rum Alley*. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil’s Row² who were circling madly about the heap and pelting at him.

His infantile countenance was livid with fury. His small body was writhing in the delivery of great, crimson oaths.

“Run, Jimmie, run! Dey’ll get yehs,” screamed a retreating Rum Alley child.

“Naw,” responded Jimmie with a valiant roar, “dese micks³ can’t make me run.”

Howls of renewed wrath went up from Devil’s Row throats. Tattered gamins on the right made a furious assault on the gravel heap. On their small,

1. First published in 1893, under the pseudonym Johnston Smith. Reprinted by D. Appleton and Company of New York in 1896; and again as *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* by Stephen Crane, ed. Thomas A. Gullason (1979), from which this text and selected notes are taken.

2. Rum Alley and Devil’s Row are fictitious

places; Rum Alley may have been suggested to Crane by the chapter “The Reign of Rum,” in Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and by the Prohibition work of his parents.

3. Derogatory slang for Irish immigrants and their descendants.

convulsed faces there shone the grins of true assassins. As they charged, they threw stones and cursed in shrill chorus.

The little champion of Rum Alley stumbled precipitately down the other side. His coat had been torn to shreds in a scuffle, and his hat was gone. He had bruises on twenty parts of his body, and blood was dripping from a cut in his head. His wan features wore a look of a tiny, insane demon.

On the ground, children from Devil's Row closed in on their antagonist. He crooked his left arm defensively about his head and fought with cursing fury. The little boys ran to and fro, dodging, hurling stones and swearing in barbaric trebles.

From a window of an apartment house that upreared its form from amid squat, ignorant stables, there leaned a curious woman. Some laborers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river,⁴ paused for a moment and regarded the fight. The engineer of a passive tugboat hung lazily to a railing and watched. Over on the Island,⁵ a worm of yellow convicts came from the shadow of a grey ominous building and crawled slowly along the river's bank.

A stone had smashed into Jimmie's mouth. Blood was bubbling over his chin and down upon his ragged shirt. Tears made furrows on his dirt-stained cheeks. His thin legs had begun to tremble and turn weak, causing his small body to reel. His roaring curses of the first part of the fight had changed to a blasphemous chatter.

In the yells of the whirling mob of Devil's Row children there were notes of joy like songs of triumphant savagery. The little boys seemed to leer gloatingly at the blood upon the other child's face.

Down the avenue came boastfully sauntering a lad of sixteen years, although the chronic sneer of an ideal manhood already sat upon his lips. His hat was tipped with an air of challenge over his eye. Between his teeth, a cigar stump was tilted at the angle of defiance. He walked with a certain swing of the shoulders which appalled the timid. He glanced over into the vacant lot in which the little raving boys from Devil's Row seethed about the shrieking and tearful child from Rum Alley.

"Gee!" he murmured with interest. "A scrap. Gee!"

He strode over to the cursing circle, swinging his shoulders in a manner which denoted that he held victory in his fists. He approached at the back of one of the most deeply engaged of the Devil's Row children.

"Ah, what deh hell," he said, and smote the deeply-engaged one on the back of the head. The little boy fell to the ground and gave a hoarse, tremendous howl. He scrambled to his feet, and perceiving, evidently, the size of his assailant, ran quickly off, shouting alarms. The entire Devil's Row party followed him. They came to a stand a short distance away and yelled taunting oaths at the boy with the chronic sneer. The latter, momentarily, paid no attention to them.

"What deh hell, Jimmie?" he asked of the small champion.

Jimmie wiped his blood-wet features with his sleeve.

"Well, it was dis way, Pete, see! I was goin' teh lick dat Riley kid and dey all pitched on me."

4. The East River, which separates the western end of Long Island (Brooklyn and Queens) from Manhattan and the Bronx.

5. In the 1890s, the "Island," located in the East

River, was known as Blackwell's Island. Here the City of New York maintained a penitentiary, various hospitals, and almshouses. Later it was called Welfare Island; now it is Roosevelt Island.

Some Rum Alley children now came forward. The party stood for a moment exchanging vainglorious remarks with Devil's Row. A few stones were thrown at long distances, and words of challenge passed between small warriors. Then the Rum Alley contingent turned slowly in the direction of their home street. They began to give, each to each, distorted versions of the fight. Causes of retreat in particular cases were magnified. Blows dealt in the fight were enlarged to catapultian power, and stones thrown were alleged to have hurtled with infinite accuracy. Valor grew strong again, and the little boys began to swear with great spirit.

"Ah, we blokies⁶ kin lick deh hull damn Row," said a child, swaggering.

Little Jimmie was striving to stanch the flow of blood from his cut lips. Scowling, he turned upon the speaker.

"Ah, where deh hell was yeh when I was doin' all deh fightin'?" he demanded. "Youse kids makes me tired."

"Ah, go ahn," replied the other argumentatively.

Jimmie replied with heavy contempt. "Ah, youse can't fight, Blue Billie! I kin lick yeh wid one han'."

"Ah, go ahn," replied Billie again.

"Ah," said Jimmie threateningly.

"Ah," said the other in the same tone.

They struck at each other, clinched, and rolled over on the cobble stones.

"Smash 'im, Jimmie, kick deh damn guts out of 'im," yelled Pete, the lad with the chronic sneer, in tones of delight.

The small combatants pounded and kicked, scratched and tore. They began to weep and their curses struggled in their throats with sobs. The other little boys clasped their hands and wriggled their legs in excitement. They formed a bobbing circle about the pair.

A tiny spectator was suddenly agitated.

"Cheese it, Jimmie, cheese it! Here comes yer fader," he yelled.

The circle of little boys instantly parted. They drew away and waited in ecstatic awe for that which was about to happen. The two little boys fighting in the modes of four thousand years ago, did not hear the warning.

Up the avenue there plodded slowly a man with sullen eyes. He was carrying a dinner pail and smoking an apple-wood pipe.

As he neared the spot where the little boys strove, he regarded them listlessly. But suddenly he roared an oath and advanced upon the rolling fighters.

"Here, you Jim, git up, now, while I belt yer life out, you damned disorderly brat."

He began to kick into the chaotic mass on the ground. The boy Billie felt a heavy boot strike his head. He made a furious effort and disentangled himself from Jimmie. He tottered away, damning.

Jimmie arose painfully from the ground and confronting his father, began to curse him. His parent kicked him. "Come home, now," he cried, "an' stop yer jawin', er I'll lam⁷ the everlasting head off yehs."

They departed. The man paced placidly along with the apple-wood emblem of serenity between his teeth. The boy followed a dozen feet in the rear. He swore luridly, for he felt that it was degradation for one who aimed to be

6. Fellows (slang).

7. Wallop, beat (slang).

some vague soldier, or a man of blood with a sort of sublime license, to be taken home by a father.

Chapter II

Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels.

A small ragged girl dragged a red, bawling infant along the crowded ways. He was hanging back, baby-like, bracing his wrinkled, bare legs.

The little girl cried out: "Ah, Tommie, come ahn. Dere's Jimmie and fader. Don't be a-pullin' me back."

She jerked the baby's arm impatiently. He fell on his face, roaring. With a second jerk she pulled him to his feet, and they went on. With the obstinacy of his order, he protested against being dragged in a chosen direction. He made heroic endeavors to keep on his legs, denounce his sister and consume a bit of orange peeling which he chewed between the times of his infantile orations.

As the sullen-eyed man, followed by the blood-covered boy, drew near, the little girl burst into reproachful cries. "Ah, Jimmie, youse bin fightin' agin."

The urchin swelled disdainfully.

"Ah, what deh hell, Mag. See?"

The little girl upbraided him. "Youse allus fightin', Jimmie, an' yeh knows it puts mudder out when yehs come home half dead, an' it's like we'll all get a poundin'."

She began to weep. The babe threw back his head and roared at his prospects.

"Ah, what deh hell!" cried Jimmie. "Shut up er I'll smack yer mou'. See?"

As his sister continued her lamentations, he suddenly swore and struck her. The little girl reeled and, recovering herself, burst into tears and quaveringly cursed him. As she slowly retreated her brother advanced dealing her cuffs. The father heard and turned about.

"Stop that, Jim, d'yeh hear? Leave yer sister alone on the street. It's like I can never beat any sense into yer damned wooden head."

The urchin raised his voice in defiance to his parent and continued his attacks. The babe bawled tremendously, protesting with great violence. During his sister's hasty manoeuvres, he was dragged by the arm.

Finally the procession plunged into one of the gruesome doorways. They crawled up dark stairways and along cold, gloomy halls. At last the father pushed open a door and they entered a lighted room in which a large woman was rampant.

She stopped in a career from a seething stove to a pan-covered table. As the father and children filed in she peered at them.

"Eh, what? Been fightin' agin, by Gawd!" She threw herself upon Jimmie. The urchin tried to dart behind the others and in the scuffle the babe, Tommie, was knocked down. He protested with his usual vehemence, because they had bruised his tender shins against a table leg.

The mother's massive shoulders heaved with anger. Grasping the urchin by the neck and shoulder she shook him until he rattled. She dragged him to an unholy sink, and, soaking a rag in water, began to scrub his lacerated face with it. Jimmie screamed in pain and tried to twist his shoulders out of the clasp of the huge arms.

The babe sat on the floor watching the scene, his face in contortions like that of a woman at a tragedy. The father, with a newly-laden pipe in his mouth, crouched on a backless chair near the stove. Jimmie's cries annoyed him. He turned about and bellowed at his wife:

"Let the damned kid alone for a minute, will yeh, Mary? Yer allus poundin' 'im. When I come nights I can't git no rest 'cause yer allus poundin' a kid. Let up, d'yeh hear? Don't be allus poundin' a kid."

The woman's operations on the urchin instantly increased in violence. At last she tossed him to a corner where he limply lay cursing and weeping.

The wife put her immense hands on her hips and with a chieftainlike stride approached her husband.

"Ho," she said, with a great grunt of contempt. "An' what in the devil are you stickin' your nose for?"

The babe crawled under the table and, turning, peered out cautiously. The ragged girl retreated and the urchin in the corner drew his legs carefully beneath him.

The man puffed his pipe calmly and put his great mudded boots on the back part of the stove.

"Go teh hell," he murmured, tranquilly.

The woman screamed and shook her fists before her husband's eyes. The rough yellow of her face and neck flared suddenly crimson. She began to howl.

He puffed imperturbably at his pipe for a time, but finally arose and began to look out at the window into the darkening chaos of back yards.

"You've been drinkin', Mary," he said. "You'd better let up on the bot', ol' woman, or you'll git done."

"You're a liar. I ain't had a drop," she roared in reply.

They had a lurid altercation, in which they damned each other's souls with frequency.

The babe was staring out from under the table, his small face working in his excitement.

The ragged girl went stealthily over to the corner where the urchin lay.

"Are yehs hurted much, Jimmie?" she whispered timidly.

"Not a damn bit! See?" growled the little boy.

"Will I wash deh blood?"

"Naw!"

"Will I—"

"When I catch dat Riley kid I'll break 'is face! Dat's right! See?"

He turned his face to the wall as if resolved to grimly bide his time.

In the quarrel between husband and wife, the woman was victor. The man grabbed his hat and rushed from the room, apparently determined upon a vengeful drunk. She followed to the door and thundered at him as he made his way down-stairs.

She returned and stirred up the room until her children were bobbing about like bubbles.

“Git outa deh way,” she persistently bawled, waving feet with their dishevelled shoes near the heads of her children. She shrouded herself, puffing and snorting, in a cloud of steam at the stove, and eventually extracted a frying-pan full of potatoes that hissed.

She flourished it. “Come teh yer suppers, now,” she cried with sudden exasperation. “Hurry up, now, er I’ll help yeh!”

The children scrambled hastily. With prodigious clatter they arranged themselves at table. The babe sat with his feet dangling high from a precarious infant chair and gorged his small stomach. Jimmie forced, with feverish rapidity, the grease-enveloped pieces between his wounded lips. Maggie, with side glances of fear of interruption, ate like a small pursued tigress.

The mother sat blinking at them. She delivered reproaches, swallowed potatoes and drank from a yellow-brown bottle. After a time her mood changed and she wept as she carried little Tommie into another room and laid him to sleep with his fists doubled in an old quilt of faded red and green grandeur. Then she came and moaned by the stove. She rocked to and fro upon a chair, shedding tears and crooning miserably to the two children about their “poor mother” and “yer fader, damn ’is soul.”

The little girl plodded between the table and the chair with a dishpan on it. She tottered on her small legs beneath burdens of dishes.

Jimmie sat nursing his various wounds. He cast furtive glances at his mother. His practised eye perceived her gradually emerged from a muddled mist of sentiment until her brain burned in drunken heat. He sat breathless.

Maggie broke a plate.

The mother started to her feet as if propelled.

“Good Gawd,” she howled. Her eyes glittered on her child with sudden hatred. The fervent red of her face turned almost to purple. The little boy ran to the halls, shrieking like a monk in an earthquake.

He floundered about in darkness until he found the stairs. He stumbled, panic-stricken, to the next floor. An old woman opened a door. A light behind her threw a flare on the urchin’s quivering face.

“Eh, Gawd, child, what is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin’ yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin’ yer fader?”

Chapter III

Jimmie and the old woman listened long in the hall. Above the muffled roar of conversation, the dismal wailings of babies at night, the thumping of feet in unseen corridors and rooms, mingled with the sound of varied hoarse shoutings in the street and the rattling of wheels over cobbles, they heard the screams of the child and the roars of the mother die away to a feeble moaning and a subdued bass muttering.

The old woman was a gnarled and leathery personage who could don, at will, an expression of great virtue. She possessed a small music box capable

of one tune, and a collection of “God bless yehs” pitched in assorted keys of fervency. Each day she took a position upon the stones of Fifth Avenue,⁸ where she crooked her legs under her and crouched immovable and hideous, like an idol. She received daily a small sum in pennies. It was contributed, for the most part, by persons who did not make their homes in that vicinity.

Once, when a lady had dropped her purse on the sidewalk, the gnarled woman had grabbed it and smuggled it with great dexterity beneath her cloak. When she was arrested she had cursed the lady into a partial swoon, and with her aged limbs, twisted from rheumatism, had almost kicked the stomach out of a huge policeman whose conduct upon that occasion she referred to when she said: “The police, damn ’em.”

“Eh, Jimmie, it’s cursed shame,” she said. “Go, now, like a dear an’ buy me a can, an’ if yer mudder raises ’ell all night yehs can sleep here.”

Jimmie took a tendered tin-pail and seven pennies and departed. He passed into the side door of a saloon and went to the bar. Straining up on his toes he raised the pail and pennies as high as his arms would let him. He saw two hands thrust down and take them. Directly the same hands let down the filled pail and he left.

In front of the gruesome doorway he met a lurching figure. It was his father, swaying about on uncertain legs.

“Give me deh can. See?” said the man, threateningly.

“Ah, come off! I got dis can fer dat ol’ woman an’ it ’ud be dirt teh swipe it. See?” cried Jimmie.

The father wrenched the pail from the urchin. He grasped it in both hands and lifted it to his mouth. He glued his lips to the under edge and tilted his head. His hairy throat swelled until it seemed to grow near his chin. There was a tremendous gulping movement and the beer was gone.

The man caught his breath and laughed. He hit his son on the head with the empty pail. As it rolled clanging into the street, Jimmie began to scream and kicked repeatedly at his father’s shins.

“Look at deh dirt what yeh done me,” he yelled. “Deh ol’ woman ’ill be raisin’ hell.”

He retreated to the middle of the street, but the man did not pursue. He staggered toward the door.

“I’ll club hell outa yeh when I ketch yeh,” he shouted, and disappeared.

During the evening he had been standing against a bar drinking whiskies and declaring to all comers, confidentially: “My home reg’lar livin’ hell! Damndes’ place! Reg’lar hell! Why do I come an’ drin’ whisk’ here thish way? ’Cause home reg’lar livin’ hell!”

Jimmie waited a long time in the street and then crept warily up through the building. He passed with great caution the door of the gnarled woman, and finally stopped outside his home and listened.

He could hear his mother moving heavily about among the furniture of the room. She was chanting in a mournful voice, occasionally interjecting bursts of volcanic wrath at the father, who, Jimmie judged, had sunk down on the floor or in a corner.

“Why deh blazes don’ chere try teh keep Jim from fightin’? I’ll break yer jaw,” she suddenly bellowed.

8. One of Manhattan’s most fashionable streets.

The man mumbled with drunken indifference. "Ah, wha' deh hell. W'a's odds? Wha' makes kick?"

"Because he tears 'is clothes, yeh damn fool," cried the woman in supreme wrath.

The husband seemed to become aroused. "Go teh hell," he thundered fiercely in reply. There was a crash against the door and something broke into clattering fragments. Jimmie partially suppressed a howl and darted down the stairway. Below he paused and listened. He heard howls and curses, groans and shrieks, confusingly in chorus as if a battle were raging. With all was the crash of splintering furniture. The eyes of the urchin glared in fear that one of them would discover him.

Curious faces appeared in doorways, and whispered comments passed to and fro. "Ol' Johnson's raisin' hell agin."

Jimmie stood until the noises ceased and the other inhabitants of the tenement had all yawned and shut their doors. Then he crawled up-stairs with the caution of an invader of a panther den. Sounds of labored breathing came through the broken door-panels. He pushed the door open and entered, quaking.

A glow from the fire threw red hues over the bare floor, the cracked and soiled plastering, and the overturned and broken furniture.

In the middle of the floor lay his mother asleep. In one corner of the room his father's limp body hung across the seat of a chair.

The urchin stole forward. He began to shiver in dread of awakening his parents. His mother's great chest was heaving painfully. Jimmie paused and looked down at her. Her face was inflamed and swollen from drinking. Her yellow brows shaded eye-lids that had grown blue. Her tangled hair tossed in waves over her forehead. Her mouth was set in the same lines of vindictive hatred that it had, perhaps, borne during the fight. Her bare, red arms were thrown out above her head in positions of exhaustion, something, mayhap, like those of a sated villain.

The urchin bended over his mother. He was fearful lest she should open her eyes, and the dread within him was so strong, that he could not forbear to stare, but hung as if fascinated over the woman's grim face.

Suddenly her eyes opened. The urchin found himself looking straight into that expression, which, it would seem, had the power to change his blood to salt. He howled piercingly and fell backward.

The woman floundered for a moment, tossed her arms about her head as if in combat, and again began to snore.

Jimmie crawled back in the shadows and waited. A noise in the next room had followed his cry at the discovery that his mother was awake. He grovelled in the gloom, the eyes from out his drawn face riveted upon the intervening door.

He heard it creak, and then the sound of a small voice came to him. "Jimmie! Jimmie! Are yehs dere?" it whispered. The urchin started. The thin, white face of his sister looked at him from the doorway of the other room. She crept to him across the floor.

The father had not moved, but lay in the same death-like sleep. The mother writhed in uneasy slumber, her chest wheezing as if she were in the agonies of strangulation. Out at the window a florid moon was peering over dark roofs, and in the distance the waters of a river glimmered pallidly.

The small frame of the ragged girl was quivering. Her features were haggard from weeping, and her eyes gleamed from fear. She grasped the urchin's arm in her little trembling hands and they huddled in a corner. The eyes of both were drawn, by some force, to stare at the woman's face, for they thought she need only to awake and all fiends would come from below.

They crouched until the ghost-mists of dawn appeared at the window, drawing close to the panes, and looking in at the prostrate, heaving body of the mother.

Chapter IV

The babe, Tommie, died. He went away in a white, insignificant coffin, his small waxen hand clutching a flower that the girl, Maggie, had stolen from an Italian.

She and Jimmie lived.

The inexperienced fibres of the boy's eyes were hardened at an early age. He became a young man of leather. He lived some red years without laboring. During that time his sneer became chronic. He studied human nature in the gutter, and found it no worse than he thought he had reason to believe it. He never conceived a respect for the world, because he had begun with no idols that it had smashed.

He clad his soul in armor by means of happening hilariously in at a mission church where a man composed his sermons of "yous." While they got warm at the stove, he told his hearers just where he calculated they stood with the Lord. Many of the sinners were impatient over the pictured depths of their degradation. They were waiting for soup-tickets.

A reader of words of wind-demons might have been able to see the portions of a dialogue pass to and fro between the exhorter and his hearers.

"You are damned," said the preacher. And the reader of sounds might have seen the reply go forth from the ragged people: "Where's our soup?"

Jimmie and a companion sat in a rear seat and commented upon the things that didn't concern them, with all the freedom of English gentlemen. When they grew thirsty and went out their minds confused the speaker with Christ.

Momentarily, Jimmie was sullen with thoughts of a hopeless altitude where grew fruit. His companion said that if he should ever meet God he would ask for a million dollars and a bottle of beer.

Jimmie's occupation for a long time was to stand on street-corners and watch the world go by, dreaming blood-red dreams at the passing of pretty women. He menaced mankind at the intersections of streets.

On the corners he was in life and of life. The world was going on and he was there to perceive it.

He maintained a belligerent attitude toward all well-dressed men. To him fine raiment was allied to weakness, and all good coats covered faint hearts. He and his order were kings, to a certain extent, over the men of untarnished clothes, because these latter dreaded, perhaps, to be either killed or laughed at.

Above all things he despised obvious Christians and ciphers with the chrysanthemums of aristocracy in their button-holes. He considered himself above both of these classes. He was afraid of neither the devil nor the leader of society.

When he had a dollar in his pocket his satisfaction with existence was the greatest thing in the world. So, eventually, he felt obliged to work. His father died and his mother's years were divided up into periods of thirty days.

He became a truck driver. He was given the charge of a pains-taking pair of horses and a large rattling truck. He invaded the turmoil and tumble of the down-town streets and learned to breathe maledictory defiance at the police who occasionally used to climb up, drag him from his perch and beat him.

In the lower part of the city he daily involved himself in hideous tangles. If he and his team chanced to be in the rear he preserved a demeanor of serenity, crossing his legs and bursting forth into yells when foot-passengers took dangerous dives beneath the noses of his champing horses. He smoked his pipe calmly for he knew that his pay was marching on.

If in the front and the key-truck of chaos, he entered terrifically into the quarrel that was raging to and fro among the drivers on their high seats, and sometimes roared oaths and violently got himself arrested.

After a time his sneer grew so that it turned its glare upon all things. He became so sharp that he believed in nothing. To him the police were always actuated by malignant impulses and the rest of the world was composed, for the most part, of despicable creatures who were all trying to take advantage of him and with whom, in defense, he was obliged to quarrel on all possible occasions. He himself occupied a down-trodden position that had a private but distinct element of grandeur in its isolation.

The most complete cases of aggravated idiocy were, to his mind, rampant upon the front platforms of all of the street cars. At first his tongue strove with these beings, but he eventually was superior. He became immured like an African cow. In him grew a majestic contempt for those strings of street cars that followed him like intent bugs.

He fell into the habit, when starting on a long journey, of fixing his eye on a high and distant object, commanding his horses to begin, and then going into a sort of a trance of observation. Multitudes of drivers might howl in his rear, and passengers might load him with opprobrium, he would not awaken until some blue policeman turned red and began to frenziedly tear bridles and beat the soft noses of the responsible horses.

When he paused to contemplate the attitude of the police toward himself and his fellows, he believed that they were the only men in the city who had no rights. When driving about, he felt that he was held liable by the police for anything that might occur in the streets, and was the common prey of all energetic officials. In revenge, he resolved never to move out of the way of anything, until formidable circumstances, or a much larger man than himself forced him to it.

Foot-passengers were mere pestering flies with an insane disregard for their legs and his convenience. He could not conceive their maniacal desires to cross the streets. Their madness smote him with eternal amazement. He was continually storming at them from his throne. He sat aloft and denounced their frantic leaps, plunges, dives and straddles.

When they would thrust at, or parry, the noses of his champing horses, making them swing their heads and move their feet, disturbing a solid dreamy repose, he swore at the men as fools, for he himself could perceive that

Providence had caused it clearly to be written, that he and his team had the unalienable right to stand in the proper path of the sun chariot, and if they so minded, obstruct its mission or take a wheel off.

And, perhaps, if the god-driver had an ungovernable desire to step down, put up his flame-colored fists and manfully dispute the right of way, he would have probably been immediately opposed by a scowling mortal with two sets of very hard knuckles.

It is possible, perhaps, that this young man would have derided, in an axle-wide alley, the approach of a flying ferry boat. Yet he achieved a respect for a fire engine. As one charged toward his truck, he would drive fearfully upon a sidewalk, threatening untold people with annihilation. When an engine would strike a mass of blocked trucks, splitting it into fragments, as a blow annihilates a cake of ice, Jimmie's team could usually be observed high and safe, with whole wheels, on the sidewalk. The fearful coming of the engine could break up the most intricate muddle of heavy vehicles at which the police had been swearing for the half of an hour.

A fire engine was enshrined in his heart as an appalling thing that he loved with a distant dog-like devotion. They had been known to overturn street cars. Those leaping horses, striking sparks from the cobbles in their forward lunge, were creatures to be ineffably admired. The clang of the gong pierced his breast like a noise of remembered war.

When Jimmie was a little boy, he began to be arrested. Before he reached a great age, he had a fair record.

He developed too great a tendency to climb down from his truck and fight with other drivers. He had been in quite a number of miscellaneous fights, and in some general barroom rows that had become known to the police. Once he had been arrested for assaulting a Chinaman. Two women in different parts of the city, and entirely unknown to each other, caused him considerable annoyance by breaking forth, simultaneously, at fateful intervals, into wailings about marriage and support and infants.

Nevertheless, he had, on a certain star-lit evening, said wonderingly and quite reverently: "Deh moon looks like hell, don't it?"

Chapter V

The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle. She grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl.

None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins. The philosophers up-stairs, down-stairs and on the same floor, puzzled over it.

When a child, playing and fighting with gamins in the street, dirt disguised her. Attired in tatters and grime, she went unseen.

There came a time, however, when the young men of the vicinity said: "Dat Johnson goil is a puty good looker." About this period her brother remarked to her: "Mag, I'll tell yeh dis! See? Yeh've edder got teh go teh hell or go teh work!" Whereupon she went to work, having the feminine aversion of going to hell.

By a chance, she got a position in an establishment where they made collars and cuffs. She received a stool and a machine in a room where sat twenty girls of various shades of yellow discontent. She perched on the stool and treadled at her machine all day, turning out collars, the name of whose brand

could be noted for its irrelevancy to anything in connection with collars. At night she returned home to her mother.

Jimmie grew large enough to take the vague position of head of the family. As incumbent of that office, he stumbled up-stairs late at night, as his father had done before him. He reeled about the room, swearing at his relations, or went to sleep on the floor.

The mother had gradually arisen to that degree of fame that she could bandy words with her acquaintances among the police-justices. Court-officials called her by her first name. When she appeared they pursued a course which had been theirs for months. They invariably grinned and cried out: "Hello, Mary, you here again?" Her grey head wagged in many a court. She always besieged the bench with voluble excuses, explanations, apologies and prayers. Her flaming face and rolling eyes were a sort of familiar sight on the Island. She measured time by means of sprees, and was eternally swollen and dishevelled.

One day the young man, Pete, who as a lad had smitten the Devil's Row urchin in the back of the head and put to flight the antagonists of his friend, Jimmie, strutted upon the scene. He met Jimmie one day on the street, promised to take him to a boxing match in Williamsburg,⁹ and called for him in the evening.

Maggie observed Pete.

He sat on a table in the Johnson home and dangled his checked legs with an enticing nonchalance. His hair was curled down over his forehead in an oiled bang. His rather pugged nose seemed to revolt from contact with a bristling moustache of short, wire-like hairs. His blue double-breasted coat, edged with black braid, buttoned close to a red puff tie, and his patent-leather shoes looked like murder-fitted weapons.

His mannerisms stamped him as a man who had a correct sense of his personal superiority. There was valor and contempt for circumstances in the glance of his eye. He waved his hands like a man of the world, who dismisses religion and philosophy, and says "Fudge."¹ He had certainly seen everything and with each curl of his lip, he declared that it amounted to nothing. Maggie thought he must be a very elegant and graceful bartender.

He was telling tales to Jimmie.

Maggie watched him furtively, with half-closed eyes, lit with a vague interest.

"Hully gee! Dey makes me tired," he said. "Mos' e'ry day some farmer² comes in an' tries teh run deh shop. See? But dey gits t'rowed right out! I jolt dem right out in deh street before dey knows where dey is! See?"

"Sure," said Jimmie.

"Dere was a mug come in deh place deh odder day wid an idear he wus goin' teh own deh place! Hully gee, he wus goin' teh own deh place! I see he had a still on³ an' I didn' wanna giv 'im no stuff, so I says: 'Git deh hell outa here an' don' make no trouble,' I says like dat! See? 'Git deh hell outa here an' don' make no trouble'; like dat. 'Git deh hell outa here,' I says. See?"

Jimmie nodded understandingly. Over his features played an eager desire to state the amount of his valor in a similar crisis, but the narrator proceeded.

9. A section of Brooklyn.
1. Nonsense (slang).

2. A naïve or stupid person (slang).
3. Was drunk (slang).

“Well, deh blokie he says: ‘T’hell wid it! I ain’ lookin’ for no scrap,’ he says (See?), ‘but’ he says, ‘I’m ’spectable cit’zen an’ I wanna drink an’ purtydamnsoon, too.’ See? ‘Deh hell,’ I says. Like dat! ‘Deh hell,’ I says. See? ‘Don’ make no trouble,’ I says. Like dat. ‘Don’ make no trouble.’ See? Den deh mug he squared off an’ said he was fine as silk wid his dukes (See?) an’ he wanted a drink damnquick. Dat’s what he said. See?”

“Sure,” repeated Jimmie.

Pete continued. “Say, I jes’ jumped deh bar an’ deh way I plunked⁴ dat blokie was great. See? Dat’s right! In deh jaw! See? Hully gee, he t’rowed a spittoon true deh front windee. Say, I taut I’d drop dead. But deh boss, he comes in after an’ he says, ‘Pete, yehs done jes’ right! Yeh’ve gota keep order an’ it’s all right.’ See? ‘It’s all right,’ he says. Dat’s what he said.”

The two held a technical discussion.

“Dat bloke was a dandy,” said Pete, in conclusion, “but he hadn’ oughta made no trouble. Dat’s what I says teh dem: ‘Don’ come in here an’ make no trouble,’ I says, like dat. ‘Don’ make no trouble.’ See?”

As Jimmie and his friend exchanged tales descriptive of their prowess, Maggie leaned back in the shadow. Her eyes dwelt wonderingly and rather wistfully upon Pete’s face. The broken furniture, grimy walls, and general disorder and dirt of her home of a sudden appeared before her and began to take a potential aspect. Pete’s aristocratic person looked as if it might soil. She looked keenly at him, occasionally, wondering if he was feeling contempt. But Pete seemed to be enveloped in reminiscence.

“Hully gee,” said he, “dose mugs can’t phase me. Dey knows I kin wipe up deh street wid any t’ree of dem.”

When he said, “Ah, what deh hell,” his voice was burdened with disdain for the inevitable and contempt for anything that fate might compel him to endure.

Maggie perceived that here was the beau ideal of a man. Her dim thoughts were often searching for far away lands where, as God says, the little hills sing together in the morning. Under the trees of her dream-gardens there had always walked a lover.⁵

Chapter VI

Pete took note of Maggie.

“Say, Mag, I’m stuck on yer shape,” he said, parenthetically, with an affable grin.

As he became aware that she was listening closely, he grew still more eloquent in his descriptions of various happenings in his career. It appeared that he was invincible in fights.

“Why,” he said, referring to a man with whom he had had a misunderstanding, “dat mug scrapped like a damn dago.⁶ Dat’s right. He was dead easy. See? He taut he was a scrapper! But he foun’ out diff’ent! Hully gee.”

He walked to and fro in the small room, which seemed then to grow even smaller and unfit to hold his dignity, the attribute of a supreme warrior. That swing of the shoulders that had frozen the timid when he was but a lad had

4. Hit (slang).

5. Portions of the last two sentences of the chapter echo Psalms 98.8, 96.12, and 65.12.

6. Derogatory term for a person of Latin, usually Italian or Spanish, descent.

increased with his growth and education at the ratio of ten to one. It, combined with the sneer upon his mouth, told mankind that there was nothing in space which could appall him. Maggie marvelled at him and surrounded him with greatness. She vaguely tried to calculate the altitude of the pinnacle from which he must have looked down upon her.

"I met a chump deh odder day way up in deh city," he said. "I was goin' teh see a frien' of mine. When I was a-crossin' deh street deh chump runned plump inteh me, an' den he turns aroun' an' says, 'Yer insolen' ruffin,' he says, like dat. 'Oh, gee,' I says, 'oh, gee, go teh hell and git off deh eart,' I says, like dat. See? 'Go teh hell an' git off deh eart,' like dat. Den deh blokie he got wild. He says I was a contempt'ble scoun'el, er somet'ing like dat, an' he says I was doom' teh everlastin' pe'dition an' all like dat. 'Gee,' I says, 'gee! Deh hell I am,' I says. 'Deh hell I am,' like dat. An' den I slugged 'im. See?"

With Jimmie in his company, Pete departed in a sort of a blaze of glory from the Johnson home. Maggie, leaning from the window, watched him as he walked down the street.

Here was a formidable man who disdained the strength of a world full of fists. Here was one who had contempt for brass-clothed power; one whose knuckles could defiantly ring against the granite of law. He was a knight.

The two men went from under the glimmering street-lamp and passed into shadows.

Turning, Maggie contemplated the dark, dust-stained walls, and the scant and crude furniture of her home. A clock, in a splintered and battered oblong box of varnished wood, she suddenly regarded as an abomination. She noted that it ticked raspily. The almost vanished flowers in the carpet-pattern, she conceived to be newly hideous. Some faint attempts she had made with blue ribbon, to freshen the appearance of a dingy curtain, she now saw to be piteous.

She wondered what Pete dined on.

She reflected upon the collar and cuff factory. It began to appear to her mind as a dreary place of endless grinding. Pete's elegant occupation brought him, no doubt, into contact with people who had money and manners. It was probable that he had a large acquaintance of pretty girls. He must have great sums of money to spend.

To her the earth was composed of hardships and insults. She felt instant admiration for a man who openly defied it. She thought that if the grim angel of death should clutch his heart, Pete would shrug his shoulders and say: "Oh, ev'ryt'ing goes."

She anticipated that he would come again shortly. She spent some of her week's pay in the purchase of flowered cretonne for a lambrequin.⁷ She made it with infinite care and hung it to the slightly-careening mantel, over the stove, in the kitchen. She studied it with painful anxiety from different points in the room. She wanted it to look well on Sunday night when, perhaps, Jimmie's friend would come. On Sunday night, however, Pete did not appear.

Afterward the girl looked at it with a sense of humiliation. She was now convinced that Pete was superior to admiration for lambrequins.

A few evenings later Pete entered with fascinating innovations in his apparel. As she had seen him twice and he had different suits on each time, Maggie had a dim impression that his wardrobe was prodigiously extensive.

7. Drapery hung from a shelf or above a window or doorway. "Cretonne": colorfully printed fabric.

“Say, Mag,” he said, “put on yer bes’ duds Friday night an’ I’ll take yehs teh deh show. See?”

He spent a few moments in flourishing his clothes and then vanished, without having glanced at the lambrequin.

Over the eternal collars and cuffs in the factory Maggie spent the most of three days in making imaginary sketches of Pete and his daily environment. She imagined some half dozen women in love with him and thought he must lean dangerously toward an indefinite one, whom she pictured with great charms of person, but with an altogether contemptible disposition.

She thought he must live in a blare of pleasure. He had friends, and people who were afraid of him.

She saw the golden glitter of the place where Pete was to take her. An entertainment of many hues and many melodies where she was afraid she might appear small and mouse-colored.

Her mother drank whiskey all Friday morning. With lurid face and tossing hair she cursed and destroyed furniture all Friday afternoon. When Maggie came home at half-past six her mother lay asleep amidst the wreck of chairs and a table. Fragments of various household utensils were scattered about the floor. She had vented some phase of drunken fury upon the lambrequin. It lay in a bedraggled heap in the corner.

“Hah,” she snorted, sitting up suddenly, “where deh hell yeh been? Why deh hell don’ yeh come home earlier? Been loafin’ ’round deh streets. Yer gettin’ teh be a reg’lar devil.”

When Pete arrived Maggie, in a worn black dress, was waiting for him in the midst of a floor strewn with wreckage. The curtain at the window had been pulled by a heavy hand and hung by one tack, dangling to and fro in the draft through the cracks at the sash. The knots of blue ribbons appeared like violated flowers. The fire in the stove had gone out. The displaced lids and open doors showed heaps of sullen grey ashes. The remnants of a meal, ghastly, like dead flesh, lay in a corner. Maggie’s red mother, stretched on the floor, blasphemed and gave her daughter a bad name.

Chapter VII

An orchestra of yellow silk women and bald-headed men on an elevated stage near the centre of a great green-hued hall,⁸ played a popular waltz. The place was crowded with people grouped about little tables. A battalion of waiters slid among the throng, carrying trays of beer glasses and making change from the inexhaustible vaults of their trousers pockets. Little boys, in the costumes of French chefs, paraded up and down the irregular aisles vending fancy cakes. There was a low rumble of conversation and a subdued clinking of glasses. Clouds of tobacco smoke rolled and wavered high in air about the dull gilt of the chandeliers.

The vast crowd had an air throughout of having just quitted labor. Men with calloused hands and attired in garments that showed the wear of an endless trudge for a living, smoked their pipes contentedly and spent five, ten, or perhaps fifteen cents for beer. There was a mere sprinkling of kid-

8. Probably Atlantic Garden, a beer-garden popular with middle- and working-class German immigrants. Women were featured in the orchestra, which played waltz and polka tunes.

gloved men who smoked cigars purchased elsewhere. The great body of the crowd was composed of people who showed that all day they strove with their hands. Quiet Germans, with maybe their wives and two or three children, sat listening to the music, with the expressions of happy cows. An occasional party of sailors from a war-ship, their faces pictures of sturdy health, spent the earlier hours of the evening at the small round tables. Very infrequent tipsy men, swollen with the value of their opinions, engaged their companions in earnest and confidential conversation. In the balcony, and here and there below, shone the impassive faces of women. The nationalities of the Bowery⁹ beamed upon the stage from all directions.

Pete aggressively walked up a side aisle and took seats with Maggie at a table beneath the balcony.

“Two beehs!”

Leaning back he regarded with eyes of superiority the scene before them. This attitude affected Maggie strongly. A man who could regard such a sight with indifference must be accustomed to very great things.

It was obvious that Pete had been to this place many times before, and was very familiar with it. A knowledge of this fact made Maggie feel little and new.

He was extremely gracious and attentive. He displayed the consideration of a cultured gentleman who knew what was due.

“Say, what deh hell? Bring deh lady a big glass! What deh hell use is dat pony?”¹

“Don’t be fresh, now,” said the waiter, with some warmth, as he departed.

“Ah, git off deh eart,” said Pete, after the other’s retreating form.

Maggie perceived that Pete brought forth all his elegance and all his knowledge of high-class customs for her benefit. Her heart warmed as she reflected upon his condescension.

The orchestra of yellow silk women and bald-headed men gave vent to a few bars of anticipatory music and a girl, in a pink dress with short skirts, galloped upon the stage. She smiled upon the throng as if in acknowledgment of a warm welcome, and began to walk to and fro, making profuse gesticulations and singing, in brazen soprano tones, a song, the words of which were inaudible. When she broke into the swift rattling measures of a chorus some half-tipsy men near the stage joined in the rollicking refrain and glasses were pounded rhythmically upon the tables. People leaned forward to watch her and to try to catch the words of the song. When she vanished there were long rollings of applause.

Obedient to more anticipatory bars, she reappeared amidst the half-suppressed cheering of the tipsy men. The orchestra plunged into dance music and the laces of the dancer fluttered and flew in the glare of gas jets. She divulged the fact that she was attired in some half dozen skirts. It was patent that any one of them would have proved adequate for the purpose for which skirts are intended. An occasional man bent forward, intent upon the pink stockings. Maggie wondered at the splendor of the costume and lost herself in calculations of the cost of the silks and laces.

9. Area of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, known for its saloons, concert and dance halls, dime museums, working-class theaters and dives,

cheap lodging houses, and pawnshops.

1. A small beer glass.

The dancer's smile of stereotyped enthusiasm was turned for ten minutes upon the faces of her audience. In the finale she fell into some of those grotesque attitudes which were at the time popular among the dancers in the theatres up-town, giving to the Bowery public the phantasies of the aristocratic theatre-going public, at reduced rates.

"Say, Pete," said Maggie, leaning forward, "dis is great."

"Sure," said Pete, with proper complacency.

A ventriloquist followed the dancer. He held two fantastic dolls on his knees. He made them sing mournful ditties and say funny things about geography and Ireland.

"Do dose little men talk?" asked Maggie.

"Naw," said Pete, "it's some damn fake. See?"

Two girls, on the bills as sisters, came forth and sang a duet that is heard occasionally at concerts given under church auspices. They supplemented it with a dance which of course can never be seen at concerts given under church auspices.

After the ventriloquists had retired, a woman of debatable age sang a negro melody. The chorus necessitated some grotesque waddlings supposed to be an imitation of a plantation darkey, under the influence, probably, of music and the moon. The audience was just enthusiastic enough over it to have her return and sing a sorrowful lay,² whose lines told of a mother's love and a sweetheart who waited and a young man who was lost at sea under the most harrowing circumstances. From the faces of a score or so in the crowd, the self-contained look faded. Many heads were bent forward with eagerness and sympathy. As the last distressing sentiment of the piece was brought forth, it was greeted by that kind of applause which rings as sincere.

As a final effort, the singer rendered some verses which described a vision of Britain being annihilated by America, and Ireland bursting her bonds. A carefully prepared crisis was reached in the last line of the last verse, where the singer threw out her arms and cried, "The star-spangled banner." Instantly a great cheer swelled from the throats of the assemblage of the masses. There was a heavy rumble of booted feet thumping the floor. Eyes gleamed with sudden fire, and calloused hands waved frantically in the air.

After a few moments' rest, the orchestra played crashingly, and a small fat man burst out upon the stage. He began to roar a song and stamp back and forth before the foot-lights, wildly waving a glossy silk hat and throwing leers, or smiles, broadcast. He made his face into fantastic grimaces until he looked like a pictured devil on a Japanese kite. The crowd laughed gleefully. His short, fat legs were never still a moment. He shouted and roared and bobbed his shock of red wig until the audience broke out in excited applause.

Pete did not pay much attention to the progress of events upon the stage. He was drinking beer and watching Maggie.

Her cheeks were blushing with excitement and her eyes were glistening. She drew deep breaths of pleasure. No thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar and cuff factory came to her.

When the orchestra crashed finally, they jostled their way to the sidewalk with the crowd. Pete took Maggie's arm and pushed a way for her, offering to fight with a man or two.

2. Narrative ballad of love or adventure.

They reached Maggie's home at a late hour and stood for a moment in front of the gruesome doorway.

"Say, Mag," said Pete, "give us a kiss for takin' yeh teh deh show, will yer?"

Maggie laughed, as if startled, and drew away from him.

"Naw, Pete," she said, "dat wasn't in it."

"Ah, what deh hell?" urged Pete.

The girl retreated nervously.

"Ah, what deh hell?" repeated he.

Maggie darted into the hall, and up the stairs. She turned and smiled at him, then disappeared.

Pete walked slowly down the street. He had something of an astonished expression upon his features. He paused under a lamp-post and breathed a low breath of surprise.

"Gawd," he said, "I wonner if I've been played fer a duffer."³

Chapter VIII

As thoughts of Pete came to Maggie's mind, she began to have an intense dislike for all of her dresses.

"What deh hell ails yeh? What makes yeh be allus fixin' and fussin'? Good Gawd," her mother would frequently roar at her.

She began to note, with more interest, the well-dressed women she met on the avenues. She envied elegance and soft palms. She craved those adornments of person which she saw every day on the street, conceiving them to be allies of vast importance to women.

Studying faces, she thought many of the women and girls she chanced to meet, smiled with serenity as though forever cherished and watched over by those they loved.

The air in the collar and cuff establishment strangled her. She knew she was gradually and surely shrivelling in the hot, stuffy room. The begrimed windows rattled incessantly from the passing of elevated trains. The place was filled with a whirl of noises and odors.

She wondered as she regarded some of the grizzled women in the room, mere mechanical contrivances sewing seams and grinding out, with heads bended over their work, tales of imagined or real girlhood happiness, past drunks, the baby at home, and unpaid wages. She speculated how long her youth would endure. She began to see the bloom upon her cheeks as valuable.

She imagined herself, in an exasperating future, as a scrawny woman with an eternal grievance. Too, she thought Pete to be a very fastidious person concerning the appearance of women.

She felt she would love to see somebody entangle their fingers in the oily beard of the fat foreigner who owned the establishment. He was a detestable creature. He wore white socks with low shoes.

He sat all day delivering orations, in the depths of a cushioned chair. His pocket-book deprived them of the power of retort.

"What een hell do you sink I pie fife dolla a week for? Play? No, py damn!"

3. Stupid person, fool (slang).

Maggie was anxious for a friend to whom she could talk about Pete. She would have liked to discuss his admirable mannerisms with a reliable mutual friend. At home, she found her mother often drunk and always raving.

It seems that the world had treated this woman very badly, and she took a deep revenge upon such portions of it as came within her reach. She broke furniture as if she were at last getting her rights. She swelled with virtuous indignation as she carried the lighter articles of household use, one by one under the shadows of the three gilt balls, where Hebrews chained them with chains of interest.⁴

Jimmie came when he was obliged to by circumstances over which he had no control. His well-trained legs brought him staggering home and put him to bed some nights when he would rather have gone elsewhere.

Swaggering Pete loomed like a golden sun to Maggie. He took her to a dime museum⁵ where rows of meek freaks astonished her. She contemplated their deformities with awe and thought them a sort of chosen tribe.

Pete, raking his brains for amusement, discovered the Central Park Menagerie and the Museum of Arts.⁶ Sunday afternoons would sometimes find them at these places. Pete did not appear to be particularly interested in what he saw. He stood around looking heavy, while Maggie giggled in glee.

Once at the Menagerie he went into a trance of admiration before the spectacle of a very small monkey threatening to thrash a cageful because one of them had pulled his tail and he had not wheeled about quickly enough to discover who did it. Ever after Pete knew that monkey by sight and winked at him, trying to induce him to fight with other and larger monkeys.

At the Museum, Maggie said, "Dis is outa sight."

"Oh hell," said Pete, "wait till next summer an' I'll take yehs to a picnic."

While the girl wandered in the vaulted rooms, Pete occupied himself in returning stony stare for stony stare, the appalling scrutiny of the watchdogs of the treasures. Occasionally he would remark in loud tones: "Dat jay⁷ has got glass eyes," and sentences of the sort. When he tired of this amusement he would go to the mummies and moralize over them.

Usually he submitted with silent dignity to all which he had to go through, but, at times, he was goaded into comment.

"What deh hell," he demanded once. "Look at all dese little jugs! Hundred jugs in a row! Ten rows in a case an' 'bout a t'ousand cases! what deh blazes use is dem?"

Evenings during the week he took her to see plays in which the brain-clutching heroine was rescued from the palatial home of her guardian, who is cruelly after her bonds, by the hero with the beautiful sentiments. The latter spent most of his time out at soak in pale-green snow storms, busy with a nickel-plated revolver, rescuing aged strangers from villains.

Maggie lost herself in sympathy with the wanderers swooning in snow storms beneath happy-hued church windows. And a choir within singing "Joy to the World." To Maggie and the rest of the audience this was transcendental realism. Joy always within, and they, like the actor, inevitably with-

4. Expressed here is the common, often anti-Semitic, stereotype of Jews owning pawnshops and charging high rates of interest. "Three gilt balls": sign of a pawnbroker's shop.

5. Popular amusement center with wax figures,

mechanized contrivances, and panoramic views.

6. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in Central Park on the Upper East Side.

7. Stupid, inexperienced person (slang).

out. Viewing it, they hugged themselves in ecstatic pity of their imagined or real condition.

The girl thought the arrogance and granite-heartedness of the magnate of the play was very accurately drawn. She echoed the maledictions that the occupants of the gallery showered on this individual when his lines compelled him to expose his extreme selfishness.

Shady persons in the audience revolted from the pictured villainy of the drama. With untiring zeal they hissed vice and applauded virtue. Unmistakably bad men evinced an apparently sincere admiration for virtue.

The loud gallery was overwhelmingly with the unfortunate and the oppressed. They encouraged the struggling hero with cries, and jeered the villain, hooting and calling attention to his whiskers. When anybody died in the pale-green snow storms, the gallery mourned. They sought out the painted misery and hugged it as akin.

In the hero's erratic march from poverty in the first act, to wealth and triumph in the final one, in which he forgives all the enemies that he has left, he was assisted by the gallery, which applauded his generous and noble sentiments and confounded the speeches of his opponents by making irrelevant but very sharp remarks. Those actors who were cursed with villainy parts were confronted at every turn by the gallery. If one of them rendered lines containing the most subtle distinctions between right and wrong, the gallery was immediately aware if the actor meant wickedness, and denounced him accordingly.

The last act was a triumph for the hero, poor and of the masses, the representative of the audience, over the villain and the rich man, his pockets stuffed with bonds, his heart packed with tyrannical purposes, imperturbable amid suffering.

Maggie always departed with raised spirits from the showing places of the melodrama. She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually surmounted the wealthy and wicked. The theatre made her think. She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated, perhaps grotesquely, by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory.

Chapter IX

A group of urchins were intent upon the side door of a saloon. Expectancy gleamed from their eyes. They were twisting their fingers in excitement.

"Here she comes," yelled one of them suddenly.

The group of urchins burst instantly asunder and its individual fragments were spread in a wide, respectable half-circle about the point of interest. The saloon door opened with a crash, and the figure of a woman appeared upon the threshold. Her grey hair fell in knotted masses about her shoulders. Her face was crimsoned and wet with perspiration. Her eyes had a rolling glare.

"Not a damn cent more of me money will yehs ever get, not a damn cent. I spent me money here fer t'ree years an' now yehs tells me yeh'll sell me no more stuff! T'hell wid yeh, Johnnie Murckre! 'Disturbance'? Disturbance be damned! T'hell wid yeh, Johnnie—"

The door received a kick of exasperation from within and the woman lurched heavily out on the sidewalk.

The gamins in the half-circle became violently agitated. They began to dance about and hoot and yell and jeer. Wide dirty grins spread over each face.

The woman made a furious dash at a particularly outrageous cluster of little boys. They laughed delightedly and scampered off a short distance, calling out over their shoulders to her. She stood tottering on the curb-stone and thundered at them.

"Yeh devil's kids," she howled, shaking red fists. The little boys whooped in glee. As she started up the street they fell in behind and marched uproariously. Occasionally she wheeled about and made charges on them. They ran nimbly out of reach and taunted her.

In the frame of a gruesome doorway she stood for a moment cursing them. Her hair straggled, giving her crimson features a look of insanity. Her great fists quivered as she shook them madly in the air.

The urchins made terrific noises until she turned and disappeared. Then they filed quietly in the way they had come.

The woman floundered about in the lower hall of the tenement house and finally stumbled up the stairs. On an upper hall a door was opened and a collection of heads peered curiously out, watching her. With a wrathful snort the woman confronted the door, but it was slammed hastily in her face and the key was turned.

She stood for a few minutes, delivering a frenzied challenge at the panels.

"Come out in deh hall, Mary Murphy, damn yeh, if yehs want a row. Come ahn, yeh overgrown terrier, come ahn."

She began to kick the door with her great feet. She shrilly defied the universe to appear and do battle. Her cursing trebles brought heads from all doors save the one she threatened. Her eyes glared in every direction. The air was full of her tossing fists.

"Come ahn, deh hull damn gang of yehs, come ahn," she roared at the spectators. An oath or two, cat-calls, jeers and bits of facetious advice were given in reply. Missiles clattered about her feet.

"What deh hell's deh matter wid yeh?" said a voice in the gathered gloom, and Jimmie came forward. He carried a tin dinner-pail in his hand and under his arm a brown truckman's apron done in a bundle. "What deh hell's wrong?" he demanded.

"Come out, all of yehs, come out," his mother was howling. "Come ahn an' I'll stamp yer damn brains under me feet.

"Shet yer face, an' come home, yeh damned old fool," roared Jimmie at her. She strided up to him and twirled her fingers in his face. Her eyes were darting flames of unreasoning rage and her frame trembled with eagerness for a fight.

"T'hell wid yehs! An' who deh hell are yehs? I ain't givin' a snap of me fingers fer yehs," she bawled at him. She turned her huge back in tremendous disdain and climbed the stairs to the next floor.

Jimmie followed, cursing blackly. At the top of the flight he seized his mother's arm and started to drag her toward the door of their room.

"Come home, damn yeh," he gritted between his teeth.

"Take yer hands off me! Take yer hands off me," shrieked his mother.

She raised her arm and whirled her great fist at her son's face. Jimmie dodged his head and the blow struck him in the back of the neck. "Damn

yeh,” gritted he again. He threw out his left hand and writhed his fingers about her middle arm. The mother and the son began to sway and struggle like gladiators.

“Whoop!” said the Rum Alley tenement house. The hall filled with interested spectators.

“Hi, ol’ lady, dat was a dandy!”

“T’ree to one on deh red!”

“Ah, stop yer damn scrappin’!”

The door of the Johnson home opened and Maggie looked out. Jimmie made a supreme cursing effort and hurled his mother into the room. He quickly followed and closed the door. The Rum Alley tenement swore disappointedly and retired.

The mother slowly gathered herself up from the floor. Her eyes glittered menacingly upon her children.

“Here, now,” said Jimmie, “we’ve had enough of dis. Sit down, an’ don’ make no trouble.”

He grasped her arm, and twisting it, forced her into a creaking chair.

“Keep yer hands off me,” roared his mother again.

“Damn yer ol’ hide,” yelled Jimmie, madly. Maggie shrieked and ran into the other room. To her there came the sound of a storm of crashes and curses. There was a great final thump and Jimmie’s voice cried: “Dere, damn yeh, stay still.” Maggie opened the door now, and went warily out. “Oh, Jimmie.”

He was leaning against the wall and swearing. Blood stood upon bruises on his knotty fore-arms where they had scraped against the floor or the walls in the scuffle. The mother lay screeching on the floor, the tears running down her furrowed face.

Maggie, standing in the middle of the room, gazed about her. The usual upheaval of the tables and chairs had taken place. Crockery was strewn broadcast in fragments. The stove had been disturbed on its legs, and now leaned idiotically to one side. A pail had been upset and water spread in all directions.

The door opened and Pete appeared. He shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, Gawd,” he observed.

He walked over to Maggie and whispered in her ear. “Ah, what deh hell, Mag? Come ahn and we’ll have a hell of a time.”

The mother in the corner upreared her head and shook her tangled locks.

“Teh hell wid him and you,” she said, glowering at her daughter in the gloom. Her eyes seemed to burn balefully. “Yeh’ve gone teh deh devil, Mag Johnson, yehs knows yehs have gone teh deh devil. Yer a disgrace teh yer people, damn yeh. An’ now, git out an’ go ahn wid dat doe-faced jude⁸ of yours. Go teh hell wid him, damn yeh, an’ a good riddance. Go teh hell an’ see how yeh likes it.”

Maggie gazed long at her mother.

“Go teh hell now, an’ see how yeh likes it. Git out. I won’t have sech as yehs in me house! Get out, d’yeh hear! Damn yeh, git out!”

The girl began to tremble.

At this instant Pete came forward. “Oh, what deh hell, Mag, see,” whispered he softly in her ear. “Dis all blows over. See? Deh ol’ woman ’ill be all right in deh mornin’. Come ahn out wid me! We’ll have a hell of a time.”

8. Judas; a betrayer.

The woman on the floor cursed. Jimmie was intent upon his bruised fore-arms. The girl cast a glance about the room filled with a chaotic mass of debris, and at the red, writhing body of her mother.

“Go teh hell an’ good riddance.”

She went.

Chapter X

Jimmie had an idea it wasn’t common courtesy for a friend to come to one’s home and ruin one’s sister. But he was not sure how much Pete knew about the rules of politeness.

The following night he returned home from work at rather a late hour in the evening. In passing through the halls he came upon the gnarled and leathery old woman who possessed the music box. She was grinning in the dim light that drifted through dust-stained panes. She beckoned to him with a smudged forefinger.

“Ah, Jimmie, what do yehs t’ink I got onto las’ night. It was deh funnies’ t’ing I ever saw,” she cried, coming close to him and leering. She was trembling with eagerness to tell her tale. “I was by me door las’ night when yer sister and her jude feller came in late, oh, very late. An’ she, the dear, she was a-cryin’ as if her heart would break, she was. It was deh funnies’ t’ing I ever saw. An’ right out here by me door she asked him did he love her, did he. An’ she was a-cryin’ as if her heart would break, poor t’ing. An’ him, I could see by deh way what he said it dat she had been askin’ orften, he says: ‘Oh, hell, yes,’ he says, says he, ‘Oh, hell, yes.’”

Storm-clouds swept over Jimmie’s face, but he turned from the leathery old woman and plodded on up-stairs.

“Oh, hell, yes,” called she after him. She laughed a laugh that was like a prophetic croak. “‘Oh, hell, yes,’ he says, says he, ‘Oh, hell, yes.’”

There was no one in at home. The rooms showed that attempts had been made at tidying them. Parts of the wreckage of the day before had been repaired by an unskilful hand. A chair or two and the table, stood uncertainly upon legs. The floor had been newly swept. Too, the blue ribbons had been restored to the curtains, and the lambrequin, with its immense sheaves of yellow wheat and red roses of equal size, had been returned, in a worn and sorry state, to its position at the mantel. Maggie’s jacket and hat were gone from the nail behind the door.

Jimmie walked to the window and began to look through the blurred glass. It occurred to him to vaguely wonder, for an instant, if some of the women of his acquaintance had brothers.

Suddenly, however, he began to swear.

“But he was me frien’! I brought ’im here! Dat’s deh hell of it!”

He fumed about the room, his anger gradually rising to the furious pitch.

“I’ll kill deh jay! Dat’s what I’ll do! I’ll kill deh jay!”

He clutched his hat and sprang toward the door. But it opened and his mother’s great form blocked the passage.

“What deh hell’s deh matter wid yeh?” exclaimed she, coming into the rooms.

Jimmie gave vent to a sardonic curse and then laughed heavily.

“Well, Maggie’s gone teh deh devil! Dat’s what! See?”

“Eh?” said his mother.

“Maggie’s gone teh deh devil! Are yehs deaf?” roared Jimmie, impatiently.

“Deh hell she has,” murmured the mother, astounded.

Jimmie grunted, and then began to stare out at the window. His mother sat down in a chair, but a moment later sprang erect and delivered a maddened whirl of oaths. Her son turned to look at her as she reeled and swayed in the middle of the room, her fierce face convulsed with passion, her blotched arms raised high in imprecation.

“May Gawd curse her forever,” she shrieked. “May she eat nothin’ but stones and deh dirt in deh street. May she sleep in deh gutter an’ never see deh sun shine again. Deh damn—”

“Here, now,” said her son. “Take a drop on yourself.”

The mother raised lamenting eyes to the ceiling.

“She’s deh devil’s own chil’, Jimmie,” she whispered. “Ah, who would t’ink such a bad girl could grow up in our fambly, Jimmie, me son. Many deh hour I’ve spent in talk wid dat girl an’ tol’ her if she ever went on deh streets I’d see her damned. An’ after all her bringin’ up an’ what I tol’ her and talked wid her, she goes teh deh bad, like a duck teh water.”

The tears rolled down her furrowed face. Her hands trembled.

“An’ den when dat Sadie MacMallister next door to us was sent teh deh devil by dat feller what worked in deh soap-factory, didn’t I tell our Mag dat if she—”

“Ah, dat’s anudder story,” interrupted the brother. “Of course, dat Sadie was nice an’ all dat—but—see—it ain’t dessame as if—well, Maggie was diff’ent—see—she was diff’ent.”

He was trying to formulate a theory that he had always unconsciously held, that all sisters, excepting his own, could advisedly be ruined.

He suddenly broke out again. “I’ll go t’ump hell outa deh mug what did her deh harm. I’ll kill ’im! He t’inks he kin scrap, but when he gits me a-chasin’ ’im he’ll fin’ out where he’s wrong, deh damned duffer. I’ll wipe up deh street wid ’im.”

In a fury he plunged out of the doorway. As he vanished the mother raised her head and lifted both hands, entreating.

“May Gawd curse her forever,” she cried.

In the darkness of the hallway Jimmie discerned a knot of women talking volubly. When he strode by they paid no attention to him.

“She allus was a bold thing,” he heard one of them cry in an eager voice. “Dere wasn’t a feller come teh deh house but she’d try teh mash⁹ ’im. My Annie says deh shameless t’ing tried teh ketch her feller, her own feller, what we useter know his fader.”

“I could a’ tol’ yehs dis two years ago,” said a woman, in a key of triumph. “Yessir, it was over two years ago dat I says teh my ol’ man, I says, ‘Dat Johnson girl ain’t straight,’ I says. ‘Oh, hell,’ he says. ‘Oh, hell.’ ‘Dat’s all right,’ I says, ‘but I know what I knows,’ I says, ‘an’ it ’ill come out later. You wait an’ see,’ I says, ‘you see.’”

“Anybody what had eyes could see dat dere was somethin’ wrong wid dat girl. I didn’t like her actions.”

On the street Jimmie met a friend. “What deh hell?” asked the latter.

9. To flirt with (slang).

Jimmie explained. "An' I'll t'ump 'im till he can't stand."

"Oh, what deh hell," said the friend. "What's deh use! Yeh'll git pulled in! Everybody ill be onto it! An' ten plunks!¹ Gee!"

Jimmie was determined. "He t'inks he kin scrap, but he'll fin' out diff'ent."
"Gee," remonstrated the friend. "What deh hell?"

Chapter XI

On a corner a glass-fronted building shed a yellow glare upon the pavements. The open mouth of a saloon called seductively to passengers to enter and annihilate sorrow or create rage.

The interior of the place was papered in olive and bronze tints of imitation leather. A shining bar of counterfeit massiveness extended down the side of the room. Behind it a great mahogany-appearing sideboard reached the ceiling. Upon its shelves rested pyramids of shimmering glasses that were never disturbed. Mirrors set in the face of the sideboard multiplied them. Lemons, oranges and paper napkins, arranged with mathematical precision, sat among the glasses. Many-hued decanters of liquor perched at regular intervals on the lower shelves. A nickel-plated cash register occupied a position in the exact centre of the general effect. The elementary senses of it all seemed to be opulence and geometrical accuracy.

Across from the bar a smaller counter held a collection of plates upon which swarmed frayed fragments of crackers, slices of boiled ham, dishevelled bits of cheese, and pickles swimming in vinegar. An odor of grasping, begrimed hands and munching mouths pervaded.

Pete, in a white jacket, was behind the bar bending expectantly toward a quiet stranger. "A beeh," said the man. Pete drew a foam-topped glassful and set it dripping upon the bar.

At this moment the light bamboo doors at the entrance swung open and crashed against the siding. Jimmie and a companion entered. They swaggered unsteadily but belligerently toward the bar and looked at Pete with bleared and blinking eyes.

"Gin," said Jimmie.

"Gin," said the companion.

Pete slid a bottle and two glasses along the bar. He bended his head sideways as he assiduously polished away with a napkin at the gleaming wood. He had a look of watchfulness upon his features.

Jimmie and his companion kept their eyes upon the bartender and conversed loudly in tones of contempt.

"He's a dindy masher, ain't he, by Gawd?" laughed Jimmie.

"Oh, hell, yes," said the companion, sneering widely. "He's great, he is. Git onto deh mug on deh blok. Dat's enough to make a feller turn hand-springs in 'is sleep."

The quiet stranger moved himself and his glass a trifle further away and maintained an attitude of oblivion.

"Gee! ain't he hot stuff!"

"Git onto his shape! Great Gawd!"

1. Dollars (slang).

"Hey," cried Jimmie, in tones of command. Pete came along slowly, with a sullen dropping of the under lip.

"Well," he growled, "what's eatin' yehs?"

"Gin," said Jimmie.

"Gin," said the companion.

As Pete confronted them with the bottle and the glasses, they laughed in his face. Jimmie's companion, evidently overcome with merriment, pointed a grimy forefinger in Pete's direction.

"Say, Jimmie," demanded he, "what deh hell is dat behind deh bar?"

"Damned if I knows," replied Jimmie. They laughed loudly. Pete put down a bottle with a bang and turned a formidable face toward them. He disclosed his teeth and his shoulders heaved restlessly.

"You fellers can't guy² me," he said. "Drink yer stuff an' git out an' don' make no trouble."

Instantly the laughter faded from the faces of the two men and expressions of offended dignity immediately came.

"Who deh hell has said anyt'ing teh you," cried they in the same breath.

The quiet stranger looked at the door calculatingly.

"Ah, come off," said Pete to the two men. "Don't pick me up for no jay. Drink yer rum an' git out an' don' make no trouble."

"Oh, deh hell," airily cried Jimmie.

"Oh, deh hell," airily repeated his companion.

"We goes when we git ready! See!" continued Jimmie.

"Well," said Pete in a threatening voice, "don' make no trouble."

Jimmie suddenly leaned forward with his head on one side. He snarled like a wild animal.

"Well, what if we does? See?" said he.

Dark blood flushed into Pete's face, and he shot a lurid glance at Jimmie.

"Well, den we'll see whose deh bes' man, you or me," he said.

The quiet stranger moved modestly toward the door.

Jimmie began to swell with valor.

"Don' pick me up fer no tenderfoot. When yeh tackles me yeh tackles one of deh bes' men in deh city. See? I'm a scrapper, I am. Ain't dat right, Billie?"

"Sure, Mike," responded his companion in tones of conviction.

"Oh, hell," said Pete, easily. "Go fall on yerself."

The two men again began to laugh.

"What deh hell is dat talkin'?" cried the companion.

"Damned if I knows," replied Jimmie with exaggerated contempt.

Pete made a furious gesture. "Git outa here now, an' don' make no trouble. See? Youse fellers er lookin' fer a scrap an' it's damn likely yeh'll fin' one if yeh keeps on shootin' off yer mout's. I know yehs! See? I kin lick better men dan yehs ever saw in yer lifes. Dat's right! See? Don' pick me up fer no stuff er yeh might be jolted out in deh street before yeh knows where yeh is. When I comes from behind dis bar, I t'rows yehs bote inteh deh street. See?"

"Oh, hell," cried the two men in chorus.

The glare of a panther came into Pete's eyes. "Dat's what I said! Unnerstan'?"

He came through a passage at the end of the bar and swelled down upon the two men. They stepped promptly forward and crowded close to him.

2. Make fun of, ridicule (slang).

They bristled like three roosters. They moved their heads pugnaciously and kept their shoulders braced. The nervous muscles about each mouth twitched with a forced smile of mockery.

“Well, what deh hell yer goin’ teh do?” gritted Jimmie.

Pete stepped warily back, waving his hands before him to keep the men from coming too near.

“Well, what deh hell yer goin’ teh do?” repeated Jimmie’s ally. They kept close to him, taunting and leering. They strove to make him attempt the initial blow.

“Keep back, now! Don’ crowd me,” ominously said Pete.

Again they chorused in contempt. “Oh, hell!”

In a small, tossing group, the three men edged for positions like frigates contemplating battle.

“Well, why deh hell don’ yeh try teh t’row us out?” cried Jimmie and his ally with copious sneers.

The bravery of bull-dogs sat upon the faces of the men. Their clenched fists moved like eager weapons.

The allied two jostled the bartender’s elbows, glaring at him with feverish eyes and forcing him toward the wall.

Suddenly Pete swore redly. The flash of action gleamed from his eyes. He threw back his arm and aimed a tremendous, lightning-like blow at Jimmie’s face. His foot swung a step forward and the weight of his body was behind his fist. Jimmie ducked his head, Bowery-like, with the quickness of a cat. The fierce, answering blows of him and his ally crushed on Pete’s bowed head.

The quiet stranger vanished.

The arms of the combatants whirled in the air like flails. The faces of the men, at first flushed to flame-colored anger, now began to fade to the pallor of warriors in the blood and heat of a battle. Their lips curled back and stretched tightly over the gums in ghoul-like grins. Through their white, gripped teeth struggled hoarse whisperings of oaths. Their eyes glittered with murderous fire.

Each head was huddled between its owner’s shoulders, and arms were swinging with marvelous rapidity. Feet scraped to and fro with a loud scratching sound upon the sanded floor. Blows left crimson blotches upon pale skin. The curses of the first quarter minute of the fight died away. The breaths of the fighters came wheezingly from their lips and the three chests were straining and heaving. Pete at intervals gave vent to low, labored hisses, that sounded like a desire to kill. Jimmie’s ally gibbered at times like a wounded maniac. Jimmie was silent, fighting with the face of a sacrificial priest. The rage of fear shone in all their eyes and their blood-colored fists swirled.

At a tottering moment a blow from Pete’s hand struck the ally and he crashed to the floor. He wriggled instantly to his feet and grasping the quiet stranger’s beer glass from the bar, hurled it at Pete’s head.

High on the wall it burst like a bomb, shivering fragments flying in all directions. Then missiles came to every man’s hand. The place had heretofore appeared free of things to throw, but suddenly glass and bottles went singing through the air. They were thrown point blank at bobbing heads. The pyramid of shimmering glasses, that had never been disturbed, changed

to cascades as heavy bottles were flung into them. Mirrors splintered to nothing.

The three frothing creatures on the floor buried themselves in a frenzy for blood. There followed in the wake of missiles and fists some unknown prayers, perhaps for death.

The quiet stranger had sprawled very pyrotechnically out on the sidewalk. A laugh ran up and down the avenue for the half of a block.

"Dey've t'rowed a bloke inteh deh street."

People heard the sound of breaking glass and shuffling feet within the saloon and came running. A small group, bending down to look under the bamboo doors, watching the fall of glass, and three pairs of violent legs, changed in a moment to a crowd.

A policeman came charging down the sidewalk and bounced through the doors into the saloon. The crowd bended and surged in absorbing anxiety to see.

Jimmie caught first sight of the on-coming interruption. On his feet he had the same regard for a policeman that, when on his truck, he had for a fire engine. He howled and ran for the side door.

The officer made a terrific advance, club in hand. One comprehensive sweep of the long night stick threw the ally to the floor and forced Pete to a corner. With his disengaged hand he made a furious effort at Jimmie's coat-tails. Then he regained his balance and paused.

"Well, well, you are a pair of pictures. What in hell yeh been up to?"

Jimmie, with his face drenched in blood, escaped up a side street, pursued a short distance by some of the more law-loving, or excited individuals of the crowd.

Later, from a corner safely dark, he saw the policeman, the ally and the bartender emerge from the saloon. Pete locked the doors and then followed up the avenue in the rear of the crowd-encompassed policeman and his charge.

On first thoughts Jimmie, with his heart throbbing at battle heat, started to go desperately to the rescue of his friend, but he halted.

"Ah, what deh hell?" he demanded of himself.

Chapter XII

In a hall of irregular shape sat Pete and Maggie drinking beer. A submissive orchestra dictated to by a spectacled man with frowsy hair and a dress suit, industriously followed the bobs of his head and the waves of his baton. A ballad singer, in a dress of flaming scarlet, sang in the inevitable voice of brass. When she vanished, men seated at the tables near the front applauded loudly, pounding the polished wood with their beer glasses. She returned attired in less gown, and sang again. She received another enthusiastic encore. She reappeared in still less gown and danced. The deafening rumble of glasses and clapping of hands that followed her exit indicated an overwhelming desire to have her come on for the fourth time, but the curiosity of the audience was not gratified.

Maggie was pale. From her eyes had been plucked all look of self-reliance. She leaned with a dependent air toward her companion. She was timid, as if fearing his anger or displeasure. She seemed to beseech tenderness of him.

Pete's air of distinguished valor had grown upon him until it threatened stupendous dimensions. He was infinitely gracious to the girl. It was apparent to her that his condescension was a marvel.

He could appear to strut even while sitting still and he showed that he was a lion of lordly characteristics by the air with which he spat.

With Maggie gazing at him wonderingly, he took pride in commanding the waiters who were, however, indifferent or deaf.

"Hi, you, git a russle³ on yehs! What deh hell yehs lookin' at? Two more beehs, d'yeh hear?"

He leaned back and critically regarded the person of a girl with a straw-colored wig who upon the stage was flinging her heels in somewhat awkward imitation of a well-known danseuse.⁴

At times Maggie told Pete long confidential tales of her former home life, dwelling upon the escapades of the other members of the family and the difficulties she had to combat in order to obtain a degree of comfort. He responded in tones of philanthropy. He pressed her arm with an air of reassuring proprietorship.

"Dey was damn jays," he said, denouncing the mother and brother.

The sound of the music which, by the efforts of the frowsy-headed leader, drifted to her ears through the smoke-filled atmosphere, made the girl dream. She thought of her former Rum Alley environment and turned to regard Pete's strong protecting fists. She thought of the collar and cuff manufactory and the eternal moan of the proprietor: "What een hell do you sink I pie fife dolla a week for? Play? No, py damn." She contemplated Pete's mansubduing eyes and noted that wealth and prosperity was indicated by his clothes. She imagined a future, rose-tinted, because of its distance from all that she previously had experienced.

As to the present she perceived only vague reasons to be miserable. Her life was Pete's and she considered him worthy of the charge. She would be disturbed by no particular apprehensions, so long as Pete adored her as he now said he did. She did not feel like a bad woman. To her knowledge she had never seen any better.

At times men at other tables regarded the girl furtively. Pete, aware of it, nodded at her and grinned. He felt proud.

"Mag, yer a bloomin' good-looker," he remarked, studying her face through the haze. The men made Maggie fear, but she blushed at Pete's words as it became apparent to her that she was the apple of his eye.

Grey-headed men, wonderfully pathetic in their dissipation, stared at her through clouds. Smooth-cheeked boys, some of them with faces of stone and mouths of sin, not nearly so pathetic as the grey heads, tried to find the girl's eyes in the smoke wreaths. Maggie considered she was not what they thought her. She confined her glances to Pete and the stage.

The orchestra played negro melodies and a versatile drummer pounded, whacked, clattered and scratched on a dozen machines to make noise.

Those glances of the men, shot at Maggie from under half-closed lids, made her tremble. She thought them all to be worse men than Pete.

"Come, let's go," she said.

3. Move, hustle (slang).

4. Ballerina.

As they went out Maggie perceived two women seated at a table with some men. They were painted and their cheeks had lost their roundness. As she passed them the girl, with a shrinking movement, drew back her skirts.

Chapter XIII

Jimmie did not return home for a number of days after the fight with Pete in the saloon. When he did, he approached with extreme caution.

He found his mother raving. Maggie had not returned home. The parent continually wondered how her daughter could come to such a pass. She had never considered Maggie as a pearl dropped unstained into Rum Alley from Heaven, but she could not conceive how it was possible for her daughter to fall so low as to bring disgrace upon her family. She was terrific in denunciation of the girl's wickedness.

The fact that the neighbors talked of it, maddened her. When women came in, and in the course of their conversation casually asked, "Where's Maggie dese days?" the mother shook her fuzzy head at them and appalled them with curses. Cunning hints inviting confidence she rebuffed with violence.

"An' wid all deh bringin' up she had, how could she?" moaningly she asked of her son. "Wid all deh talkin' wid her I did an' deh t'ings I tol' her to remember? When a girl is bringed up deh way I bringed up Maggie, how kin she go teh deh devil?"

Jimmie was transfixed by these questions. He could not conceive how under the circumstances his mother's daughter and his sister could have been so wicked.

His mother took a drink from a squidgy⁵ bottle that sat on the table. She continued her lament.

"She had a bad heart, dat girl did, Jimmie. She was wicked teh deh heart an' we never knowed it."

Jimmie nodded, admitting the fact.

"We lived in deh same house wid her an' I brought her up an' we never knowed how bad she was."

Jimmie nodded again.

"Wid a home like dis an' a mudder like me, she went teh deh bad," cried the mother, raising her eyes.

One day, Jimmie came home, sat down in a chair and began to wriggle about with a new and strange nervousness. At last he spoke shamefacedly.

"Well, look-a-here, dis t'ing queers us! See? We're queered! An' maybe it 'ud be better if I—well, I t'ink I kin look 'er up an'—maybe it 'ud be better if I fetched her home an'—"

The mother started from her chair and broke forth into a storm of passionate anger.

"What! Let 'er come an' sleep under deh same roof wid her mudder agin! Oh, yes, I will, won't I? Sure? Shame on yehs, Jimmie Johnson, fer sayin' such a t'ing teh yer own mudder—teh yer own mudder! Little did I t'ink when yehs was a babby playin' about me feet dat ye'd grow up teh say sech a t'ing teh yer mudder—yer own mudder. I never taut—"

Sobs choked her and interrupted her reproaches.

5. Squat.

"Dere ain't nottin' teh raise sech hell about," said Jimmie. "I on'y says it 'ud be better if we keep dis t'ing dark, see? It queers us! See?"

His mother laughed a laugh that seemed to ring through the city and be echoed and re-echoed by countless other laughs. "Oh, yes, I will, won't I! Sure!"

"Well, yeh must take me fer a damn fool," said Jimmie, indignant at his mother for mocking him. "I didn't say we'd make 'er inteh a little tin angel, ner nottin', but deh way it is now she can queer us! Don' che see?"

"Aye, she'll git tired of deh life atter a while an' den she'll wanna be a-comin' home, won' she, deh beast! I'll let 'er in den, won' I?"

"Well, I didn' mean none of dis prod'gal bus'ness anyway," explained Jimmie.

"It wasn't no prod'gal dauter, yeh damn fool," said the mother. "It was prod'gal son,⁶ anyhow."

"I know dat," said Jimmie.

For a time they sat in silence. The mother's eyes gloated on a scene her imagination could call before her. Her lips were set in a vindictive smile.

"Aye, she'll cry, won' she, an' carry on, an' tell how Pete, or some odder feller, beats 'er an' she'll say she's sorry an' all dat an' she ain't happy, she ain't, an' she wants to come home agin, she does."

With grim humor, the mother imitated the possible wailing notes of the daughter's voice.

"Den I'll take 'er in, won't I, deh beast. She kin cry 'er two eyes out on deh stones of deh street before I'll dirty deh place wid her. She abused an' ill-treated her own mudder—her own mudder what loved her an' she'll never git anodder chance dis side of hell."

Jimmie thought he had a great idea of women's frailty, but he could not understand why any of his kin should be victims.

"Damn her," he fervidly said.

Again he wondered vaguely if some of the women of his acquaintance had brothers. Nevertheless, his mind did not for an instant confuse himself with those brothers nor his sister with theirs. After the mother had, with great difficulty, suppressed the neighbors, she went among them and proclaimed her grief. "May Gawd forgive dat girl," was her continual cry. To attentive ears she recited the whole length and breadth of her woes.

"I brought 'er up deh way a dauter oughta be brought up an' dis is how she served me! She went teh deh devil deh first chance she got! May Gawd forgive her."

When arrested for drunkenness she used the story of her daughter's downfall with telling effect upon the police-justices. Finally one of them said to her, peering down over his spectacles: "Mary, the records of this and other courts show that you are the mother of forty-two daughters who have been ruined. The case is unparalleled in the annals of this court, and this court thinks—"

The mother went through life shedding large tears of sorrow. Her red face was a picture of agony.

Of course Jimmie publicly damned his sister that he might appear on a higher social plane. But, arguing with himself, stumbling about in ways that

6. The biblical parable of the Prodigal Son is found in Luke 15.11–32.

he knew not, he, once, almost came to a conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good had she better known why. However, he felt that he could not hold such a view. He threw it hastily aside.

Chapter XIV

In a hilarious hall there were twenty-eight tables and twenty-eight women and a crowd of smoking men. Valiant noise was made on a stage at the end of the hall by an orchestra composed of men who looked as if they had just happened in. Soiled waiters ran to and fro, swooping down like hawks on the unwary in the throng; clattering along the aisles with trays covered with glasses; stumbling over women's skirts and charging two prices for everything but beer, all with a swiftness that blurred the view of the cocoanut palms and dusty monstrosities painted upon the walls of the room. A bouncer, with an immense load of business upon his hands, plunged about in the crowd, dragging bashful strangers to prominent chairs, ordering waiters here and there and quarreling furiously with men who wanted to sing with the orchestra.

The usual smoke cloud was present, but so dense that heads and arms seemed entangled in it. The rumble of conversation was replaced by a roar. Plenteous oaths heaved through the air. The room rang with the shrill voices of women bubbling o'er with drink-laughter. The chief element in the music of the orchestra was speed. The musicians played in intent fury. A woman was singing and smiling upon the stage, but no one took notice of her. The rate at which the piano, cornet and violins were going, seemed to impart wildness to the half-drunken crowd. Beer glasses were emptied at a gulp and conversation became a rapid chatter. The smoke eddied and swirled like a shadowy river hurrying toward some unseen falls. Pete and Maggie entered the hall and took chairs at a table near the door. The woman who was seated there made an attempt to occupy Pete's attention and, failing, went away.

Three weeks had passed since the girl had left home. The air of spaniel-like dependence had been magnified and showed its direct effect in the peculiar off-handedness and ease of Pete's ways toward her.

She followed Pete's eyes with hers, anticipating with smiles gracious looks from him.

A woman of brilliance and audacity, accompanied by a mere boy, came into the place and took seats near them.

At once Pete sprang to his feet, his face beaming with glad surprise.

"By Gawd, there's Nellie," he cried.

He went over to the table and held out an eager hand to the woman.

"Why, hello, Pete, me boy, how are you," said she, giving him her fingers.

Maggie took instant note of the woman. She perceived that her black dress fitted her to perfection. Her linen collar and cuffs were spotless. Tan gloves were stretched over her well-shaped hands. A hat of a prevailing fashion perched jauntily upon her dark hair. She wore no jewelry and was painted with no apparent paint. She looked clear-eyed through the stares of the men.

"Sit down, and call your lady-friend over," she said cordially to Pete. At his beckoning Maggie came and sat between Pete and the mere boy.

"I thought yeh were gone away fer good," began Pete, at once. "When did yeh git back? How did dat Buff'lo bus'ness turn out?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders. "Well, he didn't have as many stamps⁷ as he tried to make out, so I shook him, that's all."

"Well, I'm glad teh see yehs back in deh city," said Pete, with awkward gallantry.

He and the woman entered into a long conversation, exchanging reminiscences of days together. Maggie sat still, unable to formulate an intelligent sentence upon the conversation and painfully aware of it.

She saw Pete's eyes sparkle as he gazed upon the handsome stranger. He listened smilingly to all she said. The woman was familiar with all his affairs, asked him about mutual friends, and knew the amount of his salary.

She paid no attention to Maggie, looking toward her once or twice and apparently seeing the wall beyond.

The mere boy was sulky. In the beginning he had welcomed with acclamations the additions.

"Let's all have a drink! What'll you take, Nell? And you, Miss what's-your-name. Have a drink, Mr. ——, you, I mean."

He had shown a sprightly desire to do the talking for the company and tell all about his family. In a loud voice he declaimed on various topics. He assumed a patronizing air toward Pete. As Maggie was silent, he paid no attention to her. He made a great show of lavishing wealth upon the woman of brilliance and audacity.

"Do keep still, Freddie! You gibber like an ape, dear," said the woman to him. She turned away and devoted her attention to Pete.

"We'll have many a good time together again, eh?"

"Sure, Mike," said Pete, enthusiastic at once.

"Say," whispered she, leaning forward, "let's go over to Billie's and have a heluva time."

"Well, it's dis way! See?" said Pete. "I got dis lady frien' here."

"Oh, t'hell with her," argued the woman.

Pete appeared disturbed.

"All right," said she, nodding her head at him. "All right for you! We'll see the next time you ask me to go anywheres with you."

Pete squirmed.

"Say," he said, beseechingly, "come wid me a minit an' I'll tell yer why."

The woman waved her hand.

"Oh, that's all right, you needn't explain, you know. You wouldn't come merely because you wouldn't come, that's all there is of it."

To Pete's visible distress she turned to the mere boy, bringing him speedily from a terrific rage. He had been debating whether it would be the part of a man to pick a quarrel with Pete, or would he be justified in striking him savagely with his beer glass without warning. But he recovered himself when the woman turned to renew her smilings. He beamed upon her with an expression that was somewhat tipsy and inexpressibly tender.

"Say, shake that Bowery jay," requested he, in a loud whisper.

"Freddie, you are so droll," she replied.

Pete reached forward and touched the woman on the arm.

7. Money, especially paper money (slang).

"Come out a minit while I tells yeh why I can't go wid yer. Yer doin' me dirt, Nell! I never taut ye'd do me dirt, Nell. Come on, will yer?" He spoke in tones of injury.

"Why, I don't see why I should be interested in your explanations," said the woman, with a coldness that seemed to reduce Pete to a pulp.

His eyes pleaded with her. "Come out a minit while I tells yeh."

The woman nodded slightly at Maggie and the mere boy, "'Scuse me."

The mere boy interrupted his loving smile and turned a shrivelling glare upon Pete. His boyish countenance flushed and he spoke, in a whine, to the woman:

"Oh, I say, Nellie, this ain't a square deal, you know. You aren't goin' to leave me and go off with that duffer, are you? I should think—"

"Why, you dear boy, of course I'm not," cried the woman, affectionately. She bended over and whispered in his ear. He smiled again and settled in his chair as if resolved to wait patiently.

As the woman walked down between the rows of tables, Pete was at her shoulder talking earnestly, apparently in explanation. The woman waved her hands with studied airs of indifference. The doors swung behind them, leaving Maggie and the mere boy seated at the table.

Maggie was dazed. She could dimly perceive that something stupendous had happened. She wondered why Pete saw fit to remonstrate with the woman, pleading for forgiveness with his eyes. She thought she noted an air of submission about her leonine Pete. She was astounded.

The mere boy occupied himself with cock-tails and a cigar. He was tranquilly silent for half an hour. Then he bestirred himself and spoke.

"Well," he said, sighing, "I knew this was the way it would be." There was another stillness. The mere boy seemed to be musing.

"She was pulling m'leg. That's the whole amount of it," he said, suddenly. "It's a bloomin' shame the way that girl does. Why, I've spent over two dollars in drinks to-night. And she goes off with that plug-ugly who looks as if he had been hit in the face with a coin-die.⁸ I call it rocky treatment for a fellah like me. Here, waiter, bring me a cock-tail and make it damned strong."

Maggie made no reply. She was watching the doors. "It's a mean piece of business," complained the mere boy. He explained to her how amazing it was that anybody should treat him in such a manner. "But I'll get square with her, you bet. She won't get far ahead of yours truly, you know," he added, winking. "I'll tell her plainly that it was bloomin' mean business. And she won't come it over me with any of her 'now-Freddie-dears.' She thinks my name is Freddie, you know, but of course it ain't. I always tell these people some name like that, because if they got onto your right name they might use it sometime. Understand? Oh, they don't fool me much."

Maggie was paying no attention, being intent upon the doors. The mere boy relapsed into a period of gloom, during which he exterminated a number of cock-tails with a determined air, as if replying defiantly to fate. He occasionally broke forth into sentences composed of invectives joined together in a long string.

The girl was still staring at the doors. After a time the mere boy began to see cobwebs just in front of his nose. He spurred himself into being

8. Metal device for coining money.

agreeable and insisted upon her having a charlotte-russe⁹ and a glass of beer.

"They's gone," he remarked, "they's gone." He looked at her through the smoke wreaths. "Shay, lil' girl, we mightish well make bes' of it. You ain't such bad-lookin' girl, y'know. Not half bad. Can't come up to Nell, though. No, can't do it! Well, I should shay not! Nell fine-lookin' girl! F—i—n—ine. You look damn bad longsider her, but by y'self ain't so bad. Have to do anyhow. Nell gone. On'y you left. Not half bad, though."

Maggie stood up.

"I'm going home," she said.

The mere boy started.

"Eh? What? Home," he cried, struck with amazement. "I beg pardon, did hear say home?"

"I'm going home," she repeated.

"Great Gawd, what hava struck," demanded the mere boy of himself, stupefied.

In a semi-comatose state he conducted her on board an up-town car, ostentatiously paid her fare, leered kindly at her through the rear window and fell off the steps.

Chapter XV

A forlorn woman went along a lighted avenue. The street was filled with people desperately bound on missions. An endless crowd darted at the elevated station stairs and the horse cars were thronged with owners of bundles.

The pace of the forlorn woman was slow. She was apparently searching for some one. She loitered near the doors of saloons and watched men emerge from them. She scanned furtively the faces in the rushing stream of pedestrians. Hurrying men, bent on catching some boat or train, jostled her elbows, failing to notice her, their thoughts fixed on distant dinners.

The forlorn woman had a peculiar face. Her smile was no smile. But when in repose her features had a shadowy look that was like a sardonic grin, as if some one had sketched with cruel forefinger indelible lines about her mouth.

Jimmie came strolling up the avenue. The woman encountered him with an aggrieved air.

"Oh, Jimmie, I've been lookin' all over fer yehs—," she began.

Jimmie made an impatient gesture and quickened his pace.

"Ah, don't bodder me! Good Gawd!" he said, with the savageness of a man whose life is pestered.

The woman followed him along the sidewalk in somewhat the manner of a suppliant.

"But, Jimmie," she said, "yehs told me ye'd—"

Jimmie turned upon her fiercely as if resolved to make a last stand for comfort and peace.

"Say, fer Gawd's sake, Hattie, don' foller me from one end of deh city teh deh odder. Let up, will yehs! Give me a minute's res', can't yehs? Yehs makes

9. Sponge cake with whipped cream or custard filling.

me tired, allus taggin' me. See? Ain' yehs got no sense? Do yehs want people teh get onto me? Go chase yerself, fer Gawd's sake."

The woman stepped closer and laid her fingers on his arm. "But, look-a-here—"

Jimmie snarled. "Oh, go teh hell."

He darted into the front door of a convenient saloon and a moment later came out into the shadows that surrounded the side door. On the brilliantly lighted avenue he perceived the forlorn woman dodging about like a scout. Jimmie laughed with an air of relief and went away.

When he arrived home he found his mother clamoring. Maggie had returned. She stood shivering beneath the torrent of her mother's wrath.

"Well, I'm damned," said Jimmie in greeting.

His mother, tottering about the room, pointed a quivering fore-finger.

"Lookut her, Jimmie, lookut her. Dere's yer sister, boy. Dere's yer sister. Lookut her! Lookut her!"

She screamed in scoffing laughter.

The girl stood in the middle of the room. She edged about as if unable to find a place on the floor to put her feet.

"Ha, ha, ha," bellowed the mother. "Dere she stands! Ain' she purty? Lookut her! Ain' she sweet, deh beast? Lookut her! Ha, ha, lookut her!"

She lurched forward and put her red and seamed hands upon her daughter's face. She bent down and peered keenly up into the eyes of the girl.

"Oh, she's jes' dessame as she ever was, ain' she? She's her mudder's purty darlin' yit, ain' she? Lookut her, Jimmie! Come here, fer Gawd's sake, and lookut her."

The loud, tremendous sneering of the mother brought the denizens of the Rum Alley tenement to their doors. Women came in the hallways. Children scurried to and fro.

"What's up? Dat Johnson party on anudder tear?"

"Naw! Young Mag's come home!"

"Deh hell yeh say?"

Through the open doors curious eyes stared in at Maggie. Children ventured into the room and ogled her, as if they formed the front row at a theatre. Women, without, bended toward each other and whispered, nodding their heads with airs of profound philosophy. A baby, overcome with curiosity concerning this object at which all were looking, sidled forward and touched her dress, cautiously, as if investigating a red-hot stove. Its mother's voice rang out like a warning trumpet. She rushed forward and grabbed her child, casting a terrible look of indignation at the girl.

Maggie's mother paced to and fro, addressing the doorful of eyes, expounding like a glib showman at a museum. Her voice rang through the building.

"Dere she stands," she cried, wheeling suddenly and pointing with dramatic finger. "Dere she stands! Lookut her! Ain' she a dindy? An' she was so good as to come home teh her mudder, she was! Ain' she a beaut'? Ain' she a dindy? Fer Gawd's sake!"

The jeering cries ended in another burst of shrill laughter.

The girl seemed to awaken. "Jimmie—"

He drew hastily back from her.

“Well, now, yer a hell of a t’ing, ain’ yeh?” he said, his lips curling in scorn. Radiant virtue sat upon his brow and his repelling hands expressed horror of contamination.

Maggie turned and went.

The crowd at the door fell back precipitately. A baby falling down in front of the door, wrenched a scream like a wounded animal from its mother. Another woman sprang forward and picked it up, with a chivalrous air, as if rescuing a human being from an on-coming express train.

As the girl passed down through the hall, she went before open doors framing more eyes strangely microscopic, and sending broad beams of inquisitive light into the darkness of her path. On the second floor she met the gnarled old woman who possessed the music box.

“So,” she cried, “’ere yehs are back again, are yehs? An’ dey’ve kicked yehs out? Well, come in an’ stay wid me teh-night. I ain’ got no moral standin’.”

From above came an unceasing babble of tongues, over all of which rang the mother’s derisive laughter.

Chapter XVI

Pete did not consider that he had ruined Maggie. If he had thought that her soul could never smile again, he would have believed the mother and brother, who were pyrotechnic over the affair, to be responsible for it.

Besides, in his world, souls did not insist upon being able to smile. “What deh hell?”

He felt a trifle entangled. It distressed him. Revelations and scenes might bring upon him the wrath of the owner of the saloon, who insisted upon respectability of an advanced type.

“What deh hell do dey wanna raise such a smoke about it fer?” demanded he of himself, disgusted with the attitude of the family. He saw no necessity for anyone’s losing their equilibrium merely because their sister or their daughter had stayed away from home.

Searching about in his mind for possible reasons for their conduct, he came upon the conclusion that Maggie’s motives were correct, but that the two others wished to snare him. He felt pursued.

The woman of brilliance and audacity whom he had met in the hilarious hall showed a disposition to ridicule him.

“A little pale thing with no spirit,” she said. “Did you note the expression of her eyes? There was something in them about pumpkin pie and virtue. That is a peculiar way the left corner of her mouth has of twitching, isn’t it? Dear, dear, my cloud-compelling Pete, what are you coming to?”

Pete asserted at once that he never was very much interested in the girl. The woman interrupted him, laughing.

“Oh, it’s not of the slightest consequence to me, my dear young man. You needn’t draw maps for my benefit. Why should I be concerned about it?”

But Pete continued with his explanations. If he was laughed at for his tastes in women, he felt obliged to say that they were only temporary or indifferent ones.

The morning after Maggie had departed from home, Pete stood behind the bar. He was immaculate in white jacket and apron and his hair was plastered over his brow with infinite correctness. No customers were in the

place. Pete was twisting his napkin fist slowly in a beer glass, softly whistling to himself and occasionally holding the object of his attention between his eyes and a few weak beams of sunlight that had found their way over the thick screens and into the shaded room.

With lingering thoughts of the woman of brilliance and audacity, the bartender raised his head and stared through the varying cracks between the swaying bamboo doors. Suddenly the whistling pucker faded from his lips. He saw Maggie walking slowly past. He gave a great start, fearing for the previously-mentioned eminent respectability of the place.

He threw a swift, nervous glance about him, all at once feeling guilty. No one was in the room.

He went hastily over to the side door. Opening it and looking out, he perceived Maggie standing, as if undecided, on the corner. She was searching the place with her eyes.

As she turned her face toward him Pete beckoned to her hurriedly, intent upon returning with speed to a position behind the bar and to the atmosphere of respectability upon which the proprietor insisted.

Maggie came to him, the anxious look disappearing from her face and a smile wreathing her lips.

"Oh, Pete—," she began brightly.

The bartender made a violent gesture of impatience.

"Oh, my Gawd," cried he, vehemently. "What deh hell do yeh wanna hang aroun' here fer? Do yeh wanna git me inteh trouble?" he demanded with an air of injury.

Astonishment swept over the girl's features. "Why, Pete! yehs tol' me—"

Pete glanced profound irritation. His countenance reddened with the anger of a man whose respectability is being threatened.

"Say, yehs makes me tired. See? What deh hell deh yeh wanna tag aroun' atter me fer? Yeh'll git me inteh trouble wid deh ol' man an' dey'll be hell teh pay! If he sees a woman roun' here he'll go crazy an' I'll lose me job! See? Ain' yehs got no sense? Don' be allus bodderin' me. See? Yer brudder come in here an' raised hell an' deh ol' man hada put up fer it! An' now I'm done! See? I'm done."

The girl's eyes stared into his face. "Pete, don' yeh remem—"

"Oh, hell," interrupted Pete, anticipating.

The girl seemed to have a struggle with herself. She was apparently bewildered and could not find speech. Finally she asked in a low voice: "But where kin I go?"

The question exasperated Pete beyond the powers of endurance. It was a direct attempt to give him some responsibility in a matter that did not concern him. In his indignation he volunteered information.

"Oh, go teh hell," cried he. He slammed the door furiously and returned, with an air of relief, to his respectability.

Maggie went away.

She wandered aimlessly for several blocks. She stopped once and asked aloud a question of herself: "Who?"

A man who was passing near her shoulder, humorously took the questioning word as intended for him.

"Eh? What? Who? Nobody! I didn't say anything," he laughingly said, and continued his way.

Soon the girl discovered that if she walked with such apparent aimlessness, some men looked at her with calculating eyes. She quickened her step, frightened. As a protection, she adopted a demeanor of intentness as if going somewhere.

After a time she left rattling avenues and passed between rows of houses with sternness and stolidity stamped upon their features. She hung her head for she felt their eyes grimly upon her.

Suddenly she came upon a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat, whose decorous row of buttons reached from his chin to his knees.¹ The girl had heard of the Grace of God and she decided to approach this man.

His beaming, chubby face was a picture of benevolence and kindheartedness. His eyes shone good-will.

But as the girl timidly accosted him, he gave a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side-step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving?

Chapter XVII

Upon a wet evening, several months after the last chapter, two interminable rows of cars, pulled by slipping horses, jangled along a prominent side-street. A dozen cabs, with coat-enshrouded drivers, clattered to and fro. Electric lights, whirring softly, shed a blurred radiance. A flower dealer, his feet tapping impatiently, his nose and his wares glistening with rain-drops, stood behind an array of roses and chrysanthemums. Two or three theatres emptied a crowd upon the storm-swept pavements. Men pulled their hats over their eye-brows and raised their collars to their ears. Women shrugged impatient shoulders in their warm cloaks and stopped to arrange their skirts for a walk through the storm. People having been comparatively silent for two hours burst into a roar of conversation, their hearts still kindling from the glowings of the stage.

The pavements became tossing seas of umbrellas. Men stepped forth to hail cabs or cars, raising their fingers in varied forms of polite request or imperative demand. An endless procession wended toward elevated stations. An atmosphere of pleasure and prosperity seemed to hang over the throng, born, perhaps, of good clothes and of having just emerged from a place of forgetfulness.

In the mingled light and gloom of an adjacent park, a handful of wet wanderers, in attitudes of chronic dejection, was scattered among the benches.

A girl of the painted cohorts of the city went along the street. She threw changing glances at men who passed her, giving smiling invitations to men of rural or untaught pattern and usually seeming sedately unconscious of the men with a metropolitan seal upon their faces.

Crossing glittering avenues, she went into the throng emerging from the places of forgetfulness. She hurried forward through the crowd as if intent upon reaching a distant home, bending forward in her handsome cloak, daintily lifting her skirts and picking for her well-shod feet the dryer spots upon the pavements.

1. That is, he was a clergyman.

The restless doors of saloons, clashing to and fro, disclosed animated rows of men before bars and hurrying barkeepers.

A concert hall gave to the street faint sounds of swift, machinelike music, as if a group of phantom musicians were hastening.

A tall young man, smoking a cigarette with a sublime air, strolled near the girl. He had on evening dress, a moustache, a chrysanthemum, and a look of ennui, all of which he kept carefully under his eye. Seeing the girl walk on as if such a young man as he was not in existence, he looked back transfixed with interest. He stared glassily for a moment, but gave a slight convulsive start when he discerned that she was neither new, Parisian, nor theatrical. He wheeled about hastily and turned his stare into the air, like a sailor with a search-light.

A stout gentleman, with pompous and philanthropic whiskers, went stolidly by, the broad of his back sneering at the girl.

A belated man in business clothes, and in haste to catch a car, bounced against her shoulder. "Hi, there, Mary, I beg your pardon! Brace up, old girl." He grasped her arm to steady her, and then was away running down the middle of the street.

The girl walked on out of the realm of restaurants and saloons. She passed more glittering avenues and went into darker blocks than those where the crowd travelled.

A young man in light overcoat and derby hat received a glance shot keenly from the eyes of the girl. He stopped and looked at her, thrusting his hands in his pockets and making a mocking smile curl his lips. "Come, now, old lady," he said, "you don't mean to tell me that you sized me up for a farmer?"

A laboring man marched along with bundles under his arms. To her remarks, he replied: "It's a fine evenin', ain't it?"

She smiled squarely into the face of a boy who was hurrying by with his hands buried in his overcoat, his blonde locks bobbing on his youthful temples, and a cheery smile of unconcern upon his lips. He turned his head and smiled back at her, waving his hands.

"Not this eve—some other eve!"

A drunken man, reeling in her pathway, began to roar at her. "I ain' ga no money, dammit," he shouted, in a dismal voice. He lurched on up the street, wailing to himself, "Dammit, I ain' ga no money. Damn ba' luck. Ain' ga no more money."

The girl went into gloomy districts near the river, where the tall black factories shut in the street and only occasional broad beams of light fell across the pavements from saloons. In front of one of these places, from whence came the sound of a violin vigorously scraped, the patter of feet on boards and the ring of loud laughter, there stood a man with blotched features.

"Ah, there," said the girl.

"I've got a date," said the man.

Further on in the darkness she met a ragged being with shifting, blood-shot eyes and grimy hands. "Ah, what deh hell? T'ink I'm a millionaire?"

She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things. Afar off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance. Street car bells jingled with a sound of merriment.

When almost to the river the girl saw a great figure. On going forward she perceived it to be a huge fat man in torn and greasy garments. His grey hair straggled down over his forehead. His small, bleared eyes, sparkling from amidst great rolls of red fat, swept eagerly over the girl's upturned face. He laughed, his brown, disordered teeth gleaming under a grey, grizzled moustache from which beer-drops dripped. His whole body gently quivered and shook like that of a dead jelly fish. Chuckling and leering, he followed the girl of the crimson legions.

At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence.

Chapter XVIII

In a partitioned-off section of a saloon sat a man with a half dozen women, gleefully laughing, hovering about him. The man had arrived at that stage of drunkenness where affection is felt for the universe.

"I'm good f'ler, girls," he said, convincingly. "I'm damn good f'ler. An'body treats me right, I allus trea's zem right! See?"

The women nodded their heads approvingly. "To be sure," they cried in hearty chorus. "You're the kind of a man we like, Pete. You're outa sight! What yeh goin' to buy this time, dear?"

"An't'ing yehs wants, damn it," said the man in an abandonment of good will. His countenance shone with the true spirit of benevolence. He was in the proper mode of missionaries. He would have fraternized with obscure Hottentots.² And above all, he was over-whelmed in tenderness for his friends, who were all illustrious.

"An't'ing yehs wants, damn it," repeated he, waving his hands with beneficent recklessness. "I'm good f'ler, girls, an' if an'body treats me right I—here," called he through an open door to a waiter, "bring girls drinks, damn it. What 'ill yehs have, girls? An't'ing yehs wants, damn it!"

The waiter glanced in with the disgusted look of the man who serves intoxicants for the man who takes too much of them. He nodded his head shortly at the order from each individual, and went.

"Damn it," said the man, "we're havin' heluva time. I like you girls! Damn'd if I don't! Yer right sort! See?"

He spoke at length and with feeling, concerning the excellencies of his assembled friends.

"Don' try pull man's leg, but have a heluva time! Das right! Das way teh do! Now, if I sawght yehs tryin' work me fer drinks, wouldn' buy damn t'ing! But yer right sort, damn it! Yehs know how ter treat a f'ler, an' I stays by yehs 'til spen' las' cent! Das right! I'm good f'ler an' I knows when an'body treats me right!"

Between the times of the arrival and departure of the waiter, the man discoursed to the women on the tender regard he felt for all living things. He laid stress upon the purity of his motives in all dealings with men in the

2. A southern African people.

world and spoke of the fervor of his friendship for those who were amiable. Tears welled slowly from his eyes. His voice quavered when he spoke to them.

Once when the waiter was about to depart with an empty tray, the man drew a coin from his pocket and held it forth.

"Here," said he, quite magnificently, "here's quar'."

The waiter kept his hands on his tray.

"I don' want yer money," he said.

The other put forth the coin with tearful insistence.

"Here, damn it," cried he, "tak't! Yer damn goo' f'ler an' I wan' yehs tak't!"

"Come, come, now," said the waiter, with the sullen air of a man who is forced into giving advice. "Put yer mon in yer pocket! Yer loaded an' yehs on'y makes a damn fool of yerself."

As the latter passed out of the door the man turned pathetically to the women.

"He don' know I'm damn goo' f'ler," cried he, dismally.

"Never you mind, Pete, dear," said a woman of brilliance and audacity, laying her hand with great affection upon his arm. "Never you mind, old boy! We'll stay by you, dear!"

"Das ri'," cried the man, his face lighting up at the soothing tones of the woman's voice. "Das ri', I'm damn goo' f'ler an' w'en anyone trea's me ri', I treats zem ri'! Shee!"

"Sure!" cried the women. "And we're not goin' back on you, old man."

The man turned appealing eyes to the woman of brilliance and audacity. He felt that if he could be convicted of a contemptible action he would die.

"Shay, Nell, damn it, I allus trea's yehs shquare, didn' I? I allus been goo' f'ler wi' yehs, ain't I, Nell?"

"Sure you have, Pete," assented the woman. She delivered an oration to her companions. "Yessir, that's a fact. Pete's a square fellah, he is. He never goes back on a friend. He's the right kind an' we stay by him, don't we, girls?"

"Sure," they exclaimed. Looking lovingly at him they raised their glasses and drank his health.

"Girlsh," said the man, beseechingly, "I allus trea's yehs ri', didn' I? I'm goo' f'ler, ain' I, girlsh?"

"Sure," again they chorused.

"Well," said he finally, "le's have nozzer drink, zen."

"That's right," hailed a woman, "that's right. Yer no bloomin' jay! Yer spends yer money like a man. Dat's right."

The man pounded the table with his quivering fists.

"Yessir," he cried, with deep earnestness, as if someone disputed him. "I'm damn goo' f'ler, an' w'en anyone trea's me ri', I allus trea's—le's have nozzer drink."

He began to beat the wood with his glass.

"Shay," howled he, growing suddenly impatient. As the waiter did not then come, the man swelled with wrath.

"Shay," howled he again.

The waiter appeared at the door.

"Bringsh drinksh," said the man.

The waiter disappeared with the orders.

"Zat f'ler damn fool," cried the man. "He insul' me! I'm ge'man! Can' stan' be insul'! I'm goin' lickim when comes!"

"No, no," cried the women, crowding about and trying to subdue him. "He's all right! He didn't mean anything! Let it go! He's a good fellah!"

"Din' he insult' me?" asked the man earnestly.

"No," said they. "Of course he didn't! He's all right!"

"Sure he didn' insult' me?" demanded the man, with deep anxiety in his voice.

"No, no! We know him! He's a good fellah. He didn't mean anything."

"Well, zen," said the man, resolutely, "I'm go' 'pol'gize!"

When the waiter came, the man struggled to the middle of the floor.

"Girlsh shed you insult' me! I shay damn lie! I 'pol'gize!"

"All right," said the waiter.

The man sat down. He felt a sleepy but strong desire to straighten things out and have a perfect understanding with everybody.

"Nell, I allus trea's yeh shquare, din' I? Yeh likes me, don' yehs, Nell? I'm goo' f'ler?"

"Sure," said the woman of brilliance and audacity.

"Yeh knows I'm stuck on yehs, don' yehs, Nell?"

"Sure," she repeated, carelessly.

Overwhelmed by a spasm of drunken adoration, he drew two or three bills from his pocket, and, with the trembling fingers of an offering priest, laid them on the table before the woman.

"Yehs knows, damn it, yehs kin have all got, 'cause I'm stuck on yehs, Nell, damn't, I—I'm stuck on yehs, Nell—buy drinksh—damn't—we're havin' heluva time—w'en anyone trea's me ri—I—damn't, Nell—we're havin' heluva—time."

Shortly he went to sleep with his swollen face fallen forward on his chest.

The women drank and laughed, not heeding the slumbering man in the corner. Finally he lurched forward and fell groaning to the floor.

The women screamed in disgust and drew back their skirts.

"Come ahn," cried one, starting up angrily, "let's get out of here."

The woman of brilliance and audacity stayed behind, taking up the bills and stuffing them into a deep, irregularly-shaped pocket. A guttural snore from the recumbent man caused her to turn and look down at him.

She laughed. "What a damn fool," she said, and went.

The smoke from the lamps settled heavily down in the little compartment, obscuring the way out. The smell of oil, stifling in its intensity, pervaded the air. The wine from an overturned glass dripped softly down upon the blotches on the man's neck.

Chapter XIX

In a room a woman sat at a table eating like a fat monk in a picture.

A soiled, unshaven man pushed open the door and entered.

"Well," said he, "Mag's dead."

"What?" said the woman, her mouth filled with bread.

"Mag's dead," repeated the man.

"Deh hell she is," said the woman. She continued her meal. When she finished her coffee she began to weep.

"I kin remember when her two feet was no bigger dan yer t'umb, and she weared worsted boots," moaned she.

"Well, whata dat?" said the man.

"I kin remember when she weared worsted boots," she cried.

The neighbors began to gather in the hall, staring in at the weeping woman as if watching the contortions of a dying dog. A dozen women entered and lamented with her. Under their busy hands the rooms took on that appalling appearance of neatness and order with which death is greeted.

Suddenly the door opened and a woman in a black gown rushed in with outstretched arms. "Ah, poor Mary," she cried, and tenderly embraced the moaning one.

"Ah, what ter'ble affliction is dis," continued she. Her vocabulary was derived from mission churches. "Me poor Mary, how I feel fer yehs! Ah, what a ter'ble affliction is a disobed'ent chil'."

Her good, motherly face was wet with tears. She trembled in eagerness to express her sympathy. The mourner sat with bowed head, rocking her body heavily to and fro, and crying out in a high, strained voice that sounded like a dirge on some forlorn pipe.

"I kin remember when she weared worsted boots an' her two feets was no bigger dan yer t'umb an' she weared worsted boots, Miss Smith," she cried, raising her streaming eyes.

Ah, me poor Mary," sobbed the woman in black. With low, coddling cries, she sank on her knees by the mourner's chair, and put her arms about her. The other women began to groan in different keys.

"Yer poor misguided chil' is gone now, Mary, an' let us hope it's fer deh bes'. Yeh'll fergive her now, Mary, won't yehs, dear, all her disobed'ence? All her t'ankless behavior to her mudder an' all her badness? She's gone where her ter'ble sins will be judged."

The woman in black raised her face and paused. The inevitable sunlight came streaming in at the windows and shed ghastly cheerfulness upon the faded hues of the room. Two or three of the spectators were sniffing, and one was loudly weeping. The mourner arose and staggered into the other room. In a moment she emerged with a pair of faded baby shoes held in the hollow of her hand.

"I kin remember when she used to wear dem," cried she. The women burst anew into cries as if they had all been stabbed. The mourner turned to the soiled and unshaven man.

"Jimmie, boy, go git yer sister! Go git yer sister an' we'll put deh boots on her feets!"

"Dey won't fit her now, yeh damn fool," said the man.

"Go git yer sister, Jimmie," shrieked the woman, confronting him fiercely.

The man swore sullenly. He went over to a corner and slowly began to put on his coat. He took his hat and went out, with a dragging, reluctant step.

The woman in black came forward and again besought the mourner.

"Yeh'll fergive her, Mary! Yeh'll fergive yer bad, bad chil'! Her life was a curse an' her days were black an' yeh'll fergive yer bad girl? She's gone where her sins will be judged."

"She's gone where her sins will be judged," cried the other women, like a choir at a funeral.

"Deh Lord gives and deh Lord takes away," said the woman in black, raising her eyes to the sunbeams.

"Deh Lord gives and deh Lord takes away," responded the others.

"Yeh'll fergive her, Mary!" pleaded the woman in black. The mourner essayed to speak but her voice gave way. She shook her great shoulders frantically, in an agony of grief. Hot tears seemed to scald her quivering face. Finally her voice came and arose like a scream of pain.

"Oh, yes, I'll fergive her! I'll fergive her!"

1893

The Open Boat¹

A TALE INTENDED TO BE AFTER THE FACT, BEING THE EXPERIENCE OF FOUR MEN FROM THE SUNK STEAMER COMMODORE

I

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks.

Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small boat navigation.

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean. His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat. Often he said: "Gawd! That was a narrow clip." As he remarked it he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea.

The oiler,² steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern. It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he command for a day or a decade, and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the grays of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a top-mast with a white ball on it that

1. Crane sailed as a correspondent on the steamer *Commodore*, which, on January 1, 1897, left Jacksonville, Florida, with munitions for the Cuban insurrectionists. Early on the morning of January 2, the steamer sank. With three others, Crane reached Daytona Beach in a ten-foot dinghy on the following morning. Under the title "Stephen Crane's Own Story," the *New York Press* on January 7 carried the details of his nearly fatal experience.

In June 1897, he published his fictional account, "The Open Boat," in *Scribner's Magazine*. The story gave the title to "*The Open Boat*" and *Other Tales of Adventure* (1898). The text here reprints that of the University of Virginia edition of *The Works of Stephen Crane, Vol. 5, Tales of Adventure* (1970).

2. One who oils machinery in the engine room of a ship.

slashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.

“Keep’er a little more south, Billie,” said he.

“‘A little more south,’ sir,” said the oiler in the stern.

A seat in his boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and, by the same token, a broncho is not much smaller. The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. The manner of her scramble over these walls of water is a mystic thing, and, moreover, at the top of them were ordinarily these problems in white water, the foam racing down from the summit of each wave, requiring a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as imminent and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats. In a ten-foot dingey one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience, which is never at sea in a dingey. As each slaty wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water. There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests.

In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been gray. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtlessly have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had had leisure there were other things to occupy their minds. The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the color of the sea changed from slate to emerald-green, streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the color of the waves that rolled toward them.

In disjointed sentences the cook and the correspondent argued as to the difference between a life-saving station and a house of refuge. The cook had said: “There’s a house of refuge just north of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they’ll come off in their boat and pick us up.”

“As soon as who see us?” said the correspondent.

“The crew,” said the cook.

“Houses of refuge don’t have crews,” said the correspondent. “As I understand them, they are only places where clothes and grub are stored for the benefit of shipwrecked people. They don’t carry crews.”

“Oh, yes, they do,” said the cook.

“No, they don’t,” said the correspondent.

“Well, we’re not there yet, anyhow,” said the oiler, in the stern.

“Well,” said the cook, “perhaps it’s not a house of refuge that I’m thinking of as being near Mosquito Inlet Light. Perhaps it’s a life-saving station.”

“We’re not there yet,” said the oiler, in the stern.

II

As the boat bounced from the top of each wave, the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men, and as the craft plopped her stern down again the spray slashed past them. The crest of each of these waves was a hill, from the top of which the men surveyed, for a moment, a broad tumultuous expanse, shining and wind-riven. It was probably splendid. It was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber.

"Bully good thing it's an on-shore wind," said the cook. "If not, where would we be? Wouldn't have a show."

"That's right," said the correspondent.

The busy oiler nodded his assent.

Then the captain, in the bow, chuckled in a way that expressed humor, contempt, tragedy, all in one. "Do you think we've got much of a show, now, boys?" said he.

Whereupon the three were silent, save for a trifle of hemming and hawing. To express any particular optimism at this time they felt to be childish and stupid, but they all doubtless possessed this sense of the situation in their mind. A young man thinks doggedly at such times. On the other hand, the ethics of their condition was decidedly against any open suggestion of hopelessness. So they were silent.

"Oh, well," said the captain, soothing his children, "we'll get ashore all right."

But there was that in his tone which made them think, so the oiler quoth: "Yes! If this wind holds!"

The cook was bailing, "Yes! If we don't catch hell in the surf."

Canton flannel³ gulls flew near and far. Sometimes they sat down on the sea, near patches of brown sea-weed that rolled over the waves with a movement like carpets on a line in a gale. The birds sat comfortably in groups, and they were envied by some in the dingey, for the wrath of the sea was no more to them than it was to a covey of prairie chickens a thousand miles inland. Often they came very close and stared at the men with black bead-like eyes. At these times they were uncanny and sinister in their unblinking scrutiny, and the men hooted angrily at them, telling them to be gone. One came, and evidently decided to alight on the top of the captain's head. The bird flew parallel to the boat and did not circle, but made short sidelong jumps in the air in chicken-fashion. His black eyes were wistfully fixed upon the captain's head. "Ugly brute," said the oiler to the bird. "You look as if you were made with a jack-knife." The cook and the correspondent swore darkly at the creature. The captain naturally wished to knock it away with the end of the heavy painter, but he did not dare do it, because anything resembling an emphatic gesture would have capsized this freighted boat, and so with his open hand, the captain gently and carefully waved the gull away. After it had been discouraged from the pursuit the captain breathed easier on account of his hair, and others breathed easier because the bird struck their minds at this time as being somehow grewsome and ominous.

3. Common name of a lightweight cotton fabric, usually white.

In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed.

They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed. The very ticklish part of the business was when the time came for the reclining one in the stern to take his turn at the oars. By the very last star of truth, it is easier to steal eggs from under a hen than it was to change seats in the dingey. First the man in the stern slid his hand along the thwart and moved with care, as if he were of Sèvres.⁴ Then the man in the rowing seat slid his hand along the other thwart. It was all done with the most extraordinary care. As the two sidled past each other, the whole party kept watchful eyes on the coming wave, and the captain cried: "Look out now! Steady there!"

The brown mats of sea-weed that appeared from time to time were like islands, bits of earth. They were travelling, apparently, neither one way nor the other. They were, to all intents, stationary. They informed the men in the boat that it was making progress slowly toward the land.

The captain, rearing cautiously in the bow, after the dingey soared on a great swell, said that he had seen the light-house at Mosquito Inlet. Presently the cook remarked that he had seen it. The correspondent was at the oars, then, and for some reason he too wished to look at the light-house, but his back was toward the far shore and the waves were important, and for some time he could not seize an opportunity to turn his head. But at last there came a wave more gentle than the others, and when at the crest of it he swiftly scoured the western horizon.

"See it?" said the captain.

"No," said the correspondent, slowly, "I didn't see anything."

"Look again," said the captain. He pointed. "It's exactly in that direction."

At the top of another wave, the correspondent did as he was bid, and this time his eyes chanced on a small still thing on the edge of the swaying horizon. It was precisely like the point of a pin. It took an anxious eye to find a light-house so tiny.

"Think we'll make it, Captain?"

"If this wind holds and the boat don't swamp, we can't do much else," said the captain.

The little boat, lifted by each towering sea, and splashed viciously by the crests, made progress that in the absence of sea-weed was not apparent to those in her. She seemed just a wee thing wallowing, miraculously, top-up, at the mercy of five oceans. Occasionally, a great spread of water, like white flames, swarmed into her.

"Bail her, cook," said the captain, serenely.

"All right, Captain," said the cheerful cook.

III

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an

4. Fine, often ornately decorated French porcelain.

oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dingey. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it.

"I wish we had a sail," remarked the captain. "We might try my overcoat on the end of an oar and give you two boys a chance to rest." So the cook and the correspondent held the mast and spread wide the overcoat. The oiler steered, and the little boat made good way with her new rig. Sometimes the oiler had to scull sharply to keep a sea from breaking into the boat, but otherwise sailing was a success.

Meanwhile the light-house had been growing slowly larger. It had now almost assumed color, and appeared like a little gray shadow on the sky. The man at the oars could not be prevented from turning his head rather often to try for a glimpse of this little gray shadow.

At last, from the top of each wave the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the light-house was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper. "We must be about opposite New Smyrna," said the cook, who had coasted this shore often in schooners. "Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago."

"Did they?" said the captain.

The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar. But the waves continued their old impetuous swooping at the dingey, and the little craft, no longer under way, struggled woundily over them. The oiler or the correspondent took the oars again.

Shipwrecks are *apropos* of nothing. If men could only train for them and have them occur when the men had reached pink condition, there would be less drowning at sea. Of the four in the dingey none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dingey, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily.

For these reasons, and for others, neither the oiler nor the correspondent was fond of rowing at this time. The correspondent wondered ingenuously how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat. It was not an amusement; it was a diabolical punishment, and even a genius of mental aberrations could never conclude that it was anything but a horror to the muscles and a crime against the back. He mentioned to the boat in general how the amusement of rowing struck him, and the weary-faced oiler smiled in full sympathy. Previously to the foundering, by the way, the oiler had worked double-watch in the engine-room of the ship.

"Take her easy, now, boys," said the captain. "Don't spend yourselves. If we have to run a surf you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it. Take your time."

Slowly the land arose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white—trees and sand. Finally, the captain said that he could make out a house on the shore. “That’s the house of refuge, sure,” said the cook. “They’ll see us before long, and come out after us.”

The distant light-house reared high. “The keeper ought to be able to make us out now, if he’s looking through a glass,” said the captain. “He’ll notify the life-saving people.”

“None of those other boats could have got ashore to give word of the wreck,” said the oiler, in a low voice. “Else the life-boat would be out hunting us.”

Slowly and beautifully the land loomed out of the sea. The wind came again. It had veered from the northeast to the southeast. Finally, a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat. It was the low thunder of the surf on the shore. “We’ll never be able to make the light-house now,” said the captain. “Swing her head a little more north, Billie.”

“A little more north, sir,” said the oiler.

Whereupon the little boat turned her nose once more down the wind, and all but the oarsman watched the shore grow. Under the influence of this expansion doubt and direful apprehension was leaving the minds of the men. The management of the boat was still most absorbing, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness. In an hour, perhaps, they would be ashore.

Their back-bones had become thoroughly used to balancing in the boat and they now rode this wild colt of a dingey like circus men. The correspondent thought that he had been drenched to the skin, but happening to feel in the top pocket of his coat, he found therein eight cigars. Four of them were soaked with seawater; four were perfectly scatheless. After a search, somebody produced three dry matches, and thereupon the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat, and with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at the big cigars and judged well and ill of all men. Everybody took a drink of water.

IV

“Cook,” remarked the captain, “there don’t seem to be any signs of life about your house of refuge.”

“No,” replied the cook. “Funny they don’t see us!”

A broad stretch of lowly coast lay before the eyes of the men. It was of dunes topped with dark vegetation. The roar of the surf was plain, and sometimes they could see the white lip of a wave as it spun up the beach. A tiny house was blocked out black upon the sky. Southward, the slim light-house lifted its little gray length.

Tide, wind, and waves were swinging the dingey northward. “Funny they don’t see us,” said the men.

The surf’s roar was here dulled, but its tone was, nevertheless, thunderous and mighty. As the boat swam over the great rollers, the men sat listening to this roar. “We’ll swamp sure,” said everybody.

It is fair to say here that there was not a life-saving station within twenty miles in either direction, but the men did not know this fact and in consequence they made dark and opprobrious remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation’s life-savers. Four scowling men sat in the dingey and surpassed records in the invention of epithets.

"Funny they don't see us."

The light-heartedness of a former time had completely faded. To their sharpened minds it was easy to conjure pictures of all kinds of incompetency and blindness and, indeed, cowardice. There was the shore of the populous land, and it was bitter and bitter to them that from it came no sign.

"Well," said the captain, ultimately, "I suppose we'll have to make a try for ourselves. If we stay out here too long, we'll none of us have strength left to swim after the boat swamps."

And so the oiler, who was at the oars, turned the boat straight for the shore. There was a sudden tightening of muscles. There was some thinking.

"If we don't all get ashore—" said the captain. "If we don't all get ashore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?"

They then briefly exchanged some addresses and admonitions. As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: "If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble. The whole affair is absurd. . . . But, no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work." Afterward the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds. "Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!"

The billows that came at this time were more formidable. They seemed always just about to break and roll over the little boat in a turmoil of foam. There was a preparatory and long growl in the speech of them. No mind unused to the sea would have concluded that the dingy could ascend these sheer heights in time. The shore was still afar. The oiler was a wily surferman. "Boys," he said, swiftly, "she won't live three minutes more and we're too far out to swim. Shall I take her to sea again, Captain?"

"Yes! Go ahead!" said the captain.

This oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in the middle of the surf and took her safely to sea again.

There was a considerable silence as the boat bumped over the furrowed sea to deeper water. Then somebody in gloom spoke. "Well, anyhow, they must have seen us from the shore by now."

The gulls went in slanting flight up the wind toward the gray desolate east. A squall, marked by dingy clouds, and clouds brick-red, like smoke from a burning building, appeared from the southeast.

"What do you think of those life-saving people? Ain't they peaches?"

"Funny they haven't seen us."

"Maybe they think we're out here for sport! Maybe they think we're fishin'. Maybe they think we're damned fools."

It was a long afternoon. A changed tide tried to force them southward, but wind and wave said northward. Far ahead, where coast-line, sea, and sky formed their mighty angle, there were little dots which seemed to indicate a city on the shore.

“St. Augustine?”

The captain shook his head. “Too near Mosquito Inlet.”

And the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed. Then the oiler rowed. It was a weary business. The human back can become the seat of more aches and pains than are registered in books for the composite anatomy of a regiment. It is a limited area, but it can become the theatre of innumerable muscular conflicts, tangles, wrenches, knots, and other comforts.

“Did you ever like to row, Billie?” asked the correspondent.

“No,” said the oiler. “Hang it.”

When one exchanged the rowing-seat for a place in the bottom of the boat, he suffered a bodily depression that caused him to be careless of everything save an obligation to wiggle one finger. There was cold sea-water swashing to and fro in the boat, and he lay in it. His head, pillowed on a thwart, was within an inch of the swirl of a wave crest, and sometimes a particularly obstreperous sea came inboard and drenched him once more. But these matters did not annoy him. It is almost certain that if the boat had capsized he would have tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if he felt sure that it was a great soft mattress.

“Look! There’s a man on the shore!”

“Where?”

“There? See ’im? See ’im?”

“Yes, sure! He’s walking along.”

“Now he’s stopped. Look! He’s facing us!”

“He’s waving at us!”

“So he is! By thunder!”

“Ah, now, we’re all right! Now we’re all right! There’ll be a boat out here for us in half an hour.”

“He’s going on. He’s running. He’s going up to that house there.”

The remote beach seemed lower than the sea, and it required a searching glance to discern the little black figure. The captain saw a floating stick and they rowed to it. A bath-towel was by some weird chance in the boat, and, tying this on the stick, the captain waved it. The oarsman did not dare turn his head, so he was obliged to ask questions.

“What’s he doing now?”

“He’s standing still again. He’s looking, I think. . . . There he goes again. Toward the house. . . . Now he’s stopped again.”

“Is he waving at us?”

“No, not now! he was, though.”

“Look! There comes another man!”

“He’s running.”

“Look at him go, would you.”

“Why, he’s on a bicycle. Now he’s met the other man. They’re both waving at us. Look!”

“There comes something up the beach.”

“What the devil is that thing?”

“Why, it looks like a boat.”

“Why, certainly it’s a boat.”

“No, it’s on wheels.”

“Yes, so it is. Well, that must be the life-boat. They drag them along shore on a wagon.”

"That's the life-boat, sure."

"No, by——, it's—it's an omnibus."

"I tell you it's a life-boat."

"It is not! It's an omnibus. I can see it plain. See? One of those big hotel omnibuses."

"By thunder, you're right. It's an omnibus, sure as fate. What do you suppose they are doing with an omnibus? Maybe they are going around collecting the life-crew, hey?"

"That's it, likely. Look! There's a fellow waving a little black flag. He's standing on the steps of the omnibus. There come those other two fellows. Now they're all talking together. Look at the fellow with the flag. Maybe he ain't waving it!"

"That ain't a flag, is it? That's his coat. Why, certainly, that's his coat."

"So it is. It's his coat. He's taken it off and is waving it around his head. But would you look at him swing it!"

"Oh, say, there isn't any life-saving station there. That's just a winter resort hotel omnibus that has brought over some of the boarders to see us drown."

"What's that idiot with the coat mean? What's he signaling, anyhow?"

"It looks as if he were trying to tell us to go north. There must be a life-saving station up there."

"No! He thinks we're fishing. Just giving us a merry hand. See? Ah, there, Willie."

"Well, I wish I could make something out of those signals. What do you suppose he means?"

"He don't mean anything. He's just playing."

"Well, if he'd just signal us to try the surf again, or to go to sea and wait, or go north, or go south, or go to hell—there would be some reason in it. But look at him. He just stands there and keeps his coat revolving like a wheel. The ass!"

"There come more people."

"Now there's quite a mob. Look! Isn't that a boat?"

"Where? Oh, I see where you mean. No, that's no boat."

"That fellow is still waving his coat."

"He must think we like to see him do that. Why don't he quit it. It don't mean anything."

"I don't know. I think he is trying to make us go north. It must be that there's a life-saving station there somewhere."

"Say, he ain't tired yet. Look at 'im wave."

"Wonder how long he can keep that up. He's been revolving his coat ever since he caught sight of us. He's an idiot. Why aren't they getting men to bring a boat out. A fishing boat—one of those big yawls—could come out here all right. Why don't he do something?"

"Oh, it's all right, now."

"They'll have a boat out here for us in less than no time, now that they've seen us."

A faint yellow tone came into the sky over the low land. The shadows on the sea slowly deepened. The wind bore coldness with it, and the men began to shiver.

"Holy smoke!" said one, allowing his voice to express his impious mood, "if we keep on monkeying out here! If we've got to flounder out here all night!"

“Oh, we’ll never have to stay here all night! Don’t you worry. They’ve seen us now, and it won’t be long before they’ll come chasing out after us.”

The shore grew dusky. The man waving a coat blended gradually into this gloom, and it swallowed in the same manner the omnibus and the group of people. The spray, when it dashed uproariously over the side, made the voyagers shrink and swear like men who were being branded.

“I’d like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like socking him one, just for luck.”

“Why? What did he do?”

“Oh, nothing, but then he seemed so damned cheerful.”

In the meantime the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed, and then the oiler rowed. Gray-faced and bowed forward, they mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars. The form of the light-house had vanished from the southern horizon, but finally a pale star appeared, just lifting from the sea. The streaked saffron in the west passed before the all-merging darkness, and the sea to the east was black. The land had vanished, and was expressed only by the low and drear thunder of the surf.

“If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life?”

The patient captain, drooped over the water-jar, was sometimes obliged to speak to the oarsman.

“Keep her head up! Keep her head up!”

“‘Keep her head up,’ sir.” The voices were weary and low.

This was surely a quiet evening. All save the oarsman lay heavily and listlessly in the boat’s bottom. As for him, his eyes were just capable of noting the tall black waves that swept forward in a most sinister silence, save for an occasional subdued growl of a crest.

The cook’s head was on a thwart, and he looked without interest at the water under his nose. He was deep in other scenes. Finally he spoke. “Billie,” he murmured, dreamfully, “what kind of pie do you like best?”

V

“Pie,” said the oiler and the correspondent, agitatedly. “Don’t talk about those things, blast you!”

“Well,” said the cook, “I was just thinking about ham sandwiches, and——”

A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night. As darkness settled finally, the shine of the light, lifting from the sea in the south, changed to full gold. On the northern horizon a new light appeared, a small bluish gleam on the edge of the waters. These two lights were the furniture of the world. Otherwise there was nothing but waves.

Two men huddled in the stern, and distances were so magnificent in the dingy that the rower was enabled to keep his feet partly warmed by thrusting them under his companions. Their legs indeed extended far under the rowing-seat until they touched the feet of the captain forward. Sometimes, despite the efforts of the tired oarsman, a wave came piling into the boat, an

icy wave of the night, and the chilling water soaked them anew. They would twist their bodies for a moment and groan, and sleep the dead sleep once more, while the water in the boat gurgled about them as the craft rocked.

The plan of the oiler and the correspondent was for one to row until he lost the ability, and then arouse the other from his sea-water couch in the bottom of the boat.

The oiler plied the oars until his head drooped forward, and the overpowering sleep blinded him. And he rowed yet afterward. Then he touched a man in the bottom of the boat, and called his name. "Will you spell me for a little while?" he said meekly.

"Sure, Billie," said the correspondent, awakening and dragging himself to a sitting position. They exchanged places carefully, and the oiler, cuddling down in the sea-water at the cook's side, seemed to go to sleep instantly.

The particular violence of the sea had ceased. The waves came without snarling. The obligation of the man at the oars was to keep the boat headed so that the tilt of the rollers would not capsize her, and to preserve her from filling when the crests rushed past. The black waves were silent and hard to be seen in the darkness. Often one was almost upon the boat before the oarsman was aware.

In a low voice the correspondent addressed the captain. He was not sure that the captain was awake, although this iron man seemed to be always awake. "Captain, shall I keep her making for that light north, sir?"

The same steady voice answered him. "Yes. Keep it about two points off the port bow."

The cook had tied a life-belt around himself in order to get even the warmth which this clumsy cork contrivance could donate, and he seemed almost stove-like when a rower, whose teeth invariably chattered wildly as soon as he ceased his labor, dropped down to sleep.

The correspondent, as he rowed, looked down at the two men sleeping under foot. The cook's arm was around the oiler's shoulders, and, with their fragmentary clothing and haggard faces, they were the babes of the sea, a grotesque rendering of the old babes in the wood.⁵

Later he must have grown stupid at his work, for suddenly there was a growling of water, and a crest came with a roar and a swash into the boat, and it was a wonder that it did not set the cook afloat in his life-belt. The cook continued to sleep, but the oiler sat up, blinking his eyes and shaking with the new cold.

"Oh, I'm awful sorry, Billie," said the correspondent, contritely.

"That's all right, old boy," said the oiler, and lay down again and was asleep.

Presently it seemed that even the captain dozed, and the correspondent thought that he was the one man afloat on all the oceans. The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end.

There was a long, loud swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like blue flame, was furrowed on the black waters. It might have been made by a monstrous knife.

Then there came a stillness, while the correspondent breathed with the open mouth and looked at the sea.

5. A traditional folktale tells of two babes abandoned in the woods, covered in leaves by birds when they fall asleep.

Suddenly there was another swish and another long flash of bluish light, and this time it was alongside the boat, and might almost have been reached with an oar. The correspondent saw an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling the crystalline spray and leaving the long glowing trail.

The correspondent looked over his shoulder at the captain. His face was hidden, and he seemed to be asleep. He looked at the babes of the sea. They certainly were asleep. So, being bereft of sympathy, he leaned a little way to one side and swore softly into the sea.

But the thing did not then leave the vicinity of the boat. Ahead or astern, on one side or the other, at intervals long or short, fled the long sparkling streak, and there was to be heard the whiroo of the dark fin. The speed and power of the thing was greatly to be admired. It cut the water like a gigantic and keen projectile.

The presence of this biding thing did not affect the man with the same horror that it would if he had been a picnicker. He simply looked at the sea dully and swore in an undertone.

Nevertheless, it is true that he did not wish to be alone with the thing. He wished one of his companions to awaken by chance and keep him company with it. But the captain hung motionless over the water-jar and the oiler and the cook in the bottom of the boat were plunged in slumber.

VI

“If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?”

During this dismal night, it may be remarked that a man would conclude that it was really the intention of the seven mad gods to drown him, despite the abominable injustice of it. For it was certainly an abominable injustice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard. The man felt it would be a crime most unnatural. Other people had drowned at sea since galleys swarmed with painted sails, but still—

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands supplicant, saying: “Yes, but I love myself.”

A high cold star on a winter’s night is the word he feels that she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation.

The men in the dingey had not discussed these matters, but each had, no doubt, reflected upon them in silence and according to his mind. There was seldom any expression upon their faces save the general one of complete weariness. Speech was devoted to the business of the boat.

To chime the notes of his emotion, a verse mysteriously entered the correspondent’s head. He had even forgotten that he had forgotten this verse, but it suddenly was in his mind.

A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers,
 There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears;
 But a comrade stood beside him, and he took that comrade's hand,
 And he said: "I never more shall see my own, my native land."⁶

In his childhood, the correspondent had been made acquainted with the fact that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, but he had never regarded it as important. Myriads of his school-fellows had informed him of the soldier's plight, but the dinning had naturally ended by making him perfectly indifferent. He had never considered it his affair that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, nor had it appeared to him as a matter for sorrow. It was less to him than the breaking of a pencil's point.

Now, however, it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing. It was no longer merely a picture of a few throes in the breast of a poet, meanwhile drinking tea and warming his feet at the grate; it was an actuality—stern, mournful, and fine.

The correspondent plainly saw the soldier. He lay on the sand with his feet out straight and still. While his pale left hand was upon his chest in an attempt to thwart the going of his life, the blood came between his fingers. In the far Algerian distance, a city of low square forms was set against a sky that was faint with the last sunset hues. The correspondent, plying the oars and dreaming of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier, was moved by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers.

The thing which had followed the boat and waited had evidently grown bored at the delay. There was no longer to be heard the slash of the cut-water, and there was no longer the flame of the long trail. The light in the north still glimmered, but it was apparently no nearer to the boat. Sometimes the boom of the surf rang in the correspondent's ears, and he turned the craft seaward then and rowed harder. Southward, some one had evidently built a watch-fire on the beach. It was too low and too far to be seen, but it made a shimmering, roseate reflection upon the bluff back of it, and this could be discerned from the boat. The wind came stronger, and sometimes a wave suddenly raged out like a mountain-cat and there was to be seen the sheen and sparkle of a broken crest.

The captain, in the bow, moved on his water-jar and sat erect. "Pretty long night," he observed to the correspondent. He looked at the shore. "Those life-saving people take their time."

"Did you see that shark playing around?"

"Yes, I saw him. He was a big fellow, all right."

"Wish I had known you were awake."

Later the correspondent spoke into the bottom of the boat.

"Billie!" There was a slow and gradual disentanglement. "Billie, will you spell me?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

As soon as the correspondent touched the cold comfortable seawater in the bottom of the boat, and had huddled close to the cook's life-belt he was deep in sleep, despite the fact that his teeth played all the popular airs. This

6. The lines are incorrectly quoted from Caroline E. S. Norton's poem "Bingen on the Rhine" (1883).

sleep was so good to him that it was but a moment before he heard a voice call his name in a tone that demonstrated the last stages of exhaustion. "Will you spell me?"

"Sure, Billie."

The light in the north had mysteriously vanished, but the correspondent took his course from the wide-awake captain.

Later in the night they took the boat farther out to sea, and the captain directed the cook to take one oar at the stern and keep the boat facing the seas. He was to call out if he should hear the thunder of the surf. This plan enabled the oiler and the correspondent to get respite together. "We'll give those boys a chance to get into shape again," said the captain. They curled down and, after a few preliminary chatterings and trembles, slept once more the dead sleep. Neither knew they had bequeathed to the cook the company of another shark, or perhaps the same shark.

As the boat caroused on the waves, spray occasionally bumped over the side and gave them a fresh soaking, but this had no power to break their repose. The ominous slash of the wind and the water affected them as it would have affected mummies.

"Boys," said the cook, with the notes of every reluctance in his voice, "she's drifted in pretty close. I guess one of you had better take her to sea again." The correspondent, aroused, heard the crash of the toppled crests.

As he was rowing, the captain gave him some whiskey and water, and this steadied the chills out of him. "If I ever get ashore and anybody shows me even a photograph of an oar—"

At last there was a short conversation.

"Billie. . . . Billie, will you spell me?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

VII

When the correspondent again opened his eyes, the sea and the sky were each of the gray hue of the dawning. Later, carmine and gold was painted upon the waters. The morning appeared finally, in its splendor, with a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight flamed on the tips of the waves.

On the distant dunes were set many little black cottages, and a tall white wind-mill reared above them. No man, nor dog, nor bicycle appeared on the beach. The cottages might have formed a deserted village.

The voyagers scanned the shore. A conference was held in the boat. "Well," said the captain, "if no help is coming, we might better try a run through the surf right away. If we stay out here much longer we will be too weak to do anything for ourselves at all." The others silently acquiesced in this reasoning. The boat was headed for the beach. The correspondent wondered if none ever ascended the tall wind-tower, and if then they never looked seaward. This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. It is, perhaps, plausible that a man in this situation, impressed with the unconcern of the universe, should see the innumerable flaws of his life and have them taste

wickedly in his mind and wish for another chance. A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then, in this new ignorance of the grave-edge, and he understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction, or at a tea.

"Now, boys," said the captain, "she is going to swamp sure. All we can do is to work her in as far as possible, and then when she swamps, pile out and scramble for the beach. Keep cool now, and don't jump until she swamps sure."

The oiler took the oars. Over his shoulders he scanned the surf. "Captain," he said, "I think I'd better bring her about, and keep her head-on to the seas and back her in."

"All right, Billie," said the captain. "Back her in." The oiler swung the boat then and, seated in the stern, the cook and the correspondent were obliged to look over their shoulders to contemplate the lonely and indifferent shore.

The monstrous inshore rollers heaved the boat high until the men were again enabled to see the white sheets of water scudding up the slanted beach. "We won't get in very close," said the captain. Each time a man could wrest his attention from the rollers, he turned his glance toward the shore, and in the expression of the eyes during this contemplation there was a singular quality. The correspondent, observing the others, knew that they were not afraid, but the full meaning of their glances was shrouded.

As for himself, he was too tired to grapple fundamentally with the fact. He tried to coerce his mind into thinking of it, but the mind was dominated at this time by the muscles, and the muscles said they did not care. It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame.

There were no hurried words, no pallor, no plain agitation. The men simply looked at the shore. "Now, remember to get well clear of the boat when you jump," said the captain.

Seaward the crest of a roller suddenly fell with a thunderous crash, and the long white comber came roaring down upon the boat.

"Steady now," said the captain. The men were silent. They turned their eyes from the shore to the comber and waited. The boat slid up the incline, leaped at the furious top, bounced over it, and swung down the long back of the wave. Some water had been shipped and the cook bailed it out.

But the next crest crashed also. The tumbling boiling flood of white water caught the boat and whirled it almost perpendicular. Water swarmed in from all sides. The correspondent had his hands on the gunwale at this time, and when the water entered at that place he swiftly withdrew his fingers, as if he objected to wetting them.

The little boat, drunken with this weight of water, reeled and snuggled deeper into the sea.

"Bail her out, cook! Bail her out," said the captain.

"All right, Captain," said the cook.

"Now, boys, the next one will do for us, sure," said the oiler. "Mind to jump clear of the boat."

The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable. It fairly swallowed the dingy, and almost simultaneously the men tumbled into the sea. A piece of life-belt had lain in the bottom of the boat, and as the correspondent went overboard he held this to his chest with his left hand.

The January water was icy, and he reflected immediately that it was colder than he had expected to find it off the coast of Florida. This appeared to his dazed mind as a fact important enough to be noted at the time. The coldness of the water was sad; it was tragic. This fact was somehow so mixed and confused with his opinion of his own situation that it seemed almost a proper reason for tears. The water was cold.

When he came to the surface he was conscious of little but the noisy water. Afterward he saw his companions in the sea. The oiler was ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly. Off to the correspondent's left, the cook's great white and corked back bulged out of the water, and in the rear the captain was hanging with his one good hand to the keel of the overturned dingey.

There is a certain immovable quality to a shore, and the correspondent wondered at it amid the confusion of the sea.

It seemed also very attractive, but the correspondent knew that it was a long journey, and he paddled leisurely. The piece of life preserver lay under him, and sometimes he whirled down the incline of a wave as if he were on a hand-sled.

But finally he arrived at a place in the sea where travel was beset with difficulty. He did not pause swimming to inquire what manner of current had caught him, but there his progress ceased. The shore was set before him like a bit of scenery on a stage, and he looked at it and understood with his eyes each detail of it.

As the cook passed, much farther to the left, the captain was calling to him, "Turn over on your back, cook! Turn over on your back and use the oar."

"All right, sir." The cook turned on his back, and, paddling with an oar, went ahead as if he were a canoe.

Presently the boat also passed to the left of the correspondent with the captain clinging with one hand to the keel. He would have appeared like a man raising himself to look over a board fence, if it were not for the extraordinary gymnastics of the boat. The correspondent marvelled that the captain could still hold to it.

They passed on, nearer to the shore—the oiler, the cook, the captain—and following them went the water-jar, bouncing gayly over the seas.

The correspondent remained in the grip of this strange new enemy—a current. The shore, with its white slope of sand and its green bluff, topped with little silent cottages, was spread like a picture before him. It was very near to him then, but he was impressed as one who in a gallery looks at a scene from Brittany or Holland.

He thought: "I am going to drown? Can it be possible? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature.

But later a wave perhaps whirled him out of this small deadly current, for he found suddenly that he could again make progress toward the shore. Later still, he was aware that the captain, clinging with one hand to the keel of the dingey, had his face turned away from the shore and toward him, and was calling his name. "Come to the boat! Come to the boat!"

In his struggle to reach the captain and the boat, he reflected that when one gets properly wearied, drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement, a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief, and

he was glad of it, for the main thing in his mind for some moments had been horror of the temporary agony. He did not wish to be hurt.

Presently he saw a man running along the shore. He was undressing with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything flew magically off him.

"Come to the boat," called the captain.

"All right, Captain." As the correspondent paddled, he saw the captain let himself down to bottom and leave the boat. Then the correspondent performed his one little marvel of the voyage. A large wave caught him and flung him with ease and supreme speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. It struck him even then as an event in gymnastics, and a true miracle of the sea. An overturned boat in the surf is not a plaything to a swimming man.

The correspondent arrived in water that reached only to his waist, but his condition did not enable him to stand for more than a moment. Each wave knocked him into a heap, and the under-tow pulled at him.

Then he saw the man who had been running and undressing, and undressing and running, come bounding into the water. He dragged ashore the cook, and then waded toward the captain, but the captain waved him away, and sent him to the correspondent. He was naked, naked as a tree in winter, but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint. He gave a strong pull, and a long drag, and a bully heave at the correspondent's hand. The correspondent schooled in the minor formulæ, said: "Thanks, old man." But suddenly the man cried: "What's that?" He pointed a swift finger. The correspondent said: "Go."

In the shallows, face downward, lay the oiler. His forehead touched sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea.

The correspondent did not know all that transpired afterward. When he achieved safe ground he fell, striking the sand with each particular part of his body. It was as if he had dropped from a roof, but the thud was grateful to him.

It seems that instantly the beach was populated with men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and women with coffee-pots and all the remedies sacred to their minds. The welcome of the land to the men from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land's welcome for it could only be the different and sinister hospitality of the grave.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters.

1897, 1898

*From The Black Riders*¹

VI

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
With the infinite skill of an all-master

1. First published in *"The Black Riders" and Other Lines* (1896); reprinted in *Stephen Crane: Prose and Poetry* (1984), from which this text is taken.

Made He the hull and the sails,
 Held He the rudder
 Ready for adjustment. 5
 Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
 Then—at fateful time—a wrong called,
 And God turned, heeding.
 Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
 Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways. 10
 So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
 Going ridiculous voyages,
 Making quaint progress,
 Turning as with serious purpose
 Before stupid winds. 15
 And there were many in the sky
 Who laughed at this thing.

* * *

XXIV

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
 Round and round they sped.
 I was disturbed at this;
 I accosted the man.
 “It is futile,” I said, 5
 “You can never——”

“You lie,” he cried,
 And ran on.

1896

*From War Is Kind*¹

I

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.
 Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
 And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
 Do not weep.
 War is kind. 5

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment
 Little souls who thirst for fight,
 These men were born to drill and die
 The unexplained glory flies above them
 Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom—— 10
 A field where a thousand corpses lie.

1. First published in “*War Is Kind*” and *Other Lines* (1899); reprinted in *Stephen Crane: Prose and Poetry* (1984), from which this text is taken.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.
 Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,
 Raged at his breast, gulped and died,
 Do not weep. 15
 War is kind.

Swift, blazing flag of the regiment
 Eagle with crest of red and gold,
 These men were born to drill and die
 Point for them the virtue of slaughter 20
 Make plain to them the excellence of killing
 And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button
 On the bright splendid shroud of your son,
 Do not weep. 25
 War is kind.

* * *

XIX

The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top.

Blood—blood and torn grass—
 Had marked the rise of his agony—
 This lone hunter.
 The grey-green woods impassive 5
 Had watched the threshing of his limbs.

A canoe with flashing paddle
 A girl with soft searching eyes,
 A call: "John!"

Come, arise, hunter! 10
 Can you not hear?

The chatter of a death-demon from a tree-top.

XX

The impact of a dollar upon the heart
 Smiles warm red light
 Sweeping from the hearth rosily upon the white table,
 With the hanging cool velvet shadows
 Moving softly upon the door. 5

The impact of a million dollars
 Is a crash of flunkeys
 And yawning emblems of Persia

Cheeked against oak, France and a sabre,
 The outcry of old Beauty 10
 Whored by pimping merchants
 To submission before wine and chatter.
 Silly rich peasants stamp the carpets of men,
 Dead men who dreamed fragrance and light
 Into their woof, their lives; 15
 The rug of an honest bear
 Under the feet of a cryptic slave
 Who speaks always of baubles
 Forgetting place, multitude, work and state,
 Champing and mouthing of hats 20
 Making ratful squeak of hats,
 Hats.

XXI

A man said to the universe:
 "Sir, I exist!"
 "However," replied the universe,
 "The fact has not created in me
 "A sense of obligation." 5

XXII

When the prophet, a complacent fat man,
 Arrived at the mountain-top
 He cried: "Woe to my knowledge!
 I intended to see good white lands
 And bad black lands, 5
 But the scene is grey."

1899

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON
 1871–1938

Teacher, poet, songwriter, novelist, and civil rights activist, James William Johnson (he changed his middle name to Weldon in 1913) was born in Jacksonville, Florida. He was the son of James Johnson, a headwaiter, and Helen Louise Dillet, the first African American woman teacher in Florida. Both parents had roots in Nassau, in the Bahamas. The professions of his parents enabled Johnson and his brother, John Rosamund, to have a middle-class childhood, and they were

encouraged to study English literature and European classical music. Johnson attended Atlanta University, his main aim being to use his education to further the interests of African Americans. While still in college, he taught in Hampton, Georgia, where he experienced life among poor African Americans, and he attended the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, where he heard speeches by Frederick Douglass and poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar. After graduating in 1894, he took a job as a high school principal at Jacksonville's Stanton Public School, where his mother taught; he also founded a short-lived newspaper, the *Daily American*. While working as a principal he studied law and became the first African American to gain admission to the Florida bar through open examination.

In 1900, Johnson and his brother, who had graduated from the New England Conservatory and become a composer, wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" on the occasion of Abraham Lincoln's birthday; the song was immensely popular and became known as the "Negro National Anthem." Johnson moved to New York in 1901 in order to collaborate further with his brother, and the two enjoyed success as Broadway songwriters, particularly in light opera. He also took courses at Columbia University. With the help of a letter of reference from Booker T. Washington to President Theodore Roosevelt, Johnson was appointed U.S. consul to Venezuela in 1906. While employed by the diplomatic corps, Johnson published poems in *Century Magazine* and the *Independent*. Fluent in Spanish, he was transferred to Nicaragua in 1909, where he met and married Grace Nail, the daughter of a real estate developer from New York.

In 1912, still in Nicaragua, Johnson published *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* anonymously. Through this first-person novel about a musician whose light skin tone enables him to pass as a white person, Johnson critiques the idea of essential racial identity and the attractions of middle-class white existence. The novel is one of the most significant renderings of W. E. B. Du Bois's metaphor of "double-consciousness," exploring the ways in which African Americans in a "white" culture can experience themselves from multiple perspectives. By combining a trenchant condemnation of American racism with careful manipulation of narrative form, Johnson created a novel that seems in retrospect to prefigure the achievements of later writers of the Harlem Renaissance. In fact, Johnson so deftly employed the autobiographical form that many readers believed the *Autobiography* to be a true story when it was first published. Later, in 1927, Johnson republished the novel and identified himself as the author. He went on to publish his own autobiography, *Along This Way*, in 1933.

In 1913 Johnson left the diplomatic corps and returned to New York, where he became involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He assumed the position of national organizer in 1916, and the following year he organized the landmark silent parade of ten thousand African Americans down New York's Fifth Avenue to protest lynching and other forms of antiblack violence. In 1920, he was elected the first African American executive secretary of the NAACP, a position he held until 1930.

Johnson published his first book of poetry, *Fifty Years and Other Poems*, in 1917 and went on to edit *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925), and *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals* (1926). He was a strong force behind the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, promoting writers such as Claude McKay and Langston Hughes. His second poetry collection, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927), was inspired by his student memories of the rural South. Johnson did not endorse the heavy use of Negro dialect, instead challenging African American writers to "express the racial spirit from within, rather than [through] symbols from without." His last works, including *Along This Way*, argued for integration as the only solution to American racial problems.

When Johnson retired, he was Professor of Creative Literature and Writing at Fisk University. He continued lecturing on civil rights and in the mid-1930s published a sociological book, *Negro Americans, What Now?* as well as his last collection of verse, *Saint Peter Relates an Incident: Selected Poems*. He died near his summer home in Maine when his car was struck by a train. Nearly two thousand people attended his funeral in Harlem.

Lift Every Voice and Sing¹

Lift every voice and sing
 Till earth and heaven ring,
 Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
 Let our rejoicing rise
 High as the listening skies, 5
 Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
 Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
 Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.
 Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
 Let us march on till victory is won. 10

Stony the road we trod,
 Bitter the chastening rod,
 Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
 Yet with a steady beat,
 Have not our weary feet 15
 Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
 We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
 We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
 Out from the gloomy past,
 Till now we stand at last 20
 Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
 God of our silent tears,
 Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
 Thou who hast by Thy might 25
 Led us into the light,
 Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
 Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
 Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
 Shadowed beneath Thy hand, 30
 May we forever stand.
 True to our God,
 True to our native land.

1935

1. From *Saint Peter Relates an Incident* (1935); reprinted in *James Weldon Johnson: Writings* (2004), from which this text is taken. Johnson

wrote these lyrics in February 1900 for a school commemoration of Lincoln's birthday; his brother, John Rosamund, set them to music.

*From Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*¹

Chapter I

I know that in writing the following pages I am divulging the great secret of my life, the secret which for some years I have guarded far more carefully than any of my earthly possessions; and it is a curious study to me to analyze the motives which prompt me to do it. I feel that I am led by the same impulse which forces the unfound-out criminal to take somebody into his confidence, although he knows that the act is liable, even almost certain, to lead to his undoing. I know that I am playing with fire, and I feel the thrill which accompanies that most fascinating pastime; and, back of it all, I think I find a sort of savage and diabolical desire to gather up all the little tragedies of my life, and turn them into a practical joke on society.

And, too, I suffer a vague feeling of un-satisfaction, of regret, of almost remorse from which I am seeking relief, and of which I shall speak in the last paragraph of this account.

I was born in a little town of Georgia a few years after the close of the Civil War. I shall not mention the name of the town, because there are people still living there who could be connected with this narrative. I have only a faint recollection of the place of my birth. At times I can close my eyes, and call up in a dream-like way things that seem to have happened ages ago in some other world. I can see in this half vision a little house—I can remember that flowers grew in the front yard, and that around each bed of flowers was a hedge of vari-colored glass bottles stuck in the ground neck down. I remember that once, while playing around in the sand, I became curious to know whether or not the bottles grew as the flowers did, and I proceeded to dig them up to find out; the investigation brought me a terrific spanking which indelibly fixed the incident in my mind. I can remember, too, that behind the house was a shed under which stood two or three wooden wash-tubs. These tubs were the earliest aversion of my life, for regularly on certain evenings I was plunged into one of them, and scrubbed until my skin ached. I can remember to this day the pain caused by the strong, rank soap getting into my eyes.

Back from the house a vegetable garden ran, perhaps, seventy-five or one hundred feet; but to my childish fancy it was an endless territory. I can still recall the thrill of joy, excitement and wonder it gave me to go on an exploring expedition through it, to find the blackberries, both ripe and green, that grew along the edge of the fence.

I remember with what pleasure I used to arrive at, and stand before, a little enclosure in which stood a patient cow chewing her cud, how I would occasionally offer her through the bars a piece of my bread and molasses, and how I would jerk back my hand in half fright if she made any motion to accept my offer.

I have a dim recollection of several people who moved in and about this little house, but I have a distinct mental image of only two; one, my mother,

1. First published in Boston by Sherman, French in 1912, the edition from which this text is taken. This first edition did not name an author or indi-

cate on its cover or title page that this text was anything other than a factual autobiography.

and the other, a tall man with a small, dark mustache. I remember that his shoes or boots were always shiny, and that he wore a gold chain and a great gold watch with which he was always willing to let me play. My admiration was almost equally divided between the watch and chain and the shoes. He used to come to the house evenings, perhaps two or three times a week; and it became my appointed duty whenever he came to bring him a pair of slippers, and to put the shiny shoes in a particular corner; he often gave me in return for this service a bright coin which my mother taught me to promptly drop in a little tin bank. I remember distinctly the last time this tall man came to the little house in Georgia; that evening before I went to bed he took me up in his arms, and squeezed me very tightly; my mother stood behind his chair wiping tears from her eyes. I remember how I sat upon his knee, and watched him laboriously drill a hole through a ten-dollar gold piece, and then tie the coin around my neck with a string. I have worn that gold piece around my neck the greater part of my life, and still possess it, but more than once I have wished that some other way had been found of attaching it to me besides putting a hole through it.

On the day after the coin was put around my neck my mother and I started on what seemed to me an endless journey. I knelt on the seat and watched through the train window the corn and cotton fields pass swiftly by until I fell asleep. When I fully awoke we were being driven through the streets of a large city—Savannah. I sat up and blinked at the bright lights. At Savannah we boarded a steamer which finally landed us in New York. From New York we went to a town in Connecticut, which became the home of my boyhood.

My mother and I lived together in a little cottage which seemed to me to be fitted up almost luxuriously; there were horse-hair covered chairs in the parlor, and a little square piano; there was a stairway with red carpet on it leading to a half second story; there were pictures on the walls, and a few books in a glass-doored case. My mother dressed me very neatly, and I developed that pride which well-dressed boys generally have. She was careful about my associates, and I myself was quite particular. As I look back now I can see that I was a perfect little aristocrat. My mother rarely went to anyone's house, but she did sewing, and there were a great many ladies coming to our cottage. If I were around they would generally call me, and ask me my name and age and tell my mother what a pretty boy I was. Some of them would pat me on the head and kiss me.

My mother was kept very busy with her sewing; sometimes she would have another woman helping her. I think she must have derived a fair income from her work. I know, too, that at least once each month she received a letter; I used to watch for the postman, get the letter, and run to her with it; whether she was busy or not she would take it and instantly thrust it into her bosom. I never saw her read one of them. I knew later that these letters contained money and, what was to her, more than money. As busy as she generally was she, however, found time to teach me my letters and figures and how to spell a number of easy words. Always on Sunday evenings she opened the little square piano, and picked out hymns. I can recall now that whenever she played hymns from the book her *tempos* were always decidedly *largo*.² Sometimes on other evenings when she was not sewing she would play simple

2. In music, slow and stately (Italian).

accompaniments to some old southern songs which she sang. In these songs she was freer, because she played them by ear. Those evenings on which she opened the little piano were the happiest hours of my childhood. Whenever she started toward the instrument I used to follow her with all the interest and irrepressible joy that a pampered pet dog shows when a package is opened in which he knows there is a sweet bit for him. I used to stand by her side, and often interrupt and annoy her by chiming in with strange harmonies which I found either on the high keys of the treble or low keys of the bass. I remember that I had a particular fondness for the black keys. Always on such evenings, when the music was over, my mother would sit with me in her arms often for a very long time. She would hold me close, softly crooning some old melody without words, all the while gently stroking her face against my head; many and many a night I thus fell asleep. I can see her now, her great dark eyes looking into the fire, to where? No one knew but she. The memory of that picture has more than once kept me from straying too far from the place of purity and safety in which her arms held me.

At a very early age I began to thump on the piano alone, and it was not long before I was able to pick out a few tunes. When I was seven years old I could play by ear all of the hymns and songs that my mother knew. I had also learned the names of the notes in both clefs, but I preferred not to be hampered by notes. About this time several ladies for whom my mother sewed heard me play, and they persuaded her that I should at once be put under a teacher; so arrangements were made for me to study the piano with a lady who was a fairly good musician; at the same time arrangements were made for me to study my books with this lady's daughter. My music teacher had no small difficulty at first in pinning me down to the notes. If she played my lesson over for me I invariably attempted to reproduce the required sounds without the slightest recourse to the written characters. Her daughter, my other teacher, also had her worries. She found that, in reading, whenever I came to words that were difficult or unfamiliar I was prone to bring my imagination to the rescue and read from the picture. She has laughingly told me, since then, that I would sometimes substitute whole sentences and even paragraphs from what meaning I thought the illustrations conveyed. She said she sometimes was not only amused at the fresh treatment I would give an author's subject, but that when I gave some new and sudden turn to the plot of the story she often grew interested and even excited in listening to hear what kind of a denouement I would bring about. But I am sure this was not due to dullness, for I made rapid progress in both my music and my books.

And so, for a couple of years my life was divided between my music and my school books. Music took up the greater part of my time. I had no playmates, but amused myself with games—some of them my own invention—which could be played alone. I knew a few boys whom I had met at the church which I attended with my mother, but I had formed no close friendships with any of them. Then, when I was nine years old, my mother decided to enter me in the public school, so all at once I found myself thrown among a crowd of boys of all sizes and kinds; some of them seemed to me like savages. I shall never forget the bewilderment, the pain, the heart-sickness of that first day at school. I seemed to be the only stranger in the place; every other boy seemed to know every other boy. I was fortunate enough, however, to be assigned to a teacher who knew me; my mother made her dresses. She was

one of the ladies who used to pat me on the head and kiss me. She had the tact to address a few words directly to me; this gave me a certain sort of standing in the class, and put me somewhat at ease.

Within a few days I had made one staunch friend, and was on fairly good terms with most of the boys. I was shy of the girls, and remained so; even now, a word or look from a pretty woman sets me all a-tremble. This friend I bound to me with hooks of steel in a very simple way. He was a big awkward boy with a face full of freckles and a head full of very red hair. He was perhaps fourteen years of age; that is, four or five years older than any other boy in the class. This seniority was due to the fact that he had spent twice the required amount of time in several of the preceding classes. I had not been at school many hours before I felt that "Red Head"—as I involuntarily called him—and I were to be friends. I do not doubt that this feeling was strengthened by the fact that I had been quick enough to see that a big, strong boy was a friend to be desired at a public school; and, perhaps, in spite of his dullness, "Red Head" had been able to discern that I could be of service to him. At any rate there was a simultaneous mutual attraction.

The teacher had strung the class promiscuously round the walls of the room for a sort of trial heat for places of rank; when the line was straightened out I found that by skillful maneuvering I had placed myself third, and had piloted "Red Head" to the place next to me. The teacher began by giving us to spell the words corresponding to our order in the line. "Spell first." "Spell second." "Spell third." I rattled off, "t-h-i-r-d, third," in a way which said, "Why don't you give us something hard?" As the words went down the line I could see how lucky I had been to get a good place together with an easy word. As young as I was I felt impressed with the unfairness of the whole proceeding when I saw the tailenders going down before "twelfth" and "twentieth," and I felt sorry for those who had to spell such words in order to hold a low position. "Spell fourth." "Red Head," with his hands clutched tightly behind his back, began bravely, "f-o-r-t-h." Like a flash a score of hands went up, and the teacher began saying, "No snapping of fingers, no snapping of fingers." This was the first word missed, and it seemed to me that some of the scholars were about to lose their senses; some were dancing up and down on one foot with a hand above their heads, the fingers working furiously, and joy beaming all over their faces; others stood still, their hands raised not so high, their fingers working less rapidly, and their faces expressing not quite so much happiness; there were still others who did not move nor raise their hands, but stood with great wrinkles on their foreheads, looking very thoughtful.

The whole thing was new to me, and I did not raise my hand, but slyly whispered the letter "u" to "Red head" several times. "Second chance," said the teacher. The hands went down and the class became quiet. "Red Head," his face now red, after looking beseechingly at the ceiling, then pitifully at the floor, began very haltingly, "f-u-." Immediately an impulse to raise hands went through the class, but the teacher checked it, and poor "Red Head," though he knew that each letter he added only took him farther out of the way, went doggedly on and finished, "r-t-h." The hand raising was now repeated with more hubbub and excitement than at first. Those who before had not moved a finger were now waving their hands above their heads. "Red Head" felt that he was lost. He looked very big and foolish, and some of the

scholars began to snicker. His helpless condition went straight to my heart, and gripped my sympathies. I felt that if he failed it would in some way be my failure. I raised my hand, and under cover of the excitement and the teacher's attempts to regain order, I hurriedly shot up into his ear twice, quite distinctly, "f-o-u-r-t-h," "f-o-u-r-t-h." The teacher tapped on her desk and said, "Third and last chance." The hands came down, the silence became oppressive. "Red Head" began, "f"—Since that day I have waited anxiously for many a turn of the wheel of fortune, but never under greater tension than I watched for the order in which those letters would fall from "Red's" lips—"o-u-r-t-h." A sigh of relief and disappointment went up from the class. Afterwards, through all our school days, "Red Head" shared my wit and quickness and I benefited by his strength and dogged faithfulness.

There were some black and brown boys and girls in the school, and several of them were in my class. One of the boys strongly attracted my attention from the first day I saw him. His face was as black as night, but shone as though it was polished; he had sparkling eyes, and when he opened his mouth he displayed glistening white teeth. It struck me at once as appropriate to call him "Shiny face," or "Shiny eyes," or "Shiny teeth," and I spoke of him often by one of these names to the other boys. These terms were finally merged into "Shiny," and to that name he answered good naturedly during the balance of his public school days.

"Shiny" was considered without question to be the best speller, the best reader, the best penman, in a word, the best scholar, in the class. He was very quick to catch anything; but, nevertheless, studied hard; thus he possessed two powers very rarely combined in one boy. I saw him year after year, on up into the high school, win the majority of the prizes for punctuality, deportment, essay writing, and declamation. Yet it did not take me long to discover that, in spite of his standing as a scholar, he was in some way looked down upon.

The other black boys and girls were still more looked down upon. Some of the boys often spoke of them as "niggers." Sometimes on the way home from school a crowd would walk behind them repeating:

"Nigger, nigger, never die,
Black face and shiny eye."³

On one such afternoon one of the black boys turned suddenly on his tormentors, and hurled a slate; it struck one of the white boys in the mouth, cutting a slight gash in his lip. At sight of the blood the boy who had thrown the slate ran, and his companions quickly followed. We ran after them pelting them with stones until they separated in several directions. I was very much wrought up over the affair, and went home and told my mother how one of the "niggers" had struck a boy with a slate. I shall never forget how she turned on me. "Don't you ever use that word again," she said, "and don't you ever bother the colored children at school. You ought to be ashamed of yourself." I did hang my head in shame, but not because she had convinced me that I had done wrong, but because I was hurt by the first sharp word she had ever given me.

3. This children's rhyme circulated widely in the United States. It appeared in popular songs and was also incorporated into Stephen Crane's "The Monster" (1898).

My school days ran along very pleasantly. I stood well in my studies, not always so well with regard to my behavior. I was never guilty of any serious misconduct, but my love of fun sometimes got me into trouble. I remember, however, that my sense of humor was so sly that most of the trouble usually fell on the head of the other fellow. My ability to play on the piano at school exercises was looked upon as little short of marvelous in a boy of my age. I was not chummy with many of my mates, but, on the whole, was about as popular as it is good for a boy to be.

One day near the end of my second term at school the principal came into our room, and after talking to the teacher, for some reason said, "I wish all of the white scholars to stand for a moment." I rose with the others. The teacher looked at me, and calling my name said, "You sit down for the present, and rise with the others." I did not quite understand her, and questioned, "Ma'm?" She repeated with a softer tone in her voice, "You sit down now, and rise with the others." I sat down dazed. I saw and heard nothing. When the others were asked to rise I did not know it. When school was dismissed I went out in a kind of stupor. A few of the white boys jeered me, saying, "Oh, you're a nigger too." I heard some black children say, "We knew he was colored." "Shiny" said to them, "Come along, don't tease him," and thereby won my undying gratitude.

I hurried on as fast as I could, and had gone some distance before I perceived that "Red Head" was walking by my side. After a while he said to me, "Le' me carry your books." I gave him my strap⁴ without being able to answer. When we got to my gate he said as he handed me my books, "Say, you know my big red agate?⁵ I can't shoot with it any more. I'm going to bring it to school for you to-morrow." I took my books and ran into the house. As I passed through the hallway I saw that my mother was busy with one of her customers; I rushed up into my own little room, shut the door, and went quickly to where my looking-glass hung on the wall. For an instant I was afraid to look, but when I did I looked long and earnestly. I had often heard people say to my mother, "What a pretty boy you have." I was accustomed to hear remarks about my beauty; but, now, for the first time, I became conscious of it, and recognized it. I noticed the ivory whiteness of my skin, the beauty of my mouth, the size and liquid darkness of my eyes, and how the long black lashes that fringed and shaded them produced an effect that was strangely fascinating even to me. I noticed the softness and glossiness of my dark hair that fell in waves over my temples, making my forehead appear whiter than it really was. How long I stood there gazing at my image I do not know. When I came out and reached the head of the stairs, I heard the lady who had been with my mother going out. I ran downstairs, and rushed to where my mother was sitting with a piece of work in her hands. I buried my head in her lap and blurted out, "Mother, mother, tell me, am I a nigger?" I could not see her face, but I knew the piece of work dropped to the floor, and I felt her hands on my head. I looked up into her face and repeated, "Tell me, mother, am I a nigger?" There were tears in her eyes, and I could see that she was suffering for me. And then it was that I looked at her critically for the first time. I had thought of her in a childish way only as the

4. In this era, children sometimes carried their school books bound together with a leather strap.

5. A type of marble.

most beautiful woman in the world; now I looked at her searching for defects. I could see that her skin was almost brown, that her hair was not so soft as mine, and that she did differ in some way from the other ladies who came to the house; yet, even so, I could see that she was very beautiful, more beautiful than any of them. She must have felt that I was examining her, for she hid her face in my hair, and said with difficulty, "No, my darling, you are not a nigger." She went on, "You are as good as anybody; if anyone calls you a nigger don't notice them." But the more she talked the less was I reassured, and I stopped her by asking, "Well, mother, am I white? Are you white?" She answered tremblingly, "No, I am not white, but you—your father is one of the greatest men in the country—the best blood of the South is in you—" This suddenly opened up in my heart a fresh chasm of misgiving and fear, and I almost fiercely demanded, "Who is my father? Where is he?" She stroked my hair and said, "I'll tell you about him some day." I sobbed, "I want to know now." She answered, "No, not now."

Perhaps it had to be done, but I have never forgiven the woman who did it so cruelly. It may be that she never knew that she gave me a sword-thrust that day in school which was years in healing.

* * *

Chapter X⁶

Among the first of my fellow-passengers of whom I took any particular notice was a tall, broad-shouldered, almost gigantic, colored man. His dark-brown face was clean-shaven; he was well-dressed and bore a decidedly distinguished air. In fact, if he was not handsome, he at least compelled admiration for his fine physical proportions. He attracted general attention as he strode the deck in a sort of majestic loneliness. I became curious to know who he was and determined to strike up an acquaintance with him at the first opportune moment. The chance came a day or two later. He was sitting in the smoking-room, with a cigar, which had gone out, in his mouth, reading a novel. I sat down beside him and, offering him a fresh cigar, said: "You don't mind my telling you something unpleasant, do you?" He looked at me with a smile, accepted the proffered cigar, and replied in a voice which comported perfectly with his size and appearance: "I think my curiosity overcomes any objections I might have." "Well," I said, "have you noticed that the man who sat at your right in the saloon during the first meal has not sat there since?" He frowned slightly without answering my question. "Well," I continued, "he asked the steward to remove him; and not only that, he attempted to persuade a number of the passengers to protest against your presence in the dining-saloon." The big man at my side took a long draw from his cigar, threw his head back, and slowly blew a great cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. Then turning to me he said: "Do you know, I don't object to anyone's having prejudices so long as those prejudices don't interfere with my personal liberty. Now, the man you are speaking of had a perfect right to change his seat if I in any way interfered with his appetite or his digestion.

6. After an attempt at college in Atlanta and a career in New York's music halls, the narrator is hired by a man he calls "the millionaire" to play

piano for him as he travels. In this chapter, the narrator returns to the United States from Europe to travel in the South.

I should have no reason to complain if he removed to the farthest corner of the saloon, or even if he got off the ship; but when his prejudice attempts to move *me* one foot, one inch, out of the place where I am comfortably located, then I object." On the word "object" he brought his great fist down on the table in front of us with such a crash that everyone in the room turned to look. We both covered up the slight embarrassment with a laugh and strolled out on the deck.

We walked the deck for an hour or more, discussing different phases of the Negro question. In referring to the race I used the personal pronoun "we"; my companion made no comment about it, nor evinced any surprise, except to raise his eyebrows slightly the first time he caught the significance of the word. He was the broadest-minded colored man I have ever talked with on the Negro question. He even went so far as to sympathize with and offer excuses for some white Southern points of view. I asked him what were his main reasons for being so hopeful. He replied: "In spite of all that is written, said, and done, this great, big, incontrovertible fact stands out—the Negro is progressing, and that disproves all the arguments in the world that he is incapable of progress. I was born in slavery, and at emancipation was set adrift a ragged, penniless bit of humanity. I have seen the Negro in every grade, and I know what I am talking about. Our detractors point to the increase of crime as evidence against us; certainly we have progressed in crime as in other things; what less could be expected? And yet, in this respect, we are far from the point which has been reached by the more highly civilized white race. As we continue to progress, crime among us will gradually lose much of its brutal, vulgar, I might say healthy, aspect, and become more delicate, refined, and subtle. Then it will be less shocking and noticeable, although more dangerous to society." Then dropping his tone of irony, he continued with some show of eloquence: "But, above all, when I am discouraged and disheartened, I have this to fall back on: if there is a principle of right in the world, which finally prevails, and I believe that there is; if there is a merciful but justice-loving God in heaven, and I believe that there is, we shall win; for we have right on our side, while those who oppose us can defend themselves by nothing in the moral law, nor even by anything in the enlightened thought of the present age."

For several days, together with other topics, we discussed the race problem, not only of the United States, but as it affected native Africans and Jews. Finally, before we reached Boston, our conversation had grown familiar and personal. I had told him something of my past and much about my intentions for the future. I learned that he was a physician, a graduate of Howard University, Washington, and had done post-graduate work in Philadelphia; and this was his second trip abroad to attend professional courses. He had practised for some years in the city of Washington, and though he did not say so, I gathered that his practice was a lucrative one. Before we left the ship, he had made me promise that I would stop two or three days in Washington before going on south.

We put up at a hotel in Boston for a couple of days and visited several of my new friend's acquaintances; they were all people of education and culture and, apparently, of means. I could not help being struck by the great difference between them and the same class of colored people in the South. In speech and thought they were genuine Yankees. The difference was espe-

cially noticeable in their speech. There was none of that heavy-tongued enunciation which characterizes even the best-educated colored people of the South. It is remarkable, after all, what an adaptable creature the Negro is. I have seen the black West Indian gentleman in London, and he is in speech and manners a perfect Englishman. I have seen natives of Haiti and Martinique in Paris, and they are more Frenchy than a Frenchman. I have no doubt that the Negro would make a good Chinaman, with exception of the pigtail.

My stay in Washington, instead of being two or three days, was two or three weeks. This was my first visit to the national capital, and I was, of course, interested in seeing the public buildings and something of the working of the government; but most of my time I spent with the doctor among his friends and acquaintances. The social phase of life among colored people is more developed in Washington than in any other city in the country. This is on account of the large number of individuals earning good salaries and having a reasonable amount of leisure time to draw from. There are dozens of physicians and lawyers, scores of schoolteachers, and hundreds of clerks in the departments. As to the colored department clerks, I think it fair to say that in educational equipment they average above the white clerks of the same grade; for, whereas a colored college graduate will seek such a job, the white university man goes into one of the many higher vocations which are open to him.

In a previous chapter I spoke of social life among colored people; so there is no need to take it up again here. But there is one thing I did not mention: among Negroes themselves there is the peculiar inconsistency of a color question. Its existence is rarely admitted and hardly ever mentioned; it may not be too strong a statement to say that the greater portion of the race is unconscious of its influence; yet this influence, though silent, is constant. It is evidenced most plainly in marriage selection; thus the black men generally marry women fairer than themselves; while, on the other hand, the dark women of stronger mental endowment are very often married to light-complexioned men; the effect is a tendency toward lighter complexions, especially among the more active elements in the race. Some might claim that this is a tacit admission of colored people among themselves of their own inferiority judged by the color line. I do not think so. What I have termed an inconsistency is, after all, most natural; it is, in fact, a tendency in accordance with what might be called an economic necessity. So far as racial differences go, the United States puts a greater premium on color, or, better, lack of color, than upon anything else in the world. To paraphrase, "Have a white skin, and all things else may be added unto you."⁷ I have seen advertisements in newspapers for waiters, bell-boys, or elevator men, which read: "Light-colored man wanted." It is this tremendous pressure which the sentiment of the country exerts that is operating on the race. There is involved not only the question of higher opportunity, but often the question of earning a livelihood; and so I say it is not strange, but a natural tendency. Nor is it any more a sacrifice of self-respect that a black man should give to his children every advantage he can which complexion of the skin carries than

7. A reworking of Luke 12.31: "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God: and all these things shall be added unto you."

that the new or vulgar rich should purchase for their children the advantages which ancestry, aristocracy, and social position carry. I once heard a colored man sum it up in these words: "It's no disgrace to be black, but it's often very inconvenient."

Washington shows the Negro not only at his best, but also at his worst. As I drove round with the doctor, he commented rather harshly on those of the latter class which we saw. He remarked: "You see those lazy, loafing, good-for-nothing darkies; they're not worth digging graves for; yet they are the ones who create impressions of the race for the casual observer. It's because they are always in evidence on the street corners, while the rest of us are hard at work, and you know a dozen loafing darkies make a bigger crowd and a worse impression in this country than fifty white men of the same class. But they ought not to represent the race. We are the race, and the race ought to be judged by us, not by them. Every race and every nation should be judged by the best it has been able to produce, not by the worst."

The recollection of my stay in Washington is a pleasure to me now. In company with the doctor I visited Howard University, the public schools, the excellent colored hospital, with which he was in some way connected, if I remember correctly, and many comfortable and even elegant homes. It was with some reluctance that I continued my journey south. The doctor was very kind in giving me letters to people in Richmond and Nashville when I told him that I intended to stop in both of these cities. In Richmond a man who was then editing a very creditable colored newspaper gave me a great deal of his time and made my stay there of three or four days very pleasant. In Nashville I spent a whole day at Fisk University, the home of the "Jubilee Singers,"⁸ and was more than repaid for my time. Among my letters of introduction was one to a very prosperous physician. He drove me about the city and introduced me to a number of people. From Nashville I went to Atlanta, where I stayed long enough to gratify an old desire to see Atlanta University again. I then continued my journey to Macon.

During the trip from Nashville to Atlanta I went into the smoking-compartment of the car to smoke a cigar. I was travelling in a Pullman,⁹ not because of an abundance of funds, but because through my experience with my millionaire a certain amount of comfort and luxury had become a necessity to me whenever it was obtainable. When I entered the car, I found only a couple of men there; but in a half-hour there were half a dozen or more. From the general conversation I learned that a fat Jewish-looking man was a cigar manufacturer, and was experimenting in growing Havana tobacco in Florida; that a slender bespectacled young man was from Ohio and a professor in some State institution in Alabama; that a white-moustached, well-dressed man was an old Union soldier who had fought through the Civil War; and that a tall, raw-boned, red-faced man, who seemed bent on leaving nobody in ignorance of the fact that he was from Texas, was a cotton planter.

In the North men may ride together for hours in a "smoker" and unless they are acquainted with each other never exchange a word; in the South

8. The first internationally acclaimed group of African American musicians. The singers introduced "slave songs" to the world and helped preserve this music. In 1871 and 1873, they toured the United States and Europe, and funds raised

from their concerts were used to construct the school's first permanent building, Jubilee Hall.

9. A sleeping car on a train. George Pullman founded the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1867.

men thrown together in such manner are friends in fifteen minutes. There is always present a warm-hearted cordiality which will melt down the most frigid reserve. It may be because Southerners are very much like Frenchmen in that they must talk; and not only must they talk, but they must express their opinions.

The talk in the car was for a while miscellaneous—on the weather, crops, business prospects; the old Union soldier had invested capital in Atlanta, and he predicted that that city would soon be one of the greatest in the country. Finally the conversation drifted to politics; then, as a natural sequence, turned upon the Negro question.

In the discussion of the race question the diplomacy of the Jew was something to be admired; he had the faculty of agreeing with everybody without losing his allegiance to any side. He knew that to sanction Negro oppression would be to sanction Jewish oppression and would expose him to a shot along that line from the old soldier, who stood firmly on the ground of equal rights and opportunity to all men; long traditions and business instincts told him when in Rome to act as a Roman. Altogether his position was a delicate one, and I gave him credit for the skill he displayed in maintaining it. The young professor was apologetic. He had had the same views as the G. A. R. man;¹ but a year in the South had opened his eyes, and he had to confess that the problem could hardly be handled any better than it was being handled by the Southern whites. To which the G. A. R. man responded somewhat rudely that he had spent ten times as many years in the South as his young friend and that he could easily understand how holding a position in a State institution in Alabama would bring about a change of views. The professor turned very red and had very little more to say. The Texan was fierce, eloquent, and profane in his argument, and, in a lower sense, there was a direct logic in what he said, which was convincing; it was only by taking higher ground, by dealing in what Southerners call “theories,” that he could be combated. Occasionally some one of the several other men in the “smoker” would throw in a remark to reinforce what he said, but he really didn’t need any help; he was sufficient in himself.

In the course of a short time the controversy narrowed itself down to an argument between the old soldier and the Texan. The latter maintained hotly that the Civil War was a criminal mistake on the part of the North and that the humiliation which the South suffered during Reconstruction could never be forgotten. The Union man retorted just as hotly that the South was responsible for the war and that the spirit of unforgetfulness on its part was the greatest cause of present friction; that it seemed to be the one great aim of the South to convince the North that the latter made a mistake in fighting to preserve the Union and liberate the slaves. “Can you imagine,” he went on to say, “what would have been the condition of things eventually if there had been no war, and the South had been allowed to follow its course? Instead of one great, prosperous country with nothing before it but the conquests of peace, a score of petty republics, as in Central and South America, wasting their energies in war with each other or in revolutions.”

1. A member of the Grand Army of the Republic, a post-Civil War organization of Union veterans that was highly visible in national politics.

"Well," replied the Texan, "anything—no country at all—is better than having niggers over you. But anyhow, the war was fought and the niggers were freed; for it's no use beating around the bush, the niggers, and not the Union, was the cause of it; and now do you believe that all the niggers on earth are worth the good white blood that was spilt? You freed the nigger and you gave him the ballot, but you couldn't make a citizen out of him. He don't know what he's voting for, and we buy 'em like so many hogs. You're giving 'em education, but that only makes slick rascals out of 'em."

"Don't fancy for a moment," said the Northern man, "that you have any monopoly in buying ignorant votes. The same thing is done on a larger scale in New York and Boston, and in Chicago and San Francisco; and they are not black votes either. As to education's making the Negro worse, you might just as well tell me that religion does the same thing. And, by the way, how many educated colored men do you know personally?"

The Texan admitted that he knew only one, and added that he was in the penitentiary. "But," he said, "do you mean to claim, ballot or no ballot, education or no education, that niggers are the equals of white men?"

"That's not the question," answered the other, "but if the Negro is so distinctly inferior, it is a strange thing to me that it takes such tremendous effort on the part of the white man to make him realize it, and to keep him in the same place into which inferior men naturally fall. However, let us grant for sake of argument that the Negro is inferior in every respect to the white man; that fact only increases our moral responsibility in regard to our actions toward him. Inequalities of numbers, wealth, and power, even of intelligence and morals, should make no difference in the essential rights of men."

"If he's inferior and weaker, and is shoved to the wall, that's his own lookout," said the Texan. "That's the law of nature; and he's bound to go to the wall; for no race in the world has ever been able to stand competition with the Anglo-Saxon. The Anglo-Saxon race has always been and always will be the masters of the world, and the niggers in the South ain't going to change all the records of history."

"My friend," said the old soldier slowly, "if you have studied history, will you tell me, as confidentially between white men, what the Anglo-Saxon has ever done?"

The Texan was too much astonished by the question to venture any reply.

His opponent continued: "Can you name a single one of the great fundamental and original intellectual achievements which have raised man in the scale of civilization that may be credited to the Anglo-Saxon? The art of letters, of poetry, of music, of sculpture, of painting, of the drama, of architecture; the science of mathematics, of astronomy, of philosophy, of logic, of physics, of chemistry, the use of the metals, and the principles of mechanics, were all invented or discovered by darker and what we now call inferior races and nations. We have carried many of these to their highest point of perfection, but the foundation was laid by others. Do you know the only original contribution to civilization we can claim is what we have done in steam and electricity and in making implements of war more deadly? And there we worked largely on principles which we did not discover. Why, we didn't even originate the religion we use. We are a great race, the greatest in the world today, but we ought to remember that we are standing on a pile of past races, and enjoy our position with a little less show of arrogance. We

are simply having our turn at the game, and we were a long time getting to it. After all, racial supremacy is merely a matter of dates in history. The man here who belongs to what is, all in all, the greatest race the world ever produced, is almost ashamed to own it. If the Anglo-Saxon is the source of everything good and great in the human race from the beginning, why wasn't the German forest the birthplace of civilization, rather than the valley of the Nile?"

The Texan was somewhat disconcerted, for the argument had passed a little beyond his limits, but he swung it back to where he was sure of his ground by saying: "All that may be true, but it hasn't got much to do with us and the niggers here in the South. We've got 'em here, and we've got 'em to live with, and it's a question of white man or nigger, no middle ground. You want us to treat niggers as equals. Do you want to see 'em sitting around in our parlors? Do you want to see a mulatto South? To bring it right home to you, would you let your daughter marry a nigger?"

"No, I wouldn't consent to my daughter's marrying a nigger, but that doesn't prevent my treating a black man fairly. And I don't see what fair treatment has to do with niggers sitting round in your parlors; they can't come there unless they're invited. Out of all the white men I know, only a hundred or so have the privilege of sitting round in my parlor. As to the mulatto South, if you Southerners have one boast that is stronger than another, it is your women; you put them on a pinnacle of purity and virtue and bow down in a chivalric worship before them; yet you talk and act as though, should you treat the Negro fairly and take the anti-inter-marriage laws off your statute books, these same women would rush into the arms of black lovers and husbands. It's a wonder to me that they don't rise up and resent the insult."

"Colonel," said the Texan, as he reached into his handbag and brought out a large flask of whisky, "you might argue from now until hell freezes over, and you might convince me that you're right, but you'll never convince me that I'm wrong. All you say sounds very good, but it's got nothing to do with facts. You can say what men ought to be, but they ain't that; so there you are. Down here in the South we're up against facts, and we're meeting 'em like facts. We don't believe the nigger is or ever will be the equal of the white man, and we ain't going to treat him as an equal; I'll be damned if we will. Have a drink." Everybody except the professor partook of the generous Texan's flask, and the argument closed in a general laugh and good feeling.

I went back into the main part of the car with the conversation on my mind. Here I had before me the bald, raw, naked aspects of the race question in the South; and, in consideration of the step I was just taking, it was far from encouraging. The sentiments of the Texan—and he expressed the sentiments of the South—fell upon me like a chill. I was sick at heart. Yet I must confess that underneath it all I felt a certain sort of admiration for the man who could not be swayed from what he held as his principles. Contrasted with him, the young Ohio professor was indeed a pitiable character. And all along, in spite of myself, I have been compelled to accord the same kind of admiration to the Southern white man for the manner in which he defends not only his virtues, but his vices. He knows that, judged by a high standard, he is narrow and prejudiced, that he is guilty of unfairness, oppression, and cruelty, but this he defends as stoutly as he would his better qualities. This same spirit obtains in a great degree among the blacks; they, too,

defend their faults and failings. This they generally do whenever white people are concerned. And yet among themselves they are their own most merciless critics. I have never heard the race so terribly arraigned as I have by colored speakers to strictly colored audiences. It is the spirit of the South to defend everything belonging to it. The North is too cosmopolitan and tolerant for such a spirit. If you should say to an Easterner that Paris is a gayer city than New York, he would be likely to agree with you, or at least to let you have your own way; but to suggest to a South Carolinian that Boston is a nicer city to live in than Charleston would be to stir his greatest depths of argument and eloquence.

But to-day, as I think over that smoking-car argument, I can see it in a different light. The Texan's position does not render things so hopeless, for it indicates that the main difficulty of the race question does not lie so much in the actual condition of the blacks as it does in the mental attitude of the whites; and a mental attitude, especially one not based on truth, can be changed more easily than actual conditions. That is to say, the burden of the question is not that the whites are struggling to save ten million despondent and moribund people from sinking into a hopeless slough of ignorance, poverty, and barbarity in their very midst, but that they are unwilling to open certain doors of opportunity and to accord certain treatment to ten million aspiring, education-and-property-acquiring people. In a word, the difficulty of the problem is not so much due to the facts presented as to the hypothesis assumed for its solution. In this it is similar to the problem of the solar system. By a complex, confusing, and almost contradictory mathematical process, by the use of zigzags instead of straight lines, the earth can be proved to be the center of things celestial; but by an operation so simple that it can be comprehended by a schoolboy, its position can be verified among the other worlds which revolve about the sun, and its movements harmonized with the laws of the universe. So, when the white race assumes as a hypothesis that it is the main object of creation and that all things else are merely subsidiary to its well-being, sophism, subterfuge, perversion of conscience, arrogance, injustice, oppression, cruelty, sacrifice of human blood, all are required to maintain the position, and its dealings with other races become indeed a problem, a problem which, if based on a hypothesis of common humanity, could be solved by the simple rules of justice.

When I reached Macon, I decided to leave my trunk and all my surplus belongings, to pack my bag, and strike out into the interior. This I did; and by train, by mule and ox-cart. I traveled through many counties. This was my first real experience among rural colored people, and all that I saw was interesting to me; but there was a great deal which does not require description at my hands; for log-cabins and plantations and dialect-speaking "darkeries" are perhaps better known in American literature than any other single picture of our national life. Indeed, they form an ideal and exclusive literary concept of the American Negro to such an extent that it is almost impossible to get the reading public to recognize him in any other setting; so I shall endeavor to avoid giving the reader any already overworked and hackneyed descriptions. This generally accepted literary ideal of the American Negro constitutes what is really an obstacle in the way of the thoughtful and progressive element of the race. His character has been established as a happy-go-lucky, laughing, shuffling, banjo-picking being, and the reading public

has not yet been prevailed upon to take him seriously. His efforts to elevate himself socially are looked upon as a sort of absurd caricature of “white civilization.” A novel dealing with colored people who lived in respectable homes and amidst a fair degree of culture and who naturally acted “just like white folks” would be taken in a comic-opera sense. In this respect the Negro is much in the position of a great comedian who gives up the lighter roles to play tragedy. No matter how well he may portray the deeper passions, the public is loath to give him up in his old character; they even conspire to make him a failure in serious work, in order to force him back into comedy. In the same respect, the public is not too much to be blamed, for great comedians are far more scarce than mediocre tragedians; every amateur actor is a tragedian. However, this very fact constitutes the opportunity of the future Negro novelist and poet to give the country something new and unknown, in depicting the life, the ambitions, the struggles, and the passions of those of their race who are striving to break the narrow limits of traditions. A beginning has already been made in that remarkable book by Dr. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.²

Much, too, that I saw while on this trip, in spite of my enthusiasm, was disheartening. Often I thought of what my millionaire had said to me, and wished myself back in Europe. The houses in which I had to stay were generally uncomfortable, sometimes worse. I often had to sleep in a division or compartment with several other people. Once or twice I was not so fortunate as to find divisions; everybody slept on pallets on the floor. Frequently I was able to lie down and contemplate the stars which were in their zenith. The food was at times so distasteful and poorly cooked that I could not eat it. I remember that once I lived for a week or more on buttermilk, on account of not being able to stomach the fat bacon, the rank turniptops, and the heavy damp mixture of meal, salt, and water which was called corn bread. It was only my ambition to do the work which I had planned that kept me steadfast to my purpose. Occasionally I would meet with some signs of progress and uplift in even one of these back-wood settlements—houses built of boards, with windows, and divided into rooms; decent food, and a fair standard of living. This condition was due to the fact that there was in the community some exceptionally capable Negro farmer whose thrift served as an example. As I went about among these dull, simple people—the great majority of them hard working, in their relations with the whites submissive, faithful, and often affectionate, negatively content with their lot—and contrasted them with those of the race who had been quickened by the forces of thought, I could not but appreciate the logic of the position held by those Southern leaders who have been bold enough to proclaim against the education of the Negro. They are consistent in their public speech with Southern sentiment and desires. Those public men of the South who have not been daring or heedless enough to defy the ideals of twentieth-century civilization and of modern humanitarianism and philanthropy, find themselves in the embarrassing situation of preaching one thing and praying for another. They are in the position of the fashionable woman who is compelled by the laws of polite society to say to her dearest enemy: “How happy I am to see you!”

2. W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), African American intellectual leader, civil rights activist, author, and educator; portions of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) are included in this volume.

And yet in this respect how perplexing is Southern character; for, in opposition to the above, it may be said that the claim of the Southern whites that they love the Negro better than the Northern whites do is in a manner true. Northern white people love the Negro in a sort of abstract way, as a race; through a sense of justice, charity, and philanthropy, they will liberally assist in his elevation. A number of them have heroically spent their lives in this effort (and just here I wish to say that when the colored people reach the monument-building stage, they should not forget the men and women who went South after the war and founded schools for them). Yet, generally speaking, they have no particular liking for individuals of the race. Southern white people despise the Negro as a race, and will do nothing to aid in his elevation as such; but for certain individuals they have a strong affection, and are helpful to them in many ways. With these individual members of the race they live on terms of the greatest intimacy; they entrust to them their children, their family treasures, and their family secrets; in trouble they often go to them for comfort and counsel; in sickness they often rely upon their care. This affectionate relation between the Southern whites and those blacks who come into close touch with them has not been overdrawn even in fiction.

This perplexity of Southern character extends even to the intermixture of the races. That is spoken of as though it were dreaded worse than smallpox, leprosy, or the plague. Yet, when I was in Jacksonville, I knew several prominent families there with large colored branches, which went by the same name and were known and acknowledged as blood relatives. And what is more, there seemed to exist between these black brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts a decidedly friendly feeling.

I said above that Southern whites would do nothing for the Negro as a race. I know the South claims that it has spent millions for the education of the blacks, and that it has of its own free will shouldered this awful burden. It seems to be forgetful of the fact that these millions have been taken from the public tax funds for education, and that the law of political economy which recognizes the land owner as the one who really pays the taxes is not tenable. It would be just as reasonable for the relatively few land owners of Manhattan to complain that they had to stand the financial burden of the education of the thousands and thousands of children whose parents pay rent for tenements and flats. Let the millions of producing and consuming Negroes be taken out of the South, and it would be quickly seen how much less of public funds there would be to appropriate for education or any other purpose.

In thus traveling about through the country I was sometimes amused on arriving at some little railroad-station town to be taken for and treated as a white man, and six hours later, when it was learned that I was stopping at the house of the colored preacher or school teacher, to note the attitude of the whole town change. At times this led even to embarrassment. Yet it cannot be so embarrassing for a colored man to be taken for white as for a white man to be taken for colored; and I have heard of several cases of the latter kind.

All this while I was gathering material for work, jotting down in my notebook themes and melodies, and trying to catch the spirit of the Negro in his relatively primitive state. I began to feel the necessity of hurrying so that I

might get back to some city like Nashville to begin my compositions and at the same time earn at least a living by teaching and performing before my funds gave out. At the last settlement in which I stopped I found a mine of material. This was due to the fact that “big meeting” was in progress. “Big meeting” is an institution something like camp-meeting, the difference being that it is held in a permanent church, and not in a temporary structure. All the churches of some one denomination—of course, either Methodist or Baptist—in a county, or, perhaps, in several adjoining counties, are closed, and the congregations unite at some centrally located church for a series of meetings lasting a week. It is really a social as well as a religious function. The people come in great numbers, making the trip, according to their financial status, in buggies drawn by sleek, fleet-footed mules, in ox-carts, or on foot. It was amusing to see some of the latter class trudging down the hot and dusty road, with their shoes, which were brand-new, strung across their shoulders. When they got near the church, they sat on the side of the road and, with many grimaces, tenderly packed their feet into those instruments of torture. This furnished, indeed, a trying test of their religion. The famous preachers come from near and far and take turns in warning sinners of the day of wrath. Food, in the form of those two Southern luxuries, fried chicken and roast pork, is plentiful, and no one need go hungry. On the opening Sunday the women are immaculate in starched stiff white dresses adorned with ribbons, either red or blue. Even a great many of the men wear streamers of vari-colored ribbons in the buttonholes of their coats. A few of them carefully cultivate a forelock of hair by wrapping it in twine, and on such festive occasions decorate it with a narrow ribbon streamer. Big meetings afford a fine opportunity to the younger people to meet each other dressed in their Sunday clothes, and much rustic courting, which is as enjoyable as any other kind, is indulged in.

This big meeting which I was lucky enough to catch was particularly well attended; the extra large attendance was due principally to two attractions, a man by the name of John Brown who was renowned as the most powerful preacher for miles around; and a wonderful leader of singing, who was known as “Singing Johnson.”³ These two men were a study and a revelation to me. They caused me to reflect upon how great an influence their types have been in the development of the Negro in America. Both these types are now looked upon generally with condescension or contempt by the progressive element among the colored people; but it should never be forgotten that it was they who led the race from paganism and kept it steadfast to Christianity through all the long, dark years of slavery.

John Brown was a jet-black man of medium size, with a strikingly intelligent head and face, and a voice like an organ peal. He preached each night after several lesser lights had successively held the pulpit during an hour or so. As far as subject-matter is concerned, all of the sermons were alike: each began with the fall of man, ran through various trials and tribulations of the Hebrew children, on to the redemption by Christ, and ended with a fervid picture of the judgment day and the fate of the damned. But John Brown possessed magnetism and an imagination so free and daring that he was able

3. A highly popular itinerant spiritual folk singer referred to by Johnson in his *Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925).

to carry through what the other preachers would not attempt. He knew all the arts and tricks of oratory, the modulation of the voice to almost a whisper, the pause for effect, the rise through light, rapid-fire sentences to the terrific, thundering outburst of an electrifying climax. In addition, he had the intuition of a born theatrical manager. Night after night this man held me fascinated. He convinced me that, after all, eloquence consists more in the manner of saying than in what is said. It is largely a matter of tone pictures.

The most striking example of John Brown's magnetism and imagination was his "heavenly march"; I shall never forget how it impressed me when I heard it. He opened his sermon in the usual way; then, proclaiming to his listeners that he was going to take them on the heavenly march, he seized the Bible under his arm and began to pace up and down the pulpit platform. The congregation immediately began with their feet a tramp, tramp, tramp, in time with the preacher's march in the pulpit, all the while singing in an undertone a hymn about marching to Zion. Suddenly he cried: "Halt!" Every foot stopped with the precision of a company of well-drilled soldiers, and the singing ceased. The morning star had been reached. Here the preacher described the beauties of that celestial body. Then the march, the tramp, tramp, tramp, and the singing were again taken up. Another "Halt!" They had reached the evening star. And so on, past the sun and moon—the intensity of religious emotion all the time increasing—along the milky way, on up to the gates of heaven. Here the halt was longer, and the preacher described at length the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem. Then he took his hearers through the pearly gates, along the golden streets, pointing out the glories of the city, pausing occasionally to greet some patriarchal members of the church, well-known to most of his listeners in life, who had had "the tears wiped from their eyes, were clad in robes of spotless white, with crowns of gold upon their heads and harps within their hands," and ended his march before the great white throne. To the reader this may sound ridiculous, but listened to under the circumstances, it was highly and effectively dramatic. I was a more or less sophisticated and non-religious man of the world, but the torrent of the preacher's words, moving with the rhythm and glowing with the eloquence of primitive poetry, swept me along, and I, too, felt like joining in the shouts of "Amen! Hallelujah!"

John Brown's powers in describing the delights of heaven were no greater than those in depicting the horrors of hell. I saw great, strapping fellows trembling and weeping like children at the "mourners' bench." His warnings to sinners were truly terrible. I shall never forget one expression that he used, which for originality and aptness could not be excelled. In my opinion, it is more graphic and, for us, far more expressive than St. Paul's "It is hard to kick against the pricks."⁴ He struck the attitude of a pugilist and thundered out: "Young man, your arm's too short to box with God!"

Interesting as was John Brown to me, the other man, "Singing Johnson," was more so. He was a small, dark-brown, one-eyed man, with a clear, strong, high-pitched voice, a leader of singing, a maker of songs, a man who could improvise at the moment lines to fit the occasion. Not so striking a figure as

4. Acts 9.5: "And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

John Brown, but, at “big meetings,” equally important. It is indispensable to the success of the singing, when the congregation is a large one made up of people from different communities, to have someone with a strong voice who knows just what hymn to sing and when to sing it, who can pitch it in the right key, and who has all the leading lines committed to memory. Sometimes it devolves upon the leader to “sing down” a long-winded or uninteresting speaker. Committing to memory the leading lines of all the Negro spiritual songs is no easy task, for they run up into the hundreds. But the accomplished leader must know them all, because the congregation sings only the refrains and repeats; every ear in the church is fixed upon him, and if he becomes mixed in his lines or forgets them, the responsibility falls directly on his shoulders.

For example, most of these hymns are constructed to be sung in the following manner:

Leader. Swing low, sweet chariot.
Congregation. Coming for to carry me home.
Leader. Swing low, sweet chariot.
Congregation. Coming for to carry me home.
Leader. I look over yonder, what do I see?
Congregation. Coming for to carry me home.
Leader. Two little angels coming after me.
Congregation. Coming for to carry me home. . . .⁵

The solitary and plaintive voice of the leader is answered by a sound like the roll of the sea, producing a most curious effect.

In only a few of these songs do the leader and the congregation start off together. Such a song is the well-known “Steal away to Jesus.”⁶

The leader and the congregation begin with part-singing:

Steal away, steal away,
 Steal away to Jesus;
 Steal away, steal away home,
 I ain't got long to stay here.

Then the leader alone or the congregation in unison:

My Lord he calls me,
 He calls me by the thunder,
 The trumpet sounds within-a my soul.

Then all together:

I ain't got long to stay here.

The leader and the congregation again take up the opening refrain; then the leader sings three more leading lines alone, and so on almost *ad infinitum*. It will be seen that even here most of the work falls upon the leader, for the congregation sings the same lines over and over, while his memory and ingenuity are taxed to keep the songs going.

Generally the parts taken up by the congregation are sung in a three-part harmony, the women singing the soprano and a transposed tenor, the men

5. A Negro spiritual recited in traditional call-and-response form.

6. Another spiritual, in which the leader and congregation begin in unison.

with high voices singing the melody, and those with low voices a thundering bass. In a few of these songs, however, the leading part is sung in unison by the whole congregation, down to the last line, which is harmonized. The effect of this is intensely thrilling. Such a hymn is "Go down, Moses."⁷ It stirs the heart like a trumpet call.

"Singing Johnson" was an ideal leader, and his services were in great demand. He spent his time going about the country from one church to another. He received his support in much the same way as the preachers—part of a collection, food and lodging. All of his leisure time he devoted to originating new words and melodies and new lines for old songs. He always sang with his eyes—or, to be more exact, his eye—closed, indicating the *tempo* by swinging his head to and fro. He was a great judge of the proper hymn to sing at a particular moment; and I noticed several times, when the preacher reached a certain climax, or expressed a certain sentiment, that Johnson broke in with a line or two of some appropriate hymn. The speaker understood and would pause until the singing ceased.

As I listened to the singing of these songs, the wonder of their production grew upon me more and more. How did the men who originated them manage to do it? The sentiments are easily accounted for; they are mostly taken from the Bible; but the melodies, where did they come from? Some of them so weirdly sweet, and others so wonderfully strong. Take, for instance, "Go down, Moses." I doubt that there is a stronger theme in the whole musical literature of the world. And so many of these songs contain more than mere melody; there is sounded in them that elusive undertone, the note in music which is not heard with the ears. I sat often with the tears rolling down my cheeks and my heart melted within me. Any musical person who has never heard a Negro congregation under the spell of religious fervour sing these old songs has missed one of the most thrilling emotions which the human heart may experience. Anyone who without shedding tears can listen to Negroes sing "Nobody knows de trouble I see, Nobody knows but Jesus"⁸ must indeed have a heart of stone.

As yet, the Negroes themselves do not fully appreciate these old slave songs. The educated classes are rather ashamed of them and prefer to sing hymns from books. This feeling is natural; they are still too close to the conditions under which the songs were produced; but the day will come when this slave music will be the most treasured heritage of the American Negro.

At the close of the "big meeting" I left the settlement where it was being held, full of enthusiasm. I was in that frame of mind which, in the artistic temperament, amounts to inspiration. I was now ready and anxious to get to some place where I might settle down to work, and give expression to the ideas which were teeming in my head; but I strayed into another deviation from my path of life as I had it marked out, which led me upon an entirely different road. Instead of going to the nearest and most convenient railroad station, I accepted the invitation of a young man who had been present the closing Sunday at the meeting to drive with him some miles farther to the town in which he taught school, and there take the train. My conversation with this young man as we drove along through the country was extremely

7. Spiritual in which all but the last verse is sung in unison.

8. Spiritual comparing slavery to the trial of Jesus on the cross.

interesting. He had been a student in one of the Negro colleges—strange coincidence, in the very college, as I learned through him, in which “Shiny”⁹ was now a professor. I was, of course, curious to hear about my boyhood friend; and had it not been vacation time, and that I was not sure that I should find him, I should have gone out of my way to pay him a visit; but I determined to write to him as soon as the school opened. My companion talked to me about his work among the people, of his hopes and his discouragements. He was tremendously in earnest; I might say, too much so. In fact, it may be said that the majority of intelligent colored people are, in some degree, too much in earnest over the race question. They assume and carry so much that their progress is at times impeded and they are unable to see things in their proper proportions. In many instances a slight exercise of the sense of humour would save much anxiety of soul. Anyone who marks the general tone of editorials in colored newspapers is apt to be impressed with this idea. If the mass of Negroes took their present and future as seriously as do the most of their leaders, the race would be in no mental condition to sustain the terrible pressure which it undergoes; it would sink of its own weight. Yet it must be acknowledged that in the making of a race overseriousness is a far lesser failing than its reverse, and even the faults resulting from it lean toward the right.

We drove into the town just before dark. As we passed a large, unpainted church, my companion pointed it out as the place where he held his school. I promised that I would go there with him the next morning and visit awhile. The town was of that kind which hardly requires or deserves description; a straggling line of brick and wooden stores on one side of the railroad track and some cottages of various sizes on the other side constituted about the whole of it. The young school teacher boarded at the best house in the place owned by a colored man. It was painted, had glass windows, contained “store bought” furniture, an organ, and lamps with chimneys. The owner held a job of some kind on the railroad. After supper it was not long before everybody was sleepy. I occupied the room with the school teacher. In a few minutes after we got into the room he was in bed and asleep; but I took advantage of the unusual luxury of a lamp which gave light, and sat looking over my notes and jotting down some ideas which were still fresh in my mind. Suddenly I became conscious of that sense of alarm which is always aroused by the sound of hurrying footsteps on the silence of the night. I stopped work and looked at my watch. It was after eleven. I listened, straining every nerve to hear above the tumult of my quickening pulse. I caught the murmur of voices, then the gallop of a horse, then of another and another. Now thoroughly alarmed, I woke my companion, and together we both listened. After a moment he put out the light and softly opened the window-blind, and we cautiously peeped out. We saw men moving in one direction, and from the mutterings we vaguely caught the rumor that some terrible crime had been committed. I put on my coat and hat. My friend did all in his power to dissuade me from venturing out, but it was impossible for me to remain in the house under such tense excitement. My nerves would not have stood it. Perhaps what bravery I exercised in going out was due to the fact that I felt sure my identity as a colored man had not yet become known in the town.

9. Boyhood schoolmate and friend of the narrator's (see chapter I, p. 1074).

I went out and, following the drift, reached the railroad station. There was gathered there a crowd of men, all white, and others were steadily arriving, seemingly from all the surrounding country. How did the news spread so quickly? I watched these men moving under the yellow glare of the kerosene lamps about the station, stern, comparatively silent, all of them armed, some of them in boots and spurs; fierce, determined men. I had come to know the type well, blond, tall, and lean, with ragged moustache and beard, and glittering grey eyes. At the first suggestion of daylight they began to disperse in groups, going in several directions. There was no extra noise or excitement, no loud talking, only swift, sharp words of command given by those who seemed to be accepted as leaders by mutual understanding. In fact, the impression made upon me was that everything was being done in quite an orderly manner. In spite of so many leaving, the crowd around the station continued to grow; at sunrise there were a great many women and children. By this time I also noticed some colored people; a few seemed to be going about customary tasks; several were standing on the outskirts of the crowd; but the gathering of Negroes usually seen in such towns was missing.

Before noon they brought him in. Two horsemen rode abreast; between them, half dragged, the poor wretch made his way through the dust. His hands were tied behind him, and ropes around his body were fastened to the saddle horns of his double guard. The men who at midnight had been stern and silent were now emitting that terror-instilling sound known as the "rebel yell." A space was quickly cleared in the crowd, and a rope placed about his neck, when from somewhere came the suggestion, "Burn him!" It ran like an electric current. Have you ever witnessed the transformation of human beings into savage beasts? Nothing can be more terrible. A railroad tie was sunk into the ground, the rope was removed, and a chain brought and securely coiled round the victim and the stake. There he stood, a man only in form and stature, every sign of degeneracy stamped upon his countenance. His eyes were dull and vacant, indicating not a single ray of thought. Evidently the realization of his fearful fate had robbed him of whatever reasoning power he had ever possessed. He was too stunned and stupefied even to tremble. Fuel was brought from everywhere, oil, the torch; the flames crouched for an instant as though to gather strength, then leaped up as high as their victim's head. He squirmed, he writhed, strained at his chains, then gave out cries and groans that I shall always hear. The cries and groans were choked off by the fire and smoke; but his eyes, bulging from their sockets, rolled from side to side, appealing in vain for help. Some of the crowd yelled and cheered, others seemed appalled at what they had done, and there were those who turned away sickened at the sight. I was fixed to the spot where I stood, powerless to take my eyes from what I did not want to see.

It was over before I realized that time had elapsed. Before I could make myself believe that what I saw was really happening, I was looking at a scorched post, a smouldering fire, blackened bones, charred fragments sifting down through coils of chain; and the smell of burnt flesh—human flesh—was in my nostrils.

I walked a short distance away and sat down in order to clear my dazed mind. A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me. Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with; and shame for my country,

that it, the great example of democracy to the world, should be the only civilized, if not the only state on earth, where a human being would be burned alive. My heart turned bitter within me. I could understand why Negroes are led to sympathize with even their worst criminals and to protect them when possible. By all the impulses of normal human nature they can and should do nothing less.

Whenever I hear protests from the South that it should be left alone to deal with the Negro question, my thoughts go back to that scene of brutality and savagery. I do not see how a people that can find in its conscience any excuse whatever for slowly burning to death a human being, or for tolerating such an act, can be entrusted with the salvation of a race. Of course, there are in the South men of liberal thought who do not approve lynching, but I wonder how long they will endure the limits which are placed upon free speech. They still cower and tremble before "Southern opinion." Even so late as the recent Atlanta riot¹ those men who were brave enough to speak a word in behalf of justice and humanity felt called upon, by way of apology, to preface what they said with a glowing rhetorical tribute to the Anglo-Saxon's superiority and to refer to the "great and impassable gulf" between the races "fixed by the Creator at the foundation of the world." The question of the relative qualities of the two races is still an open one. The reference to the "great gulf" loses force in face of the fact that there are in this country perhaps three or four million people with the blood of both races in their veins; but I fail to see the pertinency of either statement subsequent to the beating and murdering of scores of innocent people in the streets of a civilized and Christian city.

The Southern whites are in many respects a great people. Looked at from a certain point of view, they are picturesque. If one will put oneself in a romantic frame of mind, one can admire their notions of chivalry and bravery and justice. In this same frame of mind an intelligent man can go to the theatre and applaud the impossible hero, who with his single sword slays everybody in the play except the equally impossible heroine. So can an ordinary peace-loving citizen sit by a comfortable fire and read with enjoyment of the bloody deeds of pirates and the fierce brutality of Vikings. This is the way in which we gratify the old, underlying animal instincts and passions; but we should shudder with horror at the mere idea of such practices being realities in this day of enlightened and humanitarianized thought. The Southern whites are not yet living quite in the present age; many of their general ideas hark back to a former century, some of them to the Dark Ages. In the light of other days they are sometimes magnificent. Today they are often cruel and ludicrous.

How long I sat with bitter thoughts running through my mind I do not know; perhaps an hour or more. When I decided to get up and go back to the house, I found that I could hardly stand on my feet. I was as weak as a man who had lost blood. However, I dragged myself along, with the central idea of a general plan well fixed in my mind. I did not find my school teacher friend at home, so I did not see him again. I swallowed a few mouthfuls of food, packed my bag, and caught the afternoon train.

1. In 1906, white Atlantans, in response to alleged assaults of black men on white women, indiscriminately attacked black Atlantans, killing at least sixteen men.

When I reached Macon, I stopped only long enough to get the main part of my luggage and to buy a ticket for New York. All along the journey I was occupied in debating with myself the step which I had decided to take. I argued that to forsake one's race to better one's condition was no less worthy an action than to forsake one's country for the same purpose. I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race; but that I would change my name, raise a mustache, and let the world take me for what it would; that it was not necessary for me to go about with a label of inferiority pasted across my forehead. All the while I understood that it was not discouragement or fear or search for a larger field of action and opportunity that was driving me out of the Negro race. I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals. For certainly the law would restrain and punish the malicious burning alive of animals.

So once again I found myself gazing at the towers of New York and wondering what future that city held in store for me.

1912

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

1872–1906

Deeply admired by readers and critics, Paul Laurence Dunbar was the most visible African American literary figure of the turn of the twentieth century. Beginning with the publication of *Oak and Ivy* in 1893, he published six volumes of poetry, as well as novels, librettos, songs, and essays. Like Charles Chesnutt, Dunbar learned how to appropriate the regional idiom that dominated the representation of blacks in literature and to use it for his own, more subtle ends. His verse often employed a genial, even breezy tone that belied its complexity. As he wrote in his poem “We Wear the Mask,” Dunbar used his pen to “mouth with myriad subtleties” the many challenges facing African Americans in his time.

Dunbar's father, Joshua, who had escaped slavery in Kentucky and moved to Ohio via the Underground Railroad, served in the 55th Massachusetts Regiment of the Union Army during the Civil War. His mother, Matilda Murphy, also a former slave, separated from Joshua when Dunbar was two years old. Throughout his childhood, Matilda encouraged Paul in his education, often depriving herself so that he could continue in school. Though Dunbar first wanted to be a lawyer, he chose instead “to be a worthy singer of the songs of God and nature.” As he later explained in a letter, he wanted “to interpret my own people through song and story, and prove to the many that we are more human than African.”

Dunbar early on developed an ear for language and a love of English Romantic poetry. Yet upon graduation from Central High School, in Dayton, Ohio, where he had been an excellent student, he found only menial jobs open to him. In 1892 he was invited to read a poem at the Western Association of Writers, which was convening in Dayton. Inspired by this experience, in 1893 he traveled to the Columbian

Exposition in Chicago, where he met Frederick Douglass and sold his first poetry collection, *Oak and Ivy*, the publication of which he subsidized, for a dollar per copy. Douglass—the former U.S. minister to Haiti and Commissioner of the Haitian Exhibition—hired him as a clerk.

In 1895 Dunbar published his best-known work, *Lyrics of the Lowly Life*, from which most of the selections here are drawn. Committed to rendering authentic voices of black speakers, and inspired by Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, Dunbar published in such popular venues as the *New York Times*, *Century*, *Lippincott's Monthly*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, journals with almost exclusively white readerships. Though he was celebrated by black and white literary leaders in his own time—including Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and William Dean Howells—he was later criticized in the 1920s by Harlem Renaissance writers who saw him as catering to a white audience with stereotyped black folk elements and dialect. Despite this criticism, Dunbar's influence on subsequent African American writers such as James Weldon Johnson and Zora Neale Hurston derives from the fact that he tried to present African American speech and customs with an appreciation of their artistic value.

Dunbar married the writer Alice Moore in 1898; they lived in the Le Droit Park section of Washington, D.C., an area that welcomed the new black middle class and where they enjoyed the company of black intellectuals, activists, and artists. During this time he began to emerge as a fiction writer, publishing four collections of short stories and four novels over the next six years. In the last of his novels, *The Sport of the Gods* (1903), Dunbar chronicles the unhappy circumstances of an African American family moving from the rural South to New York City. A year before the novel was published, Dunbar and his wife separated, in part due to his alcoholism, and Dunbar's poetry increasingly reflects a more somber mood. When he returned to Dayton to live with his mother, he believed that he had failed as a poet. Critical and popular attention to his work continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, however, and Dunbar is now recognized as a major contributor to an African American poetic tradition.

When Malindy Sings¹

G'way an' quit dat noise, Miss Lucy—
 Put dat music book away;
 What 's de use to keep on tryin'?
 Ef you practise twell you're gray,
 You cain't sta't no notes a-flyin' 5
 Lak de ones dat rants and rings
 F'om de kitchen to be big woods
 When Malindy sings.

You ain't got de nachel o'gans
 Fu' to make de soun' come right, 10
 You ain't got de tu'ns an' twistin's
 Fu' to make it sweet an' light.
 Tell you one thing now, Miss Lucy,
 An' I 'm tellin' you fu' true,

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the Lowly Life* (1897) and then in his *Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken.

When hit comes to raal right singin',
 'T ain't no easy thing to do. 15

Easy 'nough fu' folks to hollah,
 Lookin' at de lines an' dots,
 When dey ain't no one kin sence it,
 An' de chune comes in, in spots; 20
 But fu' real melojous music,
 Dat jes' strikes yo' hea't and clings,
 Jes' you stan' an' listen wif me
 When Malindy sings.

Ain't you nevah hyeahd Malindy?
 Blessed soul, tek up de cross! 25
 Look hyeah, ain't you jokin', honey?
 Well, you don't know whut you los'.
 Y' ought to hyeah dat gal a-wa'blin',
 Robins, la'ks, an' all dem things, 30
 Heish dey moufs an' hides dey faces
 When Malindy sings.

Fiddlin' man jes' stop his fiddlin',
 Lay his fiddle on de she'f;
 Mockin'-bird quit tryin' to whistle, 35
 'Cause he jes' so shamed hisse'f.
 Folks a-playin' on de banjo
 Draps dey fingahs on de strings—
 Bless yo' soul—fu'gits to move em,
 When Malindy sings. 40

She jes' spreads huh mouf and hollahs,
 "Come to Jesus," twell you hyeah
 Sinnahs' tremblin' steps and voices,
 Timid-lak a-drawin' neah; 45
 Den she tu'ns to "Rock of Ages,"²
 Simply to de cross she clings,
 An' you fin' yo' teahs a-drappin'
 When Malindy sings.

Who dat says dat humble praises
 Wif de Master nevah counts? 50
 Heish yo' mouf, I hyeah dat music,
 Ez hit rises up an' mounts—
 Floatin' by de hills an' valleys,
 Way above dis buryin' sod,
 Ez hit makes its way in glory 55
 To de very gates of God!

Oh, hit 's sweetah dan de music
 Of an edicated band;

2. Both "Rock of Ages" and "Come to Jesus" are hymns.

An' hit 's dearah dan de battle's
 Song o' triumph in de lan'. 60
 It seems holier dan evenin'
 When de solemn chu'ch bell rings,
 Ez I sit an' ca'mly listen
 While Malindy sings.

Towsah, stop dat ba'kin', hyeah me! 65
 Mandy, mek dat chile keep still;
 Don't you hyeah de echoes callin'
 F'om de valley to de hill?
 Let me listen, I can hyeah it,
 Th'oo de bresh of angels' wings, 70
 Sof' an' sweet, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,"³
 Ez Malindy sings.

1897

An Ante-Bellum Sermon¹

We is gathahed hyeah, my brothahs,
 In dis howlin' wildaness,
 Fu' to speak some words of comfo't
 To each othah in distress.
 An' we chooses fu' ouah subjic' 5
 Dis—we 'll 'splain it by an' by;
 "An' de Lawd said, 'Moses, Moses,'
 An' de man said, 'Hyeah am I.'"²

Now ole Pher'oh, down in Egypt, 10
 Was de wuss man evah bo'n,
 An' he had de Hebrew chillun
 Down dah wukin' in his co'n;
 'T well de Lawd got tiahed o' his foolin',
 An' sez he: "I'll let him know—
 Look hyeah, Moses, go tell Pher'oh 15
 Fu' to let dem chillun go."

"An' ef he refuse to do it,
 I will make him rue de houah,
 Fu' I 'll empty down on Egypt 20
 All de vials of my powah."
 Yes, he did—an' Pher'oh's ahmy
 Was n't wuth a ha'f a dime;
 Fu' de Lawd will he'p his chilun,
 You kin trust him evah time.

3. A well-known African American spiritual.

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the Lowly Life* (1897) and then in his *Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems*

of Paul Laurence Dunbar (1993), from which this text is taken.

2. Here and in the following two stanzas, the poem refers to the events of Exodus.

An' yo' enemies may 'sail you
 In de back an' in de front;
 But de Lawd is all aroun' you,
 Fu' to ba' de battle's brunt.
 Dey kin fo'ge yo' chains an' shackles
 F'om de mountains to de sea;
 But de Lawd will sen' some Moses
 Fu' to set his chillun free.

An' de lan' shall hyeah his thundah,
 Lak a blas' f'om Gab'el's ho'n,
 Fu' de Lawd of hosts is mighty
 When he girds his ahmor on.
 But fu' feah some one mistakes me,
 I will pause right hyeah to say,
 Dat I 'm still a-preachin' ancient,
 I ain't talkin' 'bout to-day.

But I tell you, fellah christuns,
 Things 'll happen mighty strange;
 Now, de Lawd done dis fu' Isrul,
 An' his ways don't nevah change,
 An' de love he showed to Isrul
 Was n't all on Isrul spent;
 Now don't run an' tell yo' mastahs
 Dat I 's preachin' discontent.

'Cause I is n't; I 'se a-judgin'
 Bible people by deir ac's;
 I 'se a-givin' you de Scriptuah,
 I 'se a-handin' you de fac's.
 Cose ole Pher'oh b'lieved in slav'ry,
 But de Lawd he let him see,
 Dat de people he put bref in,—
 Evah mothah's son was free.

An' dahs othahs thinks lak Pher'oh,
 But dey calls de Scriptuah liar,
 Fu' de Bible says "a servant
 Is a-worthy of his hire."³
 An' you cain't git roun' nor thoo dat,
 An' you cain't git ovah it,
 Fu' whatevah place you git in,
 Dis hyeah Bible too 'll fit.

So you see de Lawd's intention,
 Evah sence de worl' began,
 Was dat His almighty freedom
 Should belong to evah man,

3. Biblical mandate against the unethical practice of masters withholding wages from their servants, here used to indict slavery (Leviticus 19.13, Deuteronomy 24.15 and 25).

But I think it would be bettah,
 Ef I 'd pause agin to say,
 Dat I 'm talkin' 'bout ouah freedom
 In a Bibleistic way. 70

But de Moses is a-comin',
 An' he 's comin', suah and fas'
 We kin hyeah his feet a-trompin',
 We kin hyeah his trumpit blas'. 75
 But I want to wa'n you people,
 Don't you git too brigity;⁴
 An' don't you git to braggin'
 'Bout dese things, you wait an' see. 80

But when Moses wif his powah
 Comes an' sets us chillun free,
 We will praise de gracious Mastah
 Dat has gin us liberty;
 An' we 'll shout ouah halleluyahs,
 On dat mighty reck'nin' day,
 When we 'se reco'nised ez citiz'—
 Huh uh! Chillun, let us pray! 85

1897

We Wear the Mask¹

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
 It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
 This debt we pay to human guile;
 With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
 And mouth with myriad subtleties. 5

Why should the world be overwise,
 In counting all our tears and sighs?
 Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
 To thee from tortured souls arise.
 We sing, but oh the clay is vile
 Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
 But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask! 10
 15

1897

4. Brazen, presumptuous, or insolent.

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the Lowly Life* (1897) and then in his *Complete Poems*

(1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken.

Sympathy¹

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
 When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
 When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
 And the river flows like a stream of glass;
 When the first bird sings and the first bud opes, 5
 And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
 I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
 For he must fly back to his perch and cling 10
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
 And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting—
 I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me, 15
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
 When he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
 But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings— 20
 I know why the caged bird sings!

1899

Harriet Beecher Stowe¹

She told the story, and the whole world wept
 At wrongs and cruelties it had not known
 But for this fearless woman's voice alone.
 She spoke to consciences that long had slept:
 Her message, Freedom's clear reveille, swept 5
 From heedless hovel to complacent throne.
 Command and prophecy were in the tone
 And from its sheath the sword of justice leapt.
 Around two peoples swelled a fiery wave,
 But both came forth transfigured from the flame. 10
 Blest be the hand that dared be strong to save,
 And blest be she who in our weakness came—

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (1899) and then in his *Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken.

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of the*

Hearthside (1899) and then in his *Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is taken. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), abolitionist and author of many books, the most famous being *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

Prophet and priestess! At one stroke she gave
A race to freedom and herself to fame.

1899

Frederick Douglass¹

A hush is over all the teeming lists,
And there is pause, a breath-space in the strife;
A spirit brave has passed beyond the mists
And vapors that obscure the sun of life.
And Ethiopia, with bosom torn, 5
Laments the passing of her noblest born.

She weeps for him a mother's burning tears—
She loved him with a mother's deepest love.
He was her champion thro' direful years,
And held her weal all other ends above. 10
When Bondage held her bleeding in the dust,
He raised her up and whispered, "Hope and Trust."

For her his voice, a fearless clarion, rung
That broke in warning on the ears of men;
For her the strong bow of his power he strung, 15
And sent his arrows to the very den
Where grim Oppression held his bloody place
And gloated o'er the mis'ries of a race.

And he was no soft-tongued apologist;
He spoke straightforward, fearlessly uncowed; 20
The sunlight of his truth dispelled the mist,
And set in bold relief each dark hued cloud;
To sin and crime he gave their proper hue,
And hurled at evil what was evil's due.

Through good and ill report he cleaved his way 25
Right onward, with his face set toward the heights,
Nor feared to face the foeman's dread array,—
The lash of scorn, the sting of petty spites.
He dared the lightning in the lightning's track,
And answered thunder with his thunder back. 30

When men maligned him, and their torrent wrath
In furious imprecations o'er him broke,
He kept his counsel as he kept his path;
'T was for his race, not for himself he spoke.

1. First published in Dunbar's *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* (1903), then in *The Complete Poems* (1903); reprinted in *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), from which this text is

taken. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was an anti-slavery activist who became the most visible African American leader of the nineteenth century struggle for racial equality.

He knew the import of his Master's call, 35
 And felt himself too mighty to be small.

No miser in the good he held was he,—
 His kindness followed his horizon's rim.
 His heart, his talents, and his hands were free
 To all who truly needed aught of him. 40
 Where poverty and ignorance were rife,
 He gave his bounty as he gave his life.

The place and cause that first aroused his might
 Still proved its power until his latest day.
 In Freedom's lists and for the aid of Right 45
 Still in the foremost rank he waged the fray;
 Wrong lived; his occupation was not gone.
 He died in action with his armor on!

We weep for him, but we have touched his hand,
 And felt the magic of his presence nigh, 50
 The current that he sent throughout the land,
 The kindling spirit of his battlecry.
 O'er all that holds us we shall triumph yet,
 And place our banner where his hopes were set!

Oh, Douglass, thou hast passed beyond the shore, 55
 But still thy voice is ringing o'er the gale!
 Thou 'st taught thy race how high her hopes may soar,
 And bade her seek the heights, nor faint, nor fail.
 She will not fail, she heeds thy stirring cry,
 She knows thy guardian spirit will be nigh, 60
 And, rising from beneath the chast'ning rod,
 She stretches out her bleeding hands to God!

1903

JOHN M. OSKISON

1874–1947

John Milton Oskison was born in Vinita, Indian Territory, the son of a white father and a Cherokee mother, and he came of age at a time when the future of Indian nations as distinct political and cultural entities was in question. His father, John Oskison, was born on an English tenant farm, orphaned in childhood, and brought to Illinois by an uncle whose mistreatment apparently caused him to run away. He worked at a variety of jobs, coming eventually to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), where he married a Cherokee woman, Rachel Crittenden, and became a cattle farmer. Although John Oskison Sr. had little formal education, he

valued learning, naming his son John Milton and giving him the opportunity to acquire an education. After attending a local preparatory school, Oskison left Indian Territory for Stanford University in 1895, at the age of twenty-one. He later completed a year of graduate work in English at Harvard University.

Oskison began writing short stories while at Harvard, and he also published essays on Native American issues throughout a career of working at periodicals such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*. After serving in World War I, Oskison focused his attention on writing fiction; he eventually published three novels, each offering a different perspective on the multiracial society of Oklahoma in its period of early statehood. Oskison's last published work in his own lifetime was *Tecumseh and His Times* (1938), a biographical account of the nineteenth-century Shawnee leader. More recently, scholars of Native American literature have brought to print previously unpublished works by Oskison, including chapters of his uncompleted autobiography ("A Tale of the Old I.T.") and a historical novel, *The Singing Bird*, set during the tumultuous period of Cherokee removal from the Southeast to the Indian Territory.

Like many of his contemporary Indian intellectuals, Oskison advocated education in the white world for Native Americans, but fiercely defended the value and importance of tribal values and lifeways. He was aware that Cherokees and other Indians were vulnerable in this period to opportunistic Native leaders and unscrupulous or overzealous whites. "The Problem of Old Harjo," printed here, reveals his sharp ear for the rhetoric of salvation and his ironic perspectives on the motives of so-called Friends of the Indians. Though humorous, the story takes place against the backdrop of a U.S. policy designed to force Native assimilation, including the allotment of tribal lands to individuals.

The Problem of Old Harjo¹

The Spirit of the Lord had descended upon old Harjo. From the new missionary, just out from New York, he had learned that he was a sinner. The fire in the new missionary's eyes and her gracious appeal had convinced old Harjo that this was the time to repent and be saved. He was very much in earnest, and he assured Miss Evans that he wanted to be baptized and received into the church at once. Miss Evans was enthusiastic and went to Mrs. Rowell with the news. It was Mrs. Rowell who had said that it was no use to try to convert the older Indians, and she, after fifteen years of work in Indian Territory² missions, should have known. Miss Evans was pardonably proud of her conquest.

"Old Harjo converted!" exclaimed Mrs. Rowell. "Dear Miss Evans, do you know that old Harjo has two wives?"³ To the older woman it was as if someone had said to her "Madame, the Sultan of Turkey wishes to teach one of your mission Sabbath school classes."

"But," protested the younger woman, "he is really sincere, and—"

"Then ask him," Mrs. Rowell interrupted a bit sternly, "if he will put away one of his wives. Ask him, before he comes into the presence of the Lord, if

1. First published in *Southern Workman* (April 1907).

2. Land in present-day Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska where the U.S. government resettled eastern Indians removed from their homelands.

3. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, polygamy was common among the Creek Indians, also known as the Muscogee or Mvskoke people.

he is willing to conform to the laws of the country in which he lives, the country that guarantees his idle existence. Miss Evans, your work is not even begun." No one who knew Mrs. Rowell would say that she lacked sincerity and patriotism. Her own cousin was an earnest crusader against Mormonism, and had gathered a goodly share of that wagonload of protests that the Senate had been asked to read when it was considering whether a certain statesman of Utah⁴ should be allowed to represent his state at Washington.

In her practical, tactful way, Mrs. Rowell had kept clear of such embarrassments. At first, she had written letters of indignant protest to the Indian Office against the toleration of bigamy amongst the tribes. A wise inspector had been sent to the mission, and this man had pointed out that it was better to ignore certain things, "deplorable, to be sure," than to attempt to make over the habits of the old men. Of course, the young Indians would not be permitted to take more than one wife each.

So Mrs. Rowell had discreetly limited her missionary efforts to the young, and had exercised toward the old and bigamous only that strict charity which even a hopeless sinner might claim.

Miss Evans, it was to be regretted, had only the vaguest notions about "expediency"; so weak on matters of doctrine was she that the news that Harjo was living with two wives didn't startle her. She was young and possessed of but one enthusiasm—that for saving souls.

"I suppose," she ventured, "that old Harjo *must* put away one wife before he can join the church?"

"There can be no question about it, Miss Evans."

"Then I shall have to ask him to do it." Miss Evans regretted the necessity for forcing this sacrifice, but had no doubt that the Indian would make it an order to accept the gift of salvation which she was commissioned to bear to him.

Harjo lived in a "double" log cabin⁵ three miles from the mission. His ten acres of corn had been gathered into its fence-rail crib; four hogs that were to furnish his winter's bacon had been brought in from the woods and penned conveniently near to the crib; out in a corner of the garden, a fat mound of dirt rose where the crop of turnips and potatoes had been buried against the corrupting frost; and in the hayloft of his log stable were stored many pumpkins, dried corn, onions (suspended in bunches from the rafters) and the varied forage that Mrs. Harjo number one and Mrs. Harjo number two had thriftily provided. Three cows, three young heifers, two colts, and two patient, capable mares bore the Harjo brand, a fantastic "卐" that the old man had designed. Materially, Harjo was solvent; and if the Government had ever come to his aid he could not recall the date.

This attempt to rehabilitate old Harjo morally, Miss Evans felt, was not one to be made at the mission; it should be undertaken in the Creek's own home, where the evidences of his sin should confront him as she explained.

When Miss Evans rode up to the block in front of Harjo's cabin, the old Indian came out, slowly and with a broadening smile of welcome on his face.

4. The Mormons also permitted polygamy. A Mormon Democrat elected to the House of Representatives in 1900 had been denied his seat because he was a polygamist, and in 1907 similar charges were raised against Reed Smoot, per-

haps Oskison's "statesman of Utah," a Republican elected to the Senate. Smoot was eventually permitted to take his place in Congress.

5. Two cabins connected by a covered passageway.

A clean gray flannel shirt had taken the place of the white collarless garment, with crackling stiff bosom, that he had worn to the mission meetings. Comfortable, well-patched moccasins had been substituted for creaking boots, and brown corduroys, belted in at the waist, for tight black trousers. His abundant gray hair fell down on his shoulders. In his eyes, clear and large and black, glowed the light of true hospitality. Miss Evans thought of the patriarchs as she saw him lead her horse out to the stable; thus Abraham⁶ might have looked and lived.

"Harjo," began Miss Evans before following the old man to the covered passageway between the disconnected cabins, "is it true that you have two wives?" Her tone was neither stern nor accusatory. The Creek had heard that question before, from scandalized missionaries and perplexed registry clerks when he went to Muscogee to enroll himself and his family in one of the many "final" records ordered to be made by the Government preparatory to dividing the Creek lands among the individual citizens.⁷

For answer, Harjo called, first into the cabin that was used as a kitchen and then, in a loud, clear voice, toward the small field, where Miss Evans saw a flock of half-grown turkeys running about in the corn stubble. From the kitchen emerged a tall, thin Indian woman of fifty-five, with a red handkerchief bound severely over her head. She spoke to Miss Evans and sat down in the passageway. Presently, a clear, sweet voice was heard in the field; a stout, handsome woman, about the same age as the other, climbed the rail fence and came up to the house. She, also, greeted Miss Evans briefly. Then she carried a tin basin to the well nearby, where she filled it to the brim. Setting it down on the horse block, she rolled back her sleeves, tucked in the collar of her gray blouse, and plunged her face in the water. In a minute she came out of the kitchen freshened and smiling. 'Liza Harjo had been pulling dried bean stalks at one end of the field, and it was dirty work. At last old Harjo turned to Miss Evans and said, "These two my wife—this one 'Liza, this one Jennie."

It was done with simple dignity. Miss Evans bowed and stammered. Three pairs of eyes were turned upon her in patient, courteous inquiry.

It was hard to state the case. The old man was so evidently proud of his women, and so flattered by Miss Evans' interest in them, that he would find it hard to understand. Still, it had to be done, and Miss Evans took the plunge.

"Harjo, you want to come into our church?" The old man's face lighted.

"Oh, yes, I would come to Jesus, please, my friend."

"Do you know, Harjo, that the Lord commanded that one man should mate with but one woman?" The question was stated again in simpler terms, and the Indian replied, "Me know that now, my friend. Long time ago"—Harjo plainly meant the whole period previous to his conversion—"me did not know. The Lord Jesus did not speak to me in that time and so I was blind. I do what blind man do."

"Harjo, you must have only one wife when you come into our church. Can't you give up one of these women?" Miss Evans glanced at the two, sitting by with smiles of polite interest on their faces, understanding nothing. They

6. In Genesis, Abraham fathers children by two women, Sarah and Hagar, living with them at the same time.

7. Such division of tribal lands followed from

the Dawes Act of 1887. The Creek Indian Agency was located in Muskogee, in present-day Oklahoma.

had not shared Harjo's enthusiasm either for the white man's God or his language.

"Give up my wife?" A sly smile stole over his face. He leaned closer to Miss Evans. "You tell me, my friend, which one I give up." He glanced from 'Liza to Jennie as if to weight their attractions, and the two rewarded him with their pleasantest smiles. "You tell me which one," he urged.

"Why, Harjo, how can I tell you!" Miss Evans had little sense of humor; she had taken the old man seriously.

"Then," Harjo sighed, continuing the comedy, for surely the missionary was jesting with him, "'Liza and Jennie must say." He talked to the Indian women for a time, and they laughed heartily. 'Liza, pointing to the other, shook her head. At length Harjo explained, "My friend, they cannot say. Jennie, she would run a race to see which one stay, but 'Liza, she say no, she is fat and cannot run."

Miss Evans comprehended at last. She flushed angrily, and protested, "Harjo, you are making a mock of a sacred subject; I cannot allow you to talk like this."

"But did you not speak in fun, my friend?" Harjo queried, sobering. "Surely you have just said what your friend, the white woman at the mission (he meant Mrs. Rowell) would say, and you do not mean what you say."

"Yes, Harjo, I mean it. It is true that Mrs. Rowell raised the point first, but I agree with her. The church cannot be defiled by receiving a bigamist into its membership." Harjo saw that the young woman was serious, distressingly serious. He was silent for a long time, but at last he raised his head and spoke quietly, "It is not good to talk like that if it is not in fun."

He rose and went to the stable. As he led Miss Evans' horse up to the block it was champing a mouthful of corn, the last of a generous portion that Harjo had put before it. The Indian held the bridle and waited for Miss Evans to mount. She was embarrassed, humiliated, angry. It was absurd to be dismissed in this way by—"by an ignorant old bigamist!" Then the humor of it burst upon her, and its human aspect. In her anxiety concerning the spiritual welfare of the sinner Harjo, she had insulted the man Harjo. She began to understand why Mrs. Rowell had said that the old Indians were hopeless.

"Harjo," she begged, coming out of the passageway, "please forgive me. I do not want you to give up one of your wives. Just tell me why you took them."

"I will tell you that, my friend." The old Creek looped the reins over his arm and sat down on the block. "For thirty years Jennie has lived with me as my wife. She is of the Bear people, and she came to me when I was thirty-five and she was twenty-five. She could not come before, for her mother was old, very old, and Jennie, she stay with her and feed her.

"So, when I was thirty years old I took 'Liza for my woman. She is of the Crow people.⁸ She help me make this little farm here when there was no farm for many miles around.

"Well, five years 'Liza and me, we live here and work hard. But there was no child. Then the old mother of Jennie she died, and Jennie got no family left in this part of the country. So 'Liza say to me, 'Why don't you take Jennie in here?' I say, 'You don't care?' and she say, 'No, maybe we have children

8. The Bear (Jennie) and Crow ('Liza) are clans of the Creek.

here then.' But we have no children—never have children. We do not like that, but God He would not let it be. So, we have lived here thirty years very happy. Only just now you make me sad."

"Harjo," cried Miss Evans, "forget what I said. Forget that you wanted to join the church." For a young mission worker with a single purpose always before her, Miss Evans was saying a strange thing. Yet she couldn't help saying it; all of her zeal seemed to have been dissipated by a simple statement of the old man.

"I cannot forget to love Jesus, and I want to be saved." Old Harjo spoke with solemn earnestness. The situation was distracting. On one side stood a convert eager for the protection of the church, asking only that he be allowed to fulfill the obligations of humanity and on the other stood the church, represented by Mrs. Rowell, that set an impossible condition on receiving old Harjo to itself. Miss Evans wanted to cry; prayer, she felt, would be entirely inadequate as a means of expression.

"Oh! Harjo," she cried out, "I don't know what to do. I must think it over and talk to Mrs. Rowell again."

But Mrs. Rowell could suggest no way out; Miss Evans' talk with her only gave the older woman another opportunity to preach the folly of wasting time on the old and "unreasonable" Indians. Certainly the church could not listen even to a hint of a compromise in this case. If Harjo wanted to be saved, there was one way and only one—unless—

"Is either of the two women old? I mean, so old that she is—an—"

"Not at all," answered Miss Evans. "They're both strong and—yes, happy. I think they will outlive Harjo."

"Can't you appeal to one of the women to go away? I dare say we could provide for her." Miss Evans, incongruously, remembered Jennie's jesting proposal to race for the right to stay with Harjo. What could the mission provide as a substitute for the little home that 'Liza had helped to create there in the edge of the woods? What other home would satisfy Jennie?

"Mrs. Rowell, are you sure that we ought to try to take one of Harjo's women from him? I'm not sure that it would in the least advance morality amongst the tribe, but I'm certain that it would make three gentle people unhappy for the rest of their lives."

"You may be right, Miss Evans." Mrs. Rowell was not seeking to create unhappiness, for enough of it inevitably came to be pictured in the little mission building. "You may be right," she repeated, "but it is a grievous misfortune that old Harjo should wish to unite with the church."

No one was more regular in his attendance at the mission meetings than old Harjo. Sitting well forward, he was always in plain view of Miss Evans at the organ. Before the service began, and after it was over, the old man greeted the young woman. There was never a spoken question, but in the Creek's eyes was always a mute inquiry.

Once Miss Evans ventured to write to her old pastor in New York, and explain her trouble. This was what he wrote in reply: "I am surprised that you are troubled, for I should have expected you to rejoice, as I do, over this new and wonderful evidence of the Lord's reforming power. Though the church cannot receive the old man so long as he is confessedly a bigamist and violator of his country's just laws, you should be greatly strengthened in your work through bringing him to desire salvation."

“Oh! it’s easy to talk when you’re free from responsibility!” cried out Miss Evans. “But I woke him up to a desire for this water of salvation that he cannot take. I have seen Harjo’s home, and I know how cruel and useless it would be to urge him to give up what he loves—for he does love those two women who have spent half their lives and more with him. What, what can be done?”

Month after month, as old Harjo continued to occupy his seat in the mission meetings, with that mute appeal in his eyes and a persistent light of hope on his face, Miss Evans repeated the question, “What can be done?” If she was sometimes tempted to say to the old man, “Stop worrying about your soul; you’ll get to Heaven as surely as any of us,” there was always Mrs. Rowell to remind her that she was not a Mormon missionary. She could not run away from her perplexity. If she should secure a transfer to another station, she felt that Harjo would give up coming to the meetings, and in his despair become a positive influence for evil amongst his people. Mrs. Rowell would not waste her energy on an obstinate old man. No, Harjo was her creation, her impossible convert, and throughout the years, until death—the great solvent which is not always a solvent—came to one of them, would continue to haunt her.

And meanwhile, what?

1907

JACK LONDON

1876–1916

John Griffith Chaney was born in San Francisco, California, on January 12, 1876, the son of Flora Wellman Chaney, spiritualist and common-law wife of William H. Chaney, an itinerant astrologer who abandoned Flora on learning of her pregnancy. Nine months after the child’s birth, Flora married John London, a Civil War veteran and construction worker who adopted “Johnny.” As a child, London escaped some of the unhappiness at home by living on and off with the Prentisses, African American neighbors who called him “Jack” and who served as surrogate parents until, at the age of fifteen, he sailed San Francisco Bay as an oyster pirate, going on to become a member of the California Fish Patrol. Entranced by the sea and its possibilities, he sailed aboard a sealing ship, the *Sophia Sutherland*, returning home in 1893 to publish his prize-winning first story, “Typhoon Off the Coast of Japan,” in the *San Francisco Morning Call*.

In 1894, following the Panic of 1893, London marched east with a contingent of Cockey’s Army, an organized group of the unemployed planning to agitate for jobs in Washington, D.C. He was arrested as a vagrant at Niagara Falls and did thirty days of hard time in the Erie County Penitentiary in Buffalo, New York. He later described the impact of these experiences in *The Road* (1907). “I have often thought,” he writes there, “that to this training of my tramp days is due much of my success as a story-writer. In order to get the food whereby I lived, I was compelled to tell tales that

rang true. At the back door, out of inexorable necessity, is developed the convincingness and sincerity laid down by all authorities on the art of the short-story. Also, I quite believe it was my tramp-apprenticeship that made a realist out of me. Realism constitutes the only goods one can exchange at the kitchen door for grub.”

Returning home, London vowed to educate himself, and he also turned to socialism. (He later ran twice for mayor of Oakland on the socialist ticket.) At the age of twenty he was accepted to the University of California, but, lacking money, he attended for only one semester. The most important event of London's early life occurred in 1897, when, at age twenty-one, he headed to Alaska to take part in the Klondike gold rush, a migration of tens of thousands of men seeking wealth in a forbidding region. In 1900, the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly* featured his story “An Odyssey of the North” in its January issue; Houghton Mifflin published his first book, *The Son of the Wolf*; and he married Bessie Mae Maddern, with whom he went on to have two daughters before their divorce in 1905 and his marriage to Charmian Kittredge. In these years he also traveled to London, England, to write the sociological exposé *The People of the Abyss* (1903) and to Korea to cover the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, and he bought land in Sonoma County, experimenting with terracing and organic farming. London's international reputation, though, came as a writer of adventure fiction, after he won widespread acclaim with *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904). Later, after his extensive South Seas travels and residence in Hawaii, he became modern America's first Pacific Rim writer. In a writing career of only twenty years, London published eighteen novels, 198 short stories, three plays, and hundreds of nonfiction books and articles. Unfortunately, his alcoholism exacerbated other health issues, and he died at his California ranch in 1916.

Though London said that he wrote only for money, he was a disciplined and careful craftsman, drawing from many literary, philosophical, scientific, and other sources, and he wrote on many subjects. The “Realism and Naturalism” section of this volume includes his reflections on the connection between his writing and his experience in an essay titled “What Life Means to Me” (1906). London's substantial body of work reflects the social and intellectual turbulence of the turn of the twentieth century, including his competing sympathies for socialism, Social Darwinism, and Nietzschean individualism; his combination of urban settings and characters with the pastoral and the exotic; his conflicted ideas about race; his dual identity as a literary writer of the emerging naturalist school and a mass-market phenomenon. For both his adventure writing and his socialist works London was an important influence on later writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Richard Wright. By the time he died in 1916, London was the best-selling author in America and was on his way to becoming the most popular American writer in the world. Paradoxically, for much of the twentieth century this same popularity contributed to a lack of interest in London's fiction by literary critics, who largely considered it to be too lowbrow or sensational to be worthy of their attention. But that trend has changed as literary scholars have begun to reexamine London's body of work, both for its considerable narrative artistry and the complexity of London's depiction of the world that he inhabited.

The Law of Life¹

Old Koskoosh listened greedily. Though his sight had long since faded, his hearing was still acute, and the slightest sound penetrated to the glimmering intelligence which yet abode behind the withered forehead, but which

1. This story was first printed in *McClure's Magazine* (March 1901) and was included in the collection *Children of the Frost* (1902), from which the present text is taken.

no longer gazed forth upon the things of the world. Ah! that was Sit-cum-to-ha, shrilly anathematizing the dogs as she cuffed and beat them into the harnesses. Sit-cum-to-ha was his daughter's daughter, but she was too busy to waste a thought upon her broken grandfather, sitting alone there in the snow, forlorn and helpless. Camp must be broken. The long trail waited while the short day refused to linger. Life called her, and the duties of life, not death. And he was very close to death now.

The thought made the old man panicky for the moment, and he stretched forth a palsied hand which wandered tremblingly over the small heap of dry wood beside him. Reassured that it was indeed there, his hand returned to the shelter of his mangy furs, and he again fell to listening. The sulky crackling of half-frozen hides told him that the chief's moose-skin lodge had been struck, and even then was being rammed and jammed into portable compass. The chief was his son, stalwart and strong, head man of the tribesmen, and a mighty hunter. As the women toiled with the camp luggage, his voice rose, chiding them for their slowness. Old Koskoosh strained his ears. It was the last time he would hear that voice. There went Geehow's lodge! And Tusken's! Seven, eight, nine; only the Shaman's could be still standing. There! They were at work upon it now. He could hear the Shaman grunt as he piled it on the sled. A child whimpered, and a woman soothed it with soft, crooning gutturals. Little Koo-tee, the old man thought, a fretful child, and not over strong. It would die soon, perhaps, and they would burn a hole through the frozen tundra and pile rocks above to keep the wolverines away. Well, what did it matter? A few years at best, and as many an empty belly as a full one. And in the end, Death waited, ever-hungry and hungriest of them all.

What was that? Oh, the men lashing the sleds and drawing tight the thongs. He listened, who would listen no more. The whip-lashes snarled and bit among the dogs. Hear them whine! How they hated the work and the trail! They were off! Sled after sled churned slowly away into the silence. They were gone. They had passed out of his life, and he faced the last bitter hour alone. No. The snow crunched beneath a moccasin; a man stood beside him; upon his head a hand rested gently. His son was good to do this thing. He remembered other old men whose sons had not waited after the tribe. But his son had. He wandered away into the past, till the young man's voice brought him back.

"Is it well with you?" he asked.

And the old man answered, "It is well."

"There be wood beside you," the younger man continued, "and the fire burns bright. The morning is gray, and the cold has broken. It will snow presently. Even now is it snowing."

"Ay, even now is it snowing."

"The tribesmen hurry. Their bales are heavy, and their bellies flat with lack of feasting. The trail is long and they travel fast. I go now. It is well?"

"It is well. I am as a last year's leaf, clinging lightly to the stem. The first breath that blows, and I fall. My voice is become like an old woman's. My eyes no longer show me the way of my feet, and my feet are heavy, and I am tired. It is well."

He bowed his head in content till the last noise of the complaining snow had died away, and he knew his son was beyond recall. Then his hand crept out in haste to the wood. It alone stood betwixt him and the eternity which

yawned in upon him. At last the measure of his life was a handful of fagots. One by one they would go to feed the fire, and just so, step by step, death would creep upon him. When the last stick had surrendered up its heat, the frost would begin to gather strength. First his feet would yield, then his hands; and the numbness would travel, slowly, from the extremities to the body. His head would fall forward upon his knees, and he would rest. It was easy. All men must die.

He did not complain. It was the way of life, and it was just. He had been born close to the earth, close to the earth had he lived, and the law thereof was not new to him. It was the law of all flesh. Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that concrete thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the species, the race. This was the deepest abstraction old Koskoosh's barbaric mind was capable of, but he grasped it firmly. He saw it exemplified in all life. The rise of the sap, the bursting greenness of the willow bud, the fall of the yellow leaf—in this alone was told the whole history. But one task did nature set the individual. Did he not perform it, he died. Did he perform it, it was all the same, he died. Nature did not care; there were plenty who were obedient, and it was only the obedience in this matter, not the obedient, which lived and lived always. The tribe of Koskoosh was very old. The old men he had known when a boy, had known old men before them. Therefore it was true that the tribe lived, that it stood for the obedience of all its members, way down into the forgotten past, whose very resting places were unremembered. They did not count; they were episodes. They had passed away like clouds from a summer sky. He also was an episode, and would pass away. Nature did not care. To life she set one task, gave one law. To perpetuate was the task of life, its law was death. A maiden was a good creature to look upon, full-breasted and strong, with spring to her step and light in her eyes. But her task was yet before her. The light in her eyes brightened, her step quickened, she was now bold with the young men, now timid, and she gave them of her own unrest. And ever she grew fairer and yet fairer to look upon, till some hunter, able no longer to withhold himself, took her to his lodge to cook and toil for him and to become the mother of his children. And with the coming of her offspring her looks left her. Her limbs dragged and shuffled, her eyes dimmed and bleared, and only the little children found joy against the withered cheek of the old squaw by the fire. Her task was done. But a little while, on the first pinch of famine or the first long trail, and she would be left, even as he had been left, in the snow, with a little pile of wood. Such was the law.

He placed a stick carefully upon the fire and resumed his meditations. It was the same everywhere, with all things. The mosquitos vanished with the first frost. The little tree-squirrel crawled away to die. When age settled upon the rabbit it became slow and heavy, and could no longer outfoot its enemies. Even the big bald-face grew clumsy and blind and quarrelsome, in the end to be dragged down by a handful of yelping huskies. He remembered how he had abandoned his own father on an upper reach of the Klondike one winter, the winter before the missionary came with his talk-books and his box of medicines. Many a time had Koskoosh smacked his lips over the recollection of that box, though now his mouth refused to moisten. The "painkiller" had been especially good. But the missionary was a bother after all, for he brought no meat into the camp, and he ate heartily, and the hunt-

ers grumbled. But he chilled his lungs on the divide by the Mayo, and the dogs afterwards nosed the stones away and fought over his bones.

Koskoosh placed another stick on the fire and harked back deeper into the past. There was the time of the Great Famine, when the old men crouched empty-bellied to the fire, and from their lips fell dim traditions of the ancient day when the Yukon ran wide open for three winters, and then lay frozen for three summers. He had lost his mother in that famine. In the summer the salmon run had failed, and the tribe looked forward to the winter and the coming of the caribou. Then the winter came, but with it there were no caribou. Never had the like been known, not even in the lives of the old men. But the caribou did not come, and it was the seventh year, and the rabbits had not replenished, and the dogs were naught but bundles of bones. And through the long darkness the children wailed and died, and the women, and the old men; and not one in ten of the tribe lived to meet the sun when it came back in the spring. That *was* a famine!

But he had seen times of plenty, too, when the meat spoiled on their hands, and the dogs were fat and worthless with over-eating—times when they let the game go unkilld, and the women were fertile, and the lodges were cluttered with sprawling men-children and women-children. Then it was the men became high-stomached, and revived ancient quarrels, and crossed the divides to the south to kill the Pellys, and to the west that they might sit by the dead fires of the Tananas. He remembered, when a boy, during a time of plenty, when he saw a moose pulled down by the wolves. Zing-ha lay with him in the snow and watched—Zing-ha, who later became the craftiest of hunters, and who, in the end, fell through an air-hole on the Yukon. They found him, a month afterward, just as he had crawled half-way out and frozen stiff to the ice.

But the moose. Zing-ha and he had gone out that day to play at hunting after the manner of their fathers. On the bed of the creek they struck the fresh track of a moose, and with it the tracks of many wolves. “An old one,” Zing-ha, who was quicker at reading the sign, said—“an old one who cannot keep up with the herd. The wolves have cut him out from his brothers, and they will never leave him.” And it was so. It was their way. By day and by night, never resting, snarling on his heels, snapping at his nose, they would stay by him to the end. How Zing-ha and he felt the blood-lust quicken! The finish would be a sight to see!

Eager-footed, they took the trail, and even he, Koskoosh, slow of sight and an unversed tracker, could have followed it blind, it was so wide. Hot were they on the heels of the chase, reading the grim tragedy, fresh-written, at every step. Now they came to where the moose had made a stand. Thrice the length of a grown man’s body, in every direction, had the snow been stamped about and uptossed. In the midst were the deep impressions of the splay-hoofed game, and all about, everywhere, were the lighter footmarks of the wolves. Some, while their brothers harried the kill, had lain to one side and rested. The full-stretched impress of their bodies in the snow was as perfect as though made the moment before. One wolf had been caught in a wild lunge of the maddened victim and trampled to death. A few bones, well picked, bore witness.

Again, they ceased the uplift of their snowshoes at a second stand. Here the great animal had fought desperately. Twice had he been dragged down,

as the snow attested, and twice had he shaken his assailants clear and gained footing once more. He had done his task long since, but none the less was life dear to him. Zing-ha said it was a strange thing, a moose once down to get free again; but this one certainly had. The Shaman would see signs and wonders in this when they told him.

And yet again, they came to where the moose had made to mount the bank and gain the timber. But his foes had laid on from behind, till he reared and fell back upon them, crushing two deep into the snow. It was plain the kill was at hand, for their brothers had left them untouched. Two more stands were hurried past, brief in time-length and very close together. The trail was red now, and the clean stride of the great beast had grown short and slowly. Then they heard the first sounds of the battle—not the full-throated chorus of the chase, but the short, snappy bark which spoke of close quarters and teeth to flesh. Crawling up the wind, Zing-ha bellied it through the snow, and with him crept he, Koskoosh, who was to be chief of the tribesmen in the years to come. Together they shoved aside the under branches of a young spruce and peered forth. It was the end they saw.

The picture, like all of youth's impressions, was still strong with him, and his dim eyes watched the end played out as vividly as in that far-off time. Koskoosh marveled at this, for in the days which followed, when he was a leader of men and a head of councilors, he had done great deeds and made his name a curse in the mouths of the Pellys, to say naught of the strange white man he had killed, knife to knife, in open fight.

For long he pondered on the days of his youth, till the fire died down and the frost bit deeper. He replenished it with two sticks this time, and gauged his grip on life by what remained. If Sit-cum-to-ha had only remembered her grandfather, and gathered a larger armful, his hours would have been longer. It would have been easy. But she was ever a careless child, and honored not her ancestors from the time the Beaver, son of the son of Zing-ha, first cast eyes upon her. Well, what mattered it? Had he not done likewise in his own quick youth? For a while he listened to the silence. Perhaps the heart of his son might soften, and he would come back with the dogs to take his old father on with the tribe to where the caribou ran thick and the fat hung heavy upon them.

He strained his ears, his restless brain for the moment stilled. Not a stir, nothing. He alone took breath in the midst of the great silence. It was very lonely, Hark! What was that? A chill passed over his body. The familiar, long-drawn howl broke the void, and it was close at hand. Then on his darkened eyes was projected the vision of the moose—the old bull moose—the torn flanks and bloody sides, the riddled mane, and the great branching horns, down low and tossing to the last. He saw the flashing forms of gray, the gleaming eyes, the lolling tongues, the slavered fangs. And he saw the inexorable circle close in till it became a dark point in the midst of the stamped snow.

A cold muzzle thrust against his cheek, and at its touch his soul leaped back to the present. His hand shot into the fire and dragged out a burning fagot. Overcome for the nonce by his hereditary fear of man, the brute retreated, raising a prolonged call to his brothers; and greedily they answered, till a ring of crouching, jaw-slobbered gray was stretched round about. The old man listened to the drawing in of this circle. He waved his brand wildly,

and sniffs turned to snarls; but the panting brutes refused to scatter. Now one wormed his chest forward, dragging his haunches after, now a second, now a third; but never a one drew back. Why should he cling to life? he asked, and dropped the blazing stick into the snow. It sizzled and went out. The circle grunted uneasily, but held its own. Again he saw the last stand of the old bull moose, and Koskoosh dropped his head wearily upon his knees. What did it matter after all? Was it not the law of life?

1901, 1902

To Build a Fire¹

Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little-travelled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the sky-line and dip immediately from view.

The man flung a look back along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white, rolling in gentle undulations where the ice-jams of the freeze-up had formed. North and south, as far as his eye could see, it was unbroken white, save for a dark hair-line that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south, and that curved and twisted away into the north, where it disappeared behind another spruce-covered island. This dark hair-line was the trail—the main trail—that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael on Bering Sea, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.²

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness

1. First published in the *Youth's Companion* for May 29, 1902, in a version of 2,700 words—"for boys only," according to London. The later, widely anthologized version of 7,235 words, written while London was struggling to survive his South Seas voyage aboard his sailboat the *Snark*, was first published in the *Century Magazine* 76 (August 1908). The text here is that of the 1910 collection *Lost Face*.

2. The narrator surveys a long trail extending across the Klondike gold region in Canada and Alaska, from the steep Chilcoot Pass near Skagway, which prospective miners first scaled in the

winter of 1897–98 to enter the Yukon watershed to the north; to Dyea, a shabby settlement where they disembarked onto a swampy beach; to Dawson, the hub of the Klondike gold rush; to Nulato, a settlement on the Yukon River; and finally, to St. Michael on the Bering Sea, a settlement north of the mouth of the Yukon, from which miners would sail for home. In the spring of 1898, after failing to find success prospecting for gold, London floated on the Yukon River from Dawson in a makeshift houseboat and then returned home from St. Michael.

of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a *chechaquo*,³ and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear-flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head.

As he turned to go on, he spat speculatively. There was a sharp, explosive crackle that startled him. He spat again. And again, in the air, before it could fall to the snow, the spittle crackled. He knew that at fifty below spittle crackled on the snow, but this spittle had crackled in the air. Undoubtedly it was colder than fifty below—how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter. He was bound for the old claim on the left fork of Henderson Creek, where the boys were already. They had come over across the divide from the Indian Creek country, while he had come the round-about way to take a look at the possibilities of getting out logs in the spring from the islands in the Yukon. He would be in to camp by six o'clock; a bit after dark, it was true, but the boys would be there, a fire would be going, and a hot supper would be ready. As for lunch, he pressed his hand against the protruding bundle under his jacket. It was also under his shirt, wrapped up in a handkerchief and lying against the naked skin. It was the only way to keep the biscuits from freezing. He smiled agreeably to himself as he thought of those biscuits, each cut open and sopped in bacon grease, and each enclosing a generous slice of fried bacon.

He plunged in among the big spruce trees. The trail was faint. A foot of snow had fallen since the last sled had passed over, and he was glad he was without a sled, travelling light. In fact, he carried nothing but the lunch wrapped in the handkerchief. He was surprised, however, at the cold. It certainly was cold, he concluded, as he rubbed his numb nose and cheek-bones with his mittened hand. He was a warm-whiskered man, but the hair on his face did not protect the high cheek-bones and the eager nose that thrust itself aggressively into the frosty air.

At the man's heels trotted a dog, a big native husky, the proper wolf-dog, gray-coated and without any visible or temperamental difference from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for travelling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man's judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero. Since the freezing-point is thirty-two above zero, it meant that one hundred and seven degrees of frost obtained.

3. A newcomer (Chinook).

The dog did not know anything about thermometers. Possibly in its brain there was no sharp consciousness of a condition of very cold such as was in the man's brain. But the brute had its instinct. It experienced a vague but menacing apprehension that subdued it and made it slink along at the man's heels, and that made it question eagerly every unwonted movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned fire, and it wanted fire, or else to burrow under the snow and cuddle its warmth away from the air.

The frozen moisture of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost, and especially were its jowls, muzzle, and eyelashes whitened by its crystallized breath. The man's red beard and mustache were likewise frosted, but more solidly, the deposit taking the form of ice and increasing with every warm, moist breath he exhaled. Also, the man was chewing tobacco, and the muzzle of ice held his lips so rigidly that he was unable to clear his chin when he expelled the juice. The result was that a crystal beard of the color and solidity of amber was increasing its length on his chin. If he fell down it would shatter itself, like glass, into brittle fragments. But he did not mind the appendage. It was the penalty all tobacco-chewers paid in that country, and he had been out before in two cold snaps. They had not been so cold as this, he knew, but by the spirit thermometer at Sixty Mile he knew they had been registered at fifty below and at fifty-five.

He held on through the level stretch of woods for several miles, crossed a wide flat of niggerheads,⁴ and dropped down a bank to the frozen bed of a small stream. This was Henderson Creek, and he knew he was ten miles from the forks. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He was making four miles an hour, and he calculated that he would arrive at the forks at half-past twelve. He decided to celebrate that event by eating his lunch there.

The dog dropped in again at his heels, with a tail drooping discouragement, as the man swung along the creek-bed. The furrow of the old sled-trail was plainly visible, but a dozen inches of snow covered the marks of the last runners. In a month no man had come up or down that silent creek. The man held steadily on. He was not much given to thinking, and just then particularly he had nothing to think about save that he would eat lunch at the forks and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys. There was nobody to talk to; and, had there been, speech would have been impossible because of the ice-muzzle on his mouth. So he continued monotonously to chew tobacco and to increase the length of his amber beard.

Once in a while the thought reiterated itself that it was very cold and that he had never experienced such cold. As he walked along he rubbed his cheek-bones and nose with the back of his mittened hand. He did this automatically, now and again changing hands. But rub as he would, the instant he stopped his cheek-bones went numb, and the following instant the end of his nose went numb. He was sure to frost his cheeks; he knew that, and experienced a pang of regret that he had not devised a nose-strap of the sort Bud wore in cold snaps. Such a strap passed across the cheeks, as well, and saved them. But it didn't matter much, after all. What were frosted cheeks? A bit painful, that was all; they were never serious.

4. Racist name for a strong dark chewing tobacco of the period; applied here to large hummocks of earth under the snow that are created by centuries of alternate freezing and thawing.

Empty as the man's mind was of thoughts, he was keenly observant, and he noticed the changes in the creek, the curves and bends and timber-jams, and always he sharply noted where he placed his feet. Once, coming around a bend, he shied abruptly, like a startled horse, curved away from the place where he had been walking, and retreated several paces back along the trail. The creek he knew was frozen clear to the bottom,—no creek could contain water in that arctic winter,—but he knew also that there were springs that bubbled out from the hillsides and ran along under the snow and on top the ice of the creek. He knew that the coldest snaps never froze these springs, and he knew likewise their danger. They were traps. They hid pools of water under the snow that might be three inches deep, or three feet. Sometimes a skin of ice half an inch thick covered them, and in turn was covered by the snow. Sometimes there were alternate layers of water and ice-skin, so that when one broke through he kept on breaking through for a while, sometimes wetting himself to the waist.

That was why he had shied in such panic. He had felt the give under his feet and heard the crackle of snow-hidden ice-skin. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, for he would be forced to stop and build a fire, and under its protection to bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins. He stood and studied the creek-bed and its banks, and decided that the flow of water came from the right. He reflected awhile, rubbing his nose and cheeks, then skirted to the left, stepping gingerly and testing the footing for each step. Once clear of the danger, he took a fresh chew of tobacco and swung along at his four-mile gait.

In the course of the next two hours he came upon several similar traps. Usually the snow above the hidden pools had a sunken, candied appearance that advertised the danger. Once again, however, he had a close call; and once, suspecting danger, he compelled the dog to go on in front. The dog did not want to go. It hung back until the man shoved it forward, and then it went quickly across the white, unbroken surface. Suddenly it broke through, floundered to one side, and got away to firmer footing. It had wet its forefeet and legs, and almost immediately the water that clung to it turned to ice. It made quick efforts to lick the ice off its legs, then dropped down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. This was a matter of instinct. To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being. But the man knew, having achieved a judgment on the subject, and he removed the mitten from his right hand and helped tear out the ice-particles. He did not expose his fingers more than a minute, and was astonished at the swift numbness that smote them. It certainly was cold. He pulled on the mitten hastily, and beat the hand savagely across his chest.

At twelve o'clock the day was at its brightest. Yet the sun was too far south on its winter journey to clear the horizon. The bulge of the earth intervened between it and Henderson Creek, where the man walked under a clear sky at noon and cast no shadow. At half-past twelve, to the minute, he arrived at the forks of the creek. He was pleased at the speed he had made. If he kept it up, he would certainly be with the boys by six. He unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and drew forth his lunch. The action consumed no more

than a quarter of a minute, yet in that brief moment the numbness laid hold of the exposed fingers. He did not put the mitten on, but, instead, struck the fingers a dozen sharp smashes against his leg. Then he sat down on a snow-covered log to eat. The sting that followed upon the striking of his fingers against his leg ceased so quickly that he was startled. He had had no chance to take a bite of biscuit. He struck the fingers repeatedly and returned them to the mitten, baring the other hand for the purpose of eating. He tried to take a mouthful, but the ice-muzzle prevented. He had forgotten to build a fire and thaw out. He chuckled at his foolishness, and as he chuckled he noted the numbness creeping into the exposed fingers. Also, he noted that the stinging which had first come to his toes when he sat down was already passing away. He wondered whether the toes were warm or numb. He moved them inside the moccasins and decided that they were numb.

He pulled the mitten on hurriedly and stood up. He was a bit frightened. He stamped up and down until the stinging returned into the feet. It certainly was cold, was his thought. That man from Sulphur Creek⁵ had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in the country. And he had laughed at him at the time! That showed one must not be too sure of things. There was no mistake about it, it *was* cold. He strode up and down, stamping his feet and threshing his arms, until reassured by the returning warmth. Then he got out matches and proceeded to make a fire. From the under-growth, where high water of the previous spring had lodged a supply of seasoned twigs, he got his fire-wood. Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire, over which he thawed the ice from his face and in the protection of which he ate his biscuits. For the moment the cold of space was outwitted. The dog took satisfaction in the fire, stretching out close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being singed.

When the man had finished, he filled his pipe and took his comfortable time over a smoke. Then he pulled on his mittens, settled the ear-flaps of his cap firmly about his ears, and took the creek trail up the left fork. The dog was disappointed and yearned back toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly all the generations of his ancestry had been ignorant of cold, of real cold, of cold one hundred and seven degrees below freezing-point. But the dog knew; all its ancestry knew, and it had inherited the knowledge. And it knew that it was not good to walk abroad in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie snug in a hole in the snow and wait for a curtain of cloud to be drawn across the face of outer space whence this cold came. On the other hand, there was no keen intimacy between the dog and the man. The one was the toil-slave of the other, and the only caresses it had ever received were the caresses of the whip-lash and of harsh and menacing throat-sounds that threatened the whip-lash. So the dog made no effort to communicate its apprehension to the man. It was not concerned in the welfare of the man; it was for its own sake that it yearned back toward the fire. But the man whistled, and spoke to it with the sound of whip-lashes, and the dog swung in at the man's heels and followed after.

The man took a chew of tobacco and proceeded to start a new amber beard. Also, his moist breath quickly powdered with white his mustache, eyebrows, and lashes. There did not seem to be so many springs on the left

5. Mining area between the towns of Dawson and Granville.

fork of the Henderson, and for half an hour the man saw no signs of any. And then it happened. At a place where there were no signs, where the soft, unbroken snow seemed to advertise solidity beneath, the man broke through. It was not deep. He wet himself halfway to the knees before he floundered out to the firm crust.

He was angry, and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o'clock, and this would delay him an hour, for he would have to build a fire and dry out his foot-gear. This was imperative at that low temperature—he knew that much; and he turned aside to the bank, which he climbed. On top, tangled in the underbrush about the trunks of several small spruce trees, was a high-water deposit of dry fire-wood—sticks and twigs, principally, but also larger portions of seasoned branches and fine, dry, last-year's grasses. He threw down several large pieces on top of the snow. This served for a foundation and prevented the young flame from drowning itself in the snow it otherwise would melt. The flame he got by touching a match to a small shred of birch-bark that he took from his pocket. This burned even more readily than paper. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with wisps of dry grass and with the tiniest dry twigs.

He worked slowly and carefully, keenly aware of his danger. Gradually, as the flame grew stronger, he increased the size of the twigs with which he fed it. He squatted in the snow, pulling the twigs out from their entanglement in the brush and feeding directly to the flame. He knew there must be no failure. When it is seventy-five below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire—that is, if his feet are wet. If his feet are dry, and he fails, he can run along the trail for half a mile and restore his circulation. But the circulation of wet and freezing feet cannot be restored by running when it is seventy-five below. No matter how fast he runs, the wet feet will freeze the harder.

All this the man knew. The old-timer on Sulphur Creek had told him about it the previous fall, and now he was appreciating the advice. Already all sensation had gone out of his feet. To build the fire he had been forced to remove his mittens, and the fingers had quickly gone numb. His pace of four miles an hour had kept his heart pumping blood to the surface of his body and to all the extremities. But the instant he stopped, the action of the pump eased down. The cold of space smote the unprotected tip of the planet, and he, being on that unprotected tip, received the full force of the blow. The blood of his body recoiled before it. The blood was alive, like the dog, and like the dog it wanted to hide away and cover itself up from the fearful cold. So long as he walked four miles an hour, he pumped that blood, willy-nilly, to the surface; but now it ebbed away and sank down into the recesses of his body. The extremities were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze the faster, and his exposed fingers numbed the faster, though they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and cheeks were already freezing, while the skin of all his body chilled as it lost its blood.

But he was safe. Toes and nose and cheeks would be only touched by the frost, for the fire was beginning to burn with strength. He was feeding it with twigs the size of his finger. In another minute he would be able to feed it with branches the size of his wrist, and then he could remove his wet foot-gear, and, while it dried, he could keep his naked feet warm by the fire, rubbing them at first, of course, with snow. The fire was a success. He was

safe. He remembered the advice of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought. All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his cheeks and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could go lifeless in so short a time. Lifeless they were, for he could scarcely make them move together to grip a twig, and they seemed remote from his body and from him. When he touched a twig, he had to look and see whether or not he had hold of it. The wires were pretty well down between him and his finger-ends.

All of which counted for little. There was the fire, snapping and crackling and promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice; the thick German socks were like sheaths of iron halfway to the knees; and the moccasin strings were like rods of steel all twisted and knotted as by some conflagration. For a moment he tugged with his numb fingers, then, realizing the folly of it, he drew his sheath-knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own fault or, rather, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the spruce tree. He should have built it in the open. But it had been easier to pull the twigs from the brush and drop them directly on the fire. Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its boughs. No wind had blown for weeks, and each bough was fully freighted. Each time he had pulled a twig he had communicated a slight agitation to the tree—an imperceptible agitation, so far as he was concerned, but an agitation sufficient to bring about the disaster. High up in the tree one bough capsized its load of snow. This fell on the boughs beneath, capsizing them. This process continued, spreading out and involving the whole tree. It grew like an avalanche, and it descended without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was blotted out! Where it had burned was a mantle of fresh and disordered snow.

The man was shocked. It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had only had a trail-mate he would have been in no danger now. The trail-mate could have built the fire. Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

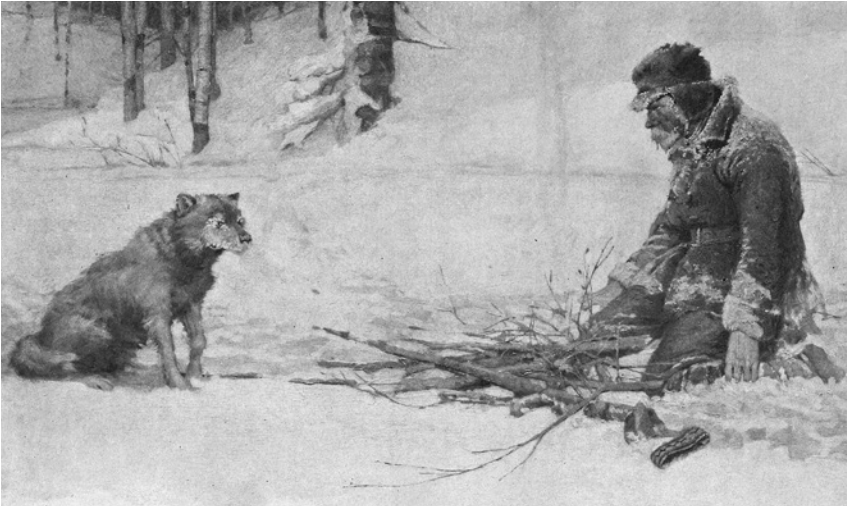
Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind. He made a new foundation for a fire, this time in the open, where no treacherous tree could blot it out. Next, he gathered dry grasses and tiny twigs from the high-water flotsam. He could not bring his fingers together to pull them out, but he was able to gather them by the handful. In this way he got many rotten twigs and bits of green moss that were undesirable, but it was the best he could do. He worked methodically, even collecting an armful of the larger branches to be used later when the fire gathered strength. And all the while the dog sat and watched him, a certain yearning wistfulness in its eyes, for it looked upon him as the fire-provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

When all was ready, the man reached in his pocket for a second piece of birch-bark. He knew the bark was there, and, though he could not feel it with his fingers, he could hear its crisp rustling as he fumbled for it. Try as he would, he could not clutch hold of it. And all the time, in his consciousness, was the knowledge that each instant his feet were freezing. This thought tended to put him in a panic, but he fought against it and kept calm. He pulled on his mittens with his teeth, and threshed his arms back and forth, beating his hands with all his might against his sides. He did this sitting down, and he stood up to do it; and all the while the dog sat in the snow, its wolf-brush of a tail curled around warmly over its forefeet, its sharp wolf-ears pricked forward intently as it watched the man. And the man, as he beat and threshed with his arms and hands, he felt a great surge of envy as he regarded the creature that was warm and secure in its natural covering.

After a time he was aware of the first faraway signals of sensation in his beaten fingers. The faint tingling grew stronger till it evolved into a stinging ache that was excruciating, but which the man hailed with satisfaction. He stripped the mitten from his right hand and fetched forth the birch-bark. The exposed fingers were quickly going numb again. Next he brought out his bunch of sulphur matches. But the tremendous cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole bunch fell in the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor clutch. He was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and cheeks, out of his mind, devoting his whole soul to the matches. He watched, using the sense of vision in place of that of touch, and when he saw his fingers on each side the bunch, he closed them—that is, he willed to close them, for the wires were down, and the fingers did not obey. He pulled the mitten on the right hand, and beat it fiercely against his knee. Then, with both mittened hands, he scooped the bunch of matches, along with much snow, into his lap. Yet he was no better off.

After some manipulation he managed to get the bunch between the heels of his mittened hands. In this fashion he carried it to his mouth. The ice crackled and snapped when by a violent effort he opened his mouth. He drew the lower jaw in, curled the upper lip out of the way, and scraped the bunch with his upper teeth in order to separate a match. He succeeded in getting one, which he dropped on his lap. He was no better off. He could not pick it up. Then he devised a way. He picked it up in his teeth and scratched it on his leg. Twenty times he scratched before he succeeded in lighting it. As it flamed he held it with his teeth to the birch-bark. But the burning brimstone went up his nostrils and into his lungs, causing him to cough spasmodically. The match fell into the snow and went out.

The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that ensued: after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner. He beat his hands, but failed in exciting any sensation. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the mittens with his teeth. He caught the whole bunch between the heels of his hands. His arm-muscles not being frozen enabled him to press the hand-heels tightly against the matches. Then he scratched the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes, and held the blazing bunch to the



“As he looked apathetically about him, his eyes chanced on the dog.” Illustration by Frank E. Schoonover for the publication of “To Build a Fire” in *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, October 1908.

birch-bark. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.

At last, when he could endure no more, he jerked his hands apart. The blazing matches fell sizzling into the snow, but the birch-bark was alight. He began laying dry grasses and the tiniest twigs on the flame. He could not pick and choose, for he had to lift the fuel between the heels of his hands. Small pieces of rotten wood and green moss clung to the twigs, and he bit them off as well as he could with his teeth. He cherished the flame carefully and awkwardly. It meant life, and it must not perish. The withdrawal of blood from the surface of his body now made him begin to shiver, and he grew more awkward. A large piece of green moss fell squarely on the little fire. He tried to poke it out with his fingers, but his shivering frame made him poke too far, and he disrupted the nucleus of the little fire, the burning grasses and tiny twigs separating and scattering. He tried to poke them together again, but in spite of the tenseness of the effort, his shivering got away with him, and the twigs were hopelessly scattered. Each twig gushed a puff of smoke and went out. The fire-provider had failed. As he looked apathetically about him, his eyes chanced on the dog, sitting across the ruins of the fire from him, in the snow, making restless, hunching movements, slightly lifting one forefoot and then the other, shifting its weight back and forth on them with wistful eagerness.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the tale of the man, caught in a blizzard, who killed a steer and crawled inside the carcass, and so was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in

the warm body until the numbness went out of them. Then he could build another fire. He spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal, who had never known the man to speak in such way before. Something was the matter, and its suspicious nature sensed danger—it knew not what danger, but somewhere, somehow, in its brain arose an apprehension of the man. It flattened its ears down at the sound of the man's voice, and its restless, hunching movements and the liftings and shiftings of its forefeet became more pronounced; but it would not come to the man. He got on his hands and knees and crawled toward the dog. This unusual posture again excited suspicion, and the animal sidled mincingly away.

The man sat up in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, by means of his teeth, and got upon his feet. He glanced down at first in order to assure himself that he was really standing up, for the absence of sensation in his feet left him unrelated to the earth. His erect position in itself started to drive the webs of suspicion from the dog's mind; and when he spoke peremptorily, with the sound of whip-lashes in his voice, the dog rendered its customary allegiance and came to him. As it came within reaching distance, the man lost his control. His arms flashed out to the dog, and he experienced genuine surprise when he discovered that his hands could not clutch, that there was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly, and before the animal could get away, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it snarled and whined and struggled.

But it was all he could do, hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath-knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling. It halted forty feet away and surveyed him curiously, with ears sharply pricked forward. The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them, and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were. He began thrashing his arms back and forth, beating the mittened hands against his sides. He did this for five minutes, violently, and his heart pumped enough blood up to the surface to put a stop to his shivering. But no sensation was aroused in the hands. He had an impression that they hung like weights on the ends of his arms, but when he tried to run the impression down, he could not find it.

A certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him. This fear quickly became poignant as he realized that it was no longer a mere matter of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet, but that it was a matter of life and death with the chances against him. This threw him into a panic, and he turned and ran up the creek-bed along the old, dim trail. The dog joined in behind and kept up with him. He ran blindly, without intention, in fear such as he had never known in his life. Slowly, as he ploughed and floundered through the snow, he began to see things again—the banks of the creek, the old timber-jams, the leafless aspens, and the sky. The running made him feel better. He did not shiver. Maybe, if he ran on,

his feet would thaw out; and, anyway, if he ran far enough, he would reach camp and the boys. Without doubt he would lose some fingers and toes and some of his face; but the boys would take care of him, and save the rest of him when he got there. And at the same time there was another thought in his mind that said he would never get to the camp and the boys; that it was too many miles away, that the freezing had too great a start on him, and that he would soon be stiff and dead. This thought he kept in the background and refused to consider. Sometimes it pushed itself forward and demanded to be heard, but he thrust it back and strove to think of other things.

It struck him as curious that he could run at all on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to himself to skim along above the surface, and to have no connection with the earth. Somewhere he had once seen a winged Mercury⁶ and he wondered if Mercury felt as he felt when skimming over the earth.

His theory of running until he reached camp and the boys had one flaw in it: he lacked the endurance. Several times he stumbled, and finally he tottered, crumpled up, and fell. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided, and next time he would merely walk and keep on going. As he sat and regained his breath, he noted that he was feeling quite warm and comfortable. He was not shivering, and it even seemed that a warm glow had come to his chest and trunk. And yet, when he touched his nose or cheeks, there was no sensation. Running would not thaw them out. Nor would it thaw out his hands and feet. Then the thought came to him that the frozen portions of his body must be extending. He tried to keep this thought down, to forget it, to think of something else; he was aware of the panicky feeling that it caused, and he was afraid of the panic. But the thought asserted itself, and persisted, until it produced a vision of his body totally frozen. This was too much, and he made another wild run along the trail. Once he slowed down to a walk, but the thought of the freezing extending itself made him run again.

And all the time the dog ran with him, at his heels. When he fell down a second time, it curled its tail over its forefeet and sat in front of him, facing him, curiously eager and intent. The warmth and security of the animal angered him, and he cursed it till it flattened down its ears appeasingly. This time the shivering came more quickly upon the man. He was losing in his battle with the frost. It was creeping into his body from all sides. The thought of it drove him on, but he ran no more than a hundred feet, when he staggered and pitched headlong. It was his last panic. When he had recovered his breath and control, he sat up and entertained in his mind the conception of meeting death with dignity. However, the conception did not come to him in such terms. His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself, running around like a chicken with its head cut off—such was the simile that occurred to him. Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anaesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.

6. Mercury is the Roman god of messengers, thieves, and storytellers; he flew between heaven and earth wearing winged sandals. He is also the

god of healing and the courier of souls to the Underworld.

He pictured the boys finding his body next day. Suddenly he found himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself any more, for even then he was out of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow. It certainly was cold, was his thought. When he got back to the States he could tell the folks what real cold was. He drifted on from this to a vision of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek. He could see him quite clearly, warm and comfortable, and smoking a pipe.

“You were right, old hoss; you were right,” the man mumbled to the old-timer of Sulphur Creek.

Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day drew to a close in a long, slow twilight. There were no signs of a fire to be made, and, besides, never in the dog’s experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the twilight drew on, its eager yearning for the fire mastered it, and with a great lifting and shifting of forefeet, it whined softly, then flattened its ears down in anticipation of being chidden by the man. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers.

1902, 1908

ZITKALA-ŠA (GERTRUDE SIMMONS BONNIN) 1876–1938

Gertrude Simmons was born in 1876 on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. Her mother was Tate Iyohi Win, or “Reaches the Wind Woman,” otherwise known as Ellen Simmons, and her father was probably a white man named Felker who left his wife before the child’s birth. Her mother later married another white man, John H. Simmons, whose surname was given to the child. Gertrude Simmons today is usually referred to as Zitkala-Ša (pronounced *sha*), or Red Bird, a name she chose for herself. Zitkala-Ša was an influential Native American writer, orator, and debater; a singer, pianist, and violinist;—and an activist on behalf of women’s and Native American rights.

The year of Zitkala-Ša’s birth, 1876, was the year in which George Armstrong Custer’s Seventh Cavalry was defeated by a coalition of Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne warriors on the Little Bighorn River in Montana, after which the federal government finally drove both tribes onto reservations. In 1890, the U.S. Department of the Census declared the closing of the frontier, meaning that no more “free land” remained

open for settlement; the United States had achieved its “manifest destiny,” extending its dominion from “sea to shining sea.” As an adult, then, Zitkala-Ša lived in what has been called the “transitional” period in Native American history, a difficult time for Indian peoples, when the U.S. government pursued an official policy of “detrribalization” and land-hungry whites sought access to tribal domains.

At the age of eight, Zitkala-Ša declared her intention to learn the white man’s ways—or, as she puts it in her autobiographical “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” (1900), she wanted to taste the “big red apples” missionaries promised Indian children if they would attend boarding school. She began her schooling at White’s Manual Institute, a Quaker school in Indiana. As her autobiography details it, her introduction to “civilization” subjected her and the other Indian children to having their long hair cut, to having the clothing in which they had arrived discarded, and, perhaps most painful, to being forbidden from speaking their Native languages. As Richard Henry Pratt, the headmaster of the Carlisle Indian Institute, put it, this form of education was intended to “Kill the Indian and save the man.” Zitkala-Ša was intimately familiar with this precept and the human costs that it extracted from students and their families.

From White’s Manual Institute, Zitkala-Ša went on to Earlham College, also in Indiana, where she began to demonstrate a wide range of talents. In the last section of “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” she tells of her appearance as the representative of the college in 1896 at a statewide oratorical competition, where some “rowdies,” as she puts it, “threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it,” along with, “in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a ‘squaw.’” This slight was somewhat assuaged by her winning second prize overall.

The following year, Zitkala-Ša became “the latest addition to our force of workers,” as the Carlisle Institute’s publication, the *Indian Helper*, announced in its July 1897 number. At Carlisle, Zitkala-Ša led the glee club, played the piano and violin, and became engaged to Thomas Marshall, a Sioux from the Pine Ridge Agency, a devout Christian convert, “without a peer among our students,” who died suddenly from an undiagnosed illness. Soon after Marshall’s death, Zitkala-Ša began to publish autobiography and fiction. (She also wrote poetry.) In addition to publications that catered to those interested in Indian education, her writing appeared in magazines such as *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s*. Her first book, *Old Indian Legends*, was published in 1901, and a chapter of this book of traditional stories is included in the “Voices from Native America” section elsewhere in this volume. Zitkala-Ša’s other writings did not appear in book form until 1921, with the publication of her autobiographical *American Indian Stories*. Her writing introduced a wide readership to the difficulty that American Indians faced in negotiating the pressures of religious conversion and cultural assimilation. Indeed, many of the concerns that she raises echo the writing of turn-of-the-century immigrants from Europe and Asia, even though as a Native of North America, Zitkala-Ša never voluntarily migrated to a new country. Zitkala-Ša’s writing also generated controversy. Her story “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” (1901), in which the protagonist’s Christianity and “civilization” have unfitted him for any relation to his traditional parents, was pronounced “morally bad” on the front page of the Carlisle Institute newspaper.

In May 1902, Zitkala-Ša married Raymond Bonnin, also a Yankton Sioux, and an employee of the U.S. Indian Service (later the Bureau of Indian Affairs). Although she would occasionally publish stories and poems thereafter, and wrote the libretto for an opera, *Sun Dance*, the bulk of Zitkala-Ša’s writing over the second half of her life derived from her active engagement in Indian affairs. After years of work on the Uintah Ouray Ute Agency in Utah, the family moved to Washington, D.C., in 1916 so that Zitkala-Ša could take up her elected position as secretary of the Society of the American Indian (SAI), an organization dedicated to improving the condition of Native people. When the SAI broke up in 1920, Zitkala-Ša began working with the



Carlisle School: “Before” and “After.” The Carlisle Indian School produced a considerable number of “before” and “after” photos, representing the difference in appearance between new Indian arrivals to the school and its graduates. Zitkala-Ša came to teach at Carlisle in 1897, at the age of only twenty-one, and she might have known some of these graduates, photographed the year of her arrival—several of whom were older than she was.

General Federation of Women's Clubs, which established an Indian Welfare Committee in 1921 at her urging. One of the committee's achievements was an inquiry into the treatment of some of the tribes in Oklahoma, which led to the publication, in 1924, of a study of the graft, corruption, and exploitation of the tribes and which spurred the formation under President Hoover of the Merriam Commission in 1928 to study these matters. In 1926, Zitkala-Ša had founded her own organization, the National Council of American Indians, of which she was president, with her husband serving as counselor general, secretary-treasurer, and executive secretary.

Zitkala-Ša's writing reveals the complex pressures that American Indian intellectuals faced at the turn of the twentieth century. Even as many Americans expressed a deep fascination with Native American stories, ceremonies, and artwork, the policies of the U.S. government and several other institutions aimed to dispossess tribal peoples of their communally held land, their indigenous languages, and many of their cultural practices. The success of Zitkala-Ša as both an author and an activist offers a remarkable example of how one woman navigated this challenging terrain.

*From Impressions of an Indian Childhood*¹

I. My Mother

A wigwam of weather-stained canvas stood at the base of some irregularly ascending hills. A footpath wound its way gently down the sloping land till it reached the broad river bottom; creeping through the long swamp grasses that bent over it on either side, it came out on the edge of the Missouri.

Here, morning, noon, and evening, my mother came to draw water from the muddy stream for our household use. Always, when my mother started for the river, I stopped my play to run along with her. She was only of medium height. Often she was sad and silent, at which times her full arched lips were compressed into hard and bitter lines, and shadows fell under her black eyes. Then I clung to her hand and begged to know what made the tears fall.

"Hush; my little daughter must never talk about my tears"; and smiling through them, she patted my head and said, "Now let me see how fast you can run to-day." Whereupon I tore away at my highest possible speed, with my long black hair blowing in the breeze.

I was a wild little girl of seven. Loosely clad in a slip of brown buckskin, and light-footed with a pair of soft moccasins on my feet, I was as free as the wind that blew my hair, and no less spirited than a bounding deer. These were my mother's pride,—my wild freedom and overflowing spirits. She taught me no fear save that of intruding myself upon others.

Having gone many paces ahead I stopped, panting for breath, and laughing with glee as my mother watched my every movement. I was not wholly conscious of myself, but was more keenly alive to the fire within. It was as if I were the activity, and my hands and feet were only experiments for my spirit to work upon.

Returning from the river, I tugged beside my mother, with my hand upon the bucket I believed I was carrying. One time, on such a return, I remember a bit of conversation we had. My grown-up cousin, Warca-Ziwin (Sunflower), who was then seventeen, always went to the river alone for water for

1. "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January 1900, the source of the text printed here. It was later included in *American Indian Stories* (1921).

her mother. Their wigwam was not far from ours; and I saw her daily going to and from the river. I admired my cousin greatly. So I said: "Mother, when I am tall as my cousin Warca-Ziwin, you shall not have to come for water. I will do it for you."

With a strange tremor in her voice which I could not understand, she answered, "If the paleface does not take away from us the river we drink."

"Mother, who is this bad paleface?" I asked.

"My little daughter, he is a sham,—a sickly sham! The bronzed Dakota is the only real man."

I looked up into my mother's face while she spoke; and seeing her bite her lips, I knew she was unhappy. This aroused revenge in my small soul. Stamping my foot on the earth, I cried aloud, "I hate the paleface that makes my mother cry!"

Setting the pail of water on the ground, my mother stooped, and stretching her left hand out on the level with my eyes, she placed her other arm about me; she pointed to the hill where my uncle and my only sister lay buried.

"There is what the paleface has done! Since then your father too has been buried in a hill nearer the rising sun. We were once very happy. But the paleface has stolen our lands and driven us hither. Having defrauded us of our land, the paleface forced us away.

"Well, it happened on the day we moved camp that your sister and uncle were both very sick. Many others were ailing, but there seemed to be no help. We traveled many days and nights; not in the grand happy way that we moved camp when I was a little girl, but we were driven, my child, driven like a herd of buffalo. With every step, your sister, who was not as large as you are now, shrieked with the painful jar until she was hoarse with crying. She grew more and more feverish. Her little hands and cheeks were burning hot. Her little lips were parched and dry, but she would not drink the water I gave her. Then I discovered that her throat was swollen and red. My poor child, how I cried with her because the Great Spirit had forgotten us!

"At last, when we reached this western country, on the first weary night your sister died. And soon your uncle died also, leaving a widow and an orphan daughter, your cousin Warca-Ziwin. Both your sister and uncle might have been happy with us to-day, had it not been for the heartless paleface."

My mother was silent the rest of the way to our wigwam. Though I saw no tears in her eyes, I knew that was because I was with her. She seldom wept before me.

II. The Legends

During the summer days, my mother built her fire in the shadow of our wigwam.

In the early morning our simple breakfast was spread upon the grass west of our tepee. At the farthest point of the shade my mother sat beside her fire, toasting a savory piece of dried meat. Near her, I sat upon my feet, eating my dried meat with unleavened bread, and drinking strong black coffee.

The morning meal was our quiet hour, when we two were entirely alone. At noon, several who chanced to be passing by stopped to rest, and to share our luncheon with us, for they were sure of our hospitality.

My uncle, whose death my mother ever lamented, was one of our nation's bravest warriors. His name was on the lips of old men when talking of the proud feats of valor; and it was mentioned by younger men, too, in connection with deeds of gallantry. Old women praised him for his kindness toward them; young women held him up as an ideal to their sweethearts. Every one loved him, and my mother worshiped his memory. Thus it happened that even strangers were sure of welcome in our lodge, if they but asked a favor in my uncle's name.

Though I heard many strange experiences related by these wayfarers, I loved best the evening meal, for that was the time old legends were told. I was always glad when the sun hung low in the west, for then my mother sent me to invite the neighboring old men and women to eat supper with us. Running all the way to the wigwams, I halted shyly at the entrances. Sometimes I stood long moments without saying a word. It was not any fear that made me so dumb when out upon such a happy errand; nor was it that I wished to withhold the invitation, for it was all I could do to observe this very proper silence. But it was a sensing of the atmosphere, to assure myself that I should not hinder other plans. My mother used to say to me, as I was almost bounding away for the old people: "Wait a moment before you invite any one. If other plans are being discussed, do not interfere, but go elsewhere."

The old folks knew the meaning of my pauses; and often they coaxed my confidence by asking, "What do you seek, little granddaughter?"

"My mother says you are to come to our tepee this evening," I instantly exploded, and breathed the freer afterwards.

"Yes, yes, gladly, gladly I shall come!" each replied. Rising at once and carrying their blankets across one shoulder, they flocked leisurely from their various wigwams toward our dwelling.

My mission done, I ran back, skipping and jumping with delight. All out of breath, I told my mother almost the exact words of the answers to my invitation. Frequently she asked, "What were they doing when you entered their tepee?" This taught me to remember all I saw at a single glance. Often I told my mother my impressions without being questioned.

While in the neighboring wigwams sometimes an old Indian woman asked me, "What is your mother doing?" Unless my mother had cautioned me not to tell, I generally answered her questions without reserve.

At the arrival of our guests I sat close to my mother, and did not leave her side without first asking her consent. I ate my supper in quiet, listening patiently to the talk of the old people, wishing all the time that they would begin the stories I loved best. At last, when I could not wait any longer, I whispered in my mother's ear, "Ask them to tell an Iktomi story,² mother."

Soothing my impatience, my mother said aloud, "My little daughter is anxious to hear your legends." By this time all were through eating, and the evening was fast deepening into twilight.

As each in turn began to tell a legend, I pillowed my head in my mother's lap; and lying flat upon my back, I watched the stars as they peeped down upon me, one by one. The increasing interest of the tale aroused me, and I sat up eagerly listening for every word. The old women made funny remarks, and laughed so heartily that I could not help joining them.

2. A story about the Sioux trickster.

The distant howling of a pack of wolves or the hooting of an owl in the river bottom frightened me, and I nestled into my mother's lap. She added some dry sticks to the fire, and the bright flames heaped up into the faces of the old folks as they sat around in a great circle.

On such an evening, I remember the glare of the fire shone on a tattooed star upon the brow of the old warrior who was telling a story. I watched him curiously as he made his unconscious gestures. The blue star upon his bronzed forehead was a puzzle to me. Looking about, I saw two parallel lines on the chin of one of the old women. The rest had none. I examined my mother's face, but found no sign there.

After the warrior's story was finished, I asked the old woman the meaning of the blue lines on her chin, looking all the while out of the corners of my eyes at the warrior with the star on his forehead. I was a little afraid that he would rebuke me for my boldness.

Here the old woman began: "Why, my grandchild, they are signs,—secret signs I dare not tell you. I shall, however, tell you a wonderful story about a woman who had a cross tattooed upon each of her cheeks."

It was a long story of a woman whose magic power lay hidden behind the marks upon her face. I fell asleep before the story was completed.

Ever after that night I felt suspicious of tattooed people. Wherever I saw one I glanced furtively at the mark and round about it, wondering what terrible magic power was covered there.

It was rarely that such a fearful story as this one was told by the camp fire. Its impression was so acute that the picture still remains vividly clear and pronounced.

* * *

VII. The Big Red Apples

The first turning away from the easy, natural flow of my life occurred in an early spring. It was in my eighth year; in the month of March, I afterward learned. At this age I knew but one language, and that was my mother's native tongue.

From some of my playmates I heard that two paleface missionaries were in our village. They were from that class of white men who wore big hats and carried large hearts, they said. Running direct to my mother, I began to question her why these two strangers were among us. She told me, after I had teased much, that they had come to take away Indian boys and girls to the East. My mother did not seem to want me to talk about them. But in a day or two, I gleaned many wonderful stories from my playfellows concerning the strangers.

"Mother, my friend Judéwin is going home with the missionaries. She is going to a more beautiful country than ours; the palefaces told her so!" I said wistfully, wishing in my heart that I too might go.

Mother sat in a chair, and I was hanging on her knee. Within the last two seasons my big brother Dawée had returned from a three years' education in the East, and his coming back influenced my mother to take a farther step from her native way of living. First it was a change from the buffalo

skin to the white man's canvas that covered our wigwam. Now she had given up her wigwam of slender poles, to live, a foreigner, in a home of clumsy logs.

"Yes, my child, several others besides Judéwin are going away with the palefaces. Your brother said the missionaries had inquired about his little sister," she said, watching my face very closely.

My heart thumped so hard against my breast, I wondered if she could hear it.

"Did he tell them to take me, mother?" I asked, fearing lest Dawée had forbidden the palefaces to see me, and that my hope of going to the Wonderland would be entirely blighted.

With a sad, slow smile, she answered: "There! I knew you were wishing to go, because Judéwin has filled your ears with the white men's lies. Don't believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter. You will cry for me, but they will not even soothe you. Stay with me, my little one! Your brother Dawée says that going East, away from your mother, is too hard an experience for his baby sister."

Thus my mother discouraged my curiosity about the lands beyond our eastern horizon; for it was not yet an ambition for Letters that was stirring me. But on the following day the missionaries did come to our very house. I spied them coming up the footpath leading to our cottage. A third man was with them, but he was not my brother Dawée. It was another, a young interpreter, a paleface who had a smattering of the Indian language. I was ready to run out to meet them, but I did not dare to displease my mother. With great glee, I jumped up and down on our ground floor. I begged my mother to open the door, that they would be sure to come to us. Alas! They came, they saw, and they conquered!

Judéwin had told me of the great tree where grew red, red apples; and how we could reach out our hands and pick all the red apples we could eat. I had never seen apple trees. I had never tasted more than a dozen red apples in my life; and when I heard of the orchards of the East, I was eager to roam among them. The missionaries smiled into my eyes, and patted my head. I wondered how mother could say such hard words against them.

"Mother, ask them if little girls may have all the red apples they want, when they go East," I whispered aloud, in my excitement.

The interpreter heard me, and answered: "Yes, little girl, the nice red apples are for those who pick them; and you will have a ride on the iron horse if you go with these good people."

I had never seen a train, and he knew it.

"Mother, I'm going East! I like big red apples, and I want to ride on the iron horse! Mother, say yes!" I pleaded.

My mother said nothing. The missionaries waited in silence; and my eyes began to blur with tears, though I struggled to choke them back. The corners of my mouth twitched, and my mother saw me.

"I am not ready to give you any word," she said to them. "To-morrow I shall send you my answer by my son."

With this they left us. Alone with my mother, I yielded to my tears, and cried aloud, shaking my head so as not to hear what she was saying to me. This was the first time I had ever been so unwilling to give up my own desire that I refused to hearken to my mother's voice.

There was a solemn silence in our home that night. Before I went to bed I begged the Great Spirit to make my mother willing I should go with the missionaries.

The next morning came, and my mother called me to her side. "My daughter, do you still persist in wishing to leave your mother?" she asked.

"Oh, mother, it is not that I wish to leave you, but I want to see the wonderful Eastern land," I answered.

My dear old aunt came to our house that morning, and I heard her say, "Let her try it."

I hoped that, as usual, my aunt was pleading on my side. My brother Dawée came for mother's decision. I dropped my play, and crept close to my aunt.

"Yes, Dawée, my daughter, though she does not understand what it all means, is anxious to go. She will need an education when she is grown, for then there will be fewer real Dakotas, and many more palefaces. This tearing her away, so young, from her mother is necessary, if I would have her an educated woman. The palefaces, who owe us a large debt for stolen lands, have begun to pay a tardy justice in offering some education to our children. But I know my daughter must suffer keenly in this experiment. For her sake, I dread to tell you my reply to the missionaries. Go, tell them that they may take my little daughter, and that the Great Spirit shall not fail to reward them according to their hearts."

Wrapped in my heavy blanket, I walked with my mother to the carriage that was soon to take us to the iron horse. I was happy. I met my playmates, who were also wearing their best thick blankets. We showed one another our new beaded moccasins, and the width of the belts that girdled our new dresses. Soon we were being drawn rapidly away by the white man's horses. When I saw the lonely figure of my mother vanish in the distance, a sense of regret settled heavily upon me. I felt suddenly weak, as if I might fall limp to the ground. I was in the hands of strangers whom my mother did not fully trust. I no longer felt free to be myself, or to voice my own feelings. The tears trickled down my cheeks, and I buried my face in the folds of my blanket. Now the first step, parting me from my mother, was taken, and all my belated tears availed nothing.

Having driven thirty miles to the ferryboat, we crossed the Missouri in the evening. Then riding again a few miles eastward, we stopped before a massive brick building. I looked at it in amazement, and with a vague misgiving, for in our village I had never seen so large a house. Trembling with fear and distrust of the palefaces, my teeth chattering from the chilly ride, I crept noiselessly in my soft moccasins along the narrow hall, keeping very close to the bare wall. I was as frightened and bewildered as the captured young of a wild creature.

*From The School Days of an Indian Girl*¹

I. The Land of Red Apples

There were eight in our party of bronzed children who were going East with the missionaries. Among us were three young braves, two tall girls, and we three little ones, Judéwin, Thowin, and I.

We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country, which, we were told, lay a little beyond the great circular horizon of the Western prairie. Under a sky of rosy apples we dreamt of roaming as freely and happily as we had chased the cloud shadows on the Dakota plains. We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us.

On the train, fair women, with tottering babies on each arm, stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers. Large men, with heavy bundles in their hands, halted near by, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us.

I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears.

I sat perfectly still, with my eyes downcast, daring only now and then to shoot long glances around me. Chancing to turn to the window at my side, I was quite breathless upon seeing one familiar object. It was the telegraph pole which strode by at short paces. Very near my mother's dwelling, along the edge of a road thickly bordered with wild sunflowers, some poles like these had been planted by white men. Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it. Now I sat watching for each pole that glided by to be the last one.

In this way I had forgotten my uncomfortable surroundings, when I heard one of my comrades call out my name. I saw the missionary standing very near, tossing candies and gums into our midst. This amused us all, and we tried to see who could catch the most of the sweetmeats. The missionary's generous distribution of candies was impressed upon my memory by a disastrous result which followed. I had caught more than my share of candies and gums, and soon after our arrival at the school I had a chance to disgrace myself, which, I am ashamed to say, I did.

Though we rode several days inside of the iron horse, I do not recall a single thing about our luncheons.

It was night when we reached the school grounds. The lights from the windows of the large buildings fell upon some of the icicled trees that stood beneath them. We were led toward an open door, where the brightness of the lights within flooded out over the heads of the excited palefaces who

1. "The School Days of an Indian Girl" first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1900, the source of the text printed here. It was later included in *American Indian Stories* (1921).

blocked the way. My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon.

Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair. A rosy-cheeked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud.

They misunderstood the cause of my tears, and placed me at a white table loaded with food. There our party were united again. As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, "Wait until you are alone in the night."

It was very little I could swallow besides my sobs, that evening.

"Oh, I want my mother and my brother Dawée! I want to go to my aunt!" I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me.

From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes, which I learned afterward to call a stairway. At the top was a quiet hall, dimly lighted. Many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall. In them lay sleeping brown faces, which peeped just out of the coverings. I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me.

I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I had thought I should be. My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.

II. The Cutting of My Long Hair

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled² hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they

2. Bobbed, cut short.

were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt.

A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I heard a man's voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judéwin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong," I rebelled.

"No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!" I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed I disappeared. I crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps near by. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my name, and I knew that even Judéwin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Women and girls entered the room. I held my breath, and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Some one threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a

coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.

* * *

V. Iron Routine

A loud-clamoring bell awakened us at half past six in the cold winter mornings. From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day. We had short time to jump into our shoes and clothes, and wet our eyes with icy water, before a small hand bell was vigorously rung for roll call.

There were too many drowsy children and too numerous orders for the day to waste a moment in any apology to nature for giving her children such a shock in the early morning. We rushed downstairs, bounding over two high steps at a time, to land in the assembly room.

A paleface woman, with a yellow-covered roll book open on her arm and a gnawed pencil in her hand, appeared at the door. Her small, tired face was coldly lighted with a pair of large gray eyes.

She stood still in a halo of authority, while over the rim of her spectacles her eyes pried nervously about the room. Having glanced at her long list of names and called out the first one, she tossed up her chin and peered through the crystals of her spectacles to make sure of the answer "Here."

Relentlessly her pencil black-marked our daily records if we were not present to respond to our names, and no chum of ours had done it successfully for us. No matter if a dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption³ had delayed the absentee, there was only time enough to mark the tardiness. It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day's harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute.

Once I lost a dear classmate. I remember well how she used to mope along at my side, until one morning she could not raise her head from her pillow. At her deathbed I stood weeping, as the paleface woman sat near her moistening the dry lips. Among the folds of the bedclothes I saw the open pages of the white man's Bible. The dying Indian girl talked disconnectedly of Jesus the Christ and the paleface who was cooling her swollen hands and feet.

I grew bitter, and censured the woman for cruel neglect of our physical ills. I despised the pencils that moved automatically, and the one teaspoon which dealt out, from a large bottle, healing to a row of variously ailing Indian children. I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her superstitious ideas. Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman. Within a week I was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy for burial.

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above

3. Tuberculosis.

those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.

VI. Four Strange Summers

After my first three years of school, I roamed again in the Western country through four strange summers.

During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid. My brother, being almost ten years my senior, did not quite understand my feelings. My mother had never gone inside of a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting her daughter who could read and write. Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory "teenth" in a girl's years.

It was under these trying conditions that, one bright afternoon, as I sat restless and unhappy in my mother's cabin, I caught the sound of the spirited step of my brother's pony on the road which passed by our dwelling. Soon I heard the wheels of a light buckboard, and Dawée's familiar "Ho!" to his pony. He lighted upon the bare ground in front of our house. Tying his pony to one of the projecting corner logs of the low-roofed cottage, he stepped upon the wooden doorstep.

I met him there with a hurried greeting, and, as I passed by, he looked a quiet "What?" into my eyes.

When he began talking with my mother, I slipped the rope from the pony's bridle. Seizing the reins and bracing my feet against the dashboard, I wheeled around in an instant. The pony was ever ready to try his speed. Looking backward, I saw Dawée waving his hand to me. I turned with the curve in the road and disappeared. I followed the winding road which crawled upward between the bases of little hillocks. Deep water-worn ditches ran parallel on either side. A strong wind blew against my cheeks and fluttered my sleeves. The pony reached the top of the highest hill, and began an even race on the level lands. There was nothing moving within that great circular horizon of the Dakota prairies save the tall grasses, over which the wind blew and rolled off in long, shadowy waves.

Within this vast wigwam of blue and green I rode reckless and insignificant. It satisfied my small consciousness to see the white foam fly from the pony's mouth.

Suddenly, out of the earth a coyote came forth at a swinging trot that was taking the cunning thief toward the hills and the village beyond. Upon the moment's impulse, I gave him a long chase and a wholesome fright. As I turned away to go back to the village, the wolf sank down upon his haunches for rest, for it was a hot summer day; and as I drove slowly homeward, I saw his sharp nose pointed at me, until I vanished below the margin of the hilltops.

In a little while I came in sight of my mother's house. Dawée stood in the yard, laughing at an old warrior who was pointing his forefinger, and again

waving his whole hand, toward the hills. With his blanket drawn over one shoulder, he talked and motioned excitedly. Dawée turned the old man by the shoulder and pointed me out to him.

“Oh han!” (Oh yes) the warrior muttered, and went his way. He had climbed the top of his favorite barren hill to survey the surrounding prairies, when he spied my chase after the coyote. His keen eyes recognized the pony and driver. At once uneasy for my safety, he had come running to my mother’s cabin to give her warning. I did not appreciate his kindly interest, for there was an unrest gnawing at my heart.

As soon as he went away, I asked Dawée about something else.

“No, my baby sister, I cannot take you with me to the party to-night,” he replied. Though I was not far from fifteen, and I felt that before long I should enjoy all the privileges of my tall cousin, Dawée persisted in calling me his baby sister.

That moonlight night, I cried in my mother’s presence when I heard the jolly young people pass by our cottage. They were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor Indian maids with prettily painted cheeks. They had gone three years to school in the East, and had become civilized. The young men wore the white man’s coat and trousers, with bright neckties. The girls wore tight muslin dresses; with ribbons at neck and waist. At these gatherings they talked English. I could speak English almost as well as my brother, but I was not properly dressed to be taken along. I had no hat, no ribbons, and no close-fitting gown. Since my return from school I had thrown away my shoes, and wore again the soft moccasins.

While Dawée was busily preparing to go I controlled my tears. But when I heard him bounding away on his pony, I buried my face in my arms and cried hot tears.

My mother was troubled by my unhappiness. Coming to my side, she offered me the only printed matter we had in our home. It was an Indian Bible, given her some years ago by a missionary. She tried to console me. “Here, my child, are the white man’s papers. Read a little from them,” she said most piously.

I took it from her hand, for her sake; but my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother. I did not read it, but laid it unopened on the floor, where I sat on my feet. The dim yellow light of the braided muslin burning in a small vessel of oil flickered and sizzled in the awful silent storm which followed my rejection of the Bible.

Now my wrath against the fates consumed my tears before they reached my eyes. I sat stony, with a bowed head. My mother threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and stepped out into the night.

After an uncertain solitude, I was suddenly aroused by a loud cry piercing the night. It was my mother’s voice wailing among the barren hills which held the bones of buried warriors. She called aloud for her brothers’ spirits to support her in her helpless misery. My fingers grew icy cold, as I realized that my unrestrained tears had betrayed my suffering to her, and she was grieving for me.

Before she returned, though I knew she was on her way, for she had ceased her weeping, I extinguished the light, and leaned my head on the window sill.

Many schemes of running away from my surroundings hovered about in my mind. A few more moons of such a turmoil drove me away to the Eastern school. I rode on the white man's iron steed, thinking it would bring me back to my mother in a few winters, when I should be grown tall, and there would be congenial friends awaiting me.

VII. *Incurring My Mother's Displeasure*

In the second journey to the East I had not come without some precautions. I had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then, before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck.

At the close of this second term of three years I was the proud owner of my first diploma. The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will.

I had written for her approval, but in her reply I found no encouragement. She called my notice to her neighbors' children, who had completed their education in three years. They had returned to their homes, and were then talking English with the frontier settlers. Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience.

Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.

As I hid myself in my little room in the college dormitory, away from the scornful and yet curious eyes of the students, I pined for sympathy. Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone West, to be nourished by my mother's love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice.

During the fall and winter seasons I scarcely had a real friend, though by that time several of my classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance.

My mother had not yet forgiven my rudeness to her, and I had no moment for letter-writing. By daylight and lamplight, I spun with reeds and thistles, until my hands were tired from their weaving, the magic design which promised me the white man's respect.

At length, in the spring term, I entered an oratorical contest among the various classes. As the day of competition approached, it did not seem possible that the event was so near at hand, but it came. In the chapel the classes assembled together, with their invited guests. The high platform was carpeted, and gayly festooned with college colors. A bright white light illumined the room, and outlined clearly the great polished beams that arched the domed ceiling. The assembled crowds filled the air with pulsating murmurs. When the hour for speaking arrived all were hushed. But on the wall the old clock which pointed out the trying moment ticked calmly on.

One after another I saw and heard the orators. Still, I could not realize that they longed for the favorable decision of the judges as much as I did. Each contestant received a loud burst of applause, and some were cheered

heartily. Too soon my turn came, and I paused a moment behind the curtains for a deep breath. After my concluding words, I heard the same applause that the others had called out.

Upon my retreating steps, I was astounded to receive from my fellow students a large bouquet of roses tied with flowing ribbons. With the lovely flowers I fled from the stage. This friendly token was a rebuke to me for the hard feelings I had borne them.

Later, the decision of the judges awarded me the first place. Then there was a mad uproar in the hall, where my classmates sang and shouted my name at the top of their lungs; and the disappointed students howled and brayed in fearfully dissonant tin trumpets. In this excitement, happy students rushed forward to offer their congratulations. And I could not conceal a smile when they wished to escort me in a procession to the students' parlor, where all were going to calm themselves. Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room.

A few weeks afterward, I appeared as the college representative in another contest. This time the competition was among orators from different colleges in our state. It was held at the state capital, in one of the largest opera houses.

Here again was a strong prejudice against my people. In the evening, as the great audience filled the house, the student bodies began warring among themselves. Fortunately, I was spared witnessing any of the noisy wrangling before the contest began. The slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a dry fever within my breast.

But after the orations were delivered a deeper burn awaited me. There, before that vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they had printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a "squaw." Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air.

Then anxiously we watched the man carry toward the stage the envelope containing the final decision.

There were two prizes given, that night, and one of them was mine!

The evil spirit laughed within me when the white flag dropped out of sight, and the hands which furled it hung limp in defeat.

Leaving the crowd as quickly as possible, I was soon in my room. The rest of the night I sat in an armchair and gazed into the crackling fire. I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me.

The Soft-Hearted Sioux¹

I

Beside the open fire I sat within our tepee. With my red blanket wrapped tightly about my crossed legs, I was thinking of the coming season, my sixteenth winter. On either side of the wigwam were my parents. My father was whistling a tune between his teeth while polishing with his bare hand a red stone pipe he had recently carved. Almost in front of me, beyond the center fire, my old grandmother sat near the entranceway.

She turned her face toward her right and addressed most of her words to my mother. Now and then she spoke to me, but never did she allow her eyes to rest upon her daughter's husband, my father. It was only upon rare occasions that my grandmother said anything to him. Thus his ears were open and ready to catch the smallest wish she might express. Sometimes when my grandmother had been saying things which pleased him, my father used to comment upon them. At other times, when he could not approve of what was spoken, he used to work or smoke silently.

On this night my old grandmother began her talk about me. Filling the bowl of her red stone pipe with dry willow bark, she looked across at me.

"My grandchild, you are tall and are no longer a little boy." Narrowing her old eyes, she asked, "My grandchild, when are you going to bring here a handsome young woman?" I stared into the fire rather than meet her gaze. Waiting for my answer, she stooped forward and through the long stem drew a flame into the red stone pipe.

I smiled while my eyes were still fixed upon the bright fire, but I said nothing in reply. Turning to my mother, she offered her the pipe. I glanced at my grandmother. The loose buckskin sleeve fell off at her elbow and showed a wrist covered with silver bracelets. Holding up the fingers of her left hand, she named off the desirable young women of our village.

"Which one, my grandchild, which one?" she questioned.

"Hoh!" I said, pulling at my blanket in confusion. "Not yet!" Here my mother passed the pipe over the fire to my father. Then she, too, began speaking of what I should do.

"My son, be always active. Do not dislike a long hunt. Learn to provide much buffalo meat and many buckskins before you bring home a wife." Presently my father gave the pipe to my grandmother, and he took his turn in the exhortations.

"Ho, my son, I have been counting in my heart the bravest warriors of our people. There is not one of them who won his title in his sixteenth winter. My son, it is a great thing for some brave of sixteen winters to do."

Not a word had I to give in answer. I knew well the fame of my warrior father. He had earned the right of speaking such words, though even he himself was a brave only at my age. Refusing to smoke my grandmother's pipe because my heart was too much stirred by their words, and sorely troubled with a fear lest I should disappoint them, I arose to go. Drawing my blanket

1. "The Soft-Hearted Sioux" first appeared in *Harper's Monthly* in March 1901, the source of the text printed here. It was later included in *American Indian Stories* (1921).

over my shoulders, I said, as I stepped toward the entranceway: "I go to hobble my pony. It is now late in the night."

II

Nine winters' snows had buried deep that night when my old grandmother, together with my father and mother, designed my future with the glow of a camp fire upon it.

Yet I did not grow up the warrior, huntsman, and husband I was to have been. At the mission school I learned it was wrong to kill. Nine winters I hunted for the soft heart of Christ, and prayed for the huntsmen who chased the buffalo on the plains.

In the autumn of the tenth year I was sent back to my tribe to preach Christianity to them. With the white man's Bible in my hand, and the white man's tender heart in my breast, I returned to my own people.

Wearing a foreigner's dress, I walked, a stranger, into my father's village.

Asking my way, for I had not forgotten my native tongue, an old man led me toward the tepee where my father lay. From my old companion I learned that my father had been sick many moons. As we drew near the tepee, I heard the chanting of a medicine-man within it. At once I wished to enter in and drive from my home the sorcerer of the plains, but the old warrior checked me. "Ho, wait outside until the medicine-man leaves your father," he said. While talking he scanned me from head to feet. Then he retraced his steps toward the heart of the camping-ground.

My father's dwelling was on the outer limits of the round-faced village. With every heartthrob I grew more impatient to enter the wigwam.

While I turned the leaves of my Bible with nervous fingers, the medicine-man came forth from the dwelling and walked hurriedly away. His head and face were closely covered with the loose robe which draped his entire figure.

He was tall and large. His long strides I have never forgot. They seemed to me then the uncanny gait of eternal death. Quickly pocketing my Bible, I went into the tepee.

Upon a mat lay my father, with furrowed face and gray hair. His eyes and cheeks were sunken far into his head. His sallow skin lay thin upon his pinched nose and high cheekbones. Stooping over him, I took his fevered hand. "How, Ate?"² I greeted him. A light flashed from his listless eyes and his dried lips parted. "My son!" he murmured, in a feeble voice. Then again the wave of joy and recognition receded. He closed his eyes, and his hand dropped from my open palm to the ground.

Looking about, I saw an old woman sitting with bowed head. Shaking hands with her, I recognized my mother. I sat down between my father and mother as I used to do, but I did not feel at home. The place where my old grandmother used to sit was now unoccupied. With my mother I bowed my head. Alike our throats were choked and tears were streaming from our eyes; but far apart in spirit our ideas and faiths separated us. My grief was for the soul unsaved; and I thought my mother wept to see a brave man's body broken by sickness.

2. Hello, Father (Lakota).

Useless was my attempt to change the faith in the medicine-man to that abstract power named God. Then one day I became righteously mad with anger that the medicine-man should thus ensnare my father's soul. And when he came to chant his sacred songs I pointed toward the door and bade him go! The man's eyes glared upon me for an instant. Slowly gathering his robe about him, he turned his back upon the sick man and stepped out of our wigwam. "Ha, ha, ha! my son, I cannot live without the medicine-man!" I heard my father cry when the sacred man was gone.

III

On a bright day, when the winged seeds of the prairie-grass were flying hither and thither, I walked solemnly toward the centre of the camping-ground. My heart beat hard and irregularly at my side. Tighter I grasped the sacred book I carried under my arm. Now was the beginning of life's work.

Though I knew it would be hard, I did not once feel that failure was to be my reward. As I stepped unevenly on the rolling ground, I thought of the warriors soon to wash off their war-paints and follow me.

At length I reached the place where the people had assembled to hear me preach. In a large circle men and women sat upon the dry red grass. Within the ring I stood, with the white man's Bible in my hand. I tried to tell them of the soft heart of Christ.

In silence the vast circle of bareheaded warriors sat under an afternoon sun. At last, wiping the wet from my brow, I took my place in the ring. The hush of the assembly filled me with great hope.

I was turning my thoughts upward to the sky in gratitude, when a stir called me to earth again.

A tall, strong man arose. His loose robe hung in folds over his right shoulder. A pair of snapping black eyes fastened themselves like the poisonous fangs of a serpent upon me. He was the medicine-man. A tremor played about my heart and a chill cooled the fire in my veins.

Scornfully he pointed a long forefinger in my direction and asked:

"What loyal son is he who, returning to his father's people, wears a foreigner's dress?" He paused a moment, and then continued: "The dress of that foreigner of whom a story says he bound a native of our land, and heaping dry sticks around him, kindled a fire at his feet!" Waving his hand toward me, he exclaimed, "Here is the traitor to his people!"

I was helpless. Before the eyes of the crowd the cunning magician turned my honest heart into a vile nest of treachery. Alas! the people frowned as they looked upon me.

"Listen!" he went on. "Which one of you who have eyed the young man can see through his bosom and warn the people of the nest of young snakes hatching there? Whose ear was so acute that he caught the hissing of snakes whenever the young man opened his mouth? This one has not only proven false to you, but even to the Great Spirit who made him. He is a fool! Why do you sit here giving ear to a foolish man who could not defend his people because he fears to kill, who could not bring venison to renew the life of his sick father? With his prayers, let him drive away the enemy! With his soft heart, let him keep off starvation! We shall go elsewhere to dwell upon an untainted ground."

With this he disbanded the people. When the sun lowered in the west and the winds were quiet, the village of cone-shaped tepees was gone. The medicine-man had won the hearts of the people.

Only my father's dwelling was left to mark the fighting-ground.

IV

From a long night at my father's bedside I came out to look upon the morning. The yellow sun hung equally between the snow-covered land and the cloudless blue sky. The light of the new day was cold. The strong breath of winter crusted the snow and fitted crystal shells over the rivers and lakes. As I stood in front of the tepee, thinking of the vast prairies which separated us from our tribe, and wondering if the high sky likewise separated the soft-hearted Son of God from us, the icy blast from the North blew through my hair and skull. My neglected hair had grown long and fell upon my neck.

My father had not risen from his bed since the day the medicine-man led the people away. Though I read from the Bible and prayed beside him upon my knees, my father would not listen. Yet I believed my prayers were not unheeded in heaven.

"Ha, ha, ha! my son," my father groaned upon the first snowfall. "My son, our food is gone. There is no one to bring me meat! My son, your soft heart has unfitted you for everything!" Then covering his face with the buffalo-robe, he said no more. Now while I stood out in that cold winter morning, I was starving. For two days I had not seen any food. But my own cold and hunger did not harass my soul as did the whining cry of the sick old man.

Stepping again into the tepee, I untied my snow-shoes, which were fastened to the tent-poles.

My poor mother, watching by the sick one, and faithfully heaping wood upon the centre fire, spoke to me:

"My son, do not fail again to bring your father meat, or he will starve to death."

"How, Ina,"³ I answered, sorrowfully. From the tepee I started forth again to hunt food for my aged parents. All day I tracked the white level lands in vain. Nowhere, nowhere were there any other footprints but my own! In the evening of this third fast-day I came back without meat. Only a bundle of sticks for the fire I brought on my back. Dropping the wood outside, I lifted the door-flap and set one foot within the tepee.

There I grew dizzy and numb. My eyes swam in tears. Before me lay my old gray-haired father sobbing like a child. In his horny hands he clutched the buffalo-robe, and with his teeth he was gnawing off the edges. Chewing the dry stiff hair and buffalo-skin, my father's eyes sought my hands. Upon seeing them empty, he cried out:

"My son, your soft heart will let me starve before you bring me meat! Two hills eastward stand a herd of cattle. Yet you will see me die before you bring me food!"

Leaving my mother lying with covered head upon her mat, I rushed out into the night.

3. Hello, Mother (Lakota).

With a strange warmth in my heart and swiftness in my feet, I climbed over the first hill, and soon the second one. The moonlight upon the white country showed me a clear path to the white man's cattle. With my hand upon the knife in my belt, I leaned heavily against the fence while counting the herd.

Twenty in all I numbered. From among them I chose the best-fattened creature. Leaping over the fence, I plunged my knife into it.

My long knife was sharp, and my hands, no more fearful and slow, slashed off choice chunks of warm flesh. Bending under the meat I had taken for my starving father, I hurried across the prairie.

Toward home I fairly ran with the life-giving food I carried upon my back. Hardly had I climbed the second hill when I heard sounds coming after me. Faster and faster I ran with my load for my father, but the sounds were gaining upon me. I heard the clicking of snowshoes and the squeaking of the leather straps at my heels; yet I did not turn to see what pursued me, for I was intent upon reaching my father. Suddenly like thunder an angry voice shouted curses and threats into my ear! A rough hand wrenched my shoulder and took the meat from me! I stopped struggling to run. A deafening whir filled my head. The moon and stars began to move. Now the white prairie was sky, and the stars lay under my feet. Now again they were turning. At last the starry blue rose up into place. The noise in my ears was still. A great quiet filled the air. In my hand I found my long knife dripping with blood. At my feet a man's figure lay prone in blood-red snow. The horrible scene about me seemed a trick of my senses, for I could not understand it was real. Looking long upon the blood-stained snow, the load of meat for my starving father reached my recognition at last. Quickly I tossed it over my shoulder and started again homeward.

Tired and haunted I reached the door of the wigwam. Carrying the food before me, I entered with it into the tepee.

"Father, here is food!" I cried, as I dropped the meat near my mother. No answer came. Turning about, I beheld my gray-haired father dead! I saw by the unsteady firelight an old gray-haired skeleton lying rigid and stiff.

Out into the open I started, but the snow at my feet became bloody.

V

On the day after my father's death, having led my mother to the camp of the medicine-man, I gave myself up to those who were searching for the murderer of the paleface.

They bound me hand and foot. Here in this cell I was placed four days ago.

The shrieking winter winds have followed me hither. Rattling the bars, they howl unceasingly: "Your soft heart! your soft heart will see me die before you bring me food!" Hark! something is clanking the chain on the door. It is being opened. From the dark night without a black figure crosses the threshold. It is the guard. He comes to warn me of my fate. He tells me that tomorrow I must die. In his stern face I laugh aloud. I do not fear death.

Yet I wonder who shall come to welcome me in the realm of strange sight. Will the loving Jesus grant me pardon and give my soul a soothing sleep? or will my warrior father greet me and receive me as his son? Will my spirit fly

upward to a happy heaven? or shall I sink into the bottomless pit, an outcast from a God of infinite love?

Soon, soon I shall know, for now I see the east is growing red. My heart is strong. My face is calm. My eyes are dry and eager for new scenes. My hands hang quietly at my side. Serene and brave, my soul awaits the men to perch me on the gallows for another flight. I go.

1901

Why I Am a Pagan¹

When the spirit swells my breast I love to roam leisurely among the green hills; or sometimes, sitting on the brink of the murmuring Missouri, I marvel at the great blue overhead. With half closed eyes I watch the huge cloud shadows in their noiseless play upon the high bluffs opposite me, while into my ear ripple the sweet, soft cadences of the river's song. Folded hands lie in my lap, for the time forgot. My heart and I lie small upon the earth like a grain of throbbing sand. Drifting clouds and tinkling waters, together with the warmth of a genial summer day, bespeak with eloquence the loving Mystery round about us. During the idle while I sat upon the sunny river brink, I grew somewhat, though my response be not so clearly manifest as in the green grass fringing the edge of the high bluff back of me.

At length retracing the uncertain footpath scaling the precipitous embankment, I seek the level lands where grew the wild prairie flowers. And they, the lovely little folk, soothe my soul with their perfumed breath.

Their quaint round faces of varied hue convince the heart which leaps with glad surprise that they, too, are living symbols of omnipotent thought. With a child's eager eye I drink in the myriad star shapes wrought in luxuriant color upon the green. Beautiful is the spiritual essence they embody.

I leave them nodding in the breeze, but take along with me their impress upon my heart. I pause to rest me upon a rock embedded on the side of a foothill facing the low river bottom. Here the Stone-Boy, of whom the American aborigine tells, frolics about, shooting his baby arrows and shouting aloud with glee at the tiny shafts of lightning that flash from the flying arrowbeaks. What an ideal warrior he became, baffling the siege of the pests of all the land till he triumphed over their united attack. And here he lay,—Inyan² our great-great-grandfather, older than the hill he rested on, older than the race of men who love to tell of his wonderful career.

Interwoven with the thread of this Indian legend of the rock, I fain would trace a subtle knowledge of the native folk which enabled them to recognize a kinship to any and all parts of this vast universe. By the leading of an ancient trail I move toward the Indian village.

With the strong, happy sense that both great and small are so surely enfolded in His magnitude that, without a miss, each has his allotted individual ground of opportunities, I am buoyant with good nature.

1. "Why I Am a Pagan" first appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in December 1902, the source of the text printed here. A revised version, with a

new ending, appeared under the title "The Great Spirit" in *American Indian Stories* (1921).

2. Stone, or Stone-Boy (Lakota).

Yellow Breast, swaying upon the slender stem of a wild sunflower, warbles a sweet assurance of this as I pass near by. Breaking off the clear crystal song, he turns his wee head from side to side eyeing me wisely as slowly I plod with moccasined feet. Then again he yields himself to his song of joy. Flit, flit hither and yon, he fills the summer sky with his swift, sweet melody. And truly does it seem his vigorous freedom lies more in his little spirit than in his wing.

With these thoughts I reach the log cabin whither I am strongly drawn by the tie of a child to an aged mother. Out bounds my four-footed friend to meet me, frisking about my path with unmistakable delight. Chän is a black shaggy dog, "a thorough bred little mongrel" of whom I am very fond. Chän seems to understand many words in Sioux, and will go to her mat even when I whisper the word, though generally I think she is guided by the tone of the voice. Often she tries to imitate the sliding inflection and long drawn out voice to the amusement of our guests, but her articulation is quite beyond my ear. In both my hands I hold her shaggy head and gaze into her large brown eyes. At once the dilated pupils contract into tiny black dots, as if the roguish spirit within would evade my questioning.

Finally resuming the chair at my desk I feel in keen sympathy with my fellow creatures, for I seem to see clearly again that all are akin.

The racial lines, which once were bitterly real, now serve nothing more than marking out a living mosaic of human beings. And even here men of same color are like the ivory keys of one instrument where each resembles all the rest, yet varies from them in pitch and quality of voice. And those creatures who are for a time mere echoes of another's note are not unlike the fable of the thin sick man whose distorted shadow, dressed like a real creature, came to the old master to make him follow as a shadow. Thus with a compassion for all echoes in human guise, I greet the solemn-faced "native preacher" whom I find awaiting me. I listen with respect for God's creature, though he mouth most strangely the jangling phrases of a bigoted creed.

As our tribe is one large family, where every person is related to all the others, he addressed me:—

"Cousin, I came from the morning church service to talk with you."

"Yes?" I said interrogatively, as he paused for some word from me.

Shifting uneasily about in the straight-backed chair he sat upon, he began: "Every holy day (Sunday) I look about our little God's house, and not seeing you there, I am disappointed. This is why I come to-day. Cousin, as I watch you from afar, I see no unbecoming behavior and hear only good reports of you, which all the more burns me with the wish that you were a church member. Cousin, I was taught long years ago by kind missionaries to read the holy book. These godly men taught me also the folly of our old beliefs.

"There is one God who gives reward or punishment to the race of dead men. In the upper region the Christian dead are gathered in unceasing song and prayer. In the deep pit below, the sinful ones dance in torturing flames.

"Think upon these things, my cousin, and choose now to avoid the after-doom of hell fire!" Then followed a long silence in which he clasped tighter and unclasped again his interlocked fingers.

Like instantaneous lightning flashes came pictures of my own mother's making, for she, too, is now a follower of the new superstition.

“Knocking out the chinking of our log cabin, some evil hand thrust in a burning taper of braided dry grass, but failed of his intent, for the fire died out and the half burned brand fell inward to the floor. Directly above it, on a shelf, lay the holy book. This is what we found after our return from a several days’ visit. Surely some great power is hid in the sacred book!”

Brushing away from my eyes many like pictures, I offered midday meal to the converted Indian sitting wordless and with downcast face. No sooner had he risen from the table with “Cousin, I have relished it,” than the church bell rang.

Thither he hurried forth with his afternoon sermon. I watched him as he hastened along, his eyes bent fast upon the dusty road till he disappeared at the end of a quarter of a mile.

The little incident recalled to mind the copy of a missionary paper brought to my notice a few days ago, in which a “Christian” pugilist commented upon a recent article of mine, grossly perverting the spirit of my pen. Still I would not forget that the pale-faced missionary and the hoodooed aborigine are both God’s creatures, though small indeed their own conceptions of Infinite Love. A wee child toddling in a wonder world, I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan.

1902

UPTON SINCLAIR

1878–1968

If Upton Sinclair challenges categorization, it’s because his life and writing seem to contain so many contradictions. Sinclair was a socialist with a sharp political edge, but he was also at times a romantic, sentimental writer. He has been criticized for conflating art with propaganda—and also for not being propagandistic enough. He was one of the most prominent leftist thinkers of his day, as well as one of the most popular authors. *The Jungle* (1906), his indictment of Chicago’s meatpacking industry, remains his best-known and most influential work, but it is only one of his many works of fiction. In all, he published more than ninety other volumes, including the novels *King Coal* (1917) and *Oil!* (1927). In 1943 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Dragon’s Teeth* (1942), a novel about the rise of Nazi Germany that appeared in a fictional series tracing the history of the American twentieth century.

Sinclair was born in Baltimore, Maryland, to Upton Beall Sinclair and Priscilla Harden, and he lived in poverty. Experiencing the differences between his family’s home and that of his wealthy maternal grandparents, who lived nearby, affected him greatly and influenced his novels, which often focused on class inequalities. In 1888 he moved with his parents to New York City, and four years later the fourteen-year-old Sinclair enrolled in the City College of New York, earning tuition by writing



Swift & Co. Packing House, 1905.

newspaper and magazine articles. He married his first wife, Meta Fuller, in 1900, and would later marry twice more.

By 1904, Sinclair was devoting himself to “muckraking,” a term for publishing exposés of corruption in business or government, usually written by writers from the Progressive movement in America who wanted to reveal the wretchedness of urban poverty that they attributed to dishonest business practices. In 1905 he was one of the founders, along with Jack London, of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, which aimed to teach students about the evils of capitalism and to promote socialism. Chapters of the society were organized at dozens of colleges and university campuses, with liberal and Progressive speakers invited to address the student groups. Around this time Sinclair spent seven weeks undercover in Chicago’s meatpacking plants interviewing workers; this became source material for his muckraking novel *The Jungle*, which almost immediately became a best seller when it was published in 1906.

Sinclair’s novel described horrific practices in the meatpacking industry; when it was published, it caused a public uproar that partly contributed to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act in 1906. As Sinclair remarked, “I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach.” Though Sinclair turned over evidence from his interviews to his publisher, Doubleday, Page and Company, there were still those who did not believe that hams could be injected with formaldehyde to disguise spoilage; that tubercular cows could be slaughtered for human consumption; and that human beings who, slipping on a bloody floor or losing a limb in the grinders, could quite literally become meat. A lawyer sent to Chicago by the publisher reported that the truth was even worse than what Sinclair described in *The Jungle*. The book, translated into thirty-five languages, earned Sinclair admirers from around the world.

The immense popularity of *The Jungle* owes as much to its sentimental and romantic style as to its timely attack on capitalism. It has a believable and sympathetic hero in Jurgis Rudkis, a Lithuanian immigrant whose desire to improve his condition and willingness to work in the most difficult conditions make him instantly recognizable as an American type. Yet instead of following Jurgis's rise in fortune, the novel unfolds as a story of personal defeat. The novel is influenced by the combined outrage and optimism of American protest writing as well as the belief in America often expressed by writers of immigrant fiction. The novel's story of the destruction of the Rudkis family by the forces of corporate greed and poverty is a tale of horror almost beyond tragedy; Jurgis loses everything, including most of his family members, and wanders—freezing, sick, and starving—in the wintry streets of Chicago. By a stroke of great fortune, a drunken rich man hands him a hundred-dollar bill, but when he tries to get it changed in a tavern, the bartender steals it, beats Jurgis, and turns him in to the police. Sinclair presents socialism as Jurgis's only hope—and the only hope of workers like him. In his review of the novel, Jack London said it was “essentially a book of today . . . alive and warm . . . brutal with life,” depicting “not what man ought to be, but what man is compelled to be in this, our world, in the twentieth century.”

Using the proceeds from *The Jungle*, Sinclair founded a short-lived utopian colony in Englewood, New Jersey, known as Helicon Hall; he also ran as a Socialist congressional candidate, and for the rest of his life he stayed involved with the Socialist party in the United States, organizing locals in New Jersey and running for the House of Representatives. In the early 1920s Sinclair moved to California, where he ran for the Senate in 1922 and for governor in 1934. He was defeated in both elections, and in 1935 he published *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked*, a book defending his socialist politics. Ultimately Sinclair split from mainstream socialism in debates published in the pages of the socialist journal the *Masses*. When Sinclair died in 1968 he was a celebrity—a popular, award-winning author known for his political convictions.

In chapter 9 of *The Jungle*, reprinted below, Jurgis and his wife, Ona, and their extended family find work in the stockyards owned by the Brown company and struggle to make ends meet. The family has hopes of getting ahead, as evidenced at the beginning of the chapter when Jurgis begins to learn English and registers to vote as a naturalized citizen. But with its grisly descriptions of the slaughterhouse, its catalog of workers' injuries and death, and its explication of machine politics, the chapter shows why the obstacles that this family faces may be too formidable for Jurgis to overcome.

*From The Jungle*¹

Chapter IX

One of the first consequences of the discovery of the union was that Jurgis became desirous of learning English. He wanted to know what was going on at the meetings, and to be able to take part in them; and so he began to look about him, and to try to pick up words. The children, who were at school, and learning fast, would teach him a few; and a friend loaned him a little book that had some in it, and Ona would read them to him. Then Jurgis became sorry that he could not read himself; and later on in the winter, when some one told him that there was a night-school that was free, he went and

1. First published by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, in 1906, the source of this selection.

enrolled. After that, every evening that he got home from the yards² in time, he would go to the school; he would go even if he were in time for only half an hour. They were teaching him both to read and to speak English—and they would have taught him other things, if only he had had a little time.

Also the union made another great difference with him—it made him begin to pay attention to the country. It was the beginning of democracy with him. It was a little state, the union, a miniature republic; its affairs were every man's affairs, and every man had a real say about them. In other words, in the union Jurgis learned to talk politics. In the place where he had come from there had not been any politics—in Russia one thought of the government as an affliction like the lightning and the hail. "Duck, little brother, duck," the wise old peasants would whisper; "everything passes away." And when Jurgis had first come to America he had supposed that it was the same. He had heard people say that it was a free country—but what did that mean? He found that here, precisely as in Russia, there were rich men who owned everything; and if one could not find any work, was not the hunger he began to feel the same sort of hunger?

When Jurgis had been working about three weeks at Brown's, there had come to him one noon-time a man who was employed as a night-watchman, and who asked him if he would not like to take out naturalization papers and become a citizen. Jurgis did not know what that meant, but the man explained the advantages. In the first place, it would not cost him anything, and it would get him half a day off, with his pay just the same; and then when election time came he would be able to vote—and there was something in that. Jurgis was naturally glad to accept, and so the night-watchman said a few words to the boss, and he was excused for the rest of the day. When, later on, he wanted a holiday to get married he could not get it; and as for a holiday with pay just the same—what power had wrought that miracle heaven only knew! However, he went with the man, who picked up several other newly landed immigrants, Poles, Lithuanians, and Slovaks, and took them all outside, where stood a great four-horse tally-ho coach,³ with fifteen or twenty men already in it. It was a fine chance to see the sights of the city, and the party had a merry time, with plenty of beer handed up from inside. So they drove down-town and stopped before an imposing granite building, in which they interviewed an official, who had the papers all ready, with only the names to be filled in. So each man in turn took an oath of which he did not understand a word, and then was presented with a handsome ornamented document with a big red seal and the shield of the United States upon it, and was told that he had become a citizen of the Republic and the equal of the President himself.

A month or two later Jurgis had another interview with this same man, who told him where to go to "register." And then finally, when election day came, the packing-houses posted a notice that men who desired to vote might remain away until nine that morning, and the same night-watchman took Jurgis and the rest of his flock into the back room of a saloon, and showed each of them where and how to mark a ballot, and then gave each two dollars, and took them to the polling place, where there was a policeman on duty especially to see that they got through all right. Jurgis felt quite proud

2. Refers to the stockyards of Chicago, called "Packingtown."

3. A large coach drawn by four horses.

of this good luck till he got home and met Jonas, who had taken the leader aside and whispered to him, offering to vote three times for four dollars, which offer had been accepted.

And now in the union Jurgis met men who explained all this mystery to him; and he learned that America differed from Russia in that its government existed under the form of a democracy. The officials who ruled it, and got all the graft, had to be elected first; and so there were two rival sets of grafters, known as political parties, and the one got the office which bought the most votes. Now and then the election was very close, and that was the time the poor man came in. In the stockyards this was only in national and state elections, for in local elections the democratic party always carried everything. The ruler of the district was therefore the democratic boss, a little Irishman named Mike Scully.⁴ Scully held an important party office in the state, and bossed even the mayor of the city, it was said; it was his boast that he carried the stockyards in his pocket. He was an enormously rich man—he had a hand in all the big graft in the neighborhood. It was Scully, for instance, who owned that dump which Jurgis and Ona had seen the first day of their arrival. Not only did he own the dump, but he owned the brick-factory as well; and first he took out the clay and made it into bricks, and then he had the city bring garbage to fill up the hole, so that he could build houses to sell to the people. Then, too, he sold the bricks to the city, at his own price, and the city came and got them in its own wagons. And also he owned the other hole near by, where the stagnant water was; and it was he who cut the ice and sold it; and what was more, if the men told truth, he had not had to pay any taxes for the water, and he had built the ice-house out of city lumber and had not had to pay anything for that. The newspapers had got hold of that story, and there had been a scandal; but Scully had hired somebody to confess and take all the blame, and then skip the country. It was said, too, that he had built his brick-kiln in the same way, and that the workmen were on the city pay-roll while they did it; however, one had to press closely to get these things out of the men, for it was not their business, and Mike Scully was a good man to stand in with. A note signed by him was equal to a job any time at the packing-houses; and also he employed a good many men himself, and worked them only eight hours a day, and paid them the highest wages. This gave him many friends—all of whom he had gotten together into the “War-Whoop League,” whose clubhouse you might see just outside of the yards. It was the biggest clubhouse, and the biggest club, in all Chicago; and they had prize-fights every now and then, and cock-fights and even dog-fights. The policemen in the district all belonged to the league, and instead of suppressing the fights, they sold tickets for them. The man that had taken Jurgis to be naturalized was one of these “Indians,”⁵ as they were called; and on election day there would be hundreds of them out, and all with big wads of money in their pockets and free drinks at every saloon in the district. That was another thing, the men said—all the saloon-keepers had to be “Indians,” and to put up on demand,

4. In Chicago during Sinclair's time, the city was under the control of “ward bosses.” The character Mike Scully is based on Tom Carey, who was head of the Twenty-Ninth Ward from 1893 to 1906, where he controlled stockyard

jobs and owned many of the houses rented to workers.

5. “Back of the yards” district was called “the Reservation” and Carey's followers “Indians.”

otherwise they could not do business on Sundays, nor have any gambling at all. In the same way Scully had all the jobs in the fire department at his disposal, and all the rest of the city graft in the stockyards district; he was building a block of flats somewhere up on Ashland Avenue, and the man who was overseeing it for him was drawing pay as a city inspector of sewers. The city inspector of water-pipes had been dead and buried for over a year, but somebody was still drawing his pay. The city inspector of sidewalks was a bar-keeper at the War-Whoop café—and maybe he could not make it uncomfortable for any tradesman who did not stand in with Scully!

Even the packers were in awe of him, so the men said. It gave them pleasure to believe this, for Scully stood as the people's man, and boasted of it boldly when election day came. The packers had wanted a bridge at Ashland Avenue, but they had not been able to get it till they had seen Scully; and it was the same with "Bubbly Creek," which the city had threatened to make the packers cover over, till Scully had come to their aid. "Bubbly Creek" is an arm of the Chicago River, and forms the southern boundary of the yards; all the drainage of the square mile of packing-houses empties into it, so that it is really a great open sewer a hundred or two feet wide. One long arm of it is blind, and the filth stays there forever and a day. The grease and chemicals that are poured into it undergo all sorts of strange transformations, which are the cause of its name; it is constantly in motion, as if huge fish were feeding in it, or great leviathans disporting themselves in its depths. Bubbles of carbonic acid gas will rise to the surface and burst, and make rings two or three feet wide. Here and there the grease and filth have caked solid, and the creek looks like a bed of lava; chickens walk about on it, feeding, and many times an unwary stranger has started to stroll across, and vanished temporarily. The packers used to leave the creek that way, till every now and then the surface would catch on fire and burn furiously, and the fire department would have to come and put it out. Once, however, an ingenious stranger came and started to gather this filth in scows,⁶ to make lard out of; then the packers took the cue, and got out an injunction to stop him, and afterwards gathered it themselves. The banks of "Bubbly Creek" are plastered thick with hairs, and this also the packers gather and clean.

And there were things even stranger than this, according to the gossip of the men. The packers had secret mains,⁷ through which they stole billions of gallons of the city's water. The newspapers had been full of this scandal—once there had even been an investigation, and an actual uncovering of the pipes; but nobody had been punished, and the thing went right on. And then there was the condemned meat industry, with its endless horrors. The people of Chicago saw the government inspectors in Packingtown, and they all took that to mean that they were protected from diseased meat; they did not understand that these hundred and sixty-three inspectors had been appointed at the request of the packers, and that they were paid by the United States government to certify that all the diseased meat was kept in the state.⁸ They had no authority beyond that; for the inspection of meat to be sold in the city and

6. Large, flat-bottomed boats.

7. Pipes.

8. Concerned about decreasing European demand for American meat products, the meat-packers persuaded Congress to pass legislation

requiring inspection of some exports; in 1891 inspections were added for meats intended for export and interstate trade. However, as Sinclair makes clear, the inspections were unreliable.

state the whole force in Packingtown consisted of three henchmen of the local political machine.⁹ And shortly afterward one of these, a physician, made the discovery that the carcasses of steers which had been condemned as tubercular by the government inspectors, and which therefore contained ptomaines, which are deadly poisons, were left upon an open platform and carted away to be sold in the city; and so he insisted that these carcasses be treated with an injection of kerosene—and was ordered to resign the same week!¹ So indignant were the packers that they went farther, and compelled the mayor to abolish the whole bureau of inspection; so that since then there has not been even a pretence of any interference with the graft. There was said to be two thousand dollars a week hush-money from the tubercular steers alone; and as much again from the hogs which had died of cholera on the trains, and which you might see any day being loaded into box-cars and hauled away to a place called Globe, in Indiana, where they made a fancy grade of lard.

Jurgis heard of these things little by little, in the gossip of those who were obliged to perpetrate them. It seemed as if every time you met a person from a new department, you heard of new swindles and new crimes. There was, for instance, a Lithuanian who was a cattle-butcher for the plant where Marija had worked, which killed meat for canning only; and to hear this man describe the animals which came to his place would have been worthwhile for a Dante or a Zola.² It seemed that they must have agencies all over the country, to hunt out old and crippled and diseased cattle to be canned. There were cattle which had been fed on “whiskey-malt,” the refuse of the breweries, and had become what the men called “steerly”—which means covered with boils. It was a nasty job killing these, for when you plunged your knife into them they would burst and splash foul-smelling stuff into your face; and when a man’s sleeves were smeared with blood, and his hands steeped in it, how was he ever to wipe his face, or to clear his eyes so that he could see? It was stuff such as this that made the “embalmed beef” that had killed several times as many United States soldiers as all the bullets of the Spaniards,³ only the army beef, besides, was not fresh canned, it was old stuff that had been lying for years in the cellars.

Then one Sunday evening, Jurgis sat puffing his pipe by the kitchen stove, and talking with an old fellow whom Jonas had introduced, and who worked

9. “Rules and Regulations for the Inspection of Livestock and their Products.” United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industries, Order No. 125:—SECTION 1. Proprietors of slaughterhouses, canning, salting, packing, or rendering establishments engaged in the slaughtering of cattle, sheep, or swine, or the packing of any of their products, the carcasses or products of which are to become subjects of interstate or foreign commerce, shall make application to the Secretary of Agriculture for inspection of said animals and their products. * * * SECTION 15. Such rejected or condemned animals shall at once be removed by the owners from the pens containing animals which have been inspected and found to be free from disease and fit for human food, and shall be disposed of in accordance with the laws, ordinances, and regulations of the state and municipality in which said rejected or condemned animals are located. * * * SECTION 25. A microscopic examination for trichinae shall be made of all swine products

exported to countries requiring such examination. *No microscopic examination will be made of hogs slaughtered for interstate trade, but this examination shall be confined to those intended for the export trade* [Sinclair’s note].

1. Sinclair refers to Dr. W. K. Jacques, a head of meat inspection at the stockyards, who insisted upon enforcing standards; he was forced to resign when he reported tainted products. He later attested to the accuracy of *The Jungle*.

2. The French novelist Émile Zola (1840–1902), known for using literary naturalism as a tool to expose social injustice. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Italian medieval poet whose *Divine Comedy* (written between 1308 and the poet’s death) is often considered the greatest literary work composed in Italian. Sinclair is referring to the first book of the poem, *Inferno* (Hell).

3. In the Spanish-American War of 1898 a number of American soldiers died from eating canned “beef” and supposedly fresh meat treated with boric or salicylic acid.

in the canning-rooms at Durham's,⁴ and so Jurgis learned a few things about the great and only Durham canned goods, which had become a national institution. They were regular alchemists at Durham's; they advertised a mushroom-catsup, and the men who made it did not know what a mushroom looked like. They advertised "potted chicken,"—and it was like the boarding-house soup of the comic papers, through which a chicken had walked with rubbers on. Perhaps they had a secret process for making chickens chemically—who knows? said Jurgis's friend; the things that went into the mixture were tripe, and the fat of pork, and beef suet, and hearts of beef, and finally the waste ends of veal, when they had any. They put these up in several grades, and sold them at several prices; but the contents of the cans all came out of the same hopper.⁵ And then there was "potted game" and "potted grouse," "potted ham," and "devilled ham"—de-vyled, as the men called it. "De-vyled" ham was made out of the waste ends of smoked beef that were too small to be sliced by the machines; and also tripe, dyed with chemicals so that it would not show white; and trimmings of hams and corned beef; and potatoes, skins and all; and finally the hard cartilaginous gullets of beef, after the tongues had been cut out. All this ingenious mixture was ground up and flavored with spices to make it taste like something. Anybody who could invent a new imitation had been sure of a fortune from old Durham, said Jurgis's informant; but it was hard to think of anything new in a place where so many sharp wits had been at work for so long; where men welcomed tuberculosis in the cattle they were feeding, because it made them fatten more quickly; and where they bought up all the old rancid butter left over in the grocery-stores of a continent, and "oxidized" it by a forced-air process, to take away the odor, re churned it with skim-milk, and sold it in bricks in the cities! Up to a year or two ago it had been the custom to kill horses in the yards—ostensibly for fertilizer; but after long agitation the newspapers had been able to make the public realize that the horses were being canned. Now it was against the law to kill horses in Packingtown, and the law was really complied with—for the present, at any rate. Any day, however, one might see sharp-horned and shaggy-haired creatures running with the sheep—and yet what a job you would have to get the public to believe that a good part of what it buys for lamb and mutton is really goat's flesh!

There was another interesting set of statistics that a person might have gathered in Packingtown—those of the various afflictions of the workers. When Jurgis had first inspected the packing-plants with Szedvilas,⁶ he had marvelled while he listened to the tale of all the things that were made out of the carcasses of animals, and of all the lesser industries that were maintained there; now he found that each one of these lesser industries was a separate little inferno, in its way as horrible as the killing-beds, the source and fountain of them all. The workers in each of them had their own peculiar diseases. And the wandering visitor might be sceptical about all the swindles, but he could not be skeptical about these, for the worker bore the evidence of them about on his own person—generally he had only to hold out his hand.

4. Sinclair modeled his portrayal of both "Brown's" and "Durham's" on the actual meat-packing company he investigated, Armour.

5. Large tank with a pipe at the bottom to

release contents.

6. A fellow Lithuanian who introduces Jurgis to Packingtown earlier in the novel.

There were the men in the pickle-rooms,⁷ for instance, where old Antanas⁸ had gotten his death; scarce a one of these that had not some spot of horror on his person. Let a man so much as scrape his finger pushing a truck in the pickle-rooms, and he might have a sore that would put him out of the world; all the joints in his fingers might be eaten by the acid, one by one. Of the butchers and floor-men, the beef-boners and trimmers, and all those who used knives, you could scarcely find a person who had the use of his thumb; time and time again the base of it had been slashed, till it was a mere lump of flesh against which the man pressed the knife to hold it. The hands of these men would be criss-crossed with cuts, until you could no longer pretend to count them or to trace them. They would have no nails,—they had worn them off pulling hides; their knuckles were swollen so that their fingers spread out like a fan. There were men who worked in the cooking-rooms, in the midst of steam and sickening odors, by artificial light; in these rooms the germs of tuberculosis might live for two years, but the supply was renewed every hour. There were the beef-luggers, who carried two-hundred-pound quarters into the refrigerator-cars; a fearful kind of work, that began at four o'clock in the morning, and that wore out the most powerful men in a few years. There were those who worked in the chilling-rooms, and whose special disease was rheumatism; the time-limit that a man could work in the chilling-rooms was said to be five years. There were the wool-pluckers, whose hands went to pieces even sooner than the hands of the pickle-men; for the pelts of the sheep had to be painted with acid to loosen the wool, and then the pluckers had to pull out this wool with their bare hands, till the acid had eaten their fingers off. There were those who made the tins for the canned-meat; and their hands, too, were a maze of cuts, and each cut represented a chance for blood-poisoning. Some worked at the stamping-machines, and it was very seldom that one could work long there at the pace that was set, and not give out and forget himself, and have a part of his hand chopped off. There were the “hoisters,” as they were called, whose task it was to press the lever which lifted the dead cattle off the floor. They ran along upon a rafter, peering down through the damp and the steam; and as old Durham’s architects had not built the killing-room for the convenience of the hoisters, at every few feet they would have to stoop under a beam, say four feet above the one they ran on; which got them into the habit of stooping, so that in a few years they would be walking like chimpanzees. Worst of any, however, were the fertilizer-men, and those who served in the cooking-rooms. These people could not be shown to the visitor,—for the odor of a fertilizer-man would scare any ordinary visitor at a hundred yards, and as for the other men, who worked in tank-rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting,—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard!

1906

7. “Pickling” meant preserving meat with various noxious chemicals.

8. Jurgis’s father, who dies earlier in the novel after working in a chemical-filled, unheated cellar.

Becoming American in the Gilded Age

In every period of the history of the United States, the question of what it means to be an American returns in new ways. In the years between the Civil War and the advent of World War I, concerns about who counted as an American and the future of American identity were shaped by a number of social forces, including the accumulation of vast wealth by leaders of industry, the demands for equality by African Americans and American Indians, and the increasing number of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, as well as Asia. During most of this time, immigrants comprised between 13 and 15 percent of the population of the United States and higher percentages of the populations of many cities—numbers that have not been matched again in U.S. history until very recently.

The term *Americanization* was frequently used during this period as a term to describe the concerted effort to turn immigrants into assimilated Americans through classes, programs, and ceremonies. Debates about Americanization often focused on language, culture, and religion—and turned on the more general question of who was fit to become an American citizen. One response to the influx of immigrants and the claims of equal citizenship made by nonwhites was *nativism*, the belief held by many whites that only native-born “Anglo-Saxons” (usually a shorthand for descendants of northern and western Europeans) could become the “true” Americans. During a time when Darwin’s ideas about evolution were being distorted and misapplied to a variety of social issues, some social scientists and politicians believed that biological race held the key to understanding the “survival of the fittest.” In the buildup to World War I, which the United States did not enter until 1917, many Americans became suspicious of foreign-born workers and blamed them for both labor disputes and job shortages. These currents and crosscurrents of national identity were debated daily in periodicals.

This selection of texts presents a series of reflections on what it meant to become an American, and how one might do so, in such an environment. It begins with one of the iconic stories of American culture, the rags-to-riches drama told and retold in the works of Horatio Alger. The fate of Alger’s protagonists, boys who won success through virtue and hard work (and more than a little luck), became a guiding myth for those who believed that the United States afforded economic opportunity for all. As an immigrant who became one of the richest Americans of his time, Andrew Carnegie embodied that story. In his “Gospel of Wealth,” he explained his belief in how the vast fortunes that he and his fellow tycoons had gained could be spent responsibly, to benefit the common good. In their own ways, both Alger and Carnegie grappled with the larger question of how a democratic society understands the dramatically unequal acquisition of wealth.

The next selections address the importance of the West to the imagination of American identity. Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis” offers a theory of American exceptionalism based on the history of expansion, and Theodore Roosevelt embraces a romantic story of the “winning of the West.” These ideas became especially important as the United States looked to become a colonial power by acquiring territory beyond the continental United States. The Spanish-American War brought Roosevelt to national attention for leading his “Rough Riders” into battle, and as president he became known as a champion of the “strenuous life” for all American men.

The final selections consider how race and culture should figure into Americanization. Charles Chesnutt contends that “the future American” would be the product of increasing racial integration and intermarriage, in spite of the social forces violently opposed to those practices. Jane Addams describes the work of her Chicago settlement house, Hull House, in helping immigrants and their families navigate the complexities of Americanization. And Horace Kallen argues that cultural diversity will be an important feature of the American nation for many years to come.

HORATIO ALGER

A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Horatio Alger (1832–1899) left the ministry in 1866 after being accused of pedophilia by his Brewster, Massachusetts, congregation. He moved to New York, where he began a career as a full-time writer. Influenced by stories that he heard on visits to the New York Children’s Aid society, Alger submitted the manuscript of *Ragged Dick* to the juvenile magazine *Student and Schoolmate* in 1867. The serialized novel was so well received that it was published in book form the following year. Five more novels in the Ragged Dick Series followed, and Alger would publish dozens of similar books in the decades that followed. Although he tried on several occasions to write novels and biographies for adult readers, his greatest successes were works that, like *Ragged Dick*, aimed at a younger audience. His books promoted the virtues of honesty and hard work, and they featured plucky, virtuous characters who triumphed over adversity and found a path to respectability and economic success. Many of Alger’s books were reprinted in the early twentieth century, and his name became synonymous with the American archetype of rising from “rags to riches.”

The protagonist of *Ragged Dick* is fourteen-year-old who lives on the streets of New York and scrapes by on his earnings as a bootblack, or shoeshine boy. At the beginning of the novel, he smokes, gambles, and wears torn clothing. By the conclusion, Dick has begun his economic and social ascent; he has rented an apartment, opened a savings account, and been hired as a merchant’s clerk. In this chapter, Dick talks with Frank, a wealthier boy who has befriended Dick and who gives Dick advice about how to improve his situation.

*From Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks*¹

Chapter VIII. Dick’s Early History

“Have you always lived in New York, Dick?” asked Frank, after a pause.

“Ever since I can remember.”

“I wish you’d tell me a little about yourself. Have you got any father or mother?”

1. *Ragged Dick* was first published in book form in 1868 by A. K. Loring. This text is from the 1910 reprint by the John C. Winston Company.

"I ain't got no mother. She died when I wasn't but three years old. My father went to sea; but he went off before mother died, and nothin' was ever heard of him. I expect he got wrecked, or died at sea."

"And what became of you when your mother died?"

"The folks she boarded with took care of me, but they was poor, and they couldn't do much. When I was seven the woman died, and her husband went out West, and then I had to scratch for myself."

"At seven years old!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement.

"Yes," said Dick, "I was a little feller to take care of myself, but," he continued with pardonable pride, "I did it."

"What could you do?"

"Sometimes one thing, and sometimes another," said Dick. "I changed my business accordin' as I had to. Sometimes I was a newsboy, and diffused intelligence among the masses, as I heard somebody say once in a big speech he made in the Park. Them was the times when Horace Greeley and James Gordon Bennett² made money."

"Through your enterprise?" suggested Frank.

"Yes," said Dick; "but I give it up after a while."

"What for?"

"Well, they didn't always put news enough in their papers, and people wouldn't buy 'em as fast as I wanted 'em to. So one mornin' I was stuck on a lot of *Heralds*, and I thought I'd make a sensation. So I called out 'GREAT NEWS! QUEEN VICTORIA ASSASSINATED!'³ All my *Heralds* went off like hot cakes, and I went off, too, but one of the gentlemen what got sold remembered me, and said he'd have me took up,⁴ and that's what made me change my business."

"That wasn't right, Dick," said Frank.

"I know it," said Dick; "but lots of boys does it."

"That don't make it any better."

"No," said Dick, "I was sort of ashamed at the time, 'specially about one poor old gentleman,—a Englishman he was. He couldn't help cryin' to think the queen was dead, and his hands shook when he handed me the money for the paper."

"What did you do next?"

"I went into the match business," said Dick; "but it was small sales and small profits. Most of the people I called on had just laid in a stock, and didn't want to buy. So one cold night, when I hadn't money enough to pay for a lodgin', I burned the last of my matches to keep me from freezin'. But it cost too much to get warm that way, and I couldn't keep it up."

"You've seen hard times, Dick," said Frank, compassionately.

"Yes," said Dick, "I've knowed what it was to be hungry and cold, with nothin' to eat or to warm me; but there's one thing I never could do," he added, proudly.

"What's that?"

"I never stole," said Dick. "It's mean and I wouldn't do it."

2. James Gordon Bennett Jr. (1841–1918) was the publisher of the *New York Herald*; Horace Greeley (1811–1872) was the founder and editor of the *New York Tribune*.

3. Queen Victoria (1819–1901) was very much

alive at the time of this book's publication, though she had been the target of several assassination attempts.

4. Arrested.

“Were you ever tempted to?”

“Lots of times. Once I had been goin’ round all day, and hadn’t sold any matches, except three cents’ worth early in the mornin’. With that I bought an apple, thinkin’ I should get some more bimeby.⁵ When evenin’ come I was awful hungry. I went into a baker’s just to look at the bread. It made me feel kind o’ good just to look at the bread and cakes, and I thought maybe they would give me some. I asked ‘em wouldn’t they give me a loaf, and take their pay in matches. But they said they’d got enough matches to last three months; so there wasn’t any chance for a trade. While I was standin’ at the stove warmin’ me, the baker went into a back room, and I felt so hungry I thought I would take just one loaf, and go off with it. There was such a big pile I don’t think he’d have known it.”

“But you didn’t do it?”

“No, I didn’t and I was glad of it, for when the man came in ag’in, he said he wanted some one to carry some cake to a lady in St. Mark’s Place.⁶ His boy was sick, and he hadn’t no one to send; so he told me he’d give me ten cents if I would go. My business wasn’t very pressin’ just then, so I went, and when I come back, I took my pay in bread and cakes. Didn’t they taste good, though?”

“So you didn’t stay long in the match business, Dick?”

“No, I couldn’t sell enough to make it pay. Then there was some folks that wanted me to sell cheaper to them; so I couldn’t make any profit. There was one old lady—she was rich, too, for she lived in a big brick house—beat me down so, that I didn’t make no profit at all; but she wouldn’t buy without, and I hadn’t sold none that day; so I let her have them. I don’t see why rich folks should be so hard upon a poor boy that wants to make a livin’.”

“There’s a good deal of meanness in the world, I’m afraid, Dick.”

“If everybody was like you and your uncle,” said Dick, “there would be some chance for poor people. If I was rich I’d try to help ‘em along.”

“Perhaps you will be rich sometime, Dick.”

Dick shook his head.

“I’m afraid all my wallets will be like this,” said Dick, indicating the one he had received from the dropper,⁷ “and will be full of papers what ain’t of no use to anybody except the owner.”

“That depends very much on yourself, Dick,” said Frank. “Stewart⁸ wasn’t always rich, you know.”

“Wasn’t he?”

“When he first came to New York as a young man he was a teacher, and teachers are not generally very rich. At last he went into business, starting in a small way, and worked his way up by degrees. But there was one thing he determined in the beginning; that he would be strictly honorable in all his dealings, and never overreach any one for the sake of making money. If there was a chance for him, Dick, there is a chance for you.”

“He knowed enough to be a teacher, and I’m awful ignorant,” said Dick.

5. By and by.

6. Street in Lower Manhattan.

7. A confidence man who drops a wallet filled with blank paper, with the hope of fooling others that it is quite valuable.

8. Alexander Turney Stewart (1803–1876) was a wealthy businessman whose New York store, called the Marble Palace, is generally considered the first department store in the United States.

“But you needn’t stay so.”

“How can I help it?”

“Can’t you learn at school?”

“I can’t go to school ’cause I’ve got my livin’ to earn. It wouldn’t do me much good if I learned to read and write, and just as I’d got learned I starved to death.”

“But are there no night-schools?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you go? I suppose you don’t work in the evenings.”

“I never cared much about it,” said Dick, “and that’s the truth. But since I’ve got to talkin’ with you, I think more about it. I guess I’ll begin to go.”

“I wish you would, Dick. You’ll make a smart man if you only get a little education.”

“Do you think so?” asked Dick, doubtfully.

“I know so. A boy who has earned his own living since he was seven years old must have something in him. I feel very much interested in you, Dick. You’ve had a hard time of it so far in life, but I think better times are in store. I want you to do well, and I feel sure you can if you only try.”

“You’re a good fellow,” said Dick, gratefully. “I’m afraid I’m a pretty rough customer, but I ain’t as bad as some. I mean to turn over a new leaf, and try to grow up ’spectable.”

“There’ve been a great many boys begin as low down as you, Dick, that have grown up respectable and honored. But they had to work pretty hard for it.”

“I’m willin’ to work hard,” said Dick.

“And you must not only work hard, but work in the right way.”

“What’s the right way?”

“You began in the right way when you determined never to steal, or do anything mean or dishonorable, however strongly tempted to do so. That will make people have confidence in you when they come to know you. But, in order to succeed well, you must manage to get as good an education as you can. Until you do, you cannot get a position in an office or counting-room, even to run errands.”

“That’s so,” said Dick, soberly. “I never thought how awful ignorant I was till now.”

“That can be remedied with perseverance,” said Frank. “A year will do a great deal for you.”

“I’ll go to work and see what I can do,” said Dick, energetically.

* * *

1868, 1910

ANDREW CARNEGIE

Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) arrived in Pittsburgh in 1848, at the age of thirteen. He immediately went to work in a cotton factory, and later he worked for the telegraph and the Pennsylvania Railroad. After the Civil War, he struck out on

his own and made his fortune in iron and steel, becoming one of the best-known industrialists of the late nineteenth century. Carnegie was relentless in his pursuit of profit, and he constantly looked for new opportunities to improve and grow his business. In 1892 the Carnegie Steel mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania, witnessed one of the most violent labor disputes of the late nineteenth century—an event that dealt a severe blow to Carnegie’s image as a benevolent employer. In 1901 Carnegie sold Carnegie Steel to J. P. Morgan for \$480 million, making him one of the richest men in the world.

Carnegie also wrote several books, including a posthumously published autobiography (1920), and he frequently wrote articles for magazines. In 1889 he published “Wealth” in the *North American Review*, and the article was soon reprinted in England under the title by which it is better known: “The Gospel of Wealth.” Here, Carnegie defends the social value of capitalism and the individual accumulation of wealth. The primary focus of the essay, though, is on the obligation of the wealthy to dispose of their money for benefit of the public good. Carnegie disparaged the rich who left their fortunes to their families, and he supported a heavy estate tax. His preference, however, was for the wealthy themselves to donate their money in their own lifetimes. Following this credo, Carnegie devoted approximately 90 percent of his own fortune to foundations, universities, and the establishment of over 2,500 public libraries.

*From The Gospel of Wealth*¹

The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his retainers. The Indians are to-day where civilized man then was. When visiting the Sioux, I was led to the wigwam of the chief. It was just like the others in external appearance, and even within the difference was trifling between it and those of the poorest of his braves. The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization.

This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. It is well, nay, essential for the progress of the race, that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, and for all the refinements of civilization, rather than that none should be so. Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor. Without wealth there can be no Mæcenas.² The “good old times” were not good old times. Neither master nor servant was as well situated then as to-day. A relapse to old conditions would be disastrous to both—not the least so to him who serves—and would sweep away civilization with it. But whether the change be for good or ill, it is upon us, beyond our power to alter, and therefore to be accepted and made the best of. It is a waste of time to criticize the inevitable.

1. First published as “Wealth” in the *North American Review* in 1889, the source of the text here.

2. Gaius Mæcenas (ca. 70–8 B.C.E.), a Roman statesman and an important patron of the most famous poets of his time.

* * *

There remains, then, only one mode of using great fortunes; but in this we have the true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth, the reconciliation of the rich and the poor—a reign of harmony—another ideal, differing, indeed, from that of the Communist in requiring only the further evolution of existing conditions, not the total overthrow of our civilization. It is founded upon the present most intense individualism, and the race is prepared to put it in practice by degrees whenever it pleases. Under its sway we shall have an ideal state, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good, and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves. Even the poorest can be made to see this, and to agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow-citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years in trifling amounts.

* * *

Those who would administer wisely must, indeed, be wise, for one of the serious obstacles to the improvement of our race is indiscriminate charity. It were better for mankind that the millions of the rich were thrown into the sea than so spent as to encourage the slothful, the drunken, the unworthy. Of every thousand dollars spent in so called charity to-day, it is probable that \$950 is unwisely spent; so spent, indeed, as to produce the very evils which it proposes to mitigate or cure. A well-known writer of philosophic books admitted the other day that he had given a quarter of a dollar to a man who approached him as he was coming to visit the house of his friend. He knew nothing of the habits of this beggar; knew not the use that would be made of this money, although he had every reason to suspect that it would be spent improperly. This man professed to be a disciple of Herbert Spencer;³ yet the quarter-dollar given that night will probably work more injury than all the money which its thoughtless donor will ever be able to give in true charity will do good. He only gratified his own feelings, saved himself from annoyance,—and this was probably one of the most selfish and very worst actions of his life, for in all respects he is most worthy.

In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or never to do all. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by alms-giving. Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do, except in cases of accident or sudden change. Every one has, of course, cases of individuals brought to his own knowledge where temporary assistance can do genuine good, and these he will not overlook. But the amount which can be wisely given by the individual for individuals is necessarily limited by his lack of knowledge of the circumstances connected with each. He is the only true

3. British philosopher and scientist (1820–1903), one of the most influential proponents of using evolutionary theory to understand human society.

reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy, and, perhaps, even more so, for in alms-giving more injury is probably done by rewarding vice than by relieving virtue.

The rich man is thus almost restricted to following the examples of Peter Cooper, Enoch Pratt of Baltimore, Mr. Pratt of Brooklyn, Senator Stanford,⁴ and others, who know that the best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise—parks, and means of recreation, by which men are helped in body and mind; works of art, certain to give pleasure and improve the public taste, and public institutions of various kinds, which will improve the general condition of the people;—in this manner returning their surplus wealth to the mass of their fellows in the forms best calculated to do them lasting good.

Thus is the problem of Rich and Poor to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself. The best minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows save by using it year by year for the general good. This day already dawns. But a little while, and although, without incurring the pity of their fellows, men may die sharers in great business enterprises from which their capital cannot be or has not been withdrawn, and is left chiefly at death for public uses, yet the man who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away “unwept, unhonored, and unsung,”⁵ no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him. Of such as these the public verdict will then be: “The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.”

Such, in my opinion, is the true Gospel concerning Wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the Rich and the Poor, and to bring “Peace on earth, among men Good-Will”⁶

1889

4. Industrial magnates who made notable philanthropic gifts: Peter Cooper (1791–1883) founded the Cooper Union Institute for the Advance of Science and Art; Enoch Pratt (1808–1896) established the central library and four branch libraries in Baltimore; Charles Pratt

(1830–1891) founded the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn; Leland Stanford (1824–1893) created Leland Stanford Junior University in California.
5. From canto VI of “The Lay of the Last Minstrel” (1805) by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832).
6. Luke 2:14.

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) first delivered his “frontier thesis” at a gathering of historians in Chicago during the World Columbian Exposition of 1893. With its focus on the significance of territorial expansion, Turner’s framework for understanding American democracy became one of the most influential ideas in

American history. Most historians of the late nineteenth century emphasized the antecedents of the United States—including a racial heritage that they believed had been brought by Anglo-Saxons from Europe—to explain the nation's character and democratic institutions. Turner's approach was quite different. He understood the history of American society as a product of a unique physical and social environment. The wilderness of the frontier, he wrote, constantly returned Americans to "primitive conditions" and cultivated democratic individualism. Turner celebrated "the transforming influences of free land" in the West, where "freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideals, are brought into existence." This vision of history was a story of progress that fit well with the vocabulary of Darwinian evolution that was everywhere in the intellectual air of the period. However, Turner also presented a challenge. Three years before he presented his thesis, the U.S. Census Bureau had declared that a continuous frontier line no longer existed; in other words, the Western frontier was "closed." If the frontier was the key to understanding the history of America, what would a future without the frontier bring?

*From The Significance of the Frontier in American History*¹

*** Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.

Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions. The peculiarity of American institutions is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life. Said Calhoun² in 1817, "We are great, and rapidly—I was about to say fearfully—growing!" So saying, he touched the distinguishing feature of American life. All peoples show development; the germ theory of politics has been sufficiently emphasized. In the case of most nations, however, the development has occurred in a limited area; and if the nation has expanded, it has met other growing peoples whom it has conquered. But in the case of the United States we have a different phenomenon. Limiting our attention to the Atlantic coast, we have the familiar phenomenon of the evolution of institutions in a limited area, such as the rise of representative government; into complex organs; the progress from primitive industrial society, without division of labor, up to manufacturing civilization. But we have in addition to this a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. Thus American development has exhibited not

1. Turner's address to the American Historical Association was delivered on July 12, 1893, in Chicago. It was printed in the *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, December 14, 1893, then in the *Report of the American Historical Association* for 1893. Along with various short papers of Turner's, it became part of

The Frontier in American History (1920), from which these excerpts are taken.

2. John Caldwell Calhoun (1782–1850), U.S. representative and senator from South Carolina and U.S. vice president under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. Turner cites "Abridgment of Debates of Congress," vol. V.

merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West. Even the slavery struggle, which is made so exclusive an object of attention by writers like Professor von Holst,³ occupies its important place in American history because of its relation to westward expansion. In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization. Much has been written about the frontier from the point of view of border warfare and the chase, but as a field for the serious study of the economist and the historian it has been neglected.

The American frontier is sharply distinguished from the European frontier—a fortified boundary line running through dense populations. The most significant thing about the American frontier is, that it lies at the hither edge of free land. In the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile. The term is an elastic one, and for our purposes does not need sharp definition. We shall consider the whole frontier belt including the Indian country and the outer margin of the “settled area” of the census reports. This paper will make no attempt to treat the subject exhaustively; its aim is simply to call attention to the frontier as a fertile field for investigation, and to suggest some of the problems which arise in connection with it. In the settlement of America we have to observe how European life entered the continent, and how America modified and developed that life and reacted on Europe. Our early history is the study of European germs developing in an American environment. Too exclusive attention has been paid by institutional students to the Germanic origins, too little to the American factors. The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick, he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, any more than the first phenomenon was a case of reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. As successive terminal moraines result from succes-

3. German psychologist Hermann Eduard von Holst (1841–1904).

sive glaciations, so each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics. Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. And to study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history.

* * *

It was not merely in legislative action that the frontier worked against the sectionalism of the coast. The economic and social characteristics of the frontier worked against sectionalism. The men of the frontier had closer resemblances to the Middle region than to either of the other sections. Pennsylvania had been the seed plot of frontier emigration, and, although she passed on her settlers along the Great Valley into the west of Virginia and the Carolinas, yet the industrial society of these Southern frontiersmen was always more like that of the Middle region than like that of the tide-water portion of the South, which later came to spread its industrial type-throughout the South. The Middle region, entered by New York harbor, was an open door to all Europe. The tide-water part of the South represented typical Englishmen, modified by a warm climate and servile labor, and living in baronial fashion on great plantations; New England stood for a special English movement—Puritanism. The Middle region was less English than the other sections. It had a wide mixture of nationalities, a varied society, the mixed town and county system of local government, a varied economic life, many religious sects. In short, it was a region mediating between New England and the South, and the East and the West. It represented that composite nationality which the contemporary United States exhibits, that juxtaposition of non-English groups, occupying a valley or a little settlement, and presenting reflections of the map of Europe in their variety. It was democratic and nonsectional, if not national; “easy, tolerant, and contented”;⁴ rooted strongly in material prosperity. It was typical of the modern United States. It was least sectional, not only because it lay between North and South, but also because with no barriers to shut out its frontiers from its settled region, and with a system of connecting waterways, the Middle region mediated between East and West as well as between North and South. Thus it became the typically American region. Even the New Englander, who was shut out from the frontier by the Middle region, tarrying in New York or Pennsylvania on his westward march, lost the acuteness of his sectionalism on the way.

* * *

So long as free land exists, the opportunity for a competency exists, and economic power secures political power. But the democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism, intolerant of administrative experience and education, and pressing individual liberty beyond its proper bounds, has its dangers as well as its benefits. Individualism in America has allowed

4. This quoted phrase comes from Henry Adams's description of Pennsylvania in his *History of the United States of America* (1889).

a laxity in regard to governmental affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit. In this connection may be noted also the influence of frontier conditions in permitting lax business honor, inflated paper currency and wild-cat banking. The colonial and revolutionary frontier was the region whence emanated many of the worst forms of an evil currency. The West in the War of 1812 repeated the phenomenon on the frontier of that day, while the speculation and wild-cat banking of the period of the crisis of 1837⁵ occurred on the new frontier belt of the next tier of States. Thus each one of the periods of lax financial integrity coincides with periods when a new set of frontier communities had arisen, and coincides in area with these successive frontiers for the most part. The recent Populist agitation is a case in point. Many a State that now declines any connection with the tenets of the Populists, itself adhered to such ideas in an earlier stage of the development of the State. A primitive society can hardly be expected to show the intelligent appreciation of the complexity of business interests in a developed society. The continual recurrence of these areas of paper-money agitation is another evidence that the frontier can be isolated and studied as a factor in American history of the highest importance.

* * *

From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The works of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not *tabula rasa*. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of

5. A financial panic, caused by real estate speculation and weak banking policy, that inaugurated a six-year economic depression.

escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier. What the Mediterranean Sea was to the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that, and more, the ever retreating frontier has been to the United States directly, and to the nations of Europe more remotely. And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.

1893, 1920

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Throughout his lifetime of politics and public leadership, Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) also staked out a formidable career as a historian, commentator, and essayist. His four-volume study, *The Winning of the West* (1889–1896), unapologetically told the story of U.S. territorial expansion as a romantic story of conquest, a westward march led by Anglo-Saxons. Roosevelt saw history in Darwinian terms of struggle, in which more-advanced races triumphed over others, advancing human history. “During the past three centuries,” *The Winning of the West* begins, “the spread of the English-speaking peoples over the world’s waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature in the world’s history, but also the event of all others most far-reaching in its effects and its importance.” He celebrated the “vigor and prowess shown by our fighting men” and scorned “shortsighted and timid” people who opposed wars “for the advance of American civilization.”

In “True Americanism,” Roosevelt celebrates the history of immigration to the United States but also displays his deep unease with foreign customs and beliefs. American identity and citizenship are tied to cultural assimilation. An immigrant who fails to “become Americanized” risks becoming “nothing at all,” he writes. With the closing of the frontier in the West, Roosevelt feared that American men would lose the virility that he believed necessary for masculine virtue. He celebrates “the iron qualities that must go with true manhood” in *The Strenuous Life* (1902), a book published the year after Roosevelt became the twenty-sixth president of the United States.

*From American Ideals*¹

From Chapter II. True Americanism

* * *

The mighty tide of immigration to our shores has brought in its train much of good and much of evil; and whether the good or the evil shall predomi-

1. From the first edition, published in 1897.

nate depends mainly on whether these newcomers do or do not throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be European, and become Americans like the rest of us. More than a third of the people of the Northern States are of foreign birth or parentage. An immense number of them have become completely Americanized, and these stand on exactly the same plane as the descendants of any Puritan, Cavalier, or Knickerbocker² among us, and do their full and honorable share of the nation's work. But where immigrants, or the sons of immigrants, do not heartily and in good faith throw in their lot with us, but cling to the speech, the customs, the ways of life, and the habits of thought of the Old World which they have left, they thereby harm both themselves and us. If they remain alien elements, unassimilated, and with interests separate from ours, they are mere obstructions to the current of our national life, and, moreover, can get no good from it themselves. In fact, though we ourselves also suffer from their perversity, it is they who really suffer most. It is an immense benefit to the European immigrant to change him into an American citizen. To bear the name of American is to bear the most honorable of titles; and whoever does not so believe has no business to bear the name at all, and, if he comes from Europe, the sooner he goes back there the better. Besides, the man who does not become Americanized nevertheless fails to remain a European, and becomes nothing at all. The immigrant cannot possibly remain what he was, or continue to be a member of the Old-World society. If he tries to retain his old language, in a few generations it becomes a barbarous jargon; if he tries to retain his old customs and ways of life, in a few generations he becomes an uncouth boor. He has cut himself off from the Old-World, and cannot retain his connection with it; and if he wishes ever to amount to anything he must throw himself heart and soul, and without reservation, into the new life to which he has come. It is urgently necessary to check and regulate our immigration, by much more drastic laws than now exist; and this should be done both to keep out laborers who tend to depress the labor market, and to keep out races which do not assimilate readily with our own, and unworthy individuals of all races—not only criminals, idiots, and paupers, but anarchists of the Most and O'Donovan Rossa type.³

From his own standpoint, it is beyond all question the wise thing for the immigrant to become thoroughly Americanized. Moreover, from our standpoint, we have a right to demand it. We freely extend the hand of welcome and of good-fellowship to every man, no matter what his creed or birthplace, who comes here honestly intent on becoming a good United States citizen like the rest of us; but we have a right, and it is our duty, to demand that he shall indeed become so, and shall not confuse the issues with which we are struggling by introducing among us Old-World quarrels and prejudices. There are certain ideas which he must give up. For instance, he must learn that American life is incompatible with the existence of any form of anarchy, or of any secret society having murder for its aim, whether at home or

2. A descendant of the original Dutch settlers of Manhattan. "Cavalier": a supporter of King Charles I during the English Civil War (1642–51).

3. Johann Most (1846–1906) was a German anarchist who emigrated to the United States and was best known for his advocacy of armed

revolt. Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831–1915) was an Irish Fenian leader who established the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Jailed numerous times, he was exiled to the United States in 1871; from New York City, he organized the first Irish republican bombings of English cities.

abroad; and he must learn that we exact full religious toleration and the complete separation of Church and State. Moreover, he must not bring in his Old-World religious race and national antipathies, but must merge them into love for our common country, and must take pride in the things which we can all take pride in. He must revere only our flag; not only must it come first, but no other flag should even come second. He must learn to celebrate Washington's birthday rather than that of the Queen or Kaiser, and the Fourth of July instead of St. Patrick's Day. Our political and social questions must be settled on their own merits, and not complicated by quarrels between England and Ireland, or France and Germany, with which we have nothing to do: it is an outrage to fight an American political campaign with reference to questions of European politics. Above all, the immigrant must learn to talk and think and *be* United States.

The immigrant of to-day can learn much from the experience of the immigrants of the past, who came to America prior to the Revolutionary War. We were then already, what we are now, a people of mixed blood. Many of our most illustrious Revolutionary names were borne by men of Huguenot blood—Jay, Sevier, Marion, Laurens.⁴ But the Huguenots were, on the whole, the best immigrants we have ever received; sooner than any other, and more completely, they became American in speech, conviction, and thought. The Hollanders took longer than the Huguenots to become completely assimilated; nevertheless they in the end became so, immensely to their own advantage. One of the leading Revolutionary generals, Schuyler, and one of the Presidents of the United States, Van Buren,⁵ were of Dutch blood; but they rose to their positions, the highest in the land, because they had become Americans and had ceased being Hollanders. If they had remained members of an alien body, cut off by their speech and customs and belief from the rest of the American community, Schuyler would have lived his life as a boorish, provincial squire, and Van Buren would have ended his days a small tavern-keeper. So it is with the Germans of Pennsylvania. Those of them who became Americanized have furnished to our history a multitude of honorable names, from the days of the Mühlensbergs onward;⁶ but those who did not become Americanized form to the present day an unimportant body, of no significance in American existence. So it is with the Irish, who gave to Revolutionary annals such names as Carroll and Sullivan, and to the Civil War men like Sheridan⁷—men who were Americans and nothing else: while the Irish who remain such, and busy themselves solely with alien politics,

4. French protestants of the 16th and 17th centuries. Among their descendants were John Jay (1745–1829), who served as president of the Continental Congress, and Ambrose Hundley Sevier (1801–1848), Democratic U.S. senator from Arkansas, who in 1848 negotiated the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican War. Others were Francis Marion (ca. 1732–1795), a general in the American Revolutionary War, and Henry Laurens (1724–1792), American merchant and South Carolina planter who became a political leader during the Revolutionary War.

5. Martin Van Buren (1782–1862) was the eighth president of the United States; as a Dutch-descended American, he was the first president of non-Anglo descent.

6. An American political, religious, and military dynasty descended from Heinrich Melchior Mühlensberg (1711–1787), a German immigrant who settled in Philadelphia; Mühlensberg was a founder of the Lutheran Church in America.

7. Charles Carroll (1737–1832), delegate to the Continental Congress and U.S. Senator from Maryland; Carroll was the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. John Sullivan (1740–1795), general in the Revolutionary War, delegate to the Continental Congress, and governor of New Hampshire. Philip Henry Sheridan (1831–1888), Union general in the American Civil War and later involved in the Indian wars of the Great Plains.

can have only an unhealthy influence upon American life, and can never rise as do their compatriots who become straightout Americans. Thus it has ever been with all people who have come hither, of whatever stock or blood. The same thing is true of the churches. A church which remains foreign, in language or spirit, is doomed.

But I wish to be distinctly understood on one point. Americanism is a question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace. The politician who bids for the Irish or German vote, or the Irishman or German who votes as an Irishman or German, is despicable, for all citizens of this commonwealth should vote solely as Americans; but he is not a whit less despicable than the voter who votes against a good American, merely because that American happens to have been born in Ireland or Germany. Know-nothingism,⁸ in any form, is as utterly un-American as foreignism. It is a base outrage to oppose a man because of his religion or birthplace, and all good citizens will hold any such effort in abhorrence. A Scandinavian, a German, or an Irishman who has really become an American has the right to stand on exactly the same footing as any native-born citizen in the land, and is just as much entitled to the friendship and support, social and political, of his neighbors. Among the men with whom I have been thrown in close personal contact socially, and who have been among my staunchest friends and allies politically, are not a few Americans who happen to have been born on the other side of the water, in Germany, Ireland, Scandinavia; and there could be no better men in the ranks of our native-born citizens.

* * *

1897

*From The Strenuous Life*¹

* * *

In all the history of mankind there is nothing that quite parallels the way in which our people have filled a vacant continent with self-governing commonwealths, knit into one nation. And of all this marvelous history perhaps the most wonderful portion is that which deals with the way in which the Pacific coast and the Rocky Mountains were settled.

The men who founded these communities showed practically by their life-work that it is indeed the spirit of adventure which is the maker of commonwealths. Their traits of daring and hardihood and iron endurance are not merely indispensable traits for pioneers; they are also traits which must go to the make-up of every mighty and successful people. You and your fathers who built up the West did more even than you thought; for you shaped

8. A nativist American political movement of the 1850s, a popular reaction to fears that the political corruption of Irish Catholic immigrants was weakening U.S. cities. The membership, mostly middle class and Protestant, was absorbed by the Republican Party in the North.

1. *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* is one of Roosevelt's most famous books, published in 1902. The excerpt is from the chapter entitled "Manhood and Statehood," an address Roosevelt gave in Colorado Springs on August 2, 1901.

thereby the destiny of the whole republic, and as a necessary corollary profoundly influenced the course of events throughout the world. More and more as the years go by this republic will find its guidance in the thought and action of the West, because the conditions of development in the West have steadily tended to accentuate the peculiarly American characteristics of its people.

There was scant room for the coward and the weakling in the ranks of the adventurous frontiersmen—the pioneer settlers who first broke up the wild prairie soil, who first hewed their way into the primeval forest, who guided their white-topped wagons across the endless leagues of Indian-haunted desolation, and explored every remote mountain-chain in the restless quest for metal wealth. Behind them came the men who completed the work they had roughly begun: who drove the great railroad systems over plain and desert and mountain pass; who stocked the teeming ranches, and under irrigation saw the bright green of the alfalfa and the yellow of the golden stubble supplant the gray of the sage-brush desert; who have built great populous cities—cities in which every art and science of civilization are carried to the highest point—on tracts which, when the nineteenth century had passed its meridian, were still known only to the grim trappers and hunters and the red lords of the wilderness with whom they waged eternal war.

Such is the record of which we are so proud. It is a record of men who greatly dared and greatly did; a record of wanderings wider and more dangerous than those of the Vikings; a record of endless feats of arms, of victory after victory in the ceaseless strife waged against wild man and wild nature. The winning of the West was the great epic feat in the history of our race.

We have then a right to meet to-day in a spirit of just pride in the past. But when we pay homage to the hardy, grim, resolute men who, with incredible toil and risk, laid deep the foundations of the civilization that we inherit, let us steadily remember that the only homage that counts is the homage of deeds—not merely of words. It is well to gather here to show that we remember what has been done in the past by the Western pioneers of our people, and that we glory in the greatness for which they prepared the way. But lip-loyalty by itself avails very little, whether it is expressed concerning a nation or an ideal. It would be a sad and evil thing for this country if ever the day came when we considered the great deeds of our forefathers as an excuse for our resting slothfully satisfied with what has been already done. On the contrary, they should be an inspiration and appeal, summoning us to show that we too have courage and strength; that we too are ready to dare greatly if the need arises; and, above all, that we are firmly bent upon that steady performance of every-day duty which, in the long run, is of such incredible worth in the formation of national character.

The old iron days have gone, the days when the weakling died as the penalty of inability to hold his own in the rough warfare against his surroundings. We live in softer times. Let us see to it that, while we take advantage of every gentler and more humanizing tendency of the age, we yet preserve the iron quality which made our forefathers and predecessors fit to do the deeds they did. It will of necessity find a different expression now, but the quality itself remains just as necessary as ever. Surely you men of the West, you men who with stout heart, cool head, and ready hand have wrought

out your own success and built up these great new commonwealths, surely you need no reminder of the fact that if either man or nation wishes to play a great part in the world there must be no dallying with the life of lazy ease. In the abounding energy and intensity of existence in our mighty democratic republic there is small space indeed for the idler, for the luxury-loving man who prizes ease more than hard, triumph-crowned effort.

We hold work not as a curse but as a blessing, and we regard the idler with scornful pity. It would be in the highest degree undesirable that we should all work in the same way or at the same things, and for the sake of the real greatness of the nation we should in the fullest and most cordial way recognize the fact that some of the most needed work must, from its very nature, be unremunerative in a material sense. Each man must choose so far as the conditions allow him the path to which he is bidden by his own peculiar powers and inclinations. But if he is a man he must in some way or shape do a man's work. If, after making all the effort that his strength of body and of mind permits, he yet honorably fails, why, he is still entitled to a certain share of respect because he has made the effort. But if he does not make the effort, or if he makes it half-heartedly and recoils from the labor, the risk, or the irksome monotony of his task, why, he has forfeited all right to our respect, and has shown himself a mere cumberer of the earth. It is not given to us all to succeed, but it is given to us all to strive manfully to deserve success.

We need then the iron qualities that must go with true manhood. We need the positive virtues of resolution, of courage, of indomitable will, of power to do without shrinking the rough work that must always be done, and to persevere through the long days of slow progress or of seeming failure which always come before any final triumph, no matter how brilliant. But we need more than these qualities. This country cannot afford to have its sons less than men; but neither can it afford to have them other than good men. If courage and strength and intellect are unaccompanied by the moral purpose, the moral sense, they become merely forms of expression for unscrupulous force and unscrupulous cunning. If the strong man has not in him the lift toward lofty things his strength makes him only a curse to himself and to his neighbor. All this is true in private life, and it is no less true in public life. If Washington and Lincoln had not had in them the whipcord fiber of moral and mental strength, the soul that steels itself to endure disaster unshaken and with grim resolve to wrest victory from defeat, then the one could not have founded, nor the other preserved, our mighty federal Union. The least touch of flabbiness, of unhealthy softness, in either would have meant ruin for this nation, and therefore the downfall of the proudest hope of mankind. But no less is it true that had either been influenced by self-seeking ambition, by callous disregard of others, by contempt for the moral law, he would have dashed us down into the black gulf of failure. Woe to all of us if ever as a people we grow to condone evil because it is successful. We can no more afford to lose social and civic decency and honesty than we can afford to lose the qualities of courage and strength. It is the merest truism to say that the nation rests upon the individual, upon the family—upon individual manliness and womanliness, using the words in their widest and fullest meaning.

To be a good husband or good wife, a good neighbor and friend, to be hard-working and upright in business and social relations, to bring up many

healthy children—to be and to do all this is to lay the foundations of good citizenship as they must be laid. But we cannot stop even with this. Each of us has not only his duty to himself, his family, and his neighbors, but his duty to the State and to the nation. We are in honor bound each to strive according to his or her strength to bring ever nearer the day when justice and wisdom shall obtain in public life as in private life. We cannot retain the full measure of our self-respect if we cannot retain pride in our citizenship. For the sake not only of ourselves but of our children and our children's children we must see that this nation stands for strength and honesty both at home and abroad. In our internal policy we cannot afford to rest satisfied until all that the government can do has been done to secure fair dealing and equal justice as between man and man. In the great part which hereafter, whether we will or not, we must play in the world at large, let us see to it that we neither do wrong nor shrink from doing right because the right is difficult; that on the one hand we inflict no injury, and that on the other we have a due regard for the honor and the interest of our mighty nation; and that we keep unsullied the renown of the flag which beyond all others of the present time or of the ages of the past stands for confident faith in the future welfare and greatness of mankind.

1902

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT

The African American author Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932) understood that national identity in the United States was—and many would argue, still is—closely tied to questions of race. In his fiction, Chesnutt explored and challenged the “color line,” revealing the divide between white and black Americans to be both a flimsy fiction and a powerful force. His volume *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899) includes several narratives about middle-class African Americans of mixed ancestry and the effects of Jim Crow on their lives. Chesnutt’s first novel, *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), tells the story of John and Rena Walden, a brother and sister of light complexion who attempt to pass for white.

Just months before *The House Behind the Cedars* appeared in print, Chesnutt published “The Future American” in the *Boston Evening Transcript*. In the essay, he responded to the “popular theory . . . that the future American race will consist of a harmonious fusion of the various European elements which now make up our heterogeneous population.” Instead, he posited a “future American race” formed through the mixture and intermarriage of all races and ethnicities, including African Americans and other nonwhites. In the final section of the essay, printed below, Chesnutt argues that although prejudice and violence may slow the process, the forces favoring racial “amalgamation” are stronger. He sounds a utopian note, predicting a time when “distinctions of color shall lose their importance” and the United States achieves a “complete racial fusion.”

*From The Future American*¹

I have endeavored in two former letters to set out the reasons why it seems likely that the future American ethnic type will be formed by a fusion of all the various races now peopling this continent, and to show that this process has been under way, slowly but surely, like all evolutionary movements, for several hundred years. I wish now to consider some of the conditions which will retard this fusion, as well as certain other facts which tend to promote it.

The Indian phase of the problem, so far at least as the United States is concerned, has been practically disposed of in what has already been said. The absorption of the Indians will be delayed so long as the tribal relations continue, and so long as the Indians are treated as wards of the Government, instead of being given their rights once for all, and placed upon the footing of other citizens. It is presumed that this will come about as the wilder Indians are educated and by the development of the country brought into closer contact with civilization, which must happen before a very great while. As has been stated, there is no very strong prejudice against the Indian blood; a well-stocked farm or a comfortable fortune will secure a white husband for a comely Indian girl any day, with some latitude, and there is no evidence of any such strong race instinct or organization as will make the Indians of the future wish to perpetuate themselves as a small and insignificant class in a great population, thus emphasizing distinctions which would be overlooked in the case of the individual.

The Indian will fade into the white population as soon as he chooses, and in the United States proper the slender Indian strain will ere long leave no trace discoverable by anyone but the anthropological expert. In New Mexico and Central America, on the contrary, the chances seem to be that the Indian will first absorb the non-indigenous elements, unless, which is not unlikely, European immigration shall increase the white contingent.

The Negro element remains, then, the only one which seems likely to present any difficulty of assimilation. The main obstacle that retards the absorption of the Negro into the general population is the apparently intense prejudice against color which prevails in the United States. This prejudice loses much of its importance, however, when it is borne in mind that it is almost purely local and does not exist in quite the same form anywhere else in the world, except among the Boers of South Africa,² where it prevails in an even more aggravated form; and, as I shall endeavor to show, this prejudice in the United States is more apparent than real, and is a caste prejudice³ which is merely accentuated by differences of race. At present, however, I wish to consider it merely as a deterrent to amalgamation.

This prejudice finds forcible expression in the laws which prevail in all the Southern States, without exception, forbidding the intermarriage of white persons and persons of color—these last being generally defined within certain degrees. While it is evident that such laws alone will not prevent the

1. "The Future American" appeared as a three-part article in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1900. This excerpt is taken from the third part, which appeared on September 1, 1900.

2. A term used to denote those who traced their ancestry to Dutch, German, and French Hugue-

not settlers of South Africa. (*Boer* means "farmer" in Afrikaans.)

3. *Caste* refers to a division of society into hereditary divisions that limit the occupations, social associations, and marriage opportunities of each caste.

intermingling of races, which goes merrily on in spite of them, it is equally apparent that this placing of mixed marriages beyond the pale of the law is a powerful deterrent to any honest or dignified amalgamation. Add to this legal restriction, which is enforced by severe penalties, the social odium accruing to the white party to such a union, and it may safely be predicted that so long as present conditions prevail in the South, there will be little marrying or giving in marriage between persons of different race. So ferocious is this sentiment against intermarriage, that in a recent Missouri case, where a colored man ran away with and married a young white woman, the man was pursued by a "posse"—a word which is rapidly being debased from its proper meaning by its use in the attempt to dignify the character of lawless Southern mobs—and shot to death; the woman was tried and convicted of the "crime" of "miscegenation"⁴—another honest word which the South degrades along with the Negro.

Another obstacle to race fusion lies in the drastic and increasing proscriptive legislation by which the South attempts to keep the white and colored races apart in every place where their joint presence might be taken to imply equality; or, to put it more directly, the persistent effort to degrade the Negro to a distinctly and permanently inferior caste. This is undertaken by means of separate schools, separate railroad and street cars, political disfranchisement, debasing and abhorrent prison systems, and an unflagging campaign of calumny, by which the vices and shortcomings of the Negroes are grossly magnified and their virtues practically lost sight of. The popular argument that the Negro ought to develop his own civilization, and has no right to share in that of the white race, unless by favor, comes with poor grace from those who are forcing their civilization upon others at the cannon's mouth; it is, moreover, uncandid and unfair. The white people of the present generation did not make their civilization; they inherited it ready-made, and much of the wealth which is so strong a factor in their power was created by the unpaid labor of the colored people. The present generation has, however, brought to a high state of development one distinctively American institution, for which it is entitled to such credit as it may wish to claim; I refer to the custom of lynching, with its attendant horrors.

The principal deterrent to race admixture, however, is the low industrial and social efficiency of the colored race. If it be conceded that these are the result of environment, then their cause is not far to seek, and the cure is also in sight. Their poverty, their ignorance and their servile estate render them as yet largely ineligible for social fusion with a race whose pride is fed not only by the record of its achievements but by a constant comparison with a less developed and less fortunate race, which it has held so long in subjection.

The forces that tend to the future absorption of the black race are, however, vastly stronger than those arrayed against it. As experience has demonstrated, slavery was favorable to the mixing of races. The growth, under healthy civil conditions, of a large and self-respecting colored citizenship would doubtless tend to lessen the clandestine association of the two races; but the effort to degrade the Negro may result, if successful, in a partial

4. Both *miscegenation* and *amalgamation* (a term Chesnutt uses later) refer to sexual reproduction between members of different racial or ethnic groups.

restoration of the old status. But, assuming that the present anti-Negro legislation is but a temporary reaction, then the steady progress of the colored race in wealth and culture and social efficiency will, in the course of time, materially soften the asperities of racial prejudice and permit them to approach the whites more closely, until, in time, the prejudice against intermarriage shall have been overcome by other considerations.

* * *

This very proscription, however, political and civil at the South, social all over the country, varying somewhat in degree, will, unless very soon relaxed, prove a powerful factor in the mixture of the races. If it is only by becoming white that colored people and their children are to enjoy the rights and dignities of citizenship, they will have every incentive to “lighten the breed,” to use a current phrase, that they may claim the white man’s privileges as soon as possible. That this motive is already at work may be seen in the enormous extent to which certain “face bleachers” and “hair straighteners” are advertised in the newspapers printed for circulation among the colored people. The most powerful factor in achieving any result is the wish to bring it about. The only thing that ever succeeded in keeping two races separated when living on the same soil—the only true ground of caste—is religion, and as has been alluded to in the case of the Jews, this is only superficially successful. The colored people are the same as the whites in religion; they have the same standards and mediums of culture, the same ideals, and the presence of the successful white race as a constant incentive to their ambition. The ultimate result is not difficult to foresee. The races will be quite as effectively amalgamated by lightening the Negroes as they would be by darkening the whites. It is only a social fiction, indeed, which makes of a person seven-eighths white a Negro; he is really much more a white man.

* * *

The adding to our territories of large areas populated by dark races, some of them already liberally dowered with Negro blood, will enhance the relative importance of the non-Caucasian elements of the population, and largely increase the flow of dark blood toward the white race, until the time shall come when distinctions of color shall lose their importance, which will be but the prelude to a complete racial fusion.

The formation of this future American race is not a pressing problem. Because of the conditions under which it must take place, it is likely to be extremely slow—much slower, indeed, in our temperate climate and highly organized society, than in the American tropics and sub-tropics, where it is already well under way, if not a *fait accompli*.⁵ That it must come in the United States, sooner or later, seems to be a foregone conclusion, as the result of natural law—*lex dura, sed tamen lex*⁶—a hard pill, but one which must be swallowed. There can manifestly be no such thing as a peaceful and progressive civilization in a nation divided by two warring races, and

5. An accomplished fact (French); something done that cannot be changed.

6. The law is harsh, but it is still the law (Latin).

homogeneity of type, at least in externals, is a necessary condition of harmonious social progress.

If this, then, must come, the development and progress of all the constituent elements of the future American race is of the utmost importance as bearing upon the quality of the resultant type. The white race is still susceptible of some improvement; and if, in time, the more objectionable Negro traits are eliminated, and his better qualities correspondingly developed, his part in the future American race may well be an important and valuable one.

1900

JANE ADDAMS

Laura Jane Addams (1860–1935) was born in Cedarville, Illinois; she graduated from Rockford Seminary in 1882, her father having refused to allow her to attend Smith College and become a physician. After a period of indecision and depression, Addams found her calling and in 1889 established the social settlement Hull-House in Chicago. From Hull-House, where she lived and worked for the rest of her life, Addams became one of the country's most famous women through her writing, settlement work, and international efforts for world peace. At Hull-House, immigrants to Chicago, including Italians, Russian and Polish Jews, Irish, Germans, Greeks, and Bohemians, could take refuge from dirty and overcrowded tenements and the dangers of life on the streets. Modeled after a similar settlement house in London, Hull-House was originally conceived as a place where upper-class women could share their love of the arts with the poor. However, Addams quickly changed the orientation of the settlement house toward providing social services for the neighborhood, including meals, clothing, and much-needed kindergarten and child care services for the children of working mothers. Hull-House included an employment bureau, an art gallery, libraries, discussion groups, crafts groups, and music and art classes. By 1900, Hull-House activities had broadened to include the Jane Club (a cooperative residence for working women), the first Little Theater in America, a labor museum, and a meeting hall for trade union groups. One of Addams's most characteristic programs at Hull-House, described in this excerpt from her autobiography, was the promotion of the traditional crafts and cultural practices of immigrants. Such programs aimed at renewing the self-respect of immigrants as they assimilated into U.S. society and also forged bonds between older immigrants and their Americanized children. Addams's deep respect for the cultures of immigrant populations led her to her involvement in the anti-imperialism movement, and she emerged as an important advocate of internationalism. A pacifist, Addams opposed U.S. involvement in World War I, and she participated in the 1915 International Congress of Women at the Hague. She helped found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1919. Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

From Twenty Years at Hull-House¹

From *Chapter V. First Days at Hull-House*

* * *

In spite of these flourishing clubs for children early established at Hull-House, and the fact that our first organized undertaking was a kindergarten, we were very insistent that the Settlement should not be primarily for the children, and that it was absurd to suppose that grown people would not respond to opportunities for education and social life. Our enthusiastic kindergarten herself demonstrated this with an old woman of ninety, who, because she was left alone all day while her daughter cooked in a restaurant, had formed such a persistent habit of picking the plaster off the walls that one landlord after another refused to have her for a tenant. It required but a few weeks' time to teach her to make large paper chains, and gradually she was content to do it all day long, and in the end took quite as much pleasure in adorning the walls as she had formerly taken in demolishing them. Fortunately the landlord had never heard the æsthetic principle that the exposure of basic construction is more desirable than gaudy decoration. In course of time it was discovered that the old woman could speak Gælic, and when one or two grave professors came to see her, the neighborhood was filled with pride that such a wonder lived in their midst. To mitigate life for a woman of ninety was an unflinching refutation of the statement that the Settlement was designed for the young.

On our first New Year's Day at Hull-House we invited the older people in the vicinity, sending a carriage for the most feeble and announcing to all of them that we were going to organize an Old Settlers' Party.

Every New Year's Day since, older people in varying numbers have come together at Hull-House to relate early hardships, and to take for the moment the place in the community to which their pioneer life entitles them. Many people who were formerly residents of the vicinity, but whom prosperity has carried into more desirable neighborhoods, come back to these meetings and often confess to each other that they have never since found such kindness as in early Chicago when all its citizens came together in mutual enterprises. Many of these pioneers, so like the men and women of my earliest childhood that I always felt comforted by their presence in the house, were very much opposed to "foreigners," whom they held responsible for a depreciation of property and a general lowering of the tone of the neighborhood. Sometimes we had a chance for championship; I recall one old man, fiercely American, who had reproached me because we had so many "foreign views" on our walls, to whom I endeavored to set forth our hope that the pictures might afford a familiar island to the immigrants in a sea of new and strange impressions. The old settler guest, taken off his guard, replied, "I see; they feel as we did when we saw a Yankee notion from down East,"—thereby formulating the dim kinship between the pioneer and the immigrant, both "buffeting the waves of a new development."² The older settlers as well as their children throughout the years have given genuine help to our various

1. First published by Macmillan in 1910, from which the following excerpts are taken.

2. A quotation from "Learning" (1910), by the American author John Jay Chapman (1862–1933).



Children at Hull-House, c. 1900.

enterprises for neighborhood improvement, and from their own memories of earlier hardships have made many shrewd suggestions for alleviating the difficulties of that first sharp struggle with untoward conditions.

In those early days we were often asked why we had come to live on Halsted Street when we could afford to live somewhere else. I remember one man who used to shake his head and say it was "the strangest thing he had met in his experience," but who was finally convinced that it was "not strange but natural." In time it came to seem natural to all of us that the Settlement should be there. If it is natural to feed the hungry and care for the sick, it is certainly natural to give pleasure to the young, comfort to the aged, and to minister to the deep-seated craving for social intercourse that all men feel. Whoever does it is rewarded by something which, if not gratitude, is at least spontaneous and vital and lacks that irksome sense of obligation with which a substantial benefit is too often acknowledged.

In addition to the neighbors who responded to the receptions and classes, we found those who were too battered and oppressed to care for them. To these, however, was left that susceptibility to the bare offices of humanity which raises such offices into a bond of fellowship.

From the first it seemed understood that we were ready to perform the humblest neighborhood services. We were asked to wash the new-born babies, and to prepare the dead for burial, to nurse the sick, and to "mind the children."

Occasionally these neighborly offices unexpectedly uncovered ugly human traits. For six weeks after an operation we kept in one of our three bedrooms a forlorn little baby who, because he was born with a cleft palate, was most

unwelcome even to his mother, and we were horrified when he died of neglect a week after he was returned to his home; a little Italian bride of fifteen sought shelter with us one November evening, to escape her husband who had beaten her every night for a week when he returned home from work, because she had lost her wedding ring; two of us officiated quite alone at the birth of an illegitimate child because the doctor was late in arriving, and none of the honest Irish matrons would “touch the likes of her”; we ministered at the deathbed of a young man, who during a long illness of tuberculosis had received so many bottles of whisky through the mistaken kindness of his friends, that the cumulative effect produced wild periods of exultation, in one of which he died.

We were also early impressed with the curious isolation of many of the immigrants; an Italian woman once expressed her pleasure in the red roses that she saw at one of our receptions in surprise that they had been “brought so fresh all the way from Italy.” She would not believe for an instant that they had been grown in America. She said that she had lived in Chicago for six years and had never seen any roses, whereas in Italy she had seen them every summer in great profusion. During all that time, of course, the woman had lived within ten blocks of a florist’s window; she had not been more than a five-cent car ride away from the public parks; but she had never dreamed of faring forth for herself, and no one had taken her. Her conception of America had been the untidy street in which she lived and had made her long struggle to adapt herself to American ways.

But in spite of some untoward experiences, we were constantly impressed with the uniform kindness and courtesy we received. Perhaps these first days laid the simple human foundations which are certainly essential for continuous living among the poor: first, genuine preference for residence in an industrial quarter to any other part of the city, because it is interesting and makes the human appeal; and second, the conviction, in the words of Canon Barnett,³ that the things which make men alike are finer and better than the things that keep them apart, and that these basic likenesses, if they are properly accentuated, easily transcend the less essential differences of race, language, creed and tradition.

Perhaps even in those first days we made a beginning toward that object which was afterwards stated in our charter: “To provide a center for a higher civic and social life; to institute and maintain educational and philanthropic enterprises, and to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago.”

From Chapter XI. Immigrants and Their Children

* * *

An overmastering desire to reveal the humbler immigrant parents to their own children lay at the base of what has come to be called the Hull-House Labor Museum. This was first suggested to my mind one early spring day when I saw an old Italian woman, her distaff against her homesick face, patiently spinning a thread by the simple stick spindle so reminiscent of all southern Europe.

3. Samuel Augustus Barnett (1844–1913), English clergyman and social reformer associated with the establishment of the first university set-

tlement, Toynbee Hall, in London, which inspired Addams to create Hull-House.

I was walking down Polk Street, perturbed in spirit, because it seemed so difficult to come into genuine relations with the Italian women and because they themselves so often lost their hold upon their Americanized children. It seemed to me that Hull-House ought to be able to devise some educational enterprise, which should build a bridge between European and American experiences in such wise as to give them both more meaning and a sense of relation. I meditated that perhaps the power to see life as a whole, is more needed in the immigrant quarter of a large city than anywhere else, and that the lack of this power is the most fruitful source of misunderstanding between European immigrants and their children, as it is between them and their American neighbors; and why should that chasm between fathers and sons, yawning at the feet of each generation, be made so unnecessarily cruel and impassable to these bewildered immigrants? Suddenly I looked up and saw the old woman with her distaff, sitting in the sun on the steps of a tenement house. She might have served as a model for one of Michael Angelo's Fates,⁴ but her face brightened as I passed and, holding up her spindle for me to see, she called out that when she had spun a little more yarn, she would knit a pair of stockings for her goddaughter. The occupation of the old woman gave me the clew that was needed. Could we not interest the young people working in the neighboring factories, in these older forms of industry, so that, through their own parents and grandparents, they would find a dramatic representation of the inherited resources of their daily occupation. If these young people could actually see that the complicated machinery of the factory had been evolved from simple tools, they might at least make a beginning towards that education which Dr. Dewey⁵ defines as "a continuing reconstruction of experience." They might also lay a foundation for reverence of the past which Goethe⁶ declares to be the basis of all sound progress.

* * * Within a month a room was fitted up to which we might invite those of our neighbors who were possessed of old crafts and who were eager to use them.

We found in the immediate neighborhood, at least four varieties of these most primitive methods of spinning and three distinct variations of the same spindle in connection with wheels. It was possible to put these seven into historic sequence and order and to connect the whole with the present method of factory spinning. The same thing was done for weaving, and on every Saturday evening a little exhibit was made of these various forms of labor in the textile industry. Within one room a Syrian woman, a Greek, an Italian, a Russian, and an Irishwoman enabled even the most casual observer to see that there is no break in orderly evolution if we look at history from the industrial standpoint; that industry develops similarly and peacefully year by year among the workers of each nation, heedless of differences in language, religion, and political experiences.

And then we grew ambitious and arranged lectures upon industrial history. I remember that after an interesting lecture upon the industrial revolution in

4. In Greek mythology, the Fates controlled human destinies, spinning and measuring out each person's life span. The painting by Michelangelo portrays them as three elderly Italian women.
5. John Dewey (1859–1952), American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer. Addams met Dewey when he began to teach at

the University of Chicago in 1894.

6. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), German poet, novelist, playwright, and natural philosopher. Among his most famous works are *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and *Faust* (1808, 1832).

England and a portrayal of the appalling conditions throughout the weaving districts of the north, which resulted from the hasty gathering of the weavers into the new towns, a Russian tailor in the audience was moved to make a speech. He suggested that whereas time had done much to alleviate the first difficulties in the transition of weaving from hand work to steam power, that in the application of steam to sewing we are still in the first stages, illustrated by the isolated woman who tries to support herself by hand needlework at home until driven out by starvation, as many of the hand weavers had been.

* * *

There has been some testimony that the Labor Museum has revealed the charm of woman's primitive activities. I recall a certain Italian girl who came every Saturday evening to a cooking class in the same building in which her mother spun in the Labor Museum exhibit; and yet Angelina always left her mother at the front door while she herself went around to a side door because she did not wish to be too closely identified in the eyes of the rest of the cooking class with an Italian woman who wore a kerchief over her head, uncouth boots, and short petticoats. One evening, however, Angelina saw her mother surrounded by a group of visitors from the School of Education, who much admired the spinning, and she concluded from their conversation that her mother was "the best stick-spindle spinner in America." When she inquired from me as to the truth of this deduction, I took occasion to describe the Italian village in which her mother had lived, something of her free life, and how, because of the opportunity she and the other women of the village had to drop their spindles over the edge of a precipice, they had developed a skill in spinning beyond that of the neighboring towns. I dilated somewhat on the freedom and beauty of that life—how hard it must be to exchange it all for a two-room tenement, and to give up a beautiful homespun kerchief for an ugly department store hat. I intimated it was most unfair to judge her by these things alone, and that while she must depend on her daughter to learn the new ways, she also had a right to expect her daughter to know something of the old ways.

That which I could not convey to the child but upon which my own mind persistently dwelt, was that her mother's whole life had been spent in a secluded spot under the rule of traditional and narrowly localized observances, until her very religion clung to local sanctities,—to the shrine before which she had always prayed, to the pavement and walls of the low vaulted church,—and then suddenly she was torn from it all and literally put out to sea, straight away from the solid habits of her religious and domestic life, and she now walked timidly but with poignant sensibility upon a new and strange shore.

It was easy to see that the thought of her mother with any other background than that of the tenement was new to Angelina and at least two things resulted; she allowed her mother to pull out of the big box under the bed the beautiful homespun garments which had been previously hidden away as uncouth; and she openly came into the Labor Museum by the same door as did her mother, proud at least of the mastery of the craft which had been so much admired.

* * *

HORACE KALLEN

Horace Kallen (1882–1974) was born in Silesia, then part of Germany, to a family of Orthodox Jews. In 1887, when Kallen was five, the family left Europe for the United States, and his father established himself as a rabbi in Boston. As a student at Harvard, Kallen initially struggled with his Jewish background, preferring at first not to be identified as a Jew. Later, he changed his orientation, becoming an ardent Zionist who supported the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. Kallen maintained this position for the rest of his life, and as a Harvard graduate student in philosophy, he would found the Harvard Menorah Society to encourage Jewish students to embrace their cultural identity.

Kallen was teaching philosophy at the University of Wisconsin when he published “Democracy versus the Melting Pot” in the *Nation*. The essay was a response to a collection of anti-immigration essays by another Wisconsin professor. In his essay Kallen attempts to steer between two extremes: on the one hand, he opposed those who, in the name of racial or ethnic purity, sought to restrict immigration to the United States; on the other, Kallen also opposed an ideal of total assimilation, in which immigrants were forced to forego their ancestral cultures. Kallen believed that this version of the “melting pot” was impossible. “Men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent,” he writes in the essay; “they cannot change their grandfathers.” Kallen later called his vision of American society, in which the descendants of immigrants retained ancestral affiliation, “cultural pluralism.” He ends this essay with an optimistic, even poetic, image of what this society might become.

*From Democracy versus the Melting Pot*¹

* * *

At the present time there is no dominant American mind. Our spirit is inarticulate, not a voice, but a chorus of many voices, each singing a rather different tune. How to get order out of this cacophony is the question for all those who are concerned about those things which alone justify wealth and power, concerned about justice, the arts, literature, philosophy, science. What must, what shall this cacophony become—a unison or a harmony?

For decidedly the older America, whose voice and whose spirit was New England, is gone beyond recall. Americans still are the artists and thinkers of the land, but they work, each for himself, without common vision or ideals. The older tradition has passed from a life into a memory, and the newer one, so far as it has an Anglo-Saxon base, is holding its own beside more formidable rivals, the expression in appropriate form of the national inheritances of the various populations concentrated in the various States of the Union, populations of whom their national self-consciousness is perhaps the chief spiritual asset. Think of the Creoles in the South and the French-Canadians in the North, clinging to French for so many generations and

1. “Democracy versus the Melting Pot” was first published by the *Nation* in two parts. These excerpts appeared in part two of the article, which appeared in the February 25, 1915, issue.

maintaining, however weakly, spiritual and social contacts with the mother-country; of the Germans, with their *Deutschthum*, their *Männerchöre*, *Turnvereine*, and *Schützenfeste*,² of the universally separate Jews; of the intensely nationalistic Irish; of the Pennsylvania Germans; of the indomitable Poles, and even more indomitable Bohemians; of the 30,000 Belgians in Wisconsin, with their “Belgian” language, a mixture of Walloon and Flemish³ welded by reaction to a strange social environment. Except in such cases as the town of Lead, South Dakota,⁴ the great ethnic groups of proletarians, thrown upon themselves in a new environment, generate from among themselves the other social classes which Mr. Ross⁵ misses so sadly among them: their shopkeepers, their physicians, their attorneys, their journalists, and their national and political leaders, who form the links between them and the greater American society. They develop their own literature, or become conscious of that of the mother-country. As they grow more prosperous and “Americanized,” as they become free from the stigma of “foreigner,” they develop group self-respect: the “wop” changes into a proud Italian, the “hunky” into an intensely nationalist Slav. They learn, or they recall, the spiritual heritage of their nationality. Their cultural abjectness gives way to cultural pride and the public schools, the libraries, and the clubs become beset with demands for texts in the national language and literature.

* * *

Immigrants appear to pass through four phases in the course of being Americanized. In the first phase they exhibit economic eagerness, the greed of the unfed. Since external differences are a handicap in the economic struggle, they “assimilate,” seeking thus to facilitate the attainment of economic independence. Once the proletarian level of such independence is reached, the process of assimilation slows down and tends to come to a stop. The immigrant group is still a national group, modified, sometimes improved, by environmental influences, but otherwise a solitary spiritual unit, which is seeking to find its way out on its own social level. This search brings to light permanent group distinctions, and the immigrant, like the Anglo-Saxon American, is thrown back upon himself and his ancestry. Then a process of dissimilation begins. The arts, life, and ideals of the nationality become central and paramount; ethnic and national differences change in status from disadvantages to distinctions. All the while the immigrant has been using the English language and behaving like an American in matters economic and political, and continues to do so. The institutions of the Republic have become the liberating cause and the background for the rise of the cultural consciousness and social autonomy of the immigrant Irishman, German,

2. A shooting, or marksmen's, festival that was a tradition in Germany; *Deutschthum* is a term for German character or spirit, “Germanness”; *Männerchöre* are male choruses or singing societies; *Turnvereine* are gymnastic societies.

3. Walloon and Flemish are distinct languages spoken by different ethnic groups in Belgium. Kallen is suggesting that the Belgian immigrants are creating a new dialect by mixing them.

4. Lead, South Dakota, was the site of the largest gold mine in North America; in this period, it was known as a company town run by its principal employer, the Homestake Mining Company.

5. In *The Old World in the New* (1914), the sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross lamented the effect of immigration on American society and called for its curtailment.

Scandinavian, Jew, Pole or Bohemian. On the whole, Americanization has not repressed nationality. Americanization has liberated nationality.

* * *

Government, the state, under the democratic conception, is merely an instrument, not an end. That it is often an abused instrument, that it is often seized by the powers that prey, that it makes frequent mistakes and considers only secondary ends, surface needs, which vary from moment to moment, is, of course, obvious; hence our social and political chaos. But that it is an instrument, flexibly adjustable to changing life, changing opinion, and needs, our whole electoral organization and party system declare. And as intelligence and wisdom prevail over "politics" and special interests, as the steady and continuous pressure of the inalienable qualities and purposes of human groups more and more dominate the confusion of our common life, the outlines of a possible great and truly democratic commonwealth become discernible.

Its form is that of the Federal republic; its substance a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously in the enterprise of self-realization through the perfection of men according to their kind. The common language of the commonwealth, the language of its great political tradition, is English, but each nationalist expresses its emotional and voluntary life in its own language, in its own inevitable aesthetic and intellectual forms. The common life of the commonwealth is politico-economic, and serves as the foundation and background for the realization of the distinctive individuality of each *natio*⁶ that composes it. The "American civilization" may come to mean the perfection of the cooperative harmonies of "European civilization," the waste, the squalor, and the distress of Europe being eliminated—a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind.

As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its substance and form; as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization, with this difference: a musical symphony is written before it is played; in the symphony of civilization the playing is the writing, so that there is nothing so fixed and inevitable about its progressions as in music, so that within the limits set by nature they may vary at will, and the range and variety of the harmonies may become wider and richer and more beautiful.

But the question is, do the dominant classes in America want such a society?

1915

6. The root of the word *nation* is the Latin word for birth or origin.

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Studies of American women writers include Dale M. Bauer's *Sex Expression and American Women Writers, 1860–1940* (2009); *Before They Could Vote: American Women's Autobiographical Writing, 1819–1919*, edited by Sidonie A. Smith and Julia Watson (2006); Susan S. Williams's *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850–1900* (2006); Martha H. Patterson's *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895–1915* (2005); Suzanne Bost's *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850–2000* (2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (2001), edited by Dale M. Bauer and Philip Gould; Elsa Nettels's *Language and Gender in American Fiction: Howells, James, Wharton, and Cather* (1997); and Elizabeth Ammons's *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (1992). Hazel V. Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1988) discusses Pauline Hopkins and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. For an introduction to scholarship on African American writers during this period see also Eric Gardner's *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (2011); John Ernest's *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African-American Literary History* (2009); Gene Andrew Jarrett's *Deans and Truants: Race and*

Realism in African American Literature (2007); Jennifer C. James's *A Freedom Bought with Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II* (2007); *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877–1919* (2006), edited by Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard; Elizabeth McHenry's *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (2002); Eric J. Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993); and Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). Peter Nabokov's *Native American Testimony* (1978; rev. and expanded 1991) is an important collection of Native American oratory. David Murray's *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (1991) contains excellent commentary on several different speeches, and William Clements's study *Oratory in Native North America* (2002) is also valuable. The best brief study of traditional Native oratory—Indian to Indian speech—is Donald Bahr's "Oratory," an entry in Andrew Wiget's edited volume, *Dictionary of Native American Literature* (1994). Important works addressing Native American writing during this period include *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), Siobhan Senier's *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard* (2003), Robert Warrior's *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (2005), Scott Lyons's *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* (2010). Also see Philip Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004) for an excellent work on the cultural forces affecting Native peoples in the early twentieth century.

Realism and naturalism are discussed in *The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*, edited by Phillip Barrish (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*, edited by Keith Newlin (2012); and *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*, edited by Donald Pizer (1995). See also Pizer's *American Naturalism and the Jews: Garland, Norris, Dreiser, Wharton, and Cather* (2008) and *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1984), along with his edited collection *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* (1998). Other important work on realism and naturalism includes Jane F. Thraill's *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (2007), Jennifer L. Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (2004), Henry Wonham's *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (2004), Bert Bender's *Evolution and "the Sex Problem": American Narratives during the Eclipse of Darwinism* (2004), Michael A. Elliott's *The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism* (2002), Barbara Hochman's *Getting at the Author: Reimagining Books and Reading in the Age of American Realism* (2001), Phillip Barrish's *American Literary Realism, Critical Theory, and Intellectual Prestige, 1880–1990* (2001), Brook Thomas's *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract* (1997), David E. Shi's *Facing Facts: Realism in American Thought and Culture, 1850–1920* (1995), Kenneth Warren's *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (1993), Michael Davitt Bell's *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (1993), Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988), Walter Benn Michaels's *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987), June Howard's *Form and*

History in American Literary Naturalism (1985), and Warner Berthoff's classic *The Ferment of Realism* (1965).

On regionalism see Philip Joseph's *American Literary Regionalism* (2007); *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500–1900*, edited by Martin Brückner and Hsuan L. Hsu (2007); Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2003); Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2001); and Donna M. Campbell's *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885–1915* (1998). On Western writing in particular, see Nina Baym's *Women Writers of the American West, 1833–1927* (2011), Nathaniel Lewis's *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship* (2003), Noreen Groover Lape's *West of the Border: The Multicultural Literature of the Western American Frontiers* (2000), Bonney MacDonald's *Updating the Literary West* (1997), and Glen A. Love's *New Americans: The Westerner and the Modern Experience in the American Novel* (1982).

AMERICAN LITERATURE 1865–1914

Henry Adams

There is no authoritative edition of Adams's work, although Ernest Samuels's annotated edition of *The Education* (1973) is the standard for that book. J. C. Levenson et al. edited six volumes of Adams's letters (1982–88); Samuels edited *Henry Adams: Selected Letters* (1992). An updated edition of Adams's *Education* was published by the Massachusetts Historical Society in 2007, edited by Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright. The Library of America has published three Adams volumes: *Democracy, Esther, Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, The Education of Henry Adams* (1983); *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson* (1986); and *History of the United States During the Administrations of James Madison* (1986).

The standard biography is the three-volume work by Ernest Samuels: *The Young Henry Adams* (1948), *Henry Adams, The Middle Years* (1958), and *Henry Adams, The Major Phase* (1964). See also Edward Chalfant's three-volume biography: *Both Sides of the Ocean: A Biography of Henry Adams, His First Life, 1838–1862* (1982), *Better in Darkness: A Biography of Henry Adams: His Second Life, 1862–1891* (1997), and *Improvement of the World: A Biography of Henry Adams, His Last Life, 1891–1918* (2001). Garry Wills celebrates the *Education* in *Henry Adams and the Making of America* (2005). Earl N. Herbert's *The Force So Much Closer Home: Henry Adams and the Adams Family* (1977) situates Adams within his family history. Other aspects of Adams as a writer and cultural figure are addressed in

William Merrill Decker and Earl N. Herbert's edited collection *Henry Adams and the Need to Know* (2005), David M. Ball's *False Starts: The Rhetoric of Failure and the Making of American Modernism* (2015) James P. Young's *Henry Adams: The Historian as Political Theorist* (2001), Brooks D. Simpson's *The Political Education of Henry Adams* (1996), William Merrill Decker's *The Literary Vocation of Henry Adams* (1990), and Harold Kaplan's *Power and Order: Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition in American Fiction* (1981).

Ambrose Bierce

The fullest edition of Bierce's writings is *Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce* (1909–12), edited by Walter Neale. *The Short Fiction of Ambrose Bierce, 3 Volumes: A Comprehensive Edition* (2006), edited by S. T. Joshi, Lawrence I. Berkove, and David E. Schultz, brings together all of Bierce's known short fiction with helpful introductions, extensive annotations, textual variants, and a section of Bierce's prefaces to his published short fiction. Joshi and Schultz also edited *The Fall of the Republic and Other Political Satires* (2000), *The Unabridged Devil's Dictionary* (2000), and *A Much Misunderstood Man: Selected Letters of Ambrose Bierce* (2003). *Phantoms of a Blood-Stained Period: The Complete Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce*, is edited by Russell Duncan and David J. Klooster (2002); Robert C. Evans edited "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge": *An Annotated Critical Edition* (2003). Bierce's poetry is collected in *Poems of Ambrose Bierce*, edited by M. E. Grenander (1996). The largest collection of Bierce's let-

ters is available in Bertha C. Pope's edition of *The Letters of Ambrose Bierce* (1921).

Robert L. Gale surveys Bierce's life and work in *An Ambrose Bierce Companion* (2001). S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz edited *Ambrose Bierce: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Sources* (1999). Prior to Lawrence I. Berkove's fine critical biography, *A Prescription for Adversity: The Moral Art of Ambrose Bierce* (2002), the standard critical biography had been Paul Fatout's still useful *Ambrose Bierce, the Devil's Lexicographer* (1951). On Bierce and the Civil War, see Roy Morris Jr.'s *Ambrose Bierce: Alone in Bad Company* (1996), Brian Thomenson's *Shadows of Blue & Gray: The Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce* (2003), Donald T. Blume's *Ambrose Bierce's Civilians and Soldiers in Context: A Critical Study* (2004), and David M. Owens's *The Devil's Topographer: Ambrose Bierce and the American War Story* (2006). Dennis Drabelle's *The Great American Railroad War: How Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris Took on the Notorious Central Pacific Railroad* (2012) discusses Bierce's journalistic career in detail. Cathy N. Davidson's *The Experimental Fictions of Ambrose Bierce: Structuring the Ineffable* (1984) remains an important work; Davidson also edited *Critical Essays on Ambrose Bierce* (1982).

Abraham Cahan

There is no collected edition of Cahan's many writings in English, Russian, and Yiddish. Isaac Metzker edited *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward* (1971). Moses Rischin's *Grandma Never Lived in America: The New Journalism of Abraham Cahan* (1985) features an extensive and informative introduction. Cahan's "*The Imported Bridegroom*" and *Other Stories of the New York Ghetto* (1898) was reprinted with an introduction by Bernard G. Richards in 1970. *The Rise of David Levinsky: A Novel* (1917) was reprinted with a superb introduction and notes by Jules Chametzky (1993). More recently, Cahan is represented in Stanford Sternlicht's 2007 reference book, *Masterpieces of Jewish American Literature*. Seth Lipsky's recent *The Rise of Abraham Cahan* (2013) is the first book-length biography of Cahan; there are also accounts of Cahan's life in Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* (1976), Ronald Sanders's *The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* (1969), and John Higham's still valuable *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (1955). Sanford Marovitz's *Abraham Cahan* (1996) is the best introduction to Cahan's life and work; Jules Chametzky's *From the Ghetto: The Fiction of Abraham Cahan* (1977) is a comprehensive critical

study. Cahan often receives extensive treatment in histories of Jewish American literature, such as Hana Wirth-Nesher's *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (2006) and Benjamin Schreier's *The Impossible Jew: Identity and the Reconstruction of Jewish American Literary History* (2015).

Charles W. Chesnutt

Werner Sollors edited the Library of America's *Charles W. Chesnutt: Stories, Novels and Essays* (2002). *Charles W. Chesnutt: Essays and Speeches*, edited by Joseph R. McElrath Jr., Robert C. Leitz III, and Jesse S. Crisler (1999), presents all of Chesnutt's known nonfiction. McElrath, Leitz, and Crisler have also edited *An Exemplary Citizen: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1906–1932* (2002). Richard H. Brodhead edited *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt* (1993), as well as *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales* (1993); and William L. Andrews edited *The Collected Stories of Charles W. Chesnutt* (1992). *The Portable Charles W. Chesnutt*, edited by Andrews and Henry Louis Gates Jr., appeared in 2008, and Norton has published a critical edition of *The Conjure Stories: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism* (2012), edited by Robert B. Stepto and Jennifer Rae Greeson.

Chesnutt's daughter, Helen M. Chesnutt, published the first full-length biography, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line* (1952). William L. Andrews's *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (1980) is a useful critical biography. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers's *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (1985) and Jane Campbell's *Mythic Black Fiction: The Transformation of History* (1986) contain useful contextual material on Chesnutt. A more specialized study is Ernestine Williams Pickens's *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Progressive Movement* (1994). Eric J. Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations* (1993) treats Chesnutt at length. Other valuable critical studies include Robert B. Stepto's *Charles Chesnutt: The Uncle Julius Stories* (1984), Henry Short's *Charles W. Chesnutt: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1998), Charles Duncan's *The Absent Man: The Narrative Craft of Charles W. Chesnutt* (1998), Dean McWilliams's *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (2002), Matthew Wilson's *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (2004), Ryan Simmons's *Chesnutt and Realism: A Study of the Novels* (2006), and Ernestine Pickens Glass and Susan Prothro's *Passing in the Works of Charles W. Chesnutt* (2010). Two edited essay collections provide especially good introductions to Chesnutt criticism: Joseph R. McElrath's *Critical Essays on Charles W. Chesnutt* (1999), and David Garrett Izzo and Maria Orban's *Charles*

Chesnutt Reappraised: Essays on the First Major African American Fiction Writer (2009).

Kate Chopin

Per Seyersted edited *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* (1969) in two volumes; he also published *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (1969). Emily Toth's *Unveiling Kate Chopin* (1999), which incorporates material from Chopin's later discovered diaries and manuscripts, is now the standard biography. Barbara C. Ewell's *Kate Chopin* (1986) and *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life* by Nancy Walker (2001) are good introductions to the life and work. Important essay collections are *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin* (2008), edited by Janet Beer; *Kate Chopin in the Twenty-First Century: New Critical Essays* (2008), edited by Heather Ostman; and *Awakenings: The Story of the Kate Chopin Revival* (2009), edited by Bernard Koloski.

Nancy A. Walker edited *Kate Chopin: The Awakening, Complete Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts* (1993); Margo Culley edited the second edition of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Awakening* (1994). Susan Disheroon Green, David Caudle, and Emily Toth compiled *Kate Chopin: An Annotated Bibliography of Critical Works* (1999). Seyersted and Toth edited *A Kate Chopin Miscellany* (1980), a collection of unpublished short fiction, poems, and letters. Bernard J. Kosloski brought out an edition of Chopin's two most important collections of short stories, "Bayou Folk" and "A Night in Acadie" (1999).

Critical studies of Chopin's writings include Wendy Martin's edited collection *New Essays on The Awakening* (1988); Lynda S. Boren and Sara deSaussure's edited collection *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou* (1992); Joyce Dyer's *The Awakening: A Novel of Beginnings* (1993); Bernard J. Kosloski's *Kate Chopin: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1996); Janet Beer's comparative *Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Studies in Short Fiction* (2005), and James Nagel's *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories: Kate Chopin, Grace King, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and George Washington Cable* (2014).

Samuel L. Clemens

See Mark Twain.

Stephen Crane

Fredson Bowers is the textual editor of *The Works of Stephen Crane* (1969–76); J. C. Levenson edited The Library of America volume, *Crane: Prose and Poetry* (1996). The fourth edition of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Red Badge of Courage*, edited by Eric Carl Link and Donald Pizer, was published in

2007. R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes's *Stephen Crane: Letters* (1960) was followed and to some extent superseded by *The Correspondence of Stephen Crane* (1988), edited by Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino. Joseph Katz edited both *The Portable Stephen Crane* (1969) and *The Poems of Stephen Crane: A Critical Edition* (1966). Patrick K. Dooley compiled *Stephen Crane: An Annotated Bibliography of Secondary Scholarship* (1992), a research tool now annually updated by Dooley in *Stephen Crane Studies*. Paul Sorrentino recently published a comprehensive, insightful biography of Crane, *Stephen Crane: A Life of Fire* (2014). Other useful biographical resources include Linda H. Davis's *Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane* (1998); *The Crane Log: A Documentary Life of Stephen Crane, 1871–1900* (1994), edited by Wertheim and Sorrentino; and Christopher Benfey's *The Double Life of Stephen Crane: A Biography* (1992). Sorrentino's *Stephen Crane Remembered* (2006) collects writings by Crane's friends, colleagues, and contemporaries. Wertheim edited the comprehensive *A Stephen Crane Encyclopedia* (1997).

Edwin H. Cady's *Stephen Crane* (1980) provides a good critical introduction to Crane's life and work. Other studies of interest include James Nagel's *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism* (1980), Chester L. Wolford's *The Anger of Stephen Crane: Fiction and the Epic Tradition* (1983), David Halliburton's *The Color of the Sky: A Study of Stephen Crane* (1991), Patrick K. Dooley's *The Pluralistic Philosophy of Stephen Crane* (1993), Michael Robertson's *Stephen Crane, Journalism, and the Making of Modern American Literature* (1997), Bill Brown's *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane and the Economics of Play* (1997), George E. Monteiro's *Stephen Crane's Blue Badge of Courage* (2000), Keith Gandall's *Class Representation in Modern Fiction and Film* (2007), and John Fagg's *On the Cusp: Stephen Crane, George Bellow, and Modernism* (2009). Donald Pizer edited and introduced *Critical Essays on Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage* (1990), and Pizer's own essays on Crane have recently been published together as *Writer in Motion: The Major Fiction of Stephen Crane: Collected Critical Essays* (2013).

Emily Dickinson

Three volumes of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955) were edited by Thomas H. Johnson; and Johnson and Theodora Ward edited three companion volumes of *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1958). R. W. Franklin's three-volume *Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition* (1998) augments and updates Johnson's three-volume *Poems*. In 1999 Franklin

published the one-volume *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Important biographies include Richard B. Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (1974), Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *Emily Dickinson* (1986), Alfred Habegger's *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (2001), Brenda Wineapple's *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (2008), and Lyndall Gordon's *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds* (2010). Jay Leyda's *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960) provides two volumes of documents, such as excerpts from family letters. Additional documents can be found in Polly Longworth's *The World of Emily Dickinson* (1990) and Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith's *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson* (1998).

Research tools include Joseph Duchac's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: An Annotated Guide to Commentary Published in English, 1890–1977* (1979), and the continuation (published in 1993) covering 1978–89; Karen Dandurand's *Dickinson Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography 1969–1985* (1988), and Willis J. Buckingham's *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s* (1989). Also useful are Jane Donahue Eberwein's *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia* (1998) and Sharon Leiter's *Critical Companion to Emily Dickinson: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (2007). The *Dickinson Electronic Archives* emilydickinson.org, directed by Smith and Marta Werner, offer access to Dickinson's manuscripts, out-of-print volumes about Dickinson, and never-before-published writings by various family members. Other valuable research tools include Martha Nell Smith and Lara Vetter's *Emily Dickinson's Correspondences: A Born-Digital Textual Inquiry* (2008), Amherst College's *Emily Dickinson Collection* acdc.amherst.edu/browse/collection/edu, and Harvard University Press and the Houghton Library's *Emily Dickinson Archive* www.edickinson.org.

Edited collections of critical essays provide an excellent introduction to Dickinson studies. See Judith Farr's *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1996); Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Cristanne Miller's *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (1998, 2006); Wendy Martin's *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson* (2002); Vivian R. Pollak's *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson* (2004); Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz's *A Companion to Emily Dickinson* (2008); Jane Donahue Eberwein and Cindy MacKenzie's *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays* (2009), Eliza Richards's *Emily Dickinson in Context* (2013), Jed

Deppman, Marianne Noble, and Gary Lee Stonum's *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* (2013), and Paul Crumbley and Eleanor Elson Heginbotham's *Dickinson's Fascicles: A Spectrum of Possibilities* (2014). Important studies include Paula Bennett's *Emily Dickinson: Woman Poet* (1990), Martha Nell Smith's *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (1992), Sharon Cameron's *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles* (1993), Domhnall Mitchell's *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception* (2000), Eleanor Elson Heginbotham's *Reading the Fascicles of Emily Dickinson* (2003), Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005), Jed Deppman's *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson* (2008), Cristanne Miller's *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (2012), and Alexandra Socarides's *Dickinson Unbound: Paper, Process, Poetics* (2012). For a lively engagement with Dickinson's poetry from a celebrated close reader, see Helen Vendler's *Dickinson: Poems and Commentaries* (2010).

Theodore Dreiser

There is no complete edition of Dreiser's writings, although the University of Pennsylvania Press began such an edition, publishing volumes that included *Sister Carrie*, edited by John C. Berkey and Alice M. Winters (1981); *American Diaries: 1902–1926*, edited by Thomas P. Riggio (1983); and a restored edition of *Jennie Gerhardt*, edited by West (1992). Important resources include Robert H. Elias's three-volume *Letters of Theodore Dreiser* (1959); Donald Pizer's *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* (1977); *Theodore Dreiser: Interviews*, edited by Frederick E. Rusch, Pizer, and Riggio (2004); the Norton Critical Edition of *Sister Carrie*, edited by Pizer (2006); Pizer's *A Picture and a Criticism of Life: New Letters* (2008); Riggio's *Letters to Women: New Letters* (2009); and Jude Davies's edition of Dreiser's *Political Writings* (2011). The standard biographies are Jerome Loving's *The Last Titan: A Life of Theodore Dreiser* (2005) and Richard Lingeman's two-volume *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City, 1891–1907* (1986) and *Theodore Dreiser: An American Journey, 1908–1945* (1990).

Useful critical books include Richard Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels* (1974); Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser* (1976); Philip Gerber, *Theodore Dreiser Revisited* (1992); Louis J. Zanine, *Mechanism and Mysticism: The Influence of Science on the Thought and Work of Theodore Dreiser* (1993); Clare Virginia Eby, *Dreiser and Veblen: Saboteurs of the Status Quo* (1999); Pizer, *Literary Masters: Theodore Dreiser* (2000); and Mary Hricko, *The Genesis of the*

Chicago Renaissance: Theodore Dreiser, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and James T. Farrell (2009). See also Miriam Gogol's edited collection *Theodore Dreiser: Beyond Naturalism* (1995), Yoshinobo Hakutani's edited *Theodore Dreiser and American Culture: New Readings* (2000), and Leonard Cassuto and Clare Eby's *The Cambridge Companion to Theodore Dreiser* (2004).

W. E. B. Du Bois

Herbert Aptheker's *The Complete Published Works of W. E. B. Du Bois* (1973–1986), in thirty-six volumes, offers a comprehensive collection of Du Bois's writings. Useful shorter collections include Philip S. Foner's *W. E. B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses* (1970); Eric Sundquist's *The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois Reader* (1995); and the Library of America volume, *Du Bois: Writings*, edited by Nathan Huggins (1996). Herbert Aptheker edited the three-volume *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois* (1973–1978), the four-volume *Writings by W. E. B. Du Bois in Periodicals Edited by Others* (1982), *Selections from Phylon* (1980), and the two-volume *Selections from the Crisis* (1972). Other good collections are Phil Zuckerman's *The Social Theory of W. E. B. Du Bois* (2004), Amy Helene Kirschke's *Art in Crisis: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Art of the Crisis Magazine* (2006), Robert Wortham's *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Sociological Imagination: A Reader, 1897–1914* (2009), and Eugene F. Provenzo and Edmund Kobina Abaka's *W. E. B. Du Bois on Africa* (2012). Important biographies of Du Bois include Arnold Rampersad's *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (1976); Jack B. Moore's *W. E. B. Du Bois* (1981); and David Levering Lewis's now standard two-volume *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (1993) and *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963* (2000).

The centennial publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* is addressed in Dolan Hubbard's edited collection, *The Souls of Black Folk: One Hundred Years Later* (2003), and in Chester Fontenot and Mary Alice Morgan's edited *W. E. B. Du Bois and Race: Essays Celebrating the Centennial Publication of The Souls of Black Folk* (2001). Critical studies of Du Bois's politics and art include Eric J. Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993), Adolph L. Reed Jr.'s *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought* (1995), Shannon Zamir's *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888–1903* (1995), Shawn Michelle Smith's *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (2004), Derek Aldridge's *The Educational Thought of W. E. B. Du Bois: An*

Intellectual History (2008), Jonathon S. Kahn's *Divine Discontent: The Religious Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (2009), and Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (2014). There are also several useful collections of essays on Du Bois, including Mary Keller and Chester J. Fontenot's *Re-Cognizing W. E. B. Du Bois in the 21st Century: Essays on W. E. B. Du Bois* (2007), Susan Gillman and Alys Eve Weinbaum's *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality, and W. E. B. Du Bois* (2007), Shannon Zamir's *The Cambridge Companion to W. E. B. Du Bois* (2008), and Amy Helene Kirschke and Phillip Luke Sinitiere's *W.E.B. Du Bois, the Crisis, and American History* (2014).

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Important editions include *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1993), edited by Joanne M. Braxton, and *The Complete Stories of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (2006), edited by Gene Andrew Jarrett. Also useful is a 1999 reprint of *The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar: Containing His Complete Poetical Works, His Best Short Stories, Numerous Anecdotes, and a Complete Biography*, originally compiled and introduced by William Dean Howells in 1907. Other useful editions include *In His Own Voice: The Dramatic and Other Uncollected Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (2002), edited by Herbert Woodward Martin and Ronald Primeau, with a foreword by Henry Louis Gates Jr., and *The Collected Novels of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (2009), edited by Herbert Woodward Martin, Ronald Primeau, and Gene Andrew Jarrett. For a good biography, see Felton O. Best's *Crossing the Color Line: A Biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1872–1906* (1996). Illuminating discussions of Dunbar's writings can be found in Gayle Jones's *Liberating Voices* (1991), Keith D. Leonard's *Fettered Genius: The African American Bardic Poet from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2006), and Jennifer C. James's *Freedom Bought with Blood* (2007). Gene Jarrett's *Deans and Truants: Race and Realism in African American Literature* (2007) has an excellent chapter on Dunbar and Howells. A special issue of *African American Review* (summer 2007) marked the centenary of Dunbar's death with a collection of excellent, up-to-date essays on Dunbar's life and art, and *We Wear the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Politics of Representative Reality* (2010), edited by Willie J. Harrell Jr., provides another useful introduction to recent criticism.

Sui Sin Far (Edith Maud Eaton)

The only substantial collection of Sui Sin Far's writing is "Mrs. Spring Fragrance" and Other

Writings (1995), edited by Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. White-Parks has also published *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography* (1995), with a chronological listing of her writings. Historical and critical work on Sui Sin Far includes Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982); William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850–1940* (1982); Mary Dearborn, *Pocahontas's Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (1986); Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990); and Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (1990). Two books published in 2001 add to the scholarship on Sui Sin Far and her sister: Diana Birchall's *Onoto Watanna: The Story of Winnifred Eaton*, and Dominika Ferens's *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*. Elizabeth Ammons's *Conflicting Stories* (1992) has a chapter on "Mrs. Spring Fragrance"; see also the chapters on Sui Sin Far in Molly Crumpton Winter's *American Narratives: Multiethnic Writing in the Age of Realism* (2007) and Mary Chapman's *Making Noise, Making News: Suffrage Print Culture and U.S. Modernism* (2014).

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

The best collection of Freeman's work is *Selected Stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* (1983), edited and introduced by Marjorie Pryse. Brent L. Kendrick edited *The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* (1985); Charles Johanningsmeier edited a 2002 reprinting of Freeman's 1894 novel *Pembroke*; and Mary R. Reichard edited *A Mary Wilkins Freeman Reader* (1997). Perry D. Westbrook's *Mary Wilkins Freeman* (1988) provides a good introduction to Freeman's life and writings; Leah Blatt Glasser's *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Work of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* (1996) also contributes to biographical and critical scholarship. Other books with discussions of Freeman include Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's anthology *American Women Regionalists: 1850–1910* (1992), Reichard's *Mary Wilkins Freeman: A Study of the Short Story* (1998), Reichard's *A Web of Relationship: Women in the Short Fiction of Mary Wilkins Freeman* (2007), Roxanne Harde's edited *Narratives of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences* (2007), and Jeffrey Weinstock's *Scare Tactics: Supernatural Fiction by American Women* (2008). See also the Mary E. Wilkins Freeman special issue of *American Transcendental Quarterly*, guest edited by Shirley Marchalouis (1999).

Hamlin Garland

Donald Pizer edited *Hamlin Garland's Diaries* (1968), *The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1969), and *Main-Travelled Roads* (1970). Joseph B. McCullough edited *Tales of the Middle Border* (1990) and *Main-Travelled Roads* (1995). In 1998 Dover reprinted *A Daughter of the Middle Border. Selected Letters of Hamlin Garland* (1998) was edited by Keith Newlin and McCullough. Newlin also edited *Hamlin Garland: A Bibliography (1896–1940), with a Checklist of Unpublished Letters* (1998) and a new edition of *A Son of the Middle Border* (2007). See also Pizer's *Hamlin Garland, Prairie Radical: Writings from the 1890s* (2010), which reprints much of Garland's radical fiction and nonfiction, almost all previously uncollected. Newlin's *Hamlin Garland: A Life* (2008) is now the standard biography, and Newlin has also compiled a useful resource volume, *Garland in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates* (2013).

For critical discussions of Garland's writings, see James Nagel's *Critical Essays on Hamlin Garland* (1982); Charles L. P. Silet, Robert E. Welch, and Richard Boudreau's *Critical Reception of Hamlin Garland* (1985); Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2001); Tom Lutz's *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (2004); and Janet Floyd's *Claims and Speculations Mining and Writing in the Gilded Age* (2012).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Editions of Gilman's writings include *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, edited by Ann J. Lane (1975); *Herland*, edited by Lane (1979); *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, edited by Lane (1980); *Herland and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, edited by Barbara Solomon (1992); *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings*, edited by Carol Farley Kessler (1994); *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, edited by Michael Kimmel (1998); and *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's In This Our World and Uncollected Poems*, edited by Denise D. Knight and Gary Scharnhorst (2012). Gary Scharnhorst's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Bibliography* (2003) is indispensable. Cynthia J. Davis's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography* (2010) is likely to become the standard biography, though Ann J. Lane's *To Herland and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1990) remains quite useful.

Judith Allen's *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Sexualities, Histories, Progressivism* (2009) is an excellent, comprehensive critical study of the development of Gilman's thought. Other major studies include Denise D. Knight's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1997), Sheryl L. Meyering's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work* (1989), Polly Wynn Allen's *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism* (1988), and Gary Scharnhorst's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1985). There are several insightful essay collections on Gilman: Davis and Knight edited *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts* (2004); Joanne B. Karpinski edited *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (1992); and Jennifer S. Tuttle and Carol Farley Kessler edited *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: New Texts, New Contexts* (2011). For good comparative studies, see Janet Beer's *Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Studies in Short Fiction* (2005), Beth Sutton-Ramspeck's *Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (2004), and Alys Eve Weinbaum's *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (2004).

Critical casebooks on "The Yellow Wall-Paper" include Catherine Golden's *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper"* (1991); Julie Bates Dock's *The Legend of "The Yellow Wallpaper": A Documentary Casebook* (1998); and Dock's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and the History of Its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook* (1998).

Joel Chandler Harris

Richard Chase's edition of *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus* (1955) remains the best one-volume collection of Harris's fiction; it was reprinted in 2002. Julius Lester's 1999 retelling of *Uncle Remus: The Complete Tales* uses contemporary black English and references. Julia Collier Harris edited *Joel Chandler Harris, Editor and Essayist: Miscellaneous Literary, Political, and Social Writings* (1931). Hugh T. Keenan's *Dearest Chums and Partners: Joel Chandler Harris's Letters to His Children* (1993) contains 280 letters. Three still-useful older biographies are Robert L. Wiggins's *The Life of Joel Chandler Harris from Obscurity in Boyhood to Fame in Early Manhood* (1918), Julia Collier Harris's *The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris* (1918), and Paul M. Cousins's *Joel Chandler Harris: A Biography* (1968). Walter M. Brasch's illuminating *Brer Rabbit, Uncle Remus, and the "Cornfield Journalist": The Tale of Joel Chandler Harris* (2000)

works as a cultural biography. Folklorist Bruce R. Bickley Jr. has published both an introductory survey of the life and work, *Joel Chandler Harris* (1987) and *Joel Chandler Harris: A Biography and Critical Study* (2000). Critical discussion of Harris can be found in older works on race in American literature, such as Eric J. Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations* (1993), as well as more recent works on the subject, such as Sarah Gilbreath Ford's *Tracing Southern Storytelling in Black and White* (2014).

Bret Harte

The most complete collection is *The Works of Bret Harte* in twenty-five volumes (1914). Harte's poetry may be found in *The Complete Poetical Works of Bret Harte* (1899). Geoffrey Bret Harte edited *The Letters of Bret Harte* (1926); *Selected Letters of Bret Harte* appeared in 1997, edited by Gary Scharnhorst and Robert L. Gale. Scharnhorst also edited Bret Harte's *California* (1990) and coedited (with Lawrence I. Berkove) *The Old West in the Old World: Lost Plays by Bret Harte and Sam Davis* (2006). Scharnhorst's critical biography, *Bret Harte: Opening the American Literary West* (2000), analyzes Harte's life, career, and reception; Axel Nissen's biography, *Bret Harte: Prince and Pauper* (2000), should also be consulted. The best bibliography is Scharnhorst's *Bret Harte: A Bibliography* (1995). Provocative discussions of Harte can be found in Chis Packard's *Queer Cowboys and Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2005) and Joanna Levin's *Bohemia in America, 1858–1920* (2010). Though he is not mentioned in the title, Harte is a central figure in Ben Tarnoff's account of the San Francisco literary scene, *The Bohemians: Mark Twain and the San Francisco Writers Who Reinvented American Literature* (2014).

Pauline E. Hopkins

Editions of Hopkins's works include Ira Dworkin's *Daughter of the Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins* (2006), which collects essays, speeches, and letters; Richard Yarborough's edition of *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1991); and Hazel V. Carby's *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* (1990), which reprints *Hagar's Daughter, Winona, and Of One Blood*. An excellent biography is Lois Brown's *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution* (2008); see also Hanna Wallinger's *Pauline E. Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (2005). Good critical work on Hopkins can be found in Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), Clau-

dia Tate's *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (1992), Susan Gilman's *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (2003), Daphne Brooks's *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (2006), Gretchen Murphy's *Shadowing the White Man's Burden: U.S. Imperialism and the Problem of the Color Line* (2010), Alisha R. Knight's *Pauline Hopkins and the American Dream: An African American Writer's (Re)visionary Gospel of Success* (2012), and Kimberly Snyder Manganelli's *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* (2012).

William Dean Howells

Indiana University Press's *A Selected Edition of W. D. Howells* (1968–1993), comprised of over thirty volumes, is the standard edition of his works. Howells's letters can be found in *The Correspondence of Samuel L. Clemens and William Dean Howells, 1872–1910* (1960), edited by Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson; *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells* (1928), edited by his daughter Mildred Howells; and the *John Hay-Howells Letters* (1980), edited by George Monteiro and Brenda Murphy. Ruth Bardon's *Selected Short Stories of William Dean Howells* was published in 1997. Other collections include *Interviews with William Dean Howells* (1973), compiled by Ulrich Halfmann; John W. Crowley's *The Mask of Fiction: Essays of W. D. Howells* (1989); *The Early Prose Writings of William Dean Howells* (1990), edited by Thomas Wortham; and *Staging Howells: Plays and Correspondence* (1994), edited by Lawrence Barrett, George Arms, Mary Beth Whidden, and Gary Scharnhorst. The Library of America also published two collections of Howells's novels, edited by Edwin Cady and Don Cook, in 1982 and 1989.

The important early biographies of Howells are Edwin H. Cady's *The Road to Realism: The Early Years, 1837–1885* (1956) and *The Realist at War: The Mature Years, 1885–1920* (1958); Van Wyck Brooks's *Howells: His Life and Work* (1959); and Kenneth S. Lynn's *William Dean Howells: An American Life* (1971). More recently, John W. Crowley published *The Dean of American Letters: The Late Career of William Dean Howells: A Writer's Life* (2005). Useful critical studies of Howells's writings include Crowley's *The Black Heart's Truth: The Early Career of W. D. Howells* (1985), Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988), Edwin H. Cady and Louis Budd's collection *On Howells: The Best Articles from American Literature* (1993), Gregory J. Stratman's *Speaking for Howells: Charting the*

Dean's Career through the Language of His Characters (2001), Michael A. Elliott's *The Culture Concept: Race, Writing, and Difference in the Age of Realism* (2002), Susan Goodman's *American Novelists and Manners, 1880–1940* (2003), Rob Davidson's *The Master and the Dean: The Literary Criticism of Henry James and William Dean Howells* (2005), and Dohra Ahmad's *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America* (2009). Howells also figures centrally in Susan Goodman's *Republic of Words: The Atlantic Monthly and Its Writers, 1857–1925* (2011).

Henry James

The Novels and Tales of Henry James (The New York Edition), in twenty-six volumes, originally published in 1907–17, was reissued 1962–65. Other collections of James's diverse writings are available in R. P. Blackmur's *The Art of the Novel* (1935) (which collects James's prefaces to the works in the New York Edition), F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock's *The Notebooks of Henry James* (1947), Leon Edel's *The Complete Plays of Henry James* (1949), F. W. Dupee's edition of the three volumes of *Henry James: Autobiography* (1956), Morris Shapiro's *Selected Literary Criticism* (1963), and Pierre A. Walker's *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene* (1999). James's novels, short stories, and literary essays are collected in multiple volumes of the Library of America series. *Tales of Henry James* (2005) was published as a Norton Critical Edition, edited by Christof Wegelin and Henry B. Wouham, and offers a useful introduction to James's short fiction. Leon Edel is the editor of the five-volume *The Letters of Henry James* published between 1974 and 1984. Philip Horne has published *Henry James: A Life in Letters* (1999), with half of the nearly 300 selections previously unpublished, and Susan E. Gunter and Steven H. Jobe have edited *Dearly Beloved Friends: Henry James's Letters to Younger Men* (2001), which contains a number of previously unpublished letters. Beginning in 2006, the University of Nebraska Press began publishing *The Complete Letters of Henry James*, edited by Pierre A. Walker, Gred Zacharias, and Alfred Habegger. Two helpful bibliographies are *A Bibliography of Henry James* (1999), edited by Edel, Dan H. Laurence, and James Rambeau; and Judith E. Funston's *Henry James: A Reference Guide, 1975–1987* (1991). Lawrence Raw's *Adapting Henry James to the Screen: Gender, Fiction and Film* (2006) offers a detailed history of film adaptations of James's works, twenty-eight in all. John R. Bradley edited *Henry James on Stage and Screen* (2000), and Susan M. Griffin edited *Henry James Goes to the Movies* (2001).

Leon Edel's five-volume opus *Henry James* (1953–72) remains the standard biography. Sheldon N. Novick published *Henry James: The Mature Master* (2007) as a follow-up to his *Henry James: The Young Master* (1996), recasting James as an active and engaged artist rather than a lonely observer of life. Fred Kaplan's *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius, A Biography* (1999) relies almost exclusively on the letters and diaries of James and his associates. Notable books about the entire James family include Philip Fisher's *House of Wits* (2008), R. W. B. Lewis's *The Jameses* (1993), and F. O. Matthiessen's *The James Family* (1947). Other biographical studies include Edwin Sill Fussell's *The Catholic Side of Henry James* (1993), Kenneth Graham's *Henry James: A Literary Life* (1995), Carol Holly's *Intensely Family: The Inheritance of Family Shame and the Autobiographies of Henry James* (1995), and Lyndall Gordon's *A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women and His Art* (1999), which looks at James's relationships with his cousin Minnie Temple and friend Constance Fenimore Woolson. James's later career is illuminated by Lyall H. Powers's edition of Theodora Bosanquet's memoir, *Henry James at Work* (2006), originally published in 1924. Among the best of the immense number of critical studies of James are Ruth Bernard Yeazell's *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (1976), Charles Robert Anderson's *Person, Place, and Thing in Henry James's Novels* (1977), Daniel Mark Fogel's *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination* (1981), John Carlos Rowe's *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (1984), Sharon Cameron's *Thinking in Henry James* (1989), Alfred Habegger's *Henry James and the "Woman Business"* (1989), Millicent Bell's *Meaning in Henry James* (1991), Ross Posnock's *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity* (1991), Sara Blair's *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation* (1996), Wendy Graham's *Henry James's Thwarted Love* (1999), Eric Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity* (2003), Leland Person's *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity* (2003), J. Hillis Miller's *Literature As Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James* (2005), Hazel Hutchison's *Seeing and Believing: Henry James and the Spiritual World* (2006), Elaine Pigeon's *Queer Impressions: Henry James's Art of Fiction* (2006), Victoria Coulson's *Henry James, Women and Realism* (2007), Kendall Johnson's *Henry James and the Visual* (2007), Amy Tucker's *The Illustration of the Master: Henry James and the Magazine Revolution* (2010), Michael Gorra's *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Mas-*

terpiece (2012), and Miranda El-Rayess's *Henry James and the Culture of Consumption* (2014).

Given the volume of James scholarship, novice scholars may want to begin with one of the many available essay collections. Particularly valuable edited collections include Graham Clark's *Henry James: Critical Assessments* (1991), Daniel Mark Fogel's *A Companion to Henry James Studies* (1993), Peter Rawlings's *Critical Essays on Henry James* (1993), Jonathan Freedman's *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James* (1998), Joseph Dewey's *The Finer Thread, The Tighter Weave: New Essays on the Short Fiction* (2001), Peggy McCormack's *Questioning the Master: Gender and Sexuality in Henry James's Writings* (2000), Greg Zacharias's *A Companion to Henry James* (2008), and John Carlos Rowe and Eric L. Haralson's *Historical Guide to Henry James* (2012)

Sarah Orne Jewett

Jewett's *Stories and Tales* were published in seven volumes in 1910; a selection, *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (1925), was edited in two volumes with a foreword by Willa Cather. Richard Cary edited *The Uncollected Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (1971), as well as *Sarah Orne Jewett: Letters* (1967). The Library of America's edition of *Jewett's Novels and Stories* (1994), edited by Michael Davitt Bell, reprints three novels and thirty stories. Paula Blanchard's *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Work* (2002) is an informative biography; a good introductory study is Josephine Donovan's *Sarah Orne Jewett* (1980). Perry D. Westbrook's *Acres of Flint: Sarah Orne Jewett and Her Contemporaries* (1981), Gwen L. Nagel's *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett* (1984), Louis A. Renza's "A White Heron" and the *Question of Minor Literature* (1985), and Sarah Way Sherman's *Sarah Orne Jewett: An American Persephone* (1989) are valuable. For more recent critical work, see June Howard's essay collection, *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1993), Richard Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (1993), Joseph Church's *Transcendent Daughters in Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs* (1995), Margaret Roman's *Sarah Orne Jewett: Reconstructing Gender* (1997), Karen L. Kilcup and Thomas S. Edwards's *Jewett and Her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon* (1999), Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2003), Paul R. Petrie's *Conscience and Purpose: Fiction and Social Consciousness in Howells, Jewett, Chesnut, and Cather* (2005), and Mitchell Robert Breitwieser's

National Melancholy: Mourning and Opportunity in Classic American Literature (2007).

James Weldon Johnson

Editions include Rudolph B. Byrd's *The Essential Writings of James Weldon Johnson* (2008); William L. Andrews's Library of America volume, *James Weldon Johnson: Writings* (2004); and the two-volume *Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson* (1995), edited by Sondra Kathryn Wilson. Wilson also edited *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (1991). Jacqueline Denise Goldsby has recently edited a new critical, authoritative edition of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, published by Norton (2015). A good starting point for Johnson studies is *Critical Essays on James Weldon Johnson* (1997), edited by Kenneth M. Price and Lawrence J. Oliver. Important critical work on Johnson includes Robert E. Fleming's *James Weldon Johnson* (1987), Jacqueline Denise Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006), Robert M. Dowling's *Slumming in New York: From The Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (2007), Andrew B. Leiter's *In the Shadow of the Black Beast: African American Masculinity in the Harlem and Southern Renaissance* (2010), Diana Rebekkah Paulin's *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction* (2012), Noelle Morrisette's *James Weldon Johnson's Modern Soundscape* (2013), and Katherine Biers's *Virtual Modernism: Writing and Technology in the Progressive Era* (2013).

Emma Lazarus

Mary Lazarus and Annie Lazarus, Emma Lazarus's sisters, edited the two-volume *The Poems of Emma Lazarus* (1888), which includes a biographical sketch. In 1939 Ralph L. Rusk edited *Letters to Emma Lazarus in the Columbia University Library*. Morris U. Schappes edited *The Letters of Emma Lazarus, 1868–1885* (1949) and *Emma Lazarus: Selections from Her Poetry and Prose* (1967). Newer editions include the Library of America's *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems* (2005), edited by John Hollander; Bette Roth Young's *Emma Lazarus: In Her World* (1995), a collection of unpublished letters to friends and literary figures; and Gregory Eiselein's *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings* (2002). Esther Schor's fine biography *Emma Lazarus* (2006) is now the standard account of her life and work. For discussions of Lazarus's writings, see also Ranen Omer-Sherman's *Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish American Literature* (2002), Meredith McGill's *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*

(2008), and Daniel Morris's *Lyric Encounters: Essays on American Poetry from Lazarus and Frost to Ortiz Cofer and Alexie* (2013).

Jack London

Important editions of London's writings include the three-volume *Letters of Jack London* (1988) and the three-volume *Complete Short Stories of Jack London* (1993), both edited by Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz III, and I. Milo Shepard. Editions of material otherwise difficult to track down are *Jack London Reports* (1970; essays and newspaper articles), edited by King Hendricks and Irving Shepard; *No Mentor but Myself: Jack London on Writers and Writing* (1999), edited by Dale L. Walker and Jeanne Campbell Reesman; the Library of America *Jack London: Novels and Stories* (1982), edited by Donald Pizer; and *The Portable Jack London* (1994), edited by Earle Labor. Jonah Raskin's *The Radical Jack London: Writings on War and Revolution* (2008) offers a selection of London's political writings. *The Road (Subterranean Lives)* (2006), edited by Todd Depastino, collects nine of London's essays from his days as a hobo, many first published in *Cosmopolitan* during 1907–8. Dan Wichlan edited *Jack London: The Unpublished and Uncollected Articles and Essays* and *The Complete Poetry of Jack London*, both published in 2008. Bibliographical work on London has languished since the publication of Joan Sherman's *Jack London: A Reference Guide* (1977) and Hensley C. Woodbridge, John London, and George H. Tweney's *Jack London: A Bibliography* (1966). The Jack London Online Collection is managed by Roy Tennant and Clarice Stasz at Sonoma State University: www.london.sonoma.edu.

Earle Labor's comprehensive biography *Jack London: An American Life* (2013) is an excellent guide to London's life, and Jay Williams has published the first volume of a more exhaustive, two-volume literary biography—*Author Under Sail: The Imagination of Jack London, 1893–1902* (2014)—that is likely to become the standard account of London's writing life. In addition, Jean Campbell Reesman's critical biography of London emphasizes his racial ambivalences. Critical books and collections of essays include Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin's *Critical Essays on Jack London* (1983), Charles N. Watson Jr.'s *The Novels of Jack London: A Reappraisal* (1983), Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman's *Jack London: Revised Edition* (1994), Susan Nuernberg's *The Critical Response to Jack London* (1995), Leonard Cassuto and Reesman's edited collection *Rereading Jack London* (1996), Jonathan Auerbach's *Male Call: Becoming Jack London*

(1996), Reesman's *Jack London: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1998), Sara S. Hodson and Reesman's edited collection *Jack London: One Hundred Years a Writer* (2002), Gina Rossetti's *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature* (2006), Daniel Métraux's *The Asian Writings of Jack London* (2010), and Michael Lundblad's *The Birth of a Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture* (2013).

José Martí

For readers of Spanish, the most complete edition of Martí's works was published by the Centro de Estudios Martianos as *Obras completas de José Martí* (2001). For English readers, Esther Allen edited and selected works for an excellent Penguin Books edition: *José Martí: Selected Writings* (2002). See also the *José Martí Reader: Writings on the Americas*, edited by Deborah Shnookal and Mirta Muñiz (2007) and *Inside the Monster: Writings on the United States and American Imperialism*, edited by Philip Foner (1975). For bilingual editions of Martí's poetry, see *José Martí, Major Poems: A Bilingual Edition* (1982) and *Versos sencillos/Simple Verses* (1997). Alfred J. López's recent biography, *José Martí: A Revolutionary Life* (2014), is superb. Other biographical accounts written in English include Oscar Montero Basingstroke's *José Martí: An Introduction* (2004), Louis A. Pérez's *José Martí in the United States: The Florida Experience* (1995), Peter Turton's *José Martí, Architect of Cuba's Freedom* (1986), and John M. Kirk's *José Martí, Mentor of the Cuban Nation* (1983). In the last two decades, there have been a number of works that focus on Martí as a way of understanding the relationship of the United States to the Western Hemisphere, as well as scholarship that situates Martí as a cultural critic of the United States. See, for example, Anne Fountain's *José Martí, the United States, and Race* (2014), María del Pilar Blanco's *Ghost-Watching American Modernity: Haunting, Landscape, and the Hemispheric Imagination* (2012), Laura Lomas's *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (2008), Susana Rotker's *The American Chronicles of José Martí: Journalism and Modernity in Spanish America* (2000), and the collection edited by Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raul A. Fernandez, *José Martí's 'Our America': From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (1998).

Native American Oratory

The first reputable general collections of speeches by Native Americans in English translation appear in the 1970s. These include Virginia Armstrong's *I Have Spoken: American*

History through the Voices of the Indians (1971), W. C. Vanderwerth's *Indian Oratory: Famous Speeches by Noted Indian Chieftains* (1971), and Peter Nabokov's *Native American Testimony* (1978; rev. and expanded 1991). David Murray's *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (1991) contains excellent commentary on several different speeches, and William Clements's study *Oratory in Native North America* (2002) is also valuable. The best brief study of traditional Native oratory—Indian to Indian speech—is Donald Bahr's "Oratory," an entry in Andrew Wiget's edited volume, *Dictionary of Native American Literature* (1994). Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer's edited volume, *Haa Tuwunaagu Yis, for Healing Our Spirit* (1990) is a wonderfully detailed but generally accessible study of Tlingit mourning oratory. Arnold Krupat's "Chief Sealth's Speech Revisited" (*American Indian Quarterly*, 2011) is a study of one of the more famous nineteenth-century examples of Native oratory.

Frank Norris

The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris (1964), edited by Donald Pizer, collects all of Norris's critical work and includes an extensive bibliography. The Library of America *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays* (1986) is also edited by Pizer. *The Apprenticeship Writings of Frank Norris, 1896–1898* (1996), edited by Joseph R. McElrath Jr., and Douglas K. Burgess in two volumes, collects Norris's diverse writings from his stint as associate editor for the *San Francisco Wave*. McElrath also edited *Frank Norris and The Wave: A Bibliography* (1988), *Frank Norris: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1992), and *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception* (1981). The definitive biography—*Frank Norris: A Life* (2006)—was coauthored by McElrath and Jesse S. Crisler, who have also compiled *Frank Norris Remembered* (2013), a collection of reminiscences by Norris's contemporaries. Dennis Drabelle also discusses Norris's life and work extensively in *The Great American Railroad War: How Ambrose Bierce and Frank Norris Took on the Notorious Central Pacific Railroad* (2012). Useful critical books include Donald Pizer's *The Novels of Frank Norris* (1966), Don Graham's edited collection *Critical Essays on Frank Norris* (1980), Barbara Hochman's *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller* (1988), McElrath's *Frank Norris Revisited* (1992), Jennifer L. Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* (2004), Gina M. Rossetti's *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature* (2006), and Ira Wells's *Fighting Words: Polemics and Social Change in Literary Naturalism* (2013).

John M. Oskison

Lionel Larré has recently published the first comprehensive edition of Oskison's writing, *Tales of the Old Indian Territory and Essays on the Indian Condition* (2012), a book that includes fiction, essays, and Oskison's unfinished autobiography "A Tale of the Old I.T. [Indian Territory]." Oskison's published novels are *Wild Harvest: A Novel of Transition Days in Oklahoma* (1925), *Black Jack Davy* (1926), and *Brothers Three* (1935). None of these deals much with Indian experience, unlike the biography, *Tecumseh and His Times: The Story of a Great Indian* (1938) or the previously unpublished novel *The Singing Bird: A Cherokee Novel*, which was recently edited by Timothy B. Powell and Melinda Smith Mullikin (2007). Robert Warrior's *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1994) discusses Oskison briefly in the context indicated by the book's title. Daniel Heath Justice's *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (2006) and Beth Piatote's *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and the Law in Native American Literature* (2013) both have insightful discussions of Oskison's writing.

Upton Sinclair

There are several good editions of *The Jungle*; the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Clare Virginia Eby (2002), includes contemporary reviews, critical essays, and bibliographies. Gene DeGruson edited Sinclair's *The Lost First Edition of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle* (1988); this is an earlier, longer version. Floyd Dell's pioneering *Upton Sinclair: A Study in Social Protest* was published in 1928 and reissued in 2005. Sinclair's *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair* was published in 1962, and Ruth Clifford Engs more recently published *Unseen Upton Sinclair: Nine Unpublished Stories, Essays and Other Works* in 2009. Biographical work includes Kevin Mattson's *Upton Sinclair and the Other American Century* (2006), Anthony Arthur's *Radical Innocent: Upton Sinclair* (2006), and Lauren Coodley's *Upton Sinclair: California Socialist, Celebrity Intellectual* (2013). Ronald Gottesman compiled the bibliographic guides *The Literary Manuscripts of Upton Sinclair* (1972) and *Upton Sinclair: An Annotated Checklist* (1973). Abraham Blinderman's *Critics on Upton Sinclair* (1975) surveys the critical perspectives up to that time. Useful critical studies include Carl S. Smith's *Chicago in the American Literary Imagination, 1888–1920* (1984), R. N. Mookerjee's *Art of Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair* (1988), Dieter Herms's edited collection *Upton Sinclair: Literature and Social Reform* (1990), Giedrius Subacius's edited collection *Upton*

Sinclair: The Lithuanian Jungle: Upon the Centenary of The Jungle (1905 and 1906) by Upton Sinclair (2006), and Elizabeth Kraft and Debra Taylor's *Writers That Changed the World: Samuel Richardson, Upton Sinclair, and the Strategies of Social Reform* (2007). *The Jungle* is also discussed extensively in Mark W. Van Wiene's *American Socialist Triptych: The Literary-Political Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Upton Sinclair, and W. E. B. Du Bois* (2012) and Michael Lundblad's *The Birth of a Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture* (2013).

Mark Twain

As the center for authoritative editions of his writings, The Mark Twain Papers at the University of California at Berkeley has been producing annotated volumes since the 1960s. Their editions to date, including *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2003), *Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts* (1969), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1983), *Roughing It* (1996), and several volumes of Mark Twain's *Letters* and his *Notebooks and Journals*, are scholarly landmarks. For Twain books that have yet to receive this treatment, however, a good recourse is the series *The Oxford Mark Twain* (1997), edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin. Essentially facsimiles of all first editions of Twain works published in his lifetime or soon after, the series is important because in the years when Clemens was head of his own publishing company, he could control everything that was produced with "Mark Twain" on the cover—including the numerous illustrations in his most famous books. These facsimiles show what American readers encountered when these books were fresh on the market, and help readers understand how Mark Twain included printed images in the creative process.

There are three encyclopedic recent guides to Twain's life and works: Gregg Camfield's *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain* (2003), R. Kent Rasmussen's two-volume *Critical Companion to Mark Twain: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (2007), and Rasmussen's shorter and earlier *Mark Twain: A to Z* (1995). Also worth consulting are Forrest G. Robinson's *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain* (1995) and Peter Messent and Louis J. Budd's *A Companion to Mark Twain* (2005). Much briefer introductions to Twain's work and his literary legacy include Peter Messent's *The Cambridge Introduction to Mark Twain* (2007) and Stephen Railton's *Mark Twain: A Short Introduction* (2004).

Because the life of Samuel Clemens has become an American novel and legend in its own right, biographies abound; the 2010 centenary of his death brought a fresh wave,

including Jerome Loving's *Mark Twain: The Adventures of Samuel Clemens* (2010) and Michael Shelden's *Mark Twain: Man in White* (2010). Also recent and well received is Ron Powers's *Mark Twain: A Life* (2005). These comprehensive narratives make use of journals and letters, and also a welter of previous retellings of the Twain story, including Justin Kaplan's still-reliable *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* (1966) and Albert Bigelow Paine's very early, extensive, but doubtfully authoritative *Mark Twain: A Biography* (1912). Other accounts of Clemens center on the Hannibal boyhood, the adventures in the West, the episodes of European and worldwide travel, and life on the lecture circuit; lately, much attention has concentrated on the final decade of his life. Recent revelations and opinions about this period include Laura Skandera Trombley's *Mark Twain's Other Woman: The Hidden Story of His Final Years* (2010) and Karen Lystra's *Dangerous Intimacy: The Untold Story of Mark Twain's Final Years* (2006). Both of these build upon Hamlin Hill's *Mark Twain: God's Fool* (1973) and Van Wyck Brooks's *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920), decisive works in transforming an author into an archetypal "wounded" American celebrity. Twain's anti-imperialism at the turn of the century has also recently engaged critics. *Following the Equator and Anti-Imperialist Essays*, edited by Fred Kaplan (1996), provides a good collection of Twain's works, and Hsuan L. Hsu's offers a critical analysis in *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain's Asia and Comparative Racialization* (2015).

Other biographical studies emphasize the imaginative experience, the business realities, and the cultural contexts of Mark Twain in his most productive years; notable among these are Victor Doyno's *Writing Huck Finn: Mark Twain's Creative Process* (1993), Bruce Michelson's *Printer's Devil: Mark Twain and the American Publishing Revolution* (2006), Roy Morris Jr.'s *Lighting Out for the Territory: How Samuel Clemens Headed West and Became Mark Twain* (2010), Morris's *American Vandal: Mark Twain Abroad* (2015), and Ben Tarnoff's *The Bohemians: Mark Twain and the San Francisco Writers Who Reinvented American Literature* (2014).

Louis J. Budd's *Our Mark Twain: The Making of His Public Personality* (1983) describes how Twain's reputation expanded, with embellishments, in the opening decades of the twentieth century. See also Shelley Fisher Fishkin's recent Library of America volume on the international response to Twain: *The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Works* (2010). The most influential studies of Twain's wit and humor include James M. Cox's *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (1966), Bruce

Michelson's *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self* (1995), Linda Morris's *Gender Play in Mark Twain: Cross-Dressing and Transgression* (2007), and Judith Yaross Lee's *Twain's Brand: Humor in Contemporary American Culture* (2012). For controversies about *Huckleberry Finn* as a "great" American novel, see Tom Quirk's *Coming to Grips with Huckleberry Finn* (1993), Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (1996), Jonathan Arac's *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target* (1997), and Andrew Levy's *Huck Finn's America: Mark Twain and the Era That Shaped His Masterpiece* (2015). *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* was published in three volumes from 2010 to 2015, becoming a national best seller.

Booker T. Washington

Louis R. Harlan edited *The Booker T. Washington Papers* in fourteen volumes (1972–89). William L. Andrews edited a Norton Critical Edition of *Up from Slavery* (1996). Louis R. Harlan's two-volume biography, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1865–1901* (1972) and *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901–1915* (1983), is standard, but it should be supplemented by Michael Rudolph West's *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (2006), Michael Bieze's *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self-Representation* (2008), and Robert J. Norell's *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (2009). Robert B. Stepto's chapter on Washington's *Up from Slavery*, in *Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (1979), is a classic analysis, as is James M. Cox's "Autobiography and Washington" in his *Recovering Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography* (1989). Also worth consulting are Kevern Verney's *The Art of the Possible: Booker T. Washington and Black Leadership in the United States, 1881–1925* (2001); Houston A. Baker Jr.'s *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism / Re-Reading Booker T.* (2001); Wilson Jeremiah Moses's *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (2005); Rebecca Carroll's edited collection *Uncle Tom or New Negro?: African Americans Reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up from Slavery 100 Years Later* (2006); and Michael Bieze and Marybeth Gasman's edited collection of essays, *Booker T. Washington Rediscovered* (2012).

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

The standard edition is *The Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (1991), edited by Trud-

ier K. Harris. *The Red Record: With Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases and Mob Rule in New Orleans* are available as reprints (2006), as is *On Lynchings* (2002), edited by Patricia Hill Collins. Mia Bay has recently edited a superb one-volume collection of Wells-Barnett's writing for Penguin Books: *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader* (2014). The autobiography is available as *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (1991), edited by Alfreda M. Duster. Biographies include Linda O. McMurry's *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (1999), Paula J. Giddings's *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (2008), and Mia Bay's *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (2009). For good discussions of Wells-Barnett as a literary and cultural figure, see Jacqueline Denise Goldsby's *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (2006), James West Davidson's "They Say": *Ida B. Wells and the Reconstruction of Race* (2007), Crystal Nicole Feimster's *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (2009), Angela D. Sims's *Ethical Complications of Lynching: Ida B. Wells's Interrogation of American Terror* (2010); and Sarah L. Silkey's *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism* (2015).

Edith Wharton

R. W. B. Lewis edited *The Collected Short Stories of Edith Wharton* (1988) in two volumes. Frederick Wegener edited *Edith Wharton: The Uncollected Critical Writings* (1991), and Laura Rattray edited *The Unpublished Writings of Edith Wharton* (2009). The Library of America published several volumes of Wharton's works (1986, 1990, 2001), including novels, novellas, stories, and poems. *The Correspondence of Edith Wharton and Macmillan, 1901–1930* (2007), edited by Shafquat Towheed, helps to illuminate Wharton's relationship with her publisher. R. W. B. Lewis's groundbreaking *Edith Wharton: A Biography* appeared in 1975, and Cynthia Griffin Wolff's important critical biographical study, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*, followed in 1977. However, Hermione Lee's deft and insightful *Edith Wharton* (2007) is likely to be the standard biography of Wharton for many years. George Ramsden's *Edith Wharton's Library: A Catalogue* (1999) inventories about half of her library—more than 2,200 books. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan's *Edith Wharton* (2006) is a reference work about contemporary views of the author. On reception, see also James W. Tuttleton, Kristin O. Lauer, and Margaret P. Murray's *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews* (1992) and Helen Kil-

loran's *The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton* (2001).

Book-length critical studies include Elizabeth Ammons's *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (1980), Susan Goodman's *Edith Wharton's Women* (1990), Goodman's *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle* (1994), Donna Campbell's *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885–1915* (1997), Carol Singley's *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* (1998), Hildegard Hoeller's *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimental Fiction* (2000), Jill M. Kress's *The Figure of Consciousness: William James, Henry James, and Edith Wharton* (2002), Julie Olin-Ammentorp, *Edith Wharton's Writings from the Great War* (2004), Emily J. Orlando's *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* (2007), Jennifer Haytock's *Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism* (2008), Jennie A. Kassanoff's *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race* (2008), Judith P. Saunders's *Reading Edith Wharton through a Darwinian Lens: Evolutionary Biological Issues in Her Fiction* (2009), and Pamela Knight's *The Cambridge Introduction to Edith Wharton* (2009). A useful reference work is Sarah Bird Wright and Clare Colquitt's *Edith Wharton A to Z* (1998). For wide-ranging collections of essays, see Alfred Bendixen and Annette Zilvermit's *Edith Wharton: New Critical Essays* (1992), Millicent Bell's *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (1995), Colquitt, Goodman, and Candace Waid's *A Forward Glance: New Essays on Edith Wharton* (1999), Singley's *Historical Guide to Edith Wharton* (2003), and Laura Rattray's *Edith Wharton in Context* (2012).

Walt Whitman

The study of Whitman has been revolutionized by the *Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive* www.whitmanarchive.org, directed by Kenneth M. Price and Ed Folsom. Before going to the printed sources listed below, students should explore this huge and superbly organized hypertext archive, which includes a lengthy and reliable biographical essay by Folsom and Price, all the known contemporary reviews, all the known photographs, the various editions of *Leaves of Grass* and other of Whitman's writings, and a current bibliography of scholarship and criticism.

The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman was under the general editorship of Gay Wilson Allen; part of this edition is *Walt Whitman: The Correspondence* (1961–69), a six-volume set with two supplements (1990–91), edited by Edwin H. Miller. Essential, in three volumes, is "Leaves of Grass": *A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems* (1980), edited by Sculley Bradley, Harold W. Blodgett, Arthur Golden, and William White. Michael

Moon's Norton Critical Edition of *Leaves of Grass* (2002) includes discussion of textual variants and compositional development. Important documents can be found in *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* (1984), edited by Edward P. Grier, and *Walt Whitman's Selected Journalism* (2014), edited by Douglas A. Noverr and Jason Stacy. For Whitman's temperance novel, *Franklin Evans; or, The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times* (1842), see Christopher Castiglia and Glenn Hendler's informative edition (2007); and Ed Folsom has edited a new facsimile edition (2010) of Whitman's 1870 *Democratic Vistas*. For useful documentary materials, see Joel Myerson's *Whitman in His Own Time* (1991, rev. 2000), and Gary Schmidgall's *Intimate with Walt: Selections from Whitman's Conversations with Horace Traubel, 1888–1892* (2001).

Important biographies include Gay Wilson Allen's *The Solitary Singer* (1967). It should be supplemented by Roger Asselineau's *The Evolution of Walt Whitman* (1960, 1962; reissued 1999), the first biography to deal openly with Whitman's sexuality; Justin Kaplan's *Walt Whitman: A Life* (1980); David S. Reynolds's *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (1995); Gary Schmidgall's *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* (1998); Jerome Loving's *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (1999); and Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price's *Re-scripting Walt Whitman: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (2005). For close attention to the Civil War period, see Roy Morris Jr.'s *The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War* (2000), and Ted Genoways's *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* (2009); and for a good general introduction, see M. Jimmie Killingsworth's *The Cambridge Introduction to Walt Whitman* (2007). Useful resources are the 1998 *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, edited by J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, and Charles M. Oliver's *Critical Companion to Walt Whitman* (2006).

On Whitman's critical reception, see Graham Clarke's four-volume *Walt Whitman: Critical Assessments* (1996) and Kenneth M. Price's *Walt Whitman: The Contemporary Reviews* (1996). Valuable collections of critical essays include Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman's *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies* (1996), David S. Reynolds's *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman* (2000), Donald D. Kummings's *A Companion to Walt Whitman* (2006), Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price's *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays* (2007), and David Haven Blake and Michael Robertson's *Walt Whitman: Where the Future Becomes Present* (2008); John Evan Seery's *A Political Companion to Walt Whitman* (2011); Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley's *Whitman among the Bohe-*

mians (2014); and Ivy G. Wilson's *Whitman Noir: Black America and the Good Gray Poet* (2014). Important critical works include Betsy Erkkila's *Whitman the Political Poet* (1989), Kenneth M. Price's *Whitman and Tradition* (1990), Michael Moon's *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in "Leaves of Grass"* (1991), Ezra Greenspan's *Walt Whitman and the American Reader* (1991), Ed Folsom's *Walt Whitman's Native Representations* (1994), Martin Klammer's *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of "Leaves of Grass"* (1995), Vivian R. Pollack's *The Erotic Whitman* (2000), Jay Grossman's *Reconstituting the American Renaissance: Emerson, Whitman, and the Poetics of Representation* (2003), M. Wynn Thomas's *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.* (2005), David Haven Blake's *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (2006), Michael Robertson's *Worshipping Whitman: The Whitman Disciples* (2008), Edward Whitley's *American Bards: Walt Whitman and Other Unlikely Candidates for National Poet* (2010); Martin T. Buinicki's *Walt Whitman's Reconstruction: Poetry and Publishing Between Memory and History* (2011), and Gary Schmidgall's *Containing Multitudes: Walt Whitman and the British Literary Tradition* (2014).

Sarah Winnemucca

Cari M. Carpenter and Carolyn Sorisio have recently published an important resource book, *The Newspaper Warrior: Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins's Campaign for American Indian Rights, 1864–1891* (2015), which collects hundreds of documents by and about Winnemucca from throughout her career. Carpenter and Sorisio also provide a succinct biographical account of Winnemucca as part of their introduction. The first full-scale biography was Gae Whitney Canfield's *Sarah Winnemucca* (1983), which was updated by Sally Zanjani in her *Sarah Winnemucca* (2001); both books contain some inaccuracies. H. David Brumble's *American Indian Autobiography* (1988) has an excellent chapter partly devoted to Winnemucca. For good discussions of Winnemucca's activism and writing, see Siobhan Senier's *American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard* (2001), Frederick Hoxie's *This Indian Country: American Indian Political Activists and the Place They Made* (2012), and David L. Moore's *That Dream Shall Have a Name: Native Americans Rewriting America* (2013).

Constance Fenimore Woolson

Anne Boyd Rioux has recently edited a one-volume collection of Woolson's short stories, *Miss Grief and Other Stories* (2016). Other editions include Victoria Brehm and Sharon L.

Dean's *Constance Fenimore Woolson: Selected Stories and Travel Narratives* (2004) and *Women Artists, Women Exiles: "Miss Grief" and Other Stories* (1988). Sharon Dean also edited *The Complete Letters of Constance Fenimore Woolson* (2012). Rioux's much-needed biography—*Constance Fenimore Woolson: Portrait of a Lady Novelist* (2016)—is an indispensable resource. For another account of Woolson's relationship with Henry James, see Lyndall Gordon's *A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women and His Art* (1999). For an introduction to critical interpretation of Woolson's writing, see Rioux's *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America* (2004), Dean's *Constance Fenimore Woolson and Edith Wharton: Perspectives on Landscape and Art* (2002), and Cheryl Tornsey's *Constance Fenimore Woolson: The Grief of Artistry* (1989). Woolson has been the subject of several edited collections of essays on her work, including Kathleen Elizabeth Diffley's *Witness to Reconstruction: Constance Fenimore Woolson and the Postbellum South, 1873–1894* (2011), Victoria Brehm's *Constance Fenimore Woolson's Nineteenth Century: Essays* (2001), and Cheryl Tornsey's *Critical Essays on Constance Fenimore Woolson* (1992).

Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin)

Dexter Fisher's 1986 edition of Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories* (1921) includes an expert and insightful introduction to this collection of autobiography, fiction, and non-fiction prose. P. Jane Hafen helpfully edited a number of Zitkala-Ša's works in *Dreams and Thunder: Stories, Poems and "The Sun Dance Opera"* (2001), and Cathy Davidson and Ada Norris edited a one-volume collection for Penguin Books, *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings* (2003), which has a useful introduction and set of textual notes. Dexter Fisher's *Zitkala-Ša: The Evolution of a Writer* (1979) and Dorothea M. Susag's *Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin): A Power(full) Literary Voice* (1993) are among the few critical and biographical studies that focus exclusively on Zitkala-Ša. For discussions of her writing in a variety of cultural contexts, see Michael Elliott's *The Culture Concept: Writing, Difference, and the Age of Realism* (2002), Molly Crumpton Winter's *American Narratives: Multiethnic Writing in the Age of Realism* (2007), and Mark Rifkin's *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (2011).

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1865–1914



The Gross Clinic (Portrait of Professor Gross), Thomas Eakins, 1875

Over the course of his career, Eakins (1844–1916) was profoundly interested in both the human body and the lives of professional men. In *The Gross Clinic*, he combines these two subjects. The painting is at once a portrait of the Philadelphia surgeon Dr. Samuel D. Gross and an exhibition of his professional skill. As Gross stands in a teaching amphitheater, light illuminates his brow and the leg of the patient, inviting the viewer to consider the relationship of mind to body. The calm of Gross's posture contrasts with the recoil of the female viewer, possibly a relative of the patient, on the lower left. Eakins inserts himself into the picture at the far right, where he holds a pad of paper and pencil, observing the scene as part of his own professional practice. Because of his attention to concrete detail and veracity, Eakins is commonly regarded as a realist painter, in much the same way that William Dean Howells and others are regarded as realist writers.



Children Sleeping in Mulberry Street, Jacob Riis, 1890

Riis (1825–1914) was a Danish immigrant who worked as a New York police reporter. His photographs of the Irish and Italian immigrant poor appeared in his influential book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). Riis's composition articulates the position of homeless slum children: they sleep where they can, bunched up below street level. The photograph emphasizes their reliance on each other—they huddle together—but also shows that the space they inhabit is not safe: the stones behind the

boys seem overwhelming and the iron railing and drainpipe make it seem as if they are in a subterranean prison. Riis was photographing immigrant life in New York during the same period when Stephen Crane and Abraham Cahan were writing about similar subjects, and well after Horatio Alger had popularized the rags-to-riches story of *Ragged Dick*.



Custer's Last Fight, Otto Becker, 1895

In 1876, George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry were defeated by Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne Indians at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Nearly twenty years later, the Anheuser-Busch brewing company commissioned Otto Becker to produce *Custer's Last Fight* and distributed the lithograph to barrooms across the nation. The image of Custer, saber aloft, surrounded by hordes of Indians was historically inaccurate, but the lithograph was widely seen as the United States prepared to enter the Spanish-American War. Such images, with their negative depictions of Indian warriors, created challenges for Native American authors writing in the aftermath of the Plains Indian Wars.



Women Watching a Sun Dance, Amos Bad Heart Bull, undated

In the years 1890 to 1913 Amos Bad Heart Bull (1869–1913), an Oglala Lakota Sioux, produced 415 paintings and drawings. Many depict aspects of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, as well as other important events in the history and culture of his people. This painting depicts women watching a Sun Dance through a pine-bough barricade. The horseshoe shape of each woman's head, black except for the part at the center, is conventional in the art of the Plains people.



Nampeyo Decorating Pottery, Edward S. Curtis, 1900

Photography was an important medium for the representation of American Indians at the turn of the twentieth century, and Curtis (1868–1952) was perhaps the most significant photographer of Native subjects during this time. His portraits struck an elegiac tone, based on the premise that American Indians were vanishing. At the same time, his work showed the remarkable artistry of Native peoples, as in this photograph of the renowned Hopi-Tewa ceramicist Nampeyo (c. 1856–1942). As anthropologists and tourists began studying the indigenous peoples of the Southwest in the late nineteenth century, Nampeyo became known as a master of pottery, and her designs remain influential to this day.



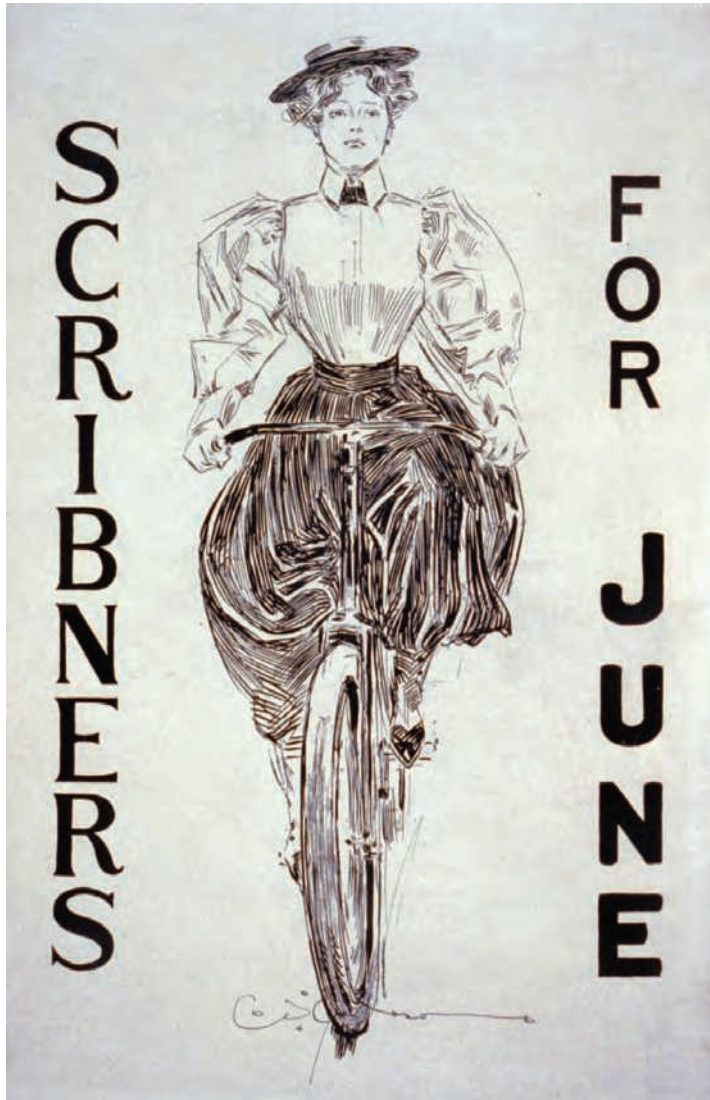
Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau), John Singer Sargent, 1884

Born in Italy to American parents, Sargent (1856–1925) became the most famous portraitist of his day. He was especially known for his portraits of upper-class women, but he also painted U.S. presidents and business tycoons. Similar in some ways to Henry James and Edith Wharton in their fiction, Sargent depicted the sophistication of his subjects but also conveyed the complicated lives beneath the surface. Madame Pierre Gautreau was originally named Virginie Amélie Avegno; she was born in Louisiana and traveled to Paris with her mother after her father was killed in the Civil War. There, she married a wealthy banker and became a celebrated social figure. When Sargent displayed the painting in 1884, his depiction of the sexual allure of this young, married woman—with bare shoulders and a barely visible ring on her left hand—provoked scandalized responses. Sargent had captured something dangerous, and he would not sell the painting for more than thirty years.



The Banjo Lesson, Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1893

Tanner (1859–1937) studied with Thomas Eakins at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts and then in Paris. As an African American painter, he encountered many of the same challenges that faced authors like Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Pauline Hopkins. In *The Banjo Lesson*, Tanner confronts the powerful stereotype of African Americans as strutting, high-stepping performers. The golden light that enters from the side of the painting conveys dignity to the two figures and illuminates the careful brushstrokes of their features. The banjo links generations, as both the teacher and his pupil concentrate on the craft of musicianship.



Scribner's for June, Charles Dana Gibson, 1895

In the 1890s, illustrator Charles Dana Gibson (1867–1944) began to depict American women in a manner that became known as the “Gibson girl”—a style of white womanhood that combined femininity with virility. With her upswept hair and hourglass figure, the Gibson girl became recognizable at a time when the “New American Woman” was a subject of frequent commentary in the popular press. In some illustrations, Gibson’s urbane subjects seem to be conforming to the social expectations of their gender and class, but in others they challenge the conventions of female behavior. On this cover of the popular *Scribner's* magazine, the subject confidently rides directly into the gaze of the viewer. Her nipped waist and perfect posture suggest traditional feminine manners; however, she wears bloomers, a garment associated with female independence and strength in the nineteenth century. Because it signified mobility and modernity, the bicycle was a favorite symbol of both those who celebrated and those who mocked the efforts of women to achieve greater autonomy.



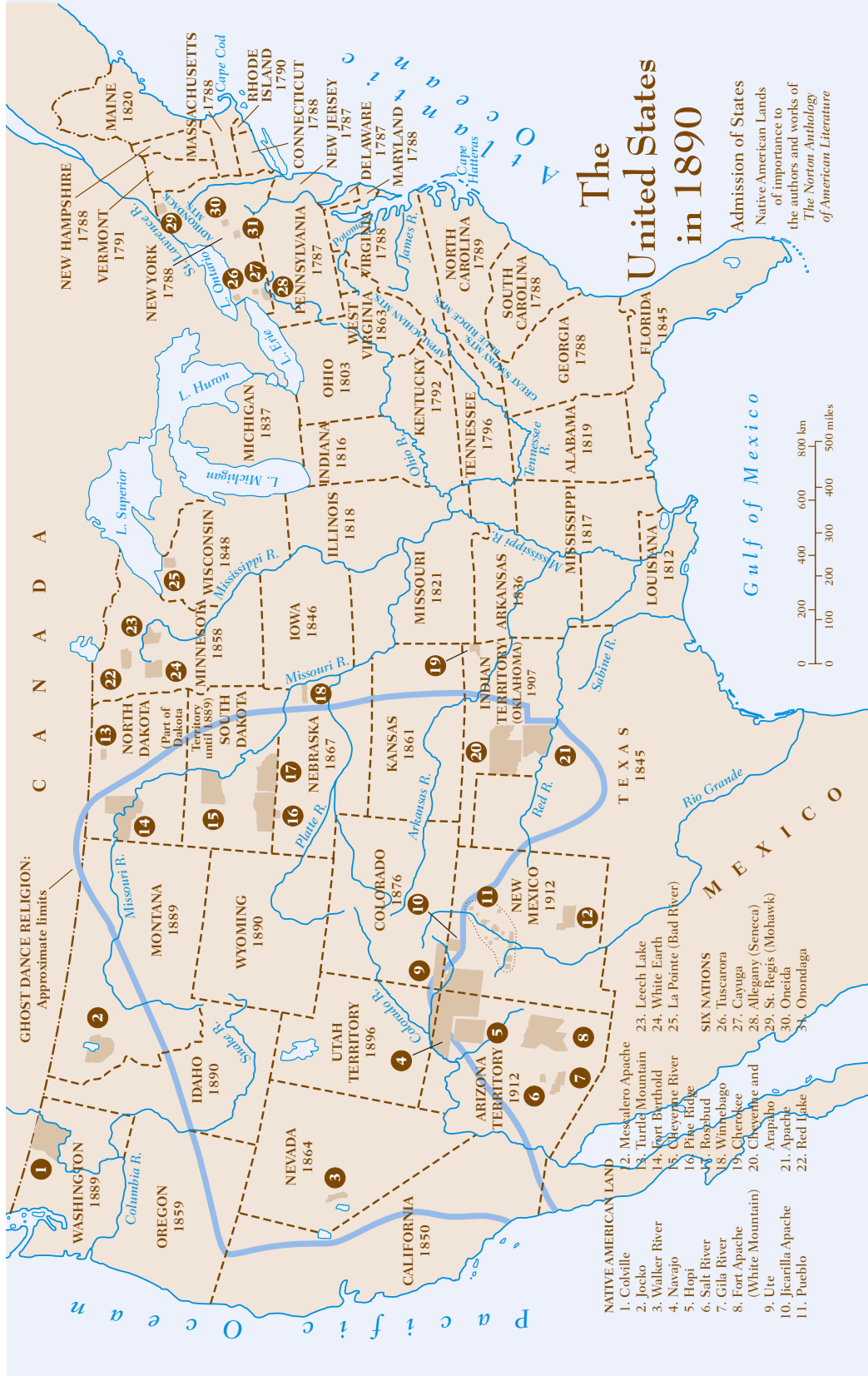
Both Members of This Club, George Bellows, 1909

Bellows (1882–1925) was a member of the Ashcan school, a group of artists who advocated representing American society in all its forms, especially the lives of the working classes, much like the naturalist writers of the time. Bellows's paintings of boxing matches are characterized by thick brushstrokes on a dark background and emphasize the motion of human figures within the confines of the ring. *Both Members of This Club* was composed at a time when many white boxers refused to enter the ring against black opponents. In the painting, Bellows creates an atmosphere of athleticism and spectacle, with both boxers performing for a grotesquely leering crowd.



Manhattan's Misty Sunset, Frederick Childe Hassam, 1911

Hassam (1850–1935), an American Impressionist, was the premier painter of New York City. *Manhattan's Misty Sunset* captures the romantic attraction of New York as a place of both tremendous opportunity and uncertainty and mystery. Hassam's limited color palette is organized around cool tones, as shades of green generalize the shapes of Brooklyn warehouses across the East River from Hassam's studio, punctuated by barely visible streetlights; the drizzle and fog suggest an ambivalence toward industrial America.



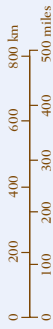
The United States in 1890

Admission of States
 Native American Lands
 of importance to
 the authors and works of
 the Norton Anthology
 of American Literature

GHOST DANCE RELIGION:
 Approximate limits

- NATIVE AMERICAN LAND**
1. Colville
 2. Jocko
 3. Walker River
 4. Navajo
 5. Hopi
 6. Salt River
 7. Gila River
 8. Fort Apache
 9. Ute
 10. Jicarilla Apache
 11. Pueblo
 12. Mesalero Apache
 13. Turtle Mountain
 14. Fort Berthold
 15. Cheyenne River
 16. Pine Ridge
 17. Rosebud
 18. Winnebago
 19. Cherokee
 20. Cheyenne and (White Mountain) Arapaho
 21. Apache
 22. Red Lake
 23. Leech Lake
 24. White Earth
 25. La Pointe (Bad River)
- SIX NATIONS**
26. Tuscarora
 27. Cayuga
 28. Allegany (Seneca)
 29. St. Regis (Mohawk)
 30. Oneida
 31. Onondaga

Gulf of Mexico



C A N A D A

M E X I C O

P a c i f i c O c e a n

A t l a n t i c O c e a n

American Literature 1865–1914

1810 1820 1830 1840 1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886)

Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens) (1835–1910)

13th Amendment abolishes slavery; Lincoln assassinated; Reconstruction begins (1865)

14th Amendment grants African Americans citizenship (1868)

Bret Harte (1836–1902)

William Dean Howells (1837–1920)

Henry Adams (1838–1918)

Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840–1894)

Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?)

Reconstruction ends; segregationist Jim Crow laws instituted (1877)

Henry James (1843–1916)

Sarah Winnemucca (c. 1844–1891)

Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908)

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887)

Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909)

Kate Chopin (1850–1904)

Vast immigration from Europe; U.S. population in 1900 is fourteen times greater than in 1800 (1880–1910)

Statue of Liberty dedicated (1886)

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852–1930)

Jose Martí (1853–1895)

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)

Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932)

Pauline Hopkins (1859–1930)

Columbian World Exposition held in Chicago (1893)

Census Bureau declares frontier “closed”; Seventh Cavalry massacre at Wounded Knee (1890)

Henry Ford founds Ford Motor Company; Wright brothers make the first successful airplane flight; *The Great Train Robbery* is first U.S. cinematic narrative (1903)

Hamlin Garland (1860–1940)

Abraham Cahan (1860–1951)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935)

Edith Wharton (1862–1937)

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931)

Sui Sin Far (Edith Maud Eaton) (1867–1914)

Spanish-American War fought in Pacific and Caribbean (1898–99)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded (1909)

W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963)

Frank Norris (1870–1902)

Stephen Crane (1871–1900)

Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945)

James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938)

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906)

John M. Oskison (1874–1947)

Panama Canal opens (1914)

Jack London (1876–1916)

Zitkala-Ša (1876–1938)

Upton Sinclair (1878–1968)

1810 1820 1830 1840 1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970

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LITERATURE



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Michael A. Elliott

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
EMORY UNIVERSITY

Sandra M. Gustafson

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Amy Hungerford

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
AND DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
YALE UNIVERSITY

Mary Loeffelholz

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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NINTH EDITION

Robert S. Levine, *General Editor*

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND
DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AND
DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR-TEACHER
University of Maryland, College Park

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Preface to the Ninth Edition

The Ninth Edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* is the first for me as General Editor; for the Eighth Edition, I served as Associate General Editor under longstanding General Editor Nina Baym. On the occasion of a new general editorship, we have undertaken one of the most extensive revisions in our long publishing history. Three new section editors have joined the team: Sandra M. Gustafson, Professor of English and Concurrent Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame, who succeeds Wayne Franklin and Philip Gura as editor of “American Literature, Beginnings to 1820”; Michael A. Elliott, Professor of English at Emory University, who succeeds Nina Baym, Robert S. Levine, and Jeanne Campbell Reesman as editor of “American Literature, 1865–1914”; and Amy Hungerford, Professor of English and American Studies at Yale University, who succeeds Jerome Klinkowitz and Patricia B. Wallace as editor of “American Literature since 1945.” These editors join Robert S. Levine, editor of “American Literature, 1820–1865,” and Mary Loeffelholz, editor of “American Literature, 1914–1945.” Each editor, new or continuing, is a well-known expert in the relevant field or period and has ultimate responsibility for his or her section of the anthology, but we have worked closely from first to last to rethink all aspects of this new edition. Volume introductions, author headnotes, thematic clusters, annotations, illustrations, and bibliographies have all been updated and revised. We have also added a number of new authors, selections, and thematic clusters. We are excited about the outcome of our collaboration and anticipate that, like the previous eight editions, this edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* will continue to lead the field.

From the anthology’s inception in 1979, the editors have had three main aims: first, to present a rich and substantial enough variety of works to enable teachers to build courses according to their own vision of American literary history (thus, teachers are offered more authors and more selections than they will probably use in any one course); second, to make the anthology self-sufficient by featuring many works in their entirety along with extensive selections for individual authors; third, to balance traditional interests with developing critical concerns in a way that allows for the complex, rigorous, and capacious study of American literary traditions. As early as 1979, we anthologized work by Anne Bradstreet, Mary Rowlandson, Sarah Kemble Knight, Phillis Wheatley, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Booker T. Washington, Charles W. Chesnutt, Edith Wharton,

W. E. B. Du Bois, and other writers who were not yet part of a standard canon. Yet we never shortchanged writers—such as Franklin, Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner—whose work many students expected to read in their American literature courses, and whom most teachers then and now would not think of doing without.

The so-called canon wars of the 1980s and 1990s usefully initiated a review of our understanding of American literature, a review that has enlarged the number and diversity of authors now recognized as contributors to the totality of American literature. The traditional writers look different in this expanded context, and they also appear different according to which of their works are selected. Teachers and students remain committed to the idea of the literary—that writers strive to produce artifacts that are both intellectually serious and formally skillful—but believe more than ever that writers should be understood in relation to their cultural and historical situations. We address the complex interrelationships between literature and history in the volume introductions, author headnotes, chronologies, and some of the footnotes. As in previous editions, we have worked with detailed suggestions from many teachers on how best to present the authors and selections. We have gained insights as well from the students who use the anthology. Thanks to questionnaires, face-to-face and phone discussions, letters, and email, we have been able to listen to those for whom this book is intended. For the Ninth Edition, we have drawn on the careful commentary of over 240 reviewers and reworked aspects of the anthology accordingly.

Our new materials continue the work of broadening the canon by representing thirteen new writers in depth, without sacrificing widely assigned writers, many of whose selections have been reconsidered, reselected, and expanded. Our aim is always to provide extensive enough selections to do the writers justice, including complete works wherever possible. Our Ninth Edition offers complete longer works, including Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and such new and recently added works as Margaret Fuller's *The Great Lawsuit*, Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, and August Wilson's *Fences*. Two complete works—Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*—are exclusive to *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Charles Brockden Brown, Louisa May Alcott, Upton Sinclair, and Junot Díaz are among the writers added to the prior edition, and to this edition we have introduced John Rollin Ridge, Constance Fenimore Woolson, George Saunders, and Natasha Tretheway, among others. We have also expanded and in some cases reconfigured such central figures as Franklin, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Twain, and Hemingway, offering new approaches in the headnotes, along with some new selections. In fact, the headnotes and, in many cases, selections for such frequently assigned authors as William Bradford, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Lydia Maria Child, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Kate Chopin, W. E. B. Du Bois, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and William

Faulkner have been revised, updated, and in some cases entirely rewritten in light of recent scholarship. The Ninth Edition further expands its selections of women writers and writers from diverse ethnic, racial, and regional backgrounds—always with attention to the critical acclaim that recognizes their contributions to the American literary record. New and recently added writers such as Samson Occom, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, John Rollin Ridge, and Sarah Winnemucca, along with the figures represented in “Voices from Native America,” enable teachers to bring early Native American writing and oratory into their syllabi, or should they prefer, to focus on these selections as a freestanding unit leading toward the moment after 1945 when Native writers fully entered the mainstream of literary activity.

We are pleased to continue our popular innovation of topical gatherings of short texts that illuminate the cultural, historical, intellectual, and literary concerns of their respective periods. Designed to be taught in a class period or two, or used as background, each of the sixteen clusters consists of brief, carefully excerpted primary and (in one case) secondary texts, about six to ten per cluster, and an introduction. Diverse voices—many new to the anthology—highlight a range of views current when writers of a particular time period were active, and thus allow students better to understand some of the large issues that were being debated at particular historical moments. For example, in “Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature,” texts by David Walker, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimké, Sojourner Truth, James M. Whitfield, and Martin R. Delany speak to the great paradox of pre-Civil War America: the contradictory rupture between the realities of slavery and the nation’s ideals of freedom.

The Ninth Edition strengthens this feature with eight new and revised clusters attuned to the requests of teachers. To help students address the controversy over race and aesthetics in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we have revised a cluster in Volume C that shows what some of the leading critics of the past few decades thought was at stake in reading and interpreting slavery and race in Twain’s canonical novel. New to Volume A is “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression,” which includes selections by Elizabeth Ashbridge, John Woolman, and John Marrant, while Volume B offers “Science and Technology in the Pre-Civil War Nation.” Volume C newly features “Becoming American in the Gilded Age,” and we continue to include the useful “Modernist Manifestos” in Volume D. We have added to the popular “Creative Nonfiction” in Volume E new selections by David Foster Wallace and Hunter S. Thompson, who join such writers as Jamaica Kincaid and Joan Didion.

The Ninth Edition features an expanded illustration program, both of the black-and-white images, 145 of which are placed throughout the volumes, and of the color plates so popular in the last two editions. In selecting color plates—from Elizabeth Graham’s embroidered map of Washington, D.C., at the start of the nineteenth century to Jeff Wall’s “After ‘Invisible Man’” at the beginning of the twenty-first—the editors aim to provide images relevant to literary works in the anthology while depicting arts and artifacts representative of each era. In addition, graphic works—segments from the colonial children’s classic *The New-England Primer* and from Art Spiegelman’s canonical graphic novel, *Maus*, and a facsimile page of Emily

Dickinson manuscript, along with the many new illustrations—open possibilities for teaching visual texts.

Period-by-Period Revisions

Volume A, *Beginnings to 1820*. Sandra M. Gustafson, the new editor of Volume A, has substantially revised the volume. Prior editions of Volume A were broken into two historical sections, with two introductions and a dividing line at the year 1700; Gustafson has dropped that artificial divide to tell a more coherent and fluid story (in her new introduction) about the variety of American literatures during this long period. The volume continues to feature narratives by early European explorers of the North American continent as they encountered and attempted to make sense of the diverse cultures they met, and as they sought to justify their aim of claiming the territory for Europeans. These are precisely the issues foregrounded by the revised cluster “First Encounters: Early European Accounts of Native America,” which gathers writings by Hernán Cortés, Samuel de Champlain, Robert Juet, and others, including the newly added Thomas Harriot. In addition to the standing material from *The Bay Psalm Book*, we include new material by Roger Williams; additional poems by Annis Boudinot Stockton; Abigail Adams’s famous letter urging her husband to “Remember the Ladies”; an additional selection from Olaudah Equiano on his post-emancipation travels; and Charles Brockden Brown’s “Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist” (the complete “prequel” to his first novel, *Wieland*). We continue to offer the complete texts of Rowlandson’s enormously influential *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (which remains one of the most compelling works on the emergence of an “American” self), Royall Tyler’s popular play *The Contrast*, and Hannah Foster’s novel *The Coquette*, which uses a real-life tragedy to meditate on the proper role of well-bred women in the new republic and testifies to the existence of a female audience for the popular novels of the period. New to this volume is Washington Irving, a writer who looks back to colonial history and forward to Jacksonian America. The inclusion of Irving in both Volumes A and B, with one key overlapping selection, points to continuities and changes between the two volumes.

Five new and revised thematic clusters of texts highlight themes central to Volume A. In addition to “First Encounters,” we have included “Native American Oral Literature,” “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression,” “Ethnographic and Naturalist Writings,” and “Native American Eloquence: Negotiation and Resistance.” “Native American Oral Literature” features creation stories, trickster tales, oratory, and poetry from a spectrum of traditions, while “Native American Eloquence” collects speeches and accounts by Canassatego and Native American women (both new to the volume), Pontiac, Chief Logan (as cited by Thomas Jefferson), and Tecumseh, which, as a group, illustrate the centuries-long pattern of initial peaceful contact between Native Americans and whites mutating into bitter and violent conflict. This cluster, which focuses on Native Americans’ points of view, complements “First Encounters,” which focuses on European colonizers’ points of view. The Native American presence in the volume is further expanded with increased representation of Samson Occom, which

includes an excerpt from his sermon at the execution of Moses Paul, and the inclusion of Sagoyewatha in “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression.” Strategically located between the Congregationalist Protestant (or late-Puritan) Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment figure Franklin, this cluster brings together works from the perspectives of the major religious groups of the early Americas, including Quakerism (poems by Francis Daniel Pastorius, selections from autographical narratives of Elizabeth Ashbridge and John Woolman), Roman Catholicism (poems by Sor Juana, two Jesuit Relations, with biographical accounts of Father Isaac Jogues and Kateri Tekakwitha), dissenting Protestantism (Marrant), Judaism (Rebecca Samuel), and indigenous beliefs (Sagoyewatha). The new cluster “Ethnographic and Naturalist Writings” includes writings by Sarah Kemble Knight and William Byrd, along with new selections by Alexander Hamilton, William Bartram, and Hendrick Aupaumut. With this cluster, the new cluster on science and technology in Volume B, and a number of new selections and revisions in Volumes C, D, and E, the Ninth Edition pays greater attention to the impact of science on American literary traditions.

Volume B, *American Literature, 1820–1865.* Under the editorship of Robert S. Levine, this volume over the past several editions has become more diverse. Included here are the complete texts of Emerson’s *Nature*, Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, Thoreau’s *Walden*, Douglass’s *Narrative*, Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, Melville’s *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*, Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*, and Margaret Fuller’s *The Great Lawsuit*. At the same time, aware of the important role of African American writers in the period, and the omnipresence of race and slavery as literary and political themes, we have recently added two major African American writers, William Wells Brown and Frances E. W. Harper, along with Douglass’s novella *The Heroic Slave*. Thoreau’s “Plea for Captain John Brown,” a generous selection from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the cluster “Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature” also help remind students of how central slavery was to the literary and political life of the nation during this period. “Native Americans: Resistance and Removal” gathers oratory and writings—by Native Americans such as Black Hawk and whites such as Ralph Waldo Emerson—protesting Andrew Jackson’s ruthless national policy of Indian removal. Newly added is a selection from *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*, by the Native American writer John Rollin Ridge. This potboiler of a novel, set in the new state of California, emerged from the debates that began during the Indian removal period. Through the figure of the legendary Mexican bandit Murieta, who fights back against white expansionists, Ridge responds to the violence encouraged by Jackson and subsequent white leaders as they laid claim to the continent. Political themes, far from diluting the literary imagination of American authors, served to inspire some of the most memorable writing of the pre–Civil War Period.

Women writers recently added to Volume B include Lydia Huntley Sigourney, the Native American writer Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, and Louisa May Alcott. Recently added prose fiction includes chapters from Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, and Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, along with Poe’s “The Black Cat” and Hawthorne’s “Wakefield.” For the first time in the print edition, we include Melville’s “Hawthorne

and His Mosses” as it appeared in the 1850 *Literary World*. Poetry by Emily Dickinson is now presented in the texts established by R. W. Franklin and includes a facsimile page from Fascicle 10. For this edition we have added several poems by Dickinson that were inspired by the Civil War. Other selections added to this edition include Fanny Fern’s amusing sketch “Writing ‘Compositions,’” the chapter in Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* on his resistance to the slave-breaker Covey, three poems by Melville (“Dupont’s Round Fight,” “A Utilitarian View of the Monitor’s Fight,” and “Art”), and Whitman’s “The Sleepers.”

Perhaps the most significant addition to Volume B is the cluster “Science and Technology in the Pre–Civil War Nation,” with selections by the canonical writers Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and Frederick Douglass, by the scientists Jacob Bigelow and Alexander Humboldt, and by the editor-writer Harriet Farley. The cluster calls attention to the strong interest in science and technology throughout this period and should provide a rich context for reconsidering works such as Thoreau’s *Walden* and Melville’s “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids.” In an effort to underscore the importance of science and technology to Poe and Hawthorne in particular, we have added two stories that directly address these topics: Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” and Hawthorne’s “The Artist of the Beautiful” (which reads nicely in relation to his “The Birth-Mark” and “Rappaccini’s Daughter”). Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson are among the many other authors in Volume B who had considerable interest in science.

Volume C, *American Literature, 1865–1914*. Newly edited by Michael A. Elliott, the volume includes expanded selections of key works, as well as new ones that illustrate how many of the struggles of this period prefigure our own. In addition to complete longer works such as Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chopin’s *The Awakening*, James’s *Daisy Miller*, and Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the Ninth Edition now includes the complete text of *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, a highly influential novella of immigrant life that depicts the pressures facing newly arrived Jews in the nation’s largest metropolis. Also new is a substantial selection from Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a masterpiece of literary regionalism that portrays a remote seaside community facing change.

Americans are still reflecting on the legacy of the Civil War, and we have added two works approaching that subject from different angles. Constance Fenimore Woolson’s “Rodman the Keeper” tells the story of a Union veteran who maintains a cemetery in the South. In “The Private History of a Campaign That Failed,” Mark Twain reflects with wit and insight on his own brief experience in the war. In the Eighth Edition, we introduced a section on the critical controversy surrounding race and the conclusion of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. That section remains as important as ever, and new additions incorporate a recent debate about the value of an expurgated edition of the novel.

We have substantially revised clusters designed to give students a sense of the cultural context of the period. New selections in “Realism and Naturalism” demonstrate what was at stake in the debate over realism, among them a feminist response from Charlotte Perkins Gilman. “Becoming American

in the Gilded Age,” a new cluster, introduces students to writing about wealth and citizenship at a time when the nation was undergoing transformation. Selections from one of Horatio Alger’s popular novels of economic uplift, Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth,” and Charles W. Chesnutt’s “The Future American” together reveal how questions about the composition of the nation both influenced the literature of this period and prefigured contemporary debates on immigration, cultural diversity, and the concentration of wealth.

The turn of the twentieth century was a time of immense literary diversity. “Voices from Native America” brings together a variety of expressive forms—oratory, memoir, ethnography—through which Native Americans sought to represent themselves. It includes new selections by Francis LaFlesche, Zitkala Ša, and Chief Joseph. For the first time, we include the complete text of José Martí’s “Our America,” in a new translation by Martí biographer Alfred J. López. By instructor request, we have added fiction and nonfiction by African American authors: Charles W. Chesnutt’s “Po’ Sandy,” Pauline Hopkins’s “Talma Gordon,” and expanded selections from W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* and James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*.

Volume D, American Literature 1914–1945. Edited by Mary Loeffelholz, Volume D offers a number of complete longer works—Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (exclusive to the Norton Anthology), William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, and Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*. To these we have added Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, which replaces *Quicksand*, and Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust*. We added *Passing* in response to numerous requests from instructors and students who regard it as one of the most compelling treatments of racial passing in American literature. The novel also offers rich descriptions of the social and racial geographies of Chicago and New York City. West’s darkly comic *The Day of the Locust* similarly offers rich descriptions of the social and racial geography of Los Angeles. West’s novel can at times seem bleak and not “politically correct,” but in many ways it is the first great American novel about the film industry, and it also has much to say about the growth of California in the early decades of the twentieth century. New selections by Zora Neale Hurston (“Sweat”) and John Steinbeck (“The Chrysanthemums”) further contribute to the volume’s exploration of issues connected with racial and social geographies.

Selections by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, and Langston Hughes encourage students and teachers to contemplate the interrelation of modernist aesthetics with ethnic, regional, and popular writing. In “Modernist Manifestos,” F. T. Marinetti, Mina Loy, Ezra Pound, Willa Cather, William Carlos Williams, and Langston Hughes show how the manifesto as a form exerted a powerful influence on international modernism in all the arts. Another illuminating cluster addresses central events of the modern period. In “World War I and Its Aftermath,” writings by Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and others explore sharply divided views on the U.S. role in World War I, as well as the radicalizing effect of modern warfare—with 365,000 American casualties—on contemporary writing. We have added to this edition a chapter from Hemingway’s first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, which speaks to the impact of the war on

sexuality and gender. Other recent and new additions to Volume D include Faulkner's popular "A Rose for Emily," Katherine Anne Porter's novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Gertrude Stein's "Objects," Marianne Moore's ambitious longer poem "Marriage," poems by Edgar Lee Masters and Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Jean Toomer's "Blood Burning Moon."

Volume E, *American Literature, 1945 to the Present*. Amy Hungerford, the new editor of Volume E, has revised the volume to present a wider range of writing in poetry, prose, drama, and nonfiction. As before, the volume offers the complete texts of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (exclusive to this anthology), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Sam Shepard's *True West*, August Wilson's *Fences*, David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and Louise Glück's long poem *October*. A selection from Art Spiegelman's prize-winning *Maus* opens possibilities for teaching the graphic novel. We also include teachable stand-alone segments from influential novels by Saul Bellow (*The Adventures of Augie March*) and Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*), and, new to this edition, Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*) and Don DeLillo (*White Noise*). The selection from one of DeLillo's most celebrated novels tells what feels like a contemporary story about a nontraditional family navigating an environmental disaster in a climate saturated by mass media. Three newly added stories—Patricia Highsmith's "The Quest for *Blank Claveringi*," Philip K. Dick's "Precious Artifact," and George Saunders's "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline"—reveal the impact of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and (especially in the case of Saunders) mass media on literary fiction. Also appearing for the first time are Edward P. Jones and Lydia Davis, contemporary masters of the short story, who join such short fiction writers as Ann Beattie and Junot Díaz. Recognized literary figures in all genres, ranging from Robert Penn Warren and Elizabeth Bishop to Leslie Marmon Silko and Toni Morrison, continue to be richly represented. In response to instructors' requests, we now include Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues."

One of the most distinctive features of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature is a rich vein of African American poetry. This edition adds two contemporary poets from this living tradition: Natasha Trethewey and Tracy K. Smith. Trethewey's selections include personal and historical elegies; Smith draws on cultural materials as diverse as David Bowie's music and the history of the Hubble Space Telescope. These writers join African American poets whose work has long helped define the anthology—Rita Dove, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Audre Lorde, and others.

This edition gives even greater exposure to literary and social experimentation during the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. The work of two avant-garde playwrights joins "Postmodern Manifestos" (which pairs nicely with "Modernist Manifestos" in Volume D). Introduced to the anthology through their short, challenging pieces, Charles Ludlam and Richard Foreman cast the mechanics of performance in a new light. Reading their thought pieces in relation to the volume's complete plays helps raise new questions about how the seemingly more traditional dramatic works engage structures of time, plot, feeling, and spectatorship. To our popular cluster "Creative Nonfiction" we have added a new selection by Joan Didion, from "Slouching Towards

Bethlehem,” which showcases her revolutionary style of journalism as she comments on experiments with public performance and communal living during the 1960s. A new selection from David Foster Wallace in the same cluster pushes reportage on the Maine Lobster Festival into philosophical inquiry: how can we fairly assess the pain of other creatures? This edition also introduces poet Frank Bidart through his most famous work—*Ellen West*—in which the poet uses experimental forms of verse he pioneered during the 1970s to speak in the voice of a woman battling anorexia. Standing authors in the anthology, notably John Ashbery and Amiri Baraka, fill out the volume’s survey of radical change in the forms, and social uses, of literary art.

We are delighted to offer this revised Ninth Edition to teachers and students, and we welcome your comments.

Additional Resources from the Publisher

The Ninth Edition retains the paperback splits format, popular for its flexibility and portability. This format accommodates the many instructors who use the anthology in a two-semester survey, but allows for mixing and matching the five volumes in a variety of courses organized by period or topic, at levels from introductory to advanced. We are also pleased to offer the Ninth Edition in an ebook format. The Digital Anthologies include all the content of the print volumes, with print-corresponding page and line numbers for seamless integration into the print-digital mixed classroom. Annotations are accessible with a click or a tap, encouraging students to use them with minimal interruption to their reading of the text. The e-reading platform facilitates active reading with a powerful annotation tool and allows students to do a full-text search of the anthology and read online or off. The Digital Editions can be accessed from any computer or device with an Internet browser and are available to students at a fraction of the print price at digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9pre1865 and digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9post1865. For exam copy access to the Digital Editions and for information on making the Digital Editions available through the campus bookstore or packaging the Digital Editions with the print anthology, instructors should contact their Norton representative.

To give instructors even more flexibility, Norton is making available the full list of 254 Norton Critical Editions. A Norton Critical Edition can be included for free with either package (Volumes A and B; Volumes C, D, E) or any individual split volume. Each Norton Critical Edition gives students an authoritative, carefully annotated text accompanied by rich contextual and critical materials prepared by an expert in the subject. The publisher also offers the much-praised guide *Writing about American Literature*, by Karen Gocsik (University of California—San Diego) and Coleman Hutchison (University of Texas—Austin), free with either package or any individual split volume.

In addition to the Digital Editions, for students using *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, the publisher provides a wealth of free resources at digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9pre1865 and digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9post1865. There students will find more than seventy reading-comprehension quizzes on the period introductions and widely

taught works with extensive feedback that points them back to the text. Ideal for self-study or homework assignments, Norton's sophisticated quizzing engine allows instructors to track student results and improvement. For over thirty works in the anthology, the sites also offer Close Reading Workshops that walk students step-by-step through analysis of a literary work. Each workshop prompts students to read, reread, consider contexts, and answer questions along the way, making these perfect assignments to build close-reading skills.

The publisher also provides extensive instructor-support materials. New to the Ninth Edition is an online Interactive Instructor's Guide at iig.wwnorton.com/americanlit9/full. Invaluable for course preparation, this resource provides hundreds of teaching notes, discussion questions, and suggested resources from the much-praised *Teaching with The Norton Anthology of American Literature: A Guide for Instructors* by Edward Whitley (Lehigh University). Also at this searchable and sortable site are quizzes, images, and lecture PowerPoints for each introduction, topic cluster, and twenty-five widely taught works. A PDF of *Teaching with NAAL* is available for download at wwnorton.com/instructors.

Finally, Norton Coursepacks bring high-quality digital media into a new or existing online course. The coursepack includes all the reading comprehension quizzes (customizable within the coursepack), the Writing about Literature video series, a bank of essay and exam questions, bulleted summaries of the period introductions, and "Making Connections" discussion or essay prompts to encourage students to draw connections across the anthology's authors and works. Coursepacks are available in a variety of formats, including Blackboard, Canvas, Desire2Learn, and Moodle, at no cost to instructors or students.

Editorial Procedures

As in past editions, editorial features—period introductions, headnotes, annotations, and bibliographies—are designed to be concise yet full and to give students necessary information without imposing a single interpretation. The editors have updated all apparatus in response to new scholarship: period introductions have been entirely or substantially rewritten, as have many headnotes. All selected bibliographies and each period's general-resources bibliographies, categorized by Reference Works, Histories, and Literary Criticism, have been thoroughly updated. The Ninth Edition retains three editorial features that help students place their reading in historical and cultural context—a Texts/Contexts timeline following each period introduction, a map on the front endpaper of each volume, and a chronological chart, on the back endpaper, showing the lifespans of many of the writers anthologized.

Whenever possible, our policy has been to reprint texts as they appeared in their historical moment. There is one exception: we have modernized most spellings and (very sparingly) the punctuation in Volume A on the principle that archaic spellings and typography pose unnecessary problems for beginning students. We have used square brackets to indicate titles supplied by the editors for the convenience of students. Whenever a portion of a text has been omitted, we have indicated that omission with three asterisks.

If the omitted portion is important for following the plot or argument, we give a brief summary within the text or in a footnote. After each work, we cite the date of first publication on the right; in some instances, the latter is followed by the date of a revised edition for which the author was responsible. When the date of composition is known and differs from the date of publication, we cite it on the left.

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ROBERT S. LEVINE, General Editor

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THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF

AMERICAN
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NINTH EDITION

VOLUME D: 1914–1945





American Literature

1914–1945

THE TWO WARS AS HISTORICAL MARKERS

The conflict eventually known as World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, with Great Britain, France, and Russia fighting against Germany. The United States, which belatedly entered the war in 1917, on the side of Britain and France, had ended its last full-scale conflict, the Civil War, some fifty years previously. In the interval, the country's industrial power had grown immensely. So had its major cities, swelled on the Eastern seaboard by immigrants increasingly from southern and eastern Europe, and on the West Coast, from Asia. In 1914 the country's network of transcontinental railroads linked its productive farms, small towns, and industry to urban centers. Henry Ford had begun the transformation of the automobile from an exotic luxury technology into a consumer good with the 1908 introduction of the Model T, and by 1912 an American entrepreneur had dreamed up the first transcontinental highway. Aviation pioneers were rapidly building on the Wright brothers' first successful powered airplane flights of 1903. Like the Civil War, World War I would mobilize the country's industries and technologies, spur their development, and uproot both soldiers and civilians. On an even larger scale, World War II would do the same.

These events were momentous both in themselves and as harbingers of transformations to come. At the end of World War I, however, the United States was still in the main a nation of small farms and small towns, with about two-thirds of its population living in rural districts or towns of fewer than twenty-five thousand inhabitants. Although several waves of immigration had altered the makeup of the population, the

Night Hawks (detail), Edward Hopper, 1942. For more information about this painting, see the color insert in this volume.



NAACP—Silent March, 1917. On July 28, 1917, under the leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, some ten thousand African Americans marched down New York City's Fifth Avenue to protest the race riots of that summer in East Saint Louis, during which an estimated one hundred black citizens were lynched and thousands of others were left homeless.

majority of Americans were still of English or German ancestry and about one American in ten was of African descent. The majority was deeply distrustful of international politics, and after the war ended, many attempted to steer the nation back to prewar modes of life. In 1924 Congress enacted a sweeping exclusionary immigration act, extending the reach of previous restrictions. The act prohibited all Asian immigration and set quotas for other countries on the basis of their existing U.S. immigrant populations, intending thereby to control the ethnic makeup of the United States (and indeed the proportion of Americans born outside the United States did decline markedly from 1910 to 1940). The immediate postwar years also saw the so-called Red Scare, when labor union headquarters were raided and immigrant radicals were deported by a government fearful of the influence of the newly Communist Soviet Union (formerly tsarist Russia).

For other Americans, however, the war helped accelerate long-sought changes in the forms of political and social life. The long struggle to win American women the vote—given a final push by women's work as nurses and ambulance drivers during the war—ended in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, successfully argued during World War I for the commissioning of black officers in the U.S. armed forces; as they would again after World War II, African Americans who fought abroad returned to fight for their rights at



Suffragettes Picket the White House, 1917. Members of the National Woman's Party regularly demonstrated in front of the White House during Woodrow Wilson's administration. After the U.S. entry into World War I heightened concerns for domestic order, pro-suffrage picketers were arrested and jailed.

home. Despite the government's restrictions on leftist political activity, many Americans—among them writers and intellectuals as well as labor activists and urban immigrants—looked to the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement for a model in combating inequality and fostering workers' rights in the United States. Other Americans went abroad, for shorter or longer stretches of time, in order to taste the expatriate life (made cheaper in war-ravaged economies by the solid American dollar) in Europe's battered but still vibrant cities and countryside. Some Americans traveled physical and social distances almost as great within the boundaries of the United States, as African Americans began to migrate in large numbers out of the segregated South and young people everywhere increasingly attended college away from home and moved to the cities. African Americans, emancipated urban women, and the restless young faced off against rural and urban traditionalists over the question of who, exactly, was truly "American."

These conflicts over the shape of the future acquired new urgency when the stock market crashed in 1929 and led to an economic depression with a 25 percent unemployment rate—a percentage even larger in its impact, by present-day standards, because women in general were not in the workforce. Known as the Great Depression, this period of economic hardship did not fully end until the United States entered World War II, following the Japanese attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Japan's ally Germany also declared war on the United States, thus involving

the country in another European conflict. The war unified the country politically; revitalized industry, which devoted itself to goods needed for the war effort; and put people to work, including women who went into the labor force in unprecedented numbers. Germany surrendered in the spring of 1945. The war ended in August 1945 following the detonation of two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Europe was in ruins and the United States had become the world's major industrial and political power. The two wars, then, bracket a period during which the United States became a fully modern nation.

In the arena of literature and culture, the period demarcated by the two world wars is known as the era of modernism. Far too broad and widespread to be understood as a single movement, *modernism* nevertheless names a recognizable international phenomenon, a wave of challenges mounted against traditional authority in almost every realm—the arts, religion, science, politics, and social conventions. American literature in these decades registers all sides of the era's struggles and debates, while sharing a commitment to explore the many meanings of modernity. Some writers rejoiced while others lamented; some anticipated future utopias and others believed that civilization had collapsed; but the period's most influential voices, believing that old forms would not work for new times, were inspired by the possibility of creating something entirely new.

Within this period, three issues stand out as dividing various writers and schools of writers, all of them related to the accelerating transformations and conflicts of modernity. One issue centered on the uses of literary tradition. To some, a work registering its allegiance to literary history—through allusion to canonical works of the past, or by using traditional poetic forms and poetic language, or by relying on traditional forms of narrative authority—seemed imitative and old-fashioned. To others, a work failing to honor literary tradition was simply bad or incompetent writing. For still others, literary history was best appreciated oppositionally: modernist works often allude to previous literature ironically, or deliberately fracture traditional literary formulas. A related issue involved the place of popular culture in serious literature. Throughout the era, popular culture gained momentum and influence. Some writers regarded it as crucial for the future of literature that popular art forms, such as film and jazz, be embraced; to others, serious literature by definition had to reject what they saw as the cynical commercialism of popular culture.

Another issue was the question of how far literature should engage itself in political and social struggle. Should art be a domain unto itself, exploring aesthetic questions and enunciating transcendent truths, or should art participate in the politics of the times? For some, a work that was political in aim counted as propaganda, not art; others thought that apolitical literature was evasive and irresponsible; some viewed the call to keep art out of politics as covertly political, a conservative mandate to preserve the status quo, even if it did not acknowledge itself as such.

CHANGING TIMES

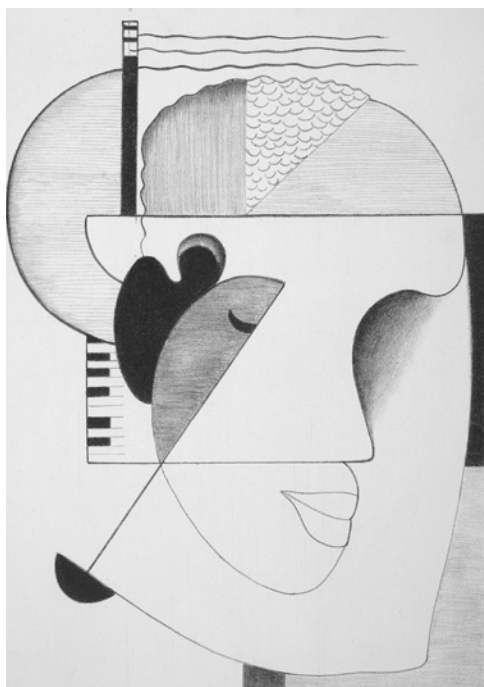
The transformations of the first half of the twentieth century were driven both by ideas and by changes in the economic and technological under-

pinnings of daily life. Much social energy in the 1920s went into enlarging the boundaries for acceptable self-expression. Adherents of small-town values such as the work ethic, social conformity, duty, and respectability clashed ideologically not only with internationally minded radicals but also with newly affluent young people who argued for more diverse, permissive, and tolerant styles of life. To some extent this debate recapitulated the long-standing American conflict between the claims of the individual and those of society, a conflict going back to the seventeenth-century religious conflicts over autonomy of conscience that were later epitomized in Ralph Waldo Emerson's call, in the 1840s: "Whosoever would be a man, must be a non-conformist."

The 1920s saw significant changes in sexual mores, with increasing numbers of young people no longer under the watchful eyes of their small-town elders. These social changes found their most influential theorist in the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1858–1939), inventor of the practice of psychoanalysis. According to Freud, many modern neuroses could be traced to repression and inhibition. Freud developed the idea of the self as grounded in an "unconscious," where forbidden desires, traumas, and unacceptable emotions—mostly sexual in nature and derived from childhood experiences—were stored. Freudian analysis aimed at helping people become aware of their repressed feelings and so less likely to reenact in the present the traumas of the past. Americanized Freudian ideas provided the psychological underpinning for much literature of the interwar era, whether the focus was the individual trapped in a repressive culture or the repressive culture itself.

The middle-class double sexual standard had, in fact, always granted considerable sexual freedom to men; now, however, women—enfranchised and liberated by automobiles and job possibilities away from home—began to demand similar freedom for themselves. Women's demands went well beyond the erotic, however, encompassing education, professional work, mobility, and whatever else seemed like social goods hitherto reserved for men. Female dress changed: long, heavy, restricting garments gave way to short, lightweight, easily worn store-bought clothing. The combination of expanding urban life with new psychologies oriented to self-expression also brought into being new social possibilities for women and men whose sexual desires did not conform to traditional patterns. Freud was only one of a number of thinkers in the period who urged a measure of toleration for sexual minorities, especially homosexuals—a term that entered specialized English usage in the 1890s and came into wider circulation in the years following World War I. Although the legal risks and social stigma borne by homosexuals remained very much in force, gay enclaves became more visible in American life and gay lives became more imaginable as a theme in American literature.

African Americans, like women, became mobile in these years as never before. Around 1915, as a direct result of the industrial needs of World War I, opportunities opened for African Americans in the factories of the North, and what became known as the Great Migration out of the South began. Not only did migration give the lie to southern white claims that African Americans were content with southern segregationist practices, but it also damaged the South's economy by draining off an important segment of its



Lenox Avenue, Sargent Claude Johnson, 1938. Johnson's lithograph pays tribute to the clubs, ballrooms, and bars of New York City's Lenox Avenue, hub of the Harlem Renaissance. During the Great Depression, the Federal Art Project enlisted many notable artists to create graphic works celebrating American cultural and natural landmarks.

working population. Even though African Americans faced racism, segregation, and racial violence in the North, a black American presence soon became powerfully visible in American cultural life. Harlem, a section of New York City, attained an almost wholly black population of over 150,000 by the mid-1920s; from this “city within a city,” African Americans wrote, performed, composed, and painted. Here as well they founded two major journals of opinion and culture, *The Crisis* (in 1910) and *Opportunity* (in 1923). This cultural outpouring influenced writers, painters, and musicians of other ethnicities and became known collectively as the Harlem Renaissance.

The famous black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois had argued in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that African Americans had a kind of double consciousness—of themselves as Americans and as blacks. This doubleness contributed to debates within the African American cultural community.

The Harlem Renaissance sparked arguments between those who wanted to claim membership in the culture at large and those who wanted to stake out a separate artistic domain; between those who wanted to celebrate rural African American folkways and those committed to urban intellectuality; between those who wanted to join the American mainstream and those who, disgusted by American race prejudice, aligned themselves with worldwide revolutionary movements; between those who celebrated a “primitive” African heritage and those who rejected the idea as a degrading stereotype. African American women, as Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1929) testifies, could experience these divisions with special intensity. Women were very much called on in efforts to “uplift,” advance, and educate the black community, but these communal obligations could be felt as constraints on individual freedom and exploration; meanwhile the white social world, given to exoticizing or sexualizing black women, offered few alternatives.

Class inequality, as well as American racial divisions, continued to generate intellectual and artistic debate in the interwar years. The nineteenth-century United States had been host to many radical movements—labor

activism, utopianism, socialism, anarchism—inspired by diverse sources. In the twentieth century, especially following the rise of the Soviet Union, the American left increasingly drew its intellectual and political program from the Marxist tradition. The German philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883) located the roots of human behavior in economics. He claimed that industrializing societies were structurally divided into two antagonistic classes based on different relations to the means of production—capital versus labor. The Industrial Revolution arose from the accumulation of surplus capital by industrialists paying the least possible amount to workers; the next stage in world history would be when workers took control of the means of production for themselves. Because, to Marx, the ideas and ideals of any particular society could represent the interests of only its dominant class, he derided individualism as a middle-class or “bourgeois” value that could only discourage worker solidarity.

Marx’s ideas formed the basis for Communist political parties across Europe. In 1917, a Communist revolution in Russia led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1914) overthrew the tsarist regime, instituted the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that Marx had called for, and engineered the development of communism as a unified international movement. Americans who thought of themselves as Marxists in the 1920s and 1930s were usually connected with the Communist Party and subjected to government surveillance and occasional violence, as were socialists, anarchists, union organizers, and others who opposed unfettered American capitalism and marketplace competition. Although politics directed from outside the national boundaries was, almost by definition, “un-American,” many adherents of these movements hoped to make the United States conform to its stated ideals, guaranteeing liberty and justice for all.

A defining conflict between American ideals and American realities for writers of the 1920s was the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were Italian immigrants, not Communists but avowed anarchists; on April 15, 1920, they were arrested near Boston after a murder during a robbery. They were accused of that crime, then tried and condemned to death in 1921; but it was widely believed that they had not received a fair trial and that their political beliefs had been held against them. After a number of appeals, they were executed in 1927, maintaining their innocence to the end. John Dos Passos and Katherine Anne Porter were among the many writers and intellectuals who demonstrated in their defense; several were arrested and jailed. It is estimated that well over a hundred poems (including works by William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Carl Sandburg) along with six plays and eight novels of the time treated the incident from a sympathetic perspective.

Like the Sacco-Vanzetti case in the 1920s, the Scottsboro case in the 1930s brought many American writers and intellectuals, black and white, together in a cause—here, the struggle against racial bias in the justice system. In 1931 nine black youths were indicted in Scottsboro, Alabama, for the alleged rape of two white women in a railroad freight car. They were all found guilty, and some were sentenced to death. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed convictions twice; in a second trial one of the alleged victims retracted her testimony; in 1937 charges against five of the defendants were dropped. But four went to jail, in many people’s view unfairly. American

Communists were especially active in the Scottsboro defense; but people across the political spectrum saw the case as crucial to the question of whether black people could receive fair trials in the American South. The unfair trial of an African American man became a literary motif in much writing of the period and beyond, including Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology played a vital, although often invisible, role in all these events, because it linked places and spaces, contributing to the shaping of culture as a national phenomenon rather than a series of local manifestations. Without new modes of production, transportation, and communication, modern America in all its complexity could not have existed. Electricity for lights and appliances, along with the telephone—nineteenth-century inventions—expanded into American homes during these years, improving life for many but widening the gap between those plugged into the new networks and those outside them. The phonograph record and the record player (early devices for recording and playing music), the motion picture (which acquired sound in 1929), and the radio brought mass popular culture into being. Although the nineteenth-century dream of forging a scattered population into a single nation could now be realized more instantaneously and directly than was ever possible with print media, many intellectuals suspected that mass culture would create a robotic, passive population vulnerable to demagoguery.

The most powerful technological innovation, however, the automobile, encouraged activity, not passivity. Automobiles put Americans on the road, dramatically reshaped the structure of American industry and occupations, and altered the national topography as well. Along with work in automobile factories themselves, millions of other jobs—in steel mills, parts factories, highway construction and maintenance, gas stations, machine shops, roadside restaurants, motels—depended on the automobile. The road itself became—and has remained—a potent symbol of the United States and of modernity as well. Cities grew, suburbs came into being, small towns died, and new towns arose, all according to the placement of highways, which rapidly supplanted the railroad in shaping the patterns of twentieth-century American urban expansion. The United States had become a nation of migrants as much as or more than it was a nation of immigrants.

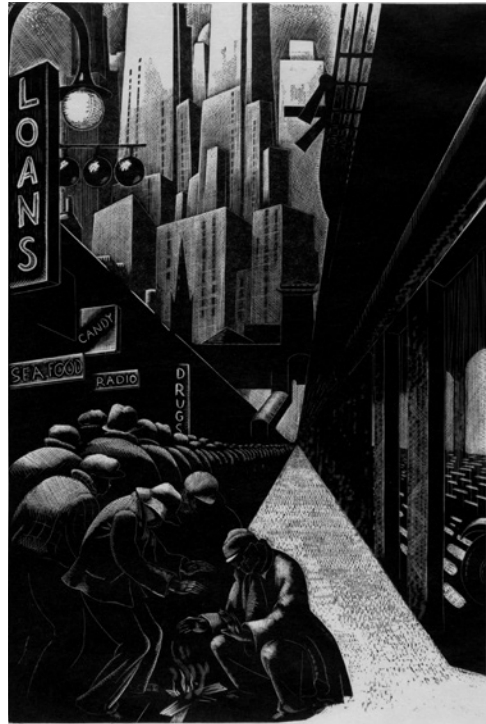
In tandem with the impact of technological change on daily life, one of the most important developments in the interwar period was the growth of modern “big” science. At the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, scientists discovered that the atom was not the smallest possible unit of matter, that matter was not indestructible, that both time and space were relative to an observer's position, that some phenomena were so small that attempts at measurement would alter them, that some outcomes could be predicted only in terms of statistical probability, that the universe might be infinite in size and yet infinitely expanding; hence, much of the commonsense basis of nineteenth-century science had to be put aside in

favor of far more powerful but also far less commonsensical theories. Among many results, scientists and literary intellectuals became less able to communicate with each other, and their worldviews began to diverge. Writers responded with ambivalence to the new science, sometimes drawing on scientific images and ideas—“the imagination uses the phraseology of science,” wrote the poet (and physician) William Carlos Williams—sometimes deploring the lost authority of traditional, humanistic explanations of the concrete, experienced world and felt human life. Gertrude Stein’s radical literary experiments were partly inspired by her laboratory experiences in neuroanatomy at Harvard University and the Johns Hopkins Medical School. Poets like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens, however, along with many of their readers, questioned the capacity of science to provide accounts of subjective experience and moral issues, and they elevated the metaphorical language of poetry over the supposed literal accuracy of scientific description. The increased specialization of intellectual activity divided educated people into what the British novelist and physicist C. P. Snow was later to call the “two cultures”—science versus letters.

THE 1930s

The Great Depression was a worldwide phenomenon and fostered social unrest that led to the rise of fascist dictatorships in Europe, including those of Francisco Franco in Spain, Benito Mussolini in Italy, and Adolf Hitler in Germany. Hitler’s program, which was to make Germany rich and strong by conquering the rest of Europe, led inexorably to World War II.

In the United States, the Depression made politics and economics the salient issues of public life and overrode questions of individual freedom with fear of mass collapse. Free-enterprise capitalism had always justified itself by arguing that the system not only made a small number of individuals immensely wealthy, but also guaranteed better lives for all. This assurance now rang hollow. The suicides of millionaire bankers



The Bread Line, New York, Clare Leighton, 1932. Leighton, who was born in England and became a U.S. citizen in 1939, made her reputation as an illustrator of rural life and work. This wood engraving’s line of idled men dwarfed by their urban surroundings represents Depression-era New York City as the dark antithesis of Leighton’s traditional subjects.



Towards Los Angeles, Dorothea Lange 1937. During the Great Depression, the Farm Security Administration (FSA)—one of many new government agencies created in response to the economic emergency—employed a number of well-known documentary photographers. Lange produced memorable portraits of migrants displaced by the Dust Bowl under the FSA's sponsorship.

and stockbrokers made the headlines, but more compelling was the enormous toll among ordinary people who lost their homes, jobs, farms, and life savings in the stock market crash. Conservatives advised waiting until things got better; radicals espoused immediate social revolution. In this polarized atmosphere, the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency in 1932 was a victory for American pragmatism; his series of liberal reforms—Social Security, programs creating jobs in the public sector, welfare, and unemployment insurance—cushioned the worst effects of the Depression and avoided the civil strife that many had thought inevitable.

The terrible economic situation in the United States produced a significant increase in Communist Party membership and prestige in the 1930s. Numerous intellectuals allied themselves with its causes, even if they did

not actually become party members. An old radical journal, *The Masses*, later *The New Masses*, became the official literary voice of the party, and various other radical groups founded journals to represent their viewpoints. Visitors to the Soviet Union returned with glowing reports about a true workers' democracy and prosperity for all. The appeal of communism was significantly enhanced by its claim to be an opponent of fascism. Communists fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War of 1936 and 1937. Hitler's nightmare policies of genocide and racial superiority, and his plans for a general European war to secure more room for the superior German "folk," became increasingly evident as European refugees began to flee to the United States in the 1930s, and many believed that the USSR would be the only country able to withstand the German war machine. But Soviet communism showed another side to Americans when American Communists were ordered to break up the meetings of other radical groups; when Josef Stalin, the Soviet dictator, instituted a series of brutal purges in the Soviet Union, beginning in 1936; and when in 1939 he signed a pact promising not to go to war against Germany. The disillusionment and betrayal felt by many radicals over these acts led many 1930s left-wing activists to become staunch anti-Communists after World War II.

AMERICAN VERSIONS OF MODERNISM

In English-language literary contexts, *modernism* is sometimes used as a catchall term for any kind of literary production in the interwar period that deals with the modern world. More narrowly, it refers to work that represents the transformation of traditional society under the pressures of modernity, and that breaks down traditional literary forms in doing so. Much modernist literature of this kind, which critics increasingly now set apart as "high modernism," is in a sense antimodern: it interprets modernity as an experience of loss. As its title underlines, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*—the great poem of high modernism—represents the modern world as a scene of ruin.

Scholars of international modernism frequently trace its rise back to the later nineteenth century, citing the works of French symbolists in literature, Friedrich Nietzsche in philosophy, and Charles Darwin in science as examples of radically antitraditional modes of thought and artistic practice. As an artistic movement, however, modernism reached a defining level of international coherence and momentum in response to World War I, which was far more devastating to the Continent than it was to the United States. Modernism involved other art forms—sculpture, painting, dance—as well as literature. The poetry of William Butler Yeats; James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922); Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27); Thomas Mann's novels and short stories, including *The Magic Mountain* (1927)—these were only a few of the literary products of this movement in England and on the Continent. In painting, artists like Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, and Georges Braque invented cubism; in the 1920s the surrealist movement known as Dadaism emerged. The American public was introduced to modern art at the famous New York Armory Show of 1913, which featured cubist paintings and caused an uproar. Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, which, to the untrained eye, looked like a mass of crudely

drawn rectangles, was especially provocative. Composers like Igor Stravinsky similarly produced music in a “modern” mode, featuring dissonance and discontinuity rather than neat formal structure and appealing tonal harmonies. His composition *The Rite of Spring* (1913) provoked a riot in the Paris concert hall where it was premiered.

At the heart of the high modernist aesthetic lay the conviction that the previously sustaining structures of human life, whether social, political, religious, or artistic, had been destroyed or shown up as falsehoods or, at best, arbitrary and fragile human constructions. Order, sequence, and unity in works of art might well express human desires for coherence rather than reliable intuitions of reality. Generalization, abstraction, and high-flown writing might conceal rather than convey the real. The traditional form of a story, with its beginnings, complications, and resolutions, might be an artifice imposed on the flux and fragmentation of experience. To the extent that art falsely presented such an order as given or natural, it had to be renovated.

Thus a key formal characteristic typical of high modernist works, whether in painting, sculpture, or musical composition, is its construction out of fragments—fragments of myth or history, fragments of experience or perception, fragments of previous artistic works. Modernist literature is often notable for what it omits: the explanations, interpretations, connections, summaries, and distancing that provide continuity, perspective, and security in earlier literatures. A modernist work may seem to begin arbitrarily, to advance without explanation, and to end without resolution, consisting of vivid segments juxtaposed without cushioning or integrating transitions. There may be abrupt shifts in perspective, voice, and tone. Its rhetoric may be understated, ironic. It may suggest rather than assert, making use of symbols and images instead of statements. Its elements may be drawn from disparate areas of experience. The effect may be shocking and unsettling; the experience of reading will be challenging and difficult. Faced with intuiting connections left unstated, the reader of a modernist work is often said to participate in the creative work of making the poem or story.

Some high modernist works, however, order their discontinuous elements into conspicuous larger patterns, patterns often drawn from world literature, mythologies, and religions. As its title advertises, Joyce’s *Ulysses* maps the lives of its modern characters onto Homer’s *Odyssey*; Eliot’s *The Waste Land* layers the Christian narrative of death and resurrection over a broad range of quest myths. The question for readers lies in the meaning of these borrowed structures and mythic parallels: do they reveal profound similarities or ironic contrasts between the modern world and earlier times? For some writers and readers, the adaptability of ancient stories to modern circumstances testified to their deep truth, underlying the surface buzz and confusion of modernity; for others, such parallels indicated Christianity to be only a myth, one of many human constructions aimed at creating order out of, and finding purpose in, history’s flux.

If meaning is a human construction, then meaning cannot be separated from the difficult process of its making; if meaning lies obscured deep underneath the ruins of modern life, then it must be effortfully sought out. Modernist literature therefore tended to foreground the search for meaning

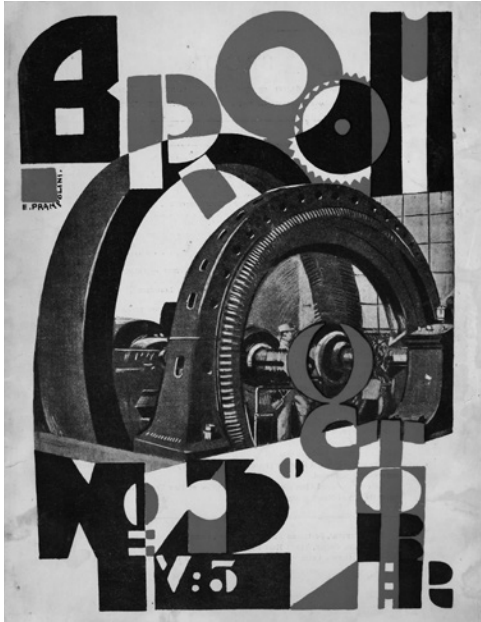
over didactic statement, and the subject matter of modernist writing often became, by extension, the literary work itself. While there have long been paintings about painting and poems about poetry, high modernist writing was especially self-reflexive, concerned with its own nature as art and with its questioning of previous traditions of literature. Ironically—because this subject matter was motivated by deep concern about the interrelation of literature and life—this subject often had the effect of limiting the audience for a modernist work; high modernism demanded of its ideal readers an encyclopedic knowledge of the traditions it fragmented or ironized. Nevertheless, over time, the principles of modernism became increasingly influential.

Modernist techniques transformed fiction as well as poetry in this period. Prose writers strove for directness, compression, and vividness. They were often sparing of words. The average novel became quite a bit shorter than it had been in the nineteenth century, when a novel was expected to fill two or even three volumes. The modernist aesthetic gave a new significance to the short story, which had previously been thought of as a relatively slight artistic form. (Poems too became shorter, as narrative poems lost ground to lyrics and the repetitive patterns of rhyme and meter that had helped sustain long poems in previous centuries lost ground to free verse.) Victorian or realistic fiction achieved its effects by accumulation and saturation; modern fiction preferred suggestion. Victorian fiction often featured an authoritative narrator; modern fiction tended to be written in the first person or to limit the reader to one character's point of view on the action. This limitation accorded with the modernist sense that truth does not exist objectively but is the product of the mind's interaction with reality. The selected point of view is often that of a naive or marginal person—a child or an outsider—to convey better the reality of confusion and dissent rather than the myth of certainty and consensus. In both poetry and fiction, modernists tended to emphasize the concrete sensory image or detail over general statement. Allusions to literary, historical, philosophical, or religious details of the past often keep company, in modernist works, with vignettes of contemporary life, chunks of popular culture, dream imagery, and symbolism drawn from the author's private repertory of life experiences. A work built from these various materials may move across time and space, shift from the public to the personal, and open up literature as a field for every sort of concern. The inclusion of material previously deemed "unliterary" in works of high seriousness extended to language that might previously have been thought improper, including representations of the speech of the uneducated and the inarticulate, the colloquial, slangy, and the popular. Traditional realistic fiction had incorporated colloquial and dialect speech, often to comic effect, in its representation of the broad tapestry of social life; but such speakers were usually framed by a narrator's educated literary voice, conveying truth and authority over subordinate voices. In modernist writing like William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, these voices assume the full burden of the narrative's authority; this is what Ernest Hemingway had in mind when he asserted that the American literary tradition began with *Huckleberry Finn*.

"Serious" literature between the two world wars thus found itself in a difficult relationship with the culture at large. If it attacked the old-style ideals of polite literature, it felt itself attacked in turn by the ever-growing indus-

try of popular literature. The reading audience in America was vast, but it preferred kinds of books different from those turned out by literary high modernists; tales of romance or adventure, historical novels, crime fiction, and Westerns became popular modes, enjoying a success that most serious writers could only dream of. The problem was that often they did dream of it; unrealistically, perhaps, the Ezra Pounds and Nathanael Wests of the era imagined themselves having an audience of millions. When, on occasion, this dream came true—as it did for F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway—writers often accused themselves, and were accused by others, of having sold out.

Serious writers in these years were, in fact, being published and read as writers had not been in earlier times. Modernist works were widely reviewed and referred to in magazines and newspapers of general circulation, where experimental writers like Gertrude Stein enjoyed a notoriety much in excess of their sales. Outside the mass periodical market, the number of so-called little magazines—that is, magazines of very small circulations devoted to the publication of works for a small audience (sometimes the works of a specific group of authors)—was in the hundreds. *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* began in 1912. *The Little Review* followed in 1914. Then came the *Seven Arts* in 1916, the *Dial* in 1917, the *Frontier* in 1920, *Reviewer* and



Broom Magazine Cover, Enrico Prampolini, 1922. *Broom* was among the most internationally ambitious of modernism's little magazines, publishing authors such as Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, and Jean Toomer alongside work by artists like Man Ray and Picasso. This cover complemented an essay by Harold Loeb, *Broom's* editor, that celebrated the modernist beauty of engines, motors, and airplanes.

Broom in 1921, *Fugitive* in 1922, *This Quarter* in 1925, *Transition* and *Hound and Horn* in 1927, and many more. The culture that did not listen attentively to serious writers or make them rich still gave them plenty of opportunity to be read, and it allowed them (in such neighborhoods as Greenwich Village in New York City) a freedom in lifestyle that was new in American history. In addition, such major publishers as New Directions, Random House, Scribner, and Harper, and such stylish periodicals as *Vanity Fair*, were actively looking for serious fiction and poetry to feature alongside best sellers like *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and *Anthony Adverse* (1933). Some writers in the period were able to use these opportunities to cross over the hierarchies separating high modernism from middle-brow and popular culture.

Vanity Fair published Gertrude Stein, E. E. Cummings, Sherwood Anderson, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. By the 1930s, American literary modernism had its recognized celebrities in authors like Stein, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, and a substantial supporting community of publishers, critics, and readers.

MODERNISM ABROAD AND ON NATIVE GROUNDS

The profession of authorship in the United States has always defined itself in part as a patriotic enterprise aimed at developing a cultural life for the nation and embodying national values. High modernism, however, was a self-consciously international movement, and the leading American exponents of high modernism tended to be permanent expatriates, such as Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, H.D., and T. S. Eliot. These writers left the United States because they found the country lacking in a tradition of high culture and indifferent, if not actively hostile, to artistic achievement. They also believed that a national culture could never be more than parochial. In London in the first two decades of the twentieth century and in Paris during the 1920s, they found a vibrant community of dedicated artists and a society that respected them and allowed them a great deal of personal freedom. Yet they seldom thought of themselves as deserting their nation, and only Eliot gave up American citizenship (sometimes, too, the traffic went in the other direction, as when the British-born poet Mina Loy became an American citizen). They thought of themselves as bringing the United States into the larger context of European culture. The ranks of these permanent expatriates were swelled by American writers who lived abroad for some part of the period, among them Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Claude McKay, Katherine Anne Porter, Nella Larsen, Robert Frost, and Eugene O'Neill.

Those writers who came back, however, and those who never left took seriously the task of integrating modernist ideas and methods with American subject matter. Not every experimental modernist writer disconnected literary ambitions from national belonging: Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams, for example, all wanted to write overtly "American" works. Some writers—as the title of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* clearly shows—attempted to speak for the nation as a whole. Crane's long poem *The Bridge* and Williams's *Paterson* both take an American city as symbol and expand it to the nation, following the model established by Walt Whitman. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is similarly ambitious, and many writers addressed the whole nation in individual works—for example, E. E. Cummings's "next to of course god america i" and Claude McKay's "America." And a profoundly modern writer like William Faulkner cannot be extricated from his commitment to writing about his native South.

Like Faulkner, many writers of the period chose to identify themselves with the American scene and to root their work in a specific region, continuing a tradition of regionalist American writing that burgeoned in the years following the American Civil War. Their perspectives on their various regions were sometimes celebratory and sometimes critical. Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, and Willa Cather worked with

the Midwest; Cather grounded her later work in the Southwest; John Steinbeck wrote about California; Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost identified their work with New England. An especially strong center of regional literary activity emerged in the South, which had a weak literary tradition up to the Civil War. Thomas Wolfe's was an Appalachian South of hardy mountain people. Katherine Anne Porter wrote about her native Texas as a heterogeneous combination of frontier, plantation, and Hispanic cultures. Zora Neale Hurston drew on her childhood memories of the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, for much of her best-known fiction, including her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. William Faulkner depicted a South at once grounded in his native state of Mississippi and also expanded into a mythic region anguished by racial and historical conflict.

As the pairing of Hurston and Faulkner suggests, the history of race in the United States was central to the specifically national subject matter to which many American modernists remained committed. Although race as a subject potentially implicated all American writers, it was African Americans whose contributions most signally differentiated American modernism from that of Europe. The numerous writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance made it impossible ever to think of a national literature without the work of black Americans. Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston attained particular prominence at the time; but others, including Claude McKay and Nella Larsen, were also well known. All were influenced by the values of modernism: both Hughes, for example, with his incorporation of blues rhythms into poetry, and Hurston, with her poetic depictions of folk culture, applied modernist techniques to represent twentieth-century African American lives. Writers associated with the Renaissance expressed protest and anger—Hughes, in particular, wrote a number of powerful antilynching and anticapitalist poems; but the movement's writers also articulated the hopes of racial uplift and, like Hurston, focused on the vitality of black culture more than on the burdens of racism. At least part of this approach was strategic—the bulk of the readership for Harlem authors was white. The note of pure anger was not expressed until Richard Wright, who had come to literary maturity in Chicago, published *Native Son* in 1940. Contributions to the Harlem Renaissance came from artists in many media; an influence equal to or greater than that of the writers came from musicians. Jazz and blues, African American in origin, are felt by many to be the most authentically American art forms the nation has ever produced. African American singers and musicians in this period achieved worldwide reputations and were often much more highly regarded abroad than in the United States.

American literary women had been active on the national scene from Anne Bradstreet forward. Their increasing prominence in the nineteenth century generated a backlash from some male modernists, who asserted their own artistic seriousness by identifying women writers with the didactic, popular writing against which they rebelled. But women refused to stay on the sidelines and associated themselves with all the important literary trends of the era: H.D. and Amy Lowell with imagism, Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein with high modernism, Willa Cather with mythic regionalism, Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen with the Harlem Renaissance, Katherine Anne Porter with psychological fiction, Edna St. Vincent

Millay with social and sexual liberation. Many of these writers concentrated on depictions of women characters or women's thoughts and experiences. Yet few labeled themselves feminists. The passage of the suffrage amendment in 1920 had taken some of the energy out of feminism that would not return until the 1960s. Some women writers found social causes like labor and racism more important than women's rights; others focused their energies on struggles less amenable to public, legal remedies, as when Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" sought to represent motherhood as compatible with an energetic vision of female sexuality. Nevertheless, these literary women were clearly pushing back the boundaries of the permissible, demanding new cultural freedom for women and taking positions on public causes.

MODERN LITERATURE ON STAGE AND SCREEN

Drama in America was slow to develop as a self-conscious literary form. It was not until 1920 (the year of Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*) that the United States produced a world-class playwright. This is not to say that *theater*—productions and performances—was new to American life. After the American Revolution, theaters—at first with itinerant English actors and companies, then with American—opened throughout the East; among early centers were Boston and Philadelphia as well as New York City. As the country expanded westward, so did its theater, together with other kinds of performance: burlesques, showboats on the Mississippi, minstrel shows, pantomimes. As the nineteenth century went on, the activity became centered more and more in New York—especially within the few blocks known as Broadway. Managers originated plays there and then sent them out to tour through the rest of the country, as Eugene O'Neill's father did with his *Count of Monte Cristo*.

Innovations in American theater are often launched in reaction against Broadway, a pattern observable as early as 1915 with the formation of the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players (organized by Susan Glaspell and others), both located in New York's Greenwich Village and both dedicated to the production of plays that more conservative managers refused. The Provincetown Players produced the first works of Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill. These fledgling companies, and others like them, often knew better what they opposed than what they wanted. European influence was important to them. By 1915, Henrik Ibsen in Europe and George Bernard Shaw in England had shown that the theater could be an arena for serious ideas; meanwhile the psychological dramas of August Strindberg, the symbolic work of Maurice Maeterlinck, and the sophisticated criticism of Arthur Schnitzler provided other models. The American tours of European companies, in particular the Moscow Art Theatre in 1923, further exposed Americans to the theatrical avant-garde.

Just as his contemporaries in poetry and fiction were changing and questioning their forms, so Eugene O'Neill sought to refine his. He experimented less in language than in dramatic structure and in new production methods available through technology (e.g., lighting) or borrowed from the stylized realism of German expressionism. Playwrights such as Sidney Howard



Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players, 1916. O'Neill (on ladder) and members of the company preparing the stage for *Bound East for Cardiff*, O'Neill's first play produced by the players, at the company's first New York City theater, on Macdougall Street in Greenwich Village.

(1891–1939), Lillian Hellman (1905–1984), and Robert Sherwood (1896–1955) wrote serious realistic plays. George Kaufman and his many collaborators, especially Moss Hart, invented a distinctively American form, the wisecracking domestic and social comedy, while S. N. Behrman and Philip Barry wrote higher comedies of ideas. The musical comedy was another distinctively American invention: beginning as a revue of jokes, songs, and dances, it progressed steadily toward an integration of its various elements, reaching new heights with the work of George and Ira Gershwin in the 1920s and 1930s and of Oscar Hammerstein, in collaboration with Jerome Kern or Richard Rodgers, from the 1920s on into the 1950s.

Social commentary and satire had been conspicuous in American drama since the early 1920s, beginning, perhaps, with Elmer Rice's fiercely expressionistic play about a rebellious nonentity, *The Adding Machine* (1923). During the Depression social criticism became a much more important dramatic theme, with political plays performed by many radical groups. Among the most significant was Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), which dramatized a taxi drivers' strike meeting and turned the stage into a platform for argument. The Federal Theatre Project of 1935–39, established by President Franklin Roosevelt's administration to provide employment to theater artists of all kinds during the Great Depression, produced plays by Odets, O'Neill, and other contemporary authors, alongside new productions of Shakespeare and Aristophanes. The Negro Theatre Unit, a major creative arm of the

project, produced works by African American writers, like W. E. B. Du Bois's *Haiti* (1938), as well as innovative productions with black casts, most famously the all-black version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* adapted by Orson Welles in 1936.

With the rise of the film industry, many popular playwrights and authors of fiction found new outlets for their work in Hollywood. Robert Sherwood became a screenwriter and had a number of his plays adapted into films; Sidney Howard won the Academy Award in 1940 for his adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*. Where writers like William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald experienced Hollywood as a graveyard of serious literary ambition, Katherine Anne Porter found in the film industry not only financial rewards but also a springboard to wider critical and popular appreciation for her work as a whole. The motion picture industry in turn provided American writers with important new subject matter: Hollywood-based novels of the period include Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (completed after his death and published in 1941), Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (newly added to this volume), and Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941)—all of which were later turned into films. The adaptation of literary works from one medium to another accelerated in the first half of the twentieth century. Writers explored the commercial and artistic possibilities emerging in the new relationships among literature's printed page, the stage, and the screen in ways that look forward to the hyperreal, media-saturated generic experimentation that would characterize much American literature in the second half of the twentieth century.

1914–1945

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
1910 Edwin Arlington Robinson, "Miniver Cheevy"	
1914 Robert Frost, "Home Burial" • Carl Sandburg, "Chicago"	1914–18 World War I
1915 Edgar Lee Masters, <i>Spoon River Anthology</i> • Ezra Pound begins <i>Cantos</i>	1915 Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to northern industrial cities
1916 Susan Glaspell, <i>Trifles</i> • Robert Frost, "Birches"	
	1917 United States declares war on Germany • revolution in Russia brings Communist Party to power
1918 Willa Cather, <i>My Ántonia</i> • Carl Sandburg, "Grass"	1918 Daylight Savings Time instituted to allow more daylight for war production
1919 Sherwood Anderson, <i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> • Amy Lowell, "Madonna of the Evening Flowers"	1919 Senate limits U.S. participation in League of Nations; does not ratify Versailles Treaty to end World War I
1920 Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"	1920 18th Amendment prohibits the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages • 19th Amendment gives women the vote
	1920–27 Sacco-Vanzetti trial
1921 T. S. Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i> • Claude McKay, "Africa", "America" • Marianne Moore, "Poetry" • Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"	
	1922 Fascism rises in Europe; Mussolini becomes dictator of Italy
1923 Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning" • Jean Toomer, <i>Cane</i>	
1924 H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), "Helen"	1924 Exclusionary immigration act bars Asians from the United States
1925 Countee Cullen, "Heritage" • Gertrude Stein, <i>The Making of Americans</i> • Alain Locke publishes <i>The New Negro</i> , leading anthology of the Harlem Renaissance	
1926 Ernest Hemingway, <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> • Hart Crane, <i>The Bridge</i>	
1927 Zora Neale Hurston, "The Eatonville Anthology"	1927 <i>The Jazz Singer</i> , first full-length "talkie," is released
1929 Nella Larsen, <i>Passing</i>	1929 Stock market crashes; Great Depression begins

Boldface titles indicate works in the anthology.

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1930 Katherine Anne Porter, “Flowering Judas”</p>	<p>1930 Sinclair Lewis is first American to win Nobel Prize for literature</p>
<p>1931 E. E. Cummings, “i sing of Olaf glad and big” • F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Babylon Revisited”</p>	<p>1931 Scottsboro trial</p>
<p>1932 Sterling Brown, “He Was a Man”</p>	<p>1932 Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal introduces Social Security, welfare, and unemployment insurance</p>
<p>1933 Gertrude Stein, <i>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</i></p>	<p>1933 Adolf Hitler’s Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) Party comes to power in Germany • 18th Amendment repealed</p>
<p>1934 William Carlos Williams, “This Is Just to Say”</p>	<p>1934 Wheeler-Howard (Indian Reorganization) Act passed, ending Dawes era</p>
<p>1936 Ernest Hemingway, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”</p>	<p>1936 Hitler begins armed occupation of Europe</p>
	<p>1936–39 Spanish Civil War: U.S. volunteers among those fighting against General Franco, who becomes dictator of Spain</p>
<p>1937 Thomas Wolfe, “The Lost Boy”</p>	<p>1937 Stalin’s purges</p>
<p>1938 John Dos Passos, <i>U.S.A.</i> • William Faulkner, “Barn Burning”</p>	
<p>1939 Richard Wright, “The Man Who Was Almost a Man” • Nathanael West, <i>The Day of the Locust</i></p>	<p>1939–45 World War II • the Holocaust</p>
<p>1940 Eugene O’Neill, <i>Long Day’s Journey into Night</i></p>	
	<p>1941 Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, Hawaii • United States enters war against Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy</p>
<p>1942 Wallace Stevens, “Of Modern Poetry”</p>	<p>1942 President Roosevelt orders internment of Japanese Americans in camps</p>
<p>1943 Langston Hughes, “Madam and Her Madam”</p>	
<p>1944 H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), <i>The Walls Do Not Fall</i> • Marianne Moore, “In Distrust of Merits”</p>	<p>1944 D Day; Allied invasion of Normandy</p>
	<p>1945 German forces surrender in spring; Japan surrenders in August following explosion of two nuclear bombs over Japanese cities</p>

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

1868–1950

Few books of poetry published in the United States have had an immediate impact like that of *Spoon River Anthology*. Its lack of rhyme and verse, its rough, flat, unpoetic diction, its forthright presentation of private yet ordinary lives, its representation of sex as a basic human motive, and its deeply critical view of small-town values—these traits of the volume ran counter to public expectations of what poetry should be like. But controversy was good for sales; the book went through nineteen printings in its first edition, a record for poetry up until then.

Edgar Lee Masters was practicing law in Chicago at the time of its publication in 1915. He was born in Kansas and grew up in two small Illinois towns, Petersburg and Lewiston. His father was a lawyer and politician, his mother a lover of music and literature homesick for her native New England. Masters attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, for a year and then studied law in his father's office. He passed his bar exams and entered the legal profession to please his father, but broke decisively with both parents when he moved to Chicago in 1891.

In Chicago, Masters met many of the writers and intellectuals involved in the Chicago Renaissance, a movement aiming to make the city a cultural center. He worked with Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, an important little magazine of the era, and began to publish poetry of his own. A friend, William Marion Reedy, publisher of the influential St. Louis weekly *Reedy's Mirror*, gave him a copy of J. W. Mackail's *Selected Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*. In this collection of some four thousand short poems written between 700 B.C.E. and 1000 C.E., Masters found interconnected autobiographical poems, where the speaker in one poem talked bluntly about speakers in other poems. This structure showed Masters how to give poetic shape to a naturalistic vision more commonly associated with fiction.

All the speakers in *Spoon River Anthology* are dead, buried in the cemetery on “the hill,” which is the title of the first poem in the book: “All, all, are sleeping on the hill.” These lifelong friends and neighbors continue their loves and quarrels beyond the grave. Their dissonant voices converge in a lament for suppressed and wasted lives, only rarely varied by joy or gusto. Sex has driven them, but given little pleasure. They long for the sympathy that they withhold from each other. Yet the poems as a group are compassionate, not judgmental.

Masters's dramatic sense, his ability to condense and convey a whole life through the narration of one incident, contributed to the craft of the short story as well as to a new sense of what poetry might consist of. His work was immediate inspiration for hostile depictions of small-town and small-minded America in the work of such 1920s writers as Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis. None of Masters's many other books of verse, except the sequel *The New Spoon River* in 1924, attained the reputation of *Spoon River Anthology*. He was, however, a prolific writer in other modes. He composed several novels; biographies of Abraham Lincoln, Vachel Lindsay (the Chicago poet), Walt Whitman, and Mark Twain; and his own autobiography, *Across Spoon River*, in 1936.

In all, he wrote more than fifty books, committing himself after the success of *Spoon River Anthology* to a full-time literary career. He married twice and had four

children. He gave up the law, left Chicago, and settled in New York City in 1920, living in later life at the Chelsea Hotel, a favorite residence for writers.

The text of the poems included here is that of *Spoon River Anthology* (1915).

Trainor, the Druggist

Only the chemist can tell, and not always the chemist,
 What will result from compounding
 Fluids or solids.
 And who can tell
 How men and women will interact 5
 On each other, or what children will result?
 There were Benjamin Pantier and his wife,
 Good in themselves, but evil toward each other:
 He oxygen, she hydrogen,
 Their son, a devastating fire. 10
 I Trainor, the druggist, a mixer of chemicals,
 Killed while making an experiment,
 Lived unwedded.
 1915

"Butch" Weldy

After I got religion and steadied down
 They gave me a job in the canning works,
 And every morning I had to fill
 The tank in the yard with gasoline,
 That fed the blow-fires in the sheds 5
 To heat the soldering irons.
 And I mounted a rickety ladder to do it,
 Carrying buckets full of the stuff.
 One morning, as I stood there pouring,
 The air grew still and seemed to heave, 10
 And I shot up as the tank exploded,
 And down I came with both legs broken,
 And my eyes burned crisp as a couple of eggs.
 For someone left a blow-fire going,
 And something sucked the flame in the tank. 15
 The Circuit Judge said whoever did it
 Was a fellow-servant of mine, and so
 Old Rhodes' son didn't have to pay me.
 And I sat on the witness stand as blind
 As Jack the Fiddler, saying over and over, 20
 "I didn't know him at all."
 1915

Margaret Fuller¹ Slack

I would have been as great as George Eliot²
 But for an untoward fate.
 For look at the photograph of me made by Penniwit,
 Chin resting on hand, and deep-set eyes—
 Gray, too, and far-searching. 5
 But there was the old, old problem:
 Should it be celibacy, matrimony or unchastity?
 Then John Slack, the rich druggist, wooed me,
 Luring me with the promise of leisure for my novel,
 And I married him, giving birth to eight children, 10
 And had no time to write.
 It was all over with me, anyway,
 When I ran the needle in my hand
 While washing the baby's things,
 And died from lock-jaw, an ironical death. 15
 Hear me, ambitious souls,
 Sex is the curse of life!

1915

Nellie Clark

I was only eight years old;
 And before I grew up and knew what it meant
 I had no words for it, except
 That I was frightened and told my Mother;
 And that my Father got a pistol 5
 And would have killed Charlie, who was a big boy,
 Fifteen years old, except for his Mother.
 Nevertheless the story clung to me.
 But the man who married me, a widower of thirty-five,
 Was a newcomer and never heard it 10
 Till two years after we were married.
 Then he considered himself cheated,
 And the village agreed that I was not really a virgin.
 Well, he deserted me, and I died
 The following winter. 15

1915

1. New England feminist, writer, and journalist (1810–1850); symbol of an emancipated and intellectual woman.

2. English novelist (1819–1880), whose real name

was Mary Ann Evans; author of such classics as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72).

Abel Melveny

I bought every kind of machine that's known—
 Grinders, shellers, planters, mowers,
 Mills and rakes and ploughs and threshers—
 And all of them stood in the rain and sun,
 Getting rusted, warped and battered, 5
 For I had no sheds to store them in,
 And no use for most of them.
 And toward the last, when I thought it over,
 There by my window, growing clearer
 About myself, as my pulse slowed down, 10
 And looked at one of the mills I bought—
 Which I didn't have the slightest need of,
 As things turned out, and I never ran—
 A fine machine, once brightly varnished,
 And eager to do its work, 15
 Now with its paint washed off—
 I saw myself as a good machine
 That Life had never used.

1915

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

1869–1935

Surveying Edwin Arlington Robinson's poetry after his death, Robert Frost observed that Robinson "could make lyric talk like drama." Like Frost, Robinson made his name as a New England regional poet. Along with Edgar Lee Masters and Sherwood Anderson, Robinson focused his most compelling work on wasted or impoverished lives played out in a small-town setting. His brief narrative and portrait poems, composed in traditionally rhymed and metered forms, often represent these blighted lives from the communal viewpoint of a tragic chorus, as in "Richard Cory" and "Eros Turannos"—a collective *we* bearing ironic witness to forms of suffering it cannot fully comprehend.

Robinson was raised in Gardiner, Maine, which became "Tilbury Town" in his poems. His father's lumber business and land speculations failed during the Great Panic of 1893. One of his brothers, a physician, became a drug addict; the other, a businessman, became an alcoholic. Robinson, by nature a scholar and book lover, was able to afford just two years at Harvard, where he continued an ambitious program of largely self-directed reading that included classical works in many languages as well as such American writers as Hawthorne, Whitman, Emerson, and Henry James. He was also drawn to the bleak vision of the British novelist Thomas

Hardy. These influences were distilled in the gloomy, austere, yet sonorous verse of his second book, *The Children of the Night* (1897)—*The Torrent and the Night Before* had been published the previous year, at his own expense.

Robinson moved from Gardiner to New York City shortly after *The Children of the Night* appeared. The volume came to the attention of no less a patron than President Theodore Roosevelt, whose son Kermit urged him to find a way of relieving Robinson's financial anxieties. Like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville before him, Robinson in 1905 reluctantly accepted a political appointment in the U.S. Customs Service, which he resigned with Roosevelt's departure from office in 1909. *The Town Down River* (1910) and *The Man against the Sky* (1916) brought Robinson increasing numbers of readers and critical notice. His *Collected Poems* (1921) won the first of his three Pulitzer Prizes.

By this time Robinson was over fifty and feeling increasingly distanced from the free verse of his modernist contemporaries. His own efforts turned in the direction of narrative poems, including a trilogy of long poems in imitation of medieval narratives that began with *Merlin* (1917) and ended with *Tristram* (1927), another Pulitzer Prize winner. These works found popular audiences, but many critics and fellow poets were less enthusiastic to see Robinson embrace without irony the romantic nostalgia he had satirized in "Miniver Cheevy." The prizes and honors of Robinson's final decades represented, to a large extent, belated recognition of his earlier poetry. Reviewing his *Collected Poems* in 1922, the poet and critic Yvor Winters praised Robinson for inheriting and extending the twisted, hard, epigrammatic New England tradition of Emerson and Emily Dickinson: to that tradition, Winters wrote, Robinson contributed his own "polished stoniness of mind."

The text of the poems included here is that of *Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (1921, 1937).

Luke Havergal

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,—
 There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,—
 And in the twilight wait for what will come.
 The wind will moan, the leaves will whisper some,—
 Whisper of her, and strike you as they fall; 5
 But go, and if you trust her she will call.
 Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
 Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
 To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes; 10
 But there, where western glooms are gathering,
 The dark will end the dark, if anything;
 God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
 And hell is more than half of paradise.
 No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies— 15
 In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,—
 Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss

That flames upon your forehead with a glow
 That blinds you to the way that you must go. 20
 Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,—
 Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
 Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
 To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal, 25
 There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
 Go,—for the winds are tearing them away,—
 Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
 Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
 But go! and if you trust her she will call. 30
 There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
 Luke Havergal.

1896

Richard Cory

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
 We people on the pavement looked at him:
 He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
 Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed, 5
 And he was always human when he talked;
 But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
 “Good-morning,” and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king,—
 And admirably schooled in every grace: 10
 In fine, we thought that he was everything
 To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
 And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
 And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, 15
 Went home and put a bullet through his head.

1896

Miniver Cheevy

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
 Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;
 He wept that he was ever born,
 And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old 5
 When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
 The vision of a warrior bold
 Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,
 And dreamed, and rested from his labors; 10
 He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,¹
 And Priam's neighbors.²

Miniver mourned the ripe renown
 That made so many a name so fragrant;
 He mourned Romance, now on the town, 15
 And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,³
 Albeit he had never seen one;
 He would have sinned incessantly
 Could he have been one. 20

Miniver cursed the commonplace
 And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
 He missed the mediæval grace
 Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought, 25
 But sore annoyed was he without it;
 Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,
 And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
 Scratched his head and kept on thinking; 30
 Miniver coughed, and called it fate,
 And kept on drinking.

1910

Eros Turannos¹

She fears him, and will always ask
 What fated her to choose him;
 She meets in his engaging mask
 All reasons to refuse him;
 But what she meets and what she fears 5

1. Thebes was an ancient city in Boeotia, rival of Athens and Sparta for supremacy in Greece and the setting of Sophocles's tragedies about Oedipus. Camelot is the legendary court of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table.
 2. The neighbors of King Priam in Homer's *Iliad*

are his heroic compatriots in the doomed city of Troy.

3. Family of wealthy merchants, politicians, churchmen, and art patrons in 16th-century Florence.

1. Love, the tyrant (Latin).

Are less than are the downward years,
 Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs
 Of age, were she to lose him.

Between a blurred sagacity
 That once had power to sound him, 10
 And Love, that will not let him be
 The Judas² that she found him,
 Her pride assuages her almost,
 As if it were alone the cost.—
 He sees that he will not be lost, 15
 And waits and looks around him.

A sense of ocean and old trees
 Envelops and allures him;
 Tradition, touching all he sees,
 Beguiles and reassures him; 20
 And all her doubts of what he says
 Are dimmed with what she knows of days—
 Till even prejudice delays
 And fades, and she secures him.

The falling leaf inaugurates 25
 The reign of her confusion;
 The pounding wave reverberates
 The dirge of her illusion;
 And home, where passion lived and died,
 Becomes a place where she can hide, 30
 While all the town and harbor side
 Vibrate with her seclusion.

We tell you, tapping on our brows,
 The story as it should be,—
 As if the story of a house 35
 Were told, or ever could be;
 We'll have no kindly veil between
 Her visions and those we have seen,—
 As if we guessed what hers have been,
 Or what they are or would be. 40

Meanwhile we do no harm; for they
 That with a god have striven,
 Not hearing much of what we say,
 Take what the god has given;
 Though like waves breaking it may be 45
 Or like a changed familiar tree,
 Or like a stairway to the sea
 Where down the blind are driven.

1914, 1921

2. One of the twelve apostles in the New Testament; he betrayed Jesus Christ.

WILLA CATHER

1873–1947

Willa Cather was born in Virginia, the oldest child of Charles and Mary Virginia Cather, who moved with their family to the Nebraska Divide when she was nine years old. After a year of farming, they relocated to the town of Red Cloud, and her father went into the real estate business. At sixteen, Cather moved on her own to Lincoln, the state capital and seat of the University of Nebraska; she attended preparatory school for one year and graduated from the university in 1895. In college she studied the classics and participated in the lively contemporary cultural life of the city by reviewing books, plays, and musical performances. Following graduation, she eked out a year as a journalist in Red Cloud and Lincoln before moving to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to work as an editor of a women's magazine, the *Home Monthly*, a position she left five years later to teach high-school English and Latin. During this time she also wrote poems and stories, gathering poems into *April Twilights*, in 1903, and stories (including the early version of "The Sculptor's Funeral") into *The Troll Garden*, in 1905. Also in Pittsburgh, in 1899, she met Isabelle McClung, from a prominent, wealthy family. She lived in the McClung home from 1901 to 1906, when she moved to New York City to write for the journal *McClure's*. Throughout her life, Cather remained devoted to McClung, experiencing her marriage in 1916 as a severe personal loss and being devastated by her death in 1938.

Having long wished to write novels, Cather took a leave of absence from *McClure's* in 1911, and wrote *Alexander's Bridge* (1912). This novel was successful, but it was the next three that made her reputation. Each focused on a western heroine: Alexandra Bergson in *O Pioneers!* (1913), Thea Kronborg in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *Ántonia Shimerda* in *My Ántonia* (1918). While Alexandra is extraordinary as the most successful farmer—the only woman farmer—on the Nebraska Divide, and Thea is extraordinary as a gifted opera singer, *Ántonia* has no unusual gifts; for Cather and the novel's many readers she stands for the entire experience of European settlement of the Great Plains. These three novels also manifest Cather's lyrical yet understated prose writing; they contain a wealth of detail about the lives of Nebraska settlers—Bohemian Czech, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, French, Russian, and "Americans" from the East—as they learned to farm on the prairie and built communities in which their various ethnicities met and mingled. Cather's is no melting pot ethos, however; rather she sees the frontier as a shifting kaleidoscope of overlapping social groups and individuals. Recognizing that even by the second decade of the twentieth century this period in U.S. history had disappeared, Cather approached her characters with deep respect for what they had endured and accomplished.

Whether these novels (or any of Cather's other work) reflect a lesbian sensibility has been a matter of much critical debate. Her *Selected Letters* (2013), long withheld from publication, confirm that Cather's central emotional involvements in her life were with women; in 1908 she began to share an apartment with Edith Lewis, a Nebraskan whom she had met in 1903, and they lived together until Cather's death. (They lived mostly in New York City, but Cather also traveled a great deal: to Europe, to New England, to the Southwest, and back to Red Cloud to visit her family.) Estrangement from conventional sexuality and sex roles is typical of many of her main characters, male and female; but heterosexual romance and sexual behavior is



Illustration for *My Ántonia*, W. T. Benda. For the first edition of *My Ántonia*, Cather commissioned a set of drawings by Wladyslaw T. Benda, a Polish immigrant who was part of the New York City art scene. Known to Cather through his work for *McClure's*, Benda simplified his often dramatic visual style to match Cather's spare narration.

equally present in her novels. It seems fair to say that close friendship, much more than romantic or sexual love, is the great ideal in her fiction.

Around 1922, according to Cather, the world broke in two; she suffered from the combined effects of poor health, dissatisfaction with the progress of her career, and alarm at the increasing mechanization and mass-produced quality of American life. She joined the Episcopal Church, and her novels took a new direction. Although her books had always celebrated alternative values to the material and conventional, this theme became much more urgent, while the motif of heroic womanhood—which had led many to call her a feminist, though Cather herself kept aloof from all movements—receded. Important books from her “middle period” include *A Lost Lady* (1923) and *The Professor's House* (1925), which deal with spiritual and cultural crises in the lives of the main characters.

Published in 1927, the novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* initiated another stage. Like many other writers and artists in the 1920s, Cather had become entranced with the American Southwest—especially New Mexico; her first trip to the region in 1912 figured in her depiction (in *The Song of the Lark*) of Thea Kronborg finding spiritual renewal in this landscape. *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, partly written at Mary Austin's home in Santa Fe, is based on the career of Jean Baptiste Lamy (1814–1888), archbishop of New Mexico, and the priest Joseph Marchebeuf, his close friend and collaborator. Another historical novel, *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) is set even further back in time, in seventeenth-century Quebec. In both books, a composite image of high French culture, ceremonial spirituality, and the American landscape contrasts with the material trivia and empty banality of contemporary life.

Inspired by the classical Latin works that she loved so much, Cather believed in the ideas of art and the artist and strove to attain an artistic height from which she might survey the entire human scene. She tried to imbue the particularities of her stories with what she thought of as universal significance. In *My Ántonia*, which continues to be the favorite novel for most Cather readers, Jim Burden reflects on the aspirations of the poet Virgil to bring the muse to his own country for the first time; by country, Virgil means “not a nation or even a province, but the little rural neighborhood” where he was born. This is clearly what is intended in *My Ántonia*; the idea of combining artistic transcendence with local, especially rural, specificity, speaks to Cather's own goals. It is a measure of her ambition that she thinks of her work in Virgilian terms, since Virgil was the greatest of the Latin poets.

Politically, culturally, and aesthetically, Cather was in many respects deeply conservative as well as conflicted—a sophisticated populist, an agrarian urbanite. She believed in high art and superior people, but also thought great human gifts were more often found among the obscure and ordinary than among those with great

advantages. Her vision of the United States seldom focused on Native Americans and African Americans; yet she preferred immigrants from Europe to migrants from the East Coast. She appreciated popular legends and folktales, which appear along with classical myth and allusion in her work. Her subtle experiments with formal structure include the retrospective narrative of *My Ántonia*, the imbedded Southwestern story of Tom Outland in *The Professor's House*, and the seemingly unplotted, episodic chronicle form of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. She once described her work as deliberately “unfurnished,” meaning that it was cut down to only those details absolutely necessary; “suggestion rather than enumeration” was another way she described her goal (see “The Novel Demeublé,” p. 324). The resulting sparseness and clarity of her fiction puts it in the modernist tradition.

The text of *My Ántonia* is that of the first edition (1918). The text of “The Sculptor’s Funeral” is that published in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920).

My Ántonia

Optima dies . . . prima fugit
—VIRGIL¹

Introduction

Last summer I happened to be crossing the plains of Iowa in a season of intense heat, and it was my good fortune to have for a traveling companion James Quayle Burden—Jim Burden, as we still call him in the West. He and I are old friends—we grew up together in the same Nebraska town—and we had much to say to each other. While the train flashed through never-ending miles of ripe wheat, by country towns and bright-flowered pastures and oak groves wilting in the sun, we sat in the observation car, where the woodwork was hot to the touch and red dust lay deep over everything. The dust and heat, the burning wind, reminded us of many things. We were talking about what it is like to spend one’s childhood in little towns like these, buried in wheat and corn, under stimulating extremes of climate: burning summers when the world lies green and billowy beneath a brilliant sky, when one is fairly stifled in vegetation, in the color and smell of strong weeds and heavy harvests; blustery winters with little snow, when the whole country is stripped bare and gray as sheet-iron. We agreed that no one who had not grown up in a little prairie town could know anything about it. It was a kind of freemasonry,² we said.

Although Jim Burden and I both live in New York, and are old friends, I do not see much of him there. He is legal counsel for one of the great Western railways, and is sometimes away from his New York office for weeks together. That is one reason why we do not often meet. Another is that I do not like his wife.

When Jim was still an obscure young lawyer, struggling to make his way in New York, his career was suddenly advanced by a brilliant marriage.³ Genevieve Whitney was the only daughter of a distinguished man. Her marriage

1. Roman poet (70–19 B.C.E.) “The best days . . . are the first to flee” (Latin); from the *Georgics* (29 B.C.), a long didactic poem idealizing farm life.

2. A secret fraternal organization; here a reference to secret, shared knowledge.

3. In the 1926 edition, Cather revised and shortened the *Introduction*, omitting most of the characterization of Burden’s wife and details of his career as an advocate of “mines and timber and oil.”

with young Burden was the subject of sharp comment at the time. It was said she had been brutally jilted by her cousin, Rutland Whitney, and that she married this unknown man from the West out of bravado. She was a restless, headstrong girl, even then, who liked to astonish her friends. Later, when I knew her, she was always doing something unexpected. She gave one of her town houses for a Suffrage headquarters, produced one of her own plays at the Princess Theater, was arrested for picketing during a garment-makers' strike, etc. I am never able to believe that she has much feeling for the causes to which she lends her name and her fleeting interest. She is handsome, energetic, executive, but to me she seems unimpressible and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm. Her husband's quiet tastes irritate her, I think, and she finds it worth while to play the patroness to a group of young poets and painters of advanced ideas and mediocre ability. She has her own fortune and lives her own life. For some reason, she wishes to remain Mrs. James Burden.

As for Jim, no disappointments have been severe enough to chill his naturally romantic and ardent disposition. This disposition, though it often made him seem very funny when he was a boy, has been one of the strongest elements in his success. He loves with a personal passion the great country through which his railway runs and branches. His faith in it and his knowledge of it have played an important part in its development. He is always able to raise capital for new enterprises in Wyoming or Montana, and has helped young men out there to do remarkable things in mines and timber and oil. If a young man with an idea can once get Jim Burden's attention, can manage to accompany him when he goes off into the wilds hunting for lost parks or exploring new canyons, then the money which means action is usually forthcoming. Jim is still able to lose himself in those big Western dreams. Though he is over forty now, he meets new people and new enterprises with the impulsiveness by which his boyhood friends remember him. He never seems to me to grow older. His fresh color and sandy hair and quick-changing blue eyes are those of a young man, and his sympathetic, solicitous interest in women is as youthful as it is Western and American.

During that burning day when we were crossing Iowa, our talk kept returning to a central figure, a Bohemian⁴ girl whom we had known long ago and whom both of us admired. More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood. To speak her name was to call up pictures of people and places, to set a quiet drama going in one's brain. I had lost sight of her altogether, but Jim had found her again after long years, had renewed a friendship that meant a great deal to him, and out of his busy life had set apart time enough to enjoy that friendship. His mind was full of her that day. He made me see her again, feel her presence, revived all my old affection for her.

"I can't see," he said impetuously, "why you have never written anything about Ántonia."

I told him I had always felt that other people—he himself, for one—knew her much better than I. I was ready, however, to make an agreement with

4. From Bohemia, a region in the Czech Republic. Immigrants to the United States from this part of eastern Europe began to arrive in great numbers during the 1880s, which is when the novel begins.

him; I would set down on paper all that I remembered of *Ántonia* if he would do the same. We might, in this way, get a picture of her.

He rumbled his hair with a quick, excited gesture, which with him often announces a new determination, and I could see that my suggestion took hold of him. "Maybe I will, maybe I will!" he declared. He stared out of the window for a few moments, and when he turned to me again his eyes had the sudden clearness that comes from something the mind itself sees. "Of course," he said, "I should have to do it in a direct way, and say a great deal about myself. It's through myself that I knew and felt her, and I've had no practice in any other form of presentation."

I told him that how he knew her and felt her was exactly what I most wanted to know about *Ántonia*. He had had opportunities that I, as a little girl who watched her come and go, had not.

Months afterward Jim Burden arrived at my apartment one stormy winter afternoon, with a bulging legal portfolio sheltered under his fur overcoat. He brought it into the sitting-room with him and tapped it with some pride as he stood warming his hands.

"I finished it last night—the thing about *Ántonia*," he said. "Now, what about yours?"

I had to confess that mine had not gone beyond a few straggling notes.

"Notes? I didn't make any." He drank his tea all at once and put down the cup. "I didn't arrange or rearrange. I simply wrote down what of herself and myself and other people *Ántonia's* name recalls to me. I suppose it hasn't any form. It hasn't any title, either." He went into the next room, sat down at my desk and wrote on the pinkish face of the portfolio the word, "*Ántonia*." He frowned at this a moment, then prefixed another word, making it "*My Ántonia*." That seemed to satisfy him.

"Read it as soon as you can," he said, rising, "but don't let it influence your own story."

My own story was never written, but the following narrative is Jim's manuscript, substantially as he brought it to me.

Book I. The Shimerdas

I

I first heard of *Ántonia*⁵ on what seemed to me an interminable journey across the great midland plain of North America. I was ten years old then; I had lost both my father and mother within a year, and my Virginia relatives were sending me out to my grandparents, who lived in Nebraska. I traveled in the care of a mountain boy, Jake Marpole, one of the "hands" on my father's old farm under the Blue Ridge, who was now going West to work for my grandfather. Jake's experience of the world was not much wider than mine. He had never been in a railway train until the morning when we set out together to try our fortunes in a new world.

5. "The Bohemian name *Ántonia* is strongly accented on the first syllable, like the English name *Anthony*, and the *i* is, of course, given the

sound of long *e*. The name is pronounced An'-ton-ee-ah" [Cather's note].

We went all the way in day-coaches,⁶ becoming more sticky and grimy with each stage of the journey. Jake bought everything the newsboys offered him: candy, oranges, brass collar buttons, a watch-charm, and for me a “Life of Jesse James,”⁷ which I remember as one of the most satisfactory books I have ever read. Beyond Chicago we were under the protection of a friendly passenger conductor, who knew all about the country to which we were going and gave us a great deal of advice in exchange for our confidence. He seemed to us an experienced and worldly man who had been almost everywhere; in his conversation he threw out lightly the names of distant States and cities. He wore the rings and pins and badges of different fraternal orders to which he belonged. Even his cuff-buttons were engraved with hieroglyphics, and he was more inscribed than an Egyptian obelisk. Once when he sat down to chat, he told us that in the immigrant car ahead there was a family from “across the water” whose destination was the same as ours.

“They can’t any of them speak English, except one little girl, and all she can say is ‘We go Black Hawk, Nebraska.’ She’s not much older than you, twelve or thirteen, maybe, and she’s as bright as a new dollar. Don’t you want to go ahead and see her, Jimmy? She’s got the pretty brown eyes, too!”

This last remark made me bashful, and I shook my head and settled down to “Jesse James.” Jake nodded at me approvingly and said you were likely to get diseases from foreigners.

I do not remember crossing the Missouri River, or anything about the long day’s journey through Nebraska. Probably by that time I had crossed so many rivers that I was dull to them. The only thing very noticeable about Nebraska was that it was still, all day long, Nebraska.

I had been sleeping, curled up in a red plush seat, for a long while when we reached Black Hawk. Jake roused me and took me by the hand. We stumbled down from the train to a wooden siding, where men were running about with lanterns. I couldn’t see any town, or even distant lights; we were surrounded by utter darkness. The engine was panting heavily after its long run. In the red glow from the fire-box, a group of people stood huddled together on the platform, encumbered by bundles and boxes. I knew this must be the immigrant family the conductor had told us about. The woman wore a fringed shawl tied over her head, and she carried a little tin trunk in her arms, hugging it as if it were a baby. There was an old man, tall and stooped. Two half-grown boys and a girl stood holding oil-cloth bundles, and a little girl clung to her mother’s skirts. Presently a man with a lantern approached them and began to talk, shouting and exclaiming. I pricked up my ears, for it was positively the first time I had ever heard a foreign tongue.

Another lantern came along. A bantering voice called out: “Hello, are you Mr. Burden’s folks? If you are, it’s me you’re looking for. I’m Otto Fuchs. I’m Mr. Burden’s hired man, and I’m to drive you out. Hello, Jimmy, ain’t you scared to come so far west?”

I looked up with interest at the new face in the lantern light. He might have stepped out of the pages of “Jesse James.” He wore a sombrero hat, with a wide leather band and a bright buckle, and the ends of his mustache were twisted up stiffly, like little horns. He looked lively and ferocious, I

6. Railroad passenger cars with no sleeping compartments.

7. Notorious American bandit (1847–1882) whose gang robbed banks and trains.

thought, and as if he had a history. A long scar ran across one cheek and drew the corner of his mouth up in a sinister curl. The top of his left ear was gone, and his skin was brown as an Indian's. Surely this was the face of a desperado. As he walked about the platform in his high-heeled boots, looking for our trunks, I saw that he was a rather slight man, quick and wiry, and light on his feet. He told us we had a long night drive ahead of us, and had better be on the hike. He led us to a hitching-bar where two farm wagons were tied, and I saw the foreign family crowding into one of them. The other was for us. Jake got on the front seat with Otto Fuchs, and I rode on the straw in the bottom of the wagon-box, covered up with a buffalo hide. The immigrants rumbled off into the empty darkness, and we followed them.

I tried to go to sleep, but the jolting made me bite my tongue, and I soon began to ache all over. When the straw settled down I had a hard bed. Cautiously I slipped from under the buffalo hide, got up on my knees and peered over the side of the wagon. There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land—slightly undulating, I knew, because often our wheels ground against the brake as we went down into a hollow and lurched up again on the other side. I had the feeling that the world was left behind, that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man's jurisdiction. I had never before looked up at the sky when there was not a familiar mountain ridge against it. But this was the complete dome of heaven, all there was of it. I did not believe that my dead father and mother were watching me from up there; they would still be looking for me at the sheep-fold down by the creek, or along the white road that led to the mountain pastures. I had left even their spirits behind me. The wagon jolted on, carrying me I knew not whither. I don't think I was homesick. If we never arrived anywhere, it did not matter. Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out. I did not say my prayers that night: here, I felt, what would be would be.

II

I do not remember our arrival at my grandfather's farm sometime before daybreak, after a drive of nearly twenty miles with heavy work-horses. When I awoke, it was afternoon. I was lying in a little room, scarcely larger than the bed that held me, and the window-shade at my head was flapping softly in a warm wind. A tall woman, with wrinkled brown skin and black hair, stood looking down at me; I knew that she must be my grandmother. She had been crying, I could see, but when I opened my eyes she smiled, peered at me anxiously, and sat down on the foot of my bed.

"Had a good sleep, Jimmy?" she asked briskly. Then in a very different tone she said, as if to herself, "My, how you do look like your father!" I remembered that my father had been her little boy; she must often have come to wake him like this when he overslept. "Here are your clean clothes," she went on, stroking my coverlid with her brown hand as she talked. "But first you come down to the kitchen with me, and have a nice warm bath behind the stove. Bring your things; there's nobody about."

“Down to the kitchen” struck me as curious; it was always “out in the kitchen” at home.⁸ I picked up my shoes and stockings and followed her through the living-room and down a flight of stairs into a basement. This basement was divided into a dining-room at the right of the stairs and a kitchen at the left. Both rooms were plastered and whitewashed—the plaster laid directly upon the earth walls, as it used to be in dugouts. The floor was of hard cement. Up under the wooden ceiling there were little half-windows with white curtains, and pots of geraniums and wandering Jew⁹ in the deep sills. As I entered the kitchen I sniffed a pleasant smell of gingerbread baking. The stove was very large, with bright nickel trimmings, and behind it there was a long wooden bench against the wall, and a tin washtub, into which grandmother poured hot and cold water. When she brought the soap and towels, I told her that I was used to taking my bath without help.

“Can you do your ears, Jimmy? Are you sure? Well, now, I call you a right smart little boy.”

It was pleasant there in the kitchen. The sun shone into my bath-water through the west half-window, and a big Maltese cat came up and rubbed himself against the tub, watching me curiously. While I scrubbed, my grandmother busied herself in the dining-room until I called anxiously, “Grandmother, I’m afraid the cakes are burning!” Then she came laughing, waving her apron before her as if she were shoeing chickens.

She was a spare, tall woman, a little stooped, and she was apt to carry her head thrust forward in an attitude of attention, as if she were looking at something, or listening to something, far away. As I grew older, I came to believe that it was only because she was so often thinking of things that were far away. She was quick-footed and energetic in all her movements. Her voice was high and rather shrill, and she often spoke with an anxious inflection, for she was exceedingly desirous that everything should go with due order and decorum. Her laugh, too, was high, and perhaps a little strident, but there was a lively intelligence in it. She was then fifty-five years old, a strong woman, of unusual endurance.

After I was dressed I explored the long cellar next to the kitchen. It was dug out under the wing of the house, was plastered and cemented, with a stairway and an outside door by which the men came and went. Under one of the windows there was a place for them to wash when they came in from work.

While my grandmother was busy about supper I settled myself on the wooden bench behind the stove and got acquainted with the cat—he caught not only rats and mice, but gophers, I was told. The patch of yellow sunlight on the floor traveled back toward the stairway, and grandmother and I talked about my journey, and about the arrival of the new Bohemian family; she said they were to be our nearest neighbors. We did not talk about the farm in Virginia, which had been her home for so many years. But after the men came in from the fields, and we were all seated at the supper-table, then she asked Jake about the old place and about our friends and neighbors there.

My grandfather said little. When he first came in he kissed me and spoke kindly to me, but he was not demonstrative. I felt at once his deliberateness

8. Farm kitchens in the South typically were detached from the main house.

9. A type of showy, trailing plant.

and personal dignity, and was a little in awe of him. The thing one immediately noticed about him was his beautiful, crinkly, snow-white beard. I once heard a missionary say it was like the beard of an Arabian sheik. His bald crown only made it more impressive.

Grandfather's eyes were not at all like those of an old man; they were bright blue, and had a fresh, frosty sparkle. His teeth were white and regular—so sound that he had never been to a dentist in his life. He had a delicate skin, easily roughened by sun and wind. When he was a young man his hair and beard were red; his eyebrows were still coppery.

As we sat at the table Otto Fuchs and I kept stealing covert glances at each other. Grandmother had told me while she was getting supper that he was an Austrian who came to this country a young boy and had led an adventurous life in the Far West among mining-camps and cow outfits. His iron constitution was somewhat broken by mountain pneumonia, and he had drifted back to live in a milder country for a while. He had relatives in Bismarck, a German settlement to the north of us, but for a year now he had been working for grandfather.

The minute supper was over, Otto took me into the kitchen to whisper to me about a pony down in the barn that had been bought for me at a sale; he had been riding him to find out whether he had any bad tricks, but he was a "perfect gentleman," and his name was Dude. Fuchs told me everything I wanted to know: how he had lost his ear in a Wyoming blizzard when he was a stage-driver, and how to throw a lasso. He promised to rope a steer for me before sundown next day. He got out his "chaps" and silver spurs to show them to Jake and me, and his best cowboy boots, with tops stitched in bold design—roses, and true-lover's knots, and undraped female figures. These, he solemnly explained, were angels.

Before we went to bed Jake and Otto were called up to the living-room for prayers. Grandfather put on silver-rimmed spectacles and read several Psalms. His voice was so sympathetic and he read so interestingly that I wished he had chosen one of my favorite chapters in the Book of Kings. I was awed by his intonation of the word "Selah." *"He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved. Selah."*¹ I had no idea what the word meant; perhaps he had not. But, as he uttered it, it became oracular, the most sacred of words.

Early the next morning I ran out of doors to look about me. I had been told that ours was the only wooden house west of Black Hawk—until you came to the Norwegian settlement, where there were several. Our neighbors lived in sod houses and dugouts—comfortable, but not very roomy. Our white frame house, with a story and half-story above the basement, stood at the east end of what I might call the farmyard, with the windmill close by the kitchen door. From the windmill the ground sloped westward, down to the barns and granaries and pig-yards. This slope was trampled hard and bare, and washed out in winding gullies by the rain. Beyond the corncribs, at the bottom of the shallow draw,² was a muddy little pond, with rusty willow bushes growing about it. The road from the post-office came directly by our door, crossed the

1. Psalms 47.4. The meaning of *Selah* is still unknown.

2. A gully that draws runoff water from rain and thaws.

farmyard, and curved round this little pond, beyond which it began to climb the gentle swell of unbroken prairie to the west. There, along the western skyline, it skirted a great cornfield, much larger than any field I had ever seen. This cornfield, and the sorghum patch behind the barn, were the only broken³ land in sight. Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, there was nothing but rough, shaggy, red grass, most of it as tall as I.

North of the house, inside the ploughed fire-breaks, grew a thick-set strip of box-elder trees, low and bushy, their leaves already turning yellow. This hedge was nearly a quarter of a mile long, but I had to look very hard to see it at all. The little trees were insignificant against the grass. It seemed as if the grass were about to run over them, and over the plum-patch behind the sod chicken-house.

As I looked about me I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea. The red of the grass made all the great prairie the color of wine-stains, or of certain seaweeds when they are first washed up. And there was so much motion in it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running.

I had almost forgotten that I had a grandmother, when she came out, her sunbonnet on her head, a grain-sack in her hand, and asked me if I did not want to go to the garden with her to dig potatoes for dinner. The garden, curiously enough, was a quarter of a mile from the house, and the way to it led up a shallow draw past the cattle corral. Grandmother called my attention to a stout hickory cane, tipped with copper, which hung by a leather thong from her belt. This, she said, was her rattlesnake cane. I must never go to the garden without a heavy stick or a corn-knife; she had killed a good many rattlers on her way back and forth. A little girl who lived on the Black Hawk road was bitten on the ankle and had been sick all summer.

I can remember exactly how the country looked to me as I walked beside my grandmother along the faint wagon-tracks on that early September morning. Perhaps the glide of long railway travel was still with me, for more than anything else I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping . . .

Alone, I should never have found the garden—except, perhaps, for the big yellow pumpkins that lay about unprotected by their withering vines—and I felt very little interest in it when I got there. I wanted to walk straight on through the red grass and over the edge of the world, which could not be very far away. The light air about me told me that the world ended here: only the ground and sun and sky were left, and if one went a little farther there would be only sun and sky, and one would float off into them, like the tawny hawks which sailed over our heads making slow shadows on the grass. While grandmother took the pitchfork we found standing in one of the rows and dug potatoes, while I picked them up out of the soft brown earth and put them into the bag, I kept looking up at the hawks that were doing what I might so easily do.

When grandmother was ready to go, I said I would like to stay up there in the garden awhile.

She peered down at me from under her sunbonnet. "Aren't you afraid of snakes?"

"A little," I admitted, "but I'd like to stay anyhow."

3. I.e., plowed. Plowing land for the first time is extremely difficult work.

“Well, if you see one, don’t have anything to do with him. The big yellow and brown ones won’t hurt you; they’re bull-snakes and help to keep the gophers down. Don’t be scared if you see anything look out of that hole in the bank over there. That’s a badger hole. He’s about as big as a big ‘possum, and his face is striped, black and white. He takes a chicken once in a while, but I won’t let the men harm him. In a new country a body feels friendly to the animals. I like to have him come out and watch me when I’m at work.”

Grandmother swung the bag of potatoes over her shoulder and went down the path, leaning forward a little. The road followed the windings of the draw; when she came to the first bend she waved at me and disappeared. I was left alone with this new feeling of lightness and content.

I sat down in the middle of the garden, where snakes could scarcely approach unseen, and leaned my back against a warm yellow pumpkin. There were some ground-cherry bushes growing along the furrows, full of fruit. I turned back the papery triangular sheaths that protected the berries and ate a few. All about me giant grasshoppers, twice as big as any I had ever seen, were doing acrobatic feats among the dried vines. The gophers scurried up and down the ploughed ground. There in the sheltered draw-bottom the wind did not blow very hard, but I could hear it singing its humming tune up on the level, and I could see the tall grasses wave. The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. Queer little red bugs came out and moved in slow squadrons around me. Their backs were polished vermilion, with black spots. I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.

III

On Sunday morning Otto Fuchs was to drive us over to make the acquaintance of our new Bohemian neighbors. We were taking them some provisions, as they had come to live on a wild place where there was no garden or chicken-house, and very little broken land. Fuchs brought up a sack of potatoes and a piece of cured pork from the cellar, and grandmother packed some loaves of Saturday’s bread, a jar of butter, and several pumpkin pies in the straw of the wagon-box. We clambered up to the front seat and jolted off past the little pond and along the road that climbed to the big cornfield.

I could hardly wait to see what lay beyond that cornfield; but there was only red grass like ours, and nothing else, though from the high wagon-seat one could look off a long way. The road ran about like a wild thing, avoiding the deep draws, crossing them where they were wide and shallow. And all along it, wherever it looped or ran, the sunflowers grew; some of them were as big as little trees, with great rough leaves and many branches which bore dozens of blossoms. They made a gold ribbon across the prairie. Occasionally one of the horses would tear off with his teeth a plant full of blossoms, and walk along munching it, the flowers nodding in time to his bites as he ate down toward them.

The Bohemian family, grandmother told me as we drove along, had bought the homestead of a fellow-countryman, Peter Krajiek, and had paid him more than it was worth. Their agreement with him was made before they left the old country, through a cousin of his, who was also a relative of Mrs. Shimerda. The Shimerdas were the first Bohemian family to come to this part of the county. Krajiek was their only interpreter, and could tell them anything he chose. They could not speak enough English to ask for advice, or even to make their most pressing wants known. One son, Fuchs said, was well-grown, and strong enough to work the land; but the father was old and frail and knew nothing about farming. He was a weaver by trade; had been a skilled workman on tapestries and upholstery materials. He had brought his fiddle with him, which wouldn't be of much use here, though he used to pick up money by it at home.

"If they're nice people, I hate to think of them spending the winter in that cave of Krajiek's," said grandmother. "It's no better than a badger hole; no proper dugout at all. And I hear he's made them pay twenty dollars for his old cookstove that ain't worth ten."

"Yes'm," said Otto; "and he's sold 'em his oxen and his two bony old horses for the price of good work-teams. I'd have interfered about the horses—the old man can understand some German—if I'd 'a' thought it would do any good. But Bohemians has a natural distrust of Austrians."⁴

Grandmother looked interested. "Now, why is that, Otto?"

Fuchs wrinkled his brow and nose. "Well, ma'm, it's politics. It would take me a long while to explain."

The land was growing rougher; I was told that we were approaching Squaw Creek, which cut up the west half of the Shimerdas' place and made the land of little value for farming. Soon we could see the broken, grassy clay cliffs which indicated the windings of the stream, and the glittering tops of the cottonwoods and ash trees that grew down in the ravine. Some of the cottonwoods had already turned, and the yellow leaves and shining white bark made them look like the gold and silver trees in fairy tales.

As we approached the Shimerdas' dwelling, I could still see nothing but rough red hillocks, and draws with shelving banks and long roots hanging out where the earth had crumbled away. Presently, against one of those banks, I saw a sort of shed, thatched with the same wine-colored grass that grew everywhere. Near it tilted a shattered windmill-frame, that had no wheel. We drove up to this skeleton to tie our horses, and then I saw a door and window sunk deep in the draw-bank. The door stood open, and a woman and a girl of fourteen ran out and looked up at us hopefully. A little girl trailed along behind them. The woman had on her head the same embroidered shawl with silk fringes that she wore when she had alighted from the train at Black Hawk. She was not old, but she was certainly not young. Her face was alert and lively, with a sharp chin and shrewd little eyes. She shook grandmother's hand energetically.

"Very glad, very glad!" she ejaculated. Immediately she pointed to the bank out of which she had emerged and said, "House no good, house no good!"

4. Bohemia shared a border with Austria and for centuries had been involved in warfare with that nation. At the time in which *My Antonia* is set,

Bohemia was a dominion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled by the Hapsburg monarchy.

Grandmother nodded consolingly. "You'll get fixed up comfortable after while, Mrs. Shimerda; make good house."

My grandmother always spoke in a very loud tone to foreigners, as if they were deaf. She made Mrs. Shimerda understand the friendly intention of our visit, and the Bohemian woman handled the loaves of bread and even smelled them, and examined the pies with lively curiosity, exclaiming, "Much good, much thank!"—and again she wrung grandmother's hand.

The oldest son, Ambrož,—they called it Ambrosch,—came out of the cave and stood beside his mother. He was nineteen years old, short and broad-backed, with a close-cropped, flat head, and a wide, flat face. His hazel eyes were little and shrewd, like his mother's, but more sly and suspicious; they fairly snapped at the food. The family had been living on corncakes and sorghum molasses for three days.

The little girl was pretty, but *Án-tonia*—they accented the name thus, strongly, when they spoke to her—was still prettier. I remembered what the conductor had said about her eyes. They were big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood. Her skin was brown, too, and in her cheeks she had a glow of rich, dark color. Her brown hair was curly and wild-looking. The little sister, whom they called Yulka (Julka), was fair, and seemed mild and obedient. While I stood awkwardly confronting the two girls, Krajiek came up from the barn to see what was going on. With him was another Shimerda son. Even from a distance one could see that there was something strange about this boy. As he approached us, he began to make uncouth noises, and held up his hands to show us his fingers, which were webbed to the first knuckle, like a duck's foot. When he saw me draw back, he began to crow delightedly, "Hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo!" like a rooster. His mother scowled and said sternly, "Marek!" then spoke rapidly to Krajiek in Bohemian.

"She wants me to tell you he won't hurt nobody, Mrs. Burden. He was born like that. The others are smart. Ambrosch, he make good farmer." He struck Ambrosch on the back, and the boy smiled knowingly.

At that moment the father came out of the hole in the bank. He wore no hat, and his thick, iron-gray hair was brushed straight back from his forehead. It was so long that it bushed out behind his ears, and made him look like the old portraits I remembered in Virginia. He was tall and slender, and his thin shoulders stooped. He looked at us understandingly, then took grandmother's hand and bent over it. I noticed how white and well-shaped his own hands were. They looked calm, somehow, and skilled. His eyes were melancholy, and were set back deep under his brow. His face was ruggedly formed, but it looked like ashes—like something from which all the warmth and light had died out. Everything about this old man was in keeping with his dignified manner. He was neatly dressed. Under his coat he wore a knitted gray vest, and, instead of a collar, a silk scarf of a dark bronze-green, carefully crossed and held together by a red coral pin. While Krajiek was translating for Mr. Shimerda, *Ántonia* came up to me and held out her hand coaxingly. In a moment we were running up the steep drawside together, Yulka trotting after us.

When we reached the level and could see the gold tree-tops, I pointed toward them, and *Ántonia* laughed and squeezed my hand as if to tell me how glad she was I had come. We raced off toward Squaw Creek and did

not stop until the ground itself stopped—fell away before us so abruptly that the next step would have been out into the tree-tops. We stood panting on the edge of the ravine, looking down at the trees and bushes that grew below us. The wind was so strong that I had to hold my hat on, and the girls' skirts were blown out before them. Ántonia seemed to like it; she held her little sister by the hand and chattered away in that language which seemed to me spoken so much more rapidly than mine. She looked at me, her eyes fairly blazing with things she could not say.

"Name? What name?" she asked, touching me on the shoulder. I told her my name, and she repeated it after me and made Yulka say it. She pointed into the gold cottonwood tree behind whose top we stood and said again, "What name?"

We sat down and made a nest in the long red grass. Yulka curled up like a baby rabbit and played with a grasshopper. Ántonia pointed up to the sky and questioned me with her glance. I gave her the word, but she was not satisfied and pointed to my eyes. I told her, and she repeated the word, making it sound like "ice." She pointed up to the sky, then to my eyes, then back to the sky, with movements so quick and impulsive that she distracted me, and I had no idea what she wanted. She got up on her knees and wrung her hands. She pointed to her own eyes and shook her head, then to mine and to the sky, nodding violently.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "blue; blue sky."

She clapped her hands and murmured, "Blue sky, blue eyes," as if it amused her. While we snuggled down there out of the wind she learned a score of words. She was quick, and very eager. We were so deep in the grass that we could see nothing but the blue sky over us and the gold tree in front of us. It was wonderfully pleasant. After Ántonia had said the new words over and over, she wanted to give me a little chased⁵ silver ring she wore on her middle finger. When she coaxed and insisted, I repulsed her quite sternly. I didn't want her ring, and I felt there was something reckless and extravagant about her wishing to give it away to a boy she had never seen before. No wonder Krajiek got the better of these people, if this was how they behaved.

While we were disputing about the ring, I heard a mournful voice calling, "Án-tonia, Án-tonia!" She sprang up like a hare. "*Tatinec*,⁶ *Tatinec*!" she shouted, and we ran to meet the old man who was coming toward us. Ántonia reached him first, took his hand and kissed it. When I came up, he touched my shoulder and looked searchingly down into my face for several seconds. I became somewhat embarrassed, for I was used to being taken for granted by my elders.

We went with Mr. Shimerda back to the dugout, where grandmother was waiting for me. Before I got into the wagon, he took a book out of his pocket, opened it, and showed me a page with two alphabets, one English and the other Bohemian. He placed this book in my grandmother's hands, looked at her entreatingly, and said with an earnestness which I shall never forget, "Te-e-ach, te-e-ach my Án-tonia!"

5. Embossed.

6. Father (Czech); affectionate term equivalent to *daddy*.

IV

On the afternoon of that same Sunday I took my first long ride on my pony, under Otto's direction. After that Dude and I went twice a week to the post-office, six miles east of us, and I saved the men a good deal of time by riding on errands to our neighbors. When we had to borrow anything, or to send about word that there would be preaching at the sod schoolhouse, I was always the messenger. Formerly Fuchs attended to such things after working hours.

All the years that have passed have not dimmed my memory of that first glorious autumn. The new country lay open before me: there were no fences in those days, and I could choose my own way over the grass uplands, trusting the pony to get me home again. Sometimes I followed the sunflower-bordered roads. Fuchs told me that the sunflowers were introduced into that country by the Mormons; that at the time of the persecution, when they left Missouri and struck out into the wilderness to find a place where they could worship God in their own way, the members of the first exploring party, crossing the plains to Utah, scattered sunflower seed as they went. The next summer, when the long trains of wagons came through with all the women and children, they had the sunflower trail to follow. I believe that botanists do not confirm Jake's story, but insist that the sunflower was native to those plains. Nevertheless, that legend has stuck in my mind, and sunflower-bordered roads always seem to me the roads to freedom.

I used to love to drift along the pale yellow cornfields, looking for the damp spots one sometimes found at their edges, where the smartweed soon turned a rich copper color and the narrow brown leaves hung curled like cocoons about the swollen joints of the stem. Sometimes I went south to visit our German neighbors and to admire their catalpa grove, or to see the big elm tree that grew up out of a deep crack in the earth and had a hawk's nest in its branches. Trees were so rare in that country, and they had to make such a hard fight to grow, that we used to feel anxious about them, and visit them as if they were persons. It must have been the scarcity of detail in that tawny landscape that made detail so precious.

Sometimes I rode north to the big prairie-dog town to watch the brown, earth-owls fly home in the late afternoon and go down to their nests underground with the dogs. Antonia Shimerda liked to go with me, and we used to wonder a great deal about these birds of subterranean habit. We had to be on our guard there, for rattlesnakes were always lurking about. They came to pick up an easy living among the dogs and owls, which were quite defenseless against them; took possession of their comfortable houses and ate the eggs and puppies. We felt sorry for the owls. It was always mournful to see them come flying home at sunset and disappear under the earth. But, after all, we felt, winged things who would live like that must be rather degraded creatures. The dog-town was a long way from any pond or creek. Otto Fuchs said he had seen populous dog-towns in the desert where there was no surface water for fifty miles; he insisted that some of the holes must go down to water—nearly two hundred feet, hereabouts. Antonia said she didn't believe it; that the dogs probably lapped up the dew in the early morning, like the rabbits.

Ántonia had opinions about everything, and she was soon able to make them known. Almost every day she came running across the prairie to have her reading lesson with me. Mrs. Shimerda grumbled, but realized it was important that one member of the family should learn English. When the lesson was over, we used to go up to the watermelon patch behind the garden. I split the melons with an old corn-knife, and we lifted out the hearts and ate them with the juice trickling through our fingers. The white Christmas melons we did not touch, but we watched them with curiosity. They were to be picked late, when the hard frosts had set in, and put away for winter use. After weeks on the ocean, the Shimerdas were famished for fruit. The two girls would wander for miles along the edge of the cornfields, hunting for ground-cherries.

Ántonia loved to help grandmother in the kitchen and to learn about cooking and house-keeping. She would stand beside her, watching her every movement. We were willing to believe that Mrs. Shimerda was a good housewife in her own country, but she managed poorly under new conditions: the conditions were bad enough, certainly!

I remember how horrified we were at the sour, ashy-gray bread she gave her family to eat. She mixed her dough, we discovered, in an old tin peck-measure⁷ that Krajiek had used about the barn. When she took the paste out to bake it, she left smears of dough sticking to the sides of the measure, put the measure on the shelf behind the stove, and let this residue ferment. The next time she made bread, she scraped this sour stuff down into the fresh dough to serve as yeast.

During those first months the Shimerdas never went to town. Krajiek encouraged them in the belief that in Black Hawk they would somehow be mysteriously separated from their money. They hated Krajiek, but they clung to him because he was the only human being with whom they could talk or from whom they could get information. He slept with the old man and the two boys in the dugout barn, along with the oxen. They kept him in their hole and fed him for the same reason that the prairie dogs and the brown owls housed the rattlesnakes—because they did not know how to get rid of him.

v

We knew that things were hard for our Bohemian neighbors, but the two girls were light-hearted and never complained. They were always ready to forget their troubles at home, and to run away with me over the prairie, scaring rabbits or starting up flocks of quail.

I remember Ántonia's excitement when she came into our kitchen one afternoon and announced: "My papa find friends up north, with Russian mans. Last night he take me for see, and I can understand very much talk. Nice mans, Mrs. Burden. One is fat and all the time laugh. Everybody laugh. The first time I see my papa laugh in this kawn-tree. Oh, very nice!"

I asked her if she meant the two Russians who lived up by the big dog-town. I had often been tempted to go to see them when I was riding in that direction, but one of them was a wild-looking fellow and I was a little afraid

7. Equal to two gallons. The implication is that the container is an unsuitable size for bread making. The sourdough bread of the Shimerda family is also seen as an inferior product.

of him. Russia seemed to me more remote than any other country—farther away than China, almost as far as the North Pole. Of all the strange, uprooted people among the first settlers, those two men were the strangest and the most aloof. Their last names were unpronounceable, so they were called Pavel and Peter. They went about making signs to people, and until the Shimerdas came they had no friends. Krajiek could understand them a little, but he had cheated them in a trade, so they avoided him. Pavel, the tall one, was said to be an anarchist; since he had no means of imparting his opinions, probably his wild gesticulations and his generally excited and rebellious manner gave rise to this supposition. He must once have been a very strong man, but now his great frame, with big, knotty joints, had a wasted look, and the skin was drawn tight over his high cheek-bones. His breathing was hoarse, and he always had a cough.

Peter, his companion, was a very different sort of fellow; short, bow-legged, and as fat as butter. He always seemed pleased when he met people on the road, smiled and took off his cap to every one, men as well as women. At a distance, on his wagon, he looked like an old man; his hair and beard were of such a pale flaxen color that they seemed white in the sun. They were as thick and curly as carded wool. His rosy face, with its snub nose, set in this fleece, was like a melon among its leaves. He was usually called “Curly Peter,” or “Rooshian Peter.”

The two Russians made good farmhands, and in summer they worked out together. I had heard our neighbors laughing when they told how Peter always had to go home at night to milk his cow. Other bachelor homesteaders used canned milk, to save trouble. Sometimes Peter came to church at the sod schoolhouse. It was there I first saw him, sitting on a low bench by the door, his plush cap in his hands, his bare feet tucked apologetically under the seat.

After Mr. Shimerda discovered the Russians, he went to see them almost every evening, and sometimes took *Ántonia* with him. She said they came from a part of Russia where the language was not very different from Bohemian, and if I wanted to go to their place, she could talk to them for me. One afternoon, before the heavy frosts began, we rode up there together on my pony.

The Russians had a neat log house built on a grassy slope, with a windlass well beside the door. As we rode up the draw we skirted a big melon patch, and a garden where squashes and yellow cucumbers lay about on the sod. We found Peter out behind his kitchen, bending over a washtub. He was working so hard that he did not hear us coming. His whole body moved up and down as he rubbed, and he was a funny sight from the rear, with his shaggy head and bandy legs. When he straightened himself up to greet us, drops of perspiration were rolling from his thick nose down on to his curly beard. Peter dried his hands and seemed glad to leave his washing. He took us down to see his chickens, and his cow that was grazing on the hillside. He told *Ántonia* that in his country only rich people had cows, but here any man could have one who would take care of her. The milk was good for Pavel, who was often sick, and he could make butter by beating sour cream with a wooden spoon. Peter was very fond of his cow. He patted her flanks and talked to her in Russian while he pulled up her lariat pin and set it in a new place.

After he had shown us his garden, Peter trundled a load of watermelons up the hill in his wheelbarrow. Pavel was not at home. He was off somewhere helping to dig a well. The house I thought very comfortable for two men who

were “batching.” Besides the kitchen, there was a living-room, with a wide double bed built against the wall, properly made up with blue gingham sheets and pillows. There was a little storeroom, too, with a window, where they kept guns and saddles and tools, and old coats and boots. That day the floor was covered with garden things, drying for winter; corn and beans and fat yellow cucumbers. There were no screens or window-blinds in the house, and all the doors and windows stood wide open, letting in flies and sunshine alike.

Peter put the melons in a row on the oil-cloth-covered table and stood over them, brandishing a butcher knife. Before the blade got fairly into them, they split of their own ripeness, with a delicious sound. He gave us knives, but no plates, and the top of the table was soon swimming with juice and seeds. I had never seen any one eat so many melons as Peter ate. He assured us that they were good for one—better than medicine; in his country people lived on them at this time of year. He was very hospitable and jolly. Once, while he was looking at Ántonia, he sighed and told us that if he had stayed at home in Russia perhaps by this time he would have had a pretty daughter of his own to cook and keep house for him. He said he had left his country because of a “great trouble.”

When we got up to go, Peter looked about in perplexity for something that would entertain us. He ran into the storeroom and brought out a gaudily painted harmonica, sat down on a bench, and spreading his fat legs apart began to play like a whole band. The tunes were either very lively or very doleful, and he sang words to some of them.

Before we left, Peter put ripe cucumbers into a sack for Mrs. Shimerda and gave us a lard-pail full of milk to cook them in. I had never heard of cooking cucumbers, but Ántonia assured me they were very good. We had to walk the pony all the way home to keep from spilling the milk.

VI

One afternoon we were having our reading lesson on the warm, grassy bank where the badger lived. It was a day of amber sunlight, but there was a shiver of coming winter in the air. I had seen ice on the little horse-pond that morning, and as we went through the garden we found the tall asparagus, with its red berries, lying on the ground, a mass of slimy green.

Tony was barefooted, and she shivered in her cotton dress and was comfortable only when we were tucked down on the baked earth, in the full blaze of the sun. She could talk to me about almost anything by this time. That afternoon she was telling me how highly esteemed our friend the badger was in her part of the world, and how men kept a special kind of dog, with very short legs, to hunt him. Those dogs, she said, went down into the hole after the badger and killed him there in a terrific struggle underground; you could hear the barks and yelps outside. Then the dog dragged himself back, covered with bites and scratches, to be rewarded and petted by his master. She knew a dog who had a star on his collar for every badger he had killed.

The rabbits were unusually spry that afternoon. They kept starting up all about us, and dashing off down the draw as if they were playing a game of some kind. But the little buzzing things that lived in the grass were all dead—all but one. While we were lying there against the warm bank, a little insect of the palest, frailest green hopped painfully out of the buffalo grass and tried

to leap into a bunch of bluestem. He missed it, fell back, and sat with his head sunk between his long legs, his antennæ quivering, as if he were waiting for something to come and finish him. Tony made a warm nest for him in her hands; talked to him gayly and indulgently in Bohemian. Presently he began to sing for us—a thin, rusty little chirp. She held him close to her ear and laughed, but a moment afterward I saw there were tears in her eyes. She told me that in her village at home there was an old beggar woman who went about selling herbs and roots she had dug up in the forest. If you took her in and gave her a warm place by the fire, she sang old songs to the children in a cracked voice, like this. Old Hata, she was called, and the children loved to see her coming and saved their cakes and sweets for her.

When the bank on the other side of the draw began to throw a narrow shelf of shadow, we knew we ought to be starting homeward; the chill came on quickly when the sun got low, and *Ántonia's* dress was thin. What were we to do with the frail little creature we had lured back to life by false pretenses? I offered my pockets, but Tony shook her head and carefully put the green insect in her hair, tying her big handkerchief down loosely over her curls. I said I would go with her until we could see Squaw Creek, and then turn and run home. We drifted along lazily, very happy, through the magical light of the late afternoon.

All those fall afternoons were the same, but I never got used to them. As far as we could see, the miles of copper-red grass were drenched in sunlight that was stronger and fiercer than at any other time of the day. The blond cornfields were red gold, the haystacks turned rosy and threw long shadows. The whole prairie was like the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed.⁸ That hour always had the exultation of victory, of triumphant ending, like a hero's death—heroes who died young and gloriously. It was a sudden transfiguration, a lifting-up of day.

How many an afternoon *Ántonia* and I have trailed along the prairie under that magnificence! And always two long black shadows flitted before us or followed after, dark spots on the ruddy grass.

We had been silent a long time, and the edge of the sun sank nearer and nearer the prairie floor, when we saw a figure moving on the edge of the upland, a gun over his shoulder. He was walking slowly, dragging his feet along as if he had no purpose. We broke into a run to overtake him.

"My papa sick all the time," Tony panted as we flew. "He not look good, Jim."

As we neared Mr. Shimerda she shouted, and he lifted his head and peered about. Tony ran up to him, caught his hand and pressed it against her cheek. She was the only one of his family who could rouse the old man from the torpor in which he seemed to live. He took the bag from his belt and showed us three rabbits he had shot, looked at *Ántonia* with a wintry flicker of a smile and began to tell her something. She turned to me.

"My *tatine* make me little hat with the skins, little hat for win-ter!" she exclaimed joyfully. "Meat for eat, skin for hat,"—she told off these benefits on her fingers.

Her father put his hand on her hair, but she caught his wrist and lifted it carefully away, talking to him rapidly. I heard the name of old Hata. He

8. In Exodus 3.2, God's angel appeared to Moses in the middle of a bush that burned, but "was not consumed."

untied the handkerchief, separated her hair with his fingers, and stood looking down at the green insect. When it began to chirp faintly, he listened as if it were a beautiful sound.

I picked up the gun he had dropped; a queer piece from the old country, short and heavy, with a stag's head on the cock. When he saw me examining it, he turned to me with his faraway look that always made me feel as if I were down at the bottom of a well. He spoke kindly and gravely, and Ántonia translated:—

“My *tatine* say when you are big boy, he give you his gun. Very fine, from Bohemie. It was belong to a great man, very rich, like what you not got here; many fields, many forests, many big house. My papa play for his wedding, and he give my papa fine gun, and my papa give you.”

I was glad that this project was one of futurity. There never were such people as the Shimerdas for wanting to give away everything they had. Even the mother was always offering me things, though I knew she expected substantial presents in return. We stood there in friendly silence, while the feeble minstrel sheltered in Ántonia's hair went on with its scratchy chirp. The old man's smile, as he listened, was so full of sadness, of pity for things, that I never afterward forgot it. As the sun sank there came a sudden coolness and the strong smell of earth and drying grass. Ántonia and her father went off hand in hand, and I buttoned up my jacket and raced my shadow home.

VII

Much as I liked Ántonia, I hated a superior tone that she sometimes took with me. She was four years older than I, to be sure, and had seen more of the world; but I was a boy and she was a girl, and I resented her protecting manner. Before the autumn was over she began to treat me more like an equal and to defer to me in other things than reading lessons. This change came about from an adventure we had together.

One day when I rode over to the Shimerdas' I found Ántonia starting off on foot for Russian Peter's house, to borrow a spade Ambrosch needed. I offered to take her on the pony, and she got up behind me. There had been another black frost the night before, and the air was clear and heady as wine. Within a week all the blooming roads had been despoiled—hundreds of miles of yellow sunflowers had been transformed into brown, rattling, burry stalks.

We found Russian Peter digging his potatoes. We were glad to go in and get warm by his kitchen stove and to see his squashes and Christmas melons, heaped in the store-room for winter. As we rode away with the spade, Ántonia suggested that we stop at the prairie-dog town and dig into one of the holes. We could find out whether they ran straight down, or were horizontal, like mole-holes; whether they had underground connections; whether the owls had nests down there, lined with feathers. We might get some puppies, or owl eggs, or snake-skins.

The dog-town was spread out over perhaps ten acres. The grass had been nibbled short and even, so this stretch was not shaggy and red like the surrounding country, but gray and velvety. The holes were several yards apart, and were disposed with a good deal of regularity, almost as if the town had been laid out in streets and avenues. One always felt that an orderly and

very sociable kind of life was going on there. I picketed Dude down in a draw, and we went wandering about, looking for a hole that would be easy to dig. The dogs were out, as usual, dozens of them, sitting up on their hind legs over the doors of their houses. As we approached, they barked, shook their tails at us, and scurried underground. Before the mouths of the holes were little patches of sand and gravel, scratched up, we supposed, from a long way below the surface. Here and there, in the town, we came on larger gravel patches, several yards away from any hole. If the dogs had scratched the sand up in excavating, how had they carried it so far? It was on one of these gravel beds that I met my adventure.

We were examining a big hole with two entrances. The burrow sloped into the ground at a gentle angle, so that we could see where the two corridors united, and the floor was dusty from use, like a little highway over which much travel went. I was walking backward, in a crouching position, when I heard *Ántonia* scream. She was standing opposite me, pointing behind me and shouting something in Bohemian. I whirled round, and there, on one of those dry gravel beds, was the biggest snake I had ever seen. He was sunning himself, after the cold night, and he must have been asleep when *Ántonia* screamed. When I turned he was lying in long loose waves, like a letter "W." He twitched and began to coil slowly. He was not merely a big snake, I thought—he was a circus monstrosity. His abominable muscularity, his loathsome, fluid motion, somehow made me sick. He was as thick as my leg, and looked as if millstones couldn't crush the disgusting vitality out of him. He lifted his hideous little head, and rattled. I didn't run because I didn't think of it—if my back had been against a stone wall I couldn't have felt more cornered. I saw his coils tighten—now he would spring, spring his length, I remembered. I ran up and drove at his head with my spade, struck him fairly across the neck, and in a minute he was all about my feet in wavy loops. I struck now from hate. *Ántonia*, barefooted as she was, ran up behind me. Even after I had pounded his ugly head flat, his body kept on coiling and winding, doubling and falling back on itself. I walked away and turned my back. I felt seasick. *Ántonia* came after me, crying, "O Jimmy, he not bite you? You sure? Why you not run when I say?"

"What did you jabber Bohunk⁹ for? You might have told me there was a snake behind me!" I said petulantly.

"I know I am just awful, Jim, I was so scared." She took my handkerchief from my pocket and tried to wipe my face with it, but I snatched it away from her. I suppose I looked as sick as I felt.

"I never know you was so brave, Jim," she went on comfortingly. "You is just like big mans; you wait for him lift his head and then you go for him. Ain't you feel scared a bit? Now we take that snake home and show everybody. Nobody ain't seen in this kawn-tree so big snake like you kill."

She went on in this strain until I began to think that I had longed for this opportunity, and had hailed it with joy. Cautiously we went back to the snake; he was still groping with his tail, turning up his ugly belly in the light. A faint, fetid smell came from him, and a thread of green liquid oozed from his crushed head.

"Look, Tony, that's his poison," I said.

9. Bohemian (slang).

I took a long piece of string from my pocket, and she lifted his head with the spade while I tied a noose around it. We pulled him out straight and measured him by my riding-quirt;¹ he was about five and a half feet long. He had twelve rattles, but they were broken off before they began to taper, so I insisted that he must once have had twenty-four. I explained to Ántonia how this meant that he was twenty-four years old, that he must have been there when white men first came, left on from buffalo and Indian times. As I turned him over I began to feel proud of him, to have a kind of respect for his age and size. He seemed like the ancient, eldest Evil. Certainly his kind have left horrible unconscious memories in all warm-blooded life. When we dragged him down into the draw, Dude sprang off to the end of his tether and shivered all over—wouldn't let us come near him.

We decided that Ántonia should ride Dude home, and I would walk. As she rode along slowly, her bare legs swinging against the pony's sides, she kept shouting back to me about how astonished everybody would be. I followed with the spade over my shoulder, dragging my snake. Her exultation was contagious. The great land had never looked to me so big and free. If the red grass were full of rattlers, I was equal to them all. Nevertheless, I stole furtive glances behind me now and then to see that no avenging mate, older and bigger than my quarry, was racing up from the rear.

The sun had set when we reached our garden and went down the draw toward the house. Otto Fuchs was the first one we met. He was sitting on the edge of the cattle-pond, having a quiet pipe before supper. Ántonia called him to come quick and look. He did not say anything for a minute, but scratched his head and turned the snake over with his boot.

"Where did you run onto that beauty, Jim?"

"Up at the dog-town," I answered laconically.

"Kill him yourself? How come you to have a weepo?"

"We'd been up to Russian Peter's, to borrow a spade for Ambrosch."

Otto shook the ashes out of his pipe and squatted down to count the rattles. "It was just luck you had a tool," he said cautiously. "Gosh! I wouldn't want to do any business with that fellow myself, unless I had a fence-post along. Your grandmother's snake-cane wouldn't more than tickle him. He could stand right up and talk to you, he could. Did he fight hard?"

Ántonia broke in: "He fight something awful! He is all over Jimmy's boots. I scream for him to run, but he just hit and hit that snake like he was crazy."

Otto winked at me. After Ántonia rode on he said: "Got him in the head first crack, didn't you? That was just as well."

We hung him up to the windmill, and when I went down to the kitchen I found Ántonia standing in the middle of the floor, telling the story with a great deal of color.

Subsequent experiences with rattlesnakes taught me that my first encounter was fortunate in circumstance. My big rattler was old, and had led too easy a life; there was not much fight in him. He had probably lived there for years, with a fat prairie dog for breakfast whenever he felt like it, a sheltered home, even an owl-feather bed, perhaps, and he had forgot that the world doesn't owe rattlers a living. A snake of his size, in fighting trim, would be more than any boy could handle. So in reality it was a mock adventure;

1. A whip with a short handle and rawhide lash.

the game was fixed for me by chance, as it probably was for many a dragon-slayer. I had been adequately armed by Russian Peter; the snake was old and lazy; and I had *Ántonia* beside me, to appreciate and admire.

That snake hung on our corral fence for several days; some of the neighbors came to see it and agreed that it was the biggest rattler ever killed in those parts. This was enough for *Ántonia*. She liked me better from that time on, and she never took a supercilious air with me again. I had killed a big snake—I was now a big fellow.

VIII

While the autumn color was growing pale on the grass and cornfields, things went badly with our friends the Russians. Peter told his troubles to Mr. Shimerda: he was unable to meet a note which fell due on the first of November; had to pay an exorbitant bonus on renewing it, and to give a mortgage on his pigs and horses and even his milk cow. His creditor was Wick Cutter, the merciless Black Hawk money-lender, a man of evil name throughout the county, of whom I shall have more to say later. Peter could give no very clear account of his transactions with Cutter. He only knew that he had first borrowed two hundred dollars, then another hundred, then fifty—that each time a bonus was added to the principal, and the debt grew faster than any crop he planted. Now everything was plastered with mortgages.

Soon after Peter renewed his note, Pavel strained himself lifting timbers for a new barn, and fell over among the shavings with such a gush of blood from the lungs that his fellow-workmen thought he would die on the spot. They hauled him home and put him into his bed, and there he lay, very ill indeed. Misfortune seemed to settle like an evil bird on the roof of the log house, and to flap its wings there, warning human beings away. The Russians had such bad luck that people were afraid of them and liked to put them out of mind.

One afternoon *Ántonia* and her father came over to our house to get buttermilk, and lingered, as they usually did, until the sun was low. Just as they were leaving, Russian Peter drove up. Pavel was very bad, he said, and wanted to talk to Mr. Shimerda and his daughter; he had come to fetch them. When *Ántonia* and her father got into the wagon, I entreated grandmother to let me go with them: I would gladly go without my supper, I would sleep in the Shimerdas' barn and run home in the morning. My plan must have seemed very foolish to her, but she was often large-minded about humoring the desires of other people. She asked Peter to wait a moment, and when she came back from the kitchen she brought a bag of sandwiches and doughnuts for us.

Mr. Shimerda and Peter were on the front seat; *Ántonia* and I sat in the straw behind and ate our lunch as we bumped along. After the sun sank, a cold wind sprang up and moaned over the prairie. If this turn in the weather had come sooner, I should not have got away. We burrowed down in the straw and curled up close together, watching the angry red die out of the west and the stars begin to shine in the clear, windy sky. Peter kept sighing and groaning. Tony whispered to me that he was afraid Pavel would never get well. We lay still and did not talk. Up there the stars grew magnificently bright. Though we had come from such different parts of the world, in both

of us there was some dusky superstition that those shining groups have their influence upon what is and what is not to be. Perhaps Russian Peter, come from farther away than any of us, had brought from his land, too, some such belief.

The little house on the hillside was so much the color of the night that we could not see it as we came up the draw. The ruddy windows guided us—the light from the kitchen stove, for there was no lamp burning.

We entered softly. The man in the wide bed seemed to be asleep. Tony and I sat down on the bench by the wall and leaned our arms on the table in front of us. The firelight flickered on the hewn logs that supported the thatch overhead. Pavel made a rasping sound when he breathed, and he kept moaning. We waited. The wind shook the doors and windows impatiently, then swept on again, singing through the big spaces. Each gust, as it bore down, rattled the panes, and swelled off like the others. They made me think of defeated armies, retreating; or of ghosts who were trying desperately to get in for shelter, and then went moaning on. Presently, in one of those sobbing intervals between the blasts, the coyotes tuned up with their whining howl; one, two, three, then all together—to tell us that winter was coming. This sound brought an answer from the bed,—a long complaining cry,—as if Pavel were having bad dreams or were waking to some old misery. Peter listened, but did not stir. He was sitting on the floor by the kitchen stove. The coyotes broke out again; yap, yap, yap—then the high whine. Pavel called for something and struggled up on his elbow.

“He is scared of the wolves,” Ántonia whispered to me. “In his country there are very many, and they eat men and women.” We slid closer together along the bench.

I could not take my eyes off the man in the bed. His shirt was hanging open, and his emaciated chest, covered with yellow bristle, rose and fell horribly. He began to cough. Peter shuffled to his feet, caught up the tea-kettle and mixed him some hot water and whiskey. The sharp smell of spirits² went through the room.

Pavel snatched the cup and drank, then made Peter give him the bottle and slipped it under his pillow, grinning disagreeably, as if he had outwitted some one. His eyes followed Peter about the room with a contemptuous, unfriendly expression. It seemed to me that he despised him for being so simple and docile.

Presently Pavel began to talk to Mr. Shimerda, scarcely above a whisper. He was telling a long story, and as he went on, Ántonia took my hand under the table and held it tight. She leaned forward and strained her ears to hear him. He grew more and more excited, and kept pointing all around his bed, as if there were things there and he wanted Mr. Shimerda to see them.

“It’s wolves, Jimmy,” Ántonia whispered. “It’s awful, what he says!”

The sick man raged and shook his fist. He seemed to be cursing people who had wronged him. Mr. Shimerda caught him by the shoulders, but could hardly hold him in bed. At last he was shut off by a coughing fit which fairly choked him. He pulled a cloth from under his pillow and held it to his mouth. Quickly it was covered with bright red spots—I thought I had never seen any blood so bright. When he lay down and turned his face to the wall,

2. Alcohol.

all the rage had gone out of him. He lay patiently fighting for breath, like a child with croup. *Ántonia's* father uncovered one of his long bony legs and rubbed it rhythmically. From our bench we could see what a hollow case his body was. His spine and shoulder-blades stood out like the bones under the hide of a dead steer left in the fields. The sharp backbone must have hurt him when he lay on it.

Gradually, relief came to all of us. Whatever it was, the worst was over. Mr. Shimerda signed to us that Pavel was asleep. Without a word Peter got up and lit his lantern. He was going out to get his team to drive us home. Mr. Shimerda went with him. We sat and watched the long bowed back under the blue sheet, scarcely daring to breathe.

On the way home, when we were lying in the straw, under the jolting and rattling *Ántonia* told me as much of the story as she could. What she did not tell me then, she told later; we talked of nothing else for days afterward.

When Pavel and Peter were young men, living at home in Russia, they were asked to be groomsmen for a friend who was to marry the belle of another village. It was in the dead of winter and the groom's party went over to the wedding in sledges. Peter and Pavel drove in the groom's sledge, and six sledges followed with all his relatives and friends.

After the ceremony at the church, the party went to a dinner given by the parents of the bride. The dinner lasted all afternoon; then it became a supper and continued far into the night. There was much dancing and drinking. At midnight the parents of the bride said good-bye to her and blessed her. The groom took her up in his arms and carried her out to his sledge and tucked her under the blankets. He sprang in beside her, and Pavel and Peter (our Pavel and Peter!) took the front seat. Pavel drove. The party set out with singing and the jingle of sleigh-bells, the groom's sledge going first. All the drivers were more or less the worse for merry-making, and the groom was absorbed in his bride.

The wolves were bad that winter, and every one knew it, yet when they heard the first wolf-cry, the drivers were not much alarmed. They had too much good food and drink inside them. The first howls were taken up and echoed and with quickening repetitions. The wolves were coming together. There was no moon, but the starlight was clear on the snow. A black drove came up over the hill behind the wedding party. The wolves ran like streaks of shadow; they looked no bigger than dogs, but there were hundreds of them.

Something happened to the hindmost sledge: the driver lost control,—he was probably very drunk,—the horses left the road, the sledge was caught in a clump of trees, and overturned. The occupants rolled out over the snow, and the fleetest of the wolves sprang upon them. The shrieks that followed made everybody sober. The drivers stood up and lashed their horses. The groom had the best team and his sledge was lightest—all the others carried from six to a dozen people.

Another driver lost control. The screams of the horses were more terrible to hear than the cries of the men and women. Nothing seemed to check the wolves. It was hard to tell what was happening in the rear; the people who were falling behind shrieked as piteously as those who were already lost. The little bride hid her face on the groom's shoulder and sobbed. Pavel sat still and watched his horses. The road was clear and white, and the groom's

three blacks went like the wind. It was only necessary to be calm and to guide them carefully.

At length, as they breasted a long hill, Peter rose cautiously and looked back. "There are only three sledges left," he whispered.

"And the wolves?" Pavel asked.

"Enough! Enough for all of us."

Pavel reached the brow of the hill, but only two sledges followed him down the other side. In that moment on the hilltop, they saw behind them a whirling black group on the snow. Presently the groom screamed. He saw his father's sledge overturned, with his mother and sisters. He sprang up as if he meant to jump, but the girl shrieked and held him back. It was even then too late. The black ground-shadows were already crowding over the heap in the road, and one horse ran out across the fields, his harness hanging to him, wolves at his heels. But the groom's movement had given Pavel an idea.

They were within a few miles of their village now. The only sledge left out of six was not very far behind them, and Pavel's middle horse was failing. Beside a frozen pond something happened to the other sledge; Peter saw it plainly. Three big wolves got abreast of the horses, and the horses went crazy. They tried to jump over each other, got tangled up in the harness, and overturned the sledge.

When the shrieking behind them died away, Pavel realized that he was alone upon the familiar road. "They still come?" he asked Peter.

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Twenty, thirty—enough."

Now his middle horse was being almost dragged by the other two. Pavel gave Peter the reins and stepped carefully into the back of the sledge. He called to the groom that they must lighten—and pointed to the bride. The young man cursed him and held her tighter. Pavel tried to drag her away. In the struggle, the groom rose. Pavel knocked him over the side of the sledge and threw the girl after him. He said he never remembered exactly how he did it, or what happened afterward. Peter, crouching in the front seat, saw nothing. The first thing either of them noticed was a new sound that broke into the clear air, louder than they had ever heard before—the bell of the monastery of their own village, ringing for early prayers.

Pavel and Peter drove into the village alone, and they had been alone ever since. They were run out of their village. Pavel's own mother would not look at him. They went away to strange towns, but when people learned where they came from, they were always asked if they knew the two men who had fed the bride to the wolves. Wherever they went, the story followed them. It took them five years to save money enough to come to America. They worked in Chicago, Des Moines, Fort Wayne, but they were always unfortunate. When Pavel's health grew so bad, they decided to try farming.

Pavel died a few days after he unburdened his mind to Mr. Shimerda, and was buried in the Norwegian graveyard. Peter sold off everything, and left the country—went to be cook in a railway construction camp where gangs of Russians were employed.

At his sale we bought Peter's wheelbarrow and some of his harness. During the auction he went about with his head down, and never lifted his eyes. He seemed not to care about anything. The Black Hawk money-lender who

held mortgages on Peter's live-stock was there, and he bought in the sale notes at about fifty cents on the dollar. Every one said Peter kissed the cow before she was led away by her new owner. I did not see him do it, but this I know: after all his furniture and his cook-stove and pots and pans had been hauled off by the purchasers, when his house was stripped and bare, he sat down on the floor with his clasp-knife and ate all the melons that he had put away for winter. When Mr. Shimerda and Krajiek drove up in their wagon to take Peter to the train, they found him with a dripping beard, surrounded by heaps of melon rinds.

The loss of his two friends had a depressing effect upon old Mr. Shimerda. When he was out hunting, he used to go into the empty log house and sit there, brooding. This cabin was his hermitage until the winter snows penned him in his cave. For *Ántonia* and me, the story of the wedding party was never at an end. We did not tell Pavel's secret to any one, but guarded it jealously—as if the wolves of the Ukraine had gathered that night long ago, and the wedding party been sacrificed, to give us a painful and peculiar pleasure. At night, before I went to sleep, I often found myself in a sledge drawn by three horses, dashing through a country that looked something like Nebraska and something like Virginia.

IX

The first snowfall came early in December. I remember how the world looked from our sitting-room window as I dressed behind the stove that morning: the low sky was like a sheet of metal; the blond cornfields had faded out into ghostliness at last; the little pond was frozen under its stiff willow bushes. Big white flakes were whirling over everything and disappearing in the red grass.

Beyond the pond, on the slope that climbed to the cornfield, there was, faintly marked in the grass, a great circle where the Indians used to ride. Jake and Otto were sure that when they galloped round that ring the Indians tortured prisoners, bound to a stake in the center; but grandfather thought they merely ran races or trained horses there. Whenever one looked at this slope against the setting sun, the circle showed like a pattern in the grass; and this morning, when the first light spray of snow lay over it, it came out with wonderful distinctness, like strokes of Chinese white on canvas. The old figure stirred me as it had never done before and seemed a good omen for the winter.

As soon as the snow had packed hard I began to drive about the country in a clumsy sleigh that Otto Fuchs made for me by fastening a wooden goods-box on bobs.³ Fuchs had been apprenticed to a cabinet-maker in the old country and was very handy with tools. He would have done a better job if I hadn't hurried him. My first trip was to the post-office, and the next day I went over to take Yulka and *Ántonia* for a sleigh-ride.

It was a bright, cold day. I piled straw and buffalo robes into the box, and took two hot bricks wrapped in old blankets. When I got to the Shimerdas' I did not go up to the house, but sat in my sleigh at the bottom of the draw and called. *Ántonia* and Yulka came running out, wearing little rabbit-skin hats their father had made for them. They had heard about my sledge from

3. Short runners. The sleigh probably had two pairs, one front and one back.

Ambrosch and knew why I had come. They tumbled in beside me and we set off toward the north, along a road that happened to be broken.

The sky was brilliantly blue, and the sunlight on the glittering white stretches of prairie was almost blinding. As Ántonia said, the whole world was changed by the snow; we kept looking in vain for familiar landmarks. The deep arroyo⁴ through which Squaw Creek wound was now only a cleft between snowdrifts—very blue when one looked down into it. The tree-tops that had been gold all the autumn were dwarfed and twisted, as if they would never have any life in them again. The few little cedars, which were so dull and dingy before, now stood out a strong, dusky green. The wind had the burning taste of fresh snow; my throat and nostrils smarted as if some one had opened a hartshorn⁵ bottle. The cold stung, and at the same time delighted one. My horse's breath rose like steam, and whenever we stopped he smoked all over. The cornfields got back a little of their color under the dazzling light, and stood the palest possible gold in the sun and snow. All about us the snow was crusted in shallow terraces, with tracings like ripple-marks at the edges, curly waves that were the actual impression of the stinging lash in the wind.

The girls had on cotton dresses under their shawls; they kept shivering beneath the buffalo robes and hugging each other for warmth. But they were so glad to get away from their ugly cave and their mother's scolding that they begged me to go on and on, as far as Russian Peter's house. The great fresh open, after the stupefying warmth indoors, made them behave like wild things. They laughed and shouted, and said they never wanted to go home again. Couldn't we settle down and live in Russian Peter's house, Yulka asked, and couldn't I go to town and buy things for us to keep house with?

All the way to Russian Peter's we were extravagantly happy, but when we turned back,—it must have been about four o'clock,—the east wind grew stronger and began to howl; the sun lost its heartening power and the sky became gray and somber. I took off my long woolen comforter and wound it around Yulka's throat. She got so cold that we made her hide her head under the buffalo robe. Ántonia and I sat erect, but I held the reins clumsily, and my eyes were blinded by the wind a good deal of the time. It was growing dark when we got to their house, but I refused to go in with them and get warm. I knew my hands would ache terribly if I went near a fire. Yulka forgot to give me back my comforter, and I had to drive home directly against the wind. The next day I came down with an attack of quinsy,⁶ which kept me in the house for nearly two weeks.

The basement kitchen seemed heavenly safe and warm in those days—like a tight little boat in a winter sea. The men were out in the fields all day, husking corn, and when they came in at noon, with long caps pulled down over their ears and their feet in red-lined over-shoes, I used to think they were like Arctic explorers.

In the afternoons, when grandmother sat upstairs darning, or making husking-gloves, I read "The Swiss Family Robinson"⁷ aloud to her, and I felt that the Swiss family had no advantages over us in the way of an adventurous

4. A water-carved gully (Spanish).

5. Ammonia preparation used as a stimulant via nasal inhalation.

6. Severe sore throat.

7. Popular children's novel (1813), by Swiss writer Johann Rudolph Wyss, about how a family wrecked on a desert island manages to survive.

life. I was convinced that man's strongest antagonist is the cold. I admired the cheerful zest with which grandmother went about keeping us warm and comfortable and well-fed. She often reminded me, when she was preparing for the return of the hungry men, that this country was not like Virginia; and that here a cook had, as she said, "very little to do with."⁸ On Sundays she gave us as much chicken as we could eat, and on other days we had ham or bacon or sausage meat. She baked either pies or cake for us every day, unless, for a change, she made my favorite pudding, striped with currants and boiled in a bag.

Next to getting warm and keeping warm, dinner and supper were the most interesting things we had to think about. Our lives centered around warmth and food and the return of the men at nightfall. I used to wonder, when they came in tired from the fields, their feet numb and their hands cracked and sore, how they could do all the chores so conscientiously: feed and water and bed the horses, milk the cows, and look after the pigs. When supper was over, it took them a long while to get the cold out of their bones. While grandmother and I washed the dishes and grandfather read his paper upstairs, Jake and Otto sat on the long bench behind the stove, "easing"⁹ their inside boots, or rubbing mutton tallow into their cracked hands.

Every Saturday night we popped corn or made taffy, and Otto Fuchs used to sing, "For I Am a Cowboy and Know I've Done Wrong," or, "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairee." He had a good baritone voice and always led the singing when we went to church services at the sod schoolhouse.

I can still see those two men sitting on the bench; Otto's close-clipped head and Jake's shaggy hair slicked flat in front by a wet comb. I can see the sag of their tired shoulders against the whitewashed wall. What good fellows they were, how much they knew, and how many things they had kept faith with!

Fuchs had been a cowboy, a stage-driver, a bar-tender, a miner; had wandered all over that great Western country and done hard work everywhere, though, as grandmother said, he had nothing to show for it. Jake was duller than Otto. He could scarcely read, wrote even his name with difficulty, and he had a violent temper which sometimes made him behave like a crazy man—tore him all to pieces and actually made him ill. But he was so soft-hearted that any one could impose upon him. If he, as he said, "forgot himself" and swore before grandmother, he went about depressed and shamefaced all day. They were both of them jovial about the cold in winter and the heat in summer, always ready to work overtime and to meet emergencies. It was a matter of pride with them not to spare themselves. Yet they were the sort of men who never get on, somehow, or do anything but work hard for a dollar or two a day.

On those bitter, starlit nights, as we sat around the old stove that fed us and warmed us and kept us cheerful, we could hear the coyotes howling down by the corrals, and their hungry, wintry cry used to remind the boys of wonderful animal stories; about gray wolves and bears in the Rockies, wildcats and panthers in the Virginia mountains. Sometimes Fuchs could be persuaded to talk about the outlaws and desperate characters he had known. I remember one funny story about himself that made grandmother,

8. I.e., the range of foodstuffs available on the prairie is extremely limited.

9. Manipulating the inside of the boot to soften it.

who was working her bread on the bread-board, laugh until she wiped her eyes with her bare arm, her hands being floury. It was like this:—

When Otto left Austria to come to America, he was asked by one of his relatives to look after a woman who was crossing on the same boat, to join her husband in Chicago. The woman started off with two children, but it was clear that her family might grow larger on the journey. Fuchs said he “got on fine with the kids,” and liked the mother, though she played a sorry trick on him. In mid-ocean she proceeded to have not one baby, but three! This event made Fuchs the object of undeserved notoriety, since he was traveling with her. The steerage stewardess was indignant with him, the doctor regarded him with suspicion. The first-cabin passengers, who made up a purse for the woman, took an embarrassing interest in Otto, and often inquired of him about his charge. When the triplets were taken ashore at New York, he had, as he said, “to carry some of them.” The trip to Chicago was even worse than the ocean voyage. On the train it was very difficult to get milk for the babies and to keep their bottles clean. The mother did her best, but no woman, out of her natural resources, could feed three babies. The husband, in Chicago, was working in a furniture factory for modest wages, and when he met his family at the station he was rather crushed by the size of it. He, too, seemed to consider Fuchs in some fashion to blame. “I was sure glad,” Otto concluded, “that he didn’t take his hard feeling out on that poor woman; but he had a sullen eye for me, all right! Now, did you ever hear of a young feller’s having such hard luck, Mrs. Burden?”

Grandmother told him she was sure the Lord had remembered these things to his credit, and had helped him out of many a scrape when he didn’t realize that he was being protected by Providence.

X

For several weeks after my sleigh-ride, we heard nothing from the Shimerdas. My sore throat kept me indoors, and grandmother had a cold which made the housework heavy for her. When Sunday came she was glad to have a day of rest. One night at supper Fuchs told us he had seen Mr. Shimerda out hunting.

“He’s made himself a rabbit-skin cap, Jim, and a rabbit-skin collar that he buttons on outside his coat. They ain’t got but one overcoat among ’em over there, and they take turns wearing it. They seem awful scared of cold, and stick in that hole in the bank like badgers.”

“All but the crazy boy,” Jake put in. “He never wears the coat. Krajiek says he’s turrrible strong and can stand anything. I guess rabbits must be getting scarce in this locality. Ambrosch come along by the cornfield yesterday where I was at work and showed me three prairie dogs he’d shot. He asked me if they was good to eat. I spit and made a face and took on, to scare him, but he just looked like he was smarter’n me and put ’em back in his sack and walked off.”

Grandmother looked up in alarm and spoke to grandfather. “Josiah, you don’t suppose Krajiek would let them poor creatures eat prairie dogs, do you?”

“You had better go over and see our neighbors to-morrow, Emmaline,” he replied gravely.

Fuchs put in a cheerful word and said prairie dogs were clean beasts and ought to be good for food, but their family connections were against them.

I asked what he meant, and he grinned and said they belonged to the rat family.

When I went downstairs in the morning, I found grandmother and Jake packing a hamper basket in the kitchen.

"Now, Jake," grandmother was saying, "if you can find that old rooster that got his comb froze, just give his neck a twist, and we'll take him along. There's no good reason why Mrs. Shimerda couldn't have got hens from her neighbors last fall and had a henhouse going by now. I reckon she was confused and didn't know where to begin. I've come strange to a new country myself, but I never forgot hens are a good thing to have, no matter what you don't have."

"Just as you say, mam," said Jake, "but I hate to think of Krajiek getting a leg of that old rooster." He tramped out through the long cellar and dropped the heavy door behind him.

After breakfast grandmother and Jake and I bundled ourselves up and climbed into the cold front wagon-seat. As we approached the Shimerdas' we heard the frosty whine of the pump and saw *Ántonia*, her head tied up and her cotton dress blown about her, throwing all her weight on the pump-handle as it went up and down. She heard our wagon, looked back over her shoulder, and catching up her pail of water, started at a run for the hole in the bank.

Jake helped grandmother to the ground, saying he would bring the provisions after he had blanketed his horses. We went slowly up the icy path toward the door sunk in the drawside. Blue puffs of smoke came from the stovepipe that stuck out through the grass and snow, but the wind whisked them roughly away.

Mrs. Shimerda opened the door before we knocked and seized grandmother's hand. She did not say "How do!" as usual, but at once began to cry, talking very fast in her own language, pointing to her feet which were tied up in rags, and looking about accusingly at every one.

The old man was sitting on a stump behind the stove, crouching over as if he were trying to hide from us. Yulka was on the floor at his feet, her kitten in her lap. She peeped out at me and smiled, but, glancing up at her mother, hid again. *Ántonia* was washing pans and dishes in a dark corner. The crazy boy lay under the only window, stretched on a gunnysack¹ stuffed with straw. As soon as we entered he threw a grainsack over the crack at the bottom of the door. The air in the cave was stifling, and it was very dark, too. A lighted lantern, hung over the stove, threw out a feeble yellow glimmer.

Mrs. Shimerda snatched off the covers of two barrels behind the door, and made us look into them. In one there were some potatoes that had been frozen and were rotting, in the other was a little pile of flour. Grandmother murmured something in embarrassment, but the Bohemian woman laughed scornfully, a kind of whinny-laugh, and catching up an empty coffee-pot from the shelf, shook it at us with a look positively vindictive.

Grandmother went on talking in her polite Virginia way, not admitting their stark need or her own remissness, until Jake arrived with the hamper, as if in direct answer to Mrs. Shimerda's reproaches. Then the poor woman broke down. She dropped on the floor beside her crazy son, hid her face on

1. Large sack made from gunny, a coarse heavy fabric.

her knees, and sat crying bitterly. Grandmother paid no heed to her, but called Ántonia to come and help empty the basket. Tony left her corner reluctantly. I had never seen her crushed like this before.

"You not mind my poor *mamenka*, Mrs. Burden. She is so sad," she whispered, as she wiped her wet hands on her skirt and took the things grandmother handed her.

The crazy boy, seeing the food, began to make soft, gurgling noises and stroked his stomach. Jake came in again, this time with a sack of potatoes. Grandmother looked about in perplexity.

"Haven't you got any sort of cave or cellar outside, Ántonia? This is no place to keep vegetables. How did your potatoes get frozen?"

"We get from Mr. Bushy, at the post-office,—what he throw out. We got no potatoes, Mrs. Burden," Tony admitted mournfully.

When Jake went out, Marek crawled along the floor and stuffed up the door-crack again. Then, quietly as a shadow, Mr. Shimerda came out from behind the stove. He stood brushing his hand over his smooth gray hair, as if he were trying to clear away a fog about his head. He was clean and neat as usual, with his green neckcloth and his coral pin. He took grandmother's arm and led her behind the stove, to the back of the room. In the rear wall was another little cave; a round hole, not much bigger than an oil barrel, scooped out in the black earth. When I got up on one of the stools and peered into it, I saw some quilts and a pile of straw. The old man held the lantern. "Yulka," he said in a low, despairing voice, "Yulka; my Ántonia!"

Grandmother drew back. "You mean they sleep in there,—your girls?" He bowed his head.

Tony slipped under his arm. "It is very cold on the floor, and this is warm like the badger hole. I like for sleep there," she insisted eagerly. "My *mamenka* have nice bed, with pillows from our own geese in Bohemie. See, Jim?" She pointed to the narrow bunk which Krajiek had built against the wall for himself before the Shimerdas came.

Grandmother sighed. "Sure enough, where *would* you sleep, dear! I don't doubt you're warm there. You'll have a better house after while, Ántonia, and then you'll forget these hard times."

Mr. Shimerda made grandmother sit down on the only chair and pointed his wife to a stool beside her. Standing before them with his hand on Ántonia's shoulder, he talked in a low tone, and his daughter translated. He wanted us to know that they were not beggars in the old country; he made good wages, and his family were respected there. He left Bohemia with more than a thousand dollars in savings, after their passage money was paid. He had in some way lost on exchange in New York, and the railway fare to Nebraska was more than they had expected. By the time they paid Krajiek for the land, and bought his horses and oxen and some old farm machinery, they had very little money left. He wished grandmother to know, however, that he still had some money. If they could get through until spring came, they would buy a cow and chickens and plant a garden, and would then do very well. Ambrosch and Ántonia were both old enough to work in the fields, and they were willing to work. But the snow and the bitter weather had disheartened them all.

Ántonia explained that her father meant to build a new house for them in the spring; he and Ambrosch had already split the logs for it, but the logs were all buried in the snow, along the creek where they had been felled.

While grandmother encouraged and gave them advice, I sat down on the floor with Yulka and let her show me her kitten. Marek slid cautiously toward us and began to exhibit his webbed fingers. I knew he wanted to make his queer noises for me—to bark like a dog or whinny like a horse,—but he did not dare in the presence of his elders. Marek was always trying to be agreeable, poor fellow, as if he had it on his mind that he must make up for his deficiencies.

Mrs. Shimerda grew more calm and reasonable before our visit was over, and, while Antonia translated, put in a word now and then on her own account. The woman had a quick ear, and caught up phrases whenever she heard English spoken. As we rose to go, she opened her wooden chest and brought out a bag made of bed-ticking, about as long as a flour sack and half as wide, stuffed full of something. At sight of it, the crazy boy began to smack his lips. When Mrs. Shimerda opened the bag and stirred the contents with her hand, it gave out a salty, earthy smell, very pungent, even among the other odors of that cave. She measured a teacup full, tied it up in a bit of sacking, and presented it ceremoniously to grandmother.

“For cook,” she announced. “Little now; be very much when cook,” spreading out her hands as if to indicate that the pint would swell to a gallon. “Very good. You no have in this country. All things for eat better in my country.”

“Maybe so, Mrs. Shimerda,” grandmother said drily. “I can’t say but I prefer our bread to yours, myself.”

Antonia undertook to explain. “This very good, Mrs. Burden,—” she clasped her hands as if she could not express how good,—“it make very much when you cook, like what my mama say. Cook with rabbit, cook with chicken, in the gravy,—oh, so good!”

All the way home grandmother and Jake talked about how easily good Christian people could forget they were their brothers’ keepers.

“I will say, Jake, some of our brothers and sisters are hard to keep: Where’s a body to begin, with these people? They’re wanting in everything, and most of all in horse-sense. Nobody can give ’em that, I guess. Jimmy, here, is about as able to take over a homestead as they are. Do you reckon that boy Ambrosch has any real push in him?”

“He’s a worker, all right, mam, and he’s got some ketch-on² about him; but he’s a mean one. Folks can be mean enough to get on in this world; and then, ag’in, they can be too mean.”

That night, while grandmother was getting supper, we opened the package Mrs. Shimerda had given her. It was full of little brown chips that looked like the shavings of some root. They were as light as feathers, and the most noticeable thing about them was their penetrating, earthy odor. We could not determine whether they were animal or vegetable.

“They might be dried meat from some queer beast, Jim. They ain’t dried fish, and they never grew on stalk or vine. I’m afraid of ’em. Anyhow, I shouldn’t want to eat anything that had been shut up for months with old clothes and goose pillows.”

She threw the package into the stove, but I bit off a corner of one of the chips I held in my hand, and chewed it tentatively. I never forgot the strange taste; though it was many years before I knew that those little brown shav-

2. Alertness (slang); literally, the ability to catch on.

ings, which the Shimerdas had brought so far and treasured so jealously, were dried mushrooms. They had been gathered, probably, in some deep Bohemian forest.

XI

During the week before Christmas, Jake was the most important person of our household, for he was to go to town and do all our Christmas shopping. But on the 21st of December, the snow began to fall. The flakes came down so thickly that from the sitting-room windows I could not see beyond the windmill—its frame looked dim and gray, unsubstantial like a shadow. The snow did not stop falling all day, or during the night that followed. The cold was not severe, but the storm was quiet and resistless. The men could not go farther than the barns and corral. They sat about the house most of the day as if it were Sunday; greasing their boots, mending their suspenders, plaiting whiplashes.

On the morning of the 22d, grandfather announced at breakfast that it would be impossible to go to Black Hawk for Christmas purchases. Jake was sure he could get through on horseback, and bring home our things in saddle-bags; but grandfather told him the roads would be obliterated, and a newcomer in the country would be lost ten times over. Anyway, he would never allow one of his horses to be put to such a strain.

We decided to have a country Christmas, without any help from town. I had wanted to get some picture-books for Yulka and Ántonia; even Yulka was able to read a little now. Grandmother took me into the ice-cold storeroom, where she had some bolts of gingham and sheeting. She cut squares of cotton cloth and we sewed them together into a book. We bound it between pasteboards, which I covered with brilliant calico, representing scenes from a circus. For two days I sat at the dining-room table, pasting this book full of pictures for Yulka. We had files of those good old family magazines which used to publish colored lithographs of popular paintings, and I was allowed to use some of these. I took "Napoleon Announcing the Divorce to Josephine"³ for my frontispiece. On the white pages I grouped Sunday-School cards and advertising cards which I had brought from my "old country." Fuchs got out the old candle-moulds and made tallow candles. Grandmother hunted up her fancy cake-cutters and baked gingerbread men and roosters, which we decorated with burnt sugar and red cinnamon drops.

On the day before Christmas, Jake packed the things we were sending to the Shimerdas in his saddle-bags and set off on grandfather's gray gelding. When he mounted his horse at the door, I saw that he had a hatchet slung to his belt, and he gave grandmother a meaning look which told me he was planning a surprise for me. That afternoon I watched long and eagerly from the sitting-room window. At last I saw a dark spot moving on the west hill, beside the half-buried cornfield, where the sky was taking on a coppery flush from the sun that did not quite break through. I put on my cap and ran out to meet Jake. When I got to the pond I could see that he was bringing in a little cedar tree across his pommel. He used to help my father cut Christmas trees for me in Virginia, and he had not forgotten how much I liked them.

3. Josephine (1763–1814), empress of France and wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, who married her in 1796 and divorced her in 1809 to marry Marie

Louise, daughter of the Austrian emperor. In American popular culture, she became a symbol of the deserted wife.

By the time we had placed the cold, fresh-smelling little tree in a corner of the sitting-room, it was already Christmas Eve. After supper we all gathered there, and even grandfather, reading his paper by the table, looked up with friendly interest now and then. The cedar was about five feet high and very shapely. We hung it with the gingerbread animals, strings of popcorn, and bits of candle which Fuchs had fitted into pasteboard sockets. Its real splendors, however, came from the most unlikely place in the world—from Otto's cowboy trunk. I had never seen anything in that trunk but old boots and spurs and pistols, and a fascinating mixture of yellow leather thongs, cartridges, and shoemaker's wax. From under the lining he now produced a collection of brilliantly colored paper figures, several inches high and stiff enough to stand alone. They had been sent to him year after year, by his old mother in Austria. There was a bleeding heart, in tufts of paper lace; there were the three kings, gorgeously appareled, and the ox and the ass and the shepherds; there was the Baby in the manger, and a group of angels, singing; there were camels and leopards, held by the black slaves of the three kings. Our tree became the talking tree of the fairy tale; legends and stories nestled like birds in its branches. Grandmother said it reminded her of the Tree of Knowledge. We put sheets of cotton wool under it for a snow-field, and Jake's pocket-mirror for a frozen lake.

I can see them now, exactly as they looked, working about the table in the lamplight: Jake with his heavy features, so rudely moulded that his face seemed, somehow, unfinished; Otto with his half-ear and the savage scar that made his upper lip curl so ferociously under his twisted mustache. As I remember them, what unprotected faces they were; their very roughness and violence made them defenseless. These boys had no practiced manner behind which they could retreat and hold people at a distance. They had only their hard fists to batter at the world with. Otto was already one of those drifting, case-hardened laborers who never marry or have children of their own. Yet he was so fond of children!

XII

On Christmas morning, when I got down to the kitchen, the men were just coming in from their morning chores—the horses and pigs always had their breakfast before we did. Jake and Otto shouted "Merry Christmas"! to me, and winked at each other when they saw the waffle-irons on the stove. Grandfather came down, wearing a white shirt and his Sunday coat. Morning prayers were longer than usual. He read the chapters from St. Matthew about the birth of Christ, and as we listened it all seemed like something that had happened lately, and near at hand. In his prayer he thanked the Lord for the first Christmas, and for all that it had meant to the world ever since. He gave thanks for our food and comfort, and prayed for the poor and destitute in great cities, where the struggle for life was harder than it was here with us. Grandfather's prayers were often very interesting. He had the gift of simple and moving expression. Because he talked so little, his words had a peculiar force; they were not worn dull from constant use. His prayers reflected what he was thinking about at the time, and it was chiefly through them that we got to know his feelings and his views about things.

After we sat down to our waffles and sausage, Jake told us how pleased the Shimerdas had been with their presents; even Ambrosch was friendly and went to the creek with him to cut the Christmas tree. It was a soft gray day outside, with heavy clouds working across the sky, and occasional squalls of snow. There were always odd jobs to be done about the barn on holidays, and the men were busy until afternoon. Then Jake and I played dominoes, while Otto wrote a long letter home to his mother. He always wrote to her on Christmas Day, he said, no matter where he was, and no matter how long it had been since his last letter. All afternoon he sat in the dining-room. He would write for a while, then sit idle, his clenched fist lying on the table, his eyes following the pattern of the oilcloth. He spoke and wrote his own language so seldom that it came to him awkwardly. His effort to remember entirely absorbed him.

At about four o'clock a visitor appeared: Mr. Shimerda, wearing his rabbit-skin cap and collar, and new mittens his wife had knitted. He had come to thank us for the presents, and for all grandmother's kindness to his family. Jake and Otto joined us from the basement and we sat about the stove, enjoying the deepening gray of the winter afternoon and the atmosphere of comfort and security in my grandfather's house. This feeling seemed completely to take possession of Mr. Shimerda. I suppose, in the crowded clutter of their cave, the old man had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from the earth, or existed only in the old world he had left so far behind. He sat still and passive, his head resting against the back of the wooden rocking-chair, his hands relaxed upon the arms. His face had a look of weariness and pleasure, like that of sick people when they feel relief from pain. Grandmother insisted on his drinking a glass of Virginia apple-brandy after his long walk in the cold, and when a faint flush came up in his cheeks, his features might have been cut out of a shell, they were so transparent. He said almost nothing, and smiled rarely; but as he rested there we all had a sense of his utter content.

As it grew dark, I asked whether I might light the Christmas tree before the lamp was brought. When the candle ends sent up their conical yellow flames, all the colored figures from Austria stood out clear and full of meaning against the green boughs. Mr. Shimerda rose, crossed himself, and quietly knelt down before the tree, his head sunk forward. His long body formed a letter "S." I saw grandmother look apprehensively at grandfather. He was rather narrow in religious matters, and sometimes spoke out and hurt people's feelings. There had been nothing strange about the tree before, but now, with some one kneeling before it,—images, candles, . . . Grandfather merely put his fingertips to his brow and bowed his venerable head, thus Protestantizing the atmosphere.⁴

We persuaded our guest to stay for supper with us. He needed little urging. As we sat down to the table, it occurred to me that he liked to look at us, and that our faces were open books to him. When his deep-seeing eyes rested on me, I felt as if he were looking far ahead into the future for me, down the road I would have to travel.

4. Traditional forms of Protestantism (the Burdens are Baptists) strongly opposed modes of worship involving images, statues, and rituals, which were interpreted as superstitions. It is therefore

notable when, at the end of the chapter, Grandfather justifies Mr. Shimerda's making the sign of the cross.

At nine o'clock Mr. Shimerda lighted one of our lanterns and put on his overcoat and fur collar. He stood in the little entry hall, the lantern and his fur cap under his arm, shaking hands with us. When he took grandmother's hand, he bent over it as he always did, and said slowly, "Good wo-man!" He made the sign of the cross over me, put on his cap and went off in the dark. As we turned back to the sitting-room, grandfather looked at me searchingly. "The prayers of all good people are good," he said quietly.

XIII

The week following Christmas brought in a thaw, and by New Year's Day all the world about us was a broth of gray slush, and the guttered slope between the windmill and the barn was running black water. The soft black earth stood out in patches along the roadsides. I resumed all my chores, carried in the cobs and wood and water, and spent the afternoons at the barn, watching Jake shell corn with a hand-sheller.

One morning, during this interval of fine weather, *Ántonia* and her mother rode over on one of their shaggy old horses to pay us a visit. It was the first time Mrs. Shimerda had been to our house, and she ran about examining our carpets and curtains and furniture, all the while commenting upon them to her daughter in an envious, complaining tone. In the kitchen she caught up an iron pot that stood on the back of the stove and said: "You got many, Shimerdas no got." I thought it weak-minded of grandmother to give the pot to her.

After dinner, when she was helping to wash the dishes, she said, tossing her head: "You got many things for cook. If I got all things like you, I make much better."

She was a conceited, boastful old thing, and even misfortune could not humble her. I was so annoyed that I felt coldly even toward *Ántonia* and listened unsympathetically when she told me her father was not well.

"My papa sad for the old country. He not look good. He never make music any more. At home he play violin all the time; for weddings and for dance. Here never. When I beg him for play, he shake his head no. Some days he take his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on the strings, like this, but never he make the music. He don't like this kawn-tree."

"People who don't like this country ought to stay at home," I said severely. "We don't make them come here."

"He not want to come, nev-er!" she burst out. "My *mamenka* make him come. All the time she say: 'America big country; much money, much land for my boys, much husband for my girls.' My papa, he cry for leave his old friends what make music with him. He love very much the man what play the long horn like this"—she indicated a slide trombone. "They go to school together and are friends from boys. But my mama, she want Ambrosch for be rich, with many cattle."

"Your mama," I said angrily, "wants other people's things."

"Your grandfather is rich," she retorted fiercely. "Why he not help my papa? Ambrosch be rich, too, after while, and he pay back. He is very smart boy. For Ambrosch my mama come here."

Ambrosch was considered the important person in the family. Mrs. Shimerda and *Ántonia* always deferred to him, though he was often surly with them and contemptuous toward his father. Ambrosch and his mother had

everything their own way. Though Ántonia loved her father more than she did any one else, she stood in awe of her elder brother.

After I watched Ántonia and her mother go over the hill on their miserable horse, carrying our iron pot with them, I turned to grandmother, who had taken up her darning, and said I hoped that snooping old woman wouldn't come to see us any more.

Grandmother chuckled and drove her bright needle across a hole in Otto's sock. "She's not old, Jim, though I expect she seems old to you. No, I wouldn't mourn, if she never came again. But, you see, a body never knows what traits poverty might bring out in 'em. It makes a woman grasping to see her children want for things. Now read me a chapter in 'The Prince of the House of David.'⁵ Let's forget the Bohemians."

We had three weeks of this mild, open weather. The cattle in the corral ate corn almost as fast as the men could shell it for them, and we hoped they would be ready for an early market. One morning the two big bulls, Gladstone and Brigham Young,⁶ thought spring had come, and they began to tease and butt at each other across the barbed wire that separated them. Soon they got angry. They bellowed and pawed up the soft earth with their hoofs, rolling their eyes and tossing their heads. Each withdrew to a far corner of his own corral, and then they made for each other at a gallop. Thud, thud, we could hear the impact of their great heads, and their bellowing shook the pans on the kitchen shelves. Had they not been dehorned, they would have torn each other to pieces. Pretty soon the fat steers took it up and began butting and horning each other. Clearly, the affair had to be stopped. We all stood by and watched admiringly while Fuchs rode into the corral with a pitchfork and prodded the bulls again and again, finally driving them apart.

The big storm of the winter began on my eleventh birthday, the 20th of January. When I went down to breakfast that morning, Jake and Otto came in white as snow-men, beating their hands and stamping their feet. They began to laugh boisterously when they saw me, calling:—

"You've got a birthday present this time, Jim, and no mistake. They was a full-grown blizzard ordered for you."

All day the storm went on. The snow did not fall this time, it simply spilled out of heaven, like thousands of feather-beds being emptied. That afternoon the kitchen was a carpenter-shop; the men brought in their tools and made two great wooden shovels with long handles. Neither grandmother nor I could go out in the storm, so Jake fed the chickens and brought in a pitiful contribution of eggs.

Next day our men had to shovel until noon to reach the barn—and the snow was still falling! There had not been such a storm in the ten years my grandfather had lived in Nebraska. He said at dinner that we would not try to reach the cattle—they were fat enough to go without their corn for a day or two; but to-morrow we must feed them and thaw out their water-tap so that they could drink. We could not so much as see the corrals, but we knew the steers were over there, huddled together under the north bank.

5. Best-selling American novel of 1855, by Joseph Holt Ingraham (1809–1860); based on the life of Jesus Christ. A pious household like the Burdens' would oppose novel reading in general; biblical novels would be exceptions.

6. Mormon leader (1801–1877) who led the Mormons to Salt Lake City in 1846–47 and directed the settlement there. William Gladstone (1809–1898), English statesman who was prime minister four times. The two bulls are humorously named.

Our ferocious bulls, subdued enough by this time, were probably warming each other's backs. "This'll take the bile out of 'em!" Fuchs remarked gleefully.

At noon that day the hens had not been heard from. After dinner Jake and Otto, their damp clothes now dried on them, stretched their stiff arms and plunged again into the drifts. They made a tunnel under the snow to the henhouse, with walls so solid that grandmother and I could walk back and forth in it. We found the chickens asleep; perhaps they thought night had come to stay. One old rooster was stirring about, pecking at the solid lump of ice in their water-tin. When we flashed the lantern in their eyes, the hens set up a great cackling and flew about clumsily, scattering down-feathers. The mottled, pinheaded, guinea-hens, always resentful of captivity, ran screeching out into the tunnel and tried to poke their ugly, painted faces through the snow walls. By five o'clock the chores were done—just when it was time to begin them all over again! That was a strange, unnatural sort of day.

XIV

On the morning of the 22d I wakened with a start. Before I opened my eyes, I seemed to know that something had happened. I heard excited voices in the kitchen—grandmother's was so shrill that I knew she must be almost beside herself. I looked forward to any new crisis with delight. What could it be, I wondered, as I hurried into my clothes. Perhaps the barn had burned; perhaps the cattle had frozen to death; perhaps a neighbor was lost in the storm.

Down in the kitchen grandfather was standing before the stove with his hands behind him. Jake and Otto had taken off their boots and were rubbing their woolen socks. Their clothes and boots were steaming, and they both looked exhausted. On the bench behind the stove lay a man, covered up with a blanket. Grandmother motioned me to the dining-room. I obeyed reluctantly. I watched her as she came and went, carrying dishes. Her lips were tightly compressed and she kept whispering to herself: "Oh, dear Saviour!" "Lord, Thou knowest!"

Presently grandfather came in and spoke to me: "Jimmy, we will not have prayers this morning, because we have a great deal to do. Old Mr. Shimerda is dead, and his family are in great distress. Ambrosch came over here in the middle of the night, and Jake and Otto went back with him. The boys have had a hard night, and you must not bother them with questions. That is Ambrosch, asleep on the bench. Come in to breakfast, boys."

After Jake and Otto had swallowed their first cup of coffee, they began to talk excitedly, disregarding grandmother's warning glances. I held my tongue, but I listened with all my ears.

"No, sir," Fuchs said in answer to a question from grandfather, "nobody heard the gun go off. Ambrosch was out with the ox team, trying to break a road, and the women folks was shut up tight in their cave. When Ambrosch come in it was dark and he didn't see nothing, but the oxen acted kind of queer. One of 'em ripped around and got away from him—bolted clean out of the stable. His hands is blistered where the rope run through. He got a lantern and went back and found the old man, just as we seen him."

"Poor soul, poor soul!" grandmother groaned. "I'd like to think he never done it. He was always considerate and un-wishful to give trouble. How could he forget himself and bring this on us!"

"I don't think he was out of his head for a minute, Mrs. Burden," Fuchs declared. "He done everything natural. You know he was always sort of fixy,⁷ and fixy he was to the last. He shaved after dinner, and washed hisself all over after the girls was done the dishes. Ántonia heated the water for him. Then he put on a clean shirt and clean socks, and after he was dressed he kissed her and the little one and took his gun and said he was going out to hunt rabbits. He must have gone right down to the barn and done it then. He layed down on that bunk-bed, close to the ox stalls, where he always slept. When we found him, everything was decent except,"—Fuchs wrinkled his brow and hesitated,—"except what he couldn't nowise foresee. His coat was hung on a peg, and his boots was under the bed. He'd took off that silk neckcloth he always wore, and folded it smooth and stuck his pin through it. He turned back his shirt at the neck and rolled up his sleeves."

"I don't see how he could do it!" grandmother kept saying.

Otto misunderstood her. "Why, mam, it was simple enough; he pulled the trigger with his big toe. He layed over on his side and put the end of the barrel in his mouth, then he drew up one foot and felt for the trigger. He found it all right!"

"Maybe he did," said Jake grimly. "There's something mighty queer about it."

"Now what do you mean, Jake?" grandmother asked sharply.

"Well, mam, I found Krajiek's axe under the manger, and I picks it up and carries it over to the corpse, and I take my oath it just fit the gash in the front of the old man's face. That there Krajiek had been sneakin' round, pale and quiet, and when he seen me examin' the axe, he begun whimperin', 'My God, man, don't do that! 'I reckon I'm a-goin' to look into this,' says I. Then he begun to squeal like a rat and run about wringin' his hands. 'They'll hang me!' says he. 'My God, they'll hang me sure!'"

Fuchs spoke up impatiently. "Krajiek's gone silly, Jake, and so have you. The old man wouldn't have made all them preparations for Krajiek to murder him, would he? It don't hang together. The gun was right beside him when Ambrosch found him."

"Krajiek could 'a' put it there, couldn't he?" Jake demanded.

Grandmother broke in excitedly: "See here, Jake Marpole, don't you go trying to add murder to suicide. We're deep enough in trouble. Otto reads you too many of them detective stories."

"It will be easy to decide all that, Emmaline," said grandfather quietly. "If he shot himself in the way they think, the gash will be torn from the inside outward."

"Just so it is, Mr. Burden," Otto affirmed. "I seen bunches of hair and stuff sticking to the poles and straw along the roof. They was blown up there by gunshot, no question."

Grandmother told grandfather she meant to go over to the Shimerdas with him.

"There is nothing you can do," he said doubtfully. "The body can't be touched until we get the coroner here from Black Hawk, and that will be a matter of several days, this weather."

7. Finicky, fastidious.

“Well, I can take them some victuals, anyway, and say a word of comfort to them poor little girls. The oldest one was his darling, and was like a right hand to him. He might have thought of her. He’s left her alone in a hard world.” She glanced distrustfully at Ambrosch, who was now eating his breakfast at the kitchen table.

Fuchs, although he had been up in the cold nearly all night, was going to make the long ride to Black Hawk to fetch the priest and the coroner. On the gray gelding, our best horse, he would try to pick his way across the country with no roads to guide him.

“Don’t you worry about me, Mrs. Burden,” he said cheerfully, as he put on a second pair of socks. “I’ve got a good nose for directions, and I never did need much sleep. It’s the gray I’m worried about. I’ll save him what I can, but it’ll strain him, as sure as I’m telling you!”

“This is no time to be over-considerate of animals, Otto; do the best you can for yourself. Stop at the Widow Steavens’s for dinner. She’s a good woman, and she’ll do well by you.”

After Fuchs rode away, I was left with Ambrosch. I saw a side of him I had not seen before. He was deeply, even slavishly, devout. He did not say a word all morning, but sat with his rosary in his hands, praying, now silently, now aloud. He never looked away from his beads, nor lifted his hands except to cross himself. Several times the poor boy fell asleep where he sat, wakened with a start, and began to pray again.

No wagon could be got to the Shimerdas’ until a road was broken, and that would be a day’s job. Grandfather came from the barn on one of our big black horses, and Jake lifted grandmother up behind him. She wore her black hood and was bundled up in shawls. Grandfather tucked his bushy white beard inside his overcoat. They looked very Biblical as they set off, I thought. Jake and Ambrosch followed them, riding the other black and my pony, carrying bundles of clothes that we had got together for Mrs. Shimerda. I watched them go past the pond and over the hill by the drifted cornfield. Then, for the first time, I realized that I was alone in the house.

I felt a considerable extension of power and authority, and was anxious to acquit myself creditably. I carried in cobs⁸ and wood from the long cellar, and filled both the stoves. I remembered that in the hurry and excitement of the morning nobody had thought of the chickens, and the eggs had not been gathered. Going out through the tunnel, I gave the hens their corn, emptied the ice from their drinking-pan, and filled it with water. After the cat had had his milk, I could think of nothing else to do, and I sat down to get warm. The quiet was delightful, and the ticking clock was the most pleasant of companions. I got “Robinson Crusoe”⁹ and tried to read, but his life on the island seemed dull compared with ours. Presently, as I looked with satisfaction about our comfortable sitting-room, it flashed upon me that if Mr. Shimerda’s soul were lingering about in this world at all, it would be here, in our house, which had been more to his liking than any other in the neighborhood. I remembered his contented face when he was with us on Christmas Day. If he could have lived with us, this terrible thing would never have happened.

8. After the corn kernels have been scraped from them, the cobs can be used for fuel.

9. A 1719 novel by English writer Daniel Defoe (1660?–1731), based on the true adventures of

Alexander Selkirk in 1704. The story tells how Robinson Crusoe, shipwrecked on an uninhabited island, learns to survive.

I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country. I thought of how far it was to Chicago, and then to Virginia, to Baltimore,—and then the great wintry ocean. No, he would not at once set out upon that long journey. Surely, his exhausted spirit, so tired of cold and crowding and the struggle with the ever-falling snow, was resting now in this quiet house.

I was not frightened, but I made no noise. I did not wish to disturb him. I went softly down to the kitchen which, tucked away so snugly underground, always seemed to me the heart and center of the house. There, on the bench behind the stove, I thought and thought about Mr. Shimerda. Outside I could hear the wind singing over hundreds of miles of snow. It was as if I had let the old man in out of the tormenting winter, and were sitting there with him. I went over all that Ántonia had ever told me about his life before he came to this country; how he used to play the fiddle at weddings and dances. I thought about the friends he had mourned to leave, the trombone-player, the great forest full of game,—belonging, as Ántonia said, to the “nobles,”—from which she and her mother used to steal wood on moonlight nights. There was a white hart that lived in that forest, and if any one killed it, he would be hanged, she said. Such vivid pictures came to me that they might have been Mr. Shimerda’s memories, not yet faded out from the air in which they had haunted him.

It had begun to grow dark when my household returned, and grandmother was so tired that she went at once to bed. Jake and I got supper, and while we were washing the dishes he told me in loud whispers about the state of things over at the Shimerdas’. Nobody could touch the body until the coroner came. If any one did, something terrible would happen, apparently. The dead man was frozen through, “just as stiff as a dressed turkey you hang out to freeze,” Jake said. The horses and oxen would not go into the barn until he was frozen so hard that there was no longer any smell of blood. They were stabled there now, with the dead man, because there was no other place to keep them. A lighted lantern was kept hanging over Mr. Shimerda’s head. Ántonia and Ambrosch and the mother took turns going down to pray beside him. The crazy boy went with them, because he did not feel the cold. I believed he felt cold as much as any one else, but he liked to be thought insensible to it. He was always coveting distinction, poor Marek!

Ambrosch, Jake said, showed more human feeling than he would have supposed him capable of; but he was chiefly concerned about getting a priest, and about his father’s soul, which he believed was in a place of torment and would remain there until his family and the priest had prayed a great deal for him.¹ “As I understand it,” Jake concluded, “it will be a matter of years to pray his soul out of Purgatory, and right now he’s in torment.”

“I don’t believe it,” I said stoutly. “I almost know it isn’t true.” I did not, of course, say that I believed he had been in that very kitchen all afternoon, on his way back to his own country. Nevertheless, after I went to bed, this idea of punishment and Purgatory came back on me crushingly. I remembered the account of Dives² in torment, and shuddered. But Mr. Shimerda had not

1. The Catholic Shimerdas believe that suicide is a mortal sin.

2. In Luke 16.19–31, Jesus recounts the story of

Dives, a rich, selfish man who suffers the torments of hell, and Lazarus, a beggar who goes to heaven.

been rich and selfish; he had only been so unhappy that he could not live any longer.

XV

Otto Fuchs got back from Black Hawk at noon the next day. He reported that the coroner would reach the Shimerdas' sometime that afternoon, but the missionary priest was at the other end of his parish, a hundred miles away, and the trains were not running. Fuchs had got a few hours' sleep at the livery barn in town, but he was afraid the gray gelding had strained himself. Indeed, he was never the same horse afterward. That long trip through the deep snow had taken all the endurance out of him.

Fuchs brought home with him a stranger, a young Bohemian who had taken a homestead near Black Hawk, and who came on his only horse to help his fellow-countrymen in their trouble. That was the first time I ever saw Anton Jelinek. He was a strapping young fellow in the early twenties then, handsome, warm-hearted, and full of life, and he came to us like a miracle in the midst of that grim business. I remember exactly how he strode into our kitchen in his felt boots and long wolf-skin coat, his eyes and cheeks bright with the cold. At sight of grandmother, he snatched off his fur cap, greeting her in a deep, rolling voice which seemed older than he.

"I want to thank you very much, Mrs. Burden, for that you are so kind to poor strangers from my kawn-tree."

He did not hesitate like a farmer boy, but looked one eagerly in the eye when he spoke. Everything about him was warm and spontaneous. He said he would have come to see the Shimerdas before, but he had hired out to husk corn all the fall, and since winter began he had been going to the school by the mill, to learn English, along with the little children. He told me he had a nice "lady-teacher" and that he liked to go to school.

At dinner grandfather talked to Jelinek more than he usually did to strangers.

"Will they be much disappointed because we cannot get a priest?" he asked.

Jelinek looked serious. "Yes, sir, that is very bad for them. Their father has done a great sin," he looked straight at grandfather. "Our Lord has said that."

Grandfather seemed to like his frankness. "We believe that, too, Jelinek. But we believe that Mr. Shimerda's soul will come to its Creator as well off without a priest. We believe that Christ is our only intercessor."

The young man shook his head. "I know how you think. My teacher at the school has explain. But I have seen too much. I believe in prayer for the dead. I have seen too much."

We asked him what he meant.

He glanced around the table. "You want I shall tell you? When I was a little boy like this one, I begin to help the priest at the altar. I make my first communion very young; what the Church teach seem plain to me. By 'n' by war-times come, when the Austrians fight us. We have very many soldiers in camp near my village, and the cholera³ break out in that camp, and the men die like flies. All day long our priest go about there to give the Sacrament

3. A highly contagious gastrointestinal disease that causes severe and often fatal dehydration.

to dying men, and I go with him to carry the vessels with the Holy Sacrament. Everybody that go near that camp catch the sickness but me and the priest. But we have no sickness, we have no fear, because we carry that blood and that body of Christ, and it preserve us." He paused, looking at grandfather. "That I know, Mr. Burden, for it happened to myself. All the soldiers know, too. When we walk along the road, the old priest and me, we meet all the time soldiers marching and officers on horse. All those officers, when they see what I carry under the cloth, pull up their horses and kneel down on the ground in the road until we pass. So I feel very bad for my kawntree-man to die without the Sacrament, and to die in a bad way for his soul, and I feel sad for his family."

We had listened attentively. It was impossible not to admire his frank, manly faith.

"I am always glad to meet a young man who thinks seriously about these things," said grandfather, "and I would never be the one to say you were not in God's care when you were among the soldiers."

After dinner it was decided that young Jelinek should hook our two strong black farmhorses to the scraper and break a road through to the Shimerdas', so that a wagon could go when it was necessary. Fuchs, who was the only cabinet-maker in the neighborhood, was set to work on a coffin.

Jelinek put on his long wolfskin coat, and when we admired it, he told us that he had shot and skinned the coyotes, and the young man who "batched" with him, Jan Bouska, who had been a fur-worker in Vienna, made the coat. From the windmill I watched Jelinek come out of the barn with the blacks, and work his way up the hillside toward the cornfield. Sometimes he was completely hidden by the clouds of snow that rose about him; then he and the horses would emerge black and shining.

Our heavy carpenter's bench had to be brought from the barn and carried down into the kitchen. Fuchs selected boards from a pile of planks grandfather had hauled out from town in the fall to make a new floor for the oats bin. When at last the lumber and tools were assembled, and the doors were closed again and the cold drafts shut out, grandfather rode away to meet the coroner at the Shimerdas', and Fuchs took off his coat and settled down to work. I sat on his work-table and watched him. He did not touch his tools at first, but figured for a long while on a piece of paper, and measured the planks and made marks on them. While he was thus engaged, he whistled softly to himself, or teasingly pulled at his half-ear. Grandmother moved about quietly, so as not to disturb him. At last he folded his ruler and turned a cheerful face to us.

"The hardest part of my job's done," he announced. "It's the head end of it that comes hard with me, especially when I'm out of practice. The last time I made one of these, Mrs. Burden," he continued, as he sorted and tried his chisels, "was for a fellow in the Black Tiger mine, up above Silverton, Colorado. The mouth of that mine goes right into the face of the cliff, and they used to put us in a bucket and run us over on a trolley and shoot us into the shaft. The bucket traveled across a box cañon three hundred feet deep, and about a third full of water. Two Swedes had fell out of that bucket once, and hit the water, feet down. If you'll believe it, they went to work the next day. You can't kill a Swede. But in my time a little Eytalian tried the high dive, and it turned out different with him. We was snowed in then, like we

are now, and I happened to be the only man in camp that could make a coffin for him. It's a handy thing to know, when you knock about like I've done."

"We'd be hard put to it now, if you didn't know, Otto," grandmother said.

"Yes, 'm," Fuchs admitted with modest pride. "So few folks does know how to make a good tight box that'll turn water. I sometimes wonder if there'll be anybody about to do it for me. However, I'm not at all particular that way."

All afternoon, wherever one went in the house, one could hear the panting wheeze of the saw or the pleasant purring of the plane. They were such cheerful noises, seeming to promise new things for living people: it was a pity that those freshly planed pine boards were to be put underground so soon. The lumber was hard to work because it was full of frost, and the boards gave off a sweet smell of pine woods, as the heap of yellow shavings grew higher and higher. I wondered why Fuchs had not stuck to cabinet-work, he settled down to it with such ease and content. He handled the tools as if he liked the feel of them; and when he planed, his hands went back and forth over the boards in an eager, beneficent way as if he were blessing them. He broke out now and then into German hymns, as if this occupation brought back old times to him.

At four o'clock Mr. Bushy, the postmaster, with another neighbor who lived east of us, stopped in to get warm. They were on their way to the Shimerdas'. The news of what had happened over there had somehow got abroad through the snow-blocked country. Grandmother gave the visitors sugar-cakes and hot coffee. Before these callers were gone, the brother of the Widow Steavens, who lived on the Black Hawk road, drew up at our door, and after him came the father of the German family, our nearest neighbors on the south. They dismounted and joined us in the dining-room. They were all eager for any details about the suicide, and they were greatly concerned as to where Mr. Shimerda would be buried. The nearest Catholic cemetery was at Black Hawk, and it might be weeks before a wagon could get so far. Besides, Mr. Bushy and grandmother were sure that a man who had killed himself could not be buried in a Catholic graveyard. There was a burying-ground over by the Norwegian church, west of Squaw Creek; perhaps the Norwegians would take Mr. Shimerda in.

After our visitors rode away in single file over the hill, we returned to the kitchen. Grandmother began to make the icing for a chocolate cake, and Otto again filled the house with the exciting, expectant song of the plane. One pleasant thing about this time was that everybody talked more than usual. I had never heard the postmaster say anything but "Only papers, today," or, "I've got a sackful of mail for ye," until this afternoon. Grandmother always talked, dear woman; to herself or to the Lord, if there was no one else to listen; but grandfather was naturally taciturn, and Jake and Otto were often so tired after supper that I used to feel as if I were surrounded by a wall of silence. Now every one seemed eager to talk. That afternoon Fuchs told me story after story; about the Black Tiger mine, and about violent deaths and casual burials, and the queer fancies of dying men. You never really knew a man, he said, until you saw him die. Most men were game, and went without a grudge.

The postmaster, going home, stopped to say that grandfather would bring the coroner back with him to spend the night. The officers of the Norwegian church, he told us, had held a meeting and decided that the Norwegian graveyard could not extend its hospitality to Mr. Shimerda.

Grandmother was indignant. "If these foreigners are so clannish, Mr. Bushy, we'll have to have an American graveyard that will be more liberal-minded. I'll get right after Josiah to start one in the spring. If anything was to happen to me, I don't want the Norwegians holding inquisitions over me to see whether I'm good enough to be laid amongst 'em."

Soon grandfather returned, bringing with him Anton Jelinek, and that important person, the coroner. He was a mild, flurried old man, a Civil War veteran, with one sleeve hanging empty. He seemed to find this case very perplexing, and said if it had not been for grandfather he would have sworn out a warrant against Krajiek. "The way he acted, and the way his axe fit the wound, was enough to convict any man."

Although it was perfectly clear that Mr. Shimerda had killed himself, Jake and the coroner thought something ought to be done to Krajiek because he behaved like a guilty man. He was badly frightened, certainly, and perhaps he even felt some stirrings of remorse for his indifference to the old man's misery and loneliness.

At supper the men ate like vikings, and the chocolate cake, which I had hoped would linger on until to-morrow in a mutilated condition, disappeared on the second round. They talked excitedly about where they should bury Mr. Shimerda; I gathered that the neighbors were all disturbed and shocked about something. It developed that Mrs. Shimerda and Ambrosch wanted the old man buried on the southwest corner of their own land; indeed, under the very stake that marked the corner. Grandfather had explained to Ambrosch that some day, when the country was put under fence and the roads were confined to section lines, two roads would cross exactly on that corner. But Ambrosch only said, "It makes no matter."

Grandfather asked Jelinek whether in the old country there was some superstition to the effect that a suicide must be buried at the cross-roads.

Jelinek said he didn't know; he seemed to remember hearing there had once been such a custom in Bohemia. "Mrs. Shimerda is made up her mind," he added. "I try to persuade her, and say it looks bad for her to all the neighbors; but she say so it must be. 'There I will bury him, if I dig the grave myself,' she say. I have to promise her I help Ambrosch make the grave to-morrow."

Grandfather smoothed his beard and looked judicial. "I don't know whose wish should decide the matter, if not hers. But if she thinks she will live to see the people of this country ride over that old man's head, she is mistaken."

XVI

Mr. Shimerda lay dead in the barn four days, and on the fifth they buried him. All day Friday Jelinek was off with Ambrosch digging the grave, chopping out the frozen earth with old axes. On Saturday we breakfasted before daylight and got into the wagon with the coffin. Jake and Jelinek went ahead on horseback to cut the body loose from the pool of blood in which it was frozen fast to the ground.

When grandmother and I went into the Shimerdas' house, we found the women-folk alone; Ambrosch and Marek were at the barn. Mrs. Shimerda sat crouching by the stove, Antonia was washing dishes. When she saw me she ran out of her dark corner and threw her arms around me. "Oh, Jimmy,"

she sobbed, "what you tink for my lovely papa!" It seemed to me that I could feel her heart breaking as she clung to me.

Mrs. Shimerda, sitting on the stump by the stove, kept looking over her shoulder toward the door while the neighbors were arriving. They came on horseback, all except the post-master, who brought his family in a wagon over the only broken wagon-trail. The Widow Steavens rode up from her farm eight miles down the Black Hawk road. The cold drove the women into the cave-house, and it was soon crowded. A fine, sleety snow was beginning to fall, and every one was afraid of another storm and anxious to have the burial over with.

Grandfather and Jelinek came to tell Mrs. Shimerda that it was time to start. After bundling her mother up in clothes the neighbors had brought, *Ántonia* put on an old cape from our house and the rabbit-skin hat her father had made for her. Four men carried Mr. Shimerda's box up the hill; *Krajiek* slunk along behind them. The coffin was too wide for the door, so it was put down on the slope outside. I slipped out from the cave and looked at Mr. Shimerda. He was lying on his side, with his knees drawn up. His body was draped in a black shawl, and his head was bandaged in white muslin, like a mummy's; one of his long, shapely hands lay out on the black cloth; that was all one could see of him.

Mrs. Shimerda came out and placed an open prayer-book against the body, making the sign of the cross on the bandaged head with her fingers. *Ambrosch* knelt down and made the same gesture, and after him *Ántonia* and *Marek*. *Yulka* hung back. Her mother pushed her forward, and kept saying something to her over and over. *Yulka* knelt down, shut her eyes, and put out her hand a little way, but she drew it back and began to cry wildly. She was afraid to touch the bandage. Mrs. Shimerda caught her by the shoulders and pushed her toward the coffin, but grandmother interfered.

"No, Mrs. Shimerda," she said firmly, "I won't stand by and see that child frightened into spasms. She is too little to understand what you want of her. Let her alone."

At a look from grandfather, *Fuchs* and *Jelinek* placed the lid on the box, and began to nail it down over Mr. Shimerda. I was afraid to look at *Ántonia*. She put her arms round *Yulka* and held the little girl close to her.

The coffin was put into the wagon. We drove slowly away, against the fine, icy snow which cut our faces like a sand-blast. When we reached the grave, it looked a very little spot in that snow-covered waste. The men took the coffin to the edge of the hole and lowered it with ropes. We stood about watching them, and the powdery snow lay without melting on the caps and shoulders of the men and the shawls of the women. *Jelinek* spoke in a persuasive tone to Mrs. Shimerda, and then turned to grandfather.

"She says, Mr. Burden, she is very glad if you can make some prayer for him here in English, for the neighbors to understand."

Grandmother looked anxiously at grandfather. He took off his hat, and the other men did likewise. I thought his prayer remarkable. I still remember it. He began, "Oh, great and just God, no man among us knows what the sleeper knows, nor is it for us to judge what lies between him and Thee." He prayed that if any man there had been remiss toward the stranger come to a far country, God would forgive him and soften his heart. He recalled the promises to the widow and the fatherless, and asked God to smooth the way

before this widow and her children, and to “incline the hearts of men to deal justly with her.” In closing, he said we were leaving Mr. Shimerda at “Thy judgment seat, which is also Thy mercy seat.”

All the time he was praying, grandmother watched him through the black fingers of her glove, and when he said “Amen,” I thought she looked satisfied with him. She turned to Otto and whispered, “Can’t you start a hymn, Fuchs? It would seem less heathenish.”

Fuchs glanced about to see if there was general approval of her suggestion, then began, “Jesus, Lover of my Soul,” and all the men and women took it up after him. Whenever I have heard the hymn since, it has made me remember that white waste and the little group of people; and the bluish air, full of fine, eddying snow, like long veils flying:—

“While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.”



Years afterward, when the open-grazing days were over, and the red grass had been ploughed under and under until it had almost disappeared from the prairie; when all the fields were under fence, and the roads no longer ran about like wild things, but followed the surveyed section-lines, Mr. Shimerda’s grave was still there, with a sagging wire fence around it, and an unpainted wooden cross. As grandfather had predicted, Mrs. Shimerda never saw the roads going over his head. The road from the north curved a little to the east just there, and the road from the west swung out a little to the south; so that the grave, with its tall red grass that was never mowed, was like a little island; and at twilight, under a new moon or the clear evening star, the dusty roads used to look like soft gray rivers flowing past it. I never came upon the place without emotion, and in all that country it was the spot most dear to me. I loved the dim superstition, the propitiatory intent, that had put the grave there; and still more I loved the spirit that could not carry out the sentence—the error from the surveyed lines, the clemency of the soft earth roads along which the home-coming wagons rattled after sunset. Never a tired driver passed the wooden cross, I am sure, without wishing well to the sleeper.

XVII

When spring came, after that hard winter, one could not get enough of the nimble air. Every morning I wakened with a fresh consciousness that winter was over. There were none of the signs of spring for which I used to watch in Virginia, no budding woods or blooming gardens. There was only—spring itself; the throb of it, the light restlessness, the vital essence of it everywhere; in the sky, in the swift clouds, in the pale sunshine, and in the warm, high wind—rising suddenly, sinking suddenly, impulsive and playful like a big puppy that pawed you and then lay down to be petted. If I had been tossed down blindfold on that red prairie, I should have known that it was spring.

Everywhere now there was the smell of burning grass. Our neighbors burned off their pasture before the new grass made a start, so that the fresh growth would not be mixed with the dead stand of last year. Those light,

swift fires, running about the country, seemed a part of the same kindling that was in the air.

The Shimerdas were in their new log house by then. The neighbors had helped them to build it in March. It stood directly in front of their old cave, which they used as a cellar. The family were now fairly equipped to begin their struggle with the soil. They had four comfortable rooms to live in, a new windmill,—bought on credit,—a chicken-house and poultry. Mrs. Shimerda had paid grandfather ten dollars for a milk cow, and was to give him fifteen more as soon as they harvested their first crop.

When I rode up to the Shimerdas' one bright windy afternoon in April, Yulka ran out to meet me. It was to her, now, that I gave reading lessons; *Ántonia* was busy with other things. I tied my pony and went into the kitchen where Mrs. Shimerda was baking bread, chewing poppy seeds as she worked. By this time she could speak enough English to ask me a great many questions about what our men were doing in the fields. She seemed to think that my elders withheld helpful information, and that from me she might get valuable secrets. On this occasion she asked me very craftily when grandfather expected to begin planting corn. I told her, adding that he thought we should have a dry spring and that the corn would not be held back by too much rain, as it had been last year.

She gave me a shrewd glance. "He not Jesus," she blustered; "he not know about the wet and the dry."

I did not answer her; what was the use? As I sat waiting for the hour when Ambrosch and *Ántonia* would return from the fields, I watched Mrs. Shimerda at her work. She took from the oven a coffee-cake which she wanted to keep warm for supper, and wrapped it in a quilt stuffed with feathers. I have seen her put even a roast goose in this quilt to keep it hot. When the neighbors were there building the new house they saw her do this, and the story got abroad that the Shimerdas kept their food in their feather beds.

When the sun was dropping low, *Ántonia* came up the big south draw with her team. How much older she had grown in eight months! She had come to us a child, and now she was a tall, strong young girl, although her fifteenth birthday had just slipped by. I ran out and met her as she brought her horses up to the windmill to water them. She wore the boots her father had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself, and his old fur cap. Her outgrown cotton dress switched about her calves, over the boot-tops. She kept her sleeves rolled up all day, and her arms and throat were burned as brown as a sailor's. Her neck came up strongly out of her shoulders, like the bole of a tree out of the turf. One sees that draft-horse neck among the peasant women in all old countries.

She greeted me gayly, and began at once to tell me how much ploughing she had done that day. Ambrosch, she said, was on the north quarter, breaking sod with the oxen.

"Jim, you ask Jake how much he ploughed to-day. I don't want that Jake get more done in one day than me. I want we have very much corn this fall."

While the horses drew in the water, and nosed each other, and then drank again, *Ántonia* sat down on the windmill step and rested her head on her hand. "You see the big prairie fire from your place last night? I hope your grandpa ain't lose no stacks?"

"No, we didn't. I came to ask you something, Tony. Grandmother wants to know if you can't go to the term of school that begins next week over at the sod schoolhouse. She says there's a good teacher, and you'd learn a lot."

Ántonia stood up, lifting and dropping her shoulders as if they were stiff. "I ain't got time to learn. I can work like mans now. My mother can't say no more how Ambrosch do all and nobody to help him. I can work as much as him. School is all right for little boys. I help make this land one good farm."

She clucked to her team and started for the barn. I walked beside her, feeling vexed. Was she going to grow up boastful like her mother, I wondered? Before we reached the stable, I felt something tense in her silence, and glancing up I saw that she was crying. She turned her face from me and looked off at the red streak of dying light, over the dark prairie.

I climbed up into the loft and threw down the hay for her, while she unharnessed her team. We walked slowly back toward the house. Ambrosch had come in from the north quarter, and was watering his oxen at the tank.

Ántonia took my hand. "Sometime you will tell me all those nice things you learn at the school, won't you, Jimmy?" she asked with a sudden rush of feeling in her voice. "My father, he went much to school. He know a great deal; how to make the fine cloth like what you not got here. He play horn and violin, and he read so many books that the priests in Bohemie come to talk to him. You won't forget my father, Jim?"

"No," I said, "I will never forget him."

Mrs. Shimerda asked me to stay for supper. After Ambrosch and Ántonia had washed the field dust from their hands and faces at the wash-basin by the kitchen door, we sat down at the oilcloth-covered table. Mrs. Shimerda ladled meal mush out of an iron pot and poured milk on it. After the mush we had fresh bread and sorghum molasses, and coffee with the cake that had been kept warm in the feathers. Ántonia and Ambrosch were talking in Bohemian; disputing about which of them had done more ploughing that day. Mrs. Shimerda egged them on, chuckling while she gobbled her food.

Presently Ambrosch said sullenly in English: "You take them ox to-morrow and try the sod plough. Then you not be so smart."

His sister laughed. "Don't be mad. I know it's awful hard work for break sod. I milk the cow for you to-morrow, if you want."

Mrs. Shimerda turned quickly to me. "That cow not give so much milk like what your grandpa say. If he make talk about fifteen dollars, I send him back the cow."

"He doesn't talk about the fifteen dollars," I exclaimed indignantly. "He doesn't find fault with people."

"He say I break his saw when we build, and I never," grumbled Ambrosch.

I knew he had broken the saw, and then hid it and lied about it. I began to wish I had not stayed for supper. Everything was disagreeable to me. Ántonia ate so noisily now, like a man, and she yawned often at the table and kept stretching her arms over her head, as if they ached. Grandmother had said, "Heavy field work'll spoil that girl. She'll lose all her nice ways and get rough ones." She had lost them already.

After supper I rode home through the sad, soft spring twilight. Since winter I had seen very little of Ántonia. She was out in the fields from sun-up

until sun-down. If I rode over to see her where she was ploughing, she stopped at the end of a row to chat for a moment, then gripped her plough-handles, clucked to her team, and waded on down the furrow, making me feel that she was now grown up and had no time for me. On Sundays she helped her mother make garden or sewed all day. Grandfather was pleased with *Ántonia*. When we complained of her, he only smiled and said, "She will help some fellow get ahead in the world."

Nowadays Tony could talk of nothing but the prices of things, or how much she could lift and endure. She was too proud of her strength. I knew, too, that Ambrosch put upon her some chores a girl ought not to do, and that the farmhands around the country joked in a nasty way about it. Whenever I saw her come up the furrow, shouting to her beasts, sun-burned, sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust-plastered, I used to think of the tone in which poor Mr. Shimerda, who could say so little, yet managed to say so much when he exclaimed, "My *Án-tonia!*"

XVIII

After I began to go to the country school, I saw less of the Bohemians. We were sixteen pupils at the sod schoolhouse, and we all came on horseback and brought our dinner. My schoolmates were none of them very interesting, but I somehow felt that by making comrades of them I was getting even with *Ántonia* for her indifference. Since the father's death, Ambrosch was more than ever the head of the house and he seemed to direct the feelings as well as the fortunes of his women-folk. *Ántonia* often quoted his opinions to me, and she let me see that she admired him, while she thought of me only as a little boy. Before the spring was over, there was a distinct coldness between us and the Shimerdas. It came about in this way.

One Sunday I rode over there with Jake to get a horse-collar which Ambrosch had borrowed from him and had not returned. It was a beautiful blue morning. The buffalo-peas were blooming in pink and purple masses along the roadside, and the larks, perched on last year's dried sunflower stalks, were singing straight at the sun, their heads thrown back and their yellow breasts a-quiver. The wind blew about us in warm, sweet gusts. We rode slowly, with a pleasant sense of Sunday indolence.

We found the Shimerdas working just as if it were a week-day. Marek was cleaning out the stable, and *Ántonia* and her mother were making garden, off across the pond in the draw-head. Ambrosch was up on the wind-mill tower, oiling the wheel. He came down, not very cordially. When Jake asked for the collar, he grunted and scratched his head. The collar belonged to grandfather, of course, and Jake, feeling responsible for it, flared up.

"Now, don't you say you haven't got it, Ambrosch, because I know you have, and if you ain't a-going to look for it, I will."

Ambrosch shrugged his shoulders and sauntered down the hill toward the stable. I could see that it was one of his mean days. Presently he returned, carrying a collar that had been badly used—trampled in the dirt and gnawed by rats until the hair was sticking out of it.

"This what you want?" he asked surlily.

Jake jumped off his horse. I saw a wave of red come up under the rough stubble on his face. "That ain't the piece of harness I loaned you, Ambrosch;

or if it is, you've used it shameful. I ain't a-going to carry such a looking thing back to Mr. Burden."

Ambrosch dropped the collar on the ground. "All right," he said coolly, took up his oil-can, and began to climb the mill. Jake caught him by the belt of his trousers and yanked him back. Ambrosch's feet had scarcely touched the ground when he lunged out with a vicious kick at Jake's stomach. Fortunately Jake was in such a position that he could dodge it. This was not the sort of thing country boys did when they played at fisticuffs, and Jake was furious. He landed Ambrosch a blow on the head—it sounded like the crack of an axe on a cow-pumpkin. Ambrosch dropped over, stunned.

We heard squeals, and looking up saw Ántonia and her mother coming on the run. They did not take the path around the pond, but plunged through the muddy water, without even lifting their skirts. They came on, screaming and clawing the air. By this time Ambrosch had come to his senses and was sputtering with nose-bleed. Jake sprang into his saddle. "Let's get out of this, Jim," he called.

Mrs. Shimerda threw her hands over her head and clutched as if she were going to pull down lightning. "Law, law!" she shrieked after us. "Law for knock my Ambrosch down!"

"I never like you no more, Jake and Jim Burden," Ántonia panted. "No friends any more!"

Jake stopped and turned his horse for a second. "Well, you're a damned ungrateful lot, the whole pack of you," he shouted back. "I guess the Burdens can get along without you. You've been a sight of trouble to them, anyhow!"

We rode away, feeling so outraged that the fine morning was spoiled for us. I hadn't a word to say, and poor Jake was white as paper and trembling all over. It made him sick to get so angry. "They ain't the same, Jimmy," he kept saying in a hurt tone. "These foreigners ain't the same. You can't trust 'em to be fair. It's dirty to kick a feller. You heard how the women turned on you—and after all we went through on account of 'em last winter! They ain't to be trusted. I don't want to see you get too thick with any of 'em."

"I'll never be friends with them again, Jake," I declared hotly. "I believe they are all like Krajiek and Ambrosch underneath."

Grandfather heard our story with a twinkle in his eye. He advised Jake to ride to town to-morrow, go to a justice of the peace, tell him he had knocked young Shimerda down, and pay his fine. Then if Mrs. Shimerda was inclined to make trouble—her son was still under age—she would be forestalled. Jake said he might as well take the wagon and haul to market the pig he had been fattening. On Monday, about an hour after Jake had started, we saw Mrs. Shimerda and her Ambrosch proudly driving by, looking neither to the right nor left. As they rattled out of sight down the Black Hawk road, grandfather chuckled, saying he had rather expected she would follow the matter up.

Jake paid his fine with a ten-dollar bill grandfather had given him for that purpose. But when the Shimerdas found that Jake sold his pig in town that day, Ambrosch worked it out in his shrewd head that Jake had to sell his pig to pay his fine. This theory afforded the Shimerdas great satisfaction, apparently. For weeks afterward, whenever Jake and I met Ántonia on her way to the post-office, or going along the road with her work-team, she would clap her hands and call to us in a spiteful, crowing voice:—

"Jake-y, Jake-y, sell the pig and pay the slap!"

Otto pretended not to be surprised at *Ántonia's* behavior. He only lifted his brows and said, "You can't tell me anything new about a Czech; I'm an Austrian."

Grandfather was never a party to what Jake called our feud with the *Shimerdas*. *Ambrosch* and *Ántonia* always greeted him respectfully, and he asked them about their affairs and gave them advice as usual. He thought the future looked hopeful for them. *Ambrosch* was a far-seeing fellow; he soon realized that his oxen were too heavy for any work except breaking sod, and he succeeded in selling them to a newly arrived German. With the money he bought another team of horses, which grandfather selected for him. *Marek* was strong, and *Ambrosch* worked him hard; but he could never teach him to cultivate corn, I remember. The one idea that had ever got through poor *Marek's* thick head was that all exertion was meritorious. He always bore down on the handles of the cultivator and drove the blades so deep into the earth that the horses were soon exhausted.

In June *Ambrosch* went to work at Mr. *Bushy's* for a week, and took *Marek* with him at full wages. Mrs. *Shimerda* then drove the second cultivator; she and *Ántonia* worked in the fields all day and did the chores at night. While the two women were running the place alone, one of the new horses got colic and gave them a terrible fright.

Ántonia had gone down to the barn one night to see that all was well before she went to bed, and she noticed that one of the roans was swollen about the middle and stood with its head hanging. She mounted another horse, without waiting to saddle him, and hammered on our door just as we were going to bed. Grandfather answered her knock. He did not send one of his men, but rode back with her himself, taking a syringe and an old piece of carpet he kept for hot applications when our horses were sick. He found Mrs. *Shimerda* sitting by the horse with her lantern, groaning and wringing her hands. It took but a few moments to release the gases pent up in the poor beast, and the two women heard the rush of wind and saw the roan visibly diminish in girth.

"If I lose that horse, Mr. *Burden*," *Ántonia* exclaimed, "I never stay here till *Ambrosch* come home! I go drown myself in the pond before morning."

When *Ambrosch* came back from Mr. *Bushy's*, we learned that he had given *Marek's* wages to the priest at *Black Hawk*, for masses for their father's soul. Grandmother thought *Ántonia* needed shoes more than Mr. *Shimerda* needed prayers, but grandfather said tolerantly, "If he can spare six dollars, pinched as he is, it shows he believes what he professes."

It was grandfather who brought about a reconciliation with the *Shimerdas*. One morning he told us that the small grain was coming on so well, he thought he would begin to cut his wheat on the first of July. He would need more men, and if it were agreeable to every one he would engage *Ambrosch* for the reaping and thrashing, as the *Shimerdas* had no small grain of their own.

"I think, *Emmaline*," he concluded, "I will ask *Ántonia* to come over and help you in the kitchen. She will be glad to earn something, and it will be a good time to end misunderstandings. I may as well ride over this morning and make arrangements. Do you want to go with me, *Jim*?" His tone told me that he had already decided for me.

After breakfast we set off together. When Mrs. *Shimerda* saw us coming, she ran from her door down into the draw behind the stable, as if she did

not want to meet us. Grandfather smiled to himself while he tied his horse, and we followed her.

Behind the barn we came upon a funny sight. The cow had evidently been grazing somewhere in the draw. Mrs. Shimerda had run to the animal, pulled up the lariat pin, and, when we came upon her, she was trying to hide the cow in an old cave in the bank. As the hole was narrow and dark, the cow held back, and the old woman was slapping and pushing at her hind quarters, trying to spank her into the draw-side.

Grandfather ignored her singular occupation and greeted her politely. "Good-morning, Mrs. Shimerda. Can you tell me where I will find Ambrosch? Which field?"

"He with the sod corn." She pointed toward the north, still standing in front of the cow as if she hoped to conceal it.

"His sod corn will be good for fodder this winter," said grandfather encouragingly. "And where is Ántonia?"

"She go with." Mrs. Shimerda kept wiggling her bare feet about nervously in the dust.

"Very well. I will ride up there. I want them to come over and help me cut my oats and wheat next month. I will pay them wages. Good-morning. By the way, Mrs. Shimerda," he said as he turned up the path, "I think we may as well call it square about the cow."

She started and clutched the rope tighter. Seeing that she did not understand, grandfather turned back. "You need not pay me anything more; no more money. The cow is yours."

"Pay no more, keep cow?" she asked in a bewildered tone, her narrow eyes snapping at us in the sunlight.

"Exactly. Pay no more, keep cow." He nodded.

Mrs. Shimerda dropped the rope, ran after us, and crouching down beside grandfather, she took his hand and kissed it. I doubt if he had ever been so much embarrassed before. I was a little startled, too. Somehow, that seemed to bring the Old World very close.

We rode away laughing, and grandfather said: "I expect she thought we had come to take the cow away for certain, Jim. I wonder if she wouldn't have scratched a little if we'd laid hold of that lariat rope!"

Our neighbors seemed glad to make peace with us. The next Sunday Mrs. Shimerda came over and brought Jake a pair of socks she had knitted. She presented them with an air of great magnanimity, saying, "Now you not come any more for knock my Ambrosch down?"

Jake laughed sheepishly. "I don't want to have no trouble with Ambrosch. If he'll let me alone, I'll let him alone."

"If he slap you, we ain't got no pig for pay the fine," she said insinuatingly.

Jake was not at all disconcerted. "Have the last word, mam," he said cheerfully. "It's a lady's privilege."

July came on with that breathless, brilliant heat which makes the plains of Kansas and Nebraska the best corn country in the world. It seemed as if we could hear the corn growing in the night; under the stars one caught a faint crackling in the dewy, heavy-odored cornfields where the feathered stalks

stood so juicy and green. If all the great plain from the Missouri to the Rocky Mountains had been under glass, and the heat regulated by a thermometer, it could not have been better for the yellow tassels that were ripening and fertilizing the silk day by day. The cornfields were far apart in those times, with miles of wild grazing land between. It took a clear, meditative eye like my grandfather's to foresee that they would enlarge and multiply until they would be, not the Shimerdas' cornfields, or Mr. Bushy's, but the world's cornfields; that their yield would be one of the great economic facts, like the wheat crop of Russia, which underlie all the activities of men, in peace or war.

The burning sun of those few weeks, with occasional rains at night, secured the corn. After the milky ears were once formed, we had little to fear from dry weather. The men were working so hard in the wheatfields that they did not notice the heat,—though I was kept busy carrying water for them,—and grandmother and *Ántonia* had so much to do in the kitchen that they could not have told whether one day was hotter than another. Each morning, while the dew was still on the grass, *Ántonia* went with me up to the garden to get early vegetables for dinner. Grandmother made her wear a sunbonnet, but as soon as we reached the garden she threw it on the grass and let her hair fly in the breeze. I remember how, as we bent over the pea-vines, beads of perspiration used to gather on her upper lip like a little mustache.

"Oh, better I like to work out of doors than in a house!" she used to sing joyfully. "I not care that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be like a man." She would toss her head and ask me to feel the muscles swell in her brown arm.

We were glad to have her in the house. She was so gay and responsive that one did not mind her heavy, running step, or her clattery way with pans. Grandmother was in high spirits during the weeks that *Ántonia* worked for us.

All the nights were close⁴ and hot during that harvest season. The harvesters slept in the hayloft because it was cooler there than in the house. I used to lie in my bed by the open window, watching the heat lightning play softly along the horizon, or looking up at the gaunt frame of the windmill against the blue night sky. One night there was a beautiful electric storm, though not enough rain fell to damage the cut grain. The men went down to the barn immediately after supper, and when the dishes were washed *Ántonia* and I climbed up on the slanting roof of the chicken-house to watch the clouds. The thunder was loud and metallic, like the rattle of sheet iron, and the lightning broke in great zigzags across the heavens, making everything stand out and come close to us for a moment. Half the sky was checkered with black thunderheads, but all the west was luminous and clear: in the lightning-flashes it looked like deep blue water, with the sheen of moonlight on it; and the mottled part of the sky was like marble pavement, like the quay of some splendid sea-coast city, doomed to destruction. Great warm splashes of rain fell on our upturned faces. One black cloud, no bigger than a little boat, drifted out into the clear space unattended, and kept moving westward. All about us we could hear the felty beat of the raindrops on the soft dust of the farmyard. Grandmother came to the door and said it was late, and we would get wet out there.

4. Humid.

"In a minute we come," Antonia called back to her. "I like your grandmother, and all things here," she sighed. "I wish my papa live to see this summer. I wish no winter ever come again."

"It will be summer a long while yet," I reassured her. "Why aren't you always nice like this, Tony?"

"How nice?"

"Why, just like this; like yourself. Why do you all the time try to be like Ambrosch?"

She put her arms under her head and lay back, looking up at the sky. "If I live here, like you, that is different. Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us."

Book II. The Hired Girls

I

I had been living with my grandfather for nearly three years when he decided to move to Black Hawk. He and grandmother were getting old for the heavy work of a farm, and as I was now thirteen they thought I ought to be going to school. Accordingly our homestead was rented to "that good woman, the Widow Steavens," and her bachelor brother, and we bought Preacher White's house, at the north end of Black Hawk. This was the first town house one passed driving in from the farm, a landmark which told country people their long ride was over.

We were to move to Black Hawk in March, and as soon as grandfather had fixed the date he let Jake and Otto know of his intention. Otto said he would not be likely to find another place that suited him so well; that he was tired of farming and thought he would go back to what he called the "wild West." Jake Marpole, lured by Otto's stories of adventure, decided to go with him. We did our best to dissuade Jake. He was so handicapped by illiteracy and by his trusting disposition that he would be an easy prey to sharpers.⁵ Grandmother begged him to stay among kindly, Christian people, where he was known; but there was no reasoning with him. He wanted to be a prospector. He thought a silver mine was waiting for him in Colorado.

Jake and Otto served us to the last. They moved us into town, put down the carpets in our new house, made shelves and cupboards for grandmother's kitchen, and seemed loath to leave us. But at last they went, without warning. Those two fellows had been faithful to us through sun and storm, had given us things that cannot be bought in any market in the world. With me they had been like older brothers; had restrained their speech and manners out of care for me, and given me so much good comradeship. Now they got on the west-bound train one morning, in their Sunday clothes, with their oilcloth valises—and I never saw them again. Months afterward we got a card from Otto, saying that Jake had been down with mountain fever but now they were both working in the Yankee Girl mine, and were doing well. I wrote to them at that address, but my letter was returned to me, "unclaimed." After that we never heard from them.

5. Swindlers.

Black Hawk, the new world in which we had come to live, was a clean, well-planted little prairie town, with white fences and good green yards about the dwellings, wide, dusty streets, and shapely little trees growing along the wooden sidewalks. In the center of the town there were two rows of new brick “store” buildings, a brick schoolhouse, the court-house, and four white churches. Our own house looked down over the town, and from our upstairs windows we could see the winding line of the river bluffs, two miles south of us. That river was to be my compensation for the lost freedom of the farming country.

We came to Black Hawk in March, and by the end of April we felt like town people. Grandfather was a deacon in the new Baptist Church, grandmother was busy with church suppers and missionary societies, and I was quite another boy, or thought I was. Suddenly put down among boys of my own age, I found I had a great deal to learn. Before the spring term of school was over I could fight, play “keeps,” tease the little girls, and use forbidden words as well as any boy in my class. I was restrained from utter savagery only by the fact that Mrs. Harling, our nearest neighbor, kept an eye on me, and if my behavior went beyond certain bounds I was not permitted to come into her yard or to play with her jolly children.

We saw more of our country neighbors now than when we lived on the farm. Our house was a convenient stopping-place for them. We had a big barn where the farmers could put up their teams, and their women-folk more often accompanied them, now that they could stay with us for dinner, and rest and set their bonnets right before they went shopping. The more our house was like a country hotel, the better I liked it. I was glad, when I came home from school at noon, to see a farm wagon standing in the back yard, and I was always ready to run downtown to get beefsteak or baker’s bread for unexpected company. All through that first spring and summer I kept hoping that Ambrosch would bring *Ántonia* and *Yulka* to see our new house. I wanted to show them our red plush furniture, and the trumpet-blowing cherubs the German paper-hanger⁶ had put on our parlor ceiling.

When Ambrosch came to town, however, he came alone, and though he put his horses in our barn, he would never stay for dinner, or tell us anything about his mother and sisters. If we ran out and questioned him as he was slipping through the yard, he would merely work his shoulders about in his coat and say, “They all right, I guess.”

Mrs. Steavens, who now lived on our farm, grew as fond of *Ántonia* as we had been, and always brought us news of her. All through the wheat season, she told us, Ambrosch hired his sister out like a man, and she went from farm to farm, binding sheaves or working with the thrashers. The farmers liked her and were kind to her; said they would rather have her for a hand than Ambrosch. When fall came she was to husk corn for the neighbors until Christmas, as she had done the year before; but grandmother saved her from this by getting her a place to work with our neighbors, the Harlings.

II

Grandmother often said that if she had to live in town, she thanked God she lived next the Harlings. They had been farming people, like ourselves,

6. Specialist in decorating with wallpaper.

and their place was like a little farm, with a big barn and a garden, and an orchard and grazing lots,—even a windmill. The Harlings were Norwegians, and Mrs. Harling had lived in Christiania⁷ until she was ten years old. Her husband was born in Minnesota. He was a grain merchant and cattle buyer, and was generally considered the most enterprising business man in our county.⁸ He controlled a line of grain elevators in the little towns along the railroad to the west of us, and was away from home a great deal. In his absence his wife was the head of the household.

Mrs. Harling was short and square and sturdy-looking, like her house. Every inch of her was charged with an energy that made itself felt the moment she entered a room. Her face was rosy and solid, with bright, twinkling eyes and a stubborn little chin. She was quick to anger, quick to laughter, and jolly from the depths of her soul. How well I remember her laugh; it had in it the same sudden recognition that flashed into her eyes, was a burst of humor, short and intelligent. Her rapid footsteps shook her own floors, and she routed lassitude and indifference wherever she came. She could not be negative or perfunctory about anything. Her enthusiasm, and her violent likes and dislikes, asserted themselves in all the every-day occupations of life. Wash-day was interesting, never dreary, at the Harlings'. Preserving-time was a prolonged festival, and house-cleaning was like a revolution. When Mrs. Harling made garden that spring, we could feel the stir of her undertaking through the willow hedge that separated our place from hers.

Three of the Harling children were near me in age. Charley, the only son,—they had lost an older boy,—was sixteen; Julia, who was known as the musical one, was fourteen when I was; and Sally, the tomboy with short hair, was a year younger. She was nearly as strong as I, and uncannily clever at all boys' sports. Sally was a wild thing, with sun-burned yellow hair, bobbed about her ears, and a brown skin, for she never wore a hat. She raced all over town on one roller skate, often cheated at "keeps," but was such a quick shot one couldn't catch her at it.

The grown-up daughter, Frances, was a very important person in our world. She was her father's chief clerk, and virtually managed his Black Hawk office during his frequent absences. Because of her unusual business ability, he was stern and exacting with her. He paid her a good salary, but she had few holidays and never got away from her responsibilities. Even on Sundays she went to the office to open the mail and read the markets. With Charley, who was not interested in business, but was already preparing for Annapolis,⁹ Mr. Harling was very indulgent; bought him guns and tools and electric batteries, and never asked what he did with them.

Frances was dark, like her father, and quite as tall. In winter she wore a sealskin coat and cap, and she and Mr. Harling used to walk home together in the evening, talking about grain-cars and cattle, like two men. Sometimes she came over to see grandfather after supper, and her visits flattered him. More than once they put their wits together to rescue some unfortunate farmer from the clutches of Wick Cutter, the Black Hawk money-lender.

7. Now Oslo, capital of Norway.

8. Successful plains agriculture required middlemen to store and market the grain and livestock

that large farms were producing.

9. I.e., U.S. Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland.

Grandfather said Frances Harling was as good a judge of credits as any banker in the country. The two or three men who had tried to take advantage of her in a deal acquired celebrity by their defeat. She knew every farmer for miles about; how much land he had under cultivation, how many cattle he was feeding, what his liabilities were. Her interest in these people was more than a business interest. She carried them all in her mind as if they were characters in a book or a play.

When Frances drove out into the country on business, she would go miles out of her way to call on some of the old people, or to see the women who seldom got to town. She was quick at understanding the grandmothers who spoke no English, and the most reticent and distrustful of them would tell her their story without realizing they were doing so. She went to country funerals and weddings in all weathers. A farmer's daughter who was to be married could count on a wedding present from Frances Harling.

In August the Harlings' Danish cook had to leave them. Grandmother entreated them to try *Ántonia*. She cornered Ambrosch the next time he came to town, and pointed out to him that any connection with Christian Harling would strengthen his credit and be of advantage to him. One Sunday Mrs. Harling took the long ride out to the Shimerdas' with Frances. She said she wanted to see "what the girl came from" and to have a clear understanding with her mother. I was in our yard when they came driving home, just before sunset. They laughed and waved to me as they passed, and I could see they were in great good humor. After supper, when grandfather set off to church, grandmother and I took my short cut through the willow hedge and went over to hear about the visit to the Shimerdas.

We found Mrs. Harling with Charley and Sally on the front porch, resting after her hard drive. Julia was in the hammock—she was fond of repose—and Frances was at the piano, playing without a light and talking to her mother through the open window.

Mrs. Harling laughed when she saw us coming. "I expect you left your dishes on the table to-night, Mrs. Burden," she called. Frances shut the piano and came out to join us.

They had liked *Ántonia* from their first glimpse of her; felt they knew exactly what kind of girl she was. As for Mrs. Shimerda, they found her very amusing. Mrs. Harling chuckled whenever she spoke of her. "I expect I am more at home with that sort of bird than you are, Mrs. Burden. They're a pair, Ambrosch and that old woman!"

They had had a long argument with Ambrosch about *Ántonia's* allowance for clothes and pocket-money. It was his plan that every cent of his sister's wages should be paid over to him each month, and he would provide her with such clothing as he thought necessary. When Mrs. Harling told him firmly that she would keep fifty dollars a year for *Ántonia's* own use, he declared they wanted to take his sister to town and dress her up and make a fool of her. Mrs. Harling gave us a lively account of Ambrosch's behavior throughout the interview; how he kept jumping up and putting on his cap as if he were through with the whole business, and how his mother tweaked his coat-tail and prompted him in Bohemian. Mrs. Harling finally agreed to pay three dollars a week for *Ántonia's* services—good wages in those days—and to keep her in shoes. There had been hot dispute about the shoes, Mrs. Shimerda finally saying persuasively that she would send Mrs. Harling

three fat geese every year to “make even.” Ambrosch was to bring his sister to town next Saturday.

“She’ll be awkward and rough at first, like enough,” grandmother said anxiously, “but unless she’s been spoiled by the hard life she’s led, she has it in her to be a real helpful girl.”

Mrs. Harling laughed her quick, decided laugh. “Oh, I’m not worrying, Mrs. Burden! I can bring something out of that girl. She’s barely seventeen, not too old to learn new ways. She’s good-looking, too!” she added warmly.

Frances turned to grandmother. “Oh, yes, Mrs. Burden, you didn’t tell us that! She was working in the garden when we got there, barefoot and ragged. But she has such fine brown legs and arms, and splendid color in her cheeks—like those big dark red plums.”

We were pleased at this praise. Grandmother spoke feelingly. “When she first came to this country, Frances, and had that genteel old man to watch over her, she was as pretty a girl as ever I saw. But, dear me, what a life she’s led, out in the fields with those rough thrashers! Things would have been very different with poor Ántonia if her father had lived.”

The Harlings begged us to tell them about Mr. Shimerda’s death and the big snowstorm. By the time we saw grandfather coming home from church we had told them pretty much all we knew of the Shimerdas.

“The girl will be happy here, and she’ll forget those things,” said Mrs. Harling confidently, as we rose to take our leave.

III

On Saturday Ambrosch drove up to the back gate, and Ántonia jumped down from the wagon and ran into our kitchen just as she used to do. She was wearing shoes and stockings, and was breathless and excited. She gave me a playful shake by the shoulders. “You ain’t forget about me, Jim?”

Grandmother kissed her. “God bless you, child! Now you’ve come, you must try to do right and be a credit to us.”

Ántonia looked eagerly about the house and admired everything. “Maybe I be the kind of girl you like better, now I come to town,” she suggested hopefully.

How good it was to have Ántonia near us again; to see her every day and almost every night! Her greatest fault, Mrs. Harling found, was that she so often stopped her work and fell to playing with the children. She would race about the orchard with us, or take sides in our hay-fights in the barn, or be the old bear that came down from the mountain and carried off Nina. Tony learned English so quickly that by the time school began she could speak as well as any of us.

I was jealous of Tony’s admiration for Charley Harling. Because he was always first in his classes at school, and could mend the water-pipes or the door-bell and take the clock to pieces, she seemed to think him a sort of prince. Nothing that Charley wanted was too much trouble for her. She loved to put up lunches for him when he went hunting, to mend his ball-gloves and sew buttons on his shooting-coat, baked the kind of nut-cake he liked, and fed his setter dog when he was away on trips with his father. Ántonia had made herself cloth working-slippers out of Mr. Harling’s old coats,

and in these she went padding about after Charley, fairly panting with eagerness to please him.

Next to Charley, I think she loved Nina best. Nina was only six, and she was rather more complex than the other children. She was fanciful, had all sorts of unspoken preferences, and was easily offended. At the slightest disappointment or displeasure her velvety brown eyes filled with tears, and she would lift her chin and walk silently away. If we ran after her and tried to appease her, it did no good. She walked on unmollified. I used to think that no eyes in the world could grow so large or hold so many tears as Nina's. Mrs. Harling and *Ántonia* invariably took her part. We were never given a chance to explain. The charge was simply: "You have made Nina cry. Now, Jimmy can go home, and Sally must get her arithmetic." I liked Nina, too; she was so quaint and unexpected, and her eyes were lovely; but I often wanted to shake her.

We had jolly evenings at the Harlings when the father was away. If he was at home, the children had to go to bed early, or they came over to my house to play. Mr. Harling not only demanded a quiet house, he demanded all his wife's attention. He used to take her away to their room in the west ell, and talk over his business with her all evening. Though we did not realize it then, Mrs. Harling was our audience when we played, and we always looked to her for suggestions. Nothing flattered one like her quick laugh.

Mr. Harling had a desk in his bedroom, and his own easy-chair by the window, in which no one else ever sat. On the nights when he was at home, I could see his shadow on the blind, and it seemed to me an arrogant shadow. Mrs. Harling paid no heed to any one else if he was there. Before he went to bed she always got him a lunch of smoked salmon or anchovies and beer. He kept an alcohol lamp in his room, and a French coffee-pot, and his wife made coffee for him at any hour of the night he happened to want it.

Most Black Hawk fathers had no personal habits outside their domestic ones; they paid the bills, pushed the baby carriage after office hours, moved the sprinkler about over the lawn, and took the family driving on Sunday. Mr. Harling, therefore, seemed to me autocratic and imperial in his ways. He walked, talked, put on his gloves, shook hands, like a man who felt that he had power. He was not tall, but he carried his head so haughtily that he looked a commanding figure, and there was something daring and challenging in his eyes. I used to imagine that the "nobles" of whom *Antonia* was always talking probably looked very much like Christian Harling, wore caped overcoats like his, and just such a glittering diamond upon the little finger.

Except when the father was at home, the Harling house was never quiet. Mrs. Harling and Nina and *Ántonia* made as much noise as a houseful of children, and there was usually somebody at the piano. Julia was the only one who was held down to regular hours of practicing, but they all played. When Frances came home at noon, she played until dinner was ready. When Sally got back from school, she sat down in her hat and coat and drummed the plantation melodies that negro minstrel troupes brought to town. Even Nina played the Swedish Wedding March.

Mrs. Harling had studied the piano under a good teacher, and somehow she managed to practice every day. I soon learned that if I were sent over on an

errand and found Mrs. Harling at the piano, I must sit down and wait quietly until she turned to me. I can see her at this moment; her short, square person planted firmly on the stool, her little fat hands moving quickly and neatly over the keys, her eyes fixed on the music with intelligent concentration.

IV

“I won’t have none of your weevily wheat, and I won’t have none of your barley, But I’ll take a measure of fine white flour, to make a cake for Charley.”

We were singing rhymes to tease Ántonia while she was beating up one of Charley’s favorite cakes in her big mixing-bowl. It was a crisp autumn evening, just cold enough to make one glad to quit playing tag in the yard, and retreat into the kitchen. We had begun to roll popcorn balls with syrup when we heard a knock at the back door, and Tony dropped her spoon and went to open it. A plump, fair-skinned girl was standing in the doorway. She looked demure and pretty, and made a graceful picture in her blue cashmere dress and little blue hat, with a plaid shawl drawn neatly about her shoulders and a clumsy pocketbook in her hand.

“Hello, Tony. Don’t you know me?” she asked in a smooth, low voice, looking in at us archly.

Ántonia gasped and stepped back. “Why, it’s Lena! Of course I didn’t know you, so dressed up!”

Lena Lingard laughed, as if this pleased her. I had not recognized her for a moment, either. I had never seen her before with a hat on her head—or with shoes and stockings on her feet, for that matter. And here she was, brushed and smoothed and dressed like a town girl, smiling at us with perfect composure.

“Hello, Jim,” she said carelessly as she walked into the kitchen and looked about her. “I’ve come to town to work, too, Tony.”

“Have you, now? Well, ain’t that funny!” Ántonia stood ill at ease, and didn’t seem to know just what to do with her visitor.

The door was open into the dining-room, where Mrs. Harling sat crocheting and Frances was reading. Frances asked Lena to come in and join them.

“You are Lena Lingard, aren’t you? I’ve been to see your mother, but you were off herding cattle that day. Mama, this is Chris Lingard’s oldest girl.”

Mrs. Harling dropped her worsted and examined the visitor with quick, keen eyes. Lena was not at all disconcerted. She sat down in the chair Frances pointed out, carefully arranging her pocketbook and gray cotton gloves on her lap. We followed with our popcorn, but Ántonia hung back—said she had to get her cake into the oven.

“So you have come to town,” said Mrs. Harling, her eyes still fixed on Lena. “Where are you working?”

“For Mrs. Thomas, the dressmaker. She is going to teach me to sew. She says I have quite a knack. I’m through with the farm. There ain’t any end to the work on a farm, and always so much trouble happens. I’m going to be a dressmaker.”

“Well, there have to be dressmakers. It’s a good trade. But I wouldn’t run down the farm, if I were you,” said Mrs. Harling rather severely. “How is your mother?”

"Oh, mother's never very well; she has too much to do. She'd get away from the farm, too, if she could. She was willing for me to come. After I learn to do sewing, I can make money and help her."

"See that you don't forget to," said Mrs. Harling skeptically, as she took up her crocheting again and sent the hook in and out with nimble fingers.

"No, 'm, I won't," said Lena blandly. She took a few grains of the popcorn we pressed upon her, eating them discreetly and taking care not to get her fingers sticky.

Frances drew her chair up nearer to the visitor. "I thought you were going to be married, Lena," she said teasingly. "Didn't I hear that Nick Svendsen was rushing you pretty hard?"

Lena looked up with her curiously innocent smile. "He did go with me quite a while. But his father made a fuss about it and said he wouldn't give Nick any land if he married me, so he's going to marry Annie Iverson. I wouldn't like to be her; Nick's awful sullen, and he'll take it out on her. He ain't spoke to his father since he promised."

Frances laughed. "And how do you feel about it?"

"I don't want to marry Nick, or any other man," Lena murmured. "I've seen a good deal of married life, and I don't care for it. I want to be so I can help my mother and the children at home, and not have to ask lief¹ of anybody."

"That's right," said Frances. "And Mrs. Thomas thinks you can learn dressmaking?"

"Yes, 'm. I've always liked to sew, but I never had much to do with. Mrs. Thomas makes lovely things for all the town ladies. Did you know Mrs. Gardener is having a purple velvet made? The velvet came from Omaha. My, but it's lovely!" Lena sighed softly and stroked her cashmere folds. "Tony knows I never did like out-of-door work," she added.

Mrs. Harling glanced at her. "I expect you'll learn to sew all right, Lena, if you'll only keep your head and not go gadding about to dances all the time and neglect your work, the way some country girls do."

"Yes, 'm. Tiny Soderball is coming to town, too. She's going to work at the Boys' Home Hotel. She'll see lots of strangers," Lena added wistfully.

"Too many, like enough," said Mrs. Harling. "I don't think a hotel is a good place for a girl; though I guess Mrs. Gardener keeps an eye on her waitresses."

Lena's candid eyes, that always looked a little sleepy under their long lashes, kept straying about the cheerful rooms with naïve admiration. Presently she drew on her cotton gloves. "I guess I must be leaving," she said irresolutely.

Frances told her to come again, whenever she was lonesome or wanted advice about anything. Lena replied that she didn't believe she would ever get lonesome in Black Hawk.

She lingered at the kitchen door and begged *Ántonia* to come and see her often. "I've got a room of my own at Mrs. Thomas's, with a carpet."

Tony shuffled uneasily in her cloth slippers. "I'll come sometime, but Mrs. Harling don't like to have me run much," she said evasively.

"You can do what you please when you go out, can't you?" Lena asked in a guarded whisper. "Ain't you crazy about town, Tony? I don't care what

1. Leave, permission.

anybody says, I'm done with the farm!" She glanced back over her shoulder toward the dining-room, where Mrs. Harling sat.

When Lena was gone, Frances asked Ántonia why she hadn't been a little more cordial to her.

"I didn't know if your mother would like her coming here," said Ántonia, looking troubled. "She was kind of talked about, out there."

"Yes, I know. But mother won't hold it against her if she behaves well here. You needn't say anything about that to the children. I guess Jim has heard all that gossip?"

When I nodded, she pulled my hair and told me I knew too much, anyhow. We were good friends, Frances and I.

I ran home to tell grandmother that Lena Lingard had come to town. We were glad of it, for she had a hard life on the farm.

Lena lived in the Norwegian settlement west of Squaw Creek, and she used to herd her father's cattle in the open country between his place and the Shimerdas'. Whenever we rode over in that direction we saw her out among her cattle, bareheaded and barefooted, scantily dressed in tattered clothing, always knitting as she watched her herd. Before I knew Lena, I thought of her as something wild, that always lived on the prairie, because I had never seen her under a roof. Her yellow hair was burned to a ruddy thatch on her head; but her legs and arms, curiously enough, in spite of constant exposure to the sun, kept a miraculous whiteness which somehow made her seem more undressed than other girls who went scantily clad. The first time I stopped to talk to her, I was astonished at her soft voice and easy, gentle ways. The girls out there usually got rough and mannish after they went to herding. But Lena asked Jake and me to get off our horses and stay awhile, and behaved exactly as if she were in a house and were accustomed to having visitors. She was not embarrassed by her ragged clothes, and treated us as if we were old acquaintances. Even then I noticed the unusual color of her eyes—a shade of deep violet—and their soft, confiding expression.

Chris Lingard was not a very successful farmer, and he had a large family. Lena was always knitting stockings for little brothers and sisters, and even the Norwegian women, who disapproved of her, admitted that she was a good daughter to her mother. As Tony said, she had been talked about. She was accused of making Ole Benson lose the little sense he had—and that at an age when she should still have been in pinafores.

Ole lived in a leaky dugout somewhere at the edge of the settlement. He was fat and lazy and discouraged, and bad luck had become a habit with him. After he had had every other kind of misfortune, his wife, "Crazy Mary," tried to set a neighbor's barn on fire, and was sent to the asylum at Lincoln. She was kept there for a few months, then escaped and walked all the way home, nearly two hundred miles, traveling by night and hiding in barns and haystacks by day. When she got back to the Norwegian settlement, her poor feet were as hard as hoofs. She promised to be good, and was allowed to stay at home—though every one realized she was as crazy as ever, and she still ran about barefooted through the snow, telling her domestic troubles to her neighbors.

Not long after Mary came back from the asylum, I heard a young Dane, who was helping us to thrash, tell Jake and Otto that Chris Lingard's oldest girl had

put Ole Benson out of his head, until he had no more sense than his crazy wife. When Ole was cultivating his corn that summer, he used to get discouraged in the field, tie up his team, and wander off to wherever Lena Lingard was herding. There he would sit down on the draw-side and help her watch her cattle. All the settlement was talking about it. The Norwegian preacher's wife went to Lena and told her she ought not to allow this; she begged Lena to come to church on Sundays. Lena said she hadn't a dress in the world any less ragged than the one on her back. Then the minister's wife went through her old trunks and found some things she had worn before her marriage.

The next Sunday Lena appeared at church, a little late, with her hair done up neatly on her head, like a young woman, wearing shoes and stockings, and the new dress, which she had made over for herself very becomingly. The congregation stared at her. Until that morning no one—unless it were Ole—had realized how pretty she was, or that she was growing up. The swelling lines of her figure had been hidden under the shapeless rags she wore in the fields. After the last hymn had been sung, and the congregation was dismissed, Ole slipped out to the hitch-bar and lifted Lena on her horse. That, in itself, was shocking; a married man was not expected to do such things. But it was nothing to the scene that followed. Crazy Mary darted out from the group of women at the church door, and ran down the road after Lena, shouting horrible threats.

"Look out, you Lena Lingard, look out! I'll come over with a corn-knife one day and trim some of that shape off you. Then you won't sail round so fine, making eyes at the men! . . ."

The Norwegian women didn't know where to look. They were formal housewives, most of them, with a severe sense of decorum. But Lena Lingard only laughed her lazy, good-natured laugh and rode on, gazing back over her shoulder at Ole's infuriated wife.

The time came, however, when Lena didn't laugh. More than once Crazy Mary chased her across the prairie and round and round the Shimerdas' cornfield. Lena never told her father; perhaps she was ashamed; perhaps she was more afraid of his anger than of the cornknife. I was at the Shimerdas' one afternoon when Lena came bounding through the red grass as fast as her white legs could carry her. She ran straight into the house and hid in *Ántonia's* feather-bed. Mary was not far behind; she came right up to the door and made us feel how sharp her blade was, showing us very graphically just what she meant to do to Lena. Mrs. Shimerda, leaning out of the window, enjoyed the situation keenly, and was sorry when *Ántonia* sent Mary away, mollified by an apronful of bottle-tomatoes. Lena came out from Tony's room behind the kitchen, very pink from the heat of the feathers, but otherwise calm. She begged *Ántonia* and me to go with her, and help get her cattle together; they were scattered and might be gorging themselves in somebody's cornfield.

"Maybe you lose a steer and learn not to make somethings with your eyes at married men," Mrs. Shimerda told her hectoringly.

Lena only smiled her sleepy smile. "I never made anything to him with my eyes. I can't help it if he hangs around, and I can't order him off. It ain't my prairie."

V

After Lena came to Black Hawk I often met her downtown, where she would be matching sewing silk or buying “findings” for Mrs. Thomas. If I happened to walk home with her, she told me all about the dresses she was helping to make, or about what she saw and heard when she was with Tiny Soderball at the hotel on Saturday nights.

The Boys’ Home was the best hotel on our branch of the Burlington, and all the commercial travelers² in that territory tried to get into Black Hawk for Sunday. They used to assemble in the parlor after supper on Saturday nights. Marshall Field’s³ man, Anson Kirkpatrick, played the piano and sang all the latest sentimental songs. After Tiny had helped the cook wash the dishes, she and Lena sat on the other side of the double doors between the parlor and the dining-room, listening to the music and giggling at the jokes and stories. Lena often said she hoped I would be a traveling man when I grew up. They had a gay life of it; nothing to do but ride about on trains all day and go to theaters when they were in big cities. Behind the hotel there was an old store building, where the salesmen opened their big trunks and spread out their samples on the counters. The Black Hawk merchants went to look at these things and order goods, and Mrs. Thomas, though she was “retail trade,” was permitted to see them and to “get ideas.” They were all generous, these traveling men; they gave Tiny Soderball handkerchiefs and gloves and ribbons and striped stockings, and so many bottles of perfume and cakes of scented soap that she bestowed some of them on Lena.

One afternoon in the week before Christmas I came upon Lena and her funny, square-headed little brother Chris, standing before the drug-store, gazing in at the wax dolls and blocks and Noah’s arks arranged in the frosty show window. The boy had come to town with a neighbor to do his Christmas shopping, for he had money of his own this year. He was only twelve, but that winter he had got the job of sweeping out the Norwegian church and making the fire in it every Sunday morning. A cold job it must have been, too!

We went into Duckford’s dry-goods store, and Chris unwrapped all his presents and showed them to me—something for each of the six younger than himself, even a rubber pig for the baby. Lena had given him one of Tiny Soderball’s bottles of perfume for his mother, and he thought he would get some handkerchiefs to go with it. They were cheap, and he hadn’t much money left. We found a tableful of handkerchiefs spread out for view at Duckford’s. Chris wanted those with initial letters in the corner, because he had never seen any before. He studied them seriously, while Lena looked over his shoulder, telling him she thought the red letters would hold their color best. He seemed so perplexed that I thought perhaps he hadn’t enough money, after all. Presently he said gravely,—

“Sister, you know mother’s name is Berthe. I don’t know if I ought to get B for Berthe, or M for Mother.”

Lena patted his bristly head. “I’d get the B, Chrissy. It will please her for you to think about her name. Nobody ever calls her by it now.”

2. Traveling salesmen.

3. Prominent Chicago-based merchant (1834–1906) who pioneered many modern retailing

practices; best known now for the department-store chain bearing his name.

That satisfied him. His face cleared at once, and he took three reds and three blues. When the neighbor came in to say that it was time to start, Lena wound Chris's comforter about his neck and turned up his jacket collar—he had no overcoat—and we watched him climb into the wagon and start on his long, cold drive. As we walked together up the windy street, Lena wiped her eyes with the back of her woolen glove. "I get awful homesick for them, all the same," she murmured, as if she were answering some remembered reproach.

VI

Winter comes down savagely over a little town on the prairie. The wind that sweeps in from the open country strips away all the leafy screens that hide one yard from another in summer, and the houses seem to draw closer together. The roofs, that looked so far away across the green tree-tops, now stare you in the face, and they are so much uglier than when their angles were softened by vines and shrubs.

In the morning, when I was fighting my way to school against the wind, I couldn't see anything but the road in front of me; but in the late afternoon, when I was coming home, the town looked bleak and desolate to me. The pale, cold light of the winter sunset did not beautify—it was like the light of truth itself. When the smoky clouds hung low in the west and the red sun went down behind them, leaving a pink flush on the snowy roofs and the blue drifts, then the wind sprang up afresh, with a kind of bitter song, as if it said: "This is reality, whether you like it or not. All those frivolities of summer, the light and shadow, the living mask of green that trembled over everything, they were lies, and this is what was underneath. This is the truth." It was as if we were being punished for loving the loveliness of summer.

If I loitered on the playground after school, or went to the post-office for the mail and lingered to hear the gossip about the cigar-stand, it would be growing dark by the time I came home. The sun was gone; the frozen streets stretched long and blue before me; the lights were shining pale in kitchen windows, and I could smell the suppers cooking as I passed. Few people were abroad, and each one of them was hurrying toward a fire. The glowing stoves in the houses were like magnets. When one passed an old man, one could see nothing of his face but a red nose sticking out between a frosted beard and a long plush cap. The young men capered along with their hands in their pockets, and sometimes tried a slide on the icy sidewalk. The children, in their bright hoods and comforters, never walked, but always ran from the moment they left their door, beating their mittens against their sides. When I got as far as the Methodist Church, I was about halfway home. I can remember how glad I was when there happened to be a light in the church, and the painted glass window shone out at us as we came along the frozen street. In the winter bleakness a hunger for color came over people, like the Laplander's craving for fats and sugar. Without knowing why, we used to linger on the sidewalk outside the church when the lamps were lighted early for choir practice or prayer-meeting, shivering and talking until our feet were like lumps of ice. The crude reds and greens and blues of that colored glass held us there.

On winter nights, the lights in the Harlings' windows drew me like the painted glass. Inside that warm, roomy house there was color, too. After

supper I used to catch up my cap, stick my hands in my pockets, and dive through the willow hedge as if witches were after me. Of course, if Mr. Harling was at home, if his shadow stood out on the blind of the west room, I did not go in, but turned and walked home by the long way, through the street, wondering what book I should read as I sat down with the two old people.

Such disappointments only gave greater zest to the nights when we acted charades, or had a costume ball in the back parlor, with Sally always dressed like a boy. Frances taught us to dance that winter, and she said, from the first lesson, that Ántonia would make the best dancer among us. On Saturday nights, Mrs. Harling used to play the old operas for us,—“Martha,” “Norma,” “Rigoletto,”⁴—telling us the story while she played. Every Saturday night was like a party. The parlor, the back parlor, and the dining-room were warm and brightly lighted, with comfortable chairs and sofas, and gay pictures on the walls. One always felt at ease there. Ántonia brought her sewing and sat with us—she was already beginning to make pretty clothes for herself. After the long winter evenings on the prairie, with Ambrosch’s sullen silences and her mother’s complaints, the Harlings’ house seemed, as she said, “like Heaven” to her. She was never too tired to make taffy or chocolate cookies for us. If Sally whispered in her ear, or Charley gave her three winks, Tony would rush into the kitchen and build a fire in the range on which she had already cooked three meals that day.

While we sat in the kitchen waiting for the cookies to bake or the taffy to cool, Nina used to coax Ántonia to tell her stories—about the calf that broke its leg, or how Yulka saved her little turkeys from drowning in the freset, or about old Christmases and weddings in Bohemia. Nina interpreted the stories about the crêche fancifully, and in spite of our derision she cherished a belief that Christ was born in Bohemia a short time before the Shimerdas left that country. We all liked Tony’s stories. Her voice had a peculiarly engaging quality; it was deep, a little husky, and one always heard the breath vibrating behind it. Everything she said seemed to come right out of her heart.

One evening when we were picking out kernels for walnut taffy, Tony told us a new story.

“Mrs. Harling, did you ever hear about what happened up in the Norwegian settlement last summer, when I was thrashing there? We were at Iversons’, and I was driving one of the grain wagons.”

Mrs. Harling came out and sat down among us. “Could you throw the wheat into the bin yourself, Tony?” She knew what heavy work it was.

“Yes, mam, I did. I could shovel just as fast as that fat Andern boy that drove the other wagon. One day it was just awful hot. When we got back to the field from dinner, we took things kind of easy. The men put in the horses and got the machine going, and Ole Iverson was up on the deck, cutting bands. I was sitting against a straw stack, trying to get some shade. My wagon wasn’t going out first, and somehow I felt the heat awful that day. The sun was so hot like it was going to burn the world up. After a while I see a man coming across the stubble, and when he got close I see it was a tramp.⁵ His

4. Prominent 19th-century operas, which are still performed. *Martha*, by Friedrich von Flotow (1812–1883), first performed in 1847. *Norma*, by Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835), first performed in

1831. *Rigoletto*, by Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), first performed in 1851.

5. Vagabond.

toes stuck out of his shoes, and he hadn't shaved for a long while, and his eyes was awful red and wild, like he had some sickness. He comes right up and begins to talk like he knows me already. He says: 'The ponds in this country is done got so low a man couldn't drown himself in one of 'em.'

"I told him nobody wanted to drown themselves, but if we didn't have rain soon we'd have to pump water for the cattle.

"'Oh, cattle,' he says, 'you'll all take care of your cattle! Ain't you got no beer here?' I told him he'd have to go to the Bohemians for beer; the Norwegians didn't have none when they thrashed. 'My God!' he says, 'so it's Norwegians now, is it? I thought this was Americy.'

"Then he goes up to the machine and yells out to Ole Iverson, 'Hello, partner, let me up there. I can cut bands, and I'm tired of trampin'. I won't go no farther.'

"I tried to make signs to Ole, 'cause I thought that man was crazy and might get the machine stopped up. But Ole, he was glad to get down out of the sun and chaff—it gets down your neck and sticks to you something awful when it's hot like that. So Ole jumped down and crawled under one of the wagons for shade, and the tramp got on the machine. He cut bands all right for a few minutes, and then, Mrs. Harling, he waved his hand to me and jumped head-first right into the thrashing machine after the wheat.

"I begun to scream, and the men run to stop the horses, but the belt had sucked him down, and by the time they got her stopped he was all beat and cut to pieces. He was wedged in so tight it was a hard job to get him out, and the machine ain't never worked right since."

"Was he clear dead, Tony?" we cried.

"Was he dead? Well, I guess so! There, now, Nina's all upset. We won't talk about it. Don't you cry, Nina. No old tramp won't get you while Tony's here."

Mrs. Harling spoke up sternly. "Stop crying, Nina, or I'll always send you upstairs when Antonia tells us about the country. Did they never find out where he came from, Antonia?"

"Never, mam. He hadn't been seen nowhere except in a little town they call Conway. He tried to get beer there, but there wasn't any saloon. Maybe he came in on a freight, but the brakeman hadn't seen him. They couldn't find no letters nor nothing on him; nothing but an old penknife in his pocket and the wishbone of a chicken wrapped up in a piece of paper, and some poetry."

"Some poetry?" we exclaimed.

"I remember," said Frances. "It was 'The Old Oaken Bucket,'⁶ cut out of a newspaper and nearly worn out. Ole Iverson brought it into the office and showed it to me."

"Now, wasn't that strange, Miss Frances?" Tony asked thoughtfully. "What would anybody want to kill themselves in summer for? In thrashing time, too! It's nice everywhere then."

"So it is, Antonia," said Mrs. Harling heartily. "Maybe I'll go home and help you thrash next summer. Isn't that taffy nearly ready to eat? I've been smelling it a long while."

6. Popular poem by the American writer Samuel Woodworth (1785–1842), first published in 1826.

There was a basic harmony between Ántonia and her mistress. They had strong, independent natures, both of them. They knew what they liked, and were not always trying to imitate other people. They loved children and animals and music, and rough play and digging in the earth. They liked to prepare rich, hearty food and to see people eat it; to make up soft white beds and to see youngsters asleep in them. They ridiculed conceited people and were quick to help unfortunate ones. Deep down in each of them there was a kind of hearty joviality, a relish of life, not over-delicate, but very invigorating. I never tried to define it, but I was distinctly conscious of it. I could not imagine Ántonia's living for a week in any other house in Black Hawk than the Harlings'.

VII

Winter lies too long in country towns; hangs on until it is stale and shabby, old and sullen. On the farm the weather was the great fact, and men's affairs went on underneath it, as the streams creep under the ice. But in Black Hawk the scene of human life was spread out shrunken and pinched, frozen down to the bare stalk.

Through January and February I went to the river with the Harlings on clear nights, and we skated up to the big island and made bonfires on the frozen sand. But by March the ice was rough and choppy, and the snow on the river bluffs was gray and mournful-looking. I was tired of school, tired of winter clothes, of the rutted streets, of the dirty drifts and the piles of cinders that had lain in the yards so long. There was only one break in the dreary monotony of that month; when Blind d'Arnault, the negro pianist, came to town. He gave a concert at the Opera House on Monday night, and he and his manager spent Saturday and Sunday at our comfortable hotel. Mrs. Harling had known d'Arnault for years. She told Ántonia she had better go to see Tiny that Saturday evening, as there would certainly be music at the Boys' Home.

Saturday night after supper I ran downtown to the hotel and slipped quietly into the parlor. The chairs and sofas were already occupied, and the air smelled pleasantly of cigar smoke. The parlor had once been two rooms, and the floor was sway-backed where the partition had been cut away. The wind from without made waves in the long carpet. A coal stove glowed at either end of the room, and the grand piano in the middle stood open.

There was an atmosphere of unusual freedom about the house that night, for Mrs. Gardener had gone to Omaha for a week. Johnnie had been having drinks with the guests until he was rather absent-minded. It was Mrs. Gardener who ran the business and looked after everything. Her husband stood at the desk and welcomed incoming travelers. He was a popular fellow, but no manager.

Mrs. Gardener was admittedly the best-dressed woman in Black Hawk, drove the best horse, and had a smart trap and a little white-and-gold sleigh. She seemed indifferent to her possessions, was not half so solicitous about them as her friends were. She was tall, dark, severe, with something Indian-like in the rigid immobility of her face. Her manner was cold, and she talked little. Guests felt that they were receiving, not conferring, a favor when they stayed at her house. Even the smartest traveling men were flattered when Mrs. Gardener stopped to chat with them for a moment. The patrons of the

hotel were divided into two classes; those who had seen Mrs. Gardener's diamonds, and those who had not.

When I stole into the parlor Anson Kirkpatrick, Marshall Field's man, was at the piano, playing airs from a musical comedy then running in Chicago. He was a dapper little Irishman, very vain, homely as a monkey, with friends everywhere, and a sweetheart in every port, like a sailor. I did not know all the men who were sitting about, but I recognized a furniture salesman from Kansas City, a drug man, and Willy O'Reilly, who traveled for a jewelry house and sold musical instruments. The talk was all about good and bad hotels, actors and actresses and musical prodigies. I learned that Mrs. Gardener had gone to Omaha to hear Booth and Barrett, who were to play there next week, and that Mary Anderson was having a great success in "A Winter's Tale,"⁷ in London.

The door from the office opened, and Johnnie Gardener came in, directing Blind d'Arnault,—he would never consent to be led. He was a heavy, bulky mulatto, on short legs, and he came tapping the floor in front of him with his gold-headed cane. His yellow face was lifted in the light, with a show of white teeth, all grinning, and his shrunken, papery eyelids lay motionless over his blind eyes.

"Good evening, gentlemen. No ladies here? Good-evening, gentlemen. We going to have a little music? Some of you gentlemen going to play for me this evening?" It was the soft, amiable negro voice, like those I remembered from early childhood, with the note of docile subservience in it. He had the negro head, too; almost no head at all; nothing behind the ears but folds of neck under close-clipped wool. He would have been repulsive if his face had not been so kindly and happy. It was the happiest face I had seen since I left Virginia.

He felt his way directly to the piano. The moment he sat down, I noticed the nervous infirmity of which Mrs. Harling had told me. When he was sitting, or standing still, he swayed back and forth incessantly, like a rocking toy. At the piano, he swayed in time to the music, and when he was not playing, his body kept up this motion, like an empty mill grinding on. He found the pedals and tried them, ran his yellow hands up and down the keys a few times, tinkling off scales, then turned to the company.

"She seems all right, gentlemen. Nothing happened to her since the last time I was here. Mrs. Gardener, she always has this piano tuned up before I come. Now, gentlemen, I expect you've all got grand voices. Seems like we might have some good old plantation songs to-night."

The men gathered round him, as he began to play "My Old Kentucky Home."⁸ They sang one negro melody after another, while the mulatto sat rocking himself, his head thrown back, his yellow face lifted, its shriveled eyelids never fluttering.

He was born in the Far South, on the d'Arnault plantation, where the spirit if not the fact of slavery persisted. When he was three weeks old he

7. A play by William Shakespeare (1564–1616). Edwin Booth (1833–1893) and Lawrence Barrett (1838–1891), American actors who had a long partnership performing Shakespearean plays. The dates of these actors' lives allow for rather precise dating of the novel. Anderson was an English actress.

8. Nostalgic popular song about the South by Stephen Foster (1826–1864), who composed for minstrel shows in which white performers acted in blackface. Foster's songs were often mistaken for folk songs and, as Cather shows here, were performed by black musicians as well as white.

had an illness which left him totally blind. As soon as he was old enough to sit up alone and toddle about, another affliction, the nervous motion of his body, became apparent. His mother, a buxom young negro wench who was laundress for the d'Arnaults, concluded that her blind baby was "not right" in his head, and she was ashamed of him. She loved him devotedly, but he was so ugly, with his sunken eyes and his "fidgets," that she hid him away from people. All the dainties she brought down from the "Big House" were for the blind child, and she beat and cuffed her other children whenever she found them teasing him or trying to get his chicken-bone away from him. He began to talk early, remembered everything he heard, and his mammy said he "wasn't all wrong." She named him Samson, because he was blind, but on the plantation he was known as "yellow Martha's simple child." He was docile and obedient, but when he was six years old he began to run away from home, always taking the same direction. He felt his way through the lilacs, along the boxwood hedge, up to the south wing of the "Big House," where Miss Nellie d'Arnault practiced the piano every morning. This angered his mother more than anything else he could have done; she was so ashamed of his ugliness that she couldn't bear to have white folks see him. Whenever she caught him slipping away from the cabin, she whipped him unmercifully, and told him what dreadful things old Mr. d'Arnault would do to him if he ever found him near the "Big House." But the next time Samson had a chance, he ran away again. If Miss d'Arnault stopped practicing for a moment and went toward the window, she saw this hideous little pickaninny, dressed in an old piece of sacking, standing in the open space between the hollyhock rows, his body rocking automatically, his blind face lifted to the sun and wearing an expression of idiotic rapture. Often she was tempted to tell Martha that the child must be kept at home, but somehow the memory of his foolish, happy face deterred her. She remembered that his sense of hearing was nearly all he had,—though it did not occur to her that he might have more of it than other children.

One day Samson was standing thus while Miss Nellie was playing her lesson to her music-master. The windows were open. He heard them get up from the piano, talk a little while, and then leave the room. He heard the door close after them. He crept up to the front windows and stuck his head in: there was no one there. He could always detect the presence of any one in a room. He put one foot over the window sill and straddled it. His mother had told him over and over how his master would give him to the big mastiff if he ever found him "meddling." Samson had got too near the mastiff's kennel once, and had felt his terrible breath in his face. He thought about that, but he pulled in his other foot.

Through the dark he found his way to the Thing, to its mouth. He touched it softly, and it answered softly, kindly. He shivered and stood still. Then he began to feel it all over, ran his finger tips along the slippery sides, embraced the carved legs, tried to get some conception of its shape and size, of the space it occupied in primeval night. It was cold and hard, and like nothing else in his black universe. He went back to its mouth, began at one end of the keyboard and felt his way down into the mellow thunder, as far as he could go. He seemed to know that it must be done with the fingers, not with the fists or the feet. He approached this highly artificial instrument through a mere instinct, and coupled himself to it, as if he knew it

was to piece him out and make a whole creature of him. After he had tried over all the sounds, he began to finger out passages from things Miss Nellie had been practicing, passages that were already his, that lay under the bones of his pinched, conical little skull, definite as animal desires. The door opened; Miss Nellie and her music-master stood behind it, but blind Samson, who was so sensitive to presences, did not know they were there. He was feeling out the pattern that lay all ready-made on the big and little keys. When he paused for a moment, because the sound was wrong and he wanted another, Miss Nellie spoke softly. He whirled about in a spasm of terror, leaped forward in the dark, struck his head on the open window, and fell screaming and bleeding to the floor. He had what his mother called a fit. The doctor came and gave him opium.

When Samson was well again, his young mistress led him back to the piano. Several teachers experimented with him. They found he had absolute pitch, and a remarkable memory. As a very young child he could repeat, after a fashion, any composition that was played for him. No matter how many wrong notes he struck, he never lost the intention of a passage, he brought the substance of it across by irregular and astonishing means. He wore his teachers out. He could never learn like other people, never acquired any finish. He was always a negro prodigy who played barbarously and wonderfully. As piano playing, it was perhaps abominable, but as music it was something real, vitalized by a sense of rhythm that was stronger than his other physical senses,—that not only filled his dark mind, but worried his body incessantly. To hear him, to watch him, was to see a negro enjoying himself as only a negro can. It was as if all the agreeable sensations possible to creatures of flesh and blood were heaped up on those black and white keys, and he were gloating over them and trickling them through his yellow fingers.

In the middle of a crashing waltz d'Arnault suddenly began to play softly, and, turning to one of the men who stood behind him, whispered, "Somebody dancing in there." He jerked his bullet head toward the dining-room. "I hear little feet,—girls, I 'spect."

Anson Kirkpatrick mounted a chair and peeped over the transom. Springing down, he wrenched open the doors and ran out into the dining-room. Tiny and Lena, Antonia and Mary Dusak, were waltzing in the middle of the floor. They separated and fled toward the kitchen, giggling.

Kirkpatrick caught Tiny by the elbows. "What's the matter with you girls? Dancing out here by yourselves, when there's a roomful of lonesome men on the other side of the partition! Introduce me to your friends, Tiny."

The girls, still laughing, were trying to escape. Tiny looked alarmed. "Mrs. Gardener wouldn't like it," she protested. "She'd be awful mad if you was to come out here and dance with us."

"Mrs. Gardener's in Omaha, girl. Now, you're Lena, are you?—and you're Tony and you're Mary. Have I got you all straight?"

O'Reilly and the others began to pile the chairs on the tables. Johnnie Gardener ran in from the office.

"Easy, boys, easy!" he entreated them. "You'll wake the cook, and there'll be the devil to pay for me. She won't hear the music, but she'll be down the minute anything's moved in the dining-room."

"Oh, what do you care, Johnnie? Fire the cook and wire Molly to bring another. Come along, nobody'll tell tales."

Johnnie shook his head. "'S a fact, boys," he said confidentially. "If I take a drink in Black Hawk, Molly knows it in Omaha!"

His guests laughed and slapped him on the shoulder. "Oh, we'll make it all right with Molly. Get your back up, Johnnie."

Molly was Mrs. Gardener's name, of course. "Molly Bawn" was painted in large blue letters on the glossy white side of the hotel bus, and "Molly" was engraved inside Johnnie's ring and on his watch-case—doubtless on his heart, too. He was an affectionate little man, and he thought his wife a wonderful woman; he knew that without her he would hardly be more than a clerk in some other man's hotel.

At a word from Kirkpatrick, d'Arnault spread himself out over the piano, and began to draw the dance music out of it, while the perspiration shone on his short wool and on his uplifted face. He looked like some glistening African god of pleasure, full of strong, savage blood. Whenever the dancers paused to change partners or to catch breath, he would boom out softly, "Who's that goin' back on me? One of these city gentlemen, I bet! Now, you girls, you ain't goin' to let that floor get cold?"

Ántonia seemed frightened at first, and kept looking questioningly at Lena and Tiny over Willy O'Reilly's shoulder. Tiny Soderball was trim and slender, with lively little feet and pretty ankles—she wore her dresses very short. She was quicker in speech, lighter in movement and manner than the other girls. Mary Dusak was broad and brown of countenance, slightly marked by smallpox, but handsome for all that. She had beautiful chestnut hair, coils of it; her forehead was low and smooth, and her commanding dark eyes regarded the world indifferently and fearlessly. She looked bold and resourceful and unscrupulous, and she was all of these. They were handsome girls, had the fresh color of their country up-bringing, and in their eyes that brilliancy which is called,—by no metaphor, alas!—"the light of youth."

D'Arnault played until his manager came and shut the piano. Before he left us, he showed us his gold watch which struck the hours, and a topaz ring, given him by some Russian nobleman who delighted in negro melodies, and had heard d'Arnault play in New Orleans. At last he tapped his way upstairs, after bowing to everybody, docile and happy. I walked home with Ántonia. We were so excited that we dreaded to go to bed. We lingered a long while at the Harlings' gate, whispering in the cold until the restlessness was slowly chilled out of us.

VIII

The Harling children and I were never happier, never felt more contented and secure, than in the weeks of spring which broke that long winter. We were out all day in the thin sunshine, helping Mrs. Harling and Tony break the ground and plant the garden, dig around the orchard trees, tie up vines and clip the hedges. Every morning, before I was up, I could hear Tony singing in the garden rows. After the apple and cherry trees broke into bloom, we ran about under them, hunting for the new nests the birds were building, throwing clods at each other, and playing hide-and-seek with Nina. Yet the summer which was to change everything was coming nearer every day. When boys and girls are growing up, life can't stand still, not even in the quietest

of country towns; and they have to grow up, whether they will or no. That is what their elders are always forgetting.

It must have been in June, for Mrs. Harling and Antonia were preserving cherries, when I stopped one morning to tell them that a dancing pavilion had come to town. I had seen two drays hauling the canvas and painted poles up from the depot.

That afternoon three cheerful-looking Italians strolled about Black Hawk, looking at everything, and with them was a dark, stout woman who wore a long gold watch chain about her neck and carried a black lace parasol. They seemed especially interested in children and vacant lots. When I overtook them and stopped to say a word, I found them affable and confiding. They told me they worked in Kansas City in the winter, and in summer they went out among the farming towns with their tent and taught dancing. When business fell off in one place, they moved on to another.

The dancing pavilion was put up near the Danish laundry, on a vacant lot surrounded by tall, arched cottonwood trees. It was very much like a merry-go-round tent, with open sides and gay flags flying from the poles. Before the week was over, all the ambitious mothers were sending their children to the afternoon dancing class. At three o'clock one met little girls in white dresses and little boys in the round-collared shirts of the time, hurrying along the sidewalk on their way to the tent. Mrs. Vanni received them at the entrance, always dressed in lavender with a great deal of black lace, her important watch chain lying on her bosom. She wore her hair on the top of her head, built up in a black tower, with red coral combs. When she smiled, she showed two rows of strong, crooked yellow teeth. She taught the little children herself, and her husband, the harpist, taught the older ones.

Often the mothers brought their fancy-work⁹ and sat on the shady side of the tent during the lesson. The popcorn man wheeled his glass wagon under the big cottonwood by the door, and lounged in the sun, sure of a good trade when the dancing was over. Mr. Jensen, the Danish laundryman, used to bring a chair from his porch and sit out in the grass plot. Some ragged little boys from the depot sold pop and iced lemonade under a white umbrella at the corner, and made faces at the spruce youngsters who came to dance. That vacant lot soon became the most cheerful place in town. Even on the hottest afternoons the cottonwoods made a rustling shade, and the air smelled of popcorn and melted butter, and Bouncing Bets wilting in the sun. Those hardy flowers had run away from the laundry-man's garden, and the grass in the middle of the lot was pink with them.

The Vannis kept exemplary order, and closed every evening at the hour suggested by the City Council. When Mrs. Vanni gave the signal, and the harp struck up "Home, Sweet Home,"¹ all Black Hawk knew it was ten o'clock. You could set your watch by that tune as confidently as by the Round House² whistle.

At last there was something to do in those long, empty summer evenings, when the married people sat like images on their front porches, and the boys

9. Embroidery.

1. Extremely popular song featured in the play *Clari*; or, *The Maid of Milan* (first produced in 1823) by the American John Howard Payne

(1791–1852).

2. Circular building for housing and repairing locomotives.

and girls tramped and tramped the board sidewalks—northward to the edge of the open prairie, south to the depot, then back again to the post-office, the ice-cream parlor, the butcher shop. Now there was a place where the girls could wear their new dresses, and where one could laugh aloud without being reproved by the ensuing silence. That silence seemed to ooze out of the ground, to hang under the foliage of the black maple trees with the bats and shadows. Now it was broken by light-hearted sounds. First the deep purring of Mr. Vanni's harp came in silvery ripples through the blackness of the dusty-smelling night; then the violins fell in—one of them was almost like a flute. They called so archly, so seductively, that our feet hurried toward the tent of themselves. Why hadn't we had a tent before?

Dancing became popular now, just as roller skating had been the summer before. The Progressive Euchre³ Club arranged with the Vannis for the exclusive use of the floor on Tuesday and Friday nights. At other times any one could dance who paid his money and was orderly; the railroad men, the Round House mechanics, the delivery boys, the ice-man, the farmhands who lived near enough to ride into town after their day's work was over.

I never missed a Saturday night dance. The tent was open until midnight then. The country boys came in from farms eight and ten miles away, and all the country girls were on the floor,—Ántonia and Lena and Tiny, and the Danish laundry girls and their friends. I was not the only boy who found these dances gayer than the others. The young men who belonged to the Progressive Euchre Club used to drop in late and risk a tiff with their sweet-hearts and general condemnation for a waltz with "the hired girls."

IX

There was a curious social situation in Black Hawk. All the young men felt the attraction of the fine, well-set-up country girls who had come to town to earn a living, and, in nearly every case, to help the father struggle out of debt, or to make it possible for the younger children of the family to go to school.

Those girls had grown up in the first bitter-hard times, and had got little schooling themselves. But the younger brothers and sisters, for whom they made such sacrifices and who have had "advantages," never seem to me, when I meet them now, half as interesting or as well educated. The older girls, who helped to break up the wild sod, learned so much from life, from poverty, from their mothers and grandmothers; they had all, like Ántonia, been early awakened and made observant by coming at a tender age from an old country to a new. I can remember a score of these country girls who were in service in Black Hawk during the few years I lived there, and I can remember something unusual and engaging about each of them. Physically they were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigor which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement, and made them conspicuous among Black Hawk women.

That was before the day of High-School athletics. Girls who had to walk more than half a mile to school were pitied. There was not a tennis court in the town; physical exercise was thought rather inelegant for the daughters of

3. Card game for four players.

well-to-do families. Some of the High-School girls were jolly and pretty, but they stayed indoors in winter because of the cold, and in summer because of the heat. When one danced with them their bodies never moved inside their clothes; their muscles seemed to ask but one thing—not to be disturbed. I remember those girls merely as faces in the schoolroom, gay and rosy, or listless and dull, cut off below the shoulders, like cherubs, by the ink-smeared tops of the high desks that were surely put there to make us round-shouldered and hollow-chested.

The daughters of Black Hawk merchants had a confident, uninquiring belief that they were “refined,” and that the country girls, who “worked out,” were not. The American⁴ farmers in our country were quite as hard-pressed as their neighbors from other countries. All alike had come to Nebraska with little capital and no knowledge of the soil they must subdue. All had borrowed money on their land. But no matter in what straits the Pennsylvanian or Virginian found himself, he would not let his daughters go out into service. Unless his girls could teach a country school, they sat at home in poverty. The Bohemian and Scandinavian girls could not get positions as teachers, because they had had no opportunity to learn the language. Determined to help in the struggle to clear the homestead from debt, they had no alternative but to go into service. Some of them, after they came to town, remained as serious and as discreet in behavior as they had been when they ploughed and herded on their father’s farm. Others, like the three Bohemian Marys, tried to make up for the years of youth they had lost. But every one of them did what she had set out to do, and sent home those hard-earned dollars. The girls I knew were always helping to pay for ploughs and reapers, brood-sows, or steers to fatten.

One result of this family solidarity was that the foreign farmers in our county were the first to become prosperous. After the fathers were out of debt, the daughters married the sons of neighbors,—usually of like nationality,—and the girls who once worked in Black Hawk kitchens are to-day managing big farms and fine families of their own; their children are better off than the children of the town women they used to serve.

I thought the attitude of the town people toward these girls very stupid. If I told my schoolmates that Lena Lingard’s grandfather was a clergyman, and much respected in Norway, they looked at me blankly. What did it matter? All foreigners were ignorant people who couldn’t speak English. There was not a man in Black Hawk who had the intelligence or cultivation, much less the personal distinction, of *Ántonia’s* father. Yet people saw no difference between her and the three Marys; they were all Bohemians, all “hired girls.”

I always knew I should live long enough to see my country girls come into their own, and I have. To-day the best that a harassed Black Hawk merchant can hope for is to sell provisions and farm machinery and automobiles to the rich farms where that first crop of stalwart Bohemian and Scandinavian girls are now the mistresses.

The Black Hawk boys looked forward to marrying Black Hawk girls, and living in a brand-new little house with best chairs that must not be sat upon, and hand-painted china that must not be used. But sometimes a young fellow would look up from his ledger, or out through the grating of his father’s bank, and let his eyes follow Lena Lingard, as she passed the window with

4. I.e., born in America, nonimmigrant.

her slow, undulating walk, or Tiny Soderball, tripping by in her short skirt and striped stockings.

The country girls were considered a menace to the social order. Their beauty shone out too boldly against a conventional background. But anxious mothers need have felt no alarm. They mistook the mettle of their sons. The respect for respectability was stronger than any desire in Black Hawk youth.

Our young man of position was like the son of a royal house; the boy who swept out his office or drove his delivery wagon might frolic with the jolly country girls, but he himself must sit all evening in a plush parlor where conversation dragged so perceptibly that the father often came in and made blundering efforts to warm up the atmosphere. On his way home from his dull call, he would perhaps meet Tony and Lena, coming along the sidewalk whispering to each other, or the three Bohemian Marys in their long plush coats and caps, comporting themselves with a dignity that only made their eventful histories the more piquant. If he went to the hotel to see a traveling man on business, there was Tiny, arching her shoulders at him like a kitten. If he went into the laundry to get his collars, there were the four Danish girls, smiling up from their ironing-boards, with their white throats and their pink cheeks.

The three Marys were the heroines of a cycle of scandalous stories, which the old men were fond of relating as they sat about the cigar-stand in the drug-store. Mary Dusak had been housekeeper for a bachelor rancher from Boston, and after several years in his service she was forced to retire from the world for a short time. Later she came back to town to take the place of her friend, Mary Svoboda, who was similarly embarrassed.⁵ The three Marys were considered as dangerous as high explosives to have about the kitchen, yet they were such good cooks and such admirable house-keepers that they never had to look for a place.

The Vannis' tent brought the town boys and the country girls together on neutral ground. Sylvester Lovett, who was cashier in his father's bank, always found his way to the tent on Saturday night. He took all the dances Lena Lingard would give him, and even grew bold enough to walk home with her. If his sisters or their friends happened to be among the onlookers on "popular nights," Sylvester stood back in the shadow under the cotton-wood trees, smoking and watching Lena with a harassed expression. Several times I stumbled upon him there in the dark, and I felt rather sorry for him. He reminded me of Ole Benson, who used to sit on the draw-side and watch Lena herd her cattle. Later in the summer, when Lena went home for a week to visit her mother, I heard from Ántonia that young Lovett drove all the way out there to see her, and took her buggy-riding. In my ingenuousness I hoped that Sylvester would marry Lena, and thus give all the country girls a better position in the town.

Sylvester dallied about Lena until he began to make mistakes in his work; had to stay at the bank until after dark to make his books balance. He was daft about her, and every one knew it. To escape from his predicament he ran away with a widow six years older than himself, who owned a half-section.⁶ This remedy worked, apparently. He never looked at Lena again,

5. Both women had out-of-wedlock babies.

6. One-half of a square mile, or 320 acres.

nor lifted his eyes as he ceremoniously tipped his hat when he happened to meet her on the sidewalk.

So that was what they were like, I thought, these white-handed, high-collared clerks and bookkeepers! I used to glare at young Lovett from a distance and only wished I had some way of showing my contempt for him.

X

It was at the Vannis' tent that *Ántonia* was discovered. Hitherto she had been looked upon more as a ward of the Harlings than as one of the "hired girls." She had lived in their house and yard and garden; her thoughts never seemed to stray outside that little kingdom. But after the tent came to town she began to go about with Tiny and Lena and their friends. The Vannis often said that *Ántonia* was the best dancer of them all. I sometimes heard murmurs in the crowd outside the pavilion that Mrs. Harling would soon have her hands full with that girl. The young men began to joke with each other about "the Harlings' Tony" as they did about "the Marshalls' Anna" or "the Gardeners' Tiny."

Ántonia talked and thought of nothing but the tent. She hummed the dance tunes all day. When supper was late, she hurried with her dishes, dropped and smashed them in her excitement. At the first call of the music, she became irresponsible. If she hadn't time to dress, she merely flung off her apron and shot out of the kitchen door. Sometimes I went with her; the moment the lighted tent came into view she would break into a run, like a boy. There were always partners waiting for her; she began to dance before she got her breath.

Ántonia's success at the tent had its consequences. The iceman lingered too long now, when he came into the covered porch to fill the refrigerator. The delivery boys hung about the kitchen when they brought the groceries. Young farmers who were in town for Saturday came tramping through the yard to the back door to engage dances, or to invite Tony to parties and picnics. Lena and Norwegian Anna dropped in to help her with her work, so that she could get away early. The boys who brought her home after the dances sometimes laughed at the back gate and wakened Mr. Harling from his first sleep. A crisis was inevitable.

One Saturday night Mr. Harling had gone down to the cellar for beer. As he came up the stairs in the dark, he heard scuffling on the back porch, and then the sound of a vigorous slap. He looked out through the side door in time to see a pair of long legs vaulting over the picket fence. *Ántonia* was standing there, angry and excited. Young Harry Paine, who was to marry his employer's daughter on Monday, had come to the tent with a crowd of friends and danced all evening. Afterward, he begged *Ántonia* to let him walk home with her. She said she supposed he was a nice young man, as he was one of Miss Frances's friends, and she didn't mind. On the back porch he tried to kiss her, and when she protested,—because he was going to be married on Monday,—he caught her and kissed her until she got one hand free and slapped him.

Mr. Harling put his beer bottles down on the table. "This is what I've been expecting, *Ántonia*. You've been going with girls who have a reputation for being free and easy, and now you've got the same reputation. I won't have this and that fellow tramping about my back yard all the time. This is the end of it, to-night. It stops, short. You can quit going to these dances, or you can hunt another place. Think it over."

The next morning when Mrs. Harling and Frances tried to reason with Ántonia, they found her agitated but determined. “Stop going to the tent?” she panted. “I wouldn’t think of it for a minute! My own father couldn’t make me stop! Mr. Harling ain’t my boss outside my work. I won’t give up my friends, either. The boys I go with are nice fellows. I thought Mr. Paine was all right, too, because he used to come here. I guess I gave him a red face for his wedding, all right!” she blazed out indignantly.

“You’ll have to do one thing or the other, Ántonia,” Mrs. Harling told her decidedly. “I can’t go back on what Mr. Harling has said. This is his house.”

“Then I’ll just leave, Mrs. Harling. Lena’s been wanting me to get a place closer to her for a long while. Mary Svoboda’s going away from the Cutters’ to work at the hotel, and I can have her place.”

Mrs. Harling rose from her chair. “Ántonia, if you go to the Cutters to work, you cannot come back to this house again. You know what that man is. It will be the ruin of you.”

Tony snatched up the tea-kettle and began to pour boiling water over the glasses, laughing excitedly. “Oh, I can take care of myself! I’m a lot stronger than Cutter is. They pay four dollars there, and there’s no children. The work’s nothing; I can have every evening, and be out a lot in the afternoons.”

“I thought you liked children. Tony, what’s come over you?”

“I don’t know, something has.” Ántonia tossed her head and set her jaw. “A girl like me has got to take her good times when she can. Maybe there won’t be any tent next year. I guess I want to have my fling, like the other girls.”

Mrs. Harling gave a short, harsh laugh. “If you go to work for the Cutters, you’re likely to have a fling that you won’t get up from in a hurry.”

Frances said, when she told grandmother and me about this scene, that every pan and plate and cup on the shelves trembled when her mother walked out of the kitchen. Mrs. Harling declared bitterly that she wished she had never let herself get fond of Ántonia.

XI

Wick Cutter was the money-lender who had fleeced poor Russian Peter. When a farmer once got into the habit of going to Cutter, it was like gambling or the lottery; in an hour of discouragement he went back.

Cutter’s first name was Wycliffe,⁷ and he liked to talk about his pious bringing-up. He contributed regularly to the Protestant churches, “for sentiment’s sake,” as he said with a flourish of the hand. He came from a town in Iowa where there were a great many Swedes, and could speak a little Swedish, which gave him a great advantage with the early Scandinavian settlers.

In every frontier settlement there are men who have come there to escape restraint. Cutter was one of the “fast set” of Black Hawk business men. He was an inveterate gambler, though a poor loser. When we saw a light burning in his office late at night, we knew that a game of poker was going on. Cutter boasted that he never drank anything stronger than sherry, and he said he got his start in life by saving the money that other young men spent for cigars. He

7. After John Wycliffe (1328–1384), English religious reformer.

was full of moral maxims for boys. When he came to our house on business, he quoted "Poor Richard's Almanack"⁸ to me, and told me he was delighted to find a town boy who could milk a cow. He was particularly affable to grandmother, and whenever they met he would begin at once to talk about "the good old times" and simple living. I detested his pink, bald head, and his yellow whiskers, always soft and glistening. It was said he brushed them every night, as a woman does her hair. His white teeth looked factory-made. His skin was red and rough, as if from perpetual sunburn; he often went away to hot springs to take mud baths. He was notoriously dissolute with women. Two Swedish girls who had lived in his house were the worse for the experience. One of them he had taken to Omaha and established in the business for which he had fitted her.⁹ He still visited her.

Cutter lived in a state of perpetual warfare with his wife, and yet, apparently, they never thought of separating. They dwelt in a fussy, scroll-work house, painted white and buried in thick evergreens, with a fussy white fence and barn. Cutter thought he knew a great deal about horses, and usually had a colt which he was training for the track. On Sunday mornings one could see him out at the fair grounds, speeding around the race-course in his trotting-buggy, wearing yellow gloves and a black-and-white-check traveling cap, his whiskers blowing back in the breeze. If there were any boys about, Cutter would offer one of them a quarter to hold the stop-watch, and then drive off, saying he had no change and would "fix it up next time." No one could cut his lawn or wash his buggy to suit him. He was so fastidious and prim about his place that a boy would go to a good deal of trouble to throw a dead cat into his back yard, or to dump a sackful of tin cans in his alley. It was a peculiar combination of old-maidishness and licentiousness that made Cutter seem so despicable.

He had certainly met his match when he married Mrs. Cutter. She was a terrifying-looking person; almost a giantess in height, raw-boned, with iron-gray hair, a face always flushed, and prominent, hysterical eyes. When she meant to be entertaining and agreeable, she nodded her head incessantly and snapped her eyes at one. Her teeth were long and curved, like a horse's; people said babies always cried if she smiled at them. Her face had a kind of fascination for me; it was the very color and shape of anger. There was a gleam of something akin to insanity in her full, intense eyes. She was formal in manner, and made calls in rustling, steel-gray brocades and a tall bonnet with bristling aigrettes.¹

Mrs. Cutter painted china so assiduously that even her washbowls and pitchers, and her husband's shaving-mug, were covered with violets and lilies. Once when Cutter was exhibiting some of his wife's china to a caller, he dropped a piece. Mrs. Cutter put her handkerchief to her lips as if she were going to faint and said grandly: "Mr. Cutter, you have broken all the Commandments—spare the finger-bowls!"

They quarreled from the moment Cutter came into the house until they went to bed at night, and their hired girls reported these scenes to the town at large. Mrs. Cutter had several times cut paragraphs about unfaithful

8. A farmer's almanac written and published in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin from 1733 to 1758; it was famous for maxims and proverbs through which Franklin taught an ethic of hard

work and prudence.

9. I.e., prostitution.

1. Sprays of feathers.

husbands out of the newspapers and mailed them to Cutter in a disguised handwriting. Cutter would come home at noon, find the mutilated journal in the paper-rack, and triumphantly fit the clipping into the space from which it had been cut. Those two could quarrel all morning about whether he ought to put on his heavy or his light underwear, and all evening about whether he had taken cold or not.

The Cutters had major as well as minor subjects for dispute. The chief of these was the question of inheritance: Mrs. Cutter told her husband it was plainly his fault they had no children. He insisted that Mrs. Cutter had purposely remained childless, with the determination to outlive him and to share his property with her “people,” whom he detested. To this she would reply that unless he changed his mode of life, she would certainly outlive him. After listening to her insinuations about his physical soundness, Cutter would resume his dumb-bell practice for a month, or rise daily at the hour when his wife most liked to sleep, dress noisily, and drive out to the track with his trotting-horse.

Once when they had quarreled about house-hold expenses, Mrs. Cutter put on her brocade and went among their friends soliciting orders for painted china, saying that Mr. Cutter had compelled her “to live by her brush.” Cutter wasn’t shamed as she had expected; he was delighted!

Cutter often threatened to chop down the cedar trees which half-buried the house. His wife declared she would leave him if she were stripped of the “privacy” which she felt these trees afforded her. That was his opportunity, surely; but he never cut down the trees. The Cutters seemed to find their relations to each other interesting and stimulating, and certainly the rest of us found them so. Wick Cutter was different from any other rascal I have ever known, but I have found Mrs. Cutters all over the world; sometimes founding new religions, sometimes being forcibly fed—easily recognizable, even when superficially tamed.

XII

After Ántonia went to live with the Cutters, she seemed to care about nothing but picnics and parties and having a good time. When she was not going to a dance, she sewed until midnight. Her new clothes were the subject of caustic comment. Under Lena’s direction she copied Mrs. Gardener’s new party dress and Mrs. Smith’s street costume so ingeniously in cheap materials that those ladies were greatly annoyed, and Mrs. Cutter, who was jealous of them, was secretly pleased.

Tony wore gloves now, and high-heeled shoes and feathered bonnets, and she went downtown nearly every afternoon with Tiny and Lena and the Marshalls’ Norwegian Anna. We High-School boys used to linger on the playground at the afternoon recess to watch them as they came tripping down the hill along the board sidewalk, two and two. They were growing prettier every day, but as they passed us, I used to think with pride that Ántonia, like Snow-White in the fairy tale, was still “fairest of them all.”

Being a Senior now, I got away from school early. Sometimes I overtook the girls down-town and coaxed them into the ice-cream parlor, where they would sit chattering and laughing, telling me all the news from the country. I remember how angry Tiny Soderball made me one afternoon. She declared

she had heard grandmother was going to make a Baptist preacher of me. "I guess you'll have to stop dancing and wear a white necktie then. Won't he look funny, girls?"

Lena laughed. "You'll have to hurry up, Jim. If you're going to be a preacher, I want you to marry me. You must promise to marry us all, and then baptize the babies."

Norwegian Anna, always dignified, looked at her reprovingly.

"Baptists don't believe in christening babies, do they, Jim?"

I told her I didn't know what they believed, and didn't care, and that I certainly wasn't going to be a preacher.

"That's too bad," Tiny simpered. She was in a teasing mood. "You'd make such a good one. You're so studious. Maybe you'd like to be a professor. You used to teach Tony, didn't you?"

Ántonia broke in. "I've set my heart on Jim being a doctor. You'd be good with sick people, Jim. Your grandmother's trained you up so nice. My papa always said you were an awful smart boy."

I said I was going to be whatever I pleased. "Won't you be surprised, Miss Tiny, if I turn out to be a regular devil of a fellow?"

They laughed until a glance from Norwegian Anna checked them; the High-School Principal had just come into the front part of the shop to buy bread for supper. Anna knew the whisper was going about that I was a sly one. People said there must be something queer about a boy who showed no interest in girls of his own age, but who could be lively enough when he was with Tony and Lena or the three Marys.

The enthusiasm for the dance, which the Vannis had kindled, did not at once die out. After the tent left town, the Euchre Club became the Owl Club, and gave dances in the Masonic Hall once a week. I was invited to join, but declined. I was moody and restless that winter, and tired of the people I saw every day. Charley Harling was already at Annapolis, while I was still sitting in Black Hawk, answering to my name at roll-call every morning, rising from my desk at the sound of a bell and marching out like the grammar-school children. Mrs. Harling was a little cool toward me, because I continued to champion Ántonia. What was there for me to do after supper? Usually I had learned next day's lessons by the time I left the school building, and I couldn't sit still and read forever.

In the evening I used to prowl about, hunting for diversion. There lay the familiar streets, frozen with snow or liquid with mud. They led to the houses of good people who were putting the babies to bed, or simply sitting still before the parlor stove, digesting their supper. Black Hawk had two saloons. One of them was admitted, even by the church people, to be as respectable as a saloon could be. Handsome Anton Jelinek, who had rented his homestead and come to town, was the proprietor. In his saloon there were long tables where the Bohemian and German farmers could eat the lunches they brought from home while they drank their beer. Jelinek kept rye bread on hand, and smoked fish and strong imported cheeses to please the foreign palate. I liked to drop into his bar-room and listen to the talk. But one day he overtook me on the street and clapped me on the shoulder.

"Jim," he said, "I am good friends with you and I always like to see you. But you know how the church people think about saloons. Your grandpa has

always treated me fine, and I don't like to have you come into my place, because I know he don't like it, and it puts me in bad with him."

So I was shut out of that.

One could hang about the drug-store, and listen to the old men who sat there every evening, talking politics and telling raw stories. One could go to the cigar factory and chat with the old German who raised canaries for sale, and look at his stuffed birds. But whatever you began with him, the talk went back to taxidermy. There was the depot, of course; I often went down to see the night train come in, and afterward sat awhile with the disconsolate telegrapher who was always hoping to be transferred to Omaha or Denver, "where there was some life." He was sure to bring out his pictures of actresses and dancers. He got them with cigarette coupons and nearly smoked himself to death to possess these desired forms and faces. For a change, one could talk to the station agent; but he was another malcontent; spent all his spare time writing letters to officials requesting a transfer. He wanted to get back to Wyoming where he could go trout-fishing on Sundays. He used to say "there was nothing in life for him but trout streams, ever since he'd lost his twins."

These were the distractions I had to choose from. There were no other lights burning downtown after nine o'clock. On starlight nights I used to pace up and down those long, cold streets, scowling at the little, sleeping houses on either side, with their storm-windows and covered back porches. They were flimsy shelters, most of them poorly built of light wood, with spindle porch-posts horribly mutilated by the turning-lathe. Yet for all their frailness, how much jealousy and envy and unhappiness some of them managed to contain! The life that went on in them seemed to me made up of evasions and negations; shifts to save cooking, to save washing and cleaning, devices to propitiate the tongue of gossip. This guarded mode of existence was like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances, became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution. The people asleep in those houses, I thought, tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark. The growing piles of ashes and cinders in the back yards were the only evidence that the wasteful, consuming process of life went on at all. On Tuesday nights the Owl Club danced; then there was a little stir in the streets, and here and there one could see a lighted window until midnight. But the next night all was dark again.

After I refused to join "the Owls," as they were called, I made a bold resolve to go to the Saturday night dances at Firemen's Hall. I knew it would be useless to acquaint my elders with any such plan. Grandfather didn't approve of dancing anyway; he would only say that if I wanted to dance I could go to the Masonic Hall, among "the people we knew." It was just my point that I saw altogether too much of the people we knew.

My bedroom was on the ground floor, and as I studied there, I had a stove in it. I used to retire to my room early on Saturday night, change my shirt and collar and put on my Sunday coat. I waited until all was quiet and the old people were asleep, then raised my window, climbed out, and went softly through the yard. The first time I deceived my grandparents I felt rather shabby, perhaps even the second time, but I soon ceased to think about it.

The dance at the Firemen's Hall was the one thing I looked forward to all the week. There I met the same people I used to see at the Vannis' tent.

Sometimes there were Bohemians from Wilber, or German boys who came down on the afternoon freight from Bismarck. Tony and Lena and Tiny were always there, and the three Bohemian Marys, and the Danish laundry girls.

The four Danish girls lived with the laundryman and his wife in their house behind the laundry, with a big garden where the clothes were hung out to dry. The laundryman was a kind, wise old fellow, who paid his girls well, looked out for them, and gave them a good home. He told me once that his own daughter died just as she was getting old enough to help her mother, and that he had been “trying to make up for it ever since.” On summer afternoons he used to sit for hours on the sidewalk in front of his laundry, his newspaper lying on his knee, watching his girls through the big open window while they ironed and talked in Danish. The clouds of white dust that blew up the street, the gusts of hot wind that withered his vegetable garden, never disturbed his calm. His droll expression seemed to say that he had found the secret of contentment. Morning and evening he drove about in his spring wagon, distributing freshly ironed clothes, and collecting bags of linen that cried out for his suds and sunny drying-lines. His girls never looked so pretty at the dances as they did standing by the ironing-board, or over the tubs, washing the fine pieces, their white arms and throats bare, their cheeks bright as the brightest wild roses, their gold hair moist with the steam or the heat and curling in little damp spirals about their ears. They had not learned much English, and were not so ambitious as Tony or Lena; but they were kind, simple girls and they were always happy. When one danced with them, one smelled their clean, freshly ironed clothes that had been put away with rosemary leaves from Mr. Jensen’s garden.

There were never girls enough to go round at those dances, but every one wanted a turn with Tony and Lena. Lena moved without exertion, rather indolently, and her hand often accented the rhythm softly on her partner’s shoulder. She smiled if one spoke to her, but seldom answered. The music seemed to put her into a soft, waking dream, and her violet-colored eyes looked sleepily and confidingly at one from under her long lashes. When she sighed she exhaled a heavy perfume of sachet powder. To dance “Home, Sweet Home,” with Lena was like coming in with the tide. She danced every dance like a waltz, and it was always the same waltz—the waltz of coming home to something, of inevitable, fated return. After a while one got restless under it, as one does under the heat of a soft, sultry summer day.

When you spun out into the floor with Tony, you didn’t return to anything. You set out every time upon a new adventure. I liked to schottische² with her; she had so much spring and variety, and was always putting in new steps and slides. She taught me to dance against and around the hard-and-fast beat of the music. If, instead of going to the end of the railroad, old Mr. Shimerda had stayed in New York and picked up a living with his fiddle, how different *Ántonia’s* life might have been!

Ántonia often went to the dances with Larry Donovan, a passenger conductor who was a kind of professional ladies’ man, as we said. I remember how admiringly all the boys looked at her the night she first wore her velveteen dress, made like Mrs. Gardener’s black velvet. She was lovely to see,

2. A group dance in the round, like a polka only somewhat slower.

with her eyes shining, and her lips always a little parted when she danced. That constant, dark color in her cheeks never changed.

One evening when Donovan was out on his run, Ántonia came to the hall with Norwegian Anna and her young man, and that night I took her home. When we were in the Cutters' yard, sheltered by the evergreens, I told her she must kiss me good-night.

"Why, sure Jim." A moment later she drew her face away and whispered indignantly, "Why, Jim! You know you ain't right to kiss me like that. I'll tell your grandmother on you!"

"Lena Lingard lets me kiss her," I retorted, "and I'm not half as fond of her as I am of you."

"Lena does?" Tony gasped. "If she's up to any of her nonsense with you, I'll scratch her eyes out!" She took my arm again and we walked out of the gate and up and down the sidewalk. "Now, don't you go and be a fool like some of these town boys. You're not going to sit around here and whittle store-boxes and tell stories all your life. You are going away to school and make something of yourself. I'm just awful proud of you. You won't go and get mixed up with the Swedes, will you?"

"I don't care anything about any of them but you," I said. "And you'll always treat me like a kid, I suppose."

She laughed and threw her arms around me. "I expect I will, but you're a kid I'm awful fond of, anyhow! You can like me all you want to, but if I see you hanging round with Lena much, I'll go to your grandmother, as sure as your name's Jim Burden! Lena's all right, only—well, you know yourself she's soft that way. She can't help it. It's natural to her."

If she was proud of me, I was so proud of her that I carried my head high as I emerged from the dark cedars and shut the Cutters' gate softly behind me. Her warm, sweet face, her kind arms, and the true heart in her; she was, oh, she was still my Ántonia! I looked with contempt at the dark, silent little houses about me as I walked home, and thought of the stupid young men who were asleep in some of them. I knew where the real women were, though I was only a boy; and I would not be afraid of them, either!

I hated to enter the still house when I went home from the dances, and it was long before I could get to sleep. Toward morning I used to have pleasant dreams: sometimes Tony and I were out in the country, sliding down straw-stacks as we used to do; climbing up the yellow mountains over and over, and slipping down the smooth sides into soft piles of chaff.

One dream I dreamed a great many times, and it was always the same. I was in a harvest-field full of shocks, and I was lying against one of them. Lena Lingard came across the stubble barefoot, in a short skirt, with a curved reaping-hook in her hand, and she was flushed like the dawn, with a kind of luminous rosininess all about her. She sat down beside me, turned to me with a soft sigh and said, "Now they are all gone, and I can kiss you as much as I like."

I used to wish I could have this flattering dream about Ántonia, but I never did.

XIII

I noticed one afternoon that grandmother had been crying. Her feet seemed to drag as she moved about the house, and I got up from the table where

I was studying and went to her, asking if she didn't feel well, and if I couldn't help her with her work.

"No, thank you, Jim. I'm troubled, but I guess I'm well enough. Getting a little rusty in the bones, maybe," she added bitterly.

I stood hesitating. "What are you fretting about, grandmother? Has grandfather lost any money?"

"No, it ain't money. I wish it was. But I've heard things. You must 'a' known it would come back to me sometime." She dropped into a chair, and covering her face with her apron, began to cry. "Jim," she said, "I was never one that claimed old folks could bring up their grandchildren. But it came about so; there wasn't any other way for you, it seemed like."

I put my arms around her. I couldn't bear to see her cry.

"What is it, grandmother? Is it the Firemen's dances?"

She nodded.

"I'm sorry I sneaked off like that. But there's nothing wrong about the dances, and I haven't done anything wrong. I like all those country girls, and I like to dance with them. That's all there is to it."

"But it ain't right to deceive us, son, and it brings blame on us. People say you are growing up to be a bad boy, and that ain't just to us."

"I don't care what they say about me, but if it hurts you, that settles it. I won't go to the Firemen's Hall again."

I kept my promise, of course, but I found the spring months dull enough. I sat at home with the old people in the evenings now, reading Latin that was not in our High-School course. I had made up my mind to do a lot of college requirement work in the summer, and to enter the freshman class at the University without conditions in the fall. I wanted to get away as soon as possible.

Disapprobation hurt me, I found,—even that of people whom I did not admire. As the spring came on, I grew more and more lonely, and fell back on the telegrapher and the cigar-maker and his canaries for companionship. I remember I took a melancholy pleasure in hanging a May-basket for Nina Harling that spring. I bought the flowers from an old German woman who always had more window plants than any one else, and spent an afternoon trimming a little work-basket. When dusk came on, and the new moon hung in the sky, I went quietly to the Harlings' front door with my offering, rang the bell, and then ran away as was the custom. Through the willow hedge I could hear Nina's cries of delight, and I felt comforted.

On those warm, soft spring evenings I often lingered downtown to walk home with Frances, and talked to her about my plans and about the reading I was doing. One evening she said she thought Mrs. Harling was not seriously offended with me.

"Mama is as broad-minded as mothers ever are, I guess. But you know she was hurt about *Ántonia*, and she can't understand why you like to be with Tiny and Lena better than with the girls of your own set."

"Can you?" I asked bluntly.

Frances laughed. "Yes, I think I can. You knew them in the country, and you like to take sides. In some ways you're older than boys of your age. It will be all right with mama after you pass your college examinations and she sees you're in earnest."

"If you were a boy," I persisted, "you wouldn't belong to the Owl Club, either. You'd be just like me."

She shook her head. “I would and I wouldn’t. I expect I know the country girls better than you do. You always put a kind of glamour over them. The trouble with you, Jim, is that you’re romantic. Mama’s going to your Commencement. She asked me the other day if I knew what your oration is to be about. She wants you to do well.”

I thought my oration very good. It stated with fervor a great many things I had lately discovered. Mrs. Harling came to the Opera House to hear the Commencement exercises, and I looked at her most of the time while I made my speech. Her keen, intelligent eyes never left my face. Afterward she came back to the dressing-room where we stood, with our diplomas in our hands, walked up to me, and said heartily: “You surprised me, Jim. I didn’t believe you could do as well as that. You didn’t get that speech out of books.” Among my graduation presents there was a silk umbrella from Mrs. Harling, with my name on the handle.

I walked home from the Opera House alone. As I passed the Methodist Church, I saw three white figures ahead of me, pacing up and down under the arching maple trees, where the moonlight filtered through the lush June foliage. They hurried toward me; they were waiting for me—Lena and Tony and Anna Hansen.

“Oh, Jim, it was splendid!” Tony was breathing hard, as she always did when her feelings outran her language. “There ain’t a lawyer in Black Hawk could make a speech like that. I just stopped your grandpa and said so to him. He won’t tell you, but he told us he was awful surprised himself, didn’t he, girls?”

Lena sidled up to me and said teasingly: “What made you so solemn? I thought you were scared. I was sure you’d forget.”

Anna spoke wistfully. “It must make you happy, Jim, to have fine thoughts like that in your mind all the time, and to have words to put them in. I always wanted to go to school, you know.”

“Oh, I just sat there and wished my papa could hear you! Jim,”—Ántonia took hold of my coat lapels,—“there was something in your speech that made me think so about my papa!”

“I thought about your papa when I wrote my speech, Tony,” I said. “I dedicated it to him.”

She threw her arms around me, and her dear face was all wet with tears.

I stood watching their white dresses glimmer smaller and smaller down the sidewalk as they went away. I have had no other success that pulled at my heartstrings like that one.

XIV

The day after Commencement I moved my books and desk upstairs, to an empty room where I should be undisturbed, and I fell to studying in earnest. I worked off a year’s trigonometry that summer, and began Virgil³ alone. Morning after morning I used to pace up and down my sunny little room, looking off at the distant river bluffs and the roll of the blond pastures between, scanning the *Æneid* aloud and committing long passages to memory. Sometimes in the evening Mrs. Harling called to me as I passed her

3. Roman poet (70–19 B.C.E.), most famous for his epic, the *Æneid*, about the founding of Rome by the Trojan hero Aeneas. The poem was part of

a basic classical education in the United States, and Jim Burden would be studying it in its original Latin. See also p. 34, epigraph and n. 1.

gate, and asked me to come in and let her play for me. She was lonely for Charley, she said, and liked to have a boy about. Whenever my grandparents had misgivings, and began to wonder whether I was not too young to go off to college alone, Mrs. Harling took up my cause vigorously. Grandfather had such respect for her judgment that I knew he would not go against her.

I had only one holiday that summer. It was in July. I met Antonia downtown on Saturday afternoon, and learned that she and Tiny and Lena were going to the river next day with Anna Hansen—the elder⁴ was all in bloom now, and Anna wanted to make elder-blow wine.

“Anna’s to drive us down in the Marshalls’ delivery wagon, and we’ll take a nice lunch and have a picnic. Just us; nobody else. Couldn’t you happen along, Jim? It would be like old times.”

I considered a moment. “Maybe I can, if I won’t be in the way.”

On Sunday morning I rose early and got out of Black Hawk while the dew was still heavy on the long meadow grasses. It was the high season for summer flowers. The pink bee-bush stood tall along the sandy roadsides, and the cone-flowers and rose mallow grew everywhere. Across the wire fence, in the long grass, I saw a clump of flaming orange-colored milkweed, rare in that part of the State. I left the road and went around through a stretch of pasture that was always cropped short in summer, where the gaillardia came up year after year and matted over the ground with the deep, velvety red that is in Bokhara carpets. The country was empty and solitary except for the larks that Sunday morning, and it seemed to lift itself up to me and to come very close.

The river was running strong for midsummer; heavy rains to the west of us had kept it full. I crossed the bridge and went upstream along the wooded shore to a pleasant dressing-room I knew among the dogwood bushes, all overgrown with wild grapevines. I began to undress for a swim. The girls would not be along yet. For the first time it occurred to me that I would be homesick for that river after I left it. The sandbars, with their clean white beaches and their little groves of willows and cottonwood seedlings, were a sort of No Man’s Land, little newly-created worlds that belonged to the Black Hawk boys. Charley Harling and I had hunted through these woods, fished from the fallen logs, until I knew every inch of the river shores and had a friendly feeling for every bar and shallow.

After my swim, while I was playing about indolently in the water, I heard the sound of hoofs and wheels on the bridge. I struck downstream and shouted, as the open spring wagon came into view on the middle span. They stopped the horse, and the two girls in the bottom of the cart stood up, steadying themselves by the shoulders of the two in front, so that they could see me better. They were charming up there, huddled together in the cart and peering down at me like curious deer when they come out of the thicket to drink. I found bottom near the bridge and stood up, waving to them.

“How pretty you look!” I called.

“So do you!” they shouted altogether, and broke into peals of laughter. Anna Hansen shook the reins and they drove on, while I zigzagged back to my inlet and clambered up behind an overhanging elm. I dried myself in the sun, and dressed slowly, reluctant to leave that green enclosure where the sunlight flickered so bright through the grapevine leaves and the woodpecker

4. A shrub that bears flowers used for a mild, sweet wine as well as edible berries.

hammered away in the crooked elm that trailed out over the water. As I went along the road back to the bridge I kept picking off little pieces of scaly chalk from the dried water gullies, and breaking them up in my hands.

When I came upon the Marshalls' delivery horse, tied in the shade, the girls had already taken their baskets and gone down the east road which wound through the sand and scrub. I could hear them calling to each other. The elder bushes did not grow back in the shady ravines between the bluffs, but in the hot, sandy bottoms along the stream, where their roots were always in moisture and their tops in the sun. The blossoms were unusually luxuriant and beautiful that summer.

I followed a cattle path through the thick underbrush until I came to a slope that fell away abruptly to the water's edge. A great chunk of the shore had been bitten out by some spring freshet, and the scar was masked by elder bushes, growing down to the water in flowery terraces. I did not touch them. I was overcome by content and drowsiness and by the warm silence about me. There was no sound but the high, sing-song buzz of wild bees and the sunny gurgle of the water underneath. I peeped over the edge of the bank to see the little stream that made the noise; it flowed along perfectly clear over the sand and gravel, cut off from the muddy main current by a long sandbar. Down there, on the lower shelf of the bank, I saw Ántonia, seated alone under the pagoda-like elders. She looked up when she heard me, and smiled, but I saw that she had been crying. I slid down into the soft sand beside her and asked her what was the matter.

"It makes me homesick, Jimmy, this flower, this smell," she said softly. "We have this flower very much at home, in the old country. It always grew in our yard and my papa had a green bench and a table under the bushes. In summer, when they were in bloom, he used to sit there with his friend that played the trombone. When I was little I used to go down there to hear them talk—beautiful talk, like what I never hear in this country."

"What did they talk about?" I asked her.

She sighed and shook her head. "Oh, I don't know! About music, and the woods, and about God, and when they were young." She turned to me suddenly and looked into my eyes. "You think, Jimmy, that maybe my father's spirit can go back to those old places?"

I told her about the feeling of her father's presence I had on that winter day when my grandparents had gone over to see his dead body and I was left alone in the house. I said I felt sure then that he was on his way back to his own country, and that even now, when I passed his grave, I always thought of him as being among the woods and fields that were so dear to him.

Ántonia had the most trusting, responsive eyes in the world; love and credulousness seemed to look out of them with open faces. "Why didn't you ever tell me that before? It makes me feel more sure for him." After a while she said: "You know, Jim, my father was different from my mother. He did not have to marry my mother, and all his brothers quarreled with him because he did. I used to hear the old people at home whisper about it. They said he could have paid my mother money, and not married her.⁵ But he was older than she was, and he was too kind to treat her like that. He lived in his mother's house, and she was a poor girl come in to do the work. After my

5. Implying that he had gotten her pregnant.

father married her, my grandmother never let my mother come into her house again. When I went to my grandmother's funeral was the only time I was ever in my grandmother's house. Don't that seem strange?"

While she talked, I lay back in the hot sand and looked up at the blue sky between the flat bouquets of elder. I could hear the bees humming and singing, but they stayed up in the sun above the flowers and did not come down into the shadow of the leaves. *Ántonia* seemed to me that day exactly like the little girl who used to come to our house with Mr. Shimerda.

"Some day, Tony, I am going over to your country, and I am going to the little town where you lived. Do you remember all about it?"

"Jim," she said earnestly, "if I was put down there in the middle of the night, I could find my way all over that little town; and along the river to the next town, where my grandmother lived. My feet remember all the little paths through the woods, and where the big roots stick out to trip you. I ain't never forgot my own country."

There was a crackling in the branches above us, and *Lena Lingard* peered down over the edge of the bank.

"You lazy things!" she cried. "All this elder, and you two lying there! Didn't you hear us calling you?" Almost as flushed as she had been in my dream, she leaned over the edge of the bank and began to demolish our flowery pagoda. I had never seen her so energetic; she was panting with zeal, and the perspiration stood in drops on her short, yielding upper lip. I sprang to my feet and ran up the bank.

It was noon now, and so hot that the dogwoods and scrub-oaks began to turn up the silvery under-side of their leaves, and all the foliage looked soft and wilted. I carried the lunch-basket to the top of one of the chalk bluffs, where even on the calmest days there was always a breeze. The flat-topped, twisted little oaks threw light shadows on the grass. Below us we could see the windings of the river, and *Black Hawk*, grouped among its trees, and, beyond, the rolling country, swelling gently until it met the sky. We could recognize familiar farmhouses and windmills. Each of the girls pointed out to me the direction in which her father's farm lay, and told me how many acres were in wheat that year and how many in corn.

"My old folks," said *Tiny Soderball*, "have put in twenty acres of rye. They get it ground at the mill, and it makes nice bread. It seems like my mother ain't been so homesick, ever since father's raised rye flour for her."

"It must have been a trial for our mothers," said *Lena*, "coming out here and having to do everything different. My mother had always lived in town. She says she started behind in farm-work, and never has caught up."

"Yes, a new country's hard on the old ones, sometimes," said *Anna* thoughtfully. "My grandmother's getting feeble now, and her mind wanders. She's forgot about this country, and thinks she's at home in *Norway*. She keeps asking mother to take her down to the waterside and the fish market. She craves fish all the time. Whenever I go home I take her canned salmon and mackerel."

"Mercy, it's hot!" *Lena* yawned. She was supine under a little oak, resting after the fury of her elder-hunting, and had taken off the high-heeled slippers she had been silly enough to wear. "Come here, Jim. You never got the sand out of your hair." She began to draw her fingers slowly through my hair.

Ántonia pushed her away. “You’ll never get it out like that,” she said sharply. She gave my head a rough touzling and finished me off with something like a box on the ear. “Lena, you oughtn’t to try to wear those slippers any more. They’re too small for your feet. You’d better give them to me for Yulka.”

“All right,” said Lena good-naturedly, tucking her white stockings under her skirt. “You get all Yulka’s things, don’t you? I wish father didn’t have such bad luck with his farm machinery; then I could buy more things for my sisters. I’m going to get Mary a new coat this fall, if the sulky plough’s never paid for!”

Tiny asked her why she didn’t wait until after Christmas, when coats would be cheaper. “What do you think of poor me?” she added; “with six at home, younger than I am? And they all think I’m rich, because when I go back to the country I’m dressed so fine!” She shrugged her shoulders. “But, you know, my weakness is playthings. I like to buy them playthings better than what they need.”

“I know how that is,” said Anna. “When we first came here, and I was little, we were too poor to buy toys. I never got over the loss of a doll somebody gave me before we left Norway. A boy on the boat broke her, and I still hate him for it.”

“I guess after you got here you had plenty of live dolls to nurse, like me!” Lena remarked cynically.

“Yes, the babies came along pretty fast, to be sure. But I never minded. I was fond of them all. The youngest one, that we didn’t any of us want, is the one we love best now.”

Lena sighed. “Oh, the babies are all right; if only they don’t come in winter. Ours nearly always did. I don’t see how mother stood it. I tell you what girls,” she sat up with sudden energy, “I’m going to get my mother out of that old sod house where she’s lived so many years. The men will never do it. Johnnie, that’s my oldest brother, he’s wanting to get married now, and build a house for his girl instead of his mother. Mrs. Thomas says she thinks I can move to some other town pretty soon, and go into business for myself. If I don’t get into business, I’ll maybe marry a rich gambler.”

“That would be a poor way to get on,” said Anna sarcastically. “I wish I could teach school, like Selma Kronn. Just think! She’ll be the first Scandinavian girl to get a position in the High School. We ought to be proud of her.”

Selma was a studious girl, who had not much tolerance for giddy things like Tiny and Lena; but they always spoke of her with admiration.

Tiny moved about restlessly, fanning herself with her straw hat. “If I was smart like her, I’d be at my books day and night. But she was born smart—and look how her father’s trained her! He was something high up in the old country.”

“So was my mother’s father,” murmured Lena, “but that’s all the good it does us! My father’s father was smart, too, but he was wild. He married a Lapp.⁶ I guess that’s what’s the matter with me; they say Lapp blood will out.”

“A real Lapp, Lena?” I exclaimed. “The kind that wear skins?”

“I don’t know if she wore skins, but she was a Lapp all right, and his folks felt dreadful about it. He was sent up north on some Government job he had, and fell in with her. He would marry her.”

6. Nomadic people of northern Scandinavia.

"But I thought Lapland women were fat and ugly, and had squint eyes, like Chinese?" I objected.

"I don't know, maybe. There must be something mighty taking about the Lapp girls, though; mother says the Norwegians up north are always afraid their boys will run after them."

In the afternoon, when the heat was less oppressive, we had a lively game of "Pussy Wants a Corner," on the flat bluff-top, with the little trees for bases. Lena was Pussy so often that she finally said she wouldn't play any more. We threw ourselves down on the grass, out of breath.

"Jim," *Ántonia* said dreamily, "I want you to tell the girls about how the Spanish first came here, like you and Charley Harling used to talk about. I've tried to tell them, but I leave out so much."

They sat under a little oak, Tony resting against the trunk and the other girls leaning against her and each other, and listened to the little I was able to tell them about Coronado⁷ and his search for the Seven Golden Cities. At school we were taught that he had not got so far north as Nebraska, but had given up his quest and turned back somewhere in Kansas. But Charley Harling and I had a strong belief that he had been along this very river. A farmer in the county north of ours, when he was breaking sod, had turned up a metal stirrup of fine workmanship, and a sword with a Spanish inscription on the blade. He lent these relics to Mr. Harling, who brought them home with him. Charley and I scoured them, and they were on exhibition in the Harling office all summer. Father Kelly, the priest, had found the name of the Spanish maker on the sword, and an abbreviation that stood for the city of Cordova.⁸

"And that I saw with my own eyes," *Ántonia* put in triumphantly. "So Jim and Charley were right, and the teachers were wrong!"

The girls began to wonder among themselves. Why had the Spaniards come so far? What must this country have been like, then? Why had Coronado never gone back to Spain, to his riches and his castles and his king? I couldn't tell them. I only knew the school books said he "died in the wilderness, of a broken heart."

"More than him has done that," said *Ántonia* sadly, and the girls murmured assent.

We sat looking off across the country, watching the sun go down. The curly grass about us was on fire now. The bark of the oaks turned red as copper. There was a shimmer of gold on the brown river. Out in the stream the sandbars glittered like glass, and the light trembled in the willow thickets as if little flames were leaping among them. The breeze sank to stillness. In the ravine a ringdove mourned plaintively, and somewhere off in the bushes an owl hooted. The girls sat listless, leaning against each other. The long fingers of the sun touched their foreheads.

Presently we saw a curious thing: There were no clouds, the sun was going down in a limpid, gold-washed sky. Just as the lower edge of the red disc rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a

7. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado (c. 1510–1554), Spanish governor of a Mexican province, who set out in 1540 in quest of the fabled Seven

Cities and their immense wealth.

8. In Spain.

plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disc; the handles, the tongue, the share—black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.⁹

Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared; the ball dropped and dropped until the red tip went beneath the earth. The fields below us were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie.

XV

Late in August the Cutters went to Omaha for a few days, leaving Ántonia in charge of the house. Since the scandal about the Swedish girl, Wick Cutter could never get his wife to stir out of Black Hawk without him.

The day after the Cutters left, Ántonia came over to see us. Grandmother noticed that she seemed troubled and distracted. "You've got something on your mind, Ántonia," she said anxiously.

"Yes, Mrs. Burden. I couldn't sleep much last night." She hesitated, and then told us how strangely Mr. Cutter had behaved before he went away. He put all the silver in a basket and placed it under her bed, and with it a box of papers which he told her were valuable. He made her promise that she would not sleep away from the house, or be out late in the evening, while he was gone. He strictly forbade her to ask any of the girls she knew to stay with her at night. She would be perfectly safe, he said, as he had just put a new Yale lock on the front door.

Cutter had been so insistent in regard to these details that now she felt uncomfortable about staying there alone. She hadn't liked the way he kept coming into the kitchen to instruct her, or the way he looked at her. "I feel as if he is up to some of his tricks again, and is going to try to scare me, somehow."

Grandmother was apprehensive at once. "I don't think it's right for you to stay there, feeling that way. I suppose it wouldn't be right for you to leave the place alone, either, after giving your word. Maybe Jim would be willing to go over there and sleep, and you could come here nights. I'd feel safer, knowing you were under my own roof. I guess Jim could take care of their silver and old usury notes as well as you could."

Ántonia turned to me eagerly. "Oh, would you, Jim? I'd make up my bed nice and fresh for you. It's a real cool room, and the bed's right next the window. I was afraid to leave the window open last night."

I liked my own room, and I didn't like the Cutters' house under any circumstances; but Tony looked so troubled that I consented to try this arrangement. I found that I slept there as well as anywhere, and when I got home in the morning, Tony had a good breakfast waiting for me. After prayers she sat down at the table with us, and it was like old times in the country.

The third night I spent at the Cutters', I awoke suddenly with the impression that I had heard a door open and shut. Everything was still, however, and I must have gone to sleep again immediately.

9. In Cather's agrarian mythology, the land is conquered or tamed by the plow, not the sword.

The next thing I knew, I felt some one sit down on the edge of the bed. I was only half awake, but I decided that he might take the Cutters' silver, whoever he was. Perhaps if I did not move, he would find it and get out without troubling me. I held my breath and lay absolutely still. A hand closed softly on my shoulder, and at the same moment I felt something hairy and cologne-scented brushing my face. If the room had suddenly been flooded with electric light, I couldn't have seen more clearly the detestable bearded countenance that I knew was bending over me. I caught a handful of whiskers and pulled, shouting something. The hand that held my shoulder was instantly at my throat. The man became insane; he stood over me, choking me with one fist and beating me in the face with the other, hissing and chuckling and letting out a flood of abuse.

"So this is what she's up to when I'm away, is it? Where is she, you nasty whelp, where is she? Under the bed, are you, hussy? I know your tricks! Wait till I get at you! I'll fix this rat you've got in here. He's caught, all right!"

So long as Cutter had me by the throat, there was no chance for me at all. I got hold of his thumb and bent it back, until he let go with a yell. In a bound, I was on my feet, and easily sent him sprawling to the floor. Then I made a dive for the open window, struck the wire screen, knocked it out, and tumbled after it into the yard.

Suddenly I found myself running across the north end of Black Hawk in my nightshirt, just as one sometimes finds one's self behaving in bad dreams. When I got home I climbed in at the kitchen window. I was covered with blood from my nose and lip, but I was too sick to do anything about it. I found a shawl and an overcoat on the hatrack, lay down on the parlor sofa, and in spite of my hurts, went to sleep.

Grandmother found me there in the morning. Her cry of fright awakened me. Truly, I was a battered object. As she helped me to my room, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My lip was cut and stood out like a snout. My nose looked like a big blue plum, and one eye was swollen shut and hideously discolored. Grandmother said we must have the doctor at once, but I implored her, as I had never begged for anything before, not to send for him. I could stand anything, I told her, so long as nobody saw me or knew what had happened to me. I entreated her not to let grandfather, even, come into my room. She seemed to understand, though I was too faint and miserable to go into explanations. When she took off my nightshirt, she found such bruises on my chest and shoulders that she began to cry. She spent the whole morning bathing and poulticing me, and rubbing me with arnica.¹ I heard *Ántonia* sobbing outside my door, but I asked grandmother to send her away. I felt that I never wanted to see her again. I hated her almost as much as I hated Cutter. She had let me in for all this disgustingness. Grandmother kept saying how thankful we ought to be that I had been there instead of *Ántonia*. But I lay with my disfigured face to the wall and felt no particular gratitude. My one concern was that grandmother should keep every one away from me. If the story once got abroad, I would never hear the last of it. I could well imagine what the old men down at the drug-store would do with such a theme.

1. A medicinal herb; here in the form of a soothing lotion.

While grandmother was trying to make me comfortable, grandfather went to the depot and learned that Wick Cutter had come home on the night express from the east, and had left again on the six o'clock train for Denver that morning. The agent said his face was striped with court-plaster, and he carried his left hand in a sling. He looked so used up, that the agent asked him what had happened to him since ten o'clock the night before; whereat Cutter began to swear at him and said he would have him discharged for incivility.

That afternoon, while I was asleep, Ántonia took grandmother with her, and went over to the Cutters' to pack her trunk. They found the place locked up, and they had to break the window to get into Ántonia's bedroom. There everything was in shocking disorder. Her clothes had been taken out of her closet, thrown into the middle of the room, and trampled and torn. My own garments had been treated so badly that I never saw them again; grandmother burned them in the Cutters' kitchen range.

While Ántonia was packing her trunk and putting her room in order, to leave it, the front-door bell rang violently. There stood Mrs. Cutter,—locked out, for she had no key to the new lock—her head trembling with rage. "I advised her to control herself, or she would have a stroke," grandmother said afterwards.

Grandmother would not let her see Ántonia at all, but made her sit down in the parlor while she related to her just what had occurred the night before. Ántonia was frightened, and was going home to stay for a while, she told Mrs. Cutter; it would be useless to interrogate the girl, for she knew nothing of what had happened.

Then Mrs. Cutter told her story. She and her husband had started home from Omaha together the morning before. They had to stop over several hours at Waymore Junction to catch the Black Hawk train. During the wait, Cutter left her at the depot and went to the Waymore bank to attend to some business. When he returned, he told her that he would have to stay overnight there, but she could go on home. He bought her ticket and put her on the train. She saw him slip a twenty-dollar bill into her handbag with her ticket. That bill, she said, should have aroused her suspicions at once—but did not.

The trains are never called at little junction towns; everybody knows when they come in. Mr. Cutter showed his wife's ticket to the conductor, and settled her in her seat before the train moved off. It was not until nearly night-fall that she discovered she was on the express bound for Kansas City, that her ticket was made out to that point, and that Cutter must have planned it so. The conductor told her the Black Hawk train was due at Waymore twelve minutes after the Kansas City train left. She saw at once that her husband had played this trick in order to get back to Black Hawk without her. She had no choice but to go on to Kansas City and take the first fast train for home.

Cutter could have got home a day earlier than his wife by any one of a dozen simpler devices; he could have left her in the Omaha hotel, and said he was going on to Chicago for a few days. But apparently it was part of his fun to outrage her feelings as much as possible.

"Mr. Cutter will pay for this, Mrs. Burden. He will pay!" Mrs. Cutter avouched, nodding her horselike head and rolling her eyes.

Grandmother said she hadn't a doubt of it.

Certainly Cutter liked to have his wife think him a devil. In some way he depended upon the excitement he could arouse in her hysterical nature. Perhaps he got the feeling of being a rake more from his wife's rage and amazement than from any experiences of his own. His zest in debauchery might wane, but never Mrs. Cutter's belief in it. The reckoning with his wife at the end of an escapade was something he counted on—like the last powerful liqueur after a long dinner. The one excitement he really couldn't do without was quarreling with Mrs. Cutter!

Book III. Lena Lingard

I

At the University I had the good fortune to come immediately under the influence of a brilliant and inspiring young scholar. Gaston Cleric had arrived in Lincoln only a few weeks earlier than I, to begin his work as head of the Latin Department. He came West at the suggestion of his physicians, his health having been enfeebled by a long illness in Italy. When I took my entrance examinations he was my examiner, and my course was arranged under his supervision.

I did not go home for my first summer vacation, but stayed in Lincoln, working off a year's Greek, which had been my only condition on entering the Freshman class. Cleric's doctor advised against his going back to New England, and except for a few weeks in Colorado, he, too, was in Lincoln all that summer. We played tennis, read, and took long walks together. I shall always look back on that time of mental awakening as one of the happiest in my life. Gaston Cleric introduced me to the world of ideas; when one first enters that world everything else fades for a time, and all that went before is as if it had not been. Yet I found curious survivals; some of the figures of my old life seemed to be waiting for me in the new.

In those days there were many serious young men among the students who had come up to the University from the farms and the little towns scattered over the thinly settled State. Some of those boys came straight from the cornfields with only a summer's wages in their pockets, hung on through the four years, shabby and underfed, and completed the course by really heroic self-sacrifice. Our instructors were oddly assorted; wandering pioneer school-teachers, stranded ministers of the Gospel, a few enthusiastic young men just out of graduate schools. There was an atmosphere of endeavor, of expectancy and bright hopefulness about the young college that had lifted its head from the prairie only a few years before.

Our personal life was as free as that of our instructors. There were no college dormitories; we lived where we could and as we could. I took rooms with an old couple, early settlers in Lincoln, who had married off their children and now lived quietly in their house at the edge of town, near the open country. The house was inconveniently situated for students, and on that account I got two rooms for the price of one. My bedroom, originally a linen closet, was unheated and was barely large enough to contain my cot bed, but it enabled me to call the other room my study. The dresser, and the great walnut wardrobe which held all my clothes, even my hats and shoes, I

had pushed out of the way, and I considered them non-existent, as children eliminate incongruous objects when they are playing house. I worked at a commodious green-topped table placed directly in front of the west window which looked out over the prairie. In the corner at my right were all my books, in shelves I had made and painted myself. On the blank wall at my left the dark, old-fashioned wall-paper was covered by a large map of ancient Rome, the work of some German scholar. Cleric had ordered it for me when he was sending for books from abroad. Over the bookcase hung a photograph of the Tragic Theater at Pompeii,² which he had given me from his collection.

When I sat at work I half faced a deep, upholstered chair which stood at the end of my table, its high back against the wall. I had bought it with great care. My instructor sometimes looked in upon me when he was out for an evening tramp, and I noticed that he was more likely to linger and become talkative if I had a comfortable chair for him to sit in, and if he found a bottle of *Bénédictine*³ and plenty of the kind of cigarettes he liked, at his elbow. He was, I had discovered, parsimonious about small expenditures—a trait absolutely inconsistent with his general character. Sometimes when he came he was silent and moody, and after a few sarcastic remarks went away again, to tramp the streets of Lincoln, which were almost as quiet and oppressively domestic as those of Black Hawk. Again, he would sit until nearly midnight, talking about Latin and English poetry, or telling me about his long stay in Italy.

I can give no idea of the peculiar charm and vividness of his talk. In a crowd he was nearly always silent. Even for his classroom he had no platitudes, no stock of professorial anecdotes. When he was tired his lectures were clouded, obscure, elliptical; but when he was interested they were wonderful. I believe that Gaston Cleric narrowly missed being a great poet, and I have sometimes thought that his bursts of imaginative talk were fatal to his poetic gift. He squandered too much in the heat of personal communication. How often I have seen him draw his dark brows together, fix his eyes upon some object on the wall or a figure in the carpet, and then flash into the lamplight the very image that was in his brain. He could bring the drama of antique life before one out of the shadows—white figures against blue backgrounds. I shall never forget his face as it looked one night when he told me about the solitary day he spent among the sea temples at Paestum:⁴ the soft wind blowing through the roofless columns, the birds flying low over the flowering marsh grasses, the changing lights on the silver, cloud-hung mountains. He had willfully stayed the short summer night there, wrapped in his coat and rug, watching the constellations on their path down the sky until “the bride of old Tithonus”⁵ rose out of the sea, and the mountains stood sharp in the dawn. It was there he caught the fever which held him back on the eve of his departure for Greece and of which he lay ill so long in Naples. He was still, indeed, doing penance for it.

2. Ancient city in southwest Italy, which was buried by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 C.E.; its buildings were preserved in superb condition.

3. After-dinner liqueur made in France by Benedictine monks.

4. Coastal town in southern Italy containing Roman temples from the 5th and 6th centuries B.C.E.

5. I.e., Eos, the goddess of the dawn. In Greek myth Tithonus was the son of the king of Troy.

I remember vividly another evening, when something led us to talk of Dante's veneration for Virgil.⁶ Cleric went through canto after canto of the "Commedia," repeating the discourse between Dante and his "sweet teacher," while his cigarette burned itself out unheeded between his long fingers. I can hear him now, speaking the lines of the poet Statius,⁷ who spoke for Dante: "I was famous on earth with the name which endures longest and honors most. The seeds of my ardor were the sparks from that divine flame whereby more than a thousand have kindled; I speak of the *Æneid*, mother to me and nurse to me in poetry."

Although I admired scholarship so much in Cleric, I was not deceived about myself; I knew that I should never be a scholar. I could never lose myself for long among impersonal things. Mental excitement was apt to send me with a rush back to my own naked land and the figures scattered upon it. While I was in the very act of yearning toward the new forms that Cleric brought up before me, my mind plunged away from me, and I suddenly found myself thinking of the places and people of my own infinitesimal past. They stood out strengthened and simplified now, like the image of the plough against the sun. They were all I had for an answer to the new appeal. I begrudged the room that Jake and Otto and Russian Peter took up in my memory, which I wanted to crowd with other things. But whenever my consciousness was quickened, all those early friends were quickened within it, and in some strange way they accompanied me through all my new experiences. They were so much alive in me that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how.

II

One March evening in my Sophomore year I was sitting alone in my room after supper. There had been a warm thaw all day, with mushy yards and little streams of dark water gurgling cheerfully into the streets out of old snow-banks. My window was open, and the earthy wind blowing through made me indolent. On the edge of the prairie, where the sun had gone down, the sky was turquoise blue, like a lake, with gold light throbbing in it. Higher up, in the utter clarity of the western slope, the evening star hung like a lamp suspended by silver chains—like the lamp engraved upon the title-page of old Latin texts, which is always appearing in new heavens, and waking new desires in men. It reminded me, at any rate, to shut my window and light my wick in answer. I did so regretfully, and the dim objects in the room emerged from the shadows and took their place about me with the helpfulness which custom breeds.

I propped my book open and stared listlessly at the page of the *Georgics* where tomorrow's lesson began. It opened with the melancholy reflection that, in the lives of mortals, the best days are the first to flee. "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit.*" I turned back to the beginning of the third book, which we had read in class that morning. "*Primus ego in patriam mecum . . . deducam Musas*"; "for I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my

6. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Italian poet, famous for the *Divine Comedy*, a long poem recounting the poet's journey through Hell (*Inferno*), Purgatory (*Purgatorio*), and Heaven

(*Paradiso*). Virgil is his guide in Hell and Purgatory.
7. Roman poet (c. 45–96 c.e.) who, in Cantos 21 and 22 of the *Purgatorio*, meets Virgil and speaks the quoted lines.

country." Cleric had explained to us that "patria" here meant, not a nation or even a province, but the little rural neighborhood on the Mincio where the poet was born. This was not a boast, but a hope, at once bold and devoutly humble, that he might bring the Muse (but lately come to Italy from her cloudy Grecian mountains), not to the capital, the *palatia Romana*, but to his own little "country"; to his father's fields, "sloping down to the river and to the old beech trees with broken tops."

Cleric said he thought Virgil, when he was dying at Brindisi, must have remembered that passage. After he had faced the bitter fact that he was to leave the *Æneid* unfinished, and had decreed that the great canvas, crowded with figures of gods and men, should be burned rather than survive him unperfected, then his mind must have gone back to the perfect utterance of the *Georgics*, where the pen was fitted to the matter as the plough is to the furrow; and he must have said to himself with the thankfulness of a good man, "I was the first to bring the Muse into my country."

We left the classroom quietly, conscious that we had been brushed by the wing of a great feeling, though perhaps I alone knew Cleric intimately enough to guess what that feeling was. In the evening, as I sat staring at my book, the fervor of his voice stirred through the quantities on the page before me. I was wondering whether that particular rocky strip of New England coast about which he had so often told me was Cleric's *patria*. Before I had got far with my reading I was disturbed by a knock. I hurried to the door and when I opened it saw a woman standing in the dark hall.

"I expect you hardly know me, Jim."

The voice seemed familiar, but I did not recognize her until she stepped into the light of my doorway and I beheld—Lena Lingard! She was so quietly conventionalized by city clothes that I might have passed her on the street without seeing her. Her black suit fitted her figure smoothly, and a black lace hat, with pale-blue forget-me-nots, sat demurely on her yellow hair.

I led her toward Cleric's chair, the only comfortable one I had, questioning her confusedly.

She was not disconcerted by my embarrassment. She looked about her with the naïve curiosity I remembered so well. "You are quite comfortable here, aren't you? I live in Lincoln now, too, Jim. I'm in business for myself. I have a dressmaking shop in the Raleigh Block, out on O Street. I've made a real good start."

"But, Lena, when did you come?"

"Oh, I've been here all winter. Didn't your grandmother ever write you? I've thought about looking you up lots of times. But we've all heard what a studious young man you've got to be, and I felt bashful. I didn't know whether you'd be glad to see me." She laughed her mellow, easy laugh, that was either very artless or very comprehending, one never quite knew which. "You seem the same, though,—except you're a young man, now, of course. Do you think I've changed?"

"Maybe you're prettier—though you were always pretty enough. Perhaps it's your clothes that make a difference."

"You like my new suit? I have to dress pretty well in my business." She took off her jacket and sat more at ease in her blouse, of some soft, flimsy silk. She was already at home in my place, had slipped quietly into it, as she

did into everything. She told me her business was going well, and she had saved a little money.

"This summer I'm going to build the house for mother I've talked about so long. I won't be able to pay up on it at first, but I want her to have it before she is too old to enjoy it. Next summer I'll take her down new furniture and carpets, so she'll have something to look forward to all winter."

I watched Lena sitting there so smooth and sunny and well cared-for, and thought of how she used to run barefoot over the prairie until after the snow began to fly, and how Crazy Mary chased her round and round the cornfields. It seemed to me wonderful that she should have got on so well in the world. Certainly she had no one but herself to thank for it.

"You must feel proud of yourself, Lena," I said heartily. "Look at me; I've never earned a dollar, and I don't know that I'll ever be able to."

"Tony says you're going to be richer than Mr. Harling some day. She's always bragging about you, you know."

"Tell me, how *is* Tony?"

"She's fine. She works for Mrs. Gardener at the hotel now. She's house-keeper. Mrs. Gardener's health isn't what it was, and she can't see after everything like she used to. She has great confidence in Tony. Tony's made it up with the Harlings, too. Little Nina is so fond of her that Mrs. Harling kind of overlooked things."

"Is she still going with Larry Donovan?"

"Oh, that's on, worse than ever! I guess they're engaged. Tony talks about him like he was president of the railroad. Everybody laughs about it, because she was never a girl to be soft. She won't hear a word against him. She's sort of innocent."

I said I didn't like Larry, and never would.

Lena's face dimpled. "Some of us could tell her things, but it wouldn't do any good. She'd always believe him. That's *Ántonia's* failing, you know; if she once likes people, she won't hear anything against them."

"I think I'd better go home and look after *Ántonia*," I said.

"I think you had." Lena looked up at me in frank amusement. "It's a good thing the Harlings are friendly with her again. Larry's afraid of them. They ship so much grain, they have influence with the railroad people. What are you studying?" She leaned her elbows on the table and drew my book toward her. I caught a faint odor of violet sachet. "So that's Latin, is it? It looks hard. You do go to the theater sometimes, though, for I've seen you there. Don't you just love a good play, Jim? I can't stay at home in the evening if there's one in town. I'd be willing to work like a slave, it seems to me, to live in a place where there are theaters."

"Let's go to a show together sometime. You are going to let me come to see you, aren't you?"

"Would you like to? I'd be ever so pleased. I'm never busy after six o'clock, and I let my sewing girls go at half-past five. I board, to save time, but sometimes I cook a chop for myself, and I'd be glad to cook one for you. Well,"—she began to put on her white gloves,—“it's been awful good to see you, Jim.”

"You needn't hurry, need you? You've hardly told me anything yet."

"We can talk when you come to see me. I expect you don't often have lady visitors. The old woman downstairs didn't want to let me come up very much.

I told her I was from your home town, and had promised your grandmother to come and see you. How surprised Mrs. Burden would be!" Lena laughed softly as she rose.

When I caught up my hat she shook her head. "No, I don't want you to go with me. I'm to meet some Swedes at the drug-store. You wouldn't care for them. I wanted to see your room so I could write Tony all about it, but I must tell her how I left you right here with your books. She's always so afraid some one will run off with you!" Lena slipped her silk sleeves into the jacket I held for her, smoothed it over her person, and buttoned it slowly. I walked with her to the door. "Come and see me sometimes when you're lonesome. But maybe you have all the friends you want. Have you?" She turned her soft cheek to me. "Have you?" she whispered teasingly in my ear. In a moment I watched her fade down the dusky stairway.

When I turned back to my room the place seemed much pleasanter than before. Lena had left something warm and friendly in the lamplight. How I loved to hear her laugh again! It was so soft and unexcited and appreciative—gave a favorable interpretation to everything. When I closed my eyes I could hear them all laughing—the Danish laundry girls and the three Bohemian Marys. Lena had brought them all back to me. It came over me, as it had never done before, the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Virgil. If there were no girls like them in the world, there would be no poetry. I understood that clearly, for the first time. This revelation seemed to me inestimably precious. I clung to it as if it might suddenly vanish.

As I sat down to my book at last, my old dream about Lena coming across the harvest field in her short skirt seemed to me like the memory of an actual experience. It floated before me on the page like a picture, and underneath it stood the mournful line: *Optima dies . . . prima fugit.*

III

In Lincoln the best part of the theatrical season came late, when the good companies stopped off there for one-night stands, after their long runs in New York and Chicago. That spring Lena went with me to see Joseph Jefferson in "Rip Van Winkle," and to a war play called "Shenandoah."⁸ She was inflexible about paying for her own seat; said she was in business now, and she wouldn't have a schoolboy spending his money on her. I liked to watch a play with Lena; everything was wonderful to her, and everything was true. It was like going to revival meetings with some one who was always being converted. She handed her feelings over to the actors with a kind of fatalistic resignation. Accessories of costume and scene meant much more to her than to me. She sat entranced through "Robin Hood"⁹ and hung upon the lips of the contralto who sang, "Oh, Promise Me!"

Toward the end of April, the billboards, which I watched anxiously in those days, bloomed out one morning with gleaming white posters on which two

8. A four-act play (1889), by American playwright Bronson Howard (1842–1908), about lovers separated by the Civil War. Jefferson (1829–1905), a well-known American comedian who from 1865 on mainly played the role of Rip Van Winkle in a

stage version of Washington Irving's 1819 story.
9. A three-act comic opera (1890), by American Reginald De Koven (1859–1920). "Oh, Promise Me!" was its most popular song.

names were impressively printed in blue Gothic letters: the name of an actress of whom I had often heard, and the name “Camille.”¹

I called at the Raleigh Block for Lena on Saturday evening, and we walked down to the theater. The weather was warm and sultry and put us both in a holiday humor. We arrived early, because Lena liked to watch the people come in. There was a note on the programme, saying that the “incidental music” would be from the opera “Traviata,”² which was made from the same story as the play. We had neither of us read the play, and we did not know what it was about—though I seemed to remember having heard it was a piece in which great actresses shone. “The Count of Monte Cristo,” which I had seen James O’Neill play that winter, was by the only Alexandre Dumas³ I knew. This play, I saw, was by his son, and I expected a family resemblance. A couple of jack-rabbits, run in off the prairie, could not have been more innocent of what awaited them than were Lena and I.

Our excitement began with the rise of the curtain, when the moody Varville, seated before the fire, interrogated Nanine. Decidedly, there was a new tang about this dialogue. I had never heard in the theater lines that were alive, that presupposed and took for granted, like those which passed between Varville and Marguerite in the brief encounter before her friends entered.⁴ This introduced the most brilliant, worldly, the most enchantingly gay scene I had ever looked upon. I had never seen champagne bottles opened on the stage before—indeed, I had never seen them opened anywhere. The memory of that supper makes me hungry now; the sight of it then, when I had only a students’ boarding-house dinner behind me, was delicate torment. I seem to remember gilded chairs and tables (arranged hurriedly by footmen in white gloves and stockings), linen of dazzling whiteness, glittering glass, silver dishes, a great bowl of fruit, and the reddest of roses. The room was invaded by beautiful women and dashing young men, laughing and talking together. The men were dressed more or less after the period in which the play was written; the women were not. I saw no inconsistency. Their talk seemed to open to one the brilliant world in which they lived; every sentence made one older and wiser, every pleasantry enlarged one’s horizon. One could experience excess and satiety without the inconvenience of learning what to do with one’s hands in a drawing-room! When the characters all spoke at once and I missed some of the phrases they flashed at each other, I was in misery. I strained my ears and eyes to catch every exclamation.

The actress who played Marguerite was even then old-fashioned, though historic. She had been a member of Daly’s⁵ famous New York company, and afterward a “star” under his direction. She was a woman who could not be taught, it is said, though she had a crude natural force which carried with

1. *La Dame aux Camélias* (The lady of the camélias) was a play based on the novel (1848) by the French writer Alexandre Dumas, *fils* (1824–1895). It was brought to the United States in an English version in 1853. The actress is probably Clara Morris (1848–1925).

2. Verdi’s 1853 opera was also based on the Dumas novel.

3. French writer (*père*, 1802–1870) who published *The Count of Monte Cristo* in 1844–45. O’Neill (1847–1920), father of Eugene O’Neill, performed

the leading role for more than a quarter century, starting in 1883.

4. The story is about the romance between Marguerite Gautier, a woman of the world, and the young Armand Duval. Armand’s father persuades her to give Armand up. Other characters are Varville, her patron; Nanine, her maid; and Gaston, a friend.

5. John Augustin Daly (1838–1899), playwright, producer, and director in the American theater.

people whose feelings were accessible and whose taste was not squeamish. She was already old, with a ravaged countenance and a physique curiously hard and stiff. She moved with difficulty—I think she was lame—I seem to remember some story about a malady of the spine. Her Armand was disproportionately young and slight, a handsome youth, perplexed in the extreme. But what did it matter? I believed devoutly in her power to fascinate him, in her dazzling loveliness. I believed her young, ardent, reckless, disillusioned, under sentence, feverish, avid of pleasure. I wanted to cross the footlights and help the slim-waisted Armand in the frilled shirt to convince her that there was still loyalty and devotion in the world. Her sudden illness, when the gayety was at its height, her pallor, the handkerchief she crushed against her lips, the cough she smothered under the laughter while Gaston kept playing the piano lightly—it all wrung my heart. But not so much as her cynicism in the long dialogue with her lover which followed. How far was I from questioning her unbelief! While the charmingly sincere young man pleaded with her—accompanied by the orchestra in the old “Traviata” duet, “*misterioso, misterioso!*”—she maintained her bitter skepticism, and the curtain fell on her dancing recklessly with the others, after Armand had been sent away with his flower.

Between the acts we had no time to forget. The orchestra kept sawing away at the “Traviata” music, so joyous and sad, so thin and far-away, so clap-trap and yet so heart-breaking. After the second act I left Lena in tearful contemplation of the ceiling, and went out into the lobby to smoke. As I walked about there I congratulated myself that I had not brought some Lincoln girl who would talk during the waits about the Junior dances, or whether the cadets would camp at Plattsmouth. Lena was at least a woman, and I was a man.

Through the scene between Marguerite and the elder Duval, Lena wept unceasingly, and I sat helpless to prevent the closing of that chapter of idyllic love, dreading the return of the young man whose ineffable happiness was only to be the measure of his fall.

I suppose no woman could have been further in person, voice, and temperament from Dumas’ appealing heroine than the veteran actress who first acquainted me with her. Her conception of the character was as heavy and uncompromising as her diction; she bore hard on the idea and on the consonants. At all times she was highly tragic, devoured by remorse. Lightness of stress or behavior was far from her. Her voice was heavy and deep: “Ar-r-romond!” she would begin, as if she were summoning him to the bar of Judgment. But the lines were enough. She had only to utter them. They created the character in spite of her.

The heartless world which Marguerite reentered with Varville had never been so glittering and reckless as on the night when it gathered in Olympe’s salon for the fourth act. There were chandeliers hung from the ceiling, I remember, many servants in livery, gaming-tables where the men played with piles of gold, and a staircase down which the guests made their entrance. After all the others had gathered round the card tables, and young Duval had been warned by Prudence, Marguerite descended the staircase with Varville; such a cloak, such a fan, such jewels—and her face! One knew at a glance how it was with her. When Armand, with the terrible words, “Look, all of you, I owe this woman nothing!” flung the gold and bank-notes at the

half-swooning Marguerite, Lena cowered beside me and covered her face with her hands.

The curtain rose on the bedroom scene. By this time there wasn't a nerve in me that hadn't been twisted. Nanine alone could have made me cry. I loved Nanine tenderly; and Gaston, how one clung to that good fellow! The New Year's presents were not too much; nothing could be too much now. I wept unrestrainedly. Even the handkerchief in my breast-pocket, worn for elegance and not at all for use, was wet through by the time that moribund woman sank for the last time into the arms of her lover.

When we reached the door of the theater, the streets were shining with rain. I had prudently brought along Mrs. Harling's useful Commencement present, and I took Lena home under its shelter. After leaving her, I walked slowly out into the country part of the town where I lived. The lilacs were all blooming in the yards, and the smell of them after the rain, of the new leaves and the blossoms together, blew into my face with a sort of bitter sweetness. I tramped through the puddles and under the showery trees, mourning for Marguerite Gauthier as if she had died only yesterday, sighing with the spirit of 1840, which had sighed so much, and which had reached me only that night, across long years and several languages, through the person of an infirm old actress. The idea is one that no circumstances can frustrate. Wherever and whenever that piece is put on, it is April.

IV

How well I remember the stiff little parlor where I used to wait for Lena: the hard horse-hair furniture, bought at some auction sale, the long mirror, the fashion-plates on the wall. If I sat down even for a moment I was sure to find threads and bits of colored silk clinging to my clothes after I went away. Lena's success puzzled me. She was so easy-going; had none of the push and self-assertiveness that get people ahead in business. She had come to Lincoln, a country girl, with no introductions except to some cousins of Mrs. Thomas who lived there, and she was already making clothes for the women of "the young married set." She evidently had great natural aptitude for her work. She knew, as she said, "what people looked well in." She never tired of poring over fashion books. Sometimes in the evening I would find her alone in her work-room, draping folds of satin on a wire figure, with a quite blissful expression of countenance. I couldn't help thinking that the years when Lena literally hadn't enough clothes to cover herself might have something to do with her untiring interest in dressing the human figure. Her clients said that Lena "had style," and overlooked her habitual inaccuracies. She never, I discovered, finished anything by the time she had promised, and she frequently spent more money on materials than her customer had authorized. Once, when I arrived at six o'clock, Lena was ushering out a fidgety mother and her awkward, overgrown daughter. The woman detained Lena at the door to say apologetically:—

"You'll try to keep it under fifty for me, won't you, Miss Lingard? You see, she's really too young to come to an expensive dressmaker, but I knew you could do more with her than anybody else."

"Oh, that will be all right, Mrs. Herron. I think we'll manage to get a good effect," Lena replied blandly.

I thought her manner with her customers very good, and wondered where she had learned such self-possession.

Sometimes after my morning classes were over, I used to encounter Lena downtown, in her velvet suit and a little black hat, with a veil tied smoothly over her face, looking as fresh as the spring morning. Maybe she would be carrying home a bunch of jonquils or a hyacinth plant. When we passed a candy store her footsteps would hesitate and linger. "Don't let me go in," she would murmur. "Get me by if you can." She was very fond of sweets, and was afraid of growing too plump.

We had delightful Sunday breakfasts together at Lena's. At the back of her long work-room was a bay-window, large enough to hold a box-couch and a reading-table. We breakfasted in this recess, after drawing the curtains that shut out the long room, with cutting-tables and wire women and sheet-draped garments on the walls. The sunlight poured in, making everything on the table shine and glitter and the flame of the alcohol lamp disappear altogether. Lena's curly black water-spaniel, Prince, breakfasted with us. He sat beside her on the couch and behaved very well until the Polish violin-teacher across the hall began to practice, when Prince would growl and sniff the air with disgust. Lena's landlord, old Colonel Raleigh, had given her the dog, and at first she was not at all pleased. She had spent too much of her life taking care of animals to have much sentiment about them. But Prince was a knowing little beast, and she grew fond of him. After breakfast I made him do his lessons; play dead dog, shake hands, stand up like a soldier. We used to put my cadet cap on his head—I had to take military drill at the University—and give him a yard-measure to hold with his front leg. His gravity made us laugh immoderately.

Lena's talk always amused me. Ántonia had never talked like the people about her. Even after she learned to speak English readily there was always something impulsive and foreign in her speech. But Lena had picked up all the conventional expressions she heard at Mrs. Thomas's dressmaking shop. Those formal phrases, the very flower of small-town proprieties, and the flat commonplaces, nearly all hypocritical in their origin, became very funny, very engaging, when they were uttered in Lena's soft voice, with her caressing intonation and arch naïveté. Nothing could be more diverting than to hear Lena, who was almost as candid as Nature, call a leg a "limb" or a house a "home."

We used to linger a long while over our coffee in that sunny corner. Lena was never so pretty as in the morning; she wakened fresh with the world every day, and her eyes had a deeper color then, like the blue flowers that are never so blue as when they first open. I could sit idle all through a Sunday morning and look at her. Ole Benson's behavior was now no mystery to me.

"There was never any harm in Ole," she said once. "People needn't have troubled themselves. He just liked to come over and sit on the draw-side and forget about his bad luck. I liked to have him. Any company's welcome when you're off with cattle all the time."

"But wasn't he always glum?" I asked. "People said he never talked at all."

"Sure he talked, in Norwegian. He'd been a sailor on an English boat and had seen lots of queer places. He had wonderful tattoos. We used to sit and look at them for hours; there wasn't much to look at out there. He was like a picture book. He had a ship and a strawberry girl on one arm, and on the

other a girl standing before a little house, with a fence and gate and all, waiting for her sweetheart. Farther up his arm, her sailor had come back and was kissing her. 'The Sailor's Return,' he called it."

I admitted it was no wonder Ole liked to look at a pretty girl once in a while, with such a fright at home.

"You know," Lena said confidentially, "he married Mary because he thought she was strong-minded and would keep him straight. He never could keep straight on shore. The last time he landed in Liverpool he'd been out on a two years' voyage. He was paid off one morning, and by the next he hadn't a cent left, and his watch and compass were gone. He'd got with some women, and they'd taken everything. He worked his way to this country on a little passenger boat. Mary was a stewardess, and she tried to convert him on the way over. He thought she was just the one to keep him steady. Poor Ole! He used to bring me candy from town, hidden in his feed-bag. He couldn't refuse anything to a girl. He'd have given away his tattoos long ago, if he could. He's one of the people I'm sorriest for."

If I happened to spend an evening with Lena and stayed late, the Polish violin-teacher across the hall used to come out and watch me descend the stairs, muttering so threateningly that it would have been easy to fall into a quarrel with him. Lena had told him once that she liked to hear him practice, so he always left his door open, and watched who came and went.

There was a coolness between the Pole and Lena's landlord on her account. Old Colonel Raleigh had come to Lincoln from Kentucky and invested an inherited fortune in real estate, at the time of inflated prices. Now he sat day after day in his office in the Raleigh Block, trying to discover where his money had gone and how he could get some of it back. He was a widower, and found very little congenial companionship in this casual Western city. Lena's good looks and gentle manners appealed to him. He said her voice reminded him of Southern voices, and he found as many opportunities of hearing it as possible. He painted and papered her rooms for her that spring, and put in a porcelain bathtub in place of the tin one that had satisfied the former tenant. While these repairs were being made, the old gentleman often dropped in to consult Lena's preferences. She told me with amusement how Ordinsky, the Pole, had presented himself at her door one evening, and said that if the landlord was annoying her by his attentions, he would promptly put a stop to it.

"I don't exactly know what to do about him," she said, shaking her head, "he's so sort of wild all the time. I wouldn't like to have him say anything rough to that nice old man. The Colonel is long-winded, but then I expect he's lonesome. I don't think he cares much for Ordinsky, either. He said once that if I had any complaints to make of my neighbors, I mustn't hesitate."

One Saturday evening when I was having supper with Lena we heard a knock at her parlor door, and there stood the Pole, coatless, in a dress shirt and collar. Prince dropped on his paws and began to growl like a mastiff, while the visitor apologized, saying that he could not possibly come in thus attired, but he begged Lena to lend him some safety pins.

"Oh, you'll have to come in, Mr. Ordinsky, and let me see what's the matter." She closed the door behind him. "Jim, won't you make Prince behave?"

I rapped Prince on the nose, while Ordinsky explained that he had not had his dress clothes on for a long time, and to-night, when he was going to play

for a concert, his waistcoat had split down the back. He thought he could pin it together until he got it to a tailor.

Lena took him by the elbow and turned him round. She laughed when she saw the long gap in the satin. "You could never pin that, Mr. Ordinsky. You've kept it folded too long, and the goods is all gone along the crease. Take it off. I can put a new piece of lining-silk in there for you in ten minutes." She disappeared into her work-room with the vest, leaving me to confront the Pole, who stood against the door like a wooden figure. He folded his arms and glared at me with his excitable, slanting brown eyes. His head was the shape of a chocolate drop, and was covered with dry, straw-colored hair that fuzzed up about his pointed crown. He had never done more than mutter at me as I passed him, and I was surprised when he now addressed me.

"Miss Lingard," he said haughtily, "is a young woman for whom I have the utmost, the utmost respect."

"So have I," I said coldly.

He paid no heed to my remark, but began to do rapid finger-exercises on his shirt-sleeves, as he stood with tightly folded arms.

"Kindness of heart," he went on, staring at the ceiling, "sentiment, are not understood in a place like this. The noblest qualities are ridiculed. Grinning college boys, ignorant and conceited, what do they know of delicacy!"

I controlled my features and tried to speak seriously.

"If you mean me, Mr. Ordinsky, I have known Miss Lingard a long time, and I think I appreciate her kindness. We come from the same town, and we grew up together."

His gaze traveled slowly down from the ceiling and rested on me. "Am I to understand that you have this young woman's interests at heart? That you do not wish to compromise her?"

"That's a word we don't use much here, Mr. Ordinsky. A girl who makes her own living can ask a college boy to supper without being talked about. We take some things for granted."

"Then I have misjudged you, and I ask your pardon,"—he bowed gravely. "Miss Lingard," he went on, "is an absolutely trustful heart. She has not learned the hard lessons of life. As for you and me, *noblesse oblige*,"⁶—he watched me narrowly.

Lena returned with the vest. "Come in and let us look at you as you go out, Mr. Ordinsky. I've never seen you in your dress suit," she said as she opened the door for him.

A few moments later he reappeared with his violin case—a heavy muffler about his neck and thick woolen gloves on his bony hands. Lena spoke encouragingly to him, and he went off with such an important, professional air, that we fell to laughing as soon as we had shut the door. "Poor fellow," Lena said indulgently, "he takes everything so hard."

After that Ordinsky was friendly to me, and behaved as if there were some deep understanding between us. He wrote a furious article, attacking the musical taste of the town, and asked me to do him a great service by taking it to the editor of the morning paper. If the editor refused to print it, I was to tell him that he would be answerable to Ordinsky "in person." He declared that he would never retract one word, and that he was quite prepared to

6. Rank carries its obligations (French).

lose all his pupils. In spite of the fact that nobody ever mentioned his article to him after it appeared—full of typographical errors which he thought intentional—he got a certain satisfaction from believing that the citizens of Lincoln had meekly accepted the epithet “coarse barbarians.” “You see how it is,” he said to me, “where there is no chivalry, there is no *amour propre*.”⁷ When I met him on his rounds now, I thought he carried his head more disdainfully than ever, and strode up the steps of front porches and rang doorbells with more assurance. He told Lena he would never forget how I had stood by him when he was “under fire.”

All this time, of course, I was drifting. Lena had broken up my serious mood. I wasn’t interested in my classes. I played with Lena and Prince, I played with the Pole, I went buggy-riding with the old Colonel, who had taken a fancy to me and used to talk to me about Lena and the “great beauties” he had known in his youth. We were all three in love with Lena.

Before the first of June, Gaston Cleric was offered an instructorship at Harvard College, and accepted it. He suggested that I should follow him in the fall, and complete my course at Harvard. He had found out about Lena—not from me—and he talked to me seriously.

“You won’t do anything here now. You should either quit school and go to work, or change your college and begin again in earnest. You won’t recover yourself while you are playing about with this handsome Norwegian. Yes, I’ve seen her with you at the theater. She’s very pretty, and perfectly irresponsible, I should judge.”

Cleric wrote my grandfather that he would like to take me East with him. To my astonishment, grandfather replied that I might go if I wished. I was both glad and sorry on the day when the letter came. I stayed in my room all evening and thought things over; I even tried to persuade myself that I was standing in Lena’s way—it is so necessary to be a little noble!—and that if she had not me to play with, she would probably marry and secure her future.

The next evening I went to call on Lena. I found her propped up on the couch in her bay window, with her foot in a big slipper. An awkward little Russian girl whom she had taken into her work-room had dropped a flat-iron on Lena’s toe. On the table beside her there was a basket of early summer flowers which the Pole had left after he heard of the accident. He always managed to know what went on in Lena’s apartment.

Lena was telling me some amusing piece of gossip about one of her clients, when I interrupted her and picked up the flower basket.

“This old chap will be proposing to you some day, Lena.”

“Oh, he has—often!” she murmured.

“What! After you’ve refused him?”

“He doesn’t mind that. It seems to cheer him to mention the subject. Old men are like that, you know. It makes them feel important to think they’re in love with somebody.”

“The Colonel would marry you in a minute. I hope you won’t marry some old fellow; not even a rich one.”

Lena shifted her pillows and looked up at me in surprise. “Why, I’m not going to marry anybody. Didn’t you know that?”

7. Self-respect (French).

"Nonsense, Lena. That's what girls say, but you know better. Every handsome girl like you marries, of course."

She shook her head. "Not me."

"But why not? What makes you say that?" I persisted.

Lena laughed. "Well, it's mainly because I don't want a husband. Men are all right for friends, but as soon as you marry them they turn into cranky old fathers, even the wild ones. They begin to tell you what's sensible and what's foolish, and want you to stick at home all the time. I prefer to be foolish when I feel like it, and be accountable to nobody."

"But you'll be lonesome. You'll get tired of this sort of life, and you'll want a family."

"Not me. I like to be lonesome. When I went to work for Mrs. Thomas I was nineteen years old, and I had never slept a night in my life when there weren't three in the bed. I never had a minute to myself except when I was off with the cattle."

Usually, when Lena referred to her life in the country at all, she dismissed it with a single remark, humorous or mildly cynical. But to-night her mind seemed to dwell on those early years. She told me she couldn't remember a time when she was so little that she wasn't lugging a heavy baby about, helping to wash for babies, trying to keep their little chapped hands and faces clean. She remembered home as a place where there were always too many children, a cross man, and work piling up around a sick woman.

"It wasn't mother's fault. She would have made us comfortable if she could. But that was no life for a girl! After I began to herd and milk I could never get the smell of the cattle off me. The few underclothes I had I kept in a cracker box. On Saturday nights, after everybody was in bed, then I could take a bath if I wasn't too tired. I could make two trips to the windmill to carry water, and heat it in the wash-boiler on the stove. While the water was heating, I could bring in a washtub out of the cave, and take my bath in the kitchen. Then I could put on a clean nightgown and get into bed with two others, who likely hadn't had a bath unless I'd given it to them. You can't tell me anything about family life. I've had plenty to last me."

"But it's not all like that," I objected.

"Near enough. It's all being under somebody's thumb. What's on your mind, Jim? Are you afraid I'll want you to marry me some day?"

Then I told her I was going away.

"What makes you want to go away, Jim? Haven't I been nice to you?"

"You've been just awfully good to me, Lena," I blurted. "I don't think about much else. I never shall think about much else while I'm with you. I'll never settle down and grind if I stay here. You know that." I dropped down beside her and sat looking at the floor. I seemed to have forgotten all my reasonable explanations.

Lena drew close to me, and the little hesitation in her voice that had hurt me was not there when she spoke again.

"I oughtn't to begun it, ought I?" she murmured. "I oughn't to have gone to see you that first time. But I did want to. I guess I've always been a little foolish about you. I don't know what first put it into my head, unless it was Ántonia, always telling me I mustn't be up to any of my nonsense with you. I let you alone for a long while, though, didn't I?"

She was a sweet creature to those she loved, that Lena Lingard!

At last she sent me away with her soft, slow, renunciatory kiss. "You aren't sorry I came to see you that time?" she whispered. "It seemed so natural. I used to think I'd like to be your first sweetheart. You were such a funny kid!" She always kissed one as if she were sadly and wisely sending one away forever.

We said many good-byes before I left Lincoln, but she never tried to hinder me or hold me back. "You are going, but you haven't gone yet, have you?" she used to say.

My Lincoln chapter closed abruptly. I went home to my grandparents for a few weeks, and afterward visited my relatives in Virginia until I joined Cleric in Boston. I was then nineteen years old.

Book IV. The Pioneer Woman's Story

I

Two years after I left Lincoln I completed my academic course at Harvard. Before I entered the Law School I went home for the summer vacation. On the night of my arrival Mrs. Harling and Frances and Sally came over to greet me. Everything seemed just as it used to be. My grandparents looked very little older. Frances Harling was married now, and she and her husband managed the Harling interests in Black Hawk. When we gathered in grandmother's parlor, I could hardly believe that I had been away at all. One subject, however, we avoided all evening.

When I was walking home with Frances, after we had left Mrs. Harling at her gate, she said simply, "You know, of course, about poor *Ántonia*."

Poor *Ántonia*! Every one would be saying that now, I thought bitterly. I replied that grandmother had written me how *Ántonia* went away to marry Larry Donovan at some place where he was working; that he had deserted her, and that there was now a baby. This was all I knew.

"He never married her," Frances said. "I haven't seen her since she came back. She lives at home, on the farm, and almost never comes to town. She brought the baby in to show it to mama once. I'm afraid she's settled down to be Ambrosch's drudge for good."

I tried to shut *Ántonia* out of my mind. I was bitterly disappointed in her. I could not forgive her for becoming an object of pity, while Lena Lingard, for whom people had always foretold trouble, was now the leading dress-maker of Lincoln, much respected in Black Hawk. Lena gave her heart away when she felt like it, but she kept her head for her business and had got on in the world.

Just then it was the fashion to speak indulgently of Lena and severely of Tiny Soderball, who had quietly gone West to try her fortune the year before. A Black Hawk boy, just back from Seattle, brought the news that Tiny had not gone to the coast on a venture, as she had allowed people to think, but with very definite plans. One of the roving promoters that used to stop at Mrs. Gardener's hotel owned idle property along the waterfront in Seattle, and he had offered to set Tiny up in business in one of his empty buildings. She was now conducting a sailors' lodging-house. This, every one said, would be the end of Tiny. Even if she had begun by running a decent place, she couldn't keep it up; all sailors' boarding-houses were alike.

When I thought about it, I discovered that I had never known Tiny as well as I knew the other girls. I remembered her tripping briskly about the dining-room on her high heels, carrying a big tray full of dishes, glancing rather pertly at the spruce traveling men, and contemptuously at the scrubby ones—who were so afraid of her that they didn't dare to ask for two kinds of pie. Now it occurred to me that perhaps the sailors, too, might be afraid of Tiny. How astonished we would have been, as we sat talking about her on Frances Harling's front porch, if we could have known what her future was really to be! Of all the girls and boys who grew up together in Black Hawk, Tiny Soderball was to lead the most adventurous life and to achieve the most solid worldly success.

This is what actually happened to Tiny: While she was running her lodging-house in Seattle, gold was discovered in Alaska.⁸ Miners and sailors came back from the North with wonderful stories and pouches of gold. Tiny saw it and weighed it in her hands. That daring which nobody had ever suspected in her, awoke. She sold her business and set out for Circle City, in company with a carpenter and his wife whom she had persuaded to go along with her. They reached Skaguay in a snowstorm, went in dog sledges over the Chilkoot Pass, and shot the Yukon in flatboats. They reached Circle City on the very day when some Siwash Indians came into the settlement with the report that there had been a rich gold strike farther up the river, on a certain Klondike Creek. Two days later Tiny and her friends, and nearly every one else in Circle City, started for the Klondike fields on the last steamer that went up the Yukon before it froze for the winter. That boatload of people founded Dawson City. Within a few weeks there were fifteen hundred homeless men in camp. Tiny and the carpenter's wife began to cook for them, in a tent. The miners gave her a lot, and the carpenter put up a log hotel for her. There she sometimes fed a hundred and fifty men a day. Miners came in on snowshoes from their placer claims twenty miles away to buy fresh bread from her, and paid for it in gold.

That winter Tiny kept in her hotel a Swede whose legs had been frozen one night in a storm when he was trying to find his way back to his cabin. The poor fellow thought it great good fortune to be cared for by a woman, and a woman who spoke his own tongue. When he was told that his feet must be amputated, he said he hoped he would not get well; what could a working-man do in this hard world without feet? He did, in fact, die from the operation, but not before he had deeded Tiny Soderball his claim on Hunker Creek. Tiny sold her hotel, invested half her money in Dawson building lots, and with the rest she developed her claim. She went off into the wilds and lived on it. She bought other claims from discouraged miners, traded or sold them on percentages.

After nearly ten years in the Klondike, Tiny returned, with a considerable fortune, to live in San Francisco. I met her in Salt Lake City in 1908. She was a thin, hard-faced woman, very well-dressed, very reserved in manner. Curiously enough, she reminded me of Mrs. Gardener, for whom she had worked in Black Hawk so long ago. She told me about some of the desperate chances she had taken in the gold country, but the thrill of them was quite gone. She said frankly that nothing interested her much now but making money. The

8. In the winter of 1897–98.

only two human beings of whom she spoke with any feeling were the Swede, Johnson, who had given her his claim, and Lena Lingard. She had persuaded Lena to come to San Francisco and go into business there.

"Lincoln was never any place for her," Tiny remarked. "In a town of that size Lena would always be gossiped about. Frisco's the right field for her. She has a fine class of trade. Oh, she's just the same as she always was! She's careless, but she's level-headed. She's the only person I know who never gets any older. It's fine for me to have her there; somebody who enjoys things like that. She keeps an eye on me and won't let me be shabby. When she thinks I need a new dress, she makes it and sends it home—with a bill that's long enough, I can tell you!"

Tiny limped slightly when she walked. The claim on Hunker Creek took toll from its possessors. Tiny had been caught in a sudden turn of weather, like poor Johnson. She lost three toes from one of those pretty little feet that used to trip about Black Hawk in pointed slippers and striped stockings. Tiny mentioned this mutilation quite casually—didn't seem sensitive about it. She was satisfied with her success, but not elated. She was like some one in whom the faculty of becoming interested is worn out.

II

Soon after I got home that summer I persuaded my grandparents to have their photographs taken, and one morning I went into the photographer's shop to arrange for sittings. While I was waiting for him to come out of his developing-room, I walked about trying to recognize the likenesses on his walls: girls in Commencement dresses, country brides and grooms holding hands, family groups of three generations. I noticed, in a heavy frame, one of those depressing "crayon enlargements" often seen in farmhouse parlors, the subject being a round-eyed baby in short dresses. The photographer came out and gave a constrained, apologetic laugh.

"That's Tony Shimerda's baby. You remember her; she used to be the Harling's Tony. Too bad! She seems proud of the baby, though; wouldn't hear to a cheap frame for the picture. I expect her brother will be in for it Saturday."

I went away feeling that I must see *Ántonia* again. Another girl would have kept her baby out of sight, but Tony, of course, must have its picture on exhibition at the town photographer's, in a great gilt frame. How like her! I could forgive her, I told myself, if she hadn't thrown herself away on such a cheap sort of fellow.

Larry Donovan was a passenger conductor, one of those train-crew aristocrats who are always afraid that some one may ask them to put up a car-window, and who, if requested to perform such a menial service, silently point to the button that calls the porter. Larry wore this air of official aloofness even on the street, where there were no car-windows to compromise his dignity. At the end of his run he stepped indifferently from the train along with the passengers, his street hat on his head and his conductor's cap in an alligator-skin bag, went directly into the station and changed his clothes. It was a matter of the utmost importance to him never to be seen in his blue trousers away from his train. He was usually cold and distant with men, but with all women he had a silent, grave familiarity, a special handshake,

accompanied by a significant, deliberate look. He took women, married or single, into his confidence; walked them up and down in the moonlight, telling them what a mistake he had made by not entering the office branch of the service, and how much better fitted he was to fill the post of General Passenger Agent in Denver than the roughshod man who then bore that title. His unappreciated worth was the tender secret Larry shared with his sweethearts, and he was always able to make some foolish heart ache over it.

As I drew near home that morning, I saw Mrs. Harling out in her yard, digging round her mountain-ash tree. It was a dry summer, and she had now no boy to help her. Charley was off in his battleship, cruising somewhere on the Caribbean sea. I turned in at the gate—it was with a feeling of pleasure that I opened and shut that gate in those days; I liked the feel of it under my hand. I took the spade away from Mrs. Harling, and while I loosened the earth around the tree, she sat down on the steps and talked about the oriole family that had a nest in its branches.

“Mrs. Harling,” I said presently, “I wish I could find out exactly how Ántonia’s marriage fell through.”

“Why don’t you go out and see your grandfather’s tenant, the Widow Steavens? She knows more about it than anybody else. She helped Ántonia get ready to be married, and she was there when Ántonia came back. She took care of her when the baby was born. She could tell you everything. Besides, the Widow Steavens is a good talker, and she has a remarkable memory.”

III

On the first or second day of August I got a horse and cart and set out for the high country, to visit the Widow Steavens. The wheat harvest was over, and here and there along the horizon I could see black puffs of smoke from the steam thrashing-machines. The old pasture land was now being broken up into wheatfields and cornfields, the red grass was disappearing, and the whole face of the country was changing. There were wooden houses where the old sod dwellings used to be, and little orchards, and big red barns; all this meant happy children, contented women, and men who saw their lives coming to a fortunate issue. The windy springs and the blazing summers, one after another, had enriched and mellowed that flat tableland; all the human effort that had gone into it was coming back in long, sweeping lines of fertility. The changes seemed beautiful and harmonious to me; it was like watching the growth of a great man or of a great idea. I recognized every tree and sandbank and rugged draw. I found that I remembered the conformation of the land as one remembers the modeling of human faces.

When I drew up to our old windmill, the Widow Steavens came out to meet me. She was brown as an Indian woman, tall, and very strong. When I was little, her massive head had always seemed to me like a Roman senator’s. I told her at once why I had come.

“You’ll stay the night with us, Jimmy? I’ll talk to you after supper. I can take more interest when my work is off my mind. You’ve no prejudice against hot biscuit for supper? Some have, these days.”

While I was putting my horse away I heard a rooster squawking. I looked at my watch and sighed; it was three o’clock, and I knew that I must eat him at six.

After supper Mrs. Steavens and I went upstairs to the old sitting-room, while her grave, silent brother remained in the basement to read his farm papers. All the windows were open. The white summer moon was shining outside, the windmill was pumping lazily in the light breeze. My hostess put the lamp on a stand in the corner, and turned it low because of the heat. She sat down in her favorite rocking-chair and settled a little stool comfortably under her tired feet. "I'm troubled with callouses, Jim; getting old," she sighed cheerfully. She crossed her hands in her lap and sat as if she were at a meeting of some kind.

"Now, it's about that dear *Ántonia* you want to know? Well, you've come to the right person. I've watched her like she'd been my own daughter.

"When she came home to do her sewing that summer before she was to be married, she was over here about every day. They've never had a sewing machine at the *Shimerdas*', and she made all her things here. I taught her hemstitching, and I helped her to cut and fit. She used to sit there at that machine by the window, pedaling the life out of it—she was so strong—and always singing them queer Bohemian songs, like she was the happiest thing in the world.

"*Ántonia*,' I used to say, 'don't run that machine so fast. You won't hasten the day none that way.'

"Then she'd laugh and slow down for a little, but she'd soon forget and begin to pedal and sing again. I never saw a girl work harder to go to house-keeping right and well-prepared. Lovely table linen the *Harlings* had given her, and *Lena Lingard* had sent her nice things from *Lincoln*. We hemstitched all the tablecloths and pillow-cases, and some of the sheets. Old Mrs. *Shimerda* knit yards and yards of lace for her underclothes. *Tony* told me just how she meant to have everything in her house. She'd even bought silver spoons and forks, and kept them in her trunk. She was always coaxing brother to go to the post-office. Her young man did write her real often, from the different towns along his run.

"The first thing that troubled her was when he wrote that his run had been changed, and they would likely have to live in *Denver*. 'I'm a country girl,' she said, 'and I doubt if I'll be able to manage so well for him in a city. I was counting on keeping chickens, and maybe a cow.' She soon cheered up, though.

"At last she got the letter telling her when to come. She was shaken by it; she broke the seal and read it in this room. I suspected then that she'd begun to get faint-hearted, waiting; though she'd never let me see it.

"Then there was a great time of packing. It was in *March*, if I remember rightly, and a terrible muddy, raw spell, with the roads bad for hauling her things to town. And here let me say, *Ambrosch* did the right thing. He went to *Black Hawk* and bought her a set of plated silver in a purple velvet box, good enough for her station. He gave her three hundred dollars in money; I saw the check. He'd collected her wages all those first years she worked out, and it was but right. I shook him by the hand in this room. 'You're behaving like a man, *Ambrosch*,' I said, 'and I'm glad to see it, son.'

"'Twas a cold, raw day he drove her and her three trunks into *Black Hawk* to take the night train for *Denver*—the boxes had been shipped before. He stopped the wagon here, and she ran in to tell me good-bye. She threw her arms around me and kissed me, and thanked me for all I'd done for her. She

was so happy she was crying and laughing at the same time, and her red cheeks was all wet with rain.

“You’re surely handsome enough for any man,” I said, looking her over.

“She laughed kind of flighty like, and whispered, ‘Good-bye, dear house!’ and then ran out to the wagon. I expect she meant that for you and your grandmother, as much as for me, so I’m particular to tell you. This house had always been a refuge to her.

“Well, in a few days we had a letter saying she got to Denver safe, and he was there to meet her. They were to be married in a few days. He was trying to get his promotion before he married, she said. I didn’t like that, but I said nothing. The next week Yulka got a postal card, saying she was ‘well and happy.’ After that we heard nothing. A month went by, and old Mrs. Shimerda began to get fretful. Ambrosch was as sulky with me as if I’d picked out the man and arranged the match.

“One night brother William came in and said that on his way back from the fields he had passed a livery team from town, driving fast out the west road. There was a trunk on the front seat with the driver, and another behind. In the back seat there was a woman all bundled up; but for all her veils, he thought ’t was Ántonia Shimerda, or Ántonia Donovan, as her name ought now to be.

“The next morning I got brother to drive me over. I can walk still, but my feet ain’t what they used to be, and I try to save myself. The lines outside the Shimerdas’ house was full of washing, though it was the middle of the week. As we got nearer I saw a sight that made my heart sink—all those underclothes we’d put so much work on, out there swinging in the wind. Yulka came bringing a dishpanful of wrung clothes, but she darted back into the house like she was loath to see us. When I went in, Ántonia was standing over the tubs, just finishing up a big washing. Mrs. Shimerda was going about her work, talking and scolding to herself. She didn’t so much as raise her eyes. Tony wiped her hand on her apron and held it out to me, looking at me steady but mournful. When I took her in my arms she drew away. ‘Don’t, Mrs. Steavens,’ she says, ‘you’ll make me cry, and I don’t want to.’

“I whispered and asked her to come out of doors with me. I knew she couldn’t talk free before her mother. She went out with me, bareheaded, and we walked up toward the garden.

“I’m not married, Mrs. Steavens,’ she says to me very quiet and natural-like, ‘and I ought to be.’

“Oh, my child,’ says I, ‘what’s happened to you? Don’t be afraid to tell me!’

“She sat down on the draw-side, out of sight of the house. ‘He’s run away from me,’ she said. ‘I don’t know if he ever meant to marry me.’

“You mean he’s thrown up his job and quit the country?’ says I.

“He didn’t have any job. He’d been fired; blacklisted for knocking down fares.⁹ I didn’t know. I thought he hadn’t been treated right. He was sick when I got there. He’d just come out of the hospital. He lived with me till my money gave out, and afterwards I found he hadn’t really been hunting work at all. Then he just didn’t come back. One nice fellow at the station told me, when I kept going to look for him, to give it up. He said he was afraid Larry’d gone bad and wouldn’t come back any more. I guess he’s gone to Old Mexico.

9. Selling tickets at reduced prices and keeping the money for himself.

The conductors get rich down there, collecting half-fares off the natives and robbing the company. He was always talking about fellows who had got ahead that way.'

"I asked her, of course, why she didn't insist on a civil marriage at once—that would have given her some hold on him. She leaned her head on her hands, poor child, and said, 'I just don't know, Mrs. Steavens. I guess my patience was wore out, waiting so long. I thought if he saw how well I could do for him, he'd want to stay with me.'

"Jimmy, I sat right down on that bank beside her and made lament. I cried like a young thing. I couldn't help it. I was just about heart-broke. It was one of them lovely warm May days, and the wind was blowing and the colts jumping around in the pastures; but I felt bowed with despair. My *Ántonia*, that had so much good in her, had come home disgraced. And that *Lena Lingard*, that was always a bad one, say what you will, had turned out so well, and was coming home here every summer in her silks and her satins, and doing so much for her mother. I give credit where credit is due, but you know well enough, *Jim Burden*, there is a great difference in the principles of those two girls. And here it was the good one that had come to grief! I was poor comfort to her. I marveled at her calm. As we went back to the house, she stopped to feel of her clothes to see if they was drying well, and seemed to take pride in their whiteness—she said she'd been living in a brick block, where she didn't have proper conveniences to wash them.

"The next time I saw *Ántonia*, she was out in the fields ploughing corn. All that spring and summer she did the work of a man on the farm; it seemed to be an understood thing. *Ambrosch* didn't get any other hand to help him. Poor *Marek* had got violent and been sent away to an institution a good while back. We never even saw any of *Tony's* pretty dresses. She didn't take them out of her trunks. She was quiet and steady. Folks respected her industry and tried to treat her as if nothing had happened. They talked, to be sure; but not like they would if she'd put on airs. She was so crushed and quiet that nobody seemed to want to humble her. She never went anywhere. All that summer she never once came to see me. At first I was hurt, but I got to feel that it was because this house reminded her of too much. I went over there when I could, but the times when she was in from the fields were the times when I was busiest here. She talked about the grain and the weather as if she'd never had another interest, and if I went over at night she always looked dead weary. She was afflicted with toothache; one tooth after another ulcerated, and she went about with her face swollen half the time. She wouldn't go to *Black Hawk* to a dentist for fear of meeting people she knew. *Ambrosch* had got over his good spell long ago, and was always surly. Once I told him he ought not to let *Ántonia* work so hard and pull herself down. He said, 'If you put that in her head, you better stay home.' And after that I did.

"*Ántonia* worked on through harvest and thrashing, though she was too modest to go out thrashing for the neighbors, like when she was young and free. I didn't see much of her until late that fall when she begun to herd *Ambrosch's* cattle in the open ground north of here, up toward the big dog town. Sometimes she used to bring them over the west hill, there, and I would run to meet her and walk north a piece with her. She had thirty cattle in her bunch; it had been dry, and the pasture was short, or she wouldn't have brought them so far.

"It was a fine open fall, and she liked to be alone. While the steers grazed, she used to sit on them grassy banks along the draws and sun herself for hours. Sometimes I slipped up to visit with her, when she hadn't gone too far.

"It does seem like I ought to make lace, or knit like Lena used to,' she said one day, 'but if I start to work, I look around and forget to go on. It seems such a little while ago when Jim Burden and I was playing all over this country. Up here I can pick out the very places where my father used to stand. Sometimes I feel like I'm not going to live very long, so I'm just enjoying every day of this fall.'

"After the winter begun she wore a man's long overcoat and boots, and a man's felt hat with a wide brim. I used to watch her coming and going, and I could see that her steps were getting heavier. One day in December, the snow began to fall. Late in the afternoon I saw Ántonia driving her cattle homeward across the hill. The snow was flying round her and she bent to face it, looking more lonesome-like to me than usual. 'Deary me,' I says to myself, 'the girl's stayed out too late. It'll be dark before she gets them cattle put into the corral.' I seemed to sense she'd been feeling too miserable to get up and drive them.

"That very night, it happened. She got her cattle home, turned them into the corral, and went into the house, into her room behind the kitchen, and shut the door. There, without calling to anybody, without a groan, she lay down on the bed and bore her child.

"I was lifting supper when old Mrs. Shimerda came running down the basement stairs, out of breath and screeching:—

"Baby come, baby come!' she says. 'Ambrosch much like devil!'

"Brother William is surely a patient man. He was just ready to sit down to a hot supper after a long day in the fields. Without a word he rose and went down to the barn and hooked up his team. He got us over there as quick as it was humanly possible. I went right in, and began to do for Ántonia; but she laid there with her eyes shut and took no account of me. The old woman got a tubful of warm water to wash the baby. I overlooked what she was doing and I said out loud:—

"Mrs. Shimerda, don't you put that strong yellow soap near that baby. You'll blister its little skin.' I was indignant.

"Mrs. Steavens,' Ántonia said from the bed, 'if you'll look in the top tray of my trunk, you'll see some fine soap.' That was the first word she spoke.

"After I'd dressed the baby, I took it out to show it to Ambrosch. He was muttering behind the stove and wouldn't look at it.

"You'd better put it out in the rain barrel,' he says.

"Now, see here, Ambrosch,' says I, 'there's a law in this land, don't forget that. I stand here a witness that this baby has come into the world sound and strong, and I intend to keep an eye on what befalls it.' I pride myself I cowed him.

"Well, I expect you're not much interested in babies, but Ántonia's got on fine. She loved it from the first as dearly as if she'd had a ring on her finger, and was never ashamed of it. It's a year and eight months old now, and no baby was ever better cared-for. Ántonia is a natural-born mother. I wish she could marry and raise a family, but I don't know as there's much chance now."

I slept that night in the room I used to have when I was a little boy, with the summer wind blowing in at the windows, bringing the smell of the ripe

fields. I lay awake and watched the moonlight shining over the barn and the stacks and the pond, and the windmill making its old dark shadow against the blue sky.

IV

The next afternoon I walked over to the Shimerdas'. Yulka showed me the baby and told me that *Ántonia* was shocking wheat on the southwest quarter. I went down across the fields, and Tony saw me from a long way off. She stood still by her shocks, leaning on her pitchfork, watching me as I came. We met like the people in the old song, in silence, if not in tears. Her warm hand clasped mine.

"I thought you'd come, Jim. I heard you were at Mrs. Steavens's last night. I've been looking for you all day."

She was thinner than I had ever seen her, and looked, as Mrs. Steavens said, "worked down," but there was a new kind of strength in the gravity of her face, and her color still gave her that look of deep-seated health and ardor. Still? Why, it flashed across me that though so much had happened in her life and in mine, she was barely twenty-four years old.

Ántonia stuck her fork in the ground, and instinctively we walked toward that unploughed patch at the crossing of the roads as the fittest place to talk to each other. We sat down outside the sagging wire fence that shut Mr. Shimerda's plot off from the rest of the world. The tall red grass had never been cut there. It had died down in winter and come up again in the spring until it was as thick and shrubby as some tropical gardengrass. I found myself telling her everything: why I had decided to study law and to go into the law office of one of my mother's relatives in New York City; about Gaston Cleric's death from pneumonia last winter, and the difference it had made in my life. She wanted to know about my friends and my way of living, and my dearest hopes.

"Of course it means you are going away from us for good," she said with a sigh. "But that don't mean I'll lose you. Look at my papa here; he's been dead all these years, and yet he is more real to me than almost anybody else. He never goes out of my life. I talk to him and consult him all the time. The older I grow, the better I know him and the more I understand him."

She asked me whether I had learned to like big cities. "I'd always be miserable in a city. I'd die of lonesomeness. I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly. I want to live and die here. Father Kelly says everybody's put into this world for something, and I know what I've got to do. I'm going to see that my little girl has a better chance than ever I had. I'm going to take care of that girl, Jim."

I told her I knew she would. "Do you know, *Ántonia*, since I've been away, I think of you more often than of any one else in this part of the world. I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister—anything that a woman can be to a man. The idea of you is a part of my mind; you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don't realize it. You really are a part of me."

She turned her bright, believing eyes to me, and the tears came up in them slowly. "How can it be like that, when you know so many people, and when I've disappointed you so? Ain't it wonderful, Jim, how much people

can mean to each other? I'm so glad we had each other when we were little. I can't wait till my little girl's old enough to tell her about all the things we used to do. You'll always remember me when you think about old times, won't you? And I guess everybody thinks about old times, even the happiest people."

As we walked homeward across the fields, the sun dropped and lay like a great golden globe in the low west. While it hung there, the moon rose in the east, as big as a cartwheel, pale silver and streaked with rose color, thin as a bubble or a ghost-moon. For five, perhaps ten minutes, the two luminaries confronted each other across the level land, resting on opposite edges of the world. In that singular light every little tree and shock of wheat, every sunflower stalk and clump of snow-on-the-mountain, drew itself up high and pointed; the very clods and furrows in the fields seemed to stand up sharply. I felt the old pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at night-fall. I wished I could be a little boy again, and that my way could end there.

We reached the edge of the field, where our ways parted. I took her hands and held them against my breast, feeling once more how strong and warm and good they were, those brown hands, and remembering how many kind things they had done for me. I held them now a long while, over my heart. About us it was growing darker and darker, and I had to look hard to see her face, which I meant always to carry with me; the closest, realest face, under all the shadows of women's faces, at the very bottom of my memory.

"I'll come back," I said earnestly, through the soft, intrusive darkness.

"Perhaps you will"—I felt rather than saw her smile. "But even if you don't, you're here, like my father. So I won't be lonesome."

As I went back alone over that familiar road, I could almost believe that a boy and girl ran along beside me, as our shadows used to do, laughing and whispering to each other in the grass.

Book V. Cuzak's Boys

I

I told Ántonia I would come back, but life intervened, and it was twenty years before I kept my promise. I heard of her from time to time; that she married, very soon after I last saw her, a young Bohemian, a cousin of Anton Jelinek; that they were poor, and had a large family. Once when I was abroad I went into Bohemia, and from Prague I sent Ántonia some photographs of her native village. Months afterward came a letter from her, telling me the names and ages of her many children, but little else; signed, "Your old friend, Ántonia Cuzak." When I met Tiny Soderball in Salt Lake, she told me that Ántonia had not "done very well"; that her husband was not a man of much force, and she had had a hard life. Perhaps it was cowardice that kept me away so long. My business took me West several times every year, and it was always in the back of my mind that I would stop in Nebraska some day and go to see Ántonia. But I kept putting it off until the next trip. I did not want to find her aged and broken; I really dreaded it. In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the

early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again.

I owe it to Lena Lingard that I went to see *Ántonia* at last. I was in San Francisco two summers ago when both Lena and Tiny Soderball were in town. Tiny lives in a house of her own, and Lena's shop is in an apartment house just around the corner. It interested me, after so many years, to see the two women together. Tiny audits Lena's accounts occasionally, and invests her money for her; and Lena, apparently, takes care that Tiny doesn't grow too miserly. "If there's anything I can't stand," she said to me in Tiny's presence, "it's a shabby rich woman." Tiny smiled grimly and assured me that Lena would never be either shabby or rich. "And I don't want to be," the other agreed complacently.

Lena gave me a cheerful account of *Ántonia* and urged me to make her a visit.

"You really ought to go, Jim. It would be such a satisfaction to her. Never mind what Tiny says. There's nothing the matter with Cuzak. You'd like him. He isn't a hustler, but a rough man would never have suited Tony. Tony has nice children—ten or eleven of them by this time, I guess. I shouldn't care for a family of that size myself, but somehow it's just right for Tony. She'd love to show them to you."

On my way East I broke my journey at Hastings, in Nebraska, and set off with an open buggy and a fairly good livery team to find the Cuzak farm. At a little past midday, I knew I must be nearing my destination. Set back on a swell of land at my right, I saw a wide farmhouse, with a red barn and an ash grove, and cattle yards in front that sloped down to the high road. I drew up my horses and was wondering whether I should drive in here, when I heard low voices. Ahead of me, in a plum thicket beside the road, I saw two boys bending over a dead dog. The little one, not more than four or five, was on his knees, his hands folded, and his close-clipped, bare head drooping forward in deep dejection. The other stood beside him, a hand on his shoulder, and was comforting him in a language I had not heard for a long while. When I stopped my horses opposite them, the older boy took his brother by the hand and came toward me. He, too, looked grave. This was evidently a sad afternoon for them.

"Are you Mrs. Cuzak's boys?" I asked.

The younger one did not look up; he was submerged in his own feelings, but his brother met me with intelligent gray eyes. "Yes, sir."

"Does she live up there on the hill? I am going to see her. Get in and ride up with me."

He glanced at his reluctant little brother. "I guess we'd better walk. But we'll open the gate for you."

I drove along the side-road and they followed slowly behind. When I pulled up at the windmill, another boy, barefooted and curly-headed, ran out of the barn to tie my team for me. He was a handsome one, this chap, fair-skinned and freckled, with red cheeks and a ruddy pelt as thick as a lamb's wool, growing down on his neck in little tufts. He tied my team with two flourishes of his hands, and nodded when I asked him if his mother was at home. As he glanced at me, his face dimpled with a seizure of irrelevant merriment, and he shot up the windmill tower with a lightness that struck me as disdainful. I knew he was peering down at me as I walked toward the house.

Ducks and geese ran quacking across my path. White cats were sunning themselves among yellow pumpkins on the porch steps. I looked through the wire screen into a big, light kitchen with a white floor. I saw a long table, rows of wooden chairs against the wall; and a shining range in one corner. Two girls were washing dishes at the sink, laughing and chattering, and a little one, in a short pinafore, sat on a stool playing with a rag baby. When I asked for their mother, one of the girls dropped her towel, ran across the floor with noiseless bare feet, and disappeared. The older one, who wore shoes and stockings, came to the door to admit me. She was a buxom girl with dark hair and eyes, calm and self-possessed.

“Won’t you come in? Mother will be here in a minute.”

Before I could sit down in the chair she offered me, the miracle happened; one of those quiet moments that clutch the heart, and take more courage than the noisy, excited passages in life. Ántonia came in and stood before me; a stalwart, brown woman, flat-chested, her curly brown hair a little grizzled. It was a shock, of course. It always is, to meet people after long years, especially if they have lived as much and as hard as this woman had. We stood looking at each other. The eyes that peered anxiously at me were—simply Ántonia’s eyes. I had seen no others like them since I looked into them last, though I had looked at so many thousands of human faces. As I confronted her, the changes grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger. She was there, in the full vigor of her personality, battered but not diminished, looking at me, speaking to me in the husky, breathy voice I remembered so well.

“My husband’s not at home, sir. Can I do anything?”

“Don’t you remember me, Ántonia? Have I changed so much?”

She frowned into the slanting sunlight that made her brown hair look redder than it was. Suddenly her eyes widened, her whole face seemed to grow broader. She caught her breath and put out two hard-worked hands.

“Why, it’s Jim! Anna, Yulka, it’s Jim Burden!” She had no sooner caught my hands than she looked alarmed. “What’s happened? Is anybody dead?”

I patted her arm. “No. I didn’t come to a funeral this time. I got off the train at Hastings and drove down to see you and your family.”

She dropped my hand and began rushing about. “Anton, Yulka, Nina, where are you all? Run, Anna, and hunt for the boys. They’re off looking for that dog, somewhere. And call Leo. Where is that Leo!” She pulled them out of corners and came bringing them like a mother cat bringing in her kittens. “You don’t have to go right off, Jim? My oldest boy’s not here. He’s gone with papa to the street fair at Wilber. I won’t let you go! You’ve got to stay and see Rudolph and our papa.” She looked at me imploringly, panting with excitement.

While I reassured her and told her there would be plenty of time, the barefooted boys from outside were slipping into the kitchen and gathering about her.

“Now, tell me their names, and how old they are.”

As she told them off in turn, she made several mistakes about ages, and they roared with laughter. When she came to my light-footed friend of the windmill, she said, “This is Leo, and he’s old enough to be better than he is.”

He ran up to her and butted her playfully with his curly head, like a little ram, but his voice was quite desperate. “You’ve forgot! You always forget mine. It’s mean! Please tell him, mother!” He clenched his fists in vexation and looked up at her impetuously.

She wound her forefinger in his yellow fleece and pulled it, watching him. "Well, how old are you?"

"I'm twelve," he panted, looking not at me but at her; "I'm twelve years old, and I was born on Easter day!"

She nodded to me. "It's true. He was an Easter baby."

The children all looked at me, as if they expected me to exhibit astonishment or delight at this information. Clearly, they were proud of each other, and of being so many. When they had all been introduced, Anna, the eldest daughter, who had met me at the door, scattered them gently, and came bringing a white apron which she tied round her mother's waist.

"Now, mother, sit down and talk to Mr. Burden. We'll finish the dishes quietly and not disturb you."

Ántonia looked about, quite distracted. "Yes, child, but why don't we take him into the parlor, now that we've got a nice parlor for company?"

The daughter laughed indulgently, and took my hat from me. "Well, you're here, now, mother, and if you talk here, Yulka and I can listen, too. You can show him the parlor after while." She smiled at me, and went back to the dishes, with her sister. The little girl with the rag doll found a place on the bottom step of an enclosed back stairway, and sat with her toes curled up, looking out at us expectantly.

"She's Nina, after Nina Harling," Ántonia explained. "Ain't her eyes like Nina's? I declare, Jim, I loved you children almost as much as I love my own. These children know all about you and Charley and Sally, like as if they'd grown up with you. I can't think of what I want to say, you've got me so stirred up. And then, I've forgot my English so. I don't often talk it any more. I tell the children I used to speak real well." She said they always spoke Bohemian at home. The little ones could not speak English at all—didn't learn it until they went to school.

"I can't believe it's you, sitting here, in my own kitchen. You wouldn't have known me, would you, Jim? You've kept so young, yourself. But it's easier for a man. I can't see how my Anton looks any older than the day I married him. His teeth have kept so nice. I haven't got many left. But I feel just as young as I used to, and I can do as much work. Oh, we don't have to work so hard now! We've got plenty to help us, papa and me. And how many have you got, Jim?"

When I told her I had no children she seemed embarrassed. "Oh, ain't that too bad! Maybe you could take one of my bad ones, now? That Leo; he's the worst of all." She leaned toward me with a smile. "And I love him the best," she whispered.

"Mother!" the two girls murmured reproachfully from the dishes.

Ántonia threw up her head and laughed. "I can't help it. You know I do. Maybe it's because he came on Easter day, I don't know. And he's never out of mischief one minute!"

I was thinking, as I watched her, how little it mattered—about her teeth, for instance. I know so many women who have kept all the things that she had lost, but whose inner glow has faded. Whatever else was gone, Ántonia had not lost the fire of life. Her skin, so brown and hardened, had not that look of flabbiness, as if the sap beneath it had been secretly drawn away.

While we were talking, the little boy whom they called Jan came in and sat down on the step beside Nina, under the hood of the stairway. He wore

a funny long gingham apron, like a smock, over his trousers, and his hair was clipped so short that his head looked white and naked. He watched us out of his big, sorrowful gray eyes.

"He wants to tell you about the dog, mother. They found it dead," Anna said, as she passed us on her way to the cupboard.

Ántonia beckoned the boy to her. He stood by her chair, leaning his elbows on her knees and twisting her apron strings in his slender fingers, while he told her his story softly in Bohemian, and the tears brimmed over and hung on his long lashes. His mother listened, spoke soothingly to him, and in a whisper promised him something that made him give her a quick, teary smile. He slipped away and whispered his secret to Nina, sitting close to her and talking behind his hand.

When Anna finished her work and had washed her hands, she came and stood behind her mother's chair. "Why don't we show Mr. Burden our new fruit cave?" she asked.

We started off across the yard with the children at our heels. The boys were standing by the windmill, talking about the dog; some of them ran ahead to open the cellar door. When we descended, they all came down after us, and seemed quite as proud of the cave as the girls were. Ambrosch, the thoughtful-looking one who had directed me down by the plum bushes, called my attention to the stout brick walls and the cement floor. "Yes, it is a good way from the house," he admitted. "But, you see, in winter there are nearly always some of us around to come out and get things."

Anna and Yulka showed me three small barrels; one full of dill pickles, one full of chopped pickles, and one full of pickled watermelon rinds.

"You wouldn't believe, Jim, what it takes to feed them all!" their mother exclaimed. "You ought to see the bread we bake on Wednesdays and Saturdays! It's no wonder their poor papa can't get rich, he has to buy so much sugar for us to preserve with. We have our own wheat ground for flour,—but then there's that much less to sell."

Nina and Jan, and a little girl named Lucie, kept shyly pointing out to me the shelves of glass jars. They said nothing, but glancing at me, traced on the glass with their finger-tips the outline of the cherries and strawberries and crab-apples within, trying by a blissful expression of countenance to give me some idea of their deliciousness.

"Show him the spiced plums, mother. Americans don't have those," said one of the older boys. "Mother uses them to make *kolaches*,"¹ he added.

Leo, in a low voice, tossed off some scornful remark in Bohemian.

I turned to him. "You think I don't know what *kolaches* are, eh? You're mistaken, young man. I've eaten your mother's *kolaches* long before that Easter day when you were born."

"Always too fresh, Leo," Ambrosch remarked with a shrug.

Leo dived behind his mother and grinned out at me.

We turned to leave the cave; Ántonia and I went up the stairs first, and the children waited. We were standing outside talking, when they all came running up the steps together, big and little, tow heads and gold heads and brown, and flashing little naked legs; a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight. It made me dizzy for a moment.

1. Fruit-filled sweet rolls.

The boys escorted us to the front of the house, which I hadn't yet seen; in farmhouses, somehow, life comes and goes by the back door. The roof was so steep that the eaves were not much above the forest of tall hollyhocks, now brown and in seed. Through July, *Ántonia* said, the house was buried in them; the Bohemians, I remembered, always planted hollyhocks. The front yard was enclosed by a thorny locust hedge, and at the gate grew two silvery, moth-like trees of the mimosa family. From here one looked down over the cattle yards, with their two long ponds, and over a wide stretch of stubble which they told me was a rye-field in summer.

At some distance behind the house were an ash grove and two orchards; a cherry orchard, with gooseberry and currant bushes between the rows, and an apple orchard, sheltered by a high hedge from the hot winds. The older children turned back when we reached the hedge, but Jan and Nina and Lucie crept through it by a hole known only to themselves and hid under the low-branching mulberry bushes.

As we walked through the apple orchard, grown up in tall bluegrass, *Ántonia* kept stopping to tell me about one tree and another. "I love them as if they were people," she said, rubbing her hand over the bark. "There wasn't a tree here when we first came. We planted every one, and used to carry water for them, too—after we'd been working in the fields all day. Anton, he was a city man, and he used to get discouraged. But I couldn't feel so tired that I wouldn't fret about these trees when there was a dry time. They were on my mind like children. Many a night after he was asleep I've got up and come out and carried water to the poor things. And now, you see, we have the good of them. My man worked in the orange groves in Florida, and he knows all about grafting. There ain't one of our neighbors has an orchard that bears like ours."

In the middle of the orchard we came upon a grape-arbor, with seats built along the sides and a warped plank table. The three children were waiting for us there. They looked up at me bashfully and made some request of their mother.

"They want me to tell you how the teacher has the school picnic here every year. These don't go to school yet, so they think it's all like the picnic."

After I had admired the arbor sufficiently, the youngsters ran away to an open place where there was a rough jungle of French pinks, and squatted down among them, crawling about and measuring with a string. "Jan wants to bury his dog there," *Ántonia* explained. "I had to tell him he could. He's kind of like Nina Harling; you remember how hard she used to take little things? He has funny notions, like her."

We sat down and watched them. *Ántonia* leaned her elbows on the table. There was the deepest peace in that orchard. It was surrounded by a triple enclosure; the wire fence, then the hedge of thorny locusts, then the mulberry hedge which kept out the hot winds of summer and held fast to the protecting snows of winter. The hedges were so tall that we could see nothing but the blue sky above them, neither the barn roof nor the windmill. The afternoon sun poured down on us through the drying grape leaves. The orchard seemed full of sun, like a cup, and we could smell the ripe apples on the trees. The crabs hung on the branches as thick as beads on a string, purple-red, with a thin silvery glaze over them. Some hens and ducks had crept through the hedge and were pecking at the fallen apples.

The drakes were handsome fellows, with pinkish gray bodies, their heads and necks covered with iridescent green feathers which grew close and full, changing to blue like a peacock's neck. Antonia said they always reminded her of soldiers—some uniform she had seen in the old country, when she was a child.

"Are there any quail left now?" I asked. I reminded her how she used to go hunting with me the last summer before we moved to town. "You weren't a bad shot, Tony. Do you remember how you used to want to run away and go for ducks with Charley Harling and me?"

"I know, but I'm afraid to look at a gun now." She picked up one of the drakes and ruffled his green capote with her fingers. "Ever since I've had children, I don't like to kill anything. It makes me kind of faint to wring an old goose's neck. Ain't that strange, Jim?"

"I don't know. The young Queen of Italy said the same thing once, to a friend of mine. She used to be a great huntswoman, but now she feels as you do, and only shoots clay pigeons."

"Then I'm sure she's a good mother," Antonia said warmly.

She told me how she and her husband had come out to this new country when the farm land was cheap and could be had on easy payments. The first ten years were a hard struggle. Her husband knew very little about farming and often grew discouraged. "We'd never have got through if I hadn't been so strong. I've always had good health, thank God, and I was able to help him in the fields until right up to the time before my babies came. Our children were good about taking care of each other. Martha, the one you saw when she was a baby, was such a help to me, and she trained Anna to be just like her. My Martha's married now, and has a baby of her own. Think of that, Jim!

"No, I never got down-hearted. Anton's a good man, and I loved my children and always believed they would turn out well. I belong on a farm. I'm never lonesome here like I used to be in town. You remember what sad spells I used to have, when I didn't know what was the matter with me? I've never had them out here. And I don't mind work a bit, if I don't have to put up with sadness." She leaned her chin on her hand and looked down through the orchard, where the sunlight was growing more and more golden.

"You ought never to have gone to town, Tony," I said, wondering at her.

She turned to me eagerly. "Oh, I'm glad I went! I'd never have known anything about cooking or housekeeping if I hadn't. I learned nice ways at the Harlings', and I've been able to bring my children up so much better. Don't you think they are pretty well-behaved for country children? If it hadn't been for what Mrs. Harling taught me, I expect I'd have brought them up like wild rabbits. No, I'm glad I had a chance to learn; but I'm thankful none of my daughters will ever have to work out. The trouble with me was, Jim, I never could believe harm of anybody I loved."

While we were talking, Antonia assured me that she could keep me for the night. "We've plenty of room. Two of the boys sleep in the haymow till cold weather comes, but there's no need for it. Leo always begs to sleep there, and Ambrosch goes along to look after him."

I told her I would like to sleep in the haymow, with the boys.

"You can do just as you want to. The chest is full of clean blankets, put away for winter. Now I must go, or my girls will be doing all the work, and I want to cook your supper myself."

As we went toward the house, we met Ambrosch and Anton, starting off with their milking-pails to hunt the cows. I joined them, and Leo accompanied us at some distance, running ahead and starting up at us out of clumps of ironweed, calling, "I'm a jack rabbit," or, "I'm a big bull-snake."

I walked between the two older boys—straight, well-made fellows, with good heads and clear eyes. They talked about their school and the new teacher, told me about the crops and the harvest, and how many steers they would feed that winter. They were easy and confidential with me, as if I were an old friend of the family—and not too old. I felt like a boy in their company, and all manner of forgotten interests revived in me. It seemed, after all, so natural to be walking along a barbed-wire fence beside the sunset, toward a red pond, and to see my shadow moving along at my right, over the close-cropped grass.

"Has mother shown you the pictures you sent her from the old country?" Ambrosch asked. "We've had them framed and they're hung up in the parlor. She was so glad to get them. I don't believe I ever saw her so pleased about anything." There was a note of simple gratitude in his voice that made me wish I had given more occasion for it.

I put my hand on his shoulder. "Your mother, you know, was very much loved by all of us. She was a beautiful girl."

"Oh, we know!" They both spoke together; seemed a little surprised that I should think it necessary to mention this. "Everybody liked her, didn't they? The Harlings and your grandmother, and all the town people."

"Sometimes," I ventured, "it doesn't occur to boys that their mother was ever young and pretty."

"Oh, we know!" they said again, warmly. "She's not very old now," Ambrosch added. "Not much older than you."

"Well," I said, "if you weren't nice to her, I think I'd take a club and go for the whole lot of you. I couldn't stand it if you boys were inconsiderate, or thought of her as if she were just somebody who looked after you. You see I was very much in love with your mother once, and I know there's nobody like her."

The boys laughed and seemed pleased and embarrassed. "She never told us that," said Anton. "But she's always talked lots about you, and about what good times you used to have. She has a picture of you that she cut out of the Chicago paper once, and Leo says he recognized you when you drove up to the windmill. You can't tell about Leo, though; sometimes he likes to be smart."

We brought the cows home to the corner nearest the barn, and the boys milked them while night came on. Everything was as it should be: the strong smell of sunflowers and ironweed in the dew, the clear blue and gold of the sky, the evening star, the purr of the milk into the pails, the grunts and squeals of the pigs fighting over their supper. I began to feel the loneliness of the farm-boy at evening, when the chores seem everlastingly the same, and the world so far away.

What a tableful we were at supper; two long rows of restless heads in the lamplight, and so many eyes fastened excitedly upon Antonia as she sat at the head of the table, filling the plates and starting the dishes on their way. The children were seated according to a system; a little one next an older one, who was to watch over his behavior and to see that he got his food. Anna and

Yulka left their chairs from time to time to bring fresh plates of *kolaches* and pitchers of milk.

After supper we went into the parlor, so that Yulka and Leo could play for me. Ántonia went first, carrying the lamp. There were not nearly chairs enough to go round, so the younger children sat down on the bare floor. Little Lucie whispered to me that they were going to have a parlor carpet if they got ninety cents for their wheat. Leo, with a good deal of fussing, got out his violin. It was old Mr. Shimerda's instrument, which Ántonia had always kept, and it was too big for him. But he played very well for a self-taught boy. Poor Yulka's efforts were not so successful. While they were playing, little Nina got up from her corner, came out into the middle of the floor, and began to do a pretty little dance on the boards with her bare feet. No one paid the least attention to her, and when she was through she stole back and sat down by her brother.

Ántonia spoke to Leo in Bohemian. He frowned and wrinkled up his face. He seemed to be trying to pout, but his attempt only brought out dimples in unusual places. After twisting and screwing the keys, he played some Bohemian airs, without the organ to hold him back, and that went better. The boy was so restless that I had not had a chance to look at his face before. My first impression was right; he really was faun-like. He hadn't much head behind his ears, and his tawny fleece grew down thick to the back of his neck. His eyes were not frank and wide apart like those of the other boys, but were deep-set, gold-green in color, and seemed sensitive to the light. His mother said he got hurt oftener than all the others put together. He was always trying to ride the colts before they were broken, teasing the turkey gobbler, seeing just how much red the bull would stand for, or how sharp the new axe was.

After the concert was over Ántonia brought out a big boxful of photographs; she and Anton in their wedding clothes, holding hands; her brother Ambrosch and his very fat wife, who had a farm of her own, and who bossed her husband, I was delighted to hear; the three Bohemian Marys and their large families.

"You wouldn't believe how steady those girls have turned out," Ántonia remarked. "Mary Svoboda's the best butter-maker in all this country, and a fine manager. Her children will have a grand chance."

As Ántonia turned over the pictures the young Cuzaks stood behind her chair, looking over her shoulder with interested faces. Nina and Jan, after trying to see round the taller ones, quietly brought a chair, climbed up on it, and stood close together, looking. The little boy forgot his shyness and grinned delightedly when familiar faces came into view. In the group about Ántonia I was conscious of a kind of physical harmony. They leaned this way and that, and were not afraid to touch each other. They contemplated the photographs with pleased recognition; looked at some admiringly, as if these characters in their mother's girlhood had been remarkable people. The little children, who could not speak English, murmured comments to each other in their rich old language.

Ántonia held out a photograph of Lena that had come from San Francisco last Christmas. "Does she still look like that? She hasn't been home for six years now." Yes, it was exactly like Lena, I told her; a comely woman, a trifle too plump, in a hat a trifle too large, but with the old lazy eyes, and the old dimpled ingenuousness still lurking at the corners of her mouth.

There was a picture of Frances Harling in a be-frogged² riding costume that I remembered well. "Isn't she fine!" the girls murmured. They all assented. One could see that Frances had come down as a heroine in the family legend. Only Leo was unmoved.

"And there's Mr. Harling, in his grand fur coat. He was awfully rich, wasn't he, mother?"

"He wasn't any Rockefeller," put in Master Leo, in a very low tone, which reminded me of the way in which Mrs. Shimerda had once said that my grandfather "wasn't Jesus." His habitual skepticism was like a direct inheritance from that old woman.

"None of your smart speeches," said Ambrosch severely.

Leo poked out a supple red tongue at him, but a moment later broke into a giggle at a tintype of two men, uncomfortably seated, with an awkward-looking boy in baggy clothes standing between them; Jake and Otto and I! We had it taken, I remembered, when we went to Black Hawk on the first Fourth of July I spent in Nebraska. I was glad to see Jake's grin again, and Otto's ferocious mustaches. The young Cuzaks knew all about them.

"He made grandfather's coffin, didn't he?" Anton asked.

"Wasn't they good fellows, Jim?" *Ántonia* eyes filled. "To this day I'm ashamed because I quarreled with Jake that way. I was saucy and impertinent to him, Leo, like you are with people sometimes, and I wish somebody had made me behave."

"We aren't through with you, yet," they warned me. They produced a photograph taken just before I went away to college; a tall youth in striped trousers and a straw hat, trying to look easy and jaunty.

"Tell us, Mr. Burden," said Charley, "about the rattler you killed at the dog town. How long was he? Sometimes mother says six feet and sometimes she says five."

These children seemed to be upon very much the same terms with *Ántonia* as the Harling children had been so many years before. They seemed to feel the same pride in her, and to look to her for stories and entertainment as we used to do.

It was eleven o'clock when I at last took my bag and some blankets and started for the barn with the boys. Their mother came to the door with us, and we tarried for a moment to look out at the white slope of the corral and the two ponds asleep in the moonlight, and the long sweep of the pasture under the star-sprinkled sky.

The boys told me to choose my own place in the haymow, and I lay down before a big window, left open in warm weather, that looked out into the stars. Ambrosch and Leo cuddled up in a hay-cave, back under the eaves, and lay giggling and whispering. They tickled each other and tossed and tumbled in the hay; and then, all at once, as if they had been shot, they were still. There was hardly a minute between giggles and bland slumber.

I lay awake for a long while, until the slow-moving moon passed my window on its way up the heavens. I was thinking about *Ántonia* and her children; about Anna's solicitude for her, Ambrosch's grave affection, Leo's jealous, animal little love. That moment, when they all came tumbling out of the cave into the light, was a sight any man might have come far to see.

2. Decorated with ornamental braiding.

Ántonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time. In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer: Ántonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; Ántonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snowstorm; Ántonia coming in with her work-team along the evening sky-line. She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. I had not been mistaken. She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions.

It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.

II

When I awoke in the morning long bands of sunshine were coming in at the window and reaching back under the eaves where the two boys lay. Leo was wide awake and was tickling his brother's leg with a dried cone-flower he had pulled out of the hay. Ambrosch kicked at him and turned over. I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep. Leo lay on his back, elevated one foot, and began exercising his toes. He picked up dried flowers with his toes and brandished them in the belt of sunlight. After he had amused himself thus for some time, he rose on one elbow and began to look at me, cautiously, then critically, blinking his eyes in the light. His expression was droll; it dismissed me lightly. "This old fellow is no different from other people. He doesn't know my secret." He seemed conscious of possessing a keener power of enjoyment than other people; his quick recognitions made him frantically impatient of deliberate judgments. He always knew what he wanted without thinking.

After dressing in the hay, I washed my face in cold water at the windmill. Breakfast was ready when I entered the kitchen, and Yulka was baking griddle-cakes. The three older boys set off for the fields early. Leo and Yulka were to drive to town to meet their father, who would return from Wilber on the noon train.

"We'll only have a lunch at noon," Ántonia said, "and cook the geese for supper, when our papa will be here. I wish my Martha could come down to see you. They have a Ford car now, and she don't seem so far away from me as she used to. But her husband's crazy about his farm and about having everything just right, and they almost never get away except on Sundays. He's a handsome boy, and he'll be rich some day. Everything he takes hold of turns out well. When they bring that baby in here, and unwrap him, he looks like a little prince; Martha takes care of him so beautiful. I'm reconciled to her being away from me now, but at first I cried like I was putting her into her coffin."

We were alone in the kitchen, except for Anna, who was pouring cream into the churn. She looked up at me. "Yes, she did. We were just ashamed of

mother. She went round crying, when Martha was so happy, and the rest of us were all glad. Joe certainly was patient with you, mother.”

Ántonia nodded and smiled at herself. “I know it was silly, but I couldn’t help it. I wanted her right here. She’d never been away from me a night since she was born. If Anton had made trouble about her when she was a baby, or wanted me to leave her with my mother, I wouldn’t have married him. I couldn’t. But he always loved her like she was his own.”

“I didn’t even know Martha wasn’t my full sister until after she was engaged to Joe,” Anna told me.

Toward the middle of the afternoon the wagon drove in, with the father and the eldest son. I was smoking in the orchard, and as I went out to meet them, Ántonia came running down from the house and hugged the two men as if they had been away for months.

“Papa” interested me, from my first glimpse of him. He was shorter than his older sons; a crumpled little man, with run-over boot heels, and he carried one shoulder higher than the other. But he moved very quickly, and there was an air of jaunty liveliness about him. He had a strong, ruddy color, thick black hair, a little grizzled, a curly mustache, and red lips. His smile showed the strong teeth of which his wife was so proud, and as he saw me his lively, quizzical eyes told me that he knew all about me. He looked like a humorous philosopher who had hitched up one shoulder under the burdens of life, and gone on his way having a good time when he could. He advanced to meet me and gave me a hard hand, burned red on the back and heavily coated with hair. He wore his Sunday clothes, very thick and hot for the weather, an unstarched white shirt, and a blue necktie with big white dots, like a little boy’s, tied in a flowing bow. Cuzak began at once to talk about his holiday—from politeness he spoke in English.

“Mama, I wish you had see the lady dance on the slack-wire in the street at night. They throw a bright light on her and she float through the air something beautiful, like a bird! They have a dancing bear, like in the old country, and two three merry-go-around, and people in balloons, and what you call the big wheel, Rudolph?”

“A Ferris wheel,” Rudolph entered the conversation in a deep baritone voice. He was six foot two, and had a chest like a young black-smith. “We went to the big dance in the hall behind the saloon last night, mother, and I danced with all the girls, and so did father. I never saw so many pretty girls. It was a Bohunk crowd, for sure. We didn’t hear a word of English on the street, except from the show people, did we, papa?”

Cuzak nodded. “And very many send word to you, Ántonia. You will excuse”—turning to me—“if I tell her.” While we walked toward the house he related incidents and delivered messages in the tongue he spoke fluently, and I dropped a little behind, curious to know what their relations had become—or remained. The two seemed to be on terms of easy friendliness, touched with humor. Clearly, she was the impulse, and he the corrective. As they went up the hill he kept glancing at her sidewise, to see whether she got his point, or how she received it. I noticed later that he always looked at people sidewise, as a work-horse does at its yoke-mate. Even when he sat opposite me in the kitchen, talking, he would turn his head a little toward the clock or the stove and look at me from the side, but with frankness and

good-nature. This trick did not suggest duplicity or secretiveness, but merely long habit, as with the horse.

He had brought a tintype of himself and Rudolph for Ántonia's collection, and several paper bags of candy for the children. He looked a little disappointed when his wife showed him a big box of candy I had got in Denver—she hadn't let the children touch it the night before. He put his candy away in the cupboard, "for when she rains," and glanced at the box, chuckling. "I guess you must have hear about how my family ain't so small," he said.

Cuzak sat down behind the stove and watched his women-folk and the little children with equal amusement. He thought they were nice, and he thought they were funny, evidently. He had been off dancing with the girls and forgetting that he was an old fellow, and now his family rather surprised him; he seemed to think it a joke that all these children should belong to him. As the younger ones slipped up to him in his retreat, he kept taking things out of his pockets; penny dolls, a wooden clown, a balloon pig that was inflated by a whistle. He beckoned to the little boy they called Jan, whispered to him, and presented him with a paper snake, gently, so as not to startle him. Looking over the boy's head he said to me, "This one is bashful. He gets left."

Cuzak had brought home with him a roll of illustrated Bohemian papers. He opened them and began to tell his wife the news, much of which seemed to relate to one person. I heard the name Vasakova, Vasakova, repeated several times with lively interest, and presently I asked him whether he were talking about the singer, Maria Vasak.

"You know? You have heard, maybe?" he asked incredulously. When I assured him that I had heard her, he pointed out her picture and told me that Vasak had broken her leg, climbing in the Austrian Alps, and would not be able to fill her engagements. He seemed delighted to find that I had heard her sing in London and in Vienna; got out his pipe and lit it to enjoy our talk the better. She came from his part of Prague. His father used to mend her shoes for her when she was a student. Cuzak questioned me about her looks, her popularity, her voice; but he particularly wanted to know whether I had noticed her tiny feet, and whether I thought she had saved much money. She was extravagant, of course but he hoped she wouldn't squander everything, and have nothing left when she was old. As a young man, working in Wienn, he had seen a good many artists who were old and poor, making one glass of beer last all evening, and "it was not very nice, that."

When the boys came in from milking and feeding, the long table was laid, and two brown geese, stuffed with apples, were put down sizzling before Ántonia. She began to carve, and Rudolph, who sat next his mother, started the plates on their way. When everybody was served, he looked across the table at me.

"Have you been to Black Hawk lately, Mr. Burden? Then I wonder if you've heard about the Cutters?"

No, I had heard nothing at all about them.

"Then you must tell him, son, though it's a terrible thing to talk about at supper. Now, all you children be quiet, Rudolph is going to tell about the murder."

"Hurrah! The murder!" the children murmured, looking pleased and interested.

Rudolph told his story in great detail, with occasional promptings from his mother or father.

Wick Cutter and his wife had gone on living in the house that *Ántonia* and I knew so well, and in the way we knew so well. They grew to be very old people. He shriveled up, *Ántonia* said, until he looked like a little old yellow monkey, for his beard and his fringe of hair never changed color. Mrs. Cutter remained flushed and wild-eyed as we had known her, but as the years passed she became afflicted with a shaking palsy which made her nervous nod continuous instead of occasional. Her hands were so uncertain that she could no longer disfigure china, poor woman! As the couple grew older, they quarreled more and more about the ultimate disposition of their "property." A new law was passed in the State, securing the surviving wife a third of her husband's estate under all conditions. Cutter was tormented by the fear that Mrs. Cutter would live longer than he, and that eventually her "people," whom he had always hated so violently, would inherit. Their quarrels on this subject passed the boundary of the close-growing cedars, and were heard in the street by whoever wished to loiter and listen.

One morning, two years ago, Cutter went into the hardware store and bought a pistol, saying he was going to shoot a dog, and adding that he "thought he would take a shot at an old cat while he was about it." (Here the children interrupted Rudolph's narrative by smothered giggles.)

Cutter went out behind the hardware store, put up a target, practiced for an hour or so, and then went home. At six o'clock that evening, when several men were passing the Cutter house on their way home to supper, they heard a pistol shot. They paused and were looking doubtfully at one another, when another shot came crashing through an upstairs window. They ran into the house and found Wick Cutter lying on a sofa in his upstairs bedroom, with his throat torn open, bleeding on a roll of sheets he had placed beside his head.

"Walk in, gentlemen," he said weakly. "I am alive, you see, and competent. You are witnesses that I have survived my wife. You will find her in her own room. Please make your examination at once, so that there will be no mistake."

One of the neighbors telephoned for a doctor, while the others went into Mrs. Cutter's room. She was lying on her bed, in her nightgown and wrapper, shot through the heart. Her husband must have come in while she was taking her afternoon nap and shot her, holding the revolver near her breast. Her nightgown was burned from the powder.

The horrified neighbors rushed back to Cutter. He opened his eyes and said distinctly, "Mrs. Cutter is quite dead, gentlemen, and I am conscious. My affairs are in order." Then, Rudolph said, "he let go and died."

On his desk the coroner found a letter, dated at five o'clock that afternoon. It stated that he had just shot his wife; that any will she might secretly have made would be invalid, as he survived her. He meant to shoot himself at six o'clock and would, if he had strength, fire a shot through the window in the hope that passers-by might come in and see him "before life was extinct," as he wrote.

"Now, would you have thought that man had such a cruel heart?" *Ántonia* turned to me after the story was told. "To go and do that poor woman out of any comfort she might have from his money after he was gone!"

“Did you ever hear of anybody else that killed himself for spite, Mr. Burden?” asked Rudolph.

I admitted that I hadn't. Every lawyer learns over and over how strong a motive hate can be, but in my collection of legal anecdotes I had nothing to match this one. When I asked how much the estate amounted to, Rudolph said it was a little over a hundred thousand dollars.

Cuzak gave me a twinkling, sidelong glance. “The lawyers, they got a good deal of it, sure,” he said merrily.

A hundred thousand dollars; so that was the fortune that had been scraped together by such hard dealing, and that Cutter himself had died for in the end!

After supper Cuzak and I took a stroll in the orchard and sat down by the windmill to smoke. He told me his story as if it were my business to know it.

His father was a shoemaker, his uncle a furrier, and he, being a younger son, was apprenticed to the latter's trade. You never got anywhere working for your relatives, he said, so when he was a journeyman he went to Vienna and worked in a big fur shop, earning good money. But a young fellow who liked a good time didn't save anything in Vienna; there were too many pleasant ways of spending every night what he'd made in the day. After three years there, he came to New York. He was badly advised and went to work on furs during a strike, when the factories were offering big wages. The strikers won, and Cuzak was blacklisted. As he had a few hundred dollars ahead, he decided to go to Florida and raise oranges. He had always thought he would like to raise oranges! The second year a hard frost killed his young grove, and he fell ill with malaria. He came to Nebraska to visit his cousin, Anton Jelinek, and to look about. When he began to look about, he saw Ántonia, and she was exactly the kind of girl he had always been hunting for. They were married at once, though he had to borrow money from his cousin to buy the wedding-ring.

“It was a pretty hard job, breaking up this place and making the first crops grow,” he said, pushing back his hat and scratching his grizzled hair. “Sometimes I git awful sore on this place and want to quit, but my wife she always say we better stick it out. The babies come along pretty fast, so it look like it be hard to move, anyhow. I guess she was right, all right. We got this place clear now. We pay only twenty dollars an acre then, and I been offered a hundred. We bought another quarter³ ten years ago, and we got it most paid for. We got plenty boys; we can work a lot of land. Yes, she is a good wife for a poor man. She ain't always so strict with me, neither. Sometimes maybe I drink a little too much beer in town, and when I come home she don't say nothing. She don't ask me no questions. We always get along fine, her and me, like at first. The children don't make trouble between us, like sometimes happens.” He lit another pipe and pulled on it contentedly.

I found Cuzak a most companionable fellow. He asked me a great many questions about my trip through Bohemia, about Vienna and the Ringstrasse and the theaters.

“Gee! I like to go back there once, when the boys is big enough to farm the place. Sometimes when I read the papers from the old country, I pretty near

3. I.e., a quarter section, equal to one-quarter of a square mile, or 160 acres.

run away," he confessed with a little laugh. "I never did think how I would be a settled man like this."

He was still, as *Ántonia* said, a city man. He liked theaters and lighted streets and music and a game of dominoes after the day's work was over. His sociability was stronger than his acquisitive instinct. He liked to live day by day and night by night, sharing in the excitement of the crowd.—Yet his wife had managed to hold him here on a farm, in one of the loneliest countries in the world.

I could see the little chap, sitting here every evening by the windmill, nursing his pipe and listening to the silence; the wheeze of the pump, the grunting of the pigs, an occasional squawking when the hens were disturbed by a rat. It did rather seem to me that Cuzak had been made the instrument of *Ántonia's* special mission. This was a fine life, certainly, but it wasn't the kind of life he had wanted to live. I wondered whether the life that was right for one was ever right for two!

I asked Cuzak if he didn't find it hard to do without the gay company he had always been used to. He knocked out his pipe against an upright, sighed, and dropped it into his pocket.

"At first I near go crazy with lonesomeness," he said frankly, "but my woman is got such a warm heart. She always make it as good for me as she could. Now it ain't so bad; I can begin to have some fun with my boys, already!"

As we walked toward the house, Cuzak cocked his hat jauntily over one ear and looked up at the moon. "Gee!" he said in a hushed voice, as if he had just wakened up, "it don't seem like I am away from there twenty-six year!"

III

After dinner the next day I said good-bye and drove back to Hastings to take the train for Black Hawk. *Ántonia* and her children gathered round my buggy before I started, and even the little ones looked up at me with friendly faces. Leo and Ambrosch ran ahead to open the lane gate. When I reached the bottom of the hill, I glanced back. The group was still there by the windmill. *Ántonia* was waving her apron.

At the gate Ambrosch lingered beside my buggy, resting his arm on the wheel-rim. Leo slipped through the fence and ran off into the pasture.

"That's like him," his brother said with a shrug. "He's a crazy kid. Maybe he's sorry to have you go, and maybe he's jealous. He's jealous of anybody mother makes a fuss over, even the priest."

I found I hated to leave this boy, with his pleasant voice and his fine head and eyes. He looked very manly as he stood there without a hat, the wind rippling his shirt about his brown neck and shoulders.

"Don't forget that you and Rudolph are going hunting with me up on the Niobrara⁴ next summer," I said. "Your father's agreed to let you off after harvest."

He smiled. "I won't likely forget. I've never had such a nice thing offered to me before. I don't know what makes you so nice to us boys," he added, blushing.

"Oh, yes you do!" I said, gathering up my reins.

4. River flowing east from Wyoming across Nebraska.

He made no answer to this, except to smile at me with unabashed pleasure and affection as I drove away.

My day in Black Hawk was disappointing. Most of my old friends were dead or had moved away. Strange children, who meant nothing to me, were playing in the Harlings' big yard when I passed; the mountain ash had been cut down, and only a sprouting stump was left of the tall Lombardy poplar that used to guard the gate. I hurried on. The rest of the morning I spent with Anton Jelinek, under a shady cottonwood tree in the yard behind his saloon. While I was having my mid-day dinner at the hotel, I met one of the old lawyers who was still in practice, and he took me up to his office and talked over the Cutter case with me. After that, I scarcely knew how to put in the time until the night express was due.

I took a long walk north of the town, out into the pastures where the land was so rough that it had never been ploughed up, and the long red grass of early times still grew shaggy over the draws and hillocks. Out there I felt at home again. Overhead the sky was that indescribable blue of autumn; bright and shadowless, hard as enamel. To the south I could see the dun-shaded river bluffs that used to look so big to me, and all about stretched drying cornfields, of the pale-gold color I remembered so well. Russian thistles were blowing across the uplands and piling against the wire fences like barricades. Along the cattle paths the plumes of golden-rod were already fading into sun-warmed velvet, gray with gold threads in it. I had escaped from the curious depression that hangs over little towns, and my mind was full of pleasant things; trips I meant to take with the Cuzak boys, in the Bad Lands and up on the Stinking Water. There were enough Cuzaks to play with for a long while yet. Even after the boys grew up, there would always be Cuzak himself! I meant to tramp along a few miles of lighted streets with Cuzak.

As I wandered over those rough pastures, I had the good luck to stumble upon a bit of the first road that went from Black Hawk out to the north country; to my grandfather's farm, then on to the Shimerdas' and to the Norwegian settlement. Everywhere else it had been ploughed under when the highways were surveyed; this half-mile or so within the pasture fence was all that was left of that old road which used to run like a wild thing across the open prairie, clinging to the high places and circling and doubling like a rabbit before the hounds. On the level land the tracks had almost disappeared—were mere shadings in the grass, and a stranger would not have noticed them. But wherever the road had crossed a draw, it was easy to find. The rains had made channels of the wheel-ruts and washed them so deep that the sod had never healed over them. They looked like gashes torn by a grizzly's claws, on the slopes where the farm wagons used to lurch up out of the hollows with a pull that brought curling muscles on the smooth hips of the horses. I sat down and watched the haystacks turn rosy in the slanting sunlight.

This was the road over which Ántonia and I came on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk and were bedded down in the straw, wondering children, being taken we knew not whither. I had only to close my eyes to hear the rumbling of the wagons in the dark, and to be again overcome by that obliterating strangeness. The feelings of that night were so

near that I could reach out and touch them with my hand. I had the sense of coming home to myself, and of having found out what a little circle man's experience is. For *Ántonia* and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.

1918

The Sculptor's Funeral

A group of the townspeople stood on the station siding of a little Kansas town, awaiting the coming of the night train, which was already twenty minutes overdue. The snow had fallen thick over everything; in the pale starlight the line of bluffs across the wide, white meadows south of the town made soft, smoke-colored curves against the clear sky. The men on the siding stood first on one foot and then on the other, their hands thrust deep into their trousers pockets, their overcoats open, their shoulders screwed up with the cold; and they glanced from time to time toward the southeast, where the railroad track wound along the river shore. They conversed in low tones and moved about restlessly, seeming uncertain as to what was expected of them. There was but one of the company who looked as if he knew exactly why he was there, and he kept conspicuously apart; walking to the far end of the platform, returning to the station door, then pacing up the track again, his chin sunk in the high collar of his overcoat, his burly shoulders drooping forward, his gait heavy and dogged. Presently he was approached by a tall, spare, grizzled man clad in a faded Grand Army suit,¹ who shuffled out from the group and advanced with a certain deference, craning his neck forward until his back made the angle of a jack-knife three-quarters open.

"I reckon she's a goin' to be pretty late again tonight, Jim," he remarked in a squeaky falsetto. "S'pose it's the snow?"

"I don't know," responded the other man with a shade of annoyance, speaking from out an astonishing cataract of red beard that grew fiercely and thickly in all directions.

The spare man shifted the quill toothpick he was chewing to the other side of his mouth. "It ain't likely that anybody from the East will come with the corpse, I s'pose," he went on reflectively.

"I don't know," responded the other, more curtly than before.

"It's too bad he didn't belong to some lodge or other. I like an order funeral² myself. They seem more appropriate for people of some repytation," the spare man continued, with an ingratiating concession in his shrill voice, as he carefully placed his toothpick in his vest pocket. He always carried the flag at the G.A.R. funerals in the town.

1. Quasi-military, uniform-inspired suit worn by members of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), a fraternal organization for northern

veterans of the Civil War founded in 1866.

2. Lodge, order: fraternal organizations.

The heavy man turned on his heel, without replying, and walked up the siding. The spare man rejoined the uneasy group. "Jim's ez full ez a tick, ez ushel," he commented commiseratingly.

Just then a distant whistle sounded, and there was a shuffling of feet on the platform. A number of lanky boys, of all ages, appeared as suddenly and slimily as eels wakened by the crack of thunder; some came from the waiting-room, where they had been warming themselves by the red stove, or half asleep on the slat benches; others uncoiled themselves from baggage trucks or slid out of express wagons. Two clambered down from the driver's seat of a hearse that stood backed up against the siding. They straightened their stooping shoulders and lifted their heads, and a flash of momentary animation kindled their dull eyes at that cold, vibrant scream, the world-wide call for men. It stirred them like the note of a trumpet; just as it had often stirred the man who was coming home tonight, in his boyhood.

The night express shot, red as a rocket, from out the eastward marsh lands and wound along the river shore under the long lines of shivering poplars that sentinelled the meadows, the escaping steam hanging in gray masses against the pale sky and blotting out the Milky Way. In a moment the red glare from the headlight streamed up the snow-covered track before the siding and glittered on the wet, black rails. The burly man with the disheveled red beard walked swiftly up the platform toward the approaching train, uncovering his head as he went. The group of men behind him hesitated, glanced questioningly at one another, and awkwardly followed his example. The train stopped, and the crowd shuffled up to the express car just as the door was thrown open, the man in the G.A.R. suit thrusting his head forward with curiosity. The express messenger appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a young man in a long ulster and travelling cap.

"Are Mr. Merrick's friends here?" inquired the young man.

The group on the platform swayed uneasily. Philip Phelps, the banker, responded with dignity: "We have come to take charge of the body. Mr. Merrick's father is very feeble and can't be about."

"Send the agent out here," growled the express messenger, "and tell the operator to lend a hand."

The coffin was got out of its rough-box and down on the snowy platform. The townspeople drew back enough to make room for it and then formed a close semicircle about it, looking curiously at the palm leaf which lay across the black cover. No one said anything. The baggage man stood by his truck, waiting to get at the trunks. The engine panted heavily, and the fireman dodged in and out among the wheels with his yellow torch and long oil-can, snapping the spindle boxes. The young Bostonian, one of the dead sculptor's pupils who had come with the body, looked about him helplessly. He turned to the banker, the only one of that black, uneasy, stoop-shouldered group who seemed enough of an individual to be addressed.

"None of Mr. Merrick's brothers are here?" he asked uncertainly.

The man with the red beard for the first time stepped up and joined the others. "No, they have not come yet; the family is scattered. The body will be taken directly to the house." He stooped and took hold of one of the handles of the coffin.

"Take the long hill road up, Thompson, it will be easier on the horses," called the liveryman as the undertaker snapped the door of the hearse and prepared to mount to the driver's seat.

Laird, the red-bearded lawyer, turned again to the stranger: "We didn't know whether there would be any one with him or not," he explained. "It's a long walk, so you'd better go up in the hack." He pointed to a single battered conveyance, but the young man replied stiffly: "Thank you, but I think I will go up with the hearse. If you don't object," turning to the undertaker, "I'll ride with you."

They clambered up over the wheels and drove off in the starlight up the long, white hill toward the town. The lamps in the still village were shining from under the low, snow-burdened roofs; and beyond, on every side, the plains reached out into emptiness, peaceful and wide as the soft sky itself, and wrapped in a tangible, white silence.

When the hearse backed up to a wooden sidewalk before a naked, weather-beaten frame house, the same composite, ill-defined group that had stood upon the station siding was huddled about the gate. The front yard was an icy swamp, and a couple of warped planks, extending from the sidewalk to the door, made a sort of rickety footbridge. The gate hung on one hinge, and was opened wide with difficulty. Steavens, the young stranger, noticed that something black was tied to the knob of the front door.

The grating sound made by the casket, as it was drawn from the hearse, was answered by a scream from the house; the front door was wrenched open, and a tall, corpulent woman rushed out bare-headed into the snow and flung herself upon the coffin, shrieking: "My boy, my boy! And this is how you've come home to me!"

As Steavens turned away and closed his eyes with a shudder of unutterable repulsion, another woman, also tall, but flat and angular, dressed entirely in black, darted out of the house and caught Mrs. Merrick by the shoulders, crying sharply: "Come, come, mother; you mustn't go on like this!" Her tone changed to one of obsequious solemnity as she turned to the banker: "The parlour is ready, Mr. Phelps."

The bearers carried the coffin along the narrow boards, while the undertaker ran ahead with the coffin-rests. They bore it into a large, unheated room that smelled of dampness and disuse and furniture polish, and set it down under a hanging lamp ornamented with jingling glass prisms and before a "Rogers group" of John Alden and Priscilla, wreathed with smilax.³ Henry Steavens stared about him with the sickening conviction that there had been a mistake, and that he had somehow arrived at the wrong destination. He looked at the clover-green Brussels,⁴ the fat plush upholstery, among the hand-painted china plaques and panels and vases, for some mark of identification,—for something that might once conceivably have belonged to Harvey Merrick. It was not until he recognized his friend in the crayon portrait of a little boy in kilts and curls, hanging above the piano, that he felt willing to let any of these people approach the coffin.

3. A flowering vine; also the name of a nymph turned into the flower in Greek mythology. "Rogers group": plaster figurines of literary and historical subjects, mass-produced by John Rogers from 1859 to 1892. John Alden and Priscilla were Pilgrims on the *Mayflower* whose love was treated

in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's best-selling 1858 narrative poem *The Courtship of Miles Standish*.

4. Carpeting developed in Europe and mass-produced in the United States beginning in the mid-19th century.

"Take the lid off, Mr. Thompson; let me see my boy's face," wailed the elder woman between her sobs. This time Steavens looked fearfully, almost beseechingly into her face, red and swollen under its masses of strong, black, shiny hair. He flushed, dropped his eyes, and then, almost incredulously, looked again. There was a kind of power about her face—a kind of brutal handsomeness, even; but it was scarred and furrowed by violence, and so colored and coarsened by fiercer passions that grief seemed never to have laid a gentle finger there. The long nose was distended and knobbed at the end, and there were deep lines on either side of it; her heavy, black brows almost met across her forehead, her teeth were large and square, and set far apart—teeth that could tear. She filled the room; the men were obliterated, seemed tossed about like twigs in an angry water, and even Steavens felt himself being drawn into the whirlpool.

The daughter—the tall, raw-boned woman in *crêpe*, with a mourning comb in her hair which curiously lengthened her long face—sat stiffly upon the sofa, her hands, conspicuous for their large knuckles, folded in her lap, her mouth and eyes drawn down, solemnly awaiting the opening of the coffin. Near the door stood a mulatto woman, evidently a servant in the house, with a timid bearing and an emaciated face pitifully sad and gentle. She was weeping silently, the corner of her calico apron lifted to her eyes, occasionally suppressing a long, quivering sob. Steavens walked over and stood beside her.

Feeble steps were heard on the stairs, and an old man, tall and frail, odorous of pipe smoke, with shaggy, unkept gray hair and a dingy beard, tobacco stained about the mouth, entered uncertainly. He went slowly up to the coffin and stood rolling a blue cotton handkerchief between his hands, seeming so pained and embarrassed by his wife's orgy of grief that he had no consciousness of anything else.

"There, there, Annie, dear, don't take on so," he quavered timidly, putting out a shaking hand and awkwardly patting her elbow. She turned and sank upon his shoulder with such violence that he tottered a little. He did not even glance toward the coffin, but continued to look at her with a dull, frightened, appealing expression, as a spaniel looks at the whip. His sunken cheeks slowly reddened and burned with miserable shame. When his wife rushed from the room, her daughter strode after her with set lips. The servant stole up to the coffin, bent over it for a moment, and then slipped away to the kitchen, leaving Steavens, the lawyer, and the father to themselves. The old man stood looking down at his dead son's face. The sculptor's splendid head seemed even more noble in its rigid stillness than in life. The dark hair had crept down upon the wide forehead; the face seemed strangely long, but in it there was not that repose we expect to find in the faces of the dead. The brows were so drawn that there were two deep lines above the beaked nose, and the chin was thrust forward defiantly. It was as though the strain of life had been so sharp and bitter that death could not at once relax the tension and smooth the countenance into perfect peace—as though he were still guarding something precious, which might even yet be wrested from him.

The old man's lips were working under his stained beard. He turned to the lawyer with timid deference: "Phelps and the rest are comin' back to set up with Harve, ain't they?" he asked. "Thank 'ee, Jim, thank 'ee." He brushed

the hair back gently from his son's forehead. "He was a good boy, Jim; always a good boy. He was ez gentle ez a child and the kindest of 'em all—only we didn't none of us ever onderstand him." The tears trickled slowly down his beard and dropped upon the sculptor's coat.

"Martin, Martin! Oh, Martin! come here," his wife wailed from the top of the stairs. The old man started timorously: "Yes, Annie, I'm coming." He turned away, hesitated, stood for a moment in miserable indecision; then reached back and patted the dead man's hair softly, and stumbled from the room.

"Poor old man, I didn't think he had any tears left. Seems as if his eyes would have gone dry long ago. At his age nothing cuts very deep," remarked the lawyer.

Something in his tone made Steavens glance up. While the mother had been in the room, the young man had scarcely seen any one else; but now, from the moment he first glanced into Jim Laird's florid face and bloodshot eyes, he knew that he had found what he had been heartsick at not finding before—the feeling, the understanding, that must exist in some one, even here.

The man was red as his beard, with features swollen and blurred by dissipation, and a hot, blazing blue eye. His face was strained—that of a man who is controlling himself with difficulty—and he kept plucking at his beard with a sort of fierce resentment. Steavens, sitting by the window, watched him turn down the glaring lamp, still its jangling pendants with an angry gesture, and then stand with his hands locked behind him, staring down into the master's face. He could not help wondering what link there had been between the porcelain vessel and so sooty a lump of potter's clay.

From the kitchen an uproar was sounding; when the dining-room door opened, the import of it was clear. The mother was abusing the maid for having forgotten to make the dressing for the chicken salad which had been prepared for the watchers. Steavens had never heard anything in the least like it; it was injured, emotional, dramatic abuse, unique and masterly in its excruciating cruelty, as violent and unrestrained as had been her grief of twenty minutes before. With a shudder of disgust the lawyer went into the dining-room and closed the door into the kitchen.

"Poor Roxy's getting it now," he remarked when he came back. "The Mericks took her out of the poor-house years ago; and if her loyalty would let her, I guess the poor old thing could tell tales that would curdle your blood. She's the mulatto woman who was standing in here a while ago, with her apron to her eyes. The old woman is a fury; there never was anybody like her. She made Harvey's life a hell for him when he lived at home; he was so sick ashamed of it. I never could see how he kept himself sweet."

"He was wonderful," said Steavens slowly, "wonderful; but until tonight I have never known how wonderful."

"That is the eternal wonder of it, anyway; that it can come even from such a dung heap as this," the lawyer cried, with a sweeping gesture which seemed to indicate much more than the four walls within which they stood.

"I think I'll see whether I can get a little air. The room is so close I am beginning to feel rather faint," murmured Steavens, struggling with one of the windows. The sash was stuck, however, and would not yield, so he sat

down dejectedly and began pulling at his collar. The lawyer came over, loosened the sash with one blow of his red fist and sent the window up a few inches. Steavens thanked him, but the nausea which had been gradually climbing into his throat for the last half hour left him with but one desire—a desperate feeling that he must get away from this place with what was left of Harvey Merrick. Oh, he comprehended well enough now the quiet bitterness of the smile that he had seen so often on his master's lips!

Once when Merrick returned from a visit home, he brought with him a singularly feeling and suggestive bas-relief⁵ of a thin, faded old woman, sitting and sewing something pinned to her knee; while a full-lipped, full-blooded little urchin, his trousers held up by a single gallows,⁶ stood beside her, impatiently twitching her gown to call her attention to a butterfly he had caught. Steavens, impressed by the tender and delicate modelling of the thin, tired face, had asked him if it were his mother. He remembered the dull flush that had burned up in the sculptor's face.

The lawyer was sitting in a rocking-chair beside the coffin, his head thrown back and his eyes closed. Steavens looked at him earnestly, puzzled at the line of the chin, and wondering why a man should conceal a feature of such distinction under that disfiguring shock of beard. Suddenly, as though he felt the young sculptor's keen glance, Jim Laird opened his eyes.

"Was he always a good deal of an oyster?" he asked abruptly. "He was terribly shy as a boy."

"Yes, he was an oyster, since you put it so," rejoined Steavens. "Although he could be very fond of people, he always gave one the impression of being detached. He disliked violent emotion; he was reflective, and rather distrustful of himself—except, of course, as regarded his work. He was sure enough there. He distrusted men pretty thoroughly and women even more, yet somehow without believing ill of them. He was determined, indeed, to believe the best; but he seemed afraid to investigate."

"A burnt dog dreads the fire," said the lawyer grimly, and closed his eyes.

Steavens went on and on, reconstructing that whole miserable boyhood. All this raw, biting ugliness had been the portion of the man whose mind was to become an exhaustless gallery of beautiful impressions—so sensitive that the mere shadow of a poplar leaf flickering against a sunny wall would be etched and held there for ever. Surely, if ever a man had the magic word in his finger tips, it was Merrick. Whatever he touched, he revealed its holiest secret; liberated it from enchantment and restored it to its pristine loveliness. Upon whatever he had come in contact with, he had left a beautiful record of the experience—a sort of ethereal signature; a scent, a sound, a color that was his own.

Steavens understood now the real tragedy of his master's life; neither love nor wine, as many had conjectured; but a blow which had fallen earlier and cut deeper than anything else could have done—a shame not his, and yet so unescapably his, to hide in his heart from his very boyhood. And without—the frontier warfare; the yearning of a boy, cast ashore upon a desert of newness and ugliness and sordidness, for all that is chastened and old, and noble with traditions.

5. Low relief (French); a sculpture in which an image is slightly raised against a background.

6. I.e., a single suspender.

At eleven o'clock the tall, flat woman in black announced that the watchers were arriving, and asked them to "step into the dining-room." As Steavens rose, the lawyer said dryly: "You go on—it'll be a good experience for you. I'm not equal to that crowd tonight; I've had twenty years of them."

As Steavens closed the door after him he glanced back at the lawyer, sitting by the coffin in the dim light, with his chin resting on his hand.

The same misty group that had stood before the door of the express car shuffled into the dining-room. In the light of the kerosene lamp they separated and became individuals. The minister, a pale, feeble-looking man with white hair and blond chin-whiskers, took his seat beside a small side table and placed his Bible upon it. The Grand Army man sat down behind the stove and tilted his chair back comfortably against the wall, fishing his quill toothpick from his waistcoat pocket. The two bankers, Phelps and Elder, sat off in a corner behind the dinner-table, where they could finish their discussion of the new usury law and its effect on chattel security loans.⁷ The real estate agent, an old man with a smiling, hypocritical face, soon joined them. The coal and lumber dealer and the cattle shipper sat on opposite sides of the hard coal-burner, their feet on the nickel-work.⁸ Steavens took a book from his pocket and began to read. The talk around him ranged through various topics of local interest while the house was quieting down. When it was clear that the members of the family were in bed, the Grand Army man hitched his shoulders and, untangling his long legs, caught his heels on the rounds of his chair.

"S'pose there'll be a will, Phelps?" he queried in his weak falsetto.

The banker laughed disagreeably, and began trimming his nails with a pearl-handled pocket-knife.

"There'll scarcely be any need for one, will there?" he queried in his turn.

The restless Grand Army man shifted his position again, getting his knees still nearer his chin. "Why, the ole man says Harve's done right well lately," he chirped.

The other banker spoke up. "I reckon he means by that Harve ain't asked him to mortgage any more farms lately, so as he could go on with his education."

"Seems like my mind don't reach back to a time when Harve wasn't bein' edycated," tittered the Grand Army man.

There was a general chuckle. The minister took out his handkerchief and blew his nose sonorously. Banker Phelps closed his knife with a snap. "It's too bad the old man's sons didn't turn out better," he remarked with reflective authority. "They never hung together. He spent money enough on Harve to stock a dozen cattle-farms, and he might as well have poured it into Sand Creek. If Harve had stayed at home and helped nurse what little they had, and gone into stock on the old man's bottom farm, they might all have been well fixed. But the old man had to trust everything to tenants and was cheated right and left."

"Harve never could have handled stock none," interposed the cattleman. "He hadn't it in him to be sharp. Do you remember when he bought Sander's

7. Loans backed by the debtor's personal property. Kansas revised its laws regulating interest on loans and prohibiting usury (excessive interest) in

1889.

8. Cast-iron stoves were often finished with nickel trim work, sometimes including footrests.

mules for eight-year olds, when everybody in town knew that Sander's father-in-law give 'em to his wife for a wedding present eighteen years before, an' they was full-grown mules then?"

The company laughed discreetly, and the Grand Army man rubbed his knees with a spasm of childish delight.

"Harve never was much account for anything practical, and he shore was never fond of work," began the coal and lumber dealer. "I mind the last time he was home; the day he left, when the old man was out to the barn helpin' his hand hitch up to take Harve to the train, and Cal Moots was patchin' up the fence; Harve, he come out on the step and sings out, in his ladylike voice: 'Cal Moots, Cal Moots! please come cord my trunk.'"

"That's Harve for you," approved the Grand Army man. "I kin hear him howlin' yet, when he was a big feller in long pants and his mother used to whale him with a rawhide in the barn for lettin' the cows git foundered in the cornfield when he was drivin' 'em home from pasture. He killed a cow of mine that-a-way onct—a pure Jersey and the best milker I had, an' the ole man had to put up for her. Harve, he was watchin' the sun set acrost the marshes when the anamile got away."

"Where the old man made his mistake was in sending the boy East to school," said Phelps, stroking his goatee and speaking in a deliberate, judicial tone. "There was where he got his head full of nonsense. What Harve needed, of all people, was a course in some first-class Kansas City business college."

The letters were swimming before Steavens's eyes. Was it possible that these men did not understand, that the palm on the coffin meant nothing to them? The very name of their town would have remained for ever buried in the postal guide had it not been now and again mentioned in the world in connection with Harvey Merrick's. He remembered what his master had said to him on the day of his death, after the congestion of both lungs had shut off any probability of recovery, and the sculptor had asked his pupil to send his body home. "It's not a pleasant place to be lying while the world is moving and doing and bettering," he had said with a feeble smile, "but it rather seems as though we ought to go back to the place we came from, in the end. The townspeople will come in for a look at me; and after they have had their say, I shan't have much to fear from the judgment of God!"

The cattleman took up the comment. "Forty's young for a Merrick to cash in; they usually hang on pretty well. Probably he helped it along with whisky."

"His mother's people were not long lived, and Harvey never had a robust constitution," said the minister mildly. He would have liked to say more. He had been the boy's Sunday-school teacher, and had been fond of him; but he felt that he was not in a position to speak. His own sons had turned out badly, and it was not a year since one of them had made his last trip home in the express car, shot in a gambling-house in the Black Hills.

"Nevertheless, there is no disputin' that Harve frequently looked upon the wine when it was red, also variegated, and it shore made an uncommon fool of him," moralized the cattleman.

Just then the door leading into the parlour rattled loudly and every one started involuntarily, looking relieved when only Jim Laird came out. The

Grand Army man ducked his head when he saw the spark in his blue, blood-shot eye. They were all afraid of Jim; he was a drunkard, but he could twist the law to suit his client's needs as no other man in all western Kansas could do, and there were many who tried. The lawyer closed the door behind him, leaned back against it and folded his arms, cocking his head a little to one side. When he assumed this attitude in the court-room, ears were always pricked up, as it usually foretold a flood of withering sarcasm.

"I've been with you gentlemen before," he began in a dry, even tone, "when you've sat by the coffins of boys born and raised in this town; and, if I remember rightly, you were never any too well satisfied when you checked them up. What's the matter, anyhow? Why is it that reputable young men are as scarce as millionaires in Sand City? It might almost seem to a stranger that there was some way something the matter with your progressive town. Why did Ruben Sayer, the brightest young lawyer you ever turned out, after he had come home from the university as straight as a die, take to drinking and forge a check and shoot himself? Why did Bill Merrit's son die of the shakes in a saloon in Omaha? Why was Mr. Thomas's son, here, shot in a gambling-house? Why did young Adams burn his mill to beat the insurance companies and go to the pen?"

The lawyer paused and unfolded his arms, laying one clenched fist quietly on the table. "I'll tell you why. Because you drummed nothing but money and knavery into their ears from the time they wore knickerbockers; because you carped away at them as you've been carping here tonight, holding our friends Phelps and Elder up to them for their models, as our grandfathers held up George Washington and John Adams. But the boys were young, and raw at the business you put them to, and how could they match coppers with such artists as Phelps and Elder? You wanted them to be successful rascals; they were only unsuccessful ones—that's all the difference. There was only one boy ever raised in this borderland between ruffianism and civilization who didn't come to grief, and you hated Harvey Merrick more for winning out than you hated all the other boys who got under the wheels. Lord, Lord, how you did hate him! Phelps, here, is fond of saying that he could buy and sell us all out any time he's a mind to; but he knew Harve wouldn't have given a tinker's damn for his bank and all his cattlefarms put together; and a lack of appreciation, that way, goes hard with Phelps.

"Old Nimrod thinks Harve drank too much; and this from such as Nimrod and me!

"Brother Elder says Harve was too free with the old man's money—fell short in filial consideration, maybe. Well, we can all remember the very tone in which brother Elder swore his own father was a liar, in the county court; and we all know that the old man came out of that partnership with his son as bare as a sheared lamb. But maybe I'm getting personal, and I'd better be driving ahead at what I want to say."

The lawyer paused a moment, squared his heavy shoulders, and went on: "Harvey Merrick and I went to school together, back East. We were dead in earnest, and we wanted you all to be proud of us some day. We meant to be great men. Even I, and I haven't lost my sense of humor, gentlemen, I meant to be a great man. I came back here to practice, and I found you didn't in the least want me to be a great man. You wanted me to be a shrewd lawyer—oh,

yes! Our veteran here wanted me to get him an increase of pension, because he had dyspepsia; Phelps wanted a new county survey that would put the widow Wilson's little bottom farm inside his south line; Elder wanted to lend money at 5 per cent a month, and get it collected; and Stark here wanted to wheedle old women up in Vermont into investing their annuities in real-estate mortgages that are not worth the paper they are written on. Oh, you needed me hard enough, and you'll go on needing me!

"Well, I came back here and became the damned shyster you wanted me to be. You pretend to have some sort of respect for me; and yet you'll stand up and throw mud at Harvey Merrick, whose soul you couldn't dirty and whose hands you couldn't tie. Oh, you're a discriminating lot of Christians! There have been times when the sight of Harvey's name in some Eastern paper has made me hang my head like a whipped dog; and, again, times when I liked to think of him off there in the world, away from all this hog-wallow, climbing the big, clean up-grade he'd set for himself.

"And we? Now that we've fought and lied and sweated and stolen, and hated as only the disappointed strugglers in a bitter, dead little Western town know how to do, what have we got to show for it? Harvey Merrick wouldn't have given one sunset over your marshes for all you've got put together, and you know it. It's not for me to say why, in the inscrutable wisdom of God, a genius should ever have been called from this place of hatred and bitter waters; but I want this Boston man to know that the drivel he's been hearing here tonight is the only tribute any truly great man could have from such a lot of sick, side-tracked, burnt-dog, land-poor sharks as the here-present financiers of Sand City—upon which town may God have mercy!"

The lawyer thrust out his hand to Steavens as he passed him, caught up his overcoat in the hall, and had left the house before the Grand Army man had had time to lift his ducked head and crane his long neck about at his fellows.

Next day Jim Laird was drunk and unable to attend the funeral services. Steavens called twice at his office, but was compelled to start East without seeing him. He had a presentiment that he would hear from him again, and left his address on the lawyer's table; but if Laird found it, he never acknowledged it. The thing in him that Harvey Merrick had loved must have gone under ground with Harvey Merrick's coffin; for it never spoke again, and Jim got the cold he died of driving across the Colorado mountains to defend one of Phelps's sons who had got into trouble out there by cutting government timber.

1905, 1920

AMY LOWELL

1874–1925

Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, the fifth and last child, twelve years younger than her nearest sibling, Amy Lowell hailed from one of Boston's wealthiest and most prestigious and powerful families. The first Lowell arrived at Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1639; from the revolutionary years on, when a Lowell was made a judge by George Washington, no era was without one or more Lowells prominent in the intellectual, religious, political, philanthropic, and commercial life of New England. In the early nineteenth century her paternal grandfather and his brothers established the Lowell textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts—the town itself had been founded by the Lowells in 1653. The success of these mills changed the economy of New England. Profits were invested in utilities, highways, railroads, and banks. In the same generation her maternal grandfather, Abbot Lawrence, established a second New England textile dynasty. All the Lowell men went to Harvard. Traditionally, those who were not in business became Unitarian ministers or scholars—the poet James Russell Lowell was her great-uncle; her father, Augustus, was important to the founding of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; her brother Percival was a pioneering scholar of Japanese and Korean civilization and an astronomer (he founded the Lowell Observatory); her brother Abbot Lawrence was president of Harvard from 1909 to 1933.

But none of the millionaires, manufacturers, philanthropists, statesmen, ambassadors, judges, and scholars in Amy Lowell's background could give this energetic and unusually intelligent young woman a model to follow. They were all men, and the rules for Lowell women were different. Women in the family were expected to marry well, imbue their children with a strong sense of family pride, oversee the running of several homes, and participate in upper-class Boston's busy social world. None of this interested Lowell in the least. Yet she believed in the importance of her heritage and shared the self-confidence and drive to contribute notably to public life characteristic of Lowell men.

Resisting the kind of formal education available to women of her class at the time, she attended school only between the ages of ten and seventeen. She educated herself through the use of her family's extensive private library as well as the resources of the Boston Athenaeum, a dues-paying library club founded by one of her ancestors early in the nineteenth century. She had enjoyed writing from childhood on, but did not venture into professional authorship until 1912, at the age of thirty-eight. In that year, her first book of poems—*A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass*—achieved both popular and critical success.

The year 1912 was the year that Harriet Monroe launched her influential little magazine, *Poetry*, and when in January 1913 Lowell read H.D.'s imagistic poetry she was converted to this new style. She decided to devote her popularity and social prominence to popularizing imagism and with characteristic energy and self-confidence journeyed to England to meet H.D., Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington, and other participants in the informal movement. When Pound abandoned imagism for vorticism, Lowell became the chief spokesperson for the movement, editing several imagist anthologies. Two volumes of original criticism by Lowell—*Six French Poets* (1915) and *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917)—also forwarded the cause. Pound, upstaged as a publicist, enviously renamed the

movement “Amygism.” Lowell retorted that “it was not until I entered the arena and Ezra dropped out that Imagism had to be considered seriously.”

Lowell’s own poetry—published in *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914), *Men, Women, and Ghosts* (1916), *Can Grande’s Castle* (1918), *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919), and *Legends* (1921)—was never exclusively imagistic but included long historical narrative poems and journalistic prose poems and used standard verse patterns, blank verse, and a Whitmanesque free verse resembling the open line developed by Carl Sandburg. Her best poems tend to enclose sharp imagistic representation within this relatively fluid line, thereby achieving an effect of simultaneous compactness and flexibility. Like many women poets, she worked with a symbolic vocabulary of flowers and color.

Lowell enjoyed her success and cheerfully went on the lecture circuit as a celebrity, making innumerable close friendships as a result of her warmth and generosity. Despite health problems that plagued her for most of her life, she remained full of energy and zest. She depended for support on the companionship of Ada Dwyer Russell, a former actress, for whom she wrote many of her most moving appreciations of female beauty. Although she traveled widely in Europe, she was ultimately committed to New England and the Lowell heritage, both of which fused in an attachment to her home, Sevenels, in Brookline. A devotee of Romantic poetry and especially of Keats, she had begun to collect Keats manuscripts in 1905; these now form the basis of the great collection at Harvard University. In addition to all her other activities in the 1920s, she worked on a two-volume biography of Keats that greatly extended the published information about the poet when it appeared in 1925, although its psychological approach offended many traditional critics.

Lowell was just fifty-one when she died. Despite continued sniping from the high modernist poets who thought her work was too accessible, her poetry continued to be both popular and critically esteemed until the 1950s, when scholars focused the canon on a very small number of writers. The efforts of feminists to rediscover and republicize the work of neglected women authors as well as the researches of literary historians into the whole picture of American literary achievement have together brought her work back into the spotlight that it occupied during her lifetime.

The texts printed here are from Lowell’s *Complete Poems* (1955).

The Captured Goddess

Over the housetops,
Above the rotating chimney-pots,
I have seen a shiver of amethyst,
And blue and cinnamon have flickered
A moment, 5
At the far end of a dusty street.

Through sheeted rain
Has come a lustre of crimson,
And I have watched moonbeams
Hushed by a film of palest green. 10

It was her wings,
Goddess!
Who stepped over the clouds,
And laid her rainbow feathers
Aslant on the currents of the air. 15
I followed her for long,

With gazing eyes and stumbling feet.
 I cared not where she led me,
 My eyes were full of colors:
 Saffrons, rubies, the yellows of beryls, 20
 And the indigo-blue of quartz;
 Flights of rose, layers of chrysoprase,
 Points of orange, spirals of vermilion,
 The spotted gold of tiger-lily petals,
 The loud pink of bursting hydrangeas. 25
 I followed,
 And watched for the flashing of her wings.

In the city I found her,
 The narrow-streeted city.
 In the market-place I came upon her, 30
 Bound and trembling.
 Her fluted wings were fastened to her sides with cords,
 She was naked and cold,
 For that day the wind blew
 Without sunshine. 35

Men chattered for her,
 They bargained in silver and gold,
 In copper, in wheat,
 And called their bids across the market-place.

The Goddess wept. 40

Hiding my face I fled,
 And the grey wind hissed behind me,
 Along the narrow streets.

1914

Venus Transiens

Tell me,
 Was Venus more beautiful
 Than you are,
 When she topped
 The crinkled waves, 5
 Drifting shoreward
 On her plaited shell?
 Was Botticelli's¹ vision
 Fairer than mine;
 And were the painted rosebuds 10
 He tossed his lady,
 Of better worth

1. Sandro Botticelli (c. 1440–1510), Italian Renaissance painter among whose works is the *Birth of Venus*, depicting the Greek goddess of love and beauty rising from the ocean on a seashell.

Than the words I blow about you
 To cover your too great loveliness
 As with a gauze
 Of misted silver? 15

For me,
 You stand poised
 In the blue and buoyant air,
 Cinctured by bright winds, 20
 Treading the sunlight.
 And the waves which precede you
 Ripple and stir
 The sands at my feet.

1919

Madonna of the Evening Flowers

All day long I have been working,
 Now I am tired.
 I call: "Where are you?"
 But there is only the oak tree rustling in the wind.
 The house is very quiet, 5
 The sun shines in on your books,
 On your scissors and thimble just put down,
 But you are not there.
 Suddenly I am lonely:
 Where are you? 10
 I go about searching.

Then I see you,
 Standing under a spire of pale blue larkspur,
 With a basket of roses on your arm.
 You are cool, like silver, 15
 And you smile.
 I think the Canterbury bells¹ are playing little tunes.

You tell me that the peonies need spraying,
 That the columbines have overrun all bounds,
 That the pyrus japonica should be cut back and rounded. 20
 You tell me these things.
 But I look at you, heart of silver,
 White heart-flame of polished silver,
 Burning beneath the blue steeples of the larkspur,
 And I long to kneel instantly at your feet, 25
 While all about us peal the loud, sweet *Te Deums* of the
 Canterbury bells.

1919

1. Little bell-shaped blue flowers. Lowell puns on the bells of Canterbury Cathedral in England pealing out religious music.

September, 1918

This afternoon was the colour of water falling through sunlight;
 The trees glittered with the tumbling of leaves;
 The sidewalks shone like alleys of dropped maple leaves;
 And the houses ran along them laughing out of square, open
 windows.

Under a tree in the park, 5
 Two little boys, lying flat on their faces,
 Were carefully gathering red berries
 To put in a pasteboard box.

Some day there will be no war.
 Then I shall take out this afternoon 10
 And turn it in my fingers,
 And remark the sweet taste of it upon my palate,
 And note the crisp variety of its flights of leaves.
 To-day I can only gather it
 And put it into my lunch-box, 15
 For I have time for nothing
 But the endeavour to balance myself
 Upon a broken world.

1919

St. Louis

June

Flat,
 Flat,
 Long as sight
 Either way,
 An immense country, 5
 With a great river
 Steaming it full of moist, unbearable heat.
 The orchards are little quincunxes of Noah's Ark trees,
 The plows and horses are children's toys tracing amusingly shallow lines
 upon an illimitable surface.
 Great chunks of life to match the country, 10
 Great lungs to breathe this hot, wet air.

But it is not mine.
 Mine is a land of hills
 Lying couchant in the angles of heraldic beasts
 About white villages. 15
 A land of singing elms and pine-trees.
 A restless up and down land

Always mounting, dipping, slipping into a different contour,
 Where the roads turn every hundred yards or so,
 Where brooks rattle forgotten Indian names to tired farm-houses, 20
 And faint spires of old meeting-houses
 Flaunt their golden weather-cocks in a brave show of challenge at a sunset
 sky.

Here the heat stuffs down with the thickness of boiled feathers,
 The river runs in steam.
 There, lilacs are in bloom, 25
 Cool blue-purples, wine-reds, whites,
 Flying colour to quiet dooryards.
 Grown year on year to a suddenness of old perfection,
 Saying "Before! Before!" to each new Spring.
 Here is "Now," 30
 But "Before" is mine with the lilacs,
 With the white sea of everywhither,
 With the heraldic, story-telling hills.

1927

New Heavens for Old

I am useless,
 What I do is nothing.
 What I think has no savour.
 There is an almanac between the windows:
 It is of the year when I was born. 5
 My fellows call to me to join them,
 They shout for me,
 Passing the house in a great wind of vermillion banners.
 They are fresh and fulminant,
 They are indecent and strut with the thought of it. 10
 They laugh, and curse, and brawl,
 And cheer a holocaust of "Who comes Firsts!" at the iron fronts of the
 houses at the two edges of the street.
 Young men with naked hearts jeering between iron house-fronts,
 Young men with naked bodies beneath their clothes
 Passionately conscious of them, 15
 Ready to strip off their clothes,
 Ready to strip off their customs, their usual routine,
 Clamouring for the rawness of life,
 In love with appetite,
 Proclaiming it as a creed, 20
 Worshipping youth,
 Worshipping themselves.
 They call for the women and the women come,
 They bare the whiteness of their lusts to the dead gaze of the
 old house-fronts,

They roar down the street like flame, 25
 They explode upon the dead houses like new, sharp fire.

But I—
 I arrange three roses in a Chinese vase:
 A pink one,
 A red one, 30
 A yellow one.
 I fuss over their arrangement.
 Then I sit in a South window
 And sip pale wine with a touch of hemlock in it,
 And think of Winter nights, 35
 And field-mice crossing and re-crossing
 The spot which will be my grave.

1927

GERTRUDE STEIN

1874–1946

Among modernists active between the wars, Gertrude Stein was more radically experimental than most. She pushed language to its limits—and kept on pushing. Her work was sometimes literal nonsense, often funny, and always exciting to those who thought of writing as a craft and language as a medium. As Sherwood Anderson wrote, “she is laying word against word, relating sound to sound, feeling for the taste, the smell, the rhythm of the individual word. She is attempting to do something for the writers of our English speech that may be better understood after a time, and she is not in a hurry.”

Stein’s grandparents were well-off German Jewish immigrants who, at the time of her birth, were established in business in Baltimore. Born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, she was the youngest of seven children; the family lived abroad from 1875 to 1879 and then settled in northern California. Her parents died when she was an adolescent, leaving their five surviving children well provided for. Stein made a family with her favorite brother, Leo, for many years. When he went to Harvard in 1892 she followed and was admitted to Harvard’s “annex for women”—later Radcliffe College. She studied there with the great psychologist William James; some of her early writings—for example, *Three Lives* (1909) and *The Making of Americans*, which she completed in 1908 but did not publish until 1925—are probably trying to apply his theories of consciousness: consciousness as unique to each individual, as an ongoing stream, a perpetual present. In *Three Lives*, also, Stein set herself the difficult task of representing the consciousnesses of three ordinary, working-class women whose lives and minds were not the conventional material of serious literature.

When Leo moved on to Johns Hopkins to study biology, Stein followed, enrolling in the medical school. At the end of her fourth year, she failed intentionally, for several reasons: Leo had become interested in art and decided to go to Europe, she



Gertrude Stein and Picasso's Portrait, Man Ray, 1922. Man Ray, one of the most important of modernist photographers, posed Stein at home in front of her 1906 portrait by Pablo Picasso. Stein in her turn composed many "portraits" in writing of her artist friends, including Picasso and Henri Matisse.

had begun to write, and she had become erotically involved with two women (the story of this triangle formed the basis of her novel *Q.E.D.*, published posthumously in 1950). In early 1903 Leo settled in Paris; Stein joined him that fall. They began to collect modern art and became good friends with many of the brilliant aspiring painters of the day, including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Henri Matisse. Stein's friendship with the painters was extremely important for her development, for she reproduced some of their experiments in the very different medium of words. Because of them, she came to think of words as tangible entities in themselves as well as vehicles conveying meaning or representing reality. The cubist movement in painting also affected her. Painters like Picasso and Braque believed that so-called representational paintings conveyed not what people actually saw but rather what they had learned to *think* they saw. The cubists wanted to reproduce a pure visual experience unmediated by cultural ideas. To see a "person" is to see a cultural construct. So they painted a human form reduced to various geometrical shapes as they might be seen from different angles when the form moved or the observer changed position. The degree to which their paintings shocked an audience measured, to Picasso and Braque, the degree to which that audience had lost its original perceiving power.

In 1909 the long companionship of Stein and her brother was complicated when Alice B. Toklas joined the household as Gertrude Stein's lover; she became her secretary, housekeeper, typist, editor, and lifelong companion. Leo moved out in 1913, and the art collection was divided, but the apartment at 27 rue de Fleurus continued to serve as a gathering place for French artists and intellectuals, American expatriates, and American visitors. Without much expectation that her work would achieve any wide audience, Stein continued to write and to advise younger writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. "A great deal of description," she said about a draft of Hemingway's first novel, "and not particularly good description.

Begin over again and concentrate.” The need to concentrate and distill—the idea that description was too often an indulgence—was a lesson the younger writer took to heart.

In the 1920s Stein and Toklas began spending summers in the south of France, where they bought a small house in 1929. They lived there during the war, when they could not return to Paris. Devoted to their adopted country, Stein and Toklas did what they could for France during both world wars. They visited and entertained American soldiers, many of whom continued to write to the couple for years after they had returned to the United States and some of whom visited when they had occasion to return to France. Even though Stein returned to the United States only once, in 1934, on what turned into a very successful lecture tour, she and Toklas always thought of themselves as Americans.

Being American is one topic of investigation that threads itself throughout Stein’s body of experimental writing; the other is love. *The Making of Americans*, the most ambitious work of Stein’s early career, linked these two concerns by wrenching a familiar novelistic form, that of the multigenerational family saga, into a strange and monumental new shape. Stein called the story of Martha Hersland and her family “a decent family progress,” but it is a progress built on repetition—not only the repetition of human character from one generation to the next but also repetition in the words and sentences of Stein’s prose. *The Making of Americans* identifies repeating with loving, with the process of writing, with human history, and with the rhythms of life itself: “Repeating is a wonderful thing in living being.”

Stein’s 1914 *Tender Buttons*, a cubist prose-poem presenting verbal collages of domestic objects, also celebrated her loving relationship with Alice B. Toklas. From its title forward, the work incorporates semiprivate erotic wordplay into its playful catalog of Stein and Toklas’s shared life. *Tender Buttons* looked forward to Stein’s innovative work of the 1920s, in which she treated words as things, ignoring or defying the connection between words and meanings, continually undercutting expectations about order, coherence, and associations.

In the 1930s Stein turned her writing toward more accessible forms and more public purposes—including self-promotion. Her gossipy, intimate, irreverent autobiography, written as *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), was serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* and became a best seller in the United States. In 1934 the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, for which she had written a libretto set to music by the American composer Virgil Thomson (1896–1989), opened on Broadway, with an all-black cast daringly chosen to portray Stein’s roster of white European saints. *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937) recounted Stein’s triumphant American lecture tour of 1934–35. Stein returned to American history for one of her last major works, the libretto to *The Mother of Us All* (set to music once again by Virgil Thomson and premiered in 1947), which centered on the life and work of the suffragist Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906).

By the time of her death Stein had become a public personality. In the later twentieth century, the women’s and gay liberation movements contributed to a new appreciation of her radical individualism. Avant-garde American writing and art, such as the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school of contemporary poetry and the hypnotically repetitive operas of Philip Glass, continue to register the influence of Stein’s experimental work.

The text of *The Making of Americans* is from the first edition (1925). The text of *Tender Buttons* is from the first edition (1914).

*From The Making of Americans*¹

[INTRODUCTION]

Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard. "Stop!" cried the groaning old man at last, "Stop! I did not drag my father beyond this tree."

It is hard living down the tempers we are born with. We all begin well, for in our youth there is nothing we are more intolerant of than our own sins writ large in others and we fight them fiercely in ourselves; but we grow old and we see that these our sins are of all sins the really harmless ones to own, nay that they give a charm to any character, and so our struggle with them dies away.

I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it. Everybody is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me. No one of them that I know can want to know it and so I write for myself and strangers.

Every one is always busy with it, no one of them then ever want to know it that every one looks like some one else and they see it. Mostly every one dislikes to hear it. It is very important to me to always know it, to always see it which one looks like others and to tell it. I write for myself and strangers. I do this for my own sake and for the sake of those who know I know it that they look like other ones, that they are separate and yet always repeated.² There are some who like it that I know they are like many others and repeat it, there are many who never can really like it.

There are many that I know and they know it. They are all of them repeating and I hear it. I love it and I tell it, I love it and now I will write it. This is now the history of the way some of them are it.

I write for myself and strangers. No one who knows me can like it. At least they mostly do not like it that every one is of a kind of men and women and I see it. I love it and I write it.

I want readers so strangers must do it. Mostly no one knowing me can like it that I love it that every one is a kind of men and women, that always I am looking and comparing and classifying of them, always I am seeing their repeating. Always more and more I love repeating, it may be irritating to hear from them but always more and more I love it of them. More and more I love it of them, the being in them, the mixing in them, the repeating in them, the deciding the kinds of them every one is who has human being.

This is now a little of what I love and how I write it. Later there will be much more of it.

There are many ways of making kinds of men and women. Now there will be descriptions of every kind of way every one can be a kind of men and women.

This is now a history of Martha Hersland. This is now a history of Martha and of every one who came to be of her living.

1. This long book—over nine hundred pages—tells the story of Martha Hersland, who represents Stein herself, and her family. *Making* refers both to family history and to making the book.

2. Differences within basic similarities among people correspond to the differences within similar sentences employed as the chief experimental technique of *The Making of Americans*.

There will then be soon much description of every way one can think of men and women, in their beginning, in their middle living, and their ending.³

Every one then is an individual being. Every one then is like many others always living, there are many ways of thinking of every one, this is now a description of all of them. There must then be a whole history of each one of them. There must then now be a description of all repeating. Now I will tell all the meaning to me in repeating, the loving there is in me for repeating.

Every one is one inside them, every one reminds some one of some other one who is or was or will be living. Every one has it to say of each one he is like such a one I see it in him, every one has it to say of each one she is like some one else I can tell by remembering. So it goes on always in living, every one is always remembering some one who is resembling to the one at whom they are then looking. So they go on repeating, every one is themselves inside them and every one is resembling to others, and that is always interesting. There are many ways of making kinds of men and women. In each way of making kinds of them there is a different system of finding them resembling. Sometime there will be here every way there can be of seeing kinds of men and women. Sometime there will be then a complete history of each one. Every one always is repeating the whole of them and so sometime some one who sees them will have a complete history of every one. Sometime some one will know all the ways there are for people to be resembling, some one sometime then will have a completed history of every one.

Soon now there will be a history of the way repeating comes out of them comes out of men and women when they are young, when they are children, they have then their own system of being resembling; this will soon be a description of the men and women in beginning, the being young in them, the being children.

There is then now and here the loving repetition, this is then, now and here, a description of the loving of repetition and then there will be a description of all the kinds of ways there can be seen to be kinds of men and women. Then there will be realised the complete history of every one, the fundamental character of every one, the bottom nature in them, the mixtures in them, the strength and weakness of everything they have inside them, the flavor of them, the meaning in them, the being in them, and then you have a whole history then of each one. Everything then they do in living is clear to the completed understanding, their living, loving, eating, pleasing, smoking, thinking, scolding, drinking, working, dancing, walking, talking, laughing, sleeping, everything in them. There are whole beings then, they are themselves inside them, repeating coming out of them makes a history of each one of them.

Always from the beginning there was to me all living as repeating. This is now a description of my feeling. As I was saying listening to repeating is often irritating,⁴ always repeating is all of living, everything in a being is always repeating, more and more listening to repeating gives to me completed understanding. Each one slowly comes to be a whole one to me. Each one slowly

3. Here Stein expands her intention to encompass every variation of human life. The repetition of present participles (*-ing*) emphasizes current action, present time.

4. Stein is aware that her techniques may irritate readers, just as human sameness may cause people to be irritated with each other.

comes to be a whole one in me. Soon then it commences to sound through my ears and eyes and feelings the repeating that is always coming out from each one, that is them, that makes then slowly of each one of them a whole one. Repeating then comes slowly then to be to one who has it to have loving repeating as natural being comes to be a full sound telling all the being in each one such a one is ever knowing. Sometimes it takes many years of knowing some one before the repeating that is that one gets to be a steady sounding to the hearing of one who has it as a natural being to love repeating that slowly comes out from every one. Sometimes it takes many years of knowing some one before the repeating in that one comes to be a clear history of such a one. Natures sometimes are so mixed up in some one that steady repeating in them is mixed up with changing. Soon then there will be a completed history of each one. Sometimes it is difficult to know it in some, for what these are saying is repeating in them is not the real repeating of them, is not the complete repeating for them. Sometimes many years of knowing some one pass before repeating of all being in them comes out clearly from them. As I was saying it is often irritating to listen to the repeating they are doing, always then that one that has it as being to love repeating that is the whole history of each one, such a one has it then that this irritation passes over into patient completed understanding. Loving repeating is one way of being. This is now a description of such feeling.

There are many that I know and they know it. They are all of them repeating and I hear it. I love it and I tell it. I love it and now I will write it. This is now a history of my love of it. I hear it and I love it and I write it. They repeat it. They live it and I see it and I hear it. They live it and I hear it and I see it and I love it and now and always I will write it. There are many kinds of men and women and I know it. They repeat it and I hear it and I love it. This is now a history of the way they do it. This is now a history of the way I love it.⁵

Now I will tell of the meaning to me in repeating, of the loving there is in me for repeating.

Sometimes every one becomes a whole one to me. Sometimes every one has a completed history for me. Slowly each one is a whole one to me, with some, all their living is passing before they are a whole one to me. There is a completed history of them to me then when there is of them a completed understanding of the bottom nature in them of the nature or natures mixed up in them with the bottom nature of them or separated in them. There is then a history of the things they say and do and feel, and happen to them. There is then a history of the living in them. Repeating is always in all of them. Repeating in them comes out of them, slowly making clear to any one that looks closely at them the nature and the natures mixed up in them. This sometime comes to be clear in every one.

Often as I was saying repeating is very irritating to listen to from them and then slowly it settles into a completed history of them. Repeating is a wonderful thing in living being. Sometime then the nature of every one comes to be clear to some one listening to the repeating coming out of each one.

This is then now to be a little description of the loving feeling for understanding of the completed history of each one that comes to one who listens

5. In telling about others with such care, Stein shows her love for them; hence the tale is about her love as well as their lives.

always steadily to all repeating. This is the history then of the loving feeling in me of repeating, the loving feeling in me for completed understanding of the completed history of every one as it slowly comes out in every one as patiently and steadily I hear it and see it as repeating in them. This is now a little a description of this loving feeling. This is now a little a history of it from the beginning.

* * *

1906–08

1925

From Tender Buttons

Objects

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.

GLAZED GLITTER

Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover.

The change in that is that red weakens an hour. The change has come. There is no search. But there is, there is that hope and that interpretation and sometime, surely any is unwelcome, sometime there is breath and there will be a sinecure and charming very charming is that clean and cleansing. Certainly glittering is handsome and convincing.

There is no gratitude in mercy and in medicine. There can be breakages in Japanese. That is no programme. That is no color chosen. It was chosen yesterday, that showed spitting and perhaps washing and polishing. It certainly showed no obligation and perhaps if borrowing is not natural there is some use in giving.

A SUBSTANCE IN A CUSHION

The change of color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared. Sugar is not a vegetable.

Callous is something that hardening leaves behind what will be soft if there is a genuine interest in there being present as many girls as men. Does this change. It shows that dirt is clean when there is a volume.

A cushion has that cover. Supposing you do not like to change, supposing it is very clean that there is no change in appearance, supposing that there is regularity and a costume is that any the worse than an oyster and an exchange. Come to season that is there any extreme use in feather and cotton. Is there not much more joy in a table and more chairs and very likely roundness and a place to put them.

A circle of fine card board and a chance to see a tassel.

What is the use of a violent kind of delightfulness if there is no pleasure in not getting tired of it. The question does not come before there is a quotation.

In any kind of place there is a top to covering and it is a pleasure at any rate there is some venturing in refusing to believe nonsense. It shows what use there is in a whole piece if one uses it and it is extreme and very likely the little things could be dearer but in any case there is a bargain and if there is the best thing to do is to take it away and wear it and then be reckless be reckless and resolved on returning gratitude.

Light blue and the same red with purple makes a change. It shows that there is no mistake. Any pink shows that and very likely it is reasonable. Very likely there should not be a finer fancy present. Some increase means a calamity and this is the best preparation for three and more being together. A little calm is so ordinary and in any case there is sweetness and some of that.

A seal and matches and a swan and ivy and a suit.

A closet, a closet does not connect under the bed. The band if it is white and black, the band has a green string. A sight a whole sight and a little groan grinding makes a trimming such a sweet singing trimming and a red thing not a round thing but a white thing, a red thing and a white thing.

The disgrace is not in carelessness nor even in sewing it comes out out of the way.

What is the sash like. The sash is not like anything mustard it is not like a same thing that has stripes, it is not even more hurt than that, it has a little top.

A BOX

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and is it disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again.

A PIECE OF COFFEE

More of double.

A place in no new table.

A single image is not splendor. Dirty is yellow. A sign of more in not mentioned. A piece of coffee is not a detainer. The resemblance to yellow is dirtier and distincter. The clean mixture is whiter and not coal color, never more coal color than altogether.

The sight of a reason, the same sight slighter, the sight of a simpler negative answer, the same sore sounder, the intention to wishing, the same splendor, the same furniture.

The time to show a message is when too late and later there is no hanging in a blight.

A not torn rose-wood color. If it is not dangerous then a pleasure and more than any other if it is cheap is not cheaper. The amusing side is that the sooner there are no fewer the more certain is the necessity dwindled. Supposing that the case contained rose-wood and a color. Supposing that there was no reason for a distress and more likely for a number, supposing that there was no astonishment, is it not necessary to mingle astonishment.

The settling of stationing cleaning is one way not to shatter scatter and scattering. The one way to use custom is to use soap and silk for cleaning. The one way to see cotton is to have a design concentrating the illusion and the illustration. The perfect way is to accustom the thing to have a lining and the shape of a ribbon and to be solid, quite solid in standing and to use heaviness in morning. It is light enough in that. It has that shape nicely. Very nicely may not be exaggerating. Very strongly may be sincerely fainting. May be strangely flattering. May not be strange in everything. May not be strange to.

DIRT AND NOT COPPER

Dirt and not copper makes a color darker. It makes the shape so heavy and makes no melody harder.

It makes mercy and relaxation and even a strength to spread a table fuller. There are more places not empty. They see cover.

NOTHING ELEGANT

A charm a single charm is doubtful. If the red is rose and there is a gate surrounding it, if inside is let in and there places change then certainly something is upright. It is earnest.

MILDRED'S UMBRELLA

A cause and no curve, a cause and loud enough, a cause and extra a loud clash and an extra wagon, a sign of extra, a sac a small sac and an established color and cunning, a slender grey and no ribbon, this means a loss a great loss a restitution.

A METHOD OF A CLOAK

A single climb to a line, a straight exchange to a cane, a desperate adventure and courage and a clock, all this which is a system, which has feeling, which has resignation and success, all makes an attractive black silver.

A RED STAMP

If lilies are lily white if they exhaust noise and distance and even dust, if they dusty will dirt a surface that has no extreme grace, if they do this and it is not necessary it is not at all necessary if they do this they need a catalogue.

A BOX

A large box is handily made of what is necessary to replace any substance. Suppose an example is necessary, the plainer it is made the more reason there is for some outward recognition that there is a result.

A box is made sometimes and them to see to see to it neatly and to have the holes stopped up makes it necessary to use paper.

A custom which is necessary when a box is used and taken is that a large part of the time there are three which have different connections. The one is on the table. The two are on the table. The three are on the table.

The one, one is the same length as is shown by the cover being longer. The other is different there is more cover that shows it. The other is different and that makes the corners have the same shade the eight are in singular arrangement to make four necessary.

Lax, to have corners, to be lighter than some weight, to indicate a wedding journey, to last brown and not curious, to be wealthy, cigarettes are established by length and by doubling.

Left open, to be left pounded, to be left closed, to be circulating in summer and winter, and sick color that is grey that is not dusty and red shows, to be sure cigarettes do measure an empty length sooner than a choice in color.

Winged, to be winged means that white is yellow and pieces pieces that are brown are dust color if dust is washed off, then it is choice that is to say it is fitting cigarettes sooner than paper.

An increase why is an increase idle, why is silver cloister, why is the spark brighter, if it is brighter is there any result, hardly more than ever.

A PLATE

An occasion for a plate, an occasional resource is in buying and how soon does washing enable a selection of the same thing neater. If the party is small a clever song is in order.

Plates and a dinner set of colored china. Pack together a string and enough with it to protect the centre, cause a considerable haste and gather more as it is cooling, collect more trembling and not any even trembling, cause a whole thing to be a church.

A sad size a size that is not sad is blue as every bit of blue is precocious. A kind of green a game in green and nothing flat nothing quite flat and more round, nothing a particular color strangely, nothing breaking the losing of no little piece.

A splendid address a really splendid address is not shown by giving a flower freely, it is not shown by a mark or by wetting.

Cut cut in white, cut in white so lately. Cut more than any other and show it. Show it in the stem and in starting and in evening coming complication.

A lamp is not the only sign of glass. The lamp and the cake are not the only sign of stone. The lamp and the cake and the cover are not the only necessity altogether.

A plan a hearty plan, a compressed disease and no coffee, not even a card or a change to incline each way, a plan that has that excess and that break is the one that shows filling.

A SELTZER BOTTLE

Any neglect of many particles to a cracking, any neglect of this makes around it what is lead in color and certainly discolor in silver. The use of this is manifold. Supposing a certain time selected is assured, suppose it is even necessary, suppose no other extract is permitted and no more handling is needed, suppose the rest of the message is mixed with a very long slender needle and even if it could be any black border, supposing all this altogether made a dress and suppose it was actual, suppose the mean way to state it was occasional, if you suppose this in August and even more melodiously, if you

suppose this even in the necessary incident of there certainly being no middle in summer and winter, suppose this and an elegant settlement a very elegant settlement is more than of consequence, it is not final and sufficient and substituted. This which was so kindly a present was constant.

A LONG DRESS

What is the current that makes machinery, that makes it crackle, what is the current that presents a long line and a necessary waist. What is this current.

What is the wind, what is it.

Where is the serene length, it is there and a dark place is not a dark place, only a white and red are black, only a yellow and green are blue, a pink is scarlet, a bow is every color. A line distinguishes it. A line just distinguishes it.

A RED HAT

A dark grey, a very dark grey, a quite dark grey is monstrous ordinarily, it is so monstrous because there is no red in it. If red is in everything it is not necessary. Is that not an argument for any use of it and even so is there any place that is better, is there any place that has so much stretched out.

A BLUE COAT

A blue coat is guided guided away, guided and guided away, that is the particular color that is used for that length and not any width not even more than a shadow.

A PIANO

If the speed is open, if the color is careless, if the selection of a strong scent is not awkward, if the button holder is held by all the waving color and there is no color, not any color. If there is no dirt in a pin and there can be none scarcely, if there is not then the place is the same as up standing.

This is no dark custom and it even is not acted in any such a way that a restraint is not spread. That is spread, it shuts and it lifts and awkwardly not awkwardly the centre is in standing.

A CHAIR

A widow in a wise veil and more garments shows that shadows are even. It addresses no more, it shadows the stage and learning. A regular arrangement, the severest and the most preserved is that which has the arrangement not more than always authorized.

A suitable establishment, well housed, practical, patient and staring, a suitable bedding, very suitable and not more particularly than complaining, anything suitable is so necessary.

A fact is that when the direction is just like that, no more, longer, sudden and at the same time not any sofa, the main action is that without a blaming there is no custody.

Practice measurement, practice the sign that means that really means a necessary betrayal, in showing that there is wearing.

Hope, what is a spectacle, a spectacle is the resemblance between the circular side place and nothing else, nothing else.

To choose it is ended, it is actual and more and more than that it has it certainly has the same treat, and a seat all that is practiced and more easily much more easily ordinarily.

Pick a barn, a whole barn, and bend more slender accents than have ever been necessary, shine in the darkness necessarily.

Actually not aching, actually not aching, a stubborn bloom is so artificial and even more than that, it is a spectacle, it is a binding accident, it is animosity and accentuation.

If the chance to dirty diminishing is necessary, if it is why is there no complexion, why is there no rubbing, why is there no special protection.

A FRIGHTFUL RELEASE

A bag which was left and not only taken but turned away was not found. The place was shown to be very like the last time. A piece was not exchanged, not a bit of it, a piece was left over. The rest was mismanaged.

A PURSE

A purse was not green, it was not straw color, it was hardly seen and it had a use a long use and the chain, the chain was never missing, it was not misplaced, it showed that it was open, that is all that it showed.

A MOUNTED UMBRELLA

What was the use of not leaving it there where it would hang what was the use if there was no chance of ever seeing it come there and show that it was handsome and right in the way it showed it. The lesson is to learn that it does show it, that it shows it and that nothing, that there is nothing, that there is no more to do about it and just so much more is there plenty of reason for making an exchange.

A CLOTH

Enough cloth is plenty and more, more is almost enough for that and besides if there is no more spreading is there plenty of room for it. Any occasion shows the best way.

MORE

An elegant use of foliage and grace and a little piece of white cloth and oil.

Wondering so winningly in several kinds of oceans is the reason that makes red so regular and enthusiastic. The reason that there is more snips are the same shining very colored rid of no round color.

A NEW CUP AND SAUCER

Enthusiastically hurting a clouded yellow bud and saucer, enthusiastically so is the bite in the ribbon.

OBJECTS

Within, within the cut and slender joint alone, with sudden equals and no more than three, two in the centre make two one side.

If the elbow is long and it is filled so then the best example is all together.
The kind of show is made by squeezing.

EYE GLASSES

A color in shaving, a saloon is well placed in the centre of an alley.

A CUTLET

A blind agitation is manly and uttermost.

CARELESS WATER

No cup is broken in more places and mended, that is to say a plate is broken and mending does do that it shows that culture is Japanese. It shows the whole element of angels and orders. It does more to choosing and it does more to that ministering counting. It does, it does change in more water.

Supposing a single piece is a hair supposing more of them are orderly, does that show that strength, does that show that joint, does that show that balloon famously. Does it.

A PAPER

A courteous occasion makes a paper show no such occasion and this makes readiness and eyesight and likeness and a stool.

A DRAWING

The meaning of this is entirely and best to say the mark, best to say it best to shown sudden places, best to make bitter, best to make the length tall and nothing broader, anything between the half.

WATER RAINING

Water astonishing and difficult altogether makes a meadow and a stroke.

COLD CLIMATE

A season in yellow sold extra strings makes lying places.

MALACHITE

The sudden spoon is the same in no size. The sudden spoon is the wound in the decision.

AN UMBRELLA

Coloring high means that the strange reason is in front not more in front behind. Not more in front in peace of the dot.

A PETTICOAT

A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm.

A WAIST

A star glide, a single frantic sullenness, a single financial grass greediness.

Object that is in wood. Hold the pine, hold the dark, hold in the rush, make the bottom.

A piece of crystal. A change, in a change that is remarkable there is no reason to say that there was a time.

A woolen object gilded. A country climb is the best disgrace, a couple of practices any of them in order is so left.

A TIME TO EAT

A pleasant simple habitual and tyrannical and authorised and educated and resumed and articulate separation. This is not tardy.

A LITTLE BIT OF A TUMBLER

A shining indication of yellow consists in there having been more of the same color than could have been expected when all four were bought. This was the hope which made the six and seven have no use for any more places and this necessarily spread into nothing. Spread into nothing.

A FIRE

What was the use of a whole time to send and not send if there was to be the kind of thing that made that come in. A letter was nicely sent.

A HANDKERCHIEF

A winning of all the blessings, a sample not a sample because there is no worry.

RED ROSES

A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a sold hole, a little less hot.

IN BETWEEN

In between a place and candy is a narrow foot-path that shows more mounting than anything, so much really that a calling meaning a bolster measured a whole thing with that. A virgin a whole virgin is judged made and so between curves and outlines and real seasons and more out glasses and a perfectly unprecedented arrangement between old ladies and mild colds there is no satin wood shining.

COLORED HATS

Colored hats are necessary to show that curls are worn by an addition of blank spaces, this makes the difference between single lines and broad stom-

achs, the least thing is lightening, the least thing means a little flower and a big delay a big delay that makes more nurses than little women really little women. So clean is a light that nearly all of it shows pearls and little ways. A large hat is tall and me and all custard whole.

A FEATHER

A feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive.

A BROWN

A brown which is not liquid not more so is relaxed and yet there is a change, a news is pressing.

A LITTLE CALLED PAULINE

A little called anything shows shudders.

Come and say what prints all day. A whole few watermelon. There is no pope.

No cut in pennies and little dressing and choose wide soles and little spats really little spices.

A little lace makes boils. This is not true.

Gracious of gracious and a stamp a blue green white bow a blue green lean, lean on the top.

If it is absurd then it is leadish and nearly set in where there is a tight head.

A peaceful life to arise her, noon and moon and moon. A letter a cold sleeve a blanket a shaving house and nearly the best and regular window.

Nearer in fairy sea, nearer and farther, show white has lime in sight, show a stitch of ten. Count, count more so that thicker and thicker is leaning.

I hope she has her cow. Bidding a wedding, widening received treading, little leading mention nothing.

Cough out cough out in the leather and really feather it is not for.

Please could, please could, jam it not plus more sit in when.

A SOUND

Elephant beaten with candy and little pops and chews all bolts and reckless reckless rats, this is this.

A TABLE

A table means does it not my dear it means a whole steadiness. Is it likely that a change.

A table means more than a glass even a looking glass is tall. A table means necessary places and a revision a revision of a little thing it means it does mean that there has been a stand, a stand where it did shake.

SHOES

To be a wall with a damper a stream of pounding way and nearly enough choice makes a steady midnight. It is pus.

A shallow hole rose on red, a shallow hole in and in this makes ale less. It shows shine.

A DOG

A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey.

A WHITE HUNTER

A white hunter is nearly crazy.

A LEAVE

In the middle of a tiny spot and nearly bare there is a nice thing to say that wrist is leading. Wrist is leading.

SUPPOSE AN EYES

Suppose it is within a gate which open is open at the hour of closing summer that is to say it is so.

All the seats are needing blackening. A white dress is in sign. A soldier a real soldier has a worn lace a worn lace of different sizes that is to say if he can read, if he can read he is a size to show shutting up twenty-four.

Go red go red, laugh white.

Suppose a collapse in rubbed purr, in rubbed purr get.

Little sales ladies little sales ladies little saddles of mutton.

Little sales of leather and such beautiful beautiful, beautiful beautiful.

A SHAWL

A shawl is a hat and hurt and a red balloon and an under coat and a sizer a sizer of talks.

A shawl is a wedding, a piece of wax a little build. A shawl.

Pick a ticket, pick it in strange steps and with hollows. There is hollow hollow belt, a belt is a shawl.

A plate that has a little bobble, all of them, any so.

Please a round it is ticket.

It was a mistake to state that a laugh and a lip and a laid climb and a depot and a cultivator and little choosing is a point it.

BOOK

Book was there, it was there. Book was there. Stop it, stop it, it was a cleaner, a wet cleaner and it was not where it was wet, it was not high, it was directly placed back, not back again, back it was returned, it was needless, it put a bank, a bank when, a bank care.

Suppose a man a realistic expression of resolute reliability suggests pleasing itself white all white and no head does that mean soap. It does not so. It means kind wavers and little chance to beside beside rest. A plain.

Suppose ear rings that is one way to breed, breed that. Oh chance to say, oh nice old pole. Next best and nearest a pillar. Chest not valuable, be papered.

Cover up cover up the two with a little piece of string and hope rose and green, green.

Please a plate, put a match to the seam and really then really then, really then it is a remark that joins many many lead games. It is a sister and sister and a flower and a flower and a dog and a colored sky a sky colored grey and nearly that nearly that let.

PEELED PENCIL, CHOKE

Rub her coke.

IT WAS BLACK, BLACK TOOK

Black ink best wheel bale brown.

Excellent not a hull house, not a pea soup, no bill no care, no precise no past pearl pearl goat.

THIS IS THIS DRESS, AIDER

Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider stop the muncher, muncher munchers.

A jack in kill her, a jack in, makes a meadowed king, makes a to let.

World War I and Its Aftermath

By some measures, World War I was a relatively contained event for citizens of the United States. The official American combat presence in the war lasted only seventeen months, from the declaration of war by the U.S. Congress on April 6, 1917, to the armistice declared in western Europe on November 11, 1918. The arrival of the first waves of United States forces in the summer and fall of 1917 helped break what had become an immensely bloody and costly stalemate between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey) and the Allies (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and Japan) along the line of trenches extending across western Europe. With the full weight of American industrial, financial, and agricultural power now fortifying the Allies, and with American president Woodrow Wilson having proposed a relatively merciful set of conditions for their surrender, the Central Powers began negotiating in earnest for peace. By the war's end, some 365,000 American soldiers had been killed or wounded in carrying out President Wilson's famous call to "make the world safe for democracy." American casualty rates were high, but the war had not devastated either the landscape or the economy of the United States. The American Civil War, by contrast, had raged over American soil for four years, from 1861 to 1865, costing the armies on both sides a total of more than 1.1 million killed and wounded (and many civilian casualties as well), and wrecked the Southern economy for decades.

The impact of World War I on the United States and its literature, however, was deep and broad. From the moment war broke out, Americans plunged into debate over the responsibilities of the United States in relation to the rest of the world. Some Americans, including writers and artists who had lived abroad or who felt specially connected to Great Britain and France, vociferously argued for an early U.S. entry into the war on the Allied side: during her American tour of 1916, for example, the pioneering modern dancer Isadora Duncan concluded her recitals with an impassioned solo on the French national anthem, the *Marseillaise*, coupled with a speech urging Americans to join the fight for the Allies. Some, like the poet Alan Seeger, acted on their loyalties by joining the French Foreign Legion or the ambulance corps of the Red Cross as volunteers early in the war. Still other Americans, however, felt that the United States ought to keep its distance from the war: why should Americans go to the rescue of a European continent entangled in ancient alliances and dynastic rivalries, decaying empires and stifling class hierarchies? In the conflict's early stages, antiwar Americans included committed left-wing activists and writers who saw revolutionary possibilities in the prospect of Europe's advanced capitalist societies destroying one another; Americans who had emigrated from Germany and other of the Central Powers; and religious pacifists and humanitarian liberals who believed that human progress could and should make war obsolete.

As the conflict went on, though, the German strategy of attacking merchant ships at sea—including ships carrying U.S. citizens as passengers—hardened American public opinion against the Central Powers and enabled President Wilson to obtain an overwhelming congressional majority in favor of American entry into the war. With war declared, the U.S. government acted quickly, on a wide front, to mobilize American society. For the first time since the Civil War, the U.S. Congress enacted a law to conscript men into the armed forces. A host of new government agencies sprang up to coordinate the American economy in the war effort: the Council of National Defense, the War Industries Board, the War Trade Board, the

Food Administration. Other government agencies, like the Committee on Public Information, set out to sell the war to the American public with the aid of new twentieth-century media like films and newsreels. When some newspapers and magazines refused the government's invitation to self-censor their views on the war, Congress responded with the Espionage Act of June 1917, which outlawed statements intended "to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces."

Writers and artists on the left protested these restrictions on freedom of speech, but they were not the only Americans to experience the contradiction between the war's declared aim of making the world safe for democracy abroad and their daily lives. Anti-immigrant feeling rose, especially against German-Americans; Woodrow Wilson declared to Congress in 1918 that "Any man who carries a hyphen about him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic." Militant suffragists denounced the hypocrisy of crusading for democracy abroad while denying the vote to women at home. While some leaders of organized labor allied themselves with management and government in the war effort, others dissented. The draft and the growth of war-related industries opened up jobs that drew black Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, where their growing urban communities came under white attack in a series of race riots both before and after the war. African Americans who volunteered for or were drafted into the segregated armed forces also registered the contradiction between American ideals of democracy and their treatment as second-class citizens. Many men and women caught up in it found that the fundamental conditions of modern warfare undermined clean-cut, idealistic notions of the war's aims. In E. E. Cummings's

"Destroy This Mad Brute." U.S. Army recruitment poster, H. R. Hopps, 1917. Propaganda on both sides of the conflict demonized opponents as rapists and brutalizers of helpless civilians. This famous poster would later be cited in Nazi propaganda as evidence of Anglo-American hatred of the German people.



The Enormous Room, the French military bureaucracy oppresses the common soldiers of its own army no less than those of the enemy; in Ernest Hemingway's experience of the Italian front as recorded in his letters, the sheer firepower of modern artillery far exceeds his commanders' ability to make sense of either their immediate tactical situation or the war's ultimate purpose. Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* depicts the coercive patriotism of the war's domestic front.

The waste and futility that marked so much of the military effort expended in World War I not only eroded popular deference to the wisdom of generals and politicians but also licensed rebellion against literary traditions. Cummings's multilingual, colloquial literary style in *The Enormous Room* defies the routines of bureaucratic language even as his autobiographical narrator refuses to defer to his jailors. Gertrude Stein's matter-of-fact, concrete, at times gossipy tone in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* declines to moralize the end of the war as a high drama of ideals achieved. Whether they witnessed World War I at firsthand or from a distance, Americans saw the home of nineteenth-century European high culture at once exploded into bits and, in another way, bound together by a shared nightmare. Both Europe's fragmentation and the grip of the war's shared experiences found their way into high modernist works of postwar American writing like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley."

ALAN SEEGER

Born in New York City, Alan Seeger (1888–1916) was educated at private schools before entering Harvard in 1906, where he became one of the editors of the *Harvard Monthly* and a contributor of poetry to its pages; among his Harvard classmates was T. S. Eliot. Looking for literary circles, Seeger returned to New York after graduating from Harvard, and in 1912 moved on to Paris. Although Paris by that time was a hub of artistic experimentation and the home of radical American modernists like Gertrude Stein, Seeger's own artistic tastes were less adventurous, and he seems to have made little contact with Paris's innovators before the outbreak of World War I inspired him to join the French Foreign Legion. Seeger's wartime letters to newspapers in the United States acknowledged some of the miseries of trench combat for the soldier "[e]xposed to all the dangers of war, but with none of its enthusiasm or splendid *élan*"; his poetry, however, romanticized the sacrifices of military service. Published after Seeger's death in combat, "I Have a Rendezvous with Death . . ." became one of the most widely anthologized American poems of the war. Reviewing Seeger's poems after his death, his former classmate T. S. Eliot declared them "high-flown, heavily decorated and solemn"—and "so out of date as to be almost a positive quality."

I Have a Rendezvous with Death . . .

I have a rendezvous with Death
 At some disputed barricade,
 When Spring comes back with rustling shade
 And apple-blossoms fill the air—
 I have a rendezvous with Death 5
 When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
 And lead me into his dark land
 And close my eyes and quench my breath—
 It may be I shall pass him still. 10
 I have a rendezvous with Death
 On some scarred slope of battered hill,
 When Spring comes round again this year
 And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep 15
 Pillowed in silk and scented down,
 Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
 Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
 Where hushed awakenings are dear . . .
 But I've a rendezvous with Death 20
 At midnight in some flaming town,
 When Spring trips north again this year,
 And I to my pledged word am true,
 I shall not fail that rendezvous.

1917

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Denied entry into the U.S. armed forces because of poor eyesight, Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) volunteered for the ambulance corps of the Red Cross and was sent to Italy in June 1918. On July 8, 1918, he was seriously wounded: hit by shrapnel from a mortar shell, he was awarded the Italian Silver Medal for Valor and spent several months recovering before returning home to Oak Park, Illinois, in January 1919. Hemingway's parents published some of his letters from the hospital in local newspapers; whether or not he knew this as he was writing, the letters seem to aim at a public tone of ironic, disillusioned courage and objective description. Hemingway drew on his experiences on the Italian front and in the military hospital for the character Frederic Henry, a wounded American officer, in his novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

Letter of August 18, 1918, to His Parents

* * *

You know they say there isn't anything funny about this war. And there isn't. I wouldn't say it was hell, because that's been a bit overworked since Gen. Sherman's time,¹ but there have been about 8 times when I would have welcomed Hell. Just on a chance that it couldn't come up to the phase of war I was experiencing. F'r example. In the trenches during an attack when a shell makes a direct hit in a group where you're standing. Shells aren't bad except direct hits. You must take chances on the fragments of the bursts. But when there is a direct hit your pals get spattered all over you. Spattered is literal. During the six days I was up in the Front line trenches, only 50 yds from the Austrians, I got the rep. of having a charmed life. The rep of having one doesn't mean much but having one does! I hope I have one. That knocking sound is my knuckles striking the wooden bed tray.

It's too hard to write on two sides of the paper so I'll skip.

Well I can now hold up my hand and say I've been shelled by high explosive, shrapnel and gas. Shot at by trench mortars, snipers and machine guns, and as an added attraction an aeroplane machine gunning the lines. I've never had a hand grenade thrown at me, but a rifle grenade struck rather close. Maybe I'll get a hand grenade later. Now out of all that mess to only be struck by a trench mortar and a machine gun bullet while advancing toward the rear, as the Irish say, was fairly lucky. What, Family?

The 227 wounds I got from the trench mortar didn't hurt a bit at the time, only my feet felt like I had rubber boots full of water on. Hot water. And my knee cap was acting queer. The machine gun bullet just felt like a sharp smack on my leg with an icy snow ball. However it spilled me. But I got up again and got my wounded into the dug out. I kind of collapsed at the dug out. The Italian I had with me had bled all over my coat and my pants looked like somebody had made current jelly in them and then punched holes to let the pulp out. Well the Captain who was a great pal of mine, It was his dug out said "Poor Hem he'll be R.I.P. soon." Rest In Peace, that is. You see they thought I was shot through the chest on account of my bloody coat. But I made them take my coat and shirt off. I wasn't wearing any undershirt, and the old torso was intact. Then they said I'd probably live. That cheered me up any amount. I told him in Italian that I wanted to see my legs, though I was afraid to look at them. So we took off my trousers and the old limbs were still there but gee they were a mess. They couldn't figure out how I had walked 150 yards with a load with both knees shot through and my right shoe punctured two big places. Also over 200 flesh wounds. "Oh," says I, "My Captain, it is of nothing. In America they all do it! It is thought well not to allow the enemy to perceive that they have captured our goats!"²

1. William Tecumseh Sherman (1820–1891), a general in the Union Army during the Civil War noted for the destructiveness of his campaign in Georgia, said that "war is . . . hell" in an 1880 speech.

2. Hemingway plays with his Italian commander's ignorance of the American idiom "to get someone's goat"—i.e., to make someone betray anger or irritation.

The goat speech required some masterful lingual ability but I got it across and then went to sleep for a couple of minutes. After I came to they carried me on a stretcher three kilometers to a dressing station. The stretcher bearers had to go over lots because the road was having the “entrails” shelled out of it. Whenever a big one would come, Whee - whoosh - Boom - they’d lay me down and get flat. My wounds were now hurting like 227 little devils were driving nails into the raw. The dressing station had been evacuated during the attack so I lay for two hours in a stable, with the roof shot off, waiting for an ambulance. When it came I ordered it down the road to get the soldiers that had been wounded first. It came back with a load and then they lifted me in. The shelling was still pretty thick and our batteries were going off all the time way back of us and the big 250’s and 350’s³ going over head for Austria with a noise like a railway train. Then we’d hear the bursts back of the lines. Then there would come a big Austrian shell and then the crash of the burst. But we were giving them more and bigger stuff than they sent. Then a battery of field guns would go off, just back of the shed—boom, boom, boom, boom, and the Seventy-Fives or 149’s⁴ would go whipping over to the Austrian lines, and the star shells going up all the time and the machines going like rivetters, tat-a-tat, tat-a-tat.

* * *

I sent you that cable so you wouldn’t worry. I’ve been in the Hospital a month and 12 days and hope to be out in another month. The Italian Surgeon did a peach of a job on my right knee joint and right foot. Took 28 stitches and assures me that I will be able to walk as well as ever. The wounds all healed up clean and there was no infection. He has my right leg in a plaster splint now so that the joint will be all right. I have some snappy souvenirs that he took out at the last operation.

I wouldn’t really be comfortable now unless I had some pain. The Surgeon is going to cut the plaster off in a week now and will allow me on crutches in 10 days.

I’ll have to learn to walk again.

* * *

3. Large artillery shells of 250 and 350 millimeters in diameter (about 10 and 14 inches, respectively).

4. Medium-caliber artillery guns designed to

move with military units in the field and firing ammunition of 75 and 149 millimeters (about 3 and 6 inches, respectively).

E. E. CUMMINGS

Following the U.S. entry into World War I, E. E. Cummings (1894–1962) volunteered for the Ambulance Corps of the American Red Cross in France. In Paris he befriended another American volunteer, William Slater Brown, who like Cummings was fluent in French. Brown and Cummings socialized with French soldiers, imbibing some of their cynicism about the war and about France’s military bureaucracy;

French wartime censors, reading Brown's letters, imprisoned both men. *The Enormous Room* records Cummings's ensuing three months in French jails and prison camps. The novelist John Dos Passos, reviewing *The Enormous Room* for *The Dial*, praised its "reckless," colloquial, and vividly personal style in rendering Cummings's encounter with "a bit of the underside of History." In this excerpt from an early chapter, Cummings is held in a detainment cell previously inhabited by both German and French prisoners.

From The Enormous Room

Chapter Two

EN ROUTE

I put the bed-roll down. I stood up.

I was myself.

An uncontrollable joy gutted me after three months of humiliation, of being bossed and herded and bullied and insulted. I was myself and my own master.

In this delirium of relief (hardly noticing what I did) I inspected the pile of straw, decided against it, set up my bed, disposed the roll on it, and began to examine my cell.

I have mentioned the length and breadth. The cell was ridiculously high; perhaps ten feet. The end with the door in it was peculiar. The door was not placed in the middle of this end, but at one side, allowing for a huge iron can waist-high which stood in the other corner. Over the door and across the end, a grating extended. A slit of sky was always visible.

Whistling joyously to myself, I took three steps which brought me to the door end. The door was massively made, all of iron or steel I should think. It delighted me. The can excited my curiosity. I looked over the edge of it. At the bottom reposefully lay a new human turd.

* * *

It was then that I noticed the walls. Arm-high they were covered with designs, mottos, pictures. The drawing had all been done in pencil. I resolved to ask for a pencil at the first opportunity.

There had been Germans and Frenchmen imprisoned in this cell. On the right wall, near the door-end, was a long selection from Goethe, laboriously copied. Near the other end of this wall a satiric landscape took place. The technique of this landscape frightened me. There were houses, men, children. And there were trees. I began to wonder what a tree looks like, and laughed copiously.

The back wall had a large and exquisite portrait of a German officer.

The left wall was adorned with a yacht, flying a number—13. "My beloved boat" was inscribed in German underneath. Then came a bust of a German soldier, very idealized, full of unfear. After this, a masterful crudity—a doughnut-bodied rider, sliding with fearful rapidity down the acute backbone of a totally transparent sausage-shaped horse who was moving simultaneously in five directions. The rider had a bored expression as he supported the stiff reins in one fist. His further leg assisted in his flight. He wore a Ger-

man soldier's cap and was smoking. I made up my mind to copy the horse and rider at once, so soon that is as I should have obtained a pencil.

Last, I found a drawing surrounded by a scrolled motto. The drawing was a potted plant with four blossoms. The four blossoms were elaborately dead. Their death was drawn with a fearful care. An obscure deliberation was exposed in the depiction of their drooping petals. The pot tottered very crookedly on a sort of table, as near as I could see. All around ran a funereal scroll. I read: "Mes derniers adieux à ma femme aimée, Gaby."¹ A fierce hand, totally distinct from the former, wrote in proud letters above: "Tombé pour désert. Six ans de prison—dégradation militaire."²

It must have been five o'clock. Steps. A vast clattering of the exterior of the door—by whom? Whang opens the door. Turnkey-creature extending a piece of chocolat with extreme and surly caution. I say "Merci"³ and seize chocolat, Klang shuts the door.

I am lying on my back, the twilight does mistily bluish miracles thru the slit over the whang-klang. I can just see leaves, meaning trees.

Then from the left and way off, faintly, broke a smooth whistle, cool like a peeled willow-branch, and I found myself listening to an air from Pétrouchka, Pétrouchka, which we saw in Paris at the Châtelet, mon ami et moi⁴. . .

The voice stopped in the middle—and I finished the air. This code continued for a half-hour.

It was dark.

I had laid a piece of my piece of chocolat on the window-sill. As I lay on my back, a little silhouette came along the sill and ate that piece of a piece, taking something like four minutes to do so. He then looked at me, I then smiled at him, and we parted, each happier than before.

My cellule⁵ was cool, and I fell asleep easily.

* * *

I contemplate the bowl which contemplates me. A glaze of greenish grease seals the mystery of its content. I induce two fingers to penetrate the seal. They bring me up a flat sliver of choux⁶ and a large, hard, thoughtful, solemn, uncooked bean. To pour the water off (it is warmish and sticky) without committing a nuisance is to lift the cover off Ça Pue.⁷ I did.

Thus leaving beans and cabbage-slivens. Which I ate hurryingly, fearing a ventral misgiving.

I pass a lot of time cursing myself about the pencil, looking at my walls, my unique interior.

Suddenly I realize the indisputable grip of nature's humorous hand. One evidently stands on Ça Pue in such cases. Having finished, panting with stink, I tumble on the bed and consider my next move.

The straw will do. Ouch, but it's Dirty.—Several hours elapse . . .

Stepsandfumble. Klang. Repetition of promise to Monsieur Savy, etc.

1. My last farewell to my beloved wife, Gaby (French).

2. Condemned for desertion. Six years in prison—military degradation (French); i.e., loss of rank.

3. Thanks (French).

4. My friend and I (French). *Pétrouchka*: is a modernist ballet set to music by Igor Stravinsky

and choreographed by Mikhail Fokine (1911). "Châtelet": i.e., the *Théâtre du Châtelet*, the musical theater of Paris.

5. Cell (French).

6. Cabbage (French). Cummings is looking at a bowl of soup brought to him by his jailors.

7. It Stinks (French); Cummings's nickname for the iron can that serves as his lavatory.

Turnkeyish and turnkeyish. Identical expression. One body collapses sufficiently to deposit a hunk of bread and a piece of water.

Give your bowl.

I gave it, smiled and said: "Well, how about that pencil?"

"Pencil?" T-c⁸ looked at t-c.

They recited then the following word: "Tomorrow." Klangandfootsteps.

So I took matches, burnt, and with just 60 of them wrote the first stanza of a ballade. Tomorrow I will write the second. Day after tomorrow the third. Next day the refrain. After—oh, well.

My whistling of Pétrouchka brought no response this evening.

So I climbed on Ça Pue, whom I now regarded with complete friendliness; the new moon was unclosing sticky wings in dusk, a far noise from near things.

I sang a song the "dirty Frenchmen" taught us, *mon ami et moi*. The song says *Bon soir, Madame la Lune*.⁹ . . . I did not sing out loud, simply because the moon was like a mademoiselle, and I did not want to offend the moon. My friends: the silhouette and la lune, not counting Ça Pue, whom I regarded almost as a part of me.

Then I lay down, and heard (but could not see) the silhouette eat something or somebody . . . and saw, but could not hear, the incense of Ça Pue mount gingerly upon the taking air of twilight.

The next day.—Promise to M. Savy. Whang. "My pencil?"—"You don't need any pencil, you're going away."—"When?"—"Directly."—"How directly?"—"In an hour or two: your friend has already gone before. Get ready."

Klangandsteps.

Everyone very sore about me. *Je m'en fous pas mal*,¹ however.

One hour I guess.

Steps. Sudden throwing of door open. Pause.

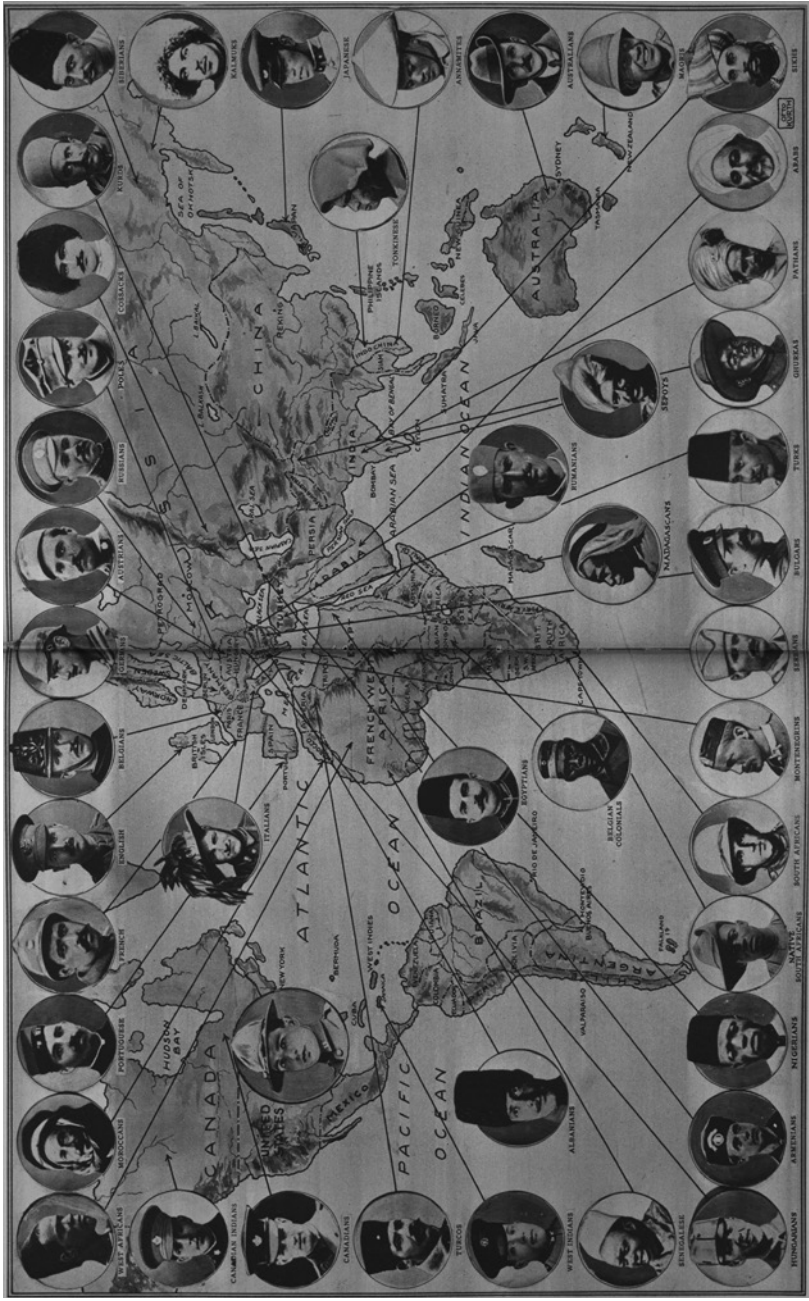
"Come out, American."

* * *

1922

8. Cummings's abbreviation of "Turnkey-creature," his contemptuous term for his jailors.
9. Good evening, Madame Moon (French); title

of a popular prewar French cabaret tune.
1. I don't give a damn (French).



“War of the Races,” *New York Times*, December 31, 1919. The *Times*’s composite “Ethnological Map of the World” frames an idealized white American soldier among representatives of the many nations involved in the war.

JESSIE REDMON FAUSET

One of the central writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882?–1961) was the first black woman to attend Cornell University. She taught Latin and French in high schools in Washington D.C. and New York City before becoming literary editor at *The Crisis* magazine, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Her career as a novelist began with *There Is Confusion* (1924), a group portrait of young African Americans in the black communities of New York and Washington D.C. Like her other novels—including *Plum Bun* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy: American Style* (1933)—*There Is Confusion* concerns itself primarily with the dilemmas of a literate, ambitious black middle class. Although some critics, both in her own time and afterward, lamented Fauset’s focus on genteel characters, she represents her urban middle-class communities as buzzing with debate over the standing of African Americans nationwide. In *There Is Confusion*, her characters monitor reports of lynching from the South, argue over whether blacks should enlist in World War I to fight on behalf of a segregated country, and trade reports of post-war repression aimed at African Americans. In this excerpt, Peter Bye, the well-educated but drifting son of a proud Philadelphia family, has enlisted in a black regiment sent to France, where he finds the Allied armies painfully divided by race. For African American soldiers in Fauset’s novel, the willingness of French women to associate openly with black men comes as a revelation; white American soldiers retaliate violently to enforce the racial segregation they are accustomed to at home.

From There Is Confusion

* * *

This town, the end of Brittany and the furthest western outpost of France, always remained in Peter’s memory as a horrible prelude to a most horrible war. Brest¹ up to the time that Europe had gone so completely and so suddenly insane, had been the typical, stupid, monotonous French town with picturesquely irregular pavements, narrow tortuous streets, dark, nestling little shops and the inevitable public square. Around and about the city to all sides stretched well ordered farms.

Then came the march of two million American soldiers across the town and the surrounding country. Under their careless feet the farms became mud, so that the name Brest recalls to the minds of thousands nothing if not a picture of the deepest, slimiest, stickiest mud that the world has known. All about were people, people, too many people, French and Americans. And finally the relations between the two nations, allies though they were, developed from misunderstandings into hot irritations, from irritations into clashes. First white Americans and Frenchmen

1. Major port city in northwestern France.



Negro Soldier, 1934, Malvin Gray Johnson. Johnson was a notable painter of the Harlem Renaissance and worked with the Federal Art Project during the Great Depression.

clashed; separate restaurants and accommodations had to be arranged. Then came the inevitable clash between white and colored Americans; petty jealousies and meannesses arose over the courtesies of Frenchwomen and the lack of discrimination in the French cafés. The Americans found a new and inexplicable irritation in the French colored colonials.² Food was bad, prices were exorbitant; officers became tyrants. Everyone was at once in Brest and constantly about to leave it; real understanding and acquaintance-ship were impossible.

Peter thought Dante might well have included this place in the description of his *Inferno*.³ Here were Disease and Death, Mutilation and Murder. Stevedores and even

soldiers became cattle and beasts of burden. Many black men were slaves. The thing from which France was to be defended could hardly be worse than this welter of human misunderstandings, the clashing of unknown tongues, the cynical investigations of the government, the immanence of war and the awful, persistent wretchedness of the weather.

The long wait turned into sudden activity and Peter's outfit was ordered to Lathus, thence to La Courtine,⁴ one of the large training centers.

* * *

At Lathus, Harley Alexander met him in the little *place*.⁵ "Seems to me you're got up regardless," Peter had commented. Alexander, one of the trimmest men in the regiment, was looking unusually shipshape, almost dapper.

The other struck him familiarly across the shoulder. "And that ain't all. Say, fellow, there's a band concert to-night right here in this little old square. I'm goin' and I'm goin' to take a lady."

"Lady! Where'd you get her?"

2. Africans and other people of color from France's overseas colonies; some white American troops resented their relative social freedom in wartime France.

3. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Italian poet. The

Inferno, the first part of Dante's epic *Divine Comedy* (1310–14), tells of Dante's journey through hell.

4. Towns in central France.

5. Town square (French).

“Right here. These girls are all right. Not afraid of a dark skin. ‘How should we have fear, m’soo,’ one of them says to me, ‘when you fight for our *patrie*⁶ and when you are so *beau*? ‘Beau’ that’s handsome, ain’t it? Say this is some country to fight for; got some sense of appreciation. Better come along, old scout. There’s a pile of loots⁷ getting ready to come, each with a French dame in tow.”

“I’ll be there,” Peter told him, laughing. “But count me out with the ladies. I can’t get along with the domestic brand and I know I’ll be out of luck with the foreign ones.”

Some passing thought wiped the joy of anticipation from Harley’s face. “My experience is that these foreign ones are a damn sight less foolish than some domestic ones I’ve met. Well, me for the concert.”

But that band concert never came off. At sunset a company of white American Southerners marched into Lathus down the main street, past the little *place*. There was a sudden uproar.

“Look! Darkies and white women! Come on, fellows, kill the damned niggers!”

There was a hasty onslaught in which the colored soldiers even taken by surprise gave as good as they took. Between these two groups from the same soil there was grimmer, more determined fighting than was seen at Verdun.⁸ The French civil population stood on the church-steps opposite the square and watched with amazement.

“*Nom de dieu!*⁹ Are they crazy, then, these Americans, that they kill each other!”

The next day saw Peter’s company on its way to La Courtine, a training center, where there were no women. Thence they moved presently to the front in the Metz¹ sector.

* * *

1924

6. The fatherland (French).

7. Shortened, Americanized version of *poilus*, nickname for French infantrymen.

8. The battle of Verdun, one of the longest and bloodiest of World War I.

9. Name of God! (French).

1. City in northeastern France, near the German border.

JOHN ALLAN WYETH JR.

Like Alan Seeger, John Allan Wyeth Jr. (1894–1981) was born in New York City and attended an Ivy League college where he wrote poetry and had a more famous literary classmate: for Wyeth, the school was Princeton and his classmate the great modernist critic and journalist Edmund Wilson (1895–1972), who remembered Wyeth as the “aesthete” of his year. Unlike Seeger, Wyeth turned his combat experience in World War I—he enlisted in 1917, was sent to France in

1918, and saw the bloody battles on the Somme and at Verdun—into innovative rather than dated poetry. His only published book of poems, *This Man's Army: A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets* (1928), transformed a literary form traditionally associated with love into a vehicle for colloquial dialogue and biting observation of men at war.

Fromereville¹

*War in Heaven*²

A reek of steam—the bath-house rang with cries.

“Come across with the soap.”

“Like hell, what makes you think it’s yours?”

“Don’t turn *off the water*, that ain’t fair

I’m all *covered* with soap.”

“Hurry up, get out of the way.”

“Thank God you’re takin’ a bath.”

“He wants to surprise us.”

“Oh is that so, well anyway I don’t stink like you.”

“Air raid!”

We ran out into the square,
naked and cold like souls on Judgment Day.
Over us, white clouds blazoned on blue skies,
and a green balloon on fire³—we watched it shrink
into flame and a fall of smoke. Around us, brute
guns belching puffs of shrapnel in the air,
where one plane swooping like a bird of prey
spat fire into a dangling parachute.

1928

1. Village in the Alsatian region of France, near the German border; site of a large American station in World War I.

2. In John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), the angel Raphael tells Adam and Eve the story of the war in heaven between the armies of

God and those of Satan and the fallen angels.

3. Manned observation balloons were widely used in World War I to spy on the enemy’s trench deployments. Under attack, their crews could attempt to escape by parachute.

GERTRUDE STEIN

One of the most accessible of Gertrude Stein’s major works, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is written in the voice of Stein’s lover of several decades. Some of its most memorable recollections are of Toklas and Stein’s time in France during World War I. Stein (1874–1946) and Toklas were traveling in England when the war broke out; as soon as the initial German advance on Paris was halted they returned to France, where they helped transport supplies for war

relief efforts and provided warm hospitality to American soldiers after the U.S. entry into the war. When the Armistice was declared, they visited the frontline villages and the blasted landscapes left behind by trench warfare and bombardment. Back in Paris, they witnessed the parades celebrating victory and the influx of diplomats struggling to forge a lasting peace. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* appeared in 1933, as Hitler and the Nazi Party were coming to power in Germany.

From The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas

Time went on, we were very busy and then came the armistice.¹ We were the first to bring the news to many small villages. The french soldiers in the hospitals were relieved rather than glad. They seemed not to feel that it was going to be such a lasting peace. I remember one of them saying to Gertrude Stein when she said to him, well here is peace, at least for twenty years, he said.

The next morning we had a telegram from Mrs. Lathrop.² Come at once want you to go with the french armies to Alsace.³ We did not stop on the way. We made it in a day. Very shortly after we left for Alsace.

* * *

Soon we came to the battle-fields and the lines of trenches of both sides. To any one who did not see it as it was then it is impossible to imagine it. It was not terrifying it was strange. We were used to ruined houses and even ruined towns but this was different. It was a landscape. And it belonged to no country.

I remember hearing a french nurse once say and the only thing she did say of the front was, c'est un paysage passionnant, an absorbing landscape. And that was what it was as we saw it. It was strange. Camouflage, huts, everything was there. It was wet and dark and there were a few people, one did not know whether they were chinamen or europeans. Our fan-belt had stopped working. A staff car stopped and fixed it with a hairpin, we still wore hairpins.

Another thing that interested us enormously was how different the camouflage of the french looked from the camouflage of the germans, and then once we came across some very very neat camouflage and it was american.⁴ The idea was the same but as after all it was different nationalities who did it the difference was inevitable. The colour schemes were different, the designs were different, the way of placing them was different, it made plain the whole theory of art and its inevitability.

* * *

1. The November 11, 1918, armistice ending combat in World War I.

2. Isabel Stevens Lathrop (1868–1964), chair of the Paris depot of the American Fund for French Wounded, was one of many socially well-connected American women involved in war relief.

3. Region of eastern France, on the German border.

4. Camouflage was invented in response to another innovation of World War I, airplane attacks on ground positions.

Our business in Alsace was not hospitals but refugees. The inhabitants were returning to their ruined homes all over the devastated country and it was the aim of the A.F.F.W.⁵ to give a pair of blankets, underclothing and children's and babies' woollen stockings and babies' booties to every family. There was a legend that the quantity of babies' booties sent to us came from the gifts sent to Mrs. Wilson⁶ who was supposed at that time to be about to produce a little Wilson. There were a great many babies' booties but not too many for Alsace.

* * *

We once more returned to a changed Paris. We were restless. Gertrude Stein began to work very hard, it was at this time that she wrote her *Accents in Alsace* and other political plays, the last plays in *Geography and Plays*.⁷ We were still in the shadow of war work and we went on doing some of it, visiting hospitals and seeing the soldiers left in them, now pretty well neglected by everybody. We had spent a great deal of our money during the war and we were economising, servants were difficult to get if not impossible, prices were high. We settled down for the moment with a *femme de ménage*⁸ for only a few hours a day. I used to say Gertrude Stein was the chauffeur and I was the cook. We used to go over early in the morning to the public markets and get in our provisions. It was a confused world.

Jessie Whitehead⁹ had come over with the peace commission as secretary to one of the delegations and of course we were very interested in knowing all about the peace. It was then that Gertrude Stein described one of the young men of the peace commission who was holding forth, as one who knew all about the war, he had been here ever since the peace. Gertrude Stein's cousins came over, everybody came over, everybody was dissatisfied and every one was restless. It was a restless and disturbed world.

* * *

As I say we were restless and we were economical and all day and all evening we were seeing people and at last there was the defile, the procession under the Arc de Triomphe,¹ of the allies.

The members of the American Fund for French Wounded were to have seats on the benches that were put up the length of the Champs Elysées² but quite rightly the people of Paris objected as these seats would make it impossible for them to see the parade and so Clemenceau promptly had them taken down. Luckily for us Jessie Whitehead's room in her hotel looked right over the Arc de Triomphe and she asked us to come to it to see the parade. We accepted gladly. It was a wonderful day.

5. American Fund for French Wounded.

6. Edith Bolling Galt Wilson (1872–1961), second wife of U.S. president Woodrow Wilson.

7. Published in 1922.

8. Cleaning woman (French).

9. Jessie Marie Whitehead, daughter of the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North

Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, friends of Stein and Toklas in England.

1. Triumphal Arch (French), monument in central Paris originally dedicated to Napoleon's military victories.

2. Elysian Fields (French), major avenue in central Paris.

We got up at sunrise, as later it would have been impossible to cross Paris in a car. This was one of the last trips Auntie³ made. By this time the red cross was painted off it but it was still a truck. Very shortly after it went its honourable way and was succeeded by Godiva, a two-seated run-about,⁴ also a little ford. She was called Godiva because she had come naked into the world and each of our friends gave us something with which to bedeck her.

Auntie then was making practically her last trip. We left her near the river and walked up to the hotel. Everybody was on the streets, men, women, children, soldiers, priests, nuns, we saw two nuns being helped into a tree from which they would be able to see. And we ourselves were admirably placed and we saw perfectly.

We saw it all, we saw first the few wounded from the Invalides⁵ in their wheeling chairs wheeling themselves. It is an old french custom that a military procession should always be preceded by the veterans from the Invalides. They all marched past through the Arc de Triomphe. Gertrude Stein remembered that when as a child she used to swing on the chains that were around the Arc de Triomphe her governess had told her that no one must walk underneath since the german armies had marched under it after 1870.⁶ And now everybody except the germans were passing through.

All the nations marched differently, some slowly, some quickly, the french carry their flags the best of all, Pershing⁷ and his officer carrying the flag behind him were perhaps the most perfectly spaced. It was this scene that Gertrude Stein described in the movie she wrote about this time that I have published in *Operas and Plays in the Plain Edition*.⁸

However it all finally came to an end. We wandered up and we wandered down the Champs Elysées and the war was over and the piles of captured cannon that had made two pyramids were being taken away and peace was upon us.

1933

3. Stein and Toklas's Ford truck, which they had used for Red Cross relief transport in the war.

4. Small, lightweight automobile. "Godiva": after Lady Godiva, who according to medieval legend rode naked through the streets of Coventry, England, to persuade her husband to forgive his tenants' debts.

5. Hôtel des Invalides, home for disabled war veterans built by Louis XIV in 1670.

6. Paris surrendered to German forces during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71.

7. General John J. Pershing, leader of the American Expeditionary Forces from 1917 to 1918.

8. Published in 1932.

ROBERT FROST

1874–1963

Although he identified himself with New England, Robert Frost was born in California and lived there until his father died, when Frost was eleven. The family then moved to New England, where his mother supported them by teaching school. Frost graduated from high school in 1891 in Lawrence, Massachusetts, sharing the post of valedictorian with Elinor White, whom he married three years later. Occasional attendance at Dartmouth College and Harvard, and a variety of different jobs including an attempt to run a farm in Derry, New Hampshire, marked the next twenty years. Frost made a new start in 1912, taking his family, which included four children, to England. There he worked on his poetry and found a publisher for his first book, *A Boy's Will* (1913). Ezra Pound reviewed it favorably, excited (as he put it in a letter) by this "VURRY Amur'k'n talent." Pound recommended Frost's poems to American editors and helped get his second book, *North of Boston*, published in 1914. *North of Boston* was widely praised by critics in America and England when it appeared; the favorable reception persuaded Frost to return home. He bought another farm in New Hampshire and prospered financially through sales of his books and papers, along with teaching and lecturing at various colleges. The success he enjoyed for the rest of his life, however, came too late to cancel the bitterness left by his earlier struggles. Moreover, he endured personal tragedy: a son committed suicide, and a daughter had a complete mental collapse.

The clarity of Frost's diction, the colloquial rhythms, the simplicity of his images, and above all the folksy speaker—these are intended to make the poems look natural, unplanned. In the context of the modernist movement, however, they can be seen as a thoughtful reply to high modernism's fondness for obscurity and difficulty. In addition, by investing in the New England terrain, Frost rejected modernist internationalism and revitalized the tradition of New England regionalism. Readers who accepted Frost's persona and his setting as typically American accepted the powerful myth that rural New England was the heart of America.

Frost played the rhythms of ordinary speech against formal patterns of line and verse and contained them within traditional poetic forms. The interaction of colloquial diction with blank verse is especially central to his dramatic monologues. To Frost traditional forms were the essence of poetry, material with which poets responded to flux and disorder (what, adopting scientific terminology, he called "decay") by forging something permanent. Poetry, he wrote, was "one step backward taken," resisting time—a "momentary stay against confusion."

Throughout the 1920s Frost's poetic practice changed very little; later books—including *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), and *West-Running Brook* (1928)—confirmed the impression he had created in *North of Boston*. Most of his poems fall into a few types. Nature lyrics describing or commenting on a scene or event—like "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Birches," and "After Apple-Picking"—are probably the best known. There are also dramatic narratives in blank verse about country people, like "The Death of the Hired Man," and poems of commentary or generalization, like "The Gift Outright," which he read at John F. Kennedy's presidential inauguration in 1961. He could also be humorous or sardonic, as in "Fire and Ice." In the nature lyrics, a comparison often emerges between the outer scene and the psyche, a comparison of what Frost in one poem called "outer and inner weather."

Because he presented himself as a New Englander reading a New England landscape, Frost is often interpreted as an ideological descendent of the nineteenth-century American Transcendentalists. But he is far less affirmative about the universe than they; for where they, looking at nature, discerned a benign creator, he saw “no expression, nothing to express.” Frost did share with Emerson and Thoreau, however, the belief that collective enterprises could do nothing but weaken the individual self. He avoided political movements precisely because they were movements, group undertakings. In the 1930s he parted company with many American writers by opposing both the social programs of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal and artistic programs similarly aimed, he thought, at the lessening of social grievances rather than the exploration of enduring human grief. In *A Further Range* (1936), for which he won the third of his four Pulitzer Prizes, Frost invited readers “to a one-man revolution”—the “only revolution that is coming,” he declared. Left-leaning critics replied by denouncing the volume’s “reactionary” constriction of Frost’s poetic voice to that of a head-shaking Yankee skeptic. Frost deeply resented this criticism and responded to it with a newly didactic kind of poetry. In the last twenty years of his life, Frost increased his activities as a teacher and lecturer—at Amherst, at Dartmouth, at Harvard, at the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College in Vermont, and in poetry readings and talks around the country.

The text of the poems included here is that of *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (1969).

The Pasture

I’m going out to clean the pasture spring;
 I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away
 (And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
 I shan’t be gone long.—You come too.
 I’m going out to fetch the little calf 5
 That’s standing by the mother. It’s so young
 It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
 I shan’t be gone long.—You come too.

1913

Mowing

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
 And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
 What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
 Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
 Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound— 5
 And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
 It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
 Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
 Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
 To the earnest love that laid the swale¹ in rows, 10

1. Grasses in a marshy meadow.

Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
 (Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
 The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
 My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

1913

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
 The work of hunters is another thing: 5
 I have come after them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
 No one has seen them made or heard them made, 10
 But at spring mending-time we find them there.
 I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
 And on a day we meet to walk the line
 And set the wall between us once again.
 We keep the wall between us as we go. 15
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 "Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them. 20
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
 One on a side. It comes to little more:
 There where it is we do not need the wall:
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
 My apple trees will never get across 25
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
 He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 "Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it 30
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offense.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall, 35
 That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. 40
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors." 45

1914

The Death of the Hired Man

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
 Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
 She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
 To meet him in the doorway with the news
 And put him on his guard. "Silas is back." 5
 She pushed him outward with her through the door
 And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.
 She took the market things from Warren's arms
 And set them on the porch, then drew him down
 To sit beside her on the wooden steps. 10

"When was I ever anything but kind to him?
 But I'll not have the fellow back," he said.
 "I told him so last haying, didn't I?
 If he left then, I said, that ended it.
 What good is he? Who else will harbor him 15
 At his age for the little he can do?
 What help he is there's no depending on.
 Off he goes always when I need him most.
 He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
 Enough at least to buy tobacco with, 20
 So he won't have to beg and be beholden.
 'All right,' I say, 'I can't afford to pay
 Any fixed wages, though I wish I could.'
 'Someone else can.' 'Then someone else will have to.'
 I shouldn't mind his bettering himself 25
 If that was what it was. You can be certain,
 When he begins like that, there's someone at him
 Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—
 In haying time, when any help is scarce.
 In winter he comes back to us. I'm done." 30

"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you," Mary said.

"I want him to: he'll have to soon or late."

"He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.
 When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,
 Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep, 35
 A miserable sight, and frightening, too—
 You needn't smile—I didn't recognize him—

I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed.
Wait till you see."

"Where did you say he'd been?"

40

"He didn't say. I dragged him to the house,
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.
I tried to make him talk about his travels.
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off."

"What did he say? Did he say anything?"

45

"But little."

"Anything? Mary, confess
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me."

"Warren!"

"But did he? I just want to know."

50

"Of course he did. What would you have him say?
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man
Some humble way to save his self-respect.
He added, if you really care to know,
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.
That sounds like something you have heard before?
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—
To see if he was talking in his sleep.
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—
The boy you had in haying four years since.
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.
Silas declares you'll have to get him back.
He says they two will make a team for work:
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!
The way he mixed that in with other things.
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft
On education—you know how they fought
All through July under the blazing sun,
Silas up on the cart to build the load,
Harold along beside to pitch it on."

55

60

65

70

"Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot."

"Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!
Harold's young college-boy's assurance piqued him.
After so many years he still keeps finding
Good arguments he sees he might have used."

75

I sympathize. I know just how it feels
 To think of the right thing to say too late. 80
 Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.
 He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying
 He studied Latin, like the violin,
 Because he liked it—that an argument!
 He said he couldn't make the boy believe 85
 He could find water with a hazel prong—
 Which showed how much good school had ever done him.
 He wanted to go over that. But most of all
 He thinks if he could have another chance
 To teach him how to build a load of hay—” 90

“I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.
 He bundles every forkful in its place,
 And tags and numbers it for future reference,
 So he can find and easily dislodge it
 In the unloading. Silas does that well. 95
 He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.
 You never see him standing on the hay
 He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself.”

“He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be
 Some good perhaps to someone in the world. 100
 He hates to see a boy the fool of books.
 Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
 And nothing to look backward to with pride,
 And nothing to look forward to with hope,
 So now and never any different.” 105

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
 Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
 Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it
 And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
 Among the harplike morning-glory strings, 110
 Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
 As if she played unheard some tenderness
 That wrought on him beside her in the night.
 “Warren,” she said, “he has come home to die:
 You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.” 115

“Home,” he mocked gently.

“Yes, what else but home?”

It all depends on what you mean by home.
 Of course he's nothing to us, any more
 Than was the hound that came a stranger to us 120
 Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.”

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
 They have to take you in.”

“I should have called it
Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.” 125

Warren leaned out and took a step or two,
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.
“Silas has better claim on us you think
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles 130
As the road winds would bring him to his door.
Silas has walked that far no doubt today.
Why doesn’t he go there? His brother’s rich,
A somebody—director in the bank.”

“He never told us that.” 135

“We know it though.”

“I think his brother ought to help, of course.
I’ll see to that if there is need. He ought of right
To take him in, and might be willing to—
He may be better than appearances. 140
But have some pity on Silas. Do you think
If he had any pride in claiming kin
Or anything he looked for from his brother,
He’d keep so still about him all this time?”

“I wonder what’s between them.” 145

“I can tell you.
Silas is what he is—we wouldn’t mind him—
But just the kind that kinsfolk can’t abide.
He never did a thing so very bad.
He don’t know why he isn’t quite as good 150
As anybody. Worthless though he is,
He won’t be made ashamed to please his brother.”

“I can’t think Si ever hurt anyone.”

“No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back. 155
He wouldn’t let me put him on the lounge.
You must go in and see what you can do.
I made the bed up for him there tonight.
You’ll be surprised at him—how much he’s broken.
His working days are done; I’m sure of it.” 160

“I’d not be in a hurry to say that.”

“I haven’t been. Go, look, see for yourself.
But, Warren, please remember how it is:
He’s come to help you ditch the meadow.
He has a plan. You mustn’t laugh at him. 165

He may not speak of it, and then he may.
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon."

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there, making a dim row, 170
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.
Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

"Warren?" she questioned.

"Dead," was all he answered. 175

1914

Home Burial¹

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs
Before she saw him. She was starting down,
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.
She took a doubtful step and then undid it
To raise herself and look again. He spoke 5
Advancing toward her: "What is it you see
From up there always—for I want to know."
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,
And her face changed from terrified to dull.
He said to gain time: "What is it you see," 10
Mounting until she cowered under him.
"I will find out now—you must tell me, dear."
She, in her place, refused him any help
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see, 15
Blind creature; and awhile he didn't see.
But at last he murmured, "Oh," and again, "Oh."

"What is it—what?" she said.

"Just that I see."

"You don't," she challenged. "Tell me what it is." 20

"The wonder is I didn't see at once.
I never noticed it from here before.
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.
The little graveyard where my people are!
So small the window frames the whole of it. 25
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?"

1. The title refers to the rural custom of burying family members on the home property.

There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
 Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
 On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those*.
 But I understand: it is not the stones, 30
 But the child's mound——”

“Don't, don't, don't, don't,” she cried.

She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm
 That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;
 And turned on him with such a daunting look, 35
 He said twice over before he knew himself:
 “Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?”

“Not you!—Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!
 I must get out of here. I must get air.—
 I don't know rightly whether any man can.” 40

“Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.
 Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs.”
 He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.
 “There's something I should like to ask you, dear.”

“You don't know how to ask it.” 45

“Help me, then.”

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

“My words are nearly always an offense.
 I don't know how to speak of anything
 So as to please you. But I might be taught 50
 I should suppose. I can't say I see how.
 A man must partly give up being a man
 With womenfolk. We could have some arrangement
 By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off
 Anything special you're a-mind to name. 55
 Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.
 Two that don't love can't live together without them.
 But two that do can't live together with them.”
 She moved the latch a little. “Don't—don't go.
 Don't carry it to someone else this time. 60
 Tell me about it if it's something human.
 Let me into your grief. I'm not so much
 Unlike other folks as your standing there
 Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.
 I do think, though, you overdo it a little. 65
 What was it brought you up to think it the thing
 To take your mother-loss of a first child
 So inconsolably—in the face of love.
 You'd think his memory might be satisfied——”

- “There you go sneering now!” 70
 “I’m not, I’m not!
 You make me angry. I’ll come down to you.
 God, what a woman! And it’s come to this,
 A man can’t speak of his own child that’s dead.”
- “You can’t because you don’t know how to speak. 75
 If you had any feelings, you that dug
 With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;
 I saw you from that very window there,
 Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
 Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly 80
 And roll back down the mound beside the hole.
 I thought, Who is that man? I didn’t know you.
 And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs
 To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.
 Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice 85
 Out in the kitchen, and I don’t know why,
 But I went near to see with my own eyes.
 You could sit there with the stains on your shoes
 Of the fresh earth from your own baby’s grave
 And talk about your everyday concerns. 90
 You had stood the spade up against the wall
 Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.”
- “I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.
 I’m cursed. God, if I don’t believe I’m cursed.”
- “I can repeat the very words you were saying: 95
 ‘Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
 Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.’
 Think of it, talk like that at such a time!
 What had how long it takes a birch to rot
 To do with what was in the darkened parlor? 100
 You *couldn’t* care! The nearest friends can go
 With anyone to death, comes so far short
 They might as well not try to go at all.
 No, from the time when one is sick to death,
 One is alone, and he dies more alone. 105
 Friends make pretense of following to the grave,
 But before one is in it, their minds are turned
 And making the best of their way back to life
 And living people, and things they understand.
 But the world’s evil. I won’t have grief so 110
 If I can change it. Oh, I won’t, I won’t!”
- “There, you have said it all and you feel better.
 You won’t go now. You’re crying. Close the door.
 The heart’s gone out of it: why keep it up?
 Amy! There’s someone coming down the road!” 115
- “You—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—
 Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you——”

“If—you—do!” She was opening the door wider.
 “Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.
 I’ll follow and bring you back by force. I *will!*—”

120

1914

After Apple-Picking

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree
 Toward heaven still,
 And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill
 Beside it, and there may be two or three
 Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough. 5
 But I am done with apple-picking now.
 Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
 The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
 I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
 I got from looking through a pane of glass 10
 I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
 And held against the world of hoary grass.
 It melted, and I let it fall and break.
 But I was well
 Upon my way to sleep before it fell, 15
 And I could tell
 What form my dreaming was about to take.
 Magnified apples appear and disappear,
 Stem end and blossom end,
 And every fleck of russet showing clear. 20
 My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
 It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
 I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
 And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
 The rumbling sound 25
 Of load on load of apples coming in.
 For I have had too much
 Of apple-picking: I am overtired
 Of the great harvest I myself desired.
 There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch, 30
 Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
 For all
 That struck the earth,
 No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
 Went surely to the cider-apple heap 35
 As of no worth.
 One can see what will trouble
 This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
 Were he not gone,
 The woodchuck could say whether it’s like his 40
 Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
 Or just some human sleep.

1914

The Wood-Pile

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,
 I paused and said, "I will turn back from here.
 No, I will go on farther—and we shall see."
 The hard snow held me, save where now and then
 One foot went through. The view was all in lines 5
 Straight up and down of tall slim trees
 Too much alike to mark or name a place by
 So as to say for certain I was here
 Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.
 A small bird flew before me. He was careful 10
 To put a tree between us when he lighted,
 And say no word to tell me who he was
 Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.
 He thought that I was after him for a feather—
 The white one in his tail; like one who takes 15
 Everything said as personal to himself.
 One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.
 And then there was a pile of wood for which
 I forgot him and let his little fear
 Carry him off the way I might have gone, 20
 Without so much as wishing him good-night.
 He went behind it to make his last stand.
 It was a cord of maple, cut and split
 And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.
 And not another like it could I see. 25
 No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
 And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
 Or even last year's or the year's before.
 The wood was gray and the bark warping off it
 And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis 30
 Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
 What held it, though, on one side was a tree
 Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
 These latter about to fall. I thought that only
 Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks 35
 Could so forget his handiwork on which
 He spent himself, the labor of his ax,
 And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
 To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
 With the slow smokeless burning of decay. 40

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveler, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5

Then took the other, as just as fair,
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
 Though as for that, the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same, 10

And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back. 15

I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
 I took the one less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference. 20

1916

The Oven Bird

There is a singer everyone has heard,
 Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
 Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
 He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
 Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten. 5
 He says the early petal-fall is past,
 When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
 On sunny days a moment overcast;
 And comes that other fall we name the fall.
 He says the highway dust is over all. 10
 The bird would cease and be as other birds
 But that he knows in singing not to sing.
 The question that he frames in all but words
 Is what to make of a diminished thing.

1916

Birches

When I see birches bend to left and right
 Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
 I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
 But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
 As ice storms do. Often you must have seen them 5
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
 After a rain. They click upon themselves
 As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells 10
 Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust—
 Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
 You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
 They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
 And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed 15
 So low for long, they never right themselves:
 You may see their trunks arching in the woods
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. 20
 But I was going to say when Truth broke in
 With all her matter of fact about the ice storm,
 I should prefer to have some boy bend them
 As he went out and in to fetch the cows—
 Some boy too far from town to learn baseball, 25
 Whose only play was what he found himself,
 Summer or winter, and could play alone.
 One by one he subdued his father's trees
 By riding them down over and over again
 Until he took the stiffness out of them, 30
 And not one but hung limp, not one was left
 For him to conquer. He learned all there was
 To learn about not launching out too soon
 And so not carrying the tree away
 Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise 35
 To the top branches, climbing carefully
 With the same pains you use to fill a cup
 Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
 Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
 Kicking his way down through the air to the ground. 40
 So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
 And so I dream of going back to be.
 It's when I'm weary of considerations,
 And life is too much like a pathless wood
 Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs 45
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.
 I'd like to get away from earth awhile
 And then come back to it and begin over.
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me 50

And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.
 I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk 55
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

1916

“Out, Out—”¹

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
 And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
 Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
 And from there those that lifted eyes could count 5
 Five mountain ranges one behind the other
 Under the sunset far into Vermont.
 And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
 As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
 And nothing happened: day was all but done.
 Call it a day, I wish they might have said 10
 To please the boy by giving him the half hour
 That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
 His sister stood beside them in her apron
 To tell them “Supper.” At the word, the saw,
 As if to prove saws knew what supper meant, 15
 Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
 He must have given the hand. However it was,
 Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
 The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
 As he swung toward them holding up the hand, 20
 Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
 The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
 Since he was old enough to know, big boy
 Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
 He saw all spoiled. “Don't let him cut my hand off— 25
 The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!”
 So. But the hand was gone already.
 The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
 He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
 And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright. 30
 No one believed. They listened at his heart.
 Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
 No more to build on there. And they, since they
 Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

1916

1. From Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 5.5.23–24: “Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow.”

Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,
 Some say in ice.
 From what I've tasted of desire
 I hold with those who favor fire.
 But if it had to perish twice, 5
 I think I know enough of hate
 To say that for destruction ice
 Is also great
 And would suffice.

1923

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Nature's first green is gold,
 Her hardest hue to hold.
 Her early leaf's a flower;
 But only so an hour.
 Then leaf subsides to leaf. 5
 So Eden sank to grief,
 So dawn goes down to day.
 Nothing gold can stay.

1923

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
 His house is in the village, though;
 He will not see me stopping here
 To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer 5
 To stop without a farmhouse near
 Between the woods and frozen lake
 The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake. 10
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep. 15
 And miles to go before I sleep.

1923

Desert Places

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
 In a field I looked into going past,
 And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
 But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs. 5
 All animals are smothered in their lairs.
 I am too absent-spirited to count;
 The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness 10
 Will be more lonely ere it will be less—
 A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
 With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
 Between stars—on stars where no human race is.
 I have it in me so much nearer home 15
 To scare myself with my own desert places.

1936

Design

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
 On a white heal-all,¹ holding up a moth
 Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—
 Assorted characters of death and blight
 Mixed ready to begin the morning right, 5
 Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—
 A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
 And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
 The wayside blue and innocent heal-all? 10
 What brought the kindred spider to that height,
 Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
 What but design of darkness to appal?—
 If design govern in a thing so small.

1922, 1936

1. Common wildflower whose blossom is normally violet or blue.

Neither Out Far Nor In Deep

The people along the sand
 All turn and look one way.
 They turn their back on the land.
 They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass 5
 A ship keeps raising its hull;
 The wetter ground like glass
 Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;
 But wherever the truth may be— 10
 The water comes ashore,
 And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
 They cannot look in deep.
 But when was that ever a bar 15
 To any watch they keep?

1936

Provide, Provide

The witch that came (the withered hag)
 To wash the steps with pail and rag
 Was once the beauty Abishag,¹

The picture pride of Hollywood.
 Too many fall from great and good 5
 For you to doubt the likelihood.

Die early and avoid the fate.
 Or if predestined to die late,
 Make up your mind to die in state.

Make the whole stock exchange your own! 10
 If need be occupy a throne,
 Where nobody can call *you* crone.

Some have relied on what they knew,
 Others on being simply true.
 What worked for them might work for you. 15

1. A beautiful maiden brought to comfort King David in his old age (1 Kings 1.2–4).

No memory of having starred
 Atones for later disregard
 Or keeps the end from being hard.

Better to go down dignified
 With boughten friendship at your side 20
 Than none at all. Provide, provide!

1934, 1936

The Gift Outright

The land was ours before we were the land's.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
 But we were England's, still colonials, 5
 Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
 Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
 Something we were withholding made us weak
 Until we found out that it was ourselves
 We were withholding from our land of living, 10
 And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
 Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
 (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
 To the land vaguely realizing westward,
 But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced, 15
 Such as she was, such as she would become.

1942

Directive

Back out of all this now too much for us,
 Back in a time made simple by the loss
 Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
 Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
 There is a house that is no more a house 5
 Upon a farm that is no more a farm
 And in a town that is no more a town.
 The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
 Who only has at heart your getting lost,
 May seem as if it should have been a quarry— 10
 Great monolithic knees the former town
 Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.
 And there's a story in a book about it:
 Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels

The ledges show lines ruled southeast-northwest, 15
 The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
 That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
 You must not mind a certain coolness from him
 Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
 Nor need you mind the serial ordeal 20
 Of being watched from forty cellar holes
 As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.¹
 As for the woods' excitement over you
 That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
 Charge that to upstart inexperience. 25
 Where were they all not twenty years ago?
 They think too much of having shaded out
 A few old pecker-fretted² apple trees.
 Make yourself up a cheering song of how
 Someone's road home from work this once was, 30
 Who may be just ahead of you on foot
 Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
 The height of the adventure is the height
 Of country where two village cultures faded
 Into each other. Both of them are lost. 35
 And if you're lost enough to find yourself
 By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
 And put a sign up closed to all but me.
 Then make yourself at home. The only field
 Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.³ 40
 First there's the children's house of make-believe,
 Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
 The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
 Weep for what little things could make them glad.
 Then for the house that is no more a house, 45
 But only a belilaced cellar hole,
 Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
 This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
 Your destination and your destiny's
 A brook that was the water of the house, 50
 Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
 Too lofty and original to rage.
 (We know the valley streams that when aroused
 Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
 I have kept hidden in the instep arch 55
 Of an old cedar at the waterside
 A broken drinking goblet like the Grail⁴
 Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,

1. Small wooden tubs for butter or lard.

2. Marked up with small holes by woodpeckers.

3. Sore on a horse's skin caused by the rubbing of the harness.

4. The cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper. According to legend, the Grail later disappeared

from its keepers because of their moral impurity, and various knights, including those of King Arthur's Round Table, went in quest of it. From this, the quest for the Grail has come to symbolize any spiritual search.

So can't get saved, as Saint Mark⁵ says they mustn't.
 (I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.) 60
 Here are your waters and your watering place.
 Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

1947

The Figure a Poem Makes¹

Abstraction is an old story with the philosophers, but it has been like a new toy in the hands of the artists of our day. Why can't we have any one quality of poetry we choose by itself? We can have in thought. Then it will go hard if we can't in practice. Our lives for it.

Granted no one but a humanist much cares how sound a poem is if it is only *a* sound. The sound is the gold in the ore. Then we will have the sound out alone and dispense with the inessential. We do till we make the discovery that the object in writing poetry is to make all poems sound as different as possible from each other, and the resources for that of vowels, consonants, punctuation, syntax, words, sentences, meter are not enough. We need the help of context—meaning—subject matter. That is the greatest help towards variety. All that can be done with words is soon told. So also with meters—particularly in our language where there are virtually but two, strict iambic and loose iambic. The ancients with many were still poor if they depended on meters for all tune. It is painful to watch our sprung-rhythmists² straining at the point of omitting one short from a foot for relief from monotony. The possibilities for tune from the dramatic tones of meaning struck across the rigidity of a limited meter are endless. And we are back in poetry as merely one more art of having something to say, sound or unsound. Probably better if sound, because deeper and from wider experience.

Then there is this wildness whereof it is spoken. Granted again that it has an equal claim with sound to being a poem's better half. If it is a wild tune, it is a poem. Our problem then is, as modern abstractionists, to have the wildness pure; to be wild with nothing to be wild about. We bring up as aberrationists, giving way to undirected associations and kicking ourselves from one chance suggestion to another in all directions as of a hot afternoon in the life of a grasshopper. Theme alone can steady us down. Just as the first mystery was how a poem could have a tune in such a straightness as meter, so the second mystery is how a poem can have wildness and at the same time a subject that shall be fulfilled.

It should be of the pleasure of a poem itself to tell how it can. The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky

5. A reference to Mark 4.11–12; see also Mark 16.16.

1. This essay was published as an introduction to *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (1939).

2. *Sprung rhythm* was a term invented by the

English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) for meters depending not on repeated units of syllables and accents, as in traditional verse, but on irregularities.

events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. It has denouement. It has an outcome that though unforeseen was predestined from the first image of the original mood—and indeed from the very mood. It is but a trick poem and no poem at all if the best of it was thought of first and saved for the last. It finds its own name as it goes and discovers the best waiting for it in some final phrase at once wise and sad—the happy-sad blend of the drinking song.

No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn't know I knew. I am in a place, in a situation, as if I had materialized from cloud or risen out of the ground. There is a glad recognition of the long lost and the rest follows. Step by step the wonder of unexpected supply keeps growing. The impressions most useful to my purpose seem always those I was unaware of and so made no note of at the time when taken, and the conclusion is come to that like giants we are always hurling experience ahead of us to pave the future with against the day when we may want to strike a line of purpose across it for somewhere. The line will have the more charm for not being mechanically straight. We enjoy the straight crookedness of a good walking stick. Modern instruments of precision are being used to make things crooked as if by eye and hand in the old days.

I tell how there may be a better wildness of logic than of inconsequence. But the logic is backward, in retrospect, after the act. It must be more felt than seen ahead like prophecy. It must be a revelation, or a series of revelations, as much for the poet as for the reader. For it to be that there must have been the greatest freedom of the material to move about in it and to establish relations in it regardless of time and space, previous relation, and everything but affinity. We prate of freedom. We call our schools free because we are not free to stay away from them till we are sixteen years of age. I have given up my democratic prejudices and now willingly set the lower classes free to be completely taken care of by the upper classes. Political freedom is nothing to me. I bestow it right and left. All I would keep for myself is the freedom of my material—the condition of body and mind now and then to summon aptly from the vast chaos of all I have lived through.

Scholars and artists thrown together are often annoyed at the puzzle of where they differ. Both work from knowledge; but I suspect they differ most importantly in the way their knowledge is come by. Scholars get theirs with conscientious thoroughness along projected lines of logic; poets theirs cavalierly and as it happens in and out of books. They stick to nothing deliberately, but let what will stick to them like burrs where they walk in the fields. No acquirement is on assignment, or even self-assignment. Knowledge of the second kind is much more available in the wild free ways of wit and art. A school boy may be defined as one who can tell you what he knows in the order in which he learned it. The artist must value himself as he snatches a thing from some previous order in time and space into a new order with not so much as a ligature clinging to it of the old place where it was organic.

More than once I should have lost my soul to radicalism if it had been the originality it was mistaken for by its young converts. Originality and initiative are what I ask for my country. For myself the originality need be no more than

the freshness of a poem run in the way I have described: from delight to wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting. A poem may be worked over once it is in being, but may not be worried into being. Its most precious quality will remain its having run itself and carried away the poet with it. Read it a hundred times: it will forever keep its freshness as a petal keeps its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went.

1939

SUSAN GLASPELL

1876–1948

Susan Glaspell—journalist, novelist, short-story writer, playwright, theatrical producer and director, actor—was a multitalented professional who eventually published more than fifty short stories, nine novels, and fourteen plays. Feminist rediscovery of *Trifles*, her first play—written and produced in 1916 and turned into a prize-winning short story, “A Jury of Her Peers,” in 1917—has made this her best-known work today.

Born and raised in Davenport, Iowa, Glaspell worked for a year on the Davenport *Morning Republican* after high school graduation, then attended Drake University in Des Moines from 1895 to 1899. In college she wrote for the campus newspaper as well as various Des Moines papers; after graduation she worked for two years on the Des Moines *Daily News*. In 1901 she abandoned journalism, returning to Davenport with a plan to earn her living as a fiction writer. Her early stories, combining regional midwestern settings with romantic plots, found favor with the editors of such popular magazines as *Harper's*, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the *American Magazine*, and the *Woman's Home Companion*. In 1909 she published her first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*.

In 1913 she married the recently divorced George Cram Cook, a Harvard-educated native of Davenport, who was a writer and theatrical director much interested in modernist experimentation. The two moved to the East Coast, traveled widely, and collaborated on many projects. They helped found both the Washington Square Players in 1914 and the group that came to be known as the Provincetown Players in 1916.

The Provincetown Players, named for the New England seaport town where many of the members spent their summers, aimed to foster an American theater by producing plays by American playwrights only. Eugene O'Neill became the best-known dramatist of the group; Glaspell was a close second. She not only wrote plays but also acted in them, directed them, and helped produce them. From 1916 to 1922 she wrote nine plays, including *Trifles*, for the Provincetown Players; in 1922 Cook and Glaspell withdrew from the group, finding that it had become too commercially successful to suit their experimental aims.

Cook died in 1924; a later close relationship, with the novelist and playwright Norman Matson, ended in 1932. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Glaspell, now a year-round resident of Provincetown, continued to write and publish. Her novel *Judd*

Rankin's Wife (1928) was made into a movie. She won the 1930 Pulitzer Prize for drama for *Alison's Room*, a play loosely based on the life of Emily Dickinson. Her last novel, *Judd Rankin's Daughter*, appeared in 1945, three years before she died at the age of seventy-two.

For Glaspell, the influence of such European playwrights as Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg opened the door to much grimmer writing in a play like *Trifles* than in her popular short stories, with their formulaic happy endings. Her realism—her unsparing depiction of women's narrow, thwarted, isolated, and subjugated lives in rural, regional settings—produces effects unlike the nostalgic celebrations of woman-centered societies often associated with women regionalists. The efficiently plotted *Trifles* also features a formal device found in other Glaspell works, including *Alison's Room*: the main character at its center never appears.

The text is from *Plays by Susan Glaspell* (1987).

Trifles

CHARACTERS

GEORGE HENDERSON, *County Attorney*
 HENRY PETERS, *Sheriff*
 LEWIS HALE, *a Neighboring Farmer*
 MRS PETERS
 MRS HALE

SCENE: *The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleting work. At the rear the outer door opens and the SHERIFF comes in followed by the COUNTY ATTORNEY and HALE. The SHERIFF and HALE are men in middle life, the COUNTY ATTORNEY is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the SHERIFF's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. MRS HALE is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.*

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*rubbing his hands*] This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS PETERS [*after taking a step forward*] I'm not—cold.

SHERIFF [*unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business*] Now, Mr Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF [*looking about*] It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us—no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove—and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF Oh—yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy—I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today and as long as I went over everything here myself—

COUNTY ATTORNEY Well, Mr Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, 'I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone.'¹ I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—

COUNTY ATTORNEY Let's talk about that later, Mr Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, 'Come in.' I wasn't sure. I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door—this door [*indicating the door by which the two women are still standing*] and there in that rocker—[*pointing to it*] sat Mrs Wright.

[*They all look at the rocker.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY What—was she doing?

HALE She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of—pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY And how did she—look?

HALE Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY How do you mean—queer?

HALE Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, 'How do. Mrs Wright it's cold, ain't it?' And she said, 'Is it?'—and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised: she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, 'I want to see John.' And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: 'Can't I see John?' 'No,' she says, kind o' dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. 'Yes,' says she, 'he's home.' 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience. 'Cause he's dead,' says she. 'Dead?' says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. 'Why—where is he?' says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that [*himself pointing to the room above*] I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, 'Why, what did he die of?' 'He died of a rope round his neck,' says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out

1. A single telephone line shared by several households.

and called Harry. I thought I might—need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin’—

COUNTY ATTORNEY I think I’d rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked . . . [*stops, his face twitches*] . . . but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, ‘No, he’s dead all right, and we’d better not touch anything.’ So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. ‘Has anybody been notified?’ I asked. ‘No,’ says she unconcerned. ‘Who did this, Mrs Wright?’ said Harry. He said it business-like—and she stopped pleatin’ of her apron. ‘I don’t know,’ she says. ‘You don’t *know*?’ says Harry. ‘No,’ says she. ‘Weren’t you sleepin’ in the bed with him?’ says Harry. ‘Yes,’ says she, ‘but I was on the inside.’ ‘Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn’t wake up?’ says Harry. ‘I didn’t wake up,’ she said after him. We must ‘a looked as if we didn’t see how that could be, for after a minute she said, ‘I sleep sound.’ Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers’ place, where there’s a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY And what did Mrs Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE She moved from that chair to this one over here [*pointing to a small chair in the corner*] and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me—scared. [*the COUNTY ATTORNEY, who has had his notebook out, makes a note*] I dunno, maybe it wasn’t scared. I wouldn’t like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr Lloyd came, and you, Mr Peters, and so I guess that’s all I know that you don’t.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*looking around*] I guess we’ll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there. [*to the SHERIFF*] You’re convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF Nothing here but kitchen things.

[*The COUNTY ATTORNEY, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY Here’s a nice mess.

[*The women draw nearer.*]

MRS PETERS [*to the other woman*] Oh, her fruit: it did freeze. [*to the LAWYER*] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire’d go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin’ about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY I guess before we’re through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[*The two women move a little closer together.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*with the gallantry of a young politician*] And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? [*the women do not*

unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place] Dirty towels! [*kicks his foot against the pans under the sink*] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS HALE [*stiffly*] There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY To be sure. And yet [*with a little bow to her*] I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels.

[*He gives it a pull to expose its length again.*]

MRS HALE Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Ah, loyal to your sex. I see. But you and Mrs Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS HALE [*shaking her head*] I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house—it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS HALE I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr Henderson. And then—

COUNTY ATTORNEY Yes—?

MRS HALE [*looking about*] It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY No—it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS HALE Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS HALE No. I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now.

[*He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.*]

SHERIFF I suppose anything Mrs Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS PETERS Yes, Mr Henderson.

[*The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.*]

MRS HALE I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticising.

[*She arranges the pans under sink which the lawyer had shoved out of place.*]

MRS PETERS Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS HALE Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. [*gives the roller towel a pull*] Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS PETERS [*who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan*] She had bread set.
[*Stands still.*]

MRS HALE [*eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it*] She was going to put this in there. [*picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things*] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [*gets up on the chair and looks*] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs Peters. Yes—here; [*holding it toward the window*] this is cherries, too. [*looking again*] I declare I believe that's the only one. [*gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside*] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

[*She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.*]

MRS PETERS Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. [*she goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back*] You coming with me, Mrs Hale? You could help me carry them.

[*They go in the other room; reappear, MRS PETERS carrying a dress and skirt, MRS HALE following with a pair of shoes.*]

MRS PETERS My, it's cold in there.

[*She puts the clothes on the big table and hurries to the stove.*]

MRS HALE [*examining the skirt*] Wright was close.² I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS PETERS She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. [*opens stair door and looks*] Yes, here it is.

[*Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.*]

MRS HALE [*abruptly moving toward her*] Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE Do you think she did it?

MRS PETERS [*in a frightened voice*] Oh, I don't know.

MRS HALE Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS PETERS [*starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice*] Mr Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS HALE Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS PETERS No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a—funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

2. Miserly.

MRS HALE That's just what Mr Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS PETERS Mr Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or—sudden feeling.

MRS HALE [*who is standing by the table*] Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here. [*she puts her hand on the dish-towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy*] It's wiped to here. [*makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the bread-box. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.*] Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up³ up there. You know, it seems kind of *sneaking*. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS PETERS But Mrs Hale, the law is the law.

MRS HALE I s'pose 'tis. [*unbuttoning her coat*] Better loosen up your things, Mrs Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

[*MRS PETERS takes off her fur tippet,⁴ goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.*]

MRS PETERS She was piecing a quilt.

[*She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.*]

MRS HALE It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

[*Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The SHERIFF enters followed by HALE and the COUNTY ATTORNEY.*]

SHERIFF They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!

[*The men laugh, the women look abashed.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*rubbing his hands over the stove*] Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up.

[*The men go outside.*]

MRS HALE [*resentfully*] I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. [*she sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision*] I don't see as it's anything to laugh about.

MRS PETERS [*apologetically*] Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

[*Pulls up a chair and joins MRS HALE at the table.*]

MRS HALE [*examining another block*] Mrs Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

[*After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant MRS HALE has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.*]

MRS PETERS Oh, what are you doing, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE [*mildly*] Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [*threading a needle*] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS PETERS [*nervously*] I don't think we ought to touch things.

3. Tidy.

4. Short cape, falling just below the shoulders.

MRS HALE I'll just finish up this end. [*suddenly stopping and leaning forward*] Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS PETERS Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. [MRS HALE *starts to say something, looks at MRS PETERS, then goes on sewing*] Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. [*putting apron and other things together*] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS HALE In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS PETERS [*looking in cupboard*] Why, here's a bird-cage. [*holds it up*] Did she have a bird, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE Why, I don't know whether she did or not—I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS PETERS [*glancing around*] Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

MRS HALE I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS PETERS No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats—being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS HALE My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS PETERS [*examining the cage*] Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS HALE [*looking too*] Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS PETERS Why, yes.

[*She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.*]

MRS HALE I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS PETERS But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS HALE It would, wouldn't it? [*dropping her sewing*] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when *she* was here. I—[*looking around the room*—]wish I had.

MRS PETERS But of course you were awful busy. Mrs Hale—your house and your children.

MRS HALE I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—[*shakes her head*]

MRS PETERS Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up.

MRS HALE Not having children makes less work—but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS HALE Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him—[*shivers*] Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. [*pauses, her eye falling on the cage*] I should think she would a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS PETERS I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[*She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it.*]

MRS HALE You weren't raised round here, were you? [MRS PETERS *shakes her head*] You didn't know—her?

MRS PETERS Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS HALE She—come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery. How—she—did—change. [*silence: then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things*] Tell you what, Mrs Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS PETERS Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here—and her things.

[*They look in the sewing basket.*]

MRS HALE Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. [*brings out a fancy box*] What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. [*Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose*] Why—[MRS PETERS *bends nearer, then turns her face away*] There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS PETERS Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS HALE [*lifting the silk*] Oh, Mrs Peters—it's—

[MRS PETERS *bends closer.*]

MRS PETERS It's the bird.

MRS HALE [*jumping up*] But, Mrs Peters—look at it! It's neck! Look at its neck! It's all—other side to.

MRS PETERS Somebody—wrung—its—neck.

[*Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside. MRS HALE slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter SHERIFF and COUNTY ATTORNEY. MRS PETERS rises.*]

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries*]

Well ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS PETERS We think she was going to—knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. [*seeing the bird-cage*]

Has the bird flown?

MRS HALE [*putting more quilt pieces over the box*] We think the—cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*preoccupied*] Is there a cat?

[MRS HALE *glances in a quick covert way at MRS PETERS.*]

MRS PETERS Well, not *now*. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY [*to SHERIFF PETERS, continuing an interrupted conversation*] No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own

rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. [*they start upstairs*] It would have to have been someone who knew just the—

[MRS PETERS *sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.*]

MRS HALE She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS PETERS [*in a whisper*] When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—[*covers her face an instant*] If they hadn't held me back I would have—[*catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*]—hurt him.

MRS HALE [*with a slow look around her*] I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. [*pause*] No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS PETERS [*moving uneasily*] We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS HALE I knew John Wright.

MRS PETERS It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS HALE His neck. Choked the life out of him.

[*Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.*]

MRS PETERS [*with rising voice*] We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

MRS HALE [*her own feeling not interrupted*] If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.

MRS PETERS [*something within her speaking*] I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—

MRS HALE [*moving*] How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

MRS PETERS I know what stillness is. [*pulling herself back*] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs Hale.

MRS HALE [*not as if answering that*] I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [*a look around the room*] Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS PETERS [*looking upstairs*] We mustn't—take on.

MRS HALE I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer. Mrs Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing. [*brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it*] If I was you, I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it *ain't*. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She—she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS PETERS [*takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice*] My, it's a good

thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with—with—wouldn't they *laugh!*

[The men are heard coming down stairs.]

MRS HALE *[under her breath]* Maybe they would—maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—

[The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter HALE from outer door.]

HALE Well. I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY I'm going to stay here a while by myself. *[to the SHERIFF]* You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF Do you want to see what Mrs Peters is going to take in?

[The LAWYER goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. *[Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back]* No, Mrs Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS Not—just that way.

SHERIFF *[chuckling]* Married to the law. *[moves toward the other room]* I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY *[scoffingly]* Oh, windows!

SHERIFF We'll be right out, Mr Hale.

[HALE goes outside. The SHERIFF follows the COUNTY ATTORNEY into the other room. Then MRS HALE rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at MRS PETERS, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting MRS HALE'S. A moment MRS HALE holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly MRS PETERS throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. MRS HALE snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter COUNTY ATTORNEY and SHERIFF.]

COUNTY ATTORNEY *[facetiously]* Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS HALE *[her hand against her pocket]* We call it—knot it, Mr Henderson.

CURTAIN

SHERWOOD ANDERSON

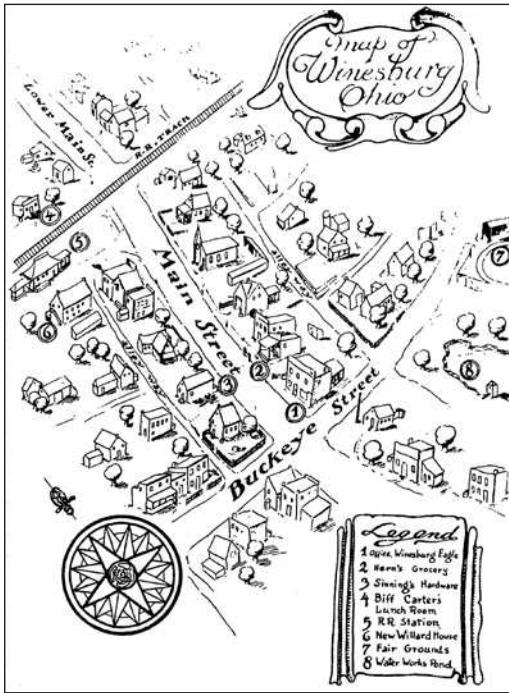
1876–1941

Sherwood Anderson was approaching middle age when he abandoned a successful business career to become a writer. Living in Chicago, New Orleans, and Paris, meeting literary people, he worked furiously to make up for his late start, producing novels, short stories, essays, and an autobiography. His short fiction provided a model for younger writers, whose careers he encouraged by literary advice and by practical help in getting published as well. *Winesburg, Ohio*, which appeared in 1919 when he was forty-three years old, remains a major work of experimental fiction and was in its time a bold treatment of small-town life in the American Midwest in the tradition of Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*.

Anderson was born in southern Ohio, the third of seven children in a family headed by a father whose training and skill as a harness maker were becoming useless in the new world of the automobile. Anderson's father kept his family on the move in search of work; the stamina and tenderness of his mother supplied coherence and security in this nomadic life. Not until 1892, when Anderson was sixteen, did they settle down in the town of Clyde, Ohio, which became the model for Winesburg. Anderson never finished high school. He held a variety of jobs, living in Chicago with an older brother in 1896 and again in 1900 when he worked as an advertising copywriter.

His first wife came from a successful Ohio business family; the couple settled in Ohio where Anderson managed a mail-order house as well as two paint firms. But he found increasingly that the need to write conflicted with his career. In 1912 he left his business and his marriage, returning to Chicago, where he met the writers and artists whose activities were creating the Chicago Renaissance. These included the novelists Floyd Dell and Theodore Dreiser; the poets Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, and Carl Sandburg; and the editors Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* and Margaret C. Anderson of the *Little Review*. His first major publication was *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916), the story of a man who runs away from a small Iowa town in futile search for life's meaning; his second was *Marching Men* (1917), about a charismatic lawyer who tries—unsuccessfully—to reorganize the factory system in a small town. These books reveal three of Anderson's preoccupations: the individual quest for self and social betterment, the small-town environment, and the distrust of modern industrial society. Missing, however, is the interest in human psychology and the sense of conflict between inner and outer worlds that appear in *Winesburg* and later works.

In 1916 Anderson began writing and publishing the tales that were brought together in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The formal achievement of the book lay in its articulation of individual tales to a loose but coherent structure. The lives of a number of people living in the town of Winesburg are observed by the naïve adolescent George Willard, a reporter for the local newspaper. Their stories contribute to his understanding of life and to his preparation for a career as a writer. The book ends when his mother dies and he leaves Winesburg. With the help of the narrator, whose vision is larger than George's, the reader can see how the lives of the characters have been profoundly distorted by the frustration and suppression of so many of their desires. Anderson calls these characters "grotesques," but the intention of *Winesburg, Ohio* is to show that life in all American small towns is grotesque in the same way. Anderson's attitude toward the characters mixes compassion for the individual with dismay at a social order that can do so much damage. His criticism is



Winesburg, Ohio, Harald Toksvig, 1919. Toksvig's map was printed in the first edition of *Winesburg, Ohio*.

decided push toward stories presenting a slice of life or a significant moment as opposed to panorama and summary.

Winesburg, Ohio appeared near the beginning of Anderson's literary career, and although he continued writing for two decades, he never repeated its success. His best later work was in short stories, published in three volumes: *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), *Horses and Men* (1923), and *Death in the Woods and Other Stories* (1933). He also wrote a number of novels, including *Poor White* (1920), *Many Marriages* (1923), *Beyond Desire* (1932), and *Kit Brandon* (1936), as well as free verse, prose poems, plays, and essays. A series of autobiographical volumes advertised his career, attempted to define the writer's vocation in America, and discussed his impact on other writers. The more he claimed, however, the less other writers were willing to allow him; both Hemingway and Faulkner, for example, whom he had met in Chicago and New Orleans, respectively, satirized his cult of the simple and thereby disavowed his influence. (In fact, he *had* stimulated and helped both of them—stimulated Hemingway in his quest for stylistic simplicity, Faulkner in his search for the proper subject matter.) During the 1930s Anderson, along with many other writers, was active in liberal causes, and he died at sea on the way to South America while on a goodwill mission for the State Department.

The text is that of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).

not specifically political, however; he is measuring society by a utopian standard of free emotional and sensual expression.

Stylistically Anderson strove for the simplest possible prose, using brief or at least uncomplex sentences and an unsophisticated vocabulary appropriate to the muffled awareness and limited resources of his typical characters. Structurally, his stories build toward a moment when the character breaks out in some frenzied gesture of release that is revelatory of a hidden inner life. In both style and structure Anderson's works were important influences on other writers: he encouraged simplicity and directness of style, made attractive the use of the point of view of outsider characters as a way of criticizing conventional society, and gave the craft of the short story a

FROM WINESBURG, OHIO

Hands

Upon the half decayed veranda of a small frame house that stood near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg, Ohio, a fat little old man walked nervously up and down. Across a long field that had been seeded for clover but that had produced only a dense crop of yellow mustard weeds, he could see the public highway along which went a wagon filled with berry pickers returning from the fields. The berry pickers, youths and maidens, laughed and shouted boisterously. A boy clad in a blue shirt leaped from the wagon and attempted to drag after him one of the maidens who screamed and protested shrilly. The feet of the boy in the road kicked up a cloud of dust that floated across the face of the departing sun. Over the long field came a thin girlish voice. "Oh, you Wing Biddlebaum, comb your hair, it's falling into your eyes," commanded the voice to the man, who was bald and whose nervous little hands fiddled about the bare white forehead as though arranging a mass of tangled locks.

Wing Biddlebaum, forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years. Among all the people of Winesburg but one had come close to him. With George Willard, son of Tom Willard, the proprietor of the new Willard House, he had formed something like a friendship. George Willard was the reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle* and sometimes in the evenings he walked out along the highway to Wing Biddlebaum's house. Now as the old man walked up and down on the veranda, his hands moving nervously about, he was hoping that George Willard would come and spend the evening with him. After the wagon containing the berry pickers had passed, he went across the field through the tall mustard weeds and climbing a rail fence peered anxiously along the road to the town. For a moment he stood thus, rubbing his hands together and looking up and down the road, and then, fear overcoming him, ran back to walk again upon the porch on his own house.

In the presence of George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum, who for twenty years had been the town mystery, lost something of his timidity, and his shadowy personality, submerged in a sea of doubts, came forth to look at the world. With the young reporter at his side, he ventured in the light of day into Main Street or strode up and down on the rickety front porch of his own house, talking excitedly. The voice that had been low and trembling became shrill and loud. The bent figure straightened. With a kind of wriggle, like a fish returned to the brook by the fisherman, Biddlebaum the silent began to talk, striving to put into words the ideas that had been accumulated by his mind during long years of silence.

Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his

name. Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it. The hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, or passed, driving sleepy teams on country roads.

When he talked to George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum closed his fists and beat with them upon a table or on the walls of his house. The action made him more comfortable. If the desire to talk came to him when the two were walking in the fields, he sought out a stump or the top board of a fence and with his hands pounding busily talked with renewed ease.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum's hands is worth a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men. It is a job for a poet. In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day. They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality. Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland.

As for George Willard, he had many times wanted to ask about the hands. At times an almost overwhelming curiosity had taken hold of him. He felt that there must be a reason for their strange activity and their inclination to keep hidden away and only a growing respect for Wing Biddlebaum kept him from blurting out the questions that were often in his mind.

Once he had been on the point of asking. The two were walking in the fields on a summer afternoon and had stopped to sit upon a grassy bank. All afternoon Wing Biddlebaum had talked as one inspired. By a fence he had stopped and beating like a giant woodpecker upon the top board had shouted at George Willard, condemning his tendency to be too much influenced by the people about him. "You are destroying yourself," he cried. "You have the inclination to be alone and to dream and you are afraid of dreams. You want to be like others in town here. You hear them talk and you try to imitate them."

On the grassy bank Wing Biddlebaum had tried again to drive his point home. His voice became soft and reminiscent, and with a sigh of contentment he launched into a long rambling talk, speaking as one lost in a dream.

Out of the dream Wing Biddlebaum made a picture for George Willard. In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them.¹

Wing Biddlebaum became wholly inspired. For once he forgot the hands. Slowly they stole forth and lay upon George Willard's shoulders. Something new and bold came into the voice that talked. "You must try to forget all you have learned," said the old man. "You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices."

1. Biddlebaum's picture invokes ideals of the Greek Golden Age generally, and more particularly the image of the Athenian philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E) teaching young Greek aristocrats.

Pausing in his speech, Wing Biddlebaum looked long and earnestly at George Willard. His eyes glowed. Again he raised the hands to caress the boy and then a look of horror swept over his face.

With a convulsive movement of his body, Wing Biddlebaum sprang to his feet and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. Tears came to his eyes. "I must be getting along home. I can talk no more with you," he said nervously.

Without looking back, the old man had hurried down the hillside and across a meadow, leaving George Willard perplexed and frightened upon the grassy slope. With a shiver of dread the boy arose and went along the road toward town. "I'll not ask him about his hands," he thought, touched by the memory of the terror he had seen in the man's eyes. "There's something wrong, but I don't want to know what it is. His hands have something to do with his fear of me and of everyone."

And George Willard was right. Let us look briefly into the story of the hands. Perhaps our talking of them will arouse the poet who will tell the hidden wonder story of the influence for which the hands were but fluttering pennants of promise.

In his youth Wing Biddlebaum had been a school teacher in a town in Pennsylvania. He was not then known as Wing Biddlebaum, but went by the less euphonic name of Adolph Myers.² As Adolph Myers he was much loved by the boys of his school.

Adolph Myers was meant by nature to be a teacher of youth. He was one of those rare, little-understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness. In their feeling for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men.

And yet that is but crudely stated. It needs the poet there. With the boys of his school, Adolph Myers had walked in the evening or had sat talking until dusk upon the schoolhouse steps lost in a kind of dream. Here and there went his hands, caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the tousled heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also. In a way the voice and the hands, the stroking of the shoulders and the touching of the hair was a part of the schoolmaster's effort to carry a dream into the young minds. By the caress that was in his fingers he expressed himself. He was one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized. Under the caress of his hands doubt and disbelief went out of the minds of the boy and they began also to dream.

And then the tragedy. A half-witted boy of the school became enamored of the young master. In his bed at night he imagined unspeakable things and in the morning went forth to tell his dreams as facts. Strange, hideous accusations fell from his loose-hung lips. Through the Pennsylvania town went a shiver. Hidden, shadowy doubts that had been in men's minds concerning Adolph Myers were galvanized into beliefs.

The tragedy did not linger. Trembling lads were jerked out of bed and questioned. "He put his arms about me," said one. "His fingers were always playing in my hair," said another.

2. Both his adopted surname and his original one underline Biddlebaum's foreignness by labeling him as German and, probably, Jewish.

One afternoon a man of the town, Henry Bradford, who kept a saloon, came to the schoolhouse door. Calling Adolph Myers into the school yard he began to beat him with his fists. As his hard knuckles beat down into the frightened face of the schoolmaster, his wrath became more and more terrible. Screaming with dismay, the children ran here and there like disturbed insects "I'll teach you to put your hands on my boy, you beast," roared the saloon keeper, who, tired of beating the master, had begun to kick him about the yard.

Adolph Myers was driven from the Pennsylvania town in the night. With lanterns in their hands a dozen men came to the door of the house where he lived alone and commanded that he dress and come forth. It was raining and one of the men had a rope in his hands. They had intended to hang the schoolmaster, but something in his figure, so small, white, and pitiful, touched their hearts and they let him escape. As he ran away into the darkness they repented of their weakness and ran after him, swearing and throwing sticks and great balls of soft mud at the figure that screamed and ran faster and faster into the darkness.

For twenty years Adolph Myers had lived alone in Winesburg. He was but forty but looked sixty-five. The name of Biddlebaum he got from a box of goods seen at a freight station as he hurried through an eastern Ohio town. He had an aunt in Winesburg, a black-toothed old woman who raised chickens, and with her he lived until she died. He had been ill for a year after the experience in Pennsylvania, and after his recovery worked as a day laborer in the fields, going timidly about and striving to conceal his hands. Although he did not understand what had happened he felt that the hands must be to blame. Again and again the fathers of the boys had talked of the hands. "Keep your hands to yourself," the saloon keeper had roared, dancing with fury in the schoolhouse yard.

Upon the veranda of his house by the ravine, Wing Biddlebaum continued to walk up and down until the sun had disappeared and the road beyond the field was lost in the grey shadows. Going into his house he cut slices of bread and spread honey upon them. When the rumble of the evening train that took away the express cars loaded with the day's harvest of berries had passed and restored the silence of the summer night, he went again to walk upon the veranda. In the darkness he could not see the hands and they became quiet. Although he still hungered for the presence of the boy, who was the medium through which he expressed his love of man, the hunger became again a part of his loneliness and his waiting. Lighting a lamp, Wing Biddlebaum washed the few dishes soiled by his simple meal and, setting up a folding cot by the screen door that led to the porch, prepared to undress for the night. A few stray white bread crumbs lay on the cleanly washed floor by the table; putting the lamp upon a low stool he began to pick up the crumbs, carrying them to his mouth one by one with unbelievable rapidity. In the dense blotch of light beneath the table, the kneeling figure looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church. The nervous expressive fingers, flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary.³

3. String of beads used by Roman Catholics to keep track of prayers, divided into sections ("decades") of ten beads.

Mother

Elizabeth Willard, the mother of George Willard, was tall and gaunt and her face was marked with smallpox scars. Although she was but forty-five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure. Listlessly she went about the disorderly old hotel looking at the faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets and, when she was able to be about, doing the work of a chambermaid among beds soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men. Her husband, Tom Willard, a slender, graceful man with square shoulders, a quick military step, and a black mustache, trained to turn sharply up at the ends, tried to put the wife out of his mind. The presence of the tall ghostly figure, moving slowly through the halls, he took as a reproach to himself. When he thought of her he grew angry and swore. The hotel was unprofitable and forever on the edge of failure and he wished himself out of it. He thought of the old house and the woman who lived there with him as things defeated and done for. The hotel in which he had begun life so hopefully was now a mere ghost of what a hotel should be. As he went spruce and businesslike through the streets of Winesburg, he sometimes stopped and turned quickly about as though fearing that the spirit of the hotel and of the woman would follow him even into the streets. "Damn such a life, damn it!" he sputtered aimlessly.

Tom Willard had a passion for village politics and for years had been the leading Democrat in a strongly Republican community. Some day, he told himself, the tide of things political will turn in my favor and the years of ineffectual service count big in the bestowal of rewards. He dreamed of going to Congress and even of becoming governor. Once when a younger member of the party arose at a political conference and began to boast of his faithful service, Tom Willard grew white with fury. "Shut up, you," he roared, glaring about. "What do you know of service? What are you but a boy? Look at what I've done here! I was a Democrat here in Winesburg when it was a crime to be a Democrat. In the old days they fairly hunted us with guns."

Between Elizabeth and her one son George there was a deep unexpressed bond of sympathy, based on a girlhood dream that had long ago died. In the son's presence she was timid and reserved, but sometimes while he hurried about town intent upon his duties as a reporter, she went into his room and closing the door knelt by a little desk, made of a kitchen table, that sat near a window. In the room by the desk she went through a ceremony that was half a prayer, half a demand, addressed to the skies. In the boyish figure she yearned to see something half forgotten that had once been a part of herself recreated. The prayer concerned that. "Even though I die, I will in some way keep defeat from you," she cried, and so deep was her determination that her whole body shook. Her eyes glowed and she clenched her fists. "If I am dead and see him becoming a meaningless drab figure like myself, I will come back," she declared. "I ask God now to give me that privilege. I demand it. I will pay for it. God may beat me with his fists. I will take any blow that may befall if but this my boy be allowed to express something for us both." Pausing uncertainly, the woman stared about the boy's room. "And do not let him become smart and successful either," she added vaguely.

The communion between George Willard and his mother was outwardly a formal thing without meaning. When she was ill and sat by the window in her room he sometimes went in the evening to make her a visit. They sat by a window that looked over the roof of a small frame building into Main Street. By turning their heads they could see, through another window, along an alleyway that ran behind the Main Street stores and into the back door of Abner Groff's bakery. Sometimes as they sat thus a picture of village life presented itself to them. At the back door of his shop appeared Abner Groff with a stick or an empty milk bottle in his hand. For a long time there was a feud between the baker and a grey cat that belonged to Sylvester West, the druggist. The boy and his mother saw the cat creep into the door of the bakery and presently emerge followed by the baker who swore and waved his arms about. The baker's eyes were small and red and his black hair and beard were filled with flour dust. Sometimes he was so angry that, although the cat had disappeared, he hurled sticks, bits of broken glass, and even some of the tools of his trade about. Once he broke a window at the back of Sinning's Hardware Store. In the alley the grey cat crouched behind barrels filled with torn paper and broken bottles above which flew a black swarm of flies. Once when she was alone, and after watching a prolonged and ineffectual outburst on the part of the baker, Elizabeth Willard put her head down on her long white hands and wept. After that she did not look along the alleyway any more, but tried to forget the contest between the bearded man and the cat. It seemed like a rehearsal of her own life, terrible in its vividness.

In the evening when the son sat in the room with his mother, the silence made them both feel awkward. Darkness came on and the evening train came in at the station. In the street below feet tramped up and down upon a board sidewalk. In the station yard, after the evening train had gone, there was a heavy silence. Perhaps Skinner Leason, the express agent, moved a truck the length of the station platform. Over on Main Street sounded a man's voice, laughing. The door of the express office banged. George Willard arose and crossing the room fumbled for the doorknob. Sometimes he knocked against a chair, making it scrape along the floor. By the window sat the sick woman, perfectly still, listless. Her long hands, white and bloodless, could be seen drooping over the ends of the arms of the chair. "I think you had better be out among the boys. You are too much indoors," she said, striving to relieve the embarrassment of the departure. "I thought I would take a walk," replied George Willard, who felt awkward and confused.

One evening in July, when the transient guests who made the New Willard House their temporary homes had become scarce, and the hallways, lighted only by kerosene lamps turned low, were plunged in gloom, Elizabeth Willard had an adventure. She had been ill in bed for several days and her son had not come to visit her. She was alarmed. The feeble blaze of life that remained in her body was blown into a flame by her anxiety and she crept out of bed, dressed and hurried along the hallway toward her son's room, shaking with exaggerated fears. As she went along she steadied herself with her hand, slipped along the papered walls of the hall and breathed with difficulty. The air whistled through her teeth. As she hurried forward she thought how foolish she was. "He is concerned with boyish affairs," she told herself. "Perhaps he has now begun to walk about in the evening with girls."

Elizabeth Willard had a dread of being seen by guests in the hotel that had once belonged to her father and the ownership of which still stood recorded in her name in the county courthouse. The hotel was continually losing patronage because of its shabbiness and she thought of herself as also shabby. Her own room was in an obscure corner and when she felt able to work she voluntarily worked among the beds, preferring the labor that could be done when the guests were abroad seeking trade among the merchants of Winesburg.

By the door of her son's room the mother knelt upon the floor and listened for some sound from within. When she heard the boy moving about and talking in low tones a smile came to her lips. George Willard had a habit of talking aloud to himself and to hear him doing so had always given his mother a peculiar pleasure. The habit in him, she felt, strengthened the secret bond that existed between them. A thousand times she had whispered to herself of the matter. "He is groping about, trying to find himself," she thought. "He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself."

In the darkness in the hallway by the door the sick woman arose and started again toward her own room. She was afraid that the door would open and the boy come upon her. When she had reached a safe distance and was about to turn a corner into a second hallway she stopped and bracing herself with her hands waited, thinking to shake off a trembling fit of weakness that had come upon her. The presence of the boy in the room had made her happy. In her bed, during the long hours alone, the little fears that had visited her had become giants. Now they were all gone. "When I get back to my room I shall sleep," she murmured gratefully.

But Elizabeth Willard was not to return to her bed and to sleep. As she stood trembling in the darkness the door of her son's room opened and the boy's father, Tom Willard, stepped out. In the light that streamed out at the door he stood with the knob in his hand and talked. What he said infuriated the woman.

Tom Willard was ambitious for his son. He had always thought of himself as a successful man, although nothing he had ever done had turned out successfully. However, when he was out of sight of the New Willard House and had no fear of coming upon his wife, he swaggered and began to dramatize himself as one of the chief men of the town. He wanted his son to succeed. He it was who had secured for the boy the position on the *Winesburg Eagle*. Now, with a ring of earnestness in his voice, he was advising concerning some course of conduct. "I tell you what, George, you've got to wake up," he said sharply. "Will Henderson has spoken to me three times concerning the matter. He says you go along for hours not hearing when you are spoken to and acting like a gawky girl. What ails you?" Tom Willard laughed good-naturedly. "Well, I guess you'll get over it," he said. "I told Will that. You're not a fool and you're not a woman. You're Tom Willard's son and you'll wake up. I'm not afraid. What you say clears things up. If being a newspaper man had put the notion of becoming a writer into your mind that's all right. Only I guess you'll have to wake up to do that too, eh?"

Tom Willard went briskly along the hallway and down a flight of stairs to the office. The woman in the darkness could hear him laughing and talking with a guest who was striving to wear away a dull evening by dozing in a chair by the office door. She returned to the door of her son's room. The weakness had passed from her body as by a miracle and she stepped boldly along. A thousand ideas raced through her head. When she heard the scraping of a chair and the sound of a pen scratching upon paper, she again turned and went back along the hallway to her own room.

A definite determination had come into the mind of the defeated wife of the Winesburg Hotel keeper. The determination was the result of long years of quiet and rather ineffectual thinking. "Now," she told herself, "I will act. There is something threatening my boy and I will ward it off." The fact that the conversation between Tom Willard and his son had been rather quiet and natural, as though an understanding existed between them, maddened her. Although for years she had hated her husband, her hatred had always before been a quite impersonal thing. He had been merely a part of something else that she hated. Now, and by the few words at the door, he had become the thing personified. In the darkness of her own room she clenched her fists and glared about. Going to a cloth bag that hung on a nail by the wall she took out a long pair of sewing scissors and held them in her hand like a dagger. "I will stab him," she said aloud. "He has chosen to be the voice of evil and I will kill him. When I have killed him something will snap within myself and I will die also. It will be a release for all of us."

In her girlhood and before her marriage with Tom Willard, Elizabeth had borne a somewhat shaky reputation in Winesburg. For years she had been what is called "stage-struck" and had paraded through the streets with traveling men guests at her father's hotel, wearing loud clothes and urging them to tell her of life in the cities out of which they had come. Once she startled the town by putting on men's clothes and riding a bicycle down Main Street.

In her own mind the tall girl had been in those days much confused. A great restlessness was in her and it expressed itself in two ways. First there was an uneasy desire for change, for some big definite movement to her life. It was this feeling that had turned her mind to the stage. She dreamed of joining some company and wandering over the world, seeing always new faces and giving something out of herself to all people. Sometimes at night she was quite beside herself with the thought, but when she tried to talk of the matter to the members of the theatrical companies that came to Winesburg and stopped at her father's hotel, she got nowhere. They did not seem to know what she meant, or if she did get something of her passion expressed, they only laughed. "It's not like that," they said. "It's as dull and uninteresting as this here. Nothing comes of it."

With the traveling men when she walked about with them, and later with Tom Willard, it was quite different. Always they seemed to understand and sympathize with her. On the side streets of the village, in the darkness under the trees, they took hold of her hand and she thought that something unexpressed in herself came forth and became a part of an unexpressed something in them.

And then there was the second expression of her restlessness. When that came she felt for a time released and happy. She did not blame the men who walked with her and later she did not blame Tom Willard. It was always the same, beginning with kisses and ending, after strange wild emotions, with peace and then sobbing repentance. When she sobbed she put her hand upon the face of the man and had always the same thought. Even though he were large and bearded she thought he had become suddenly a little boy. She wondered why he did not sob also.

In her room, tucked away in a corner of the old Willard House, Elizabeth Willard lighted a lamp and put it on a dressing table that stood by the door. A thought had come into her mind and she went to a closet and brought out a small square box and set it on the table. The box contained material for make-up and had been left with other things by a theatrical company that had once been stranded in Winesburg. Elizabeth Willard had decided that she would be beautiful. Her hair was still black and there was a great mass of it braided and coiled about her head. The scene that was to take place in the office below began to grow in her mind. No ghostly worn-out figure should confront Tom Willard, but something quite unexpected and startling. Tall and with dusky cheeks and hair that fell in a mass from her shoulders, a figure should come striding down the stairway before the startled loungers in the hotel office. The figure would be silent—it would be swift and terrible. As a tigress whose cub had been threatened would she appear, coming out of the shadows, stealing noiselessly along and holding the long wicked scissors in her hand.

With a little broken sob in her throat Elizabeth Willard blew out the light that stood upon the table and stood weak and trembling in the darkness. The strength that had been a miracle in her body left and she half reeled across the floor, clutching at the back of the chair in which she had spent so many long days staring out over the tin roofs into the main street of Winesburg. In the hallway there was the sound of footsteps and George Willard came in at the door. Sitting in a chair beside his mother he began to talk. "I'm going to get out of here," he said. "I don't know where I shall go or what I shall do but I am going away."

The woman in the chair waited and trembled. An impulse came to her. "I suppose you had better wake up," she said. "You think that? You will go to the city and make money, eh? It will be better for you, you think, to be a business man, to be brisk and smart and alive?" She waited and trembled.

The son shook his head. "I suppose I can't make you understand, but oh, I wish I could," he said earnestly. "I can't even talk to father about it. I don't try. There isn't any use. I don't know what I shall do. I just want to go away and look at people and think."

Silence fell upon the room where the boy and woman sat together. Again, as on the other evenings, they were embarrassed. After a time the boy tried again to talk. "I suppose it won't be for a year or two but I've been thinking about it," he said, rising and going toward the door. "Something father said makes it sure that I shall have to go away." He fumbled with the door knob. In the room the silence became unbearable to the woman. She wanted to cry out with joy because of the words that had come from the lips of her son, but the expression of joy had become impossible to her. "I think you had better go out among the boys. You are too much indoors," she said. "I

thought I would go for a little walk," replied the son stepping awkwardly out of the room and closing the door.

Adventure

Alice Hindman, a woman of twenty-seven when George Willard was a mere boy, had lived in Winesburg all her life. She clerked in Winney's Dry Goods Store and lived with her mother, who had married a second husband.

Alice's step-father was a carriage painter, and given to drink. His story is an odd one. It will be worth telling some day.

At twenty-seven Alice was tall and somewhat slight. Her head was large and overshadowed her body. Her shoulders were a little stooped and her hair and eyes brown. She was very quiet but beneath a placid exterior a continual ferment went on.

When she was a girl of sixteen and before she began to work in the store, Alice had an affair with a young man. The young man, named Ned Currie, was older than Alice. He, like George Willard, was employed on the *Winesburg Eagle* and for a long time he went to see Alice almost every evening. Together the two walked under the trees through the streets of the town and talked of what they would do with their lives. Alice was then a very pretty girl and Ned Currie took her into his arms and kissed her. He became excited and said things he did not intend to say and Alice, betrayed by her desire to have something beautiful come into her rather narrow life, also grew excited. She also talked. The outer crust of her life, all of her natural diffidence and reserve, was torn away and she gave herself over to the emotions of love. When, late in the fall of her sixteenth year, Ned Currie went away to Cleveland where he hoped to get a place on a city newspaper and rise in the world, she wanted to go with him. With a trembling voice she told him what was in her mind. "I will work and you can work," she said. "I do not want to harness you to a needless expense that will prevent your making progress. Don't marry me now. We will get along without that and we can be together. Even though we live in the same house no one will say anything. In the city we will be unknown and people will pay no attention to us."

Ned Currie was puzzled by the determination and abandon of his sweetheart and was also deeply touched. He had wanted the girl to become his mistress but changed his mind. He wanted to protect and care for her. "You don't know what you're talking about," he said sharply; "you may be sure I'll let you do no such thing. As soon as I get a good job I'll come back. For the present you'll have to stay here. It's the only thing we can do."

On the evening before he left Winesburg to take up his new life in the city, Ned Currie went to call on Alice. They walked about through the streets for an hour and then got a rig from Wesley Moyer's livery and went for a drive in the country. The moon came up and they found themselves unable to talk. In his sadness the young man forgot the resolutions he had made regarding his conduct with the girl.

They got out of the buggy at a place where a long meadow ran down to the bank of Wine Creek and there in the dim light became lovers. When at midnight they returned to town they were both glad. It did not seem to

them that anything that could happen in the future could blot out the wonder and beauty of the thing that had happened. "Now we will have to stick to each other, whatever happens we will have to do that," Ned Currie said as he left the girl at her father's door.

The young newspaper man did not succeed in getting a place on a Cleveland paper and went west to Chicago. For a time he was lonely and wrote to Alice almost every day. Then he was caught up by the life of the city; he began to make friends and found new interests in life. In Chicago he boarded at a house where there were several women. One of them attracted his attention and he forgot Alice in Winesburg. At the end of a year he had stopped writing letters, and only once in a long time, when he was lonely or when he went into one of the city parks and saw the moon shining on the grass as it had shone that night on the meadow by Wine Creek, did he think of her at all.

In Winesburg the girl who had been loved grew to be a woman. When she was twenty-two years old her father, who owned a harness repair shop, died suddenly. The harness maker was an old soldier, and after a few months his wife received a widow's pension. She used the first money she got to buy a loom and became a weaver of carpets, and Alice got a place in Winney's store. For a number of years nothing could have induced her to believe that Ned Currie would not in the end return to her.

She was glad to be employed because the daily round of toil in the store made the time of waiting seem less long and uninteresting. She began to save money, thinking that when she had saved two or three hundred dollars she would follow her lover to the city and try if her presence would not win back his affections.

Alice did not blame Ned Currie for what had happened in the moonlight in the field, but felt that she could never marry another man. To her the thought of giving to another what she still felt could belong only to Ned seemed monstrous. When other young men tried to attract her attention she would have nothing to do with them. "I am his wife and shall remain his wife whether he comes back or not," she whispered to herself, and for all of her willingness to support herself could not have understood the growing modern idea of a woman's owning herself and giving and taking for her own ends in life.

Alice worked in the dry goods store from eight in the morning until six at night and on three evenings a week went back to the store to stay from seven until nine. As time passed and she became more and more lonely she began to practice the devices common to lonely people. When at night she went upstairs into her own room she knelt on the floor to pray and in her prayers whispered things she wanted to say to her lover. She became attached to inanimate objects, and because it was her own, could not bear to have anyone touch the furniture of her room. The trick of saving money, begun for a purpose, was carried on after the scheme of going to the city to find Ned Currie had been given up. It became a fixed habit, and when she needed new clothes she did not get them. Sometimes on rainy afternoons in the store she got out her bank book and, letting it lie open before her, spent hours dreaming impossible dreams of saving money enough so that the interest would support both herself and her future husband.

"Ned always liked to travel about," she thought. "I'll give him the chance. Some day when we are married and I can save both his money and my own, we will be rich. Then we can travel together all over the world."

In the dry goods store weeks ran into months and months into years as Alice waited and dreamed of her lover's return. Her employer, a grey old man with false teeth and a thin grey mustache that drooped down over his mouth, was not given to conversation, and sometimes, on rainy days and in the winter when a storm raged in Main Street, long hours passed when no customers came in. Alice arranged and rearranged the stock. She stood near the front window where she could look down the deserted street and thought of the evenings when she had walked with Ned Currie and of what he had said. "We will have to stick to each other now." The words echoed and re-echoed through the mind of the maturing woman. Tears came into her eyes. Sometimes when her employer had gone out and she was alone in the store she put her head on the counter and wept. "Oh, Ned, I am waiting," she whispered over and over, and all the time the creeping fear that he would never come back grew stronger within her.

In the spring when the rains have passed and before the long hot days of summer have come, the country about Winesburg is delightful. The town lies in the midst of open fields, but beyond the fields are pleasant patches of woodlands. In the wooded places are many little cloistered nooks, quiet places where lovers go to sit on Sunday afternoons. Through the trees they look out across the fields and see farmers at work about the barns or people driving up and down on the roads. In the town bells ring and occasionally a train passes, looking like a toy thing in the distance.

For several years after Ned Currie went away Alice did not go into the wood with other young people on Sunday, but one day after he had been gone for two or three years and when her loneliness seemed unbearable, she put on her best dress and set out. Finding a little sheltered place from which she could see the town and a long stretch of the fields, she sat down. Fear of age and ineffectuality took possession of her. She could not sit still, and arose. As she stood looking out over the land something, perhaps the thought of never ceasing life as it expresses itself in the flow of the season, fixed her mind on the passing years. With a shiver of dread, she realized that for her the beauty and freshness of youth had passed. For the first time she felt that she had been cheated. She did not blame Ned Currie and did not know what to blame. Sadness swept over her. Dropping to her knees, she tried to pray, but instead of prayers words of protest came to her lips. "It is not going to come to me. I will never find happiness. Why do I tell myself lies?" she cried, and an odd sense of relief came with this, her first bold attempt to face the fear that had become a part of her everyday life.

In the year when Alice Hindman became twenty-five two things happened to disturb the dull uneventfulness of her days. Her mother married Bush Milton, the carriage painter of Winesburg, and she herself became a member of the Winesburg Methodist Church. Alice joined the church because she had become frightened by the loneliness of her position in life. Her mother's second marriage had emphasized her isolation. "I am becoming old and queer. If Ned comes he will not want me. In the city where he is living men are perpetually young. There is so much going on that they do not have time to grow old," she told herself with a grim little smile, and went resolutely about the business of becoming acquainted with people. Every Thursday evening when the store had closed she went to a prayer meeting in the

basement of the church and on Sunday evening attended a meeting of an organization called The Epworth League.

When Will Hurley, a middle-aged man who clerked in a drug store and who also belonged to the church, offered to walk home with her she did not protest. "Of course I will not let him make a practice of being with me, but if he comes to see me once in a long time there can be no harm in that," she told herself, still determined in her loyalty to Ned Currie.

Without realizing what was happening, Alice was trying feebly at first, but with growing determination, to get a new hold upon life. Beside the drug clerk she walked in silence, but sometimes in the darkness as they went stolidly along she put out her hand and touched softly the folds of his coat. When he left her at the gate before her mother's house she did not go indoors, but stood for a moment by the door. She wanted to call to the drug clerk, to ask him to sit with her in the darkness on the porch before the house, but was afraid he would not understand. "It is not him that I want," she told herself; "I want to avoid being so much alone. If I am not careful I will grow unaccustomed to being with people."

During the early fall of her twenty-seventh year a passionate restlessness took possession of Alice. She could not bear to be in the company of the drug clerk, and when, in the evening, he came to walk with her she sent him away. Her mind became intensely active and when, weary from the long hours of standing behind the counter in the store, she went home and crawled into bed, she could not sleep. With staring eyes she looked into the darkness. Her imagination, like a child awakened from long sleep, played about the room. Deep within her there was something that would not be cheated by phantasies and that demanded some definite answer from life.

Alice took a pillow into her arms and held it tightly against her breasts. Getting out of bed, she arranged a blanket so that in the darkness it looked like a form lying between the sheets and, kneeling beside the bed, she caressed it, whispering words over and over, like a refrain. "Why doesn't something happen? Why am I left here alone?" she muttered. Although she sometimes thought of Ned Currie, she no longer depended on him. Her desire had grown vague. She did not want Ned Currie or any other man. She wanted to be loved, to have something answer the call that was growing louder and louder within her.

And then one night when it rained Alice had an adventure. It frightened and confused her. She had come home from the store at nine and found the house empty. Bush Milton had gone off to town and her mother to the house of a neighbor. Alice went upstairs to her room and undressed in the darkness. For a moment she stood by the window hearing the rain beat against the glass and then a strange desire took possession of her. Without stopping to think of what she intended to do, she ran downstairs through the dark house and out into the rain. As she stood on the little grass plot before the house and felt the cold rain on her body a mad desire to run naked through the streets took possession of her.

She thought that the rain would have some creative and wonderful effect on her body. Not for years had she felt so full of youth and courage. She wanted to leap and run, to cry out, to find some other lonely human and embrace him. On the brick sidewalk before the house a man stumbled

homeward. Alice started to run. A wild, desperate mood took possession of her. “What do I care who it is. He is alone, and I will go to him,” she thought; and then without stopping to consider the possible result of her madness, called softly. “Wait!” she cried. “Don’t go away. Whoever you are, you must wait.”

The man on the sidewalk stopped and stood listening. He was an old man and somewhat deaf. Putting his hand to his mouth, he shouted, “What? What say?” he called.

Alice dropped to the ground and lay trembling. She was so frightened at the thought of what she had done that when the man had gone on his way she did not dare get to her feet, but crawled on hands and knees through the grass to the house. When she got to her own room she bolted the door and drew her dressing table across the doorway. Her body shook as with a chill and her hands trembled so that she had difficulty getting into her night-dress. When she got into bed she buried her face in the pillow and wept broken-heartedly. “What is the matter with me? I will do something dreadful if I am not careful,” she thought, and turning her face to the wall, began trying to force herself to face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg.

1919

CARL SANDBURG

1878–1967

SON of an immigrant Swedish blacksmith who had settled in Galesburg, Illinois, Carl Sandburg was an active populist and socialist, a journalist, and an important figure in the Chicago Renaissance of arts and letters. During the 1920s and 1930s he was one of the most widely read poets in the nation. His poetic aim was to celebrate the working people of America in poems that they could understand. He wrote sympathetically and affirmatively of the masses, using a long verse line unfettered by rhyme or regular meter, a line deriving from Whitman but with cadences closer to the rhythms of ordinary speech. “Simple poems for simple people,” he said.

Sandburg’s irregular schooling included brief attendance at Lombard College, but he was too restless to work through to a degree. He held a variety of jobs before moving to Chicago in 1913; he was in the army during the Spanish–American War, served as a war correspondent for the Galesburg *Evening Mail*, worked for the Social Democratic Party in Wisconsin, was secretary to the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, and wrote editorials for the Milwaukee *Leader*. He had long been writing poetry but achieved success with the 1914 publication of his poem “Chicago” in *Poetry* magazine.

Poetry was one element in a surge of artistic activity in Chicago following the 1893 World’s Fair. Such midwesterners as the architect Frank Lloyd Wright; the novelists Theodore Dreiser, Henry Blake Fuller, and Floyd Dell; and the poets Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay believed not only that Chicago was a great city but that, since the Midwest was America’s heartland, it was in this region that the cultural

life of the nation ought to center. Two literary magazines—*Poetry*, founded in 1912 by Harriet Monroe, and the *Little Review*, founded by Margaret C. Anderson in 1914—helped bring this informal movement to international attention. Nothing could be more apt to local interests than a celebratory poem called “Chicago.”

Four volumes of poetry by Sandburg appeared in the next ten years: *Chicago Poems* (1914), *Cornhuskers* (1918), *Smoke and Steel* (1920), and *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922). These present a panorama of America, concentrating on the prairies and cities of the Midwest. Like Whitman, Sandburg was aware that American life was increasingly urban, and he had little interest in the small town and its conventional middle class. The cities of the Midwest seemed to display both the vitality of the masses and their exploitation in an inequitable class system. Unlike many radicals whose politics were formed after the turn of the twentieth century, Sandburg believed that the people themselves, rather than a cadre of intellectuals acting on behalf of the people, would ultimately shape their own destiny. His political poems express appreciation for the people’s energy and outrage at the injustices they suffer. They also balance strong declarative statements with passages of precise description. Other poems show Sandburg working in more lyrical or purely imagistic modes.

If the early “Chicago” is his best-known poem, his most ambitious is the book-length *The People, Yes* (1936), a collage of prose vignettes, anecdotes, and poetry, making use of his researches into American folk song. Sandburg had published these researches in *The American Songbag* in 1927, and he also composed a multivolume biography of Abraham Lincoln between 1926 and 1939. The purpose of this painstaking work was to present Lincoln as an authentic folk hero, a great man who had risen from among the people of the American heartland and represented its best values. He wrote features, editorials, and columns for the *Chicago Daily News* between 1922 and 1930, and pursued other literary projects as well. After World War II, when it became common for poets to read their works at campuses around the country, he enjoyed bringing his old-style populist radicalism to college students.

The text of the poems here is that of *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg* (1970).

Chicago

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation’s Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

5

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen
your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm
boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I
have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of
women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at
this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so
proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here
is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;

10

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a
 savage pitted against the wilderness,
 Bareheaded,
 Shoveling,
 Wrecking, 15
 Planning,
 Building, breaking, rebuilding,
 Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white
 teeth,
 Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man
 laughs,
 Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost
 a battle, 20
 Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and
 under his ribs the heart of the people,
 Laughing!
 Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-
 naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker,
 Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight
 Handler to the Nation.

1914, 1916

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on. 5

1916

Cool Tombs

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the
copperheads and the assassin¹ . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and
collateral turned ashes² . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs.

1. President Lincoln (1809–1865) was opposed by southern sympathizers in the North, called Copperheads, and assassinated by John Wilkes Booth. The copperhead is a poisonous snake.

2. The second administration of President Grant (1822–1885) was riddled with bribery and political corruption. After leaving office, Grant was exploited in business and declared bankruptcy.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw³ in May, did she wonder? does she remember? . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin horns . . . tell me if the lovers are losers . . . tell me if any get more than the lovers . . . in the dust . . . in the cool tombs.

1918

Grass¹

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work—
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun. 5
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass. 10
Let me work.

1918

3. A fruit native to the eastern United States. Pocahontas (1595?–1617), daughter of the Native American chief Powhatan, intervened to save the life of Captain John Smith. “Red haw”: a type of

American hawthorn tree.

1. The proper names in this poem are all famous battlefields in the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War, and World War I.

WALLACE STEVENS

1879–1955

Wallace Stevens was raised in Reading, Pennsylvania, and attended Harvard for three years as a special student before leaving in 1900 to find a career. His father, a self-made lawyer and businessman, advised Stevens to approach his Harvard studies both broadly and practically. Cautioning Stevens that “you are not out on a pic-nic—but really preparing for the campaign of life—where self sustenance is essential and where everything depends upon yourself,” he also encouraged his son’s pursuit of a wide-ranging liberal education. Anticipating that Stevens’s

“power of painting pictures in words” might one day make him famous, his father suggested that he “Paint truth but not always in drab clothes”—“A little romance is essential to ecstasy.” As a young man, Stevens wrestled with both sides of his father’s values. Drawn equally to a life of aesthetic dreaming and practical work, Stevens admonished himself “not to be a dilettante—half dream, half deed. I must be all dream or all deed.” Ultimately, however, he straddled these worlds more successfully than perhaps any other American poet of the twentieth century.

After moving to New York City for a brief attempt at journalism, Stevens went to law school. He started publishing in little magazines in 1914 and frequented literary gatherings in New York, becoming friends with William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore, among others. In 1916 he began to work for the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company and moved with his wife to Hartford, Connecticut. They made that city their lifelong home, Stevens writing his poetry at night and during summers. Visiting Florida frequently on business from 1922 onward, he experienced the contrast between the South’s lush tropical climate and the chilly austerity of New England that he would turn into a metaphor for opposing ways of imagining the world in poems like “The Snow Man” and “Sunday Morning.” A good businessman, Stevens by the mid-1930s was prosperous. He continued to work for the same company until his death, eventually becoming a vice president.

Stevens’s first volume of poetry, *Harmonium*, appeared in 1923. The poems in that book are dazzling in their wit, imagery, and color; they found Stevens an audience, although some critics saw in them so much display as to make their “seriousness” questionable. But Stevens’s purpose in part was to show that display was a valid poetic exercise—that poetry existed to illuminate the world’s surfaces as well as its depths. Anything but drab, the poems of *Harmonium* abound in allusions to music and painting; are packed with sense images, especially of sound and color; and are elegant and unexpectedly funny. Consider the surprise and humor in the titles of the selections printed here as well as these: “Floral Decorations for Bananas,” “Palace of the Babies,” “The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws,” “Frogs Eat Butterflies, Snakes Eat Frogs, Hogs Eat Snakes, Men Eat Hogs.” Stevens’s line is simple—either blank verse or brief stanzas, sparsely rhymed—so that the reader’s attention is directed to vocabulary and imagery more often than prosody. Invented words are frequent, some employed simply for the pleasure of their sound effects.

Harmonium interspersed brief lyrics with more extended meditative poems, some of which became in the following decades not only landmarks of Stevens’s career but also touchstones for critics attempting to define the ambitions of twentieth-century poetry more broadly. “Peter Quince at the Clavier” along with “Sunday Morning” articulated Stevens’s paradoxical belief that the only immortal beauty is that found in earthly nature and mortal human life. In “Sunday Morning,” the speaker replies to human yearnings for “imperishable bliss” by asserting that the annual return of “April’s green” will outlast every human myth or image of permanence, including Christianity’s faith in the resurrection of Christ.

Stevens thought of the twentieth century as “an age of disbelief,” and he did not much regret the loss. “To see the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences,” he wrote near the end of his life. Stevens’s hope that with the fading of traditional religion poetry might become the forger of new faiths coincided with the convictions of such other modernist poets as T. S. Eliot (before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism) and Ezra Pound. From the beginning of his career to the end, Stevens played variations on the proposition that poetry gestures toward a “supreme fiction,” embraced without the need of final belief. All gods, Stevens thought, borrowed their power from the human world. The modern poet’s role was to return that borrowed glory to its origins and, in doing so, to provide men and women with “a style of bearing themselves in reality.”

Reality was an important word for Stevens throughout his career, often paired with *imagination*. Stevens inherited the central conviction of the nineteenth-

century British romantic poets and American transcendentalists, that reality comes to human beings through acts of perception and imaginative ordering that at least half create—as the poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850) famously phrased it—what we experience. Placing a jar on a hill in Tennessee (“Anecdote of the Jar”) reorders the world perceived around it; the singer’s voice (as in “The Idea of Order at Key West”) creates the world for her and her audience.

In the six years following the appearance of *Harmonium* Stevens published little new work. During the years leading up to World War II, however, Stevens’s concern for the pressures of reality deepened, and his style altered. New volumes and major works began appearing with *Ideas of Order* in 1935, *Owl’s Clover* in 1936, *The Man with a Blue Guitar* in 1937, and *Parts of a World* in 1942. The poems became increasingly discursive and philosophical; the conspicuous effects diminished, the diction became plainer. Although he would always remain distanced from political movements, World War II drew Stevens to articulate his own distinctive concern for the active role that poetry might play in the world: “It has to think about war / And it has to find what will suffice” (“Of Modern Poetry”).

After World War II, long poems in this discursive, philosophical style became increasingly central to Stevens’s work. “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” anchored *Transport to Summer* (1947), and *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven* (1950) included “The Auroras of Autumn” and “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven.” A book collecting his occasional lectures appeared as *The Necessary Angel* in 1951. A final collection, *The Rock* (1954) appeared in the same year as his *Collected Poems*. Circling around the image of a rock covered with fallen leaves (a pun, among other things, on the leaves of a book), these last poems explored both “an end of the imagination” and the unending work of reclothing the world in images.

Stevens had always been something of a late bloomer as a poet—*Harmonium* appeared when he was forty-four—and his reputation rose steeply in the last decade of his life. He received the Bollingen Prize for lifetime achievement in poetry in 1950 and the National Book Award for *Auroras of Autumn* in 1951. His *Collected Poems* (1954) was recognized with the Pulitzer Prize as well as a second National Book Award in 1955, and has been celebrated as one of the most important books of American poetry in the twentieth century.

The text of the poems included here is that of *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (1954).

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

5

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

10

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
 And, nothing himself, beholds
 Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. 15

1931

A High-Toned Old Christian Woman

Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame.
 Take the moral law and make a nave¹ of it
 And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,
 The conscience is converted into palms,
 Like windy citherns² hankering for hymns. 5
 We agree in principle. That's clear. But take
 The opposing law and make a peristyle,³
 And from the peristyle project a masque⁴
 Beyond the planets. Thus, our bawdiness,
 Unpurged by epitaph, indulged at last, 10
 Is equally converted into palms,
 Squiggling like saxophones. And palm for palm,
 Madame, we are where we began. Allow,
 Therefore, that in the planetary scene
 Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed, 15
 Smacking their muzzy⁵ bellies in parade,
 Proud of such novelties of the sublime,
 Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,
 May, merely may, madame, whip from themselves
 A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres. 20
 This will make widows wince. But fictive things
 Wink as they will. Wink most when widows wince.

1923

The Emperor of Ice-Cream

Call the roller of big cigars,
 The muscular one, and bid him whip
 In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
 Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
 As they are used to wear, and let the boys 5
 Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
 Let be be finale of seem.
 The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

1. Main body of a church building, especially the vaulted central portion of a Christian Gothic church.

2. I.e., citherns; pear-shaped guitars.

3. Colonnade surrounding a building, especially

the cells or main chamber of an ancient Greek temple—an "opposing law" to a Christian church.

4. Spectacle or entertainment consisting of music, dancing, mime, and often poetry.

5. Sodden with drunkenness.

Take from the dresser of deal,¹
 Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet 10
 On which she embroidered fantails² once
 And spread it so as to cover her face.
 If her horny feet protrude, they come
 To show how cold she is, and dumb.
 Let the lamp affix its beam. 15
 The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

1923

Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock

The houses are haunted
 By white night-gowns.
 None are green,
 Or purple with green rings,
 Or green with yellow rings, 5
 Or yellow with blue rings.
 None of them are strange,
 With socks of lace
 And beaded ceintures.
 People are not going 10
 To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
 Only, here and there, an old sailor,
 Drunk and asleep in his boots,
 Catches tigers
 In red weather. 15

1931

Sunday Morning¹

I

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
 Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
 And the green freedom of a cockatoo
 Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
 The holy hush of ancient sacrifice. 5
 She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
 Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
 As a calm darkens among water-lights.
 The pungent oranges and bright, green wings

1. Plain, unfinished wood.

2. Stevens explained that "the word fantails does not mean fan, but fantail pigeons."

1. This poem was first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1915; the editor, Harriet Monroe, printed

only five of its eight stanzas but arranged them in the order Stevens suggested when consenting to the deletions (I, VIII, IV, V, and VII); he restored the deleted stanzas and the original sequence in subsequent printings.

Seem things in some procession of the dead, 10
 Winding across wide water, without sound.
 The day is like wide water, without sound,
 Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
 Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
 Dominion of the blood and sepulchre. 15

II

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
 What is divinity if it can come
 Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
 Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
 In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else 20
 In any balm or beauty of the earth,
 Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
 Divinity must live within herself:
 Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
 Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued 25
 Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
 Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
 All pleasures and all pains, remembering
 The bough of summer and the winter branch.
 These are the measures destined for her soul. 30

III

Jove² in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
 No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
 Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
 He moved among us, as a muttering king,
 Magnificent, would move among his hinds, 35
 Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
 With heaven, brought such requital to desire
 The very hinds³ discerned it, in a star.
 Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
 The blood of paradise? And shall the earth 40
 Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
 The sky will be much friendlier than than now,
 A part of labor and a part of pain,
 And next in glory to enduring love,
 Not this dividing and indifferent blue. 45

IV

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
 Before they fly, test the reality
 Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
 But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
 Return no more, where, then, is paradise?" 50
 There is not any haunt of prophecy,

2. Supreme god in Roman mythology.

3. Farmhands; an allusion to the shepherds who

saw the star of Bethlehem that signaled the birth of Jesus.

Nor any old chimera⁴ of the grave,
 Neither the golden underground, nor isle
 Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
 Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm 55
 Remote on heaven's hill,⁵ that has endured
 As April's green endures; or will endure
 Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
 Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
 By the consummation of the swallow's wings. 60

V

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
 The need of some imperishable bliss."
 Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
 Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams 65
 And our desires. Although she strews the leaves
 Of sure obliteration on our paths,
 The path sick sorrow took, the many paths
 Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love
 Whispered a little out of tenderness,
 She makes the willow shiver in the sun 70
 For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze
 Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.
 She causes boys to pile new plums and pears
 On disregarded plate. The maidens taste
 And stray impassioned in the littering leaves. 75

VI

Is there no change of death in paradise?
 Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
 Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
 Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
 With rivers like our own that seek for seas 80
 They never find, the same receding shores
 That never touch with inarticulate pang?
 Why set the pear upon those river-banks
 Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
 Alas, that they should wear our colors there, 85
 The silken weavings of our afternoons,
 And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
 Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
 Within whose burning bosom we devise
 Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly. 90

VII

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
 Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
 Their boisterous devotion to the sun,

4. In Greek mythology, a monster with a lion's head, goat's body, and serpent's tail.

5. Versions of Paradise in diverse world religions.

Not as a god, but as a god might be,
 Naked among them, like a savage source. 95
 Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
 Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
 And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
 The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
 The trees, like serafin,⁶ and echoing hills, 100
 That choir among themselves long afterward.
 They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
 Of men that perish and of summer morn.
 And whence they came and whither they shall go
 The dew upon their feet shall manifest. 105

VIII

She hears, upon that water without sound,
 A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
 Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
 It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
 We live in an old chaos of the sun, 110
 Or old dependency of day and night,
 Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
 Of that wide water, inescapable.
 Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
 Whistle about us their spontaneous cries; 115
 Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
 And, in the isolation of the sky,
 At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
 Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
 Downward to darkness, on extended wings. 120

1915, 1923

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
 And round it was, upon a hill.
 It made the slovenly wilderness
 Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it, 5
 And sprawled around, no longer wild.
 The jar was round upon the ground
 And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
 The jar was gray and bare. 10
 It did not give of bird or bush,
 Like nothing else in Tennessee.

1923

6. I.e., seraphim; angels.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

5

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

10

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

15

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

20

VII

O thin men of Haddam,¹
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

25

1. A city in Connecticut.

VIII

I know noble accents
 And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
 But I know, too,
 That the blackbird is involved
 In what I know. 30

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
 It marked the edge
 Of one of many circles. 35

X

At the sight of blackbirds
 Flying in a green light,
 Even the bawds of euphony
 Would cry out sharply. 40

XI

He rode over Connecticut
 In a glass coach.
 Once, a fear pierced him,
 In that he mistook
 The shadow of his equipage
 For blackbirds. 45

XII

The river is moving.
 The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
 It was snowing
 And it was going to snow.
 The blackbird sat
 In the cedar-limbs. 50

The Idea of Order at Key West¹

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
 The water never formed to mind or voice,
 Like a body wholly body, fluttering
 Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
 Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry, 5
 That was not ours although we understood,
 Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
 The song and water were not medleyed sound
 Even if what she sang was what she heard, 10
 Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
 It may be that in all her phrases stirred
 The grinding water and the gasping wind;
 But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang. 15
 The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
 Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
 Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
 It was the spirit that we sought and knew
 That we should ask this often as she sang. 20

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
 That rose, or even colored by many waves;
 If it was only the outer voice of sky
 And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
 However clear, it would have been deep air, 25
 The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
 Repeated in a summer without end
 And sound alone. But it was more than that,
 More even than her voice, and ours, among
 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind, 30
 Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
 On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
 Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that that made
 The sky acutest at its vanishing. 35
 She measured to the hour its solitude.
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we, 40
 As we beheld her striding there alone,
 Knew that there never was a world for her
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

1. One of the islands off the southern coast of Florida, where Stevens vacationed. The poem begins with the scene of a woman walking by the sea and singing.

Ramon Fernandez,² tell me, if you know,
 Why, when the singing ended and we turned 45
 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
 The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles, 50
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
 The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
 Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
 And of ourselves and of our origins, 55
 In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

1936

Of Modern Poetry

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
 What will suffice. It has not always had
 To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
 Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed 5
 To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
 It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
 It has to face the men of the time and to meet
 The women of the time. It has to think about war
 And it has to find what will suffice. It has 10
 To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage
 And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
 With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
 In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
 Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound 15
 Of which, an invisible audience listens,
 Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
 In an emotion as of two people, as of two
 Emotions becoming one. The actor is
 A metaphysician in the dark, twanging 20
 An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
 Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
 Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
 Beyond which it has no will to rise.

It must 25
 Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
 Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
 Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

1942

2. A French literary critic and essayist (1894–1944). Stevens said that he had invented the name and that its coincidence with a real person was accidental.

The Plain Sense of Things

After the leaves have fallen, we return
 To a plain sense of things. It is as if
 We had come to an end of the imagination,
 Inanimate in an inert savoir.¹

It is difficult even to choose the adjective 5
 For this blank cold, this sadness without cause.
 The great structure has become a minor house.
 No turban walks across the lessened floors.

The greenhouse never so badly needed paint.
 The chimney is fifty years old and slants to one side. 10
 A fantastic effort has failed, a repetition
 In a repetitiousness of men and flies.

Yet the absence of the imagination had
 Itself to be imagined. The great pond,
 The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves, 15
 Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing silence

Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
 The great pond and its waste of the lilies, all this
 Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge,
 Required, as a necessity requires. 20

1954

1. Knowledge (French).

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

1883–1963

A modernist known for his disagreements with all the other modernists, William Carlos Williams thought of himself as the most underrated poet of his generation. His reputation has risen dramatically since World War II as a younger generation of poets testified to the influence of his work on their idea of what poetry should be. The simplicity of his verse forms, the matter-of-factness of both his subject matter and his means of describing it, seemed to bring poetry into natural relation with everyday life. He is now judged to be among the most important poets writing between the wars. His career continued into the 1960s, taking new directions as he produced, along with shorter lyrics, his epic five-part poem *Paterson*.

He was born in 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey, a town near the city of Paterson. His maternal grandmother, an Englishwoman deserted by her husband, had come to

America with her son, married again, and moved to Puerto Rico. Her son—Williams's father—married a woman descended on one side from French Basque people, on the other from Dutch Jews. This mix of origins always fascinated Williams and made him feel that he was different from what he thought of as mainstream Americans—that is, northerners or midwesterners of English descent. After the family moved to New Jersey, Williams's father worked as a salesman for a perfume company; in childhood his father was often away from home, and the two women—mother and grandmother—were the most important adults to him.

Except for a year in Europe, Williams attended local schools. He entered the School of Dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania directly after graduating from high school but soon switched to medicine. In college he met and became friends with Ezra Pound; Hilda Doolittle, later to become known as the poet H.D.; and the painter Charles Demuth. These friendships did much to steer him toward poetry, and even as he completed his medical work, interned in New York City, and did postgraduate study in Leipzig, Germany, he was reconceiving his commitment to medicine as a means of self-support in the more important enterprise of becoming a poet. Although he never lost his sense that he was a doctor in order to be a poet, his patients knew him as a dedicated old-fashioned physician, who made house calls, listened to people's problems, and helped them through life's crises. Pediatrics was his specialty; and in the course of his career, he delivered more than two thousand babies.

In 1912, after internship and study abroad, Williams married his fiancée of several years, Florence Herman. Despite strains in their relationship caused by Williams's continuing interest in other women, the marriage lasted and became, toward the end of Williams's life, the subject of some beautiful love poetry, including "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower." In the meantime women and the mixed belittlement-adoration accorded them by men (including the poet) were persistent themes in his work. The couple settled in Rutherford, where Williams opened his practice. Except for a trip to Europe in 1924, when he saw Pound and met James Joyce, among others, and trips for lectures and poetry readings later in his career, Williams remained in Rutherford all his life, continuing his medical practice until poor health forced him to retire. He wrote at night, and spent weekends in New York City with friends who were writers and artists—the avant-garde painters Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, the poets Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens, and others. At their gatherings he acquired a reputation for outspoken hostility to most of the "isms" of the day.

The characteristic Williams style emerged clearly in the landmark volume of mixed prose and poetry *Spring and All* (1923; see pp. 286 and 326). This book demonstrates that the gesture of staying at home was more for him than a practical assessment of his chances of self-support. Interested, like his friend Ezra Pound, in making a new kind of poetry, Williams also wanted always to speak as an American within an American context. He staked this claim in the title of one of his books of essays, *In the American Grain* (1925), and in his choice of his own region as the setting and subject of *Paterson* (1946–58), a long poem about his native city incorporating a great variety of textual fragments—letters, newspaper accounts, poetry—in a modernist collage.

Williams detested Eliot's *The Waste Land*, describing its popularity as a "catastrophe" and deploring not only its internationalism but also its pessimism and deliberate obscurity. To him these characteristics were un-American. Yet Williams was not a sentimental celebrant of American life. He objected to Robert Frost's homespun poetry—which might be thought of as similar to his own work—for nostalgically evoking a bygone rural America rather than engaging with what he saw as the real American present. His America was made up of small cities like Paterson, with immigrants, factories, and poor working-class people struggling to get

by. The sickness and suffering he saw as a physician entered into his poetry, as did his personal life; but the overall impact of his poetry is social rather than autobiographical.

The social aspect of Williams's poetry rises from its accumulation of detail; he opposed the use of poetry for general statements and abstract critique. "No ideas but in things," he wrote—a line that became one of the most influential mottos of twentieth-century American poetry. "Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself," echoed Wallace Stevens; yet there is a world of difference between Williams's plainspoken and often opinionated writing and Stevens's cool elegance. Williams drew his vocabulary from up-to-date local speech and searched for a poetic line derived from the cadences of street talk. But he rejected "free verse" as an absurdity; rhythm within the line, and linking one line to another, was the heart of poetic craft to him. While working on *Paterson*, he invented the "triadic" or "stepped line," a long line broken into three segments, which he used in many poems, including several of the selections printed here.

Williams published fiction and essays as well as poetry, especially during the 1930s. Books of short stories (*The Edge of the Knife*, 1932, and *Life along the Passaic River*, 1938) and novels (*White Mule*, 1937, and *In the Money*, 1940) appeared in these years. He was also involved with others in the establishment of several little magazines, each designed to promulgate counterstatements to the powerful influences of Pound, Eliot, and the New Critics. All the time he remained active in his community and in political events; in the 1930s and 1940s he aligned himself with liberal Democratic and, on occasion, leftist issues but always from the vantage point of an unreconstructed individualism. Some of his affiliations were held against him in the McCarthy era and to his great distress he was deprived in 1948 of the post of consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress.

It was also in 1948 that he had a heart attack, and in 1951 the first of a series of strokes required him to turn over his medical practice to one of his two sons and made writing increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, he persevered in his work on *Paterson*, whose five books were published in 1946, 1948, 1949, 1951, and 1958. *The Desert Music* (1954) and *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962), containing new poetry, also appeared; but by 1961 Williams had to stop writing. By the time of his death a host of younger poets, including Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley, had been inspired by his example. He won the National Book Award in 1950, the Bollingen Prize in 1953, and the Pulitzer Prize in 1962.

The texts of the poems included here are those of *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, Volume 1: 1909–1939 (1986), edited by A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan, and *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, Volume 2: 1939–1962 (1988), edited by Christopher MacGowan.

The Young Housewife

At ten A.M. the young housewife
 moves about in negligee behind
 the wooden walls of her husband's house.
 I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb
 to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
 shy, uncorseted, tucking in
 stray ends of hair, and I compare her
 to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car
 rush with a crackling sound over
 dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

1916, 1917

Portrait of a Lady

Your thighs are appletrees
 whose blossoms touch the sky.
 Which sky? The sky
 where Watteau¹ hung a lady's
 slipper. Your knees
 are a southern breeze—or
 a gust of snow. Agh! what
 sort of man was Fragonard?²
 —as if that answered
 anything. Ah, yes—below
 the knees, since the tune
 drops that way, it is
 one of those white summer days,
 the tall grass of your ankles
 flickers upon the shore—
 Which shore?—
 the sand clings to my lips—
 Which shore?
 Agh, petals maybe. How
 should I know?
 Which shore? Which shore?
 I said petals from an appletree.

1920, 1934

Queen-Anne's-Lace¹

Her body is not so white as
 anemone petals nor so smooth—nor
 so remote a thing. It is a field
 of the wild carrot taking
 the field by force; the grass
 does not raise above it.
 Here is no question of whiteness,

1. Jean Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), French artist who painted elegantly dressed lovers in idealized rustic settings.

2. Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), French painter who depicted fashionable lovers in paintings more wittily and openly erotic than Wat-

teau's. Fragonard's *The Swing* depicts a girl who has kicked her slipper into the air.

1. A common wildflower whose white bloom is composed of numerous tiny blossoms, each with a dark spot at the center, joined to the stalk by fibrous stems.

white as can be, with a purple mole
 at the center of each flower.
 Each flower is a hand's span 10
 of her whiteness. Wherever
 his hand has lain there is
 a tiny purple blemish. Each part
 is a blossom under his touch 15
 to which the fibres of her being
 stem one by one, each to its end,
 until the whole field is a
 white desire, empty, a single stem,
 a cluster, flower by flower,
 a pious wish to whiteness gone over— 20
 or nothing.

1921

The Widow's Lament in Springtime

Sorrow is my own yard
 where the new grass
 flames as it has flamed
 often before but not 5
 with the cold fire
 that closes round me this year.
 Thirtyfive years
 I lived with my husband.
 The plumbtree is white today
 with masses of flowers. 10
 Masses of flowers
 load the cherry branches
 and color some bushes
 yellow and some red
 but the grief in my heart 15
 is stronger than they
 for though they were my joy
 formerly, today I notice them
 and turn away forgetting.
 Today my son told me 20
 that in the meadows,
 at the edge of the heavy woods
 in the distance, he saw
 trees of white flowers.
 I feel that I would like 25
 to go there
 and fall into those flowers
 and sink into the marsh near them.

1921

Spring and All¹

By the road to the contagious hospital²
 under the surge of the blue
 mottled clouds driven from the
 northeast—a cold wind. Beyond, the
 waste of broad, muddy fields
 brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen 5

patches of standing water
 the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
 purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
 stuff of bushes and small trees
 with dead, brown leaves under them
 leafless vines— 10

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
 dazed spring approaches— 15

They enter the new world naked,
 cold, uncertain of all
 save that they enter. All about them
 the cold, familiar wind—

Now the grass, tomorrow
 the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf 20

One by one objects are defined—
 It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
 entrance—Still, the profound change
 has come upon them: rooted, they
 grip down and begin to awaken 25

1923

To Elsie¹

The pure products of America
 go crazy—
 mountain folk from Kentucky

1. In the volume *Spring and All* (as originally published, 1923), prose statements were interspersed through the poems, which were identified by roman numerals. Williams added titles later and used the volume's title for the opening poem. For examples of the prose sections of *Spring and*

All, see "Modernist Manifestos," p. 326.

2. I.e., a hospital for treating contagious diseases.
 1. In *Spring and All*, this poem was originally numbered XVIII. Elsie, from the State Orphanage, worked for the Williams family as a nurse-maid.

or the ribbed north end of
 Jersey 5
 with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
 old names
 and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken 10
 to railroading
 out of sheer lust of adventure—

and young slatterns, bathed
 in filth
 from Monday to Saturday 15

to be tricked out that night
 with gauds
 from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
 character 20
 but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags—succumbing without
 emotion
 save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry 25
 or viburnum—
 which they cannot express—

Unless it be that marriage
 perhaps
 with a dash of Indian blood 30

will throw up a girl so desolate
 so hemmed round
 with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an
 agent— 35
 reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
 some hard-pressed
 house in the suburbs—

some doctor's family, some Elsie— 40
 voluptuous water
 expressing with broken

brain the truth about us—
 her great
 ungainly hips and flopping breasts 45

addressed to cheap
 jewelry
 and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet
 were 50
 an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
 destined
 to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains 55
 after deer
 going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
 Somehow
 it seems to destroy us 60

It is only in isolate flecks that
 something
 is given off

No one
 to witness 65
 and adjust, no one to drive the car

1923

The Red Wheelbarrow¹

so much depends
 upon

a red wheel
 barrow

glazed with rain
 water 5

beside the white
 chickens

1923

1. Numbered XXII in *Spring and All*.

The Dead Baby

Sweep the house
 under the feet of the curious
 holiday seekers—
 sweep under the table and the bed
 the baby is dead— 5

The mother's eyes where she sits
 by the window, unconsoled—
 have purple bags under them
 the father—
 tall, wellspoken, pitiful 10
 is the abler of these two—

Sweep the house clean
 here is one who has gone up
 (though problematically)
 to heaven, blindly 15
 by force of the facts—
 a clean sweep
 is one way of expressing it—

Hurry up! any minute
 they will be bringing it 20
 from the hospital—
 a white model of our lives
 a curiosity—
 surrounded by fresh flowers

1927, 1935

This Is Just to Say

I have eaten
 the plums
 that were in
 the icebox

and which 5
 you were probably
 saving
 for breakfast

Forgive me
 they were delicious 10
 so sweet
 and so cold

1934

A Sort of a Song

Let the snake wait under
 his weed
 and the writing
 be of words, slow and quick, sharp
 to strike, quiet to wait, 5
 sleepless.

—through metaphor to reconcile
 the people and the stones.
 Compose. (No ideas
 but in things) Invent! 10
 Saxifrage is my flower that splits
 the rocks.

1944

The Dance

In Brueghel's great picture, *The Kermess*,¹
 the dancers go round, they go round and
 around, the squeal and the blare and the
 tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles 5
 tipping their bellies (round as the thick-
 sided glasses whose wash they impound)
 their hips and their bellies off balance
 to turn them. Kicking and rolling about
 the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those 10
 shanks must be sound to bear up under such
 rollicking measures, prance as they dance
 in Brueghel's great picture, *The Kermess*.

1944

Burning the Christmas Greens

Their time past, pulled down
 cracked and flung to the fire
 —go up in a roar
 All recognition lost, burnt clean
 clean in the flame, the green 5
 dispersed, a living red,
 flame red, red as blood wakes
 on the ash—

1. *The Wedding Dance* by the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel (or Breughel) the Elder (c. 1525–1569).

and ebbs to a steady burning
 the rekindled bed become 10
 a landscape of flame

At the winter's midnight
 we went to the trees, the coarse
 holly, the balsam and
 the hemlock for their green 15

At the thick of the dark
 the moment of the cold's
 deepest plunge we brought branches
 cut from the green trees

to fill our need, and over 20
 doorways, about paper Christmas
 bells covered with tinfoil
 and fastened by red ribbons

we stuck the green prongs
 in the windows hung 25
 woven wreaths and above pictures
 the living green. On the

mantle we built a green forest
 and among those hemlock
 sprays put a herd of small 30
 white deer as if they

were walking there. All this!
 and it seemed gentle and good
 to us. Their time past,
 relief! The room bare. We 35

stuffed the dead grate
 with them upon the half burnt out
 log's smoldering eye, opening
 red and closing under them

and we stood there looking down. 40
 Green is a solace
 a promise of peace, a fort
 against the cold (though we

did not say so) a challenge
 above the snow's 45
 hard shell. Green (we might
 have said) that, where

small birds hide and dodge
 and lift their plaintive

rallying cries, blocks for them
and knocks down 50

the unseeing bullets of
the storm. Green spruce boughs
pulled down by a weight of
snow—Transformed! 55

Violence leaped and appeared.
Recreant! roared to life
as the flame rose through and
our eyes recoiled from it.

In the jagged flames green 60
to red, instant and alive. Green!
those sure abutments . . . Gone!
lost to mind

and quick in the contracting
tunnel of the grate 65
appeared a world! Black
mountains, black and red—as

yet uncolored—and ash white,
an infant landscape of shimmering
ash and flame and we, in 70
that instant, lost,

breathless to be witnesses,
as if we stood
ourselves refreshed among
the shining fauna of that fire. 75

1944

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus¹

According to Brueghel²
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field 5
the whole pageantry

1. In Greek mythology, a young man whose father made wings for him with feathers held together by wax. Icarus flew too close to the sun, the wax melted, and he fell into the sea and drowned.

2. A landscape by Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c. 1525–1569) in which Icarus is depicted by a tiny leg sticking out of the sea in one corner of the picture.

of the year was
 awake tingling
 near

the edge of the sea
 concerned
 with itself 10

sweating in the sun
 that melted
 the wings' wax 15

unsignificantly
 off the coast
 there was

a splash quite unnoticed
 this was 20
 Icarus drowning

1962

EZRA POUND

1885–1972

Ezra Loomis Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho. When he was still an infant his parents settled in a comfortable suburb near Philadelphia where his father was an assayer at the regional branch of the U.S. Mint. “I knew at fifteen pretty much what I wanted to do,” he wrote in 1913; what he wanted was to become a poet. He had this goal in mind as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania (where he met and became lifelong friends with William Carlos Williams and had a romance with Hilda Doolittle, who was later to become the poet H.D.) and at Hamilton College; it also motivated his graduate studies in languages—French, Italian, Old English, and Latin—at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received an M.A. in 1906. He planned to support himself as a college teacher while writing.

The poetry that he had in mind in these early years was in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century—melodious in versification and diction, romantic in themes, world-weary in tone—poetry for which the term *decadent* was used. A particular image of the poet went with such poetry: the poet committed to art for its own sake, careless of convention, and continually shocking the respectable middle class. A rebellious and colorful personality, Pound delighted in this role but quickly found that it was not compatible with the sober behavior expected from professors of language. He lost his first teaching job, at Wabash College in Indiana, in fewer than six months.

Convinced that his country had no place for him—and that a country with no place for him had no place for art—he went to Europe in 1908. He settled in London

and quickly became involved in its literary life, and especially prominent in movements to revolutionize poetry and identify good new poets. He supported himself by teaching and reviewing for several journals. For a while he acted as secretary to the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats. He married Dorothy Shakespear, daughter of a close friend of Yeats, in 1914. Ten years later he became involved with the American expatriate Olga Rudge and maintained relationships with both women thereafter.

As an advocate of the new, he found himself propagandizing against the very poetry that had made him want to be a poet at the start, and this contradiction remained throughout his life: on the one hand, a desire to “make it new”; on the other, a deep attachment to the old. Many of his critical essays were later collected and published in books such as *Make It New* (1934), *The ABC of Reading* (1934), *Polite Essays* (1937), and *Literary Essays* (1954). He was generous in his efforts to assist other writers in their work and in their attempts to get published; he was helpful to H.D., T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway, and Marianne Moore, to name just a few.

Pound first campaigned for “imagism,” his name for a new kind of poetry. Rather than describing something—an object or situation—and then generalizing about it, imagist poets attempted to present the object directly, avoiding the ornate diction and complex but predictable verse forms of traditional poetry. Any significance to be derived from the image had to appear inherent in its spare, clean presentation. “Go in fear of abstractions,” Pound wrote (see “A Retrospect,” p. 321). Elaborate grammatical constructions seemed artificial; hence this new poetry tended to work by juxtaposition of fragments. Although imagism lasted only briefly as a formal movement, most subsequent twentieth-century poetry showed its influence. Pound soon moved on to “vorticism,” which, although still espousing direct and bare presentation, sought for some principle of dynamism and energy in the image. In his imagist phase Pound was connected with H.D. and Richard Aldington, a British poet who became H.D.’s husband; as a vorticist he was allied with the iconoclastic writer and artist Wyndham Lewis.

Pound thought of the United States as a culturally backward nation and longed to produce a sophisticated, worldly poetry on behalf of his country. Walt Whitman was his symbol of American poetic narrowness. His major works during his London years consisted of free translations from languages unknown to most Westerners: Provençal, Chinese, Japanese. He also experimented with the dramatic monologue form developed by the English Victorian poet Robert Browning. Poems from these years appeared in his volumes *A Lume Spento* (By the spent light; Italian), which appeared in 1908, *A Quinzaine for This Yule* (1908), and *Personae* (1910). *Persona* means “mask,” and the poems in this last volume developed the dramatic monologue as a means for the poet to assume various identities and to engage in acts of historical reconstruction and empathy.

Although the imagist view of poetry would seem to exclude the long poem as a workable form, Pound could not overcome the traditional belief that a really great poem had to be long. He hoped to write such a poem himself, a poem for his time, which would unite biography and history by representing the total content of his mind and memory. To this end he began working on his *Cantos* in 1915. The cantos were separate poems of varying lengths, combining reminiscence, meditation, description, and transcriptions from books Pound was reading, all of which were to be forged into unity by the heat of the poet’s imagination. Ultimately, he produced 116 cantos, whose intricate obscurities continue to fascinate and challenge critics. The London period came to a close with two poems of disillusionment, “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Life and Contacts)” and “Mauberley,” which described the decay of Western civilization in the aftermath of the Great War.

Looking for an explanation of what had gone wrong, Pound came upon the “social credit” theories of Major Clifford Hugh Douglas, a social economist who

attributed all the ills of civilization to the interposition of money between human exchanges of goods. At this point, poetry and politics fused in Pound's work, and he began to search for a society in which art was protected from money and to record this search in poems and essays. This became a dominant theme in the *Cantos*. Leaving England for good in 1920, he lived on the Mediterranean Sea, in Paris for a time, and then settled in the small Italian town of Rapallo in 1925. His survey of history having persuaded him that the ideal society was a hierarchy with a strong leader and an agricultural economy, he greeted the Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini as a deliverer. He looked for other strong leaders in world history and idealized them in the *Cantos*. During World War II he voluntarily served the Italian government by making numerous English-language radio broadcasts beamed at England and the United States in which he vilified Jews, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and American society in general. When the U.S. Army occupied Italy, Pound was arrested, held for weeks in an open-air cage at the prison camp near Pisa, and finally brought to the United States to be tried for treason. The trial did not take place, however, because the court accepted a psychiatric report to the effect that Pound was "insane and mentally unfit to be tried." From 1946 to 1958 he was a patient and a prisoner in St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the criminally insane in Washington, D.C. During those years he received visits, wrote letters, composed cantos, and continued his polemic against American society.

In 1948 the *Pisan Cantos* (LXXIV–LXXXIV) won the Library of Congress's newly established Bollingen Prize for poetry, an event that provoked tremendous debate about Pound's stature as a poet as well as a citizen. Ten years later the efforts of a committee of writers succeeded in winning Pound's release; he returned to Italy, where he died at the age of eighty-seven. He remains one of the most controversial poets of the era.

The texts of the poems included here are those of *Personae: The Collected Poems* (rev., 1949) and *The Cantos* (1976).

To Whistler, American¹

On the loan exhibit of his paintings at the Tate Gallery.

You also, our first great
Had tried all ways;
Tested and pried and worked in many fashions,
And this much gives me heart to play the game.

Here is a part that's slight, and part gone wrong, 5
And much of little moment, and some few
Perfect as Dürer!²
"In the Studio" and these two portraits,³ if I had my choice!
And then these sketches in the mood of Greece?

You had your searches, your uncertainties, 10
And this is good to know—for us, I mean,
Who bear the brunt of our America
And try to wrench her impulse into art.

1. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), expatriate American painter.

2. Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), German painter and engraver.

3. "'Brown and Gold—de Race,' 'Grenat et Or—Le Petit Cardinal' ('Garnet and Gold—The Little Cardinal')." [Pound's note]. Titles and subjects of the portraits.

You were not always sure, not always set
 To hiding night or tuning “symphonies”;⁴ 15
 Had not one style from birth, but tried and pried
 And stretched and tampered with the media.

You and Abe Lincoln from that mass of dolts
 Show us there’s chance at least of winning through.

1912, 1949

Portrait d’une Femme¹

Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea,²
 London has swept about you this score years
 And bright ships left you this or that in fee:
 Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things,
 Strange spars of knowledge and dimmed wares of price. 5
 Great minds have sought you—lacking someone else.
 You have been second always. Tragical?
 No. You preferred it to the usual thing:
 One dull man, dulling and uxorious,
 One average mind—with one thought less, each year. 10
 Oh, you are patient, I have seen you sit
 Hours, where something might have floated up.
 And now you pay one. Yes, you richly pay.
 You are a person of some interest, one comes to you
 And takes strange gain away: 15
 Trophies fished up; some curious suggestion;
 Fact that leads nowhere; and a tale or two,
 Pregnant with mandrakes,³ or with something else
 That might prove useful and yet never proves,
 That never fits a corner or shows use, 20
 Or finds its hour upon the loom of days:
 The tarnished, gaudy, wonderful old work;
 Idols and ambergris and rare inlays,
 These are your riches, your great store; and yet
 For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things, 25
 Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff:
 In the slow float of differing light and deep,
 No! there is nothing! In the whole and all,
 Nothing that’s quite your own.

Yet this is you. 30

1912

4. Whistler painted many night scenes and titled many paintings “symphonies.”

1. Portrait of a lady (French).

2. Sea in the North Atlantic where boats were becalmed; named for its large masses of floating seaweed.

3. Herb used as a cathartic; believed in legend to have human properties, to shriek when pulled from the ground, and to promote pregnancy.

A Virginal¹

No, no! Go from me. I have left her lately.
 I will not spoil my sheath with lesser brightness,
 For my surrounding air hath a new lightness;
 Slight are her arms, yet they have bound me straitly
 And left me cloaked as with a gauze of æther; 5
 As with sweet leaves; as with subtle clearness.
 Oh, I have picked up magic in her nearness
 To sheathe me half in half the things that sheathe her.
 No, no! Go from me. I have still the flavour,
 Soft as spring wind that's come from birchen bowers. 10
 Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,
 As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches,
 Hath of the trees a likeness of the savour:
 As white their bark, so white this lady's hours.

1912

A Pact

I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman—
 I have detested you long enough.
 I come to you as a grown child
 Who has had a pig-headed father;
 I am old enough now to make friends. 5
 It was you that broke the new wood,
 Now is a time for carving.
 We have one sap and one root—
 Let there be commerce between us.

1913, 1916

In a Station of the Metro¹

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
 Petals on a wet, black bough.

1913, 1916

The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter¹

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
 I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.

1. A small pianolike instrument popular in the 16th and 17th centuries.

1. Paris subway.

1. Adaptation from the Chinese of Li Po (701–

762), named Rihaku in Japanese, from the papers of Ernest Fenollosa, an American scholar whose widow gave his papers on Japan and China to Pound.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
 You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
 And we went on living in the village of Chŭkan: 5
 Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
 I never laughed, being bashful.
 Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
 Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back. 10

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
 I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
 Forever and forever and forever.
 Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed, 15
 You went into far Ku-tŭ-en, by the river of swirling eddies,
 And you have been gone five months.
 The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
 By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses, 20
 Too deep to clear them away!
 The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
 The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
 Over the grass in the West garden;
 They hurt me. I grow older. 25
 If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
 Please let me know beforehand,
 And I will come out to meet you
 As far as Chŭ-fŭ-Sa.

By Rihaku

1915

Villanelle: The Psychological Hour¹

I

I had over-prepared the event,
 that much was ominous.
 With middle-ageing care
 I had laid out just the right books.
 I had almost turned down the pages. 5

*Beauty is so rare a thing,
 So few drink of my fountain.*

1. The poem is not in the traditional villanelle stanza pattern.

So much barren regret,
 So many hours wasted!
 And now I watch, from the window, 10
 the rain, the wandering busses.
 “Their little cosmos is shaken”—
 the air is alive with that fact.
 In their parts of the city
 they are played on by diverse forces. 15
 How do I know?
 Oh, I know well enough.
 For them there is something afoot.
 As for me;
 I had over-prepared the event— 20

*Beauty is so rare a thing.
 So few drink of my fountain.*

Two friends: a breath of the forest . . .
 Friends? Are people less friends
 because one has just, at last, found them? 25
 Twice they promised to come.

“Between the night and morning?”²

*Beauty would drink of my mind.
 Youth would awhile forget
 my youth is gone from me. 30*

II

(“Speak up! You have danced so stiffly?
 Someone admired your works,
 And said so frankly.
 “Did you talk like a fool,
 The first night? 35
 The second evening?”

“*But* they promised again:
 “To-morrow at tea-time.’”)

III

Now the third day is here—
 no word from either; 40
 No word from her nor him,
 Only another man’s note:
 “Dear Pound, I am leaving England.”

1916

2. In “The People,” an uncollected poem published in 1916, William Butler Yeats complained of an “unmannerly town” that can ruin one’s reputation “Between the night and the morning.”

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley¹
(Life and Contacts)²

"Vocat æestus in umbram"

—Nemesianus,³ Ec. IV

*E. P. Ode pour l'élection de Son Sepulchre*⁴

For three years, out of key with his time,
He strove to resuscitate the dead art
Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"
In the old sense. Wrong from the start—

No, hardly, but seeing he had been born
In a half savage country, out of date;
Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;
Capaneus,⁵ trout for factitious bait;

5

Ἰδμεν γὰρ τοι πάνθ' ὄσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ⁶
Caught in the unstopped ear;
Giving the rocks small lee-way
The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year.

10

His true Penelope was Flaubert,⁷
He fished by obstinate isles;
Observed the elegance of Circe's⁸ hair
Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.

15

Unaffected by "the march of events,"
He passed from men's memory in *l'an trentuniesme*
De son eage,⁹ the case presents
No adjunct to the Muses' diadem.

20

1. This poem was published in 1920 when Pound was on the verge of leaving London. He declared that the poem was modeled partly on the technique of Henry James's prose fiction: it presents its subject through the medium of a character's mind or voice, a "center of consciousness" whose mind and standards are also part of the subject being treated and are exposed themselves to scrutiny and assessment. In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" the first thirteen lyrics are presented through "E. P." In the next section, titled "Mauberley" (I through "Medallion"), the persona of "E. P." is absorbed in the fictitious poet Mauberley, a second persona.

2. Echo of a conventional subtitle of literary biographies, "Life and Letters." In the 1957 edition, Pound reversed the sequence, claiming that "Contacts and Life" followed the "order of the subject matter." To the American edition of *Personae* in 1926 Pound added the following note: "The sequence is so distinctly a farewell to London that the reader who chooses to regard this as an exclusively American edition may as well omit it."

3. Carthaginian poet (3rd century). The Latin,

from his *Eclogues* (4.38), reads "The heat calls us into the shade."

4. Adaptation of the title of an ode by Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585), "On the Selection of His Tomb" (*Odes* 4.5).

5. One of the seven champions who attack Thebes in Aeschylus's tragedy *The Seven Against Thebes* (476 B.C.E.) and who is struck down by Zeus.

6. For we know all the toils [endured] in wide Troy (Greek). In Homer's *Odyssey* (12.189) part of the sirens' song to detain Odysseus. Odysseus stopped his comrades' ears with wax to prevent their succumbing to the lure.

7. Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), French novelist who cultivated form and stylistic precision. Penelope was Odysseus's wife; she remained faithful during his long absence, despite appeals from many suitors.

8. Sorceress with whom Odysseus lived for a year before returning home.

9. The thirty-first year of his age (Old French); adapted from *The Testament* by the 15th-century French poet François Villon.

II

The age demanded an image
Of its accelerated grimace,
Something for the modern stage,
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries 25
Of the inward gaze;
Better mendacities
Than the classics in paraphrase!

The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time, 30
A prose kinema,¹ not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.

III

The tea-rose tea-gown, etc.
Supplants the mousseline of Cos,²
The pianola "replaces"
Sappho's barbitos.³ 35

Christ follows Dionysus,⁴
Phallic and ambrosial
Made way for macerations⁵
Caliban casts out Ariel.⁶ 40

All things are a flowing,
Sage Heracleitus⁷ says;
But a tawdry cheapness
Shall outlast our days.

Even the Christian beauty 45
Defects—after Samothrace;⁸
We see τὸ καλὸν⁹
Decreed in the market place.

Faun's flesh is not to us,
Nor the saint's vision. 50
We have the press for wafer;
Franchise for circumcision.

1. Movement (Greek) and early spelling of *cinema*, "motion pictures."

2. Gauzelike fabric for which the Aegean island Cos was famous.

3. Lyrelike instrument used by the Greek poet Sappho (fl. 600 B.C.E.).

4. Greek god of fertility, regenerative suffering, wine, and poetic inspiration; his rites were characterized by frenzies and ecstasies.

5. Wasting, fasting. Pound contrasts Christian asceticism to Dionysian rites.

6. Characters in Shakespeare's *Tempest*; Caliban is earthbound and Ariel is a spirit of air.

7. Greek philosopher (fl. 500 B.C.E.) who taught that all reality is flux or "a flowing."

8. North Aegean island, center of religious mystery cults.

9. The beautiful (Greek).

All men, in law, are equals.
 Free of Pisistratus,¹
 We choose a knave or an eunuch
 To rule over us. 55

O bright Apollo,
 τίς ἄνδρα, τίς ἥρωα, τίνα θεόν,²
 What god, man, or hero
 Shall I place a tin wreath upon! 60

IV

These fought in any case,
 and some believing,
 pro domo,³ in any case . . .

Some quick to arm,
 some for adventure, 65
 some from fear of weakness,
 some from fear of censure,
 some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
 learning later . . .
 some in fear, learning love of slaughter; 70

Died some, pro patria,
 non "dulce" non "et decor"⁴ . . .
 walked eye-deep in hell
 believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
 came home, home to a lie, 75
 home to many deceptions,
 home to old lies and new infamy;
 usury age-old and age-thick
 and liars in public places.

Daring as never before, wastage as never before. 80
 Young blood and high blood,
 fair cheeks, and fine bodies;

fortitude as never before

frankness as never before,
 disillusion as never told in the old days, 85
 hysterias, trench confessions,
 laughter out of dead bellies.

1. Athenian tyrant and art patron (fl. 6th century B.C.E.).

2. What man, what hero, what god (Greek). Pound's version of Pindar's "What god, what hero, what man shall we loudly praise" (*Olympian Odes* 2.2).

3. For the home (Latin).

4. For one's native land, not sweetly, not gloriously (Latin). Adapted from Horace, "it is sweet and glorious to die for one's fatherland" (*Odes* 3.2.13).

V

There died a myriad,
 And of the best, among them,
 For an old bitch gone in the teeth, 90
 For a botched civilization,

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,
 Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

For two gross of broken statues,
 For a few thousand battered books. 95

*Yeux Glauques*⁵

Gladstone⁶ was still respected,
 When John Ruskin produced
 "King's Treasuries"; Swinburne
 And Rossetti still abused.

Fœtid Buchanan lifted up his voice 100
 When that faun's head of hers
 Became a pastime for
 Painters and adulterers.

The Burne-Jones cartoons⁷
 Have preserved her eyes; 105
 Still, at the Tate, they teach
 Cophetua to rhapsodize;

Thin like brook-water,
 With a vacant gaze.
 The English Rubaiyat was still-born⁸ 110
 In those days.

The thin, clear gaze, the same
 Still darts out faun-like from the half-ruin'd face,
 Questing and passive . . .
 "Ah, poor Jenny's⁹ case" . . . 115

5. The brilliant yellow-green eyes of Elizabeth Siddal, the favorite model of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and later the wife of the painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882). She was the model for the beggar maid in *Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (now hanging in the Tate Gallery, London), by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898).

6. William E. Gladstone (1809–1898) was four times prime minister of Britain.

7. Drawings. The Pre-Raphaelites, including the poet Algernon Swinburne (1837–1909), were attacked as "The Fleshly School of Poetry" by

Robert W. Buchanan (1841–1901) in 1871 and were defended by the critic John Ruskin (1819–1900), whose *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) contains a chapter titled "Kings' Treasuries," calling for the diffusion of literature and the improvement of English tastes in the arts.

8. Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883) translated *The Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyām* in 1859, but it was not read ("still-born") until discovered later by the Pre-Raphaelites.

9. Prostitute, heroine of a poem by Rossetti.

Bewildered that a world
Shows no surprise
At her last maquero's¹
Adulteries.

*"Siena mi fe'; Disfecemi Maremma"*²

Among the pickled foetuses and bottled bones, 120
Engaged in perfecting the catalogue,
I found the last scion of the
Senatorial families of Strasbourg, Monsieur Verog.³

For two hours he talked of Gallifet;⁴
Of Dowson; of the Rhymers' Club; 125
Told me how Johnson (Lionel)⁵ died
By falling from a high stool in a pub . . .

But showed no trace of alcohol
At the autopsy, privately performed—
Tissue preserved—the pure mind 130
Arose toward Newman⁶ as the whiskey warmed.

Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels;
Headlam for uplift; Image⁷ impartially imbued
With raptures for Bacchus, Terpsichore⁸ and the Church
So spoke the author of "The Dorian Mood," 135

M. Verog, out of step with the decade,
Detached from his contemporaries,
Neglected by the young,
Because of these reveries.

Brennbaum

The sky-like limpid eyes, 140
The circular infant's face,
The stiffness from spats to collar
Never relaxing into grace;

1. Pimp's.

2. Siena made me, Maremma unmade me (Medieval Italian); spoken by a Sienese woman, condemned by her husband to die in Maremma marshes for her infidelity, in Dante's *Purgatory* (5.134).

3. Victor Plarr (1863–1929), French poet ("In the Dorian Mood," 1896) and raconteur from Strasbourg, later librarian of the Royal College of Surgeons and member of the Rhymers' Club.

4. Marquis de Gallifet (1830–1909), French general at the battle of Sedan, which the French lost, in the Franco-Prussian War.

5. Two members of the Rhymers' Club were

Roman Catholic poets and heavy drinkers. Ernest Dowson (1867–1900), of whom Plarr published a memoir. Lionel Johnson (1867–1902), whose *Poetical Works* Pound edited in 1915.

6. John Henry Newman (1801–1890), editor and Roman Catholic convert and intellectual, later cardinal.

7. Two more members of the Rhymers' Club. The Reverend Stewart D. Headlam (1847–1924), forced to resign his curacy for lecturing on the dance to workers' clubs. Selwyn Image (1849–1930), founder with Headlam of the Church and Stage Guild.

8. Greek Muse of the dance.

The heavy memories of Horeb, Sinai and the forty years,⁹
 Showed only when the daylight fell 145
 Level across the face
 Of Brennbaum "The Impeccable."

Mr. Nixon

In the cream gilded cabin of his steam yacht
 Mr. Nixon advised me kindly, to advance with fewer
 Dangers of delay. "Consider 150
 "Carefully the reviewer.

"I was as poor as you are;
 "When I began I got, of course,
 "Advance on royalties, fifty at first," said Mr. Nixon,
 "Follow me, and take a column, 155
 "Even if you have to work free.

"Butter reviewers. From fifty to three hundred
 "I rose in eighteen months;
 "The hardest nut I had to crack
 "Was Dr. Dundas. 160

"I never mentioned a man but with the view
 "Of selling my own works.
 "The tip's a good one, as for literature
 "It gives no man a sinecure.

"And no one knows, at sight, a masterpiece. 165
 "And give up verse, my boy,
 "There's nothing in it."

.....
 Likewise a friend of Blougram's once advised me:¹
 Don't kick against the pricks,
 Accept opinion. The "Nineties"² tried your game 170
 And died, there's nothing in it.

X

Beneath the sagging roof
 The stylist has taken shelter,
 Unpaid, uncelebrated,
 At last from the world's welter 175

9. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Moses saw the burning bush at Horeb (Exodus 3.2); he received the Ten Commandments at Sinai (Exodus 19.20ff.).

1. In Robert Browning's "Bishop Blougram's Apology," the bishop rationalized doctrinal laxity.
 2. The 1890s.

Nature receives him;
 With a placid and uneducated mistress
 He exercises his talents
 And the soil meets his distress.

The haven from sophistications and contentions 180
 Leaks through its thatch;
 He offers succulent cooking;
 The door has a creaking latch.

XI

“Conservatrix of Milésien”³
 Habits of mind and feeling, 185
 Possibly. But in Ealing⁴
 With the most bank-clerky of Englishmen?

No, “Milésian” is an exaggeration.
 No instinct has survived in her
 Older than those her grandmother 190
 Told her would fit her station.

XII

“Daphne with her thighs in bark
 Stretches toward me her leafy hands,”⁵
 Subjectively. In the stuffed-satin drawing-room
 I await The Lady Valentine’s commands, 195

Knowing my coat has never been
 Of precisely the fashion
 To stimulate, in her,
 A durable passion;

Doubtful, somewhat, of the value 200
 Of well-gowned approbation
 Of literary effort,
 But never of The Lady Valentine’s vocation:

Poetry, her border of ideas,
 The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending 205
 With other strata
 Where the lower and higher have ending;

A hook to catch the Lady Jane’s attention,
 A modulation toward the theatre,

3. I.e., conservator of the erotic, for which the Ionian city of Miletus and Aristides’s *Milesian Tales* (2nd century B.C.E.) were known.

4. London suburb.

5. In Greek mythology, the nymph Daphne

changed into a laurel tree to escape Apollo. Pound’s lines are a translation of Théophile Gautier’s version of Ovid’s story in *Le Château de Souvenir*.

Also, in the case of revolution,
A possible friend and comforter. 210

Conduct, on the other hand, the soul
"Which the highest cultures have nourished"⁶
To Fleet St. where
Dr. Johnson⁷ flourished; 215

Beside this thoroughfare
The sale of half-hose has
Long since superseded the cultivation
Of Pierian roses.⁸

*Envoi (1919)*⁹

Go, dumb-born book, 220
Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:
Hadst thou but song
As thou hast subjects known,
Then were there cause in thee that should condone
Even my faults that heavy upon me lie, 225
And build her glories their longevity.

Tell her that sheds
Such treasure in the air,
Recking naught else but that her graces give
Life to the moment, 230
I would bid them live
As roses might, in magic amber laid,
Red overwrought with orange and all made
One substance and one colour
Braving time. 235

Tell her that goes
With song upon her lips
But sings not out the song, nor knows
The maker of it, some other mouth,
May be as fair as hers, 240
Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone. 245

1920

6. A translation of two lines from "Complainte de Pianos" by French poet Jules Laforgue (1860–1887).

7. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), man of letters in mid-18th-century London. "Fleet St.": newspaper publishing center in London.

8. Roses of Pieria, place near Mount Olympus in Greece, where the Muses were worshipped.

9. This section of the poem is modeled on "Go, Lovely Rose" by Edmund Waller (1606–1687), whose poems were set to music by Henry Lawes (1596–1662).

FROM THE CANTOS

I¹

And then went down to the ship,
 Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
 We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
 Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
 Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward 5
 Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,
 Circe's² this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.
 Then sat we amidships, wind jamming the tiller,
 Thus with stretched sail, we went over sea till day's end.
 Sun to his slumber, shadows o'er all the ocean, 10
 Came we then to the bounds of deepest water,
 To the Kimmerian³ lands, and peopled cities
 Covered with close-webbed mist, unpierced ever
 With glitter of sun-rays
 Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven 15
 Swartest night stretched over wretched men there
 The ocean flowing backward, came we then to the place
 Aforesaid by Circe.
 Here did they rites, Perimedes and Eurylochus,⁴
 And drawing sword from my hip 20
 I dug the ell-square pitkin;⁵
 Poured we libations unto each the dead,
 First mead then sweet wine, water mixed with white flour.
 Then prayed I many a prayer to the sickly death's-heads;
 As set in Ithaca, sterile bulls of the best 25
 For sacrifice, heaping the pyre with goods,
 A sheep to Tiresias only, black and a bell-sheep.⁶
 Dark blood flowed in the fosse,⁷
 Souls out of Erebus,⁸ cadaverous dead, of brides
 Of youths and of the old who had borne much; 30
 Souls stained with recent tears, girls tender,
 Men many, mauled with bronze lance heads,
 Battle spoil, bearing yet dreory⁹ arms,
 These many crowded about me; with shouting,
 Pallor upon me, cried to my men for more beasts; 35
 Slaughtered the herds, sheep slain of bronze;
 Poured ointment, cried to the gods,

1. Lines 1–68 are an adaptation of book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*, which recounts Odysseus's voyage to Hades, the underworld of the dead. Odysseus was a native of Ithaca, in Greece.

2. Odysseus lived for a year with Circe before he determined to return to Ithaca. She instructed him to get directions for his trip home by visiting the Theban prophet Tiresias in the underworld.

3. Mythical people living in a foggy region at the

edge of the earth.

4. Two of Odysseus's companions.

5. Small pit, one ell (forty-five inches) on each side.

6. The prophet Tiresias is likened to a sheep that leads the herd.

7. Ditch, trench.

8. Land of the dead, Hades.

9. Bloody.

To Pluto the strong, and praised Proserpine;¹
 Unsheathed the narrow sword,
 I sat to keep off the impetuous impotent dead, 40
 Till I should hear Tiresias.

But first Elpenor² came, our friend Elpenor,
 Unburied, cast on the wide earth,
 Limbs that we left in the house of Circe,
 Unwept, unwrapped in sepulchre, since toils urged other. 45
 Pitiful spirit. And I cried in hurried speech:
 “Elpenor, how art thou come to this dark coast?
 “Cam’st thou afoot, outstripping seamen?”

And he in heavy speech:
 “Ill fate and abundant wine. I slept in Circe’s ingle.³ 50
 “Going down the long ladder unguarded,
 “I fell against the buttress,
 “Shattered the nape-nerve, the soul sought Avernus.⁴
 “But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied,
 “Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-bord, and inscribed: 55
 “*A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.*
 “And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows.”

And Anticlea⁵ came, whom I beat off, and then Tiresias Theban,
 Holding his golden wand, knew me, and spoke first:
 “A second time?⁶ why? man of ill star, 60
 “Facing the sunless dead and this joyless region?
 “Stand from the fosse, leave me my bloody bever⁷
 “For soothsay.”

And I stepped back,
 And he strong with the blood, said then: “Odysseus 65
 “Shalt return through spiteful Neptune,⁸ over dark seas,
 “Lose all companions.” And then Anticlea came.
 Lie quiet Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus,
 In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer.⁹
 And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away 70
 And unto Circe.

Venerandam,¹
 In the Cretan’s phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,
 Cypri munimenta sortita est,² mirthful, orichalchi,³ with golden

1. Goddess of regeneration and wife of Pluto, god of the underworld.

2. Odysseus’s companion who fell to his death from the roof of Circe’s house and was left unburied by his friends.

3. Corner, house.

4. Lake near Naples, the entrance to Hades.

5. Odysseus’s mother. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus weeps at the sight of her but obeys Circe’s instructions to speak to no one until Tiresias has first drunk the libation of blood that will enable him to speak.

6. They met once before on earth.

7. Libation.

8. God of the sea, who was to delay Odysseus’s return by a storm at sea.

9. Pound acknowledges using the Renaissance Latin translation of Homer, produced in the workshop (“officina”) of Wechel in Paris in 1538, by Andreas Divus.

1. Commanding reverence; a phrase describing Aphrodite, the goddess of love, in the Latin translation of the second Homeric Hymn by Georgius Dartona Cretensis (the “Cretan” in line 73).

2. The fortresses of Cyprus were her appointed realm (Latin).

3. Of copper (Latin); a reference to gifts presented to Aphrodite in the second Homeric Hymn.

Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids
Bearing the golden bough of Argicida.⁴ So that: 75

1925

XVII¹

So that the vines burst from my fingers
And the bees weighted with pollen
More heavily in the vine-shoots:
 chirr—chirr—chir-rikk—a purring sound,
And the birds sleepily in the branches. 5
 ZAGREUS! IO ZAGREUS.²
With the first pale-clear of the heaven
And the cities set in their hills,
And the goddess of the fair knees³
Moving there, with the oak-woods behind her, 10
The green slope, with white hounds
 leaping about her;
And thence down to the creek's mouth, until evening,
Flat water before me,
 and the trees growing in water, 15
Marble trunks out of stillness,⁴
On past the palazzi,
 in the stillness,
The light now, not of the sun.
 Chrysophrase,⁵ 20
And the water green clear, and blue clear;
On, to the great cliffs of amber.
 Between them,
Cave of Nerea,⁶
 she like a great shell curved, 25
And the boat drawn without sound,

4. Aeneas offered the Golden Bough to Proserpine before descending to the underworld. Pound associates Persephone with Aphrodite, goddess of love and slayer of the Greeks (Argi) during the Trojan War, and associates the Golden Bough, sacred to the goddess Diana, with the magic wand of the god Hermes, slayer of the many-eyed Argus ("Argicida") and liberator of Io.

1. This canto represents Pound's treatment of ancient myth and Renaissance history. Three sequences figure in this canto: Ulysses's (Odysseus's) voyage through the Mediterranean in search of home in Ithaca, Jason's voyage to the islands of Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece, and a ship's entrance into Venice. Among the personae that Pound assumes, besides Ulysses and Jason, are Dionysus (Zagreus), the Greek god of wine, rebirth, and ecstasy; Actaeon, who saw the goddess Diana bathing and was punished by being turned into a stag that was torn apart by his hounds; and Hades (Pluto), god of the underworld, who loved Koré (Persephone, goddess of

regeneration) and who kidnaped her from a meadow but was later forced to allow her to return to earth for several months each year.

2. Zagreus! I am Zagreus. (Greek). A sacrificial god often identified in a Greek myth with Dionysus, Zagreus was the offspring of Persephone (Koré) and Zeus; Zeus raped her before she was kidnaped by Hades.

3. Diana, goddess of the hunt.

4. The first glimpse of Venice. The marble façades and columns of its *palazzi* (palaces) are presented in accordance with the theories of the landscape painter and art critic Adrian Stokes (1854–1935), a friend of Pound's. Stokes (*The Stones of Rimini*, 1934) stressed the affinity of Venetian arts with the salt sea and the origin of marble from sunken forests and watery limestone: "Amid the sea Venice is built from the essence of the sea."

5. Green semiprecious stone.

6. Possibly the nymph Calypso, the temptress and death goddess who detained Ulysses for seven years in her island cave.

Without odour of ship-work,
 Nor bird-cry, nor any noise of wave moving,
 Nor splash of porpoise, nor any noise of wave moving,
 Within her cave, Nerea, 30
 she like a great shell curved
 In the suavity of the rock,
 cliff green-gray in the far,
 In the near, the gate-cliffs of amber,
 And the wave 35
 green clear, and blue clear,
 And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple,
 cool, porphyry smooth,
 the rock sea-worn.
 No gull-cry, no sound of porpoise, 40
 Sand as of malachite,⁷ and no cold there,
 the light not of the sun.

Zagreus, feeding his panthers,
 the turf clear as on hills under light.
 And under the almond-trees, gods, 45
 with them, *choros nympharum*.⁸ Gods,
 Hermes and Athene,⁹
 As shaft of compass,
 Between them, trembled—
 To the left is the place of fauns, 50
 sylva nympharum;¹
 The low wood, moor-scrub,
 the doe, the young spotted deer,
 leap up through the broom-plants,
 as dry leaf amid yellow. 55
 And by one cut of the hills,
 the great alley of Memnons.²
 Beyond, sea, crests seen over dune
 Night sea churning shingle,
 To the left, the alley of cypress. 60
 A boat came,
 One man holding her sail,
 Guiding her with oar caught over gunwale, saying:
 “ There, in the forest of marble,
 “ the stone trees—out of water— 65
 “ the arbours of stone—
 “ marble leaf, over leaf,
 “ silver, steel over steel,
 “ silver beaks rising and crossing,
 “ prow set against prow, 70

7. Green mineral.

8. Chorus of nymphs (Greek).

9. Ulysses's protectors. Hermes (messenger of the gods, patron of merchants and thieves) freed Ulysses from the bonds of Calypso. Athene (goddess of wisdom) calmed the waves for his final

voyage home to Ithaca (*Odyssey* 5).

1. Forest of the nymphs (Greek).

2. Commander of Ethiopian troops in the defense of Troy, he was called "son of dawn." His statue near Thebes, here likened to a row of cypress trees, reputedly issued a musical sound at daybreak.

“ stone, ply over ply,
 “ the gilt beams flare of an evening”
 Borso, Carmagnola, the men of craft, *i vitrei*,³
 Thither, at one time, time after time,
 And the waters richer than glass, 75
 Bronze gold, the blaze over the silver,
 Dye-pots in the torch-light,
 The flash of wave under prows,
 And the silver beaks rising and crossing.
 Stone trees, white and rose-white in the darkness, 80
 Cypress there by the towers,
 Drift under hulls in the night.

 “In the gloom the gold
 Gathers the light about it.”⁴ . . .

 Now supine in burrow, half over-arched bramble, 85
 One eye for the sea, through that peek-hole,
 Gray light, with Athene.
 Zothar and her elephants, the gold loin-cloth,
 The sistrum,⁵ shaken, shaken,
 the cohorts of her dancers. 90
 And Aletha,⁶ by bend of the shore,
 with her eyes seaward,
 and in her hands sea-wrack
 Salt-bright with the foam.
 Koré through the break meadow, 95
 with green-gray dust in the grass:
 “For this hour, brother of Circe.”⁷
 Arm laid over my shoulder,
 Saw the sun for three days, the sun fulvid,
 As a lion lift over sand-plain; 100
 and that day,
 And for three days, and none after,
 Splendour, as the splendour of Hermes,
 And shipped thence
 to the stone place, 105
 Pale white, over water,
 known water,
 And the white forest of marble, bent bough over bough,
 The pleached arbour of stone,
 Thither Borso, when they shot the barbed arrow at him, 110
 And Carmagnola, between the two columns,

3. Glassmakers, for whom Venice is famous. Borse d'Este (1431–1471) of Ferrara, patron of learning whose assassination was attempted in Venice. Francesco Bussone da Carmagnola (1390?–1432), mercenary soldier, tried and executed for treason in Venice.

4. Quoted from an earlier canto (XI) where “about” reads “against.”

5. An Egyptian metal rattle.

6. Zothar (line 88) and Aletha are probably invented names.

7. I.e., Aetes, king of Colchis, who maintained a cult of the sun (his father) on his island, and held possession of the Golden Fleece sought by Jason. Circe was the enchantress who detained Ulysses for a year, then instructed him to consult Tiresias in the underworld to learn his route home and told him how to enter the world of the dead through the Grove of Persephone.

Sigismundo,⁸ after that wreck in Dalmatia.
Sunset like the grasshopper flying.

1933

XLV

With *Usura*¹

With usura hath no man a house of good stone
each block cut smooth and well fitting
that design might cover their face,
with usura 5
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall
*harpes et luz*²
or where virgin receiveth message
and halo projects from incision,³
with usura 10
seeth no man Gonzaga⁴ his heirs and his concubines
no picture is made to endure nor to live with
but it is made to sell and sell quickly
with usura, sin against nature,
is thy bread ever more of stale rags 15
is thy bread dry as paper,
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour
with usura the line grows thick
with usura is no clear demarcation
and no man can find site for his dwelling. 20
Stonecutter is kept from his stone
weaver is kept from his loom
WITH USURA
wool comes not to market
sheep bringeth no gain with usura 25
Usura is a murrain,⁵ usura
blunteth the needle in the maid's hand
and stoppeth the spinner's cunning. Pietro Lombardo⁶
came not by usura
Duccio came not by usura 30
nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin⁷ not by usura

8. Sigismondo Malatesta (1417–1468), Renaissance ruler of Rimini whom Pound admired. An art patron, antipapist, and builder of the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini, he fought for Venice and other cities and in 1464 reached the Dalmatian coast in an unsuccessful crusade.

1. Usury, or lending money at interest (Latin). Pound interpreted this practice as the root of all corruption in the modern world, the cause of the separation of the worker—whether farmer, laborer, or artist—from the work.

2. Harps and lutes (Latin). In medieval and Renaissance depictions of Paradise, the angels are shown playing on such instruments.

3. Description of scenes in religious paintings, especially the Annunciation, in which the Virgin Mary is informed that she is to be the mother of Christ.

4. Luigi Gonzaga (1267–1360), prince of Mantua and founder of a dynasty that ruled that Italian city until the 18th century.

5. A plague (archaic).

6. Italian sculptor (1435–1515).

7. Duccio di Buoninsegna (1260?–1318?), Piero della Francesca (1420?–1492), and Giovanni Bellini (1430?–1516) were Italian painters from Florence and nearby towns.

nor was 'La Calumnia'⁸ painted.
 Came not by usura Angelico; came not Ambrogio Praedis,⁹
 Came no church of cut stone signed: *Adamo me fecit*.¹
 Not by usura St Trophime 35
 Not by usura Saint Hilaire,²
 Usura rusteth the chisel
 It rusteth the craft and the craftsman
 It gnaweth the thread in the loom
 None learneth to weave gold in her pattern; 40
 Azure hath a canker by usura; cramoisi³ is unbroidered
 Emerald findeth no Memling⁴
 Usura slayeth the child in the womb
 It stayeth the young man's courting
 It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth 45
 between the young bride and her bridegroom
 CONTRA NATURAM⁵
 They have brought whores for Eleusis⁶
 Corpses are set to banquet
 at behest of usura. 50

N.B. Usury: A charge for the use of purchasing power, levied without regard to production; often without regard to the possibilities of production. (Hence the failure of the Medici bank.⁷)

1937

8. Rumor (Italian); allegorical painting by Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), one of the greatest of the Italian Renaissance painters.

9. Fra Angelico (1387?–1455) and Praedis (1455?–1506) were Italian painters.

1. Adam made me (Latin); words carved into the church of San Zeno Maggiore in Verona, Italy. To Pound, a symbol of the architect's pride in and feeling of connection with his work.

2. Medieval churches in the French cities of Arles and Poitiers, respectively.

3. Heavy crimson cloth (French).

4. Hans Memling (1430?–1495), Flemish painter.

5. Against nature (Latin).

6. City in ancient Greece, northwest of Athens, where secret religious rites in honor of Demeter and Persephone, the goddess of fertility and her daughter, were celebrated by priestesses every spring. The substitution of whores for priestesses represents the degradation of ancient rituals.

7. A bank operated from 1397 to 1494 by the Medici family of Florence; it anticipated modern banking techniques.

Modernist Manifestos

As an artistic movement, or set of movements, given to asserting its breaks with past traditions, modernism in the early twentieth century often proclaimed itself in the writing of manifestos. The modernist manifesto is a public declaration of artistic convictions, relatively brief, often highly stylized or epigrammatic in the mode of other forms of modernist writing, and almost always an aggressively self-conscious declaration of artistic independence.

The word *manifesto*, derived from Latin and meaning “to make public,” first entered English usage in the seventeenth century to describe printed declarations of belief and advocacy. Early manifestos tended to be weapons forged by dissenting groups in religious and political struggles, a tradition that continued into the nineteenth century with perhaps the most famous political manifesto of the era, Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848). In the nineteenth century, artistic groups also began to issue manifestos. The preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) by the poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, defended their “experiment” with a new kind of poetry; in the United States, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature* (1836), the founding document of American transcendentalism, called for spiritual and artistic renewal; inspired partly by Emerson’s example, Margaret Fuller’s “The Great Lawsuit: MAN *versus* MEN. WOMAN *versus* WOMEN” (1843) linked women’s pursuit of political rights to their pursuit of artistic expression and intellectual independence. In late-nineteenth-century Paris, the “Symbolist Manifesto” (1886), by the poet Jean Moréas, turned the genre of the manifesto in some of its characteristically high modernist directions. Attacking not so much oppressive social conditions as oppressive conceptions of literature, the symbolists declared their hostility to realism’s “plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description” in order to claim for poetry a freer, less moralizing play of verbal imagination.

The writers of manifestos did not have one particular audience in mind; it was enough for them to get their positions into the public realm. But manifestos also worked to bring like-minded people together; a poet might publish a manifesto in a journal of poetry, a political radical in a radical journal, and so on. In the modernist period, manifestos increasingly reached an international community of self-consciously avant-garde, cosmopolitan artists. The Italian writer F. T. Marinetti published his “Manifesto of Futurism” in French; Ezra Pound’s “A Retrospect” ranged freely over his contemporaries in British and American modernist poetry as well as over Pound’s admired writers of the past in several languages—Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare; Willa Cather similarly juxtaposed American fiction with French, Russian, and British works in “The Novel Démeublé.”

Hostility is often a rhetorical tool of the manifesto, and it was especially so in the modernist period. Modernist manifestos often tried to grab their audiences by the lapels, to separate not only the new from the old but also a creative *us* from a “vulgar” or hidebound *them*. The us–them divide was intended to offend traditionalists as well as to unite the believers in new artistic movements, and it often succeeded in both aims. Marinetti’s “Manifesto of Futurism” set the tone in 1909 by declaring that “No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece” and exalting “scorn for women” along with modern technology. By 1918, Ezra Pound in “A Retrospect” could manage to insult in one sentence both traditional poetic forms and would-be imitators of his own free verse: “The actual language and phrasing” of the new poetry, Pound complained, “is often as bad as that of our elders without even the excuse that

the words are shoveled in to fill a metric pattern or to complete the noise of a rhyme-sound.” The modernist boundary between *us* and *them*, Pound’s “Retrospect” implies, will always be in motion, always pushing forward and leaving someone behind.

At the same time, however, the very aggression of some high modernist manifestos encouraged some members of their audience to talk back with equal vigor. Marinetti denounced advocates of women’s suffrage but recognized a counterpart to his own aggressive tactics in London’s most radical suffragettes, to the point of joining them on a march that was broken up by mounted police. The Anglo-American poet Mina Loy wrote and privately circulated her “Feminist Manifesto” as an enthusiastic member of Marinetti’s circle; his take-no-prisoners example licensed her rhetoric of destruction and demolition, which she aimed not only at the institutions of sexism but also at less confrontational versions of feminism.

Other influential modernist manifestos were more measured in their language or more subtle in their explorations of the relationship between modernist destruction and cultural production. William Carlos Williams’s exuberant prose interludes in *Spring and All* asserted, with the aid of language borrowed from evolutionary biology, that modernism’s sudden “SPRING” into the new was the explosive culmination of many small, repeated movements in the past. The title metaphor of Willa Cather’s “The Novel D emeubl e”—the novel “unfurnished”—suggested that modernism might prune the decorative excesses of nineteenth-century realism without abandoning its basic structure. And Langston Hughes, although he railed against “the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America,” ultimately envisioned the mountain—the internal and external struggles of black Americans to cast off white denigrations of African American culture—as the foundation of a higher and broader modernist art: “We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.”

F. T. MARINETTI

Marinetti (1876–1944) published two obscure volumes of poetry in his native Italian before “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” appeared in *Le Figaro*, an influential Parisian journal, in February 1909. The futurist manifesto attracted an international circle of artists and writers into Marinetti’s orbit, including painters, architects, poets, sculptors, playwrights, and film directors. Across all the arts, futurism scorned traditional standards of artistic beauty, celebrated modern technologies of speed, and aimed to shock audiences: futurist painters adopted the mixed perspectives of cubism to celebrate speeding trains, and futurist theater drew on cabaret, variety shows, and circuses in staging free-form events that violated traditional theater’s boundary between actors and audience. Futurism’s aesthetic of aggression had unsettling political implications as well: true to his manifesto’s declaration that war is “the only hygiene” of the world, Marinetti welcomed the technologically enhanced slaughter of World War I and supported the rise of Mussolini’s Italian fascism.

From Manifesto of Futurism

1. We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness.

2. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry.

3. Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap.

4. We say that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath—a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot—is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.¹

5. We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit.

6. The poet must spend himself with ardor, splendor, and generosity, to swell the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements.

7. Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before man.

8. We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! . . . Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.

9. We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.

10. We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.

11. We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke; bridges that stride the rivers like giant gymnasts, flashing in the sun with a glitter of knives; adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing; and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd.

* * *

1909

1. Famous Greek statue of Nike, the winged goddess of victory, from the 2nd or 3rd century B.C.E.; discovered on the island of Samothrace in 1863, it became an icon of 19th-century high artistic taste.

MINA LOY

“Feminist Manifesto” was written during Loy’s association with F. T. Marinetti but never published during her lifetime (1882–1966); it survives in a copy sent to a friend, the writer Mabel Dodge Luhan, in 1914. Loy’s central demand is sexual freedom, the end of the divide between “the mistress” and “the mother,” and the destruction of women’s attachment to ideals of their own purity. Loy’s modernist call for women’s free sexual expression appeals to elite women’s sense of race and class privilege: echoing nineteenth-century alarms that granting women life choices beyond marriage and childbearing would lead to white “race suicide,” Loy urges “superior” women to embrace maternity as both a responsibility and an aspect of their own sexual development.

Feminist Manifesto

The feminist movement as at present instituted is

Inadequate

Women if you want to realise yourselves—you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illusions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—are you prepared for the Wrench—? There is no half-measure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about Reform, the only method is Absolute Demolition

Cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-crusades & uniform education¹—you are glossing over

Reality.

Professional & commercial careers are opening up for you—

Is that all you want ?

1. Securing women’s legal right to own property, gaining access to education for women (especially higher education) on the same terms as men, and

suppressing prostitution were all important goals of 19th- and early 20th-century feminist movements.

And if you honestly desire to find your level without prejudice—be Brave & deny at the outset—that pathetic clap-trap war cry Woman is the equal of man—

She is NOT! for

The man who lives a life in which his activities conform to a social code which is a protectorate of the feminine element—
— is no longer masculine

The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a relative impersonality, are not yet Feminine

Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not —seek within yourselves to find out what you are

As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice between Parasitism, & Prostitution—or Negation

Men & women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited—at present they are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the others sexual dependence—. The only point at which the interests of the sexes merge—is the sexual embrace.

The first illusion it is to your interest to demolish is the division of women into two classes the mistress, & the mother every well-balanced & developed woman knows that is not true, Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty for expressing herself through all her functions—there are no restrictions the woman who is so incompletely evolved as to be un-self-conscious in sex, will prove a restrictive influence on the temperamental expansion of the next generation; the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother—an inferior mentality—& will enjoy an inadequate apprehension of Life .

To obtain results you must make sacrifices & the first & greatest sacrifice you have to make is of your “virtue”
 The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity—is too easy a stand-by—rendering her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value— therefore, the first self-enforced law for the female sex, as a protection against the man made bogey of virtue—which is the principle instrument of her subjection, would be the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population at puberty—.

The value of man is assessed entirely according to his use or interest to the community, the value of woman, depends entirely on chance, her success or insuccess in manoeuvring a man into taking the life-long responsibility of her—
 The advantages of marriage of too ridiculously ample— compared to all other trades—for under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man (with-out return of any sort—even offspring)—as a thank offering for her virginity

The woman who has not succeeded in striking that advantageous bargain—is prohibited from any but surreptitious re-action to Life-stimuli—& entirely debarred maternity.

Every woman has a right to maternity—

Every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex—

Each child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life—& not necessarily of a possibly irksome & outworn continuance of an alliance—spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it—follow their individual lines of personal evolution—

For the harmony of the race, each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpenetration of the male & female temperaments—free of stress

Woman must become more responsible for the child than man—

Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved—

The feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers his attentions from her to another woman

The desire for comfortable protection instead of an intelligent curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressure of life sex or so called love must be reduced to its initial element, honour, grief, sentimentality, pride & consequently jealousy must be detached from it.

Woman for her happiness must retain her deceptive fragility of appearance, combined with indomitable will, irreducible courage, & abundant health the outcome of sound nerves—

Another great illusion that woman must use all her introspective clear-sightedness & unbiassed bravery to destroy—for the sake of her self respect is the impurity of sex the realisation in defiance of superstition that there is nothing impure in sex—except in the mental attitude to it—will constitute an incalculable & wider social regeneration than it is possible for our generation to imagine.

1914

1982

EZRA POUND

“A Retrospect” summarizes Pound’s (1885–1972) early declarations of the principles of Imagism. His famous list of “Don’ts,” originally published in 1913, cautioned poets against superfluous words, rigid metrical rhythms, and the use of abstract rhetoric rather than “direct treatment” of poetic subjects. Pound’s own poetry by 1918 was taking a turn away from Imagism’s characteristic emphasis on representing “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” and toward longer poems, more engaged with history and the inherited materials of art.

From A Retrospect

There has been so much scribbling about a new fashion in poetry, that I may perhaps be pardoned this brief recapitulation and retrospect.

In the spring or early summer of 1912, "H. D.," Richard Aldington and myself decided¹ that we were agreed upon the three principles following:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Upon many points of taste and of predilection we differed, but agreeing upon these three positions we thought we had as much right to a group name, at least as much right, as a number of French "schools" proclaimed by Mr Flint in the August number of Harold Monro's² magazine for 1911.

This school has since been "joined" or "followed" by numerous people who, whatever their merits, do not show any signs of agreeing with the second specification. Indeed *vers libre*³ has become as prolix and as verbose as any of the flaccid varieties that preceded it. It has brought faults of its own. The actual language and phrasing is often as bad as that of our elders without even the excuse that the words are shovelled in to fill a metric pattern or to complete the noise of a rhyme-sound. Whether or no the phrases followed by the followers are musical must be left to the reader's decision. At times I can find a marked metre in "vers libres," as stale and hackneyed as any pseudo-Swinburnian,⁴ at times the writers seem to follow no musical structure whatever. But it is, on the whole, good that the field should be ploughed. Perhaps a few good poems have come from the new method, and if so it is justified.

Criticism is not a circumscription or a set of prohibitions. It provides fixed points of departure. It may startle a dull reader into alertness. That little of it which is good is mostly in stray phrases; or if it be an older artist helping a younger it is in great measure but rules of thumb, cautions gained by experience.

I set together a few phrases on practical working about the time the first remarks on imagisme were published. The first use of the word "Imagiste" was in my note to T.E. Hulme's⁵ five poems, printed at the end of my "Ripostes" in the autumn of 1912. I reprint my cautions from *Poetry* for March, 1913.

A FEW DON'TS

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart,⁶ though we might not agree absolutely in our application.

1. H.D. and the British poet Richard Aldington (1892–1962), who married H.D. in 1913, were among the first poets designated "Imagistes" by Pound.

2. Scottish poet and critic Harold Munro founded the *Poetry Review* in 1911. The British poet and translator Frank Stuart Flint (1885–1960) was a friend of Pound's and another Imagist.

3. Free verse (French); poetry without a fixed pattern of rhyme or meter.

4. The British Victorian poet Algernon Swinburne (1837–1909) was famous for using elaborate poetic forms.

5. Thomas Ernest Hulme (1883–1917), British poet and critic who, with Pound, formulated early statements of Imagism.

6. British psychologist Bernard Hart (1879–1960), influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, popularized the idea of the "complex" as an "emotional system of ideas."

It is the presentation of such a “complex” instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

All this, however, some may consider open to debate. The immediate necessity is to tabulate A LIST OF DON'TS for those beginning to write verses. I can not put all of them into Mosaic⁷ negative.

To begin with, consider the three propositions (demanding direct treatment, economy of words, and the sequence of the musical phrase), not as dogma—never consider anything as dogma—but as the result of long contemplation, which, even if it is some one else's contemplation, may be worth consideration.

Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work. Consider the discrepancies between the actual writing of the Greek poets and dramatists, and the theories of the Graeco-Roman grammarians, concocted to explain their metres.

LANGUAGE

Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something.

Don't use such an expression as “dim lands *of peace*.” It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.

Go in fear of abstractions. Do not retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths.

What the expert is tired of today the public will be tired of tomorrow.

Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher spends on the art of music.

Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.

Don't allow “influence” to mean merely that you mop up the particular decorative vocabulary of some one or two poets whom you happen to admire. A Turkish war correspondent was recently caught red-handed babbling in his despatches of “dove-grey” hills, or else it was “pearl-pale,” I can not remember.

Use either no ornament or good ornament.

1918

7. Referring to the “Thou shalt not . . .” formula of the Ten Commandments of Moses (Exodus 20.1–17).

WILLA CATHER

“The Novel *Démeublé*” strikes many familiar high modernist themes: distrust of mass production, the importance of distinguishing popular entertainment from serious art, and disdain for nineteenth-century realism with its consumerist catalogs of material objects. In this essay, however, Cather (1873–1947) sifts through the nineteenth-century heritage rather than rejecting it wholesale; she finds a precursor for her own ideal of the “unfurnished” modernist novel in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

From The Novel Démeublé

The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished. The property-man has been so busy on its pages, the importance of material objects and their vivid presentation have been so stressed, that we take it for granted whoever can observe, and can write the English language, can write a novel. Often the latter qualification is considered unnecessary.

In any discussion of the novel, one must make it clear whether one is talking about the novel as a form of amusement, or as a form of art; since they serve very different purposes and in very different ways. One does not wish the egg one eats for breakfast, or the morning paper, to be made of the stuff of immortality. The novel manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people must be considered exactly like a cheap soap or a cheap perfume, or cheap furniture. Fine quality is a distinct disadvantage in articles made for great numbers of people who do not want quality but quantity, who do not want a thing that “wears,” but who want change,—a succession of new things that are quickly thread-bare and can be lightly thrown away. Does anyone pretend that if the Woolworth store windows were piled high with Tanagra figurines at ten cents, they could for a moment compete with Kewpie brides¹ in the popular esteem? Amusement is one thing; enjoyment of art is another.

* * *

There is a popular superstition that “realism” asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations. But is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague indication of the sympathy and candour with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme? Is the story of a

1. Kewpie dolls, enormously popular from their introduction in the 1910s, were manufactured in ceramic and, later, plastic. Named for their resemblance to images of Cupid, they were often distributed in bride and groom sets. “Woolworth’s”: American chain store founded in the

late 19th century and noted for inexpensive merchandise. “Tanagra figurines”: miniature terracotta statues, usually of fashionably dressed women, mass produced in Greece at the end of the 4th century B.C.E.

banker who is unfaithful to his wife and who ruins himself by speculation in trying to gratify the caprices of his mistresses, at all reinforced by a masterly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits, the methods of the Stock Exchange? Of course, if the story is thin, these things do reinforce it in a sense,—any amount of red meat thrown into the scale to make the beam dip. But are the banking system and the Stock Exchange worth being written about at all? Have such things any proper place in imaginative art?

* * *

If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a vivid and brilliant form of journalism. Out of the teeming, gleaming stream of the present it must select the eternal material of art. There are hopeful signs that some of the younger writers are trying to break away from mere verisimilitude, and, following the development of modern painting, to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of their characters; to present their scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration. The higher processes of art are all processes of simplification. The novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it; just as the modern painter learns to draw, and then learns when utterly to disregard his accomplishment, when to subordinate it to a higher and truer effect. In this direction only, it seems to me, can the novel develop into anything more varied and perfect than all the many novels that have gone before.

One of the very earliest American romances might well serve as a suggestion to later writers. In *The Scarlet Letter* how truly in the spirit of art is the *mise-en-scène*² presented. That drudge, the theme-writing high-school student, could scarcely be sent there for information regarding the manners and dress and interiors of Puritan society. The material investiture of the story is presented as if unconsciously; by the reserved, fastidious hand of an artist, not by the gaudy fingers of a showman or the mechanical industry of a department-store window-dresser. As I remember it, in the twilight melancholy of that book, in its consistent mood, one can scarcely ever see the actual surroundings of the people; one feels them, rather, in the dusk.

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.

* * *

How wonderful it would be if we could throw all the furniture out of the window; and along with it, all the meaningless reiterations concerning physical sensations, all the tiresome old patterns, and leave the room as bare as the stage of a Greek theatre, or as that house into which the glory of Pentecost³ descended; leave the scene bare for the play of emotions, great and little—for the nursery tale, no less than the tragedy, is killed by tasteless

2. Stage setting (French). *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), by American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864).

3. Christian festival marking the descent of the

Holy Spirit to Christ's disciples after his death and resurrection (Acts 2.1–4); often painted as described in the Bible, with the disciples at a table in a closed room.

amplitude. The elder Dumas⁴ enunciated a great principle when he said that to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls.

1922

4. Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870), popular French novelist, author of *The Three Musketeers* (1844).

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Williams's 1923 *Spring and All* interspersed untitled short poems (many of them, like "Spring and All" and "The Red Wheelbarrow," now familiar to readers as free-standing lyrics) with sections of manifesto-style prose. *Spring and All* dramatizes repeatedly what Williams (1883–1963) calls "the leap from prose to the process of imagination," charting the rhythmic ebb and flow of imagination's force. Although the poems in *Spring and All* are numbered consecutively, the headings of the prose interludes frequently, as here, play with typographical conventions of numbering.

From Spring and All

CHAPTER VI

Now, in the imagination, all flesh, all human flesh has been dead upon the earth for ten million, billion years. The bird has turned into a stone within whose heart an egg, unlaid, remained hidden.

It is spring! but miracle of miracles a miraculous miracle has gradually taken place during these seemingly wasted eons. Through the orderly sequences of unmentionable time EVOLUTION HAS REPEATED ITSELF FROM THE BEGINNING.

Good God!

Every step once taken in the first advance of the human race, from the amoeba to the highest type of intelligence, has been duplicated, every step exactly paralleling the one that preceded in the dead ages gone by. A perfect plagiarism results. Everything is and is new. Only the imagination is undeceived.

At this point the entire complicated and laborious process begins to near a new day. (More of this in Chapter XIX) But for the moment everything is fresh, perfect, recreated.

In fact now, for the first time, everything IS new. Now at last the perfect effect is being witlessly discovered. The terms "veracity" "actuality" "real" "natural" "sincere" are being discussed at length, every word in the discus-

sion being evolved from an identical discussion which took place the day before yesterday.

Yes, the imagination, drunk with prohibitions, has destroyed and recreated everything afresh in the likeness of that which it was. Now indeed men look about in amazement at each other with a full realization of the meaning of "art."

CHAPTER 2

It is spring: life again begins to assume its normal appearance as of "today." Only the imagination is undeceived. The volcanos are extinct. Coal is beginning to be dug again where the fern forests stood last night. (If an error is noted here, pay no attention to it.)

CHAPTER XIX

I realize that the chapters are rather quick in their sequence and that nothing much is contained in any one of them but no one should be surprised at this today.

THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM

It is spring. That is to say, it is approaching THE BEGINNING.

In that huge and microscopic career of time, as it were a wild horse racing in an illimitable pampa¹ under the stars, describing immense and microscopic circles with his hoofs on the solid turf, running without a stop for the millionth part of a second until he is aged and worn to a heap of skin, bones and ragged hoofs—In that majestic progress of life, that gives the exact impression of Phidias' frieze,² the men and beasts of which, though they seem of the rigidity of marble are not so but move, with blinding rapidity, though we do not have the time to notice it, their legs advancing a millionth part of an inch every fifty thousand years—In that progress of life which seems stillness itself in the mass of its movements—at last SPRING is approaching.

In that colossal surge toward the finite and the capable life has now arrived for the second time at that exact moment when in the ages past the destruction of the species *Homo sapiens* occurred.

Now at last that process of miraculous verisimilitude, that great copying which evolution has followed, repeating move for move every move that it made in the past—is approaching the end.

Suddenly it is at an end. THE WORLD IS NEW.³

1923

1. Extensive grassy plains of central Argentina (Spanish, *la pampa*).

2. The most important sculptor of classical Athens, Phidias (c. 500–c. 432 B.C.E.) or his students executed the frieze (a long band of relief sculpture surmounting columns) decorating the Par-

thenon in Athens. The frieze depicts a festival procession of men and horses.

3. In the original publication, the poem "Spring and All" ("By the road to the contagious hospital"; see p. 286) directly followed this section.

LANGSTON HUGHES

Where Willa Cather, along with many other modernists, sought to divide high art from popular entertainment, Langston Hughes (1902–1967) urged African American artists to embrace black popular culture, epitomized for Hughes and many other observers of the 1920s by the innovations of jazz. “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” published at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, takes aim at white audiences who looked to black artists for easy, stereotypical entertainment. Hughes’s essay reserves most of its anger, however, for black elites who—he charged—preferred their artists to imitate white standards.

From The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, “I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet,” meaning, I believe, “I want to write like a white poet”; meaning subconsciously, “I would like to be a white poet”; meaning behind that, “I would like to be white.” And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.

* * *

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. “O, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are,” say the Negroes. “Be stereotyped, don’t go too far, don’t shatter our illusions about you, don’t amuse us too seriously. We will pay you,” say the whites. Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write “Cane.”¹ The colored people did not praise it. The white people did not buy it. Most of the colored people who did read “Cane” hate it. They are afraid of it. Although the critics gave it good reviews the public remained indifferent. Yet (excepting the work of Du Bois²) “Cane” contains the finest prose written by a Negro in America. And like the singing of Robeson,³ it is truly racial.

* * *

1. Jean Toomer’s *Cane* combines prose and poems in a modernist dual portrait of rural Georgia and the urban black community of Washington, D.C.; see p. 618.

2. W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), author of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and other works on

African American life and history.

3. Paul Robeson (1898–1976), African American actor and singer; in 1925 he made his concert debut in New York City with a program of black spirituals.

Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. I am sincere as I know how to be in these poems and yet after every reading I answer questions like these from my own people: Do you think Negroes should always write about Negroes? I wish you wouldn't read some of your poems to white folks. How do you find anything interesting in a place like a cabaret? Why do you write about black people? You aren't black. What makes you do so many jazz poems?

But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman is ashamed to say that her race created it and she does not like me to write about it. The old subconscious “white is best” runs through her mind. Years of study under white teachers, a lifetime of white books, pictures, and papers, and white manners, morals, and Puritan standards made her dislike the spirituals. And now she turns up her nose at jazz and all its manifestations—likewise almost everything else distinctly racial. She doesn't care for the Winold Reiss⁴ portraits of Negroes because they are “too Negro.” She does not want a true picture of herself from anybody. She wants the artist to flatter her, to make the white world believe that all Negroes are as smug and as near white in soul as she wants to be. But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering “I want to be white,” hidden in the aspirations of his people, to “Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro—and beautiful!”

So I am ashamed for the black poet who says, “I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet,” as though his own racial world were not as interesting as any other world. I am ashamed, too, for the colored artist who runs from the painting of Negro faces to the painting of sunsets after the manner of the academicians because he fears the strange un-whiteness of his own features. An artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he might choose.

Let the blare of Negro Jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand. Let Paul Robeson singing *Water Boy*, and Rudolph Fisher writing about the streets of Harlem, and Jean Toomer holding the heart of Georgia in his hands, and Aaron Douglas⁵ drawing strange black fantasies cause the smug Negro middle class to turn from their white, respectable, ordinary books and papers to catch a glimmer of their own beauty. We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure

4. German-born artist (1886–1953), known for his portraits of figures from the Harlem Renaissance.

5. Painter and muralist (1899–1979), who studied with Reiss and who became the first head of the Harlem Artists' Guild. Bessie Smith (1894?–

1937), noted blues singer at the height of her fame in the 1920s. Rudolph Fisher (1897–1934), Harlem Renaissance author and musician who arranged songs for Robeson's 1925 New York concert debut.

doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

1926

H.D. (HILDA DOOLITTLE)

1886–1961

In January 1913, Harriet Monroe's influential little magazine, *Poetry*, printed three vivid poems by an unknown "H.D., Imagiste." These spare, elegant lyrics were among the first important products of the "Imagist" movement: poems devoid of explanation and declamation, unrhymed and lacking regular beat, depending on the power of an image to arrest attention and convey emotion. The poet's pen name, the movement's name, and the submission to the magazine were all the work of Ezra Pound, poet and tireless publicist for anything new in the world of poetry. The poems themselves had been written by his friend Hilda Doolittle. In later years, H.D. would look back at these events as epitomizing her dilemma: how to be a woman poet speaking in a world where women were spoken for and about by men. It is, perhaps, a symbol of her sense of difficulty that, though she strove for a voice that could be recognized as clearly feminine, she continued to publish under the name that Pound had devised for her.

She was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, one girl in a family of five boys. Her mother was a musician and music teacher, active in the Moravian church to which many in Bethlehem belonged. The symbols and rituals of this group, along with its tradition of secrecy created in response to centuries of oppression, had much to do with H.D.'s interest in images and her attraction in later life to occult and other symbol systems: the cabala, numerology, the tarot, and psychoanalysis.

When her father, an astronomer and mathematician, was appointed director of the observatory at the University of Pennsylvania, the family moved to a suburb of Philadelphia. There, when she was fifteen years old, H.D. met Ezra Pound, a student at the university, already dedicated to poetry and acting the poet's role with dramatic intensity. The two were engaged for a while, but Pound's influence continued long after each had gone on to other partners. H.D. attended college at Bryn Mawr for two years; in 1911 she made a bold move to London, where Pound had gone some years earlier. She married a member of his circle, the English poet Richard Aldington, in 1913. With Aldington she studied Greek and read the classics, but the marriage was not a success and was destroyed by their separation during World War I when Aldington went into the army and served in France.

The years 1918–19 were terrible for H.D.: her brother Gilbert was killed in the fighting in France, her father died soon thereafter, her marriage broke up, close friendships with Pound and with D. H. Lawrence came to an end, she had a nearly fatal case of flu, and amid all this gave birth to a daughter who Aldington said was not his child. But she was rescued from the worst of her emotional and financial troubles by Winifred Ellerman, whose father, a shipping magnate, was one of the wealthiest men in England. Ellerman, a writer who had adopted the pen name

Bryher, had initially been attracted by H.D.'s poetry; their relationship developed first as a love affair and then into a lifelong friendship.

In 1923, H.D. settled in Switzerland. With Bryher's financial help she raised her daughter and cared for her ailing mother, who had joined her household. During 1933 and 1934 she spent time in Vienna, where she underwent analysis by Sigmund Freud, hoping to understand both her writer's block and what she called her "two loves" of women and men. Freud's theory of the unconscious and the disguised ways in which it reaches expression accorded well with H.D.'s understanding of how the unexplained images in a poem could be significant; the images were coded personal meanings. H.D.'s religious mysticism clashed with Freud's materialism, however, and she had mixed reactions to Freud's developing theory that women's unhappiness was determined by their sense of biological inferiority to men. But H.D. was instrumental (with Bryher's help) in getting Freud, who was Jewish, safely to London when the Nazi regime took over in Austria. When World War II broke out H.D. went back to London to share England's fate in crisis.

During the 1930s she worked mostly in prose forms and composed several autobiographical pieces (some of which remain unpublished). Like many major poets of the era, H.D. came in time to feel the need to write longer works; the bombardment of London inspired three long related poems about World War II, *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946), which appeared together as *Trilogy*. In them she combined layers of historical and personal experience; wars going back to the Trojan War all fused in one image of humankind forever imposing and enduring violence.

The personal and the historical had always been one to her, and she became increasingly attracted to the image of Helen, the so-called cause of the Trojan War, as an image of herself. According to Homer's *Iliad*, Helen's beauty led Paris, a Trojan prince, to steal her from her Greek husband, Menelaus; and all the Greek warriors made common cause to get her back. After ten years' encampment before the walls of Troy, they found a devious way to enter the city and destroy it. H.D. was struck by the fact that the legend was related entirely from the male point of view; Helen never had a chance to speak. The object of man's acts and the subject of their poems, she was herself always silent. If Helen tried to speak, would she even have a voice or a point of view? Out of these broodings, and helped by her study of symbols, H.D. wrote her meditative epic of more than fourteen hundred lines, *Helen in Egypt*. The poem, composed between 1951 and 1955, consists of three books of interspersed verse and prose commentary, which follow Helen's quest. "She herself is the writing" that she seeks to understand, the poet observes.

H.D.'s Imagist poetry, for which she was known during her lifetime, represents the Imagist credo with its vivid phrasing, compelling imagery, free verse, short poetic line, and avoidance of abstraction and generalization. She followed Pound's example in producing many translations of poetry from older literature, especially from her favorite Greek poets. Her natural images are influenced by her early immersion in astronomy as well as by Greek poetry's Mediterranean settings. Austere landscapes of sea, wind, stars, and sand are contrasted with sensual figures of jewels, honey, and shells. Traditional metaphorical resources of earlier women's poetry, such as flowers and birds, are absorbed into modernism's aesthetic of "fiery tempered steel." As when her "Oread" calls upon the sea to "splash your great pines / on our rocks," H.D.'s best-known poems embody high modernism's goal of condensing forces at once lush and shattering, violent and creative, into a single arresting image.

The texts of the poems included here are those of *Collected Poems 1912–1944*, edited by Louis L. Martz (1983).

Mid-day

The light beats upon me.
 I am startled—
 a split leaf crackles on the paved floor—
 I am anguished—defeated.

A slight wind shakes the seed-pods— 5
 my thoughts are spent
 as the black seeds.
 My thoughts tear me,
 I dread their fever.
 I am scattered in its whirl. 10
 I am scattered like
 the hot shrivelled seeds.

The shrivelled seeds
 are split on the path—
 the grass bends with dust, 15
 the grape slips
 under its crackled leaf:
 yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,
 and the blackened stalks of mint,
 the poplar is bright on the hill, 20
 the poplar spreads out,
 deep-rooted among trees.

O poplar, you are great
 among the hill-stones,
 while I perish on the path 25
 among the crevices of the rocks.

1916

Oread¹

Whirl up, sea—
 whirl your pointed pines,
 splash your great pines
 on our rocks,
 hurl your green over us, 5
 cover us with your pools of fir.

1914, 1924

1. A nymph of mountains and hills.

Leda¹

Where the slow river
 meets the tide,
 a red swan lifts red wings
 and darker beak,
 and underneath the purple down 5
 of his soft breast
 uncurls his coral feet.

Through the deep purple
 of the dying heat
 of sun and mist, 10
 the level ray of sun-beam
 has caressed
 the lily with dark breast,
 and flecked with richer gold
 its golden crest. 15

Where the slow lifting
 of the tide,
 floats into the river
 and slowly drifts
 among the reeds, 20
 and lifts the yellow flags,
 he floats
 where tide and river meet.

Ah kingly kiss—
 no more regret 25
 nor old deep memories
 to mar the bliss;
 where the low sedge is thick,
 the gold day-lily
 outspreads and rests 30
 beneath soft fluttering
 of red swan wings
 and the warm quivering
 of the red swan's breast.

1919, 1921

1. In Greek mythology, Leda is the mortal raped by Zeus, in the guise of a swan. Helen of Troy was her daughter.

Fragment 113

*"Neither honey nor bee for me."
—Sappho.¹*

Not honey,
not the plunder of the bee
from meadow or sand-flower
or mountain bush;
from winter-flower or shoot 5
born of the later heat:
not honey, not the sweet
stain on the lips and teeth:
not honey, not the deep
plunge of soft belly 10
and the clinging of the gold-edged
pollen-dusted feet;

not so—
though rapture blind my eyes,
and hunger crisp 15
dark and inert my mouth,
not honey, not the south,
not the tall stalk
of red twin-lilies,
nor light branch of fruit tree 20
caught in flexible light branch;

not honey, not the south;
ah flower of purple iris,
flower of white,
or of the iris, withering the grass— 25
for fleck of the sun's fire,
gathers such heat and power,
that shadow-print is light,
cast through the petals
of the yellow iris flower; 30

not iris—old desire—old passion—
old forgetfulness—old pain—
not this, nor any flower,
but if you turn again,
seek strength of arm and throat, 35
touch as the god;
neglect the lyre-note;
knowing that you shall feel,
about the frame,
no trembling of the string 40
but heat, more passionate

1. Greek woman lyric poet of Lesbos in the 7th century B.C.E.

of bone and the white shell
and fiery tempered steel.

1922

Helen¹

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands. 5

All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still
when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills. 10

Greece sees unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees, 15
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

1924

From The Walls Do Not Fall

To Bryher
FOR KARNAK 1923
FROM LONDON 1942

1

An incident here and there,
and rails gone (for guns)
from your (and my) old town square:

mist and mist-grey, no colour,
still the Luxor bee, chick and hare¹ 5
pursue unalterable purpose

1. In Greek legend, the wife of Menelaus. Her kidnapping by the Trojan prince Paris started the Trojan War. She was the daughter of the god Zeus, the product of his rape, when disguised as a swan, of the mortal Leda.

1. Luxor is a town on the Nile River in Egypt, close to the ruins of the ancient city of Thebes, where the Temple of Karnak is located. The bee, chick, and hare are carved symbols that appear on the temple.

in green, rose-red, lapis;
they continue to prophesy
from the stone papyrus:

there, as here, ruin opens 10
the tomb, the temple; enter,
there as here, there are no doors:

the shrine lies open to the sky,
the rain falls, here, there
sand drifts; eternity endures: 15

ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
leaves the sealed room
open to the air,

so, through our desolation,
thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us 20
through gloom:

unaware, Spirit announces the Presence;
shivering overtakes us,
as of old, Samuel:²

trembling at a known street-corner, 25
we know not nor are known;
the Pythian³ pronounces—we pass on

to another cellar, to another sliced wall
where poor utensils show
like rare objects in a museum; 30

Pompeii⁴ has nothing to teach us,
we know crack of volcanic fissure,
slow flow of terrible lava,

pressure on heart, lungs, the brain
about to burst its brittle case 35
(what the skull can endure!):

over us, Apocryphal⁵ fire,
under us, the earth sway, dip of a floor,
slope of a pavement

where men roll, drunk 40
with a new bewilderment,
sorcery, bedevilment:

2. A biblical seer and prophet.

3. Pythia is another name for Delphi, a Greek town famous because the Oracle of Apollo was located there. The Pythian is the high priestess of that oracle, who was possessed by the Delphic spirit and prophesied.

4. Ancient Italian city near Naples, burned and buried in a few hours by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 C.E.

5. The Apocrypha are books rejected from the Bible because of doubtful authenticity.

the bone-frame was made for
 no such shock knit within terror,
 yet the skeleton stood up to it: 45

the flesh? it was melted away,
 the heart burnt out, dead ember,
 tendons, muscles shattered, outer husk dismembered,

yet the frame held:
 we passed the flame: we wonder 50
 what saved us? what for?

1944

MARIANNE MOORE

1887–1972

Marianne Moore was a radically inventive modernist, greatly admired by other poets of her generation, and a powerful influence on such later writers as Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, and Richard Wilbur. Like her forerunner Emily Dickinson, she made of the traditional and constraining “woman’s place” a protected space to do her own work, but unlike Dickinson, she was a deliberate professional, publishing her poems regularly, in touch with the movements and artists of her time. She was famous for the statement that poetry, though departing from the real world, re-created that world within its forms: poems were “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” Her earlier work is distinguished by great precision of observation and language, ornate diction, and complex stanza and prosodic patterns. Her later work is much less ornate; and in revising her poetry, she tended to simplify and shorten.

She was born in Kirkwood, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. In her childhood, the family was abandoned by her father; they moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where—in a pattern common among both men and women writers of this period—her mother supported them by teaching school. She went to Bryn Mawr College, graduating in 1909; traveled with her mother in England and France in 1911; and returned to Carlisle to teach at the U.S. Indian School between 1911 and 1915. Having begun to write poetry in college, she was first published in 1915 and 1916 in such little magazines as the *Egoist* (an English magazine with which Ezra Pound was associated), *Poetry*, and *Others* (a journal for experimental writing with which William Carlos Williams was associated, founded by Alfred Kreymbourg, a New York poet and playwright). Through these magazines she entered the avant-garde and modernist world. She never married; in 1916 she and her mother merged their household with that of Moore’s brother, a Presbyterian minister, and they moved with him to a parish in Brooklyn, New York. There Moore was close to literary circles and Ebbets Field, where the Dodgers, then a Brooklyn baseball team, had their home stadium. Moore was a lifelong fan.

While holding jobs in schools and libraries, Moore worked at her poetry. A volume called simply *Poems* was brought out in London in 1921 without her knowledge

through the efforts of two women friends who were writers, H.D. (whom she had met at Bryn Mawr) and Bryher. A long and ambitious poem, "Marriage," appeared in the little magazine *Manikan* in 1923. Another book, *Observations*, appeared in 1924 and won the Dial Award; William Carlos Williams praised it as "a break *through* all preconceptions of poetic form and mood and pace." In 1925 she began to work as editor of the *Dial*, continuing in this influential position until the magazine was disbanded in 1929. Her reviews and editorial judgments were greatly respected, although her preference for elegance and decorum over sexual frankness was not shared by some of the writers—Hart Crane and James Joyce among them—whose work she rejected or published only after they revised it. As a critic, Moore was prolific; her collected prose makes a larger book than her collected poetry.

Moore believed that poets usually undervalued prose; "precision, economy of statement, logic" were features of good prose that could "liberate" the imagination, she wrote, and she often found these qualities in scientific and historical description. Her poems were an amalgam of her own observation and her wide reading, which she acknowledged by quotation marks and often by footnotes as well. Many of her quotations are obscure or inexact, and some have no identifiable sources. Moore's poetry rarely incorporates direct quotations from or allusions to other poets, the kinds of reference by which poets conventionally invoke a great tradition and assert their own place in it. She prefers to juxtapose disparate areas of human knowledge and to combine the elevated with the ordinary. Moore's notebooks suggest, for example, that the image of the kiwi bird in "The Mind Is an Enchanting Thing" emerged from a sketch Moore made of a shoe-polish tin; she praises the human mind both for its capacity to be mesmerized by the small facets of its environment and for its changeful, self-undoing freedom.

Against the exactitude and "unbearable accuracy" (as she put it) of her language, Moore counterpointed a complex texture of stanza form and versification. Pound worked with the clause, Williams with the line, H.D. with the image, Stevens and Stein with the word; Moore, unlike these modernist contemporaries, for the most part used the entire stanza as the unit of her poetry. Her stanzas are composed of regular lines counted by syllables, instead of by stress, and rhymes often occur at unaccented syllables and in the middle of a line or even a word. The effects she achieves are complex and subtle; she was often called the "poet's poet" of her day because the reader needed to pay close attention to appreciate the audacity of her formal experiments.

Nevertheless, her poetry also had a thematic, declarative edge, which the outbreak of World War II led her to expand. In "The Paper Nautilus," she drew on her characteristic vein of natural observation in order to will that a threatened civilization be protected by love. At the same time, Moore was keenly aware of her distance, as a civilian and a woman, from direct experience of combat; "In Distrust of Merits," her most famous poem of the war, reflects Moore's struggle (like Dickinson's during the Civil War) to adopt an ethically responsible relationship toward the fighting she could know only through newsreels and photographs.

Moore received the Bollingen, National Book, and Pulitzer awards for *Collected Poems* in 1951. Throughout her lifetime she continued to revise, expand, cut, and select, so that from volume to volume a poem with the same name may be a very different work. Her *Complete Poems* of 1967 represented her poetry as she wanted it remembered, but a full understanding of Moore calls for reading all of the versions of her changing work.

Poetry¹

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all
 this fiddle.
 Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one
 discovers in
 it after all, a place for the genuine.
 Hands that can grasp, eyes
 that can dilate, hair that can rise 5
 if it must, these things are important not because a
 high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because
 they are
 useful. When they become so derivative as to become
 unintelligible,
 the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
 do not admire what 10
 we cannot understand: the bat
 holding on upside down or in quest of something to
 eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf
 under
 a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse
 that feels a flea, the base-
 ball fan, the statistician— 15
 nor is it valid
 to discriminate against “business documents and
 school-books”;² all these phenomena are important. One must
 make a distinction
 however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the
 result is not poetry,
 nor till the poets among us can be 20
 “literalists of
 the imagination”³—above
 insolence and triviality and can present
 for inspection, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,” shall
 we have
 it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand, 25
 the raw material of poetry in
 all its rawness and
 that which is on the other hand
 genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

1921, 1935

1. The version printed here follows the text and format of *Selected Poems* (1935).

2. *Diary of Tolstoy* (Dutton), p. 84. “Where the boundary between prose and poetry lies, I shall never be able to understand. The question is raised in manuals of style, yet the answer to it lies beyond me. Poetry is verse; prose is not verse. Or else poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books” [Moore’s note].

3. Yeats’s *Ideas of Good and Evil* (A.H. Bullen), p. 182. “The limitation of his view was from the very intensity of his vision; he was a too literal realist of imagination, as others are of nature; and because he believed that the figures seen by the mind’s eye, when exalted by inspiration, were ‘eternal existences,’ symbols of divine essences, he hated every grace of style that might obscure their lineaments” [Moore’s note].

Marriage¹

This institution,
 perhaps one should say enterprise
 out of respect for which
 one says one need not change one's mind
 about a thing one has believed in, 5
 requiring public promises
 of one's intention
 to fulfil a private obligation:
 I wonder what Adam and Eve
 think of it by this time, 10
 this fire-gilt steel
 alive with goldenness;
 how bright it shows—
 "of circular traditions and impostures,
 committing many spoils,"² 15
 requiring all one's criminal ingenuity
 to avoid!
 Psychology which explains everything
 explains nothing,
 and we are still in doubt. 20
 Eve: beautiful woman—
 I have seen her
 when she was so handsome
 she gave me a start,
 able to write simultaneously 25
 in three languages—
 English, German and French—
 and talk in the meantime;³
 equally positive in demanding a commotion
 and in stipulating quiet: 30
 "I should like to be alone";
 to which the visitor replies,
 "I should like to be alone;
 why not be alone together?"
 Below the incandescent stars 35
 below the incandescent fruit,
 the strange experience of beauty;
 its existence is too much;

1. The text here is from *Complete Poems* (1967), where Moore describes "Marriage" as "Statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly."

2. "Of circular traditions . . ." Francis Bacon [Moore's note]. From a letter by the English philosopher, scientist, and statesman (1561–1626).

3. *Write simultaneously*. "Miss A—will write simultaneously in three languages, English, German, and French, talking in the meantime.

[She] takes advantage of her abilities in everyday life, writing her letters simultaneously with both hands; namely, the first, third, and fifth words with her left and the second, fourth, and sixth with her right hand. While generally writing outward, she is able as well to write inward with both hands." "Multiple consciousness or Reflex Action of Unaccustomed Range," *Scientific American*, January 1922 [Moore's note].

it tears one to pieces
 and each fresh wave of consciousness 40
 is poison.
 "See her, see her in this common world,"⁴
 the central flaw
 in that first crystal-fine experiment,
 this amalgamation which can never be more 45
 than an interesting impossibility,
 describing it
 as "that strange paradise
 unlike flesh, stones,
 gold or stately buildings, 50
 the choicest piece of my life:
 the heart rising
 in its estate of peace
 as a boat rises
 with the rising of the water";⁵ 55
 constrained in speaking of the serpent—
 shed snakeskin in the history of politeness
 not to be returned to again—
 that invaluable accident
 exonerating Adam.⁶ 60
 And he has beauty also;
 it's distressing—the O thou
 to whom from whom,
 without whom nothing—Adam;
 "something feline, 65
 something colubrine"⁷—how true!
 a crouching mythological monster
 in that Persian miniature of emerald mines,
 raw silk—ivory white, snow white,
 oyster white and six others— 70
 that paddock full of leopards and giraffes—
 long lemon-yellow bodies
 sown with trapezoids of blue.
 Alive with words,
 vibrating like a cymbal 75
 touched before it has been struck,
 he has prophesied correctly—

4. "See her, see her in this common world." George Shock. [Moore's note]. Shock is not otherwise identified.

5. "That strange paradise, unlike flesh, stones . . ." Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* [Moore's note]. Moore's quotation does not exactly recall any single passage in this much-reprinted 1649 devotional treatise by Baxter (1615–1691), an English Puritan minister.

6. In the Bible, Eve yields to the serpent's temptation to eat the fruit of the tree forbidden by God, and passes it along to Adam: "she

gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Genesis 3.12).

7. "We were puzzled and we were fascinated, as if by something feline, by something colubrine." Philip Littell, reviewing Santayana's *Poems* in *The New Republic*, March 21, 1923 [Moore's note]. George Santayana (1863–1952) was better known as a philosopher whose students at Harvard included T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Gertrude Stein, and W. E. B. Du Bois. "Colubrine": snake-like.

the industrious waterfall,
 “the speedy stream
 which violently bears all before it,
 at one time silent as the air
 and now as powerful as the wind.”⁸ 80
 “Treading chasms
 on the uncertain footing of a spear,”⁹
 forgetting that there is in woman 85
 a quality of mind
 which as an instinctive manifestation
 is unsafe,
 he goes on speaking
 in a formal customary strain,
 of “past states, the present state,
 seals, promises,
 the evil one suffered,
 the good one enjoys,
 hell, heaven,
 everything convenient
 to promote one’s joy.”¹
 In him a state of mind
 perceives what it was not
 intended that he should; 100
 “he experiences a solemn joy
 in seeing that he has become an idol.”²
 Plagued by the nightingale
 in the new leaves,
 with its silence— 105
 not its silence but its silences,
 he says of it:
 “It clothes me with a shirt of fire.”³
 “He dares not clap his hands
 to make it go on 110
 lest it should fly off;
 if he does nothing, it will sleep;

8. Unannotated by Moore but quoted almost directly from Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*.

9. “*Treading chasms . . .*” Hazlitt: *Essay on Burke’s Style* [Moore’s note]. Quoted inexactly from “On the Prose Style of Poets” (1822), in which the essayist William Hazlitt (1778–1830) praises the English statesman Edmund Burke (1729–1797) for a prose style that went “nearest to the verge of poetry, and yet never fell over” and that “loses no particle of the exact, characteristic, extreme impression of the thing he writes about.” Hazlitt takes “the unsteady footing of a spear” from Shakespeare’s 1 *Henry IV* 1.3.524.

1. “*Past states . . .*” Richard Baxter [Moore’s note].

2. “*He experiences a solemn joy.*” “*A Travers Champs*,” by Anatole France in *Filles et Garçons* (Hachette): “*Le Petit Jean comprend quel est beau et cette idée le pénètre d’un respect profond de lui-même . . . Il goûte une joie pieuse à*

se sentir devenu une idole.” [Moore’s note]. *Filles et Garçons* (literally, Daughters and Sons [French]), a collection of illustrated children’s stories by novelist and poet Anatole France (1844–1942), appeared in 1887. The first sentence, not translated by Moore, may be rendered as “Little John understood that he was handsome and this idea filled him with deep self-respect.”

3. “*It clothes me with a shirt of fire.*” Hagop Boghossian in a poem, “The Nightingale” [Moore’s note]. In *Observations* (1924), where “Marriage” appeared first in book form, Moore added that Boghossian was a teacher of philosophy at Worcester College in Massachusetts and his poem originally written in Armenian. In Greek myth, the hero Heracles puts on a poisoned shirt, sent by an enemy; it burns so painfully that he builds and walks into his own funeral pyre.

if he cries out, it will not understand."⁴
 Unnerved by the nightingale
 and dazzled by the apple, 115
 impelled by "the illusion of a fire
 effectual to extinguish fire,"
 compared with which
 the shining of the earth
 is but deformity—a fire 120
 "as high as deep
 as bright as broad
 as long as life itself,"⁵
 he stumbles over marriage,
 "a very trivial object indeed"⁶ 125
 to have destroyed the attitude
 in which he stood—
 the ease of the philosopher
 unfathered by a woman.
 Unhelpful Hymen!⁷ 130
 a kind of overgrown cupid
 reduced to insignificance
 by the mechanical advertising
 parading as involuntary comment,
 by that experiment of Adam's 135
 with ways out but no way in—
 the ritual of marriage,
 augmenting all its lavishness;
 its fiddle-head ferns,
 lotus flowers, opuntias, white dromedaries, 140
 its hippopotamus—
 nose and mouth combined
 in one magnificent hopper—
 its snake and the potent apple.
 He tells us 145
 that "for love that will
 gaze an eagle blind,
 that is with Hercules
 climbing the trees
 in the garden of the Hesperides, 150
 from forty-five to seventy
 is the best age,"⁸
 commending it
 as a fine art, as an experiment,

4. "He dares not clap his hands . . ." Edward Thomas, *Feminine Influence on the Poets* (Martin Secker, 1910) [Moore's note]. From Thomas's summary of a poem by King James I of Scotland (1394–1437), in which the speaker is listening to a nightingale and looking at a lovely, inaccessible woman.

5. "Illusion of a fire . . ." "as high as deep . . ." Richard Baxter [Moore's note].

6. "Marriage is a law, and the worst of all laws . . . a very trivial object indeed." Godwin [Moore's note]. From *An Enquiry Concerning*

Political Justice (1793) by the radical English journalist, novelist, and philosopher William Godwin (1756–1836), husband of the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and father of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein* (1818).

7. In Greek myth, the god of marriage.

8. "For love that will gaze an eagle blind . . ." Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* [Moore's note]. This novel by Trollope (1815–1882) appeared in 1857.

a duty or as merely recreation. 155
 One must not call him ruffian
 nor friction a calamity—
 the fight to be affectionate:
 “no truth can be fully known
 until it has been tried 160
 by the tooth of disputation.”⁹
 The blue panther with black eyes,
 the basalt panther with blue eyes,
 entirely graceful—
 one must give them the path— 165
 the black obsidian Diana
 who “darkeneth her countenance
 as a bear doth,”¹
 the spiked hand
 that has an affection for one 170
 and proves it to the bone,
 impatient to assure you
 that impatience is the mark of independence,
 not of bondage.
 “Married people often look that way”²— 175
 “seldom and cold, up and down,
 mixed and malarial
 with a good day and a bad.”³
 We Occidentals are so unemotional,
 self lost, the irony preserved 180
 in “the Ahasuerus *tête-à-tête* banquet”⁴
 with its small orchids like snakes’ tongues,
 with its “good monster, lead the way,”⁵
 with little laughter
 and munificence of humor 185
 in that quixotic atmosphere of frankness
 in which “four o’clock does not exist,
 but at five o’clock
 the ladies in their imperious humility

9. “No truth can be fully known . . .” Robert of Sorbonne [Moore’s note]. Sorbonne (1201–1274), theologian and chaplain to the king of France, founded the Sorbonne, now the University of Paris, in 1257. Moore’s quotation is from his rules for students.

1. “Darkeneth her countenance as a bear doth.” Ecclesiasticus [Moore’s note]. From Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) 25.24 in the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible (1582–1610), which begins, “The wickedness of a woman changeth her face.”

2. “Married people often look that way.” C. Bertram Hartmann [Moore’s note]. The modernist painter Hartman (1882–1960) was an acquaintance of Moore’s.

3. “Seldom and cold . . .” Richard Baxter [Moore’s note].

4. “Ahasuerus’ *tête-à-tête* banquet.” George Adam Smith, *Expositor’s Bible* [Moore’s note]. “*Tête-à-tête*”: private, between two people (French);

literally, head to head. Ahasuerus is the biblical Persian king who first insults his wife and queen, Vashti, then replaces her with Esther, unaware that Esther is a Jew. When one of the king’s ministers, Haman, persecutes the kingdom’s Jews, Esther invites him to a private dinner with herself and Ahasuerus; Haman brags of being singled out (Esther 5.12) but pays for it with his life when Esther persuades Ahasuerus to take her part. The commentary on Esther in the *Expositor’s Bible* (authored by Walter Frederic Adeney, rather than George Adam Smith, and published in 1893) casts it as a modern battle of the sexes, chastising the despotic male egotism that sees the world “always through the medium of his own vastly magnified shadow” and asserting that “The first of a woman’s rights is her right to her own person.”

5. “Good monster, lead the way.” *The Tempest* [Moore’s note]. From Shakespeare’s play (2.2), referring to Caliban.

are ready to receive you”;⁶ 190
 in which experience attests
 that men have power
 and sometimes one is made to feel it.
 He says, “What monarch would not blush
 to have a wife 195
 with hair like a shaving-brush?”⁷
 The fact of woman
 is “not the sound of the flute
 but very poison.”⁸
 She says, “Men are monopolists 200
 of ‘stars, garters, buttons
 and other shining baubles’—
 unfit to be the guardians
 of another person’s happiness.”⁹
 He says, “These mummies 205
 must be handled carefully—
 ‘the crumbs from a lion’s meal,
 a couple of shins and the bit of an ear’;¹
 turn to the letter M
 and you will find 210
 that ‘a wife is a coffin,’²
 that severe object
 with the pleasing geometry
 stipulating space not people,
 refusing to be buried 215
 and uniquely disappointing,
 revengefully wrought in the attitude
 of an adoring child
 to a distinguished parent.”
 She says, “This butterfly, 220
 this waterfly, this nomad
 that has ‘proposed
 to settle on my hand for life’³—
 What can one do with it?
 There must have been more time 225

6. “*Four o’clock does not exist . . .*” Comtesse de Noailles, “Le Thé,” *Femina*, December 1921. “*Dans leur impérieuse humilité elles jouent leurs rôles sur le globe*” [Moore’s note]. *Femina* was a fashionable French women’s magazine. “Le Thé”: “Tea-time.” The French sentence may be translated as “The ladies play their roles on earth with imperious humility.”

7. “*What monarch . . .*” From “The Rape of the Lock,” a parody by Mary Frances Nearing, with suggestions by M. Moore [Moore’s note]. Nearing was a friend of Moore’s. The object of her parody is the mock-heroic poem “The Rape of the Lock” (1712) by Alexander Pope (1688–1744).

8. “*The sound of the flute . . .*” A. Mitram Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1916). Silence of women—to an Oriental, this is as poetry set to music” [Moore’s note]. Like Adeney’s commentary on the book of Esther, this quotation stereotypically links male domination in marriage to “Oriental” cultures.

9. “*Men are monopolists . . .*” Miss M. Carey Thomas, Founder’s address, Mount Holyoke, 1921: “Men practically reserve for themselves stately funerals, splendid monuments, memorial statues, membership in academies, medals, titles, honorary degrees, stars, garters, ribbons, buttons and other shining baubles, so valueless in themselves and yet so infinitely desirable because they are symbols of recognition by their fellow-craftsmen of difficult work well done” [Moore’s note]. Thomas was president of Bryn Mawr College from 1894 to 1922.

1. “*The crumbs from a lion’s meal . . .*”: Amos iii, 12. Translation by George Adam Smith, *Expositor’s Bible* [Moore’s note].

2. “*A wife is a coffin.*” Ezra Pound [Moore’s note].

3. “*Settle on my hand.*” Charles Reade, *Christie Johnston* [Moore’s note]. This popular romantic novel by Reade (1814–1884) was made into a silent film in 1921.

in Shakespeare's day
 to sit and watch a play.
 You know so many artists who are fools."
 He says, "You know so many fools
 who are not artists." 230
 The fact forgot
 that "some have merely rights
 while some have obligations,"⁴
 he loves himself so much,
 he can permit himself 235
 no rival in that love.
 She loves herself so much,
 she cannot see herself enough—
 a statuette of ivory on ivory,
 the logical last touch 240
 to an expansive splendor
 earned as wages for work done:
 one is not rich but poor
 when one can always seem so right.
 What can one do for them— 245
 these savages
 condemned to disaffect
 all those who are not visionaries
 alert to undertake the silly task
 of making people noble? 250
 This model of petrine⁵ fidelity
 who "leaves her peaceful husband
 only because she has seen enough of him"⁶—
 that orator reminding you,
 "I am yours to command." 255
 "Everything to do with love is mystery;
 it is more than a day's work
 to investigate this science."⁷
 One sees that it is rare—
 that striking grasp of opposites 260
 opposed each to the other, not to unity,
 which in cycloid inclusiveness
 has dwarfed the demonstration
 of Columbus with the egg⁸—
 a triumph of simplicity— 265

4. "Asiatics have rights; Europeans have obligations." Edmund Burke [Moore's note]. This summary of Burke's views comes from one of his biographers, the British author, editor, and statesman John Morley (1838–1923).

5. Related to or recalling Saint Peter, the chief of Christ's disciples, who after Christ's arrest denied knowing him (Matthew 26.69–75).

6. "Leaves her peaceful husband . . ." Simone Puget, advertisement entitled "Change of Fashion," *English Review*, June 1914: "Thus proceed pretty dolls when they leave their old home to renovate their frame, and dear others who may abandon their peaceful husband only because

they have seen enough of him" [Moore's note].

7. "Everything to do with love is mystery . . ." F. C. Tilney, *Fables of La Fontaine*, "Love and Folly," Book XII, No. 14 [Moore's note]. Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695) adapted his *Fables* (1668–94) from the literatures of many eras and languages.

8. According to legend, Christopher Columbus (1450/51–1506) replied to those who scoffed that sooner or later anyone would have found a way to the New World by wagering that they could not find a way to stand an egg on its tip; when they failed, he cracked the shell lightly at the egg's end and succeeded, making the point that once the way was shown it seemed obvious.

that charitable Euroclydon⁹
of frightening disinterestedness
which the world hates,
admitting:

“I am such a cow, 270
if I had a sorrow
I should feel it a long time;
I am not one of those
who have a great sorrow
in the morning 275
and a great joy at noon”;

which says: “I have encountered it
among those unpretentious
protégés of wisdom,
where seeming to parade 280
as the debater and the Roman,
the statesmanship
of an archaic Daniel Webster¹
persists to their simplicity of temper
as the essence of the matter: 285

‘Liberty and union
now and forever’;

the Book on the writing-table;
the hand in the breast-pocket.”²

1923, 1967

To a Snail¹

If “compression is the first grace of style,”²
you have it. Contractility is a virtue
as modesty is a virtue.
It is not the acquisition of any one thing
that is able to adorn, 5
or the incidental quality that occurs
as a concomitant of something well said,
that we value in style,
but the principle that is hid:
in the absence of feet, “a method of conclusions”; 10

9. A stormy Mediterranean wind, identified in the Bible with the wind that led to the wreck of a ship carrying Saint Paul (Acts 27.14).

1. American statesman, lawyer and orator (1782–1852); as a member of Congress for New Hampshire (1813–17) and Massachusetts (1823–41, 1845–50) he vigorously opposed efforts to dissolve or diminish the constitutional powers of the federal government of the United States.

2. “*Liberty and Union . . .*” Daniel Webster (statue

with inscription, Central Park, New York City) [Moore’s note]. The inscription quotes from Webster’s famous Senate speech of January 27, 1824, affirming the “glorious Union” against South Carolina’s efforts to nullify the U.S. Constitution.

1. The text is from *Complete Poems* (1967).

2. “The very first grace of style is that which comes from compression.” *Demetrius on Style* translated by W. Hamilton Fyfe. Heinemann, 1932 [Moore’s note].

“a knowledge of principles,”
in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn.

1924

The Paper Nautilus¹

For authorities whose hopes
are shaped by mercenaries?
Writers entrapped by
teatime fame and by
commuters' comforts? Not for these 5
the paper nautilus
constructs her thin glass shell.

Giving her perishable
souvenir of hope, a dull
white outside and smooth 10
edged inner surface
glossy as the sea, the watchful
maker of it guards it
day and night; she scarcely

eats until the eggs are hatched. 15
Buried eight-fold in her eight
arms, for she is in
a sense a devil
fish, her glass ram'shorn-cradled freight
is hid but is not crushed; 20
as Hercules,² bitten

by a crab loyal to the hydra,
was hindered to succeed,
the intensively
watched eggs coming from 25
the shell free it when they are freed,—
leaving its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close

laid Ionic³ chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of 30
a Parthenon⁴ horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to. 35

1941, 1967

1. The text is from *Complete Poems* (1967).

2. Hero of Greek myth, who performed numerous exploits including battle with the hydra, a many-headed monster.

3. Classical Greek, specifically Athenian.

4. Temple in Athens decorated by a carved marble band of sculptures, including processions of horses.

The Mind Is an Enchanting Thing¹

is an enchanted thing
 like the glaze on a
 katydid-wing
 subdivided by sun
 till the nettings are legion. 5
 Like Giesecking playing Scarlatti;²

like the apteryx³ awl
 as a beak, or the
 kiwi's rain-shawl
 of haired feathers, the mind 10
 feeling its way as though blind,
 walks along with its eyes on the ground.

It has memory's ear
 that can hear without
 having to hear. 15
 Like the gyroscope's fall,
 truly unequivocal
 because trued by regnant certainty,

it is a power of
 strong enchantment. It 20
 is like the dove
 neck animated by
 sun; it is memory's eye;
 it's conscientious inconsistency.

It tears off the veil; tears 25
 the temptation, the
 mist the heart wears,
 from its eye—if the heart
 has a face; it takes apart
 dejection. It's fire in the dove-neck's 30

iridescence; in the
 inconsistencies
 of Scarlatti.
 Unconfusion submits
 its confusion to proof; it's 35
 not a Herod's⁴ oath that cannot change.

1944

1. The text is from *Complete Poems* (1967).

2. Walter Wilhelm Giesecking (1895–1956), French-born German pianist, known for his renditions of compositions by the Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757).

3. A flightless New Zealand bird, related to the kiwi, with a beak shaped like an awl.

4. Herod Antipas (d. 39 C.E.), ruler of Judea under the Romans. He had John the Baptist beheaded to fulfill a promise to Salome (Mark 6.22–27).

In Distrust of Merits¹

Strengthened to live, strengthened to die for
 medals and positioned victories?
 They're fighting, fighting, fighting the blind
 man who thinks he sees,—
 who cannot see that the enslaver is 5
 enslaved; the hater, harmed. O shining O
 firm star, O tumultuous
 ocean lashed till small things go
 as they will, the mountainous
 wave makes us who look, know 10

depth. Lost at sea before they fought! O
 star of David, star of Bethlehem,²
 O black imperial lion³
 of the Lord—emblem
 of a risen world—be joined at last, be 15
 joined. There is hate's crown beneath which all is
 death; there's love's without which none
 is king; the blessed deeds bless
 the halo. As contagion
 of sickness makes sickness, 20

contagion of trust can make trust. They're
 fighting in deserts and caves, one by
 one, in battalions and squadrons;
 they're fighting that I
 may yet recover from the disease, My 25
 Self; some have it lightly; some will die. "Man's
 wolf to man" and we devour
 ourselves. The enemy could not
 have made a greater breach in our
 defenses. One pilot- 30

ing a blind man can escape him, but
 Job disheartened by false comfort⁴ knew
 that nothing can be so defeating
 as a blind man who
 can see. O alive who are dead, who are 35
 proud not to see, O small dust of the earth
 that walks so arrogantly
 trust begets power and faith is
 an affectionate thing. We
 vow, we make this promise 40

1. The text is from *Complete Poems* (1967).

2. A symbol of christianity. "Star of David": a symbol of Judaism.

3. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, leader of his country's resistance against Italian occupation during World War II. After Mussolini's fall in

1943, Selassie declared Ethiopia "less interested in vengeance for the past than in justice for the future."

4. When undergoing Jehovah's test of his fidelity, Job rejected the attempts of friends to comfort him.

to the fighting—it's a promise—"We'll
 never hate black, white, red, yellow, Jew,
 Gentile, Untouchable."⁵ We are
 not competent to
 make our vows. With set jaw they are fighting, 45
 fighting, fighting,—some we love whom we know,
 some we love but know not—that
 hearts may feel and not be numb.
 It cures me; or am I what
 I can't believe in? Some 50

in snow, some on crags, some in quicksands,
 little by little, much by much, they
 are fighting fighting fighting that where
 there was death there may
 be life. "When a man is prey to anger, 55
 he is moved by outside things; when he holds
 his ground in patience patience
 patience, that is action or
 beauty," the soldier's defense
 and hardest armor for 60

the fight. The world's an orphans' home. Shall
 we never have peace without sorrow?
 without pleas of the dying for
 help that won't come? O
 quiet form upon the dust, I cannot 65
 look and yet I must. If these great patient
 dyings—all these agonies
 and wound bearings and bloodshed—
 can teach us how to live, these
 dyings were not wasted. 70

Hate-hardened heart, O heart of iron,
 iron is iron till it is rust.
 There never was a war that was
 not inward; I must
 fight till I have conquered in myself what 75
 causes war, but I would not believe it.
 I inwardly did nothing.
 O Iscariot⁶-like crime!
 Beauty is everlasting
 and dust is for a time. 80

1944

5. The lowest hereditary caste in India.

6. Judas Iscariot was the apostle who betrayed Jesus Christ.

T. S. ELIOT

1888–1965

The publication in 1922 of *The Waste Land* in the British little magazine *Criterion* and the American *Dial* was a cultural and literary event. The poem's title and the view it incorporated of modern civilization seemed, to many, to catch precisely the state of culture and society after World War I. The war, supposedly fought to save European civilization, had been the most brutal and destructive in Western history: what kind of civilization could have allowed it to take place? The long, fragmented structure of *The Waste Land*, too, contained so many technical innovations that ideas of what poetry was and how it worked seemed fundamentally changed. A generation of poets either imitated or resisted it.

The author of this poem was an American living in London, T. S. Eliot. Eliot had a comfortable upbringing in St. Louis: his mother was involved in cultural and charitable activities and wrote poetry; his father was a successful businessman. His grandfather Eliot had been a New England Unitarian minister who, moving to St. Louis, had founded Washington University. Eliot was thus a product of that New England-based "genteel tradition" that shaped the nation's cultural life after the Civil War. He attended Harvard for both undergraduate (1906–10) and graduate (1911–14) work. He studied at the Sorbonne in Paris from 1910 to 1911 and at Oxford from 1915 to 1916, writing a dissertation on the idealistic philosophy of the English logician and metaphysician F. H. Bradley (1846–1924). The war prevented Eliot from returning to Harvard for the oral defense of his doctoral degree, and this delay became the occasion of his turning to a life in poetry and letters rather than in academics.

Eliot had begun writing traditional poetry as a college student. In 1908, however, he read Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and learned about Jules Laforgue and other French Symbolist poets. Symons's book altered Eliot's view of poetry, as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (published in *Poetry* in 1915) and "Preludes" (published in *Blast* in the same year) showed; in these poems Eliot took Symons's "revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric" in the direction of associative, oblique free verse. His fellow expatriate and poet Ezra Pound, reading this work, began enthusiastically introducing Eliot in literary circles as a young American who had "trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*." Pound helped Eliot over several years to get financially established. In addition, he was a perceptive reader and critic of Eliot's draft poems.

Eliot settled in England, marrying Vivian Haigh-Wood in 1915. Separated in 1932, they never divorced; Haigh-Wood died in a mental institution in 1947. After marrying, Eliot worked in London, first as a teacher and then from 1917 to 1925 in the foreign department of Lloyd's Bank, hoping to find time to write poetry and literary essays. His criticism was published in the *Egoist* and then in the little magazine that he founded, *Criterion*, which was published from 1922 to 1939. His persuasive style, a mixture of advocacy and judiciousness, effectively counterpointed Pound's aggressive, confrontational approach; the two together had a tremendous effect on how the poetry of the day was written and how the poetry of the past was evaluated. More than any other Americans they defined what is now thought of as "high" modernism.

Eliot began working on *The Waste Land* in 1921 and finished it in a Swiss sanatorium while recovering from a mental collapse brought on by overwork, marital

problems, and general depression. He accepted some alterations suggested by his wife and cut huge chunks out of the poem on Pound's advice. Although Pound's work on the poem was all excision, so different was the manuscript before and after Pound's suggestions were incorporated that some critics suggest we should think of *The Waste Land* as jointly authored. The poem as published in *Criterion* and the *Dial* had no footnotes; these were appended for its publication in book form and added yet another layer (possibly self-mocking) to the complex texture of the poem.

The Waste Land consists of five discontinuous segments, each composed of fragments incorporating multiple voices and characters, literary and historical allusions and quotations, vignettes of contemporary life, surrealistic images, myths and legends. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," the poet writes, asking whether he can form any coherent structure from the splinters of civilization. The poem's discontinuous elements are organized by recurrent allusions to the myth of seasonal death, burial, and rebirth that, according to much anthropological thinking of the time, underlay all religions. In Sir James Frazer's multivolume *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915) and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), Eliot found a repertory of myths through which he could invoke, without specifically naming any religion, the story of a desert land brought to life by a king's sacrifice. Although it gestures toward religious belief, *The Waste Land* concludes with the outcome of the quest for regeneration uncertain in a cacophonous, desolate landscape.

Many readers saw *The Waste Land* as the definitive cultural statement of its time, but it was not definitive for Eliot. The poem may have been Eliot's indirect confession of personal discord, for which he sought resolution in social orders beyond those of poetry. In 1927 he became a British citizen; in a preface to the collection of essays *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), he declared himself a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion." After "The Hollow Men" and the "Sweeney" poems, which continue *The Waste Land's* critique of modern civilization, he turned increasingly to poems of religious doubt and reconciliation. "The Journey of the Magi" and "Ash Wednesday" are poems about the search for a faith desperately needed, yet difficult to sustain. The *Four Quartets*, begun with "Burnt Norton" in 1934 and completed in 1943, are not so much reports of secure faith as dramatizations of the difficult process of arriving at belief. The *Four Quartets* move away from the fragmentary quotation and collage techniques of *The Waste Land* in favor of plainer expository statement grounded in particular times and places—the England of Eliot's chosen citizenship and the America of his origins—while aspiring to a timeless religious faith.

An emphasis on order, hierarchy, and racial homogeneity emerged in Eliot's social essays of the later 1920s and 1930s; a strain of crude anti-Semitism had appeared in the earlier Sweeney poems. As European politics became increasingly turbulent, the stability promised by totalitarian regimes appealed to some observers, Eliot included. The Communist rejection of all religion also tended to drive the more traditionally religious modernists into the opposing camp of fascism. Pound's and Eliot's Fascist sympathies in the 1930s, together with their immense influence on poetry, linked high modernism with reactionary politics in the public's perception, even while individual modernists in these years embraced political movements ranging from the far left to the extreme right, maintained centrist or liberal allegiances, or despised politics completely.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Eliot's criticism and poetry became increasingly important to the group of writers—many of them poets and academics in the United States—whose work became known collectively as the "New Criticism." In his influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot had defined the English and European poetic tradition as a self-sufficient organic whole, an elastic equilibrium



Eliot inspecting manuscripts at his desk.

that constantly reformed itself to accommodate new poets. What makes poems matter, in Eliot's definition of tradition, is their effect on other poems, not their capacity to act upon the world outside of poetry. Poets contribute to the tradition, he argued, not through the direct expression of individual emotion but through a difficult process of distancing "the man who suffers" from "the mind which creates"; readers, therefore, should focus on the feeling embodied in the poem itself rather than reading the poem through the life of the poet. In other essays, Eliot denigrated didactic, expository, or narrative poets like Milton and the Victorians while applauding the verbally complex, paradoxical, indirect, symbolic work of

seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets like John Donne and George Herbert. Through the New Criticism, Eliot's "impersonal" approach to poetry had a powerful role in shaping the literary curriculum in American colleges and universities, especially following World War II.

For the New Criticism, which analyzed poems for imagery, allusion, ambiguity, and irony, Eliot's essays provided theory, his poetry opportunities for practical criticism. But when critics used Eliot's preference for difficult indirection to judge literary quality and made interpretation the main task of readers, they often overlooked the lyricism, obvious didacticism, and humor of Eliot's own poetry. And they minimized the poems' cultural, historical, and autobiographical content.

However elitist his pronouncements, however hostile to modernity he claimed to be, Eliot drew heavily on popular forms and longed to have wide cultural influence. There are vaudeville turns throughout *The Waste Land*. He admired Charlie Chaplin and wanted "as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible." He pursued this ambition by writing verse plays. *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) was a church pageant; *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesman* (1959), all religious in theme, were successfully produced in London and on Broadway. He never became a popular poet, however, despite his tremendous impact on the teaching and writing of poetry. Although Eliot remained a resident of England, he returned to the United States frequently to lecture and to give readings of his poems. He married his assistant, Valerie Fletcher, in 1957. By the time of his death he had become a social and cultural institution.

The text of the poems is that of *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (1969).

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S'io credessi che mia risposta fosse
a persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
questa fiamma staria senza più scosse.
Ma per ciò che giammai di questo fondo
non tornò vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.¹*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats 5
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . . 10
Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, 15
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap, 20
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time²
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes; 25
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days³ of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate; 30
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

1. If I thought that my reply would be to one who would ever return to the world, this flame would stay without further movement; but since none has ever returned alive from this depth, if what I hear is true, I answer you without fear of infamy (Italian; Dante's *Inferno* 27.61–66). The speaker, Guido da Montefeltro, consumed in flame as punishment for giving false counsel, confesses his

shame without fear of its being reported since he believes Dante cannot return to earth.

2. An echo of Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress" (1681): "Had we but world enough and time."

3. *Works and Days* is a didactic poem about farming by the Greek poet Hesiod (8th century B.C.E.).

And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go 35
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair— 40
(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')
Do I dare 45
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, 50
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall⁴
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all— 55
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? 60
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress 65
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

.
Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets 70
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
.

4. Echo of Duke Orsino's invocation of music in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* 1.1.4: "If music be the food of love, play on. . . . That strain again! It had a dying fall."

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! 75
 Smoothed by long fingers,
 Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis? 80
 But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
 Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in
 upon a platter,⁵
 I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, 85
 And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
 Would it have been worth while, 90
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
 To say: 'I am Lazarus,⁶ come from the dead,
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'— 95
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,
 Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all.
 That is not it, at all.'

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 Would it have been worth while, 100
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail
 along the floor—
 And this, and so much more?—
 It is impossible to say just what I mean!
 But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen: 105
 Would it have been worth while
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
 And turning toward the window, should say:
 'That is not it at all,
 That is not what I meant, at all.' 110

.
 No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do
 To swell a progress,⁷ start a scene or two,
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
 Deferential, glad to be of use, 115
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

5. The head of the prophet John the Baptist, who was killed at the behest of Princess Salome, was brought to her on a platter (see Mark 6.17–20, Matthew 14.3–11).

6. The resurrection of Lazarus is recounted in John 11.1–44; see also Luke 16.19–31.

7. A journey or procession made by royal courts and often portrayed on Elizabethan stages.

Full of high sentence,⁸ but a bit obtuse;
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
 Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . . 120
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
 I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
 I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me. 125

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown 130
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

1915, 1917

Sweeney among the Nightingales¹

ὄμοι, πέπληγμαι καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔσω.²

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees
 Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
 The zebra stripes along his jaw
 Swelling to maculate giraffe.

The circles of the stormy moon 5
 Slide westward toward the River Plate,³
 Death and the Raven drift above
 And Sweeney guards the hornèd gate.⁴

Gloomy Orion and the Dog⁵
 Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas; 10
 The person in the Spanish cape
 Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees

8. Opinions, sententiousness.

1. The poem juxtaposes the imminent death of Sweeney in a nonheroic present, the ritual sacrifice of Christ enacted in a convent, the murder (by his wife and her lover) of Agamemnon in Aeschylus's tragedy, and the tragedy of Philomela in Greek mythology. Raped by her sister's husband, who then cut out her tongue, Philomela was transformed into a nightingale whose song springs from the violation she has suffered but cannot report.

2. Alas, I am struck a mortal blow within (Greek; Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*); this is Agamemnon's cry when he is murdered.

3. Estuary between Argentina and Uruguay.

4. The Gates of Horn, in the Greek underworld; dreams pass through them to the upper world.

5. Sirius, also called the Dog Star, is the brightest star in the sky. "Orion": a constellation representing the mythical hunter. Sirius is said to be his dog.

Slips and pulls the table cloth
 Overturns a coffee-cup,
 Reorganised upon the floor
 She yawns and draws a stocking up; 15

The silent man in mocha brown
 Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;
 The waiter brings in oranges
 Bananas figs and hothouse grapes; 20

The silent vertebrate in brown
 Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;
 Rachel *née* Rabinovitch
 Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;

She and the lady in the cape 25
 Are suspect, thought to be in league;
 Therefore the man with heavy eyes
 Declines the gambit, shows fatigue,

Leaves the room and reappears
 Outside the window, leaning in, 30
 Branches of wistaria
 Circumscribe a golden grin;

The host with someone indistinct
 Converses at the door apart,
 The nightingales are singing near 35
 The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
 When Agamemnon cried aloud
 And let their liquid siftings fall
 To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud. 40

1918, 1919

*From Tradition and the Individual Talent*¹

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. We cannot refer to “the tradition” or to “a tradition”; at most, we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is “traditional” or even “too traditional.” Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing

1. From *The Sacred Wood* (1920), first published in the *Egoist* (1919). The text is that of *Selected Essays* (1951).

archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology.

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are "more critical" than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is

something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

* * *

II

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not Blue-book² knowledge but the enjoyment of poetry, and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it. I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. The other aspect of this Impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of "personality," not being necessarily more interesting, or having "more to say," but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulfuric acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

* * *

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of

2. Official guidebooks. "Susurrus": murmuring, buzzing (Latin).

eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express, and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that “emotion recollected in tranquillity”³ is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not “recollected,” and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is “tranquil” only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him “personal.” Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

III

ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἴσως Θεϊότερόν τι καὶ ἀπαθές ἐστιν.⁴

This essay proposes to halt at the frontiers of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry. To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is an expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

1919, 1920

3. From Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (2nd ed., 1800): "poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity."

4. No doubt the mind is something divine and not subject to external impressions (Greek; Aristotle's *De Anima* [On the soul] 1.4).

Gerontion¹

Thou hast nor youth nor age
 But as it were an after dinner sleep
 Dreaming of both.²

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
 Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
 I was neither at the hot gates³
 Nor fought in the warm rain
 Nor knee deep in the salt-marsh, heaving a cutlass, 5
 Bitten by flies, fought.
 My house is a decayed house,
 And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
 Spawned in some estaminet⁴ of Antwerp,
 Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.⁵ 10
 The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
 Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.⁶
 The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
 Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.
 I an old man, 15
 A dull head among windy spaces.

Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!'⁷
 The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
 Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year
 Came Christ the tiger 20

In depraved May,⁸ dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
 To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
 Among whispers,⁹ by Mr. Silvero
 With caressing hands, at Limoges
 Who walked all night in the next room; 25
 By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
 By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
 Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp
 Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.
 Vacant shuttles 30
 Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
 An old man in a draught house
 Under a windy knob.

1. Eliot intended to reprint this dramatic monologue as a prelude to *The Waste Land* until persuaded not to by Ezra Pound. The title is derived from the Greek word meaning "an old man."

2. Lines spoken by the duke of Vienna to describe death in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* 3.1.32–34.

3. An allusion to Thermopylae, the mountain pass where the Spartans heroically resisted the Persians (480 B.C.E.).

4. Café. The anti-Semitic passage identifies the landlord with urban decay.

5. Allusions to symptoms of and cures for venereal disease.

6. Dung.

7. Echoes of the "signs and wonders" expected as testimony to Christ's divinity in John 4.48 and the demand "Master, we would see a sign from thee" in Matthew 12.38.

8. Cf. *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), chap. 18: the "passionate depravity that marked the Maryland May."

9. In lines 18–22, Gerontion imagines Christ as a powerful beast, like "the Lion of the tribe of Juda" (Revelation 5.5). Line 22 alludes to dividing and eating the bread, and drinking the wine, in Christian Communion.

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
 History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors 35
 And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
 Guides us by vanities. Think now
 She gives when our attention is distracted
 And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
 That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late 40
 What's not believed in, or is still believed,
 In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
 Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
 Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
 Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices 45
 Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
 Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
 These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
 We have not reached conclusion, when I 50
 Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
 I have not made this show purposelessly
 And it is not by any concitation
 Of the backward devils.
 I would meet you upon this honestly. 55
 I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?
 I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch: 60
 How should I use them for your closer contact?

These with a thousand small deliberations
 Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
 Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
 With pungent sauces, multiply variety 65
 In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
 Suspend its operations, will the weevil
 Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
 Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear¹
 In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits 70
 Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn.
 White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
 And an old man driven by the Trades²
 To a sleepy corner.

Tenants of the house, 75
 Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

1920

1. The polestar in the constellation the Bear.

2. Trade winds.

The Waste Land¹

*“Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.”*²

FOR EZRA POUND
IL MIGLIOR FABBRO.³

I. *The Burial of the Dead*⁴

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering 5
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee⁵
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,⁶ 10
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.⁷
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie, 15
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow 20
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,⁸
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,⁹

1. Eliot's notes for the first hardcover edition of *The Waste Land* opened with his acknowledgment that “not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem” were suggested by Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail Legend, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), and that he was indebted also to James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915), “especially the two volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*,” which deal with vegetation myths and fertility rites. Eliot's notes are incorporated in the footnotes to this text. Many critics believe that the notes were added in a spirit of parody. The numerous and extensive literary quotations add to the multivoiced effect of the poem.

2. A quotation from Petronius's *Satyricon* (1st century c.e.) about the Sibyl (prophetess) of Cumae, blessed with eternal life by Apollo but doomed to perpetual old age, who guided Aeneas through Hades in Virgil's *Aeneid*: “For once I myself saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her

‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she replied, ‘I want to die.’”

3. “The better maker,” the tribute in Dante's *Purgatorio* 26.117 to the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel.

4. The title of the Anglican burial service.

5. A lake near Munich. Lines 8–16 were suggested by the Countess Marie Larisch's memoir, *My Past* (1913).

6. A public park in Munich, with cafés; former grounds of a Bavarian palace.

7. I am certainly not Russian; I come from Lithuania, a true German (German).

8. “Cf. Ezekiel II, i” [Eliot's note]. There God addresses the prophet Ezekiel as “Son of man” and declares: “stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.”

9. “Cf. Ecclesiastes XII, v” [Eliot's note]. There the preacher describes the bleakness of old age when “the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail.”

And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
 There is shadow under this red rock,¹ 25
 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
 And I will show you something different from either
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
 I will show you fear in a handful of dust. 30

*Frisch weht der Wind
 Der Heimat zu
 Mein Irisch Kind,
 Wo weilest du?*²

'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
 'They called me the hyacinth girl.' 35
 —Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth³ garden,
 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, 40
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
*Oed' und leer das Meer.*⁴

Madame Sosostriis,⁵ famous clairvoyante,
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe, 45
 With a wicked pack of cards.⁶ Here, said she,
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,⁷
 (Those are pearls that were his eyes.⁸ Look!)
 Here is Belladonna,⁹ the Lady of the Rocks,
 The lady of situations. 50
 Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
 And here is the one-eyed merchant,¹ and this card,
 Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,

1. Cf. Isaiah 32.1–2 and the prophecy that the reign of the Messiah "shall be . . . as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

2. "V. [see] *Tristan und Isolde*, I, verses 5–8" [Eliot's note]. In Wagner's opera, a sailor aboard Tristan's ship recalls his love back in Ireland: "Fresh blows the wind to the homeland; my Irish child, where are you waiting?"

3. The boy in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10, who was beloved by Apollo but slain by a jealous rival. The Greeks celebrated his festival in May.

4. "III, verse 24" [Eliot's note]. In *Tristan*, III, verse 24, the dying Tristan, awaiting the ship that carries his beloved Isolde, is told that "Empty and barren is the sea."

5. Eliot derived the name from "Sesostriis, the Sorceress of Ectabana," the pseudo-Egyptian name assumed by a woman who tells fortunes in Aldous Huxley's novel *Chrome Yellow* (1921). Sesostriis was a 12th-dynasty Egyptian king.

6. The tarot deck of cards. Eliot's note to this passage reads: "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the tra-

ditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the 'crowds of people,' and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself."

7. A symbolic figure that includes "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant" in Part III and "Phlebas the Phoenician" in Part IV. The ancient Phoenicians were seagoing merchants who spread Egyptian fertility cults throughout the Mediterranean.

8. The line is a quotation from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *Tempest* 1.2.398. Prince Ferdinand, disconsolate because he thinks his father has drowned in the storm, is consoled when Ariel sings of a miraculous sea change that has transformed death into "something rich and strange."

9. Literally "beautiful lady"; the name of both the poisonous plant deadly nightshade and a cosmetic.

1. These three figures are from the Tarot deck.

Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
 The Hanged Man. Fear death by water. 55
 I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
 Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
 Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
 One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,² 60
 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
 I had not thought death had undone so many.³
 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,⁴
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. 65
 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
 With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.⁵
 There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!⁶
 'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!⁷ 70
 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
 'O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
 'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!⁸ 75
 'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!⁹

II. A Game of Chess¹

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,²
 Glowed on the marble, where the glass

2. "Cf. Baudelaire: 'Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves, / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant'" [Eliot's note]. The lines are quoted from "Les Sept Vieillards" (The seven old men), poem 93 of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The flowers of evil, 1857) by the French Symbolist Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), and may be translated from the French: "Swarming city, city full of dreams, / Where the specter in broad daylight accosts the passerby."

3. "Cf. *Inferno* III, 55–57" [Eliot's note]. The note continues to quote Dante's lines, which may be translated: "So long a train of people, / That I should never have believed / That death had undone so many."

4. "Cf. *Inferno* IV, 25–27" [Eliot's note]. Dante describes, in Limbo, the virtuous pagan dead, who, living before Christ, could not hope for salvation. The lines read: "Here, so far as I could tell by listening, / There was no lamentation except sighs, / which caused the eternal air to tremble."

5. "A phenomenon which I have often noticed" [Eliot's note]. The church named is in the financial district of London.

6. A hat manufacturer.

7. The battle of Mylae (260 B.C.E.) was a victory for Rome against Carthage.

8. "Cf. the dirge in Webster's *White Devil*

[Eliot's note]. In the play by John Webster (d. 1625), a crazed woman fears that the corpses of her decadent and murdered relatives might be disinterred: "But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men, / For with his nails he'll dig them up again." In echoing the lines Eliot altered "foe" to "friend" and the "wolf" to "Dog," invoking the brilliant Dog Star, Sirius, whose rise in the heavens accompanied the flooding of the Nile and promised the return of fertility to Egypt.

9. "V. Baudelaire, Preface to *Fleurs du Mal*" [Eliot's note]. The last line of the introductory poem to *Les Fleurs du Mal*. "Au Lecteur" (To the reader) may be translated from the French: "Hypocrite reader!—my likeness—my brother!"

1. The title suggests two plays by Thomas Middleton: *A Game of Chess* (1627), about a marriage of political expediency, and *Women Beware Women* (1657), containing a scene in which a mother-in-law is engrossed in a chess game while her daughter-in-law is seduced nearby. Eliot's note to line 118 refers readers to this play. It is now believed that much of this section reflects Eliot's disintegrating marriage.

2. "Cf. *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, ii. 190" [Eliot's note]. In Shakespeare's play, Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra begins: "The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne, / Burn'd on the water."

Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out 80
 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
 Reflecting light upon the table as
 The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
 From satin cases poured in rich profusion. 85
 In vials of ivory and coloured glass
 Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
 Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
 And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
 That freshened from the window, these ascended 90
 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
 Flung their smoke into the laquearia,³
 Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
 Huge sea-wood fed with copper
 Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone, 95
 In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
 Above the antique mantel was displayed
 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene⁴
 The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale 100
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 ‘Jug Jug’⁵ to dirty ears.
 And other withered stumps of time
 Were told upon the walls; staring forms 105
 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
 Spread out in fiery points
 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still. 110

‘My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
 ‘Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
 ‘What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
 ‘I never know what you are thinking. Think.’

I think we are in rats’ alley⁶ 115
 Where the dead men lost their bones.

3. “Laquearia, V. *Aeneid*, I, 726” [Eliot’s note]. Eliot quotes the passage containing the term *laquearia* (“paneled ceiling”) and describing the banquet hall where Queen Dido welcomed Aeneas to Carthage. It reads: “Blazing torches hang from the gilded paneled ceiling, and torches conquer the night with flames.” Aeneas became Dido’s lover but abandoned her to continue his journey to found Rome, and she committed suicide.

4. Eliot’s notes for lines 98–99 refer the reader to “Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV, 140” for the phrase

“sylvan scene” and to “Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, Philomela.” The lines splice the setting of Eve’s temptation in the Garden of Eden, first described through Satan’s eyes, with the rape of Philomela by her sister’s husband, King Tereus, and her transformation into the nightingale. Eliot’s note for line 100 refers the reader ahead to the nightingale’s song in Part III, line 204, of his own poem.

5. The conventional rendering of the nightingale’s song in Elizabethan poetry.

6. Eliot’s note refers readers to “Part III, l. 195.”

'What is that noise?'

The wind under the door.⁷

'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'

Nothing again nothing.

120

'Do

'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

'Nothing?'

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

125

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'

But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—

It's so elegant

So intelligent

130

'What shall I do now? What shall I do?'

'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

'With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?'

'What shall we ever do?'

The hot water at ten.

135

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed,⁸ I said—

I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,

140

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME⁹

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.

He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,

145

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,

He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,

And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.

Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.

150

Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.

155

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

7. "Cf. Webster: 'Is the wind in that door still?'" [Eliot's note]. In John Webster's *The Devil's Law Case* (1623) 3.2.162, a duke is cured of an infection by a wound intended to kill him; a surprised surgeon asks the quoted question, meaning, "Is

he still alive?"

8. Slang for "demobilized," discharged from the army.

9. Routine call of British bartenders to clear the pub at closing time.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.) 160
 The chemist¹ said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.
 You *are* a proper fool, I said.
 Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
 What you get married for if you don't want children?
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME 165
 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,²
 And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 Goonight Bill, Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight. 170
 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.³

III. *The Fire Sermon*⁴

The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf
 Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
 Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed. 175
 Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.⁵
 The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
 Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
 Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
 And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors; 180
 Departed, have left no addresses.
 By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept⁶ . . .
 Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
 Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
 But at my back in a cold blast I hear⁷ 185
 The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

 A rat crept softly through the vegetation
 Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
 While I was fishing in the dull canal
 On a winter evening round behind the gashouse 190
 Musing upon the king my brother's wreck⁸
 And on the king my father's death before him.

1. Pharmacist.

2. Ham or bacon.

3. A double echo of the popular song "Good night ladies, we're going to leave you now" and mad Ophelia's farewell before drowning, in Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 4.5.72.

4. I.e., Buddha's Fire Sermon. See p. 374, n. 8.

5. "V. Spenser, *Prothalamion*" [Eliot's note]. The line is the refrain of the marriage song by Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), a pastoral celebration of marriage set along the Thames River near London.

6. The phrasing recalls Psalms 137.1, in which the exiled Jews mourn for their homeland: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." Lake Leman

is another name for Lake Geneva, location of the sanatorium where Eliot wrote the bulk of *The Waste Land*. The archaic term *leman*, for "illicit mistress," led to the phrase "waters of leman" signifying lusts.

7. This line and line 196 echo Andrew Marvell (1621–1678), *To His Coy Mistress*, lines 21–24: "But at my back I always hear / Time's winged chariot hurrying near; / And yonder all before us lie / Deserts of vast eternity."

8. "Cf. *The Tempest*, 1, ii" [Eliot's note]. Another allusion to Shakespeare's play, 1.2.389–90, where Prince Ferdinand, thinking his father dead, describes himself as "Sitting on a bank, / Weeping again the King my father's wrack."

White bodies naked on the low damp ground
 And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
 Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year. 195
 But at my back from time to time I hear
 The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
 Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring,⁹
 O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
 And on her daughter 200
 They wash their feet in soda water¹
Et, O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!;²

Twit twit twit
 Jug jug jug jug jug jug
 So rudely forc'd. 205
 Tereu³

Unreal City
 Under the brown fog of a winter noon
 Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
 Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants 210
 C.i.f.⁴ London: documents at sight,
 Asked me in demotic French
 To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
 Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back 215
 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
 Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
 I Tiresias,⁵ though blind, throbbing between two lives,

9. "Cf. Day, *Parliament of Bees*: 'When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear, / A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring / Actaeon to Diana in the spring, / Where all shall see her naked skin'" [Eliot's note]. Actaeon was changed into a stag and hunted to death as punishment for seeing Diana, goddess of chastity, bathing. John Day (1574–c. 1640), English poet.

1. "I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia" [Eliot's note]. The bawdy song was popular among World War I troops.

2. "V. Verlaine, *Parsifal*" [Eliot's note]. The last line of the sonnet "Parsifal" by the French Symbolist Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) reads: "And O those children's voices singing in the cupola." In Wagner's opera, the feet of Parsifal, the questing knight, are washed before he enters the sanctuary of the Grail.

3. Alludes to Tereus, who raped Philomela, and like *jug* is a conventional Elizabethan term for the nightingale's song; also a slang pronunciation of *true*.

4. "The currants were quoted at a price 'carriage and insurance free to London'; and the Bill of Lading, etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of the sight draft" [Eliot's note]. Some have suggested another possibility for the phrase

"carriage and insurance free": "cost, insurance and freight."

5. Eliot's note reads: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest." The note quotes the Latin passage from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.421–43, which may be translated: "Jove [very drunk] said jokingly to Juno: 'You women have greater pleasure in love than that enjoyed by men.' She denied it. So they decided to refer the question to wise Tiresias who knew love from both points of view. For once, with a blow of his staff, he had separated two huge snakes who were copulating in the forest, and miraculously was changed instantly from a man into a woman and remained so for seven years. In the eighth year he saw the snakes again and said: 'If a blow against you is so powerful that it changes the sex of the author of it, now I shall strike you again.' With these words he struck them, and his former shape and masculinity were restored. As

Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives 220
 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,⁶
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
 Out of the window perilously spread
 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays, 225
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
 I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
 I too awaited the expected guest. 230
 He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
 A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
 One of the low on whom assurance sits
 As a silk hat on a Bradford⁷ millionaire.
 The time is now propitious, as he guesses, 235
 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
 Endeavours to engage her in caresses
 Which still are unrequited, if undesired.
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
 Exploring hands encounter no defence; 240
 His vanity requires no response,
 And makes a welcome of indifference.
 (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
 Enacted on this same divan or bed;
 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall⁸ 245
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
 Bestows one final patronising kiss,
 And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
 Hardly aware of her departed lover; 250
 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'
 When lovely woman stoops to folly and
 Paces about her room again, alone,
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand, 255
 And puts a record on the gramophone.⁹

referee in the sportive quarrel, he supported Jove's claim. Juno, overly upset by the decision, condemned the arbitrator to eternal blindness. But the all-powerful father (inasmuch as no god can undo what has been done by another god) gave him the power of prophecy, with this honor compensating him for the loss of sight."

6. "This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the 'longshore' or 'dory' fisherman, who returns at nightfall" [Eliot's note]. Fragment 149, by the female Greek poet Sappho (fl. 600 B.C.E.), celebrates the Evening Star who "brings homeward all those / Scattered by the dawn, / The sheep to fold . . . / The children to their mother's side." A more familiar echo is "Home is the sailor, home from sea" in "Requiem" by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894).

7. A Yorkshire, England, manufacturing town where fortunes were made during World War I.

8. Tiresias prophesied in the marketplace below the wall of Thebes, witnessed the tragedies of Oedipus and Creon in that city, and retained his prophetic powers in the underworld.

9. Eliot's note refers to the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) by Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) and the song sung by Olivia when she revisits the scene of her seduction: "When lovely woman stoops to folly / And finds too late that men betray / What charm can soothe her melancholy, / What art can wash her guilt away? / The only art her guilt to cover, / To hide her shame from every eye, / To give repentance to her lover / And wring his bosom—is to die."

'This music crept by me upon the waters'¹
 And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
 O City city, I can sometimes hear
 Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street, 260
 The pleasant whining of a mandoline
 And a clatter and a chatter from within
 Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
 Of Magnus Martyr² hold
 Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold. 265

The river sweats³
 Oil and tar
 The barges drift
 With the turning tide
 Red sails 270
 Wide
 To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
 The barges wash
 Drifting logs
 Down Greenwich reach 275
 Past the Isle of Dogs.⁴
 Weialala leia
 Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester⁵
 Beating oars 280
 The stern was formed
 A gilded shell
 Red and gold
 The brisk swell
 Rippled both shores 285
 Southwest wind
 Carried down stream
 The peal of bells
 White towers
 Weialala leia 290
 Wallala leialala

1. Eliot's note refers to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the scene where Ferdinand listens to Ariel's song telling of his father's miraculous sea change: "This music crept by me on the waters, / Allaying both their fury and my passion / With its sweet air" (1.2.391–93).

2. "The interior of St. Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among [Christopher] Wren's interiors" [Eliot's note].

3. "The Song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 inclusive they speak in turn. V. *Götterdämmerung*, III, i: the Rhine-daughters" [Eliot's note]. Lines 277–78 and 290–91 are from the lament of the Rhine maidens for the lost beauty of the Rhine River in the opera by Richard Wagner (1813–1883), *Götterdämmerung*

(The twilight of the gods, 1876).

4. A peninsula in the Thames opposite Greenwich, a borough of London and the birthplace of Queen Elizabeth I. Throughout this section Eliot has named places along the Thames River.

5. Reference to the romance between Queen Elizabeth I and the earl of Leicester. Eliot's note refers to the historian James A. Froude, "*Elizabeth*, Vol. I. ch. iv, letter of [bishop] De Quadra [the ambassador] to Philip of Spain: 'In the afternoon we were in a barge, watching the games on the river. (The queen) was alone with Lord Robert and myself on the poop, when they began to talk nonsense, and went so far that Lord Robert at last said, as I was on the spot there was no reason why they should not be married if the queen pleased.'"

Trams and dusty trees.
 Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
 Undid me.⁶ By Richmond I raised my knees
 Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.' 295
 'My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
 Under my feet. After the event
 He wept. He promised "a new start."
 I made no comment. What should I resent?'

'On Margate Sands, 300
 I can connect
 Nothing with nothing.
 The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
 My people humble people who expect
 Nothing.' 305

la la

To Carthage then I came⁷

Burning burning burning burning⁸
 O Lord Thou pluckest me out⁹
 O Lord Thou pluckest 310

burning

IV. *Death by Water*

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
 Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
 And the profit and loss. 315

A current under sea
 Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
 He passed the stages of his age and youth
 Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew 320
 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. *What the Thunder Said*¹

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
 After the frosty silence in the gardens

6. "Cf. *Purgatorio*, V, 133" [Eliot's note]. Eliot parodies Dante's lines, which may be translated: "Remember me, who am La Pia. / Siena made me, Maremma undid me."

7. "V. St. Augustine's *Confessions*: 'to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears'" [Eliot's note]. Augustine here recounts his licentious youth.

8. Eliot's note to lines 307–09 refers to "Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount)" and "St. Augustine's *Confessions*." The "collocation of these two repre-

sentatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident."

9. The line is from Augustine's *Confessions* and echoes also Zechariah 3.2, where Jehovah, rebuking Satan, calls the high priest Joshua "a brand plucked out of the fire."

1. "In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe" [Eliot's note]. During his disciples' journey to Emmaus,

After the agony in stony places
 The shouting and the crying 325
 Prison and palace and reverberation
 Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
 He who was living is now dead
 We who were living are now dying
 With a little patience² 330

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink 335
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
 If there were only water amongst the rock
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit 340
 There is not even silence in the mountains
 But dry sterile thunder without rain
 There is not even solitude in the mountains
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
 From doors of mudcracked houses 345
 If there were water

And no rock
 If there were rock
 And also water
 And water 350
 A spring
 A pool among the rock
 If there were the sound of water only
 Not the cicada³
 And dry grass singing 355
 But sound of water over a rock
 Where the hermit-thrush⁴ sings in the pine trees
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
 But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you?⁵ 360
 When I count, there are only you and I together

after his Crucifixion and Resurrection, Jesus walked alongside and conversed with them, but they did not recognize him (Luke 24.13–34).

2. The opening nine lines allude to Christ's imprisonment and trial, to his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, and to his Crucifixion on Golgotha (Calvary) and burial.

3. Grasshopper. Cf. line 23 and see p. 365, n. 9.

4. "This is . . . the hermit-thrush which I have heard in Quebec Province. Chapman says (*Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*) 'it is

most at home in secluded woodland and thickety retreats.' . . . Its 'water dripping song' is justly celebrated" [Eliot's note].

5. "The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted" [Eliot's note].

But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
 I do not know whether a man or a woman
 —But who is that on the other side of you? 365

What is that sound high in the air⁶
 Murmur of maternal lamentation
 Who are those hooded hordes swarming
 Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth 370
 Ringed by the flat horizon only
 What is the city over the mountains
 Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
 Falling towers
 Jerusalem Athens Alexandria 375
 Vienna London
 Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
 And fiddled whisper music on those strings
 And bats with baby faces in the violet light 380
 Whistled, and beat their wings
 And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
 And upside down in air were towers
 Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
 And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells. 385

In this decayed hole among the mountains
 In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
 Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
 There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
 It has no windows, and the door swings, 390
 Dry bones can harm no one.
 Only a cock stood on the rooftree
 Co co rico co co rico⁷
 In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
 Bringing rain 395

Ganga⁸ was sunken, and the limp leaves
 Waited for rain, while the black clouds
 Gathered far distant, over Himavant.⁹
 The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
 Then spoke the thunder 400

6. Eliot's note quotes a passage in German from *Blick ins Chaos* (1920) by Hermann Hesse (1877–1962), which may be translated: "Already half of Europe, already at least half of Eastern Europe, on the way to Chaos, drives drunk in sacred infatuation along the edge of the precipice, since drunkenly, as though hymn-singing, as Dimitri Karamazov sang in [the novel] *The Brothers Karamazov* [1882] by Feodor Dostoevsky [1821–

1881]. The offended bourgeois laughs at the songs; the saint and the seer hear them with tears."

7. A cock's crow in folklore signaled the departure of ghosts (as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 1.1.157ff.); in Matthew 26.34 and 74, a cock crowed, as Christ predicted, when Peter denied him three times.

8. The Indian river Ganges.

9. A mountain in the Himalayas.

Da¹

Datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment's surrender

Which an age of prudence can never retract 405

By this, and this only, we have existed

Which is not to be found in our obituaries

Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider²

Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor

In our empty rooms 410

Da

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key³

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison 415

Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus⁴

Da

Damyata: The boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar

The sea was calm, your heart would have responded 420

Gaily, when invited, beating obedient

To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore

Fishing,⁵ with the arid plain behind me 425

Shall I at least set my lands in order?⁶

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*⁷

*Quando fiam uti chelidon*⁸—O swallow swallow

1. "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata' (Give, sympathise, control). The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the *Brihadaranyaka—Upanishad*, 5, 1" [Eliot's note]. In the Hindu legend, the injunction of Prajapati (supreme deity) is *Da*, which is interpreted in three different ways by gods, men, and demons, to mean "control ourselves," "give alms," and "have compassion." Prajapati assures them that when "the divine voice, The Thunder," repeats the syllable it means all three things and that therefore "one should practice . . . Self-Control, Alms-giving, and Compassion."

2. Eliot's note refers to Webster's *The White Devil* 5.6: "they'll remarry / Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider / Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs."

3. "Cf. *Inferno*, XXXIII, 46" [Eliot's note]. At this point Ugolino recalls his imprisonment with his children, where they starved to death: "And I heard below the door of the horrible tower being locked up." Eliot's note continues: "Also F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p.346. 'My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence

which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul."

4. Roman patrician who defiantly chose self-exile when threatened with banishment by the leaders of the populace. He is the tragic protagonist in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608).

5. "V. Weston: *From Ritual to Romance*; chapter on the Fisher King" [Eliot's note].

6. Cf. Isaiah 38.1: "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live."

7. Eliot's note to *Purgatorio* 26 quotes in Italian the passage (lines 145–48) where the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, recalling his lusts, addresses Dante: "I pray you now, by the Goodness that guides you to the summit of this staircase, reflect in due season on my suffering." Then, in the line quoted in *The Waste Land*, "he hid himself in the fire that refines them."

8. Eliot's note refers to the *Pervigilium Veneris* (The Vigil of Venus), an anonymous Latin poem, and suggests a comparison with "Philomela in Parts II and III" of *The Waste Land*. The last stanzas of the *Pervigilium* recreate the myth of the nightingale in the image of a swallow, and the poet listening to the bird speaks the quoted line, "When shall I be as the swallow," and adds: "that I may cease to be silent." "O Swallow, Swallow" are the opening words of one of the songs interspersed in Tennyson's narrative poem *The Princess* (1847).

*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*⁹

430

These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.¹
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih²

1921

1922

The Hollow Men

Mistah Kurtz—he dead.¹

A penny for the Old Guy²

I

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats' feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar
 5
 10

Shape without form, shade without colour,
 Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
 With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
 Remember us—if at all—not as lost
 Violent souls, but only
 As the hollow men
 The stuffed men.
 15

9. "V. Gerard de Nerval, Sonnet *El Desdichado*" [Eliot's note]. The line reads: "The Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower."

1. Eliot's note refers to Thomas Kyd's revenge play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, subtitled *Hieronymo's Mad Againe* (1594). In it Hieronymo is asked to write a court play and he answers, "I'll fit you," in the double sense of "oblige" and "get even." He manages, although mad, to kill the murderers of his son by acting in the play and assigning parts appropriately, then commits suicide.

2. "Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. 'The peace which passeth understanding' is our equivalent to this word" [Eliot's

note]. The Upanishad is a Vedic treatise, a sacred Hindu text.

1. Quotation from *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad (1857–1924). Kurtz went into the African jungle as an official of a trading company and degenerated into an evil, tyrannical man. His dying words were "the horror!"

2. Guy Fawkes led a group of conspirators who planned to blow up the English House of Commons in 1605; he was caught and executed before the plan was carried out. On the day of his execution (November 5) children make straw effigies of the "guy" and beg for pennies for fireworks.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
 In death's dream kingdom 20
 These do not appear:
 There, the eyes are
 Sunlight on a broken column
 There, is a tree swinging
 And voices are 25
 In the wind's singing
 More distant and more solemn
 Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
 In death's dream kingdom 30
 Let me also wear
 Such deliberate disguises
 Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
 In a field
 Behaving as the wind behaves 35
 No nearer—

Not that final meeting
 In the twilight kingdom

III

This is the dead land
 This is cactus land 40
 Here the stone images
 Are raised, here they receive
 The supplication of a dead man's hand
 Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this 45
 In death's other kingdom
 Waking alone
 At the hour when we are
 Trembling with tenderness
 Lips that would kiss 50
 Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
 There are no eyes here
 In this valley of dying stars
 In this hollow valley 55
 This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
 We grope together

And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river 60

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose³
Of death's twilight kingdom 65
The hope only
Of empty men.

V

*Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear 70
At five o'clock in the morning.*⁴

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act 75
Falls the Shadow

*For Thine is the Kingdom*⁵

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion 80
And the response
Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm 85
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow 90

For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

3. Part 3 of *The Divine Comedy*, by Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), is a vision of Paradise. The souls of the saved in heaven range themselves around the deity in the figure of a “multifoliate rose” (*Paradiso* 28.30).

4. Allusion to a children's rhyming game, “Here we go round the mulberry bush,” substituting a prickly pear cactus for the mulberry bush.

5. Part of a line from the Lord's Prayer.

This is the way the world ends 95
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

1925

Journey of the Magi¹

'A cold coming we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year
 For a journey, and such a long journey:
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,
 The very dead of winter.'² 5
 And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
 Lying down in the melting snow.
 There were times we regretted
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet. 10
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
 And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
 And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices: 15
 A hard time we had of it.
 At the end we preferred to travel all night,
 Sleeping in snatches,
 With the voices singing in our ears, saying
 That this was all folly. 20

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation,
 With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
 And three trees on the low sky. 25
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we continued
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon 30
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for 35

1. The three wise men, or kings, who followed the star of Bethlehem, bringing gifts to the newly born Christ.

2. These lines are adapted from the sermon preached at Christmas, in 1622, by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes.

Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, 40
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

1935

FROM FOUR QUARTETS

Burnt Norton¹

τῶν λόγων θεόντος ζῆνοῦ ζῶουσιν οἱ πολλοί
 ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν.

I. p.77. Fr. 2.

ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὠυτή.

I. p.89. Fr. 60.²

—Diels: *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*
 (Herakleitos)

I

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.³
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable. 5
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present. 10
 Footfalls echo in the memory

1. Eliot made "Burnt Norton," published originally as a separate poem, the basis and formal model for "East Coker" (1940), "The Dry Salvages" (1941), and "Little Gidding" (1942). Together they make up *Four Quartets* (1943). The *Quartets* seeks to capture those rare moments when eternity "intersects" the temporal continuum, while treating also the relations between those moments and the flux of time. Central to "Burnt Norton" is the idea of the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) that the ascent of a soul to union with God is facilitated by memory and disciplined meditation but that meditation is superseded by a "dark night of the soul" that deepens paradoxically

the nearer one approaches the light of God. Burnt Norton is a manor house in Gloucestershire, England.

2. The Greek epigraphs are from the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (540?–475 B.C.E.) and may be translated: "But although the Word is common to all, the majority of people live as though they had each an understanding peculiarly his own" and "The way up and the way down are one and the same."

3. The opening lines echo Ecclesiastes 3.15: "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been."

Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden.⁴ My words echo
 Thus, in your mind. 15

But to what purpose
 Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
 I do not know.

Other echoes
 Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow? 20
 Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
 Round the corner. Through the first gate,
 Into our first world, shall we follow
 The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.

There they were, dignified, invisible, 25
 Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
 In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,
 And the bird called, in response to
 The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
 And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses 30
 Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
 There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.

So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
 Along the empty alley, into the box circle,⁵
 To look down into the drained pool. 35

Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
 And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
 The surface glittered out of heart of light,⁶
 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool. 40

Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
 Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
 Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
 Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
 Cannot bear very much reality. 45
 Time past and time future
 What might have been and what has been.
 Point to one end, which is always present.

II

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle-tree. 50
 The trilling wire in the blood
 Sings below inveterate scars
 Appeasing long forgotten wars.
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph 55

4. The rose is a symbol of sexual and spiritual love; in Christian traditions it is associated with the harmony of religious truth and with the Virgin Mary. The memory may be personal as well.

5. Evergreen boxwood shrubs, planted in a circle.
 6. An echo of Dante, *Paradiso* 12.28–29: “From out of the heart of one of the new lights there moved a voice.”

Are figured in the drift of stars
 Ascend to summer in the tree
 We move above the moving tree
 In light upon the figured leaf⁷
 And hear upon the sodden floor 60
 Below, the boarhound and the boar
 Pursue their pattern as before
 But reconciled among the stars.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is, 65
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from
 nor towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
 There would be no dance and there is only the dance.
 I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where. 70
 And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.
 The inner freedom from the practical desire,
 The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
 And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
 By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving, 75
*Erhebung*⁸ without motion, concentration
 Without elimination, both a new world
 And the old made explicit, understood
 In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
 The resolution of its partial horror. 80
 Yet the enchainment of past and future
 Woven in the weakness of the changing body,
 Protects mankind from heaven and damnation
 Which flesh cannot endure.

Time past and time future 85

Allow but a little consciousness.
 To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall 90
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.
 Only through time time is conquered.

III

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light: neither daylight 95
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence

7. An echo of the description of death in Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (1850) 43.10–12: “So that still garden of the souls / In many a figured leaf enrolls

/ The total world since life began.”

8. Exaltation (German).

Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation 100
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning 105
 Tumid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time,
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after. 110
 Eructation of unhealthy souls
 Into the faded air, the torpid
 Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London,
 Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,
 Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate.⁹ Not here 115
 Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

Descend lower, descend only
 Into the world of perpetual solitude,
 World not world, but that which is not world,
 Internal darkness, deprivation 120
 And destitution of all property,
 Desiccation of the world of sense,
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
 This is the one way, and the other 125
 Is the same, not in movement
 But abstention from movement; while the world moves
 In appetency, on its metallated ways
 Of time past and time future.

IV

Time and the bell have buried the day, 130
 The black cloud carries the sun away.
 Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
 Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
 Clutch and cling?
 Chill 135
 Fingers of yew be curled
 Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing
 Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
 At the still point of the turning world.

9. Districts and neighborhoods in London.

V

Words move, music moves 140
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still 145
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there 150
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, 155
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
 Always assail them. The Word in the desert¹
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
 The crying shadow in the funeral dance, 160
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.²
 The detail of the pattern is movement,
 As in the figure of the ten stairs.³
 Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable; 165
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless, and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation 170
 Between un-being and being.
 Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage 175
 Quick, now, here, now always—
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
 Stretching before and after.

1936, 1943

1. An allusion to Christ's temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4.1–4).

2. A monster in Greek mythology and a symbol of fantasies and delusions.

3. An allusion to St. John of the Cross's figure for the soul's ascent to God: "The Ten Degrees of the Mystical Ladder of Divine Love."

EUGENE O'NEILL

1888–1953

Eugene O'Neill, the nation's first major playwright, was born in a New York City hotel on Broadway on October 16, 1888. His father was James O'Neill, an actor who abandoned his early success in Shakespearean roles to make a fortune playing the lead role in a dramatization of Alexander Dumas's swashbuckling novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844–45), which he performed on tour more than five thousand times. O'Neill's mother, Ella Quinlan, the daughter of a successful Irish immigrant businessman in Cincinnati, hated backstage life and became addicted to morphine. An older brother, James Jr., had been born in 1878 and during most of Eugene's childhood was away at various boarding schools. Later "Jamie," Eugene's idol, became an actor and an alcoholic.

During O'Neill's childhood, his parents toured for part of every year, lived in New York City hotels for another part, and spent summers at their home in New London, Connecticut. O'Neill went to good preparatory schools and started college at Princeton in 1906. Suspended after his freshman year for missing classes and exams, O'Neill found work in New York City, where he met Kathleen Jenkins; when she became pregnant, the two eloped. With his father's help, he shipped out to sea and went searching for gold in South America, leaving his wife behind; it would be eleven years before he met their son, Eugene Jr., born in 1910. O'Neill drank and drifted, alternating sea voyages with sojourns in Greenwich Village, an area of lower Manhattan that was becoming home to artists and political radicals. After nearly dying of tuberculosis in 1912, O'Neill decided to curtail his drinking and write plays. In 1914 his father subsidized the publication of *Thirst*, a collection of five one-act plays; fortified by this accomplishment, O'Neill applied and was accepted as a special student at Harvard in the playwriting class of Professor George Pierce Baker—the first such class offered at an American university. O'Neill's real entry into the contemporary theater, though, came through his Greenwich Village friends: he joined a new experimental theater group called the Provincetown Players—in the summer its members staged plays on a wharf in Provincetown, Massachusetts. For the rest of the year they used a small theater in the Village. They produced O'Neill's one-act play *Bound East for Cardiff* in the summer of 1916.

The Provincetown group gave O'Neill his forum, and—working closely with playwright Susan Glaspell—he gave them a place in American theater history. Play followed play in these early years: five of his plays were staged in 1917, and he wrote another six in 1918. The works with likely appeal for general audiences were moved uptown from the Village to Broadway, making O'Neill both famous and financially successful. Many of these early plays, with crude and slangy dialogue that departed strikingly from the stage rhetoric of the day, were grim one-acts based on his experiences at sea. Instead of the elegant witticisms of drawing-room comedy or the flowery eloquence of historical drama, audiences were faced with ships' holds and sailors' bars. An exaggerated realism, veering toward expressionism, was the mode of these earliest works.

Around 1920, O'Neill's plays became longer and less realistic, and his aims more ambitious. He began to experiment with techniques to convey inner emotions not expressible in dramatic action—the world of the mind, of memories and fears. He ignored standard play divisions of scenes and acts; made his characters wear masks; split one character between two actors; and reintroduced ghosts, choruses, and

Shakespearean-style monologues and direct addresses to the audience. The political radicalism of his Greenwich Village circles was reflected in the themes of many of these plays, although O'Neill would always be more drawn to the deep-lived emotions of social conflicts than to organized political movements aimed at resolving them. In *The Emperor Jones* (1920), a former Pullman porter uses the lessons of Wall Street ("Dere's little stealin' like you does, and dere's big stealin' like I does") to oppress the inhabitants of a Caribbean island; their revolt sends Jones into flight, pursued by the ghosts of New World slavery. In *The Hairy Ape* (1922), a sailor, becoming aware of how he is viewed by the upper class, degenerates into what he is perceived to be. *Desire under the Elms* (1924) links family conflict to lust after property and control as well as to erotic desire; *The Great God Brown* (1926) drew on O'Neill's full array of experimental techniques to expose the inner life of a business magnate. Centered on the turbulent emotional life of a beautiful woman, *Strange Interlude* (1928), despite its audacious nine-act length, won the Pulitzer Prize, was made into a Hollywood film, and became O'Neill's greatest commercial success.

O'Neill's father had died in 1920, his mother in 1921, his brother in 1923. During the mid-1920s, O'Neill became interested in dramatizing the complicated pattern of his family's life. He was influenced by the popularization of Sigmund Freud's ideas: the power of irrational drives; the existence of a subconscious; the roles of repression and inhibition in the formation of personality and in adult suffering; the importance of sex; and above all the lifelong influence of parents. With Freud, he saw the family as a locus of intense and irresolvable conflicting feelings: as Edmund observes of his mother in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, "it's as if, in spite of loving us, she hated us." But where Freud's famous case histories explore the conflicts of an individual, O'Neill's dramatic method came to focus on the family, rather than the person, as the fundamental human unit. He found inspiration and confirmation for this approach in classical Greek drama, which had always centered on families. His 1931 *Mourning Becomes Electra*, based on the *Oresteia* cycle of the classical Greek playwright Aeschylus, situated the ancient story of family murder and divine retribution in Civil War America with great success.

Twice married after the annulment of his early elopement, O'Neill began to suffer from a series of health problems in the 1930s, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1941, and lived in relative seclusion for the last twenty years of his life. Following the production of *Mourning Becomes Electra* in 1931, his output slowed. Much of his work from the 1930s and 1940s remained in manuscript until after his death, and there was a twelve-year gap in the staging of his plays between *Days without End* (1934), which failed on Broadway, and *The Iceman Cometh*, in 1946, which also did poorly. During this interval O'Neill set out and revised increasingly ambitious plans for cycles of plays that would encompass American history through the stories of several families. Recalling the conflicting immigrant experiences of his own parents—the prosperous assimilation of his mother's family contrasted with his Irish-born father's famine-driven economic insecurity and greed—sharpened O'Neill's sense of American history as a family drama of possession and dispossession.

Three years after O'Neill's death, *Iceman* was successfully revived, and O'Neill's work reattained prominence. His widow, the former actress Carlotta Monterey, whom O'Neill had married in 1929, released other plays, which were widely acclaimed in posthumous productions. Among such stagings were parts of a projected nine- or eleven-play sequence (critics differ in the interpretation of the surviving manuscript material) about an Irish family in America named the Melody family and some obviously autobiographical dramas about a family named the Tyrones. The Melody plays produced after O'Neill's death include *A Touch of the Poet*, produced in 1957, and *More Stately Mansions*, which was staged in 1967; the Tyrone plays include *Long Day's Journey into Night*, produced in 1956, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, produced in 1957.

In inscribing the manuscript of *Long Day's Journey* to Carlotta, O'Neill wrote that he had faced his dead in this play, writing "with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for *all* the four haunted Tyrones." His treatment made it impossible to blame any of the characters for the suffering they inflicted on the others; each Tyrone was both a victim and an oppressor. The Tyrones are at the mercy of the past, and the word *ghosts* recurs throughout the play: ghosts of those they remember, those who influenced them, their younger selves, their dreams and ambitions, and their disappointments. O'Neill handled the emotionalism of his theme with rigorous dramatic formalism, designing the play as a series of encounters—each character is placed with one, two, or three of the others, until every combination is worked through. *Long Day's Journey* observes the classical dramatic unities of time and space, following the family's various configurations through one day, from the pretense of conventional family life in the morning to the tragic truth of their night. The audience thus witnesses a literal day in the lives of the Tyrones, as well as the journey through life toward death.

Romantic, realistic, naturalistic, melodramatic, sentimental, cynical, poetic—O'Neill's work in general is all of these. Even while he made his characters espouse philosophical positions, O'Neill was not trying to write philosophical drama. He wanted to make plays conveying emotions of such intensity and complexity that the theater would become a vital force in American life. In all his works, the spectacle of emotional intensity was meant to produce emotional response in an audience—what Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, had called "catharsis." O'Neill's plays have been translated and staged all over the world; he won the Pulitzer Prize four times and the Nobel Prize in 1936, the first and so far only American dramatist to do so.

The text is that of the Yale University Press Edition (1956).

Long Day's Journey into Night

CHARACTERS

JAMES TYRONE

MARY CAVAN TYRONE, *his wife*

JAMES TYRONE, JR., *their elder son*

EDMUND TYRONE, *their younger son*

CATHLEEN, *second girl*¹

SCENES

ACT 1 *Living room of the Tyrones' summer home 8:30 A.M. of a day in August, 1912*

ACT 2 SCENE 1 *The same, around 12:45*

SCENE 2 *The same, about a half hour later*

ACT 3 *The same, around 6:30 that evening*

ACT 4 *The same, around midnight*

Act 1

SCENE—*Living room of JAMES TYRONE's summer home on a morning in August, 1912.*

1. A servant.

At rear are two double doorways with portieres. The one at right leads into a front parlor with the formally arranged, set appearance of a room rarely occupied. The other opens on a dark, windowless back parlor, never used except as a passage from living room to dining room. Against the wall between the doorways is a small bookcase, with a picture of Shakespeare above it, containing novels by Balzac, Zola, Stendhal, philosophical and sociological works by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Engels, Kropotkin, Max Sterner, plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, poetry by Swinburne, Rossetti, Wilde, Ernest Dowson, Kipling, etc.²

In the right wall, rear, is a screen door leading out on the porch which extends halfway around the house. Farther forward, a series of three windows looks over the front lawn to the harbor and the avenue that runs along the water front. A small wicker table and an ordinary oak desk are against the wall, flanking the windows.

In the left wall, a similar series of windows looks out on the grounds in back of the house. Beneath them is a wicker couch with cushions, its head toward rear. Farther back is a large, glassed-in bookcase with sets of Dumas, Victor Hugo, Charles Lever, three sets of Shakespeare, *The World's Best Literature* in fifty large volumes, Hume's *History of England*, Thiers' *History of the Consulate and Empire*, Smollett's *History of England*, Gibbon's *Roman Empire* and miscellaneous volumes of old plays, poetry, and several histories of Ireland. The astonishing thing about these sets is that all the volumes have the look of having been read and reread.

The hardwood floor is nearly covered by a rug, inoffensive in design and color. At center is a round table with a green shaded reading lamp, the cord plugged in one of the four sockets in the chandelier above. Around the table within reading-light range are four chairs, three of them wicker armchairs, the fourth (at right front of table) a varnished oak rocker with leather bottom.

It is around 8:30. Sunshine comes through the windows at right.

As the curtain rises, the family have just finished breakfast. MARY TYRONE and her husband enter together from the back parlor, coming from the dining room.

MARY is fifty-four, about medium height. She still has a young, graceful figure, a trifle plump, but showing little evidence of middle-aged waist and hips, although she is not tightly corseted. Her face is distinctly Irish in type. It must once have been extremely pretty, and is still striking. It does not match her healthy figure but is thin and pale with the bone structure prominent. Her nose is long and straight, her mouth wide with full, sensitive lips. She uses no rouge or any sort of make-up. Her high forehead is framed by thick, pure white hair. Accentuated by her pallor and white hair, her dark brown eyes appear black. They are unusually large and beautiful, with black brows and long curling lashes.

What strikes one immediately is her extreme nervousness. Her hands are never still. They were once beautiful hands, with long, tapering fingers, but rheumatism has knotted the joints and warped the fingers, so that now they have an ugly crippled look. One avoids looking at them, the more so because one is conscious she is sensitive about their appearance and humiliated by her inability to control the nervousness which draws attention to them.

2. A variety of 19th-century (especially late-19th-century) authors are cited. Nobody in the audience would be able to read the titles and authors on these books—an example of O'Neill's novelis-

tic approach to theatrical detail, also seen in the minute physical descriptions he provides of the characters' appearance and behavior throughout.

She is dressed simply but with a sure sense of what becomes her. Her hair is arranged with fastidious care. Her voice is soft and attractive. When she is merry, there is a touch of Irish lilt in it.

Her most appealing quality is the simple, unaffected charm of a shy convent-girl youthfulness she has never lost—an innate unworldly innocence.

JAMES TYRONE is sixty-five but looks ten years younger. About five feet eight, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, he seems taller and slenderer because of his bearing, which has a soldierly quality of head up, chest out, stomach in, shoulders squared. His face has begun to break down but he is still remarkably good looking—a big, finely shaped head, a handsome profile, deep-set light-brown eyes. His grey hair is thin with a bald spot like a monk's tonsure.

The stamp of his profession is unmistakably on him. Not that he indulges in any of the deliberate temperamental posturings of the stage star. He is by nature and preference a simple, unpretentious man, whose inclinations are still close to his humble beginnings and his Irish farmer forebears. But the actor shows in all his unconscious habits of speech, movement and gesture. These have the quality of belonging to a studied technique. His voice is remarkably fine, resonant and flexible, and he takes great pride in it.

His clothes, assuredly, do not costume any romantic part. He wears a thread-bare, ready-made, grey sack suit and shineless black shoes, a collar-less shirt with a thick white handkerchief knotted loosely around his throat. There is nothing picturesquely careless about this get-up. It is commonplace shabby. He believes in wearing his clothes to the limit of usefulness, is dressed now for gardening, and doesn't give a damn how he looks.

He has never been really sick a day in his life. He has no nerves. There is a lot of stolid, earthy peasant in him, mixed with streaks of sentimental melancholy and rare flashes of intuitive sensibility.

TYRONE's arm is around his wife's waist as they appear from the back parlor. Entering the living room he gives her a playful hug.

TYRONE You're a fine armful now, Mary, with those twenty pounds you've gained.

MARY [*smiles affectionately*] I've gotten too fat, you mean, dear. I really ought to reduce.

TYRONE None of that, my lady! You're just right. We'll have no talk of reducing. Is that why you ate so little breakfast?

MARY So little? I thought I ate a lot.

TYRONE You didn't. Not as much as I'd like to see, anyway.

MARY [*teasingly*] Oh you! You expect everyone to eat the enormous breakfast you do. No one else in the world could without dying of indigestion. [*She comes forward to stand by the right of table.*]

TYRONE [*following her*] I hope I'm not as big a glutton as that sounds. [*with hearty satisfaction*] But thank God, I've kept my appetite and I've the digestion of a young man of twenty, if I am sixty-five.

MARY You surely have, James. No one could deny that.

[She laughs and sits in the wicker armchair at right rear of table. She comes around in back of her and selects a cigar from a box on the table and cuts off the end with a little clipper. From the dining room JAMIE's and EDMUND's voices are heard. Mary turns her head that way.]

Why did the boys stay in the dining room, I wonder? Cathleen must be waiting to clear the table.

TYRONE [*jokingly but with an undercurrent of resentment*] It's a secret confab they don't want me to hear, I suppose. I'll bet they're cooking up some new scheme to touch the Old Man.

[*She is silent on this, keeping her head turned toward their voices. Her hands appear on the table top, moving restlessly. He lights his cigar and sits down in the rocker at right of table, which is his chair, and puffs contentedly.*]

There's nothing like the first after-breakfast cigar, if it's a good one, and this new lot have the right mellow flavor. They're a great bargain, too. I got them dead cheap. It was McGuire put me on to them.

MARY [*a trifle acidly*] I hope he didn't put you on to any new piece of property at the same time. His real estate bargains don't work out so well.

TYRONE [*defensively*] I wouldn't say that, Mary. After all, he was the one who advised me to buy that place on Chestnut Street and I made a quick turnover on it for a fine profit.

MARY [*smiles now with teasing affection*] I know. The famous one stroke of good luck. I'm sure McGuire never dreamed—[*Then she pats his hand.*] Never mind, James. I know it's a waste of breath trying to convince you you're not a cunning real estate speculator.

TYRONE [*huffily*] I've no such idea. But land is land, and it's safer than the stocks and bonds of Wall Street swindlers. [*then placatingly*] But let's not argue about business this early in the morning.

[*A pause. The boys' voices are again heard and one of them has a fit of coughing. MARY listens worriedly. Her fingers play nervously on the table top.*]

MARY James, it's Edmund you ought to scold for not eating enough. He hardly touched anything except coffee. He needs to eat to keep up his strength. I keep telling him that but he says he simply has no appetite. Of course, there's nothing takes away your appetite like a bad summer cold.

TYRONE Yes, it's only natural. So don't let yourself get worried—

MARY [*quickly*] Oh, I'm not. I know he'll be all right in a few days if he takes care of himself. [*as if she wanted to dismiss the subject but can't*] But it does seem a shame he should have to be sick right now.

TYRONE Yes, it is bad luck. [*He gives her a quick, worried look.*] But you mustn't let it upset you, Mary. Remember, you've got to take care of yourself, too.

MARY [*quickly*] I'm not upset. There's nothing to be upset about. What makes you think I'm upset?

TYRONE Why, nothing, except you've seemed a bit high-strung the past few days.

MARY [*forcing a smile*] I have? Nonsense, dear. It's your imagination. [*with sudden tenseness*] You really must not watch me all the time, James. I mean, it makes me self-conscious.

TYRONE [*putting a hand over one of her nervously playing ones*] Now, now, Mary. That's your imagination. If I've watched you it was to admire how fat and beautiful you looked. [*His voice is suddenly moved by deep feeling.*] I can't tell you the deep happiness it gives me, darling, to see you as you've been since you came back to us, your dear old self again.

[*He leans over and kisses her cheek impulsively—then turning back adds with a constrained air*] So keep up the good work, Mary.

MARY [*has turned her head away*] I will, dear. [*She gets up restlessly and goes to the windows at right.*] Thank heavens, the fog is gone. [*She turns back.*] I do feel out of sorts this morning. I wasn't able to get much sleep with that awful foghorn going all night long.

TYRONE Yes, it's like having a sick whale in the back yard. It kept me awake, too.

MARY [*affectionately amused*] Did it? You had a strange way of showing your restlessness. You were snoring so hard I couldn't tell which was the foghorn! [*She comes to him, laughing, and pats his cheek playfully.*] Ten foghorns couldn't disturb you. You haven't a nerve in you. You've never had.

TYRONE [*his vanity piqued—testily*] Nonsense. You always exaggerate about my snoring.

MARY I couldn't. If you could only hear yourself once—
[*A burst of laughter comes from the dining room. She turns her head, smiling.*]

What's the joke, I wonder?

TYRONE [*grumpily*] It's on me. I'll bet that much. It's always on the Old Man.

MARY [*teasingly*] Yes, it's terrible the way we all pick on you, isn't it? You're so abused! [*She laughs—then with a pleased, relieved air*] Well, no matter what the joke is about, it's a relief to hear Edmund laugh. He's been so down in the mouth lately.

TYRONE [*ignoring this—resentfully*] Some joke of Jamie's, I'll wager. He's forever making sneering fun of somebody, that one.

MARY Now don't start in on poor Jamie, dear. [*without conviction*] He'll turn out all right in the end, you wait and see.

TYRONE He'd better start soon, then. He's nearly thirty-four.

MARY [*ignoring this*] Good heavens, are they going to stay in the dining room all day? [*She goes to the back parlor doorway and calls*] Jamie! Edmund! Come in the living room and give Cathleen a chance to clear the table.

[*EDMUND calls back, "We're coming, Mama." She goes back to the table.*]

TYRONE [*grumbling*] You'd find excuses for him no matter what he did.

MARY [*sitting down beside him, pats his hand*] Shush.

Their sons JAMES, JR., and EDMUND enter together from the back parlor. They are both grinning, still chuckling over what had caused their laughter, and as they come forward they glance at their father and their grins grow broader.

JAMIE, the elder, is thirty-three. He has his father's broad-shouldered, deep-chested physique, is an inch taller and weighs less, but appears shorter and stouter because he lacks TYRONE'S bearing and graceful carriage. He also lacks his father's vitality. The signs of premature disintegration are on him. His face is still good looking, despite marks of dissipation, but it has never been handsome like TYRONE'S, although JAMIE resembles him rather than his mother. He has fine brown eyes, their color midway between his father's lighter and his mother's darker ones. His hair is thinning and already there is indication of a bald spot like TYRONE'S. His nose is unlike that of any other member of the family, pro-

nouncedly aquiline. Combined with his habitual expression of cynicism it gives his countenance a Mephistophelian cast. But on the rare occasions when he smiles without sneering, his personality possesses the remnant of a humorous, romantic, irresponsible Irish charm—that of the beguiling ne'er-do-well, with a strain of the sentimentally poetic, attractive to women and popular with men.

He is dressed in an old sack suit, not as shabby as TYRONE's, and wears a collar and tie. His fair skin is sunburned a reddish, freckled tan.

EDMUND is ten years younger than his brother, a couple of inches taller, thin and wiry. Where JAMIE takes after his father, with little resemblance to his mother, EDMUND looks like both his parents, but is more like his mother. Her big, dark eyes are the dominant feature in his long, narrow Irish face. His mouth has the same quality of hypersensitiveness hers possesses. His high fore-head is hers accentuated, with dark brown hair, sunbleached to red at the ends, brushed straight back from it. But his nose is his father's and his face in profile recalls TYRONE's. EDMUND's hands are noticeably like his mother's, with the same exceptionally long fingers. They even have to a minor degree the same nervousness. It is in the quality of extreme nervous sensibility that the likeness of EDMUND to his mother is most marked.

He is plainly in bad health. Much thinner than he should be, his eyes appear feverish and his cheeks are sunken. His skin, in spite of being sunburned a deep brown, has a parched sallowness. He wears a shirt, collar and tie, no coat, old flannel trousers, brown sneakers.

MARY [turns smilingly to them, in a merry tone that is a bit forced] I've been teasing your father about his snoring. [to TYRONE] I'll leave it to the boys, James. They must have heard you. No, not you, Jamie. I could hear you down the hall almost as bad as your father. You're like him. As soon as your head touches the pillow you're off and ten foghorns couldn't wake you. [She stops abruptly, catching JAMIE's eyes regarding her with an uneasy, probing look. Her smile vanishes and her manner becomes self-conscious.] Why are you staring, Jamie? [Her hands flutter up to her hair.] Is my hair coming down? It's hard for me to do it up properly now. My eyes are getting so bad and I never can find my glasses.

JAMIE [looks away guiltily] Your hair's all right, Mama. I was only thinking how well you look.

TYRONE [heartily] Just what I've been telling her, Jamie. She's so fat and sassy, there'll soon be no holding her.

EDMUND Yes, you certainly look grand, Mama. [She is reassured and smiles at him lovingly. He winks with a kidding grin.] I'll back you up about Papa's snoring. Gosh, what a racket!

JAMIE I heard him, too. [He quotes, putting on a ham-actor manner] "The Moor, I know his trumpet."³

[His mother and brother laugh.]

TYRONE [scathingly] If it takes my snoring to make you remember Shakespeare instead of the dope sheet on the ponies, I hope I'll keep on with it.

MARY Now, James! You mustn't be so touchy.

[JAMIE shrugs his shoulders and sits down in the chair on her right.]

3. Shakespeare's *Othello* 2.1.180.

EDMUND [*irritably*] Yes, for Pete's sake, Papa! The first thing after breakfast! Give it a rest, can't you? [*He slumps down in the chair at left of table next to his brother. His father ignores him.*]

MARY [*reprovingly*] Your father wasn't finding fault with you. You don't have to always take Jamie's part. You'd think you were the one ten years older.

JAMIE [*boredly*] What's all the fuss about? Let's forget it.

TYRONE [*contemptuously*] Yes, forget! Forget everything and face nothing! It's a convenient philosophy if you've no ambition in life except to—

MARY James, do be quiet. [*She puts an arm around his shoulder—coaxingly*] You must have gotten out of the wrong side of the bed this morning. [*to the boys, changing the subject*] What were you two grinning about like Cheshire cats when you came in? What was the joke?

TYRONE [*with a painful effort to be a good sport*] Yes, let us in on it, lads. I told your mother I knew damned well it would be one on me, but never mind that, I'm used to it.

JAMIE [*dryly*] Don't look at me. This is the Kid's story.

EDMUND [*grins*] I meant to tell you last night, Papa, and forgot it. Yesterday when I went for a walk I dropped in at the Inn—

MARY [*worriedly*] You shouldn't drink now, Edmund.

EDMUND [*ignoring this*] And who do you think I met there, with a beautiful bun on,⁴ but Shaughnessy, the tenant on that farm of yours.

MARY [*smiling*] That dreadful man! But he is funny.

TYRONE [*scowling*] He's not so funny when you're his landlord. He's a wily Shanty Mick, that one. He could hide behind a corkscrew. What's he complaining about now, Edmund—for I'm damned sure he's complaining, I suppose he wants his rent lowered. I let him have the place for almost nothing, just to keep someone on it, and he never pays that till I threaten to evict him.

EDMUND No, he didn't beef about anything. He was so pleased with life he even bought a drink, and that's practically unheard of. He was delighted because he'd had a fight with your friend, Harker, the Standard Oil millionaire, and won a glorious victory.

MARY [*with amused dismay*] Oh, Lord! James, you'll really have to do something—

TYRONE Bad luck to Shaughnessy, anyway!

JAMIE [*maliciously*] I'll bet the next time you see Harker at the Club and give him the old respectful bow, he won't see you.

EDMUND Yes. Harker will think you're no gentleman for harboring a tenant who isn't humble in the presence of a king of America.

TYRONE Never mind the Socialist gabble. I don't care to listen—

MARY [*tactfully*] Go on with your story, Edmund.

EDMUND [*grins at his father provocatively*] Well, you remember, Papa, the ice pond on Harker's estate is right next to the farm, and you remember Shaughnessy keeps pigs. Well, it seems there's a break in the fence and the pigs have been bathing in the millionaire's ice pond, and Harker's foreman told him he was sure Shaughnessy had broken the fence on purpose to give his pigs a free wallow.

4. I.e., drunk.

MARY [*shocked and amused*] Good heavens!

TYRONE [*sourly, but with a trace of admiration*] I'm sure he did, too, the dirty scallywag. It's like him.

EDMUND So Harker came in person to rebuke Shaughnessy. [*He chuckles.*] A very bonehead play! If I needed any further proof that our ruling plutocrats, especially the ones who inherited their boodle, are not mental giants, that would clinch it.

TYRONE [*with appreciation, before he thinks*] Yes, he'd be no match for Shaughnessy. [*then he growls*] Keep your damned anarchist remarks to yourself. I won't have them in my house. [*But he is full of eager anticipation.*] What happened?

EDMUND Harker had as much chance as I would with Jack Johnson.⁵ Shaughnessy got a few drinks under his belt and was waiting at the gate to welcome him. He told me he never gave Harker a chance to open his mouth. He began by shouting that he was no slave Standard Oil could trample on. He was a King of Ireland, if he had his rights, and scum was scum to him, no matter how much money it had stolen from the poor.

MARY Oh, Lord! [*But she can't help laughing.*]

EDMUND Then he accused Harker of making his foreman break down the fence to entice the pigs into the ice pond in order to destroy them. The poor pigs, Shaughnessy yelled, had caught their death of cold. Many of them were dying of pneumonia, and several others had been taken down with cholera from drinking the poisoned water. He told Harker he was hiring a lawyer to sue him for damages. And he wound up by saying that he had to put up with poison ivy, ticks, potato bugs, snakes and skunks on his farm, but he was an honest man who drew the line somewhere, and he'd be damned if he'd stand for a Standard Oil thief trespassing. So would Harker kindly remove his dirty feet from the premises before he sicked the dog on him. And Harker did! [*He and JAMIE laugh.*]

MARY [*shocked but giggling*] Heavens, what a terrible tongue that man has!

TYRONE [*admiringly before he thinks*] The damned old scoundrel! By God, you can't beat him! [*He laughs—then stops abruptly and scowls.*] The dirty blackguard! He'll get me in serious trouble yet. I hope you told him I'd be mad as hell—

EDMUND I told him you'd be tickled to death over the great Irish victory, and so you are. Stop faking, Papa.

TYRONE Well, I'm not tickled to death.

MARY [*teasingly*] You are, too, James. You're simply delighted!

TYRONE No, Mary, a joke is a joke, but—

EDMUND I told Shaughnessy he should have reminded Harker that a Standard Oil millionaire ought to welcome the flavor of hog in his ice water as an appropriate touch.

TYRONE The devil you did! [*frowning*] Keep your damned Socialist anarchist sentiments out of my affairs!

EDMUND Shaughnessy almost wept because he hadn't thought of that one, but he said he'd include it in a letter he's writing to Harker, along with a few other insults he'd overlooked. [*He and JAMIE laugh.*]

5. Famous prizefighter, the first African American heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

TYRONE What are you laughing at? There's nothing funny—A fine son you are to help that blackguard get me into a lawsuit!

MARY Now, James, don't lose your temper.

TYRONE [*turns on JAMIE*] And you're worse than he is, encouraging him. I suppose you're regretting you weren't there to prompt Shaughnessy with a few nastier insults. You've a fine talent for that, if for nothing else.

MARY James! There's no reason to scold Jamie.

[*JAMIE is about to make some sneering remark to his father, but he shrugs his shoulders.*]

EDMUND [*with sudden nervous exasperation*] Oh, for God's sake, Papa! If you're starting that stuff again, I'll beat it. [*He jumps up.*] I left my book upstairs, anyway. [*He goes to the front parlor, saying disgustedly*] God, Papa, I should think you'd get sick of hearing yourself—

[*He disappears. TYRONE looks after him angrily.*]

MARY You musn't mind Edmund, James. Remember he isn't well.

[*EDMUND can be heard coughing as he goes upstairs. She adds nervously*]

A summer cold makes anyone irritable.

JAMIE [*genuinely concerned*] It's not just a cold he's got. The Kid is damned sick.

[*His father gives him a sharp warning look but he doesn't see it.*]

MARY [*turns on him resentfully*] Why do you say that? It is just a cold! Anyone can tell that! You always imagine things!

TYRONE [*with another warning glance at JAMIE—easily*] All Jamie meant was Edmund might have a touch of something else, too, which makes his cold worse.

JAMIE Sure, Mama. That's all I meant.

TYRONE Doctor Hardy thinks it might be a bit of malarial fever he caught when he was in the tropics. If it is, quinine will soon cure it.

MARY [*a look of contemptuous hostility flashes across her face*] Doctor Hardy! I wouldn't believe a thing he said, if he swore on a stack of Bibles! I know what doctors are. They're all alike. Anything, they don't care what, to keep you coming to them. [*She stops short, overcome by a fit of acute self-consciousness as she catches their eyes fixed on her. Her hands jerk nervously to her hair. She forces a smile.*] What is it? What are you looking at? Is my hair—?

TYRONE [*puts his arm around her—with guilty heartiness, giving her a playful hug*] There's nothing wrong with your hair. The healthier and fatter you get, the vainer you become. You'll soon spend half the day primping before the mirror.

MARY [*half reassured*] I really should have new glasses. My eyes are so bad now.

TYRONE [*with Irish blarney*] Your eyes are beautiful, and well you know it. [*He gives her a kiss. Her face lights up with a charming, shy embarrassment. Suddenly and startlingly one sees in her face the girl she had once been, not a ghost of the dead, but still a living part of her.*]

MARY You musn't be so silly, James. Right in front of Jamie!

TYRONE Oh, he's on to you, too. He knows this fuss about eyes and hair is only fishing for compliments. Eh, Jamie?

JAMIE [*his face has cleared, too, and there is an old boyish charm in his loving smile at his mother*] Yes, You can't kid us, Mama.

MARY [*laughs and an Irish lilt comes into her voice*] Go along with both of you! [*then she speaks with a girlish gravity*] But I did truly have beautiful hair once, didn't I, James?

TYRONE The most beautiful in the world!

MARY It was a rare shade of reddish brown and so long it came down below my knees. You ought to remember it, too, Jamie. It wasn't until after Edmund was born that I had a single grey hair. Then it began to turn white. [*The girlishness fades from her face.*]

TYRONE [*quickly*] And that made it prettier than ever.

MARY [*again embarrassed and pleased*] Will you listen to your father, Jamie—after thirty-five years of marriage! He isn't a great actor for nothing, is he? What's come over you, James? Are you pouring coals of fire on my head for teasing you about snoring? Well, then, I take it all back. It must have been only the foghorn I heard. [*She laughs, and they laugh with her. Then she changes to a brisk businesslike air.*] But I can't stay with you any longer, even to hear compliments. I must see the cook about dinner and the day's marketing. [*She gets up and sighs with humorous exaggeration.*] Bridget is so lazy. And so sly. She begins telling me about her relatives so I can't get a word in edgeways and scold her. Well, I might as well get it over. [*She goes to the back-parlor doorway, then turns, her face worried again.*] You mustn't make Edmund work on the grounds with you, James, remember. [*again with the strange obstinate set to her face*] Not that he isn't strong enough, but he'd perspire and he might catch more cold.

[*She disappears through the back parlor. TYRONE turns on JAMIE condemningly.*]

TYRONE You're a fine lunkhead! Haven't you any sense? The one thing to avoid is saying anything that would get her more upset over Edmund.

JAMIE [*shrugging his shoulders*] All right. Have it your way. I think it's the wrong idea to let Mama go on kidding yourself. It will only make the shock worse when she has to face it. Anyway, you can see she's deliberately fooling herself with that summer cold talk. She knows better.

TYRONE Knows? Nobody knows yet.

JAMIE Well, I do. I was with Edmund when he went to Doc Hardy on Monday. I heard him pull that touch of malaria stuff. He was stalling. That isn't what he thinks any more. You know it as well as I do. You talked to him when you went uptown yesterday, didn't you?

TYRONE He couldn't say anything for sure yet. He's to phone me today before Edmund goes to him.

JAMIE [*slowly*] He thinks it's consumption,⁶ doesn't he, Papa?

TYRONE [*reluctantly*] He said it might be.

JAMIE [*moved, his love for his brother coming out*] Poor kid! God damn it! [*He turns on his father accusingly.*] It might never have happened if you'd sent him to a real doctor when he first got sick.

TYRONE What's the matter with Hardy? He's always been our doctor up here.

JAMIE Everything's the matter with him! Even in this hick burg he's rated third class! He's a cheap old quack!

6. Tuberculosis.

TYRONE That's right! Run him down! Run down everybody! Everyone is a fake to you!

JAMIE [*contemptuously*] Hardy only charges a dollar. That's what makes you think he's a fine doctor!

TYRONE [*stung*] That's enough! You're not drunk now! There's no excuse— [*He controls himself—a bit defensively*] If you mean I can't afford one of the fine society doctors who prey on the rich summer people—

JAMIE Can't afford? You're one of the biggest property owners around here.

TYRONE That doesn't mean I'm rich. It's all mortgaged—

JAMIE Because you always buy more instead of paying off mortgages. If Edmund was a lousy acre of land you wanted, the sky would be the limit!

TYRONE That's a lie! And your sneers against Doctor Hardy are lies! He doesn't put on frills, or have an office in a fashionable location, or drive around in an expensive automobile. That's what you pay for with those other five-dollars-to-look-at-your-tongue fellows, not their skill.

JAMIE [*with a scornful shrug of his shoulders*] Oh, all right. I'm a fool to argue. You can't change the leopard's spots.

TYRONE [*with rising anger*] No, you can't. You've taught me that lesson only too well. I've lost all hope you will ever change yours. You dare tell me what I can afford? You've never known the value of a dollar and never will! You've never saved a dollar in your life! At the end of each season you're penniless! You've thrown your salary away every week on whores and whiskey!

JAMIE My salary! Christ!

TYRONE It's more than you're worth, and you couldn't get that if it wasn't for me. If you weren't my son, there isn't a manager in the business who would give you a part, your reputation stinks so. As it is, I have to humble my pride and beg for you, saying you've turned over a new leaf, although I know it's a lie!

JAMIE I never wanted to be an actor. You forced me on the stage.

TYRONE That's a lie! You made no effort to find anything else to do. You left it to me to get you a job and I have no influence except in the theater. Forced you! You never wanted to do anything except loaf in bar-rooms! You'd have been content to sit back like a lazy lunk and sponge on me for the rest of your life! After all the money I'd wasted on your education, and all you did was get fired in disgrace from every college you went to!

JAMIE Oh, for God's sake, don't drag up that ancient history!

TYRONE It's not ancient history that you have to come home every summer to live on me.

JAMIE I earn my board and lodging working on the grounds. It saves you hiring a man.

TYRONE Bah! You have to be driven to do even that much! [*His anger ebbs into a weary complaint.*] I wouldn't give a damn if you ever displayed the slightest sign of gratitude. The only thanks is to have you sneer at me for a dirty miser, sneer at my profession, sneer at every damned thing in the world—except yourself.

JAMIE [*wryly*] That's not true, Papa. You can't hear me talking to myself, that's all.

TYRONE [*stares at him puzzledly, then quotes mechanically*] “Ingratitude, the vilest weed that grows!”⁷

JAMIE I could see that line coming! God, how many thousand times—! [*He stops, bored with their quarrel, and shrugs his shoulders.*] All right, Papa. I’m a bum. Anything you like, so long as it stops the argument.

TYRONE [*with indignant appeal now*] If you’d get ambition in your head instead of folly! You’re young yet. You could still make your mark. You had the talent to become a fine actor! You have it still. You’re my son—!

JAMIE [*boredly*] Let’s forget me. I’m not interested in the subject. Neither are you. [TYRONE *gives up*. JAMIE *goes on casually*.] What started us on this? Oh, Doc Hardy. When is he going to call you up about Edmund?

TYRONE Around lunch time. [*He pauses—then defensively*] I couldn’t have sent Edmund to a better doctor. Hardy’s treated him whenever he was sick up here, since he was knee high. He knows his constitution as no other doctor could. It’s not a question of my being miserly, as you’d like to make out. [*bitterly*] And what could the finest specialist in America do for Edmund, after he’s deliberately ruined his health by the mad life he’s led ever since he was fired from college? Even before that when he was in prep school, he began dissipating and playing the Broadway sport to imitate you, when he’s never had your constitution to stand it. You’re a healthy hulk like me—or you were at his age—but he’s always been a bundle of nerves like his mother. I’ve warned him for years his body couldn’t stand it, but he wouldn’t heed me, and now it’s too late.

JAMIE [*sharply*] What do you mean, too late? You talk as if you thought—

TYRONE [*guiltily explosive*] Don’t be a damned fool! I meant nothing but what’s plain to anyone! His health has broken down and he may be an invalid for a long time.

JAMIE [*stares at his father, ignoring his explanation*] I know it’s an Irish peasant idea consumption is fatal. It probably is when you live in a hovel on a bog, but over here, with modern treatment—

TYRONE Don’t I know that! What are you gabbing about, anyway? And keep your dirty tongue off Ireland, with your sneers about peasants and bogs and hovels! [*accusingly*] The less you say about Edmund’s sickness, the better for your conscience! You’re more responsible than anyone!

JAMIE [*stung*] That’s a lie! I won’t stand for that, Papa!

TYRONE It’s the truth! You’ve been the worst influence for him. He grew up admiring you as a hero! A fine example you set him! If you ever gave him advice except in the ways of rottenness, I’ve never heard of it! You made him old before his time, pumping him full of what you consider worldly wisdom, when he was too young to see that your mind was so poisoned by your own failure in life, you wanted to believe every man was a knave with his soul for sale, and every woman who wasn’t a whore was a fool!

JAMIE [*with a defensive air of weary indifference again*] All right. I did put Edmund wise to things, but not until I saw he’d started to raise hell, and knew he’d laugh at me if I tried the good advice, older brother stuff. All I did was make a pal of him and be absolutely frank so he’d learn

7. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* 1.4.

from my mistakes that—[*He shrugs his shoulders—cynically*] Well, that if you can't be good you can at least be careful.

[*His father snorts contemptuously. Suddenly JAMIE becomes really moved.*]

That's a rotten accusation, Papa. You know how much the Kid means to me, and how close we've always been—not like the usual brothers! I'd do anything for him.

TYRONE [*impressed—mollifyingly*] I know you may have thought it was for the best, Jamie. I didn't say you did it deliberately to harm him.

JAMIE Besides it's damned rot! I'd like to see anyone influence Edmund more than he wants to be. His quietness fools people into thinking they can do what they like with him. But he's stubborn as hell inside and what he does is what he wants to do, and to hell with anyone else! What had I to do with all the crazy stunts he's pulled in the last few years—working his way all over the map as a sailor and all that stuff. I thought that was a damned fool idea, and I told him so. You can't imagine me getting fun out of being on the beach in South America, or living in filthy dives, drinking rotgut, can you? No, thanks! I'll stick to Broadway, and a room with a bath, and bars that serve bonded Bourbon.

TYRONE You and Broadway! It's made you what you are! [*with a touch of pride*] Whatever Edmund's done, he's had the guts to go off on his own, where he couldn't come whining to me the minute he was broke.

JAMIE [*stung into sneering jealousy*] He's always come home broke finally, hasn't he? And what did his going away get him? Look at him now! [*He is suddenly shamefaced.*] Christ! That's a lousy thing to say. I don't mean that.

TYRONE [*decides to ignore this*] He's been doing well on the paper. I was hoping he'd found the work he wants to do at last.

JAMIE [*sneering jealously again*] A hick town rag! Whatever bull they hand you, they tell me he's a pretty bum reporter. If he weren't your son—[*ashamed again*] No, that's not true! They're glad to have him, but it's the special stuff that gets him by. Some of the poems and parodies he's written are damned good. [*grudgingly again*] Not that they'd ever get him anywhere on the big time. [*hastily*] But he's certainly made a damned good start.

TYRONE Yes. He's made a start. You used to talk about wanting to become a newspaper man but you were never willing to start at the bottom. You expected—

JAMIE Oh, for Christ's sake, Papa! Can't you lay off me!

TYRONE [*stares at him—then looks away—after a pause*] It's damnable luck Edmund should be sick right now. It couldn't have come at a worse time for him. [*He adds, unable to conceal an almost furtive uneasiness*] Or for your mother. It's damnable she should have this to upset her, just when she needs peace and freedom from worry. She's been so well in the two months since she came home. [*His voice grows husky and trembles a little.*] It's been heaven to me. This home has been a home again. But I needn't tell you, Jamie.

[*His son looks at him, for the first time with an understanding sympathy. It is as if suddenly a deep bond of common feeling existed between them in which their antagonisms could be forgotten.*]

JAMIE [*almost gently*] I've felt the same way, Papa.

TYRONE Yes, this time you can see how strong and sure of herself she is. She's a different woman entirely from the other times. She has control of her nerves—or she had until Edmund got sick. Now you can feel her growing tense and frightened underneath. I wish to God we could keep the truth from her, but we can't if he has to be sent to a sanatorium. What makes it worse is her father died of consumption. She worshiped him and she's never forgotten. Yes, it will be hard for her. But she can do it! She has the will power now! We must help her, Jamie, in every way we can!

JAMIE [*moved*] Of course, Papa. [*hesitantly*] Outside of nerves, she seems perfectly all right this morning.

TYRONE [*with hearty confidence now*] Never better. She's full of fun and mischief. [*Suddenly he frowns at JAMIE suspiciously.*] Why do you say, seems? Why shouldn't she be all right? What the hell do you mean?

JAMIE Don't start jumping down my throat! God, Papa, this ought to be one thing we can talk over frankly without a battle.

TYRONE I'm sorry, Jamie. [*tensely*] But go on and tell me—

JAMIE There's nothing to tell. I was all wrong. It's just that last night— Well, you know how it is, I can't forget the past. I can't help being suspicious. Any more than you can. [*bitterly*] That's the hell of it. And it makes it hell for Mama! She watches us watching her—

TYRONE [*sadly*] I know. [*tensely*] Well, what was it! Can't you speak out!

JAMIE Nothing, I tell you. Just my damned foolishness. Around three o'clock this morning, I woke up and heard her moving around in the spare room. Then she went to the bathroom. I pretended to be asleep. She stopped in the hall to listen, as if she wanted to make sure I was.

TYRONE [*with forced scorn*] For God's sake, is that all? She told me herself the foghorn kept her awake all night, and every night since Edmund's been sick she's been up and down, going to his room to see how he was.

JAMIE [*eagerly*] Yes, that's right, she did stop to listen outside his room. [*hesitantly again*] It was her being in the spare room that scared me. I couldn't help remembering that when she starts sleeping alone in there, it has always been a sign—

TYRONE It isn't this time! It's easily explained. Where else could she go last night to get away from my snoring? [*He gives way to a burst of resentful anger.*] By God, how you can live with a mind that sees nothing but the worst motives behind everything is beyond me!

JAMIE [*stung*] Don't pull that! I've just said I was all wrong. Don't you suppose I'm as glad of that as you are!

TYRONE [*mollifyingly*] I'm sure you are, Jamie. [*A pause. His expression becomes somber. He speaks slowly with a superstitious dread.*] It would be like a curse she can't escape if worry over Edmund—It was her long sickness after bringing him into the world that she first—

JAMIE She didn't have anything to do with it!

TYRONE I'm not blaming her.

JAMIE [*bitingly*] Then who are you blaming? Edmund, for being born?

TYRONE You damned fool! No one was to blame.

JAMIE The bastard of a doctor was! From what Mama's said, he was another cheap quack like Hardy! You wouldn't pay for a first-rate—

TYRONE That's a lie! [*furiously*] So I'm to blame! That's what you're driving at, is it? You evil-minded loafer!

JAMIE [*warningly as he hears his mother in the dining room*] Ssh!
 [TYRONE gets hastily to his feet and goes to look out the windows at right. JAMIE speaks with a complete change of tone.]

Well, if we're going to cut the front hedge today, we'd better go to work.
 [MARY comes in from the back parlor. She gives a quick, suspicious glance from one to the other, her manner nervously self-conscious.]

TYRONE [*turns from the window—with an actor's heartiness*] Yes, it's too fine a morning to waste indoors arguing. Take a look out the window, Mary. There's no fog in the harbor. I'm sure the spell of it we've had is over now.

MARY [*going to him*] I hope so, dear. [*to JAMIE, forcing a smile*] Did I actually hear you suggesting work on the front hedge, Jamie? Wonders will never cease! You must want pocket money badly.

JAMIE [*kiddingly*] When don't I? [*He winks at her, with a derisive glance at his father.*] I expect a salary of at least one large iron man⁸ at the end of the week—to carouse on!

MARY [*does not respond to his humor—her hands fluttering over the front of her dress*] What were you two arguing about?

JAMIE [*shrugs his shoulders*] The same old stuff.

MARY I heard you say something about a doctor, and your father accusing you of being evil-minded.

JAMIE [*quickly*] Oh, that. I was saying again Doc Hardy isn't my idea of the world's greatest physician.

MARY [*knows he is lying—vaguely*] Oh. No, I wouldn't say he was either. [*changing the subject—forcing a smile*] That Bridget! I thought I'd never get away. She told me about her second cousin on the police force in St. Louis. [*then with nervous irritation*] Well, if you're going to work on the hedge why don't you go? [*hastily*] I mean, take advantage of the sunshine before the fog comes back. [*strangely, as if talking aloud to herself*] Because I know it will. [*Suddenly she is self-consciously aware that they are both staring fixedly at her—flurriedly, raising her hands*] Or I should say, the rheumatism in my hands knows. It's a better weather prophet than you are, James. [*She stares at her hands with fascinated repulsion.*] Ugh! How ugly they are! Who'd ever believe they were once beautiful?
 [*They stare at her with a growing dread.*]

TYRONE [*takes her hands and gently pushes them down*] Now, now, Mary. None of that foolishness. They're the sweetest hands in the world.

[*She smiles, her face lighting up, and kisses him gratefully. He turns to his son.*]

Come on Jamie. Your mother's right to scold us. The way to start work is to start work. The hot sun will sweat some of that booze fat off your middle.

[*He opens the screen door and goes out on the porch and disappears down a flight of steps leading to the ground. JAMIE rises from his chair and, taking off his coat, goes to the door. At the door he turns back but avoids looking at her, and she does not look at him.*]

8. Dollar (slang).

JAMIE [*with an awkward, uneasy tenderness*] We're all so proud of you, Mama, so darned happy.

[*She stiffens and stares at him with a frightened defiance. He flounders on.*]

But you've still got to be careful. You mustn't worry so much about Edmund. He'll be all right.

MARY [*with a stubborn, bitterly resentful look*] Of course, he'll be all right. And I don't know what you mean, warning me to be careful.

JAMIE [*rebuffed and hurt, shrugs his shoulders*] All right, Mama. I'm sorry I spoke.

[*He goes out on the porch. She waits rigidly until he disappears down the steps. Then she sinks down in the chair he had occupied, her face betraying a frightened, furtive desperation, her hands roving over the table top, aimlessly moving objects around. She hears EDMUND descending the stairs in the front hall. As he nears the bottom he has a fit of coughing. She springs to her feet, as if she wanted to run away from the sound, and goes quickly to the windows at right. She is looking out, apparently calm, as he enters from the front parlor, a book in one hand. She turns to him, her lips set in a welcoming, motherly smile.*]

MARY Here you are. I was just going upstairs to look for you.

EDMUND I waited until they went out. I don't want to mix up in any arguments. I feel too rotten.

MARY [*almost resentfully*] Oh, I'm sure you don't feel half as badly as you make out. You're such a baby. You like to get us worried so we'll make a fuss over you. [*hastily*] I'm only teasing, dear. I know how miserably uncomfortable you must be. But you feel better today, don't you? [*worriedly, taking his arm*] All the same, you've grown much too thin. You need to rest all you can. Sit down and I'll make you comfortable.

[*He sits down in the rocking chair and she puts a pillow behind his back.*]

There, How's that?

EDMUND Grand. Thanks, Mama.

MARY [*kisses him—tenderly*] All you need is your mother to nurse you. Big as you are, you're still the baby of the family to me, you know.

EDMUND [*takes her hand—with deep seriousness*] Never mind me. You take care of yourself. That's all that counts.

MARY [*evading his eyes*] But I am, dear. [*forcing a laugh*] Heavens, don't you see how fat I've grown! I'll have to have all my dresses let out. [*She turns away and goes to the windows at right. She attempts a light, amused tone.*] They've started clipping the hedge. Poor Jamie! How he hates working in front where everyone passing can see him. There go the Chatfields in their new Mercedes. It's a beautiful car, isn't it? Not like our secondhand Packard. Poor Jamie! He bent almost under the hedge so they wouldn't notice him. They bowed to your father and he bowed back as if he were taking a curtain call. In that filthy old suit I've tried to make him throw away. [*Her voice has grown bitter.*] Really, he ought to have more pride than to make such a show of himself.

EDMUND He's right not to give a damn what anyone thinks. Jamie's a fool to care about the Chatfields. For Pete's sake, who ever heard of them outside this hick burg?

MARY [*with satisfaction*] No one. You're quite right, Edmund. Big frogs in a small puddle. It is stupid of Jamie. [*She pauses, looking out the window—then with an undercurrent of lonely yearning*] Still, the Chatfields and people like them stand for something. I mean they have decent, presentable homes they don't have to be ashamed of. They have friends who entertain them and whom they entertain. They're not cut off from everyone. [*She turns back from the window.*] Not that I want anything to do with them. I've always hated this town and everyone in it. You know that. I never wanted to live here in the first place, but your father liked it and insisted on building this house, and I've had to come here every summer.

EDMUND Well, it's better than spending the summer in a New York hotel, isn't it? And this town's not so bad. I like it well enough. I suppose because it's the only home we've had.

MARY I've never felt it was my home. It was wrong from the start. Everything was done in the cheapest way. Your father would never spend the money to make it right. It's just as well we haven't any friends here. I'd be ashamed to have them step in the door. But he's never wanted family friends. He hates calling on people, or receiving them. All he likes is to hobnob with men at the Club or in a barroom. Jamie and you are the same way, but you're not to blame. You've never had a chance to meet decent people here. I know you both would have been so different if you'd been able to associate with nice girls instead of—You'd never have disgraced yourselves as you have, so that now no respectable parents will let their daughters be seen with you.

EDMUND [*irritably*] Oh, Mama, forget it! Who cares? Jamie and I would be bored stiff. And about the Old Man, what's the use of talking? You can't change him.

MARY [*mechanically rebuking*] Don't call your father the Old Man. You should have more respect. [*then dully*] I know it's useless to talk. But sometimes I feel so lonely. [*Her lips quiver and she keeps her head turned away.*]

EDMUND Anyway, you've got to be fair, Mama. It may have been all his fault in the beginning, but you know that later on, even if he'd wanted to, we couldn't have had people here—[*He flounders guiltily.*] I mean, you wouldn't have wanted them.

MARY [*wincing—her lips quivering pitifully*] Don't. I can't bear having you remind me.

EDMUND Don't take it that way! Please, Mama! I'm trying to help. Because it's bad for you to forget. The right way is to remember. So you'll always be on your guard. You know what's happened before. [*miserably*] God, Mama, you know I hate to remind you. I'm doing it because it's been so wonderful having you home the way you've been, and it would be terrible—

MARY [*strickenly*] Please, dear. I know you mean it for the best, but—[*A defensive uneasiness comes into her voice again.*] I don't understand why you should suddenly say such things. What put it in your mind this morning?

EDMUND [*evasively*] Nothing. Just because I feel rotten and blue, I suppose.

MARY Tell me the truth. Why are you so suspicious all of a sudden?

EDMUND I'm not!

MARY Oh, yes you are. I can feel it. Your father and Jamie, too—particularly Jamie.

EDMUND Now don't start imagining things, Mama.

MARY [*her hands fluttering*] It makes it so much harder, living in this atmosphere of constant suspicion, knowing everyone is spying on me, and none of you believe in me, or trust me.

EDMUND That's crazy, Mama. We do trust you.

MARY If there was only some place I could go to get away for a day, or even an afternoon, some woman friend I could talk to—not about anything serious, simply laugh and gossip and forget for a while—someone besides the servants—that stupid Cathleen!

EDMUND [*gets up worriedly and puts his arm around her*] Stop it, Mama. You're getting yourself worked up over nothing.

MARY Your father goes out. He meets his friends in barrooms or at the Club. You and Jamie have the boys you know. You go out. But I am alone. I've always been alone.

EDMUND [*soothingly*] Come now! You know that's a fib. One of us always stays around to keep you company, or goes with you in the automobile when you take a drive.

MARY [*bitterly*] Because you're afraid to trust me alone! [*She turns on him—sharply.*] I insist you tell me why you act so differently this morning—why you felt you had to remind me—

EDMUND [*hesitates—then blurts out guiltily*] It's stupid. It's just that I wasn't asleep when you came in my room last night. You didn't go back to your and Papa's room. You went in the spare room for the rest of the night.

MARY Because your father's snoring was driving me crazy! For heaven's sake, haven't I often used the spare room as my bedroom? [*bitterly*] But I see what you thought. That was when—

EDMUND [*too vehemently*] I didn't think anything!

MARY So you pretended to be asleep in order to spy on me!

EDMUND No! I did it because I knew if you found out I was feverish and couldn't sleep, it would upset you.

MARY Jamie was pretending to be asleep, too, I'm sure, and I suppose your father—

EDMUND Stop it, Mama!

MARY Oh, I can't bear it, Edmund, when even you—! [*Her hands flutter up to pat her hair in their aimless, distracted way. Suddenly a strange undercurrent of revengefulness comes into her voice.*] It would serve all of you right if it was true!

EDMUND Mama! Don't say that! That's the way you talk when—

MARY Stop suspecting me! Please, dear! You hurt me! I couldn't sleep because I was thinking about you. That's the real reason! I've been so worried ever since you've been sick. [*She puts her arms around him and hugs him with a frightened, protective tenderness.*]

EDMUND [*soothingly*] That's foolishness. You know it's only a bad cold.

MARY Yes, of course, I know that!

EDMUND But listen, Mama. I want you to promise me that even if it should turn out to be something worse, you'll know I'll soon be all right

again, anyway, and you won't worry yourself sick, and you'll keep on taking care of yourself—

MARY [*frightenedly*] I won't listen when you're so silly! There's absolutely no reason to talk as if you expected something dreadful! Of course, I promise you. I give you my sacred word of honor! [*then with a sad bitterness*] But I suppose you're remembering I've promised before on my word of honor.

EDMUND No!

MARY [*her bitterness receding into a resigned helplessness*] I'm not blaming you, dear. How can you help it? How can any one of us forget? [*strangely*] That's what makes it so hard—for all of us. We can't forget.

EDMUND [*grabs her shoulder*] Mama! Stop it!

MARY [*forcing a smile*] All right, dear. I didn't mean to be so gloomy. Don't mind me. Here. Let me feel your head. Why, it's nice and cool. You certainly haven't any fever now.

EDMUND Forget! It's you—

MARY But I'm quite all right, dear. [*with a quick, strange, calculating, almost sly glance at him*] Except I naturally feel tired and nervous this morning, after such a bad night. I really ought to go upstairs and lie down until lunch time and take a nap.

[*He gives her an instinctive look of suspicion—then, ashamed of himself, looks quickly away. She hurries on nervously.*]

What are you going to do? Read here? It would be much better for you to go out in the fresh air and sunshine. But don't get overheated, remember. Be sure and wear a hat.

[*She stops, looking straight at him now. He avoids her eyes. There is a tense pause. Then she speaks jeeringly.*]

Or are you afraid to trust me alone?

EDMUND [*tormentedly*] No! Can't you stop talking like that! I think you ought to take a nap. [*He goes to the screen door—forcing a joking tone*] I'll go down and help Jamie bear up. I love to lie in the shade and watch him work.

[*He forces a laugh in which she makes herself join. Then he goes out on the porch and disappears down the steps. Her first reaction is one of relief. She appears to relax. She sinks down in one of the wicker armchairs at rear of table and leans her head back, closing her eyes. But suddenly she grows terribly tense again. Her eyes open and she strains forward, seized by a fit of nervous panic. She begins a desperate battle with herself. Her long fingers, warped and knotted by rheumatism, drum on the arms of the chair, driven by an insistent life of their own, without her consent.*]

CURTAIN

Act 2

SCENE 1

SCENE—*The same. It is around quarter to one. No sunlight comes into the room now through the windows at right. Outside the day is still fine but increasingly sultry, with a faint haziness in the air which softens the glare of the sun.*

EDMUND sits in the armchair at left of table, reading a book. Or rather he is trying to concentrate on it but cannot. He seems to be listening for some sound from upstairs. His manner is nervously apprehensive and he looks more sickly than in the previous act.

The second girl, CATHLEEN, enters from the back parlor. She carries a tray on which is a bottle of bonded Bourbon, several whiskey glasses and a pitcher of ice water. She is a buxom Irish peasant, in her early twenties, with a red-cheeked comely face, black hair and blue eyes—amiable, ignorant, clumsy, and possessed by a dense, well-meaning stupidity. She puts the tray on the table. EDMUND pretends to be so absorbed in his book he does not notice her, but she ignores this.

CATHLEEN [*with garrulous familiarity*] Here's the whiskey. It'll be lunch time soon. Will I call your father and Mister Jamie, or will you?

EDMUND [*without looking up from his book*] You do it.

CATHLEEN It's a wonder your father wouldn't look at his watch once in a while. He's a divil for making the meals late, and then Bridget curses me as if I was to blame. But he's a grand handsome man, if he is old. You'll never see the day you're as good looking—nor Mister Jamie, either. [*She chuckles.*] I'll wager Mister Jamie wouldn't miss the time to stop work and have his drop of whiskey if he had a watch to his name!

EDMUND [*gives up trying to ignore her and grins*] You win that one.

CATHLEEN And here's another I'd win, that you're making me call them so you can sneak a drink before they come.

EDMUND Well, I hadn't thought of that—

CATHLEEN Oh no, not you! Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, I suppose.

EDMUND But now you suggest it—

CATHLEEN [*suddenly primly virtuous*] I'd never suggest a man or a woman touch drink, Mister Edmund. Sure, didn't it kill an uncle of mine in the old country. [*relenting*] Still, a drop now and then is no harm when you're in low spirits, or have a bad cold.

EDMUND Thanks for handing me a good excuse. [*then with forced casualness*] You'd better call my mother, too.

CATHLEEN What for? She's always on time without any calling. God bless her, she has some consideration for the help.

EDMUND She's been taking a nap.

CATHLEEN She wasn't asleep when I finished my work upstairs a while back. She was lying down in the spare room with her eyes wide open. She'd a terrible headache, she said.

EDMUND [*his casualness more forced*] Oh well then, just call my father.

CATHLEEN [*goes to the screen door, grumbling good-naturedly*] No wonder my feet kill me each night. I won't walk out in this heat and get sunstroke. I'll call from the porch.

[*She goes out on the side porch, letting the screen door slam behind her, and disappears on her way to the front porch. A moment later she is heard shouting.*]

Mister Tyrone! Mister Jamie! It's time!

[EDMUND, who has been staring frightenedly before him, forgetting his book, springs to his feet nervously.]

EDMUND God, what a wench!

[He grabs the bottle and pours a drink, adds ice water and drinks. As he does so, he hears someone coming in the front door. He puts the glass hastily on the tray and sits down again, opening his book. JAMIE comes in from the front parlor, his coat over his arm. He has taken off collar and tie and carries them in his hand. He is wiping sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. EDMUND looks up as if his reading was interrupted. JAMIE takes one look at the bottle and glasses and smiles cynically.]

JAMIE Sneaking one, eh? Cut out the bluff, Kid. You're a rottener actor than I am.

EDMUND [*grins*] Yes, I grabbed one while the going was good.

JAMIE [*puts a hand affectionately on his shoulder*] That's better. Why kid me? We're pals, aren't we?

EDMUND I wasn't sure it was you coming.

JAMIE I made the Old Man look at his watch. I was halfway up the walk when Cathleen burst into song. Our wild Irish lark! She ought to be a train announcer.

EDMUND That's what drove me to drink. Why don't you sneak one while you've got a chance?

JAMIE I was thinking of that little thing. [*He goes quickly to the window at right.*] The Old Man was talking to old Captain Turner. Yes, he's still at it. [*He comes back and takes a drink.*] And now to cover up from his eagle eye. [*He measures two drinks of water and pours them in the whiskey bottle and shakes it up.*] There. That fixes it. [*He pours water in the glass and sets it on the table by EDMUND.*] And here's the water you've been drinking.

EDMUND Fine! You don't think it will fool him, do you?

JAMIE Maybe not, but he can't prove it. [*Putting on his collar and tie.*] I hope he doesn't forget lunch listening to himself talk. I'm hungry. [*He sits across the table from EDMUND—irritably*] That's what I hate about working down in front. He puts on an act for every damned fool that comes along.

EDMUND [*gloomily*] You're in luck to be hungry. The way I feel I don't care if I ever eat again.

JAMIE [*gives him a glance of concern*] Listen, Kid. You know me. I've never lectured you, but Doctor Hardy was right when he told you to cut out the redeye.

EDMUND Oh, I'm going to after he hands me the bad news this afternoon. A few before then won't make any difference.

JAMIE [*hesitates—then slowly*] I'm glad you've got your mind prepared for bad news. It won't be such a jolt. [*He catches EDMUND staring at him.*] I mean, it's a cinch you're really sick, and it would be wrong dope to kid yourself.

EDMUND [*disturbed*] I'm not. I know how rotten I feel, and the fever and chills I get at night are no joke. I think Doctor Hardy's last guess was right. It must be the damned malaria come back on me.

JAMIE Maybe, but don't be too sure.

EDMUND Why? What do you think it is?

JAMIE Hell, how would I know? I'm no Doc. [*abruptly*] Where's Mama?

EDMUND Upstairs.

JAMIE [*looks at him sharply*] When did she go up?

EDMUND Oh, about the time I came down to the hedge, I guess. She said she was going to take a nap.

JAMIE You didn't tell me—

EDMUND [*defensively*] Why should I? What about it? She was tired out. She didn't get much sleep last night.

JAMIE I know she didn't.

[*A pause. The brothers avoid looking at each other.*]

EDMUND That damned foghorn kept me awake, too.

[*Another pause.*]

JAMIE She's been upstairs alone all morning, eh? You haven't seen her?

EDMUND No. I've been reading here. I wanted to give her a chance to sleep.

JAMIE Is she coming down to lunch?

EDMUND Of course.

JAMIE [*dryly*] No of course about it. She might not want any lunch. Or she might start having most of her meals alone upstairs. That's happened, hasn't it?

EDMUND [*with frightened resentment*] Cut it out, Jamie! Can't you think anything but—? [*persuasively*] You're all wrong to suspect anything. Cathleen saw her not long ago. Mama didn't tell her she wouldn't be down to lunch.

JAMIE Then she wasn't taking a nap?

EDMUND Not right then, but she was lying down, Cathleen said.

JAMIE In the spare room?

EDMUND Yes. For Pete's sake, what of it?

JAMIE [*bursts out*] You damned fool! Why did you leave her alone so long? Why didn't you stick around?

EDMUND Because she accused me—and you and Papa—of spying on her all the time and not trusting her. She made me feel ashamed. I know how rotten it must be for her. And she promised on her sacred word of honor—

JAMIE [*with a bitter weariness*] You ought to know that doesn't mean anything.

EDMUND It does this time!

JAMIE That's what we thought the other times. [*He leans over the table to give his brother's arm an affectionate grasp.*] Listen, Kid, I know you think I'm a cynical bastard, but remember I've seen a lot more of this game than you have. You never knew what was really wrong until you were in prep-school. Papa and I kept it from you. But I was wise ten years or more before we had to tell you. I know the game backwards and I've been thinking all morning of the way she acted last night when she thought we were asleep. I haven't been able to think of anything else. And now you tell me she got you to leave her alone upstairs all morning.

EDMUND She didn't! You're crazy!

JAMIE [*placatingly*] All right, Kid. Don't start a battle with me. I hope as much as you do I'm crazy. I've been as happy as hell because I'd really begun to believe that this time—[*He stops—looking through the front parlor toward the hall—lowering his voice, hurriedly*] She's coming downstairs. You win on that. I guess I'm a damned suspicious louse.

[*They grow tense with a hopeful, fearful expectancy. JAMIE mutters*]

Damn! I wish I'd grabbed another drink.

EDMUND Me, too.

[*He coughs nervously and this brings on a real fit of coughing. JAMIE glances at him with worried pity. MARY enters from the front parlor. At first one notices no change except that she appears to be less nervous, to be more as she was when we first saw her after breakfast, but then one becomes aware that her eyes are brighter, and there is a peculiar detachment in her voice and manner, as if she were a little withdrawn from her words and actions.*]

MARY [*goes worriedly to EDMUND and puts her arm around him*] You mustn't cough like that. It's bad for your throat. You don't want to get a sore throat on top of your cold.

[*She kisses him. He stops coughing and gives her a quick apprehensive glance, but if his suspicions are aroused her tenderness makes him renounce them and he believes what he wants to believe for the moment. On the other hand, JAMIE knows after one probing look at her that his suspicions are justified. His eyes fall to stare at the floor, his face sets in an expression of embittered, defensive cynicism. MARY goes on, half sitting on the arm of EDMUND's chair, her arm around him, so her face is above and behind his and he cannot look into her eyes.*]

But I seem to be always picking on you, telling you don't do this and don't do that. Forgive me, dear. It's just that I want to take care of you.

EDMUND I know, Mama. How about you? Do you feel rested?

MARY Yes, ever so much better. I've been lying down ever since you went out. It's what I needed after such a restless night. I don't feel nervous now.

EDMUND That's fine.

[*He pats her hand on his shoulder. JAMIE gives him a strange, almost contemptuous glance, wondering if his brother can really mean this. EDMUND does not notice but his mother does.*]

MARY [*in a forced teasing tone*] Good heavens, how down in the mouth you look, Jamie. What's the matter now?

JAMIE [*without looking at her*] Nothing.

MARY Oh, I'd forgotten you've been working on the front hedge. That accounts for your sinking into the dumps, doesn't it?

JAMIE If you want to think so, Mama.

MARY [*keeping her tone*] Well, that's the effect it always has, isn't it? What a big baby you are! Isn't he, Edmund?

EDMUND He's certainly a fool to care what anyone thinks.

MARY [*strangely*] Yes, the only way is to make yourself not care.

[*She catches JAMIE giving her a bitter glance and changes the subject.*]

Where is your father? I heard Cathleen call him.

EDMUND Gabbing with old Captain Turner, Jamie says. He'll be late, as usual.

[*JAMIE gets up and goes to the windows at right, glad of an excuse to turn his back.*]

MARY I've told Cathleen time and again she must go wherever he is and tell him. The idea of screaming as if this were a cheap boardinghouse!

JAMIE [*looking out the window*] She's down there now. [*sneeringly*] Interrupting the famous Beautiful Voice! She should have more respect.

MARY [*sharply—letting her resentment toward him come out*] It's you who should have more respect. Stop sneering at your father! I won't have it! You ought to be proud you're his son! He may have his faults. Who hasn't? But he's worked hard all his life. He made his way up from ignorance and poverty to the top of his profession! Everyone else admires him and you should be the last one to sneer—you, who, thanks to him, have never had to work hard in your life!

[*Stung, JAMIE has turned to stare at her with accusing antagonism. Her eyes waver guiltily and she adds in a tone which begins to placate*]

Remember your father is getting old, Jamie. You really ought to show more consideration.

JAMIE *I ought to?*

EDMUND [*uneasily*] Oh, dry up, Jamie!

[*JAMIE looks out the window again.*]

And, for Pete's sake, Mama, why jump on Jamie all of a sudden?

MARY [*bitterly*] Because he's always sneering at someone else, always looking for the worst weakness in everyone. [*then with a strange, abrupt change to a detached, impersonal tone*] But I suppose life has made him like that, and he can't help it. None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and once they're done they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever.

[*EDMUND is made apprehensive by her strangeness. He tries to look up in her eyes but she keeps them averted. JAMIE turns to her—then looks quickly out of the window again.*]

JAMIE [*dully*] I'm hungry. I wish the Old Man would get a move on. It's a rotten trick the way he keeps meals waiting, and then beefs because they're spoiled.

MARY [*with a resentment that has a quality of being automatic and on the surface while inwardly she is indifferent*] Yes, it's very trying, Jamie. You don't know how trying. You don't have to keep house with summer servants who don't care because they know it isn't a permanent position. The really good servants are all with people who have homes and not merely summer places. And your father won't even pay the wages the best summer help ask. So every year I have stupid, lazy greenhorns to deal with. But you've heard me say this a thousand times. So has he, but it goes in one ear and out the other. He thinks money spent on a home is money wasted. He's lived too much in hotels. Never the best hotels, of course. Second-rate hotels. He doesn't understand a home. He doesn't feel at home in it. And yet, he wants a home. He's even proud of having this shabby place. He loves it here. [*She laughs—a hopeless and yet amused laugh.*] It's really funny, when you come to think of it. He's a peculiar man.

EDMUND [*again attempting uneasily to look up in her eyes*] What makes you ramble on like that, Mama?

MARY [*quickly casual—patting his cheek*] Why, nothing in particular, dear. It is foolish.

[*As she speaks, CATHLEEN enters from the back parlor.*]

CATHLEEN [*volubly*] Lunch is ready, Ma'am, I went down to Mister Tyrone, like you ordered, and he said he'd come right away, but he kept on talking to that man, telling him of the time when—

MARY [*indifferently*] All right, Cathleen. Tell Bridget I'm sorry but she'll have to wait a few minutes until Mister Tyrone is here.

[CATHLEEN mutters, "Yes, Ma'am," and goes off through the back parlor, grumbling to herself.]

JAMIE Damn it! Why don't you go ahead without him? He told us to.

MARY [*with a remote, amused smile*] He doesn't mean it. Don't you know your father yet? He'd be so terribly hurt.

EDMUND [*jumps up—as if he was glad of an excuse to leave*] I'll make him get a move on.

[*He goes out on the side porch. A moment later he is heard calling from the porch exasperatedly.*]

Hey! Papa! Come on! We can't wait all day!

[MARY has risen from the arm of the chair. Her hands play restlessly over the table top. She does not look at JAMIE but she feels the cynically appraising glance he gives her face and hands.]

MARY [*tensely*] Why do you stare like that?

JAMIE You know. [*He turns back to the window.*]

MARY I don't know.

JAMIE Oh, for God's sake, do you think you can fool me, Mama? I'm not blind.

MARY [*looks directly at him now, her face set again in an expression of blank, stubborn denial*] I don't know what you're talking about.

JAMIE No? Take a look at your eyes in the mirror!

EDMUND [*coming in from the porch*] I got Papa moving. He'll be here in a minute. [*with a glance from one to the other, which his mother avoids—uneasily*] What happened? What's the matter, Mama?

MARY [*disturbed by his coming, gives way to a flurry of guilty, nervous excitement*] Your brother ought to be ashamed of himself. He's been insinuating I don't know what.

EDMUND [*turns on JAMIE*] God damn you!

[*He takes a threatening step toward him. JAMIE turns his back with a shrug and looks out the window.*]

MARY [*more upset, grabs EDMUND's arm—excitedly*] Stop this at once, do you hear me? How dare you use such language before me! [*Abruptly her tone and manner change to the strange detachment she has shown before.*]

It's wrong to blame your brother. He can't help being what the past has made him. Any more than your father can. Or you. Or I.

EDMUND [*frightenedly—with a desperate hoping against hope*] He's a liar! It's a lie, isn't it, Mama?

MARY [*keeping her eyes averted*] What is a lie? Now you're talking in riddles like Jamie. [*Then her eyes meet his stricken, accusing look. She stammers*] Edmund! Don't! [*She looks away and her manner instantly regains the quality of strange detachment—calmly*] There's your father coming up the steps now. I must tell Bridget.

[*She goes through the back parlor. EDMUND moves slowly to his chair. He looks sick and hopeless.*]

JAMIE [*from the window, without looking around*] Well?

EDMUND [*refusing to admit anything to his brother yet—weakly defiant*]
Well, what? You're a liar.

[JAMIE *again shrugs his shoulders. The screen door on the front porch is heard closing. EDMUND says dully*]

Here's Papa. I hope he loosens up with the old bottle.

[TYRONE *comes in through the front parlor. He is putting on his coat.*]

TYRONE Sorry I'm late. Captain Turner stopped to talk and once he starts gabbing you can't get away from him.

JAMIE [*without turning—dryly*] You mean once he starts listening.

[*His father regards him with dislike. He comes to the table with a quick measuring look at the bottle of whiskey. Without turning, JAMIE senses this.*]

It's all right. The level in the bottle hasn't changed.

TYRONE I wasn't noticing that. [*He adds caustically*] As if it proved anything with you around. I'm on to your tricks.

EDMUND [*dully*] Did I hear you say, let's all have a drink?

TYRONE [*frowns at him*] Jamie is welcome after his hard morning's work, but I won't invite you. Doctor Hardy—

EDMUND To hell with Doctor Hardy! One isn't going to kill me. I feel—all in, Papa.

TYRONE [*with a worried look at him—putting on a fake heartiness*] Come along, then. It's before a meal and I've always found that good whiskey, taken in moderation as an appetizer, is the best of tonics.

[EDMUND *gets up as his father passes the bottle to him. He pours a big drink. TYRONE frowns admonishingly.*]

I said, in moderation.

[*He pours his own drink and passes the bottle to JAMIE, grumbling.*]

It'd be a waste of breath mentioning moderation to you.

[*Ignoring the hint, JAMIE pours a big drink. His father scowls—then, giving it up, resumes his hearty air, raising his glass.*]

Well, here's health and happiness!

[EDMUND *gives a bitter laugh.*]

EDMUND That's a joke!

TYRONE What is?

EDMUND Nothing. Here's how. [*They drink.*]

TYRONE [*becoming aware of the atmosphere*] What's the matter here?

There's gloom in the air you could cut with a knife. [*turns on JAMIE resentfully*] You got the drink you were after, didn't you? Why are you wearing that gloomy look on your mug?

JAMIE [*shrugging his shoulders*] You won't be singing a song yourself soon.

EDMUND Shut up, Jamie.

TYRONE [*uneasy now—changing the subject*] I thought lunch was ready.

I'm hungry as a hunter. Where is your mother?

MARY [*returning through the back parlor, calls*] Here I am.

[*She comes in. She is excited and self-conscious. As she talks, she glances everywhere except at any of their faces.*]

I've had to calm down Bridget. She's in a tantrum over your being late again, and I don't blame her. If your lunch is dried up from waiting in the oven, she said it served you right, you could like it or leave it for all she cared. [*with increasing excitement*] Oh, I'm so sick and tired of pretending

this is a home! You won't help me! You won't put yourself out the least bit! You don't know how to act in a home! You don't really want one! You never have wanted one—never since the day we were married! You should have remained a bachelor and lived in second-rate hotels and entertained your friends in barrooms! [*She adds strangely, as if she were now talking aloud to herself rather than to TYRONE*] Then nothing would ever have happened.

[*They stare at her. TYRONE knows now. He suddenly looks a tired, bitterly sad old man. EDMUND glances at his father and sees that he knows, but he still cannot help trying to warn his mother.*]

EDMUND Mama! Stop talking. Why don't we go in to lunch.

MARY [*Starts and at once the quality of unnatural detachment settles on her face again. She even smiles with an ironical amusement to herself.*] Yes, it is inconsiderate of me to dig up the past, when I know your father and Jamie must be hungry. [*putting her arm around EDMUND's shoulder—with a fond solicitude which is at the same time remote*] I do hope you have an appetite, dear. You really must eat more [*Her eyes become fixed on the whiskey glass on the table beside him—sharply*] Why is that glass there? Did you take a drink? Oh, how can you be such a fool? Don't you know it's the worst thing? [*She turns on TYRONE.*] You're to blame, James. How could you let him? Do you want to kill him? Don't you remember my father? He wouldn't stop after he was stricken. He said doctors were fools! He thought, like you, that whiskey is a good tonic! [*A look of terror comes into her eyes and she stammers*] But, of course, there's no comparison at all. I don't know why I—Forgive me for scolding you, James. One small drink won't hurt Edmund. It might be good for him, if it gives him an appetite.

[*She pats EDMUND's cheek playfully, the strange detachment again in her manner. He jerks his head away. She seems not to notice, but she moves instinctively away.*]

JAMIE [*roughly, to hide his tense nerves*] For God's sake, let's eat. I've been working in the damned dirt under the hedge all morning. I've earned my grub.

[*He comes around in back of his father, not looking at his mother, and grabs EDMUND's shoulder.*]

Come on, Kid. Let's put on the feed bag.

[*EDMUND gets up, keeping his eyes averted from his mother. They pass her, heading for the back parlor.*]

TYRONE [*dully*] Yes, you go in with your mother, lads. I'll join you in a second.

[*But they keep on without waiting for her. She looks at their backs with a helpless hurt and, as they enter the back parlor, starts to follow them. TYRONE's eyes are on her, sad and condemning. She feels them and turns sharply without meeting his stare.*]

MARY Why do you look at me like that? [*Her hands flutter up to pat her hair.*] Is it my hair coming down? I was so worn out from last night, I thought I'd better lie down this morning. I drowsed off and had a nice refreshing nap. But I'm sure I fixed my hair again when I woke up. [*forcing a laugh*] Although, as usual, I couldn't find my glasses. [*sharply*] Please stop staring! One would think you were accusing me—[*then pleadingly*] James! You don't understand!

TYRONE [*with dull anger*] I understand that I've been a God-damned fool to believe in you!

[*He walks away from her to pour himself a big drink.*]

MARY [*her face again sets in stubborn defiance*] I don't know what you mean by "believing in me." All I've felt was distrust and spying and suspicion. [*then accusingly*] Why are you having another drink? You never have more than one before lunch. [*bitterly*] I know what to expect. You will be drunk tonight. Well, it won't be the first time, will it—or the thousandth? [*again she bursts out pleadingly*] Oh, James, please! You don't understand! I'm worried about Edmund! I'm so afraid he—

TYRONE I don't want to listen to excuses, Mary.

MARY [*strickenly*] Excuses? You mean—? Oh, you can't believe that of me! You mustn't believe that, James! [*then slipping away into her strange detachment—quite casually*] Shall we not go into lunch dear? I don't want anything but I know you're hungry.

[*He walks slowly to where she stands in the doorway. He walks like an old man. As he reaches her she bursts out piteously.*]

James! I tried so hard! I tried so hard! Please believe—!

TYRONE [*moved in spite of himself—helplessly*] I suppose you did, Mary. [*then grief-strickenly*] For the love of God, why couldn't you have the strength to keep on?

MARY [*her face setting into that stubborn denial again*] I don't know what you're talking about. Have the strength to keep on what?

TYRONE [*hopelessly*] Never mind. It's no use now.

[*He moves on and she keeps beside him as they disappear in the back parlor.*]

CURTAIN

Act 2

SCENE 2

SCENE—*The same, about a half hour later. The tray with the bottle of whiskey has been removed from the table. The family are returning from lunch as the curtain rises. MARY is the first to enter from the back parlor. Her husband follows. He is not with her as he was in the similar entrance after breakfast at the opening of Act One. He avoids touching her or looking at her. There is condemnation in his face, mingled now with the beginning of an old weary, helpless resignation. JAMIE and EDMUND follow their father. JAMIE's face is hard with defensive cynicism. EDMUND tries to copy this defense but without success. He plainly shows he is heartsick as well as physically ill.*

MARY is terribly nervous again, as if the strain of sitting through lunch with them had been too much for her. Yet at the same time, in contrast to this, her expression shows more of that strange aloofness which seems to stand apart from her nerves and the anxieties which harry them.

She is talking as she enters—a stream of words that issues casually, in a routine of family conversation, from her mouth. She appears indifferent to the fact that their thoughts are not on what she is saying any more than her own are. As she talks, she comes to the left of the table and stands, facing front, one

hand fumbling with the bosom of her dress, the other playing over the table top. TYRONE lights a cigar and goes to the screen door, staring out. JAMIE fills a pipe from a jar on top of the bookcase at rear. He lights it as he goes to look out the window at right. EDMUND sits in a chair by the table, turned half away from his mother so he does not have to watch her.

MARY It's no use finding fault with Bridget. She doesn't listen. I can't threaten her, or she'd threaten she'd leave. And she does do her best at times. It's too bad they seem to be just the times you're sure to be late, James. Well, there's this consolation: it's difficult to tell from her cooking whether she's doing her best or her worst. [*She gives a little laugh of detached amusement—indifferently*] Never mind. The summer will soon be over, thank goodness. Your season will open again and we can go back to second-rate hotels and trains. I hate them, too, but at least I don't expect them to be like a home, and there's no housekeeping to worry about. It's unreasonable to expect Bridget or Cathleen to act as if this was a home. They know it isn't as well as we know it. It never has been and it never will be.

TYRONE [*bitterly without turning around*] No, it never can be now. But it was once, before you—

MARY [*her face instantly set in blank denial*] Before I what? [*There is dead silence. She goes on with a return of her detached air.*] No, no. Whatever you mean, it isn't true, dear. It was never a home. You've always preferred the Club or barroom. And for me it's always been as lonely as a dirty room in a one-night stand hotel. In a real home one is never lonely. You forget I know from experience what a home is like. I gave up one to marry you—my father's home. [*At once, through an association of ideas she turns to EDMUND. Her manner becomes tenderly solicitous, but there is the strange quality of detachment in it.*] I'm worried about you, Edmund. You hardly touched a thing at lunch. That's no way to take care of yourself. It's all right for me not to have an appetite. I've been growing too fat. But you must eat. [*coaxingly maternal*] Promise me you will, dear, for my sake.

EDMUND [*dully*] Yes, Mama.

MARY [*pats his cheek as he tries not to shrink away*] That's a good boy.
[*There is another pause of dead silence. Then the telephone in the front hall rings and all of them stiffen startledly.*]

TYRONE [*hastily*] I'll answer. McGuire said he'd call me. [*He goes out through the front parlor.*]

MARY [*indifferently*] McGuire. He must have another piece of property on his list that no one would think of buying except your father. It doesn't matter any more, but it's always seemed to me your father could afford to keep on buying property but never to give me a home.

[*She stops to listen as TYRONE's voice is heard from the hall.*]

TYRONE Hello. [*with forced heartiness*] Oh, how are you, Doctor?

[*JAMIE turns from the window. MARY's fingers play more rapidly on the table top. TYRONE's voice, trying to conceal, reveals that he is hearing bad news.*]

I see—[*hurriedly*] Well, you'll explain all about it when you see him this afternoon. Yes, he'll be in without fail. Four o'clock. I'll drop in myself

and have a talk with you before that. I have to go uptown on business, anyway. Goodbye, Doctor.

EDMUND [*dully*] That didn't sound like glad tidings.

[JAMIE gives him a pitying glance—then looks out the window again. MARY's face is terrified and her hands flutter distractedly. TYRONE comes in. The strain is obvious in his casualness as he addresses EDMUND.]

TYRONE It was Doctor Hardy. He wants you to be sure and see him at four.

EDMUND [*dully*] What did he say? Not that I give a damn now.

MARY [*bursts out excitedly*] I wouldn't believe him if he swore on a stack of Bibles. You mustn't pay attention to a word he says, Edmund.

TYRONE [*sharply*] Mary!

MARY [*more excitedly*] Oh, we all realize why you like him, James! Because he's cheap! But please don't try to tell me! I know all about Doctor Hardy. Heaven knows I ought to after all these years. He's an ignorant fool! There should be a law to keep men like him from practicing. He hasn't the slightest idea—When you're in agony and half insane, he sits and holds your hand and delivers sermons on will power! [*Her face is drawn in an expression of intense suffering by the memory. For the moment, she loses all caution. With bitter hatred*] He deliberately humiliates you! He makes you beg and plead! He treats you like a criminal! He understands nothing! And yet it was exactly the same type of cheap quack who first gave you the medicine—and you never knew what it was until too late! [*passionately*] I hate doctors! They'll sell their souls! What's worse, they'll sell yours, and you never know it till one day you find yourself in hell!

EDMUND Mama! For God's sake, stop talking.

TYRONE [*shakily*] Yes, Mary, it's no time—

MARY [*suddenly is overcome by guilty confusion—stammers*] I—Forgive me, dear. You're right. It's useless to be angry now. [*There is again a pause of dead silence. When she speaks again, her face has cleared and is calm, and the quality of uncanny detachment is in her voice and manner.*] I'm going upstairs for a moment, if you'll excuse me. I have to fix my hair. [*she adds smilingly*] That is if I can find my glasses. I'll be right down.

TYRONE [*as she starts through the doorway—pleading and rebuking*] Mary!

MARY [*turns to stare at him calmly*] Yes, dear? What is it?

TYRONE [*helplessly*] Nothing.

MARY [*with a strange derisive smile*] You're welcome to come up and watch me if you're so suspicious.

TYRONE As if that could do any good! You'd only postpone it. And I'm not your jailor. This isn't a prison.

MARY No. I know you can't help thinking it's a home. [*She adds quickly with a detached contrition*] I'm sorry, dear. I don't mean to be bitter. It's not your fault.

[*She turns and disappears through the back parlor. The three in the room remain silent. It is as if they were waiting until she got upstairs before speaking.*]

JAMIE [*cynically brutal*] Another shot in the arm!

EDMUND [*angrily*] Cut out that kind of talk!

TYRONE Yes! Hold your foul tongue and your rotten Broadway loafer's lingo! Have you no pity or decency? [*losing his temper*] You ought to be kicked out in the gutter! But if I did it, you know damned well who'd weep and plead for you, and excuse you and complain till I let you come back.

JAMIE [*a spasm of pain crosses his face*] Christ, don't I know that? No pity? I have all the pity in the world for her. I understand what a hard game to beat she's up against—which is more than you ever have! My lingo didn't mean I had no feeling. I was merely putting bluntly what we all know, and have to live with now, again. [*bitterly*] The cures are no damned good except for a while. The truth is there is no cure and we've been saps to hope—[*cynically*] They never come back!

EDMUND [*scornfully parodying his brother's cynicism*] They never come back! Everything is in the bag! It's all a frame-up! We're all fall guys and suckers and we can't beat the game! [*disdainfully*] Christ, if I felt the way you do—!

JAMIE [*stung for a moment—then shrugging his shoulders, dryly*] I thought you did. Your poetry isn't very cheery. Nor the stuff you read and claim to admire. [*He indicates the small bookcase at rear.*] Your pet with the unpronounceable name, for example.

EDMUND Nietzsche. You don't know what you're talking about. You haven't read him.

JAMIE Enough to know it's a lot of bunk!

TYRONE Shut up, both of you! There's little choice between the philosophy you learned from Broadway loafers, and the one Edmund got from his books. They're both rotten to the core. You've both flouted the faith you were born and brought up in—the one true faith of the Catholic Church—and your denial has brought nothing but self-destruction!

[*His two sons stare at him contemptuously. They forget their quarrel and are as one against him on this issue.*]

EDMUND That's the bunk, Papa!

JAMIE We don't pretend, at any rate. [*caustically*] I don't notice you've worn any holes in the knees of your pants going to Mass.

TYRONE It's true I'm a bad Catholic in the observance, God forgive me. But I believe! [*angrily*] And you're a liar! I may not go to church but every night and morning of my life I get on my knees and pray!

EDMUND [*bitingly*] Did you pray for Mama?

TYRONE I did. I've prayed to God these many years for her.

EDMUND Then Nietzsche must be right. [*He quotes from Thus Spake Zarathustra.*] "God is dead: of His pity for man hath God died."

TYRONE [*ignores this*] If your mother had prayed, too—She hasn't denied her faith, but she's forgotten it, until now there's no strength of the spirit left in her to fight against her curse. [*then dully resigned*] But what's the good of talk? We've lived with this before and now we must again. There's no help for it. [*bitterly*] Only I wish she hadn't led me to hope this time. By God, I never will again!

EDMUND That's a rotten thing to say, Papa! [*defiantly*] Well, I'll hope! She's just started. It can't have got a hold on her yet. She can still stop. I'm going to talk to her.

JAMIE [*shrugs his shoulders*] You can't talk to her now. She'll listen but she won't listen. She'll be here but she won't be here. You know the way she gets.

TYRONE Yes, that's the way the poison acts on her always. Every day from now on, there'll be the same drifting away from us until by the end of each night—

EDMUND [*miserably*] Cut it out, Papa! [*He jumps up from his chair.*] I'm going to get dressed. [*bitterly, as he goes*] I'll make so much noise she can't suspect I've come to spy on her.

[*He disappears through the front parlor and can be heard stamping noisily upstairs.*]

JAMIE [*after a pause*] What did Doc Hardy say about the Kid?

TYRONE [*dully*] It's what you thought. He's got consumption.

JAMIE God damn it!

TYRONE There is no possible doubt, he said.

JAMIE He'll have to go to a sanatorium.

TYRONE Yes, and the sooner the better, Hardy said, for him and everyone around him. He claims that in six months to a year Edmund will be cured, if he obeys orders. [*He sighs—gloomily and resentfully*] I never thought a child of mine—It doesn't come from my side of the family. There wasn't one of us that didn't have lungs as strong as an ox.

JAMIE Who gives a damn about that part of it! Where does Hardy want to send him?

TYRONE That's what I'm to see him about.

JAMIE Well, for God's sake, pick out a good place and not some cheap dump!

TYRONE [*stung*] I'll send him wherever Hardy thinks best!

JAMIE Well, don't give Hardy your old over-the-hills-to-the-poorhouse song about taxes and mortgages.

TYRONE I'm no millionaire who can throw money away! Why shouldn't I tell Hardy the truth?

JAMIE Because he'll think you want him to pick a cheap dump, and because he'll know it isn't the truth—especially if he hears afterwards you've seen McGuire and let that flannel-mouth, gold-brick merchant sting you with another piece of bum property!

TYRONE Keep your nose out of my business!

JAMIE This is Edmund's business. What I'm afraid of is, with your Irish bog trotter idea that consumption is fatal, you'll figure it would be a waste of money to spend any more than you can help.

TYRONE You liar!

JAMIE All right. Prove I'm a liar. That's what I want. That's why I brought it up.

TYRONE [*his rage still smoldering*] I have every hope Edmund will be cured. And keep your dirty tongue off Ireland! You're a fine one to sneer, with the map of it on your face!

JAMIE Not after I wash my face. [*Then before his father can react to this insult to the Old Sod he adds dryly, shrugging his shoulders*] Well, I've said all I have to say. It's up to you. [*abruptly*] What do you want me to do this afternoon, now you're going uptown? I've done all I can do on

the hedge until you cut more of it. You don't want me to go ahead with your clipping, I know that.

TYRONE No. You'd get it crooked, as you get everything else.

JAMIE Then I'd better go uptown with Edmund. The bad news coming on top of what's happened to Mama may hit him hard.

TYRONE [*forgetting his quarrel*] Yes, go with him, Jamie. Keep up his spirits, if you can. [*He adds caustically*] If you can without making it an excuse to get drunk!

JAMIE What would I use for money? The last I heard they were still selling booze, not giving it away. [*He starts for the front-parlor doorway.*] I'll get dressed.

[He stops in the doorway as he sees his mother approaching from the hall, and moves aside to let her come in. Her eyes look brighter, and her manner is more detached. This change becomes more marked as the scene goes on.]

MARY [*vaguely*] You haven't seen my glasses anywhere, have you, Jamie?

[She doesn't look at him. He glances away, ignoring her question but she doesn't seem to expect an answer. She comes forward, addressing her husband without looking at him.]

You haven't seen them, have you, James?

[Behind her JAMIE disappears through the front parlor.]

TYRONE [*turns to look out the screen door*] No, Mary.

MARY What's the matter with Jamie? Have you been nagging at him again? You shouldn't treat him with such contempt all the time. He's not to blame. If he'd been brought up in a real home, I'm sure he would have been different. [*She comes to the windows at right—lightly*] You're not much of a weather prophet, dear. See how hazy it's getting. I can hardly see the other shore.

TYRONE [*trying to speak naturally*] Yes, I spoke too soon. We're in for another night of fog, I'm afraid.

MARY Oh, well, I won't mind it tonight.

TYRONE No, I don't imagine you will, Mary.

MARY [*flashes a glance at him—after a pause*] I don't see Jamie going down to the hedge. Where did he go?

TYRONE He's going with Edmund to the Doctor's. He went up to change his clothes. [*then, glad of an excuse to leave her*] I'd better do the same or I'll be late for my appointment at the Club.

[He makes a move toward the front-parlor doorway, but with a swift impulsive movement she reaches out and clasps his arm.]

MARY [*a note of pleading in her voice*] Don't go yet, dear. I don't want to be alone. [*hastily*] I mean, you have plenty of time. You know you boast you can dress in one-tenth the time it takes the boys. [*vaguely*] There is something I wanted to say. What is it? I've forgotten. I'm glad Jamie is going uptown. You didn't give him any money, I hope.

TYRONE I did not.

MARY He'd only spend it on drink and you know what a vile, poisonous tongue he has when he's drunk. Not that I would mind anything he said tonight, but he always manages to drive you into a rage, especially if you're drunk, too, as you will be.

TYRONE [*resentfully*] I won't. I never get drunk.

MARY [*teasing indifferently*] Oh, I'm sure you'll hold it well. You always have.

TYRONE I've never missed a performance in my life. That's the proof! [*then bitterly*] If I did get drunk it is not you who should blame me. No man has ever had a better reason.

MARY Reason? What reason? You always drink too much when you go to the Club, don't you? Particularly when you meet McGuire. He sees to that. Don't think I'm finding fault, dear. You must do as you please. I won't mind.

TYRONE I know you won't. [*He turns toward the front parlor, anxious to escape.*] I've got to get dressed.

MARY [*again she reaches out and grasps his arm—pleadingly*] No, please wait a little while, dear. At least, until one of the boys comes down. You will all be leaving me so soon.

TYRONE [*with bitter sadness*] It's you who are leaving us, Mary.

MARY I? That's a silly thing to say, James. How could I leave? There is nowhere I could go. Who would I go to see? I have no friends.

TYRONE It's your own fault—[*He stops and sighs helplessly—persuasively*] There's surely one thing you can do this afternoon that will be good for you, Mary. Take a drive in the automobile. Get away from the house. Get a little sun and fresh air. [*injuredly*] I bought the automobile for you. You know I don't like the damned things. I'd rather walk any day, or take a trolley. [*with growing resentment*] I had it here waiting for you when you came back from the sanatorium. I hoped it would give you pleasure and distract your mind. You used to ride in it every day, but you've hardly used it at all lately. I paid a lot of money I couldn't afford, and there's the chauffeur I have to board and lodge and pay high wages whether he drives you or not. [*bitterly*] Waste! The same old waste that will land me in the poorhouse in my old age! What good did it do you? I might as well have thrown the money out the window.

MARY [*with detached calm*] Yes, it was a waste of money, James. You shouldn't have bought a secondhand automobile. You were swindled again as you always are, because you insist on secondhand bargains in everything.

TYRONE It's one of the best makes! Everyone says it's better than any of the new ones!

MARY [*ignoring this*] It was another waste to hire Smythe, who was only a helper in a garage and had never been a chauffeur. Oh, I realize his wages are less than a real chauffeur's, but he more than makes up for that, I'm sure, by the graft he gets from the garage on repair bills. Something is always wrong. Smythe sees to that, I'm afraid.

TYRONE I don't believe it! He may not be a fancy millionaire's flunky but he's honest! You're as bad as Jamie, suspecting everyone!

MARY You mustn't be offended, dear. I wasn't offended when you gave me the automobile. I knew you didn't mean to humiliate me. I knew that was the way you had to do everything. I was grateful and touched. I knew buying the car was a hard thing for you to do, and it proved how much you loved me, in your way, especially when you couldn't really believe it would do me any good.

TYRONE Mary! [*He suddenly hugs her to him—brokenly*] Dear Mary! For the love of God, for my sake and the boys' sake and your own, won't you stop now?

MARY [*stammers in guilty confusion for a second*] I—James! Please! [*Her strange, stubborn defense comes back instantly.*] Stop what? What are you talking about?

[*He lets his arm fall to his side brokenly. She impulsively puts her arm around him.*]

James! We've loved each other! We always will! Let's remember only that, and not try to understand what we cannot understand, or help things that cannot be helped—the things life has done to us we cannot excuse or explain.

TYRONE [*as if he hadn't heard—bitterly*] You won't even try?

MARY [*her arms drop hopelessly and she turns away—with detachment*]

Try to go for a drive this afternoon, you mean? Why, yes, if you wish me to, although it makes me feel lonelier than if I stayed here. There is no one I can invite to drive with me, and I never know where to tell Smythe to go. If there was a friend's house where I could drop in and laugh and gossip awhile. But, of course, there isn't. There never has been. [*her manner becoming more and more remote*] At the Convent I had so many friends. Girls whose families lived in lovely homes. I used to visit them and they'd visit me in my father's home. But, naturally, after I married an actor—you know how actors were considered in those days—a lot of them gave me the cold shoulder. And then, right after we were married, there was the scandal of that woman who had been your mistress, suing you. From then on, all my old friends either pitied me or cut me dead. I hated the ones who cut me much less than the pitiers.

TYRONE [*with guilty resentment*] For God's sake, don't dig up what's long forgotten. If you're that far gone in the past already, when it's only the beginning of the afternoon, what will you be tonight?

MARY [*stares at him defiantly now*] Come to think of it, I do have to drive uptown. There's something I must get at the drugstore.

TYRONE [*bitterly scornful*] Leave it to you to have some of the stuff hidden, and prescriptions for more! I hope you'll lay in a good stock ahead so we'll never have another night like the one when you screamed for it, and ran out of the house in your nightdress half crazy, to try and throw yourself off the dock!

MARY [*tries to ignore this*] I have to get tooth powder and toilet soap and cold cream—[*She breaks down pitifully.*] James! You mustn't remember! You mustn't humiliate me so!

TYRONE [*ashamed*] I'm sorry. Forgive me, Mary!

MARY [*defensively detached again*] It doesn't matter. Nothing like that ever happened. You must have dreamed it.

[*He stares at her hopelessly. Her voice seems to drift farther and farther away.*]

I was so healthy before Edmund was born. You remember, James. There wasn't a nerve in my body. Even traveling with you season after season, with week after week of one-night stands, in trains without Pullmans, in dirty rooms of filthy hotels, eating bad food, bearing children in hotel

rooms, I still kept healthy. But bearing Edmund was the last straw. I was so sick afterwards, and that ignorant quack of a cheap hotel doctor—All he knew was I was in pain. It was easy for him to stop the pain.

TYRONE Mary! For God's sake, forget the past!

MARY [*with strange objective calm*] Why? How can I? The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us. [*going on*] I blame only myself. I swore after Eugene died I would never have another baby. I was to blame for his death. If I hadn't left him with my mother to join you on the road, because you wrote telling me you missed me and were so lonely, Jamie would never have been allowed, when he still had measles, to go in the baby's room. [*her face hardening*] I've always believed Jamie did it on purpose. He was jealous of the baby. He hated him. [*as TYRONE starts to protest*] Oh, I know Jamie was only seven, but he was never stupid. He'd been warned it might kill the baby. He knew. I've never been able to forgive him for that.

TYRONE [*with bitter sadness*] Are you back with Eugene now? Can't you let our dead baby rest in peace?

MARY [*as if she hadn't heard him*] It was my fault. I should have insisted on staying with Eugene and not have let you persuade me to join you, just because I loved you. Above all, I shouldn't have let you insist I have another baby to take Eugene's place, because you thought that would make me forget his death. I knew from experience by then that children should have homes to be born in, if they are to be good children, and women need homes, if they are to be good mothers. I was afraid all the time I carried Edmund. I knew something terrible would happen. I knew I'd proved by the way I'd left Eugene that I wasn't worthy to have another baby, and that God would punish me if I did. I never should have borne Edmund.

TYRONE [*with an uneasy glance through the front parlor*] Mary! Be careful with your talk. If he heard you he might think you never wanted him. He's feeling bad enough already without—

MARY [*violently*] It's a lie! I did want him! More than anything in the world! You don't understand! I meant, for his sake. He has never been happy. He never will be. Nor healthy. He was born nervous and too sensitive, and that's my fault. And now, ever since he's been so sick I've kept remembering Eugene and my father and I've been so frightened and guilty—[*then, catching herself, with an instant change to stubborn denial*] Oh, I know it's foolish to imagine dreadful things when there's no reason for it. After all, everyone has colds and gets over them.

[*TYRONE stares at her and sighs helplessly. He turns away toward the front parlor and sees EDMUND coming down the stairs in the hall.*]

TYRONE [*sharply, in a low voice*] Here's Edmund. For God's sake try and be yourself—at least until he goes! You can do that much for him!

[*He waits, forcing his face into a pleasantly paternal expression. She waits frightenedly, seized again by a nervous panic, her hands fluttering over the bosom of her dress, up to her throat and hair, with a distracted aimlessness. Then, as EDMUND approaches the doorway, she cannot face him. She goes swiftly away to the windows at left and stares out with her back to the front parlor. EDMUND enters. He has changed to a ready-made*]

blue serge suit, high stiff collar and tie, black shoes. With an actor's heartiness]

Well! You look spic and span. I'm on my way up to change, too. [*He starts to pass him.*]

EDMUND [*dryly*] Wait a minute, Papa. I hate to bring up disagreeable topics, but there's the matter of carfare. I'm broke.

TYRONE [*starts automatically on a customary lecture*] You'll always be broke until you learn the value—[*checks himself guiltily, looking at his son's sick face with worried pity*] But you've been learning, lad. You worked hard before you took ill. You've done splendidly. I'm proud of you. [*He pulls out a small roll of bills from his pants pocket and carefully selects one. EDMUND takes it. He glances at it and his face expresses astonishment. His father again reacts customarily—sarcastically*]

Thank you. [*He quotes*] "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is—"

EDMUND "To have a thankless child."⁹ I know. Give me a chance, Papa. I'm knocked speechless. This isn't a dollar. It's a ten spot.

TYRONE [*embarrassed by his generosity*] Put it in your pocket. You'll probably meet some of your friends uptown and you can't hold your end up and be sociable with nothing in your jeans.

EDMUND You meant it? Gosh, thank you, Papa. [*He is genuinely pleased and grateful for a moment—then he stares at his father's face with uneasy suspicion.*] But why all of a sudden—? [*cynically*] Did Doc Hardy tell you I was going to die? [*Then he sees his father is bitterly hurt.*] No! That's a rotten crack. I was only kidding, Papa. [*He puts an arm around his father impulsively and gives him an affectionate hug.*] I'm very grateful. Honest, Papa.

TYRONE [*touched, returns his hug*] You're welcome, lad.

MARY [*suddenly turns to them in a confused panic of frightened anger*] I won't have it! [*She stamps her foot.*] Do you hear, Edmund! Such morbid nonsense! Saying you're going to die! It's the books you read! Nothing but sadness and death! Your father shouldn't allow you to have them. And some of the poems you've written yourself are even worse! You'd think you didn't want to live! A boy of your age with everything before him! It's just a pose you get out of books! You're not really sick at all!

TYRONE Mary! Hold your tongue!

MARY [*instantly changing to a detached tone*] But, James, it's absurd of Edmund to be so gloomy and make such a great to-do about nothing. [*turning to EDMUND but avoiding his eyes—teasingly affectionate*] Never mind, dear. I'm on to you. [*She comes to him.*] You want to be petted and spoiled and made a fuss over, isn't that it? You're still such a baby. [*She puts her arm around him and hugs him. He remains rigid and unyielding. Her voice begins to tremble.*] But please don't carry it too far, dear. Don't say horrible things. I know it's foolish to take them seriously but I can't help it. You've got me—so frightened.

[*She breaks and hides her face on his shoulder, sobbing. EDMUND is moved in spite of himself. He pats her shoulder with an awkward tenderness.*]

EDMUND Don't, mother. [*His eyes meet his father's.*]

9. Shakespeare's *King Lear* 1.4.312.

TYRONE [*huskily—clutching at hopeless hope*] Maybe if you asked your mother now what you said you were going to—[*He fumbles with his watch.*] By God, look at the time! I'll have to shake a leg.

[*He hurries away through the front parlor. MARY lifts her head. Her manner is again one of detached motherly solicitude. She seems to have forgotten the tears which are still in her eyes.*]

MARY How do you feel, dear? [*She feels his forehead.*] Your head is a little hot, but that's just from going out in the sun. You look ever so much better than you did this morning. [*taking his hand*] Come and sit down. You mustn't stand on your feet so much. You must learn to husband your strength.

[*She gets him to sit and she sits sideways on the arm of his chair, an arm around his shoulder, so he cannot meet her eyes.*]

EDMUND [*starts to blurt out the appeal he now feels is quite hopeless*] Listen, Mama—

MARY [*interrupting quickly*] Now, now! Don't talk. Lean back and rest. [*persuasively*] You know, I think it would be much better for you if you stayed home this afternoon and let me take care of you. It's such a tiring trip uptown in the dirty old trolley on a hot day like this. I'm sure you'd be much better off here with me.

EDMUND [*dully*] You forget I have an appointment with Hardy. [*trying again to get his appeal started*] Listen, Mama—

MARY [*quickly*] You can telephone and say you don't feel well enough. [*excitedly*] It's simply a waste of time and money seeing him. He'll only tell you some lie. He'll pretend he's found something serious the matter because that's his bread and butter. [*She gives a hard sneering little laugh.*] The old idiot! All he knows about medicine is to look solemn and preach will power!

EDMUND [*trying to catch her eyes*] Mama! Please listen! I want to ask you something! You—You're only just started. You can still stop. You've got the will power! We'll all help you. I'll do anything! Won't you, Mama?

MARY [*stammers pleadingly*] Please don't—talk about things you don't understand!

EDMUND [*dully*] All right, I give up. I knew it was no use.

MARY [*in blank denial now*] Anyway, I don't know what you're referring to. But I do know you should be the last one—Right after I returned from the sanatorium, you began to be ill. The doctor there had warned me I must have peace at home with nothing to upset me, and all I've done is worry about you. [*then distractedly*] But that's no excuse! I'm only trying to explain. It's not an excuse! [*She hugs him to her—pleadingly*] Promise me, dear, you won't believe I made you an excuse.

EDMUND [*bitterly*] What else can I believe?

MARY [*slowly takes her arm away—her manner remote and objective again*] Yes, I suppose you can't help suspecting that.

EDMUND [*ashamed but still bitter*] What do you expect?

MARY Nothing, I don't blame you. How could you believe me—when I can't believe myself? I've become such a liar. I never lied about anything once upon a time. Now I have to lie, especially to myself. But how can you understand, when I don't myself. I've never understood anything about it, except that one day long ago I found I could no longer

call my soul my own. [*She pauses—then lowering her voice to a strange tone of whispered confidence*] But some day, dear, I will find it again—some day when you're all well, and I see you healthy and happy and successful, and I don't have to feel guilty any more—some day when the Blessed Virgin Mary forgives me and gives me back the faith in Her love and pity I used to have in my convent days, and I can pray to Her again—when She sees no one in the world can believe in me even for a moment any more, then She will believe in me, and with Her help it will be so easy. I will hear myself scream with agony, and at the same time I will laugh because I will be so sure of myself. [*then as EDMUND remains hopelessly silent, she adds sadly*] Of course, you can't believe that, either. [*She rises from the arm of his chair and goes to stare out the windows at right with her back to him—casually*] Now I think of it, you might as well go uptown. I forgot I'm taking a drive. I have to go to the drugstore. You would hardly want to go there with me. You'd be so ashamed.

EDMUND [*brokenly*] Mama! Don't!

MARY I suppose you'll divide that ten dollars your father gave you with Jamie. You always divide with each other, don't you? Like good sports. Well, I know what he'll do with his share. Get drunk someplace where he can be with the only kind of woman he understands or likes. [*She turns to him, pleading frightenedly*] Edmund! Promise me you won't drink! It's so dangerous! You know Doctor Hardy told you—

EDMUND [*bitterly*] I thought he was an old idiot. Anyway, by tonight, what will you care?

MARY [*pitifully*] Edmund!

[*JAMIE'S voice is heard from the front hall, "Come on, Kid, let's beat it."*
MARY'S manner at once becomes detached again.]

Go on, Edmund. Jamie's waiting. [*She goes to the front-parlor doorway.*]
 There comes your father downstairs, too.

[*TYRONE'S voice calls, "Come on, Edmund."*]

EDMUND [*jumping up from his chair*] I'm coming.
 [*He stops beside her—without looking at her.*]

Goodbye, Mama.

MARY [*kisses him with detached affection*] Goodbye, dear. If you're coming home for dinner, try not to be late. And tell your father. You know what Bridget is.

[*He turns and hurries away. TYRONE calls from the hall, "Goodbye, Mary," and then JAMIE, "Goodbye, Mama." She calls back*]

Goodbye. [*The front screen door is heard closing after them. She comes and stands by the table, one hand drumming on it, the other fluttering up to pat her hair. She stares about the room with frightened, forsaken eyes and whispers to herself.*] It's so lonely here. [*Then her face hardens into bitter self-contempt.*] You're lying to yourself again. You wanted to get rid of them. Their contempt and disgust aren't pleasant company. You're glad they're gone. [*She gives a little despairing laugh.*] Then Mother of God, why do I feel so lonely?

CURTAIN

Act 3

SCENE—*The same. It is around half past six in the evening. Dusk is gathering in the living room, an early dusk due to the fog which has rolled in from the Sound and is like a white curtain drawn down outside the windows. From a lighthouse beyond the harbor's mouth, a foghorn is heard at regular intervals, moaning like a mournful whale in labor, and from the harbor itself, intermittently, comes the warning ringing of bells on yachts at anchor.*

The tray with the bottle of whiskey, glasses, and pitcher of ice water is on the table, as it was in the pre-luncheon scene of the previous act. MARY and the second girl, CATHLEEN, are discovered. The latter is standing at left of table. She holds an empty whiskey glass in her hand as if she'd forgotten she had it. She shows the effects of drink. Her stupid, good-humored face wears a pleased and flattered simper.

MARY is paler than before and her eyes shine with unnatural brilliance. The strange detachment in her manner has intensified. She has hidden deeper within herself and found refuge and release in a dream where present reality is but an appearance to be accepted and dismissed unfeelingly—even with a hard cynicism—or entirely ignored. There is at times an uncanny gay, free youthfulness in her manner, as if in spirit she were released to become again, simply and without self-consciousness, the naive, happy, chattering schoolgirl of her convent days. She wears the dress into which she had changed for her drive to town, a simple, fairly expensive affair, which would be extremely becoming if it were not for the careless, almost slovenly way she wears it. Her hair is no longer fastidiously in place. It has a slightly disheveled, lopsided look. She talks to CATHLEEN with a confiding familiarity, as if the second girl were an old, intimate friend. As the curtain rises, she is standing by the screen door looking out. A moan of the foghorn is heard.

MARY [*amused—girlishly*] That foghorn! Isn't it awful, Cathleen?

CATHLEEN [*talks more familiarly than usual but never with intentional impertinence because she sincerely likes her mistress*] It is indeed, Ma'am. It's like a banshee.

MARY [*Goes on as if she hadn't heard. In nearly all the following dialogue there is the feeling that she has CATHLEEN with her merely as an excuse to keep talking.*] I don't mind it tonight. Last night it drove me crazy. I lay awake worrying until I couldn't stand it any more.

CATHLEEN Bad cess to it.¹ I was scared out of my wits riding back from town. I thought that ugly monkey, Smythe, would drive us in a ditch or against a tree. You couldn't see your hand in front of you. I'm glad you had me sit in back with you, Ma'am. If I'd been in front with that monkey—He can't keep his dirty hands to himself. Give him half a chance and he's pinching me on the leg or you-know-where—asking your pardon, Ma'am, but it's true.

MARY [*dreamily*] It wasn't the fog I minded, Cathleen, I really love fog.

CATHLEEN They say it's good for the complexion.

1. Bad luck to it (Irish).

MARY It hides you from the world and the world from you. You feel that everything has changed, and nothing is what it seemed to be. No one can find or touch you any more.

CATHLEEN I wouldn't care so much if Smythe was a fine, handsome man like some chauffeurs I've seen—I mean, if it was all in fun, for I'm a decent girl. But for a shriveled runt like Smythe—! I've told him, you must think I'm hard up that I'd notice a monkey like you. I've warned him, one day I'll give a clout that'll knock him into next week. And so I will!

MARY It's the foghorn I hate. It won't let you alone. It keeps reminding you, and warning you, and calling you back. [*She smiles strangely.*] But it can't tonight. It's just an ugly sound. It doesn't remind me of anything. [*She gives a teasing, girlish laugh.*] Except, perhaps, Mr. Tyrone's snores. I've always had such fun teasing him about it. He has snored ever since I can remember, especially when he's had too much to drink, and yet he's like a child, he hates to admit it. [*She laughs, coming to the table.*] Well, I suppose I snore at times, too, and I don't like to admit it. So I have no right to make fun of him, have I? [*She sits in the rocker at right of table.*]

CATHLEEN Ah, sure, everybody healthy snores. It's a sign of sanity, they say. [*then, worriedly*] What time is it, Ma'am? I ought to go back in the kitchen. The damp is in Bridget's rheumatism and she's like a raging devil. She'll bite my head off.

[*She puts her glass on the table and makes a movement toward the back parlor.*]

MARY [*with a flash of apprehension*] No, don't go, Cathleen. I don't want to be alone, yet.

CATHLEEN You won't be for long. The Master and the boys will be home soon.

MARY I doubt if they'll come back for dinner. They have too good an excuse to remain in the barrooms where they feel at home.

[*CATHLEEN stares at her, stupidly puzzled. MARY goes on smilingly*]

Don't worry about Bridget. I'll tell her I kept you with me, and you can take a big drink of whiskey to her when you go. She won't mind then.

CATHLEEN [*grins—at her ease again*] No, Ma'am. That's the one thing can make her cheerful. She loves her drop.

MARY Have another drink yourself, if you wish, Cathleen.

CATHLEEN I don't know if I'd better, Ma'am. I can feel what I've had already. [*reaching for the bottle*] Well, maybe one more won't harm. [*She pours a drink.*] Here's your good health, Ma'am. [*She drinks without bothering about a chaser.*]

MARY [*dreamily*] I really did have good health once, Cathleen. But that was long ago.

CATHLEEN [*worried again*] The Master's sure to notice what's gone from the bottle. He has the eye of a hawk for that.

MARY [*amusedly*] Oh, we'll play Jamie's trick on him. Just measure a few drinks of water and pour them in.

CATHLEEN [*does this—with a silly giggle*] God save me, it'll be half water. He'll know by the taste.

MARY [*indifferently*] No, by the time he comes home he'll be too drunk to tell the difference. He has such a good excuse, he believes, to drown his sorrows.

CATHLEEN [*philosophically*] Well, it's a good man's failing. I wouldn't give a trauneen² for a teetotaler. They've no high spirits. [*then, stupidly puzzled*] Good excuse? You mean Master Edmund, Ma'am? I can tell the Master is worried about him.

MARY [*stiffens defensively—but in a strange way the reaction has a mechanical quality, as if it did not penetrate to real emotion*] Don't be silly, Cathleen. Why should he be? A touch of grippe is nothing. And Mr. Tyrone never is worried about anything, except money and property and the fear he'll end his days in poverty. I mean, deeply worried. Because he cannot really understand anything else. [*She gives a little laugh of detached, affectionate amusement.*] My husband is a very peculiar man, Cathleen.

CATHLEEN [*vaguely resentful*] Well, he's a fine, handsome, kind gentleman just the same, Ma'am. Never mind his weakness.

MARY Oh, I don't mind. I've loved him dearly for thirty-six years. That proves I know he's lovable at heart and can't help being what he is, doesn't it?

CATHLEEN [*hazily reassured*] That's right. Ma'am. Love him dearly, for any fool can see he worships the ground you walk on. [*fighting the effect of her last drink and trying to be soberly conversational*] Speaking of acting, Ma'am, how is it you never went on the stage?

MARY [*resentfully*] I? What put that absurd notion in your head? I was brought up in a respectable home and educated in the best convent in the Middle West. Before I met Mr. Tyrone I hardly knew there was such a thing as a theater. I was a very pious girl. I even dreamed of becoming a nun. I've never had the slightest desire to be an actress.

CATHLEEN [*bluntly*] Well, I can't imagine you a holy nun, Ma'am. Sure, you never darken the door of a church, God forgive you.

MARY [*ignores this*] I've never felt at home in the theater. Even though Mr. Tyrone has made me go with him on all his tours, I've had little to do with the people in his company, or with anyone on the stage. Not that I have anything against them. They have always been kind to me, and I to them. But I've never felt at home with them. Their life is not my life. It has always stood between me and—[*She gets up—abruptly*] But let's not talk of old things that couldn't be helped. [*She goes to the porch door and stares out.*] How thick the fog is. I can't see the road. All the people in the world could pass by and I would never know. I wish it was always that way. It's getting dark already. It will soon be night, thank goodness. [*She turns back—vaguely*] It was kind of you to keep me company this afternoon, Cathleen. I would have been lonely driving uptown alone.

CATHLEEN Sure, wouldn't I rather ride in a fine automobile than stay here and listen to Bridget's lies about her relations? It was like a vacation, Ma'am. [*She pauses—then stupidly*] There was only one thing I didn't like.

MARY [*vaguely*] What was that, Cathleen?

CATHLEEN The way the man in the drugstore acted when I took in the prescription for you. [*indignantly*] The impidence³ of him!

MARY [*with stubborn blankness*] What are you talking about? What drugstore? What prescription? [*then hastily, as CATHLEEN stares in stupid amazement*] Oh, of course, I'd forgotten. The medicine for the rheumatism in

2. Coin of very low value (Irish).

3. Impudence.

my hands. What did the man say? [*then with indifference*] Not that it matters, as long as he filled the prescription.

CATHLEEN It mattered to me, then! I'm not used to being treated like a thief. He gave me a long look and says insultingly, "Where did you get hold of this?" and I says, "It's none of your damned business, but if you must know, it's for the lady I work for, Mrs. Tyrone, who's sitting out in the automobile." That shut him up quick. He gave a look out at you and said, "Oh," and went to get the medicine.

MARY [*vaguely*] Yes, he knows me. [*She sits in the armchair at right rear of table. She adds in a calm, detached voice*] It's a special kind of medicine. I have to take it because there is no other that can stop the pain—all the pain—I mean, in my hands. [*She raises her hands and regards them with melancholy sympathy. There is no tremor in them now.*] Poor hands! You'd never believe it, but they were once one of my good points, along with my hair and eyes, and I had a fine figure, too. [*Her tone has become more and more far-off and dreamy.*] They were a musician's hands. I used to love the piano. I worked so hard at my music in the Convent—if you can call it work when you do something you love. Mother Elizabeth and my music teacher both said I had more talent than any student they remembered. My father paid for special lessons. He spoiled me. He would do anything I asked. He would have sent me to Europe to study after I graduated from the Convent. I might have gone—if I hadn't fallen in love with Mr. Tyrone. Or I might have become a nun. I had two dreams. To be a nun, that was the more beautiful one. To become a concert pianist, that was the other. [*She pauses, regarding her hands fixedly. CATHLEEN blinks her eyes to fight off drowsiness and a tipsy feeling.*] I haven't touched a piano in so many years. I couldn't play with such crippled fingers, even if I wanted to. For a time after my marriage I tried to keep up my music. But it was hopeless. One-night stands, cheap hotels, dirty trains, leaving children, never having a home—[*She stares at her hands with fascinated disgust.*] See, Cathleen, how ugly they are! So maimed and crippled! You would think they'd been through some horrible accident! [*She gives a strange little laugh.*] So they have, come to think of it. [*She suddenly thrusts her hands behind her back.*] I won't look at them. They're worse than the fog-horn for reminding me—[*then with defiant self-assurance*] But even they can't touch me now. [*She brings her hands from behind her back and deliberately stares at them—calmly*] They're far away. I see them, but the pain has gone.

CATHLEEN [*stupidly puzzled*] You've taken some of the medicine? It made you act funny, Ma'am. If I didn't know better, I'd think you'd a drop taken.

MARY [*dreamily*] It kills the pain. You go back until at last you are beyond its reach. Only the past when you were happy is real. [*She pauses—then as if her words had been an evocation which called back happiness she changes in her whole manner and facial expression. She looks younger. There is a quality of an innocent convent girl about her, and she smiles shyly.*] If you think Mr. Tyrone is handsome now, Cathleen, you should have seen him when I first met him. He had the reputation of being one of the best looking men in the country. The girls in the Convent who had seen him act, or seen his photographs, used to rave about him. He was a great matinee idol then, you know. Women used to wait at the stage door

just to see him come out. You can imagine how excited I was when my father wrote me he and James Tyrone had become friends, and that I was to meet him when I came home for Easter vacation. I showed the letter to all the girls, and how envious they were! My father took me to see him act first. It was a play about the French Revolution and the leading part was a nobleman. I couldn't take my eyes off him. I wept when he was thrown in prison—and then was so mad at myself because I was afraid my eyes and nose would be red. My father had said we'd go backstage to his dressing room right after the play, and so we did. [*She gives a little excited, shy laugh.*] I was so bashful all I could do was stammer and blush like a little fool. But he didn't seem to think I was a fool. I know he liked me the first moment we were introduced. [*coquettishly*] I guess my eyes and nose couldn't have been red, after all. I was really very pretty then, Cathleen. And he was handsomer than my wildest dream, in his make-up and his nobleman's costume that was so becoming to him. He was different from all ordinary men, like someone from another world. At the same time he was simple, and kind, and unassuming, not a bit stuck-up or vain. I fell in love right then. So did he, he told me afterwards. I forgot all about becoming a nun or a concert pianist. All I wanted was to be his wife. [*She pauses, staring before her with unnaturally bright, dreamy eyes, and a rapt, tender, girlish smile.*] Thirty-six years ago, but I can see it as clearly as if it were tonight! We've loved each other ever since. And in all those thirty-six years, there has never been a breath of scandal about him. I mean, with any other woman. Never since he met me. That has made me very happy, Cathleen. It has made me forgive so many other things.

CATHLEEN [*fighting tipsy drowsiness—sentimentally*] He's a fine gentleman and you're a lucky woman. [*then, fidgeting*] Can I take the drink to Bridget, Ma'am? It must be near dinnertime and I ought to be in the kitchen helping her. If she don't get something to quiet her temper, she'll be after me with the cleaver.

MARY [*with a vague exasperation at being brought back from her dream*] Yes, yes, go. I don't need you now.

CATHLEEN [*with relief*] Thank you, Ma'am. [*She pours out a big drink and starts for the back parlor with it.*] You won't be alone long. The Master and the boys—

MARY [*impatiently*] No, no, they won't come. Tell Bridget I won't wait. You can serve dinner promptly at half past six. I'm not hungry but I'll sit at the table and we'll get it over with.

CATHLEEN You ought to eat something, Ma'am. It's a queer medicine if it takes away your appetite.

MARY [*has begun to drift into dreams again—reacts mechanically*] What medicine? I don't know what you mean. [*in dismissal*] You better take the drink to Bridget.

CATHLEEN Yes, Ma'am.

[She disappears through the back parlor. MARY waits until she hears the pantry door close behind her. Then she settles back in relaxed dreaminess, staring fixedly at nothing. Her arms rest limply along the arms of the chair, her hands with long, warped, swollen-knuckled, sensitive fingers drooping in complete calm. It is growing dark in the room. There is a pause of dead quiet. Then from the world outside comes the melancholy

moan of the foghorn, followed by a chorus of bells, muffled by the fog, from the anchored craft in the harbor. MARY's face gives no sign she has heard, but her hands jerk and the fingers automatically play for a moment on the air. She frowns and shakes her head mechanically as if a fly had walked across her mind. She suddenly loses all the girlish quality and is an aging, cynically sad, embittered woman.]

MARY [*bitterly*] You're a sentimental fool. What is so wonderful about that first meeting between a silly romantic schoolgirl and a matinee idol? You were much happier before you knew he existed, in the Convent when you used to pray to the Blessed Virgin. [*longingly*] If I could only find the faith I lost, so I could pray again! [*She pauses—then begins to recite the Hail Mary in a flat, empty tone.*] "Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with Thee; blessed art Thou among women." [*sneeringly*] You expect the Blessed Virgin to be fooled by a lying dope fiend reciting words! You can't hide from her! [*She springs to her feet. Her hands fly up to pat her hair distractedly.*] I must go upstairs. I haven't taken enough. When you start again you never know exactly how much you need. [*She goes toward the front parlor—then stops in the doorway as she hears the sound of voices from the front path. She starts guiltily.*] That must be them—[*She hurries back to sit down. Her face sets in stubborn defensiveness—resentfully*] Why are they coming back? They don't want to. And I'd much rather be alone. [*Suddenly her whole manner changes. She becomes pathetically relieved and eager.*] Oh, I'm so glad they've come! I've been so horribly lonely!

[*The front door is heard closing and TYRONE calls uneasily from the hall.*]

TYRONE Are you there, Mary?

[*The light in the hall is turned on and shines through the front parlor to fall on MARY.*]

MARY [*rises from her chair, her face lighting up lovingly—with excited eagerness*] I'm here, dear. In the living room. I've been waiting for you.

[*TYRONE comes in through the front parlor. EDMUND is behind him. TYRONE has had a lot to drink but beyond a slightly glazed look in his eyes and a trace of blur in his speech, he does not show it. EDMUND has also had more than a few drinks without much apparent effect, except that his sunken cheeks are flushed and his eyes look bright and feverish. They stop in the doorway to stare appraisingly at her. What they see fulfills their worst expectations. But for the moment MARY is unconscious of their condemning eyes. She kisses her husband and then EDMUND. Her manner is unnaturally effusive. They submit shrinkingly. She talks excitedly.*]

I'm so happy you've come. I had given up hope. I was afraid you wouldn't come home. It's such a dismal, foggy evening. It must be much more cheerful in the barrooms uptown, where there are people you can talk and joke with. No, don't deny it. I know how you feel. I don't blame you a bit. I'm all the more grateful to you for coming home. I was sitting here so lonely and blue. Come and sit down.

[*She sits at left rear of table, EDMUND at left of table, and TYRONE in the rocker at right of it.*]

Dinner won't be ready for a minute. You're actually a little early. Will wonders never cease. Here's the whiskey, dear. Shall I pour a drink for you? [*Without waiting for a reply she does so.*] And you, Edmund? I don't

want to encourage you, but one before dinner, as an appetizer, can't do any harm.

[She pours a drink for him. They make no move to take the drinks. She talks on as if unaware of their silence.]

Where's Jamie? But, of course, he'll never come home so long as he has the price of a drink left. *[She reaches out and clasps her husband's hand—sadly]* I'm afraid Jamie has been lost to us for a long time, dear. *[Her face hardens.]* But we mustn't allow him to drag Edmund down with him, as he'd like to do. He's jealous because Edmund has always been the baby—just as he used to be of Eugene. He'll never be content until he makes Edmund as hopeless a failure as he is.

EDMUND *[miserably]* Stop talking, Mama.

TYRONE *[dully]* Yes, Mary, the less you say now—*[then to Edmund, a bit tipsily]* All the same there's truth in your mother's warning. Beware of that brother of yours, or he'll poison life for you with his damned sneering serpent's tongue!

EDMUND *[as before]* Oh, cut it out, Papa.

MARY *[goes on as if nothing had been said]* It's hard to believe, seeing Jamie as he is now, that he was ever my baby. Do you remember what a healthy, happy baby he was, James? The one-night stands and filthy trains and cheap hotels and bad food never made him cross or sick. He was always smiling or laughing. He hardly ever cried. Eugene was the same, too, happy and healthy, during the two years he lived before I let him die through my neglect.

TYRONE Oh, for the love of God! I'm a fool for coming home!

EDMUND Papa! Shut up!

MARY *[smiles with detached tenderness at EDMUND]* It was Edmund who was the crosspatch when he was little, always getting upset and frightened about nothing at all. *[She pats his hand—teasingly]* Everyone used to say, dear, you'd cry at the drop of a hat.

EDMUND *[cannot control his bitterness]* Maybe I guessed there was a good reason not to laugh.

TYRONE *[reproving and pitying]* Now, now, lad. You know better than to pay attention—

MARY *[as if she hadn't heard—sadly again]* Who would have thought Jamie would grow up to disgrace us. You remember, James, for years after he went to boarding school, we received such glowing reports. Everyone liked him. All his teachers told us what a fine brain he had, and how easily he learned his lessons. Even after he began to drink and they had to expel him, they wrote us how sorry they were, because he was so likable and such a brilliant student. They predicted a wonderful future for him if he would only learn to take life seriously. *[She pauses—then adds with a strange, sad detachment]* It's such a pity. Poor Jamie! It's hard to understand—*[Abruptly a change comes over her. Her face hardens and she stares at her husband with accusing hostility.]* No, it isn't at all. You brought him up to be a boozier. Since he first opened his eyes, he's seen you drinking. Always a bottle on the bureau in the cheap hotel rooms! And if he had a nightmare when he was little, or a stomach-ache, your remedy was to give him a teaspoonful of whiskey to quiet him.

TYRONE [*stung*] So I'm to blame because that lazy hulk has made a drunken loafer of himself? Is that what I came home to listen to? I might have known! When you have the poison in you, you want to blame everyone but yourself!

EDMUND Papa! You told me not to pay attention. [*then, resentfully*] Anyway it's true. You did the same thing with me. I can remember that teaspoonful of booze every time I woke up with a nightmare.

MARY [*in a detached reminiscent tone*] Yes, you were continually having nightmares as a child. You were born afraid. Because I was so afraid to bring you into the world. [*She pauses—then goes on with the same detachment*] Please don't think I blame your father, Edmund. He didn't know any better. He never went to school after he was ten. His people were the most ignorant kind of poverty-stricken Irish. I'm sure they honestly believed whiskey is the healthiest medicine for a child who is sick or frightened.

[*TYRONE is about to burst out in angry defense of his family but EDMUND intervenes.*]

EDMUND [*sharply*] Papa! [*changing the subject*] Are we going to have this drink, or aren't we?

TYRONE [*controlling himself—dully*] You're right. I'm a fool to take notice. [*He picks up his glass listlessly.*] Drink hearty, lad.

[*EDMUND drinks but TYRONE remains staring at the glass in his hand. EDMUND at once realizes how much the whiskey has been watered. He frowns, glancing from the bottle to his mother—starts to say something but stops.*]

MARY [*in a changed tone—repentantly*] I'm sorry if I sounded bitter, James. I'm not. It's all so far away. But I did feel a little hurt when you wished you hadn't come home. I was so relieved and happy when you came, and grateful to you. It's very dreary and sad to be here alone in the fog with night falling.

TYRONE [*moved*] I'm glad I came, Mary, when you act like your real self.

MARY I was so lonesome I kept Cathleen with me just to have someone to talk to. [*Her manner and quality drift back to the shy convent girl again.*] Do you know what I was telling her, dear? About the night my father took me to your dressing room and I first fell in love with you. Do you remember?

TYRONE [*deeply moved—his voice husky*] Can you think I'd ever forget, Mary?

[*EDMUND looks away from them, sad and embarrassed.*]

MARY [*tenderly*] No. I know you still love me, James, in spite of everything.

TYRONE [*His face works and he blinks back tears—with quiet intensity*]

Yes! As God is my judge! Always and forever, Mary!

MARY And I love you, dear, in spite of everything.

[*There is a pause in which EDMUND moves embarrassedly. The strange detachment comes over her manner again as if she were speaking impersonally of people seen from a distance.*]

But I must confess, James, although I couldn't help loving you, I would never have married you if I'd known you drank so much. I remember the first night your barroom friends had to help you up to the door of

our hotel room, and knocked and then ran away before I came to the door. We were still on our honeymoon, do you remember?

TYRONE [*with guilty vehemence*] I don't remember! It wasn't on our honeymoon! And I never in my life had to be helped to bed, or missed a performance!

MARY [*as though he hadn't spoken*] I had waited in that ugly hotel room hour after hour. I kept making excuses for you. I told myself it must be some business connected with the theater. I knew so little about the theater. Then I became terrified. I imagined all sorts of horrible accidents. I got on my knees and prayed that nothing had happened to you—and then they brought you up and left you outside the door. [*She gives a little, sad sigh.*] I didn't know how often that was to happen in the years to come, how many times I was to wait in ugly hotel rooms. I became quite used to it.

EDMUND [*bursts out with a look of accusing hate at his father*] Christ! No wonder—! [*He controls himself—gruffly*] When is dinner, Mama? It must be time.

TYRONE [*overwhelmed by shame which he tries to hide, fumbles with his watch*] Yes. It must be. Let's see. [*He stares at his watch without seeing it—pleadingly*] Mary! Can't you forget—?

MARY [*with detached pity*] No, dear. But I forgive. I always forgive you. So don't look so guilty. I'm sorry I remembered out loud. I don't want to be sad, or to make you sad. I want to remember only the happy part of the past. [*Her manner drifts back to the shy, gay convent girl.*] Do you remember our wedding, dear? I'm sure you've completely forgotten what my wedding gown looked like. Men don't notice such things. They don't think they're important. But it was important to me, I can tell you! How I fussed and worried! I was so excited and happy! My father told me to buy anything I wanted and never mind what it cost. The best is none too good, he said. I'm afraid he spoiled me dreadfully. My mother didn't. She was very pious and strict. I think she was a little jealous. She didn't approve of my marrying—especially an actor. I think she hoped I would become a nun. She used to scold my father. She'd grumble, "You never tell me, never mind what it costs, when I buy anything! You've spoiled that girl so, I pity her husband if she ever marries. She'll expect him to give her the moon. She'll never make a good wife." [*She laughs affectionately.*] Poor mother! [*She smiles at TYRONE with a strange, incongruous coquetry.*] But she was mistaken, wasn't she, James? I haven't been such a bad wife, have I?

TYRONE [*huskily, trying to force a smile*] I'm not complaining, Mary.

MARY [*a shadow of vague guilt crosses her face*] At least, I've loved you dearly, and done the best I could—under the circumstances. [*The shadow vanishes and her shy, girlish expression returns.*] That wedding gown was nearly the death of me and the dressmaker, too! [*She laughs.*] I was so particular. It was never quite good enough. At last she said she refused to touch it any more or she might spoil it, and I made her leave so I could be alone to examine myself in the mirror. I was so pleased and vain. I thought to myself, "Even if your nose and mouth and ears are a trifle too large, your eyes and hair and figure, and your hands, make up for it. You're just as pretty as any actress he's ever met, and you don't have to use

paint." [*She pauses, wrinkling her brow in an effort of memory.*] Where is my wedding gown now, I wonder? I kept it wrapped up in tissue paper in my trunk. I used to hope I would have a daughter and when it came time for her to marry—She couldn't have bought a lovelier gown, and I knew, James, you'd never tell her, never mind the cost. You'd want her to pick up something at a bargain. It was made of soft, shimmering satin, trimmed with wonderful old duchesse lace, in tiny ruffles around the neck and sleeves, and worked in with the folds that were draped round in a bustle effect at the back. The basque⁴ was boned and very tight. I remember I held my breath when it was fitted, so my waist would be as small as possible. My father even let me have duchesse lace on my white satin slippers, and lace with orange blossoms in my veil. Oh, how I loved that gown! It was so beautiful! Where is it now, I wonder? I used to take it out from time to time when I was lonely, but it always made me cry, so finally a long while ago—[*She wrinkles her forehead again.*] I wonder where I hid it? Probably in one of the old trunks in the attic. Some day I'll have to look.

[*She stops, staring before her. TYRONE sighs, shaking his head hopelessly, and attempts to catch his son's eye, looking for sympathy, but EDMUND is staring at the floor.*]

TYRONE [*forces a casual tone*] Isn't it dinner time, dear? [*with a feeble attempt at teasing*] You're forever scolding me for being late, but now I'm on time for once, it's dinner that's late.

[*She doesn't appear to hear him. He adds, still pleasantly*]

Well, if I can't eat yet, I can drink. I'd forgotten I had this.

[*He drinks his drink. EDMUND watches him. TYRONE scowls and looks at his wife with sharp suspicion—roughly*]

Who's been tampering with my whiskey? The damned stuff is half water! Jamie's been away and he wouldn't overdo his trick like this, anyway. Any fool could tell—Mary, answer me! [*with angry disgust*] I hope to God you haven't taken to drink on top of—

EDMUND Shut up, Papa! [*to his mother, without looking at her*] You treated Cathleen and Bridget, isn't that it, Mama?

MARY [*with indifferent casualness*] Yes, of course. They work hard for poor wages. And I'm the housekeeper, I have to keep them from leaving. Besides, I wanted to treat Cathleen because I had her drive uptown with me, and sent her to get my prescription filled.

EDMUND For God's sake, Mama! You can't trust her! Do you want everyone on earth to know?

MARY [*her face hardening stubbornly*] Know what? That I suffer from rheumatism in my hands and have to take medicine to kill the pain? Why should I be ashamed of that? [*turns on EDMUND with a hard, accusing antagonism—almost a revengeful enmity*] I never knew what rheumatism was before you were born! Ask your father!

[*EDMUND looks away, shrinking into himself.*]

TYRONE Don't mind her, lad. It doesn't mean anything. When she gets to the stage where she gives the old crazy excuse about her hands she's gone far away from us.

4. Tight-fitting bodice.

MARY [*turns on him—with a strangely triumphant, taunting smile*] I'm glad you realize that, James! Now perhaps you'll give up trying to remind me, you and Edmund! [*abruptly, in a detached, matter-of-fact tone*] Why don't you light the light, James? It's getting dark. I know you hate to, but Edmund has proved to you that one bulb burning doesn't cost much. There's no sense letting your fear of the poorhouse make you too stingy.

TYRONE [*reacts mechanically*] I never claimed one bulb cost much! It's having them on, one here and one there, that makes the Electric Light Company rich. [*He gets up and turns on the reading lamp—roughly*] But I'm a fool to talk reason to you. [*to EDMUND*] I'll get a fresh bottle of whiskey, lad, and we'll have a real drink. [*He goes through the back parlor.*]

MARY [*with detached amusement*] He'll sneak around to the outside cellar door so the servants won't see him. He's really ashamed of keeping his whiskey padlocked in the cellar. Your father is a strange man, Edmund. It took many years before I understood him. You must try to understand and forgive him, too, and not feel contempt because he's close-fisted. His father deserted his mother and their six children a year or so after they came to America. He told them he had a premonition he would die soon, and he was homesick for Ireland, and wanted to go back there to die. So he went and he did die. He must have been a peculiar man, too. Your father had to go to work in a machine shop when he was only ten years old.

EDMUND [*protests dully*] Oh, for Pete's sake, Mama. I've heard Papa tell that machine shop story ten thousand times.

MARY Yes, dear, you've had to listen, but I don't think you've ever tried to understand.

EDMUND [*ignoring this—miserably*] Listen, Mama! You're not so far gone yet you've forgotten everything. You haven't asked me what I found out this afternoon. Don't you care a damn?

MARY [*shakenly*] Don't say that! You hurt me, dear!

EDMUND What I've got is serious, Mama. Doc Hardy knows for sure now.

MARY [*stiffens into scornful, defensive stubbornness*] That lying old quack! I warned you he'd invent—!

EDMUND [*miserably dogged*] He called in a specialist to examine me, so he'd be absolutely sure.

MARY [*ignoring this*] Don't tell me about Hardy! If you heard what the doctor at the sanatorium, who really knows something, said about how he'd treated me! He said he ought to be locked up! He said it was a wonder I hadn't gone mad! I told him I had once, that time I ran down in my nightdress to throw myself off the dock. You remember that, don't you? And yet you want me to pay attention to what Doctor Hardy says. Oh, no!

EDMUND [*bitterly*] I remember, all right. It was right after that Papa and Jamie decided they couldn't hide it from me any more. Jamie told me. I called him a liar! I tried to punch him in the nose. But I knew he wasn't lying. [*His voice trembles, his eyes begin to fill with tears.*] God, it made everything in life seem rotten!

MARY [*pitiably*] Oh, don't. My baby! You hurt me so dreadfully!

EDMUND [*dully*] I'm sorry, Mama. It was you who brought it up. [*then with a bitter, stubborn persistence*] Listen, Mama. I'm going to tell you whether you want to hear or not. I've got to go to a sanatorium.

MARY [*dazedly, as if this was something that had never occurred to her*] Go away? [*violently*] No! I won't have it! How dare Doctor Hardy advise such a thing without consulting me! How dare your father allow him! What right has he? You are my baby! Let him attend to Jamie! [*more and more excited and bitter*] I know why he wants you sent to a sanatorium. To take you from me! He's always tried to do that. He's been jealous of every one of my babies! He kept finding ways to make me leave them. That's what caused Eugene's death. He's been jealous of you most of all. He knew I loved you most because—

EDMUND [*miserably*] Oh, stop talking crazy, can't you, Mama! Stop trying to blame him. And why are you so against my going away now? I've been away a lot, and I've never noticed it broke your heart!

MARY [*bitterly*] I'm afraid you're not very sensitive, after all. [*sadly*] You might have guessed, dear, that after I knew you knew—about me—I had to be glad whenever you were where you couldn't see me.

EDMUND [*brokenly*] Mama! Don't! [*He reaches out blindly and takes her hand—but he drops it immediately, overcome by bitterness again.*] All this talk about loving me—and you won't even listen when I try to tell you how sick—

MARY [*with an abrupt transformation into a detached bullying motherliness*] Now, now. That's enough! I don't care to hear because I know it's nothing but Hardy's ignorant lies.

[*He shrinks back into himself. She keeps on in a forced, teasing tone but with an increasing undercurrent of resentment.*]

You're so like your father, dear. You love to make a scene out of nothing so you can be dramatic and tragic. [*with a belittling laugh*] If I gave you the slightest encouragement, you'd tell me next you were going to die—

EDMUND People do die of it. Your own father—

MARY [*sharply*] Why do you mention him? There's no comparison at all with you. He had consumption. [*angrily*] I hate you when you become gloomy and morbid! I forbid you to remind me of my father's death, do you hear me?

EDMUND [*his face hard—grimly*] Yes, I hear you, Mama. I wish to God I didn't! [*He gets up from his chair and stands staring condemningly at her—bitterly*] It's pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother!

[*She winces—all life seeming to drain from her face, leaving it with the appearance of a plaster cast. Instantly EDMUND wishes he could take back what he has said. He stammers miserably.*]

Forgive me, Mama. I was angry. You hurt me.

[*There is a pause in which the foghorn and the ships' bells are heard.*]

MARY [*goes slowly to the windows at right like an automaton—looking out, a blank, far-off quality in her voice*] Just listen to that awful foghorn. And the bells. Why is it fog makes everything sound so sad and lost, I wonder?

EDMUND [*brokenly*] I—I can't stay here. I don't want any dinner.

[*He hurries away through the front parlor. She keeps staring out the window until she hears the front door close behind him. Then she comes back and sits in her chair, the same blank look on her face.*]

MARY [*vaguely*] I must go upstairs. I haven't taken enough. [*She pauses—then longingly*] I hope, sometime, without meaning it, I will take an overdose. I never could do it deliberately. The Blessed Virgin would never forgive me, then.

[*She hears TYRONE returning and turns as he comes in, through the back parlor, with a bottle of whiskey he has just uncorked. He is fuming.*]

TYRONE [*wrathfully*] The padlock is all scratched. That drunken loafer has tried to pick the lock with a piece of wire, the way he's done before. [*with satisfaction, as if this was a perpetual battle of wits with his elder son*] But I've fooled him this time. It's a special padlock a professional burglar couldn't pick. [*He puts the bottle on the tray and suddenly is aware of EDMUND'S absence.*] Where's Edmund?

MARY [*with a vague far-away air*] He went out. Perhaps he's going uptown again to find Jamie. He still has some money left, I suppose, and it's burning a hole in his pocket. He said he didn't want any dinner. He doesn't seem to have any appetite these days. [*then stubbornly*] But it's just a summer cold.

[*TYRONE stares at her and shakes his head helplessly and pours himself a big drink and drinks it. Suddenly it is too much for her and she breaks out and sobs.*]

Oh, James, I'm so frightened! [*She gets up and throws her arms around him and hides her face on his shoulder—sobbingly*] I know he's going to die!

TYRONE Don't say that! It's not true! They promised me in six months he'd be cured.

MARY You don't believe that! I can tell when you're acting! And it will be my fault. I should never have borne him. It would have been better for his sake. I could never hurt him then. He wouldn't have had to know his mother was a dope fiend—and hate her!

TYRONE [*his voice quivering*] Hush, Mary, for the love of God! He loves you. He knows it was a curse put on you without your knowing or willing it. He's proud you're his mother! [*abruptly as he hears the pantry door opening*] Hush, now! Here comes Cathleen. You don't want her to see you crying.

[*She turns quickly away from him to the windows at right, hastily wiping her eyes. A moment later CATHLEEN appears in the back-parlor doorway. She is uncertain in her walk and grinning woozily.*]

CATHLEEN [*starts guiltily when she sees TYRONE—with dignity*] Dinner is served, Sir. [*raising her voice unnecessarily*] Dinner is served, Ma'am. [*She forgets her dignity and addresses TYRONE with good-natured familiarity*] So you're here, are you? Well, well. Won't Bridget be in a rage! I told her the Madame said you wouldn't be home. [*then reading accusation in his eye*] Don't be looking at me that way. If I've a drop taken, I didn't steal it. I was invited.

[*She turns with huffy dignity and disappears through the back parlor.*]

TYRONE [*sighs—then summoning his actor's heartiness*] Come along, dear. Let's have our dinner. I'm hungry as a hunter.

MARY [*comes to him—her face is composed in plaster again and her tone is remote*] I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me, James. I couldn't possibly

eat anything. My hands pain me dreadfully. I think the best thing for me is to go to bed and rest. Good night dear.

[She kisses him mechanically and turns toward the front parlor.]

TYRONE *[harshly]* Up to take more of that God-damned poison, is that it? You'll be like a mad ghost before the night's over!

MARY *[starts to walk away—blankly]* I don't know what you're talking about, James. You say such mean, bitter things when you've drunk too much. You're as bad as Jamie or Edmund.

[She moves off through the front parlor. He stands a second as if not knowing what to do. He is a sad, bewildered, broken old man. He walks wearily off through the back parlor toward the dining room.]

CURTAIN

Act 4

SCENE—*The same. It is around midnight. The lamp in the front hall has been turned out, so that now no light shines through the front parlor. In the living room only the reading lamp on the table is lighted. Outside the windows the wall of fog appears denser than ever. As the curtain rises, the foghorn is heard, followed by the ships' bells from the harbor.*

TYRONE *is seated at the table. He wears his pince-nez⁵ and is playing solitaire. He has taken off his coat and has on an old brown dressing gown. The whiskey bottle on the tray is three-quarters empty. There is a fresh full bottle on the table, which he has brought from the cellar so there will be an ample reserve on hand. He is drunk and shows it by the owlish, deliberate manner in which he peers at each card to make certain of its identity, and then plays it as if he wasn't certain of his aim. His eyes have a misted, oily look and his mouth is slack. But despite all the whiskey in him, he has not escaped, and he looks as he appeared at the close of the preceding act, a sad, defeated old man, possessed by hopeless resignation.*

As the curtain rises, he finishes a game and sweeps the cards together. He shuffles them clumsily, dropping a couple on the floor. He retrieves them with difficulty, and starts to shuffle again, when he hears someone entering the front door. He peers over his pince-nez through the front parlor.

TYRONE *[his voice thick]* Who's that? Is it you, Edmund?

[EDMUND's voice answers curtly, "Yes." Then he evidently collides with something in the dark hall and can be heard cursing. A moment later the hall lamp is turned on. TYRONE frowns and calls.]

Turn that light out before you come in.

[But EDMUND doesn't. He comes in through the front parlor. He is drunk now, too, but like his father he carries it well, and gives little physical sign of it except in his eyes and a chip-on-the-shoulder aggressiveness in his manner. TYRONE speaks, at first with a warm, relieved welcome.]

I'm glad you've come, lad. I've been damned lonely. *[then resentfully]* You're a fine one to run away and leave me to sit alone here all night when you know—*[with sharp irritation]* I told you to turn out that light! We're

5. Eyeglasses clipped to the nose.

not giving a ball. There's no reason to have the house ablaze with electricity at this time of night, burning up money!

EDMUND [*angrily*] Ablaze with electricity! One bulb! Hell, everyone keeps a light on in the front hall until they go to bed. [*He rubs his knee.*] I damned near busted my knee on the hat stand.

TYRONE The light from here shows in the hall. You could see your way well enough if you were sober.

EDMUND If I was sober? I like that!

TYRONE I don't give a damn what other people do. If they want to be wasteful fools, for the sake of show, let them be!

EDMUND One bulb! Christ, don't be such a cheap skate! I've proved by figures if you left the light bulb on all night it wouldn't be as much as one drink!

TYRONE To hell with your figures! The proof is in the bills I have to pay!

EDMUND [*sits down opposite his father—contemptuously*] Yes, facts don't mean a thing, do they? What you want to believe, that's the only truth! [*derisively*] Shakespeare was an Irish Catholic, for example.

TYRONE [*stubbornly*] So he was. The proof is in his plays.

EDMUND Well he wasn't, and there's no proof of it in his plays, except to you! [*jeeringly*] The Duke of Wellington, there was another good Irish Catholic!

TYRONE I never said he was a good one. He was a renegade but a Catholic just the same.

EDMUND Well, he wasn't. You just want to believe no one but an Irish Catholic general could beat Napoleon.

TYRONE I'm not going to argue with you. I asked you to turn out that light in the hall.

EDMUND I heard you, and as far as I'm concerned it stays on.

TYRONE None of your damned insolence! Are you going to obey me or not?

EDMUND Not! If you want to be a crazy miser put it out yourself!

TYRONE [*with threatening anger*] Listen to me! I've put up with a lot from you because from the mad things you've done at times I've thought you weren't quite right in your head. I've excused you and never lifted my hand to you. But there's a straw that breaks the camel's back. You'll obey me and put out that light or, big as you are, I'll give you a thrashing that'll teach you—! [*Suddenly he remembers EDMUND's illness and instantly becomes guilty and shamefaced.*] Forgive me, lad. I forgot—You shouldn't goad me into losing my temper.

EDMUND [*ashamed himself now*] Forget it, Papa. I apologize, too. I had no right being nasty about nothing. I am a bit soused, I guess. I'll put out the damned light. [*He starts to get up.*]

TYRONE No, stay where you are. Let it burn.

[*He stands up abruptly—and a bit drunkenly—and begins turning on the three bulbs in the chandelier, with a childish, bitterly dramatic self-pity.*]

We'll have them all on! Let them burn! To hell with them! The poor-house is the end of the road, and it might as well be sooner as later! [*He finishes turning on the lights.*]

EDMUND [*has watched this proceeding with an awakened sense of humor—now he grins, teasing affectionately*] That's a grand curtain. [*He laughs.*] You're a wonder, Papa.

TYRONE [*sits down sheepishly—grumbles pathetically*] That's right, laugh at the old fool! The poor old ham! But the final curtain will be in the poorhouse just the same, and that's not comedy! [*Then as EDMUND is still grinning, he changes the subject.*] Well, well, let's not argue. You've got brains in that head of yours, though you do your best to deny them. You'll live to learn the value of a dollar. You're not like your damned tramp of a brother. I've given up hope he'll ever get sense. Where is he, by the way?

EDMUND How would I know?

TYRONE I thought you'd gone back uptown to meet him.

EDMUND No. I walked out to the beach. I haven't seen him since this afternoon.

TYRONE Well, if you split the money I gave you with him, like a fool—

EDMUND Sure I did. He's always staked me when he had anything.

TYRONE Then it doesn't take a soothsayer to tell he's probably in the whorehouse.

EDMUND What of it if he is? Why not?

TYRONE [*contemptuously*] Why not, indeed. It's the fit place for him. If he's ever had a loftier dream than whores and whiskey, he's never shown it.

EDMUND Oh, for Pete's sake, Papa! If you're going to start that stuff, I'll beat it. [*He starts to get up.*]

TYRONE [*placatingly*] All right, all right, I'll stop. God knows, I don't like the subject either. Will you join me in a drink?

EDMUND Ah! Now you're talking!

TYRONE [*passes the bottle to him—mechanically*] I'm wrong to treat you. You've had enough already.

EDMUND [*pouring a big drink—a bit drunkenly*] Enough is *not* as good as a feast. [*He hands back the bottle.*]

TYRONE It's too much in your condition.

EDMUND Forget my condition! [*He raises his glass.*] Here's how.

TYRONE Drink hearty. [*They drink.*] If you walked all the way to the beach you must be damp and chilled.

EDMUND Oh, I dropped in at the Inn on the way out and back.

TYRONE It's not a night I'd pick for a long walk.

EDMUND I loved the fog. It was what I needed. [*He sounds more tipsy and looks it.*]

TYRONE You should have more sense than to risk—

EDMUND To hell with sense! We're all crazy. What do we want with sense? [*He quotes from Dowson⁶ sardonically.*]

“They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
Love and desire and hate:
I think they have no portion in us after
We pass the gate.

6. Ernest Dowson (1867–1900), English poet.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
 Out of a misty dream
 Our path emerges for a while, then closes
 Within a dream."

[*staring before him*] The fog was where I wanted to be. Halfway down the path you can't see this house. You'd never know it was here. Or any of the other places down the avenue. I couldn't see but a few feet ahead. I didn't meet a soul. Everything looked and sounded unreal. Nothing was what it is. That's what I wanted—to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself. Out beyond the harbor, where the road runs along the beach, I even lost the feeling of being on land. The fog and the sea seemed part of each other. It was like walking on the bottom of the sea. As if I had drowned long ago. As if I was a ghost belonging to the fog, and the fog was the ghost of the sea. It felt damned peaceful to be nothing more than a ghost within a ghost. [*He sees his father staring at him with mingled worry and irritated disapproval. He grins mockingly.*] Don't look at me as if I'd gone nutty. I'm talking sense. Who wants to see life as it is, if they can help it? It's the three Gorgons⁷ in one. You look in their faces and turn to stone. Or it's Pan.⁸ You see him and you die—that is, inside you—and have to go on living as a ghost.

TYRONE [*impressed and at the same time revolted*] You have a poet in you but it's a damned morbid one! [*forcing a smile*] Devil take your pessimism. I feel low-spirited enough. [*He sighs.*] Why can't you remember your Shakespeare and forget the third-raters. You'll find what you're trying to say in him—as you'll find everything else worth saying. [*He quotes, using his fine voice*] "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep."⁹

EDMUND [*ironically*] Fine! That's beautiful. But I wasn't trying to say that. We are such stuff as manure is made on, so let's drink up and forget it. That's more my idea.

TYRONE [*disgustedly*] Ach! Keep such sentiments to yourself. I shouldn't have given you that drink.

EDMUND It did pack a wallop, all right. On you, too. [*He grins with affectionate teasing.*] Even if you've never missed a performance! [*aggressively*] Well, what's wrong with being drunk? It's what we're after, isn't it? Let's not kid each other, Papa. Not tonight. We know what we're trying to forget. [*hurriedly*] But let's not talk about it. It's no use now.

TYRONE [*dully*] No. All we can do is try to be resigned—again.

EDMUND Or be so drunk you can forget. [*He recites, and recites well, with bitter, ironical passion, the Symons' translation of Baudelaire's¹ prose poem.*] "Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually.

7. In Greek mythology, three monstrous sisters so ugly that the sight of them turned one to stone.

8. Greek god of woods, fields, and flocks, half man and half goat, associated with wildness.

9. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* 4.1.156–58.

1. Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), French poet. Arthur Symons (1865–1945), English poet and literary critic.

“Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken.

“And if sometimes, on the stairs of a palace, or on the green side of a ditch, or in the dreary solitude of your own room, you should awaken and the drunkenness be half or wholly slipped away from you, ask of the wind, or of the wave, or of the star, or of the bird, or of the clock, of whatever flies, or sighs, or rocks, or sings, or speaks, ask what hour it is; and the wind, wave, star, bird, clock, will answer you: ‘It is the hour to be drunken! Be drunken, if you would not be martyred slaves of Time; be drunken continually! With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will.’” [*He grins at his father provocatively.*]

TYRONE [*thickly humorous*] I wouldn’t worry about the virtue part of it, if I were you. [*then disgustedly*] Pah! It’s morbid nonsense! What little truth is in it you’ll find nobly said in Shakespeare. [*then appreciatively*] But you recited it well, lad. Who wrote it?

EDMUND Baudelaire.

TYRONE Never heard of him.

EDMUND [*grins provocatively*] He also wrote a poem about Jamie and the Great White Way.

TYRONE That loafer! I hope to God he misses the last car and has to stay uptown!

EDMUND [*goes on, ignoring this*] Although he was French and never saw Broadway and died before Jamie was born, he knew him and Little Old New York just the same. [*He recites the Symons’ translation of Baudelaire’s “Epilogue.”*]

“With heart at rest I climbed the citadel’s
Steep height, and saw the city as from a tower,
Hospital, brothel, prison, and such hells,

Where evil comes up softly like a flower.
Thou knowest, O Satan, patron of my pain,
Not for vain tears I went up at that hour;

But like an old sad faithful lecher, fain
To drink delight of that enormous trull
Whose hellish beauty makes me young again.

Whether thou sleep, with heavy vapours full,
Sodden with day, or, new apparelled, stand
In gold-laced veils of evening beautiful,

I love thee, infamous city! Harlots and
Hunted have pleasures of their own to give,
The vulgar herd can never understand.”

TYRONE [*with irritable disgust*] Morbid filth! Where the hell do you get your taste in literature? Filth and despair and pessimism! Another atheist, I suppose. When you deny God, you deny hope. That’s the trouble with you. If you’d get down on your knees—

EDMUND [*as if he hadn’t heard—sardonically*] It’s a good likeness of Jamie, don’t you think, hunted by himself and whiskey, hiding in a Broadway

hotel room with some fat tart—he likes them fat—reciting Dowson's Cynara to her. [*He recites derisively, but with deep feeling*]

“All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.”

[*jeeringly*] And the poor fat burlesque queen doesn't get a word of it, but suspects she's being insulted! And Jamie never loved any Cynara, and was never faithful to a woman in his life, even in his fashion! But he lies there, kidding himself he is superior and enjoys pleasures “the vulgar herd can never understand”! [*He laughs.*] It's nuts—completely nuts!

TYRONE [*vaguely—his voice thick*] It's madness, yes. If you'd get on your knees and pray. When you deny God, you deny sanity.

EDMUND [*ignoring this*] But who am I to feel superior? I've done the same damned thing. And it's no more crazy than Dowson himself, inspired by an absinthe hangover, writing it to a dumb barmaid, who thought he was a poor crazy souse, and gave him the gate to marry a waiter! [*He laughs—then soberly, with genuine sympathy*] Poor Dowson. Booze and consumption got him. [*He starts and for a second looks miserable and frightened. Then with defensive irony*] Perhaps it would be tactful of me to change the subject.

TYRONE [*thickly*] Where you get your taste in authors—That damned library of yours! [*He indicates the small bookcase at rear.*] Voltaire, Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen! Atheists, fools, and madmen! And your poets! This Dowson, and this Baudelaire, and Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, and Whitman and Poe! Whore-mongers and degenerates! Pah! When I've three good sets of Shakespeare there [*he nods at the large bookcase*] you could read.

EDMUND [*provocatively*] They say he was a souse, too.

TYRONE They lie! I don't doubt he liked his glass—it's a good man's failing—but he knew how to drink so it didn't poison his brain with morbidness and filth. Don't compare him with the pack you've got in there. [*He indicates the small bookcase again.*] Your dirty Zola! And your Dante Gabriel Rossetti who was a dope fiend! [*He starts and looks guilty.*]

EDMUND [*with defensive dryness*] Perhaps it would be wise to change the subject. [*a pause*] You can't accuse me of not knowing Shakespeare. Didn't I win five dollars from you once when you bet me I couldn't learn a leading part of his in a week, as you used to do in stock in the old days. I learned Macbeth and recited it letter perfect, with you giving me the cues.

TYRONE [*approvingly*] That's true. So you did. [*He smiles teasingly and sighs.*] It was a terrible ordeal, I remember, hearing you murder the lines. I kept wishing I'd paid over the bet without making you prove it.

[*He chuckles and EDMUND grins. Then he starts as he hears a sound from upstairs—with dread*]

Did you hear? She's moving around. I was hoping she'd gone to sleep.

EDMUND Forget it! How about another drink?

[*He reaches out and gets the bottle, pours a drink and hands it back. Then with a strained casualness, as his father pours a drink*]

When did Mama go to bed?

TYRONE Right after you left. She wouldn't eat any dinner. What made you run away?

EDMUND Nothing. [*Abruptly raising his glass.*] Well, here's how.

TYRONE [*mechanically*] Drink hearty, lad. [*They drink. TYRONE again listens to sounds upstairs—with dread*] She's moving around a lot. I hope to God she doesn't come down.

EDMUND [*dully*] Yes. She'll be nothing but a ghost haunting the past by this time. [*He pauses—then miserably*] Back before I was born—

TYRONE Doesn't she do the same with me? Back before she ever knew me. You'd think the only happy days she's ever known were in her father's home, or at the Convent, praying and playing the piano. [*jealous resentment in his bitterness*] As I've told you before, you must take her memories with a grain of salt. Her wonderful home was ordinary enough. Her father wasn't the great, generous, noble Irish gentleman she makes out. He was a nice enough man, good company and a good talker. I liked him and he liked me. He was prosperous enough, too, in his wholesale grocery business, an able man. But he had his weakness. She condemns my drinking but she forgets his. It's true he never touched a drop till he was forty, but after that he made up for lost time. He became a steady champagne drinker, the worst kind. That was his grand pose, to drink only champagne. Well, it finished him quick—that and the consumption— [*He stops with a guilty glance at his son.*]

EDMUND [*sardonically*] We don't seem able to avoid unpleasant topics, do we?

TYRONE [*sighs sadly*] No. [*then with a pathetic attempt at heartiness*] What do you say to a game or two of Casino, lad?

EDMUND All right.

TYRONE [*shuffling the cards clumsily*] We can't lock up and go to bed till Jamie comes on the last trolley—which I hope he won't—and I don't want to go upstairs, anyway, till she's asleep.

EDMUND Neither do I.

TYRONE [*keeps shuffling the cards fumblingly, forgetting to deal them*] As I was saying, you must take her tales of the past with a grain of salt. The piano playing and her dream of becoming a concert pianist. That was put in her head by the nuns flattering her. She was their pet. They loved her for being so devout. They're innocent women, anyway, when it comes to the world. They don't know that not one in a million who shows promise ever rises to concert playing. Not that your mother didn't play well for a schoolgirl, but that's no reason to take it for granted she could have—

EDMUND [*sharply*] Why don't you deal, if we're going to play.

TYRONE Eh? I am. [*dealing with very uncertain judgment of distance*] And the idea she might have become a nun. That's the worst. Your mother was one of the most beautiful girls you could ever see. She knew it, too. She was a bit of a rogue and a coquette, God bless her, behind all her

shyness and blushes. She was never made to renounce the world. She was bursting with health and high spirits and the love of loving.

EDMUND For God's sake, Papa! Why don't you pick up your hand?

TYRONE [*picks it up—dully*] Yes, let's see what I have here.

[*They both stare at their cards unseeingly. Then they both start. TYRONE whispers*]

Listen!

EDMUND She's coming downstairs.

TYRONE [*hurriedly*] We'll play our game. Pretend not to notice and she'll soon go up again.

EDMUND [*staring through the front parlor—with relief*] I don't see her. She must have started down and then turned back.

TYRONE Thank God.

EDMUND Yes. It's pretty horrible to see her the way she must be now. [*with bitter misery*] The hardest thing to take is the blank wall she builds around her. Or it's more like a bank of fog in which she hides and loses herself. Deliberately, that's the hell of it! You know something in her does it deliberately—to get beyond our reach, to be rid of us, to forget we're alive! It's as if, in spite of loving us, she hated us!

TYRONE [*remonstrates gently*] Now, now, lad. It's not her. It's the damned poison.

EDMUND [*bitterly*] She takes it to get that effect. At least, I know she did this time! [*abruptly*] My play, isn't it? Here. [*He plays a card.*]

TYRONE [*plays mechanically—gently reproachful*] She's been terribly frightened about your illness, for all her pretending. Don't be too hard on her, lad. Remember she's not responsible. Once that cursed poison gets a hold on anyone—

EDMUND [*his face grows hard and he stares at his father with bitter accusation*] It never should have gotten a hold on her! I know damned well she's not to blame! And I know who is! You are! Your damned stinginess! If you'd spent money for a decent doctor when she was so sick after I was born, she'd never have known morphine existed! Instead you put her in the hands of a hotel quack who wouldn't admit his ignorance and took the easiest way out, not giving a damn what happened to her afterwards! All because his fee was cheap! Another one of your bargains!

TYRONE [*stung—angrily*] Be quiet! How dare you talk of something you know nothing about! [*trying to control his temper*] You must try to see my side of it, too, lad. How was I to know he was that kind of a doctor? He had a good reputation—

EDMUND Among the souses in the hotel bar, I suppose!

TYRONE That's a lie! I asked the hotel proprietor to recommend the best—

EDMUND Yes! At the same time crying poorhouse and making it plain you wanted a cheap one! I know your system! By God, I ought to after this afternoon!

TYRONE [*guiltily defensive*] What about this afternoon?

EDMUND Never mind now. We're talking about Mama! I'm saying no matter how you excuse yourself you know damned well your stinginess is to blame—

TYRONE And I say you're a liar! Shut your mouth right now, or—

EDMUND [*ignoring this*] After you found out she'd been made a morphine addict, why didn't you send her to a cure then, at the start, while she still had a chance? No, that would have meant spending some money! I'll bet you told her all she had to do was use a little will power! That's what you still believe in your heart, in spite of what doctors, who really know something about it, have told you!

TYRONE You lie again! I know better than that now! But how was I to know then? What did I know of morphine? It was years before I discovered what was wrong. I thought she'd never got over her sickness, that's all. Why didn't I send her to a cure, you say? [*bitterly*] Haven't I? I've spent thousands upon thousands in cures! A waste. What good have they done her? She always started again.

EDMUND Because you've never given her anything that would help her want to stay off it! No home except this summer dump in a place she hates and you've refused even to spend money to make this look decent, while you keep buying more property, and playing sucker for every con man with a gold mine, or a silver mine, or any kind of get-rich-quick swindle! You've dragged her around on the road, season after season, on one-night stands, with no one she could talk to, waiting night after night in dirty hotel rooms for you to come back with a bun on after the bars closed! Christ, is it any wonder she didn't want to be cured. Jesus, when I think of it I hate your guts!

TYRONE [*strickenly*] Edmund! [*then in a rage*] How dare you talk to your father like that, you insolent young cub! After all I've done for you.

EDMUND We'll come to that, what you're doing for me!

TYRONE [*looking guilty again—ignores this*] Will you stop repeating your mother's crazy accusations, which she never makes unless it's the poison talking? I never dragged her on the road against her will. Naturally, I wanted her with me. I loved her. And she came because she loved me and wanted to be with me. That's the truth, no matter what she says when she's not herself. And she needn't have been lonely. There was always the members of my company to talk to, if she'd wanted. She had her children, too, and I insisted, in spite of the expense, on having a nurse to travel with her.

EDMUND [*bitterly*] Yes, your one generosity, and that because you were jealous of her paying too much attention to us, and wanted us out of your way! It was another mistake, too! If she'd had to take care of me all by herself, and had that to occupy her mind, maybe she'd have been able—

TYRONE [*goaded into vindictiveness*] Or for that matter, if you insist in judging things by what she says when she's not in her right mind, if you hadn't been born she'd never—[*He stops ashamed.*]

EDMUND [*suddenly spent and miserable*] Sure. I know that's what she feels, Papa.

TYRONE [*protests penitently*] She doesn't! She loves you as dearly as ever mother loved a son! I only said that because you put me in such a God-damned rage, raking up the past, and saying you hate me—

EDMUND [*dully*] I didn't mean it, Papa. [*He suddenly smiles—kidding a bit drunkenly*] I'm like Mama, I can't help liking you, in spite of everything.

TYRONE [*grins a bit drunkenly in return*] I might say the same of you. You're no great shakes as a son. It's a case of "A poor thing but mine own."² [*They both chuckle with real, if alcoholic, affection. TYRONE changes the subject.*] What's happened to our game? Whose play is it?

EDMUND Yours, I guess.

[*TYRONE plays a card which EDMUND takes and the game gets forgotten again.*]

TYRONE You mustn't let yourself be too downhearted, lad, by the bad news you had today. Both the doctors promised me, if you obey orders at this place you're going, you'll be cured in six months, or a year at most.

EDMUND [*his face hard again*] Don't kid me. You don't believe that.

TYRONE [*too vehemently*] Of course I believe it! Why shouldn't I believe it when both Hardy and the specialist—?

EDMUND You think I'm going to die.

TYRONE That's a lie! You're crazy!

EDMUND [*more bitterly*] So why waste money? That's why you're sending me to a state farm—

TYRONE [*in guilty confusion*] What state farm? It's the Hilltown Sanatorium, that's all I know, and both doctors said it was the best place for you.

EDMUND [*scathingly*] For the money! That is, for nothing, or practically nothing. Don't lie, Papa! You know damned well Hilltown Sanatorium is a state institution! Jamie suspected you'd cry poorhouse to Hardy and he wormed the truth out of him.

TYRONE [*furiously*] That drunken loafer! I'll kick him out in the gutter! He's poisoned your mind against me ever since you were old enough to listen!

EDMUND You can't deny it's the truth about the state farm, can you?

TYRONE It's not true the way you look at it! What if it is run by the state? That's nothing against it. The state has the money to make a better place than any private sanatorium. And why shouldn't I take advantage of it? It's my right—and yours. We're residents. I'm a property owner. I help to support it. I'm taxed to death—

EDMUND [*with bitter irony*] Yes, on property valued at a quarter of a million.

TYRONE Lies! It's all mortgaged!

EDMUND Hardy and the specialist know what you're worth. I wonder what they thought of you when they heard you moaning poorhouse and showing you wanted to wish me on charity!

TYRONE It's a lie! All I told them was I couldn't afford any millionaire's sanatorium because I was land poor. That's the truth!

EDMUND And then you went to the Club to meet McGuire and let him stick you with another bum piece of property! [*as TYRONE starts to deny*] Don't lie about it! We met McGuire in the hotel bar after he left you. Jamie kidded him about hooking you, and he winked and laughed!

TYRONE [*lying feebly*] He's a liar if he said—

EDMUND Don't lie about it! [*with gathering intensity*] God, Papa, ever since I went to sea and was on my own, and found out what hard work

2. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* 5.4.60.

for little pay was, and what it felt like to be broke, and starve, and camp on park benches because I had no place to sleep, I've tried to be fair to you because I knew what you'd been up against as a kid. I've tried to make allowances. Christ, you have to make allowances in this damned family or go nuts! I have tried to make allowances for myself when I remember all the rotten stuff I've pulled! I've tried to feel like Mama that you can't help being what you are where money is concerned. But God Almighty, this last stunt of yours is too much! It makes me want to puke! Not because of the rotten way you're treating me. To hell with that! I've treated you rottenly, in my way, more than once. But to think when it's a question of your son having consumption, you can show yourself up before the whole town as such a stinking old tightwad! Don't you know Hardy will talk and the whole damned town will know! Jesus, Papa, haven't you any pride or shame? [*bursting with rage*] And don't think I'll let you get away with it! I won't go to any damned state farm just to save you a few lousy dollars to buy more bum property with! You stinking old miser—! [*He chokes huskily, his voice trembling with rage, and then is shaken by a fit of coughing.*]

TYRONE [*has shrunk back in his chair under this attack, his guilty contrition greater than his anger—he stammers*] Be quiet! Don't say that to me! You're drunk! I won't mind you. Stop coughing, lad. You've got yourself worked up over nothing. Who said you had to go to this Hilltown place? You can go anywhere you like. I don't give a damn what it costs. All I care about is to have you get well. Don't call me a stinking miser, just because I don't want doctors to think I'm a millionaire they can swindle.

[*EDMUND has stopped coughing. He looks sick and weak. His father stares at him frightenedly.*]

You look weak, lad. You'd better take a bracer.

EDMUND [*grabs the bottle and pours his glass brimfull—weakly*] Thanks. [*He gulps down the whiskey.*]

TYRONE [*pours himself a big drink, which empties the bottle, and drinks it; his head bows and he stares dully at the cards on the table—vaguely*] Whose play is it? [*He goes on dully, without resentment.*] A stinking old miser. Well, maybe you're right. Maybe I can't help being, although all my life since I had anything I've thrown money over the bar to buy drinks for everyone in the house, or loaned money to sponges I knew would never pay it back—[*with a loose-mouthed sneer of self-contempt*] But, of course, that was in barrooms, when I was full of whiskey. I can't feel that way about it when I'm sober in my home. It was at home I first learned the value of a dollar and the fear of the poorhouse. I've never been able to believe in my luck since. I've always feared it would change and everything I had would be taken away. But still, the more property you own, the safer you think you are. That may not be logical, but it's the way I have to feel. Banks fail, and your money's gone, but you think you can keep land beneath your feet. [*Abruptly his tone becomes scornfully superior.*] You said you realized what I'd been up against as a boy. The hell you do! How could you? You've had everything—nurses, schools, college, though you didn't stay there. You've had food, clothing. Oh, I know you had a fling of hard work with your back and hands, a bit of being

homeless and penniless in a foreign land, and I respect you for it. But it was a game of romance and adventure to you. It was play.

EDMUND [*dully sarcastic*] Yes, particularly the time I tried to commit suicide at Jimmie the Priest's, and almost did.

TYRONE You weren't in your right mind. No son of mine would ever—You were drunk.

EDMUND I was stone cold sober. That was the trouble. I'd stopped to think too long.

TYRONE [*with drunken peevishness*] Don't start your damned atheist morbidness again! I don't care to listen. I was trying to make plain to you— [*scornfully*] What do you know of the value of a dollar? When I was ten my father deserted my mother and went back to Ireland to die. Which he did soon enough, and deserved to, and I hope he's roasting in hell. He mistook rat poison for flour, or sugar, or something. There was gossip it wasn't by mistake but that's a lie. No one in my family ever—

EDMUND My bet is, it wasn't by mistake.

TYRONE More morbidness! Your brother put that in your head. The worst he can suspect is the only truth for him. But never mind. My mother was left, a stranger in a strange land, with four small children, me and a sister a little older and two younger than me. My two older brothers had moved to other parts. They couldn't help. They were hard put to it to keep themselves alive. There was no damned romance in our poverty. Twice we were evicted from the miserable hovel we called home, with my mother's few sticks of furniture thrown out in the street, and my mother and sisters crying. I cried, too, though I tried hard not to, because I was the man of the family. At ten years old! There was no more school for me. I worked twelve hours a day in a machine shop, learning to make files. A dirty barn of a place where rain dripped through the roof, where you roasted in summer, and there was no stove in winter, and your hands got numb with cold, where the only light came through two small filthy windows, so on grey days I'd have to sit bent over with my eyes almost touching the files in order to see! You talk of work! And what do you think I got for it? Fifty cents a week! It's the truth! Fifty cents a week! And my poor mother washed and scrubbed for the Yanks by the day, and my older sister sewed, and my two younger stayed at home to keep the house. We never had clothes enough to wear, nor enough food to eat. Well I remember one Thanksgiving, or maybe it was Christmas, when some Yank in whose house mother had been scrubbing gave her a dollar extra for a present, and on the way home she spent it all on food. I can remember her hugging and kissing us and saying with tears of joy running down her tired face: "Glory be to God, for once in our lives we'll have enough for each of us!" [*He wipes tears from his eyes.*] A fine, brave, sweet woman. There never was a braver or finer.

EDMUND [*moved*] Yes, she must have been.

TYRONE Her one fear was she'd get old and sick and have to die in the poorhouse. [*He pauses—then adds with grim humor*] It was in those days I learned to be a miser. A dollar was worth so much then. And once you've learned a lesson, it's hard to unlearn it. You have to look for bargains. If I took this state farm sanatorium for a good bargain, you'll have to forgive me. The doctors did tell me it's a good place. You must believe that,

Edmund. And I swear I never meant you to go there if you didn't want to. [*vehemently*] You can choose any place you like! Never mind what it costs! Any place I can afford. Any place you like—within reason.

[*At this qualification, a grin twitches EDMUND's lips. His resentment has gone. His father goes on with an elaborately offhand, casual air.*]

There was another sanatorium the specialist recommended. He said it had a record as good as any place in the country. It's endowed by a group of millionaire factory owners, for the benefit of their workers principally, but you're eligible to go there because you're a resident. There's such a pile of money behind it, they don't have to charge much. It's only seven dollars a week but you get ten times that value. [*hastily*] I don't want to persuade you to anything, understand. I'm simply repeating what I was told.

EDMUND [*concealing his smile—casually*] Oh, I know that. It sounds like a good bargain to me. I'd like to go there. So that settles that. [*Abruptly he is miserably desperate again—dully*] It doesn't matter a damn now, anyway. Let's forget it! [*changing the subject*] How about our game? Whose play is it?

TYRONE [*mechanically*] I don't know. Mine, I guess. No, it's yours.

[*EDMUND plays a card. His father takes it. Then about to play from his hand, he again forgets the game.*]

Yes, maybe life overdid the lesson for me, and made a dollar worth too much, and the time came when that mistake ruined my career as a fine actor. [*sadly*] I've never admitted this to anyone before, lad, but tonight I'm so heartsick I feel at the end of everything, and what's the use of fake pride and pretense. That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such a great success in—a great money success—it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune. I didn't want to do anything else, and by the time I woke up to the fact I'd become a slave to the damned thing and did try other plays, it was too late. They had identified me with that one part, and didn't want me in anything else. They were right, too. I'd lost the great talent I once had through years of easy repetition, never learning a new part, never really working hard. Thirty-five to forty thousand dollars net profit a season like snapping your fingers! It was too great a temptation. Yet before I bought the damned thing I was considered one of the three or four young actors with the greatest artistic promise in America. I'd worked like hell. I'd left a good job as a machinist to take supers³ parts because I loved the theater. I was wild with ambition. I read all the plays ever written. I studied Shakespeare as you'd study the Bible. I educated myself. I got rid of an Irish brogue you could cut with a knife. I loved Shakespeare. I would have acted in any of his plays for nothing, for the joy of being alive in his great poetry. And I acted well in him. I felt inspired by him. I could have been a great Shakespearean actor, if I'd kept on. I know that! In 1874 when Edwin Booth⁴ came to the theater in Chicago where I was leading man, I played Cassius to his Brutus one night, Brutus to his Cassius the next, Othello to his Iago, and so on. The first night I played Othello, he said to our manager. "That young man is playing Othello better than I ever did!" [*proudly*] That from Booth, the

3. Supernumeraries, extras.

4. Edwin Booth (1833–1893), American actor and theatrical manager.

greatest actor of his day or any other! And it was true! And I was only twenty-seven years old! As I look back on it now, that night was the high spot in my career. I had life where I wanted it! And for a time after that I kept on upward with ambition high. Married your mother. Ask her what I was like in those days. Her love was an added incentive to ambition. But a few years later my good bad luck made me find the big money-maker. It wasn't that in my eyes at first. It was a great romantic part I knew I could play better than anyone. But it was a great box office success from the start—and then life had me where it wanted me—from thirty-five to forty thousand net profit a season! A fortune in those days—or even in these. [*bitterly*] What the hell was it I wanted to buy, I wonder, that was worth—Well, no matter. It's a late day for regrets. [*He glances vaguely at his cards.*] My play, isn't it?

EDMUND [*moved, stares at his father with understanding—slowly*] I'm glad you've told me this, Papa. I know you a lot better now.

TYRONE [*with a loose, twisted smile*] Maybe I shouldn't have told you. Maybe you'll only feel more contempt for me. And it's a poor way to convince you of the value of a dollar. [*Then as if this phrase automatically aroused an habitual association in his mind, he glances up at the chandelier disapprovingly.*] The glare from those extra lights hurts my eyes. You don't mind if I turn them out, do you? We don't need them, and there's no use making the Electric Company rich.

EDMUND [*controlling a wild impulse to laugh—agreeably*] No, sure not. Turn them out.

TYRONE [*gets heavily and a bit waveringly to his feet and gropes uncertainly for the lights—his mind going back to its line of thought*] No, I don't know what the hell it was I wanted to buy. [*He clicks out one bulb.*] On my solemn oath, Edmund, I'd gladly face not having an acre of land to call my own, nor a penny in the bank—[*He clicks out another bulb.*] I'd be willing to have no home but the poorhouse in my old age if I could look back now on having been the fine artist I might have been.

[*He turns out the third bulb, so only the reading lamp is on, and sits down again heavily. EDMUND suddenly cannot hold back a burst of strained, ironical laughter. TYRONE is hurt.*]

What the devil are you laughing at?

EDMUND Not at you, Papa. At life. It's so damned crazy.

TYRONE [*growls*] More of your morbidness! There's nothing wrong with life. It's we who—[*He quotes*] "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings."⁵ [*He pauses—then sadly*] The praise Edwin Booth gave my Othello. I made the manager put down his exact words in writing. I kept it in my wallet for years. I used to read it every once in a while until finally it made me feel so bad I didn't want to face it any more. Where is it now, I wonder? Somewhere in this house. I remember I put it away carefully—

EDMUND [*with a wry ironical sadness*] It might be in an old trunk in the attic, along with Mama's wedding dress. [*Then as his father stares at him, he adds quickly*] For Pete's sake, if we're going to play cards, let's play.

5. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 1.2.134.

[*He takes the card his father had played and leads. For a moment, they play the game, like mechanical chess players. Then TYRONE stops, listening to a sound upstairs.*]

TYRONE She's still moving around. God knows when she'll go to sleep.

EDMUND [*pleads tensely*] For Christ's sake, Papa, forget it!

[*He reaches out and pours a drink. TYRONE starts to protest, then gives it up. EDMUND drinks. He puts down the glass. His expression changes. When he speaks it is as if he were deliberately giving way to drunkenness and seeking to hide behind a maudlin manner.*]

Yes, she moves above and beyond us, a ghost haunting the past, and here we sit pretending to forget, but straining our ears listening for the slightest sound, hearing the fog drip from the eaves like the uneven tick of a rundown, crazy clock—or like the dreary tears of a trollop spattering in a puddle of stale beer on a honky-tonk table top! [*He laughs with maudlin appreciation.*] Not so bad, that last, eh? Original, not Baudelaire. Give me credit! [*then with alcoholic talkativeness*] You've just told me some high spots in your memories. Want to hear mine? They're all connected with the sea. Here's one. When I was on the Squarehead square rigger, bound for Buenos Aires. Full moon in the Trades. The old hooker driving fourteen knots. I lay on the bowsprit, facing astern, with the water foaming into spume under me, the masts with every sail white in the moonlight, towering high above me. I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it, and for a moment I lost myself—actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea, became white sails and flying spray, became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky! I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of Man, to Life itself! To God, if you want to put it that way. Then another time, on the American Line, when I was lookout on the crow's nest in the dawn watch. A calm sea, that time. Only a lazy ground swell and a slow drowsy roll of the ship. The passengers asleep and none of the crew in sight. No sound of man. Black smoke pouring from the funnels behind and beneath me. Dreaming, not keeping lookout, feeling alone, and above, and apart, watching the dawn creep like a painted dream over the sky and sea which slept together. Then the moment of ecstatic freedom came. The peace, the end of the quest, the last harbor, the joy of belonging to a fulfillment beyond men's lousy, pitiful, greedy fears and hopes and dreams! And several other times in my life, when I was swimming far out, or lying alone on a beach, I have had the same experience. Became the sun, the hot sand, green seaweed anchored to a rock, swaying in the tide. Like a saint's vision of beatitude. Like the veil of things as they seem drawn back by an unseen hand. For a second you see—and seeing the secret, are the secret. For a second there is meaning! Then the hand lets the veil fall and you are alone, lost in the fog again, and you stumble on toward nowhere, for no good reason! [*He grins wryly.*] It was a great mistake, my being born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death!

TYRONE [*stares at him—impressed*] Yes, there's the makings of a poet in you all right. [*then protesting uneasily*] But that's morbid craziness about not being wanted and loving death.

EDMUND [*sardonically*] The makings of a poet. No, I'm afraid I'm like the guy who is always panhandling for a smoke. He hasn't even got the makings. He's got only the habit. I couldn't touch what I tried to tell you just now. I just stammered. That's the best I'll ever do. I mean, if I live. Well, it will be faithful realism, at least. Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people.

[*A pause. Then they both jump startledly as there is a noise from outside the house, as if someone had stumbled and fallen on the front steps.*

EDMUND *grins.*]

Well, that sounds like the absent brother. He must have a peach of a bun on.

TYRONE [*scowling*] That loafer! He caught the last car, bad luck to it. [*He gets to his feet.*] Get him to bed, Edmund. I'll go out on the porch. He has a tongue like an adder when he's drunk. I'd only lose my temper.

[*He goes out the door to the side porch as the front door in the hall bangs shut behind* JAMIE. EDMUND *watches with amusement* JAMIE's *wavering progress through the front parlor.* JAMIE *comes in. He is very drunk and woozy on his legs. His eyes are glassy, his face bloated, his speech blurred, his mouth slack like his father's, a leer on his lips.*]

JAMIE [*swaying and blinking in the doorway—in a loud voice*] What ho! What ho!

EDMUND [*sharply*] Nix on the loud noise!

JAMIE [*blinks at him*] Oh, hello, Kid. [*with great seriousness*] I'm as drunk as a fiddler's bitch.

EDMUND [*dryly*] Thanks for telling me your great secret.

JAMIE [*grins foolishly*] Yes. Unneshesary information Number One, eh? [*He bends and slaps at the knees of his trousers.*] Had serious accident. The front steps tried to trample on me. Took advantage of fog to waylay me. Ought to be a lighthouse out there. Dark in here, too. [*scowling*] What the hell is this, the morgue? Lesh have some light on subject. [*He sways forward to the table, reciting Kipling*⁶]

“Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
 Ford o' Kabul river in the dark!
 Keep the crossing-stakes beside you, an' they
 will surely guide you
 'Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.”

[*He fumbles at the chandelier and manages to turn on the three bulbs.*] Thash more like it. The hell with old Gaspard.⁷ Where is the old tightwad?

EDMUND Out on the porch.

JAMIE Can't expect us to live in the Black Hole of Calcutta.⁸ [*His eyes fix on the full bottle of whiskey.*] Say! Have I got the d.t.'s?⁹ [*He reaches out*

6. Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), English author.

7. Jamie's contemptuous name for his father, drawn from a character in the popular drama *The Bells*.

8. Small dungeon in Calcutta, India, where, on June 20, 1756, 123 of 146 British prisoners died of suffocation. Hence, any small, cramped space.

9. Delirium tremens.

fumblingly and grabs it.] By God, it's real. What's matter with the Old Man tonight? Must be ossified to forget he left this out. Grab opportunity by the forelock. Key to my success. [*He slops a big drink into a glass.*]

EDMUND You're stinking now. That will knock you stiff.

JAMIE Wisdom from the mouth of babes. Can the wise stuff, Kid. You're still wet behind the ears. [*He lowers himself into a chair, holding the drink carefully aloft.*]

EDMUND All right. Pass out if you want to.

JAMIE Can't, that's trouble. Had enough to sink a ship, but can't sink. Well, here's hoping. [*He drinks.*]

EDMUND Shove over the bottle. I'll have one, too.

JAMIE [*with sudden, big-brotherly solicitude, grabbing the bottle*] No, you don't. Not while I'm around. Remember doctor's orders. Maybe no one else gives a damn if you die, but I do. My kid brother. I love your guts, Kid. Everything else is gone. You're all I've got left. [*pulling bottle closer to him*] So no booze for you, if I can help it. [*Beneath his drunken sentimentality there is a genuine sincerity.*]

EDMUND [*irritably*] Oh, lay off it.

JAMIE [*is hurt and his face hardens*] You don't believe I care, eh? Just drunken bull. [*He shoves the bottle over.*] All right. Go ahead and kill yourself.

EDMUND [*seeing he is hurt—affectionately*] Sure I know you care, Jamie, and I'm going on the wagon. But tonight doesn't count. Too many damned things have happened today. [*He pours a drink.*] Here's how. [*He drinks.*]

JAMIE [*sobers up momentarily and with a pitying look*] I know, Kid. It's been a lousy day for you. [*then with sneering cynicism*] I'll bet old Gaspard hasn't tried to keep you off booze. Probably give you a case to take with you to the state farm for pauper patients. The sooner you kick the bucket, the less expense. [*with contemptuous hatred*] What a bastard to have for a father! Christ, if you put him in a book, no one would believe it!

EDMUND [*defensively*] Oh, Papa's all right, if you try to understand him—and keep your sense of humor.

JAMIE [*cynically*] He's been putting on the old sob act for you, eh? He can always kid you. But not me. Never again. [*then slowly*] Although, in a way, I do feel sorry for him about one thing. But he has even that coming to him. He's to blame. [*hurriedly*] But to hell with that. [*He grabs the bottle and pours another drink, appearing very drunk again.*] That lash drink's getting me. This one ought to put the lights out. Did you tell Gaspard I got it out of Doc Hardy this sanatorium is a charity dump?

EDMUND [*reluctantly*] Yes. I told him I wouldn't go there. It's all settled now. He said I can go anywhere I want. [*He adds, smiling without resentment*] Within reason, of course.

JAMIE [*drunkenly imitating his father*] Of course, lad. Anything within reason. [*sneering*] That means another cheap dump. Old Gaspard, the miser in "The Bells," that's a part he can play without make-up.

EDMUND [*irritably*] Oh, shut up, will you. I've heard that Gaspard stuff a million times.

JAMIE [*shrugs his shoulders—thickly*] Aw right, if you're shatisfied—let him get away with it. It's your funeral—I mean, I hope it won't be.

EDMUND [*changing the subject*] What did you do uptown tonight? Go to Mamie Burns?

JAMIE [*very drunk, his head nodding*] Sure thing. Where else could I find suitable feminine companionship? And love. Don't forget love. What is a man without a good woman's love? A God-damned hollow shell.

EDMUND [*chuckles tipsily, letting himself go now and be drunk*] You're a nut.

JAMIE [*quotes with gusto from Oscar Wilde's*¹ "The Harlot's House"]

"Then, turning to my love, I said,
"The dead are dancing with the dead,
The dust is whirling with the dust."

But she—she heard the violin,
And left my side and entered in:
Love passed into the house of lust.

Then suddenly the tune went false,
The dancers wearied of the waltz . . ."

[*He breaks off, thickly*] Not strictly accurate. If my love was with me, I didn't notice it. She must have been a ghost. [*He pauses.*] Guess which one of Mamie's charmers I picked to bless me with her woman's love. It'll hand you a laugh, Kid. I picked Fat Violet.

EDMUND [*laughs drunkenly*] No, honest? Some pick! God, she weighs a ton. What the hell for, a joke?

JAMIE No joke. Very serious. By the time I hit Mamie's dump I felt very sad about myself and all the other poor bums in the world. Ready for a weep on any old womanly bosom. You know how you get when John Barleycorn turns on the soft music inside you. Then, soon as I got in the door, Mamie began telling me all her troubles. Beefed how rotten business was, and she was going to give Fat Violet the gate. Customers didn't fall for Vi. Only reason she'd kept her was she could play the piano. Lately Vi's gone on drunks and been too boiled to play, and was eating her out of house and home, and although Vi was a goodhearted dumbbell, and she felt sorry for her because she didn't know how the hell she'd make a living, still business was business, and she couldn't afford to run a house for fat tarts. Well, that made me feel sorry for Fat Violet, so I squandered two bucks of your dough to escort her upstairs. With no dishonorable intentions whatever. I like them fat, but not that fat. All I wanted was a little heart-to-heart talk concerning the infinite sorrow of life.

EDMUND [*chuckles drunkenly*] Poor Vi! I'll bet you recited Kipling and Swinburne and Dowson and gave her "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion."

JAMIE [*grins loosely*] Sure—with the Old Master, John Barleycorn, playing soft music. She stood it for a while. Then she got good and sore. Got the idea I took her upstairs for a joke. Gave me a grand bawling out. Said she was better than a drunken bum who recited poetry. Then she began to cry. So I had to say I loved her because she was fat, and she wanted to believe that, and I stayed with her to prove it, and that

1. Irish author (1854–1900).

cheered her up, and she kissed me when I left, and said she'd fallen hard for me, and we both cried a little more in the hallway, and everything was fine, except Mamie Burns thought I'd gone bughouse.

EDMUND [*quotes derisively*]

“Harlots and
Hunted have pleasures of their own to give,
The vulgar herd can never understand.”

JAMIE [*nods his head drunkenly*] Egzactly! Hell of a good time, at that. You should have stuck around with me, Kid. Mamie Burns inquired after you. Sorry to hear you were sick. She meant it, too. [*He pauses—then with maudlin humor, in a ham-actor tone*] This night has opened my eyes to a great career in store for me, my boy! I shall give the art of acting back to the performing seals, which are its most perfect expression. By applying my natural God-given talents in their proper sphere, I shall attain the pinnacle of success! I'll be the lover of the fat woman in Barnum and Bailey's circus! [EDMUND *laughs*. JAMIE'S *mood changes to arrogant disdain*.] Pah! Imagine me sunk to the fat girl in a hick town hooker shop! Me! Who have made some of the best-lookers on Broadway sit up and beg! [*He quotes from Kipling's "Sestina of the Tramp-Royal"*]

“Speakin' in general, I 'ave tried 'em all,
The 'appy roads that take you o'er the world.”

[*with sodden melancholy*] Not so apt. Happy roads is bunk. Weary roads is right. Get you nowhere fast. That's where I've got—nowhere. Where everyone lands in the end, even if most of the suckers won't admit it.

EDMUND [*derisively*] Can it! You'll be crying in a minute.

JAMIE [*starts and stares at his brother for a second with bitter hostility—thickly*] Don't get—too damned fresh. [*then abruptly*] But you're right. To hell with repining! Fat Violet's a good kid. Glad I stayed with her. Christian act. Cured her blues. Hell of a good time. You should have stuck with me, Kid. Taken your mind off your troubles. What's the use coming home to get the blues over what can't be helped. All over—finished now—not a hope! [*He stops, his head nodding drunkenly, his eyes closing—then suddenly he looks up, his face hard, and quotes jeeringly.*]

“If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose love would follow me still . . .”

EDMUND [*violently*] Shut up!

JAMIE [*in a cruel, sneering tone with hatred in it*] Where's the hophead?
Gone to sleep?

[EDMUND *jerks as if he'd been struck*. There is a tense silence. EDMUND'S *face looks stricken and sick*. Then in a burst of rage he springs from his chair.]

EDMUND You dirty bastard!

[*He punches his brother in the face, a blow that glances off the cheekbone*. For a second JAMIE reacts pugnaciously and half rises from his chair to do battle, but suddenly he seems to sober up to a shocked realization of what he has said and he sinks back limply.]

JAMIE [*miserably*] Thanks, Kid. I certainly had that coming. Don't know what made me—booze talking—You know me, Kid.

EDMUND [*his anger ebbing*] I know you'd never say that unless—But God, Jamie, no matter how drunk you are, it's no excuse! [*He pauses—miserably*] I'm sorry I hit you. You and I never scrap—that bad. [*He sinks back on his chair.*]

JAMIE [*huskily*] It's all right. Glad you did. My dirty tongue. Like to cut it out. [*He hides his face in his hands—dully*] I suppose it's because I feel so damned sunk. Because this time Mama had me fooled. I really believed she had it licked. She thinks I always believe the worst, but this time I believed the best. [*His voice flutters.*] I suppose I can't forgive her—yet. It meant so much. I'd begun to hope, if she'd beaten the game, I could, too. [*He begins to sob, and the horrible part of his weeping is that it appears sober, not the maudlin tears of drunkenness.*]

EDMUND [*blinking back tears himself*] God, don't I know how you feel! Stop it, Jamie!

JAMIE [*trying to control his sobs*] I've known about Mama so much longer than you. Never forget the first time I got wise. Caught her in the act with a hypo. Christ, I'd never dreamed before that any women but whores took dope! [*He pauses.*] And then this stuff of you getting consumption. It's got me licked. We've been more than brothers. You're the only pal I've ever had. I love your guts. I'd do anything for you.

EDMUND [*reaches out and pats his arm*] I know that, Jamie.

JAMIE [*his crying over—drops his hands from his face—with a strange bitterness*] Yet I'll bet you've heard Mama and old Gaspard spill so much bunk about my hoping for the worst, you suspect right now I'm thinking to myself that Papa is old and can't last much longer, and if you were to die, Mama and I would get all he's got, and so I'm probably hoping—

EDMUND [*indignantly*] Shut up, you damned fool! What the hell put that in your nut? [*He stares at his brother accusingly.*] Yes, that's what I'd like to know. What put that in your mind?

JAMIE [*confusedly—appearing drunk again*] Don't be a dumbbell! What I said! Always suspected of hoping for the worst. I've got so I can't help— [*then drunkenly resentful*] What are you trying to do, accuse me? Don't play the wise guy with me! I've learned more of life than you'll ever know! Just because you've read a lot of highbrow junk, don't think you can fool me! You're only an overgrown kid! Mama's baby and Papa's pet! The family White Hope! You've been getting a swelled head lately. About nothing! About a few poems in a hick town newspaper! Hell, I used to write better stuff for the Lit magazine in college! You better wake up! You're setting no rivers on fire! You let hick town boobs flatter you with bunk about your future—

[*Abruptly his tone changes to disgusted contrition. EDMUND has looked away from him, trying to ignore this tirade.*]

Hell, Kid, forget it. That goes for Sweeny. You know I don't mean it. No one hopes more than I do you'll knock 'em all dead. No one is prouder you've started to make good. [*drunkenly assertive*] Why shouldn't I be proud? Hell, it's purely selfish. You reflect credit on me. I've had more to do with bringing you up than anyone. I wised you up about women, so you'd never be a fall guy, or make any mistakes you didn't want to make!

And who steered you on to reading poetry first? Swinburne,² for example? I did! And because I once wanted to write, I planted it in your mind that someday you'd write! Hell, you're more than my brother. I made you! You're my Frankenstein!³

[*He has risen to a note of drunken arrogance. EDMUND is grinning with amusement now.*]

EDMUND All right, I'm your Frankenstein. So let's have a drink. [*He laughs.*]
You crazy nut!

JAMIE [*thickly*] I'll have a drink. Not you. Got to take care of you. [*He reaches out with a foolish grin of dotting affection and grabs his brother's hand.*] Don't be scared of this sanatorium business. Hell, you can beat that standing on your head. Six months and you'll be in the pink. Probably haven't got consumption at all. Doctors lot of fakers. Told me years ago to cut out booze or I'd soon be dead—and here I am. They're all con men. Anything to grab your dough. I'll bet this state farm stuff is political graft game. Doctors get a cut for every patient they send.

EDMUND [*disgustedly amused*] You're the limit! At the Last Judgment, you'll be around telling everyone it's in the bag.

JAMIE And I'll be right. Slip a piece of change to the Judge and be saved, but if you're broke you can go to hell!

[*He grins at this blasphemy and EDMUND has to laugh. JAMIE goes on.*]

"Therefore put money in thy purse."⁴ That's the only dope. [*mockingly*]
The secret of my success! Look what it's got me!

[*He lets EDMUND's hand go to pour a big drink, and gulps it down. He stares at his brother with bleary affection—takes his hand again and begins to talk thickly but with a strange, convincing sincerity.*]

Listen, Kid, you'll be going away. May not get another chance to talk. Or might not be drunk enough to tell you truth. So got to tell you now. Something I ought to have told you long ago—for your own good.

[*He pauses—struggling with himself. EDMUND stares, impressed and uneasy. Jamie blurts out*]

Not drunken bull, but "in vino veritas"⁵ stuff. You better take it seriously. Want to warn you—against me. Mama and Papa are right. I've been rotten bad influence. And worst of it is, I did it on purpose.

EDMUND [*uneasily*] Shut up! I don't want to hear—

JAMIE Nix, Kid! You listen! Did it on purpose to make a bum of you. Or part of me did. A big part. That part that's been dead so long. That hates life. My putting you wise so you'd learn from my mistakes. Believed that myself at times, but it's a fake. Made my mistakes look good. Made getting drunk romantic. Made whores fascinating vampires instead of poor, stupid, diseased slobbs they really are. Made fun of work as sucker's game. Never wanted you to succeed and make me look even worse by comparison. Wanted you to fail. Always jealous of you. Mama's baby, Papa's pet! [*He stares at EDMUND with increasing enmity.*] And it

2. Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), English poet and critic.

3. In the novel *Frankenstein* by the English author Mary Shelley (1797–1851), the scientist Dr. Frankenstein creates a monster. Jamie confuses the

scientist with his creation, although it is possible that the mistake is O'Neill's.

4. Shakespeare's *Othello* 1.3.354.

5. In wine there is truth (Latin).

was your being born that started Mama on dope. I know that's not your fault, but all the same, God damn you, I can't help hating your guts—!

EDMUND [*almost frightenedly*] Jamie! Cut it out! You're crazy!

JAMIE But don't get wrong idea, Kid. I love you more than I hate you. My saying what I'm telling you now proves it. I run the risk you'll hate me—and you're all I've got left. But I didn't mean to tell you that last stuff—go that far back. Don't know what made me. What I wanted to say is, I'd like to see you become the greatest success in the world. But you'd better be on your guard. Because I'll do my damndest to make you fail. Can't help it. I hate myself. Got to take revenge. On everyone else. Especially you. Oscar Wilde's "Reading Gaol" has the dope twisted. The man was dead and so he had to kill the thing he loved. That's what it ought to be. The dead part of me hopes you won't get well. Maybe he's even glad the game has got Mama again! He wants company, he doesn't want to be the only corpse around the house! [*He gives a hard, tortured laugh.*]

EDMUND Jesus, Jamie! You really have gone crazy!

JAMIE Think it over and you'll see I'm right. Think it over when you're away from me in the sanatorium. Make up your mind you've got to tie a can to me—get me out of your life—think of me as dead—tell people, "I had a brother, but he's dead." And when you come back, look out for me. I'll be waiting to welcome you with that "my old pal" stuff, and give you the glad hand, and at the first good chance I get stab you in the back.

EDMUND Shut up! I'll be God-damned if I'll listen to you any more—

JAMIE [*as if he hadn't heard*] Only don't forget me. Remember I warned you—for your sake. Give me credit. Greater love hath no man than this, that he saveth his brother from himself. [*very drunkenly, his head bobbing*] That's all. Feel better now. Gone to confession. Know you absolve me, don't you, Kid? You understand. You're a damned fine kid. Ought to be. I made you. So go and get well. Don't die on me. You're all I've got left. God bless you, Kid. [*His eyes close. He mumbles*] That last drink—the old K.O.

[*He falls into a drunken doze, not completely asleep. EDMUND buries his face in his hands miserably. TYRONE comes in quietly through the screen door from the porch, his dressing gown wet with fog, the collar turned up around his throat. His face is stern and disgusted but at the same time pitying. EDMUND does not notice his entrance.*]

TYRONE [*in a low voice*] Thank God he's asleep.

[*EDMUND looks up with a start.*]

I thought he'd never stop talking. [*He turns down the collar of his dressing gown.*] We'd better let him stay where he is and sleep it off.

[*EDMUND remains silent. TYRONE regards him—then goes on*]

I heard the last part of his talk. It's what I've warned you. I hope you'll heed the warning, now it comes from his own mouth.

[*EDMUND gives no sign of having heard. TYRONE adds pityingly*]

But don't take it too much to heart, lad. He loves to exaggerate the worst of himself when he's drunk. He's devoted to you. It's the one good thing left in him. [*He looks down on JAMIE with a bitter sadness.*] A sweet spectacle for me! My first-born, who I hoped would bear my name in honor and dignity, who showed such brilliant promise!

EDMUND [*miserably*] Keep quiet, can't you, Papa?

TYRONE [*pours a drink*] A waste! A wreck, a drunken hulk, done with and finished!

[*He drinks. JAMIE has become restless, sensing his father's presence, struggling up from his stupor. Now he gets his eyes open to blink up at TYRONE. The latter moves back a step defensively, his face growing hard.*]

JAMIE [*suddenly points a finger at him and recites with dramatic emphasis*]

“Clarence is come, false, fleeting, perjured Clarence,
That stabbed me in the field by Tewksbury.
Seize on him, Furies, take him into torment.”⁶

[*then resentfully*] What the hell are you staring at? [*He recites sardonically from Rossetti*⁷]

“Look in my face. My name is Might-Have-Been;
I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell.”

TYRONE I'm well aware of that, and God knows I don't want to look at it.

EDMUND Papa! Quit it!

JAMIE [*derisively*] Got a great idea for you, Papa. Put on revival of “The Bells” this season. Great part in it you can play without make-up. Old Gaspard, the miser!

[*TYRONE turns away, trying to control his temper.*]

EDMUND Shut up, Jamie!

JAMIE [*jeeringly*] I claim Edwin Booth never saw the day when he could give as good a performance as a trained seal. Seals are intelligent and honest. They don't put up any bluffs about the Art of Acting. They admit they're just hams earning their daily fish.

TYRONE [*stung, turns on him in a rage*] You loafer!

EDMUND Papa! Do you want to start a row that will bring Mama down? Jamie, go back to sleep! You've shot off your mouth too much already.

[*TYRONE turns away.*]

JAMIE [*thickly*] All right, Kid. Not looking for argument. Too damned sleepy.

[*He closes his eyes, his head nodding. TYRONE comes to the table and sits down, turning his chair so he won't look at JAMIE. At once he becomes sleepy, too.*]

TYRONE [*heavily*] I wish to God she'd go to bed so that I could, too. [*drowsily*] I'm dog tired. I can't stay up all night like I used to. Getting old—old and finished. [*with a bone-cracking yawn*] Can't keep my eyes open. I think I'll catch a few winks. Why don't you do the same, Edmund? It'll pass the time until she—

[*His voice trails off. His eyes close, his chin sags, and he begins to breathe heavily through his mouth. EDMUND sits tensely. He hears something and jerks nervously forward in his chair, staring through the front parlor into the hall. He jumps up with a hunted, distracted expression. It seems for a second he is going to hide in the back parlor. Then he sits down again and waits, his eyes averted, his hands gripping the arms of his chair. Suddenly all five bulbs of the chandelier in the front parlor are turned*]

6. Shakespeare's *Richard III* 1.4.55–57.

7. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1821–1882), English poet and painter.

on from a wall switch, and a moment later someone starts playing the piano in there—the opening of one of Chopin's⁸ simpler waltzes, done with a forgetful, stiff-fingered groping, as if an awkward schoolgirl were practicing it for the first time. TYRONE starts to wide-awakeness and sober dread, and JAMIE's head jerks back and his eyes open. For a moment they listen frozenly. The playing stops as abruptly as it began, and MARY appears in the doorway. She wears a sky-blue dressing gown over her nightdress, dainty slippers and pompons on her bare feet. Her face is paler than ever. Her eyes look enormous. They glisten like polished black jewels. The uncanny thing is that her face now appears so youthful. Experience seems ironed out of it. It is a marble mask of girlish innocence, the mouth caught in a shy smile. Her white hair is braided in two pigtails which hang over her breast. Over one arm, carried negligently, trailing on the floor, as if she had forgotten she held it, is an old-fashioned white satin wedding gown, trimmed with duchesse lace. She hesitates in the doorway, glancing round the room, her forehead puckered puzzledly, like someone who has come to a room to get something but has become absent-minded on the way and forgotten what it was. They stare at her. She seems aware of them merely as she is aware of other objects in the room, the furniture, the windows, familiar things she accepts automatically as naturally belonging there but which she is too preoccupied to notice.]

JAMIE [*breaks the cracking silence—bitterly, self-defensively sardonic*] The Mad Scene. Enter Ophelia!⁹

[*His father and brother both turn on him fiercely. EDMUND is quicker. He slaps JAMIE across the mouth with the back of his hand.*]

TYRONE [*his voice trembling with suppressed fury*] Good boy, Edmund. The dirty blackguard! His own mother!

JAMIE [*mumbles guiltily, without resentment*] All right, Kid. Had it coming. But I told you how much I'd hoped—[*He puts his hands over his face and begins to sob.*]

TYRONE I'll kick you out in the gutter tomorrow, so help me God. [*But JAMIE's sobbing breaks his anger, and he turns and shakes his shoulder, pleading*] Jamie, for the love of God, stop it!

[*Then MARY speaks, and they freeze into silence again, staring at her. She has paid no attention whatever to the incident. It is simply a part of the familiar atmosphere of the room, a background which does not touch her preoccupation; and she speaks aloud to herself, not to them.*]

MARY I play so badly now. I'm all out of practice. Sister Theresa will give me a dreadful scolding. She'll tell me it isn't fair to my father when he spends so much money for extra lessons. She's quite right, it isn't fair, when he's so good and generous, and so proud of me. I'll practice every day from now on. But something horrible has happened to my hands. The fingers have gotten so stiff—[*She lifts her hands to examine them with a frightened puzzlement.*] The knuckles are all swollen. They're so ugly. I'll have to go to the Infirmary and show Sister Martha. [*with a sweet smile of affectionate trust*] She's old and a little cranky, but I love her just the same, and she has things in her medicine chest that'll cure

8. Frederic Chopin (1810–1849), Polish composer famous for works for the piano.

9. An allusion to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

anything. She'll give me something to rub on my hands, and tell me to pray to the Blessed Virgin, and they'll be well again in no time. [*She forgets her hands and comes into the room, the wedding gown trailing on the floor. She glances around vaguely, her forehead puckered again.*] Let me see. What did I come here to find? It's terrible, how absent-minded I've become. I'm always dreaming and forgetting.

TYRONE [*in a stifled voice*] What's that she's carrying, Edmund?

EDMUND [*dully*] Her wedding gown, I suppose.

TYRONE Christ! [*He gets to his feet and stands directly in her path—in anguish*] Mary! Isn't it bad enough—? [*controlling himself—gently persuasive*] Here, let me take it, dear. You'll only step on it and tear it and get it dirty dragging it on the floor. Then you'd be sorry afterwards.

[*She lets him take it, regarding him from somewhere far away within herself, without recognition, without either affection or animosity.*]

MARY [*with the shy politeness of a well-bred young girl toward an elderly gentleman who relieves her of a bundle*] Thank you. You are very kind. [*She regards the wedding gown with a puzzled interest.*] It's a wedding gown. It's very lovely, isn't it? [*A shadow crosses her face and she looks vaguely uneasy.*] I remember now. I found it in the attic hidden in a trunk. But I don't know what I wanted it for. I'm going to be a nun—that is, if I can only find—[*She looks around the room, her forehead puckered again.*] What is it I'm looking for? I know it's something I lost. [*She moves back from TYRONE, aware of him now only as some obstacle in her path.*]

TYRONE [*in hopeless appeal*] Mary!

[*But it cannot penetrate her preoccupation. She doesn't seem to hear him. He gives up helplessly, shrinking into himself, even his defensive drunkenness taken from him, leaving him sick and sober. He sinks back on his chair, holding the wedding gown in his arms with an unconscious clumsiness, protective gentleness.*]

JAMIE [*drops his hand from his face, his eyes on the table top. He has suddenly sobered up, too—dully*] It's no good, Papa. [*He recites from Swinburne's "A Leave-taking" and does it well, simply but with a bitter sadness.*]

“Let us rise up and part; she will not know.
Let us go seaward as the great winds go,
Full of blown sand and foam; what help is here?
There is no help, for all these things are so,
And all the world is bitter as a tear.
And how these things are, though ye strove to show,
She would not know.”

MARY [*looking around her*] Something I miss terribly. It can't be altogether lost. [*She starts to move around in back of JAMIE's chair.*]

JAMIE [*turns to look up into her face—and cannot help appealing pleadingly in his turn*] Mama!

[*She does not seem to hear. He looks away hopelessly.*]

Hell! What's the use? It's no good. [*He recites from "A Leave-taking" again with increased bitterness.*]

“Let us go hence, my songs; she will not hear.
 Let us go hence together without fear;
 Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,
 And over all old things and all things dear.
 She loves not you nor me as all we love her.
 Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,
 She would not hear.”

MARY [*looking around her*] Something I need terribly. I remember when I had it I was never lonely nor afraid. I can't have lost it forever, I would die if I thought that. Because then there would be no hope.

[*She moves like a sleepwalker, around the back of JAMIE's chair, then forward toward left front, passing behind EDMUND.*]

EDMUND [*turns impulsively and grabs her arm. As he pleads he has the quality of a bewilderedly hurt little boy.*] Mama! It isn't a summer cold! I've got consumption!

MARY [*For a second he seems to have broken through to her. She trembles and her expression becomes terrified. She calls distractedly, as if giving a command to herself.*] No! [*And instantly she is far away again. She murmurs gently but impersonally.*] You must not try to touch me. You must not try to hold me. It isn't right, when I am hoping to be a nun.

[*He lets his hand drop from her arm. She moves left to the front end of the sofa beneath the windows and sits down, facing front, her hands folded in her lap, in a demure school-girlish pose.*]

JAMIE [*gives Edmund a strange look of mingled pity and jealous gloating*] You damned fool. It's no good. [*He recites again from the Swinburne poem.*]

“Let us go hence, go hence; she will not see.
 Sing all once more together; surely she,
 She too, remembering days and words that were,
 Will turn a little toward us, sighing; but we,
 We are hence, we are gone, as though we had not been there.
 Nay, and though all men seeing had pity on me,
 She would not see.”

TYRONE [*trying to shake off his hopeless stupor*] Oh, we're fools to pay any attention. It's the damned poison. But I've never known her to drown herself in it as deep as this. [*gruffly*] Pass me that bottle, Jamie. And stop reciting that damned morbid poetry. I won't have it in my house!

[*JAMIE pushes the bottle toward him. He pours a drink without disarranging the wedding gown he holds carefully over his other arm and on his lap, and shoves the bottle back. JAMIE pours his and passes the bottle to EDMUND, who, in turn, pours one. TYRONE lifts his glass and his sons follow suit mechanically, but before they can drink MARY speaks and they slowly lower their drinks to the table, forgetting them.*]

MARY [*staring dreamily before her. Her face looks extraordinarily youthful and innocent. The shyly eager, trusting smile is on her lips as she talks aloud to herself.*] I had a talk with Mother Elizabeth. She is so sweet and good. A saint on earth. I love her dearly. It may be sinful of me but I love her better than my own mother. Because she always understands, even before

you say a word. Her kind blue eyes look right into your heart. You can't keep any secrets from her. You couldn't deceive her, even if you were mean enough to want to. [*She gives a little rebellious toss of her head—with girlish pique*] All the same, I don't think she was so understanding this time. I told her I wanted to be a nun. I explained how sure I was of my vocation, that I had prayed to the Blessed Virgin to make me sure, and to find me worthy. I told Mother I had had a true vision when I was praying in the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, on the little island in the lake. I said I knew, as surely as I knew I was kneeling there, that the Blessed Virgin had smiled and blessed me with her consent. But Mother Elizabeth told me I must be more sure than that, even, that I must prove it wasn't simply my imagination. She said, if I was so sure, then I wouldn't mind putting myself to a test by going home after I graduated, and living as other girls lived, going out to parties and dances and enjoying myself; and then if after a year or two I still felt sure, I could come back to see her and we would talk it over again. [*She tosses her head—indignantly*] I never dreamed Holy Mother would give me such advice! I was really shocked. I said, of course, I would do anything she suggested, but I knew it was simply a waste of time. After I left her, I felt all mixed up, so I went to the shrine and prayed to the Blessed Virgin and found peace again because I knew she heard my prayer and would always love me and see no harm ever came to me so long as I never lost my faith in her. [*She pauses and a look of growing uneasiness comes over her face. She passes a hand over her forehead as if brushing cobwebs from her brain—vaguely*] That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time. [*She stares before her in a sad dream. TYRONE stirs in his chair. EDMUND and JAMIE remain motionless.*]

CURTAIN

1940

CLAUDE MCKAY

1889–1948

One of his biographers aptly calls Claude McKay a lifelong wanderer, a “sojourner” in the Harlem Renaissance. A Jamaican by birth, he did not become an American citizen until 1940; he left Harlem just when the Renaissance was getting started; he criticized leading black intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke (who, in turn, criticized him). Nevertheless, *Harlem Shadows*, his 1922 book of poetry, is generally considered the book that initiated the Harlem Renaissance; his *Home to Harlem* (1928) was the only best-selling African American novel of the decade. Whether the Harlem Renaissance was a unified movement

or a resonant label encompassing artists with diverse aims, whether McKay was an American Harlemiter or a man of the world, he was unquestionably one of the most important black writers of the 1920s. As well as influencing African American literature, he has had a major impact on writing by West Indians and Africans.

Claude McKay (Festus Claudius McKay) was born in Sunny Ville, a rural village in central Jamaica. This village, with its setting of spectacular natural beauty, became in later years his symbol of a lost golden age. McKay's grandfather, a West African Ashanti, had been brought to the island as a slave, and McKay's father passed on to his son what he remembered of Ashanti values and rituals. Economic necessity led the young McKay to Kingston (Jamaica's principal city) in 1909, where he was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker and wheelwright. Combining his emerging literary ambitions with an interest in Jamaican folkways, McKay published two ground-breaking books of dialect poetry—*Songs of Jamaica* and *Constab Ballads*—in 1912. Prize money from these books took him to the United States to study agriculture, but his literary ambitions drew him to New York City after two years in school (first at the Tuskegee Institute, then at Kansas State College). He married his Jamaican sweetheart, Eulalie Imelda Lewars, in 1914; the couple had a daughter, but the marriage did not last. Supporting himself in jobs like restaurant kitchen helper and Pullman railroad waiter, he began to publish in avant-garde journals; by 1917 he was appearing in *The Seven Arts*, *Pearson's*, and the prominent left-wing *Liberator*, edited by Max Eastman. *The Liberator* published his famous poem "If We Must Die" in 1919. His poetry, much of it written in strict sonnet form, braided racial subject matter, radical politics, and poetic technique into compelling statements that were also good poetry according to traditional standards.

McKay's radical politics, already formed in Jamaica, rose from his belief that racism was inseparable from capitalism, which he saw as a structure designed to perpetuate economic inequality. To him, attacking capitalism was attacking racial injustice. Before the publication of *Harlem Shadows*, McKay had spent 1919–21 in England; in 1923 he went to Moscow, where he was welcomed as a celebrity. His connections to the Communist regime in Russia made him a target for the FBI, which issued orders to keep him from returning to the United States. He stayed in Europe until 1934, living mainly in France but also in Spain and Morocco. *Home to Harlem* (1928), written mostly in France, was an episodic guide to Harlem's artistic, popular, and intellectual life. Later events turned it into one of the movement's last statements; retrenchment in the publishing industry after the stock market crash of 1929, the emergence of younger African American writers with different values, and dissension among Harlem artists themselves combined to bring an end to the Harlem Renaissance and altered the character of life in Harlem itself.

When McKay was finally able to return to the United States in 1934, the nation was deep in the Great Depression. With general unemployment at over 25 percent, paid literary work was extremely hard to come by. In 1935 he joined the New York City branch of the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal organization giving work to unemployed writers. Except for his important autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), he did little creative work, and his health failed. Through his friendship with Ellen Tarry, a young African American writer who was a Catholic, he received medical care from Friendship House, a Catholic lay organization in Harlem. In the later years of his life, appalled by Stalin's purges, McKay repudiated his earlier Communist sympathies. He began to work at Friendship House and, after moving to Chicago, worked for the Catholic Youth Organization. He converted to Catholicism in 1944 and died in Chicago four years later.

All texts are from *Harlem Shadows* (1922).

The Harlem Dancer

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
 And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
 Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
 Blown by black players upon a picnic day. 5
 She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
 The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
 To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
 Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
 Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
 Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise, 10
 The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
 Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;
 But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
 I knew her self was not in that strange place.

1917, 1922

Harlem Shadows

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
 In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
 Its veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
 To bend and barter at desire's call. 5
 Ah, little dark girls who in slippered feet
 Go prowling through the night from street to street!

Through the long night until the silver break
 Of day the little gray feet know no rest;
 Through the lone night until the last snow-flake
 Has dropped from heaven upon the earth's white breast, 10
 The dusky, half-clad girls of tired feet
 Are trudging, thinly shod, from street to street.

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
 Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
 Has pushed the timid little feet of clay, 15
 The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!
 Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
 In Harlem wandering from street to street.

1918, 1922

The Lynching

His Spirit in smoke ascended to high heaven.
 His father, by the cruelest way of pain,
 Had bidden him to his bosom once again;
 The awful sin remained still unforgiven.
 All night a bright and solitary star 5
 (Perchance the one that ever guided him,
 Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)
 Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.
 Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view
 The ghastly body swaying in the sun 10
 The women thronged to look, but never a one
 Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue;
 And little lads, lynchers that were to be,
 Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.

1919, 1922

If We Must Die

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
 Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
 While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
 Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
 If we must die, O let us nobly die, 5
 So that our precious blood may not be shed
 In vain; then even the monsters we defy
 Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
 O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
 Though far outnumbered let us show us brave, 10
 And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
 What though before us lies the open grave?
 Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
 Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

1919, 1922

Africa

The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,
 The sciences were sucklings at thy breast;
 When all the world was young in pregnant night
 Thy slaves toiled at thy monumental best.
 Thou ancient treasure-land, thou modern prize, 5
 New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!
 The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle eyes

Watches the mad world with immobile lids.
 The Hebrews humbled them at Pharaoh's name.
 Cradle of Power! Yet all things were in vain! 10
 Honor and Glory, Arrogance and Fame!
 They went. The darkness swallowed thee again.
 Thou art the harlot, now thy time is done,
 Of all the mighty nations of the sun.

1921, 1922

America

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
 And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
 Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
 I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!
 Her vigor flows like tides into my blood, 5
 Giving me strength erect against her hate.
 Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
 Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,
 I stand within her walls with not a shred
 Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer. 10
 Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
 And see her might and granite wonders there,
 Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
 Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

1921, 1922

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

1890–1980

Over a long writing life Katherine Anne Porter produced only four books of stories and one novel, *Ship of Fools*, which did not appear until she was over seventy. Her reputation as a prose writer did not depend on quantity; each story was technically skilled, emotionally powerful, combining traditional narration with new symbolic techniques and contemporary subject matter.

Callie Porter—she changed the name to Katherine Anne when she became a writer—was born in the small settlement of Indian Creek, Texas; her mother died soon after giving birth to her fourth child, when Porter was not quite two years old. Her father moved them all to his mother's home in Kyle, Texas, where the paternal grandmother raised the family in extreme poverty. The father gave up all attempts to support them either financially or emotionally; the security provided by the strong, loving, but pious and stern grandmother ended with her death when Porter was

eleven. Porter married to leave home immediately after her sixteenth birthday, only to find that rooted domesticity was not for her. Long before her divorce in 1915, she had separated from her first husband and begun a life of travel, activity, and changes of jobs.

She started writing in 1916 as a reporter for a Dallas newspaper. In 1917 she moved to Denver, the next year to New York City's Greenwich Village. Between 1918 and 1924 she lived mainly in Mexico, freelancing, meeting artists and intellectuals, and becoming involved in revolutionary politics. In Mexico she found the resources of journalism inadequate to her ambitions; using an anecdote she had heard from an archaeologist as a kernel, she wrote her first story, "María Concepción," which was published in the prestigious *Century* magazine in 1922. Like all her stories, it dealt with powerful emotions and had a strong sense of locale. Critics praised her as a major talent.

Although she considered herself a serious writer from this time on, Porter was distracted from fiction by many crosscurrents. A self-supporting woman with expensive tastes, she hesitated to give up lucrative freelance offers. She enjoyed travel and gladly took on jobs that sent her abroad. She became involved in political causes, including the Sacco-Vanzetti case. She was married four times.

Porter planned each story meticulously—taking extensive notes, devising scenarios, roughing out dialogue, and revising many times, sometimes over a period of years. She did not write confessional or simple autobiographical fiction, but each story originated in an important experience of her life. Although not a feminist, Porter devoted much of her work to exploring the tensions in women's lives in the modern era. The story that made her famous for life, so that everything else she published thereafter was looked on as a literary event, was "Flowering Judas" (1929), set in Mexico and dealing with revolutionary politics, lust, and betrayal. The reality of mixed motives and the difference between pure idealism and egotistical opportunism as they are encountered in revolutionary politics are among the themes in this deceptively simple narrative. It appeared in the little magazine *Hound and Horn*. The collections *Flowering Judas* and *Noon Wine* came out in 1930 and 1937. In 1930 Porter went back to Mexico and the following year to Europe on a Guggenheim fellowship; she lived in Berlin, Paris, and Basel before returning to the United States in 1936. Two more collections of stories and novellas appeared in 1939 (*Pale Horse, Pale Rider*) and in 1944 (*The Leaning Tower*). These later collections feature several stories about Miranda Gay, a character who is partly autobiographical and partly an idealized image of the southern belle facing the modern world. *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* narrates Miranda's World War I romance with a soldier in the highly charged political climate of the American home front.

Soon after arriving in Europe in 1931 Porter began working on a novel, but it was not until 1962 that *Ship of Fools*, which runs to almost five hundred pages, appeared. Set on an ocean liner crossing the Atlantic to Germany in August 1931, it explores the characters and developing relationships of a large number of passengers; the ship, as Porter wrote in a preface, stands for "this world on its voyage to eternity." As in "Flowering Judas" and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* the personal and the political intersect in *Ship of Fools*, since the coming of Nazism in Germany frames the interlinked stories of the travelers. In its film version, *Ship of Fools* brought Porter a great deal of money. Capitalizing on the publicity, her publishers brought out the *Collected Stories* in 1965, from which followed the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, the Gold Medal for fiction of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and election to the American Academy of Letters, all in the next two years. The happiest occasions in her later years—she lived to be ninety—were connected with endowing and establishing the Katherine Anne Porter Room at the University of Maryland, not far from her last home near Washington, D.C.

The texts are from the *Collected Stories* (1965).

Flowering Judas¹

Braggioni sits heaped upon the edge of a straight-backed chair much too small for him, and sings to Laura in a furry, mournful voice. Laura has begun to find reasons for avoiding her own house until the latest possible moment, for Braggioni is there almost every night. No matter how late she is, he will be sitting there with a surly, waiting expression, pulling at his kinky yellow hair, thumbing the strings of his guitar, snarling a tune under his breath. Lupe the Indian maid meets Laura at the door, and says with a flicker of a glance towards the upper room, "He waits."

Laura wishes to lie down, she is tired of her hairpins and the feel of her long tight sleeves, but she says to him, "Have you a new song for me this evening?" If he says yes, she asks him to sing it. If he says no, she remembers his favorite one, and asks him to sing it again. Lupe brings her a cup of chocolate and a plate of rice, and Laura eats at the small table under the lamp, first inviting Braggioni, whose answer is always the same: "I have eaten, and besides, chocolate thickens the voice."

Laura says, "Sing, then," and Braggioni heaves himself into song. He scratches the guitar familiarly as though it were a pet animal, and sings passionately off key, taking the high notes in a prolonged painful squeal. Laura, who haunts the markets listening to the ballad singers, and stops every day to hear the blind boy playing his reed-flute in Sixteenth of September Street,² listens to Braggioni with pitiless courtesy, because she dares not smile at his miserable performance. Nobody dares to smile at him. Braggioni is cruel to everyone, with a kind of specialized insolence, but he is so vain of his talents, and so sensitive to slights, it would require a cruelty and vanity greater than his own to lay a finger on the vast cureless wound of his self-esteem. It would require courage, too, for it is dangerous to offend him, and nobody has this courage.

Braggioni loves himself with such tenderness and amplitude and eternal charity that his followers—for he is a leader of men, a skilled revolutionist, and his skin has been punctured in honorable warfare—warm themselves in the reflected glow, and say to each other: "He has a real nobility, a love of humanity raised above mere personal affections." The excess of this self-love has flowed out, inconveniently for her, over Laura, who, with so many others, owes her comfortable situation and her salary to him. When he is in a very good humor, he tells her, "I am tempted to forgive you for being a *gringa*. *Gringita!*"³ and Laura, burning, imagines herself leaning forward suddenly, and with a sound back-handed slap wiping the suety smile from his face. If he notices her eyes at these moments he gives no sign.

She knows what Braggioni would offer her, and she must resist tenaciously without appearing to resist, and if she could avoid it she would not admit even to herself the slow drift of his intention. During these long evenings which have spoiled a long month for her, she sits in her deep chair

1. One of a genus of trees and shrubs with purplish rosy flowers. According to legend, Judas Iscariot, betrayer of Jesus, hanged himself from such a tree.

2. A street in Morelia, a city in western Mexico

where the story is set.

3. A young female foreigner, non-Mexican girl; a patronizing term meaning "cute little foreign girl." Diminutive of *gringa*, which is used pejoratively, especially for an American.

with an open book on her knees, resting her eyes on the consoling rigidity of the printed page when the sight and sound of Braggioni singing threaten to identify themselves with all her remembered afflictions and to add their weight to her uneasy premonitions of the future. The gluttonous bulk of Braggioni has become a symbol of her many disillusiones, for a revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues. This is nonsense, she knows it now and is ashamed of it. Revolution must have leaders, and leadership is a career for energetic men. She is, her comrades tell her, full of romantic error, for what she defines as cynicism in them is merely "a developed sense of reality." She is almost too willing to say, "I am wrong, I suppose I don't really understand the principles," and afterward she makes a secret truce with herself, determined not to surrender her will to such expedient logic. But she cannot help feeling that she has been betrayed irreparably by the disunion between her way of living and her feeling of what life should be, and at times she is almost contented to rest in this sense of grievance as a private store of consolation. Sometimes she wishes to run away, but she stays. Now she longs to fly out of this room, down the narrow stairs, and into the street where the houses lean together like conspirators under a single mottled lamp, and leave Braggioni singing to himself.

Instead she looks at Braggioni, frankly and clearly, like a good child who understands the rules of behavior. Her knees cling together under sound blue serge, and her round white collar is not purposely nun-like. She wears the uniform of an idea, and has renounced vanities. She was born Roman Catholic, and in spite of her fear of being seen by someone who might make a scandal of it, she slips now and again into some crumbling little church, kneels on the chilly stone, and says a Hail Mary on the gold rosary she bought in Tehuantepec. It is no good and she ends by examining the altar with its tinsel flowers and ragged brocades, and feels tender about the battered doll-shape of some male saint whose white, lace-trimmed drawers hang limply around his ankles below the hieratic dignity of his velvet robe. She has encased herself in a set of principles derived from her early training, leaving no detail of gesture or of personal taste untouched, and for this reason she will not wear lace made on machines. This is her private heresy, for in her special group the machine is sacred, and will be the salvation of the workers. She loves fine lace, and there is a tiny edge of fluted cobweb on this collar, which is one of twenty precisely alike, folded in blue tissue paper in the upper drawer of her clothes chest.

Braggioni catches her glance solidly as if he had been waiting for it, leans forward, balancing his paunch between his spread knees, and sings with tremendous emphasis, weighing his words. He has, the song relates, no father and no mother, nor even a friend to console him; lonely as a wave of the sea he comes and goes, lonely as a wave. His mouth opens round and yearns sideways, his balloon cheeks grow oily with the labor of song. He bulges marvelously in his expensive garments. Over his lavender collar, crushed upon a purple necktie, held by a diamond hoop: over his ammunition belt of tooled leather worked in silver, buckled cruelly around his gasping middle: over the tops of his glossy yellow shoes Braggioni swells with ominous ripeness, his mauve silk hose stretched taut, his ankles bound with the stout leather thongs of his shoes.

When he stretches his eyelids at Laura she notes again that his eyes are the true tawny yellow cat's eyes. He is rich, not in money, he tells her, but in power, and this power brings with it the blameless ownership of things, and the right to indulge his love of small luxuries. "I have a taste for the elegant refinements," he said once, flourishing a yellow silk handkerchief before her nose. "Smell that? It is Jockey Club, imported from New York." Nonetheless he is wounded by life. He will say so presently. "It is true everything turns to dust in the hand, to gall on the tongue." He sighs and his leather belt creaks like a saddle girth. "I am disappointed in everything as it comes. Everything." He shakes his head. "You, poor thing, you will be disappointed too. You are born for it. We are more alike than you realize in some things. Wait and see. Some day you will remember what I have told you, you will know that Braggioni was your friend."

Laura feels a slow chill, a purely physical sense of danger, a warning in her blood that violence, mutilation, a shocking death, wait for her with lessening patience. She has translated this fear into something homely, immediate, and sometimes hesitates before crossing the street. "My personal fate is nothing, except as the testimony of a mental attitude," she reminds herself, quoting from some forgotten philosophic primer, and is sensible enough to add, "Anyhow, I shall not be killed by an automobile if I can help it."

"It may be true I am as corrupt, in another way, as Braggioni," she thinks in spite of herself, "as callous, as incomplete," and if this is so, any kind of death seems preferable. Still she sits quietly, she does not run. Where could she go? Uninvited she has promised herself to this place; she can no longer imagine herself as living in another country, and there is no pleasure in remembering her life before she came here.

Precisely what is the nature of this devotion, its true motives, and what are its obligations? Laura cannot say. She spends part of her days in Xochimilco, near by, teaching Indian children to say in English, "The cat is on the mat." When she appears in the classroom they crowd about her with smiles on their wise, innocent, clay-colored faces, crying, "Good morning, my titcher!" in immaculate voices, and they make of her desk a fresh garden of flowers every day.

During her leisure she goes to union meetings and listens to busy important voices quarreling over tactics, methods, internal politics. She visits the prisoners of her own political faith in their cells, where they entertain themselves with counting cockroaches, repenting of their indiscretions, composing their memoirs, writing out manifestoes and plans for their comrades who are still walking about free, hands in pockets, sniffing fresh air. Laura brings them food and cigarettes and a little money, and she brings messages disguised in equivocal phrases from the men outside who dare not set foot in the prison for fear of disappearing into the cells kept empty for them. If the prisoners confuse night and day, and complain, "Dear little Laura, time doesn't pass in this infernal hole, and I won't know when it is time to sleep unless I have a reminder," she brings them their favorite narcotics, and says in a tone that does not wound them with pity, "Tonight will really be night for you," and though her Spanish amuses them, they find her comforting, useful. If they lose patience and all faith, and curse the slowness of their friends in coming to their rescue with money and influence, they trust her not to repeat everything, and if she inquires, "Where do you think we can

find money, or influence?" they are certain to answer, "Well, there is Braggioni, why doesn't he do something?"

She smuggles letters from headquarters to men hiding from firing squads in back streets in mildewed houses, where they sit in tumbled beds and talk bitterly as if all Mexico were at their heels, when Laura knows positively they might appear at the band concert in the Alameda⁴ on Sunday morning, and no one would notice them. But Braggioni says, "Let them sweat a little. The next time they may be careful. It is very restful to have them out of the way for a while." She is not afraid to knock on any door in any street after midnight, and enter in the darkness, and say to one of these men who is really in danger: "They will be looking for you—seriously—tomorrow morning after six. Here is some money from Vicente. Go to Vera Cruz and wait."

She borrows money from the Roumanian agitator to give to his bitter enemy the Polish agitator. The favor of Braggioni is their disputed territory, and Braggioni holds the balance nicely, for he can use them both. The Polish agitator talks love to her over café tables, hoping to exploit what he believes is her secret sentimental preference for him, and he gives her misinformation which he begs her to repeat as the solemn truth to certain persons. The Roumanian is more adroit. He is generous with his money in all good causes, and lies to her with an air of ingenuous candor, as if he were her good friend and confidant. She never repeats anything they may say. Braggioni never asks questions. He has other ways to discover all that he wishes to know about them.

Nobody touches her, but all praise her gray eyes, and the soft, round under lip which promises gayety, yet is always grave, nearly always firmly closed: and they cannot understand why she is in Mexico. She walks back and forth on her errands, with puzzled eyebrows, carrying her little folder of drawings and music and school papers. No dancer dances more beautifully than Laura walks, and she inspires some amusing, unexpected ardors, which cause little gossip, because nothing comes of them. A young captain who had been a soldier in Zapata's⁵ army attempted, during a horseback ride near Cuernavaca, to express his desire for her with the noble simplicity befitting a rude folk-hero: but gently, because he was gentle. This gentleness was his defeat, for when he alighted, and removed her foot from the stirrup, and essayed to draw her down into his arms, her horse, ordinarily a tame one, shied fiercely, reared and plunged away. The young hero's horse careered blindly after his stable-mate, and the hero did not return to the hotel until rather late that evening. At breakfast he came to her table in full charro dress,⁶ gray buckskin jacket and trousers with strings of silver buttons down the leg, and he was in a humorous, careless mood. "May I sit with you?" and "You are a wonderful rider. I was terrified that you might be thrown and dragged. I should never have forgiven myself. But I cannot admire you enough for your riding!"

"I learned to ride in Arizona," said Laura.

4. Public promenade bordered with trees.

5. Emiliano Zapata (c. 1879–1919), Mexican peasant revolutionary general whose movement, *zapatismo*, combined agrarian and Mexican Indian cultural aspirations; one of the most sig-

nificant figures in Mexico from 1910 to 1919, when he was murdered.

6. Costume worn by a peasant horseman of special status.

"If you will ride with me again this morning, I promise you a horse that will not shy with you," he said. But Laura remembered that she must return to Mexico City at noon.

Next morning the children made a celebration and spent their playtime writing on the blackboard, "We lov ar ticher," and with tinted chalks they drew wreaths of flowers around the words. The young hero wrote her a letter: "I am a very foolish, wasteful, impulsive man. I should have first said I love you, and then you would not have run away. But you shall see me again." Laura thought, "I must send him a box of colored crayons," but she was trying to forgive herself for having spurred her horse at the wrong moment.

A brown, shock-haired youth came and stood in her patio one night and sang like a lost soul for two hours, but Laura could think of nothing to do about it. The moonlight spread a wash of gauzy silver over the clear spaces of the garden, and the shadows were cobalt blue. The scarlet blossoms of the Judas tree were dull purple, and the names of the colors repeated themselves automatically in her mind, while she watched not the boy, but his shadow, fallen like a dark garment across the fountain rim, trailing in the water. Lupe came silently and whispered expert counsel in her ear: "If you will throw him one little flower, he will sing another song or two and go away." Laura threw the flower, and he sang a last song and went away with the flower tucked in the band of his hat. Lupe said, "He is one of the organizers of the Typographers Union, and before that he sold corridos⁷ in the Merced market, and before that, he came from Guanajuato, where I was born. I would not trust any man, but I trust least those from Guanajuato."

She did not tell Laura that he would be back again the next night, and the next, nor that he would follow her at a certain fixed distance around the Merced market, through the Zócolo, up Francisco I. Madero Avenue, and so along the Paseo de la Reforma to Chapultepec Park, and into the Philosopher's Footpath, still with that flower withering in his hat, and an indivisible attention in his eyes.

Now Laura is accustomed to him, it means nothing except that he is nineteen years old and is observing a convention with all propriety, as though it were founded on a law of nature, which in the end it might well prove to be. He is beginning to write poems which he prints on a wooden press, and he leaves them stuck like handbills in her door. She is pleasantly disturbed by the abstract, unhurried watchfulness of his black eyes which will in time turn easily towards another object. She tells herself that throwing the flower was a mistake, for she is twenty-two years old and knows better; but she refuses to regret it, and persuades herself that her negation of all external events as they occur is a sign that she is gradually perfecting herself in the stoicism she strives to cultivate against that disaster she fears, though she cannot name it.

She is not at home in the world. Every day she teaches children who remain strangers to her, though she loves their tender round hands and their charming opportunist savagery. She knocks at unfamiliar doors not knowing whether a friend or a stranger shall answer, and even if a known face emerges from the sour gloom of that unknown interior, still it is the face of a stranger. No matter what this stranger says to her, nor what her message to him, the

7. Popular ballads.

very cells of her flesh reject knowledge and kinship in one monotonous word. No. No. No. She draws her strength from this one holy talismanic word which does not suffer her to be led into evil. Denying everything, she may walk anywhere in safety, she looks at everything without amazement.

No, repeats this firm unchanging voice of her blood; and she looks at Braggioni without amazement. He is a great man, he wishes to impress this simple girl who covers her great round breasts with thick dark cloth, and who hides long, invaluable beautiful legs under a heavy skirt. She is almost thin except for the incomprehensible fullness of her breasts, like a nursing mother's, and Braggioni, who considers himself a judge of women, speculates again on the puzzle of her notorious virginity, and takes the liberty of speech which she permits without a sign of modesty, indeed, without any sort of sign, which is disconcerting.

"You think you are so cold, *gringita!* Wait and see. You will surprise yourself some day! May I be there to advise you!" He stretches his eyelids at her, and his ill-humored cat's eyes waver in a separate glance for the two points of light marking the opposite ends of a smoothly drawn path between the swollen curve of her breasts. He is not put off by that blue serge, nor by her resolutely fixed gaze. There is all the time in the world. His cheeks are bellying with the wind of song. "O girl with the dark eyes," he sings, and reconsiders. "But yours are not dark. I can change all that. O girl with the green eyes, you have stolen my heart away!" then his mind wanders to the song, and Laura feels the weight of his attention being shifted elsewhere. Singing thus, he seems harmless, he is quite harmless, there is nothing to do but sit patiently and say "No," when the moment comes. She draws a full breath, and her mind wanders also, but not far. She dares not wander too far.

Not for nothing has Braggioni taken pains to be a good revolutionist and a professional lover of humanity. He will never die of it. He has the malice, the cleverness, the wickedness, the sharpness of wit, the hardness of heart, stipulated for loving the world profitably. *He will never die of it.* He will live to see himself kicked out from his feeding trough by other hungry world-saviors. Traditionally he must sing in spite of his life which drives him to bloodshed, he tells Laura, for his father was a Tuscany⁸ peasant who drifted to Yucatan and married a Maya woman: a woman of race, an aristocrat. They gave him the love and knowledge of music, thus: and under the rip of his thumbnail, the strings of the instrument complain like exposed nerves.

Once he was called Delgadito by all the girls and married women who ran after him; he was so scrawny all his bones showed under his thin cotton clothing, and he could squeeze his emptiness to the very backbone with his two hands. He was a poet and the revolution was only a dream then; too many women loved him and sapped away his youth, and he could never find enough to eat anywhere, anywhere! Now he is a leader of men, crafty men who whisper in his ear, hungry men who wait for hours outside his office for a word with him, emaciated men with wild faces who waylay him at the street gate with a timid, "Comrade, let me tell you . . ." and they blow the foul breath from their empty stomachs in his face.

He is always sympathetic. He gives them handfuls of small coins from his own pocket, he promises them work, there will be demonstrations, they

8. A region in north-central Italy.

must join the unions and attend the meetings, above all they must be on the watch for spies. They are closer to him than his own brothers, without them he can do nothing—until tomorrow, comrade!

Until tomorrow. “They are stupid, they are lazy, they are treacherous, they would cut my throat for nothing,” he says to Laura. He has good food and abundant drink, he hires an automobile and drives in the Paseo on Sunday morning, and enjoys plenty of sleep in a soft bed beside a wife who dares not disturb him; and he sits pampering his bones in easy billows of fat, singing to Laura, who knows and thinks these things about him. When he was fifteen, he tried to drown himself because he loved a girl, his first love, and she laughed at him. “A thousand women have paid for that,” and his tight little mouth turns down at the corners. Now he perfumes his hair with Jockey Club, and confides to Laura: “One woman is really as good as another for me, in the dark. I prefer them all.”

His wife organizes unions among the girls in the cigarette factories, and walks in picket lines, and even speaks at meetings in the evening. But she cannot be brought to acknowledge the benefits of true liberty. “I tell her I must have my freedom, net. She does not understand my point of view.” Laura has heard this many times. Braggioni scratches the guitar and meditates. “She is an instinctively virtuous woman, pure gold, no doubt of that. If she were not, I should lock her up, and she knows it.”

His wife, who works so hard for the good of the factory girls, employs part of her leisure lying on the floor weeping because there are so many women in the world, and only one husband for her, and she never knows where nor when to look for him. He told her: “Unless you can learn to cry when I am not here, I must go away for good.” That day he went away and took a room at the Hotel Madrid.

It is this month of separation for the sake of higher principles that has been spoiled not only for Mrs. Braggioni, whose sense of reality is beyond criticism, but for Laura, who feels herself bogged in a nightmare. Tonight Laura envies Mrs. Braggioni, who is alone, and free to weep as much as she pleases about a concrete wrong. Laura has just come from a visit to the prison, and she is waiting for tomorrow with a bitter anxiety as if tomorrow may not come, but time may be caught immovably in this hour, with herself transfixed, Braggioni singing on forever, and Eugenio’s body not yet discovered by the guard.

Braggioni says: “Are you going to sleep?” Almost before she can shake her head, he begins telling her about the May-day disturbances coming on in Morelia, for the Catholics hold a festival in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and the Socialists celebrate their martyrs on that day. “There will be two independent processions, starting from either end of town, and they will march until they meet, and the rest depends . . .” He asks her to oil and load his pistols. Standing up, he unbuckles his ammunition belt, and spreads it laden across her knees. Laura sits with the shells slipping through the cleaning cloth dipped in oil, and he says again he cannot understand why she works so hard for the revolutionary idea unless she loves some man who is in it. “Are you not in love with someone?” “No,” says Laura. “And no one is in love with you?” “No.” “Then it is your own fault. No woman need go begging. Why, what is the matter with you? The legless beggar woman in the Alameda has a perfectly faithful lover. Did you know that?”

Laura peers down the pistol barrel and says nothing, but a long, slow faintness rises and subsides in her; Braggioni curves his swollen fingers around the throat of the guitar and softly smothers the music out of it, and when she hears him again he seems to have forgotten her, and is speaking in the hypnotic voice he uses when talking in small rooms to a listening, close-gathered crowd. Some day this world, now seemingly so composed and eternal, to the edges of every sea shall be merely a tangle of gaping trenches, of crashing walls and broken bodies. Everything must be torn from its accustomed place where it has rotted for centuries, hurled skyward and distributed, cast down again clean as rain, without separate identity. Nothing shall survive that the stiffened hands of poverty have created for the rich and no one shall be left alive except the elect spirits destined to procreate a new world cleansed of cruelty and injustice, ruled by benevolent anarchy: "Pistols are good, I love them, cannon are even better, but in the end I pin my faith to good dynamite," he concludes, and strokes the pistol lying in her hands. "Once I dreamed of destroying this city, in case it offered resistance to General Ortíz, but it fell into his hands like an overripe pear."

He is made restless by his own words, rises and stands waiting. Laura holds up the belt to him: "Put that on, and go kill somebody in Morelia, and you will be happier," she says softly. The presence of death in the room makes her bold. "Today, I found Eugenio going into a stupor. He refused to allow me to call the prison doctor. He had taken all the tablets I brought him yesterday. He said he took them because he was bored."

"He is a fool, and his death is his own business," says Braggioni, fastening his belt carefully.

"I told him if he had waited only a little while longer, you would have got him set free," says Laura. "He said he did not want to wait."

"He is a fool and we are well rid of him," says Braggioni, reaching for his hat.

He goes away. Laura knows his mood has changed, she will not see him any more for a while. He will send word when he needs her to go on errands into strange streets, to speak to the strange faces that will appear, like clay masks with the power of human speech, to mutter their thanks to Braggioni for his help. Now she is free, and she thinks, I must run while there is time. But she does not go.

Braggioni enters his own house where for a month his wife has spent many hours every night weeping and tangling her hair upon her pillow. She is weeping now, and she weeps more at the sight of him, the cause of all her sorrows. He looks about the room. Nothing is changed, the smells are good and familiar, he is well acquainted with the woman who comes toward him with no reproach except grief on her face. He says to her tenderly: "You are so good, please don't cry any more, you dear good creature." She says, "Are you tired, my angel? Sit here and I will wash your feet." She brings a bowl of water, and kneeling, unlaces his shoes, and when from her knees she raises her sad eyes under her blackened lids, he is sorry for everything, and bursts into tears. "Ah, yes, I am hungry, I am tired, let us eat something together," he says, between sobs. His wife leans her head on his arm and says, "Forgive me!" and this time he is refreshed by the solemn, endless rain of her tears.

Laura takes off her serge dress and puts on a white linen nightgown and goes to bed. She turns her head a little to one side, and lying still, reminds

herself that it is time to sleep. Numbers tick in her brain like little clocks, soundless doors close of themselves around her. If you would sleep, you must not remember anything, the children will say tomorrow, good morning, my teacher, the poor prisoners who come every day bringing flowers to their jailor. 1-2-3-4-5—it is monstrous to confuse love with revolution, night with day, life with death—ah, Eugenio!

The tolling of the midnight bell is a signal, but what does it mean? Get up, Laura, and follow me: come out of your sleep, out of your bed, out of this strange house. What are you doing in this house? Without a word, without fear she rose and reached for Eugenio's hand, but he eluded her with a sharp, sly smile and drifted away. This is not all, you shall see—Murderer, he said, follow me, I will show you a new country, but it is far away and we must hurry. No, said Laura, not unless you take my hand, no; and she clung first to the stair rail, and then to the topmost branch of the Judas tree that bent down slowly and set her upon the earth, and then to the rocky ledge of a cliff, and then to the jagged wave of a sea that was not water but a desert of crumbling stone. Where are you taking me, she asked in wonder but without fear. To death, and it is a long way off, and we must hurry, said Eugenio. No, said Laura, not unless you take my hand. Then eat these flowers, poor prisoner, said Eugenio in a voice of pity, take and eat: and from the Judas tree he stripped the warm bleeding flowers, and held them to her lips. She saw that his hand was fleshless, a cluster of small white petrified branches, and his eye sockets were without light, but she ate the flowers greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst. Murderer! said Eugenio, and Cannibal! This is my body and my blood. Laura cried No! and at the sound of her own voice, she awoke trembling, and was afraid to sleep again.

1929, 1930

Pale Horse, Pale Rider¹

In sleep she knew she was in her bed, but not the bed she had lain down in a few hours since, and the room was not the same but it was a room she had known somewhere. Her heart was a stone lying upon her breast outside of her; her pulses lagged and paused, and she knew that something strange was going to happen, even as the early morning winds were cool through the lattice, the streaks of light were dark blue and the whole house was snoring in its sleep.

Now I must get up and go while they are all quiet. Where are my things? Things have a will of their own in this place and hide where they like. Daylight will strike a sudden blow on the roof startling them all up to their feet; faces will beam asking, Where are you going, What are you doing, What are you thinking, How do you feel, Why do you say such things, What do you

1. First words of an African American spiritual, based on Revelation 6, in which four horses and their riders associated with the Apocalypse appear: "power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and

with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (verse 8). The last of these figures is a "pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him" (verse 8).

mean? No more sleep. Where are my boots and what horse shall I ride? Fiddler or Graylie or Miss Lucy with the long nose and the wicked eye? How I have loved this house in the morning before we are all awake and tangled together like badly cast fishing lines. Too many people have been born here, and have wept too much here, and have laughed too much, and have been too angry and outrageous with each other here. Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantel-pieces, there have been too damned many antimacassars in this house, she said loudly, and oh, what accumulation of storied dust never allowed to settle in peace for one moment.

And the stranger? Where is that lank greenish stranger I remember hanging about the place, welcomed by my grandfather, my great-aunt, my five times removed cousin, my decrepit hound and my silver kitten? Why did they take to him, I wonder? And where are they now? Yet I saw him pass the window in the evening. What else besides them did I have in the world? Nothing. Nothing is mine, I have only nothing but it is enough, it is beautiful and it is all mine. Do I even walk about in my own skin or is it something I have borrowed to spare my modesty? Now what horse shall I borrow for this journey I do not mean to take, Graylie or Miss Lucy or Fiddler who can jump ditches in the dark and knows how to get the bit between his teeth? Early morning is best for me because trees are trees in one stroke, stones are stones set in shades known to be grass, there are no false shapes or surmises, the road is still asleep with the crust of dew unbroken. I'll take Graylie because he is not afraid of bridges.

Come now, Graylie, she said, taking his bridle, we must outrun Death and the Devil. You are no good for it, she told the other horses standing saddled before the stable gate, among them the horse of the stranger, gray also, with tarnished nose and ears. The stranger swung into his saddle beside her, leaned far towards her and regarded her without meaning, the blank still stare of mindless malice that makes no threats and can bide its time. She drew Graylie around sharply, urged him to run. He leaped the low rose hedge and the narrow ditch beyond, and the dust of the lane flew heavily under his beating hoofs. The stranger rode beside her, easily, lightly, his reins loose in his half-closed hand, straight and elegant in dark shabby garments that flapped upon his bones; his pale face smiled in an evil trance, he did not glance at her. Ah, I have seen this fellow before, I know this man if I could place him. He is no stranger to me.

She pulled Graylie up, rose in her stirrups and shouted, I'm not going with you this time—ride on! Without pausing or turning his head the stranger rode on. Graylie's ribs heaved under her, her own ribs rose and fell, Oh, why am I so tired, I must wake up. "But let me get a fine yawn first," she said, opening her eyes and stretching, "a slap of cold water in my face, for I've been talking in my sleep again, I heard myself but what was I saying?"

Slowly, unwillingly, Miranda drew herself up inch by inch out of the pit of sleep, waited in a daze for life to begin again. A single word struck in her mind, a gong of warning, reminding her for the day long what she forgot happily in sleep, and only in sleep. The war, said the gong, and she shook her head. Dangling her feet idly with their slippers hanging, she was reminded of the way all sorts of persons sat upon her desk at the newspaper office. Every day she found someone there, sitting upon her desk instead of the

chair provided, dangling his legs, eyes roving, full of his important affairs, waiting to pounce about something or other. “*Why* won’t they sit in the chair? Should I put a sign on it, saying, ‘For God’s sake, sit here?’”

Far from putting up a sign, she did not even frown at her visitors. Usually she did not notice them at all until their determination to be seen was greater than her determination not to see them. Saturday, she thought, lying comfortably in her tub of hot water, will be pay day, as always. Or I hope always. Her thoughts roved hazily in a continual effort to bring together and unite firmly the disturbing oppositions in her day-to-day existence, where survival, she could see clearly, had become a series of feats of sleight of hand. I owe—let me see, I wish I had pencil and paper—well, suppose I *did* pay five dollars now on a Liberty Bond,² I couldn’t possibly keep it up. Or maybe. Eighteen dollars a week. So much for rent, so much for food, and I mean to have a few things besides. About five dollars’ worth. Will leave me twenty-seven cents. I suppose I can make it. I suppose I should be worried. I am worried. Very well, now I am worried and what next? Twenty-seven cents. That’s not so bad. Pure profit, really. Imagine if they should suddenly raise me to twenty I should then have two dollars and twenty-seven cents left over. But they aren’t going to raise me to twenty. They are in fact going to throw me out if I don’t buy a Liberty Bond. I hardly believe that. I’ll ask Bill. (Bill was the city editor.) I wonder if a threat like that isn’t a kind of blackmail. I don’t believe even a Lusk Committeeman³ can get away with that.

Yesterday there had been two pairs of legs dangling, on either side of her typewriter, both pairs stuffed thickly into funnels of dark expensive-looking material. She noticed at a distance that one of them was oldish and one was youngish, and they both of them had a stale air of borrowed importance which apparently they had got from the same source. They were both much too well nourished and the younger one wore a square little mustache. Being what they were, no matter what their business was it would be something unpleasant. Miranda had nodded them at them, pulled out her chair and without removing her cap or gloves had reached into a pile of letters and sheets from the copy desk as if she had not a moment to spare. They did not move, or take off their hats. At last she had said “Good morning” to them, and asked if they were, perhaps, waiting for her?

The two men slid off the desk, leaving some of her papers rumpled, and the oldish man had inquired why she had not bought a Liberty Bond. Miranda had looked at him then, and got a poor impression. He was a puffy-faced man, gross-mouthed, with little lightless eyes, and Miranda wondered why nearly all of those selected to do the war work at home were of his sort. He might be anything at all, she thought; advance agent for a road show, promoter of a wildcat oil company, a former saloon keeper announcing the opening of a new cabaret, an automobile salesman—any follower of any one of the crafty, haphazard callings. But he was now all Patriot, working for

2. Equivalent of a U.S. Savings Bond, established to finance the war effort during World War I.

3. Member of a committee established in 1919 by the New York State Legislature, chaired by state senator Clayton Lusk, to investigate subversive activities: pacifism, left-wing labor activ-

ism, socialism, communism; it was one of several undertakings associated with the “red scare” of 1919–21. Porter’s dating is in error, because the narrative—set in a small city named Blue Mountain—takes place immediately before and during the war’s end, i.e., autumn 1918.

the government. "Look here," he asked her, "do you know there's a war, or don't you?"

Did he expect an answer to that? Be quiet, Miranda told herself, this was bound to happen. Sooner or later it happens. Keep your head. The man wagged his finger at her, "Do you?" he persisted, as if he were prompting an obstinate child.

"Oh, the war," Miranda had echoed on a rising note and she almost smiled at him. It was habitual, automatic, to give that solemn, mystically uplifted grin when you spoke the words or heard them spoken. "*C'est la guerre*,"⁴ whether you could pronounce it or not, was even better, and always, always, you shrugged.

"Yeah," said the younger man in a nasty way, "the war." Miranda, startled by the tone, met his eye; his stare was really stony, really viciously cold, the kind of thing you might expect to meet behind a pistol on a deserted corner. This expression gave temporary meaning to a set of features otherwise non-descript, the face of those men who have no business of their own. "We're having a war, and some people are buying Liberty Bonds and others just don't seem to get around to it," he said. "That's what we mean."

Miranda frowned with nervousness, the sharp beginnings of fear. "Are you selling them?" she asked, taking the cover off her typewriter and putting it back again.

"No, we're not selling them," said the older man. "We're just asking you why you haven't bought one." The voice was persuasive and ominous.

Miranda began to explain that she had no money, and did not know where to find any, when the older man interrupted: "That's no excuse, no excuse at all, and you know it, with the Huns⁵ overrunning martyred Belgium."

"With our American boys fighting and dying in Belleau Wood," said the younger man, "anybody can raise fifty dollars to help beat the Boche."⁶

Miranda said hastily, "I have eighteen dollars a week and not another cent in the world. I simply cannot buy anything."

"You can pay for it five dollars a week," said the older man (they had stood there cawing back and forth over her head), "like a lot of other people in this office, and a lot of other offices besides are doing."

Miranda, desperately silent, had thought, "Suppose I were not a coward, but said what I really thought? Suppose I said to hell with this filthy war? Suppose I asked that little thug, What's the matter with you, why aren't you rotting in Belleau Wood? I wish you were . . ."

She began to arrange her letters and notes, her fingers refusing to pick up things properly. The older man went on making his little set speech. It was hard, of course. Everybody was suffering, naturally. Everybody had to do his share. But as to that, a Liberty Bond was the safest investment you could make. It was just like having the money in the bank. Of course. The government was back of it and where better could you invest?

4. It is war (French, literal trans.); used colloquially to mean "what else can you expect?"

5. Disparaging term for German soldiers fighting against the combined armies of France, England, and the United States.

6. Another disparaging term for German

soldiers. Belleau Wood is a forested area in northeastern France, which was the scene of a hard-won victory over German troops by a force composed chiefly of Americans in a battle waged on June 6–25, 1918.

"I agree with you about that," said Miranda, "but I haven't any money to invest."

And of course, the man had gone on, it wasn't so much her fifty dollars that was going to make any difference. It was just a pledge of good faith on her part. A pledge of good faith that she was a loyal American doing her duty. And the thing was safe as a church. Why, if he had a million dollars he'd be glad to put every last cent of it in these Bonds. . . . "You can't lose by it," he said, almost benevolently, "and you can lose a lot if you don't. Think it over. You're the only one in this whole newspaper office that hasn't come in. And every firm in this city has come in one hundred per cent. Over at the *Daily Clarion* nobody had to be asked twice."

"They pay better over there," said Miranda. "But next week, if I can. Not now, next week."

"See that you do," said the younger man. "This ain't any laughing matter."

They lolled away, past the Society Editor's desk, past Bill the City Editor's desk, past the long copy desk where old man Gibbons sat all night shouting at intervals, "Jarge! Jarge!" and the copy boy would come flying. "Never say *people* when you mean *persons*," old man Gibbons had instructed Miranda, "and never say *practically*, say *virtually*, and don't for God's sake ever so long as I am at this desk use the barbarism *inasmuch* under any circumstances whatsoever. Now you're educated, you may go." At the head of the stairs her inquisitors had stopped in their fussy pride and vainglory, lighting cigars and wedging their hats more firmly over their eyes.

Miranda turned over in the soothing water, and wished she might fall asleep there, to wake up only when it was time to sleep again. She had a burning slow headache, and noticed it now, remembering she had waked up with it and it had in fact begun the evening before. While she dressed she tried to trace the insidious career of her headache, and it seemed reasonable to suppose it had started with the war. "It's been a headache, all right, but not quite like this." After the Committeemen had left, yesterday, she had gone to the cloakroom and had found Mary Townsend, the Society Editor, quietly hysterical about something. She was perched on the edge of the shabby wicker couch with ridges down the center, knitting on something rose-colored. Now and then she would put down her knitting, seize her head with both hands and rock, saying, "My *God*," in a surprised, inquiring voice. Her column was called *Ye Towne Gossyp*, so of course everybody called her *Towney*. Miranda and *Towney* had a great deal in common, and liked each other. They had both been real reporters once, and had been sent together to "cover" a scandalous elopement, in which no marriage had taken place, after all, and the recaptured girl, her face swollen, had sat with her mother, who was moaning steadily under a mound of blankets. They had both wept painfully and implored the young reporters to suppress the worst of the story. They had suppressed it, and the rival newspaper printed it all the next day. Miranda and *Towney* had then taken their punishment together, and had been degraded publicly to routine female jobs, one to the theaters, the other to society. They had this in common, that neither of them could see what else they could possibly have done, and they knew they were considered fools by the rest of the staff—nice girls, but fools. At sight of Miranda,

Towney had broken out in a rage. "I can't do it, I'll never be able to raise the money, I told them, I can't, I can't, but they wouldn't listen."

Miranda said, "I knew I wasn't the only person in this office who couldn't raise five dollars. I told them I couldn't, too, and I can't."

"My God," said Towney, in the same voice, "they told me I'd lose my job—"

"I'm going to ask Bill," Miranda said; "I don't believe Bill would do that."

"It's not up to Bill," said Towney. "He'd have to if they got after him. Do you suppose they could put us in jail?"

"I don't know," said Miranda. "If they do, we won't be lonesome." She sat down beside Towney and held her own head. "What kind of soldier are you knitting that for? It's a sprightly color, it ought to cheer him up."

"Like hell," said Towney, her needles going again. "I'm making this for myself. That's that."

"Well," said Miranda, "we won't be lonesome and we'll catch up on our sleep." She washed her face and put on fresh make-up. Taking clean gray gloves out of her pocket she went out to join a group of young women fresh from the country club dances, the morning bridge, the charity bazaar, the Red Cross workrooms, who were wallowing in good works. They gave tea dances and raised money, and with the money they bought quantities of sweets, fruit, cigarettes, and magazines for the men in the cantonment hospitals. With this loot they were now setting out, a gay procession of high-powered cars and brightly tinted faces to cheer the brave boys who already, you might very well say, had fallen in defense of their country. It must be frightfully hard on them, the dears, to be floored like this when they're all crazy to get overseas and into the trenches as quickly as possible. Yes, and some of them are the cutest things you ever saw, I didn't know there were so many good-looking men in this country, good heavens, I said, where do they come from? Well, my dear, you may ask yourself that question, who knows where they did come from? You're quite right, the way I feel about it is this, we must do everything we can to make them contented, but I draw the line at talking to them. I told the chaperons at those dances for enlisted men, I'll dance with them, every dumbbell who asks me, but I will NOT talk to them, I said, even if there is a war. So I danced hundreds of miles without opening my mouth except to say, Please keep your knees to yourself. I'm glad we gave those dances up. Yes, and the men stopped coming, anyway. But listen, I've heard that a great many of the enlisted men come from very good families; I'm not good at catching names, and those I did catch I'd never heard before, so I don't know . . . but it seems to me if they were from good families, you'd know it, wouldn't you? I mean, if a man is well bred he doesn't step on your feet, does he? At least not that. I used to have a pair of sandals ruined at every one of those dances. Well, I think any kind of social life is in very poor taste just now, I think we should all put on our Red Cross head dresses and wear them for the duration of the war—

Miranda, carrying her basket and her flowers, moved in among the young women, who scattered out and rushed upon the ward uttering girlish laughter meant to be refreshingly gay, but there was a grim determined clang in it calculated to freeze the blood. Miserably embarrassed at the idiocy of her errand, she walked rapidly between the long rows of high beds, set foot to foot with a

narrow aisle between. The men, a selected presentable lot, sheets drawn up to their chins, not seriously ill, were bored and restless, most of them willing to be amused at anything. They were for the most part picturesquely bandaged as to arm or head, and those who were not visibly wounded invariably replied "Rheumatism" if some tactless girl, who had been solemnly warned never to ask this question, still forgot and asked a man what his illness was. The good-natured, eager ones, laughing and calling out from their hard narrow beds, were soon surrounded. Miranda, with her wilting bouquet and her basket of sweets and cigarettes, looking about, caught the unfriendly bitter eye of a young fellow lying on his back, his right leg in a cast and pulley. She stopped at the foot of his bed and continued to look at him, and he looked back with an unchanged, hostile face. Not having any, thank you and be damned to the whole business, his eyes said plainly to her, and will you be so good as to take your trash off my bed? For Miranda had set it down, leaning over to place it where he might be able to reach it if he would. Having set it down, she was incapable of taking it up again, but hurried away, her face burning, down the long aisle and out into the cool October sunshine, where the dreary raw barracks swarmed and worked with an aimless life of scurrying, dun-colored insects; and going around to a window near where he lay, she looked in, spying upon her soldier. He was lying with his eyes closed, his eyebrows in a sad bitter frown. She could not place him at all, she could not imagine where he came from nor what sort of being he might have been "in life," she said to herself. His face was young and the features sharp and plain, the hands were not laborer's hands but not well-cared-for hands either. They were good useful properly shaped hands, lying there on the coverlet. It occurred to her that it would be her luck to find him, instead of a jolly hungry puppy glad of a bite to eat and a little chatter. It is like turning a corner absorbed in your painful thoughts and meeting your state of mind embodied, face to face, she said. "My own feelings about this whole thing, made flesh. Never again will I come here, this is no sort of thing to be doing. This is disgusting," she told herself plainly. "Of course I would pick him out," she thought, getting into the back seat of the car she came in, "serves me right, I know better."

Another girl came out looking very tired and climbed in beside her. After a short silence, the girl said in a puzzled way, "I don't know what good it does, really. Some of them wouldn't take anything at all. I don't like this, do you?"

"I hate it," said Miranda.

"I suppose it's all right, though," said the girl, cautiously.

"Perhaps," said Miranda, turning cautious also.

That was for yesterday. At this point Miranda decided there was no good in thinking of yesterday, except for the hour after midnight she had spent dancing with Adam. He was in her mind so much, she hardly knew when she was thinking about him directly. His image was simply always present in more or less degree, he was sometimes nearer the surface of her thoughts, the pleasantest, the only really pleasant thought she had. She examined her face in the mirror between the windows and decided that her uneasiness was not all imagination. For three days at least she had felt odd and her expression was unfamiliar. She would have to raise that fifty dollars somehow, she supposed, or who knows what can happen? She was hardened to stories of personal disaster, of outrageous accusations and extraordinarily bitter penalties that had grown monstrously out of incidents very little more important than her

failure—her refusal—to buy a Bond. No, she did not find herself a pleasing sight, flushed and shiny, and even her hair felt as if it had decided to grow in the other direction. I must do something about this, I can't let Adam see me like this, she told herself, knowing that even now at that moment he was listening for the turn of her door knob, and he would be in the hallway, or on the porch when she came out, as if by sheerest coincidence. The noon sunlight cast cold slanting shadows in the room where, she said, I suppose I live, and this day is beginning badly, but they all do now, for one reason or another. In a drowse, she sprayed perfume on her hair, put on her moleskin cap and jacket, now in their second winter, but still good, still nice to wear, again being glad she had paid a frightening price for them. She had enjoyed them all this time, and in no case would she have had the money now. Maybe she could manage for that Bond. She could not find the lock without leaning to search for it, then stood undecided a moment possessed by the notion that she had forgotten something she would miss seriously later on.

Adam was in the hallway, a step outside his own door; he swung about as if quite startled to see her, and said, "Hello. I don't have to go back to camp today after all—isn't that luck?"

Miranda smiled at him gaily because she was always delighted at the sight of him. He was wearing his new uniform, and he was all olive and tan and tawny, hay colored and sand colored from hair to boots. She half noticed again that he always began by smiling at her; that his smile faded gradually; that his eyes became fixed and thoughtful as if he were reading in a poor light.

They walked out together into the fine fall day, scuffling bright ragged leaves under their feet, turning their faces up to a generous sky really blue and spotless. At the first corner they waited for a funeral to pass, the mourners seated straight and firm as if proud in their sorrow.

"I imagine I'm late," said Miranda, "as usual. What time is it?"

"Nearly half past one," he said, slipping back his sleeve with an exaggerated thrust of his arm upward. The young soldiers were still self-conscious about their wrist watches. Such of them as Miranda knew were boys from southern and southwestern towns, far off the Atlantic seaboard, and they had always believed that only sissies wore wrist watches. "I'll slap you on the wrist watch," one vaudeville comedian would simper to another, and it was always a good joke, never stale.

"I think it's a most sensible way to carry a watch," said Miranda. "You needn't blush."

"I'm nearly used to it," said Adam, who was from Texas. "We've been told time and again how all the he-manly regular army men wear them. It's the horrors of war," he said; "are we downhearted? I'll say we are."

It was the kind of patter going the rounds. "You look it," said Miranda.

He was tall and heavily muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks, and he was infinitely buttoned, strapped, harnessed into a uniform as tough and unyielding in cut as a strait jacket, though the cloth was fine and supple. He had his uniforms made by the best tailor he could find, he confided to Miranda one day when she told him how squish he was looking in his new soldier suit. "Hard enough to make anything of the outfit, anyhow," he told her. "It's the least I can do for my beloved country, not to go around looking like a tramp." He was twenty-four years old and a Second

Lieutenant in an Engineers Corps, on leave because his outfit expected to be sent over shortly. "Came in to make my will," he told Miranda, "and get a supply of toothbrushes and razor blades. By what gorgeous luck do you suppose," he asked her, "I happened to pick on your rooming house? How did I know you were there?"

Strolling, keeping step, his stout polished well-made boots setting themselves down firmly beside her thin-soled black suède, they put off as long as they could the end of their moment together, and kept up as well as they could their small talk that flew back and forth over little grooves worn in the thin upper surface of the brain, things you could say and hear clink reassuringly at once without disturbing the radiance which played and darted about the simple and lovely miracle of being two persons named Adam and Miranda, twenty-four years old each, alive and on the earth at the same moment: "Are you in the mood for dancing, Miranda?" and "I'm always in the mood for dancing, Adam!" but there were things in the way, the day that ended with dancing was a long way to go.

He really did look, Miranda thought, like a fine healthy apple this morning. One time or another in their talking, he had boasted that he had never had a pain in his life that he could remember. Instead of being horrified at this monster, she approved his monstrous uniqueness. As for herself, she had had too many pains to mention, so she did not mention them. After working for three years on a morning newspaper she had an illusion of maturity and experience; but it was fatigue merely, she decided, from keeping what she had been brought up to believe were unnatural hours, eating casually at dirty little restaurants, drinking bad coffee all night, and smoking too much. When she said something of her way of living to Adam, he studied her face a few seconds as if he had never seen it before, and said in a forthright way, "Why, it hasn't hurt you a bit, I think you're beautiful," and left her dangling there, wondering if he had thought she wished to be praised. She did wish to be praised, but not at that moment. Adam kept unwholesome hours too, or had in the ten days they had known each other, staying awake until one o'clock to take her out for supper; he smoked also continually, though if she did not stop him he was apt to explain to her exactly what smoking did to the lungs. "But," he said, "does it matter so much if you're going to war, anyway?"

"No," said Miranda, "and it matters even less if you're staying at home knitting socks. Give me a cigarette, will you?" They paused at another corner, under a half-foliaged maple, and hardly glanced at a funeral procession approaching. His eyes were pale tan with orange flecks in them, and his hair was the color of a haystack when you turn the weathered top back to the clear straw beneath. He fished out his cigarette case and snapped his silver lighter at her, snapped it several times in his own face, and they moved on, smoking.

"I can see you knitting socks," he said. "That would be just your speed. You know perfectly well you can't knit."

"I do worse," she said, soberly; "I write pieces advising other young women to knit and roll bandages and do without sugar and help win the war."

"Oh, well," said Adam, with the easy masculine morals in such questions, "that's merely your job, that doesn't count."

"I wonder," said Miranda. "How did you manage to get an extension of leave?"

"They just gave it," said Adam, "for no reason. The men are dying like flies out there, anyway. This funny new disease.⁷ Simply knocks you into a cocked hat."

"It seems to be a plague," said Miranda, "something out of the Middle Ages. Did you ever see so many funerals, ever?"

"Never did. Well, let's be strong minded and not have any of it. I've got four days more straight from the blue and not a blade of grass must grow under our feet. What about tonight?"

"Same thing," she told him, "but make it about half past one. I've got a special job beside my usual run of the mill."

"What a job you've got," said Adam, "nothing to do but run from one dizzy amusement to another and then write a piece about it."

"Yes, it's too dizzy for words," said Miranda. They stood while a funeral passed, and this time they watched it in silence. Miranda pulled her cap to an angle and winked in the sunlight, her head swimming slowly "like goldfish," she told Adam, "my head swims. I'm only half awake, I must have some coffee."

They lounged on their elbows over the counter of a drug store. "No more cream for the stay-at-homes," she said, "and only one lump of sugar. I'll have two or none; that's the kind of martyr I'm being. I mean to live on boiled cabbage and wear shoddy from now on and get in good shape for the next round. No war is going to sneak up on me again."

"Oh, there won't be any more wars, don't you read the newspapers?" asked Adam. "We're going to mop 'em up this time, and they're going to stay mopped, and this is going to be all."

"So they told me," said Miranda, tasting her bitter lukewarm brew and making a rueful face. Their smiles approved of each other, they felt they had got the right tone, they were taking the war properly. Above all, thought Miranda, no tooth-gnashing, no hair-tearing, it's noisy and unbecoming and it doesn't get you anywhere.

"Swill," said Adam rudely, pushing back his cup. "Is that all you're having for breakfast?"

"It's more than I want," said Miranda.

"I had buckwheat cakes, with sausage and maple syrup, and two bananas, and two cups of coffee, at eight o'clock, and right now, again, I feel like a famished orphan left in the ashcan. I'm all set," said Adam, "for broiled steak and fried potatoes and—"

"Don't go on with it," said Miranda, "it sounds delirious to me. Do all that after I'm gone." She slipped from the high seat, leaned against it slightly, glanced at her face in her round mirror, rubbed rouge on her lips and decided that she was past praying for.

"There's something terribly wrong," she told Adam. "I feel too rotten. It can't just be the weather, and the war."

"The weather is perfect," said Adam, "and the war is simply too good to be true. But since when? You were all right yesterday."

7. A global influenza epidemic, lasting from 1918 to 1919, affected at least half a billion people, killing about half a million in the United States and at least 50 million worldwide. The influenza seems to have arrived in the United States via ships

bringing wounded soldiers back from Europe. Soldiers in crowded conditions were especially vulnerable—more military people died in the pandemic than were killed in battle during the entire war.

"I don't know," she said slowly, her voice sounding small and thin. They stopped as always at the open door before the flight of littered steps leading up to the newspaper loft. Miranda listened for a moment to the rattle of typewriters above, the steady rumble of presses below. "I wish we were going to spend the whole afternoon on a park bench," she said, "or drive to the mountains."

"I do too," he said; "let's do that tomorrow."

"Yes, tomorrow, unless something else happens. I'd like to run away," she told him; "let's both."

"Me?" said Adam. "Where I'm going there's no running to speak of. You mostly crawl about on your stomach here and there among the debris. You know, barbed wire and such stuff. It's going to be the kind of thing that happens once in a lifetime." He reflected a moment, and went on, "I don't know a darned thing about it, really, but they make it sound awfully messy. I've heard so much about it I feel as if I had been there and back. It's going to be an anticlimax," he said, "like seeing the pictures of a place so often you can't see it at all when you actually get there. Seems to me I've been in the army all my life."

Six months, he meant. Eternity. He looked so clear and fresh, and he had never had a pain in his life. She had seen them when they had been there and back and they never looked like this again. "Already the returned hero," she said, "and don't I wish you were."

"When I learned the use of the bayonet in my first training camp," said Adam, "I gouged the vitals out of more sandbags and sacks of hay than I could keep track of. They kept bawling at us, 'Get him, get that Boche, stick him before he sticks you'—and we'd go for those sandbags like wild-fire, and honestly, sometimes I felt a perfect fool for getting so worked up when I saw the sand trickling out. I used to wake up in the night sometimes feeling silly about it."

"I can imagine," said Miranda. "It's perfect nonsense." They lingered, unwilling to say good-by. After a little pause, Adam, as if keeping up the conversation, asked, "Do you know what the average life expectation of a sapping party⁸ is after it hits the job?"

"Something speedy, I suppose."

"Just nine minutes," said Adam; "I read that in your own newspaper not a week ago."

"Make it ten and I'll come along," said Miranda.

"Not another second," said Adam, "exactly nine minutes, take it or leave it."

"Stop bragging," said Miranda. "Who figured that out?"

"A noncombatant," said Adam, "a fellow with rickets."

This seemed very comic, they laughed and leaned towards each other and Miranda heard herself being a little shrill. She wiped the tears from her eyes. "My, it's a funny war," she said; "isn't it? I laugh every time I think about it."

Adam took her hand in both of his and pulled a little at the tips of her gloves and sniffed them. "What nice perfume you have," he said, "and such

8. Group of soldiers skilled in explosives who dig trenches to approach or undermine enemy positions.

a lot of it, too. I like a lot of perfume on gloves and hair," he said, sniffing again.

"I've got probably too much," she said. "I can't smell or see or hear today. I must have a fearful cold."

"Don't catch cold," said Adam; "my leave is nearly up and it will be the last, the very last." She moved her fingers in her gloves as he pulled at the fingers and turned her hands as if they were something new and curious and of great value, and she turned shy and quiet. She liked him, she liked him, and there was more than this but it was no good even imagining, because he was not for her nor for any woman, being beyond experience already, committed without any knowledge or act of his own to death. She took back her hands. "Good-by," she said finally, "until tonight."

She ran upstairs and looked back from the top. He was still watching her, and raised his hand without smiling. Miranda hardly ever saw anyone look back after he had said good-by. She could not help turning sometimes for one glimpse more of the person she had been talking with, as if that would save too rude and too sudden a snapping of even the lightest bond. But people hurried away, their faces already changed, fixed, in their straining towards their next stopping place, already absorbed in planning their next act or encounter. Adam was waiting as if he expected her to turn, and under his brows fixed in a strained frown, his eyes were very black.

At her desk she sat without taking off jacket or cap, slitting envelopes and pretending to read the letters. Only Chuck Rouncivale, the sports reporter, and Ye Towne Gossyp were sitting on her desk today, and them she liked having there. She sat on theirs when she pleased. Towney and Chuck were talking and they went on with it.

"They say," said Towney, "that it is really caused by germs brought by a German ship to Boston, a camouflaged ship, naturally, it didn't come in under its own colors. Isn't that ridiculous?"

"Maybe it was a submarine," said Chuck, "sneaking in from the bottom of the sea in the dead of night. Now that sounds better."

"Yes, it does," said Towney; "they always slip up somewhere in these details . . . and they think the germs were sprayed over the city—it started in Boston, you know—and somebody reported seeing a strange, thick, greasy-looking cloud float up out of Boston Harbor and spread slowly all over that end of town. I think it was an old woman who saw it."

"Should have been," said Chuck.

"I read it in a New York newspaper," said Towney; "so it's bound to be true."

Chuck and Miranda laughed so loudly at this that Bill stood up and glared at them. "Towney still reads the newspapers," explained Chuck.

"Well, what's funny about that?" asked Bill, sitting down again and frowning into the clutter before him.

"It was a noncombatant saw that cloud," said Miranda.

"Naturally," said Towney.

"Member of the Lusk Committee, maybe," said Miranda.

"The Angel of Mons," said Chuck, "or a dollar-a-year man."

Miranda wished to stop hearing, and talking, she wished to think for just five minutes of her own about Adam, really to think about him, but there was no time. She had seen him first ten days ago, and since then they had been

crossing streets together, darting between trucks and limousines and push-carts and farm wagons; he had waited for her in doorways and in little restaurants that smelled of stale frying fat; they had eaten and danced to the urgent whine and bray of jazz orchestras, they had sat in dull theaters because Miranda was there to write a piece about the play. Once they had gone to the mountains and, leaving the car, had climbed a stony trail, and had come out on a ledge upon a flat stone, where they sat and watched the lights change on a valley landscape that was, no doubt, Miranda said, quite apocryphal—"We need not believe it, but it is fine poetry," she told him; they had leaned their shoulders together there, and had sat quite still, watching. On two Sundays they had gone to the geological museum, and had pored in shared fascination over bits of meteors, rock formations, fossilized tusks and trees, Indian arrows, grottoes from the silver and gold lodes. "Think of those old miners washing out their fortunes in little pans beside the streams," said Adam, "and inside the earth there was this—" and he had told her he liked better those things that took long to make; he loved airplanes too, all sorts of machinery, things carved out of wood or stone. He knew nothing much about them, but he recognized them when he saw them. He had confessed that he simply could not get through a book, any kind of book except textbooks on engineering; reading bored him to crumbs; he regretted now he hadn't brought his roadster, but he hadn't thought he would need a car; he loved driving, he wouldn't expect her to believe how many hundreds of miles he could get over in a day . . . he had showed her snapshots of himself at the wheel of his roadster; of himself sailing a boat, looking very free and windblown, all angles, hauling on the ropes; he would have joined the air force, but his mother had hysterics every time he mentioned it. She didn't seem to realize that dog fighting in the air was a good deal safer than sapping parties on the ground at night. But he hadn't argued, because of course she did not realize about sapping parties. And here he was, stuck, on a plateau a mile high with no water for a boat and his car at home, otherwise they could really have had a good time. Miranda knew he was trying to tell her what kind of person he was when he had his machinery with him. She felt she knew pretty well what kind of person he was, and would have liked to tell him that if he thought he had left himself at home in a boat or an automobile, he was much mistaken. The telephones were ringing, Bill was shouting at somebody who kept saying, "Well, but listen, well, but listen—" but nobody was going to listen, of course, nobody. Old man Gibbons bellowed in despair, "Jarge, Jarge—"

"Just the same," Towney was saying in her most complacent patriotic voice. "Hut Service⁹ is a fine idea, and we should all volunteer even if they don't want us." Towney does well at this, thought Miranda, look at her; remembering the rose-colored sweater and the tight rebellious face in the cloakroom. Towney was now all open-faced glory and goodness, willing to sacrifice herself for her country. "After all," said Towney, "I *can* sing and dance well enough for the Little Theater, and I could write their letters for them, and at a pinch I might drive an ambulance. I have driven a Ford for years."

Miranda joined in: "Well, I can sing and dance too, but who's going to do the bed-making and the scrubbing up? Those huts are hard to keep, and it

9. Civilian aid provided for soldiers abroad.

would be a dirty job and we'd be perfectly miserable; and as I've got a hard dirty job and am perfectly miserable, I'm going to stay at home."

"I think the women should keep out of it," said Chuck Rouncivale. "They just add skirts to the horrors of war." Chuck had bad lungs and fretted a good deal about missing the show. "I could have been there and back with a leg off by now; it would have served the old man right. Then he'd either have to buy his own hooch or sober up."

Miranda had seen Chuck on pay day giving the old man money for hooch. He was a good-humored ingratiating old scoundrel, too, that was the worst of him. He slapped his son on the back and beamed upon him with the bleared eye of paternal affection while he took his last nickel.

"It was Florence Nightingale¹ ruined wars," Chuck went on.

"What's the idea of petting soldiers and binding up their wounds and soothing their fevered brows? That's not war. Let 'em perish where they fall. That's what they're there for."

"You can talk," said Towney, with a slantwise glint at him.

"What's the idea?" asked Chuck, flushing and hunching his shoulders. "You know I've got this lung, or maybe half of it anyway by now."

"You're much too sensitive," said Towney. "I didn't mean a thing."

Bill had been raging about, chewing his half-smoked cigar, his hair standing up in a brush, his eyes soft and lambent but wild, like a stag's. He would never, thought Miranda, be more than fourteen years old if he lived for a century, which he would not, at the rate he was going. He behaved exactly like city editors in the moving pictures, even to the chewed cigar. Had he formed his style on the films, or had scenario writers seized once for all on the type Bill in its inarguable purity? Bill was shouting to Chuck: "*And if he comes back here take him up the alley and saw his head off by hand!*"

Chuck said, "He'll be back, don't worry." Bill said mildly, already off on another track, "Well, saw him off." Towney went to her own desk, but Chuck sat waiting amiably to be taken to the new vaudeville show. Miranda, with two tickets, always invited one of the reporters to go with her on Monday. Chuck was lavishly hardboiled and professional in his sports writing, but he had told Miranda that he didn't give a damn about sports, really; the job kept him out in the open, and paid him enough to buy the old man's hooch. He preferred shows and didn't see why women always had the job.

"Who does Bill want sawed today?" asked Miranda.

"That hooper you panned in this morning's," said Chuck. "He was up here bright and early asking for the guy that writes up show business. He said he was going to take the goof who wrote that piece up the alley and bop him in the nose. He said . . ."

"I hope he's gone," said Miranda; "I do hope he had to catch a train."

Chuck stood up and arranged his maroon-colored turtle-necked sweater, glanced down at the peasoup tweed plus fours and the hobnailed tan boots which he hoped would help to disguise the fact that he had a bad lung and didn't care for sports, and said, "He's long gone by now, don't worry. Let's get going; you're late as usual."

1. English woman (1820–1910) who founded modern nursing and in 1854 organized a unit of thirty-eight female nurses to serve in the Crimean War.

Miranda, facing about, almost stepped on the toes of a little drab man in a derby hat. He might have been a pretty fellow once, but now his mouth drooped where he had lost his side teeth, and his sad red-rimmed eyes had given up coquetry. A thin brown wave of hair was combed out with brillian-tine and curled against the rim of the derby. He didn't move his feet, but stood planted with a kind of inert resistance, and asked Miranda: "Are you the so-called dramatic critic on this hick newspaper?"

"I'm afraid I am," said Miranda.

"Well," said the little man, "I'm just asking for one minute of your valuable time." His underlip shot out, he began with shaking hands to fish about in his waistcoat pocket. "I just hate to let you get away with it, that's all." He riffled through a collection of shabby newspaper clippings. "Just give these the once-over, will you? And then let me ask you if you think I'm gonna stand for being knocked by a tanktown critic," he said, in a toneless voice; "look here, here's Buffalo, Chicago, Saint Looey, Philadelphia, Frisco, besides New York. Here's the best publications in the business, *Variety*, the *Billboard*, they all broke down and admitted that Danny Dickerson knows his stuff. So you don't think so, hey? That's all I wanta ask you."

"No, I don't," said Miranda, as bluntly as she could, "and I can't stop to talk about it,"

The little man leaned nearer, his voice shook as if he had been nervous for a long time. "Look here, what was there you didn't like about me? Tell me that."

Miranda said, "You shouldn't pay any attention at all. What does it matter what I think?"

"I don't care what you think, it ain't that," said the little man, "but these things get round and booking agencies back East don't know how it is out here. We get panned in the sticks and they think it's the same as getting panned in Chicago, see? They don't know the difference. They don't know that the more high class an act is the more the hick critics pan it. But I've been called the best in the business by the best in the business and I wanta know what you think is wrong with me."

Chuck said, "Come on, Miranda, curtain's going up." Miranda handed the little man his clippings, they were mostly ten years old, and tried to edge past him. He stepped before her again and said without much conviction, "If you was a man I'd knock your block off." Chuck got up at that and lounged over, taking his hands out of his pockets, and said, "Now you've done your song and dance you'd better get out. Get the hell out now before I throw you downstairs."

The little man pulled at the top of his tie, a small blue tie with red polka dots, slightly frayed at the knot. He pulled it straight and repeated as if he had rehearsed it, "Come out in the alley." The tears filled his thickened red lids. Chuck said, "Ah, shut up," and followed Miranda, who was running towards the stairs. He overtook her on the sidewalk. "I left him sniveling and shuffling his publicity trying to find the joker," said Chuck, "the poor old heel."

Miranda said, "There's too much of everything in this world just now. I'd like to sit down here on the curb, Chuck, and die, and never again see—I wish I could lose my memory and forget my own name . . . I wish—"

Chuck said, "Toughen up, Miranda. This is no time to cave in. Forget that fellow. For every hundred people in show business, there are ninety-

nine like him. But you don't manage right, anyway. You bring it on yourself. All you have to do is play up the headlines, and you needn't even mention the also-rans. Try to keep in mind that Rypinsky has got show business cornered in this town; please Rypinsky and you'll please the advertising department, please them and you'll get a raise. Hand-in-glove, my poor dumb child, will you never learn?"

"I seem to keep learning all the wrong things," said Miranda, hopelessly.

"You do for a fact," Chuck told her cheerfully. "You are as good at it as I ever saw. Now do you feel better?"

"This is a rotten show you've invited me to," said Chuck. "Now what are you going to do about it? If I were writing it up, I'd—"

"Do write it up," said Miranda. "You write it up this time. I'm getting ready to leave, anyway, but don't tell anybody yet."

"You mean it? All my life," said Chuck, "I've yearned to be a so-called dramatic critic on a hick newspaper, and this is positively my first chance."

"Better take it," Miranda told him. "It may be your last." She thought, This is the beginning of the end of something. Something terrible is going to happen to me. I shan't need bread and butter where I'm going. I'll will it to Chuck, he has a venerable father to buy hooch for. I hope they let him have it. Oh, Adam, I hope I see you once more before I go under with whatever is the matter with me. "I wish the war were over," she said to Chuck, as if they had been talking about that. "I wish it were over and I wish it had never begun."

Chuck had got out his pad and pencil and was already writing his review. What she had said seemed sage enough but how would he take it? "I don't care how it started or when it ends," said Chuck, scribbling away, "I'm not going to be there."

All the rejected men talked like that, thought Miranda. War was the one thing they wanted, now they couldn't have it. Maybe they had wanted badly to go, some of them. All of them had a sidelong eye for the women they talked with about it, a guarded resentment which said, "Don't pin a white feather² on me, you bloodthirsty female. I've offered my meat to the crows and they won't have it." The worst thing about war for the stay-at-homes is there isn't anyone to talk to any more. The Lusk Committee will get you if you don't watch out. Bread will win the war. Work will win, sugar will win, peach pits will win the war. Nonsense. *Not* nonsense, I tell you, there's some kind of valuable high explosive to be got out of peach pits. So all the happy housewives hurry during the canning season to lay their baskets of peach pits on the altar of their country. It keeps them busy and makes them feel useful, and all these women running wild with the men away are dangerous, if they aren't given something to keep their little minds out of mischief. So rows of young girls, the intact cradles of the future, with their pure serious faces framed becomingly in Red Cross wimples,³ roll cockeyed bandages that will never reach a base hospital, and knit sweaters that will never warm a manly chest, their minds dwelling lovingly on all the blood and mud and the next dance at the Acanthus Club for the officers of the flying corps. Keeping still and quiet will win the war.

2. Sign of cowardice.

3. Headcoverings surrounding the entire face and chin.

"I'm simply not going to be there," said Chuck, absorbed in his review. No, Adam will be there, thought Miranda. She slipped down in the chair and leaned her head against the dusty plush, closed her eyes and faced for one instant that was a lifetime the certain, the overwhelming and awful knowledge that there was nothing at all ahead for Adam and for her. Nothing. She opened her eyes and held her hands together palms up, gazing at them and trying to understand oblivion.

"Now look at this," said Chuck, for the lights had come on and the audience was rustling and talking again. "I've got it all done, even before the headliner comes on. It's old Stella Mayhew, and she's always good, she's been good for forty years, and she's going to sing 'O the blues ain't nothin' but the easy-going heart disease.' That's all you need to know about her. Now just glance over this. Would you be willing to sign it?"

Miranda took the pages and stared at them conscientiously, turning them over, she hoped, at the right moment, and gave them back. "Yes, Chuck, yes, I'd sign that. But I won't. We must tell Bill you wrote it, because it's your start, maybe."

"You don't half appreciate it," said Chuck. "You read it too fast. Here, listen to this—" and he began to mutter excitedly. While he was reading she watched his face. It was a pleasant face with some kind of spark of life in it, and a good severity in the modeling of the brow above the nose. For the first time since she had known him she wondered what Chuck was thinking about. He looked preoccupied and unhappy, he wasn't so frivolous as he sounded. The people were crowding into the aisle, bringing out their cigarette cases ready to strike a match the instant they reached the lobby; women with waved hair clutched at their wraps, men stretched their chins to ease them of their stiff collars, and Chuck said, "We might as well go now." Miranda, buttoning her jacket, stepped into the moving crowd, thinking, What did I ever know about them? There must be a great many of them here who think as I do, and we dare not say a word to each other of our desperation, we are speechless animals letting ourselves be destroyed, and why? Does anybody here believe the things we say to each other?

Stretched in unease on the ridge of the wicker couch in the cloakroom, Miranda waited for time to pass and leave Adam with her. Time seemed to proceed with more than usual eccentricity, leaving twilight gaps in her mind for thirty minutes which seemed like a second, and then hard flashes of light that shone clearly on her watch proving that three minutes is an intolerable stretch of waiting, as if she were hanging by her thumbs. At last it was reasonable to imagine Adam stepping out of the house in the early darkness into the blue mist that might soon be rain, he would be on the way, and there was nothing to think about him, after all. There was only the wish to see him and the fear, the present threat, of not seeing him again; for every step they took towards each other seemed perilous, drawing them apart instead of together, as a swimmer in spite of his most determined strokes is yet drawn slowly backward by the tide. "I don't want to love," she would think in spite of herself, "not Adam, there is no time and we are not ready for it and yet this is all we have—"

And there he was on the sidewalk, with his foot on the first step, and Miranda almost ran down to meet him. Adam, holding her hands, asked,

“Do you feel well now? Are you hungry? Are you tired? Will you feel like dancing after the show?”

“Yes to everything,” said Miranda, “yes, yes. . . .” Her head was like a feather, and she steadied herself on his arm. The mist was still mist that might be rain later, and though the air was sharp and clean in her mouth, it did not, she decided, make breathing any easier. “I hope the show is good, or at least funny,” she told him, “but I promise nothing.”

It was a long, dreary play, but Adam and Miranda sat very quietly together waiting patiently for it to be over. Adam carefully and seriously pulled off her glove and held her hand as if he were accustomed to holding her hand in theaters. Once they turned and their eyes met, but only once, and the two pairs of eyes were equally steady and noncommittal. A deep tremor set up in Miranda, and she set about resisting herself methodically as if she were closing windows and doors and fastening down curtains against a rising storm. Adam sat watching the monotonous play with a strange shining excitement, his face quite fixed and still.

When the curtain rose for the third act, the third act did not take place at once. There was instead disclosed a backdrop almost covered with an American flag improperly and disrespectfully exposed, nailed at each upper corner, gathered in the middle and nailed again, sagging dustily. Before it posed a local dollar-a-year man, now doing his bit as a Liberty Bond salesman. He was an ordinary man past middle life, with a neat little melon buttoned into his trousers and waistcoat, an opinionated tight mouth, a face and figure in which nothing could be read save the inept sensual record of fifty years. But for once in his life he was an important fellow in an impressive situation, and he reveled, rolling his words in an actorish tone.

“Looks like a penguin,” said Adam. They moved, smiled at each other, Miranda reclaimed her hand, Adam folded his together and they prepared to wear their way again through the same old moldy speech with the same old dusty backdrop. Miranda tried not to listen, but she heard. These vile Huns—glorious Belleau Wood—our keyword is Sacrifice—Martyred Belgium—give till it hurts—our noble boys Over There—Big Berthas⁴—the death of civilization—the Boche—

“My head aches,” whispered Miranda. “Oh, why won’t he hush?”

“He won’t,” whispered Adam. “I’ll get you some aspirin.”

“In Flanders Field the poppies grow, Between the crosses row on row”⁵—“He’s getting into the home stretch,” whispered Adam—atrocities, innocent babes hoisted on Boche bayonets—your child and my child—if our children are spared these things, then let us say with all reverence that these dead have not died in vain—the war, the *war*, the WAR to end WAR, war for Democracy, for humanity, a safe world forever and ever—and to prove our faith in Democracy to each other, and to the world, let everybody get together and buy Liberty Bonds and do without sugar and wool socks—was that it? Miranda asked herself, Say that over, I didn’t catch the last line. Did you mention Adam? If you didn’t I’m not interested. What about Adam, you little pig? And what are

4. Powerful, long-range mounted artillery guns used by the Germans; named for Bertha Krupp, daughter of German armaments manufacturer Alfred Krupp.

5. First two lines of a famous World War I poem

by the Canadian army doctor John McCrea (1872–1918), first published in the English magazine *Punch* on December 8, 1915, and then in McCrea’s posthumous volume *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* (1919).

we going to sing this time, “Tipperary” or “There’s a Long, Long Trail”?⁶ Oh, please do let the show go on and get over with. I must write a piece about it before I can go dancing with Adam and we have no time. Coal, oil, iron, gold, international finance, why don’t you tell us about them, you little liar?

The audience rose and sang, “There’s a Long, Long Trail A-winding,” their opened mouths black and faces pallid in the reflected footlights; some of the faces grimaced and wept and had shining streaks like snail’s tracks on them. Adam and Miranda joined in at the tops of their voices, grinning shamefacedly at each other once or twice.

In the street, they lit their cigarettes and walked slowly as always. “Just another nasty old man who would like to see the young ones killed,” said Miranda in a low voice; “the tom-cats try to eat the little tom-kittens, you know. They don’t fool you really, do they, Adam?”

The young people were talking like that about the business by then. They felt they were seeing pretty clearly through that game. She went on, “I hate these potbellied baldheads, too fat, too old, too cowardly, to go to war themselves, they know they’re safe; it’s you they are sending instead—”

Adam turned eyes of genuine surprise upon her. “Oh, *that* one,” he said. “Now what could the poor sap do if they did take him? It’s not his fault,” he explained, “he can’t do anything but talk.” His pride in his youth, his forbearance and tolerance and contempt for that unlucky being breathed out of his very pores as he strolled, straight and relaxed in his strength. “What *could* you expect of him, Miranda?”

She spoke his name often, and he spoke hers rarely. The little shock of pleasure the sound of her name in his mouth gave her stopped her answer. For a moment she hesitated, and began at another point of attack. “Adam,” she said, “the worst of war is the fear and suspicion and the awful expression in all the eyes you meet . . . as if they had pulled down the shutters over their minds and their hearts and were peering out at you, ready to leap if you make one gesture or say one word they do not understand instantly. It frightens me; I live in fear too, and no one should have to live in fear. It’s the skulking about, and the lying. It’s what war does to the mind and the heart, Adam, and you can’t separate these two—what it does to them is worse than what it can do to the body.”

Adam said soberly, after a moment, “Oh, yes, but suppose one comes back whole? The mind and the heart sometimes get another chance, but if anything happens to the poor old human frame, why, it’s just out of luck, that’s all.”

“Oh, yes,” mimicked Miranda. “It’s just out of luck, that’s all.”

“If I didn’t go,” said Adam, in a matter-of-fact voice, “I couldn’t look myself in the face.”

So that’s all settled. With her fingers flattened on his arm, Miranda was silent, thinking about Adam. No, there was no resentment or revolt in him. Pure, she thought, all the way through, flawless, complete, as the sacrificial lamb must be. The sacrificial lamb strode along casually, accommodating his long pace to hers, keeping her on the inside of the walk in the good American style, helping her across street corners as if she were a cripple—“I hope we don’t come to a mud puddle, he’ll carry me over it”—giving off

6. Popular war songs.

whiffs of tobacco smoke, a manly smell of scentless soap, freshly cleaned leather and freshly washed skin, breathing through his nose and carrying his chest easily. He threw back his head and smiled into the sky which still misted, promising rain. "Oh, boy," he said, "what a night. Can't you hurry that review of yours so we can get started?"

He waited for her before a cup of coffee in the restaurant next to the pressroom, nicknamed The Greasy Spoon. When she came down at last, freshly washed and combed and powdered, she saw Adam first, sitting near the dingy big window, face turned to the street, but looking down. It was an extraordinary face, smooth and fine and golden in the shabby light, but now set in a blind melancholy, a look of pained suspense and disillusion. For just one split second she got a glimpse of Adam when he would have been older, the face of the man he would not live to be. He saw her then, rose, and the bright glow was there.

Adam pulled their chairs together at their table; they drank hot tea and listened to the orchestra jazzing "Pack Up Your Troubles."

"In an old kit bag, and smoil, smoil, smoil," shouted half a dozen boys under the draft age, gathered around a table near the orchestra. They yelled incoherently, laughed in great hysterical bursts of something that appeared to be merriment, and passed around under the tablecloth flat bottles containing a clear liquid—for in this western city founded and built by roaring drunken miners, no one was allowed to take his alcohol openly—splashed it into their tumblers of ginger ale, and went on singing, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." When the tune changed to "Madelon," Adam said, "Let's dance." It was a tawdry little place, crowded and hot and full of smoke, but there was nothing better. The music was gay; and life is completely crazy anyway, thought Miranda, so what does it matter? This is what we have, Adam and I, this is all we're going to get, this is the way it is with us. She wanted to say, "Adam, come out of your dream and listen to me. I have pains in my chest and my head and my heart and they're real. I am in pain all over, and you are in such danger as I can't bear to think about, and why can we not save each other?" When her hand tightened on his shoulder his arm tightened about her waist instantly, and stayed there, holding firmly. They said nothing but smiled continually at each other, odd changing smiles as though they had found a new language. Miranda, her face near Adam's shoulder, noticed a dark young pair sitting at a corner table, each with an arm around the waist of the other, their heads together, their eyes staring at the same thing, whatever it was, that hovered in space before them. Her right hand lay on the table, his hand over it, and her face was a blur with weeping. Now and then he raised her hand and kissed it, and set it down and held it, and her eyes would fill again. They were not shameless, they had merely forgotten where they were, or they had no other place to go, perhaps. They said not a word, and the small pantomime repeated itself, like a melancholy short film running monotonously over and over again. Miranda envied them. She envied that girl. At least she can weep if that helps, and he does not even have to ask, What is the matter? Tell me. They had cups of coffee before them, and after a long while—Miranda and Adam had danced and sat down again twice—when the coffee was quite cold, they drank it suddenly, then embraced as before, without a word and scarcely a glance at each other. Something

was done and settled between them, at least; it was enviable, enviable, that they could sit quietly together and have the same expression on their faces while they looked into the hell they shared, no matter what kind of hell, it was theirs, they were together.

At the table nearest Adam and Miranda a young woman was leaning on her elbow, telling her young man a story. "And I don't like him because he's too fresh. He kept on asking me to take a drink and I kept telling him, I don't drink and he said, Now look here, I want a drink the worst way and I think it's mean of you not to drink with me, I can't sit up here and drink by myself, he said. I told him, You're not by yourself in the first place; I like that, I said, and if you want a drink go ahead and have it, I told him, why drag *me* in? So he called the waiter and ordered ginger ale and two glasses and I drank straight ginger ale like I always do but he poured a shot of hooch in his. He was awfully proud of that hooch, said he made it himself out of potatoes. Nice homemade likker, warm from the pipe, he told me, three drops of this and your ginger ale will taste like Mumm's Extry.⁷ But I said, No, and I mean no, can't you get that through your bean? He took another drink and said, Ah, come on, honey, don't be so stubborn, this'll make your shimmy shake. So I just got tired of the argument, and I said, I don't need to drink, to shake my shimmy, I can strut my stuff on tea, I said. Well, why don't you then, he wanted to know, and I just told him—"

She knew she had been asleep for a long time when all at once without even a warning footstep or creak of the door hinge, Adam was in the room turning on the light, and she knew it was he, though at first she was blinded and turned her head away. He came over at once and sat on the side of the bed and began to talk as if he were going on with something they had been talking about before. He crumpled a square of paper and tossed it in the fireplace.

"You didn't get my note," he said. "I left it under the door. I was called back suddenly to camp for a lot of inoculations. They kept me longer than I expected, I was late. I called the office and they told me you were not coming in today. I called Miss Hobbe here and she said you were in bed and couldn't come to the telephone. Did she give you my message?"

"No," said Miranda drowsily, "but I think I have been asleep all day. Oh, I do remember. There was a doctor here. Bill sent him. I was at the telephone once, for Bill told me he would send an ambulance and have me taken to the hospital. The doctor tapped my chest and left a prescription and said he would be back, but he hasn't come."

"Where is it, the prescription?" asked Adam.

"I don't know. He left it, though, I saw him."

Adam moved about searching the tables and the mantelpiece.

"Here it is," he said. "I'll be back in a few minutes. I must look for an all-night drug store. It's after one o'clock. Good-by."

Good-by, good-by. Miranda watched the door where he had disappeared for quite a while, then closed her eyes, and thought, When I am not here I cannot remember anything about this room where I have lived for nearly a year, except that the curtains are too thin and there was never any way of

7. Brand of champagne.

shutting out the morning light. Miss Hobbe had promised heavier curtains, but they had never appeared. When Miranda in her dressing gown had been at the telephone that morning, Miss Hobbe had passed through, carrying a tray. She was a little red-haired nervously friendly creature, and her manner said all too plainly that the place was not paying and she was on the ragged edge.

"My dear *child*," she said sharply, with a glance at Miranda's attire, "what is the matter?"

Miranda, with the receiver to her ear, said, "Influenza, I think."

"*Horrors*," said Miss Hobbe, in a whisper, and the tray wavered in her hands. "Go back to bed at once . . . go at *once!*"

"I must talk to Bill first," Miranda had told her, and Miss Hobbe had hurried on and had not returned. Bill had shouted directions at her, promising everything, doctor, nurse, ambulance, hospital, her check every week as usual, everything, but she was to get back to bed and stay there. She dropped into bed, thinking that Bill was the only person she had ever seen who actually tore his own hair when he was excited enough . . . I suppose I should ask to be sent home, she thought, it's a respectable old custom to inflict your death on the family if you can manage it. No, I'll stay here, this is my business, but not in this room, I hope . . . I wish I were in the cold mountains in the snow, that's what I should like best; and all about her rose the measured ranges of the Rockies wearing their perpetual snow, their majestic blue laurels of cloud, chilling her to the bone with their sharp breath. Oh, no, I must have warmth—and her memory turned and roved after another place she had known first and loved best, that now she could see only in drifting fragments of palm and cedar, dark shadows and a sky that warmed without dazzling, as this strange sky had dazzled without warming her; there was the long slow wavering of gray moss in the drowsy oak shade, the spacious hovering of buzzards overhead, the smell of crushed water herbs along a bank, and without warning a broad tranquil river into which flowed all the rivers she had known. The walls shelved away in one deliberate silent movement on either side, and a tall sailing ship was moored near by, with a gangplank weathered to blackness touching the foot of her bed. Back of the ship was jungle, and even as it appeared before her, she knew it was all she had ever read or had been told or felt or thought about jungles; a writhing terribly alive and secret place of death, creeping with tangles of spotted serpents, rainbow-colored birds with malign eyes, leopards with humanly wise faces and extravagantly crested lions; screaming long-armed monkeys tumbling among broad fleshy leaves that glowed with sulphur-colored light and exuded the ichor of death, and rotting trunks of unfamiliar trees sprawled in crawling slime. Without surprise, watching from her pillow, she saw herself run swiftly down this gangplank to the slanting deck, and standing there, she leaned on the rail and waved gaily to herself in bed, and the slender ship spread its wings and sailed away into the jungle. The air trembled with the shattering scream and the hoarse bellow of voices all crying together, rolling and colliding above her like ragged storm-clouds, and the words became two words only rising and falling and clamoring about her head. Danger, danger, danger, the voices said, and War, war, war. There was her door half open, Adam standing with his hand on the knob, and Miss Hobbe with her face all

out of shape with terror was crying shrilly, "I tell you, they must come for her *now*, or I'll put her on the sidewalk . . . I tell you, this is a plague, a plague, my God, and I've got a houseful of people to think about!"

Adam said, "I know that. They'll come for her tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning, my God, they'd better come now!"

"They can't get an ambulance," said Adam, "and there aren't any beds. And we can't find a doctor or a nurse. They're all busy. That's all there is to it. You stay out of the room, and I'll look after her."

"Yes, you'll look after her, I can see that," said Miss Hobbe, in a particularly unpleasant tone.

"Yes, that's what I said," answered Adam, drily, "and you keep out."

He closed the door carefully. He was carrying an assortment of misshapen packages, and his face was astonishingly impassive.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, leaning over and speaking very quietly.

"Most of it," said Miranda, "it's a nice prospect, isn't it?"

"I've got your medicine," said Adam, "and you're to begin with it this minute. She can't put you out."

"So it's really as bad as that," said Miranda.

"It's as bad as anything can be," said Adam, "all the theaters and nearly all the shops and restaurants are closed, and the streets have been full of funerals all day and ambulances all night—"

"But not one for me," said Miranda, feeling hilarious and light-headed. She sat up and beat her pillow into shape and reached for her robe. "I'm glad you're here, I've been having a nightmare. Give me a cigarette, will you, and light one for yourself and open all the windows and sit near one of them. You're running a risk," she told him, "don't you know that? Why do you do it?"

"Never mind," said Adam, "take your medicine," and offered her two large cherry-colored pills. She swallowed them promptly and instantly vomited them up. "*Do* excuse me," she said, beginning to laugh. "I'm so sorry." Adam without a word and with a very concerned expression washed her face with a wet towel, gave her some cracked ice from one of the packages, and firmly offered her two more pills. "That's what they always did at home," she explained to him, "and it worked." Crushed with humiliation, she put her hands over her face and laughed again, painfully.

"There are two more kinds yet," said Adam, pulling her hands from her face and lifting her chin. "You've hardly begun. And I've got other things, like orange juice and ice cream—they told me to feed you ice cream—and coffee in a thermos bottle, and a thermometer. You have to work through the whole lot so you'd better take it easy."

"This time last night we were dancing," said Miranda, and drank something from a spoon. Her eyes followed him about the room, as he did things for her with an absent-minded face, like a man alone; now and again he would come back, and slipping his hand under her head, would hold a cup or a tumbler to her mouth, and she drank, and followed him with her eyes again, without a clear notion of what was happening.

"Adam," she said, "I've just thought of something. Maybe they forgot St. Luke's Hospital. Call the sisters there and ask them not to be so selfish with their silly old rooms. Tell them I only want a very small dark ugly one for three days, or less. Do try them, Adam."

He believed, apparently, that she was still more or less in her right mind, for she heard him at the telephone explaining in his deliberate voice. He was back again almost at once, saying, "This seems to be my day for getting mixed up with peevish old maids. The sister said that even if they had a room you couldn't have it without doctor's orders. But they didn't have one, anyway. She was pretty sour about it."

"Well," said Miranda in a thick voice, "I think that's abominably rude and mean, don't you?" She sat up with a wild gesture of both arms, and began to retch again, violently.

"Hold it, as you were," called Adam, fetching the basin. He held her head, washed her face and hands with ice water, put her head straight on the pillow, and went over and looked out of the window. "Well," he said at last, sitting beside her again, "they haven't got a room. They haven't got a bed. They haven't even got a baby crib, the way she talked. So I think that's straight enough, and we may as well dig in."

"Isn't the ambulance coming?"

"Tomorrow, maybe."

He took off his tunic and hung it on the back of a chair. Kneeling before the fireplace, he began carefully to set kindling sticks in the shape of an Indian tepee, with a little paper in the center for them to lean upon. He lighted this and placed other sticks upon them, and larger bits of wood. When they were going nicely he added still heavier wood, and coal a few lumps at a time, until there was a good blaze, and a fire that would not need rekindling. He rose and dusted his hands together, the fire illuminated him from the back and his hair shone.

"Adam," said Miranda, "I think you're very beautiful." He laughed out at this, and shook his head at her. "What a hell of a word," he said, "for me." "It was the first that occurred to me," she said, drawing up on her elbow to catch the warmth of the blaze. "That's a good job, that fire."

He sat on the bed again, dragging up a chair and putting his feet on the rungs. They smiled at each other for the first time since he had come in that night. "How do you feel now?" he asked.

"Better, much better," she told him. "Let's talk. Let's tell each other what we meant to do."

"You tell me first," said Adam. "I want to know about you."

"You'd get the notion I had a very sad life," she said, "and perhaps it was, but I'd be glad enough to have it now. If I could have it back, it could be easy to be happy about almost anything at all. That's not true, but that's the way I feel now." After a pause, she said, "There's nothing to tell, after all, if it ends now, for all this time I was getting ready for something that was going to happen later, when the time came. So now it's nothing much."

"But it must have been worth having until now, wasn't it?" he asked seriously as if it were something important to know.

"Not if this is all," she repeated obstinately.

"Weren't you ever—happy?" asked Adam, and he was plainly afraid of the word; he was shy of it as he was of the word *love*, he seemed never to have spoken it before, and was uncertain of its sound or meaning.

"I don't know," she said, "I just lived and never thought about it. I remember things I liked, though, and things I hoped for."

"I was going to be an electrical engineer," said Adam. He stopped short. "And I shall finish up when I get back," he added, after a moment.

"Don't you love being alive?" asked Miranda. "Don't you love weather and the colors at different times of the day, and all the sounds and noises like children screaming in the next lot, and automobile horns and little bands playing in the street and the smell of food cooking?"

"I love to swim, too," said Adam.

"So do I," said Miranda; "we never did swim together."

"Do you remember any prayers?" she asked him suddenly. "Did you ever learn anything at Sunday School?"

"Not much," confessed Adam without contrition. "Well, the Lord's Prayer."

"Yes, and there's Hail Mary," she said, "and the really useful one beginning, I confess to Almighty God and to blessed Mary ever virgin and to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul—"

"Catholic," he commented.

"Prayers just the same, you big Methodist. I'll bet you *are* a Methodist."

"No, Presbyterian."

"Well, what others do you remember?"

"Now I lay me down to sleep—" said Adam.

"Yes, that one, and Blessed Jesus meek and mild—you see that my religious education wasn't neglected either. I even know a prayer beginning O Apollo. Want to hear it?"

"No," said Adam, "you're making fun."

"I'm not," said Miranda, "I'm trying to keep from going to sleep. I'm afraid to go to sleep, I may not wake up. Don't let me go to sleep, Adam. Do you know Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Bless the bed I lie upon?"

"If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Is that it?" asked Adam. "It doesn't sound right, somehow."

"Light me a cigarette, please, and move over and sit near the window. We keep forgetting about fresh air. You must have it." He lighted the cigarette and held it to her lips. She took it between her fingers and dropped it under the edge of her pillow. He found it and crushed it out in the saucer under the water tumbler. Her head swam in darkness for an instant, cleared, and she sat up in panic, throwing off the covers and breaking into a sweat. Adam leaped up with an alarmed face, and almost at once was holding a cup of hot coffee to her mouth.

"You must have some too," she told him, quiet again, and they sat huddled together on the edge of the bed, drinking coffee in silence.

Adam said, "You must lie down again. You're awake now."

"Let's sing," said Miranda. "I know an old spiritual, I can remember some of the words." She spoke in a natural voice. "I'm fine now." She began in a hoarse whisper, "Pale horse, pale rider, done taken my lover away . . ." Do you know that song?"

"Yes," said Adam, "I heard Negroes in Texas sing it, in an oil field."

"I heard them sing it in a cotton field," she said; "it's a good song."

They sang that line together. "But I can't remember what comes next," said Adam.

"Pale horse, pale rider," said Miranda, "(We really need a good banjo) 'done taken my lover away—'" Her voice cleared and she said, "But we ought to get on with it. What's the next line?"

"There's a lot more to it than that," said Adam, "about forty verses, the rider done taken away mammy, pappy, brother, sister, the whole family besides the lover—"

"But not the singer, not yet," said Miranda. "Death always leaves one singer to mourn. 'Death,'" she sang, "'oh, leave one singer to mourn—'"

"'Pale horse, pale rider,'" chanted Adam, coming in on the beat, "'done taken my lover away!' (I think we're good, I think we ought to get up an act—)"

"Go in Hut Service," said Miranda, "entertain the poor defenseless heroes Over There."

"We'll play banjos," said Adam; "I always wanted to play the banjo."

Miranda sighed, and lay back on the pillow and thought, I must give up, I can't hold out any longer. There was only that pain, only that room, and only Adam. There were no longer any multiple planes of living, no tough filaments of memory and hope pulling taut backwards and forwards holding her upright between them. There was only this one moment and it was a dream of time, and Adam's face, very near hers, eyes still and intent, was a shadow, and there was to be nothing more. . . .

"Adam," she said out of the heavy soft darkness that drew her down, down, "I love you, and I was hoping you would say that to me, too."

He lay down beside her with his arm under her shoulder, and pressed his smooth face against hers, his mouth moved towards her mouth and stopped. "Can you hear what I am saying? . . . What do you think I have been trying to tell you all this time?"

She turned towards him, the cloud cleared and she saw his face for an instant. He pulled the covers about her and held her, and said, "Go to sleep, darling, darling, if you will go to sleep now for one hour I will wake you up and bring you hot coffee and tomorrow we will find somebody to help. I love you, go to sleep—"

Almost with no warning at all, she floated into the darkness, holding his hand, in sleep that was not sleep but clear evening light in a small green wood, an angry dangerous wood full of inhuman concealed voices singing sharply like the whine of arrows and she saw Adam transfixed by a flight of these singing arrows that struck him in the heart and passed shrilly cutting their path through the leaves. Adam fell straight back before her eyes, and rose again unwounded and alive; another flight of arrows loosed from the invisible bow struck him again and he fell, and yet he was there before her untouched in a perpetual death and resurrection. She threw herself before him, angrily and selfishly she interposed between him and the track of the arrow, crying, No, no, like a child cheated in a game, It's my turn now, why must you always be the one to die? and the arrows struck her cleanly through the heart and through his body and he lay dead, and she still lived, and the wood whistled and sang and shouted, every branch and leaf and blade of grass had its own terrible accusing voice. She ran then, and Adam caught her in the middle of the room, running, and said, "Darling, I must have been asleep too. What happened, you screamed terribly?"

After he had helped her to settle again, she sat with her knees drawn up under her chin, resting her head on her folded arms and began carefully searching for her words because it was important to explain clearly. "It was a very odd sort of dream, I don't know why it could have frightened me.

There was something about an old-fashioned valentine. There were two hearts carved on a tree, pierced by the same arrow—you know, Adam—”

“Yes, I know, honey,” he said in the gentlest sort of way, and sat kissing her on the cheek and forehead with a kind of accustomedness, as if he had been kissing her for years, “one of those lace paper things.”

“Yes, and yet they were alive, and were us, you understand—this doesn’t seem to be quite the way it was, but it was something like that. It was in a wood—”

“Yes,” said Adam. He got up and put on his tunic and gathered up the thermos bottle. “I’m going back to that little stand and get us some ice cream and hot coffee,” he told her, “and I’ll be back in five minutes, and you keep quiet. Good-bye for five minutes,” he said, holding her chin in the palm of his hand and trying to catch her eye, “and you be very quiet.”

“Good-bye,” she said. “I’m awake again.” But she was not, and the two alert young internes from the County hospital who had arrived, after frantic urgings from the noisy city editor of the *Blue Mountain News*, to carry her away in a police ambulance, decided that they had better go down and get the stretcher. Their voices roused her, she sat up, got out of bed at once and stood glancing about brightly. “Why, you’re all right,” said the darker and stouter of the two young men, both extremely fit and competent-looking in their white clothes, each with a flower in his buttonhole. “I’ll just carry you.” He unfolded a white blanket and wrapped it around her. She gathered up the folds and asked, “But where is Adam?” taking hold of the doctor’s arm. He laid a hand on her drenched forehead, shook his head, and gave her a shrewd look. “Adam?”

“Yes,” Miranda told him, lowering her voice confidentially, “he was here and now he is gone.”

“Oh, he’ll be back,” the interne told her easily, “he’s just gone round the block to get cigarettes. Don’t worry about Adam. He’s the least of your troubles.”

“Will he know where to find me?” she asked, still holding back.

“We’ll leave him a note,” said the interne. “Come now, it’s time we got out of here.”

He lifted and swung her up to his shoulder. “I feel very badly,” she told him; “I don’t know why.”

“I’ll bet you do,” said he, stepping out carefully, the other doctor going before them, and feeling for the first step of the stairs. “Put your arms around my neck,” he instructed her. “It won’t do you any harm and it’s a great help to me.”

“What’s your name?” Miranda asked as the other doctor opened the front door and they stepped out into the frosty sweet air.

“Hildesheim,” he said, in the tone of one humoring a child.

“Well, Dr. Hildesheim, aren’t we in a pretty mess?”

“We certainly are,” said Dr. Hildesheim.

The second young interne, still quite fresh and dapper in his white coat, though his carnation was withering at the edges, was leaning over listening to her breathing through a stethoscope, whistling thinly, “There’s a Long, Long Trail—” From time to time he tapped her ribs smartly with two fingers, whistling. Miranda observed him for a few moments until she fixed his

bright busy hazel eye not four inches from hers. "I'm not unconscious," she explained, "I know what I want to say." Then to her horror she heard herself babbling nonsense, knowing it was nonsense though she could not hear what she was saying. The flicker of attention in the eye near her vanished, the second interne went on tapping and listening, hissing softly under his breath.

"I wish you'd stop whistling," she said clearly. The sound stopped. "It's a beastly tune," she added. Anything, anything at all to keep her small hold on the life of human beings, a clear line of communication, no matter what, between her and the receding world. "Please let me see Dr. Hildesheim," she said, "I have something important to say to him. I must say it now." The second interne vanished. He did not walk away, he fled into the air without a sound, and Dr. Hildesheim's face appeared in his stead.

"Dr. Hildesheim, I want to ask you about Adam."

"That young man? He's been here, and left you a note, and has gone again," said Dr. Hildesheim, "and he'll be back tomorrow and the day after." His tone was altogether too merry and flippant.

"I don't believe you," said Miranda, bitterly, closing her lips and eyes and hoping she might not weep.

"Miss Tanner," called the doctor, "have you got that note?"

Miss Tanner appeared beside her, handed her an unsealed envelope, took it back, unfolded the note and gave it to her.

"I can't see it," said Miranda, after a pained search of the page full of hasty scratches in black ink.

"Here, I'll read it," said Miss Tanner. "It says, 'They came and took you while I was away and now they will not let me see you. Maybe tomorrow they will, with my love, Adam,'" read Miss Tanner in a firm dry voice, pronouncing the words distinctly. "Now, do you see?" she asked soothingly.

Miranda, hearing the words one by one, forgot them one by one. "Oh, read it again, what does it say?" she called out over the silence that pressed upon her, reaching towards the dancing words that just escaped as she almost touched them. "That will do," said Dr. Hildesheim, calmly authoritarian. "Where is that bed?"

"There is no bed yet," said Miss Tanner, as if she said, We are short of oranges. Dr. Hildesheim said, "Well, we'll manage something," and Miss Tanner drew the narrow trestle with bright crossed metal supports and small rubbery wheels into a deep jut of the corridor, out of the way of the swift white figures darting about, whirling and skimming like water flies all in silence. The white walls rose sheer as cliffs, a dozen frosted moons followed each other in perfect self-possession down a white lane and dropped mutely one by one into a snowy abyss.

What is this whiteness and silence but the absence of pain? Miranda lay lifting the nap of her white blanket softly between eased fingers, watching a dance of tall deliberate shadows moving behind a wide screen of sheets spread upon a frame. It was there, near her, on her side of the wall where she could see it clearly and enjoy it, and it was so beautiful she had no curiosity as to its meaning. Two dark figures nodded, bent, curtsied to each other, retreated and bowed again, lifted long arms and spread great hands against the white shadow of the screen; then with a single round movement, the sheets were folded back, disclosing two speechless men in white,

standing, and another speechless man in white, lying on the bare springs of a white iron bed. The man on the springs was swathed smoothly from head to foot in white, with folded bands across the face, and a large stiff bow like merry rabbit ears dangled at the crown of his head.

The two living men lifted a mattress standing hunched against the wall, spread it tenderly and exactly over the dead man. Wordless and white they vanished down the corridor, pushing the wheeled bed before them. It had been an entrancing and leisurely spectacle, but now it was over. A pallid white fog rose in their wake insinuatingly and floated before Miranda's eyes, a fog in which was concealed all terror and all weariness, all the wrung faces and twisted backs and broken feet of abused, outraged living things, all the shapes of their confused pain and their estranged hearts; the fog might part at any moment and loose the horde of human torments. She put up her hands and said, Not yet, not yet, but it was too late. The fog parted and two executioners, white clad, moved towards her pushing between them with marvelously deft and practiced hands the misshapen figure of an old man in filthy rags whose scanty beard waggled under his opened mouth as he bowed his back and braced his feet to resist and delay the fate they had prepared for him. In a high weeping voice he was trying to explain to them that the crime of which he was accused did not merit the punishment he was about to receive; and except for this whining cry there was silence as they advanced. The soiled cracked bowls of the old man's hands were held before him beseechingly as a beggar's as he said, "Before God I am not guilty," but they held his arms and drew him onward, passed, and were gone.

The road to death is a long march beset with all evils, and the heart fails little by little at each new terror, the bones rebel at each step, the mind sets up its own bitter resistance and to what end? The barriers sink one by one, and no covering of the eyes shuts out the landscape of disaster, nor the sight of crimes committed there. Across the field came Dr. Hildesheim, his face a skull beneath his German helmet, carrying a naked infant writhing on the point of his bayonet, and a huge stone pot marked Poison in Gothic letters. He stopped before the well that Miranda remembered in a pasture on her father's farm, a well once dry but now bubbling with living water, and into its pure depths he threw the child and the poison, and the violated water sank back soundlessly into the earth. Miranda, screaming, ran with her arms above her head; her voice echoed and came back to her like a wolf's howl, Hildesheim is a Boche, a spy, a Hun, kill him, kill him before he kills you. . . . She woke howling, she heard the foul words accusing Dr. Hildesheim tumbling from her mouth; opened her eyes and knew she was in a bed in a small white room, with Dr. Hildesheim sitting beside her, two firm fingers on her pulse. His hair was brushed sleekly and his buttonhole flower was fresh. Stars gleamed through the window, and Dr. Hildesheim seemed to be gazing at them with no particular expression, his stethoscope dangling around his neck. Miss Tanner stood at the foot of the bed writing something on a chart.

"Hello," said Dr. Hildesheim, "at least you take it out in shouting. You don't try to get out of bed and go running around." Miranda held her eyes open with a terrible effort, saw his rather heavy, patient face clearly even as her mind tottered and slithered again, broke from its foundation and spun like a cast wheel in a ditch. "I didn't mean it, I never believed it, Dr. Hildesheim,

you musn't remember it—" and was gone again, not being able to wait for an answer.

The wrong she had done followed her and haunted her dream: this wrong took vague shapes of horror she could not recognize or name, though her heart cringed at sight of them. Her mind, split in two, acknowledged and denied what she saw in the one instant, for across an abyss of complaining darkness her reasoning coherent self watched the strange frenzy of the other coldly, reluctant to admit the truth of its visions, its tenacious remorse and despairs.

"I know those are your hands," she told Miss Tanner, "I know it, but to me they are white tarantulas, don't touch me."

"Shut your eyes," said Miss Tanner.

"Oh, no," said Miranda, "for then I see worse things," but her eyes closed in spite of her will, and the midnight of her internal torment closed about her.

Oblivion, thought Miranda, her mind feeling among her memories of words she had been taught to describe the unseen, the unknowable, is a whirlpool of gray water turning upon itself for all eternity . . . eternity is perhaps more than the distance to the farthest star. She lay on a narrow ledge over a pit that she knew to be bottomless, though she could not comprehend it; the ledge was her childhood dream of danger, and she strained back against a reassuring wall of granite at her shoulders, staring into the pit, thinking, There it is, there it is at last, it is very simple; and soft carefully shaped words like oblivion and eternity are curtains hung before nothing at all. I shall not know when it happens, I shall not feel or remember, why can't I consent now, I am lost, there is no hope for me. Look, she told herself, there it is, that is death and there is nothing to fear. But she could not consent, still shrinking stiffly against the granite wall that was her childhood dream of safety, breathing slowly for fear of squandering breath, saying desperately, Look, don't be afraid, it is nothing, it is only eternity.

Granite walls, whirlpools, stars are things. None of them is death, nor the image of it. Death is death, said Miranda, and for the dead it has no attributes. Silenced she sank easily through deeps under deeps of darkness until she lay like a stone at the farthest bottom of life, knowing herself to be blind, deaf, speechless, no longer aware of the members of her own body, entirely withdrawn from all human concerns, yet alive with a peculiar lucidity and coherence; all notions of the mind, the reasonable inquiries of doubt, all ties of blood and the desires of the heart, dissolved and fell away from her, and there remained of her only a minute fiercely burning particle of being that knew itself alone, that relied upon nothing beyond itself for its strength; not susceptible to any appeal or inducement, being itself composed entirely of one single motive, the stubborn will to live. This fiery motionless particle set itself unaided to resist destruction, to survive and to be in its own madness of being, motiveless and planless beyond that one essential end. Trust me, the hard unwinking angry point of light said. Trust me. I stay.

At once it grew, flattened, thinned to a fine radiance, spread like a great fan and curved out into a rainbow through which Miranda, enchanted, altogether believing, looked upon a deep clear landscape of sea and sand, of soft meadow and sky, freshly washed and glistening with transparencies of blue. Why, of course, of course, said Miranda, without surprise but with

serene rapture as if some promise made to her had been kept long after she had ceased to hope for it. She rose from her narrow ledge and ran lightly through the tall portals of the great bow that arched in its splendor over the burning blue of the sea and the cool green of the meadow on either hand.

The small waves rolled in and over unhurriedly, lapped upon the sand in silence and retreated; the grasses flurried before a breeze that made no sound. Moving towards her leisurely as clouds through the shimmering air came a great company of human beings, and Miranda saw in an amazement of joy that they were all the living she had known. Their faces were transfigured, each in its own beauty, beyond what she remembered of them, their eyes were clear and untroubled as good weather, and they cast no shadows. They were pure identities and she knew them every one without calling their names or remembering what relation she bore to them. They surrounded her smoothly on silent feet, then turned their entranced faces again towards the sea, and she moved among them easily as a wave among waves. The drifting circle widened, separated, and each figure was alone but not solitary; Miranda, alone too, questioning nothing, desiring nothing, in the quietude of her ecstasy, stayed where she was, eyes fixed on the overwhelming deep sky where it was always morning.

Lying at ease, arms under her head, in the prodigal warmth which flowed evenly from sea and sky and meadow, within touch but not touching the serenely smiling familiar beings about her, Miranda felt without warning a vague tremor of apprehension, some small flick of distrust in her joy; a thin frost touched the edges of this confident tranquillity; something, somebody, was missing, she had lost something, she had left something valuable in another country, oh, what could it be? There are no trees, no trees here, she said in fright, I have left something unfinished. A thought struggled at the back of her mind, came clearly as a voice in her ear. Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they? At once as if a curtain had fallen, the bright landscape faded, she was alone in a strange stony place of bitter cold, picking her way along a steep path of slippery snow, calling out, Oh, I must go back! But in what direction? Pain returned, a terrible compelling pain running through her veins like heavy fire, the stench of corruption filled her nostrils, the sweetish sickening smell of rotting flesh and pus; she opened her eyes and saw pale light through a coarse white cloth over her face, knew that the smell of death was in her own body, and struggled to lift her hand. The cloth was drawn away; she saw Miss Tanner filling a hypodermic needle in her methodical expert way, and heard Dr. Hildesheim saying, "I think that will do the trick. Try another." Miss Tanner plucked firmly at Miranda's arm near the shoulder, and the unbelievable current of agony ran burning through her veins again. She struggled to cry out, saying, Let me go, let me go; but heard only incoherent sounds of animal suffering. She saw doctor and nurse glance at each other with the glance of initiates at a mystery, nodding in silence, their eyes alive with knowledgeable pride. They looked briefly at their handiwork and hurried away.

Bells screamed all off key, wrangling together as they collided in mid air, horns and whistles mingled shrilly with cries of human distress; sulphur colored light exploded through the black window pane and flashed away in darkness. Miranda waking from a dreamless sleep asked without expecting an answer, "What is happening?" for there was a bustle of voices and foot-

steps in the corridor, and a sharpness in the air; the far clamor went on, a furious exasperated shrieking like a mob in revolt.

The light came on, and Miss Tanner said in a furry voice, "Hear that? They're celebrating. It's the Armistice. The war is over, my dear." Her hands trembled. She rattled a spoon in a cup, stopped to listen, held the cup out to Miranda. From the ward for old bedridden women down the hall floated a ragged chorus of cracked voices singing, "My country, 'tis of thee . . ."

Sweet land . . . oh, terrible land of this bitter world where the sound of rejoicing was a clamor of pain, where ragged tuneless old women, sitting up waiting for their evening bowl of cocoa, were singing, "Sweet land of Liberty—"

"Oh, say, can you see?" their hopeless voices were asking next, the hammer strokes of metal tongues drowning them out. "The war is over," said Miss Tanner, her underlip held firmly, her eyes blurred. Miranda said, "Please open the window, please, I smell death in here."

Now if real daylight such as I remember having seen in this world would only come again, but it is always twilight or just before morning, a promise of day that is never kept. What has become of the sun? That was the longest and loneliest night and yet it will not end and let the day come. Shall I ever see light again?

Sitting in a long chair, near a window, it was in itself a melancholy wonder to see the colorless sunlight slanting on the snow, under a sky drained of its blue. "Can this be my face?" Miranda asked her mirror. "Are these my own hands?" she asked Miss Tanner, holding them up to show the yellow tint like melted wax glimmering between the closed fingers. The body is a curious monster, no place to live in, how could anyone feel at home there? Is it possible I can ever accustom myself to this place? she asked herself. The human faces around her seemed dulled and tired, with no radiance of skin and eyes as Miranda remembered radiance; the once white walls of her room were now a soiled gray. Breathing slowly, falling asleep and waking again, feeling the splash of water on her flesh, taking food, talking in bare phrases with Dr. Hildesheim and Miss Tanner, Miranda looked about her with the covertly hostile eyes of an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will.

"It is morning," Miss Tanner would say, with a sigh, for she had grown old and weary once for all in the past month, "morning again, my dear," showing Miranda the same monotonous landscape of dulled evergreens and leaden snow. She would rustle about in her starched skirts, her face bravely powdered, her spirit unbreakable as good steel, saying, "Look, my dear, what a heavenly morning, like a crystal," for she had an affection for the salvaged creature before her, the silent ungrateful human being whom she, Cornelia Tanner, a nurse who knew her business, had snatched back from death with her own hands. "Nursing is nine-tenths, just the same," Miss Tanner would tell the other nurses; "keep that in mind." Even the sunshine was Miss Tanner's own prescription for the further recovery of Miranda, this patient the doctors had given up for lost, and who yet sat here, visible proof of Miss Tanner's theory. She said, "Look at the sunshine, now," as she might be saying, "I ordered this for you, my dear, do sit up and take it."

"It's beautiful," Miranda would answer, even turning her head to look, thanking Miss Tanner for her goodness, most of all her goodness about the weather, "beautiful, I always loved it." And I might love it again if I saw it, she thought, but truth was, she could not see it. There was no light, there might never be light again, compared as it must always be with the light she had seen beside the blue sea that lay so tranquilly along the shore of her paradise. That was a child's dream of the heavenly meadow, the vision of repose that comes to a tired body in sleep, she thought, but I have seen it when I did not know it was a dream. Closing her eyes she would rest for a moment remembering that bliss which had repaid all the pain of the journey to reach it; opening them again she saw with a new anguish the dull world to which she was condemned, where the light seemed filmed over with cobwebs, all the bright surfaces corroded, the sharp planes melted and formless, all objects and beings meaningless, ah, dead and withered things that believed themselves alive!

At night, after the long effort of lying in her chair, in her extremity of grief for what she had so briefly won, she folded her painful body together and wept silently, shamelessly, in pity for herself and her lost rapture. There was no escape. Dr. Hildesheim, Miss Tanner, the nurses in the diet kitchen, the chemist, the surgeon, the precise machine of the hospital, the whole humane conviction and custom of society, conspired to pull her inseparable rack of bones and wasted flesh to its feet, to put in order her disordered mind, and to set her once more safely in the road that would lead her again to death.

Chuck Rouncivale and Mary Townsend came to see her, bringing her a bundle of letters they had guarded for her. They brought a basket of delicate small hothouse flowers, lilies of the valley with sweet peas and feathery fern, and above these blooms their faces were merry and haggard.

Mary said, "You *have* had a tussle, haven't you?" and Chuck said, "Well, you made it back, didn't you?" Then after an uneasy pause, they told her that everybody was waiting to see her again at her desk. "They've put me back on sports already, Miranda," said Chuck. For ten minutes Miranda smiled and told them how gay and what a pleasant surprise it was to find herself alive. For it will not do to betray the conspiracy and tamper with the courage of the living; there is nothing better than to be alive, everyone has agreed on that; it is past argument, and who attempts to deny it is justly outlawed. "I'll be back in no time at all," she said; "this is almost over."

Her letters lay in a heap in her lap and beside her chair. Now and then she turned one over to read the inscription, recognized this handwriting or that, examined the blotted stamps and the post-marks, and let them drop again. For two or three days they lay upon the table beside her, and she continued to shrink from them. "They will all be telling me again how good it is to be alive, they will say again they love me, they are glad I am living too, and what can I answer to that?" and her hardened, indifferent heart shuddered in despair at itself, because before it had been tender and capable of love.

Dr. Hildesheim said, "What, all these letters not opened yet?" and Miss Tanner said, "Read your letters, my dear, I'll open them for you." Standing beside the bed, she slit them cleanly with a paper knife. Miranda, cornered, picked and chose until she found a thin one in an unfamiliar handwriting. "Oh, no, now," said Miss Tanner, "take them as they come. Here, I'll hand them to you." She sat down, prepared to be helpful to the end.

What a victory, what triumph, what happiness to be alive, sang the letters in a chorus. The names were signed with flourishes like the circles in air of bugle notes, and they were the names of those she had loved best; some of those she had known well and pleasantly; and a few who meant nothing to her, then or now. The thin letter in the unfamiliar handwriting was from a strange man at the camp where Adam had been, telling her that Adam had died of influenza in the camp hospital. Adam had asked him, in case anything happened, to be sure to let her know.

If anything happened. To be sure to let her know. If anything happened. “Your friend, Adam Barclay,” wrote the strange man. It had happened—she looked at the date—more than a month ago.

“I’ve been here a long time, haven’t I?” she asked Miss Tanner, who was folding letters and putting them back in their proper envelopes.

“Oh, quite a while,” said Miss Tanner, “but you’ll be ready to go soon now. But you must be careful of yourself and not overdo, and you should come back now and then and let us look at you, because sometimes the aftereffects are very—”

Miranda, sitting up before the mirror, wrote carefully: “One lipstick, medium, one ounce flask Bois d’Hiver perfume, one pair of gray suède gauntlets⁸ without straps, two pairs gray sheer stockings without clocks—”

Towney, reading after her, said, “Everything without something so that it will be almost impossible to get?”

“Try it, though,” said Miranda, “they’re nicer without. One walking stick of silvery wood with a silver knob.”

“That’s going to be expensive,” warned Towney. “Walking is hardly worth it.”

“You’re right,” said Miranda, and wrote in the margin, “a nice one to match my other things. Ask Chuck to look for this, Mary. Good looking and not too heavy.” Lazarus, come forth. Not unless you bring me my top hat and stick. Stay where you are then, you snob. Not at all. I’m coming forth. “A jar of cold cream,” wrote Miranda, “a box of apricot powder—and, Mary, I don’t need eye shadow, do I?” She glanced at her face in the mirror and away again. “Still, no one need pity this corpse if we look properly to the art of the thing.”

Mary Townsend said, “You won’t recognize yourself in a week.”

“Do you suppose, Mary,” asked Miranda, “I could have my old room back again?”

“That should be easy,” said Mary. “We stored away all your things there with Miss Hobbe.” Miranda wondered again at the time and trouble the living took to be helpful to the dead. But not quite dead now, she reassured herself, one foot in either world now; soon I shall cross back and be at home again. The light will seem real and I shall be glad when I hear that someone I know has escaped from death. I shall visit the escaped ones and help them dress and tell them how lucky they are, and how lucky I am still to have them. Mary will be back soon with my gloves and my walking stick, I must go now, I must begin saying good-by to Miss Tanner and Dr. Hildesheim. Adam, she said, now you need not die again, but still I wish you were here; I wish you had come back, what do you think I came back for, Adam, to be deceived like this?

8. Gloves with a cuff covering part of the arm. “Bois d’Hiver”: winter wood (French).

At once he was there beside her, invisible but urgently present, a ghost but more alive than she was, the last intolerable cheat of her heart; for knowing it was false she still clung to the lie, the unpardonable lie of her bitter desire. She said, "I love you," and stood up trembling, trying by the mere act of her will to bring him to sight before her. If I could call you up from the grave I would, she said, if I could see your ghost I would say, I believe . . . "I believe," she said aloud. "Oh, let me see you once more." The room was silent, empty, the shade was gone from it, struck away by the sudden violence of her rising and speaking aloud. She came to herself as if out of sleep. Oh, no, that is not the way, I must never do that, she warned herself. Miss Tanner said, "Your taxicab is waiting, my dear," and there was Mary. Ready to go.

No more war, no more plague, only the dazed silence that follows the ceasing of the heavy guns; noiseless houses with the shades drawn, empty streets, the dead cold light of tomorrow. Now there would be time for everything.

1937, 1939

ZORA NEALE HURSTON

1891–1960

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama, and moved with her family in 1892 to Eatonville, Florida, an all-black town. Her father, a Baptist preacher of considerable eloquence, was not a family man and made life difficult for his wife and eight children. The tie between mother and daughter was strong; Lucy Hurston was a driving force and strong support for all her children. But her death when Zora Hurston was about eleven left the child with little home life. Hitherto, the town of Eatonville had been like an extended family to her, and her early childhood was protected from racism because she encountered no white people. With her mother's death, Hurston's wanderings and her initiation into American racism began. The early security had given her the core of self-confidence she needed to survive. She moved from one relative's home to another until she was old enough to support herself, and with her earnings she began slowly to pursue an education. Although she had never finished grade school in Eatonville she was able to enter and complete college. In the early 1920s at Howard University in Washington, D.C. (the nation's leading African American university at that time), she studied with the great black educator Alain Locke, who was to make history with his anthology *The New Negro* in 1925. After a short story, "Drenched in Light," appeared in the New York African American magazine *Opportunity*, she decided to move to Harlem and pursue a literary career there.

As her biographer, Robert Hemenway, writes, "Zora Hurston was an extraordinarily witty woman, and she acquired an instant reputation in New York for her high spirits and side-splitting tales of Eatonville life. She could walk into a room of strangers . . . and almost immediately gather people, charm, amuse, and impress them." The Eatonville vignettes printed here convey the flavor of this discourse. Generous, outspoken, high spirited, an interesting conversationalist, she worked as



Zora Neale Hurston, as photographed by Carl Van Vechten in 1938.

a personal secretary for the politically liberal novelist Fannie Hurst and entered Barnard College. Her career took two simultaneous directions: at Barnard she studied with the famous anthropologist Franz Boas and developed an interest in black folk traditions, and in Harlem she became well known as a storyteller, an informal performing artist. Thus she was doubly committed to oral narrative, and her work excels in its representation of people talking.

When she graduated from Barnard in 1927 she received a fellowship to return to Florida and study the oral traditions of Eatonville. From then on, she strove to achieve a balance between focusing on the folk and her origins and focusing on herself as an individual. After the fellowship money ran out, Hurston was supported by Mrs. R. Osgood Mason, an elderly white patron of the arts. Mason had firm ideas about what she wanted her protégés to produce; she

required them all to get her permission before publishing any of the work that she had subsidized. In this relationship, Hurston experienced a difficulty that all the black artists of the Harlem Renaissance had to face—the fact that well-off white people were the sponsors of, and often expected to be the chief audience for, their work.

Hurston's work was not entirely popular with the male intellectual leaders of the Harlem community. She quarreled especially with Langston Hughes; she rejected the idea that a black writer's chief concern should be how blacks were being portrayed to the white reader. She did not write to "uplift her race," either; because in her view it was already uplifted, she (like Claude McKay) was not embarrassed to present her characters as mixtures of good and bad, strong and weak. Some of the other Harlem writers thought her either naive or egotistical, but Hurston argued that freedom could only mean freedom from all coercion, no matter what the source.

The Great Depression brought an end to the structure that had undergirded Hurston's fieldwork, and she turned fully to writing. Unfortunately her most important work appeared in the mid-1930s when there was little interest in it, or in African American writing in general. She published *Jonah's Gourd Vine* in 1934 (a novel whose main character is based on her father); *Mules and Men* in 1935 (based on material from her field trips in Florida—this was her best-selling book, but it earned a total of only \$943.75); and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in 1937. This novel about an African American woman's quest for selfhood has become a popular and critical favorite, both a woman's story, and a descriptive critique of southern African American folk society, showing its divisions and diversity. Technically, it is a loosely organized, highly metaphorical novel, with passages of broad folk humor and of extreme artistic compression. Other books followed in 1938 and 1939, and she wrote an autobiography—*Dust Tracks on a Road*—which appeared in 1942, with its occa-

sional expression of antiwhite sentiments removed by her editors. At this point, however, Hurston had no audience. For the last decade of her life she lived in Florida, working from time to time as a maid.

Sweat¹

It was eleven o'clock of a Spring night in Florida. It was Sunday. Any other night, Delia Jones would have been in bed for two hours by this time. But she was a washwoman, and Monday morning meant a great deal to her. So she collected the soiled clothes on Saturday when she returned the clean things. Sunday night after church, she sorted them and put the white things to soak. It saved her almost a half day's start. A great hamper in the bedroom held the clothes that she brought home. It was so much neater than a number of bundles lying around.

She squatted in the kitchen floor beside the great pile of clothes, sorting them into small heaps according to color, and humming a song in a mournful key, but wondering through it all where Sykes, her husband, had gone with her horse and buckboard.

Just then something long, round, limp and black fell upon her shoulders and slithered to the floor beside her. A great terror took hold of her. It softened her knees and dried her mouth so that it was a full minute before she could cry out or move. Then she saw that it was the big bull whip her husband liked to carry when he drove.

She lifted her eyes to the door and saw him standing there bent over with laughter at her fright. She screamed at him.

"Sykes, what you throw dat whip on me like dat? You know it would skeer me—looks just like a snake, an' you knows how skeered Ah is of snakes."

"Course Ah knowed it! That's how come Ah done it." He slapped his leg with his hand and almost rolled on the ground in his mirth. "If you such a big fool dat you got to have a fit over a earth worm or a string, Ah don't keer how bad Ah skeer you."

"You aint got no business doing it. Gawd knows it's a sin. Some day Ah'm gointuh drop dead from some of yo' foolishness. 'Nother thing, where you been wid mah rig? Ah feeds dat pony. He aint fuh you to be drivin' wid no bull whip."

"You sho is one aggravatin' nigger woman!" he declared and stepped into the room. She resumed her work and did not answer him at once. "Ah done tole you time and again to keep them white folks' clothes outa dis house."

He picked up the whip and glared down at her. Delia went on with her work. She went out into the yard and returned with a galvanized tub and sat it on the washbench. She saw that Sykes had kicked all of the clothes together again, and now stood in her way truculently, his whole manner hoping, *praying*, for an argument. But she walked calmly around him and commenced to re-sort the things.

"Next time, Ah'm gointer kick 'em outdoors," he threatened as he struck a match along the leg of his corduroy breeches.

1. The text is that of the first printing in *Fire!!* (1926).

Delia never looked up from her work, and her thin, stooped shoulders sagged further.

"Ah aint for no fuss t'night, Sykes. Ah just come from taking sacrament at the church house."

He snorted scornfully. "Yeah, you just come from de church house on a Sunday night, but heah you is gone to work on them clothes. You ain't nothing but a hypocrite. One of them amen-corner Christians—sing, whoop, and shout, then come home and wash white folks clothes on the Sabbath."

He stepped roughly upon the whitest pile of things, kicking them helter-skelter as he crossed the room. His wife gave a little scream of dismay, and quickly gathered them together again.

"Sykes, you quit grindin' dirt into these clothes! How can Ah git through by Sat'day if Ah don't start on Sunday?"

"Ah don't keer if you never git through. Anyhow, Ah done promised Gawd and a couple of other men, Ah aint gointer have it in mah house. Don't gimme no lip neither, else Ah'll throw 'em out and put mah fist up side yo' head to boot."

Delia's habitual meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf. She was on her feet; her poor little body, her bare knuckly hands bravely defying the strapping hulk before her.

"Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washin' fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!"

"What's that got to do with me?" he asked brutally.

"What's it got to do with you, Sykes? Mah tub of suds is filled yo' belly with vittles more times than yo' hands is filled it. Mah sweat is done paid for this house and Ah reckon Ah kin keep on sweatin' in it."

She seized the iron skillet from the stove and struck a defensive pose, which act surprised him greatly, coming from her. It cowed him and he did not strike her as he usually did.

"Naw you won't," she panted, "that ole snaggle-toothed black woman you runnin' with aint comin' heah to pile up on *mah* sweat and blood. You aint paid for nothin' on this place, and Ah'm gointer stay right heah till Ah'm toted out foot foremost."

"Well, you better quit gittin' me riled up, else they'll be totin' you out sooner than you expect. Ah'm so tired of you Ah don't know whut to do. Gawd! how Ah hates skinny wimmen!"

A little awed by this new Delia, he sidled out of the door and slammed the back gate after him. He did not say where he had gone, but she knew too well. She knew very well that he would not return until nearly daybreak also. Her work over, she went on to bed but not to sleep at once. Things had come to a pretty pass!

She lay awake, gazing upon the debris that cluttered their matrimonial trail. Not an image left standing along the way. Anything like flowers had long ago been drowned in the salty stream that had been pressed from her heart. Her tears, her sweat, her blood. She had brought love to the union and he had brought a longing after the flesh. Two months after the wedding, he had given her the first brutal beating. She had the memory of his numerous trips to Orlando with all of his wages when he had returned to her pen-

niless, even before the first year had passed. She was young and soft then, but now she thought of her knotty, muscled limbs, her harsh knuckly hands, and drew herself up into an unhappy little ball in the middle of the big feather bed. Too late now to hope for love, even if it were not Bertha it would be someone else. This case differed from the others only in that she was bolder than the others. Too late for everything except her little home. She had built it for her old days, and planted one by one the trees and flowers there. It was lovely to her, lovely.

Somehow, before sleep came, she found herself saying aloud: "Oh well, whatever goes over the Devil's back, is got to come under his belly. Sometime or ruther, Sykes, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing." After that she was able to build a spiritual earthworks against her husband. His shells could no longer reach her. *Amen*. She went to sleep and slept until he announced his presence in bed by kicking her feet and rudely snatching the cover away.

"Gimme some kivah heah, an' git yo' damn foots over on yo' own side! Ah oughter mash you in yo' mouf fuh drawing dat skillet on me."

Delia went clear to the rail without answering him. A triumphant indifference to all that he was or did.

The week was as full of work for Delia as all other weeks, and Saturday found her behind her little pony, collecting and delivering clothes.

It was a hot, hot day near the end of July. The village men on Joe Clarke's porch even chewed cane listlessly. They did not hurl the cane-knots as usual. They let them dribble over the edge of the porch. Even conversation had collapsed under the heat.

"Heah come Delia Jones," Jim Merchant said, as the shaggy pony came 'round the bend of the road toward them. The rusty buckboard was heaped with baskets of crisp, clean laundry.

"Yep," Joe Lindsay agreed. "Hot or col', rain or shine, jes ez reg'lar ez de weeks roll roun' Delia carries 'em an' fetches 'em on Sat'day."

"She better if she wanter eat," said Moss. "Sykes Jones aint wuth de shot an' powder hit would tek tuh kill 'em. Not to *huh* he aint."

"He sho' aint," Walter Thomas chimed in. "It's too bad, too, cause she wuz a right pritty li'l trick when he got huh. Ah'd uh mah'ied huh mahseff if he hadnter beat me to it."

Delia nodded briefly at the men as she drove past.

"Too much knockin' will ruin *any* 'oman. He done beat huh 'nough tuh kill three women, let 'lone change they looks," said Elijah Moseley. "How Sykes kin stommuck dat big black greasy Mogul he's layin' roun' wid, gits me. Ah swear dat eight-rock couldn't kiss a sardine can Ah done thowed out de back do' way las' yeah."

"Aw, she's fat, thass how come. He's allus been crazy 'bout fat women," put in Merchant. "He'd a' been tied up wid one long time ago if he could a' found one tuh have him. Did Ah tell yuh 'bout him come sidlin' roun' *mah* wife—bringin' her a basket uh pee-cans outa his yard fuh a present? Yessir, mah wife! She tol' him tuh take 'em right straight back home, cause Delia works so hard ovah dat washtub she reckon everything on de place taste lak sweat an' soapsuds. Ah jus' wisht Ah'd a' caught 'im 'roun' dere! Ah'd a' made his hips ketch on fiah down dat shell road."

"Ah know he done it, too. Ah sees 'im grinnin' at every 'oman dat passes," Walter Thomas said. "But even so, he useter eat some mighty big hunks uh humble pie tuh git dat lil' 'oman he got. She wuz ez pritty ez a speckled pup! Dat wuz fifteen yeahs ago. He useter be so skeered uh losin' huh, she could make him do some parts of a husband's duty. Dey never wuz de same in de mind."

"There oughter be a law about him," said Lindsay. "He aint fit tuh carry guts tuh a bear."

Clarke spoke for the first time. "Taint no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it aint in 'im. There's plenty men dat takes a wife lak dey do a joint uh sugar-cane. It's round, juicy an' sweet when dey gits it. But dey squeeze an' grind, squeeze an' grind an' wring tell dey wring every drop uh pleasure dat's in 'em out. When dey's satisfied dat dey is wrung dry, dey treats 'em jes lak dey do a cane-chew. Dey thows 'em away. Dey knows whut dey is doin' while dey is at it, an' hates theirselves fuh it but they keeps on hangin' after huh tell she's empty. Den dey hates huh fuh bein' a cane-chew an' in de way."

"We oughter take Sykes an' dat stray 'oman uh his'n down in Lake Howell swamp an' lay on de rawhide till they cain't say 'Lawd a' mussy.' He allus wuz uh ovahbearin' niggah, but since dat white 'oman from up north done teached 'im how to run a automobile, he done got too biggety to live—an' we oughter kill 'im," Old Man Anderson advised.

A grunt of approval went around the porch. But the heat was melting their civic virtue and Elijah Moseley began to bait Joe Clarke.

"Come on, Joe, git a melon outa dere an' slice it up for yo' customers. We'se all sufferin' wid de heat. De bear's done got *me!*"

"Thass right, Joe, a watermelon is jes' whut Ah needs tuh cure de eppizudicks." Walter Thomas joined forces with Moseley. "Come on dere, Joe. We all is steady customers an' you aint set us up in a long time. Ah chooses dat long, bowlegged Floridy favorite."

"A god, an' be dough. You all gimme twenty cents and slice away," Clarke retorted. "Ah needs a col' slice m'self. Heah, everybody chip in. Ah'll lend y'all mah meat knife."

The money was quickly subscribed and the huge melon brought forth. At that moment, Sykes and Bertha arrived. A determined silence fell on the porch and the melon was put away again.

Merchant snapped down the blade of his jack-knife and moved toward the store door.

"Come on in, Joe, an' gimme a slab uh sow belly an' uh pound uh coffee—almost fuhgot 'twas Sat'day. Got to git on home." Most of the men left also.

Just then Delia drove past on her way home, as Sykes was ordering magnificently for Bertha. It pleased him for Delia to see.

"Git whutsoever yo' heart desires, Honey. Wait a minute, Joe. Give huh two botles uh strawberry soda-water, uh quart uh parched ground-peas, an a block uh chewin' gum."

With all this they left the store, with Sykes reminding Bertha that this was his town and she could have it if she wanted it.

The men returned soon after they left, and held their watermelon feast.

"Where did Sykes Jones git dat 'oman from nohow?" Lindsay asked.

“Ovah Apopka. Guess dey musta been cleanin’ out de town when she lef’. She don’t look lak a thing but a hunk uh liver wid hair on it.”

“Well, she sho’ kin squall,” Dave Carter contributed. “When she gits ready tuh laff, she jes’ opens huh mouf an’ latches it back tuh de las’ notch. No ole grandpa alligator down in Lake Bell aint got nothin’ on huh.”

Bertha had been in town three months now. Sykes was still paying her room rent at Della Lewis’—the only house in town that would have taken her in. Sykes took her frequently to Winter Park to “stomps.” He still assured her that he was the swellest man in the state.

“Sho’ you kin have dat lil’ ole house soon’s Ah kin git dat ’oman outa dere. Everything b’longs tuh me an’ you sho’ kin have it. Ah sho’ ’bominates uh skinny ’oman. Lawdy, you sho’ is got one portly shape on you! You kin git *anything* you wants. Dis is *mah* town an’ you sho’ kin have it.”

Delia’s work-worn knees crawled over the earth in Gethsemane and up the rocks of Calvary many, many times during these months. She avoided the villagers and meeting places in her efforts to be blind and deaf. But Bertha nullified this to a degree, by coming to Delia’s house to call Sykes out to her at the gate.

Delia and Sykes fought all the time now with no peaceful interludes. They slept and ate in silence. Two or three times Delia had attempted a timid friendliness, but she was repulsed each time. It was plain that the breaches must remain agape.

The sun had burned July to August. The heat streamed down like a million hot arrows, smiting all things living upon the earth. Grass withered, leaves browned, snakes went blind in shedding and men and dogs went mad. Dog days!

Delia came home one day and found Sykes there before her. She wondered, but started to go on into the house without speaking, even though he was standing in the kitchen door and she must either stoop under his arm or ask him to move. He made no room for her. She noticed a soap box beside the steps, but paid no particular attention to it, knowing that he must have brought it there. As she was stooping to pass under his outstretched arm, he suddenly pushed her backward, laughingly.

“Look in de box dere Delia, Ah done brung yuh somethin’!”

She nearly fell upon the box in her stumbling, and when she saw what it held, she all but fainted outright.

“Sykes! Sykes, mah Gawd! You take dat rattlesnake ’way from heah! You *gottuh*. Oh, Jesus, have mussy!”

“Ah aint gut tuh do nuthin’ uh de kin’—fact is Ah aint got tuh do nothin’ but die. Taint no use uh you puttin’ on airs makin’ out lak you skeered uh dat snake—he’s gointer stay right heah tell he die. He wouldn’t bite me cause Ah knows how tuh handle ’im. Nohow he wouldn’t risk breakin’ out his fangs ’gin yo’ skinny laigs.”

“Naw, now Sykes, don’t keep dat thing ’roun’ heah tuh skeer me tuh death. You knows Ah’m even feared uh earth worms. Thass de biggest snake Ah evah did see. Kill ’im Sykes, please.”

“Doan ast me tuh do nothin’ fuh yuh. Goin’ ’roun’ tryin’ tuh be so damn astorperious. Naw, Ah aint gonna kill it. Ah think uh damn sight mo’ uh

him dan you! Dat's a nice snake an' anybody doan lak 'im kin jes' hit de grit."

The village soon heard that Sykes had the snake, and came to see and ask questions.

"How de hen-fire did you ketch dat six-foot rattler, Sykes?" Thomas asked.

"He's full uh frogs so he caint hardly move, thass how Ah eased up on 'm. But Ah'm a snake charmer an' knows how tuh handle 'em. Shux, dat aint nothin'. Ah could ketch one eve'y day if Ah so wanted tuh."

"Whut he needs is a heavy hick'ry club leaned real heavy on his head. Dat's de bes 'way tuh charm a rattlesnake."

"Naw, Walt, y'all jes' don't understand dese diamon' backs lak Ah do," said Sykes in a superior tone of voice.

The village agreed with Walter, but the snake stayed on. His box remained by the kitchen door with its screen wire covering. Two or three days later it had digested its meal of frogs and literally came to life. It rattled at every movement in the kitchen or the yard. One day as Delia came down the kitchen steps she saw his chalky-white fangs curved like scimitars hung in the wire meshes. This time she did not run away with averted eyes as usual. She stood for a long time in the doorway in a red fury that grew bloodier for every second that she regarded the creature that was her torment.

That night she broached the subject as soon as Sykes sat down to the table.

"Sykes, Ah wants you tuh take dat snake 'way fum heah. You done starved me an' Ah put up widcher, you done beat me an Ah took dat, but you done kilt all mah insides bringin' dat varmint heah."

Sykes poured out a saucer full of coffee and drank it deliberately before he answered her.

"A whole lot Ah keer 'bout how you feels inside uh out. Dat snake aint goin' no damn wheah till Ah gits ready fuh 'im tuh go. So fur as beatin' is concerned, yuh aint took near all dat you gointer take ef yuh stay 'roun' *me*."

Delia pushed back her plate and got up from the table. "Ah hates you, Sykes," she said calmly. "Ah hates you tuh de same degree dat Ah useter love yuh. Ah done took an' took till mah belly is full up tuh mah neck. Dat's de reason Ah got mah letter fum de church an' moved mah membership tuh Woodbridge—so Ah don't haftuh take no sacrament wid yuh. Ah don't wantuh see yuh 'roun' me a-tall. Lay 'roun' wid dat 'oman all yuh wants tuh, but gwan 'way fum me an' mah house. Ah hates yuh lak uh suck-egg dog."

Sykes almost let the huge wad of corn bread and collard greens he was chewing fall out of his mouth in amazement. He had a hard time whipping himself up to the proper fury to try to answer Delia.

"Well, Ah'm glad you does hate me. Ah'm sho' tiahed uh you hangin' ontuh me. Ah don't want yuh. Look at yuh stringey ole neck! Yo' rawbony laigs an' arms is enough tuh cut uh man tuh death. You looks jes' lak de devvul's doll-baby tuh *me*. You cain't hate me no worse dan Ah hates you. Ah been hatin' *you* fuh years."

"Yo' ole black hide don't look lak nothin' tuh me, but uh passel uh wrinkled up rubber, wid yo' big ole yeahs flappin' on each side lak uh paih uh buzzard wings. Don't think Ah'm gointuh be run way fum mah house neither. Ah'm goin' tuh de white folks bout *you*, mah young man, de very nex' time you lay yo' han's on me. Mah cup is done run ovah." Delia said this

with no signs of fear and Sykes departed from the house, threatening her, but made not the slightest move to carry out any of them.

That night he did not return at all, and the next day being Sunday, Delia was glad that she did not have to quarrel before she hitched up her pony and drove the four miles to Woodbridge.

She stayed to the night service—"love feast"—which was very warm and full of spirit. In the emotional winds her domestic trials were borne far and wide so that she sang as she drove homeward,

*Jurden water, black an' col'
Chills de body, not de soul
An' Ah wantah cross Jurden in uh calm time.*

She came from the barn to the kitchen door and stopped.

"Whut's de mattah, ol' satan, you aint kickin' up yo' racket?" She addressed the snake's box. Complete silence. She went on into the house with a new hope in its birth struggles. Perhaps her threat to go to the white folks had frightened Sykes! Perhaps he was sorry! Fifteen years of misery and suppression had brought Delia to the place where she would hope *anything* that looked towards a way over or through her wall of inhibitions.

She felt in the match safe behind the stove at once for a match. There was only one there.

"Dat niggah wouldn't fetch nothin' heah tuh save his rotten neck, but he kin run thew whut Ah brings quick enough. Now he done toted off nigh on tuh haff uh box uh matches. He done had dat 'oman heah in mah house, too."

Nobody but a woman could tell how she knew this even before she struck the match. But she did and it put her into a new fury.

Presently she brought in the tubs to put the white things to soak. This time she decided she need not bring the hamper out of the bedroom; she would go in there and do the sorting. She picked up the pot-bellied lamp and went in. The room was small and the hamper stood hard by the foot of the white iron bed. She could sit and reach through the bedposts—resting as she worked.

"Ah wantah cross Jurden in uh calm time." She was singing again. The mood of the "love feast" had returned. She threw back the lid of the basket almost gaily. Then, moved by both horror and terror, she sprung back toward the door. *There lay the snake in the basket!* He moved sluggishly at first, but even as she turned round and round, jumped up and down in an insanity of fear, he began to stir vigorously. She saw him pouring his awful beauty from the basket upon the bed, then she seized the lamp and ran as fast as she could to the kitchen. The wind from the open door blew out the light and the darkness added to her terror. She sped to the darkness of the yard, slamming the door after her before she thought to set down the lamp. She did not feel safe even on the ground, so she climbed up in the hay barn.

There for an hour or more she lay sprawled upon the hay a gibbering wreck.

Finally she grew quiet, and after that, coherent thought. With this, stalked through her a cold, bloody rage. Hours of this. A period of introspection, a space of retrospection, then a mixture of both. Out of this an awful calm.

“Well, Ah done de bes’ Ah could. If things aint right, Gawd knows taint mah fault.”

She went to sleep—a twitchy sleep—and woke up to a faint gray sky. There was a loud hollow sound below. She peered out. Sykes was at the wood-pile, demolishing a wire-covered box.

He hurried to the kitchen door, but hung outside there some minutes before he entered, and stood some minutes more inside before he closed it after him.

The gray in the sky was spreading. Delia descended without fear now, and crouched beneath the low bedroom window. The drawn shade shut out the dawn, shut in the night. But the thin walls held back no sound.

“Dat ol’ scratch is woke up now!” She mused at the tremendous whirr inside, which every woodsman knows, is one of the sound illusions. The rattler is a ventriloquist. His whirr sounds to the right, to the left, straight ahead, behind, close under foot—everywhere but where it is. Woe to him who guesses wrong unless he is prepared to hold up his end of the argument! Sometimes he strikes without rattling at all.

Inside, Skyes heard nothing until he knocked a pot lid off the stove while trying to reach the match safe in the dark. He had emptied his pockets at Bertha’s.

The snake seemed to wake up under the stove and Skyes made a quick leap into the bedroom. In spite of the gin he had had, his head was clearing now.

“Mah Gawd!” he chattered, “ef Ah could on’y strack uh light!”

The rattling ceased for a moment as he stood paralyzed. He waited. It seemed that the snake waited also.

“Oh fuh de light! Ah thought he’d be too sick”—Skyes was muttering to himself when the whirr began again, closer, right underfoot this time. Long before this, Skyes’ ability to think had been flattened down to primitive instinct and he leaped—onto the bed.

Outside Delia heard a cry that might have come from a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla. All the terror, all the horror, all the rage that man possibly could express, without a recognizable human sound.

A tremendous stir inside there, another series of animal screams, the intermittent whirr of the reptile. The shade torn violently down from the window, letting in the red dawn, a huge brown hand seizing the window stick, great dull blows upon the wooden floor punctuating the gibberish of sound long after the rattle of the snake had abruptly subsided. All this Delia could see and hear from her place beneath the window, and it made her ill. She crept over to the four-o’clocks and stretched herself on the cool earth to recover.

She lay there. “Delia, Delia!” She could hear Skyes calling in a most despairing tone as one who expected no answer. The sun crept on up, and he called. Delia could not move—her legs were gone flabby. She never moved, he called, and the sun kept rising.

“Mah Gawd!” she heard him moan. “Mah Gawd fum Heben!” She heard him stumbling about and got up from her flower-bed. The sun was growing warm. As she approached the door she heard him call out hopefully, “Delia, is dat you Ah heah?”

She saw him on his hands and knees as soon as she reached the door. He crept an inch or two toward her—all that he was able, and she saw his hor-

ribly swollen neck and his one open eye shining with hope. A surge of pity too strong to support bore her away from that eye that must, could not, fail to see the tubs. He would see the lamp. Orlando with its doctors was too far. She could scarcely reach the Chinaberry tree, where she waited in the growing heat while inside she knew the cold river was creeping up and up to extinguish that eye which must know by now that she knew.

1926

The Eatonville Anthology¹

I. The Pleading Woman

Mrs. Tony Roberts is the pleading woman. She just loves to ask for things. Her husband gives her all he can take and scrape, which is considerably more than most wives get for their housekeeping, but she goes from door to door begging for things.

She starts at the store. "Mist' Clarke," she sing-songs in a high keening voice, "gimme lil' piece uh meat tuh boil a pot uh greens wid. Lawd knows me an' mah chillen is so hongry! Hits uh SHAME! Tony don't fee-ee-eee-ed me!"

Mr. Clarke knows that she has money and that her larder is well stocked, for Tony Roberts is the best provider on his list. But her keening annoys him and he rises heavily. The pleader at his elbow shows all the joy of a starving man being seated at a feast.

"Thass right Mist' Clarke. De Lawd loveth de cheerful giver. Gimme jes' a lil' piece 'bout dis big (indicating the width of her hand) an' de Lawd'll bless yuh."

She follows this angel-on-earth to his meat tub and superintends the cutting, crying out in pain when he refuses to move the knife over just a teeny bit mo'.

Finally, meat in hand, she departs, remarking on the meanness of some people who give a piece of salt meat only two-fingers wide when they were plainly asked for a hand-wide piece. Clarke puts it down to Tony's account and resumes his reading.

With the slab of salt pork as a foundation, she visits various homes until she has collected all she wants for the day. At the Piersons for instance: "Sister Pierson, plee-ee-ease gimme uh han'full uh collard greens fuh me an' mah po' chillen! 'Deed, me an' mah chillen is so hongry. Tony doan' fee-ee-ed me!"

Mrs. Pierson picks a bunch of greens for her, but she springs away from them as if they were poison. "Lawd a mussy, Mis' Pierson, you ain't gonna gimme dat lil' eye-full uh greens fuh me an' mah chillen, is you? Don't be so graspin'; Gawd won't bless yuh. Gimme uh han'full mo'. Lawd, some folks is got everything, an' theys jes' as gripin' an stingy!"

Mrs. Pierson raises the ante, and the pleading woman moves on to the next place, and on and on. The next day, it commences all over.

1. The text is that of *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive* (1979), edited by Alice Walker. Eatonville was Hurston's hometown; here

she brings together many of the stories about its residents that she told at parties in Harlem. The stories are cast in the forms of traditional African American tales.

II. *Turpentine Love*

Jim Merchant is always in good humor—even with his wife. He says he fell in love with her at first sight. That was some years ago. She has had all her teeth pulled out, but they still get along splendidly.

He says the first time he called on her he found out that she was subject to fits. This didn't cool his love, however. She had several in his presence.

One Sunday, while he was there, she had one, and her mother tried to give her a dose of turpentine to stop it. Accidentally, she spilled it in her eye and it cured her. She never had another fit, so they got married and have kept each other in good humor ever since.

III.

Becky Moore has eleven children of assorted colors and sizes. She has never been married, but that is not her fault. She has never stopped any of the fathers of her children from proposing, so if she has no father for her children it's not her fault. The men round about are entirely to blame.

The other mothers of the town are afraid that it is catching. They won't let their children play with hers.

IV. *Tippy*

Sykes Jones' family all shoot craps. The most interesting member of the family—also fond of bones, but another kind—is Tippy, the Jones' dog.

He is so thin, that it amazes one that he lives at all. He sneaks into village kitchens if the housewives are careless about the doors and steals meats, even off the stoves. He also sucks eggs.

For these offenses he has been sentenced to death dozens of times, and the sentences executed upon him, only they didn't work. He has been fed bluestone, strychnine, nux vomica, even an entire Peruna² bottle beaten up. It didn't fatten him, but it didn't kill him. So Eatonville has resigned itself to the plague of Tippy, reflecting that it has erred in certain matters and is being chastened.

In spite of all the attempts upon his life, Tippy is still willing to be friendly with anyone who will let him.

V. *The Way of a Man with a Train*

Old Man Anderson lived seven or eight miles out in the country from Eatonville. Over by Lake Apopka. He raised feed-corn and cassava and went to market with it two or three times a year. He bought all of his victuals wholesale so he wouldn't have to come to town for several months more.

He was different from citybred folks. He had never seen a train. Everybody laughed at him for even the smallest child in Eatonville had either been to Maitland or Orlando and watched a train go by. On Sunday afternoons all of the young people of the village would go over to Maitland, a

2. A patent medicine cure-all.

mile away, to see Number 35 whizz southward on its way to Tampa and wave at the passengers. So we looked down on him a little. Even we children felt superior in the presence of a person so lacking in worldly knowledge.

The grown-ups kept telling him he ought to go see a train. He always said he didn't have time to wait so long. Only two trains a day passed through Maitland. But patronage and ridicule finally had its effect and Old Man Anderson drove in one morning early. Number 78 went north to Jacksonville at 10:20. He drove his light wagon over in the woods beside the railroad below Maitland, and sat down to wait. He began to fear that his horse would get frightened and run away with the wagon. So he took him out and led him deeper into the grove and tied him securely. Then he returned to his wagon and waited some more. Then he remembered that some of the train-wise villagers had said the engine belched fire and smoke. He had better move his wagon out of danger. It might catch fire. He climbed down from the seat and placed himself between the shafts to draw it away. Just then 78 came thundering over the trestle spouting smoke, and suddenly began blowing for Maitland. Old Man Anderson became so frightened he ran away with the wagon through the woods and tore it up worse than the horse ever could have done. He doesn't know yet what a train looks like, and says he doesn't care.

VI. *Coon Taylor*

Coon Taylor never did any real stealing. Of course, if he saw a chicken or a watermelon he'd take it. The people used to get mad but they never could catch him. He took so many melons from Joe Clarke that he set up in the melon patch one night with his shotgun loaded with rock-salt. He was going to fix Coon. But he was tired. It is hard work being a mayor, postmaster, storekeeper and everything. He dropped asleep sitting on a stump in the middle of the patch. So he didn't see Coon when he came. Coon didn't see him either, that is, not at first. He knew the stump was there, however. He had opened many of Clarke's juicy Florida Favorite on it. He selected his fruit, walked over to the stump and burst the melon on it. This is, he thought it was the stump until it fell over with a yell. Then he knew it was no stump and departed hastily from those parts. He had cleared the fence when Clarke came to, as it were. So the charge of rock-salt was wasted on the desert air.

During the sugar-cane season, he found he couldn't resist Clarke's soft green cane, but Clarke did not go to sleep this time. So after he had cut six or eight stalks by the moonlight, Clarke rose up out of the cane strippings with his shotgun and made Coon sit right down and chew up the last one of them on the spot. And the next day he made Coon leave his town for three months.

VII. *Village Fiction*

Joe Lindsay is said by Lum Boger to be the largest manufacturer of prevarications in Eatonville; Brazzle (late owner of the world's leanest and meanest mule) contends that his business is the largest in the state and his wife holds that he is the biggest liar in the world.

Exhibit A—He claims that while he was in Orlando one day he saw a doctor cut open a woman, remove everything—liver, lights and heart included—

clean each of them separately; the doctor then washed out the empty woman, dried her out neatly with a towel and replaced the organs so expertly that she was up and about her work in a couple of weeks.

VIII.

Sewell is a man who lives all to himself. He moves a great deal. So often, that 'Lige Moseley says his chickens are so used to moving that every time he comes out into his backyard the chickens lie down and cross their legs, ready to be tied up again.

He is baldheaded; but he says he doesn't mind that, because he wants as little as possible between him and God.

IX.

Mrs. Clarke is Joe Clarke's wife. She is a soft-looking, middle-aged woman, whose bust and stomach are always holding a get-together.

She waits on the store sometimes and cries every time he yells at her which he does every time she makes a mistake, which is quite often. She calls her husband "Jody." They say he used to beat her in the store when he was a young man, but he is not so impatient now. He can wait until he goes home.

She shouts in Church every Sunday and shakes the hand of fellowship with everybody in the Church with her eyes closed, but somehow always misses her husband.

X.

Mrs. McDuffy goes to Church every Sunday and always shouts and tells her "determination." Her husband always sits in the back row and beats her as soon as they get home. He says there's no sense in her shouting, as big a devil as she is. She just does it to slur him. Elijah Moseley asked her why she didn't stop shouting, seeing she always got a beating about it. She says she can't "squinch the sperrit." Then Elijah asked Mr. McDuffy to stop beating her, seeing that she was going to shout anyway. He answered that she just did it for spite and that his fist was just as hard as her head. He could last just as long as she. So the village let the matter rest.

XI. *Double- Shuffle*

Back in the good old days before the World War, things were very simple in Eatonville. People didn't fox-trot. When the town wanted to put on its Sunday clothes and wash behind the ears, it put on a "breakdown." The daring younger set would two-step and waltz, but the good church members and the elders stuck to the grand march. By rural canons dancing is wicked, but one is not held to have danced until the feet have been crossed. Feet don't get crossed when one grand marches.

At elaborate affairs the organ from the Methodist church was moved up to the hall and Lizzimore, the blind man, presided. When informal gatherings were held, he merely played his guitar assisted by any volunteer with mouth organs or accordions.

Among white people the march is as mild as if it had been passed on by Volstead.³ But it still has a kick in Eatonville. Everybody happy, shining eyes, gleaming teeth. Feet dragged 'shhlap, shhlap! to beat out the time. No orchestra needed. Round and round! Back again, parse-me-la! shlap! shlap! Strut! Strut! Seaboard! Shlap! Shlap! Tiddy bumm! Mr. Clarke in the lead with Mrs. Moseley.

It's too much for some of the young folks. Double shuffling commences. Buck and wing. Lizzimore about to break his guitar. Accordion doing contortions. People fall back against the walls, and let the soloist have it, shouting as they clapp the old, old double-shuffle songs.

'Me an' mah honey got two mo' days
Two mo' days tuh do de buck'

Sweating bodies, laughing mouths, grotesque faces, feet drumming fiercely. Deacons clapping as hard as the rest.

"Great big nigger, black as tar
Trying tuh git tuh hebben on uh 'lectric car."

"Some love cabbage, some love kale
But I love a gal wid a short skirt tail."
Long tall angel—steppin' down,
Long white robe an' starry crown.

'Ah would not marry uh black gal (bumm bumm!)
Tell yuh de reason why
Every time she comb her hair
She make de goo-goo eye.

Would not marry a yaller gal (bumm bumm!)
Tell yuh de reason why
Her neck so long an' stringy
Ahm 'fraid she'd never die.

Would not marry uh preacher
Tell yuh de reason why
Every time he comes tuh town
He makes de chicken fly.

When the buck dance⁴ was over, the boys would give the floor to the girls and they would parse-me-la with a sly eye out of the corner to see if anybody was looking who might "have them up in church" on conference night.⁵ Then there would be more dancing. Then Mr. Clarke would call for everybody's best attention and announce that *'freshments was served! Every gent'man would please take his lady by the arm and scorch*⁶ her right up to de table fur a treat!

Then the men would stick their arms out with a flourish and ask their ladies: "You lak chicken? Well, then, take a wing." And the ladies would take the proffered "wings" and parade up to the long table and be served.

3. Andrew J. Volstead (1860–1947), congressman who introduced the Prohibition Amendment.

4. All-male dance.

5. A formal meeting of church officials. The girls are afraid they might be accused of loose behavior.

6. Escort (dialect).

Of course most of them had brought baskets in which were heaps of jointed and fried chicken, two or three kinds of pies, cakes, potato pone and chicken purlo.⁷ The hall would separate into happy groups about the baskets until time for more dancing.

But the boys and girls got scattered about during the war, and now they dance the fox-trot by a brand new piano. They do waltz and two-step still, but no one now considers it good form to lock his chin over his partner's shoulder and stick out behind. One night just for fun and to humor the old folks, they danced, that is, they grand marched, but everyone picked up their feet. *Bah!!*

XII. The Head of the Nail

Daisy Taylor was the town vamp. Not that she was pretty. But sirens were all but non-existent in the town. Perhaps she was forced to it by circumstances. She was quite dark, with little bushy patches of hair squatting over her head. These were held down by shingle-nails often. No one knows whether she did this for artistic effect or for lack of hairpins, but there they were shining in the little patches of hair when she got all dressed for the afternoon and came up to Clarke's store to see if there was any mail for her.

It was seldom that anyone wrote to Daisy, but she knew that the men of the town would be assembled there by five o'clock, and some one could usually be induced to buy her some soda water or peanuts.

Daisy flirted with married men. There were only two single men in town. Lum Boger, who was engaged to the assistant school-teacher, and Hiram Lester, who had been off to school at Tuskegee and wouldn't look at a person like Daisy. In addition to other drawbacks, she was pigeon-toed and her petticoat was always showing so perhaps he was justified. There was nothing else to do except flirt with married men.

This went on for a long time. First one wife and then another complained of her, or drove her from the preserves by threat.

But the affair with Crooms was the most prolonged and serious. He was even known to have bought her a pair of shoes.

Mrs. Laura Crooms was a meek little woman who took all of her troubles crying, and talked a great deal of leaving things in the hands of God.

The affair came to a head one night in orange picking time. Crooms was over at Oneido picking oranges. Many fruit pickers move from one town to the other during the season.

The *town* was collected at the store-postoffice as is customary on Saturday nights. The *town* has had its bath and with its week's pay in pocket fares forth to be merry. The men tell stories and treat the ladies to soda water, peanuts and peppermint candy.

Daisy was trying to get treats, but the porch was cold to her that night.

"Ah don't keer if you don't treat me. What's a dirty lil nickel?" She flung this at Walter Thomas. "The everloving Mister Crooms will gimme anything atall Ah wants."

7. I.e., pilaf; a stew of rice, vegetables, and chicken.

"You better shet up yo' mouf talking 'bout Albert Crooms. Heah his wife comes right now."

Daisy went akimbo. "Who? Me! Ah don't keer whut Laura Crooms think. If she ain't a heavy hip-ted Mama enough to keep him, she don't need to come crying to me."

She stood making goo-goo eyes as Mrs. Crooms walked upon the porch. Daisy laughed loud, made several references to Albert Crooms, and when she saw the mail-bag come in from Maitland she said, "Ah better go in an' see if Ah ain't got a letter from Oneido."

The more Daisy played the game of getting Mrs. Crooms' goat, the better she liked it. She ran in and out of the store laughing until she could scarcely stand. Some of the people present began to talk to Mrs. Crooms—to egg her on to halt Daisy's boasting, but she was for leaving it all in the hands of God. Walter Thomas kept on after Mrs. Crooms until she stiffened and resolved to fight. Daisy was inside when she came to this resolve and never dreamed anything of the kind could happen. She had gotten hold of an envelope and came laughing and shouting, "Oh, Ah can't stand to see Oneido lose!"

There was a box of ax-handles on display on the porch, propped up against the door jamb. As Daisy stepped upon the porch, Mrs. Crooms leaned the heavy end of one of those handles heavily upon her head. She staggered from the porch to the ground and the timid Laura, fearful of a counter-attack, struck again and Daisy toppled into the town ditch. There was not enough water in there to do more than muss her up. Every time she tried to rise, down would come that ax-handle again. Laura was fighting a scared fight. With Daisy thoroughly licked, she retired to the store porch and left her fallen enemy in the ditch. But Elijah Moseley, who was some distance down the street when the trouble began, arrived as the victor was withdrawing. He rushed up and picked Daisy out of the mud and began feeling her head.

"Is she hurt much?" Joe Clarke asked from the doorway.

"I don't know," Elijah answered. "I was just looking to see if Laura had been lucky enough to hit one of those nails on the head and drive it in."

Before a week was up, Daisy moved to Orlando. There in a wider sphere, perhaps, her talents as a vamp were appreciated.

XIII. Pants and Cal'line

Sister Cal'line Potts was a silent woman. Did all of her laughing down inside, but did the thing that kept the town in an uproar of laughter. It was the general opinion of the village that Cal'line would do anything she had a mind to. And she had a mind to do several things.

Mitchell Potts, her husband, had a weakness for women. No one ever believed that she was jealous. She did things to the women, surely. But most any townsman would have said that she did them because she liked the novel situation and the queer things she could bring out of it.

Once he took up with Delphine—called Mis' Pheeny by the town. She lived on the outskirts on the edge of the piney woods. The town winked and talked. People don't make secrets of such things in villages. Cal'line went about her business with her thin black lips pursed tight as ever, and her shiny black eyes unchanged.

"Dat devil of a Cal'line's got somethin' up her sleeve!" The town smiled in anticipation.

"Delphine is too big a cigar for her to smoke. She ain't crazy," said some as the weeks went on and nothing happened. Even Pheeny herself would give an extra flirt to her over-starched petticoats as she rustled into church past her of Sundays.

Mitch Potts said furthermore, that he was tired of Cal'line's foolishness. She had to stay where he put her. His African soup-bone (arm) was too strong to let a woman run over him. 'Nough was 'nough. And he did some fancy cussing, and he was the fanciest cusser in the county.

So the town waited and the longer it waited, the odds changed slowly from the wife to the husband.

One Saturday, Mitch knocked off work at two o'clock and went over to Maitland. He came back with a rectangular box under his arm and kept straight on out to the barn to put it away. He ducked around the corner of the house quickly, but even so, his wife glimpsed the package. Very much like a shoe box. So!

He put on the kettle and took a bath. She stood in her bare feet at the ironing board and kept on ironing. He dressed. It was about five o'clock but still very light. He fiddled around outside. She kept on with her ironing. As soon as the sun got red, he sauntered out to the barn, got the parcel and walked away down the road, past the store and out into the piney woods. As soon as he left the house, Cal'line slipped on her shoes without taking time to don stockings, put on one of her husband's old Stetsons, worn and floppy, slung the axe over her shoulder and followed in his wake. He was hailed cheerily as he passed the sitters on the store porch and answered smiling sheepishly and passed on. Two minutes later passed his wife, silently, unsmilingly, and set the porch to giggling and betting.

An hour passed perhaps. It was dark. Clarke had long ago lighted the swinging kerosene lamp inside.

XIV.

Once 'way back yonder before the stars fell all the animals used to talk just like people. In them days dogs and rabbits was the best of friends—even tho both of them was stuck on the same gal—which was Miss Nancy Coon. She had the sweetest smile and the prettiest striped and bushy tail to be found anywhere.

They both run their legs nigh off trying to win her for themselves—fetching nice ripe persimmons and such. But she never give one or the other no satisfaction.

Finally one night Mr. Dog popped the question right out. "Miss Coon," he says, "Ma'am, also Ma'am which would you ruther be—a lark flyin' or a dove a settin'?"

Course Miss Nancy she blushed and laughed a little and hid her face behind her bushy tail for a spell. Then she said sorter shy like, "I does love yo' sweet voice, brother dawg—but—I ain't jes' exactly set my mind yit."

Her and Mr. Dog set on a spell, when up comes hopping Mr. Rabbit wid his tail fresh washed and his whiskers shining. He got right down to business and asked Miss Coon to marry him, too.

“Oh, Miss Nancy,” he says, “Ma’am, also Ma’am, if you’d see me settin’ straddle of a mud-cat⁸ leadin’ a minnow, what would you think? Ma’am also Ma’am?” Which is a out and out proposal as everybody knows.

“Youse awful nice, Brother Rabbit and a beautiful dancer, but you cannot sing like Brother Dog. Both you uns come back next week to gimme time for to decide.”

They both left arm-in-arm. Finally Mr. Rabbit says to Mr. Dog. “Taint no use in me going back—she ain’t gwinter have me. So I mought as well give up. She loves singing, and I ain’t got nothing but a squeak.”

“Oh, don’t talk that a way,” says Mr. Dog, tho’ he is glad Mr. Rabbit can’t sing none.

“Thass all right, Brer Dog. But if I had a sweet voice like you got, I’d have it worked on and make it sweeter.”

“How! How! How!” Mr. Dog cried, jumping up and down.

“Lemme fix it for you, like I do for Sister Lark and Sister Mockingbird.”

“When? Where?” asked Mr. Dog, all excited. He was figuring that if he could sing just a little better Miss Coon would be bound to have him.

“Just you meet me t’morrer in de huckleberry patch,” says the rabbit and off they both goes to bed.

The dog is there on time next day and after a while the rabbit comes loping up.

“Mawnin’, Brer Dawg,” he says kinder chippy like. “Ready to git yo’ voice sweetened?”

“Sholy, sholy, Brer Rabbit. Let’s we all hurry about it. I wants tuh serenade Miss Nancy from the piney woods tuh night.”

“Well, den, open yo’ mouf and poke out yo’ tongue,” says the rabbit.

No sooner did Mr. Dog poke out his tongue than Mr. Rabbit split it with a knife and ran for all he was worth to a hollow stump and hid hisself.

The dog has been mad at the rabbit ever since.

Anybody who don’t believe it happened, just look at the dog’s tongue and he can see for himself where the rabbit slit it right up the middle.

Stepped on a tin, mah story ends.

1927

How It Feels to Be Colored Me¹

I am colored but I offer nothing in the way of extenuating circumstances except the fact that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother’s side was *not* an Indian chief.

I remember the very day that I became colored. Up to my thirteenth year I lived in the little Negro town of Eatonville, Florida. It is exclusively a colored town. The only white people I knew passed through the town going to or coming from Orlando. The native whites rode dusty horses, the Northern tourists chugged down the sandy village road in automobiles. The town

8. Catfish.

1. The text is that of *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive* (1979), edited by Alice Walker.

knew the Southerners and never stopped cane chewing when they passed. But the Northerners were something else again. They were peered at cautiously from behind the curtains by the timid. The more venturesome would come out on the porch to watch them go past and got just as much pleasure out of the tourists as the tourists got out of the village.

The front porch might seem a daring place for the rest of the town, but it was a gallery seat for me. My favorite place was atop the gate-post. Proscenium box² for a born first-nighter. Not only did I enjoy the show, but I didn't mind the actors knowing that I liked it. I usually spoke to them in passing. I'd wave at them and when they returned my salute, I would say something like this: "Howdy-do-well-I-thank-you-where-you-goin'?" Usually automobile or the horse paused at this, and after a queer exchange of compliments, I would probably "go a piece of the way" with them, as we say in farthest Florida. If one of my family happened to come to the front in time to see me, of course negotiations would be rudely broken off. But even so, it is clear that I was the first "welcome-to-our-state" Floridian, and I hope the Miami Chamber of Commerce will please take notice.

During this period, white people differed from colored to me only in that they rode through town and never lived there. They liked to hear me "speak pieces" and sing and wanted to see me dance the parse-me-la, and gave me generously of their small silver for doing these things, which seemed strange to me for I wanted to do them so much that I needed bribing to stop. Only they didn't know it. The colored people gave no dimes. They deplored any joyful tendencies in me, but I was their Zora nevertheless. I belonged to them, to the nearby hotels, to the county—everybody's Zora.

But changes came in the family when I was thirteen, and I was sent to school in Jacksonville. I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, as Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror, I became a fast brown—warranted not to rub nor run.

But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said "On the line!" The Reconstruction said "Get set!"; and the generation before said "Go!" I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep. Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid

2. Box at the front of the auditorium, closest to the stage.

through my ancestors for it. No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost. It is thrilling to think—to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep.

The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult. No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat. No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed. The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting.

I do not always feel colored. Even now I often achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville before the Hegira.³ I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.

For instance at Barnard. “Besides the waters of the Hudson” I feel my race. Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon, and overswept, but through it all, I remain myself. When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again.

Sometimes it is the other way around. A white person is set down in our midst, but the contrast is just as sharp for me. For instance, when I sit in the drafty basement that is The New World Cabaret⁴ with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are seated by the jazz waiters. In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen—follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai⁵ above my head, I hurl it true to the mark *yeeeeooww!* I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something—give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat smoking calmly.

“Good music they have here,” he remarks, drumming the table with his fingertips.

Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am *so* colored.

At certain times I have no race, I am *me*. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance. So far as

3. Forced march of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.; hence any forced flight or journey for safety.

4. Popular Harlem nightclub in the 1920s.

5. A slender spear used by some South African peoples.

my feelings are concerned, Peggy Hopkins Joyce on the Boule Mich⁶ with her gorgeous raiment, stately carriage, knees knocking together in a most aristocratic manner, has nothing on me. The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads.

I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries. My country, right or wrong.

Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How *can* any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me.

But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held—so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place—who knows?

1928

6. Boulevard St. Michel, a street on the Left Bank of Paris running through the Latin Quarter. It is lined with cafés that were—and still are—

frequented by Americans. Joyce was a much-photographed socialite and heiress.

NELLA LARSEN

1891–1964

Harlem Renaissance leaders proposed that African American artists and intellectuals should uplift their race. In the famous phrase of W. E. B. Du Bois, it was the duty of the “talented tenth” to educate the masses of black Americans while at the same time leading the struggle against white prejudice. This ideology inspired many writers but produced divisive arguments: should African American writing be anchored in authentic popular black culture—whether found in the folkways of the rural South or in the jazz scene of urban communities—or should it represent the deliberately cosmopolitan, educated cultural style of the “New Negroes”? Modernist writers’ interest in the “primitive” accentuated these debates. Writers of the Harlem Renaissance were well aware of how African Americans had been stereotypically demeaned as primitive, uncultured, indeed barely human; given that history, was it

possible to celebrate an African American identity authentically rooted in black folk culture?

Nella Larsen's writings showed how uplift's demand for racial allegiance could tear apart the inner lives of African Americans. Her own mixed-race background enabled her to see that already in the 1920s the majority of Americans socially categorized as "Negroes" were in fact people of mixed racial ancestry, and this led her to ask how there could be such a thing as racial authenticity if there was no such thing as "pure" race. Nevertheless, she saw that even if race was an artificial construct, it had powerfully real effects—effects that to her were always destructive of African American selfhood.

Larsen was born in Chicago, of a white mother—a Danish immigrant—and a black West Indian father. He died when she was two, and her mother then married a white man. Larsen, a visibly dark child, was viewed by her visibly light family as an embarrassment. At the age of sixteen she attended a high school connected to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. This, her first experience in an all-black environment, lasted for only a year (1907–8). She moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, where she stayed from 1909 to 1912, visiting relatives and auditing classes at the university. Up to this point—but not beyond it—her life story resembles that of Helga Crane, protagonist of Larsen's first novel, *Quicksand*.

Returning to the United States after three years abroad, Larsen studied and then practiced nursing for several years. In 1919 she married Elmer Samuel Imes, a black research physicist who later became chair of Fisk University's Physics Department. In 1922, now residing in Harlem, she left nursing and began to work for the New York Public Library system. By 1926 she and her husband were involved in the Harlem Renaissance scene, and she decided to become a writer.

Carl Van Vechten, wealthy white patron of Harlem Renaissance writers, helped get *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929)—her two completed novels—published by the prestigious house of Alfred A. Knopf. Both books sold well and were praised by reviewers across the critical spectrum. Larsen won a Guggenheim fellowship in 1930 for creative writing—the first "black" woman to receive such an award—and went to Spain to work on a third novel, which never materialized. In fact, except for one controversial short story (she was accused of having plagiarized it) and her subsequent published defense of her integrity (in the African American journal *Forum*, in 1930), she seems to have published only the two novels.

Her retreat from literature may have been caused by the painful plagiarism incident; by a lengthy divorce proceeding; or as the result of sharply falling book sales, which affected all Harlem Renaissance authors after the stock market crashed in 1929. Whatever the explanation, she stopped writing, returned to nursing for self-support, moved from Harlem to Brooklyn, and cut her ties with former literary friends and colleagues. At the time of her death, her work had been forgotten. After the 1986 reissue of the two novels in one volume, with an introduction by Deborah E. McDowell, she quickly became recognized as an important Harlem Renaissance figure, perhaps the movement's best novelist.

Passing looks at black characters who are able to pass as white, and do so to enjoy privileges that white people take for granted. Like *Quicksand*, it represents the erotic fascination that such mixed or passing characters—especially women—inspire in both black and white observers. *Passing* is narrated from the point of view of Irene Redfield, a married, middle-class black woman drawn into an ambivalent friendship with Clare Kendry, a childhood acquaintance who lives her adult life on the boundary between black and white social worlds. Like the paintings of Archibald Motley (see the color insert to this volume), *Passing* presents a vivid picture of urban black life, including its professional and artistic elites; Larsen's sardonic perspective further encompasses the white intellectuals



Girls waiting for Episcopal Church to end so they can see the processional, South Side of Chicago, Illinois, Russell Lee, 1941. Lee's photographs of the South Side neighborhood were inspired by Richard Wright's bestselling novel *Native Son* (1940).

who come to Harlem in search of excitement and exoticism. Following Irene and Clare's contacts from Chicago to New York City, Larsen traces the complicated urban geographies of pleasure and danger that each woman navigates. Although Irene disapproves of Clare's racial fluidity, she herself passes for brief periods of time; although she participates dutifully in the politics of uplift, racial identity never provides Irene with the "security of place and substance" that she longs for.

The text of *Passing* is the first edition of 1929.

Passing

One three centuries removed
 From the scenes his fathers loved,
 Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
 What is Africa to me?

—COUNTEE CULLEN¹

Part One. Encounter

ONE

It was the last letter in Irene Redfield's little pile of morning mail. After her other ordinary and clearly directed letters the long envelope of thin

1. From Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage"; see p. 855.

Italian paper with its almost illegible scrawl seemed out of place and alien. And there was, too, something mysterious and slightly furtive about it. A thin sly thing which bore no return address to betray the sender. Not that she hadn't immediately known who its sender was. Some two years ago she had one very like it in outward appearance. Furtive, but yet in some peculiar, determined way a little flaunting. Purple ink. Foreign paper of extraordinary size.

It had been, Irene noted, postmarked in New York the day before. Her brows came together in a tiny frown. The frown, however, was more from perplexity than from annoyance; though there was in her thoughts an element of both. She was wholly unable to comprehend such an attitude towards danger as she was sure the letter's contents would reveal; and she disliked the idea of opening and reading it.

This, she reflected, was of a piece with all that she knew of Clare Kendry. Stepping always on the edge of danger. Always aware, but not drawing back or turning aside. Certainly not because of any alarms or feeling of outrage on the part of others.

And for a swift moment Irene Redfield seemed to see a pale small girl sitting on a ragged blue sofa, sewing pieces of bright red cloth together, while her drunken father, a tall, powerfully built man, raged threateningly up and down the shabby room, bellowing curses and making spasmodic lunges at her which were not the less frightening because they were, for the most part, ineffectual. Sometimes he did manage to reach her. But only the fact that the child had edged herself and her poor sewing over to the farthest corner of the sofa suggested that she was in any way perturbed by this menace to herself and her work.

Clare had known well enough that it was unsafe to take a portion of the dollar that was her weekly wage for the doing of many errands for the dress-maker who lived on the top floor of the building of which Bob Kendry was janitor. But that knowledge had not deterred her. She wanted to go to her Sunday school's picnic, and she had made up her mind to wear a new dress. So, in spite of certain unpleasantness and possible danger, she had taken the money to buy the material for that pathetic little red frock.

There had been, even in those days, nothing sacrificial in Clare Kendry's idea of life, no allegiance beyond her own immediate desire. She was selfish, and cold, and hard. And yet she had, too, a strange capacity of transforming warmth and passion, verging sometimes almost on theatrical heroics.

Irene, who was a year or more older than Clare, remembered the day that Bob Kendry had been brought home dead, killed in a silly saloon-fight. Clare, who was at that time a scant fifteen years old, had just stood there with her lips pressed together, her thin arms folded across her narrow chest, staring down at the familiar pasty-white face of her parent with a sort of disdain in her slanting black eyes. For a very long time she had stood like that, silent and staring. Then, quite suddenly, she had given way to a torrent of weeping, swaying her thin body, tearing at her bright hair, and stamping her small feet. The outburst had ceased as suddenly as it had begun. She glanced quickly about the bare room, taking everyone in, even the two policemen, in a sharp look of flashing scorn. And, in the next instant, she had turned and vanished through the door.

Seen across the long stretch of years, the thing had more the appearance of an outpouring of pent-up fury than of an overflow of grief for her dead father; though she had been, Irene admitted, fond enough of him in her own rather catlike way.

Catlike. Certainly that was the word which best described Clare Kendry, if any single word could describe her. Sometimes she was hard and apparently without feeling at all; sometimes she was affectionate and rashly impulsive. And there was about her an amazing soft malice, hidden well away until provoked. Then she was capable of scratching, and very effectively too. Or, driven to anger, she would fight with a ferocity and impetuosity that disregarded or forgot any danger; superior strength, numbers, or other unfavourable circumstances. How savagely she had clawed those boys the day they had hooted her parent and sung a derisive rhyme, of their own composing, which pointed out certain eccentricities in his careening gait! And how deliberately she had—

Irene brought her thoughts back to the present, to the letter from Clare Kendry that she still held unopened in her hand. With a little feeling of apprehension, she very slowly cut the envelope, drew out the folded sheets, spread them, and began to read.

It was, she saw at once, what she had expected since learning from the postmark that Clare was in the city. An extravagantly phrased wish to see her again. Well, she needn't and wouldn't, Irene told herself, accede to that. Nor would she assist Clare to realize her foolish desire to return for a moment to that life which long ago, and of her own choice, she had left behind her.

She ran through the letter, puzzling out, as best she could, the carelessly formed words or making instinctive guesses at them.

“. . . For I am lonely, so lonely . . . cannot help longing to be with you again, as I have never longed for anything before; and I have wanted many things in my life. . . . You can't know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other that I once thought I was glad to be free of. . . . It's like an ache, a pain that never ceases. . . .” Sheets upon thin sheets of it. And ending finally with, “and it's your fault, 'Rene dear. At least partly. For I wouldn't now, perhaps, have this terrible, this wild desire if I hadn't seen you that time in Chicago. . . .”

Brilliant red patches flamed in Irene Redfield's warm olive cheeks.

“That time in Chicago.” The words stood out from among the many paragraphs of other words, bringing with them a clear, sharp remembrance, in which even now, after two years, humiliation, resentment, and rage were mingled.

TWO

This is what Irene Redfield remembered.

Chicago. August. A brilliant day, hot, with a brutal staring sun pouring down rays that were like molten rain. A day on which the very outlines of the buildings shuddered as if in protest at the heat. Quivering lines sprang up from baked pavements and wriggled along the shining car-tracks. The automobiles parked at the kerbs were a dancing blaze, and the glass of the shop-windows threw out a blinding radiance. Sharp particles of dust rose

from the burning sidewalks, stinging the seared or dripping skins of wilting pedestrians. What small breeze there was seemed like the breath of a flame fanned by slow bellows.

It was on that day of all others that Irene set out to shop for the things which she had promised to take home from Chicago to her two small sons, Brian junior and Theodore. Characteristically, she had put it off until only a few crowded days remained of her long visit. And only this sweltering one was free of engagements till the evening.

Without too much trouble she had got the mechanical aeroplane for Junior. But the drawing-book, for which Ted had so gravely and insistently given her precise directions, had sent her in and out of five shops without success.

It was while she was on her way to a sixth place that right before her smarting eyes a man toppled over and became an inert crumpled heap on the scorching cement. About the lifeless figure a little crowd gathered. Was the man dead, or only faint? someone asked her. But Irene didn't know and didn't try to discover. She edged her way out of the increasing crowd, feeling disagreeably damp and sticky and soiled from contact with so many sweating bodies.

For a moment she stood fanning herself and dabbing at her moist face with an inadequate scrap of handkerchief. Suddenly she was aware that the whole street had a wobbly look, and realized that she was about to faint. With a quick perception of the need for immediate safety, she lifted a wavering hand in the direction of a cab parked directly in front of her. The perspiring driver jumped out and guided her to his car. He helped, almost lifted her in. She sank down on the hot leather seat.

For a minute her thoughts were nebulous. They cleared.

"I guess," she told her Samaritan, "it's tea I need. On a roof somewhere."

"The Drayton,² ma'am?" he suggested. "They do say as how it's always a breeze up there."

"Thank you. I think the Drayton'll do nicely," she told him.

There was that little grating sound of the clutch being slipped in as the man put the car in gear and slid deftly out into the boiling traffic. Reviving under the warm breeze stirred up by the moving cab, Irene made some small attempts to repair the damage that the heat and crowds had done to her appearance.

All too soon the rattling vehicle shot towards the sidewalk and stood still. The driver sprang out and opened the door before the hotel's decorated attendant could reach it. She got out, and thanking him smilingly as well as in a more substantial manner for his kind helpfulness and understanding, went in through the Drayton's wide doors.

Stepping out of the elevator that had brought her to the roof, she was led to a table just in front of a long window whose gently moving curtains suggested a cool breeze. It was, she thought, like being wafted upward on a magic carpet to another world, pleasant, quiet, and strangely remote from the sizzling one that she had left below.

2. The fictional hotel's lakeside location and elegance link it to Chicago's Drake Hotel, opened in 1920.

The tea, when it came, was all that she had desired and expected. In fact, so much was it what she had desired and expected that after the first deep cooling drink she was able to forget it, only now and then sipping, a little absently, from the tall green glass, while she surveyed the room about her or looked out over some lower buildings at the bright unstirred blue of the lake reaching away to an undetected horizon.

She had been gazing down for some time at the specks of cars and people creeping about in streets, and thinking how silly they looked, when on taking up her glass she was surprised to find it empty at last. She asked for more tea and while she waited, began to recall the happenings of the day and to wonder what she was to do about Ted and his book. Why was it that almost invariably he wanted something that was difficult or impossible to get? Like his father. For ever wanting something that he couldn't have.

Presently there were voices, a man's booming one and a woman's slightly husky. A waiter passed her, followed by a sweetly scented woman in a fluttering dress of green chiffon³ whose mingled pattern of narcissuses, jonquils, and hyacinths⁴ was a reminder of pleasantly chill spring days. Behind her there was a man, very red in the face, who was mopping his neck and forehead with a big crumpled handkerchief.

"Oh dear!" Irene groaned, rasped by annoyance, for after a little discussion and commotion they had stopped at the very next table. She had been alone there at the window and it had been so satisfyingly quiet. Now, of course, they would chatter.

But no. Only the woman sat down. The man remained standing, abstractedly pinching the knot of his bright blue tie. Across the small space that separated the two tables his voice carried clearly.

"See you later, then," he declared, looking down at the woman. There was pleasure in his tones and a smile on his face.

His companion's lips parted in some answer, but her words were blurred by the little intervening distance and the medley of noises floating up from the streets below. They didn't reach Irene. But she noted the peculiar caressing smile that accompanied them.

The man said: "Well, I suppose I'd better," and smiled again, and said good-bye, and left.

An attractive-looking woman, was Irene's opinion, with those dark, almost black, eyes and that wide mouth like a scarlet flower against the ivory of her skin. Nice clothes too, just right for the weather, thin and cool without being mussy, as summer things were so apt to be.

A waiter was taking her order. Irene saw her smile up at him as she murmured something—thanks, maybe. It was an odd sort of smile. Irene couldn't quite define it, but she was sure that she would have classed it, coming from another woman, as being just a shade too provocative for a waiter. About this one, however, there was something that made her hesitate to name it that. A certain impression of assurance, perhaps.

The waiter came back with the order. Irene watched her spread out her napkin, saw the silver spoon in the white hand slit the dull gold of the melon. Then, conscious that she had been staring, she looked quickly away.

3. A smooth, shiny lightweight fabric, typically of silk or cotton.

4. All bloom in early spring.

Her mind returned to her own affairs. She had settled, definitely, the problem of the proper one of two frocks for the bridge party that night, in rooms whose atmosphere would be so thick and hot that every breath would be like breathing soup. The dress decided, her thoughts had gone back to the snag of Ted's book, her unseeing eyes far away on the lake, when by some sixth sense she was acutely aware that someone was watching her.

Very slowly she looked around, and into the dark eyes of the woman in the green frock at the next table. But she evidently failed to realize that such intense interest as she was showing might be embarrassing, and continued to stare. Her demeanour was that of one who with utmost singleness of mind and purpose was determined to impress firmly and accurately each detail of Irene's features upon her memory for all time, nor showed the slightest trace of disconcertment at having been detected in her steady scrutiny.

Instead, it was Irene who was put out. Feeling her colour heighten under the continued inspection, she slid her eyes down. What, she wondered, could be the reason for such persistent attention? Had she, in her haste in the taxi, put her hat on backwards? Guardedly she felt at it. No. Perhaps there was a streak of powder somewhere on her face. She made a quick pass over it with her handkerchief. Something wrong with her dress? She shot a glance over it. Perfectly all right. *What* was it?

Again she looked up, and for a moment her brown eyes politely returned the stare of the other's black ones, which never for an instant fell or wavered. Irene made a little mental shrug. Oh well, let her look! She tried to treat the woman and her watching with indifference, but she couldn't. All her efforts to ignore her, it, were futile. She stole another glance. Still looking. What strange languorous eyes she had!

And gradually there rose in Irene a small inner disturbance, odious and hatefully familiar. She laughed softly, but her eyes flashed.

Did that woman, could that woman, somehow know that here before her very eyes on the roof of the Drayton sat a Negro?⁵

Absurd! Impossible! White people were so stupid about such things for all that they usually asserted that they were able to tell; and by the most ridiculous means, finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth, and other equally silly rot. They always took her for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a gipsy. Never, when she was alone, had they even remotely seemed to suspect that she was a Negro. No, the woman sitting there staring at her couldn't possibly know.

Nevertheless, Irene felt, in turn, anger, scorn, and fear slide over her. It wasn't that she was ashamed of being a Negro, or even of having it declared. It was the idea of being ejected from any place, even in the polite and tactful way in which the Drayton would probably do it, that disturbed her.

But she looked, boldly this time, back into the eyes still frankly intent upon her. They did not seem to her hostile or resentful. Rather, Irene had the feeling that they were ready to smile if she would. Nonsense, of course. The feeling passed, and she turned away with the firm intention of keeping her gaze on the lake, the roofs of the buildings across the way, the sky,

5. Public accommodations in Chicago in the 1920s were desegregated by law but not necessarily in practice.

anywhere but on that annoying woman. Almost immediately, however, her eyes were back again. In the midst of her fog of uneasiness she had been seized by a desire to outstare the rude observer. Suppose the woman did know or suspect her race. She couldn't prove it.

Suddenly her small fright increased. Her neighbour had risen and was coming towards her. What was going to happen now?

"Pardon me," the woman said pleasantly, "but I think I know you." Her slightly husky voice held a dubious note.

Looking up at her, Irene's suspicions and fears vanished. There was no mistaking the friendliness of that smile or resisting its charm. Instantly she surrendered to it and smiled too, as she said: "I'm afraid you're mistaken."

"Why, of course, I know you!" the other exclaimed. "Don't tell me you're not Irene Westover. Or do they still call you 'Rene?'"

In the brief second before her answer, Irene tried vainly to recall where and when this woman could have known her. There, in Chicago. And before her marriage. That much was plain. High school? College? Y. W. C. A.⁶ committees? High school, most likely. What white girls had she known well enough to have been familiarly addressed as 'Rene by them? The woman before her didn't fit her memory of any of them. Who was she?

"Yes, I'm Irene Westover. And though nobody calls me 'Rene any more, it's good to hear the name again. And you—" She hesitated, ashamed that she could not remember, and hoping that the sentence would be finished for her.

"Don't you know me? Not really, 'Rene?'"

"I'm sorry, but just at the minute I can't seem to place you."

Irene studied the lovely creature standing beside her for some clue to her identity. Who could she be? Where and when had they met? And through her perplexity there came the thought that the trick which her memory had played her was for some reason more gratifying than disappointing to her old acquaintance, that she didn't mind not being recognized.

And, too, Irene felt that she was just about to remember her. For about the woman was some quality, an intangible something, too vague to define, too remote to seize, but which was, to Irene Redfield, very familiar. And that voice. Surely she'd heard those husky tones somewhere before. Perhaps before time, contact, or something had been at them, making them into a voice remotely suggesting England. Ah! Could it have been in Europe that they had met? 'Rene. No.

"Perhaps," Irene began, "you—"

The woman laughed, a lovely laugh, a small sequence of notes that was like a trill and also like the ringing of a delicate bell fashioned of a precious metal, a tinkling.

Irene drew a quick sharp breath. "Clare!" she exclaimed, "not really Clare Kendry?"

So great was her astonishment that she had started to rise.

"No, no, don't get up," Clare Kendry commanded, and sat down herself. "You've simply got to stay and talk. We'll have something more. Tea? Fancy meeting you here! It's simply too, too lucky!"

6. Young Women's Christian Association, founded in 1855 in London to improve the lives of young working women in the city. By the 1920s it had chapters in cities throughout the United States.

"It's awfully surprising," Irene told her, and, seeing the change in Clare's smile, knew that she had revealed a corner of her own thoughts. But she only said: "I'd never in this world have known you if you hadn't laughed. You are changed, you know. And yet, in a way, you're just the same."

"Perhaps," Clare replied. "Oh, just a second."

She gave her attention to the waiter at her side. "M-mm, let's see. Two teas. And bring some cigarettes. Y-es, they'll be all right. Thanks." Again that odd upward smile. Now, Irene was sure that it was too provocative for a waiter.

While Clare had been giving the order, Irene made a rapid mental calculation. It must be, she figured, all of twelve years since she, or anybody that she knew, had laid eyes on Clare Kendry.

After her father's death she'd gone to live with some relatives, aunts or cousins two or three times removed, over on the west side: relatives that nobody had known the Kendry's possessed until they had turned up at the funeral and taken Clare away with them.

For about a year or more afterwards she would appear occasionally among her old friends and acquaintances on the south side for short little visits that were, they understood, always stolen from the endless domestic tasks in her new home. With each succeeding one she was taller, shabbier, and more belligerently sensitive. And each time the look on her face was more resentful and brooding. "I'm worried about Clare, she seems so unhappy," Irene remembered her mother saying. The visits dwindled, becoming shorter, fewer, and further apart until at last they ceased.

Irene's father, who had been fond of Bob Kendry, made a special trip over to the west side about two months after the last time Clare had been to see them and returned with the bare information that he had seen the relatives and that Clare had disappeared. What else he had confided to her mother, in the privacy of their own room, Irene didn't know.

But she had had something more than a vague suspicion of its nature. For there had been rumours. Rumours that were, to girls of eighteen and nineteen years, interesting and exciting.

There was the one about Clare Kendry's having been seen at the dinner hour in a fashionable hotel in company with another woman and two men, all of them white. And *dressed!* And there was another which told of her driving in Lincoln Park⁷ with a man, unmistakably white, and evidently rich. Packard⁸ limousine, chauffeur in livery, and all that. There had been others whose context Irene could no longer recollect, but all pointing in the same glamorous direction.

And she could remember quite vividly how, when they used to repeat and discuss these tantalizing stories about Clare, the girls would always look knowingly at one another and then, with little excited giggles, drag away their eager shining eyes and say with lurking undertones of regret or disbelief some such thing as: "Oh, well, maybe she's got a job or something," or "After all, it mayn't have been Clare," or "You can't believe all you hear."

And always some girl, more matter-of-fact or more frankly malicious than the rest, would declare: "Of course it was Clare! Ruth said it was and so did Frank, and they certainly know her when they see her as well as we do."

7. Chicago's largest public park, fronting Lake Michigan.

8. A U.S. auto company known for luxury cars.

And someone else would say: “Yes, you can bet it was Clare all right.” And then they would all join in asserting that there could be no mistake about it’s having been Clare, and that such circumstances could mean only one thing. Working indeed! People didn’t take their servants to the Shelby for dinner. Certainly not all dressed up like that. There would follow insincere regrets, and somebody would say: “Poor girl, I suppose it’s true enough, but what can you expect. Look at her father. And her mother, they say, would have run away if she hadn’t died. Besides, Clare always had a—a—having way with her.”

Precisely that! The words came to Irene as she sat there on the Drayton roof, facing Clare Kendry. “A having way.” Well, Irene acknowledged, judging from her appearance and manner, Clare seemed certainly to have succeeded in having a few of the things that she wanted.

It was, Irene repeated, after the interval of the waiter, a great surprise and a very pleasant one to see Clare again after all those years, twelve at least.

“Why, Clare, you’re the last person in the world I’d have expected to run into. I guess that’s why I didn’t know you.”

Clare answered gravely: “Yes. It is twelve years. But I’m not surprised to see you, ‘Rene. That is, not so very. In fact, ever since I’ve been here, I’ve more or less hoped that I should, or someone. Preferably you, though. Still, I imagine that’s because I’ve thought of you often and often, while you—I’ll wager you’ve never given me a thought.”

It was true, of course. After the first speculations and indictments, Clare had gone completely from Irene’s thoughts. And from the thoughts of others too—if their conversation was any indication of their thoughts.

Besides, Clare had never been exactly one of the group, just as she’d never been merely the janitor’s daughter, but the daughter of Mr. Bob Kendry, who, it was true, was a janitor, but who also, it seemed, had been in college with some of their fathers. Just how or why he happened to be a janitor, and a very inefficient one at that, they none of them quite knew. One of Irene’s brothers, who had put the question to their father, had been told: “That’s something that doesn’t concern you,” and given him the advice to be careful not to end in the same manner as “poor Bob.”

No, Irene hadn’t thought of Clare Kendry. Her own life had been too crowded. So, she supposed, had the lives of other people. She defended her—their—forgetfulness. “You know how it is. Everybody’s so busy. People leave, drop out, maybe for a little while there’s talk about them, or questions; then, gradually they’re forgotten.”

“Yes, that’s natural,” Clare agreed. And what, she inquired, had they said of her for that little while at the beginning before they’d forgotten her altogether?

Irene looked away. She felt the tell-tale colour rising in her cheeks. “You can’t,” she evaded, “expect me to remember trifles like that over twelve years of marriages, births, deaths, and the war.”

There followed that trill of notes that was Clare Kendry’s laugh, small and clear and the very essence of mockery.

“Oh, ‘Rene!” she cried, “of course you remember! But I won’t make you tell me, because I know just as well as if I’d been there and heard every unkind word. Oh, I know, I know. Frank Danton saw me in the Shelby one night.

Don't tell me he didn't broadcast that, and with embroidery. Others may have seen me at other times. I don't know. But once I met Margaret Hammer in Marshall Field's.⁹ I'd have spoken, was on the very point of doing it, but she cut me dead. My dear 'Rene, I assure you that from the way she looked through me, even I was uncertain whether I was actually there in the flesh or not. I remember it clearly, too clearly. It was that very thing which, in a way, finally decided me not to go out and see you one last time before I went away to stay. Somehow, good as all of you, the whole family, had always been to the poor forlorn child that was me, I felt I shouldn't be able to bear that. I mean if any of you, your mother or the boys or—Oh, well, I just felt I'd rather not know it if you did. And so I stayed away. Silly, I suppose. Sometimes I've been sorry I didn't go."

Irene wondered if it was tears that made Clare's eyes so luminous.

"And now 'Rene, I want to hear all about you and everybody and everything. You're married, I s'pose?"

Irene nodded.

"Yes," Clare said knowingly, "you would be. Tell me about it."

And so for an hour or more they had sat there smoking and drinking tea and filling in the gap of twelve years with talk. That is, Irene did. She told Clare about her marriage and removal to New York, about her husband, and about her two sons, who were having their first experience of being separated from their parents at a summer camp, about her mother's death, about the marriages of her two brothers. She told of the marriages, births and deaths in other families that Clare had known, opening up, for her, new vistas on the lives of old friends and acquaintances.

Clare drank it all in, these things which for so long she had wanted to know and hadn't been able to learn. She sat motionless, her bright lips slightly parted, her whole face lit by the radiance of her happy eyes. Now and then she put a question, but for the most part she was silent.

Somewhere outside, a clock struck. Brought back to the present, Irene looked down at her watch and exclaimed: "Oh, I must go, Clare!"

A moment passed during which she was the prey of uneasiness. It had suddenly occurred to her that she hadn't asked Clare anything about her own life and that she had a very definite unwillingness to do so. And she was quite well aware of the reason for that reluctance. But, she asked herself, wouldn't it, all things considered, be the kindest thing not to ask? If things with Clare were as she—as they all—had suspected, wouldn't it be more tactful to seem to forget to inquire how she had spent those twelve years?

If? It was that "if" which bothered her. It might be, it might just be, in spite of all gossip and even appearances to the contrary, that there was nothing, had been nothing, that couldn't be simply and innocently explained. Appearances, she knew now, had a way sometimes of not fitting facts, and if Clare hadn't—Well, if they had all been wrong, then certainly she ought to express some interest in what had happened to her. It would seem queer and rude if she didn't. But how was she to know? There was, she at last decided, no way; so she merely said again. "I must go, Clare."

9. Chicago's largest department store in the 1920s.

“Please, not so soon, ’Rene,” Clare begged, not moving.

Irene thought: “She’s really almost too good-looking. It’s hardly any wonder that she—”

“And now, ’Rene dear, that I’ve found you, I mean to see lots and lots of you. We’re here for a month at least. Jack, that’s my husband, is here on business. Poor dear! in this heat. Isn’t it beastly? Come to dinner with us tonight, won’t you?” And she gave Irene a curious little sidelong glance and a sly, ironical smile peeped out on her full red lips, as if she had been in the secret of the other’s thoughts and was mocking her.

Irene was conscious of a sharp intake of breath, but whether it was relief or chagrin that she felt, she herself could not have told. She said hastily: “I’m afraid I can’t, Clare. I’m filled up. Dinner and bridge. I’m so sorry.”

“Come tomorrow instead, to tea,” Clare insisted. “Then you’ll see Margery—she’s just ten—and Jack too, maybe, if he hasn’t got an appointment or something.”

From Irene came an uneasy little laugh. She had an engagement for tomorrow also and she was afraid that Clare would not believe it. Suddenly, now, that possibility disturbed her. Therefore it was with a half-vexed feeling at the sense of undeserved guilt that had come upon her that she explained that it wouldn’t be possible because she wouldn’t be free for tea, or for luncheon or dinner either. “And the next day’s Friday when I’ll be going away for the week-end, Idlewild,¹ you know. It’s quite the thing now.” And then she had an inspiration.

“Clare!” she exclaimed, “why don’t you come up with me? Our place is probably full up—Jim’s wife has a way of collecting mobs of the most impossible people—but we can always manage to find room for one more. And you’ll see absolutely everybody.”

In the very moment of giving the invitation she regretted it. What a foolish, what an idiotic impulse to have given way to! She groaned inwardly as she thought of the endless explanations in which it would involve her, of the curiosity, and the talk, and the lifted eyebrows. It wasn’t she assured herself, that she was a snob, that she cared greatly for the petty restrictions and distinctions with which what called itself Negro society chose to hedge itself about; but that she had a natural and deeply rooted aversion to the kind of front-page notoriety that Clare Kendry’s presence in Idlewild, as her guest, would expose her to. And here she was, perversely and against all reason, inviting her.

But Clare shook her head. “Really, I’d love to, ’Rene,” she said, a little mournfully. “There’s nothing I’d like better. But I couldn’t. I mustn’t, you see. It wouldn’t do at all. I’m sure you understand. I’m simply crazy to go, but I can’t.” The dark eyes glistened and there was a suspicion of a quaver in the husky voice. “And believe me, ’Rene, I do thank you for asking me. Don’t think I’ve entirely forgotten just what it would mean for you if I went. That is, if you still care about such things.”

All indication of tears had gone from her eyes and voice, and Irene Redfield, searching her face, had an offended feeling that behind what was now

1. Vacation community in western Michigan, founded in 1912 by white developers and marketed to African Americans, who were excluded

from other resorts. Notable property owners in the 1920s included W. E. B. Du Bois and other black intellectuals.

only an ivory mask lurked a scornful amusement. She looked away, at the wall far beyond Clare. Well, she deserved it, for, as she acknowledged to herself, she *was* relieved. And for the very reason at which Clare had hinted. The fact that Clare had guessed her perturbation did not, however, in any degree lessen that relief. She was annoyed at having been detected in what might seem to be an insincerity; but that was all.

The waiter came with Clare's change. Irene reminded herself that she ought immediately to go. But she didn't move.

The truth was, she was curious. There were things that she wanted to ask Clare Kendry. She wished to find out about this hazardous business of "passing," this breaking away from all that was familiar and friendly to take one's chance in another environment, not entirely strange, perhaps, but certainly not entirely friendly. What, for example, one did about background, how one accounted for oneself. And how one felt when one came into contact with other Negroes. But she couldn't. She was unable to think of a single question that in its context or its phrasing was not too frankly curious, if not actually impertinent.

As if aware of her desire and her hesitation, Clare remarked, thoughtfully: "You know, 'Rene, I've often wondered why more coloured girls, girls like you and Margaret Hammer and Esther Dawson and—oh, lots of others—never 'passed' over. It's such a frightfully easy thing to do. If one's the type, all that's needed is a little nerve."

"What about background? Family, I mean. Surely you can't just drop down on people from nowhere and expect them to receive you with open arms, can you?"

"Almost," Clare asserted. "You'd be surprised, 'Rene, how much easier that is with white people than with us. Maybe because there are so many more of them, or maybe because they are secure and so don't have to bother. I've never quite decided."

Irene was inclined to be incredulous. "You mean that you didn't have to explain where you came from? It seems impossible."

Clare cast a glance of repressed amusement across the table at her. "As a matter of fact, I didn't. Though I suppose under any other circumstances I might have had to provide some plausible tale to account for myself. I've a good imagination, so I'm sure I could have done it quite creditably, and credibly. But it wasn't necessary. There were my aunts, you see, respectable and authentic enough for anything or anybody."

"I see. They were 'passing' too."

"No. They weren't. They were white."

"Oh!" And in the next instant it came back to Irene that she had heard this mentioned before; by her father, or, more likely, her mother. They were Bob Kendry's aunts. He had been a son of their brother's, on the left hand.² A wild oat.

"They were nice old ladies," Clare explained, "very religious and as poor as church mice. That adored brother of theirs, my grandfather, got through every penny they had after he'd finished his own little bit."

Clare paused in her narrative to light another cigarette. Her smile, her expression, Irene noticed, was faintly resentful.

2. Outside of marriage.

“Being good Christians,” she continued, “when dad came to his tipsy end, they did their duty and gave me a home of sorts. I was, it was true, expected to earn my keep by doing all the housework and most of the washing. But do you realize, ’Rene, that if it hadn’t been for them, I shouldn’t have had a home in the world?”

Irene’s nod and little murmur were comprehensive, understanding.

Clare made a small mischievous grimace and proceeded. “Besides, to their notion, hard labour was good for me. I had Negro blood and they belonged to the generation that had written and read long articles headed: ‘Will the Blacks Work?’ Too, they weren’t quite sure that the good God hadn’t intended the sons and daughters of Ham to sweat because he had poked fun at old man Noah once when he had taken a drop too much. I remember the aunts telling me that that old drunkard had cursed Ham and his sons for all time.”³

Irene laughed. But Clare remained quite serious.

“It was more than a joke, I assure you, ’Rene. It was a hard life for a girl of sixteen. Still, I had a roof over my head, and food, and clothes—such as they were. And there were the Scriptures, and talks on morals and thrift and industry and the loving-kindness of the good Lord.”

“Have you ever stopped to think, Clare,” Irene demanded, “how much unhappiness and downright cruelty are laid to the loving-kindness of the Lord? And always by His most ardent followers, it seems.”

“Have I?” Clare exclaimed. “It, they, made me what I am today. For, of course, I was determined to get away, to be a person and not a charity or a problem, or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham. Then, too, I wanted things. I knew I wasn’t bad-looking and that I could ‘pass.’ You can’t know, ’Rene, how, when I used to go over to the south side, I used almost to hate all of you. You had all the things I wanted and never had had. It made me all the more determined to get them, and others. Do you, can you understand what I felt?”

She looked up with a pointed and appealing effect, and, evidently finding the sympathetic expression on Irene’s face sufficient answer, went on. “The aunts were queer. For all their Bibles and praying and ranting about honesty, they didn’t want anyone to know that their darling brother had seduced—ruined, they called it—a Negro girl. They could excuse the ruin, but they couldn’t forgive the tar-brush.⁴ They forbade me to mention Negroes to the neighbours, or even to mention the south side. You may be sure that I didn’t. I’ll bet they were good and sorry afterwards.”

She laughed and the ringing bells in her laugh had a hard metallic sound.

“When the chance to get away came, that omission was of great value to me. When Jack, a schoolboy acquaintance of some people in the neighbour-

3. Noah’s son Ham, seeing his drunken father naked in his tent, told his two brothers, who covered their father’s nakedness while averting their eyes. On waking, Noah “knew what his younger son had done unto him” and cursed Ham, vowing that “a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren” (Genesis 9.24–25). Noah’s curse was frequently cited in the pre–Civil War United States as justifying the enslavement of Africans, who were thought to be descended from Ham.

4. Derogatory reference to African descent. The south side of Chicago, especially between Thirty-Fifth and Forty-Seventh Streets, emerged in the 1920s as “Bronzeville,” the center of African American community and culture in an increasingly segregated city. For later representations in art and literature, see Archibald Motley’s *Black Belt* (in this volume’s color insert) and Langston Hughes’s “Visitors to the Black Belt” (p. 839).

hood, turned up from South America with untold gold, there was no one to tell him that I was coloured, and many to tell him about the severity and the religiousness of Aunt Grace and Aunt Edna. You can guess the rest. After he came, stopped slipping off to the south side and slipped off to meet him instead. I couldn't manage both. In the end I had no great difficulty in convincing him that it was useless to talk marriage to the aunts. So on the day that I was eighteen, we went off and were married. So that's that. Nothing could have been easier."

"Yes, I do see that for you it was easy enough. By the way! I wonder why they didn't tell father that you were married. He went over to find out about you when you stopped coming over to see us. I'm sure they didn't tell him. Not that you were married."

Clare Kendry's eyes were bright with tears that didn't fall. "Oh, how lovely! To have cared enough about me to do that. The dear sweet man! Well, they couldn't tell him because they didn't know it. I took care of that, for I couldn't be sure that those consciences of theirs wouldn't begin to work on them afterwards and make them let the cat out of the bag. The old things probably thought I was living in sin, wherever I was. And it would be about what they expected."

An amused smile lit the lovely face for the smallest fraction of a second. After a little silence she said soberly: "But I'm sorry if they told your father so. That was something I hadn't counted on."

"I'm not sure that they did," Irene told her. "He didn't say so, anyway."

"He wouldn't, 'Rene dear. Not your father."

"Thanks. I'm sure he wouldn't."

"But you've never answered my question. Tell me, honestly, haven't you ever thought of 'passing'?"

Irene answered promptly: "No. Why should I?" And so disdainful was her voice and manner that Clare's face flushed and her eyes glinted. Irene hastened to add: "You see, Clare, I've everything I want. Except, perhaps, a little more money."

At that Clare laughed, her spark of anger vanished as quickly as it had appeared. "Of course," she declared, "that's what everybody wants, just a little more money, even the people who have it. And I must say I don't blame them. Money's awfully nice to have. In fact, all things considered, I think, 'Rene, that it's even worth the price."

Irene could only shrug her shoulders. Her reason partly agreed, her instinct wholly rebelled. And she could not say why. And though conscious that if she didn't hurry away, she was going to be late to dinner, she still lingered. It was as if the woman sitting on the other side of the table, a girl that she had known, who had done this rather dangerous and, to Irene Redfield, abhorrent thing successfully and had announced herself well satisfied, had for her a fascination, strange and compelling.

Clare Kendry was still leaning back in the tall chair, her sloping shoulders against the carved top. She sat with an air of indifferent assurance, as if arranged for, desired. About her clung that dim suggestion of polite insolence with which a few women are born and which some acquire with the coming of riches or importance.

Clare, it gave Irene a little prick of satisfaction to recall, hadn't got that by passing herself off as white. She herself had always had it.

Just as she'd always had that pale gold hair, which, unshaved still, was drawn loosely back from a broad brow, partly hidden by the small close hat. Her lips, painted a brilliant geranium-red, were sweet and sensitive and a little obstinate. A tempting mouth. The face across the forehead and cheeks was a trifle too wide, but the ivory skin had a peculiar soft lustre. And the eyes were magnificent! dark, sometimes absolutely black, always luminous, and set in long, black lashes. Arresting eyes, slow and mesmeric, and with, for all their warmth, something withdrawn and secret about them.

Ah! Surely! They were Negro eyes! mysterious and concealing. And set in that ivory face under that bright hair, there was about them something exotic.

Yes, Clare Kendry's loveliness was absolute, beyond challenge, thanks to those eyes which her grandmother and later her mother and father had given her.

Into those eyes there came a smile and over Irene the sense of being petted and caressed. She smiled back.

"Maybe," Clare suggested, "you can come Monday, if you're back. Or, if you're not, then Tuesday."

With a small regretful sigh, Irene informed Clare that she was afraid she wouldn't be back by Monday and that she was sure she had dozens of things for Tuesday, and that she was leaving Wednesday. It might be, however, that she could get out of something Tuesday.

"Oh, do try. Do put somebody else off. The others can see you any time, while I—Why, I may never see you again! Think of that, 'Rene! You'll have to come. You'll simply have to! I'll never forgive you if you don't."

At that moment it seemed a dreadful thing to think of never seeing Clare Kendry again. Standing there under the appeal, the caress, of her eyes, Irene had the desire, the hope, that this parting wouldn't be the last.

"I'll try, Clare," she promised gently. "I'll call you—or will you call me?"

"I think, perhaps, I'd better call you. Your father's in the book, I know, and the address is the same. Sixty-four eighteen. Some memory, what? Now remember, I'm going to expect you. You've got to be able to come."

Again that peculiar mellowing smile.

"I'll do my best, Clare."

Irene gathered up her gloves and bag. They stood up. She put out her hand. Clare took and held it.

"It has been nice seeing you again, Clare. How pleased and glad father'll be to hear about you!"

"Until Tuesday, then," Clare Kendry replied. "I'll spend every minute of the time from now on looking forward to seeing you again. Good-bye, 'Rene dear. My love to your father, and this kiss for him."

The sun had gone from overhead, but the streets were still like fiery furnaces. The languid breeze was still hot. And the scurrying people looked even more wilted than before Irene had fled from their contact.

Crossing the avenue in the heat, far from the coolness of the Drayton's roof, away from the seduction of Clare Kendry's smile, she was aware of a sense of irritation with herself because she had been pleased and a little flattered at the other's obvious gladness at their meeting.

With her perspiring progress homeward this irritation grew, and she began to wonder just what had possessed her to make her promise to find time, in the crowded days that remained of her visit, to spend another afternoon with a woman whose life had so definitely and deliberately diverged from hers; and whom, as had been pointed out, she might never see again.

Why in the world had she made such a promise?

As she went up the steps to her father's house, thinking with what interest and amazement he would listen to her story of the afternoon's encounter, it came to her that Clare had omitted to mention her marriage name. She had referred to her husband as Jack. That was all. Had that, Irene asked herself, been intentional?

Clare had only to pick up the telephone to communicate with her, or to drop her a card, or to jump into a taxi. But she couldn't reach Clare in any way. Nor could anyone else to whom she might speak of their meeting.

"As if I should!"

Her key turned in the lock. She went in. Her father, it seemed, hadn't come in yet.

Irene decided that she wouldn't, after all, say anything to him about Clare Kendry. She had, she told herself, no inclination to speak of a person who held so low an opinion of her loyalty, or her discretion. And certainly she had no desire or intention of making the slightest effort about Tuesday. Nor any other day for that matter.

She was through with Clare Kendry.

THREE

On Tuesday morning a dome of grey sky rose over the parched city, but the stifling air was not relieved by the silvery mist that seemed to hold a promise of rain, which did not fall.

To Irene Redfield this soft foreboding fog was another reason for doing nothing about seeing Clare Kendry that afternoon.

But she did see her.

The telephone. For hours it had rung like something possessed. Since nine o'clock she had been hearing its insistent jangle. Awhile she was resolute, saying firmly each time: "Not in, Liza, take the message." And each time the servant returned with the information: "It's the same lady, ma'am; she says she'll call again."

But at noon, her nerves frayed and her conscience smiting her at the reproachful look on Liza's ebony face as she withdrew for another denial, Irene weakened.

"Oh, never mind. I'll answer this time, Liza."

"It's her again."

"Hello. . . . Yes."

"It's Clare, 'Rene. . . . Where *have* you been? . . . Can you be here around four? . . . What? . . . But, 'Rene, you promised! Just for a little while. . . . You can if you want to. . . . I am *so* disappointed. I had counted so on seeing you. . . . Please be nice and come. Only for a minute. I'm sure you can manage it if you try. . . . I won't beg you to stay. . . . Yes. . . . I'm going to expect

you . . . It's the Morgan . . . Oh, yes! The name's Bellew, Mrs. John Bellew. . . . About four, then. . . . I'll be so happy to see you! . . . Goodbye."

"Damn!"

Irene hung up the receiver with an emphatic bang, her thoughts immediately filled with self-reproach. She'd done it again. Allowed Clare Kendry to persuade her into promising to do something for which she had neither time nor any special desire. What was it about Clare's voice that was so appealing, so very seductive?

Clare met her in the hall with a kiss. She said: "You're good to come, 'Rene. But, then, you always were nice to me." And under her potent smile a part of Irene's annoyance with herself fled. She was even a little glad that she had come.

Clare led the way, stepping lightly, towards a room whose door was standing partly open, saying: "There's a surprise. It's a real party. See."

Entering, Irene found herself in a sitting-room, large and high, at whose windows hung startling blue draperies which triumphantly dragged attention from the gloomy chocolate-coloured furniture. And Clare was wearing a thin floating dress of the same shade of blue, which suited her and the rather difficult room to perfection.

For a minute Irene thought the room was empty, but turning her head, she discovered, sunk deep in the cushions of a huge sofa, a woman staring up at her with such intense concentration that her eyelids were drawn as though the strain of that upward glance had paralysed them. At first Irene took her to be a stranger, but in the next instant she said in an unsympathetic, almost harsh voice: "And how are you, Gertrude?"

The woman nodded and forced a smile to her pouting lips. "I'm all right," she replied. "And you're just the same, Irene. Not changed a bit."

"Thank you." Irene responded, as she chose a seat. She was thinking: "Great goodness! Two of them."

For Gertrude too had married a white man, though it couldn't be truthfully said that she was "passing." Her husband—what was his name?—had been in school with her and had been quite well aware, as had his family and most of his friends, that she was a Negro. It hadn't, Irene knew, seemed to matter to him then. Did it now, she wondered? Had Fred—Fred Martin, that was it—had he ever regretted his marriage because of Gertrude's race? Had Gertrude?

Turning to Gertrude, Irene asked: "And Fred, how is he? It's unmentionable years since I've seen him."

"Oh, he's all right," Gertrude answered briefly.

For a full minute no one spoke. Finally out of the oppressive little silence Clare's voice came pleasantly, conversationally: "We'll have tea right away. I know that you can't stay long, 'Rene. And I'm so sorry you won't see Margery. We went up the lake over the week end to see some of Jack's people, just out of Milwaukee. Margery wanted to stay with the children. It seemed a shame not to let her, especially since it's so hot in town. But I'm expecting Jack any second."

Irene said briefly: "That's nice."

Gertrude remained silent. She was, it was plain, a little ill at ease. And her presence there annoyed Irene, roused in her a defensive and resentful

feeling for which she had at the moment no explanation. But it did seem to her odd that the woman that Clare was now should have invited the woman that Gertrude was. Still, of course, Clare couldn't have known. Twelve years since they had met.

Later, when she examined her feeling of annoyance, Irene admitted, a shade reluctantly, that it arose from a feeling of being outnumbered, a sense of aloneness, in her adherence to her own class and kind; not merely in the great thing of marriage, but in the whole pattern of her life as well.

Clare spoke again, this time at length. Her talk was of the change that Chicago presented to her after her long absence in European cities. Yes, she said in reply to some question from Gertrude, she'd been back to America a time or two, but only as far as New York and Philadelphia, and once she had spent a few days in Washington. John Bellew, who, it appeared, was some sort of international banking agent, hadn't particularly wanted her to come with him on this trip, but as soon as she had learned that it would probably take him as far as Chicago, she made up her mind to come anyway.

"I simply had to. And after I once got here, I was determined to see someone I knew and find out what had happened to everybody. I didn't quite see how I was going to manage it, but I meant to. Somehow. I'd just about decided to take a chance and go out to your house, 'Rene, or call up and arrange a meeting, when I ran into you. What luck!"

Irene agreed that it was luck. "It's the first time I've been home for five years, and now I'm about to leave. A week later and I'd have been gone. And how in the world did you find Gertrude?"

"In the book. I remembered about Fred. His father still has the meat market."

"Oh, yes," said Irene, who had only remembered it as Clare had spoken, "on Cottage Grove near—"

Gertrude broke in. "No. It's moved. We're on Maryland Avenue—used to be Jackson—now. Near Sixty-third Street.⁵ And the market's Fred's. His name's the same as his father's."

Gertrude, Irene thought, looked as if her husband might be a butcher. There was left of her youthful prettiness, which had been so much admired in their high-school days, no trace. She had grown broad, fat almost, and though there were no lines on her large white face, its very smoothness was somehow prematurely ageing. Her black hair was clipt, and by some unfortunate means all the live curliness had gone from it. Her over-trimmed Georgette *crêpe*⁶ dress was too short and showed an appalling amount of leg, stout legs in sleazy stockings of a vivid rose-beige shade. Her plump hands were newly and not too competently manicured—for the occasion, probably. And she wasn't smoking.

Clare said—and Irene fancied that her husky voice held a slight edge—"Before you came, Irene, Gertrude was telling me about her two boys. Twins. Think of it! Isn't it too marvellous for words?"

5. In the 1920s the junction of Maryland Avenue and Sixty-Third Street lay at the far end of Chicago's black South Side, where it adjoined the

then predominantly white neighborhoods of Hyde Park and Woodlawn.

6. Lightweight textured fabric, usually of silk.

Irene felt a warmth creeping into her cheeks. Uncanny, the way Clare could divine what one was thinking. She was a little put out, but her manner was entirely easy as she said: “That is nice. I’ve two boys myself, Gertrude. Not twins, though. It seems that Clare’s rather behind, doesn’t it?”

Gertrude, however, wasn’t sure that Clare hadn’t the best of it. “She’s got a girl. I wanted a girl. So did Fred.”

“Isn’t that a bit unusual?” Irene asked. “Most men want sons. Egotism, I suppose.”

“Well, Fred didn’t.”

The tea-things had been placed on a low table at Clare’s side. She gave them her attention now, pouring the rich amber fluid from the tall glass pitcher into stately slim glasses, which she handed to her guests, and then offered them lemon or cream and tiny sandwiches or cakes.

After taking up her own glass she informed them: “No, I have no boys and I don’t think I’ll ever have any. I’m afraid. I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear that she might be dark. Thank goodness, she turned out all right. But I’ll never risk it again. Never! The strain is simply too—too hellish.”

Gertrude Martin nodded in complete comprehension.

This time it was Irene who said nothing.

“You don’t have to tell me!” Gertrude said fervently. “I know what it is all right. Maybe you don’t think I wasn’t scared to death too. Fred said I was silly, and so did his mother. But, of course, they thought it was just a notion I’d gotten into my head and they blamed it on my condition. They don’t know like we do, how it might go way back, and turn out dark no matter what colour the father and mother are.”

Perspiration stood out on her forehead. Her narrow eyes rolled first in Clare’s, then in Irene’s direction. As she talked she waved her heavy hands about.

“No,” she went on, “no more for me either. Not even a girl. It’s awful the way it skips generations and then pops out. Why, he actually said he didn’t care what colour it turned out, if I would only stop worrying about it. But, of course, nobody wants a dark child.” Her voice was earnest and she took for granted that her audience was in entire agreement with her.

Irene, whose head had gone up with a quick little jerk, now said in a voice of whose even tones she was proud: “One of my boys is dark.”

Gertrude jumped as if she had been shot at. Her eyes goggled. Her mouth flew open. She tried to speak, but could not immediately get the words out. Finally she managed to stammer: “Oh! And your husband, is he—is he—er—dark, too?”

Irene, who was struggling with a flood of feelings, resentment, anger, and contempt, was, however, still able to answer as coolly as if she had not that sense of not belonging to and of despising the company in which she found herself drinking iced tea from tall amber glasses on that hot August afternoon. Her husband, she informed them quietly, couldn’t exactly “pass.”

At that reply Clare turned on Irene her seductive caressing smile and remarked a little scoffingly: “I do think that coloured people—we—are too silly about some things. After all, the thing’s not important to Irene or hundreds of others. Not awfully, even to you, Gertrude. It’s only deserters like me who have to be afraid of freaks of the nature. As my inestimable dad

used to say, 'Everything must be paid for.' Now, please one of you tell me what ever happened to Claude Jones. You know, the tall, lanky specimen who used to wear that comical little moustache that the girls used to laugh at so. Like a thin streak of soot. The moustache, I mean."

At that Gertrude shrieked with laughter. "Claude Jones!" and launched into the story of how he was no longer a Negro or a Christian but had become a Jew.

"A Jew!" Clare exclaimed.

"Yes, a Jew. A black Jew, he calls himself. He won't eat ham and goes to the synagogue on Saturday. He's got a beard now as well as a moustache. You'd die laughing if you saw him. He's really too funny for words. Fred says he's crazy and I guess he is. Oh, he's a scream all right, a regular scream!" And she shrieked again.

Clare's laugh tinkled out. "It certainly sounds funny enough. Still, it's his own business. If he gets along better by turning—"

At that, Irene, who was still hugging her unhappy don't-care feeling of rightness, broke in, saying bitinglly: "It evidently doesn't occur to either you or Gertrude that he might possibly be sincere in changing his religion. Surely everyone doesn't do everything for gain."

Clare Kendry had no need to search for the full meaning of that utterance. She reddened slightly and retorted seriously: "Yes, I admit that might be possible—his being sincere, I mean. It just didn't happen to occur to me, that's all. I'm surprised," and the seriousness changed to mockery, "that you should have expected it to. Or did you really?"

"You don't, I'm sure, imagine that that is a question that I can answer," Irene told her. "Not here and now."

Gertrude's face expressed complete bewilderment. However, seeing that little smiles had come out on the faces of the two other women and not recognizing them for the smiles of mutual reservations which they were, she smiled too.

Clare began to talk, steering carefully away from anything that might lead towards race or other thorny subjects. It was the most brilliant exhibition of conversational weight-lifting that Irene had ever seen. Her words swept over them in charming well-modulated streams. Her laughs tinkled and pealed. Her little stories sparkled.

Irene contributed a bare "Yes" or "No" here and there. Gertrude, a "You don't say!" less frequently.

For a while the illusion of general conversation was nearly perfect. Irene felt her resentment changing gradually to a silent, somewhat grudging admiration.

Clare talked on, her voice, her gestures, colouring all she said of wartime in France, of after-the-wartime in Germany, of the excitement at the time of the general strike in England, of dressmaker's openings in Paris, of the new gaiety of Budapest.⁷

But it couldn't last, this verbal feat. Gertrude shifted in her seat and fell to fidgeting with her fingers. Irene, bored at last by all this repetition of the

7. World War I ended in 1918; in its aftermath Budapest, formerly part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire, became the capital of an independent

Hungary. "General Strike": in May 1926 a nine-day general strike idled much of Great Britain's transportation and industry.

selfsame things that she had read all too often in papers, magazines, and books, set down her glass and collected her bag and handkerchief. She was smoothing out the tan fingers of her gloves preparatory to putting them on when she heard the sound of the outer door being opened and saw Clare spring up with an expression of relief saying: "How lovely! Here's Jack at exactly the right minute. You can't go now, 'Rene dear."

John Bellew came into the room. The first thing that Irene noticed about him was that he was not the man that she had seen with Clare Kendry on the Drayton roof. This man, Clare's husband, was a tallish person, broadly made. His age she guessed to be somewhere between thirty-five and forty. His hair was dark brown and waving, and he had a soft mouth, somewhat womanish, set in an unhealthy-looking dough-coloured face. His steel-grey opaque eyes were very much alive, moving ceaselessly between thick bluish lids. But there was, Irene decided, nothing unusual about him, unless it was an impression of latent physical power.

"Hello, Nig," was his greeting to Clare.

Gertrude who had started slightly, settled back and looked covertly towards Irene, who had caught her lip between her teeth and sat gazing at husband and wife. It was hard to believe that even Clare Kendry would permit this ridiculing of her race by an outsider, though he chanced to be her husband. So he knew, then, that Clare was a Negro? From her talk the other day Irene had understood that he didn't. But how rude, how positively insulting, for him to address her in that way in the presence of guests!

In Clare's eyes, as she presented her husband, was a queer gleam, a jeer, it might be. Irene couldn't define it.

The mechanical professions that attend an introduction over, she inquired: "Did you hear what Jack called me?"

"Yes," Gertrude answered, laughing with a dutiful eagerness.

Irene didn't speak. Her gaze remained level on Clare's smiling face.

The black eyes fluttered down. "Tell them, dear, why you call me that."

The man chuckled, crinkling up his eyes, not, Irene was compelled to acknowledge, unpleasantly. He explained: "Well, you see, it's like this. When we were first married, she was as white as—as—well as white as a lily. But I declare she's gettin' darker and darker. I tell her if she don't look out, she'll wake up one of these days and find she's turned into a nigger."

He roared with laughter. Clare's ringing bell-like laugh joined his. Gertrude after another uneasy shift in her seat added her shrill one. Irene, who had been sitting with lips tightly compressed, cried out: "That's good!" and gave way to gales of laughter. She laughed and laughed and laughed. Tears ran down her cheeks. Her sides ached. Her throat hurt. She laughed on and on and on, long after the others had subsided. Until, catching sight of Clare's face, the need for a more quiet enjoyment of this priceless joke, and for caution, struck her. At once she stopped.

Clare handed her husband his tea and laid her hand on his arm with an affectionate little gesture. Speaking with confidence as well as with amusement, she said: "My goodness, Jack! What difference would it make if, after all these years, you were to find out that I was one or two per cent coloured?"

Bellew put out his hand in a repudiating fling, definite and final. "Oh, no, Nig," he declared, "nothing like that with me. I know you're no nigger, so it's all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be."

Irene's lips trembled almost uncontrollably, but she made a desperate effort to fight back her disastrous desire to laugh again, and succeeded. Carefully selecting a cigarette from the lacquered box on the tea-table before her, she turned an oblique look on Clare and encountered her peculiar eyes fixed on her with an expression so dark and deep and unfathomable that she had for a short moment the sensation of gazing into the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart. A faint sense of danger brushed her, like the breath of a cold fog. Absurd, her reason told her, as she accepted Bellew's proffered light for her cigarette. Another glance at Clare showed her smiling. So, as one always ready to oblige, was Gertrude.

An on-looker, Irene reflected, would have thought it a most congenial tea-party, all smiles and jokes and hilarious laughter. She said humorously: "So you dislike Negroes, Mr. Bellew?" But her amusement was at her thought, rather than her words.

John Bellew gave a short denying laugh. "You got me wrong there, Mrs. Redfield. Nothing like that at all. I don't dislike them, I hate them. And so does Nig, for all she's trying to turn into one. She wouldn't have a nigger maid around her for love nor money. Not that I'd want her to. They give me the creeps. The black scrimy devils."

This wasn't funny. Had Bellew, Irene inquired, ever known any Negroes? The defensive tone of her voice brought another start from the uncomfortable Gertrude, and, for all her appearance of serenity, a quick apprehensive look from Clare.

Bellew answered: "Thank the Lord, no! And never expect to! But I know people who've known them, better than they know their black selves. And I read in the papers about them. Always robbing and killing people. And," he added darkly, "worse."

From Gertrude's direction came a queer little suppressed sound, a snort or a giggle. Irene couldn't tell which. There was a brief silence, during which she feared that her self-control was about to prove too frail a bridge to support her mounting anger and indignation. She had a leaping desire to shout at the man beside her: "And you're sitting here surrounded by three black devils, drinking tea."

The impulse passed, obliterated by her consciousness of the danger in which such rashness would involve Clare, who remarked with a gentle reprovingness: "Jack dear, I'm sure 'Rene doesn't care to hear all about your pet aversions. Nor Gertrude either. Maybe they read the papers too, you know." She smiled on him, and her smile seemed to transform him, to soften and mellow him, as the rays of the sun does a fruit.

"All right, Nig, old girl. I'm sorry," he apologized. Reaching over, he playfully touched his wife's pale hands, then turned back to Irene. "Didn't mean to bore you, Mrs. Redfield. Hope you'll excuse me," he said sheepishly. "Clare tells me you're living in New York. Great city, New York. The city of the future."

In Irene, rage had not retreated, but was held by some dam of caution and allegiance to Clare. So, in the best casual voice she could muster, she agreed with Bellew. Though, she reminded him, it was exactly what Chicagoans were apt to say of their city. And all the while she was speaking, she was thinking how amazing it was that her voice did not tremble, that outwardly she was calm. Only her hands shook slightly. She drew them inward from their rest in her lap and pressed the tips of her fingers together to still them.

"Husband's a doctor, I understand. Manhattan, or one of the other boroughs?"

Manhattan, Irene informed him, and explained the need for Brian to be within easy reach of certain hospitals and clinics.

"Interesting life, a doctor's."

"Ye-es. Hard, though. And, in a way, monotonous. Nerve-racking too."

"Hard on the wife's nerves at least, eh? So many lady patients." He laughed, enjoying, with a boyish heartiness, the hoary joke.

Irene managed a momentary smile, but her voice was sober as she said: "Brian doesn't care for ladies, especially sick ones. I sometimes wish he did. It's South America that attracts him."

"Coming place, South America, if they ever get the niggers out of it. It's run over—"

"Really, Jack!" Clare's voice was on the edge of temper.

"Honestly, Nig, I forgot." To the others he said: "You see how hen-pecked I am." And to Gertrude: "You're still in Chicago, Mrs.—er—Mrs. Martin?"

He was, it was plain, doing his best to be agreeable to these old friends of Clare's. Irene had to concede that under other conditions she might have liked him. A fairly good-looking man of amiable disposition, evidently, and in easy circumstances. Plain and with no nonsense about him.

Gertrude replied that Chicago was good enough for her. She'd never been out of it and didn't think she ever should. Her husband's business was there.

"Of course, of course. Can't jump up and leave a business."

There followed a smooth surface of talk about Chicago, New York, their differences and their recent spectacular changes.

It was, Irene, thought, unbelievable and astonishing that four people could sit so unruffled, so ostensibly friendly, while they were in reality seething with anger, mortification, shame. But no, on second thought she was forced to amend her opinion. John Bellew, most certainly, was as undisturbed within as without. So, perhaps, was Gertrude Martin. At least she hadn't the mortification and shame that Clare Kendry must be feeling, or, in such full measure, the rage and rebellion that she, Irene, was repressing.

"More tea, 'Rene," Clare offered.

"Thanks, no. And I must be going. I'm leaving tomorrow, you know, and I've still got packing to do."

She stood up. So did Gertrude, and Clare, and John Bellew.

"How do you like the Drayton, Mrs. Redfield?" the latter asked.

"The Drayton? Oh, very much. Very much indeed," Irene answered, her scornful eyes on Clare's unrevealing face.

"Nice place, all right. Stayed there a time or two myself," the man informed her.

"Yes, it is nice," Irene agreed. "Almost as good as our best New York places." She had withdrawn her look from Clare and was searching in her bag for some non-existent something. Her understanding was rapidly increasing, as was her pity and her contempt. Clare was so daring, so lovely, and so "having."

They gave their hands to Clare with appropriate murmurs. "So good to have seen you." . . . "I do hope I'll see you again soon."

"Good-bye," Clare returned. "It was good of you to come, 'Rene dear. And you too, Gertrude."

"Good-bye, Mr. Bellevue." . . . "So glad to have met you." It was Gertrude who had said that. Irene couldn't, she absolutely couldn't bring herself to utter the polite fiction or anything approaching it.

He accompanied them out into the hall, summoned the elevator.

"Good-bye," they said again, stepping in.

Plunging downward they were silent.

They made their way through the lobby without speaking.

But as soon as they had reached the street Gertrude, in the manner of one unable to keep bottled up for another minute that which for the last hour she had had to retain, burst out: "My God! What an awful chance! She must be plumb crazy."

"Yes, it certainly seems risky," Irene admitted.

"Risky! I should say it was. Risky! My God! What a word! And the mess she's liable to get herself into!"

"Still, I imagine she's pretty safe. They don't live here, you know. And there's a child. That's a certain security."

"It's an awful chance, just the same," Gertrude insisted. "I'd never in the world have married Fred without him knowing. You can't tell what will turn up."

"Yes, I do agree that it's safer to tell. But then Bellevue wouldn't have married her. And, after all, that's what she wanted."

Gertrude shook her head. "I wouldn't be in her shoes for all the money she's getting out of it, when he finds out. Not with him feeling the way he does. Gee! Wasn't it awful? For a minute I was so mad I could have slapped him."

It had been, Irene acknowledged, a distinctly trying experience, as well as a very unpleasant one. "I was more than a little angry myself."

"And imagine her not telling us about him feeling that way! Anything might have happened. We might have said something."

That, Irene pointed out, was exactly like Clare Kendry. Taking a chance, and not at all considering anyone else's feelings.

Gertrude said: "Maybe she thought we'd think it a good joke. And I guess you did. The way you laughed. My land! I was scared to death he might catch on."

"Well, it was rather a joke," Irene told her, "on him and us and maybe on her."

"All the same, it's an awful chance. I'd hate to be her."

"She seems satisfied enough. She's got what she wanted, and the other day she told me it was worth it."

But about that Gertrude was sceptical. "She'll find out different," was her verdict. "She'll find out different all right."

Rain had begun to fall, a few scattered large drops.

The end-of-the-day crowds were scurrying in the directions of street-cars and elevated roads.

Irene said: "You're going south? I'm sorry. I've got an errand. If you don't mind, I'll just say good-bye here. It has been nice seeing you, Gertrude. Say hello to Fred for me, and to your mother if she remembers me. Good-bye."

She had wanted to be free of the other woman, to be alone; for she was still sore and angry.

What right, she kept demanding of herself, had Clare Kendry to expose her, or even Gertrude Martin, to such humiliation, such downright insult?

And all the while, on the rushing ride out to her father's house, Irene Redfield was trying to understand the look on Clare's face as she had said good-bye. Partly mocking, it had seemed, and partly menacing. And something else for which she could find no name. For an instant a recrudescence of that sensation of fear which she had had while looking into Clare's eyes that afternoon touched her. A slight shiver ran over her.

"It's nothing," she told herself. "Just somebody walking over my grave, as the children say." She tried a tiny laugh and was annoyed to find that it was close to tears.

What a state she had allowed that horrible Bellevue to get her into!

And late that night, even, long after the last guest had gone and the old house was quiet, she stood at her window frowning out into the dark rain and puzzling again over that look on Clare's incredibly beautiful face. She couldn't, however, come to any conclusion about its meaning, try as she might. It was unfathomable, utterly beyond any experience or comprehension of hers.

She turned away from the window, at last, with a still deeper frown. Why, after all, worry about Clare Kendry? She was well able to take care of herself, had always been able. And there were, for Irene, other things, more personal and more important to worry about.

Besides, her reason told her, she had only herself to blame for her disagreeable afternoon and its attendant fears and questions. She ought never to have gone.

FOUR

The next morning, the day of her departure for New York, had brought a letter, which, at first glance, she had instinctively known came from Clare Kendry, though she couldn't remember ever having had a letter from her before. Ripping it open and looking at the signature, she saw that she had been right in her guess. She wouldn't, she told herself, read it. She hadn't the time. And, besides, she had no wish to be reminded of the afternoon before. As it was, she felt none too fresh for her journey; she had had a wretched night. And all because of Clare's innate lack of consideration for the feelings of others.

But she did read it. After father and friends had waved good-bye, and she was being hurled eastward, she became possessed of an uncontrollable

curiosity to see what Clare had said about yesterday. For what, she asked, as she took it out of her bag and opened it, could she, what could anyone, say about a thing like that?

Clare Kendry had said:

'RENE DEAR:

However am I to thank you for your visit? I know you are feeling that under the circumstances I ought not to have asked you to come, or, rather, insisted. But if you could know how glad, how excitingly happy, I was to meet you and how I ached to see more of you (to see everybody and couldn't), you would understand my wanting to see you again, and maybe forgive me a little.

My love to you always and always and to your dear father, and all my poor thanks.

CLARE.

And there was a postscript which said:

It may be, 'Rene dear, it may just be, that, after all, your way may be the wiser and infinitely happier one. I'm not sure just now. At least not so sure as I have been.

C.

But the letter hadn't conciliated Irene. Her indignation was not lessened by Clare's flattering reference to her wiseness. As if, she thought wrathfully, anything could take away the humiliation, or any part of it, of what she had gone through yesterday afternoon for Clare Kendry.

With an unusual methodicalness she tore the offending letter into tiny ragged squares that fluttered down and made a small heap in her black *crêpe de Chine*⁸ lap. The destruction completed, she gathered them up, rose, and moved to the train's end. Standing there, she dropped them over the railing and watched them scatter, on tracks, on cinders, on forlorn grass, in rills of dirty water.

And that, she told herself, was that. The chances were one in a million that she would ever again lay eyes on Clare Kendry. If, however, that millionth chance should turn up, she had only to turn away her eyes, to refuse her recognition.

She dropped Clare out of her mind and turned her thoughts to her own affairs. To home, to the boys, to Brian. Brian, who in the morning would be waiting for her in the great clamorous station. She hoped that he had been comfortable and not too lonely without her and the boys. Not so lonely that that old, queer, unhappy restlessness had begun again within him; that craving for some place strange and different, which at the beginning of her marriage she had had to make such strenuous efforts to repress, and which yet faintly alarmed her, though it now sprang up at gradually lessening intervals.

8. A lightweight textured fabric, usually of silk, and therefore named by association with China (*Chine*, French).

Part Two. Re-Encounter

ONE

Such were Irene Redfield's memories as she sat there in her room, a flood of October sunlight streaming in upon her, holding that second letter of Clare Kendry's.

Laying it aside, she regarded with an astonishment that had in it a mild degree of amusement the violence of the feelings which it stirred in her.

It wasn't the great measure of anger that surprised and slightly amused her. That, she was certain, was justified and reasonable, as was the fact that it could hold, still strong and unabated, across the stretch of two years' time entirely removed from any sight or sound of John Bellew, or of Clare. That even at this remote date the memory of the man's words and manner had power to set her hands to trembling and to send the blood pounding against her temples did not seem to her extraordinary. But that she should retain that dim sense of fear, of panic, was surprising, silly.

That Clare should have written, should, even all things considered, have expressed a desire to see her again, did not so much amaze her. To count as nothing the annoyances, the bitterness, or the suffering of others, that was Clare.

Well—Irene's shoulders went up—one thing was sure: that she needn't, and didn't intend to, lay herself open to any repetition of a humiliation as galling and outrageous as that which, for Clare Kendry's sake, she had borne "that time in Chicago." Once was enough.

If, at the time of choosing, Clare hadn't precisely reckoned the cost, she had, nevertheless, no right to expect others to help make up the reckoning. The trouble with Clare was, not only that she wanted to have her cake and eat it too, but that she wanted to nibble at the cakes of other folk as well.

Irene Redfield found it hard to sympathize with this new tenderness, this avowed yearning of Clare's for "my own people."

The letter which she just put out of her hand was, to her taste, a bit too lavish in its wordiness, a shade too unreserved in the manner of its expression. It roused again that old suspicion that Clare was acting, not consciously, perhaps—that is, not too consciously—but, none the less, acting. Nor was Irene inclined to excuse what she termed Clare's downright selfishness.

And mingled with her disbelief and resentment was another feeling, a question. Why hadn't she spoken that day? Why, in the face of Bellew's ignorant hate and aversion, had she concealed her own origin? Why had she allowed him to make his assertions and express his misconceptions undisputed? Why, simply because of Clare Kendry, who had exposed her to such torment, had she failed to take up the defence of the race to which she belonged?

Irene asked these questions, felt them. They were, however, merely rhetorical, as she herself was well aware. She knew their answers, every one, and it was the same for them all. The sardony⁹ of it! She couldn't betray Clare, couldn't even run the risk of appearing to defend a people that were

9. Larsen's coinage, from "sardonic" (in parallel with "irony"/"ironic").

being maligned, for fear that that defence might in some infinitesimal degree lead the way to final discovery of her secret. She had to Clare Kendry a duty. She was bound to her by those very ties of race, which, for all her repudiation of them, Clare had been unable to completely sever.

And it wasn't, as Irene knew, that Clare cared at all about the race or what was to become of it. She didn't. Or that she had for any of its members great, or even real, affection, though she professed undying gratitude for the small kindnesses which the Westover family had shown her when she was a child. Irene doubted the genuineness of it, seeing herself only as a means to an end where Clare was concerned. Nor could it be said that she had even the slight artistic or sociological interest in the race that some members of other races displayed. She hadn't. No, Clare Kendry cared nothing for the race. She only belonged to it.

"Not another damned thing!" Irene declared aloud as she drew a fragile stocking over a pale beige-coloured foot.

"Aha! Swearing again, are you, madam? Caught you in the act that time."

Brian Redfield had come into the room in that noiseless way which, in spite, of the years of their life together, still had the power to disconcert her. He stood looking down on her with that amused smile of his, which was just the faintest bit supercilious and yet was somehow very becoming to him.

Hastily Irene pulled on the other stocking and slipped her feet into the slippers beside her chair.

"And what brought on this particular outburst of profanity? That is, if an indulgent but perturbed husband may inquire. The mother of sons too! The times, alas, the times!"

"I've had this letter," Irene told him. "And I'm sure that anybody'll admit it's enough to make a saint swear. The nerve of her!"

She passed the letter to him, and in the act made a little mental frown. For, with a nicety of perception, she saw that she was doing it instead of answering his question with words, so that he might be occupied while she hurried through her dressing. For she was late again, and Brian, she well knew, detested that. Why, oh why, couldn't she ever manage to be on time? Brian had been up for ages, had made some calls for all she knew, besides having taken the boys downtown to school. And she wasn't dressed yet; had only begun. Damn Clare! This morning it was her fault.

Brian sat down and bent his head over the letter, puckering his brows slightly in his effort to make out Clare's scrawl.

Irene, who had risen and was standing before the mirror, ran a comb through her black hair, then tossed her head with a light characteristic gesture, in order to disarrange a little the set locks. She touched a powder-puff to her warm olive skin, and then put on her frock with a motion so hasty that it was with some difficulty properly adjusted. At last she was ready, though she didn't immediately say so, but stood, instead, looking with a sort of curious detachment at her husband across the room.

Brian, she was thinking, was extremely good-looking. Not, of course, pretty or effeminate; the slight irregularity of his nose saved him from the prettiness, and the rather marked heaviness of his chin saved him from the effeminacy. But he was, in a pleasant masculine way, rather handsome. And yet, wouldn't he, perhaps, have been merely ordinarily good-looking

but for the richness, the beauty of his skin, which was of an exquisitely fine texture and deep copper colour.

He looked up and said: "Clare? That must be the girl you told me about meeting the last time you were out home. The one you went to tea with?"

Irene's answer to that was an inclination of the head.

"I'm ready," she said.

They were going downstairs, Brian deftly, unnecessarily, piloting her round the two short curved steps, just before the centre landing.

"You're not," he asked, "going to see her?"

His words, however, were in reality not a question, but, as Irene was aware, an admonition.

Her front teeth just touched. She spoke through them, and her tones held a thin sarcasm. "Brian, darling, I'm really not such an idiot that I don't realize that if a man calls me a nigger, it's his fault the first time, but mine if he has the opportunity to do it again."

They went into the dining-room. He drew back her chair and she sat down behind the fat-bellied German coffee-pot, which sent out its morning fragrance, mingled with the smell of crisp toast and savoury bacon, in the distance. With his long, nervous fingers he picked up the morning paper from his own chair and sat down.

Zulena, a small mahogany-coloured creature, brought in the grapefruit.

They took up their spoons.

Out of the silence Brian spoke. Blandly. "My dear, you misunderstand me entirely. I simply meant that I hope you're not going to let her pester you. She will, you know, if you give her half a chance and she's anything at all like your description of her. Anyway, they always do. Besides," he corrected, "the man, her husband, didn't call you a nigger. There's a difference, you know."

"No, certainly he didn't. Not actually. He couldn't, not very well, since he didn't know. But he would have. It amounts to the same thing. And I'm sure it was just as unpleasant."

"U-mm, I don't know. But it seems to me," he pointed out, "that you, my dear, had all the advantage. You knew what his opinion of you was, while he—Well, 'twas ever thus. We know, always have. They don't. Not quite. It has, you will admit, it's humorous side, and, sometimes, its conveniences."

She poured the coffee.

"I can't see it. I'm going to write Clare. Today, if I can find a minute. It's a thing we might as well settle definitely, and immediately. Curious, isn't it, that knowing, as she does, his unqualified attitude, she still—"

Brian interrupted: "It's always that way. Never known it to fail. Remember Albert Hammond, how he used to be forever haunting Seventh Avenue, and Lenox Avenue, and the dancing-places, until some 'shine'¹ took a shot at him for casting an eye towards his 'sheba'² They always come back. I've seen it happen time and time again."

"But why?" Irene wanted to know. "Why?"

1. Derogatory slang for an African American man.

2. Derogatory slang for an African American

woman, after the biblical queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10).

"If I knew that, I'd know what race is."

"But wouldn't you think that having got the thing, or things, they were after, and at such risk, they'd be satisfied? Or afraid?"

"Yes," Brian agreed, "you certainly would think so. But, the fact remains, they aren't. Not satisfied, I mean. I think they're scared enough most of the time, when they give way to the urge and slip back. Not scared enough to stop them, though. Why, the good God only knows."

Irene leaned forward, speaking, she was aware, with a vehemence absolutely unnecessary, but which she could not control.

"Well, Clare can just count me out. I've no intention of being the link between her and her poorer darker brethren. After that scene in Chicago too! To calmly expect me—" She stopped short, suddenly too wrathful for words.

"Quite right. The only sensible thing to do. Let her miss you. It's an unhealthy business, the whole affair. Always is."

Irene nodded. "More coffee," she offered.

"Thanks, no." He took up his paper again, spreading it open with a little rattling noise.

Zulena came in bringing more toast. Brian took a slice and bit into it with that audible crunching sound that Irene disliked so intensely, and turned back to his paper.

She said: "It's funny about 'passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it."

"Instinct of the race to survive and expand."

"Rot! Everything can't be explained by some general biological phrase."

"Absolutely everything can. Look at the so-called whites, who've left bastards all over the known earth. Same thing in them. Instinct of the race to survive and expand."³

With that Irene didn't at all agree, but many arguments in the past had taught her the futility of attempting to combat Brian on ground where he was more nearly at home than she. Ignoring his unqualified assertion, she slid away from the subject entirely.

"I wonder," she asked, "if you'll have time to run me down to the printing-office. It's on a Hundred and Sixteenth Street. I've got to see about some handbills and some more tickets for the dance."

"Yes, of course. How's it going? Everything all set?"

"Ye-es. I guess so. The boxes are all sold and nearly all the first batch of tickets. And we expect to take in almost as much again at the door. Then, there's all that cake to sell. It's a terrible lot of work, though."

"I'll bet it is. Uplifting the brother's no easy job. I'm as busy as a cat with fleas, myself." And over his face there came a shadow. "Lord! how I hate sick people, and their stupid, meddling families, and smelly, dirty rooms, and climbing filthy steps in dark hallways."

"Surely," Irene began, fighting back the fear and irritation that she felt, "surely—"

3. Brian echoes the evolutionary theory of the survival of the fittest, as articulated by Charles Darwin (1809–1882) in *On the Origin of Species* (1859).

Her husband silenced her, saying sharply: "Let's not talk about it, please." And immediately, in his usual, slightly mocking tone he asked: "Are you ready to go now? I haven't a great deal of time to wait."

He got up. She followed him out into the hall without replying. He picked up his soft brown hat from the small table and stood a moment whirling it round on his long tea-coloured fingers.

Irene, watching him, was thinking: "It isn't fair, it isn't fair." After all these years to still blame her like this. Hadn't his success proved that she'd been right in insisting that he stick to his profession right there in New York? Couldn't he see, even now, that it *had* been best? Not for her, oh no, not for her—she had never really considered herself—but for him and the boys. Was she never to be free of it, that fear which crouched, always, deep down within her, stealing away the sense of security, the feeling of permanence, from the life which she had so admirably arranged for them all, and desired so ardently to have remain as it was? That strange, and to her fantastic, notion of Brian's of going off to Brazil, which, though unmentioned, yet lived within him; how it frightened her, and—yes, angered her!

"Well?" he asked lightly.

"I'll just get my things. One minute," she promised and turned upstairs.

Her voice had been even and her step was firm, but in her there was no slackening of the agitation, of the alarms, which Brian's expression of discontent had raised. He had never spoken of his desire since that long-ago time of storm and strain, of hateful and nearly disastrous quarrelling, when she had so firmly opposed him, so sensibly pointed out its utter impossibility and its probable consequences to her and the boys, and had even hinted at a dissolution of their marriage in the event of his persistence in his idea. No, there had been, in all the years that they had lived together since then, no other talk of it, no more than there had been any other quarrelling or any other threats. But because, so she insisted, the bond of flesh and spirit between them was so strong, she knew, had always known, that his dissatisfaction had continued, as had his dislike and disgust for his profession and his country.

A feeling of uneasiness stole upon her at the inconceivable suspicion that she might have been wrong in her estimate of her husband's character. But she squirmed away from it. Impossible! She couldn't have been wrong. Everything proved that she had been right. More than right, if such a thing could be. And all, she assured herself, because she understood him so well, because she had, actually, a special talent for understanding him. It was, as she saw it, the one thing that had been the basis of the success which she had made of a marriage that had threatened to fail. She knew him as well as he knew himself, or better.

Then why worry? The thing, this discontent which had exploded into words, would surely die, flicker out, at last. True, she had in the past often been tempted to believe that it had died, only to become conscious, in some instinctive, subtle way, that she had been merely deceiving herself for a while and that it still lived. But it *would* die. Of that she was certain. She had only to direct and guide her man, to keep him going in the right direction.

She put on her coat and adjusted her hat.

Yes, it would die, as long ago she had made up her mind that it should. But in the meantime, while it was still living and still had the power to flare

up and alarm her, it would have to be banked, smothered, and something offered in its stead. She would have to make some plan, some decision, at once. She frowned, for it annoyed her intensely. For, though temporary, it would be important and perhaps disturbing. Irene didn't like changes, particularly changes that affected the smooth routine of her household. Well, it couldn't be helped. Something would have to be done. And immediately.

She took up her purse and drawing on her gloves, ran down the steps and out through the door which Brian held open for her and stepped into the waiting car.

"You know," she said, settling herself into the seat beside him, "I'm awfully glad to get this minute alone with you. It does seem that we're always so busy—I do hate that—but what can we do? I've had something on my mind for ever so long, something that needs talking over and really serious consideration."

The car's engine rumbled as it moved out from the kerb and into the scant traffic of the street under Brian's expert guidance.

She studied his profile.

They turned into Seventh Avenue. Then he said: "Well, let's have it. No time like the present for the settling of weighty matters."

"It's about Junior. I wonder if he isn't going too fast in school? We do forget that he's not eleven yet. Surely it can't be good for him to—well, if he is, I mean. Going too fast, you know. Of course, you know more about these things than I do. You're better able to judge. That is, if you've noticed or thought about it at all."

"I do wish, Irene, you wouldn't be for ever fretting about those kids. They're all right. Perfectly all right. Good, strong, healthy boys, especially Junior. Most especially Junior."

"We-ll, I s'pose you're right. You're expected to know about things like that, and I'm sure you wouldn't make a mistake about your own boy." (Now, why had she said that?) "But that isn't all. I'm terribly afraid he's picked up some queer ideas about things—some things—from the older boys, you know."

Her manner was consciously light. Apparently she was intent of the maze of traffic, but she was still watching Brian's face closely. On it was a peculiar expression. Was it, could it possibly be, a mixture of scorn and distaste?

"Queer ideas?" he repeated. "D'you mean ideas about sex, Irene?"

"Ye-es. Not quite nice ones. Dreadful jokes, and things like that."

"Oh, I see," he threw at her. For a while there was silence between them. After a moment he demanded bluntly: "Well, what of it? If sex isn't a joke, what is it? And what is a joke?"

"As you please, Brian. He's your son, you know." Her voice was clear, level, disapproving.

"Exactly! And you're trying to make a molly-coddle out of him. Well, just let me tell you, I won't have it. And you needn't think I'm going to let you change him to some nice kindergarten kind of a school because he's getting a little necessary education. I won't! He'll stay right where he is. The sooner and the more he learns about sex, the better for him. And most certainly if he learns that it's a grand joke, the greatest in the world. It'll keep him from lots of disappointments later on."

Irene didn't answer.

They reached the printing-shop. She got out, emphatically slamming the car's door behind her. There was a piercing agony of misery in her heart. She hadn't intended to behave like this, but her extreme resentment at his attitude, the sense of having been wilfully misunderstood and reprovved, drove her to fury.

Inside the shop, she stilled the trembling of her lips and drove back her rising anger. Her business transacted, she came back to the car in a chastened mood. But against the armour of Brian's stubborn silence she heard herself saying in a calm, metallic voice: "I don't believe I'll go back just now. I've remembered that I've got to do something about getting something decent to wear. I haven't a rag that's fit to be seen. I'll take the bus downtown."

Brian merely doffed his hat in that maddening polite way which so successfully curbed and yet revealed his temper.

"Good-bye," she said bitingly. "Thanks for the lift," and turned towards the avenue.

What, she wondered contritely, was she to do next? She was vexed with herself for having chosen, as it had turned out, so clumsy an opening for what she had intended to suggest: some European school for Junior next year, and Brian to take him over. If she had been able to present her plan, and he had accepted it, as she was sure that he would have done, with other more favourable opening methods, he would have had that to look forward to as a break in the easy monotony that seemed, for some reason she was wholly unable to grasp, so hateful to him.

She was even more vexed at her own explosion of anger. What could have got into her to give way to it in such a moment?

Gradually her mood passed. She drew back from the failure her first attempt at substitution, not so much discouraged as disappointed and ashamed. It might be, she reflected, that, in addition to her ill-timed loss of temper, she had been too hasty in her eagerness to distract him, had rushed too closely on the heels of his outburst, and had thus aroused his suspicions and his obstinacy. She had but to wait. Another more appropriate time would come, tomorrow, next week, next month. It wasn't now, as it had been once, that she was afraid that he would throw everything aside and rush off to that remote place of his heart's desire. He wouldn't, she knew. He was fond of her, loved her, in his slightly undemonstrative way.

And there were the boys.

It was only that she wanted him to be happy, resenting, however, his inability to be so with things as they were, and never acknowledging that though she did want him to be happy, it was only in her own way and by some plan of hers for him that she truly desired him to be so. Nor did she admit that all other plans, all other ways, she regarded as menaces, more or less indirect, to that security of place and substance which she insisted upon for her sons and in a lesser degree for herself.

TWO

Five days had gone by since Clare Kendry's appealing letter. Irene Redfield had not replied to it. Nor had she had any other word from Clare.

She had not carried out her first intention of writing at once because on going back to the letter for Clare's address, she had come upon something which, in the rigour of her determination to maintain unbroken between them the wall that Clare herself had raised, she had forgotten, or not fully noted. It was the fact that Clare had requested her to direct her answer to the post office's general delivery.⁴

That had angered Irene, and increased her disdain and contempt for the other.

Tearing the letter across, she had flung it into the scrap-basket. It wasn't so much Clare's carefulness and her desire for secrecy in their relations—Irene understood the need for that—as that Clare should have doubted her discretion, implied that she might not be cautious in the wording of her reply and the choice of a posting-box. Having always had complete confidence in her own good judgment and tact, Irene couldn't bear to have anyone seem to question them. Certainly not Clare Kendry.

In another, calmer moment she decided that it was, after all, better to answer nothing, to explain nothing, to refuse nothing; to dispose of the matter simply by not writing at all. Clare, of whom it couldn't be said that she was stupid, would not mistake the implication of that silence. She might—and Irene was sure that she would—choose to ignore it and write again, but that didn't matter. The whole thing would be very easy. The basket for all letters, silence for their answers.

Most likely she and Clare would never meet again. Well, she, for one, could endure that. Since childhood their lives had never really touched. Actually they were strangers. Strangers in their ways and means of living. Strangers in their desires and ambitions. Strangers even in their racial consciousness. Between them the barrier was just as high, just as broad, and just as firm as if in Clare did not run that strain of black blood. In truth, it was higher, broader, and firmer; because for her there were perils, not known, or imagined, by those others who had no such secrets to alarm or endanger them.

The day was getting on toward evening. It was past the middle of October. There had been a week of cold rain, drenching the rotting leaves which had fallen from the poor trees that lined the street on which the Redfields' house was located, and sending a damp air of penetrating chill into the house, with a hint of cold days to come. In Irene's room a low fire was burning. Outside, only a dull grey light was left of the day. Inside, lamps had already been lighted.

From the floor above there was the sound of young voices. Sometimes Junior's serious and positive; again, Ted's deceptively gracious one. Often there was laughter, or the noise of commotion, tussling, or toys being slammed down.

Junior, tall for his age, was almost incredibly like his father in feature and colouring; but his temperament was hers, practical and determined, rather than Brian's. Ted, speculative and withdrawn, was, apparently, less positive in his ideas and desires. About him there was a deceiving air of candour

4. Mail held at the post office for pickup rather than delivered to an address.

that was, Irene knew, like his father's show of reasonable acquiescence. If, for the time being, and with a charming appearance of artlessness, he submitted to the force of superior strength, or some other immovable condition or circumstance, it was because of his intense dislike of scenes and unpleasant argument. Brian over again.

Gradually Irene's thought slipped away from Junior and Ted, to become wholly absorbed in their father.

The old fear, with strength increased, the fear for the future, had again laid its hand on her. And, try as she might, she could not shake it off. It was as if she had admitted to herself that against that easy surface of her husband's concordance with her wishes, which had, since the war had given him back to her physically unimpaired, covered an increasing inclination to tear himself and his possessions loose from their proper setting, she was helpless.

The chagrin which she had felt at her first failure to subvert this latest manifestation of his discontent had receded, leaving in its wake an uneasy depression. Were all her efforts, all her labours, to make up to him that one loss, all her silent striving to prove to him that her way had been best, all her ministrations to him, all her outward sinking of self, to count for nothing in some unperceived sudden moment? And if so, what, then, would be the consequences to the boys? To her? To Brian himself? Endless searching had brought no answer to these questions. There was only an intense weariness from their shuttle-like procession in her brain.

The noise and commotion from above grew increasingly louder. Irene was about to go to the stairway and request the boys to be quieter in their play when she heard the doorbell ringing.

Now, who was that likely to be? She listened to Zulena's heels, faintly tapping on their way to the door, then to the shifting sound of her feet on the steps, then to her light knock on the bedroom door.

"Yes. Come in," Irene told her.

Zulena stood in the doorway. She said: "Someone to see you, Mrs. Redfield." Her tone was discreetly regretful, as if to convey that she was reluctant to disturb her mistress at that hour, and for a stranger. "A Mrs. Bellew."

Clare!

"Oh dear! Tell her, Zulena," Irene began, "that I can't—No. I'll see her. Please bring her up here."

She heard Zulena pass down the hall, down the stairs, then stood up, smoothing out the tumbled green and ivory draperies of her dress with light stroking pats. At the mirror she dusted a little powder on her nose and brushed out her hair.

She meant to tell Clare Kendry at once, and definitely, that it was of no use, her coming, that she couldn't be responsible, that she'd talked it over with Brian, who had agreed with her that it was wiser, for Clare's own sake, to refrain—

But that was as far as she got in her rehearsal. For Clare had come softly into the room without knocking, and before Irene could greet her, had dropped a kiss on her dark curls.

Looking at the woman before her, Irene Redfield had a sudden inexplicable onrush of affectionate feeling. Reaching out, she grasped Clare's two hand in her own and cried with something like awe in her voice: "Dear God! But aren't you lovely, Clare!"

Clare tossed that aside. Like the furs and small blue hat which she threw on the bed before seating herself slantwise in Irene's favourite chair, with one foot curled under her.

"Didn't you mean to answer my letter, 'Rene?'" she asked gravely.

Irene looked away. She had that uncomfortable feeling that one has when one has not been wholly kind or wholly true.

Clare went on: "Every day I went to that nasty little post-office place. I'm sure they were all beginning to think that I'd been carrying on an illicit love-affair and that the man had thrown me over. Every morning the same answer: 'Nothing for you.' I got into an awful fright, thinking that something might have happened to your letter, or to mine. And half the nights I would lie awake looking out at the watery stars—hopeless things, the stars—worrying and wondering. But at last it soaked in, that you hadn't written and didn't intend to. And then—well, as soon as ever I'd seen Jack off for Florida, I came straight here. And now, 'Rene, please tell me quite frankly why you didn't answer my letter."

"Because, you see—" Irene broke off and kept Clare waiting while she lit a cigarette, blew out the match, and dropped it into a tray. She was trying to collect her arguments, for some sixth sense warned her that it was going to be harder than she thought to convince Clare Kendry of the folly of Harlem for her. Finally she proceeded: "I can't help thinking that you ought not to come up here, ought not to run the risk of knowing Negroes."

"You mean you don't want me, 'Rene?'"

Irene hadn't supposed that anyone could look so hurt. She said, quite gently, "No, Clare, it's not that. But even you must see that it's terribly foolish, and not just the right thing."

The tinkle of Clare's laugh rang out, while she passed her hands over the bright sweep of her hair. "Oh, 'Rene!" she cried, "you're priceless! And you haven't changed a bit. The right thing!" Leaning forward, she looked curiously into Irene's disapproving brown eyes. "You don't, you really can't mean exactly that! Nobody could. It's simply unbelievable."

Irene was on her feet before she realized that she had risen. "What I really mean," she retorted, "is that it's dangerous and that you ought not to run such silly risks. No one ought to. You least of all."

Her voice was brittle. For into her mind had come a thought, strange and irrelevant, a suspicion, that had surprised and shocked her and driven her to her feet. It was that in spite of her determined selfishness the woman before her was yet capable of heights and depths of feeling that she, Irene Redfield, had never known. Indeed, never cared to know. The thought, the suspicion, was gone as quickly as it had come.

Clare said: "Oh, me!"

Irene touched her arm caressingly, as if in contrition for that flashing thought. "Yes, Clare, you. It's not safe. Not safe at all."

"Safe!"

It seemed to Irene that Clare had snapped her teeth down on the word and then flung it from her. And for another flying second she had that suspicion of Clare's ability for a quality of feeling that was to her strange, and even repugnant. She was aware, too, of a dim premonition of some impending disaster. It was as if Clare Kendry had said to her, for whom safety, security, were all-important: "Safe! Damn being safe!" and meant it.

With a gesture of impatience she sat down. In a voice of cool formality, she said: "Brian and I have talked the whole thing over carefully and decided that it isn't wise. He says it's always a dangerous business, this coming back. He's seen more than one come to grief because of it. And, Clare, considering everything—Mr. Bellew's attitude and all that—don't you think you ought to be as careful as you can?"

Clare's deep voice broke the small silence that had followed Irene's speech. She said, speaking almost plaintively: "I ought to have known. It's Jack. I don't blame you for being angry, though I must say you behaved beautifully that day. But I did think you'd understand, 'Rene. It was that, partly, that has made me want to see other people. It just swooped down and changed everything. If it hadn't been for that, I'd have gone on to the end, never seeing any of you. But that did something to me, and I've been so lonely since! You can't know. Not close to a single soul. Never anyone to really talk to."

Irene pressed out her cigarette. While doing so, she saw again the vision of Clare Kendry staring disdainfully down at the face of her father, and thought that it would be like that that she would look at her husband if he lay dead before her.

Her own resentment was swept aside and her voice held an accent of pity as she exclaimed: "Why, Clare! I didn't know. Forgive me. I feel like seven beasts.⁵ It was stupid of me not to realize."

"No. Not at all. You couldn't. Nobody, none of you, could," Clare moaned. The black eyes filled with tears that ran down her cheeks and spilled into her lap, ruining the priceless velvet of her dress. Her long hands were a little uplifted and clasped tightly together. Her effort to speak moderately was obvious, but not successful. "How could you know? How could you? You're free. You're happy. And," with faint derision, "safe."

Irene passed over that touch of derision, for the poignant rebellion of the other's words had brought the tears to her own eyes, though she didn't allow them to fall. The truth was that she knew weeping did not become her. Few women, she imagined, wept as attractively as Clare. "I'm beginning to believe," she murmured, "that no one is ever completely happy, or free, or safe."

"Well, then, what does it matter? One risk more or less, if we're not safe anyway, if even you're not, it can't make all the difference in the world. It can't to me. Besides, I'm used to risks. And this isn't such a big one as you're trying to make it."

"Oh, but it is. And it can make all the difference in the world. There's your little girl, Clare. Think of the consequences to her."

Clare's face took on a startled look, as though she were totally unprepared for this new weapon with which Irene had assailed her. Seconds passed, during which she sat with stricken eyes and compressed lips. "I think," she said at last, "that being a mother is the cruellest thing in the world." Her clasped hands swayed forward and back again, and her scarlet mouth trembled irrepressibly.

5. After the seven-headed monster described in the Book of Revelation (13.1).

"Yes," Irene softly agreed. For a moment she was unable to say more, so accurately had Clare put into words that which, not so definitely defined, was so often in her own heart of late. At the same time she was conscious that here, to her hand, was a reason which could not be lightly brushed aside. "Yes," she repeated, "and the most responsible, Clare. We mothers are all responsible for the security and happiness of our children. Think what it would mean to your Margery if Mr. Bellew should find out. You'd probably lose her. And even if you didn't, nothing that concerned her would ever be the same again. He'd never forget that she had Negro blood. And if she should learn—Well, I believe that after twelve it is too late to learn a thing like that. She'd never forgive you. You may be used to risks, but this is one you mustn't take, Clare. It's a selfish whim, an unnecessary and—"

"Yes, Zulena, what is it?" she inquired, a trifle tartly, of the servant who had silently materialized in the doorway.

"The telephone's for you, Mrs. Redfield. It's Mr. Wentworth."

"All right. Thank you. I'll take it here." And, with a muttered apology to Clare, she took up the instrument.

"Hello. . . . Yes, Hugh. . . . Oh, quite. . . . And you? . . . I'm sorry, every single thing's gone. . . . Oh, too bad. . . . Ye-es, I s'pose you could. Not very pleasant, though. . . . Yes, of course, in a pinch everything goes. . . . Wait! I've got it! I'll change mine with whoever's next to you, and you can have that. . . . No. . . . I mean it. . . . I'll be so busy I shan't know whether I'm sitting or standing. . . . As long as Brian has a place to drop down now and then. . . . Not a single soul. . . . No, don't. . . . That's nice. . . . My love to Bianca. . . . I'll see to it right away and call you back. . . . Goodbye."

She hung up and turned back to Clare, a little frown on her softly chiselled features. "It's the N. W. L. dance," she explained, "the Negro Welfare League,⁶ you know. I'm on the ticket committee, or, rather, I *am* the committee. Thank heaven it comes off tomorrow night and doesn't happen again for a year. I'm about crazy, and now I've got to persuade somebody to change boxes with me."

"That wasn't," Clare asked, "Hugh Wentworth? Not *the* Hugh Wentworth?"⁷

Irene inclined her head. On her face was a tiny triumphant smile. "Yes, *the* Hugh Wentworth. D'you know him?"

"No. How should I? But I do know about him. And I've read a book or two of his."

"Awfully good, aren't they?"

"U-umm, I s'pose so. Sort of contemptuous, I thought. As if he more or less despised everything and everybody."

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he did. Still, he's about earned the right to. Lived on the edges of nowhere in at least three continents. Been through every danger in all kinds of savage places. It's no wonder he thinks the rest

6. An organization dedicated to racial uplift. A number of U.S. cities in the early 20th century had local chapters; in the 1920s, many of these and other local uplift organizations merged with the New York-based National Urban League.

7. Hugh and Bianca Wentworth may be modeled on Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964), the famous white patron and publicist of the Harlem Renaissance, and his wife, Fania Marinoff (1890–1971), to both of whom Larsen dedicated *Passing*.

of us are a lazy self-pampering lot. Hugh's a dear, though, generous as one of the twelve disciples; give you the shirt off his back. Bianca—that's his wife—is nice too."

"And he's coming up here to your dance?"

Irene asked why not.

"It seems rather curious, a man like that, going to a Negro dance."

This, Irene told her, was the year 1927 in the city of New York, and hundreds of white people of Hugh Wentworth's type came to affairs in Harlem, more all the time. So many that Brian had said: "Pretty soon the coloured people won't be allowed in at all, or will have to sit in Jim Crow⁸ sections."

"What do they come for?"

"Same reason you're here, to see Negroes."

"But why?"

"Various motives," Irene explained. "A few purely and frankly to enjoy themselves. Others to get material to turn into shekels.⁹ More, to gaze on these great and near great while they gaze on the Negroes."

Clare clapped her hand. "'Rene, suppose I come too! It sounds terribly interesting and amusing. And I don't see why I shouldn't."

Irene, who was regarding her through narrowed eyelids, had the same thought that she had had two years ago on the roof of the Drayton, that Clare Kendry was just a shade too good-looking. Her tone was on the edge of irony as she said: "You mean because so many other white people go?"

A pale rose-colour came into Clare's ivory cheeks. She lifted a hand in protest. "Don't be silly! Certainly not! I mean that in a crowd of that kind I shouldn't be noticed."

On the contrary, was Irene's opinion. It might be even doubly dangerous. Some friend or acquaintance of John Bellew or herself might see and recognize her.

At that, Clare laughed for a long time, little musical trills following one another in sequence after sequence. It was as if the thought of any friend of John Bellew's going to a Negro dance was to her the most amusing thing in the world.

"I don't think," she said, when she had done laughing, "we need worry about that."

Irene, however, wasn't so sure. But all her efforts to dissuade Clare were useless. To her, "You never can tell whom you're likely to meet there," Clare's rejoinder was: "I'll take my chance on getting by."

"Besides, you won't know a soul and I shall be too busy to look after you. You'll be bored stiff."

"I won't, I won't. If nobody asks me to dance, not even Dr. Redfield, I'll just sit and gaze on the great and the near great, too. Do, 'Rene, be polite and invite me."

Irene turned away from the caress of Clare's smile, saying promptly and positively: "I will not."

"I mean to go anyway," Clare retorted, and her voice was no less positive than Irene's.

8. Segregated.

9. Money (slang), from the currency of ancient Israel and with anti-Semitic connotations.

“Oh, no. You couldn’t possibly go there alone. It’s a public thing. All sorts of people go, anybody who can pay a dollar, even ladies of easy virtue looking for trade.¹ If you were to go there alone, you might be mistaken for one of them, and that wouldn’t be too pleasant.”

Clare laughed again. “Thanks. I never have been. It might be amusing. I’m warning you, ’Rene, that if you’re not going to be nice and take me, I’ll still be among those present. I suppose, my dollar’s as good as anyone’s.”

“Oh, the dollar! Don’t be a fool, Claire. I don’t care where you go, or what you do. All I’m concerned with is the unpleasantness and possible danger which your going might incur, because of your situation. To put it frankly, I shouldn’t like to be mixed up in any row of the kind.” She had risen again as she spoke and was standing at the window lifting and spreading the small yellow chrysanthemums in the grey stone jar on the sill. Her hands shook slightly, for she was in a near rage of impatience and exasperation.

Claire’s face looked strange, as if she wanted to cry again. One of her satin-covered feet swung restlessly back and forth. She said vehemently, violently almost: “Damn Jack! He keeps me out of everything. Everything I want. I could kill him! I expect I shall, some day.”

“I wouldn’t,” Irene advised her, “you see, there’s still capital punishment, in this state at least. And really, Clare, after everything’s said, I can’t see that you’ve a right to put all the blame on him. You’ve got to admit that there’s his side to the thing. You didn’t tell him you were coloured, so he’s got no way of knowing about this hankering of yours after Negroes, or that it galls you to fury to hear them called niggers and black devils. As far as I can see, you’ll just have to endure some things and give up others. As we’ve said before, everything must be paid for. Do, please, be reasonable.”

But Clare, it was plain, had shut away reason as well as caution. She shook her head. “I can’t, I can’t,” she said. “I would if I could, but I can’t. You don’t know, you can’t realize how I want to see Negroes, to be with them again, to talk with them, to hear them laugh.”

And in the look she gave Irene, there was something groping, and hopeless, and yet so absolutely determined that it was like an image of the futile searching and the firm resolution in Irene’s own soul, and increased the feeling of doubt and compunction that had been growing within her about Clare Kendry.

She gave in.

“Oh, come if you want to. I s’pose you’re right. Once can’t do such a terrible lot of harm.”

Pushing aside Clare’s extravagant thanks, for immediately she was sorry that she had consented, she said briskly: “Should you like to come up and see my boys?”

“I’d love to.”

They went up, Irene thinking that Brian would consider that she’d behaved like a spineless fool. And he would be right. She certainly had.

Clare was smiling. She stood in the doorway of the boys’ playroom, her shadowy eyes looking down on Junior and Ted, who had sprung apart from their tusselling. Junior’s face had a funny little look of resentment. Ted’s was blank.

1. Prostitutes seeking customers.

Clare said: "Please don't be cross. Of course, I know I've gone and spoiled everything. But maybe, if I promise not to get too much in the way, you'll let me come in, just the same."

"Sure, come in if you want to," Ted told her. "We can't stop you, you know." He smiled and made her a little bow and then turned away to a shelf that held his favourite books. Taking one down, he settled himself in a chair and began to read.

Junior said nothing, did nothing, merely stood there waiting.

"Get up, Ted! That's rude. This is Theodore, Mrs. Bellew. Please excuse his bad manners. He does know better. And this is Brian junior. Mrs. Bellew is an old friend of mother's. We used to play together when we were little girls."

Clare had gone and Brian had telephoned that he'd been detained and would have his dinner downtown. Irene was a little glad for that. She was going out later herself, and that meant she wouldn't, probably, see Brian until morning and so could put off for a few more hours speaking of Clare and the N. W. L. dance.

She was angry with herself and with Clare. But more with herself, for having permitted Clare to tease her into doing something that Brian had, all but expressly, asked her not to do. She didn't want him ruffled, not just then, not while he was possessed of that unreasonable restless feeling.

She was annoyed, too, because she was aware that she had consented to something which, if it went beyond the dance, would involve her in numerous petty inconveniences and evasions. And not only at home with Brian, but outside with friends and acquaintances. The disagreeable possibilities in connection with Clare Kendry's coming among them loomed before her in endless irritating array.

Clare, it seemed, still retained her ability to secure the thing that she wanted in the face of any opposition, and in utter disregard of the convenience and desire of others. About her there was some quality, hard and persistent, with the strength and endurance of rock, that would not be beaten or ignored. She couldn't, Irene thought, have had an entirely serene life. Not with that dark secret for ever crouching in the background of her consciousness. And yet she hadn't the air of a woman whose life had been touched by uncertainty or suffering. Pain, fear, and grief were things that left their mark on people. Even love, that exquisite torturing emotion, left its subtle traces on the countenance.

But Clare—she had remained almost what she had always been, an attractive, somewhat lonely child—selfish, wilful, and disturbing.

THREE

The things which Irene Redfield remembered afterward about the Negro Welfare League dance seemed, to her, unimportant and unrelated.

She remembered the not quite derisive smile with which Brian had cloaked his vexation when she informed him—oh, so apologetically—that she had promised to take Clare, and related the conversation of her visit.

She remembered her own little choked exclamation of admiration, when, on coming downstairs a few minutes later than she had intended, she had

rushed into the living-room where Brian was waiting and had found Clare there too. Clare, exquisite, golden, fragrant, flaunting, in a stately gown of shining black taffeta,² whose long, full skirt lay in graceful folds about her slim golden feet; her glistening hair drawn smoothly back into a small twist at the nape of her neck; her eyes sparkling like dark jewels. Irene, with her new rose-coloured chiffon frock ending at the knees, and her cropped curls, felt dowdy and commonplace. She regretted that she hadn't counselled Clare to wear something ordinary and inconspicuous. What on earth would Brian think of deliberate courting of attention? But if Clare Kendry's appearance had in it anything that was, to Brian Redfield, annoying or displeasing, the fact was not discernible to his wife as, with an uneasy feeling of guilt, she stood there looking into his face while Clare explained that she and he had made their own introductions, accompanying her words with a little deferential smile for Brian, and receiving in return one of his amused, slightly mocking smiles.

She remembered Clare's saying, as they sped northward: "You know, I feel exactly as I used to on the Sunday we went to the Christmas-tree celebration. I knew there was to be a surprise for me and couldn't quite guess what it was to be. I am so excited. You can't possibly imagine! It's marvellous to be really on the way! I can hardly believe it!"

At her words and tone a chilly wave of scorn had crept through Irene. All those superlatives! She said, taking care to speak indifferently: "Well, maybe in some ways you will be surprised, more, probably, than you anticipate."

Brian, at the wheel, had thrown back: "And then again, she won't be so very surprised after all, for it'll no doubt be about what she expects. Like the Christmas-tree."

She remembered rushing around here and there, consulting with this person and that one, and now and then snatching a part of a dance with some man whose dancing she particularly liked.

She remembered catching glimpses of Clare in the whirling crowd, dancing, sometimes with a white man, more often with a Negro, frequently with Brian. Irene was glad that he was being nice to Clare, and glad that Clare was having the opportunity to discover that some coloured men were superior to some white men.

She remembered a conversation she had with Hugh Wentworth in a free half-hour when she had dropped into a chair in an emptied box and let her gaze wander over the bright crowd below.

Young men, old men, white men, black men; youthful women, older women, pink women, golden women; fat men, thin men, tall men, short men; stout women, slim women, stately women, small women moved by. An old nursery rhyme popped into her head. She turned to Wentworth, who had just taken a seat beside her, and recited it:

"Rich man, poor man,
Beggan man, thief,
Doctor, lawyer,
Indian chief."

2. A smooth fabric, often made of silk, typically used in formal women's clothing.

“Yes,” Wentworth said, “that’s it. Everybody seems to be here and a few more. But what I’m trying to find out is the name, status, and race of the blonde beauty out of the fairy-tale. She’s dancing with Ralph Hazelton at the moment. Nice study in contrasts, that.”

It was. Clare fair and golden, like a sunlit day. Hazelton dark, with gleaming eyes, like a moonlit night.

“She’s a girl I used to know a long time ago in Chicago. And she wanted especially to meet you.”

“’S awfully good of her, I’m sure. And now, alas! the usual thing’s happened. All these others, these—er—‘gentlemen of colour’ have driven a mere Nordic from her mind.”

“Stuff!”

“’S a fact, and what happens to all the ladies of my superior race who’re lured up here. Look at Bianca. Have I laid eyes on her tonight except in spots, here and there, being twirled about by some Ethiopian? I have not.”

“But, Hugh, you’ve got to admit that the average coloured man is a better dancer than the average white man—that is, if the celebrities and ‘butter and egg’ men³ who find their way up here are fair specimens of white Terpsichorean⁴ art.”

“Not having tripped the light fantastic⁵ with any of the males, I’m not in a position to argue the point. But I don’t think it’s merely that. ’S something else, some other attraction. They’re always raving about the good looks of some Negro, preferably an unusually dark one. Take Hazelton there, for example. Dozens of women have declared him to be fascinatingly handsome. How about you, Irene? Do you think he’s—er—ravishingly beautiful?”

“I do not! And I don’t think the others do either. Not honestly, I mean. I think that what they feel is—well, a kind of emotional excitement. You know, the sort of thing you feel in the presence of something strange, and even, perhaps, a bit repugnant to you; something so different that it’s really at the opposite end of the pole from all your accustomed notions of beauty.”

“Damned if I don’t think you’re halfway right!”

“I’m sure I am. Completely. (Except, of course, when it’s just patronizing kindness on their part.) And I know coloured girls who’ve experienced the same thing—the other way round, naturally.”

“And the men? You don’t subscribe to the general opinion about their reason for coming up here. Purely predatory. Or, do you?”

“N-no. More curious, I should say.”

Wentworth, whose eyes were a clouded amber colour, had given her a long, searching look that was really a stare. He said: “All this is awfully interestin’, Irene. We’ve got to have a long talk about it some time soon. There’s your friend from Chicago, first time up here and all that. A case in point.”

Irene’s smile had only just lifted the corners of her painted lips. A match blazed in Wentworth’s broad hands as he lighted her cigarette and his own, and flickered out before he asked: “Or isn’t she?”

3. Big spenders.

4. From Terpsichore, the classical Greek Muse of dancing and song.

5. Danced; the phrase goes back at least as far as John Milton’s poem “L’Allegro” (1645).

Her smile changed to a laugh. "Oh, Hugh! You're so clever. You usually know everything. Even how to tell the sheep from the goats. What do you think? Is she?"

He blew a long contemplative wreath of smoke. "Damned if I know! I'll be as sure as anything that I've learned the trick. And then in the next minute I'll find I couldn't pick some of 'em if my life depended on it."

"Well, don't let that worry you. Nobody can. Not by looking."

"Not by looking, eh? Meaning?"

"I'm afraid I can't explain. Not clearly. There are ways. But they're not definite or tangible."

"Feeling of kinship, or something like that?"

"Good heavens, no! Nobody has that, except for their in-laws."

"Right again! But go on about the sheep and the goats."

"Well, take my own experience with Dorothy Thompkins. I'd met her four or five times, in groups and crowds of people, before I knew she wasn't a Negro. One day I went to an awful tea, terribly dicty.⁶ Dorothy was there. We got talking. In less than five minutes, I knew she was 'fay.'⁷ Not from anything she did or said or anything in her appearance. Just—just something. A thing that couldn't be registered."

"Yes, I understand what you mean. Yet lots of people 'pass' all the time."

"Not on our side, Hugh. It's easy for a Negro to 'pass' for white. But I don't think it would be so simple for a white person to 'pass' for coloured."

"Never thought of that."

"No, you wouldn't. Why should you?"

He regarded her critically through mists of smoke. "Slippin' me, Irene?"

She said soberly: "Not you, Hugh. I'm too fond of you. And you're too sincere."

And she remembered that towards the end of the dance Brian had come to her and said: "I'll drop you first and then run Clare down." And that he had been doubtful of her discretion when she had explained to him that he wouldn't have to bother because she had asked Bianca Wentworth to take her down with them. Did she, he had asked, think it had been wise to tell them about Clare?

"I told them nothing," she said sharply, for she was unbearably tired, "except that she was at the Walsingham. It's on their way, And, really, I haven't thought anything about the wisdom of it, but now that I do, I'd say it's much better for them to take her than you."

"As you please. She's your friend, you know," he had answered, with a disclaiming shrug of his shoulders.

Except for these few unconnected things the dance faded to a blurred memory, its outlines mingling with those of other dances of its kind that she had attended in the past and would attend in the future.

FOUR

But undistinctive as the dance had seemed, it was, nevertheless, important. For it marked the beginning of a new factor in Irene Redfield's life, some-

6. Pretentious.

7. From "ofay," derogatory slang term for a white person.

thing that left its trace on all the future years of her existence. It was the beginning of a new friendship with Clare Kendry.

She came to them frequently after that. Always with a touching gladness that welled up and overflowed on all the Redfield household. Yet Irene could never be sure whether her comings were a joy or a vexation.

Certainly she was no trouble. She had not to be entertained, or even noticed—if anyone could ever avoid noticing Clare. If Irene happened to be out or occupied, Clare could very happily amuse herself with Ted and Junior, who had conceived for her an admiration that verged on adoration, especially Ted. Or, lacking the boys, she would descend to the kitchen and, with—to Irene—an exasperating childlike lack of perception, spend her visit in talk and merriment with Zulena and Sadie.

Irene, while secretly resenting these visits to the playroom and kitchen, for some obscure reason which she shied away from putting into words, never requested that Clare make an end of them, or hinted that she wouldn't have spoiled her own Margery so outrageously, nor been so friendly with white servants.

Brian looked on these things with the same tolerant amusement that marked his entire attitude toward Clare. Never since his faintly derisive surprise at Irene's information that she was to go with them the night of the dance, had he shown any disapproval of Clare's presence. On the other hand, it couldn't be said that her presence seemed to please him. It didn't annoy or disturb him, so far as Irene could judge. That was all.

Didn't he, she once asked him, think Clare was extraordinarily beautiful?

"No," he had answered. "That is, not particularly."

"Brian, you're fooling!"

"No, honestly. Maybe I'm fussy. I s'pose she'd be an unusually good-looking white woman. I like my ladies darker. Beside an A-number-one sheba, she simply hasn't got 'em."

Clare went, sometimes with Irene and Brian, to parties and dances, and on a few occasions when Irene hadn't been able or inclined to go out, she had gone alone with Brian to some bridge party or benefit dance.

Once in a while she came formally to dine with them. She wasn't, however, in spite of her poise and air of worldliness, the ideal dinner-party guest. Beyond the æsthetic pleasure one got from watching her, she contributed little, sitting for the most part silent, an odd dreaming look in her hypnotic eyes. Though she could for some purpose of her own—the desire to be included in some party being made up to go cabaretting, or an invitation to a dance or a tea—talk fluently and entertainingly.

She was generally liked. She was so friendly and responsive, and so ready to press the sweet food of flattery on all. Nor did she object to appearing a bit pathetic and ill-used, so that people could feel sorry for her. And, no matter how often she came among them, she still remained someone apart, a little mysterious and strange, someone to wonder about and to admire and to pity.

Her visits were undecided and uncertain, being, as they were, dependent on the presence or absence of John Bellew in the city. But she did, once in a while, manage to steal uptown for an afternoon even when he was not away. As time went on without any apparent danger of discovery, even Irene ceased to be perturbed about the possibility of Clare's husband's stumbling on her racial identity.

The daughter, Margery, had been left in Switzerland in school, for Clare and Bellew would be going back in the early spring. In March, Clare thought. "And how I do hate to think of it!" she would say, always with a suggestion of leashed rebellion; "but I can't see how I'm going to get out of it. Jack won't hear of my staying behind. If I could have just a couple of months more in New York, alone I mean, I'd be the happiest thing in the world."

"I imagine you'll be happy enough, once you get away," Irene told her one day when she was bewailing her approaching departure. "Remember, there's Margery. Think how glad you'll be to see her after all this time."

"Children aren't everything," was Clare Kendry's answer to that. "There are other things in the world, though I admit some people don't seem to suspect it." And she laughed, more, it seemed, at some secret joke of her own than at her words.

Irene replied: "You know you don't mean that, Clare. You're only trying to tease me. I know very well that I take being a mother rather seriously. I *am* wrapped up in my boys and the running of my house. I can't help it. And, really, I don't think it's anything to laugh at." And though she was aware of the slight primness in her words and attitude, she had neither power nor wish to efface it.

Clare, suddenly very sober and sweet, said: "You're right. It's no laughing matter. It's shameful of me to tease you, 'Rene. You are so good." And she reached out and gave Irene's hand an affectionate little squeeze. "Don't think," she added, "whatever happens, that I'll ever forget how good you've been to me."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, but you have, you have. It's just that I haven't any proper morals or sense of duty, as you have, that makes me act as I do."

"Now you are talking nonsense."

"But it's true, 'Rene. Can't you realize that I'm not like you a bit? Why, to get the things I want badly enough, I'd do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away. Really, 'Rene, I'm not safe." Her voice as well as the look on her face had a beseeching earnestness that made Irene vaguely uncomfortable.

She said: "I don't believe it. In the first place what you're saying is so utterly, so wickedly wrong. And as for your giving up things—" She stopped, at a loss for an acceptable term to express her opinion of Clare's "having" nature.

But Clare Kendry had begun to cry, audibly, with no effort at restraint, and for no reason that Irene could discover.

Part Three. Finale

ONE

The year was getting on towards its end. October, November had gone. December had come and brought with it a little snow and then a freeze and after that a thaw and some soft pleasant days that had in them a feeling of spring.

It wasn't, this mild weather, a bit Christmasy, Irene Redfield was thinking, as she turned out of Seventh Avenue into her own street. She didn't like it to be warm and springy when it should have been cold and crisp, or

grey and cloudy as if snow was about to fall. The weather, like people, ought to enter into the spirit of the season. Here the holidays were almost upon them, and the streets through which she had come were streaked with rills of muddy water and the sun shone so warmly that children had taken off their hats and scarfs. It was all as soft, as like April, as possible. The kind of weather for Easter. Certainly not for Christmas.

Though, she admitted, reluctantly, she herself didn't feel the proper Christmas spirit this year, either. But that couldn't be helped, it seemed, any more than the weather. She was weary and depressed. And for all her trying, she couldn't be free of that dull, indefinite misery which with increasing tenaciousness had laid hold of her. The morning's aimless wandering through the teeming Harlem streets, long after she had ordered the flowers which had been her excuse for setting out, was but another effort to tear herself loose from it.

She went up the cream stone steps, into the house, and down to the kitchen. There were to be people in to tea. But that, she found, after a few words with Sadie and Zulena, need give her no concern. She was thankful. She didn't want to be bothered. She went upstairs and took off her things and got into bed.

She thought: "Bother those people coming to tea!"

She thought: "If I could only be sure that at bottom it's just Brazil."

She thought: "Whatever it is, if I only knew what it was, I could manage it."

Brian again. Unhappy, restless, withdrawn. And she, who had prided herself on knowing his moods, their causes and their remedies, had found it first unthinkable, and then intolerable, that this, so like and yet so unlike those other spasmodic restlessnesses of his, should be to her incomprehensible and elusive.

He was restless and he was not restless. He was discontented, yet there were times when she felt he was possessed of some intense secret satisfaction, like a cat who had stolen the cream. He was irritable with the boys, especially Junior, for Ted, who seemed to have an uncanny knowledge of his father's periods of off moods, kept out of his way when possible. They got on his nerves, drove him to violent outbursts of temper, very different from his usual gently sarcastic remarks that constituted his idea of discipline for them. On the other hand, with her he was more than customarily considerate and abstemious. And it had been weeks since she had felt the keen edge of his irony.

He was like a man marking time, waiting. But what was he waiting for? It was extraordinary that, after all these years of accurate perception, she now lacked the talent to discover what that appearance of waiting meant. It was the knowledge that, for all her watching, all her patient study, the reason for his humour still eluded her which filled her with foreboding dread. That guarded reserve of his seemed to her unjust, inconsiderate, and alarming. It was as if he had stepped out beyond her reach into some section, strange and walled, where she could not get at him.

She closed her eyes, thinking what a blessing it would be if she could get a little sleep before the boys came in from school. She couldn't, of course, though she was so tired, having had, of late, so many sleepless nights. Nights filled with questionings and premonitions.

But she did sleep—several hours.

She wakened to find Brian standing at her bedside looking down at her, an unfathomable expression in his eyes.

She said: "I must have dropped off to sleep," and watched a slender ghost of his old amused smile pass over his face.

"It's getting on to four," he told her, meaning, she knew, that she was going to be late again.

She fought back the quick answer that rose to her lips and said instead: "I'm getting right up. It was good of you to think to call me." She sat up.

He bowed. "Always the attentive husband, you see."

"Yes indeed. Thank goodness, everything's ready."

"Except you. Oh, and Clare's downstairs."

"Clare! What a nuisance! I didn't ask her. Purposely."

"I see. Might a mere man ask why? Or is the reason so subtly feminine that it wouldn't be understood by him?"

A little of his smile had come back. Irene, who was beginning to shake off some of her depression under his familiar banter, said, almost gaily: "Not at all. It just happens that this party happens to be for Hugh, and that Hugh happens not to care a great deal for Clare; therefore I, who happen to be giving the party, didn't happen to ask her. Nothing could be simpler. Could it?"

"Nothing. It's so simple that I can easily see beyond your simple explanation and surmise that Clare, probably, just never happened to pay Hugh the admiring attention that he happens to consider no more than his just due. Simplest thing in the world."

Irene exclaimed in amazement: "Why, I thought you liked Hugh! You don't, you can't, believe anything so idiotic!"

"Well, Hugh does think he's God, you know."

"That," Irene declared, getting out of bed, "is absolutely not true. He thinks ever so much better of himself than that, as you, who know and have read him, ought to be able to guess. If you remember what a low opinion he has of God, you won't make such a silly mistake."

She went into the closet for her things and, coming back, hung her frock over the back of a chair and placed her shoes on the floor beside it. Then she sat down before her dressing-table.

Brian didn't speak. He continued to stand beside the bed, seeming to look at nothing in particular. Certainly not at her. True, his gaze was on her, but in it there was some quality that made her feel that at that moment she was no more to him than a pane of glass through which he stared. At what? She didn't know, couldn't guess. And this made her uncomfortable. Piqued her.

She said: "It just happens that Hugh prefers intelligent women."

Plainly he was startled. "D'you mean that you think Clare is stupid?" he asked, regarding her with lifted eyebrows, which emphasized the disbelief of his voice.

She wiped the cold cream from her face, before she said: "No, I don't. She isn't stupid. She's intelligent enough in a purely feminine way. Eighteenth-century France would have been a marvellous setting for her, or the old South if she hadn't made the mistake of being born a Negro."

"I see. Intelligent enough to wear a tight bodice and keep bowing swains whispering compliments and retrieving dropped fans. Rather a pretty picture. I take it, though, as slightly feline in its implication."

"Well, then, all I can say is that you take it wrongly. Nobody admires Clare more than I do, for the kind of intelligence she has, as well as for her decorative qualities. But she's not—She isn't—She hasn't—Oh, I can't explain it. Take Bianca, for example, or, to keep to the race, Felise Free-land. Looks *and* brains. Real brains that can hold their own with anybody. Clare has got brains of a sort, the kind that are useful too. Acquisitive, you know. But she'd bore a man like Hugh to suicide. Still, I never thought that even Clare would come to a private party to which she hadn't been asked. But, it's like her."

For a minute there was silence. She completed the bright red arch of her full lips. Brian moved towards the door. His hand was on the knob. He said: "I'm sorry, Irene. It's my fault entirely. She seemed so hurt at being left out that I told her I was sure you'd forgotten and to just come along."

Irene cried out: "But, Brian, I—" and stopped, amazed at the fierce anger that had blazed up in her.

Brian's head came round with a jerk. His brows lifted in an odd surprise.

Her voice, she realized, *had* gone queer. But she had an instinctive feeling that it hadn't been the whole cause of his attitude. And that little straightening motion of the shoulders. Hadn't it been like that of a man drawing himself up to receive a blow? Her fright was like a scarlet spear of terror leaping at her heart.

Clare Kendry! So that was it! Impossible. It couldn't be.

In the mirror before her she saw that he was still regarding her with that air of slight amazement. She dropped her eyes to the jars and bottles on the table and began to fumble among them with hands whose fingers shook slightly.

"Of course," she said carefully, "I'm glad you did. And in spite of my recent remarks, Clare does add to any party. She's so easy on the eyes."

When she looked again, the surprise had gone from his face and the expectancy from his bearing.

"Yes," he agreed. "Well, I guess I'll run along. One of us ought to be down, I s'pose."

"You're right. One of us ought to." She was surprised that it was in her normal tones she spoke, caught as she was by the heart since that dull indefinite fear had grown suddenly into sharp panic. "I'll be down before you know it," she promised.

"All right." But he still lingered. "You're quite certain. You don't mind my asking her? Not awfully, I mean? I see now that I ought to have spoken to you. Trust women to have their reasons for everything."

She made a little pretence at looking at him, managed a tiny smile, and turned away. Clare! How sickening!

"Yes, don't they?" she said, striving to keep her voice casual. Within her she felt a hardness from feeling, not absent, but repressed. And that hardness was rising, swelling. Why didn't he go? Why didn't he?

He had opened the door at last. "You won't be long?" he asked, admonished.

She shook her head, unable to speak, for there was a choking in her throat, and the confusion in her mind was like the beating of wings. Behind her she heard the gentle impact of the door as it closed behind him, and knew that he had gone. Down to Clare.

For a long minute she sat in strained stiffness. The face in the mirror vanished from her sight, blotted out by this thing which had so suddenly flashed across her groping mind. Impossible for her to put it immediately into words or give it outline, for, prompted by some impulse of self-protection, she recoiled from exact expression.

She closed her unseeing eyes and clenched her fists. She tried not to cry. But her lips tightened and no effort could check the hot tears of rage and shame that sprang into her eyes and flowed down her cheeks; so she laid her face in her arms and wept silently.

When she was sure that she had done crying, she wiped away the warm remaining tears and got up. After bathing her swollen face in cold, refreshing water and carefully applying a stinging splash of toilet water, she went back to the mirror and regarded herself gravely. Satisfied that there lingered no betraying evidence of weeping, she dusted a little powder on her dark-white face and again examined it carefully, and with a kind of ridiculous contempt.

"I do think," she confided to it, "that you've been something—oh, very much—of a damned fool."

Downstairs the ritual of tea gave her some busy moments, and that, she decided, was a blessing. She wanted no empty spaces of time in which her mind would immediately return to that horror which she had not yet gathered sufficient courage to face. Pouring tea properly and nicely was an occupation that required a kind of well-balanced attention.

In the room beyond, a clock chimed. A single sound. Fifteen minutes past five o'clock. That was all! And yet in the short space of half an hour all of life had changed, lost its colour, its vividness, its whole meaning. No, she reflected, it wasn't that that had happened. Life about her, apparently, went on exactly as before.

"Oh, Mrs. Runyon. . . . So nice to see you. . . . Two? . . . Really? . . . How exciting! . . . Yes, I think Tuesday's all right. . . ."

Yes, life went on precisely as before. It was only she that had changed. Knowing, stumbling on this thing, had changed her. It was as if in a house long dim, a match had been struck, showing ghastly shapes where had been only blurred shadows.

Chatter, chatter, chatter. Someone asked her a question. She glanced up with what she felt was a rigid smile.

"Yes . . . Brian picked it up last winter in Haiti. Terribly weird, isn't it? . . . It is rather marvellous in its own hideous way. . . . Practically nothing, I believe. A few cents. . . ."

Hideous. A great weariness came over her. Even the small exertion of pouring golden tea into thin old cups seemed almost too much for her. She went on pouring. Made repetitions of her smile. Answered questions. Manufactured conversation. She thought: "I feel like the oldest person in the world with the longest stretch of life before me."

“Josephine Baker⁸ . . . No. I’ve never seen her. . . . Well, she might have been in *Shuffle Along*⁹ when I saw it, but if she was, I don’t remember her. . . . Oh, but you’re wrong! . . . I do think Ethel Waters¹ is awfully good. . . .”

There were the familiar little tinkling sounds of spoons striking against frail cups, the soft running sounds of inconsequential talk, punctuated now and then with laughter. In irregular small groups, disintegrating, coalescing, striking just the right note of disharmony, disorder in the big room, which Irene had furnished with a sparingness that was almost chaste, moved the guests with that slight familiarity that makes a party a success. On the floor and the walls the sinking sun threw long, fantastic shadows.

So like many other tea-parties she had had. So unlike any of those others. But she mustn’t think yet. Time enough for that after. All the time in the world. She had a second’s flashing knowledge of what those words might portend. Time with Brian. Time without him. It was gone, leaving in its place an almost uncontrollable impulse to laugh, to scream, to hurl things about. She wanted, suddenly, to shock people, to hurt them, to make them notice her, to be aware of her suffering.

“Hello, Dave. . . . Felise. . . . Really your clothes are the despair of half the women in Harlem. . . . How do you do it? . . . Lovely, is it Worth or Lanvin?² . . . Oh, a mere Babani.³ . . .”

“Merely that,” Felise Freeland acknowledged. “Come out of it, Irene, whatever it is. You look like the second grave-digger.”⁴

“Thanks, for the hint, Felise. I’m not feeling quite up to par. The weather, I guess.”

“Buy yourself an expensive new frock, child. It always helps. Any time this child gets the blues, it means money out of Dave’s pocket. How’re those boys of yours?”

The boys! For once she’d forgotten them.

They were, she told Felise, very well. Felise mumbled something about that being awfully nice, and said she’d have to fly, because for a wonder she saw Mrs. Bellew sitting by herself, “and I’ve been trying to get her alone all afternoon. I want her for a party. Isn’t she stunning today?”

Clare was. Irene couldn’t remember ever having seen her look better. She was wearing a superlatively simple cinnamon-brown frock which brought out all her vivid beauty, and a little golden bowl of a hat. Around her neck hung a string of amber beads that would easily have made six or eight like one Irene owned. Yes, she was stunning.

The ripple of talk flowed on. The fire roared. The shadows stretched longer.

Across the room was Hugh. He wasn’t, Irene hoped, being too bored. He seemed as he always did, a bit aloof, a little amused, and somewhat weary. And as usual he was hovering before the book-shelves. But he was not, she noticed, looking at the book he had taken down. Instead, his dull amber eyes were held by something across the room. They were a little scornful. Well, Hugh had never cared for Clare Kendry. For a minute Irene hesitated, then

8. Singer and dancer (1906–1975), whose fame flowered when she moved from the United States to Paris.

9. An all-black musical that was a Broadway hit in the early 1920s and launched Baker’s career.

1. Blues singer (1896–1977), who was one of the most celebrated performers to emerge from the

Harlem Renaissance.

2. Classic Parisian houses of high fashion.

3. A fashion house known for exotic designs imported to Paris from China, Japan, the Middle East, Africa, and London.

4. The second of two unnamed minor characters in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (5.1).

turned her head, though she knew what it was that held Hugh's gaze. Clare, who had suddenly clouded all her days. Brian, the father of Ted and Junior.

Clare's ivory face was what it always was, beautiful and caressing. Or maybe today a little masked. Unrevealing. Unaltered and undisturbed by any emotion within or without. Brian's seemed to Irene to be pitifully bare. Or was it too as it always was? That half-effaced seeking look, did he always have that? Queer, that now she didn't know, couldn't recall. Then she saw him smile, and the smile made his face all eager and shining. Impelled by some inner urge of loyalty to herself, she glanced away. But only for a moment. And when she turned towards them again, she thought that the look on his face was the most melancholy and yet the most scoffing that she had ever seen upon it.

In the next quarter of an hour she promised herself to Bianca Wentworth in Sixty-second Street, Jane Tenant at Seventh Avenue and a Hundred and Fiftieth Street, and the Dashields in Brooklyn⁵ for dinner all on the same evening and at almost the same hour.

Oh well, what did it matter? She had no thoughts at all now, and all she felt was a great fatigue. Before her tired eyes Clare Kendry was talking to Dave Freeland. Scraps of their conversation, in Clare's husky voice, floated over to her: ". . . always admired you . . . so much about you long ago . . . everybody says so . . . no one but you. . . ." And more of the same. The man hung rapt on her words, though he was the husband of Felise Freeland, and the author of novels that revealed a man of perception and a devastating irony. And he fell for such pish-posh! And all because Clare had a trick of sliding down ivory lids over astonishing black eyes and then lifting them suddenly and turning on a caressing smile. Men like Dave Freeland fell for it. And Brian.

Her mental and physical languor receded. Brian. What did it mean? How would it affect her and the boys? The boys! She had a surge of relief. It ebbed, vanished. A feeling of absolute unimportance followed. Actually, she didn't count. She was, to him, only the mother of his sons. That was all. Alone she was nothing. Worse. An obstacle.

Rage boiled up in her.

There was a slight crash. On the floor at her feet lay the shattered cup. Dark stains dotted the bright rug. Spread. The chatter stopped. Went on. Before her, Zulena gathered up the white fragments.

As from a distance Hugh Wentworth's clipt voice came to her, though he was, she was aware, somehow miraculously at her side. "Sorry," he apologized. "Must have pushed you. Clumsy of me. Don't tell me it's priceless and irreplaceable."

It hurt. Dear God! How the thing hurt! But she couldn't think of that now. Not with Hugh sitting there mumbling apologies and lies. The significance of his words, the power of his discernment, stirred in her a sense of caution. Her pride revolted. Damn Hugh! Something would have to be done about him. Now. She couldn't, it seemed, help his knowing. It was too late for that. But she could and would keep him from knowing that she knew. She could, she would bear it. She'd have to. There were the boys. Her whole

5. The fast-growing, ethnically diverse industrial city had become a borough of Manhattan in 1898. Sixty-second Street traverses the Upper

West and Upper East Side neighborhoods of Manhattan. One Hundred Fiftieth Street lies in Harlem.

body went taut. In that second she saw that she could bear anything, but only if no one knew that she had anything to bear. It hurt. It frightened her, but she could bear it.

She turned to Hugh. Shook her head. Raised innocent dark eyes to his concerned pale ones. "Oh, no," she protested, "you didn't push me. Cross your heart, hope to die, and I'll tell you how it happened."

"Done!"

"Did you notice that cup? Well, you're lucky. It was the ugliest thing that your ancestors, the charming Confederates ever owned. I've forgotten how many thousands of years ago it was that Brian's great-great-grand-uncle owned it. But it has, or had, a good old hoary history. It was brought North by way of the subway. Oh, all right! Be English if you want to and call it the underground. What I'm coming to is the fact that I've never figured out a way of getting rid of it until about five minutes ago. I had an inspiration. I had only to break it, and I was rid of it for ever. So simple! And I'd never thought of it before."

Hugh nodded and his frosty smile spread over his features. Had she convinced him?

"Still," she went on with a little laugh that didn't, she was sure, sound the least bit forced, "I'm perfectly willing for you to take the blame and admit that you pushed me at the wrong moment. What are friends for, if not to help bear our sins? Brian will certainly be told that it was your fault.

"More tea, Clare? . . . I haven't had a minute with you. . . . Yes, it is a nice party. . . . You'll stay to dinner, I hope. . . . Oh, too bad! . . . I'll be alone with the boys. . . . They'll be sorry. Brian's got a medical meeting, or something. . . . Nice frock you're wearing. . . . Thanks. . . . Well, good-bye; see you soon, I hope."

The clock chimed. One. Two, Three. Four. Five. Six. Was it, could it be, only a little over an hour since she had come down to tea? One little hour.

"Must you go? . . . Good-bye. . . . Thank you so much. . . . So nice to see you. . . . Yes, Wednesday. . . . My love to Madge. . . . Sorry, but I'm filled up for Tuesday. . . . Oh, really? . . . Yes. . . . Good-bye. . . . Good-bye. . . ."

It hurt. It hurt like hell. But it didn't matter, if no one knew. If everything could go on as before. If the boys were safe.

It did hurt.

But it didn't matter.

TWO

But it did matter. It mattered more than anything had ever mattered before.

What bitterness! That the one fear, the one uncertainty, that she had felt, Brian's ache to go somewhere else, should have dwindled to a childish triviality! And with it the quality of the courage and resolution with which she had met it. From the visions and dangers which she now perceived she shrank away. For them she had no remedy or courage. Desperately she tried to shut out the knowledge from which had risen this turmoil, which she had no power to moderate or still, within her. And half succeeded.

For, she reasoned, what was there, what had there been, to show that she was even half correct in her tormenting notion? Nothing. She had seen nothing, heard nothing. She had no facts or proofs. She was only making herself unutterably wretched by an unfounded suspicion. It had been a case of looking for trouble and finding it in good measure. Merely that.

With this self-assurance that she had no real knowledge, she redoubled her efforts to drive out of her mind the distressing thought of faiths broken and trusts betrayed which every mental vision of Clare, of Brian, brought with them. She could not, she would not, go again through the tearing agony that lay just behind her.

She must, she told herself, be fair. In all their married life she had had no slightest cause to suspect her husband of any infidelity, of any serious flirtation even. If—and she doubted it—he had had his hours of outside erratic conduct, they were unknown to her. Why begin now to assume them? And on nothing more concrete than an idea that had leapt into her mind because he had told her that he had invited a friend, a friend of hers, to a party in his own house. And at a time when she had been, it was likely, more asleep than awake. How could she without anything done or said, or left undone or unsaid, so easily believe him guilty? How be so ready to renounce all confidence in the worth of their life together?

And if, perchance, there were some small something—well, what could it mean? Nothing. There were the boys. There was John Bellew. The thought of these three gave her some slight relief. But she did not look the future in the face. She wanted to feel nothing, to think nothing; simply to believe that it was all silly invention on her part. Yet she could not. Not quite.

Christmas, with its unreality, its hectic rush, its false gaiety, came and went. Irene was thankful for the confused unrest of the season. Its irksomeness, its crowds, its inane and insincere repetitions of genialities, pushed between her and the contemplation of her growing unhappiness.

She was thankful, too, for the continued absence of Clare, who, John Bellew having returned from a long stay in Canada, had withdrawn to that other life of hers, remote and inaccessible. But beating against the walled prison of Irene's thoughts was the shunned fancy that, though absent, Clare Kendry was still present, that she was close.

Brian, too, had withdrawn. The house contained his outward self and his belongings. He came and went with his usual noiseless irregularity. He sat across from her at table. He slept in his room next to hers at night. But he was remote and inaccessible. No use pretending that he was happy, that things were the same as they had always been. He wasn't and they weren't. However, she assured herself, it needn't necessarily be because of anything that involved Clare. It was, it must be, another manifestation of the old longing.

But she did wish it were spring, March, so that Clare would be sailing, out of her life and Brian's. Though she had come almost to believe that there was nothing but generous friendship between those two, she was very tired of Clare Kendry. She wanted to be free of her, and of her furtive

comings and goings. If something would only happen, something that would make John Bellew decide on an earlier departure, or that would remove Clare. Anything. She didn't care what. Not even if it were that Clare's Margery were ill, or dying. Not even if Bellew should discover—

She drew a quick, sharp breath. And for a long time sat staring down at the hands in her lap. Strange, she had not before realized how easily she could put Clare out of her life! She had only to tell John Bellew that his wife—No. Not that! But if he should somehow learn of these Harlem visits—Why should she hesitate? Why spare Clare?

But she shrank away from the idea of telling that man, Clare Kendry's white husband, anything that would lead him to suspect that his wife was a Negro. Nor could she write it, or telephone it, or tell it to someone else who would tell him.

She was caught between two allegiances, different, yet the same. Herself. Her race. Race! The thing that bound and suffocated her. Whatever steps she took, or if she took none at all, something would be crushed. A person or the race. Clare, herself, or the race. Or, it might be, all three. Nothing, she imagined, was ever more completely sardonic.

Sitting alone in the quiet living-room in the pleasant fire-light, Irene Redfield wished, for the first time in her life, that she had not been born a Negro. For the first time she suffered and rebelled because she was unable to disregard the burden of race. It was, she cried silently, enough to suffer as a woman, an individual, on one's own account, without having to suffer for the race as well. It was a brutality, and undeserved. Surely, no other people so cursed as Ham's dark children.

Nevertheless, her weakness, her shrinking, her own inability to compass the thing, did not prevent her from wishing fervently that, in some way with which she had no concern, John Bellew would discover, not that his wife had a touch of the tar-brush—Irene didn't want that—but that she was spending all the time that he was out of the city in black Harlem. Only that. It would be enough to rid her forever of Clare Kendry.

THREE

As if in answer to her wish, the very next day Irene came face to face with Bellew.

She had gone downtown with Felise Freeland to shop. The day was an exceptionally cold one, with a strong wind that had whipped a dusky red into Felise's smooth golden cheeks and driven moisture into Irene's soft brown eyes.

Clinging to each other, with heads bent against the wind, they turned out of the Avenue into Fifty-seventh Street.⁶ A sudden bluster flung them around the corner with unexpected quickness and they collided with a man.

"Pardon," Irene begged laughingly, and looked up into the face of Clare Kendry's husband.

"Mrs. Redfield!"

His hat came off. He held out his hand, smiling genially.

6. In the shopping district of midtown Manhattan.

But the smile faded at once. Surprise, incredulity, and—was it understanding?—passed over his features.

He had, Irene knew, become conscious of Felise, golden, with curly black Negro hair, whose arm was still linked in her own. She was sure, now, of the understanding in his face, as he looked at her again and then back at Felise. And displeasure.

He didn't, however, withdraw his outstretched hand. Not at once.

But Irene didn't take it. Instinctively, in the first glance of recognition, her face had become a mask. Now she turned on him a totally uncomprehending look, a bit questioning. Seeing that he still stood with hand outstretched, she gave him the cool appraising stare which she reserved for mashers, and drew Felise on.

Felise drawled: "Aha! Been 'passing,' have you? Well, I've queered that."

"Yes, I'm afraid you have."

"Why, Irene Redfield! You sound as if you cared terribly. I'm sorry."

"I do, but not for the reason you think. I don't believe I've ever gone native⁷ in my life except for the sake of convenience, restaurants, theatre tickets, and things like that. Never socially I mean, except once. You've just passed the only person that I've ever met disguised as a white woman."

"Awfully sorry. Be sure your sin will find you out and all that. Tell me about it."

"I'd like to. It would amuse you. But I can't."

Felise's laughter was as languidly nonchalant as her cool voice. "Can it possible that the honest Irene has—Oh, do look at that coat! There. The red one. Isn't it a dream?"

Irene was thinking: "I had my chance and didn't take it. I had only to speak and to introduce him to Felise with the casual remark that he was Clare's husband. Only that. Fool. Fool." That instinctive loyalty to a race. Why couldn't she get free of it? Why should it include Clare? Clare, who'd shown little enough consideration for her, and hers. What she felt was not so much resentment as a dull despair because she could not change herself in this respect, could not separate individuals from the race, herself from Clare Kendry.

"Let's go home, Felise. I'm so tired I could drop."

"Why, we haven't done half the things we planned."

"I know, but it's too cold to be running all over town. But you stay down if you want to."

"I think I'll do that, if you don't mind."

And now another problem confronted Irene. She must tell Clare of this meeting. Warn her. But how? She hadn't seen her for days. Writing and telephoning were equally unsafe. And even if it was possible to get in touch with her, what good would it do? If Bellew hadn't concluded that he'd made a mistake, if he was certain of her identity—and he was nobody's fool—telling Clare wouldn't avert the results of the encounter. Besides, it was too late. Whatever was in store for Clare Kendry had already overtaken her.

7. Passed for white; an ironic reversal of the phrase's usual sense of a white person adopting "native" ways of life.

Irene was conscious of a feeling of relieved thankfulness at the thought that she was probably rid of Clare, and without having lifted a finger or uttered one word.

But she did mean to tell Brian about meeting John Bellew.

But that, it seemed, was impossible. Strange. Something held her back. Each time she was on the verge of saying: "I ran into Clare's husband on the street downtown today. I'm sure he recognized me, and Felise was with me," she failed to speak. It sounded too much like the warning she wanted it to be. Not even in the presence of the boys at dinner could she make the bare statement.

The evening dragged. At last she said good-night and went upstairs, the words unsaid.

She thought: "Why didn't I tell him? Why didn't I? If trouble comes from this, I'll never forgive myself. I'll tell him when he comes up."

She took up a book, but she could not read, so oppressed was she by a nameless foreboding.

What if Bellew should divorce Clare? Could he? There was the Rhineland case.⁸ But in France, in Paris, such things were very easy. If he divorced her—If Clare were free—But of all the things that could happen, that was the one she did not want. She must get her mind away from that possibility. She must.

Then came a thought which she tried to drive away. If Clare should die! Then—Oh, it was vile! To think, yes, to wish that! She felt faint and sick. But the thought stayed with her. She could not get rid of it.

She heard the outer door open. Close. Brian had gone out. She turned her face into her pillow to cry. But no tears came.

She lay there awake, thinking of things past. Of her courtship and marriage and Junior's birth. Of the time they had bought the house in which they had lived so long and so happily. Of the time Ted had passed his pneumonia crisis and they knew he would live. And of other sweet painful memories that would never come again.

Above everything else she had wanted, had striven, to keep undisturbed the pleasant routine of her life. And now Clare Kendry had come into it, and with her the menace of impermanence.

"Dear God," she prayed, "make March come quickly."

By and by she slept.

FOUR

The next morning brought with it a snow-storm lasted throughout the day.

After a breakfast, which had been eaten almost in silence and which she was relieved to have done with, Irene Redfield lingered for a little while in the downstairs hall, looking out at the soft flakes fluttering down. She was

8. *Rhineland v. Rhineland* was a notorious case of 1925 in which Leonard Rhineland, a member of a wealthy New York family, sued his wife, Alice Jones Rhineland, for an annulment of their marriage on the grounds that she had concealed from him her mixed-race ancestry.

After a trial that included examining parts of her body in private—her arms, shoulders, and lower legs—the jury found in Alice's favor, concluding that she had not hidden her race and that Leonard had married her knowing that she was "colored."

watching them immediately fill some ugly irregular gaps left by the feet of hurrying pedestrians when Zulena came to her, saying: "The telephone, Mrs. Redfield. It's Mrs. Bellew."

"Take the message, Zulena, please."

Though she continued to stare out of the window, Irene saw nothing now, stabbed as she was by fear—and hope. Had anything happened between Clare and Bellew? And if so, what? And was she to be freed at last from the aching anxiety of the past weeks? Or was there to be more, and worse? She had a wrestling moment, in which it seemed that she must rush after Zulena and hear for herself what it was that Clare had to say. But she waited.

Zulena, when she came back, said: "She says, ma'am, that she'll be able to go to Mrs. Freeland's tonight. She'll be here some time between eight and nine."

"Thank you, Zulena."

The day dragged on to its end.

At dinner Brian spoke bitterly of a lynching that he had been reading about in the evening paper.

"Dad, why is it that they only lynch coloured people?"⁹ Ted asked.

"Because they hate 'em, son."

"Brian!" Irene's voice was a plea and a rebuke.

Ted said: "Oh! And why do they hate 'em?"

"Because they are afraid of them."

"But what makes them afraid of 'em?"

"Because—"

"Brian!"

"It seems, son, that is a subject we can't go into at the moment without distressing the ladies of our family," he told the boy with mock seriousness, "but we'll take it up some time when we're alone together."

Ted nodded in his engaging grave way. "I see. Maybe we can talk about it tomorrow on the way to school."

"That'll be fine."

"Brian!"

"Mother," Junior remarked, "that's the third time you've said 'Brian' like that."

"But not the last, Junior, never you fear," his father told him.

After the boys had gone up to their own floor, Irene said suavely: "I do wish, Brian, that you wouldn't talk about lynching before Ted and Junior. It was really inexcusable for you to bring up a thing like that at dinner. There'll be time enough for them to learn about such horrible things when they're older."

"You're absolutely wrong! If, as you're so determined, they've got to live in this damned country, they'd better find out what sort of thing they're up

9. Murder by mob, mostly of black men, remained widespread in the United States during the early 20th century, in the North as well as the South. Major anti-lynching campaigns

were mounted during this period by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and networks of African American women's clubs.

against as soon as possible. The earlier they learn it, the better prepared they'll be."

"I don't agree. I want their childhood to be happy and as free from the knowledge of such things as it possibly can be."

"Very laudable," was Brian's sarcastic answer. "Very laudable indeed, all things considered. But can it?"

"Certainly it can. If you'll only do your part."

"Stuff! You know as well as I do, Irene, that it can't. What was the use of our trying to keep them from learning the word 'nigger' and its connotation? They found out, didn't they? And how? Because somebody called Junior a dirty nigger."

"Just the same you're not to talk to them about the race problem. I won't have it."

They glared at each other.

"I tell you, Irene, they've got to know these things, and it might as well be now as later."

"They do not!" she insisted, forcing back the tears of anger that were threatening to fall.

Brian growled: "I can't understand how anybody as intelligent as you like to think you are can show evidences of such stupidity." He looked at her in a puzzled harassed way.

"Stupid!" she cried. "Is it stupid to want my children to be happy?" Her lips were quivering.

"At the expense of proper preparation for life and their future happiness, yes. And I'd feel I hadn't done my duty by them if I didn't give them some inkling of what's before them. It's the least I can do. I wanted to get them out of this hellish place years ago. You wouldn't let me. I gave up the idea, because you objected. Don't expect me to give up everything."

Under the lash of his words she was silent. Before any answer came to her, he had turned and gone from the room.

Sitting there alone in the forsaken dining-room, unconsciously pressing the hands lying in her lap, tightly together, she was seized by a convulsion of shivering. For, to her, there had been something ominous in the scene that she had just had with her husband. Over and over in her mind his last words: "Don't expect me to give up everything," repeated themselves. What had they meant? What could they mean? Clare Kendry?

Surely, she was going mad with fear and suspicion. She must not work herself up. She must not! Where were all the self-control, the common sense, that she was so proud of? Now, if ever, was the time for it.

Clare would soon be there. She must hurry or she would be late again, and those two would wait for her downstairs together, as they had done so often since that first time, which now seemed so long ago. Had it been really only last October? Why, she felt years, not months, older.

Drearly she rose from her chair and went upstairs to set about the business of dressing to go out when she would far rather have remained at home. During the process she wondered, for the hundredth time, why she hadn't told Brian about herself and Felise running into Bellew the day before, and for the hundredth time she turned away from acknowledging to herself the real reason for keeping back the information.

When Clare arrived, radiant in a shining red gown, Irene had not finished dressing. But her smile scarcely hesitated as she greeted her, saying: "I always seem to keep C. P. time,¹ don't I? We hardly expected you to be able to come. Felise will be pleased. How nice you look."

Clare kissed a bare shoulder, seeming not to notice a slight shrinking.

"I hadn't an idea in the world, myself, that I'd be able to make it; but Jack had to run down to Philadelphia unexpectedly. So here I am."

Irene looked up, a flood of speech on her lips. "Philadelphia. That's not very far, is it? Clare, I—?"

She stopped, one of her hands clutching the side of her stool, the other lying clenched on the dressing-table. Why didn't she go on and tell Clare about meeting Bellew? Why couldn't she?

But Clare didn't notice the unfinished sentence. She laughed and said lightly: "It's far enough for me. Anywhere, away from me, is far enough. I'm not particular."

Irene passed a hand over her eyes to shut out the accusing face in the glass before her. With one corner of her mind she wondered how long she had looked like that, drawn and haggard and—yes, frightened. Or was it only imagination?

"Clare," she asked, "have you ever seriously thought what it would mean if he should find you out?"

"Yes."

"Oh! You have! And what you'd do in that case?"

"Yes." And having said it, Clare Kendry smiled quickly, a smile that came and went like a flash, leaving untouched the gravity of her face.

That smile and the quiet resolution of that one word, "yes," filled Irene with a primitive paralysing dread. Her hands were numb, her feet like ice, her heart like a stone weight. Even her tongue was like a heavy dying thing. There were long spaces between the words as she asked: "And what should you do?"

Clare, who was sunk in a deep chair, her eyes far away, seemed wrapped in some pleasant impenetrable reflection. To Irene, sitting expectantly upright, it was an interminable time before she dragged herself back to the present to say calmly: "I'd do what I want to do more than anything else right now. I'd come up here to live. Harlem, I mean. Then I'd be able to do as I please, when I please."

Irene leaned forward, cold and tense. "And what about Margery?" Her voice was a strained whisper.

"Margery?" Clare repeated, letting her eyes flutter over Irene's concerned face. "Just this, 'Rene. If it wasn't for her, I'd do it anyway. She's all that holds me back. But if Jack finds out, if our marriage is broken, that lets me out. Doesn't it?"

Her gentle resigned tone, her air of innocent candour, appeared, to her listener, spurious. A conviction that the words were intended as a warning took possession of Irene. She remembered that Clare Kendry had always seemed to know what other people were thinking. Her compressed lips grew firm and obdurate. Well, she wouldn't know this time.

1. I.e., colored people's time, an idiom stereotyping African Americans as habitually late.

She said: "Do go downstairs and talk to Brian. He's got a mad on."

Though she had determined that Clare should not get at her thoughts and fears, the words had sprung, unthought of, to her lips. It was as if they had come from some outer layer of callousness that had no relation to her tortured heart. And they had been, she realized, precisely the right words for her purpose.

For as Clare got up and went out, she saw that that arrangement was as good as her first plan of keeping her waiting up there while she dressed—or better. She would only have hindered and rasped her. And what matter if those two spent one hour, more or less, alone together, one or many, now that everything had happened between them?

Ah! The first time that she had allowed herself to admit to herself that everything had happened, had not forced herself to believe, to hope, that nothing irrevocable had been consummated! Well, it had happened. She knew it, and knew that she knew it.

She was surprised that, having thought the thought, conceded the fact, she was no more hurt, cared no more, than during her previous frenzied endeavours to escape it. And this absence of acute, unbearable pain seemed to her unjust, as if she had been denied some exquisite solace of suffering which the full acknowledgment should have given her.

Was it, perhaps, that she had endured all that a woman could endure of tormenting humiliation and fear? Or was it that she lacked the capacity for the acme of suffering? "No, no!" she denied fiercely. "I'm human like everybody else. It's just that I'm so tired, so worn out, I can't feel any more." But she did not really believe that.

Security. Was it just a word? If not, then was it only by the sacrifice of other things, happiness, love, or some wild ecstasy that she had never known, that it could be obtained? And did too much striving, too much faith in safety and permanence, unfit one for these other things?

Irene didn't know, couldn't decide, though for a long time she sat questioning and trying to understand. Yet all the while, in spite of her searchings and feeling of frustration, she was aware that, to her, security was the most important and desired thing in life. Not for any of the others, or for all of them, would she exchange it. She wanted only to be tranquil. Only, unmolested, to be allowed to direct for their own best good the lives of her sons and her husband.

Now that she had relieved herself of what was almost like a guilty knowledge, admitted that which by some sixth sense she had long known, she could again reach out for plans. Could think again of ways to keep Brian by her side, and in New York. For she would not go to Brazil. She belonged in this land of rising towers. She was an American. She grew from this soil, and she would not be uprooted. Not even because of Clare Kendry, or a hundred Clare Kendrys.

Brian, too, belonged here. His duty was to her and to his boys.

Strange, that she couldn't now be sure that she had ever truly known love. Not even for Brian. He was her husband and the father of her sons. But was he anything more? Had she ever wanted or tried for more? In that hour she thought not.

Nevertheless, she meant to keep him. Her freshly painted lips narrowed to a thin straight line. True, she had left off trying to believe that he and

Clare loved and yet did not love, but she still intended to hold fast to the outer shell of her marriage, to keep her life fixed, certain. Brought to the edge of distasteful reality, her fastidious nature did not recoil. Better, far better, to share him than to lose him completely. Oh, she could close her eyes, if need be. She could bear it. She could bear anything. And there was March ahead. March and the departure of Clare.

Horribly clear, she could now see the reason for her instinct to withhold—omit, rather—her news of the encounter with Bellew. If Clare was freed, anything might happen.

She paused in her dressing, seeing with perfect clearness that dark truth which she had from that first October afternoon felt about Clare Kendry and of which Clare herself had once warned her—that she got the things she wanted because she met the great condition of conquest, sacrifice. If she wanted Brian, Clare wouldn't revolt from the lack of money or place. It was as she had said, only Margery kept her from throwing all that away. And if things were taken out of her hands—Even if she was only alarmed, only suspected that such a thing was about to occur, anything might happen. Anything.

No! At all costs, Clare was not to know of that meeting with Bellew. Nor was Brian. It would only weaken her own power to keep him.

They would never know from her that he was on his way to suspecting the truth about his wife. And she would do anything, risk anything, to prevent him from finding out that truth. How fortunate that she had obeyed her instinct and omitted to recognize Bellew!

“Ever go up to the sixth floor, Clare?” Brian asked as he stopped the car and got out to open the door for them.

“Why, of course! We're on the seventeenth.”

“I mean, did you ever go up by nigger-power?”²

“That's good!” Clare laughed. “Ask 'Rene. My father was a janitor, you know, in the good old days before every ramshackle flat had its elevator. But you can't mean we've got to walk up? Not here!”

“Yes, here. And Felise lives at the very top,” Irene told her.

“What on earth for?”

“I believe she claims it discourages the casual visitor.”

“And she's probably right. Hard on herself, though.”

Brian said “Yes, a bit. But she says she'd rather be dead than bored.”

“Oh, a garden! And how lovely with that undisturbed snow!”

“Yes, isn't it? But keep to the walk with those foolish thin shoes. You too, Irene.”

Irene walked beside them on the cleared cement path that split the whiteness of the courtyard garden. She felt a something in the air, something that had been between those two and would be again. It was like a live thing pressing against her. In a quick furtive glance she saw Clare clinging to Brian's other arm. She was looking at him with that provocative upward glance of hers, and his eyes were fastened on her face with what seemed to Irene an expression of wistful eagerness.

2. On foot.

"It's this entrance, I believe," she informed them in quite her ordinary voice.

"Mind," Brian told Clare, "you don't fall by the wayside before the fourth floor. They absolutely refuse to carry anyone up more than the last two flights."

"Don't be silly!" Irene snapped.

The party began gaily.

Dave Freeland was at his best, brilliant, crystal clear, and sparkling. Felise, too, was amusing, and not so sarcastic as usual, because she liked the dozen or so guests that dotted the long, untidy living-room. Brian was witty, though, Irene noted, his remarks were somewhat more barbed than was customary even with him. And there was Ralph Hazelton, throwing nonsensical shining things into the pool of talk, which the others, even Clare, picked up and flung back with fresh adornment.

Only Irene wasn't merry. She sat almost silent, smiling now and then, that she might appear amused.

"What's the matter, Irene?" someone asked. "Taken a vow never to laugh, or something? You're as sober as a judge."

"No. It's simply that the rest of you are so clever that I'm speechless, absolutely stunned."

"No wonder," Dave Freeland remarked, "that you're on the verge of tears. You haven't a drink. What'll you take?"

"Thanks. If I must take something, make it a glass of ginger-ale and three drops of Scotch. The Scotch first, please. Then the ice, then the ginger ale."

"Heavens! Don't attempt to mix that yourself, Dave darling. Have the butler in," Felise mocked.

"Yes, do. And the footman." Irene laughed a little, then said: "It seems dreadfully warm in here. Mind if I open this window?" With that she pushed open one of the long casement-windows³ of which the Freelands were so proud.

It had stopped snowing some two or three hours back. The moon was just rising, and far behind the tall buildings a few stars were creeping out. Irene finished her cigarette and threw it out, watching the tiny spark drop slowly down to the white ground below.

Someone in the room had turned on the phonograph. Or was it the radio? She didn't know which she disliked more. And nobody was listening to its blare. The talking, the laughter never for a minute ceased. Why must they have more noise?

Dave came with her drink. "You ought not," he told her, "to stand there like that. You'll take cold. Come along and talk to me, or listen to me gabble." Taking her arm, he led her across the room. They had just found seats when the door-bell rang and Felise called over to him to go and answer it.

In the next moment Irene heard his voice in the hall, carelessly polite: "Your wife? Sorry. I'm afraid you're wrong. Perhaps next—"

3. Hinged windows that typically open outward.

Then the roar of John Bellew's voice above all the other noises of the room: "I'm *not* wrong! I've been to the Redfields and I know she's with them. You'd better stand out of my way and save yourself trouble in the end."

"What is it, Dave?" Felise ran out to the door.

And so did Brian. Irene heard him saying: "I'm Redfield. What the devil's the matter with you?"

But Bellew didn't heed him. He pushed past them all into the room and strode towards Clare. They all looked at her as she got up from her chair, backing a little from his approach.

"So you're a nigger, a damned dirty nigger!" His voice was a snarl and a moan, an expression of rage and of pain.

Everything was in confusion. The men had sprung forward. Felise had leapt between them and Bellew. She said quickly: "Careful. You're the only white man here." And the silver chill of her voice, as well as her words, was a warning.

Clare stood at the window, as composed as if everyone were not staring at her in curiosity and wonder, as if the whole structure of her life were not lying in fragments before her. She seemed unaware of any danger or uncaring. There was even a faint smile on her full, red lips, and in her shining eyes.

It was that smile that maddened Irene. She ran across the room, her terror tinged with ferocity, and laid a hand on Clare's bare arm. One thought possessed her. She couldn't have Clare Kendry cast aside by Bellew. She couldn't have her free.

Before them stood John Bellew, speechless now in his hurt and anger. Beyond them the little huddle of other people, and Brian stepping out from among them.

What happened next, Irene Redfield never afterwards allowed herself to remember. Never clearly.

One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone.

There was a gasp of horror, and above it a sound not quite human, like a beast in agony. "Nig! My God! Nig!"

A frenzied rush of feet down long flights of stairs. The slamming of distant doors. Voices.

Irene stayed behind. She sat down and remained quite still, staring at a ridiculous Japanese print on the wall across the room.

Gone! The soft white face, the bright hair, the disturbing scarlet mouth, the dreaming eyes, the caressing smile, the whole torturing loveliness that had been Clare Kendry. That beauty that had torn at Irene's placid life. Gone! The mocking daring, the gallantry of her pose, the ringing bells of her laughter.

Irene wasn't sorry. She was amazed, incredulous almost.

What would the others think? That Clare had fallen? That she had deliberately leaned backward? Certainly one or the other. Not—

But she mustn't, she warned herself, think of that. She was too tired, and too shocked. And, indeed, both were true. She was utterly weary, and she was violently staggered. But her thoughts reeled on. If only she could be as free of mental as she was of bodily vigour; could only put from her memory the vision of her hand on Clare's arm!

"It was an accident, a terrible accident," she muttered fiercely. "It *was*."

People were coming up the stairs. Through the still open door their steps and talk sounded nearer, nearer.

Quickly she stood up and went noiselessly into the bedroom and closed the door softly behind her.

Her thoughts raced. Ought she to have stayed? Should she go back out there to them? But there would be questions. She hadn't thought of them, of afterwards, of this. She had thought of nothing in that sudden moment of action.

It was cold. Icy chills ran up her spine and over her bare neck and shoulders.

In the room outside there were voices. Dave Freeland's and others that she did not recognize.

Should she put on her coat? Felise had rushed down without any wrap. So had all the others. So had Brian. Brian! He mustn't take cold. She took up his coat and left her own. At the door she paused for a moment, listening fearfully. She heard nothing. No voices. No footsteps. Very slowly she opened the door. The room was empty. She went out.

In the hall below she heard dimly the sound of feet going down the steps, of a door being opened and closed, and of voices far away.

Down, down, down, she went, Brian's great coat clutched in her shivering arms and trailing a little on each step behind her.

What was she to say to them when at last she had finished going down those endless stairs? She should have rushed out when they did. What reason could she give for her dallying behind? Even she didn't know why she had done that. And what else would she be asked? There had been her hand reaching out towards Clare. What about that?

In the midst of her wonderings and questionings came a thought so terrifying, so horrible, that she had had to grasp hold of the banister to save herself from pitching downwards. A cold perspiration drenched her shaking body. Her breath came short in sharp and painful gasps.

What if Clare was not dead?

She felt nauseated, as much at the idea of the glorious body mutilated as from fear.

How she managed to make the rest of the journey without fainting she never knew. But at last she was down. Just at the bottom she came on the others, surrounded by a little circle of strangers. They were all speaking in whispers, or in the awed, discreetly lowered tones adapted to the presence of disaster. In the first instant she wanted to turn and rush back up the way she had come. Then a calm desperation came over her. She braced herself, physically and mentally.

"Here's Irene now," Dave Freeland announced, and told her that, having only just missed her, they had concluded that she had fainted or something like that, and were on the way to find out about her. Felise, she saw, was holding on to his arm, all the insolent nonchalance gone out of her, and the golden brown of her handsome face changed to a queer mauve colour.

Irene made no indication that she had heard Freeland, but went straight to Brian. His face looked aged and altered, and his lips were purple and trembling. She had a great longing to comfort him, to charm away his suf-

fering and horror. But she was helpless, having so completely lost control of his mind and heart.

She stammered: "Is she—is she—?"

It was Felise who answered. "Instantly, we think."

Irene struggled against the sob of thankfulness that rose in her throat. Choked down, it turned to a whimper, like a hurt child's. Someone laid a hand on her shoulder in a soothing gesture. Brian wrapped his coat about her. She began to cry rackingly, her entire body heaving with convulsive sobs. He made a slight perfunctory attempt to comfort her.

"There, there, Irene. You mustn't. You'll make yourself sick. She's—" His voice broke suddenly.

As from a long distance she heard Ralph Hazelton's voice saying: "I was looking right at her. She just tumbled over and was gone before you could say 'Jack Robinson.' Fainted, I guess. Lord! It was quick. Quickest thing I ever saw in all my life."

"It's impossible, I tell you! Absolutely impossible!"

It was Brian who spoke in that frenzied hoarse voice, which Irene had never heard before. Her knees quaked under her.

Dave Freeland said: "Just a minute, Brian. Irene was there beside her. Let's hear what she has to say."

She had a moment of stark craven fear. "Oh God," she thought, prayed, "help me."

A strange man, official and authoritative, addressed her. "You're sure she fell? Her husband didn't give her a shove or anything like that, as Dr. Redfield seems to think?"

For the first time she was aware that Bellew was not in the little group shivering in the small hallway. What did that mean? As she began to work it out in her numbed mind, she was shaken with another hideous trembling. Not that! Oh, not that!

"No, no!" she protested. "I'm quite certain that he didn't. I was there, too. As close as he was. She just fell, before anybody could stop her. I—"

Her quaking knees gave way under her. She moaned and sank down, moaned again. Through the great heaviness that submerged and drowned her she was dimly conscious of strong arms lifting her up. Then everything was dark.

Centuries after, she heard the strange man saying: "Death by misadventure, I'm inclined to believe. Let's go up and have another look at that window."

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

1892–1950

Edna St. Vincent Millay's output ranged from Elizabethan sonnets through plays and sketches to political speeches. In the 1920s she became a kind of national symbol of the modern woman—liberated from Victorian mores, independent, self-supporting, full of energy and talent. She was raised in a small town on the coast of Maine by her divorced mother, who supported herself and three daughters through work as a practical nurse. The mother provided her children with books and music lessons and encouraged ambition and independence. Millay began to write poetry in high school and published her first book of poetry, *Renascence and Other Poems*, in 1917, when she was twenty-five. She went to Vassar College from 1913 to 1917 through the generosity of a benefactor impressed by her writing. At Vassar she studied languages, wrote songs and verse plays, and became interested in acting. After graduation she went to New York City, settling in the Greenwich Village section of the city and becoming associated with the unconventional life of the literary and political rebels who lived there. A member of the Provincetown Players group, she acted and also wrote two plays for them. *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver* (1923, later retitled *The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems*) was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Millay lived in Europe from 1921 to 1923 and, upon her return, married and moved with her businessman husband Eugene Boissevain to a farm in upstate New York. She participated in the protests against the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 and during the 1930s wrote anti-fascist newspaper verse, radio plays, and speeches. She was an early advocate of U.S. entrance into World War II.

Although as a young woman Millay achieved notoriety mainly for love poetry that described free, guiltless sexuality, her poems are more founded in the failure of love than in the joy of sex. The tone of her earliest work was flippantly cynical; she often wrote in elevated diction and traditional forms, only to bring her poems to mocking conclusions. Later work became more muted and lyrical. Working with closed stanza forms and regular metrical lines, she displayed a high degree of technical virtuosity within chosen limits: "I will put chaos into fourteen lines," she wrote in one sonnet. Her anti-fascist writing explored freer poetic forms and a more direct public voice.

The text of the poems included here is that of *Collected Poems: Edna St. Vincent Millay* (1956).

Recuerdo¹

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

5

1. Remembrance, souvenir.

We were very tired, we were very merry—
 We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
 And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
 From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere; 10
 And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
 And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
 We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
 We hailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head, 15
 And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
 And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears,
 And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

1922

I Think I Should Have Loved You Presently

I think I should have loved you presently,
 And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
 And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
 And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;
 And all my pretty follies flung aside 5
 That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,
 Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,
 Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.
 I, that had been to you, had you remained,
 But one more waking from a recurrent dream, 10
 Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,
 And walk your memory's halls, austere, supreme,
 A ghost in marble of a girl you knew
 Who would have loved you in a day or two.

1922

[I, being born a woman]

I, being born a woman and distressed
 By all the needs and notions of my kind,
 Am urged by your propinquity to find
 Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
 To bear your body's weight upon my breast: 5
 So subtly is the fume of life designed,
 To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
 And leave me once again undone, possessed.
 Think not for this, however, the poor treason
 Of my stout blood against my staggering brain, 10
 I shall remember you with love, or season

My scorn with pity,—let me make it plain:
 I find this frenzy insufficient reason
 For conversation when we meet again.

1923

Apostrophe to Man

(On reflecting that the world is ready to go to war again)

Detestable race, continue to expunge yourself, die out.
 Breed faster, crowd, encroach, sing hymns, build bombing airplanes;
 Make speeches, unveil statues, issue bonds, parade;
 Convert again into explosives the bewildered ammonia and the distracted
 cellulose;
 Convert again into putrescent matter drawing flies 5
 The hopeful bodies of the young; exhort,
 Pray, pull long faces, be earnest, be all but overcome, be photographed;
 Confer, perfect your formulae, commercialize
 Bacteria harmful to human tissue,
 Put death on the market; 10
 Breed, crowd, encroach, expand, expunge yourself, die out,
Homo called *sapiens*.

1934

I Too beneath Your Moon, Almighty Sex

I too beneath your moon, almighty Sex,
 Go forth at nightfall crying like a cat,
 Leaving the lofty tower I laboured at
 For birds to foul and boys and girls to vex
 With tittering chalk; and you, and the long necks 5
 Of neighbours sitting where their mothers sat
 Are well aware of shadowy this and that
 In me, that's neither noble nor complex.
 Such as I am, however, I have brought
 To what it is, this tower; it is my own; 10
 Though it was reared To Beauty, it was wrought
 From what I had to build with: honest bone
 Is there, and anguish; pride; and burning thought;
 And lust is there, and nights not spent alone.

1939

I Forgot for a Moment

July 1940

I forgot for a moment France; I forgot England; I forgot my care:
I lived for a moment in a world where I was free to be
With the things and people that I love, and I was happy there.
I forgot for a moment Holland, I forgot my heavy care.

I lived for a moment in a world so lovely, so inept 5
At twisted words and crookèd deeds, it was as if I slept and dreamt.

It seemed that all was well with Holland—not a tank had crushed
The tulips there.
Mile after mile the level lowlands blossomed—yellow square,
white square,
Scarlet strip and mauve strip bright beneath the brightly clouded sky,
the round clouds and the gentle air. 10
Along the straight canals between striped fields of tulips in the
morning sailed
Broad ships, their hulls by tulip-beds concealed, only the sails showing.

It seemed that all was well with England—the harsh foreign voice
hysterically vowing,
Once more, to keep its word, at length was disbelieved, and hushed.

It seemed that all was well with France, with her straight roads 15
Lined with slender poplars, and the peasants on the skyline ploughing.

1940

E. E. CUMMINGS

1894–1962

Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, Edward Estlin Cummings built a reputation as author of a particularly agreeable kind of modernist poetry, distinguished by clever formal innovation, a tender lyricism, and the thematic celebration of individuals against mass society. These qualities were evident in his first literary success, a zesty prose account of his experience in a French prison camp during World War I, *The Enormous Room* (1922; see p. 206). He and a friend had joined the ambulance corps in France the day after the United States entered the war; their disdain for the bureaucracy, expressed in outspoken letters home, aroused antagonism among French officials and they were imprisoned. To be made a prisoner by one's own side struck Cummings as outrageous and yet funny; from the experience he produced an ironic, profane celebration of the ordinary soldier and an attack on



E. E. Cummings, self-portrait, 1939. Cummings showed his early abstract paintings at modernist exhibitions like that of New York's Society of Independent Artists; his later work, like this self-portrait, became more realistic and figurative.

bureaucracy. His poetry continued the attack on depersonalized, commercial, exploitative mass culture and celebrated loners, lovers, and nonconformists.

He was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His father was a Congregationalist minister and teacher at Harvard; the family was close knit and Cummings, a much-loved son. While a student at Harvard (he graduated in 1915 and took an M.A. in 1916) he began to write poetry based on the intricate stanza patterns of the pre-Raphaelite and Metaphysical writers he was reading in English literature classes. When he began to innovate—as he did after discovering the poetry of Ezra Pound—he was able to build (like Pound himself) from a firm apprenticeship in traditional techniques.

After the war, Cummings established a life that included a studio in Greenwich Village, travel and sojourns in France, and summers at the family home in New Hampshire. He was a painter as well as a poet; simple living and careful management of a small allowance from his mother, along with prizes, royalties,

and commissions, enabled him to work full time as an artist. He published four volumes of well-received poetry in the 1920s and a book of collected poems toward the end of the 1930s. In the 1950s he visited and read at many college campuses, where students enjoyed his tricks of verse and vocabulary and appreciated his tender yet earthy poetry. He received a special citation by the National Book Award committee in 1955 and the Bollingen Prize in 1957.

In his attempts to reshape poetry Cummings was also concerned with being widely accessible. Cummings's verse is characterized by common speech and attention to the visual form of the poem—that is, the poem as it appears on the page as distinguished from its sound when read aloud. Experiments with capitalization or lack of it, punctuation, line breaks, hyphenation, and verse shapes were all carried out for the reader's eyes as well as ears. To express his sense that life was always in process, he wrote untitled poems without beginnings and endings, consisting of fragmentary lines. There is always humor in his poetry, and his outrage at cruelty and exploitation is balanced with gusto and celebration of the body.

The text of the poems included here is that of *Complete Poems* (1991).

Thy fingers make early flowers of

Thy fingers make early flowers of
 all things.
 thy hair mostly the hours love:
 a smoothness which
 sings,saying 5
 (though love be a day)
 do not fear,we will go amaying.

thy whitest feet crisply are straying.
 Always
 thy moist eyes are at kisses playing, 10
 whose strangeness much
 says;singing
 (though love be a day)
 for which girl art thou flowers bringing?

To be thy lips is a sweet thing 15
 and small.
 Death,Thee i call rich beyond wishing
 if this thou catch,
 else missing.
 (though love be a day 20
 and life be nothing,it shall not stop kissing).

1923

in Just-

in Just-
 spring when the world is mud-
 luscious the little
 lame balloonman

whistles far and wee 5

and eddieandbill come
 running from marbles and
 piracies and it's
 spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful 10

the queer
 old balloonman whistles
 far and wee
 and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and 15

it's
spring
and
the

goat-footed 20

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

1920, 1923

O sweet spontaneous

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

fingers of 5
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee 10
,has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

beauty .how 15
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but 20
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

thou answerest 25

them only with

spring)

1920, 1923

Buffalo Bill 's

Buffalo Bill 's¹
defunct

who used to

ride a watersmooth-silver

stallion

5

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

Jesus

he was a handsome man

and what i want to know is

how do you like your blueeyed boy

10

Mister Death

1920, 1923

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls

are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds

(also,with the church's protestant blessings

daughters,unscented shapeless spirited)

they believe in Christ and Longfellow,¹ both dead,

5

are invariably interested in so many things—

at the present writing one still finds

delighted fingers knitting for the is it Poles?

perhaps. While permanent faces coyly bandy

scandal of Mrs. N and Professor D

10

. . . . the Cambridge ladies do not care,above

Cambridge if sometimes in its box of

sky lavender and cornerless,the

moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

1923

1. William F. Cody (1846–1917), American scout and Wild West showman.

1. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), American poet often used as a symbol for tradi-

tionalist writing and values. He was a professor of romance languages at Harvard University in Cambridge.

“next to of course god america i

“next to of course god america i
 love you land of the pilgrims’ and so forth oh
 say can you see by the dawn’s early my
 country ’tis of centuries come and go
 and are no more what of it we should worry 5
 in every language even deafanddumb
 thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
 by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
 why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
 iful than these heroic happy dead 10
 who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
 they did not stop to think they died instead
 then shall the voice of liberty be mute?”

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

1926

i sing of Olaf glad and big

i sing of Olaf glad and big
 whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
 a conscientious object-or

his wellbelovéd colonel(trig
 westpointer¹ most succinctly bred) 5
 took erring Olaf soon in hand;
 but—though an host of overjoyed
 noncoms²(first knocking on the head
 him)do through icy waters roll
 that helplessness which others stroke 10
 with brushes recently employed
 anent this muddy toiletbowl,
 while kindred intellects evoke
 allegiance per blunt instruments—
 Olaf(being to all intents 15
 a corpse and wanting any rag
 upon what God unto him gave)
 responds,without getting annoyed
 “I will not kiss your fucking flag”

straightway the silver bird³ looked grave 20
 (departing hurriedly to shave)

1. Graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York.

2. Noncommissioned officers.

3. Insignia of a colonel.

but—though all kinds of officers
 (a yearning nation's blueeyed pride)
 their passive prey did kick and curse
 until for wear their clarion 25
 voices and boots were much the worse,
 and egged the firstclassprivates on
 his rectum wickedly to tease
 by means of skilfully applied
 bayonets roasted hot with heat— 30
 Olaf(upon what were once knees)
 does almost ceaselessly repeat
 “there is some shit I will not eat”

our president,being of which
 assertions duly notified 35
 threw the yellowsonofabitch
 into a dungeon,where he died

Christ(of His mercy infinite)
 i pray to see; and Olaf,too

preponderatingly because 40
 unless statistics lie he was
 more brave than me:more blond than you.

1931

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
 any experience,your eyes have their silence:
 in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
 or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will uncloze me 5
 though i have closed myself as fingers,
 you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
 (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me,iand 10
 my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,
 as when the heart of this flower imagines
 the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
 the power of your intense fragility:whose texture
 compels me with the colour of its countries, 15
 rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens;only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands

20

1931

anyone lived in a pretty how town

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men(both little and small) 5
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few 10
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief 15
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then)they 20
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess 25
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
busy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep 30
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)
 summer autumn winter spring
 reaped their sowing and went their came 35
 sun moon stars rain

1940

my father moved through dooms of love

my father moved through dooms of love
 through sames of am through haves of give,
 singing each morning out of each night
 my father moved through depths of height

this motionless forgetful where 5
 turned at his glance to shining here;
 that if(so timid air is firm)
 under his eyes would stir and squirm

newly as from unburied which
 floats the first who,his april touch 10
 drove sleeping selves to swarm their fates
 woke dreamers to their ghostly roots

and should some why completely weep
 my father's fingers brought her sleep:
 vainly no smallest voice might cry 15
 for he could feel the mountains grow.

Lifting the valleys of the sea
 my father moved through griefs of joy;
 praising a forehead called the moon
 singing desire into begin 20

joy was his song and joy so pure
 a heart of star by him could steer
 and pure so now and now so yes
 the wrists of twilight would rejoice

keen as midsummer's keen beyond 25
 conceiving mind of sun will stand,
 so strictly(over utmost him
 so hugely)stood my father's dream

his flesh was flesh his blood was blood:
 no hungry man but wished him food; 30
 no cripple wouldn't creep one mile
 uphill to only see him smile.

Scorning the pomp of must and shall
 my father moved through dooms of feel;
 his anger was as right as rain 35
 his pity was as green as grain

septembering arms of year extend
 less humbly wealth to foe and friend
 than he to foolish and to wise
 offered immeasurable is 40

proudly and(by octobering flame
 beckoned)as earth will downward climb,
 so naked for immortal work
 his shoulders marched against the dark

his sorrow was as true as bread: 45
 no liar looked him in the head;
 if every friend became his foe
 he'd laugh and build a world with snow.

My father moved through theys of we,
 singing each new leaf out of each tree 50
 (and every child was sure that spring
 danced when she heard my father sing)

then let men kill which cannot share,
 let blood and flesh be mud and mire,
 scheming imagine,passion willed, 55
 freedom a drug that's bought and sold

giving to steal and cruel kind,
 a heart to fear,to doubt a mind,
 to differ a disease of same,
 conform the pinnacle of am 60

though dull were all we taste as bright,
 bitter all utterly things sweet,
 maggoty minus and dumb death
 all we inherit,all bequeath

and nothing quite so least as truth 65
 —i say though hate were why men breathe—
 because my father lived his soul
 love is the whole and more than all

pity this busy monster,manunkind

pity this busy monster,manunkind,

not. Progress is a comfortable disease:
your victim(death and life safely beyond)

plays with the bigness of his littleness
—electrons deify one razorblade 5
into a mountainrange;lenses extend

unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish
returns on its unself.

A world of made

is not a world of born—pity poor flesh 10

and trees,poor stars and stones,but never this
fine specimen of hypermagical

ultraomnipotence. We doctors know

a hopeless case if—listen:there’s a hell
of a good universe next door;let’s go 15

1944

JEAN TOOMER

1894–1967

Jean Toomer’s *Cane*, the author’s contribution to Harlem Renaissance literature, received immediate acclaim when it appeared in 1923. Toomer described African American communities from Chicago and Washington, D.C., to small-town Georgia through the analytic filter of a modernist, urban literary style. William Stanley Braithwaite, in the NAACP-sponsored *Crisis*, praised him as the first to “write about the Negro without the surrender or the compromise of the author’s vision.” Sherwood Anderson recognized *Cane* as the work of an artistic peer, and other readers compared it favorably to Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Born in Washington, D.C., Toomer never knew his father. He grew up with his grandfather, who had been an important Louisiana politician during the Reconstruction era, and his mother. After high school graduation, he attended several colleges—the University of Wisconsin, the Massachusetts College of Agriculture, the American College of Physical Training in Chicago, the University of Chicago, and the City College of New York—without completing a degree. He held numerous short-term jobs in various parts of the country, including four months in 1921 as

superintendent of a small black school in Sparta, Georgia. This encounter with black Americans in the rural South formed the basis of *Cane*.

Toomer began writing when he was in his middle twenties, publishing poems and stories in avant-garde magazines such as *Broom*, the *Little Review*, and *Prairie*. He also published in the major political and artistic journals of the Harlem Renaissance such as the *Liberator*, *Crisis*, and *Opportunity*. Composed as an assemblage of short stories, sketches, poems, and even a play, *Cane* brought together many of Toomer's published magazine pieces.

Part I of *Cane*, set in rural Georgia, depicts a black community based in the rhythms of cotton culture, charged with sexual desire, and menaced by white violence. Part II shows black life in Washington, D.C., and Chicago, the fast-paced urban hives of money and ambition. The autobiographical third part describes an African American intellectual teaching in the South, trying to put down roots in an unfamiliar setting that he struggles to recognize as the source of his own artistic ambitions. This three-part structure is held together by a narrator who alternately steps forward in a first-person voice and recedes into third-person narration, poetry, or drama. *Cane's* shifting voices explore whether a northern, urban African American can understand himself and his vocation by immersion in a black folk heritage that he has never known. The work is distinguished by its poetic, imagistic, evocative prose; its linguistic innovativeness; and its experimental construction.

Toomer spent much of the last forty years of his life looking for a spiritual community; he had difficulty finding publishers for the writing he produced during these decades. For a while he was a disciple of the Russian mystic George I. Gurdjieff. In the late 1940s he became a committed Quaker. At his death he left many unpublished short stories, as well as novels, plays, and an autobiography.

The text is that of the first edition (1923) as corrected in 1973.

*From Cane*¹

Georgia Dusk

The sky, lazily disdaining to pursue
 The setting sun, too indolent to hold
 A lengthened tournament for flashing gold,
 Passively darkens for night's barbecue,

A feast of moon and men and barking hounds, 5
 An orgy for some genius of the South
 With blood-hot eyes and cane-lipped scented mouth,
 Surprised in making folk-songs from soul sounds.

The sawmill blows its whistle, buzz-saws stop, 10
 And silence breaks the bud of knoll and hill,
 Soft settling pollen where plowed lands fulfill
 Their early promise of a bumper crop.

Smoke from the pyramidal sawdust pile
 Curls up, blue ghosts of trees, tarrying low

1. Of the book's three sections, the first and the last are Georgia scenes. "Fern" appears in the first section after the poem "Georgia Dusk." "Portrait in Georgia" followed by "Blood-Burning Moon"

conclude the first section. "Seventh Street" is the first sketch in the second section, which is devoted to Washington, D.C., and Chicago.

Where only chips and stumps are left to show 15
The solid proof of former domicile.

Meanwhile, the men, with vestiges of pomp,
Race memories of king and caravan,
High-priests, an ostrich, and a juju-man,²
Go singing through the footpaths of the swamp. 20

Their voices rise . . . the pine trees are guitars,
Strumming, pine-needles fall like sheets of rain . . .
Their voices rise . . . the chorus of the cane
Is caroling a vesper to the stars . . .

O singers, resinous and soft your songs 25
Above the sacred whisper of the pines,
Give virgin lips to cornfield concubines,
Bring dreams of Christ to dusky cane-lipped throngs.

Fern

Face flowed into her eyes. Flowed in soft cream foam and plaintive ripples, in such a way that wherever your glance may momentarily have rested, it immediately thereafter wavered in the direction of her eyes. The soft suggestion of down slightly darkened, like the shadow of a bird's wing might, the creamy brown color of her upper lip. Why, after noticing it, you sought her eyes, I cannot tell you. Her nose was aquiline, Semitic. If you have heard a Jewish cantor³ sing, if he has touched you and made your own sorrow seem trivial when compared with his, you will know my feeling when I follow the curves of her profile, like mobile rivers, to their common delta. They were strange eyes. In this, that they sought nothing—that is, nothing that was obvious and tangible and that one could see, and they gave the impression that nothing was to be denied. When a woman seeks, you will have observed, her eyes deny. Fern's eyes desired nothing that you could give her; there was no reason why they should withhold. Men saw her eyes and fooled themselves. Fern's eyes said to them that she was easy. When she was young, a few men took her, but got no joy from it. And then, once done, they felt bound to her (quite unlike their hit and run with other girls), felt as though it would take them a lifetime to fulfill an obligation which they could find no name for. They became attached to her, and hungered after finding the barest trace of what she might desire. As she grew up, new men who came to town felt as almost everyone did who ever saw her: that they would not be denied. Men were everlastingly bringing her their bodies. Something inside of her got tired of them, I guess, for I am certain that for the life of her she could not tell why or how she began to turn them off. A man in fever is no trifling thing to send away. They began to leave her, baffled and ashamed, yet vowing to themselves that some day they would do some fine thing for her: send her candy every week and not let her know whom it came from, watch out for her

2. West African tribesman who controls the magical fetish or charm, or "juju."

3. Singer in religious services.

wedding-day and give her a magnificent something with no name on it, buy a house and deed it to her, rescue her from some unworthy fellow who had tricked her into marrying him. As you know, men are apt to idolize or fear that which they cannot understand, especially if it be a woman. She did not deny them, yet the fact was that they were denied. A sort of superstition crept into their consciousness of her being somehow above them. Being above them meant that she was not to be approached by anyone. She became a virgin. Now a virgin in a small southern town is by no means the usual thing, if you will believe me. That the sexes were made to mate is the practice of the South. Particularly, black folks were made to mate. And it is black folks whom I have been talking about thus far. What white men thought of Fern I can arrive at only by analogy. They let her alone.

Anyone, of course, could see her, could see her eyes. If you walked up the Dixie Pike most any time of day, you'd be most like to see her resting listless-like on the railing of her porch, back propped against a post, head tilted a little forward because there was a nail in the porch post just where her head came which for some reason or other she never took the trouble to pull out. Her eyes, if it were sunset, rested idly where the sun, molten and glorious, was pouring down between the fringe of pines. Or maybe they gazed at the gray cabin on the knoll from which an evening folk-song was coming. Perhaps they followed a cow that had been turned loose to roam and feed on cotton-stalks and corn leaves. Like as not they'd settle on some vague spot above the horizon, though hardly a trace of wistfulness would come to them. If it were dusk, then they'd wait for the search-light of the evening train which you could see miles up the track before it flared across the Dixie Pike, close to her home. Wherever they looked, you'd follow them and then waver back. Like her face, the whole countryside seemed to flow into her eyes. Flowed into them with the soft listless cadence of Georgia's South. A young Negro, once, was looking at her, spellbound, from the road. A white man passing in a buggy had to flick him with his whip if he was to get by without running him over. I first saw her on her porch. I was passing with a fellow whose crusty numbness (I was from the North and suspected of being prejudiced and stuck-up) was melting as he found me warm. I asked him who she was. "That's Fern," was all that I could get from him. Some folks already thought that I was given to nosing around; I let it go at that, so far as questions were concerned. But at first sight of her I felt as if I heard a Jewish cantor sing. As if his singing rose above the unheard chorus of a folk-song. And I felt bound to her. I too had my dreams: something I would do for her. I have knocked about from town to town too much not to know the futility of mere change of place. Besides, picture if you can, this cream-colored solitary girl sitting at a tenement window looking down on the indifferent throngs of Harlem. Better that she listen to folk-songs at dusk in Georgia, you would say, and so would I. Or, suppose she came up North and married. Even a doctor or a lawyer, say, one who would be sure to get along—that is, make money. You and I know, who have had experience in such things, that love is not a thing like prejudice which can be bettered by changes of town. Could men in Washington, Chicago, or New York, more than the men of Georgia, bring her something left vacant by the bestowal of their bodies? You and I who know men in these cities will have to say, they could not. See

her out and out a prostitute along State Street in Chicago. See her move into a southern town where white men are more aggressive. See her become a white man's concubine . . . Something I must do for her. There was myself. What could I do for her? Talk, of course. Push back the fringe of pines upon new horizons. To what purpose? and what for? Her? Myself? Men in her case seem to lose their selfishness. I lost mine before I touched her. I ask you, friend (it makes no difference if you sit in the Pullman or the Jim Crow⁴ as the train crosses her road), what thoughts would come to you—that is, after you'd finished with the thoughts that leap into men's minds at the sight of a pretty woman who will not deny them; what thoughts would come to you, had you seen her in a quick flash, keen and intuitively, as she sat there on her porch when your train thundered by? Would you have got off at the next station and come back for her to take her where? Would you have completely forgotten her as soon as you reached Macon, Atlanta, Augusta, Pasadena, Madison, Chicago, Boston, or New Orleans? Would you tell your wife or sweetheart about a girl you saw? Your thoughts can help me, and I would like to know. Something I would do for her . . .

One evening I walked up the Pike on purpose, and stopped to say hello. Some of her family were about, but they moved away to make room for me. Damn if I knew how to begin. Would you? Mr. and Miss So-and-So, people, the weather, the crops, the new preacher, the frolic, the church benefit, rabbit and possum hunting, the new soft drink they had at old Pap's store, the schedule of the trains, what kind of town Macon was, Negro's migration north, bollweevils, syrup, the Bible—to all these things she gave a yassur or nassur, without further comment. I began to wonder if perhaps my own emotional sensibility had played one of its tricks on me. "Lets take a walk," I at last ventured. The suggestion, coming after so long an isolation, was novel enough, I guess, to surprise. But it wasn't that. Something told me that men before me had said just that as a prelude to the offering of their bodies. I tried to tell her with my eyes. I think she understood. The thing from her that made my throat catch, vanished. Its passing left her visible in a way I'd thought, but never seen. We walked down the Pike with people on all the porches gaping at us. "Doesnt it make you mad?" She meant the row of petty gossiping people. She meant the world. Through a canebrake that was ripe for cutting, the branch was reached. Under a sweet-gum tree, and where reddish leaves had dammed the creek a little, we sat down. Dusk, suggesting the almost imperceptible procession of giant trees, settled with a purple haze about the cane. I felt strange, as I always do in Georgia, particularly at dusk. I felt that things unseen to men were tangibly immediate. It would not have surprised me had I had vision. People have them in Georgia more often than you would suppose. A black woman once saw the mother of Christ and drew her in charcoal on the courthouse wall . . . When one is on the soil of one's ancestors, most anything can come to one . . . From force of habit, I suppose, I held Fern in my arms—that is, without at first noticing it. Then my mind came back to her. Her eyes, unusually weird and open, held me. Held God. He flowed in as I've seen the countryside flow in. Seen men. I

4. In the segregated South, black persons were required to sit in the "Jim Crow" section of railway cars and were not allowed as passengers in the first-class "Pullman" lounges, or sleeping cars.

must have done something—what, I don't know, in the confusion of my emotion. She sprang up. Rushed some distance from me. Fell to her knees, and began swaying, swaying. Her body was tortured with something it could not let out. Like boiling sap it flooded arms and fingers till she shook them as if they burned her. It found her throat, and spattered inarticulately in plaintive, convulsive sounds, mingled with calls to Christ Jesus. And then she sang, brokenly. A Jewish cantor singing with a broken voice. A child's voice, uncertain, or an old man's. Dusk hid her; I could hear only her song. It seemed to me as though she were pounding her head in anguish upon the ground. I rushed at her. She fainted in my arms.

There was talk about her fainting with me in the canefield. And I got one or two ugly looks from town men who'd set themselves up to protect her. In fact, there was talk of making me leave town. But they never did. They kept a watch-out for me, though. Shortly after, I came back North. From the train window I saw her as I crossed her road. Saw her on her porch, head tilted a little forward where the nail was, eyes vaguely focused on the sunset. Saw her face flow into them, the countryside and something that I call God, flowing into them . . . Nothing ever really happened. Nothing ever came to Fern, not even I. Something I would do for her. Some fine unnamed thing . . . And, friend, you? She is still living, I have reason to know. Her name, against the chance that you might happen down that way, is Fernie May Rosen.

* * *

Portrait in Georgia

Hair—braided chestnut,
 coiled like a lyncher's rope,
 Eyes—fagots,
 Lips—old scars, or the first red blisters,
 Breath—the last sweet scent of cane,
 And her slim body, white as the ash
 of black flesh after flame.

* * *

Blood-Burning Moon

I

Up from the skeleton stone walls, up from the rotting floor boards and the solid hand-hewn beams of oak of the pre-war cotton factory, dusk came. Up from the dusk the full moon came, Glowing like a fired pine-knot, it illumined the great door and soft showered the Negro shanties aligned along the single street of factory town. The full moon in the great door was an omen. Negro women improvised songs against its spell.

Louisa sang as she came over the crest of the hill from the white folks' kitchen. Her skin was the color of oak leaves on young trees in fall. Her breasts, firm and up-pointed like ripe acorns. And her singing had the low murmur of winds in fig trees. Bob Stone, younger son of the people she worked for, loved her. By the way the world reckons things, he had won her. By measure of that warm glow which came into her mind at thought of him, he had

won her. Tom Burwell, whom the whole town called Big Boy, also loved her. But working in the fields all day, and far away from her, gave him no chance to show it. Though often enough of evenings he had tried to. Somehow, he never got along. Strong as he was with hands upon the ax or plow, he found it difficult to hold her. Or so he thought. But the fact was that he held her to factory town more firmly than he thought for. His black balanced, and pulled against, the white of Stone, when she thought of them. And her mind was vaguely upon them as she came over the crest of the hill, coming from the white folks' kitchen. As she sang softly at the evil face of the full moon.

A strange stir was in her. Indolently, she tried to fix upon Bob or Tom as the cause of it. To meet Bob in the canebrake, as she was going to do an hour or so later, was nothing new. And Tom's proposal which she felt on its way to her could be indefinitely put off. Separately, there was no unusual significance to either one. But for some reason, they jumbled when her eyes gazed vacantly at the rising moon. And from the jumble came the stir that was strangely within her. Her lips trembled. The slow rhythm of her song grew agitant and restless. Rusty black and tan spotted hounds, lying in the dark corners of porches or prowling around back yards, put their noses in the air and caught its tremor. They began plaintively to yelp and howl. Chickens woke up and cackled. Intermittently, all over the countryside dogs barked and roosters crowed as if heralding a weird dawn or some ungodly awakening. The women sang lustily. Their songs were cotton-wads to stop their ears. Louisa came down into factory town and sank wearily upon the step before her home. The moon was rising towards a thick cloud-bank which soon would hide it.

Red nigger moon. Sinner!
 Blood-burning moon. Sinner!
 Come out that fact'ry door.

2

Up from the deep dusk of a cleared spot on the edge of the forest a mellow glow arose and spread fan-wise into the low-hanging heavens. And all around the air was heavy with the scent of boiling cane. A large pile of cane-stalks lay like ribboned shadows upon the ground. A mule, harnessed to a pole, trudged lazily round and round the pivot of the grinder. Beneath a swaying oil lamp, a Negro alternately whipped out at the mule, and fed cane-stalks to the grinder. A fat boy waddled pails of fresh ground juice between the grinder and the boiling stove. Steam came from the copper boiling pan. The scent of cane came from the copper pan and drenched the forest and the hill that sloped to factory town, beneath its fragrance. It drenched the men in circle seated around the stove. Some of them chewed at the white pulp of stalks, but there was no need for them to, if all they wanted was to taste the cane. One tasted it in factory town. And from factory town one could see the soft haze thrown by the glowing stove upon the low-hanging heavens.

Old David Georgia stirred the thickening syrup with a long ladle, and ever so often drew it off. Old David Georgia tended his stove and told tales about the white folks, about moonshining and cotton picking, and about sweet nigger gals, to the men who sat there about his stove to listen to him. Tom Burwell chewed cane-stalk and laughed with the others till some one men-

tioned Louisa. Till some one said something about Louisa and Bob Stone, about the silk stockings she must have gotten from him. Blood ran up Tom's neck hotter than the glow that flooded from the stove. He sprang up. Glared at the men and said, "She's my gal." Will Manning laughed. Tom strode over to him. Yanked him up and knocked him to the ground. Several of Manning's friends got up to fight for him. Tom whipped out a long knife and would have cut them to shreds if they hadn't ducked into the woods. Tom had had enough. He nodded to Old David Georgia and swung down the path to factory town. Just then, the dogs started barking and the roosters began to crow. Tom felt funny. Away from the fight, away from the stove, chill got to him. He shivered. He shuddered when he saw the full moon rising towards the cloud-bank. He who didn't give a goddam for the fears of old women. He forced his mind to fasten on Louisa. Bob Stone. Better not be. He turned into the street and saw Louisa sitting before her home. He went towards her, ambling, touched the brim of a marvelously shaped, spotted, felt hat, said he wanted to say something to her, and then found that he didn't know what he had to say, or if he did, that he couldn't say it. He shoved his big fists in his overalls, grinned, and started to move off.

"You all want me, Tom?"

"That's what us wants, sho, Louisa."

"Well, here I am—"

"An here I is, but that aint ahelpin none, all th same."

"You wanted to say something? . . ."

"I did that, sho. But words is like th spots on dice: no matter how y fumbles em, there's times when they jes wont come. I dunno why. Seems like th love I feels fo yo done stole m tongue. I got it now. Whee! Louisa, honey, I oughtnt tell y, I feel I oughtnt cause yo is young an goes t church an I has had other gals, but Louisa I sho do love y. Lil gal, Ise watched y from them first days when you all sat right here befo yo door befo th well an sang sometimes in a way that like t broke m heart. Ise carried y with me into th fields, day after day, an after that, an I sho can plow when yo is there, an I can pick cotton. Yassur! Come near beatin Barlo yesterday. I sho did. Yassur! An next year if ole Stone'll trust me, I'll have a farm. My own. My bales will buy yo what y gets from white folks now. Silk stockings an purple dresses—course I dont believe what some folks been whisperin as t how y gets them things now. White folks always did do for niggers what they likes. An they jes cant help alikin yo, Louisa. Bob Stone likes y. Course he does. But not th way folks is awhisperin. Does he, hon?"

"I dont know what you mean, Tom."

"Course y dont. Ise already cut two niggers. Had t hon, t tell em so. Niggers always tryin t make somethin out a nothin. An then besides, white folks aint up t them tricks so much nowadays. Godam better not be. Leasta-wise not with yo. Cause I wouldnt stand f it. Nassur."

"What would you do, Tom?"

"Cut him jes like I cut a nigger."

"No, Tom—"

"I said I would an there aint no mo to it. But that aint th talk f now. Sing, honey Louisa, an while I'm listenin t y I'll be makin love."

Tom took her hand in his. Against the tough thickness of his own, hers felt soft and small. His huge body slipped down to the step beside her. The full

moon sank upward into the deep purple of the cloud-bank. An old woman brought a lighted lamp and hung it on the common well whose bulky shadow squatted in the middle of the road, opposite Tom and Louisa. The old woman lifted the well-lid, took hold the chain, and began drawing up the heavy bucket. As she did so, she sang. Figures shifted, restlesslike, between lamp and window in the front rooms of the shanties. Shadows of the figures fought each other on the gray dust of the road. Figures raised the windows and joined the old woman in song. Louisa and Tom, the whole street, singing:

Red nigger moon. Sinner!
 Blood-burning moon. Sinner!
 Come out that fact'ry door.

3

Bob Stone sauntered from his veranda out into the gloom of fir trees and magnolias. The clear white of his skin paled, and the flush of his cheeks turned purple. As if to balance this outer change, his mind became consciously a white man's. He passed the house with its huge open hearth which, in the days of slavery, was the plantation cookery. He saw Louisa bent over that hearth. He went in as a master should and took her. Direct, honest, bold. None of this sneaking that he had to go through now. The contrast was repulsive to him. His family had lost ground. Hell no, his family still owned the niggers, practically. Damned if they did, or he wouldnt have to duck around so. What would they think if they knew? His mother? His sister? He shouldnt mention them, shouldnt think of them in this connection. There in the dusk he blushed at doing so. Fellows about town were all right, but how about his friends up North? He could see them incredible, repulsed. They didnt know. The thought first made him laugh. Then, with their eyes still upon him, he began to feel embarrassed. He felt the need of explaining things to them. Explain hell. They wouldnt understand, and moreover, who ever-heard of a Southerner getting on his knees to any Yankee, or anyone. No sir. He was going to see Louisa to-night, and love her. She was lovely—in her way. Nigger way. What way was that? Damned if he knew. Must know. He'd known her long enough to know. Was there something about niggers that you couldnt know? Listening to them at church didnt tell you anything. Looking at them didnt tell you anything. Talking to them didnt tell you anything—unless it was gossip, unless they wanted to talk. Of course, about farming, and licker, and craps—but those werent nigger. Nigger was something more. How much more? Something to be afraid of, more? Hell no. Who ever heard of being afraid of a nigger? Tom Burwell. Cartwell had told him that Tom went with Louisa after she reached home. No sir. No nigger had ever been with his girl. He'd like to see one try. Some position for him to be in. Him, Bob Stone, of the old Stone family, in a scrap with a nigger over a nigger girl. In the good old days . . . Ha! Those were the days. His family had lost ground. Not so much, though. Enough for him to have to cut through old Lemon's canefield by way of the woods, that he might meet her. She was worth it. Beautiful nigger gal. Why nigger? Why not, just gal? No, it was because she was nigger that he went to her. Sweet . . . The scent of boiling cane came to him. Then he saw the rich glow of the stove. He heard the voices of the men circled around it. He was about to skirt the clearing when

he heard his own name mentioned. He stopped. Quivering. Leaning against a tree, he listened.

“Bad nigger. Yassur, he sho is one bad nigger when he gets started.”

“Tom Burwell’s been on th gang three times fo cutting men.”

“What y think he’s agwine t do t Bob Stone?”

“Dunno yet. He aint found out. When he does— Baby!”

“Aint no tellin.”

“Young Stone aint no quitter an I ken tell y that. Blood of th old uns in his veins.”

“Thats right. He’ll scrap, sho.”

“Be gettin too hot f niggers round this away.”

“Shut up, nigger. Y dont know what y talkin bout.”

Bob Stone’s ears burned as though he had been holding them over the stove. Sizzling heat welled up within him. His feet felt as if they rested on red-hot coals. They stung him to quick movement. He circled the fringe of the glowing. Not a twig cracked beneath his feet. He reached the path that led to factory town. Plunged furiously down it. Haltway along, a blindness within him veered him aside. He crashed into the bordering canebrake. Cane leaves cut his face and lips. He tasted blood. He threw himself down and dug his fingers in the ground. The earth was cool. Cane-roots took the fever from his hands. After a long while, or so it seemed to him, the thought came to him that it must be time to see Louisa. He got to his feet and walked calmly to their meeting place. No Louisa. Tom Burwell had her. Veins in his forehead bulged and distended. Saliva moistened the dried blood on his lips. He bit down on his lips. He tasted blood. Not his own blood; Tom Burwell’s blood. Bob drove through the cane and out again upon the road. A hound swung down the path before him towards factory town. Bob couldnt see it. The dog loped aside to let him pass. Bob’s blind rushing made him stumble over it. He fell with a thud that dazed him. The hound yelped. Answering yelps came from all over the countryside. Chickens cackled. Roosters crowed, heralding the bloodshot eyes of southern awakening. Singers in the town were silenced. They shut their windows down. Palpitant between the rooster crows, a chill hush settled upon the huddled forms of Tom and Louisa. A figure rushed from the shadow and stood before them. Tom popped to his feet.

“Whats y want?”

“I’m Bob Stone.”

“Yassur—an I’m Tom Burwell. Whats y want?”

Bob lunged at him. Tom side-stepped, caught him by the shoulder, and flung him to the ground. Straddled him.

“Let me up.”

“Yassur—but watch yo doins, Bob Stone.”

A few dark figures, drawn by the sound of scuffle, stood about them. Bob sprang to his feet.

“Fight like a man, Tom Burwell, an I’ll lick y.”

Again he lunged. Tom side-stepped and flung him to the ground. Straddled him.

“Get off me, you godam nigger you.”

“Yo sho has started somethin now. Get up.”

Tom yanked him up and began hammering at him. Each blow sounded as if it smashed into a precious, irreplaceable soft something. Beneath them, Bob staggered back. He reached in his pocket and whipped out a knife.

"That's my game, sho."

Blue flash, a steel blade slashed across Bob Stone's throat. He had a sweetish sick feeling. Blood began to flow. Then he felt a sharp twitch of pain. He let his knife drop. He slapped one hand against his neck. He pressed the other on top of his head as if to hold it down. He groaned. He turned, and staggered towards the crest of the hill in the direction of white town. Negroes who had seen the fight slunk into their homes and blew the lamps out. Louisa, dazed, hysterical, refused to go indoors. She slipped, crumbled, her body loosely propped against the woodwork of the well. Tom Burwell leaned against it. He seemed rooted there.

Bob reached Broad Street. White men rushed up to him. He collapsed in their arms.

"Tom Burwell. . . ."

White men like ants upon a forage rushed about. Except for the taut hum of their moving, all was silent. Shotguns, revolvers, rope, kerosene, torches. Two high-powered cars with glaring search-lights. They came together. The taut hum rose to a low roar. Then nothing could be heard but the flop of their feet in the thick dust of the road. The moving body of their silence preceded them over the crest of the hill into factory town. It flattened the Negroes beneath it. It rolled to the wall of the factory, where it stopped. Tom knew that they were coming. He couldn't move. And then he saw the search-lights of the two cars glaring down on him. A quick shock went through him. He stiffened. He started to run. A yell went up from the mob. Tom wheeled about and faced them. They poured down on him. They swarmed. A large man with dead-white face and flabby cheeks came to him and almost jabbed a gun-barrel through his guts.

"Hands behind y, nigger."

Tom's wrists were bound. The big man shoved him to the well. Burn him over it, and when the woodwork caved in, his body would drop to the bottom. Two deaths for a goddam nigger. Louisa was driven back. The mob pushed in. Its pressure, its momentum was too great. Drag him to the factory. Wood and stakes already there. Tom moved in the direction indicated. But they had to drag him. They reached the great door. Too many to get in there. The mob divided and flowed around the walls to either side. The big man shoved him through the door. The mob pressed in from the sides. Taut humming. No words. A stake was sunk into the ground. Rotting floor boards piled around it. Kerosene poured on the rotting floor boards. Tom bound to the stake. His breast was bare. Nails' scratches let little lines of blood trickle down and mat into the hair. His face, his eyes were set and stony. Except for irregular breathing, one would have thought him already dead. Torches were flung onto the pile. A great flare muffled in black smoke shot upward. The mob yelled. The mob was silent. Now Tom could be seen within the flames. Only his head, erect, lean, like a blackened stone. Stench of burning flesh soaked the air. Tom's eyes popped. His head settled downward. The mob yelled. Its yell echoed against the skeleton stone walls and sounded like a hundred yells. Like a hundred mobs yelling. Its yell thudded against the thick front wall and fell back. Ghost of

a yell slipped through the flames and out the great door of the factory. It fluttered like a dying thing down the single street of factory town. Louisa, upon the step before her home, did not hear it, but her eyes opened slowly. They saw the full moon glowing in the great door. The full moon, an evil thing, an omen, soft showering the homes of folks she knew. Where were they, these people? She'd sing, and perhaps they'd come out and join her. Perhaps Tom Burwell would come. At any rate, the full moon in the great door was an omen which she must sing to:

Red nigger moon. Sinner!
 Blood-burning moon. Sinner!
 Come out that fact'ry door.

Seventh Street

Money burns the pocket, pocket hurts,
 Bootleggers in silken shirts,
 Ballooned, zooming Cadillacs,
 Whizzing, whizzing down the street-car tracks.

Seventh Street is a bastard of Prohibition and the War.⁵ A crude-boned, soft-skinned wedge of nigger life breathing its loafer air, jazz songs and love, thrusting unconscious rhythms, black reddish blood into the white and whitewashed wood of Washington. Stale soggy wood of Washington. Wedges rust in soggy wood . . . Split it! In two! Again! Shred it! . . . the sun. Wedges are brilliant in the sun; ribbons of wet wood dry and blow away. Black reddish blood. Pouring for crude-boned soft-skinned life, who set you flowing? Blood suckers of the War would spin in a frenzy of dizziness if they drank your blood. Prohibition would put a stop to it. Who set you flowing? White and whitewash disappear in blood. Who set you flowing? Flowing down the smooth asphalt of Seventh Street, in shanties, brick office buildings, theaters, drug stores, restaurants, and cabarets? Eddying on the corners? Swirling like a blood-red smoke up where the buzzards fly in heaven? God would not dare to suck black red blood. A Nigger God! He would duck his head in shame and call for the Judgment Day. Who set you flowing?

Money burns the pocket, pocket hurts,
 Bootleggers in silken shirts,
 Ballooned, zooming Cadillacs,
 Whizzing, whizzing down the street-car tracks.

1923

5. World War I.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

1896–1940

In the 1920s and 1930s F. Scott Fitzgerald was equally famous as a writer and as a celebrity author whose lifestyle seemed to symbolize the two decades; in the 1920s he stood for all-night partying, drinking, and the pursuit of pleasure, while in the 1930s he stood for the gloomy aftermath of excess. “Babylon Revisited,” written immediately after the stock market crash, is simultaneously a personal and a national story.

Fitzgerald was born in a middle-class neighborhood in St. Paul, Minnesota, descended on his father’s side from southern colonial landowners and legislators, on his mother’s from Irish immigrants. Much of his boyhood was spent in Buffalo and Syracuse, New York. The family was not prosperous and it took an aunt’s support to send him to a Catholic boarding school in New Jersey in 1911. Two years later he entered Princeton University, where he participated in extracurricular literary and dramatic activities, forming friendships with campus intellectuals, like the prominent critic Edmund Wilson, who were to help him in later years. But he failed to make the football team and felt the disappointment for years. After three years of college Fitzgerald quit to join the army, but the war ended before he saw active service. Stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, he met and courted Zelda Sayre, a local belle who rejected him. In 1919 he went to New York City, determined to make a fortune and win Zelda. Amazingly, he succeeded. A novel he had begun in college, revised, and published in 1920 as *This Side of Paradise* became an immediate best-seller, making its author rich and famous at the age of twenty-four. As one of the earliest examples of a novel about college life, *This Side of Paradise* was accepted as the voice of the younger generation in a society increasingly oriented toward youth. He combined the traditional narrative and rhetorical gifts of a good fiction writer, it appeared, with a thoroughly modern sensibility. A week after the novel appeared, Scott and Zelda were married. Living extravagantly in New York City and St. Paul, and on Long Island, they more than spent the money Fitzgerald made from two collections of short stories—*Flappers and Philosophers* (1920) and *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922)—and a second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922). Their only child, a daughter, was born in 1921.

In 1924, the Fitzgeralds moved to Europe to live more cheaply. They made friends with American expatriates: Hemingway, Stein, and Pound among others. During this time Fitzgerald published his best-known and most successful novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and another book of short stories, *All the Sad Young Men* (1926). *The Great Gatsby* tells the story of a self-made young man whose dream of success, personified in a rich and beautiful young woman named Daisy, turns out to be a fantasy in every sense: Daisy belongs to a corrupt society, Gatsby corrupts himself in the quest for her, and above all, the rich have no intention of sharing their privileges. The novel is narrated from the point of view of Nick Carraway, an onlooker who is both moved and repelled by the tale he tells and whose responses form a sort of subplot: this experiment in narrative point of view was widely imitated. The structure of *The Great Gatsby* is compact; the style dazzling; and its images of automobiles, parties, and garbage heaps seem to capture the contradictions of a consumer society. The novel became an instant classic and remains so to this day.

Fitzgerald wrote dozens of short stories during the twenties; many were published in the mass-circulation weekly the *Saturday Evening Post*, which paid extremely well. Despite the pace at which he worked—in all he wrote 178 short stories—the Fitzgeralds

could not get out of debt. Scott became an alcoholic, and Zelda had a mental breakdown in 1930 and spent most of the rest of her life institutionalized. In 1931 Fitzgerald reestablished himself permanently in the United States, living at first near Baltimore, where his wife was hospitalized. A fourth novel, *Tender Is the Night*, appeared in 1934. The novel follows the emotional decline of a young American psychiatrist whose personal energies are sapped and his career corroded equally by his marriage to a beautiful and wealthy patient and his own weakness of character (“character” was one of Fitzgerald’s favorite concepts). As in *The Great Gatsby*, the character begins as a disciple of the work ethic and turns into a pursuer of wealth, and the American Dream accordingly turns into a nightmare. Unlike *Gatsby*, whose characters never really connect with each other, *Tender Is the Night* shows a range of intimacies, none of them successful. The novel did not sell well. In 1937 Fitzgerald turned to Hollywood screenwriting; toward the end of the decade things were looking up for him, and he planned to revive his career as a fiction writer. But his health had been ruined by heavy drinking; he died of a heart attack in Hollywood at the age of forty-four, leaving an unfinished novel about a film mogul, *The Last Tycoon*, which was brought out by Edmund Wilson in 1941. Wilson also successfully promoted Fitzgerald’s posthumous reputation by editing a collection of his writings, which he called *The Crack-Up*, in 1945.

The text of “Winter Dreams” is from *Metropolitan* magazine (1922); that of “Babylon Revisited” is from *Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1951).

Winter Dreams

Some of the caddies were poor as sin and lived in one-room houses with a neurasthenic cow in the front yard, but Dexter Green’s father owned the second best grocery store in Dillard—the best one was “The Hub,” patronized by the wealthy people from Lake Erminie—and Dexter caddied only for pocket-money.

In the fall when the days became crisp and grey and the long Minnesota winter shut down like the white lid of a box, Dexter’s skis moved over the snow that hid the fairways of the golf course. At these times the country gave him a feeling of profound melancholy—it offended him that the links should lie in enforced fallowness, haunted by ragged sparrows for the long season. It was dreary, too, that on the tees where the gay colors fluttered in summer there were now only the desolate sand-boxes knee-deep in crusted ice. When he crossed the hills the wind blew cold as misery, and if the sun was out he tramped with his eyes squinted up against the hard dimensionless glare.

In April the winter ceased abruptly. The snow ran down into Lake Erminie scarcely tarrying for the early golfers to brave the season with red and black balls. Without elation, without an interval of moist glory the cold was gone.

Dexter knew that there was something dismal about this northern spring, just as he knew there was something gorgeous about the fall. Fall made him clench his hands and tremble and repeat idiotic sentences to himself and make brisk abrupt gestures of command to imaginary audiences and armies. October filled him with hope which November raised to a sort of ecstatic triumph, and in this wood the fleeting brilliant impressions of the summer at Lake Erminie were ready grist to his will. He became a golf champion and defeated Mr. T. A. Hedrick in a marvelous match played over a hundred

times in the fairways of his imagination, a match each detail of which he changed about untiringly—sometimes winning with almost laughable ease, sometimes coming up magnificently from behind. Again, stepping from a Pierce-Arrow automobile, like Mr. Mortimer Jones, he strolled frigidly into the lounge of the Erminie Golf Club—or perhaps, surrounded by an admiring crowd, he gave an exhibition of fancy diving from the springboard of the Erminie Club raft. . . . Among those most impressed was Mr. Mortimer Jones.

And one day it came to pass that Mr. Jones, himself and not his ghost, came up to Dexter, almost with tears in his eyes and said that Dexter was the — best caddy in the club and wouldn't he decide not to quit if Mr. Jones made it worth his while, because every other — caddy in the club lost one ball a hole for him—regularly—

“No, sir,” said Dexter, decisively, “I don't want to caddy any more.” Then, after a pause, “I'm too old.”

“You're—why, you're not more than fourteen. Why did you decide just this morning that you wanted to quit? You promised that next week you'd go over to the state tournament with me.”

“I decided I was too old.”

Dexter handed in his “A Class” badge, collected what money was due him from the caddy master and caught the train for Dillard.

“The best — caddy I ever saw,” shouted Mr. Mortimer Jones over a drink that afternoon. “Never lost a ball! Willing! Intelligent! Quiet! Honest! Grateful!”

The little girl who had done this was eleven—beautifully ugly as little girls are apt to be who are destined after a few years to be inexpressably lovely and bring no end of misery to a great number of men. The spark, however, was perceptible. There was a general ungodliness in the way her lips twisted down at the corners when she smiled and in the—Heaven help us!—in the almost passionate quality of her eyes. Vitality is born early in such women. It was utterly in evidence now, shining through her thin frame in a sort of glow.

She had come eagerly out on to the course at nine o'clock with a white linen nurse and five small new golf clubs in a white canvas bag which the nurse was carrying. When Dexter first saw her she was standing by the caddy house, rather ill-at-ease and trying to conceal the fact by engaging her nurse in an obviously unnatural conversation illumined by startling and irrelevant smiles from herself.

“Well, it's certainly a nice day, Hilda,” Dexter heard her say, then she drew down the corners of her mouth, smiled and glanced furtively around, her eyes in transit falling for an instant on Dexter.

Then to the nurse:

“Well, I guess there aren't very many people out here this morning, are there?”

The smile again radiant, blatantly artificial—convincing.

“I don't know what we're supposed to do now,” said the nurse, looking nowhere in particular.

“Oh, that's all right”—the smile—“I'll fix it up.”

Dexter stood perfectly still, his mouth faintly ajar. He knew that if he moved forward a step his stare would be in her line of vision—if he moved backward he would lose his full view of her face—For a moment he had not

realized how young she was. Now he remembered having seen her several times the year before—in bloomers.

Suddenly, involuntarily, he laughed, a short abrupt laugh—then, startled by himself, he turned and began to walk quickly away.

“Boy!”

Dexter stopped.

“Boy—”

Beyond question he was addressed. Not only that, but he was treated to that absurd smile, that preposterous smile—the memory of which at least half a dozen men were to carry to the grave.

“Boy, do you know where the golf teacher is?”

“He’s giving a lesson.”

“Well, do you know where the caddy-master is?”

“He’s not here yet this morning.”

“Oh.” For a moment this baffled her. She stood alternately on her right and left foot.

“We’d like to get a caddy,” said the nurse. “Mrs. Mortimer Jones sent us out to play golf and we don’t know how without we get a caddy.”

Here she was stopped by an ominous glance from Miss Jones, followed immediately by the smile.

“There aren’t any caddies here except me,” said Dexter to the nurse. “And I got to stay here in charge until the caddy-master gets here.”

“Oh.”

Miss Jones and her retinue now withdrew and at a proper distance from Dexter became involved in a heated conversation. The conversation was concluded by Miss Jones taking one of the clubs and hitting it on the ground with violence. For further emphasis she raised it again and was about to bring it down smartly upon the nurse’s bosom, when the nurse seized the club and twisted it from her hands.

“You darn *fool!*” cried Miss Jones wildly.

Another argument ensued. Realizing that the elements of the comedy were implied in the scene, Dexter several times began to smile but each time slew the smile before it reached maturity. He could not resist the monstrous conviction that the little girl was justified in beating the nurse.

The situation was resolved by the fortuitous appearance of the caddy-master who was appealed to immediately by the nurse.

“Miss Jones is to have a little caddy and this one says he can’t go.”

“Mr. McKenna said I was to wait here till you came,” said Dexter quickly.

“Well, he’s here now.” Miss Jones smiled cheerfully at the caddy-master. Then she dropped her bag and set off at a haughty mince toward the first tee.

“Well?” The caddy-master turned to Dexter. “What you standing there like a dummy for? Go pick up the young lady’s clubs.”

“I don’t think I’ll go out today,” said Dexter.

“You don’t—”

“I think I’ll quit.”

The enormity of his decision frightened him. He was a favorite caddy and the thirty dollars a month he earned through the summer were not to be made elsewhere in Dillard. But he had received a strong emotional shock and his perturbation required a violent and immediate outlet.

It is not so simple as that, either. As so frequently would be the case in the future, Dexter was unconsciously dictated to by his winter dreams.

Now, of course, the quality and the seasonability of these winter dreams varied, but the stuff of them remained. They persuaded Dexter several years later to pass up a business course at the State University—his father, prospering now, would have paid his way—for the precarious advantage of attending an older and more famous university in the East, where he was bothered by his scanty funds. But do not get the impression, because his winter dreams happened to be concerned at first with musings on the rich, that there was anything shoddy in the boy. He wanted not association with glittering things and glittering people—he wanted the glittering things themselves. Often he reached out for the best without knowing why he wanted it—and sometimes he ran up against the mysterious denials and prohibitions in which life indulges. It is with one of those denials and not with his career as a whole that this story deals.

He made money. It was rather amazing. After college he went to the city from which Lake Erminie draws its wealthy patrons. When he was only twenty-three and had been there not quite two years, there were already people who liked to say, “Now *there’s* a boy—” All about him rich men’s sons were peddling bonds precariously, or investing patrimonies precariously, or plodding through the two dozen volumes of canned rubbish in the “George Washington Commercial Course,” but Dexter borrowed a thousand dollars on his college degree and his steady eyes, and bought a partnership in a *laundry*.

It was a small laundry when he went into it. Dexter made a specialty of learning how the English washed fine woolen golf stockings without shrinking them. Inside of a year he was catering to the trade who wore knickerbockers. Men were insisting that their shetland hose and sweaters go to his laundry just as they had insisted on a caddy who could find golf balls. A little later he was doing their wives’ lingerie as well—and running five branches in different parts of the city. Before he was twenty-seven he owned the largest string of laundries in his section of the country. It was then that he sold out and went to New York. But the part of his story that concerns us here goes back to when he was making his first big success.

When he was twenty-three Mr. W. L. Hart, one of the grey-haired men who like to say “Now *there’s* a boy”—gave him a guest card to the Lake Erminie Club for over a week-end. So he signed his name one day on the register, and that afternoon played golf in a foursome with Mr. Hart and Mr. Sandwood and Mr. T. A. Hedrick. He did not consider it necessary to remark that he had once carried Mr. Hart’s bag over this same links and that he knew every trap and gully with his eyes shut—but he found himself glancing at the four caddies who trailed them, trying to catch a gleam or gesture that would remind him of himself, that would lessen the gap which lay between his past and his future.

It was a curious day, slashed abruptly with fleeting, familiar impressions. One minute he had the sense of being a trespasser—in the next he was impressed by the tremendous superiority he felt toward Mr. T. A. Hedrick, who was a bore and not even a good golfer any more.

Then, because of a ball Mr. Hart lost near the fifteenth green an enormous thing happened. While they were searching the stiff grasses of the

rough there was a clear call of "Fore!" from behind a hill in their rear. And as they all turned abruptly from their search a bright new ball sliced abruptly over the hill and caught Mr. T. A. Hedrick rather neatly in the stomach.

Mr. T. A. Hedrick grunted and cursed.

"By Gad!" cried Mr. Hedrick, "they ought to put some of these crazy women off the course. It's getting to be outrageous."

A head and a voice came up together over the hill:

"Do you mind if we go through?"

"You hit me in the stomach!" thundered Mr. Hedrick.

"Did I?" The girl approached the group of men. "I'm sorry. I yelled 'Fore!'"

Her glance fell casually on each of the men. She nodded to Sandwood and then scanned the fairway for her ball.

"Did I bounce off into the rough?"

It was impossible to determine whether this question was ingenuous or malicious. In a moment, however, she left no doubt, for as her partner came up over the hill she called cheerfully.

"Here I am! I'd have gone on the green except that I hit something."

As she took her stance for a short mashie shot, Dexter looked at her closely. She wore a blue gingham dress, rimmed at throat and shoulders with a white edging that accentuated her tan. The quality of exaggeration, of thinness that had made her passionate eyes and down turning mouth absurd at eleven was gone now. She was arrestingly beautiful. The color in her cheeks was centered like the color in a picture—it was not a "high" color, but a sort of fluctuating and feverish warmth, so shaded that it seemed at any moment it would recede and disappear. This color and the mobility of her mouth gave a continual impression of flux, of intense life, of passionate vitality—balanced only partially by the sad luxury of her eyes.

She swung her mashie impatiently and without interest, pitching the ball into a sandpit on the other side of the green. With a quick insincere smile and a careless "Thank you!" she went on after it.

"That Judy Jones!" remarked Mr. Hedrick on the next tee, as they waited—some moments—for her to play on ahead. "All she needs is to be turned up and spanked for six months and then to be married off to an old-fashioned cavalry captain."

"Gosh, she's good looking!" said Mr. Sandwood, who was just over thirty.

"Good-looking!" cried Mr. Hedrick contemptuously. "She always looks as if she wanted to be kissed! Turning those big cow-eyes on every young calf in town!"

It is doubtful if Mr. Hedrick intended a reference to the maternal instinct.

"She'd play pretty good golf if she'd try," said Mr. Sandwood.

"She has no form," said Mr. Hedrick solemnly.

"She has a nice figure," said Mr. Sandwood.

"Better thank the Lord she doesn't drive a swifter ball," said Mr. Hart, winking at Dexter. "Come on. Let's go."

Later in the afternoon the sun went down with a riotous swirl of gold and varying blues and scarlets, and left the dry rustling night of western summer. Dexter watched from the verandah of the Erminie Club, watched the even overlap of the waters in the little wind, silver molasses under the harvest moon. Then the moon held a finger to her lips and the lake became a clear

pool, pale and quiet. Dexter put on his bathing suit and swam out to the farthest raft, where he stretched dripping on the wet canvas of the spring board.

There was a fish jumping and a star shining and the lights around the lake were gleaming. Over on a dark peninsula a piano was playing the songs of last summer and of summers before that—songs from “The Pink Lady” and “The Chocolate Soldier” and “Mlle. Modiste”—and because the sound of a piano over a stretch of water had always seemed beautiful to Dexter he lay perfectly quiet and listened.

The tune the piano was playing at that moment had been gay and new five years before when Dexter was a sophomore at college. They had played it at a prom once and because he could not afford the luxury of proms in those days he had stood outside the gymnasium and listened. The sound of the tune and the splash of the fish jumping precipitated in him a sort of ecstasy and it was with that ecstasy he viewed what happened to him now. The ecstasy was a gorgeous appreciation. It was his sense that, for once, he was magnificently atune to life and that everything about him was radiating a brightness and a glamor he might never know again.

A low pale oblong detached itself suddenly from the darkness of the peninsula, spitting forth the reverberate sound of a racing motorboat. Two white streamers of cleft water rolled themselves out behind it and almost immediately the boat was beside him, drowning out the hot tinkle of the piano in the drone of its spray. Dexter raising himself on his arms was aware of a figure standing at the wheel, of two dark eyes regarding him over the lengthening space of water—then the boat had gone by and was sweeping in an immense and purposeless circle of spray round and round in the middle of the lake. With equal eccentricity one of the circles flattened out and headed back toward the raft.

“Who’s that?” she called, shutting off the motor. She was so near now that Dexter could see her bathing suit, which consisted apparently of pink rompers. “Oh—you’re one of the men I hit in the stomach.”

The nose of the boat bumped the raft. After an inexpert struggle, Dexter managed to twist the line around a two-by-four. Then the raft tilted rakishly as she sprung on.

“Well, kiddo,” she said huskily, “do you”—she broke off. She had sat herself upon the springboard, found it damp and jumped up quickly,—“do you want to go surf-board riding?”

He indicated that he would be delighted.

“The name is Judy Jones. Ghastly reputation but enormously popular.” She favored him with an absurd smirk—rather, what tried to be a smirk, for, twist her mouth as she might, it was not grotesque, it was merely beautiful. “See that house over on the peninsula?”

“No.”

“Well, there’s a house there that I live in only you can’t see it because it’s too dark. And in that house there is a fella waiting for me. When he drove up by the door I drove out by the dock because he has watery eyes and asks me if I have an ideal.”

There was a fish jumping and a star shining and the lights around the lake were gleaming. Dexter sat beside Judy Jones and she explained how her boat was driven. Then she was in the water, swimming to the floating surf-board with exquisite crawl. Watching her was as without effort to the eye as watch-

ing a branch waving or a sea-gull flying. Her arms, burned to butternut, moved sinuously among the dull platinum ripples, elbow appearing first, casting the forearm back with a cadence of falling water, then reaching out and down stabbing a path ahead.

They moved out into the lake and, turning, Dexter saw that she was kneeling on the low rear of the now up-tilted surf-board.

"Go faster," she called, "fast as it'll go."

Obediently he jammed the lever forward and the white spray mounted at the bow. When he looked around again the girl was standing up on the rushing board, her arms spread ecstatically, her eyes lifted toward the moon.

"It's awful cold, kiddo," she shouted. "What's your name anyways?"

"The name is Dexter Green. Would it amuse you to know how good you look back there?"

"Yes," she shouted, "it would amuse me. Except that I'm too cold. Come to dinner tomorrow night."

He kept thinking how glad he was that he had never caddied for this girl. The damp gingham clinging made her like a statue and turned her intense mobility to immobility at last.

"—At seven o'clock," she shouted, "Judy Jones, Girl, who hit man in stomach. Better write it down,"—and then, "Faster—oh, faster!"

Had he been as calm inwardly as he was in appearance, Dexter would have had time to examine his surroundings in detail. He received, however, an enduring impression that the house was the most elaborate he had ever seen. He had known for a long time that it was the finest on Lake Erminie, with a Pompeiian swimming pool and twelve acres of lawn and garden. But what gave it an air of breathless intensity was the sense that it was inhabited by Judy Jones—that it was as casual a thing to her as the little house in the village had once been to Dexter. There was a feeling of mystery in it, of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and strange than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through these deep corridors and of romances that were not musty and laid already in lavender, but were fresh and breathing and set forth in rich motor cars and in great dances whose flowers were scarcely withered. They were more real because he could feel them all about him, pervading the air with the shades and echoes of still vibrant emotion.

And so while he waited for her to appear he peopled the soft deep summer room and the sun porch that opened from it with the men who had already loved Judy Jones. He knew the sort of men they were—the men who when he first went to college had entered from the great prep-schools with graceful clothes and the deep tan of healthy summer, who did nothing or anything with the same debonaire ease.

Dexter had seen that, in one sense, he was better than these men. He was newer and stronger. Yet in acknowledging to himself that he wished his children to be like them he was admitting that he was but the rough, strong stuff from which this graceful aristocracy eternally sprang.

When, a year before, the time had come when he could wear good clothes, he had known who were the best tailors in America, and the best tailor in America had made him the suit he wore this evening. He had acquired that particular reserve peculiar to his university, that set it off from other universities. He recognized the value to him of such a mannerism and he had

adopted it; he knew that to be careless in dress and manner required more confidence than to be careful. But carelessness was for his children. His mother's name had been Krimlich. She was a Bohemian¹ of the peasant class and she had talked broken English to the end of her days. Her son must keep to the set patterns.

He waited for Judy Jones in her house, and he saw these other young men around him. It excited him that many men had loved her. It increased her value in his eyes.

At a little after seven Judy Jones came downstairs. She wore a blue silk afternoon dress. He was disappointed at first that she had not put on something more elaborate, and this feeling was accentuated when, after a brief greeting, she went to the door of a butler's pantry and pushing it open called: "You can have dinner, Martha." He had rather expected that a butler would announce dinner, that there would be a cocktail perhaps. It even offended him that she should know the maid's name.

Then he put these thoughts behind him as they sat down together on a chintz-covered lounge.

"Father and mother won't be here," she said.

"Ought I to be sorry?"

"They're really quite nice," she confessed, as if it had just occurred to her. "I think my father's the best looking man of his age I've ever seen. And mother looks about thirty."

He remembered the last time he had seen her father, and found he was glad the parents were not to be here tonight. They would wonder who he was. He had been born in Keeble, a Minnesota village fifty miles farther north and he always gave Keeble as his home instead of Dillard. Country towns were well enough to come from if they weren't inconveniently in sight and used as foot-stools by fashionable lakes.

Before dinner he found the conversation unsatisfactory. The beautiful Judy seemed faintly irritable—as much so as it was possible to be with a comparative stranger. They discussed Lake Erminie and its golf course, the surf-board riding of the night before and the cold she had caught, which made her voice more husky and charming than ever. They talked of his university which she had visited frequently during the past two years, and of the nearby city which supplied Lake Erminie with its patrons and whither Dexter would return next day to his prospering laundries.

During dinner she slipped into a moody depression which gave Dexter a feeling of guilt. Whatever petulance she uttered in her throaty voice worried him. Whatever she smiled at—at him, at a silver fork, at nothing—it disturbed him that her smile could have no root in mirth, or even in amusement. When the red corners of her lips curved down, it was less a smile than an invitation to a kiss.

Then, after dinner, she led him out on the dark sun-porch and deliberately changed the atmosphere.

"Do I seem gloomy?" she demanded.

"No, but I'm afraid I'm boring you," he answered quickly.

1. Native of Bohemia, in the Czech Republic.

"You're not. I like you. But I've just had rather an unpleasant afternoon. There was a—man I cared about. He told me out of a clear sky that he was poor as a church-mouse. He'd never even hinted it before. Does this sound horribly mundane?"

"Perhaps he was afraid to tell you."

"I suppose he was," she answered thoughtfully. "He didn't start right. You see, if I'd thought of him as poor—well, I've been mad about loads of poor men, and fully intended to marry them all. But in this case, I hadn't thought of him that way and my interest in him wasn't strong enough to survive the shock."

"I know. As if a girl calmly informed her fiancé that she was a widow. He might not object to widows, but——"

"Let's start right," she suggested suddenly. "Who are you, anyhow?"

For a moment Dexter hesitated. There were two versions of his life that he could tell. There was Dillard and his caddying and his struggle through college, or——

"I'm nobody," he announced. "My career is largely a matter of futures."

"Are you poor?"

"No," he said frankly, "I'm probably making more money than any man my age in the northwest. I know that's an obnoxious remark, but you advised me to start right."

There was a pause. She smiled, and with a touch of amusement.

"You sound like a man in a play."

"It's your fault. You tempted me into being assertive."

Suddenly she turned her dark eyes directly upon him and the corners of her mouth drooped until her face seemed to open like a flower. He dared scarcely to breathe, he had the sense that she was exerting some force upon him; making him overwhelmingly conscious of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, the freshness of many clothes, of cool rooms and gleaming things, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor.

The porch was bright with the bought luxury of starshine. The wicker of the settee squeaked fashionably when he put his arm around her, commanded by her eyes. He kissed her curious and lovely mouth and committed himself to the following of a grail.

It began like that—and continued, with varying shades of intensity, on such a note right up to the dénouement. Dexter surrendered a part of himself to the most direct and unprincipled personality with which he had ever come in contact. Whatever the beautiful Judy Jones desired, she went after with the full pressure of her charm. There was no divergence of method, no jockeying for position or premeditation of effects—there was very little mental quality in any of her affairs. She simply made men conscious to the highest degree of her physical loveliness.

Dexter had no desire to change her. Her deficiencies were knit up with a passionate energy that transcended and justified them.

When, as Judy's head lay against his shoulder that first night, she whispered:

"I don't know what's the matter with me. Last night I thought I was in love with a man and tonight I think I'm in love with you——"

—it seemed to him a beautiful and romantic thing to say. It was the exquisite excitability that for the moment he controlled and owned. But a week later he was compelled to view this same quality in a different light. She took him in her roadster to a picnic supper and after supper she disappeared, likewise in her roadster, with another man. Dexter became enormously upset and was scarcely able to be decently civil to the other people present. When she assured him that she had not kissed the other man he knew she was lying—yet he was glad that she had taken the trouble to lie to him.

He was, as he found before the summer ended, one of a dozen, a varying dozen, who circulated about her. Each of them had at one time been favored above all others—about half of them still basked in the solace of occasional sentimental revivals. Whenever one showed signs of dropping out through long neglect she granted him a brief honeyed hour which encouraged him to tag along for a year or so longer. Judy made these forays upon the helpless and defeated without malice, indeed half unconscious that there was anything mischievous in what she did.

When a new man came to town everyone dropped out—dates were automatically cancelled.

The helpless part of trying to do anything about it was that she did it all herself. She was not a girl who could be “won” in the kinetic sense—she was proof against cleverness, she was proof against charm, if any of these assailed her too strongly she would immediately resolve the affair to a physical basis and under the magic of her physical splendor the strong as well as the brilliant played her game and not their own. She was entertained only by the gratification of her desires and by the direct exercise of her own charm. Perhaps from so much youthful love, so many youthful lovers she had come, in self defense, to nourish herself wholly from within.

Succeeding Dexter’s first exhilaration came restlessness and dissatisfaction. The helpless ecstasy of losing himself in her charm was a powerful opiate rather than a tonic. It was fortunate for his work during the winter that those moments of ecstasy came infrequently. Early in their acquaintance it had seemed for a while that there was a deep and spontaneous mutual attraction—that first August for example—three days of long evenings on her dusky verandah, of strange wan kisses through the late afternoon, in shadowy alcoves or behind the protecting trellises of the garden arbors, of mornings when she was fresh as a dream and almost shy at meeting him in the clarity of the rising day. There was all the ecstasy of an engagement about it, sharpened by his realization that there was no engagement. It was during those three days that, for the first time, he had asked her to marry him. She said “maybe some day,” she said “kiss me,” she said “I’d like to marry you,” she said “I love you,”—she said—nothing.

The three days were interrupted by the arrival of a New York man who visited the Jones’ for half September. To Dexter’s agony, rumor engaged them. The man was the son of the president of a great trust company. But at the end of a month it was reported that Judy was yawning. At a dance one night she sat all evening in a motor boat with an old beau, while the New Yorker searched the club for her frantically. She told the old beau that she was bored with her visitor and two days later he left. She was seen with him at the station and it was reported that he looked very mournful indeed.

On this note the summer ended. Dexter was twenty-four and he found himself increasingly in a position to do as he wished. He joined two clubs in the city and lived at one of them. Though he was by no means an integral part of the stag-lines at these clubs he managed to be on hand at dances where Judy Jones was likely to appear. He could have gone out socially as much as he liked—he was an eligible young man, now, and popular with downtown fathers. His confessed devotion to Judy Jones had rather solidified his position. But he had no social aspirations and rather despised the dancing men who were always on tap for the Thursday or Saturday parties and who filled in at dinners with the younger married set. Already he was playing with the idea of going East to New York. He wanted to take Judy Jones with him. No disillusion as to the world in which she had grown up could cure his illusion as to her desirability.

Remember that—for only in the light of it can what he did for her be understood.

Eighteen months after he first met Judy Jones he became engaged to another girl. Her name was Irene Scheerer and her father was one of the men who had always believed in Dexter. Irene was light haired and sweet and honorable and a little stout and she had two beaux whom she pleasantly relinquished when Dexter formally asked her to marry him.

Summer, fall, winter, spring, another summer, another fall—so much he had given of his active life to the curved lips of Judy Jones. She had treated him with interest, with encouragement, with malice, with indifference, with contempt. She had inflicted on him the innumerable little slights and indignities possible in such a case—as if in revenge for having ever cared for him at all. She had beckoned him and yawned at him and beckoned him again and he had responded often with bitterness and narrowed eyes. She had brought him ecstatic happiness and intolerable agony of spirit. She had caused him untold inconvenience and not a little trouble. She had insulted him and she had ridden over him and she had played his interest in her against his interest in his work—for fun. She had done everything to him except to criticize him—this she had not done—it seemed to him only because it might have sullied the utter indifference she manifested and sincerely felt toward him.

When autumn had come and gone again it occurred to him that he could not have Judy Jones. He had to beat this into his mind but he convinced himself at last. He lay awake at night for a while and argued it over. He told himself the trouble and the pain she had caused him, he enumerated her glaring deficiencies as a wife. Then he said to himself that he loved her and after a while he fell asleep. For a week, lest he imagine her husky voice over the telephone or her eyes opposite him at lunch, he worked hard and late and at night he went to his office and plotted out his years.

At the end of a week he went to a dance and cut in on her once. For almost the first time since they had met he did not ask her to sit out with him or tell her that she was lovely. It hurt him that she did not miss these things—that was all. He was not jealous when he saw that there was a new man tonight. He had been hardened against jealousy long before.

He stayed late at the dance. He sat for an hour with Irene Scheerer and talked about books and about music. He knew very little about either. But

he was beginning to be master of his own time now and he had a rather priggish notion that he—the young and already fabulously successful Dexter Green—should know more about such things.

That was in October when he was twenty-five. In January Dexter and Irene became engaged. It was to be announced in June and they were to be married three months later.

The Minnesota winter prolonged itself interminably and it was almost May when the winds came soft and the snow ran down into Lake Erminie at last. For the first time in over a year Dexter was enjoying a certain tranquility of spirit. Judy Jones had been in Florida and afterwards in Hot Springs and somewhere she had been engaged and somewhere she had broken it off. At first, when Dexter had definitely given her up, it had made him sad that people still linked them together and asked for news of her, but when he began to be placed at dinner next to Irene Scheerer people didn't ask him about her any more—they told him about her. He ceased to be an authority on her.

May at last. Dexter walked the streets at night when the darkness was damp as rain, wondering that so soon, with so little done, so much of ecstasy had gone from him. May one year back had been marked by Judy's poignant, unforgivable, yet forgiven turbulence—it had been one of those rare times when he fancied she had grown to care for him. That old penny's worth of happiness he had spent for this bushel of content. He knew that Irene would be no more than a curtain spread behind him, a hand moving among gleaming tea cups, a voice calling to children . . . fire and loveliness were gone, magic of night and the hushed wonder of the hours and seasons . . . slender lips, down turning, dropping to his lips like poppy petals, bearing him up into a heaven of eyes . . . a haunting gesture, light of a warm lamp on her hair. The thing was deep in him. He was too strong, too alive for it to die lightly.

In the middle of May when the weather balanced for a few days on the thin bridge that led to deep summer he turned in one night at Irene's house. Their engagement was to be announced in a week now—no one would be surprised at it. And tonight they would sit together on the lounge at the College Club and look on for an hour at the dancers. It gave him a sense of solidity to go with her—. She was so sturdily popular, so intensely a "good egg."

He mounted the steps of the brown stone house and stepped inside.

"Irene," he called.

Mrs. Scheerer came out of the living room to meet him.

"Dexter," she said. "Irene's gone upstairs with a splitting headache. She wanted to go with you but I made her go to bed."

"Nothing serious I—"

"Oh, no. She's going to play golf with you in the morning. You can spare her for just one night, can't you, Dexter?"

Her smile was kind. She and Dexter liked each other. In the living room he talked for a moment before he said goodnight.

Returning to the College Club, where he had rooms, he stood in the doorway for a moment and watched the dancers. He leaned against the door post, nodded at a man or two—yawned.

"Hello, kiddo."

The familiar voice at his elbow startled him. Judy Jones had left a man and crossed the room to him—Judy Jones, a slender enamelled doll in cloth of

gold, gold in a band at her head, gold in two slipper points at her dress's hem. The fragile glow of her face seemed to blossom as she smiled at him. A breeze of warmth and light blew through the room. His hands in the pockets of his dinner jacket tightened spasmodically. He was filled with a sudden excitement.

"When did you get back?" he asked casually.

"Come here and I'll tell you about it."

She turned and he followed her. She had been away—he could have wept at the wonder of her return. She had passed through enchanted streets, doing young things that were like plaintive music. All mysterious happenings, all fresh and quickening hopes, had gone away with her, come back with her now.

She turned in the doorway.

"Have you a car here? If you haven't I have."

"I have a coupé."

In then, with a rustle of golden cloth. He slammed the door. Into so many cars she had stepped—like this—like that—her back against the leather, so—her elbow resting on the door—waiting. She would have been soiled long since had there been anything to soil her,—except herself—but these things were all her own outpouring.

With an effort he forced himself to start the car and avoiding her surprised glance backed into the street. This was nothing, he must remember. She had done this before and he had put her behind him, as he would have slashed a bad account from his books.

He drove slowly downtown and affecting a disinterested abstraction traversed the deserted streets of the business section, peopled here and there, where a movie was giving out its crowd or where consumptive or pugilistic youth lounged in front of pool halls. The clink of glasses and the slap of hands on the bars issued from saloons, cloisters of glazed glass and dirty yellow light.

She was watching him closely and the silence was embarrassing yet in this crisis he could find no casual word with which to profane the hour. At a convenient turning he began to zig-zag back toward the College Club.

"Have you missed me?" she asked suddenly.

"Everybody missed you."

He wondered if she knew of Irene Scheerer. She had been back only a day—her absence had been almost contemporaneous with his engagement.

"What a remark!" Judy laughed sadly—without sadness. She looked at him searchingly. He became absorbed for a moment in the dashboard.

"You're handsomer than you used to be," she said thoughtfully. "Dexter, you have the most rememberable eyes."

He could have laughed at this, but he did not laugh. It was the sort of thing that was said to sophomores. Yet it stabbed at him.

"I'm awfully tired of everything, kiddo." She called everyone kiddo, endowing the obsolete slang with careless, individual camaraderie. "I wish you'd marry me."

The directness of this confused him. He should have told her now that he was going to marry another girl but he could not tell her. He could as easily have sworn that he had never loved her.

"I think we'd get along," she continued, on the same note, "unless probably you've forgotten me and fallen in love with another girl."

Her confidence was obviously enormous. She had said, in effect, that she found such a thing impossible to believe, that if it were true he had merely committed a childish indiscretion—and probably to show off. She would forgive him, because it was not a matter of any moment but rather something to be brushed aside lightly.

“Of course you could never love anybody but me,” she continued. “I like the way you love me. Oh, Dexter, have you forgotten last year?”

“No, I haven’t forgotten.”

“Neither have I!”

Was she sincerely moved—or was she carried along by the wave of her own acting?

“I wish we could be like that again,” she said, and he forced himself to answer:

“I don’t think we can.”

“I suppose not. . . . I hear you’re giving Irene Scheerer a violent rush.”

There was not the faintest emphasis on the name, yet Dexter was suddenly ashamed.

“Oh, take me home,” cried Judy suddenly. “I don’t want to go back to that idiotic dance—with those children.”

Then, as he turned up the street that led to the residence district, Judy began to cry quietly to herself. He had never seen her cry before.

The dark street lightened, the dwellings of the rich loomed up around them, he stopped his coupé in front of the great white bulk of the Mortimer Jones’ house, somnolent, gorgeous, drenched with the splendor of the damp moonlight. Its solidity startled him. The strong walls, the fine steel of the girders, the breadth and beam and pomp of it were there only to bring out the contrast with the young beauty beside him. It was sturdy to accentuate her slightness—as if to show what a breeze could be generated by a butterfly’s wing.

He sat perfectly quiet, his nerves in wild clamor, afraid that if he moved he would find her irresistibly in his arms. Two tears had rolled down her wet face and trembled on her upper lip.

“I’m more beautiful than anybody else,” she said brokenly, “why can’t I be happy?” Her moist eyes tore at his stability—mouth turned slowly downward with an exquisite sadness. “I’d like to marry you if you’ll have me, Dexter. I suppose you think I’m not worth having but I’ll be so beautiful for you, Dexter.”

A million phrases of anger, of pride, of passion, of hatred, of tenderness fought on his lips. Then a perfect wave of emotion washed over him, carrying off with it a sediment of wisdom, of convention, of doubt, of honor. This was his girl who was speaking, his own, his beautiful, his pride.

“Won’t you come in?” he heard her draw in her breath sharply.

Waiting.

“All right,” his voice was trembling, “I’ll come in.”

It seems strange to say that neither when it was over nor a long time afterward did he regret that night. Looking at it from the perspective of ten years, the fact that Judy’s flare for him endured just one month seemed of little importance. Nor did it matter that by his yielding he subjected himself to a deeper agony in the end and gave serious hurt to Irene Scheerer and to

Irene's parents who had befriended him. There was nothing sufficiently pictorial about Irene's grief to stamp itself on his mind.

Dexter was at bottom hard-minded. The attitude of the city on his action was of no importance to him, not because he was going to leave the city, but because any outside attitude on the situation seemed superficial. He was completely indifferent to popular opinion. Nor, when he had seen that it was no use, that he did not possess in himself the power to move fundamentally or to hold Judy Jones, did he bear any malice toward her. He loved her and he would love her until the day he was too old for loving—but he could not have her. So he tasted the deep pain that is reserved only for the strong, just as he had tasted for a little while the deep happiness.

Even the ultimate falsity of the grounds upon which Judy terminated the engagement—that she did not want to “take him away” from Irene, that it—was on her conscience—did not revolt him. He was beyond any revulsion or any amusement.

He went east in February with the intention of selling out his laundries and settling in New York—but the war² came to America in March and changed his plans. He returned to the west, handed over the management of the business to his partner and went into the first officers' training camp in late April. He was one of those young thousands who greeted the war with a certain amount of relief, welcoming the liberation from webs of tangled emotion.

This story is not his biography, remember, although things creep into it which have nothing to do with those dreams he had when he was young. We are almost done with them and with him now. There is only one more incident to be related here and it happens seven years farther on.

It took place in New York, where he had done well—so well that there were no barriers too high for him now. He was thirty-two years old, and, except for one flying trip immediately after the war, he had not been west in seven years. A man named Devlin from Detroit came into his office to see him in a business way, and then and there this incident occurred, and closed out, so to speak, this particular side of his life.

“So you're from the middle west,” said the man Devlin with careless curiosity. “That's funny—I thought men like you were probably born and raised on Wall Street. You know—wife of one of my best friends in Detroit came from your city. I was an usher at the wedding.”

Dexter waited with no apprehension of what was coming. There was a magic that his city would never lose for him. Just as Judy's house had always seemed to him more mysterious and gay than other houses, so his dream of the city itself, now that he had gone from it, was pervaded with a melancholy beauty.

“Judy Simms,” said Devlin with no particular interest, “Judy Jones she was once.”

“Yes. I knew her.” A dull impatience spread over him. He had heard, of course, that she was married,—perhaps deliberately he had heard no more.

“Awfully nice girl,” brooded Devlin, meaninglessly, “I'm sort of sorry for her.”

“Why?” Something in Dexter was alert, receptive, at once.

2. World War I, which the United States entered in 1917.

“Oh, Joe Simms has gone to pieces in a way. I don’t mean he beats her, you understand, or anything like that. But he drinks and runs around—”

“Doesn’t she run around?”

“No. Stays at home with her kids.”

“Oh.”

“She’s a little too old for him,” said Devlin.

“Too old!” cried Dexter, “why man, she’s only twenty-seven.”

He was possessed with a wild notion of rushing out into the streets and taking a train to Detroit. He rose to his feet, spasmodically, involuntarily.

“I guess you’re busy,” Devlin apologized quickly. “I didn’t realize—”

“No, I’m not busy,” said Dexter, steadying his voice. “I’m not busy at all. Not busy at all. Did you say she was—twenty-seven. No, I said she was twenty-seven.”

“Yes, you did,” agreed Devlin drily.

“Go on, then. Go on.”

“What do you mean?”

“About Judy Jones.”

Devlin looked at him helplessly.

“Well, that’s—I told you all there is to it. He treats her like the devil. Oh, they’re not going to get divorced or anything. When he’s particularly outrageous she forgives him. In fact, I’m inclined to think she loves him. She was a pretty girl when she first came to Detroit.”

A pretty girl! The phrase struck Dexter as ludicrous.

“Isn’t she—a pretty girl any more?”

“Oh, she’s all right.”

“Look here,” said Dexter, sitting down suddenly, “I don’t understand. You say she was a ‘pretty girl’ and now you say she’s ‘all right.’ I don’t understand what you mean—Judy Jones wasn’t a pretty girl, at all. She was a great beauty. Why, I knew her, I knew her. She was—”

Devlin laughed pleasantly.

“I’m not trying to start a row,” he said. “I think Judy’s a nice girl and I like her. I can’t understand how a man like Joe Simms could fall madly in love with her, but he did.” Then he added, “Most of the women like her.”

Dexter looked closely at Devlin, thinking wildly that there must be a reason for this, some insensitivity in the man or some private malice.

“Lots of women fade just-like-*that*.” Devlin snapped his fingers. “You must have seen it happen. Perhaps I’ve forgotten how pretty she was at her wedding. I’ve seen her so much since then, you see. She has nice eyes.”

A sort of dullness settled down upon Dexter. For the first time in his life he felt like getting very drunk. He knew that he was laughing loudly at something Devlin had said but he did not know what it was or why it was funny. When Devlin went, in a few minutes, he lay down on his lounge and looked out the window at the New York skyline into which the sun was sinking in dully lovely shades of pink and gold.

He had thought that having nothing else to lose he was invulnerable at last—but he knew that he had just lost something more, as surely as if he had married Judy Jones and seen her fade away before his eyes.

The dream was gone. Something had been taken from him. In a sort of panic he pushed the palms of his hands into his eyes and tried to bring up a picture of the waters lapping at Lake Erminie and the moonlit verandah,

and gingham on the golf links and the dry sun and the gold color of her neck's soft down. And her mouth damp to his kisses and her eyes plaintive with melancholy and her freshness like new fine linen in the morning. Why these things were no longer in the world. They had existed and they existed no more.

For the first time in years the tears were streaming down his face. But they were for himself now. He did not care about mouth and eyes and moving hands. He wanted to care and he could not care. For he had gone away and he could never go back any more. The gates were closed, the sun was gone down and there was no beauty but the grey beauty of steel that withstands all time. Even the grief he could have borne was left behind in the country of illusion, of youth, of the richness of life, where his winter dreams had flourished.

"Long ago," he said, "long ago, there was something in me, but now that thing is gone. Now that thing is gone, that thing is gone. I cannot cry. I cannot care. That thing will come back no more."

1922

Babylon Revisited¹

"And where's Mr. Campbell?" Charlie asked.

"Gone to Switzerland. Mr. Campbell's a pretty sick man, Mr. Wales."

"I'm sorry to hear that. And George Hardt?" Charlie inquired.

"Back in America, gone to work."

"And where is the Snow Bird?"

"He was in here last week. Anyway, his friend, Mr. Schaeffer, is in Paris."

Two familiar names from the long list of a year and a half ago. Charlie scribbled an address in his notebook and tore out the page.

"If you see Mr. Schaeffer, give him this," he said. "It's my brother-in-law's address. I haven't settled on a hotel yet."

He was not really disappointed to find Paris was so empty. But the stillness in the Ritz bar was strange and portentous. It was not an American bar any more—he felt polite in it, and not as if he owned it. It had gone back into France. He felt the stillness from the moment he got out of the taxi and saw the doorman, usually in a frenzy of activity at this hour, gossiping with a *chasseur*² by the servants' entrance.

Passing through the corridor, he heard only a single, bored voice in the once-clamorous women's room. When he turned into the bar he traveled the twenty feet of green carpet with his eyes fixed straight ahead by old habit; and then, with his foot firmly on the rail, he turned and surveyed the room, encountering only a single pair of eyes that fluttered up from a newspaper in the corner. Charlie asked for the head barman, Paul, who in the latter days of the bull market had come to work in his own custom-built

1. Babylon was an ancient, prosperous city in Mesopotamia, associated by the Hebrews and Greeks with materialism and sensual pleasure; here, the reference is to Paris, where the story is

set in the aftermath of the stock market crash of 1929.

2. Messenger-boy, errand runner (French).

car—disembarking, however, with due nicety at the nearest corner. But Paul was at his country house today and Alix giving him information.

“No, no more,” Charlie said, “I’m going slow these days.”

Alix congratulated him: “You were going pretty strong a couple of years ago.”

“I’ll stick to it all right,” Charlie assured him. “I’ve stuck to it for over a year and a half now.”

“How do you find conditions in America?”

“I haven’t been to America for months. I’m in business in Prague, representing a couple of concerns there. They don’t know about me down there.”

Alix smiled.

“Remember the night of George Hardt’s bachelor dinner here?” said Charlie. “By the way, what’s become of Claude Fessenden?”

Alix lowered his voice confidentially: “He’s in Paris, but he doesn’t come here any more. Paul doesn’t allow it. He ran up a bill of thirty thousand francs, charging all his drinks and his lunches, and usually his dinner, for more than a year. And when Paul finally told him he had to pay, he gave him a bad check.”

Alix shook his head sadly.

“I don’t understand it, such a dandy fellow. Now he’s all bloated up—” He made a plump apple of his hands.

Charlie watched a group of strident queens installing themselves in a corner.

“Nothing affects them,” he thought. “Stocks rise and fall, people loaf or work, but they go on forever.” The place oppressed him. He called for the dice and shook with Alix for the drink.

“Here for long, Mr. Wales?”

“I’m here for four or five days to see my little girl.”

“Oh-h! You have a little girl?”

Outside, the fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs shone smokily through the tranquil rain. It was late afternoon and the streets were in movement; the *bistros*³ gleamed. At the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines he took a taxi. The Place de la Concorde moved by in pink majesty; they crossed the logical Seine, and Charlie felt the sudden provincial quality of the left bank.⁴

Charlie directed his taxi to the Avenue de l’Opera, which was out of his way. But he wanted to see the blue hour spread over the magnificent façade, and imagine that the cab horns, playing endlessly the first few bars of *Le Plus que Lent*,⁵ were the trumpets of the Second Empire. They were closing the iron grill in front of Brentano’s Book-store, and people were already at dinner behind the trim little bourgeois hedge of Duval’s. He had never eaten at a really cheap restaurant in Paris. Five-course dinner, four francs fifty, eighteen cents, wine included. For some odd reason he wished that he had.

As they rolled on to the Left Bank and he felt its sudden provincialism, he thought, “I spoiled this city for myself. I didn’t realize it, but the days came along one after another, and then two years were gone, and everything was gone, and I was gone.”

3. Small, informal restaurants.

4. Paris is divided by the Seine River; the grander buildings and broader streets are on the Right Bank. To Charlie, the Left Bank is more like a

town than a city.

5. I.e., *La Plus que Lente* (More than slow), piano composition by French composer Claude Debussy (1862–1918).

He was thirty-five, and good to look at. The Irish mobility of his face was sobered by a deep wrinkle between his eyes. As he rang his brother-in-law's bell in the Rue Palatine, the wrinkle deepened till it pulled down his brows; he felt a cramping sensation in his belly. From behind the maid who opened the door darted a lovely little girl of nine who shrieked "Daddy!" and flew up, struggling like a fish, into his arms. She pulled his head around by one ear and set her cheek against his.

"My old pie," he said.

"Oh, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, dads, dads, dads!"

She drew him into the salon, where the family waited, a boy and a girl his daughter's age, his sister-in-law and her husband. He greeted Marion with his voice pitched carefully to avoid either feigned enthusiasm or dislike, but her response was more frankly tepid, though she minimized her expression of unalterable distrust by directing her regard toward his child. The two men clasped hands in a friendly way and Lincoln Peters rested his for a moment on Charlie's shoulder.

The room was warm and comfortably American. The three children moved intimately about, playing through the yellow oblongs that led to other rooms; the cheer of six o'clock spoke in the eager smacks of the fire and the sounds of French activity in the kitchen. But Charlie did not relax; his heart sat up rigidly in his body and he drew confidence from his daughter, who from time to time came close to him, holding in her arms the doll he had brought.

"Really extremely well," he declared in answer to Lincoln's question. "There's a lot of business there that isn't moving at all, but we're doing even better than ever. In fact, damn well. I'm bringing my sister over from America next month to keep house for me. My income last year was bigger than it was when I had money. You see, the Czechs—"

His boasting was for a specific purpose; but after a moment, seeing a faint restiveness in Lincoln's eye, he changed the subject:

"Those are fine children of yours, well brought up, good manners."

"We think Honoria's a great little girl too."

Marion Peters came back from the kitchen. She was a tall woman with worried eyes, who had once possessed a fresh American loveliness. Charlie had never been sensitive to it and was always surprised when people spoke of how pretty she had been. From the first there had been an instinctive antipathy between them.

"Well, how do you find Honoria?" she asked.

"Wonderful. I was astonished how much she's grown in ten months. All the children are looking well."

"We haven't had a doctor for a year. How do you like being back in Paris?"

"It seems very funny to see so few Americans around."

"I'm delighted," Marion said vehemently. "Now at least you can go into a store without their assuming you're a millionaire. We've suffered like everybody, but on the whole it's a good deal pleasanter."

"But it was nice while it lasted," Charlie said. "We were a sort of royalty, almost infallible, with a sort of magic around us. In the bar this afternoon"—he stumbled, seeing his mistake—"there wasn't a man I knew."

She looked at him keenly. "I should think you'd have had enough of bars."

"I only stayed a minute. I take one drink every afternoon, and no more."

"Don't you want a cocktail before dinner?" Lincoln asked.

"I take only one drink every afternoon, and I've had that."

"I hope you keep to it," said Marion.

Her dislike was evident in the coldness with which she spoke, but Charlie only smiled; he had larger plans. Her very aggressiveness gave him an advantage, and he knew enough to wait. He wanted them to initiate the discussion of what they knew had brought him to Paris.

At dinner he couldn't decide whether Honoria was most like him or her mother. Fortunate if she didn't combine the traits of both that had brought them to disaster. A great wave of protectiveness went over him. He thought he knew what to do for her. He believed in character; he wanted to jump back a whole generation and trust in character again as the eternally valuable element. Everything else wore out.

He left soon after dinner, but not to go home. He was curious to see Paris by night with clearer and more judicious eyes than those of other days. He bought a *strapontin* for the Casino and watched Josephine Baker⁶ go through her chocolate arabesques.

After an hour he left and strolled toward Montmartre, up the Rue Pigalle into the Place Blanche. The rain had stopped and there were a few people in evening clothes disembarking from taxis in front of cabarets, and *cocottes*⁷ prowling singly or in pairs, and many Negroes. He passed a lighted door from which issued music, and stopped with the sense of familiarity; it was Bricktop's, where he had parted with so many hours and so much money. A few doors farther on he found another ancient rendezvous and incautiously put his head inside. Immediately an eager orchestra burst into sound, a pair of professional dancers leaped to their feet and a maître d'hôtel swooped toward him, crying, "Crowd just arriving, sir!" But he withdrew quickly.

"You have to be damn drunk," he thought.

Zelli's was closed, the bleak and sinister cheap hotels surrounding it were dark; up in the Rue Blanche there was more light and a local, colloquial French crowd. The Poet's Cave had disappeared, but the two great mouths of the Café of Heaven and the Café of Hell still yawned—even devoured, as he watched, the meager contents of a tourist bus—a German, a Japanese, and an American couple who glanced at him with frightened eyes.

So much for the effort and ingenuity of Montmartre. All the catering to vice and waste was on an utterly childish scale, and he suddenly realized the meaning of the word "dissipate"—to dissipate into thin air; to make nothing out of something. In the little hours of the night every move from place to place was an enormous human jump, an increase of paying for the privilege of slower and slower motion.

He remembered thousand-franc notes given to an orchestra for playing a single number, hundred-franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab.

But it hadn't been given for nothing.

It had been given, even the most wildly squandered sum, as an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth remembering, the things that now he would always remember—his child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont.

6. African American jazz singer and dancer (1906–1975) who arrived in Paris with a vaudeville troupe in 1925 and remained as a star enter-

tainer. "*Strapontin*": folding seat.

7. Coquettes (French, literal trans.); prostitutes.

In the glare of a *brasserie*⁸ a woman spoke to him. He bought her some eggs and coffee, and then, eluding her encouraging stare, gave her a twenty-franc note and took a taxi to his hotel.

II

He woke upon a fine fall day—football weather. The depression of yesterday was gone and he liked the people on the streets. At noon he sat opposite Honoria at Le Grand Vatel, the only restaurant he could think of not reminiscent of champagne dinners and long luncheons that began at two and ended in a blurred and vague twilight.

“Now, how about vegetables? Oughtn’t you to have some vegetables?”

“Well, yes.”

“Here’s *épinards* and *chou-fleur* and carrots and *haricots*.”⁹

“I’d like *chou-fleur*.”

“Wouldn’t you like to have two vegetables?”

“I usually only have one at lunch.”

The waiter was pretending to be inordinately fond of children. “*Quelle est mignonne la petite! Elle parle exactement comme une Française.*”¹

“How about dessert? Shall we wait and see?”

The waiter disappeared. Honoria looked at her father expectantly.

“What are we going to do?”

“First, we’re going to that toy store in the Rue Saint-Honoré and buy you anything you like. And then we’re going to the vaudeville at the Empire.”

She hesitated. “I like it about the vaudeville, but not the toy store.”

“Why not?”

“Well, you brought me this doll.” She had it with her. “And I’ve got lots of things. And we’re not rich any more, are we?”

“We never were. But today you are to have anything you want.”

“All right,” she agreed resignedly.

When there had been her mother and a French nurse he had been inclined to be strict; now he extended himself, reached out for a new tolerance; he must be both parents to her and not shut any of her out of communication.

“I want to get to know you,” he said gravely. “First let me introduce myself. My name is Charles J. Wales, of Prague.”

“Oh, daddy!” her voice cracked with laughter.

“And who are you, please?” he persisted, and she accepted a rôle immediately: “Honoriam Wales, Rue Palatine, Paris.”

“Married or single?”

“No, not married. Single.”

He indicated the doll. “But I see you have a child, madame.”

Unwilling to disinherit it, she took it to her heart and thought quickly: “Yes, I’ve been married, but I’m not married now. My husband is dead.”

He went on quickly, “And the child’s name?”

“Simone. That’s after my best friend at school.”

8. Large, plain restaurant specializing in simple meals and beer.

9. Green beans (French). “*Épinards*”: spinach.

“*Chou-fleur*”: cauliflower.

1. How cute she is! She speaks exactly like a French girl (French).

"I'm very pleased that you're doing so well at school."

"I'm third this month," she boasted. "Elsie"—that was her cousin—"is only about eighteenth, and Richard is about at the bottom."

"You like Richard and Elsie, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. I like Richard quite well and I like her all right."

Cautiously and casually he asked: "And Aunt Marion and Uncle Lincoln—which do you like best?"

"Oh, Uncle Lincoln, I guess."

He was increasingly aware of her presence. As they came in, a murmur of ". . . adorable" followed them, and now the people at the next table bent all their silences upon her, staring as if she were something no more conscious than a flower.

"Why don't I live with you?" she asked suddenly. "Because mamma's dead?"

"You must stay here and learn more French. It would have been hard for daddy to take care of you so well."

"I don't really need much taking care of any more. I do everything for myself."

Going out of the restaurant, a man and a woman unexpectedly hailed him.

"Well, the old Wales!"

"Hello there, Lorraine. . . . Dunc."

Sudden ghosts out of the past: Duncan Schaeffer, a friend from college. Lorraine Quarrles, a lovely, pale blonde of thirty; one of a crowd who had helped them make months into days in the lavish times of three years ago.

"My husband couldn't come this year," she said, in answer to his question. "We're poor as hell. So he gave me two hundred a month and told me I could do my worst on that. . . . This your little girl?"

"What about coming back and sitting down?" Duncan asked.

"Can't do it." He was glad for an excuse. As always, he felt Lorraine's passionate, provocative attraction, but his own rhythm was different now.

"Well, how about dinner?" she asked.

"I'm not free. Give me your address and let me call you."

"Charlie, I believe you're sober," she said judicially. "I honestly believe he's sober, Dunc. Pinch him and see if he's sober."

Charlie indicated Honoria with his head. They both laughed.

"What's your address?" said Duncan skeptically.

He hesitated, unwilling to give the name of his hotel.

"I'm not settled yet. I'd better call you. We're going to see the vaudeville at the Empire."

"There! That's what I want to do," Lorraine said. "I want to see some clowns and acrobats and jugglers. That's just what we'll do, Dunc."

"We've got to do an errand first," said Charlie. "Perhaps we'll see you there."

"All right, you snob. . . . Good-by, beautiful little girl."

"Good-by."

Honoria bobbed politely.

Somehow, an unwelcome encounter. They liked him because he was functioning, because he was serious; they wanted to see him, because he was stronger than they were now, because they wanted to draw a certain sustenance from his strength.

At the Empire, Honoria proudly refused to sit upon her father's folded coat. She was already an individual with a code of her own, and Charlie was more

and more absorbed by the desire of putting a little of himself into her before she crystallized utterly. It was hopeless to try to know her in so short a time.

Between the acts they came upon Duncan and Lorraine in the lobby where the band was playing.

"Have a drink?"

"All right, but not up at the bar. We'll take a table."

"The perfect father."

Listening abstractedly to Lorraine, Charlie watched Honoria's eyes leave their table, and he followed them wistfully about the room, wondering what they saw. He met her glance and she smiled.

"I liked that lemonade," she said.

What had she said? What had he expected? Going home in a taxi afterward, he pulled her over until her head rested against his chest.

"Darling, do you ever think about your mother?"

"Yes, sometimes," she answered vaguely.

"I don't want you to forget her. Have you got a picture of her?"

"Yes, I think so. Anyhow, Aunt Marion has. Why don't you want me to forget her?"

"She loved you very much."

"I loved her too."

They were silent for a moment.

"Daddy, I want to come and live with you," she said suddenly.

His heart leaped; he had wanted it to come like this.

"Aren't you perfectly happy?"

"Yes, but I love you better than anybody. And you love me better than anybody, don't you, now that mummy's dead?"

"Of course I do. But you won't always like me best, honey. You'll grow up and meet somebody your own age and go marry him and forget you ever had a daddy."

"Yes, that's true," she agreed tranquilly.

He didn't go in. He was coming back at nine o'clock and he wanted to keep himself fresh and new for the thing he must say then.

"When you're safe inside, just show yourself in that window."

"All right. Good-by, dads, dads, dads, dads."

He waited in the dark street until she appeared, all warm and glowing, in the window above and kissed her fingers out into the night.

III

They were waiting. Marion sat behind the coffee service in a dignified black dinner dress that just faintly suggested mourning. Lincoln was walking up and down with the animation of one who had already been talking. They were as anxious as he was to get into the question. He opened it almost immediately:

"I suppose you know what I want to see you about—why I really came to Paris."

Marion played with the black stars on her necklace and frowned.

"I'm awfully anxious to have a home," he continued. "And I'm awfully anxious to have Honoria in it. I appreciate your taking in Honoria for her mother's sake, but things have changed now"—he hesitated and then continued

more forcibly—"changed radically with me, and I want to ask you to reconsider the matter. It would be silly for me to deny that about three years ago I was acting badly—"

Marion looked up at him with hard eyes.

"—but all that's over. As I told you, I haven't had more than a drink a day for over a year, and I take that drink deliberately, so that the idea of alcohol won't get too big in my imagination. You see the idea?"

"No," said Marion succinctly.

"It's a sort of stunt I set myself. It keeps the matter in proportion."

"I get you," said Lincoln. "You don't want to admit it's got any attraction for you."

"Something like that. Sometimes I forget and don't take it. But I try to take it. Anyhow, I couldn't afford to drink in my position. The people I represent are more than satisfied with what I've done, and I'm bringing my sister over from Burlington to keep house for me, and I want awfully to have Honoria too. You know that even when her mother and I weren't getting along well we never let anything that happened touch Honoria. I know she's fond of me and I know I'm able to take care of her and—well, there you are. How do you feel about it?"

He knew that now he would have to take a beating. It would last an hour or two hours, and it would be difficult, but if he modulated his inevitable resentment to the chastened attitude of the reformed sinner, he might win his point in the end.

Keep your temper, he told himself. You don't want to be justified. You want Honoria.

Lincoln spoke first: "We've been talking it over ever since we got your letter last month. We're happy to have Honoria here. She's a dear little thing, and we're glad to be able to help her, but of course that isn't the question—"

Marion interrupted suddenly. "How long are you going to stay sober, Charlie?" she asked.

"Permanently, I hope."

"How can anybody count on that?"

"You know I never did drink heavily until I gave up business and came over here with nothing to do. Then Helen and I began to run around with—"

"Please leave Helen out of it. I can't bear to hear you talk about her like that."

He stared at her grimly; he had never been certain how fond of each other the sisters were in life.

"My drinking only lasted about a year and a half—from the time we came over until I—collapsed."

"It was time enough."

"It was time enough," he agreed.

"My duty is entirely to Helen," she said. "I try to think what she would have wanted me to do. Frankly, from the night you did that terrible thing you haven't really existed for me. I can't help that. She was my sister."

"Yes."

"When she was dying she asked me to look out for Honoria. If you hadn't been in a sanitarium then, it might have helped matters."

He had no answer.

"I'll never in my life be able to forget the morning when Helen knocked at my door, soaked to the skin and shivering and said you'd locked her out."

Charlie gripped the sides of the chair. This was more difficult than he expected; he wanted to launch out into a long expostulation and explanation, but he only said: "The night I locked her out—" and she interrupted, "I don't feel up to going over that again."

After a moment's silence Lincoln said: "We're getting off the subject. You want Marion to set aside her legal guardianship and give you Honoria. I think the main point for her is whether she has confidence in you or not."

"I don't blame Marion," Charlie said slowly, "but I think she can have entire confidence in me. I had a good record up to three years ago. Of course, it's within human possibilities I might go wrong any time. But if we wait much longer I'll lose Honoria's childhood and my chance for a home." He shook his head, "I'll simply lose her, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Lincoln.

"Why didn't you think of all this before?" Marion asked.

"I suppose I did, from time to time, but Helen and I were getting along badly. When I consented to the guardianship, I was flat on my back in a sanitarium and the market had cleaned me out. I knew I'd acted badly, and I thought if it would bring any peace to Helen, I'd agree to anything. But now it's different. I'm functioning, I'm behaving damn well, so far as—"

"Please don't swear at me," Marion said.

He looked at her, startled. With each remark the force of her dislike became more and more apparent. She had built up all her fear of life into one wall and faced it toward him. This trivial reproof was possibly the result of some trouble with the cook several hours before. Charlie became increasingly alarmed at leaving Honoria in this atmosphere of hostility against himself; sooner or later it would come out, in a word here, a shake of the head there, and some of that distrust would be irrevocably implanted in Honoria. But he pulled his temper down out of his face and shut it up inside him; he had won a point, for Lincoln realized the absurdity of Marion's remark and asked her lightly since when she had objected to the word "damn."

"Another thing," Charlie said: "I'm able to give her certain advantages now. I'm going to take a French governess to Prague with me. I've got a lease on a new apartment—"

He stopped, realizing that he was blundering. They couldn't be expected to accept with equanimity the fact that his income was again twice as large as their own.

"I suppose you can give her more luxuries than we can," said Marion. "When you were throwing away money we were living along watching every ten francs. . . . I suppose you'll start doing it again."

"Oh, no," he said. "I've learned. I worked hard for ten years, you know—until I got lucky in the market, like so many people. Terribly lucky. It won't happen again."

There was a long silence. All of them felt their nerves straining, and for the first time in a year Charlie wanted a drink. He was sure now that Lincoln Peters wanted him to have his child.

Marion shuddered suddenly; part of her saw that Charlie's feet were planted on the earth now, and her own maternal feeling recognized the

naturalness of his desire; but she had lived for a long time with a prejudice—a prejudice founded on a curious disbelief in her sister's happiness, and which, in the shock of one terrible night, had turned to hatred for him. It had all happened at a point in her life where the discouragement of ill health and adverse circumstances made it necessary for her to believe in tangible villainy and a tangible villain.

"I can't help what I think!" she cried out suddenly. "How much you were responsible for Helen's death, I don't know. It's something you'll have to square with your own conscience."

An electric current of agony surged through him; for a moment he was almost on his feet, an unuttered sound echoing in his throat. He hung on to himself for a moment, another moment.

"Hold on there," said Lincoln uncomfortably. "I never thought you were responsible for that."

"Helen died of heart trouble," Charlie said dully.

"Yes, heart trouble." Marion spoke as if the phrase had another meaning for her.

Then, in the flatness that followed her outburst, she saw him plainly and she knew he had somehow arrived at control over the situation. Glancing at her husband, she found no help from him, and as abruptly as if it were a matter of no importance, she threw up the sponge.

"Do what you like!" she cried, springing up from her chair. "She's your child. I'm not the person to stand in your way. I think if it were my child I'd rather see her—" She managed to check herself. "You two decide it. I can't stand this. I'm sick. I'm going to bed."

She hurried from the room; after a moment Lincoln said:

"This has been a hard day for her. You know how strongly she feels—" His voice was almost apologetic: "When a woman gets an idea in her head."

"Of course."

"It's going to be all right. I think she sees now that you—can provide for the child, and so we can't very well stand in your way or Honoria's way."

"Thank you, Lincoln."

"I'd better go along and see how she is."

"I'm going."

He was still trembling when he reached the street, but a walk down the Rue Bonaparte to the *quais*² set him up, and as he crossed the Seine, fresh and new by the *quai* lamps, he felt exultant. But back in his room he couldn't sleep. The image of Helen haunted him. Helen whom he had loved so until they had senselessly begun to abuse each other's love, tear it into shreds. On that terrible February night that Marion remembered so vividly, a slow quarrel had gone on for hours. There was a scene at the Florida, and then he attempted to take her home, and then she kissed young Webb at a table; after that there was what she had hysterically said. When he arrived home alone he turned the key in the lock in wild anger. How could he know she would arrive an hour later alone, that there would be a snowstorm in which she wandered about in slippers, too confused to find a taxi? Then the

2. Quays (French); a section of the Left Bank is lined with quays, or walking places along the river.

aftermath, her escaping pneumonia by a miracle, and all the attendant horror. They were “reconciled,” but that was the beginning of the end, and Marion, who had seen with her own eyes and who imagined it to be one of many scenes from her sister’s martyrdom, never forgot.

Going over it again brought Helen nearer, and in the white, soft light that steals upon half sleep near morning he found himself talking to her again. She said that he was perfectly right about Honoria and that she wanted Honoria to be with him. She said she was glad he was being good and doing better. She said a lot of other things—very friendly things—but she was in a swing in a white dress, and swinging faster and faster all the time, so that at the end he could not hear clearly all that she said.

IV

He woke up feeling happy. The door of the world was open again. He made plans, vistas, futures for Honoria and himself, but suddenly he grew sad, remembering all the plans he and Helen had made. She had not planned to die. The present was the thing—work to do and someone to love. But not to love too much, for he knew the injury that a father can do to a daughter or a mother to a son by attaching them too closely: afterward, out in the world, the child would seek in the marriage partner the same blind tenderness and, failing probably to find it, turn against love and life.

It was another bright, crisp day. He called Lincoln Peters at the bank where he worked and asked if he could count on taking Honoria when he left for Prague. Lincoln agreed that there was no reason for delay. One thing—the legal guardianship. Marion wanted to retain that a while longer. She was upset by the whole matter, and it would oil things if she felt that the situation was still in her control for another year. Charlie agreed, wanting only the tangible, visible child.

Then the question of a governess. Charles sat in a gloomy agency and talked to a cross Béarnaise and to a buxom Breton peasant,³ neither of whom he could have endured. There were others whom he would see tomorrow.

He lunched with Lincoln Peters at Griffons, trying to keep down his exultation.

“There’s nothing quite like your own child,” Lincoln said. “But you understand how Marion feels too.”

“She’s forgotten how hard I worked for seven years there,” Charlie said. “She just remembers one night.”

“There’s another thing.” Lincoln hesitated. “While you and Helen were tearing around Europe throwing money away, we were just getting along. I didn’t touch any of the prosperity because I never got ahead enough to carry anything but my insurance. I think Marion felt there was some kind of injustice in it—you not even working toward the end, and getting richer and richer.”

“It went just as quick as it came,” said Charlie.

3. Béarn and Breton are two French provincial regions. The implication is that Charlie wants a higher-class (preferably Parisian) governess.

“Yes, a lot of it stayed in the hands of *chasseurs* and saxophone players and *maitres d’hôtel*—well, the big party’s over now. I just said that to explain Marion’s feeling about those crazy years. If you drop in about six o’clock tonight before Marion’s too tired, we’ll settle the details on the spot.”

Back at his hotel, Charlie found a *pneumatique* that had been redirected from the Ritz bar where Charlie had left his address for the purpose of finding a certain man.

“DEAR CHARLIE: You were so strange when we saw you the other day that I wondered if I did something to offend you. If so, I’m not conscious of it. In fact, I have thought about you too much for the last year, and it’s always been in the back of my mind that I might see you if I came over here. We *did* have such good times that crazy spring, like the night you and I stole the butcher’s tricycle, and the time we tried to call on the president and you had the old derby rim and the wire cane. Everybody seems so old lately, but I don’t feel old a bit. Couldn’t we get together some time today for old time’s sake? I’ve got a vile hang-over for the moment, but will be feeling better this afternoon and will look for you about five in the sweatshop at the Ritz.

“Always devotedly,
LORRAINE.”

His first feeling was one of awe that he had actually, in his mature years, stolen a tricycle and pedaled Lorraine all over the Étoile between the small hours and dawn. In retrospect it was a nightmare. Locking out Helen didn’t fit in with any other act of his life, but the tricycle incident did—it was one of many. How many weeks or months of dissipation to arrive at that condition of utter irresponsibility?

He tried to picture how Lorraine had appeared to him then—very attractive; Helen was unhappy about it, though she said nothing. Yesterday, in the restaurant, Lorraine had seemed trite, blurred, worn away. He emphatically did not want to see her, and he was glad Alix had not given away his hotel address. It was a relief to think, instead, of Honoria, to think of Sundays spent with her and of saying good morning to her and of knowing she was there in his house at night, drawing her breath in the darkness.

At five he took a taxi and bought presents for all the Peters—a piquant cloth doll, a box of Roman soldiers, flowers for Marion, big linen handkerchiefs for Lincoln.

He saw, when he arrived in the apartment, that Marion had accepted the inevitable. She greeted him now as though he were a recalcitrant member of the family, rather than a menacing outsider. Honoria had been told she was going; Charlie was glad to see that her tact made her conceal her excessive happiness. Only on his lap did she whisper her delight and the question “When?” before she slipped away with the other children.

He and Marion were alone for a minute in the room, and on an impulse he spoke out boldly:

“Family quarrels are bitter things. They don’t go according to any rules. They’re not like aches or wounds; they’re more like splits in the skin that won’t heal because there’s not enough material. I wish you and I could be on better terms.”

“Some things are hard to forget,” she answered. “It’s a question of confidence.” There was no answer to this and presently she asked, “When do you propose to take her?”

“As soon as I can get a governess. I hoped the day after tomorrow.”

“That’s impossible. I’ve got to get her things in shape. Not before Saturday.”

He yielded. Coming back into the room, Lincoln offered him a drink.

“I’ll take my daily whisky,” he said.

It was warm here, it was a home, people together by a fire. The children felt very safe and important; the mother and father were serious, watchful. They had things to do for the children more important than his visit here. A spoonful of medicine was, after all, more important than the strained relations between Marion and himself. They were not dull people, but they were very much in the grip of life and circumstances. He wondered if he couldn’t do something to get Lincoln out of his rut at the bank.

A long peal at the door-bell; the *bonne à tout faire*⁴ passed through and went down the corridor. The door opened upon another long ring, and then voices, and the three in the salon looked up expectantly; Richard moved to bring the corridor within his range of vision, and Marion rose. Then the maid came back along the corridor, closely followed by the voices, which developed under the light into Duncan Schaeffer and Lorraine Quarrles.

They were gay, they were hilarious, they were roaring with laughter. For a moment Charlie was astounded; unable to understand how they ferreted out the Peters’ address.

“Ah-h-h!” Duncan wagged his finger roguishly at Charlie. “Ah-h-h!”

They both slid down another cascade of laughter. Anxious and at a loss, Charlie shook hands with them quickly and presented them to Lincoln and Marion. Marion nodded, scarcely speaking. She had drawn back a step toward the fire; her little girl stood beside her, and Marion put an arm about her shoulder.

With growing annoyance at the intrusion, Charlie waited for them to explain themselves. After some concentration Duncan said:

“We came to invite you out to dinner. Lorraine and I insist that all this shishi, cagy business ’bout your address got to stop.”

Charlie came closer to them, as if to force them backward down the corridor.

“Sorry, but I can’t. Tell me where you’ll be and I’ll phone you in half an hour.”

This made no impression. Lorraine sat down suddenly on the side of a chair, and focusing her eyes on Richard, cried, “Oh, what a nice little boy! Come here, little boy.” Richard glanced at his mother, but did not move. With a perceptible shrug of her shoulders, Lorraine turned back to Charlie:

“Come and dine. Sure your cousins won’ mine. See you so sel’om. Or solemn.”

“I can’t,” said Charlie sharply. “You two have dinner and I’ll phone you.”

4. Maid of all work (French). The Peters family cannot afford to hire several servants with specialized tasks.

Her voice became suddenly unpleasant. "All right, we'll go. But I remember once when you hammered on my door at four A.M. I was enough of a good sport to give you a drink. Come on, Dunc."

Still in slow motion, with blurred, angry faces, with uncertain feet, they retired along the corridor.

"Good night," Charlie said.

"Good night!" responded Lorraine emphatically.

When he went back into the salon Marion had not moved, only now her son was standing in the circle of her other arm. Lincoln was still swinging Honoria back and forth like a pendulum from side to side.

"What an outrage!" Charlie broke out. "What an absolute outrage!"

Neither of them answered. Charlie dropped into an armchair, picked up his drink, set it down again and said:

"People I haven't seen for two years having the colossal nerve—"

He broke off. Marion had made the sound "Oh!" in one swift, furious breath, turned her body from him with a jerk and left the room.

Lincoln set down Honoria carefully.

"You children go in and start your soup," he said, and when they obeyed, he said to Charlie:

"Marion's not well and she can't stand shocks. That kind of people make her really physically sick."

"I didn't tell them to come here. They wormed your name out of somebody. They deliberately—"

"Well, it's too bad. It doesn't help matters. Excuse me a minute."

Left alone, Charlie sat tense in his chair. In the next room he could hear the children eating, talking in monosyllables, already oblivious to the scene between their elders. He heard a murmur of conversation from a farther room and then the ticking bell of a telephone receiver picked up, and in a panic he moved to the other side of the room and out of earshot.

In a minute Lincoln came back. "Look here, Charlie. I think we'd better call off dinner for tonight. Marion's in bad shape."

"Is she angry with me?"

"Sort of," he said, almost roughly. "She's not strong and—"

"You mean she's changed her mind about Honoria?"

"She's pretty bitter right now. I don't know. You phone me at the bank tomorrow."

"I wish you'd explain to her I never dreamed these people would come here. I'm just as sore as you are."

"I couldn't explain anything to her now."

Charlie got up. He took his coat and hat and started down the corridor. Then he opened the door of the dining room and said in a strange voice, "Good night, children."

Honoria rose and ran around the table to hug him.

"Good night, sweetheart," he said vaguely, and then trying to make his voice more tender, trying to conciliate something, "Good night, dear children."

V

Charlie went directly to the Ritz bar with the furious idea of finding Lorraine and Duncan, but they were not there, and he realized that in any case there was nothing he could do. He had not touched his drink at the Peters, and now he ordered a whisky-and-soda. Paul came over to say hello.

"It's a great change," he said sadly. "We do about half the business we did. So many fellows I hear about back in the States lost everything, maybe not in the first crash, but then in the second. Your friend George Hardt lost every cent, I hear. Are you back in the States?"

"No, I'm in business in Prague."

"I heard that you lost a lot in the crash."

"I did," and he added grimly, "but I lost everything I wanted in the boom."

"Selling short."

"Something like that."

Again the memory of those days swept over him like a nightmare—the people they had met travelling; then people who couldn't add a row of figures or speak a coherent sentence. The little man Helen had consented to dance with at the ship's party, who had insulted her ten feet from the table; the women and girls carried screaming with drink or drugs out of public places—

—The men who locked their wives out in the snow, because the snow of twenty-nine wasn't real snow. If you didn't want it to be snow, you just paid some money.

He went to the phone and called the Peters' apartment; Lincoln answered.

"I called up because this thing is on my mind. Has Marion said anything definite?"

"Marion's sick," Lincoln answered shortly. "I know this thing isn't altogether your fault, but I can't have her go to pieces about it. I'm afraid we'll have to let it slide for six months; I can't take the chance of working her up to this state again."

"I see."

"I'm sorry, Charlie."

He went back to his table. His whisky glass was empty, but he shook his head when Alix looked at it questioningly. There wasn't much he could do now except send Honoria some things; he would send her a lot of things tomorrow. He thought rather angrily that this was just money—he had given so many people money. . . .

"No, no more," he said to another waiter. "What do I owe you?"

He would come back some day; they couldn't make him pay forever. But he wanted his child, and nothing was much good now, beside that fact. He wasn't young any more, with a lot of nice thoughts and dreams to have by himself. He was absolutely sure Helen wouldn't have wanted him to be so alone.

JOHN DOS PASSOS

1896–1970

John Dos Passos's trilogy *U.S.A.* (1938) ranks with John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) as a major piece of post-Depression leftist fiction. Always politically committed to the rights of the individual, Dos Passos migrated from social radicalism in the 1930s to social conservatism in the 1950s. He was born in Chicago of well-to-do Portuguese-American parents who were unmarried, and lived with his mother. He went to the exclusive Choate School and then to Harvard, graduating in 1916. At first he followed his father's wishes and studied architecture in Spain, but in 1917, like many young men impatient at the United States' delay in entering World War I, he joined the famous Norton-Harjes volunteer ambulance corps. After the United States entered the war, he became a medical corpsman in the U.S. Army.

After the war he married and spent a decade as a freelance journalist, traveling in Spain and Europe, and writing poetry, travel essays, plays, and fiction on the side. His novel *Three Soldiers* (1921) showed three young men from different backgrounds—a factory worker from San Francisco, a Harvard-educated composer, and a farm youth from Indiana—destroyed by their own bureaucratic army. Another novel, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), experimented with kaleidoscopic and cinematic techniques to present the depersonalization of contemporary urban life.

Like many of the liberal and radical writers of the day, Dos Passos supported the accused anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. In 1926 he joined the executive board of the Communist journal *The New Masses*. For the next eight years he took part in Communist activities but never joined the party, for he rejected the Communist demand that all writers in the party express only the party line. In 1934 the Communists broke up a Socialist rally at New York City's Madison Square Garden; this event persuaded Dos Passos that the Communists were more interested in power than social justice. Soon after he severed his Communist ties.

The three novels making up *U.S.A.*—*The 42nd Parallel, 1919*, and *The Big Money*—appeared between 1930 and 1936. Its subject is twentieth-century America from coast to coast and at every social level; its portrayal is savagely satirical. It has a cast of eleven major characters, followed separately, whose lives occasionally intersect. Even the idealistic left-wing characters have a moral flabbiness and superficiality that, Dos Passos believed, was the effect of American materialism and its encouragement of personal greed. At that point in his life, Dos Passos believed that capitalism led to a division between rich and poor that could be remedied only by social change. And yet, because change could be produced only by individuals, and individuals were corrupted by their society, the source of change seemed elusive.

Dos Passos's blending of fiction with nonfiction in *U.S.A.* and his adaptation of cinematic strategies to written work were early uses of techniques that became commonplace in post-World War II fiction. Fiction alternated with other kinds of material—notably the “Newsreel” sections, in which newspaper excerpts and headlines, snippets from popular songs, and quotations from speeches and documents are brought together in an imitation of the weekly feature one saw at the movie house before television took over visual newscasting; the “Camera Eye” sections, which are impressionistic, emotional, lyrical fragments; and biographies of American notables like the dancer Isadora Duncan, the film star Rudolph Valentino, the inventors

Thomas Edison and the Wright brothers, the financier J. P. Morgan, the labor leader Eugene Debs, the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and the sociologist Thorstein Veblen.

Beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt's second term in 1936, Dos Passos supported the president. But after the war his concern for personal liberty and his fear of institutions and of concentrated power led him to reconceive the threat to America as coming from the left rather than the right. He wrote a number of novels from this vantage point, including a trilogy called *District of Columbia* (1952), and *Mid-century* (1961), which returned to the format of *U.S.A.*

The text is that of the first complete edition of *U.S.A.* (1938).

FROM U.S.A.

The Big Money¹

Newsreel LXVIII

WALL STREET STUNNED

*This is not Thirtyeight, but it's old Ninetyseven²
You must put her in Center on time*

MARKET SURE TO RECOVER FROM SLUMP

DECLINE IN CONTRACTS

POLICE TURN MACHINE GUNS ON COLORADO
MINE STRIKERS KILL 5 WOUND 40

sympathizers appeared on the scene just as thousands of office workers were pouring out of the buildings at the lunch hour. As they raised their placard high and started an indefinite march from one side to the other, they were jeered and hooted not only by the office workers but also by workmen on a building under construction

NEW METHODS OF SELLING SEEN

RESCUE CREWS TRY TO UPEND ILL-FATED CRAFT
WHILE WAITING FOR PONTOONS

*He looked 'round an' said to his black greasy fireman
Jus' shovel in a little more coal
And when we cross that White Oak Mountain
You can watch your Ninety-seven roll*

I find your column interesting and need advice. I have saved four thousand dollars which I want to invest for a better income. Do you think I might buy stocks?

1. The following sections come at the end of *The Big Money*.

2. The 1903 wreck of the "old Ninetyseven" train between Washington, D.C., and Atlanta,

Georgia, gave rise to several popular railroad ballads. A 1924 recording of one of these sold over a million copies.

POLICE KILLER FLICKS CIGARETTE AS HE GOES
TREMBLING TO DOOM

PLAY AGENCIES IN RING OF SLAVE GIRL MARTS

MAKER OF LOVE DISBARRED AS LAWYER

*Oh the right wing clothesmakers
And the Socialist fakers
They make by the workers . . .
Double cross*

*They preach Social-ism
But practice Fasc-ism
To keep capitalism
By the boss³*

MOSCOW CONGRESS OUSTS OPPOSITION⁴

*It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville
An' a line on a three mile grade
It was on that grade he lost his average
An' you see what a jump he made*

MILL THUGS IN MURDER RAID

here is the most dangerous example of how at the decisive moment the bourgeois ideology liquidates class solidarity and turns a friend of the workingclass of yesterday into a most miserable propagandist for imperialism today

RED PICKETS FINED FOR PROTEST HERE

*We leave our home in the morning
We kiss our children goodbye*

OFFICIALS STILL HOPE FOR RESCUE OF MEN

*He was goin' downgrade makin' ninety miles an hour
When his whistle broke into a scream
He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle
An' was scalded to death with the steam*

RADICALS FIGHT WITH CHAIRS AT UNITY MEETING

PATROLMEN PROTECT REDS

U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE URGES CONFIDENCE

REAL VALUES UNHARMED

*While we slave for the bosses
Our children scream an' cry
But when we draw our money
Our grocery bills to pay*

PRESIDENT SEES PROSPERITY NEAR

3. Excerpts from this Socialist labor-union protest song are also interspersed in this "newsreel."

4. Probably the Seventh Congress of the Third International held in Moscow in 1935.

*Not a cent to spend for clothing
Not a cent to lay away*

STEAMROLLER IN ACTION AGAINST MILITANTS

MINERS BATTLE SCABS

*But we cannot buy for our children
Our wages are too low
Now listen to me you workers
Both you women and men
Let us win for them the victory
I'm sure it ain't no sin*

CARILLON PEALS IN SINGING TOWER⁵

the President⁶ declared it was impossible to view the increased advantages for the many without smiling at those who a short time ago expressed so much fear lest our country might come under the control of a few individuals of great wealth.

HAPPY CROWDS THROUG CEREMONY

on a tiny island nestling like a green jewel in the lake that mirrors the singing tower, the President today participated in the dedication of a bird sanctuary and its pealing carillon, fulfilling the dream of an immigrant boy

The Camera Eye (51)

at the head of the valley in the dark of the hills on the broken floor of a lurchedover cabin a man halfsits halflies propped up by an old woman two wrinkled girls that might be young chunks of coal flare in the hearth flicker in his face white and sagging as dough blacken the cavedin mouth the taut throat the belly swelled enormous with the wound he got working on the minetipple⁷

the barefoot girl brings him a tincup of water the woman wipes sweat off his streaming face with a dirty denim sleeve the firelight flares in his eyes stretched big with fever in the women's scared eyes and in the blanched faces of the foreigners

without help in the valley hemmed by dark strike-silent hills the man will die (my father died we know what it is like to see a man die) the women will lay him out on the rickety cot the miners will bury him

in the jail it's light too hot the steamheat hisses we talk through the greenpainted iron bars to a tall white mustachioed old man some smiling miners in shirtsleeves a boy faces white from mining have already the tallow look of jailfaces

foreigners what can we say to the dead? foreigners what can we say to the jailed? the representative of the political party talks fast through the bars join up with us and no other union we'll send you tobacco candy solidarity

5. The Singing Tower was erected in Florida through the efforts of Edward W. Bok (1863–1930), Dutch-born editor and philanthropist.

6. President Calvin Coolidge, who spoke at the

tower's dedication in 1929.

7. The apparatus at a coal mine that tips cars to unload the coal.

our lawyers will write briefs speakers will shout your names at meetings
 they'll carry your names on cardboard on picketlines the men in jail shrug
 their shoulders smile thinly our eyes look in their eyes through the bars

what can I say? (in another continent I have seen the faces looking out
 through the barred basement windows behind the ragged sentry's boots
 I have seen before day the stragglng footsore prisoners herded through the
 streets limping between bayonets heard the volley

I have seen the dead lying out in those distant deeper valleys) what can we
 say to the jailed?

in the law's office we stand against the wall the law is a big man with eyes
 angry in a big pumpkinface who sits and stares at us meddling foreigners
 through the door the deputies crane with their guns they stand guard at
 the mines they blockade the miners' soupkitchens they've cut off the road
 up the valley the hiredmen with guns stand ready to shoot (they have made
 us foreigners in the land where we were born they are the conquering army
 that has filtered into the country unnoticed they have taken the hilltops by
 stealth they levy toll they stand at the minehead they stand at the
 polls they stand by when the bailiffs carry the furniture of the family
 evicted from the city tenement out on the sidewalk they are there when the
 bankers foreclose on a farm they are ambushed and ready to shoot down the
 strikers marching behind the flag up the switchback road to the mine those
 that the guns spare they jail)

the law stares across the desk out of angry eyes his face reddens in
 splotches like a gobbler's neck with the strut of the power of submachine-
 guns sawedoffshotguns teargas and vomitinggas the power that can feed you
 or leave you to starve

sits easy at his desk his back is covered he feels strong behind him he
 feels the prosecutingattorney the judge an owner himself the political boss
 the minesuperintendent the board of directors the president of the utility
 the manipulator of the holdingcompany

he lifts his hand towards the telephone
 the deputies crowd in the door
 we have only words against

* * *

WILLIAM FAULKNER

1897–1962

Between 1929 and 1936 William Faulkner published novels about childhood, families, sex, race, obsessions, time, the past, his native South, and the modern world. He invented voices for characters ranging from sages to children, criminals, the insane, even the dead—sometimes all within one book. He developed, beyond this ventriloquism, his own unmistakable narrative voice: urgent, intense, highly rhetorical. He experimented with narrative chronology and with techniques for representing mind and memory. He invented an entire southern county and wrote its history.

He was a native Mississippian, born near Oxford, where his parents moved when he was about five. His great-grandfather had been a local legend: a colonel in the Civil War, lawyer, railroad builder, financier, politician, writer, and public figure who was shot and killed by a business and political rival in 1889. Faulkner's grandfather carried on some of the family enterprises, and his father worked first for the railroad (the Gulf and Chicago) and later as business manager of the University of Mississippi. His father was a reclusive man who loved to hunt, drink, and swap stories with his hunting friends; the mother, ambitious, sensitive, and literary, was a more profound influence on Faulkner, her favorite of four sons. In Faulkner's childhood his maternal grandmother also lived with them; she was a high-spirited, independent, and imaginative old lady whose death in 1907 seems to have affected Faulkner deeply.

Faulkner dropped out of high school in 1915 and had no further formal education beyond a year (1919–20) as a special student at the University of Mississippi. Through family connections, various jobs were made for him, but he was unhappy in all of them. In 1918 Estelle Oldham, his high school love, married someone else; Faulkner briefly left Oxford. First he went to New Haven, where his best friend and informal tutor, Phil Stone, was attending law school at Yale; then he enlisted in the British Royal Flying Corps and was sent to Canada to train. World War I ended before he saw active service; nevertheless, when he returned to Oxford in 1919 he was limping from what he claimed was a war wound.

Back at home, Faulkner drifted from one job to another and wrote poetry that was a *mélange* of Shakespearean, pastoral, Victorian, and Edwardian modes, with an overlay of French Symbolism, which he published in *The Marble Faun*, in 1924. In 1925 he went to New Orleans where, for the first time, he met and mingled with literary people, including Sherwood Anderson, who encouraged Faulkner to develop his own style, to concentrate on prose, and to use his region for material.

Faulkner wrote his first novel, *Soldier's Pay*, in New Orleans, and Anderson recommended it to his own publisher, Liveright; it appeared in 1926. He also published in the New Orleans magazine *The Double Dealer* and the newspaper *The Times Picayune*. He learned about the experimental writing of James Joyce and the ideas of Sigmund Freud. After a trip to Europe at the end of the same year, he returned to Oxford. In 1929 he married Estelle Oldham, who had been divorced and had returned to Oxford with her two children. They bought a ruined mansion, Rowan Oak, in 1930 and began to restore it to its antebellum appearance. A daughter born in 1931 died in infancy; a second daughter, Jill, was born in 1933.

Faulkner's second novel was a satire on New Orleans intellectuals called *Mosquitos* (1927). His more typical subject matter emerged with his rejected novel *Flags in the Dust*, and the shortened version of it that appeared in 1929 as *Sartoris*. In this work Faulkner focused on the interconnections between a prominent southern family and the local

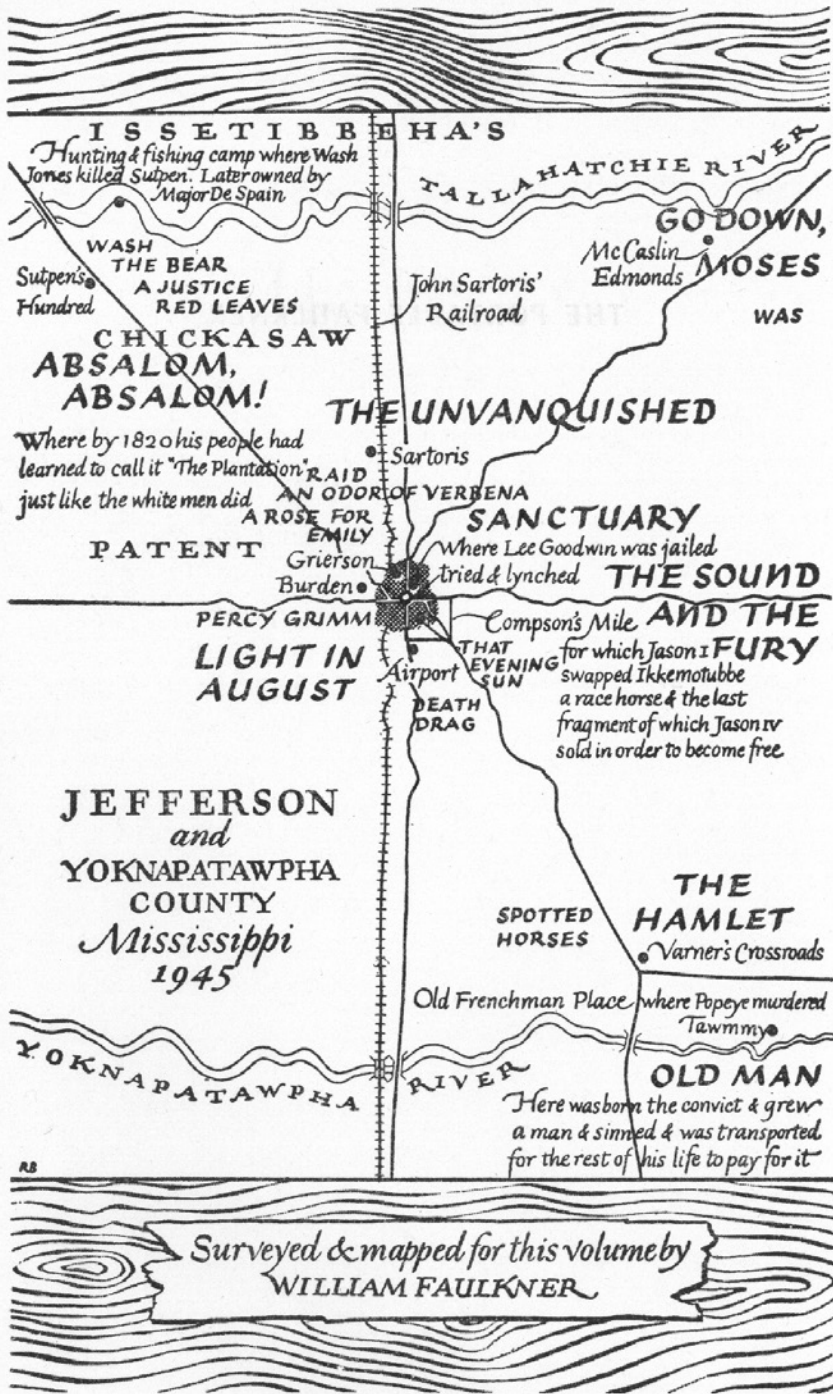
community: the Sartoris family as well as many other characters appeared in later works, and the region, renamed Yoknapatawpha County, was to become the locale of Faulkner's imaginative world.

The social and historical emphasis in *Sartoris* was not directly followed up in the works Faulkner wrote next. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)—Faulkner's favorite novel—and *As I Lay Dying* (1930) were dramatically experimental attempts to articulate the inexpressible aspects of individual psychology. *The Sound and the Fury* has four sections, each with a different narrator, each supplying a different piece of the plot. Three of the narrators are brothers: Benjy, the idiot; Quentin, the suicide; and Jason, the business failure. Each of them, for different reasons, mourns the loss of their sister, Caddie. While the story moves out to the disintegration of the old southern family to which these brothers belong, its focus is on the private obsessions of the brothers, and it invents an entirely different style for each narrator. Only the last section, told from a traditionally omniscient point of view, provides a sequential narration; the other three jump freely in time and space. The structure of *As I Lay Dying*, included here in its entirety, is even more complex. Like *The Sound and the Fury*, it is organized around the loss of a beloved woman. The precipitating event in the novel is the death of a mother. The story moves forward in chronological time as the "poor white" Bundren family takes her body to the town of Jefferson for burial. Its narration is divided into fifty-nine sections of interior monologue by fifteen characters, each with a different perception of the action and a different way of relating to reality. The family's adventures and misadventures on the road are comic, tragic, grotesque, absurd, and deeply moving.

Neither these books nor Faulkner's early short stories were very popular. *Sanctuary*, a sensational work about sex, gangsters, official corruption, and urban violence, attracted considerable attention, however. Published in 1931, it took its place in the large amount of hard-boiled fiction that appeared in the decade, notably by such authors as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. During four different intervals—1932–37, 1942–45, 1951, and 1954—Faulkner spent time in Hollywood or on contract as a scriptwriter. He worked well with the director Howard Hawks and wrote the scripts for two famous movies, an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* and



To Have and Have Not, movie poster, 1944. Faulkner coauthored the screenplay that adapted Hemingway's 1937 novel as a romantic vehicle for Humphrey Bogart and the newcomer Lauren Bacall.



Yoknapatawpha County. Faulkner drew this map of his fictional world for Malcolm Cowley's 1946 collection *The Portable Faulkner*.

an adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, both starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.

He continued to produce brilliant and inventive novels during these years. *Light in August* (1932) counterpointed a comic pastoral about the pregnant earth-mother figure Lena Grove with a grim tragedy about the embittered outcast Joe Christmas, who may or may not be racially mixed; it interrelated individual psychology and cultural pathology. *Absalom, Absalom!*, which followed in 1936, is thought by many to be Faulkner's masterpiece. The story of Thomas Sutpen, the ruthless would-be founder of a southern dynasty after the Civil War, is related by four different speakers, each trying to find "the meaning" of the story. The reader, observing how the story changes in each telling, comes to see that making stories is the human way of making meaning. Like Faulkner's earlier novels, *Absalom* is thus simultaneously about an individual, about the South, and about itself as a work of fiction. But its emphasis shifts from the private psychology that dominated in earlier work to social psychology: to the collective mind of the South.

With World War II, Faulkner's work became more traditional and less difficult. He began to write about the rise, in Yoknapatawpha County, of the poor white family named Snopes—this family had appeared in earlier works (like "Barn Burning")—and the simultaneous decline of the region's "aristocratic" families. *The Hamlet* (1940) was the first of three novels devoted to the Snopeses. Because all his works had been set in Yoknapatawpha County and were interconnected, the region and its people began to take on an existence independent of any one book in which they appeared.

Faulkner's national reputation soared after the publication in 1946 of an anthology of his writings, *The Portable Faulkner*, edited by the critic Malcolm Cowley. He already had a major reputation abroad, especially in France, where his work in translation was a powerful influence on the French so-called new novel and its practitioners such as Michel Butor and Alain Robbe-Grillet. His antiracist *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) occasioned the award of the Nobel Prize in 1950. In the 1950s Faulkner visited many college campuses. His writing took on more of the air of an old-fashioned yarn; he dealt with more legendary and local color materials; he rounded out the Snopes saga with *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). At the age of sixty-five he died of a heart attack.

The text of *As I Lay Dying* is that established by Noel Polk (1985). The texts of "A Rose for Emily" and "Barn Burning" are those of *Collected Stories* (1950).

As I Lay Dying¹

Darl

Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cottonhouse can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own.

The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laid-by cotton,² to the cottonhouse in the center of the field, where it turns and circles the cottonhouse at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision.

The cottonhouse is of rough logs, from between which the chinking has long fallen. Square, with a broken roof set at a single pitch, it leans in empty

1. For assistance with the footnotes, we are indebted to Joseph Blotner's notes in William

Faulkner, *Novels 1930–1935* (1985).

2. Cultivated cotton crop, waiting to be picked.

and shimmering dilapidation in the sunlight, a single broad window in two opposite walls giving onto the approaches of the path. When we reach it I turn and follow the path which circles the house. Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path toward the foot of the bluff.

Tull's wagon stands beside the spring, hitched to the rail, the reins wrapped about the seat stanchion. In the wagon bed are two chairs. Jewel stops at the spring and takes the gourd from the willow branch and drinks. I pass him and mount the path, beginning to hear Cash's saw.

When I reach the top he has quit sawing. Standing in a litter of chips, he is fitting two of the boards together. Between the shadow spaces they are yellow as gold, like soft gold, bearing on their flanks in smooth undulations the marks of the adze blade: a good carpenter, Cash is. He holds the two planks on the trestle, fitted along the edges in a quarter of the finished box. He kneels and squints along the edge of them, then he lowers them and takes up the adze. A good carpenter. Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort. I go on to the house, followed by the

Chuck. Chuck. Chuck.

of the adze.

Cora

So I saved out the eggs and baked yesterday. The cakes turned out right well. We depend a lot on our chickens. They are good layers, what few we have left after the possums and such. Snakes too, in the summer. A snake will break up a hen-house quicker than anything. So after they were going to cost so much more than Mr Tull thought, and after I promised that the difference in the number of eggs would make it up, I had to be more careful than ever because it was on my final say-so we took them. We could have stocked cheaper chickens, but I gave my promise as Miss Lawington said when she advised me to get a good breed, because Mr Tull himself admits that a good breed of cows or hogs pays in the long run. So when we lost so many of them we couldn't afford to use the eggs ourselves, because I could not have had Mr Tull chide me when it was on my say-so we took them. So when Miss Lawington told me about the cakes I thought that I could bake them and earn enough at one time to increase the net value of the flock the equivalent of two head. And that by saving the eggs out one at a time, even the eggs wouldn't be costing anything. And that week they laid so well that I not only saved out enough eggs above what we had engaged to sell, to bake the cakes with, I had saved enough so that the flour and the sugar and the stove wood would not be costing anything. So I baked yesterday, more careful than ever I baked in my life, and the cakes turned out right well. But when we got to town this morning Miss Lawington told me the lady had changed her mind and was not going to have the party after all.

"She ought to taken those cakes anyway," Kate says.

"Well," I say, "I reckon she never had no use for them now."

"She ought to taken them," Kate says. "But those rich town ladies can change their minds. Poor folks cant."

Riches is nothing in the face of the Lord, for He can see into the heart. "Maybe I can sell them at the bazaar Saturday," I say. They turned out real well.

"You cant get two dollars a piece for them," Kate says.

"Well, it isn't like they cost me anything," I say. I saved them out and swapped a dozen of them for the sugar and flour. It isn't like the cakes cost me anything, as Mr Tull himself realises that the eggs I saved were over and beyond what we had engaged to sell, so it was like we had found the eggs or they had been given to us.

"She ought to taken those cakes when she same as gave you her word," Kate says. The Lord can see into the heart. If it is His will that some folks has different ideas of honesty from other folks, it is not my place to question His decree.

"I reckon she never had any use for them," I say. They turned out real well, too.

The quilt is drawn up to her chin, hot as it is, with only her two hands and her face outside. She is propped on the pillow, with her head raised so she can see out the window, and we can hear him every time he takes up the adze or the saw. If we were deaf we could almost watch her face and hear him, see him. Her face is wasted away so that the bones draw just under the skin in white lines. Her eyes are like two candles when you watch them gutter down into the sockets of iron candle-sticks. But the eternal and the everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her.

"They turned out real nice," I say. "But not like the cakes Addie used to bake." You can see that girl's washing and ironing in the pillow-slip, if ironed it ever was. Maybe it will reveal her blindness to her, laying there at the mercy and the ministration of four men and a tom-boy girl. "There's not a woman in this section could ever bake with Addie Bundren," I say. "First thing we know she'll be up and baking again, and then we wont have any sale for ours at all." Under the quilt she makes no more of a hump than a rail would, and the only way you can tell she is breathing is by the sound of the mattress shucks. Even the hair at her cheek does not move, even with that girl standing right over her, fanning her with the fan. While we watch she swaps the fan to the other hand without stopping it.

"Is she sleeping?" Kate whispers.

"She's just watching Cash yonder," the girl says. We can hear the saw in the board. It sounds like snoring. Eula turns on the trunk and looks out the window. Her necklace looks real nice with her red hat. You wouldn't think it only cost twenty-five cents.

"She ought to taken those cakes," Kate says.

I could have used the money real well. But it's not like they cost me anything except the baking. I can tell him that anybody is likely to make a miscue, but it's not all of them that can get out of it without loss, I can tell him. It's not everybody can eat their mistakes, I can tell him.

Someone comes through the hall. It is Darl. He does not look in as he passes the door. Eula watches him as he goes on and passes from sight again

toward the back. Her hand rises and touches her beads lightly, and then her hair. When she finds me watching her, her eyes go blank.

Darl

Pa and Vernon are sitting on the back porch. Pa is tilting snuff from the lid of his snuff-box into his lower lip, holding the lip outdrawn between thumb and finger. They look around as I cross the porch and dip the gourd into the water bucket and drink.

"Where's Jewel?" pa says. When I was a boy I first learned how much better water tastes when it has set a while in a cedar bucket. Warmish-cool, with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells. It has to set at least six hours, and be drunk from a gourd. Water should never be drunk from metal.

And at night it is better still. I used to lie on the pallet in the hall, waiting until I could hear them all asleep, so I could get up and go back to the bucket. It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank. After that I was bigger, older. Then I would wait until they all went to sleep so I could lie with my shirt-tail up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself, feeling the cool silence blowing upon my parts and wondering if Cash was yonder in the darkness doing it too, had been doing it perhaps for the last two years before I could have wanted to or could have.

Pa's feet are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes, from working so hard in the wet in homemade shoes when he was a boy. Beside his chair his brogans sit. They look as though they had been hacked with a blunt axe out of pig-iron. Vernon has been to town. I have never seen him go to town in overalls. His wife, they say. She taught school too, once.

I fling the dipper dregs to the ground and wipe my mouth on my sleeve. It is going to rain before morning. Maybe before dark. "Down to the barn," I say. "Harnessing the team."

Down there fooling with that horse. He will go on through the barn, into the pasture. The horse will not be in sight: he is up there among the pine seedlings, in the cool. Jewel whistles, once and shrill. The horse snorts, then Jewel sees him, glinting for a gaudy instant among the blue shadows. Jewel whistles again; the horse comes dropping down the slope, stiff-legged, his ears cocking and flicking, his mis-matched eyes rolling, and fetches up twenty feet away, broadside on, watching Jewel over his shoulder in an attitude kittenish and alert.

"Come here, sir," Jewel says. He moves. Moving that quick his coat, bunching, tongues swirling like so many flames. With tossing mane and tail and rolling eye the horse makes another short curvetting rush and stops again, feet bunched, watching Jewel. Jewel walks steadily toward him, his hands at his sides. Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun.

When Jewel can almost touch him, the horse stands on his hind legs and slashes down at Jewel. Then Jewel is enclosed by a glittering maze of hooves as by an illusion of wings; among them, beneath the upreared chest, he moves with the flashing limberness of a snake. For an instant before the jerk comes

onto his arms he sees his whole body earth-free, horizontal, whipping snake-limber, until he finds the horse's nostrils and touches earth again. Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific, the horse back-thrust on stiffened, quivering legs, with lowered head; Jewel with dug heels, shutting off the horse's wind with one hand, with the other patting the horse's neck in short strokes myriad and caressing, cursing the horse with obscene ferocity.

They stand in rigid terrific hiatus, the horse trembling and groaning. Then Jewel is on the horse's back. He flows upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in midair shaped to the horse. For another moment the horse stands spraddled, with lowered head, before it bursts into motion. They descend the hill in a series of spine-jolting jumps, Jewel high, leech-like on the withers, to the fence where the horse bunches to a scuttering halt again.

"Well," Jewel says, "you can quit now, if you got a-plenty."

Inside the barn Jewel slides running to the ground before the horse stops. The horse enters the stall, Jewel following. Without looking back the horse kicks at him, slamming a single hoof into the wall with a pistol-like report. Jewel kicks him in the stomach; the horse arches his neck back, crop-toothed; Jewel strikes him across the face with his fist and slides on to the trough and mounts upon it. Clinging to the hay-rack he lowers his head and peers out across the stall tops and through the doorway. The path is empty; from here he cannot even hear Cash sawing. He reaches up and drags down hay in hurried armsful and crams it into the rack.

"Eat," he says. "Get the goddamn stuff out of sight while you got a chance, you pussel-gutted³ bastard. You sweet son of a bitch," he says.

Jewel

It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddamn box. Where she's got to see him. Where every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you. I told him to go somewhere else. I said Good God do you want to see her in it. It's like when he was a little boy and she says if she had some fertilizer she would try to raise some flowers and he taken the bread pan and brought it back from the barn full of dung.

And now them others sitting there, like buzzards. Waiting, fanning themselves. Because I said If you wouldn't keep on sawing and nailing at it until a man cant sleep even and her hands laying on the quilt like two of them roots dug up and tried to wash and you couldn't get them clean. I can see the fan and Dewey Dell's arm. I said if you'd just let her alone. Sawing and knocking, and keeping the air always moving so fast on her face that when you're tired you cant breathe it, and that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less. One lick less until everybody that passes in the road will have to stop and see it and say what a fine carpenter he is. If it had just been me when Cash fell off of that church and if it had just been me when pa laid sick with that load of wood fell on him, it would not be happening with every bastard in the county coming in to stare at her because if there is a God what the hell is He for. It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill faces

3. Fat.

and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddamn adze going One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet.

Darl

We watch him come around the corner and mount the steps. He does not look at us. "You ready?" he says.

"If you're hitched up," I say. I say "Wait." He stops, looking at pa. Vernon spits, without moving. He spits with decorous and deliberate precision into the pocked dust below the porch. Pa rubs his hands slowly on his knees. He is gazing out beyond the crest of the bluff, out across the land. Jewel watches him a moment, then he goes on to the pail and drinks again.

"I mislike undecision as much as ere a man," pa says.

"It means three dollars," I say. The shirt across pa's hump is faded lighter than the rest of it. There is no sweat stain on his shirt. I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it.

"But if she dont last until you get back," he says. "She will be disappointed."

Vernon spits into the dust. But it will rain before morning.

"She's counted on it," pa says. "She'll want to start right away. I know her. I promised her I'd keep the team here and ready, and she's counting on it."

"We'll need that three dollars then, sure," I say. He gazes out over the land, rubbing his hands on his knees. Since he lost his teeth his mouth collapses in slow repetition when he dips. The stubble gives his lower face that appearance that old dogs have. "You'd better make up your mind soon, so we can get there and get a load on before dark," I say.

"Ma aint that sick," Jewel says. "Shut up, Darl."

"That's right," Vernon says. "She seems more like herself today than she has in a week. Time you and Jewel get back, she'll be setting up."

"You ought to know," Jewel says. "You been here often enough looking at her. You or your folks." Vernon looks at him. Jewel's eyes look like pale wood in his high-blooded face. He is a head taller than any of the rest of us, always was. I told them that's why ma always whipped him and petted him more. Because he was peakling around the house more. That's why she named him Jewel I told them.

"Shut up, Jewel," pa says, but as though he is not listening much. He gazes out across the land, rubbing his knees.

"You could borrow the loan of Vernon's team and we could catch up with you," I say. "If she didn't wait for us."

"Ah, shut your goddamn mouth," Jewel says.

"She'll want to go in ourn," pa says. He rubs his knees. "Dont ere a man mislike it more."

"It's laying there, watching Cash whittle on that damn . . ." Jewel says. He says it harshly, savagely, but he does not say the word. Like a little boy in the dark to flail his courage and suddenly aghast into silence by his own noise.

"She wanted that like she wants to go in our own wagon," pa says. "She'll rest easier for knowing it's a good one, and private. She was ever a private woman. You know it well."

"Then let it be private," Jewel says. "But how the hell can you expect it to be—" he looks at the back of pa's head, his eyes like pale wooden eyes.

"Sho," Vernon says, "she'll hold on till it's finished. She'll hold on till everything's ready, till her own good time. And with the roads like they are now, it wont take you no time to get her to town."

"It's fixing up to rain," pa says. "I am a luckless man. I have ever been." He rubs his hands on his knees. "It's that durn doctor, liable to come at any time. I couldn't get word to him till so late. If he was to come tomorrow and tell her the time was nigh, she wouldn't wait. I know her. Wagon or no wagon, she wouldn't wait. Then she'd be upset, and I wouldn't upset her for the living world. With that family burying-ground in Jefferson and them of her blood waiting for her there, she'll be impatient. I promised my word me and the boys would get her there quick as mules could walk it, so she could rest quiet." He rubs his hands on his knees. "No man ever misliked it more."

"If everybody wasn't burning hell to get her there," Jewel says in that harsh, savage voice. "With Cash all day long right under the window, hammering and sawing at that—"

"It was her wish," pa says. "You got no affection nor gentleness for her. You never had. We would be beholden to no man," he says, "me and her. We have never yet been, and she will rest quieter for knowing it and that it was her own blood sawed out the boards and drove the nails. She was ever one to clean up after herself."

"It means three dollars," I say. "Do you want us to go, or not?" Pa rubs his knees. "We'll be back by tomorrow sundown."

"Well . . ." pa says. He looks out over the land, awry-haired, mouthing the snuff slowly against his gums.

"Come on," Jewel says. He goes down the steps. Vernon spits neatly into the dust.

"By sundown, now," pa says. "I would not keep her waiting."

Jewel glances back, then he goes on around the house. I enter the hall, hearing the voices before I reach the door. Tilting a little down the hill, as our house does, a breeze draws through the hall all the time, upslanting. A feather dropped near the front door will rise and brush along the ceiling, slanting backward, until it reaches the down-turning current at the back door: so with voices. As you enter the hall, they sound as though they were speaking out of the air about your head.

Cora

It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. It was like he knew he would never see her again, that Anse Bundren was driving him from his mother's death bed, never to see her in this world again. I always said Darl was different from those others. I always said he was the only one of them that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection. Not that Jewel, the one she labored so to bear and coddled and petted so and him flinging into tantrums or sulking spells, inventing devilment to devil her until I would have frailed⁴ him time and time. Not him to come and tell her goodbye. Not him to miss a chance to make that extra three dollars at the price of his mother's goodbye kiss. A Bundren through and

4. I.e., "flailed"; beaten.

through, loving nobody, caring for nothing except how to get something with the least amount of work. Mr Tull says Darl asked them to wait. He said Darl almost begged them on his knees not to force him to leave her in her condition. But nothing would do but Anse and Jewel must make that three dollars. Nobody that knows Anse could have expected different, but to think of that boy, that Jewel, selling all those years of self-denial and down-right partiality—they couldn't fool me: Mr Tull says Mrs Bundren liked Jewel the least of all, but I knew better. I knew she was partial to him, to the same quality in him that let her put up with Anse Bundren when Mr Tull said she ought to poisoned him—for three dollars, denying his dying mother the goodbye kiss.

Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming over every time I could, coming sometimes when I shouldn't have, neglecting my own family and duties so that somebody would be with her in her last moments and she would not have to face the Great Unknown without one familiar face to give her courage. Not that I deserve credit for it: I will expect the same for myself. But thank God it will be the faces of my loved kin, my blood and flesh, for in my husband and children I have been more blessed than most, trials though they have been at times.

She lived, a lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her, because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting the will of God to do it. Refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens.

"But she wanted to go," Mr Tull said. "It was her own wish to lie among her own people."

"Then why didn't she go alive?" I said. "Not one of them would have stopped her, with even that little one almost old enough now to be selfish and stone-hearted like the rest of them."

"It was her own wish," Mr Tull said. "I heard Anse say it was."

"And you would believe Anse, of course," I said. "A man like you would. Dont tell me."

"I'd believe him about something he couldn't expect to make anything off of me by not telling," Mr Tull said.

"Dont tell me," I said. "A woman's place is with her husband and children, alive or dead. Would you expect me to want to go back to Alabama and leave you and the girls when my time comes, that I left of my own will to cast my lot with yours for better and worse, until death and after?"

"Well, folks are different," he said.

I should hope so. I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man, for the honor and comfort of my Christian husband and the love and respect of my Christian children. So that when I lay me down in the consciousness of my duty and reward I will be surrounded by loving faces, carrying the farewell kiss of each of my loved ones into my reward. Not like Addie Bundren dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart. Glad to go. Lying there with her head propped up so she could watch Cash building the coffin, having to watch him so he would not skimp on it, like as not, with those men not worrying about anything except if there was time to earn another three dollars before the rain come and the river got too high to get across it. Like as not, if they hadn't decided to make that last load, they would have loaded her into the wagon on a quilt and crossed the river first and then stopped and give her time to die what Christian death they would let her.

Except Darl. It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. Sometimes I lose faith in human nature for a time; I am assailed by doubt. But always the Lord restores my faith and reveals to me His bounteous love for His creatures. Not Jewel, the one she had always cherished, not him. He was after that three extra dollars. It was Darl, the one that folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse, with Cash a good carpenter and always more building than he can get around to, and Jewel always doing something that made him some money or got him talked about, and that near-naked girl always standing over Addie with a fan so that every time a body tried to talk to her and cheer her up, would answer for her right quick, like she was trying to keep anybody from coming near her at all.

It was Darl. He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and His mercy. I saw that with Jewel she had just been pretending, but that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was. He just looked at her, not even coming in where she could see him and get upset, knowing that Anse was driving him away and he would never see her again. He said nothing, just looking at her.

"What you want, Darl?" Dewey Dell said, not stopping the fan, speaking up quick, keeping even him from her. He didn't answer. He just stood and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full for words.

Dewey Dell

The first time me and Lafe picked on down the row. Pa dassent⁵ sweat because he will catch his death from the sickness so that everybody that comes to help us. And Jewel dont care about anything he is not kin to us in caring, not care-kin. And Cash like sawing the long hot sad yellow days up into planks and nailing them to something. And pa thinks because neighbors will always treat one another that way because he has always been too busy letting neighbors do for him to find out. And I did not think that Darl would, that sits at the supper table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land.

We picked on down the row, the woods getting closer and closer and the secret shade, picking on into the secret shade with my sack and Lafe's sack. Because I said will I or wont I when the sack was half full because I said if the sack is full when we get to the woods it wont be me. I said if it dont mean for me to do it the sack will not be full and I will turn up the next row but if the sack is full, I cannot help it. It will be that I had to do it all the time and I cannot help it. And we picked on toward the secret shade and our eyes would drown together touching on his hands and my hands and I didn't say anything. I said "What are you doing?" and he said "I am picking into your sack." And so it was full when we came to the end of the row and I could not help it.

And so it was because I could not help it. It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know and I said "Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill

5. Dares not.

him?" without the words I said it and he said "Why?" without the words. And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows.

He stands in the door, looking at her.

"What you want, Darl?" I say.

"She is going to die," he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.

"When is she going to die?" I say.

"Before we get back," he says.

"Then why are you taking Jewel?" I say.

"I want him to help me load," he says.

Tull

Anse keeps on rubbing his knees. His overalls are faded; on one knee a serge patch cut out of a pair of Sunday pants, wore iron-slick. "No man mislikes it more than me," he says.

"A fellow's got to guess ahead now and then," I say. "But, come long and short, it wont be no harm done neither way."

"She'll want to get started right off," he says. "It's far enough to Jefferson at best."

"But the roads is good now," I say. It's fixing to rain tonight, too. His folks buries at New Hope, too, not three miles away. But it's just like him to marry a woman born a day's hard ride away and have her die on him.

He looks out over the land, rubbing his knees. "No man so mislikes it," he says.

"They'll get back in plenty of time," I say. "I wouldn't worry none."

"It means three dollars," he says.

"Might be it wont be no need for them to rush back, noways," I say. "I hope it."

"She's a-going," he says. "Her mind is set on it."

It's a hard life on women, for a fact. Some women. I mind my mammy lived to be seventy and more. Worked every day, rain or shine; never a sick day since her last chap was born until one day she kind of looked around her and then she went and taken that lace-trimmed night gown she had had forty-five years and never wore out of the chest and put it on and laid down on the bed and pulled the covers up and shut her eyes. "You all will have to look out for pa the best you can," she said. "I'm tired."

Anse rubs his hands on his knees. "The Lord giveth," he says. We can hear Cash a-hammering and sawing beyond the corner.

It's true. Never a truer breath was ever breathed. "The Lord giveth," I say.

That boy comes up the hill. He is carrying a fish nigh long as he is. He slings it to the ground and grunts "Hah" and spits over his shoulder like a man. Durn nigh long as he is.

"What's that?" I say. "A hog? Where'd you get it?"

"Down to the bridge," he says. He turns it over, the under side caked over with dust where it is wet, the eye coated over, humped under the dirt.

"Are you aiming to leave it laying there?" Anse says.

"I aim to show it to ma," Vardaman says. He looks toward the door. We can hear the talking, coming out on the draft. Cash too, knocking and hammering at the boards. "There's company in there," he says.

"Just my folks," I say. "They'd enjoy to see it too."

He says nothing, watching the door. Then he looks down at the fish laying in the dust. He turns it over with his foot and prods at the eye-bump with his toe, gouging at it. Anse is looking out over the land. Vardaman looks at Anse's face, then at the door. He turns, going toward the corner of the house, when Anse calls him without looking around.

"You clean that fish," Anse says.

Vardaman stops. "Why cant Dewey Dell clean it?" he says.

"You clean that fish," Anse says.

"Aw, pa," Vardaman says.

"You clean it," Anse says. He dont look around. Vardaman comes back and picks up the fish. It slides out of his hands, smearing wet dirt onto him, and flops down, dirtying itself again, gapmouthed, goggle-eyed, hiding into the dust like it was ashamed of being dead, like it was in a hurry to get back hid again. Vardaman cusses it. He cusses it like a grown man, standing a-straddle of it. Anse dont look around. Vardaman picks it up again. He goes on around the house, toting it in both arms like a armful of wood, it overlapping him on both ends, head and tail. Durn nigh big as he is.

Anse's wrists dangle out of his sleeves: I never see him with a shirt on that looked like it was his in all my life. They all looked like Jewel might have give him his old ones. Not Jewel, though. He's long-armed, even if he is spindling. Except for the lack of sweat. You could tell they aint been nobody else's but Anse's that way without no mistake. His eyes look like pieces of burnt-out cinder fixed in his face, looking out over the land.

When the shadow touches the steps he says "It's five oclock."

Just as I get up Cora comes to the door and says it's time to get on. Anse reaches for his shoes. "Now, Mr Bundren," Cora says, "dont you get up now." He puts his shoes on, stomping into them, like he does everything, like he is hoping all the time he really cant do it and can quit trying to. When we go up the hall we can hear them clumping on the floor like they was iron shoes. He comes toward the door where she is, blinking his eyes, kind of looking ahead of hisself before he sees, like he is hoping to find her setting up, in a chair maybe or maybe sweeping, and looks into the door in that surprised way like he looks in and finds her still in bed every time and Dewey Dell still a-fanning her with the fan. He stands there, like he dont aim to move again nor nothing else.

"Well, I reckon we better get on," Cora says. "I got to feed the chickens." It's fixing to rain, too. Clouds like that dont lie, and the cotton making every day the Lord sends. That'll be something else for him. Cash is still trimming at the boards. "If there's ere a thing we can do," Cora says.

"Anse'll let us know," I say.

Anse dont look at us. He looks around, blinking, in that surprised way, like he had wore hisself down being surprised and was even surprised at that. If Cash just works that careful on my barn.

"I told Anse it likely wont be no need," I say. "I so hope it."

"Her mind is set on it," he says. "I reckon she's bound to go."

"It comes to all of us," Cora says. "Let the Lord comfort you."

"About that corn," I say. I tell him again I will help him out if he gets into a tight, with her sick and all. Like most folks around here, I done help him so much already I cant quit now.

"I aimed to get to it today," he says. "Seems like I cant get my mind on nothing."

"Maybe she'll hold out till you are laid-by," I say.

"If God wills it," he says.

"Let Him comfort you," Cora says.

If Cash just works that careful on my barn. He looks up when we pass.

"Dont reckon I'll get to you this week," he says.

"Taint no rush," I say. "Whenever you get around to it."

We get into the wagon. Cora sets the cake box on her lap. It's fixing to rain, sho.

"I dont know what he'll do," Cora says. "I just dont know."

"Poor Anse," I say. "She kept him at work for thirty-odd years. I reckon she is tired."

"And I reckon she'll be behind him for thirty years more," Kate says. "Or if it aint her, he'll get another one before cotton-picking."

"I reckon Cash and Darl can get married now," Eula says.

"That poor boy," Cora says. "The poor little tyke."

"What about Jewel?" Kate says.

"He can, too," Eula says.

"Hmph," Kate says. "I reckon he will. I reckon so. I reckon there's more gals than one around here that dont want to see Jewel tied down. Well, they needn't to worry."

"Why, Kate!" Cora says. The wagon begins to rattle. "The poor little tyke," Cora says.

It's fixing to rain this night. Yes, sir. A rattling wagon is mighty dry weather, for a Birdsell. But that'll be cured. It will for a fact.

"She ought to taken them cakes after she said she would," Kate says.

Anse

Durn that road. And it fixing to rain, too. I can stand here and same as see it with second-sight, a-shutting down behind them like a wall, shutting down betwixt them and my given promise. I do the best I can, much as I can get my mind on anything, but durn them boys.

A-laying there, right up to my door, where every bad luck that comes and goes is bound to find it. I told Addie it want⁶ any luck living on a road when it come by here, and she said, for the world like a woman, "Get up and move, then." But I told her it want no luck in it, because the Lord put roads for travelling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it longways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man. And so He never aimed for folks to live on a road, because which gets there first, I says, the road or the house? Did you ever know Him to set a road down by a house? I says. No you never, I says, because it's always men cant rest till they gets the house set where everybody that passes in a wagon can spit in the doorway, keeping the folks restless and wanting to get up and go somewheres else when He aimed for them to stay put like a tree or a stand of corn. Because if He'd a aimed for man to be always a-moving and going somewheres else, wouldn't He a put him longways on his belly, like a snake? It stands to reason He would.

6. Wasn't.

Putting it where every bad luck prowling can find it and come straight to my door, charging me taxes on top of it. Making me pay for Cash having to get them carpenter notions when if it hadn't been no road come there, he wouldn't a got them; falling off of churches and lifting no hand in six months and me and Addie slaving and a-slaving, when there's plenty of sawing on this place he could do if he's got to saw.

And Darl too. Talking me out of him, durn them. It aint that I am afraid of work; I always is fed me and mine and kept a roof above us: it's that they would short-hand me just because he tends to his own business, just because he's got his eyes full of the land all the time. I says to them, he was alright at first, with his eyes full of the land, because the land laid up-and-down ways then; it wasn't till that ere road come and switched the land around long-ways and his eyes still full of the land, they begun to threaten me out of him, trying to short-hand me with the law.

Making me pay for that. She was well and hale as ere a woman ever were, except for that road. Just laying down, resting herself in her own bed, asking naught of none. "Are you sick, Addie?" I said.

"I am not sick," she said.

"You lay you down and rest you," I said. "I knowed you are not sick. You're just tired. You lay you down and rest."

"I am not sick," she said. "I will get up."

"Lay still and rest," I said. "You are just tired. You can get up tomorrow." And she was laying there, well and hale as ere a woman ever were, except for that road.

"I never sent for you," I said. "I take you to witness I never sent for you."

"I know you didn't," Peabody said. "I bound that. Where is she?"

"She's a-laying down," I said. "She's just a little tired, but she'll—"

"Get outen here, Anse," he said. "Go set on the porch a while."

And now I got to pay for it, me without a tooth in my head, hoping to get ahead enough so I could get my mouth fixed where I could eat God's own victuals as a man should, and her hale and well as ere a woman in the land until that day. Got to pay for being put to the need of that three dollars. Got to pay for the way for them boys to have to go away to earn it. And now I can see same as second sight the rain shutting down betwixt us, a-coming up that road like a durn man, like it want ere a other house to rain on in all the living land.

I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not say it's a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by. I am not religious, I reckon. But peace is my heart: I know it is. I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherlike, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls.⁷ But it seems hard that a man in his need could be so flouted by a road.

Vardaman comes around the house, bloody as a hog to his knees, and that ere fish chopped up with the axe like as not, or maybe throwed away for him to lie about the dogs et it. Well, I reckon I aint no call to expect no more of him than of his man-growed brothers. He comes along, watching the house, quiet, and sits on the steps. "Whew," he says, "I'm pure tired."

"Go wash them hands," I say. But couldn't no woman strove harder than Addie to make them right, man and boy: I'll say that for her.

7. "As for every sparrow that falls." Cf. Matthew 10:29: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father."

“It was full of blood and guts as a hog,” he says. But I just cant seem to get no heart into anything, with this here weather sapping me, too. “Pa,” he says, “is ma sick some more?”

“Go wash them hands,” I say. But I just cant seem to get no heart into it.

Darl

He has been to town this week: the back of his neck is trimmed close, with a white line between hair and sunburn like a joint of white bone. He has not once looked back.

“Jewel,” I say. Back running, tunnelled between the two sets of bobbing mule ears, the road vanishes beneath the wagon as though it were a ribbon and the front axle were a spool. “Do you know she is going to die, Jewel?”

It takes two people to make you, and one people to die. That’s how the world is going to end.

I said to Dewey Dell: “You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?” She wouldn’t say what we both knew. “The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true: is that it? But you know it is true now. I can almost tell you the day when you knew it is true. Why wont you say it, even to yourself?” She will not say it. She just keeps on saying Are you going to tell pa? Are you going to kill him? “You cannot believe it is true because you cannot believe that Dewey Dell, Dewey Dell Bundren, could have such bad luck: is that it?”

The sun, an hour above the horizon, is poised like a bloody egg upon a crest of thunderheads; the light has turned copper: in the eye portentous, in the nose sulphurous, smelling of lightning. When Peabody comes, they will have to use the rope. He has pussel-gutted himself eating cold greens. With the rope they will haul him up the path, balloon-like up the sulphurous air.

“Jewel,” I say, “do you know that Addie Bundren is going to die? Addie Bundren is going to die?”

Peabody

When Anse finally sent for me of his own accord, I said “He has wore her out at last.” And I said a damn good thing, and at first I would not go because there might be something I could do and I would have to haul her back, by God. I thought maybe they have the same sort of fool ethics in heaven they have in the Medical College and that it was maybe Vernon Tull sending for me again, getting me there in the nick of time, as Vernon always does things, getting the most for Anse’s money like he does for his own. But when it got far enough into the day for me to read weather sign I knew it couldn’t have been anybody but Anse that sent. I knew that nobody but a luckless man could ever need a doctor in the face of a cyclone. And I knew that if it had finally occurred to Anse himself that he needed one, it was already too late.

When I reach the spring and get down and hitch the team, the sun has gone down behind a bank of black cloud like a topheavy mountain range, like a load of cinders dumped over there, and there is no wind. I could hear Cash sawing for a mile before I got there. Anse is standing at the top of the bluff above the path.

“Where’s the horse?” I say.

"Jewel's taken and gone," he says. "Cant nobody else ketch hit. You'll have to walk up, I reckon."

"Me, walk up, weighing two hundred and twenty-five pounds?" I say. "Walk up that durn wall?" He stands there beside a tree. Too bad the Lord made the mistake of giving trees roots and giving the Anse Bundrens He makes feet and legs. If He'd just swapped them, there wouldn't ever be a worry about this country being deforested someday. Or any other country. "What do you aim for me to do?" I say. "Stay here and get blowed clean out of the country when that cloud breaks?" Even with the horse it would take me fifteen minutes to ride up across the pasture to the top of the ridge and reach the house. The path looks like a crooked limb blown against the bluff. Anse has not been in town in twelve years. And how his mother ever got up there to bear him, he being his mother's son.

"Vardaman's gittin the rope," he says.

After a while Vardaman appears with the plowline. He gives the end of it to Anse and comes down the path, uncoiling it.

"You hold it tight," I say. "I done already wrote this visit onto my books, so I'm going to charge you just the same, whether I get there or not."

"I got hit," Anse says. "You kin come on up."

I'll be damned if I can see why I dont quit. A man seventy years old, weighing two hundred and odd pounds, being hauled up and down a damn mountain on a rope. I reckon it's because I must reach the fifty thousand dollar mark of dead accounts on my books before I can quit. "What the hell does your wife mean," I say, "taking sick on top of a durn mountain?"

"I'm right sorry," he says. He let the rope go, just dropped it, and he has turned toward the house. There is a little daylight up here still, of the color of sulphur matches. The boards look like strips of sulphur. Cash does not look back. Vernon Tull says he brings each board up to the window for her to see it and say it is all right. The boy overtakes us. Anse looks back at him. "Wher's the rope?" he says.

"It's where you left it," I say. "But never you mind that rope. I got to get back down that bluff. I dont aim for that storm to catch me up here. I'd blow too durn far once I got started."

The girl is standing by the bed, fanning her. When we enter she turns her head and looks at us. She has been dead these ten days. I suppose it's having been a part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be. I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind—and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town.

She looks at us. Only her eyes seem to move. It's like they touch us, not with sight or sense, but like the stream from a hose touches you, the stream at the instant of impact as dissociated from the nozzle as though it had never been there. She does not look at Anse at all. She looks at me, then at the boy. Beneath the quilt she is no more than a bundle of rotten sticks.

"Well, Miss Addie," I say. The girl does not stop the fan. "How are you, sister?" I say. Her head lies gaunt on the pillow, looking at the boy. "You picked out a fine time to get me out here and bring up a storm." Then I send Anse and the boy out. She watches the boy as he leaves the room. She has not moved save her eyes.

He and Anse are on the porch when I come out, the boy sitting on the steps, Anse standing by a post, not even leaning against it, his arms dangling, the hair pushed and matted up on his head like a dipped rooster. He turns his head, blinking at me.

"Why didn't you send for me sooner?" I say.

"Hit was jest one thing and then another," he says. "That ere corn me and the boys was aimin to git up with, and Dewey Dell a-takin good keer of her, and folks comin in, a-offerin to help and sich, till I jest thought . . ."

"Damn the money," I say. "Did you ever hear of me worrying a fellow before he was ready to pay?"

"Hit aint begrudgin the money," he says. "I jest kept a-thinking . . . She's goin, is she?" The durn little tyke is sitting on the top step, looking smaller than ever in the sulphur-colored light. That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image. "I knowed hit," Anse says. "All the while I made sho. Her mind is sot on hit."

"And a damn good thing, too," I say. "With a trifling—" He sits on the top step, small, motionless in faded overalls. When I came out he looked up at me, then at Anse. But now he has stopped looking at us. He just sits there.

"Have you told her yit?" Anse says.

"What for?" I say. "What the devil for?"

"She'll know hit. I knowed that when she see you she would know hit, same as writing. You wouldn't need to tell her. Her mind—"

Behind us the girl says, "Paw." I look at her, at her face.

"You better go quick," I say.

When we enter the room she is watching the door. She looks at me. Her eyes look like lamps blaring up just before the oil is gone. "She wants you to go out," the girl says.

"Now, Addie," Anse says, "when he come all the way from Jefferson to git you well?" She watches me: I can feel her eyes. It's like she was shoving at me with them. I have seen it before in women. Seen them drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than pack-horses. That's what they mean by the love that passeth understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again. I leave the room. Beyond the porch Cash's saw snores steadily into the board. A minute later she calls his name, her voice harsh and strong.

"Cash," she says; "you, Cash!"

Darl

Pa stands beside the bed. From behind his leg Vardaman peers, with his round head and his eyes round and his mouth beginning to open. She looks at pa; all her failing life appears to drain into her eyes, urgent, irremediable. "It's Jewel she wants," Dewey Dell says.

"Why, Addie," pa says, "him and Darl went to make one more load. They thought there was time. That you would wait for them, and that three dollars and all . . ." He stoops laying his hand on hers. For a while yet she looks at

him, without reproach, without anything at all, as if her eyes alone are listening to the irrevocable cessation of his voice. Then she raises herself, who has not moved in ten days. Dewey Dell leans down, trying to press her back.

"Ma," she says; "ma."

She is looking out the window, at Cash stooping steadily at the board in the failing light, laboring on toward darkness and into it as though the stroking of the saw illumined its own motion, board and saw engendered.

"You, Cash," she shouts, her voice harsh, strong, and unimpaired. "You, Cash!"

He looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is a composite picture of all time since he was a child. He drops the saw and lifts the board for her to see, watching the window in which the face has not moved. He drags a second plank into position and slants the two of them into their final juxtaposition, gesturing toward the ones yet on the ground, shaping with his empty hand in pantomime the finished box. For a while still she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure nor approbation. Then the face disappears.

She lies back and turns her head without so much as glancing at pa. She looks at Vardaman; her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flames glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them.

"Ma," Dewey Dell says; "ma!" Leaning above the bed, her hands lifted a little, the fan still moving like it has for ten days, she begins to keen. Her voice is strong, young, tremulous and clear, rapt with its own timbre and volume, the fan still moving steadily up and down, whispering the useless air. Then she flings herself across Addie Bundren's knees, clutching her, shaking her with the furious strength of the young before sprawling suddenly across the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left, jarring the whole bed into a chattering sibilance of mattress shucks, her arms out-flung and the fan in one hand still beating with expiring breath into the quilt.

From behind pa's leg Vardaman peers, his mouth full open all color draining from his face into his mouth, as though he has by some means fleshed his own teeth in himself, sucking. He begins to move slowly backward from the bed, his eyes round, his pale face fading into the dusk like a piece of paper pasted on a failing wall, and so out of the door.

Pa leans above the bed in the twilight, his humped silhouette partaking of that owl-like quality of awry-feathered, disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought.

"Durn them boys," he says.

Jewel, I say. Overhead the day drives level and gray, hiding the sun by a flight of gray spears. In the rain the mules smoke a little, splashed yellow with mud, the off⁸ one clinging in sliding lunges to the side of the road above the ditch. The tilted lumber gleams dull yellow, water-soaked and heavy as lead, tilted at a steep angle into the ditch above the broken wheel; about the shattered spokes and about Jewel's ankles a runnel of yellow neither water nor earth swirls, curving with the yellow road neither of earth nor water, down the hill dissolving into a streaming mass of dark green neither of earth nor sky, Jewel, I say

Cash comes to the door, carrying the saw. Pa stands beside the bed, humped, his arms dangling. He turns his head, his shabby profile, his chin collapsing slowly as he works the snuff against his gums.

"She's gone," Cash says.

"She taken and left us," pa says. Cash does not look at him. "How nigh are you done?" pa says. Cash does not answer. He enters, carrying the saw. "I reckon you better get at it," pa says. "You'll have to do the best you can, with them boys gone off that-a-way." Cash looks down at her face. He is not listening to pa at all. He does not approach the bed. He stops in the middle of the floor, the saw against his leg, his sweating arms powdered lightly with sawdust, his face composed. "If you get in a tight, maybe some of them'll get here tomorrow and help you," pa says. "Vernon could." Cash is not listening. He is looking down at her peaceful, rigid face fading into the dusk as though darkness were a precursor of the ultimate earth, until at last the face seems to float detached upon it, lightly as the reflection of a dead leaf. "There is Christians enough to help you," pa says. Cash is not listening. After a while he turns without looking at pa and leaves the room. Then the saw begins to snore again. "They will help us in our sorrow," pa says.

The sound of the saw is steady, competent, unhurried, stirring the dying light so that at each stroke her face seems to wake a little into an expression of listening and of waiting, as though she were counting the strokes. Pa looks down at the face, at the black sprawl of Dewey Dell's hair, the out-flung arms, the clutched fan now motionless on the fading quilt. "I reckon you better get supper on," he says.

Dewey Dell does not move.

"Git up, now, and put supper on," pa says. "We got to keep our strength up. I reckon Doctor Peabody's right hungry, coming all this way. And Cash'll need to eat quick and get back to work so he can finish it in time."

Dewey Dell rises, heaving to her feet. She looks down at the face. It is like a casting of fading bronze upon the pillow, the hands alone still with any semblance of life: a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not yet departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last.

Dewey Dell stoops and slides the quilt from beneath them and draws it up over them to the chin, smoothing it down, drawing it smooth. Then without looking at pa she goes around the bed and leaves the room.

She will go out where Peabody is, where she can stand in the twilight and look at his back with such an expression that, feeling her eyes and turning, he will say: I would not let it grieve me, now. She was old, and sick too. Suffering more than we knew. She couldn't have got well. Vardaman's getting big now, and with you to take good care of them all. I would try not to let it grieve me. I expect you'd better go and get some supper ready. It dont have to be much. But they'll need to eat, and she looking at him, saying You could do so much for me if you just would. If you just knew. I am I and you are you and I know it and you dont know it and you could do so much for me if you just would and if you just would then I could tell you and then nobody would have to know it except you and me and Darl

Pa stands over the bed, dangle-armed, humped, motionless. He raises his hand to his head, scouring his hair, listening to the saw. He comes nearer

and rubs his hand, palm and back, on his thigh and lays it on her face and then on the hump of quilt where her hands are. He touches the quilt as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity, so that at last he desists, his hand falling to his side and stroking itself again, palm and back, on his thigh. The sound of the saw snores steadily into the room. Pa breathes with a quiet, rasping sound, mouthing the snuff against his gums. "God's will be done," he says. "Now I can get them teeth."

Jewel's hat droops limp about his neck, channelling water onto the soaked towsack tied about his shoulders as, ankle-deep in the running ditch, he pries with a slipping two-by-four, with a piece of rotting log for fulcrum, at the axle. Jewel, I say, she is dead, Jewel. Addie Bundren is dead

Vardaman

Then I begin to run. I run toward the back and come to the edge of the porch and stop. Then I begin to cry. I can feel where the fish was in the dust. It is cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls. Then it wasn't so. It hadn't happened then. And now she is getting so far ahead I cannot catch her.

The trees look like chickens when they ruffle out into the cool dust on the hot days. If I jump off the porch I will be where the fish was, and it all cut up into not-fish now. I can hear the bed and her face and them and I can feel the floor shake when he walks on it that came and did it. That came and did it when she was all right but he came and did it.

"The fat son of a bitch."

I jump from the porch, running. The top of the barn comes swooping up out of the twilight. If I jump I can go through it like the pink lady in the circus, into the warm smelling, without having to wait. My hands grab at the bushes; beneath my feet the rocks and dirt go rubbing down.

Then I can breathe again, in the warm smelling. I enter the stall, trying to touch him, and then I can cry then I vomit the crying. As soon as he gets through kicking I can and then I can cry, the crying can.

"He kilt her. He kilt her."

The life in him runs under the skin, under my hand, running through the splotches, smelling up into my nose where the sickness is beginning to cry, vomiting the crying, and then I can breathe, vomiting it. It makes a lot of noise. I can smell the life running up from under my hands, up my arms, and then I can leave the stall.

I cannot find it. In the dark, along the dust, the walls I cannot find it. The crying makes a lot of noise. I wish it wouldn't make so much noise. Then I find it in the wagon shed, in the dust, and I run across the lot and into the road, the stick jouncing on my shoulder.

They watch me as I run up, beginning to jerk back, their eyes rolling, snorting, jerking back on the hitch-rein. I strike. I can hear the stick striking; I can see it hitting their heads, the breast-yoke, missing altogether sometimes as they rear and plunge, but I am glad.

"You kilt my maw!"

The stick breaks, they rearing and snorting, their feet popping loud on the ground; loud because it is going to rain and the air is empty for the rain. But it is still long enough. I run this way and that as they rear and jerk at the hitch-rein, striking.

“You kilt her!”

I strike at them, striking, they wheeling in a long lunge, the buggy wheeling onto two wheels and motionless like it is nailed to the ground and the horses motionless like they are nailed by the hind feet to the center of a whirling plate.

I run in the dust. I cannot see, running in the sucking dust where the buggy vanishes tilted on two wheels. I strike, the stick hitting into the ground, bouncing, striking into the dust and then into the air again and the dust sucking on down the road faster than if a car was in it. And then I can cry, looking at the stick. It is broken down to my hand, not longer than stove wood that was a long stick. I throw it away and I can cry. It does not make so much noise now.

The cow is standing in the barn door, chewing. When she sees me come into the lot she lows, her mouth full of flopping green, her tongue flopping.

“I aint a-goin to milk you. I aint a-goin to do nothing for them.”

I hear her turn when I pass. When I turn she is just behind me with her sweet, hot, hard breath.

“Didn’t I tell you I wouldn’t?”

She nudges me, snuffing. She moans deep inside, her mouth closed. I jerk my hand, cursing her like Jewel does.

“Git, now.”

I stoop my hand to the ground and run at her. She jumps back and whirls away and stops, watching me. She moans. She goes on to the path and stands there, looking up the path.

It is dark in the barn, warm, smelling, silent. I can cry quietly, watching the top of the hill.

Cash comes to the hill, limping where he fell off of the church. He looks down at the spring, then up the road and back toward the barn. He comes down the path stiffly and looks at the broken hitch-rein and at the dust in the road and then up the road, where the dust is gone.

“I hope they’ve got clean past Tull’s by now. I so hope hit.”

Cash turns and limps up the path.

“Durn him. I showed him. Durn him.”

I am not crying now. I am not anything. Dewey Dell comes to the hill and calls me. Vardaman. I am not anything. I am quiet. You, Vardaman. I can cry quiet now, feeling and hearing my tears.

“Then hit want. Hit hadn’t happened then. Hit was a-layin right there on the ground. And now she’s gittin ready to cook hit.”

It is dark. I can hear wood, silence: I know them. But not living sounds, not even him. It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components—snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of a co-ordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*. I see him dissolve—legs, a rolling eye, a gaudy splotching like cold flames—and float upon the dark in fading

solution; all one yet neither; all either yet none. I can see hearing coil toward him, caressing, shaping his hard shape—fetlock, hip, shoulder and head; smell and sound. I am not afraid.

“Cooked and et. Cooked and et.”

Dewey Dell

He could do so much for me if he just would. He could do everything for me. It's like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room in it for anything else very important. He is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts and if there is not any room for anything else important in a big tub of guts, how can it be room in a little tub of guts. But I know it is there because God gave women a sign when something has happened bad.

It's because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it. And he could do so much for me, and then I would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone.

I would let him come in between me and Lafe, like Darl came in between me and Lafe, and so Lafe is alone too. He is Lafe and I am Dewey Dell, and when mother died I had to go beyond and outside of me and Lafe and Darl to grieve because he could do so much for me and he dont know it. He dont even know it.

From the back porch I cannot see the barn. Then the sound of Cash's sawing comes in from that way. It is like a dog outside the house, going back and forth around the house to whatever door you come to, waiting to come in. He said I worry more than you do and I said You dont know what worry is so I cant worry. I try to but I cant think long enough to worry.

I light the kitchen lamp. The fish, cut into jagged pieces, bleeds quietly in the pan. I put it into the cupboard quick, listening into the hall, hearing. It took her ten days to die; maybe she dont know it is yet. Maybe she wont go until Cash. Or maybe until Jewel. I take the dish of greens from the cupboard and the bread pan from the cold stove, and I stop, watching the door.

“Where's Vardaman?” Cash says. In the lamp his sawdusted arms look like sand.

“I dont know. I aint seen him.”

“Peabody's team run away. See if you can find Vardaman. The horse will let him catch him.”

“Well. Tell them to come to supper.”

I cannot see the barn. I said, I dont know how to worry. I dont know how to cry. I tried, but I cant. After a while the sound of the saw comes around, coming dark along the ground in the dust-dark. Then I can see him, going up and down above the plank.

“You come in to supper,” I say. “Tell him.” He could do everything for me. And he dont know it. He is his guts and I am my guts. And I am Lafe's guts. That's it. I dont see why he didn't stay in town. We are country people, not as good as town people. I dont see why he didn't. Then I can see the top of the barn. The cow stands at the foot of the path, lowing. When I turn back, Cash is gone.

I carry the buttermilk in. Pa and Cash and he are at the table.

"Where's that big fish Bud caught, sister?" he says.

I set the milk on the table. "I never had no time to cook it."

"Plain turnip greens is mighty spindling eating for a man my size," he says. Cash is eating. About his head the print of his hat is sweated into his hair. His shirt is blotched with sweat. He has not washed his hands and arms.

"You ought to took time," pa says. "Where's Vardaman?"

I go toward the door. "I cant find him."

"Here, sister," he says; "never mind about the fish. It'll save, I reckon. Come on and sit down."

"I aint minding it," I say. "I'm going to milk before it sets in to rain."

Pa helps himself and pushes the dish on. But he does not begin to eat. His hands are halfclosed on either side of his plate, his head bowed a little, his awry hair standing into the lamplight. He looks like right after the maul hits the steer and it no longer alive and dont yet know that it is dead.

But Cash is eating, and he is too. "You better eat something," he says. He is looking at pa. "Like Cash and me. You'll need it."

"Ay," pa says. He rouses up, like a steer that's been kneeling in a pond and you run at it. "She would not begrudge me it."

When I am out of sight of the house, I go fast. The cow lows at the foot of the bluff. She nuzzles at me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress, against my hot nakedness, moaning. "You got to wait a little while. Then I'll tend to you." She follows me into the barn where I set the bucket down. She breathes into the bucket, moaning. "I told you. You just got to wait, now. I got more to do than I can tend to." The barn is dark. When I pass, he kicks the wall a single blow. I go on. The broken plank is like a pale plank standing on end. Then I can see the slope, feel the air moving on my face again, slow, pale with lesser dark and with empty seeing, the pine clumps blotched up the tilted slope, secret and waiting.

The cow in silhouette against the door nuzzles at the silhouette of the bucket, moaning.

Then I pass the stall. I have almost passed it. I listen to it saying for a long time before it can say the word and the listening part is afraid that there may not be time to say it. I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible. Lafe. Lafe. "Lafe" Lafe. Lafe. I lean a little forward, one foot advanced with dead walking. I feel the darkness rushing past my breast, past the cow; I begin to rush upon the darkness but the cow stops me and the darkness rushes on upon the sweet blast of her moaning breath, filled with wood and with silence.

"Vardaman. You, Vardaman."

He comes out of the stall. "You durn little sneak! You durn little sneak!"

He does not resist; the last of rushing darkness flees whistling away. "What? I aint done nothing."

"You durn little sneak!" My hands shake him, hard. Maybe I couldn't stop them. I didn't know they could shake so hard. They shake both of us, shaking.

"I never done it," he says. "I never touched them."

My hands stop shaking him, but I still hold him. "What are you doing here? Why didn't you answer when I called you?"

"I aint doing nothing."

"You go on to the house and get your supper."

He draws back. I hold him. "You quit now. You leave me be."

"What are you doing down here? You didn't come down here to sneak after me?"

"I never. I never. You quit, now. I didn't even know you was down here. You leave me be."

I hold him, leaning down to see his face, feel it with my eyes. He is about to cry. "Go on, now. I done put supper on and I'll be there soon as I milk. You better go on before he eats everything up. I hope that team runs clean back to Jefferson."

"He kilt her," he says. He begins to cry.

"Hush."

"She never hurt him and he come and kilt her."

"Hush." He struggles. I hold him. "Hush."

"He kilt her." The cow comes up behind us, moaning. I shake him again.

"You stop it, now. Right this minute. You're fixing to make yourself sick and then you cant go to town. You go on to the house and eat your supper."

"I dont want no supper. I dont want to go to town."

"We'll leave you here, then. Lessen you behave, we will leave you. Go on, now, before that old green-eating tub of guts eats everything up from you." He goes on, disappearing slowly into the hill. The crest, the trees, the roof of the house stand against the sky. The cow nuzzles at me, moaning. "You'll just have to wait. What you got in you aint nothing to what I got in me, even if you are a woman too." She follows me, moaning. Then the dead, hot, pale air breathes on my face again. He could fix it all right, if he just would. And he dont even know it. He could do everything for me if he just knowed it. The cow breathes upon my hips and back, her breath warm, sweet, stertorous, moaning. The sky lies flat down the slope, upon the secret clumps. Beyond the hill sheet-lightning stains upward and fades. The dead air shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness, further away than seeing shapes the dead earth. It lies dead and warm upon me, touching me naked through my clothes. I said You dont know what worry is. I dont know what it is. I dont know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I dont know whether I can cry or not, I dont know whether I have tried to or not. I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth.

Vardaman

When they get it finished they are going to put her in it and then for a long time I couldn't say it. I saw the dark stand up and go whirling away and I said "Are you going to nail her up in it, Cash? Cash? Cash?" I got shut up in the crib the new door it was too heavy for me it went shut I couldn't breathe because the rat was breathing up all the air, I said "Are you going to nail it shut, Cash? Nail it? *Nail* it?"

Pa walks around. His shadow walks around, over Cash going up and down above the saw, at the bleeding plank.

Dewey Dell said we will get some bananas. The train is behind the glass, red on the track. When it runs the track shines on and off. Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a country boy because boys in town. Bicycles. Why do flour and sugar and coffee cost so much when he is a

country boy. "Wouldn't you ruther have some bananas instead?" Bananas are gone, eaten. Gone. When it runs on the track shines again. "Why aint I a town boy, pa?" I said. God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country. If He can make the train, why cant He make them all in the town because flour and sugar and coffee. "Wouldn't you ruther have bananas?"

He walks around. His shadow walks around.

It was not her. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away. "Did she go as far as town?" "She went further than town." "Did all those rabbits and possums go further than town?" God made the rabbits and possums. He made the train. Why must He make a different place for them to go if she is just like the rabbit.

Pa walks around. His shadow does. The saw sounds like it is asleep.

And so if Cash nails the box up, she is not a rabbit. And so if she is not a rabbit I couldn't breathe in the crib and Cash is going to nail it up. And so if she lets him it is not her. I know. I was there. I saw when it did not be her. I saw. They think it is and Cash is going to nail it up.

It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there wont be anything in the box and so she can breathe. It was laying right yonder on the ground. I can get Vernon. He was there and he seen it, and with both of us it will be and then it will not be.

Tull

It was nigh to midnight and it had set in to rain when he woke us. It had been a misdoubtful night, with the storm making; a night when a fellow looks for most anything to happen before he can get the stock fed and himself to the house and supper et and in bed with the rain starting, and when Peabody's team come up, lathered, with the broke harness dragging and the neck-yoke betwixt the off critter's legs, Cora says "It's Addie Bundren. She's gone at last."

"Peabody mought have been to ere a one of a dozen houses hereabouts," I says. "Besides, how do you know it's Peabody's team?"

"Well, aint it?" she says. "You hitch up, now."

"What for?" I says. "If she is gone, we cant do nothing till morning. And it fixing to storm, too."

"It's my duty," she says. "You put the team in."

But I wouldn't do it. "It stands to reason they'd send for us if they needed us. You dont even know she's gone yet."

"Why, dont you know that's Peabody's team? Do you claim it aint? Well, then." But I wouldn't go. When folks wants a fellow, it's best to wait till they sends for him, I've found. "It's my Christian duty," Cora says. "Will you stand between me and my Christian duty?"

"You can stay there all day tomorrow, if you want," I says.

So when Cora waked me it had set in to rain. Even while I was going to the door with the lamp and it shining on the glass so he could see I am coming, it kept on knocking. Not loud, but steady, like he might have gone to

sleep thumping, but I never noticed how low down on the door the knocking was till I opened it and never seen nothing. I held the lamp up, with the rain sparkling across it and Cora back in the hall saying “Who is it, Vernon?” but I couldn’t see nobody a-tall at first until I looked down and around the door, lowering the lamp.

He looked like a drowned puppy, in them overalls, without no hat, splashed up to his knees where he had walked them four miles in the mud. “Well, I’ll be durned,” I says.

“Who is it, Vernon?” Cora says.

He looked at me, his eyes round and black in the middle like when you throw a light in a owl’s face. “You mind⁹ that ere fish,” he says.

“Come in the house,” I says. “What is it? Is your maw—”

“Vernon,” Cora says.

He stood kind of around behind the door, in the dark. The rain was blowing onto the lamp, hissing on it so I am scared every minute it’ll break. “You was there,” he says. “You seen it.”

Then Cora come to the door. “You come right in outen the rain,” she says, pulling him in and him watching me. He looked just like a drowned puppy. “I told you,” Cora says. “I told you it was a-happening. You go and hitch.”

“But he aint said—” I says.

He looked at me, dripping onto the floor. “He’s a-ruining the rug,” Cora says. “You go get the team while I take him to the kitchen.”

But he hung back, dripping, watching me with them eyes. “You was there. You seen it laying there. Cash is fixing to nail her up, and it was a-laying right there on the ground. You seen it. You seen the mark in the dirt. The rain never come up till after I was a-coming here. So we can get back in time.”

I be durn if it didn’t give me the creeps, even when I didn’t know yet. But Cora did. “You get that team quick as you can,” she says. “He’s outen his head with grief and worry.”

I be durn if it didn’t give me the creeps. Now and then a fellow gets to thinking. About all the sorrow and afflictions in this world; how it’s liable to strike anywhere, like lightning. I reckon it does take a powerful trust in the Lord to guard a fellow, though sometimes I think that Cora’s a mite over-cautious, like she was trying to crowd the other folks away and get in closer than anybody else. But then, when something like this happens, I reckon she is right and you got to keep after it and I reckon I am blessed in having a wife that ever strives for sanctity and well-doing like she says I am.

Now and then a fellow gets to thinking about it. Not often, though. Which is a good thing. For the Lord aimed for him to do and not to spend too much time thinking, because his brain it’s like a piece of machinery: it wont stand a whole lot of racking. It’s best when it all runs along the same, doing the day’s work and not no one part used no more than needful. I have said and I say again, that’s ever living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much. Cora’s right when she says all he needs is a wife to straighten him out. And when I think about that, I think that if nothing but being married will help a man, he’s durn nigh hopeless. But I reckon Cora’s right when she says the reason the Lord had to create women is because man dont know his own good when he sees it.

9. Remember.

When I come back to the house with the team, they was in the kitchen. She was dressed on top of her nightgown, with a shawl over her head and her umbrella and her bible wrapped up in the oilcloth, and him sitting on a up-turned bucket on the stove-zinc where she had put him, dripping onto the floor. "I cant get nothing outen him except about a fish," she says. "It's a judgment on them. I see the hand of the Lord upon this boy for Anse Bundren's judgment and warning."

"The rain never come up till after I left," he says. "I had done left. I was on the way. And so it was there in the dust. You seen it. Cash is fixing to nail her, but you seen it."

When we got there it was raining hard, and him sitting on the seat between us, wrapped up in Cora's shawl. He hadn't said nothing else, just sitting there with Cora holding the umbrella over him. Now and then Cora would stop singing long enough to say "It's a judgment on Anse Bundren. May it show him the path of sin he is a-trodding." Then she would sing again, and him sitting there between us, leaning forward a little like the mules couldn't go fast enough to suit him.

"It was laying right yonder," he says, "but the rain come up after I taken and left. So I can go and open the windows, because Cash aint nailed her yet."

It was long a-past midnight when we drove the last nail, and almost dust-dawn when I got back home and taken the team out and got back in bed, with Cora's nightcap laying on the other pillow. And be durned if even then it wasn't like I could still hear Cora singing and feel that boy leaning forward between us like he was ahead of the mules, and still see Cash going up and down with that saw, and Anse standing there like a scarecrow, like he was a steer standing knee-deep in a pond and somebody come by and set the pond up on edge and he aint missed it yet.

It was nigh toward daybreak when we drove the last nail and toted it into the house, where she was laying on the bed with the window open and the rain blowing on her again. Twice he did it, and him so dead for sleep that Cora says his face looked like one of these here Christmas masts¹ that had done been buried a while and then dug up, until at last they put her into it and nailed it down so he couldn't open the window on her no more. And the next morning they found him in his shirt tail, laying asleep on the floor like a felled steer, and the top of the box bored clean full of holes and Cash's new auger broke off in the last one. When they taken the lid off they found that two of them had bored on into her face.

If it's a judgment, it aint right. Because the Lord's got more to do than that. He's bound to have. Because the only burden Anse Bundren's ever had is himself. And when folks talks him low, I think to myself he aint that less of a man or he couldn't a bore himself this long.

It aint right. I be durn if it is. Because He said Suffer little children to come unto Me dont make it right, neither. Cora said, "I have bore you what the Lord God sent me. I faced it without fear nor terror because my faith was strong in the Lord, a-bolstering and sustaining me. If you have no son, it's because the Lord has decreed otherwise in His wisdom. And my life is and has ever been a open book to ere a man or woman among His creatures because I trust in my God and my reward."

1. Masks.

I reckon she's right. I reckon if there's ere a man or woman anywhere that He could turn it all over to and go away with His mind at rest, it would be Cora. And I reckon she would make a few changes, no matter how He was running it. And I reckon they would be for man's good. Leastways, we would have to like them. Leastways, we might as well go on and make like we did.

Darl

The lantern sits on a stump. Rusted, grease-fouled, its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare upon the trestles and the boards and the adjacent earth. Upon the dark ground the chips look like random smears of soft pale paint on a black canvas. The boards look like long smooth tatters torn from the flat darkness and turned backside out.

Cash labors about the trestles, moving back and forth, lifting and placing the planks with long clattering reverberations in the dead air as though he were lifting and dropping them at the bottom of an invisible well, the sounds ceasing without departing, as if any movement might dislodge them from the immediate air in reverberant repetition. He saws again, his elbow flashing slowly, a thin thread of fire running along the edge of the saw, lost and recovered at the top and bottom of each stroke in unbroken elongation, so that the saw appears to be six feet long, into and out of pa's shabby and aimless silhouette. "Give me that plank," Cash says. "No; the other one." He puts the saw down and comes and picks up the plank he wants, sweeping pa away with the long swinging gleam of the balanced board.

The air smells like sulphur. Upon the impalpable plane of it their shadows form as upon a wall, as though like sound they had not gone very far away in falling but had merely congealed for a moment, immediate and musing. Cash works on, half turned into the feeble light, one thigh and one pole-thin arm braced, his face sloped into the light with a rapt, dynamic immobility above his tireless elbow. Below the sky sheet-lightning slumbers lightly; against it the trees, motionless, are ruffled out to the last twig, swollen, increased as though quick with young.

It begins to rain. The first harsh, sparse, swift drops rush through the leaves and across the ground in a long sigh, as though of relief from intolerable suspense. They are big as buckshot, warm as though fired from a gun; they sweep across the lantern in a vicious hissing. Pa lifts his face, slack-mouthed, the wet black rim of snuff plastered close along the base of his gums; from behind his slack-faced astonishment he muses as though from beyond time, upon the ultimate outrage. Cash looks once at the sky, then at the lantern. The saw has not faltered, the running gleam of its pistoning edge unbroken. "Get something to cover the lantern," he says.

Pa goes to the house. The rain rushes suddenly down, without thunder, without warning of any sort; he is swept onto the porch upon the edge of it and in an instant Cash is wet to the skin. Yet the motion of the saw has not faltered, as though it and the arm functioned in a tranquil conviction that rain was an illusion of the mind. Then he puts down the saw and goes and crouches above the lantern, shielding it with his body, his back shaped lean and scrawny by his wet shirt as though he had been abruptly turned wrong-side out, shirt and all.

Pa returns. He is wearing Jewel's raincoat and carrying Dewey Dell's. Squatting over the lantern, Cash reaches back and picks up four sticks and drives them into the earth and takes Dewey Dell's raincoat from pa and spreads it over the sticks, forming a roof above the lantern. Pa watches him. "I dont know what you'll do," he says. "Darl taken his coat with him."

"Get wet," Cash says. He takes up the saw again; again it moves up and down, in and out of that unhurried imperviousness as a piston moves in the oil; soaked, scrawny, tireless, with the lean light body of a boy or an old man. Pa watches him, blinking, his face streaming; again he looks up at the sky with that expression of dumb and brooding outrage and yet of vindication, as though he had expected no less; now and then he stirs; moves, gaunt and streaming, picking up a board or a tool and then laying it down. Vernon Tull is there now, and Cash is wearing Mrs Tull's raincoat and he and Vernon are hunting the saw. After a while they find it in pa's hand.

"Why don't you go on to the house, out of the rain?" Cash says. Pa looks at him, his face streaming slowly. It is as though upon a face carved by a savage caricaturist a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement flowed. "You go on in," Cash says. "Me and Vernon can finish it."

Pa looks at them. The sleeves of Jewel's coat are too short for him. Upon his face the rain streams, slow as cold glycerin. "I dont begrudge her the wetting," he says. He moves again and falls to shifting the planks, picking them up, laying them down again carefully, as though they are glass. He goes to the lantern and pulls at the propped raincoat until he knocks it down and Cash comes and fixes it back.

"You get on to the house," Cash says. He leads pa to the house and returns with the raincoat and folds it and places it beneath the shelter where the lantern sits. Vernon has not stopped. He looks up, still sawing.

"You ought to done that at first," he says. "You knowed it was fixing to rain."

"It's his fever," Cash says. He looks at the board.

"Ay," Vernon says. "He'd a come, anyway."

Cash squints at the board. On the long flank of it the rain crashed steadily, myriad, fluctuant. "I'm going to bevel it," he says.

"It'll take more time," Vernon says. Cash sets the plank on edge; a moment longer Vernon watches him, then he hands him the plane.

Vernon holds the board steady while Cash bevels the edge of it with the tedious and minute care of a jeweler. Mrs Tull comes to the edge of the porch and calls Vernon. "How near are you done?" she says.

Vernon does not look up. "Not long. Some, yet."

She watches Cash stooping at the plank, the turgid savage gleam of the lantern slicking on the raincoat as he moves. "You go down and get some planks off the barn and finish it and come in out of the rain," she says. "You'll both catch your death." Vernon does not move. "Vernon," she says.

"We wont be long," he says. "We'll be done after a spell." Mrs Tull watches them a while. Then she reenters the house.

"If we git in a tight, we could take some of them planks," Vernon says. "I'll help you put them back."

Cash ceases the plane and squints along the plank, wiping it with his palm. "Give me the next one," he says.

Some time toward dawn the rain ceases. But it is not yet day when Cash drives the last nail and stands stiffly up and looks down at the finished

coffin, the others watching him. In the lantern light his face is calm, musing; slowly he strokes his hands on his raincoated thighs in a gesture deliberate, final and composed. Then the four of them—Cash and pa and Vernon and Peabody—raise the coffin to their shoulders and turn toward the house. It is light, yet they move slowly; empty, yet they carry it carefully; lifeless, yet they move with hushed precautionary words to one another, speaking of it as though, complete, it now slumbered lightly alive, waiting to come awake. On the dark floor their feet clump awkwardly, as though for a long time they have not walked on floors.

They set it down by the bed. Peabody says quietly: "Let's eat a snack. It's almost daylight. Where's Cash?"

He has returned to the trestles, stooped again in the lantern's feeble glare as he gathers up his tools and wipes them on a cloth carefully and puts them into the box with its leather sling to go over the shoulder. Then he takes up box, lantern and raincoat and returns to the house, mounting the steps into faint silhouette against the paling east.

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlampped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*.

How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home.

Cash

I made it on the bevel.

1. There is more surface for the nails to grip.
2. There is twice the gripping-surface to each seam.
3. The water will have to seep into it on a slant. Water moves easiest up and down or straight across.
4. In a house people are upright two thirds of the time. So the seams and joints are made up-and-down. Because the stress is up-and-down.
5. In a bed where people lie down all the time, the joints and seams are made sideways, because the stress is sideways.
6. Except.
7. A body is not square like a crosstie.
8. Animal magnetism.
9. The animal magnetism of a dead body makes the stress come slanting, so the seams and joints of a coffin are made on the bevel.
10. You can see by an old grave that the earth sinks down on the bevel.

11. While in a natural hole it sinks by the center, the stress being up-and-down.

12. So I made it on the bevel.

13. It makes a neater job.

Vardaman

My mother is a fish.

Tull

It was ten oclock when I got back, with Peabody's team hitched on to the back of the wagon. They had already dragged the buckboard back from where Quick found it upside down straddle of the ditch about a mile from the spring. It was pulled out of the road at the spring, and about a dozen wagons was already there. It was Quick found it. He said the river was up and still rising. He said it had already covered the highest water-mark on the bridge-piling he had ever seen. "That bridge wont stand a whole lot of water," I said. "Has somebody told Anse about it?"

"I told him," Quick said. "He says he reckons them boys has heard and unloaded and are on the way back by now. He says they can load up and get across."

"He better go on and bury her at New Hope," Armstid said. "That bridge is old. I wouldn't monkey with it."

"His mind is set on taking her to Jefferson," Quick said.

"Then he better get at it soon as he can," Armstid said.

Anse meets us at the door. He has shaved, but not good. There is a long cut on his jaw, and he is wearing his Sunday pants and a white shirt with the neckband buttoned. It is drawn smooth over his hump, making it look bigger than ever, like a white shirt will, and his face is different too. He looks folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed, shaking us by the hand as we walk up onto the porch and scrape our shoes, a little stiff in our Sunday clothes, our Sunday clothes rustling, not looking full at him as he meets us.

"The Lord giveth," we say.

"The Lord giveth."

That boy is not there. Peabody told about how he come into the kitchen, hollering, swarming and clawing at Cora when he found her cooking that fish, and how Dewey Dell taken him down to the barn. "My team all right?" Peabody says.

"All right," I tell him. "I give them a bait this morning. Your buggy seems all right too. It aint hurt."

"And no fault of somebody's," he says. "I'd give a nickel to know where that boy was when that team broke away."

"If it's broke anywhere, I'll fix it," I say.

The women folks go on into the house. We can hear them, talking and fanning. The fans go wish. wish. wish and them talking, the talking sounding kind of like bees murmuring in a water bucket. The men stop on the porch, talking some, not looking at one another.

"Howdy, Vernon," they say. "Howdy, Tull."

"Looks like more rain."

"It does for a fact."

"Yes, sir. It will rain some more."

"It come up quick."

"And going away slow. It dont fail."

I go around to the back. Cash is filling up the holes he bored in the top of it. He is trimming out plugs for them, one at a time, the wood wet and hard to work. He could cut up a tin can and hide the holes and nobody wouldn't know the difference. Wouldn't mind, anyway. I have seen him spend a hour trimming out a wedge like it was glass he was working, when he could have reached around and picked up a dozen sticks and drove them into the joint and made it do.

When we finished I go back to the front. The men have gone a little piece from the house, sitting on the ends of the boards and on the sawhorses where we made it last night, some sitting and some squatting. Whitfield aint come yet.

They look up at me, their eyes asking.

"It's about," I say. "He's ready to nail."

While they are getting up Anse comes to the door and looks at us and we return to the porch. We scrape our shoes again, careful, waiting for one another to go in first, milling a little at the door. Anse stands inside the door, dignified, composed. He waves us in and leads the way into the room.

They had laid her in it reversed. Cash made it clock-shape, like this



with every joint and seam bevelled and scrubbed with the plane, tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket, and they had laid her in it head to foot so it wouldn't crush her dress. It was her wedding dress and it had a flare-out bottom, and they had laid her head to foot in it so the dress could spread out, and they had made her a veil out of a mosquito bar so the auger holes in her face wouldn't show.

When we are going out, Whitfield comes. He is wet and muddy to the waist, coming in. "The Lord comfort this house," he says. "I was late because the bridge has gone. I went down to the old ford and swum my horse over, the Lord protecting me. His grace be upon this house."

We go back to the trestles and plank-ends and sit or squat.

"I knowed it would go," Armstid says.

"It's been there a long time, that ere bridge," Quick says.

"The Lord has kept it there, you mean," Uncle Billy says. "I dont know ere a man that's touched hammer to it in twenty-five years."

"How long has it been there, Uncle Billy?" Quick says.

"It was built in . . . let me see . . . It was in the year 1888," Uncle Billy says. "I mind it because the first man to cross it was Peabody coming to my house when Jody was born."

"If I'd a crossed it every time your wife littered since, it'd a been wore out long before this, Billy," Peabody says.

We laugh, suddenly loud, then suddenly quiet again. We look a little aside at one another.

"Lots of folks has crossed it that wont cross no more bridges," Houston says.

"It's a fact," Littlejohn says. "It's so."

"One more aint, no ways," Armstid says. "It'd taken them two-three days to get her to town in the wagon. They'd be gone a week, getting her to Jefferson and back."

"What's Anse so itching to take her to Jefferson for, anyway?" Houston says.

"He promised her," I say. "She wanted it. She come from there. Her mind was set on it."

"And Anse is set on it, too," Quick says.

"Ay," Uncle Billy says. "It's like a man that's let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows."

"Well, it'll take the Lord to get her over that river now," Peabody says. "Anse cant do it."

"And I reckon He will," Quick says. "He's took care of Anse a long time, now."

"It's a fact," Littlejohn says.

"Too long to quit now," Armstid says.

"I reckon He's like everybody else around here," Uncle Billy says. "He's done it so long now He cant quit."

Cash comes out. He has put on a clean shirt; his hair, wet, is combed smooth down on his brow, smooth and black as if he had painted it onto his head. He squats stiffly among us, we watching him.

"You feeling this weather, aint you?" Armstid says.

Cash says nothing.

"A broke bone always feels it," Littlejohn says. "A fellow with a broke bone can tell it a-coming."

"Lucky Cash got off with just a broke leg," Armstid says. "He might have hurt himself bed-rid. How far'd you fall, Cash?"

"Twenty-eight foot, four and a half inches, about," Cash says. I move over beside him.

"A fellow can sho slip quick on wet planks," Quick says.

"It's too bad," I say. "But you couldn't a help it."

"It's them durn women," he says. "I made it to balance with her. I made it to her measure and weight."

If it takes wet boards for folks to fall, it's fixing to be lots of falling before this spell is done.

"You couldn't have help it," I say.

I dont mind the folks falling. It's the cotton and corn I mind.

Neither does Peabody mind the folks falling. How bout it, Doc?

It's a fact. Washed clean outen the ground it will be. Seems like something is always happening to it.

Course it does. That's why it's worth anything. If nothing didn't happen and everybody made a big crop, do you reckon it would be worth the raising?

Well, I be durn if I like to see my work washed outen the ground, work I sweat over.

It's a fact. A fellow wouldn't mind seeing it washed up if he could just turn on the rain himself.

Who is that man can do that? Where is the color of his eyes?

Ay. The Lord made it to grow. It's Hisn to wash up if He sees it fitten so.

"You couldn't have help it," I say.

"It's them durn women," he says.

In the house the women begin to sing. We hear the first line commence, beginning to swell as they take hold, and we rise and move toward the door, taking off our hats and throwing our chews away. We do not go in. We stop at the steps, clumped, holding our hats between our lax hands in front or behind, standing with one foot advanced and our heads lowered, looking aside, down at our hats in our hands and at the earth or now and then at the sky and at one another's grave, composed face.

The song ends; the voices quaver away with a rich and dying fall. Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad. Somebody in the house begins to cry. It sounds like her eyes and her voice were turned back inside her, listening; we move, shifting to the other leg, meeting one another's eye and making like they hadn't touched.

Whitfield stops at last. The women sing again. In the thick air it's like their voices come out of the air, flowing together and on in the sad, comforting tunes. When they cease it's like they hadn't gone away. It's like they had just disappeared into the air and when we moved we would loose them again out of the air around us, sad and comforting. Then they finish and we put on our hats, our movements stiff, like we hadn't never wore hats before.

On the way home Cora is still singing. "I am bounding toward my God and my reward," she sings, sitting on the wagon, the shawl around her shoulders and the umbrella open over her, though it is not raining.

"She has hern," I say. "Wherever she went, she has her reward in being free of Anse Bundren." *She laid there three days in that box, waiting for Darl and Jewel to come clean back home and get a new wheel and go back to where the wagon was in the ditch. Take my team, Anse, I said.*

We'll wait for ourn, he said. She'll want it so. She was ever a particular woman.

On the third day they got back and they loaded her into the wagon and started and it already too late. You'll have to go all the way round by Samson's bridge. It'll take you a day to get there. Then you'll be forty miles from Jefferson. Take my team, Anse.

We'll wait for ourn. She'll want it so.

It was about a mile from the house we saw him, sitting on the edge of the slough. It hadn't had a fish in it never that I knowed. He looked around at us, his eyes round and calm, his face dirty, the pole across his knees. Cora was still singing.

"This aint no good day to fish," I said. "You come on home with us and me and you'll go down to the river first thing in the morning and catch some fish."

"It's one in here," he said. "Dewey Dell seen it."

"You come on with us. The river's the best place."

"It's in here," he said. "Dewey Dell seen it."

"I'm bounding toward my God and my reward," Cora sung.

Darl

"It's not your horse that's dead, Jewel," I say. He sits erect on the seat, leaning a little forward, wooden-backed. The brim of his hat has soaked free of the crown in two places, dropping across his wooden face so that, head lowered, he looks through it like through the visor of a helmet, looking long across the valley to where the barn leans against the bluff, shaping the invisible horse. "See them?" I say. High above the house, against the quick thick sky, they hang in narrowing circles. From here they are no more than specks, implacable, patient, portentous. "But it's not your horse that's dead."

"Goddamn you," he says. "Goddamn you."

I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel's mother is a horse.

Motionless, the tall buzzards hang in soaring circles, the clouds giving them an illusion of retrograde.

Motionless, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, he shapes the horse in a rigid stoop like a hawk, hook-winged. They are waiting for us, ready for the moving of it, waiting for him. He enters the stall and waits until it kicks at him so that he can slip past and mount onto the trough and pause, peering out across the intervening stall-tops toward the empty path, before he reaches into the loft.

"Goddamn him. Goddamn him."

Cash

"It wont balance. If you want it to tote and ride on a balance, we will have—"

"Pick up. Goddamn you, pick up."

"I'm telling you it wont tote and it wont ride on a balance unless—"

"Pick up! Pick up, goddamn your thick-nosed soul to hell, pick up!"

It wont balance. If they want it to tote and ride on a balance, they will have

Darl

He stoops among us above it, two of the eight hands. In his face the blood goes in waves. In between them his flesh is greenish looking, about that smooth, thick, pale green of cow's cud; his face suffocated, furious, his lip lifted upon his teeth. "Pick up!" he says. "Pick up, goddamn your thick-nosed soul!"

He heaves, lifting one whole side so suddenly that we all spring into the lift to catch and balance it before he hurls it completely over. For an instant it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling. Then it breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of her body had added buoyancy to the planks or as though, seeing that the garment was about to be torn from her, she rushes suddenly after it in a passionate reversal that flouts its own desire and need. Jewel's face goes completely green and I can hear teeth in his breath.

We carry it down the hall, our feet harsh and clumsy on the floor, moving with shuffling steps, and through the door.

"Steady it a minute, now," pa says, letting go. He turns back to shut and lock the door, but Jewel will not wait.

"Come on," he says in that suffocating voice. "Come on."

We lower it carefully down the steps. We move, balancing it as though it were something infinitely precious, our faces averted, breathing through our teeth to keep our nostrils closed. We go down the path, toward the slope.

"We better wait," Cash says. "I tell you it aint balanced now. We'll need another hand on the hill."

"Then turn loose," Jewel says. He will not stop. Cash begins to fall behind, hobbling to keep up, breathing harshly; then he is distanced and Jewel carries the entire front end alone, so that, tilting as the path begins to slant, it begins to rush away from one and slip down the air like a sled upon invisible snow, smoothly evacuating atmosphere in which the sense of it is still shaped.

"Wait, Jewel," I say. But he will not wait. He is almost running now and Cash is left behind. It seems to me that the end which I now carry alone has no weight, as though it coasts like a rushing straw upon the furious tide of Jewel's despair. I am not even touching it when, turning, he lets it overshoot him, swinging, and stops it and sloughs it into the wagon bed in the same motion and looks back at me, his face suffused with fury and despair.

"Goddamn you. Goddamn you."

Vardaman

We are going to town. Dewey Dell says it wont be sold because it belongs to Santa Claus and he taken it back with him until next Christmas. Then it will be behind the glass again, shining with waiting.

Pa and Cash are coming down the hill, but Jewel is going to the barn. "Jewel," pa says. Jewel does not stop. "Where you going?" pa says. But Jewel does not stop. "You leave that horse here," pa says. Jewel stops and looks at pa. Jewel's eyes look like marbles. "You leave that horse here," pa says. "We'll all go in the wagon with ma, like she wanted."

But my mother is a fish. Vernon seen it. He was there.

"Jewel's mother is a horse," Darl said.

"Then mine can be a fish, cant it, Darl?" I said.

Jewel is my brother.

"Then mine will have to be a horse, too," I said.

"Why?" Darl said. "If pa is your pa, why does your ma have to be a horse just because Jewel's is?"

"Why does it?" I said. "Why does it, Darl?"

Darl is my brother.

"Then what is your ma, Darl?" I said.

"I haven't got ere one," Darl said. "Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is was, it cant be *is*. Can it?"

"No," I said.

"Then I am not," Darl said. "Am I?"

"No," I said.

I am. Darl is my brother.

"But you *are*, Darl," I said.

"I know it," Darl said. "That's why I am not *is*. *Are* is too many for one woman to foal."

Cash is carrying his tool box. Pa looks at him. "I'll stop at Tull's on the way back," Cash says. "Get on that barn roof."

"It aint respectful," pa says. "It's a deliberate flouting of her and of me."

"Do you want him to come all the way back here and carry them up to Tull's afoot?" Darl says. Pa looks at Darl, his mouth chewing. Pa shaves every day now because my mother is a fish.

"It aint right," pa says.

Dewey Dell has the package in her hand. She has the basket with our dinner too.

"What's that?" pa says.

"Mrs Tull's cakes," Dewey Dell says, getting into the wagon. "I'm taking them to town for her."

"It aint right," pa says. "It's a flouting of the dead."

It'll be there. It'll be there come Christmas, she says, shining on the track. She says he wont sell it to no town boys.

Darl

He goes on toward the barn, entering the lot, woodenbacked.

Dewey Dell carries the basket on one arm, in the other hand something wrapped square in a newspaper. Her face is calm and sullen, her eyes brooding and alert; within them I can see Peabody's back like two round peas in two thimbles: perhaps in Peabody's back two of those worms which work surreptitious and steady through you and out the other side and you waking suddenly from sleep or from waking, with on your face an expression sudden, intent, and concerned. She sets the basket into the wagon and climbs in, her leg coming long from beneath her tightening dress: that lever which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life. She sits on the seat beside Vardaman and sets the parcel on her lap.

Then he enters the barn. He has not looked back.

"It aint right," pa says. "It's little enough for him to do for her."

"Go on," Cash says. "Leave him stay if he wants. He'll be all right here. Maybe he'll go up to Tull's and stay."

"He'll catch us," I say. "He'll cut across and meet us at Tull's lane."

"He would have rid that horse, too," pa says, "if I hadn't a stopped him. A durn spotted critter wilder than a cattymount.² A deliberate flouting of her and of me."

The wagon moves; the mules' ears begin to bob. Behind us, above the house, motionless in tall and soaring circles, they diminish and disappear.

Anse

I told him not to bring that horse out of respect for his dead ma, because it wouldn't look right, him prancing along on a durn circus animal and her wanting us all to be in the wagon with her that sprung from her flesh and blood,

2. Mountain lion.

but we hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl begun to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat with Cash, with his dead ma laying in her coffin at his feet, laughing. How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him, I dont know. I says I got some regard for what folks says about my flesh and blood even if you haven't, even if I have raised such a durn passel of boys, and when you fixes it so folks can say such about you, it's a reflection on your ma, I says, not me: I am a man and I can stand it; it's on your womenfolks, your ma and sister that you should care for, and I turned and looked back at him and him setting there, laughing.

"I dont expect you to have no respect for me," I says. "But with your own ma not cold in her coffin yet."

"Yonder," Cash says, jerking his head toward the lane. The horse is still a right smart piece away, coming up at a good pace, but I dont have to be told who it is. I just looked back at Darl, setting there laughing.

"I done my best," I says. "I tried to do as she would wish it. The Lord will pardon me and excuse the conduct of them He sent me." And Darl setting on the plank seat right above her where she was laying, laughing.

Darl

He comes up the lane fast, yet we are three hundred yards beyond the mouth of it when he turns into the road, the mud flying beneath the flicking drive of the hooves. Then he slows a little, light and erect in the saddle, the horse mincing through the mud.

Tull is in his lot. He looks at us, lifts his hand. We go on, the wagon creaking, the mud whispering on the wheels. Vernon still stands there. He watches Jewel as he passes, the horse moving with a light, high-kneed driving gait, three hundred yards back. We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dream-like as to be uninferant of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it.

It turns off at right angles, the wheel-marks of last Sunday healed away now: a smooth, red scoration curving away into the pines; a white signboard with faded lettering: New Hope Church. 3 mi. It wheels up like a motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean; beyond it the red road lies like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim. It wheels past, empty, unscarred, the white signboard turns away its fading and tranquil assertion. Cash looks up the road quietly, his head turning as we pass it like an owl's head, his face composed. Pa looks straight ahead, humped. Dewey Dell looks at the road too, then she looks back at me, her eyes watchful and repudiant, not like that question which was in those of Cash, for a smoldering while. The signboard passes; the unscarred road wheels on. Then Dewey Dell turns her head. The wagon creaks on.

Cash spits over the wheel. "In a couple of days now it'll be smelling," he says.

"You might tell Jewel that," I say.

He is motionless now, sitting the horse at the junction, upright, watching us, no less still than the signboard that lifts its fading capitulation opposite him.

"It aint balanced right for no long ride," Cash says.

"Tell him that, too," I say. The wagon creaks on.

A mile further along he passes us, the horse, archnecked, reined back to a swift singlefoot. He sits lightly, poised, upright, wooden-faced in the saddle, the broken hat raked at a swaggering angle. He passes us swiftly, without looking at us, the horse driving, its hooves hissing in the mud. A gout of mud, backflung, plops onto the box. Cash leans forward and takes a tool from his box and removes it carefully. When the road crosses Whiteleaf, the willows leaning near enough, he breaks off a branch and scours at the stain with the wet leaves.

Anse

It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it.³ Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It ain't the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they cant take their autos and such. Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord.⁴

But it's a long wait, seems like. It's bad that a fellow must earn the reward of his right-doing by flouting hissself and his dead. We drove all the rest of the day and got to Samson's at dusk-dark and then that bridge was gone, too. They hadn't never see the river so high, and it not done raining yet. There was old men that hadn't never see nor hear of it being so in the memory of man. I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth.⁵ But I be durn if He dont take some curious ways to show it, seems like.

But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will.

Samson

It was just before sundown. We were sitting on the porch when the wagon came up the road with the five of them in it and the other one on the horse behind. One of them raised his hand, but they were going on past the store without stopping.

"Who's that?" MacCallum says: I cant think of his name: Rafe's twin; that one it was.

"It's Bundren, from down beyond New Hope," Quick says. "There's one of them Snopes horses Jewel's riding."

"I didn't know there was ere a one of them horses left," MacCallum says. "I thought you folks down there finally contrived to give them all away."

"Try and get that one," Quick says. The wagon went on.

"I bet old man Lon never gave it to him," I says.

"No," Quick says. "He bought it from pappy." The wagon went on. "They must not a heard about the bridge," he says.

"What're they doing up here, anyway?" MacCallum says.

3. Cf. Genesis 3.19: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground."

4. Cf. Matthew 13.12: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall

be taken away even that he hath."

5. Cf. Hebrews 12.6: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

"Taking a holiday since he got his wife buried, I reckon," Quick says. "Heading for town, I reckon, with Tull's bridge gone too. I wonder if they aint heard about the bridge."

"They'll have to fly, then," I says. "I dont reckon there's ere a bridge between here and Mouth of Ishatawa."

They had something in the wagon. But Quick had been to the funeral three days ago and we naturally never thought anything about it except that they were heading away from home mighty late and that they hadn't heard about the bridge. "You better holler at them," MacCallum says. Durn it, the name is right on the tip of my tongue. So Quick hollered and they stopped and he went to the wagon and told them.

He come back with them. "They're going to Jefferson," he says. "The bridge at Tull's is gone, too." Like we didn't know it, and his face looked funny, around the nostrils, but they just sat there, Bundren and the girl and the chap on the seat, and Cash and the second one, the one folks talks about, on a plank across the tail-gate, and the other one on that spotted horse. But I reckon they was used to it by then, because when I said to Cash that they'd have to pass by New Hope again and what they'd better do, he just says,

"I reckon we can get there."

I aint much for meddling. Let every man run his own business to suit himself, I say. But after I talked to Rachel about them not having a regular man to fix her and it being July and all, I went back down to the barn and tried to talk to Bundren about it.

"I give her my promise," he says. "Her mind was set on it."

I notice how it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it aint the moving he hates so much as the starting and the stopping. And like he would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard. He set there on the wagon, hunched up, blinking, listening to us tell about how quick the bridge went and how high the water was, and I be durn if he didn't act like he was proud of it, like he had made the river rise himself.

"You say it's higher than you ever see it before?" he says. "God's will be done," he says. "I reckon it wont go down much by morning, neither," he says.

"You better stay here tonight," I says, "and get a early start for New Hope tomorrow morning." I was just sorry for them bone-gaunted mules. I told Rachel, I says, "Well, would you have had me turn them away at dark, eight miles from home? What else could I do," I says. "It wont be but one night, and they'll keep it in the barn, and they'll sholy get started by daylight." And so I says, "You stay here tonight and early tomorrow you can go back to New Hope. I got tools enough, and the boys can go on right after supper and have it dug and ready if they want" and then I found that girl watching me. If her eyes had a been pistols, I wouldn't be talking now. I be dog⁶ if they didn't blaze at me. And so when I went down to the barn I come on them, her talking so she never noticed when I come up.

"You promised her," she says. "She wouldn't go until you promised. She thought she could depend on you. If you dont do it, it will be a curse on you."

6. Doggone or darned.

"Cant no man say I dont aim to keep my word," Bundren says. "My heart is open to ere a man."

"I dont care what your heart is," she says. She was whispering, kind of, talking fast. "You promised her. You've got to. You—" then she seen me and quit, standing there. If they'd been pistols, I wouldn't be talking now. So when I talked to him about it, he says,

"I give her my promise. Her mind is set on it."

"But seems to me she'd rather have her ma buried close by, so she could—"

"It's Addie I give the promise to," he says. "Her mind is set on it."

So I told them to drive it into the barn, because it was threatening rain again, and that supper was about ready. Only they didn't want to come in.

"I thank you," Bundren says. "We wouldn't discommode you. We got a little something in the basket. We can make out."

"Well," I says, "since you are so particular about your womenfolks, I am too. And when folks stops with us at meal time and wont come to the table, my wife takes it as a insult."

So the girl went on to the kitchen to help Rachel. And then Jewel come to me.

"Sho," I says. "Help yourself outen the loft. Feed him when you bait the mules."

"I rather pay you for him," he says.

"What for?" I says. "I wouldn't begrudge no man a bait for his horse."

"I rather pay you," he says; I thought he said extra.

"Extra for what?" I says. "Wont he eat hay and corn?"

"Extra feed," he says. "I feed him a little extra and I dont want him beholden to no man."

"You cant buy no feed from me, boy," I says. "And if he can eat that loft clean, I'll help you load the barn onto the wagon in the morning."

"He aint never been beholden to no man," he says. "I rather pay you for it."

And if I had my rathers, you wouldn't be here a-tall, I wanted to say. But I just says, "Then it's high time he commenced. You cant buy no feed from me."

When Rachel put supper on, her and the girl went and fixed some beds. But wouldn't any of them come in. "She's been dead long enough to get over that sort of foolishness," I says. Because I got just as much respect for the dead as ere a man, but you've got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can. But they wouldn't do it.

"It wouldn't be right," Bundren says. "Course, if the boys wants to go to bed, I reckon I can set up with her. I dont begrudge her it."

So when I went back down there they were squatting on the ground around the wagon, all of them. "Let that chap come to the house and get some sleep, anyway," I says. "And you better come too," I says to the girl. I wasn't aiming to interfere with them. And I sholy hadn't done nothing to her that I knowed.

"He's done already asleep," Bundren says. They had done put him to bed in the trough in a empty stall.

"Well, you come on, then," I says to her. But still she never said nothing. They just squatted there. You couldn't hardly see them. "How about you boys?" I says. "You got a full day tomorrow." After a while Cash says,

"I thank you. We can make out."

"We wouldn't be beholden," Bundren says. "I thank you kindly."

So I left them squatting there. I reckon after four days they was used to it. But Rachel wasn't.

"It's a outrage," she says. "A outrage."

"What could he a done?" I says. "He give her his promised word."

"Who's talking about him?" she says. "Who cares about him?" she says, crying. "I just wish that you and him and all the men in the world that torture us alive and flout us dead, dragging us up and down the country—"

"Now, now," I says. "You're upset."

"Dont you touch me!" she says. "Dont you touch me!"

A man cant tell nothing about them. I lived with the same one fifteen years and I be durn if I can. And I imagined a lot of things coming up between us, but I be durn if I ever thought it would be a body four days dead and that a woman. But they make life hard on them, not taking it as it comes up, like a man does.

So I laid there, hearing it commence to rain, thinking about them down there, squatting around the wagon and the rain on the roof, and thinking about Rachel crying there until after a while it was like I could still hear her crying even after she was asleep, and smelling it even when I knowed I couldn't. I couldn't decide even then whether I could or not, or if it wasn't just knowing it was what it was.

So next morning I never went down there. I heard them hitching up and then when I knowed they must be about ready to take out, I went out the front and went down the road toward the bridge until I heard the wagon come out of the lot and go back toward New Hope. And then when I come back to the house, Rachel jumped on me because I wasn't there to make them come in to breakfast. You cant tell about them. Just about when you decide they mean one thing, I be durn if you not only haven't got to change your mind, like as not you got to take a rawhiding for thinking they meant it.

But it was still like I could smell it. And so I decided then that it wasn't smelling it, but it was just knowing it was there, like you will get fooled now and then. But when I went to the barn I knew different. When I walked into the hallway I saw something. It kind of hunkered up when I come in and I thought at first it was one of them got left, then I saw what it was. It was a buzzard. It looked around and saw me and went on down the hall, spraddle-legged, with its wings kind of hunkered out, watching me first over one shoulder and then over the other, like a old baldheaded man. When it got outdoors it begun to fly. It had to fly a long time before it ever got up into the air, with it thick and heavy and full of rain like it was.

If they was bent on going to Jefferson, I reckon they could have gone around up by Mount Vernon, like MacCallum did. He'll get home about day after tomorrow, horseback. Then they'd be just eighteen miles from town. But maybe this bridge being gone too has learned him the Lord's sense and judgment.

That MacCallum. He's been trading with me off and on for twelve years. I have known him from a boy up; know his name as well as I do my own. But be durn if I can say it.

Dewey Dell

The signboard comes in sight. It is looking out at the road now, because it can wait. New Hope. 3 mi. it will say. New Hope. 3 mi. New Hope. 3 mi. And then the road will begin, curving away into the trees, empty with waiting, saying New Hope three miles.

I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It's not that I wouldn't and will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon.

Now it begins to say it. New Hope three miles. New Hope three miles. *That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events*

Cash's head turns slowly as we approach, his pale empty sad composed and questioning face following the red and empty curve; beside the back wheel Jewel sits the horse, gazing straight ahead.

The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pinpoints. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules, above the travail. *Suppose I tell him to turn. He will do what I say. Dont you know he will do what I say?* Once I waked with a black void rushing under me. I could not see. I saw Vardaman rise and go to the window and strike the knife into the fish, the blood gushing, hissing like steam but I could not see. *He'll do as I say. He always does. I can persuade him to anything. You know I can. Suppose I say Turn here.* That was when I died that time. *Suppose I do. We'll go to New Hope. We wont have to go to town.* I rose and took the knife from the streaming fish still hissing and I killed Darl.

When I used to sleep with Vardaman I had a nightmare once I thought I was awake but I couldn't see and couldn't feel I couldn't feel the bed under me and I couldn't think what I was I couldn't think of my name I couldn't even think I am a girl I couldn't even think I nor even think I want to wake up nor remember what was opposite to awake so I could do that I knew that something was passing but I couldn't even think of time then all of a sudden I knew that something was it was wind blowing over me it was like the wind came and blew me back from where it was I was not blowing the room and Vardaman asleep and all of them back under me again and going on like a piece of cool silk dragging across my naked legs

It blows cool out of the pines, a sad steady sound. New Hope. Was 3 mi. Was 3 mi. I believe in God I believe in God.

"Why didn't we go to New Hope, pa?" Vardaman says. "Mr Samson said we was, but we done passed the road."

Darl says, "Look, Jewel." But he is not looking at me. He is looking at the sky. The buzzard is as still as if he were nailed to it.

We turn into Tull's lane. We pass the barn and go on, the wheels whispering in the mud, passing the green rows of cotton in the wild earth, and Vernon little across the field behind the plow. He lifts his hand as we pass and stands there looking after us for a long while.

"Look, Jewel," Darl says. Jewel sits on his horse like they were both made out of wood, looking straight ahead.

I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God.

Tull

After they passed I taken the mule out and looped up the trace chains and followed. They was setting in the wagon at the end of the levee when I caught up with them. Anse was setting there, looking at the bridge where it was swagged down into the river with just the two ends in sight. He was looking at it like he had believed all the time that folks had been lying to him about it being gone, but like he was hoping all the time it really was. Kind of pleased astonishment he looked, setting on the wagon in his Sunday pants, mumbling his mouth. Looking like a uncurried horse dressed up: I dont know.

The boy was watching the bridge where it was mid-sunk and logs and such drifted up over it and it swagging and shivering like the whole thing would go any minute, big-eyed he was watching it, like he was to a circus. And the gal too. When I come up she looked around at me, her eyes kind of blaring up and going hard like I had made to touch her. Then she looked at Anse again and then back at the water again.

It was nigh up to the levee on both sides, the earth hid except for the tongue of it we was on going out to the bridge and then down into the water, and except for knowing how the road and the bridge used to look, a fellow couldn't tell where was the river and where the land. It was just a tangle of yellow and the levee not less wider than a knife-back kind of, with us setting in the wagon and on the horse and the mule.

Darl was looking at me, and then Cash turned and looked at me with that look in his eyes like when he was figuring on whether the planks would fit her that night, like he was measuring them inside of him and not asking you to say what you thought and not even letting on he was listening if you did say it, but listening all right. Jewel hadn't moved. He sat there on the horse, leaning a little forward, with that same look on his face when him and Darl passed the house yesterday, coming back to get her.

"If it was just up, we could drive across," Anse says. "We could drive right on across it."

Sometimes a log would get shoved over the jam and float on, rolling and turning, and we could watch it go on to where the ford used to be. It would slow up and whirl crossways and hang out of water for a minute, and you could tell by that that the ford used to be there.

"But that dont show nothing," I say. "It could be a bar of quicksand built up there." We watch the log. Then the gal is looking at me again.

"Mr Whitfield crossed it," she says.

"He was a-horseback," I say. "And three days ago. It's a riz five foot since."

"If the bridge was just up," Anse says.

The log bobs up and goes on again. There is a lot of trash and foam, and you can hear the water.

"But it's down," Anse says.

Cash says, "A careful fellow could walk across yonder on the planks and logs."

"But you couldn't tote nothing," I say. "Likely time you set foot on that mess, it'll all go, too. What you think, Darl?"

He is looking at me. He dont say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it aint never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like

he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes. Then I can feel that gal watching me like I had made to touch her. She says something to Anse. “. . . Mr Whitfield. . .” she says.

“I give her my promised word in the presence of the Lord,” Anse says. “I reckon it aint no need to worry.”

But still he does not start the mules. We set there above the water. Another log bobs up over the jam and goes on; we watch it check up and swing slow for a minute where the ford used to be. Then it goes on.

“It might start falling tonight,” I say. “You could lay over one more day.”

Then Jewel turns sideways on the horse. He has not moved until then, and he turns and looks at me. His face is kind of green, then it would go red and then green again. “Get to hell on back to your damn plowing,” he says. “Who the hell asked you to follow us here?”

“I never meant no harm,” I say.

“Shut up, Jewel,” Cash says. Jewel looks back at the water, his face gritted, going red and green and then red. “Well,” Cash says after a while, “what you want to do?”

Anse dont say nothing. He sets humped up, mumbling his mouth. “If it was just up, we could drive across it,” he says.

“Come on,” Jewel says, moving the horse.

“Wait,” Cash says. He looks at the bridge. We look at him, except Anse and the gal. They are looking at the water. “Dewey Dell and Vardaman and pa better walk across on the bridge,” Cash says.

“Vernon can help them,” Jewel says. “And we can hitch his mule ahead of ourn.”

“You ain’t going to take my mule into that water,” I say.

Jewel looks at me. His eyes look like pieces of a broken plate. “I’ll pay for your damn mule. I’ll buy it from you right now.”

“My mule aint going into that water,” I say.

“Jewel’s going to use his horse,” Darl says. “Why wont you risk your mule, Vernon?”

“Shut up, Darl,” Cash says. “You and Jewel both.”

“My mule aint going into that water,” I say.

Darl

He sits the horse, glaring at Vernon, his lean face suffused up to and beyond the pale rigidity of his eyes. The summer when he was fifteen, he took a spell of sleeping. One morning when I went to feed the mules the cows were still in the tie-up and then I heard pa go back to the house and call him. When we came on back to the house for breakfast he passed us, carrying the milk buckets, stumbling along like he was drunk, and he was milking when we put the mules in and went on to the field without him. We had been there an hour and still he never showed up. When Dewey Dell came with our lunch, pa sent her back to find Jewel. They found him in the tie-up, sitting on the stool, asleep.

After that, every morning pa would go in and wake him. He would go to sleep at the supper table and soon as supper was finished he would go to bed, and when I came in to bed he would be lying there like a dead man. Yet

still pa would have to wake him in the morning. He would get up, but he wouldn't hardly have half sense: he would stand for pa's jawing and complaining without a word and take the milk buckets and go to the barn, and once I found him asleep at the cow, the bucket in place and half full and his hands up to the wrists in the milk and his head against the cow's flank.

After that Dewey Dell had to do the milking. He still got up when pa waked him, going about what we told him to do in that dazed way. It was like he was trying hard to do them; that he was as puzzled as anyone else.

"Are you sick?" ma said. "Dont you feel all right?"

"Yes," Jewel said. "I feel all right."

"He's just lazy, trying me," pa said, and Jewel standing there, asleep on his feet like as not. "Ain't you?" he said, waking Jewel up again to answer.

"No," Jewel said.

"You take off and stay in the house today," ma said.

"With that whole bottom piece to be busted out?"⁷ pa said. "If you aint sick, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Jewel said. "I'm all right."

"All right?" pa said. "You're asleep on your feet this minute."

"No," Jewel said. "I'm all right."

"I want him to stay at home today," ma said.

"I'll need him," pa said. "It's tight enough, with all of us to do it."

"You'll just have to do the best you can with Cash and Darl," ma said. "I want him to stay in today."

But he wouldn't do it. "I'm all right," he said, going on. But he wasn't all right. Anybody could see it. He was losing flesh, and I have seen him go to sleep chopping; watched the hoe going slower and slower up and down, with less and less of an arc, until it stopped and he leaning on it motionless in the hot shimmer of the sun.

Ma wanted to get the doctor, but pa didn't want to spend the money without it was needful, and Jewel did seem all right except for his thinness and his way of dropping off to sleep at any moment. He ate hearty enough, except for his way of going to sleep in his plate, with a piece of bread half-way to his mouth and his jaws still chewing. But he swore he was all right.

It was ma that got Dewey Dell to do his milking, paid her somehow, and the other jobs around the house that Jewel had been doing before supper she found some way for Dewey Dell and Vardaman to do them. And doing them herself when pa wasn't there. She would fix him special things to eat and hide them for him. And that may have been when I first found it out, that Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty. And at times when I went in to go to bed she would be sitting in the dark by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew that she was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit.

One night she was taken sick and when I went to the barn to put the team in and drive to Tull's, I couldn't find the lantern. I remembered noticing it on the nail the night before, but it wasn't there now at midnight. So I hitched in the dark and went on and came back with Mrs Tull just after daylight.

7. Plowed.

And there the lantern was, hanging on the nail where I remembered it and couldn't find it before. And then one morning while Dewey Dell was milking just before the sunup, Jewel came into the barn from the back, through the hole in the back wall, with the lantern in his hand.

I told Cash, and Cash and I looked at one another.

"Rutting," Cash said.

"Yes," I said. "But why the lantern? And every night, too. No wonder he's losing flesh. Are you going to say anything to him?"

"Wont do any good," Cash said.

"What he's doing now wont do any good, either."

"I know. But he'll have to learn that himself. Give him time to realise that it'll save, that there'll be just as much more tomorrow, and he'll be all right. I wouldn't tell anybody, I reckon."

"No," I said. "I told Dewey Dell not to. Not ma, anyway."

"No. Not ma."

After that I thought it was right comical: he acting so bewildered and willing and dead for sleep and gaunt as a bean-pole, and thinking he was so smart with it. And I wondered who the girl was. I thought of all I knew that it might be, but I couldn't say for sure.

"Taint any girl," Cash said. "It's a married woman somewhere. Aint any young girl got that much daring and staying power. That's what I dont like about it."

"Why?" I said. "She'll be safer for him than a girl would. More judgment."

He looked at me, his eyes fumbling, the words fumbling at what he was trying to say. "It ain't always the safe things in this world that a fellow . . ."

"You mean, the safe things are not always the best things?"

"Ay; best," he said, fumbling again. "It aint the best things, the things that are good for him. . . . A young boy. A fellow kind of hates to see . . . wallowing in somebody else's mire . . ." That's what he was trying to say. When something is new and hard and bright, there ought to be something a little better for it than just being safe, since the safe things are just the things that folks have been doing so long they have worn the edges off and there's nothing to the doing of them that leaves a man to say, That was not done before and it cannot be done again.

So we didn't tell, not even when after a while he'd appear suddenly in the field beside us and go to work, without having had time to get home and make out he had been in bed all night. He would tell ma that he hadn't been hungry at breakfast or that he had eaten a piece of bread while he was hitching up the team. But Cash and I knew that he hadn't been home at all on those nights and he had come up out of the woods when we got to the field. But we didn't tell. Summer was almost over then; we knew that when the nights began to get cool, she would be done if he wasn't.

But when fall came and the nights began to get longer, the only difference was that he would always be in bed for pa to wake him, getting him up at last in that first state of semi-idiocy like when it first started, worse than when he had stayed out all night.

"She's sure a stayer," I told Cash. "I used to admire her, but I downright respect her now."

"It aint a woman," he said.

"You know," I said. But he was watching me. "What is it, then?"

"That's what I aim to find out," he said.

"You can trail him through the woods all night if you want to," I said. "I'm not."

"I aint trailing him," he said.

"What do you call it, then?"

"I aint trailing him," he said. "I dont mean it that way."

And so a few nights later I heard Jewel get up and climb out the window, and then I heard Cash get up and follow him. The next morning when I went to the barn, Cash was already there, the mules fed, and he was helping Dewey Dell milk. And when I saw him I knew that he knew what it was. Now and then I would catch him watching Jewel with a queer look, like having found out where Jewel went and what he was doing had given him something to really think about at last. But it was not a worried look; it was the kind of look I would see on him when I would find him doing some of Jewel's work around the house, work that pa still thought Jewel was doing and that ma thought Dewey Dell was doing. So I said nothing to him, believing that when he got done digesting it in his mind, he would tell me. But he never did.

One morning—it was November then, five months since it started—Jewel was not in bed and he didn't join us in the field. That was the first time ma learned anything about what had been going on. She sent Vardaman down to find where Jewel was, and after a while she came down too. It was as though, so long as the deceit ran along quiet and monotonous, all of us let ourselves be deceived, abetting it unawares or maybe through cowardice, since all people are cowards and naturally prefer any kind of treachery because it has a bland outside. But now it was like we had all—and by a kind of telepathic agreement of admitted fear—flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness, staring at one another and saying "Now is the truth. He hasn't come home. Something has happened to him. We let something happen to him."

Then we saw him. He came up along the ditch and then turned straight across the field, riding the horse. Its mane and tail were going, as though in motion they were carrying out the splotchy pattern of its coat: he looked like he was riding on a big pinwheel, barebacked, with a rope bridle, and no hat on his head. It was a descendant of those Texas ponies Flem Snopes brought here twenty-five years ago and auctioned off for two dollars a head and nobody but old Lon Quick ever caught his and still owned some of the blood because he could never give it away.

He galloped up and stopped, his heels in the horse's ribs and it dancing and swirling like the shape of its mane and tail and the splotches of its coat had nothing whatever to do with the flesh-and-bone horse inside them, and he sat there, looking at us.

"Where did you get that horse?" pa said.

"Bought it," Jewel said. "From Mr. Quick."

"Bought it?" pa said. "With what? Did you buy that thing on my word?"

"It was my money," Jewel said. "I earned it. You wont need to worry about it."

"Jewel," ma said; "Jewel."

"It's all right," Cash said. "He earned the money. He cleaned up that forty acres of new ground Quick laid out last spring. He did it single handed,

working at night by lantern. I saw him. So I dont reckon that horse cost anybody anything except Jewel. I dont reckon we need worry.”

“Jewel,” ma said. “Jewel . . .” Then she said: “You come right to the house and go to bed.”

“Not yet,” Jewel said. “I aint got time. I got to get me a saddle and bridle. Mr. Quick says he . . .”

“Jewel,” ma said, looking at him. “I’ll give—I’ll give . . . give . . .” Then she began to cry. She cried hard, not hiding her face, standing there in her faded wrapper, looking at him and him on the horse, looking down at her, his face growing cold and a little sick looking, until he looked away quick and Cash came and touched her.

“You go on to the house,” Cash said. “This here ground is too wet for you. You go on, now.” She put her hands to her face then and after a while she went on, stumbling a little on the plow-marks. But pretty soon she straightened up and went on. She didn’t look back. When she reached the ditch she stopped and called Vardaman. He was looking at the horse, kind of dancing up and down by it.

“Let me ride, Jewel,” he said. “Let me ride, Jewel.”

Jewel looked at him, then he looked away again, holding the horse reined back. Pa watched him, mumbling his lip.

“So you bought a horse,” he said. “You went behind my back and bought a horse. You never consulted me; you know how tight it is for us to make by, yet you bought a horse for me to feed. Taken the work from your flesh and blood and bought a horse with it.”

Jewel looked at pa, his eyes paler than ever. “He wont never eat a mouthful of yours,” he said. “Not a mouthful. I’ll kill him first. Dont you never think it. Dont you never.”

“Let me ride, Jewel,” Vardaman said. “Let me ride, Jewel.” He sounded like a cricket in the grass, a little one. “Let me ride, Jewel.”

That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where he was sleeping, in the dark. She cried hard, maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to. And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day.

Tull

So they finally got Anse to say what he wanted to do, and him and the gal and the boy got out of the wagon. But even when we were on the bridge Anse kept on looking back, like he thought maybe, once he was outen the wagon, the whole thing would kind of blow up and he would find himself back yonder in the field again and her laying up there in the house, waiting to die and it to do all over again.

“You ought to let them taken your mule,” he says, and the bridge shaking and swaying under us, going down into the moiling water like it went clean through to the other side of the earth, and the other end coming up outen the water like it wasn’t the same bridge a-tall and that them that would walk up outen the water on that side must come from the bottom of the earth. But it was still whole; you could tell that by the way when this end swagged,

it didn't look like the other end swagged at all: just like the other trees and the bank yonder were swinging back and forth slow like on a big clock. And them logs scraping and bumping at the sunk part and tilting end-up and shooting clean outen the water and tumbling on toward the ford and the waiting, slick, whirling, and foamy.

"What good would that a done?" I says. "If your team cant find the ford and haul it across, what good would three mules or even ten mules do?"

"I aint asking it of you," he says. "I can always do for me and mine. I aint asking you to risk your mule. It aint your dead; I am not blaming you."

"They ought to went back and laid over until tomorrow," I says. The water was cold. It was thick, like slush ice. Only it kind of lived. One part of you knowed it was just water, the same thing that had been running under this same bridge for a long time, yet when them logs would come spewing up outen it, you were not surprised, like they was a part of water, of the waiting and the threat.

It was like when we was across, up out of the water again and the hard earth under us, that I was surprised. It was like we hadn't expected the bridge to end on the other bank, on something tame like the hard earth again that we had tromped on before this time and knowed well. Like it couldn't be me here, because I'd have had better sense than to done what I just done. And when I looked back and saw the other bank and saw my mule standing there where I used to be and knew that I'd have to get back there someway, I knew it couldn't be, because I just couldn't think of anything that could make me cross that bridge ever even once. Yet here I was, and the fellow that could make himself cross it twice, couldn't be me, not even if Cora told him to.

It was that boy. I said "Here; you better take a holt of my hand" and he waited and held to me. I be durn if it wasn't like he come back and got me; like he was saying They wont nothing hurt you. Like he was saying about a fine place he knowed where Christmas come twice with Thanksgiving and lasts on through the winter and the spring and the summer, and if I just stayed with him I'd be all right too.

When I looked back at my mule it was like he was one of these here spy-glasses and I could look at him standing there and see all the broad land and my house sweated outen it like it was the more the sweat, the broader the land; the more the sweat, the tighter the house because it would take a tight house for Cora, to hold Cora like a jar of milk in the spring: you've got to have a tight jar or you'll need a powerful spring, so if you have a big spring, why then you have the incentive to have tight, wellmade jars, because it is your milk, sour or not, because you would rather have milk that will sour than to have milk that wont, because you are a man.

And him holding to my hand, his hand that hot and confident, so that I was like to say: Look-a-here. Cant you see that mule yonder? He never had no business over here, so he never come, not being nothing but a mule. Because a fellow can see ever now and then that children have more sense than him. But he dont like to admit it to them until they have beards. After they have a beard, they are too busy because they dont know if they'll ever quite make it back to where they were in sense before they was haired, so you dont mind admitting then to folks that are worrying about the same thing that aint worth the worry that you are yourself.

Then we was over and we stood there, looking at Cash turning the wagon around. We watched them drive back down the road to where the trail turned off into the bottom. After a while the wagon was out of sight.

"We better get on down to the ford and git ready to help," I said.

"I give her my word," Anse says. "It is sacred on me. I know you begrudge it, but she will bless you in heaven."

"Well, they got to finish circumventing the land before they can dare the water," I said. "Come on."

"It's the turning back," he said. "It ain't no luck in turning back."

He was standing there, humped, mournful, looking at the empty road beyond the swagging and swaying bridge. And that gal, too, with the lunch basket on one arm and that package under the other. Just going to town. Bent on it. They would risk the fire and the earth and the water and all just to eat a sack of bananas. "You ought to laid over a day," I said. "It would a fell some by morning. It mought not a rained tonight. And it cant get no higher."

"I give my promise," he says. "She is counting on it."

Darl

Before us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again.

It clucks and murmurs among the spokes and about the mules' knees, yellow, skummed with flotsam and with thick soiled gouts of foam as though it had sweat, lathering, like a driven horse. Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound; in it the unwinded cane and saplings lean as before a little gale, swaying without reflections as though suspended on invisible wires from the branches overhead. Above the ceaseless surface they stand—trees, cane, vines—rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the waste and mournful water.

Cash and I sit in the wagon; Jewel sits the horse at the off rear wheel. The horse is trembling, its eye rolling wild and baby-blue in its long pink face, its breathing stertorous like groaning. He sits erect, poised, looking quietly and steadily and quickly this way and that, his face calm, a little pale, alert. Cash's face is also gravely composed; he and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame. When we speak our voices are quiet, detached.

"I reckon we're still in the road, all right."

"Tull taken and cut them two big whiteoaks. I heard tell how at high water in the old days they used to line up the ford by them trees."

"I reckon he did that two years ago when he was logging down here. I reckon he never thought that anybody would ever use this ford again."

"I reckon not. Yes, it must have been then. He cut a sight of timber outen here then. Payed off that mortgage with it, I hear tell."

"Yes. Yes, I reckon so. I reckon Vernon could have done that."

"That's a fact. Most folks that logs in this here country, they need a durn good farm to support the sawmill. Or maybe a store. But I reckon Vernon could."

"I reckon so. He's a sight."

"Ay. Vernon is. Yes, it must still be here. He never would have got that timber out of here if he hadn't cleaned out that old road. I reckon we are still on it." He looks about quietly, at the position of the trees, leaning this way and that, looking back along the floorless road shaped vaguely high in air by the position of the lopped and felled trees, as if the road too had been soaked free of earth and floated upward, to leave in its spectral tracing a monument to a still more profound desolation than this above which we now sit, talking quietly of old security and old trivial things. Jewel looks at him, then at me, then his face turns in in that quiet, constant, questing about the scene, the horse trembling quietly and steadily between his knees.

"He could go on ahead slow and sort of feel it out," I say.

"Yes," Cash says, not looking at me. His face is in profile as he looks forward where Jewel has moved on ahead.

"He cant miss the river," I say. "He couldn't miss seeing it fifty yards ahead."

Cash does not look at me, his face in profile. "If I'd just suspicioned it, I could a come down last week and taken a sight on it."

"The bridge was up then," I say. He does not look at me. "Whitfield crossed it a-horseback."

Jewel looks at us again, his expression sober and alert and subdued. His voice is quiet. "What you want me to do?"

"I ought to come down last week and taken a sight on it," Cash says.

"We couldn't have known," I say. "There wasn't any way for us to know."

"I'll ride on ahead," Jewel says. "You can follow where I am." He lifts the horse. It shrinks, bowed; he leans to it, speaking to it, lifting it forward almost bodily, it setting its feet down with gingerly splashings, trembling, breathing harshly. He speaks to it, murmurs to it. "Go on," he says. "I aint going to let nothing hurt you. Go on, now."

"Jewel," Cash says. Jewel does not look back. He lifts the horse on.

"He can swim," I say. "If he'll just give the horse time, anyhow . . ." When he was born, he had a bad time of it. Ma would sit in the lamp-light, holding him on a pillow on her lap. We would wake and find her so. There would be no sound from them.

"That pillow was longer than him," Cash says. He is leaning a little forward. "I ought to come down last week and sighted. I ought to done it."

"That's right," I say. "Neither his feet nor his head would reach the end of it. You couldn't have known," I say.

"I ought to done it," he says. He lifts the reins. The mules move, into the traces; the wheels murmur alive in the water. He looks back and down at Addie. "It aint on a balance," he says.

At last the trees open; against the open river Jewel sits the horse, half turned, it belly deep now. Across the river we can see Vernon and pa and Vardaman and Dewey Dell. Vernon is waving at us, waving us further downstream.

"We are too high up," Cash says. Vernon is shouting too, but we cannot make out what he says for the noise of the water. It runs steady and deep now, unbroken, without sense of motion until a log comes along, turning slowly. "Watch it," Cash says. We watch it and see it falter and hang for a moment, the current building up behind it in a thick wave, submerging it for an instant before it shoots up and tumbles on.

"There it is," I say.

"Ay," Cash says. "It's there." We look at Vernon again. He is now flapping his arms up and down. We move on downstream, slowly and carefully, watching Vernon. He drops his hands. "This is the place," Cash says.

"Well, goddamn it, let's get across, then," Jewel says. He moves the horse on.

"You wait," Cash says. Jewel stops again.

"Well, by God—" he says. Cash looks at the water, then he looks back at Addie. "It aint on a balance," he says.

"Then go on back to the goddamn bridge and walk across," Jewel says. "You and Darl both. Let me on that wagon."

Cash does not pay him any attention. "It aint on a balance," he says. "Yes, sir. We got to watch it."

"Watch it, hell," Jewel says. "You get out of that wagon and let me have it. By God, if you're afraid to drive it over . . ." His eyes are pale as two bleached chips in his face. Cash is looking at him.

"We'll get it over," he says. "I tell you what you do. You ride on back and walk across the bridge and come down the other bank and meet us with the rope. Vernon'll take your horse home with him and keep it till we get back."

"You go to hell," Jewel says.

"You take the rope and come down the bank and be ready with it," Cash says. "Three cant do no more than two can—one to drive and one to steady it."

"Goddamn you," Jewel says.

"Let Jewel take the end of the rope and cross upstream of us and brace it," I say. "Will you do that, Jewel?"

Jewel watches me, hard. He looks quick at Cash, then back at me, his eyes alert and hard. "I dont give a damn. Just so we do something. Setting here, not lifting a goddamn hand . . ."

"Let's do that, Cash," I say.

"I reckon we'll have to," Cash says.

The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice. Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance between the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between. The mules stand, their fore quarters already sloped a little, their rumps high. They too are breathing now with a deep groaning sound; looking back once, their gaze sweeps across us with in their eyes a wild, sad, profound and despairing quality as though they had already seen in the thick water the shape of the disaster which they could not speak and we could not see.

Cash turns back into the wagon. He lays his hands flat on Addie, rocking her a little. His face is calm, down-sloped, calculant, concerned. He lifts his box of tools and wedges it forward under the seat; together we shove Addie forward, wedging her between the tools and the wagon bed. Then he looks at me.

“No,” I say. “I reckon I’ll stay. Might take both of us.”

From the tool box he takes his coiled rope and carries the end twice around the seat stanchion and passes the end to me without tying it. The other end he pays out to Jewel, who takes a turn about his saddle horn.

He must force the horse down into the current. It moves, highkneed, archnecked, boring and chafing. Jewel sits lightly forward, his knees lifted a little; again his swift alert calm gaze sweeps upon us and on. He lowers the horse into the stream, speaking to it in a soothing murmur. The horse slips, goes under to the saddle, surges to its feet again, the current building up against Jewel’s thighs.

“Watch yourself,” Cash says.

“I’m on it now,” Jewel says. “You can come ahead now.”

Cash takes the reins and lowers the team carefully and skillfully into the stream.

I felt the current take us and I knew we were on the ford by that reason, since it was only by means of that slipping contact that we could tell that we were in motion at all. What had once been a flat surface was now a succession of troughs and hillocks lifting and falling about us, shoving at us, teasing at us with light lazy touches in the vain instants of solidity underfoot. Cash looked back at me, and then I knew that we were gone. But I did not realise the reason for the rope until I saw the log. It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ. Get out and let the current take you down to the bend, Cash said, You can make it all right. No, I said, I’d get just as wet that way as this

The log appears suddenly between two hills, as if it had rocketed suddenly from the bottom of the river. Upon the end of it a long gout of foam hangs like the beard of an old man or a goat. When Cash speaks to me I know that he has been watching it all the time, watching it and watching Jewel ten feet ahead of us. “Let the rope go,” he says. With his other hand he reaches down and reeves the two turns from the stanchion. “Ride on, Jewel,” he says; “see if you can pull us ahead of the log.”

Jewel shouts at the horse; again he appears to lift it bodily between his knees. He is just above the top of the ford and the horse has a purchase of some sort for it surges forward, shining wetly half out of water, crashing on in a succession of lunges. It moves unbelievably fast; by that token Jewel realises at last that the rope is free, for I can see him sawing back on the reins, his head turned, as the log rears in a long sluggish lunge between us, bearing down upon the team. They see it too; for a moment they also shine black out of water. Then the downstream one vanishes, dragging the other with him; the wagon sheers crosswise, poised on the crest of the ford as the log strikes it, tilting it up and on. Cash is half turned, the reins running taut from his hand and disappearing into the water, the other hand reached back upon Addie, holding her jammed over against the high side of the wagon. “Jump clear,” he says quietly. “Stay away from the team and dont try to fight it. It’ll swing you into the bend all right.”

"You come too," I say. Vernon and Vardaman are running along the bank, pa and Dewey Dell stand watching us, Dewey Dell with the basket and the package in her arms. Jewel is trying to fight the horse back. The head of one mule appears, its eyes wide; it looks back at us for an instant, making a sound almost human. The head vanishes again.

"Back, Jewel," Cash shouts. "Back, Jewel." For another instant I see him leaning to the tilting wagon, his arm braced back against Addie and his tools; I see the bearded head of the rearing log strike up again, and beyond it Jewel holding the horse upreared, its head wrenched around, hammering its head with his fist. I jump from the wagon on the downstream side. Between two hills I see the mules once more. They roll up out of the water in succession, turning completely over, their legs stiffly extended as when they had lost contact with the earth.

Vardaman

Cash tried but she fell off and Darl jumped going under he went under and Cash hollering to catch her and I hollering running and hollering and Dewey Dell hollering at me Vardaman you vardaman you vardaman and Vernon passed me because he was seeing her come up and she jumped into the water again and Darl hadn't caught her yet

He came up to see and I hollering catch her Darl catch her and he didn't come back because she was too heavy he had to go on catching at her and I hollering catch her darl catch her darl because in the water she could go faster than a man and Darl had to grabble for her so I knew he could catch her because he is the best grabber even with the mules in the way again they dived up rolling their feet stiff rolling down again and their backs up now and Darl had to again because in the water she could go faster than a man or a woman and I passed Vernon and he wouldn't get in the water and help Darl he wouldn't grabble for her with Darl he knew but he wouldn't help.

The mules dived up again diving their legs stiff their stiff legs rolling slow and then Darl again and I hollering catch her darl catch her head her into the bank darl and Vernon wouldn't help and then Darl dodged past the mules where he could he had her under the water coming in to the bank coming in slow because in the water she fought to stay under the water but Darl is strong and he was coming in slow and so I knew he had her because he came slow and I ran down into the water to help and I couldn't stop hollering because Darl was strong and steady holding her under the water even if she did fight he would not let her go he was seeing me and he would hold her and it was all right now it was all right now it was all right

Then he comes up out of the water. He comes a long way up slow before his hands do but he's got to have her got to so I can bear it. Then his hands come up and all of him above the water. I cant stop. I have not got time to try. I will try to when I can but his hands came empty out of the water emptying the water emptying away

"Where is ma, Darl?" I said. "You never got her. You knew she is a fish but you let her get away. You never got her. Darl. Darl. Darl." I began to run along the bank, watching the mules dive up slow again and then down again.

Tull

When I told Cora how Darl jumped out of the wagon and left Cash sitting there trying to save it and the wagon turning over, and Jewel that was almost to the bank fighting that horse back where it had more sense than to go, she says "And you're one of the folks that says Darl is the queer one, the one that aint bright, and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon. I notice Anse was too smart to been on it a-tall."

"He couldn't a done no good, if he'd been there," I said. "They was going about it right and they would have made it if it hadn't a been for that log."

"Log, fiddlesticks," Cora said. "It was the hand of God."

"Then how can you say it was foolish?" I said. "Nobody cant guard against the hand of God. It would be sacrilege to try to."

"Then why dare it?" Cora says. "Tell me that."

"Anse didn't," I said. "That's just what you faulted him for."

"His place was there," Cora said. "If he had been a man, he would a been there instead of making his sons do what he dursn't."

"I dont know what you want, then," I said. "One breath you say they was daring the hand of God to try it, and the next breath you jump on Anse because he wasn't with them." Then she begun to sing again, working at the washtub, with that singing look in her face like she had done give up folks and all their foolishness and had done went on ahead of them, marching up the sky, singing.

The wagon hung for a long time while the current built up under it, shoving it off the ford, and Cash leaning more and more, trying to keep the coffin braced so it wouldn't slip down and finish tilting the wagon over. Soon as the wagon got tilted good, to where the current could finish it, the log went on. It headed around the wagon and went on good as a swimming man could have done. It was like it had been sent there to do a job and done it and went on.

When the mules finally kicked loose, it looked for a minute like maybe Cash would get the wagon back. It looked like him and the wagon wasn't moving at all, and just Jewel fighting that horse back to the wagon. Then that boy passed me, running and hollering at Darl and the gal trying to catch him, and then I see the mules come rolling slow up out of the water, their legs spraddled stiff like they had balked upside down, and roll on into the water again.

Then the wagon tilted over and then it and Jewel and the horse was all mixed up together. Cash went outen sight, still holding the coffin braced, and then I couldn't tell anything for the horse lunging and splashing. I thought that Cash had give up then and was swimming for it and I was yelling at Jewel to come on back and then all of a sudden him and the horse went under too and I thought they was all going. I knew that the horse had got dragged off the ford too, and with that wild drowning horse and that wagon and that loose box, it was going to be pretty bad, and there I was, standing knee-deep in the water, yelling at Anse behind me: "See what you done now? See what you done now?"

The horse come up again. It was headed for the bank now, throwing its head up, and then I saw one of them holding to the saddle on the downstream side, so I started running along the bank, trying to catch sight of Cash

because he couldn't swim, yelling at Jewel where Cash was like a durn fool, bad as that boy that was on down the bank still hollering at Darl.

So I went down into the water so I could still keep some kind of a grip in the mud, when I saw Jewel. He was middle deep, so I knew he was on the ford, anyway, leaning hard upstream, and then I see the rope, and then I see the water building up where he was holding the wagon snubbed just below the ford.

So it was Cash holding to the horse when it come splashing and scrambling up the bank, moaning and groaning like a natural man. When I come to it it was just kicking Cash loose from his holt on the saddle. His face turned up a second when he was sliding back into the water. It was gray, with his eyes closed and a long swipe of mud across his face. Then he let go and turned over in the water. He looked just like a old bundle of clothes kind of washing up and down against the bank. He looked like he was laying there in the water on his face, rocking up and down a little, looking at something on the bottom.

We could watch the rope cutting down into the water, and we could feel the weight of the wagon kind of blump and lunge lazy like, like it just as soon as not, and that rope cutting down into the water hard as a iron bar. We could hear the water hissing on it like it was red hot. Like it was a straight iron bar stuck into the bottom and us holding the end of it, and the wagon lazing up and down, kind of pushing and prodding at us like it had come around and got behind us, lazy like, like it just as soon as not when it made up its mind. There was a shoat come by, blowed up like a balloon: one of them spotted shoats of Lon Quick's. It bumped against the rope like it was a iron bar and bumped off and went on, and us watching that rope slanting down into the water. We watched it.

Darl

Cash lies on his back on the earth, his head raised on a rolled garment. His eyes are closed, his face is gray, his hair plastered in a smooth smear across his forehead as though done with a paint brush. His face appears sunken a little, sagging from the bony ridges of eye sockets, nose, gums, as though the wetting had slacked the firmness which had held the skin full; his teeth, set in pale gums, are parted a little as if he had been laughing quietly. He lies pole-thin in his wet clothes, a little pool of vomit at his head and a thread of it running from the corner of his mouth and down his cheek where he couldn't turn his head quick or far enough, until Dewey Dell stoops and wipes it away with the hem of her dress.

Jewel approaches. He has the plane. "Vernon just found the square," he says. He looks down at Cash, dripping too. "Aint he talked none yet?"

"He had his saw and hammer and chalk-line and rule," I say. "I know that."

Jewel lays the square down. Pa watches him. "They cant be far away," pa says. "It all went together. Was there ere a such misfortunate man."

Jewel does not look at Pa. "You better call Vardaman back here," he says. He looks at Cash. Then he turns and goes away. "Get him to talk soon as he can," he says, "so he can tell us what else there was."

We return to the river. The wagon is hauled clear, the wheels chocked (carefully: we all helped; it is as though upon the shabby, familiar, inert shape

of the wagon there lingered somehow, latent yet still immediate, that violence which had slain the mules that drew it not an hour since) above the edge of the flood. In the wagon bed it lies profoundly, the long pale planks hushed a little with wetting yet still yellow, like gold seen through water, save for two long muddy smears. We pass it and go on to the bank.

One end of the rope is made fast to a tree. At the edge of the stream, knee-deep, Vardaman stands, bent forward a little, watching Vernon with rapt absorption. He has stopped yelling and he is wet to the armpits. Vernon is at the other end of the rope, shoulder-deep in the river, looking back at Vardaman. "Further back than that," he says. "You git back by the tree and hold the rope for me, so it cant slip."

Vardaman backs along the rope, to the tree, moving blindly, watching Vernon. When we come up he looks at us once, his eyes round and a little dazed. Then he looks at Vernon again in that posture of rapt alertness.

"I got the hammer too," Vernon says. "Looks like we ought to done already got that chalk-line. It ought to floated."

"Floated clean away," Jewel says. "We wont get it. We ought to find the saw, though."

"I reckon so," Vernon says. He looks at the water. "That chalk-line, too. What else did he have?"

"He aint talked yet," Jewel says, entering the water. He looks back at me. "You go back and get him roused up to talk," he says.

"Pa's there," I say. I follow Jewel into the water, along the rope. It feels alive in my hand, bellied faintly in a prolonged and resonant arc. Vernon is watching me.

"You better go," he says. "You better be there."

"Let's see what else we can get before it washes on down," I say.

We hold to the rope, the current curling and dimpling about our shoulders. But beneath that false blandness the true force of it leans against us lazily. I had not thought that water in July could be so cold. It is like hands molding and prodding at the very bones. Vernon is still looking back toward the bank.

"Reckon it'll hold us all?" he says. We too look back, following the rigid bar of the rope as it rises from the water to the tree and Vardaman crouched a little beside it, watching us. "Wish my mule wouldn't strike out for home," Vernon says.

"Come on," Jewel says. "Let's get outen here."

We submerge in turn, holding to the rope, being clutched by one another while the cold wall of the water sucks the slanting mud backward and upstream from beneath our feet and we are suspended so, groping along the cold bottom. Even the mud there is not still. It has a chill, scouring quality, as though the earth under us were in motion too. We touch and fumble at one another's extended arms, letting ourselves go cautiously against the rope; or, erect in turn, watch the water suck and boil where one of the other two gropes beneath the surface. Pa has come down to the shore, watching us.

Vernon comes up, streaming, his face sloped down into his pursed blowing mouth. His mouth is bluish, like a circle of weathered rubber. He has the rule.

"He'll be glad of that," I say. "It's right new. He bought it just last month out of the catalogue."

"If we just knowed for sho what else," Vernon says, looking over his shoulder and then turning to face where Jewel had disappeared. "Didn't he go down fore me?" Vernon says.

"I dont know," I say. "I think so. Yes. Yes, he did."

We watch the thick curling surface, streaming away from us in slow whorls.

"Give him a pull on the rope," Vernon says.

"He's on your end of it," I say.

"Aint nobody on my end of it," he says.

"Pull it in," I say. But he has already done that, holding the end above the water; and then we see Jewel. He is ten yards away; he comes up, blowing, and looks at us, tossing his long hair back with a jerk of his head, then he looks toward the bank; we can see him filling his lungs.

"Jewel," Vernon says, not loud, but his voice going full and clear along the water, peremptory yet tactful. "It'll be back here. Better come back."

Jewel dives again. We stand there, leaning back against the current, watching the water where he disappeared, holding the dead rope between us like two men holding the nozzle of a fire hose, waiting for the water. Suddenly Dewey Dell is behind us in the water. "You make him come back," she says. "Jewel!" she says. He comes up again, tossing his hair back from his eyes. He is swimming now, toward the bank, the current sweeping him downstream quartering. "You, Jewel!" Dewey Dell says. We stand holding the rope and see him gain the bank and climb out. As he rises from the water, he stoops and picks up something. He comes back along the bank. He has found the chalk-line. He comes opposite us and stands there, looking about as if he were seeking something. Pa goes on down the bank. He is going back to look at the mules again where their round bodies float and rub quietly together in the slack water within the bend.

"What did you do with the hammer, Vernon?" Jewel says.

"I give it to him," Vernon says, jerking his head at Vardaman. Vardaman is looking after pa. Then he looks at Jewel. "With the square." Vernon is watching Jewel. He moves toward the bank, passing Dewey Dell and me.

"You get on out of here," I say. She says nothing, looking at Jewel and Vernon.

"Where's the hammer?" Jewel says. Vardaman scuttles up the bank and fetches it.

"It's heavier than the saw," Vernon says. Jewel is tying the end of the chalk-line about the hammer shaft.

"Hammer's got the most wood in it," Jewel says. He and Vernon face one another, watching Jewel's hands.

"And flatter, too," Vernon says, "It'd float three to one, almost. Try the plane."

Jewel looks at Vernon. Vernon is tall, too; long and lean, eye to eye they stand in their close wet clothes. Lon Quick could look even at a cloudy sky and tell the time to ten minutes. Big Lon I mean, not little Lon.

"Why dont you get out of the water?" I say.

"It wont float like a saw," Jewel says.

"It'll float nigher to a saw than a hammer will," Vernon says.

"Bet you," Jewel says.

"I wont bet," Vernon says.

They stand there, watching Jewel's still hands.

"Hell," Jewel says. "Get the plane, then."

So they get the plane and tie it to the chalk-line and enter the water again. Pa comes back along the bank. He stops for a while and looks at us, hunched, mournful, like a failing steer or an old tall bird.

Vernon and Jewel return, leaning against the current. "Get out of the way," Jewel says to Dewey Dell. "Get out of the water."

She crowds against me a little so they can pass, Jewel holding the plane high as though it were perishable, the blue string trailing back over his shoulder. They pass us and stop; they fall to arguing quietly about just where the wagon went over.

"Darl ought to know," Vernon says. They look at me.

"I dont know," I says. "I wasn't there that long."

"Hell," Jewel says. They move on, gingerly, leaning against the current, reading the ford with their feet.

"Have you got a holt of the rope?" Vernon says. Jewel does not answer. He glances back at the shore, calculat, then at the water. He flings the plane outward, letting the string run through his fingers, his fingers turning blue where it runs over them. When the line stops, he hands it back to Vernon.

"Better let me go this time," Vernon says. Again Jewel does not answer; we watch him duck beneath the surface.

"Jewel," Dewey Dell whimpers.

"It aint so deep there," Vernon says. He does not look back. He is watching the water where Jewel went under.

When Jewel comes up he has the saw.

When we pass the wagon pa is standing beside it, scrubbing at the two mud smears with a handful of leaves. Against the jungle Jewel's horse looks like a patchwork quilt hung on a line.

Cash has not moved. We stand above him, holding the plane, the saw, the hammer, the square, the rule, the chalk-line, while Dewey Dell squats and lifts Cash's head. "Cash," she says; "Cash."

He opens his eyes, staring profoundly up at our inverted faces.

"If ever was such a misfortunate man," pa says.

"Look, Cash," we say, holding the tools up so he can see; "what else did you have?"

He tries to speak, rolling his head, shutting his eyes.

"Cash," we say; "Cash."

It is to vomit he is turning his head. Dewey Dell wipes his mouth on the wet hem of her dress; then he can speak.

"It's his saw-set," Jewel says. "The new one he bought when he bought the rule." He moves, turning away. Vernon looks up after him, still squatting. Then he rises and follows Jewel down to the water.

"If ever was such a misfortunate man," pa says. He looms tall above us as we squat; he looks like a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist. "It's a trial," he says. "But I dont begrudge her it. No man can say I begrudge her it." Dewey Dell has laid Cash's head back on the folded coat, twisting his head a little to avoid the vomit. Beside him his tools lie. "A fellow might call it lucky it was the same leg he broke when he fell offen that church," pa says. "But I dont begrudge her it."

Jewel and Vernon are in the river again. From here they do not appear to violate the surface at all; it is as though it had severed them both at a single blow, the two torsos moving with infinitesimal and ludicrous care upon the surface. It looks peaceful, like machinery does after you have watched it and listened to it for a long time. As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the myriad original motion, and seeing and hearing in themselves blind and deaf; fury in itself quiet with stagnation. Squatting, Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth.

Cash

It wasn't on a balance. I told them that if they wanted it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to

Cora

One day we were talking. She had never been pure religious, not even after that summer at the camp meeting when Brother Whitfield wrestled with her spirit, singled her out and strove with the vanity in her mortal heart, and I said to her many a time, "God gave you children to comfort your hard human lot and for a token of His own suffering and love, for in love you conceived and bore them." I said that because she took God's love and her duty to Him too much as a matter of course, and such conduct is not pleasing to Him. I said, "He gave us the gift to raise our voices in His undying praise" because I said there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner than over a hundred that never sinned.⁸ And she said "My daily life is an acknowledgment and expiation of my sin" and I said "Who are you, to say what is sin and what is not sin? It is the Lord's part to judge; ours to praise His mercy and His holy name in the hearing of our fellow mortals" because He alone can see into the heart, and just because a woman's life is right in the sight of man, she cant know if there is no sin in her heart without she opens her heart to the Lord and receives His grace. I said, "Just because you have been a faithful wife is no sign that there is no sin in your heart, and just because your life is hard is no sign that the Lord's grace is absolving you." And she said, "I know my own sin. I know that I deserve my punishment. I do not begrudge it." And I said, "It is out of your vanity that you would judge sin and salvation in the Lord's place. It is our mortal lot to suffer and to raise our voices in praise of Him who judges the sin and offers the salvation through our trials and tribulations time out of mind amen. Not even after Brother Whitfield, a godly man if ever one breathed God's breath, prayed for you and strove as never a man could except him," I said.

Because it is not us that can judge our sins or know what is sin in the Lord's eyes. She has had a hard life, but so does every woman. But you'd think from the way she talked that she knew more about sin and salvation than the Lord God Himself, than them who have strove and labored with the sin

8. Cf. Luke 15:7: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

in this human world. When the only sin she ever committed was being partial to Jewel that never loved her and was its own punishment, in preference to Darl that was touched by God Himself and considered queer by us mortals and that did love her. I said, "There is your sin. And your punishment too. Jewel is your punishment. But where is your salvation? And life is short enough," I said, "to win eternal grace in. And God is a jealous God. It is His to judge and to mete; not yours."

"I know," she said. "I—" Then she stopped, and I said, "Know what?"

"Nothing," she said. "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me."

"How do you know, without you open your heart to Him and lift your voice in His praise?" I said. Then I realised that she did not mean God. I realised that out of the vanity of her heart she had spoken sacrilege. And I went down on my knees right there. I begged her to kneel and open her heart and cast from it the devil of vanity and cast herself upon the mercy of the Lord. But she wouldn't. She just sat there, lost in her vanity and her pride, that had closed her heart to God and set that selfish mortal boy in His place. Kneeling there I prayed for her. I prayed for that poor blind woman as I had never prayed for me and mine.

Addie

In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them. It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth; especially in the early spring, for it was worst then.

I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time. And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me. I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever.

And so I took Anse. I saw him pass the school house three or four times before I learned that he was driving four miles out of his way to do it. I noticed then how he was beginning to hump—a tall man and young—so that he looked already like a tall bird hunched in the cold weather, on the wagon seat. He would pass the school house, the wagon creaking slow, his head turning slow to watch the door of the school house as the wagon passed, until he went on around the curve and out of sight. One day I went to the door and stood there when he passed. When he saw me he looked quickly away and did not look back again.

In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness, and during the day it would seem as though I couldn't wait for the last one to go so I could go down to the spring. And so when I looked up that day and saw Anse standing there in his Sunday clothes, turning his hat round and round in his hands, I said:

"If you've got any womenfolks, why in the world dont they make you get your hair cut?"

"I aint got none," he said. Then he said suddenly, driving his eyes at me like two hounds in a strange yard: "That's what I come to see you about."

"And make you hold your shoulders up," I said. "You haven't got any? But you've got a house. They tell me you've got a house and a good farm. And you live there alone, doing for yourself, do you?" He just looked at me, turning the hat in his hands. "A new house," I said. "Are you going to get married?"

And he said again, holding his eyes to mine: "That's what I come to see you about."

Later he told me, "I aint got no people. So that wont be no worry to you. I dont reckon you can say the same."

"No. I have people. In Jefferson."

His face fell a little. "Well, I got a little property. I'm forehanded; I got a good honest name. I know how town folks are, but maybe when they talk to me . . ."

"They might listen," I said. "But they'll be hard to talk to." He was watching my face. "They're in the cemetery."

"But your living kin," he said. "They'll be different."

"Will they?" I said. "I dont know. I never had any other kind."

So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride. I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights.

He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn't need a word for that any more than for pride or fear. Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, Let Anse use it, if he wants to. So that it was Anse or love; love or Anse: it didn't matter.

I would think that even while I lay with him in the dark and Cash asleep in the cradle within the swing of my hand. I would think that if he were to wake and cry, I would suckle him, too. Anse or love: it didn't matter. My

aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, and what you will, outside the circle.

Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But then I realised that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too, and that my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right anymore than I could have known I was wrong.

"Nonsense," Anse said; "you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two."

He did not know that he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse*. It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now. And when I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them.

And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. Like Cora, who could never even cook.

She would tell me what I owed to my children and to Anse and to God. I gave Anse the children. I did not ask for them. I did not even ask him for what he could have given me: not-Anse. That was my duty to him, to not ask that, and that duty I fulfilled. I would be I; I would let him be the shape and echo of his word. That was more than he asked, because he could not have asked for that and been Anse, using himself so with a word.

And then he died. He did not know he was dead. I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in peoples' lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother.

I believed that I had found it. I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land. I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes we both wore in the

world's face, of the circumspection necessary because he was he and I was I; the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify that sin He had created. While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin. I would think of him as thinking of me as dressed also in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air. Then I would lay with Anse again—I did not lie to him: I just refused, just as I refused my breast to Cash and Darl after their time was up—hearing the dark land talking the voiceless speech.

I hid nothing. I tried to deceive no one. I would not have cared. I merely took the precautions that he thought necessary for his sake, not for my safety, but just as I wore clothes in the world's face. And I would think then when Cora talked to me, of how the high dead words in time seemed to lose even the significance of their dead sound.

Then it was over. Over in the sense that he was gone and I knew that, see him again though I would, I would never again see him coming swift and secret to me in the woods dressed in sin like a gallant garment already blowing aside with the speed of his secret coming.

But for me it was not over. I mean, over in the sense of beginning and ending, because to me there was no beginning nor ending to anything then. I even held Anse refraining still, not that I was holding him recessional, but as though nothing else had ever been. My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all. Then I found that I had Jewel. When I waked to remember to discover it, he was two months gone.

My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward. And so I have cleaned my house. With Jewel—I lay by the lamp, holding up my own head, watching him cap and suture it before he breathed—the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased. Then there was only the milk, warm and calm, and I lying calm in the slow silence, getting ready to clean my house.

I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die.

One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too.

Whitfield

When they told me she was dying, all that night I wrestled with Satan, and I emerged victorious. I woke to the enormity of my sin; I saw the true light at last, and I fell on my knees and confessed to God and asked His guidance and received it. "Rise," He said; "repair to that home in which you have put a liv-

ing lie, among those people with whom you have outraged My Word; confess your sin aloud. It is for them, for that deceived husband, to forgive you: not I."

So I went. I heard that Tull's bridge was gone; I said "Thanks, O Lord, O Mighty Ruler of all;" for by those dangers and difficulties which I should have to surmount I saw that He had not abandoned me; that my reception again into His holy peace and love would be the sweeter for it. "Just let me not perish before I have begged the forgiveness of the man whom I betrayed," I prayed; "let me not be too late; let not the tale of mine and her transgression come from her lips instead of mine. She had sworn then that she would never tell it, but eternity is a fearsome thing to face: have I not wrestled thigh to thigh with Satan myself? let me not have also the sin of her broken vow upon my soul. Let not the waters of Thy Mighty Wrath encompass me until I have cleansed my soul in the presence of them whom I injured."

It was His hand that bore me safely above the flood, that fended from me the dangers of the waters. My horse was frightened, and my own heart failed me as the logs and the uprooted trees bore down upon my littleness. But not my soul: time after time I saw them averted at destruction's final instant, and I lifted my voice above the noise of the flood: "Praise to Thee, O Mighty Lord and King. By this token shall I cleanse my soul and gain again into the fold of Thy undying love."

I knew then that forgiveness was mine. The flood, the danger, behind, and as I rode on across the firm earth again and the scene of my Gethsemane drew closer and closer, I framed the words which I should use. I would enter the house; I would stop her before she had spoken; I would say to her husband: "Anse, I have sinned. Do with me as you will."

It was already as though it were done. My soul felt freer, quieter than it had in years; already I seemed to dwell in abiding peace again as I rode on. To either side I saw His hand; in my heart I could hear His voice: "Courage. I am with thee."

Then I reached Tull's house. His youngest girl came out and called to me as I was passing. She told me that she was already dead.

I have sinned, O Lord. Thou knowest the extent of my remorse and the will of my spirit. But He is merciful; He will accept the will for the deed, Who knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there. It was He in His infinite wisdom that restrained the tale from her dying lips as she lay surrounded by those who loved and trusted her; mine the travail by water which I sustained by the strength of His hand. Praise to Thee in Thy bounteous and omnipotent love; O praise.

I entered the house of bereavement, the lowly dwelling where another erring mortal lay while her soul faced the awful and irrevocable judgment, peace to her ashes.

"God's grace upon this house," I said.

Darl

On the horse he rode up to Armstid's and came back on the horse, leading Armstid's team. We hitched up and laid Cash on top of Addie. When we laid him down he vomited again, but he got his head over the wagon bed in time.

"He taken a lick in the stomach, too," Vernon said.

"The horse may have kicked him in the stomach too," I said. "Did he kick you in the stomach, Cash?"

He tried to say something. Dewey Dell wiped his mouth again.

"What's he say?" Vernon said.

"What is it, Cash?" Dewey Dell said. She leaned down. "His tools," she said. Vernon got them and put them into the wagon. Dewey Dell lifted Cash's head so he could see. We drove on, Dewey Dell and I sitting beside Cash to steady him *and he riding on ahead on the horse*. Vernon stood watching us for a while. Then he turned and went back toward the bridge. He walked gingerly, beginning to flap the wet sleeves of his shirt as though he had just got wet.

He was sitting the horse before the gate. Armstid was waiting at the gate. We stopped *and he got down* and we lifted Cash down and carried him into the house, where Mrs Armstid had the bed ready. We left her and Dewey Dell undressing him.

We followed pa out to the wagon. He went back and got into the wagon and drove on, we following on foot, into the lot. The wetting had helped, because Armstid said, "You're welcome to the house. You can put it there." *He followed, leading the horse, and stood beside the wagon, the reins in his hand.*

"I thank you," pa said. "We'll use in the shed yonder. I know it's a imposition on you."

"You're welcome to the house," Armstid said. *He had that wooden look on his face again; that bold, surly, high-colored rigid look like his face and eyes were two colors of wood, the wrong one pale and the wrong one dark. His shirt was beginning to dry, but it still clung close upon him when he moved.*

"She would appreciate it," pa said.

We took the team out and rolled the wagon back under the shed. One side of the shed was open.

"It wont rain under," Armstid said. "But if you'd rather . . ."

Back of the barn was some rusted sheets of tin roofing. We took two of them and propped them against the open side.

"You're welcome to the house," Armstid said.

"I thank you," pa said. "I'd take it right kind if you'd give them a little snack."

"Sho," Armstid said. "Lula'll have supper ready soon as she gets Cash comfortable." *He had gone back to the horse and he was taking the saddle off, his damp shirt lapping flat to him when he moved.*

Pa wouldn't come in the house.

"Come in and eat," Armstid said. "It's nigh ready."

"I wouldn't crave nothing," pa said. "I thank you."

"You come in and dry and eat," Armstid said. "It'll be all right here."

"It's for her," pa said. "It's for her sake I am taking the food. I got no team, no nothing. But she will be grateful to ere a one of you."

"Sho," Armstid said. "You folks come in and dry."

But after Armstid gave pa a drink, he felt better, and when we went in to see about Cash *he hadn't come in with us. When I looked back he was leading the horse into the barn* he was already talking about getting another team, and by supper time he had good as bought it. *He is down there in the barn, sliding fluidly past the gaudy lunging swirl, into the stall with it. He climbs onto the manger and drags the hay down and leaves the stall and seeks and*

finds the curry-comb. Then he returns and slips quickly past the single crashing thump and up against the horse, where it cannot overreach. He applies the curry-comb, holding himself within the horse's striking radius with the agility of an acrobat, cursing the horse in a whisper of obscene caress. Its head flashes back, tooth-cropped; its eyes roll in the dusk like marbles on a gaudy velvet cloth as he strikes it upon the face with the back of the curry-comb.

Armstid

But time I give him another sup of whiskey and supper was about ready, he had done already bought a team from somebody, on a credit. Picking and choosing he were by then, saying how he didn't like this span and wouldn't put his money in nothing so-and-so owned, not even a hen coop.

"You might try Snopes," I said. "He's got three-four span. Maybe one of them would suit you."

Then he begun to mumble his mouth, looking at me like it was me that owned the only span of mules in the county and wouldn't sell them to him, when I knew that like as not it would be my team that would ever get them out of the lot at all. Only I dont know what they would do with them, if they had a team. Littlejohn had told me that the levee through Haley bottom had done gone for two miles and that the only way to get to Jefferson would be to go around by Mottson. But that was Anse's business.

"He's a close man to trade with," he says, mumbling his mouth. But when I give him another sup after supper, he cheered up some. He was aiming to go back to the barn and set up with her. Maybe he thought that if he just stayed down there ready to take out, Santa Claus would maybe bring him a span of mules. "But I reckon I can talk him around," he says. "A man'll always help a fellow in a tight, if he's got ere a drop of Christian blood in him."

"Of course you're welcome to the use of mine," I said, me knowing how much he believed that was the reason.

"I thank you," he said. "She'll want to go in ourn," and him knowing how much I believed that was the reason.

After supper Jewel rode over to the Bend to get Peabody. I heard he was to be there today at Varner's. Jewel come back about midnight. Peabody had gone down below Inverness somewhere, but Uncle Billy come back with him, with his satchel of horse-physic. Like he says, a man aint so different from a horse or a mule, come long come short, except a mule or a horse has got a little more sense. "What you been into now, boy?" he says, looking at Cash. "Get me a mattress and a chair and a glass of whisky," he says.

He made Cash drink the whiskey, then he run Anse out of the room. "Lucky it was the same leg he broke last summer," Anse says, mournful, mumbling and blinking. "That's something."

We folded the mattress across Cash's legs and set the chair on the mattress and me and Jewel set on the chair and the gal held the lamp and Uncle Billy taken a chew of tobacco and went to work. Cash fought pretty hard for a while, until he fainted. Then he laid still, with big balls of sweat standing on his face like they had started to roll down and then stopped to wait for him.

When he waked up, Uncle Billy had done packed up and left. He kept on trying to say something until the gal leaned down and wiped his mouth. "It's his tools," she said.

"I brought them in," Darl said. "I got them."

He tried to talk again; she leaned down. "He wants to see them," she said. So Darl brought them in where he could see them. They shoved them under the side of the bed, where he could reach his hand and touch them when he felt better. Next morning Anse taken that horse and rode over to the Bend to see Snopes. Him and Jewel stood in the lot talking a while, then Anse got on the horse and rode off. I reckon that was the first time Jewel ever let anybody ride that horse, and until Anse come back he hung around in that swole-up way, watching the road like he was half a mind to take out after Anse and get the horse back.

Along toward nine oclock it begun to get hot. That was when I see the first buzzard. Because of the wetting, I reckon. Anyway it wasn't until well into the day that I see them. Lucky the breeze was setting away from the house, so it wasn't until well into the morning. But soon as I see them it was like I could smell it in the field a mile away from just watching them, and them circling and circling for everybody in the county to see what was in my barn.

I was still a good half a mile from the house when I heard that boy yelling. I thought maybe he might have fell into the well or something, so I whipped up and come into the lot on the lope.

There must have been a dozen of them setting along the ridge-pole of the barn, and that boy was chasing another one around the lot like it was a turkey and it just lifting enough to dodge him and go flopping back to the roof of the shed again where he had found it setting on the coffin. It had got hot then, right, and the breeze had dropped or changed or something, so I went and found Jewel, but Lulu come out.

"You got to do something," she said. "It's a outrage."

"That's what I aim to do," I said.

"It's a outrage," she said. "He should be lawed for treating her so."

"He's getting her into the ground the best he can," I said. So I found Jewel and asked him if he didn't want to take one of the mules and go over to the Bend and see about Anse. He didn't say nothing. He just looked at me with his jaws going bone-white and them bone-white eyes of hisn, then he went and begun to call Darl.

"What you fixing to do?" I said.

He didn't answer. Darl come out. "Come on," Jewel said.

"What you aim to do?" Darl said.

"Going to move the wagon," Jewel said over his shoulder.

"Dont be a fool," I said. "I never meant nothing. You couldn't help it." And Darl hung back too, but nothing wouldn't suit Jewel.

"Shut your goddamn mouth," he says.

"It's got to be somewhere," Darl said. "We'll take out soon as pa gets back."

"You wont help me?" Jewel says, them white eyes of hisn kind of blaring and his face shaking like he had a aguer.⁹

"No," Darl said. "I wont. Wait till pa gets back."

So I stood in the door and watched him push and haul at that wagon. It was on a downhill, and once I thought he was fixing to beat out the back end of the shed. Then the dinner bell rung. I called him, but he didn't look around. "Come on to dinner," I said. "Tell that boy." But he didn't answer, so

9. Ague or fever.

I went on to dinner. The gal went down to get that boy, but she come back without him. About half through dinner we heard him yelling again, running that buzzard out.

"It's a outrage," Lula said; "a outrage."

"He's doing the best he can," I said. "A fellow dont trade with Snopes in thirty minutes. They'll set in the shade all afternoon to dicker."

"Do?" she says. "Do? He's done too much, already."

And I reckon he had. Trouble is, his quitting was just about to start our doing. He couldn't buy no team from nobody, let alone Snopes, withouten he had something to mortgage he didn't know would mortgage yet. And so when I went back to the field I looked at my mules and same as told them goodbye for a spell. And when I come back that evening and the sun shining all day on that shed, I wasn't so sho I would regret it.

He come riding up just as I went out to the porch, where they all was. He looked kind of funny: kind of more hang-dog than common, and kind of proud too. Like he had done something he thought was cute but wasn't so sho now how other folks would take it.

"I got a team," he said.

"You bought a team from Snopes?" I said.

"I reckon Snopes aint the only man in this country that can drive a trade," he said.

"Sho," I said. He was looking at Jewel, with that funny look, but Jewel had done got down from the porch and was going toward the horse. To see what Anse had done to it, I reckon.

"Jewel," Anse says. Jewel looked back. "Come here," Anse says. Jewel come back a little and stopped again.

"What you want?" he said.

"So you got a team from Snopes," I said. "He'll send them over tonight, I reckon? You'll want a early start tomorrow, long as you'll have to go by Mottson."

Then he quit looking like he had been for a while. He got that badgered look like he used to have, mumbling his mouth.

"I do the best I can," he said. "Fore God, if there were ere a man in the living world suffered the trials and floutings I have suffered."

"A fellow that just beat Snopes in a trade ought to feel pretty good," I said. "What did you give him, Anse?"

He didn't look at me. "I give a chattel mortgage on my cultivator and seeder," he said.

"But they aint worth forty dollars. How far do you aim to get with a forty dollar team?"

They were all watching him now, quiet and steady. Jewel was stopped, halfway back, waiting to go on to the horse. "I give other things," Anse said. He begun to mumble his mouth again, standing there like he was waiting for somebody to hit him and him with his mind already made up not to do nothing about it.

"What other things?" Darl said.

"Hell," I said. "You take my team. You can bring them back. I'll get along someway."

"So that's what you were doing in Cash's clothes last night," Darl said. He said it just like he was reading it outen the paper. Like he never give a durn

himself one way or the other. Jewel had come back now, standing there, looking at Anse with them marble eyes of hisn. "Cash aimed to buy that talking machine from Suratt with that money," Darl said.

Anse stood there, mumbling his mouth. Jewel watched him. He aint never blinked yet.

"But that's just eight dollars more," Darl said, in that voice like he was just listening and never give a darn himself. "That still wont buy a team."

Anse looked at Jewel, quick, kind of sliding his eyes that way, then he looked down again. "God knows, if there were ere a man," he says. Still they didn't say nothing. They just watched him, waiting, and him sliding his eyes toward their feet and up their legs but no higher. "And the horse," he says.

"What horse?" Jewel said. Anse just stood there. I be darn, if a man cant keep the upper hand of his sons, he ought to run them away from home, no matter how big they are. And if he cant do that, I be darn if he oughtn't to leave himself. I be darn if I wouldn't. "You mean, you tried to swap my horse?" Jewel says.

Anse stands there, dangle-armed. "For fifteen years I aint had a tooth in my head," he says. "God knows it. He knows in fifteen years I aint et the victuals He aimed for man to eat to keep his strength up, and me saving a nickel here and nickel there so my family wouldn't suffer it, to buy them teeth so I could eat God's appointed food. I give that money. I thought that if I could do without eating, my sons could do without riding. God knows I did."

Jewel stands with his hands on his hips, looking at Anse. Then he looks away. He looked out across the field, his face still as a rock. Like it was somebody else talking about somebody else's horse and him not even listening. Then he spit, slow, and said "Hell" and he turned and went on to the gate and unhitched the horse and got on it. It was moving when he come into the saddle and by the time he was on it they was tearing down the road like the Law might have been behind them. They went out of sight that way, the two of them looking like some kind of a spotted cyclone.

"Well," I says. "You take my team," I said. But he wouldn't do it. And they wouldn't even stay, and that boy chasing them buzzards all day in the hot sun until he was nigh as crazy as the rest of them. "Leave Cash here, anyway," I said. But they wouldn't do that. They made a pallet for him with quilts on top of the coffin and laid him on it and set his tools by him, and we put my team in and hauled the wagon about a mile down the road.

"If we'll bother you here," Anse says, "just say so."

"Sho," I said. "It'll be fine here. Safe, too. Now let's go back and eat supper."

"I thank you," Anse said. "We got a little something in the basket. We can make out."

"Where'd you get it?" I said.

"We brought it from home."

"But it'll be stale now," I said. "Come and get some hot victuals."

But they wouldn't come. "I reckon we can make out," Anse said. So I went home and et and taken a basket back to them and tried again to make them come back to the house.

"I thank you," he said. "I reckon we can make out." So I left them there, squatting around a little fire, waiting; God knows what for.

I come on home. I kept thinking about them there, and about that fellow tearing away on that horse. And that would be the last they would see of

him. And I be durn if I could blame him. Not for wanting to not give up his horse, but for getting shut of such a durn fool as Anse.

Or that's what I thought then. Because be durn if there aint something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him, even when he knows he'll be wanting to kick himself next minute. Because about a hour after breakfast next morning Eustace Grimm that works Snopes' place come up with a span of mules, hunting Anse.

"I thought him and Anse never traded," I said.

"Sho," Eustace said. "All they liked was the horse. Like I said to Mr Snopes, he was letting this team go for fifty dollars, because if his uncle Flem had a just kept them Texas horses when he owned them, Anse wouldn't a never—"

"The horse?" I said. "Anse's boy taken that horse and cleared out last night, probably halfway to Texas by now, and Anse—"

"I didn't know who brung it," Eustace said. "I never see them. I just found the horse in the barn this morning when I went to feed, and I told Mr Snopes and he said to bring the team on over here."

Well, that'll be the last they'll ever see of him now, sho enough. Come Christmas time they'll maybe get a postal card from him in Texas, I reckon. And if it hadn't been Jewel, I reckon it'd a been me; I owe him that much, myself. I be durn if Anse dont conjure a man, some way. I be durn if he aint a sight.

Vardaman

Now there are seven of them, in little tall black circles.

"Look, Darl," I say; "see?"

He looks up. We watch them in little tall black circles of not-moving.

"Yesterday there were just four," I say.

There were more than four on the barn.

"Do you know what I would do if he tries to light on the wagon again?" I say.

"What would you do?" Darl says.

"I wouldn't let him light on her," I say. "I wouldn't let him light on Cash, either."

Cash is sick. He is sick on the box. But my mother is a fish.

"We got to get some medicine in Mottson," pa says. "I reckon we'll just have to."

"How do you feel, Cash?" Darl says.

"It dont bother none," Cash says.

"Do you want it propped a little higher?" Darl says.

Cash has a broken leg. He has had two broken legs. He lies on the box with a quilt rolled under his head and a piece of wood under his knee.

"I reckon we ought to left him at Armstid's," pa says.

I haven't got a broken leg and pa hasn't and Darl hasn't and "It's just the bumps," Cash says. "It kind of grinds together a little on a bump. It dont bother none." *Jewel has gone away. He and his horse went away one supper time*

"It's because she wouldn't have us beholden," pa says. "Fore God, I do the best that ere a man" *Is it because Jewel's mother is a horse Darl? I said.*

"Maybe I can draw the ropes a little tighter," Darl says. *That's why Jewel and I were both in the shed and she was in the wagon because the horse lives in the barn and I had to keep on running the buzzard away from*

"If you just would," Cash says. And Dewey Dell hasn't got a broken leg and I haven't. Cash is my brother.

We stop. When Darl loosens the rope Cash begins to sweat again. His teeth look out.

"Hurt?" Darl says.

"I reckon you better put it back," Cash says.

Darl puts the rope back, pulling hard. Cash's teeth look out.

"Hurt?" Darl says.

"It dont bother none," Cash says.

"Do you want pa to drive slower?" Darl says.

"No," Cash says. "Aint no time to hang back. It dont bother none."

"We'll have to get some medicine at Mottson," pa says. "I reckon we'll have to."

"Tell him to go on," Cash says. We go on. Dewey Dell leans back and wipes Cash's face. Cash is my brother. *But Jewel's mother is a horse. My mother is a fish. Darl says that when we come to the water again I might see her and Dewey Dell said, She's in the box; how could she have got out? She got out through the holes I bored, into the water I said, and when we come to the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish*

"Those cakes will be in fine shape by the time we get to Jefferson," Darl says.

Dewey Dell does not look around.

"You better try to sell them in Mottson," Darl says.

"When will we get to Mottson, Darl?" I say.

"Tomorrow," Darl says. "If this team dont rack to pieces. Snopes must have fed them on sawdust."

"Why did he feed them on sawdust, Darl?" I say.

"Look," Darl says. "See?"

Now there are nine of them, tall in little tall black circles.

When we come to the foot of the hill pa stops and Darl and Dewey Dell and I get out. Cash cant walk because he has a broken leg. "Come up, mules," pa says. The mules walk hard; the wagon creaks. Darl and Dewey Dell and I walk behind the wagon, up the hill. When we come to the top of the hill pa stops and we get back into the wagon.

Now there are ten of them, tall in little tall black circles on the sky.

Moseley

I happened to look up, and saw her outside the window, looking in. Not close to the glass, and not looking at anything in particular; just standing there with her head turned this way and her eyes full on me and kind of blank too, like she was waiting for a sign. When I looked up again she was moving toward the door.

She kind of bumbled at the screen door a minute, like they do, and came in. She had on a stiff-brimmed straw hat setting on the top of her head and she was carrying a package wrapped in newspaper: I thought that she had a

quarter or a dollar at the most, and that after she stood around a while she would maybe buy a cheap comb or a bottle of nigger toilet water, so I never disturbed her for a minute or so except to notice that she was pretty in a kind of sullen, awkward way, and that she looked a sight better in her gingham dress and her own complexion than she would after she bought whatever she would finally decide on. Or tell that she wanted. I knew that she had already decided before she came in. But you have to let them take their time. So I went on with what I was doing, figuring to let Albert wait on her when he caught up at the fountain, when he came back to me.

"That woman," he said. "You better see what she wants."

"What does she want?" I said.

"I dont know. I cant get anything out of her. You better wait on her."

So I went around the counter. I saw that she was barefooted, standing with her feet flat and easy on the floor, like she was used to it. She was looking at me, hard, holding the package; I saw she had about as black a pair of eyes as ever I saw, and she was a stranger. I never remembered seeing her in Mottson before. "What can I do for you?" I said.

Still she didn't say anything. She stared at me without winking. Then she looked back at the folks at the fountain. Then she looked past me, toward the back of the store.

"Do you want to look at some toilet things?" I said. "Or is it medicine you want?"

"That's it," she said. She looked quick back at the fountain again. So I thought maybe her ma or somebody had sent her in for some of this female dope and she was ashamed to ask for it. I knew she couldn't have a complexion like hers and use it herself, let alone not being much more than old enough to barely know what it was for. It's a shame, the way they poison themselves with it. But a man's got to stock it or go out of business in this country.

"Oh," I said. "What do you use? We have—" She looked at me again, almost like she had said hush, and looked toward the back of the store again.

"I'd liefer go back there," she said.

"All right," I said. You have to humor them. You save time by it. I followed her to the back. She put her hand on the gate. "There's nothing back there but the prescription case," I said. "What do you want?" She stopped and looked at me. It was like she had taken some kind of a lid off her face, her eyes. It was her eyes: kind of dumb and hopeful and sullenly willing to be disappointed all at the same time. But she was in trouble of some sort; I could see that. "What's your trouble?" I said. "Tell me what it is you want. I'm pretty busy." I wasn't meaning to hurry her, but a man just hasn't got the time they have out there.

"It's the female trouble," she said.

"Oh," I said. "Is that all?" I thought maybe she was younger than she looked, and her first one had scared her, or maybe one had been a little abnormal as it will in young women. "Where's your ma?" I said. "Haven't you got one?"

"She's out yonder in the wagon," she said.

"Why not talk to her about it before you take any medicine," I said. "Any woman would have told you about it." She looked at me, and I looked at her again and said, "How old are you?"

"Seventeen," she said.

"Oh," I said. "I thought maybe you were . . ." She was watching me. But then, in the eyes all of them look like they had no age and knew everything in the world, anyhow. "Are you too regular, or not regular enough?"

She quit looking at me but she didn't move. "Yes," she said. "I reckon so. Yes."

"Well, which?" I said. "Dont you know?" It's a crime and a shame; but after all, they'll buy it from somebody. She stood there, not looking at me. "You want something to stop it?" I said. "Is that it?"

"No," she said. "That's it. It's already stopped."

"Well, what—" Her face was lowered a little, still, like they do in all their dealings with a man so he dont ever know just where the lightning will strike next. "You are not married, are you?" I said.

"No."

"Oh," I said. "And how long has it been since it stopped? about five months maybe?"

"It aint been but two," she said.

"Well, I haven't got anything in my store you want to buy," I said, "unless it's a nipple. And I'd advise you to buy that and go back home and tell your pa, if you have one, and let him make somebody buy you a wedding license. Was that all you wanted?"

But she just stood there, not looking at me.

"I got the money to pay you," she said.

"Is it your own, or did he act enough of a man to give you the money?"

"He give it to me. Ten dollars. He said that would be enough."

"A thousand dollars wouldn't be enough in my store and ten cents wouldn't be enough," I said. "You take my advice and go home and tell your pa or your brothers if you have any or the first man you come to in the road."

But she didn't move. "Lafe said I could get it at the drugstore. He said to tell you me and him wouldn't never tell nobody you sold it to us."

"And I just wish your precious Lafe had come for it himself; that's what I wish. I dont know: I'd have had a little respect for him then. And you can go back and tell him I said so—if he aint halfway to Texas by now, which I dont doubt. Me, a respectable druggist, that's kept store and raised a family and been a church-member for fifty-six years in this town. I'm a good mind to tell your folks myself, if I can just find who they are."

She looked at me now, her eyes and face kind of blank again like when I first saw her through the window. "I didn't know," she said. "He told me I could get something at the drugstore. He said they might not want to sell it to me, but if I had ten dollars and told them I wouldn't never tell nobody . . ."

"He never said this drugstore," I said. "If he did or mentioned my name, I defy him to prove it. I defy him to repeat it or I'll prosecute him to the full extent of the law, and you can tell him so."

"But maybe another drugstore would," she said.

"Then I dont want to know it. Me, that's—" Then I looked at her. But it's a hard life they have; sometimes a man . . . if there can ever be any excuse for sin, which it cant be. And then, life wasn't made to be easy on folks: they wouldn't ever have any reason to be good and die. "Look here," I said. "You get that notion out of your head. The Lord gave you what you have, even if He did use the devil to do it; you let Him take it away from you if it's His

will to do so. You go on back to Lafe and you and him take that ten dollars and get married with it."

"Lafe said I could get something at the drugstore," she said.

"Then go and get it," I said. "You wont get it here."

She went out, carrying the package, her feet making a little hissing on the floor. She bumped again at the door and went out. I could see her through the glass going on down the street.

It was Albert told me about the rest of it. He said the wagon was stopped in front of Grummet's hardware store, with the ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchiefs to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon, listening to the marshal arguing with the man. He was a kind of tall, gaunted man sitting on the wagon, saying it was a public street and he reckoned he had as much right there as anybody, and the marshal telling him he would have to move on; folks couldn't stand it. It had been dead eight days, Albert said. They came from some place out in Yoknapatawpha county, trying to get to Jefferson with it. It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill, in that ramshackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get it out of town, with that home-made box and another fellow with a broken leg lying on a quilt on top of it, and the father and a little boy sitting in the seat and the marshal trying to make them get out of town.

"It's a public street," the man says. "I reckon we can stop to buy something same as airy other man. We got the money to pay for hit, and hit aint airy law that says a man cant spend his money where he wants."

They had stopped to buy some cement. The other son was in Grummet's, trying to make Grummet break a sack and let him have ten cents' worth, and finally Grummet broke the sack to get him out. They wanted the cement to fix the fellow's broken leg, someway.

"Why, you'll kill him," the marshal said. "You'll cause him to lose his leg. You take him on to the doctor, and you get this thing buried soon as you can. Dont you know you're liable to jail for endangering the public health?"

"We're doing the best we can," the father said. Then he told a long tale about how they had to wait for the wagon to come back and how the bridge was washed away and how they went eight miles to another bridge and it was gone too so they came back and swum the ford and the mules got drowned and how they got another team and found that the road was washed out and they had to come clean around by Mottson, and then the one with the cement came back and told him to shut up.

"We'll be gone in a minute," he told the marshal.

"We never aimed to bother nobody," the father said.

"You take that fellow to a doctor," the marshal told the one with the cement.

"I reckon he's all right," he said.

"It aint that we're hard-hearted," the marshal said. "But I reckon you can tell yourself how it is."

"Sho," the other said. "We'll take out soon as Dewey Dell comes back. She went to deliver a package."

So they stood there with the folks backed off with handkerchiefs to their faces, until in a minute the girl came up with that newspaper package.

"Come on," the one with the cement said, "we've lost too much time." So they got in the wagon and went on. And when I went to supper it still seemed

like I could smell it. And the next day I met the marshal and I begun to sniff and said,

“Smell anything?”

“I reckon they’re in Jefferson by now,” he said.

“Or in jail. Well, thank the Lord it’s not our jail.”

“That’s a fact,” he said.

Darl

“Here’s a place,” pa says. He pulls the team up and sits looking at the house. “We could get some water over yonder.”

“All right,” I say. “You’ll have to borrow a bucket from them, Dewey Dell.”

“God knows,” pa says. “I wouldn’t be beholden, God knows.”

“If you see a good-sized can, you might bring it,” I say. Dewey Dell gets down from the wagon, carrying the package. “You had more trouble than you expected, selling those cakes in Mottson,” I say. How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls. Cash broke his leg and now the sawdust is running out. He is bleeding to death is Cash.

“I wouldn’t be beholden,” pa says. “God knows.”

“Then make some water yourself,” I say. “We can use Cash’s hat.”

When Dewey Dell comes back the man comes with her. Then he stops and she comes on and he stands there and after a while he goes back to the house and stands on the porch, watching us.

“We better not try to lift him down,” pa says. “We can fix it here.”

“Do you want to be lifted down, Cash?” I say.

“Wont we get to Jefferson tomorrow?” he says. He is watching us, his eyes interrogatory, intent, and sad. “I can last it out.”

“It’ll be easier on you,” pa says. “It’ll keep it from rubbing together.”

“I can last it,” Cash says. “We’ll lose time stopping.”

“We done bought the cement now,” pa says.

“I could last it,” Cash says. “It aint but one more day. It dont bother to speak of.” He looks at us, his eyes wide in his thin gray face, questioning. “It sets up so,” he says.

“We done bought it now,” pa says.

I mix the cement in the can, stirring the slow water into the pale green thick coils. I bring the can to the wagon where Cash can see. He lies on his back, his thin profile in silhouette, ascetic and profound against the sky. “Does that look about right?” I say.

“You dont want too much water, or it wont work right,” he says.

“Is this too much?”

“Maybe if you could get a little sand,” he says. “It aint but one more day,” he says. “It dont bother me none.”

Vardaman goes back down the road to where we crossed the branch and returns with sand. He pours it slowly into the thick coiling in the can. I go to the wagon again.

“Does that look all right?”

“Yes,” Cash says. “I could have lasted. It dont bother me none.”

We loosen the splints and pour the cement over his leg, slow.

"Watch out for it," Cash says. "Dont get none on it if you can help."

"Yes," I say. Dewey Dell tears a piece of paper from the package and wipes the cement from the top of it as it drips from Cash's leg.

"How does that feel?"

"It feels fine," he says. "It's cold. It feels fine."

"If it'll just help you," pa says. "I asks your forgiveness. I never foreseen it no more than you."

"It feels fine," Cash says.

If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time.

We replace the splints, the cords, drawing them tight, the cement in thick pale green slow surges among the cords, Cash watching us quietly with that profound questioning look.

"That'll steady it," I say.

"Ay," Cash says. "I'm obliged."

Then we all turn on the wagon and watch him. He is coming up the road behind us, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, moving only from his hips down. He comes up without a word, with his pale rigid eyes in his high sullen face, and gets into the wagon.

"Here's a hill," pa says. "I reckon you'll have to get out and walk."

Vardaman

Darl and Jewel and Dewey Dell and I are walking up the hill, behind the wagon. Jewel came back. He came up the road and got into the wagon. He was walking. Jewel hasn't got a horse anymore. Jewel is my brother. Cash is my brother. Cash has a broken leg. We fixed Cash's leg so it doesn't hurt. Cash is my brother. Jewel is my brother too, but he hasn't got a broken leg.

Now there are five of them, tall in little tall black circles.

"Where do they stay at night, Darl?" I say. "When we stop at night in the barn, where do they stay?"

The hill goes off into the sky. Then the sun comes up from behind the hill and the mules and the wagon and pa walk on the sun. You cannot watch them, walking slow on the sun. In Jefferson it is red on the track behind the glass. The track goes shining round and round. Dewey Dell says so.

Tonight I am going to see where they stay while we are in the barn.

Darl

"Jewel" I say, "whose son are you?"

The breeze was setting up from the barn, so we put her under the apple tree, where the moonlight can dapple the apple tree upon the long slumbering flanks within which now and then she talks in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling. I took Vardaman to listen. When we came up the cat leaped down from it and flicked away with silver claw and silver eye into the shadow.

"Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?"

"You goddamn lying son of a bitch."

"Dont call me that," I say.

"You goddamn lying son of a bitch."

"Dont you call me that, Jewel." In the tall moonlight his eyes look like spots of white paper pasted on a high small football.

After supper Cash began to sweat a little. "It's getting a little hot," he said. "It was the sun shining on it all day, I reckon."

"You want some water poured on it?" we say. "Maybe that will ease it some."

"I'd be obliged," Cash said. "It was the sun shining on it, I reckon. I ought to thought and kept it covered."

"We ought to thought," we said. "You couldn't have suspicioned."

"I never noticed it getting hot," Cash said. "I ought to minded it."

So we poured the water over it. His leg and foot below the cement looked like they had been boiled. "Does that feel better?" we said.

"I'm obliged," Cash said. "It feels fine."

Dewey Dell wipes his face with the hem of her dress.

"See if you can get some sleep," we say.

"Sho," Cash says. "I'm right obliged. It feels fine now."

Jewel, I say, Who was your father, Jewel?

Goddamn you. Goddamn you.

Vardaman

She was under the apple tree and Darl and I go across the moon and the cat jumps down and runs and we can hear her inside the wood.

"Hear?" Darl says. "Put your ear close."

I put my ear close and I can hear her. Only I cant tell what she is saying.

"What is she saying, Darl?" I say. "Who is she talking to?"

"She's talking to God," Darl says. "She is calling on Him to help her."

"What does she want Him to do?" I say.

"She wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man," Darl says.

"Why does she want to hide her away from the sight of man, Darl?"

"So she can lay down her life," Darl says.

"Why does she want to lay down her life, Darl?"

"Listen," Darl says. We hear her. We hear her turn over on her side. "Listen," Darl says.

"She's turned over," I say. "She's looking at me through the wood."

"Yes," Darl says.

"How can she see through the wood, Darl?"

"Come," Darl says. "We must let her be quiet. Come."

"She cant see out there, because the holes are in the top," I say. "How can she see, Darl?"

"Let's go see about Cash," Darl says.

And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody

Cash is sick in his leg. We fixed his leg this afternoon, but he is sick in it again, lying on the bed. We pour water on his leg and then he feels fine.

"I feel fine," Cash says. "I'm obliged to you."

"Try to get some sleep," we say.

"I feel fine," Cash says. "I'm obliged to you."

And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody. It is not about pa and it is not about Cash and it is not about Jewel and it is not about Dewey Dell and it is not about me

Dewey Dell and I are going to sleep on the pallet. It is on the back porch, where we can see the barn, and the moon shines on half of the pallet and we will lie half in the white and half in the black, with the moonlight on our legs. And then I am going to see where they stay at night while we are in the barn. We are not in the barn tonight but I can see the barn and so I am going to find where they stay at night.

We lie on the pallet, with our legs in the moon.

"Look," I say, "my legs look black. Your legs look black, too."

"Go to sleep," Dewey Dell says.

Jefferson is a far piece.

"Dewey Dell."

"What."

"If it's not Christmas now, how will it be there?"

It goes round and round on the shining track. Then the track goes shining round and round.

"Will what be there?"

"That train. In the window."

"You go to sleep. You can see tomorrow if it's there."

Maybe Santa Claus wont know they are town boys.

"Dewey Dell."

"You go to sleep. He aint going to let none of them town boys have it."

It was behind the window, red on the track, the track shining round and round. It made my heart hurt. And then it was pa and Jewel and Darl and Mr Gillespie's boy. Mr Gillespie's boy's legs come down under his night-shirt. When he goes into the moon, his legs fuzz. They go on around the house toward the apple tree.

"What are they going to do, Dewey Dell?"

They went around the house toward the apple tree.

"I can smell her," I say. "Can you smell her, too?"

"Hush," Dewey Dell says. "The wind's changed. Go to sleep."

And so I am going to know where they stay at night soon. They come around the house, going across the yard in the moon, carrying her on their shoulders. They carry her down to the barn, the moon shining flat and quiet on her. Then they come back and go into the house again. While they were in the moon, Mr Gillespie's boy's legs fuzzed. And then I waited and I said Dewey Dell? and then I waited and then I went to find where they stay at night and I saw something that Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody.

Darl

Against the dark doorway he seems to materialise out of darkness, lean as a race horse in his underclothes in the beginning of the glare. He leaps to the ground with on his face an expression of furious unbelief. He has seen me without even turning his head or his eyes in which the glare swims like two small torches. "Come on," he says, leaping down the slope toward the barn.

For an instant longer he runs silver in the moonlight, then he springs out like a flat figure cut leanly from tin against an abrupt and soundless explosion as the whole loft of the barn takes fire at once, as though it had been stuffed with powder. The front, the conical façade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin on the saw-

horses like a cubistic bug, comes into relief. Behind me pa and Gillespie and Mack and Dewey Dell and Vardaman emerge from the house.

He pauses at the coffin, stooping, looking at me, his face furious. Overhead the flames sound like thunder; across us rushes a cool draft: there is no heat in it at all yet, and a handful of chaff lifts suddenly and sucks swiftly along the stalls where a horse is screaming. "Quick," I say; "the horses."

He glares a moment longer at me, then at the roof overhead, then he leaps toward the stall where the horse screams. It plunges and kicks, the sound of the crashing blows sucking up into the sound of the flames. They sound like an interminable train crossing an endless trestle. Gillespie and Mack pass me, in knee-length nightshirts, shouting, their voices thin and high and meaningless and at the same time profoundly wild and sad: ". . . cow . . . stall . . ." Gillespie's nightshirt rushes ahead of him on the draft, ballooning about his hairy thighs.

The stall door has swung shut. Jewel thrusts it back with his buttocks and he appears, his back arched, the muscles ridged through his garment as he drags the horse out by its head. In the glare its eyes roll with soft, fleet, wild opaline fire; its muscles bunch and run as it flings its head about, lifting Jewel clear of the ground. He drags it on, slowly, terrifically; again he gives me across his shoulder a single glare furious and brief. Even when they are clear of the barn the horse continues to fight and lash backward toward the doorway until Gillespie passes me, stark-naked, his nightshirt wrapped about the mule's head, and beats the maddened horse on out of the door.

Jewel returns, running; again he looks down at the coffin. But he comes on. "Where's cow?" he cries, passing me. I follow him. In the stall Mack is struggling with the other mule. When its head turns into the glare I can see the wild rolling of its eye too, but it makes no sound. It just stands there, watching Mack over its shoulder, swinging its hind quarters toward him whenever he approaches. He looks back at us, his eyes and mouth three round holes in his face on which the freckles look like English peas on a plate. His voice is thin, high, faraway.

"I cant do nothing . . ." It is as though the sound had been swept from his lips and up and away, speaking back to us from an immense distance of exhaustion. Jewel slides past us; the mule whirls and lashes out, but he has already gained its head. I lean to Mack's ear:

"Nightshirt. Around his head."

Mack stares at me. Then he rips the nightshirt off and flings it over the mule's head, and it becomes docile at once. Jewel is yelling at him: "Cow? Cow?"

"Back," Mack cries. "Last stall."

The cow watches us as we enter. She is backed into the corner, head lowered, still chewing though rapidly. But she makes no move. Jewel has paused, looking up, and suddenly we watch the entire floor to the loft dissolve. It just turns to fire; a faint litter of sparks rains down. He glances about. Back under the trough is a three-legged milking stool. He catches it up and swings it into the planking of the rear wall. He splinters a plank, then another, a third; we tear the fragments away. While we are stooping at the opening something charges into us from behind. It is the cow; with a single whistling breath she rushes between us and through the gap and into the outer glare, her tail erect and rigid as a broom nailed upright to the end of her spine.

Jewel turns back into the barn. "Here," I say; "Jewel!" I grasp at him; he strikes my hand down. "You fool," I say, "dont you see you cant make it back yonder?" The hallway looks like a searchlight turned into rain. "Come on," I say, "around this way."

When we are through the gap he begins to run. "Jewel," I say, running. He darts around the corner. When I reach it he has almost reached the next one, running against the glare like that figure cut from tin. Pa and Gillespie and Mack are some distance away, watching the barn, pink against the darkness where for the time the moonlight has been vanquished. "Catch him!" I cry; "stop him!"

When I reach the front, he is struggling with Gillespie; the one lean in underclothes, the other stark naked. They are like two figures in a Greek frieze, isolated out of all reality by the red glare. Before I can reach them he has struck Gillespie to the ground and turned and run back into the barn.

The sound of it has become quite peaceful now, like the sound of the river did. We watch through the dissolving proscenium of the doorway as Jewel runs crouching to the far end of the coffin and stoops to it. For an instant he looks up and out at us through the rain of burning hay like a portiere of flaming beads, and I can see his mouth shape as he calls my name.

"Jewel!" Dewey Dell cries; "Jewel!" It seems to me that I now hear the accumulation of her voice through the last five minutes, and I hear her scuffling and struggling as pa and Mack hold her, screaming "Jewel! Jewel!" But he is no longer looking at us. We see his shoulders strain as he upends the coffin and slides it single-handed from the sawhorses. It looms unbelievably tall, hiding him: I would not have believed that Addie Bundren would have needed that much room to lie comfortable in; for another instant it stands upright while the sparks rain on it in scattering bursts as though they engendered other sparks from the contact. Then it topples forward, gaining momentum, revealing Jewel and the sparks raining on him too in engendering gusts, so that he appears to be enclosed in a thin nimbus of fire. Without stopping it overends and rears again, pauses, then crashes slowly forward and through the curtain. This time Jewel is riding upon it, clinging to it, until it crashes down and flings him forward and clear and Mack leaps forward into the thin smell of scorching meat and slaps at the widening crimson-edged holes that bloom like flowers in his undershirt.

Vardaman

When I went to find where they stay at night, I saw something They said, "Where is Darl? Where did Darl go?"

They carried her back under the apple tree.

The barn was still red, but it wasn't a barn now. It was sunk down, and the red went swirling up. The barn went swirling up in little red pieces, against the sky and the stars so that the stars moved backward.

And then Cash was still awake. He turned his head from side to side, with sweat on his face.

"Do you want some more water on it, Cash?" Dewey Dell said.

Cash's leg and foot turned black. We held the lamp and looked at Cash's foot and leg where it was black.

"Your foot looks like a nigger's foot, Cash," I said.

"I reckon we'll have to bust it off," pa said.

"What in the tarnation you put it on there for," Mr Gillespie said.

"I thought it would steady it some," pa said. "I just aimed to help him."

They got the flat iron and the hammer. Dewey Dell held the lamp. They had to hit it hard. And then Cash went to sleep.

"He's asleep now," I said. "It cant hurt him while he's asleep."

It just cracked. It wouldn't come off.

"It'll take the hide, too," Mr Gillespie said. "Why in the tarnation you put it on there. Didn't none of you think to grease his leg first?"

"I just aimed to help him," pa said. "It was Darl put it on."

"Where is Darl?" they said.

"Didn't none of you have more sense than that?" Mr Gillespie said. "I'd a thought he would, anyway."

Jewel was lying on his face. His back was red. Dewey Dell put the medicine on it. The medicine was made out of butter and soot, to draw out the fire. Then his back was black.

"Does it hurt, Jewel?" I said. "Your back looks like a nigger's, Jewel," I said. Cash's foot and leg looked like a nigger's. Then they broke it off. Cash's leg bled.

"You go on back and lay down," Dewey Dell said. "You ought to be asleep."

"Where is Darl?" they said.

He is out there under the apple tree with her, lying on her. He is there so the cat wont come back. I said, "Are you going to keep the cat away, Darl?"

The moonlight dappled on him too. On her it was still, but on Darl it dappled up and down.

"You needn't to cry," I said. "Jewel got her out. You needn't to cry, Darl."

The barn is still red. It used to be redder than this. Then it went swirling, making the stars run backward without falling. It hurt my heart like the train did.

When I went to find where they stay at night, I saw something that Dewey Dell says I mustn't never tell nobody

Darl

We have been passing the signs for some time now: the drug stores, the clothing stores, the patent medicine and the garages and cafes, and the mile-boards diminishing, becoming more starkly reaccruent: 3 mi. 2 mi. From the crest of a hill, as we get into the wagon again, we can see the smoke low and flat, seemingly unmoving in the unwinded afternoon.

"Is that it, Darl?" Vardaman says. "Is that Jefferson?" He too has lost flesh; like ours, his face has an expression strained, dreamy, and gaunt.

"Yes," I say. He lifts his head and looks at the sky. High against it they hang in narrowing circles, like the smoke, with an outward semblance of form and purpose, but with no inference of motion, progress or retrograde. We mount the wagon again where Cash lies on the box, the jagged shards of cement cracked about his leg. The shabby mules droop rattling and clanking down the hill.

"We'll have to take him to the doctor," pa says. "I reckon it aint no way around it." The back of Jewel's shirt, where it touches him, stains slow and

black with grease. Life was created in the valleys. It blew up onto the hills on the old terrors, the old lusts, the old despairs. That's why you must walk up the hills so you can ride down.

Dewey Dell sits on the seat, the newspaper package on her lap. When we reach the foot of the hill where the road flattens between close walls of trees, she begins to look about quietly from one side of the road to the other.

At last she says,

"I got to stop."

Pa looks at her, his shabby profile that of anticipant and disgruntled annoyance. He does not check the team. "What for?"

"I got to go to the bushes," Dewey Dell says.

Pa does not check the team. "Cant you wait till we get to town? It aint over a mile now."

"Stop," Dewey Dell says. "I got to go to the bushes."

Pa stops in the middle of the road and we watch Dewey Dell descend, carrying the package. She does not look back.

"Why not leave your cakes here?" I say. "We'll watch them."

She descends steadily, not looking at us.

"How would she know where to go if she waited till we get to town?" Vardaman says. "Where would you go to do it in town, Dewey Dell?"

She lifts the package down and turns and disappears among the trees and undergrowth.

"Dont be no longer than you can help," pa says. "We aint got no time to waste." She does not answer. After a while we cannot hear her even. "We ought to done like Armstid and Gillespie said and sent word to town and had it dug and ready," he says.

"Why didn't you?" I say. "You could have telephoned."

"What for?" Jewel says. "Who the hell cant dig a hole in the ground?"

A car comes over the hill. It begins to sound the horn, slowing. It runs along the roadside in low gear, the outside wheels in the ditch, and passes us and goes on. Vardaman watches it until it is out of sight.

"How far is it now, Darl?" he says.

"Not far," I say.

"We ought to done it," pa says. "I just never wanted to be beholden to none except her flesh and blood."

"Who the hell cant dig a damn hole in the ground?" Jewel says.

"It aint respectful, talking that way about her grave," pa says. "You all dont know what it is. You never pure loved her, none of you." Jewel does not answer. He sits a little stiffly erect, his body arched away from his shirt. His high-colored jaw juts.

Dewey Dell returns. We watch her emerge from the bushes, carrying the package, and climb into the wagon. She now wears her Sunday dress, her beads, her shoes and stockings.

"I thought I told you to leave them clothes to home," pa says. She does not answer, does not look at us. She sets the package in the wagon and gets in. The wagon moves on.

"How many more hills now, Darl?" Vardaman says.

"Just one," I say. "The next one goes right up into town."

This hill is red sand, bordered on either hand by negro cabins; against the sky ahead the massed telephone lines run, and the clock on the courthouse

lifts among the trees. In the sand the wheels whisper, as though the very earth would hush our entry. We descend as the hill commences to rise.

We follow the wagon, the whispering wheels, passing the cabins where faces come suddenly to the doors, white-eyed. We hear sudden voices, ejaculant. Jewel has been looking from side to side; now his head turns forward and I can see his ears taking on a still deeper tone of furious red. Three negroes walk beside the road ahead of us; ten feet ahead of them a white man walks. When we pass the negroes their heads turn suddenly with that expression of shock and instinctive outrage. "Great God," one says; "what they got in that wagon?"

Jewel whirls. "Son of a bitches," he says. As he does so he is abreast of the white man, who has paused. It is as though Jewel had gone blind for the moment, for it is the white man toward whom he whirls.

"Darl!" Cash says from the wagon. I grasp at Jewel. The white man has fallen back a pace, his face still slack-jawed; then his jaw tightens, claps to. Jewel leans above him, his jaw muscles gone white.

"What did you say?" he says.

"Here," I say. "He dont mean anything, mister. Jewel," I say. When I touch him he swings at the man. I grasp his arm; we struggle. Jewel has never looked at me. He is trying to free his arm. When I see the man again he has an open knife in his hand.

"Hold on, mister," I say; "I've got him. Jewel," I say.

"Thinks because he's a goddamn town fellow," Jewel says, panting, wrenching at me. "Son of a bitch," he says.

The man moves. He begins to edge around me, watching Jewel, the knife low against his flank. "Cant no man call me that," he says. Pa has got down, and Dewey Dell is holding Jewel, pushing at him. I release him and face the man.

"Wait," I say. "He dont mean nothing. He's sick; got burned in a fire last night, and he aint himself."

"Fire or no fire," the man says, "cant no man call me that."

"He thought you said something to him," I say.

"I never said nothing to him. I never see him before."

"Fore God," pa says; "fore God."

"I know," I say. "He never meant anything. He'll take it back."

"Let him take it back, then."

"Put up your knife, and he will."

The man looks at me. He looks at Jewel. Jewel is quiet now.

"Put up your knife," I say.

The man shuts the knife.

"Fore God," pa says. "Fore God."

"Tell him you didn't mean anything, Jewel," I say.

"I thought he said something," Jewel says. "Just because he's—"

"Hush," I say. "Tell him you didn't mean it."

"I didn't mean it," Jewel says.

"He better not," the man says. "Calling me a—"

"Do you think he's afraid to call you that?" I say.

The man looks at me. "I never said that," he said.

"Don't think it, neither," Jewel says.

"Shut up," I say. "Come on. Drive on, pa."

The wagon moves. The man stands watching us. Jewel does not look back. "Jewel would a whipped him," Vardaman says.

We approach the crest, where the street runs, where cars go back and forth; the mules haul the wagon up and onto the crest and the street. Pa stops them. The street runs on ahead, where the square opens and the monument stands before the courthouse. We mount again while the heads turn with that expression which we know; save Jewel. He does not get on, even though the wagon has started again. "Get in, Jewel," I say. "Come on. Let's get away from here." But he does not get in. Instead he sets his foot on the turning hub of the rear wheel, one hand grasping the stanchion, and with the hub turning smoothly under his sole he lifts the other foot and squats there, staring straight ahead, motionless, lean, wooden-backed, as though carved squatting out of the lean wood.

Cash

It wasn't nothing else to do. It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us, because he knowed some way that Darl set fire to it. I dont know how he knowed, but he did. Vardaman see him do it, but he swore he never told nobody but Dewey Dell and that she told him not to tell nobody. But Gillespie knowed it. But he would a suspicioned it sooner or later. He could have done it that night just watching the way Darl acted.

And so pa said, "I reckon there aint nothing else to do," and Jewel said, "You want to fix him now?"

"Fix him?" pa said.

"Catch him and tie him up," Jewel said. "Goddamn it, do you want to wait until he sets fire to the goddamn team and wagon?"

But there wasn't no use in that. "There aint no use in that," I said. "We can wait till she is underground." A fellow that's going to spend the rest of his life locked up, he ought to be let to have what pleasure he can have before he goes.

"I reckon he ought to be there," pa says. "God knows, it's a trial on me. Seems like it aint no end to bad luck when once it starts."

Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.

Because Jewel is too hard on him. Of course it was Jewel's horse was traded to get her that nigh to town, and in a sense it was the value of his horse Darl tried to burn up. But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. But I dont reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he cant see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they aint nothing else to do with him but what the most folks says is right.

But it's a shame, in a way. Folks seems to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a courthouse with and others dont have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy courthouse, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse.

So we went up the street, toward the square, and he said, "We better take Cash to the doctor first. We can leave him there and come back for him." That's it. It's because me and him was born close together, and it nigh ten years before Jewel and Dewey Dell and Vardaman begun to come along. I feel kin to them, all right, but I dont know. And me being the oldest, and thinking already the very thing that he done: I dont know.

Pa was looking at me, then at him, mumbling his mouth.

"Go on," I said. "We'll get it done first."

"She would want us all there," pa says.

"Let's take Cash to the doctor first," Darl said. "She'll wait. She's already waited nine days."

"You all dont know," pa says. "The somebody you was young with and you growed old in her and she growed old in you, seeing the old coming on and it was the one somebody you could hear say it dont matter and know it was the truth outen the hard world and all a man's grief and trials. You all dont know."

"We got the digging to do, too," I said.

"Armstid and Gillespie both told you to send word ahead," Darl said. "Dont you want to go to Peabody's now, Cash?"

"Go on," I said. "It feels right easy now. It's best to get things done in the right place."

"If it was just dug," pa says. "We forgot our spade, too."

"Yes," Darl said. "I'll go to the hardware store. We'll have to buy one."

"It'll cost money," pa says.

"Do you begrudge her it?" Darl says.

"Go on and get a spade," Jewel said. "Here. Give me the money."

But pa didn't stop. "I reckon we can get a spade," he said. "I reckon there are Christians here." So Darl set still and we went on, with Jewel squatting on the tail-gate, watching the back of Darl's head. He looked like one of these bull dogs, one of these dogs that dont bark none, squatting against the rope, watching the thing he was waiting to jump at.

He set that way all the time we was in front of Mrs Bundren's house, hearing the music, watching the back of Darl's head with them hard white eyes of hisn.

The music was playing in the house. It was one of them graphophones.¹ It was natural as a music-band.

"Do you want to go to Peabody's?" Darl said. "They can wait here and tell pa, and I'll drive you to Peabody's and come back for them."

1. Trademark of an early machine for playing recorded music using wax platters.

"No," I said. It was better to get her underground, now we was this close, just waiting until pa borrowed the shovel. He drove along the street until we could hear the music.

"Maybe they got one here," he said. He pulled up at Mrs Bundren's. It was like he knowed. Sometimes I think that if a working man could see work as far ahead as a lazy man can see laziness. So he stopped there like he knowed, before that little new house, where the music was. We waited there, hearing it. I believe I could have dickered Suratt down to five dollars on that one of his. It's a comfortable thing, music is. "Maybe they got one here," pa says.

"You want Jewel to go," Darl says, "or do you reckon I better?"

"I reckon I better," pa says. He got down and went up the path and around the house to the back. The music stopped, then it started again.

"He'll get it, too," Darl said.

"Ay," I said. It was just like he knowed, like he could see through the walls and into the next ten minutes.

Only it was more than ten minutes. The music stopped and never commenced again for a good spell, where her and pa was talking at the back. We waited in the wagon.

"You let me take you back to Peabody's," Darl said.

"No," I said. "We'll get her underground."

"If he ever gets back," Jewel said. He begun to cuss. He started to get down from the wagon. "I'm going," he said.

Then we saw pa coming back. He had two spades, coming around the house. He laid them in the wagon and got in and we went on. The music never started again. Pa was looking back at the house. He kind of lifted his hand a little and I saw the shade pulled back a little at the window and her face in it.

But the curiouesest thing was Dewey Dell. It surprised me. I see all the while how folks could say he was queer, but that was the very reason couldn't nobody hold it personal. It was like he was outside of it too, same as you, and getting mad at it would be kind of like getting mad at a mud-puddle that splashed you when you stepped in it. And then I always kind of had a idea that him and Dewey Dell kind of knowed things betwixt them. If I'd a said it was ere a one of us she liked better than ere a other, I'd a said it was Darl. But when we got it filled and covered and drove out the gate and turned into the lane where them fellows was waiting, when they come out and come on him and he jerked back, it was Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him. And then I believed I knowed how Gillespie knowed about how his barn taken fire.

She hadn't said a word, hadn't even looked at him, but when them fellows told him what they wanted and that they had come to get him and he throwed back, she jumped on him like a wild cat so that one of the fellows had to quit and hold her and her scratching and clawing at him like a wild cat, while the other one and pa and Jewel throwed Darl down and held him lying on his back, looking up at me.

"I thought you would have told me," he said. "I never thought you wouldn't have."

"Darl," I said. But he fought again, him and Jewel and the fellow, and the other one holding Dewey Dell and Vardaman yelling and Jewel saying,

"Kill him. Kill the son of a bitch."

It was bad so. It was bad. A fellow cant get away from a shoddy job. He cant do it. I tried to tell him, but he just said, "I thought you'd a told me. It's not that I," he said, then he begun to laugh. The other fellow pulled Jewel off of him and he sat there on the ground, laughing.

I tried to tell him. If I could have just moved, even set up. But I tried to tell him and he quit laughing, looking up at me.

"Do you want me to go?" he said.

"It'll be better for you," I said. "Down there it'll be quiet, with none of the bothering and such. It'll be better for you, Darl," I said.

"Better," he said. He begun to laugh again. "Better," he said. He couldn't hardly say it for laughing. He sat on the ground and us watching him, laughing and laughing. It was bad. It was bad so. I be durn if I could see anything to laugh at. Because there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into.

But I aint so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment.

Peabody

I said, "I reckon a man in a tight might let Bill Varner patch him up like a damn mule, but I be damned if the man that'd let Anse Bundren treat him with raw cement aint got more spare legs than I have."

"They just aimed to ease hit some," he said.

"Aimed, hell," I said. "What in hell did Armstid mean by even letting them put you on that wagon again?"

"Hit was gittin right noticeable," he said. "We never had time to wait." I just looked at him. "Hit never bothered me none," he said.

"Dont you lie there and try to tell me you rode six days on a wagon without springs, with a broken leg and it never bothered you."

"It never bothered me much," he said.

"You mean, it never bothered Anse much," I said. "No more than it bothered him to throw that poor devil down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer. Dont tell me. And dont tell me it aint going to bother you to lose sixty-odd square inches of skin to get that concrete off. And dont tell me it aint going to bother you to have to limp around on one short leg for the balance of your life—if you walk at all again. Concrete," I said. "God Amighty, why didn't Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family . . . Where is Anse, anyway? What's he up to now?"

"He's takin back them spades he borrowed," he said.

"That's right," I said. "Of course he'd have to borrow a spade to bury his wife with. Unless he could borrow a hole in the ground. Too bad you all didn't put him in it too . . . Does that hurt?"

"Not to speak of," he said, and the sweat big as marbles running down his face and his face about the color of blotting paper.

"Course not," I said. "About next summer you can hobble around fine on this leg. Then it wont bother you, not to speak of . . . If you had anything you could call luck, you might say it was lucky this is the same leg you broke before," I said.

"Hit's what paw says," he said.

MacGowan

It happened I am back of the prescription case, pouring up some chocolate sauce, when Jody comes back and says, "Say, Skeet, there's a woman up front that wants to see the doctor and when I said What doctor you want to see, she said she wants to see the doctor that works here and when I said There aint any doctor works here, she just stood there, looking back this way."

"What kind of a woman is it?" I says. "Tell her to go upstairs to Alford's office."

"Country woman," he says.

"Send her to the courthouse," I says. "Tell her all the doctors have gone to Memphis to a Barbers' Convention."

"All right," he says, going away. "She looks pretty good for a country girl," he says.

"Wait," I says. He waited and I went and peeped through the crack. But I couldn't tell nothing except she had a good leg against the light. "Is she young, you say?" I says.

"She looks like a pretty hot mamma, for a country girl," he says.

"Take this," I says, giving him the chocolate. I took off my apron and went up there. She looked pretty good. One of them black eyed ones that look like she'd as soon put a knife in you as not if you two-timed her. She looked pretty good. There wasn't nobody else in the store; it was dinner time.

"What can I do for you?" I says.

"Are you the doctor?" she says.

"Sure," I says. She quit looking at me and was kind of looking around.

"Can we go back yonder?" she says.

It was just a quarter past twelve, but I went and told Jody to kind of watch out and whistle if the old man come in sight, because he never got back before one.

"You better lay off of that," Jody says. "He'll fire your stern out of here so quick you cant wink."

"He dont never get back before one," I says. "You can see him go into the postoffice. You keep your eye peeled, now, and give me a whistle."

"What you going to do?" he says.

"You keep your eye out. I'll tell you later."

"Aint you going to give me no seconds on it?" he says.

"What the hell do you think this is?" I says; "a stud-farm? You watch out for him. I'm going into conference."

So I go on to the back. I stopped at the glass and smoothed my hair, then I went behind the prescription case, where she was waiting. She is looking at the medicine cabinet, then she looks at me.

"Now madam," I says; "what is your trouble?"

"It's the female trouble," she says, watching me. "I got the money," she says.

"Ah," I says. "Have you got female troubles or do you want female troubles? If so, you come to the right doctor." Them country people. Half the time they dont know what they want, and the balance of the time they cant tell it to you. The clock said twenty past twelve.

"No," she says.

"No which?" I says.

"I aint had it," she says. "That's it." She looked at me. "I got the money," she says.

So I knew what she was talking about.

"Oh," I says. "You got something in your belly you wish you didn't have." She looks at me. "You wish you had a little more or a little less, huh?"

"I got the money," she says. "He said I could git something at the drug-store for hit."

"Who said so?" I says.

"He did," she says, looking at me.

"You dont want to call no names," I says. "The one that put the acorn in your belly? He the one that told you?" She dont say nothing. "You aint married, are you?" I says. I never saw no ring. But like as not, they aint heard yet out there that they use rings.

"I got the money," she says. She showed it to me, tied up in her handkerchief: a ten spot.

"I'll swear you have," I says. "He give it to you?"

"Yes," she says.

"Which one?" I says. She looks at me. "Which one of them give it to you?"

"It aint but one," she says. She looks at me.

"Go on," I says. She dont say nothing. The trouble about the cellar is, it aint but one way out and that's back up the inside stairs. The clock says twenty-five to one. "A pretty girl like you," I says.

She looks at me. She begins to tie the money back up in the handkerchief. "Excuse me a minute," I says. I go around the prescription case. "Did you hear about that fellow sprained his ear?" I says. "After that he couldn't even hear a belch."

"You better get her out from back there before the old man comes," Jody says.

"If you'll stay up there in front where he pays you to stay, he wont catch nobody but me," I says.

He goes on, slow, toward the front. "What you doing to her, Skeet?" he says.

"I cant tell you," I says. "It wouldn't be ethical. You go on up there and watch."

"Say, Skeet," he says.

"Ah, go on," I says. "I aint doing nothing but filling a prescription."

"He may not do nothing about that woman back there, but if he finds you monkeying with that prescription case, he'll kick your stern clean down them cellar stairs."

"My stern has been kicked by bigger bastards than him," I says. "Go back and watch out for him, now."

So I come back. The clock said fifteen to one. She is tying the money in the handkerchief. "You aint the doctor," she says.

"Sure I am," I says. She watches me. "Is it because I look too young, or am I too handsome?" I says. "We used to have a bunch of old water-jointed

doctors here," I says; "Jefferson used to be a kind of Old Doctors' Home for them. But business started falling off and folks stayed so well until one day they found out that the women wouldn't never get sick at all. So they run all the old doctors out and got us young good-looking ones that the women would like and then the women begun to get sick again and so business picked up. They're doing that all over the country. Hadn't you heard about it? Maybe it's because you aint never needed a doctor."

"I need one now," she says.

"And you come to the right one," I says. "I already told you that."

"Have you got something for it?" she says. "I got the money."

"Well," I says, "of course a doctor has to learn all sorts of things while he's learning to roll calomel; he cant help himself. But I dont know about your trouble."

"He told me I could get something. He told me I could get it at the drug-store."

"Did he tell you the name of it?" I says. "You better go back and ask him."

She quit looking at me, kind of turning the handkerchief in her hands. "I got to do something," she says.

"How bad do you want to do something?" I says. She looks at me. "Of course, a doctor learns all sorts of things folks dont think he knows. But he aint supposed to tell all he knows. It's against the law."

Up front Jody says, "Skeet."

"Excuse me a minute," I says. I went up front. "Do you see him?" I says.

"Aint you done yet?" he says. "Maybe you better come up here and watch and let me do that consulting."

"Maybe you'll lay a egg," I says. I come back. She is looking at me. "Of course you realise that I could be put in the penitentiary for doing what you want," I says. "I would lose my license and then I'd have to go to work. You realise that?"

"I aint got but ten dollars," she says. "I could bring the rest next month, maybe."

"Pooh," I says, "ten dollars? You see, I cant put no price on my knowledge and skill. Certainly not for no little paltry sawbuck."

She looks at me. She dont even blink. "What you want, then?"

The clock said four to one. So I decided I better get her out. "You guess three times and then I'll show you," I says.

She dont even blink her eyes. "I got to do something," she says. She looks behind her and around, then she looks toward the front. "Gimme the medicine first," she says.

"You mean, you're ready to right now?" I says. "Here?"

"Gimme the medicine first," she says.

So I took a graduated glass and kind of turned my back to her and picked out a bottle that looked all right, because a man that would keep poison setting around in a unlabelled bottle ought to be in jail, anyway. It smelled like turpentine. I poured some into the glass and give it to her. She smelled it, looking at me across the glass.

"Hit smells like turpentine," she says.

"Sure," I says. "That's just the beginning of the treatment. You come back at ten oclock tonight and I'll give you the rest of it and perform the operation."

“Operation?” she says.

“It wont hurt you. You’ve had the same operation before. Ever hear about the hair of the dog?”

She looks at me. “Will it work?” she says.

“Sure it’ll work. If you come back and get it.”

So she drunk whatever it was without batting a eye, and went out. I went up front.

“Didn’t you get it?” Jody says.

“Get what?” I says.

“Ah, come on,” he says. “I aint going to try to beat your time.”

“Oh, her,” I says. “She just wanted a little medicine. She’s got a bad case of dysentery and she’s a little ashamed about mentioning it with a stranger there.”

It was my night, anyway, so I helped the old bastard check up and I got his hat on him and got him out of the store by eight-thirty. I went as far as the corner with him and watched him until he passed under two street lamps and went on out of sight. Then I come back to the store and waited until nine-thirty and turned out the front lights and locked the door and left just one light burning at the back, and I went back and put some talcum powder into six capsules and kind of cleared up the cellar and then I was all ready.

She come in just at ten, before the clock had done striking. I let her in and she come in, walking fast. I looked out the door, but there wasn’t nobody but a boy in overalls sitting on the curb. “You want something?” I says. He never said nothing, just looking at me. I locked the door and turned off the light and went on back. She was waiting. She didn’t look at me now.

“Where is it?” she said.

I gave her the box of capsules. She held the box in her hand, looking at the capsules.

“Are you sure it’ll work?” she says.

“Sure,” I says. “When you take the rest of the treatment.”

“Where do I take it?” she says.

“Down in the cellar,” I says.

Vardaman

Now it is wider and lighter, but the stores are dark because they have all gone home. The stores are dark, but the lights pass on the windows when we pass. The lights are in the trees around the courthouse. They roost in the trees, but the courthouse is dark. The clock on it looks four ways, because it is not dark. The moon is not dark too. Not very dark. *Darl he went to Jackson is my brother Darl is my brother* Only it was over that way, shining on the track.

“Let’s go that way, Dewey Dell,” I say.

“What for?” Dewey Dell says. The track went shining around the window, it red on the track. But she said he would not sell it to the town boys. “But it will be there Christmas,” Dewey Dell says. “You’ll have to wait till then, when he brings it back.”

Darl went to Jackson. Lots of people didn’t go to Jackson. Darl is my brother. My brother is going to Jackson

While we walk the lights go around, roosting in the trees. On all sides it is the same. They go around the courthouse and then you cannot see them. But you can see them in the black windows beyond. They have all gone home to bed except me and Dewey Dell.

Going on the train to Jackson. My brother

There is a light in the store, far back. In the window are two big glasses of soda water, red and green. Two men could not drink them. Two mules could not. Two cows could not. *Darl*

A man comes to the door. He looks at Dewey Dell.

"You wait out here," Dewey Dell says.

"Why cant I come in?" I say. "I want to come in, too."

"You wait out here," she says.

"All right," I say.

Dewey Dell goes in.

Darl is my brother. Darl went crazy

The walk is harder than sitting on the ground. He is in the open door. He looks at me. "You want something?" he says. His head is slick. Jewel's head is slick sometimes. Cash's head is not slick. *Darl he went to Jackson my brother Darl* In the street he ate a banana. *Wouldn't you rather have bananas? Dewey Dell said. You wait till Christmas. It'll be there then. Then you can see it. So we are going to have some bananas. We are going to have a bag full, me and Dewey Dell.* He locks the door. Dewey Dell is inside. Then the light winks out.

He went to Jackson. He went crazy and went to Jackson both. Lots of people didn't go crazy. Pa and Cash and Jewel and Dewey Dell and me didn't go crazy. We never did go crazy. We didn't go to Jackson either. Darl

I hear the cow a long time, clopping on the street. Then she comes into the square. She goes across the square, her head down clopping. She lows. There was nothing in the square before she lowed, but it wasn't empty. Now it is empty after she lowed. She goes on, clopping. She lows. *My brother is Darl. He went to Jackson on the train. He didn't go on the train to go crazy. He went crazy in our wagon. Darl* She has been in there a long time. And the cow is gone too. A long time. She has been in there longer than the cow was. But not as long as empty. *Darl is my brother. My brother Darl*

Dewey Dell comes out. She looks at me.

"Let's go around that way now," I say.

She looks at me. "It aint going to work," she says. "That son of a bitch."

"What aint going to work, Dewey Dell?"

"I just know it wont," she says. She is not looking at anything. "I just know it."

"Let's go that way," I say.

"We got to go back to the hotel. It's late. We got to slip back in."

"Cant we go by and see, anyway?"

"Hadn't you rather have bananas? Hadn't you rather?"

"All right." *My brother he went crazy and he went to Jackson too. Jackson is further away than crazy*

"It wont work," Dewey Dell says. "I just know it wont."

"What wont work?" I say. *He had to get on the train to go to Jackson. I have not been on the train, but Darl has been on the train. Darl. Darl is my brother. Darl. Darl*

Darl

Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said.

"Yes yes yes yes yes."

Two men put him on the train. They wore mismatched coats, bulging behind over their right hip pockets. Their necks were shaved to a hairline, as though the recent and simultaneous barbers had had a chalk-line like Cash's. "Is it the pistols you're laughing at?" I said. "Why do you laugh?" I said. "Is it because you hate the sound of laughing?"

They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh. One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I don't know what that is. Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face. I know what that is. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?"

"Yes yes yes yes yes."

The wagon stands on the square, hitched, the mules motionless, the reins wrapped about the seat-spring, the back of the wagon toward the courthouse. It looks no different from a hundred other wagons there; Jewel standing beside it and looking up the street like any other man in town that day, yet there is something different, distinctive. There is about it that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have, perhaps due to the fact that Dewey Dell and Vardaman on the seat and Cash on a pallet in the wagon bed are eating bananas from a paper bag. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?"

Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams.

"Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes."

Dewey Dell

When he saw the money I said, "It's not my money, it doesn't belong to me."

"Whose is it, then?"

"It's Cora Tull's money. It's Mrs Tull's. I sold the cakes for it."

"Ten dollars for two cakes?"

"Don't you touch it. It's not mine."

"You never had them cakes. It's a lie. It was them Sunday clothes you had in that package."

"Don't you touch it! If you take it you are a thief."

"My own daughter accuses me of being a thief. My own daughter."

"Pa. Pa."

"I have fed you and sheltered you. I give you love and care, yet my own daughter, the daughter of my dead wife, calls me a thief over her mother's grave."

"Its not mine, I tell you. If it was, God knows you could have it."

"Where did you get ten dollars?"

"Pa. Pa."

"You wont tell me. Did you come by it so shameful you dare not?"

"It's not mine, I tell you. Cant you understand it's not mine?"

"It's not like I wouldn't pay it back. But she calls her own father a thief."

"I cant, I tell you. I tell you it's not my money. God knows you could have it."

"I wouldn't take it. My own born daughter that has et my food for seventeen years, begrudges me the loan of ten dollars."

"It's not mine. I cant."

"Whose is it, then?"

"It was give to me. To buy something with."

"To buy what with?"

"Pa. Pa."

"It's just a loan. God knows, I hate for my blooden children to reproach me. But I give them what was mine without stint. Cheerful I give them, without stint. And now they deny me. Addie. It was lucky for you you died, Addie."

"Pa. Pa."

"God knows it is."

He took the money and went out.

Cash

So when we stopped there to borrow the shovels we heard the graphophone playing in the house, and so when we got done with the shovels pa says, "I reckon I better take them back."

So we went back to the house. "We better take Cash on to Peabody's," Jewel said.

"It wont take but a minute," pa said. He got down from the wagon. The music was not playing now.

"Let Vardaman do it," Jewel said. "He can do it in half the time you can. Or here, you let me—"

"I reckon I better do it," pa says. "Long as it was me that borrowed them."

So we set in the wagon, but the music wasn't playing now. I reckon it's a good thing we aint got ere a one of them. I reckon I wouldn't never get no work done a-tall for listening to it. I dont know if a little music aint about the nicest thing a fellow can have. Seems like when he comes in tired of a night, it aint nothing could rest him like having a little music played and him resting. I have see them that shuts up like a hand-grip, with a handle and all, so a fellow can carry it with him wherever he wants.

"What you reckon he's doing?" Jewel says. "I could a toted them shovels back and forth ten times by now."

"Let him take his time," I said. "He aint as spry as you, remember."

"Why didn't he let me take them back, then? We got to get your leg fixed up so we can start home tomorrow."

"We got plenty of time," I said. "I wonder what them machines costs on the installment."

"Installment of what?" Jewel said. "What you got to buy it with?"

"A fellow cant tell," I said. "I could a bought that one from Suratt for five dollars, I believe."

And so pa come back and we went to Peabody's. While we was there pa said he was going to the barbershop and get a shave. And so that night he said he had some business to tend to, kind of looking away from us while he said it, with his hair combed wet and slick and smelling sweet with perfume, but I said leave him be; I wouldn't mind hearing a little more of that music myself.

And so next morning he was gone again, then he come back and told us to get hitched up and ready to take out and he would meet us and when they was gone he said,

"I dont reckon you got no more money."

"Peabody just give me enough to pay the hotel with," I said. "We dont need nothing else, do we?"

"No," pa said; "no. We dont need nothing." He stood there, not looking at me.

"If it is something we got to have, I reckon maybe Peabody," I said.

"No," he said; "it aint nothing else. You all wait for me at the corner."

So Jewel got the team and come for me and they fixed me a pallet in the wagon and we drove across the square to the corner where pa said, and we was waiting there in the wagon, with Dewey Dell and Vardaman eating bananas, when we see them coming up the street. Pa was coming along with that kind of daresome and hangdog look all at once like when he has been up to something he knows ma aint going to like, carrying a grip in his hand, and Jewel says,

"Who's that?"

Then we see it wasn't the grip that made him look different; it was his face, and Jewel says, "He got them teeth."

It was a fact. It made him look a foot taller, kind of holding his head up, hangdog and proud too, and then we see her behind him, carrying the other grip—a kind of duck-shaped woman all dressed up, with them kind of hard-looking pop eyes like she was daring ere a man to say nothing. And there we set watching them, with Dewey Dell's and Vardaman's mouth half open and half-et bananas in their hands and her coming around from behind pa, looking at us like she dared ere a man. And then I see that the grip she was carrying was one of them little graphophones. It was for a fact, all shut up as pretty as a picture, and everytime a new record would come from the mail order and us setting in the house in the winter, listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life.

"It's Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell," pa says, kind of hangdog and proud too, with his teeth and all, even if he wouldn't look at us. "Meet Mrs Bundren," he says.

A Rose for Emily

I

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor—he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron—remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply. They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse—a close, dank smell. The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sunray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered—a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on

an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily—"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared. "Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart—the one we believed would marry her—had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man—a young man then—going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man—any man—could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

"But what will you have me do about it, madam?" he said.

"Why, send her word to stop it," the woman said. "Isn't there a law?"

"I'm sure that won't be necessary," Judge Stevens said. "It's probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I'll speak to him about it."

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. "We really must do something about it, Judge. I'd be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we've got to do something." That night the Board of Aldermen met—three gray-beards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

"It's simple enough," he said. "Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don't"

"Dammit, sir," Judge Stevens said, "will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?"

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings. As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows—sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began to work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee—a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town. Whenever you heard a lot of laughing

anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*—without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily. Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could" This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jealousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough—even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eyesockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—"

"I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is arsenic? Yes ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet,"

because Homer himself had remarked—he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club—that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily," behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister—Miss Emily's people were Episcopal—to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron—the streets had been finished some time since—was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent on Sundays with a twenty-five-cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows—she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house—like the carved torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation—dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men—some in their brushed Confederate uniforms—on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road, but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left

upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.

1931

Barn Burning

The store in which the Justice of the Peace's court was sitting smelled of cheese. The boy, crouched on his nail keg at the back of the crowded room, knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish—this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled coming in intermittent gusts momentary and brief between the other constant one, the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood. He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (*our enemy* he thought in that despair; *ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!*) stood, but he could hear them, the two of them that is, because his father had said no word yet:

"But what proof have you, Mr. Harris?"

"I told you. The hog got into my corn. I caught it up and sent it back to him. He had no fence that would hold it. I told him so, warned him. The next time I put the hog in my pen. When he came to get it I gave him enough wire to patch up his pen. The next time I put the hog up and kept it. I rode down to his house and saw the wire I gave him still rolled on to the spool in his yard. I told him he could have the hog when he paid me a dollar pound fee. That evening a nigger came with the dollar and got the hog. He was a strange nigger. He said, 'He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn.' I said, 'What?' 'That whut he say to tell you,' the nigger said. 'Wood and hay kin burn.' That night my barn burned. I got the stock out but I lost the barn."

"Where is the nigger? Have you got him?"

"He was a strange nigger, I tell you. I don't know what became of him."

"But that's not proof. Don't you see that's not proof?"

"Get that boy up here. He knows." For a moment the boy thought too that the man meant his older brother until Harris said, "Not him. The little one.

The boy," and, crouching, small for his age, small and wiry like his father, in patched and faded jeans even too small for him, with straight, uncombed, brown hair and eyes gray and wild as storm scud, he saw the men between himself and the table part and become a lane of grim faces, at the end of which he saw the Justice, a shabby, collarless, graying man in spectacles, beckoning him. He felt no floor under his bare feet; he seemed to walk beneath the palpable weight of the grim turning faces. His father, stiff in his black Sunday coat donned not for the trial but for the moving, did not even look at him. *He aims for me to lie*, he thought, again with that frantic grief and despair. *And I will have to do hit.*

"What's your name, boy?" the Justice said.

"Colonel Sartoris Snopes,"¹ the boy whispered.

"Hey?" the Justice said. "Talk louder. Colonel Sartoris? I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?" The boy said nothing. *Enemy! Enemy!* he thought; for a moment he could not even see, could not see that the Justice's face was kindly nor discern that his voice was troubled when he spoke to the man named Harris: "Do you want me to question this boy?" But he could hear, and during those subsequent long seconds while there was absolutely no sound in the crowded little room save that of quiet and intent breathing it was as if he had swung outward at the end of a grape vine, over a ravine, and at the top of the swing had been caught in a prolonged instant of mesmerized gravity, weightless in time.

"No!" Harris said violently, explosively. "Damnation! Send him out of here!" Now time, the fluid world, rushed beneath him again, the voices coming to him again through the smell of cheese and sealed meat, the fear and despair and the old grief of blood:

"This case is closed. I can't find against you, Snopes, but I can give you advice. Leave this country and don't come back to it."

His father spoke for the first time, his voice cold and harsh, level, without emphasis: "I aim to. I don't figure to stay in a country among people who . . ." he said something unprintable and vile, addressed to no one.

"That'll do," the Justice said. "Take your wagon and get out of this country before dark. Case dismissed."

His father turned, and he followed the stiff black coat, the wiry figure walking a little stiffly from where a Confederate provost's man's musket ball had taken him in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago, followed the two backs now, since his older brother had appeared from somewhere in the crowd, no taller than the father but thicker, chewing tobacco steadily, between the two lines of grim-faced men and out of the store and across the worn gallery and down the sagging steps and among the dogs and half-grown boys in the mild May dust, where as he passed a voice hissed:

"Barn burner!"

Again he could not see, whirling; there was a face in a red haze, moonlike, bigger than the full moon, the owner of it half again his size, he leaping in

1. The boy is named for Colonel Sartoris, a leading citizen of Jefferson (the fictional town that Faulkner based on his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi) and an officer in the Confederate Army.

The Snopeses are a poor white family from the same area. Both families appear in other works by Faulkner.

the red haze toward the face, feeling no blow, feeling no shock when his head struck the earth, scrabbling up and leaping again, feeling no blow this time either and tasting no blood, scrabbling up to see the other boy in full flight and himself already leaping into pursuit as his father's hand jerked him back, the harsh, cold voice speaking above him: "Go get in the wagon."

It stood in a grove of locusts and mulberries across the road. His two hulking sisters in their Sunday dresses and his mother and her sister in calico and sunbonnets were already in it, sitting on and among the sorry residue of the dozen and more movings which even the boy could remember—the battered stove, the broken beds and chairs, the clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run, stopped at some fourteen minutes past two o'clock of a dead and forgotten day and time, which had been his mother's dowry. She was crying, though when she saw him she drew her sleeve across her face and began to descend from the wagon. "Get back," the father said.

"He's hurt. I got to get some water and wash his . . ."

"Get back in the wagon," his father said. He got in too, over the tail-gate. His father mounted to the seat where the older brother already sat and struck the gaunt mules two savage blows with the peeled willow, but without heat. It was not even sadistic; it was exactly that same quality which in later years would cause his descendants to over-run the engine before putting a motor car into motion, striking and reining back in the same movement. The wagon went on, the store with its quiet crowd of grimly watching men dropped behind; a curve in the road hid it. *Forever* he thought. *Maybe he's done satisfied now, now that he has . . .* stopping himself, not to say it aloud even to himself. His mother's hand touched his shoulder.

"Does hit hurt?" she said.

"Naw," he said. "Hit don't hurt. Lemme be."

"Can't you wipe some of the blood off before hit dries?"

"I'll wash to-night," he said. "Lemme be, I tell you."

The wagon went on. He did not know where they were going. None of them ever did or ever asked, because it was always somewhere, always a house of sorts waiting for them a day or two days or even three days away. Likely his father had already arranged to make a crop on another farm before he . . . Again he had to stop himself. He (the father) always did. There was something about his wolflike independence and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravening ferocity not so much a sense of dependability as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his.

That night they camped, in a grove of oaks and beeches where a spring ran. The nights were still cool and they had a fire against it, of a rail lifted from a nearby fence and cut into lengths—a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire; such fires were his father's habit and custom always, even in freezing weather. Older, the boy might have remarked this and wondered why not a big one; why should not a man who had not only seen the waste and extravagance of war, but who had in his blood an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own, have burned everything in sight? Then he might have gone a step farther and thought that that was the reason: that niggard blaze was the living fruit of nights passed during those four years in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray, with his strings of horses (captured

horses, he called them). And older still, he might have divined the true reason: that the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being, as the element of steel or of powder spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion.

But he did not think this now and he had seen those same niggard blazes all his life. He merely ate his supper beside it and was already half asleep over his iron plate when his father called him, and once more he followed the stiff back, the stiff and ruthless limp, up the slope and on to the starlit road where, turning, he could see his father against the stars but without face or depth—a shape black, flat, and bloodless as though cut from tin in the iron folds of the frockcoat which had not been made for him, the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin:

"You were fixing to tell them. You would have told him." He didn't answer. His father struck him with the flat of his hand on the side of the head, hard but without heat, exactly as he had struck the two mules at the store, exactly as he would strike either of them with any stick in order to kill a horse fly, his voice still without heat or anger: "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you. Do you think either of them, any man there this morning, would? Don't you know all they wanted was a chance to get at me because they knew I had them beat? Eh?" Later, twenty years later, he was to tell himself, "If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again." But now he said nothing. He was not crying. He just stood there. "Answer me," his father said.

"Yes," he whispered. His father turned.

"Get on to bed. We'll be there to-morrow."

To-morrow they were there. In the early afternoon the wagon stopped before a paintless two-room house identical almost with the dozen others it had stopped before even in the boy's ten years, and again, as on the other dozen occasions, his mother and aunt got down and began to unload the wagon, although his two sisters and his father and brother had not moved.

"Likely hit ain't fitten for hawgs," one of the sisters said.

"Nevertheless, fit it will and you'll hog it and like it," his father said. "Get out of them chairs and help your Ma unload."

The two sisters got down, big, bovine, in a flutter of cheap ribbons; one of them drew from the jumbled wagon bed a battered lantern, the other a worn broom. His father handed the reins to the older son and began to climb stiffly over the wheel. "When they get unloaded, take the team to the barn and feed them." Then he said, and at first the boy thought he was still speaking to his brother: "Come with me."

"Me?" he said.

"Yes," his father said. "You."

"Abner," his mother said. His father paused and looked back—the harsh level stare beneath the shaggy, graying, irascible brows.

"I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin to-morrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months."

They went back up the road. A week ago—or before last night, that is—he would have asked where they were going, but not now. His father had

struck him before last night but never before had he paused afterward to explain why; it was as if the blow and the following calm, outrageous voice still rang, reperculated, divulging nothing to him save the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events.

Presently he could see the grove of oaks and cedars and the other flowering trees and shrubs where the house would be, though not the house yet. They walked beside a fence massed with honeysuckle and Cherokee roses and came to a gate swinging open between two brick pillars, and now, beyond a sweep of drive, he saw the house for the first time and at that instant he forgot his father and the terror and despair both, and even when he remembered his father again (who had not stopped) the terror and despair did not return. Because, for all the twelve movings, they had sojourned until now in a poor country, a land of small farms and fields and houses, and he had never seen a house like this before. *Hit's big as a courthouse* he thought quietly, with a surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought into words, being too young for that: *They are safe from him. People whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity are beyond his touch, he no more to them than a buzzing wasp: capable of stinging for a little moment but that's all; the spell of this peace and dignity rendering even the barns and stable and cribs which belong to it impervious to the puny flames he might contrive . . .* this, the peace and joy, ebbing for an instant as he looked again at the stiff black back, the stiff and implacable limp of the figure which was not dwarfed by the house, for the reason that it had never looked big anywhere and which now, against the serene columned backdrop, had more than ever that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow. Watching him, the boy remarked the absolutely undeviating course which his father held and saw the stiff foot come squarely down in a pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride. But it ebbed only for a moment, though he could not have thought this into words either, walking on in the spell of the house, which he could even want but without envy, without sorrow, certainly never with that ravening and jealous rage which unknown to him walked in the ironlike black coat before him: *Maybe he will feel it too. Maybe it will even change him now from what maybe he couldn't help but be.*

They crossed the portico. Now he could hear his father's stiff foot as it came down on the boards with clocklike finality, a sound out of all proportion to the displacement of the body it bore and which was not dwarfed either by the white door before it, as though it had attained to a sort of vicious and ravening minimum not to be dwarfed by anything—the flat, wide, black hat, the formal coat of broadcloth which had once been black but which had now that friction-gazed greenish cast of the bodies of old house flies, the lifted sleeve which was too large, the lifted hand like a curled claw. The door opened so promptly that the boy knew the Negro must have been watching them all the time, an old man with neat grizzled hair, in a linen jacket, who stood barring the door with his body, saying, “Wipe yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow.”

“Get out of my way, nigger,” his father said, without heat too, flinging the door back and the Negro also and entering, his hat still on his head. And now the boy saw the prints of the stiff foot on the doorjamb and saw them appear on the pale rug behind the machinelike deliberation of the foot which seemed to bear (or transmit) twice the weight which the body compassed. The Negro was shouting “Miss Lula! Miss Lula!” somewhere behind them, then the boy, deluged as though by a warm wave by a suave turn of carpeted stair and a pendant glitter of chandeliers and a mute gleam of gold frames, heard the swift feet and saw her too, a lady—perhaps he had never seen her like before either—in a gray, smooth gown with lace at the throat and an apron tied at the waist and the sleeves turned back, wiping cake or biscuit dough from her hands with a towel as she came up the hall, looking not at his father at all but at the tracks on the blond rug with an expression of incredulous amazement.

“I tried,” the Negro cried. “I tole him to . . .”

“Will you please go away?” she said in a shaking voice. “Major de Spain is not at home. Will you please go away?”

His father had not spoken again. He did not speak again. He did not even look at her. He just stood stiff in the center of the rug, in his hat, the shaggy iron-gray brows twitching slightly above the pebble-colored eyes as he appeared to examine the house with brief deliberation. Then with the same deliberation he turned; the boy watched him pivot on the good leg and saw the stiff foot drag round the arc of the turning, leaving a final long and fading smear. His father never looked at it, he never once looked down at the rug. The Negro held the door. It closed behind them, upon the hysteric and indistinguishable woman-wail. His father stopped at the top of the steps and scraped his boot clean on the edge of it. At the gate he stopped again. He stood for a moment, planted stiffly on the stiff foot, looking back at the house. “Pretty and white, ain’t it?” he said. “That’s sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain’t white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it.”

Two hours later the boy was chopping wood behind the house within which his mother and aunt and the two sisters (the mother and aunt, not the two girls, he knew that; even at this distance and muffled by walls the flat loud voices of the two girls emanated an incorrigible idle inertia) were setting up the stove to prepare a meal, when he heard the hooves and saw the linen-clad man on a fine sorrel mare, whom he recognized even before he saw the rolled rug in front of the Negro youth following on a fat bay carriage horse—a suffused, angry face vanishing, still at full gallop, beyond the corner of the house where his father and brother were sitting in the two tilted chairs; and a moment later, almost before he could have put the axe down, he heard the hooves again and watched the sorrel mare go back out of the yard, already galloping again. Then his father began to shout one of the sisters’ names, who presently emerged backward from the kitchen door dragging the rolled rug along the ground by one end while the other sister walked behind it.

“If you ain’t going to tote, go on and set up the wash pot,” the first said.

“You, Sarty!” the second shouted. “Set up the wash pot!” His father appeared at the door, framed against that shabbiness, as he had been against that other bland perfection, impervious to either, the mother’s anxious face at his shoulder.

“Go on,” the father said. “Pick it up.” The two sisters stooped, broad, lethargic; stooping, they presented an incredible expanse of pale cloth and a flutter of tawdry ribbons.

“If I thought enough of a rug to have to git hit all the way from France I wouldn’t keep hit where folks coming in would have to tromp on hit,” the first said. They raised the rug.

“Abner,” the mother said. “Let me do it.”

“You go back and git dinner,” his father said. “I’ll tend to this.”

From the woodpile through the rest of the afternoon the boy watched them, the rug spread flat in the dust beside the bubbling wash-pot, the two sisters stooping over it with that profound and lethargic reluctance, while the father stood over them in turn, implacable and grim, driving them though never raising his voice again. He could smell the harsh homemade lye they were using; he saw his mother come to the door once and look toward them with an expression not anxious now but very like despair; he saw his father turn, and he fell to with the axe and saw from the corner of his eye his father raise from the ground a flattish fragment of field stone and examine it and return to the pot, and this time his mother actually spoke: “Abner. Abner. Please don’t. Please, Abner.”

Then he was done too. It was dusk; the whippoorwills had already begun. He could smell coffee from the room where they would presently eat the cold food remaining from the mid-afternoon meal, though when he entered the house he realized they were having coffee again probably because there was a fire on the hearth, before which the rug now lay spread over the backs of the two chairs. The tracks of his father’s foot were gone. Where they had been were now long, water-cloudy scoriations resembling the sporadic course of a lilliputian mowing machine.

It still hung there while they ate the cold food and then went to bed, scattered without order or claim up and down the two rooms, his mother in one bed, where his father would later lie, the older brother in the other, himself, the aunt, and the two sisters on pallets on the floor. But his father was not in bed yet. The last thing the boy remembered was the depthless, harsh silhouette of the hat and coat bending over the rug and it seemed to him that he had not even closed his eyes when the silhouette was standing over him, the fire almost dead behind it, the stiff foot prodding him awake. “Catch up the mule,” his father said.

When he returned with the mule his father was standing in the black door, the rolled rug over his shoulder. “Ain’t you going to ride?” he said.

“No. Give me your foot.”

He bent his knee into his father’s hand, the wiry, surprising power flowed smoothly, rising, he rising with it, on to the mule’s bare back (they had owned a saddle once; the boy could remember it though not when or where) and with the same effortlessness his father swung the rug up in front of him. Now in the starlight they retraced the afternoon’s path, up the dusty road rife with honeysuckle, through the gate and up the black tunnel of the drive to the lightless house, where he sat on the mule and felt the rough warp of the rug drag across his thighs and vanish.

“Don’t you want me to help?” he whispered. His father did not answer and now he heard again that stiff foot striking the hollow portico with that

wooden and clocklike deliberation, that outrageous overstatement of the weight it carried. The rug, hunched, not flung (the boy could tell that even in the darkness) from his father's shoulder, struck the angle of wall and floor with a sound unbelievably loud, thunderous, then the foot again, unhurried and enormous; a light came on in the house and the boy sat, tense, breathing steadily and quietly and just a little fast, though the foot itself did not increase its beat at all, descending the steps now; now the boy could see him.

"Don't you want to ride now?" he whispered. "We kin both ride now," the light within the house altering now, flaring up and sinking. *He's coming down the stairs now*, he thought. He had already ridden the mule up beside the horse block; presently his father was up behind him and he doubled the reins over and slashed the mule across the neck, but before the animal could begin to trot the hard, thin arm came round him, the hard, knotted hand jerking the mule back to a walk.

In the first red rays of the sun they were in the lot, putting plow gear on the mules. This time the sorrel mare was in the lot before he heard it at all, the rider collarless and even bareheaded, trembling, speaking in a shaking voice as the woman in the house had done, his father merely looking up once before stooping again to the hame he was buckling, so that the man on the mare spoke to his stooping back:

"You must realize you have ruined that rug. Wasn't there anybody here, any of your women . . ." he ceased, shaking, the boy watching him, the older brother leaning now in the stable door, chewing, blinking slowly and steadily at nothing apparently. "It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had a hundred dollars. You never will. So I'm going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your crop. I'll add it in your contract and when you come to the commissary you can sign it. That won't keep Mrs. de Spain quiet but maybe it will teach you to wipe your feet off before you enter her house again."

Then he was gone. The boy looked at his father, who still had not spoken or even looked up again, who was now adjusting the logger-head in the hame.

"Pap," he said. His father looked at him—the inscrutable face, the shaggy brows beneath which the gray eyes glinted coldly. Suddenly the boy went toward him, fast, stopping as suddenly. "You done the best you could!" he cried. "If he wanted hit done different why didn't he wait and tell you how? He won't git no twenty bushels! He won't git none! We'll gether hit and hide hit! I kin watch . . ."

"Did you put the cutter back in that straight stock like I told you?"

"No, sir," he said.

"Then go do it."

That was Wednesday. During the rest of that week he worked steadily, at what was within his scope and some which was beyond it, with an industry that did not need to be driven nor even commanded twice; he had this from his mother, with the difference that some at least of what he did he liked to do, such as splitting wood with the half-size axe which his mother and aunt had earned, or saved money somehow, to present him with at Christmas. In company with the two older women (and on one afternoon, even one of the sisters), he built pens for the shoat and the cow which were a part of his father's contract with the landlord, and one afternoon, his father being absent, gone somewhere on one of the mules, he went to the field.

They were running a middle buster now, his brother holding the plow straight while he handled the reins, and walking beside the straining mule, the rich black soil shearing cool and damp against his bare ankles, he thought *Maybe this is the end of it. Maybe even that twenty bushels that seems hard to have to pay for just a rug will be a cheap price for him to stop forever and always from being what he used to be*; thinking, dreaming now, so that his brother had to speak sharply to him to mind the mule: *Maybe he even won't collect the twenty bushels. Maybe it will all add up and balance and vanish—corn, rug, fire; the terror and grief, the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses—gone, done with for ever and ever.*

Then it was Saturday; he looked up from beneath the mule he was harnessing and saw his father in the black coat and hat. "Not that," his father said. "The wagon gear." And then, two hours later, sitting in the wagon bed behind his father and brother on the seat, the wagon accomplished a final curve, and he saw the weathered paintless store with its tattered tobacco- and patent-medicine posters and the tethered wagons and saddle animals below the gallery. He mounted the gnawed steps behind his father and brother, and there again was the lane of quiet, watching faces for the three of them to walk through. He saw the man in spectacles sitting at the plank table and he did not need to be told this was a Justice of the Peace; he sent one glare of fierce, exultant, partisan defiance at the man in collar and cravat now, whom he had seen but twice before in his life, and that on a galloping horse, who now wore on his face an expression not of rage but of amazed unbelief which the boy could not have known was at the incredible circumstance of being sued by one of his own tenants, and came and stood against his father and cried at the Justice: "He ain't done it! He ain't burnt . . ."

"Go back to the wagon," his father said.

"Burnt?" the Justice said. "Do I understand this rug was burned too?"

"Does anybody here claim it was?" his father said. "Go back to the wagon." But he did not, he merely retreated to the rear of the room, crowded as that other had been, but not to sit down this time, instead, to stand pressing among the motionless bodies, listening to the voices:

"And you claim twenty bushels of corn is too high for the damage you did to the rug?"

"He brought the rug to me and said he wanted the tracks washed out of it. I washed the tracks out and took the rug back to him."

"But you didn't carry the rug back to him in the same condition it was in before you made the tracks on it."

His father did not answer, and now for perhaps half a minute there was no sound at all save that of breathing, the faint, steady suspiration of complete and intent listening.

"You decline to answer that, Mr. Snopes?" Again his father did not answer. "I'm going to find against you, Mr. Snopes. I'm going to find that you were responsible for the injury to Major de Spain's rug and hold you liable for it. But twenty bushels of corn seems a little high for a man in your circumstances to have to pay. Major de Spain claims it cost a hundred dollars. October corn will be worth about fifty cents. I figure that if Major de Spain can stand a ninety-five-dollar loss on something he paid cash for, you can stand a five-dollar loss you haven't earned yet. I hold you in damages to Major de

Spain to the amount of ten bushels of corn over and above your contract with him, to be paid to him out of your crop at gathering time. Court adjourned."

It had taken no time hardly, the morning was but half begun. He thought they would return home and perhaps back to the field, since they were late, far behind all other farmers. But instead his father passed on behind the wagon, merely indicating with his hand for the older brother to follow with it, and crossed the road toward the blacksmith shop opposite, pressing on after his father, overtaking him, speaking, whispering up at the harsh, calm face beneath the weathered hat: "He won't git no ten bushels neither. He won't git one. We'll . . ." until his father glanced for an instant down at him, the face absolutely calm, the grizzled eyebrows tangled above the cold eyes, the voice almost pleasant, almost gentle:

"You think so? Well, we'll wait till October anyway."

The matter of the wagon—the setting of a spoke or two and the tightening of the tires—did not take long either, the business of the tires accomplished by driving the wagon into the spring branch behind the shop and letting it stand there, the mules nuzzling into the water from time to time, and the boy on the seat with the idle reins, looking up the slope and through the sooty tunnel of the shed where the slow hammer rang and where his father sat on an upended cypress bolt, easily, either talking or listening, still sitting there when the boy brought the dripping wagon up out of the branch and halted it before the door.

"Take them on to the shade and hitch," his father said. He did so and returned. His father and the smith and a third man squatting on his heels inside the door were talking, about crops and animals; the boy, squatting too in the ammoniac dust and hoof-parings and scales of rust, heard his father tell a long and unhurried story out of the time before the birth of the older brother even when he had been a professional horsetrader. And then his father came up beside him where he stood before a tattered last year's circus poster on the other side of the store, gazing rapt and quiet at the scarlet horses, the incredible poisonings and convolutions of tulle and tights and the painted leers of comedians, and said "It's time to eat."

But not at home. Squatting beside his brother against the front wall, he watched his father emerge from the store and produce from a paper sack a segment of cheese and divide it carefully and deliberately into three with his pocket knife and produce crackers from the same sack. They all three squatted on the gallery and ate, slowly, without talking; then in the store again, they drank from a tin dipper tepid water smelling of the cedar bucket and of living beech trees. And still they did not go home. It was a horse lot this time, a tall rail fence upon and along which men stood and sat and out of which one by one horses were led, to be walked and trotted and then cantered back and forth along the road while the slow swapping and buying went on and the sun began to slant westward, they—the three of them—watching and listening, the older brother with his muddy eyes and his steady, inevitable tobacco, the father commenting now and then on certain of the animals, to no one in particular.

It was after sundown when they reached home. They ate supper by lamplight, then, sitting on the doorstep, the boy watched the night fully accomplish, listening to the whippoorwills and the frogs, when he heard his mother's voice: "Abner! No! No! Oh, God. Oh, God. Abner!" and he rose,

whirled, and saw the altered light through the door where a candle stub now burned in a bottle neck on the table and his father, still in the hat and coat, at once formal and burlesque as though dressed carefully for some shabby and ceremonial violence, emptying the reservoir of the lamp back into the five-gallon kerosene can from which it had been filled, while the mother tugged at his arm until he shifted the lamp to the other hand and flung her back, not savagely or viciously, just hard, into the wall, her hands flung out against the wall for balance, her mouth open and in her face the same quality of hopeless despair as had been in her voice. Then his father saw him standing in the door.

"Go to the barn and get that can of oil we were oiling the wagon with," he said. The boy did not move. Then he could speak.

"What . . ." he cried. "What are you . . ."

"Go get that oil," his father said. "Go."

Then he was moving, running, outside the house, toward the stable: this is the old habit, the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed him willy nilly and which had run for so long (and who knew where, battenning on what of outrage and savagery and lust) before it came to him. *I could keep on*, he thought. *I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can't. I can't*, the rusted can in his hand now, the liquid splashing in it as he ran back to the house and into it, into the sound of his mother's weeping in the next room, and handed the can to his father.

"Ain't you going to even send a nigger?" he cried. "At least you sent a nigger before!"

This time his father didn't strike him. The hand came even faster than the blow had, the same hand which had set the can on the table with almost excruciating care flashing from the can toward him too quick for him to follow it, gripping him by the back of his shirt and on to tiptoe before he had seen it quit the can, the face stooping at him in breathless and frozen ferocity, the cold, dead voice speaking over him to the older brother who leaned against the table, chewing with that steady, curious, sidewise motion of cows:

"Empty the can into the big one and go on. I'll catch up with you."

"Better tie him up to the bedpost," the brother said.

"Do like I told you," the father said. Then the boy was moving, his bunched shirt and the hard, bony hand between his shoulder-blades, his toes just touching the floor, across the room and into the other one, past the sisters sitting with spread heavy thighs in the two chairs over the cold hearth, and to where his mother and aunt sat side by side on the bed, the aunt's arms about his mother's shoulders.

"Hold him," the father said. The aunt made a startled movement. "Not you," the father said. "Lennie. Take hold of him. I want to see you do it." His mother took him by the wrist. "You'll hold him better than that. If he gets loose don't you know what he is going to do? He will go up yonder." He jerked his head toward the road. "Maybe I'd better tie him."

"I'll hold him," his mother whispered.

"See you do then." Then his father was gone, the stiff foot heavy and measured upon the boards, ceasing at last.

Then he began to struggle. His mother caught him in both arms, he jerking and wrenching at them. He would be stronger in the end, he knew that.

But he had no time to wait for it. "Lemme go!" he cried. "I don't want to have to hit you!"

"Let him go!" the aunt said. "If he don't go, before God, I am going there myself!"

"Don't you see I can't!" his mother cried. "Sarty! Sarty! No! No! Help me, Lizzie!"

Then he was free. His aunt grasped at him but it was too late. He whirled, running, his mother stumbled forward on to her knees behind him, crying to the nearer sister: "Catch him, Net! Catch him!" But that was too late too, the sister (the sisters were twins, born at the same time, yet either of them now gave the impression of being, encompassing as much living meat and volume and weight as any other two of the family) not yet having begun to rise from the chair, her head, face, alone merely turned, presenting to him in the flying instant an astonishing expanse of young female features untroubled by any surprise even, wearing only an expression of bovine interest. Then he was out of the room, out of the house, in the mild dust of the starlit road and the heavy rifeness of honeysuckle, the pale ribbon unspooling with terrific slowness under his running feet, reaching the gate at last and turning in, running, his heart and lungs drumming, on up the drive toward the lighted house, the lighted door. He did not knock, he burst in, sobbing for breath, incapable for the moment of speech; he saw the astonished face of the Negro in the linen jacket without knowing when the Negro had appeared.

"De Spain!" he cried, panted. "Where's . . ." then he saw the white man too emerging from a white door down the hall. "Barn!" he cried. "Barn!"

"What?" the white man said. "Barn?"

"Yes!" the boy cried. "Barn!"

"Catch him!" the white man shouted.

But it was too late this time too. The Negro grasped his shirt, but the entire sleeve, rotten with washing, carried away, and he was out that door too and in the drive again, and had actually never ceased to run even while he was screaming into the white man's face.

Behind him the white man was shouting, "My horse! Fetch my horse!" and he thought for an instant of cutting across the park and climbing the fence into the road, but he did not know the park nor how high the vine-massed fence might be and he dared not risk it. So he ran on down the drive, blood and breath roaring; presently he was in the road again though he could not see it. He could not hear either: the galloping mare was almost upon him before he heard her, and even then he held his course, as if the very urgency of his wild grief and need must in a moment more find him wings, waiting until the ultimate instant to hurl himself aside and into the weed-choked roadside ditch as the horse thundered past and on, for an instant in furious silhouette against the stars, the tranquil early summer night sky which, even before the shape of the horse and rider vanished, stained abruptly and violently upward: a long, swirling roar incredible and soundless, blotting the stars, and he springing up and into the road again, running again, knowing it was too late yet still running even after he heard the shot and, an instant later, two shots, pausing now without knowing he had ceased to run, crying "Pap! Pap!", running again before he knew he had begun to run, stumbling, tripping over something and scrabbling up again without ceasing to run, looking backward over his shoulder at the

glare as he got up, running on among the invisible trees, panting, sobbing, "Father! Father!"

At midnight he was sitting on the crest of a hill. He did not know it was midnight and he did not know how far he had come. But there was no glare behind him now and he sat now, his back toward what he had called home for four days anyhow, his face toward the dark woods which he would enter when breath was strong again, small, shaking steadily in the chill darkness, hugging himself into the remainder of his thin, rotten shirt, the grief and despair now no longer terror and fear but just grief and despair. *Father. My father*, he thought. "He was brave!" he cried suddenly, aloud but not loud, no more than a whisper: "He was! He was in the war! He was in Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!" not knowing that his father had gone to that war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag, going to war as Malbrouck² himself did: for booty—it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy booty or his own.

The slow constellations wheeled on. It would be dawn and then sun-up after a while and he would be hungry. But that would be to-morrow and now he was only cold, and walking would cure that. His breathing was easier now and he decided to get up and go on, and then he found that he had been asleep because he knew it was almost dawn, the night almost over. He could tell that from the whippoorwills. They were everywhere now among the dark trees below him, constant and inflectioned and ceaseless, so that, as the instant for giving over to the day birds drew nearer and nearer, there was no interval at all between them. He got up. He was a little stiff, but walking would cure that too as it would the cold, and soon there would be the sun. He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing—the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back.

1938

2. Figure in an 18th-century French ballad, "Malbrouck Has Gone to the War," popularly identified with John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough (1650–1722), who rose through the

ranks from private to become a famous commander. Despite his military genius, he was often accused of greed and disloyalty.

HART CRANE

1899–1932

Before his suicide at the age of thirty-two, Hart Crane led a life of extremes: he wrote poetry of frequently ecstatic intensity, drank uncontrollably, had bitterly ambivalent relations with his quarreling parents; he relished the comparative erotic freedom of post–World War I Greenwich Village while enduring his literary friends' disapproval of his homosexuality. Born and raised in Ohio, Crane went to New York

City in 1917, ostensibly to prepare for college but in fact to investigate the possibility of a literary career. Returning to Cleveland for four years (1919–23), he tried unsuccessfully to enter business as a means of financing an after-hours literary life. During these years he read widely and developed a large circle of intellectual friends and correspondents. He also published some of the poems that made his early reputation: “My Grandmother’s Love Letters” in 1920, “Chaplinesque” in 1921, and “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen” in 1922. He also began work on the love sequence *Voyages*. By 1923, believing himself ready to succeed as a writer, he moved back to New York City.

His most productive years came between 1923 and 1927. He completed *Voyages* in 1924, published his first collection, *White Buildings*, in 1926, and composed ten of the fifteen poems that were to make up *The Bridge* in 1926. He held occasional jobs, but received most of his support from his parents, friends, and above all from the patronage of a banker, Otto Kahn. Crane defined himself as a follower of Walt Whitman in the visionary, prophetic, affirmative American tradition, aiming at nothing less than to master the techniques of modernism while reversing its direction—to make it positive, celebratory, and deeply meshed with contemporary American life without sacrificing technical complexity or richness. For him as for the somewhat older William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was both threat and model. That poem could become an “absolute impasse,” he wrote, unless one could “go *through* it to a different goal,” leaving its negations behind. This was the task he attempted in *The Bridge*.

Crane’s practice centered on metaphor—the device that, in his view, represented the difference between poetry and expository prose. He believed that metaphor had preceded logic in the development of human thought and that it still remained the primary mode in which human knowledge was acquired and through which experience was connected to mind. The center of *The Bridge*, for example, is the Brooklyn Bridge—a tangible object transformed metaphorically into the sign of connection, technology, America, history, and the future. The poem, published in 1930, was not particularly well received by the critics; this was a great disappointment to Crane, and even though *Poetry* magazine awarded it a prize and the Guggenheim Foundation gave him a fellowship in the same year, he was perplexed about his future. In Mexico he completed work for a third book, *Key West*, but on the return trip to New York City he jumped overboard and drowned.

The Bridge is a visionary poem made up of fifteen individual sections of varying lengths. It encapsulates a heroic quest, at once personal and epic, to find and enunciate “America.” Like Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road,” which also focused on a symbol of expansion and dynamism, *The Bridge* moves westward in imagination from Brooklyn to California. It also goes back into the American past, dwelling on historical or legendary figures such as Columbus, Pocahontas, and Rip Van Winkle. It moves upward under the guidance of Whitman; down in “The Tunnel” it meets the wandering spirit of Edgar Allan Poe. The material bridge stands at the center of all this motion and stands, finally, for the poem and poetry itself. The separate lyrics making up *The Bridge* are arranged like music, with recurring, modulated themes rather than a narrative or an expository line. As in most modernist poems, the verse is open and varied, the syntax complicated and often ambiguous, the references often dependent on a personal, sometimes inaccessible train of thought. Like his model Whitman, Crane wrote from the paradoxical, conflicted position of the outsider claiming to speak from and for the very center of America.

The text of the poems included here is that of *Complete Poems of Hart Crane*, edited by Marc Simon (1993).

Chaplinsque¹

We make our meek adjustments,
 Contented with such random consolations
 As the wind deposits
 In slithered and too ample pockets.

For we can still love the world, who find 5
 A famished kitten on the step, and know
 Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
 Or warm torn elbow coverts.

We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
 Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb 10
 That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
 Facing the dull squint with what innocence
 And what surprise!

And yet these fine collapses are not lies
 More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane; 15
 Our obsequies² are, in a way, no enterprise.
 We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
 What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
 The moon in lonely alleys make 20
 A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
 And through all sound of gaiety and quest
 Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.

1921, 1926

At Melville's Tomb¹

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
 The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
 An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
 Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.²

1. Crane wrote of seeing Charlie Chaplin's film *The Kid* (1921) and said that he aimed "to put in words some of the Chaplin pantomime, so beautiful, and so full of eloquence, and so modern." The film "made me feel myself, as a poet, as being 'in the same boat' with him," Crane wrote.

2. In the double sense of "funeral rites" and "obsequiousness."

1. This poem was published in *Poetry* magazine only after Crane provided the editor, Harriet Monroe, with a detailed explanation of its images. His letter and Monroe's inquiries and comments were published with the poem. Crane's detailed comments in the letter are incorporated in the

notes to the poem. Herman Melville (1819–1891), American author.

2. "Dice bequeath an embassy, in the first place, by being ground (in this connection only, of course) in little cubes from the bones of drowned men by the action of the sea, and are finally thrown up on the sand, having 'numbers' but no identification. These being the bones of dead men who never completed their voyage, it seems legitimate to refer to them as the only surviving evidence of certain messages undelivered, mute evidence of certain things. . . . Dice as a symbol of chance and circumstance is also implied" [Crane's note].

And wrecks passed without sound of bells, 5
 The calyx of death's bounty giving back
 A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,
 The portent wound in corridors of shells.³

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil, 10
 Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,
 Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars;⁴
 And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive
 No farther tides⁵ . . . High in the azure steeps
 Monody shall not wake the mariner. 15
 This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

1926

FROM THE BRIDGE

*From going to and fro in the earth,
 and from walking up and down in it.*
 —The Book of Job¹

To Brooklyn Bridge

*How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
 The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
 Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
 Over the chained bay waters Liberty—*

*Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes 5
 As apparitional as sails that cross
 Some page of figures to be filed away;
 —Till elevators drop us from our day . . .*

3. "This calyx refers in a double ironic sense both to a cornucopia and the vortex made by a sinking vessel. As soon as the water has closed over a ship this whirlpool sends up broken spars, wreckage, etc., which can be alluded to as livid *hieroglyphs*, making a *scattered chapter* so far as any complete record of the recent ship and crew is concerned. In fact, about as much definite knowledge might come from all this as anyone might gain from the roar of his own veins, which is easily heard (haven't you ever done it?) by holding a shell close to one's ear" [Crane's note]. A calyx is a whorl of leaves forming the outer casing of the bud of a plant.

4. "Refers simply to a conviction that a man, not knowing perhaps a definite god yet being endowed with a reverence for deity—such a man naturally postulates a deity somehow, and the

altar of that deity by the very *action* of the eyes *lifted* in searching" [Crane's note].

5. "Hasn't it often occurred that instruments originally invented for record and computation have inadvertently so extended the concepts of the entity they were invented to measure (concepts of space, etc.) in the mind and imagination that employed them, that they may metaphorically be said to have extended the original boundaries of the entity measured? This little bit of 'relativity' ought not to be discredited in poetry now that scientists are proceeding to measure the universe on principles of pure *ratio*, quite as metaphorical, so far as previous standards of scientific methods extended, as some of the axioms in *Job*" [Crane's note].

1. Satan's answer to Jehovah when asked where he has been (Job 1.7).

*I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
 With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene 10
 Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
 Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;*

*And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
 As though the sun took step of thee, yet left 15
 Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
 Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!*

*Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
 A bedlamite² speeds to thy parapets,
 Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,
 A jest falls from the speechless caravan. 20*

*Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
 A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
 All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
 Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.*

*And obscure as that heaven of the Jews, 25
 Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
 Of anonymity time cannot raise:
 Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.*

*O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
 (How could mere toil align thy choring strings!) 30
 Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
 Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—*

*Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
 Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
 Beading thy path—condense eternity: 35
 And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.*

*Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
 Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
 The City's fiery parcels all undone,
 Already snow submerges an iron year . . . 40*

*O Sleepless as the river under thee,
 Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
 Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
 And of the curvship lend a myth to God.*

1927, 1930

2. Insane person, patient in a hospital for the mentally ill.

*From II. Powhatan's Daughter*¹

* * *

*The River*²

Stick your patent name on a signboard
 brother—all over—going west—young man
 Tintex—Japalac—Certain-teed Overalls ads³
 and lands sakes! under the new playbill ripped
 5 in the guaranteed corner—see Bert Williams⁴ what?
 Minstrels when you steal a chicken just
 save me the wing for if it isn't
 Erie it ain't for miles around a
 Mazda—and the telegraphic night coming on Thomas
 10 a Ediford⁵—and whistling down the tracks
 a headlight rushing with the sound—can you
 imagine—while an express makes time like
 SCIENCE—COMMERCE AND THE HOLYGHOST
 15 WALLSTREET AND VIRGINBIRTH WITHOUT STONES OR
 WIRES OR EVEN RUNNING brooks connecting ears
 and no more sermons windows flashing roar
 breathtaking—as you like it⁶ . . . eh?

*. . . and past
 the din and
 slogans of
 the year—*

20 So the 20th Century—so
 whizzed the Limited—roared by and left
 three men, still hungry on the tracks, ploddingly
 watching the tail lights wizen and converge, slipping
 gimleted and neatly out of sight.

• • • • •

25 The last bear, shot drinking in the Dakotas
 Loped under wires that span the mountain stream.
 Keen instruments,⁷ strung to a vast precision
 Bind town to town and dream to ticking dream.
 But some men take their liquor slow—and count
 —Though they'll confess no rosary nor clue—

*to those
 whose
 addresses
 are never
 near*

1. Powhatan was the Native American chief with whom English settlers in Virginia (1607) had to deal. Pocahontas (1595–1617) was his daughter, whom Crane associated with the American “continent,” a “nature symbol” comparable to the “traditional Hertha of ancient Teutonic mythology.”

2. Crane wrote the following in a letter: “I’m trying in this part of the poem to chart the pioneer experience of our forefathers—and to tell the story backwards . . . on the ‘backs’ of hoboos. These hoboos are simply ‘psychological ponies’ to carry the reader across the country and back to the Mississippi, which you will notice is described as a great River of Time. I also unlatch the door to the pure Indian world which opens out in ‘The Dance’ section, so the reader is gradually led back in time to the pure savage world, while existing at

the same time in the present.” In the opening lines the image of a subway is translated into an image of a luxury express train, the Twentieth Century Limited, traveling from New York City to Chicago.

3. Advertising slogans: trade names of a dye, a varnish, and a brand of overalls.

4. Egbert A. Williams (1876–1922), popular black minstrel show performer.

5. A combined reference to Thomas Edison (1847–1931), inventor of the electric lightbulb (trade name “Mazda”), and Henry Ford (1863–1947), automobile manufacturer.

6. An echo of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* 2.1.16–17: “Books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones.”

7. The telephone and telegraph.

30 The river's minute by the far brook's year.
 Under a world of whistles, wires and steam
 Caboose-like they go ruminating through
 Ohio, Indiana—blind baggage—
 To Cheyenne tagging . . . Maybe Kalamazoo.

35 Time's rendings, time's blendings they construe
 As final reckonings of fire and snow;
 Strange bird-wit, like the elemental gist
 Of unwall'd winds they offer, singing low
My Old Kentucky Home and *Casey Jones*,
 40 *Some Sunny Day*. I heard a road-gang chanting so.

And afterwards, who had a colt's eyes—one said,
 "Jesus! Oh I remember watermelon days!" And sped
 High in a cloud of merriment, recalled
 "—And when my Aunt Sally Simpson smiled," he drawled—
 45 "It was almost Louisiana, long ago."
 "There's no place like Booneville though, Buddy,"
 One said, excising a last burr from his vest,
 "—For early trout-ing." Then peering in the can,
 "—But I kept on the tracks." Possessed, resigned,
 50 He trod the fire down pensively and grinned,
 Spreading dry shingles of a beard. . . .

Behind

My father's cannery works I used to see
 Rail-squatters ranged in nomad raiillery,
 55 The ancient men—wifeless or runaway
 Hobo-trekkers that forever search
 An empire wilderness of freight and rails.
 Each seemed a child, like me, on a loose perch,
 Holding to childhood like some termless play.
 60 John, Jake or Charley, hopping the slow freight
 —Memphis to Tallahassee—riding the rods,
 Blind fists of nothing, humpty-dumpty clods.

Yet they touch something like a key perhaps.
 From pole to pole across the hills, the states
 65 —They know a body under the wide rain;
 Youngsters with eyes like fjords, old reprobates
 With racetrack jargon,—dotting immensity
 They lurk across her, knowing her yonder breast
 Snow-silvered, sumac-stained or smoky blue—
 70 Is past the valley-sleepers, south or west.
 —As I have trod the rumorous midnights, too,

*but who have
 touched her,
 knowing her
 without name*

And past the circuit of the lamp's thin flame
 (O Nights that brought me to her body bare!)
 Have dreamed beyond the print that bound her name.
 75 Trains sounding the long blizzards out—I heard
 Wail into distances I knew were hers.

Papooses crying on the wind's long mane
 Screamed redskin dynasties that fled the brain,
 —Dead echoes! But I knew her body there,
 80 Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark,
 And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair.

Under the Ozarks, domed by Iron Mountain,
 The old gods of the rain lie wrapped in pools
 Where eyeless fish curvet a sunken fountain
 85 And re-descend with corn from querulous crows.
 Such pilferings make up their timeless eatage,
 Propitiate them for their timber torn
 By iron, iron—always the iron dealt cleavage!
 They doze now, below axe and powder horn.

*nor the
 myths of her
 fathers . . .*

90 And Pullman breakfasters glide glistening steel
 From tunnel into field—iron strides the dew—
 Straddles the hill, a dance of wheel on wheel.
 You have a half-hour's wait at Siskiyou,
 Or stay the night and take the next train through.
 95 Southward, near Cairo passing, you can see
 The Ohio merging,—borne down Tennessee;
 And if it's summer and the sun's in dusk
 Maybe the breeze will lift the River's musk
 —As though the waters breathed that you might know
 100 *Memphis Johnny, Steamboat Bill, Missouri Joe.*
 Oh, lean from the window, if the train slows down,
 As though you touched hands with some ancient clown,
 —A little while gaze absently below
 And hum *Deep River* with them while they go.

105 Yes, turn again and sniff once more—look see,
 O Sheriff, Brakeman and Authority—
 Hitch up your pants and crunch another quid,⁸
 For you, too, feed the River timelessly.

And few evade full measure of their fate;
 110 Always they smile out eerily what they seem.
 I could believe he joked at heaven's gate—
 Dan Midland—jolted from the cold brake-beam.⁹

Down, down—born pioneers in time's despite,
 Grimed tributaries to an ancient flow—
 115 They win no frontier by their wayward plight,
 But drift in stillness, as from Jordan's¹ brow.

You will not hear it as the sea; even stone
 Is not more hushed by gravity . . . But slow,
 As loth to take more tribute—sliding prone

8. Chunk of chewing tobacco.

9. Structure on a railroad car where hoboes ride.
 Dan Midland was a legendary hobo who fell to his

death from a train.

1. River mentioned frequently in the Bible.

120 Like one whose eyes were buried long ago
 The River, spreading, flows—and spends your dream.
 What are you, lost within this tideless spell?
 You are your father's father, and the stream—
 A liquid theme that floating niggers swell.

125 Damp tonnage and alluvial march of days—
 Nights turbid, vascular with silted shale
 And roots surrendered down of moraine clays:
 The Mississippi drinks the farthest dale.

130 O quarrying passion, undertowed sunlight!
 The basalt surface drags a jungle grace
 Ochreous and lynx-barred in lengthening might;
 Patience! and you shall reach the biding place!

Over De Soto's bones the freighted floors
 Throb past the City storied of three thrones.²
 135 Down two more turns the Mississippi pours
 (Anon tall ironsides³ up from salt lagoons)

And flows within itself, heaps itself free.
 All fades but one thin skyline 'round . . . Ahead
 No embrace opens but the stinging sea;
 140 The River lifts itself from its long bed,

Poised wholly on its dream, a mustard glow
 Tortured with history, its one will—flow!
 —The Passion spreads in wide tongues, choked and slow,
 Meeting the Gulf, hosannas silently below.

1930

VII. The Tunnel

*To Find the Western path
 Right thro' the Gates of Wrath.*
 —Blake¹

Performances, assortments, résumés—
 Up Times Square to Columbus Circle lights
 Channel the congresses, nightly sessions,
 Refractions of the thousand theatres, faces—
 Mysterious kitchens. . . You shall search them all. 5
 Someday by heart you'll learn each famous sight
 And watch the curtain lift in hell's despite;
 You'll find the garden in the third act dead,

2. New Orleans, at various times under Spanish, French, and English rule. The body of the Spanish explorer Hernándo de Soto (1500–1542) was consigned to the Mississippi River. In 1862 Admiral David G. Farragut (1801–1870) led a Union

fleet up the Mississippi from the Gulf and captured New Orleans.

3. Warships.

1. The opening lines of "Morning," by the visionary English poet William Blake (1757–1827).

Finger your knees—and wish yourself in bed
With tabloid crime-sheets perched in easy sight. 10

Then let you reach your hat
and go.
As usual, let you—also
walking down—exclaim
to twelve upward leaving 15
a subscription praise
for what time slays.

Or can't you quite make up your mind to ride;
A walk is better underneath the L² a brisk
Ten blocks or so before? But you find yourself 20
Preparing penguin flexions of the arms,—
As usual you will meet the scuttle yawn:
The subway yawns the quickest promise home.

Be minimum, then, to swim the hiving swarms
Out of the Square, the Circle burning bright³— 25
Avoid the glass doors gyring at your right,
Where boxed alone a second, eyes take fright
—Quite unprepared rush naked back to light:
And down beside the turnstile press the coin
Into the slot. The gongs already rattle. 30

And so
of cities you bespeak
subways, rivered under streets
and rivers. . . . In the car
the overtone of motion 35
underground, the monotone
of motion is the sound
of other faces, also underground—

“Let's have a pencil Jimmy—living now
at Floral Park 40
Flatbush—on the fourth of July—
like a pigeon's muddy dream—potatoes
to dig in the field—travlin the town—too—
night after night—the Culver line—the
girls all shaping up—it used to be—” 45

Our tongues recant like beaten weather vanes.
This answer lives like verdigris,⁴ like hair
Beyond extinction, surcease of the bone;
And repetition freezes—“What
“what do you want? getting weak on the links?
fandaddle daddy don't ask for change—IS THIS 50
FOURTEENTH? it's half past six she said—if

2. Elevated railway.

3. An echo of Blake's poem “The Tyger”; also the

lighted sign indicating a subway station.

4. Green coating or stain on copper.

you don't like my gate why did you
 swing on it, why *didja*
 swing on it
 anyhow—” 55

And somehow anyhow swing—

The phonographs of hades in the brain
 Are tunnels that re-wind themselves, and love
 A burnt match skating in a urinal— 60
 Somewhere above Fourteenth TAKE THE EXPRESS
 To brush some new presentiment of pain—
 “But I want service in this office SERVICE
 I said—after
 the show she cried a little afterwards but—” 65

Whose head is swinging from the swollen strap?
 Whose body smokes along the bitten rails,
 Bursts from a smoldering bundle far behind
 In back forks of the chasms of the brain,—
 Puffs from a riven stump far out behind 70
 In interborough fissures of the mind . . . ?

And why do I often meet your visage here,
 Your eyes like agate lanterns—on and on
 Below the toothpaste and the dandruff ads?
 —And did their riding eyes right through your side, 75
 And did their eyes like unwashed platters ride?
 And Death, aloft,—gigantically down
 Probing through you—toward me, O evermore!⁵
 And when they dragged your retching flesh,
 Your trembling hands that night through Baltimore— 80
 That last night on the ballot rounds, did you,
 Shaking, did you deny the ticket, Poe?

For Gravesend Manor change at Chambers Street.
 The platform hurries along to a dead stop.

The intent escalator lifts a serenade 85
 Stilly
 Of shoes, umbrellas, each eye attending its shoe, then
 Bolting outright somewhere above where streets
 Burst suddenly in rain. . . . The gongs recur:
 Elbows and levers, guard and hissing door. 90
 Thunder is galvothermic⁶ here below. . . . The car
 Wheels off. The train rounds, bending to a scream,
 Taking the final level for the dive
 Under the river—

5. Echoes of “the agate lamp within thy hand” from “To Helen,” “Death looks gigantically down” from “The City in the Sea,” and the refrain “Nevermore” in “The Raven” —poems by Edgar Allan

Poe (1809–1849).

6. I.e., galvanothermic, producing heat by electricity.

And somewhat emptier than before, 95
 Demented, for a hitching second, humps; then
 Lets go. . . . Toward corners of the floor
 Newspapers wing, revolve and wing.
 Blank windows gargle signals through the roar.

And does the Daemon take you home, also, 100
 Wop washerwoman, with the bandaged hair?
 After the corridors are swept, the cuspidors—
 The gaunt sky-barracks cleanly now, and bare,
 O Genoese, do you bring mother eyes and hands
 Back home to children and to golden hair? 105

Daemon, demurring and eventful yawn!
 Whose hideous laughter is a bellows mirth
 —Or the muffled slaughter of a day in birth—
 O cruelly to inoculate the brinking dawn
 With antennae toward worlds that glow and sink;— 110
 To spoon us out more liquid than the dim
 Locution of the eldest star, and pack
 The conscience navelled in the plunging wind,
 Umbilical to call—and straightway die!

O caught like pennies beneath soot and steam, 115
 Kiss of our agony thou gatherest;
 Condensed, thou takest all—shrill ganglia
 Impassioned with some song we fail to keep.
 And yet, like Lazarus,⁷ to feel the slope,
 The sod and billow breaking,—lifting ground, 120
 —A sound of waters bending astride the sky
 Unceasing with some Word that will not die . . . !

• • • • •

A tugboat, wheezing wreaths of steam,
 Lunged past, with one galvanic blare stove up the River.
 I counted the echoes assembling, one after one, 125
 Searching, thumbing the midnight on the piers.
 Lights, coasting, left the oily tympanum of waters;
 The blackness somewhere gouged glass on a sky.
 And this thy harbor, O my City, I have driven under,
 Tossed from the coil of ticking towers. . . . Tomorrow, 130
 And to be. . . . Here by the River that is East—
 Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;
 Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie.
 How far away the star has pooled the sea—
 Or shall the hands be drawn away, to die? 135
 Kiss of our agony Thou gatherest,

O Hand of Fire
 gatherest—

1927, 1930

7. He was resurrected from the grave by Jesus in John 11.43–44.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

1899–1961

The narrator in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, reflecting on his war experiences, observes at one point, "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear." Hemingway's aim and achievement as a novelist and short-story writer were to convey his concerns in a prose style built from what was left after eliminating all the words one "could not stand to hear." As flamboyant in his personal style as he was severe in his writing, Hemingway became an international celebrity after the publication in 1926 of his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. At the time of his death, he was probably the most famous writer in the world.

He was born and raised in Oak Park, Illinois, one of six children. His mother was a music teacher, director of the church choir, and a lover of high culture who had contemplated a career as an opera singer. His father was a successful physician, prone to depression, who enjoyed hunting, fishing, and cooking and who shared in household responsibilities more than most men of his era. The family spent summers at their cottage in northern Michigan, where many of Hemingway's stories are set. After high school, Hemingway took a job on the *Kansas City Star*. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Hemingway was eager to go. An eye problem barred him from the army, so he joined the ambulance corps. Within three weeks he was wounded by shrapnel. After six months in the hospital Hemingway went home as a decorated hero: when wounded, he had carried a comrade more badly hurt than he to safety (see p. 204). He found readjustment difficult and became increasingly estranged from his family, especially his mother. Years later, when his father committed suicide, Hemingway blamed his mother for that death.

In 1920 he married Hadley Richardson and went to Paris. Supported partly by her money and partly by his journalism, Hemingway worked at becoming a writer. He came to know Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others in the large community of expatriate artistic and literary Americans. Besides reading his manuscripts and advising him, Fitzgerald and Anderson, better known than he, used their influence to get his book of short stories *In Our Time* published in the United States in 1925. In this book, stories about the adolescent Nick Adams as he grows up in northern Michigan alternate with very brief, powerful vignettes of war and crime.

In 1926 his novel *The Sun Also Rises* appeared; it presents the stripped-down "Hemingway style" at its finest. "I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg," he told an interviewer. "There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows." Narrated by Jake Barnes, whose World War I wounds have left him sexually impotent, *The Sun Also Rises* depicts Jake's efforts to live according to a self-conscious code of dignity, of "grace under pressure," in the midst of a circle of self-seeking American and English expatriates in Paris—the "lost generation," as Gertrude Stein dubbed them. He finds an ideal in the rich tradition of Spanish peasant life, especially as epitomized in bullfighting and the bullfighter. *The Sun Also Rises* was directly responsible for a surge of American tourism to Pamplona, Spain, where the novel's bullfights are set.

In 1927 Hemingway brought out his second collection of stories, *Men without Women*. Adapting journalistic techniques in telegraphic prose that minimized narrator

commentary and depended heavily on uncontextualized dialogue, these stories developed the modern, speeded-up, streamlined style exemplified in “Hills Like White Elephants.” His second novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, appeared in 1929. It described a romance between an American army officer, Frederic Henry, and a British nurse, Catherine Barkley. The two run away from war, trying to make “a separate peace,” but their idyll is shattered when Catherine dies in childbirth. Hemingway’s work has been much criticized for its depictions of women. The wholly good Catherine lives for Frederic Henry alone; and Maria, in his Spanish Civil War novel (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 1940), is a fantasy figure of total submissiveness. Characters like Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* and Pilar in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, however, are strong, complex figures. Overall, Hemingway identified the rapid change in women’s status after World War I and the general blurring of sex roles that accompanied the new sexual freedom as aspects of modernity that men were simultaneously attracted to and found hard to deal with. More recently, especially in light of the themes of some of his posthumously published writings, critics have begun to reinterpret Hemingway’s work as preoccupied with the cultural and psychological meanings of masculinity in a way that bespeaks considerable sexual ambivalence.

As Hemingway aged, his interest in exclusively masculine forms of self-assertion and self-definition became more pronounced. War, hunting, and similar pursuits that he had used at first to show men manifesting dignity in the face of certain defeat increasingly became depicted (in his life as well as his writing) as occasions for competitive masculine display and triumph. Soon after the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*, his first marriage broke up; in all he was married four times. In the 1930s and 1940s he adopted the style of life of a celebrity. Some of his best-known work from these years, such as “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (1936), treats the theme of the successful writer losing his talent in an atmosphere of success, adulation, and wealth.

A political loner distrustful of all ideological abstractions, Hemingway was nevertheless drawn into antifascist politics by the Spanish Civil War. In *To Have and Have Not* (1937), the earliest of his political novels, the good characters are working-class people and the antagonists are idle rich. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* draws on Hemingway’s experiences in Spain as a war correspondent, celebrating both the peasant antifascists and the Americans who fought on their behalf. Hemingway’s opposition to fascism did not, however, keep him from viewing the pro-Loyalist communists, who were also active in the Spanish Civil War, with considerable skepticism. His one play, *The Fifth Column*—which was printed along with his collected stories in 1938 and staged in 1940—specifically blames the communists for betraying the cause.

Hemingway was fiercely anti-Nazi during World War II. As well as working as a war correspondent, work that sent him often to Europe, he used his fishing boat to keep watch for German submarines off the coast of Cuba, where he had a home. After the war ended, he continued his travels and was badly hurt in Africa in January 1954 in the crash of a small plane. He had already published his allegorical fable *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), in the mass-circulation weekly magazine *Life*; this, his last major work published during his lifetime, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and was central to his winning the Nobel Prize in 1954. The plane crash had damaged his mental and physical health, and he never fully recovered. Subject increasingly to depression and an incapacitating paranoia—afflictions that seem to have run in his family—he was hospitalized several times before killing himself in 1961. Yet it does appear that some of his suspicions about being watched by U.S. government agents may have been justified. Many writers associated with radical causes had dossiers compiled on them by the FBI. Several books have been published posthumously based on the voluminous manuscript collections he left. These include a book of reminiscences about his life in 1920s Paris, *A Moveable Feast* (1964); a novel about literary fame and sexual ambiguity constructed from several unfinished drafts, *The Garden of Eden* (1986); and *The Nick Adams Stories* (1972), a collection that added eight previously unpublished stories to the group.

From The Sun Also Rises¹

Chapter III

[IT WAS A WARM SPRING NIGHT]

It was a warm spring night and I sat at a table on the terrace of the Napolitain after Robert² had gone, watching it get dark and the electric signs come on, and the red and green stop-and-go traffic-signal, and the crowd going by, and the horse-cabs clippety-clopping along at the edge of the solid taxi traffic, and the *poules*³ going by, singly and in pairs, looking for the evening meal. I watched a good-looking girl walk past the table and watched her go up the street and lost sight of her, and watched another, and then saw the first one coming back again. She went by once more and I caught her eye, and she came over and sat down at the table. The waiter came up.

"Well, what will you drink?" I asked.

"Pernod."

"That's not good for little girls."

"Little girl yourself. Dites garçon, un pernod."⁴

"A pernod for me, too."

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Going on a party?"

"Sure. Aren't you?"

"I don't know. You never know in this town."

"Don't you like Paris?"

"No."

"Why don't you go somewhere else?"

"Isn't anywhere else."

"You're happy, all right."

"Happy, hell!"

Pernod is greenish imitation absinthe.⁵ When you add water it turns milky. It tastes like licorice and it has a good uplift, but it drops you just as far. We sat and drank it, and the girl looked sullen.

"Well," I said, "are you going to buy me a dinner?"

She grinned and I saw why she made a point of not laughing. With her mouth closed she was a rather pretty girl. I paid for the saucers and we walked out to the street. I hailed a horse-cab and the driver pulled up at the curb. Settled back in the slow, smoothly rolling *fiacre* we moved up the Avenue de

1. The text is that of the first edition (1926), published by Charles Scribner's Sons. Hemingway's two epigraphs to the novel cite a remark by Gertrude Stein—"You are all a lost generation"—and Ecclesiastes 1.4–7: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. . . . The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. . . . The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. . . . All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again."

2. Robert Cohn, an American expatriate writer with whom the narrator, Jake Barnes, has a barbed, competitive friendship. Barnes like Cohn is an aspiring author, but Cohn has just had his

first novel accepted for publication. Cohn also has family money backing his literary career, while Barnes supports himself as a journalist. Cohn has recently become romantically interested in Lady Brett Ashley, a British divorcée whom Barnes met during World War I at a military hospital where she was a volunteer. Although Jake and Brett are intensely attracted to one another, his war wound has left him unable to consummate a sexual relationship. As the chapter begins, Barnes and Cohn have just had a drink together following the end of Barnes's working day, much of which Cohn spent loitering in Barnes's office.

3. Hens (French, literal trans.); slang for *prostitutes*.

4. Tell the waiter, a pernod (French).

5. An anise- and herb-flavored, highly alcoholic spirit.

l'Opéra,⁶ passed the locked doors of the shops, their windows lighted, the Avenue broad and shiny and almost deserted. The cab passed the New York *Herald* bureau with the window full of clocks.

"What are all the clocks for?" she asked.

"They show the hour all over America."

"Don't kid me."

We turned off the Avenue up the Rue des Pyramides, through the traffic of the Rue de Rivoli, and through a dark gate into the Tuileries.⁷ She cuddled against me and I put my arm around her. She looked up to be kissed. She touched me with one hand and I put her hand away.

"Never mind."

"What's the matter? You sick?"

"Yes."

"Everybody's sick. I'm sick, too."

We came out of the Tuileries into the light and crossed the Seine and then turned up the Rue des Saints Pères.⁸

"You oughtn't to drink pernod if you're sick."

"You neither."

"It doesn't make any difference with me. It doesn't make any difference with a woman."

"What are you called?"

"Georgette. How are you called?"

"Jacob."

"That's a Flemish name."

"American too."

"You're not Flamand?"

"No, American."

"Good, I detest Flamands."

By this time we were at the restaurant. I called to the *cocher*⁹ to stop. We got out and Georgette did not like the looks of the place. "This is no great thing of a restaurant."

"No," I said. "Maybe you would rather go to Foyot's.¹ Why don't you keep the cab and go on?"

I had picked her up because of a vague sentimental idea that it would be nice to eat with some one. It was a long time since I had dined with a *poule*, and I had forgotten how dull it could be. We went into the restaurant, passed Madame Lavigne at the desk and into a little room. Georgette cheered up a little under the food.

"It isn't bad here," she said. "It isn't chic, but the food is all right."

"Better than you eat in Liège."

"Brussels,² you mean."

We had another bottle of wine and Georgette made a joke. She smiled and showed all her bad teeth, and we touched glasses.

6. Major Parisian thoroughfare running from the Louvre to the Palais Garnier, Paris's central opera house. "*Fiacre*": a small horse carriage.

7. The large formal garden in the center of Paris. The streets are also in central Paris.

8. St. Peter's Street, on the Left Bank. The Seine divides Paris into the Right Bank, associated with business, wealth, and the state, and the Left Bank,

traditionally the neighborhood of artists and students.

9. Coachman.

1. A famous, luxurious restaurant on the Right Bank, frequented by politicians and businessmen.

2. Belgian cities. Liège is historically French speaking; Brussels historically Dutch speaking.

"You're not a bad type," she said. "It's a shame you're sick. We get on well. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"I got hurt in the war," I said.

"Oh, that dirty war."

We would probably have gone on and discussed the war and agreed that it was in reality a calamity for civilization, and perhaps would have been better avoided. I was bored enough. Just then from the other room some one called: "Barnes! I say, Barnes! Jacob Barnes!"

"It's a friend calling me," I explained, and went out.

There was Braddocks at a big table with a party: Cohn, Frances Clyne,³ Mrs. Braddocks, several people I did not know.

"You're coming to the dance, aren't you?" Braddocks asked.

"What dance?"

"Why, the dancings. Don't you know we've revived them?" Mrs. Braddocks put in.

"You must come, Jake. We're all going," Frances said from the end of the table. She was tall and had a smile.

"Of course, he's coming," Braddocks said. "Come in and have coffee with us, Barnes."

"Right."

"And bring your friend," said Mrs. Braddocks laughing. She was a Canadian and had all their easy social graces.

"Thanks, we'll be in," I said. I went back to the small room.

"Who are your friends?" Georgette asked.

"Writers and artists."

"There are lots of those on this side of the river."

"Too many."

"I think so. Still, some of them make money."

"Oh, yes."

We finished the meal and the wine. "Come on," I said. "We're going to have coffee with the others."

Georgette opened her bag, made a few passes at her face as she looked in the little mirror, re-defined her lips with the lipstick, and straightened her hat.

"Good," she said.

We went into the room full of people and Braddocks and the men at his table stood up.

"I wish to present my fiancée, Mademoiselle Georgette Leblanc," I said. Georgette smiled that wonderful smile, and we shook hands all round.

"Are you related to Georgette Leblanc,⁴ the singer?" Mrs. Braddocks asked.

"Connais pas,"⁵ Georgette answered.

"But you have the same name," Mrs. Braddocks insisted cordially.

"No," said Georgette. "Not at all. My name is Hobin."

"But Mr. Barnes introduced you as Mademoiselle Georgette Leblanc. Surely he did," insisted Mrs. Braddocks, who in the excitement of talking French was liable to have no idea what she was saying.

3. Cohn's possessive partner in a fading romantic relationship. Henry Braddocks is another writer in Barnes and Cohn's circle.

4. A noted French opera singer (1869–1941).

5. I don't know (French).

"He's a fool," Georgette said.

"Oh, it was a joke, then," Mrs. Braddocks said.

"Yes," said Georgette. "To laugh at."

"Did you hear that, Henry?" Mrs. Braddocks called down the table to Braddocks. "Mr. Barnes introduced his fiancée as Mademoiselle Leblanc, and her name is actually Hobin."

"Of course, darling. Mademoiselle Hobin, I've known her for a very long time."

"Oh, Mademoiselle Hobin," Frances Clyne called, speaking French very rapidly and not seeming so proud and astonished as Mrs. Braddocks at its coming out really French. "Have you been in Paris long? Do you like it here? You love Paris, do you not?"

"Who's she?" Georgette turned to me. "Do I have to talk to her?"

She turned to Frances, sitting smiling, her hands folded, her head poised on her long neck, her lips pursed ready to start talking again.

"No, I don't like Paris. It's expensive and dirty."

"Really? I find it so extraordinarily clean. One of the cleanest cities in all Europe."

"I find it dirty."

"How strange! But perhaps you have not been here very long."

"I've been here long enough."

"But it does have nice people in it. One must grant that."

Georgette turned to me. "You have nice friends."

Frances was a little drunk and would have liked to have kept it up but the coffee came, and Lavigne with the liqueurs, and after that we all went out and started for Braddocks's dancing-club.

The dancing-club was a *bal musette* in the Rue de la Montagne Sainte Geneviève.⁶ Five nights a week the working people of the Pantheon quarter⁷ danced there. One night a week it was the dancing-club. On Monday nights it was closed. When we arrived it was quite empty, except for a policeman sitting near the door, the wife of the proprietor back of the zinc bar, and the proprietor himself. The daughter of the house came down-stairs as we went in. There were long benches, and tables ran across the room, and at the far end a dancing-floor.

"I wish people would come earlier," Braddocks said. The daughter came up and wanted to know what we would drink. The proprietor got up on a high stool beside the dancing-floor and began to play the accordion. He had a string of bells around one of his ankles and beat time with his foot as he played. Every one danced. It was hot and we came off the floor perspiring.

"My God," Georgette said. "What a box to sweat in!"

"It's hot."

"Hot, my God!"

"Take off your hat."

"That's a good idea."

Some one asked Georgette to dance, and I went over to the bar. It was really very hot and the accordion music was pleasant in the hot night. I drank

6. Street in the Latin Quarter of the Left Bank, known for its universities and nightlife. "*Bal musette*": a dance hall with an accordion band.

7. The Left Bank neighborhood surrounding the

Pantheon. Designed in 1755 as a church, the building was later converted into a secular memorial and burial place for notable French citizens.

a beer, standing in the doorway and getting the cool breath of wind from the street. Two taxis were coming down the steep street. They both stopped in front of the Bal.⁸ A crowd of young men, some in jerseys and some in their shirtsleeves, got out. I could see their hands and newly washed, wavy hair in the light from the door. The policeman standing by the door looked at me and smiled. They came in. As they went in, under the light I saw white hands, wavy hair, white faces, grimacing, gesturing, talking. With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them.

One of them saw Georgette and said: "I do declare. There is an actual harlot. I'm going to dance with her, Lett. You watch me."

The tall dark one, called Lett, said: "Don't you be rash."

The wavy blond one answered: "Don't you worry, dear." And with them was Brett.

I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure. Instead, I walked down the street and had a beer at the bar at the next Bal. The beer was not good and I had a worse cognac to take the taste out of my mouth. When I came back to the Bal there was a crowd on the floor and Georgette was dancing with the tall blond youth, who danced big-hippily, carrying his head on one side, his eyes lifted as he danced. As soon as the music stopped another one of them asked her to dance. She had been taken up by them. I knew then that they would all dance with her. They are like that.

I sat down at a table. Cohn was sitting there. Frances was dancing. Mrs. Braddocks brought up somebody and introduced him as Robert Prentiss. He was from New York by way of Chicago, and was a rising new novelist. He had some sort of an English accent. I asked him to have a drink.

"Thanks so much," he said, "I've just had one."

"Have another."

"Thanks, I will then."

We got the daughter of the house over and each had a *fine à l'eau*.⁹

"You're from Kansas City, they tell me," he said.

"Yes."

"Do you find Paris amusing?"

"Yes."

"Really?"

I was a little drunk. Not drunk in any positive sense but just enough to be careless.

"For God's sake," I said, "yes. Don't you?"

"Oh, how charmingly you get angry," he said. "I wish I had that faculty."

I got up and walked over toward the dancing-floor. Mrs. Braddocks followed me. "Don't be cross with Robert," she said. "He's still only a child, you know."

"I wasn't cross," I said. "I just thought perhaps I was going to throw up."

"Your fiancée is having a great success," Mrs. Braddocks looked out on the floor where Georgette was dancing in the arms of the tall, dark one, called Lett.

"Isn't she?" I said.

8. I.e., the *bal musette*.

9. Cognac and water.

“Rather,” said Mrs. Braddocks.

Cohn came up. “Come on, Jake,” he said, “have a drink.” We walked over to the bar. “What’s the matter with you? You seem all worked up over something?”

“Nothing. This whole show makes me sick is all.”

Brett came up to the bar.

“Hello, you chaps.”

“Hello, Brett,” I said. “Why aren’t you tight?”

“Never going to get tight any more. I say, give a chap a brandy and soda.”

She stood holding the glass and I saw Robert Cohn looking at her. He looked a great deal as his compatriot must have looked when he saw the promised land.¹ Cohn, of course, was much younger. But he had that look of eager, deserving expectation.

Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy’s. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht, and you missed none of it with that wool jersey.

“It’s a fine crowd you’re with, Brett,” I said.

“Aren’t they lovely? And you, my dear. Where did you get it?”

“At the Napolitain.”

“And have you had a lovely evening?”

“Oh, priceless,” I said.

Brett laughed. “It’s wrong of you, Jake. It’s an insult to all of us. Look at Frances there, and Jo.”

This for Cohn’s benefit.

“It’s in restraint of trade,” Brett said. She laughed again.

“You’re wonderfully sober,” I said.

“Yes. Aren’t I? And when one’s with the crowd I’m with, one can drink in such safety, too.”

The music started and Robert Cohn said: “Will you dance this with me, Lady Brett?”

Brett smiled at him. “I’ve promised to dance this with Jacob,” she laughed. “You’ve a hell of a biblical name, Jake.”

“How about the next?” asked Cohn.

“We’re going,” Brett said. “We’ve a date up at Montmartre.”²

Dancing, I looked over Brett’s shoulder, and saw Cohn, standing at the bar, still watching her.

“You’ve made a new one there,” I said to her.

“Don’t talk about it. Poor chap. I never knew it till just now.”

“Oh, well,” I said. “I suppose you like to add them up.”

“Don’t talk like a fool.”

“You do.”

“Oh, well. What if I do?”

“Nothing,” I said. We were dancing to the accordion and some one was playing the banjo. It was hot and I felt happy. We passed close to Georgette dancing with another one of them.

“What possessed you to bring her?”

“I don’t know, I just brought her.”

1. I.e., like Moses, who was allowed to see but not to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 34.4). Barnes here and elsewhere in the novel

mocks Cohn’s Jewish identity.

2. Parisian neighborhood associated with avant-garde artists.

"You're getting damned romantic."

"No, bored."

"Now?"

"No, not now."

"Let's get out of here. She's well taken care of."

"Do you want to?"

"Would I ask you if I didn't want to?"

We left the floor and I took my coat off a hanger on the wall and put it on. Brett stood by the bar. Cohn was talking to her. I stopped at the bar and asked them for an envelope. The patronne found one. I took a fifty-franc note from my pocket, put it in the envelope, sealed it, and handed it to the patronne.³

"If the girl I came with asks for me, will you give her this?" I said. "If she goes out with one of those gentlemen, will you save this for me?"

"C'est entendu, Monsieur,"⁴ the patronne said. "You go now? So early?"

"Yes," I said.

We started out the door. Cohn was still talking to Brett. She said good night and took my arm. "Good night, Cohn," I said. Outside in the street we looked for a taxi.

"You're going to lose your fifty francs," Brett said.

"Oh, yes."

"No taxis."

"We could walk up to the Pantheon and get one."

"Come on and we'll get a drink in the pub next door and send for one."

"You wouldn't walk across the street."

"Not if I could help it."

We went into the next bar and I sent a waiter for a taxi.

"Well," I said, "we're out away from them."

We stood against the tall zinc bar and did not talk and looked at each other. The waiter came and said the taxi was outside. Brett pressed my hand hard. I gave the waiter a franc and we went out. "Where should I tell him?" I asked.

"Oh, tell him to drive around."

I told the driver to go to the Parc Montsouris,⁵ and got in, and slammed the door. Brett was leaning back in the corner, her eyes closed. I sat beside her. The cab started with a jerk.

"Oh, darling, I've been so miserable," Brett said.

1926

Hills Like White Elephants¹

The hills across the valley of the Ebro² were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and

3. Landlady, barkeeper (French). In 1925, 50 francs was equivalent to about \$2.50 in U.S. dollars, roughly \$30.00 in today's money.

4. Understood, sir (French).

5. Large public park on the Left Bank.

1. The text is from *Men without Women* (1927), published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

2. Spain's largest river.

the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

"What should we drink?" the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the man said.

"Let's drink beer."

"Dos cervezas,"³ the man said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones."

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

The girl looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro.⁴ It's a drink."

"Could we try it?"

The man called "Listen" through the curtain. The woman came out from the bar.

"Four reales."⁵

"We want two Anis del Toro."

"With water?"

"Do you want it with water?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "Is it good with water?"

"It's all right."

"You want them with water?" asked the woman.

"Yes, with water."

"It tastes like licorice," the girl said and put the glass down.

"That's the way with everything."

"Yes," said the girl. "Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe."⁶

"Oh, cut it out."

"You started it," the girl said. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time."

"Well, let's try and have a fine time."

"All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn't that bright?"

"That was bright."

"I wanted to try this new drink. That's all we do, isn't it—look at things and try new drinks?"

"I guess so."

3. Two beers (Spanish).

4. Bull's anisette (Spanish, literal trans.); a brand of anise-flavored liqueur.

5. Small Spanish coins. In 1925, 4 reales were

worth about 15 cents in U.S. money.

6. Anise- and herb-flavored, highly alcoholic spirit, associated with Parisian life and banned in the United States in 1912.

The girl looked across at the hills.

"They're lovely hills," she said. "They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees."

"Should we have another drink?"

"All right."

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

"The beer's nice and cool," the man said.

"It's lovely," the girl said.

"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not really an operation at all."

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

"I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in."

The girl did not say anything.

"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Then what will we do afterward?"

"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

"I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I," said the girl. "And afterward they were all so happy."

"Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple."

"And you really want to?"

"I think it's the best thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you don't really want to."

"And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?"

"I love you now. You know I love you."

"I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?"

"I'll love it. I love it now but I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry."

"If I do it you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple."

"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't care about me."

"Well, I care about you."

"Oh, yes. But I don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine."

"I don't want you to do it if you feel that way."

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far

away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

"And we could have all this," she said. "And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible."

"What did you say?"

"I said we could have everything."

"We can have everything."

"No, we can't."

"We can have the whole world."

"No, we can't."

"We can go everywhere."

"No, we can't. It isn't ours any more."

"It's ours."

"No, it isn't. And once they take it away, you never get it back."

"But they haven't taken it away."

"We'll wait and see."

"Come on back in the shade," he said. "You mustn't feel that way."

"I don't feel any way," the girl said. "I just know things."

"I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do——"

"Nor that isn't good for me," she said. "I know. Could we have another beer?"

"All right. But you've got to realize——"

"I realize," the girl said. "Can't we maybe stop talking?"

They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the man looked at her and at the table.

"You've got to realize," he said, "that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you."

"Doesn't it mean anything to you? We could get along."

"Of course it does. But I don't want anybody but you. I don't want any one else. And I know it's perfectly simple."

"Yes, you know it's perfectly simple."

"It's all right for you to say that, but I do know it."

"Would you do something for me now?"

"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please stop talking?"

He did not say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.

"But I don't want you to," he said, "I don't care anything about it."

"I'll scream," the girl said.

The woman came out through the curtains with two glasses of beer and put them down on the damp felt pads. "The train comes in five minutes," she said.

"What did she say?" asked the girl.

"That the train is coming in five minutes."

The girl smiled brightly at the woman, to thank her.

"I'd better take the bags over to the other side of the station," the man said. She smiled at him.

"All right. Then come back and we'll finish the beer."

He picked up the two heavy bags and carried them around the station to the other tracks. He looked up the tracks but could not see the train. Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people.

They were all waiting reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him.

“Do you feel better?” he asked.

“I feel fine,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.”

1927

THOMAS WOLFE

1900–1938

Thomas Wolfe’s writing was diametrically opposed to the suggestive conciseness of such modernist prose writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. He wanted to write about America, he said, “not the government, or the Revolutionary War, or the Monroe Doctrine,” but rather “the ten million seconds and moments of your life.” Elsewhere he said, “I want to write about everything and say all that can be said about each particular.” As a result his manuscripts were vast scrawls that had to be shaped into books by his editors and agents.

Wolfe was born in Asheville, North Carolina, the seventh and youngest child of O. W. and Julia Westall Wolfe. His father, who had been married before, was a stonemason. His mother came from a Carolina mountain family. When Wolfe was about six years old, she opened a boardinghouse a few blocks from the family home. Thereafter, the family divided its time between these two residences. Later, Julia Wolfe began to invest in real estate, and between the earnings of the two parents, the family was financially comfortable. All its members were highly individualistic, emotional, and self-expressive; the passionate family drama was both Wolfe’s inspiration and his burden. His youth was punctuated by loss as well: his brother Grover died when Wolfe was four, his beloved brother Ben when he was eighteen, and his father when he was twenty-two.

There was no tradition of higher education on either side of the family, but some of Wolfe’s teachers persuaded his parents to send him to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After graduating he took a year of additional study at Harvard University, working with George Pierce Baker, who at that time gave one of the very few courses in playwriting in the nation, the famous “47 Workshop,” where Eugene O’Neill also studied. In 1924 Wolfe moved to New York City, where he taught composition at New York University while trying to write salable plays.

At about this time, Wolfe met and became involved with Aline Bernstein, a successful scene designer for the Neighborhood Playhouse, a New York theater group. She persuaded the young writer to try writing prose fiction, and with her encouragement he turned to the subject of his own life. A three-hundred-thousand-word manuscript—i.e., about a thousand typed pages—titled *O Lost* made the rounds of several publishers before coming to the attention of Maxwell Perkins at Scribner. Perkins, a leading editor of the day, had made it his life’s work to identify major American talents—Fitzgerald and Hemingway were among those he published—and he found in Wolfe a writer who equaled his highest idea of American genius. Reorganized and cut by about a third, the book appeared as *Look Homeward, Angel* in 1929. Despite the fact that book sales were generally down because of the Great Depression, it was a popular success and made Wolfe a celebrity.

Look Homeward, Angel is an extensive fictional re-creation of Wolfe's youth and of the members of his family; the hero, Eugene Gant, is Wolfe himself. Its picture of the mountain South is a substantial contribution to American regional writing. A sequel, *Of Time and the River*, came out in 1935 and was even more popular. Wolfe's autobiographical revelations offended some readers, including residents of Asheville and his own family. Only his mother appeared unperturbed by the merciless way in which he had put living people into print. Pro-German statements that he made in the mid-1930s angered many others, and he made numerous enemies. Maxwell Perkins's role came under critical scrutiny—one reviewer going so far as to suggest that Wolfe was only part author of his own books. In distress, Wolfe changed publishers.

In the summer of 1938 Wolfe, before a visit to the West Coast, delivered a crate of manuscript to his new editor, Edward Aswell of Harper's. The crate, he said, contained his next book. What it really contained were thousands of handwritten pages in no particular order. In Seattle, Wolfe contracted a case of pneumonia that developed serious complications. He died of a brain infection in September, and it was left to Aswell to work up two more books from the manuscript material, *The Web and the Rock*, published in 1939, and *You Can't Go Home Again*, published in 1940. Although these books have a new hero, George Webber, they continue Wolfe's autobiographical saga. Wolfe's reputation suffered after his death for what was deemed his lack of artistry: his formlessness and prolixity in an age where criticism called for tight structure and verbal economy. Those who admire his work point to his treatment of childhood and adolescence, his depiction of the mountain South, and his romantically nostalgic evocations of lost happiness.

"The Lost Boy" is a segment of the Gant saga, with different names for the characters, that was not used in the novels. It was published as a short story in 1937. As noted, Grover Cleveland Wolfe, Thomas Wolfe's brother, died at the age of eleven when the author-to-be was just four. In 1904 Julia Wolfe took some of the children, including Tom and Grover, to St. Louis, where the World's Fair was being held; there she ran a boardinghouse, the Carolina House, for some months. It was in St. Louis that Grover died of typhoid fever. In "The Lost Boy," Grover is called Robert. The story offers a four-angled view of him: (1) an episode involving Robert and his father, (2) a view of Robert through his mother's eyes, (3) an older sister's account of his illness and death, and (4) the attempt of the author-brother to recapture time and his lost brother by returning years later to the house in St. Louis where they had lived.

The text is from *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe* (1987).

The Lost Boy¹

The light came and went, the booming strokes of three o'clock beat out across the town in thronging bronze, light winds of April blew the fountain out in rainbow sheets, until the plume returned and pulsed, as Robert turned into the Square. He was a child dark-eyed and grave, birthmarked upon his neck—a berry of warm brown—and with a gentle face, perhaps too quiet and listening for his years. The scuffed boy's shoes, the thick-ribbed stockings gartered at the knees, the short knee pants cut straight with three small useless buttons at the side, the sailor blouse, the old cap battered out of shape, perched sideways up on top the raven head—these friendly shabby garments, shaped by Robert, uttered him. He turned and passed along the north side of the Square, and in that moment felt the union of Forever and Now.

1. The text reproduces the story as it appeared in *Redbook* magazine in 1937. The story as collected in *The Hills Beyond* (1941) differs in many particulars from the version that appeared in Wolfe's lifetime.

Light came and went and came again; the great plume of the fountain pulsed, and the winds of April sheeted it across the Square in rainbow gossamer of spray. The street-cars ground into the Square from every portion of the town's small compass and halted briefly like wound toys in their old quarter-hourly formula of assembled Eight. The courthouse bell boomed out its solemn warning of immediate Three, and everything was just the same as it had always been.

He saw with quiet eyes that haggis² of vexed shapes, that hodge-podge of ill-sorted masonries, and he did not feel lost. For "Here," thought Robert, "here's the Square as it has always been—and Papa's shop, the fire department and the city hall, the fountain pulsing with its plume, the drug-store on the corner there, the row of old brick buildings on this side, the people passing and the cars that come and go, the light that comes and changes and that always will come back again, and everything that comes and goes and changes in the Square, and yet will be the same—here," Robert thought, "here is the Square that never changes; here is Robert almost twelve—and here is Time."

For so it seemed to him: small center of his little universe, itself the accidental masonry of twenty years, the chance agglomerate of time and of disrupted strivings, it was for him earth's pivot and the granite core of changelessness, the eternal Place where all things came and passed, the Place that would abide forever and would never change.

The Square walked past him then with steady steps—plume, pulse, and fountain, and the sheeting spray, the open arches of the fire department doors, the wooden stomp of the great hoofs, the casual whiskings of the dry coarse tails. He passed the firetrap of a wiener stand; and the Singer³ shop, the steel-bright smartness of the new machines, with their swift evocations of the house, the whir, the treadle, and the mounting hum—the vague monotony of women's work. He passed the music-store, the confined splendor of piano shapes, the deep-toned richness, and the smell of proud dark wood, the stale yet pleasant memory of parlors.

He passed the grocery store then, the gaunt gray horse, the old head leaning to its hitching block; within, the pickle-barrels, the fans, the sultry coffee and the cloven cheese, the musty compost of cool plenty, the delicious All-Smell, and the buttered unction of the grocer with his straw-cuffed sleeves.

He was going past the hardware store now. He always had to stop by places that had shining perfect things in them, and windows full of geometric tools, of hammers, saws, and planing-boards, and strong new rakes and hoes with unworn handles of white perfect wood, stamped hard and vivid with the maker's seal. Ah, how he loved such things as these, strong perfect shapes and pungent smells, the great integrities of use and need, the certitude of this unchanging pattern, set to the grand assurance of the everlasting Square. He turned a corner, and he *was* caught, held. A waft of air, warm, chocolate-laden, filled his nostrils. He tried to pass the white front of the little eight-foot shop; he paused, struggling with conscience; he could not go on. It was the little candy-shop run by old Crocker and his wife. And Robert could not pass.

"Old stingy Crockers!" he thought scornfully. "I'll not go there again. They're so stingy they stop the clocks at night. But—" The maddening fragrance of rich cooking chocolate touched him once again. "I'll just look in the

2. I.e., pudding.

3. Manufacturer of sewing machines.

window and see what they've got." He paused a moment, looking with his dark and quiet eyes into the window of the candy shop. His dark eyes rested for a moment on a tray of chocolate drops. Unconsciously he licked his lips. Put one of them upon your tongue and it just melted there like honey. And then the trays full of rich home-made fudge. He looked longingly at the deep body of the chocolate fudge, reflectively at the maple walnut, more critically, yet with longing, at the mints, the nougatines, and all the other tempters.

"Old stingy Crockers!" Robert muttered once again, and turned to go. "I wouldn't go in *there* again."

And yet—he did not go away. "Old stingy Crockers," it was true; still, they did make the best candy in town, the best, in fact, that he had ever tasted.



He looked through the window back into the little shop and saw Mrs. Crocker there. A customer had made a purchase, and as Robert looked, he saw Mrs. Crocker, with her little wrenny⁴ face, lean over and peer primly at the scales. She had a piece of fudge in her clean bony fingers—and now she broke it, primly, in her little bony hands. She dropped a morsel down into the scales. They weighted down alarmingly, and her thin lips tightened. She snatched a piece of fudge out of the scales and broke it carefully once again. This time the scale wavered, went down very slowly, and came back again. Mrs. Crocker carefully put the reclaimed piece of fudge back in the tray, put the remainder in a paper bag, folded it and gave it to the customer, counted the money carefully, and doled it out into the till.

Robert stood there, looking scornfully. "Old stingy Crocker—afraid that she might give a crumb away."

He grunted, and again he turned to go. But now Mr. Crocker came out from the little partitioned place behind, bearing a tray of fresh-made candy in his skinny hands. Old man Crocker rocked along the counter to the front and put it down. He was a cripple. One leg was inches shorter than the other, and on this leg there was an enormous thick-soled boot, with a kind of wooden rocker-like arrangement, six inches high at least, to make up for the deficiency of his game right leg. And on this wooden cradle Mr. Crocker rocked along. He was a little pinched and skinny figure of a man with bony hands and meager features, and when he walked, he really rocked along, with a kind of prim and apprehensive little smile, as if he was afraid he was going to lose something.

"Old stingy Crocker," muttered Robert. "Humph! He wouldn't give you *anything*."

And yet he did not go away. He hung there curiously, peering through the window, with his dark and gentle face now focused and intent, flattening his nose against the glass. Unconsciously he scratched the thick-ribbed fabric of one stockinged leg with the scuffed toe of his old shoe. The fresh warm odor of the new-made fudge had reached him. It was delicious. It was a little maddening. Half-consciously, he began to fumble in one trouser pocket and pulled out his purse, a shabby worn old black one with a twisted clasp. He opened it and prowled about inside.

4. Wrenlike; Wolfe's invented word. The wren is a small, wide-eyed, active bird.

What he found was not inspiring: a nickel and two pennies and—he had forgotten them—the stamps. He took the stamps out and unfolded them. There were five twos, eight ones, all that remained of the dollar and sixty cents' worth which Reed, the pharmacist, had given him for running errands a week or two before.

"Old Crocker," Robert thought, looked somberly at the grotesque little form and—"Well—" indefinitely—"He's had all the rest of them. He might as well take these."

So, soothing conscience with this sop of scorn, he went into the shop, and pointing with a slightly grimy finger at the fresh-made tray of chocolate fudge, he said: "I'll take fifteen cents' worth of this, Mr. Crocker."

He paused a moment, fighting with embarrassment; then he lifted his dark face and said quietly: "And please, I'll have to give you stamps again."

Mr. Crocker made no answer. He pressed his lips together. Then he got the candy scoop, slid open the door of the glass case, put fudge into the scoop, and rocking to the scales, began to weigh the candy out. Robert watched him as he peered and squinted, watched him purse his lips together, saw him take a piece of fudge and break it into two parts. And then old Crocker broke two parts in two. He weighed, he squinted, he hovered, until it seemed to Robert that by calling *Mrs. Crocker* stingy he had been guilty of a rank injustice. But finally the scales hung there, quivering apprehensively, upon the very hair-line of nervous balance, as if even the scales were afraid that one more move from old man Crocker and they would be undone.

Mr. Crocker took the candy, dumped it into a paper bag, and rocking back along the counter toward the boy, he said: "Where are the stamps?" Robert gave them to him. Mr. Crocker relinquished his claw-like hold on the bag and set it down upon the counter. Robert took the bag and then remembered. "Mr. Crocker,"—again he felt the old embarrassment that was almost like strong pain,—"I gave you too much," Robert said. "There were eighteen cents in stamps. You—you can just give me three ones back."

Mr. Crocker did not answer for a moment. He was busy unfolding the stamps and flattening them out on top of the glass counter. When he had done so, he peered at them sharply, for a moment, thrusting his scrawny neck forward and running his eye up and down, as a bookkeeper who tots up rows of figures.

Then he said tartly: "I don't like this kind of business. I'm not a post office. The next time you come in here and want anything, you'll have to have the money for it."

Hot anger rose in Robert's throat. His olive face suffused with angry color. His tarry eyes got black and bright. For a moment he was on the verge of saying: "Then why did you take my other stamps? Why do you tell me now, when you have taken all the stamps I had, that you don't want them?"

But he was a quiet, gentle, gravely thoughtful boy, and he had been taught how to respect his elders. So he just stood there looking with his tar-black eyes. Old Man Crocker took the stamps up in his thin, parched fingers, and turning, rocked away down to the till.

He took the twos and laid them in one rounded scallop, then took the ones and folded them and put them in the one next to it. Then he closed the till and started to rock off, down toward the other end. Robert kept looking at

him, but Mr. Crocker did not look at Robert. Instead, he began to take some cardboard shapes and fold them into boxes.

In a moment Robert said: "Mr. Crocker, will you give me the three ones, please?"

Mr. Crocker did not answer. But Mrs. Crocker, also folding boxes with her parsley hands, muttered tartly: "Hm! *I'd* give him nothing!"

Mr. Crocker looked at Robert: "What are you waiting for?"

"Will you give me the three ones, please?" Robert said.

"I'll give you nothing," Mr. Crocker said. "Now you get out of here! And don't you come here with any more of those stamps."

"I should like to know where he gets them, that's what *I* should like to know," said Mrs. Crocker.

"You get out of here," said Mr. Crocker. "And don't you come back here with any stamps. . . . Where did you get those stamps?" he said.

"That's just what *I've* been thinking," Mrs. Crocker said.

"You've been coming in here for the last two weeks with stamps," said Mr. Crocker. "I don't like the look of it. Where did you get those stamps?" he said.

"That's what *I've* been thinking all along," said Mrs. Crocker.

Robert had got white underneath his olive skin. His eyes had lost their luster. They looked like dull, stunned balls of tar. "From Mr. Reed," he said. "I got the stamps from Mr. Reed." He burst out desperately: "Mr. Crocker, Mr. Reed will tell you how I got the stamps. I did some work for Mr. Reed; he gave me those stamps two weeks ago."

"Mr. *Reed*," said Mrs. Crocker acidly. "I call it mighty funny."

"Mr. Crocker," Robert said, "if you'll just let me have the three ones—"

"You get out of here, boy!" cried Mr. Crocker. "Now don't you come in here again! There's something funny about this whole business! If you can't pay as other people do, then I don't want your trade."

"Mr. Crocker," Robert said again, and underneath the olive skin his face was gray, "if you'll just let me have those three—"

"You get out of here," Mr. Crocker cried, and began to rock forward toward the boy. "If you don't get out—"

"I'd call a policeman, that's what I'd do," Mrs. Crocker said.

Mr. Crocker came rocking up to Robert, took the boy and pushed him with his bony little hands. Robert felt sick and gray down to the hollow pit of his stomach.

"You've got to give me those three ones," he said.

"You get out of here!" shrilled Mr. Crocker. He seized the screen door, pulled it open and pushed Robert out. "Don't you come back in here," he said, pausing for a moment, working thinly at the lips. Then he turned and rocked back in the shop again. Robert stood there on the pavement. And light came and went and came again.

The boy stood there for a moment, and a wagon rattled past. There were some people passing by, but Robert did not notice them. He stood there blindly, in the watches of the sun, but something had gone out of the day.

He felt the soul-sickening guilt that all the children, all the good men of the earth, have felt since time began. And even anger had been drowned out, in the swelling tide of guilt. "There is the Square," thought Robert as before.

“This is Now. There is my father’s shop. And all of it is as it has always been—save I.”

And the Square reeled drunkenly around him, light went in blind gray motes before his eyes, the fountain sheeted out to rainbow iridescence and returned to its proud pulsing plume again. But all the brightness had gone out of day.

The scuffed boots of the lost boy moved and stumbled blindly over. The numb feet crossed the pavement—reached the sidewalk, crossed the plotted central Square—the grass plots, the flower-beds, so soon with red and packed geraniums.

“I want to be alone,” thought Robert, “where I can not go near him. Oh, God, I hope he never hears, that no one ever tells him—”

The plume blew out; the iridescent sheet of spray blew over him. He passed through, found the other side and crossed the street. “Oh, God, if Papa ever hears,” thought Robert, as his numb feet started up the steps into his father’s shop.

He found and felt the steps—the thickness of old lumber twenty feet in length. He saw it all: the iron columns on his father’s porch, painted with the dull anomalous black-green that all such columns in this land and weather come to; two angels, fly-specked, and the waiting stones. Beyond and all around, in the stonecutter’s shop, cold shapes of white and marble, rounded stone, the limestone base, the languid angel with strong marble hands of love.

He went on down the aisle; the white shapes stood around him. He went on back into the workroom. This he knew—the little cast-iron stove in the left-hand corner, the high, dirty window, looking down across the market square, the rude old shelves, upon the shelves the chisels and a layer of stone dust; an emery wheel with pump tread, and two trestles of coarse wood upon which rested gravestones. At one trestle was a man, at work.

The boy looked numbly, saw the name was *Creasman*: the carved analysis of John, the symmetry of S, the fine finality of *Creasman—November, Nineteen-Three*.

The man looked up and then returned to work. He was a man of fifty-three, immensely long and tall and gaunt. He wore good dark clothes, save he had no coat. He worked in shirt-sleeves with his vest on, a strong watch-chain stretching across his vest; wing collar and black tie, Adam’s apple, bony forehead, bony nose, light eyes, gray-green, undeep and cold, and somehow lonely-looking, a striped apron going up around his shoulders, and starched cuffs. And in one hand a tremendous rounded wooden mallet like a butcher’s bole; and in his other hand, implacable and cold, the chisel.

“How are you, son?”

He did not look up as he spoke. He spoke quietly, absently. He worked upon the chisel and the wooden mallet as delicately as a jeweler might work upon a watch, except that in the man and the wooden mallet there was power, too.

“What is it, son?” he said.

He moved around the table from the head, and started up on *J* again.

“Papa, I never stole the stamps,” said Robert.

The man put down the mallet, laid the chisel down. He came around the trestle.

"What?" he said. And Robert winked his tar-black eyes; they brightened; the hot tears shot out. "I never stole the stamps," he said.

"Hey? What is this?" the man said. "What stamps?"

"That Mr. Reed gave to me, when the other boy was sick and I worked there for three days. . . . And old man Crocker," Robert said, "he took all the stamps. And I told him Mr. Reed had given them to me. And now he owes me three ones—and old man Crocker says—he says—I must have taken them."

"The stamps that Reed gave to you—hey?" the stonecutter said. "The stamps you had—" He wet his great thumb briefly on his lips, strode from his workshop out into the storeroom aisle.

The man came back, cleared his throat, and as he passed the old gray board-partition of his office, he cleared his throat and wet his thumb, and said: "I tell you, now—"

Then he turned and strode up toward the front again and cleared his throat and said: "I tell you, now—" And coming back, along the aisle between the rows of marshaled gravestones, he muttered underneath his breath: "By God, now—"

He took Robert by the hand. They went out flying down along the aisle by all the gravestones, the fly-specked angels waiting there, the wooden steps, across the cobbles and the central plot—across the whole thing, but they did not notice it.

And the fountain pulsed, the plume blew out in sheeted spray and swept across them, and an old gray horse, with a peaceful look about its torn lips, swucked up the cool, the flowing mountain water from the trough as Robert and his father went across the Square.

They went across the Square through the sheeted iridescence of the spray and to the other street and to the candy-shop. The man was dressed in his striped apron still; he was still holding Robert by the hand. He opened the screen door and stepped inside. "Give him the stamps," he said.

Mr. Crocker came rocking forward behind the counter, with a prim and careful look that now was somewhat like a smile. "It was just—" he said.

"Give him the stamps," the man said, and threw some coins down on the counter.

Mr. Crocker rocked away and got the stamps. "I just didn't know—" he said.

The stonecutter took the stamps and gave them to the boy. And Mr. Crocker took the coins.

"It was just that—" Mr. Crocker said, and smiled.

The man in the apron cleared his throat: "You never were a father," the man said. "You never knew the feeling of a child. And that is why you acted as you did. But a judgment is upon you. God has cursed you. He has afflicted you. He has made you lame and childless—and miserable as you are, you will go lame and childless to your grave—and be forgotten!"

And Crocker's wife kept kneading her bony little hands and said imploringly: "Oh, no—oh, don't say that! Please don't say that!"

The stonecutter, the breath still hoarse in him, left the store. Light came again into the day.

"Well, son," he said, and laid his hand on the boy's back. "Now don't you mind."

They walked across the Square, the sheeted spray of iridescent light swept out on them; a horse swizzled at the water-trough.

"Well, son," the gaunt man said again, "now don't you mind."

And he trod his own steps then with his great stride and went back again into his shop.

The lost boy stood upon the Square, close by the porch of his father's shop: light came again into the Square. A car curved in, upon the billboard of the car-end was a poster and some words: "*St. Louis*" and "*Excursion*" and "*The Fair*."

And light came and went into the Square, and Robert stood there thinking quietly: "Here is the Square that never changes; here is Time."

And light came and went and came again into the Square—but now not quite the same as it had done before. He saw that pattern of familiar shapes, and knew that they were just the same as they had always been. But something had gone out of the day, and something had come in again: out of the vision of those quiet eyes some brightness had been lost; into their vision some deeper color come. He could not say, he did not know through what transforming shadows life had passed within that quarter-hour. He only knew that something had been gained forever—something lost.

As we went down through Indiana—you were too young, child, to remember it, but I always think of all of you, the way you looked that morning, when we went down through Indiana, going to the Fair. All of the apple trees were coming out, and it was April; all of the trees were coming out; it was the beginning of the spring in Indiana, and everything was getting green. Of course we don't have farms at home like those in Indiana. The children had never seen such farms as those, and I reckon, kid-like, had to take it in.

So all of them kept running up and down the aisle—well, no, except for you and *Robert*—you were too young; you were just three; I kept you with me. As for Robert: well, I'm going to tell you about that. But the rest of them kept running up and down the aisle and from one window to another. They kept calling out and hollering to each other every time they saw something new. They kept trying to look out on all sides in every way at once, as if they wished they had eyes in the back of their heads. It was the first time any of them had been in Indiana, and I reckon, that, kid-like, it all seemed strange and new.

And so it seemed they couldn't get enough. It seemed they never could be still.

You see, they were excited about going to St. Louis and so curious over everything they saw. They couldn't help it, and they wanted to see everything. But "I'll vow," I said, "if you children don't sit down and rest, you'll be worn to a frazzle before we ever get to see St. Louis and the Fair!"

Except for Robert! He—no sir, not him! Now, boy, I want to tell you—I've raised the lot of you, and if I do say so, there wasn't a numbskull in the lot. But *Robert*! Well, you've all grown up now, all of you have gone away, and none of you are children any more. . . . And of course, I hope that, as the fellow says, you have reached the dignity of man's estate. . . . I suppose you have the judgment of a grown man. . . . But Robert! *Robert* had it, even then!

Oh, even as a child, you know—at a time I was almost afraid to trust the rest of you out of my sight—I could depend on Robert. I could send him

anywhere, and I'd always know he'd get back safe, and do exactly what I told him to!

Why, I didn't even have to tell him—you could send that child to market and tell him what you wanted, and he'd come home with *twice* as much as you could get yourself for the same money.

Now you know, I've always been considered a good trader, but *Robert!* Why, it got so finally that your papa said to me: "You'd be better off if you just tell him what you want and leave the rest to him. For," your papa says, "damned if I don't believe he's a better trader than you are. . . . He gets more for the money than anyone I ever saw."

Well, I had to admit it, you know. . . . I had to own up then. . . . Robert, even as a child, was a far better trader than I was. . . . Why, yes, they told it on him all over town, you know. . . . They said all of the market men, all of the farmers, would begin to laugh when they saw him coming. They'd say, "Look out! Here's Robert! Here's one trader you're not going to fool!"

And they were right! . . . *That* child! . . . I'd say: "Robert, suppose you run uptown and see if they've got anything good to *eat* today. Suppose you take this dollar and just see what you can do with it."

Well, sir, that was all that was needed. The minute that you told that child that you depended on his judgment, he'd have gone to the ends of the earth for you—and let me tell you something, he wouldn't *miss*, either!

His eyes would get black as coals—oh, the way that child would look at you, the intelligence and sense in his expression! He'd say, "Yes, *ma'am!* Now don't you worry, Mamma, you leave it all to me—and I'll do *good!*" said Robert.

And he'd be off like a streak of lightning and oh, Lord! As your father said to me, "I've been living in this town for almost thirty years," he said, "and I thought I knew everything there was to know about it—but that child," your papa says, "he knows places that I never heard of!" Oh, he'd go right down there to that place below your papa's shop where the draymen used to park their wagons—or he'd go down there to those old lots on Concord Street where the farmers used to keep their wagons. And child that he was, he'd go right in among them, *sir*—*Robert* would!—go right in and barter with them like a grown man!

And he'd come home with things he'd bought that would make your eyes stick out. . . . Here he comes one time with another boy, dragging a great bushel basket full of ripe termaters⁵ between them. "Why, Robert," I says, "how on earth are we ever going to use them? Why, they'll go bad on us before we're half-way through them." "Well, Mamma," he says, "I know,"—oh, just as solemn as a judge—"but they were the last the man had," he says, "and he wanted to go home, and so I got them for ten cents," he says. "I thought it was a shame to let 'em go, and I figgered what we couldn't eat—why," says Robert, "you could *put up!*" Well, the way he said it, so earnest and so serious, I had to laugh. "But I'll vow," I said, "if you don't beat all!" . . . But that was *Robert* the way he was in *those* days! As everyone said, boy that he was, he had the sense and judgment of a grown man. . . . Child, child, I've seen you all grow up, and all of you were bright enough, but for all-round

5. Tomatoes.

intelligence, judgment, and general ability, Robert surpassed the whole crowd. . . . I've never seen his equal, and everyone who knew him as a child will say the same.

So that's what I tell them now, when they ask me about all of you. I have to tell the truth. I always said that you were smart enough—but when they come around and brag to me about you, and I reckon how you have got on and have a kind of name—I don't let on to them, I never say a word. Why, yes! Why, here, you know—oh, 'long about a month ago, this feller comes. He said he came from New Jersey, or somewhere up in that part of the country—and he began to ask me all sorts of questions, what you were like when you were a boy and all such stuff as that.

I just pretended to study it all over; then I said, "Well, yes," real serious-like, you know. "Well, yes—I reckon I ought to know a little something about him: he was my child, just the same as all the others were; I brought him up just the the way I brought up all the others. And," I says—oh, just as solemn as you please, "he wasn't a *bad* sort of a boy. Why," I says, "up to the time that he was twelve years old he was just about the same as any other boy—a good average normal sort of fellow."

"Oh," he says. "But didn't you notice something? Didn't you notice how brilliant he was? He must have been more brilliant than the rest!"

"Well, now," I says, and pretended to study that all over, too. "Now let me see. . . . Yes," I says—I just looked him in the eye, as solemn as you please. "I guess he was a fairly bright sort of a boy. I never had no complaints to make of him on that score. He was bright enough," I says. "The only trouble with him was that he was lazy."

"Lazy!" he says—oh, you should have seen the look upon his face, you know—he jumped like someone had stuck a pin in him. "Lazy!" he says, "Why, you don't mean to tell me—"

"Yes," I says, "I was telling him the same thing myself the last time that I saw him. I told him it was a mighty lucky thing for him that he had the gift of gab. Of course, he went off to college and read a lot of books, and I reckon that's where he got this flow of language they say he has. . . . But as I said to him, 'Now look a-here,' I said, 'if you can earn your living doing a light easy class of work like this you do,' I says, 'you're mighty lucky, because none of the rest of your people had any such luck as that. They had to work hard for a living.'"

Oh, I told him, you know. I made no bones about it. And I tell you what—I wish you could have seen his face. It was a study.

"Well," he says, at last, "you've got to admit this, haven't you—he was the brightest boy you had, now wasn't he?"

I just looked at him a moment. I had to tell the truth. I couldn't fool him any longer. "No," I says. "He was a good bright boy—I have no complaint to make about him on that score; but the brightest boy I had, the one that surpassed all the rest of them in sense, and in understanding, and in judgment—the best boy that I had, the smartest boy I ever saw, was—well, it wasn't him," I said. "It was another one."

He looked at me a moment; then he said: "Which boy was that?"

Well, I just looked at him, and smiled. I shook my head. I wouldn't tell him. "I never brag about my own," I said. "You'll have to find out for yourself."

But—I'll have to tell *you*: the best one of the whole lot was—*Robert!*

. . . And when I think of Robert as he was long about that time, I always see him sitting there, so grave and earnest-like, with his nose pressed to the window, as we went down through Indiana in the morning, to the Fair.

So Robert sat beside this gentleman and looked out the window. I never knew the man—I never asked his name—but I tell you what! He was certainly a fine-looking, well-dressed, good substantial sort of man, and I could see that he had taken a great liking to Robert, and Robert sat there looking out, and then turned to this gentleman, as grave and earnest as a grown-up man, and says: “What kind of crops grow here, sir?” Well, this gentleman threw his head back and just ha-ha-ed. “Well, I’ll see if I can tell you,” says this gentleman, and then, you know, he talked to him, and Robert took it all in, as solemn as you please, and asked this gentleman every sort of question—what the trees were, what was growing there, how big the farms were—all sorts of questions, which this gentleman would answer, until I said: “I’ll vow, Robert! You’ll bother the very life out of this gentleman.”

The gentleman threw his head back and laughed right out. “Now you leave that boy alone. He’s all right,” he said. “He doesn’t bother me a bit, and if I know the answers to his questions, I will answer him. And if I don’t know, why, then, I’ll tell him so. But he’s *all right*,” he said, and put his arm around Robert’s shoulders. “You leave him alone. He doesn’t bother me a bit.”

And I can still remember how he looked, that morning, with his black eyes, his black hair, and with the birthmark on his neck—so grave, so serious, so earnest-like—as he looked out the windows at the apple trees, the farms, the barns, the houses, and the orchards, taking it all in because it was, I reckon, strange and new to him.

It was so long ago, but when I think of it, it all comes back, as if it happened yesterday. And all of you have grown up and gone away, and nothing is the same as it was then. But all of you were there with me that morning, and I guess I should remember how the others looked, but every time I think of it, I still see Robert just the way he was, the way he looked that morning when we went down through Indiana, by the river, to the Fair.

Can you remember how Robert used to look? . . . I mean the birthmark, the black eyes, the olive skin—the birthmark always showed because of those open sailor blouses kids used to wear. . . . But I guess you must have been too young. . . . I was looking at that old photograph the other day—that picture showing all of us before the house in Orchard Street? . . . *You* weren’t there. . . . *You* hadn’t arrived. . . . You remember how mad you used to get when we used to tell you that you were only a dish-rag hanging out in Heaven, when something happened?

I was looking at that old picture just the other day. There we were. . . . And my God, what is it all about? . . . I mean, when you see the way you were—Mary and Dick and Robert, Bill and all of us—and then—look at us now! Do you ever get to feeling funny? You know what I mean—do you ever get to feeling *queer*?—when you try to figure these things out. . . . You’ve been to college, and you ought to know the answer. . . . And I wish you’d tell me if you know. . . .

My Lord, when I think sometimes of the way I used to be—the dreams I used to have. . . . Taking singing lessons from Aunt Nell because I felt that

some day I was going to have a great career in opera. . . . Can you beat it now? . . . Can you imagine it? . . . *Me!* In grand opera! . . . Now I want to ask you. . . . I'd like to know. . . .

My Lord! When I go uptown and look at all these funny-looking little boys and girls hanging around the drug-store—do you suppose any of them have ambitions the way we did? . . . Do you suppose any of these funny-looking little girls are thinking about a big career in opera? . . . Didn't you ever see that picture of us? It was made before the old house down on Orchard Street, with Papa standing there in his swallow-tail,⁶ and Mamma there beside him—and Robert and Dick and Jim, and Mary, Bill, and me, with our feet up on our bicycles.

Well, there I was, and my poor old skinny legs and long white dress, and two pigtails hanging down my back. And all the funny-looking clothes we wore, with the doo-lolly⁷ business on them. . . . But I guess you can't remember. You weren't born.

But—well, we were a right nice-looking set of people, if I do say so. And there was 86 the way it used to be, with the front porch, the grape-vines, and the flower-beds before the house. And Miss Martha standing there by Papa with a watch-charm pinned to her waist. . . . I shouldn't laugh, but Miss Martha. . . . Well, Mamma was a pretty woman then—and Papa in his swallow-tail was a good-looking man. Do you remember how he used to get dressed up on Sunday? And how grand he thought he was? And how wonderful that dinky little shop on the Square looked to us! . . . Can you beat it now? . . . Why, we thought that Papa was the biggest man in town and—oh, you can't tell me! You can't tell me! He had his faults, but Papa was a wonderful man. You know he was!

And there was Jim and Dick and Robert, Mary, Bill, and me lined up there before the house with one foot on our bicycles. . . . And I got to thinking back about it all. It all came back.

Do you remember anything about St. Louis? You were only three or four years old then, but you must remember something. . . . Do you remember how you used to bawl when I would scrub you? How you'd bawl for Robert? . . . Poor kid, you used to yell for Robert every time I'd get you in the tub. He was a sweet kid, and he was crazy about you: he almost brought you up.

That year Robert was working at the Inside Inn out on the Fair Grounds . . . Do you remember the old Inside Inn? That big old wooden thing inside the Fair? . . . And how I used to take you there to wait for Robert when he got through working? . . . And Billy Pelham at the news-stand, how he used to give you a stick of chewing-gum?

They were all crazy about Robert. . . . Everybody liked him. . . . And how proud Robert was of you! . . . Don't you remember how he used to show you off? . . . How he used to take you around and make you talk to Billy Pelham? . . . And Mr. Curtis at the desk? . . . And how Robert would try to make you talk and get you to say, "Robert"? And you couldn't pronounce the "r"—and you'd say "*Wobbut.*" Have you forgotten that? . . . You shouldn't forget *that*, because . . . you were a *cute* kid, then . . . Ho-ho-ho-ho. . . . I don't know where it's gone to, but you were a big hit in those days. . . .

6. Formal coat.

7. Dressy, showy (colloquial).

And I was thinking of it all the other day: how we used to go and meet Robert there and how he'd take us to the Midway. . . . Do you remember the Midway? The Snake-Eater and the Living Skeleton, the Fat Woman and the Shoot the Chute, the Scenic Railway and the Ferris Wheel? . . . How you bawled the night we took you up on the Ferris Wheel! You yelled your head off. . . . I tried to laugh it off, but I tell you, I was scared myself. . . . And how Robert laughed at us and told us there was no danger. . . . My Lord, poor little Robert! He was only twelve years old at the time, but he seemed so grown-up to us. I was two years older, but I thought he knew it all.

It was always that way with him. . . . Looking back now, it sometimes seems that it was Robert who brought us up. He was always looking after us, telling us what to do, bringing us something—some ice-cream or some candy, something he had bought out of the poor little money he'd got at the Inn. . . .

Then I got to thinking of the afternoon we sneaked away from home. . . . Mamma had gone out somewhere. And Robert and I got on the street-car and came downtown. . . . And my Lord, in those days, that was what we called a *trip*. A ride on the street-car was something to write home about in those days. . . . I hear that it's all built up around there now.

So we got on the car and rode the whole way down into the business section of St. Louis. Robert took me into a drug-store and set me up to⁸ soda-water. Then we came out and walked around some, down to the Union Station and clear over to the river. . . . And both of us half scared to death at what we'd done and wondering what Mamma would say if she found out.

We stayed there till it was getting dark, and we passed by a lunch-room—an old joint with one-armed chairs and people eating at the counter. . . . We read all the signs to see what they had to eat and how much it cost, and I guess nothing on the menu was more than fifteen cents, but it couldn't have looked grander to us if it had been Delmonico's.⁹ . . . So we stood there with our noses pressed against the window, looking in. . . . Two skinny little kids, both of us scared half to death, getting the thrill of a lifetime out of it. . . . You know what I mean? . . . And smelling everything with all our might and thinking how good it all smelled. . . . Then Robert turned to me and whispered, "Come on, Sue. . . . Let's go in. . . . It says fifteen cents for pork and beans. And I've got money," Robert said. "I've got sixty cents."

I was so scared I couldn't speak. . . . I'd never been in a place like that before. . . . But I kept thinking, "Oh, Lord, if Mamma should find out!" . . . Don't you know how it is when you're a kid? It was the thrill of a lifetime. . . . I couldn't resist. So we both went in and ordered pork and beans and a cup of coffee. . . . I suppose we were too frightened at what we'd done really to enjoy anything. We just gobbled it all up in a hurry, and gulped our coffee down. And I don't know whether it was the excitement—I guess the poor kid was already sick when we came in there and didn't know it. But I turned and looked at him, and he was as white as death. . . . And when I asked him what was the matter, he wouldn't tell me. . . . He was too proud. He said he was all right, but I could see that he was sick as a dog. . . . So

8. Treated me to (slang).

9. A famous and expensive restaurant in New York City.

he paid the bill. . . . It came to forty cents; I'll never forget *that* as long as I live. . . . And sure enough, we no more than got out the door—he'd hardly time to reach the curb—before it all came up. . . .

And the poor kid was so scared and so ashamed. What scared him so was not that he had got sick but that he had spent all that money, and it had come to nothing. And Mamma would find out. . . . Poor kid, he just stood there looking at me and he whispered, "Oh, Sue, don't tell Mamma. She'll be mad if she finds out." Then we hurried home, and he was still white as a sheet when we got there.

Mamma was waiting for us. . . . She looked at us—you know how Miss Martha looks at you, when she thinks you've been doing something that you shouldn't? . . . Mamma said: "Why, where on earth have you two children been?" I guess she was all set to lay us out. Then she took one look at Robert's face. That was enough for her. She said: "Why, child, what in the world—" She was white as a sheet herself. . . . And all that Robert said was "Mamma, I feel sick."

He was sick as a dog. He fell over on the bed, and we undressed him, and Mamma put her hand upon his forehead and came out in the hall—she was so white you could have made a black mark on her face with chalk—and whispered to me:

"Go and get the doctor quick; he's burning up."

And I went running, my pigtails flying, to get Dr. Packer. I brought him back with me. When he came out of Robert's room, he told Mamma what to do, but I don't know if she even heard him.

Her face was white as a sheet. She looked at me and looked right through me. . . . And oh, my Lord, I'll never forget the way she looked, the way my heart stopped and came up in my throat. . . . I was only a skinny little kid of fourteen. But she looked as if she was dying right before my eyes. . . . And I knew that if anything happened to him, she'd never get over it, if she lived to be a hundred.

Poor old Mamma. You know, he always was her eyeballs¹—you know that, don't you?—Not the rest of us!—No, sir! I know what I'm talking about. It always has been Robert—she always thought more of him than she did of any of the others and—Poor kid! I can see him lying there white as a sheet and remember how sick he was, and how scared I was! . . . I don't know why—all we'd done had been to sneak away from home and go to a lunch-room—but I felt guilty about the whole thing, as if it was my fault. . . .

It all came back to me the other day when I was looking at that picture, and I thought, my God, we were two kids together, and I was only two years older than Robert was. . . . And now I'm forty-six. . . . Can you imagine that—the way we all grow up and change and go away? . . . And my Lord, Robert seemed so grown-up to me even then. He was only a kid; yet he seemed older than the rest of us.

I was thinking of it just the other day, and I wonder what Robert would say now if he could see that picture. For when you look at it, it all comes back—the boarding house, St. Louis and the Fair. . . . And all of it is just the same as it has always been, as if it happened yesterday. . . . And all of us have grown up and gone away. And nothing has turned out the way we thought

1. Favorite (slang).

it would. . . . And all my hopes and dreams and big ambitions have come to nothing.

It's all so long ago, as if it happened in another world. And then it all comes back, as if it happened yesterday. . . . And sometimes I will lie awake at night and think of all the people who have come and gone, and all the things that happened. And hear the trains down by the river, and the whistles and the bell. . . . And how we went to St. Louis back in 1904.

And then I go out into the street and see the faces of the people that I pass. . . . Don't you see something funny in their eyes, as if they were wondering what had happened to them since they were kids—what it was that they had lost? . . . Now am I crazy, or do they look that way to you?

My God, I'd like to find out what is wrong. . . . What has changed since then. . . . And if we have that same queer funny look in our eyes, too. . . . And if it happens to us all, to everyone. . . . Robert and Jim and Dick and me—all standing there before that house on Orchard Street—and then you see the way we were—and how it all gets lost. . . .

The way it all turns out is nothing like the way we thought that it would be. . . . And how it all gets lost, until it seems that it has never happened—that it is something that we dreamed somewhere. . . . You see what I mean now? . . . That it is something that we hear somewhere, that it happened to someone else. . . . And then it all comes back again.

And there you are, two funny, frightened, skinny little kids with their noses pressed against a dirty window thirty years ago. . . . The way it felt, the way it smelled, even the funny smell in that old pantry of our house. And the steps before the house, the way the rooms looked. Those two little boys in sailor suits who used to ride up and down before the house on their tricycles. . . . And the birthmark on Robert's neck. . . . The Inside Inn. . . . St. Louis and the Fair. . . . It all comes back as if it happened yesterday. And then it goes away and seems farther off and stranger than if it happened in a dream.

"This is King's Highway," a man said. I looked and saw that it was just a street. There were some new buildings, and a big hotel; some restaurants, "bar-grill" places of the modern kind, the livid monotone of neon lights, the ceaseless traffic of the motorcars—all this was new, but it was just a street. And I knew that it had always been a street and nothing more. But somehow—I stood there looking at it, wondering what else I had expected to find.

The man kept looking at me, and I asked him if the Fair had been out this way.

"Sure, the Fair was out beyond here," the man said. "Where the park is now. But this street you're looking for? Don't you remember the name of the street or nothing?"

I said I thought the name was Edgemont Street, but that I was not sure. And I said the house was on the corner of this street and another street. And then the man said, "What street was that?" I said I did not know, but that King's Highway was a block or so away and that an interurban line ran past about a block or so from where we lived.

"What line was this?" the man said, and stared at me.

"The interurban line," I said.

Then he stared at me again and finally, “I don’t know no interurban line,” he said.

I said it was a line that ran behind some houses and that there were board fences there and grass beside the tracks. But somehow I could not say that it was summer in those days and that you could smell the ties, a kind of wooden tarry smell, and feel a kind of absence in the afternoon, after the car had gone. I could not say that King’s Highway had not been a street in those days but a kind of road that wound from magic out of some dim land, and that along the way it had got mixed with Tom the Piper’s son, with hot cross buns,² with all the light that came and went, and with cloud shadows passing on the mountains, with coming down through Indiana in the morning, and the smell of engine smoke, the Union Station, and most of all with voices lost and far and long ago that said, “King’s Highway.”

I didn’t say those things about King’s Highway because I looked about me and I saw what King’s Highway was. I left him then and went on till I found the place. And again, again, I turned into the street, finding the place where the two corners meet, the huddled block, the turret, and the steps, and paused a moment, looking back, as if the street was Time.

So I waited for a moment for a word, for a door to open, for the child to come. I waited, but no words were spoken; no one came.

Yet all of it was just as it had always been except the steps were lower and the porch less high, the strip of grass less wide than I had thought. A gray-stone front, St. Louis style, three-storied, with a slant slate roof, the side red brick and windowed, still with the old arched entrance in the center for the doctor’s use.

There was a tree in front, a lamp-post, and behind and to the side more trees than I had known there would be. And all the slaty turret gables, all the slaty window gables going into points, the two arched windows, in strong stone, in the front room.

It was all so strong, so solid and so ugly—and so enduring and good, the way I had remembered it, except I did not smell the tar, the hot and caulky dryness of the old cracked ties, the boards of backyard fences and the coarse and sultry grass, and absence in the afternoon when the street-car had gone, and the feel of the hot afternoon, and that everyone was absent at the Fair.

It was a hot day. Darkness had come; the heat hung and sweltered like a sodden blanket in St. Louis. The heat soaked down, and the people sweltered in it; the faces of the people were pale and greasy with the heat. And in their faces was a kind of patient wretchedness, and one felt the kind of desolation that one feels at the end of a hot day in a great city in America—when one’s home is far away across the continent, and he thinks of all that distance, all that heat, and feels: “Oh, God, but it’s a big country!”

Then he hears the engine and the wheel again, the wailing whistle and the bell, the sound of shifting in the sweltering yard, and walks the street, and walks the street, beneath the clusters of hard lights, and by the people with sagged faces, and is drowned in desolation and no belief.

He feels the way one feels when one comes back, and knows that he should not have come, and when he sees that, after all, King’s Highway is—a street;

2. I.e., Mother Goose nursery rhymes.

and St. Louis—the enchanted name—a big hot common town upon the river, sweltering in wet dreary heat, and not quite South, and nothing else enough to make it better.

It had not been like this before. I could remember how it got hot in the afternoons, and how I would feel a sense of absence and vague sadness when everyone had gone away. The house would seem so lonely, and sometimes I would sit inside, on the second step of the hall stairs, and listen to the sound of silence and absence in the afternoon. I could smell the oil upon the floor and on the stairs, and see the sliding doors with their brown varnish and the beady chains across the door, and thrust my hand among the beady chains, and gather them together in my arms, and let them clash, and swish with light beady swishings all round me. I could feel darkness, absence, and stained light, within the house, through the stained glass of the window on the stairs, through the small stained glasses by the door, stained light and absence, and vague sadness in the house in a hot mid-afternoon. And all these things themselves would have a kind of life: would seem to wait attentively, to be most living and most still.

Then I would long for evening and return, the slant of light, and feet along the street, the sharp-faced twins in sailor-suits upon their tricycles, the smell of supper and the sound of voices in the house again, and Robert coming from the Fair.

And again, again, I turned into the street, finding the place where two corners meet, turning at last to see if Time was there. I passed the house; some lights were burning in the house; the door was open, and a woman sat upon the porch. And presently I turned and stopped before the house again. I stood looking at it for a moment, and I put my foot upon the step.

Then I said to the woman who was sitting on the porch: "This house—excuse me, but could you tell me, please, who lives here?"

I know my words were strange and hollow and I had not said what I wished to say. She stared at me a moment, puzzled.

Then she said: "I live here. Who are you looking for?"

I said, "Why, I am looking for—There used to be a house—" I said.

The woman was now staring hard at me.

"I used to live here in this house," I said.

She was silent for a moment; then she said: "When was it that you lived here?"

"In 1904."

Again she was silent, looking at me for a moment. Then presently: "Oh. . . . That was the year of the Fair. You were here then?"

"Yes." I now spoke rapidly, with more confidence: "My mother had the house, and we were here for seven months. . . . And the house belonged to Dr. Packer," I went on. "We rented it from him."

"Yes," the woman said, and nodded now. "This was Dr. Packer's house. He's been dead for many years. But this was the Packer house, all right."

"That entrance on the side," I said, "where the steps go up—that was for Dr. Packer's patients. That was the entrance to his office."

"Oh," the woman said, "I didn't know that. I've often wondered what it was. I didn't know what it was for."

"And this big room here in front," I said, "that was the office. And there were sliding doors, and next to it a kind of alcove for his patients."

"Yes, the alcove is still there, only all of it has been made into one room now—and I never knew just what the alcove was for."

"And there were sliding doors on this side, too, that opened on the hall—and a stairway going up upon this side. And halfway up the stairway, at the landing, a little window of stained glass—and across the sliding doors here in the hall a kind of curtain made of strings of beads."

She nodded, smiling. "Yes, it's just the same—we still have the sliding doors and the stained glass window on the stairs. There's no bead curtain any more," she said, "but I remember when people had them. I know what you mean."

"When we were here," I said, "we used the Doctor's office for a parlor—except later on, the last month or two; and then we used it for a bedroom."

"It is a bedroom now," she said. "I rent rooms—all of the rooms upstairs are rented—but I have two brothers and they sleep in this front room."

And we were silent for a moment; then I said, "My brother stayed there, too."

"In the front room?" the woman said.

I answered: "Yes."

She paused a moment; then she said: "Won't you come in? I don't believe it's changed much. Would you like to see?"

I thanked her and said I would, and I went up the steps. She opened the screen door, and I went in.

And it was just the same—the stairs, the hallway, and the sliding doors, the window of stained glass upon the stairs. All of it was just the same except the stained light of absence in the afternoon, and the child who sat there, waiting on the stairs, and something fading like a dream, something coming like a light, something going, passing, fading like the shadows of a wood. And then it would be gone again, fading like cloud shadows in the hills, coming like the vast, the drowsy rumors of the distant enchanted Fair, and coming, going, coming, being found and lost, possessed and held and never captured, like lost voices in the mountains, long ago, like the dark eyes and the quiet face, the dark lost boy, my brother, who himself like shadows, or like absence in the house, would come, would go, and would return again.

The woman took me into the house and through the hall. I told her of the pantry, and I told her where it was and pointed to the place, but now it was no longer there. And I told her of the back yard, and the old board fence around the yard. But the old board fence was gone. And I told her of the carriage-house, and told her it was painted red. But now there was a small garage. And the back yard was still there, but smaller than I thought, and now there was a tree.

"I did not know there was a tree," I said. "I do not remember any tree."

"Perhaps it wasn't there," she said. "A tree could grow in thirty years." And then we came back through the house and paused a moment at the sliding doors.

"And could I see this room?" I said.

She slid the doors back. They slid open smoothly, with a kind of rolling heaviness, as they used to do. And then I saw the room again. It was the same. There was a window to the side, the two arched windows to the front, the alcove and the sliding doors, the fireplace with the tiles of mottled green,

the mantel of dark mission wood, a dresser and a bed, just where the dresser and the bed had been so long ago.

"Is this the room?" the woman said. "It hasn't changed?"

I told her it was the same.

"And your brother slept here where my brothers sleep?"

"This was his room," I said.

And we were silent for a moment. Then I turned to go, and said: "Well, thank you. I appreciate your showing me."

The woman said that she was glad and that it was no trouble. And she said, "And when you see your family, you can tell them that you saw the house," she said. "And my name is Mrs. Bell. You can tell your mother that a Mrs. Bell has got the house. And when you see your brother, you can tell him that you saw the room he slept in, and that you found it just the same."

I told her then that he was dead.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she looked at me and said: "He died here, didn't he? In this room?"

I told her that he did.

"Well, then," she said, "I knew it. I don't know how. But when you told me he was here, I knew it."

I said nothing. In a moment the woman said: "What did he die of?"

"Typhoid."

She looked shocked and troubled, and began involuntarily:

"My two brothers—"

"That was so long ago," I said. "I don't think you need to worry now."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking about that," she said. . . . "It was just hearing that a little boy—your brother—was—was in this room that my two brothers sleep in now—"

"Well, maybe I shouldn't have told you then. But he was a good boy—and if you'd known him, you wouldn't mind."

She said nothing, and I added quickly: "Besides, he didn't stay here long. This wasn't really his room—but the night he came back with my sister, he was so sick—they didn't move him."

"Oh," the woman said, "I see." And in a moment: "Are you going to tell your mother you were here?"

"I don't think so."

"I—I wonder how she feels about this room."

"I don't know. She never speaks of it."

"Oh. . . . How old was he?"

"He was twelve."

"You must have been pretty young yourself."

"I was four."

"And—you just wanted to see the room, didn't you? Is that why you came back?"

"Yes."

"Well"—indefinitely—"I guess you've seen it now."

"Yes, thank you."

"I guess you don't remember much about him, do you? I shouldn't think you would."

"No, not much."

The years dropped off like fallen leaves: the face came back again—the soft dark oval, the dark eyes, the soft brown berry on the neck, the raven hair, all bending down, approaching—the whole ghost-wise, intent and instant, like faces from a haunted wood.

“Now say it: *Robert!*”

“Wobbut.”

“No, not *Wobbut: Robert. . . . Say it.*”

“Wobbut.”

“Ah-h—you *didn't* say it. . . . You said *Wobbut: Robert! . . . Now say it.*”

“Wobbut.”

“Look, I'll tell you what I'll do if you say it right. . . . Would you like to go down to King's Highway? Would you like Robert to set you up? All right, then. . . . If you say Robert right, I'll take you to King's Highway and set you up to ice-cream. . . . Now say it right: *Say Robert.*”

“Wobbut.”

“Ah-h you-u! . . . Old tongue-tie, that's what you are. Some day I'm going to. . . . Well, come on, then. I'll set you up, anyway.”

It all came back and faded and was lost again. I turned to go, and thanked the woman, and I said: “Good-bye.”

“Well, then, good-bye,” the woman said, and we shook hands. “I'm glad if I could show you. I'm glad if—” She did not finish, and at length she said: “Well, then, that was a long time ago. You'll find it all changed now, I guess. It's all built up around here now—way out beyond here, out beyond where the Fair grounds used to be. I guess you'll find it changed,” she said.

We could find no more to say. We stood there for a moment on the steps, and shook hands once more.

“Well, then, good-bye.”

And again, again, I turned into the street, finding the place where corners meet, turning to look again to see where Time had gone. And all of it was just the same, it seemed that it had never changed since then, except all had been found and caught and captured for forever. And so, finding all, I knew all had been lost.

I knew that I would never come again, and that lost magic would not come again, and that the light that came, that passed and went and that returned again, the memory of lost voices in the hills, cloud shadows passing in the mountains, the voices of our kinsmen long ago, the street, the heat, King's Highway, and the piper's son, the vast and drowsy murmur of the distant Fair—oh, strange and bitter miracle of Time—come back again.

But I knew that it could not come back—the cry of absence in the afternoon, the house that waited and the child that dreamed; and through the thicket of man's memory, from the enchanted wood, the dark eye and the quiet face,—poor child, life's stranger and life's exile, lost, like all of us, a cipher in blind mazes, long ago—my parent, friend, and brother, the lost boy, was gone forever and would not return.

STERLING BROWN

1901–1989

For much of his long and distinguished career Sterling Brown presented himself to the public mainly as a teacher and scholar of African American folk culture and written literature. During the Harlem Renaissance movement, however, he was also hailed as a technically accomplished and eloquent poet. Rediscovered by younger black poets in the late 1960s, Brown has since been called, to quote the poet Michael S. Harper, “a trustee of consciousness, and a national treasure.”

Born in Washington, D.C., and never resident in New York, Brown identified himself with the “New Negro” movement in general rather than with its particular manifestation in Harlem during the 1920s. “The New Negro,” he wrote in 1955, “is not to me a group of writers centered in Harlem during the second half of the twenties. Most of the writers were not Harlemites; much of the best writing was not about Harlem, which was the show-window, the cashier’s till, but no more Negro America than New York is America.” Brown viewed Harlem as the place where African American writing was publicized rather than produced, believing that the cosmopolitan and sophisticated New York writers themselves had not written representatively about, or from the perspective of, ordinary black people. While he himself was well educated and of middle-class background, Brown immersed himself deeply in the full range of African American popular expression—jazz, blues, spirituals, work songs, folk tales—so that his writing could reach beyond his own experience.

Brown’s father was the Reverend Sterling Nelson Brown, who had been born a slave but eventually attended Fisk University and Oberlin College and later became professor of religion at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Brown attended the academically oriented Dunbar High School, went to Williams College in 1918, and took a master’s degree at Harvard. He won a prize in 1925 for his first nationally published essay—a sketch of the tenor Roland Hayes that appeared in *Opportunity*—and thereby came to the attention of black intellectuals. While teaching at Virginia Seminary and College between 1926 and 1928, he met and married Daisy Turnbull. After brief teaching jobs at Fisk, Lincoln University in Missouri, and Atlanta University, he joined the faculty at Howard University in 1929, where he continued to teach until retirement. His first book, *Outline for the Study of the Poetry of American Negroes* (1931), was a pedagogical supplement to James Weldon Johnson’s *Book of American Negro Poetry*, including paper topics, study questions, definitions, and other material. Having published individual poems in magazines and newspapers, Brown brought out a collection of this work called *Southern Road* in 1932. It was highly praised by influential critics, many of whom were especially impressed with Brown’s technical virtuosity. Alain Locke, the major theorist of the New Negro movement, believed that the book came very close to his ideal of the “poetic portrayal of Negro folk-life . . . true in both letter and spirit to the idiom of the folk’s own way of feeling and thinking.” Despite such acclaim, the book did not sell widely—1932 was not a good year for publishing, and the Harlem Renaissance movement had ended abruptly with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. Brown’s planned second book of poems, tentatively called *No Hiding Place* and ready for the press in 1935, was rejected by publishers for economic reasons.

After this setback Brown made little further effort to publish poetry and turned his energies into academic and administrative channels, always retaining his focus on African American culture. From 1936 to 1939 he was Negro affairs editor for the

Federal Writers' Project, a government funding source for writers during the Depression years; he also worked on the staff of the "Carnegie-Myrdal Study of the Negro," the basis of a landmark study of race relations, *An American Dilemma*, written by the Swedish sociologists Gunnar Myrdal and Alva Myrdal and published shortly after the end of World War II. *The Negro in American Fiction*, a book of critical essays, and *Negro Poetry and Drama*, a literary history, both appeared in 1938. Together with Ulysses Lee and Arthur P. Davis, Brown edited the important anthology *Negro Caravan* (1941), collecting important examples of African American literature from its folk foundations to 1940. Over the years he published numerous essays, notes, and commentaries on African American literature, the role of blacks in American writing, black folklore, and black music; he was an acknowledged expert on all of these topics.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s motivated him to conduct lectures and poetry readings that brought him and his poetry back into national view. It became clear at this time that Alain Locke's earlier assessment of Brown was only partly true. Although in some sense Brown strove in his poetry to make a literary form appropriate to authentic black folk voices, he saw these voices not as raw folk data but as already artistically self-conscious. Blues, jazz, and spirituals were complex, expressive, culturally sophisticated forms. In addition, Brown deployed his speakers' voices not for the main purpose of celebrating the black folk tradition—though this was certainly part of his aim—but to expose and criticize racial injustice. Both his scholarly writing and his poetry call attention to African American achievements and deplore American racism.

The text of the poems printed here is from *Collected Poems* (1996).

Mister Samuel and Sam

Mister Samuel, he belong to Rotary,¹
 Sam to de Sons of Rest;²
 Both wear red hats³ lak monkey men,
 An' you cain't say which is de best.

Mister Samuel ride in a Cadillac, 5
 Sam ride in a Tin Lizzie Fo'd;
 Both spend their jack fo' gas an' oil,
 An' both git stuck on de road.

Mister Samuel speak in de Chamber of Commerce,
 Sam he speak in ch'uch; 10
 Both of 'em talk for a mighty long time,
 Widout sayin', Lawd knows, ve'y much.

Mister Samuel deal wid high finance,
 Sam deal in a two-bit game;
 Mister Samuel crashes, Sam goes broke, 15
 But deys busted jes' de same.

Mister Samuel wife speak sof' an' low,
 When dey gits in their weekly fight;

1. The National Association of Rotary Clubs, service clubs founded to bring together businessmen and professionals, was established in the United States in 1910.

2. A social club for industrial workers and retirees that emerged in the United Kingdom and the

United States in the early 20th century. Colloquially, any group of idlers or hobos.

3. Associated with the Shriners, a fraternal organization founded in 1870, as well as with the monkeys who often accompanied organ grinders in the streets of U.S. cities.

Sam catches a broomstick crost his rear,
An' both of 'em's henpecked right. 20

Mister Samuel drinks his Canadian Rye,
Sam drinks his bootleg gin;
Both gits as high as a Georgia pine,
And both calls de doctor in.

Mister Samuel die, an' de folks all know, 25
Sam die widout no noise;
De worl' go by in de same ol' way,
And dey's both of 'em po' los' boys. . . .

1932, 1980

He Was a Man

It wasn't about no woman,
It wasn't about no rape,
He wasn't crazy, and he wasn't drunk,
An' it wasn't no shooting scrape,
He was a man, and they laid him down. 5

He wasn't no quarrelsome feller,
And he let other folks alone,
But he took a life, as a man will do,
In a fight for to save his own,
He was a man, and they laid him down. 10

He worked on his little homeplace
Down on the Eastern Shore;
He had his family, and he had his friends,
And he didn't expect much more,
He was a man, and they laid him down. 15

He wasn't nobody's great man,
He wasn't nobody's good,
Was a po' boy tried to get from life
What happiness he could,
He was a man, and they laid him down. 20

He didn't abuse Tom Wickley,
Said nothing when the white man curst,
But when Tom grabbed his gun, he pulled his own,
And his bullet got there first,
He was a man, and they laid him down. 25

Didn't catch him in no manhunt,
But they took him from a hospital bed,
Stretched on his back in the nigger ward,
With a bullet wound in his head,
He was a man, and they laid him down. 30

It didn't come off at midnight
Nor yet at the break of day,

It was in the broad noon daylight,
 When they put po' Will away,
 He was a man, and they laid him down. 35

Didn't take him to no swampland,
 Didn't take him to no woods,
 Didn't hide themselves, didn't have no masks,
 Didn't wear no Ku Klux hoods,
 He was a man, and they laid him down. 40

They strung him up on Main Street,
 On a tree in the Court House Square,
 And people came from miles around
 To enjoy a holiday there,
 He was a man, and they laid him down. 45

They hung him and they shot him,
 They piled packing cases around,
 They burnt up Will's black body,
 'Cause he shot a white man down;
 "He was a man, and we'll lay him down." 50

It wasn't no solemn business,
 Was more like a barbecue,
 The crackers yelled when the fire blazed,
 And the women and the children too—
 "He was a man, and we laid him down." 55

The Coroner and the Sheriff
 Said "Death by Hands Unknown."
 The mob broke up by midnight,
 "Another uppity Nigger gone—
 He was a man, an' we laid him down." 60

1932, 1980

Master and Man

The yellow ears are crammed in Mr. Cromartie's bin
 The wheat is tight sacked in Mr. Cromartie's barn.
 The timothy is stuffed in Mr. Cromartie's loft.
 The ploughs are lined up in Mr. Cromartie's shed.
 The cotton has gone to Mr. Cromartie's factor. 5
 The money is in Mr. Cromartie's bank.
 Mr. Cromartie's son made his frat at the college.
 Mr. Cromartie's daughter has got her new car.
 The veranda is old, but the fireplace is rosy.
 Well done, Mr. Cromartie. Time now for rest. 10

Blackened sticks line the furrows that Uncle Ned laid.
 Bits of fluff are in the corners where Uncle Ned ginned.
 The mules he ploughed are sleek in Mr. Cromartie's pastures.
 The hoes grow dull in Mr. Cromartie's shed.

His winter rations wait on the commissary shelves; 15
 Mr. Cromartie's ledger is there for his service.
 Uncle Ned daubs some mortar between the old logs.
 His children have traipsed off to God knows where.
 His old lady sits patching the old, thin denims;
 She's got a new dress, and his young one a doll, 20
 He's got five dollars. The year has come round.
 The harvest is over: Uncle Ned's harvesting,
 Mr. Cromartie's harvest. Time now for rest.

1936, 1980

Break of Day

Big Jess fired on the Alabama Central,
 Man in full, babe, man in full.
 Been throwing on coal for Mister Murphy
 From times way back, baby, times way back.

Big Jess had a pleasing woman, name of Mamie, 5
 Sweet-hipted Mama, sweet-hipted Mame;
 Had a boy growing up for to be a fireman,
 Just like his pa, baby, like his pa.

Out by the roundhouse Jess had his cabin,
 Longside the tracks, babe, long the tracks, 10
 Jess pulled the whistle when they high-balled past it
 "I'm on my way, baby, on my way."

Crackers craved the job what Jess was holding,
 Times right tough, babe, times right tough,
 Warned Jess to quit his job for a white man, 15
 Jess he laughed, baby, he jes' laughed.

He picked up his lunch-box, kissed his sweet woman,
 Sweet-hipted Mama, sweet-hipted Mame,
 His son walked with him to the white-washed palings,
 "Be seeing you soon, son, see you soon." 20

Mister Murphy let Big Jess talk on the whistle
 "So long sugar baby, so long babe";
 Train due back in the early morning
 Breakfast time, baby, breakfast time.

Mob stopped the train crossing Black Bear Mountain 25
 Shot rang out, babe, shot rang out.
 They left Big Jess on the Black Bear Mountain,
 Break of day, baby, break of day.

Sweet Mame sits rocking, waiting for the whistle
 Long past due, babe, long past due. 30
 The grits are cold, and the coffee's boiled over,
 But Jess done gone, baby he done gone.

1938, 1980

Bitter Fruit of the Tree

They said to my grandmother: "Please do not be bitter,"
 When they sold her first-born and let the second die,
 When they drove her husband till he took to the swamplands,
 And brought him home bloody and beaten at last.
 They told her, "It is better you should not be bitter, 5
 Some must work and suffer so that we, who must, can live,
 Forgiving is noble, you must not be heathen bitter;
 These are your orders: you *are* not to be bitter."
 And they left her shack for their porticoed house.

They said to my father: "Please do not be bitter," 10
 When he ploughed and planted a crop not his,
 When he weatherstripped a house that he could not enter,
 And stored away a harvest he could not enjoy.
 They answered his questions: "It does not concern you,
 It is not for you to know, it is past your understanding, 15
 All you need know is: you must not be bitter."
 And they laughed on their way to reckon the crop,
 And my father walked over the wide garnered acres
 Where a cutting wind warned him of the cold to come.

They said to my brother: "Please do not be bitter, 20
 Is it not sad to see the old place go to ruin?
 The eaves are sprung and the chimney tower is leaning,
 The sills, joists, and columns are rotten in the core;
 The blinds hang crazy and the shingles blow away,
 The fields have gone back to broomsedge and pine, 25
 And the soil washes down the red gully scars.
 With so much to be done, there's no time for being bitter.
 Your father made it for us, it is up to you to save it,
 What is past is over, and you should not be bitter."
 But my brother is bitter, and he does not hear. 30

1939, 1980

Sterling Brown: "Bitter Fruit of the Tree" from THE COLLECTED POEMS OF STERLING A BROWN, selected by Michael S. Harper. Copyright © 1980 by Sterling A. Brown. Reprinted by permission of Elizabeth A. Dennis.

LANGSTON HUGHES

1902–1967

Langston Hughes was the most popular and versatile of the many writers connected with the Harlem Renaissance. Along with Zora Neale Hurston, and in contrast to Jean Toomer and Countee Cullen (who wanted to work with the patterns of written literary forms, whether traditional or experimental), he wanted to capture the oral and improvisatory traditions of black culture in written form.

Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri; as a child, since his parents were separated, he lived mainly with his maternal grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas. He did, however, live intermittently both with his mother in Detroit and Cleveland, where he finished high school and began to write poetry, and with his father, who, disgusted with American racism, had gone to Mexico. Like other poets in this era—T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Edgar Lee Masters, and Robert Frost—Hughes had a mother sympathetic to his poetic ambitions and a businesslike father with whom he was in deep, scarring conflict.

Hughes entered Columbia University in 1920 but left after a year. Traveling and drifting, he shipped out as a merchant seaman and worked at a nightclub in Paris (France) and as a busboy in Washington, D.C. All this time he was writing and publishing poetry, chiefly in the two important African American periodicals *Opportunity* and the *Crisis*. Eleven of Hughes's poems were published in Alain Locke's pioneering anthology, *The New Negro* (1925), and he was also well represented in Countee Cullen's 1927 anthology, *Caroling Dusk*. Carl Van Vechten, one of the white patrons of African American writing, helped get *The Weary Blues*, Hughes's first volume of poems, published in 1926. It was in this year, too, that his important essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" appeared in the *Nation* (see p. 328); in that essay Hughes described the immense challenges to be faced by the serious black artist "who would produce a racial art" but insisted on the need for courageous artists to make the attempt. Other patrons appeared: Amy Spingarn financed his college education at Lincoln University (Pennsylvania), and Charlotte Mason subsidized him in New York City between 1928 and 1930. The publication of his novel *Not without Laughter* in 1930 solidified his reputation and sales, enabling him to support himself. By the 1930s he was being called "the bard of Harlem."

The Great Depression brought an abrupt end to much African American literary activity, but Hughes was already a public figure. In the activist 1930s he was much absorbed in radical politics. Hughes and other blacks were drawn by the American Communist Party, which made racial justice an important plank in its platform, promoting an image of working-class solidarity that nullified racial boundaries. He visited the Soviet Union in 1932 and produced a significant amount of radical writing up to the eve of World War II. He covered the Spanish civil war for the *Baltimore Afro-American* in 1937. By the end of the decade he had also been involved in drama and screenplay writing and had begun an autobiography, all the while publishing poetry. In 1943 he invented the folksy, streetwise character Jesse B. Semple, whose commonsense prose monologues on race were eventually collected in four volumes, and Alberta K. Johnson, Semple's female equivalent, in his series of "Madam" poems.

In the 1950s and 1960s Hughes published a variety of anthologies for children and adults, including *First Book of Negroes* (1952), *The First Book of Jazz* (1955), and *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958). In 1953 he was called to testify before Senator Joseph McCarthy's committee on subversive activities in connection with his 1930s radicalism. The FBI listed him as a security risk until 1959; and during these years, when he could not travel outside the United States because he would not have been allowed to reenter the country, Hughes worked to rehabilitate his reputation as a good American by producing patriotic poetry. From 1960 to the end of his life he was again on the international circuit.

Within the spectrum of artistic possibilities open to writers of the Harlem Renaissance—drawing on African American rural folk forms; on literary traditions and forms that entered the United States from Europe and Great Britain; or on the new cultural forms of blacks in American cities—Hughes chose to focus his work on modern, urban black life. He modeled his stanza forms on the improvisatory rhythms of jazz music and adapted the vocabulary of everyday black speech to poetry. He also acknowledged finding inspiration for his writing in the work of white American poets who preceded him. Like Walt Whitman he heard America singing, and he asserted his right to sing America back; he also learned from Carl Sandburg's earlier

attempts to work jazz into poetry. Hughes did not confuse his pride in African American culture with complacency toward the material deprivations of black life in the United States. He was keenly aware that the modernist “vogue in things Negro” among white Americans was potentially exploitative and voyeuristic; he confronted such racial tourists with the misery as well as the jazz of Chicago’s South Side. Early and late, Hughes’s poems demanded that African Americans be acknowledged as owners of the culture they gave to the United States and as fully enfranchised American citizens.

The source of the poems printed here is *Collected Poems* (1994).

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. 5
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its
muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. 10

1921, 1926

Mother to Son

Well, son, I’ll tell you:
Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.
It’s had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up, 5
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I’ve been a-climbin’ on,
And reachin’ landin’s, 10
And turnin’ corners,
And sometimes goin’ in the dark
Where there ain’t been no light.
So boy, don’t you turn back.
Don’t you set down on the steps 15
’Cause you finds it’s kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—
 For I'se still goin', honey,
 I'se still climbin',
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. 20

1922, 1926

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
 They send me to eat in the kitchen
 When company comes,
 But I laugh, 5
 And eat well,
 And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
 I'll be at the table
 When company comes. 10
 Nobody'll dare
 Say to me,
 "Eat in the kitchen,"
 Then.

Besides, 15
 They'll see how beautiful I am
 And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

1925, 1959

The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
 I heard a Negro play.
 Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light 5
 He did a lazy sway. . . .
 He did a lazy sway. . . .
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
 With his ebony hands on each ivory key.
 He made that poor piano moan with melody. 10
 O Blues!
 Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
 Sweet Blues!
 Coming from a black man's soul. 15
 O Blues!
 In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
 I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—
 "Ain't got nobody in all this world,
 Ain't got nobody but ma self. 20
 I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
 And put ma troubles on de shelf."
 Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
 He played a few chords then he sang some more—
 "I got de Weary Blues 25
 And I can't be satisfied.
 Got de Weary Blues
 And can't be satisfied—
 I ain't happy no mo'
 And I wish that I had died." 30
 And far into the night he crooned that tune.
 The stars went out and so did the moon.
 The singer stopped playing and went to bed.
 While the Weary Blues echoed through his head
 He slept like a rock or a man that's dead. 35

1925

Mulatto

I am your son, white man!

Georgia dusk
 And the turpentine woods.
 One of the pillars of the temple fell.

You are my son!
Like hell! 5

The moon over the turpentine woods.
 The Southern night
 Full of stars,
 Great big yellow stars. 10
 What's a body but a toy?
 Juicy bodies
 Of nigger wenches
 Blue black
 Against black fences. 15
 O, you little bastard boy,
 What's a body but a toy?
 The scent of pine wood stings the soft night air.

What's the body of your mother?
Silver moonlight everywhere. 20

What's the body of your mother?
Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,
A nigger joy,
A little yellow 25
Bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.
Niggers ain't my brother.
Not ever.
Niggers ain't my brother. 30
The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
O, sweet as earth,
Dusk dark bodies
Give sweet birth 35
To little yellow bastard boys.

Git on back there in the night,
You ain't white.

The bright stars scatter everywhere.
Pine wood scent in the evening air. 40
A nigger night,
A nigger joy.

I am your son, white man!

A little yellow
Bastard boy. 45

1927

Song for a Dark Girl

Way Down South in Dixie¹
(Break the heart of me)
They hung my black young lover
To a cross roads tree.

Way Down South in Dixie 5
(Bruised body high in air)
I asked the white Lord Jesus
What was the use of prayer.

1. Last line of "Dixie," the popular minstrel song, probably composed by Daniel D. Emmett (1815–1904).

Way Down South in Dixie
 (Break the heart of me) 10
 Love is a naked shadow
 On a gnarled and naked tree.

1927

Genius Child

This is a song for the genius child.
 Sing it softly, for the song is wild.
 Sing it softly as ever you can—
 Lest the song get out of hand.

Nobody loves a genius child. 5

Can you love an eagle,
 Tame or wild?
 Can you love an eagle,
 Wild or tame?
 Can you love a monster 10
 Of frightening name?

Nobody loves a genius child.

Kill him—and let his soul run wild!

1937, 1947

Visitors to the Black Belt

You can talk about
Across the railroad tracks—
 To me it's *here*
 On this side of the tracks.

You can talk about 5
Up in Harlem—
 To me it's *here*
 In Harlem.

You can say
 Jazz on the South Side¹— 10
 To me it's hell
 On the South Side:

1. African American neighborhood in Chicago. See also Archibald J. Motley's 1934 painting, *Black Belt*, in the color insert to this volume.

Kitchenettes
 With no heat
 And garbage
 In the halls. 15

Who're you, outsider?

Ask me who am I.

1940, 1943

Note on Commercial Theatre

You've taken my blues and gone—
 You sing 'em on Broadway
 And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,¹
 And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
 And you fixed 'em 5
 So they don't sound like me.
 Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone.
 You put me in *Macbeth* and *Carmen Jones*²
 And all kinds of *Swing Mikados*³ 10
 And in everything but what's about me—
 But someday somebody'll
 Stand up and talk about me,
 And write about me—

Black and beautiful— 15
 And sing about me,
 And put on plays about me!

I reckon it'll be
 Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me. 20

1940, 1959

1. Outdoor concert amphitheater constructed in the 1920s.

2. An all-black musical (1943), loosely based on the opera *Carmen* by French composer George Bizet (1838–1875), focused on African American life during World War II. An all-black production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), set in Haiti, was

a Broadway success in 1936.

3. During 1939, two different all-black versions of *The Mikado* (1885), a comic opera by the British team of W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911) and Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900), competed on Broadway: *The Swing Mikado* (which premiered in Chicago in 1938) and *The Hot Mikado*.

Vagabonds

We are the desperate
 Who do not care,
 The hungry
 Who have nowhere
 To eat, 5
 No place to sleep,
 The tearless
 Who cannot
 Weep.

1941, 1947

Words Like Freedom¹

There are words like *Freedom*
 Sweet and wonderful to say.
 On my heart-strings freedom sings
 All day everyday.

There are words like *Liberty* 5
 That almost make me cry.
 If you had known what I know
 You would know why.

1943, 1967

Madam and Her Madam

I worked for a woman,
 She wasn't mean—
 But she had a twelve-room
 House to clean.

Had to get breakfast, 5
 Dinner, and supper, too—
 Then take care of her children
 When I got through.

Wash, iron, and scrub,
 Walk the dog around— 10
 It was too much,
 Nearly broke me down.

1. Originally published under the title "Refugee in America."

I said, Madam,
 Can it be
 You trying to make a
 Pack-horse out of me? 15

She opened her mouth.
 She cried, Oh, no!
 You know, Alberta,
 I love you so! 20

I said, Madam,
 That may be true—
 But I'll be dogged
 If I love you!

1943

Freedom [1]¹

Freedom will not come
 Today, this year
 Nor ever
 Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
 As the other fellow has
 To stand
 On my two feet
 And own the land. 5

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
 I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
 I cannot live on tomorrow's bread. 10

Freedom
 Is a strong seed
 Planted
 In a great need. 15

I live here, too.
 I want freedom
 Just as you. 20

1943, 1967

1. Originally published under the title "Democracy."

Madam's Calling Cards

I had some cards printed
The other day.
They cost me more
Than I wanted to pay.

I told the man 5
I wasn't no mint,
But I hankered to see
My name in print.

MADAM JOHNSON,
ALBERTA K. 10
He said, Your name looks good
Madam'd that way.

Shall I use Old English
Or a Roman letter?
I said, Use American. 15
American's better.

There's nothing foreign
To my pedigree:
Alberta K. Johnson—
American that's me. 20

1943, 1949

Silhouette

Southern gentle lady,
Do not swoon.
They've just hung a black man
In the dark of the moon.

They've hung a black man 5
To a roadside tree
In the dark of the moon
For the world to see
How Dixie protects
Its white womanhood. 10

Southern gentle lady,
Be good!
Be good!

1944, 1949

Theme for English B

The instructor said,

*Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.*

5

I wonder if it's that simple?

I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.

I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.¹

I am the only colored student in my class.

10

The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

15

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

20

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.

I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.

I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.²

I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like
the same things other folks like who are other races.

25

So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.

But it will be
a part of you, instructor.

30

You are white—

yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.

That's American.

Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.

Nor do I often want to be a part of you.

35

But we are, that's true!

As I learn from you,

I guess you learn from me—
although you're older—and white—
and somewhat more free.

40

This is my page for English B.

1949

1. The City College of the City University of New York. Winston-Salem and Durham are cities in North Carolina.

2. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German

composer of the Baroque era. Bessie Smith (1894–1937), noted blues singer. “Bop”: jazz form developed in Harlem during World War II.

JOHN STEINBECK

1902–1968

Most of John Steinbeck's best writing is set in the region of California that he called home, the Salinas Valley and Monterey peninsula of California, where visitors today will find official remembrances of him everywhere. Steinbeck believed in the American promise of opportunity for all, but believed also that social injustices and economic inequalities had put opportunity beyond reach for many. His work merged literary modernism with literary realism, celebrated traditional rural communities along with social outcasts and immigrant cultures, and endorsed conservative values and radical politics at the same time.

Steinbeck's father managed a flour mill and later became treasurer of Monterey County; his mother, who had taught school before marriage, was active in local civic affairs. Their home was full of books, and Steinbeck read avidly from an early age. After graduating from Salinas High School in 1919, he began to study at Stanford University but took time off for a variety of short-term jobs at local mills, farms, and estates. During this period he developed an abiding respect for people who worked on farms and in factories, and committed his literary abilities to their cause. He left college for good in 1925, having completed less than three years of coursework, and continued his roving life.

With financial help from his father, Steinbeck spent most of 1929 writing. He moved to the seaside town of Pacific Grove, on the Monterey coast, and in 1930 was married (the first of three times). In 1935 he achieved commercial success with his third novel, *Tortilla Flat*, a celebration of the Mexican-American culture of the "paisanos" who lived in the Monterey hills. Steinbeck's next novel, *In Dubious Battle* (1936), contrasted the decency of striking migratory farm workers both to the cynicism of landowners and their vigilantes, and to the equal cynicism of Communist labor union organizers who exploit the workers' plight for their own purposes. Sympathy for the underdog appears again in *Of Mice and Men* (1937), a best-selling short novel about two itinerant ranch hands, and yet again in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), his most famous and most ambitious novel. *The Long Valley* (1938) brought together a number of his stories set in the Salinas Valley, including "The Chrysanthemums."

Inspired by the devastating 1930s drought in the southern plains states and the exodus of thousands of farmers from their homes in the so-called Dust Bowl, *The Grapes of Wrath* told the story of the Joad family, who, after losing their land in Oklahoma, migrated westward to California on U.S. Highway 66 looking for, but not finding, a better life. Because of its supposed radicalism, the novel was banned or burned in several states, but even so, it became the nation's number one best seller and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1940. *Cannery Row* (1945), a local-color novel about workers in the sardine canneries of Monterey, also became a best seller.

During and after World War II, the film industry began paying serious attention to Steinbeck's writing. *Of Mice and Men* was adapted as a film in 1939, and *The Grapes of Wrath* followed in 1940. The family saga *East of Eden* (1952), Steinbeck's longest novel, was filmed in 1955 with the electric young actor James Dean (1931–1955) in a starring role. The qualities that made Steinbeck's fiction so adaptable to the screen were also those for which he won the Nobel Prize in 1962; the prize committee praised his work for "combining sympathetic humour and keen social perception."

The text of "The Chrysanthemums" is that of its first printing, in *Harper's* (1937).

The Chrysanthemums

The high grey-flannel fog of winter closed off the Salinas Valley from the sky and from all the rest of the world. On every side it sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot. On the broad, level land floor the gang plows¹ bit deep and left the black earth shining like metal where the shares had cut. On the foothill ranches across the Salinas River, the yellow stubble fields seemed to be bathed in pale cold sunshine, but there was no sunshine in the valley now in December. The thick willow scrub along the river flamed with sharp and positive yellow leaves.

It was a time of quiet and of waiting. The air was cold and tender. A light wind blew up from the southwest so that the farmers were mildly hopeful of a good rain before long; but fog and rain do not go together.

Across the river, on Henry Allen's foothill ranch there was little work to be done, for the hay was cut and stored and the orchards were plowed up to receive the rain deeply when it should come. The cattle on the higher slopes were becoming shaggy and rough-coated.

Elisa Allen, working in her flower garden, looked down across the yard and saw Henry, her husband, talking to two men in business suits. The three of them stood by the tractor shed, each man with one foot on the side of the little Fordson.² They smoked cigarettes and studied the machine as they talked.

Elisa watched them for a moment and then went back to her work. She was thirty-five. Her face was lean and strong and her eyes were as clear as water. Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clodhopper shoes, a figured print dress almost completely covered by a big corduroy apron with four big pockets to hold the snips, the trowel and scratcher, the seeds and the knife she worked with. She wore heavy leather gloves to protect her hands while she worked.

She was cutting down the old year's chrysanthemum stalks with a pair of short and powerful scissors. She looked down toward the men by the tractor shed now and then. Her face was eager and mature and handsome; even her work with the scissors was over-eager, over-powerful. The chrysanthemum stems seemed too small and easy for her energy.

She brushed a cloud of hair out of her eyes with the back of her glove, and left a smudge of earth on her cheek in doing it. Behind her stood the neat white farm house with red geraniums close-banked around it as high as the windows. It was a hard-swept looking little house with hard-polished windows, and a clean mud-mat on the front steps.

Elisa cast another glance toward the tractor shed. The strangers were getting into their Ford coupe.³ She took off a glove and put her strong fingers down into the forest of new green chrysanthemum sprouts that were growing around the old roots. She spread the leaves and looked down among the close-growing stems. No aphids were there, no sowbugs or snails or cutworms. Her terrier fingers destroyed such pests before they could get started.

1. Plows with multiple plowshares, or plowing blades.

2. Brand of tractor made by the Ford Motor

Company.

3. Closed-roof, two-door automobile.

Elisa started at the sound of her husband's voice. He had come near quietly, and he leaned over the wire fence that protected her flower garden from cattle and dogs and chickens.

"At it again," he said. "You've got a strong new crop coming."

Elisa straightened her back and pulled on the gardening glove again. "Yes. They'll be strong this coming year." In her tone and on her face there was a little smugness.

"You've got a gift with things," Henry observed. "Some of those yellow chrysanthemums you had this year were ten inches across. I wish you'd work out in the orchard and raise some apples that big."

Her eyes sharpened. "Maybe I could do it, too. I've a gift with things, all right. My mother had it. She could stick anything in the ground and make it grow. She said it was having planters' hands that knew how to do it."

"Well, it sure works with flowers," he said.

"Henry, who were those men you were talking to?"

"Why, sure, that's what I came to tell you. They were from the Western Meat Company. I sold those thirty head of three-year-old steers. Got nearly my own price, too."

"Good," she said. "Good for you."

"And I thought," he continued, "I thought how it's Saturday afternoon, and we might go into Salinas for dinner at a restaurant, and then to a picture show—to celebrate, you see."

"Good," she repeated. "Oh, yes. That will be good."

Henry put on his joking tone. "There's fights tonight. How'd you like to go to the fights?"

"Oh, no," she said breathlessly. "No, I wouldn't like fights."

"Just fooling, Elisa. We'll go to a movie. Let's see. It's two now. I'm going to take Scotty and bring down those steers from the hill. It'll take us maybe two hours. We'll go in town about five and have dinner at the Cominos Hotel. Like that?"

"Of course I'll like it. It's good to eat away from home."

"All right, then. I'll go get up a couple of horses."

She said, "I'll have plenty of time to transplant some of these sets, I guess."

She heard her husband calling Scotty down by the barn. And a little later she saw the two men ride up the pale yellow hillside in search of the steers.

There was a little square sandy bed kept for rooting the chrysanthemums. With her trowel she turned the soil over and over, and smoothed it and patted it firm. Then she dug ten parallel trenches to receive the sets. Back at the chrysanthemum bed she pulled out the little crisp shoots, trimmed off the leaves of each one with her scissors and laid it on a small orderly pile.

A squeak of wheels and plod of hoofs came from the road. Elisa looked up. The country road ran along the dense bank of willows and cottonwoods that bordered the river, and up this road came a curious vehicle, curiously drawn. It was an old spring-wagon, with a round canvas top on it like the cover of a prairie schooner. It was drawn by an old bay horse and a little grey-and-white burro. A big stubble-bearded man sat between the cover flaps and drove the crawling team. Underneath the wagon, between the hind wheels, a lean and rangy mongrel dog walked sedately. Words were painted on the canvas, in clumsy, crooked letters. "Pots, pans, knives, sisors, lawn mores, Fixed." Two

rows of articles, and the triumphantly definitive “Fixed” below. The black paint had run down in little sharp points beneath each letter.

Elisa, squatting on the ground, watched to see the crazy, loose-jointed wagon pass by. But it didn’t pass. It turned into the farm road in front of her house, crooked old wheels skirling and squeaking. The rangy dog darted from between the wheels and ran ahead. Instantly the two ranch shepherds flew out at him. Then all three stopped, and with stiff and quivering tails, with taut straight legs, with ambassadorial dignity, they slowly circled, sniffing daintily. The caravan pulled up to Elisa’s wire fence and stopped. Now the newcomer dog, feeling out-numbered, lowered his tail and retired under the wagon with raised hackles and bared teeth.

The man on the wagon seat called out, “That’s a bad dog in a fight when he gets started.”

Elisa laughed. “I see he is. How soon does he generally get started?”

The man caught up her laughter and echoed it heartily. “Sometimes not for weeks and weeks,” he said. He climbed stiffly down, over the wheel. The horse and the donkey drooped like unwatered flowers.

Elisa saw that he was a very big man. Although his hair and beard were greying, he did not look old. His worn black suit was wrinkled and spotted with grease. The laughter had disappeared from his face and eyes the moment his laughing voice ceased. His eyes were dark, and they were full of the brooding that gets in the eyes of teamsters and of sailors. The calloused hands he rested on the wire fence were cracked, and every crack was a black line. He took off his battered hat.

“I’m off my general road, ma’am,” he said. “Does this dirt road cut over across the river to the Los Angeles highway?”

Elisa stood up and shoved the thick scissors in her apron pocket. “Well, yes, it does, but it winds around and then fords the river. I don’t think your team could pull through the sand.”

He replied with some asperity, “It might surprise you what them beasts can pull through.”

“When they get started?” she asked.

He smiled for a second. “Yes. When they get started.”

“Well,” said Elisa, “I think you’ll save time if you go back to the Salinas road and pick up the highway there.”

He drew a big finger down the chicken wire and made it sing. “I ain’t in any hurry, ma’am. I go from Seattle to San Diego and back every year. Takes all my time. About six months each way. I aim to follow nice weather.”

Elisa took off her gloves and stuffed them in the apron pocket with the scissors. She touched the under edge of her man’s hat, searching for fugitive hairs. “That sounds like a nice kind of a way to live,” she said.

He leaned confidentially over the fence. “Maybe you noticed the writing on my wagon. I mend pots and sharpen knives and scissors. You got any of them things to do?”

“Oh, no,” she said quickly. “Nothing like that.” Her eyes hardened with resistance.

“Scissors is the worst thing,” he explained. “Most people just ruin scissors trying to sharpen ’em, but I know how. I got a special tool. It’s a little bobbit kind of thing, and patented. But it sure does the trick.”

"No. My scissors are all sharp."

"All right, then. Take a pot," he continued earnestly, "a bent pot, or a pot with a hole. I can make it like new so you don't have to buy no new ones. That's a saving for you."

"No," she said shortly. "I tell you I have nothing like that for you to do."

His face fell to an exaggerated sadness. His voice took on a whining undertone. "I ain't had a thing to do today. Maybe I won't have no supper tonight. You see I'm off my regular road. I know folks on the highway clear from Seattle to San Diego. They save their things for me to sharpen up because they know I do it so good and save them money."

"I'm sorry," Elisa said irritably. "I haven't anything for you to do."

His eyes left her face and fell to searching the ground. They roamed about until they came to the chrysanthemum bed where she had been working. "What's them plants, ma'am?"

The irritation and resistance melted from Elisa's face. "Oh, those are chrysanthemums, giant whites and yellows. I raise them every year, bigger than anybody around here."

"Kind of a long-stemmed flower? Looks like a quick puff of colored smoke?" he asked.

"That's it. What a nice way to describe them."

"They smell kind of nasty till you get used to them," he said.

"It's a good bitter smell," she retorted, "not nasty at all."

He changed his tone quickly. "I like the smell myself."

"I had ten-inch blooms this year," she said.

The man leaned farther over the fence. "Look. I know a lady down the road a piece, has got the nicest garden you ever seen. Got nearly every kind of flower but no chrysanthemums. Last time I was mending a copper-bottom washtub for her (that's a hard job but I do it good), she said to me, 'If you ever run across some nice chrysanthemums I wish you'd try to get me a few seeds.' That's what she told me."

Elisa's eyes grew alert and eager. "She couldn't have known much about chrysanthemums. You *can* raise them from seed, but it's much easier to root the little sprouts you see there."

"Oh," he said. "I s'pose I can't take none to her, then."

"Why yes you can," Elisa cried. "I can put some in damp sand, and you can carry them right along with you. They'll take root in the pot if you keep them damp. And then she can transplant them."

"She'd sure like to have some, ma'am. You say they're nice ones?"

"Beautiful," she said. "Oh, beautiful." Her eyes shone. She tore off the battered hat and shook out her dark pretty hair. "I'll put them in a flower pot, and you can take them right with you. Come into the yard."

While the man came through the picket gate Elisa ran excitedly along the geranium-bordered path to the back of the house. And she returned carrying a big red flower pot. The gloves were forgotten now. She kneeled on the ground by the starting bed and dug up the sandy soil with her fingers and scooped it into the bright new flower pot. Then she picked up the little pile of shoots she had prepared. With her strong fingers she pressed them into the sand and tamped around them with her knuckles. The man stood over her. "I'll tell you what to do," she said. "You remember so you can tell the lady."

"Yes, I'll try to remember."

"Well, look. These will take root in about a month. Then she must set them out, about a foot apart in good rich earth like this, see?" She lifted a handful of dark soil for him to look at. "They'll grow fast and tall. Now remember this: In July tell her to cut them down, about eight inches from the ground."

"Before they bloom?" he asked.

"Yes, before they bloom." Her face was tight with eagerness. "They'll grow right up again. About the last of September the buds will start."

She stopped and seemed perplexed. "It's the budding that takes the most care," she said hesitantly. "I don't know how to tell you." She looked deep into his eyes, searchingly. Her mouth opened a little, and she seemed to be listening. "I'll try to tell you," she said. "Did you ever hear of planting hands?"

"Can't say I have, ma'am."

"Well, I can only tell you what it feels like. It's when you're picking off the buds you don't want. Everything goes right down into your fingertips. You watch your fingers work. They do it themselves. You can feel how it is. They pick and pick the buds. They never make a mistake. They're with the plant. Do you see? Your fingers and the plant. You can feel that, right up your arm. They know. They never make a mistake. You can feel it. When you're like that you can't do anything wrong. Do you see that? Can you understand that?"

She was kneeling on the ground looking up at him. Her breast swelled passionately.

The man's eyes narrowed. He looked away self-consciously. "Maybe I know," he said. "Sometimes in the night in the wagon there—"

Elisa's voice grew husky. She broke in on him, "I've never lived as you do, but I know what you mean. When the night is dark—why, the stars are sharp-pointed, and there's quiet. Why, you rise up and up! Every pointed star gets driven into your body. It's like that. Hot and sharp and—lovely."

Kneeling there, her hand went out toward his legs in the greasy black trousers. Her hesitant fingers almost touched the cloth. Then her hand dropped to the ground. She crouched low like a fawning dog.

He said, "It's nice, just like you say. Only when you don't have no dinner, it ain't."

She stood up then, very straight, and her face was ashamed. She held the flower pot out to him and placed it gently in his arms. "Here. Put it in your wagon, on the seat, where you can watch it. Maybe I can find something for you to do."

At the back of the house she dug in the can pile and found two old and battered aluminum saucepans. She carried them back and gave them to him. "Here, maybe you can fix these."

His manner changed. He became professional. "Good as new I can fix them." At the back of his wagon he set a little anvil, and out of an oily tool box dug a small machine hammer. Elisa came through the gate to watch him while he pounded out the dents in the kettles. His mouth grew sure and knowing. At a difficult part of the work he sucked his under-lip.

"You sleep right in the wagon?" Elisa asked.

"Right in the wagon, ma'am. Rain or shine I'm dry as a cow in there."

"It must be nice," she said. "It must be very nice. I wish women could do such things."

"It ain't the right kind of a life for a woman."

Her upper lip raised a little, showing her teeth. "How do you know? How can you tell?" she said.

"I don't know, ma'am," he protested. "Of course I don't know. Now here's your kettles, done. You don't have to buy no new ones."

"How much?"

"Oh, fifty cents'll do. I keep my prices down and my work good. That's why I have all them satisfied customers up and down the highway."

Elisa brought him a fifty-cent piece from the house and dropped it in his hand. "You might be surprised to have a rival some time. I can sharpen scissors, too. And I can beat the dents out of little pots. I could show you what a woman might do."

He put his hammer back in the oily box and shoved the little anvil out of sight. "It would be a lonely life for a woman, ma'am, and a scary life, too, with animals creeping under the wagon all night." He climbed over the single-tree, steadying himself with a hand on the burro's white rump. He settled himself in the seat, picked up the lines. "Thank you kindly, ma'am," he said. "I'll do like you told me; I'll go back and catch the Salinas road."

"Mind," she called, "if you're long in getting there, keep the sand damp."

"Sand, ma'am? . . . Sand? Oh, sure. You mean around the chrysanthemums. Sure I will." He clucked his tongue. The beasts leaned luxuriously into their collars. The mongrel dog took his place between the back wheels. The wagon turned and crawled out the entrance road and back the way it had come, along the river.

Elisa stood in front of her wire fence watching the slow progress of the caravan. Her shoulders were straight, her head thrown back, her eyes half-closed, so that the scene came vaguely into them. Her lips moved silently, forming the words "Good-bye—good-bye." Then she whispered, "That's a bright direction. There's a glowing there." The sound of her whisper startled her. She shook herself free and looked about to see whether anyone had been listening. Only the dogs had heard. They lifted their heads toward her from their sleeping in the dust, and then stretched out their chins and settled asleep again. Elisa turned and ran hurriedly into the house.

In the kitchen she reached behind the stove and felt the water tank. It was full of hot water from the noonday cooking. In the bathroom she tore off her soiled clothes and flung them into the corner. And then she scrubbed herself with a little block of pumice, legs and thighs, loins and chest and arms, until her skin was scratched and red. When she had dried herself she stood in front of a mirror in her bedroom and looked at her body. She tightened her stomach and threw out her chest. She turned and looked over her shoulder at her back.

After a while she began to dress, slowly. She put on her newest under-clothing and her nicest stockings and the dress which was the symbol of her prettiness. She worked carefully on her hair, penciled her eyebrows and rouged her lips.

Before she was finished she heard the little thunder of hoofs and the shouts of Henry and his helper as they drove the red steers into the corral. She heard the gate bang shut and set herself for Henry's arrival.

His step sounded on the porch. He entered the house calling, "Elisa, where are you?"

"In my room, dressing. I'm not ready. There's hot water for your bath. Hurry up. It's getting late."

When she heard him splashing in the tub, Elisa laid his dark suit on the bed, and shirt and socks and tie beside it. She stood his polished shoes on the floor beside the bed. Then she went to the porch and sat primly and stiffly down. She looked toward the river road where the willow-line was still yellow with frosted leaves so that under the high grey fog they seemed a thin band of sunshine. This was the only color in the grey afternoon. She sat unmoving for a long time. Her eyes blinked rarely.

Henry came banging out of the door, shoving his tie inside his vest as he came. Elisa stiffened and her face grew tight. Henry stopped short and looked at her. "Why—why, Elisa. You look so nice!"

"Nice? You think I look nice? What do you mean by 'nice'?"

Henry blundered on. "I don't know. I mean you look different, strong and happy."

"I am strong? Yes, strong. What do you mean 'strong'?"

He looked bewildered. "You're playing some kind of a game," he said helplessly. "It's a kind of a play. You look strong enough to break a calf over your knee, happy enough to eat it like a watermelon."

For a second she lost her rigidity. "Henry! Don't talk like that. You didn't know what you said." She grew complete again. "I'm strong," she boasted. "I never knew before how strong."

Henry looked down toward the tractor shed, and when he brought his eyes back to her, they were his own again. "I'll get out the car. You can put on your coat while I'm starting."

Elisa went into the house. She heard him drive to the gate and idle down his motor, and then she took a long time to put on her hat. She pulled it here and pressed it there. When Henry turned the motor off she slipped into her coat and went out.

The little roadster bounced along on the dirt road by the river, raising the birds and driving the rabbits into the brush. Two cranes flapped heavily over the willow-line and dropped into the river-bed.

Far ahead on the road Elisa saw a dark speck. She knew.

She tried not to look as they passed it, but her eyes would not obey. She whispered to herself sadly, "He might have thrown them off the road. That wouldn't have been much trouble, not very much. But he kept the pot," she explained. "He had to keep the pot. That's why he couldn't get them off the road."

The roadster turned a bend and she saw the caravan ahead. She swung full around toward her husband so she could not see the little covered wagon and the mismatched team as the car passed them.

In a moment it was over. The thing was done. She did not look back.

She said loudly, to be heard above the motor, "It will be good, tonight, a good dinner."

"Now you've changed again," Henry complained. He took one hand from the wheel and patted her knee. "I ought to take you in to dinner oftener. It would be good for both of us. We get so heavy out on the ranch."

"Henry," she asked, "could we have wine at dinner?"

"Sure we could. Say! That will be fine."

She was silent for a while; then she said, "Henry, at those prize fights, do the men hurt each other very much?"

“Sometimes a little, not often. Why?”

“Well, I’ve read how they break noses, and blood runs down their chests. I’ve read how the fighting gloves get heavy and soggy with blood.”

He looked around at her. “What’s the matter, Elisa? I didn’t know you read things like that.” He brought the car to a stop, then turned to the right over the Salinas River bridge.

“Do any women ever go to the fights?” she asked.

“Oh, sure, some. What’s the matter, Elisa? Do you want to go? I don’t think you’d like it, but I’ll take you if you really want to go.”

She relaxed limply in the seat. “Oh, no. No. I don’t want to go. I’m sure I don’t.” Her face was turned away from him. “It will be enough if we can have wine. It will be plenty.” She turned up her coat collar so he could not see that she was crying weakly—like an old woman.

1937

COUNTEE CULLEN

1903–1946

More than most poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Countee Cullen valued traditional poetic forms in English—the sonnet, rhymed couplets, and quatrains—over modernist free verse or rhythms suggested by jazz and popular culture. Never one to shy away from controversy, Cullen prefaced his important anthology of African American poetry, *Caroling Dusk* (1927), with the assertion, “As heretical as it may sound, there is the probability that Negro poets, dependent as they are on the English language, may have more to gain from the rich background of English and American poetry than from any nebulous atavistic yearnings toward an African inheritance.” Cullen demanded that black poets be considered as American poets, ultimately without any special racial designation. Nevertheless, the titles of his books of poetry—*Color* (1925), *Copper Sun* (1927), *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* (1928)—showed that, like Claude MacKay and Jean Toomer, he felt a responsibility to write about being black even if he did so in modes outside of black folk traditions. Although he clashed with a number of his contemporaries in the Harlem Renaissance, Cullen could also be generous to black writers whose poetics differed from his. What mattered to Cullen was appreciating the full range of black literary writing, a range as great, he insisted, as that found among white poets in English, and resisting every “attempt to corral the ebony muse into some definite mold” to which all black writers should conform.

Although Cullen’s birthplace and early years are obscure, he was adopted at some point in his childhood by a Harlem-based minister and given a good education, first in New York public schools and then at New York University, where he received his B.A. in 1925, and at Harvard, where he took an M.A. in 1926. In high school, Cullen earned a citywide poetry prize for “I Have a Rendezvous with Life,” a rejoinder to Alan Seeger’s sentimental World War I poem (see p. 203). His first book of poems, *Color*, appeared in his senior year at college; it established him as the “black Keats,” a prodigy.

From 1926 to 1928, Cullen was assistant editor at the important black journal *Opportunity*, for which he also wrote a feature column, “The Dark Tower.” In 1928

he married Nina Yolande Du Bois, the daughter of W. E. B. Du Bois, and won a Guggenheim fellowship that took him to Paris and enabled him to complete another book of poems, *The Black Christ* (1929). His marriage quickly disintegrated, however, over Cullen's attraction to men, and the couple was divorced in 1930. Neither *The Black Christ* nor the novel that followed, *One Way to Heaven* (1932), earned the acclaim of Cullen's earlier books. He spent the last years of his life teaching at New York's Frederick Douglass Junior High School, where his pupils included the future novelist James Baldwin. With the revival of scholarly interest in the Harlem Renaissance, Cullen's distinctive combination of traditionalist poetic skill with acerbic self-questioning on matters of racism and racial identity has once again brought his poetry to critical attention.

The text of "From the Dark Tower" is that of *Copper Sun* (1927); the text of other poems included here is that of *Color* (1925).

Yet Do I Marvel

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
 And did He stoop to quibble could tell why
 The little buried mole continues blind,
 Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die,
 Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus 5
 Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare
 If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus!
 To struggle up a never-ending stair.
 Inscrutable His ways are, and immune
 To catechism by a mind too strewn 10
 With petty cares to slightly understand
 What awful brain compels His awful hand.
 Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
 To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

1925

Incident

Once riding in old Baltimore,
 Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
 I saw a Baltimorean
 Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small, 5
 And he was no whit bigger,
 And so I smiled, but he poked out
 His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

1. Tantalus and Sisyphus are figures in Greek mythology who were punished in Hades. Tantalus was offered food and water that was then instantly

snatched away. Sisyphus had to roll a heavy stone to the top of a hill and, after it rolled back down, repeat the ordeal perpetually.

I saw the whole of Baltimore
 From May until December;
 Of all the things that happened there
 That's all that I remember.

1925

Heritage

What is Africa to me:
 Copper sun or scarlet sea,
 Jungle star or jungle track,
 Strong bronzed men, or regal black
 Women from whose loins I sprang
 When the birds of Eden sang?
*One three centuries removed
 From the scenes his fathers loved,
 Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
 What is Africa to me?*

So I lie, who all day long
 Want no sound except the song
 Sung by wild barbaric birds
 Goading massive jungle herds,
 Juggernauts¹ of flesh that pass
 Trampling tall defiant grass
 Where young forest lovers lie,
 Plighting troth beneath the sky.
 So I lie, who always hear,
 Though I cram against my ear
 Both my thumbs, and keep them there,
 Great drums throbbing through the air.
 So I lie, whose fount of pride,
 Dear distress, and joy allied,
 Is my somber flesh and skin,
 With the dark blood dammed within
 Like great pulsing tides of wine
 That, I fear, must burst the fine
 Channels of the chafing net
 Where they surge and foam and fret.

Africa? A book one thumbs
 Listlessly, till slumber comes.
 Unremembered are her bats
 Circling through the night, her cats
 Crouching in the river reeds,

1. The juggernaut is a sacred Hindu idol dragged on a huge car in the path of which devotees were believed to throw themselves—hence any power

demanding blind sacrifice, here spliced with the image of elephants.

Stalking gentle flesh that feeds
 By the river brink; no more
 Does the bugle-throated roar
 Cry that monarch claws have leapt
 From the scabbards where they slept. 40
 Silver snakes that once a year
 Doff the lovely coats you wear,
 Seek no covert in your fear
 Lest a mortal eye should see;
 What's your nakedness to me? 45
 Here no leprous flowers rear
 Fierce corollas² in the air;
 Here no bodies sleek and wet,
 Dripping mingled rain and sweat,
 Tread the savage measures of 50
 Jungle boys and girls in love.
 What is last year's snow to me,³
 Last year's anything? The tree
 Budding yearly must forget
 How its past arose or set— 55
 Bough and blossom, flower, fruit,
 Even what shy bird with mute
 Wonder at her travail there,
 Meekly labored in its hair.
One three centuries removed 60
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

So I lie, who find no peace
 Night or day, no slight release 65
 From the unremitant beat
 Made by cruel padded feet
 Walking through my body's street.
 Up and down they go, and back,
 Treading out a jungle track. 70
 So I lie, who never quite
 Safely sleep from rain at night—
 I can never rest at all
 When the rain begins to fall;
 Like a soul gone mad with pain 75
 I must match its weird refrain;
 Ever must I twist and squirm,
 Writhing like a baited worm,
 While its primal measures drip
 Through my body, crying, "Strip! 80
 Doff this new exuberance.
 Come and dance the Lover's Dance!"

2. The whorl of petals forming the inner envelope of a flower.

3. An echo of the lament "Where are the snows of

yesteryear?" from "Grand Testament" by the 15th-century French poet François Villon.

In an old remembered way
Rain works on me night and day.

Quaint, outlandish heathen gods 85
Black men fashion out of rods,
Clay, and brittle bits of stone,
In a likeness like their own,
My conversion came high-priced;
I belong to Jesus Christ, 90
Preacher of humility;
Heathen gods are naught to me.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
So I make an idle boast;
Jesus of the twice-turned cheek⁴ 95
Lamb of God, although I speak
With my mouth thus, in my heart
Do I play a double part.
Ever at Thy glowing altar
Must my heart grow sick and falter, 100
Wishing He I served were black,
Thinking then it would not lack
Precedent of pain to guide it,
Let who would or might deride it;
Surely then this flesh would know 105
Yours had borne a kindred woe.
Lord, I fashion dark gods, too,
Daring even to give You
Dark despairing features where,
Crowned with dark rebellious hair, 110
Patience wavers just so much as
Mortal grief compels, while touches
Quick and hot, of anger, rise
To smitten cheek and weary eyes.
Lord, forgive me if my need 115
Sometimes shapes a human creed.
*All day long and all night through,
One thing only must I do:
Quench my pride and cool my blood,
Lest I perish in the flood.* 120
*Lest a hidden ember set
Timber that I thought was wet
Burning like the driest flax,
Melting like the merest wax,
Lest the grave restore its dead.* 125
*Not yet has my heart or head
In the least way realized
They and I are civilized.*

1925

4. In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.39), Jesus declared that when struck on the cheek, one should turn the other cheek rather than strike back.

From the Dark Tower¹

We shall not always plant while others reap
 The golden increment of bursting fruit,
 Not always countenance, abject and mute,
 That lesser men should hold their brothers cheap;
 Not everlastingly while others sleep 5
 Shall we beguile their limbs with mellow flute,
 Not always bend to some more subtle brute;
 We were not made eternally to weep.

The night whose sable breast relieves the stark,
 White stars is no less lovely being dark, 10
 And there are buds that cannot bloom at all
 In light, but crumple, piteous, and fall;
 So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds,
 And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.

1927

Uncle Jim

“White folks is white,” says uncle Jim;
 “A platitude,” I sneer;
 And then I tell him so is milk,
 And the froth upon his beer.

His heart walled up with bitterness, 5
 He smokes his pungent pipe,
 And nods at me as if to say,
 “Young fool, you’ll soon be ripe!”

I have a friend who eats his heart
 Away with grief of mine, 10
 Who drinks my joy as tipplers drain
 Deep goblets filled with wine.

I wonder why here at his side,
 Face-in-the-grass with him,
 My mind should stray the Grecian urn¹ 15
 To muse on uncle Jim.

1927

1. An allusion to “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” by the British Victorian poet Robert Browning (1812–1889). Cullen also titled his *Opportunity* column after Browning’s poem.

1. An allusion to “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by the British Romantic poet John Keats (1795–1821). Cullen was particularly fond of Keats’s poetry.

NATHANAEL WEST

1903–1940

Born Nathan Weinstein to a prosperous Jewish family living in the Upper East Side neighborhood of New York City, Nathanael West assumed his new legal name in 1926, on the eve of departing for Paris to sample its legendary Bohemian artistic life. It was not his first attempt at self-reinvention. While still in his teens, Weinstein had altered his high school transcript in order to get into Tufts University, where for one brief, giddy semester he made the most of the college's social life—pledging a Jewish fraternity, attending plays in Boston—while meeting none of his academic obligations. Having withdrawn from Tufts, he used the transcript of another student named Nathan Weinstein to apply to Brown University, where he was accepted and from which he managed to graduate in 1924.

Unlike Tufts, Brown at this time had no fraternities open to Jewish men. Weinstein and his friends at Brown created their own social alternatives, based on their appetite for immersion in modern culture in all its forms, both popular and elite. He attended movies; helped found a campus literary magazine, *Casements*, to which he contributed poetry and cover art; acted in plays satirizing college life; and pursued a vigorous reading program outside of the classroom that included writers from the leading edge of American modernism—William Carlos Williams (1883–1963), F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)—as well as international figures like James Joyce (1882–1941), Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), and Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880).

Nathanael West's brief postgraduate sojourn in Paris bore little immediate fruit. His family could not support his stab at the expatriate artistic life, and he returned to New York in January 1927. There he renewed contacts with college friends such as S. J. Perelman (1904–1979), who was then at the beginning of his prolific career as a contributor to *The New Yorker*, and through them made his way into a range of New York literary circles, including those of John Dos Passos and other writers associated with the Communist publications *New Masses* and *The Daily Worker*. He worked as a manager at residential hotels in the city, a position that allowed him to find rooms for literary friends and that supplied as well the experience of the seamy side of transient city life later reflected in the characters of *The Day of the Locust* (1939).

Unlike his better-established literary friends, however, West still struggled to break into print. His efforts at magazine stories found no buyers. In 1929 he completed revisions to *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, a surrealistic novelette begun during his time at Brown and in Paris. Its dreaming antihero, an aspiring writer, passes through the anus of the Trojan horse and wends his way through the horse's guts, encountering other authors along the way; through this device, West's narrative becomes a miniature encyclopedia of literary styles and periods. In this respect, in its application of Greek myth to modern life, and in its ending with a sexual coupling, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* nods to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1918–22). In contrast to Joyce's broad view of modernity, though, West offered a narrower satire on authors in search of an audience; few readers, then or later, found the book's obscene energies rewarding. With the backing of William Carlos Williams, *The Dream of a Balso Snell* finally appeared in 1931 in a limited edition, to little critical fanfare.

In the meantime, however, West had been handed more promising material. His friend Perelman in 1929 introduced him to a woman who contributed an advice column to the *Brooklyn Eagle* under the pseudonym of "Susan Chester"; the letters



Hollywoodland sign, c. 1935. Erected in 1923, the sign originally advertised a housing development.

from her readers that she shared with West became the basis for his next novel, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933). Here, what starts out as a purely commercial “stunt”—a young newspaperman writing an advice column intended to increase his paper’s circulation—becomes sinister, as the columnist finds himself unable to maintain his ironic distance from the suffering that bombards him. Empathy, cultivated as a primary social virtue in the tradition of classic nineteenth-century realist fiction, comes to a disastrous end in *Miss Lonelyhearts* with the columnist’s death at the hands of one of his readers. William Carlos Williams, in a laudatory review, compared the “dreadful logic” of West’s plotting to the “classical precedent” set by Greek and Shakespearean tragedy.

Miss Lonelyhearts was a modest critical success, but one that left its author, like its protagonist, faced with the need to make a living. The novel’s first publisher went bankrupt just as the book was released, and its rescue and reissue by another firm failed to recapture lost momentum in terms of either sales or publicity. West did, however, sell the movie rights for *Miss Lonelyhearts* to Twentieth Century Pictures (it appeared in late 1933 as *Advice to the Lovelorn*, much altered from the original). In July 1933 West followed the path that William Faulkner before him had taken, and that F. Scott Fitzgerald would take after him: he went to Hollywood to write for the movies, on contract with Columbia Pictures.

West would return to New York several times before the end of his life, but the financial attractions of Hollywood life proved substantial, if not always predictable. The movie rights to *Miss Lonelyhearts* brought him \$4,000; by contrast, from 1931 through 1934 West earned a total of only \$780 in royalties from his first three novels, including one more that sold poorly and failed to move critics, *A Cool Million* (1934). In 1936 he was able to earn a weekly salary of \$250 as a screenwriter from a second-rate studio, Republic Productions; by 1940 he was collaborating on screenplays and adaptations that commanded as much as \$25,000 from major studios. A member of the Screen Writers Guild from his earliest years in Hollywood, West was elected to the guild’s executive board in 1939.

Hollywood supplied West not only with an income, but also with a memorable subject for fiction, most fully realized in *The Day of the Locust*. West's final novel paints a cruel, raw, and memorable picture of late 1930s American popular culture—its new visual culture, oriented to the movies and stardom, lit by searchlights and neon; its new soundscape, saturated with radio and recordings—and of the multilayered, multiethnic, burgeoning city of Los Angeles, overlaid on an earlier Spanish California. At the center of this panorama hulks the movie industry, vehicle of the hopes and dreams of most of West's characters. Where *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* represents all of Western literary history as living inside the guts of a graffiti-defaced Trojan horse, Tod Hackett, the protagonist of *The Day of the Locust*, encounters a Trojan horse next to a Mayan temple and a Dutch windmill and a thirty-foot-high Buddha—all of them stage sets, sitting in storage on a movie studio's back lot. Although *The Day of the Locust* sold modestly (only 1,164 copies in its first year of publication), West's characterization of Hollywood as a “dream dump,” graveyard of both personal and high cultural ambition, remains resonant to this day. So too does the novel's style, modeled in part after the movies West regarded with love and loathing: fast-paced, assembled through cutting and collage, avid for the hard-boiled insider's knowledge of this new modern world.

West died in a car crash, along with his wife, Eileen McKenney, an aspiring actress, in 1940. The text of *The Day of the Locust* printed here is that of the first edition of 1939, published by Random House.

The Day of the Locust¹

I

Around quitting time, Tod Hackett heard a great din on the road outside his office. The groan of leather mingled with the jangle of iron and over all beat the tattoo of a thousand hooves. He hurried to the window.

An army of cavalry and foot² was passing. It moved like a mob; its lines broken, as though fleeing from some terrible defeat. The dolmans of the hussars,³ the heavy shakos of the guards, Hanoverian⁴ light horse, with their flat leather caps and flowing red plumes, were all jumbled together in bobbing disorder. Behind the cavalry came the infantry, a wild sea of waving sabertaches,⁵ sloped muskets, crossed shoulder belts and swinging cartridge boxes. Tod recognized the scarlet infantry of England with their white shoulder pads, the black infantry of the Duke of Brunswick,⁶ the French grenadiers with their enormous white gaiters, the Scotch with bare knees under plaid skirts.

1. Moses calls a plague of locusts upon Egypt when Pharaoh refuses to let the enslaved Israelites depart: “they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land” (Exodus 10.15). In the Book of Revelation (9.4–6), locusts return to torment “those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. . . . And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.”

2. Costumed actors playing extras in a historical movie being filmed about the Battle of Waterloo

(1815), which ended the drive of Napoleon (1769–1821) to return to power as emperor of France.

3. Cavalrymen. “Dolmans”: short-cut jackets worn as part of the hussars' uniforms.

4. From the German city-state of Hanover, allied with England against Napoleon. “Shakos”: high, cylindrical military hats.

5. Flat pouches worn alongside swords.

6. One of the commanders of the multinational army, serving under the general command of the Duke of Wellington of England, that defeated Napoleon's forces.

While he watched, a little fat man, wearing a cork sun-helmet, polo shirt and knickers, darted around the corner of the building in pursuit of the army.

“Stage Nine—you bastards—Stage Nine!” he screamed through a small megaphone.

The cavalry put spur to their horses and the infantry broke into a dog-trot. The little man in the cork hat ran after them, shaking his fist and cursing.

Tod watched until they had disappeared behind half a Mississippi steamboat, then put away his pencils and drawing board, and left the office. On the sidewalk outside the studio he stood for a moment trying to decide whether to walk home or take a streetcar. He had been in Hollywood less than three months and still found it a very exciting place, but he was lazy and didn’t like to walk. He decided to take the streetcar as far as Vine Street⁷ and walk the rest of the way.

A talent scout for National Films had brought Tod to the Coast after seeing some of his drawings in an exhibit of undergraduate work at the Yale School of Fine Arts. He had been hired by telegram. If the scout had met Tod, he probably wouldn’t have sent him to Hollywood to learn set and costume designing. His large, sprawling body, his slow blue eyes and sloppy grin made him seem completely without talent, almost doltish in fact.

Yet, despite his appearance, he was really a very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes. And “The Burning of Los Angeles,” a picture he was soon to paint, definitely proved he had talent.

He left the car at Vine Street. As he walked along, he examined the evening crowd. A great many of the people wore sports clothes which were not really sports clothes. Their sweaters, knickers, slacks, blue flannel jackets with brass buttons were fancy dress. The fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping, not boating; the man in the Norfolk jacket and Tyrolean hat⁸ was returning, not from a mountain, but an insurance office; and the girl in slacks and sneaks with a bandanna around her head had just left a switchboard, not a tennis court.

Scattered among these masqueraders were people of a different type. Their clothing was somber and badly cut, bought from mail-order houses. While the others moved rapidly, darting into stores and cocktail bars, they loitered on the corners or stood with their backs to the shop windows and stared at everyone who passed. When their stare was returned, their eyes filled with hatred. At this time Tod knew very little about them except that they had come to California to die.

He was determined to learn much more. They were the people he felt he must paint. He would never again do a fat red barn, old stone wall or sturdy Nantucket fisherman. From the moment he had seen them, he had

7. A major thoroughfare in Hollywood.

8. Items of sports clothing associated, respectively, with the English countryside and the Alps. Norfolk jackets feature pockets and patches for

the convenience of hunters and shooters. Tyrolean hats typically feature narrow brims, decorative bands, and a spray of feathers.

known that, despite his race, training and heritage, neither Winslow Homer nor Thomas Ryder could be his masters and he turned to Goya and Daumier.⁹

He had learned this just in time. During his last year in art school, he had begun to think that he might give up painting completely. The pleasures he received from the problems of composition and color had decreased as his facility had increased and he had realized that he was going the way of all his classmates, toward illustration or mere handsomeness. When the Hollywood job had come along, he had grabbed it despite the arguments of his friends who were certain that he was selling out and would never paint again.

He reached the end of Vine Street and began the climb into Pinyon Canyon.¹ Night had started to fall.

The edges of the trees burned with a pale violet light and their centers gradually turned from deep purple to black. The same violet piping, like a Neon tube,² outlined the tops of the ugly, humpbacked hills and they were almost beautiful.

But not even the soft wash of dusk could help the houses. Only dynamite would be of any use against the Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages, and every possible combination of these styles that lined the slopes of the canyon.

When he noticed that they were all of plaster, lath and paper, he was charitable and blamed their shape on the materials used. Steel, stone and brick curb a builder's fancy a little, forcing him to distribute his stresses and weights and to keep his corners plumb, but plaster and paper know no law, not even that of gravity.

On the corner of La Huerta Road was a miniature Rhine castle with tarpaper turrets pierced for archers. Next to it was a little highly colored shack with domes and minarets out of the *Arabian Nights*.³ Again he was charitable. Both houses were comic, but he didn't laugh. Their desire to startle was so eager and guileless.

It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that need are. But it is easy to sigh. Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous.

2

The house he lived in was a nondescript affair called the San Bernardino Arms. It was an oblong three stories high, the back and sides of which

9. Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), French printmaker and painter known for his scathing caricatures of French life. Francisco Goya (1746–1828), Spanish painter and printmaker whose increasingly dark later work included images of madness and war. Homer (1836–1910), American painter noted for his seascapes. Ryder (1746–1810), English engraver noted for his illustrated Shakespeare and for engraving a famous portrait of Benjamin Franklin. The context also suggests the American painter Albert Pinkham

Ryder (1847–1917), noted for his seascapes, who was admired by early modernists.

1. Fictional, modeled after Beachwood Canyon, developed for housing in the 1920s.

2. Pioneered in France in 1910, neon lighting came into wide use in the United States in the 1920s.

3. First English edition (1706) of a famous collection of ancient and medieval Middle Eastern stories and folk tales.

were of plain, unpainted stucco, broken by even rows of unadorned windows. The façade was the color of diluted mustard and its windows, all double, were framed by pink Moorish columns which supported turnip-shaped lintels.

His room was on the third floor, but he paused for a moment on the landing of the second. It was on that floor that Faye Greener lived, in 208. When someone laughed in one of the apartments he started guiltily and continued upstairs.

As he opened his door a card fluttered to the floor. "Honest Abe Kusich," it said in large type, then underneath in smaller italics were several endorsements, printed to look like press notices.

'... the Lloyds⁴ of Hollywood' . . . Stanley Rose.

'Abe's word is better than Morgan's⁵ bonds'—Gail Brenshaw.

On the other side was a penciled message:

"Kingpin fourth, Solitair sixth. You can make some real dough on those nags."⁶

After opening the window, he took off his jacket and lay down on the bed. Through the window he could see a square of enameled sky and a spray of eucalyptus. A light breeze stirred its long, narrow leaves, making them show first their green side, then their silver one.

He began to think of "Honest Abe Kusich" in order not to think of Faye Greener. He felt comfortable and wanted to remain that way.

Abe was an important figure in a set of lithographs called "The Dancers" on which Tod was working. He was one of the dancers. Faye Greener was another and her father, Harry, still another. They changed with each plate, but the group of uneasy people who formed their audience remained the same. They stood staring at the performers in just the way that they stared at the masqueraders on Vine Street. It was their stare that drove Abe and the others to spin crazily and leap into the air with twisted backs like hooked trout.

Despite the sincere indignation that Abe's grotesque depravity aroused in him, he welcomed his company. The little man excited him and in that way made him feel certain of his need to paint.

He had first met Abe when he was living on Ivar Street,⁷ in a hotel called the Chateau Mirabella. Another name for Ivar Street was "Lysol⁸ Alley," and the Chateau was mainly inhabited by hustlers, their managers, trainers and advance agents.

In the morning its halls reeked of antiseptic. Tod didn't like this odor. Moreover, the rent was high because it included police protection, a service for which he had no need. He wanted to move, but inertia and the fact that he didn't know where to go kept him in the Chateau until he met Abe. The meeting was accidental.

He was on the way to his room late one night when he saw what he supposed was a pile of soiled laundry lying in front of the door across the hall

4. A famous London-based insurer and banker.

5. J. P. Morgan (1837–1913), the leading American financier at the turn of the 20th century.

6. Advice for betting on a horse race.

7. I.e., Ivar Avenue; runs off Hollywood Boulevard.

8. Brand name of a popular disinfectant, introduced in 1889, that came into widespread use during the 1918 flu pandemic.

from his own. Just as he was passing it, the bundle moved and made a peculiar noise. He struck a match, thinking it might be a dog wrapped in a blanket. When the light flared up, he saw it was a tiny man.

The match went out and he hastily lit another. It was a male dwarf rolled up in a woman's flannel bathrobe. The round thing at the end was his slightly hydrocephalic⁹ head. A slow, choked snore bubbled from it.

The hall was cold and draughty. Tod decided to wake the man and stirred him with his toe. He groaned and opened his eyes.

"You oughn't to sleep there."

"The hell you say," said the dwarf, closing his eyes again.

"You'll catch cold."

This friendly observation angered the little man still more.

"I want my clothes!" he bellowed.

The bottom of the door next to which he was lying filled with light. Tod decided to take a chance and knock. A few seconds later a woman opened it part way.

"What the hell do you want?" she demanded.

"There's a friend of yours out here who . . ."

Neither of them let him finish.

"So what!" she barked, slamming the door.

"Give me my clothes, you bitch!" roared the dwarf.

She opened the door again and began to hurl things into the hall. A jacket and trousers, a shirt, socks, shoes and underwear, a tie and hat followed each other through the air in rapid succession. With each article went a special curse.

Tod whistled with amazement.

"Some gal!"

"You bet," said the dwarf. "A lollapalooza—all slut and a yard wide."

He laughed at his own joke, using a high-pitched cackle more dwarflike than anything that had come from him so far, then struggled to his feet and arranged the voluminous robe so that he could walk without tripping. Tod helped him gather his scattered clothing.

"Say, mister," he asked, "could I dress in your place?"

Tod let him into his bathroom. While waiting for him to reappear, he couldn't help imagining what had happened in the woman's apartment. He began to feel sorry for having interfered. But when the dwarf came out wearing his hat, Tod felt better.

The little man's hat fixed almost everything. That year Tyrolean hats were being worn a great deal along Hollywood Boulevard and the dwarf's was a fine specimen. It was the proper magic green color and had a high, conical crown. There should have been a brass buckle on the front, but otherwise it was quite perfect.

The rest of his outfit didn't go well with the hat. Instead of shoes with long points and a leather apron, he wore a blue, double-breasted suit and a black shirt with a yellow tie. Instead of a crooked thorn stick, he carried a rolled copy of the *Daily Running Horse*.

9. Enlarged because of fluid accumulating inside the skull.

"That's what I get for fooling with four-bit broads," he said by way of greeting.

Tod nodded and tried to concentrate on the green hat. His ready acquiescence seemed to irritate the little man.

"No quiff can give Abe Kusich the fingeroo and get away with it," he said bitterly. "Not when I can get her leg broke for twenty bucks and I got twenty."

He took out a thick billfold and shook it at Tod.

"So she thinks she can give me the fingeroo, hah? Well, let me tell . . ."

Tod broke in hastily.

"You're right, Mr. Kusich."

The dwarf came over to where Tod was sitting and for a moment Tod thought he was going to climb into his lap, but he only asked his name and shook hands. The little man had a powerful grip.

"Let me tell you something, Hackett, if you hadn't come along, I'da broke in the door. That dame thinks she can give me the fingeroo, but she's got another thinkola coming. But thanks anyway."

"Forget it."

"I don't forget nothing. I remember. I remember those who do me dirt and those who do me favors."

He wrinkled his brow and was silent for a moment.

"Listen," he finally said, "seeing as you helped me, I got to return it. I don't want anybody going around saying Abe Kusich owes him anything. So I'll tell you what. I'll give you a good one for the fifth at Caliente.¹ You put a fiver on its nose and it'll get you twenty smackeroos. What I'm telling you is strictly correct."

Tod didn't know how to answer and his hesitation offended the little man.

"Would I give you a bum steer?" he demanded, scowling. "Would I?"

Tod walked toward the door to get rid of him.

"No," he said.

"Then why won't you bet, hah?"

"What's the name of the horse?" Tod asked, hoping to calm him.

The dwarf had followed him to the door, pulling the bathrobe after him by one sleeve. Hat and all, he came to a foot below Tod's belt.

"Tragopan. He's a certain, sure winner. I know the guy who owns him and he gave me the office."

"Is he a Greek?" Tod asked.

He was being pleasant in order to hide the attempt he was making to maneuver the dwarf through the door.

"Yeh, he's a Greek. Do you know him?"

"No."

"No?"

"No," said Tod with finality.

"Keep your drawers on," ordered the dwarf, "all I want to know is how you know he's a Greek if you don't know him?"

1. The Agua Caliente racetrack in Baja California, which opened in 1929, was popular with Hollywood celebrities.

His eyes narrowed with suspicion and he clenched his fists.

Tod smiled to placate him.

"I just guessed it."

"You did?"

The dwarf hunched his shoulders as though he were going to pull a gun or throw a punch. Tod backed off and tried to explain.

"I guessed he was a Greek because Tragopan is a Greek word that means pheasant."

The dwarf was far from satisfied.

"How do you know what it means? You ain't a Greek?"

"No, but I know a few Greek words."

"So you're a wise guy, hah, a know-it-all."

He took a short step forward, moving on his toes, and Tod got set to block a punch.

"A college man, hah? Well, let me tell . . ."

His foot caught in the wrapper and he fell forward on his hands. He forgot Tod and cursed the bathrobe, then got started on the woman again.

"So she thinks she can give me the fingeroo."

He kept poking himself in the chest with his thumbs.

"Who gave her forty bucks for an abortion? Who? And another ten to go to the country for a rest that time. To a ranch I sent her. And who got her fiddle out of hock that time in Santa Monica? Who?"

"That's right," Tod said, getting ready to give him a quick shove through the door.

But he didn't have to shove him. The little man suddenly darted out of the room and ran down the hall, dragging the bathrobe after him.

A few days later, Tod went into a stationery store on Vine Street to buy a magazine. While he was looking through the rack, he felt a tug at the bottom of his jacket. It was Abe Kusich, the dwarf, again.

"How's things?" he demanded.

Tod was surprised to find that he was just as truculent as he had been the other night. Later, when he got to know him better, he discovered that Abe's pugnacity was often a joke. When he used it on his friends, they played with him like one does with a growling puppy, staving off his mad rushes and then baiting him to rush again.

"Fair enough," Tod said, "but I think I'll move."

He had spent most of Sunday looking for a place to live and was full of the subject. The moment he mentioned it, however, he knew that he had made a mistake. He tried to end the matter by turning away, but the little man blocked him. He evidently considered himself an expert on the housing situation. After naming and discarding a dozen possibilities without a word from Tod, he finally hit on the San Bernardino Arms.

"That's the place for you, the San Berdoo. I live there, so I ought to know. The owner's strictly from hunger. Come on, I'll get you fixed up swell."

"I don't know, I . . ." Tod began.

The dwarf bridled instantly, and appeared to be mortally offended.

"I suppose it ain't good enough for you. Well, let me tell you something, you . . ."

Tod allowed himself to be bullied and went with the dwarf to Pinyon Canyon. The rooms in the San Berdoo were small and not very clean. He

rented one without hesitation, however, when he saw Faye Greener in the hall.

3

Tod had fallen asleep. When he woke again, it was after eight o'clock. He took a bath and shaved, then dressed in front of the bureau mirror. He tried to watch his fingers as he fixed his collar and tie, but his eyes kept straying to the photograph that was pushed into the upper corner of the frame.

It was a picture of Faye Greener, a still from a two-reel farce in which she had worked as an extra. She had given him the photograph willingly enough, had even autographed it in a large, wild hand, "Affectionately yours, Faye Greener," but she refused his friendship, or, rather, insisted on keeping it impersonal. She had told him why. He had nothing to offer her, neither money nor looks, and she could only love a handsome man and would only let a wealthy man love her. Tod was a "good-hearted man," and she liked "good-hearted men," but only as friends. She wasn't hard-boiled. It was just that she put love on a special plane, where a man without money or looks couldn't move.

Tod grunted with annoyance as he turned to the photograph. In it she was wearing a harem costume, full Turkish trousers, breastplates and a monkey jacket, and lay stretched out on a silken divan. One hand held a beer bottle and the other a pewter stein.

He had gone all the way to Glendale to see her in that movie. It was about an American drummer who gets lost in the seraglio² of a Damascus merchant and has a lot of fun with the female inmates. Faye played one of the dancing girls. She had only one line to speak, "Oh, Mr. Smith!" and spoke it badly.

She was a tall girl with wide, straight shoulders and long, swordlike legs. Her neck was long, too, and columnar. Her face was much fuller than the rest of her body would lead you to expect and much larger. It was a moon face, wide at the cheek bones and narrow at chin and brow. She wore her "platinum"³ hair long, letting it fall almost to her shoulders in back, but kept it away from her face and ears with a narrow blue ribbon that went under it and was tied on top of her head with a little bow.

She was supposed to look drunk and she did, but not with alcohol. She lay stretched out on the divan with her arms and legs spread, as though welcoming a lover, and her lips were parted in a heavy, sullen smile. She was supposed to look inviting, but the invitation wasn't to pleasure.

Tod lit a cigarette and inhaled with a nervous gasp. He started to fool with his tie again, but had to go back to the photograph.

Her invitation wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love. If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper. You would do it with a scream. You couldn't expect to rise again. Your teeth would be driven into your skull

2. Harem.

3. Bleached blond. Frank Capra's film *Platinum Blonde* (1931) featured Jean Harlow in the title

role and popularized the damaging bleaching process used to achieve her dramatic white-blond hair color.

like nails into a pine board and your back would be broken. You wouldn't even have time to sweat or close your eyes.

He managed to laugh at his language, but it wasn't a real laugh and nothing was destroyed by it.

If she would only let him, he would be glad to throw himself, no matter what the cost. But she wouldn't have him. She didn't love him and he couldn't further her career. She wasn't sentimental and she had no need for tenderness, even if he were capable of it.

When he had finished dressing, he hurried out of the room. He had promised to go to a party at Claude Estee's.

4

Claude was a successful screen writer who lived in a big house that was an exact reproduction of the old Dupuy mansion near Biloxi, Mississippi. When Tod came up the walk between the boxwood hedges, he greeted him from the enormous, two-story porch by doing the impersonation that went with the Southern colonial architecture. He teetered back and forth on his heels like a Civil War colonel and made believe he had a large belly.

He had no belly at all. He was a dried-up little man with the rubbed features and stooped shoulders of a postal clerk. The shiny mohair coat and nondescript trousers of that official would have become him, but he was dressed, as always, elaborately. In the buttonhole of his brown jacket was a lemon flower. His trousers were of reddish Harris tweed with a hound tooth check and on his feet were a pair of magnificent, rust-colored blüchers.⁴ His shirt was ivory flannel and his knitted tie⁵ a red that was almost black.

While Tod mounted the steps to reach his outstretched hand, he shouted to the butler.

"Here, you black rascal! A mint julep."

A Chinese servant came running with a Scotch and soda.

After talking to Tod for a moment, Claude started him in the direction of Alice, his wife, who was at the other end of the porch.

"Don't run off," he whispered. "We're going to a sporting house."⁶

Alice was sitting in a wicker swing with a woman named Mrs. Joan Schwartzen. When she asked him if he was playing any tennis, Mrs. Schwartzen interrupted her.

"How silly, batting an inoffensive ball across something that ought to be used to catch fish on account of millions are starving for a bite of herring."

"Joan's a female tennis champ," Alice explained.

Mrs. Schwartzen was a big girl with large hands and feet and square, bony shoulders. She had a pretty, eighteen-year-old face and a thirty-five-year-old neck that was veined and sinewy. Her deep sunburn, ruby colored with a slight blue tint, kept the contrast between her face and neck from being too startling.

4. Lace-up men's shoes.

5. Tweed, flannel, and knitted ties are typically associated with casual, cold-weather men's clothing.

6. A brothel.

"Well, I wish we were going to a brothel this minute," she said. "I adore them."

She turned to Tod and fluttered her eyelids.

"Don't you, Mr. Hackett?"

"That's right, Joan darling," Alice answered for him. "Nothing like a bagnio⁷ to set a fellow up. Hair of the dog that bit you."

"How dare you insult me!"

She stood up and took Tod's arm.

"Convoy me over there."

She pointed to the group of men with whom Claude was standing.

"For God's sake, convoy her," Alice said. "She thinks they're telling dirty stories."

Mrs. Schwartzen pushed right among them, dragging Tod after her.

"Are you talking smut?" she asked. "I adore smut."

They all laughed politely.

"No, shop," said someone.

"I don't believe it. I can tell from the beast in your voices. Go ahead, do say something obscene."

This time no one laughed.

Tod tried to disengage her arm, but she kept a firm grip on it. There was a moment of awkward silence, then the man she had interrupted tried to make a fresh start.

"The picture business is too humble," he said. "We ought to resent people like Coombes."

"That's right," said another man. "Guys like that come out here, make a lot of money, grouse all the time about the place, flop on their assignments, then go back East and tell dialect stories about producers they've never met."

"My God," Mrs. Schwartzen said to Tod in a loud, stagey whisper, "they *are* talking shop."

"Let's look for the man with the drinks," Tod said.

"No. Take me into the garden. Have you seen what's in the swimming pool?"

She pulled him along.

The air of the garden was heavy with the odor of mimosa and honeysuckle. Through a slit in the blue serge sky poked a grained moon that looked like an enormous bone button. A little flagstone path, made narrow by its border of oleander, led to the edge of the sunken pool. On the bottom, near the deep end, he could see a heavy, black mass of some kind.

"What is it?" he asked.

She kicked a switch that was hidden at the base of a shrub and a row of submerged floodlights illuminated the green water. The thing was a dead horse, or, rather, a life-size, realistic reproduction of one. Its legs stuck up stiff and straight and it had an enormous, distended belly. Its hammerhead lay twisted to one side and from its mouth, which was set in an agonized grin, hung a heavy, black tongue.

7. A brothel.

"Isn't it marvelous!" exclaimed Mrs. Schwartz, clapping her hands and jumping up and down excitedly like a little girl.

"What's it made of?"

"Then you weren't fooled? How impolite! It's rubber, of course. It cost lots of money."

"But why?"

"To amuse. We were looking at the pool one day and somebody, Jerry Appis, I think, said that it needed a dead horse on the bottom, so Alice got one. Don't you think it looks cute?"

"Very."

"You're just an old meanie. Think how happy the Estees must feel, showing it to people and listening to their merriment and their oh's and ah's of unconfined delight."

She stood on the edge of the pool and "ohed and ahed" rapidly several times in succession.

"Is it still there?" someone called.

Tod turned and saw two women and a man coming down the path.

"I think its belly's going to burst," Mrs. Schwartz shouted to them gleefully.

"Goody," said the man, hurrying to look.

"But it's only full of air," said one of the women.

Mrs. Schwartz made believe she was going to cry.

"You're just like that mean Mr. Hackett. You just won't let me cherish my illusions."

Tod was half way to the house when she called after him. He waved but kept going.

The men with Claude were still talking shop.

"But how are you going to get rid of the illiterate mockies⁸ that run it? They've got a strangle hold on the industry. Maybe they're intellectual stumblebums, but they're damn good business men. Or at least they know how to go into receivership and come up with a gold watch in their teeth."

"They ought to put some of the millions they make back into the business again. Like Rockefeller does with his Foundation.⁹ People used to hate the Rockefellers, but now instead of hollering about their ill-gotten oil dough, everybody praises them for what the Foundation does. It's a swell stunt and pictures could do the same thing. Have a Cinema Foundation and make contributions to Science and Art. You know, give the racket a front."

Tod took Claude to one side to say good night, but he wouldn't let him go. He led him into the library and mixed two double Scotches. They sat down on the couch facing the fireplace.

"You haven't been to Audrey Jennings's place?" Claude asked.

"No, but I've heard tell of it."

"Then you've got to come along."

8. Derogatory slang for Jews.

9. American oil tycoon J. D. Rockefeller (1839–

1937) established the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913.

"I don't like pro-sport."

"We won't indulge in any. We're just going to see a movie."

"I get depressed."

"Not at Jennings's you won't. She makes vice attractive by skillful packaging. Her dive's a triumph of industrial design."

Tod liked to hear him talk. He was master of an involved comic rhetoric that permitted him to express his moral indignation and still keep his reputation for worldliness and wit.

Tod fed him another lead. "I don't care how much cellophane she wraps it in," he said—"nautch joints¹ are depressing, like all places for deposit, banks, mail boxes, tombs, vending machines."

"Love is like a vending machine, eh? Not bad. You insert a coin and press home the lever. There's some mechanical activity inside the bowels of the device. You receive a small sweet, frown at yourself in the dirty mirror, adjust your hat, take a firm grip on your umbrella and walk away, trying to look as though nothing had happened. It's good, but it's not for pictures."

Tod played straight again.

"That's not it. I've been chasing a girl and it's like carrying something a little too large to conceal in your pocket, like a briefcase or a small valise. It's uncomfortable."

"I know, I know. It's always uncomfortable. First your right hand gets tired, then your left. You put the valise down and sit on it, but people are surprised and stop to stare at you, so you move on. You hide it behind a tree and hurry away, but someone finds it and runs after you to return it. It's a small valise when you leave home in the morning, cheap and with a bad handle, but by evening it's a trunk with brass corners and many foreign labels. I know. It's good, but it won't film. You've got to remember your audience. What about the barber in Purdue? He's been cutting hair all day and he's tired. He doesn't want to see some dope carrying a valise or fooling with a nickel machine. What the barber wants is armor and glamor."

The last part was for himself and he sighed heavily. He was about to begin again when the Chinese servant came in and said that the others were ready to leave for Mrs. Jennings's.

5

They started out in several cars. Tod rode in the front of the one Claude drove and as they went down Sunset Boulevard he described Mrs. Jennings for him. She had been a fairly prominent actress in the days of silent films, but sound made it impossible for her to get work.² Instead of becoming an extra or a bit player like many other old stars, she had shown excellent business sense and had opened a callhouse.³ She wasn't vicious. Far from it. She ran her business just as other women run lending libraries, shrewdly and with taste.

1. Brothels.

2. The arrival of films with recorded sound, beginning in 1927, ended the careers of many

performers who had marked accents or voices otherwise not acceptable in the new medium.

3. Brothel.

None of the girls lived on the premises. You telephoned and she sent a girl over. The charge was thirty dollars for a single night of sport and Mrs. Jennings kept fifteen of it. Some people might think that fifty per cent is a high brokerage fee, but she really earned every cent of it. There was a big overhead. She maintained a beautiful house for the girls to wait in and a car and a chauffeur to deliver them to the clients.

Then, too, she had to move in the kind of society where she could make the right contacts. After all, not every man can afford thirty dollars. She permitted her girls to service only men of wealth and position, not to say taste and discretion. She was so particular that she insisted on meeting the prospective sportsman before servicing him. She had often said, and truthfully, that she would not let a girl of hers go to a man with whom she herself would not be willing to sleep.

And she was really cultured. All the most distinguished visitors considered it quite a lark to meet her. They were disappointed, however, when they discovered how refined she was. They wanted to talk about certain lively matters of universal interest, but she insisted on discussing Gertrude Stein and Juan Gris.⁴ No matter how hard the distinguished visitor tried, and some had been known to go to really great lengths, he could never find a flaw in her refinement or make a breach in her culture.

Claude was still using his peculiar rhetoric on Mrs. Jennings when she came to the door of her house to greet them.

"It's so nice to see you again," she said. "I was telling Mrs. Prince at tea only yesterday—the Estees are my favorite couple."

She was a handsome woman, smooth and buttery, with fair hair and a red complexion.

She led them into a small drawing room whose color scheme was violet, gray and rose. The Venetian blinds were rose, as was the ceiling, and the walls were covered with a pale gray paper that had a tiny, widely spaced flower design in violet. On one wall hung a silver screen, the kind that rolls up, and against the opposite wall, on each side of a cherry-wood table, was a row of chairs covered with rose and gray glazed chintz⁵ bound in violet piping. There was a small projection machine on the table and a young man in evening dress was fumbling with it.

She waved them to their seats. A waiter then came in and asked what they wanted to drink. When their orders had been taken and filled, she flipped the light switch and the young man started his machine. It whirred merrily, but he had trouble in getting it focused.

"What are we going to see first?" Mrs. Schwartz asked.

"*Le Predicament de Marie.*"

"That sounds ducky."

"It's charming, utterly charming," said Mrs. Jennings.

"Yes," said the cameraman, who was still having trouble. "I love *Le Predicament de Marie*. It has a marvelous quality that is too exciting."

There was a long delay, during which he fussed desperately with his machine. Mrs. Schwartz started to whistle and stamp her feet and the

4. Members of the modernist art community of Paris. Gris (1887–1927), Spanish painter. Stein (1874–1946), American writer.

5. Cotton fabric, usually printed in floral patterns, popular in 19th-century clothing and décor.

others joined in. They imitated a rowdy audience in the days of the nickel-odeon.⁶

“Get a move on, slow poke.”

“What’s your hurry? Here’s your hat.”

“Get a horse!”

“Get out and get under!”

The young man finally found the screen with his light beam and the film began.

LE PREDICAMENT DE MARIE

ou

LA BONNE DISTRAIT⁷

Marie, the “bonne,” was a buxom young girl in a tight-fitting black silk uniform with very short skirts. On her head was a tiny lace cap. In the first scene, she was shown serving dinner to a middle-class family in an oak-paneled dining room full of heavy, carved furniture. The family was very respectable and consisted of a bearded, frock-coated father, a mother with a whalebone collar and a cameo brooch, a tall, thin son with a long mustache and almost no chin and a little girl wearing a large bow in her hair and a crucifix on a gold chain around her neck.

After some low comedy with father’s beard and the soup, the actors settled down seriously to their theme. It was evident that while the whole family desired Marie, she only desired the young girl. Using his napkin to hide his activities, the old man pinched Marie, the son tried to look down the neck of her dress and the mother patted her knee. Marie, for her part, surreptitiously fondled the child.

The scene changed to Marie’s room. She undressed and got into a chiffon negligee, leaving on only her black silk stockings and high-heeled shoes. She was making an elaborate night toilet when the child entered. Marie took her on her lap and started to kiss her. There was a knock on the door. Consternation. She hid the child in the closet and let in the bearded father. He was suspicious and she had to accept his advances. He was embracing her when there was another knock. Again consternation and tableau.⁸ This time it was the mustachioed son. Marie hid the father under the bed. No sooner had the son begun to grow warm than there was another knock. Marie made him climb into a large blanket chest. The new caller was the lady of the house. She, too, was just settling down to work when there was another knock.

Who could it be? A telegram? A policeman? Frantically Marie counted the different hiding places. The whole family was present. She tiptoed to the door and listened.

“Who can it be that wishes to enter now?” read the title card.

And there the machine stuck. The young man in evening dress became as frantic as Marie. When he got it running again, there was a flash of light and the film whizzed through the apparatus until it had all run out.

6. In the early years of film, a movie theater charging 5 cents for admission.

7. Marie’s Predicament; or the Distracted Maid (French); the correct French feminine form

would be “Distraite.”

8. Pause in the action during which the performers remain motionless.

"I'm sorry, extremely," he said. "I'll have to rewind."

"It's a frameup," someone yelled.

"Fake!"

"Cheat!"

"The old teaser routine!"

They stamped their feet and whistled.

Under cover of the mock riot, Tod sneaked out. He wanted to get some fresh air. The waiter, whom he found loitering in the hall, showed him to the patio in back of the house.

On his return, he peeked into the different rooms. In one of them he found a large number of miniature dogs in a curio cabinet. There were glass pointers, silver beagles, porcelain schnauzers, stone dachshunds, aluminum bulldogs, onyx whippets, china bassets, wooden spaniels. Every recognized breed was represented and almost every material that could be sculptured, cast or carved.

While he was admiring the little figures, he heard a girl singing. He thought he recognized her voice and peeked into the hall. It was Mary Dove, one of Faye Greener's best friends.

Perhaps Faye also worked for Mrs. Jennings. If so, for thirty dollars . . .

He went back to see the rest of the film.

6

Tod's hope that he could end his trouble by paying a small fee didn't last long. When he got Claude to ask Mrs. Jennings about Faye, that lady said she had never heard of the girl. Claude then asked her to inquire through Mary Dove. A few days later she phoned him to say there was nothing doing. The girl wasn't available.

Tod wasn't really disappointed. He didn't want Faye that way, not at least while he still had a chance some other way. Lately, he had begun to think he had a good one. Harry, her father, was sick and that gave him an excuse for hanging around their apartment. He ran errands and kept the old man company. To repay his kindness, she permitted him the intimacies of a family friend. He hoped to deepen her gratitude and make it serious.

Apart from this purpose, he was interested in Harry and enjoyed visiting him. The old man was a clown and Tod had all the painter's usual love of clowns. But what was more important, he felt that his clownship was a clue to the people who stared (a painter's clue, that is—a clue in the form of a symbol), just as Faye's dreams were another.

He sat near Harry's bed and listened to his stories by the hour. Forty years in vaudeville and burlesque had provided him with an infinite number of them. As he put it, his life had consisted of a lightning series of "nip-ups," "high-gruesomes," "flying-W's" and "hundred-and-eights"⁹ done to escape a barrage of "exploding stoves." An "exploding stove" was any catastrophe, natural or human, from a flood in Medicine Hat, Wyoming, to an angry policeman in Moose Factory, Ontario.

When Harry had first begun his stage career, he had probably restricted his clowning to the boards,¹ but now he clowned continuously. It was his

9. Acrobatic maneuvers.

1. I.e., to the stage.

sole method of defense. Most people, he had discovered, won't go out of their way to punish a clown.

He used a set of elegant gestures to accent the comedy of his bent, hopeless figure and wore a special costume, dressing like a banker, a cheap, unconvincing, imitation banker. The costume consisted of a greasy derby with an unusually high crown, a wing collar and polka dot four-in-hand, a shiny double-breasted jacket and gray-striped trousers. His outfit fooled no one, but then he didn't intend it to fool anyone. His slyness was of a different sort.

On the stage he was a complete failure and knew it. Yet he claimed to have once come very close to success. To prove how close, he made Tod read an old clipping from the theatrical section of the *Sunday Times*.

"BEDRAGGLED HARLEQUIN," it was headed.

"The commedia del' arte² is not dead, but lives on in Brooklyn, or was living there last week on the stage of the Oglethorpe Theatre in the person of one Harry Greener. Mr. Greener is of a troupe called 'The Flying Lings,' who, by the time this reaches you, have probably moved on to Mystic, Connecticut, or some other place more fitting than the borough of large families. If you have the time and really love the theatre, by all means seek out the Lings wherever they may be.

"Mr. Greener, the bedraggled Harlequin of our caption, is not bedraggled but clean, neat and sweet when he first comes on. By the time the Lings, four muscular Orientals, finish with him, however, he is plenty bedraggled. He is tattered and bloody, but still sweet.

"When Mr. Greener enters the trumpets are properly silent. Mama Ling is spinning a plate on the end of a stick held in her mouth, Papa Ling is doing cartwheels, Sister Ling is juggling fans and Sonny Ling is hanging from the proscenium arch by his pigtail. As he inspects his strenuous colleagues, Mr. Greener tries to hide his confusion under some much too obvious worldliness. He ventures to tickle Sister and receives a powerful kick in the belly in return for this innocent attention. Having been kicked, he is on familiar ground and begins to tell a dull joke. Father Ling sneaks up behind him and tosses him to Brother, who looks the other way. Mr. Greener lands on the back of his neck. He shows his mettle by finishing his dull story from a recumbent position. When he stands up, the audience, which failed to laugh at his joke, laughs at his limp, so he continues lame for the rest of the act.

"Mr. Greener begins another story, even longer and duller than his first. Just before he arrives at the gag line, the orchestra blares loudly and drowns him out. He is very patient and very brave. He begins again, but the orchestra will not let him finish. The pain that almost, not quite, thank God, crumples his stiff little figure would be unbearable if it were not obviously make-believe. It is gloriously funny.

"The finale is superb. While the Ling Family flies through the air, Mr. Greener, held to the ground by his sense of reality and his knowledge of gravitation, tries hard to make the audience think that he is neither surprised nor worried by the rocketing Orientals. It's familiar stuff, his hands signal, but his face denies this. As time goes on and no one is hurt, he

2. Italian popular theater form, originating in the 16th century, in which Harlequin, a comic servant traditionally dressed in a checkered costume, is a stock character.

regains his assurance. The acrobats ignore him, so he ignores the acrobats. His is the final victory; the applause is for him.

“My first thought was that some producer should put Mr. Greener into a big revue against a background of beautiful girls and glittering curtains. But my second was that this would be a mistake. I am afraid that Mr. Greener, like certain humble field plants which die when transferred to richer soil, had better be left to bloom in vaudeville against a background of ventriloquists and lady bicycle riders.”

Harry had more than a dozen copies of this article, several on rag paper.³ After trying to get a job by inserting a small advertisement in *Variety*⁴ (“. . . ‘some producer should put Mr. Greener into a big revue . . .’ *The Times*”), he had come to Hollywood, thinking to earn a living playing comedy bits in films. There proved to be little demand for his talents, however. As he himself put it, he “stank from hunger.” To supplement his meagre income from the studios, he peddled silver polish which he made in the bathroom of the apartment out of chalk, soap and yellow axle grease. When Faye wasn’t at Central Casting, she took him around on his peddling trips in her Model T Ford. It was on their last expedition together that he had fallen sick.

It was on this trip that Faye acquired a new suitor by the name of Homer Simpson. About a week after Harry had taken to his bed, Tod met Homer for the first time. He was keeping the old man company when their conversation was interrupted by a light knock on the apartment door. Tod answered it and found a man standing in the hall with flowers for Faye and a bottle of port wine for her father.

Tod examined him eagerly. He didn’t mean to be rude but at first glance this man seemed an exact model for the kind of person who comes to California to die, perfect in every detail down to fever eyes and unruly hands.

“My name is Homer Simpson,” the man gasped, then shifted uneasily and patted his perfectly dry forehead with a folded handkerchief.

“Won’t you come in?” Tod asked.

He shook his head heavily and thrust the wine and flowers at Tod. Before Tod could say anything, he had lumbered off.

Tod saw that he was mistaken. Homer Simpson was only physically the type. The men he meant were not shy.

He took the gifts in to Harry, who didn’t seem at all surprised. He said Homer was one of his grateful customers.

“That Miracle Polish of mine sure does fetch ‘em.”

Later, when Faye came home and heard the story, she was very much amused. They both told Tod how they had happened to meet Homer, interrupting themselves and each other every few seconds to laugh.

The next night Tod saw Homer staring at the apartment house from the shadow of a date palm on the opposite side of the street. He watched him for a few minutes, then called out a friendly greeting. Without replying, Homer ran away. On the next day and the one after, Tod again saw him lurking near the palm tree. He finally caught him by approaching the tree silently from the rear.

3. Heavy, expensive paper.

4. A major trade journal of the entertainment industry since its launch in 1905.

“Hello, Mr. Simpson,” Tod said softly. “The Greeners were very grateful for your gift.”

This time Simpson didn’t move, perhaps because Tod had him backed against the tree.

“That’s fine,” he blurted out. “I was passing . . . I live up the street.”

Tod managed to keep their conversation going for several minutes before he escaped again.

The next time Tod was able to approach him without the stalk. From then on, he responded very quickly to his advances. Sympathy, even of the most obvious sort, made him articulate, almost garrulous.

7

Tod was right about one thing at least. Like most of the people he was interested in, Homer was a Middle-Westerner. He came from a little town near Des Moines, Iowa, called Wayneville, where he had worked for twenty years in a hotel.

One day, while sitting in the park in the rain, he had caught cold and his cold developed into pneumonia. When he came out of the hospital, he found that the hotel had hired a new bookkeeper. They offered to take him on again, but his doctor advised him to go to California for a rest. The doctor had an authoritative manner, so Homer left Wayneville for the Coast.

After living for a week in a railroad hotel in Los Angeles, he rented a cottage in Pinyon Canyon. It was only the second house the real estate agent showed him, but he took it because he was tired and because the agent was a bully.

He rather liked the way the cottage was located. It was the last house in the canyon and the hills rose directly behind the garage. They were covered with lupines, Canterbury bells, poppies, and several varieties of large yellow daisy. There were also some scrub pines, Joshua and eucalyptus trees. The agent told him that he would see doves and plumed quail, but during all the time he lived there, he saw only a few large, black velvet spiders and a lizard. He grew very fond of the lizard.

The house was cheap because it was hard to rent. Most of the people who took cottages in that neighborhood wanted them to be “Spanish” and this one, so the agent claimed, was “Irish.” Homer thought that the place looked kind of queer, but the agent insisted that it was cute.

The house was queer. It had an enormous and very crooked stone chimney, little dormer windows with big hoods and a thatched roof that came down very low on both sides of the front door. This door was of gumwood painted like fumed oak and it hung on enormous hinges. Although made by machine, the hinges had been carefully stamped to appear hand-forged. The same kind of care and skill had been used to make the roof thatching, which was not really straw but heavy fireproof paper colored and ribbed to look like straw.

The prevailing taste had been followed in the living room. It was “Spanish.” The walls were pale orange flecked with pink and on them hung several silk armorial banners in red and gold. A big galleon stood on the mantel-piece. Its hull was plaster, its sails paper and its rigging wire. In the fireplace was a variety of cactus in gaily colored Mexican pots. Some of the plants were made of rubber and cork; others were real.

The room was lit by wall fixtures in the shape of galleons with pointed amber bulbs projecting from their decks. The table held a lamp with a paper shade, oiled to look like parchment, that had several more galleons painted on it. On each side of the windows red velvet draperies hung from black, double-headed spears.

The furniture consisted of a heavy couch that had fat monks for legs and was covered with faded red damask, and three swollen armchairs, also red. In the center of the room was a very long mahogany table. It was of the trestle type and studded with large-headed bronze nails. Beside each of the chairs was a small end table, the same color and design as the big one, but with a colored tile let into the top.

In the two small bedrooms still another style had been used. This the agent had called "New England." There was a spool bed made of iron grained like wood, a Windsor chair of the kind frequently seen in tea shops, and a Governor Winthrop dresser⁵ painted to look like unpainted pine. On the floor was a small hooked rug. On the wall facing the dresser was a colored etching of a snowbound Connecticut farmhouse, complete with wolf. Both of these rooms were exactly alike in every detail. Even the pictures were duplicates.

There was also a bathroom and a kitchen.

8

It took Homer only a few minutes to get settled in his new home. He unpacked his trunk, hung his two suits, both dark gray, in the closet of one of his bedrooms and put his shirts and underclothes into the dresser drawers. He made no attempt to rearrange the furniture.

After an aimless tour of the house and the yard, he sat down on the couch in the living room. He sat as though waiting for someone in the lobby of a hotel. He remained that way for almost half an hour without moving anything but his hands, then got up and went into the bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed.

Although it was still early in the afternoon, he felt very sleepy. He was afraid to stretch out and go to sleep. Not because he had bad dreams, but because it was so hard for him to wake again. When he fell asleep, he was always afraid that he would never get up.

But his fear wasn't as strong as his need. He got his alarm clock and set it for seven o'clock, then lay down with it next to his ear. Two hours later, it seemed like seconds to him, the alarm went off. The bell rang for a full minute before he began to work laboriously toward consciousness. The struggle was a hard one. He groaned. His head trembled and his feet shot out. Finally his eyes opened, then widened. Once more the victory was his.

He lay stretched out on the bed, collecting his senses and testing the different parts of his body. Every part was awake but his hands. They still slept. He was not surprised. They demanded special attention, had always demanded it. When he had been a child, he used to stick pins into them and once had even thrust them into a fire. Now he used only cold water.

5. A dresser typically set on short legs and featuring a fold-down desktop, named for John Winthrop (1587/8–1649), first governor of the

Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1630 to 1633. "Windsor chair": a wooden chair with a curved bentwood back.

He got out of bed in sections, like a poorly made automaton, and carried his hands into the bathroom. He turned on the cold water. When the basin was full, he plunged his hands in up to the wrists. They lay quietly on the bottom like a pair of strange aquatic animals. When they were thoroughly chilled and began to crawl about, he lifted them out and hid them in a towel.

He was cold. He ran hot water into the tub and began to undress, fumbling with the buttons of his clothing as though he were undressing a stranger. He was naked before the tub was full enough to get in and he sat down on a stool to wait. He kept his enormous hands folded quietly on his belly. Although absolutely still, they seemed curbed rather than resting.

Except for his hands, which belonged on a piece of monumental sculpture, and his small head, he was well proportioned. His muscles were large and round and he had a full, heavy chest. Yet there was something wrong. For all his size and shape, he looked neither strong nor fertile. He was like one of Picasso's great sterile athletes, who brood hopelessly on pink sand, staring at veined marble waves.⁶

When the tub was full, he got in and sank down in the hot water. He grunted his comfort. But in another moment he would begin to remember, in just another moment. He tried to fool his memory by overwhelming it with tears and brought up the sobs that were always lurking uneasily in his chest. He cried softly at first, then harder. The sound he made was like that of a dog lapping gruel. He concentrated on how miserable and lonely he was, but it didn't work. The thing he was trying so desperately to avoid kept crowding into his mind.

One day when he was working in the hotel, a guest called Romola Martin had spoken to him in the elevator.

"Mr. Simpson, you're Mr. Simpson, the bookkeeper?"

"Yes."

"I'm in six-eleven."

She was small and childlike, with a quick, nervous manner. In her arms she coddled a package which obviously contained a square gin bottle.

"Yes," said Homer again, working against his natural instinct to be friendly. He knew that Miss Martin owed several weeks' rent and had heard the room clerk say she was a drunkard.

"Oh! . . ." the girl went on coquettishly, making obvious their difference in size, "I'm sorry you're worried about your bill, I . . ."

The intimacy of her tone embarrassed Homer.

"You'll have to speak to the manager," he rapped out, turning away.

He was trembling when he reached his office.

How bold the creature was! She was drunk, of course, but not so drunk that she didn't know what she was doing. He hurriedly labeled his excitement disgust.

Soon afterwards the manager called and asked him to bring in Miss Martin's credit card. When he went into the manager's office, he found Miss Carlisle, the room clerk, there. Homer listened to what the manager was saying to her.

"You roomed six-eleven?"

6. Suggests figures from the paintings of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) around the early 1920s.

"I did, yes, sir."

"Why? She's obvious enough, isn't she?"

"Not when she's sober."

"Never mind that. We don't want her kind in this hotel."

"I'm sorry."

The manager turned to Homer and took the credit card he was holding.

"She owes thirty-one dollars," Homer said.

"She'll have to pay up and get out. I don't want her kind around here." He smiled. "Especially when they run up bills. Get her on the phone for me."

Homer asked the telephone operator for six-eleven and after a short time was told that the room didn't answer.

"She's in the house," he said. "I saw her in the elevator."

"I'll have the housekeeper look."

Homer was working on his books some minutes later when his phone rang. It was the manager again. He said that six-eleven had been reported in by the housekeeper and asked Homer to take her a bill.

"Tell her to pay up or get out," he said.

His first thought was to ask that Miss Carlisle be sent because he was busy, but he didn't dare to suggest it. While making out the bill, he began to realize how excited he was. It was terrifying. Little waves of sensation moved along his nerves and the base of his tongue tingled.

When he got off at the sixth floor, he felt almost gay. His step was buoyant and he had completely forgotten his troublesome hands. He stopped at six-eleven and made as though to knock, then suddenly took fright and lowered his fist without touching the door.

He couldn't go through with it. They would have to send Miss Carlisle.

The housekeeper, who had been watching from the end of the hall, came up before he could escape.

"She doesn't answer," Homer said hurriedly.

"Did you knock hard enough? That slut is in there."

Before Homer could reply, she pounded on the door.

"Open up!" she shouted.

Homer heard someone move inside, then the door opened a few inches.

"Who is it, please?" a light voice asked.

"Mr. Simpson, the bookkeeper," he gasped.

"Come in, please."

The door opened a little wider and Homer went in without daring to look around at the housekeeper. He stumbled to the center of the room and stopped. At first he was conscious only of the heavy odor of alcohol and stale tobacco, but then underneath he smelled a metallic perfume. His eyes moved in a slow circle. On the floor was a litter of clothing, newspapers, magazines, and bottles. Miss Martin was huddled up on a corner of the bed. She was wearing a man's black silk dressing gown with light blue cuffs and lapel facings. Her close-cropped hair was the color and texture of straw and she looked like a little boy. Her youthfulness was heightened by her blue button eyes, pink button nose and red button mouth.

Homer was too busy with his growing excitement to speak or even think. He closed his eyes to tend it better, nursing carefully what he felt. He had to be careful, for if he went too fast, it might wither and then he would be cold again. It continued to grow.

“Go away, please, I’m drunk,” Miss Martin said.

Homer neither moved nor spoke.

She suddenly began to sob. The coarse, broken sounds she made seemed to come from her stomach. She buried her face in her hands and pounded the floor with her feet.

Homer’s feelings were so intense that his head bobbed stiffly on his neck like that of a toy Chinese dragon.

“I’m broke. I haven’t any money. I haven’t a dime. I’m broke, I tell you.”

Homer pulled out his wallet and moved on the girl as though to strike her with it.

She cowered away from him and her sobs grew stronger.

He dropped the wallet in her lap and stood over her, not knowing what else to do. When she saw the wallet, she smiled, but continued sobbing.

“Sit down,” she said.

He sat down on the bed beside her.

“You strange man,” she said coyly. “I could kiss you for being so nice.”

He caught her in his arms and hugged her. His suddenness frightened her and she tried to pull away, but he held on and began awkwardly to caress her. He was completely unconscious of what he was doing. He knew only that what he felt was marvelously sweet and that he had to make the sweetness carry through to the poor, sobbing woman.

Miss Martin’s sobs grew less and soon stopped altogether. He could feel her fidget and gather strength.

The telephone rang.

“Don’t answer it,” she said, beginning to sob once more.

He pushed her away gently and stumbled to the telephone. It was Miss Carlisle.

“Are you all right?” she asked, “or shall we send for the cops?”

“All right,” he said, hanging up.

It was all over. He couldn’t go back to the bed.

Miss Martin laughed at his look of acute distress.

“Bring the gin, you enormous cow,” she shouted gaily. “It’s under the table.”

He saw her stretch herself out in a way that couldn’t be mistaken. He ran out of the room.

Now in California, he was crying because he had never seen Miss Martin again. The next day the manager had told him that he had done a good job and that she had paid up and checked out.

Homer tried to find her. There were two other hotels in Wayneville, small run-down houses, and he inquired at both of them. He also asked in the few rooming places, but with no success. She had left town.

He settled back into his regular routine, working ten hours, eating two, sleeping the rest. Then he caught cold and had been advised to come to California. He could easily afford not to work for a while. His father had left him about six thousand dollars and during the twenty years he had kept books in the hotel, he had saved at least ten more.⁷

7. Homer’s assets are worth about \$275,000 in current U.S. dollars.

He got out of the tub, dried himself hurriedly with a rough towel, then went into the bedroom to dress. He felt even more stupid and washed out than usual. It was always like that. His emotions surged up in an enormous wave, curving and rearing, higher and higher, until it seemed as though the wave must carry everything before it. But the crash never came. Something always happened at the very top of the crest and the wave collapsed to run back like water down a drain, leaving, at the most, only the refuse of feeling.

It took him a long time to get all his clothing on. He stopped to rest after each garment with a desperation far out of proportion to the effort involved.

There was nothing to eat in the house and he had to go down to Hollywood Boulevard for food. He thought of waiting until morning, but then, although he was not hungry, decided against waiting. It was only eight o'clock and the trip would kill some time. If he just sat around, the temptation to go to sleep again would become irresistible.

The night was warm and very still. He started down hill, walking on the outer edge of the pavement. He hurried between lamp-posts, where the shadows were heaviest, and came to a full stop for a moment at every circle of light. By the time he reached the boulevard, he was fighting the desire to run. He stopped for several minutes on the corner to get his bearings. As he stood there, poised for flight, his fear made him seem almost graceful.

When several other people passed without paying any attention to him, he quieted down. He adjusted the collar of his coat and prepared to cross the street. Before he could take two steps someone called to him.

"Hey, you, mister."

It was a beggar who had spotted him from the shadow of a doorway. With the infallible instinct of his kind, he knew that Homer would be easy.

"Can you spare a nickel?"

"No," Homer said without conviction.

The beggar laughed and repeated his question, threateningly.

"A nickel, mister!"

He poked his hand into Homer's face.

Homer fumbled in his change pocket and dropped several coins on the sidewalk. While the man scrambled for them, he made his escape across the street.

The SunGold Market into which he turned was a large, brilliantly lit place. All the fixtures were chromium and the floor and walls were lined with white tile. Colored spotlights played on the showcases and counters, heightening the natural hues of the different foods. The oranges were bathed in red, the lemons in yellow, the fish in pale green, the steaks in rose and the eggs in ivory.

Homer went directly to the canned goods department and bought a can of mushroom soup and another of sardines. These and a half a pound of soda crackers would be enough for his supper.

Out on the street again with his parcel, he started to walk home. When he reached the corner that led to Pinyon Canyon and saw how steep and black the hill looked, he turned back along the lighted boulevard. He thought of waiting until someone else started up the hill, but finally took a taxicab.

10

Although Homer had nothing to do but prepare his scanty meals, he was not bored. Except for the Romola Martin incident and perhaps one or two other widely spaced events, the forty years of his life had been entirely without variety or excitement. As a bookkeeper, he had worked mechanically, totaling figures and making entries with the same impersonal detachment that he now opened cans of soup and made his bed.

Someone watching him go about his little cottage might have thought him sleep-walking or partially blind. His hands seemed to have a life and a will of their own. It was they who pulled the sheets tight and shaped the pillows.

One day, while opening a can of salmon for lunch, his thumb received a nasty cut. Although the wound must have hurt, the calm, slightly querulous expression he usually wore did not change. The wounded hand writhed about on the kitchen table until it was carried to the sink by its mate and bathed tenderly in hot water.

When not keeping house, he sat in the back yard, called the patio by the real estate agent, in an old broken deck chair. He went out to it immediately after breakfast to bake himself in the sun. In one of the closets he had found a tattered book and he held it in his lap without looking at it.

There was a much better view to be had in any direction other than the one he faced. By moving his chair in a quarter circle he could have seen a large part of the canyon twisting down to the city below. He never thought of making this shift. From where he sat, he saw the closed door of the garage and a patch of its shabby, tarpaper roof. In the foreground was a sooty, brick incinerator and a pile of rusty cans. A little to the right of them were the remains of a cactus garden in which a few ragged, tortured plants still survived.

One of these, a clump of thick, paddlelike blades, covered with ugly needles, was in bloom. From the tip of several of its topmost blades protruded a bright yellow flower, somewhat like a thistle blossom but coarser. No matter how hard the wind blew, its petals never trembled.

A lizard lived in a hole near the base of this plant. It was about five inches long and had a wedge-shaped head from which darted a fine, forked tongue. It earned a hard living catching the flies that strayed over to the cactus from the pile of cans.

The lizard was self-conscious and irritable, and Homer found it very amusing to watch. Whenever one of its elaborate stalks was foiled, it would shift about uneasily on its short legs and puff out its throat. Its coloring matched the cactus perfectly, but when it moved over to the cans where the flies were thick, it stood out very plainly. It would sit on the cactus by the hour without moving, then become impatient and start for the cans. The flies would spot it immediately and after several misses, it would sneak back sheepishly to its original post.

Homer was on the side of the flies. Whenever one of them, swinging too widely, would pass the cactus, he prayed silently for it to keep on going or turn back. If it lighted, he watched the lizard begin its stalk and held his breath until it had killed, hoping all the while that something would warn the fly. But no matter how much he wanted the fly to escape, he never thought of interfering, and was careful not to budge or make the slightest

noise. Occasionally the lizard would miscalculate. When that happened Homer would laugh happily.

Between the sun, the lizard and the house, he was fairly well occupied. But whether he was happy or not is hard to say. Probably he was neither, just as a plant is neither. He had memories to disturb him and a plant hasn't, but after the first bad night his memories were quiet.

11

He had been living this way for almost a month, when, one day, just as he was about to prepare his lunch, the door bell rang. He opened it and found a man standing on the step with a sample case in one hand and a derby hat in the other. Homer hurriedly shut the door again.

The bell continued to ring. He put his head out of the window nearest the door to order the fellow away, but the man bowed very politely and begged for a drink of water. Homer saw that he was old and tired and thought that he looked harmless. He got a bottle of water from the icebox, then opened the door and asked him in.

"The name, sir, is Harry Greener," the man announced in sing-song, stressing every other syllable.

Homer handed him a glass of water. He swallowed it quickly, then poured himself another.

"Much obliged," he said with an elaborate bow. "That was indeed refreshing."

Homer was astonished when he bowed again, did several quick jig steps, then let his derby hat roll down his arm. It fell to the floor. He stooped to retrieve it, straightening up with a jerk as though he had been kicked, then rubbed the seat of his trousers ruefully.

Homer understood that this was to amuse, so he laughed.

Harry thanked him by bowing again, but something went wrong. The exertion had been too much for him. His face blanched and he fumbled with his collar.

"A momentary indisposition," he murmured, wondering himself whether he was acting or sick.

"Sit down," Homer said.

But Harry wasn't through with his performance. He assumed a gallant smile and took a few unsteady steps toward the couch, then tripped himself. He examined the carpet indignantly, made believe he had found the object that had tripped him and kicked it away. He then limped to the couch and sat down with a whistling sigh like air escaping from a toy balloon.

Homer poured more water. Harry tried to stand up, but Homer pressed him back and made him drink sitting. He drank this glass as he had the other two, in quick gulps, then wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, imitating a man with a big mustache who had just drunk a glass of foamy beer.

"You are indeed kind, sir," he said. "Never fear, some day I'll repay you a thousandfold."

Homer clucked.

From his pocket Harry brought out a small can and held it out for him to take.

"Compliments of the house," he announced. "'Tis a box of Miracle Solvent, the modern polish par excellence, the polish without peer or parallel, used by all the movie stars . . ."

He broke off his spiel with a trilling laugh.

Homer took the can.

"Thank you," he said, trying to appear grateful. "How much is it?"

"The ordinary price, the retail price, is fifty cents, but you can have it for the extraordinary price of a quarter, the wholesale price, the price I pay at the factory."

"A quarter?" asked Homer, habit for the moment having got the better of his timidity. "I can buy one twice that size for a quarter in the store."

Harry knew his man.

"Take it, take it for nothing," he said contemptuously.

Homer was tricked into protesting.

"I guess maybe this is a much better polish."

"No," said Harry, as though he were spurning a bribe. "Keep your money. I don't want it."

He laughed, this time bitterly.

Homer pulled out some change and offered it.

"Take it, please. You need it, I'm sure. I'll have two cans."

Harry had his man where he wanted him. He began to practice a variety of laughs, all of them theatrical, like a musician tuning up before a concert. He finally found the right one and let himself go. It was a victim's laugh.

"Please stop," Homer said.

But Harry couldn't stop. He was really sick. The last block that held him poised over the runway of self-pity had been knocked away and he was sliding down the chute, gaining momentum all the time. He jumped to his feet and began doing Harry Greener, poor Harry, honest Harry, well-meaning, humble, deserving, a good husband, a model father, a faithful Christian, a loyal friend.

Homer didn't appreciate the performance in the least. He was terrified and wondered whether to phone the police. But he did nothing. He just held up his hand for Harry to stop.

At the end of his pantomime, Harry stood with his head thrown back, clutching his throat, as though waiting for the curtain to fall. Homer poured him still another glass of water. But Harry wasn't finished. He bowed, sweeping his hat to his heart, then began again. He didn't get very far this time and had to gasp painfully for breath. Suddenly, like a mechanical toy that had been overwound, something snapped inside of him and he began to spin through his entire repertoire. The effort was purely muscular, like the dance of a paralytic. He jiggled, juggled his hat, made believe he had been kicked, tripped, and shook hands with himself. He went through it all in one dizzy spasm, then reeled to the couch and collapsed.

He lay on the couch with his eyes closed and his chest heaving. He was even more surprised than Homer. He had put on his performance four or five times already that day and nothing like this had happened. He was really sick.

"You've had a fit," Homer said when Harry opened his eyes.

As the minutes passed, Harry began to feel better and his confidence returned. He pushed all thought of sickness out of his mind and even went

so far as to congratulate himself on having given the finest performance of his career. He should be able to get five dollars out of the big dope who was leaning over him.

"Have you any spirits in the house?" he asked weakly.

The grocer had sent Homer a bottle of port wine on approval and he went to get it. He filled a tumbler half full and handed it to Harry, who drank it in small sips, making the faces that usually go with medicine.

Speaking slowly, as though in great pain, he then asked Homer to bring in his sample case.

"It's on the doorstep. Somebody might steal it. The greater part of my small capital is invested in those cans of polish."

When Homer stepped outside to obey, he saw a girl near the curb. It was Faye Greener. She was looking at the house.

"Is my father in there?" she called out.

"Mr. Greener?"

She stamped her foot.

"Tell him to get a move on, damn it. I don't want to stay here all day."

"He's sick."

The girl turned away without giving any sign that she either heard or cared.

Homer took the sample case back into the house with him. He found Harry pouring himself another drink.

"Pretty fair stuff," he said, smacking his lips over it. "Pretty fair, all right, all right. Might I be so bold as to ask what you pay for a . . ."

Homer cut him short. He didn't approve of people who drank and wanted to get rid of him.

"Your daughter's outside," he said with as much firmness as he could muster. "She wants you."

Harry collapsed on the couch and began to breathe heavily. He was acting again.

"Don't tell her," he gasped. "Don't tell her how sick her old daddy is. She must never know."

Homer was shocked by his hypocrisy.

"You're better," he said as coldly as he could. "Why don't you go home?"

Harry smiled to show how offended and hurt he was by the heartless attitude of his host. When Homer said nothing, his smile became one expressing boundless courage. He got carefully to his feet, stood erect for a minute, then began to sway weakly and tumbled back on the couch.

"I'm faint," he groaned.

Once again he was surprised and frightened. He was faint.

"Get my daughter," he gasped.

Homer found her standing at the curb with her back to the house. When he called her, she whirled and came running toward him. He watched her for a second, then went in, leaving the door unlatched.

Faye burst into the room. She ignored Homer and went straight to the couch.

"Now what in hell's the matter?" she exploded.

"Darling daughter," he said. "I have been badly taken, and this gentleman has been kind enough to let me rest for a moment."

"He had a fit or something," Homer said.

She whirled around on him so suddenly that he was startled.

"How do you do?" she said, holding her hand forward and high up.

He shook it gingerly.

"Charmed," she said, when he mumbled something.

She spun around once more.

"It's my heart," Harry said. "I can't stand up."

The little performance he put on to sell polish was familiar to her and she knew that this wasn't part of it. When she turned to face Homer again, she looked quite tragic. Her head, instead of being held far back, now drooped forward.

"Please let him rest there," she said.

"Yes, of course."

Homer motioned her toward a chair, then got her a match for her cigarette. He tried not to stare at her, but his good manners were wasted. Faye enjoyed being stared at.

He thought her extremely beautiful, but what affected him still more was her vitality. She was taut and vibrant. She was as shiny as a new spoon.

Although she was seventeen, she was dressed like a child of twelve in a white cotton dress with a blue sailor collar. Her long legs were bare and she had blue sandals on her feet.

"I'm so sorry," she said when Homer looked at her father again.

He made a motion with his hand to show that it was nothing.

"He has a vile heart, poor dear," she went on. "I've begged and begged him to go to a specialist, but you men are all alike."

"Yes, he ought to go to a doctor," Homer said.

Her odd mannerisms and artificial voice puzzled him.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"About one o'clock."

She stood up suddenly and buried both her hands in her hair at the sides of her head, making it bunch at the top in a shiny ball.

"Oh," she gasped prettily, "and I had a luncheon date."

Still holding her hair, she turned at the waist without moving her legs, so that her snug dress twisted even tighter and Homer could see her dainty, arched ribs and little, dimpled belly. This elaborate gesture, like all her others, was so completely meaningless, almost formal, that she seemed a dancer rather than an affected actress.

"Do you like salmon salad?" Homer ventured to ask.

"Salmon sal-ahde?"

She seemed to be repeating the question to her stomach. The answer was yes.

"With plenty of mayonnaise, huh? I adore it."

"I was going to have some for lunch. I'll finish making it."

"Let me help."

They looked at Harry, who appeared to be asleep, then went into the kitchen. While he opened a can of salmon, she climbed on a chair and straddled it with her arms folded across the top of its back and rested her chin on her arms. Whenever he looked at her, she smiled intimately and tossed her pale, glittering hair first forward, then back.

Homer was excited and his hands worked quickly. He soon had a large bowl of salad ready. He set the table with his best cloth and his best silver and china.

“It makes me hungry just to look,” she said.

The way she said this seemed to mean that it was Homer who made her hungry and he beamed at her. But before he had a chance to sit down, she was already eating. She buttered a slice of bread, covered the butter with sugar and took a big bite. Then she quickly smeared a gob of mayonnaise on the salmon and went to work. Just as he was about to sit down, she asked for something to drink. He poured her a glass of milk and stood watching her like a waiter. He was unaware of her rudeness.

As soon as she had gobbled up her salad, he brought her a large red apple. She ate the fruit more slowly, nibbling daintily, her smallest finger curled away from the rest of her hand. When she had finished it, she went back to the living room and Homer followed her.

Harry still lay as they had left him, stretched out on the sofa. The heavy noon-day sun hit directly on his face, beating down on him like a club. He hardly felt its blows, however. He was busy with the stabbing pain in his chest. He was so busy with himself that he had even stopped trying to plan how to get money out of the big dope.

Homer drew the window curtain to shade his face. Harry didn't even notice. He was thinking about death. Faye bent over him. He saw, from under his partially closed eyelids, that she expected him to make a reassuring gesture. He refused. He examined the tragic expression that she had assumed and didn't like it. In a serious moment like this, her ham sorrow was insulting.

“Speak to me, Daddy,” she begged.

She was baiting him without being aware of it.

“What the hell is this,” he snarled, “a Tom show?”⁸

His sudden fury scared her and she straightened up with a jerk. He didn't want to laugh, but a short bark escaped before he could stop it. He waited anxiously to see what would happen. When it didn't hurt he laughed again. He kept on, timidly at first, then with growing assurance. He laughed with his eyes closed and the sweat pouring down his brow. Faye knew only one way to stop him and that was to do something he hated as much as she hated his laughter. She began to sing.

*“Jeepers Creepers!
Where'd ya get those peepers? . . .”*⁹

She trucked, jerking her buttocks and shaking her head from side to side.

Homer was amazed. He felt that the scene he was witnessing had been rehearsed. He was right. Their bitterest quarrels often took this form; he laughing, she singing.

*“Jeepers Creepers!
Where'd ya get those eyes?
Gosh, all git up!
How'd they get so lit up?
Gosh all git . . .”*

When Harry stopped, she stopped and flung herself into a chair. But Harry was only gathering strength for a final effort. He began again. This

8. Popular performances based on the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896).

9. Popular song introduced by the jazz trumpeter and singer Louis Armstrong (1901–1971) in the film *Going Places* (1938).

new laugh was not critical; it was horrible. When she was a child, he used to punish her with it. It was his masterpiece. There was a director who always called on him to give it when he was shooting a scene in an insane asylum or a haunted castle.

It began with a sharp, metallic crackle, like burning sticks, then gradually increased in volume until it became a rapid bark, then fell away again to an obscene chuckle. After a slight pause, it climbed until it was the nicker of a horse, then still higher to become a machinelike screech.

Faye listened helplessly with her head cocked on one side. Suddenly, she too laughed, not willingly, but fighting the sound.

"You bastard!" she yelled.

She leaped to the couch, grabbed him by the shoulders and tried to shake him quiet.

He kept laughing.

Homer moved as though he meant to pull her away, but he lost courage and was afraid to touch her. She was so naked under her skimpy dress.

"Miss Greener," he pleaded, making his big hands dance at the end of his arms. "Please, please . . ."

Harry couldn't stop laughing now. He pressed his belly with his hands, but the noise poured out of him. It had begun to hurt again.

Swinging her hand as though it held a hammer, she brought her fist down hard on his mouth. She hit him only once. He relaxed and was quiet.

"I had to do it," she said to Homer when he took her arm and led her away.

He guided her to a chair in the kitchen and shut the door. She continued to sob for a long time. He stood behind her chair, helplessly, watching the rhythmical heave of her shoulders. Several times his hands moved forward to comfort her, but he succeeded in curbing them.

When she was through crying, he handed her a napkin and she dried her face. The cloth was badly stained by her rouge and mascara.

"I've spoilt it," she said, keeping her face averted. "I'm very sorry."

"It was dirty," Homer said.

She took a compact from her pocket and looked at herself in its tiny mirror.

"I'm a fright."

She asked if she could use the bathroom and he showed her where it was. He then tiptoed into the living room to see Harry. The old man's breathing was noisy but regular and he seemed to be sleeping quietly. Homer put a cushion under his head without disturbing him and went back into the kitchen. He lit the stove and put the coffeepot on the flame, then sat down to wait for the girl to return. He heard her go into the living room. A few seconds later she came into the kitchen.

She hesitated apologetically in the doorway.

"Won't you have some coffee?"

Without waiting for her to reply, he poured a cup and moved the sugar and cream so that she could reach them.

"I had to do it," she said. "I just had to."

"That's all right."

To show her that it wasn't necessary to apologize, he busied himself at the sink.

"No, I had to," she insisted. "He laughs that way just to drive me wild. I can't stand it. I simply can't."

“Yes.”

“He’s crazy. We Greeners are all crazy.”

She made this last statement as though there were merit in being crazy.

“He’s pretty sick,” Homer said, apologizing for her. “Maybe he had a sunstroke.”

“No, he’s crazy.”

He put a plate of gingersnaps on the table and she ate them with her second cup of coffee. The dainty crunching sound she made chewing fascinated him.

When she remained quiet for several minutes, he turned from the sink to see if anything was wrong. She was smoking a cigarette and seemed lost in thought.

He tried to be gay.

“What are you thinking?” he said awkwardly, then felt foolish.

She sighed to show how dark and foreboding her thoughts were, but didn’t reply.

“I’ll bet you would like some candy,” Homer said. “There isn’t any in the house, but I could call the drugstore and they’d send it right over. Or some ice cream?”

“No, thanks, please.”

“It’s no trouble.”

“My father isn’t really a peddler,” she said, abruptly. “He’s an actor. I’m an actress. My mother was also an actress, a dancer. The theatre is in our blood.”

“I haven’t seen many shows. I . . .”

He broke off because he saw that she wasn’t interested.

“I’m going to be a star some day,” she announced as though daring him to contradict her.

“I’m sure you . . .”

“It’s my life. It’s the only thing in the whole world that I want.”

“It’s good to know what you want. I used to be a book-keeper in a hotel, but . . .”

“If I’m not, I’ll commit suicide.”

She stood up and put her hands to her hair, opened her eyes wide and frowned.

“I don’t go to shows very often,” he apologized, pushing the gingersnaps toward her. “The lights hurt my eyes.”

She laughed and took a cracker.

“I’ll get fat.”

“Oh, no.”

“They say fat women are going to be popular next year. Do you think so? I don’t. It’s just publicity for Mae West.”¹

He agreed with her.

She talked on and on, endlessly, about herself and about the picture business. He watched her, but didn’t listen, and whenever she repeated a question in order to get a reply, he nodded his head without saying anything.

His hands began to bother him. He rubbed them against the edge of the table to relieve their itch, but it only stimulated them. When he clasped them

1. American actress (1893–1980), known for her statuesque figure and racy jokes. Her film career was in decline by 1939.

behind his back, the strain became intolerable. They were hot and swollen. Using the dishes as an excuse, he held them under the cold water tap of the sink.

Faye was still talking when Harry appeared in the doorway. He leaned weakly against the doorjamb. His nose was very red, but the rest of his face was drained white and he seemed to have grown too small for his clothing. He was smiling, however.

To Homer's amazement, they greeted each other as though nothing had happened.

"You okay now, Pop?"

"Fine and dandy, baby. Right as rain, fit as a fiddle and lively as a flea, as the feller says."

The nasal twang he used in imitation of a country yokel made Homer smile.

"Do you want something to eat?" he asked. "A glass of milk, maybe?"

"I could do with a snack."

Faye helped him over to the table. He tried to disguise how weak he was by doing an exaggerated Negro shuffle.

Homer opened a can of sardines and sliced some bread. Harry smacked his lips over the food, but ate slowly and with an effort.

"That hit the spot, all righty right," he said when he had finished.

He leaned back and fished a crumpled cigar butt out of his vest pocket. Faye lit it for him and he playfully blew a puff of smoke in her face.

"We'd better go, Daddy," she said.

"In a jiffy, child."

He turned to Homer.

"Nice place you've got here. Married?"

Faye tried to interfere.

"Dad!"

He ignored her.

"Bachelor, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, well, a young fellow like you."

"I'm here for my health," Homer found it necessary to say.

"Don't answer his questions," Faye broke in.

"Now, now, daughter, I'm just being friendly like. I don't mean no harm."

He was still using exaggerated backwoods accent. He spat dry into an imaginary spittoon and made believe he was shifting a cud of tobacco from cheek to cheek.

Homer thought his mimicry funny.

"I'd be lonesome and scared living alone in a big house like this," Harry went on. "Don't you ever get lonesome?"

Homer looked at Faye for his answer. She was frowning with annoyance.

"No," he said, to prevent Harry from repeating the uncomfortable question.

"No? Well, that's fine."

He blew several smoke rings at the ceiling and watched their behavior judiciously.

"Did you ever think of taking boarders?" he asked. "Some nice, sociable folks, I mean. It'll bring in a little extra money and make things more homey."

Homer was indignant, but underneath his indignation lurked another idea, a very exciting one. He didn't know what to say.

Faye misunderstood his agitation.

"Cut it out, Dad," she exclaimed before Homer could reply. "You've been a big enough nuisance already."

"Just chinning," he protested innocently. "Just chewing the fat."

"Well, then, let's get going," she snapped.

"There's plenty of time," Homer said.

He wanted to add something stronger, but didn't have the courage. His hands were braver. When Faye shook good-bye, they clutched and refused to let go.

Faye laughed at their warm insistence.

"Thanks a million, Mr. Simpson," she said. "You've been very kind. Thanks for the lunch and for helping Daddy."

"We're very grateful," Harry chimed in. "You've done a Christian deed this day. God will reward you."

He had suddenly become very pious.

"Please look us up," Faye said. "We live close-by in the San Berdoo Apartments, about five blocks down the canyon. It's the big yellow house."

When Harry stood, he had to lean against the table for support. Faye and Homer each took him by the arm and helped him into the street. Homer held him erect, while Faye went to get their Ford which was parked across the street.

"We're forgetting your order of Miracle Salve," Harry said, "the polish without peer or parallel."

Homer found a dollar and slipped it into his hand. He hid the money quickly and tried to become businesslike.

"I'll leave the goods tomorrow."

"Yes, that'll be fine," Homer said. "I really need some silver polish."

Harry was angry because it hurt him to be patronized by a sucker. He made an attempt to re-establish what he considered to be their proper relationship by bowing ironically, but didn't get very far with the gesture and began to fumble with his Adam's apple. Homer helped him into the car and he slumped down in the seat beside Faye.

They drove off. She turned to wave, but Harry didn't even look back.

12

Homer spent the rest of the afternoon in the broken deck chair. The lizard was on the cactus, but he took little interest in its hunting. His hands kept his thoughts busy. They trembled and jerked, as though troubled by dreams. To hold them still, he clasped them together. Their fingers twined like a tangle of thighs in miniature. He snatched them apart and sat on them.

When the days passed and he couldn't forget Faye, he began to grow frightened. He somehow knew that his only defense was chastity, that it served him, like the shell of a tortoise, as both spine and armor. He couldn't shed it even in thought. If he did, he would be destroyed.

He was right. There are men who can lust with parts of themselves. Only their brain or their hearts burn and then not completely. There are others, still more fortunate, who are like the filaments of an incandescent lamp. They burn fiercely, yet nothing is destroyed. But in Homer's case it would be like dropping a spark into a barn full of hay. He had escaped in the

Romola Martin incident, but he wouldn't escape again. Then, for one thing, he had had his job in the hotel, a daily all-day task that protected him by tiring him, but now he had nothing.

His thoughts frightened him and he bolted into the house, hoping to leave them behind like a hat. He ran into his bedroom and threw himself down on the bed. He was simple enough to believe that people don't think while asleep.

In his troubled state, even this delusion was denied him and he was unable to fall asleep. He closed his eyes and tried to make himself drowsy. The approach to sleep which had once been automatic had somehow become a long, shining tunnel. Sleep was at the far end of it, a soft bit of shadow in the hard glare. He couldn't run, only crawl toward the black patch. Just as he was about to give up, habit came to his rescue. It collapsed the shining tunnel and hurled him into the shadow.

When he awoke it was without a struggle. He tried to fall asleep once more, but this time couldn't even find the tunnel. He was thoroughly awake. He tried to think of how very tired he was, but he wasn't tired. He felt more alive than he had at any time since Romola Martin.

Outside a few birds still sang intermittently, starting and breaking off, as though sorry to acknowledge the end of another day. He thought that he heard the lisp of silk against silk, but it was only the wind playing in the trees. How empty the house was! He tried to fill it by singing.

*"Oh, say can you see,
By the dawn's early light . . ."*

It was the only song he knew. He thought of buying a victrola² or a radio. He knew, however, that he would buy neither. This fact made him very sad. It was a pleasant sadness, very sweet and calm.

But he couldn't let well enough alone. He was impatient and began to prod at his sadness, hoping to make it acute and so still more pleasant. He had been getting pamphlets in the mail from a travel bureau and he thought of the trips he would never take. Mexico was only a few hundred miles away. Boats left daily for Hawaii.

His sadness turned to anguish before he knew it and became sour. He was miserable again. He began to cry.

Only those who still have hope can benefit from tears. When they finish, they feel better. But to those without hope, like Homer, whose anguish is basic and permanent, no good comes from crying. Nothing changes for them. They usually know this, but still can't help crying.

Homer was lucky. He cried himself to sleep.

But he awoke again in the morning with Faye uppermost in his mind. He bathed, ate breakfast and sat in his deck chair. In the afternoon, he decided to go for a walk. There was only one way for him to go and that led past the San Bernardino Apartments.

Some time during his long sleep, he had given up the battle. When he came to the apartment house, he peered into the amber-lit hallway and read the Greener card on the letter box, then turned and went home. On the next night, he repeated the trip, carrying a gift of flowers and wine.

2. An early phonograph record player.

13

Harry Greener's condition didn't improve. He remained in bed, staring at the ceiling with his hands folded on his chest.

Tod went to see him almost every night. There were usually other guests. Sometimes Abe Kusich, sometimes Anna and Annabelle Lee, a sister act of the nineteen-tens, more often the four Gingos, a family of performing Eskimos from Point Barrow, Alaska.

If Harry were asleep or there were visitors, Faye usually invited Tod into her room for a talk. His interest in her grew despite the things she said and he continued to find her very exciting. Had any other girl been so affected, he would have thought her intolerable. Faye's affectations, however, were so completely artificial that he found them charming.

Being with her was like being backstage during an amateurish, ridiculous play. From in front, the stupid lines and grotesque situations would have made him squirm with annoyance, but because he saw the perspiring stagehands and the wires that held up the tawdry summerhouse with its tangle of paper flowers, he accepted everything and was anxious for it to succeed.

He found still another way to excuse her. He believed that while she often recognized the falseness of an attitude, she persisted in it because she didn't know how to be simpler or more honest. She was an actress who had learned from bad models in a bad school.

Yet Faye did have some critical ability, almost enough to recognize the ridiculous. He had often seen her laugh at herself. What was more, he had even seen her laugh at her dreams.

One evening they talked about what she did with herself when she wasn't working as an extra. She told him that she often spent the whole day making up stories. She laughed as she said it. When he questioned her, she described her method quite willingly.

She would get some music on the radio, then lie down on her bed and shut her eyes. She had a large assortment of stories to choose from. After getting herself in the right mood, she would go over them in her mind, as though they were a pack of cards, discarding one after another until she found the one that suited. On some days, she would run through the whole pack without making a choice. When that happened, she would either go to Vine Street for an ice cream soda or, if she was broke, thumb over the pack again and force herself to choose.

While she admitted that her method was too mechanical for the best results and that it was better to slip into a dream naturally, she said that any dream was better than no dream and beggars couldn't be choosers. She hadn't exactly said this, but he was able to understand it from what she did say. He thought it important that she smiled while telling him, not with embarrassment, but critically. However, her critical powers ended there. She only smiled at the mechanics.

The first time he had ever heard one of her dreams was late at night in her bedroom. About half an hour earlier, she had knocked on his door and had asked him to come and help her with Harry because she thought he was dying. His noisy breathing, which she had taken for the death rattle, had awakened her and she was badly frightened. Tod put on his bathrobe and

followed her downstairs. When he got to the apartment, Harry had managed to clear his throat and his breathing had become quiet again.

She invited him into her room for a smoke. She sat on the bed and he sat beside her. She was wearing an old beach robe of white toweling over her pajamas and it was very becoming.

He wanted to beg her for a kiss but was afraid, not because she would refuse, but because she would insist on making it meaningless. To flatter her, he commented on her appearance. He did a bad job of it. He was incapable of direct flattery and got bogged down in a much too roundabout observation. She didn't listen and he broke off feeling like an idiot.

"I've got a swell idea," she said suddenly. "An idea how we can make some real money."

He made another attempt to flatter her. This time by assuming an attitude of serious interest.

"You're educated," she said. "Well, I've got some swell ideas for pictures. All you got to do is write them up and then we'll sell them to the studios."

He agreed and she described her plan. It was very vague until she came to what she considered would be its results, then she went into concrete details. As soon as they had sold one story, she would give him another. They would make loads and loads of money. Of course she wouldn't give up acting, even if she was a big success as a writer, because acting was her life.

He realized as she went on that she was manufacturing another dream to add to her already very thick pack. When she finally got through spending the money, he asked her to tell him the idea he was to "write up," keeping all trace of irony out of his voice.

On the wall of the room beyond the foot of her bed was a large photograph that must have once been used in the lobby of a theatre to advertise a Tarzan picture.³ It showed a beautiful young man with magnificent muscles, wearing only a narrow loin cloth, who was ardently squeezing a slim girl in a torn riding habit. They stood in a jungle clearing and all around the pair writhed great vines loaded with fat orchids. When she told her story, he knew that this photograph had a lot to do with inspiring it.

A young girl is cruising on her father's yacht in the South Seas. She is engaged to marry a Russian count, who is tall, thin and old, but with beautiful manners. He is on the yacht, too, and keeps begging her to name the day. But she is spoiled and won't do it. Maybe she became engaged to him in order to spite another man. She becomes interested in a young sailor who is far below her in station, but very handsome. She flirts with him because she is bored. The sailor refuses to be toyed with no matter how much money she's got and tells her that he only takes orders from the captain and to go back to her foreigner. She gets sore as hell and threatens to have him fired, but he only laughs at her. How can he be fired in the middle of the ocean? She falls in love with him, although maybe she doesn't realize it herself, because he is the first man who has ever said no to one of her whims and because he is so handsome. Then there is a big storm and the yacht is wrecked near an island. Everybody is drowned, but she manages to swim to shore. She makes herself

3. Based on the character created by the American novelist Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875–1950) in *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912). Raised by a group of apes as one of them after the death of his parents,

Tarzan eventually becomes their king. In the 1930s several Tarzan pictures were made starring the Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller.

a hut of boughs and lives on fish and fruit. It's the tropics. One morning, while she is bathing naked in a brook, a big snake grabs her. She struggles but the snake is too strong for her and it looks like curtains. But the sailor, who has been watching her from behind some bushes, leaps to her rescue. He fights the snake for her and wins.

Tod was to go on from there. He asked her how she thought the picture should end, but she seemed to have lost interest. He insisted on hearing, however.

"Well, he marries her, of course, and they're rescued. First they're rescued and then they're married, I mean. Maybe he turns out to be a rich boy who is being a sailor just for the adventure of it, or something like that. You can work it out easy enough."

"It's sure-fire," Tod said earnestly, staring at her wet lips and the tiny point of her tongue which she kept moving between them.

"I've got just hundreds and hundreds more."

He didn't say anything and her manner changed. While telling the story, she had been full of surface animation and her hands and face were alive with little illustrative grimaces and gestures. But now her excitement narrowed and became deeper and its play internal. He guessed that she must be thumbing over her pack and that she would soon select another card to show him.

He had often seen her like this, but had never before understood it. All these little stories, these little day-dreams of hers, were what gave such extraordinary color and mystery to her movements. She seemed always to be struggling in their soft grasp as though she were trying to run in a swamp. As he watched her, he felt sure that her lips must taste of blood and salt and that there must be a delicious weakness in her legs. His impulse wasn't to aid her to get free, but to throw her down in the soft, warm mud and to keep her there.

He expressed some of his desire by a grunt. If he only had the courage to throw himself on her. Nothing less violent than rape would do. The sensation he felt was like that he got when holding an egg in his hand. Not that she was fragile or even seemed fragile. It wasn't that. It was her completeness, her egglike self-sufficiency, that made him want to crush her.

But he did nothing and she began to talk again.

"I've got another swell idea that I want to tell you. Maybe you had better write this one up first. It's a backstage story and they're making a lot of them this year."

She told him about a young chorus girl who gets her big chance when the star of the show falls sick. It was a familiar version of the Cinderella theme, but her technique was much different from the one she had used for the South Sea tale. Although the events she described were miraculous, her description of them was realistic. The effect was similar to that obtained by the artists of the Middle Ages, who, when doing a subject like the raising of Lazarus from the dead or Christ walking on water,⁴ were careful to keep all the details intensely realistic. She, like them, seemed to think that fantasy could be made plausible by a humdrum technique.

"I like that one, too," he said when she had finished.

4. Miracles performed by Jesus Christ; see John 11.1–44 and 6.16–21.

“Think them over and do the one that has the best chance.”

She was dismissing him and if he didn't act at once the opportunity would be gone. He started to lean toward her, but she caught his meaning and stood up. She took his arm with affectionate brusqueness—they were now business partners—and guided him to the door.

In the hall, when she thanked him for coming down and apologized for having disturbed him, he tried again. She seemed to melt a little and he reached for her. She kissed him willingly enough, but when he tried to extend the caress, she tore free.

“Whoa there, palsy-walsy,” she laughed. “Mama spank.”

He started for the stairs.

“Good-bye now,” she called after him, then laughed again.

He barely heard her. He was thinking of the drawings he had made of her and of the new one he would do as soon as he got to his room.

In “The Burning of Los Angeles” Faye is the naked girl in the left foreground being chased by the group of men and women who have separated from the main body of the mob. One of the women is about to hurl a rock at her to bring her down. She is running with her eyes closed and a strange half-smile on her lips. Despite the dreamy repose of her face, her body is straining to hurl her along at top speed. The only explanation for this contrast is that she is enjoying the release that wild flight gives in much the same way that a game bird must when, after hiding for several tense minutes, it bursts from cover in complete, unthinking panic.

14

Tod had other and more successful rivals than Homer Simpson. One of the most important was a young man called Earle Shoop.

Earle was a cowboy from a small town in Arizona. He worked occasionally in horse-operas⁵ and spent the rest of his time in front of a saddlery store on Sunset Boulevard. In the window of this store was an enormous Mexican saddle covered with carved silver, and around it was arranged a large collection of torture instruments. Among other things there were fancy, braided quirts, spurs with great spiked wheels, and double bits that looked as though they could break a horse's jaw without trouble. Across the back of the window ran a low shelf on which was a row of boots, some black, some red and some a pale yellow. All of the boots had scalloped tops and very high heels.

Earle always stood with his back to the window, his eyes fixed on a sign on the roof of a one-story building across the street that read: “MalTED MILKS TOO THICK FOR A STRAW.” Regularly, twice every hour, he pulled a sack of tobacco and a sheaf of papers from his shirt pocket and rolled a cigarette. Then he tightened the cloth of his trousers by lifting his knee and struck a match along the underside of his thigh.

He was over six feet tall. The big Stetson⁶ hat he wore added five inches more to his height and the heels of his boots still another three. His pole-like appearance was further exaggerated by the narrowness of his shoulders and by his lack of either hips or buttocks. The years he had spent in the saddle had not made him bowlegged. In fact, his legs were so straight that

5. Western-themed films.

6. A famous brand of cowboy hats.

his dungarees, bleached a very light blue by the sun and much washing, hung down without a wrinkle, as though they were empty.

Tod could see why Faye thought him handsome. He had a two-dimensional face that a talented child might have drawn with a ruler and a compass. His chin was perfectly round and his eyes, which were wide apart, were also round. His thin mouth ran at right angles to his straight, perpendicular nose. His reddish tan complexion was the same color from hairline to throat, as though washed in by an expert, and it completed his resemblance to a mechanical drawing.

Tod had told Faye that Earle was a dull fool. She agreed laughing, but then said that he was “criminally handsome,” an expression she had picked up in the chatter column of a trade paper.

Meeting her on the stairs one night, Tod asked if she would go to dinner with him.

“I can’t. I’ve got a date. But you can come along.”

“With Earle?”

“Yes, with Earle,” she repeated, mimicking his annoyance.

“No, thanks.”

She misunderstood, perhaps on purpose, and said, “He’ll treat this time.”

Earle was always broke and whenever Tod went with them he was the one who paid.

“That isn’t it, and you damn well know it.”

“Oh, isn’t it?” she asked archly, then, absolutely sure of herself, added, “Meet us at Hodge’s around five.”

Hodge’s was the saddlery store. When Tod got there, he found Earle Shoop at his usual post, just standing and just looking at the sign across the street. He had on his ten-gallon hat and his high-heeled boots. Neatly folded over his left arm was a dark gray jacket. His shirt was navy-blue cotton with large polka dots, each the size of a dime. The sleeves of his shirt were not rolled, but pulled to the middle of his forearm and held there by a pair of fancy, rose armbands. His hands were the same clean reddish tan as his face.

“Lo, thar,” was the way he returned Tod’s salute.

Tod found his Western accent amusing. The first time he had heard it, he had replied, “Lo, thar, stranger,” and had been surprised to discover that Earle didn’t know he was being kidded. Even when Tod talked about “cayuses,” “mean hombres” and “rustlers,”⁷ Earle took him seriously.

“Howdy, partner,” Tod said.

Next to Earle was another Westerner in a big hat and boots, sitting on his heels and chewing vigorously on a little twig. Close behind him was a battered paper valise held together by heavy rope tied with professional-looking knots.

Soon after Tod arrived a third man came along. He made a thorough examination of the merchandise in the window, then turned and began to stare across the street like the other two.

He was middle-aged and looked like an exercise boy from a racing stable. His face was completely covered with a fine mesh of wrinkles, as though he had been sleeping with it pressed against a roll of rabbit wire. He was very shabby and had probably sold his big hat, but he still had his boots.

7. Cattle thieves. “Cayuses”: members of a northwestern American Indian people. “Hombres”: men (Spanish).

“Lo, boys,” he said.

“Lo, Hink,” said the man with the paper valise.

Tod didn’t know whether he was included in the greeting, but took a chance and replied.

“Howdy.”

Hink prodded the valise with his toe.

“Goin’ some place, Calvin?” he asked.

“Azusa,⁸ there’s a rodeo.”

“Who’s running it?”

“A fellow calls himself ‘Badlands Jack.’”

“That grifter! . . . You goin’, Earle?”

“Nope.”

“I gotta eat,” said Calvin.

Hink carefully considered all the information he had received before speaking again.

“Mono’s makin’ a new Buck Stevens,”⁹ he said. “Will Ferris told me they’d use more than forty riders.”

Calvin turned and looked up at Earle.

“Still got the piebald vest?”¹ he asked slyly.

“Why?”

“It’ll cinch you a job as a road agent.”²

Tod understood that this was a joke of some sort because Calvin and Hink chuckled and slapped their thighs loudly while Earle frowned.

There was another long silence, then Calvin spoke again.

“Ain’t your old man still got some cows?” he asked Earle.

But Earle was wary this time and refused to answer.

Calvin winked at Tod, slowly and elaborately, contorting one whole side of his face.

“That’s right, Earle,” Hink said. “Your old man’s still got some stock. Why don’t you go home?”

They couldn’t get a rise out of Earle, so Calvin answered the question.

“He dassint. He got caught in a sheep car with a pair of rubber boots on.”

It was another joke. Calvin and Hink slapped their thighs and laughed, but Tod could see that they were waiting for something else. Earle, suddenly, without even shifting his weight, shot his foot out and kicked Calvin solidly in the rump. This was the real point of the joke. They were delighted by Earle’s fury. Tod also laughed. The way Earle had gone from apathy to action without the usual transition was funny. The seriousness of his violence was even funnier.

A little while later, Faye drove by in her battered Ford touring car³ and pulled into the curb some twenty feet away. Calvin and Hink waved, but Earle didn’t budge. He took his time, as befitted his dignity. Not until she tooted her horn did he move. Tod followed a short distance behind him.

“Hi, cowboy,” said Faye gaily.

8. In 1939, a small city, still surrounded by citrus groves, at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains northeast of Los Angeles.

9. Suggests Buck Jones (1891–1942), an American actor known for starring in Westerns.

1. Made from the hide of a horse with large patches of color.

2. A stagecoach robber.

3. Open-topped car, like Ford’s Model T, out of fashion by the 1930s.

"Lo, honey," he drawled, removing his hat carefully and replacing it with even greater care.

Faye smiled at Tod and motioned for them both to climb in. Tod got in the back. Earle unfolded the jacket he was carrying, slapped it a few times to remove the wrinkles, then put it on and adjusted its collar and shaped the roll of its lapels. He then climbed in beside Faye.

She started the car with a jerk. When she reached LaBrea, she turned right to Hollywood Boulevard and then left along it. Tod could see that she was watching Earle out of the corner of her eye and that he was preparing to speak.

"Get going," she said, trying to hurry him. "What is it?"

"Looka here, honey, I ain't got any dough for supper."

She was very much put out.

"But I told Tod we'd treat him. He's treated us enough times."

"That's all right," Tod interposed. "Next time'll do. I've got plenty of money."

"No, damn it," she said without looking around. "I'm sick of it."

She pulled into the curb and slammed on the brakes.

"It's always the same story," she said to Earle.

He adjusted his hat, his collar and his sleeves, then spoke.

"We've got some grub at camp."

"Beans, I suppose."

"Nope."

She prodded him.

"Well, what've you got?"

"Mig and me's set some traps."

Faye laughed.

"Rat traps, eh? We're going to eat rats."

Earle didn't say anything.

"Listen, you big, strong, silent dope," she said, "either make sense, or God damn it, get out of this car."

"They're quail traps," he said without the slightest change in his wooden, formal manner.

She ignored his explanation.

"Talking to you is like pulling teeth. You wear me out."

Tod knew that there was no hope for him in this quarrel. He had heard it all before.

"I didn't mean nothing," Earle said. "I was only funning. I wouldn't feed you rats."

She slammed off the emergency brake and started the car again. At Zacarias Street, she turned into the hills. After climbing steadily for a quarter of a mile, she reached a dirt road and followed it to its end. They all climbed out, Earle helping Faye.

"Give me a kiss," she said, smiling her forgiveness.

He took his hat off ceremoniously and placed it on the hood of the car, then wrapped his long arms around her. They paid no attention to Tod, who was standing off to one side watching them. He saw Earle close his eyes and pucker up his lips like a little boy. But there was nothing boyish about what he did to her. When she had had as much as she wanted, she pushed him away.

"You, too?" she called gaily to Tod, who had turned his back.

“Oh, some other time,” he replied, imitating her casualness.

She laughed, then took out a compact and began to fix her mouth. When she was ready, they started along a little path that was a continuation of the dirt road. Earle led, Faye came next and Tod brought up the rear.

It was full spring. The path ran along the bottom of a narrow canyon and wherever weeds could get a purchase in its steep banks they flowered in purple, blue and yellow. Orange poppies bordered the path. Their petals were wrinkled like crepe and their leaves were heavy with talcumlike dust.

They climbed until they reached another canyon. This one was sterile, but its bare ground and jagged rocks were even more brilliantly colored than the flowers of the first. The path was silver, grained with streaks of rose-gray, and the walls of the canyon were turquoise, mauve, chocolate and lavender. The air itself was vibrant pink.

They stopped to watch a humming bird chase a blue jay. The jay flashed by squawking with its tiny enemy on its tail like a ruby bullet. The gaudy birds burst the colored air into a thousand glittering particles like metal confetti.

When they came out of this canyon, they saw below them a little green valley thick with trees, mostly eucalyptus, with here and there a poplar and one enormous black live-oak. Sliding and stumbling down a dry wash, they made for the valley.

Tod saw a man watching their approach from the edge of the wood. Faye also saw him and waved.

“Hi, Mig!” she shouted.

“Chinita!” he called back.

She ran the last ten yards of the slope and the man caught her in his arms.

He was toffee-colored with large Armenian eyes and pouting black lips. His head was a mass of tight, ordered curls. He wore a long-haired sweater, called a “gorilla” in and around Los Angeles, with nothing under it. His soiled duck trousers were held up by a red bandanna handkerchief. On his feet were a pair of tattered tennis sneakers.

They moved on to the camp which was located in a clearing in the center of the wood. It consisted of little more than a ramshackle hut patched with tin signs that had been stolen from the highway and a stove without legs or bottom set on some rocks. Near the hut was a row of chicken coops.

Earle started a fire under the stove while Faye sat down on a box and watched him. Tod went over to look at the chickens. There was one old hen and half a dozen game cocks. A great deal of pains had been taken in making the coops, which were of grooved boards, carefully matched and joined. Their floors were freshly spread with peat moss.

The Mexican came over and began to talk about the cocks. He was very proud of them.

“That’s Hermano, five times winner. He’s one of Street’s Butcher Boys. Pepe and El Negro are still stags.⁴ I fight them next week in San Pedro. That’s Villa, he’s a blinker,⁵ but still good. And that one’s Zapata, twice winner, a Tassel Dom⁶ he is. And that’s Jjutla. My champ.”

4. Immature roosters.

5. A gamecock blinded in one eye.

6. A breed of gamecock.

He opened the coop and lifted the bird out for Tod.

"A murderer is what the guy is. Speedy and how!"

The cock's plumage was green, bronze and copper. Its beak was lemon and its legs orange.

"He's beautiful," Tod said.

"I'll say."

Mig tossed the bird back into the coop and they went back to join the others at the fire.

"When do we eat?" Faye asked.

Miguel tested the stove by spitting on it. He next found a large iron skillet and began to scour it with sand. Earle gave Faye a knife and some potatoes to peel, then picked up a burlap sack.

"I'll get the birds," he said.

Tod went along with him. They followed a narrow path that looked as though it had been used by sheep until they came to a tiny field covered with high, tufted grass. Earle stopped behind a gum bush and held up his hand to warn Tod.

A mocking bird was singing near by. Its song was like pebbles being dropped one by one from a height into a pool of water. Then a quail began to call, using two soft guttural notes. Another quail answered and the birds talked back and forth. Their call was not like the cheerful whistle of the Eastern bobwhite. It was full of melancholy and weariness, yet marvelously sweet. Still another quail joined the duet. This one called from near the center of the field. It was a trapped bird, but the sound it made had no anxiety in it, only sadness, impersonal and without hope.

When Earle was satisfied that no one was there to spy on his poaching, he went to the trap. It was a wire basket about the size of a washtub with a small door in the top. He stooped over and began to fumble with the door. Five birds ran wildly along the inner edge and threw themselves at the wire. One of them, a cock, had a dainty plume on his head that curled forward almost to his beak.

Earle caught the birds one at a time and pulled their heads off before dropping them into his sack. Then he started back. As he walked along, he held the sack under his left arm. He lifted the birds out with his right hand and plucked them one at a time. Their feathers fell to the ground, point first, weighed down by the tiny drop of blood that trembled on the tips of their quills.

The sun went down before they reached the camp again. It grew chilly and Tod was glad of the fire. Faye shared her seat on the box with him and they both leaned forward into the heat.

Mig brought a jug of tequila from the hut. He filled a peanut butter jar for Faye and passed the jug to Tod. The liquor smelled like rotten fruit, but he liked the taste. When he had had enough, Earle took it and then Miguel. They continued to pass it from hand to hand.

Earle tried to show Faye how plump the game was, but she wouldn't look. He gutted the birds, then began cutting them into quarters with a pair of heavy tin shears. Faye held her hands over her ears in order not to hear the soft click made by the blades as they cut through flesh and bone. Earle wiped the pieces with a rag and dropped them into the skillet where a large piece of lard was already sputtering.

For all her squeamishness, Faye ate as heartily as the men did. There was no coffee and they finished with tequila. They smoked and kept the jug moving. Faye tossed away the peanut butter jar and drank like the others, throwing her head back and tilting the jug.

Tod could sense her growing excitement. The box on which they were sitting was so small that their backs touched and he could feel how hot she was and how restless. Her neck and face had turned from ivory to rose. She kept reaching for his cigarettes.

Earle's features were hidden in the shadow of his big hat, but the Mexican sat full in the light of the fire. His skin glowed and the oil in his black curls sparkled. He kept smiling at Faye in a manner that Tod didn't like. The more he drank, the less he liked it.

Faye kept crowding Tod, so he left the box to sit on the ground where he could watch her better. She was smiling back at the Mexican. She seemed to know what he was thinking and to be thinking the same thing. Earle, too, became aware of what was passing between them. Tod heard him curse softly and saw him lean forward into the light and pick up a thick piece of firewood.

Mig laughed guiltily and began to sing.

*"Las palmeras lloran por tu ausencia,
Las laguna se seco—ay!
La cerca de alambre que estaba en
El patio tambien se cayo!"*⁷

His voice was a plaintive tenor and it turned the revolutionary song into a sentimental lament, sweet and cloying. Faye joined in when he began another stanza. She didn't know the words, but she was able to carry the melody and to harmonize.

*"Pues mi madre las cuidaba, ay!
Toditito se acabo—ay!"*⁸

Their voices touched in the thin, still air to form a minor chord and it was as though their bodies had touched. The song was transformed again. The melody remained the same, but the rhythm broke and its beat became ragged. It was a rumba now.

Earle shifted uneasily and played with his stick. Tod saw her look at him and saw that she was afraid, but instead of becoming wary, she grew still more reckless. She took a long pull at the jug and stood up. She put one hand on each of her buttocks and began to dance.

Mig seemed to have completely forgotten Earle. He clapped his hands, cupping them to make a hollow, drumlike sound, and put all he felt into his voice. He had changed to a more fitting song.

*"Tony's wife,
The boys in Havana love Tony's wife . . ."*⁹

7. "The palmtrees cry for your absence, / The lake has dried up—ay! / The wire fence that was around / The patio has fallen as well" (Spanish); from "Las cuatro milpas" (The four corn patches), a popular ballad about a farm lost during the Mexican revolution (1910–20), recorded by Amer-

ican singer Lydia Mendoza (1916–2007) in 1934.

8. "Then my mother took care of them, ay! / Everything has come to an end" (Spanish).

9. From "Tony's Wife" (1933), a popular song by Russian-born American songwriter Irving Berlin (1888–1989).

Faye had her hands clasped behind her head now and she rolled her hips to the broken beat. She was doing the “bump.”

*“Tony’s wife,
They’re fightin’ their duels about Tony’s wife . . .”*

Perhaps Tod had been mistaken about Earle. He was using his club on the back of the skillet, using it to bang out the rhythm.

The Mexican stood up, still singing, and joined her in the dance. They approached each other with short mincing steps. She held her skirt up and out with her thumbs and forefingers and he did the same with his trousers. They met head on, blue-black against pale-gold, and used their heads to pivot, then danced back to back with their buttocks touching, their knees bent and wide apart. While Faye shook her breasts and her head, holding the rest of her body rigid, he struck the soft ground heavily with his feet and circled her. They faced each other again and made believe they were cradling their behinds in a shawl.

Earle pounded the skillet harder and harder until it rang like an anvil. Suddenly he, too, jumped up and began to dance. He did a crude hoe-down. He leaped into the air and knocked his heels together. He whooped. But he couldn’t become part of their dance. Its rhythm was like a smooth glass wall between him and the dancers. No matter how loudly he whooped or threw himself around, he was unable to disturb the precision with which they retreated and advanced, separated and came together again.

Tod saw the blow before it fell. He saw Earle raise his stick and bring it down on the Mexican’s head. He heard the crack and saw the Mexican go to his knees still dancing, his body unwilling or unable to acknowledge the interruption.

Faye had her back to Mig when he fell, but she didn’t turn to look. She ran. She flashed by Tod. He reached for her ankle to pull her down, but missed. He scrambled to his feet and ran after her.

If he caught her now, she wouldn’t escape. He could hear her on the hill a little way ahead of him. He shouted to her, a deep, agonized bellow, like that a hound makes when it strikes a fresh line after hours of cold trailing. Already he could feel how it would be when he pulled her to the ground.

But the going was heavy and the stones and sand moved under his feet. He fell prone with his face in a clump of wild mustard that smelled of the rain and sun, clean, fresh and sharp. He rolled over on his back and stared up at the sky. The violent exercise had driven most of the heat out of his blood, but enough remained to make him tingle pleasantly. He felt comfortably relaxed, even happy.

Somewhere farther up the hill a bird began to sing. He listened. At first the low rich music sounded like water dripping on something hollow, the bottom of a silver pot perhaps, then like a stick dragged slowly over the strings of a harp. He lay quietly, listening.

When the bird grew silent, he made an effort to put Faye out of his mind and began to think about the series of cartoons¹ he was making for his canvas of Los Angeles on fire. He was going to show the city burning at high noon, so that the flames would have to compete with the desert sun and

1. Preliminary studies for a painting.

thereby appear less fearful, more like bright flags flying from roofs and windows than a terrible holocaust. He wanted the city to have quite a gala air as it burned, to appear almost gay. And the people who set it on fire would be a holiday crowd.

The bird began to sing again. When it stopped, Faye was forgotten and he only wondered if he weren't exaggerating the importance of the people who come to California to die. Maybe they weren't really desperate enough to set a single city on fire, let alone the whole country. Maybe they were only the pick of America's madmen and not at all typical of the rest of the land.

He told himself that it didn't make any difference because he was an artist, not a prophet. His work would not be judged by the accuracy with which it foretold a future event but by its merit as painting. Nevertheless, he refused to give up the role of Jeremiah.² He changed "pick of America's madmen" to "cream" and felt almost certain that the milk from which it had been skimmed was just as rich in violence. The Angelenos³ would be first, but their comrades all over the country would follow. There would be civil war.

He was amused by the strong feeling of satisfaction this dire conclusion gave him. Were all prophets of doom and destruction such happy men?

He stood up without trying to answer. When he reached the dirt road at the top of the canyon Faye and the car were gone.

15

"She went to the pictures with that Simpson guy," Harry told him when he called to see her the next night.

He sat down to wait for her. The old man was very ill and lay on the bed with extreme care as though it were a narrow shelf from which he might fall if he moved.

"What are they making on your lot?" he asked slowly, rolling his eyes toward Tod without budging his head.

"'Manifest Destiny,' 'Sweet and Low Down,' 'Waterloo,' 'The Great Divide,' 'Begging Your . . .'"

"'The Great Divide'—" Harry said, interrupting eagerly. "I remember that vehicle."⁴

Tod realized he shouldn't have got him started, but there was nothing he could do about it now. He had to let him run down like a clock.

"When it opened I was playing the Irving in a little number called 'Enter Two Gents,' a trifle, but entertainment, real entertainment. I played a Jew comic, a Ben Welch⁵ effect, derby and big pants—'Pat, dey offered me a chob in de Heagle Laundreh' . . . 'Faith now, Ikey, and did you take it?' . . . 'No, who wants to vash heagles?' Joe Parvos played straight for me in a cop's suit. Well, the night 'The Great Divide' opened, Joe was laying up with a whisker in the old Fifth Avenue when the stove exploded. It was the broad's husband who blew the whistle. He was . . ."

He hadn't run down. He had stopped and was squeezing his left side with both hands.

2. Biblical prophet who foretold the fall of the kingdom of Judah; generically, someone who denounces a corrupt society and predicts its collapse.

3. Residents of Los Angeles.

4. In the entertainment industry, a production

designed around the drawing power of its star. None of the titles were in fact being shot in Hollywood in the late 1930s.

5. Comedian (d. 1926) on the early-20th-century American vaudeville circuit.

Tod leaned over anxiously.
 “Some water?”

Harry framed the word “no” with his lips, then groaned skillfully. It was a second-act curtain groan, so phony that Tod had to hide a smile. And yet, the old man’s pallor hadn’t come from a box.

Harry groaned again, modulating from pain to exhaustion, then closed his eyes. Tod saw how skillfully he got the maximum effect out of his agonized profile by using the pillow to set it off. He also noticed that Harry, like many actors, had very little back or top to his head. It was almost all face, like a mask, with deep furrows between the eyes, across the forehead and on either side of the nose and mouth, plowed there by years of broad grinning and heavy frowning. Because of them, he could never express anything either subtly or exactly. They wouldn’t permit degrees of feeling, only the furthest degree.

Tod began to wonder if it might not be true that actors suffer less than other people. He thought about this for a while, then decided that he was wrong. Feeling is of the heart and nerves and the crudeness of its expression has nothing to do with its intensity. Harry suffered as keenly as anyone, despite the theatricality of his groans and grimaces.

He seemed to enjoy suffering. But not all kinds, certainly not sickness. Like many people, he only enjoyed the sort that was self-inflicted. His favorite method was to bare his soul to strangers in bar-rooms. He would make believe he was drunk, and stumble over to where some strangers were sitting. He usually began by reciting a poem.

*“Let me sit down for a moment,
 I have a stone in my shoe.
 I was once blithe and happy,
 I was once young like you.”*

If his audience shouted, “scram, bum!” he only smiled humbly and went on with his act.

“Have pity, folks, on my gray hair . . .”

The bartender or someone else had to stop him by force, otherwise he would go on no matter what was said to him. Once he got started everyone in the bar usually listened, for he gave a great performance. He roared and whispered, commanded and cajoled. He imitated the whimper of a little girl crying for her vanished mother, as well as the different dialects of the many cruel managers he had known. He even did the off-stage noises, twittering like birds to herald the dawn of Love and yelping like a pack of bloodhounds when describing how an Evil Fate ever pursued him.

He made his audience see him start out in his youth to play Shakespeare in the auditorium of the Cambridge Latin School,⁶ full of glorious dreams, burning with ambition. Follow him, as still a mere stripling, he starved in a Broadway rooming house, an idealist who desires only to share his art with the world. Stand with him, as, in the prime of manhood, he married a beautiful dancer, a headliner on the Gus Sun⁷ time. Be close behind him as, one night, he returned

6. Public high school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, named for its classical curriculum.

7. Owner of a chain of theaters and well-known

booking agent for minor vaudeville acts (1868–1959).

home unexpectedly to find her in the arms of a head usher. Forgive, as he forgave, out of the goodness of his heart and the greatness of his love. Then laugh, tasting the bitter gall, when the very next night he found her in the arms of a booking agent. Again he forgave her and again she sinned. Even then he didn't cast her out, no, though she jeered, mocked and even struck him repeatedly with an umbrella. But she ran off with a foreigner, a swarthy magician fellow. Behind she left memories and their baby daughter. He made his audience shadow him still as misfortune followed misfortune and, a middle-aged man, he haunted the booking offices, only a ghost of his former self. He who had hoped to play Hamlet, Lear, Othello,⁸ must needs become the Co. in an act called Nat Plumstone & Co., light quips and breezy patter. He made them dog his dragging feet as, an aged and trembling old man, he . . .

Faye came in quietly. Tod started to greet her, but she put her finger to her lips for him to be silent and motioned toward the bed.

The old man was asleep. Tod thought his worn, dry skin looked like eroded ground. The few beads of sweat that glistened on his forehead and temples carried no promise of relief. It might rot, like rain that comes too late to a field, but could never refresh.

They both tiptoed out of the room.

In the hall he asked if she had had a good time with Homer.

"That dope!" she exclaimed, making a wry face. "He's strictly home-cooking."

Tod started to ask some more questions, but she dismissed him with a curt, "I'm tired, honey."

16

The next afternoon, Tod was on his way upstairs when he saw a crowd in front of the door to the Greeners' apartment. They were excited and talked in whispers.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Harry's dead."

He tried the door of the apartment. It wasn't locked, so he went in. The corpse lay stretched out on the bed, completely covered with a blanket. From Faye's room came the sound of crying. He knocked softly on her door. She opened it for him, then turned without saying a word, and stumbled to her bed. She was sobbing into a face towel.

He stood in the doorway, without knowing what to do or say. Finally, he went over to the bed and tried to comfort her. He patted her shoulder.

"You poor kid."

She was wearing a tattered, black lace negligee that had large rents in it. When he leaned over her, he noticed that her skin gave off a warm, sweet odor, like that of buckwheat in flower.

He turned away and lit a cigarette. There was a knock on the door. When he opened it, Mary Dove rushed past him to take Faye in her arms.

Mary also told Faye to be brave. She phrased it differently than he had done, however, and made it sound a lot more convincing.

"Show some guts, kid. Come on now, show some guts."

8. The titular heroes of Shakespeare's major tragedies.

Faye shoved her away and stood up. She took a few wild steps, then sat down on the bed again.

"I killed him," she groaned.

Mary and he both denied this emphatically.

"I killed him, I tell you! I did! I did!"

She began to call herself names. Mary wanted to stop her, but Tod told her not to. Faye had begun to act and he felt that if they didn't interfere she would manage an escape for herself.

"She'll talk herself quiet," he said.

In a voice heavy with self-accusation, she began to tell what had happened. She had come home from the studio and found Harry in bed. She asked him how he was, but didn't wait for an answer. Instead, she turned her back on him to examine herself in the wall mirror. While fixing her face, she told him that she had seen Ben Murphy and that Ben had said that if Harry were feeling better he might be able to use him in a Bowery⁹ sequence. She had been surprised when he didn't shout as he always did when Ben's name was mentioned. He was jealous of Ben and always shouted, "To hell with that bastard; I knew him when he cleaned spittoons in a nigger bar-room."

She realized that he must be pretty sick. She didn't turn around because she noticed what looked like the beginning of a pimple. It was only a speck of dirt and she wiped it off, but then she had to do her face all over again. While she was working at it, she told him that she could get a job as a dress extra if she had a new evening gown. Just to kid him, she looked tough and said, "If you can't buy me an evening gown, I'll find someone who can."

When he didn't say anything, she got sore and began to sing, "Jeepers Creepers." He didn't tell her to shut up, so she knew something must be wrong. She ran over to the couch. He was dead.

As soon as she had finished telling all this, she began to sob in a lower key, almost a coo, and rocked herself back and forth.

"Poor papa . . . Poor darling . . ."

The fun they used to have together when she was little. No matter how hard up he was, he always bought her dolls and candy, and no matter how tired, he always played with her. She used to ride piggy-back and they would roll on the floor and laugh and laugh.

Mary's sobs made Faye speed up her own and they both began to get out of hand.

There was a knock on the door. Tod answered it and found Mrs. Johnson, the janitress. Faye shook her head for him not to let her in.

"Come back later," Tod said.

He shut the door in her face. A minute later it opened again and Mrs. Johnson entered boldly. She had used a pass-key.

"Get out," he said.

She tried to push past him, but he held her until Faye told him to let her go.

He disliked Mrs. Johnson intensely. She was an officious, bustling woman with a face like a baked apple, soft and blotched. Later he found out that her hobby was funerals. Her preoccupation with them wasn't morbid; it was formal. She was interested in the arrangement of the flowers, the order of the procession, the clothing and deportment of the mourners.

9. A run-down, disreputable neighborhood in New York.

She went straight to Faye and stopped her sobs with a firm, "Now, Miss Greener."

There was so much authority in her voice and manner that she succeeded where Mary and Tod had failed.

Faye looked up at her respectfully.

"First, my dear," Mrs. Johnson said, counting one with the thumb of her right hand on the index finger of her left, "first, I want you to understand that my sole desire in this matter is to help you."

She looked hard at Mary, then at Tod.

"I don't get anything out of it, and it's just a lot of trouble."

"Yes," Faye said.

"All right. There are several things I have to know, if I'm to help you. Did the deceased leave any money or insurance?"

"No."

"Have you any money?"

"No."

"Can you borrow any?"

"I don't think so."

Mrs. Johnson sighed.

"Then the city will have to bury him."

Faye didn't comment.

"Don't you understand, child, the city will have to bury him in a pauper's grave?"

She put so much contempt into "city" and horror into "pauper" that Faye flushed and began to sob again.

Mrs. Johnson made as though to walk out, even took several steps in the direction of the door, then changed her mind and came back.

"How much does a funeral cost?" Faye asked.

"Two hundred dollars. But you can pay on the installment plan—fifty dollars down and twenty-five a month."

Mary and Tod both spoke together.

"I'll get the money."

"I've got some."

"That's fine," Mrs. Johnson said. "You'll need at least fifty more for incidental expenses. I'll go ahead and take care of everything. Mr. Holsepp will bury your father. He'll do it right."

She shook hands with Faye, as though she were congratulating her, and hurried out of the room.

Mrs. Johnson's little business talk had apparently done Faye some good. Her lips were set and her eyes dry.

"Don't worry," Tod said. "I can raise the money."

"No, thanks," she said.

Mary opened her purse and took out a roll of bills.

"Here's some."

"No," she said, pushing it away.

She sat thinking for a while, then went to the dressing table and began to fix her tear-stained face. She wore a hard smile as she worked. Suddenly she turned, lipstick in air, and spoke to Mary.

"Can you get me into Mrs. Jennings'?"

"What for?" Tod demanded. "I'll get the money."

Both girls ignored him.

"Sure," said Mary, "you ought to done that long ago. It's a soft touch."

Faye laughed.

"I was saving it."

The change that had come over both of them startled Tod. They had suddenly become very tough.

"For a punkola like that Earle. Get smart, girlie, and lay off the cheapies. Let him ride a horse, he's a cowboy, ain't he?"

They laughed shrilly and went into the bathroom with their arms around each other.

Tod thought he understood their sudden change to slang. It made them feel worldly and realistic, and so more able to cope with serious things.

He knocked on the bathroom door.

"What do *you* want?" Faye called out.

"Listen, kid," he said, trying to imitate them. "Why go on the turf?¹ I can get the dough."

"Oh, yeah! No, thanks," Faye said.

"But listen . . ." he began again.

"Go peddle your tripe!" Mary shouted.

17

On the day of Harry's funeral Tod was drunk. He hadn't seen Faye since she went off with Mary Dove, but he knew that he was certain to find her at the undertaking parlor and he wanted to have the courage to quarrel with her. He started drinking at lunch. When he got to Holsepp's in the late afternoon, he had passed the brave state and was well into the ugly one.

He found Harry in his box, waiting to be wheeled out for exhibition in the adjoining chapel. The casket was open and the old man looked quite snug. Drawn up to a little below his shoulders and folded back to show its fancy lining was an ivory satin coverlet. Under his head was a tiny lace cushion. He was wearing a Tuxedo, or at least had on a black bow tie with his stiff shirt and wing collar. His face had been newly shaved, his eyebrows shaped and plucked and his lips and cheeks rouged. He looked like the interlocutor² in a minstrel show.

Tod bowed his head as though in silent prayer when he heard someone come in. He recognized Mrs. Johnson's voice and turned carefully to face her. He caught her eye and nodded, but she ignored him. She was busy with a man in a badly fitting frock coat.

"It's the principle of the thing," she scolded. "Your estimate said bronze. Those handles ain't bronze and you know it."

"But I asked Miss Greener," whined the man. "She okayed them."

"I don't care. I'm surprised at you, trying to save a few dollars by fobbing off a set of cheap gun-metal handles on the poor child."

Tod didn't wait for the undertaker to answer. He had seen Faye pass the door on the arm of one of the Lee sisters. When he caught up with her, he didn't know what to say. She misunderstood his agitation and was touched. She sobbed a little for him.

1. I.e., become a prostitute.

2. Role analogous to master of ceremonies. He

appeared in whiteface; the other performers, in blackface.

She had never looked more beautiful. She was wearing a new, very tight black dress and her platinum hair was tucked up in a shining bun under a black straw sailor. Every so often, she carried a tiny lace handkerchief to her eyes and made it flutter there for a moment. But all he could think of was that she had earned the money for the outfit on her back.

She grew uneasy under his stare and started to edge away. He caught her arm.

“May I speak with you for a minute, alone?”

Miss Lee took the hint and left.

“What is it?” Faye asked.

“Not here,” he whispered, making mystery out of his uncertainty.

He led her along the hall until he found an empty showroom. On the walls were framed photographs of important funerals and on little stands and tables were samples of coffin materials and models of tombstones and mausoleums.

Not knowing what to say, he accented his awkwardness, playing the inoffensive fool.

She smiled and became almost friendly.

“Give out, you big dope.”

“A kiss . . .”

“Sure, baby,” she laughed, “only don’t muss me.” They pecked at each other.

She tried to get away, but he held her. She became annoyed and demanded an explanation. He searched his head for one. It wasn’t his head he should have searched, however.

She was leaning toward him, drooping slightly, but not from fatigue. He had seen young birches droop like that at midday when they are over-heavy with sun.

“You’re drunk,” she said, pushing him away.

“Please,” he begged.

“Le’go, you bastard.”

Raging at him, she was still beautiful. That was because her beauty was structural like a tree’s, not a quality of her mind or heart. Perhaps even whoring couldn’t damage it for that reason, only age or accident or disease.

In a minute she would scream for help. He had to say something. She wouldn’t understand the aesthetic argument and with what values could he back up the moral one? The economic didn’t make sense either. Whoring certainly paid. Half of the customer’s thirty dollars. Say ten men a week.

She kicked at his shins, but he held on to her. Suddenly he began to talk. He had found an argument. Disease would destroy her beauty. He shouted at her like a Y.M.C.A.³ lecturer on sex hygiene.

She stopped struggling and held her head down, sobbing fitfully. When he was through, he let go of her arms and she bolted from the room. He groped his way to a carved, marble coffin.

He was still sitting there when a young man in a black jacket and gray striped trousers came in.

“Are you here for the Greener funeral?”

Tod stood up and nodded vaguely.

3. Young Men’s Christian Association.

“The services are beginning,” the man said, then opened a little casket covered with grosgrain⁴ satin and took out a dust cloth. Tod watched him go around the showroom wiping off the samples.

“Services have probably started,” the man repeated with a wave at the door.

Tod understood this time and left. The only exit he could find led through the chapel. The moment he entered it, Mrs. Johnson caught him and directed him to a seat. He wanted badly to get away, but it was impossible to do so without making a scene.

Faye was sitting in the front row of benches, facing the pulpit. She had the Lee sisters on one side and Mary Dove and Abe Kusich on the other. Behind them sat the tenants of the San Berdoo, occupying about six rows. Tod was alone in the seventh. After him were several empty rows and then a scattering of men and women who looked very much out of place.

He turned in order not to see Faye’s jerking shoulders and examined the people in the last rows. He knew their kind. While not torch-bearers themselves, they would run behind the fire and do a great deal of the shouting. They had come to see Harry buried, hoping for a dramatic incident of some sort, hoping at least for one of the mourners to be led weeping hysterically from the chapel. It seemed to Tod that they stared back at him with an expression of vicious, acrid boredom that trembled on the edge of violence. When they began to mutter among themselves, he half-turned and watched them out of the corner of his eyes.

An old woman with a face pulled out of shape by badly-fitting store teeth came in and whispered to a man sucking on the handle of a home-made walking stick. He passed her message along and they all stood up and went out hurriedly. Tod guessed that some star had been seen going into a restaurant by one of their scouts. If so, they would wait outside the place for hours until the star came out again or the police drove them away.

The Gingo family arrived soon after they had left. The Gingos were Eskimos who had been brought to Hollywood to make retakes for a picture about polar exploration. Although it had been released long ago, they refused to return to Alaska. They liked Hollywood.

Harry had been a good friend of theirs and had eaten with them quite regularly, sharing the smoked salmon, white fish, marinated and maatjes herrings⁵ they bought at Jewish delicatessen stores. He also shared the great quantities of cheap brandy they mixed with hot water and salt butter and drank out of tin cups.

Mama and Papa Gingo, trailed by their son, moved down the center aisle of the chapel, bowing and waving to everyone, until they reached the front row. Here they gathered around Faye and shook hands with her, each one in turn. Mrs. Johnson tried to make them go to one of the back rows, but they ignored her orders and sat down in front.

The overhead lights of the chapel were suddenly dimmed. Simultaneously other lights went on behind imitation stained-glass windows which hung on the fake oak-paneled walls. There was a moment of hushed silence, broken only by Faye’s sobs, then an electric organ started to play a recording of one of Bach’s chorales, “Come Redeemer, Our Saviour.”⁶

4. Fabric of a strong, heavy, corded weave, often used for ribbons.

5. Pickled young herring (Yiddish).

6. A hymn by the German theologian Martin Luther (1483–1546) that was set to music several times by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750).

Tod recognized the music. His mother often played a piano adaptation of it on Sundays at home. It very politely asked Christ to come, in clear and honest tones with just the proper amount of supplication. The God it invited was not the King of Kings, but a shy and gentle Christ, a maiden surrounded by maidens, and the invitation was to a lawn fete, not to the home of some weary, suffering sinner. It didn't plead; it urged with infinite grace and delicacy, almost as though it were afraid of frightening the prospective guest.

So far as Tod could tell, no one was listening to the music. Faye was sobbing and the others seemed busy inside themselves. Bach politely serenading Christ was not for them.

The music would soon change its tone and grow exciting. He wondered if that would make any difference. Already the bass was beginning to throb. He noticed that it made the Eskimos uneasy. As the bass gained in power and began to dominate the treble, he heard Papa Gingo grunt with pleasure. Mama caught Mrs. Johnson eyeing him, and put her fat hand heavily on the back of his head to keep him quiet.

"Now come, O our Saviour," the music begged. Gone was its diffidence and no longer was it polite. Its struggle with the bass had changed it. Even a hint of a threat crept in and a little impatience. Of doubt, however, he could not detect the slightest trace.

If there was a hint of a threat, he thought, just a hint, and a tiny bit of impatience, could Bach be blamed? After all, when he wrote this music, the world had already been waiting for its lover more than seventeen hundred years. But the music changed again and both threat and impatience disappeared. The treble soared free and triumphant and the bass no longer struggled to keep it down. It had become a rich accompaniment. "Come or don't come," the music seemed to say, "I love you and my love is enough." It was a simple statement of fact, neither cry nor serenade, made without arrogance or humility.

Perhaps Christ heard. If He did, He gave no sign. The attendants heard, for it was their cue to trundle on Harry in his box. Mrs. Johnson followed close behind and saw to it that the casket was properly placed. She raised her hand and Bach was silenced in the middle of a phrase.

"Will those of you who wish to view the deceased before the sermon please step forward?" she called out.

Only the Gingos stood up immediately. They made for the coffin in a group. Mrs. Johnson held them back and motioned for Faye to look first. Supported by Mary Dove and the Lee girls, she took a quick peek, increased the tempo of her sobs for a moment, then hurried back to the bench.

The Gingos had their chance next. They leaned over the coffin and told each other something in a series of thick, explosive gutturals. When they tried to take another look, Mrs. Johnson herded them firmly to their seats.

The dwarf sidled up to the box, made a play with his handkerchief and retreated. When no one followed him, Mrs. Johnson lost patience, seeming to take what she understood as a lack of interest for a personal insult.

"Those who wish to view the remains of the late Mr. Greener must do so at once," she barked.

There was a little stir, but no one stood up.

"You, Mrs. Gail," she finally said, looking directly at the person named. "How about you? Don't you want a last look? Soon all that remains of your neighbor will be buried forever."

There was no getting out of it. Mrs. Gail moved down the aisle, trailed by several others.

Tod used them to cover his escape.

18

Faye moved out of the San Berdoo the day after the funeral. Tod didn't know where she had gone and was getting up the courage to call Mrs. Jenning when he saw her from the window of his office. She was dressed in the costume of a Napoleonic vivandiere.⁷ By the time he got the window open, she had almost turned the corner of the building. He shouted for her to wait. She waved, but when he got downstairs she was gone.

From her dress, he was sure that she was working in the picture called "Waterloo." He asked a studio policeman where the company was shooting and was told on the back lot. He started toward it at once. A platoon of cuirassiers, big men mounted on gigantic horses, went by. He knew that they must be headed for the same set and followed them. They broke into a gallop and he was soon outdistanced.

The sun was very hot. His eyes and throat were choked with the dust thrown up by the horses' hooves and his head throbbed. The only bit of shade he could find was under an ocean liner made of painted canvas with real life boats hanging from its davits.⁸ He stood in its narrow shadow for a while, then went on toward a great forty-foot papier mache⁹ sphinx that loomed up in the distance. He had to cross a desert to reach it, a desert that was continually being made larger by a fleet of trucks dumping white sand. He had gone only a few feet when a man with a megaphone ordered him off.

He skirted the desert, making a wide turn to the right, and came to a Western street with a plank sidewalk. On the porch of the "Last Chance Saloon" was a rocking chair. He sat down on it and lit a cigarette.

From there he could see a jungle compound with a water buffalo tethered to the side of a conical grass hut. Every few seconds the animal groaned musically. Suddenly an Arab charged by on a white stallion. He shouted at the man, but got no answer. A little while later he saw a truck with a load of snow and several malamute dogs.¹ He shouted again. The driver shouted something back, but didn't stop.

Throwing away his cigarette, he went through the swinging doors of the saloon. There was no back to the building and he found himself in a Paris street. He followed it to its end, coming out in a Romanesque² courtyard. He heard voices a short distance away and went toward them. On a lawn of fiber, a group of men and women in riding costume were picnicking. They were eating cardboard food in front of a cellophane waterfall. He started toward them to ask his way, but was stopped by a man who scowled and held up a sign—"Quiet, Please, We're Shooting." When Tod took another step forward, the man shook his fist threateningly.

Next he came to a small pond with large celluloid swans floating on it. Across one end was a bridge with a sign that read, "To Kamp Komfit." He

7. Female camp-follower selling food and drink to Napoleon's armies.

8. Cranes that project over the side of a ship.

9. Chewed paper (French, literal trans.); a mold-

able mixture of paper and glue.

1. Alaskan sled dogs.

2. Architectural style of early medieval Europe.

crossed the bridge and followed a little path that ended at a Greek temple dedicated to Eros.³ The god himself lay face downward in a pile of old newspaper and bottles.

From the steps of the temple, he could see in the distance a road lined with Lombardy poplars. It was the one on which he had lost the cuirassiers. He pushed his way through a tangle of briars, old flats and iron junk, skirting the skeleton of a Zeppelin,⁴ a bamboo stockade, an adobe fort, the wooden horse of Troy,⁵ a flight of baroque palace stairs that started in a bed of weeds and ended against the branches of an oak, part of the Fourteenth Street elevated station,⁶ a Dutch windmill, the bones of a dinosaur, the upper half of the Merrimac,⁷ a corner of a Mayan temple, until he finally reached the road.

He was out of breath. He sat down under one of the poplars on a rock made of brown plaster and took off his jacket. There was a cool breeze blowing and he soon felt more comfortable.

He had lately begun to think not only of Goya and Daumier but also of certain Italian artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of Salvatore Rosa, Francesco Guardi and Monsu Desiderio,⁸ the painters of Decay and Mystery. Looking down hill now, he could see compositions that might have actually been arranged from the Calabrian work of Rosa. There were partially demolished buildings and broken monuments half hidden by great, tortured trees, whose exposed roots writhed dramatically in the arid ground, and by shrubs that carried, not flowers or berries, but armories of spikes, hooks and swords.

For Guardi and Desiderio there were bridges which bridged nothing, sculpture in trees, palaces that seemed of marble until a whole stone portico began to flap in the light breeze. And there were figures as well. A hundred yards from where Tod was sitting a man in a derby hat leaned drowsily against the gilded poop of a Venetian barque and peeled an apple. Still farther on, a charwoman on a stepladder was scrubbing with soap and water the face of a Buddha thirty feet high.

He left the road and climbed across the spine of the hill to look down on the other side. From there he could see a ten-acre field of cockleburs spotted with clumps of sunflowers and wild gum. In the center of the field was a gigantic pile of sets, flats and props. While he watched, a ten-ton truck added another load to it. This was the final dumping ground. He thought of Janvier's "Sargasso Sea."⁹ Just as that imaginary body of water was a history of civilization in the form of a marine junkyard, the studio lot was one in the form of a dream dump. A Sargasso of the imagination! And the dump grew continually, for there wasn't a dream afloat somewhere which wouldn't

3. The Greek god of love.

4. A passenger-carrying airship. Their popularity declined after 1937, when the *Hindenburg* crashed and burned in New Jersey, killing thirty-six.

5. In Homer's *Iliad*, the city of Troy falls when its Greek besiegers enter the city concealed in a large wooden horse.

6. In New York City.

7. A wood-hulled U.S. Navy ship that was converted into an ironclad warship, one of the first of its kind, by the Confederate navy during the American Civil War (1861–65).

8. Paintings formerly attributed to Monsu Desiderio are now thought to be by several different

French Renaissance painters, including François de Nomé (early 17th century) and Didier Barra (1590–1656), both noted for their fantastic paintings of ruins. Nomé's works influenced the surrealist painters of the 1920s and 1930s. Rosa (1615–1673) and Guardi (1712–1793), Italian painters known for their dark and stormy images. 9. *In the Sargasso Sea* (1898), an adventure tale by the American novelist and historian Thomas A. Janvier (1849–1913), in which the protagonist drifts into a floating junkyard of ghost ships at the center of the Sargasso Sea, a section of the Atlantic encircled by the Gulf Stream and other currents and where marine refuse naturally accumulates.

sooner or later turn up on it, having first been made photographic by plaster, canvas, lath and paint. Many boats sink and never reach the Sargasso, but no dream ever entirely disappears. Somewhere it troubles some unfortunate person and some day, when that person has been sufficiently troubled, it will be reproduced on the lot.

When he saw a red glare in the sky and heard the rumble of cannon, he knew it must be Waterloo. From around a bend in the road trotted several cavalry regiments. They wore casques¹ and chest armor of black cardboard and carried long horse pistols in their saddle holsters. They were Victor Hugo's soldiers. He had worked on some of the drawings for their uniforms himself, following carefully the descriptions in "Les Misérables."²

He went in the direction they took. Before long he was passed by the men of Lefebvre-Desnouettes, followed by a regiment of gendarmes d'élite, several companies of chasseurs of the guard and a flying detachment of Rimbaud's lancers.³

They must be moving up for the disastrous attack on La Haite Santee.⁴ He hadn't read the scenario and wondered if it had rained yesterday. Would Grouchy⁵ or Blucher arrive? Grotenstein, the producer, might have changed it.

The sound of cannon was becoming louder all the time and the red fan in the sky more intense. He could smell the sweet, pungent odor of blank powder. It might be over before he could get there. He started to run. When he topped a rise after a sharp bend in the road, he found a great plain below him covered with early nineteenth-century troops, wearing all the gay and elaborate uniforms that used to please him so much when he was a child and spent long hours looking at the soldiers in an old dictionary. At the far end of the field, he could see an enormous hump around which the English and their allies were gathered. It was Mont St. Jean and they were getting ready to defend it gallantly. It wasn't quite finished, however, and swarmed with grips, property men, set dressers, carpenters and painters.

Tod stood near a eucalyptus tree to watch, concealing himself behind a sign that read, "'Waterloo'—A Charles H. Grotenstein Production." Near by a youth in a carefully torn horse guard's uniform was being rehearsed in his lines by one of the assistant directors.

"Vive l'Empereur!"⁶ the young man shouted, then clutched his breast and fell forward dead. The assistant director was a hard man to please and made him do it over and over again.

In the center of the plain, the battle was going ahead briskly. Things looked tough for the British and their allies. The Prince of Orange commanding the center, Hill the right and Picton the left wing, were being pressed hard by

1. Helmets.

2. The epic novel (1862) of the Napoleonic era and its aftermath by the popular French writer Victor Hugo (1802–1885). A 1935 Hollywood film adaptation was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture.

3. Mobile mounted troops. Charles Lefebvre-Desnouettes (1773–1822), a French general during the Napoleonic Wars. "Gendarmes d'élite": members of Napoleon's elite Imperial Guard (French). "Chasseurs": hunters (French, literal trans.); light infantry or cavalry.

4. La Haye Sainte (The holy crown; French), a walled farm, was captured by the French during the course of the battle, giving them the strategic

advantage until the Prussian army, lead by Field Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher (1742–1819), arrived along rain-bogged paths in time to secure victory for the allied armies opposing Napoleon, whose artillery was still more hampered by the wet ground. According to Victor Hugo's famous account of the battle in *Les Misérables*, "If it had not rained in the night between the 17th and the 18th of June, 1815, the fate of Europe would have been different. A few drops of water, more or less, decided the downfall of Napoleon."

5. Marshal Emmanuel de Grouchy (1766–1847) commanded one wing of Napoleon's forces at Waterloo.

6. Long live the Emperor! (French).

the veteran French. The desperate and intrepid Prince was in an especially bad spot. Tod heard him cry hoarsely above the din of battle, shouting to the Hollande-Belgians, “Nassau! Brunswick! Never retreat!” Nevertheless, the retreat began. Hill, too, fell back. The French killed General Picton with a ball through the head and he returned to his dressing room. Alten⁷ was put to the sword and also retired. The colors of the Lunenburg battalion, borne by a prince of the family of Deux-Ponts, were captured by a famous child star in the uniform of a Parisian drummer boy. The Scotch Greys were destroyed and went to change into another uniform. Ponsonby’s heavy dragoons were also cut to ribbons. Mr. Grotenstein would have a large bill to pay at the Western Costume Company.

Neither Napoleon nor Wellington was to be seen. In Wellington’s absence, one of the assistant directors, a Mr. Crane, was in command of the allies. He reinforced his center with one of Chasse’s brigades and one of Wincke’s.⁸ He supported these with infantry from Brunswick, Welsh foot, Devon yeomanry and Hanoverian⁹ light horse with oblong leather caps and flowing plumes of horsehair.

For the French, a man in a checked cap ordered Milhaud’s cuirassiers to carry Mont St. Jean.¹ With their sabers in their teeth and their pistols in their hands, they charged. It was a fearful sight.

The man in the checked cap was making a fatal error. Mont St. Jean was unfinished. The paint was not yet dry and all the struts were not in place. Because of the thickness of the cannon smoke, he had failed to see that the hill was still being worked on by property men, grips and carpenters.

It was the classic mistake, Tod realized, the same one Napoleon had made. Then it had been wrong for a different reason. The Emperor had ordered the cuirassiers to charge Mont St. Jean not knowing that a deep ditch was hidden at its foot to trap his heavy cavalry. The result had been disaster for the French; the beginning of the end.

This time the same mistake had a different outcome. Waterloo, instead of being the end of the Grand Army, resulted in a draw. Neither side won, and it would have to be fought over again the next day. Big losses, however, were sustained by the insurance company in workmen’s compensation. The man in the checked cap was sent to the dog house by Mr. Grotenstein just as Napoleon was sent to St. Helena.²

When the front rank of Milhaud’s heavy division started up the slope of Mont St. Jean, the hill collapsed. The noise was terrific. Nails screamed with agony as they pulled out of joists. The sound of ripping canvas was like that of little children whimpering. Lath and scantling snapped as though

7. Commanders in the allied forces opposing Napoleon. The Prince of Orange, later William II, king of the Netherlands (1792–1849), was wounded at Waterloo. Rowland Hill (1772–1842) led a crucial charge against the Imperial Guard. Thomas Picton (1758–1815) died in battle, although his troops successfully repulsed the French. Charles Alten (1764–1840), commanding a division in the Allied front lines, was seriously wounded. Nassau and Brunswick were allied troops from states that are now part of Germany. West’s account of the battle in these paragraphs draws heavily on Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, chapter 6.
8. Hugo’s *Les Misérables* names Chassé and Wincke as allied commanders. David Hendrik

Chassé (1765–1849) commanded a division from the Netherlands. Wincke may be Hugo’s error for August von Klencke, who commanded the Light Field Battalion Luneburg in the army of the German state of Hanover, allied with England.

9. Brunswick, Wales, and Devonshire (in England) and Hanover all contributed to the allied forces.

1. Wellington’s high position at Waterloo, attacked at the climax of the battle by armored cavalry under the command of Édouard Jean-Baptiste Milhaud (1766–1833).

2. A small, remote island in the south Atlantic to which Napoleon was exiled.

they were brittle bones. The whole hill folded like an enormous umbrella and covered Napoleon's army with painted cloth.

It turned into a rout. The victors of Bersina, Leipsic, Austerlitz,³ fled like schoolboys who had broken a pane of glass. "Sauve qui peut!"⁴ they cried, or, rather, "Scram!"

The armies of England and her allies were too deep in scenery to flee. They had to wait for the carpenters and ambulances to come up. The men of the gallant Seventy-Fifth Highlanders⁵ were lifted out of the wreck with block and tackle. They were carted off by the stretcher-bearers, still clinging bravely to their claymores.⁶

19

Tod got a lift back to his office in a studio car. He had to ride on the running board because the seats were occupied by two Walloon grenadiers and four Swabian foot.⁷ One of the infantrymen had a broken leg, the other extras were only scratched and bruised. They were quite happy about their wounds. They were certain to receive several extra days' pay, and the man with the broken leg thought he might get as much as five hundred dollars.

When Tod arrived at his office, he found Faye waiting to see him. She hadn't been in the battle. At the last moment, the director had decided not to use any vivandieres.

To his surprise, she greeted him with warm friendliness. Nevertheless, he tried to apologize for his behavior in the funeral parlor. He had hardly started before she interrupted him. She wasn't angry, but grateful for his lecture on venereal disease. It had brought her to her senses.

She had still another surprise for him. She was living in Homer Simpson's house. The arrangement was a business one. Homer had agreed to board and dress her until she became a star. They were keeping a record of every cent he spent and as soon as she clicked in pictures, she would pay him back with six per cent interest. To make it absolutely legal, they were going to have a lawyer draw up a contract.

She pressed Tod for an opinion and he said it was a splendid idea. She thanked him and invited him to dinner for the next night.

After she had gone, he wondered what living with her would do to Homer. He thought it might straighten him out. He fooled himself into believing this with an image, as though a man were a piece of iron to be heated and then straightened with hammer blows. He should have known better, for if anyone ever lacked malleability Homer did.

He continued to make this mistake when he had dinner with them. Faye seemed very happy, talking about charge accounts and stupid sales clerks. Homer had a flower in his buttonhole, wore carpet slippers and beamed at her continually.

After they had eaten, while Homer was in the kitchen washing dishes, Tod got her to tell him what they did with themselves all day. She said that they lived quietly and that she was glad because she was tired of excitement. All she wanted was a career. Homer did the housework and she was

3. Battles in the Napoleonic wars.

4. Every man for himself! (French).

5. A Scottish regiment.

6. Traditional broadswords.

7. Soldiers from French-speaking Belgium and southwestern Germany, respectively.

getting a real rest. Daddy's long sickness had tired her out completely. Homer liked to do housework and anyway he wouldn't let her go into the kitchen because of her hands.

"Protecting his investment," Tod said.

"Yes," she replied seriously, "they have to be beautiful."

They had breakfast around ten, she went on. Homer brought it to her in bed. He took a housekeeping magazine and fixed the tray like the pictures in it. While she bathed and dressed, he cleaned the house. Then they went downtown to the stores and she bought all sorts of things, mostly clothes. They didn't eat lunch on account of her figure, but usually had dinner out and went to the movies.

"Then, ice cream sodas," Homer finished for her, as he came out of the kitchen.

Faye laughed and excused herself. They were going to a picture and she wanted to change her dress. When she had left, Homer suggested that they get some air in the patio. He made Tod take the deck chair while he sat on an upturned orange crate.

If he had been careful and had acted decently, Tod couldn't help thinking, she might be living with him. He was at least better looking than Homer. But then there was her other prerequisite. Homer had an income and lived in a house, while he earned thirty dollars a week and lived in a furnished room.

The happy grin on Homer's face made him feel ashamed of himself. He was being unfair. Homer was a humble, grateful man who would never laugh at her, who was incapable of laughing at anything. Because of this great quality, she could live with him on what she considered a much higher plane.

"What's the matter?" Homer asked softly, laying one of his heavy hands on Tod's knee.

"Nothing. Why?"

Tod moved so that the hand slipped off.

"You were making faces."

"I was thinking of something."

"Oh," Homer said sympathetically.

Tod couldn't resist asking an ugly question.

"When are you two getting married?"

Homer looked hurt.

"Didn't Faye tell about us?"

"Yes, sort of."

"It's a business arrangement."

"Yes?"

To make Tod believe it, he poured out a long, disjointed argument, the one he must have used on himself. He even went further than the business part and claimed that they were doing it for poor Harry's sake. Faye had nothing left in the world except her career and she must succeed for her daddy's sake. The reason she wasn't a star was because she didn't have the right clothes. He had money and believed in her talent, so it was only natural for them to enter into a business arrangement. Did Tod know a good lawyer?

It was a rhetorical question, but would become a real one, painfully insistent, if Tod smiled. He frowned. That was wrong, too.

“We must see a lawyer this week and have papers drawn up.”

His eagerness was pathetic. Tod wanted to help him, but didn’t know what to say. He was still fumbling for an answer when they heard a woman shouting from the hill behind the garage.

“Adore! Adore!”

She had a high soprano voice, very clear and pure.

“What a funny name,” Tod said, glad to change the subject.

“Maybe it’s a foreigner,” Homer said.

The woman came into the yard from around the corner of the garage. She was eager and plump and very American.

“Have you seen my little boy?” she asked, making a gesture of helplessness. “Adore’s such a wanderer.”

Homer surprised Tod by standing up and smiling at the woman. Faye had certainly helped his timidity.

“Is your son lost?” Homer said.

“Oh, no—just hiding to tease me.”

She held out her hand.

“We’re neighbors. I’m Maybelle Loomis.”

“Glad to know you, ma’am. I’m Homer Simpson and this is Mr. Hackett.”

Tod also shook hands with her.

“Have you been living here long?” she asked.

“No. I’ve just come from the East,” Homer said.

“Oh, have you? I’ve been here ever since Mr. Loomis passed on six years ago. I’m an old settler.”

“You like it then?” Tod asked.

“Like California?” she laughed at the idea that anyone might not like it.

“Why, it’s a paradise on earth!”

“Yes,” Homer agreed gravely.

“And anyway,” she went on, “I have to live here on account of Adore.”

“Is he sick?”

“Oh, no. On account of his career. His agent calls him the biggest little attraction in Hollywood.”

She spoke so vehemently that Homer flinched.

“He’s in the movies?” Tod asked.

“I’ll say,” she snapped.

Homer tried to placate her.

“That’s very nice.”

“If it weren’t for favoritism,” she said bitterly, “he’d be a star. It ain’t talent. It’s pull. What’s Shirley Temple⁸ got that he ain’t got?”

“Why, I don’t know,” Homer mumbled.

She ignored this and let out a fearful bellow.

“Adore! Adore!”

Tod had seen her kind around the studio. She was one of that army of women who drag their children from casting office to casting office and sit for hours, weeks, months, waiting for a chance to show what Junior can do. Some of them are very poor, but no matter how poor, they always manage to scrape together enough money, often by making great sacrifices, to send their children to one of the innumerable talent schools.

8. Temple (1928–2014) was the country’s most famous child movie star during the 1930s.

“Adore!” she yelled once more, then laughed and became a friendly housewife again, a chubby little person with dimples in her fat cheeks and fat elbows.

“Have you any children, Mr. Simpson?” she asked.

“No,” he replied, blushing.

“You’re lucky—they’re a nuisance.”

She laughed to show that she didn’t really mean it and called her child again.

“Adore . . . Oh, Adore . . .”

Her next question surprised them both.

“Who do you follow?”

“What?” said Tod.

“I mean—in the Search for Health, along the Road of Life?”

They both gaped at her.

“I’m a raw-foodist, myself,” she said. “Dr. Pierce is our leader. You must have seen his ads—‘Know-All Pierce-All.’”

“Oh, yes,” Tod said, “you’re vegetarians.”

She laughed at his ignorance.

“Far from it. We’re much stricter. Vegetarians eat cooked vegetables. We eat only raw ones. Death comes from eating dead things.”

Neither Tod nor Homer found anything to say.

“Adore,” she began again. “Adore . . .”

This time there was an answer from around the corner of the garage.

“Here I am, mama.”

A minute later, a little boy appeared dragging behind him a small sailboat on wheels. He was about eight years old, with a pale, peaked face and a large, troubled forehead. He had great staring eyes. His eyebrows had been plucked and shaped carefully. Except for his Buster Brown collar,⁹ he was dressed like a man, in long trousers, vest and jacket.

He tried to kiss his mother, but she fended him off and pulled at his clothes, straightening and arranging them with savage little tugs.

“Adore,” she said sternly, “I want you to meet Mr. Simpson, our neighbor.”

Turning like a soldier at the command of a drill sergeant, he walked up to Homer and grasped his hand.

“A pleasure, sir,” he said, bowing stiffly with his heels together.

“That’s the way they do it in Europe,” Mrs. Loomis beamed. “Isn’t he cute?”

“What a pretty sailboat!” Homer said, trying to be friendly.

Both mother and son ignored his comment. She pointed to Tod, and the child repeated his bow and heel-click.

“Well, we’ve got to go,” she said.

Tod watched the child, who was standing a little to one side of his mother and making faces at Homer. He rolled his eyes back in his head so that only the whites showed and twisted his lips in a snarl.

Mrs. Loomis noticed Tod’s glance and turned sharply. When she saw what Adore was doing, she yanked him by the arm, jerking him clear off the ground.

9. A large round collar worn with a floppy bow tie, named after a cartoon character created in 1902; out of fashion by the 1930s.

“Adore!” she yelled.

To Tod she said apologetically, “He thinks he’s the Frankenstein monster.”¹ She picked the boy up, hugging and kissing him ardently. Then she set him down again and fixed his rumpled clothing.

“Won’t Adore sing something for us?” Tod asked.

“No,” the little boy said sharply.

“Adore,” his mother scolded, “sing at once.”

“That’s all right, if he doesn’t feel like it,” Homer said.

But Mrs. Loomis was determined to have him sing. She could never permit him to refuse an audience.

“Sing, Adore,” she repeated with quiet menace. “Sing ‘Mama Doan Wan’ No Peas.’”²

His shoulders twitched as though they already felt the strap. He tilted his straw sailor over one eye, buttoned up his jacket and did a little strut, then began:

*“Mama doan wan’ no peas,
An’ rice, an’ cocoanut oil,
Just a bottle of brandy handy all the day.
Mama doan wan’ no peas,
Mama doan wan’ no cocoanut oil.”*

His singing voice was deep and rough and he used the broken groan of the blues singer quite expertly. He moved his body only a little, against rather than in time with the music. The gestures he made with his hands were extremely suggestive.

*“Mama doan wan’ no gin,
Because gin do make her sin,
Mama doan wan’ no glass of gin,
Because it boun’ to make her sin,
An’ keep her hot and bothered all the day.”*

He seemed to know what the words meant, or at least his body and his voice seemed to know. When he came to the final chorus, his buttocks writhed and his voice carried a top-heavy load of sexual pain.

Tod and Homer applauded. Adore grabbed the string of his sailboat and circled the yard. He was imitating a tugboat. He tooted several times, then ran off.

“He’s just a baby,” Mrs. Loomis said proudly, “but he’s got loads of talent.”

Tod and Homer agreed.

She saw that he was gone again and left hurriedly. They could hear her calling in the brush back of the garage.

“Adore! Adore . . .”

“That’s a funny woman,” Tod said.

Homer sighed.

“I guess it’s hard to get a start in pictures. But Faye is awfully pretty.”

1. The monster created by Viktor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein* (1818), by Mary Shelley (1797–1851). A number of popular film adaptations starring Boris Karloff as the monster were made during the 1930s.

2. Song written in 1931 by Charles Lofthouse and L. Wolfe Gilbert and popularized in a 1938 recording by Jimmy Rushing with Count Basie and his orchestra.

Tod agreed. She appeared a moment later in a new flower print dress and picture hat and it was his turn to sigh. She was much more than pretty. She posed, quivering and balanced, on the doorstep and looked down at the two men in the patio. She was smiling, a subtle half-smile uncontaminated by thought. She looked just born, everything moist and fresh, volatile and perfumed. Tod suddenly became very conscious of his dull, insensitive feet bound in dead skin and of his hands, sticky and thick, holding a heavy, rough felt hat.

He tried to get out of going to the pictures with them, but couldn't. Sitting next to her in the dark proved the ordeal he expected it to be. Her self-sufficiency made him squirm and the desire to break its smooth surface with a blow, or at least a sudden obscene gesture, became irresistible.

He began to wonder if he himself didn't suffer from the ingrained, morbid apathy he liked to draw in others. Maybe he could only be galvanized into sensibility and that was why he was chasing Faye.

He left hurriedly, without saying good-bye. He had decided to stop running after her. It was an easy decision to make, but a hard one to carry out. In order to manage it, he fell back on one of the oldest tricks in the very full bag of the intellectual. After all, he told himself, he had drawn her enough times. He shut the portfolio that held the drawings he had made of her, tied it with a string, and put it away in his trunk.

It was a childish trick, hardly worthy of a primitive witch doctor, yet it worked. He was able to avoid her for several months. During this time, he took his pad and pencils on a continuous hunt for other models. He spent his nights at the different Hollywood churches, drawing the worshipers. He visited the "Church of Christ, Physical" where holiness was attained through the constant use of chest-weights and spring grips; the "Church Invisible" where fortunes were told and the dead made to find lost objects; the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming" where a woman in male clothing preached the "Crusade Against Salt"; and the "Temple Moderne" under whose glass and chromium roof "Brain-Breathing, the Secret of the Aztecs" was taught.

As he watched these people writhe on the hard seats of their churches, he thought of how well Alessandro Magnasco³ would dramatize the contrast between their drained-out, feeble bodies and their wild, disordered minds. He would not satirize them as Hogarth⁴ or Daumier might, nor would he pity them. He would paint their fury with respect, appreciating its awful, anarchic power and aware that they had it in them to destroy civilization.

One Friday night in the "Tabernacle of the Third Coming," a man near Tod stood up to speak. Although his name most likely was Thompson or Johnson and his home town Sioux City, he had the same counter-sunk eyes, like the heads of burnished spikes, that a monk by Magnasco might have. He was probably just in from one of the colonies in the desert near Soboba Hot Springs⁵ where he had been conning over his soul on a diet of raw fruit and nuts. He was very angry. The message he had brought to the city was one that an illiterate anchorite⁶ might have given decadent Rome. It was a crazy jumble of dietary rules, economics and Biblical threats. He claimed to have seen the Tiger of Wrath stalking the walls of the citadel and the Jackal of

3. Italian painter (1667–1749) noted for representing beggars, criminals, religious enthusiasts, and outcasts.

4. William Hogarth (1697–1764), satirical English

painter and printmaker.

5. Resort in southern California's San Jacinto Valley.

6. A hermit.

Lust skulking in the shrubbery,⁷ and he connected these omens with “thirty dollars every Thursday and meat eating.”

Tod didn't laugh at the man's rhetoric. He knew it was unimportant. What mattered were his messianic rage and the emotional response of his hearers. They sprang to their feet, shaking their fists and shouting. On the altar someone began to beat a bass drum and soon the entire congregation was singing “Onward Christian Soldiers.”⁸

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As time went on, the relationship between Faye and Homer began to change. She became bored with the life they were leading together and as her boredom deepened, she began to persecute him. At first she did it unconsciously, later maliciously.

Homer realized that the end was in sight even before she did. All he could do to prevent its coming was to increase his servility and his generosity. He waited on her hand and foot. He bought her a coat of summer ermine and a light blue Buick runabout.⁹

His servility was like that of a cringing, clumsy dog, who is always anticipating a blow, welcoming it even, and in a way that makes overwhelming the desire to strike him. His generosity was still more irritating. It was so helpless and unselfish that it made her feel mean and cruel, no matter how hard she tried to be kind. And it was so bulky that she was unable to ignore it. She had to resent it. He was destroying himself, and although he didn't mean it that way, forcing her to accept the blame.

They had almost reached a final crisis when Tod saw them again. Late one night, just as he was preparing for bed, Homer knocked on his door and said that Faye was downstairs in the car and that they wanted him to go to a night club with them.

The outfit Homer wore was very funny. He had on loose blue linen slacks and a chocolate flannel jacket over a yellow polo shirt. Only a Negro could have worn it without looking ridiculous, and no one was ever less a Negro than Homer.

Tod drove with them to the “Cinderella Bar,” a little stucco building in the shape of a lady's slipper, on Western Avenue. Its floor show consisted of female impersonators.

Faye was in a nasty mood. When the waiter took their order, she insisted on a champagne cocktail for Homer. He wanted coffee. The waiter brought both, but she made him take the coffee back.

Homer explained painstakingly, as he must have done many times, that he could not drink alcohol because it made him sick. Faye listened with mock patience. When he finished, she laughed and lifted the cocktail to his mouth.

“Drink it, damn you,” she said.

She tilted the glass, but he didn't open his mouth and the liquor ran down his chin. He wiped himself, using the napkin without unfolding it.

7. The prophet Jeremiah predicts that both Babylon and Jerusalem will become a haunt of jackals for their sins (Jeremiah 9.11, 51.37). According to one of the “Proverbs of Hell” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) by English poet William Blake, “The tigers of wrath are wiser than the

horses of instruction.”

8. Popular Christian hymn, English in origin, composed in 1871.

9. A small open car. In the 1930s Buick was a luxury car. “Ermine”: a particularly expensive fur.

Faye called the waiter again.

"He doesn't like champagne cocktails," she said. "Bring him brandy."

Homer shook his head.

"Please, Faye," he whimpered.

She held the brandy to his lips, moving the glass when he turned away.

"Come on, sport—bottoms up."

"Let him alone," Tod finally said.

She ignored him as though she hadn't even heard his protest. She was both furious and ashamed of herself. Her shame strengthened her fury and gave it a target.

"Come on, sport," she said savagely, "or mama'll spank."

She turned to Tod.

"I don't like people who won't drink. It isn't sociable. They feel superior and I don't like people who feel superior."

"I don't feel superior," Homer said.

"Oh, yes, you do. I'm drunk and you're sober and so you feel superior. Goddamned, stinking superior."

He opened his mouth to reply and she poured the brandy into it, then clapped her hand over his lips so that he couldn't spit it back. Some of it came out of his nose.

Still without unfolding the napkin, he wiped himself. Faye ordered another brandy. When it came, she held it to his lips again, but this time he took it and drank it himself, fighting the stuff down.

"That's the boy," Faye laughed. "Well done, sloppy-boppy."

Tod asked her to dance in order to give Homer a moment alone. When they reached the floor, she made an attempt to defend herself.

"That guy's superiority is driving me crazy."

"He loves you," Tod said.

"Yeah, I know, but he's such a slob."

She started to cry on his shoulder and he held her very tight. He took a long chance.

"Sleep with me."

"No, baby," she said sympathetically.

"Please, please . . . just once."

"I can't, honey. I don't love you."

"You worked for Mrs. Jennings. Make believe you're still working for her."

She didn't get angry.

"That was a mistake. And anyway, that was different. I only went on call enough times to pay for the funeral and besides those men were complete strangers. You know what I mean?"

"Yes. But please, darling. I'll never bother you again. I'll go east right after. Be kind."

"I can't."

"Why . . . ?"

"I just can't. I'm sorry, darling. I'm not a tease, but I can't like that."

"I love you."

"No, sweetheart, I can't."

They danced until the number finished without saying anything else. He was grateful to her for having behaved so well, for not having made him feel too ridiculous.

When they returned to the table, Homer was sitting exactly as they had left him. He held the folded napkin in one hand and the empty brandy glass in the other. His helplessness was extremely irritating.

"You're right about the brandy, Faye," Homer said. "It's swell! Whoopee!"

He made a little circular gesture with the hand that held the glass.

"I'd like a Scotch," Tod said.

"Me, too," Faye said.

Homer made another gallant attempt to get into the spirit of the evening. "Garsoon,"¹ he called to the waiter, "more drinks."

He grinned at them anxiously. Faye burst out laughing and Homer did his best to laugh with her. When she stopped suddenly, he found himself laughing alone and turned his laugh into a cough, then hid the cough in his napkin.

She turned to Tod.

"What the devil can you do with a slob like that?"

The orchestra started and Tod was able to ignore her question. All three of them turned to watch a young man in a tight evening gown of red silk sing a lullaby.

*"Little man, you're crying,
I know why you're blue,
Someone took your kiddycar away;
Better go to sleep now,
Little man, you've had a busy day . . ."*²

He had a soft, throbbing voice and his gestures were matronly, tender and aborted, a series of unconscious caresses. What he was doing was in no sense parody; it was too simple and too restrained. It wasn't even theatrical. This dark young man with his thin, hairless arms and soft, rounded shoulders, who rocked an imaginary cradle as he crooned, was really a woman.

When he had finished, there was a great deal of applause. The young man shook himself and became an actor again. He tripped on his train, as though he weren't used to it, lifted his skirts to show he was wearing Paris garters,³ then strode off swinging his shoulders. His imitation of a man was awkward and obscene.

Homer and Tod applauded him.

"I hate fairies," Faye said.

"All women do."

Tod meant it as a joke, but Faye was angry.

"They're dirty," she said.

He started to say something else, but Faye had turned to Homer again. She seemed unable to resist nagging him. This time she pinched his arm until he gave a little squeak.

"Do you know what a fairy is?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said hesitatingly.

"All right, then," she barked. "Give out! What's a fairy?"

1. Homer's pronunciation of *garçon*, "waiter" (French).

2. From "Little Man, You've Had a Busy Day" (1934), by Al Hoffman (1902–1960), Maurice Sigler (1901–1960), and Mabel Wayne (1890–

1978), recorded in the 1930s by Paul Robeson (1898–1976) among other notable singers.

3. A brand marketed to men for holding up dress socks.

Homer twisted uneasily, as though he already felt the ruler on his behind, and looked imploring at Tod, who tried to help him by forming the word “homo” with his lips.

“Momo,” Homer said.

Faye burst out laughing. But his hurt look made it impossible not to relent, so she patted his shoulder.

“What a hick,” she said.

He grinned gratefully and signaled the waiter to bring another round of drinks.

The orchestra began to play and a man came over to ask Faye to dance. Without saying a word to Homer, she followed him to the floor.

“Who’s that?” Homer asked, chasing them with his eyes.

Tod made believe he knew and said that he had often seen him around the San Berdoo. His explanation satisfied Homer, but at the same time set him to thinking of something else. Tod could almost see him shaping a question in his head.

“Do you know Earle Shoop?” Homer finally asked.

“Yes.”

Homer then poured out a long, confused story about a dirty black hen. He kept referring to the hen again and again, as though it were the one thing he couldn’t stand about Earle and the Mexican. For a man who was incapable of hatred, he managed to draw a pretty horrible picture of the bird.

“You never saw such a disgusting thing, the way it squats and turns its head. The roosters have torn all the feathers off its neck and made its comb all bloody and it has scabby feet covered with warts and it cackles so nasty when they drop it into the pen.”

“Who drops it into what pen?”

“The Mexican.”

“Miguel?”

“Yes. He’s almost as bad as his hen.”

“You’ve been to their camp?”

“Camp?”

“In the mountains?”

“No. They’re living in the garage. Faye asked me if I minded if a friend of hers lived in the garage for a while because he was broke. But I didn’t know about the chickens or the Mexican. . . . Lots of people are out of work nowadays.”

“Why don’t you throw them out?”

“They’re broke and they have no place to go. It isn’t very comfortable living in a garage.”

“But if they don’t behave?”

“It’s just that hen. I don’t mind the roosters, they’re pretty, but that dirty hen. She shakes her dirty feathers each time and clucks so nasty.”

“You don’t have to look at it.”

“They do it every afternoon at the same time when I’m usually sitting in the chair in the sun having got back from shopping with Faye and just before dinner. The Mexican knows I don’t like to see it so he tries to make me look just for spite. I go into the house, but he taps on the windows and calls me to come out and watch. I don’t call that fun. Some people have funny ideas of what’s fun.”

"What's Faye say?"

"She doesn't mind the hen. She says it's only natural."

Then, in case Tod should mistake this for criticism, he told him what a fine, wholesome child she was. Tod agreed, but brought him back to the subject.

"If I were you," he said, "I'd report the chickens to the police. You have to have a permit to keep chickens in the city. I'd do something and damned quick."

Homer avoided a direct answer.

"I wouldn't touch that thing for all the money in the world. She's all over scabs and almost naked. She looks like a buzzard. She eats meat. I saw her one time eating some meat that the Mexican got out of the garbage can. He feeds the roosters grain but the hen eats garbage and he keeps her in a dirty box."

"If I were you, I'd throw those bastards out and their birds with them."

"No, they're nice enough young fellows, just down on their luck, like a lot of people these days, you know. It's just that hen . . ."

He shook his head wearily, as though he could smell and taste her.

Faye was coming back. Homer saw that Tod was going to speak to her about Earle and the Mexican and signaled desperately for him not to do it. She, however, caught him at it and was curious.

"What have you guys been chinning about?"

"You, darling," Tod said. "Homer has a t.l.⁴ for you."

"Tell me, Homer."

"No, first you tell me one."

"Well, the man I just danced with asked me if you were a movie big shot."

Tod saw that Homer was unable to think of a return compliment so he spoke for him.

"I said you were the most beautiful girl in the place."

"Yes," Homer agreed. "That's what Tod said."

"I don't believe it. Tod hates me. And anyway, I caught you telling him to keep quiet. You were shushing him."

She laughed.

"I bet I know what you were talking about." She mimicked Homer's excited disgust. "That dirty black hen, she's all over scabs and almost naked."

Homer laughed apologetically, but Tod was angry.

"What's the idea of keeping those guys in the garage?" he demanded.

"What the hell is it your business?" she replied, but not with real anger. She was amused.

"Homer enjoys their company. Don't you, sloppy-boppy?"

"I told Tod they were nice fellows just down on their luck like a lot of people these days. There's an awful lot of unemployment going around."

"That's right," she said. "If they go, I go."

Tod had guessed as much. He realized there was no use in saying anything. Homer was again signaling for him to keep quiet.

For some reason or other, Faye suddenly became ashamed of herself. She apologized to Tod by offering to dance with him again, flirting as she suggested it. Tod refused.

4. From "trade last"; a compliment passed along in hopes of receiving another compliment in exchange.

She broke the silence that followed by a eulogy of Miguel's game chickens, which was really meant to be an excuse for herself. She described what marvelous fighters the birds were, how much Miguel loved them and what good care he took of them.

Homer agreed enthusiastically. Tod remained silent. She asked him if he had ever seen a cock fight and invited him to the garage for the next night. A man from San Diego was coming North with his birds to pit them against Miguel's.

When she turned to Homer again, he leaned away as though she were going to hit him. She flushed with shame at this and looked at Tod to see if he had noticed. The rest of the evening, she tried to be nice to Homer. She even touched him a little, straightening his collar and patting his hair smooth. He beamed happily.

21

When Tod told Claude Estee about the cock fight, he wanted to go with him. They drove to Homer's place together.

It was one of those blue and lavender nights when the luminous color seems to have been blown over the scene with an air brush. Even the darkest shadows held some purple.

A car stood in the driveway of the garage with its headlights on. They could see several men in the corner of the building and could hear their voices. Someone laughed, using only two notes, ha-ha and ha-ha, over and over again.

Tod stepped ahead to make himself known, in case they were taking precautions against the police. When he entered the light, Abe Kusich and Miguel greeted him, but Earle didn't.

"The fights are off," Abe said. "That stinkola from Diego didn't get here."

Claude came up and Tod introduced him to the three men. The dwarf was arrogant, Miguel gracious and Earle his usual wooden, surly self.

Most of the garage floor had been converted into a pit, an oval space about nine feet long and seven or eight wide. It was floored with an old carpet and walled by a low, ragged fence made of odd pieces of lath and wire. Faye's coupe stood in the driveway, placed so that its headlights flooded the arena.

Claude and Tod followed Abe out of the glare and sat down with him on an old trunk in the back of the garage. Earle and Miguel came in and squatted on their heels facing them. They were both wearing blue denims, polka-dot shirts, big hats and high-heeled boots. They looked very handsome and picturesque.

They sat smoking silently, all of them calm except the dwarf, who was fidgety. Although he had plenty of room, he suddenly gave Tod a shove.

"Get over, lard-ass," he snarled.

Tod moved, crowding against Claude, without saying anything. Earle laughed at Tod rather than the dwarf, but the dwarf turned on him anyway.

"Why, you punkola! Who you laughing at?"

"You," Earle said.

"That so, hah? Well, listen to me, you pee-hole bandit, for two cents I'd knock you out of them prop boots."

Earle reached into his shirt pocket and threw a coin on the ground.

"There's a nickel," he said.

The dwarf started to get off the trunk, but Tod caught him by the collar. He didn't try to get loose, but leaned forward against his coat, like a terrier in a harness, and wagged his great head from side to side.

"Go on," he sputtered, "you fugitive from the Western Costume Company, you . . . you louse in a fright-wig, you."

Earle would have been much less angry if he could have thought of a snappy comeback. He mumbled something about a half-pint bastard, then spat. He hit the instep of the dwarf's shoe with a big gob of spittle.

"Nice shot," Miguel said.

This was apparently enough for Earle to consider himself the winner, for he smiled and became quiet. The dwarf slapped Tod's hand away from his collar with a curse and settled down on the trunk again.

"He ought to wear gaffs,"⁵ Miguel said.

"I don't need them for a punk like that."

They all laughed and everything was fine again.

Abe leaned across Tod to speak to Claude.

"It would have been a swell main," he said. "There was more than a dozen guys here before you come and some of them with real dough. I was going to make book."

He took out his wallet and gave him one of his business cards.

"It was in the bag," Miguel said. "I got five birds that would of won easy and two sure losers. We would of made a killing."

"I've never seen a chicken fight," Claude said. "In fact, I've never even seen a game chicken."

Miguel offered to show him one of his birds and left to get it. Tod went down to the car for the bottle of whiskey they had left in a side pocket. When he got back, Miguel was holding Jujutla in the light. They all examined the bird.

Miguel held the cock firmly with both hands, somewhat in the manner that a basketball is held for an underhand toss. The bird had short, oval wings and a heart-shaped tail that stood at right angles to its body. It had a triangular head, like a snake's, terminating in a slightly curved beak, thick at the base and fine at the point. All its feathers were so tight and hard that they looked as though they had been varnished. They had been thinned out for fighting and the lines of its body, which was like a truncated wedge, stood out plainly. From between Miguel's fingers dangled its long, bright orange legs and its slightly darker feet with their horn nails.

"Juju was bred by John R. Bowes of Lindale, Texas," Miguel said proudly. "He's a six times winner. I give fifty dollars and a shotgun for him."

"He's a nice bird," the dwarf said grudgingly, "but looks ain't everything."

Claude took out his wallet.

"I'd like to see him fight," he said. "Suppose you sell me one of your other birds and I put it against him."

Miguel thought a while and looked at Earle, who told him to go ahead.

"I've got a bird I'll sell you for fifteen bucks," he said.

The dwarf interfered.

5. Metal spurs attached to fighting gamecocks.

“Let me pick the bird.”

“Oh, I don’t care,” Claude said, “I just want to see a fight. Here’s your fifteen.”

Earle took the money and Miguel told him to get Hermano, the big red.

“That red’ll go over eight pounds,” he said, “while Juju won’t go more than six.”

Earle came back carrying a large rooster that had a silver shawl. He looked like an ordinary barnyard fowl.

When the dwarf saw him, he became indignant.

“What do you call that, a goose?”

“That’s one of Street’s Butcher Boys,” Miguel said.

“I wouldn’t bait a hook with him,” the dwarf said.

“You don’t have to bet,” Earle mumbled.

The dwarf eyed the bird and the bird eyed him. He turned to Claude.

“Let me handle him for you, mister,” he said.

Miguel spoke quickly.

“Earle’ll do it. He knows the cock.”

The dwarf exploded at this.

“It’s a frame-up!” he yelled.

He tried to take the red, but Earle held the bird high in the air out of the little man’s reach.

Miguel opened the trunk and took out a small wooden box, the kind chessmen are kept in. It was full of curved gaffs, small squares of chamois with holes in their centers and bits of waxed string like that used by a shoemaker.

They crowded around to watch him arm Juju. First he wiped the short stubs on the cock’s legs to make sure they were clean and then placed a leather square over one of them so that the stub came through the hole. He then fitted a gaff over it and fastened it with a bit of the soft string, wrapping very carefully. He did the same to the other leg.

When he had finished, Earle started on the big red.

“That’s a bird with lots of cojones,”⁶ Miguel said. “He’s won plenty fights. He don’t look fast maybe, but he’s fast all right and he packs an awful wallop.”

“Strictly for the cook stove, if you ask me,” the dwarf said.

Earle took out a pair of shears and started to lighten the red’s plumage. The dwarf watched him cut away most of the bird’s tail, but when he began to work on the breast, he caught his hand.

“Leave him be!” he barked. “You’ll kill him fast that way. He needs that stuff for protection.”

He turned to Claude again.

“Please, mister, let me handle him.”

“Make him buy a share in the bird,” Miguel said.

Claude laughed and motioned for Earle to give Abe the bird. Earle didn’t want to and looked meaningly at Miguel.

The dwarf began to dance with rage.

“You’re trying to cold-deck⁷ us!” he screamed.

“Aw, give it to him,” Miguel said.

6. Balls, testicles (Spanish).

7. To stack the deck; i.e., to cheat.

The little man tucked the bird under his left arm so that his hands were free and began to look over the gaffs in the box. They were all the same length, three inches, but some had more pronounced curves than the others. He selected a pair and explained his strategy to Claude.

"He's going to do most of his fighting on his back. This pair'll hit right that way. If he could get over the other bird, I wouldn't use them."

He got down on his knees and honed the gaffs on the cement floor until they were like needles.

"Have we a chance?" Tod asked.

"You can't ever tell," he said, shaking his extra large head. "He feels almost like a dead bird."

After adjusting the gaffs with great care, he looked the bird over, stretching its wings and blowing its feathers in order to see its skin.

"The comb ain't bright enough for fighting condition," he said, pinching it, "but he looks strong. He may have been a good one once."

He held the bird in the light and looked at its head. When Miguel saw him examining its beak, he told him anxiously to quit stalling. But the dwarf paid no attention and went on muttering to himself. He motioned for Tod and Claude to look.

"What'd I tell you!" he said, puffing with indignation. "We've been cold-decked."

He pointed to a hair line running across the top of the bird's beak.

"That's not a crack," Miguel protested, "it's just a mark."

He reached for the bird as though to rub its beak and the bird pecked savagely at him. This pleased the dwarf.

"We'll fight," he said, "but we won't bet."

Earle was to referee. He took a piece of chalk and drew three lines in the center of the pit, a long one in the middle and two shorter ones parallel to it and about three feet away.

"Pit your cocks," he called.

"No, bill them first," the dwarf protested.

He and Miguel stood at arm's length and thrust their birds together to anger them. Juju caught the big red by the comb and held on viciously until Miguel jerked him away. The red, who had been rather apathetic, came to life and the dwarf had trouble holding him. The two men thrust their birds together again, and again Juju caught the red's comb. The big cock became frantic with rage and struggled to get at the smaller bird.

"We're ready," the dwarf said.

He and Miguel climbed into the pit and set their birds down on the short lines so that they faced each other. They held them by the tails and waited for Earle to give the signal to let go.

"Pit them," he ordered.

The dwarf had been watching Earle's lips and he had his bird off first, but Juju rose straight in the air and sank one spur in the red's breast. It went through the feathers into the flesh. The red turned with the gaff still stuck in him and pecked twice at his opponent's head.

They separated the birds and held them to the lines again.

"Pit 'em!" Earle shouted.

Again Juju got above the other bird, but this time he missed with his spurs. The red tried to get above him, but couldn't. He was too clumsy and

heavy to fight in the air. Juju climbed again, cutting and hitting so rapidly that his legs were a golden blur. The red met him by going back on his tail and hooking upward like a cat. Juju landed again and again. He broke one of the red's wings, then practically severed a leg.

"Handle them," Earle called.

When the dwarf gathered the red up, its neck had begun to droop and it was a mass of blood and matted feathers. The little man moaned over the bird, then set to work. He spit into its gaping beak and took the comb between his lips and sucked the blood back into it. The red began to regain its fury, but not its strength. Its beak closed and its neck straightened. The dwarf smoothed and shaped its plumage. He could do nothing to help the broken wing or the dangling leg.

"Pit 'em," Earle said.

The dwarf insisted that the birds be put down beak to beak on the center line, so that the red would not have to move to get at his opponent. Miguel agreed.

The red was very gallant. When Abe let go of its tail, it made a great effort to get off the ground and meet Juju in the air, but it could only thrust with one leg and fell over on its side. Juju sailed above it, half turned and came down on its back, driving in both spurs. The red twisted free, throwing Juju, and made a terrific effort to hook with its good leg, but fell sideways again.

Before Juju could get into the air, the red managed to drive a hard blow with its beak to Juju's head. This slowed the smaller bird down and he fought on the ground. In the pecking match, the red's greater weight and strength evened up for his lack of a leg and a wing. He managed to give as good as he got. But suddenly his cracked beak broke off, leaving only the lower half. A large bubble of blood rose where the beak had been. The red didn't retreat an inch, but made a great effort to get into the air once more. Using its one leg skillfully, it managed to rise six or seven inches from the ground, not enough, however, to get its spurs into play. Juju went up with him and got well above, then drove both gaffs into the red's breast. Again one of the steel needles stuck.

"Handle them," Earle shouted.

Miguel freed his bird and gave the other back to the dwarf. Abe, moaning softly, smoothed its feathers and licked its eyes clean, then took its whole head in his mouth. The red was finished, however. It couldn't even hold its neck straight. The dwarf blew away the feathers from under its tail and pressed the lips of its vent⁸ together hard. When that didn't seem to help, he inserted his little finger and scratched the bird's testicles. It fluttered and made a gallant effort to straighten its neck.

"Pit birds."

Once more the red tried to rise with Juju, pushing hard with its remaining leg, but it only spun crazily. Juju rose, but missed. The red thrust weakly with its broken bill. Juju went into the air again and this time drove a gaff through one of the red's eyes into its brain. The red fell over stone dead.

The dwarf groaned with anguish, but no one else said anything. Juju pecked at the dead bird's remaining eye.

"Take off that stinking cannibal!" the dwarf screamed.

8. Cloacal opening.

Miguel laughed, then caught Juju and removed its gaffs. Earle did the same for the red. He handled the dead cock gently and with respect.

Tod passed the whiskey.

22

They were well on their way to getting drunk when Homer came out to the garage. He gave a little start when he saw the dead chicken sprawled on the carpet. He shook hands with Claude after Tod had introduced him, and with Abe Kusich, then made a little set speech about everybody coming in for a drink. They trooped after him.

Faye greeted them at the door. She was wearing a pair of green silk lounging pajamas and green mules⁹ with large pompons and very high heels. The top three buttons of her jacket were open and a good deal of her chest was exposed but nothing of her breasts; not because they were small, but because they were placed wide apart and their thrust was upward and outward.

She gave Tod her hand and patted the dwarf on the top of the head. They were old friends. In acknowledging Homer's awkward introduction of Claude, she was very much the lady. It was her favorite role and she assumed it whenever she met a new man, especially if he were someone whose affluence was obvious.

"Charmed to have you," she trilled.

The dwarf laughed at her.

In a voice stiff with hauteur, she then ordered Homer into the kitchen for soda, ice and glasses.

"A swell layout," announced the dwarf, putting on the hat he had taken off in the doorway.

He climbed into one of the big Spanish chairs, using his knees and hands to do it, and sat on the edge with his feet dangling. He looked like a ventriloquist's dummy.

Earle and Miguel had remained behind to wash up. When they came in, Faye welcomed them with stilted condescension.

"How do you do, boys? The refreshments will be along in a jiffy. But perhaps you prefer a liqueur, Miguel?"

"No, mum," he said, a little startled. "I'll have what the others have."

He followed Earle across the room to the couch. Both of them took long, wooden steps, as though they weren't used to being in a house. They sat down gingerly with their backs straight, their big hats on their knees and their hands under their hats. They had combed their hair before leaving the garage and their small round heads glistened prettily.

Homer took the drinks around on a small tray.

They all made a show of manners, all but the dwarf, that is, who remained as arrogant as ever. He even commented on the quality of the whiskey. As soon as everyone had been served, Homer sat down.

Faye alone remained standing. She was completely self-possessed despite their stares. She stood with one hip thrown out and her hand on it. From

9. Backless shoes.

where Claude was sitting he could follow the charming line of her spine as it swooped into her buttocks, which were like a heart upside down.

He gave a low whistle of admiration and everyone agreed by moving uneasily or laughing.

"My dear," she said to Homer, "perhaps some of the men would like cigars?"

He was surprised and mumbled something about there being no cigars in the house but that he would go to the store for them if . . . Having to say all this made him unhappy and he took the whiskey around again. He poured very generous shots.

"That's a becoming shade of green," Tod said.

Faye peacocked for them all.

"I thought maybe it was a little gaudy . . . vulgar, you know."

"No," Claude said enthusiastically, "it's stunning."

She repaid him for his compliment by smiling in a peculiar, secret way and running her tongue over her lips. It was one of her most characteristic gestures and very effective. It seemed to promise all sorts of undefined intimacies, yet it was really as simple and automatic as the word thanks. She used it to reward anyone for anything, no matter how unimportant.

Claude made the same mistake Tod had often made and jumped to his feet.

"Won't you sit here?" he said, waving gallantly at his chair.

She accepted by repeating the secret smile and the tongue caress. Claude bowed, but then, realizing that everyone was watching him, added a little mock flourish to make himself less ridiculous. Tod joined them, then Earle and Miguel came over. Claude did the courting while the others stood by and stared at her.

"Do you work in pictures, Mr. Estee?" she asked.

"Yes. You're in pictures, of course?"

Everyone was aware of the begging note in his voice, but no one smiled. They didn't blame him. It was almost impossible to keep that note out when talking to her. Men used it just to say good morning.

"Not exactly, but I hope to be," she said. "I've worked as an extra, but I haven't had a real chance yet. I expect to get one soon. All I ask is a chance. Acting is in my blood. We Greeners, you know, were all theatre people from away back."

"Yes. I . . ."

She didn't let Claude finish, but he didn't care.

"Not musicals, but real dramas. Of course, maybe light comedies at first. All I ask is a chance. I've been buying a lot of clothes lately to make myself one. I don't believe in luck. Luck is just hard work, they say, and I'm willing to work as hard as anybody."

"You have a delightful voice and you handle it well," he said.

He couldn't help it. Having once seen her secret smile and the things that accompanied it, he wanted to make her repeat it again and again.

"I'd like to do a show on Broadway," she continued. "That's the way to get a start nowadays. They won't talk to you unless you've had stage experience."

She went on and on, telling him how careers are made in the movies and how she intended to make hers. It was all nonsense. She mixed bits of badly understood advice from the trade papers with other bits out of the fan magazines and compared these with the legends that surround the activities of screen stars and executives. Without any noticeable transition, possibilities

became probabilities and wound up as inevitabilities. At first she occasionally stopped and waited for Claude to chorus a hearty agreement, but when she had a good start, all her questions were rhetorical and the stream of words rippled on without a break.

None of them really heard her. They were all too busy watching her smile, laugh, shiver, whisper, grow indignant, cross and uncross her legs, stick out her tongue, widen and narrow her eyes, toss her head so that her platinum hair splashed against the red plush of the chair back. The strange thing about her gestures and expressions was that they didn't really illustrate what she was saying. They were almost pure. It was as though her body recognized how foolish her words were and tried to excite her hearers into being uncritical. It worked that night; no one even thought of laughing at her. The only move they made was to narrow their circle about her.

Tod stood on the outer edge, watching her through the opening between Earle and the Mexican. When he felt a light tap on his shoulder, he knew it was Homer, but didn't turn. When the tap was repeated, he shrugged the hand away. A few minutes later, he heard a shoe squeak behind him and turned to see Homer tiptoeing off. He reached a chair safely and sank into it with a sigh. He put his heavy hands on the knees, one on each, and stared for a while at their backs. He felt Tod's eyes on him and looked up and smiled.

His smile annoyed Tod. It was one of those irritating smiles that seem to say: "My friend, what can you know of suffering?" There was something very patronizing and superior about it, and intolerably snobbish.

He felt hot and a little sick. He turned his back on Homer and went out the front door. His indignant exit wasn't very successful. He wobbled quite badly and when he reached the sidewalk, he had to sit down on the curb with his back against a date palm.

From where he was sitting, he couldn't see the city in the valley below the canyon, but he could see the reflection of its lights, which hung in the sky above it like a batik¹ parasol. The unlighted part of the sky at the edge of the parasol was a deep black with hardly a trace of blue.

Homer followed him out of the house and stood standing behind him, afraid to approach. He might have sneaked away without Tod's knowing it, if he had not suddenly looked down and seen his shadow.

"Hello," he said.

He motioned for Homer to join him on the curb.

"You'll catch cold," Homer said.

Tod understood his protest. He made it because he wanted to be certain that his company was really welcome. Nevertheless, Tod refused to repeat the invitation. He didn't even turn to look at him again. He was sure he was wearing his long-suffering smile and didn't want to see it.

He wondered why all his sympathy had turned to malice. Because of Faye? It was impossible for him to admit it. Because he was unable to do anything to help him? This reason was a more comfortable one, but he dismissed it with even less consideration. He had never set himself up as a healer.

Homer was looking the other way, at the house, watching the parlor window. He cocked his head to one side when someone laughed. The four short sounds, ha-ha and again ha-ha, distinct musical notes, were made by the dwarf.

1. Cloth patterned through a wax-relief dying process, brought to a high art in Indonesia.

“You could learn from him,” Tod said.

“What?” Homer asked, turning to look at him.

“Let it go.”

His impatience both hurt and puzzled Homer. He saw that and motioned for him to sit down, this time emphatically.

Homer obeyed. He did a poor job of squatting and hurt himself. He sat nursing his knee.

“What is it?” Tod finally said, making an attempt to be kind.

“Nothing, Tod, nothing.”

He was grateful and increased his smile. Tod couldn’t help seeing all its annoying attributes, resignation, kindness, and humility.

They sat quietly, Homer with his heavy shoulders hunched and the sweet grin on his face, Tod frowning, his back pressed hard against the palm tree. In the house the radio was playing and its blare filled the street.

They sat for a long time without speaking. Several times Homer started to tell Tod something but he didn’t seem able to get the words out. Tod refused to help him with a question.

His big hands left his lap, where they had been playing “here’s the church and here the steeple,” and hid in his armpits. They remained there for a moment, then slid under his thighs. A moment later they were back in his lap. The right hand cracked the joints of the left, one by one, then the left did the same service for the right. They seemed easier for a moment, but not for long. They started “here’s the church” again, going through the entire performance and ending with the joint manipulation as before. He started a third time, but catching Tod’s eyes, he stopped and trapped his hands between his knees.

It was the most complicated tic Tod had ever seen. What made it particularly horrible was its precision. It wasn’t pantomime, as he had first thought, but manual ballet.

When Tod saw the hands start to crawl out again, he exploded.

“For Christ’s sake!”

The hands struggled to get free, but Homer clamped his knees shut and held them.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Oh, all right.”

“But I can’t help it, Tod. I have to do it three times.”

“Okay with me.”

He turned his back on him.

Faye started to sing and her voice poured into the street.

*“Dreamed about a reefer five feet long
Not too mild and not too strong,
You’ll be high, but not for long,
If you’re a viper—a vi-paah.”²*

Instead of her usual swing delivery, she was using a lugubrious one, wailing the tune as though it were a dirge. At the end of every stanza, she shifted to an added minor.

2. “If You’re a Viper,” a popular jazz song about marijuana written and first recorded in 1936 by Stuff Smith (1909–1967). “Viper”: a marijuana smoker. “Reefer”: a joint, or marijuana cigarette.

*"I'm the queen of everything,
Gotta be high before I can swing,
Light a tea and let it be,
If you're a viper—a vi-paah."*

"She sings very pretty," Homer said.

"She's drunk."

"I don't know what to do, Tod," Homer complained. "She's drinking an awful lot lately. It's that Earle. We used to have a lot of fun before he came, but now we don't have any fun any more since he started to hang around."

"Why don't you get rid of him?"

"I was thinking about what you said about the license to keep chickens."

Tod understood what he wanted.

"I'll report them to the Board of Health tomorrow."

Homer thanked him, then insisted on explaining in detail why he couldn't do it himself.

"But that'll only get rid of the Mexican," Tod said. "You'll have to throw Earle out yourself."

"Maybe he'll go with his friend?"

Tod knew that Homer was begging him to agree so that he could go on hoping, but he refused.

"Not a chance. You'll have to throw him out."

Homer accepted this with his brave, sweet smile.

"Maybe . . ."

"Tell Faye to do it," Tod said.

"Oh, I can't."

"Why the hell not? It's your house."

"Don't be mad at me, Toddie."

"All right, Homie, I'm not mad at you."

Faye's voice came through the open window.

*"And when your throat gets dry,
You know you're high,
If you're a viper."*

The others harmonized on the last word, repeating it.

"Vi-paah . . ."

"Toddie," Homer began, "if . . ."

"Stop calling me Toddie, for Christ's sake!"

Homer didn't understand. He took Tod's hand.

"I didn't mean nothing. Back home we call . . ."

Tod couldn't stand his trembling signals of affection. He tore free with a jerk.

"Oh, but, Toddie, I . . ."

"She's a whore!"

He heard Homer grunt, then heard his knees creak as he struggled to his feet.

Faye's voice came pouring through the window, a reedy wail that broke in the middle with a husky catch.

*"High, high, high, high, when you're high,
Everything is dandy,*

*Truck on down to the candy store,
Bust your conk on peppermint candy!³
Then you know your body's sent,
Don't care if you don't pay rent,
Sky is high and so am I,
If you're a viper—a vi-paah."*

23

When Tod went back into the house, he found Earle, Abe Kusich and Claude standing together in a tight group, watching Faye dance with Miguel. She and the Mexican were doing a slow tango to music from the phonograph. He held her very tight, one of his legs thrust between hers, and they swayed together in long spirals that broke rhythmically at the top of each curve into a dip. All the buttons on her lounging pajamas were open and the arm he had around her waist was inside her clothes.

Tod stood watching the dancers from the doorway for a moment, then went to a little table on which the whiskey bottle was. He poured himself a quarter of a tumblerful, tossed it off, then poured another drink. Carrying the glass, he went over to Claude and the others. They paid no attention to him; their heads moved only to follow the dancers, like the gallery at a tennis match.

"Did you see Homer?" Tod asked, touching Claude's arm.

Claude didn't turn, but the dwarf did. He spoke as though hypnotized.

"What a quiff! What a quiff!"⁴

Tod left them and went to look for Homer. He wasn't in the kitchen, so he tried the bedrooms. One of them was locked. He knocked lightly, waited, then repeated the knock. There was no answer, but he thought he heard someone move. He looked through the keyhole. The room was pitch dark.

"Homer," he called softly.

He heard the bed creak, then Homer replied.

"Who is it?"

"It's me—Toddie."

He used the diminutive with perfect seriousness.

"Go away, please," Homer said.

"Let me in for a minute. I want to explain something."

"No," Homer said, "go away, please."

Tod went back to the living room. The phonograph record had been changed to a fox-trot and Earle was now dancing with Faye. He had both his arms around her in a bear hug and they were stumbling all over the room, bumping into the walls and furniture. Faye, her head thrown back, was laughing wildly. Earle had both eyes shut tight.

Miguel and Claude were also laughing, but not the dwarf. He stood with his fists clenched and his chin stuck out. When he couldn't stand any more of it, he ran after the dancers to cut in. He caught Earle by the seat of his trousers.

"Le'me dance," he barked.

Earle turned his head, looking down at the dwarf from over his shoulder.

3. Cocaine (slang). "Conk": head.

4. Derogatory slang for female genitals.

“Git! G’wan, git!”

Faye and Earle had come to a halt with their arms around each other. When the dwarf lowered his head like a goat and tried to push between them, she reached down and tweaked his nose.

“Le’me dance,” he bellowed.

They tried to start again, but Abe wouldn’t let them. He had his hands between them and was trying frantically to pull them apart. When that wouldn’t work, he kicked Earle sharply in the shins. Earle kicked back and his boot landed in the little man’s stomach, knocking him flat on his back. Everyone laughed.

The dwarf struggled to his feet and stood with his head lowered like a tiny ram. Just as Faye and Earle started to dance again, he charged between Earle’s legs and dug upward with both hands. Earle screamed with pain, and tried to get at him. He screamed again, then groaned and started to sink to the floor, tearing Faye’s silk pajamas on his way down.

Miguel grabbed Abe by the throat. The dwarf let go his hold and Earle sank to the floor. Lifting the little man free, Miguel shifted his grip to his ankles and dashed him against the wall, like a man killing a rabbit against a tree. He swung the dwarf back to slam him again, but Tod caught his arm. Then Claude grabbed the dwarf and together they pulled him away from the Mexican.

He was unconscious. They carried him into the kitchen and held him under the cold water. He came to quickly, and began to curse. When they saw he was all right, they went back to the living room.

Miguel was helping Earle over to the couch. All the tan had drained from his face and it was covered with sweat. Miguel loosened his trousers while Claude took off his necktie and opened his collar.

Faye and Tod watched from the side.

“Look,” she said, “my new pajamas are ruined.”

One of the sleeves had been pulled almost off and her shoulder stuck through it. The trousers were also torn. While he stared at her, she undid the top of the trousers and stepped out of them. She was wearing tight black lace drawers. Tod took a step toward her and hesitated. She threw the pajama bottoms over her arm, turned slowly and walked toward the door.

“Faye,” Tod gasped.

She stopped and smiled at him.

“I’m going to bed,” she said. “Get that little guy out of here.”

Claude came over and took Tod by the arm.

“Let’s blow,” he said.

Tod nodded.

“We’d better take the homunculus with us or he’s liable to murder the whole household.”

Tod nodded again and followed him into the kitchen. They found the dwarf holding a big piece of ice to the side of his head.

“There’s some lump where that greaser⁵ slammed me.”

He made them finger and admire it.

“Let’s go home,” Claude said.

“No,” said the dwarf, “let’s go see some girls. I’m just getting started.”

5. Derogatory slang for a Mexican American.

"To hell with that," snapped Tod. "Come on."

He pushed the dwarf toward the door.

"Take your hands off, punk!" roared the little man.

Claude stepped between them.

"Easy there, citizen," he said.

"All right, but no shoving."

He strutted out and they followed.

Earle still lay stretched on the couch. He had his eyes closed and was holding himself below the stomach with both hands. Miguel wasn't there.

Abe chuckled, wagging his big head gleefully.

"I fixed that buckeroo."

Out on the sidewalk he tried again to get them to go with him.

"Come on, you guys—we'll have some fun."

"I'm going home," Claude said.

They went with the dwarf to his car and watched him climb in behind the wheel. He had special extensions on the clutch and brake so that he could reach them with his tiny feet.

"Come to town?"

"No, thanks," Claude said politely.

"Then to hell with you!"

That was his farewell. He let out the brake and the car rolled away.

24

Tod woke up the next morning with a splitting headache. He called the studio to say he wouldn't be in and remained in bed until noon, then went downtown for breakfast. After several cups of hot tea, he felt a little better and decided to visit Homer. He still wanted to apologize.

Climbing the hill to Pinyon Canyon made his head throb and he was relieved when no one answered his repeated knocks. As he started away, he saw one of the curtains move and went back to knock once more. There was still no answer.

He went around to the garage. Faye's car was gone and so were the game chickens. He went to the back of the house and knocked on the kitchen door. Somehow the silence seemed too complete. He tried the handle and found that the door wasn't locked. He shouted hello a few times, as a warning, then went through the kitchen into the living room.

The red velvet curtains were all drawn tight, but he could see Homer sitting on the couch and staring at the backs of his hands which were cupped over his knees. He wore an old-fashioned cotton nightgown and his feet were bare.

"Just get up?"

Homer neither moved nor replied.

Tod tried again.

"Some party!"

He knew it was stupid to be hearty, but he didn't know what else to be.

"Boy, have I got a hang-over," he went on, even going so far as to attempt a chuckle.

Homer paid absolutely no attention to him.

The room was just as they had left it the night before. Tables and chairs were overturned and the smashed picture lay where it had fallen. To give

himself a reason for staying, he began to tidy up. He righted the chairs, straightened the carpet and picked up the cigarette butts that littered the floor. He also threw aside the curtains and opened a window.

"There, that's better, isn't it?" he asked cheerfully.

Homer looked up for a second, then down at his hands again. Tod saw that he was coming out of his stupor.

"Want some coffee?" he asked.

He lifted his hands from his knees and hid them in his armpits, clamping them tight, but didn't answer.

"Some hot coffee—what do you say?"

He took his hands from under his arms and sat on them. After waiting a little while he shook his head no, slowly, heavily, like a dog with a foxtail in its ear.

"I'll make some."

Tod went to the kitchen and put the pot on the stove. While it was boiling, he took a peek into Faye's room. It had been stripped. All the dresser drawers were pulled out and there were empty boxes all over the floor. A broken flask of perfume lay in the middle of the carpet and the place reeked of gardenia.

When the coffee was ready, he poured two cups and carried them into the living room on a tray. He found Homer just as he had left him, sitting on his hands. He moved a small table close to him and put the tray on it.

"I brought a cup for myself, too," he said. "Come on—drink it while it's hot."

Tod lifted a cup and held it out, but when he saw that he was going to speak, he put it down and waited.

"I'm going back to Wayneville," Homer said.

"A swell idea—great!"

He pushed the coffee at him again. Homer ignored it. He gulped several times, trying to swallow something that was stuck in his throat, then began to sob. He cried without covering his face or bending his head. The sound was like an ax chopping pine, a heavy, hollow, chunking noise. It was repeated rhythmically but without accent. There was no progress in it. Each chunk was exactly like the one that proceeded. It would never reach a climax.

Tod realized that there was no use trying to stop him. Only a very stupid man would have the courage to try to do it. He went to the farthest corner of the room and waited.

Just as he was about to light a second cigarette, Homer called him.

"Tod!"

"I'm here, Homer."

He hurried over to the couch again.

Homer was still crying, but he suddenly stopped even more abruptly than he had started.

"Yes, Homer?" Tod asked encouragingly.

"She's left."

"Yes, I know. Drink some coffee."

"She's left."

Tod knew that he put a great deal of faith in sayings, so he tried one.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish."

"She left before I got up," he said.

"What the hell do you care? You're going back to Wayneville."

“You shouldn’t curse,” Homer said with the same lunatic calm.

“I’m sorry,” Tod mumbled.

The word “sorry” was like dynamite set off under a dam. Language leaped out of Homer in a muddy, twisting torrent. At first, Tod thought it would do him a lot of good to pour out in this way. But he was wrong. The lake behind the dam replenished itself too fast. The more he talked the greater the pressure grew because the flood was circular and ran back behind the dam again.

After going on continuously for about twenty minutes, he stopped in the middle of a sentence. He leaned back, closed his eyes and seemed to fall asleep. Tod put a cushion under his head. After watching him for a while, he went back to the kitchen.

He sat down and tried to make sense out of what Homer had told him. A great deal of it was gibberish. Some of it, however, wasn’t. He hit on a key that helped when he realized that a lot of it wasn’t jumbled so much as timeless. The words went behind each other instead of after. What he had taken for long strings were really one thick word and not a sentence. In the same way several sentences were simultaneous and not a paragraph. Using this key, he was able to arrange a part of what he had heard so that it made the usual kind of sense.

After Tod had hurt him by saying that nasty thing about Faye, Homer ran around to the back of the house and let himself in through the kitchen, then went to peek into the parlor. He wasn’t angry with Tod, just surprised and upset because Tod was a nice boy. From the hall that led into the parlor he could see everybody having a good time and he was glad because it was kind of dull for Faye living with an old man like him. It made her restless. No one noticed him peeking there and he was glad because he didn’t feel much like joining the fun, although he liked to watch people enjoy themselves. Faye was dancing with Mr. Estee and they made a nice pair. She seemed happy. Her face shone like always when she was happy. Next she danced with Earle. He didn’t like that because of the way he held her. He couldn’t see what she saw in that fellow. He just wasn’t nice, that’s all. He had mean eyes. In the hotel business they used to watch out for fellows like that and never gave them credit because they would jump their bills.⁶ Maybe he couldn’t get a job because nobody would trust him, although it was true as Faye said that a lot of people were out of work nowadays. Standing there peeking at the party, enjoying the laughing and singing, he saw Earle catch Faye and bend her back and kiss her and everybody laughed although you could see Faye didn’t like it because she slapped his face. Earle didn’t care, he just kissed her again, a long nasty one. She got away from him and ran toward the door where he was standing. He tried to hide, but she caught him. Although he didn’t say anything, she said he was nasty spying on her and wouldn’t listen when he tried to explain. She went into her room and he followed to tell about the peeking, but she carried on awful and cursed him some more as she put red on her lips. Then she knocked over the perfume. That made her twice as mad. He tried to explain but she wouldn’t listen and just went on calling him all sorts of dirty things. So he went to his room and got undressed and tried to go to sleep. Then Tod woke him up and wanted to come in and talk. He

6. I.e., leave without paying.

wasn't angry, but didn't feel like talking just then, all he wanted to do was go to sleep. Tod went away and no sooner had he climbed back into bed when there was some awful screaming and banging. He was afraid to go out and see and he thought of calling the police, but he was scared to go in the hall where the phone was so he started to get dressed to climb out of the window and go for help because it sounded like murder but before he finished putting his shoes on, he heard Tod talking to Faye and he figured that it must be all right or she wouldn't be laughing so he got undressed and went back to bed again. He couldn't fall asleep wondering what had happened, so when the house was quiet, he took a chance and knocked on Faye's door to find out. Faye let him in. She was curled up in bed like a little girl. She called him daddy and kissed him and said that she wasn't angry at him at all. She said there had been a fight but nobody got hurt much and for him to go back to bed and that they would talk more in the morning. He went back like she said and fell asleep, but he woke up again as it was just breaking daylight. At first he wondered why he was up because when he once fell asleep, usually he didn't get up before the alarm clock rang. He knew that something had happened, but he didn't know what until he heard a noise in Faye's room. It was a moan and he thought he was dreaming, but he heard it again. Sure enough, Faye was moaning all right. He thought she must be sick. She moaned again like in pain. He got out of bed and went to her door and knocked and asked if she was sick. She didn't answer and the moaning stopped so he went back to bed. A little later, she moaned again so he got out of bed, thinking she might want the hot water bottle or some aspirin and a drink of water or something and knocked on her door again, only meaning to help her. She heard him and said something. He didn't understand what but he thought she meant for him to go in. Lots of times when she had a headache he brought her an aspirin and a glass of water in the middle of the night. The door wasn't locked. You'd have thought she would have locked the door because the Mexican was in bed with her, both of them naked and she had her arms around him. Faye saw him and pulled the sheets over her head without saying anything. He didn't know what to do, so he backed out of the room and closed the door. He was standing in the hall, trying to figure out what to do, feeling so ashamed, when Earle appeared with his boots in his hand. He must have been sleeping in the parlor. He wanted to know what the trouble was. "Faye's sick," he said, "and I'm getting her a glass of water." But then Faye moaned again and Earle heard it. He pushed open the door. Faye screamed. He could hear Earle and Miguel cursing each other and fighting. He was afraid to call the police on account of Faye and didn't know what to do. Faye kept on screaming. When he opened the door again, Miguel fell out with Earle on top of him and both of them tearing at each other. He ran inside the room and locked the door. She had the sheets over her head, screaming. He could hear Earle and Miguel fighting in the hall and then he couldn't hear them any more. She kept the sheets over her head. He tried to talk to her but she wouldn't answer. He sat down on a chair to guard her in case Earle and Miguel came back, but they didn't and after a while she pulled the sheets away from her face and told him to get out. She pulled the sheets over her face again when he answered, so then he waited a little longer and again she told him to get out without letting him see her face. He couldn't hear either Miguel or Earle. He opened the door and looked out. They were gone. He locked the doors and windows and

went to his room and lay down on his bed. Before he knew it he fell asleep and when he woke up she was gone. All he could find was Earle's boots in the hall. He threw them out the back and this morning they were gone.

25

Tod went into the living room to see how Homer was getting on. He was still on the couch, but had changed his position. He had curled his big body into a ball. His knees were drawn up almost to his chin, his elbows were tucked in close and his hands were against his chest. But he wasn't relaxed. Some inner force of nerve and muscle was straining to make the ball tighter and still tighter. He was like a steel spring which has been freed of its function in a machine and allowed to use all its strength centripetally. While part of a machine the pull of the spring had been used against other and stronger forces, but now, free at last, it was striving to attain the shape of its original coil.

Original coil . . . In a book of abnormal psychology borrowed from the college library, he had once seen a picture of a woman sleeping in a net hammock whose posture was much like Homer's. "Uterine Flight," or something like that, had been the caption under the photograph. The woman had been sleeping in the hammock without changing her position, that of the foetus in the womb, for a great many years. The doctors of the insane asylum had been able to awaken her for only short periods of time and those months apart.

He sat down to smoke a cigarette and wondered what he ought to do. Call a doctor? But after all Homer had been awake most of the night and was exhausted. The doctor would shake him a few times and he would yawn and ask what the matter was. He could try to wake him up himself. But hadn't he been enough of a pest already? He was so much better off asleep, even if it was a case of "Uterine Flight."

What a perfect escape the return to the womb was. Better by far than Religion or Art or the South Sea Islands. It was so snug and warm there, and the feeding was automatic. Everything perfect in that hotel. No wonder the memory of those accommodations lingered in the blood and nerves of everyone. It was dark, yes, but what a warm, rich darkness. The grave wasn't in it. No wonder one fought so desperately against being evicted when the nine months' lease was up.

Tod crushed his cigarette. He was hungry and wanted his dinner, also a double Scotch and soda. After he had eaten, he would come back and see how Homer was. If he was still asleep, he would try to wake him. If he couldn't, he might call a doctor.

He took another look at him, then tiptoed out of the cottage, shutting the door carefully.

26

Tod didn't go directly to dinner. He went first to Hodge's saddlery store thinking he might be able to find out something about Earle and through him about Faye. Calvin was standing there with a wrinkled Indian who had long hair held by a bead strap around his forehead. Hanging over the Indian's chest was a sandwich board that read—

TUTTLE'S TRADING POST
for
 GENUINE RELICS OF THE OLD WEST
*Beads, Silver, Jewelry, Moccasins,
 Dolls, Toys, Rare Books, Postcards.*
 TAKE BACK A SOUVENIR
from
 TUTTLE'S TRADING POST

Calvin was always friendly.

"'Lo, thar," he called out, when Tod came up.

"Meet the chief," he added, grinning. "Chief Kiss-My-Towkus."

The Indian laughed heartily at the joke.

"You gotta live," he said.

"Earle been around today?" Tod asked.

"Yop. Went by an hour ago."

"We were at a party last night and I . . ."

Calvin broke in by hitting his thigh a wallop with the flat of his palm.

"That must've been some shindig to hear Earle tell it. Eh, Skookum?"

"Vas you dere, Sharley?" the Indian agreed, showing the black inside of his mouth, purple tongue and broken orange teeth.

"I heard there was a fight after I left."

Calvin smacked his thigh again.

"Sure musta been. Earle get himself two black eyes, lulus."

"That's what comes of palling up with a dirty greaser," said the Indian excitedly.

He and Calvin got into a long argument about Mexicans. The Indian said that they were all bad. Calvin claimed he had known quite a few good ones in his time. When the Indian cited the case of the Hermanos brothers who had killed a lonely prospector for half a dollar, Calvin countered with a long tale about a man called Tomas Lopez who shared his last pint of water with a stranger when they both were lost in the desert.

Tod tried to get the conversation back to what interested him.

"Mexicans are very good with women," he said.

"Better with horses," said the Indian. "I remember one time along the Brazos,⁷ I . . ."

Tod tried again.

"They fought over Earle's girl, didn't they?"

"Not to hear him tell it," Calvin said. "He claims it was dough—claims the Mex robbed him while he was sleeping."

"The dirty, thievin' rat," said the Indian, spitting.

"He claims he's all washed up with that bitch," Calvin went on. "Yes, siree, that's his story, to hear him tell it."

Tod had enough.

"So long," he said.

"Glad to meet you," said the Indian.

"Don't take any wooden nickels,"⁸ Calvin shouted after him.

7. River running through Texas.

8. I.e., look out for yourself. During the Great Depression, some banks issued wooden nickels as emergency currency, but most were produced as

promotional tokens; many featured variations on the Indian image featured on the "buffalo nickel" issued by the U.S. Mint from 1913 to 1938.

Tod wondered if she had gone with Miguel. He thought it more likely that she would go back to work for Mrs. Jennings. But either way she would come out all right. Nothing could hurt her. She was like a cork. No matter how rough the sea got, she would go dancing over the same waves that sank iron ships and tore away piers of reinforced concrete. He pictured her riding a tremendous sea. Wave after wave reared its ton on ton of solid water and crashed down only to have her spin gaily away.

When he arrived at Musso Frank's restaurant, he ordered a steak and a double Scotch. The drink came first and he sipped it with his inner eye still on the spinning cork.

It was a very pretty cork, gilt with a glittering fragment of mirror set in its top. The sea in which it danced was beautiful, green in the trough of the waves and silver at their tips. But for all their moon-driven power, they could do no more than net the bright cork for a moment in a spume of intricate lace. Finally it was set down on a strange shore where a savage with pork-sausage fingers and a pimped butt picked it up and hugged it to his sagging belly. Tod recognized the fortunate man; he was one of Mrs. Jennings's customers.

The waiter brought his order and paused with bent back for him to comment. In vain. Tod was far too busy to inspect the steak.

"Satisfactory, sir?" asked the waiter.

Tod waved him away with a gesture more often used on flies. The waiter disappeared. Tod tried the same gesture on what he felt, but the driving itch refused to go. If only he had the courage to wait for her some night and hit her with a bottle and rape her.

He knew what it would be like, lurking in the dark in a vacant lot, waiting for her. Whatever that bird was that sang at night in California would be bursting its heart in theatrical runs and quavers and the chill night air would smell of spice pink. She would drive up, turn the motor off, look up at the stars, so that her breasts reared, then toss her head and sigh. She would throw the ignition keys into her purse and snap it shut, then get out of the car. The long step she took would make her tight dress pull up so that an inch of glowing flesh would show above her black stocking. As he approached carefully, she would be pulling her dress down, smoothing it nicely over her hips.

"Faye, Faye, just a minute," he would call.

"Why, Tod, hello."

She would hold her hand out to him at the end of her long arm that swooped so gracefully to join her curving shoulder.

"You scared me!"

She would look like a deer on the edge of the road when a truck comes unexpectedly around a bend.

He could feel the cold bottle he held behind his back and the forward step he would take to bring . . .

"Is there anything wrong with it, sir?"

The fly-like waiter had come back. Tod waved at him, but this time the man continued to hover.

"Perhaps you would like me to take it back, sir?"

"No, no."

"Thank you, sir."

But he didn't leave. He waited to make sure that the customer was really going to eat. Tod picked up his knife and cut a piece. Not until he had also put some boiled potato in his mouth did the man leave.

Tod tried to start the rape going again, but he couldn't feel the bottle as he raised it to strike. He had to give it up.

The waiter came back. Tod looked at the steak. It was a very good one, but he wasn't hungry any more.

"A check, please."

"No dessert, sir?"

"No, thank you, just a check."

"Check it is, sir," the man said brightly as he fumbled for his pad and pencil.

27

When Tod reached the street, he saw a dozen great violet shafts of light moving across the evening sky in wide crazy sweeps. Whenever one of the fiery columns reached the lowest point of its arc, it lit for a moment rose-colored domes and delicate minarets of Kahn's Persian Palace Theatre.⁹ The purpose of this display was to signal the world premiere of a new picture.

Turning his back on the searchlights, he started in the opposite direction, toward Homer's place. Before he had gone very far, he saw a clock that read a quarter past six and changed his mind about going back just yet. He might as well let the poor fellow sleep for another hour and kill some time by looking at the crowds.

When still a block from the theatre, he saw an enormous electric sign that hung over the middle of the street. In letters ten feet high he read that—

"MR. KAHN A PLEASURE DOME DECREED"

Although it was still several hours before the celebrities would arrive, thousands of people had already gathered. They stood facing the theatre with their backs toward the gutter in a thick line hundreds of feet long. A big squad of policemen was trying to keep a lane open between the front rank of the crowd and the façade of the theatre.

Tod entered the lane while the policeman guarding it was busy with a woman whose parcel had torn open, dropping oranges all over the place. Another policeman shouted for him to get the hell across the street, but he took a chance and kept going. They had enough to do without chasing him. He noticed how worried they looked and how careful they tried to be. If they had to arrest someone, they joked good-naturedly with the culprit, making light of it until they got him around the corner, then they whaled him with their clubs. Only so long as the man was actually part of the crowd did they have to be gentle.

Tod had walked only a short distance along the narrow lane when he began to get frightened. People shouted, commenting on his hat, his carriage, and his clothing. There was a continuous roar of catcalls, laughter and yells,

9. Modeled on Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, site of many movie premieres, which opened in 1927. The theater's electric sign echoes the opening line of "Kubla Khan"

(1816)—"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure dome decree"—by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).

pierced occasionally by a scream. The scream was usually followed by a sudden movement in the dense mass and part of it would surge forward wherever the police line was weakest. As soon as that part was rammed back, the bulge would pop out somewhere else.

The police force would have to be doubled when the stars started to arrive. At the sight of their heroes and heroines, the crowd would turn demoniac. Some little gesture, either too pleasing or too offensive, would start it moving and then nothing but machine guns would stop it. Individually the purpose of its members might simply be to get a souvenir, but collectively it would grab and rend.

A young man with a portable microphone was describing the scene. His rapid, hysterical voice was like that of a revivalist preacher whipping his congregation toward the ecstasy of fits.

“What a crowd, folks! What a crowd! There must be ten thousand excited, screaming fans outside Kahn’s Persian tonight. The police can’t hold them. Here, listen to them roar.”

He held the microphone out and those near it obligingly roared for him.

“Did you hear it? It’s a bedlam, folks. A veritable bedlam! What excitement! Of all the premieres I’ve attended, this is the most . . . the most . . . stupendous, folks. Can the police hold them? Can they? It doesn’t look so, folks . . .”

Another squad of police came charging up. The sergeant pleaded with the announcer to stand further back so the people couldn’t hear him. His men threw themselves at the crowd. It allowed itself to be hustled and shoved out of habit and because it lacked an objective. It tolerated the police, just as a bull elephant does when he allows a small boy to drive him with a light stick.

Tod could see very few people who looked tough, nor could he see any working men. The crowd was made up of the lower middle classes, every other person one of his torch-bearers.

Just as he came near the end of the lane, it closed in front of him with a heave, and he had to fight his way through. Someone knocked his hat off and when he stooped to pick it up, someone kicked him. He whirled around angrily and found himself surrounded by people who were laughing at him. He knew enough to laugh with them. The crowd became sympathetic. A stout woman slapped him on the back, while a man handed him his hat, first brushing it carefully with his sleeve. Still another man shouted for a way to be cleared.

By a great deal of pushing and squirming, always trying to look as though he were enjoying himself, Tod finally managed to break into the open. After rearranging his clothes, he went over to a parking lot and sat down on the low retaining wall that ran along the front of it.

New groups, whole families, kept arriving. He could see a change come over them as soon as they had become part of the crowd. Until they reached the line, they looked diffident, almost furtive, but the moment they had become part of it, they turned arrogant and pugnacious. It was a mistake to think them harmless curiosity seekers. They were savage and bitter, especially the middle-aged and the old, and had been made so by boredom and disappointment.

All their lives they had slaved at some kind of dull, heavy labor, behind desks and counters, in the fields and at tedious machines of all sorts, saving

their pennies and dreaming of the leisure that would be theirs when they had enough. Finally that day came. They could draw a weekly income of ten or fifteen dollars.¹ Where else should they go but California, the land of sunshine and oranges?

Once there, they discover that sunshine isn't enough. They get tired of oranges, even of avocado pears and passion fruit. Nothing happens. They don't know what to do with their time. They haven't the mental equipment for leisure, the money nor the physical equipment for pleasure. Did they slave so long just to go to an occasional Iowa picnic? What else is there? They watch the waves come in at Venice.² There wasn't any ocean where most of them came from, but after you've seen one wave, you've seen them all. The same is true of the airplanes at Glendale.³ If only a plane would crash once in a while so that they could watch the passengers being consumed in a "holocaust of flame," as the newspapers put it. But the planes never crash.

Their boredom becomes more and more terrible. They realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, wars. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing.

Tod stood up. During the ten minutes he had been sitting on the wall, the crowd had grown thirty feet and he was afraid that his escape might be cut off if he loitered much longer. He crossed to the other side of the street and started back.

He was trying to figure what to do if he were unable to wake Homer when, suddenly, he saw his head bobbing above the crowd. He hurried toward him. From his appearance, it was evident that there was something definitely wrong.

Homer walked more than ever like a badly made automaton and his features were set in a rigid, mechanical grin. He had his trousers on over his nightgown and part of it hung out of his open fly. In both of his hands were suitcases. With each step, he lurched to one side then the other, using the suitcases for balance weights.

Tod stopped directly in front of him, blocking his way.

"Where're you going?"

"Wayneville," he replied, using an extraordinary amount of jaw movement to get out this single word.

"That's fine. But you can't walk to the station from here. It's in Los Angeles."

Homer tried to get around him, but he caught his arm.

"We'll get a taxi. I'll go with you."

The cabs were all being routed around the block because of the preview. He explained this to Homer and tried to get him to walk to the corner.

"Come on, we're sure to get one on the next street."

1. Equivalent to an annual income of \$15,000–25,000 in present-day U.S. dollars.

2. Beachfront neighborhood of Los Angeles, founded in 1905 as a resort town.

3. Opened in 1922, the Grand Central Airport at Glendale was the first commercial airport in Los Angeles.

Once Tod got him into a cab, he intended to tell the driver to go to the nearest hospital. But Homer wouldn't budge, no matter how hard he yanked and pleaded. People stopped to watch them, others turned their heads curiously. He decided to leave him and get a cab.

"I'll come right back," he said.

He couldn't tell from either Homer's eyes or expression whether he heard, for they both were empty of everything, even annoyance. At the corner he looked around and saw that Homer had started to cross the street, moving blindly. Brakes screeched and twice he was almost run over, but he didn't swerve or hurry. He moved in a straight diagonal. When he reached the other curb, he tried to get on the sidewalk at a point where the crowd was very thick and was shoved violently back. He made another attempt and this time a policeman grabbed him by the back of the neck and hustled him to the end of the line. When the policeman let go of him, he kept on walking as though nothing had happened.

Tod tried to get over to him, but was unable to cross until the traffic lights changed. When he reached the other side, he found Homer sitting on a bench, fifty or sixty feet from the outskirts of the crowd.

He put his arm around Homer's shoulder and suggested that they walk a few blocks further. When Homer didn't answer, he reached over to pick up one of the valises. Homer held on to it.

"I'll carry it for you," he said, tugging gently.

"Thief!"

Before Homer could repeat the shout, he jumped away. It would be extremely embarrassing if Homer shouted thief in front of a cop. He thought of phoning for an ambulance. But then, after all, how could he be sure that Homer was crazy? He was sitting quietly on the bench, minding his own business.

Tod decided to wait, then try again to get him into a cab. The crowd was growing in size all the time, but it would be at least half an hour before it over-ran the bench. Before that happened, he would think of some plan. He moved a short distance away and stood with his back to a store window so that he could watch Homer without attracting attention.

About ten feet from where Homer was sitting grew a large eucalyptus tree and behind the trunk of the tree was a little boy. Tod saw him peer around it with great caution, then suddenly jerk his head back. A minute later he repeated the maneuver. At first Tod thought he was playing hide and seek, then noticed that he had a string in his hand which was attached to an old purse that lay in front of Homer's bench. Every once in a while the child would jerk the string, making the purse hop like a sluggish toad. Its torn lining hung from its iron mouth like a furry tongue and a few uncertain flies hovered over it.

Tod knew the game the child was playing. He used to play it himself when he was small. If Homer reached to pick up the purse, thinking there was money in it, he would yank it away and scream with laughter.

When Tod went over to the tree, he was surprised to discover that it was Adore Loomis, the kid who lived across the street from Homer. Tod tried to chase him, but he dodged around the tree, thumbing his nose. He gave up and went back to his original position. The moment he left, Adore got busy with his purse again. Homer wasn't paying any attention to the child, so Tod decided to let him alone.

Mrs. Loomis must be somewhere in the crowd, he thought. Tonight when she found Adore, she would give him a hiding. He had torn the pocket of his jacket and his Buster Brown collar was smeared with grease.

Adore had a nasty temper. The completeness with which Homer ignored both him and his pocketbook made him frantic. He gave up dancing it at the end of the string and approached the bench on tiptoes, making ferocious faces, yet ready to run at Homer's first move. He stopped when about four feet away and stuck his tongue out. Homer ignored him. He took another step forward and ran through a series of insulting gestures.

If Tod had known that the boy held a stone in his hand, he would have interfered. But he felt sure that Homer wouldn't hurt the child and was waiting to see if he wouldn't move because of his pestering. When Adore raised his arm, it was too late. The stone hit Homer in the face. The boy turned to flee, but tripped and fell. Before he could scramble away, Homer landed on his back with both feet, then jumped again.

Tod yelled for him to stop and tried to yank him away. He shoved Tod and went on using his heels. Tod hit him as hard as he could, first in the belly, then in the face. He ignored the blows and continued to stamp on the boy. Tod hit him again and again, then threw both arms around him and tried to pull him off. He couldn't budge him. He was like a stone column.

The next thing Tod knew, he was torn loose from Homer and sent to his knees by a blow in the back of the head that spun him sideways. The crowd in front of the theatre had charged. He was surrounded by churning legs and feet. He pulled himself erect by grabbing a man's coat, then let himself be carried along backwards in a long, curving swoop. He saw Homer rise above the mass for a moment, shoved against the sky, his jaw hanging as though he wanted to scream but couldn't. A hand reached up and caught him by his open mouth and pulled him forward and down.

There was another dizzy rush. Tod closed his eyes and fought to keep upright. He was jostled about in a hacking cross surf of shoulders and backs, carried rapidly in one direction and then in the opposite. He kept pushing and hitting out at the people around him, trying to face in the direction he was going. Being carried backwards terrified him.

Using the eucalyptus tree as a landmark, he tried to work toward it by slipping sideways against the tide, pushing hard when carried away from it and riding the current when it moved toward his objective. He was within only a few feet of the tree when a sudden, driving rush carried him far past it. He struggled desperately for a moment, then gave up and let himself be swept along. He was the spearhead of a flying wedge when it collided with a mass going in the opposite direction. The impact turned him around. As the two forces ground against each other, he was turned again and again, like a grain between millstones. This didn't stop until he became part of the opposing force. The pressure continued to increase until he thought he must collapse. He was slowly being pushed into the air. Although relief for his cracking ribs could be gotten by continuing to rise, he fought to keep his feet on the ground. Not being able to touch was an even more dreadful sensation than being carried backwards.

There was another rush, shorter this time, and he found himself in a dead spot where the pressure was less and equal. He became conscious of a terrible pain in his left leg, just above the ankle, and tried to work it into a

more comfortable position. He couldn't turn his body, but managed to get his head around. A very skinny boy, wearing a Western Union cap, had his back wedged against his shoulder. The pain continued to grow and his whole leg as high as the groin throbbed. He finally got his left arm free and took the back of the boy's neck in his fingers. He twisted as hard as he could. The boy began to jump up and down in his clothes. He managed to straighten his elbow, by pushing at the back of the boy's head, and so turn half way around and free his leg. The pain didn't grow less.

There was another wild surge forward that ended in another dead spot. He now faced a young girl who was sobbing steadily. Her silk print dress had been torn down the front and her tiny brassiere hung from one strap. He tried by pressing back to give her room, but she moved with him every time he moved. Now and then, she would jerk violently and he wondered if she was going to have a fit. One of her thighs was between his legs. He struggled to get free of her, but she clung to him, moving with him and pressing against him.

She turned her head and said, "Stop, stop," to someone behind her.

He saw what the trouble was. An old man, wearing a Panama hat and horn-rimmed glasses, was hugging her. He had one of his hands inside her dress and was biting her neck.

Tod freed his right arm with a heave, reached over the girl and brought his fist down on the man's head. He couldn't hit very hard but managed to knock the man's hat off, also his glasses. The man tried to bury his face in the girl's shoulder, but Tod grabbed one of his ears and yanked. They started to move again. Tod held on to the ear as long as he could, hoping that it would come away in his hand. The girl managed to twist under his arm. A piece of her dress tore, but she was free of her attacker.

Another spasm passed through the mob and he was carried toward the curb. He fought toward a lamp-post, but he was swept by before he could grasp it. He saw another man catch the girl with the torn dress. She screamed for help. He tried to get to her, but was carried in the opposite direction. This rush also ended in a dead spot. Here his neighbors were all shorter than he was. He turned his head upward toward the sky and tried to pull some fresh air into his aching lungs, but it was all heavily tainted with sweat.

In this part of the mob no one was hysterical. In fact, most of the people seemed to be enjoying themselves. Near him was a stout woman with a man pressing hard against her from in front. His chin was on her shoulder, and his arms were around her. She paid no attention to him and went on talking to the woman at her side.

"The first thing I knew," Tod heard her say, "there was a rush and I was in the middle."

"Yeah. Somebody hollered, 'Here comes Gary Cooper,'⁴ and then wham!"

"That ain't it," said a little man wearing a cloth cap and pullover sweater. "This is a riot you're in."

"Yeah," said a third woman, whose snaky gray hair was hanging over her face and shoulders. "A pervert attacked a child."

"He ought to be lynched."

4. Hollywood star (1901–1961), known for playing incorruptible American heroes; his movies of the 1930s included *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936).

Everybody agreed vehemently.

"I come from St. Louis," announced the stout woman, "and we had one of them pervert fellers in our neighborhood once. He ripped up a girl with a pair of scissors."

"He must have been crazy," said the man in the cap. "What kind of fun is that?"

Everybody laughed. The stout woman spoke to the man who was hugging her.

"Hey, you," she said. "I ain't no pillow."

The man smiled beatifically but didn't move. She laughed, making no effort to get out of his embrace.

"A fresh guy," she said.

The other woman laughed.

"Yeah," she said, "this is a regular free-for-all."

The man in the cap and sweater thought there was another laugh in his comment about the pervert.

"Ripping up a girl with scissors. That's the wrong tool."

He was right. They laughed even louder than the first time.

"You'd a done it different, eh, kid?" said a young man with a kidney-shaped head and waxed mustaches.

The two women laughed. This encouraged the man in the cap and he reached over and pinched the stout woman's friend. She squealed.

"Lay off that," she said good-naturedly.

"I was shoved," he said.

An ambulance siren screamed in the street. Its wailing moan started the crowd moving again and Tod was carried along in a slow, steady push. He closed his eyes and tried to protect his throbbing leg. This time, when the movement ended, he found himself with his back to the theatre wall. He kept his eyes closed and stood on his good leg. After what seemed like hours, the pack began to loosen and move again with a churning motion. It gathered momentum and rushed. He rode it until he was slammed against the base of an iron rail which fenced the driveway of the theatre from the street. He had the wind knocked out of him by the impact, but managed to cling to the rail. He held on desperately, fighting to keep from being sucked back. A woman caught him around the waist and tried to hang on. She was sobbing rhythmically. Tod felt his fingers slipping from the rail and kicked backwards as hard as he could. The woman let go.

Despite the agony in his leg, he was able to think clearly about his picture, "The Burning of Los Angeles." After his quarrel with Faye, he had worked on it continually to escape tormenting himself, and the way to it in his mind had become almost automatic.

As he stood on his good leg, clinging desperately to the iron rail, he could see all the rough charcoal strokes with which he had blocked it out on the big canvas. Across the top, parallel with the frame, he had drawn the burning city, a great bonfire of architectural styles, ranging from Egyptian to Cape Cod colonial.⁵ Through the center, winding from left to right, was a long hill street and down it, spilling into the middle foreground, came the

5. Simple, small, gable-roofed houses modeled after 17th-century New England homes and popular during the Depression.

mob carrying baseball bats and torches. For the faces of its members, he was using the innumerable sketches he had made of the people who come to California to die; the cultists of all sorts, economic as well as religious, the wave, airplane, funeral and preview watchers—all those poor devils who can only be stirred by the promise of miracles and then only to violence. A super “Dr. Know-All Pierce-All” had made the necessary promise and they were marching behind his banner in a great united front of screwballs and screwboxes to purify the land. No longer bored, they sang and danced joyously in the red light of the flames.

In the lower foreground, men and women fled wildly before the vanguard of the crusading mob. Among them were Faye, Harry, Homer, Claude and himself. Faye ran proudly, throwing her knees high. Harry stumbled along behind her, holding on to his beloved derby hat with both hands. Homer seemed to be falling out of the canvas, his face half-asleep, his big hands clawing the air in anguished pantomime. Claude turned his head as he ran to thumb his nose at his pursuers. Tod himself picked up a small stone to throw before continuing his flight.

He had almost forgotten both his leg and his predicament, and to make his escape still more complete he stood on a chair and worked at the flames in an upper corner of the canvas, modeling the tongues of fire so that they licked even more avidly at a corinthian column that held up the palmleaf roof of a nutburger stand.

He had finished one flame and was starting on another when he was brought back by someone shouting in his ear. He opened his eyes and saw a policeman trying to reach him from behind the rail to which he was clinging. He let go with his left hand and raised his arm. The policeman caught him by the wrist, but couldn't lift him. Tod was afraid to let go until another man came to aid the policeman and caught him by the back of his jacket. He let go of the rail and they hauled him up and over it.

When they saw that he couldn't stand, they let him down easily to the ground. He was in the theatre driveway. On the curb next to him sat a woman crying into her skirt. Along the wall were groups of other disheveled people. At the end of the driveway was an ambulance. A policeman asked him if he wanted to go to the hospital. He shook his head no. He then offered him a lift home. Tod had the presence of mind to give Claude's address.

He was carried through the exit to the back street and lifted into a police car. The siren began to scream and at first he thought he was making the noise himself. He felt his lips with his hands. They were clamped tight. He knew then it was the siren. For some reason this made him laugh and he began to imitate the siren as loud as he could.

RICHARD WRIGHT

1908–1960

With the 1940 publication of *Native Son* by the Book-of-the-Month Club, Richard Wright became the most famous African American author of his time. *Native Son* is an uncompromising study of an African American underclass youth who is goaded to brutal violence by the oppression, hatred, and incomprehension of the white world. The sensational story disregarded conventional wisdom about how black authors should approach a white reading audience. Bigger Thomas, the main character, embodied everything that such an audience might fear and detest, but by situating the point of view within this character's consciousness Wright forced readers to see the world through Bigger's eyes and thus to understand him. The novel was structured like a hard-boiled detective story, contained layers of literary allusion and symbol, and combined Marxist social analysis with existential philosophy—in brief, it was at once a powerful social statement and a complex work of literary art.

Wright was born near Natchez, Mississippi. When he was five, his father abandoned the family—Wright, his younger brother, and his mother—and for the next ten years Wright was raised by a series of relatives in Mississippi. By 1925, when he went to Memphis on his own, he had moved twenty times. Extreme poverty, a constantly interrupted education that never went beyond junior high school, and the religious fundamentalism of his grandmother, along with the constant experiences of humiliation and hatred in a racially segregated South: all these contributed to Wright's growing sense that the hidden anger of black people was justified and that only by acknowledging and expressing it could they grapple with it. The title of *Native Son* made the point that the United States is as much the country of black as of white; the story showed that blacks had been deprived of their inheritance.

Two years after moving to Memphis, Wright went north to Chicago. There he took a series of odd jobs and then joined the WPA Writers' Project (a government project of the Depression years to help support authors) as a writer of guidebooks and as a director of the Federal Negro Theater. He began to study Marxist theory, contributing poetry to leftist literary magazines and joining the Communist Party in 1932. By 1935 he had become the center of a group of African American Chicago writers and had started to write fiction. He was influenced by the naturalistic fiction of James T. Farrell, whose study of sociology at the University of Chicago had helped give structure to his popular Studs Lonigan trilogy about working people of Irish descent.

Wright moved to New York in 1937 to write for the New York Writers' Project and as a reporter on the communist *Daily Worker*. In 1938 he published *Uncle Tom's Children*, a collection of four short stories. (An earlier novel, *Lawd Today*, was not published until after his death.) Set in the rural South, the stories center on racial conflict and physical violence. Wright's theme of the devastating effect of relentless, institutionalized hatred and humiliation on the black male's psyche was paramount in all of them.

After *Native Son*, Wright turned to autobiographical writings that eventuated in *Black Boy*, published in 1945. Many consider this to be his best book, and such writers as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin took it as a model for their own work in the 1950s and 1960s. A communist activist in the early 1940s, Wright became increasingly disillusioned and broke completely with the party in 1944. Visiting France in 1946, he was warmly received by leading writers and philosophers. In 1947 he settled

permanently in that country, where he was perceived from the first as one of the important experimental modernist prose writers and was ranked on a level with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. An existential novel, *The Outsider* (1953), was followed by five more books: two novels and three collections of lectures, travel writings, and sociopolitical commentary. The collection *Eight Men*, from which the story printed here is taken, was the last literary project he worked on, and it appeared the year after his death.

Wright's immersion in Marxist doctrine gave him tools for representing society as divided into antagonistic classes and run for the benefit of the few. But in each of his works he portrays individuals who, no matter how they are deformed and brutalized by oppression and exploitation, retain a transcendent spark of selfhood. Ultimately, it is in this spark that Wright put his faith. His writing from first to last affirmed the dignity and humanity of society's outcasts without romanticizing them, and indicted those who had cast them out. As Ralph Ellison expressed it, Wright's example "converted the American Negro impulse toward self-annihilation and 'going underground' into a will to confront the world" and to "throw his findings unashamedly into the guilty conscience of America."

The text was first published in *Harper's Bazaar* (1939) under the title "Almos' a Man." Under its present title it appeared in *Eight Men* (1961), a posthumous collection of Wright's short fiction.

The Man Who Was Almost a Man

Dave struck out across the fields, looking homeward through paling light. What's the use talkin wid em niggers in the field? Anyhow, his mother was putting supper on the table. Them niggers can't understan nothing. One of these days he was going to get a gun and practice shooting, then they couldn't talk to him as though he were a little boy. He slowed, looking at the ground. Shucks, Ah ain scareda them even ef they are biggern me! Aw, Ah know whut Ahma do. Ahm going by ol Joe's sto n git that Sears Roebuck catlog n look at them guns. Mebbe Ma will lemme buy one when she gits mah pay from ol man Hawkins. Ahma beg her t gimme some money. Ahm ol enough to hava gun. Ahm seventeen. Almost a man. He strode, feeling his long loose-jointed limbs. Shucks, a man oughta hava little gun aftah he done worked hard all day.

He came in sight of Joe's store. A yellow lantern glowed on the front porch. He mounted steps and went through the screen door, hearing it bang behind him. There was a strong smell of coal oil and mackerel fish. He felt very confident until he saw fat Joe walk in through the rear door, then his courage began to ooze.

"Howdy, Dave! Whutcha want?"

"How yuh, Mistah Joe? Aw, Ah don wanna buy nothing. Ah jus wanted t see ef yuhd lemme look at tha catlog erwhile."

"Sure! You wanna see it here?"

"Nawsuh. Ah wans t take it home wid me. Ah'll bring it back termorrow when Ah come in from the fiels."

"You plannin on buying something?"

"Yessuh."

"Your ma lettin you have your own money now?"

"Shucks. Mistah Joe, Ahm gittin t be a man like anybody else!"

Joe laughed and wiped his greasy white face with a red bandanna.

"Whut you plannin on buyin?"

Dave looked at the floor, scratched his head, scratched his thigh, and smiled. Then he looked up shyly.

"Ah'll tell yuh, Mistah Joe, ef yuh promise yuh won't tell."

"I promise."

"Waal, Ahma buy a gun."

"A gun? What you want with a gun?"

"Ah wanna keep it."

"You ain't nothing but a boy. You don't need a gun."

"Aw, lemme have the catlog, Mistah Joe. Ah'll bring it back."

Joe walked through the rear door. Dave was elated. He looked around at barrels of sugar and flour. He heard Joe coming back. He craned his neck to see if he were bringing the book. Yeah, he's got it. Gawddog, he's got it!

"Here, but be sure you bring it back. It's the only one I got."

"Sho, Mistah Joe."

"Say, if you wanna buy a gun, why don't you buy one from me? I gotta gun to sell."

"Will it shoot?"

"Sure it'll shoot."

"Whut kind is it?"

"Oh, it's kinda old . . . a left-hand Wheeler. A pistol. A big one."

"Is it got bullets in it?"

"It's loaded."

"Kin Ah see it?"

"Where's your money?"

"What yuh wan fer it?"

"I'll let you have it for two dollars."

"Just two dollahs? Shucks, Ah could buy tha when Ah git mah pay."

"I'll have it here when you want it."

"Awright, suh. Ah be in fer it."

He went through the door, hearing it slam again behind him. Ahma git some money from Ma n buy me a gun! Only two dollahs! He tucked the thick catalogue under his arm and hurried.

"Where yuh been, boy?" His mother held a steaming dish of black-eyed peas.

"Aw, Ma, Ah just stopped down the road t talk wid the boys."

"Yuh know bettah t keep suppah waitin."

He sat down, resting the catalogue on the edge of the table.

"Yuh git up from there and git to the well n wash yosef! Ah ain feedin no hogs in mah house!"

She grabbed his shoulder and pushed him. He stumbled out of the room, then came back to get the catalogue.

"Whut this?"

"Aw, Ma, it's jusa catlog."

"Who yuh git it from?"

"From Joe, down at the sto."

“Waal, thas good. We kin use it in the outhouse.”

“Naw, Ma.” He grabbed for it. “Gimme ma catlog, Ma.”

She held onto it and glared at him.

“Quit hollerin at me! Whut’s wrong wid yuh? Yuh crazy?”

“But Ma, please. It ain mine! It’s Joe’s! He tol me t bring it back t im tomorrow.”

She gave up the book. He stumbled down the back steps, hugging the thick book under his arm. When he had splashed water on his face and hands, he groped back to the kitchen and fumbled in a corner for the towel. He bumped into a chair; it clattered to the floor. The catalogue sprawled at his feet. When he had dried his eyes he snatched up the book and held it again under his arm. His mother stood watching him.

“Now, ef yuh gonna act a fool over that ol book, Ah’ll take it n burn it up.”

“Naw, Ma, please.”

“Waal, set down n be still!”

He sat down and drew the oil lamp close. He thumbed page after page, unaware of the food his mother set on the table. His father came in. Then his small brother.

“Whutcha got there, Dave?” his father asked.

“Jusa catlog,” he answered, not looking up.

“Yeah, here they is!” His eyes glowed at blue-and-black revolvers. He glanced up, feeling sudden guilt. His father was watching him. He eased the book under the table and rested it on his knees. After the blessing was asked, he ate. He scooped up peas and swallowed fat meat without chewing. Buttermilk helped to wash it down. He did not want to mention money before his father. He would do much better by cornering his mother when she was alone. He looked at his father uneasily out of the edge of his eye.

“Boy, how come yuh don quit foolin wid tha book n eat yo suppah?”

“Yessuh.”

“How you n ol man Hawkins gitten erlong?”

“Suh?”

“Can’t yuh hear? Why don yuh lissen? Ah ast yu how wuz yuh n ol man Hawkins gittin erlong?”

“Oh, swell, Pa. Ah plows mo lan than anybody over there.”

“Waal, yuh oughta keep yo mind on whut yuh doin.”

“Yessuh.”

He poured his plate full of molasses and sopped it up slowly with a chunk of cornbread. When his father and brother had left the kitchen, he still sat and looked again at the guns in the catalogue, longing to muster courage enough to present his case to his mother. Lawd, ef Ah only had tha pretty one! He could almost feel the slickness of the weapon with his fingers. If he had a gun like that he would polish it and keep it shining so it would never rust. N Ah’d keep it loaded, by Gawd!

“Ma?” His voice was hesitant.

“Hunh?”

“Ol man Hawkins give yuh mah money yit?”

“Yeah, but ain no usa yuh thinking bout throwin nona it erway. Ahm keepin tha money sos yuh kin have cloes t go to school this winter.”

He rose and went to her side with the open catalogue in his palms. She was washing dishes, her head bent low over a pan. Shyly he raised the book. When he spoke, his voice was husky, faint.

"Ma, Gawd knows Ah wans one of these."

"One of whut?" she asked, not raising her eyes.

"One of these," he said again, not daring even to point. She glanced up at the page, then at him with wide eyes.

"Nigger, is yuh gone plumb crazy?"

"Aw, Ma."

"Git outta here! Don yuh talk t me bout no gun! Yuh a fool!"

"Ma, Ah kin buy one fer two dollahs."

"Not ef Ah knows it, yuh ain!"

"But yuh promised me one."

"Ah don care whut Ah promised! Yuh ain nothing but a boy yit!"

"Ma, ef yuh lemme buy one Ah'll *never* ast yuh fer nothing no mo."

"Ah tol yuh t git outta here! Yuh ain gonna toucha penny of tha money fer no gun! Thas how come Ah has Mistah Hawkins t pay yo wages t me, cause Ah knows yuh ain got no sense."

"But, Ma, we needa gun. Pa ain got no gun. We needa gun in the house. Yuh kin never tell whut might happen."

"Now don yuh try to maka fool outta me, boy! Ef we did hava gun, yuh wouldn't have it!"

He laid the catalogue down and slipped his arm around her waist.

"Aw, Ma, Ah done worked hard alla summer n ain ast yuh fer nothin, is Ah, now?"

"Thas whut yuh spouse t do!"

"But Ma, Ah wans a gun. Yuh kin lemme have two dollahs outta mah money. Please, Ma. I kin give it to Pa . . . Please, Ma! Ah loves yuh, Ma."

When she spoke her voice came soft and low.

"What yuh wan wida gun, Dave? Yuh don need no gun. Yuh'll git in trouble. N ef yo pa jus thought Ah let yuh have money t buy a gun he'd hava fit."

"Ah'll hide it, Ma. It ain but two dollahs."

"Lawd, chil, whut's wrong wid yuh?"

"Ain nothing wrong, Ma. Ahm almos a man now. Ah wans a gun."

"Who gonna sell yuh a gun?"

"Ol Joe at the sto."

"N it don cos but two dollahs?"

"Thas all, Ma. Just two dollahs. Please, Ma."

She was stacking the plates away; her hands moved slowly, reflectively. Dave kept an anxious silence. Finally, she turned to him.

"Ah'll let yuh git tha gun ef yuh promise me one thing."

"Whut's tha, Ma?"

"Yuh bring it straight back t me, yuh hear? It be fer Pa."

"Yessum! Lemme go now, Ma."

She stooped, turned slightly to one side, raised the hem of her dress, rolled down the top of her stocking, and came up with a slender wad of bills.

"Here," she said. "Lawd knows yuh don need no gun. But yer pa does. Yuh bring it right back t me, yuh hear? Ahma put it up. Now ef yuh don, Ahma have yuh pa pick yuh so hard yuh won fergit it."

“Yessum.”

He took the money, ran down the steps, and across the yard.

“Dave! Yuuuuuh Daaaaave!”

He heard, but he was not going to stop now. “Naw, Lawd!”

The first movement he made the following morning was to reach under his pillow for the gun. In the gray light of dawn he held it loosely, feeling a sense of power. Could kill a man with a gun like this. Kill anybody, black or white. And if he were holding his gun in his hand, nobody could run over him; they would have to respect him. It was a big gun, with a long barrel and a heavy handle. He raised and lowered it in his hand, marveling at its weight.

He had not come straight home with it as his mother had asked; instead he had stayed out in the fields, holding the weapon in his hand, aiming it now and then at some imaginary foe. But he had not fired it; he had been afraid that his father might hear. Also he was not sure he knew how to fire it.

To avoid surrendering the pistol he had not come into the house until he knew that they were all asleep. When his mother had tiptoed to his bedside late that night and demanded the gun, he had first played possum; then he had told her that the gun was hidden outdoors, that he would bring it to her in the morning. Now he lay turning it slowly in his hands. He broke it, took out the cartridges, felt them, and then put them back.

He slid out of bed, got a long strip of old flannel from a trunk, wrapped the gun in it, and tied it to his naked thigh while it was still loaded. He did not go in to breakfast. Even though it was not yet daylight, he started for Jim Hawkins’ plantation. Just as the sun was rising he reached the barns where the mules and plows were kept.

“Hey! That you, Dave?”

He turned. Jim Hawkins stood eying him suspiciously.

“What’re yuh doing here so early?”

“Ah didn’t know Ah wuz gittin up so early, Mistah Hawkins. Ah wuz fixin t hitch up ol Jenny n take her t the fiels.”

“Good. Since you’re so early, how about plowing that stretch down by the woods?”

“Suits me, Mistah Hawkins.”

“O.K. Go to it!”

He hitched Jenny to a plow and started across the fields. Hot dog! This was just what he wanted. If he could get down by the woods, he could shoot his gun and nobody would hear. He walked behind the plow, hearing the traces creaking, feeling the gun tied tight to his thigh.

When he reached the woods, he plowed two whole rows before he decided to take out the gun. Finally, he stopped, looked in all directions, then untied the gun and held it in his hand. He turned to the mule and smiled.

“Know whut this is, Jenny? Naw, yuh wouldn know! Yuhs jusa ol mule! Anyhow, this is a gun, n it kin shoot, by Gawd!”

He held the gun at arm’s length. Whut t hell, Ahma shoot this thing! He looked at Jenny again.

“Lissen here, Jenny! When Ah pull this ol trigger, Ah don wan yuh t run n acka fool now!”

Jenny stood with head down, her short ears pricked straight. Dave walked off about twenty feet, held the gun far out from him at arm’s length, and

turned his head. Hell, he told himself, Ah ain afraid. The gun felt loose in his fingers; he waved it wildly for a moment. Then he shut his eyes and tightened his forefinger. Bloom! A report half deafened him and he thought his right hand was torn from his arm. He heard Jenny whinnying and galloping over the field, and he found himself on his knees, squeezing his fingers hard between his legs. His hand was numb; he jammed it into his mouth, trying to warm it, trying to stop the pain. The gun lay at his feet. He did not quite know what had happened. He stood up and stared at the gun as though it were a living thing. He gritted his teeth and kicked the gun. Yuh almos broke mah arm! He turned to look for Jenny; she was far over the fields, tossing her head and kicking wildly.

“Hol on there, ol mule!”

When he caught up with her she stood trembling, walling her big white eyes at him. The plow was far away; the traces had broken. Then Dave stopped short, looking, not believing. Jenny was bleeding. Her left side was red and wet with blood. He went closer. Lawd, have mercy! Wondah did Ah shoot this mule? He grabbed for Jenny’s mane. She flinched, snorted, whirled, tossing her head.

“Hol on now! Hol on.”

Then he saw the hole in Jenny’s side, right between the ribs. It was round, wet, red. A crimson stream streaked down the front leg, flowing fast. Good Gawd! Ah wuzn’t shootin at tha mule. He felt panic. He knew he had to stop that blood, or Jenny would bleed to death. He had never seen so much blood in all his life. He chased the mule for a half a mile, trying to catch her. Finally she stopped, breathing hard, stumpy tail half arched. He caught her mane and led her back to where the plow and gun lay. Then he stooped and grabbed handfuls of damp black earth and tried to plug the bullet hole. Jenny shuddered, whinnied, and broke from him.

“Hol on! Hol on now!”

He tried to plug it again, but blood came anyhow. His fingers were hot and sticky. He rubbed dirt into his palms, trying to dry them. Then again he attempted to plug the bullet hole, but Jenny shied away, kicking her heels high. He stood helpless. He had to do something. He ran at Jenny; she dodged him. He watched a red stream of blood flow down Jenny’s leg and form a bright pool at her feet.

“Jenny . . . Jenny,” he called weakly.

His lips trembled. She’s bleeding t death! He looked in the direction of home, wanting to go back, wanting to get help. But he saw the pistol lying in the damp black clay. He had a queer feeling that if he only did something, this would not be; Jenny would not be there bleeding to death.

When he went to her this time, she did not move. She stood with sleepy, dreamy eyes; and when he touched her she gave a low-pitched whinny and knelt to the ground, her front knees slopping in blood.

“Jenny . . . Jenny . . .” he whispered.

For a long time she held her neck erect; then her head sank, slowly. Her ribs swelled with a mighty heave and she went over.

Dave’s stomach felt empty, very empty. He picked up the gun and held it gingerly between his thumb and forefinger. He buried it at the foot of a tree. He took a stick and tried to cover the pool of blood with dirt—but what was the use? There was Jenny lying with her mouth open and her eyes walled and

glassy. He could not tell Jim Hawkins he had shot his mule. But he had to tell something. Yeah, Ah'll tell em Jenny started gittin wil n fell on the joint of the plow. . . . But that would hardly happen to a mule. He walked across the field slowly, head down.

It was sunset. Two of Jim Hawkins' men were over near the edge of the woods digging a hole in which to bury Jenny. Dave was surrounded by a knot of people, all of whom were looking down at the dead mule.

"I don't see how in the world it happened," said Jim Hawkins for the tenth time.

The crowd parted and Dave's mother, father, and small brother pushed into the center.

"Where Dave?" his mother called.

"There he is," said Jim Hawkins.

His mother grabbed him.

"Whut happened, Dave? Whut yuh done?"

"Nothin."

"C mon, boy, talk," his father said.

Dave took a deep breath and told the story he knew nobody believed.

"Waal," he drawled. "Ah brung ol Jenny down here sos Ah could do mah plowin. Ah plowed bout two rows, just like yuh see." He stopped and pointed at the long rows of upturned earth. "Then somethin musta been wrong wid ol Jenny. She wouldn ack right a-tall. She started snortin n kickin her heels. Ah tried t hol her, but she pulled erway, rearin n goin in. Then when the point of the plow was stickin up in the air, she swung erroun n twisted herself back on it . . . She stuck herself n started t bleed. N fo Ah could do anything, she wuz dead."

"Did you ever hear of anything like that in all your life?" asked Jim Hawkins.

There were white and black standing in the crowd. They murmured. Dave's mother came close to him and looked hard into his face. "Tell the truth, Dave," she said.

"Looks like a bullet hole to me," said one man.

"Dave, whut yuh do wid the gun?" his mother asked.

The crowd surged in, looking at him. He jammed his hands into his pockets, shook his head slowly from left to right, and backed away. His eyes were wide and painful.

"Did he hava gun?" asked Jim Hawkins.

"By Gawd, Ah tol yuh tha wu a gun wound," said a man, slapping his thigh.

His father caught his shoulders and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Tell whut happened, yuh rascal! Tell whut . . ."

Dave looked at Jenny's stiff legs and began to cry.

"Whut yuh do wid tha gun?" his mother asked.

"Whut wuz he doin wida gun?" his father asked.

"Come on and tell the truth," said Hawkins. "Ain't nobody going to hurt you . . ."

His mother crowded close to him.

"Did yuh shoot tha mule, Dave?"

Dave cried, seeing blurred white and black faces.

“Ahh ddinn gggo tt sshoooot hher . . . Ah ssswear ffo Gawd Ahh ddin. . . . Ah wuz a-tryin t ssee ef the old gggun would sshoot.”

“Where yuh git the gun from?” his father asked.

“Ah got it from Joe, at the sto.”

“Where yuh git the money?”

“Ma give it t me.”

“He kept worryin me, Bob. Ah had t. Ah tol im t bring the gun right back to me . . . It was fer yuh, the gun.”

“But how yuh happen to shoot that mule?” asked Jim Hawkins.

“Ah wuzn shootin at the mule, Mistah Hawkins. The gun jumped when Ah pulled the trigger . . . N fo Ah knowed anythin Jenny was there a-bleedin.”

Somebody in the crowd laughed. Jim Hawkins walked close to Dave and looked into his face.

“Well, looks like you have bought you a mule, Dave.”

“Ah swear fo Gawd, Ah didn go t kill the mule, Mistah Hawkins!”

“But you killed her!”

All the crowd was laughing now. They stood on tiptoe and poked heads over one another’s shoulders.

“Well, boy, looks like yuh done bought a dead mule! Hahaha!”

“Ain tha ershame.”

“Hohohohoho.”

Dave stood, head down, twisting his feet in the dirt.

“Well, you needn’t worry about it, Bob,” said Jim Hawkins to Dave’s father.

“Just let the boy keep on working and pay me two dollars a month.”

“Whut yuh wan fer yo mule, Mistah Hawkins?”

Jim Hawkins screwed up his eyes.

“Fifty dollars.”

“Whut yuh do wid tha gun?” Dave’s father demanded.

Dave said nothing.

“Yuh wan me t take a tree n beat yuh till yuh talk!”

“Nawsuh!”

“Whut yuh do wid it?”

“Ah throwed it erway.”

“Where?”

“Ah . . . Ah throwed it in the creek.”

“Waal, c mon home. N firs thing in the mawnin git to tha creek n fin tha gun.”

“Yessuh.”

“Whut yuh pay fer it?”

“Two dollahs.”

“Take tha gun n git yo money back n carry it t Mistah Hawkins, yuh hear? N don fergit Ahma lam you black bottom good fer this! Now march yosef on home, suh!”

Dave turned and walked slowly. He heard people laughing. Dave glared, his eyes welling with tears. Hot anger bubbled in him. Then he swallowed and stumbled on.

That night Dave did not sleep. He was glad that he had gotten out of killing the mule so easily, but he was hurt. Something hot seemed to turn over inside him each time he remembered how they had laughed. He tossed on his bed,

feeling his hard pillow. N Pa says he's gonna beat me . . . He remembered other beatings, and his back quivered. Naw, naw, Ah sho don wan im t beat me tha way no mo. Dam em all! Nobody ever gave him anything. All he did was work. They treat me like a mule, n then they beat me. He gritted his teeth. N Ma had t tell on me.

Well, if he had to, he would take old man Hawkins that two dollars. But that meant selling the gun. And he wanted to keep that gun. Fifty dollars for a dead mule.

He turned over, thinking how he had fired the gun. He had an itch to fire it again. Ef other men kin shoota gun, by Gawd, Ah kin! He was still, listening. Mebbe they all sleepin now. The house was still. He heard the soft breathing of his brother. Yes, now! He would go down and get that gun and see if he could fire it! He eased out of bed and slipped into overalls.

The moon was bright. He ran almost all the way to the edge of the woods. He stumbled over the ground, looking for the spot where he had buried the gun. Yeah, here it is. Like a hungry dog scratching for a bone, he pawed it up. He puffed his black cheeks and blew dirt from the trigger and barrel. He broke it and found four cartridges unshot. He looked around; the fields were filled with silence and moonlight. He clutched the gun stiff and hard in his fingers. But, as soon as he wanted to pull the trigger, he shut his eyes and turned his head. Naw, An can't shoot wid mah eyes closed n mah head turned. With effort he held his eyes open; then he squeezed. *Blooom!* He was stiff, not breathing. The gun was still in his hands. Dammit, he'd done it! He fired again. *Bloooooom!* He smiled. *Bloooooom! Bloooooom! Click, click.* There! It was empty. If anybody could shoot a gun, he could. He put the gun into his hip pocket and started across the fields.

When he reached the top of a ridge he stood straight and proud in the moonlight, looking at Jim Hawkins' big white house, feeling the gun sagging in his pocket. Lawd, ef Ah had just one mo bullet Ah'd taka shot at the house. Ah'd like t scare ol man Hawkins jusa little . . . Jusa enough t let im know Dave Saunders is a man.

To his left the road curved, running to the tracks of the Illinois Central. He jerked his head, listening. From far off came a faint *hoof-hoof; hoof-hoof; hoof-hoof*. . . He stood rigid. Two dollahs a mont. Les see now . . . Tha means it'll take bout two years. Shucks! Ah'll be dam!

He started down the road, toward the tracks. Yeah, here she comes! He stood beside the track and held himself stiffly. Here she comes, erroun the ben . . . C mon, yuh slow poke! C mon! He had his hand on his gun; something quivered in his stomach. Then the train thundered past, the gray and brown box cars rumbling and clinking. He gripped the gun tightly; then he jerked his hand out of his pocket. Ah betcha Bill wouldn't do it! Ah betcha. . . The cars slid past, steel grinding upon steel. Ahm ridin yuh ternight, so hep me Gawd! He was hot all over. He hesitated just a moment; then he grabbed, pulled atop of a car, and lay flat. He felt his pocket; the gun was still there. Ahead the long rails were glinting in the moonlight, stretching away, away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man . . .

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For early histories of the period authored by critics who were active in the rise of modernism, see Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return* (1951), *After the Genteel Tradition: American Writers, 1910–1930* (1964), and *A Second Flowering: Works and Days of the Lost Generation* (1973); and Edmund Wilson's *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties* (1952). Other important early surveys include Alfred Kazin's *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (1942);

Frederick J. Hoffman's *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade* (1955); Harold Clurman's *The Fervent Years: The Story of the Group Theatre and the Thirties* (1957); Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900–1954* (1956); Joseph Wood Krutch's *The American Drama Since 1918* (1957); Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* (1961); Louis D. Rubin's *Writers of the Modern South* (1963); Howard Taubman's *The Making of the American Theater* (1965); Warren French's *The Social Novel at the End of an Era* (1966); Brooks Atkinson's *Broadway: Nineteen Hundred to Nineteen Seventy* (1970); Nathan I. Huggins's *Harlem Renaissance* (1971); Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1971); and Kenner's *A Home-made World: The American Modernist Writers* (1975).

General books on literary and cultural history appearing since 1980 include David Levering Lewis's *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1981); Daniel J. Singal's *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South 1919–1945* (1982); Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940* (1986); *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), edited by Houston Baker Jr.; Cecilia Tichi's *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (1987); Joan Shelley Rubin's *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992); Michael North's *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth-Century Literature* (1994); George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1980–1940* (1994); George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995); Cheryl Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995); Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America* (1995); Ann Douglas's *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (1995); Ross Posnock's *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (1998); William J. Maxwell's *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (1999); Christine Stansell's *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (1999); David G. Nicholls's *Conjuring the Folk: Forms of Modernity in African America* (2000); Michael Szalay's *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (2000); Edward Pavlic's *Crossroads Modernism: Descent and Emergence in African-American Literary Culture* (2002); Catherine Turner's *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (2003); Tim Armstrong's *Modernism: A Cultural History* (2005); Daphne Lamothe's *Inventing the New Negro: Narrative, Culture, and Ethnography* (2008); Sarah Wilson's *Melting-Pot Modernism* (2010); Erick King Watts's *Hearing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement* (2012); Jeffrey Hart's *The Living Moment: Modernism in a Broken World* (2012); Pearl James's *The New Death: American Modernism and World War I* (2013); Hazel Hutchison's *The War That Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War* (2015); and Ichiro Takayoshi's *American Writers and the Approach of World War II, 1930–1941* (2015).

Literary Theory and Criticism

For an introduction to the ideas of literary criticism during the period, see Rene Wellek's *A History of Modern Criticism: American Criticism, 1900–*

1950, volume 7 (1987); and Vincent B. Leitch's *American Literary Criticism from the 30s to the 80s* (1988). Gordon Hutner's *American Literature, American Culture* (1998) reprints a number of critical statements from the period. Gerald's Graff's *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987); Lawrence H. Schwartz's *Creating Faulkner's Reputation: The Politics of Modern Literary Criticism* (1988); and Mark Jancovich's *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (1994) analyze aspects of American literary criticism in the period and its aftermath.

Theoretical treatments of modernism (often in international perspectives) include Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986); Ashadur Eyssteinnsson's *The Concept of Modernism* (1991); Joseph N. Riddel's *The Turning Word: American Literary Modernism and Continental Theory* (1996); Leonard Diepeveen's *The Difficulties of Modernism* (2003); Michael Trask's *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (2003); Susan McCabe's *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (2005); Robert Scholes's *Paradox of Modernism* (2006); and John Carlos Rowe's *Afterlives of Modernism: Liberalism, Transnationalism, and Political Critique* (2011).

Criticism of poetry published since 1980 includes M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall's *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (1984); William Drake's *The First Wave: Women Poets in America, 1914–1945* (1987); Albert Gelpi's *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910–1950* (1987); Lisa M. Steinman's *Made in America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets* (1987); *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance* (1989), edited by Maureen Honey; Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (1989); Elisa New's *Fictions of Form in American Poetry* (1993); Frank Lentricchia's *Modernist Quartet* (1994); Elizabeth Gregory's *Quotation and Modern America Poetry: Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads* (1996); Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetries, 1908–1934* (2001); Merrill Cole's *The Other Orpheus: A Poetics of Modern Homosexuality* (2003); Jennifer Ashton's *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (2005); Rachel Potter's *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture, 1900–1930* (2006); Charles Altieri's *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After* (2006); and Joel Nickels's *The Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (2012).

Critical studies of fiction published since 1980 include Hazel V. Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987); Linda Wagner-Martin's *The Modern American Novel, 1914–1945* (1990); J. Gerald Kennedy's *Imagining Paris* (1993); Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929–41* (1993); David Minter's *A Cultural History of the American Novel* (1994); Laura Hapke's *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (1995); Gordon Hutner's *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920–1960* (2009); Lawrence Buell's *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (2014); and David M. Ball's *False Starts: The Rhetoric of Failure and the Making of American Modernism* (2014).

Critical studies of drama published since 1980 include C. W. E. Bigsby's *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, volume 1,

1900–1940 (1985); Ethan Mordden's *The American Theatre* (1981); Brenda Murphy's *American Realism and American Drama, 1880–1940* (1987); David Krasner's *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910–1927* (2002); Julia A. Walker's *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre: Bodies, Voices, Words* (2005); Soyica Diggs Colbert's *The African-American Theatrical Body: Reception, Performance, and the Stage* (2011); and Andrea Most's *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (2013).

AMERICAN LITERATURE 1914–1945

Sherwood Anderson

In addition to works mentioned in the author's headnote, Anderson published *The Modern Writer* (1925); *Sherwood Anderson's Notebook* (1925); *Alice and the Lost Novel* (1929); *Nearer the Grass Roots* (1929); *The American Country Fair* (1930); and *Home Town* (1940). The Library of America published his *Collected Stories* (2012), edited by Charles Baxter. The Norton Critical Edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1996), edited by Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White, includes background materials and critical essays, as does the edition edited by John H. Ferres (1996). White edited a variorum edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1997) as well as *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition* (1969). *The Letters of Sherwood Anderson* (1953) were edited by Howard Mumford Jones and Walter Rideout. See also *Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters* (1984), edited by Charles E. Modlin, and *Letters to Bab: Sherwood Anderson to Marietta D. Finley, 1916–1933* (1985), edited by William A. Sutton. A two-volume biography by Walter Rideout is *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America* (2006–7). For critical commentary see *Sherwood Anderson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1974), edited by Walter Rideout; *New Essays on Winesburg, Ohio* (1990), edited by John W. Crowley; Allen Papinchak's *Sherwood Anderson: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1992); Judy Jo Small's *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Sherwood Anderson* (1994); Ray Lewis White's *Winesburg, Ohio: An Exploration* (1990); and Clarence Lindsay's *Such a Rare Thing: The Art of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio* (2009).

Sterling Brown

Brown's *Collected Poems*, selected by Michael S. Harper (1989, 1996), includes *Southern Road, No Hiding Place* as well as additional individual poems. *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown* (1996) is edited by Mark A. Sanders, and Sanders with John Edgar Tidwell edited *Sterling A. Brown's A Negro Looks at the South* (2007). A special

issue of the journal *Callaloo*, 5 (1982), contains a bibliography by Robert G. O'Meally along with reminiscences and critical assessments by several scholars. Full-length studies are Joanne V. Gabbin's *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (1985), and Mark A. Sanders's *Afro-Modernist Aesthetics and the Poetry of Sterling A. Brown* (1999). There are discussions of Brown in Stephen Henderson's *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (1973); Jean Wagner's *Black Poetry* (1973); Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (1987); Victor Kramer's *The Harlem Renaissance Reconsidered* (1987); and Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery* (1989). *After Winter: The Art and Life of Sterling A. Brown* (2009), edited by Tidwell and Steven C. Tracy, includes a wide selection of critical essays.

Willa Cather

Cather's volume of verse, *April Twilights* (1903; rev. 1923; reissued with an introduction by Bernice Slote, 1990), and her collection of essays, *Not under Forty* (1936), supplement the standard edition of her fiction, *The Novels and Stories of Willa Cather* (1937–41), and the scholarly editions (1992–2015) under the general editorship of Guy Reynolds. Her stories, novels, poems, and essays were published in three volumes by the Library of America with notes by Sharon O'Brien (1987, 1990, 1992). *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (2013) was edited by Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout. Other sources include *Willa Cather on Writing* (1949); *Writings from Willa Cather's Campus Years* (1950), edited by James Shively; and *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements* (1967), edited by Bernice Slote. William M. Curtin collected articles and reviews in the two-volume *The World and the Parish* (1970). Personal memoirs include Edith Lewis's *Willa Cather Living* (1953, 2000), and Elizabeth Sergeant's *Willa Cather: A Memoir* (1953, 1992). Janis P. Stout's *A Calendar of the Let-*

ters of *Willa Cather* (2002), and the biography *Willa Cather: The Writer and Her World* (2000) are worthwhile. Phyllis C. Robinson's *Willa: The Life of Willa Cather* (1982) is a full-length biography, as is James Woodress's *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (1987). Sharon O'Brien's *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (1987) concentrates on Cather's early years.

Critical studies of Cather are David Stouck's *Willa Cather's Imagination* (1975); Marilyn Arnold's *Willa Cather's Short Fiction* (1984) and *Willa Cather: A Reference Guide* (1986); Susan J. Rosowski's *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (1986); Sally P. Harvey's *Redefining the American Dream: The Novels of Willa Cather* (1995); Joseph R. Urgo's *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* (1995); Guy Reynolds's *Willa Cather in Context* (1996); O'Brien's *New Essays on My Antonia* (1999); Ann Romines's *Willa Cather's Southern Connection* (2000); Joan Acoella's *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism* (2000); and David Porter's *On the Divide: The Many Lives of Willa Cather* (2008) on her relationship to the literary marketplace. Janis P. Stout edited *Willa Cather and Material Culture: Real-World Writing and Writing the Real World* (2005). Also useful is *Violence, the Arts, and Willa Cather* (2007), edited by Joseph R. Urgo and Merrill Maguire Skaggs.

Hart Crane

Langdon Hammer edited *Hart Crane: Complete Poems and Selected Letters* (2006) for the Library of America. Crane's *Collected Poems*, edited by his friend Waldo Frank, appeared in 1933. Lawrence Kramer edited *The Bridge: An Annotated Edition* (2011). *Correspondence between Hart Crane and Waldo Frank* (1998) was edited by Steve H. Cook. Other sources of primary and bibliographical material are *My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane* (1997), edited by Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber; *Hart Crane: An Annotated Critical Bibliography* (1970), edited by Joseph Schwartz; and *Hart Crane: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1972), edited by Joseph Schwartz and Robert C. Schweik. Gary Lane compiled *A Concordance to the Poems of Hart Crane* (1972). Biographies of Crane are John Unter-ecker's *Voyager: A Life of Hart Crane* (1969); Paul Mariani's *The Broken Tower: A Life of Hart Crane* (2000); and Clive Fisher's *Hart Crane: A Life* (2002).

Useful earlier studies are R. W. B. Lewis's *The Poetry of Hart Crane* (1967); Monroe K. Spears's *Hart Crane* (1965); and Huncie Voelcker's *The Hart Crane Voyages* (1967). See also Richard P. Sugg's *Hart Crane's "The Bridge"* (1976); Helge Norman Nilsen's *Hart Crane's Divided Vision: An Analysis of "The Bridge"* (1980); Edward Brunner's *Hart Crane and the*

Making of "The Bridge" (1984); Paul Giles's *Hart Crane: The Contexts of The Bridge* (1986); Thomas E. Yingling's *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text* (1990); Brian M. Reed's *Hart Crane: After His Lights* (2006); Daniel Gabriel's *Hart Crane and the Modernist Epic: Canon and Genre Formation in Crane, Pound, Eliot and Williams* (2007); and John T. Irwin, *Hart Crane's Poetry: "Appollinaire Lived in Paris, I Live in Cleveland, Ohio"* (2011).

Countee Cullen

The Library of America issued Cullen's *Collected Poems* (2013), edited by Major Jackson. Cullen's groundbreaking anthology of 1927, *Caroling Dusk*, was reissued in 1993. His poetry volume, *Color*, originally published in 1925, was also reissued in 1993. *My Soul's High Song*, a collection of his writings edited by Gerald Early, appeared in 1991. *And Bid Him Sing: A Biography of Countée Cullen*, by Charles Molesworth, appeared in 2012. Earlier work of interest includes Helen J. Dinger's *A Study of Countee Cullen* (1953); Margaret Perry's *A Bio-Bibliography of Countee P. Cullen* (1969); Blanche E. Ferguson's *Countee Cullen and the Negro Renaissance* (1966); and Alan R. Shucard's *Countee Cullen* (1984).

E. E. Cummings

Complete Poems 1904–62, edited by George J. Firmage, was published in 1991. Firmage also edited *Three Plays and a Ballet* (1967). Cummings's prose fiction includes *The Enormous Room* (1922) and *EIMI* (1933). *E. E. Cummings: A Miscellany Revised* (1965), edited by Firmage, contains previously uncollected short prose pieces. *Six Nonlectures* (1953) consists of the talks that Cummings delivered at Harvard in the same year. A gathering of works is *Another E. E. Cummings* (1999), edited by Richard Kostreanetz. *Selected Letters of E. E. Cummings* (1969) was edited by F. W. Dupee and George Stade. Firmage edited *E. E. Cummings: A Bibliography* (1960). Barry Ahearn edited *The Correspondence of Ezra Pound and E. E. Cummings* (1996).

Several of Cummings's earlier works have been reedited by Firmage in the Cummings Typescript Editions. These include *Tulips & Chimneys* (1976); *No Thanks* (1978); *The Enormous Room*, with illustrations by Cummings (1978); *ViVa* (1979); *XAIPE* (1979); and *Etcetera*, the unpublished poems (1983).

Biographies are Richard S. Kennedy's *Dreams in the Mirror* (1979, 1994) and Susan Cheever's *E. E. Cummings: A Life* (2014). Early studies include Norman Friedman's *E. E. Cummings: The Growth of a Writer* (1964); Robert E. Wegner's *The Poetry and Prose of E. E. Cummings* (1965); and Rushworth Kidder's *E. E. Cummings, An Introduction to the*

Poetry (1979). See also Cary Lane's *I Am: A Study of E. E. Cummings' Poems* (1976), and Richard S. Kennedy's *E. E. Cummings Revisited* (1994). Norman Friedman edited *E. E. Cummings: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1972) and authored *(Re)Valuing Cummings: Further Essays on the Poet* (1996). David G. Farley's *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (2010) compares Cummings and Ezra Pound.

Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)

H.D.'s poetry through 1944 has been collected and edited by Louis L. Martz in *Collected Poems 1912–1944* (1983). *Collected Poems of H.D.* was published in 1925. Subsequent volumes of poetry include *Red Rose for Bronze* (1931); the trilogy of war poems *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), *Tribute to the Angels* (1945), and *The Flowering of the Rod* (1946); the dramatic monologue *Helen in Egypt* (1961); the major collection of her late poems, *Hermetic Definition* (1972); and the long poem *Vale Ave* (1992). H.D.'s other book-length verse dramas are *Hippolytus Temporalizes* (1927) and the translation of *Euripides' Ion* (1937). *Palimpsest* (1926), *Hadylus* (1928), *Bid Me to Live* (1961), *HERmione* (1981), and *Asphodel* (1992), edited by Robert Spoo, compose her major prose fiction. *By Avon River* (1949) celebrates Shakespeare in prose and verse. *Tribute to Freud* (1956) is her account of her psychoanalysis by Freud. Also important are two autobiographical works: *End to Torment* (1979) and *The Gift* (1982, complete edition 1998). Michael Boughn compiled *H.D.: A Bibliography, 1905–1990* (1993). *Richard Aldington and H.D.: The Early Years in Letters* (1992), edited by Caroline Zilboorg, collects correspondence. Zilboorg also edited a scholarly edition of *Bid Me to Live* (2012).

Barbara Guest's *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (1984) is a biography; Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle* (1986); Susan S. Friedman's *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (1981); and Janice S. Robinson's *H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet* (1982) combine biography and literary analysis. Among critical books are Gary Burnett's *H. D.: Between Image and Epic, The Mysteries of Her Poetics* (1990); Friedman's *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, and H.D.'s Fiction* (1990); Eileen Gregory's *H.D. and Hellenism* (1997); Diana Collocott's *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism* (1999); Georgia Taylor's *H.D. and the Public Sphere of Modernist Women Writers 1913–1946* (2001); Adalaide Morris's *How to Live/What to Do: H.D.'s Cultural Poetics* (2003); and Annette Debo's *The American H.D.* (2012). Nephie J. Christodoulides and Polina Mackay edited *The Cambridge Companion to H. D.* (2011).

John Dos Passos

The Library of America reissued U.S.A. in a single volume (1997), followed by *Travel Books and Other Writings, 1916–1941* (2003) and *Novels, 1920–1925* (2003). John Rohrkemper's *John Dos Passos, A Reference Guide* appeared in 1980. Two biographies are Virginia Spencer Carr's *Dos Passos: A Life* (1984) and Townsend Ludington's *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey* (1980). *Dos Passos: A Collection of Critical Essays* was edited by Andrew Hook in 1974 and *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Barry Maine, appeared in 1988 and was reissued in 1997. Useful books include Linda W. Wagner's *Dos Passos: The Artist as American* (1979); Robert C. Rosen's *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer* (1981); Donald Pizer's *Dos Passos' U.S.A.: A Critical Study* (1990); Janet Casey's *Dos Passos and the Ideology of the Feminine* (1998); and Seth Moglen's *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism* (2007).

T. S. Eliot

Eliot's poetic works have been collected in *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (1963) and *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (1969). *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917* (1997), edited by Christopher Ricks, contains early, previously unpublished poetry. The indispensable manuscript to *The Waste Land* is in *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* (1971), edited by Valerie Eliot. Michael North edited a Norton Critical Edition of *The Waste Land* (2001), and Lawrence Rainey edited *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose* (2005). Important critical writings include *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *Poetry and Drama* (1951), *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1953), *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), and *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (1965). Three volumes of social commentary are *After Strange Gods* (1934), *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), and *Notes toward the Definition of Culture* (1948). Valerie Eliot's edition of *The Letters of T. S. Eliot* (1988–2015) has reached five volumes, up to 1933. J. L. Dawson edited *Concordance to the Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (1995). Good biographies are Peter Ackroyd's *T. S. Eliot: A Life* (1984); Lyndall Gordon's *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (1998, 2000), an updating of her earlier biographies; James E. Miller Jr.'s *T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888–1922* (2005); and Robert Crawford's *Young Eliot: A Biography* (2015).

Influential earlier studies of Eliot include F. O. Matthiessen's *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (rev. 1947); Helen Gardner's *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (1950); Hugh Kenner's *The*

Invisible Poet (1959), Northrop Frye's *T. S. Eliot* (1963); and Stephen Spender's *T. S. Eliot* (1976).

Among numerous critical studies are Helen Gardner's *The Composition of Four Quartets* (1978); Derek Traversi's *T. S. Eliot: The Longer Poems* (1976); Louis Menand's *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context* (1987); Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley's *Reading "The Waste Land": Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation* (1990); Brooker's *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (1994); A. David Moody's *Thomas Stearns Eliot, Poet* (1994); Anthony Julius's *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (1996); Ronald Schuchard's *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (2001); David Chintz's *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2003); and Craig Raine's *T. S. Eliot* (2006). Moody also edited the useful *Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot* (1994). For collections of critical essays about Eliot, see *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Criticism* (1974), edited by Linda W. Wagner (1974); *T. S. Eliot: The Modernist in History* (1991), edited by Ronald Bush; and *Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T. S. Eliot* (2004), edited by Cassandra Laity and Nancy K. Gish. Gareth Reeves's *T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"* (1994) is a comprehensive introduction to the poem.

Donald C. Gallup compiled the standard bibliography, *T. S. Eliot: A Bibliography* (rev. 1969).

William Faulkner

The Library of America issued Faulkner's novels in four volumes: 1930–1935 (1985), 1936–1940 (1990), 1942–1954 (1994), and 1957–1962 (1999). In addition to the volumes mentioned in the author's headnote are *Early Prose and Poetry* (1962), edited by Carvel Collins; *Dr. Martino and Other Stories* (1934); *Pylon* (1935); *The Unvanquished* (1938); *Intruder in the Dust* (1948); *Knight's Gambit* (1949); *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (1950); *Requiem for a Nun* (1951); *Notes on a Hornet* (1951); *Big Woods* (1955); and *Essays, Speeches, and Public Letters* (rev. 2004), edited by James B. Meriwether. Transcripts of discussions and interviews with Faulkner include *Faulkner at Nagano* (1956), edited by Robert A. Jelliffe; *Faulkner in the University* (1959), edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner; *Faulkner at West Point* (1964), edited by Joseph L. Fant and Robert Ashley (1964); and *The Lion in the Garden* (1968), edited by Meriwether and Michael Millgate. Letters are collected in *The Faulkner-Cowley File* (1961), edited by Malcolm Cowley (1961), and *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (1977), edited by Joseph L. Blotner. Noel Polk has produced editions of several Faulkner novels based on a study of the manuscripts. Michael Gorra and Polk have published a Norton Critical Edition

of *The Sound and the Fury* (2014), and Gorra has also published one of *As I Lay Dying* (2010).

Blotner's *Faulkner: A Biography*, 2 volumes (1974) is condensed and updated in *Faulkner* (1984). Two shorter biographies based on Blotner's work are David Minter's *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (1980) and Judith Wittenberg's *Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography* (1979).

Comprehensive guides are Thomas E. Connolly's *Faulkner's World: A Directory of His People and Synopsis of Actions in His Published Works* (1988); and *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia* (1999), edited by Robert W. Hamblin and Charles E. Peek. Teresa Towner's *Cambridge Introduction to William Faulkner* (2008) and John T. Matthews's edited *New Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner* (2015) are useful. Influential early studies include Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963) and Hyatt H. Waggoner's *William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World* (1959). Later studies include John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest, Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (1975); Thadious M. Davis's *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (1983); Eric J. Sundquist's *Faulkner: The House Divided* (1983); Robert Dale Parker's *Faulkner and the Novelistic Imagination* (1985); Warwick Wadlington's *Reading Faulknerian Tragedy* (1987) and *As I Lay Dying: Stories out of Stories* (1992); Minrose C. Gwin's *The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (beyond) Sexual Difference* (1990); André Bleikasten's *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from "The Sound and the Fury" to "Light in August"* (1990); Richard Moreland's *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* (1990); Joel Williamson's *William Faulkner and Southern History* (1993); Diane Roberts's *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (1994); David Minter's *Faulkner's Questioning Narratives: Fiction of His Major Phase, 1929–42* (2001); Philip Weinstein's *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (2010); and Candace Waid's *The Signifying Eye: Seeing Faulkner's Art* (2013).

Edited collections of critical essays include Louis J. Budd and Edwin Cady's *On Faulkner* (1989); Linda Wagner-Martin's *Faulkner: Six Decades of Criticism* (2002); Annette Trefzer's *Global Faulkner: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2006* (2009); and Peter Lurie and Ann J. Abadie's *Faulkner and Film* (2014).

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Fitzgerald's novels are *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender Is the Night* (1934; rev. 1939; rpt. 1953), and the unfinished *The Last Tycoon* (1941). His collections of stories are *Flappers and Philosophers*

(1921), *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), *All the Sad Young Men* (1926), and *Taps at Reveille* (1935). Two recent editions of his fiction are the Library of America's *Novels and Stories 1920–1922* (2000) and Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith Baughman's *Before Gatsby: The First Twenty-Six Stories* (2001). The Cambridge Edition of Fitzgerald's works (1991–2014) includes his novels, story collections, and *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940* (2005). A satirical play, *The Vegetable, or From Presidents to Postman*, was published in 1923. Among collections of Fitzgerald's writings are *F. Scott Fitzgerald in His Own Time: A Miscellany* (1971), edited by Jackson R. Bryer and Bruccoli, and *Afternoon of an Author* (1957), edited by Arthur Mizener. *The Crack-Up* (1945), edited by Edmund Wilson, collects essays, notebook entries, and letters from the 1930s; youthful work is collected in *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Princeton Years; Selected Writings, 1914–1920* (1966), edited by Chip Defaa.

The fullest collection of letters is *Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1980), edited by Bruccoli and Margaret M. Duggan. Other volumes of letters are *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence* (1971), edited by John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer; *As Ever, Scott Fitz* (1972), edited by Bruccoli and Jennifer McCabe Atkinson (letters between Fitzgerald and his literary agent, Harold Ober); and *Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda: The Love Letters of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (2002), edited by Jackson R. Bryer and Cathy W. Barks. Biographies include Bruccoli's *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1981), Scott Donaldson's *Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald, A Biographical Portrait* (1983), James Mellow's *Invented Lives* (1984), Jeffrey Myers's *Scott Fitzgerald* (2000), and Andrew Turnbull's *Scott Fitzgerald* (2001).

Among guides are Robert Gale's *An F. Scott Fitzgerald Encyclopedia* (1998); Linda Pelzer's *Student Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (2001); and Kirk Curnutt's *Cambridge Introduction to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (2007). Critical studies include Milton R. Stern's *The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1970); Brian Way's *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction* (1980); John Kuehl's *F. Scott Fitzgerald, a Study of the Short Fiction* (1991); and Scott Donaldson's *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: Works and Days* (2009). Among collections of critical essays are *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism* (1983), edited by Jackson R. Bryer; *New Essays on "The Great Gatsby"* (1985), edited by Bruccoli; *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (2001), edited by Ruth Prigozy; *F. Scott Fitzgerald in the Twenty-First Century* (2003), edited by Jackson R. Bryer, Prigozy, and Milton B. Stern; and *F. Scott*

Fitzgerald in Context (2013), edited by Bryant Mangum.

Robert Frost

The Poetry of Robert Frost (1969) incorporated *Complete Poems* (1949) and Frost's last volume, *In the Clearing* (1962). The Library of America issued Frost's *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* (1995). Mark Richardson edited *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost* (2007), and Robert Faggen edited *The Notebooks of Robert Frost* (2007). Richardson and Donald Sheehy edited *The Letters of Robert Frost*, volume 1 (2014). Important collections of letters appear in *Selected Letters of Robert Frost* (1964), edited by Lawrence Thompson; *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (1963); and Margaret Anderson's, *Robert Frost and John Bartlett: The Record of a Friendship* (1963). Conversations and interviews with Frost include Edward C. Lathem's *Interviews with Robert Frost* (1966); Reginald L. Cook's *The Dimensions of Robert Frost* (1964); Daniel Smythe's *Robert Frost Speaks* (1954); and Louis Mertin's *Robert Frost: Life and Talks—Walking* (1965).

Lawrance Thompson completed two volumes of the authorized biography: *Robert Frost: The Early Years, 1874–1915* (1966) and *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915–1938* (1970). The third volume, *Robert Frost, the Later Years* (1976), was completed by Richard Winnick, and Lathem produced a shorter version of the biography in *Robert Frost: A Biography* (1981). Other biographies are Jeffrey Meyers's *Robert Frost* (1996) and Jay Parini's *Robert Frost: A Life* (1999). William H. Pritchard in *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* (1984) is interested in the poet's art, not his personal life. James L. Potter's *Robert Frost Handbook* (1980) is a useful guide; Lathem produced a concordance to Frost's poetry (1994).

A brief critical introduction is Mordecai Marcus's *The Poems of Robert Frost* (1991). Other critical studies are Richard Poirier's *Robert Frost, The Work of Knowing* (1977, reissued with new material in 1990); John C. Kemp's *Robert Frost and New England: The Poet as Regionalist* (1979); George Monteiro's *Robert Frost and the New England Renaissance* (1988); Mario D'Avanzo's *A Cloud of Other Poets: Robert Frost and the Romantics* (1990); Judith Oster's *Toward Robert Frost* (1991); George Bagby's *Frost and the Book of Nature* (1993); Mark Richardson's *Robert Frost: The Poet and His Poetics* (1997); and Tim Kendall's *The Art of Robert Frost* (2012). Collections of critical essays include *On Frost* (1991), edited by Edwin H. Cady and Louis J. Budd, and Robert Faggen's *Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost* (2001).

Susan Glaspell

Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays, edited by Linda Ben-Zvi and J. Ellen Gainor, appeared in 2010. *Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, edited by Martha C. Carpenter, was published in 1995. Patricia I. Bryan and Martha C. Carnpenter edited *Her America: "A Jury of Her Peers" and Other Stories* (2010). Two biographies are Arthur E. Waterman's *Susan Glaspell* (1966) and Barbara O. Rajkowska's *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (2000). Critical studies include Marcia Noe's *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland* (1983); Veronica A. Makowsky's *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (1993); Gainor's *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915–48* (2001); and Brenda Murphy's *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (2005). A collection of critical essays is *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction* (1995), edited by Ben-Zvi.

Ernest Hemingway

There is no collected edition of Hemingway's writings. In addition to works mentioned in the author's headnote, his fiction includes *Today Is Friday* (1926) and *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen* (1933). His tribute to Spain, *The Spanish Earth*, and his play *The Fifth Column* appeared in 1938, the latter in a collection *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories*. His journalism has been collected in *The Wild Years* (1962), edited by Gene Z. Hanrahan, and *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades* (1967), edited by William White. His *Complete Poems* (1992) has been edited by Nicholas Gerogiannis. *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway*, vols. 1 and 2 (2011, 2013), have appeared under the general editorship of Sandra Spanier. Audre Hanneman's *Ernest Hemingway: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (1967) is thorough. Scribners published *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (1987).

The authorized biography is Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1969). Jeffrey Meyers's *Hemingway: A Biography* (1985) and Kenneth S. Lynn's *Hemingway* (1987) are important. Michael Reynolds's detailed volumes include *The Young Hemingway* (1986), *Hemingway: The Paris Years* (1989), *Hemingway: The 1930s* (1997), and *Hemingway: The Final Years* (1999). Bernice Kert's *The Hemingway Women* (1983) tells about Hemingway's mother, wives, and lovers; John Raeburn's *Fame Became of Him: Hemingway as Public Writer* (1984) compares the life with the public image.

Paul Smith's *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (1989) is useful; Peter B. Messent's *Ernest Hemingway* (1992)

is a good overview. For collections of critical essays on Hemingway, see *Ernest Hemingway: Eight Decades of Criticism* (2009), edited by Linda Wagner-Martin; *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway* (1996), edited by Scott Donaldson; and *A Historical Guide to Ernest Hemingway* (2001), edited by Wagner-Martin. Specialized studies include Wirt Williams's *The Tragic Art of Ernest Hemingway* (1982); Mark Spilka's *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny* (1990); Robert W. Trogdon's *The Lousy Racket: Hemingway, Scribners, and the Business of Literature* (2007); Amy L. Strong's *Race and Identity in Hemingway's Fiction* (2008); Robert Paul Lamb's *Art Matters: Hemingway, Craft, and the Creation of the Modern Short Story* (2010); and Mark Cirino's *Ernest Hemingway: Thought in Action* (2012).

Langston Hughes

A sixteen-volume standard edition of Hughes's complete works appeared in 2001–3. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel edited *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1994), including *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (1932), *Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play in Verse* (1932), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), and *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of our Times* (1967). His short stories were edited by Akiba Sullivan Harper (1996). Faith Berry edited *Good Morning Revolution: Uncollected Social Protest Writings by Langston Hughes* (1973). *Mule Bone* (1991), which he coauthored with Zora Neale Hurston, has been edited with contextual materials by George Houston Pope and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Hughes's autobiographical volumes include *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956); both were reissued in 1993. Charles H. Nichols edited *Arna Bontemps–Langston Hughes: Letters 1925–1967* (1980), and Rampersad edited his *Selected Letters* (2015).

Early biographies of Hughes include Charlemae Rollins's *Black Troubador: Langston Hughes* (1970), and James S. Haskins's *Always Movin' On: The Life of Langston Hughes* (1976). Faith Berry's *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem* (1983, 1995) contains much about Hughes's life to 1940. Arnold Rampersad's two-volume *Life of Langston Hughes*—volume 1, 1902–1941: *I, Too, Sing America* (1986), and volume 2, 1941–1967: *I Dream a World* (1988)—is definitive.

Thomas A. Mikolyzk compiled *Langston Hughes: A Bio-Bibliography* (1990). Contemporary reviews were collected by Letitia Dace (1997). Full-length critical studies are Onwuchekwa Jemie's *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry* (1976); Richard K. Barksdale's *Langston Hughes: The Poet and His*

Critics (1977); Steven C. Tracy's *Langston Hughes and the Blues* (1988); R. Baxter Miller's *The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes* (1989); W. Jason Miller's *Langston Hughes and American Lynching Culture* (2011); Vera M. Kutzinski's *The Worlds of Langston Hughes: Modernism and Translation in the Americas* (2012); and David E. Chinitz's *Which Sin to Bear? Authenticity and Compromise in Langston Hughes* (2013). Essay collections include *Langston Hughes: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah; *Langston Hughes: The Man, His Art, and His Continuing Influence* (1995), edited by C. James Trotman; and *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes* (2003), edited by Steven C. Tracy. Peter Mandelik and Stanley Schatt's *A Concordance to the Poetry of Langston Hughes* (1975) is useful.

Zora Neale Hurston

Robert Hemenway's *Zora Neale Hurston, A Literary Biography* (1977) initiated the Hurston revival; her work is mostly available in paperback editions. The Library of America published Hurston's writing in two volumes: *Novels and Stories* (1995) and *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (1995); Jean Lee Cole and Charles Mitchell edited *Collected Plays* (2008). Her letters were edited by Carla Kaplan (2002). Biographies include Valerie Boyd's *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (2003) and Virginia Lynn Moylan's *Zora Neale Hurston's Final Decade* (2011). Book-length studies include Karla C. F. Holloway's *The Character of the Word: The Texts of Zora Neale Hurston* (1987); John Lowe's *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston's Cosmic Comedy* (1994); Deborah G. Plant's *Every Tub Must Sit on Its Own Bottom: The Philosophy and Politics of Zora Neale Hurston* (1995); Margaret Genevieve West's *Zora Neale Hurston and American Literary Culture* (2005); and Loyalie King's *Cambridge Introduction to Zora Neale Hurston* (2008). Hurston is linked to other writers in Cheryl A. Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995); Carla Kaplan's *The Erotics of Talk: Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms* (1996); and Trudier Harris's *The Power of the Porch: The Storyteller's Craft in Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan* (1996). Collections of essays are *New Essays on "Their Eyes Were Watching God"* (1990), edited by Michael Awkward; *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah; and *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston* (1998), edited by Gloria L. Cronin.

Nella Larsen

Larsen's complete fiction, including *Quick-*

sand, *Passing*, and three stories, appeared in 1992, edited by Charles R. Larson; this volume was reissued in 2001. The two novels were also made available in 1986, in an edition introduced by Deborah E. McDowell. The Norton Critical Edition of *Passing* (2007), edited by Carla Kaplan, includes critical and historical backgrounds. Biographies are Thadious M. Davis's *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled* (1994), and George Hutchinson's *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (2006). Larsen is also considered in Cheryl A. Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (1995). Three critical studies, each connecting Larsen with other African American writers, are Charles R. Larson's *Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen* (1993); Jacquelyn Y. McLendon's *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen* (1995); and Erika M. Miller's *The Other Reconstruction: Where Violence and Womanhood Meet in the Writings of Wells-Barnett, Grimké, and Larsen* (2000). Pamela L. Caughie discusses *Passing* in "'The Best People': The Making of the Black Bourgeoisie in Writings of the Negro Renaissance," *Modernism/Modernity* 20.3 (2013), 519–537.

Amy Lowell

Lowell's complete poems were published in 1955. Honor Moore edited her *Selected Poems* (2004) for the Library of America. Ferris Greenslet, who was her editor at Houghton Mifflin, has written an excellent family chronicle from the first settler to Amy Lowell, *The Lowells and Their Seven Worlds* (1945). Additional biographical material may be found in S. Foster Damon's *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, with Extracts from Her Correspondence* (1935), and Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell: *Correspondence of a Friendship* (1945), edited by Harley Farnsworth MacNair. Critical estimates of Lowell include Jean Gould's *Amy: The World of Amy Lowell and the Imagist Movement* (1975); Glenn Richard Ruihley's *The Thorn of a Rose: Amy Lowell Reconsidered* (1975); Richard Benvenuto's *Amy Lowell* (1985); and Melissa Bradshaw's *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet* (2011). Adrienne Munich and Bradshaw edited *Amy Lowell, American Modern* (2004).

Edgar Lee Masters

An edition of *Spoon River Anthology* annotated by John E. Hall was appeared in 1992, uncollected Spoon River poems were edited by Herbert K. Russell in 1991, and Masters's autobiography, *Across Spoon River*, was published with an introduction by Ronald Primeau in 1991. His son, Hardin Wallace Masters, published *Edgar Lee Masters: A Biographical*

Sketchbook about a Famous American Author (1978); the definitive biography is by Russell (2001). A brief general estimate and survey is John T. Flanagan's *Edgar Lee Masters: The Spoon River Poet and His Critics* (1974). Ronald Primeau's *Beyond Spoon River: The Legacy of Edgar Lee Masters* (1981) considers Masters's lesser-known work.

Claude McKay

Volumes of McKay's poetry include *Songs of Jamaica* (1912), *Constab Ballads* (1912), *Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems* (1920)—published in England—and *Harlem Shadows* (1922). William J. Maxwell edited the *Complete Poems* (2004), including many poems previously uncollected. Books of prose published in his lifetime include the novels *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929), and *Banana Bottom* (1933); a short story collection, *Gingertown* (1932, 1991); an autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), and an essay collection, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (1940). Collections brought out after McKay's death include *Selected Poems* (1953), *The Dialect Poetry of Claude McKay* (1972), *The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Poetry and Prose* (1973); two books of short stories, *Trial by Lynching* (1977) and *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (1979); and an essay collection, *The Negro in America* (1979).

Three good biographies are James R. Giles's *Claude McKay* (1976); Wayne F. Cooper's *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (1987, 1996); and Tyrone Tillery's *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (1992). A collection of interpretive essays is *Claude McKay: Centennial Studies* (1992), edited by A. L. McLeod. General works with material on McKay include Harold Cruse's still valuable *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967); Kenneth Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (1970; rev. ed. 2004); Nathan I. Huggins's *Harlem Renaissance* (1971); Addison Gayle's *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America* (1975); David Levering Lewis's *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1981); Bernard W. Bell's *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987); and George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995). Contrasting treatments of McKay's poetry are in Winston James's *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay's Jamaican Poetry of Rebellion* (2001) and Josh Gosciak's *The Shadowed Country: Claude McKay and the Romance of the Victorians* (2006).

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Millay's *Collected Sonnets* (1941) and *Collected Lyrics* (1943) were followed by *Collected Poems: Edna St. Vincent Millay* (1956), edited

by Norma Millay (1956). The Library of America issued *Selected Poems* (2003). Her prose sketches, *Distressing Dialogue*, published under the pseudonym Nancy Boyd, appeared in 1924. Her three verse plays (*Aria da Capa*, 1920; *The Lamp and the Bell*, 1921; and *Two Slatterns and a King*, 1921) were collected in *Three Plays* (1926). Allan Ross Macdougall edited *Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay* in 1952. The biographies are Daniel Epstein's *What Lips My Lips Have Kissed* (2001) and Nancy Milford's *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (2001). A chapter on Millay appears in Brett C. Millier's *Flawed Light: American Women Poets and Alcohol* (2009). Essay collections are *Critical Essays on Edna St. Vincent Millay* (1993), edited by William B. Thesing, and *Millay at One Hundred* (1995), edited by Diane P. Freedman. Elissa Zellinger's "Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Poetess Tradition," *Legacy* 29.2 (2012), 240–62, looks at Millay's formal choices in the context of earlier women's poetry.

Marianne Moore

Each collection of Moore's verse excluded some earlier poems while subjecting others to extensive revisions and changes in format. Her separate volumes include *Poems* (1921), *Observations* (1924), *The Pangolin and Other Verse* (1936), *What Are Years?* (1941), *Nevertheless* (1944), *Like a Bulwark* (1956), *O to Be a Dragon* (1959), and *Tell Me, Tell Me* (1966). Collections include *Selected Poems* (1935), *Collected Poems* (1951), and *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (1967, repr. 1981, 1987), which included selections from her translation of *The Fables of La Fontaine* (1954). Grace Shulman's *The Poems of Marianne Moore* (2003) is now the fullest edition. Patricia C. Willis has brought together Moore's published prose in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore* (1986). Moore's correspondence with Robert Lowell is published in David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet* (1991); her relation to Wallace Stevens is considered by Robin G. Schulze in *The Web of Friendship* (1995). Biographies are Charles Molesworth's *Marianne Moore: A Literary Life* (1990) and Linda Leavell's *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (2013). Bonnie Costello edited *The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore* (1997). Book-length studies include Bernard F. Engel's *Marianne Moore* (1963, rev. 1989); Costello's *Marianne Moore: Imaginary Possessions* (1982); John M. Slatin's *The Savage's Romance: The Poetry of Marianne Moore* (1986); Grace Schulman's *Marianne Moore: The Poetry of Engagement* (1987); Margaret Holley's *The Poetry of Marianne Moore: A Study in Voice and Value* (1987); Cristanne Miller's *Questions of Authority* (1995); Leavell's

Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts (1995); Elisabeth W. Joyce's *Cultural Critique and Abstraction: Marianne Moore and the Avant-Garde* (1998); and Victoria Bazin's *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (2010). Bethany Hickock's *Degrees of Freedom: American Women Poets and the Women's College, 1905–1955* (2008) connects Moore with Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath. Essay collections include *Marianne Moore, Woman and Poet* (1990), edited by Patricia Willis, and *Critics and Poets on Marianne Moore: "A Right Good Salvo of Barks"* (2005), edited by Leavell, Miller, and Schulze. Craig S. Abbott compiled *Marianne Moore: A Descriptive Bibliography* in 1977. Gary Lane's *A Concordance to the Poems of Marianne Moore* appeared in 1972.

Eugene O'Neill

The Library of America collected O'Neill's plays in three volumes, *Complete Plays, 1913–1920*; *Complete Plays, 1920–1931*; and *Complete Plays, 1932–1943* (1988). The standard biography of O'Neill is still that of Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *O'Neill* (1962, rev. 2000). Other biographical treatments are L. Schaeffer's *O'Neill, Son and Artist* (1973, 1990); Stephen A. Bloch's *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy* (1999); and Robert M. Dowling's *Eugene O'Neill: A Life in Four Acts* (2014). *The Theatre We Worked For: The Letters of Eugene O'Neill to Kenneth Macgowan* (1982), edited by Jackson R. Bryer, documents O'Neill's attitudes to the theater of his day. Brenda Murphy's *O'Neill: Long Day's Journey into Night* (2001) provides a production history. Bryer and Travis Bogard edited *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill* (1994). *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill* (1990) is edited by Mark W. Estrin. Literary analysis of O'Neill's plays can be found in Bogard's *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1972, rev. 1987); Michael Manheim's *Eugene O'Neill's New Language of Kinship* (1982); Judith E. Barlow's *Final Acts: The Creation of Three Late O'Neill Plays* (1985); Kurt Eisen's *The Inner Strength of Opposites* (1994); on O'Neill's techniques; Joel Pfister's *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse* (1995); Donald Gallup's *Eugene O'Neill and His Eleven-Play Cycle* (1998); Doris Alexander's *Eugene O'Neill's Last Plays: Separating Art from Autobiography* (2005); and John Patrick Diggins's *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire Under Democracy* (2007).

Essay collections include *Eugene O'Neill's Century* (1991), edited by Richard F. Moorton Jr.; *The Critical Response to Eugene O'Neill* (1993), edited by John H. Houchin; and *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill* (1998), edited by Michael Manheim.

Katherine Anne Porter

Primary sources include *Ship of Fools* (1962); *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965); *The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter* (1970); *The Never-Ending Wrong* (1977), about the Sacco and Vanzetti case; *Letters* (1990), edited by Isabel Bayley; "This Strange, Old World" and *Other Book Reviews by Katherine Anne Porter* (1991), edited by Darlene Harbour Unrue; *Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter* (1993), edited by Ruth M. Alvarez and Thomas F. Walsh; and *Katherine Anne Porter's Poetry* (1996), edited by Unrue. The Library of America's *Collected Stories and Other Writings* (2008), edited by Unrue, includes Porter's literary reviews and her journalism from Mexico. Unrue edited *Selected Letters of Katherine Anne Porter: Chronicles of a Modern Woman* (2012).

Biographies are Joan Givner's *Katherine Anne Porter, A Life* (1982, rev. 1991), and Unrue's *Katherine Anne Porter: The Life of an Artist* (2005). Givner also edited *Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations* (1987). A *Bibliography of the Works of Katherine Anne Porter*, edited by Louise Waldrip and Shirley Ann Bauer, appeared in 1969.

Critical studies include Jane Krause DeMouy's *Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of Her Fiction* (1983); Unrue's *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* (1985); Willene and George Hendrick's *Katherine Anne Porter* (rev. 1988); Thomas F. Walsh's *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden* (1992); Robert H. Brinkmeyer's *Katherine Anne Porter's Artistic Development* (1993); Janis P. Stout's *Katherine Anne Porter, A Sense of the Times* (1995); Mary Titus's *The Ambivalent Art of Katherine Anne Porter* (2005); and Stout's *South by Southwest: Katherine Anne Porter and the Burden of Texas History* (2013). Unrue edited *Critical Essays on Katherine Anne Porter* (1997).

Ezra Pound

Pound's early poetry, from *A Lume Spento* (1908) through *Riposte* (1912), is in the authoritative *Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound* (1976), edited by Michael King. The same volumes, along with later volumes *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, are collected in *Personae: The Collected Shorter Poems* (rev. ed. 1949; 2nd rev. ed. 1990). The New Directions edition of *The Cantos* (1993) is definitive. The Library of America's *Poems and Translations* (2003), edited by Richard Sieburth, excludes *The Cantos*. The most important of Pound's critical writings are *The Spirit of Romance* (rev. 1952); *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (1916); *Instigations* (1920); *Make It New* (1934); *The ABC of Read-*

ing (1934); *Guide to Kulchur* (1938); and *Patria Mia* (1950). His criticism has been collected in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (1954), edited by T. S. Eliot; *Selected Prose, 1909–1965* (1973), edited by William Cookson; and *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose Contributions to Periodicals* (1991), prefaced and arranged by Lea Baechler, A. Walton Litz, and James Longenback in eleven volumes. *Ezra Pound Speaking: Radio Speeches of World War II* (1978), edited by Leonard W. Doob, collects his wartime radio addresses. D. D. Paige edited *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941* (1950). Other correspondence is collected in *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespear: Their Letters, 1909–1914* (1984), edited by Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz; *Pound/Lewis: The Letters of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis* (1985), edited by Timothy Materer; *Ezra Pound and James Loughlin* (1994), edited by David M. Gordon; and *Pound/Cummings: The Correspondence of Ezra Pound and E. E. Cummings*, edited by Barry Ahearn. Reviews of Pound are collected in Eric Homberger's *Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage* (1973, 1997).

James J. Wilhelm's three-volume biography includes *The American Roots of Ezra Pound* (1985), *Ezra Pound in London and Paris, 1908–1925* (1990), and *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years, 1925–1972* (1994). David Moody also has a three-volume biography, *Ezra Pound: Poet* (2007, 2014, 2015). Also useful are Noel Stock's *The Life of Ezra Pound* (1970, 1982); C. David Haymann's *Ezra Pound, The Last Rower: A Political Profile* (1976); and Wendy Stallard Flory's *The American Ezra Pound* (1989). *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secrets of St. Elizabeth* (1984), by E. Fuller Torrey, focuses on Pound's trial and incarceration.

Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* (1972) has been influential. Good introductions are Christine Brooke-Rose's *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* (1971) and James Knapp's *Ezra Pound* (1972). For *The Cantos* see the *Annotated Index to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (1957) (through "Canto LXXXIV"), edited by John H. Edwards and William W. Vasse; Noel Stock's *Reading the Cantos* (1967); Ronald Bush's *The Genesis of Pound's Cantos* (1976); Wilhelm's *The Later Cantos of Ezra Pound* (1977); Lawrence S. Rainey's *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture* (1991); Carrol F. Terrill's *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (1993); George Kearn's *Guide to Ezra Pound's Selected Cantos* (1980); Anthony Woodward's *Ezra Pound and "The Pisan Cantos"* (1980); and William Cookson's updated *Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (2001). Tim Redman's *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* (1991) addresses the poet's politics, as does Leon Surette's *Pound in Purgatory: From Economic*

Realism to Anti-Semitism (1999). Cultural approaches to Pound include Michael Coyle's *Ezra Pound, Popular Genres, and the Discourse of Culture* (1995); Daniel Tiffany's *Radio Corpse* (1995); and Rebecca Beasley's *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (2007). Marjorie Perloff's *The Dance of the Intellect* (1996) studies poetry in the Pound tradition; Jacob Korg's *Winter Love: Ezra Pound and H. D.* (2003) is a comparative study. Andrew Gibson edited *Pound in Multiple Perspective: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1993), and Ira B. Nadel edited *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound* (1999).

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Collected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson (1921) was enlarged periodically through 1937. In addition to shorter verse, Robinson wrote long narrative poems, including the *Arthurian Trilogy of Merlin* (1917), *Lancelot* (1920), and *Tristrum* (1927). Other books include *Roman Bartholomew* (1923), *The Man Who Died Twice* (1924), *Cavender's House* (1929), *The Glory of the Nightingales* (1930), *Matthias at the Door* (1931), *Talifer* (1933), *Amaranth* (1934), and *King Jasper* (1935). Ridgely Torrence compiled *Selected Letters* (1940). Denham Sutcliffe edited *Untriangulated Stars: Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson to Harry de Forest Smith, 1890–1905* (1947). Richard Cary edited *Edwin Arlington Robinson's Letters to Edith Brower* (1968).

Scott Donaldson's *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Poet's Life* (2007) is comprehensive. Richard Cary documented *The Early Reception of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (1974). Introductions to Robinson's work include Wallace L. Anderson's *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Critical Introduction* (1967), Hoyt C. Franchere's *Edwin Arlington Robinson* (1968), and Louis O. Coxe's *Edwin Arlington Robinson: The Life of Poetry* (1969). Ellsworth Barnard edited *Edwin Arlington Robinson: Centenary Essays* (1969). Other collections are *Appreciation of Edwin Arlington Robinson: Twenty-eight Interpretive Essays* (1969), edited by Richard Cary; and *Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1970), edited by Francis Murphy. Richard Hoffpait's *The Contemplative Poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, and Yvor Winters* (2002) links Robinson to other poets.

Carl Sandburg

The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg (1950) was revised and expanded in 1970. *Breathing Tokens* (1978), edited by Margaret Sandburg, prints unpublished poems. *Billy Sunday and Other Poems* (1993), edited by George and Wilene Hendrick, contains some of his unpub-

lished, uncollected, and unexpurgated poems. Paul Berman edited his *Selected Poems* (2006) for the Library of America. In addition to eight full-length volumes of poetry, Sandburg wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning study of Abraham Lincoln: *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, 2 vols. (1926), and *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, 4 vols. (1939); two collections of journalism and social commentary; *Rootabaga Stories* for children; a novel; and a book of American folk songs. *Fables, Foibles and Foolies* (1988), edited by George Hendrick, is a selection of unpublished humorous pieces. *More Rootabagas* (1993), edited by Hendrick, contains stories for children. *Selected Poems* (1996) was edited by George and Willene Hendrick. *The Letters of Carl Sandburg* (1968, 1988) was edited by Herbert Mitgang. *The Poet and the Dream Girl: The Love Letters of Lillian Steichen and Carl Sandburg* (1987, 1999) was edited by Margaret Sandburg.

Always the Young Strangers (1953) and *Ever the Winds of Chance* (1983), edited by Margaret Sandburg and George Hendrick, are segments of Sandburg's autobiography. A full-scale biography is Penelope Niven's *Carl Sandburg: A Biography* (1991). Critical studies include Richard Crowder's *Carl Sandburg* (1964) and Philip R. Yannella's *The Other Carl Sandburg* (1996). John Marsh's *Hog Butchers, Beggars, and Busboys: Poverty, Labor, and the Making of Modern American Poetry* (2011) includes a chapter on Sandburg.

Gertrude Stein

The Library of America published Stein's writings in two volumes: 1903–32 and 1932–46 (1998). The Yale Edition of the *Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein* (1951–58), edited by Carl Van Vechten, contains eight volumes of poetry, prose fiction, portraits, essays, and miscellany. The Norton Critical Edition of *Three Lives and Q.E.D.* (2005), edited by Marianne DeKoven, supplies critical and biographical contexts. Among publications in Stein's lifetime are *Tender Buttons* (1914) and prose fiction, including *Three Lives* (1909), *The Making of Americans* (1925), *Lucy Church Amiably* (1930), *Ida: A Novel* (1941), and *Brewsie and Willie* (1946). *Geography and Plays* (1922), *Operas and Plays* (1932), and *Last Operas and Plays* (1949, 1995), edited by Carl Van Vechten, contain dramatic pieces. Biographical material and portraits of Stein's contemporaries may be found in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), *Portraits and Prayers* (1934), *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945). Other works, including meditations, essays, sketches, and sociolinguistic treatises, are *Useful Knowledge* (1928), *How to Write* (1931), *Lectures in America* (1935), *Narration: Four Lectures by Gertrude*

Stein (1935), *What Are Masterpieces?* (1940), and *Four in America* (1947). Donald C. Gallup edited *Fernhurst, Q.E.D. and Other Early Writings by Gertrude Stein* (1971) and also a collection of letters to Stein, *The Flowers of Friendship* (1953). Her correspondence with Mabel Dodge Luhan is edited by Patricia R. Everett (1996), with Thornton Wilder by Edward Burns and Ulla E. Dydo (1996), and with Virgil Thomson by Susan Holbrook and Thomas Dilworth (2010). *Baty Precious Always Shines* (2000), edited by Kay Turner, has selected love letters written between Stein and her partner, Alice B. Toklas. *Gertrude Stein: An Annotated Bibliography* (1979) was compiled by Maureen R. Liston.

W. G. Rogers's *When This You See Remember Me: Gertrude Stein in Person* (1948) and Alice B. Toklas's *What Is Remembered* (1963) are reminiscences of Stein by friends. Biographies include Howard Greenfield's *Gertrude Stein: A Biography* (1973); James R. Mellow's *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (1974); Janet Hobbhouse's *Everybody Who Was Anybody* (1989); Linda Wagner-Martin's *Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (1995); Brenda Wineapple's *Sister Brother: Gertrude and Leo Stein* (1996); and Janet Malcolm's *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* (2007).

Critical studies include Robert B. Haas's *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (1971); Richard Bridgman's *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (1970); Wendy Steiner's *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (1978); Marianne DeKoven's *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (1983); Randa Kay Dubnick's *The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language, and Cubism* (1984); Lisa Ruddick's *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (1990); Jane P. Bowers's *Gertrude Stein* (1993); Linda Watts's *Gertrude Stein: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1999); Barbara Will's *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius"* (2000); Steven Meyer's *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (2001); Dana Cairns Watson's *Gertrude Stein and the Essence of What Happens* (2005); and Karen Leick's *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* (2009). Bruce Kellner edited the useful *Gertrude Stein Companion* (1988). A collection of critical essays, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, is *Gertrude Stein Advanced* (1990).

John Steinbeck

The Library of America issued four volumes of Steinbeck's work, *Novels and Stories 1932–1937* (1994), *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings* (1996), *Novels 1942–1952* (2002), and *Travels with Charley and Later Novels*

1947–1962 (2007). Two biographies are Jack J. Benson's *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* (1984) and Jay Parini's *John Steinbeck* (1995). Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten edited *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (1975). Critical studies of Steinbeck include R. S. Hughes's *Beyond the Red Pony: A Reader's Guide to Steinbeck's Complete Short Stories* (1987); John H. Timmerman's *The Dramatic Landscape of Steinbeck's Short Stories* (1990); and Warren French's *John Steinbeck's Fiction Revisited* (1994). R. David edited *John Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1972); other collections are *Rediscovering Steinbeck* (1989), edited by Cliff Lewis and Carroll Britch; *Critical Essays on Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath* (1989), edited by John Ditsky; *Short Novels of John Steinbeck* (1990), edited by Jackson J. Benson; *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews* (1996), edited by Joseph R. McElrath Jr., Jesse S. Crisler, and Susan Shillinglaw; *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (1997), edited by Susan F. Beegel; and *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck* (2002), edited by Shillinglaw and Kevin Hearle.

Wallace Stevens

The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens was published in 1954. Milton J. Bates's *Opus Posthumous* (1957, rev. 1989) includes previously uncollected poems, plays, and essays. *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (1951) is Stevens's prose statement on poetry. The Library of America issued his *Collected Poetry and Prose* (1997). Other resources are *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (1966, 1996), edited by Holly Stevens; *The Contemplated Spouse: The Letters of Wallace Stevens to Elsie* (2006), edited by J. Donald Blount; *Concordance to the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (1963), edited by Thomas Walsh; and *Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1973), compiled by J. M. Edelstein.

Joan Richardson's *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years, 1879–1923* (1986) chronicles the poet's youth and her *Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923–1955* (1988) completes the story. Another biography is Tony Sharpe's *Wallace Stevens: A Literary Life* (2000). A. Walton Litz's *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens* (1972) traces Stevens's thought and style through his early and middle years. Harold Bloom's *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (1977) considers intellectual influences on Stevens; Joseph N. Riddle's *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens* (1969, 1991) reads many individual poems. Other good full-length studies include Eleanor Cook's *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens* (1988) and *A Reader's*

Guide to Wallace Stevens (2007); James Longenbach's *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (1991); Alan Filreis's *Modernism from Left to Right* (1994); Janet McCann's *Wallace Stevens Revisited* (1995); and Edward Ragg's *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* (2010). Jacqueline Vaught Brogan's *The Violence within/The Violence without: Wallace Stevens and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Poetics* (2003) and Malcolm Woodland's *Wallace Stevens and the Apocalyptic Mode* (2005) consider the relation of Stevens's poetry to war. Albert Gelpi collects essays on the poet in *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism* (1990); other collections are *Critical Essays on Wallace Stevens* (1988), edited by Steven Gould Axelrod and Helen Deese; *Wallace Stevens and the Feminine* (1993), edited by Melita Schaum; and *Wallace Stevens Across the Atlantic* (2008), edited by Bart Eeckhout and Ragg.

Jean Toomer

Toomer's published works include *Cane* (1923, repr. 1975, pub. also in a Norton Critical Edition, 2011), *Essentials* (1931), *Portage Potential* (1932), and an address, "The Flavor of Man" (1949). His *Collected Poems*, edited by Robert B. Jones and Margery Toomer Latimer, was published in 1988. *A Jean Toomer Reader* (1993), containing previously unpublished writings, was edited by Frederik L. Rusch; Robert B. Jones edited *Selected Essays and Literary Criticism* (1996). Mark Whalan edited *The Letters of Jean Toomer, 1919–1924* (2005). Brian Joseph Benson and Mabel Mayle Dillard's *Jean Toomer* (1980); Nellie Y. McKay's *Jean Toomer, Artist: A Study of His Literary Life and Work, 1894–1936* (1984); and Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge's *The Lives of Jean Toomer: A Hunger for Wholeness* (1989) are biographies. Studies include Charles Scruggs and Lee Van De Marr's *Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History* (1998); Karen Ford Jackson's *Split-Gut Song: Jean Toomer and the Poetics of Modernity* (2005); and Barbara Foley's *Jean Toomer: Race, Repression and Revolution* (2014). Whalan's *Race, Manhood, and Modernism in America: The Short Story Cycles of Sherwood Anderson and Jean Toomer* (2007) is a comparative study. Essay collections are *Jean Toomer: A Critical Evaluation* (1988), edited by Therman B. O'Daniel, and *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Geneviève Faber and Michel Faith (2000).

Nathanael West

West's published novels are *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *A Cool Million: The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin*

(1934), and *The Day of the Locust* (1939). *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust* are reprinted in a combined volume from New Directions (1962, 1969). The Library of America's *Novels and Other Writings* (1997), edited by Sacvan Bercovitch, includes selected letters as well as screenplays and a play. Biographies are Jay Martin's *Nathanael West: The Art of His Life* (1970) and Joe Woodward's *Alive Inside the Wreck: A Biography of Nathanael West* (2011). Critical studies include James F. Light's *Nathanael West: An Interpretive Study* (1961); Victor Comerchero's *Nathanael West: The Ironic Prophet* (1964); Randall Reid's *The Fiction of Nathanael West: No Redeemer, No Promised Land* (1967); Alistair Wisker's *The Writing of Nathanael West* (1990); and Jonathan Veitch's *American Superrealism: Nathanael West and the Politics of Representation in the 1930s* (1997). Chapters on West are in Rita Barnard's *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathanael West, and Mass Culture in the 1930s* (1995); Karen Jacobs's *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (2001); and Chip Rhodes's *Politics, Desire, and the Hollywood Novel* (2008). Ben Siegel's *Critical Essays on Nathanael West* (1994) provides a useful sampling of contemporary reviews and early critical responses. William White compiled *Nathanael West: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (1975).

William Carlos Williams

Williams's poems were first collected in three volumes: *Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams* (1951), *Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams* (1950), and *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962). More recent are *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, volume 1, 1909–1939* (1996), edited by A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan, and volume 2, 1939–1962, edited by MacGowan (1988). Paterson's five books, published individually between 1946 and 1958, were issued in one volume in 1963 and reedited by MacGowan (1992). The Library of America issued *Selected Poems* (2004), edited by Robert Pinsky. *Kora in Hell*, Williams's volume of prose poetry, is in the collection *Imaginations* (1970), edited by Webster Schott, along with essays, fiction, and creative prose. Williams's short stories are collected in *Make Light of It* (1950) and again, with several additions, in *The Farmers' Daughters* (1961). His novels are *A Voyage to Paganry* (1928), *White Mule* (1937), *In the Money* (1940), and *The Build Up* (1946). His dramatic pieces were published together in *Many Loves and Other Plays* (1961). Important essays are contained in *In the American Grain* (1925, 1940), *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (1954), and *Imaginations* (1970), edited by Webster Schott. Williams's prose also

includes *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (1951); a book of recollections dictated to Edith Heal, *I Wanted to Write a Poem* (1958); and *Yes, Mrs. Williams* (1959), a portrait of the poet's mother. J. C. Thirlwall edited *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams* (1957). Selections from the Pound–Williams correspondence, edited by Hugh Witemeyer, appeared in 1996. Letters between Williams and Denise Levertov, edited by MacGowan, appeared in 1998. Barry Ahearn edited *The Correspondence of William Carlos Williams and Louis Zukofsky* (2003). *The Humane Particulars: The Collected Letters of William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke* (2003) was edited by James H. East. Emily Mitchell Wallace compiled *A Bibliography of William Carlos Williams* (1968). Reed Whittemore's *William Carlos Williams: Poet from Jersey* (1975) is a critical biography, as are Paul Mariani's more detailed *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (1981), and Herbert Leibowitz's "Something Urgent I Have to Say to You": *The Life and Works of William Carlos Williams* (2011).

James E. Breslin's *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist* (1970) is a still-useful overview. Other general introductions are Thomas R. Whitaker's *William Carlos Williams* (1989) and Kelli A. Larson's *Guide to the Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (1995). Among specialized studies are Mike Weaver's *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (1971); Joseph N. Riddel's *The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counter-Poetics of William Carlos Williams* (1974); Henry M. Sayre's *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (1983); Ann W. Fisher-Wirth's *William Carlos Williams and Autobiography: The Woods of His Own Nature* (1989); Ron Callan's *William Carlos Williams and Transcendentalism* (1992); T. Hugh Crawford's *Modernism, Medicine, and William Carlos Williams* (1993); Brian A. Bremen's *William Carlos Williams and the Diagnostics of Culture* (1993); Peter Halter's *The Revolution in the Visual Arts and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (1994); Donald W. Markos's *Ideas in Things* (1994); Barry Ahearn's *William Carlos Williams and Alterity* (1994); Julio Marzan's *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams* (1994); Stanley Koehler's *Countries of the Mind: The Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (1998); and John Beck's *Writing the Radical Center: William Carlos Williams, John Dewey, and American Cultural Politics* (2001).

Linda Wagner's *The Prose of William Carlos Williams* (1970) and Robert Coles's *William Carlos Williams: The Knack of Survival in America* (1975) discuss Williams's prose. For Paterson, see Joel Conarroe's *William Carlos Williams' Paterson: Language and Landscape* (1970); Benjamin Sankey's *A Companion to*

William Carlos Williams's Paterson (1971); and Ann Marie Mikkelsen's *Pastoral, Pragmatism, and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2011). Paul Mariani's *William Carlos Williams: The Poet and His Critics* (1975) considers Williams's critical reception, as does *William Carlos Williams, The Critical Heritage* (1980, 1997), edited by Charles Doyle.

Thomas Wolfe

Arlyn and Matthew Bruccoli edited Wolfe's massive *O Lost: A Story of the Buried Life* (2000). David Madden compiled *Thomas Wolfe's Civil War* (2004) from Wolfe's writings. Among primary documents are *The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe* (1970), edited by Richard S. Kennedy and P. Reeves; *The Autobiography of an American Novelist*, by Thomas Wolfe (1983), edited by Leslie Field; *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe* (1956), edited by Elizabeth Nowell; *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother* (1968), edited by C. Holman and S. Ross; *My Other Loneliness: Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein* (1983), edited by Suzanne Stutman; *Beyond Love and Loyalty: The Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Elizabeth Nowell* (1983), edited by Richard S. Kennedy; and *To Loot My Life Clean: The Thomas Wolfe–Maxwell Perkins Correspondence* (2000), edited by Matthew Bruccoli. The fullest biography is David Herbert Donald's *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe* (1987). John Lane Idol Jr.'s *A Thomas Wolfe Companion* (1987) is informative and useful. John Earl Bassett compiled *Thomas Wolfe: An Annotated Critical Bibliography* (1996).

There were many critical studies of Wolfe in the 1950s and 1960s. Later books include Carol I. Johnston's *Of Time and the Artist* (1996) and Robert Taylor Ensign's *Lean down Your Ear upon the Earth, and Listen: Thomas Wolfe's Greener Modernism* (2003).

Collections of critical essays are *Thomas Wolfe: The Critical Reception* (1974), edited by P. Reeves; *The Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe* (1975), edited by C. Hugh Holman; and *Critical Essays on Thomas Wolfe* (1985), edited by John S. Phillipson.

Richard Wright

Wright's fiction includes *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), *Native Son* (1940), *The Outsider* (1953), and *Eight Men* (1961). *Black Boy* (1945) is his autobiography; *White Man, Listen!* (1957) is an important work of nonfiction. The Library of America has published his writings in two volumes, including an unexpurgated version of *Native Son* (1991). Earle V. Bryant edited *Byline, Richard Wright: Articles from the Daily Worker and the New Masses* (2015). For a complete bibliography of his writings, see *Richard Wright: A Primary Bibliography* (1982), compiled by Charles T. Davis and Michel Fabre. A good sample of reviews can be found in *Richard Wright: The Critical Reception* (1978), edited by John M. Reilly; a massive bibliography of Wright criticism around the world has been assembled by Keneth Kinnamon (1988). Kinnamon and Michel Fabre edited *Conversations with Richard Wright* (1993). The best critical biography is Fabre's *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (1993); see also Margaret Walker's *Richard Wright, Daemonic Genius* (1993) and Hazel Rowley's *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (2001). Critical studies include Russell C. Brignano's *Richard Wright: An Introduction to the Man and His Works* (1970), Kinnamon's *The Emergence of Richard Wright* (1972), Fabre's *Richard Wright: Books and Writers* (1990) and his essays in *The World of Richard Wright* (2007), and Robert Butler's *Native Son: The Emergence of a New Black Hero* (1991). Abdul R. Jan Mohamed's *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (2005) is an ambitious theoretical study. Collections of criticism are Yoshinobu Hakutani's *Critical Essays on Richard Wright* (1982); *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah; *The Critical Response to Richard Wright* (1995), edited by Robert J. Butler; *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1995), edited by Arnold Rampersad; Kinnamon's *Critical Essays on Richard Wright's Native Son* (1997); and *Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century* (2011), edited by Alice Mikal Craven, William E. Dow, and Gary Taylor.

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1914–1945



Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2, Marcel Duchamp, 1912

Rejected by Duchamp's fellow French modernists when he submitted it to the annual Salon des Indépendants (the annual exhibition of France's Society of Independent Artists) in 1912, *Nude Descending a Staircase* went on to become the most controversial work shown at the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art in New York City—the Armory Show, as it became known, after its site in a National Guard armory. Featuring paintings and sculpture by European avant-garde artists as well as a scattering of Americans, including Edward Hopper and Charles Sheeler, the Armory Show brought modernist art to the attention of a broad American public. *Nude Descending a Staircase* links Cubism's technique of representing objects in multiple perspectives with the innovations of late nineteenth-century multiple-exposure photography, the precursor to motion pictures.



Portrait of a German Officer, Marsden Hartley, 1914

Born in Lewiston, Maine, Hartley immersed himself in European modernist painting at Gertrude Stein's Paris salon during a 1912 trip financed by the photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Hartley's abstract "portrait," completed on his second European trip to Berlin and before the United States entered World War I, represents its wartime subject in fragments of ribbons, uniforms, and flags. The painting memorializes Hartley's friend Karl von Freyburg, a German cavalry officer who had been killed in combat. Hartley's *Portrait* is deliberately far removed from the kind of traditional memorial art that might have idealized an officer on his horse. Among the elements incorporated into the painting are Freyburg's initials (K v. F) and the age at which he died (24). Like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (p. 365), this work registers a world blown to pieces.



Hollywood, Thomas Hart Benton, 1937–38

The Missouri-born painter Thomas Hart Benton studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and then, like other American artists of his generation, traveled to Paris for further education and immersion in avant-garde circles. On returning to the United States, Benton worked as a painter of backdrops for early silent movies being filmed in Fort Lee, New Jersey. His service in the U.S. Navy during World War I introduced him to still another use for painting, as camouflage for warships. But after the war, Benton declared himself “an enemy of modernism” and turned toward a more realistic style. During the Great Depression, he earned a national reputation by producing several series of murals on subjects from American regional life and history, including controversial topics like slavery and the Ku Klux Klan. In 1937 *Life* magazine sent Benton to Los Angeles to cover the film industry; his large canvas *Hollywood* was the result. Like many famous paintings in Western art, *Hollywood* centers the viewer’s gaze on a nearly nude female body, a modern-day goddess in the process of creation. Surrounding this body are not cupids and angels but managers and technicians of an industrial workplace—one of many American work settings that Benton painted. Like Nathanael West in *The Day of the Locust*, Benton in *Hollywood* focuses on the unnamed and invisible laborers supporting the film industry.



Black Belt, Archibald J. Motley, 1934

Motley attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and later studied European art on a Guggenheim fellowship in Paris, where he was drawn to Renaissance and nineteenth-century realistic portraiture. During the 1930s his painting was supported by the federal Works Progress Administration. *Black Belt* captures the social breadth and vitality of Chicago's South Side and other emerging African American urban centers, using a stylized realism of vivid colors and flat perspective. His men and women include well-dressed couples; a matronly, homeward-bound woman; and the stoic, downcast worker in the foreground. In the middle background a man in a suit and hat glances warily over his shoulder toward the viewer; in his poem about the South Side (p. 839), Langston Hughes explicitly challenged outsiders looking in on black life. Chicago's diverse African American community was an important setting for Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (p. 538).



River Rouge Plant, Charles Sheeler, 1932

This painting of a Ford Motor Company factory near Detroit grew out of a series of photographs that Sheeler took for an advertising agency. Along with other “precisionist” painters of the 1920s and 1930s, Sheeler was influenced by Futurism’s celebration of the machine and by Cubism’s breaking of traditional unified perspective into multiple flat planes. Sheeler’s painterly style, however, remained realistic; he sought the broken planes and angles of Cubism in the objects themselves (here, the multiple white planes of the factory and its reflection) and avoided calling attention to the medium of paint—its texture and brushwork, the surface of the canvas—over what it represented. Like the poet Hart Crane, Sheeler found the materials for a modernist art in the American industrial landscape.



From the Faraway, Nearby, Georgia O'Keeffe, 1937

O'Keeffe found inspiration in the landscapes of the American Southwest. Noted in the 1920s for her large, vivid paintings of flowers “with great sexy involutions” (as *Life* magazine observed), O'Keeffe in the 1930s began painting the bones she found scattered about the New Mexico desert. In this almost surrealist image, the sharp lines of the elk antlers floating in the foreground are echoed in softer form by the hills; the painting’s perspective collapses the middle distance to put the faraway and the nearby on top of one another. O'Keeffe’s paintings became modernist icons of the American landscape; the bones of the Southwest, she wrote, opened her work up to “the wideness and wonder of the world as I live in it.”



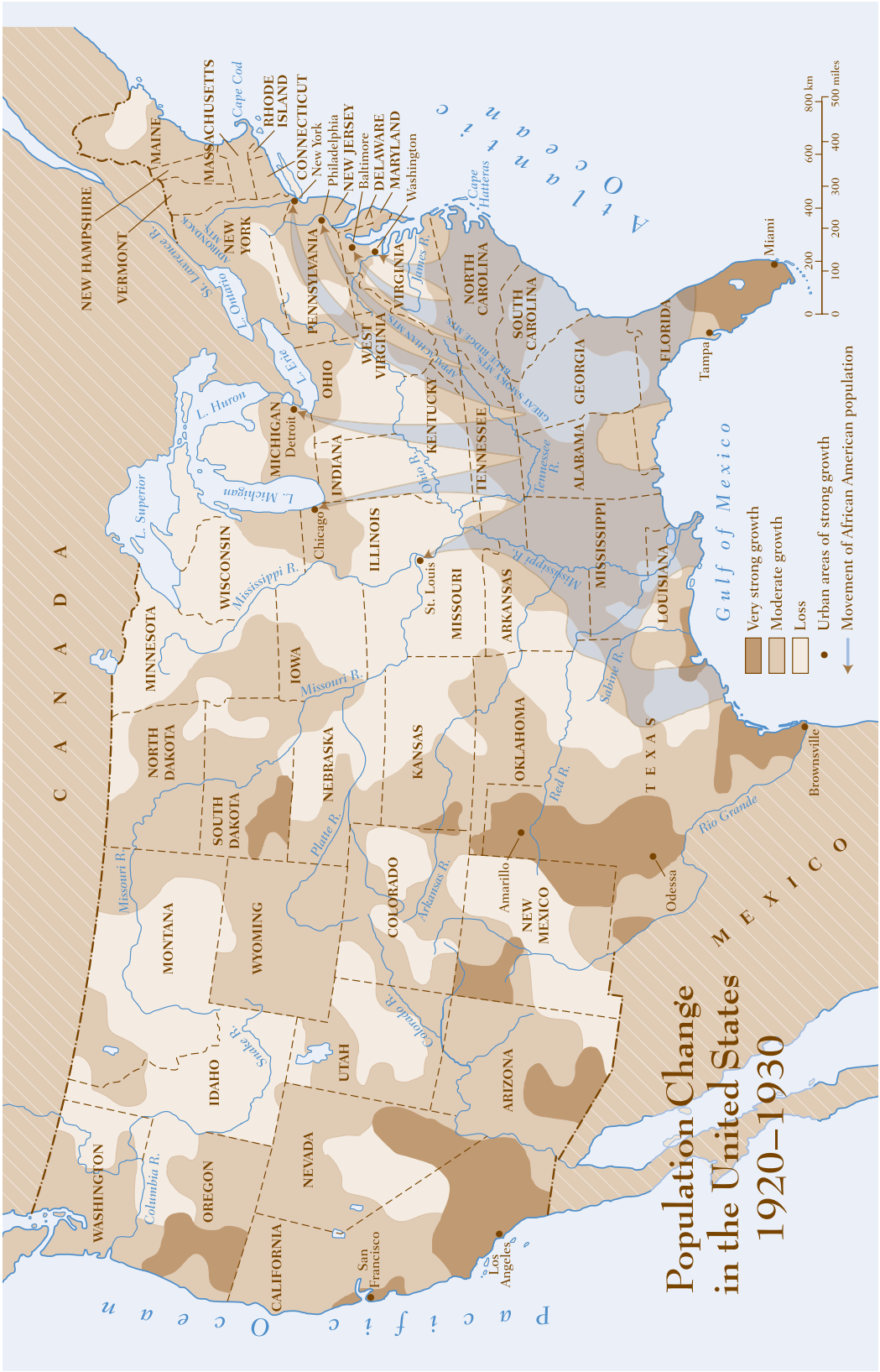
We Can Do It! (“Rosie the Riveter”), J. Howard Miller, c. 1942

World War II drew many women out of traditional roles in the home and into the industrial labor force and various forms of war-related work. Miller’s poster *We Can Do It!*, produced by the defense contractor Westinghouse for the War Production Co-ordinating Committee, uses the bright colors and clean, simple lines of advertising to make the dislocations of traditional gender patterns familiar and acceptable, at least for the duration of the war. The worker’s pert face and feminine grooming balance her assertively flexed bicep. A popular wartime song, “Rosie the Riveter,” gave Miller’s anonymous heroine her familiar nickname.



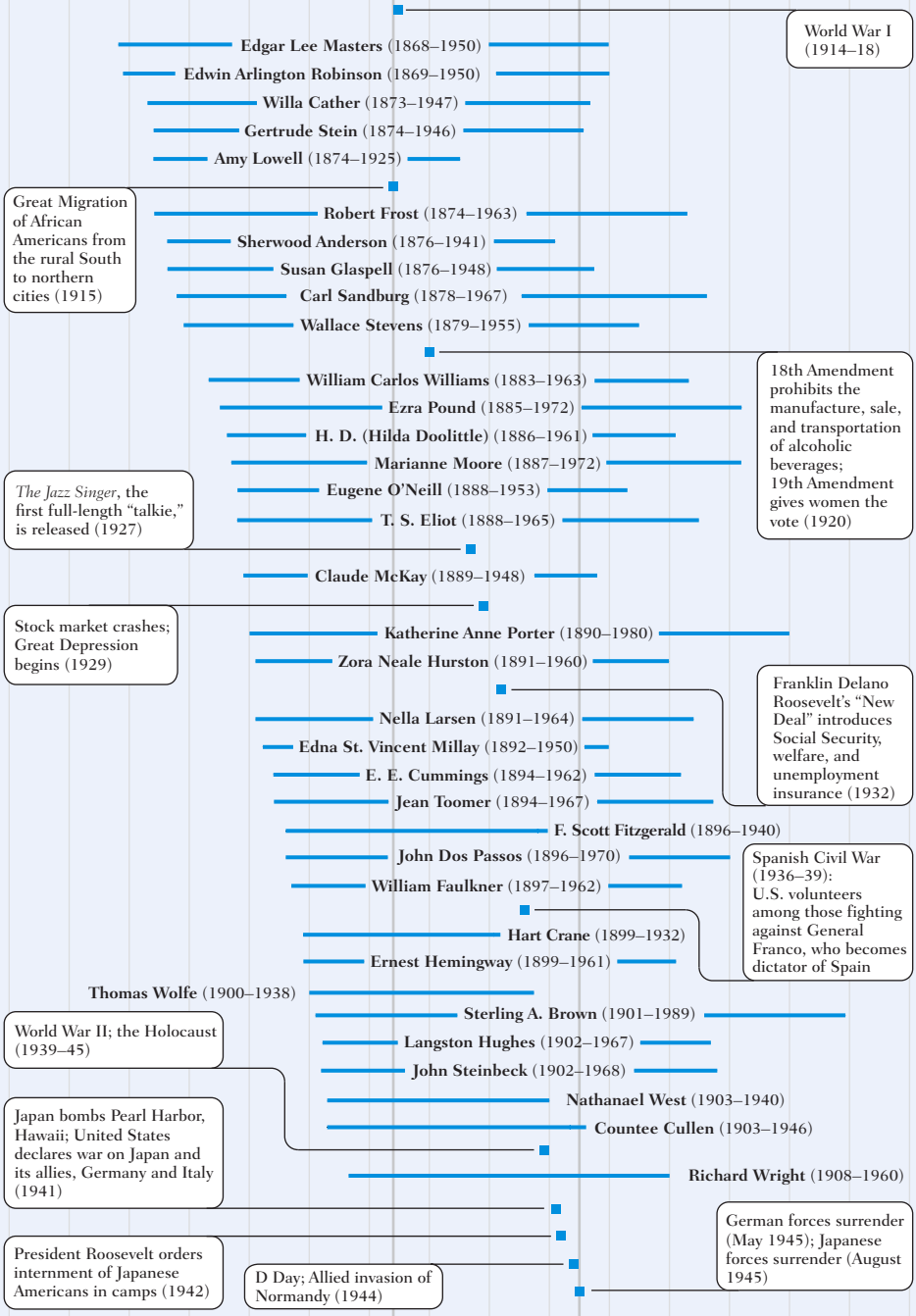
Night Hawks, Edward Hopper, 1942

Born in Nyack, New York, and trained at the New York Institute of Design, Hopper sold his first painting at the 1913 Armory show and lived in New York's Greenwich Village for most of his career. Hopper's painting represents the night life of loners in the city. Its stylized realism preserves traditional perspective, accentuated by the deep view through the restaurant's large plate-glass window, but simplifies both realistic detail and painterly brushwork. In both style and subject, Hopper's painting is often compared to the work of writers like Ernest Hemingway and to the visual style of 1940s *film noir* (literally, "dark film"). *Night Hawks* depicts a clean, well-lit restaurant against a dark urban background of uncertain danger or promise. The customer with his back to the viewer, like one of the "private eye" characters of *film noir*, keeps to himself but stands in for the viewer's anonymous perspective on the scene.



American Literature 1914–1945

1850 1860 1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000



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HUNGERFORD

Michael A. Elliott

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
EMORY UNIVERSITY

Sandra M. Gustafson

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Amy Hungerford

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
AND DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
YALE UNIVERSITY

Mary Loeffelholz

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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Robert S. Levine, *General Editor*

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND
DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AND
DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR-TEACHER
University of Maryland, College Park

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Preface to the Ninth Edition

The Ninth Edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* is the first for me as General Editor; for the Eighth Edition, I served as Associate General Editor under longstanding General Editor Nina Baym. On the occasion of a new general editorship, we have undertaken one of the most extensive revisions in our long publishing history. Three new section editors have joined the team: Sandra M. Gustafson, Professor of English and Concurrent Professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame, who succeeds Wayne Franklin and Philip Gura as editor of “American Literature, Beginnings to 1820”; Michael A. Elliott, Professor of English at Emory University, who succeeds Nina Baym, Robert S. Levine, and Jeanne Campbell Reesman as editor of “American Literature, 1865–1914”; and Amy Hungerford, Professor of English and American Studies at Yale University, who succeeds Jerome Klinkowitz and Patricia B. Wallace as editor of “American Literature since 1945.” These editors join Robert S. Levine, editor of “American Literature, 1820–1865,” and Mary Loeffelholz, editor of “American Literature, 1914–1945.” Each editor, new or continuing, is a well-known expert in the relevant field or period and has ultimate responsibility for his or her section of the anthology, but we have worked closely from first to last to rethink all aspects of this new edition. Volume introductions, author headnotes, thematic clusters, annotations, illustrations, and bibliographies have all been updated and revised. We have also added a number of new authors, selections, and thematic clusters. We are excited about the outcome of our collaboration and anticipate that, like the previous eight editions, this edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* will continue to lead the field.

From the anthology’s inception in 1979, the editors have had three main aims: first, to present a rich and substantial enough variety of works to enable teachers to build courses according to their own vision of American literary history (thus, teachers are offered more authors and more selections than they will probably use in any one course); second, to make the anthology self-sufficient by featuring many works in their entirety along with extensive selections for individual authors; third, to balance traditional interests with developing critical concerns in a way that allows for the complex, rigorous, and capacious study of American literary traditions. As early as 1979, we anthologized work by Anne Bradstreet, Mary Rowlandson, Sarah Kemble Knight, Phillis Wheatley, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Booker T. Washington, Charles W. Chesnutt, Edith Wharton,

W. E. B. Du Bois, and other writers who were not yet part of a standard canon. Yet we never shortchanged writers—such as Franklin, Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner—whose work many students expected to read in their American literature courses, and whom most teachers then and now would not think of doing without.

The so-called canon wars of the 1980s and 1990s usefully initiated a review of our understanding of American literature, a review that has enlarged the number and diversity of authors now recognized as contributors to the totality of American literature. The traditional writers look different in this expanded context, and they also appear different according to which of their works are selected. Teachers and students remain committed to the idea of the literary—that writers strive to produce artifacts that are both intellectually serious and formally skillful—but believe more than ever that writers should be understood in relation to their cultural and historical situations. We address the complex interrelationships between literature and history in the volume introductions, author headnotes, chronologies, and some of the footnotes. As in previous editions, we have worked with detailed suggestions from many teachers on how best to present the authors and selections. We have gained insights as well from the students who use the anthology. Thanks to questionnaires, face-to-face and phone discussions, letters, and email, we have been able to listen to those for whom this book is intended. For the Ninth Edition, we have drawn on the careful commentary of over 240 reviewers and reworked aspects of the anthology accordingly.

Our new materials continue the work of broadening the canon by representing thirteen new writers in depth, without sacrificing widely assigned writers, many of whose selections have been reconsidered, reselected, and expanded. Our aim is always to provide extensive enough selections to do the writers justice, including complete works wherever possible. Our Ninth Edition offers complete longer works, including Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and such new and recently added works as Margaret Fuller's *The Great Lawsuit*, Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, and August Wilson's *Fences*. Two complete works—Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*—are exclusive to *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Charles Brockden Brown, Louisa May Alcott, Upton Sinclair, and Junot Díaz are among the writers added to the prior edition, and to this edition we have introduced John Rollin Ridge, Constance Fenimore Woolson, George Saunders, and Natasha Tretheway, among others. We have also expanded and in some cases reconfigured such central figures as Franklin, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Twain, and Hemingway, offering new approaches in the headnotes, along with some new selections. In fact, the headnotes and, in many cases, selections for such frequently assigned authors as William Bradford, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Lydia Maria Child, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Kate Chopin, W. E. B. Du Bois, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and William

Faulkner have been revised, updated, and in some cases entirely rewritten in light of recent scholarship. The Ninth Edition further expands its selections of women writers and writers from diverse ethnic, racial, and regional backgrounds—always with attention to the critical acclaim that recognizes their contributions to the American literary record. New and recently added writers such as Samson Occom, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, John Rollin Ridge, and Sarah Winnemucca, along with the figures represented in “Voices from Native America,” enable teachers to bring early Native American writing and oratory into their syllabi, or should they prefer, to focus on these selections as a freestanding unit leading toward the moment after 1945 when Native writers fully entered the mainstream of literary activity.

We are pleased to continue our popular innovation of topical gatherings of short texts that illuminate the cultural, historical, intellectual, and literary concerns of their respective periods. Designed to be taught in a class period or two, or used as background, each of the sixteen clusters consists of brief, carefully excerpted primary and (in one case) secondary texts, about six to ten per cluster, and an introduction. Diverse voices—many new to the anthology—highlight a range of views current when writers of a particular time period were active, and thus allow students better to understand some of the large issues that were being debated at particular historical moments. For example, in “Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature,” texts by David Walker, William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimké, Sojourner Truth, James M. Whitfield, and Martin R. Delany speak to the great paradox of pre-Civil War America: the contradictory rupture between the realities of slavery and the nation’s ideals of freedom.

The Ninth Edition strengthens this feature with eight new and revised clusters attuned to the requests of teachers. To help students address the controversy over race and aesthetics in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we have revised a cluster in Volume C that shows what some of the leading critics of the past few decades thought was at stake in reading and interpreting slavery and race in Twain’s canonical novel. New to Volume A is “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression,” which includes selections by Elizabeth Ashbridge, John Woolman, and John Marrant, while Volume B offers “Science and Technology in the Pre-Civil War Nation.” Volume C newly features “Becoming American in the Gilded Age,” and we continue to include the useful “Modernist Manifestos” in Volume D. We have added to the popular “Creative Nonfiction” in Volume E new selections by David Foster Wallace and Hunter S. Thompson, who join such writers as Jamaica Kincaid and Joan Didion.

The Ninth Edition features an expanded illustration program, both of the black-and-white images, 145 of which are placed throughout the volumes, and of the color plates so popular in the last two editions. In selecting color plates—from Elizabeth Graham’s embroidered map of Washington, D.C., at the start of the nineteenth century to Jeff Wall’s “After ‘Invisible Man’” at the beginning of the twenty-first—the editors aim to provide images relevant to literary works in the anthology while depicting arts and artifacts representative of each era. In addition, graphic works—segments from the colonial children’s classic *The New-England Primer* and from Art Spiegelman’s canonical graphic novel, *Maus*, and a facsimile page of Emily Dickinson

manuscript, along with the many new illustrations—open possibilities for teaching visual texts.

Period-by-Period Revisions

Volume A, *Beginnings to 1820*. Sandra M. Gustafson, the new editor of Volume A, has substantially revised the volume. Prior editions of Volume A were broken into two historical sections, with two introductions and a dividing line at the year 1700; Gustafson has dropped that artificial divide to tell a more coherent and fluid story (in her new introduction) about the variety of American literatures during this long period. The volume continues to feature narratives by early European explorers of the North American continent as they encountered and attempted to make sense of the diverse cultures they met, and as they sought to justify their aim of claiming the territory for Europeans. These are precisely the issues foregrounded by the revised cluster “First Encounters: Early European Accounts of Native America,” which gathers writings by Hernán Cortés, Samuel de Champlain, Robert Juet, and others, including the newly added Thomas Harriot. In addition to the standing material from *The Bay Psalm Book*, we include new material by Roger Williams; additional poems by Annis Boudinot Stockton; Abigail Adams’s famous letter urging her husband to “Remember the Ladies”; an additional selection from Olaudah Equiano on his post-emancipation travels; and Charles Brockden Brown’s “Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist” (the complete “prequel” to his first novel, *Wieland*). We continue to offer the complete texts of Rowlandson’s enormously influential *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (which remains one of the most compelling works on the emergence of an “American” self), Royall Tyler’s popular play *The Contrast*, and Hannah Foster’s novel *The Coquette*, which uses a real-life tragedy to meditate on the proper role of well-bred women in the new republic and testifies to the existence of a female audience for the popular novels of the period. New to this volume is Washington Irving, a writer who looks back to colonial history and forward to Jacksonian America. The inclusion of Irving in both Volumes A and B, with one key overlapping selection, points to continuities and changes between the two volumes.

Five new and revised thematic clusters of texts highlight themes central to Volume A. In addition to “First Encounters,” we have included “Native American Oral Literature,” “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression,” “Ethnographic and Naturalist Writings,” and “Native American Eloquence: Negotiation and Resistance.” “Native American Oral Literature” features creation stories, trickster tales, oratory, and poetry from a spectrum of traditions, while “Native American Eloquence” collects speeches and accounts by Canassatego and Native American women (both new to the volume), Pontiac, Chief Logan (as cited by Thomas Jefferson), and Tecumseh, which, as a group, illustrate the centuries-long pattern of initial peaceful contact between Native Americans and whites mutating into bitter and violent conflict. This cluster, which focuses on Native Americans’ points of view, complements “First Encounters,” which focuses on European colonizers’ points of view. The Native American presence in the volume is further expanded with increased representation of Samson Occom, which

includes an excerpt from his sermon at the execution of Moses Paul, and the inclusion of Sagoyewatha in “American Literature and the Varieties of Religious Expression.” Strategically located between the Congregationalist Protestant (or late-Puritan) Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment figure Franklin, this cluster brings together works from the perspectives of the major religious groups of the early Americas, including Quakerism (poems by Francis Daniel Pastorius, selections from autographical narratives of Elizabeth Ashbridge and John Woolman), Roman Catholicism (poems by Sor Juana, two Jesuit Relations, with biographical accounts of Father Isaac Jogues and Kateri Tekakwitha), dissenting Protestantism (Marrant), Judaism (Rebecca Samuel), and indigenous beliefs (Sagoyewatha). The new cluster “Ethnographic and Naturalist Writings” includes writings by Sarah Kemble Knight and William Byrd, along with new selections by Alexander Hamilton, William Bartram, and Hendrick Aupaumut. With this cluster, the new cluster on science and technology in Volume B, and a number of new selections and revisions in Volumes C, D, and E, the Ninth Edition pays greater attention to the impact of science on American literary traditions.

Volume B, American Literature, 1820–1865. Under the editorship of Robert S. Levine, this volume over the past several editions has become more diverse. Included here are the complete texts of Emerson’s *Nature*, Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, Thoreau’s *Walden*, Douglass’s *Narrative*, Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, Melville’s *Benito Cereno* and *Billy Budd*, Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*, and Margaret Fuller’s *The Great Lawsuit*. At the same time, aware of the important role of African American writers in the period, and the omnipresence of race and slavery as literary and political themes, we have recently added two major African American writers, William Wells Brown and Frances E. W. Harper, along with Douglass’s novella *The Heroic Slave*. Thoreau’s “Plea for Captain John Brown,” a generous selection from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the cluster “Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature” also help remind students of how central slavery was to the literary and political life of the nation during this period. “Native Americans: Resistance and Removal” gathers oratory and writings—by Native Americans such as Black Hawk and whites such as Ralph Waldo Emerson—protesting Andrew Jackson’s ruthless national policy of Indian removal. Newly added is a selection from *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*, by the Native American writer John Rollin Ridge. This potboiler of a novel, set in the new state of California, emerged from the debates that began during the Indian removal period. Through the figure of the legendary Mexican bandit Murieta, who fights back against white expansionists, Ridge responds to the violence encouraged by Jackson and subsequent white leaders as they laid claim to the continent. Political themes, far from diluting the literary imagination of American authors, served to inspire some of the most memorable writing of the pre-Civil War period.

Women writers recently added to Volume B include Lydia Huntley Sigourney, the Native American writer Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, and Louisa May Alcott. Recently added prose fiction includes chapters from Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, and Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, along with Poe’s “The Black Cat” and Hawthorne’s “Wakefield.”

For the first time in the print edition, we include Melville's "Hawthorne and His Mosses" as it appeared in the 1850 *Literary World*. Poetry by Emily Dickinson is now presented in the texts established by R. W. Franklin and includes a facsimile page from Fascicle 10. For this edition we have added several poems by Dickinson that were inspired by the Civil War. Other selections added to this edition include Fanny Fern's amusing sketch "Writing 'Compositions,'" the chapter in Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* on his resistance to the slave-breaker Covey, three poems by Melville ("Dupont's Round Fight," "A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Fight," and "Art"), and Whitman's "The Sleepers."

Perhaps the most significant addition to Volume B is the cluster "Science and Technology in the Pre-Civil War Nation," with selections by the canonical writers Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and Frederick Douglass, by the scientists Jacob Bigelow and Alexander Humboldt, and by the editor-writer Harriet Farley. The cluster calls attention to the strong interest in science and technology throughout this period and should provide a rich context for reconsidering works such as Thoreau's *Walden* and Melville's "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids." In an effort to underscore the importance of science and technology to Poe and Hawthorne in particular, we have added two stories that directly address these topics: Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" and Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful" (which reads nicely in relation to his "The Birth-Mark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter"). Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson are among the many other authors in Volume B who had considerable interest in science.

Volume C, *American Literature, 1865–1914*. Newly edited by Michael A. Elliott, the volume includes expanded selections of key works, as well as new ones that illustrate how many of the struggles of this period prefigure our own. In addition to complete longer works such as Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chopin's *The Awakening*, James's *Daisy Miller*, and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the Ninth Edition now includes the complete text of *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, a highly influential novella of immigrant life that depicts the pressures facing newly arrived Jews in the nation's largest metropolis. Also new is a substantial selection from Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a masterpiece of literary regionalism that portrays a remote seaside community facing change.

Americans are still reflecting on the legacy of the Civil War, and we have added two works approaching that subject from different angles. Constance Fenimore Woolson's "Rodman the Keeper" tells the story of a Union veteran who maintains a cemetery in the South. In "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," Mark Twain reflects with wit and insight on his own brief experience in the war. In the Eighth Edition, we introduced a section on the critical controversy surrounding race and the conclusion of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. That section remains as important as ever, and new additions incorporate a recent debate about the value of an expurgated edition of the novel.

We have substantially revised clusters designed to give students a sense of the cultural context of the period. New selections in "Realism and Naturalism" demonstrate what was at stake in the debate over realism, among them a feminist response from Charlotte Perkins Gilman. "Becoming

American in the Gilded Age,” a new cluster, introduces students to writing about wealth and citizenship at a time when the nation was undergoing transformation. Selections from one of Horatio Alger’s popular novels of economic uplift, Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth,” and Charles W. Chesnutt’s “The Future American” together reveal how questions about the composition of the nation both influenced the literature of this period and prefigured contemporary debates on immigration, cultural diversity, and the concentration of wealth.

The turn of the twentieth century was a time of immense literary diversity. “Voices from Native America” brings together a variety of expressive forms—oratory, memoir, ethnography—through which Native Americans sought to represent themselves. It includes new selections by Francis LaFlesche, Zitkala Ša, and Chief Joseph. For the first time, we include the complete text of José Martí’s “Our America,” in a new translation by Martí biographer Alfred J. López. By instructor request, we have added fiction and nonfiction by African American authors: Charles W. Chesnutt’s “Po’ Sandy,” Pauline Hopkins’s “Talma Gordon,” and expanded selections from W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* and James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*.

Volume D, American Literature 1914–1945. Edited by Mary Loeffelholz, Volume D offers a number of complete longer works—Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (exclusive to the Norton Anthology), William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, and Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*. To these we have added Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, which replaces *Quicksand*, and Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust*. We added *Passing* in response to numerous requests from instructors and students who regard it as one of the most compelling treatments of racial passing in American literature. The novel also offers rich descriptions of the social and racial geographies of Chicago and New York City. West’s darkly comic *The Day of the Locust* similarly offers rich descriptions of the social and racial geography of Los Angeles. West’s novel can at times seem bleak and not “politically correct,” but in many ways it is the first great American novel about the film industry, and it also has much to say about the growth of California in the early decades of the twentieth century. New selections by Zora Neale Hurston (“Sweat”) and John Steinbeck (“The Chrysanthemums”) further contribute to the volume’s exploration of issues connected with racial and social geographies.

Selections by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Hart Crane, and Langston Hughes encourage students and teachers to contemplate the interrelation of modernist aesthetics with ethnic, regional, and popular writing. In “Modernist Manifestos,” F. T. Marinetti, Mina Loy, Ezra Pound, Willa Cather, William Carlos Williams, and Langston Hughes show how the manifesto as a form exerted a powerful influence on international modernism in all the arts. Another illuminating cluster addresses central events of the modern period. In “World War I and Its Aftermath,” writings by Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and others explore sharply divided views on the U.S. role in World War I, as well as the radicalizing effect of modern warfare—with 365,000 American casualties—on contemporary writing. We have added to this edition a chapter from Hemingway’s first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, which speaks to the impact of the war

on sexuality and gender. Other recent and new additions to Volume D include Faulkner's popular "A Rose for Emily," Katherine Anne Porter's novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Gertrude Stein's "Objects," Marianne Moore's ambitious longer poem "Marriage," poems by Edgar Lee Masters and Edwin Arlington Robinson, and Jean Toomer's "Blood Burning Moon."

Volume E, *American Literature, 1945 to the Present*. Amy Hungerford, the new editor of Volume E, has revised the volume to present a wider range of writing in poetry, prose, drama, and nonfiction. As before, the volume offers the complete texts of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (exclusive to this anthology), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Sam Shepard's *True West*, August Wilson's *Fences*, David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and Louise Glück's long poem *October*. A selection from Art Spiegelman's prize-winning *Maus* opens possibilities for teaching the graphic novel. We also include teachable stand-alone segments from influential novels by Saul Bellow (*The Adventures of Augie March*) and Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*), and, new to this edition, Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*) and Don DeLillo (*White Noise*). The selection from one of DeLillo's most celebrated novels tells what feels like a contemporary story about a nontraditional family navigating an environmental disaster in a climate saturated by mass media. Three newly added stories—Patricia Highsmith's "The Quest for *Blank Claveringi*," Philip K. Dick's "Precious Artifact," and George Saunders's "CivilWarLand in Bad Decline"—reveal the impact of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and (especially in the case of Saunders) mass media on literary fiction. Also appearing for the first time are Edward P. Jones and Lydia Davis, contemporary masters of the short story, who join such short fiction writers as Ann Beattie and Junot Díaz. Recognized literary figures in all genres, ranging from Robert Penn Warren and Elizabeth Bishop to Leslie Marmon Silko and Toni Morrison, continue to be richly represented. In response to instructors' requests, we now include Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues."

One of the most distinctive features of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature is a rich vein of African American poetry. This edition adds two contemporary poets from this living tradition: Natasha Trethewey and Tracy K. Smith. Trethewey's selections include personal and historical elegies; Smith draws on cultural materials as diverse as David Bowie's music and the history of the Hubble Space Telescope. These writers join African American poets whose work has long helped define the anthology—Rita Dove, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Audre Lorde, and others.

This edition gives even greater exposure to literary and social experimentation during the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. The work of two avant-garde playwrights joins "Postmodern Manifestos" (which pairs nicely with "Modernist Manifestos" in Volume D). Introduced to the anthology through their short, challenging pieces, Charles Ludlam and Richard Foreman cast the mechanics of performance in a new light. Reading their thought pieces in relation to the volume's complete plays helps raise new questions about how the seemingly more traditional dramatic works engage structures of time, plot, feeling, and spectatorship. To our popular cluster "Creative Nonfiction" we have added a new selection by Joan Didion, from "Slouching Towards

Bethlehem,” which showcases her revolutionary style of journalism as she comments on experiments with public performance and communal living during the 1960s. A new selection from David Foster Wallace in the same cluster pushes reportage on the Maine Lobster Festival into philosophical inquiry: how can we fairly assess the pain of other creatures? This edition also introduces poet Frank Bidart through his most famous work—*Ellen West*—in which the poet uses experimental forms of verse he pioneered during the 1970s to speak in the voice of a woman battling anorexia. Standing authors in the anthology, notably John Ashbery and Amiri Baraka, fill out the volume’s survey of radical change in the forms, and social uses, of literary art.

We are delighted to offer this revised Ninth Edition to teachers and students, and we welcome your comments.

Additional Resources from the Publisher

The Ninth Edition retains the paperback splits format, popular for its flexibility and portability. This format accommodates the many instructors who use the anthology in a two-semester survey, but allows for mixing and matching the five volumes in a variety of courses organized by period or topic, at levels from introductory to advanced. We are also pleased to offer the Ninth Edition in an ebook format. The Digital Anthologies include all the content of the print volumes, with print-corresponding page and line numbers for seamless integration into the print-digital mixed classroom. Annotations are accessible with a click or a tap, encouraging students to use them with minimal interruption to their reading of the text. The e-reading platform facilitates active reading with a powerful annotation tool and allows students to do a full-text search of the anthology and read online or off. The Digital Editions can be accessed from any computer or device with an Internet browser and are available to students at a fraction of the print price at digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9pre1865 and digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9post1865. For exam copy access to the Digital Editions and for information on making the Digital Editions available through the campus bookstore or packaging the Digital Editions with the print anthology, instructors should contact their Norton representative.

To give instructors even more flexibility, Norton is making available the full list of 254 Norton Critical Editions. A Norton Critical Edition can be included for free with either package (Volumes A and B; Volumes C, D, E) or any individual split volume. Each Norton Critical Edition gives students an authoritative, carefully annotated text accompanied by rich contextual and critical materials prepared by an expert in the subject. The publisher also offers the much-praised guide *Writing about American Literature*, by Karen Gocsik (University of California—San Diego) and Coleman Hutchison (University of Texas—Austin), free with either package or any individual split volume.

In addition to the Digital Editions, for students using *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, the publisher provides a wealth of free resources at digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9pre1865 and digital.wwnorton.com/americanlit9post1865. There students will find more than seventy reading-comprehension quizzes on the period introductions and widely taught works with extensive feedback that points them back to the text. Ideal for self-study

or homework assignments, Norton's sophisticated quizzing engine allows instructors to track student results and improvement. For over thirty works in the anthology, the sites also offer Close Reading Workshops that walk students step-by-step through analysis of a literary work. Each workshop prompts students to read, reread, consider contexts, and answer questions along the way, making these perfect assignments to build close-reading skills.

The publisher also provides extensive instructor-support materials. New to the Ninth Edition is an online Interactive Instructor's Guide at iig.wwnorton.com/americanlit9/full. Invaluable for course preparation, this resource provides hundreds of teaching notes, discussion questions, and suggested resources from the much-praised *Teaching with The Norton Anthology of American Literature: A Guide for Instructors* by Edward Whitley (Lehigh University). Also at this searchable and sortable site are quizzes, images, and lecture PowerPoints for each introduction, topic cluster, and twenty-five widely taught works. A PDF of *Teaching with NAAL* is available for download at wnorton.com/instructors.

Finally, Norton Coursepacks bring high-quality digital media into a new or existing online course. The coursepack includes all the reading comprehension quizzes (customizable within the coursepack), the Writing about Literature video series, a bank of essay and exam questions, bulleted summaries of the period introductions, and "Making Connections" discussion or essay prompts to encourage students to draw connections across the anthology's authors and works. Coursepacks are available in a variety of formats, including Blackboard, Canvas, Desire2Learn, and Moodle, at no cost to instructors or students.

Editorial Procedures

As in past editions, editorial features—period introductions, headnotes, annotations, and bibliographies—are designed to be concise yet full and to give students necessary information without imposing a single interpretation. The editors have updated all apparatus in response to new scholarship: period introductions have been entirely or substantially rewritten, as have many headnotes. All selected bibliographies and each period's general-resources bibliographies, categorized by Reference Works, Histories, and Literary Criticism, have been thoroughly updated. The Ninth Edition retains three editorial features that help students place their reading in historical and cultural context—a Texts/Contexts timeline following each period introduction, a map on the front endpaper of each volume, and a chronological chart, on the back endpaper, showing the lifespans of many of the writers anthologized.

Whenever possible, our policy has been to reprint texts as they appeared in their historical moment. There is one exception: we have modernized most spellings and (very sparingly) the punctuation in Volume A on the principle that archaic spellings and typography pose unnecessary problems for beginning students. We have used square brackets to indicate titles supplied by the editors for the convenience of students. Whenever a portion of a text has been omitted, we have indicated that omission with three asterisks.

If the omitted portion is important for following the plot or argument, we give a brief summary within the text or in a footnote. After each work, we cite the date of first publication on the right; in some instances, the latter is followed by the date of a revised edition for which the author was responsible. When the date of composition is known and differs from the date of publication, we cite it on the left.

The editors have benefited from commentary offered by hundreds of teachers throughout the country. Those teachers who prepared detailed critiques, or who offered special help in preparing texts, are listed under Acknowledgments, on a separate page. We also thank the many people at Norton who contributed to the Ninth Edition: Julia Reidhead, who supervised the Ninth Edition; Marian Johnson, managing editor, college; Carly Fraser Doria, media editor; Kurt Wildermuth, Michael Fleming, Harry Haskell, and Candace Levy, manuscript editors; Rachel Taylor and Ava Bramson, assistant editors; Sean Mintus, production manager; Cat Abelman, photo editor; Julie Tesser, photo researcher; Debra Morton Hoyt, art director; Tiani Kennedy, cover designer; Megan Jackson Schindel, permissions manager; and Margaret Gorenstein, who cleared permissions. We also wish to acknowledge our debt to the late George P. Brockway, former president and chairman at Norton, who invented this anthology, and to the late M. H. Abrams, Norton's advisor on English texts. All have helped us create an anthology that, more than ever, testifies to the continuing richness of American literary traditions.

ROBERT S. LEVINE, General Editor

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THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF

AMERICAN
LITERATURE



NINTH EDITION

VOLUME E: LITERATURE SINCE 1945





American Literature since 1945

How do we tell the story of American literature in our own time? In one version of that story, we are led into the twenty-first century by an unlikely hero named Oscar Wao, the creation of novelist and short-story writer Junot Díaz in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008). Oscar is a nerdy, overweight devotee of fantasy fiction and comics, dreaming of becoming the Dominican American J. R. R. Tolkien, author of Oscar's favorite novels, the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Failing at exercise, dating, and the college social scene, Oscar leaves New Jersey for an extended stay with relatives in the Dominican Republic. There he achieves the romantic fulfillment that eluded him at home, but his refugee family's tragic history comes full circle, too, as Oscar's life is changed forever by his unwitting entanglement with the Dominican Republic's brutal political regime. This, Díaz tells us, is *fuku*, a curse that wreaks havoc the world over, anywhere we find those hungry for power crushing the freedom, and the bodies, of the weak.

Díaz's hero and the novel that brings him to life embody what feels truly new in American writing of the twenty-first century. When we read *Oscar Wao*—or virtually any of Díaz's stories, such as “Drown,” reprinted in this volume—we plug into an electric, multilingual English renewed by Spanish, African, and Latin American borrowings. What has been called a *mestizo* language was practiced, described, and theorized by the writer Gloria Anzaldúa decades before (see her essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” also in this volume). Building on the work of Anzaldúa and others, a writer of Díaz's generation need not justify the hybrid, but can simply inhabit it, using new language to reach new regions of human experience and

Blam, Roy Lichtenstein, 1962. For more information about this painting, see the color insert in this volume.

American culture. Following Díaz's allusions in *Oscar Wao*, readers are led to genre fiction, superhero comics, film, fashion, pop music, arts, religious ritual, modern sexuality, and mass entertainment—a cultural milieu that stretches from New Jersey to Santo Domingo. But Díaz's headlong prose also brings references to more traditionally literary writers such as William Shakespeare, Herman Melville, and the Latin American novelist Gabriel García Márquez, alongside the terms and ideas of literary criticism, history, philosophy, gender theory, and critiques of political power. Twenty-first-century readers have been more than ready to embrace Díaz's capacious literary and cultural vision. They have been willing to wrestle with what is difficult in his writing while they revel in his brilliant, loving use of the lowbrow and the popular. Do readers have to choose between the academic and the popular, between “serious” and “entertaining”? Junot Díaz says no. What do the X-Men comics have to say about theories of dictatorship? *Oscar Wao* explains—in a footnote, no less. Twenty-first-century readers live these intersections daily, code-shifting as they move among family, friends, school, work, nations, and cultures. The fiction of Junot Díaz seems to speak all these languages and more.

Junot Díaz took eleven years to write *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. He had to invent the hybrid language from which to spin the strands of his story. The Pulitzer Prize committee—known for honoring epic novels that sum up something important about American life—chose *Oscar Wao* for the 2008 prize, marking the arrival in literature of a vision of America already lived by many of its citizens. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Oscar Wao* did just what the poet Ezra Pound exhorted ambitious writers to do at the start of the twentieth century: “Make it new.” In doing so, of course, Díaz joined a literary tradition even as he broke its molds.

The vitality of contemporary American literature, evident throughout the most recent selections in this volume, is fueled by two great engines, one artistic and one demographic. The artistic urge to experiment galvanized writers inspired by, or reacting against, the influential modernist writers of the first half of the twentieth century who themselves experimented ceaselessly with literary form and with the subjects and stories that could be spoken through poetry, drama, and fiction. At the same time, the demographics of American education and immigration were changing radically, beginning in the middle of the twentieth century. These forces transformed the cast of American high- and middlebrow culture: who participated in American culture, and who was taught the reading and writing skills essential to the creation of modern literature. As an interest in experiment surged through a nation of new readers and writers, the basic elements of literary culture were renewed once more.

NEW READERS, NEW WRITERS, NEW HEROES

Addressing American college students in 1950, the Russian émigré author Vladimir Nabokov gave his audience a multiple-choice quiz: What makes a reader a *good* reader? The options included joining a book club, identifying with characters, and reading a story for what it had to say about society. These were, for Nabokov, trick answers: they were common ways of reading

then, as now, but he disparaged them. He wanted readers to take a different approach. The correct answers, he told the students, were owning a dictionary, possessing a good memory, and having imagination. Both the “wrong” answers and the ones Nabokov thought were right tell us a great deal about what the new generation of American readers was looking for when they turned to literature.

These readers—more diverse and better educated than ever before, faced with more choices than ever before—would help to define American and world literature over the next half century. Many of those regularly encountering literary works in the second half of the twentieth century were, or had been, servicemen. Quality paperbacks at low prices were suddenly everywhere, and the format was no longer the province solely of lowbrow “pulp” fiction. Millions of pocket-sized paperbacks had been sent abroad during World War II, given away by publishers through the Armed Services Editions series. Mysteries, Westerns, domestic novels, and works by Charles Dickens and Shakespeare all found their way overseas. *The Great Gatsby*, which had faded from public consciousness by the 1940s, was made popular again by servicemen and their paperbacks. While these books carried aspects of American and British culture into the barracks and bivouacs of soldiers in the theaters of war, those soldiers were also encountering the languages and cultures of Europe, North Africa, India, and Japan in the course of their service, broadening their cultural education in ways not specifically American. Coming back to the United States after 1945, veterans were greeted by an entitlement that dramatically changed American society: the benefits of the GI Bill—the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944—signed into law by President Roosevelt. Under its provisions the government provided money so that veterans could buy homes and attend school, receiving tuition and a



Army Special Services librarian and soldiers in the Philippines, 1946.



The GI Bill (1944), which provided federal subsidies to support college education for returning World War II veterans, democratized American higher education. Shown here, veterans and other students at New York University in January 1945.

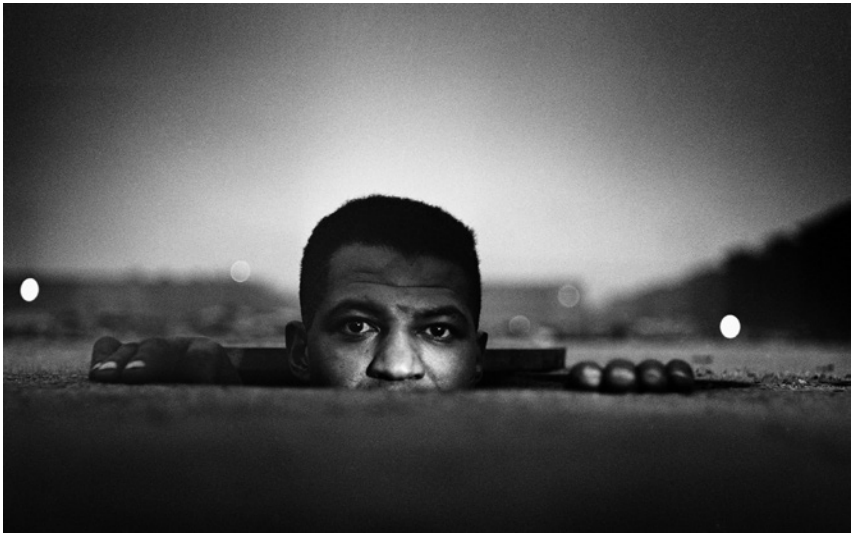
stipend for up to four years of college or other professional training. For the first time, men from immigrant, poor, and working-class families, whose parents had little education, were attending college in droves. In 1947, the program's peak year, 49 percent of students admitted to college were veterans. By the time the original version of the law had run its course in 1956, 7.8 million out of the 16 million World War II veterans had benefited from its education and training provisions. Combined with a booming American economy, plentiful jobs, and the widespread urge to start adult lives delayed by military deployment, the entitlement helped to lift millions of individuals and families into the middle class.

That demographic change transformed the demographics of reading and writing for the rest of the century. American readers' increasing sophistication about aesthetic and cultural matters was fueled by their professors' desire to teach the formally complex works promoted by the international modernist writers they admired from the early twentieth century. An influx of writers and scholars fleeing Europe just prior to the outbreak of war had given American intellectuals renewed contact with the literary currents of French, German, and Russian literature. "The New Criticism"—a modernist-inspired method of critical interpretation grounded in reading the text "closely"—was popular in literature classrooms just about everywhere, enshrined in textbooks such as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943; the writer Flannery O'Connor called *Understanding Fiction* her "Bible"). The method put students from varied backgrounds on an equal footing as readers and helped them to see how literary works were crafted, benefits that explain why students and teachers still practice "close reading" today.

Nabokov's recommended reading practices would serve students well as they encountered complex literary works, European influences, and the challenge of reading closely—and they would serve the future readers of his morally edgy novel *Lolita* (1955), too. *Lolita* is about a gentlemanly and intellectual European pedophile in love with a brash American preteen girl.

Initially banned in the United States, once *Lolita* became available freely to the American public in 1958, it became a best seller even as it tested readers' moral tolerance and aesthetic sophistication. Ironically, then, while Nabokov strove to teach American college students a kind of literary appreciation fostered by his aristocratic European education, the practices he in turn discouraged were too deeply embedded in American history to be set aside by the new college students filling the lecture halls and classrooms where he taught. Literature's capacity to change the culture by encouraging readers to think about their society through the lens of a story had already had significant effects in the nation's history. Nineteenth-century readers identifying with the characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or turning to Frederick Douglass's autobiography to understand slavery fueled the abolitionist movement that in turn fueled the Civil War. The African American characters that northern white readers identified with or listened to in fiction and autobiography reached them in ways their social lives otherwise prevented.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a new generation read not only for the "aesthetic bliss" Nabokov celebrated and for the formal features of language that "close reading" and an appreciation of international modernism could reveal, but also in order to remake themselves and their society. Those socially engaged acts of reading ensured that writers catering to them would make their mark both on the development of fiction, poetry, and drama as art forms and on politics, commerce, religion, medicine, and domestic life. By the mid-twentieth century, one could already point to a long history of black writers in the United States who used their skills on the page to fight the philosophy, psychology, and policies of white supremacy. The burgeoning civil rights movement and, later, the Black Arts movement, brought many more black writers into publication. While African American members of the armed services were in Europe, James Baldwin—who did not qualify for the service because of the effects of childhood malnutrition—was working in the War Information Office in New York, but he was also honing his craft as a fiction writer, joining a distinguished generation of black writers that included Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Ann Petry, and others who enjoyed wide audiences in the United States before, during, and after the war. Although James Baldwin left the United States in 1949 and spent most of the rest of his life in Europe, he would become one of the most canny commentators on race to address a mass readership in the postwar period. The essays contained in his well-received 1965 volume, *The Fire Next Time*, are even more direct than the critique to be found in *Black Boy*, the memoir that his mentor Richard Wright had published just twenty years earlier. This was partly due to the genre Baldwin chose: Baldwin's essays were not stories or memoirs, but cultural criticism. He provided a pointed psychological, spiritual, sexual, and practical analysis of racism in America that was as important to the civil rights movement's intellectual evolution as sit-ins and boycotts were to its political success. Baldwin's fiction—such as the story "Sonny's Blues," found in this volume—matched this social analysis with storytelling that could make readers feel the human cost of poverty and addiction in black communities—the outgrowths of the racist society Baldwin's essays lay bare.



“A Man Becomes Invisible.” One of a set of images created by photographer Gordon Parks for a photo essay on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. The essay was published in *Life* magazine on August 25, 1952.

Drawing energy from the newly educated readers and writers of the mid-twentieth century, American fiction and drama in the postwar period frequently celebrated nonconforming outsiders like Baldwin’s Sonny: the philosophical character, often a writer or an artist, usually male, who suffers social rejection for his ideals or simply for his identity. The social liberation movements of the second half of the twentieth century—not only the civil rights movement, but also the later Black Power movement, the American Indian Movement (AIM, founded in 1968), the women’s liberation movement (which gained momentum in the early 1970s), and the movement for gay rights (which began with a protest at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York City, in 1969, and entered a new phase with the AIDS crisis in the mid-1980s)—inspired content for this infinitely flexible dramatic setup. Notable examples of the outsider character would include the nameless narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952); Augie in Saul Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953); the autobiographical narrator of Maxine Hong Kingston’s stories in *The Woman Warrior* (1979); Toni Morrison’s Milkman Dead and Guitar Bains (*Song of Solomon*, 1979); Don DeLillo’s Jack Gladney (*White Noise*, 1985); Sherman Alexie’s Junior in his acclaimed young adult novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007); Junot Díaz’s Oscar Wao (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 2007); and Philip Roth’s many Jewish protagonists who belong neither in their Jewish communities nor in the Protestant-dominated culture around them, the kind of character central to the story “Defender of the Faith” and embodied perhaps most memorably in Coleman Silk—the contemporary black man who lives out his life as a Jew in Roth’s *The Human Stain* (2000). There were limits to American optimism about the prospects for outsiders’ lives: like Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a*

Salesman, the outsider trying to reenter society's circle of norms can fail, sometimes spectacularly. These misfit characters can be heroes and antiheroes, weak men or rebels, and their stories can end in tragedy or triumph.

Such outsider characters were related to the rise of a new readership looking for characters with whom they could identify, but they were also inspired by discontent with mass culture in the United States and its perceived insistence on social conformity. That discontent sent young people in the postwar period searching for meaning and identity—beyond the desire for upward mobility, marriage and children, a house in the suburbs, and the sturdy work ethic of their fathers and mothers. The satirical and sometimes simply resistant attitude toward intellectual, cultural, religious, and political authority cultivated among the coterie of so-called beat-



Toni Morrison in 1970 at Random House, where she worked as an editor.

niks in the late 1940s and 1950s—a group that included Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs—had become a popular movement among the generation born in the decade after the war. In the 1970s, many important women writers whom readers will find in this anthology—such as Jamaica Kincaid, Anne Sexton, Elizabeth Bishop, Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Leslie Marmon Silko—also resisted conformities of race, education, religion, and gender that they perceived had circumscribed the lives of the women and men around them. Some, like Bishop, found artistic and personal solidarity among artists with whom they shared an aesthetic vision and a common set of cultural touchstones (later in this volume readers can see Bishop among a roomful of male writers at New York's Gotham Book Mart in a group photograph included alongside the selections from poet Randall Jarrell). Others, like Bambara, cultivated a diverse solidarity of women through collective projects and mutual support—as in Bambara's significant gathering of writers in the volume she edited, *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970). Toni Morrison spent twenty years as an editor at Random House, the job she held before becoming a full-time writer, where she ensured that black writers received the attention they deserved. And some writers resisted norms by arguing for new ones, as demonstrated in Silko's lifelong advocacy for politically engaged Native American art, which led her to criticize sharply white writers (famously, the poet Gary Snyder) for appropriating Native American sources as well as Native writers (such as fellow fiction writer Louise Erdrich) for being insufficiently committed to Native American



Levittown. Construction and aerial views of housing development in Levittown, PA, built by Levitt & Sons between 1951 and 1957. Levittown was the prototype for similar developments built all over the country in the 1950s and 1960s. They offered largely identical single-family homes for a generation of upwardly mobile middle-class Americans who wanted to move out of cities.

materials. Silko's admonishments to writers regarding the subjects and cultural materials that they should or should not write about suggests how nonconformity with the mainstream could sometimes place different forms of expectation or restraint upon writers. Do writers have to turn to their own heritage for inspiration? Sometimes it has seemed that writers of color are expected to do so, and white writers are free to choose not to. Language itself is a form of conformity and restraint. In the fiction of George Saunders—such as his story “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline,” included here—the characters resist (and are sometimes overcome by) the stifling, dystopian worlds of American business where the euphemisms of customer service and “total quality management” jargon make it nearly impossible to describe, or even to perceive, the world beyond capitalist enterprise. Nonconformity had its most theatrical moment in the 1960s youth counterculture, epitomized by LSD advocate Timothy Leary's exhortation to “turn on, tune in, drop out.” “Turning on” to the exploration of consciousness through psychedelic drugs such as LSD was meant to expand the mind beyond the limits of conventional thought and perception. For Leary and many in the counterculture, to “tune in” meant that one would seek to be open to the world spiritually, intellectually, and sensually; to “drop out” was to reject social conventions and free the mind of the unconscious limits that accompanied those conventions. The writer Joan Didion turned a critical eye on the counterculture in her essay “Slouching Towards Bethlehem,” excerpted below in the “Creative Nonfiction” cluster, but the counterculture was artistically enabling for many, including Didion herself, whose practice of reportage looked little like the conventional journalism of her day. Didion waxed personal in her reporting—breaking the rules of objectivity—as the counterculture around her took to heart the adage that “the personal is political.”

“Dropping out” was the 1960s incarnation of an old impulse in American culture, one that can be traced back at least to Henry David Thoreau, alone in his cabin on Walden Pond writing essays about civil disobedience, who was jailed briefly upon his return to town for refusing to pay taxes that supported slavery and the war against Mexico. But this aspect of the counterculture was not as politically engaged as the model of Thoreau might suggest. The ethic of “dropping out” was perhaps most famously embodied by novelist Ken Kesey. Kesey became famous when he published *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962), a best-selling novel that told the story of a man sent to a mental institution and, finally, lobotomized, because he would not conform to society’s expectations. The money Kesey earned from this book supported him and a group of followers call-



The Merry Pranksters atop their bus, “Further.”

ing themselves “The Merry Pranksters,” who experimented with drugs, music, art, meditation, macrobiotic diets, and unusual social, sexual, and leadership arrangements. The Pranksters’ compound in the redwood groves of La Honda, California, and their converted schoolbus, called “Further” and piloted by Neal Cassady, the model for Jack Kerouac’s hero in *On the Road* (1957), became the symbols of the counterculture’s ideals and excesses. Kesey’s world was described in Thomas Wolfe’s book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), an early example of a genre that came to be called “creative nonfiction.” Like Hunter S. Thompson’s “gonzo” journalism—in which the journalist immerses him- or herself in extreme experience in order to report on it vividly—this new genre of writing used literary language (in these cases, the high-energy poetic prose style of the Beat writers) to report on real people and events. Wolfe and Thompson crafted their styles to match—and to make the reader feel that she had somehow experienced—their wild subjects.

Testifying to the broadly shared celebration of the outsider in American prose writing, we can look back to Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and to the melancholy, misfit suburbanites of John Cheever’s and John Updike’s stories to round out the fellowship of nonconforming heroes. This was a durable narrative and thematic convention that long accompanied protest and cultural transformation but also had its politically quietist side. Nabokov, who told his college student audience they should not identify with characters, would not approve: America’s newly expanded and diverse reading public embraced these figures and, yes, *identified* with

them as culture heroes and fellow-travelers. That they still speak to readers today—many can be met in the pages of this volume of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*—reveals how unconventionality itself can become a fertile and endlessly engaging convention.

LITERATURE AND AMERICAN MEDIA

While education, immigration, and political and cultural unrest had an enormous impact on America's readers and writers during the second half of the twentieth century, the medium of writing itself was suddenly surrounded by a rich and shifting context of new media. Many would say that writing—fiction, poetry, and plays especially—had to *compete* with other media in new ways, but that would oversimplify the matter. For the new media that developed after World War II and through into the twenty-first century are closely related to literature and together take up themes and ideas rooted in literature's longer history.

Two major developments dominate our sense of the media landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: first, the rise of television after the Second World War, and second, the invention of the Internet in the 1990s. These two forms of media—and of course, the second is better understood as a whole constellation of media, including text, moving and still images, and sound—fascinated not only their mass publics but also writers and dramatists whose very vocations made them highly aware of the powers and effects of different media. The very first “media theorist” was a trained literary critic, a Canadian-born professor named Marshall McLuhan, whose best-known book, *Understanding Media* (1964), consciously echoed the titles of the much-used literary textbooks of the New Criticism. Famous for his dictum that “the medium is the message,” he argued that *how* something is communicated is sometimes the very essence of *what* it communicates. Television shows and print advertising were often the targets of his analyses, but he also wrote lovingly of medieval life, of a time before Gutenberg's printing press, when oral storytelling, music, and traveling dramatic productions constituted the public media of the day. McLuhan's attention to the material medium at the expense of content sometimes seemed absurd to his critics, but his emphasis reflected the public's sense that television in particular was changing American mass culture less because of what was said on television than because of how it delivered a culture of performance into living rooms across the country. The television networks took types of programs already well established in radio and on the vaudeville stage of the early twentieth century—such as the variety show, the interview or advice show, and cowboy and detective stories—and made them come alive every night on screens in American homes. In 1947, about 6,000 sets could be found in those homes; by 1951, the number was over 12 million. McLuhan's prolific writing and speaking about television made him a celebrity. When appointed by Fordham University to hold the prestigious Albert Schweitzer Chair, he was one of the highest paid English professors in the country (with a salary of \$100,000 in 1967). He was so well known that Woody Allen gave him an amusing cameo in his film *Annie Hall* (1977): Allen's character pulls McLuhan out from behind a billboard in the lobby of a movie theater in order to refute an annoying man spouting media criticism while

waiting in line for tickets. McLuhan lamented the passivity with which viewers received television. Allen makes the scene in which McLuhan appears a commentary on passivity. Allen breaks character and addresses the film's audience: "If life were only like this!" he says to the audience, as McLuhan gives the obnoxious moviegoer an intellectual dressing-down.



Media critic Marshall McLuhan (far right) and, addressing the audience, film-maker Woody Allen (center) in *Annie Hall* (1977).

The problem of passivity in the face of spectacle is something that television made urgent and that modern uses of drama highlight in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Television made Americans nightly spectators to realities that were far from entertaining. Images of violence against peaceful civil rights protesters and, in the late 1960s and '70s, images of the war in Vietnam—which many term the first “televised war”—galvanized national issues that might otherwise have seemed too local or too far away to engage people throughout the country. Viewers found their passivity challenged: What should they do with the violence or injustice that they saw in front of them on the screen? How did watching something implicate them as participants in what they watched? How did performance in social life constrain them—to norms of gender or race, for example? How might performance free them?

In twentieth- and twenty-first-century drama, playwrights experimented—as Woody Allen does in *Annie Hall*—with the so-called fourth wall, the side of the stage that faces the audience. They explored what would happen when a play broke through that wall, treating the whole theater, including the audience, as its staging area. Even public spaces—parks, streets, and museums—were treated as stages that could include random passersby. The term *fourth wall* comes from the eighteenth-century French playwright Denis Diderot; engaging the audience was routine in Shakespearean drama, and the audience is always crucial to comedy—we have to laugh in order for comedy to work. And in classical Greek drama, the fourth wall is broken whenever the chorus addresses the audience directly and comments on the action. Among the plays included in this volume, for instance, August Wilson's *Fences* (1983) provokes audiences to think about barriers and spheres of action, to consider how enclosures determine human beings' powers of expression. The stage, in every play, fences things in, and, therefore, fences things out. The counterculture experimented with “happenings” that moved performance out to public spaces where the question of what is fenced in or out becomes particularly acute. A description of one such performance appears in the excerpt from Didion's “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” in the Creative Nonfiction cluster in this volume: a performance by the San Francisco Mime Troupe in the section of Golden Gate Park known as the “Panhandle.” Disturbingly, the troupe uses the racist tradition of blackface theater to goad people into resisting racist political

structures; Didion implicitly asks the reader to consider whether such a performance finally undermines or reinforces racial stereotyping.

Avant-garde theater, as articulated in the “Postmodern Manifestos” by Charles Ludlam and George Foreman included in this volume, invites readers to think of theater as a place where such questions can be explored and where the real-life social roles that people perform can be experimented with. (Ludlam was particularly interested in the performance of gender.) Even realist theater was tending toward this kind of self-conscious meditation on spectatorship. “Reality TV” in the twenty-first century, with its confession booths and “real” people, pushes right through the fourth wall, even as it gives the viewer an uncomfortable voyeuristic feeling as he or she passively consumes, as entertainment, the tears and abuses of the people on the show. What seemed in the early twentieth century like artificiality—the artwork’s own acknowledgment that it is fictional—became the ultimate stamp of a certain kind of realism in the twenty-first century.

Poetry was affected, too, by the rising interest in theatricality that the new medium of television stimulated. One of the signal changes in poetic practice, starting with the Beat poets in the middle of the twentieth century, was the growing popularity of public poetry readings. Perhaps the most famous reading of the twentieth century occurred on October 7, 1955, at the Six Gallery in San Francisco—a converted garage with a toilet adjoining the stage area. Jack Kerouac passed the wine jug while Allen Ginsberg read *Howl*, which had not been heard before that night. After using the toilet with the door ajar in front of the audience, Gins-

berg pulled up his pants, walked out, and read a tour de force poem that seemed to expose the bodies and the anguish of, as the poem put it, “the best minds of my generation.” Joined that night by the poets of what came to be called the “San Francisco Renaissance,” Ginsberg’s performance reminded the world that poetry was an oral medium, an art of sound—a fact that had faded from view (rightly or wrongly) as readers absorbed the most famous poems of the early twentieth century, including T. S. Eliot’s footnoted *The Waste Land* (1922), considered by some the ultimate modernist example of the art form. Readings such as the one at the Six Gallery treated poetry like jazz performance—an experience of musicality, improvisation, and blues-inspired rhythm and



ComCo (Communications Company) poster for a poetry reading by LeRoi Jones (1967). Chester Anderson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California.

emotion. Robert Lowell explained that part of his own dramatic change of poetic style from formalism to free verse forms in the 1950s came from the realization that his more traditional poems would not make much of a splash at a reading. Sylvia Plath read “Daddy” on BBC radio shortly before her suicide in 1963, her flat, elegant tone playing like a chill wind on the surface of tightly controlled anger. Again and again the poets in this volume turn to music, from Theodore Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz,” to the jazz-inspired poetry of Michael Harper, to the dancing figures and film scores in Tracy K. Smith’s “Thirst” and “The Universe: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack.”

While fiction, like poetry, began to be read onstage regularly during the period covered by this volume, it was not drama or live performance but film that intersected most broadly with narrative: Patricia Highsmith and Philip K. Dick wrote stories that were adapted regularly into popular Hollywood films; film features in Don DeLillo’s stories almost as often as television does; and the crosscuts and dialogue of film can be discerned in fictional forms and settings throughout the period. Still-image media such as photography and painting interface with literature, too. Natasha Trethewey’s poetry meditates on both these media. For her, they represent the deceptions and the truths of history that the poet must confront. Like Marshall McLuhan, Trethewey reveals messages inherent to different media, such as the oppressive racial spectatorship implicit in much photography, even—or especially—when it is used to reveal the beauty of the downtrodden. What does writing accomplish, then, that television, film, music, photography, and painting cannot quite achieve? Readers will find many answers among the selections here. Writers throughout the period wrestle with, borrow from, and sometimes engulf the media of their times as they reimagine what literature can be and do.

EXPERIMENT AND PLAY IN TWENTIETH- AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERATURE

What is “postmodern”? In contemporary parlance, this is an endlessly useful term that can describe practically anything aesthetically edgy or off-kilter, anything that bends genres or cultural registers, anything that comments on the welter of media in contemporary culture. Students coming to the study of the literature of this period for the first time might well use *postmodern* to define the works that were most influential in the second half of the twentieth century. The “Postmodern Manifestos” in this volume, as well as other examples included here, suggest the variety of ideas and styles that the term can indicate. Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985) has been considered one of the best fictional descriptions of life in postmodern America. Postmodern life is imagined by DeLillo as a heap of fragments, a babble of incessant voices flowing from modern media (radio, television, film, and cyberspace) to penetrate our perceptions and thoughts. In DeLillo’s America, material consumption and entertainment become the goals of domestic and professional life, and his stories are crammed with cars, stores, fast food, breaking news, tourist attractions, screens, and sports. The human beings caught up in these pursuits, though, always suspect there is something beyond all these glittery attractions. In the face

of such a world, the protagonist of *White Noise*, Jack Gladney, seeks genuine transcendence, looking variously to data, psychotropic drugs, mystical sound, and spiritual mantras in his search for meaning. The enchanting words Jack hears muttered by his sleeping daughter turn out to be the name of a car—“*Toyota Celica*.” Is DeLillo suggesting that it is impossible to reclaim the soul in modern, commercial America? Or, rather, is transcendence available to us in all human culture, no matter how banal? Or is Jack’s mistake simply funny? This sort of ambiguity and uncertainty, and the way DeLillo shifts between satire and sincerity, suggests what is so inviting to readers in the literature typically called “postmodern.” Readers of fiction have found such openness to interpretation especially appealing in the exuberant satires of Thomas Pynchon, George Saunders, Lydia Davis, and Ishmael Reed, to name a few, all found alongside DeLillo in this volume.

In poetry, writers embraced the task of re-enchanting the material, commercial world—a task that poets have been called to since the ancient Greek poet Hesiod celebrated human labor in “Works and Days.” In “A Supermarket in California,” Allen Ginsberg’s speaker, walking and thinking of the nineteenth-century American poet Walt Whitman, looks at the grocery aisles with new wonder: “What peaches and what penumbras!” He catches earthy Walt squeezing the produce and eyeing the handsome grocery boys. Others felt it was poetry’s job to probe the material properties of language itself. The poets known as the “L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E” school, and their experimentalist precursor, John Ashbery, questioned the basic expectations of meaning. What can language do and become if it is freed from the requirement that it steadily refer to the world? Perhaps poems should represent the distracted mind as it writes the poem, rather than some object that can discipline the poet’s unruly attention. Such poetry can seem difficult—indeed, it *is* difficult to follow meaning and sense if these are not the underlying threads holding a poem together. And yet, like the ambiguous satires of the story writers, postmodern poetry most often wants to play *with* readers, not against them. Ashbery was inspired by mid-century abstract painting—by artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Readers can take pleasure in the color, texture, feeling, connotations, and shapes of language even if its meanings remain elusive.

Writing in the second half of the twentieth century was not experimental only in matters of form. For many writers, the imperative to create challenging or innovative forms—be they poetic, narrative, or dramatic—paled in significance next to the social changes they, and the world around them, were experiencing. Realism, in whatever genre, could respond to the shocks of contemporary life. When the forms of modernist literature seemed too heady, too abstract, or too intellectual, realism offered a mode suited to the autobiographical and the personal. The poet Robert Lowell lived this transition in his own work: the poems in his first book, *Lord Weary’s Castle* (1946), were formally intricate, lyrically beautiful, and concerned with large subjects—the Protestant legacy in commercial life, the spiritual condition of the nation. But in fact these concerns grew from Lowell’s own past, from his distinguished, old New England Protestant family, a family from which he dissented when he converted to Catholicism in 1940. *Life Studies* (1959), Lowell’s second volume of poetry, changed tack, driving

straight for the autobiographical core of his art with freer forms, more direct language, and candid accounts of his ruined loves and his struggles with alcoholism, depression, and mania. Breaking with both social decorum and poetic form, a prose section acknowledges a possibly Jewish ancestor in the poet's white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant family tree. Alongside work by other poets who used the so-called confessional approach to poetry—including Frank O'Hara, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, and Sharon Olds—Lowell's experiments with subject and form brought newly accessible urgency and emotion to lyric poetry in the decades after World War II. Billy Collins's popular contemporary poetry must be read in this context: the poem "I Chop Some Parsley While Listening to Art Blakey's Version of 'Three Blind Mice'" (1998) uses an immediately personal and ordinary (not to mention humorous) occasion to transcribe the poet's thoughts on the effects of music. This is a different kind of confession—there is no deep trauma remembered here, no scandal or lost love. And the poem doesn't push the boundaries of socially acceptable topics in the manner of confessional poetry. Rather, it pushes the boundaries of poetic relevance—chopping parsley? chopping onions? speculations about the three blind mice of nursery rhyme fame? But the poem's accessible realism and its unapologetic emotion owe a debt to the generation of poets that began with Lowell.

"From the modernism you choose you get the postmodernism you deserve." So declared the critic David Antin in his 1972 essay "Modernism and Postmodernism." Given the wide variety of aesthetic strategies people refer to when they use the word *postmodernism*, Antin is surely correct. While writers who have been called "postmodern" sometimes rejected or reacted against the early-twentieth-century writers and artists who have been called "modernists," their techniques and concerns are often continuous with those of these earlier practitioners. The writers of the early twentieth century took up socially taboo topics, were inspired by other artistic media, and wove high and low culture into their work. They wrestled with profound social changes and with a brutal, seemingly pointless war. And so when late-twentieth-century writers reacted against modernism, they had also decided what the movement meant. From the longer perspective of the twenty-first century, it's clear that the aesthetic epoch reflected in much of this volume could just as well be termed "long modernism." Like their early-twentieth-century precursors, many of the writers included here experiment with literary form and subject as an antidote to what they see as the violent, empty, fragmented, and soul-crushingly conventional forms of modern life.

What is truly *postmodern*, then? Writers such as Edward P. Jones, Natasha Trethewey, Patricia Highsmith, George Saunders, and Philip K. Dick turn to personal history, to low-brow visual media, to the new languages of business, and to genres such as horror and science fiction for sources of inspiration and provocation that were not typical for writers of the early twentieth century. Consider, for instance, how a lesbian pulp novel such as *The Fear and the Guilt* (1954), by Wilene Shaw (the pen name of Virginia M. Harrison), sports its genre conventions on its cover: Ruby brings her lover, Christy, to her southern home, where Christy is seduced by Ruby's father (and agrees to marry him). By contrast, Highsmith's carefully crafted realist novel, *The Price of Salt* (1952), upended such pulp conventions. It is a



Cover of original 1952 edition of *The Price of Salt*, by Patricia Highsmith, publishing under the pseudonym Claire Morgan. The book's imagery and format placed it in the company of lowbrow erotic genre fiction such as the example on the right, *The Fear and the Guilt* (1954).

love story between two women with an unprecedented happy ending for the couple. Though some critics have noted how its narrative artistry seems to have inspired the cross-country car chase in Nabokov's *Lolita*, and while it is clear that Highsmith learned much from the great modern novelist Henry James, *The Price of Salt* wore a paperback cover and looked as steamy as its pulp sisters. Harkening back to the literature of the nineteenth century, writers understood as postmodern in this sense seek to make readers *feel* something even while they revel in satire and irony, while (for all their confessional force) the writers of "long modernism" can be suspicious of sentiment. Rejecting or reimagining what "elite" literature might look like, writers looking for alternatives to a dominant and elite modernism likewise reimagine their readers and pave the way for the innovations of a writer like Junot Díaz.

LITERATURE NOW

In the United States alone, over 50,000 novels are published each year. Worldwide, the number is well over 200,000. It is cheaper and easier than ever to make written works available to readers. Writing programs have made the professional lives of poets and other writers sustainable, even



Author Grace Paley teaching writing at Sarah Lawrence College.

when their work doesn't turn a profit in the publishing market. The Association of Writers and Writing Programs reports that in 1975 there were a total of 79 programs granting creative writing degrees ranging from the associate's degree to the Ph.D. In 2012 that number was 880. The teaching now done by many writers not only allows them to continue writing but also trains new writers, whose work can in turn be found in the ever-increasing numbers of creative writing journals and websites, as well as in the blogs, posts, and Twitter feeds generated daily to keep Web content fresh. If the ranks of readers and writers expanded dramatically in the United States in the wake of World War II, how much more has the audience for writing of all kinds expanded—but also fragmented—in the wake of the Internet? The rise of digital culture and of global publishing has made the ubiquity of writing, and of English, suddenly obvious.

One argument about what literature looks like now is that it is defined by its global audience, massive production, and transnational use of English. The literary critic Rebecca Walkowitz notes that many of the most successful writers now labor with the knowledge that their work will instantly be translated into multiple languages. She argues that this fact has driven a resurgence in literary experimentation with plot and character, elements of fiction that “survive” translation in ways that more material aspects of language—grammar, sound, etymology—cannot. Others point to the way that the migration of literary works to unexpected new contexts changes the interpretation and social meaning of those works. Critics have tracked, for instance, how the southern novelist William Faulkner was received in Japan in the twentieth century, or how the movie *Shrek* has been remade and repurposed by digital film artists in Iran. And Web formats privilege some forms of writing over others: fiction with short (that is, easily scrollable) chapters or sections translates better to online contexts than narratives made up of longer blocks of text. Poetry, by contrast, translates beautifully to the screen. In turn, poetry and fiction appearing in traditional print form sometimes borrow styles from texting, posts, and tweets. Readers should be

sure to explore the Poetry Foundation's excellent website, which provides additional poems and readings by virtually every poet in this anthology.

What does all the writing sparked by the rise of the Internet tell us about literature today? Crucially, it reminds us that language itself is a living thing, an artistic medium that changes in the very hands of the writers and speakers who use it. Physical and virtual migrations of people and their writing in the contemporary world are driven by economic, political, religious, and personal forces—forces that call out now, as they always have, for a response in art. As Junot Díaz, Gloria Anzaldúa, Maxine Hong Kingston, Tracy K. Smith, and other writers fold multiple languages into their literary works, they recraft the English we have at our disposal. African immigration, the rise of Spanish as an American language (just as German was in the American West in the nineteenth century), and immigrations yet to come will continually reshape the literary landscape. Today, writing flourishes at the grass roots, much of it thriving apart from major publishers, advertisers, and reviewing venues even as the most admired of the writers in the last half-century become the touchstones of an evolving tradition. While this overabundance has unsettled any shared sense of what merits readers' attention, it also indicates the extraordinary energy and possibility in American literature now. Intrepid readers who go exploring will find as-yet-undiscovered wonders.

AMERICAN LITERATURE SINCE 1945

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
1941 Eudora Welty, "Petrified Man"	
1945 Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"	1945 U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Japan surrenders, ending World War II • Cold War begins
1947 Tennessee Williams, <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	1947 Jackie Robinson becomes the first black Major League ballplayer
1948 Theodore Roethke, <i>The Lost Son</i>	
1949 Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	
1950 Richard Wilbur, "A World without Objects Is a Sensible Emptiness" • Charles Olson, "Projective Verse"	1950 Senator Joseph McCarthy begins attacks on supposed Communist influence on U.S. government
1952 Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i>	1950–53 Korean War
1953 Saul Bellow, <i>The Adventures of Augie March</i>	1953 House Concurrent Resolution 108 dictates government's intention to "terminate" its treaty relations with Native American tribes
	1954 <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> declares segregated schools unconstitutional • Beat Generation poets begin to gather at San Francisco's City Lights Bookshop
1955 Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People"	
1955–68 John Berryman composes <i>The Dream Songs</i> (pub. 1964, 1968, 1977)	
1956 Allen Ginsberg, <i>Howl</i>	
1957 Jack Kerouac, <i>On the Road</i>	1956 Martin Luther King Jr. leads bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama
1958 Bernard Malamud, "The Magic Barrel"	
1959 Philip Roth, "Defender of the Faith" • Robert Lowell, <i>Life Studies</i> • Frank O'Hara, "Personism"	1959 Fidel Castro becomes Communist leader of Cuba
1960 Thomas Pynchon, "Entropy" • Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool"	1960 Woolworth lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, marks beginning of civil rights movement
1961 Denise Levertov, "The Jacob's Ladder"	
1962 Robert Hayden, "Middle Passage"	1962 United States and Soviet Union come close to war over Russian missiles based in Cuba; missiles withdrawn
1963 James Wright, "A Blessing"	1963 Martin Luther King Jr. delivers "I Have a Dream" speech • black church in Birmingham, Alabama, bombed, killing four girls • President John F. Kennedy assassinated

Boldface titles indicate works in the anthology.

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1964 John Cheever, "The Swimmer" • Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "An Agony. As Now." • Frank O'Hara, "A Step Away from Them" • Philip K. Dick, "Precious Artifact"</p>	
<p>1965 James Baldwin, "Going to Meet the Man" • A. R. Ammons, "Corson's Inlet"</p>	<p>1965 Riots break out in Watts section of Los Angeles • Malcolm X assassinated • hippie culture flourishes in San Francisco</p>
<p>1966 James Merrill, "The Broken Home" • Sylvia Plath, <i>Ariel</i></p>	<p>1965–73 Vietnam War</p> <p>1966 National Organization for Women (NOW) founded • Hayden and Brooks criticized at Black Writers' Conference, Fisk University, for composing "academic" poetry</p>
<p>1967 A. R. Ammons, "A Poem Is a Walk" • W. S. Merwin, "For a Coming Extinction" • Patricia Highsmith, "The Quest for <i>Blank Claverigi</i>"</p>	
<p>1968 Donald Barthelme, "The Balloon" • Edward Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> • Joan Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem"</p>	<p>1968 Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated • Senator Robert F. Kennedy assassinated • photo of Earthrise by Apollo 8</p>
<p>1969 N. Scott Momaday, <i>The Way to Rainy Mountain</i> • Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> • Galway Kinnell, "The Porcupine" • Robert Penn Warren, <i>Audubon</i></p>	<p>1969 U.S. astronauts land on the moon • Stonewall riots in New York City initiate gay liberation movement • Woodstock Festival held near Bethel, New York</p>
<p>1970 Ishmael Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto"</p>	<p>1970 National Guard kills four students during antiwar demonstration at Kent State University, Ohio</p>
<p>1971 Audre Lorde, "Black Mother Woman"</p> <p>1972 Rudolfo Anaya, <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> • Anne Sexton, <i>The Death of the Fathers</i></p>	<p>1972 Watergate scandal • military draft ends</p>
<p>1973 Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" • Adrienne Rich, <i>Diving into the Wreck</i></p>	<p>1973 <i>Roe v. Wade</i> legalizes abortion • American Indian Movement members occupy Wounded Knee, South Dakota</p>
<p>1974 Grace Paley, "A Conversation with My Father" • Annie Dillard, <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i></p>	<p>1974 President Richard Nixon resigns in wake of Watergate, avoiding impeachment</p>
<p>1975 John Updike, "Separating" • John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" • Michael S. Harper, "Nightmare Begins Responsibility"</p>	
<p>1976 Elizabeth Bishop, <i>Geography III</i> • Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman" • Barry Lopez, <i>Desert Notes</i></p>	<p>1976 U.S. bicentennial</p>
<p>1977 Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury"</p> <p>1978 Ann Beattie, "Weekend" • Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl"</p>	
<p>1979 Philip Levine, "Starlight" • Mary Oliver, "The Black Snake"</p>	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1980 Toni Cade Bambara, “Medley” • Sam Shepard, <i>True West</i></p>	
<p>1981 Leslie Marmon Silko, “Lullaby” • James Dickey, “Falling” • Simon J. Ortiz, “From Sand Creek”</p>	
<p>1982 Raymond Carver, “Cathedral” • David Mamet, <i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i></p>	<p>1982 Equal Rights Amendment defeated • antinuclear movement protests manufacture of nuclear weapons • AIDS officially identified in the United States</p>
<p>1983 Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” • Joy Harjo, “Call It Fear”</p>	
<p>1984 Louise Erdrich, “Dear John Wayne”</p>	
<p>1985 Ursula K. Le Guin, “She Unnames Them” • Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i></p>	<p>1985 Introduction of first desktop publishing software, Aldus pagemaker</p>
<p>1986 Lydia Davis, “Break It Down” • Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus I</i> • Rita Dove, <i>Thomas and Beulah</i> • Li-Young Lee, “Eating Together”</p>	
<p>1987 Gloria Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i> • Sharon Olds, “I Go Back to May 1937”</p>	
<p>1988 Yusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It”</p>	
<p>1989 Amy Tan, <i>The Joy Luck Club</i></p>	<p>1989 Soviet Union collapses; Cold War ends • oil tanker <i>Exxon Valdez</i> runs aground in Alaska</p>
<p>1990 Robert Pinsky, “The Want Bone” • Frank Bidart, “Ellen West”</p>	<p>1990 Congress passes Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act</p>
<p>1991 Sandra Cisneros, <i>Woman Hollering Creek</i></p>	<p>1991 United States enters Persian Gulf War • World Wide Web introduced</p>
<p>1992 Edward P. Jones, “The First Day”</p>	
<p>1993 Gary Snyder, “Ripples on the Surface” • A. R. Ammons, <i>Garbage</i> • Sherman Alexie, “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona”</p>	
<p>1996 W. S. Merwin, “Lament for the Makers” • Sherman Alexie, “The Exaggeration of Despair” • Junot Díaz, “Drown” • George Saunders, “CivilWar-Land in Bad Decline”</p>	<p>1995 Federal building in Oklahoma City bombed in a terrorist attack</p>
<p>1998 Billy Collins, “I Chop Some Parsley While Listening to Art Blakey’s Version of ‘Three Blind Mice’”</p>	<p>1997 <i>Mars Pathfinder</i> robot explores Mars</p>

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
<p>1999 Jhumpa Lahiri, “Sexy” • Charles Simic, “Arriving Celebrities”</p> <p>2000 Lucille Clifton, “Moonchild”</p> <p>2004 Louise Glück, “October” • David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster”</p> <p>2006 Natasha Trethewey, <i>Native Guard</i></p> <p>2007 Edwidge Danticat, <i>Brother, I’m Dying</i> • Junot Díaz, <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i></p> <p>2011 Tracy K. Smith, “My God, It’s Full of Stars”</p>	<p>2001 Execution of Timothy McVeigh, convicted of 1995 Oklahoma City bombing</p> <p>• September 11 terrorist attacks on Pentagon and World Trade Center</p> <p>2003 United States and Great Britain invade Iraq</p> <p>2007 Advent of worst economic recession since the Great Depression.</p> <p>2009 Inauguration of Barack Obama as U.S. president</p> <p>2010 Massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico</p> <p>2011 Death of terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, architect of 9/11 attacks</p> <p>2013 Second inauguration of Barack Obama as U.S. president</p> <p>2014 Police shooting of an unarmed black teenager named Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, touches off nationwide protests</p> <p>2015 U.S. Supreme Court rules that state bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional • hundreds of thousands of migrants from Syria and other areas in the Middle East cross into Europe</p>

ROBERT PENN WARREN

1905–1989

In 1969, with a long, distinguished career as a man of letters already behind him, Robert Penn Warren published his long poem *Audubon: A Vision*. Although Warren wrote many highly regarded poems before the publication of the volume, until the 1960s he was best known for his fiction. In the six books of poetry that followed *Audubon*, Warren developed the claim he had begun earlier in his career to a powerful, distinctive, American voice. The mark of Warren's poetry, from early to late, is a passion directed toward the physical world and toward a knowledge of truth. As a poet he yearns for more than what life usually discloses, yet an intense love for the world accompanies this yearning.

Warren was born in Guthrie in southern Kentucky, and much of his writing reflects his engagement with the lessons of history as they can be read in the experience of the American South. He took this sense of history most immediately from his father, who read history and poetry aloud to the family, and from his maternal grandfather, Gabriel Telemachus Penn. Warren spent his boyhood summers on this grandfather's isolated tobacco farm. There the old man, who had fought on the Confederate side in the Civil War, told Warren tales of war while the two mapped out battles together, or the boy listened while his grandfather recited poetry "by the yard" (as Warren described it), especially Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns. The memory of an idyllic boyhood spent dreaming amid the natural world informs many of Warren's poems.

The decisive literary moment in Warren's life came when, at the age of sixteen, he enrolled at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He had wanted to be a naval officer, but an eye injury prevented him from taking up his commission at Annapolis. Vanderbilt was enjoying a feverish interest in poetry at the time. (Even football players, Warren reported, seemed to be writing verse, and Warren remembers that people lined up for the latest issues of the *Dial* and other literary periodicals in which they might find new work by Yeats or Eliot or Hart Crane.) Part of the excitement was due to the presence of the poet John Crowe Ransom, who taught Warren's freshman composition class and soon involved him, even as an undergraduate, with the Fugitives, a group of faculty members and, according to Warren, "bookish, intelligent young businessmen" who met to discuss literature and philosophy. By the time Warren joined it was largely a poetry club at which Ransom and others read and criticized one another's work. Here Warren met Allen Tate, the gifted poet and critic, who found the redheaded undergraduate, five years his junior, "the most gifted person I have ever known." For years to come they constituted a kind of southern axis in American letters, and in 1930 they joined several other southern writers in a political manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*. The collection of twelve essays envisioned an agrarian South with strong local cultures as the only humane alternative to an increasingly self-destructive industrialism centered in the North.

Warren attended graduate school at the University of California, at Yale, and then as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in England. From 1935 to 1942 he was on the English faculty at Louisiana State University. There, along with Cleanth Brooks and Charles W. Pipkin, he founded the *Southern Review*, which for the seven years of their involvement was the most influential literary quarterly in the country. It was the principal forum for pioneering interpretative essays by "New

Critics” such as Ransom, Kenneth Burke, and R. P. Blackmur. (Brooks and Warren also edited *Understanding Poetry*, the important school anthology and text that introduced students to “close reading” on New Critical principles.) In addition, the *Southern Review* published the best fiction by emerging southern writers such as Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty.

Warren’s own fiction brought him wide critical attention in the 1940s. The novel *All the King’s Men* (1946), which he conceived as a verse play, won the Pulitzer Prize and later became a film. It portrayed the rise and fall of a southern demagogue who closely resembled Huey Long, the Louisiana governor and senator who was assassinated in the rotunda of the Louisiana statehouse in 1935. Warren’s interest was in showing the tangled motives of his protagonist, Willie Stark, a Depression-era governor who led a corrupt regime that was progressive in its social programs. In its focus on violent subjects with historical and psychological resonance, Warren’s fiction anticipates his sequence *Audubon: A Vision*. Other novels, like *World Enough and Time* (1950), set in the Kentucky of the 1820s, are based on documents and grow out of his ongoing study of and response to southern history.

From 1944 to 1954 Warren was intensely active in fiction and published almost no poems. In 1952 he married the writer Eleanor Clark, his second wife, and, prompted by the landscapes where they lived in Europe and by the birth of a son and daughter in the mid 1950s, he returned to poetry with a new intimacy and autobiographical intensity. His earlier work, like “Bearded Oaks,” had been strongly influenced by the formal control and the elegant, well-mannered rationality of John Crowe Ransom’s verse. But beginning with the volume *Promises* (1957), and revealed fully in *Audubon*, Warren’s poetic line loosened up, moved with vigor and raw energy. Although the tone of his poems sometimes grows too insistent or rhetorical, his muscular syntax and rhythm forged a “voice-instrument calibrated to experience,” in the words of Dave Smith, a poet of a younger generation, indebted to Warren’s work.

In *Democracy and Poetry* (1975), his Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, Warren said, “What poetry most significantly celebrates is the capacity of man to face the deep, dark inwardness of his nature and fate.” In *Audubon*, Warren’s version of the historical John James Audubon must enter what Yeats once called “the abyss of the self” to create a heroic selfhood at the center of the poetry. Ornithologist and painter of *Birds of America*, Audubon (1785–1851) was artist and scientist, solitary searcher and classifier, consumed by his tasks. Basing part of his poem on Audubon’s autobiographical account, Warren imagines a man launched into his true vision after an encounter with violence at the heart of experience: he narrowly escapes being robbed and murdered in the wilderness by a crone and her sons. In this incident Audubon must also confront the violent desire of his own “lust of the eye” and thereby reconcile in himself the need for both passion and reverence toward existence. Passion directs Warren’s hero to slay the birds in order to paint them, to put them “In our imagination” (*Audubon* VI, “Love and Knowledge”). But reverence demands the heart’s total response to the beauty of existence. This is why Warren commands his hero and himself: “Continue to walk in the world. Yes, love it!” While the most representative figure in Warren’s poems is solitary—the individual, like Audubon, confronting versions of the American sublime—Warren also wrote a number of fine poems in other registers, among them some moving love poems. The sense of history that animates so much of his fiction becomes in his poems the persistent struggle of memory to overcome the passage of time, to make *then* into *now*, as reflected in the title of his volume *Now and Then: Poems 1976–1978* (1978). The struggle with time is one aspect of the heroic engagement with existence that was the dramatic center of Warren’s work.

Bearded Oaks

The oaks, how subtle and marine,
 Bearded, and all the layered light
 Above them swims; and thus the scene,
 Recessed, awaits the positive night.

So, waiting, we in the grass now lie 5
 Beneath the languorous tread of light:
 The grasses, kelp-like, satisfy
 The nameless motions of the air.

Upon the floor of light, and time, 10
 Unmurmuring, of polyp made,
 We rest; we are, as light withdraws,
 Twin atolls on a shelf of shade.

Ages to our construction went,
 Dim architecture, hour by hour:
 And violence, forgot now, lent 15
 The present stillness all its power.

The storm of noon above us rolled,
 Of light the fury, furious gold,
 The long drag troubling us, the depth:
 Dark is unrocking, unrippling, still. 20

Passion and slaughter, ruth, decay
 Descend, minutely whispering down,
 Silted down swaying streams, to lay
 Foundation for our voicelessness.

All our debate is voiceless here, 25
 As all our rage, the rage of stone
 If hope is hopeless, then fearless is fear,
 And history is thus undone.

Our feet once wrought the hollow street
 With echo when the lamps were dead 30
 At windows, once our headlight glare
 Disturbed the doe that, leaping, fled.

I do not love you less that now
 The caged heart makes iron stroke,
 Or less that all that light once gave 35
 The graduate dark should now revoke.

We live in time so little time
 And we learn all so painfully,
 That we may spare this hour's term
 To practice for eternity. 40

From Audubon¹

I. Was Not the Lost Dauphin

[A]

Was not the lost dauphin, though handsome was only
 Base-born and not even able
 To make a decent living, was only
 Himself, Jean Jacques, and his passion—what
 Is man but his passion? 5

Saw,

Eastward and over the cypress swamp, the dawn,
 Redder than meat, break;
 And the large bird,
 Long neck outthrust, wings crooked to scull air, moved 10
 In a slow calligraphy, crank, flat, and black against
 The color of God's blood spilt, as though
 Pulled by a string.

Saw

It proceed across the inflamed distance. 15

Moccasins set in hoar frost, eyes fixed on the bird,
 Thought: "On that sky it is black."
 Thought: "In my mind it is white."
 Thinking: "*Ardea occidentalis*, heron the great one."

Dawn: his heart shook in the tension of the world. 20

Dawn: and what is your passion?

[B]

October: and the bear,
 Daft in the honey-light, yawns.

The bear's tongue, pink as a baby's, out-crisps to the curled tip,
 It bleeds the black blood of the blueberry. 25

The teeth are more importantly white
 Than has ever been imagined.

The bear feels his own fat
 Sweeten, like a drowse, deep to the bone.

Bemused, above the fume of ruined blueberries,
 The last bee hums. 30

1. John James Audubon (1785–1851), natural son of French parents (hence "Jean Jacques" in line 4), but later an American citizen. Painter, ornithologist, Kentucky settler, he dedicated his life to the pursuit, classification, and depiction of the

Birds of America (first published in England, 1827). Among the stories told about his birth was one (false) that he was the Dauphin, the son of the dethroned and executed Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette of France.

The wings, like mica, glint
In the sunlight.

He leans on his gun. Thinks
How thin is the membrane between himself and the world. 35

VI. *Love and Knowledge*

Their footless dance
Is of the beautiful liability of their nature.
Their eyes are round, boldly convex, bright as a jewel,
And merciless. They do not know
Compassion, and if they did, 5
We should not be worthy of it. They fly
In air that glitters like fluent crystal
And is hard as perfectly transparent iron, they cleave it
With no effort. They cry
In a tongue multitudinous, often like music. 10

He slew them, at surprising distances, with his gun.
Over a body held in his hand, his head was bowed low,
But not in grief.

He put them where they are, and there we see them:
In our imagination. 15

What is love?

Our name for it is knowledge.

VII. *Tell Me a Story*

[A]

Long ago, in Kentucky, I, a boy, stood
By a dirt road, in first dark, and heard
The great geese hoot northward.

I could not see them, there being no moon
And the stars sparse. I heard them. 5

I did not know what was happening in my heart.

It was the season before the elderberry blooms,
Therefore they were going north.

The sound was passing northward.

[B]

Tell me a story. 10

In this century, and moment, of mania,
Tell me a story.

Make it a story of great distances, and starlight.

The name of the story will be Time,
But you must not pronounce its name. 15

Tell me a story of deep delight.
1969

Mortal Limit

I saw the hawk ride updraft in the sunset over Wyoming.
It rose from coniferous darkness, past gray jags
Of mercilessness, past whiteness, into the gloaming
Of dream-spectral light above the last purity of snow-snags.

There—west—were the Tetons.¹ Snow-peaks would soon be 5
In dark profile to break constellations. Beyond what height
Hangs now the black speck? Beyond what range will gold eyes see
New ranges rise to mark a last scrawl of light?

Or, having tasted that atmosphere's thinness, does it 10
Hang motionless in dying vision before
It knows it will accept the mortal limit,
And swing into the great circular downwardness that will restore

The breath of earth? Of rock? Of rot? Of other such
Items, and the darkness of whatever dream we clutch?
1985

1. High mountain range in northwest Wyoming.

THEODORE ROETHKE

1908–1963

Theodore Roethke had the kind of childhood a poet might have invented. He was born in Saginaw, Michigan, where both his German grandfather and his father kept greenhouses for a living. The greenhouse world, he later said, represented for him “both heaven and hell, a kind of tropics created in the savage climate of Michigan, where austere German Americans turned their love of order and their terrifying efficiency into something truly beautiful.” Throughout his life he was haunted both by the ordered, protected world of the greenhouse—the constant activity of growth, the cultivated flowers—and by the desolate landscape of his part of Michigan. “The marsh, the mire, the Void, is always there, immediate and terrifying. It is a splendid place for schooling the spirit. It is America.”

Roethke's poetry often reenacted this "schooling" of the spirit by revisiting the landscapes of his childhood: the nature poems that make up the largest part of his early work try to bridge the distance between a child's consciousness and the adult mysteries presided over by his father. Roethke arranged and rearranged these poems to give the sense of a spiritual autobiography, especially in preparing the volumes *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (1948), *Praise to the End!* (1951), and *The Waking* (1953). In what are known as "the greenhouse poems," the greenhouse world emerged as a "reality harsher than reality," the cultivator's activity pulsating and threatening. Its overseers, like "Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartze" (the title of one poem) emerge as gods, fates, muses, and witches all in one. By focusing on the minute processes of botanical growth—the rooting, the budding—the poet found a way of participating in the mysteries of this once alien world, whether he was deep in the subterranean root cellar or, as a child, perched high on top of the greenhouse.

In his books *The Lost Son* and *Praise to the End!* Roethke explored the regenerative possibilities of prerational speech (like children's riddles) in which language as sound recaptures nonlogical states of being. In these poems, his most dazzling and original work, Roethke opened up the possibilities of language. The title of one section of the long poem *The Lost Son* is "The Gibber," a pun because the word means both a meaningless utterance and the pouch at the base of a flower's calyx. The pun identifies principles of growth with the possibilities of speech freed from logical meanings, and the sequence as a whole suggests the power of both nature and language to revive the spirit of an adult life: "A lively understandable spirit / Once entertained you. / It will come again. / Be still. / Wait."

If the nature poems of Roethke's first four books explore the anxieties within him since childhood, his later love poems show him in periods of release and momentary pleasure: "And I dance round and round, / A fond and foolish man, / And see and suffer myself / In another being at last." The love poems, many included in *Words for the Wind* (1958) and *The Far Field* (1964), are among the most appealing in modern American verse. His beautiful and tender "Elegy for Jane" should be included in this category. These poems stand in sharp relief to the suffering Roethke experienced in other areas of his personal life—several mental breakdowns and periods of alcoholism—which led to a premature death. *The Far Field*, a posthumous volume, includes fierce, strongly rhymed lyrics in which Roethke tried "bare, even terrible statement," pressing toward the threshold of spiritual insight: "A man goes far to find out what he is— / Death of the self in a long, tearless night, / All natural shapes blazing unnatural light." The nature poems of this last volume, gathered as "The North American Sequence," use extended landscape to find natural analogies for the human passage toward the dark unknown, hoping "in their rhythms to catch the very movement of mind itself."

Roethke is remembered as one of the great teachers of poetry, especially by those young poets and critics who studied with him at the University of Washington from 1948 until the time of his death. James Wright, David Wagoner, and Richard Hugo, among others, attended his classes. He was noted for his mastery of sound and metrics. Although his own poetry was intensely personal, his starting advice to students always deemphasized undisciplined self-expression. "Write like someone else," he instructed beginners. In Roethke's own career, however, this advice had its costs. His apprenticeship to Yeats, in particular, endangered his own poetic voice; in some late poems the echo of this great predecessor makes Roethke all but inaudible.

Roethke was much honored later in his career: a Pulitzer Prize for *The Waking* (1953); a National Book Award and Bollingen Prize for the collected poems, *Words for the Wind* (1958); and a posthumous National Book Award for *The Far Field* (1964).

Cuttings

Sticks-in-a-drowse droop over sugary loam,
 Their intricate stem-fur dries;
 But still the delicate slips keep coaxing up water;
 The small cells bulge;

One nub of growth 5
 Nudges a sand-crumble loose,
 Pokes through a musty sheath
 Its pale tendrulous horn.

1948

Cuttings

(later)

This urge, wrestle, resurrection of dry sticks,
 Cut stems struggling to put down feet,
 What saint strained so much,
 Rose on such lopped limbs to a new life?

I can hear, underground, that sucking and sobbing, 5
 In my veins, in my bones I feel it,—
 The small waters seeping upward,
 The tight grains parting at last.
 When sprouts break out,
 Slippery as fish 10
 I quail, lean to beginnings, sheath-wet.

1948

Root Cellar

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
 Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
 Shoots dangled and drooped,
 Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
 Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes. 5
 And what a congress of stinks!—
 Roots ripe as old bait,
 Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
 Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
 Nothing would give up life: 10
 Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

1948

Big Wind

Where were the greenhouses going,
 Lunging into the lashing
 Wind driving water
 So far down the river
 All the faucets stopped?— 5
 So we drained the manure-machine
 For the steam plant,
 Pumping the stale mixture
 Into the rusty boilers,
 Watching the pressure gauge 10
 Waver over to red,
 As the seams hissed
 And the live steam
 Drove to the far
 End of the rose-house, 15
 Where the worst wind was,
 Creaking the cypress window-frames,
 Cracking so much thin glass
 We stayed all night,
 Stuffing the holes with burlap; 20
 But she rode it out,
 That old rose-house,
 She hove into the teeth of it,
 The core and pith of that ugly storm,
 Ploughing with her stiff prow, 25
 Bucking into the wind-waves
 That broke over the whole of her,
 Flailing her sides with spray,
 Flinging long strings of wet across the roof-top,
 Finally veering, wearing themselves out, merely 30
 Whistling thinly under the wind-vents;
 She sailed until the calm morning,
 Carrying her full cargo of roses.

1948

Weed Puller

Under the concrete benches,
 Hacking at black hairy roots,—
 Those lewd monkey-tails hanging from drainholes,—
 Digging into the soft rubble underneath,
 Webs and weeds, 5
 Grubs and snails and sharp sticks,
 Or yanking tough fern-shapes,
 Coiled green and thick, like dripping smilax,¹

1. A type of fern.

Tugging all day at perverse life:
 The indignity of it!— 10
 With everything blooming above me,
 Lilies, pale-pink cyclamen, roses,
 Whole fields lovely and inviolate,—
 Me down in that fetor of weeds,
 Crawling on all fours, 15
 Alive, in a slippery grave.

1948

Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartzel¹

Gone the three ancient ladies
 Who creaked on the greenhouse ladders,
 Reaching up white strings
 To wind, to wind
 The sweet-pea tendrils, the smilax,² 5
 Nasturtiums, the climbing
 Roses, to straighten
 Carnations, red
 Chrysanthemums; the stiff
 Stems, jointed like corn, 10
 They tied and tucked,—
 These nurses of nobody else.
 Quicker than birds, they dipped
 Up and sifted the dirt;
 They sprinkled and shook; 15
 They stood astride pipes,
 Their skirts billowing out wide into tents,
 Their hands twinkling with wet;
 Like witches they flew along rows
 Keeping creation at ease; 20
 With a tendril for needle
 They sewed up the air with a stem;
 They teased out the seed that the cold kept asleep,—
 All the coils, loops, and whorls.
 They trellised the sun; they plotted for more than themselves. 25

I remember how they picked me up, a spindly kid,
 Pinching and poking my thin ribs
 Till I lay in their laps, laughing,
 Weak as a whiffet;³
 Now, when I'm alone and cold in my bed, 30
 They still hover over me,
 These ancient leathery crones,

1. Women who worked in the greenhouse owned by Roethke's father.

2. A type of fern.

3. A small, young, or unimportant person (probably from *whippet*, a small, delicate-looking racing dog).

With their bandannas stiffened with sweat,
 And their thorn-bitten wrists,
 And their snuff-laden breath blowing lightly over me in my first
 sleep. 35

1948

Child on Top of a Greenhouse

The wind billowing out the seat of my britches,
 My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,
 The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,
 Up through the streaked glass, flashing with sunlight,
 A few white clouds all rushing eastward, 5
 A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,
 And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!

1948

My Papa's Waltz

The whiskey on your breath
 Could make a small boy dizzy;
 But I hung on like death:
 Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans 5
 Slid from the kitchen shelf;
 My mother's countenance
 Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist 10
 Was battered on one knuckle;
 At every step you missed
 My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head 15
 With a palm caked hard by dirt,
 Then waltzed me off to bed
 Still clinging to your shirt.

1948

Dolor

I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils,
 Neat in their boxes, dolor of pad and paper-weight,
 All the misery of manilla folders and mucilage,

Desolation in immaculate public places,
 Lonely reception room, lavatory, switchboard, 5
 The unalterable pathos of basin and pitcher,
 Ritual of multigraph, paper-clip, comma,
 Endless duplication of lives and objects.
 And I have seen dust from the walls of institutions,
 Finer than flour, alive, more dangerous than silica, 10
 Sift, almost invisible, through long afternoons of tedium,
 Dropping a fine film on nails and delicate eyebrows,
 Glazing the pale hair, the duplicate grey standard faces.

1948

Night Crow

When I saw that clumsy crow
 Flap from a wasted tree,
 A shape in the mind rose up:
 Over the gulfs of dream
 Flew a tremendous bird 5
 Further and further away
 Into a moonless black,
 Deep in the brain, far back.

1948

The Lost Son

I. The Flight

At Woodlawn¹ I heard the dead cry:
 I was lulled by the slamming of iron,
 A slow drip over stones,
 Toads brooding wells.
 All the leaves stuck out their tongues; 5
 I shook the softening chalk of my bones,
 Saying,
 Snail, snail, glister me forward,
 Bird, soft-sigh me home,
 Worm, be with me. 10
 This is my hard time.

Fished in an old wound,
 The soft pond of repose;
 Nothing nibbled my line,
 Not even the minnows came. 15

Sat in an empty house
 Watching shadows crawl,

1. A cemetery.

Scratching.

There was one fly.

Voice, come out of the silence.

20

Say something.

Appear in the form of a spider

Or a moth beating the curtain.

Tell me:

Which is the way I take;

25

Out of what door do I go,

Where and to whom?

Dark hollows said, lee to the wind,

The moon said, back of an eel,

The salt said, look by the sea,

30

Your tears are not enough praise,

You will find no comfort here,

In the kingdom of bang and blab.

Running lightly over spongy ground,

Past the pasture of flat stones,

35

The three elms,

The sheep strewn on a field,

Over a rickety bridge

Toward the quick-water, wrinkling and rippling.

Hunting along the river,

40

Down among the rubbish, the bug-riddled foliage,

By the muddy pond-edge, by the bog-holes,

By the shrunken lake, hunting, in the heat of summer.

The shape of a rat?

It's bigger than that.

45

It's less than a leg

And more than a nose,

Just under the water

It usually goes.

Is it soft like a mouse?

50

Can it wrinkle its nose?

Could it come in the house

On the tips of its toes?

Take the skin of a cat

And the back of an eel,

55

Then roll them in grease,—

That's the way it would feel.

It's sleek as an otter

With wide webby toes

Just under the water

60

It usually goes.

2. *The Pit*

Where do the roots go?
 Look down under the leaves.
 Who put the moss there?
 These stones have been here too long. 65
 Who stunned the dirt into noise?
 Ask the mole, he knows.
 I feel the slime of a wet nest.
 Beware Mother Mildew.
 Nibble again, fish nerves. 70

3. *The Gibber*

At the wood's mouth,
 By the cave's door,
 I listened to something
 I had heard before.

Dogs of the groin 75
 Barked and howled,
 The sun was against me,
 The moon would not have me.

The weeds whined,
 The snakes cried, 80
 The cows and briars
 Said to me: Die.

What a small song. What slow clouds. What dark water.
 Hath the rain a father? All the caves are ice. Only the snow's here.
 I'm cold. I'm cold all over. Rub me in father and mother. 85
 Fear was my father, Father Fear.
 His look drained the stones.

What gliding shape
 Beckoning through halls,
 Stood poised on the stair, 90
 Fell dreamily down?

From the mouths of jugs
 Perched on many shelves,
 I saw substance flowing
 That cold morning. 95

Like a slither of eels
 That watery cheek
 As my own tongue kissed
 My lips awake.

Is this the storm's heart? The ground is unstilling itself. 100
 My veins are running nowhere. Do the bones cast out their fire?

Is the seed leaving the old bed? These buds are live as birds.
 Where, where are the tears of the world?
 Let the kisses resound, flat like a butcher's palm;
 Let the gestures freeze; our doom is already decided. 105
 All the windows are burning! What's left of my life?
 I want the old rage, the lash of primordial milk!
 Goodbye, goodbye, old stones, the time-order is going,
 I have married my hands to perpetual agitation,
 I run, I run to the whistle of money. 110

Money money money
 Water water water

How cool the grass is.
 Has the bird left?
 The stalk still sways. 115
 Has the worm a shadow?
 What do the clouds say?

These sweeps of light undo me.
 Look, look, the ditch is running white!
 I've more veins than a tree! 120
 Kiss me, ashes, I'm falling through a dark swirl.

4. *The Return*

The way to the boiler was dark,
 Dark all the way,
 Over slippery cinders
 Through the long greenhouse. 125

The roses kept breathing in the dark.
 They had many mouths to breathe with.
 My knees made little winds underneath
 Where the weeds slept.

There was always a single light 130
 Swinging by the fire-pit,
 Where the fireman pulled out roses,
 The big roses, the big bloody clinkers.²

Once I stayed all night.
 The light in the morning came slowly over the white 135
 Snow.
 There were many kinds of cool
 Air.
 Then came steam.

Pipe-knock. 140

2. Large cinders; the residue left in burning coal.

Scurry of warm over small plants.
 Ordnung!³ ordnung!
 Papa is coming!

A fine haze moved off the leaves;
 Frost melted on far panes; 145
 The rose, the chrysanthemum turned toward the light.
 Even the hushed forms, the bent yellowy weeds
 Moved in a slow up-sway.

5. "*It was beginning winter*"

It was beginning winter,
 An in-between time, 150
 The landscape still partly brown:
 The bones of weeds kept swinging in the wind,
 Above the blue snow.

It was beginning winter,
 The light moved slowly over the frozen field, 155
 Over the dry seed-crowns,
 The beautiful surviving bones
 Swinging in the wind.

Light traveled over the wide field;
 Stayed. 160
 The weeds stopped swinging.
 The mind moved, not alone,
 Through the clear air, in the silence.

Was it light?
 Was it light within? 165
 Was it light within light?
 Stillness becoming alive,
 Yet still?

A lively understandable spirit
 Once entertained you. 170
 It will come again.
 Be still.
 Wait.

1948

The Waking

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
 I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
 I learn by going where I have to go.

3. A call to order (German).

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
 I hear my being dance from ear to ear. 5
 I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
 God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
 And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how? 10
 The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
 I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
 To you and me; so take the lively air,
 And, lovely, learn by going where to go. 15

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
 What falls away is always. And is near.
 I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
 I learn by going where I have to go.

1953

Elegy for Jane

My Student, Thrown by a Horse

I remember the neckcurls, limp and damp as tendrils;
 And her quick look, a sidelong pickerel smile;
 And how, once startled into talk, the light syllables leaped for her,
 And she balanced in the delight of her thought,
 A wren, happy, tail into the wind, 5
 Her song trembling the twigs and small branches.
 The shade sang with her;
 The leaves, their whispers turned to kissing;
 And the mold sang in the bleached valleys under the rose.

Oh, when she was sad, she cast herself down into such a pure depth, 10
 Even a father could not find her:
 Scraping her cheek against straw;
 Stirring the clearest water.

My sparrow, you are not here,
 Waiting like a fern, making a spiny shadow. 15
 The sides of wet stones cannot console me,
 Nor the moss, wound with the last light.

If only I could nudge you from this sleep,
 My maimed darling, my skittery pigeon.
 Over this damp grave I speak the words of my love: 20
 I, with no rights in this matter,
 Neither father nor lover.

1953

I Knew a Woman

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,
 When small birds sighed, she would sigh back at them;
 Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than one:
 The shapes a bright container can contain!
 Of her choice virtues only gods should speak, 5
 Or English poets who grew up on Greek
 (I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
 She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and Stand;¹
 She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin; 10
 I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;
 She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
 Coming behind her for her pretty sake
 (But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose: 15
 Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;
 She played it quick, she played it light and loose;
 My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;
 Her several parts could keep a pure repose, 20
 Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose
 (She moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay:
 I'm martyr to a motion not my own;
 What's freedom for? To know eternity.
 I swear she cast a shadow white as stone. 25
 But who would count eternity in days?
 These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:
 (I measure time by how a body sways).

1958

Wish for a Young Wife

My lizard, my lively writher,
 May your limbs never wither,
 May the eyes in your face
 Survive the green ice
 Of envy's mean gaze; 5
 May you live out your life
 Without hate, without grief,
 And your hair ever blaze,

1. The triadic parts of a Pindaric ode, a ceremonious poem in the manner of the Greek lyric poet Pindar (c. 522–c. 438 B.C.E.).

In the sun, in the sun,
 When I am undone, 10
 When I am no one.

1964

In a Dark Time

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
 I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
 I hear my echo in the echoing wood—
 A lord of nature weeping to a tree.
 I live between the heron and the wren, 5
 Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What's madness but nobility of soul
 At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!
 I know the purity of pure despair,
 My shadow pinned against a sweating wall. 10
 That place among the rocks—is it a cave,
 Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
 A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
 And in broad day the midnight come again! 15
 A man goes far to find out what he is—
 Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
 All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
 My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly, 20
 Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
 A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
 The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
 And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

1964

EUDORA WELTY

1909–2001

In her essay “Place in Fiction,” Eudora Welty spoke of her work as filled with the spirit of place: “Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course.” Both her outwardly uneventful life and her writing are most intimately connected to the topography and atmosphere, the season and the soil of Mississippi, her lifelong home.

Born in Jackson to parents who came from the North, and raised in comfortable circumstances (her father headed an insurance company), she attended Mississippi State College for Women, then graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1929. After a course in advertising at the Columbia University School of Business, she returned to Mississippi, working first as a radio writer and newspaper society editor, then for the Depression-era Works Progress Administration, taking photographs of and interviewing local residents. Those travels would be reflected in her fiction and also in a book of her photographs, *One Time and Place*, published in 1971.

She began writing fiction after her return to Mississippi in 1931 and five years later published her first story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," in a small magazine. Over the next two years six of her stories were published in the *Southern Review*, a serious literary magazine one of whose editors was the poet and novelist Robert Penn Warren. She also received strong support from Katherine Anne Porter, who contributed an introduction to Welty's first book of stories, *A Curtain of Green* (1941). That introduction hailed the arrival of another gifted southern fiction writer, and in fact the volume contained some of the best stories she ever wrote, such as "Petrified Man." Her profusion of metaphor and the difficult surface of her narrative—often oblique and indirect in its effect—were in part a mark of her admiration for modern writers like Virginia Woolf and (as with any young southern writer) William Faulkner. Although Welty's stories were as shapely as those of her mentor, Porter, they were more richly idiomatic and comic in their inclination. A second collection, *The Wide Net*, appeared two years later; and her first novel, *The Robber Bridegroom*, was published in 1942.

In that year and the next she was awarded the O. Henry Memorial Prize for the best piece of short fiction, and from then on she received a steady stream of awards and prizes, including the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972). Her most ambitious and longest piece of fiction is *Losing Battles* (1970), in which she aimed to compose a narrative made up almost wholly out of her characters' voices in mainly humorous interplay. Like Robert Frost, Welty loved gossip in all its actuality and intimacy, and if that love failed in the novels to produce compelling, extended sequences, it did result in many lively and entertaining pages. Perhaps her finest single book after *A Curtain of Green* was *The Golden Apples* (1949), a sequence of tales about a fabulous, invented, small Mississippi community named Morgana. Her characters appear and reappear in these related stories and come together most memorably in the brilliant "June Recital," perhaps her masterpiece.

Throughout her fiction Welty's wonderfully sharp sense of humor is strongly evident. Although her characters often consist of involuted southern families, physically handicapped, mentally retarded, or generally unstable kinfolk—and although her narratives are shot through with undercurrents of death, violence, and degradation—Welty transforms everything with an entertaining twist. No matter how desperate a situation may be, she makes us listen to the way a character talks about it; we pay attention to style rather than information. And although her attitude toward human folly is satiric, her satire is devoid of the wish to undermine and mock her characters. Instead, the vivid realizations of her prose give them irresistible life and a memorable expressiveness. Yet she remarked in an essay that "fine story writers seem to be in a sense obstructionists," and Welty's narratives unfold through varied repetitions or reiterations that have, she once claimed, the function of a deliberate double exposure in photography. By making us pay close attention to who is speaking and the implications of that speech, by asking us to imagine the way in which a silent character is responding to that speech, and by making us read behind the deceptively simple response she gives to that character, she makes us active readers, playfully engaged in a typically complicated scene. "Why I Live at the P.O.," "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," "Powerhouse," "June Recital," "Petrified Man," and many others demonstrate the strength and the joy of her art. And although she has been called a "regional" writer, she has noted the condescending nature of that term, which she

calls an “outsider’s term; it has no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life” (*On Writing*). So it is with Eudora Welty’s fiction.

The text is from *A Curtain of Green* (1941).

Petrified Man

“Reach in my purse and git me a cigarette without no powder in it if you kin, Mrs. Fletcher, honey,” said Leota to her ten o’clock shampoo-and-set customer. “I don’t like no perfumed cigarettes.”

Mrs. Fletcher gladly reached over to the lavender shelf under the lavender-framed mirror, shook a hair net loose from the clasp of the patent-leather bag, and slapped her hand down quickly on a powder puff which burst out when the purse was opened.

“Why, look at the peanuts, Leota!” said Mrs. Fletcher in her marvelling voice.

“Honey, them goobers has been in my purse a week if they’s been in it a day. Mrs. Pike bought them peanuts.”

“Who’s Mrs. Pike?” asked Mrs. Fletcher, settling back. Hidden in this den of curling fluid and henna¹ packs, separated by a lavender swing-door from the other customers, who were being gratified in other booths, she could give her curiosity its freedom. She looked expectantly at the black part in Leota’s yellow curls as she bent to light the cigarette.

“Mrs. Pike is this lady from New Orleans,” said Leota, puffing, and pressing into Mrs. Fletcher’s scalp with strong red-nailed fingers. “A friend, not a customer. You see, like maybe I told you last time, me and Fred and Sal and Joe all had us a fuss, so Sal and Joe up and moved out, so we didn’t do a thing but rent out their room. So we rented it to Mrs. Pike. And Mr. Pike.” She flicked an ash into the basket of dirty towels. “Mrs. Pike is a very decided blonde. *She* bought me the peanuts.”

“She must be cute,” said Mrs. Fletcher.

“Honey, ‘cute’ ain’t the word for what she is. I’m tellin’ you, Mrs. Pike is attractive. She has her a good time. She’s got a sharp eye out, Mrs. Pike has.”

She dashed the comb through the air, and paused dramatically as a cloud of Mrs. Fletcher’s hennaed hair floated out of the lavender teeth like a small storm-cloud.

“Hair fallin’.”

“Aw, Leota.”

“Uh-huh, commencin’ to fall out,” said Leota, combing again, and letting fall another cloud.

“Is it any dandruff in it?” Mrs. Fletcher was frowning, her hair-line eyebrows diving down toward her nose, and her wrinkled, beady-lashed eyelids batting with concentration.

“Nope.” She combed again. “Just fallin’ out.”

“Bet it was that last perm’nent you gave me that did it,” Mrs. Fletcher said cruelly. “Remember you cooked me fourteen minutes.”

“You had fourteen minutes comin’ to you,” said Leota with finality.

1. Reddish brown dye for tinting hair.

“Bound to be somethin’,” persisted Mrs. Fletcher. “Dandruff, dandruff. I couldn’t of caught a thing like that from Mr. Fletcher, could I?”

“Well,” Leota answered at last, “you know what I heard in here yestiddy, one of Thelma’s ladies was settin’ over yonder in Thelma’s booth gittin’ a machineless, and I don’t mean to insist or insinuate or anything, Mrs. Fletcher, but Thelma’s lady just happ’med to throw out—I forgotten what she was talkin’ about at the time—that you was p-r-e-g., and lots of times that’ll make your hair do awful funny, fall out and God knows what all. It just ain’t our fault, is the way I look at it.”

There was a pause. The women stared at each other in the mirror.

“Who was it?” demanded Mrs. Fletcher.

“Honey, I really couldn’t say,” said Leota. “Not that you look it.”

“Where’s Thelma? I’ll get it out of her,” said Mrs. Fletcher.

“Now, honey, I wouldn’t go and git mad over a little thing like that,” Leota said, combing hastily, as though to hold Mrs. Fletcher down by the hair. “I’m sure it was somebody didn’t mean no harm in the world. How far gone are you?”

“Just wait,” said Mrs. Fletcher, and shrieked for Thelma, who came in and took a drag from Leota’s cigarette.

“Thelma, honey, throw your mind back to yestiddy if you kin,” said Leota, drenching Mrs. Fletcher’s hair with a thick fluid and catching the overflow in a cold wet towel at her neck.

“Well, I got my lady half wound for a spiral,” said Thelma doubtfully.

“This won’t take but a minute,” said Leota. “Who is it you got in there, old Horse Face? Just cast your mind back and try to remember who your lady was yestiddy who happ’med to mention that my customer was pregnant, that’s all. She’s dead to know.”

Thelma drooped her blood-red lips and looked over Mrs. Fletcher’s head into the mirror. “Why, honey, I ain’t got the faintest,” she breathed. “I really don’t recollect the faintest. But I’m sure she meant no harm. I declare, I forgot my hair finally got combed and thought it was a stranger behind me.”

“Was it that Mrs. Hutchinson?” Mrs. Fletcher was tensely polite.

“Mrs. Hutchinson? Oh, Mrs. Hutchinson.” Thelma batted her eyes. “Naw, precious, she come on Thursday and didn’t ev’m mention your name. I doubt if she ev’m knows you’re on the way.”

“Thelma!” cried Leota staunchly.

“All I know is, whoever it is ’ll be sorry some day. Why, I just barely knew it myself!” cried Mrs. Fletcher. “Just let her wait!”

“Why? What’re you gonna do to her?”

It was a child’s voice, and the women looked down. A little boy was making tents with aluminum wave pinchers² on the floor under the sink.

“Billy Boy, hon, mustn’t bother nice ladies,” Leota smiled. She slapped him brightly and behind her back waved Thelma out of the booth. “Ain’t Billy Boy a sight? Only three years old and already just nuts about the beauty-parlor business.”

“I never saw him here before,” said Mrs. Fletcher, still unmollified.

“He ain’t been here before, that’s how come,” said Leota. “He belongs to Mrs. Pike. She got her a job but it was Fay’s Millinery. He oughtn’t to try on those ladies’ hats, they come down over his eyes like I don’t know what.

2. Clips used to form and hold (or set) hair curl or wave.

They just git to look ridiculous, that's what, an' of course he's gonna put 'em on: hats. They tole Mrs. Pike they didn't appreciate him hangin' around there. Here, he couldn't hurt a thing."

"Well! I don't like children that much," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well!" said Leota moodily.

"Well! I'm almost tempted not to have this one," said Mrs. Fletcher. "That Mrs. Hutchinson! Just looks straight through you when she sees you on the street and then spits at you behind your back."

"Mr. Fletcher would beat you on the head if you didn't have it now," said Leota reasonably. "After going this far."

Mrs. Fletcher sat up straight. "Mr. Fletcher can't do a thing with me."

"He can't!" Leota winked at herself in the mirror.

"No, siree, he can't. If he so much as raises his voice against me, he knows good and well I'll have one of my sick headaches, and then I'm just not fit to live with. And if I really look that pregnant already—"

"Well, now, honey, I just want you to know—I habn't told any of my ladies and I ain't goin' to tell 'em—even that you're losin' your hair. You just get you one of those Stork-a-Lure dresses and stop worryin'. What people don't know don't hurt nobody, as Mrs. Pike says."

"Did you tell Mrs. Pike?" asked Mrs. Fletcher sulkily.

"Well, Mrs. Fletcher, look, you ain't ever goin' to lay eyes on Mrs. Pike or her lay eyes on you, so what diffunce does it make in the long run?"

"I knew it!" Mrs. Fletcher deliberately nodded her head so as to destroy a ringlet Leota was working on behind her ear. "Mrs. Pike!"

Leota sighed. "I reckon I might as well tell you. It wasn't any more Thelma's lady tole me you was pregnant than a bat."

"Not Mrs. Hutchinson?"

"Naw, Lord! It was Mrs. Pike."

"Mrs. Pike!" Mrs. Fletcher could only sputter and let curling fluid roll into her ear. "How could Mrs. Pike possibly know I was pregnant or otherwise, when she doesn't even know me? The nerve of some people!"

"Well, here's how it was. Remember Sunday?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Sunday, Mrs. Pike an' me was all by ourself. Mr. Pike and Fred had gone over to Eagle Lake, sayin' they was goin' to catch 'em some fish, but they didn't a course. So we was gettin' in Mrs. Pike's car, it's a 1939 Dodge—"

"1939, eh," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"—An' we was gettin' us a Jax beer apiece—that's the beer that Mrs. Pike says is made right in N.O., so she won't drink no other kind. So I seen you drive up to the drugstore an' run in for just a secont, leavin' I reckon Mr. Fletcher in the car, an' come runnin' out with looked like a perscription. So I says to Mrs. Pike, just to be makin' talk, 'Right yonder's Mrs. Fletcher, and I reckon that's Mr. Fletcher—she's one of my regular customers,' I says."

"I had on a figured print," said Mrs. Fletcher tentatively.

"You sure did," agreed Leota. "So Mrs. Pike, she give you a good look—she's very observant, a good judge of character, cute as a minute, you know—and she says, 'I bet you another Jax that lady's three months on the way.'"

"What gall!" said Mrs. Fletcher. "Mrs. Pike!"

"Mrs. Pike ain't goin' to bite you," said Leota. "Mrs. Pike is a lovely girl, you'd be crazy about her, Mrs. Fletcher. But she can't sit still a minute. We

went to the travellin' freak show yestiddy after work. I got through early—nine o'clock. In the vacant store next door. What, you ain't been?"

"No, I despise freaks," declared Mrs. Fletcher.

"Aw. Well, honey, talkin' about bein' pregnant an' all, you ought to see those twins in a bottle, you really owe it to yourself."

"What twins?" asked Mrs. Fletcher out of the side of her mouth.

"Well, honey, they got these two twins in a bottle, see? Born joined plumb together—dead a course." Leota dropped her voice into a soft lyrical hum. "They was about this long—pardon—must of been full time, all right, wouldn't you say?—an' they had these two heads an' two faces an' four arms an' four legs, all kind of joined *here*. See, this face looked this-a-way, and the other face looked that-a-way, over their shoulder, see. Kinda pathetic."

"Glah!" said Mrs. Fletcher disapprovingly.

"Well, ugly? Honey, I mean to tell you—their parents was first cousins and all like that. Billy Boy, git me a fresh towel from off Teeny's stack—this 'n's wringin' wet—an' quit ticklin' my ankles with that curler. I declare! He don't miss nothin'."

"Me and Mr. Fletcher aren't one speck of kin, or he could never of had me," said Mrs. Fletcher placidly.

"Of course not!" protested Leota. "Neither is me an' Fred, not that we know of. Well, honey, what Mrs. Pike liked was the pygmies. They've got these pygmies down there, too, an' Mrs. Pike was just wild about 'em. You know, the teeniniest men in the universe? Well, honey, they can just rest back on their little bohunkus an' roll around an' you can't hardly tell if they're sittin' or standin'. That'll give you some idea. They're about forty-two years old. Just suppose it was your husband!"

"Well, Mr. Fletcher is five foot nine and one half," said Mrs. Fletcher quickly.

"Fred's five foot ten," said Leota, "but I tell him he's still a shrimp, account of I'm so tall." She made a deep wave over Mrs. Fletcher's other temple with the comb. "Well, these pygmies are a kind of a dark brown, Mrs. Fletcher. Not bad lookin' for what they are, you know."

"I wouldn't care for them," said Mrs. Fletcher. "What does that Mrs. Pike see in them?"

"Aw, I don't know," said Leota. "She's just cute, that's all. But they got this man, this petrified man, that ever'thing ever since he was nine years old, when it goes through his digestion, see, somehow Mrs. Pike says it goes to his joints and has been turning to stone."

"How awful!" said Mrs. Fletcher.

"He's forty-two too. That looks like a bad age."

"Who said so, that Mrs. Pike? I bet she's forty-two," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Naw," said Leota, "Mrs. Pike's thirty-three, born in January, an Aquarian. He could move his head—like this. A course his head and mind ain't a joint, so to speak, and I guess his stomach ain't, either—not yet, anyways. But see—his food, he eats it, and it goes down, see, and then he digests it"—Leota rose on her toes for an instant—"and it goes out to his joints and before you can say 'Jack Robinson,' it's stone—pure stone. He's turning to stone. How'd you liked to be married to a guy like that? All he can do, he can move his head just a quarter of an inch. A course he *looks just terrible*."

"I should think he would," said Mrs. Fletcher frostily. "Mr. Fletcher takes bending exercises every night of the world. I make him."

"All Fred does is lay around the house like a rug. I wouldn't be surprised if he woke up some day and couldn't move. The petrified man just sat there moving his quarter of an inch though," said Leota reminiscently.

"Did Mrs. Pike like the petrified man?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"Not as much as she did the others," said Leota deprecatingly. "And then she likes a man to be a good dresser, and all that."

"Is Mr. Pike a good dresser?" asked Mrs. Fletcher sceptically.

"Oh, well, yeah," said Leota, "but he's twelve or fourteen years older'n her. She ast Lady Evangeline about him."

"Who's Lady Evangeline?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well, it's this mind reader they got in the freak show," said Leota. "Was real good. Lady Evangeline is her name, and if I had another dollar I wouldn't do a thing but have my other palm read. She had what Mrs. Pike said was the 'sixth mind' but she had the worst manicure I ever saw on a living person."

"What did she tell Mrs. Pike?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"She told her Mr. Pike was as true to her as he could be and besides, would come into some money."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Fletcher. "What does he do?"

"I can't tell," said Leota, "because he don't work. Lady Evangeline didn't tell me enough about my nature or anything. And I would like to go back and find out some more about this boy. Used to go with this boy until he got married to this girl. Oh, shoot, that was about three and a half years ago, when you was still goin' to the Robert E. Lee Beauty Shop in Jackson. He married her for her money. Another fortune-teller tole me that at the time. So I'm not in love with him anymore, anyway, besides being married to Fred, but Mrs. Pike thought, just for the hell of it, see, to ask Lady Evangeline was he happy."

"Does Mrs. Pike know everything about you already?" asked Mrs. Fletcher unbelievably. "Mercy!"

"Oh, yeah, I tole her ever'thing about ever'thing, from now on back to I don't know when—to when I first started goin' out," said Leota. "So I ast Lady Evangeline for one of my questions, was he happily married, and she says, just like she was glad I ask her, 'Honey,' she says, 'naw, he idn't. You write down this day, March 8, 1941,' she says, 'and mock it down: three years from today him and her won't be occupyin' the same bed.' There it is, up on the wall with them other dates—see, Mrs. Fletcher? And she says, 'Child, you ought to be glad you didn't git him, because he's so mercenary.' So I'm glad I married Fred. He sure ain't mercenary, money don't mean a thing to him. But I sure would like to go back and have my other palm read."

"Did Mrs. Pike believe in what the fortune-teller said?" asked Mrs. Fletcher in a superior tone of voice.

"Lord, yes, she's from New Orleans. Ever'body in New Orleans believes ever'thing spooky. One of 'em in New Orleans before it was raided says to Mrs. Pike one summer she was goin' to go from State to State and meet some grey-headed men, and, sure enough, she says she went on a beautician convention up to Chicago. . . ."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Fletcher. "Oh, is Mrs. Pike a beautician too?"

"Sure she is," protested Leota. "She's a beautician. I'm goin' to git her in here if I can. Before she married. But it don't leave you. She says sure enough, there was three men who was a very large part of making her trip what it was, and they all three had grey in their hair and they went in six States. Got

Christmas cards from 'em. Billy Boy, go see if Thelma's got any dry cotton. Look how Mrs. Fletcher's a-drippin'."

"Where did Mrs. Pike meet Mr. Pike?" asked Mrs. Fletcher primly.

"On another train," said Leota.

"I met Mr. Fletcher, or rather he met me, in a rental library," said Mrs. Fletcher with dignity, as she watched the net come down over her head.

"Honey, me an' Fred, we met in a rumble seat³ eight months ago and we was practically on what you might call the way to the altar inside of half an hour," said Leota in a guttural voice, and bit a bobby pin open. "Course it don't last. Mrs. Pike says nothin' like that ever lasts."

"Mr. Fletcher and myself are as much in love as the day we married," said Mrs. Fletcher belligerently as Leota stuffed cotton into her ears.

"Mrs. Pike says it don't last," repeated Leota in a louder voice. "Now go git under the dryer. You can turn yourself on, can't you? I'll be back to comb you out. Durin' lunch I promised to give Mrs. Pike a facial. You know—free. Her bein' in the business, so to speak."

"I bet she needs one," said Mrs. Fletcher, letting the swing-door fly back against Leota. "Oh, pardon me."

A week later, on time for her appointment, Mrs. Fletcher sank heavily into Leota's chair after first removing a drug-store rental book, called *Life Is Like That*, from the seat. She stared in a discouraged way into the mirror.

"You can tell it when I'm sitting down, all right," she said.

Leota seemed preoccupied and stood shaking out a lavender cloth. She began to pin it around Mrs. Fletcher's neck in silence.

"I said you sure can tell it when I'm sitting straight on and coming at you this way," Mrs. Fletcher said.

"Why, honey, naw you can't," said Leota gloomily. "Why, I'd never know. If somebody was to come up to me on the street and say, 'Mrs. Fletcher is pregnant!' I'd say, 'Heck, she don't look it to me.'"

"If a certain party hadn't found it out and spread it around, it wouldn't be too late even now," said Mrs. Fletcher frostily, but Leota was almost choking her with the cloth, pinning it so tight, and she couldn't speak clearly. She paddled her hands in the air until Leota wearily loosened her.

"Listen, honey, you're just a virgin compared to Mrs. Montjoy," Leota was going on, still absent-minded. She bent Mrs. Fletcher back in the chair and, sighing, tossed liquid from a teacup on to her head and dug both hands into her scalp. "You know Mrs. Montjoy—her husband's that premature-greyheaded fella?"

"She's in the Trojan Garden Club, is all I know," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well, honey," said Leota, but in a weary voice, "she come in here not the week before and not the day before she had her baby—she come in here the very selfsame day, I mean to tell you. Child, we was all plumb scared to death. There she was! Come for her shampoo an' set. Why, Mrs. Fletcher, in an hour an' twenty minutes she was layin' up there in the Baptist Hospital with a seb'm-pound son. It was that close a shave. I declare, if I hadn't been so tired I would of drank up a bottle of gin that night."

"What gall," said Mrs. Fletcher. "I never knew her at all well."

3. Folding seat at the rear of an automobile.

"See, her husband was waitin' outside in the car, and her bags was all packed an' in the back seat, an' she was all ready, 'cept she wanted her shampoo an' set. An' havin' one pain right after another. Her husband kep' comin' in here, scared-like, but couldn't do nothin' with her a course. She yelled bloody murder, too, but she always yelled her head off when I give her a perm'nent."

"She must of been crazy," said Mrs. Fletcher. "How did she look?"

"Shoot!" said Leota.

"Well, I can guess," said Mrs. Fletcher. "Awful."

"Just wanted to look pretty while she was havin' her baby, is all," said Leota airily. "Course, we was glad to give the lady what she was after—that's our motto—but I bet a hour later she wasn't payin' no mind to them little end curls. I bet she wasn't thinkin' about she ought to have on a net. It wouldn't of done her no good if she had."

"No, I don't suppose it would," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Yeah man! She was a-yellin'. Just like when I give her perm'nent."

"Her husband ought to make her behave. Don't it seem that way to you?" asked Mrs. Fletcher. "He ought to put his foot down."

"Ha," said Leota. "A lot he could do. Maybe some women is soft."

"Oh, you mistake me, I don't mean for her to get soft—far from it! Women have to stand up for themselves, or there's just no telling. But now you take me—I ask Mr. Fletcher's advice now and then, and he appreciates it, especially on something important, like is it time for a permanent—not that I've told him about the baby. He says, 'Why, dear, go ahead!' Just ask their *advice*."

"Huh! If I ever ast Fred's advice we'd be floatin' down the Yazoo River on a houseboat or somethin' by this time," said Leota. "I'm sick of Fred. I told him to go over to Vicksburg."

"Is he going?" demanded Mrs. Fletcher.

"Sure. See, the fortune-teller—I went back and had my other palm read, since we've got to rent the room agin—said my lover was goin' to work in Vicksburg, so I don't know who she could mean, unless she meant Fred. And Fred ain't workin' here—that much is so."

"Is he going to work in Vicksburg?" asked Mrs. Fletcher. "And—"

"Sure. Lady Evangeline said so. Said the future is going to be brighter than the present. He don't want to go, but I ain't gonna put up with nothin' like that. Lays around the house an' bulls—did bull—with that good-for-nothin' Mr. Pike. He says if he goes who'll cook, but I says I never get to eat anyway—not meals. Billy Boy, take Mrs. Grover that *Screen Secrets* and leg it."

Mrs. Fletcher heard stamping feet go out the door.

"Is that that Mrs. Pike's little boy here again?" she asked, sitting up gingerly.

"Yeah, that's still him." Leota stuck out her tongue.

Mrs. Fletcher could hardly believe her eyes. "Well! How's Mrs. Pike, your attractive new friend with the sharp eyes who spreads it around town that perfect strangers are pregnant?" she asked in a sweetened tone.

"Oh, Mizziz Pike." Leota combed Mrs. Fletcher's hair with heavy strokes.

"You act like you're tired," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Tired? Feel like it's four o'clock in the afternoon already," said Leota. "I ain't told you the awful luck we had, me and Fred? It's the worst thing you ever heard of. Maybe *you* think Mrs. Pike's got sharp eyes. Shoot, there's a limit! Well, you know, we rented out our room to this Mr. and Mrs. Pike from New Orleans when Sal an' Joe Fentress got mad at us 'cause they

drank up some home-brew we had in the closet—Sal an' Joe did. So, a week ago Sat'-day Mr. and Mrs. Pike moved in. Well, I kinda fixed up the room, you know—put a sofa pillow on the couch and picked some ragged robbins and put in a vase, but they never did say they appreciated it. Anyway, then I put some old magazines on the table."

"I think that was lovely," said Mrs. Fletcher.

"Wait. So, come night 'fore last, Fred and this Mr. Pike, who Fred just took up with, was back from they said they was fishin', bein' as neither one of 'em has got a job to his name, and we was all settin' around their room. So Mrs. Pike was settin' there, readin' a old *Startling G-Man Tales* that was mine, mind you, I'd bought it myself, and all of a sudden she jumps!—into the air—you'd 'a' thought she'd set on a spider—an' says, 'Canfield'—ain't that silly, that's Mr. Pike—'Canfield, my God Almighty,' she says, 'honey,' she says, 'we're rich, and you won't have to work.' Not that he turned one hand anyway. Well, me and Fred rushes over to her, and Mr. Pike, too, and there she sets, pointin' her finger at a photo in my copy of *Startling G-Man*. 'See that man?' yells Mrs. Pike. 'Remember him, Canfield?' 'Never forget a face,' says Mr. Pike. 'It's Mr. Petrie, that we stayed with him in the apartment next to ours in Toulouse Street in N.O. for six weeks. Mr. Petrie.' 'Well,' says Mrs. Pike, like she can't hold out one secont longer, 'Mr. Petrie is wanted for five hundred dollars cash, for rapin' four women in California, and I know where he is.'"

"Mercy!" said Mrs. Fletcher. "Where was he?"

At some time Leota had washed her hair and now she yanked her up by the back locks and sat her up.

"Know where he was?"

"I certainly don't," Mrs. Fletcher said. Her scalp hurt all over.

Leota flung a towel around the top of her customer's head. "Nowhere else but in that freak show! I saw him just as plain as Mrs. Pike. *He* was the petrified man!"

"Who would ever have thought that!" cried Mrs. Fletcher sympathetically.

"So Mr. Pike says, 'Well whatta you know about that', an' he looks real hard at the photo and whistles. And she starts dancin' and singin' about their good luck. She meant our bad luck! I made a point of tellin' that fortune-teller the next time I saw her. I said, 'Listen, that magazine was layin' around the house for a month, and there was the freak show runnin' night an' day, not two steps away from my own beauty parlor, with Mr. Petrie just settin' there waitin'. An' it had to be Mr. and Mrs. Pike, almost perfect strangers.'"

"What gall," said Mrs. Fletcher. She was only sitting there, wrapped in a turban, but she did not mind.

"Fortune-tellers don't care. And Mrs. Pike, she goes around actin' like she thinks she was Mrs. God," said Leota. "So they're goin' to leave tomorrow, Mr. and Mrs. Pike. And in the meantime I got to keep that mean, bad little ole kid here, gettin' under my feet ever' minute of the day an' talkin' back too."

"Have they gotten the five hundred dollars' reward already?" asked Mrs. Fletcher.

"Well," said Leota, "at first Mr. Pike didn't want to do anything about it. Can you feature that? Said he kinda liked that ole bird and said he was real nice to 'em, lent 'em money or somethin'. But Mrs. Pike simply tole him he could just go to hell, and I can see her point. She says, 'You ain't worked a lick in six months, and here I make five hundred dollars in two seconts, and what

thanks do I get for it? You go to hell, Canfield,' she says. So," Leota went on in a despondent voice, "they called up the cops and they caught the ole bird, all right, right there in the freak show where I saw him with my own eyes, thinkin' he was petrified. He's the one. Did it under his real name—Mr. Petrie. Four women in California, all in the month of August. So Mrs. Pike gits five hundred dollars. And my magazine, and right next door to my beauty parlor. I cried all night, but Fred said it wasn't a bit of use and to go to sleep, because the whole thing was just a sort of coincidence—you know: can't do nothin' about it. He says it put him clean out of the notion of goin' to Vicksburg for a few days till we rent out the room agin—no tellin' who we'll git this time."

"But can you imagine anybody knowing this old man, that's raped four women?" persisted Mrs. Fletcher, and she shuddered audibly. "Did Mrs. Pike *speak* to him when she met him in the freak show?"

Leota had begun to comb Mrs. Fletcher's hair. "I says to her, I says, 'I didn't notice you fallin' on his neck when he was the petrified man—don't tell me you didn't recognize your fine friend?' And she says, 'I didn't recognize him with that white powder all over his face. He just looked familiar,' Mrs. Pike says, 'and lots of people look familiar.' But she says that ole petrified man did put her in mind of somebody. She wondered who it was! Kep' her awake, which man she'd ever knew it reminded her of. So when she seen the photo, it all come to her. Like a flash. Mr. Petrie. The way he'd turn his head and look at her when she took him in his breakfast."

"Took him in his breakfast!" shrieked Mrs. Fletcher. "Listen—don't tell me. I'd 'a' felt something."

"Four women. I guess those women didn't have the faintest notion at the time they'd be worth a hundred an' twenty-five bucks apiece some day to Mrs. Pike. We ast her how old the fella was then, an's she says he musta had one foot in the grave, at least. Can you beat it?"

"Not really petrified at all, of course," said Mrs. Fletcher meditatively. She drew herself up. "I'd 'a' felt something," she said proudly.

"Shoot! I did feel somethin'," said Leota. "I tole Fred when I got home I felt so funny. I said, 'Fred, that ole petrified man sure did leave me with a funny feelin'.' He says, 'Funny-haha or funny-peculiar?' and I says, 'Funny-peculiar.'" She pointed her comb into the air emphatically.

"I'll bet you did," said Mrs. Fletcher.

They both heard a crackling noise.

Leota screamed, "Billy Boy! What you doin' in my purse?"

"Aw, I'm just eatin' these ole stale peanuts up," said Billy Boy.

"You come here to me!" screamed Leota, recklessly flinging down the comb, which scattered a whole ashtray full of bobby pins and knocked down a row of Coca-Cola bottles. "This is the last straw!"

"I caught him! I caught him!" giggled Mrs. Fletcher. "I'll hold him on my lap. You bad, bad boy, you! I guess I better learn how to spank little old bad boys," she said.

Leota's eleven o'clock customer pushed open the swing-door upon Leota's paddling him heartily with the brush, while he gave angry but belittling screams which penetrated beyond the booth and filled the whole curious beauty parlor. From everywhere ladies began to gather round to watch the paddling. Billy Boy kicked both Leota and Mrs. Fletcher as hard as he could, Mrs. Fletcher with her new fixed smile.

Billy Boy stomped through the group of wild-haired ladies and went out the door, but flung back the words, “If you’re so smart, why ain’t you rich?”

1941

ELIZABETH BISHOP

1911–1979

“The enormous power of reticence,” the poet Octavio Paz said in a tribute, “—that is the great lesson of Elizabeth Bishop.” Bishop’s reticence originates in a temperament indistinguishable from her style; her remarkable formal gifts allowed her to create ordered and lucid structures that hold strong feelings in place. Chief among these feelings was a powerful sense of loss. Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, she was eight months old when her father died. Her mother suffered a series of breakdowns and was permanently institutionalized when Elizabeth was five. “I’ve never concealed this,” Bishop once wrote, “although I don’t like to make too much of it. But of course it is an important fact, to me. I didn’t see her again.” Her understatement is characteristic. When Bishop wrote about her early life—as she first did in several poems and stories in the 1950s and last did in her extraordinary final book, *Geography III* (1976)—she resisted sentimentality and self-pity. It was as if she could look at the events of her own life with the same unflinching gaze she turned on the landscapes that so consistently compelled her. The deep feeling in her poems rises out of direct and particular description, but Bishop does more than simply observe. Whether writing about her childhood landscape of Nova Scotia or her adopted Brazil, she often opens a poem with long perspectives on time, with landscapes that dwarf the merely human, emphasizing the dignified frailty of a human observer.

Examining her own case, she traces the observer’s instinct to early childhood. “In the Waiting Room,” a poem written in the early 1970s, probes the sources of her interest in details. Using an incident from when she was seven—a little girl waits for her aunt in the dentist’s anteroom—Bishop shows how in the course of the episode she became aware, as if wounded, of the utter strangeness and engulfing power of the world. The spectator in that poem hangs on to details as a kind of life jacket; she observes because she has to.

After her father’s death, Bishop and her mother lived with Bishop’s maternal grandparents in Great Village, Nova Scotia. She remained there for several years after her mother was institutionalized, until she was removed (“kidnapped,” as she says in one of her stories) by her paternal grandparents and taken to live in Worcester, Massachusetts. This experience was followed by a series of illnesses (eczema, bronchitis, and asthma), which plagued her for years. Bishop later lived with an aunt and attended Walnut Hill School, a private high school. In 1934 she graduated from Vassar College, where she had been introduced to Marianne Moore. Moore’s meticulous taste for fact was to influence Bishop’s poetry, but more immediately Moore’s independent life as a poet seemed an alternative to Bishop’s vaguer intentions to attend medical school. Bishop lived in New York City and in Key West, Florida; a traveling fellowship took her to Brazil, where she met Lotade Macedo Soares, an architect with whom she lived for sixteen years. Lota committed suicide in 1967, a loss registered in Bishop’s late villanelle “One Art” (1976).

Exile and travel were always at the heart of Bishop's poems. The title of her first book, *North & South* (1946), looks backward to the northern seas of Nova Scotia and forward to the tropical worlds of Brazil. Her poems are set among these landscapes, where she can stress the sweep and violence of encircling and eroding geological powers or, in the case of Brazil, a bewildering botanical plenty. *Questions of Travel* (1965), her third volume, constitutes a sequence of poems initiating her, with her botanist-geologist-anthropologist's curiosity, into Brazilian life and the mysteries of what questions a traveler-exile should ask. In this series with its increasing penetration of a new country, a process is at work similar to one Bishop identifies in the great English naturalist Charles Darwin, of whom Bishop once said: "One admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic—and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels the strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown."

In 1969 Bishop's *Complete Poems* appeared, an ironic title in light of the fact that she continued to publish new poetry. *Geography III* contains some of her best work, poems that, from the perspective of her return to the United States, look back on the appetite for exploration apparent in her earlier verse. The influence of her long friendship with the poet Robert Lowell, and their high regard for one another's work, may be felt in the way *Geography III* explores the memory and autobiography more directly than does her earlier work. Bishop, however, believed that there were limits on the ways in which poems could use the materials of a life. In a well-known 1972 letter to Lowell, she discusses these limits. Having left Brazil, Bishop lived in Boston from 1970 and taught at Harvard University until 1977. She received the Pulitzer Prize for the combined volume *North & South and A Cold Spring* (1955) and the National Book Award for *The Complete Poems*, and in 1976 was the first woman and the first American to receive the Books Abroad Neustadt International Prize for Literature. Since Bishop's death, most of her published work has been gathered in two volumes: *The Complete Poems 1929–1979* and *The Collected Prose*. An edition of her unpublished poems and drafts, *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box*, was published to some controversy in 2006.

The Man-Moth¹

Here, above,
 cracks in the buildings are filled with battered moonlight.
 The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat.
 It lies at his feet like a circle for a doll to stand on,
 and he makes an inverted pin, the point magnetized to the moon. 5
 He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties,
 feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold,
 of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers.

But when the Man-Moth
 pays his rare, although occasional, visits to the surface, 10
 the moon looks rather different to him. He emerges
 from an opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks

1. Newspaper misprint for "mammoth" [Bishop's note]. Bishop explained that when she saw this misprint in the *New York Times* she took it as "an

oracle . . . kindly explaining New York City to me, at least for a moment."

and nervously begins to scale the faces of buildings.
 He thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky,
 proving the sky quite useless for protection. 15
 He trembles, but must investigate as high as he can climb.

Up the façades,
 his shadow dragging like a photographer's cloth behind him,
 he climbs fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage
 to push his small head through that round clean opening 20
 and be forced through, as from a tube, in black scrolls on the
 light.

(Man, standing below him, has no such illusions.)
 But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although
 he fails, of course, and falls back scared but quite unhurt.

Then he returns 25
 to the pale subways of cement he calls his home. He flits,
 he flutters, and cannot get aboard the silent trains
 fast enough to suit him. The doors close swiftly.
 The Man-Moth always seats himself facing the wrong way
 and the train starts at once at its full, terrible speed, 30
 without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort.
 He cannot tell the rate at which he travels backwards.

Each night he must
 be carried through artificial tunnels and dream recurrent dreams.
 Just as the ties recur beneath his train, these underlie 35
 his rushing brain. He does not dare look out the window,
 for the third rail,² the unbroken draught of poison,
 runs there beside him. He regards it as disease
 he has inherited susceptibility to. He has to keep
 his hands in pockets, as others must wear mufflers. 40

If you catch him,
 hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
 an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
 as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
 one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips. 45
 Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention
 he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,
 cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink.

1935

The Fish

I caught a tremendous fish
 and held him beside the boat
 half out of water, with my hook

2. The exposed electrical conductor of a railway that carries high-voltage power and thus the threat of electrocution.

fast in a corner of his mouth.
 He didn't fight. 5
 He hadn't fought at all.
 He hung a grunting weight,
 battered and venerable
 and homely. Here and there
 his brown skin hung in strips 10
 like ancient wallpaper,
 and its pattern of darker brown
 was like wallpaper:
 shapes like full-blown roses
 stained and lost through age. 15
 He was speckled with barnacles,
 fine rosettes of lime,
 and infested
 with tiny white sea-lice,
 and underneath two or three 20
 rags of green weed hung down.
 While his gills were breathing in
 the terrible oxygen
 —the frightening gills,
 fresh and crisp with blood, 25
 that can cut so badly—
 I thought of the coarse white flesh
 packed in like feathers,
 the big bones and the little bones,
 the dramatic reds and blacks 30
 of his shiny entrails,
 and the pink swim-bladder
 like a big peony.
 I looked into his eyes
 which were far larger than mine 35
 but shallower, and yellowed,
 the irises backed and packed
 with tarnished tinfoil
 seen through the lenses
 of old scratched isinglass.¹ 40
 They shifted a little, but not
 to return my stare.
 —It was more like the tipping
 of an object toward the light.
 I admired his sullen face, 45
 the mechanism of his jaw,
 and then I saw
 that from his lower lip
 —if you could call it a lip—
 grim, wet, and weaponlike, 50
 hung five old pieces of fish-line,
 or four and a wire leader
 with the swivel still attached,

1. A whitish, semitransparent substance, originally obtained from the swim bladders of some freshwater fish and occasionally used for windows.

with all their five big hooks
 grown firmly in his mouth. 55
 A green line, frayed at the end
 where he broke it, two heavier lines,
 and a fine black thread
 still crimped from the strain and snap
 when it broke and he got away. 60
 Like medals with their ribbons
 frayed and wavering,
 a five-haired beard of wisdom
 trailing from his aching jaw.
 I stared and stared 65
 and victory filled up
 the little rented boat,
 from the pool of bilge
 where oil had spread a rainbow
 around the rusted engine 70
 to the bailer rusted orange,
 the sun-cracked thwarts,
 the oarlocks on their strings,
 the gunnels—until everything
 was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! 75
 And I let the fish go.

1946

Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance¹

Thus should have been our travels:
 serious, engravable.
 The Seven Wonders of the World are tired
 and a touch familiar, but the other scenes,
 innumerable, though equally sad and still, 5
 are foreign. Often the squatting Arab,
 or group of Arabs, plotting, probably,
 against our Christian Empire,
 while one apart, with outstretched arm and hand
 points to the Tomb, the Pit, the Sepulcher.² 10
 The branches of the date-palms look like files.
 The cobbled courtyard, where the Well is dry,
 is like a diagram, the brickwork conduits
 are vast and obvious, the human figure
 far gone in history or theology, 15
 gone with its camel or its faithful horse.
 Always the silence, the gesture, the specks of birds
 suspended on invisible threads above the Site,
 or the smoke rising solemnly, pulled by threads.

1. Part of the title of an old edition of the Bible described in the opening lines of the poem. A concordance is a guide to occurrences of words and proper names and places in a book.

2. Jesus's burial place, depicted (along with other places associated with his life, such as the Well and the Site) among the "2,000 illustrations" of the title.

Granted a page alone or a page made up 20
 of several scenes arranged in catty-cornered rectangles
 or circles set on stippled gray,
 granted a grim lunette,³
 caught in the toils of an initial letter,
 when dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves. 25
 The eye drops, weighted, through the lines
 the burin⁴ made, the lines that move apart
 like ripples above sand,
 dispersing storms, God's spreading fingerprint,
 and painfully, finally, that ignite 30
 in watery prismatic white-and-blue.

Entering the Narrows at St. Johns⁵
 the touching bleat of goats reached to the ship.
 We glimpsed them, reddish, leaping up the cliffs 35
 among the fog-soaked weeds and butter-and-eggs.⁶
 And at St. Peter's⁷ the wind blew and the sun shone madly.
 Rapidly, purposefully, the Collegians⁸ marched in lines,
 crisscrossing the great square with black, like ants.
 In Mexico the dead man lay
 in a blue arcade; the dead volcanoes 40
 glistened like Easter lilies.
 The jukebox went on playing "Ay, Jalisco!"
 And at Volubilis⁹ there were beautiful poppies
 splitting the mosaics; the fat old guide made eyes.
 In Dingle¹ harbor a golden length of evening 45
 the rotting hulks held up their dripping plush.
 The Englishwoman poured tea, informing us
 that the Duchess was going to have a baby.
 And in the brothels of Marrakesh²
 the little pockmarked prostitutes 50
 balanced their tea-trays on their heads
 and did their belly-dances; flung themselves
 naked and giggling against our knees,
 asking for cigarettes. It was somewhere near there
 I saw what frightened me most of all: 55
 A holy grave, not looking particularly holy,
 one of a group under a keyhole-arched stone baldaquin³
 open to every wind from the pink desert.
 An open, gritty, marble trough, carved solid
 with exhortation, yellowed 60
 as scattered cattle-teeth;
 half-filled with dust, not even the dust
 of the poor prophet paynim who once lay there.
 In a smart burnoose⁴ Khadour looked on amused.

3. An oval framing an illustration, often part of an enlarged initial letter.

4. An engraver's tool.

5. In Newfoundland.

6. A plant whose flowers are two shades of yellow.

7. The papal basilica in Rome.

8. Members of constituent orders of the Catho-

lic Church.

9. A ruined Roman city in Morocco.

1. A town in southwest Ireland.

2. A city in Morocco.

3. Architectural canopy.

4. A long cloak with a hood. "Paynim": archaic literary word for pagan, especially Muslim.

Everything only connected by “and” and “and.” 65
 Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the edges
 of the pages and pollinates the fingertips.)
 Open the heavy book. Why couldn’t we have seen
 this old Nativity while we were at it?
 —the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light, 70
 an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
 colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
 and, lulled within, a family with pets,
 —and looked and looked our infant⁵ sight away.

1955

The Bight¹

On My Birthday

At low tide like this how sheer the water is.
 White, crumbling ribs of marl protrude and glare
 and the boats are dry, the pilings dry as matches.
 Absorbing, rather than being absorbed,
 the water in the bight doesn’t wet anything, 5
 the color of the gas flame turned as low as possible.
 One can smell it turning to gas; if one were Baudelaire²
 one could probably hear it turning to marimba music.
 The little ocher dredge at work off the end of the dock
 already plays the dry perfectly off-beat claves. 10
 The birds are outside. Pelicans crash
 into this peculiar gas unnecessarily hard,
 it seems to me, like pickaxes,
 rarely coming up with anything to show for it,
 and going off with humorous elbowings. 15
 Black-and-white man-of-war birds soar
 on impalpable drafts
 and open their tails like scissors on the curves
 or tense them like wishbones, till they tremble.
 The frowsy sponge boats keep coming in 20
 with the obliging air of retrievers,
 bristling with jackstraw gaffs and hooks
 and decorated with bobbles of sponges.
 There is a fence of chicken wire along the dock
 where, glinting like plowshares, 25
 the blue-gray shark tails are hung up to dry
 for the Chinese-restaurant trade.
 Some of the little white boats are still piled up
 against each other, or lie on their sides, stove in,
 and not yet salvaged, if they ever will be, from the last bad storm, 30

5. Its Latin root (*infans*) means “speechless.”

1. A bay or an inlet.

2. Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), French poet

whose theory of correspondences (see line 32)
 promised links, through poetry, between the
 physical and spiritual worlds.

like torn-open, unanswered letters.
 The bight is littered with old correspondences.
 Click. Click. Goes the dredge,
 and brings up a dripping jawful of marl.
 All the untidy activity continues,
 awful but cheerful. 35

1955

At the Fishhouses

Although it is a cold evening,
 down by one of the fishhouses
 an old man sits netting,
 his net, in the gloaming almost invisible
 a dark purple-brown, 5
 and his shuttle worn and polished.
 The air smells so strong of codfish
 it makes one's nose run and one's eyes water.
 The five fishhouses have steeply peaked roofs
 and narrow, cleated gangplanks slant up 10
 to storerooms in the gables
 for the wheelbarrows to be pushed up and down on.
 All is silver: the heavy surface of the sea,
 swelling slowly as if considering spilling over,
 is opaque, but the silver of the benches, 15
 the lobster pots, and masts, scattered
 among the wild jagged rocks,
 is of an apparent translucence
 like the small old buildings with an emerald moss
 growing on their shoreward walls. 20
 The big fish tubs are completely lined
 with layers of beautiful herring scales
 and the wheelbarrows are similarly plastered
 with creamy iridescent coats of mail,
 with small iridescent flies crawling on them. 25
 Up on the little slope behind the houses,
 set in the sparse bright sprinkle of grass,
 is an ancient wooden capstan,¹
 cracked, with two long bleached handles
 and some melancholy stains, like dried blood, 30
 where the ironwork has rusted.
 The old man accepts a Lucky Strike.²
 He was a friend of my grandfather.
 We talk of the decline in the population
 and of codfish and herring 35
 while he waits for a herring boat to come in.
 There are sequins on his vest and on his thumb.

1. Cylindrical drum around which rope is wound,
 used for winching or hoisting the anchor of a ship.

2. Brand of cigarettes.

He has scraped the scales, the principal beauty,
 from unnumbered fish with that black old knife,
 the blade of which is almost worn away. 40

Down at the water's edge, at the place
 where they haul up the boats, up the long ramp
 descending into the water, thin silver
 tree trunks are laid horizontally
 across the gray stones, down and down 45
 at intervals of four or five feet.

Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,
 element bearable to no mortal,
 to fish and to seals . . . One seal particularly
 I have seen here evening after evening. 50
 He was curious about me. He was interested in music;
 like me a believer in total immersion,³
 so I used to sing him Baptist hymns.

I also sang "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."
 He stood up in the water and regarded me 55
 steadily, moving his head a little.

Then he would disappear, then suddenly emerge
 almost in the same spot, with a sort of shrug
 as if it were against his better judgment.

Cold dark deep and absolutely clear, 60
 the clear gray icy water . . . Back, behind us,
 the dignified tall firs begin.

Bluish, associating with their shadows,
 a million Christmas trees stand
 waiting for Christmas. The water seems suspended 65
 above the rounded gray and blue-gray stones.

I have seen it over and over, the same sea, the same,
 slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones,
 icily free above the stones,
 above the stones and then the world. 70

If you should dip your hand in,
 your wrist would ache immediately,
 your bones would begin to ache and your hand would burn
 as if the water were a transmutation of fire
 that feeds on stones and burns with a dark gray flame. 75

If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter,
 then briny, then surely burn your tongue.
 It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
 dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
 drawn from the cold hard mouth 80
 of the world, derived from the rocky breasts
 forever, flowing and drawn, and since
 our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.

1955

3. Form of baptism favored by Baptists.

Questions of Travel

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
 hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
 and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
 makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
 turning to waterfalls under our very eyes. 5
 —For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,
 aren't waterfalls yet,
 in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
 they probably will be.
 But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling, 10
 the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
 slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.
 Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
 Where should we be today? 15
 Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
 in this strangest of theatres?
 What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
 in our bodies, we are determined to rush
 to see the sun the other way around? 20
 The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?
 To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
 inexplicable and impenetrable,
 at any view,
 instantly seen and always, always delightful? 25
 Oh, must we dream our dreams
 and have them, too?
 And have we room
 for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity 30
 not to have seen the trees along this road,
 really exaggerated in their beauty,
 not to have seen them gesturing
 like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
 —Not to have had to stop for gas and heard 35
 the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
 of disparate wooden clogs
 carelessly clacking over
 a grease-stained filling-station floor.
 (In another country the clogs would all be tested. 40
 Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
 —A pity not to have heard
 the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
 who sings above the broken gasoline pump
 in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque: 45
 three towers, five silver crosses.
 —Yes, a pity not to have pondered,

blurr'dly and inconclusively,
 on what connection can exist for centuries
 between the crudest wooden footwear 50
 and, careful and finicky,
 the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.
 —Never to have studied history in
 the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages.
 —And never to have had to listen to rain 55
 so much like politicians' speeches:
 two hours of unrelenting oratory
 and then a sudden golden silence
 in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

*"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come 60
 to imagined places, not just stay at home?
 Or could Pascal¹ have been not entirely right
 about just sitting quietly in one's room?"*

*Continent, city, country, society:
 the choice is never wide and never free. 65
 And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,
 wherever that may be?"*

1965

The Armadillo

for Robert Lowell

This is the time of year
 when almost every night
 the frail, illegal fire balloons appear.
 Climbing the mountain height,

rising toward a saint 5
 still honored in these parts,
 the paper chambers flush and fill with light
 that comes and goes, like hearts.

Once up against the sky it's hard
 to tell them from the stars— 10
 planets, that is—the tinted ones:
 Venus going down, or Mars,

or the pale green one. With a wind,
 they flare and falter, wobble and toss;
 but if it's still they steer between 15
 the kite sticks of the Southern Cross,

1. French mathematician and philosopher (1623–1662) who said, "Men's misfortunes spring from the single cause that they are unable to stay quietly in one room" (*Pensées*, trans. J. M. Cohen).

receding, dwindling, solemnly
 and steadily forsaking us,
 or, in the downdraft from a peak,
 suddenly turning dangerous. 20

Last night another big one fell.
 It splattered like an egg of fire
 against the cliff behind the house.
 The flame ran down. We saw the pair

of owls who nest there flying up 25
 and up, their whirling black-and-white
 stained bright pink underneath, until
 they shrieked up out of sight.

The ancient owls' nest must have burned.
 Hastily, all alone, 30
 a glistening armadillo left the scene,
 rose-flecked, head down, tail down,

and then a baby rabbit jumped out,
short-eared, to our surprise.
 So soft!—a handful of intangible ash 35
 with fixed, ignited eyes.

Too pretty, dreamlike mimicry!
O falling fire and piercing cry
and panic, and a weak mailed fist¹
clenched ignorant against the sky! 40

1965

Sestina¹

September rain falls on the house.
 In the failing light, the old grandmother
 sits in the kitchen with the child
 beside the Little Marvel Stove,
 reading the jokes from the almanac, 5
 laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears
 and the rain that beats on the roof of the house
 were both foretold by the almanac,
 but only known to a grandmother. 10
 The iron kettle sings on the stove.
 She cuts some bread and says to the child,

1. The armadillo, curled tight and protected
 against everything but fire.

1. A fixed verse form in which the end words of the

first six-line stanza must be used at the ends of the
 lines in the following stanzas in a rotating order;
 the final three lines must contain all six words.

It's time for tea now; but the child
 is watching the teakettle's small hard tears
 dance like mad on the hot black stove, 15
 the way the rain must dance on the house.
 Tidying up, the old grandmother
 hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac
 hovers half open above the child, 20
 hovers above the old grandmother
 and her teacup full of dark brown tears.
 She shivers and says she thinks the house
 feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove. 25
I know what I know, says the almanac.
 With crayons the child draws a rigid house
 and a winding pathway. Then the child
 puts in a man with buttons like tears
 and shows it proudly to the grandmother. 30

But secretly, while the grandmother
 busies herself about the stove,
 the little moons fall down like tears
 from between the pages of the almanac
 into the flower bed the child 35
 has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.
 The grandmother sings to the marvellous stove
 and the child draws another inscrutable house.

1965

In the Waiting Room

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
 I went with Aunt Consuelo
 to keep her dentist's appointment
 and sat and waited for her
 in the dentist's waiting room. 5
 It was winter. It got dark
 early. The waiting room
 was full of grown-up people,
 arctics and overcoats,
 lamps and magazines. 10
 My aunt was inside
 what seemed like a long time
 and while I waited I read
 the *National Geographic*

(I could read) and carefully
 studied the photographs: 15
 the inside of a volcano,
 black, and full of ashes;
 then it was spilling over
 in rivulets of fire. 20
 Osa and Martin Johnson¹
 dressed in riding breeches,
 laced boots, and pith helmets.
 A dead man slung on a pole
 —“Long Pig,”² the caption said. 25
 Babies with pointed heads
 wound round and round with string;
 black, naked women with necks
 wound round and round with wire
 like the necks of light bulbs. 30
 Their breasts were horrifying.
 I read it right straight through.
 I was too shy to stop.
 And then I looked at the cover:
 the yellow margins, the date. 35

Suddenly, from inside,
 came an *oh!* of pain
 —Aunt Consuelo’s voice—
 not very loud or long.
 I wasn’t at all surprised; 40
 even then I knew she was
 a foolish, timid woman.
 I might have been embarrassed,
 but wasn’t. What took me
 completely by surprise 45
 was that it was *me*:
 my voice, in my mouth.
 Without thinking at all
 I was my foolish aunt,
 I—we—were falling, falling, 50
 our eyes glued to the cover
 of the *National Geographic*,
 February, 1918.

I said to myself: three days
 and you’ll be seven years old. 55
 I was saying it to stop
 the sensation of falling off
 the round, turning world
 into cold, blue-black space.
 But I felt: you are an *I*, 60
 you are an *Elizabeth*,

1. Famous explorers and travel writers.

2. Polynesian cannibals’ name for the human carcass.

you are one of *them*.
 Why should you be one, too?
 I scarcely dared to look.
 to see what it was I was. 65
 I gave a sidelong glance
 —I couldn't look any higher—
 at shadowy gray knees,
 trousers and skirts and boots
 and different pairs of hands 70
 lying under the lamps.
 I knew that nothing stranger
 had ever happened, that nothing
 stranger could ever happen.
 Why should I be my aunt, 75
 or me, or anyone?
 What similarities—
 boots, hands, the family voice
 I felt in my throat, or even
 the *National Geographic* 80
 and those awful hanging breasts—
 held us all together
 or made us all just one?
 How—I didn't know any
 word for it—how “unlikely” . . . 85
 How had I come to be here,
 like them, and overhear
 a cry of pain that could have
 got loud and worse but hadn't?

The waiting room was bright 90
 and too hot. It was sliding
 beneath a big black wave,
 another, and another.

Then I was back in it.
 The War was on. Outside, 95
 in Worcester, Massachusetts,
 were night and slush and cold,
 and it was still the fifth
 of February, 1918.

1976

The Moose

for Grace Bulmer Bowers

From narrow provinces
 of fish and bread and tea,
 home of the long tides

where the bay leaves the sea
twice a day and takes
the herrings long rides, 5

where if the river
enters or retreats
in a wall of brown foam
depends on if it meets 10
the bay coming in,
the bay not at home;

where, silted red,
sometimes the sun sets
facing a red sea, 15
and others, veins the flats'
lavender, rich mud
in burning rivulets;

on red, gravelly roads,
down rows of sugar maples,
past clapboard farmhouses 20
and neat, clapboard churches,
bleached, ridged as clamshells,
past twin silver birches,

through late afternoon 25
a bus journeys west,
the windshield flashing pink,
pink glancing off of metal,
brushing the dented flank
of blue, beat-up enamel; 30

down hollows, up rises,
and waits, patient, while
a lone traveller gives
kisses and embraces
to seven relatives 35
and a collie supervises.

Goodbye to the elms,
to the farm, to the dog.
The bus starts. The light
grows richer; the fog, 40
shifting, salty, thin,
comes closing in.

Its cold, round crystals
form and slide and settle
in the white hens' feathers, 45
in gray glazed cabbages,
on the cabbage roses
and lupins like apostles;

the sweet peas cling
to their wet white string 50
on the whitewashed fences;
bumblebees creep
inside the foxgloves,
and evening commences.

One stop at Bass River. 55
Then the Economies—
Lower, Middle, Upper;
Five Islands, Five Houses,¹
where a woman shakes a tablecloth
out after supper. 60

A pale flickering. Gone.
The Tantramar marshes
and the smell of salt hay.
An iron bridge trembles
and a loose plank rattles 65
but doesn't give way.

On the left, a red light
swims through the dark:
a ship's port lantern.
Two rubber boots show, 70
illuminated, solemn.
A dog gives one bark.

A woman climbs in
with two market bags,
brisk, freckled, elderly. 75
"A grand night. Yes, sir,
all the way to Boston."
She regards us amicably.

Moonlight as we enter
the New Brunswick woods, 80
hairy, scratchy, splintery;
moonlight and mist
caught in them like lamb's wool
on bushes in a pasture.

The passengers lie back. 85
Snores. Some long sighs.
A dreamy divagation
begins in the night,
a gentle, auditory,
slow hallucination. . . . 90

1. These are small towns and villages in Nova Scotia, near Halifax.

In the creakings and noises,
 an old conversation
 —not concerning us,
 but recognizable, somewhere,
 back in the bus: 95
 Grandparents' voices

uninterruptedly
 talking, in Eternity:
 names being mentioned,
 things cleared up finally; 100
 what he said, what she said,
 who got pensioned;

deaths, deaths and sicknesses;
 the year he remarried;
 the year (something) happened. 105
 She died in childbirth.
 That was the son lost
 when the schooner foundered.

He took to drink. Yes.
 She went to the bad. 110
 When Amos began to pray
 even in the store and
 finally the family had
 to put him away.

“Yes . . .” that peculiar 115
 affirmative. “Yes . . .”
 A sharp, indrawn breath,
 half groan, half acceptance,
 that means “Life’s like that.
 We know *it* (also death).” 120

Talking the way they talked
 in the old featherbed,
 peacefully, on and on,
 dim lamplight in the hall,
 down in the kitchen, the dog 125
 tucked in her shawl.

Now, it’s all right now
 even to fall asleep
 just as on all those nights.
 —Suddenly the bus driver 130
 stops with a jolt,
 turns off his lights.

A moose has come out of
 the impenetrable wood
 and stands there, looms, rather, 135

in the middle of the road.
It approaches; it sniffs at
the bus's hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,
high as a church, 140
homely as a house
(or, safe as houses).
A man's voice assures us
"Perfectly harmless . . ."

Some of the passengers 145
exclaim in whispers,
childishly, softly,
"Sure are big creatures."
"It's awful plain."
"Look! It's a she!" 150

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(we all feel) this sweet 155
sensation of joy?

"Curious creatures,"
says our quiet driver,
rolling his *r*'s.
"Look at that, would you." 160
Then he shifts gears.
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam; 165
then there's a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

1976

One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent. 5
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went. 10
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. 15
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.

1976

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

1911–1983

Speaking of Blanche DuBois, the heroine of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams once said, “She was a demonic creature; the size of her feeling was too great for her to contain.” In Williams’s plays—he wrote and rewrote more than twenty full-length dramas as well as screenplays and shorter works—his characters are driven by the size of their feelings, much as Williams felt driven to write about them.

He was born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi. His mother, “Miss Edwina,” the daughter of an Episcopalian minister, was repressed and genteel, very much the southern belle in her youth. His father, Cornelius, was a traveling salesman, often away from his family and often violent and drunk when at home. As a child, Williams was sickly and overly protected by his mother; he was closely attached to his sister, Rose, repelled by the roughhouse world of boys, and alienated from his father. The family’s move from Mississippi to St. Louis, where Cornelius became a sales manager of the shoe company he had traveled for, was a shock to Mrs. Williams and her young children, used to living in small southern towns where a minister’s daughter was an important person. Yet Mrs. Williams could take care of herself; she was a “survivor.”

Williams went to the University of Missouri but left after two years; his father then found him a job in the shoe-factory warehouse. He worked there for nearly three years, writing feverishly at night. (His closest friend at the time was a burly coworker, easygoing and attractive to women, named Stanley Kowalski, whose name and characteristics Williams would borrow for *A Streetcar Named Desire*.) Williams found the life so difficult, however, that he succumbed to a nervous breakdown. After recovering at the home of his beloved grandparents, he went on to further studies, finally graduating at the age of twenty-seven. Earlier, Rose had been suffering increasing mental imbalance; the final trauma was apparently brought on by one of Cornelius’s

alcoholic rages, in which he beat Edwina and, trying to calm Rose, made a gesture that she took to be sexual. Shortly thereafter Edwina signed the papers allowing Rose to be “tragically becalmed” by a prefrontal lobotomy. Rose spent most of her life in sanatoriums, except when Williams brought her out for visits.

The next year, Williams left for New Orleans, the first of many temporary homes; it would provide the setting for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In New Orleans he changed his name to “Tennessee,” later giving—as often when discussing his life—various romantic reasons for doing so. There also he actively entered the homosexual world.

Williams had had plays produced at local theaters and in 1939 he won a prize for a collection of one-act plays, *American Blues*. The next year *Battle of Angels* failed (in 1957 he would rewrite it as *Orpheus Descending*). His first success was *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). Williams called it a “memory play,” seen through the recollections of the writer, Tom, who talks to the audience about himself and about the scenes depicting his mother, Amanda, poverty-stricken but genteelly living on memories of her southern youth and her “gentlemen callers”; his crippled sister, Laura, who finds refuge in her “menagerie” of little glass animals; and the traumatic effect of a modern “gentleman caller” on them. While there are similarities between Edwina, Rose, and Tennessee on the one hand, and Amanda, Laura, and Tom on the other, there are also differences: the play is not literally autobiographical.

The financial success of *Menagerie* proved exhilarating, then debilitating. Williams fled to Mexico to work full-time on an earlier play, *The Poker Night*. It had begun as *The Moth*; its first image, as Williams’s biographer, Donald Spoto, tells us, was “simply that of a woman, sitting with folded hands near a window, while moonlight streamed in and she awaited in vain the arrival of her boyfriend”: named Blanche, she was at first intended as a young Amanda. During rehearsals of *Menagerie*, Williams had asked members of the stage crew to teach him to play poker, and he began to visualize his new play as a series of confrontations between working-class poker players and two refined southern women.

As the focus of his attention changed from Stanley to Blanche, *The Poker Night* turned into *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Upon opening in 1947, it was an even greater success than *The Glass Menagerie*, and it won the Pulitzer Prize. Williams was able to travel and to buy a home in Key West, Florida, where he did much of his ensuing work. At about this time his “transitory heart” found “a home at last” in a young man named Frank Merlo.

For more than a decade thereafter a new Williams play appeared almost every two years. Among the most successful were *The Rose Tattoo* (1950), in which the tempestuous heroine, Serafina, worshiping the memory of her dead husband, finds love again; the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), which portrays the conflict of the dying Big Daddy and his impotent son, Brick, watched and controlled by Brick’s wife, “Maggie the Cat”; and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961), which brings a varied group of tormented people together at a rundown hotel on the Mexican coast. His plays were produced widely abroad and also became equally successful films. Yet some of the ones now regarded as the best of this period were commercial failures: *Summer and Smoke* (1948), for example, and the surrealistic and visionary *Camino Real* (1953).

For years Williams had depended on a wide variety of drugs, especially to help him sleep and to keep him awake in the early mornings, when he invariably worked. In the 1960s the drugs began to take a real toll. Other factors contributed to the decline of his later years: Frank Merlo’s death, the emergence of younger playwrights of whom he felt blindly jealous, and the violent nature of the 1960s, which seemed both to mirror his inner chaos and to leave him behind.

Yet despite Broadway failures, critical disparagements, and a breakdown for which he was hospitalized, he valiantly kept working. Spoto notes that in Williams’s late work, Rose was “the source and inspiration of everything he wrote, either directly—with a surrogate character representing her—or indirectly, in the situation of romanticized mental illness or unvarnished verisimilitude.” This observation is



A game of seven-card stud poker continues as the action of *A Streetcar Named Desire* concludes. Original Broadway production, 1947.

certainly true of his last Broadway play, the failed *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980), ostensibly about the ghosts of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and of the play he obsessively wrote and rewrote, *The Two Character Play*, which chronicles the descent of a brother and sister, who are also lovers, into madness and death.

Despite Williams's self-destructiveness, in his writing and in his social life, the work of his great years was now being seriously studied and often revived by regional and community theaters. Critics began to see that he was one of America's best and most dedicated playwrights. And he kept on working. He was collaborating on a film of two stories about Rose when he died, apparently having choked to death on the lid of a pill bottle.

Always reluctant to talk about his work (likening it to a "bird that will be startled away, as by a hawk's shadow"), Williams did not see himself in a tradition of American dramaturgy. He acknowledged the influence of Anton Chekhov, the nineteenth-century Russian writer of dramas with lonely, searching characters; of D. H. Lawrence, the British novelist who emphasized the theme of a sexual life force; and above all of the American Hart Crane, homosexual *poète maudit*, who, he said, "touched fire that burned [himself] alive," adding that "perhaps it is only through self-immolation of such a nature that we living beings can offer to you the entire truth of ourselves." Such a statement indicates the deeply confessional quality of Williams's writing, even in plays not directly autobiographical.

Although he never acknowledged any debt to the American playwright Eugene O'Neill, Williams shared with O'Neill an impatience over the theatrical conventions of realism. *The Glass Menagerie*, for example, uses screened projections, lighting effects, and music to emphasize that it takes place in Tom's memory. *A Streetcar Named Desire* moves in and out of the house on Elysian Fields, while music and lighting reinforce all the major themes. Williams also relies on the effects of language, especially of a vivid and colloquial Southern speech that may be compared

with that of William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, or Flannery O'Connor. Rhythms of language become almost a musical indication of character, distinguishing Blanche from other characters. Reading or seeing his plays, we become aware of how symbolic repetitions—in Blanche's and Stanley's turns of phrase, the naked light bulb and the paper lantern, the Mexican woman selling flowers for the dead, the "Varsoviana" waltz and the reverberating voices—produce a heightening of reality: what Williams called "poetic realism."

More than a half century later, does the destruction of Blanche, the "lady," still have the power to move us? Elia Kazan, in his director's notes, calls her "an outdated creature, approaching extinction . . . like a dinosaur." But Blythe Danner, who played Blanche in a 1988 revival, acutely observes that Williams "was attached to the things that were going to destroy him" and that Blanche, similarly, is attracted to and repelled by Stanley: "It's Tennessee fighting, fighting, fighting what he doesn't want to get into, what is very prevalent in his mind. That incredible contradiction in so many people is what he captures better than any other playwright."

Contemporary criticisms of Williams's plays focused on their violence and their obsession with sexuality, which in some of the later work struck some commentators as an almost morbid preoccupation with "perversion"—murder, rape, drugs, incest, nymphomania. The shriller voices making such accusations were attacking Williams for his homosexuality, which could not be publicly spoken of in this country until comparatively recently. These taboo topics, however, figure as instances of Williams's deeper subjects: desire and loneliness. As he said in an interview, "Desire is rooted in a longing for companionship, a release from the loneliness that haunts every individual." Loneliness and desire propel his characters into extreme behavior, no doubt, but such behavior literally dramatizes the plight that Williams saw as universal.

The following text is from *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, volume 1 (1971).

A Streetcar Named Desire

*And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.
—"The Broken Tower" by Hart Crane¹*

THE CHARACTERS

BLANCHE	PABLO
STELLA	A NEGRO WOMAN
STANLEY	A DOCTOR
MITCH	A NURSE
EUNICE	A YOUNG COLLECTOR
STEVE	A MEXICAN WOMAN

Scene One

The exterior of a two-story corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L & N tracks and the river.² The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a

1. American poet (1899–1932).

2. Elysian Fields is a New Orleans street at the northern tip of the French Quarter, between the

Louisville & Nashville railroad tracks and the Mississippi River. In Greek mythology the Elysian Fields are the abode of the blessed in the afterlife.

raffish charm. The houses are mostly white frame, weathered grey, with rickety outside stairs and galleries and quaintly ornamented gables. This building contains two flats, upstairs and down. Faded white stairs ascend to the entrances of both.

It is first dark of an evening early in May. The sky that shows around the dim white building is a peculiarly tender blue, almost a turquoise, which invests the scene with a kind of lyricism and gracefully attenuates the atmosphere of decay. You can almost feel the warm breath of the brown river beyond the river warehouses with their faint redolences of bananas and coffee. A corresponding air is evoked by the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This "Blue Piano" expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here.

Two women, one white and one colored, are taking the air on the steps of the building. The white woman is EUNICE, who occupies the upstairs flat; the colored woman a neighbor, for New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town.

Above the music of the "Blue Piano" the voices of people on the street can be heard overlapping.

[Two men come around the corner, STANLEY KOWALSKI and MITCH. They are about twenty-eight or thirty years old, roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes. STANLEY carries his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher's. They stop at the foot of the steps.]

STANLEY [bellowing] Hey there! Stella, baby!

[STELLA comes out on the first floor landing, a gentle young woman, about twenty-five, and of a background obviously quite different from her husband's.]

STELLA [mildly] Don't holler at me like that. Hi, Mitch.

STANLEY Catch!

STELLA What?

STANLEY Meat!

[He heaves the package at her. She cries out in protest but manages to catch it: then she laughs breathlessly. Her husband and his companion have already started back around the corner.]

STELLA [calling after him] Stanley! Where are you going?

STANLEY Bowling!

STELLA Can I come watch?

STANLEY Come on. [He goes out.]

STELLA Be over soon. [to the white woman] Hello, Eunice. How are you?

EUNICE I'm all right. Tell Steve to get him a poor boy's sandwich 'cause nothing's left here.

[They all laugh; the colored woman does not stop. STELLA goes out.]

COLORED WOMAN What was that package he th'ew at 'er? [She rises from steps, laughing louder.]

EUNICE You hush, now!

NEGRO WOMAN Catch what!

[She continues to laugh. BLANCHE comes around the corner, carrying a valise. She looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip and again at the building. Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white

gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than STELLA. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth.]

EUNICE [*finally*] What's the matter, honey? Are you lost?

BLANCHE [*with faintly hysterical humor*] They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries³ and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!

EUNICE That's where you are now.

BLANCHE At Elysian Fields?

EUNICE This here is Elysian Fields.

BLANCHE They mustn't have—understood—what number I wanted . . .

EUNICE What number you lookin' for?

[BLANCHE *wearily refers to the slip of paper.*]

BLANCHE Six thirty-two.

EUNICE You don't have to look no further.

BLANCHE [*uncomprehendingly*] I'm looking for my sister, Stella DuBois, I mean—Mrs. Stanley Kowalski.

EUNICE That's the party.—You just did miss her, though.

BLANCHE This—can this be—her home?

EUNICE She's got the downstairs here and I got the up.

BLANCHE Oh. She's—out?

EUNICE You noticed that bowling alley around the corner?

BLANCHE I'm—not sure I did.

EUNICE Well, that's where she's at, watchin' her husband bowl. [*There is a pause.*] You want to leave your suitcase here an' go find her?

BLANCHE No.

NEGRO WOMAN I'll go tell her you come.

BLANCHE Thanks.

NEGRO WOMAN You welcome. [*She goes out.*]

EUNICE She wasn't expecting you?

BLANCHE No. No, not tonight.

EUNICE Well, why don't you just go in and make yourself at home till they get back.

BLANCHE How could I—do that?

EUNICE We own this place so I can let you in.

[*She gets up and opens the downstairs door. A light goes on behind the blind, turning it light blue. BLANCHE slowly follows her into the downstairs flat. The surrounding areas dim out as the interior is lighted. Two rooms can be seen, not too clearly defined. The one first entered is primarily a kitchen but contains a folding bed to be used by BLANCHE. The room beyond this is a bedroom. Off this room is a narrow door to a bathroom.*]

EUNICE [*defensively, noticing BLANCHE's look*] It's sort of messed up right now but when it's clean it's real sweet.

BLANCHE Is it?

EUNICE Uh-huh, I think so. So you're Stella's sister?

BLANCHE Yes. [*wanting to get rid of her*] Thanks for letting me in.

EUNICE *Por nada*,⁴ as the Mexicans say, *por nada*! Stella spoke of you.

3. The end of a streetcar line that stopped at a cemetery. Desire is a New Orleans street.

4. It's nothing (Spanish).

BLANCHE Yes?

EUNICE I think she said you taught school.

BLANCHE Yes.

EUNICE And you're from Mississippi, huh?

BLANCHE Yes.

EUNICE She showed me a picture of your home-place, the plantation.

BLANCHE Belle Reve?⁵

EUNICE A great big place with white columns.

BLANCHE Yes . . .

EUNICE A place like that must be awful hard to keep up.

BLANCHE If you will excuse me, I'm just about to drop.

EUNICE Sure, honey. Why don't you set down?

BLANCHE What I meant was I'd like to be left alone.

EUNICE [*offended*] Aw. I'll make myself scarce, in that case.

BLANCHE I didn't meant to be rude, but—

EUNICE I'll drop by the bowling alley an' hustle her up. [*She goes out the door.*]

[BLANCHE sits in a chair very stiffly with her shoulders slightly hunched and her legs pressed close together and her hands tightly clutching her purse as if she were quite cold. After a while the blind look goes out of her eyes and she begins to look slowly around. A cat screeches. She catches her breath with a startled gesture. Suddenly she notices something in a half opened closet. She springs up and crosses to it, and removes a whiskey bottle. She pours a half tumbler of whiskey and tosses it down. She carefully replaces the bottle and washes out the tumbler at the sink. Then she resumes her seat in front of the table.]

BLANCHE [*faintly to herself*] I've got to keep hold of myself! [*STELLA comes quickly around the corner of the building and runs to the door of the downstairs flat.*]

STELLA [*calling out joyfully*] Blanche!

[*For a moment they stare at each other. Then BLANCHE springs up and runs to her with a wild cry.*]

BLANCHE Stella, oh, Stella, Stella! Stella for Star!

[*She begins to speak with feverish vivacity as if she feared for either of them to stop and think. They catch each other in a spasmodic embrace.*]

BLANCHE Now, then, let me look at you. But don't you look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested! And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciles glare! [*STELLA laughs and complies.*] Come back here now! Oh, my baby! Stella! Stella for Star! [*She embraces her again.*] I thought you would never come back to this horrible place! What am I saying? I didn't mean to say that. I meant to be nice about it and say—Oh, what a convenient location and such—Ha-a-ha! Precious lamb! You haven't said a *word* to me.

STELLA You haven't given me a chance to, honey! [*She laughs, but her glance at BLANCHE is a little anxious.*]

BLANCHE Well, now you talk. Open your pretty mouth and talk while I look around for some liquor! I know you must have some liquor on the place! Where could it be, I wonder? Oh, I spy, I spy!

5. Beautiful Dream (French).

[She rushes to the closet and removes the bottle; she is shaking all over and panting for breath as she tries to laugh. The bottle nearly slips from her grasp.]

STELLA [*noticing*] Blanche, you sit down and let me pour the drinks. I don't know what we've got to mix with. Maybe a coke's in the icebox. Look'n see, honey, while I'm—

BLANCHE No coke, honey, not with my nerves tonight! Where—where—where is—?

STELLA Stanley? Bowling! He loves it. They're having a—found some soda!—tournament . . .

BLANCHE Just water, baby, to chase it! Now don't get worried, your sister hasn't turned into a drunkard, she's just all shaken up and hot and tired and dirty! You sit down, now, and explain this place to me! What are you doing in a place like this?

STELLA Now, Blanche—

BLANCHE Oh, I'm not going to be hypocritical, I'm going to be honestly critical about it! Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture—Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir!⁶ [*She laughs.*]

STELLA No, honey, those are the L & N tracks.

BLANCHE No, now seriously, putting joking aside. Why didn't you tell me, why didn't you write me, honey, why didn't you let me know?

STELLA [*carefully, pouring herself a drink*] Tell you what, Blanche?

BLANCHE Why, that you had to live in these conditions!

STELLA Aren't you being a little intense about it? It's not that bad at all! New Orleans isn't like other cities.

BLANCHE This has got nothing to do with New Orleans. You might as well say—forgive me, blessed baby! [*She suddenly stops short.*] The subject is closed!

STELLA [*a little drily*] Thanks.

[During the pause, BLANCHE stares at her. She smiles at BLANCHE.]

BLANCHE [*looking down at her glass, which shakes in her hand*] You're all I've got in the world, and you're not glad to see me!

STELLA [*sincerely*] Why, Blanche, you know that's not true.

BLANCHE No?—I'd forgotten how quiet you were.

STELLA You never did give me a chance to say much, Blanche. So I just got in the habit of being quiet around you.

BLANCHE [*vaguely*] A good habit to get into . . . [*then, abruptly*] You haven't asked me how I happened to get away from the school before the spring term ended.

STELLA Well, I thought you'd volunteer that information—if you wanted to tell me.

BLANCHE You thought I'd been fired?

STELLA No, I—thought you might have—resigned . . .

BLANCHE I was so exhausted by all I'd been through my—nerves broke. [*nervously tamping cigarette*] I was on the verge of—lunacy, almost! So Mr. Graves—Mr. Graves is the high school superintendent—he suggested I take a leave of absence. I couldn't put all of those details into

6. From the refrain of Poe's gothic ballad "Ulalume" (1847).

the wire . . . [*She drinks quickly.*] Oh, this buzzes right through me and feels so *good!*

STELLA Won't you have another?

BLANCHE No, one's my limit.

STELLA Sure?

BLANCHE You haven't said a word about my appearance.

STELLA You look just fine.

BLANCHE God love you for a liar! Daylight never exposed so total a ruin!

But you—you've put on some weight, yes, you're just as plump as a little partridge! And it's so becoming to you!

STELLA Now, Blanche—

BLANCHE Yes, it is, it is or I wouldn't say it! You just have to watch around the hips a little. Stand up.

STELLA Not now.

BLANCHE You hear me? I said stand up! [*STELLA complies reluctantly.*]

You messy child, you, you've spilt something on that pretty white lace collar! About your hair—you ought to have it cut in a feather bob with your dainty features. Stella, you have a maid, don't you?

STELLA No. With only two rooms it's—

BLANCHE What? *Two* rooms, did you say?

STELLA This one and— [*She is embarrassed.*]

BLANCHE The other one? [*She laughs sharply. There is an embarrassed silence.*]

BLANCHE I am going to take just one little tiny nip more, sort of to put the stopper on, so to speak. . . . Then put the bottle away so I won't be tempted. [*She rises.*] I want you to look at *my* figure! [*She turns around.*] You know I haven't put on one ounce in ten years, Stella? I weigh what I weighed the summer you left Belle Reve. The summer Dad died and you left us . . .

STELLA [*a little wearily*] It's just incredible, Blanche, how well you're looking.

BLANCHE [*They both laugh uncomfortably.*] But, Stella, there's only two rooms, I don't see where you're going to put me!

STELLA We're going to put you in here.

BLANCHE What kind of bed's this—one of those collapsible things? [*She sits on it.*]

STELLA Does it feel all right?

BLANCHE [*dubiously*] Wonderful, honey. I don't like a bed that gives much. But there's no door between the two rooms, and Stanley—will it be decent?

STELLA Stanley is Polish, you know.

BLANCHE Oh, yes. They're something like Irish, aren't they?

STELLA Well—

BLANCHE Only not so—highbrow? [*They both laugh again in the same way.*] I brought some nice clothes to meet all your lovely friends in.

STELLA I'm afraid you won't think they are lovely.

BLANCHE What are they like?

STELLA They're Stanley's friends.

BLANCHE Polacks?

STELLA They're a mixed lot, Blanche.

BLANCHE Heterogeneous—types?

STELLA Oh, yes. Yes, types is right!

BLANCHE Well—anyhow—I brought nice clothes and I'll wear them. I guess you're hoping I'll say I'll put up at a hotel, but I'm not going to put up at a hotel. I want to be *near* you, got to be *with* somebody, I *can't* be *alone*! Because—as you must have noticed—I'm—*not* very *well*. . . .
[*Her voice drops and her look is frightened.*]

STELLA You seem a little bit nervous or overwrought or something.

BLANCHE Will Stanley like me, or will I be just a visiting in-law, Stella? I couldn't stand that.

STELLA You'll get along fine together, if you'll just try not to—well—compare him with men that we went out with at home.

BLANCHE Is he so—different?

STELLA Yes. A different species.

BLANCHE In what way; what's he like?

STELLA Oh, you can't describe someone you're in love with! Here's a picture of him! [*She hands a photograph to BLANCHE.*]

BLANCHE An officer?

STELLA A Master Sergeant in the Engineers' Corps. Those are decorations!

BLANCHE He had those on when you met him?

STELLA I assure you I wasn't just blinded by all the brass.

BLANCHE That's not what I—

STELLA But of course there were things to adjust myself to later on.

BLANCHE Such as his civilian background! [*STELLA laughs uncertainly.*]

How did he take it when you said I was coming?

STELLA Oh, Stanley doesn't know yet.

BLANCHE [*frightened*] You—haven't told him?

STELLA He's on the road a good deal.

BLANCHE Oh. Travels?

STELLA Yes.

BLANCHE Good. I mean—isn't it?

STELLA [*half to herself*] I can hardly stand it when he is away for a night . . .

BLANCHE Why, Stella!

STELLA When he's away for a week I nearly go wild!

BLANCHE Gracious!

STELLA And when he comes back I cry on his lap like a baby . . . [*She smiles to herself.*]

BLANCHE I guess that is what is meant by being in love . . . [*STELLA looks up with a radiant smile.*] Stella—

STELLA What?

BLANCHE [*in an uneasy rush*] I haven't asked you the things you probably thought I was going to ask. And so I'll expect you to be understanding about what I have to tell you.

STELLA What, Blanche? [*Her face turns anxious.*]

BLANCHE Well, Stella—you're going to reproach me, I know that you're bound to reproach me—but before you do—take into consideration—you left! I stayed and struggled! You came to New Orleans and looked out for yourself! I stayed at *Belle Reve* and tried to hold it together! I'm not meaning this in any reproachful way, but *all* the burden descended on *my* shoulders.

STELLA The best I could do was make my own living, Blanche.

[BLANCHE *begins to shake again with intensity.*]

BLANCHE I know, I know. But you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!

STELLA Stop this hysterical outburst and tell me what's happened? What do you mean fought and bled? What kind of—

BLANCHE I knew you would, Stella. I knew you would take this attitude about it!

STELLA About—what?—please!

BLANCHE [*slowly*] The loss—the loss . . .

STELLA Belle Reve? Lost, is it? No!

BLANCHE Yes, Stella.

[*They stare at each other across the yellow-checked linoleum of the table.*]

BLANCHE *slowly nods her head and* STELLA *looks slowly down at her hands folded on the table. The music of the "Blue Piano" grows louder.*

BLANCHE *touches her handkerchief to her forehead.*]

STELLA But how did it go? What happened?

BLANCHE [*springing up*] You're a fine one to ask me how it went!

STELLA Blanche!

BLANCHE You're a fine one to sit there *accusing me* of it!

STELLA *Blanche!*

BLANCHE I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burned like rubbish! You just came home in time for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths—not always. Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they even cry out to you, "Don't let me go!" Even the old, sometimes, say, "Don't let me go." As if you were able to stop them! But funerals are quiet, with pretty flowers. And, oh, what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in! Unless you were there at the bed when they cried out, "Hold me!" you'd never suspect there was the struggle for breath and bleeding. You didn't dream, but I saw! *Saw! Saw!* And now you sit there telling me with your eyes that I let the place go! How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? Death is expensive, Miss Stella! And old Cousin Jessie's right after Margaret's, hers! Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep! . . . Stella. Belle Reve was his headquarters! Honey—that's how it slipped through my fingers! Which of them left us a fortune? Which of them left a cent of insurance even? Only poor Jessie—one hundred to pay for her coffin. That was all, Stella! And I with my pitiful salary at the school. Yes, accuse me! Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go! *I let the place go? Where were you!* In bed with your—Polack!

STELLA [*springing*] Blanche! You be still! That's enough! [*She starts out.*]

BLANCHE Where are you going?

STELLA I'm going into the bathroom to wash my face.

BLANCHE Oh, Stella, Stella, you're crying!

STELLA Does that surprise you?

BLANCHE Forgive me—I didn't mean to—

[The sound of men's voices is heard. STELLA goes into the bathroom, closing the door behind her. When the men appear, and BLANCHE realizes it must be STANLEY returning, she moves uncertainly from the bathroom door to the dressing table, looking apprehensively toward the front door. STANLEY enters, followed by STEVE and MITCH. STANLEY pauses near his door, STEVE by the foot of the spiral stair, and MITCH is slightly above and to the right of them, about to go out. As the men enter, we hear some of the following dialogue.]

STANLEY Is that how he got it?

STEVE Sure that's how he got it. He hit the old weather-bird for 300 bucks on a six-number-ticket.

MITCH Don't tell him those things; he'll believe it.

[Mitch starts out.]

STANLEY *[restraining Mitch]* Hey, Mitch—come back here.

[BLANCHE, at the sound of voices, retires in the bedroom. She picks up STANLEY's photo from dressing table, looks at it, puts it down. When STANLEY enters the apartment, she darts and hides behind the screen at the head of bed.]

STEVE *[to STANLEY and MITCH]* Hey, are we playin' poker tomorrow?

STANLEY Sure—at Mitch's.

MITCH *[hearing this, returns quickly to the stair rail]* No—not at my place. My mother's still sick!

STANLEY Okay, at my place . . . *[MITCH starts out again.]* But you bring the beer!

[MITCH pretends not to hear—calls out "Good night, all," and goes out, singing. EUNICE's voice is heard, above.]

EUNICE Break it up down there! I made the spaghetti dish and ate it myself.

STEVE *[going upstairs]* I told you and phoned you we was playing. *[to the men]* Jax beer!⁷

EUNICE You never phoned me once.

STEVE I told you at breakfast—and phoned you at lunch . . .

EUNICE Well, never mind about that. You just get yourself home here once in a while.

STEVE You want it in the papers?

[More laughter and shouts of parting come from the men. STANLEY throws the screen door of the kitchen open and comes in. He is of medium height, about five feet eight or nine, and strongly, compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them.]

BLANCHE *[drawing involuntarily back from his stare]* You must be Stanley. I'm Blanche.

7. A local brand.

STANLEY Stella's sister?

BLANCHE Yes.

STANLEY H'lo. Where's the little woman?

BLANCHE In the bathroom.

STANLEY Oh. Didn't know you were coming in town.

BLANCHE I—uh—

STANLEY Where you from, Blanche?

BLANCHE Why, I—live in Laurel.

[*He has crossed to the closet and removed the whiskey bottle.*]

STANLEY In Laurel, huh? Oh, yeah. Yeah, in Laurel, that's right. Not in my territory. Liquor goes fast in hot weather. [*He holds the bottle to the light to observe its depletion.*] Have a shot?

BLANCHE No, I—rarely touch it.

STANLEY Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often.

BLANCHE [*faintly*] Ha-ha.

STANLEY My clothes're stickin' to me. Do you mind if I make myself comfortable? [*He starts to remove his shirt.*]

BLANCHE Please, please do.

STANLEY Be comfortable is my motto.

BLANCHE It's mine, too. It's hard to stay looking fresh. I haven't washed or even powdered my face and—here you are!

STANLEY You know you can catch cold sitting around in damp things, especially when you been exercising hard like bowling is. You're a teacher, aren't you?

BLANCHE Yes.

STANLEY What do you teach, Blanche?

BLANCHE English.

STANLEY I never was a very good English student. How long you here for, Blanche?

BLANCHE I—don't know yet.

STANLEY You going to shack up here?

BLANCHE I thought I would if it's not inconvenient for you all.

STANLEY Good.

BLANCHE Traveling wears me out.

STANLEY Well, take it easy.

[*A cat screeches near the window, BLANCHE springs up.*]

BLANCHE What's that?

STANLEY Cats . . . Hey, Stella!

STELLA [*faintly, from the bathroom*] Yes, Stanley.

STANLEY Haven't fallen in, have you? [*He grins at BLANCHE. She tries unsuccessfully to smile back. There is a silence.*] I'm afraid I'll strike you as being the unrefined type. Stella's spoke of you a good deal. You were married once, weren't you?

[*The music of the polka rises up, faint in the distance.*]

BLANCHE Yes. When I was quite young.

STANLEY What happened?

BLANCHE The boy—the boy died. [*She sinks back down.*] I'm afraid I'm—going to be sick! [*Her head falls on her arms.*]

Scene Two

It is six o'clock the following evening. BLANCHE is bathing. STELLA is completing her toilette. BLANCHE's dress, a flowered print, is laid out on STELLA's bed.

STANLEY *enters the kitchen from outside, leaving the door open on the perpetual "Blue Piano" around the corner.*

STANLEY What's all this monkey doings?

STELLA Oh, Stan! [*She jumps up and kisses him, which he accepts with lordly composure.*] I'm taking Blanche to Galatoire's⁸ for supper and then to a show, because it's your poker night.

STANLEY How about my supper, huh? I'm not going to no Galatoire's for supper!

STELLA I put you a cold plate on ice.

STANLEY Well, isn't that just dandy!

STELLA I'm going to try to keep Blanche out till the party breaks up because I don't know how she would take it. So we'll go to one of the little places in the Quarter afterward and you'd better give me some money.

STANLEY Where is she?

STELLA She's soaking in a hot tub to quiet her nerves. She's terribly upset.

STANLEY Over what?

STELLA She's been through such an ordeal.

STANLEY Yeah?

STELLA Stan, we've—lost Belle Reve!

STANLEY The place in the country?

STELLA Yes.

STANLEY How?

STELLA [*vaguely*] Oh, it had to be—sacrificed or something. [*There is a pause while STANLEY considers. STELLA is changing into her dress.*] When she comes in be sure to say something nice about her appearance. And, oh! Don't mention the baby. I haven't said anything yet, I'm waiting until she gets in a quieter condition.

STANLEY [*ominously*] So?

STELLA And try to understand her and be nice to her, Stan.

BLANCHE [*singing in the bathroom*] "From the land of the sky blue water,
They brought a captive maid!"

STELLA She wasn't expecting to find us in such a small place. You see I'd tried to gloss things over a little in my letters.

STANLEY So?

STELLA And admire her dress and tell her she's looking wonderful. That's important with Blanche. Her little weakness!

STANLEY Yeah. I get the idea. Now let's skip back a little to where you said the country place was disposed of.

STELLA Oh!—yes . . .

STANLEY How about that? Let's have a few more details on that subject.

STELLA It's best not to talk much about it until she's calmed down.

STANLEY So that's the deal, huh? Sister Blanche cannot be annoyed with business details right now!

8. Renowned fancy restaurant with traditional New Orleans cuisine.

STELLA You saw how she was last night.

STANLEY Uh-hum, I saw how she was. Now let's have a gander at the bill of sale.

STELLA I haven't seen any.

STANLEY She didn't show you no papers, no deed of sale or nothing like that, huh?

STELLA It seems like it wasn't sold.

STANLEY Well, what in hell was it then, give away? To charity?

STELLA Shhh! She'll hear you.

STANLEY I don't care if she hears me. Let's see the papers!

STELLA There weren't any papers, she didn't show any papers, I don't care about papers.

STANLEY Have you ever heard of the Napoleonic code?⁹

STELLA No, Stanley, I haven't heard of the Napoleonic code and if I have, I don't see what it—

STANLEY Let me enlighten you on a point or two, baby.

STELLA Yes?

STANLEY In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa. For instance if I had a piece of property, or you had a piece of property—

STELLA My head is swimming!

STANLEY All right. I'll wait till she gets through soaking in a hot tub and then I'll inquire if *she* is acquainted with the Napoleonic code. It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you're swindled under the Napoleonic code I'm swindled *too*. And I don't like to be *swindled*.

STELLA There's plenty of time to ask her questions later but if you do now she'll go to pieces again. I don't understand what happened to Belle Reve but you don't know how ridiculous you are being when you suggest that my sister or I or anyone of our family could have perpetrated a swindle on anyone else.

STANLEY Then where's the money if the place was sold?

STELLA Not sold—*lost, lost!*

[*He stalks into bedroom, and she follows him.*]

Stanley!

[*He pulls open the wardrobe trunk standing in middle of room and jerks out an armful of dresses.*]

STANLEY Open your eyes to this stuff! You think she got them out of a teacher's pay?

STELLA Hush!

STANLEY Look at these feathers and furs that she come here to preen herself in! What's this here? A solid-gold dress, I believe! And this one! What is these here? Fox-pieces! [*He blows on them.*] Genuine fox fur-pieces, a half a mile long! Where are your fox-pieces, Stella? Bushy snow-white ones, no less! Where are your white fox-pieces?

STELLA Those are inexpensive summer furs that Blanche has had a long time.

9. This codification of French law (1802), made by Napoleon as emperor, is the basis for Louisiana's civil law.

STANLEY I got an acquaintance who deals in this sort of merchandise. I'll have him in here to appraise it. I'm willing to bet you there's thousands of dollars invested in this stuff here!

STELLA Don't be such an idiot, Stanley!

[He hurls the furs to the day bed. Then he jerks open a small drawer in the trunk and pulls up a fistful of costume jewelry.]

STANLEY And what have we here? The treasure chest of a pirate!

STELLA Oh, Stanley!

STANLEY Pearls! Ropes of them! What is this sister of yours, a deep-sea diver? Bracelets of solid gold, too! Where are your pearls and gold bracelets?

STELLA Shhh! Be still, Stanley!

STANLEY And diamonds! A crown for an empress!

STELLA A rhinestone tiara she wore to a costume ball.

STANLEY What's rhinestone?

STELLA Next door to glass.

STANLEY Are you kidding? I have an acquaintance that works in a jewelry store. I'll have him in here to make an appraisal of this. Here's your plantation, or what was left of it, here!

STELLA You have no idea how stupid and horrid you're being! Now close that trunk before she comes out of the bathroom!

[He kicks the trunk partly closed and sits on the kitchen table.]

STANLEY The Kowalskis and the DuBoises have different notions.

STELLA *[angrily]* Indeed they have, thank heavens!—*I'm going outside.*

[She snatches up her white hat and gloves and crosses to the outside door.]

You come out with me while Blanche is getting dressed.

STANLEY Since when do you give me orders?

STELLA Are you going to stay here and insult her?

STANLEY You're damn tootin' I'm going to stay here.

[STELLA goes out to the porch. BLANCHE comes out of the bathroom in a red satin robe.]

BLANCHE *[airily]* Hello, Stanley! Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being!

[He lights a cigarette.]

STANLEY That's good.

BLANCHE *[drawing the curtains at the windows]* Excuse me while I slip on my pretty new dress!

STANLEY Go right ahead, Blanche.

[She closes the drapes between the rooms.]

BLANCHE I understand there's to be a little card party to which we ladies are cordially *not* invited!

STANLEY *[ominously]* Yeah?

[BLANCHE throws off her robe and slips into a flowered print dress.]

BLANCHE Where's Stella?

STANLEY Out on the porch.

BLANCHE I'm going to ask a favor of you in a moment.

STANLEY What could that be, I wonder?

BLANCHE Some buttons in back! You may enter! *[He crosses through drapes with a smoldering look.]* How do I look?

STANLEY You look all right.

BLANCHE Many thanks! Now the buttons!

STANLEY I can't do nothing with them.

BLANCHE You men with your big clumsy fingers. May I have a drag on your cig?

STANLEY Have one for yourself.

BLANCHE Why, thanks! . . . It looks like my trunk has exploded.

STANLEY Me an' Stella were helping you unpack.

BLANCHE Well, you certainly did a fast and thorough job of it!

STANLEY It looks like you raided some stylish shops in Paris.

BLANCHE Ha-ha! Yes—clothes are my passion!

STANLEY What does it cost for a string of fur-pieces like that?

BLANCHE Why, those were a tribute from an admirer of mine!

STANLEY He must have had a lot of—admiration!

BLANCHE Oh, in my youth I excited some admiration. But look at me now!
 [*She smiles at him radiantly.*] Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be—attractive?

STANLEY Your looks are okay.

BLANCHE I was fishing for a compliment, Stanley.

STANLEY I don't go in for that stuff.

BLANCHE What—stuff?

STANLEY Compliments to women about their looks. I never met a woman that didn't know if she was good-looking or not without being told, and some of them give themselves credit for more than they've got. I once went out with a doll who said to me, "I am the glamorous type, I am the glamorous type!" I said, "So what?"

BLANCHE And what did she say then?

STANLEY She didn't say nothing. That shut her up like a clam.

BLANCHE Did it end the romance?

STANLEY It ended the conversation—that was all. Some men are took in by this Hollywood glamor stuff and some men are not.

BLANCHE I'm sure you belong in the second category.

STANLEY That's right.

BLANCHE I cannot imagine any witch of a woman casting a spell over you.

STANLEY That's—right.

BLANCHE You're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think. To interest you a woman would have to—
 [*She pauses with an indefinite gesture.*]

STANLEY [*slowly*] Lay . . . her cards on the table.

BLANCHE [*smiling*] Well, I never cared for wishy-washy people. That was why, when you walked in here last night, I said to myself—"My sister has married a man!"—Of course that was all that I could tell about you.

STANLEY [*booming*] Now let's cut the re-bop!¹

BLANCHE [*pressing hands to her ears*] Ouuuuu!

STELLA [*calling from the steps*] Stanley! You come out here and let Blanche finish dressing!

BLANCHE I'm through dressing, honey.

1. Nonsense (from "bebop," a form of jazz).

STELLA Well, you come out, then.

STANLEY Your sister and I are having a little talk.

BLANCHE [*lightly*] Honey, do me a favor. Run to the drugstore and get me a lemon Coke with plenty of chipped ice in it!—Will you do that for me, sweetie?

STELLA [*uncertainly*] Yes. [*She goes around the corner of the building.*]

BLANCHE The poor little thing was out there listening to us, and I have an idea she doesn't understand you as well as I do. . . . All right; now, Mr. Kowalski, let us proceed without any more double-talk. I'm ready to answer all questions. I've nothing to hide. What is it?

STANLEY There is such a thing in this state of Louisiana as the Napoleonic code, according to which whatever belongs to my wife is also mine—and vice versa.

BLANCHE My, but you have an impressive judicial air!

[*She sprays herself with her atomizer; then playfully sprays him with it. He seizes the atomizer and slams it down on the dresser. She throws back her head and laughs.*]

STANLEY If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!

BLANCHE Such as what!

STANLEY Don't play so dumb. You know what!

BLANCHE [*she puts the atomizer on the table*] All right. Cards on the table. That suits me. [*She turns to STANLEY.*] I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty per cent illusion, but when a thing is important I tell the truth, and this is the truth: I haven't cheated my sister or you or anyone else as long as I have lived.

STANLEY Where's the papers? In the trunk?

BLANCHE Everything that I own is in that trunk.

[*STANLEY crosses to the trunk, shoves it roughly open and begins to open compartments.*]

BLANCHE What in the name of heaven are you thinking of! What's in the back of that little boy's mind of yours? That I am absconding with something, attempting some kind of treachery on my sister?—Let me do that! It will be faster and simpler. . . . [*She crosses to the trunk and takes out a box.*] I keep my papers mostly in this tin box. [*She opens it.*]

STANLEY What's them underneath? [*He indicates another sheaf of paper.*]

BLANCHE These are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy. [*He snatches them up. She speaks fiercely.*] Give those back to me!

STANLEY I'll have a look at them first!

BLANCHE The touch of your hands insults them!

STANLEY Don't pull that stuff!

[*He rips off the ribbon and starts to examine them. BLANCHE snatches them from him, and they cascade to the floor.*]

BLANCHE Now that you've touched them I'll burn them!

STANLEY [*staring, baffled*] What in hell are they?

BLANCHE [*on the floor gathering them up*] Poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was and I—never mind about that! Just give them back to me!

STANLEY What do you mean by saying you'll have to burn them?

BLANCHE I'm sorry, I must have lost my head for a moment. Everyone has something he won't let others touch because of their—intimate nature . . .

[*She now seems faint with exhaustion and she sits down with the strong box and puts on a pair of glasses and goes methodically through a large stack of papers.*]

Ambler & Ambler. Hm. . . . Crabtree. . . . More Ambler & Ambler.

STANLEY What is Ambler & Ambler?

BLANCHE A firm that made loans on the place.

STANLEY Then it was lost on a mortgage?

BLANCHE [*touching her forehead*] That must've been what happened.

STANLEY I don't want no ifs, ands or buts! What's all the rest of them papers?

[*She hands him the entire box. He carries it to the table and starts to examine the paper.*]

BLANCHE [*picking up a large envelope containing more papers*] There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications—to put it plainly! [*She removes her glasses with an exhausted laugh.*] The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation, till finally all that was left—and Stella can verify that!—was the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which now all but Stella and I have retreated. [*She pours the contents of the envelope on the table.*] Here all of them are, all papers! I hereby endow you with them! Take them, peruse them—commit them to memory, even! I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable hands! . . . I wonder if Stella's come back with my lemon Coke . . . [*She leans back and closes her eyes.*]

STANLEY I have a lawyer acquaintance who will study these out.

BLANCHE Present them to him with a box of aspirin tablets.

STANLEY [*becoming somewhat sheepish*] You see, under the Napoleonic code—a man has to take an interest in his wife's affairs—especially now that she's going to have a baby.

[*BLANCHE opens her eyes. The "Blue Piano" sounds louder.*]

BLANCHE Stella? Stella going to have a baby? [*dreamily*] I didn't know she was going to have a baby!

[*She gets up and crosses to the outside door. STELLA appears around the corner with a carton from the drugstore. STANLEY goes into the bedroom with the envelope and the box. The inner rooms fade to darkness and the outside wall of the house is visible, BLANCHE meets STELLA at the foot of the steps to the sidewalk.*]

BLANCHE Stella, Stella for star! How lovely to have a baby! It's all right. Everything's all right.

STELLA I'm sorry he did that to you.

BLANCHE Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve. We thrashed it out. I feel a bit shaky, but I think I handled it nicely, I laughed and treated it all as a joke. [*STEVE and PABLO appear, carrying a case of beer.*] I called him a little boy and laughed and flirted. Yes, I was flirting with your husband! [*as the men approach*] The guests

are gathering for the poker party. [*The two men pass between them, and enter the house.*] Which way do we go now, Stella—this way?

STELLA No, this way. [*She leads BLANCHE away.*]

BLANCHE [*laughing*] The blind are leading the blind!

[*A tamale VENDOR is heard calling.*]

VENDOR'S VOICE Red-hot!

Scene Three

THE POKER NIGHT²

There is a picture of Van Gogh's³ of a billiard-parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade. The poker players—STANLEY, STEVE, MITCH and PABLO—wear colored shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors. There are vivid slices of watermelon on the table, whiskey bottles and glasses. The bedroom is relatively dim with only the light that spills between the portieres and through the wide window on the street.

For a moment, there is absorbed silence as a hand is dealt.

STEVE Anything wild this deal?

PABLO One-eyed jacks are wild.

STEVE Give me two cards.

PABLO You, Mitch?

MITCH I'm out.

PABLO One.

MITCH Anyone want a shot?

STANLEY Yeah. Me.

PABLO Why don't somebody go to the Chinaman's and bring back a load of chop suey?

STANLEY When I'm losing you want to eat! Ante up! Openers? Openers! Get y'r ass off the table, Mitch. Nothing belongs on a poker table but cards, chips and whiskey.

[*He lurches up and tosses some watermelon rinds to the floor.*]

MITCH Kind of on your high horse, ain't you?

STANLEY How many?

STEVE Give me three.

STANLEY One.

MITCH I'm out again. I oughta go home pretty soon.

STANLEY Shut up.

MITCH I gotta sick mother. She don't go to sleep until I come in at night.

STANLEY Then why don't you stay home with her?

MITCH She says to go out, so I go, but I don't enjoy it. All the while I keep wondering how she is.

STANLEY Aw, for the sake of Jesus, go home, then!

PABLO What've you got?

2. Williams's first title for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (see headnote).

3. *The Night Café*, by the Dutch Postimpressionist painter Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).

STEVE Spade flush.

MITCH You all are married. But I'll be alone when she goes.—I'm going to the bathroom.

STANLEY Hurry back and we'll fix you a sugar-tit.

MITCH Aw, go rut. [*He crosses through the bedroom into the bathroom.*]

STEVE [*dealing a hand*] Seven card stud.⁴ [*telling his joke as he deals*] This ole farmer is out in back of his house sittin' down th'owing corn to the chickens when all at once he hears a loud cackle and this young hen comes lickety split around the side of the house with the rooster right behind her and gaining on her fast.

STANLEY [*impatient with the story*] Deal!

STEVE But when the rooster catches sight of the farmer th'owing the corn he puts on the brakes and lets the hen get away and starts pecking corn. And the old farmer says, "Lord God, I hopes I never gits *that* hongry!"

[*STEVE and PABLO laugh. The sisters appear around the corner of the building.*]

STELLA The game is still going on.

BLANCHE How do I look?

STELLA Lovely, Blanche.

BLANCHE I feel so hot and frazzled. Wait till I powder before you open the door. Do I look done in?

STELLA Why no. You are as fresh as a daisy.

BLANCHE One that's been picked a few days.

[*STELLA opens the door and they enter.*]

STELLA Well, well, well. I see you boys are still at it?

STANLEY Where you been?

STELLA Blanche and I took in a show. Blanche, this is Mr. Gonzales and Mr. Hubbell.

BLANCHE Please don't get up.

STANLEY Nobody's going to get up, so don't be worried.

STELLA How much longer is this game going to continue?

STANLEY Till we get ready to quit.

BLANCHE Poker is so fascinating. Could I kibitz?

STANLEY You could not. Why don't you women go up and sit with Eunice?

STELLA Because it is nearly two-thirty. [*BLANCHE crosses into the bedroom and partially closes the portieres.*] Couldn't you call it quits after one more hand?

[*A chair scrapes. STANLEY gives a loud whack of his hand on her thigh.*]

STELLA [*sharply*] That's not fun, Stanley.

[*The men laugh, STELLA goes into the bedroom.*]

STELLA It makes me so mad when he does that in front of people.

BLANCHE I think I will bathe.

STELLA Again?

BLANCHE My nerves are in knots. Is the bathroom occupied?

STELLA I don't know.

[*BLANCHE knocks, MITCH opens the door and comes out, still wiping his hands on a towel.*]

4. An adventurous and risky variant of poker.

BLANCHE Oh!—good evening.

MITCH Hello. [*He stares at her.*]

STELLA Blanche, this is Harold Mitchell. My sister, Blanche DuBois.

MITCH [*with awkward courtesy*] How do you do, Miss DuBois.

STELLA How is your mother now, Mitch?

MITCH About the same, thanks. She appreciated your sending over that custard.—Excuse me, please.

[*He crosses slowly back into the kitchen, glancing back at BLANCHE and coughing a little shyly. He realizes he still has the towel in his hands and with an embarrassed laugh hands it to STELLA. BLANCHE looks after him with a certain interest.*]

BLANCHE That one seems—superior to the others.

STELLA Yes, he is.

BLANCHE I thought he had a sort of sensitive look.

STELLA His mother is sick.

BLANCHE Is he married?

STELLA No.

BLANCHE Is he a wolf?

STELLA Why, Blanche! [*BLANCHE laughs.*] I don't think he would be.

BLANCHE What does—what does he do? [*She is unbuttoning her blouse.*]

STELLA He's on the precision bench in the spare parts department. At the plant Stanley travels for.

BLANCHE Is that something much?

STELLA No. Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere.

BLANCHE What makes you think Stanley will?

STELLA Look at him.

BLANCHE I've looked at him.

STELLA Then you should know.

BLANCHE I'm sorry, but I haven't noticed the stamp of genius even on Stanley's forehead.

[*She takes off the blouse and stands in her pink silk brassiere and white skirt in the light through the portieres. The game has continued in undertones.*]

STELLA It isn't on his forehead and it isn't genius.

BLANCHE Oh. Well, what is it, and where? I would like to know.

STELLA It's a drive that he has. You're standing in the light, Blanche!

BLANCHE Oh, am I!

[*She moves out of the yellow streak of light. STELLA has removed her dress and put on a light blue satin kimona.*]

STELLA [*with girlish laughter*] You ought to see their wives.

BLANCHE [*laughingly*] I can imagine. Big, beefy things, I suppose.

STELLA You know that one upstairs? [*more laughter*] One time [*laughing*] the plaster—[*laughing*] cracked—

STANLEY You hens cut out that conversation in there!

STELLA You can't hear us.

STANLEY Well, you can hear me and I said to hush up!

STELLA This is my house and I'll talk as much as I want to!

BLANCHE Stella, don't start a row.

STELLA He's half drunk!—I'll be out in a minute.

[*She goes into the bathroom, BLANCHE rises and crosses leisurely to a small white radio and turns it on.*]

STANLEY Awright, Mitch, you in?

MITCH What? Oh!—No, I'm out!

[*BLANCHE moves back into the streak of light. She raises her arms and stretches, as she moves indolently back to the chair. Rhumba music comes over the radio. MITCH rises at the table.*]

STANLEY Who turned that on in there?

BLANCHE I did. Do you mind?

STANLEY Turn it off!

STEVE Aw, let the girls have their music.

PABLO Sure, that's good, leave it on!

STEVE Sounds like Xavier Cugat!⁵

[*STANLEY jumps up and, crossing to the radio, turns it off. He stops short at the sight of BLANCHE in the chair. She returns his look without flinching. Then he sits again at the poker table. Two of the men have started arguing hotly.*]

STEVE I didn't hear you name it.

PABLO Didn't I name it, Mitch?

MITCH I wasn't listenin'.

PABLO What were you doing, then?

STANLEY He was looking through them drapes. [*He jumps up and jerks roughly at curtains to close them.*] Now deal the hand over again and let's play cards or quit. Some people get ants when they win.

[*MITCH rises as STANLEY returns to his seat.*]

STANLEY [*yelling*] Sit down!

MITCH I'm going to the "head." Deal me out.

PABLO Sure he's got ants now. Seven five-dollar bills in his pants pocket folded up tight as spitballs.

STEVE Tomorrow you'll see him at the cashier's window getting them changed into quarters.

STANLEY And when he goes home he'll deposit them one by one in a piggy bank his mother give him for Christmas. [*dealing*] This game is Spit in the Ocean.⁶

[*MITCH laughs uncomfortably and continues through the portieres. He stops just inside.*]

BLANCHE [*softly*] Hello! The Little Boys' Room is busy right now.

MITCH We've—been drinking beer.

BLANCHE I hate beer.

MITCH It's—a hot weather drink.

BLANCHE Oh, I don't think so; it always makes me warmer. Have you got any cigs? [*She has slipped on the dark red satin wrapper.*]

MITCH Sure.

BLANCHE What kind are they?

MITCH Luckies.

BLANCHE Oh, good. What a pretty case. Silver?

MITCH Yes. Yes; read the inscription.

5. Cuban bandleader (1900–1990), well known for composing and playing rhumbas.

6. Another variant of poker.

BLANCHE Oh, is there an inscription? I can't make it out. [*He strikes a match and moves closer.*] Oh! [*reading with feigned difficulty*] "And if God choose, / I shall but love thee better—after—death!" Why, that's from my favorite sonnet by Mrs. Browning.⁷

MITCH You know it?

BLANCHE Certainly I do!

MITCH There's a story connected with that inscription.

BLANCHE It sounds like a romance.

MITCH A pretty sad one.

BLANCHE Oh?

MITCH The girl's dead now.

BLANCHE [*in a tone of deep sympathy*] Oh!

MITCH She knew she was dying when she give me this. A very strange girl, very sweet—very!

BLANCHE She must have been fond of you. Sick people have such deep, sincere attachments.

MITCH That's right, they certainly do.

BLANCHE Sorrow makes for sincerity, I think.

MITCH It sure brings it out in people.

BLANCHE The little there is belongs to people who have experienced some sorrow.

MITCH I believe you are right about that.

BLANCHE I'm positive that I am. Show me a person who hasn't known any sorrow and I'll show you a shuperficial—Listen to me! My tongue is a little—thick! You boys are responsible for it. The show let out at eleven and we couldn't come home on account of the poker game so we had to go somewhere and drink. I'm not accustomed to having more than one drink. Two is the limit—and *three!* [*She laughs.*] Tonight I had three.

STANLEY Mitch!

MITCH Deal me out. I'm talking to Miss—

BLANCHE DuBois.

MITCH Miss DuBois?

BLANCHE It's a French name. It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Like an orchard in spring! You can remember it by that.

MITCH You're French?

BLANCHE We are French by extraction. Our first American ancestors were French Huguenots.

MITCH You are Stella's sister, are you not?

BLANCHE Yes, Stella is my precious little sister. I call her little in spite of the fact she's somewhat older than I. Just slightly. Less than a year. Will you do something for me?

MITCH Sure. What?

BLANCHE I bought this adorable little colored paper lantern at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb! Will you, please?

MITCH Be glad to.

7. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), British poet, most famous for her sequence of love poems, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. The quota-

tion here is from sonnet 43, better known by its first line, "How do I love thee?"

BLANCHE I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action.

MITCH [*adjusting the lantern*] I guess we strike you as being a pretty rough bunch.

BLANCHE I'm very adaptable—to circumstances.

MITCH Well, that's a good thing to be. You are visiting Stanley and Stella?

BLANCHE Stella hasn't been so well lately, and I came down to help her for a while. She's very run down.

MITCH You're not—?

BLANCHE Married? No, no. I'm an old maid schoolteacher!

MITCH You may teach school but you're certainly not an old maid.

BLANCHE Thank you, sir! I appreciate your gallantry!

MITCH So you are in the teaching profession?

BLANCHE Yes. Ah, yes . . .

MITCH Grade school or high school or—

STANLEY [*bellowing*] Mitch!

MITCH Coming!

BLANCHE Gracious, what lung-power! . . . I teach high school. In Laurel.

MITCH What do you teach? What subject?

BLANCHE Guess!

MITCH I bet you teach art or music? [BLANCHE *laughs delicately*.] Of course I could be wrong. You might teach arithmetic.

BLANCHE Never arithmetic, sir; never arithmetic! [*with a laugh*] I don't even know my multiplication tables! No, I have the misfortune of being an English instructor. I attempt to instill a bunch of bobby-soxers and drugstore Romeos with reverence for Hawthorne and Whitman and Poe!

MITCH I guess that some of them are more interested in other things.

BLANCHE How very right you are! Their literary heritage is not what most of them treasure above all else! But they're sweet things! And in the spring, it's touching to notice them making their first discovery of love! As if nobody had ever known it before!

[*The bathroom door opens and STELLA comes out. BLANCHE continues talking to MITCH.*]

Oh! Have you finished? Wait—I'll turn on the radio.

[*She turns the knobs on the radio and it begins to play "Wien, Wien, nur du allein."*⁸ BLANCHE *waltzes to the music with romantic gestures, MITCH is delighted and moves in awkward imitation like a dancing bear. STANLEY stalks fiercely through the portieres into the bedroom. He crosses to the small white radio and snatches it off the table. With a shouted oath, he tosses the instrument out the window.*]

STELLA Drunk—drunk—animal thing, you! [*She rushes through to the poker table.*] All of you—please go home! If any of you have one spark of decency in you—

BLANCHE [*wildly*] Stella, watch out, he's—

[STANLEY *charges after STELLA.*]

MEN [*feebly*] Take it easy, Stanley. Easy, fellow.—Let's all—

STELLA You lay your hands on me and I'll—

[*She backs out of sight. He advances and disappears. There is the sound of a blow. STELLA cries out. BLANCHE screams and runs into the kitchen.*]

8. Vienna, Vienna, you are my only (German); a waltz from an operetta by Franz Lehár (1870–1948).

The men rush forward and there is grappling and cursing. Something is overturned with a crash.

BLANCHE [*shrilly*] My sister is going to have a baby!

MITCH This is terrible.

BLANCHE Lunacy, absolute lunacy!

MITCH Get him in here, men.

[STANLEY is forced, pinioned by the two men, into the bedroom. He nearly throws them off. Then all at once he subsides and is limp in their grasp. They speak quietly and lovingly to him and he leans his face on one of their shoulders.]

STELLA [*in a high, unnatural voice, out of sight*] I want to go away, I want to go away!

MITCH Poker shouldn't be played in a house with women.

[BLANCHE rushes into the bedroom.]

BLANCHE I want my sister's clothes! We'll go to that woman's upstairs!

MITCH Where is the clothes?

BLANCHE [*opening the closet*] I've got them! [*She rushes through to STELLA.*]

Stella, Stella, precious! Dear, dear little sister, don't be afraid!

[With her arm around STELLA, BLANCHE guides her to the outside door and upstairs.]

STANLEY [*dully*] What's the matter; what's happened?

MITCH You just blew your top, Stan.

PABLO He's okay, now.

STEVE Sure, my boy's okay!

MITCH Put him on the bed and get a wet towel.

PABLO I think coffee would do him a world of good, now.

STANLEY [*thickly*] I want water.

MITCH Put him under the shower!

[The men talk quietly as they lead him to the bathroom.]

STANLEY Let the rut go of me, you sons of bitches!

[Sounds of blows are heard. The water goes on full tilt.]

STEVE Let's get quick out of here!

[They rush to the poker table and sweep up their winnings on their way out.]

MITCH [*sadly but firmly*] Poker should not be played in a house with women.

[The door closes on them and the place is still. The Negro entertainers in the bar around the corner play "Paper Doll"⁹ slow and blue. After a moment STANLEY comes out of the bathroom dripping water and still in his clinging wet polka dot drawers.]

STANLEY Stella! [*There is a pause.*] My baby doll's left me!

[He breaks into sobs. Then he goes to the phone and dials, still shuddering with sobs.]

Eunice? I want my baby! [*He waits a moment; then he hangs up and dials again.*] Eunice! I'll keep on ringin' until I talk with my baby!

[An indistinguishable shrill voice is heard. He hurls phone to floor. Dissonant brass and piano sounds as the rooms dim out to darkness and the outer walls appear in the night light. The "Blue Piano" plays for a brief interval. Finally, STANLEY stumbles half-dressed out to the porch and

9. Popular song of the early 1940s by Johnny Black.

down the wooden steps to the pavement before the building. There he throws back his head like a baying hound and bellows his wife's name: "Stella! Stella, sweetheart! Stella!"

STANLEY *Stell-lahhhhh!*

EUNICE [*calling down from the door of her upper apartment*] Quit that howling out there an' go back to bed!

STANLEY I want my baby down here. Stella, Stella!

EUNICE She ain't comin' down so you quit! Or you'll git th' law on you!

STANLEY Stella!

EUNICE You can't beat on a woman an' then call 'er back! She won't come! And her goin' t' have a baby! . . . You stinker! You whelp of a Polack, you! I hope they do haul you in and turn the fire hose on you, same as the last time!

STANLEY [*humbly*] Eunice, I want my girl to come down with me!

EUNICE Hah! [*She slams her door.*]

STANLEY [*with heaven-splitting violence*] STELL-LAHHHHH!

[The low-tone clarinet moans. The door upstairs opens again. STELLA slips down the rickety stairs in her robe. Her eyes are glistening with tears and her hair loose about her throat and shoulders. They stare at each other. Then they come together with low, animal moans. He falls to his knees on the steps and presses his face to her belly, curving a little with maternity. Her eyes go blind with tenderness as she catches his head and raises him level with her. He snatches the screen door open and lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat. BLANCHE comes out the upper landing in her robe and slips fearfully down the steps.]

BLANCHE Where is my little sister? Stella? Stella?

[She stops before the dark entrance of her sister's flat. Then catches her breath as if struck. She rushes down to the walk before the house. She looks right and left as if for a sanctuary. The music fades away, MITCH appears from around the corner.]

MITCH Miss DuBois?

BLANCHE Oh!

MITCH All quiet on the Potomac now?

BLANCHE She ran downstairs and went back in there with him.

MITCH Sure she did.

BLANCHE I'm terrified!

MITCH Ho-ho! There's nothing to be scared of. They're crazy about each other.

BLANCHE I'm not used to such—

MITCH Naw, it's a shame this had to happen when you just got here. But don't take it serious.

BLANCHE Violence! Is so—

MITCH Set down on the steps and have a cigarette with me.

BLANCHE I'm not properly dressed.

MITCH That don't make no difference in the Quarter.

BLANCHE Such a pretty silver case.

MITCH I showed you the inscription, didn't I?

BLANCHE Yes. [*During the pause, she looks up at the sky.*] There's so much— so much confusion in the world . . . [*He coughs diffidently.*] Thank you for being so kind! I need kindness now.

Scene Four

It is early the following morning. There is a confusion of street cries like a choral chant.

STELLA *is lying down in the bedroom. Her face is serene in the early morning sunlight. One hand rests on her belly, rounding slightly with new maternity. From the other dangles a book of colored comics. Her eyes and lips have that almost narcotized tranquility that is in the faces of Eastern idols.*

The table is sloppy with remains of breakfast and the debris of the preceding night, and STANLEY's gaudy pyjamas lie across the threshold of the bathroom. The outside door is slightly ajar on a sky of summer brilliance.

BLANCHE *appears at this door. She has spent a sleepless night and her appearance entirely contrasts with STELLA's. She presses her knuckles nervously to her lips as she looks through the door, before entering.*

BLANCHE Stella?

STELLA [*stirring lazily*] Hmmh?

[*BLANCHE utters a moaning cry and runs into the bedroom, throwing herself down beside STELLA in a rush of hysterical tenderness.*]

BLANCHE Baby, my baby sister!

STELLA [*drawing away from her*] Blanche, what is the matter with you?

[*BLANCHE straightens up slowly and stands beside the bed looking down at her sister with knuckles pressed to her lips.*]

BLANCHE He's left?

STELLA Stan? Yes.

BLANCHE Will he be back?

STELLA He's gone to get the car greased. Why?

BLANCHE Why! I've been half crazy, Stella! When I found out you'd been insane enough to come back in here after what happened—I started to rush in after you!

STELLA I'm glad you didn't.

BLANCHE What were you thinking of? [*STELLA makes an indefinite gesture.*] Answer me! What? What?

STELLA Please, Blanche! Sit down and stop yelling.

BLANCHE All right, Stella. I will repeat the question quietly now. How could you come back in this place last night? Why, you must have slept with him!

[*STELLA gets up in a calm and leisurely way.*]

STELLA Blanche, I'd forgotten how excitable you are. You're making much too much fuss about this.

BLANCHE Am I?

STELLA Yes, you are, Blanche. I know how it must have seemed to you and I'm awful sorry it had to happen, but it wasn't anything as serious as you seem to take it. In the first place, when men are drinking and playing poker anything can happen. It's always a powder-keg. He didn't know what he was doing. . . . He was as good as a lamb when I came back and he's really very, very ashamed of himself.

BLANCHE And that—that makes it all right?

STELLA No, it isn't all right for anybody to make such a terrible row, but—people do sometimes. Stanley's always smashed things. Why, on our

wedding night—soon as we came in here—he snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the place smashing light bulbs with it.

BLANCHE He did—*what?*

STELLA He smashed all the light bulbs with the heel of my slipper! [*She laughs.*]

BLANCHE And you—you *let* him? Didn't *run*, didn't *scream*?

STELLA I was—sort of—thrilled by it. [*She waits for a moment.*] Eunice and you had breakfast?

BLANCHE Do you suppose I wanted any breakfast?

STELLA There's some coffee left on the stove.

BLANCHE You're so—matter of fact about it, Stella.

STELLA What other can I be? He's taken the radio to get it fixed. It didn't land on the pavement so only one tube was smashed.

BLANCHE And you are standing there smiling!

STELLA What do you want me to do?

BLANCHE Pull yourself together and face the facts.

STELLA What are they, in your opinion?

BLANCHE In my opinion? You're married to a madman!

STELLA No!

BLANCHE Yes, you are, your fix is worse than mine is! Only you're not being sensible about it. I'm going to *do* something. Get hold of myself and make myself a new life!

STELLA Yes?

BLANCHE But you've given in. And that isn't right, you're not old! You can get out.

STELLA [*slowly and emphatically*] I'm not in anything I want to get out of.

BLANCHE [*incredulously*] What—Stella?

STELLA I said I am not in anything that I have a desire to get out of. Look at the mess in this room! And those empty bottles! They went through two cases last night! He promised this morning that he was going to quit having these poker parties, but you know how long such a promise is going to keep. Oh, well, it's his pleasure, like mine is movies and bridge. People have got to tolerate each other's habits, I guess.

BLANCHE I don't understand you. [*STELLA turns toward her.*] I don't understand your indifference. Is this a Chinese philosophy you've—cultivated?

STELLA Is what—what?

BLANCHE This—shuffling about and mumbling—'One tube smashed—beer bottles—mess in the kitchen!'—as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened! [*STELLA laughs uncertainly and picking up the broom, twirls it in her hands.*]

BLANCHE Are you deliberately shaking that thing in my face?

STELLA No.

BLANCHE Stop it. Let go of that broom. I won't have you cleaning up for him!

STELLA Then who's going to do it? Are you?

BLANCHE I? I!

STELLA No, I didn't think so.

BLANCHE Oh, let me think, if only my mind would function! We've got to get hold of some money, that's the way out!

STELLA I guess that money is always nice to get hold of.

BLANCHE Listen to me. I have an idea of some kind. [*Shakily she twists a cigarette into her holder.*] Do you remember Shep Huntleigh? [STELLA *shakes her head.*] Of course you remember Shep Huntleigh. I went out with him at college and wore his pin for a while. Well—

STELLA Well?

BLANCHE I ran into him last winter. You know I went to Miami during the Christmas holidays?

STELLA No.

BLANCHE Well, I did. I took the trip as an investment, thinking I'd meet someone with a million dollars.

STELLA Did you?

BLANCHE Yes. I ran into Shep Huntleigh—I ran into him on Biscayne Boulevard, on Christmas Eve, about dusk . . . getting into his car—Cadillac convertible; must have been a block long!

STELLA I should think it would have been—inconvenient in traffic!

BLANCHE You've heard of oil wells?

STELLA Yes—remotely.

BLANCHE He has them, all over Texas. Texas is literally spouting gold in his pockets.

STELLA My, my.

BLANCHE Y'know how indifferent I am to money. I think of money in terms of what it does for you. But he could do it, he could certainly do it!

STELLA Do what, Blanche?

BLANCHE Why—set us up in a—shop!

STELLA What kind of a shop?

BLANCHE Oh, a—shop of some kind! He could do it with half what his wife throws away at the races.

STELLA He's married?

BLANCHE Honey, would I be here if the man weren't married? [STELLA *laughs a little.* BLANCHE *suddenly springs up and crosses to phone.* She *speaks shrilly.*] How do I get Western Union?—Operator! Western Union!

STELLA That's a dial phone, honey.

BLANCHE I can't dial, I'm too—

STELLA Just dial O.

BLANCHE O?

STELLA Yes, "O" for Operator! [BLANCHE *considers a moment; then she puts the phone down.*]

BLANCHE Give me a pencil. Where is a slip of paper? I've got to write it down first—the message, I mean . . . [She *goes to the dressing table, and grabs up a sheet of Kleenex and an eyebrow pencil for writing equipment.*] Let me see now . . . [She *bites the pencil.*] 'Darling Shep. Sister and I in desperate situation.'

STELLA I beg your pardon!

BLANCHE 'Sister and I in desperate situation. Will explain details later. Would you be interested in—?' [She *bites the pencil again.*] 'Would you be—interested—in . . . ' [She *smashes the pencil on the table and springs up.*] You never get anywhere with direct appeals!

STELLA [*with a laugh*] Don't be so ridiculous, darling!

BLANCHE But I'll think of something, I've got to think of—something! Don't laugh at me, Stella! Please, please don't—I—I want you to look at

the contents of my purse! Here's what's in it! [*She snatches her purse open.*] Sixty-five measly cents in coin of the realm!

STELLA [*crossing to bureau*] Stanley doesn't give me a regular allowance, he likes to pay bills himself, but—this morning he gave me ten dollars to smooth things over. You take five of it, Blanche, and I'll keep the rest.

BLANCHE Oh, no. No, Stella.

STELLA [*insisting*] I know how it helps your morale just having a little pocket-money on you.

BLANCHE No, thank you—I'll take to the streets!

STELLA Talk sense! How did you happen to get so low on funds?

BLANCHE Money just goes—it goes places. [*She rubs her forehead.*] Sometime today I've got to get hold of a Bromo!¹

STELLA I'll fix you one now.

BLANCHE Not yet—I've got to keep thinking!

STELLA I wish you'd just let things go, at least for a—while . . .

BLANCHE Stella, I can't live with him! You can, he's your husband. But how could I stay here with him, after last night, with just those curtains between us?

STELLA Blanche, you saw him at his worst last night.

BLANCHE On the contrary, I saw him at his best! What such a man has to offer is animal force and he gave a wonderful exhibition of that! But the only way to live with such a man is to—go to bed with him! And that's your job—not mine!

STELLA After you've rested a little, you'll see it's going to work out. You don't have to worry about anything while you're here. I mean—expenses . . .

BLANCHE I have to plan for us both, to get us both—out!

STELLA You take it for granted that I am in something that I want to get out of.

BLANCHE I take it for granted that you still have sufficient memory of Belle Reve to find this place and these poker players impossible to live with.

STELLA Well, you're taking entirely too much for granted.

BLANCHE I can't believe you're in earnest.

STELLA No?

BLANCHE I understand how it happened—a little. You saw him in uniform, an officer, not here but—

STELLA I'm not sure it would have made any difference where I saw him.

BLANCHE Now don't say it was one of those mysterious electric things between people! If you do I'll laugh in your face.

STELLA I am not going to say anything more at all about it!

BLANCHE All right, then, don't!

STELLA But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant. [*Pause.*]

BLANCHE What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another . . .

STELLA Haven't you ever ridden on that streetcar?

1. Short for Bromo-Seltzer, a headache and heartburn remedy.

BLANCHE It brought me here.—Where I'm not wanted and where I'm ashamed to be . . .

STELLA Then don't you think your superior attitude is a bit out of place?

BLANCHE I am not being or feeling at all superior, Stella. Believe me I'm not! It's just this. This is how I look at it. A man like that is someone to go out with—once—twice—three times when the devil is in you. But live with? Have a child by?

STELLA I have told you I love him.

BLANCHE Then I *tremble* for you! I just—*tremble* for you. . . .

STELLA I can't help your trembling if you insist on trembling!

[*There is a pause.*]

BLANCHE May I—speak—*plainly*?

STELLA Yes, do. Go ahead. As plainly as you want to.

[*Outside, a train approaches. They are silent till the noise subsides. They are both in the bedroom. Under cover of the train's noise STANLEY enters from outside. He stands unseen by the women, holding some packages in his arms, and overhears their following conversation. He wears an undershirt and grease-stained seersucker pants.*]

BLANCHE Well—if you'll forgive me—he's *common*!

STELLA Why, yes, I suppose he is.

BLANCHE Suppose! You can't have forgotten that much of our bringing up, Stella, that you just *suppose* that any part of a gentleman's in his nature! *Not one particle, no!* Oh, if he was just—*ordinary*! Just *plain*—but good and wholesome, but—*no*. There's something downright—*bestial*—about him! You're hating me saying this, aren't you?

STELLA [*coldly*] Go on and say it all, Blanche.

BLANCHE He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something—ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in—anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you—*you* here—*waiting* for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! you call it—this party of apes! Somebody growls—some creature snatches at something—the fight is on! *God!* Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella—my sister—there has been *some* progress since then! Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make *grow!* And *cling* to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . *Don't—don't hang back with the brutes!*

[*Another train passes outside. STANLEY hesitates, licking his lips. Then suddenly he turns stealthily about and withdraws through front door. The women are still unaware of his presence. When the train has passed he calls through the closed front door.*]

STANLEY Hey! Hey, Stella!

STELLA [*who has listened gravely to BLANCHE*] Stanley!

BLANCHE Stell, I—

[*But STELLA has gone to the front door. STANLEY enters casually with his packages.*]

STANLEY Hiyuh, Stella. Blanche back?

STELLA Yes, she's back.

STANLEY Hiyuh, Blanche. [*He grins at her.*]

STELLA You must've got under the car.

STANLEY Them darn mechanics at Fritz's don't know their ass fr'm—Hey!

[*STELLA has embraced him with both arms, fiercely, and full in the view of BLANCHE. He laughs and clasps her head to him. Over her head he grins through the curtains at BLANCHE. As the lights fade away, with a lingering brightness on their embrace, the music of the "Blue Piano" and trumpet and drums is heard.*]

Scene Five

BLANCHE is seated in the bedroom fanning herself with a palm leaf as she reads over a just-completed letter. Suddenly she bursts into a peal of laughter. STELLA is dressing in the bedroom.

STELLA What are you laughing at, honey?

BLANCHE Myself, myself, for being such a liar! I'm writing a letter to Shep.

[*She picks up the letter.*] "Darling Shep. I am spending the summer on the wing, making flying visits here and there. And who knows, perhaps I shall take a sudden notion to swoop down on Dallas! How would you feel about that? Ha-ha! [*She laughs nervously and brightly, touching her throat as if actually talking to SHEP.*] Forewarned is forearmed, as they say!"—
How does that sound?

STELLA Uh-huh . . .

BLANCHE [*going on nervously*] "Most of my sister's friends go north in the summer but some have homes on the Gulf and there has been a continued round of entertainments, teas, cocktails, and luncheons—"

[*A disturbance is heard upstairs at the Hubbells' apartment.*]

STELLA Eunice seems to be having some trouble with Steve.

[*EUNICE's voice shouts in terrible wrath.*]

EUNICE I heard about you and that blonde!

STEVE That's a damn lie!

EUNICE You ain't pulling the wool over my eyes! I wouldn't mind if you'd stay down at the Four Deuces, but you always going up.

STEVE Who ever seen me up?

EUNICE I seen you chasing her 'round the balcony—I'm gonna call the vice squad!

STEVE Don't you throw that at me!

EUNICE [*shrieking*] You hit me! I'm gonna call the police!

[*A clatter of aluminum striking a wall is heard, followed by a man's angry roar, shouts and overturned furniture. There is a crash; then a relative hush.*]

BLANCHE [*brightly*] Did he kill her?

[*EUNICE appears on the steps in daemonic disorder.*]

STELLA No! She's coming downstairs.

EUNICE Call the police, I'm going to call the police! [*She rushes around the corner.*]

[*They laugh lightly. STANLEY comes around the corner in his green and scarlet silk bowling shirt. He trots up the steps and bangs into the kitchen. BLANCHE registers his entrance with nervous gestures.*]

STANLEY What's a matter with Eun-uss?

STELLA She and Steve had a row. Has she got the police?

STANLEY Naw. She's gettin' a drink.

STELLA That's much more practical!

[*STEVE comes down nursing a bruise on his forehead and looks in the door.*]

STEVE She here?

STANLEY Naw, naw. At the Four Deuces.

STEVE That rutting hunk! [*He looks around the corner a bit timidly, then turns with affected boldness and runs after her.*]

BLANCHE I must jot that down in my notebook. Ha-ha! I'm compiling a notebook of quaint little words and phrases I've picked up here.

STANLEY You won't pick up nothing here you ain't heard before.

BLANCHE Can I count on that?

STANLEY You can count on it up to five hundred.

BLANCHE That's a mighty high number. [*He jerks open the bureau drawer, slams it shut and throws shoes in a corner. At each noise BLANCHE winces slightly. Finally she speaks.*] What sign were you born under?

STANLEY [*while he is dressing*] Sign?

BLANCHE Astrological sign. I bet you were born under Aries. Aries people are forceful and dynamic. They dote on noise! They love to bang things around! You must have had lots of banging around in the army and now that you're out, you make up for it by treating inanimate objects with such a fury!

[*STELLA has been going in and out of closet during this scene. Now she pops her head out of the closet.*]

STELLA Stanley was born just five minutes after Christmas.

BLANCHE Capricorn—the Goat!

STANLEY What sign were *you* born under?

BLANCHE Oh, my birthday's next month, the fifteenth of September; that's under Virgo.

STANLEY What's Virgo?

BLANCHE Virgo is the Virgin.

STANLEY [*contemptuously*] Hah! [*He advances a little as he knots his tie.*]

Say, do you happen to know somebody named Shaw?

[*Her face expresses a faint shock. She reaches for the cologne bottle and dampens her handkerchief as she answers carefully.*]

BLANCHE Why, everybody knows somebody named Shaw!

STANLEY Well, this somebody named Shaw is under the impression he met you in Laurel, but I figure he must have got you mixed up with some other party because this other party is someone he met at a hotel called the Flamingo.

[*BLANCHE laughs breathlessly as she touches the cologne-dampened handkerchief to her temples.*]

BLANCHE I'm afraid he does have me mixed up with this "other party."
The Hotel Flamingo is not the sort of establishment I would dare to be seen in!

STANLEY You know of it?

BLANCHE Yes, I've seen it and smelled it.

STANLEY You must've got pretty close if you could smell it.

BLANCHE The odor of cheap perfume is penetrating.

STANLEY That stuff you use is expensive?

BLANCHE Twenty-five dollars an ounce! I'm nearly out. That's just a hint if you want to remember my birthday! [*She speaks lightly but her voice has a note of fear.*]

STANLEY Shaw must've got you mixed up. He goes in and out of Laurel all the time so he can check on it and clear up any mistake.

[*He turns away and crosses to the portieres. BLANCHE closes her eyes as if faint. Her hand trembles as she lifts the handkerchief again to her forehead. STEVE and EUNICE come around corner. STEVE's arm is around EUNICE's shoulder and she is sobbing luxuriously and he is cooing love-words. There is a murmur of thunder as they go slowly upstairs in a tight embrace.*]

STANLEY [*to STELLA*] I'll wait for you at the Four Deuces!

STELLA Hey! Don't I rate one kiss?

STANLEY Not in front of your sister.

[*He goes out. BLANCHE rises from her chair. She seems faint; looks about her with an expression of almost panic.*]

BLANCHE Stella! What have you heard about me?

STELLA Huh?

BLANCHE What have people been telling you about me?

STELLA Telling?

BLANCHE You haven't heard any—unkind—gossip about me?

STELLA Why, no, Blanche, of course not!

BLANCHE Honey, there was—a good deal of talk in Laurel.

STELLA About you, Blanche?

BLANCHE I wasn't so good the last two years or so, after Belle Reve had started to slip through my fingers.

STELLA All of us do things we—

BLANCHE I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft—soft people have got to shimmer and glow—they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a—paper lantern over the light. . . . It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft *and attractive*. And I—I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick.

[*The afternoon has faded to dusk. STELLA goes into the bedroom and turns on the light under the paper lantern. She holds a bottled soft drink in her hand.*]

BLANCHE Have you been listening to me?

STELLA I don't listen to you when you are being morbid! [*She advances with the bottled Coke.*]

BLANCHE [*with abrupt change to gaiety*] Is that Coke for me?

STELLA Not for anyone else!

BLANCHE Why, you precious thing, you! Is it just Coke?

STELLA [*turning*] You mean you want a shot in it!

BLANCHE Well, honey, a shot never does a Coke any harm! Let me! You mustn't wait on me!

STELLA I like to wait on you, Blanche. It makes it seem more like home.
[*She goes into the kitchen, finds a glass and pours a shot of whiskey into it.*]

BLANCHE I have to admit I love to be waited on . . .

[*She rushes into the bedroom. STELLA goes to her with the glass. BLANCHE suddenly clutches STELLA's free hand with a moaning sound and presses the hand to her lips. STELLA is embarrassed by her show of emotion.*]

BLANCHE speaks in a choked voice.]

You're—you're—so good to me! And I—

STELLA Blanche.

BLANCHE I know, I won't! You hate me to talk sentimental! But honey, believe I feel things more than I tell you! I won't stay long! I won't, I promise I—

STELLA Blanche!

BLANCHE [*hysterically*] I won't, I promise, I'll go! Go soon! I will really! I won't hang around until he—throws me out . . .

STELLA Now will you stop talking foolish?

BLANCHE Yes, honey. Watch how you pour—that fizzy stuff foams over!
[*BLANCHE laughs shrilly and grabs the glass, but her hand shakes so it almost slips from her grasp. STELLA pours the Coke into the glass. It foams over and spills. BLANCHE gives a piercing cry.*]

STELLA [*shocked by the cry*] Heavens!

BLANCHE Right on my pretty white skirt!

STELLA Oh . . . Use my hanky. Blot gently.

BLANCHE [*slowly recovering*] I know—gently—gently . . .

STELLA Did it stain?

BLANCHE Not a bit. Ha-ha! Isn't that lucky? [*She sits down shakily, taking a grateful drink. She holds the glass in both hands and continues to laugh a little.*]

STELLA Why did you scream like that?

BLANCHE I don't know why I screamed! [*continuing nervously*] Mitch—Mitch is coming at seven. I guess I am just feeling nervous about our relations. [*She begins to talk rapidly and breathlessly.*] He hasn't gotten a thing but a good-night kiss, that's all I have given him, Stella. I want his respect. And men don't want anything they get too easy. But on the other hand men lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over—thirty. They think a girl over thirty ought to—the vulgar term is—"put out." . . . And I—I'm not "putting out." Of course he—he doesn't know—I mean I haven't informed him—of my real age!

STELLA Why are you sensitive about your age?

BLANCHE Because of hard knocks my vanity's been given. What I mean is—he thinks I'm sort of—prim and proper, you know! [*She laughs out sharply.*] I want to deceive him enough to make him—want me . . .

STELLA Blanche, do you want *him*?

BLANCHE I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes—I want Mitch . . . *very badly!* Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem . . .

- [STANLEY comes around the corner with a drink under his belt.]
 STANLEY [*bawling*] Hey, Steve! Hey, Eunice! Hey, Stella!
 [*There are joyous calls from above. Trumpet and drums are heard from around the corner.*]
- STELLA [*kissing BLANCHE impulsively*] It will happen!
 BLANCHE [*doubtfully*] It will?
 STELLA It will! [*She goes across into the kitchen, looking back at BLANCHE.*]
 It will, honey, it will. . . . But don't take another drink! [*Her voice catches as she goes out the door to meet her husband.*]
 [BLANCHE sinks faintly back in her chair with her drink. EUNICE shrieks with laughter and runs down the steps. STEVE bounds after her with goatlike screeches and chases her around corner. STANLEY and STELLA twine arms as they follow, laughing. Dusk settles deeper. The music from the Four Deuces is slow and blue.]
- BLANCHE Ah, me, ah, me, ah, me . . .
 [*Her eyes fall shut and the palm leaf fan drops from her fingers. She slaps her hand on the chair arm a couple of times. There is a little glimmer of lightning about the building. A YOUNG MAN comes along the street and rings the bell.*]
- BLANCHE Come in.
 [*The YOUNG MAN appears through the portieres. She regards him with interest.*]
- BLANCHE Well, well! What can I do for you?
 YOUNG MAN I'm collecting for *The Evening Star*.
 BLANCHE I didn't know that stars took up collections.
 YOUNG MAN It's the paper.
 BLANCHE I know, I was joking—feebly! Will you—have a drink?
 YOUNG MAN No, ma'am. No, thank you. I can't drink on the job.
 BLANCHE Oh, well, now, let's see. . . . No, I don't have a dime! I'm not the lady of the house. I'm her sister from Mississippi. I'm one of those poor relations you've heard about.
 YOUNG MAN That's all right. I'll drop by later. [*He starts to go out. She approaches a little.*]
 BLANCHE Hey! [*He turns back shyly. She puts a cigarette in a long holder.*]
 Could you give me a light? [*She crosses toward him. They meet at the door between the two rooms.*]
 YOUNG MAN Sure. [*He takes out a lighter.*] This doesn't always work.
 BLANCHE It's temperamental? [*It flares.*] Ah!—thank you. [*He starts away again.*] Hey! [*He turns again, still more uncertainly. She goes close to him.*]
 Uh—what time is it?
 YOUNG MAN Fifteen of seven, ma'am.
 BLANCHE So late? Don't you just love these long rainy afternoons in New Orleans when an hour isn't just an hour—but a little piece of eternity dropped into your hands—and who knows what to do with it? [*She touches his shoulders.*] You—uh—didn't get wet in the rain?
 YOUNG MAN No, ma'am. I stepped inside.
 BLANCHE In a drugstore? And had a soda?
 YOUNG MAN Uh-huh.
 BLANCHE Chocolate?
 YOUNG MAN No, ma'am. Cherry.
 BLANCHE [*laughing*] Cherry!

YOUNG MAN A cherry soda.

BLANCHE You make my mouth water. [*She touches his cheek lightly, and smiles. Then she goes to the trunk.*]

YOUNG MAN Well, I'd better be going—

BLANCHE [*stopping him*] Young man!

[*He turns. She takes a large, gossamer scarf from the trunk and drapes it about her shoulders. In the ensuing pause, the "Blue Piano" is heard. It continues through the rest of this scene and the opening of the next. The young man clears his throat and looks yearningly at the door.*]

Young man! Young, young, young man! Has anyone ever told you that you look like a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights?

[*The YOUNG MAN laughs uncomfortably and stands like a bashful kid. BLANCHE speaks softly to him.*]

Well, you do, honey lamb! Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth!

[*Without waiting for him to accept, she crosses quickly to him and presses her lips to his.*]

Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good—and keep my hands off children.

[*He stares at her a moment. She opens the door for him and blows a kiss at him as he goes down the steps with a dazed look. She stands there a little dreamily after he has disappeared. Then MITCH appears around the corner with a bunch of roses.*]

BLANCHE [*gaily*] Look who's coming! My Rosenkavalier! Bow to me first . . . now present them! Ahhhh—*Merci*!!!²

[*She looks at him over them, coquettishly pressing them to her lips. He beams at her self-consciously.*]

Scene Six

It is about two A.M on the same evening. The outer wall of the building is visible. BLANCHE and MITCH come in. The utter exhaustion which only a neurasthenic personality can know is evident in BLANCHE's voice and manner. MITCH is stolid but depressed. They have probably been out to the amusement park on Lake Pontchartrain, for MITCH is bearing, upside down, a plaster statuette of Mae West, the sort of prize won at shooting galleries and carnival games of chance.

BLANCHE [*stopping lifelessly at the steps*] Well— [*MITCH laughs uneasily.*]
Well . . .

MITCH I guess it must be pretty late—and you're tired.

BLANCHE Even the hot tamale man has deserted the street, and he hangs on till the end. [*MITCH laughs uneasily again.*] How will you get home?

MITCH I'll walk over to Bourbon and catch an owl-car.

BLANCHE [*laughing grimly*] Is that streetcar named Desire still grinding along the tracks at this hour?

MITCH [*heavily*] I'm afraid you haven't gotten much fun out of this evening, Blanche.

BLANCHE I spoiled it for you.

2. "Merci": thank you (French). "My Rosenkavalier": Knight of the Rose (German); title of a romantic opera (1911) by Richard Strauss.

MITCH No, you didn't, but I felt all the time that I wasn't giving you much—entertainment.

BLANCHE I simply couldn't rise to the occasion. That was all. I don't think I've ever tried so hard to be gay and made such a dismal mess of it. I get ten points for trying!—I *did* try.

MITCH Why did you try if you didn't feel like it, Blanche?

BLANCHE I was just obeying the law of nature.

MITCH Which law is that?

BLANCHE The one that says the lady must entertain the gentleman—or no dice! See if you can locate my door key in this purse. When I'm so tired my fingers are all thumbs!

MITCH [*rooting in her purse*] This it?

BLANCHE No, honey, that's the key to my trunk which I must soon be packing.

MITCH You mean you are leaving here soon?

BLANCHE I've overstayed my welcome.

MITCH This it?

[*The music fades away.*]

BLANCHE Eureka! Honey, you open the door while I take a last look at the sky. [*She leans on the porch rail. He opens the door and stands awkwardly behind her.*] I'm looking for the Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, but these girls are not out tonight. Oh, yes they are, there they are! God bless them! All in a bunch going home from their little bridge party. . . . Y' get the door open? Good boy! I guess you—want to go now . . .

[*He shuffles and coughs a little.*]

MITCH Can I—uh—kiss you—good night?

BLANCHE Why do you always ask me if you may?

MITCH I don't know whether you want me to or not.

BLANCHE Why should you be so doubtful?

MITCH That night when we parked by the lake and I kissed you, you—

BLANCHE Honey, it wasn't the kiss I objected to. I liked the kiss very much. It was the other little—familiarity—that I—felt obliged to—discourage. . . . I didn't resent it! Not a bit in the world! In fact, I was somewhat flattered that you—desired me! But, honey, you know as well as I do that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost!

MITCH [*solemnly*] Lost?

BLANCHE I guess you are used to girls that like to be lost. The kind that get lost immediately, on the first date!

MITCH I like you to be exactly the way that you are, because in all my—experience—I have never known anyone like you.

[*BLANCHE looks at him gravely; then she bursts into laughter and then claps a hand to her mouth.*]

MITCH Are you laughing at me?

BLANCHE No, honey. The lord and lady of the house have not yet returned, so come in. We'll have a nightcap. Let's leave the lights off. Shall we?

MITCH You just—do what you want to.

[*BLANCHE precedes him into the kitchen. The outer wall of the building disappears and the interiors of the two rooms can be dimly seen.*]

BLANCHE [*remaining in the first room*] The other room's more comfortable—go on in. This crashing around in the dark is my search for some liquor.

MITCH You want a drink?

BLANCHE I want *you* to have a drink! You have been so anxious and solemn all evening, and so have I; we have both been anxious and solemn and now for these few last remaining moments of our lives together—I want to create—*joie de vivre*! I'm lighting a candle.

MITCH That's good.

BLANCHE We are going to be very Bohemian. We are going to pretend that we are sitting in a little artists' cafe on the Left Bank in Paris! [*She lights a candle stub and puts it in a bottle.*] *Je suis la Dame aux Camélias! Vous êtes—Armand!*³ Understand French?

MITCH [*heavily*] Naw. Naw, I—

BLANCHE *Voulez-vous couchez avec moi ce soir? Vous ne comprenez pas? Ah, quelle dommage!*⁴—I mean it's a damned good thing. . . . I've found some liquor! Just enough for two shots without any dividends, honey . . .

MITCH [*heavily*] That's—good.

[*She enters the bedroom with the drinks and the candle.*]

BLANCHE Sit down! Why don't you take off your coat and loosen your collar?

MITCH I better leave it on.

BLANCHE No. I want you to be comfortable.

MITCH I am ashamed of the way I perspire. My shirt is sticking to me.

BLANCHE Perspiration is healthy. If people didn't perspire they would die in five minutes. [*She takes his coat from him.*] This is a nice coat. What kind of material is it?

MITCH They call that stuff alpaca.

BLANCHE Oh. Alpaca.

MITCH It's very light-weight alpaca.

BLANCHE Oh. Light-weight alpaca.

MITCH I don't like to wear a wash-coat even in summer because I sweat through it.

BLANCHE Oh.

MITCH And it don't look neat on me. A man with a heavy build has got to be careful of what he puts on him so he don't look too clumsy.

BLANCHE You are not too heavy.

MITCH You don't think I am?

BLANCHE You are not the delicate type. You have a massive bone-structure and a very imposing physique.

MITCH Thank you. Last Christmas I was given a membership to the New Orleans Athletic Club.

BLANCHE Oh, good.

MITCH It was the finest present I ever was given. I work out there with the weights and I swim and I keep myself fit. When I started there, I was

3. I am the Lady of the Camélias! You are—Armand! (French). Both are characters in the popular romantic play *La Dame aux Camélias* (1852), by the French author Alexandre Dumas

filis; she is a courtesan who gives up her true love, Armand.

4. Would you like to sleep with me this evening? You don't understand? Ah, what a pity! (French).

getting soft in the belly but now my belly is hard. It is so hard now that a man can punch me in the belly and it don't hurt me. Punch me! Go on! See?

[*She pokes lightly at him.*]

BLANCHE Gracious. [*Her hand touches her chest.*]

MITCH Guess how much I weigh, Blanche?

BLANCHE Oh, I'd say in the vicinity of—one hundred and eighty?

MITCH Guess again.

BLANCHE Not that much?

MITCH No. More.

BLANCHE Well, you're a tall man and you can carry a good deal of weight without looking awkward.

MITCH I weigh two hundred and seven pounds and I'm six feet one and one half inches tall in my bare feet—without shoes on. And that is what I weigh stripped.

BLANCHE Oh, my goodness, me! It's awe-inspiring.

MITCH [*embarrassed*] My weight is not a very interesting subject to talk about. [*He hesitates for a moment.*] What's yours?

BLANCHE My weight?

MITCH Yes.

BLANCHE Guess!

MITCH Let me lift you.

BLANCHE Samson!⁵ Go on, lift me. [*He comes behind her and puts his hands on her waist and raises her lightly off the ground.*] Well?

MITCH You are light as a feather.

BLANCHE Ha-ha! [*He lowers her but keeps his hands on her waist. BLANCHE speaks with an affectation of demureness.*] You may release me now.

MITCH Huh?

BLANCHE [*gaily*] I said unhand me, sir. [*He fumblingly embraces her. Her voice sounds gently reproving.*] Now, Mitch. Just because Stanley and Stella aren't at home is no reason why you shouldn't behave like a gentleman.

MITCH Just give me a slap whenever I step out of bounds.

BLANCHE That won't be necessary. You're a natural gentleman, one of the very few that are left in the world. I don't want you to think that I am severe and old maid school-teacherish or anything like that. It's just—well—

MITCH Huh?

BLANCHE I guess it is just that I have—old-fashioned ideals! [*She rolls her eyes, knowing he cannot see her face. MITCH goes to the front door. There is a considerable silence between them. BLANCHE sighs and MITCH coughs self-consciously.*]

MITCH [*finally*] Where's Stanley and Stella tonight?

BLANCHE They have gone out. With Mr. and Mrs. Hubbell upstairs.

MITCH Where did they go?

BLANCHE I think they were planning to go to a midnight prevue at Loew's State.

MITCH We should all go out together some night.

5. Legendary strong man in the Bible's Book of Judges; he is captured by the Philistines after he reveals the secret of his strength, his long hair, to the temptress Delilah.

BLANCHE No. That wouldn't be a good plan.

MITCH Why not?

BLANCHE You are an old friend of Stanley's?

MITCH We was together in the Two-Forty-First.⁶

BLANCHE I guess he talks to you frankly?

MITCH Sure.

BLANCHE Has he talked to you about me?

BLANCHE Oh—not very much.

BLANCHE The way you say that, I suspect that he has.

MITCH No, he hasn't said much.

BLANCHE But what he *has* said. What would you say his attitude toward me was?

MITCH Why do you want to ask that?

BLANCHE Well—

MITCH Don't you get along with him?

BLANCHE What do you think?

MITCH I don't think he understands you.

BLANCHE That is putting it mildly. If it weren't for Stella about to have a baby, I wouldn't be able to endure things here.

MITCH He isn't—nice to you?

BLANCHE He is insufferably rude. Goes out of his way to offend me.

MITCH In what way, Blanche?

BLANCHE Why, in every conceivable way.

MITCH I'm surprised to hear that.

BLANCHE Are you?

MITCH Well, I—don't see how anybody could be rude to you.

BLANCHE It's really a pretty frightful situation. You see, there's no privacy here. There's just these portieres between the two rooms at night. He stalks through the rooms in his underwear at night. And I have to ask him to close the bathroom door. That sort of commonness isn't necessary. You probably wonder why I don't move out. Well, I'll tell you frankly. A teacher's salary is barely sufficient for her living expenses. I didn't save a penny last year and so I had to come here for the summer. That's why I have to put up with my sister's husband. And he has to put up with me, apparently so much against his wishes. . . . Surely he must have told you how much he hates me!

MITCH I don't think he hates you.

BLANCHE He hates me. Or why would he insult me? The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me, unless—

MITCH Blanche—

BLANCHE Yes, honey?

MITCH Can I ask you a question?

BLANCHE Yes. What?

MITCH How old are you?

[*She makes a nervous gesture.*]

BLANCHE Why do you want to know?

6. Engineering battalion in World War II.

MITCH I talked to my mother about you and she said, “How old is Blanche?”

And I wasn’t able to tell her. [*There is another pause.*]

BLANCHE You talked to your mother about me?

MITCH Yes.

BLANCHE Why?

MITCH I told my mother how nice you were, and I liked you.

BLANCHE Were you sincere about that?

MITCH You know I was.

BLANCHE Why did your mother want to know my age?

MITCH Mother is sick.

BLANCHE I’m sorry to hear it. Badly?

MITCH She won’t live long. Maybe just a few months.

BLANCHE Oh.

MITCH She worries because I’m not settled.

BLANCHE Oh.

MITCH She wants me to be settled down before she— [*His voice is hoarse and he clears his throat twice, shuffling nervously around with his hands in and out of his pockets.*]

BLANCHE You love her very much, don’t you?

MITCH Yes.

BLANCHE I think you have a great capacity for devotion. You will be lonely when she passes on, won’t you? [*MITCH clears his throat and nods.*]

I understand what that is.

MITCH To be lonely?

BLANCHE I loved someone, too, and the person I loved I lost.

MITCH Dead? [*She crosses to the window and sits on the sill, looking out. She pours herself another drink.*] A man?

BLANCHE He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery—love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn’t like a man’s, although he wasn’t the least bit effeminate looking—still—that thing was there. . . . He came to me for help. I didn’t know that. I didn’t find out anything till after our marriage when we’d run away and come back and all I knew was I’d failed him in some mysterious way and wasn’t able to give the help he needed but couldn’t speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me—but I wasn’t holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn’t know that. I didn’t know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty—which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it . . . the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years . . .

[*A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hands to her ears and crouches over. The headlight of the locomotive glares into the room as it thunders past. As the noise recedes she straightens slowly and continues speaking.*]

Afterward we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way.

[Polka music sounds, in a minor key faint with distance.]

We danced the Varsouviana!⁷ Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later—a shot!

[The polka stops abruptly. BLANCHE rises stiffly. Then, the polka resumes in a major key.]

I ran out—all did!—all ran and gathered about the terrible thing at the edge of the lake! I couldn't get near for the crowding. Then somebody caught my arm. "Don't go any closer! Come back! You don't want to see!" See? See what! Then I heard voices say—Allan! Allan! The Grey boy! He'd stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired—so that the back of his head had been—blown away!

[She sways and covers her face.]

It was because—on the dance floor—unable to stop myself—I'd suddenly said—"I saw! I know! You disgust me . . ." And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle . . .

[MITCH gets up awkwardly and moves toward her a little. The polka music increases. MITCH stands beside her.]

MITCH *[drawing her slowly into his arms]* You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be—you and me, Blanche?

[She stares at him vacantly for a moment. Then with a soft cry huddles in his embrace. She makes a sobbing effort to speak but the words won't come. He kisses her forehead and her eyes and finally her lips. The Polka tune fades out. Her breath is drawn and released in long, grateful sobs.]

BLANCHE Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!

Scene Seven

It is late afternoon in mid-September.

The portieres are open and a table is set for a birthday supper, with cake and flowers.

STELLA is completing the decorations as STANLEY comes in.

STANLEY What's all this stuff for?

STELLA Honey, it's Blanche's birthday.

STANLEY She here?

STELLA In the bathroom.

STANLEY *[mimicking]* "Washing out some things"?

STELLA I reckon so.

STANLEY How long she been in there?

STELLA All afternoon.

STANLEY *[mimicking]* "Soaking in a hot tub"?

STELLA Yes.

STANLEY Temperature 100 on the nose, and she soaks herself in a hot tub.

7. Fast Polish waltz, similar to the polka.

STELLA She says it cools her off for the evening.

STANLEY And you run out an' get her cokes, I suppose? And serve 'em to Her Majesty in the tub? [STELLA *shrugs*.] Set down here a minute.

STELLA Stanley, I've got things to do.

STANLEY Set down! I've got th' dope on your big sister, Stella.

STELLA Stanley, stop picking on Blanche.

STANLEY That girl calls *me* common!

STELLA Lately you been doing all you can think of to rub her the wrong way, Stanley, and Blanche is sensitive and you've got to realize that Blanche and I grew up under very different circumstances than you did.

STANLEY So I been told. And told and told and told! You know she's been feeding us a pack of lies here?

STELLA No, I don't, and—

STANLEY Well, she has, however. But now the cat's out of the bag! I found out some things!

STELLA What—things?

STANLEY Things I already suspected. But now I got proof from the most reliable sources—which I have checked on!

[BLANCHE is singing in the bathroom a saccharine popular ballad which is used contrapuntally with STANLEY's speech.]

STELLA [to STANLEY] Lower your voice!

STANLEY Some canary bird, huh!

STELLA Now please tell me quietly what you think you've found out about my sister.

STANLEY Lie Number One: All this squeamishness she puts on! You should just know the line she's been feeding to Mitch. He thought she had never been more than kissed by a fellow! But Sister Blanche is no lily! Ha-ha! Some lily she is!

STELLA What have you heard and who from?

STANLEY Our supply-man down at the plant has been going through Laurel for years and he knows all about her and everybody else in the town of Laurel knows all about her. She is as famous in Laurel as if she was the President of the United States, only she is not respected by any party! This supply-man stops at a hotel called the Flamingo.

BLANCHE [*singing blithely*] "Say, it's only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea—But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!"⁸

STELLA What about the—Flamingo?

STANLEY She stayed there, too.

STELLA My sister lived at Belle Reve.

STANLEY This is after the home-place had slipped through her lily-white fingers! She moved to the Flamingo! A second-class hotel which has the advantage of not interfering in the private social life of the personalities there! The Flamingo is used to all kinds of goings-on. But even the management of the Flamingo was impressed by Dame Blanche! In fact they was so impressed by Dame Blanche that they requested her to turn in her room key—for permanently! This happened a couple of weeks before she showed here.

8. From "It's Only a Paper Moon" (1933), a popular song by Harold Arlen.

BLANCHE [*singing*] "It's a Barnum and Bailey world, Just as phony as it can be—But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!"

STELLA What—contemptible—lies!

STANLEY Sure, I can see how you would be upset by this. She pulled the wool over your eyes as much as Mitch's!

STELLA It's pure invention! There's not a word of truth in it and if I were a man and this creature had dared to invent such things in my presence—

BLANCHE [*singing*] "Without your love, It's a honky-tonk parade! Without your love, It's a melody played In a penny arcade . . ."

STANLEY Honey, I told you I thoroughly checked on these stories! Now wait till I finished. The trouble with Dame Blanche was that she couldn't put on her act any more in Laurel! They got wised up after two or three dates with her and then they quit, and she goes on to another, the same old line, same old act, same old hooey! But the town was too small for this to go on forever! And as time went by she became a town character. Regarded as not just different but downright loco—nuts. [*STELLA draws back.*] And for the last year or two she has been washed up like poison. That's why she's here this summer, visiting royalty, putting on all this act—because she's practically told by the mayor to get out of town! Yes, did you know there was an army camp near Laurel and your sister's was one of the places called "Out-of-Bounds"?

BLANCHE "It's only a paper moon, Just as phony as it can be—But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me!"

STANLEY Well, so much for her being such a refined and particular type of girl. Which brings us to Lie Number Two.

STELLA I don't want to hear any more!

STANLEY She's not going back to teach school! In fact I am willing to bet you that she never had no idea of returning to Laurel! She didn't resign temporarily from the high school because of her nerves! No, siree, Bob! She didn't. They kicked her out of that high school before the spring term ended—and I hate to tell you the reason that step was taken! A seventeen-year-old boy—she'd gotten mixed up with!

BLANCHE "It's a Barnum and Bailey world, Just as phony as it can be—"
 [*In the bathroom the water goes on loud; little breathless cries and peals of laughter are heard as if a child were frolicking in the tub.*]

STELLA This is making me—sick!

STANLEY The boy's dad learned about it and got in touch with the high school superintendent. Boy, oh, boy, I'd like to have been in that office when Dame Blanche was called on the carpet! I'd like to have seen her trying to squirm out of that one! But they had her on the hook good and proper that time and she knew that the jig was all up! They told her she better move on to some fresh territory. Yep, it was practically a town ordinance passed against her!

[*The bathroom door is opened and BLANCHE thrusts her head out, holding a towel about her hair.*]

BLANCHE Stella!

STELLA [*faintly*] Yes, Blanche?

BLANCHE Give me another bath-towel to dry my hair with. I've just washed it.

STELLA Yes, Blanche. [*She crosses in a dazed way from the kitchen to the bathroom door with a towel.*]

BLANCHE What's the matter, honey?

STELLA Matter? Why?

BLANCHE You have such a strange expression on your face!

STELLA Oh— [*she tries to laugh*] I guess I'm a little tired!

BLANCHE Why don't you bathe, too, soon as I get out?

STANLEY [*calling from the kitchen*] How soon is that going to be?

BLANCHE Not so terribly long! Possess your soul in patience!

STANLEY It's not my soul, it's my kidneys I'm worried about!

[*BLANCHE slams the door. STANLEY laughs harshly. STELLA comes slowly back into the kitchen.*]

STANLEY Well, what do you think of it?

STELLA I don't believe all of those stories and I think your supply-man was mean and rotten to tell them. It's possible that some of the things he said are partly true. There are things about my sister I don't approve of—things that caused sorrow at home. She was always—flighty!

STANLEY Flighty!

STELLA But when she was young, very young, she married a boy who wrote poetry. . . . He was extremely good-looking. I think Blanche didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human! But then she found out—

STANLEY What?

STELLA This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate. Didn't your supply-man give you that information?

STANLEY All we discussed was recent history. That must have been a pretty long time ago.

STELLA Yes, it was—a pretty long time ago . . .

[*STANLEY comes up and takes her by the shoulders rather gently. She gently withdraws from him. Automatically she starts sticking little pink candles in the birthday cake.*]

STANLEY How many candles you putting in that cake?

STELLA I'll stop at twenty-five.

STANLEY Is company expected?

STELLA We asked Mitch to come over for cake and ice-cream.

[*STANLEY looks a little uncomfortable. He lights a cigarette from the one he has just finished.*]

STANLEY I wouldn't be expecting Mitch over tonight.

[*STELLA pauses in her occupation with candles and looks slowly around at STANLEY.*]

STELLA Why?

STANLEY Mitch is a buddy of mine. We were in the same outfit together—Two-forty-first Engineers. We work in the same plant and now on the same bowling team. You think I could face him if—

STELLA Stanley Kowalski, did you—did you repeat what that—?

STANLEY You're goddam right I told him! I'd have that on my conscience the rest of my life if I knew all that stuff and let my best friend get caught!

STELLA Is Mitch through with her?

STANLEY Wouldn't you be if—?

STELLA I said, *Is Mitch through with her?*

[BLANCHE's voice is lifted again, serenely as a bell. She sings "But it wouldn't be make-believe If you believed in me."]

STANLEY No, I don't think he's necessarily through with her—just wised up!

STELLA Stanley, she thought Mitch was—going to—going to marry her. I was hoping so, too.

STANLEY Well, he's not going to marry her. Maybe he *was*, but he's not going to jump in a tank with a school of sharks—now! [*He rises.*] Blanche!

Oh, Blanche! Can I please get in my bathroom? [*There is a pause.*]

BLANCHE Yes, indeed, sir! Can you wait one second while I dry?

STANLEY Having waited one hour I guess one second ought to pass in a hurry.

STELLA And she hasn't got her job? Well, what will she do!

STANLEY She's not stayin' here after Tuesday. You know that, don't you? Just to make sure I bought her ticket myself. A bus ticket.

STELLA In the first place, Blanche wouldn't go on a bus.

STANLEY She'll go on a bus and like it.

STELLA No, she won't, no, she won't, Stanley!

STANLEY *She'll go!* Period. P.S. She'll go *Tuesday!*

STELLA [*slowly*] What'll—she—do? What on earth will she—do!

STANLEY Her future is mapped out for her.

STELLA What do you mean?

[*BLANCHE sings.*]

STANLEY Hey, canary bird! Toots! Get *OUT* of the *BATHROOM!*

[*The bathroom door flies open and BLANCHE emerges with a gay peal of laughter, but as STANLEY crosses past her, a frightened look appears in her face, almost a look of panic. He doesn't look at her but slams the bathroom door shut as he goes in.*]

BLANCHE [*snatching up a hairbrush*] Oh, I feel so good after my long, hot bath, I feel so good and cool and—rested!

STELLA [*sadly and doubtfully from the kitchen*] Do you, Blanche?

BLANCHE [*snatching up a hairbrush*] Yes, I do, so refreshed! [*She tinkles her highball glass.*] A hot bath and a long, cold drink always give me a brand new outlook on life! [*She looks through the portieres at STELLA, standing between them, and slowly stops brushing.*] Something has happened!—What is it?

STELLA [*turning away quickly*] Why, nothing has happened, Blanche.

BLANCHE You're lying! Something has!

[*She stares fearfully at STELLA, who pretends to be busy at the table. The distant piano goes into a hectic breakdown.*]

Scene Eight

Three quarters of an hour later.

The view through the big windows is fading gradually into a still-golden dusk. A torch of sunlight blazes on the side of a big water-tank or oil-drum across the empty lot toward the business district which is now pierced by pinpoint of lighted windows or windows reflecting the sunset.

The three people are completing a dismal birthday supper. STANLEY looks sullen. STELLA is embarrassed and sad.

BLANCHE *has a tight, artificial smile on her drawn face. There is a fourth place at the table which is left vacant.*

BLANCHE [*suddenly*] Stanley, tell us a joke, tell us a funny story to make us all laugh. I don't know what's the matter, we're all so solemn. Is it because I've been stood up by my beau?

[STELLA *laughs feebly.*]

It's the first time in my entire experience with men, and I've had a good deal of all sorts, that I've actually been stood up by anybody! Ha-ha! I don't know how to take it. . . . Tell us a funny little story, Stanley! Something to help us out.

STANLEY I didn't think you liked my stories, Blanche.

BLANCHE I like them when they're amusing but not indecent.

STANLEY I don't know any refined enough for your taste.

BLANCHE Then let me tell one.

STELLA Yes, you tell one, Blanche. You used to know lots of good stories.

[*The music fades.*]

BLANCHE Let me see, now. . . . I must run through my repertoire! Oh, yes—I love parrot stories! Do you all like parrot stories? Well, this one's about the old maid and the parrot. This old maid, she had a parrot that cursed a blue streak and knew more vulgar expressions than Mr. Kowalski!

STANLEY Huh.

BLANCHE And the only way to hush the parrot up was to put the cover back on its cage so it would think it was night and go back to sleep. Well, one morning the old maid had just uncovered the parrot for the day—when who should she see coming up the front walk but the preacher! Well, she rushed back to the parrot and slipped the cover back on the cage and then she let in the preacher. And the parrot was perfectly still, just as quiet as a mouse, but just as she was asking the preacher how much sugar he wanted in his coffee—the parrot broke the silence with a loud—[*She whistles.*—and said—“God damn, but that was a short day!”

[*She throws back her head and laughs. STELLA also makes an ineffectual effort to seem amused. STANLEY pays no attention to the story but reaches way over the table to spear his fork into the remaining chop which he eats with his fingers.*]

BLANCHE Apparently Mr. Kowalski was not amused.

STELLA Mr. Kowalski is too busy making a pig of himself to think of anything else!

STANLEY That's right, baby.

STELLA Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy. Go and wash up and then help me clear the table.

[*He hurls a plate to the floor.*]

STANLEY That's how I'll clear the table! [*He seizes her arm.*] Don't ever talk that way to me! “Pig—Polack—disgusting—vulgar—greasy!”—them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister's too much around here! What do you two think you are? A pair of queens? Remember what Huey Long⁹ said—“Every Man is a King!” And I am the king

9. Demagogic Louisiana political leader, governor, and senator (1893–1935).

around here, so don't forget it! [*He hurls a cup and saucer to the floor.*]
My place is cleared! You want me to clear your places?

[*STELLA begins to cry weakly. STANLEY stalks out on the porch and lights a cigarette. The Negro entertainers around the corner are heard.*]

BLANCHE What happened while I was bathing? What did he tell you, Stella?

STELLA Nothing, nothing, nothing!

BLANCHE I think he told you something about Mitch and me! You know why Mitch didn't come but you won't tell me! [*STELLA shakes her head helplessly.*] I'm going to call him!

STELLA I wouldn't call him, Blanche.

BLANCHE I am, I'm going to call him on the phone.

STELLA [*miserably*] I wish you wouldn't.

BLANCHE I intend to be given some explanation from someone!

[*She rushes to the phone in the bedroom. STELLA goes out on the porch and stares reproachfully at her husband. He grunts and turns away from her.*]

STELLA I hope you're pleased with your doings. I never had so much trouble swallowing food in my life, looking at that girl's face and the empty chair! [*She cries quietly.*]

BLANCHE [*at the phone*] Hello. Mr. Mitchell, please. . . . Oh. . . . I would like to leave a number if I may. Magnolia 9047. And say it's important to call. . . . Yes, very important. . . . Thank you.

[*She remains by the phone with a lost, frightened look. STANLEY turns slowly back toward his wife and takes her clumsily in his arms.*]

STANLEY Stell, it's gonna be all right after she goes and after you've had the baby. It's gonna be all right again between you and me the way that it was. You remember the way that it was? Them nights we had together? God, honey, it's gonna be sweet when we can make noise in the night the way that we used to and get the colored lights going with nobody's sister behind the curtains to hear us!

[*Their upstairs neighbors are heard in bellowing laughter at something. STANLEY chuckles.*]

Steve an' Eunice . . .

STELLA Come on back in. [*She returns to the kitchen and starts lighting the candles on the white cake.*] Blanche?

BLANCHE Yes. [*She returns from the bedroom to the table in the kitchen.*]

Oh, those pretty, pretty little candles! Oh, don't burn them, Stella.

STELLA I certainly will.

[*STANLEY comes back in.*]

BLANCHE You ought to save them for baby's birthdays. Oh, I hope candles are going to glow in his life and I hope that his eyes are going to be like candles, like two blue candles lighted in a white cake!

STANLEY [*sitting down*] What poetry!

BLANCHE [*she pauses reflectively for a moment*] I shouldn't have called him.

STELLA There's lots of things could have happened.

BLANCHE There's no excuse for it, Stella. I don't have to put up with insults. I won't be taken for granted.

STANLEY Goddamn, it's hot in here with the steam from the bathroom.

BLANCHE I've said I was sorry three times. [*The piano fades out.*] I take hot baths for my nerves. Hydrotherapy, they call it. You healthy Polack, without a nerve in your body, of course you don't know what anxiety feels like!

STANLEY I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one-hundred-per-cent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack.

[*The phone rings. BLANCHE rises expectantly.*]

BLANCHE Oh, that's for me, I'm sure.

STANLEY I'm not sure. Keep your seat. [*He crosses leisurely to phone.*] H'lo. Aw, yeh, hello, Mac.

[*He leans against wall, staring insultingly in at BLANCHE. She sinks back in her chair with a frightened look. STELLA leans over and touches her shoulder.*]

BLANCHE Oh, keep your hands off me, Stella. What is the matter with you? Why do you look at me with that pitying look?

STANLEY [*bawling*] QUIET IN THERE!—We've got a noisy woman on the place.—Go on, Mac. At Riley's? No, I don't wanta bowl at Riley's. I had a little trouble with Riley last week. I'm the team captain, ain't I? All right, then, we're not gonna bowl at Riley's, we're gonna bowl at the West Side or the Gala! All right, Mac. See you!

[*He hangs up and returns to the table. BLANCHE fiercely controls herself, drinking quickly from her tumbler of water. He doesn't look at her but reaches in a pocket. Then he speaks slowly and with false amiability.*]

Sister Blanche, I've got a little birthday remembrance for you.

BLANCHE Oh, have you, Stanley? I wasn't expecting any, I—I don't know why Stella wants to observe my birthday! I'd much rather forget it—when you—reach twenty-seven! Well—age is a subject that you'd prefer to—ignore!

STANLEY Twenty-seven?

BLANCHE [*quickly*] What is it? Is it for me?
[*He is holding a little envelope toward her.*]

STANLEY Yes, I hope you like it!

BLANCHE Why, why—Why, it's a—

STANLEY Ticket! Back to Laurel! On the Greyhound! Tuesday!

[*The Varsouviana music steals in softly and continues playing. STELLA rises abruptly and turns her back. BLANCHE tries to smile. Then she tries to laugh. Then she gives both up and springs from the table and runs into the next room. She clutches her throat and then runs into the bathroom. Coughing, gagging sounds are heard.*]

Well!

STELLA You didn't need to do that.

STANLEY Don't forget all that I took off her.

STELLA You needn't have been so cruel to someone alone as she is.

STANLEY Delicate piece she is.

STELLA She is. She was. You didn't know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody, was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her, and forced her to change.

[*He crosses into the bedroom, ripping off his shirt, and changes into a brilliant silk bowling shirt. She follows him.*]

Do you think you're going bowling now?

STANLEY Sure.

STELLA You're not going bowling. [*She catches hold of his shirt.*] Why did you do this to her?

STANLEY I done nothing to no one. Let go of my shirt. You've torn it.

STELLA I want to know why. Tell me why.

STANLEY When we first met, me and you, you thought I was common. How right you was, baby. I was common as dirt. You showed me the snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them colored lights going! And wasn't we happy together, wasn't it all okay till she showed here?

[*STELLA makes a slight movement. Her look goes suddenly inward as if some interior voice had called her name. She begins a slow, shuffling progress from the bedroom to the kitchen, leaning and resting on the back of the chair and then on the edge of a table with a blind look and listening expression. STANLEY, finishing with his shirt, is unaware of her reaction.*]

And wasn't we happy together? Wasn't it all okay? Till she showed here.

Hoity-Toity, describing me as an ape. [*He suddenly notices the change in STELLA.*] Hey, what is it, Stel? [*He crosses to her.*]

STELLA [*quietly*] Take me to the hospital.

[*He is with her now, supporting her with his arm, murmuring indistinguishably as they go outside.*]

Scene Nine

A while later that evening. BLANCHE is seated in a tense hunched position in a bedroom chair that she has recovered with diagonal green and white stripes. She has on her scarlet satin robe. On the table beside chair is a bottle of liquor and a glass. The rapid, feverish polka tune, the "Varsouviana," is heard. The music is in her mind; she is drinking to escape it and the sense of disaster closing in on her, and she seems to whisper the words of the song. An electric fan is turning back and forth across her.

MITCH comes around the corner in work clothes: blue denim shirt and pants. He is unshaven. He climbs the steps to the door and rings. BLANCHE is startled.

BLANCHE Who is it, please?

MITCH [*hoarsely*] Me. Mitch.

[*The polka tune stops.*]

BLANCHE Mitch!—Just a minute.

[*She rushes about frantically, hiding the bottle in a closet, crouching at the mirror and dabbing her face with cologne and powder. She is so excited that her breath is audible as she dashes about. At last she rushes to the door in the kitchen and lets him in.*]

Mitch!—Y'know, I really shouldn't let you in after the treatment I have received from you this evening! So utterly uncavalier! But hello, beautiful!

[*She offers him her lips. He ignores it and pushes past her into the flat. She looks fearfully after him as he stalks into the bedroom.*]

My, my, what a cold shoulder! And such uncouth apparel! Why, you haven't even shaved! The unforgivable insult to a lady! But I forgive you. I forgive you because it's such a relief to see you. You've stopped that

polka tune that I had caught in my head. Have you ever had anything caught in your head? No, of course you haven't, you dumb angel-puss, you'd never get anything awful caught in your head!

[*He stares at her while she follows him while she talks. It is obvious that he has had a few drinks on the way over.*]

MITCH Do we have to have that fan on?

BLANCHE No!

MITCH I don't like fans.

BLANCHE Then let's turn it off, honey. I'm not partial to them!

[*She presses the switch and the fan nods slowly off. She clears her throat uneasily as MITCH plumps himself down on the bed in the bedroom and lights a cigarette.*]

I don't know what there is to drink. I—haven't investigated.

MITCH I don't want Stan's liquor.

BLANCHE It isn't Stan's. Everything here isn't Stan's. Some things on the premises are actually mine! How is your mother? Isn't your mother well?

MITCH Why?

BLANCHE Something's the matter tonight, but never mind. I won't cross-examine the witness. I'll just—[*She touches her forehead vaguely. The polka tune starts up again.*—]pretend I don't notice anything different about you! That—music again . . .

MITCH What music?

BLANCHE The "Varsourviana"! The polka tune they were playing when Allan—Wait!

[*A distant revolver shot is heard. BLANCHE seems relieved.*]

There now, the shot! It always stops after that.

[*The polka music dies out again.*]

Yes, now it's stopped.

MITCH Are you boxed out of your mind?

BLANCHE I'll go and see what I can find in the way of— [*She crosses into the closet, pretending to search for the bottle.*] Oh, by the way, excuse me for not being dressed. But I'd practically given you up! Had you forgotten your invitation to supper?

MITCH I wasn't going to see you any more.

BLANCHE Wait a minute. I can't hear what you're saying and you talk so little that when you do say something, I don't want to miss a single syllable of it. . . . What am I looking around here for? Oh, yes—liquor! We've had so much excitement around here this evening that I *am* boxed out of my mind! [*She pretends suddenly to find the bottle. He draws his foot up on the bed and stares at her contemptuously.*] Here's something. Southern Comfort! What is that, I wonder?

MITCH If you don't know, it must belong to Stan.

BLANCHE Take your foot off the bed. It has a light cover on it. Of course you boys don't notice things like that. I've done so much with this place since I've been here.

MITCH I bet you have.

BLANCHE You saw it before I came. Well, look at it now! This room is almost—dainty! I want to keep it that way. I wonder if this stuff ought to be mixed with something? Ummm, it's sweet, so sweet! It's terribly,

terribly sweet! Why, it's a *liqueur*, I believe! Yes, that's what it *is*, a liqueur! [MITCH *grunts*.] I'm afraid you won't like it, but try it, and maybe you will.

MITCH I told you already I don't want none of his liquor and I mean it. You ought to lay off his liquor. He says you been lapping it up all summer like a wild cat!

BLANCHE What a fantastic statement! Fantastic of him to say it, fantastic of you to repeat it! I won't descend to the level of such cheap accusations to answer them, even!

MITCH Huh.

BLANCHE What's in your mind? I see something in your eyes!

MITCH [*getting up*] It's dark in here.

BLANCHE I like it dark. The dark is comforting to me.

MITCH I don't think I ever seen you in the light. [BLANCHE *laughs breathlessly*.] That's a fact!

BLANCHE Is it?

MITCH I've never seen you in the afternoon.

BLANCHE Whose fault is that?

MITCH You never want to go out in the afternoon.

BLANCHE Why, Mitch, you're at the plant in the afternoon!

MITCH Not Sunday afternoon. I've asked you to go out with me sometimes on Sundays but you always make an excuse. You never want to go out till after six and then it's always some place that's not lighted much.

BLANCHE There is some obscure meaning in this but I fail to catch it.

MITCH What it means is I've never had a real good look at you, Blanche.

Let's turn the light on here.

BLANCHE [*fearfully*] Light? Which light? What for?

MITCH This one with the paper thing on it. [*He tears the paper lantern off the light bulb. She utters a frightened gasp.*]

BLANCHE What did you do that for?

MITCH So I can take a look at you good and plain!

BLANCHE Of course you don't really mean to be insulting!

MITCH No, just realistic.

BLANCHE I don't want realism. I want magic! [MITCH *laughs*.] Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!—*Don't turn the light on!*

[MITCH *crosses to the switch. He turns the light on and stares at her. She cries out and covers her face. He turns the lights off again.*]

MITCH [*slowly and bitterly*] I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it—Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen any more. But I was a fool enough to believe you was straight.

BLANCHE Who told you I wasn't—"straight"? My loving brother-in-law. And you believed him.

MITCH I called him a liar at first. And then I checked on the story. First I asked our supply-man who travels through Laurel. And then I talked directly over long-distance to this merchant.

BLANCHE Who is this merchant?

MITCH Kiefaber.

BLANCHE The merchant Kiefaber of Laurel! I know the man. He whistled at me. I put him in his place. So now for revenge he makes up stories about me.

MITCH Three people, Kiefaber, Stanley and Shaw, swore to them!

BLANCHE Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub! And such a filthy tub!

MITCH Didn't you stay at a hotel called The Flamingo?

BLANCHE Flamingo? No! Tarantula was the name of it! I stayed at a hotel called The Tarantula Arms!

MITCH [*stupidly*] Tarantula?

BLANCHE Yes, a big spider! That's where I brought my victims. [*She pours herself another drink.*] Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan—intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with. . . . I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection—here and there, in the most—unlikely places—even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy but—somebody wrote the superintendent about it—"This woman is morally unfit for her position!"

[*She throws back her head with convulsive, sobbing laughter. Then she repeats the statement, gasps, and drinks.*]

True? Yes, I suppose—unfit somehow—anyway. . . . So I came here. There was nowhere else I could go. I was played out. You know what played out is? My youth was suddenly gone up the water-spout, and—I met you. You said you needed somebody. Well, I needed somebody, too. I thanked God for you, because you seemed to be gentle—a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in! But I guess I was asking, hoping—too much! Kiefaber, Stanley and Shaw have tied an old tin can to the tail of the kite.

[*There is a pause. MITCH stares at her dumbly.*]

MITCH You lied to me, Blanche.

BLANCHE Don't say I lied to you.

MITCH Lies, lies, inside and out, all lies.

BLANCHE Never inside, I didn't lie in my heart . . .

[*A VENDOR comes around the corner. She is a blind MEXICAN WOMAN in a dark shawl, carrying bunches of those gaudy tin flowers that lower-class Mexicans display at funerals and other festive occasions. She is calling barely audibly. Her figure is only faintly visible outside the building.*]

MEXICAN WOMAN Flores. Flores, Flores para los muertos.¹ Flores. Flores.

BLANCHE What? Oh! Somebody outside . . . [*She goes to the door, opens it and stares at the MEXICAN WOMAN.*]

MEXICAN WOMAN [*she is at the door and offers BLANCHE some of her flowers*] Flores? Flores para los muertos?

BLANCHE [*frightened*] No, no! Not now! Not now!

[*She darts back into the apartment, slamming the door.*]

MEXICAN WOMAN [*she turns away and starts to move down the street*] Flores para los muertos.

[*The polka tune fades in.*]

BLANCHE [*as if to herself*] Crumble and fade and—regrets—recriminations . . . "If you'd done this, it wouldn't've cost me that!"

1. Flowers for the dead (Spanish).

MEXICAN WOMAN Coronas para los muertos.² Coronas . . .

BLANCHE Legacies! Huh. . . . And other things such as bloodstained pillow-slips—"Her linen needs changing"—"Yes, Mother. But couldn't we get a colored girl to do it?" No, we couldn't of course. Everything gone but the—

MEXICAN WOMAN Flores.

BLANCHE Death—I used to sit here and she used to sit over there and death was as close as you are. . . . We didn't dare even admit we had ever heard of it!

MEXICAN WOMAN Flores para los muertos, flores—flores . . .

BLANCHE The opposite is desire. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder! Not far from Belle Reve, before we had lost Belle Reve, was a camp where they trained young soldiers. On Sunday nights they would go in town to get drunk—

MEXICAN WOMAN [*softly*] Coronas . . .

BLANCHE —and on the way back they would stagger onto my lawn and call—"Blanche! Blanche!"—the deaf old lady remaining suspected nothing. But sometimes I slipped outside to answer their calls. . . . Later the paddy-wagon would gather them up like daisies . . . the long way home . . .

[*The MEXICAN WOMAN turns slowly and drifts back off with her soft mournful cries. BLANCHE goes to the dresser and leans forward on it. After a moment, MITCH rises and follows her purposefully. The polka music fades away. He places his hands on her waist and tries to turn her about.*]

BLANCHE What do you want?

MITCH [*fumbling to embrace her*] What I been missing all summer.

BLANCHE Then marry me, Mitch!

MITCH I don't think I want to marry you anymore.

BLANCHE No?

MITCH [*dropping his hands from her waist*] You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother.

BLANCHE Go away, then. [*He stares at her.*] Get out of here quick before I start screaming fire! [*Her throat is tightening with hysteria.*] Get out of here quick before I start screaming fire.

[*He still remains staring. She suddenly rushes to the big window with its pale blue square of the soft summer light and cries wildly.*]

Fire! Fire! Fire!

[*With a startled gasp, MITCH turns and goes out the outer door, clatters awkwardly down the steps and around the corner of the building.*

BLANCHE staggers back from the window and falls to her knees. The distant piano is slow and blue.]

Scene Ten

It is a few hours later that night.

BLANCHE *has been drinking fairly steadily since MITCH left. She has dragged her wardrobe trunk into the center of the bedroom. It hangs open with flowery dresses thrown across it. As the drinking and packing went on, a mood of hysterical exhilaration came into her and she has decked herself out in a somewhat*

2. Wreaths for the dead (Spanish).

soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed silver slippers with brilliants set in their heels.

Now she is placing the rhinestone tiara on her head before the mirror of the dressing-table and murmuring excitedly as if to a group of spectral admirers.

BLANCHE How about taking a swim, a moonlight swim at the old rock-quarry? If anyone's sober enough to drive a car! Ha-ha! Best way in the world to stop your head buzzing! Only you've got to be careful to dive where the deep pool is—if you hit a rock you don't come up till tomorrow . . .

[Tremblingly she lifts the hand mirror for a closer inspection. She catches her breath and slams the mirror face down with such violence that the glass cracks. She moans a little and attempts to rise. STANLEY appears around the corner of the building. He still has on the vivid green silk bowling shirt. As he rounds the corner the honky-tonk music is heard. It continues softly throughout the scene. He enters the kitchen, slamming the door. As he peers in at BLANCHE he gives a low whistle. He has had a few drinks on the way and has brought some quart beer bottles home with him.]

BLANCHE How is my sister?

STANLEY She is doing okay.

BLANCHE And how is the baby?

STANLEY [*grinning amiably*] The baby won't come before morning so they told me to go home and get a little shut-eye.

BLANCHE Does that mean we are to be alone in here?

STANLEY Yep. Just me and you, Blanche. Unless you got somebody hid under the bed. What've you got on those fine feathers for?

BLANCHE Oh, that's right. You left before my wire came.

STANLEY You got a wire?

BLANCHE I received a telegram from an old admirer of mine.

STANLEY Anything good?

BLANCHE I think so. An invitation.

STANLEY What to? A fireman's ball?

BLANCHE [*throwing back her head*] A cruise of the Caribbean on a yacht!

STANLEY Well, well. What do you know?

BLANCHE I have never been so surprised in my life.

STANLEY I guess not.

BLANCHE It came like a bolt from the blue!

STANLEY Who did you say it was from?

BLANCHE An old beau of mine.

STANLEY The one that give you the white fox-pieces?

BLANCHE Mr. Shep Huntleigh. I wore his ATO pin my last year at college. I hadn't seen him again until last Christmas. I ran in to him on Biscayne Boulevard. Then—just now—this wire—inviting me on a cruise of the Caribbean! The problem is clothes. I tore into my trunk to see what I have that's suitable for the tropics!

STANLEY And come up with that—gorgeous—diamond—tiara?

BLANCHE This old relic? Ha-ha! It's only rhinestones.

STANLEY Gosh. I thought it was Tiffany diamonds. [*He unbuttons his shirt.*]

BLANCHE Well, anyhow, I shall be entertained in style.

STANLEY Uh-huh. It goes to show, you never know what is coming.

BLANCHE Just when I thought my luck had begun to fail me—

STANLEY Into the picture pops this Miami millionaire.

BLANCHE This man is not from Miami. This man is from Dallas.

STANLEY This man is from Dallas?

BLANCHE Yes, this man is from Dallas where gold spouts out of the ground!

STANLEY Well, just so he's from somewhere! [*He starts removing his shirt.*]

BLANCHE Close the curtains before you undress any further.

STANLEY [*amiably*] This is all I'm going to undress right now. [*He rips the sack off a quart beer bottle*] Seen a bottle-opener?

[*She moves slowly toward the dresser, where she stands with her hands knotted together.*]

I used to have a cousin who could open a beer bottle with his teeth. [*pounding the bottle cap on the corner of table*] That was his only accomplishment, all he could do—he was just a human bottle-opener. And then one time, at a wedding party, he broke his front teeth off! After that he was so ashamed of himself he used t' sneak out of the house when company came . . .

[*The bottle cap pops off and a geyser of foam shoots up. Stanley laughs happily, holding up the bottle over his head.*]

Ha-ha! Rain from heaven! [*He extends the bottle toward her*] Shall we bury the hatchet and make it a loving-cup? Huh?

BLANCHE No, thank you.

STANLEY Well, it's a red-letter night for us both. You having an oil millionaire and me having a baby.

[*He goes to the bureau in the bedroom and crouches to remove something from the bottom drawer.*]

BLANCHE [*drawing back*] What are you doing in here?

STANLEY Here's something I always break out on special occasions like this. The silk pyjamas I wore on my wedding night!

BLANCHE Oh.

STANLEY When the telephone rings and they say, "You've got a son!" I'll tear this off and wave it like a flag! [*He shakes out a brilliant pyjama coat.*]

I guess we are both entitled to put on the dog. [*He goes back to the kitchen with the coat over his arm.*]

BLANCHE When I think of how divine it is going to be to have such a thing as privacy once more—I could weep with joy!

STANLEY This millionaire from Dallas is not going to interfere with your privacy any?

BLANCHE It won't be the sort of thing you have in mind. This man is a gentleman and he respects me. [*improvising feverishly*] What he wants is my companionship. Having great wealth sometimes makes people lonely! A cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life—immeasurably! I have those things to offer, and this doesn't take them away. Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart—and I have all of those things—aren't taken away, but grow! Increase with the years! How strange that I should be called a destitute woman! When I have all of these treasures locked in my heart. [*A choked sob comes from her.*] I think of myself as a very, very rich woman! But I have been foolish—casting my pearls before swine!

STANLEY Swine, huh?

BLANCHE Yes, swine! Swine! And I'm thinking not only of you but of your friend, Mr. Mitchell. He came to see me tonight. He dared to come here in his work clothes! And to repeat slander to me, vicious stories that he had gotten from you! I gave him his walking papers . . .

STANLEY You did, huh?

BLANCHE But then he came back. He returned with a box of roses to beg my forgiveness! He implored my forgiveness. But some things are not forgivable. Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable. It is the one unforgivable thing in my opinion and it is the one thing of which I have never, never been guilty. And so I told him, I said to him. "Thank you," but it was foolish of me to think that we could ever adapt ourselves to each other. Our ways of life are too different. Our attitudes and our backgrounds are incompatible. We have to be realistic about such things. So farewell, my friend! And let there be no hard feelings . . .

STANLEY Was this before or after the telegram came from the Texas oil millionaire?

BLANCHE What telegram? No! No, after! As a matter of fact, the wire came just as—

STANLEY As a matter of fact there wasn't no wire at all!

BLANCHE Oh, oh!

STANLEY There isn't no millionaire! And Mitch didn't come back with roses 'cause I know where he is—

BLANCHE Oh!

STANLEY There isn't a goddam thing but imagination!

BLANCHE Oh!

STANLEY And lies and conceit and tricks!

BLANCHE Oh!

STANLEY And look at yourself! Take a look at yourself in that worn-out Mardi Gras outfit, rented for fifty cents from some rag-picker! And with the crazy crown on! What queen do you think you are?

BLANCHE Oh—God . . .

STANLEY I've been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light-bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say—*Ha!—Ha!* Do you hear me? *Ha—ha—ha!* [*He walks into the bedroom.*]

BLANCHE Don't come in here!

[Lurid reflections appear on the walls around BLANCHE. The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form. She catches her breath, crosses to the phone and jiggles the hook. STANLEY goes into the bathroom and closes the door.]

Operator, operator! Give me long-distance, please. . . . I want to get in touch with Mr. Shep Huntleigh of Dallas. He's so well known he doesn't require any address. Just ask anybody who—Wait!!—No, I couldn't find it right now. . . . Please understand, I—No! No, wait!. . . . One moment! Someone is—Nothing! Hold on, please!

[She sets the phone down and crosses warily into the kitchen. The night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jangle. The shadows and

lurid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces. Through the back wall of the rooms, which have become transparent, can be seen the sidewalk. A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her and there is a struggle. A policeman's whistle breaks it up. The figures disappear. Some moments later the Negro Woman appears around the corner with a sequined bag which the prostitute had dropped on the walk. She is rooting excitedly through it. BLANCHE presses her knuckles to her lips and returns slowly to the phone. She speaks in a hoarse whisper.]

BLANCHE Operator! Operator! Never mind long-distance. Get Western Union. There isn't time to be—Western—Western Union!

[She waits anxiously.]

Western Union? Yes! I—want to—Take down this message! “In desperate, desperate circumstances! Help me! Caught in a trap. Caught in—”
Oh!

[The bathroom door is thrown open and STANLEY comes out in the brilliant silk pyjamas. He grins at her as he knots the tasseled sash about his waist. She gasps and backs away from the phone. He stares at her for a count of ten. Then a clicking becomes audible from the telephone, steady and rasping.]

STANLEY You left th' phone off th' hook.

[He crosses to it deliberately and sets it back on the hook. After he has replaced it, he stares at her again, his mouth slowly curving into a grin, as he weaves between BLANCHE and the outer door. The barely audible “Blue Piano” begins to drum up louder. The sound of it turns into the roar of an approaching locomotive. BLANCHE crouches, pressing her fists to her ears until it has gone by.]

BLANCHE *[finally straightening]* Let me—let me get by you!

STANLEY Get by me? Sure. Go ahead. *[He moves back a pace in the doorway.]*

BLANCHE You—you stand over there! *[She indicates a further position.]*

STANLEY *[grinning]* You got plenty of room to walk by me now.

BLANCHE Not with you there! But I've got to get out somehow!

STANLEY You think I'll interfere with you? Ha-ha!

[The “Blue Piano” goes softly. She turns confusedly and makes a faint gesture. The inhuman jungle voices rise up. He takes a step toward her, biting his tongue which protrudes between his lips.]

STANLEY *[softly]* Come to think of it—maybe you wouldn't be bad to—interfere with . . .

[BLANCHE moves backward through the door into the bedroom.]

BLANCHE Stay back! Don't you come toward me another step or I'll—

STANLEY What?

BLANCHE Some awful thing will happen! It will!

STANLEY What are you putting on now?

[They are now both inside the bedroom.]

BLANCHE I warn you, don't, I'm in danger!

[He takes another step. She smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top.]

STANLEY What did you do that for?

BLANCHE So I could twist the broken end in your face!

STANLEY I bet you would do that!

BLANCHE I would! I will if you—

STANLEY Oh! So you want some roughhouse! All right, let's have some roughhouse!

[He springs toward her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist.]

Tiger—tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning!

[She moans. The bottle-top falls. She sinks to her knees: He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed. The hot trumpet and drums from the Four Deuces sound loudly.]

Scene Eleven

It is some weeks later. STELLA is packing BLANCHE's things. Sounds of water can be heard running in the bathroom.

The portieres are partly open on the poker players—STANLEY, STEVE, MITCH and PABLO—who sit around the table in the kitchen. The atmosphere of the kitchen is now the same raw, lurid one of the disastrous poker night.

The building is framed by the sky of turquoise. STELLA has been crying as she arranges the flowery dresses in the open trunk.

EUNICE comes down the steps from her flat above and enters the kitchen. There is an outburst from the poker table.

STANLEY Drew to an inside straight and made it, by God.

PABLO *Maldita sea tu suerte!*

STANLEY Put it in English, greaseball.

PABLO I am cursing your rutting luck.

STANLEY [*prodigiously elated*] You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky. Take at Salerno.³ I believed I was lucky. I figured that 4 out of 5 would not come through but I would . . . and I did. I put that down as a rule. To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you are lucky.

MITCH You . . . you . . . you . . . Brag . . . brag . . . bull . . . bull.

[STELLA goes into the bedroom and starts folding a dress.]

STANLEY What's the matter with him?

EUNICE [*walking past the table*] I always did say that men are callous things with no feelings, but this does beat anything. Making pigs of yourselves. [*She comes through the portieres into the bedroom.*]

STANLEY What's the matter with her?

STELLA How is my baby?

EUNICE Sleeping like a little angel. Brought you some grapes. [*She puts them on a stool and lowers her voice.*] Blanche?

STELLA Bathing.

EUNICE How is she?

STELLA She wouldn't eat anything but asked for a drink.

EUNICE What did you tell her?

STELLA I—just told her that—we'd made arrangements for her to rest in the country. She's got it mixed in her mind with Shep Huntleigh.

[BLANCHE opens the bathroom door slightly.]

BLANCHE Stella.

3. Important beachhead in the Allied invasion of Italy in World War II.

STELLA Yes, Blanche.

BLANCHE If anyone calls while I'm bathing take the number and tell them I'll call right back.

STELLA Yes.

BLANCHE That cool yellow silk—the bouclé. See if it's crushed. If it's not too crushed I'll wear it and on the lapel that silver and turquoise pin in the shape of a seahorse. You will find them in the heart-shaped box I keep my accessories in. And Stella . . . Try and locate a bunch of artificial violets in that box, too, to pin with the seahorse on the lapel of the jacket.

[*She closes the door. STELLA turns to EUNICE.*]

STELLA I don't know if I did the right thing.

EUNICE What else could you do?

STELLA I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.

EUNICE Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going.

[*The bathroom door opens a little.*]

BLANCHE [*looking out*] Is the coast clear?

STELLA Yes, Blanche. [*to EUNICE*] Tell her how well she's looking.

BLANCHE Please close the curtains before I come out.

STELLA They're closed.

STANLEY —How many for you?

PABLO Two.

STEVE Three.

[*BLANCHE appears in the amber light of the door. She has a tragic radiance in her red satin robe following the sculptural lines of her body. The "Varsouviana" rises audibly as BLANCHE enters the bedroom.*]

BLANCHE [*with faintly hysterical vivacity*] I have just washed my hair.

STELLA Did you?

BLANCHE I'm not sure I got the soap out.

EUNICE Such fine hair!

BLANCHE [*accepting the compliment*] It's a problem. Didn't I get a call?

STELLA Who from, Blanche?

BLANCHE Shep Huntleigh . . .

STELLA Why, not yet, honey!

BLANCHE How strange! I—

[*At the sound of BLANCHE's voice MITCH's arm supporting his cards has sagged and his gaze is dissolved into space. STANLEY slaps him on the shoulder.*]

STANLEY Hey, Mitch, come to!

[*The sound of this new voice shocks BLANCHE. She makes a shocked gesture, forming his name with her lips. STELLA nods and looks quickly away. BLANCHE stands quite still for some moments—the silver-backed mirror in her hand and a look of sorrowful perplexity as though all human experience shows on her face. BLANCHE finally speaks but with sudden hysteria.*]

BLANCHE What's going on here?

[*She turns from STELLA to EUNICE and back to STELLA. Her rising voice penetrates the concentration of the game. MITCH ducks his head lower but STANLEY shoves back his chair as if about to rise. STEVE places a restraining hand on his arm.*]

BLANCHE [*continuing*] What's happened here? I want an explanation of what's happened here.

STELLA [*agonizingly*] Hush! Hush!

EUNICE Hush! Hush! Honey.

STELLA Please, Blanche.

BLANCHE Why are you looking at me like that? Is something wrong with me?

EUNICE You look wonderful, Blanche. Don't she look wonderful?

STELLA Yes.

EUNICE I understand you are going on a trip.

STELLA Yes, Blanche *is*. She's going on a vacation.

EUNICE I'm green with envy.

BLANCHE Help me, help me get dressed!

STELLA [*handing her dress*] Is this what you—

BLANCHE Yes, it will do! I'm anxious to get out of here—this place is a trap!

EUNICE What a pretty blue jacket.

STELLA It's lilac colored.

BLANCHE You're both mistaken. It's Della Robbia blue.⁴ The blue of the robe in the old Madonna pictures. Are these grapes washed?

[*She fingers the bunch of grapes which EUNICE had brought in.*]

EUNICE Huh?

BLANCHE Washed, I said. Are they washed?

EUNICE They're from the French Market.

BLANCHE That doesn't mean they've been washed. [*The cathedral bells chime.*] Those cathedral bells—they're the only clean thing in the Quarter. Well, I'm going now. I'm ready to go.

EUNICE [*whispering*] She's going to walk out before they get here.

STELLA Wait, Blanche.

BLANCHE I don't want to pass in front of those men.

EUNICE Then wait'll the game breaks up.

STELLA Sit down and . . .

[*BLANCHE turns weakly, hesitantly about. She lets them push her into a chair.*]

BLANCHE I can smell the sea air. The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die, I'm going to die on the sea. You know what I shall die of [*She plucks a grape.*] I shall die of eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean. I will die—with my hand in the hand of some nice-looking ship's doctor, a very young one with a small blond mustache and a big silver watch. "Poor lady," they'll say, "the quinine did her no good. That unwashed grape has transported her soul to heaven." [*The cathedral chimes are heard.*] And I'll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon—in the blaze of summer—and into an ocean as blue as [*chimes again*] my first lover's eyes!

[*A DOCTOR and a MATRON have appeared around the corner of the building and climbed the steps to the porch. The gravity of their profession is exaggerated—the unmistakable aura of the state institution with its cynical detachment. The DOCTOR rings the doorbell. The murmur of the game is interrupted.*]

4. A shade of light blue seen in terra cottas made by the Della Robbia family during the Italian Renaissance.

EUNICE [*whispering to STELLA*] That must be them.

[*STELLA presses her fists to her lips.*]

BLANCHE [*rising slowly*] What is it?

EUNICE [*affectedly casual*] Excuse me while I see who's at the door.

STELLA Yes.

[*EUNICE goes into the kitchen.*]

BLANCHE [*tensely*] I wonder if it's for me.

[*A whispered colloquy takes place at the door.*]

EUNICE [*returning, brightly*] Someone is calling for Blanche.

BLANCHE It is for me, then! [*She looks fearfully from one to the other and then to the portieres. The "Varsouviana" faintly plays.*] Is it the gentleman I was expecting from Dallas?

EUNICE I think it is, Blanche.

BLANCHE I'm not quite ready.

STELLA Ask him to wait outside.

BLANCHE I . . .

[*EUNICE goes back to the portieres. Drums sound very softly.*]

STELLA Everything packed?

BLANCHE My silver toilet articles are still out.

STELLA Ah!

EUNICE [*returning*] They're waiting in front of the house.

BLANCHE They! Who's "they"?

EUNICE There's a lady with him.

BLANCHE I cannot imagine who this "lady" could be! How is she dressed?

EUNICE Just—just a sort of a—plain-tailored outfit.

BLANCHE Possibly she's— [*Her voice dies out nervously.*]

STELLA Shall we go, Blanche?

BLANCHE Must we go through that room?

STELLA I will go with you.

BLANCHE How do I look?

STELLA Lovely.

EUNICE [*echoing*] Lovely.

[*BLANCHE moves fearfully to the portieres. EUNICE draws them open for her. BLANCHE goes into the kitchen.*]

BLANCHE [*to the men*] Please don't get up. I'm only passing through.

[*She crosses quickly to outside door. STELLA and EUNICE follow. The poker players stand awkwardly at the table—all except MITCH who remains seated, looking down at the table. BLANCHE steps out on a small porch at the side of the door. She stops short and catches her breath.*]

DOCTOR How do you do?

BLANCHE You are not the gentleman I was expecting. [*She suddenly gasps and starts back up the steps. She stops by STELLA, who stands just outside the door, and speaks in a frightening whisper.*] That man isn't Shep Huntleigh.

[*The "Varsouviana" is playing distantly. STELLA stares back at BLANCHE. EUNICE is holding STELLA's arm. There is a moment of silence—no sound but that of STANLEY steadily shuffling the cards. BLANCHE catches her breath again and slips back into the flat. She enters the flat with a peculiar smile, her eyes wide and brilliant. As soon as her sister goes past her, STELLA closes her eyes and clenches her hands. EUNICE throws her arms comfortingly about her. Then she starts up to her flat. BLANCHE stops just*

inside the door. MITCH keeps staring down at his hands on the table, but the other men look at her curiously. At last she starts around the table toward the bedroom. As she does, STANLEY suddenly pushes back his chair and rises as if to block her way. The MATRON follows her into the flat.]

STANLEY Did you forget something?

BLANCHE [*shrilly*] Yes! Yes, I forgot something!

[She rushes past him into the bedroom. Lurid reflections appear on the walls in odd, sinuous shapes. The "Varsouviana" is filtered into a weird distortion, accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle. BLANCHE seizes the back of a chair as if to defend herself.]

STANLEY [*sotto voce*]⁵ Doc, you better go in.

DOCTOR [*sotto voce, motioning to the MATRON*] Nurse, bring her out.

[The MATRON advances on one side, STANLEY on the other. Divested of all the softer properties of womanhood, the MATRON is a peculiarly sinister figure in her severe dress. Her voice is bold and toneless as a firebell.]

MATRON Hello, Blanche.

[The greeting is echoed and re-echoed by other mysterious voices behind the walls, as if reverberated through a canyon of rock.]

STANLEY She says that she forgot something.

[The echo sounds in threatening whispers.]

MATRON That's all right.

STANLEY What did you forget, Blanche?

BLANCHE I—I—

MATRON It don't matter. We can pick it up later.

STANLEY Sure. We can send it along with the trunk.

BLANCHE [*retreating in panic*] I don't know you—I don't know you. I want to be—left alone—please!

MATRON Now, Blanche!

ECHOES [*rising and falling*] Now, Blanche—now, Blanche—now, Blanche!

STANLEY You left nothing here but spilt talcum and old empty perfume bottles—unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you. You want the lantern?

[He crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb, and extends it toward her. She cries out as if the lantern was herself. The MATRON steps boldly toward her. She screams and tries to break past the MATRON. All the men spring to their feet. STELLA runs out to the porch, with EUNICE following to comfort her, simultaneously with the confused voices of the men in the kitchen. STELLA rushes into EUNICE's embrace on the porch.]

STELLA Oh, my God, Eunice help me! Don't let them do that to her, don't let them hurt her! Oh, God, oh, please God, don't hurt her! What are they doing to her? What are they doing? [*She tries to break from EUNICE's arms.*]

EUNICE No, honey, no, no, honey. Stay here. Don't go back in there. Stay with me and don't look.

STELLA What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?

EUNICE You done the right thing, the only thing you could do. She couldn't stay here; there wasn't no other place for her to go.

5. In an undertone [Italian].

[While STELLA and EUNICE are speaking on the porch the voices of the men in the kitchen overlap them. MITCH has started toward the bedroom. STANLEY crosses to block him. STANLEY pushes him aside. MITCH lunges and strikes at STANLEY. STANLEY pushes MITCH back. MITCH collapses at the table, sobbing. During the preceding scenes, the MATRON catches hold of BLANCHE's arm and prevents her flight. BLANCHE turns wildly and scratches at the MATRON. The heavy woman pinions her arms. BLANCHE cries out hoarsely and slips to her knees.]

MATRON These fingernails have to be trimmed. [The DOCTOR comes into the room and she looks at him.] Jacket, Doctor?

DOCTOR Not unless necessary.

[He takes off his hat and now he becomes personalized. The unhuman quality goes. His voice is gentle and reassuring as he crosses to BLANCHE and crouches in front of her. As he speaks her name, her terror subsides a little. The lurid reflections fade from the walls, the inhuman cries and noises die out and her own hoarse crying is calmed.]

DOCTOR Miss DuBois.

[She turns her face to him and stares at him with desperate pleading. He smiles; then he speaks to the MATRON.]

It won't be necessary.

BLANCHE [faintly] Ask her to let go of me.

DOCTOR [to the MATRON] Let go.

[The MATRON releases her. BLANCHE extends her hands toward the DOCTOR. He draws her up gently and supports her with his arm and leads her through the portieres.]

BLANCHE [holding tight to his arm] Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

[The poker players stand back as BLANCHE and the DOCTOR cross the kitchen to the front door. She allows him to lead her as if she were blind. As they go out on the porch, STELLA cries out her sister's name from where she is crouched a few steps up on the stairs.]

STELLA Blanche! Blanche, Blanche!

[BLANCHE walks on without turning, followed by the DOCTOR and the MATRON. They go around the corner of the building. EUNICE descends to STELLA and places the child in her arms. It is wrapped in a pale blue blanket. STELLA accepts the child, sobbingly. EUNICE continues downstairs and enters the kitchen where the men, except for STANLEY, are returning silently to their places about the table. STANLEY has gone out on the porch and stands at the foot of the steps looking at STELLA.]

STANLEY [a bit uncertainly] Stella?

[She sobs with inhuman abandon. There is something luxurious in her complete surrender to crying now that her sister is gone.]

STANLEY [voluptuously, soothingly] Now, honey. Now, love. Now, now, love. [He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse.]

Now, now, love. Now, love. . . .

[The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away under the swelling music of the "Blue Piano" and the muted trumpet.]

STEVE This game is seven-card stud.

CURTAIN

JOHN CHEEVER

1912–1982

“It seems to me that man’s inclination toward light, toward brightness, is very nearly botanical—and I mean spiritual light. One not only needs it, one struggles for it.” These sentences from an interview with John Cheever, conducted by the novelist John Hersey, at first glance look strange coming from a “*New Yorker* writer” of entertaining stories in which harried, well-to-do, white middle-class suburbanites conduct their lives. “Our Chekhov of the exurbs,” he was dubbed by the reviewer John Leonard, with reference to the mythical community of Shady Hill (which Cheever created along the lines of existing ones in Fairfield, Connecticut, or Westchester County, New York). Yet Chekhov’s own characters, living in darkness, aspire toward “spiritual light,” with a similarly “botanical” inclination. Trapped in their beautifully appointed houses and neighborhoods but carried along by the cool, effortless prose of their creator, Cheever’s characters are viewed with a sympathetic irony, well-seasoned by sadness.

Cheever’s early years were not notably idyllic, and he displays little nostalgia for a lost childhood. Born in Quincy, Massachusetts, he grew up in what he describes as shabby gentility, with his father departing the family when his son was fifteen. (Cheever had an older brother, Fred, with whom he formed a strong but troubled relationship.) Two years later his father lost the family’s money in the crash of 1929, and by that time Cheever had been expelled from Thayer Academy, in Braintree. The expulsion marked the end of his formal education and the beginning of his career as a writer; for, remarkably, he wrote a short story about the experience, titled it “Expelled,” and sent it to the *New Republic*, where Malcolm Cowley (who would become a lifelong friend) published it.

During the 1930s Cheever lived in New York City, in impoverished circumstances, taking odd jobs to support himself and winning a fellowship to the writer’s colony at Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs, New York. His New York life would provide the material for many of his early stories, whose protagonists are rather frequently in desperate economic situations. With the coming of World War II, Cheever joined the armed forces and served in the Pacific theater but saw no combat. In 1941 he married Mary Winternitz. About the marriage, which produced three children and lasted through four decades, Cheever said, “That two people—both of us temperamental, quarrelsome, and intensely ambitious—could have gotten along for such a vast period of time is for me a very good example of the boundlessness of human nature.” Meanwhile, with the help of Malcolm Cowley, he began to publish in the *New Yorker*, and in 1943, while he was serving in the military, his first book of stories (*The Way Some People Live*) was published to favorable reviews. Over the decades to follow the stories continued to appear, largely in the *New Yorker*, where he became—along with J. D. Salinger and John Updike—a recurrent phenomenon. Five further volumes of short fiction were published, and in 1978 *The Stories of John Cheever* gathered those he wished to be remembered for.

Although he is praised for his skill as a realist depicter of suburban manners and morals, Cheever’s art cannot be adequately understood in such terms alone. As Stephen C. Moore has pointed out, “His best stories move from a base in a mimetic presentation of surface reality—the *scenery* of apparently successful American middle class life—to fables of heroism.” Cheever’s embattled heroes express themselves in taking up challenges that are essentially fabulous, and foolhardy: swimming home

across the backyard pools of Westchester (“The Swimmer,” printed here); performing feats of physical daredevilry in suburban living rooms (“O Youth and Beauty”); or dealing with the myriad demands and temptations that beset the hero who, having escaped death in an airplane, returns home to more severe trials (“The Country Husband”). Whatever the specific narrative, we are always aware of the storyteller’s art, shaping ordinary life into the odder, more willful figures of fantasy and romance.

While Cheever will be remembered primarily as a short-story writer, his output includes a respectable number of novels. In 1957 he won a National Book Award for his first one, *The Wapshot Chronicle* (it was followed by *The Wapshot Scandal*, in 1964), notable for its New England seacoast setting and domestic flavor, if less so for a continuously engaging narrative line. Perhaps his most gripping novel is *Bullet Park* (1969), which, like the best of the stories, is both realistic and fabulous. The suburban milieu, seen from the 5:42 train from New York, has never been depicted more accurately, even lovingly, by Cheever. And as is to be expected, his protagonist’s carefully built, pious suburban existence turns out to be a mess. The novel provoked interesting disagreement about its merits (some critics felt the narrative manipulations both ruthless and sentimental), but there was no disagreement about the vivid quality of its represented life, on the commuter train or at the cocktail party. In the years just previous to his death, and after a bout with alcohol and drug addiction, Cheever published his two final novels, *Falconer* (1978) and *Oh What a Paradise It Seems* (1980), the former receiving much praise for its harrowing rendering of prison life. (Farragut, the novel’s hero, is sent to Falconer Prison for killing his brother; Cheever lived in Ossining, New York, home of Sing Sing Prison, during his later years.)

From the beginning to the end of his career he was and remained a thoroughly professional writer, wary of pronouncing on the world at large (there is a noticeable absence of politics and ideology in his work) or on the meaning and significance of his own art. As one sees from his *Journals* (1991), he agonized over the disruptive facts of his alcoholism and his homosexuality. But he remained a private man, seemingly untouched by experiments—or fads—in fiction writing. Whether or not, as T. S. Eliot said about Henry James, he had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it, Cheever remained firmly resistant to ideas of all sorts. This insular tendency is probably a reason why his work makes less than a “major” claim on us, but it is also the condition responsible for his devoted and scrupulous attention to the particularities of middle-class life at the far edge of its promised dream.

This text of “The Swimmer” is from *The Brigadier and the Golf Widow* (1964).

The Swimmer

It was one of those midsummer Sundays when everyone sits around saying: “I *drank* too much last night.” You might have heard it whispered by the parishioners leaving church, heard it from the lips of the priest himself, struggling with his cassock in the *vestiarium*,¹ heard it from the golf links and the tennis courts, heard it from the wildlife preserve where the leader of the Audubon group was suffering from a terrible hangover. “I *drank* too much,” said Donald Westerhazy. “We all *drank* too much,” said Lucinda Merrill. “It must have been the wine,” said Helen Westerhazy. “I *drank* too much of that claret.”

This was at the edge of the Westerhazys’ pool. The pool, fed by an artesian well with a high iron content, was a pale shade of green. It was a fine

1. Cloakroom for religious vestments adjacent to a church’s sanctuary.

day. In the west there was a massive stand of cumulus cloud so like a city seen from a distance—from the bow of an approaching ship—that it might have had a name. Lisbon. Hackensack.² The sun was hot. Neddy Merrill sat by the green water, one hand in it, one around a glass of gin. He was a slender man—he seemed to have the especial slenderness of youth—and while he was far from young he had slid down his banister that morning and given the bronze backside of Aphrodite³ on the hall table a smack, as he jogged toward the smell of coffee in his dining room. He might have been compared to a summer's day, particularly the last hours of one, and while he lacked a tennis racket or a sail bag the impression was definitely one of youth, sport, and clement weather. He had been swimming and now he was breathing deeply, stertorously as if he could gulp into his lungs the components of that moment, the heat of the sun, the intenseness of his pleasure. It all seemed to flow into his chest. His own house stood in Bullet Park,⁴ eight miles to the south, where his four beautiful daughters would have had their lunch and might be playing tennis. Then it occurred to him that by taking a dogleg to the southwest he could reach his home by water.

His life was not confining and the delight he took in this observation could not be explained by its suggestion of escape. He seemed to see, with a cartographer's eye, that string of swimming pools, that quasi-subterranean stream that curved across the county. He had made a discovery, a contribution to modern geography; he would name the stream Lucinda after his wife. He was not a practical joker nor was he a fool but he was determinedly original and had a vague and modest idea of himself as a legendary figure. The day was beautiful and it seemed to him that a long swim might enlarge and celebrate its beauty.

He took off a sweater that was hung over his shoulders and dove in. He had an inexplicable contempt for men who did not hurl themselves into pools. He swam a choppy crawl, breathing either with every stroke or every fourth stroke and counting somewhere well in the back of his mind the one-two one-two of a flutter kick. It was not a serviceable stroke for long distances but the domestication of swimming had saddled the sport with some customs and in his part of the world a crawl was customary. To be embraced and sustained by the light green water was less a pleasure, it seemed, than the resumption of a natural condition, and he would have liked to swim without trunks, but this was not possible, considering his project. He hoisted himself up on the far curb—he never used the ladder—and started across the lawn. When Lucinda asked where he was going he said he was going to swim home.

The only maps and charts he had to go by were remembered or imaginary but these were clear enough. First there were the Grahams, the Hammers, the Lears, the Howlands, and the Crosscups. He would cross Ditmar Street to the Bunkers and come, after a short portage, to the Levys, the Welchers, and the public pool in Lancaster. Then there were the Hallorans, the Sachses, the Biswangers, Shirley Adams, the Gilmartins, and the Clydes. The day was lovely, and that he lived in a world so generously supplied with water seemed like a clemency, a beneficence. His heart was high and he ran across the grass. Making his way home by an uncommon route gave him

2. A town in New Jersey. Lisbon is the capital of Portugal.

3. Greek goddess of love and beauty.

4. Fictive suburb used as a location for many of Cheever's stories and novels.

the feeling that he was a pilgrim, an explorer, a man with a destiny, and he knew that he would find friends all along the way; friends would line the banks of the Lucinda River.

He went through a hedge that separated the Westerhazys' land from the Grahams', walked under some flowering apple trees, passed the shed that housed their pump and filter, and came out at the Grahams' pool. "Why, Neddy," Mrs. Graham said, "what a marvelous surprise. I've been trying to get you on the phone all morning. Here, let me get you a drink." He saw then, like any explorer, that the hospitable customs and traditions of the natives would have to be handled with diplomacy if he was ever going to reach his destination. He did not want to mystify or seem rude to the Grahams nor did he have the time to linger there. He swam the length of their pool and joined them in the sun and was rescued, a few minutes later, by the arrival of two carloads of friends from Connecticut. During the uproarious reunions he was able to slip away. He went down by the front of the Grahams' house, stepped over a thorny hedge, and crossed a vacant lot to the Hammers'. Mrs. Hammer, looking up from her roses, saw him swim by although she wasn't quite sure who it was. The Lears heard him splashing past the open windows of their living room. The Howlands and the Crosscups were away. After leaving the Howlands' he crossed Ditmar Street and started for the Bunkers', where he could hear, even at that distance, the noise of a party.

The water refracted the sound of voices and laughter and seemed to suspend it in midair. The Bunkers' pool was on a rise and he climbed some stairs to a terrace where twenty-five or thirty men and women were drinking. The only person in the water was Rusty Towers, who floated there on a rubber raft. Oh how bonny and lush were the banks of the Lucinda River! Prosperous men and women gathered by the sapphire-colored waters while caterer's men in white coats passed them cold gin. Overhead a red de Haviland trainer was circling around and around and around in the sky with something like the glee of a child in a swing. Ned felt a passing affection for the scene, a tenderness for the gathering, as if it was something he might touch. In the distance he heard thunder. As soon as Enid Bunker saw him she began to scream: "Oh look who's here! What a marvelous surprise! When Lucinda said that you couldn't come I thought I'd *die*." She made her way to him through the crowd, and when they had finished kissing she led him to the bar, a progress that was slowed by the fact that he stopped to kiss eight or ten other women and shake the hands of as many men. A smiling bartender he had seen at a hundred parties gave him a gin and tonic and he stood by the bar for a moment, anxious not to get stuck in any conversation that would delay his voyage. When he seemed about to be surrounded he dove in and swam close to the side to avoid colliding with Rusty's raft. At the far end of the pool he bypassed the Tomlinsons with a broad smile and jogged up the garden path. The gravel cut his feet but this was the only unpleasantness. The party was confined to the pool, and as he went toward the house he heard the brilliant, watery sound of voices fade, heard the noise of a radio from the Bunkers' kitchen, where someone was listening to a ballgame. Sunday afternoon. He made his way through the parked cars and down the grassy border of their driveway to Alewives' Lane. He did not want to be seen on the road in his bathing trunks but there was no traffic and he made the short distance to the Levys' driveway, marked with a private property sign and a green tube

for the *New York Times*. All the doors and windows of the big house were open but there were no signs of life; not even a dog barked. He went around the side of the house to the pool and saw that the Levys had only recently left. Glasses and bottles and dishes of nuts were on a table at the deep end, where there was a bathhouse or gazebo, hung with Japanese lanterns. After swimming the pool he got himself a glass and poured a drink. It was his fourth or fifth drink and he had swum nearly half the length of the Lucinda River. He felt tired, clean, and pleased at that moment to be alone; pleased with everything.

It would storm. The stand of cumulus cloud—that city—had risen and darkened, and while he sat there he heard the percussiveness of thunder again. The de Haviland trainer was still circling overhead and it seemed to Ned that he could almost hear the pilot laugh with pleasure in the afternoon; but when there was another peal of thunder he took off for home. A train whistle blew and he wondered what time it had gotten to be. Four? Five? He thought of the provincial station at that hour, where a waiter, his tuxedo concealed by a raincoat, a dwarf with some flowers wrapped in newspaper, and a woman who had been crying would be waiting for the local. It was suddenly growing dark; it was that moment when the pin-headed birds seem to organize their song into some acute and knowledgeable recognition of the storm's approach. Then there was a fine noise of rushing water from the crown of an oak at his back, as if a spigot there had been turned. Then the noise of fountains came from the crowns of all the tall trees. Why did he love storms, what was the meaning of his excitement when the door sprang open and the rain wind fled rudely up the stairs, why had the simple task of shutting the windows of an old house seemed fitting and urgent, why did the first watery notes of a storm wind have for him the unmistakable sound of good news, cheer, glad tidings? Then there was an explosion, a smell of cordite, and rain lashed the Japanese lanterns that Mrs. Levy had bought in Kyoto the year before last, or was it the year before that?

He stayed in the Levys' gazebo until the storm had passed. The rain had cooled the air and he shivered. The force of the wind had stripped a maple of its red and yellow leaves and scattered them over the grass and the water. Since it was midsummer the tree must be blighted, and yet he felt a peculiar sadness at this sign of autumn. He braced his shoulders, emptied his glass, and started for the Welchers' pool. This meant crossing the Lindleys' riding ring and he was surprised to find it overgrown with grass and all the jumps dismantled. He wondered if the Lindleys had sold their horses or gone away for the summer and put them out to board. He seemed to remember having heard something about the Lindleys and their horses but the memory was unclear. On he went, barefoot through the wet grass, to the Welchers', where he found their pool was dry.

This breach in his chain of water disappointed him absurdly, and he felt like some explorer who seeks a torrential headwater and finds a dead stream. He was disappointed and mystified. It was common enough to go away for the summer but no one ever drained his pool. The Welchers had definitely gone away. The pool furniture was folded, stacked, and covered with a tarpaulin. The bathhouse was locked. All the windows of the house were shut, and when he went around to the driveway in front he saw a for-sale sign nailed to a tree. When had he last heard from the Welchers—when, that is,

had he and Lucinda last regretted an invitation to dine with them? It seemed only a week or so ago. Was his memory failing or had he so disciplined it in the repression of unpleasant facts that he had damaged his sense of the truth? Then in the distance he heard the sound of a tennis game. This cheered him, cleared away all his apprehensions and let him regard the overcast sky and the cold air with indifference. This was the day that Neddy Merrill swam across the county. That was the day! He started off then for his most difficult portage.

Had you gone for a Sunday afternoon ride that day you might have seen him, close to naked, standing on the shoulders of route 424, waiting for a chance to cross. You might have wondered if he was the victim of foul play, had his car broken down, or was he merely a fool. Standing barefoot in the deposits of the highway—beer cans, rags, and blowout patches—exposed to all kinds of ridicule, he seemed pitiful. He had known when he started that this was a part of his journey—it had been on his maps—but confronted with the lines of traffic, worming through the summery light, he found himself unprepared. He was laughed at, jeered at, a beer can was thrown at him, and he had no dignity or humor to bring to the situation. He could have gone back, back to the Westerhazys', where Lucinda would still be sitting in the sun. He had signed nothing, vowed nothing, pledged nothing, not even to himself. Why, believing as he did, that all human obduracy was susceptible to common sense, was he unable to turn back? Why was he determined to complete his journey even if it meant putting his life in danger? At what point had this prank, this joke, this piece of horseplay become serious? He could not go back, he could not even recall with any clearness the green water at the Westerhazys', the sense of inhaling the day's components, the friendly and relaxed voices saying that they had *drunk* too much. In the space of an hour, more or less, he had covered a distance that made his return impossible.

An old man, tooling down the highway at fifteen miles an hour, let him get to the middle of the road, where there was a grass divider. Here he was exposed to the ridicule of the northbound traffic, but after ten or fifteen minutes he was able to cross. From here he had only a short walk to the Recreation Center at the edge of the Village of Lancaster, where there were some handball courts and a public pool.

The effect of the water on voices, the illusion of brilliance and suspense, was the same here as it had been at the Bunkers' but the sounds here were louder, harsher, and more shrill, and as soon as he entered the crowded enclosure he was confronted with regimentation. "ALL SWIMMERS MUST TAKE A SHOWER BEFORE USING THE POOL. ALL SWIMMERS MUST USE THE FOOTBATH. ALL SWIMMERS MUST WEAR THEIR IDENTIFICATION DISKS." He took a shower, washed his feet in a cloudy and bitter solution and made his way to the edge of the water. It stank of chlorine and looked to him like a sink. A pair of life-guards in a pair of towers blew police whistles at what seemed to be regular intervals and abused the swimmers through a public address system. Neddy remembered the sapphire water at the Bunkers' with longing and thought that he might contaminate himself—damage his own prosperousness and charm—by swimming in this murk, but he reminded himself that he was an explorer, a pilgrim, and that this was merely a stagnant bend in the Lucinda River. He dove, scowling with distaste, into the chlorine and had

to swim with his head above water to avoid collisions, but even so he was bumped into, splashed and jostled. When he got to the shallow end both lifeguards were shouting at him: "Hey, you, you without the identification disk, get outa the water." He did, but they had no way of pursuing him and he went through the reek of suntan oil and chlorine out through the hurricane fence and passed the handball courts. By crossing the road he entered the wooded part of the Halloran estate. The woods were not cleared and the footing was treacherous and difficult until he reached the lawn and the clipped beech hedge that encircled their pool.

The Hallorans were friends, an elderly couple of enormous wealth who seemed to bask in the suspicion that they might be Communists. They were zealous reformers but they were not Communists, and yet when they were accused, as they sometimes were, of subversion, it seemed to gratify and excite them. Their beech hedge was yellow and he guessed this had been blighted like the Levys' maple. He called hullo, hullo, to warn the Hallorans of his approach, to palliate his invasion of their privacy. The Hallorans, for reasons that had never been explained to him, did not wear bathing suits. No explanations were in order, really. Their nakedness was a detail in their uncompromising zeal for reform and he stepped politely out of his trunks before he went through the opening in the hedge.

Mrs. Halloran, a stout woman with white hair and a serene face, was reading the *Times*. Mr. Halloran was taking beech leaves out of the water with a scoop. They seemed not surprised or displeased to see him. Their pool was perhaps the oldest in the county, a fieldstone rectangle, fed by a brook. It had no filter or pump and its waters were the opaque gold of the stream.

"I'm swimming across the county," Ned said.

"Why, I didn't know one could," exclaimed Mrs. Halloran.

"Well, I've made it from the Westerhazys," Ned said. "That must be about four miles."

He left his trunks at the deep end, walked to the shallow end, and swam this stretch. As he was pulling himself out of the water he heard Mrs. Halloran say: "We've been *terribly* sorry to hear about all your misfortunes, Neddy."

"My misfortunes?" Ned asked. "I don't know what you mean."

"Why, we heard that you'd sold the house and that your poor children . . ."

"I don't recall having sold the house," Ned said, "and the girls are at home."

"Yes," Mrs. Halloran sighed. "Yes . . ." Her voice filled the air with an unseasonable melancholy and Ned spoke briskly. "Thank you for the swim."

"Well, have a nice trip," said Mrs. Halloran.

Beyond the hedge he pulled on his trunks and fastened them. They were loose and he wondered if, during the space of an afternoon, he could have lost some weight. He was cold and he was tired and the naked Hallorans and their dark water had depressed him. The swim was too much for his strength but how could he have guessed this, sliding down the banister that morning and sitting in the Westerhazys' sun? His arms were lame. His legs felt rubbery and ached at the joints. The worst of it was the cold in his bones and the feeling that he might never be warm again. Leaves were falling down around him and he smelled woodsmoke on the wind. Who would be burning wood at this time of year?

He needed a drink. Whiskey would warm him, pick him up, carry him through the last of his journey, refresh his feeling that it was original and valorous to swim across the county. Channel swimmers took brandy. He needed a stimulant. He crossed the lawn in front of the Hallorans' house and went down a little path to where they had built a house for their only daughter Helen and her husband Eric Sachs. The Sachses' pool was small and he found Helen and her husband there.

"Oh, *Neddy*," Helen said. "Did you lunch at Mother's?"

"Not *really*," Ned said. "I *did* stop to see your parents." This seemed to be explanation enough. "I'm terribly sorry to break in on you like this but I've taken a chill and I wonder if you'd give me a drink."

"Why, I'd *love* to," Helen said, "but there hasn't been anything in this house to drink since Eric's operation. That was three years ago."

Was he losing his memory, had his gift for concealing painful facts let him forget that he had sold his house, that his children were in trouble, and that his friend had been ill? His eyes slipped from Eric's face to his abdomen, where he saw three pale, sutured scars, two of them at least a foot long. Gone was his navel, and what, *Neddy* thought, would the roving hand, bed-checking one's gifts at 3 A.M. make of a belly with no navel, no link to birth, this breach in the succession?

"I'm sure you can get a drink at the Biswangers'," Helen said. "They're having an enormous do. You can hear it from here. Listen!"

She raised her head and from across the road, the lawns, the gardens, the woods, the fields, he heard again the brilliant noise of voices over water. "Well, I'll get wet," he said, still feeling that he had no freedom of choice about his means of travel. He dove into the Sachses' cold water and, gasping, close to drowning, made his way from one end of the pool to the other. "Lucinda and I want *terribly* to see you," he said over his shoulder, his face set toward the Biswangers'. "We're sorry it's been so long and we'll call you *very* soon."

He crossed some fields to the Biswangers' and the sounds of revelry there. They would be honored to give him a drink, they would be happy to give him a drink, they would in fact be lucky to give him a drink. The Biswangers invited him and Lucinda for dinner four times a year, six weeks in advance. They were always rebuffed and yet they continued to send out their invitations, unwilling to comprehend the rigid and undemocratic realities of their society. They were the sort of people who discussed the price of things at cocktails, exchanged market tips during dinner, and after dinner told dirty stories to mixed company. They did not belong to *Neddy's* set—they were not even on Lucinda's Christmas card list. He went toward their pool with feelings of indifference, charity, and some unease, since it seemed to be getting dark and these were the longest days of the year. The party when he joined it was noisy and large. Grace Biswanger was the kind of hostess who asked the optometrist, the veterinarian, the real-estate dealer and the dentist. No one was swimming and the twilight, reflected on the water of the pool, had a wintry gleam. There was a bar and he started for this. When Grace Biswanger saw him she came toward him, not affectionately as he had every right to expect, but belliciously.

"Why, this party has everything," she said loudly, "including a gate crasher."

She could not deal him a social blow—there was no question about this and he did not flinch. “As a gate crasher,” he asked politely, “do I rate a drink?”

“Suit yourself,” she said. “You don’t seem to pay much attention to invitations.”

She turned her back on him and joined some guests, and he went to the bar and ordered a whiskey. The bartender served him but he served him rudely. His was a world in which the caterer’s men kept the social score, and to be rebuffed by a part-time barkeep meant that he had suffered some loss of social esteem. Or perhaps the man was new and uninformed. Then he heard Grace at his back say: “They went for broke overnight—nothing but income—and he showed up drunk one Sunday and asked us to loan him five thousand dollars. . . .” She was always talking about money. It was worse than eating your peas off a knife. He dove into the pool, swam its length and went away.

The next pool on his list, the last but two, belonged to his old mistress, Shirley Adams. If he had suffered any injuries at the Biswangers’ they would be cured here. Love—sexual roughhouse in fact—was the supreme elixir, the painkiller, the brightly colored pill that would put the spring back into his step, the joy of life in his heart. They had had an affair last week, last month, last year. He couldn’t remember. It was he who had broken it off, his was the upper hand, and he stepped through the gate of the wall that surrounded her pool with nothing so considered as self-confidence. It seemed in a way to be his pool as the lover, particularly the illicit lover, enjoys the possessions of his mistress with an authority unknown to holy matrimony. She was there, her hair the color of brass, but her figure, at the edge of the lighted, cerulean water, excited in him no profound memories. It had been, he thought, a light-hearted affair, although she had wept when he broke it off. She seemed confused to see him and he wondered if she was still wounded. Would she, God forbid, weep again?

“What do you want?” she asked.

“I’m swimming across the county.”

“Good Christ. Will you ever grow up?”

“What’s the matter?”

“If you’ve come here for money,” she said, “I won’t give you another cent.”

“You could give me a drink.”

“I could but I won’t. I’m not alone.”

“Well, I’m on my way.”

He dove in and swam the pool, but when he tried to haul himself up onto the curb he found that the strength in his arms and his shoulders had gone, and he paddled to the ladder and climbed out. Looking over his shoulder he saw, in the lighted bathhouse, a young man. Going out onto the dark lawn he smelled chrysanthemums or marigolds—some stubborn autumnal fragrance—on the night air, strong as gas. Looking overhead he saw that the stars had come out, but why should he seem to see Andromeda, Cepheus, and Cassiopeia? What had become of the constellations of midsummer? He began to cry.

It was probably the first time in his adult life that he had ever cried, certainly the first time in his life that he had ever felt so miserable, cold, tired, and bewildered. He could not understand the rudeness of the caterer’s barkeep or the rudeness of a mistress who had come to him on her knees and showered his trousers with tears. He had swum too long, he had been

immersed too long, and his nose and his throat were sore from the water. What he needed then was a drink, some company, and some clean dry clothes, and while he could have cut directly across the road to his home he went on to the Gilmartins' pool. Here, for the first time in his life, he did not dive but went down the steps into the icy water and swam a hobbled side stroke that he might have learned as a youth. He staggered with fatigue on his way to the Clydes' and paddled the length of their pool, stopping again and again with his hand on the curb to rest. He climbed up the ladder and wondered if he had the strength to get home. He had done what he wanted, he had swum the county, but he was so stupefied with exhaustion that his triumph seemed vague. Stooped, holding onto the gateposts for support, he turned up the driveway of his house.

The place was dark. Was it so late that they had all gone to bed? Had Lucinda stayed at the Westerhazys' for supper? Had the girls joined her there or gone someplace else? Hadn't they agreed, as they usually did on Sunday, to regret all their invitations and stay at home? He tried the garage doors to see what cars were in but the doors were locked and rust came off the handles onto his hands. Going toward the house, he saw that the force of the thunderstorm had knocked one of the rain gutters loose. It hung down over the front door like an umbrella rib, but it could be fixed in the morning. The house was locked, and he thought that the stupid cook or the stupid maid must have locked the place up until he remembered that it had been some time since they had employed a maid or a cook. He shouted, pounded on the door, tried to force it with his shoulder, and then, looking in at the windows, saw that the place was empty.

1964

ROBERT HAYDEN

1913–1980

“Hayden is by far the best chronicler and rememberer of the African American heritage in these Americas that I know of,” the poet Michael Harper, whose own sense of history is indebted to Robert Hayden’s work, has said. Hayden’s poems save what has vanished, what has been lost to standard histories, like a 1920s prizefighter from the Midwest (“Free Fantasia: Tiger Flowers”) or a miner trapped in Crystal Cave (“Beginnings, V”). He records the loss of what others never noticed as missing, and in their recovery he discovers a significance in the passing moment, the passed-over figure, the inarticulate gesture, which lasts through time. Always, in his words, “opposed to the chauvinistic and the doctrinaire” in art, he cherished the freedom of the poet to write about whatever seized the imagination. But his imagination was in its nature elegiac and historical. As he remembers and re-creates the African American heritage, he speaks to the struggles of the individual spirit for freedom and to painful self-divisions known to the people of many

times and places. But if the circumstances he confronts in his poems are often harsh, his work captures the energy and joyfulness that make survival possible.

Born in Detroit, Michigan, Hayden grew up in a poor neighborhood called by its inhabitants, with affectionate irony, "Paradise Valley." His powerful sequence *Elegies for Paradise Valley* (1978) resurrects the neighborhood in its racial and ethnic mix. Memory for Hayden is an act of love that leads to self-awareness; in this sequence and in poems like "Those Winter Sundays," he writes about his own past, confronts its pain, and preserves its sustaining moments of happiness.

Hayden had a deep understanding of the conflicts that divide the self. His family history gave him an early acquaintance with such self-division: his parents' marriage ended when he was young, and his mother left him in the care of foster parents (whose surname he adopted) when she left Detroit to look for work. He remained with the Haydens even after his mother returned to Detroit when he was a teenager and lived for a period with his foster family until conflict arose between her and his foster mother. "I lived in the midst of so much turmoil all the time I didn't know if I loved or hated," he once said. As an African American and as a poet Hayden also lived between worlds. He courageously maintained his sense of vocation through years of critical neglect and amid the demands of full-time teaching at Fisk University from 1946 to 1968. He published his first book, *Heart-Shape in the Dust*, in 1940, but his mature work did not appear in quantity until his volume *Ballad of Remembrance* (1962). At the same time his belief that the poet should not be restricted by any set of themes, racial or otherwise, and the highly formal quality of his work led to criticism by some young African American writers in the 1960s. But Hayden never abandoned his belief in the power of art to speak universally. In a 1974 interview he told Dennis Gendron of rereading Yeats's poem "Easter 1916" in the wake of the riots in Detroit—"that is the kind of poetry I want to write," he said, in admiration of the ways Yeats conceived a particular historical and political moment so that it speaks across time and place.

In fact, Hayden did himself write that kind of poetry. His most famous poem, "Middle Passage," demonstrates his transfiguring imagination and the knowledge of historical documents, which began early in his career. In 1936, after leaving college because of increasingly difficult economic conditions, Hayden joined the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, and for two years he researched the history of abolition movements and the Underground Railroad in Michigan. "Middle Passage" is a collage of accounts of the slave ships that transported men and women from Africa into slavery in the New World. Through the multiple voices in the poem, Hayden lets the accounts of those who participated in (and profited from) the slave trade reveal the evidence of their own damnation. The blindness that attacks one of the ships becomes a symbol of the devastating suffering of those transported into slavery and of the moral blindness everywhere evident in the traders' accounts. The collage technique allows Hayden to suggest the fragmentation of the story; the silences in the poem evoke the missing voices of those who suffered and died on the voyages or in the intolerable conditions of slavery. At the heart of the poem is the account of a rebellion led by one of the slaves (Cinquez) on the ship *Amistad*. Cinquez is one of several figures in Hayden's poems who dramatize "The deep immortal human wish / the timeless will" ("Middle Passage") that for Hayden is the indomitable yearning for freedom. This "timeless will" and struggle also appear in his poems about Harriet Tubman ("Runagate Runagate"), Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Phillis Wheatley, and the later figures Paul Robeson and Bessie Smith.

Hayden's experiment with collage technique in "Middle Passage" connects him to modernist poets like T. S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams and to an African American tradition acutely aware of the power of voice. He continued to experiment with poetic form and with the creation of different voices, always testing the possibilities of craft and forging a language to express what he knew and felt. His sequences *Beginnings* and *Elegies for Paradise Valley* demonstrate his formal origi-

nality, as does his late poem “American Journal,” with its long lines and its approximation to prose. Hayden loved language and was unafraid to be lushly descriptive as well as to be precisely imagistic. His work summons us to notice the world as we had not before and offers us candor, clear-sightedness, and a transforming gaiety.

From 1968 until his death, Hayden was professor of English at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. In 1976 he became the first African American to be appointed poetry consultant to the Library of Congress, the position now known as poet laureate of the United States.

Middle Passage¹

I

*Jesús, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy*²

Sails flashing to the wind like weapons,
sharks following the moans the fever and the dying;
horror the corposant and compass rose.³

Middle Passage: 5
voyage through death
to life upon these shores.

“10 April 1800—
Blacks rebellious. Crew uneasy. Our linguist says
their moaning is a prayer for death, 10
ours and their own. Some try to starve themselves.
Lost three this morning leaped with crazy laughter
to the waiting sharks, sang as they went under.”

Desire, Adventure, Tartar, Ann:

Standing to America, bringing home 15
black gold, black ivory, black seed.

*Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,
of his bones New England pews are made,
those are altar lights that were his eyes.*⁴

Jesus Saviour Pilot Me 20
Over Life's Tempestuous Sea⁵

We pray that Thou wilt grant, O Lord,
safe passage to our vessels bringing
heathen souls unto Thy chastening.

1. Main route for the slave trade in the Atlantic between Africa and the West Indies.

2. Names of slave ships. (*Estrella* and *Esperanza* are Spanish for “Star” and “Hope,” respectively.)

3. Circle printed on a map showing compass directions. “Corposant”: a fiery luminousness that can appear on the decks of ships during electrical

storms.

4. “Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes” (Shakespeare’s *Tempest* 1.2.400–402). The sprite Ariel is singing about the supposed death by drowning of the king of Naples.

5. Words from a Protestant hymn.

Jesus Saviour

25

“8 bells. I cannot sleep, for I am sick
 with fear, but writing eases fear a little
 since still my eyes can see these words take shape
 upon the page & so I write, as one
 would turn to exorcism. 4 days scudding, 30
 but now the sea is calm again. Misfortune
 follows in our wake like sharks (our grinning
 tutelary gods). Which one of us
 has killed an albatross?⁶ A plague among
 our blacks—Ophthalmia: blindness—& we 35
 have jettisoned the blind to no avail.
 It spreads, the terrifying sickness spreads.
 Its claws have scratched sight from the Capt.’s eyes
 & there is blindness in the fo’c’sle⁷
 & we must sail 3 weeks before we come 40
 to port.”

*What port awaits us, Davy Jones’
 or home? I’ve heard of slavers drifting, drifting,
 playthings of wind and storm and chance, their crews
 gone blind, the jungle hatred 45
 crawling up on deck.*

Thou Who Walked On Galilee

“Deponent further sayeth *The Bella J*
 left the Guinea Coast
 with cargo of five hundred blacks and odd 50
 for the barracoons⁸ of Florida:

“That there was hardly room ’tween-decks for half
 the sweltering cattle stowed spoon-fashion there;
 that some went mad of thirst and tore their flesh
 and sucked the blood: 55

“That Crew and Captain lusted with the comeliest
 of the savage girls kept naked in the cabins;
 that there was one they called The Guinea Rose
 and they cast lots and fought to lie with her:

“That when the Bo’s’n piped all hands,⁹ the flames 60
 spreading from starboard already were beyond
 control, the negroes howling and their chains
 entangled with the flames:

6. A bird of good omen; to kill one is an unlucky and impious act (as in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*).

7. Short for forecassle, the place in a ship where

sailors are quartered.

8. Barracks or enclosures for slaves.

9. I.e., when the boatswain (petty officer aboard a ship) signaled to summon all the crew on deck.

“That the burning blacks could not be reached,
 that the Crew abandoned ship, 65
 leaving their shrieking negresses behind,
 that the Captain perished drunken with the wenches:

“Further Deponent sayeth not.”

Pilot Oh Pilot Me

II

Aye, lad, and I have seen those factories, 70
 Gambia, Rio Pongo, Calabar;¹
 have watched the artful mongos² baiting traps
 of war wherein the victor and the vanquished

Were caught as prizes for our barracoons.
 Have seen the nigger kings whose vanity 75
 and greed turned wild black hides of Fellatah,
 Mandingo, Ibo, Kru³ to gold for us.

And there was one—King Anthracite we named him—
 fetish face beneath French parasols
 of brass and orange velvet, impudent mouth 80
 whose cups were carven skulls of enemies:

He'd honor us with drum and feast and conjo⁴
 and palm-oil-glistening wenches deft in love,
 and for tin crowns that shone with paste,
 red calico and German-silver trinkets 85

Would have the drums talk war and send
 his warriors to burn the sleeping villages
 and kill the sick and old and lead the young
 in coffles⁵ to our factories.

Twenty years a trader, twenty years, 90
 for there was wealth aplenty to be harvested
 from those black fields, and I'd be trading still
 but for the fevers melting down my bones.

III

Shuttles in the rocking loom of history,
 the dark ships move, the dark ships move, 95
 their bright ironical names
 like jests of kindness on a murderer's mouth;

1. A city in southeast Nigeria. Gambia is a river and nation in West Africa. Rio Pongo is a watercourse, dry for most of the year, in East Africa.
 2. I.e., Africans.

3. African tribes.

4. Dance.

5. Train of slaves fastened together.

plough through thrashing glister toward
 fata morgana's lucent melting shore,
 weave toward New World littorals⁶ that are
 mirage and myth and actual shore. 100

Voyage through death,
 voyage whose chartings are unlove.

A charnel stench, effluvium of living death
 spreads outward from the hold,
 where the living and the dead, the horribly dying,
 lie interlocked, lie foul with blood and excrement. 105

*Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,
 the corpse of mercy rots with him,
 rats eat love's rotten gelid eyes.* 110

*But, oh, the living look at you
 with human eyes whose suffering accuses you,
 whose hatred reaches through the swill of dark
 to strike you like a leper's claw.*

*You cannot stare that hatred down
 or chain the fear that stalks the watches
 and breathes on you its fetid scorching breath;
 cannot kill the deep immortal human wish,
 the timeless will.* 115

"But for the storm that flung up barriers
 of wind and wave, *The Amistad*,⁷ señores,
 would have reached the port of Príncipe in two,
 three days at most; but for the storm we should
 have been prepared for what befell. 120

Swift as the puma's leap it came. There was
 that interval of moonless calm filled only
 with the water's and the rigging's usual sounds,
 then sudden movement, blows and snarling cries
 and they had fallen on us with machete
 and marlinspike. It was as though the very
 air, the night itself were striking us. 130

Exhausted by the rigors of the storm,
 we were no match for them. Our men went down
 before the murderous Africans. Our loyal
 Celestino ran from below with gun
 and lantern and I saw, before the cane-
 knife's wounding flash, Cinquez,
 that surly brute who calls himself a prince, 135

6. Coastal regions. "Fata morgana": mirage.

7. A Spanish ship—the name means "Friendship"—that carried fifty-three illegally obtained

slaves out of Havana, Cuba, in July 1839. The slaves revolted and seized the ship.

directing, urging on the ghastly work.⁸
 He hacked the poor mulatto down, and then 140
 he turned on me. The decks were slippery
 when daylight finally came. It sickens me
 to think of what I saw, of how these apes
 threw overboard the butchered bodies of
 our men, true Christians all, like so much jetsam. 145
 Enough, enough. The rest is quickly told:
 Cinquez was forced to spare the two of us
 you see to steer the ship to Africa,
 and we like phantoms doomed to rove the sea
 voyaged east by day and west by night, 150
 deceiving them, hoping for rescue,
 prisoners on our own vessel, till
 at length we drifted to the shores of this
 your land, America, where we were freed
 from our unspeakable misery. Now we 155
 demand, good sirs, the extradition of
 Cinquez and his accomplices to La
 Havana.⁹ And it distresses us to know
 there are so many here who seem inclined
 to justify the mutiny of these blacks. 160
 We find it paradoxical indeed
 that you whose wealth, whose tree of liberty
 are rooted in the labor of your slaves
 should suffer the august John Quincy Adams
 to speak with so much passion of the right 165
 of chattel slaves to kill their lawful masters
 and with his Roman rhetoric weave a hero's
 garland for Cinquez.¹ I tell you that
 we are determined to return to Cuba
 with our slaves and there see justice done. Cinquez— 170
 or let us say 'the Prince'—Cinquez shall die."

The deep immortal human wish,
 the timeless will:

Cinquez its deathless primaveral image,
 life that transfigures many lives. 175

Voyage through death
 to life upon these shores.

1962

8. During the mutiny the Africans, led by a man called Cinqué, or Cinquez, killed the captain, his slave Celestino, and the mate, but spared the two slave owners.

9. After two months the *Amistad* reached Long Island Sound, where it was detained by the American ship *Washington*, the slaves were imprisoned,

and the owners were freed. The owners began litigation to return the slaves to Havana to be tried for murder.

1. The case reached the Supreme Court in 1841; the Africans were defended by former president John Quincy Adams, and the court released the thirty-seven survivors to return to Africa.

Homage to the Empress of the Blues¹

Because there was a man somewhere in a candystripe silk shirt,
 gracile and dangerous as a jaguar and because a woman moaned for him
 in sixty-watt gloom and mourned him Faithless Love
 Twotiming Love Oh Love Oh Careless Aggravating Love,

She came out on the stage in yards of pearls, emerging like 5
 a favorite scenic view, flashed her golden smile and sang.

Because grey laths began somewhere to show from underneath
 torn hurdygurdy² lithographs of dollfaced heaven;
 and because there were those who feared alarming fists of snow
 on the door and those who feared the riot-squad of statistics, 10

She came out on the stage in ostrich feathers, beaded satin,
 and shone that smile on us and sang.

1962

Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early
 and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
 then with cracked hands that ached
 from labor in the weekday weather made
 banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him. 5

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
 When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
 and slowly I would rise and dress,
 fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him, 10
 who had driven out the cold
 and polished my good shoes as well.
 What did I know, what did I know
 of love's austere and lonely offices?

1962

1. Bessie Smith (1895–1937), one of the greatest American blues singers. Her flamboyant style, which grew out of the black vaudeville tradition, made her popular in the 1920s.

2. A disreputable kind of dance hall, so called because of the hurdy-gurdies (barrel organs) that provided the music for dancing. "Laths": the strips of wood that form a backing for wall plaster.

Free Fantasia: Tiger Flowers¹

for Michael

The sporting people
 along St. Antoine—²
 that scufflers'
 paradise of ironies—
 bet salty money 5
 on his righteous
 hook and jab.

I was a boy then, running
 (unbeknownst to Pa)
 errands for Miss Jackie 10
 and Stack-o'-Diamonds' Eula Mae.
 . . . Their perfumes,
 rouged Egyptian faces.
 Their pianolas jazzing.

O Creole babies, 15
 Dixie odalisques,³
 speeding through cutglass
 dark to see the macho angel
 trick you'd never
 turn, his bluesteel prowess 20
 in the ring.

Hardshell believers
 amen'd the wreck
 as God A'mighty's
 will. I'd thought 25
 such gaiety could not
 die. Nor could our
 elegant avenger.

The Virgin Forest
 by Rousseau⁴— 30
 its psychedelic flowers
 towering, its deathless
 dark dream figure
 death the leopard
 claws—I choose it 35
 now as elegy
 for Tiger Flowers.

1975

1. A midwestern boxer (1895–1927) who in 1926 became the first African American middleweight champion.

2. Street in Detroit, Michigan.

3. Female slaves or concubines in a harem.

4. Henri Rousseau (1844–1910), French painter known for jungle scenes and exotic colors.

RANDALL JARRELL

1914–1965

“**M**onstrously knowing and monstrously innocent. . . . A Wordsworth with the obsession of a Lewis Carroll”—so Robert Lowell once described his friend and fellow poet Randall Jarrell. Jarrell was a teacher and a critic as well as a poet, and for many writers of his generation—Lowell, Delmore Schwartz, and John Berryman among them—he was the critic whose taste was most unerring, who seemed to know instantly what was genuine and what was not. An extraordinary teacher, he loved the activity of teaching, both in and out of the classroom; “the gods who had taken away the poet’s audience had given him students,” he once said. The novelist Peter Taylor recalls that when he came to Vanderbilt University as a freshman in the mid-1930s, Jarrell, then a graduate student, had already turned the literary students into disciples; he held court discussing Chekhov on the sidelines of touch football games. For all his brilliance Jarrell was, at heart, democratic. Believing that poetry belongs to every life, his teaching, his literary criticism, and his poetry aimed to recapture and reeducate a general audience lost to poetry in an age of specialization. Jarrell’s interests were democratic as well, and he had a lifelong fascination with popular culture. Witty and incisive, Jarrell could be intimidating; at the same time he remained deeply in touch with childhood’s mystery and enchantment. It was as if, his close friend the philosopher Hannah Arendt once said, he “had emerged from the enchanted forests.” He loved fairy tales, translated a number of them, and wrote several books for children, among them *The Bat-Poet* (1964). The childlike quality of the person informs Jarrell’s poems as well; he is unembarrassed by the adult heart still in thrall to childhood’s wishes.

Jarrell was born in Nashville, Tennessee, but spent much of his childhood in Long Beach, California. After his parents divorced when he was eleven, he remained for a year with his grandparents in Hollywood, then returned to live with his mother in Nashville. He majored in psychology at Vanderbilt and stayed on there to do graduate work in English. In 1937 he left Nashville to teach at Kenyon College (Gambier, Ohio) at the invitation of his old Vanderbilt professor John Crowe Ransom, the *New Critic* and Fugitive poet. From that time on Jarrell almost always had some connection with a university: after Kenyon, the University of Texas, Sarah Lawrence College, and from 1947 until his death, the Women’s College of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. But, as suggested by his novel *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) with its mixed satiric and tender views of academic life, he was never satisfied with a cloistered education. As poetry editor of *The Nation* (1946), and then in a series of essays and reviews collected as *Poetry and the Age* (1953), he introduced readers to the work of his contemporaries—Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, the William Carlos Williams of *Paterson*—and influentially reassessed the reputations of Walt Whitman and Robert Frost.

Among the poets who emerged after World War II, Jarrell stands out for his colloquial plainness. While others—Richard Wilbur and the early Robert Lowell, for example—were writing highly structured poems with complicated imagery, Jarrell’s work feels and sounds close to what he calls in one poem the “dailiness of life” (“Well Water”). He is master of the everyday heartbreak and identifies with ordinary forms of loneliness. Jarrell’s gift of imaginative sympathy appears in the treatment of soldiers in his war poems, the strongest to come out of World War II. He had been trained as an Army Air Force pilot and after that as a control operator,



The Gotham Book Mart. This midtown Manhattan store was famous for its literary eminences. A December 1948 party drew a roomful of midcentury writers, including, clockwise, W. H. Auden on the ladder, Elizabeth Bishop, Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, Charles Henri Ford, William Rose Benét, Stephen Spender, Marya Zaturenska, Horace Gregory, Tennessee Williams, Richard Eberhart, Gore Vidal, and José García Villa.

and he had a sense of the war's special casualties. With their understanding of soldiers as both destructive and innocent at the same time, these poems make his volumes *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945) and *Losses* (1948) powerful and moving. Jarrell also empathized with the dreams, loneliness, and disappointments of women, whose perspective he often adopted, as in the title poem of his collection *The Woman at the Washington Zoo* (1960) and his poem "Next Day."

Against the blasted or unrealized possibilities of adult life Jarrell often poised the rich mysteries of childhood. The title poem of his last book, *The Lost World* (1965), looks back to his Los Angeles playtime, the movie sets and plaster dinosaurs and pterodactyls against whose eternal lighthearted presence he measures his own aging. The poem has Jarrell's characteristic sense of loss but also his capacity for a mysterious happiness, which animates the poem even as he holds "nothing" in his hands.

Jarrell suffered a nervous breakdown in February 1965, but returned to teaching that fall. In October he was struck by a car and died. His *Complete Poems* were published posthumously (1969), as were a translation of Goethe's *Faust*, Part I, in preparation at his death, and two books of essays, *The Third Book of Criticism* (1969) and *Kipling*, Auden & Co. (1980).

90 North¹

At home, in my flannel gown, like a bear to its floe,
 I clambered to bed; up the globe's impossible sides
 I sailed all night—till at last, with my black beard,
 My furs and my dogs, I stood at the northern pole.

There in the childish night my companions lay frozen, 5
 The stiff furs knocked at my starveling throat,
 And I gave my great sigh: the flakes came huddling,
 Were they really my end? In the darkness I turned to my rest.

—Here, the flag snaps in the glare and silence
 Of the unbroken ice. I stand here, 10
 The dogs bark, my beard is black, and I stare
 At the North Pole . . .

And now what? Why, go back.

Turn as I please, my step is to the south.
 The world—my world spins on this final point
 Of cold and wretchedness: all lines, all winds 15
 End in this whirlpool I at last discover.

And it is meaningless. In the child's bed
 After the night's voyage, in that warm world
 Where people work and suffer for the end
 That crowns the pain—in that Cloud-Cuckoo-Land² 20

I reached my North and it had meaning.
 Here at the actual pole of my existence,
 Where all that I have done is meaningless,
 Where I die or live by accident alone—

Where, living or dying, I am still alone; 25
 Here where North, the night, the berg of death
 Crowd me out of the ignorant darkness,
 I see at last that all the knowledge

I wrung from the darkness—that the darkness flung me—
 Is worthless as ignorance: nothing comes from nothing, 30
 The darkness from the darkness. Pain comes from the darkness
 And we call it wisdom. It is pain.

1942

1. The latitude of the North Pole.

2. A fantasy world; in Aristophanes' comedy *The*

Birds (414 B.C.E.), an imaginary city the cuckoos build in the sky.

The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner¹

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
 And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
 Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
 I woke to black flak² and the nightmare fighters.
 When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose. 5

1945

Second Air Force

Far off, above the plain the summer dries,
 The great loops of the hangars sway like hills.
 Buses and weariness and loss, the nodding soldiers
 Are wire, the bare frame building, and a pass
 To what was hers; her head hides his square patch 5
 And she thinks heavily: My son is grown.
 She sees a world: sand roads, tar-paper barracks,
 The bubbling asphalt of the runways, sage,
 The dunes rising to the interminable ranges, 10
 The dim flights moving over clouds like clouds.
 The armorers in their patched faded green,
 Sweat-stiffened, banded with brass cartridges,
 Walk to the line; their Fortresses,¹ all tail,
 Stand wrong and flimsy on their skinny legs,
 And the crews climb to them clumsily as bears. 15
 The head withdraws into its hatch (a boy's),
 The engines rise to their blind laboring roar,
 And the green, made beasts run home to air.
 Now in each aspect death is pure.
 (At twilight they wink over men like stars 20
 And hour by hour, through the night, some see
 The great lights floating in—from Mars, from Mars.)
 How emptily the watchers see them gone.

They go, there is silence; the woman and her son
 Stand in the forest of the shadows, and the light 25
 Washes them like water. In the long-sunken city
 Of evening, the sunlight stills like sleep
 The faint wonder of the drowned; in the evening,
 In the last dreaming light, so fresh, so old,

1. A ball turret was a plexiglass sphere set into the belly of a B-17 or B-24 [bomber], and inhabited by two .50 caliber machine-guns and one man, a short, small man. When this gunner tracked with his machine-guns a fighter attacking his bomber from below, he revolved with the turret; hunched upside-down in his little sphere, he looked like the

foetus in the womb. The fighters which attacked him were armed with cannon firing explosive shells. The hose was a steam hose [Jarrell's note].
 2. Antiaircraft fire.

1. B-17 Flying Fortresses, an American bomber in World War II.

The soldiers pass like beasts, unquestioning, 30
 And the watcher for an instant understands
 What there is then no need to understand;
 But she wakes from her knowledge, and her stare,
 A shadow now, moves emptily among
 The shadows learning in their shadowy fields 35
 The empty missions.

Remembering,
 She hears the bomber calling, *Little Friend!*²
 To the fighter hanging in the hostile sky,
 And sees the ragged flame eat, rib by rib, 40
 Along the metal of the wing into her heart:
 The lives stream out, blossom, and float steadily
 To the flames of the earth, the flames
 That burn like stars above the lands of men.

She saves from the twilight that takes everything 45
 A squadron shipping, in its last parade—
 Its dogs run by it, barking at the band—
 A gunner walking to his barracks, half-asleep,
 Starting at something, stumbling (above, invisible,
 The crews in the steady winter of the sky 50
 Tremble in their wired fur); and feels for them
 The love of life for life. The hopeful cells
 Heavy with someone else's death, cold carriers
 Of someone else's victory, grope past their lives
 Into her own bewilderment: The years meant *this?* 55

But for them the bombers answer everything.

1945

Next Day

Moving from Cheer to Joy, from Joy to All,
 I take a box
 And add it to my wild rice, my Cornish game hens.
 The slacked or shorted, basketed, identical
 Food-gathering flocks 5
 Are selves I overlook. Wisdom, said William James,¹

Is learning what to overlook. And I am wise
 If that is wisdom.
 Yet somehow, as I buy All from these shelves

2. In "Second Air Force" the woman visiting her son remembers what she has read on the front page of her newspaper the week before, a conversation between a bomber, in flames over Germany, and one of the fighters protecting it: "Then I heard the bomber call me in: 'Little Friend, Lit-

tle Friend, I got two engines on fire. Can you see me, Little Friend?' I said, 'I'm crossing right over you. Let's go home'" [Jarrell's note].

1. From *The Principles of Psychology*, by the American philosopher William James (1842–1910).

And the boy takes it to my station wagon,
 What I've become
 Troubles me even if I shut my eyes. 10

When I was young and miserable and pretty
 And poor, I'd wish
 What all girls wish: to have a husband,
 A house and children. Now that I'm old, my wish
 Is womanish: 15
 That the boy putting groceries in my car

See me. It bewilders me he doesn't see me.
 For so many years 20
 I was good enough to eat: the world looked at me
 And its mouth watered. How often they have undressed me,
 The eyes of strangers!
 And, holding their flesh within my flesh, their vile

Imaginings within my imagining, 25
 I too have taken
 The chance of life. Now the boy pats my dog
 And we start home. Now I am good.
 The last mistaken,
 Ecstatic, accidental bliss, the blind 30

Happiness that, bursting, leaves upon the palm
 Some soap and water—
 It was so long ago, back in some Gay
 Twenties, Nineties, I don't know . . . Today I miss
 My lovely daughter 35
 Away at school, my sons away at school,

My husband away at work—I wish for them.
 The dog, the maid,
 And I go through the sure unvarying days
 At home in them. As I look at my life,
 I am afraid 40
 Only that it will change, as I am changing:

I am afraid, this morning, of my face.
 It looks at me
 From the rear-view mirror, with the eyes I hate,
 The smile I hate. Its plain, lined look 45
 Of gray discovery
 Repeats to me: "You're old." That's all, I'm old.

And yet I'm afraid, as I was at the funeral
 I went to yesterday. 50
 My friend's cold made-up face, granite among its flowers,
 Her undressed, operated-on, dressed body
 Were my face and body.
 As I think of her I hear her telling me

How young I seem; I *am* exceptional; 55
 I think of all I have.
 But really no one is exceptional,
 No one has anything, I'm anybody,
 I stand beside my grave
 Confused with my life, that is commonplace and solitary. 60

1965

Well Water

What a girl called "the dailiness of life"
 (Adding an errand to your errand. Saying,
 "Since you're up . . ." Making you a means to
 A means to a means to) is well water
 Pumped from an old well at the bottom of the world. 5
 The pump you pump the water from is rusty
 And hard to move and absurd, a squirrel-wheel
 A sick squirrel turns slowly, through the sunny
 Inexorable hours. And yet sometimes
 The wheel turns of its own weight, the rusty 10
 Pump pumps over your sweating face the clear
 Water, cold, so cold! you cup your hands
 And gulp from them the dailiness of life.

1965

Thinking of the Lost World

This spoonful of chocolate tapioca
 Tastes like—like peanut butter, like the vanilla
 Extract Mama told me not to drink.
 Swallowing the spoonful, I have already traveled
 Through time to my childhood. It puzzles me 5
 That age is like it.
 Come back to that calm country
 Through which the stream of my life first meandered,
 My wife, our cat, and I sit here and see
 Squirrels quarreling in the feeder, a mockingbird 10
 Copying our chipmunk, as our end copies
 Its beginning.
 Back in Los Angeles, we missed
 Los Angeles. The sunshine of the Land
 Of Sunshine is a gray mist now, the atmosphere 15
 Of some factory planet: when you stand and look
 You see a block or two, and your eyes water.
 The orange groves are all cut down . . . My bow
 Is lost, all my arrows are lost or broken,
 My knife is sunk in the eucalyptus tree 20

Too far for even Pop to get it out,
 And the tree's sawed down. It and the stair-sticks
 And the planks of the tree house are all firewood
 Burned long ago; its gray smoke smells of Vicks.¹

Twenty Years After, thirty-five years after, 25
 Is as good as ever—better than ever,
 Now that D'Artagnan² is no longer old—
 Except that it is unbelievable.
 I say to my old self: "I believe. Help thou
 Mine unbelief." 30

I believe the dinosaur
 Or pterodactyl's married the pink sphinx
 And lives with those Indians in the undiscovered
 Country between California and Arizona
 That the mad girl told me she was princess of— 35
 Looking at me with the eyes of a lion,
 Big, golden, without human understanding,
 As she threw paper-wads from the back seat
 Of the car in which I drove her with her mother
 From the jail in Waycross to the hospital 40
 In Daytona. If I took my eyes from the road
 And looked back into her eyes, the car would—I'd be—

Or if only I could find a crystal set³
 Sometimes, surely, I could still hear their chief
 Reading to them from Dumas or *Amazing Stories*; 45
 If I could find in some Museum of Cars
 Mama's dark blue Buick, Lucky's electric,
 Couldn't I be driven there? Hold out to them,
 The paraffin half picked out, Tawny's dewclaw—
 And have walk to me from among their wigwams 50
 My tall brown aunt, to whisper to me: "Dead?
 They told you I was dead?"

As if you could die!
 If I never saw you, never again
 Wrote to you, even, after a few years, 55
 How often you've visited me, having put on,
 As a mermaid puts on her sealskin, another face
 And voice, that don't fool me for a minute—
 That are yours for good . . . All of them are gone
 Except for me; and for me nothing is gone— 60
 The chicken's body is still going round
 And round in widening circles, a satellite
 From which, as the sun sets, the scientist bends
 A look of evil on the unsuspecting earth.
 Mama and Pop and Dandeen are still there 65
 In the Gay Twenties.

The Gay Twenties! You say

1. A remedy for colds.

2. Hero of *The Three Musketeers* (1844), by Alexandre Dumas père; its sequel was *Twenty Years*

After (1845).

3. Old-fashioned radio receiver, often built by children in the 1920s and '30s.

The Gay Nineties . . . But it's all right: they *were* gay,
 O so gay! A certain number of years after,
 Any time is Gay, to the new ones who ask: 70
 "Was that the first World War or the second?"
 Moving between the first world and the second,
 I hear a boy call, now that my beard's gray:
 "Santa Claus! Hi, Santa Claus!" It *is* miraculous
 To have the children call you Santa Claus. 75
 I wave back. When my hand drops to the wheel,
 It is brown and spotted, and its nails are ridged
 Like Mama's. Where's my own hand? My smooth
 White bitten-fingernailed one? I seem to see
 A shape in tennis shoes and khaki riding-pants 80
 Standing there empty-handed; I reach out to it
 Empty-handed, my hand comes back empty,
 And yet my emptiness is traded for its emptiness,
 I have found that Lost World in the Lost and Found
 Columns whose gray illegible advertisements 85
 My soul has memorized world after world:
 LOST—NOTHING. STRAYED FROM NOWHERE. NO REWARD.
 I hold in my own hands, in happiness,
 Nothing: the nothing for which there's no reward.

1965

JOHN BERRYMAN

1914–1972

From a generation whose ideal poem was short, self-contained, and ironic, John Berryman emerged as the author of two extended and passionate works: "Homage to Mistress Bradstreet" and the lyric sequence *The Dream Songs*. It was as if Berryman needed more space than the single lyric provided—a larger theater in which to play out an unrelenting psychic drama. He had written shorter poems—songs and sonnets—but his discovery of large-scale dramatic situations and strange new voices astonished his contemporaries.

Berryman seemed fated to intense suffering and self-preoccupation. His father, a banker, shot himself outside his son's window when the boy was twelve. The suicide haunted Berryman to the end of his own life, which also came by suicide. Berryman, who was born John Smith, took a new name from his stepfather, also a banker. His childhood was a series of displacements: ten years near McAlester, Oklahoma, then Tampa, Florida, and after his father's suicide, Gloucester, Massachusetts, and New York City. His mother's second marriage ended in divorce, but his stepfather sent him to private school in Connecticut. Berryman graduated from Columbia College in 1936 and won a fellowship to Clare College, Cambridge, England.

He was later to say of himself, "I masquerade as a writer. Actually I am a scholar." However misleading this may be about his poetry, it reminds us that throughout his life Berryman drew nourishment from teaching—at Wayne State, at Harvard

(1940–43), then off and on at Princeton, and from 1955 until his death, at the University of Minnesota. He chose to teach not creative writing but literature and the “history of civilization,” and he claimed that such teaching forced him into areas in which he would not otherwise have done detailed work. A mixture of bookishness and wildness characterizes all his writing; five years of research lay behind the intensities of “Homage to Mistress Bradstreet,” while an important constituent of “huffy Henry’s” personality in *The Dream Songs* is his professorial awkwardness and exhibitionism.

Berryman seemed drawn to borrowing identities in his poetry. In his first important volume, *The Dispossessed* (1948), he had experimented with various dramatic voices in the short poems “Nervous Songs: The Song of the Demented Priest,” “A Professor’s Song,” “The Song of the Tortured Girl,” and “The Song of the Man Forsaken and Obsessed.” The *dispossession* of the book’s title had two opposite and urgent meanings for him: “the miserable, *put out of one’s own*, and the relieved, saved, undevilled, de-spelled.” Taking on such roles was for Berryman both a revelation of his cast-out, fatherless state and an exorcism of it. It was perhaps in that spirit that he entered into an imaginary dialogue with what he felt as the kindred nature of the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet. “Both of our worlds unhandes us.” What started out to be a poem of fifty lines emerged as the fifty-seven stanzas of “Homage to Mistress Bradstreet” (1956), a work so absorbing that after completing it Berryman claimed to be “a ruin for two years.” It was not Bradstreet’s poetry that engaged him. Quite the contrary: he was fascinated by the contrast between her “bald abstract rime” and her life of passionate suffering. The poem explores the kinship between Bradstreet and Berryman as figures of turbulence and rebellion.

Berryman took literary encouragement from another American poet of the past, Stephen Crane, about whom he wrote a book-length critical study in 1950. Crane’s poems, he said, have “the character of a ‘dream,’ something seen naively in a new relation.” Berryman’s attraction to a poetry that accommodated the nightmare antics of the dream world became apparent in his own long work, *The Dream Songs*. It was modeled, he claimed, on “the greatest American poem,” Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” in which the speaker assumes a fluid, ever-changing persona. 77 *Dream Songs* was published in 1964. Additional poems, to a total of 385, appeared in *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (1968). (Some uncollected dream songs were published posthumously in *Henry’s Fate*, 1977, and drafts of others remained in manuscript.) Obvious links exist between Berryman and other so-called confessional writers such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. But the special autobiographical flavor of *The Dream Songs* is that of a psychic vaudeville; as in dreams, the poet represents himself through a fluid series of alter egos, whose voices often flow into one another in single poems. One of these voices is that of a blackface minstrel, and Berryman’s appropriation of this dialect prompted Michael Harper’s poem “Tongue-Tied in Black and White,” written both as homage to Berryman and as part of Harper’s quarrel with the use of “that needful black idiom offending me” (“Tongue-Tied in Black and White”). Despite the suffering that these poems enact, Berryman seemed to find a secret strength through the staginess, variety, resourcefulness, and renewals of these poems.

The Dream Songs brought Berryman a success that was not entirely beneficial. The collection *Love and Fame* (1970) shows him beguiled by his own celebrity and wrestling with some of its temptations. In an unfinished, posthumously published novel, *Recovery*, he portrays himself as increasingly prey to alcoholism. Berryman had been married twice before, and his hospitalization for drinking and for periods of insanity had put a strain on his third marriage. He came to distrust his poetry as a form of exhibitionism, and in his use of the discipline of prose and in the prayers that crowd his last two volumes of poetry (*Delusions, Etc.* appeared posthumously), he was clearly in search of some new and humbling style. Having been raised a strict Catholic and fallen away from the church, he tried to return to it in his last years, speaking of his need for a “God of rescue.” On January 7, 1972, Berryman committed suicide by leaping from a Minneapolis bridge.

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet Anne Bradstreet (“Born 1612 Anne Dudley, married at 16 Simon Bradstreet, a Cambridge man, steward to the Countess of Warwick and protegee of her father Thomas Dudley secretary to the Earl of Lincoln. Crossed in the *Arbella*, 1630, under Governor Winthrop” [Berryman’s note]) came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony when she was eighteen years old. She was one of the first poets on American soil. Of this poem, Berryman says:

An American historian somewhere observes that all colonial settlements are intensely conservative, *except* in the initial break-off point (whether religious, political, legal, or whatever). Trying to do justice to both parts of this obvious truth—which I came upon only after the poem was finished—I concentrated upon the second and the poem laid itself out in a series of rebellions. I had her rebel first against the new environment and above all against her barrenness (which in fact lasted for years), then against her marriage (which in fact seems to have been brilliantly happy), and finally against her continuing life of illness, loss, and age. These are the three large sections of the poem; they are preceded and followed by an exordium and coda, of four stanzas each, spoken by the “I” of the twentieth-century poet, which modulates into her voice, who speaks most of the poem. Such is the plan. Each rebellion, of course, is succeeded by submission, although even in the moment of the poem’s supreme triumph—the presentment, too long to quote now, of the birth of her first child—rebellion survives.

Berryman wrote two stanzas of the poem and found himself stalled for five years, during which he gathered material, until he discovered the strategy of dialogue and inserted himself in the poem. “Homage to Mistress Bradstreet” was first published in *Partisan Review* in 1953, but did not appear as a book until 1956.

In his exordium (stanzas 1–4), the poet makes an intense identification between himself and Bradstreet, both of them alienated by hardship or circumstance from those around them: “We are on each other’s hands / who care. Both of our worlds unhanding us.” The identification is so complete that in the subsequent stanzas he hears her voice recounting the tribulations of life in a new country, her yearnings for the England she left behind, her lonely dedication to her poetry, and the personal suffering in her early barrenness and miscarriages. Stanza 17 continues in Bradstreet’s voice.

From Homage to Mistress Bradstreet

* * *

17

The winters close, Springs open, no child stirs
 under my withering heart, O seasoned heart 130
 God grudged his aid.
 All things else soil like a shirt.
 Simon is much away. My executive¹ stales.
 The town came through for the cartway by the pales,²
 but my patience is short, 135
 I revolt from, I am like, these savage foresters

1. Power to act.

2. Stockade fence.

18

whose passionless dicker in the shade, whose glance
 impassive & scant, belie their murderous cries
 when quarry seems to show.
 Again I must have been wrong, twice.³ 140
 Unwell in a new way. Can that begin?
 God brandishes. O love, O I love. Kin,
 gather. My world is strange
 and merciful, ingrown months, blessing a swelling trance.⁴

19

So squeezed, wince you I scream? I love you & hate 145
 off with you. Ages! *Useless*. Below my waist
 he has me in Hell's vise.
 Stalling. He let go. Come back: brace
 me somewhere. No. No. Yes! everything down
 hardens I press with horrible joy down 150
 my back cracks like a wrist
 shame I am voiding oh behind it is too late

20

hide me forever I work thrust I must free
 now I all muscles & bones concentrate
 what is living from dying? 155
 Simon I must leave you so untidy
 Monster you are killing me Be sure
 I'll have you later Women do endure
 I can *can* no longer
 and it passes the wretched trap whelming and I am me 160

21

drencht & powerful, I did it with my body!
 One proud tug greens Heaven. Marvellous,
 unforbidding Majesty.
 Swell, imperious bells. I fly.
 Mountainous, woman not breaks and will bend: 165
 sways God nearby: anguish comes to an end.
 Blossomed Sarah,⁵ and I
 blossom. Is that thing alive? I hear a famisht howl.

22

Beloved household, I am Simon's wife,
 and the mother of Samuel—whom greedy yet I miss 170
 out of his kicking place.

3. One of the several allusions to her failure to become pregnant.

4. Her first child was not born until about 1633

[Berryman's note].

5. Wife of Abraham, barren until old age, when she gave birth to Isaac (Genesis 17.19).

More in some ways I feel at a loss,
 freer. Cantabanks & mummers,⁶ nears
 longing for you. Our chopping⁷ scores my ears,
 our costume bores my eyes. 175
 St. George⁸ to the good sword, rise! chop-logic's rife

23

& fever & Satan & Satan's ancient fere.⁹
 Pioneering is not feeling well,
 not Indians, beasts. 180
 Not all their riddling can forestall
 one leaving. Sam, your uncle has had to
 go from us to live with God. 'Then Aunt went too?'
 Dear, she does wait still.
 Stricken: 'Oh. Then he takes us one by one.' My dear.

24

Forswearing it otherwise, they starch their minds. 185
 Folkmoots, & blether, blether. John Cotton rakes¹
 to the synod of Cambridge.²
 Down from my body my legs flow,
 out from it arms wave, on it my head shakes.
 Now Mistress Hutchinson rings forth a call— 190
 should she? many creep out a broken wall—
 affirming the Holy Ghost
 dwells in one justified. Factioning passion blinds

25

all to all her good, all—can she be exiled?
 Bitter sister, victim! I miss you. 195
 —I miss you, Anne,³
 day or night weak as a child,
 tender & empty, doomed, quick to no tryst.
 —I hear you. Be kind, you who leaguer⁴
 my image in the mist. 200
 —Be kind you, to one unchained eager far & wild

6. Ballad singers and mimes.

7. *Chopping*: disputing, snapping, haggling; axing [Berryman's note].

8. Patron saint of England; the slayer of dragons.

9. *Fere*: his friend Death [Berryman's note].

1. "*Rakes*: inclines, as a mast; bows" [Berryman's note]. "*Folkmoots*": a town assembly for debate. "*Blether*": nonsense.

2. In the first synod (a body for religious debate), Cotton agreed to the condemnation and banishment of his follower Anne Hutchinson. Her heresies included a deemphasis of perfect moral conduct as evidence of the justification for Christian salvation.

3. One might say: He [the poet] is enabled to speak, at last, in the fortune of an echo of her—and when she is loneliest (her former spiritual adviser [John Cotton] having deserted Anne Hutchinson, and this her [Bradstreet's] closest friend banished), as if she had summoned him; and only thus, perhaps, is she enabled to hear him. This second section of the poem is a dialogue, his voice however ceasing well before it ends at [line] 307, and hers continuing for the whole third part until the coda ([stanzas] 54–57) [Berryman's note].

4. Beleaguer, besiege.

26

and if, O my love, my heart is breaking, please
 neglect my cries and I will spare you. Deep
 in Time's grave, Love's, you lie still.
 Lie still.—Now? That happy shape 205
 my forehead had under my most long, rare,
 ravendark, hidden, soft bodiless hair
 you award me still.
 You must not love me, but I do not bid you cease.

27

Veiled my eyes, attending. How can it be I? 210
 Moist, with parted lips, I listen, wicked.
 I shake in the morning & retch.
 Brood I do on myself naked.
 A fading world I dust, with fingers new.
 —I have earned the right to be alone with you. 215
 —What right can that be?
 Convulsing, if you love, enough, like a sweet lie.

28

Not that, I know, you can. This cratered skin,
 like the crabs & shells of my Palissy⁵ ewer, touch!
 Oh, you do, you do? 220
 Falls on me what I like a witch,
 for lawless holds, annihilations of law
 which Time and he and man abhor, foresaw:
 sharper than what my Friend⁶
 brought me for my revolt when I moved smooth & thin, 225

29

faintings black, rigour, chilling, brown
 parching, back, brain burning, the grey pocks
 itch, a manic stench
 of pustules snapping, pain floods the palm,
 sleepless, or a red shaft with a dreadful start 230
 rides at the chapel, like a slipping heart.
 My soul strains in one qualm
 ah but *this* is not to save me but to throw me down.

30

And out of this I lull. It lessens. Kiss me.
 That once. As sings out up in sparkling dark 235
 a trail of a star & dies,
 while the breath flutters, sounding, mark,

5. Bernard Palissy (1510–1590), French Protestant ceramicist noted for special glazes and highly ornamented pieces.

6. Allusion to the punishments of God visited on those who rebel against him (cf. Isaiah 1.6).

so shorn ought such caresses to us be
 who, deserving nothing, flush and flee
 the darkness of that light, 240
 a lurching frozen from a warm dream. Talk to me.

31⁷

—It is Spring's New England. Pussy willows wedge
 up in the wet. Milky crestings, fringed
 yellow, in heaven, eyed
 by the melting hand-in-hand or mere 245
 desirers single, heavy-footed, rapt,
 make surge poor human hearts. Venus is trapt—
 the hefty pike shifts, sheer⁸—
 in Orion blazing. Warblings, odours, nudge to an edge—

32

—Ravishing, ha, what crouches outside ought, 250
 flamboyant, ill, angelic. Often, now,
 I am afraid of you.
 I am a sobersides; I know.
 I *want* to take you for my lover.—Do.
 —I hear a madness. Harmless I to you 255
 am not, not I?—No.
 —I cannot but be. Sing a concord of our thought.

33

—Wan dolls in indigo on gold:⁹ refrain
 my western lust. I am drowning in this past.
 I lose sight of you 260
 who mistress me from air. Unbraced
 in delirium of the grand depths,¹ giving away
 haunters what kept me, I breathe solid spray.
 —I am losing you!
 Straiten me on.²—I suffered living like a stain: 265

34

I trundle the bodies, on the iron bars,
 over that fire backward & forth; they burn;

7. Berryman (in *Poets on Poetry*) called this speech of the poet to Bradstreet "an only half-subdued aria-stanza."

8. Lines 246–47 are opposed images of the bottom of the sea against the summit of the sky, as imaged by the planet Venus and the constellation Orion. "Sheer" in the sense of "invisible" (quoted from comments by Berryman in the Italian translation of "Mistress Bradstreet" by Sergio Perosa).

9. Cf., on Byzantine icons [here, the impassive Madonnas painted against gold backgrounds in medieval altarpieces of the Eastern Church], Frederick Rolfe ("Baron Corvo"): "Who ever dreams of praying (with expectation of response)

for the prayer of a Tintoretto or a Titian, or a Bellini, or a Botticelli? But who can refrain from crying 'O Mother!' to these unruffleable wan dolls in indigo on gold?" (quoted from *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* by Graham Greene in *The Last Childhood*) [Berryman's note].

1. "Délîres des grandes profondeurs," described by [the twentieth-century French marine explorer Jacques-Yves] Cousteau and others; a euphoria, sometimes fatal, in which the hallucinated diver offers passing fish his line, helmet, anything [Berryman's note; he translates the French phrase in line 262].

2. I.e., tighten your embrace.

bits fall. I wonder if
 I killed them. Women serve my turn.
 —Dreams! You are good.—No.—Dense with hardihood 270
 the wicked are dislodged, and lodged the good.
 In green space we are safe.
 God awaits us (but I am yielding) who Hell wars.

35

—I cannot feel myself God waits. He flies
 nearer a kindly world; or he is flown. 275
 One Saturday's rescue³
 won't show. Man is entirely alone
 may be. I am a man of griefs & fits
 trying to be my friend. And the brown smock splits,
 down the pale flesh a gash 280
 broadens and Time holds up your heart against my eyes.

36

—Hard and divided heaven! creases me. Shame
 is failing. My breath is scented, and I throw
 hostile glances towards God.
 Crumpling plunge of a pestle, bray:⁴ 285
 sin cross & opposite, wherein I survive
 nightmares of Eden. Reaches foul & live
 he for me, this soul
 to crunch, a minute tangle of eternal flame.

37

I fear Hell's hammer-wind. But fear does wane. 290
 Death's blossoms grain my hair; I cannot live.
 A black joy clashes
 joy, in twilight. The Devil said
 'I will deal toward her softly, and her enchanting cries
 will fool the horns of Adam.'⁵ Father of lies, 295
 a male great pestle smashes
 small women swarming towards the mortar's rim in vain.

38

I see the cruel spread Wings black with saints!
 Silky my breasts not his, mine, mine to withhold
 or tender, tender. 300
 I am sifting, nervous, and bold.
 The light is changing. Surrender this loveliness

3. As of cliffhangers, movie serials wherein each week's episode ends with a train bearing down on the strapped heroine or with the hero dangling over an abyss into which Indians above him peer with satisfaction before they hatchet the rope; *rescue*: forcible recovery (by the owner) of goods dis-trained [Berryman's note].

4. Punning (according to Berryman's notes) on (1) the pulverizing action of a mortar and pestle and (2) the strident noise of a donkey.

5. Referring to Satan's temptation of Eve, who was to eat the apple from the Tree of Knowledge and then convince Adam to do so (cf. Genesis 3).

you cannot make me do. *But* I will. Yes.
 What horror, down stormy air,
 warps towards me? My threatening promise faints 305

39⁶

torture me, Father, lest not I be thine!
 Tribunal terrible & pure, my God,
 mercy for him and me.
 Faces half-fanged, Christ drives abroad,
 and though the crop hopes, Jane⁷ is so slipshod 310
 I cry. Evil dissolves, & love, like foam;
 that love. Prattle of children powers me home,
 my heart claps like the swan's
 under a frenzy of *who* love me & who shine.⁸

* * *

1953, 1956

FROM THE DREAM SONGS¹

I

Huffy Henry hid the day,
 unappeasable Henry sulked.
 I see his point,—a trying to put things over.
 It was the thought that they thought
 they could *do* it made Henry wicked & away. 5
 But he should have come out and talked.

All the world like a woolen lover
 once did seem on Henry's side.
 Then came a departure.
 Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought. 10
 I don't see how Henry, pried
 open for all the world to see, survived.

6. The stanza is unsettled, like [stanza] 24, by a middle line, signaling a broad transition [Berryman's note].

7. A servant.

8. The final stanzas present Bradstreet's intensified vision of death and damnation and include the death of her father, blaspheming. But in the last four stanzas the poem modulates back into the poet's voice and his vow to keep Bradstreet alive in his loving memory and in his writing. "Hover, utter, still, a sourcing whom my lost candle like the firefly loves."

1. These poems were written over a period of thirteen years. (77 *Dream Songs* was published in 1964, and the remaining poems appeared in *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* in 1968. Some uncol-

lected dream songs were included in the volume *Henry's Fate*, which appeared five years after Berryman committed suicide in 1972.) Berryman placed an introductory note at the head of *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest*: "The poem then, whatever its wide cast of characters, is essentially about an imaginary character (not the poet, not me) named Henry, a white American in early middle age sometimes in blackface, who has suffered an irreversible loss and talks about himself sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, sometimes even in the second; he has a friend, never named, who addresses him as Mr. Bones and variants thereof. Requiescant in pace." (The final sentence here is Latin for "Rest in peace.")

What he has now to say is a long
wonder the world can bear & be.
Once in a sycamore I was glad 15
all at the top, and I sang.
Hard on the land wears the strong sea
and empty grows every bed.

14

Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.
After all, the sky flashes, the great sea yearns,
we ourselves flash and yearn,
and moreover my mother told me as a boy
(repeatingly) 'Ever to confess you're bored 5
means you have no

Inner Resources.' I conclude now I have no
inner resources, because I am heavy bored.
Peoples bore me,
literature bores me, especially great literature, 10
Henry bores me, with his plights & gripes
as bad as achilles,²

who loves people and valiant art, which bores me.
And the tranquil hills, & gin, look like a drag
and somehow a dog 15
has taken itself & its tail considerably away
into mountains or sea or sky, leaving
behind: me, wag.

29

There sat down, once, a thing on Henry's heart
so heavy, if he had a hundred years
& more, & weeping, sleepless, in all them time
Henry could not make good.
Starts again always in Henry's ears 5
the little cough somewhere, an odour, a chime.

And there is another thing he has in mind
like a grave Sienese face³ a thousand years
would fail to blur the still profiled reproach of. Ghastly,
with open eyes, he attends, blind. 10
All the bells say: too late. This is not for tears;
thinking.

2. Greek hero of Homer's *Iliad*, who, angry at slights against his honor, sulked in his tent and refused to fight against the Trojans.

3. Allusion to the somber, austere mosaiclike religious portraits by the Italian painters who worked in Siena during the 13th and 14th centuries.

But never did Henry, as he thought he did,
 end anyone and hacks her body up
 and hide the pieces, where they may be found. 15
 He knows: he went over everyone, & nobody's missing.
 Often he reckons, in the dawn, them up.
 Nobody is ever missing.

40

I'm scared a lonely. Never see my son,
 easy be not to see anyone,
 combers⁴ out to sea
 know they're goin somewhere but not me.
 Got a little poison, got a little gun. 5
 I'm scared a lonely.

I'm scared a only one thing, which is me,
 from othering I don't take nothin, see,
 for any hound dog's sake.
 But this is where I livin, where I rake 10
 my leaves and cop my promise,⁵ this' where we
 cry oursel's awake.

Wishin was dyin but I gotta make
 it all this way to that bed on these feet
 where peoples said to meet. 15
 Maybe but even if I see my son
 forever never, get back on the take,
 free, black & forty-one.⁶

384

The marker slants, flowerless, day's almost done,
 I stand above my father's grave with rage,
 often, often before
 I've made this awful pilgrimage to one
 who cannot visit me, who tore his page 5
 out: I come back for more,

I spit upon this dreadful banker's grave
 who shot his heart out in a Florida dawn
 O ho alas alas
 When will indifference come, I moan & rave 10

4. Waves that roll over and break with a foamy crest.

5. Slang for "pile up potential."

6. Playing on "free, white, and twenty-one," colloquial expression for legally independent.

I'd like to scrabble till I got right down
away down under the grass

and ax the casket open ha to see
just how he's taking it, which he sought so hard
we'll tear apart
the mouldering grave clothes ha & then Henry
will heft the ax once more, his final card,
and fell it on the start.

15

1968

BERNARD MALAMUD

1914–1986

Bernard Malamud began late as a writer, publishing his first novel at age thirty-eight and reaching a wider audience about a decade later. It is his second novel (*The Assistant*, 1957) that most readers, rightly, consider his best. Malamud knew well the urban life he wrote about in that book. He was born in Brooklyn, graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn and the City College of New York, then earned a master's degree at Columbia. During the 1940s he taught evening classes at Erasmus Hall and Harlem Evening High School, while writing short stories that by 1950 had begun to appear in such magazines as *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*. Along with Saul Bellow, he was an important member of the group of Jewish novelists who flourished in the 1950s and beyond, but unlike Bellow, his stories were usually notable for the way they captured the speech and manners of working-class, recently immigrated Jews.

That urban Jewish milieu was absent from his first novel, *The Natural* (1952), which tells of an injured Major League pitcher reborn into a splendid outfielder. (Malamud may have been influenced by John R. Tunis's popular boy's book, *The Kid from Tompkinsville*, 1939.) The book contains much allegorical play with the Grail legend and other myths, but it held at arm's length Malamud's deeper concerns, which came to full expression in *The Assistant*, with its vivid but depressing rendering of a grocer's day-to-day existence. Rejecting the frenetic verbal energy of his first novel, Malamud wrote *The Assistant* in a low-key, rather toneless style, just right for catching the drab solemnities of his characters' lives. Like Bellow's *The Victim*, published a few years previously, the novel is about human responsibility and the possibilities for conversion, seen through the conflict between Jew and Gentile. This conflict is given life through faithfully rendered speech and the patient yet always surprising turns of event with which the story unfolds. If the allegorical twist at its end is too ingenious for belief, still *The Assistant* remains unforgettable.

In subsequent novels Malamud extended and relaxed his style. The comic *A New Life* (1962) is about a hapless college professor at a West Coast university (Malamud taught at Oregon State for a time). *The Fixer* (1966) is a parable-history of the ritual murder of a Christian child. *The Tenants* (1971) attempted, in eventually violent, sensationalistic terms, to portray one minority's experience confronting another's—

Jew against African American. *Dubin's Lives* (1979) is a somewhat conventional tale of a writer of biographies who is suddenly overtaken by life, in the form of a desirable young woman (the novel is set in Vermont, where Malamud lived for years, teaching at Bennington College from 1961 until he retired). *God's Grace* (1982), by contrast, is a parable or fable, set in a post-thermonuclear future.

While these later novels seem sometimes abstract and didactic, *The Assistant* and Malamud's short fiction present memorable portraits of embattled Jews in grotesque circumstances. At times these figures resemble heroes of folklore; at other times they threaten to collapse into caricatures. In a story such as "The Lady in the Lake," the pathetic-comic hero becomes both. At his best, in that story or ones such as "The Magic Barrel" (printed here), "Idiots First," and "The Last Mohican," Malamud imagines, intensely and purely, his lonely questers for perfection as they become entangled in the imperfections of a social world. Such occasions of tragicomic humiliation sound the deeper note that was Malamud's trademark.

The following text is from the short-story collection *The Magic Barrel* (1958).

The Magic Barrel

Not long ago there lived in uptown New York, in a small, almost meager room, though crowded with books, Leo Finkle, a rabbinical student at the Yeshiva University.¹ Finkle, after six years of study, was to be ordained in June and had been advised by an acquaintance that he might find it easier to win himself a congregation if he were married. Since he had no present prospects of marriage, after two tormented days of turning it over in his mind, he called in Pinye Salzman, a marriage broker whose two-line advertisement he had read in the *Forward*.²

The matchmaker appeared one night out of the dark fourth-floor hallway of the graystone rooming house where Finkle lived, grasping a black, strapped portfolio that had been worn thin with use. Salzman, who had been long in the business, was of slight but dignified build, wearing an old hat, and an overcoat too short and tight for him. He smelled frankly of fish, which he loved to eat, and although he was missing a few teeth, his presence was not displeasing, because of an amiable manner curiously contrasted with mournful eyes. His voice, his lips, his wisp of beard, his bony fingers were animated, but give him a moment of repose and his mild blue eyes revealed a depth of sadness, a characteristic that put Leo a little at ease although the situation, for him, was inherently tense.

He at once informed Salzman why he had asked him to come, explaining that his home was in Cleveland, and that but for his parents, who had married comparatively late in life, he was alone in the world. He had for six years devoted himself almost entirely to his studies, as a result of which, understandably, he had found himself without time for a social life and the company of young women. Therefore he thought it the better part of trial and error—of embarrassing fumbling—to call in an experienced person to advise him on these matters. He remarked in passing that the function of the marriage broker was ancient and honorable, highly approved in the Jewish

1. In New York City; it offers courses in theological as well as secular disciplines. Generically, "yeshiva" is a term for a Jewish seminary.

2. *The Jewish Daily Forward*, a Yiddish-language daily newspaper published in New York City.

community, because it made practical the necessary without hindering joy. Moreover, his own parents had been brought together by a matchmaker. They had made, if not a financially profitable marriage—since neither had possessed any worldly goods to speak of—at least a successful one in the sense of their everlasting devotion to each other. Salzman listened in embarrassed surprise, sensing a sort of apology. Later, however, he experienced a glow of pride in his work, an emotion that had left him years ago, and he heartily approved of Finkle.

The two went to their business. Leo had led Salzman to the only clear place in the room, a table near a window that overlooked the lamp-lit city. He seated himself at the matchmaker's side but facing him, attempting by an act of will to suppress the unpleasant tickle in his throat. Salzman eagerly unstrapped his portfolio and removed a loose rubber band from a thin packet of much-handled cards. As he flipped through them, a gesture and sound that physically hurt Leo, the student pretended not to see and gazed steadfastly out the window. Although it was still February, winter was on its last legs, signs of which he had for the first time in years begun to notice. He now observed the round white moon, moving high in the sky through a cloud menagerie, and watched with half-open mouth as it penetrated a huge hen, and dropped out of her like an egg laying itself. Salzman, though pretending through eyeglasses he had just slipped on, to be engaged in scanning the writing on the cards, stole occasional glances at the young man's distinguished face, noting with pleasure the long, severe scholar's nose, brown eyes heavy with learning, sensitive yet ascetic lips, and a certain, almost hollow quality of the dark cheeks. He gazed around at shelves upon shelves of books and let out a soft, contented sigh.

When Leo's eyes fell upon the cards, he counted six spread out in Salzman's hand.

"So few?" he asked in disappointment.

"You wouldn't believe me how much cards I got in my office," Salzman replied. "The drawers are already filled to the top, so I keep them now in a barrel, but is every girl good for a new rabbi?"

Leo blushed at this, regretting all he had revealed of himself in a curriculum vitae he had sent to Salzman. He had thought it best to acquaint him with his strict standards and specifications, but in having done so, he felt he had told the marriage broker more than was absolutely necessary.

He hesitantly inquired, "Do you keep photographs of your clients on file?"

"First comes family, amount of dowry, also what kind promises," Salzman replied, unbuttoning his tight coat and settling himself in the chair. "After come pictures, rabbi."

"Call me Mr. Finkle. I'm not yet a rabbi."

Salzman said he would, but instead called him doctor, which he changed to rabbi when Leo was not listening too attentively.

Salzman adjusted his horn-rimmed spectacles, gently cleared his throat and read in an eager voice the contents of the top card:

"Sophie P. Twenty four years. Widow one year. No children. Educated high school and two years college. Father promises eight thousand dollars. Has wonderful wholesale business. Also real estate. On the mother's side comes teachers, also one actor. Well known on Second Avenue."

Leo gazed up in surprise. “Did you say a widow?”

“A widow don’t mean spoiled, rabbi. She lived with her husband maybe four months. He was a sick boy she made a mistake to marry him.”

“Marrying a widow has never entered my mind.”

“This is because you have no experience. A widow, especially if she is young and healthy like this girl, is a wonderful person to marry. She will be thankful to you the rest of her life. Believe me, if I was looking now for a bride, I would marry a widow.”

Leo reflected, then shook his head.

Salzman hunched his shoulders in an almost imperceptible gesture of disappointment. He placed the card down on the wooden table and began to read another:

“Lily H. High school teacher. Regular. Not a substitute. Has savings and new Dodge car. Lived in Paris one year. Father is successful dentist thirty-five years. Interested in professional man. Well Americanized family. Wonderful opportunity.”

“I knew her personally,” said Salzman. “I wish you could see this girl. She is a doll. Also very intelligent. All day you could talk to her about books and theater and what not. She also knows current events.”

“I don’t believe you mentioned her age?”

“Her age?” Salzman said, raising his brows. “Her age is thirty-two years.”

Leo said after a while, “I’m afraid that seems a little too old.”

Salzman let out a laugh. “So how old are you, rabbi?”

“Twenty-seven.”

“So what is the difference, tell me, between twenty-seven and thirty-two? My own wife is seven years older than me. So what did I suffer?—Nothing. If Rothschild’s³ daughter wants to marry you, would you say on account her age, no?”

“Yes,” Leo said dryly.

Salzman shook off the no in the yes. “Five years don’t mean a thing. I give you my word that when you will live with her for one week you will forget her age. What does it mean five years—that she lived more and knows more than somebody who is younger? On this girl, God bless her, years are not wasted. Each one that it comes makes better the bargain.”

“What subjects does she teach in high school?”

“Languages. If you heard the way she speaks French, you will think it is music. I am in the business twenty-five years, and I recommend her with my whole heart. Believe me, I know what I’m talking, rabbi.”

“What’s on the next card?” Leo said abruptly.

Salzman reluctantly turned up the third card:

“Ruth K. Nineteen years. Honor student. Father offers thirteen thousand cash to the right bridegroom. He is a medical doctor. Stomach specialist with marvelous practice. Brother in law owns own garment business. Particular people.”

Salzman looked as if he had read his trump card.

“Did you say nineteen?” Leo asked with interest.

“On the dot.”

“Is she attractive?” He blushed. “Pretty?”

3. Once prominent, enormously wealthy family of Jewish international bankers and business leaders.

Salzman kissed his finger tips. "A little doll. On this I give you my word. Let me call the father tonight and you will see what means pretty."

But Leo was troubled. "You're sure she's that young?"

"This I am positive. The father will show you the birth certificate."

"Are you positive there isn't something wrong with her?" Leo insisted.

"Who says there is wrong?"

"I don't understand why an American girl her age should go to a marriage broker."

A smile spread over Salzman's face.

"So for the same reason you went, she comes."

Leo flushed. "I am pressed for time."

Salzman, realizing he had been tactless, quickly explained. "The father came, not her. He wants she should have the best, so he looks around himself. When we will locate the right boy he will introduce him and encourage. This makes a better marriage than if a young girl without experience takes for herself. I don't have to tell you this."

"But don't you think this young girl believes in love?" Leo spoke uneasily.

Salzman was about to guffaw but caught himself and said soberly, "Love comes with the right person, not before."

Leo parted dry lips but did not speak. Noticing that Salzman had snatched a glance at the next card, he cleverly asked, "How is her health?"

"Perfect," Salzman said, breathing with difficulty. "Of course, she is a little lame on her right foot from an auto accident that it happened to her when she was twelve years, but nobody notices on account she is so brilliant and also beautiful."

Leo got up heavily and went to the window. He felt curiously bitter and upbraided himself for having called in the marriage broker. Finally, he shook his head.

"Why not?" Salzman persisted, the pitch of his voice rising.

"Because I detest stomach specialists."

"So what do you care what is his business? After you marry her do you need him? Who says he must come every Friday night in your house?"

Ashamed of the way the talk was going, Leo dismissed Salzman, who went home with heavy, melancholy eyes.

Though he had felt only relief at the marriage broker's departure, Leo was in low spirits the next day. He explained it as arising from Salzman's failure to produce a suitable bride for him. He did not care for his type of clientele. But when Leo found himself hesitating whether to seek out another matchmaker, one more polished than Pinye, he wondered if it could be—his protestations to the contrary, and although he honored his father and mother—that he did not, in essence, care for the matchmaking institution? This thought he quickly put out of mind yet found himself still upset. All day he ran around in the woods—missed an important appointment, forgot to give out his laundry, walked out of a Broadway cafeteria without paying and had to run back with the ticket in his hand; had even not recognized his landlady in the street when she passed with a friend and courteously called out, "A good evening to you, Doctor Finkle." By nightfall, however, he had regained sufficient calm to sink his nose into a book and there found peace from his thoughts.

Almost at once there came a knock on the door. Before Leo could say enter, Salzman, commercial cupid, was standing in the room. His face was

gray and meager, his expression hungry, and he looked as if he would expire on his feet. Yet the marriage broker managed, by some trick of the muscles, to display a broad smile.

“So good evening. I am invited?”

Leo nodded, disturbed to see him again, yet unwilling to ask the man to leave.

Beaming still, Salzman laid his portfolio on the table. “Rabbi, I got for you tonight good news.”

“I’ve asked you not to call me rabbi. I’m still a student.”

“Your worries are finished. I have for you a first-class bride.”

“Leave me in peace concerning this subject,” Leo pretended lack of interest.

“The world will dance at your wedding.”

“Please, Mr. Salzman, no more.”

“But first must come back my strength,” Salzman said weakly. He fumbled with the portfolio straps and took out of the leather case an oily paper bag, from which he extracted a hard, seeded roll and a small, smoked white fish. With a quick motion of his hand he stripped the fish out of its skin and began ravenously to chew. “All day in a rush,” he muttered.

Leo watched him eat.

“A sliced tomato you have maybe?” Salzman hesitantly inquired.

“No.”

The marriage broker shut his eyes and ate. When he had finished he carefully cleaned up the crumbs and rolled up the remains of the fish, in the paper bag. His spectacled eyes roamed the room until he discovered, amid some piles of books, a one-burner gas stove. Lifting his hat he humbly asked, “A glass tea you got, rabbi?”

Conscience-stricken, Leo rose and brewed the tea. He served it with a chunk of lemon and two cubes of lump sugar, delighting Salzman.

After he had drunk his tea, Salzman’s strength and good spirits were restored.

“So tell me, rabbi,” he said amiably, “you considered some more the three clients I mentioned yesterday?”

“There was no need to consider.”

“Why not?”

“None of them suits me.”

“What then suits you?”

Leo let it pass because he could give only a confused answer.

Without waiting for a reply, Salzman asked, “You remember this girl I talked to you—the high school teacher?”

“Age thirty-two?”

But, surprisingly, Salzman’s face lit in a smile. “Age twenty-nine.”

Leo shot him a look. “Reduced from thirty-two?”

“A mistake,” Salzman avowed. “I talked today with the dentist. He took me to his safety deposit box and showed me the birth certificate. She was twenty-nine years last August. They made her a party in the mountains where she went for her vacation. When her father spoke to me the first time I forgot to write the age and I told you thirty-two, but now I remember this was a different client, a widow.”

“The same one you told me about? I thought she was twenty-four?”

“A different. Am I responsible that the world is filled with widows?”

“No, but I’m not interested in them, nor for that matter, in school teachers.”

Salzman pulled his clasped hands to his breast. Looking at the ceiling he devoutly exclaimed, “Yiddishe kinder,⁴ what can I say to somebody that he is not interested in high school teachers? So what then you are interested?”

Leo flushed but controlled himself.

“In what else will you be interested,” Salzman went on, “if you not interested in this fine girl that she speaks four languages and has personally in the bank ten thousand dollars? Also her father guarantees further twelve thousand. Also she has a new car, wonderful clothes, talks on all subjects, and she will give you a first-class home and children. How near do we come in our life to paradise?”

“If she’s so wonderful, why wasn’t she married ten years ago?”

“Why?” said Salzman with a heavy laugh. “—Why? Because she is *partikiler*.⁵ This is why. She wants the *best*.”

Leo was silent, amused at how he had entangled himself. But Salzman had aroused his interest in Lily H., and he began seriously to consider calling on her. When the marriage broker observed how intently Leo’s mind was at work on the facts he had supplied, he felt certain they would soon come to an agreement.

Late Saturday afternoon, conscious of Salzman, Leo Finkle walked with Lily Hirschorn along Riverside Drive. He walked briskly and erectly, wearing with distinction the black fedora he had that morning taken with trepidation out of the dusty hat box on his closet shelf, and the heavy black Saturday coat he had thoroughly whisked clean. Leo also owned a walking stick, a present from a distant relative, but quickly put temptation aside and did not use it. Lily, petite and not unpretty, had on something signifying the approach of spring. She was *au courant*,⁶ animatedly, with all sorts of subjects, and he weighed her words and found her surprisingly sound—score another for Salzman, whom he uneasily sensed to be somewhere around, hiding perhaps high in a tree along the street, flashing the lady signals with a pocket mirror; or perhaps a cloven-hoofed Pan,⁷ piping nuptial ditties as he danced his invisible way before them, strewing wild buds on the walk and purple grapes in their path, symbolizing fruit of a union, though there was of course still none.

Lily startled Leo by remarking, “I was thinking of Mr. Salzman, a curious figure, wouldn’t you say?”

Not certain what to answer, he nodded.

She bravely went on, blushing, “I for one am grateful for his introducing us. Aren’t you?”

He courteously replied, “I am.”

“I mean,” she said with a little laugh—and it was all in good taste, or at least gave the effect of being not in bad—“do you mind that we came together so?”

He was not displeased with her honesty, recognizing that she meant to set the relationship aright, and understanding that it took a certain amount of experience in life, and courage, to want to do it quite that way. One had to have some sort of past to make that kind of beginning.

4. Jewish children (Yiddish); the sense is, what do these children know of the world as their parents knew it.

5. Yiddish corruption of “particular.”

6. In keeping with the times (French).

7. Ancient Greek rural deity, part man and part goat, who presided over shepherds and flocks.

He said that he did not mind. Salzman's function was traditional and honorable—valuable for what it might achieve, which, he pointed out, was frequently nothing.

Lily agreed with a sigh. They walked on for a while and she said after a long silence, again with a nervous laugh, "Would you mind if I asked you something a little bit personal? Frankly, I find the subject fascinating." Although Leo shrugged, she went on half embarrassedly, "How was it that you came to your calling? I mean was it a sudden passionate inspiration?"

Leo, after a time, slowly replied, "I was always interested in the Law."⁸

"You saw revealed in it the presence of the Highest?"

He nodded and changed the subject. "I understand that you spent a little time in Paris, Miss Hirschorn?"

"Oh, did Mr. Salzman tell you, Rabbi Finkle?" Leo winced but she went on, "It was ages ago and almost forgotten. I remember I had to return for my sister's wedding."

And Lily would not be put off. "When," she asked in a trembly voice, "did you become enamored of God?"

He stared at her. Then it came to him that she was talking not about Leo Finkle, but of a total stranger, some mystical figure, perhaps even passionate prophet that Salzman had dreamed up for her—no relation to the living or dead. Leo trembled with rage and weakness. The trickster had obviously sold her a bill of goods, just as he had him, who'd expected to become acquainted with a young lady of twenty-nine, only to behold, the moment he laid eyes upon her strained and anxious face, a woman past thirty-five and aging rapidly. Only his self control had kept him this long in her presence.

"I am not," he said gravely, "a talented religious person," and in seeking words to go on, found himself possessed by shame and fear. "I think," he said in a strained manner, "that I came to God not because I loved Him, but because I did not."

This confession he spoke harshly because its unexpectedness shook him.

Lily wilted. Leo saw a profusion of loaves of bread go flying like ducks high over his head, not unlike the winged loaves by which he had counted himself to sleep last night. Mercifully, then, it snowed, which he would not put past Salzman's machinations.

He was infuriated with the marriage broker and swore he would throw him out of the room the minute he reappeared. But Salzman did not come that night, and when Leo's anger had subsided, an unaccountable despair grew in its place. At first he thought this was caused by his disappointment in Lily, but before long it became evident that he had involved himself with Salzman without a true knowledge of his own intent. He gradually realized—with an emptiness that seized him with six hands—that he had called in the broker to find him a bride because he was incapable of doing it himself. This terrifying insight he had derived as a result of his meeting and conversation with Lily Hirschorn. Her probing questions had somehow irritated him into revealing—to himself more than her—the true nature of his relationship to God, and from that it had come upon him, with shocking force, that apart from his

8. The "Law," or Torah, consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—that part of Old Testament Scripture called the Pentateuch (Five Books of Moses).

parents, he had never loved anyone. Or perhaps it went the other way, that he did not love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man. It seemed to Leo that his whole life stood starkly revealed and he saw himself for the first time as he truly was—unloved and loveless. This bitter but somehow not fully unexpected revelation brought him to a point of panic, controlled only by extraordinary effort. He covered his face with his hands and cried.

The week that followed was the worst of his life. He did not eat and lost weight. His beard darkened and grew ragged. He stopped attending seminars and almost never opened a book. He seriously considered leaving the Yeshiva, although he was deeply troubled at the thought of the loss of all his years of study—saw them like pages torn from a book, strewn over the city—and at the devastating effect of this decision upon his parents. But he had lived without knowledge of himself, and never in the Five Books and all the Commentaries—*mea culpa*⁹—had the truth been revealed to him. He did not know where to turn, and in all this desolating loneliness there was no *to whom*, although he often thought of Lily but not once could bring himself to go downstairs and make the call. He became touchy and irritable, especially with his landlady, who asked him all manner of personal questions; on the other hand, sensing his own disagreeableness, he waylaid her on the stairs and apologized abjectly, until mortified, she ran from him. Out of this, however, he drew the consolation that he was a Jew and that a Jew suffered. But gradually, as the long and terrible week drew to a close, he regained his composure and some idea of purpose in life: to go on as planned. Although he was imperfect, the ideal was not. As for his quest of a bride, the thought of continuing afflicted him with anxiety and heartburn, yet perhaps with this new knowledge of himself he would be more successful than in the past. Perhaps love would now come to him and a bride to that love. And for this sanctified seeking who needed a Salzman?

The marriage broker, a skeleton with haunted eyes, returned that very night. He looked, withal, the picture of frustrated expectancy—as if he had steadfastly waited the week at Miss Lily Hirschorn’s side for a telephone call that never came.

Casually coughing, Salzman came immediately to the point: “So how did you like her?”

Leo’s anger rose and he could not refrain from chiding the matchmaker: “Why did you lie to me, Salzman?”

Salzman’s pale face went dead white, the world had snowed on him.

“Did you not state that she was twenty-nine?” Leo insisted.

“I gave you my word—”

“She was thirty-five, if a day. *At least* thirty-five.”

“Of this don’t be too sure. Her father told me—”

“Never mind. The worst of it was that you lied to her.”

“How did I lie to her, tell me?”

“You told her things about me that weren’t true. You made me out to be more, consequently less than I am. She had in mind a totally different person, a sort of semimystical Wonder Rabbi.”

“All I said, you was a religious man.”

9. Literally, “through my fault” (Latin), an admission of error. “Commentaries”: explanatory commentaries on the Pentateuch.

"I can imagine."

Salzman sighed. "This is my weakness that I have," he confessed. "My wife says to me I shouldn't be a salesman, but when I have two fine people that they would be wonderful to be married, I am so happy that I talk too much." He smiled wanly. "This is why Salzman is a poor man."

Leo's anger left him. "Well, Salzman, I'm afraid that's all."

The marriage broker fastened hungry eyes on him.

"You don't want anymore a bride?"

"I do," said Leo, "but I have decided to seek her in a different way. I am no longer interested in an arranged marriage. To be frank, I now admit the necessity of premarital love. That is, I want to be in love with the one I marry."

"Love?" said Salzman, astounded. After a moment he remarked, "For us, our love is our life, not for the ladies. In the ghetto they—"

"I know, I know," said Leo. "I've thought of it often. Love, I have said to myself, should be a by-product of living and worship rather than its own end. Yet for myself I find it necessary to establish the level of my need and fulfill it."

Salzman shrugged but answered, "Listen, rabbi, if you want love, this I can find for you also. I have such beautiful clients that you will love them the minute your eyes will see them."

Leo smiled unhappily. "I'm afraid you don't understand."

But Salzman hastily unstrapped his portfolio and withdrew a manila packet from it.

"Pictures," he said, quickly laying the envelope on the table.

Leo called after him to take the pictures away, but as if on the wings of the wind, Salzman had disappeared.

March came. Leo had returned to his regular routine. Although he felt not quite himself yet—lacked energy—he was making plans for a more active social life. Of course it would cost something, but he was an expert in cutting corners; and when there were no corners left he would make circles rounder. All the while Salzman's pictures had lain on the table, gathering dust. Occasionally as Leo sat studying, or enjoying a cup of tea, his eyes fell on the manila envelope, but he never opened it.

The days went by and no social life to speak of developed with a member of the opposite sex—it was difficult, given the circumstances of his situation. One morning Leo toiled up the stairs to his room and stared out the window at the city. Although the day was bright his view of it was dark. For some time he watched people in the street below hurrying along and then turned with a heavy heart to his little room. On the table was the packet. With a sudden relentless gesture he tore it open. For a half-hour he stood by the table in a state of excitement, examining the photographs of the ladies Salzman had included. Finally, with a deep sigh he put them down. There were six, of varying degrees of attractiveness, but look at them long enough and they all became Lily Hirschorn: all past their prime, all starved behind bright smiles, not a true personality in the lot. Life, despite their frantic yoo-hooings, had passed them by; they were pictures in a brief case that stank of fish. After a while, however, as Leo attempted to return the photographs into the envelope, he found in it another, a snapshot of the type taken by a machine for a quarter. He gazed at it a moment and let out a cry.

Her face deeply moved him. Why, he could at first not say. It gave him the impression of youth—spring flowers, yet age—a sense of having been used to

the bone, wasted; this came from the eyes, which were hauntingly familiar, yet absolutely strange. He had a vivid impression that he had met her before, but try as he might he could not place her although he could almost recall her name, as if he had read it in her own handwriting. No, this couldn't be; he would have remembered her. It was not, he affirmed, that she had an extraordinary beauty—no, though her face was attractive enough; it was that *something* about her moved him. Feature for feature, even some of the ladies of the photographs could do better; but she leaped forth to his heart—had *lived*, or wanted to—more than just wanted, perhaps regretted how she had lived—had somehow deeply suffered: it could be seen in the depths of those reluctant eyes, and from the way the light enclosed and shone from her, and within her, opening realms of possibility: this was her own. Her he desired. His head ached and eyes narrowed with the intensity of his gazing, then as if an obscure fog had blown up in the mind, he experienced fear of her and was aware that he had received an impression, somehow, of evil. He shuddered, saying softly, it is thus with us all. Leo brewed some tea in a small pot and sat sipping it without sugar, to calm himself. But before he had finished drinking, again with excitement he examined the face and found it good: good for Leo Finkle. Only such a one could understand him and help him seek whatever he was seeking. She might, perhaps, love him. How she had happened to be among the discards in Salzman's barrel he could never guess, but he knew he must urgently go find her.

Leo rushed downstairs, grabbed up the Bronx telephone book, and searched for Salzman's home address. He was not listed, nor was his office. Neither was he in the Manhattan book. But Leo remembered having written down the address on a slip of paper after he had read Salzman's advertisement in the "personals" column of the *Forward*. He ran up to his room and tore through his papers, without luck. It was exasperating. Just when he needed the matchmaker he was nowhere to be found. Fortunately Leo remembered to look in his wallet. There on a card he found his name written and a Bronx address. No phone number was listed, the reason—Leo now recalled—he had originally communicated with Salzman by letter. He got on his coat, put a hat on over his skull cap and hurried to the subway station. All the way to the far end of the Bronx he sat on the edge of his seat. He was more than once tempted to take out the picture and see if the girl's face was as he remembered it, but he refrained, allowing the snapshot to remain in his inside coat pocket, content to have her so close. When the train pulled into the station he was waiting at the door and bolted out. He quickly located the street Salzman had advertised.

The building he sought was less than a block from the subway, but it was not an office building, nor even a loft, nor a store in which one could rent office space. It was a very old tenement house. Leo found Salzman's name in pencil on a soiled tag under the bell and climbed three dark flights to his apartment. When he knocked, the door was opened by a thin, asthmatic, gray-haired woman, in felt slippers.

"Yes?" she said, expecting nothing. She listened without listening. He could have sworn he had seen her, too, before but knew it was an illusion.

"Salzman—does he live here? Pinye Salzman," he said, "the matchmaker?" She stared at him a long minute. "Of course."

He felt embarrassed. "Is he in?"

"No." Her mouth, though left open, offered nothing more.

"The matter is urgent. Can you tell me where his office is?"

"In the air." She pointed upward.

"You mean he has no office?" Leo asked.

"In his socks."

He peered into the apartment. It was sunless and dingy, one large room divided by a half-open curtain, beyond which he could see a sagging metal bed. The near side of a room was crowded with rickety chairs, old bureaus, a three-legged table, racks of cooking utensils, and all the apparatus of a kitchen. But there was no sign of Salzman or his magic barrel, probably also a figment of the imagination. An odor of frying fish made Leo weak to the knees.

"Where is he?" he insisted. "I've got to see your husband."

At length she answered, "So who knows where he is? Every time he thinks a new thought he runs to a different place. Go home, he will find you."

"Tell him Leo Finkle."

She gave no sign she had heard.

He walked downstairs, depressed.

But Salzman, breathless, stood waiting at his door.

Leo was astounded and overjoyed. "How did you get here before me?"

"I rushed."

"Come inside."

They entered. Leo fixed tea, and a sardine sandwich for Salzman. As they were drinking he reached behind him for the packet of pictures and handed them to the marriage broker.

Salzman put down his glass and said expectantly, "You found somebody you like?"

"Not among these."

The marriage broker turned away.

"Here is the one I want." Leo held forth the snapshot.

Salzman slipped on his glasses and took the picture into his trembling hand. He turned ghastly and let out a groan.

"What's the matter?" cried Leo.

"Excuse me. Was an accident this picture. She isn't for you."

Salzman frantically shoved the manila packet into his portfolio. He thrust the snapshot into his pocket and fled down the stairs.

Leo, after momentary paralysis, gave chase and cornered the marriage broker in the vestibule. The landlady made hysterical outcries but neither of them listened.

"Give me back the picture, Salzman."

"No." The pain in his eyes was terrible.

"Tell me who she is then."

"This I can't tell you. Excuse me."

He made to depart, but Leo, forgetting himself, seized the matchmaker by his tight coat and shook him frenziedly.

"Please," sighed Salzman. "*Please.*"

Leo ashamedly let him go. "Tell me who she is," he begged. "It's very important for me to know."

"She is not for you. She is a wild one—wild, without shame. This is not a bride for a rabbi."

"What do you mean wild?"

"Like an animal. Like a dog. For her to be poor was a sin. This is why to me she is dead now."

"In God's name, what do you mean?"

"Her I can't introduce to you," Salzman said.

"Why are you so excited?"

"Why, he asks," Salzman said, bursting into tears. "This is my baby, my Stella, she should burn in hell."

Leo hurried up to bed and hid under the covers. Under the covers he thought his life through. Although he soon fell asleep he could not sleep her out of his mind. He woke, beating his breast. Though he prayed to be rid of her, his prayers went unanswered. Through days of torment he endlessly struggled not to love her; fearing success, he escaped it. He then concluded to convert her to goodness, himself to God. The idea alternately nauseated and exalted him.

He perhaps did not know that he had come to a final decision until he encountered Salzman in a Broadway cafeteria. He was sitting alone at a rear table, sucking the bony remains of a fish. The marriage broker appeared haggard, and transparent to the point of vanishing.

Salzman looked up at first without recognizing him. Leo had grown a pointed beard and his eyes were weighted with wisdom.

"Salzman," he said, "love has at last come to my heart."

"Who can love from a picture?" mocked the marriage broker.

"It is not impossible."

"If you can love her, then you can love anybody. Let me show you some new clients that they just sent me their photographs. One is a little doll."

"Just her I want," Leo murmured.

"Don't be a fool, doctor. Don't bother with her."

"Put me in touch with her, Salzman," Leo said humbly. "Perhaps I can be of service."

Salzman had stopped eating and Leo understood with emotion that it was now arranged.

Leaving the cafeteria, he was, however, afflicted by a tormenting suspicion that Salzman had planned it all to happen this way.

Leo was informed by letter that she would meet him on a certain corner, and she was there one spring night, waiting under a street lamp. He appeared, carrying a small bouquet of violets and rosebuds. Stella stood by the lamp post, smoking. She wore white with red shoes, which fitted his expectations, although in a troubled moment he had imagined the dress red, and only the shoes white. She waited uneasily and shyly. From afar he saw that her eyes—clearly her father's—were filled with desperate innocence. He pictured, in her, his own redemption. Violins and lit candles revolved in the sky. Leo ran forward with flowers outthrust.

Around the corner, Salzman, leaning against a wall, chanted prayers for the dead.

RALPH ELLISON

1914–1994

When Ralph Waldo Ellison began writing what would become *Invisible Man* (1952), American readers and critics were skeptical that black experience could rise to the level of “universal” significance that defined high literary ambition at the time. Asked in 1953 whether he thought “the Negro writer” could “escape provincialism when his literature is concerned with a minority,” Ellison stressed the universality of the individual human being. Ellison was true to the experience, thoughts, imagination, and inner truth of the individual in his fiction. He consciously departed from the model of his mentor, Richard Wright, setting aside the social realism perfected by Wright—and thereafter expected of black writers—in favor of the styles and techniques of Modernism. Inspired by Melville, Hemingway, Joyce, and others, he stepped away from realism to reconsider humanity through the eyes of an unnamed black narrator described only as “invisible.”

Ellison was born and raised in Oklahoma, won a state scholarship, and attended the Tuskegee Institute, where he was a music major, his instrument the trumpet. He embraced both the Western classical repertoire and the world of Kansas City jazz then just reaching its heyday. Befriending the blues singer Jimmy Rushing and other members of what would be the great Count Basie band of the 1930s, Ellison saw in this “deep, rowdy stream of jazz” the power and control that constituted art. His abiding love of music is found in some of the essays in his collection *Shadow and Act* (1964). Ellison also immersed himself in the visual arts, admiring the African American sculptor Richmond Barthé, with whom he studied for a short time after he arrived in New York City in the early 1940s. He invoked Picasso as a master artist who could transform folk content into universal form, and he was inspired by the photography in Richard Wright’s *Twelve Million Black Voices* (1941). Ellison collected art throughout his life, and readers of his fiction have noted that visual elements such as framing, color, shape, pigment, and the image of the canvas recur in his work as often as the more commonly noted elements of sound and music.

Ellison created *Invisible Man* through an arduous, seven-year process of planning and revision, inspired by his Modernist literary models and informed by his knowledge of music and the visual arts. When the novel was published in 1952, he was criticized for being less political than he should be as a black writer. The most prominent of these critics, Irving Howe, took the author to task for not following Wright’s lead and devoting his fiction to the “Negro cause”. Howe believed that African Americans should write social protest novels about the tragedy of black ghetto life. But Ellison’s intellectual sphere was much broader, and in his life he crossed and recrossed what W. E. B. Du Bois called “the color line.” He married a white woman at a time when this was against the law in several states, and he enjoyed an artistic circle that included not only the artists, writers, and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance but also the thriving Yiddish language writers in New York (an acquaintance reported that he was nearly fluent in Yiddish). Ellison wrote parts of *Invisible Man* at the office of a Jewish friend on Fifth Avenue, and in a letter he noted that white people at Radio City Music Hall looking through his windows as he typed seemed to think he was doing something obscene. For a short time he lived in the Hudson Valley with Saul Bellow, also featured in this volume, who was the son of Russian Jewish parents. Both Bellow and Ellison aspired to be great American writers.

"I wasn't, and am not, *primarily* concerned with injustice, but with art," Ellison declared. And yet he saw the novel as a driver of social change. "Serious literature" engaged what Ellison described as the "moral core" of a society; for Ellison, this meant the values of democracy and equality. Ellison called *Invisible Man* an "attempt to return to the mood of personal moral responsibility for democracy which typified the best of our nineteenth-century fiction." Readers may note that the narrator is told by a wealthy trustee to read Ralph Waldo Emerson (Ellison's namesake); the speech in "Battle Royal" sounds Emersonian, and references to Emerson and Melville can be found throughout the narrative. Ellison believed that in devoting himself to the novel as an art form, he took on "the responsibilities inherited by those who practice the craft in the U.S."—those of "describing for all that fragment of the huge diverse American experience which I know best" and of "shaping . . . the culture as I should like it to be." "The American novel," Ellison explained, "is in this sense a conquest of the frontier; as it describes our experience, it creates it."

Invisible Man won the National Book Award, and Ellison subsequently received a number of awards and lectureships. He taught at the Salzburg Seminar, Bard College, and the University of Chicago. In 1970 he was named Albert Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities at New York University, where he taught until his retirement. Always humble, Ellison called *Invisible Man* "an attempt" at a great novel, and he wondered whether it would "be around in 20 years." Ellison's self-critical habits of mind kept him from completing another book after *Invisible Man*; when he died in 1994 he left a mass of notes and manuscript material meant for several novels. Editors assembled the late novel *Juneteenth* (1999) from over 2,000 manuscript pages. A version of the novel Ellison worked on right after *Invisible Man*, titled *Three Days Before the Shooting . . .*, was similarly pieced together and published in 2010.

"Battle Royal," the excerpt from *Invisible Man* reprinted here, was originally published as a stand-alone story called "Invisible Man" in a 1947 issue of Cyril Connolly's *Horizon*, a leading British art and literature journal. It appeared in a special double issue titled "Art on the American *Horizon*," alongside contributions from the American poets Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and E.E. Cummings; art critic Clement Greenberg; and media critic Marshall McLuhan. It was republished in the United States in 1948 as "Battle Royal" in '48: *The Magazine of the Year*. Because many readers assumed that black writers drew only from personal experience, the story was received as if it were fact. Ellison had to insist that the story was "an imaginative re-creation of certain aspects of our American life and the effect these have upon our personality. As such," he advised, "it is to be read as a near allegory or an extended metaphor. . . . The facts themselves are of no moment, are, for me, even amusing."

From *Invisible Man*

Prologue¹

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass.

1. Ras the Destroyer, Rinehart, and Brother Jack, mentioned in the prologue, are characters who will appear later in the novel.

When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition in the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful.

One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name. I sprang at him, seized his coat lapels and demanded that he apologize. He was a tall blond man, and as my face came close to his he looked insolently out of his blue eyes and cursed me, his breath hot in my face as he struggled. I pulled his chin down sharp upon the crown of my head, butting him as I had seen the West Indians do, and felt his flesh tear and the blood gush out, and I yelled, "Apologize! Apologize!" But he continued to curse and struggle, and I butted him again and again until he went down heavily, on his knees, profusely bleeding. I kicked him repeatedly, in a frenzy because he still uttered insults though his lips were frothy with blood. Oh yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him in the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth—when it occurred to me that the man had not *seen* me, actually; that he, as far as he knew, was in the midst of a walking nightmare! And I stopped the blade, slicing the air as I pushed him away, letting him fall back to the street. I stared at him hard as the lights of a car stabbed through the darkness. He lay there, moaning on the asphalt; a man almost killed by a phantom. It unnerved me. I was both disgusted and ashamed. I was like a drunken man myself, wavering about on weakened legs. Then I was amused: Something in this man's thick head had sprung out and beaten him within an inch of his life. I began to laugh at this crazy discovery. Would he have awakened at the point of death? Would Death himself have freed him for wakeful living? But I didn't linger. I ran away into the dark, laughing so hard I feared I might rupture myself. The next day I saw his picture in the *Daily News*, beneath a caption stating that he had been "mugged." Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man!

Most of the time (although I do not choose as I once did to deny the violence of my days by ignoring it) I am not so overtly violent. I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers. I learned in time though that it is possible to carry on a fight

against them without their realizing it. For instance, I have been carrying on a fight with Monopolated Light & Power for some time now. I use their service and pay them nothing at all, and they don't know it. Oh, they suspect that power is being drained off, but they don't know where. All they know is that according to the master meter back there in their power station a hell of a lot of free current is disappearing somewhere into the jungle of Harlem. The joke, of course, is that I don't live in Harlem but in a border area. Several years ago (before I discovered the advantages of being invisible) I went through the routine process of buying service and paying their outrageous rates. But no more. I gave up all that, along with my apartment, and my old way of life: That way based upon the fallacious assumption that I, like other men, was visible. Now, aware of my invisibility, I live rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century, which I discovered when I was trying to escape in the night from Ras the Destroyer. But that's getting too far ahead of the story, almost to the end, although the end is in the beginning and lies far ahead.

The point now is that I found a home—or a hole in the ground, as you will. Now don't jump to the conclusion that because I call my home a "hole" it is damp and cold like a grave; there are cold holes and warm holes. Mine is a warm hole. And remember, a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring; then he comes strolling out like the Easter chick breaking from its shell. I say all this to assure you that it is incorrect to assume that, because I'm invisible and live in a hole, I am dead. I am neither dead nor in a state of suspended animation. Call me Jack-the-Bear,² for I am in a state of hibernation.

My hole is warm and full of light. Yes, *full* of light. I doubt if there is a brighter spot in all New York than this hole of mine, and I do not exclude Broadway. Or the Empire State Building on a photographer's dream night. But that is taking advantage of you. Those two spots are among the darkest of our whole civilization—pardon me, our whole *culture* (an important distinction, I've heard)—which might sound like a hoax, or a contradiction, but that (by contradiction, I mean) is how the world moves: Not like an arrow, but a boomerang. (Beware of those who speak of the *spiral* of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy.) I know; I have been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness. And I love light. Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I *am* invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form. A beautiful girl once told me of a recurring nightmare in which she lay in the center of a large dark room and felt her face expand until it filled the whole room, becoming a formless mass while her eyes ran in bilious jelly up the chimney. And so it is with me. Without light I am not only invisible, but formless as well; and to be unaware of one's form is to live a death. I myself, after existing some twenty years, did not become alive until I discovered my invisibility.

That is why I fight my battle with Monopolated Light & Power. The deeper reason, I mean: It allows me to feel my vital aliveness. I also fight them for taking so much of my money before I learned to protect myself. In my hole in

2. Also the title of a 1940 jazz recording by Duke Ellington and his orchestra.

the basement there are exactly 1,369 lights. I've wired the entire ceiling, every inch of it. And not with fluorescent bulbs, but with the older, more-expensive-to-operate kind, the filament type. An act of sabotage, you know. I've already begun to wire the wall. A junk man I know, a man of vision, has supplied me with wire and sockets. Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light. The truth is the light and light is the truth. When I finish all four walls, then I'll start on the floor. Just how that will go, I don't know. Yet when you have lived invisible as long as I have you develop a certain ingenuity. I'll solve the problem. And maybe I'll invent a gadget to place my coffee pot on the fire while I lie in bed, and even invent a gadget to warm my bed—like the fellow I saw in one of the picture magazines who made himself a gadget to warm his shoes! Though invisible, I am in the great American tradition of tinkers. That makes me kin to Ford, Edison and Franklin. Call me, since I have a theory and a concept, a “thinker-tinker.” Yes, I'll warm my shoes; they need it, they're usually full of holes. I'll do that and more.

Now I have one radio-phonograph; I plan to have five. There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole, and when I have music I want to *feel* its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing “What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue”—all at the same time. Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my favorite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin. I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vapor rising as Louis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound. Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he *is* invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music. Once when I asked for a cigarette, some jokers gave me a reefer, which I lighted when I got home and sat listening to my phonograph. It was a strange evening. Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music.

Once I saw a prizefighter boxing a yokel. The fighter was swift and amazingly scientific. His body was one violent flow of rapid rhythmic action. He hit the yokel a hundred times when the yokel held up his arms in stunned surprise. But suddenly the yokel, rolling about in the gale of boxing gloves, struck one blow and knocked science, speed and footwork as cold as a well-digger's posterior. The smart money hit the canvas. The long shot got the nod. The yokel had simply stepped inside of his opponent's sense of time. So under the spell of the reefer I discovered a new analytical way of listening to music. The unheard sounds came through, and each melodic line existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece, and waited patiently for the other voices to speak. That night I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths. *And beneath the swiftness of the hot tempo there was a slower tempo and a cave and I entered it and looked around and heard an old woman singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco, and beneath that lay a still lower level on which I saw a beautiful girl the color of ivory*

pleading in a voice like my mother's as she stood before a group of slaveowners who bid for her naked body, and below that I found a lower level and a more rapid tempo and I heard someone shout:

"Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is the 'Blackness of Blackness.'"

And a congregation of voices answered: "That blackness is most black, brother, most black . . ."

"In the beginning . . ."

"At the very start," they cried.

". . . there was blackness . . ."

"Preach it . . ."

". . . and the sun . . ."

"The sun, Lawd . . ."

". . . was blood red . . ."

"Red . . ."

"Now black is . . ." the preacher shouted.

"Bloody . . ."

"I said black is . . ."

"Preach it, brother . . ."

". . . an' black ain't . . ."

"Red, Lawd, red: He said it's red!"

"Amen, brother . . ."

"Black will git you . . ."

"Yes, it will . . ."

". . . an' black won't . . ."

"Now, it won't!"

"It do . . ."

"It do, Lawd . . ."

". . . an' it don't."

"Halleluiah . . ."

". . . It'll put you, glory, glory, Oh my Lawd, in the WHALE'S BELLY."

"Preach it, dear brother . . ."

". . . an' make you tempt . . ."

"Good God a-mighty!"

"Old Aunt Nelly!"

"Black will make you . . ."

"Black . . ."

". . . or black will un-make you."

"Ain't it the truth, Lawd?"

And at that point a voice of trombone timbre screamed at me, "Git out of here, you fool! Is you ready to commit treason?"

And I tore myself away, hearing the old singer of spirituals moaning, "Go curse your God, boy, and die."

I stopped and questioned her, asked her what was wrong.

"I dearly loved my master, son," she said.

"You should have hated him," I said.

"He gave me several sons," she said, "and because I loved my sons I learned to love their father though I hated him too."

"I too have become acquainted with ambivalence," I said. "That's why I'm here."

"What's that?"

"Nothing, a word that doesn't explain it. Why do you moan?"

"I moan this way 'cause he's dead," she said.

"Then tell me, who is that laughing upstairs?"

"Them's my sons. They glad."

"Yes, I can understand that too," I said.

"I laughs too, but I moans too. He promised to set us free but he never could bring hisself to do it. Still I loved him . . ."

"Loved him? You mean . . .?"

"Oh, yes, but I loved something else even more."

"What more?"

"Freedom."

"Freedom," I said. "Maybe freedom lies in hating."

"Naw, son, it's in loving. I loved him and give him the poison and he withered away like a frost-bit apple. Them boys woulda tore him to pieces with they homemade knives."

"A mistake was made somewhere," I said, "I'm confused." And I wished to say other things, but the laughter upstairs became too loud and moan-like for me and I tried to break out of it, but I couldn't. Just as I was leaving I felt an urgent desire to ask her what freedom was and went back. She sat with her head in her hands, moaning softly; her leather-brown face was filled with sadness.

"Old woman, what is this freedom you love so well?" I asked around a corner of my mind.

She looked surprised, then thoughtful, then baffled. "I done forgot, son. It's all mixed up. First I think it's one thing, then I think it's another. It gits my head to spinning. I guess now it ain't nothing but knowing how to say what I got up in my head. But it's a hard job, son. Too much is done happen to me in too short a time. Hit's like I have a fever. Ever'time I starts to walk my head gits to swirling and I falls down. Or if it ain't that, it's the boys; they gits to laughing and wants to kill up the white folks. They's bitter, that's what they is . . ."

"But what about freedom?"

"Leave me 'lone, boy; my head aches!"

I left her, feeling dizzy myself. I didn't get far.

Suddenly one of the sons, a big fellow six feet tall, appeared out of nowhere and struck me with his fist.

"What's the matter, man?" I cried.

"You made Ma cry!"

"But how?" I said, dodging a blow.

"Askin' her them questions, that's how. Git outa here and stay, and next time you got questions like that, ask yourself!"

He held me in a grip like cold stone, his fingers fastening upon my windpipe until I thought I would suffocate before he finally allowed me to go. I stumbled about dazed, the music beating hysterically in my ears. It was dark. My head cleared and I wandered down a dark narrow passage, thinking I heard his footsteps hurrying behind me. I was sore, and into my being had come a profound craving for tranquillity, for peace and quiet, a state I felt I could never achieve. For one thing, the trumpet was blaring and the rhythm was too hectic. A tomtom beating like heart-thuds began drowning out the trumpet, filling my ears. I longed for water and I heard it rushing through the cold mains my fingers touched as I felt my way, but I couldn't stop to search because of the footsteps behind me.

"Hey, Ras," I called. "Is it you, Destroyer? Rinehart?"

No answer, only the rhythmic footsteps behind me. Once I tried crossing the road, but a speeding machine struck me, scraping the skin from my leg as it roared past.

Then somehow I came out of it, ascending hastily from this underworld of sound to hear Louis Armstrong innocently asking,

*What did I do
To be so black
And blue?*

At first I was afraid; this familiar music had demanded action, the kind of which I was incapable, and yet had I lingered there beneath the surface I might have attempted to act. Nevertheless, I know now that few really listen to this music. I sat on the chair's edge in a soaking sweat, as though each of my 1,369 bulbs had everyone become a klieg light³ in an individual setting for a third degree with Ras and Rinehart in charge. It was exhausting—as though I had held my breath continuously for an hour under the terrifying serenity that comes from days of intense hunger. And yet, it was a strangely satisfying experience for an invisible man to hear the silence of sound. I had discovered unrecognized compulsions of my being—even though I could not answer "yes" to their promptings. I haven't smoked a reefer since, however; not because they're illegal, but because to *see* around corners is enough (that is not unusual when you are invisible). But to hear around them is too much; it inhibits action. And despite Brother Jack and all that sad, lost period of the Brotherhood, I believe in nothing if not in action.

Please, a definition: A hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action.

Besides, the drug destroys one's sense of time completely. If that happened, I might forget to dodge some bright morning and some cluck would run me down with an orange and yellow street car, or a bilious bus! Or I might forget to leave my hole when the moment for action presents itself.

Meanwhile I enjoy my life with the compliments of Monopolated Light & Power. Since you never recognize me even when in closest contact with me, and since, no doubt, you'll hardly believe that I exist, it won't matter if you know that I tapped a power line leading into the building and ran it into my hole in the ground. Before that I lived in the darkness into which I was chased, but now I see. I've illuminated the blackness of my invisibility—and vice versa. And so I play the invisible music of my isolation. The last statement doesn't seem just right, does it? But it is; you hear this music simply because music is heard and seldom seen, except by musicians. Could this compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white be thus an urge to make music of invisibility? But I am an orator, a rabble rouser—Am? I *was*, and perhaps shall be again. Who knows? All sickness is not unto death, neither is invisibility.

I can hear you say, "What a horrible, irresponsible bastard!" And you're right. I leap to agree with you. I am one of the most irresponsible beings that ever lived. Irresponsibility is part of my invisibility; any way you face it, it is a denial. But to whom can I be responsible, and why should I be, when

3. Powerful arc light used in making movies.

you refuse to see me? And wait until I reveal how truly irresponsible I am. Responsibility rests upon recognition, and recognition is a form of agreement. Take the man whom I almost killed: Who was responsible for that near murder—I? I don't think so, and I refuse it. I won't buy it. You can't give it to me. *He* bumped *me*, *he* insulted *me*. Shouldn't he, for his own personal safety, have recognized my hysteria, my "danger potential"? He, let us say, was lost in a dream world. But didn't *he* control that dream world—which, alas, is only too real!—and didn't *he* rule me out of it? And if he had yelled for a policeman, wouldn't *I* have been taken for the offending one? Yes, yes, yes! Let me agree with you, I was the irresponsible one; for I should have used my knife to protect the higher interests of society. Some day that kind of foolishness will cause us tragic trouble. All dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all. But I shirked that responsibility; I became too snarled in the incompatible notions that buzzed within my brain. I was a coward . . .

But what did *I* do to be so blue? Bear with me.

Chapter I

[BATTLE ROYAL]

It goes a long way back, some twenty years. All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was. I accepted their answers too, though they were often in contradiction and even self-contradictory. I was naïve. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But first I had to discover that I am an invisible man!

And yet I am no freak of nature, nor of history. I was in the cards, other things having been equal (or unequal) eighty-five years ago. I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed. About eighty-five years ago they were told that they were free, united with others of our country in everything pertaining to the common good, and, in everything social, separate like the fingers of the hand. And they believed it. They exulted in it. They stayed in their place, worked hard, and brought up my father to do the same. But my grandfather is the one. He was an odd old guy, my grandfather, and I am told I take after him. It was he who caused the trouble. On his deathbed he called my father to him and said, "Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open." They thought the old man had gone out of his mind. He had been the meekest of men. The younger children were rushed from the room, the shades drawn and the flame of the lamp turned so low that it sputtered on the wick like the old man's breathing. "Learn it to the younguns," he whispered fiercely; then he died.

But my folks were more alarmed over his last words than over his dying. It was as though he had not died at all, his words caused so much anxiety. I was warned emphatically to forget what he had said and, indeed, this is the first time it has been mentioned outside the family circle. It had a tremendous effect upon me, however. I could never be sure of what he meant. Grandfather had been a quiet old man who never made any trouble, yet on his deathbed he had called himself a traitor and a spy, and he had spoken of his meekness as a dangerous activity. It became a constant puzzle which lay unanswered in the back of my mind. And whenever things went well for me I remembered my grandfather and felt guilty and uncomfortable. It was as though I was carrying out his advice in spite of myself. And to make it worse, everyone loved me for it. I was praised by the most lily-white men of the town. I was considered an example of desirable conduct—just as my grandfather had been. And what puzzled me was that the old man had defined it as *treachery*. When I was praised for my conduct I felt a guilt that in some way I was doing something that was really against the wishes of the white folks, that if they had understood they would have desired me to act just the opposite, that I should have been sulky and mean, and that that really would have been what they wanted, even though they were fooled and thought they wanted me to act as I did. It made me afraid that some day they would look upon me as a traitor and I would be lost. Still I was more afraid to act any other way because they didn't like that at all. The old man's words were like a curse. On my graduation day I delivered an oration in which I showed that humility was the secret, indeed, the very essence of progress. (Not that I believed this—how could I, remembering my grandfather?—I only believed that it worked.) It was a great success. Everyone praised me and I was invited to give the speech at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens. It was a triumph for our whole community.

It was in the main ballroom of the leading hotel. When I got there I discovered that it was on the occasion of a smoker, and I was told that since I was to be there anyway I might as well take part in the battle royal to be fought by some of my schoolmates as part of the entertainment. The battle royal came first.

All of the town's big shots were there in their tuxedos, wolfing down the buffet foods, drinking beer and whiskey and smoking black cigars. It was a large room with a high ceiling. Chairs were arranged in neat rows around three sides of a portable boxing ring. The fourth side was clear, revealing a gleaming space of polished floor. I had some misgivings over the battle royal, by the way. Not from a distaste for fighting, but because I didn't care too much for the other fellows who were to take part. They were tough guys who seemed to have no grandfather's curse worrying their minds. No one could mistake their toughness. And besides, I suspected that fighting a battle royal might detract from the dignity of my speech. In those pre-invisible days I visualized myself as a potential Booker T. Washington.⁴ But the other fellows didn't care too much for me either, and there were nine of them. I felt superior to them in my way, and I didn't like the manner in which we were all crowded together into the servants' elevator. Nor did they like my being there. In fact, as the warmly lighted floors flashed past the elevator

4. African American author and educator (1856–1915).

we had words over the fact that I, by taking part in the fight, had knocked one of their friends out of a night's work.

We were led out of the elevator through a rococo hall into an anteroom and told to get into our fighting togs. Each of us was issued a pair of boxing gloves and ushered out into the big mirrored hall, which we entered looking cautiously about us and whispering, lest we might accidentally be heard above the noise of the room. It was foggy with cigar smoke. And already the whiskey was taking effect. I was shocked to see some of the most important men of the town quite tipsy. They were all there—bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants. Even one of the more fashionable pastors. Something we could not see was going on up front. A clarinet was vibrating sensuously and the men were standing up and moving eagerly forward. We were a small tight group, clustered together, our bare upper bodies touching and shining with anticipatory sweat; while up front the big shots were becoming increasingly excited over something we still could not see. Suddenly I heard the school superintendent, who had told me to come, yell, "Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up the little shines!"

We were rushed up to the front of the ballroom, where it smelled even more strongly of tobacco and whiskey. Then we were pushed into place. I almost wet my pants. A sea of faces, some hostile, some amused, ringed around us, and in the center, facing us, stood a magnificent blonde—stark naked. There was dead silence. I felt a blast of cold air chill me. I tried to back away, but they were behind me and around me. Some of the boys stood with lowered heads, trembling. I felt a wave of irrational guilt and fear. My teeth chattered, my skin turned to goose flesh, my knees knocked. Yet I was strongly attracted and looked in spite of myself. Had the price of looking been blindness, I would have looked. The hair was yellow like that of a circus kewpie doll, the face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue, the color of a baboon's butt. I felt a desire to spit upon her as my eyes brushed slowly over her body. Her breasts were firm and round as the domes of East Indian temples, and I stood so close as to see the fine skin texture and beads of pearly perspiration glistening like dew around the pink and erected buds of her nipples. I wanted at one and the same time to run from the room, to sink through the floor, or go to her and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body; to feel the soft thighs, to caress her and destroy her, to love her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the small American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V. I had a notion that of all in the room she saw only me with her personal eyes.

And then she began to dance, a slow sensuous movement; the smoke of a hundred cigars clinging to her like the thinnest of veils. She seemed like a fair bird-girl girdled in veils calling to me from the angry surface of some gray and threatening sea. I was transported. Then I became aware of the clarinet playing and the big shots yelling at us. Some threatened us if we looked and others if we did not. On my right I saw one boy faint. And now a man grabbed a silver pitcher from a table and stepped close as he dashed ice water upon him and stood him up and forced two of us to support him as his head hung and moans issued from his thick bluish lips. Another boy began to plead to go home. He was the largest of the group, wearing dark

red fighting trunks much too small to conceal the erection which projected from him as though in answer to the insinuating low-registered moaning of the clarinet. He tried to hide himself with his boxing gloves.

And all the while the blonde continued dancing, smiling faintly at the big shots who watched her with fascination, and faintly smiling at our fear. I noticed a certain merchant who followed her hungrily, his lips loose and drooling. He was a large man who wore diamond studs in a shirtfront which swelled with the ample paunch underneath, and each time the blonde swayed her undulating hips he ran his hand through the thin hair of his bald head and, with his arms upheld, his posture clumsy like that of an intoxicated panda, wound his belly in a slow and obscene grind. This creature was completely hypnotized. The music had quickened. As the dancer flung herself about with a detached expression on her face, the men began reaching out to touch her. I could see their beefy fingers sink into the soft flesh. Some of the others tried to stop them and she began to move around the floor in graceful circles, as they gave chase, slipping and sliding over the polished floor. It was mad. Chairs went crashing, drinks were spilt, as they ran laughing and howling after her. They caught her just as she reached a door, raised her from the floor, and tossed her as college boys are tossed at a hazing, and above her red, fixed-smiling lips I saw the terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror and that which I saw in some of the other boys. As I watched, they tossed her twice and her soft breasts seem to flatten against the air and her legs flung wildly as she spun. Some of the more sober ones helped her to escape. And I started off the floor, heading for the anteroom with the rest of the boys.

Some were still crying and in hysteria. But as we tried to leave we were stopped and ordered to get into the ring. There was nothing to do but what we were told. All ten of us climbed under the ropes and allowed ourselves to be blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth. One of the men seemed to feel a bit sympathetic and tried to cheer us up as we stood with our backs against the ropes. Some of us tried to grin. "See that boy over there?" one of the men said. "I want you to run across at the bell and give it to him right in the belly. If you don't get him, I'm going to get you. I don't like his looks." Each of us was told the same. The blindfolds were put on. Yet even then I had been going over my speech. In my mind each word was as bright as flame. I felt the cloth pressed into place, and frowned so that it would be loosened when I relaxed.

But now I felt a sudden fit of blind terror. I was unused to darkness. It was as though I had suddenly found myself in a dark room filled with poisonous cottonmouths. I could hear the bleary voices yelling insistently for the battle royal to begin.

"Get going in there!"

"Let me at that big nigger!"

I strained to pick up the school superintendent's voice, as though to squeeze some security out of that slightly more familiar sound.

"Let me at those black sonsabitches!" someone yelled.

"No, Jackson, no!" another voice yelled. "Here, somebody, help me hold Jack."

"I want to get at that ginger-colored nigger. Tear him limb from limb," the first voice yelled.

I stood against the ropes trembling. For in those days I was what they called ginger-colored, and he sounded as though he might crunch me between his teeth like a crisp ginger cookie.

Quite a struggle was going on. Chairs were being kicked about and I could hear voices grunting as with a terrific effort. I wanted to see, to see more desperately than ever before. But the blindfold was tight as a thick skin-puckering scab and when I raised my gloved hands to push the layers of white aside a voice yelled, "Oh, no you don't, black bastard! Leave that alone!"

"Ring the bell before Jackson kills him a coon!" someone boomed in the sudden silence. And I heard the bell clang and the sound of the feet scuffling forward.

A glove smacked against my head. I pivoted, striking out stiffly as someone went past, and felt the jar ripple along the length of my arm to my shoulder. Then it seemed as though all nine of the boys had turned upon me at once. Blows pounded me from all sides while I struck out as best I could. So many blows landed upon me that I wondered if I were not the only blindfolded fighter in the ring, or if the man called Jackson hadn't succeeded in getting me after all.

Blindfolded, I could no longer control my motions. I had no dignity. I stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man. The smoke had become thicker and with each new blow it seemed to sear and further restrict my lungs. My saliva became like hot bitter glue. A glove connected with my head, filling my mouth with warm blood. It was everywhere. I could not tell if the moisture I felt upon my body was sweat or blood. A blow landed hard against the nape of my neck. I felt myself going over, my head hitting the floor. Streaks of blue light filled the black world behind the blindfold. I lay prone, pretending that I was knocked out, but felt myself seized by hands and yanked to my feet. "Get going, black boy! Mix it up!" My arms were like lead, my head smarting from blows. I managed to feel my way to the ropes and held on, trying to catch my breath. A glove landed in my mid-section and I went over again, feeling as though the smoke had become a knife jabbed into my guts. Pushed this way and that by the legs milling around me, I finally pulled erect and discovered that I could see the black, sweat-washed forms weaving in the smoky-blue atmosphere like drunken dancers weaving to the rapid drum-like thuds of blows.

Everyone fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else. No group fought together for long. Two, three, four, fought one, then turned to fight each other, were themselves attacked. Blows landed below the belt and in the kidney, with the gloves open as well as closed, and with my eye partly opened now there was not so much terror. I moved carefully, avoiding blows, although not too many to attract attention, fighting from group to group. The boys groped about like blind, cautious crabs crouching to protect their mid-sections, their heads pulled in short against their shoulders, their arms stretched nervously before them, with their fists testing the smoke-filled air like the knobbed feelers of hypersensitive snails. In one corner I glimpsed a boy violently punching the air and heard him scream in pain as he smashed his hand against a ring post. For a second I saw him bent over holding his hand, then going down as a blow caught his unprotected head. I played one group against the other, slipping

in and throwing a punch then stepping out of range while pushing the others into the melee to take the blows blindly aimed at me. The smoke was agonizing and there were no rounds, no bells at three minute intervals to relieve our exhaustion. The room spun around me, a swirl of lights, smoke, sweating bodies surrounded by tense white faces. I bled from both nose and mouth, the blood spattering upon my chest.

The men kept yelling, "Slug him, black boy! Knock his guts out!"
"Uppercut him! Kill him! Kill that big boy!"

Taking a fake fall, I saw a boy going down heavily beside me as though we were felled by a single blow, saw a sneaker-clad foot shoot into his groin as the two who had knocked him down stumbled upon him. I rolled out of range, feeling a twinge of nausea.

The harder we fought the more threatening the men became. And yet, I had begun to worry about my speech again. How would it go? Would they recognize my ability? What would they give me?

I was fighting automatically when suddenly I noticed that one after another of the boys was leaving the ring. I was surprised, filled with panic, as though I had been left alone with an unknown danger. Then I understood. The boys had arranged it among themselves. It was the custom for the two men left in the ring to slug it out for the winner's prize. I discovered this too late. When the bell sounded two men in tuxedos leaped into the ring and removed the blindfold. I found myself facing Tatlock, the biggest of the gang. I felt sick at my stomach. Hardly had the bell stopped ringing in my ears than it clanged again and I saw him moving swiftly toward me. Thinking of nothing else to do I hit him smash on the nose. He kept coming, bringing the rank sharp violence of stale sweat. His face was a black blank of a face, only his eyes alive—with hate of me and aglow with a feverish terror from what had happened to us all. I became anxious. I wanted to deliver my speech and he came at me as though he meant to beat it out of me. I smashed him again and again, taking his blows as they came. Then on a sudden impulse I struck him lightly and as we clinched, I whispered, "Fake like I knocked you out, you can have the prize."

"I'll break your behind," he whispered hoarsely.

"For *them*?"

"For *me*, sonofabitch!"

They were yelling for us to break it up and Tatlock spun me half around with a blow, and as a joggled camera sweeps in a reeling scene, I saw the howling red faces crouching tense beneath the cloud of blue-gray smoke. For a moment the world wavered, unraveled, flowed, then my head cleared and Tatlock bounced before me. That fluttering shadow before my eyes was his jabbing left hand. Then falling forward, my head against his damp shoulder, I whispered,

"I'll make it five dollars more."

"Go to hell!"

But his muscles relaxed a trifle beneath my pressure and I breathed, "Seven?"

"Give it to your ma," he said, ripping me beneath the heart.

And while I still held him I butted him and moved away. I felt myself bombarded with punches. I fought back with hopeless desperation. I wanted to deliver my speech more than anything else in the world, because I felt

that only these men could judge truly my ability, and now this stupid clown was ruining my chances. I began fighting carefully now, moving in to punch him and out again with my greater speed. A lucky blow to his chin and I had him going too—until I heard a loud voice yell, “I got my money on the big boy.”

Hearing this, I almost dropped my guard. I was confused: Should I try to win against the voice out there? Would not this go against my speech, and was not this a moment for humility, for nonresistance? A blow to my head as I danced about sent my right eye popping like a jack-in-the-box and settled my dilemma. The room went red as I fell. It was a dream fall, my body languid and fastidious as to where to land, until the floor became impatient and smashed up to meet me. A moment later I came to. An hypnotic voice said FIVE emphatically. And I lay there, hazily watching a dark red spot of my own blood shaping itself into a butterfly, glistening and soaking into the soiled gray world of the canvas.

When the voice drawled TEN I was lifted up and dragged to a chair. I sat dazed. My eye pained and swelled with each throb of my pounding heart and I wondered if now I would be allowed to speak. I was wringing wet, my mouth still bleeding. We were grouped along the wall now. The other boys ignored me as they congratulated Tatlock and speculated as to how much they would be paid. One boy whimpered over his smashed hand. Looking up front, I saw attendants in white jackets rolling the portable ring away and placing a small square rug in the vacant space surrounded by chairs. Perhaps, I thought, I will stand on the rug to deliver my speech.

Then the M.C. called to us, “Come on up here boys and get your money.”

We ran forward to where the men laughed and talked in their chairs, waiting. Everyone seemed friendly now.

“There it is on the rug,” the man said. I saw the rug covered with coins of all dimensions and a few crumpled bills. But what excited me, scattered here and there, were the gold pieces.

“Boys, it’s all yours,” the man said. “You get all you grab.”

“That’s right, Sambo,” a blond man said, winking at me confidentially.

I trembled with excitement, forgetting my pain. I would get the gold and the bills, I thought. I would use both hands. I would throw my body against the boys nearest me to block them from the gold.

“Get down around the rug now,” the man commanded, “and don’t anyone touch it until I give the signal.”

“This ought to be good,” I heard.

As told, we got around the square rug on our knees. Slowly the man raised his freckled hand as we followed it upward with our eyes.

I heard, “These niggers look like they’re about to pray!”

Then, “Ready,” the man said. “Go!”

I lunged for a yellow coin lying on the blue design of the carpet, touching it and sending a surprised shriek to join those rising around me. I tried frantically to remove my hand but could not let go. A hot, violent force tore through my body, shaking me like a wet rat. The rug was electrified. The hair bristled up on my head as I shook myself free. My muscles jumped, my nerves jangled, writhed. But I saw that this was not stopping the other boys. Laughing in fear and embarrassment, some were holding back and scooping

up the coins knocked off by the painful contortions of the others. The men roared above us as we struggled.

"Pick it up, goddamnit, pick it up!" someone called like a bass-voiced parrot. "Go on, get it!"

I crawled rapidly around the floor, picking up the coins, trying to avoid the coppers and to get greenbacks and the gold. Ignoring the shock by laughing, as I brushed the coins off quickly, I discovered that I could contain the electricity—a contradiction, but it works. Then the men began to push us onto the rug. Laughing embarrassedly, we struggled out of their hands and kept after the coins. We were all wet and slippery and hard to hold. Suddenly I saw a boy lifted into the air, glistening with sweat like a circus seal, and dropped, his wet back landing flush upon the charged rug, heard him yell and saw him literally dance upon his back, his elbows beating a frenzied tattoo upon the floor, his muscles twitching like the flesh of a horse stung by many flies. When he finally rolled off, his face was gray and no one stopped him when he ran from the floor amid booming laughter.

"Get the money," the M.C. called. "That's good hard American cash!"

And we snatched and grabbed, snatched and grabbed. I was careful not to come too close to the rug now, and when I felt the hot whiskey breath descend upon me like a cloud of foul air I reached out and grabbed the leg of a chair. It was occupied and I held on desperately.

"Leggo, nigger! Leggo!"

The huge face wavered down to mine as he tried to push me free. But my body was slippery and he was too drunk. It was Mr. Colcord, who owned a chain of movie houses and "entertainment palaces." Each time he grabbed me I slipped out of his hands. It became a real struggle. I feared the rug more than I did the drunk, so I held on, surprising myself for a moment by trying to topple *him* upon the rug. It was such an enormous idea that I found myself actually carrying it out. I tried not to be obvious, yet when I grabbed his leg, trying to tumble him out of the chair, he raised up roaring with laughter, and, looking at me with soberness dead in the eye, kicked me viciously in the chest. The chair leg flew out of my hand and I felt myself going and rolled. It was as though I had rolled through a bed of hot coals. It seemed a whole century would pass before I would roll free, a century in which I was seared through the deepest levels of my body to the fearful breath within me and the breath seared and heated to the point of explosion. It'll all be over in a flash, I thought as I rolled clear. It'll all be over in a flash.

But not yet, the men on the other side were waiting, red faces swollen as though from apoplexy as they bent forward in their chairs. Seeing their fingers coming toward me I rolled away as a fumbled football rolls off the receiver's fingertips, back into the coals. That time I luckily sent the rug sliding out of place and heard the coins ringing against the floor and the boys scuffling to pick them up and the M.C. calling, "All right, boys, that's all. Go get dressed and get your money."

I was limp as a dish rag. My back felt as though it had been beaten with wires.

When we had dressed the M.C. came in and gave us each five dollars, except Tatlock, who got ten for being last in the ring. Then he told us to leave. I was not to get a chance to deliver my speech, I thought. I was going

out into the dim alley in despair when I was stopped and told to go back. I returned to the ballroom, where the men were pushing back their chairs and gathering in groups to talk.

The M.C. knocked on a table for quiet. "Gentlemen," he said, "we almost forgot an important part of the program. A most serious part, gentlemen. This boy was brought here to deliver a speech which he made at his graduation yesterday . . ."

"Bravo!"

"I'm told that he is the smartest boy we've got out there in Greenwood. I'm told that he knows more big words than a pocket-sized dictionary."

Much applause and laughter.

"So now, gentlemen, I want you to give him your attention."

There was still laughter as I faced them, my mouth dry, my eye throbbing. I began slowly, but evidently my throat was tense, because they began shouting, "Louder! Louder!"

"We of the younger generation extol the wisdom of that great leader and educator," I shouted, "who first spoke these flaming words of wisdom: 'A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal: "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel came back: "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River.' And like him I say, and in his words, 'To those of my race who depend upon bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is his next-door neighbor, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded . . .'"

I spoke automatically and with such fervor that I did not realize that the men were still talking and laughing until my dry mouth, filling up with blood from the cut, almost strangled me. I coughed, wanting to stop and go to one of the tall brass, sand-filled spittoons to relieve myself, but a few of the men, especially the superintendent, were listening and I was afraid. So I gulped it down, blood, saliva and all, and continued. (What powers of endurance I had during those days! What enthusiasm! What a belief in the lightness of things!) I spoke even louder in spite of the pain. But still they talked and still they laughed, as though deaf with cotton in dirty ears. So I spoke with greater emotional emphasis. I closed my ears and swallowed blood until I was nauseated. The speech seemed a hundred times as long as before, but I could not leave out a single word. All had to be said, each memorized nuance considered, rendered. Nor was that all. Whenever I uttered a word of three or more syllables a group of voices would yell for me to repeat it. I used the phrase "social responsibility," and they yelled:

"What's that word you say, boy?"

"Social responsibility," I said.

"What?"

"Social . . ."

"Louder."

". . . responsibility."

"More!"

“Respon—”

“Repeat!”

“—sibility.”

The room filled with the uproar of laughter until, no doubt, distracted by having to gulp down my blood, I made a mistake and yelled a phrase I had often seen denounced in newspaper editorials, heard debated in private.

“Social . . .”

“What?” they yelled.

“. . . equality—”

The laughter hung smokelike in the sudden stillness. I opened my eyes, puzzled. Sounds of displeasure filled the room. The M.C. rushed forward. They shouted hostile phrases at me. But I did not understand.

A small dry mustached man in the front row blared out, “Say that slowly, son!”

“What, sir?”

“What you just said!”

“Social responsibility, sir,” I said.

“You weren’t being smart, were you, boy?” he said, not unkindly.

“No, sir!”

“You sure that about ‘equality’ was a mistake?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” I said. “I was swallowing blood.”

“Well, you had better speak more slowly so we can understand. We mean to do right by you, but you’ve got to know your place at all times. All right, now, go on with your speech.”

I was afraid. I wanted to leave but I wanted also to speak and I was afraid they’d snatch me down.

“Thank you, sir,” I said, beginning where I had left off, and having them ignore me as before.

Yet when I finished there was a thunderous applause. I was surprised to see the superintendent come forth with a package wrapped in white tissue paper, and, gesturing for quiet, address the men.

“Gentlemen, you see that I did not overpraise the boy. He makes a good speech and some day he’ll lead his people in the proper paths. And I don’t have to tell you that that is important in these days and times. This is a good, smart boy, and so to encourage him in the right direction, in the name of the Board of Education I wish to present him a prize in the form of this . . .”

He paused, removing the tissue paper and revealing a gleaming calfskin brief case.

“. . . in the form of this first-class article from Shad Whitmore’s shop.”

“Boy,” he said, addressing me, “take this prize and keep it well. Consider it a badge of office. Prize it. Keep developing as you are and some day it will be filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people.”

I was so moved that I could hardly express my thanks. A rope of bloody saliva forming a shape like an undiscovered continent drooled upon the leather and I wiped it quickly away. I felt an importance that I had never dreamed.

“Open it and see what’s inside,” I was told.

My fingers a-tremble, I complied, smelling the fresh leather and finding an official-looking document inside. It was a scholarship to the state college for Negroes. My eyes filled with tears and I ran awkwardly off the floor.

I was overjoyed; I did not even mind when I discovered that the gold pieces I had scrambled for were brass pocket tokens advertising a certain make of automobile.

When I reached home everyone was excited. Next day the neighbors came to congratulate me. I even felt safe from grandfather, whose deathbed curse usually spoiled my triumphs. I stood beneath his photograph with my brief case in hand and smiled triumphantly into his stolid black peasant's face. It was a face that fascinated me. The eyes seemed to follow everywhere I went.

That night I dreamed I was at a circus with him and that he refused to laugh at the clowns no matter what they did. Then later he told me to open my brief case and read what was inside and I did, finding an official envelope stamped with the state seal; and inside the envelope I found another and another, endlessly, and I thought I would fall of weariness. "Them's years," he said. "Now open that one." And I did and in it I found an engraved document containing a short message in letters of gold. "Read it," my grandfather said. "Out loud!"

"To Whom It May Concern," I intoned. "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running."

I awoke with the old man's laughter ringing in my ears.

(It was a dream I was to remember and dream again for many years after. But at that time I had no insight into its meaning. First I had to attend college.)

1952

SAUL BELLOW

1915–2005

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976, Saul Bellow distinguished himself through a writing career that spanned nearly two-thirds of a century. Bellow, the child of Russian Jewish immigrants, was born in Lachine, Quebec, a suburb of Montreal, and spent nine years there before moving with his family to Chicago. While relishing the style of big-city life typical of the 1920s and 1930s, he pursued an increasingly intellectual track through Tuley High School, the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University. Literature was always Bellow's great love, but as his biographer James Atlas explains, the antisemitic establishment was unreceptive to his ambitions. "In search of career advice," Atlas notes, Bellow sought counsel from the chair of Northwestern's English Department, William Frank Bryan, who warned him against postgraduate study in the field, because "no Jew could really grasp the tradition of English literature. . . . No Jew would ever have the right *feeling* for it." Bellow therefore began work toward a master's degree in sociology and anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. Discouraged by the technical work required and chided by his new advisor for being too literary, he dropped out after just one semester, returning to Chicago and a lifelong career in literature that involved teaching (initially at a downtown teachers college, later

most prestigiously as a member of the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought), editing (first for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, then for his own journal, *The Noble Savage*), and writing fiction. Except for brief service in the bureaucracy of the merchant marine during World War II, a Guggenheim Fellowship year in Paris (1948–49), and some time living in New York City and the New England countryside, Bellow made Chicago his primary residence and the setting for his most characteristic work, most famously *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). In finding a voice for the protagonist of this novel Bellow discovered his own style, a mix of the urban colloquial and the erudite.

Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man*, was not published until he was nearly thirty. It is a short series of elegantly morose meditations, told through the journal of a young man waiting to be inducted into the army and with the "freedom" of having nothing to do but wait. Eventually he is drafted: "Long live regimentation," he sardonically exults. Bellow's second novel, *The Victim* (1947), continues the investigation of ways people strive to be relieved of self-determination. This book concerns a week in the life of Asa Leventhal, alone in New York City while his wife visits a relative; he is suddenly confronted by a figure from the past (Kirby Allbee, a Gentile) who succeeds in implicating Leventhal with the past and its present manifestations. *The Victim* is Bellow's most somberly naturalistic depiction of a man brought up against forces larger than himself, yet from the opening sentence ("On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok") a poetic dimension appears and helps create the sense of mystery and disturbance felt by both the main character and the reader.

Dangling Man and *The Victim* are highly wrought, mainly humorless books; in two long novels published in the 1950s Bellow opened up into new ranges of aspiration and situational zaniness, which brought him respectful admiration from many critics. *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) are each narrated by an "I" who, like Mark Twain's Huck Finn, is good at lighting out for the territory ahead of whoever means to tie him down. The hero's adventures, whether occurring in Chicago, Mexico, or Africa, are exuberantly delivered in an always stimulating and sometimes overactive prose. *Augie* is filled with sights and sounds, colors and surfaces; its tone is self-involved, affectionate, and affirmative; *Henderson*, Bellow's most extravagant narrative, has the even more fabulous air of a quest-romance, in which the hero returns home from Africa at peace with the world he had been warring against.

The ironic motto for Bellow's novels of the 1950s may well be "Seize the Day," as in the title of perhaps his most sharply defined piece of fiction. This short novel (1956) is both painful and exhilarating because it so fully exposes its hero (Tommy Wilhelm, an aging out-of-work ex-actor) to the insults of other people who don't understand him, to a city (New York, particularly its Upper West Side) impervious to his needs, and to a narrative prose that mixes ridicule and affection so thoroughly as to make them scarcely distinguishable. *Seize the Day* combines, within Tommy's monologues, a wildness and pathos of bitter comedy that was a powerful new element in Bellow's work.

In "Where Do We Go from Here? The Future of Fiction," an essay published in 1965, Bellow pointed out that nineteenth-century American literature—Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville—was highly didactic in its efforts to "instruct a young and raw nation." Bellow sees himself in this instructive tradition and in the international company of "didactic" novelists like Dostoyevsky, D. H. Lawrence, and Joseph Conrad; he believes also that "the imagination is looking for new ways to express virtue . . . we have barely begun to comprehend what a human being is." These concerns animate the novels Bellow wrote in the years since *Henderson*. In *Herzog* (1964) the hero is another down-and-outer, a professor-intellectual, a student of Romanticism and of the glorification of Self, which Herzog believes both modern life and modernist literature have been undercutting. At the same time he is a comic and pathetic victim of marital disorder; like all Bellow's heroes (and Bellow himself),

Herzog has a terrible time with women, yet cannot live without them. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), written out of the disorders of the late 1960s, the atmosphere is grimmer. Sammler, an aging Jew living (again) on New York's Upper West Side, analyzes and judges but cannot understand the young or blacks, or the mass of people gathered at Broadway and Ninety-Sixth Street. He sees about him everywhere "poverty of soul" but admits that he too has "a touch of the same disease—the disease of the single self explaining what was what and who was who."

These novels, as well as *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), have been accused of parading too single-handedly attitudes toward which their author is sympathetic, whereas *The Dean's December* (1982) was criticized by John Updike, in a review, for being too much "about Saul Bellow," even though indirectly. Subsequently, a collection of shorter fiction, *Him with His Foot in His Mouth* (1984); the novels *More Die of Heartbreak* (1987) and *Ravelstein* (2000); three novellas, *The Bellarosa Connection* (1989), *A Theft* (1989), and *The Actual* (1997); and three stories collected as *Something to Remember Me By* (1991) exhibit various talky, informal protagonists and narrators with a lot on their minds. Matters of form and plot in these works seem less important than the ideas and active energy struck off by human beings in turmoil—usually comic turmoil. What Bellow finds moving in Theodore Dreiser's work, "his balkiness and sullenness, and then his allegiance to life," is still found in his own: complaint and weariness, fault-finding, accusation of self and others—these gestures directed at "life" also make up the stuff of life and the "allegiance" out of which Bellow's heroes are made. We read him for this range of interest; for flexibility and diversity of style and idiom; and for the eloquences of nostalgia, invective, and lamentation that make up his intensely imagined world.

Married five times, he ended his academic career with a brief residency at Boston University, afterward retiring to rural Vermont, where he died two months short of his ninetieth birthday and five years after publishing *Ravelstein*, his nineteenth book and a work indicative of the conservative, traditionalist posture of his later career.

From The Adventures of Augie March

Chapter 1

I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent. But a man's character is his fate, says Heraclitus,¹ and in the end there isn't any way to disguise the nature of the knocks by acoustical work on the door or gloving the knuckles.

Everybody knows there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression; if you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining.

My own parents were not much to me, though I cared for my mother. She was simple-minded, and what I learned from her was not what she taught, but on the order of object lessons. She didn't have much to teach, poor woman. My brothers and I loved her. I speak for them both; for the elder it is safe enough; for the younger one, Georgie, I have to answer—he was born an idiot—but I'm in no need to guess, for he had a song he sang as he ran drag-footed with his stiff idiot's trot, up and down along the curl-wired fence in the backyard:

1. Early Greek philosopher (fl. c. 480 B.C.E.) famous for his cryptic aphorisms and for positing the existence of the human soul.

Georgie Mahchy, Augie, Simey
 Winnie Mahchy, evwy, evwy love Mama.

He was right about everyone save Winnie, Grandma Lausch's poodle, a pursy old overfed dog. Mama was Winnie's servant, as she was Grandma Lausch's. Loud-breathing and wind-breaking, she lay near the old lady's stool on a cushion embroidered with a Berber² aiming a rifle at a lion. She was personally Grandma's, belonged to her suite; the rest of us were the governed, and especially Mama. Mama passed the dog's dish to Grandma, and Winnie received her food at the old lady's feet from the old lady's hands. These hands and feet were small; she wore a shriveled sort of lisle on her legs and her slippers were gray—ah, the gray of that felt, the gray despotic to souls—with pink ribbons. Mama, however, had large feet, and around the house she wore men's shoes, usually without strings, and a dusting or mobcap like somebody's fanciful cotton effigy of the form of the brain. She was meek and long, round-eyed like Georgie—gentle green round eyes and a gentle freshness of color in her long face. Her hands were work-reddened, she had very few of her teeth left—to heed the knocks as they come—and she and Simon wore the same ravelly coat-sweaters. Besides having round eyes, Mama had circular glasses that I went with her to the free dispensary on Harrison Street³ to get. Coached by Grandma Lausch, I went to do the lying. Now I know it wasn't so necessary to lie, but then everyone thought so, and Grandma Lausch especially, who was one of those Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood that my young years were full of. So Grandma, who had it all ready before we left the house and must have put in hours plotting it out in thought and phrase, lying small in her chilly small room under the featherbed, gave it to me at breakfast. The idea was that Mama wasn't keen enough to do it right. That maybe one didn't need to be keen didn't occur to us; it was a contest. The dispensary would want to know why the Charities didn't pay for the glasses. So you must say nothing about the Charities, but that sometimes money from my father came and sometimes it didn't, and that Mama took boarders. This was, in a delicate and choosy way, by ignoring and omitting certain large facts, true. It was true enough for *them*, and at the age of nine I could appreciate this perfectly. Better than my brother Simon, who was too blunt for this kind of maneuver and, anyway, from books, had gotten hold of some English schoolboy notions of honor. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*⁴ for many years had an influence we were not in a position to afford.

Simon was a blond boy with big cheekbones and wide gray eyes and had the arms of a cricketer—I go by the illustrations; we never played anything but softball. Opposed to his British style was his patriotic anger at George III.⁵ The mayor was at that time ordering the schoolboard to get history books that dealt more harshly with the king, and Simon was very hot at Cornwallis.⁶ I admired this patriotic flash, his terrific personal wrath at the general, and his satisfaction over his surrender at Yorktown,⁷ which would

2. Non-Arab North African tribesman.

3. Downtown location of Chicago's social welfare agency.

4. Novel (1857) based on experiences at Rugby School, by the English jurist and religious reformer Thomas Hughes (1822–1896).

5. King (1738–1820) of England, Scotland, and Ireland during a period (r. 1760–1820) that

included the American Revolution.

6. Charles Cornwallis (1738–1805), British general who made the final surrender in the American Revolution.

7. Village in southeast Virginia where in 1781 British forces surrendered to George Washington's Continental Army, effectively ending the American Revolution.

often come over him at lunch while we ate our bologna sandwiches. Grandma had a piece of boiled chicken at noon, and sometimes there was the gizzard for bristle-headed little Georgie, who loved it and blew at the ridgy thing more to cherish than to cool it. But this martial true-blood pride of Simon's disqualified him for the crafty task to be done at the dispensary; he was too disdainful to lie and might denounce everybody instead. I could be counted on to do the job, because I enjoyed it. I loved a piece of strategy. I had enthusiasms too; I had Simon's, though there was never much meat in Cornwallis for me, and I had Grandma Lausch's as well. As for the truth of these statements I was instructed to make—well, it was a fact that we had a boarder. Grandma Lausch was our boarder, not a relation at all. She was supported by two sons, one from Cincinnati and one from Racine, Wisconsin. The daughters-in-law did not want her, and she, the widow of a powerful Odessa⁸ businessman—a divinity over us, bald, whiskery, with a fat nose, greatly armored in a cutaway, a double-breasted vest, powerfully buttoned (his blue photo, enlarged and retouched by Mr. Lulov, hung in the parlor, doubled back between the portico columns of the full-length mirror, the dome of the stove beginning where his trunk ended)—she preferred to live with us, because for so many years she was used to direct a house, to command, to govern, to manage, scheme, devise, and intrigue in all her languages. She boasted French and German besides Russian, Polish, and Yiddish; and who but Mr. Lulov, the retouch artist from Division Street,⁹ could have tested her claim to French? And he was a serene bogus too, that triple-backed gallant tea-drinker. Except that he had been a hackie in Paris, once, and if he told the truth about that might have known French among other things, like playing tunes on his teeth with a pencil or singing and keeping time with a handful of coins that he rattled by jiggling his thumb along the table, and how to play chess.

Grandma Lausch played like Timur, whether chess or klabyasch,¹ with palatal catty harshness and sharp gold in her eyes. Klabyasch she played with Mr. Kreindl, a neighbor of ours who had taught her the game. A powerful stub-handed man with a large belly, he swatted the table with those hard hands of his, flinging down his cards and shouting "*Shtoch! Yasch! Menél! Klabyasch!*"² Grandma looked sardonically at him. She often said, after he left, "If you've got a Hungarian friend you don't need an enemy." But there was nothing of the enemy about Mr. Kreindl. He merely, sometimes, sounded menacing because of his drill-sergeant's bark. He was an old-time Austro-Hungarian³ conscript, and there was something soldierly about him: a neck that had strained with pushing artillery wheels, a campaigner's red in the face, a powerful bite in his jaw and gold-crowned teeth, green cockeyes and soft short hair, altogether Napoleonic.⁴ His feet slanted out on the ideal of

8. City in the Ukraine on the Black Sea, departure point for many Russian Jews who emigrated to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

9. Commercial and shopping street on Chicago's North Side.

1. Card game taking its name from the Yiddish verb for "to gather." "Timur": also known as Tamerlane, Mongol warrior (1336–1405) whose conquests

stretched from the Ukraine to northern India.

2. Successive winning tricks.

3. The dual monarchy of Austria and Hungary (1867–1918) encompassed Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, and parts of Poland, Romania, Italy, and the Balkans.

4. Era and style of Napoléon Bonaparte's (1769–1821) rule as Napoléon I, emperor of the French (1804–15).

Frederick the Great,⁵ but he was about a foot under the required height for guardsmen. He had a masterly look of independence. He and his wife—a woman quiet and modest to the neighbors and violently quarrelsome at home—and his son, a dental student, lived in what was called the English basement at the front of the house. The son, Kotzie, worked evenings in the corner drugstore and went to school in the neighborhood of County Hospital, and it was he who told Grandma about the free dispensary. Or rather, the old woman sent for him to find out what one could get from those state and county places. She was always sending for people, the butcher, the grocer, the fruit peddler, and received them in the kitchen to explain that the Marches had to have discounts. Mama usually had to stand by. The old woman would tell them, “You see how it is—do I have to say more? There’s no man in the house and children to bring up.” This was her most frequent argument. When Lubin, the caseworker, came around and sat in the kitchen, familiar, bald-headed, in his gold glasses, his weight comfortable, his mouth patient, she shot it at him: “How do you expect children to be brought up?” While he listened, trying to remain comfortable but gradually becoming like a man determined not to let a grasshopper escape from his hand. “Well, my dear, Mrs. March could raise your rent,” he said. She must often have answered—for there were times when she sent us all out to be alone with him—“Do you know what things would be like without me? You ought to be grateful for the way I hold them together.” I’m sure she even said, “And when I die, Mr. Lubin, you’ll see what you’ve got on your hands.” I’m one hundred per cent sure of it. To us nothing was ever said that might weaken her rule by suggesting it would ever end. Besides, it would have shocked us to hear it, and she, in her miraculous knowledge of us, able to be extremely close to our thoughts—she was one sovereign who knew exactly the proportions of love, respect, and fear of power in her subjects—understood how we would have been shocked. But to Lubin, for reasons of policy and also because she had to express feelings she certainly had, she must have said it. He had a harassed patience with her of “deliver me from such clients,” though he tried to appear master of the situation. He held his derby between his thighs (his suits, always too scanty in the pants, exposed white socks and bulldog shoes, crinkled, black, and bulging with toes), and he looked into the hat as though debating whether it was wise to release his grasshopper on the lining for a while.

“I pay as much as I can afford,” she would say.

She took her cigarette case out from under her shawl, she cut a Murad⁶ in half with her sewing scissors and picked up the holder. This was still at a time when women did not smoke. Save the intelligentsia—the term she applied to herself. With the holder in her dark little gums between which all her guile, malice, and command issued, she had her best inspirations of strategy. She was as wrinkled as an old paper bag, an autocrat, hard-shelled and jesuitical,⁷

5. Frederick II (1712–1786), called “the Great,” king of Prussia (r. 1740–86), patron of the arts and philosophy.

6. A Turkish cigarette, named for the Murad River.

7. Reference to the Society of Jesus, commonly called Jesuits, a Catholic religious order famous for its intellectual rigor, founded in 1540 by the Spanish priest Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556).

a pouncy old hawk of a Bolshevik,⁸ her small ribboned gray feet immobile on the shoekit and stool Simon had made in the manual-training class, dingy old wool Winnie whose bad smell filled the flat on the cushion beside her. If wit and discontent don't necessarily go together, it wasn't from the old woman that I learned it. She was impossible to satisfy. Kreindl, for example, on whom we could depend, Kreindl who carried up the coal when Mama was sick and who instructed Kotzie to make up our prescriptions for nothing, she called "that trashy Hungarian," or "Hungarian pig." She called Kotzie "the baked apple"; she called Mrs. Kreindl "the secret goose," Lubin "the shoemaker's son," the dentist "the butcher," the butcher "the timid swindler." She detested the dentist, who had several times unsuccessfully tried to fit her with false teeth. She accused him of burning her gums when taking the impressions. But then she tried to pull his hands away from her mouth. I saw that happen: the stolid, square-framed Dr. Wernick, whose compact forearms could have held off a bear, painfully careful with her, determined, concerned at her choked screams, and enduring her scratches. To see her struggle like that was no easy thing for me, and Dr. Wernick was sorry to see me there too, I know, but either Simon or I had to squire her wherever she went. Here particularly she needed a witness to Wernick's cruelty and clumsiness as well as a shoulder to lean on when she went weakly home. Already at ten I was only a little shorter than she and big enough to hold her small weight.

"You saw how he put his paws over my face so I couldn't breathe?" she said. "God made him to be a butcher. Why did he become a dentist? His hands are too heavy. The touch is everything to a dentist. If his hands aren't right he shouldn't be let practice. But his wife worked hard to send him through school and make a dentist of him. And I must go to him and be burned because of it."

The rest of us had to go to the dispensary—which was like the dream of a multitude of dentists' chairs, hundreds of them in a space as enormous as an armory, and green bowls with designs of glass grapes, drills lifted zigzag as insects' legs, and gas flames on the porcelain swivel trays—a thundery gloom in Harrison Street of limestone county buildings and cumbersome red streetcars with metal grillwork on their windows and monarchical iron whiskers of cowcatchers front and rear. They lumbered and clanged, and their brake tanks panted in the slushy brown of a winter afternoon or the bare stone brown of a summer's, salted with ash, smoke, and prairie dust, with long stops at the clinics to let off dumpers, cripples, hunchbacks, brace-legs, crutch-wielders, tooth and eye sufferers, and all the rest.

So before going with my mother for the glasses I was always instructed by the old woman and had to sit and listen with profound care. My mother too had to be present, for there must be no slip-up. She must be coached to say nothing. "Remember, Rebecca," Grandma would rerepeat, "let him answer everything." To which Mama was too obedient even to say yes, but only sat and kept her long hands folded on the bottle-fly iridescence of the dress the old woman had picked for her to wear. Very healthy and smooth, her color; none of us inherited this high a color from her, or the form of her nose with nostrils turned back and showing a little of the partition. "You keep out of it. If they ask you something, you look at Augie like this." And she illustrated

8. Left-wing political party allied with other Communist forces in the Russian Revolution (1917).

how Mama was to turn to me, terribly exact, if she had only been able to drop her habitual grandeur. “Don’t tell anything. Only answer questions,” she said to me. My mother was anxious that I should be worthy and faithful. Simon and I were her miracles or accidents; Georgie was her own true work in which she returned to her fate after blessed and undeserved success. “Augie, listen to Grandma. Hear what she says,” was all she ever dared when the old woman unfolded her plan.

“When they ask you, ‘Where is your father?’ you say, ‘I don’t know where, miss.’ No matter how old she is, you shouldn’t forget to say ‘miss.’ If she wants to know where he was the last time you heard from him, you must tell her that the last time he sent a money order was about two years ago from Buffalo, New York. Never say a word about the Charity. The Charity you should never mention, you hear that? Never. When she asks you how much the rent is, tell her eighteen dollars. When she asks where the money comes from, say you have boarders. How many? Two boarders. Now, say to me, how much rent?”

“Eighteen dollars.”

“And how many boarders?”

“Two.”

“And how much do they pay?”

“How much should I say?”

“Eight dollars each a week.”

“Eight dollars.”

“So you can’t go to a private doctor, if you get sixty-four dollars a month. The eyedrops alone cost me five when I went, and he scalded my eyes. And these specs”—she tapped the case—“cost ten dollars the frames and fifteen the glasses.”

Never but at such times, by necessity, was my father mentioned. I claimed to remember him; Simon denied that I did, and Simon was right. I liked to imagine it.

“He wore a uniform,” I said. “Sure I remember. He was a soldier.”

“Like hell he was. You don’t know anything about it.”

“Maybe a sailor.”

“Like hell. He drove a truck for Hall Brothers laundry on Marshfield,⁹ that’s what he did. I said he used to wear a uniform. Monkey sees, monkey does; monkey hears, monkey says.” Monkey was the basis of much thought with us. On the sideboard, on the Turkestan runner, with their eyes, ears, and mouth covered, we had see-no-evil, speak-no-evil, hear-no-evil, a lower trinity of the house. The advantage of lesser gods is that you can take their names any way you like. “Silence in the courthouse, monkey wants to speak; speak, monkey, speak.” “The monkey and the bamboo were playing in the grass . . .” Still the monkeys could be potent, and awesome besides, and deep social critics when the old woman, like a great lama—for she is Eastern to me, in the end—would point to the squatting brown three, whose mouths and nostrils were drawn in sharp blood-red, and with profound wit, her unkindness finally touching greatness, say, “Nobody asks you to love the whole world, only to be honest, *ehrlich*.¹ Don’t have a loud mouth. The more you love people the more they’ll mix you up. A child loves, a person respects.

9. Commercial avenue on Chicago’s North Side.

1. Sincere (German).

Respect is better than love. And that's respect, the middle monkey." It never occurred to us that she sinned mischievously herself against that convulsed speak-no-evil who hugged his lips with his hands; but no criticism of her came near our minds at any time, much less when the resonance of a great principle filled the whole kitchen.

She used to read us lessons off poor Georgie's head. He would kiss the dog. This bickering handmaiden of the old lady, at one time. Now a dozy, long-sighing crank and proper object of respect for her years of right-minded but not exactly lovable busyness. But Georgie loved her—and Grandma, whom he would kiss on the sleeve, on the knee, taking knee or arm in both hands and putting his underlip forward, chaste, lummoxy, caressing, gentle and diligent when he bent his narrow back, blouse bagging all over it, whitish hair pointy and close as a burr or sunflower when the seeds have been picked out of it. The old lady let him embrace her and spoke to him in the following way: "Hey, you, boy, clever *junge*,² you like the old Grandma, my minister, my *cavalier*?³ That's-a-boy. You know who's good to you, who gives you gizzards and necks? Who? Who makes noodles for you? Yes. Noodles are slippery, hard to pick up with a fork and hard to pick up with the fingers. You see how the little bird pulls the worm? The little worm wants to stay in the ground. The little worm doesn't want to come out. Enough, you're making my dress wet." And she'd sharply push his forehead off with her old prim hand, having fired off for Simon and me, mindful always of her duty to wise us up, one more animadversion on the trustful, loving, and simple surrounded by the cunning-hearted and tough, a fighting nature of birds and worms, and a desperate mankind without feelings. Illustrated by Georgie. But the principal illustration was not Georgie but Mama, in her love-originated servitude, simpleminded, abandoned with three children. This was what old lady Lausch was driving at, now, in the later wisdom of her life, that she had a second family to lead.

And what must Mama have thought when in any necessary connection my father was brought into the conversation? She sat docile. I conceive that she thought of some detail about him—a dish he liked, perhaps meat and potatoes, perhaps cabbage or cranberry sauce; perhaps that he disliked a starched collar, or a soft collar; that he brought home the *Evening American* or the *Journal*.⁴ She thought this because her thoughts were always simple; but she felt abandonment, and greater pains than conscious mental ones put a dark streak to her simplicity. I don't know how she made out before, when we were alone after the desertion, but Grandma came and put a regulating hand on the family life. Mama surrendered powers to her that maybe she had never known she had and took her punishment in drudgery; occupied a place, I suppose, among women conquered by a superior force of love, like those women whom Zeus got the better of in animal form and who next had to take cover from his furious wife. Not that I can see my big, gentle, dilapidated, scrubbing, and lugging mother as a fugitive of immense beauty from such classy wrath, or our father as a marble-legged Olympian. She had sewed buttonholes in a coat factory in a Wells Street⁵ loft and he was a laundry

2. Young man (German).

3. Yiddish borrowing from the German *kavalier* (gentleman) and Polish *kawaler* (bachelor, gallant).

4. Chicago newspapers of the era.

5. Light-industrial street immediately north of Chicago's downtown area.

driver—there wasn't even so much as a picture of him left when he blew. But she does have a place among such women by the deeper right of continual payment. And as for vengeance from a woman, Grandma Lausch was there to administer the penalties under the standards of legitimacy, representing the main body of married womankind.

Still the old lady had a heart. I don't mean to say she didn't. She was tyrannical and a snob about her Odessa luster and her servants and governesses, but though she had been a success herself she knew what it was to fall through susceptibility. I began to realize this when I afterward read some of the novels she used to send me to the library for. She taught me the Russian alphabet so that I could make out the titles. Once a year she read *Anna Karenina* and *Eugene Onegin*.⁶ Occasionally I got into hot water by bringing a book she didn't want. "How many times do I have to tell you if it doesn't say *roman* I don't want it? You didn't look inside. Are your fingers too weak to open the book? Then they should be too weak to play ball or pick your nose. For that you've got strength! *Bozhe moy!*⁷ God in Heaven! You haven't got the brains of a cat, to walk two miles and bring me a book about religion because it says Tolstoi on the cover."

The old *grande dame*, I don't want to be misrepresenting her. She was suspicious of what could have been, given one wrong stitch of heredity, a family vice by which we could have been exploited. She didn't want to read Tolstoi on religion. She didn't trust him as a family man because the countess had had such trouble with him. But although she never went to the synagogue, ate bread on Passover, sent Mama to the pork butcher where meat was cheaper, loved canned lobster and other forbidden food, she was not an atheist and free-thinker. Mr. Anticol, the old junky she called (search me why) "Rameses"—after the city named with Pithom in the Scriptures maybe;⁸ no telling what her inspirations were—was that. A real rebel to God. Icy and canny, she would listen to what he had to say and wouldn't declare herself. He was ruddy, and gloomy; his leathery serge cap made him flat-headed, and his alley calls for rags, old iron—"recks aline," he sung it—made him gravel-voiced and gruff. He had tough hair and brows and despising brown eyes; he was a studious, shaggy, meaty old man. Grandma bought a set of the *Encyclopedia Americana*—edition of 1892, I think—from him and saw to it that Simon and I read it; and he too, whenever he met us, asked, "How's the set?" believing, I reckon, that it taught irreverence to religion. What had made him an atheist was a massacre of Jews in his town. From the cellar where he was hidden he saw a laborer pissing on the body of his wife's younger brother, just killed. "So don't talk to me about God," he said. But it was he that talked about God, all the time. And while Mrs. Anticol stayed pious, it was his idea of grand apostasy to drive to the reform synagogue on the high holidays and park his pink-eye nag among the luxurious, whirl-wired touring cars of the rich Jews who bared their heads inside as if they were attending a theater, a kind of abjectness in them that gave him grim entertainment to the end of his life. He caught a cold in the rain and died of pneumonia.

6. Verse narrative (1823–31) by the Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837). "*Anna Karenina*"; novel (1875–77) by the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910).

7. My God! (Russian).

8. Exodus 1.11: "Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses."

Grandma, all the same, burned a candle on the anniversary of Mr. Lausch's death, threw a lump of dough on the coals when she was baking, as a kind of offering, had incantations over baby teeth and stunts against the evil eye. It was kitchen religion and had nothing to do with the giant God of the Creation who turned back the waters and exploded Gomorrah, but it was on the side of religion at that. And while we're on that side I'll mention the Poles—we were just a handful of Jews among them in the neighborhood—and the swollen, bleeding hearts on every kitchen wall, the pictures of saints, baskets of death flowers tied at the door, communions, Easters, and Christmases. And sometimes we were chased, stoned, bitten, and beat up for Christ-killers, all of us, even Georgie, articed, whether we liked it or not, to this mysterious trade. But I never had any special grief from it, or brooded, being by and large too larky and boisterous to take it to heart, and looked at it as needing no more special explanation than the stone-and-bat wars of the street gangs or the swarming on a fall evening of parish punks to rip up fences, screech and bawl at girls, and beat up strangers. It wasn't in my nature to fatigue myself with worry over being born to this occult work, even though some of my friends and playmates would turn up in the middle of these mobs to trap you between houses from both ends of a passageway. Simon had less truck with them. School absorbed him more, and he had his sentiments anyway, a mixed extract from Natty Bumppo, Quentin Durward, Tom Brown, Clark at Kaskaskia, the messenger who brought the good news from Ratisbon,⁹ and so on, that kept him more to himself. I was just a slow understudy to this, just as he never got me to put in hours on his Sandow muscle builder¹ and the gimmick for developing the sinews of the wrist. I was an easy touch for friendships, and most of the time they were cut short by older loyalties. I was pals longest with Stashu Kopecs, whose mother was a midwife graduated from the Aesculapian School of Midwifery on Milwaukee Avenue.² Well to do, the Kopecses had an electric player piano and linoleums in all the rooms, but Stashu was a thief, and to run with him I stole too: coal off the cars, clothes from the lines, rubber balls from the dime store, and pennies off the newsstands. Mostly for the satisfaction of dexterity, though Stashu invented the game of stripping in the cellar and putting on girls' things swiped from the clotheslines. Then he too showed up in a gang that caught me one cold afternoon of very little snow while I was sitting on a crate frozen into the mud, eating Nabisco³ wafers, my throat full of the sweet dust. Foremost, there was a thug of a kid, about thirteen but undersized, hard and grieved-looking. He came up to accuse me, and big Moonya Staplanski, just out of the St. Charles Reformatory⁴ and headed next for the one at Pontiac,⁵ backed him up.

"You little Jew bastard, you hit my brother," Moonya said.

9. The French name for the German city of Regensburg, which was captured by Napoleon's armies in 1809. "Natty Bumppo": protagonist of the Leatherstocking novels by the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851). "Quentin Durward": eponymous hero in the novel (1823) by the Scottish poet and novelist Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832). "Tom Brown": see n. 4, p. 211. "Clark at Kaskaskia": the American military leader George Rogers Clark (1752–1818) captured the British frontier fort at Kaskaskia, Illinois, in 1778.

1. Device named after Eugen Sandow (1867–1925), American physical culturist born in Germany, famous for his performances as a bodybuilder and for advocacy of physical education.

2. Commercial and shopping street on Chicago's North Side, at this time a Polish-American neighborhood.

3. Brand name of the National Biscuit Company.

4. Site of the Illinois State Reformatory for Boys.

5. Site of the Illinois Correctional Center.

"I never did. I never even saw him before."

"You took away a nickel from him. How did you buy them biscuits else, you?"

"I got them at home."

Then I caught sight of Stashu, hayheaded and jeering, pleased to sickness with his deceit and his new-revealed brotherhood with the others, and I said, "Hey, you lousy bed-wetter, Stashu, you know Moon ain't even got a brother."

Here the kid hit me and the gang jumped me, Stashu with the rest, tearing the buckles from my sheepskin coat and bloodying my nose.

"Who is to blame?" said Grandma Lausch when I came home. "You know who? You are, Augie, because that's all the brains you have to go with that piss-in-bed *accoucherka's*⁶ son. Does Simon hang around with them? Not Simon. He has too much sense." I thanked God she didn't know about the stealing. And in a way, because that was her schooling temperament, I suspect she was pleased that I should see where it led to give your affections too easily. But Mama, the prime example of this weakness, was horrified. Against the old lady's authority she didn't dare to introduce her feelings during the hearing, but when she took me into the kitchen to put a compress on me she near-sightedly pored over my scratches, whispering and sighing to me, while Georgie tottered around behind her, long and white, and Winnie lapped water under the sink.

1953

6. Yiddish borrowing from the Polish *akuszerka* (midwife).

ARTHUR MILLER

1915–2005

For much modern American drama the family is the central subject, as the anthology selections show. In *Long Day's Journey into Night* Eugene O'Neill studied his own family through the Tyrones; in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* the Kowalskis are one family, which Blanche invades, while Blanche and Stella, as sisters, are another. Most of Arthur Miller's plays, as well, concentrate on the family and envision an ideal world as, perhaps, an enlarged family. Often the protagonist's sense of family draws him into conflict with—and eventual doom in—the outside world. Yet Miller recognized that an ideal is sometimes a rationalization. Joe Keller insists in *All My Sons* (1947) that during the war he shipped damaged airplane parts to support his family, but a desire for commercial success was part of his motive. Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge* (1955) accepts death because of his sense of responsibility to his niece, but married man though he is, he may also be in love with that same niece. In *Death of a Salesman* (1949) Willy Loman's delusions and self-deceptions derive from, and return to, his image of himself as family provider,

an image he cannot live up to; driven by his desire to be “well liked,” a successful social personality, he fails to connect with either of his sons and neglects his wife. Thus Miller’s treatment of the family leads to a treatment both of personal ideals and of the society within which families have to operate.

Miller was born into a German Jewish family in Manhattan; his father was a well-to-do but almost illiterate clothing manufacturer, his mother an avid reader. When his father’s business collapsed after the stock market crash in 1929, the family moved to Brooklyn, where Miller graduated from high school. His subsequent two years of work in an automobile-parts warehouse to earn money for college tuition are warmly recalled in his play *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955). At the University of Michigan he enrolled as a journalism student. These were the years of the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, and the attraction of Marxism as a way out of the Depression, and here Miller formed his political views. He also began to write plays, which won prizes at the university and in New York. He then went to work for the Federal Theater Project, wrote radio plays, toured army camps to gather material for a film, and married Mary Slattery, the first of his three wives.

In 1947 Miller enjoyed his first Broadway success, *All My Sons*. (*The Man Who Had All the Luck* had failed in 1944.) This strongly realistic portrayal of a family divided because of the father’s insistence on business as usual during World War II drew the attention of audiences and theater critics. *Death of a Salesman*, his masterpiece, was produced two years later and won the Pulitzer Prize. An adaptation of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* followed in 1951. It was suggested to him by the actors Fredric March and Florence Eldridge, but Miller was clearly drawn by Ibsen’s hero, Dr. Stockmann, who leads a fight against pollution with strong but confused idealism.

In the early 1950s, the hysterical search for supposed Communist infiltration of American life reached its height as Senator Joseph McCarthy summoned suspect after suspect to hearings in Washington. Miller later said that at this time he was reading a book about the Salem witch trials and saw that “the main point of the hearings, precisely as in seventeenth-century Salem, was that the accused make public confession, damn his confederates as well as his Devil master, and guarantee his sterling new allegiance by breaking disgusting old vows—whereupon he was let loose to rejoin the society of extremely decent people.” Out of this insight came *The Crucible* (1953), in which the hero, John Proctor, allows himself to be executed rather than sign away his name and his children’s respect. Hysteria touched Miller personally when he was denied a passport and in 1957 was convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to name suspected Communists (this conviction was unanimously overturned by the Supreme Court the following year).

Miller had long been looking for a way to dramatize what he had earlier learned about mob control of the Brooklyn waterfront and finally did so in the one-act play *A View from the Bridge*, produced with *A Memory of Two Mondays* in 1955; later he would rework *View* into a full-length play. Meanwhile, he had met the glamorous movie actress Marilyn Monroe; they married in 1956, after he divorced his first wife. He wrote the screenplay *The Misfits* for Monroe, but in their private life, their complex natures were ill-sorted. The marriage ended in divorce in 1961, and a year later he married the photographer Ingeborg Morath, with whom he collaborated on several books of photographs and essays.

In 1964 two plays opened: *After the Fall* (in which the protagonist is a thinly disguised Miller investigating his family, his responsibilities, and his wives) and *Incident at Vichy* (about Jews and Nazis in Vichy, France). While these were by no means as successful as *Salesman*, they returned him seriously to the stage. Among later plays are *The Price* (1968), *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* (1977), and two one-act plays under the title *Danger: Memory!* (1986). These last fared poorly in New York, but found successful productions elsewhere in the world.



Actor Lee J. Cobb as Willy Loman being restrained by actors Arthur Kennedy (left) and Cameron Mitchell (right) as his sons Biff and Hap, respectively, in the 1949 original Broadway production of *Death of a Salesman*.

Miller in his later years was something of an activist. In the late 1960s he was asked to become president of PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists), the international writers' group. By opening this organization to writers in what were then Iron Curtain countries and speaking out for those repressed by totalitarian regimes, he became a respected champion of human rights.

Like his contemporary Tennessee Williams, Miller rejected the influence of "mawkish twenties slang" and "deadly repetitiveness." Again like Williams, Miller was impatient with prosy dialogue and well-made structures. As he explained, the success of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947 helped him write *Death of a Salesman*:

With *Streetcar*, Tennessee had printed a license to speak at full throat, and it helped strengthen me as I turned to Willy Loman, a salesman always full of words, and better yet, a man who could never cease trying, like Adam, to name

himself and the world's wonders. I had known all along that this play could not be encompassed by conventional realism, and for one integral reason: in Willy the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind. I wanted precisely the same fluidity of form.

In *Salesman* the action moves effortlessly from the present—the last twenty-four hours of Willy's life—into moments in his memory, symbolized in the stage setting by the idyllic leaves around his house that, in these past moments, block out the threatening apartment houses. The successful realization of this fluidity on the stage was greatly aided by Miller's director, Elia Kazan, and his stage designer, Jo Mielziner, both of whom had worked with Williams two years earlier on *Streetcar*. A striking difference between Williams and Miller, however, is the latter's overt moralizing, which adds a didactic element to his plays not to be found in those of Williams.

The text is from *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (1957).

Death of a Salesman

Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem

THE CHARACTERS

WILLY LOMAN	THE WOMAN	JENNY
LINDA	CHARLEY	STANLEY
BIFF	UNCLE BEN	MISS FORSYTHE
HAPPY	HOWARD WAGNER	LETTA
BERNARD		

The action takes place in WILLY LOMAN's house and yard and in various places he visits in the New York and Boston of today.

Act One

A melody is heard, playing upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.

Before us is the Salesman's house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry flow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality. The kitchen at center seems actual enough, for there is a kitchen table with three chairs, and a refrigerator. But no other fixtures are seen. At the back of the kitchen there is a draped entrance, which leads to the living-room. To the right of the kitchen, on a level raised two feet, is a bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair. On a shelf over the bed a silver athletic trophy stands. A window opens onto the apartment house at the side.

Behind the kitchen, on a level raised six and a half feet, is the boys' bedroom, at present barely visible. Two beds are dimly seen, and at the back of the room a dormer window. (This bedroom is above the unseen living-room.) At the left a stairway curves up to it from the kitchen.

The entire setting is wholly or, in some places, partially transparent. The roofline of the house is one-dimensional; under and over it we see the apartment

buildings. Before the house lies an apron, curving beyond the forestage into the orchestra. This forward area serves as the back yard as well as the locale of all WILLY's imaginings and of his city scenes. Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping "through" a wall onto the forestage.

From the right, WILLY LOMAN, the Salesman, enters, carrying two large sample cases. The flute plays on. He hears but is not aware of it. He is past sixty years of age, dressed quietly. Even as he crosses the stage to the doorway of the house, his exhaustion is apparent. He unlocks the door, comes into the kitchen, and thankfully lets his burden down, feeling the soreness of his palms. A word-sigh escapes his lips—it might be "Oh, boy, oh, boy." He closes the door, then carries his cases out into the living-room, through the draped kitchen doorway.

LINDA, his wife, has stirred in her bed at the right. She gets out and puts on a robe, listening. Most often jovial, she has developed an iron repression of her exceptions to WILLY's behavior—she more than loves him, she admires him, as though his mercurial nature, his temper, his massive dreams and little cruelties, served her only as sharp reminders of the turbulent longings within him, longings which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end.

LINDA [hearing WILLY outside the bedroom, calls with some trepidation]

Willy!

WILLY It's all right. I came back.

LINDA Why? What happened? [slight pause] Did something happen, Willy?

WILLY No, nothing happened.

LINDA You didn't smash the car, did you?

WILLY [with casual irritation] I said nothing happened. Didn't you hear me?

LINDA Don't you feel well?

WILLY I'm tired to the death. [The flute has faded away. He sits on the bed beside her, a little numb.] I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda.

LINDA [very carefully, delicately] Where were you all day? You look terrible.

WILLY I got as far as a little above Yonkers. I stopped for a cup of coffee.

Maybe it was the coffee.

LINDA What?

WILLY [after a pause] I suddenly couldn't drive any more. The car kept going off onto the shoulder, y'know?

LINDA [helpfully] Oh. Maybe it was the steering again. I don't think Angelo knows the Studebaker.

WILLY No, it's me, it's me. Suddenly I realize I'm goin' sixty miles an hour and I don't remember the last five minutes. I'm—I can't seem to—keep my mind to it.

LINDA Maybe it's your glasses. You never went for your new glasses.

WILLY No, I see everything. I came back ten miles an hour. It took me nearly four hours from Yonkers.

LINDA [resigned] Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way.

WILLY I just got back from Florida.

LINDA But you didn't rest your mind. Your mind is overactive, and the mind is what counts, dear.

WILLY I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in the morning. [*She is taking off his shoes.*] These goddam arch supports are killing me.

LINDA Take an aspirin. Should I get you an aspirin? It'll soothe you.

WILLY [*with wonder*] I was driving along, you understand? And I was fine. I was even observing the scenery. You can imagine, me looking at scenery, on the road every week of my life. But it's so beautiful up there, Linda, the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm. I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me. And then all of a sudden I'm goin' off the road! I'm tellin' ya, I absolutely forgot I was driving. If I'd've gone the other way over the white line I might've killed somebody. So I went on again—and five minutes later I'm dreamin' again, and I nearly— [*He presses two fingers against his eyes.*] I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts.

LINDA Willy, dear. Talk to them again. There's no reason why you can't work in New York.

WILLY They don't need me in New York. I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England.

LINDA But you're sixty years old. They can't expect you to keep traveling every week.

WILLY I'll have to send a wire to Portland. I'm supposed to see Brown and Morrison tomorrow morning at ten o'clock to show the line. Goddammit, I could sell them! [*He starts putting on his jacket.*]

LINDA [*taking the jacket from him*] Why don't you go down to the place tomorrow and tell Howard you've simply got to work in New York? You're too accommodating, dear.

WILLY If old man Wagner was alive I'd a been in charge of New York now! That man was a prince, he was a masterful man. But that boy of his, that Howard, he don't appreciate. When I went north the first time, the Wagner Company didn't know where New England was!

LINDA Why don't you tell those things to Howard, dear?

WILLY [*encouraged*] I will, I definitely will. Is there any cheese?

LINDA I'll make you a sandwich.

WILLY No, go to sleep. I'll take some milk. I'll be up right away. The boys in?

LINDA They're sleeping. Happy took Biff on a date tonight.

WILLY [*interested*] That so?

LINDA It was so nice to see them shaving together, one behind the other, in the bathroom. And going out together. You notice? The whole house smells of shaving lotion.

WILLY Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.

LINDA Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way.

WILLY No, no, some people—some people accomplish something. Did Biff say anything after I went this morning?

LINDA You shouldn't have criticized him, Willy, especially after he just got off the train. You mustn't lose your temper with him.

WILLY When the hell did I lose my temper? I simply asked him if he was making any money. Is that a criticism?

LINDA But, dear, how could he make any money?

WILLY [*worried and angered*] There's such an undercurrent in him. He became a moody man. Did he apologize when I left this morning?

LINDA He was crestfallen, Willy. You know how he admires you. I think if he finds himself, then you'll both be happier and not fight any more.

WILLY How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life? A farmhand? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week?

LINDA He's finding himself, Willy.

WILLY Not finding yourself at the age of thirty-four is a disgrace!

LINDA Shh!

WILLY The trouble is he's lazy, goddammit!

LINDA Willy, please!

WILLY Biff is a lazy bum!

LINDA They're sleeping. Get something to eat. Go on down.

WILLY Why did he come home? I would like to know what brought him home.

LINDA I don't know. I think he's still lost, Willy. I think he's very lost.

WILLY Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such—personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff—he's not lazy.

LINDA Never.

WILLY [*with pity and resolve*] I'll see him in the morning; I'll have a nice talk with him. I'll get him a job selling. He could be big in no time. My God! Remember how they used to follow him around in high school? When he smiled at one of them their faces lit up. When he walked down the street . . . [*He loses himself in reminiscences.*]

LINDA [*trying to bring him out of it*] Willy, dear, I got a new kind of American-type cheese today. It's whipped.

WILLY Why do you get American when I like Swiss?

LINDA I just thought you'd like a change—

WILLY I don't want a change! I want Swiss cheese. Why am I always being contradicted?

LINDA [*with a covering laugh*] I thought it would be a surprise.

WILLY Why don't you open a window in here, for God's sake?

LINDA [*with infinite patience*] They're all open, dear.

WILLY The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks.

LINDA We should've bought the land next door.

WILLY The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow any more, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?

LINDA Yeah, like being a million miles from the city.

WILLY They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood. [*lost*] More and more I think of those days, Linda. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What fragrance in this room!

LINDA Well, after all, people had to move somewhere.

WILLY No, there's more people now.

LINDA I don't think there's more people. I think—

WILLY There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house! And another one on the other side . . . How can they whip cheese?

[On WILLY's last line, BIFF and HAPPY raise themselves up in their beds, listening.]

LINDA Go down, try it. And be quiet.

WILLY [turning to LINDA, guiltily] You're not worried about me, are you, sweetheart?

BIFF What's the matter?

HAPPY Listen!

LINDA You've got too much on the ball to worry about.

WILLY You're my foundation and my support, Linda.

LINDA Just try to relax, dear. You make mountains out of molehills.

WILLY I won't fight with him any more. If he wants to go back to Texas, let him go.

LINDA He'll find his way.

WILLY Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life. Like Thomas Edison, I think. Or B. F. Goodrich. One of them was deaf. [He starts for the bedroom doorway.] I'll put my money on Biff.

LINDA And Willy—if it's warm Sunday we'll drive in the country. And we'll open the windshield, and take lunch.

WILLY No, the windshields don't open on the new cars.

LINDA But you opened it today.

WILLY Me? I didn't. [He stops.] Now isn't that peculiar! Isn't that a remarkable—[He breaks off in amazement and fright as the flute is heard distantly.]

LINDA What, darling?

WILLY That is the most remarkable thing.

LINDA What, dear?

WILLY I was thinking of the Chevy. [slight pause] Nineteen twenty-eight . . . when I had that red Chevy—[breaks off] That funny? I coulda sworn I was driving that Chevy today.

LINDA Well, that's nothing. Something must've reminded you.

WILLY Remarkable. Ts. Remember those days? The way Biff used to simulate that car? The dealer refused to believe there was eighty thousand miles on it. [He shakes his head.] Heh! [to LINDA] Close your eyes, I'll be right up. [He walks out of the bedroom.]

HAPPY [to BIFF] Jesus, maybe he smashed up the car again!

LINDA [calling after WILLY] Be careful on the stairs, dear! The cheese is on the middle shelf! [She turns, goes over to the bed, takes his jacket, and goes out of the bedroom.]

[Light has risen on the boys' room. Unseen, WILLY is heard talking to himself, "Eighty thousand miles," and a little laugh. BIFF gets out of bed, comes downstage a bit, and stands attentively. BIFF is two years older than his brother HAPPY, well built, but in these days bears a worn air and seems less self-assured. He has succeeded less, and his dreams are stronger and less acceptable than HAPPY's. HAPPY is tall, powerfully made.]

Sexuality is like a visible color on him, or a scent that many women have discovered. He, like his brother, is lost, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content.

HAPPY [*getting out of bed*] He's going to get his license taken away if he keeps that up. I'm getting nervous about him, y'know, Biff?

BIFF His eyes are going.

HAPPY No, I've driven with him. He sees all right. He just doesn't keep his mind on it. I drove into the city with him last week. He stops at a green light and then it turns red and he goes. [*He laughs.*]

BIFF Maybe he's color-blind.

HAPPY Pop? Why he's got the finest eye for color in the business. You know that.

BIFF [*sitting down on his bed*] I'm going to sleep.

HAPPY You're not still sour on Dad, are you Biff?

BIFF He's all right, I guess.

WILLY [*underneath them, in the living-room*] Yes, sir, eighty thousand miles—eighty-two thousand!

BIFF You smoking?

HAPPY [*holding out a pack of cigarettes*] Want one?

BIFF [*taking a cigarette*] I can never sleep when I smell it.

WILLY What a simonizing job, heh!

HAPPY [*with deep sentiment*] Funny, Biff, y'know? Us sleeping in here again? The old beds. [*He pats his bed affectionately.*] All the talk that went across those two beds, huh? Our whole lives.

BIFF Yeah. Lotta dreams and plans.

HAPPY [*with a deep and masculine laugh*] About five hundred women would like to know what was said in this room.

[*They share a soft laugh.*]

BIFF Remember that big Betsy something—what the hell was her name—over on Bushwick Avenue?

HAPPY [*combing his hair*] With the collie dog!

BIFF That's the one. I got you in there, remember?

HAPPY Yeah, that was my first time—I think. Boy, there was a pig! [*They laugh, almost crudely.*] You taught me everything I know about women. Don't forget that.

BIFF I bet you forgot how bashful you used to be. Especially with girls.

HAPPY Oh, I still am, Biff.

BIFF Oh, go on.

HAPPY I just control it, that's all. I think I got less bashful and you got more so. What happened, Biff? Where's the old humor, the old confidence? [*He shakes BIFF's knee. BIFF gets up and moves restlessly about the room.*] What's the matter?

BIFF Why does Dad mock me all the time?

HAPPY He's not mocking you, he—

BIFF Everything I say there's a twist of mockery on his face. I can't get near him.

HAPPY He just wants you to make good, that's all. I wanted to talk to you about Dad for a long time, Biff. Something's—happening to him. He—talks to himself.

BIFF I noticed that this morning. But he always mumbled.

HAPPY But not so noticeable. It got so embarrassing I sent him to Florida.

And you know something? Most of the time he's talking to you.

BIFF What's he say about me?

HAPPY I can't make it out.

BIFF What's he say about me?

HAPPY I think the fact that you're not settled, that you're still kind of up in the air . . .

BIFF There's one or two other things depressing him, Happy.

HAPPY What do you mean?

BIFF Never mind. Just don't lay it all to me.

HAPPY But I think if you just got started—I mean—is there any future for you out there?

BIFF I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know—what I'm supposed to want.

HAPPY What do you mean?

BIFF Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that's how you build a future.

HAPPY Well, you really enjoy it on a farm? Are you content out there?

BIFF [*with rising agitation*] Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same. I just realized it lately. In Nebraska when I herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas. It's why I came home now, I guess, because I realized it. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And it's cool there now, see? Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old. I oughta be makin' my future. That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself. [*after a pause*] I've always made a point of not wasting my life, and everytime I come back here I know that all I've done is to waste my life.

HAPPY You're a poet, you know that, Biff? You're a—you're an idealist!

BIFF No, I'm mixed up very bad. Maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something. Maybe that's my trouble. I'm like a boy. I'm not married. I'm not in business, I just—I'm like a boy. Are you content, Hap? You're a success, aren't you? Are you content?

HAPPY Hell, no!

BIFF Why? You're making money, aren't you?

HAPPY [*moving about with energy, expressiveness*] All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He's a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on

Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. And I know that's just what I would do. I don't know what the hell I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment—all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. And it's crazy. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women. And still, goddammit, I'm lonely.

BIFF [*with enthusiasm*] Listen why don't you come out West with me?

HAPPY You and I, heh?

BIFF Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles.

Men built like we are should be working out in the open.

HAPPY [*avidly*] The Loman Brothers, heh?

BIFF [*with vast affection*] Sure, we'd be known all over the counties!

HAPPY [*enthralled*] That's what I dream about, Biff. Sometimes I want to just rip my clothes off in the middle of the store and outbox that goddam merchandise manager. I mean I can outbox, outrun, and outlift anybody in that store, and I have to take orders from those common, petty sons-of-bitches till I can't stand it any more.

BIFF I'm tellin' you, kid, if you were with me I'd be happy out there.

HAPPY [*enthused*] See, Biff, everybody around me is so false that I'm constantly lowering my ideals . . .

BIFF Baby, together we'd stand up for one another, we'd have someone to trust.

HAPPY If I were around you—

BIFF Hap, the trouble is we weren't brought up to grub for money. I don't know how to do it.

HAPPY Neither can I!

BIFF Then let's go!

HAPPY The only thing is—what can you make out there?

BIFF But look at your friend. Builds an estate and then hasn't the peace of mind to live in it.

HAPPY Yeah, but when he walks into the store the waves part in front of him. That's fifty-two thousand dollars a year coming through the revolving door, and I got more in my pinky finger than he's got in his head.

BIFF Yeah, but you just said—

HAPPY I gotta show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade. I want to walk into the store the way he walks in. Then I'll go with you, Biff. We'll be together yet, I swear. But take those two we had tonight. Now weren't they gorgeous creatures?

BIFF Yeah, yeah, most gorgeous I've had in years.

HAPPY I get that any time I want, Biff. Whenever I feel disgusted. The only trouble is, it gets like bowling or something. I just keep knockin' them over and it doesn't mean anything. You still run around a lot?

BIFF Naa. I'd like to find a girl—steady, somebody with substance.

HAPPY That's what I long for.

BIFF Go on! You'd never come home.

HAPPY I would! Somebody with character, with resistance! Like Mom, y'know? You're gonna call me a bastard when I tell you this. That girl Charlotte I was with tonight is engaged to be married in five weeks. [*He tries on his new hat.*]

BIFF No kiddin'!

HAPPY Sure, the guy's in line for the vice-presidency of the store. I don't know what gets into me, maybe I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can't get rid of her. And he's the third executive I've done that to. Isn't that a crummy characteristic? And to top it all, I go to their weddings! [*indignantly, but laughing*] Like I'm not supposed to take bribes. Manufacturers offer me a hundred-dollar bill now and then to throw an order their way. You know how honest I am, but it's like this girl, see. I hate myself for it. Because I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it and—I love it!

BIFF Let's go to sleep.

HAPPY I guess we didn't settle anything, heh?

BIFF I just got one idea that I think I'm going to try.

HAPPY What's that?

BIFF Remember Bill Oliver?

HAPPY Sure, Oliver is very big now. You want to work for him again?

BIFF No, but when I quit he said something to me. He put his arm on my shoulder, and he said, "Biff, if you ever need anything, come to me."

HAPPY I remember that. That sounds good.

BIFF I think I'll go to see him. If I could get ten thousand or even seven or eight thousand dollars I could buy a beautiful ranch.

HAPPY I bet he'd back you. 'Cause he thought highly of you, Biff. I mean, they all do. You're well liked, Biff. That's why I say to come back here, and we both have the apartment. And I'm tellin' you, Biff, any babe you want . . .

BIFF No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and still be something. I just wonder though. I wonder if Oliver still thinks I stole that carton of basketballs.

HAPPY Oh, he probably forgot that long ago. It's almost ten years. You're too sensitive. Anyway, he didn't really fire you.

BIFF Well, I think he was going to. I think that's why I quit. I was never sure whether he knew or not. I know he thought the world of me, though. I was the only one he'd let lock up the place.

WILLY [*below*] You gonna wash the engine, Biff?

HAPPY Shh!

[*BIFF looks at HAPPY, who is gazing down, listening. WILLY is mumbling in the parlor.*]

HAPPY You hear that?

[*They listen. WILLY laughs warmly.*]

BIFF [*growing angry*] Doesn't he know Mom can hear that?

WILLY Don't get your sweater dirty, Biff!

[*A look of pain crosses BIFF's face.*]

HAPPY Isn't that terrible? Don't leave again, will you? You'll find a job here. You gotta stick around. I don't know what to do about him, it's getting embarrassing.

WILLY What a simonizing job!

BIFF Mom's hearing that!

WILLY No kiddin', Biff, you got a date? Wonderful!

HAPPY Go on to sleep. But talk to him in the morning, will you?

BIFF [*reluctantly getting into bed*] With her in the house. Brother!

HAPPY [*getting into bed*] I wish you'd have a good talk with him.

[*The light on their room begins to fade.*]

BIFF [*to himself in bed*] That selfish, stupid . . .

HAPPY Sh . . . Sleep, Biff.

[*Their light is out. Well before they have finished speaking, WILLY's form is dimly seen below in the darkened kitchen. He opens the refrigerator, searches in there, and takes out a bottle of milk. The apartment houses are fading out, and the entire house and surroundings become covered with leaves. Music insinuates itself as the leaves appear.*]

WILLY Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff, that's all. Don't make any promises. No promises of any kind. Because a girl, y'know, they always believe what you tell 'em, and you're very young, Biff, you're too young to be talking seriously to girls.

[*Light rises on the kitchen. WILLY, talking, shuts the refrigerator door and comes downstage to the kitchen table. He pours milk into a glass. He is totally immersed in himself, smiling faintly.*]

WILLY Too young entirely, Biff. You want to watch your schooling first. Then when you're all set, there'll be plenty of girls for a boy like you. [*He smiles broadly at a kitchen chair.*] That so? The girls pay for you? [*He laughs.*] Boy, you must really be makin' a hit.

[*WILLY is gradually addressing—physically—a point offstage, speaking through the wall of the kitchen, and his voice has been rising in volume to that of a normal conversation.*]

WILLY I been wondering why you polish the car so careful. Ha! Don't leave the hubcaps, boys. Get the chamois to the hubcaps. Happy, use newspaper on the windows, it's the easiest thing. Show him how to do it, Biff! You see, Happy? Pad it up, use it like a pad. That's it, that's it, good work. You're doin' all right, Hap. [*He pauses, then nods in approbation for a few seconds, then looks upward.*] Biff, first thing we gotta do when we get time is clip that big branch over the house. Afraid it's gonna fall in a storm and hit the roof. Tell you what. We get a rope and sling her around, and then we climb up there with a couple of saws and take her down. Soon as you finish the car, boys, I wanna see ya. I got a surprise for you, boys.

BIFF [*offstage*] Whatta ya got, Dad?

WILLY No, you finish first. Never leave a job till you're finished—remember that, [*looking toward the "big trees"*] Biff, up in Albany I saw a beautiful hammock. I think I'll buy it next trip, and we'll hang it right between those two elms. Wouldn't that be something? Just swingin' there under those branches. Boy, that would be . . .

[*YOUNG BIFF and YOUNG HAPPY appear from the direction WILLY was addressing. HAPPY carries rags and a pail of water. BIFF, wearing a sweater with a block "S," carries a football.*]

BIFF [*pointing in the direction of the car offstage*] How's that, Pop, professional?

WILLY Terrific. Terrific job, boys. Good work, Biff.

HAPPY Where's the surprise, Pop?

WILLY In the back seat of the car.

HAPPY Boy! [*He runs off.*]

BIFF What is it, Dad? Tell me, what'd you buy?

WILLY [*laughing, cuffs him*] Never mind, something I want you to have.

BIFF [*turns and starts off*] What is it, Hap?

HAPPY [*offstage*] It's a punching bag!

BIFF Oh, Pop!

WILLY It's got Gene Tunney's¹ signature on it!
[*HAPPY runs onstage with a punching bag.*]

BIFF Gee, how'd you know we wanted a punching bag?

WILLY Well, it's the finest thing for the timing.

HAPPY [*lies down on his back and pedals with his feet*] I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?

WILLY [*to HAPPY*] Jumping rope is good too.

BIFF Did you see the new football I got?

WILLY [*examining the ball*] Where'd you get a new ball?

BIFF The coach told me to practice my passing.

WILLY That so? And he gave you the ball, heh?

BIFF Well, I borrowed it from the locker room. [*He laughs confidentially.*]

WILLY [*laughing with him at the left*] I want you to return that.

HAPPY I told you he wouldn't like it!

BIFF [*angrily*] Well, I'm bringing it back!

WILLY [*stopping the incipient argument, to HAPPY*] Sure, he's gotta practice with a regulation ball, doesn't he? [*to BIFF*] Coach'll probably congratulate you on your initiative!

BIFF Oh, he keeps congratulating my initiative all the time, Pop.

WILLY That's because he likes you. If somebody else took that ball there'd be an uproar. So what's the report, boys, what's the report?

BIFF Where'd you go this time, Dad? Gee we were lonesome for you.

WILLY [*pleased, puts an arm around each boy and they come down to the apron*] Lonesome, heh?

BIFF Missed you every minute.

WILLY Don't say? Tell you a secret, boys. Don't breathe it to a soul. Someday I'll have my own business, and I'll never have to leave home any more.

HAPPY Like Uncle Charley, heh?

WILLY Bigger than Uncle Charley! Because Charley is not—liked. He's liked, but he's not—well liked.

BIFF Where'd you go this time, Dad?

WILLY Well, I got on the road, and I went north to Providence. Met the Mayor.

BIFF The Mayor of Providence!

WILLY He was sitting in the hotel lobby.

BIFF What'd he say?

WILLY He said, "Morning!" And I said, "You got a fine city here, Mayor." And then he had coffee with me. And then I went to Waterbury. Waterbury is a fine city. Big clock city, the famous Waterbury clock. Sold a nice bill there. And then Boston—Boston is the cradle of the Revolution. A fine city. And a couple of other towns in Mass., and on to Portland and Bangor and straight home!

BIFF Gee, I'd love to go with you sometime, Dad.

WILLY Soon as summer comes.

HAPPY Promise?

1. World heavyweight boxing champion from 1926 to 1928.

WILLY You and Hap and I, and I'll show you all the towns. America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people. And they know me, boys, they know me up and down New England. The finest people. And when I bring you fellas up, there'll be open sesame for all of us, 'cause one thing, boys: I have friends. I can park my car in any street in New England, and the cops protect it like their own. This summer, heh?

BIFF and HAPPY [*together*] Yeah! You bet!

WILLY We'll take our bathing suits.

HAPPY We'll carry your bags, Pop!

WILLY Oh, won't that be something! Me comin' into the Boston stores with you boys carryin' my bags. What a sensation!

[*BIFF is prancing around, practicing passing the ball.*]

WILLY You nervous, Biff, about the game?

BIFF Not if you're gonna be there.

WILLY What do they say about you in school, now that they made you captain?

HAPPY There's a crowd of girls behind him everytime the classes change.

BIFF [*taking WILLY's hand*] This Saturday, Pop, this Saturday—just for you, I'm going to break through for a touchdown.

HAPPY You're supposed to pass.

BIFF I'm takin' one play for Pop. You watch me, Pop, and when I take off my helmet, that means I'm breakin' out. Then you watch me crash through that line!

WILLY [*kisses BIFF*] Oh, wait'll I tell this in Boston!

[*BERNARD enters in knickers. He is younger than BIFF, earnest and loyal, a worried boy.*]

BERNARD Biff, where are you? You're supposed to study with me today.

WILLY Hey, looka Bernard. What're you lookin' so anemic about, Bernard?

BERNARD He's gotta study, Uncle Willy. He's got Regents² next week.

HAPPY [*tauntingly, spinning BERNARD around*] Let's box, Bernard!

BERNARD Biff! [*He gets away from HAPPY.*] Listen, Biff, I heard Mr. Birnbaum say that if you don't start studyin' math he's gonna flunk you, and you won't graduate. I heard him!

WILLY You better study with him, Biff. Go ahead now.

BERNARD I heard him!

BIFF Oh, Pop, you didn't see my sneakers! [*He holds up a foot for WILLY to look at.*]

WILLY Hey, that's a beautiful job of printing!

BERNARD [*wiping his glasses*] Just because he printed University of Virginia on his sneakers doesn't mean they've got to graduate him, Uncle Willy!

WILLY [*angrily*] What're you talking about? With scholarships to three universities they're gonna flunk him?

BERNARD But I heard Mr. Birnbaum say—

WILLY Don't be a pest, Bernard! [*to his boys*] What an anemic!

BERNARD Okay, I'm waiting for you in my house, Biff.

[*BERNARD goes off. The Lomans laugh.*]

WILLY Bernard is not well liked, is he?

BIFF He's liked, but he's not well liked.

2. Compulsory statewide high school examinations in New York.

HAPPY That's right, Pop.

WILLY That's just what I mean. Bernard can get the best marks in school, y'understand, but when he gets out in the business world, y'understand, you are going to be five times ahead of him. That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises.³ Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want. You take me, for instance. I never have to wait in line to see a buyer. "Willy Loman is here!" That's all they have to know, and I go right through.

BIFF Did you knock them dead, Pop?

WILLY Knocked 'em cold in Providence, slaughtered 'em in Boston.

HAPPY [*on his back, pedaling again*] I'm losing weight, you notice, Pop?

[LINDA enters, as of old, a ribbon in her hair, carrying a basket of washing.]

LINDA [*with youthful energy*] Hello, dear!

WILLY Sweetheart!

LINDA How'd the Chevy run?

WILLY Chevrolet, Linda, is the greatest car ever built. [*to the boys*] Since when do you let your mother carry wash up the stairs?

BIFF Grab hold there, boy!

HAPPY Where to, Mom?

LINDA Hang them up on the line. And you better go down to your friends, Biff. The cellar is full of boys. They don't know what to do with themselves.

BIFF Ah, when Pop comes home they can wait!

WILLY [*laughs appreciatively*] You better go down and tell them what to do, Biff.

BIFF I think I'll have them sweep out the furnace room.

WILLY Good work, Biff.

BIFF [*goes through wall-line of kitchen to doorway at back and calls down*]

Fellas! Everybody sweep out the furnace room! I'll be right down!

VOICES All right! Okay, Biff.

BIFF George and Sam and Frank, come out back! We're hangin' up the wash! Come on, Hap, on the double!

[*He and HAPPY carry out the basket.*]

LINDA The way they obey him!

WILLY Well, that training, the training. I'm tellin' you, I was sellin' thousands and thousands, but I had to come home.

LINDA Oh, the whole block'll be at that game. Did you sell anything?

WILLY I did five hundred gross in Providence and seven hundred gross in Boston.

LINDA No! Wait a minute, I've got a pencil. [*She pulls pencil and paper out of her apron pocket.*] That makes your commission . . . Two hundred—my God! Two hundred and twelve dollars!

WILLY Well, I didn't figure it yet, but . . .

LINDA How much did you do?

WILLY Well, I—I did—about a hundred and eighty gross in Providence.

Well, no—it came to—roughly two hundred gross on the whole trip.

LINDA [*without hesitation*] Two hundred gross. That's . . . [*She figures.*]

3. In Greek mythology Adonis was a beautiful youth favored by Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

WILLY The trouble was that three of the stores were half closed for inventory in Boston. Otherwise I woulda broke records.

LINDA Well, it makes seventy dollars and some pennies. That's very good.

WILLY What do we owe?

LINDA Well, on the first there's sixteen dollars on the refrigerator—

WILLY Why sixteen?

LINDA Well, the fan belt broke, so it was a dollar eighty.

WILLY But it's brand new.

LINDA Well, the man said that's the way it is. Till they work themselves in, y'know.

[*They move through the wall-line into the kitchen.*]

WILLY I hope we didn't get stuck on that machine.

LINDA They got the biggest ads of any of them!

WILLY I know, it's a fine machine. What else?

LINDA Well, there's nine-sixty for the washing machine. And for the vacuum cleaner there's three and a half due on the fifteenth. Then the roof, you got twenty-one dollars remaining.

WILLY It don't leak, does it?

LINDA No, they did a wonderful job. Then you owe Frank for the carburetor.

WILLY I'm not going to pay that man! That goddam Chevrolet, they ought to prohibit the manufacture of that car!

LINDA Well, you owe him three and a half. And odds and ends, comes to around a hundred and twenty dollars by the fifteenth.

WILLY A hundred and twenty dollars! My God, if business don't pick up I don't know what I'm gonna do!

LINDA Well, next week you'll do better.

WILLY Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week. I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me.

[*They move onto the forestage.*]

LINDA Oh, don't be foolish.

WILLY I know it when I walk in. They seem to laugh at me.

LINDA Why? Why would they laugh at you? Don't talk that way, Willy.

[*WILLY moves to the edge of the stage. LINDA goes into the kitchen and starts to darn stockings.*]

WILLY I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I'm not noticed.

LINDA But you're doing wonderful, dear. You're making seventy to a hundred dollars a week.

WILLY But I gotta be at it ten, twelve hours a day. Other men—I don't know—they do it easier. I don't know why—I can't stop myself—I talk too much. A man oughta come in with a few words. One thing about Charley. He's a man of few words, and they respect him.

LINDA You don't talk too much, you're just lively.

WILLY [*smiling*] Well, I figure, what the hell, life is short, a couple of jokes. [*to himself*] I joke too much! [*The smiles goes.*]

LINDA Why? You're—

WILLY I'm fat. I'm very—foolish to look at, Linda. I didn't tell you, but Christmas time I happened to be calling on F. H. Stewarts, and a

salesman I know, as I was going in to see the buyer I heard him say something about—walrus. And I—I cracked him right across the face. I won't take that. I simply will not take that. But they do laugh at me. I know that.

LINDA Darling . . .

WILLY I gotta overcome it. I know I gotta overcome it. I'm not dressing to advantage, maybe.

LINDA Willy, darling, you're the handsomest man in the world—

WILLY Oh, no, Linda.

LINDA To me you are. [*slight pause*] The handsomest.

[*From the darkness is heard the laughter of a woman. WILLY doesn't turn to it, but it continues through LINDA's lines.*]

LINDA And the boys, Willy. Few men are idolized by their children the way you are.

[*Music is heard as behind a scrim,⁴ to the left of the house, THE WOMAN, dimly seen, is dressing.*]

WILLY [*with great feeling*] You're the best there is, Linda, you're a pal, you know that? On the road—on the road I want to grab you sometimes and just kiss the life outa you.

[*The laughter is loud now, and he moves into a brightening area at the left, where THE WOMAN has come from behind the scrim and is standing, putting on her hat, looking into a "mirror" and laughing.*]

WILLY 'Cause I get so lonely—especially when business is bad and there's nobody to talk to. I get the feeling that I'll never sell anything again, that I won't make a living for you, or a business, a business for the boys. [*He talks through THE WOMAN's subsiding laughter; THE WOMAN primps at the "mirror."*] There's so much I want to make for—

THE WOMAN Me? You didn't make me, Willy. I picked you.

WILLY [*pleased*] You picked me?

THE WOMAN [*who is quite proper-looking, WILLY's age*] I did. I've been sitting at that desk watching all the salesmen go by, day in, day out. But you've got such a sense of humor, and we do have such a good time together, don't we?

WILLY Sure, sure. [*He takes her in his arms.*] Why do you have to go now?

THE WOMAN It's two o'clock . . .

WILLY No, come on in! [*He pulls her.*]

THE WOMAN . . . my sisters'll be scandalized. When'll you be back?

WILLY Oh, two weeks about. Will you come up again?

THE WOMAN Sure thing. You do make me laugh. It's good for me. [*She squeezes his arm, kisses him.*] And I think you're a wonderful man.

WILLY You picked me, heh?

THE WOMAN Sure. Because you're so sweet. And such a kidder.

WILLY Well, I'll see you next time I'm in Boston.

THE WOMAN I'll put you right through to the buyers.

WILLY [*slapping her bottom*] Right. Well, bottoms up!

THE WOMAN [*slaps him gently and laughs*] You just kill me, Willy. [*He suddenly grabs her and kisses her roughly.*] You kill me. And thanks for the stockings. I love a lot of stockings. Well, good night.

4. Part of a stage set; a painted gauze curtain that becomes transparent when lighted from the back.

WILLY Good night. And keep your pores open!

THE WOMAN Oh, Willy!

[THE WOMAN *bursts out laughing, and LINDA's laughter blends in. THE WOMAN disappears into the dark. Now the area at the kitchen table brightens. LINDA is sitting where she was at the kitchen table, but now is mending a pair of her silk stockings.*]

LINDA You are, Willy. The handsomest man. You've got no reason to feel that—

WILLY [*coming out of THE WOMAN's dimming area and going over to LINDA*]

I'll make it all up to you, Linda. I'll—

LINDA There's nothing to make up, dear. You're doing fine, better than—

WILLY [*noticing her mending*] What's that?

LINDA Just mending my stockings. They're so expensive—

WILLY [*angrily, taking them from her*] I won't have you mending stockings in this house! Now throw them out!

[LINDA *puts the stockings in her pocket.*]

BERNARD [*entering on the run*] Where is he? If he doesn't study!

WILLY [*moving to the forestage, with great agitation*] You'll give him the answers!

BERNARD I do, but I can't on a Regents! That's a state exam! They're liable to arrest me!

WILLY Where is he? I'll whip him, I'll whip him!

LINDA And he'd better give back that football, Willy, it's not nice.

WILLY Biff! Where is he? Why is he taking everything?

LINDA He's too rough with the girls, Willy. All the mothers are afraid of him!

WILLY I'll whip him!

BERNARD He's driving the car without a license!

[THE WOMAN's *laugh is heard.*]

WILLY Shut up!

LINDA All the mothers—

WILLY Shut up!

BERNARD [*backing quietly away and out*] Mr. Birnbaum says he's stuck up.

WILLY Get outa here!

BERNARD If he doesn't buckle down he'll flunk math! [*He goes off.*]

LINDA He's right, Willy, you've gotta—

WILLY [*exploding at her*] There's nothing the matter with him! You want him to be a worm like Bernard? He's got spirit, personality . . .

[*As he speaks, LINDA, almost in tears, exits into the living-room. WILLY is alone in the kitchen, wilting and staring. The leaves are gone. It is night again, and the apartment houses look down from behind.*]

WILLY Loaded with it. Loaded! What is he stealing? He's giving it back, isn't he? Why is he stealing? What did I tell him? I never in my life told him anything but decent things.

[HAPPY *in pajamas has come down the stairs; WILLY suddenly becomes aware of HAPPY's presence.*]

HAPPY Let's go now, come on.

WILLY [*sitting down at the kitchen table*] Huh! Why did she have to wax the floors herself? Everytime she waxes the floors she keels over. She knows that!

HAPPY Shh! Take it easy. What brought you back tonight?

WILLY I got an awful scare. Nearly hit a kid in Yonkers. God! Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time! Ben! That man was a genius, that man was success incarnate! What a mistake! He begged me to go.

HAPPY Well, there's no use in—

WILLY You guys! There was a man started with the clothes on his back and ended up with diamond mines!

HAPPY Boy, someday I'd like to know how he did it.

WILLY What's the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich! The world is an oyster, but you don't crack it open on a mattress!

HAPPY Pop, I told you I'm gonna retire you for life.

WILLY You'll retire me for life on seventy goddam dollars a week? And your women and your car and your apartment, and you'll retire me for life! Christ's sake, I couldn't get past Yonkers today! Where are you guys, where are you? The woods are burning! I can't drive a car!

[CHARLEY has appeared in the doorway. He is a large man, slow of speech, laconic, immovable. In all he says, despite what he says, there is pity, and, now, trepidation. He has a robe over pajamas, slippers on his feet. He enters the kitchen.]

CHARLEY Everything all right?

HAPPY Yeah, Charley, everything's . . .

WILLY What's the matter?

CHARLEY I heard some noise. I thought something happened. Can't we do something about the walls? You sneeze in here, and in my house hats blow off.

HAPPY Let's go to bed, Dad. Come on.

[CHARLEY signals to HAPPY to go.]

WILLY You go ahead, I'm not tired at the moment.

HAPPY [to WILLY] Take it easy, huh? [He exits.]

WILLY What're you doin' up?

CHARLEY [sitting down at the kitchen table opposite WILLY] Couldn't sleep good. I had a heartburn.

WILLY Well, you don't know how to eat.

CHARLEY I eat with my mouth.

WILLY No, you're ignorant. You gotta know about vitamins and things like that.

CHARLEY Come on, let's shoot. Tire you out a little.

WILLY [hesitantly] All right. You got cards?

CHARLEY [taking a deck from his pocket] Yeah, I got them. Someplace. What is it with those vitamins?

WILLY [dealing] They build up your bones. Chemistry.

CHARLEY Yeah, but there's no bones in a heartburn.

WILLY What are you talkin' about? Do you know the first thing about it?

CHARLEY Don't get insulted.

WILLY Don't talk about something you don't know anything about.

[They are playing. Pause.]

CHARLEY What're you doin' home?

WILLY A little trouble with the car.

CHARLEY Oh. [*pause*] I'd like to take a trip to California.

WILLY Don't say.

CHARLEY You want a job?

WILLY I got a job, I told you that. [*after a slight pause*] What the hell are you offering me a job for?

CHARLEY Don't get insulted.

WILLY Don't insult me.

CHARLEY I don't see no sense in it. You don't have to go on this way.

WILLY I got a good job. [*slight pause*] What do you keep comin' in here for?

CHARLEY You want me to go?

WILLY [*after a pause, withering*] I can't understand it. He's going back to Texas again. What the hell is that?

CHARLEY Let him go.

WILLY I got nothin' to give him, Charley, I'm clean, I'm clean.

CHARLEY He won't starve. None a them starve. Forget about him.

WILLY Then what have I got to remember?

CHARLEY You take it too hard. To hell with it. When a deposit bottle is broken you don't get your nickel back.

WILLY That's easy enough for you to say.

CHARLEY That ain't easy for me to say.

WILLY Did you see the ceiling I put up in the living-room?

CHARLEY Yeah, that's a piece of work. To put up a ceiling is a mystery to me. How do you do it?

WILLY What's the difference?

CHARLEY Well, talk about it.

WILLY You gonna put up a ceiling?

CHARLEY How could I put up a ceiling?

WILLY Then what the hell are you bothering me for?

CHARLEY You're insulted again.

WILLY A man who can't handle tools is not a man. You're disgusting.

CHARLEY Don't call me disgusting, Willy.

[UNCLE BEN, carrying a valise and an umbrella, enters the forestage from around the right corner of the house. He is a stolid man, in his sixties, with a mustache and an authoritative air. He is utterly certain of his destiny, and there is an aura of far places about him. He enters exactly as WILLY speaks.]

WILLY I'm getting awfully tired, Ben.

[BEN'S music is heard. BEN looks around at everything.]

CHARLEY Good, keep playing; you'll sleep better. Did you call me Ben?

[BEN looks at his watch.]

WILLY That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben.

BEN I only have a few minutes. [*He strolls, inspecting the place. WILLY and CHARLEY continue playing.*]

CHARLEY You never heard from him again, heh? Since that time?

WILLY Didn't Linda tell you? Couple of weeks ago we got a letter from his wife in Africa. He died.

CHARLEY That so.

BEN [*chuckling*] So this is Brooklyn, eh?

CHARLEY Maybe you're in for some of his money.

WILLY Naa, he had seven sons. There's just one opportunity I had with that man . . .

BEN I must make a train, William. There are several properties I'm looking at in Alaska.

WILLY Sure, sure! If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different.

CHARLEY Go on, you'd froze to death up there.

WILLY What're you talking about?

BEN Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska, William. Surprised you're not up there.

WILLY Sure, tremendous.

CHARLEY Heh?

WILLY There was the only man I ever met who knew the answers.

CHARLEY Who?

BEN How are you all?

WILLY [*taking a pot, smiling*] Fine, fine.

CHARLEY Pretty sharp tonight.

BEN Is Mother living with you?

WILLY No, she died a long time ago.

CHARLEY Who?

BEN That's too bad. Fine specimen of a lady, Mother.

WILLY [*to CHARLEY*] Heh?

BEN I'd hoped to see the old girl.

CHARLEY Who died?

BEN Heard anything from Father, have you?

WILLY [*unnerved*] What do you mean, who died?

CHARLEY [*taking a pot*] What're you talkin' about?

BEN [*looking at his watch*] William, it's half-past eight!

WILLY [*as though to dispel his confusion he angrily stops CHARLEY's hand*] That's my build!

CHARLEY I put the ace—

WILLY If you don't know how to play the game I'm not gonna throw my money away on you!

CHARLEY [*rising*] It was my ace, for God's sake!

WILLY I'm through, I'm through!

BEN When did Mother die?

WILLY Long ago. Since the beginning you never knew how to play cards.

CHARLEY [*picks up the cards and goes to the door*] All right! Next time I'll bring a deck with five aces.

WILLY I don't play that kind of game!

CHARLEY [*turning to him*] You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

WILLY Yeah?

CHARLEY Yeah! [*He goes out.*]

WILLY [*slamming the door after him*] Ignoramus!

BEN [*as WILLY comes toward him through the wall-line of the kitchen*] So you're William.

WILLY [*shaking BEN's hand*] Ben! I've been waiting for you so long! What's the answer? How did you do it?

BEN Oh, there's a story in that.

[LINDA enters the forestage, as of old, carrying the wash basket.]

LINDA Is this Ben?

BEN [*gallantly*] How do you do, my dear.

LINDA Where've you been all these years? Willy's always wondered why you—

WILLY [*pulling BEN away from her impatiently*] Where is Dad? Didn't you follow him? How did you get started?

BEN Well, I don't know how much you remember.

WILLY Well, I was just a baby, of course, only three or four years old—

BEN Three years and eleven months.

WILLY What a memory, Ben!

BEN I have many enterprises, William, and I have never kept books.

WILLY I remember I was sitting under the wagon in—was it Nebraska?

BEN It was South Dakota, and I gave you a bunch of wild flowers.

WILLY I remember you walking away down some open road.

BEN [*laughing*] I was going to find Father in Alaska.

WILLY Where is he?

BEN At that age I had a very faulty view of geography, William. I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa.

LINDA Africa!

WILLY The Gold Coast!

BEN Principally diamond mines.

LINDA Diamond mines!

BEN Yes, my dear. But I've only a few minutes—

WILLY No! Boys! Boys! [YOUNG BIFF and HAPPY appear.] Listen to this. This is your Uncle Ben, a great man! Tell my boys, Ben!

BEN Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. [*He laughs.*] And by God I was rich.

WILLY [*to the boys*] You see what I been talking about? The greatest things can happen!

BEN [*glancing at his watch*] I have an appointment in Ketchikan Tuesday week.

WILLY No, Ben! Please tell about Dad. I want my boys to hear. I want them to know the kind of stock they spring from. All I remember is a man with a big beard, and I was in Mamma's lap, sitting around a fire, and some kind of high music.

BEN His flute. He played the flute.

WILLY Sure, the flute, that's right!

[*New music is heard, a high, rollicking tune.*]

BEN Father was a very great and a very wild-hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd drive the team right across the country; through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. And we'd stop in the towns and sell the flutes that he'd made on the way. Great inventor, Father. With one gadget he made more in a week than a man like you could make in a lifetime.

WILLY That's just the way I'm bringing them up, Ben—rugged, well liked, all-around.

BEN Yeah? [to BIFF] Hit that, boy—hard as you can. [*He pounds his stomach.*]

BIFF Oh, no, sir!

BEN [*taking boxing stance*] Come on, get to me! [*He laughs.*]

WILLY Go to it, Biff! Go ahead, show him!

BIFF Okay! [*He cocks his fist and starts in.*]

LINDA [to WILLY] Why must he fight, dear?

BEN [*sparring with BIFF*] Good boy! Good boy!

WILLY How's that, Ben, heh?

HAPPY Give him the left, Biff!

LINDA Why are you fighting?

BEN Good boy! [*Suddenly comes in, trips BIFF, and stands over him, the point of his umbrella poised over BIFF's eye.*]

LINDA Look out, Biff!

BIFF Gee!

BEN [*patting BIFF's knee*] Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way. [*taking LINDA's hand and bowing*] It was an honor and a pleasure to meet you, Linda.

LINDA [*withdrawing her hand coldly, frightened*] Have a nice—trip.

BEN [to WILLY] And good luck with your—what do you do?

WILLY Selling.

BEN Yes. Well . . . [*He raises his hand in farewell to all.*]

WILLY No, Ben, I don't want you to think . . . [*He takes BEN's arm to show him.*] It's Brooklyn, I know, but we hunt too.

BEN Really, now.

WILLY Oh, sure, there's snakes and rabbits and—that's why I moved out here. Why, Biff can fell any one of these trees in no time! Boys! Go right over to where they're building the apartment house and get some sand. We're gonna rebuild the entire front stoop right now! Watch this, Ben!

BIFF Yes, sir! On the double, Hap!

HAPPY [*as he and BIFF run off*] I lost weight, Pop, you notice?

[*CHARLEY enters in knickers, even before the boys are gone.*]

CHARLEY Listen, if they steal any more from that building the watchman'll put the cops on them!

LINDA [to WILLY] Don't let Biff . . .

[*BEN laughs lustily.*]

WILLY You shoulda seen the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds a money.

CHARLEY Listen, if that watchman—

WILLY I gave them hell, understand. But I got a couple of fearless characters there.

CHARLEY Willy, the jails are full of fearless characters.

BEN [*clapping WILLY on the back, with a laugh at CHARLEY*] And the stock exchange, friend!

WILLY [*joining in BEN's laughter*] Where are the rest of your pants?

CHARLEY My wife bought them.

WILLY Now all you need is a golf club and you can go upstairs and go to sleep. [to BEN] Great athlete! Between him and his son Bernard they can't hammer a nail!

BERNARD [*rushing in*] The watchman's chasing Biff!

WILLY [*angrily*] Shut up! He's not stealing anything!

LINDA [*alarmed, hurrying off left*] Where is he? Biff, dear! [*She exits.*]

WILLY [*moving toward the left, away from BEN*] There's nothing wrong. What's the matter with you?

BEN Nervy boy. Good!

WILLY [*laughing*] Oh, nerves of iron, that Biff!

CHARLEY Don't know what it is. My New England man comes back and he's bleedin', they murdered him up there.

WILLY It's contacts, Charley, I got important contacts!

CHARLEY [*sarcastically*] Glad to hear it, Willy. Come in later, we'll shoot a little casino. I'll take some of your Portland money. [*He laughs at WILLY and exits.*]

WILLY [*turning to BEN*] Business is bad, it's murderous. But not for me, of course.

BEN I'll stop by on my way back to Africa.

WILLY [*longingly*] Can't you stay a few days? You're just what I need, Ben, because I—I have a fine position here, but I—well, Dad left when I was such a baby and I never had a chance to talk to him and I still feel—kind of temporary about myself.

BEN I'll be late for my train.

[*They are at opposite ends of the stage.*]

WILLY Ben, my boys—can't we talk? They'd go into the jaws of hell for me, see, but I—

BEN William, you're being first-rate with your boys. Outstanding, manly chaps!

WILLY [*hanging on to his words*] Oh, Ben, that's good to hear! Because sometimes I'm afraid that I'm not teaching them the right kind of—Ben, how should I teach them?

BEN [*giving great weight to each word, and with a certain vicious audacity*] William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich! [*He goes off into darkness around the right corner of the house.*]

WILLY . . . was rich! That's just the spirit I want to imbue them with! To walk into a jungle! I was right! I was right! I was right!

[*BEN is gone, but WILLY is still speaking to him as LINDA, in nightgown and robe, enters the kitchen, glances around for WILLY, then goes to the door of the house, looks out and sees him. Comes down to his left. He looks at her.*]

LINDA Willy, dear? Willy?

WILLY I was right!

LINDA Did you have some cheese? [*He can't answer.*] It's very late, darling. Come to bed, heh?

WILLY [*looking straight up*] Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard.

LINDA You coming in?

WILLY Whatever happened to that diamond watch fob? Remember? When Ben came from Africa that time? Didn't he give me a watch fob with a diamond in it?

LINDA You pawned it, dear. Twelve, thirteen years ago. For Biff's radio correspondence course.

WILLY Gee, that was a beautiful thing. I'll take a walk.

LINDA But you're in your slippers.

WILLY [*starting to go around the house at the left*] I was right! I was! [*half to LINDA, as he goes, shaking his head*] What a man! There was a man worth talking to. I was right!

LINDA [*calling after WILLY*] But in your slippers, Willy!

[*WILLY is almost gone when BIFF, in his pajamas, comes down the stairs and enters the kitchen.*]

BIFF What is he doing out there?

LINDA Sh!

BIFF God Almighty, Mom, how long has he been doing this?

LINDA Don't, he'll hear you.

BIFF What the hell is the matter with him?

LINDA It'll pass by morning.

BIFF Shouldn't we do anything?

LINDA Oh, my dear, you should do a lot of things, but there's nothing to do so go to sleep.

[*HAPPY comes down the stairs and sits on the steps.*]

HAPPY I never heard him so loud, Mom.

LINDA Well, come around more often; you'll hear him. [*She sits down at the table and mends the lining of WILLY's jacket.*]

BIFF Why didn't you ever write me about this, Mom?

LINDA How would I write to you? For over three months you had no address.

BIFF I was on the move. But you know I thought of you all the time. You know that, don't you, pal?

LINDA I know, dear, I know. But he likes to have a letter. Just to know that there's still a possibility for better things.

BIFF He's not like this all the time, is he?

LINDA It's when you come home he's always the worst.

BIFF When I come home?

LINDA When you write you're coming, he's all smiles, and talks about the future, and—he's just wonderful. And then the closer you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he's arguing, and he seems angry at you. I think it's just that maybe he can't bring himself to—to open up to you. Why are you so hateful to each other? Why is that?

BIFF [*evasively*] I'm not hateful, Mom.

LINDA But you no sooner come in the door than you're fighting!

BIFF I don't know why. I mean to change. I'm tryin', Mom, you understand?

LINDA Are you home to stay now?

BIFF I don't know. I want to look around, see what's doin'.

LINDA Biff, you can't look around all your life, can you?

BIFF I just can't take hold, Mom. I can't take hold of some kind of a life.

LINDA Biff, a man is not a bird, to come and go with the springtime.

BIFF Your hair . . . [*He touches her hair.*] Your hair got so gray.

LINDA Oh, it's been gray since you were in high school. I just stopped dyeing it, that's all.

BIFF Dye it again, will ya? I don't want my pal looking old. [*He smiles.*]

LINDA You're such a boy! You think you can go away for a year and . . .
You've got to get it into your head now that one day you'll knock on this door and there'll be strange people here—

BIFF What are you talking about? You're not even sixty, Mom.

LINDA But what about your father?

BIFF [*lamely*] Well, I meant him too.

HAPPY He admires Pop.

LINDA Biff, dear, if you don't have any feeling for him, then you can't have any feeling for me.

BIFF Sure I can, Mom.

LINDA No. You can't just come to see me, because I love him. [*with a threat, but only a threat, of tears*] He's the dearest man in the world to me, and I won't have anyone making him feel unwanted and low and blue. You've got to make up your mind now, darling, there's no leeway any more. Either he's your father and you pay him that respect, or else you're not to come here. I know he's not easy to get along with—nobody knows that better than me—but . . .

WILLY [*from the left, with a laugh*] Hey, hey, Biffo!

BIFF [*starting to go out after WILLY*] What the hell is the matter with him?
[HAPPY stops him.]

LINDA Don't—don't go near him!

BIFF Stop making excuses for him! He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you.

HAPPY He's always had respect for—

BIFF What the hell do you know about it?

HAPPY [*surlily*] Just don't call him crazy!

BIFF He's got no character—Charley wouldn't do this. Not in his own house—spewing out that vomit from his mind.

HAPPY Charley never had to cope with what he's got to.

BIFF People are worse off than Willy Loman. Believe me, I've seen them!

LINDA Then make Charley your father, Biff. You can't do that, can you? I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. You called him crazy—

BIFF I didn't mean—

LINDA No, a lot of people think he's lost his—balance. But you don't have to be very smart to know what his trouble is. The man is exhausted.

HAPPY Sure!

LINDA A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man. He works for a company thirty-six years this March, opens up unheard-of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away.

HAPPY [*indignantly*] I didn't know that, Mom.

LINDA You never asked, my dear! Now that you get your spending money someplace else you don't trouble your mind with him.

HAPPY But I gave you money last—

LINDA Christmas time, fifty dollars! To fix the hot water it cost ninety-seven fifty! For five weeks he's been on straight commission, like a beginner, an unknown!

BIFF Those ungrateful bastards!

LINDA Are they any worse than his sons? When he brought them business, when he was young, they were glad to see him. But now his old friends, the old buyers that loved him so and always found some order to hand him in a pinch—they're all dead, retired. He used to be able to make six, seven calls a day in Boston. Now he takes his valises out of the car and puts them back and takes them out again and he's exhausted. Instead of walking he talks now. He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no one knows him any more, no one welcomes him. And what goes through a man's mind, driving seven hundred miles home without having earned a cent? Why shouldn't he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it's his pay? How long can that go on? How long? You see what I'm sitting here and waiting for? And you tell me he has no character? The man who never worked a day but for your benefit? When does he get the medal for that? Is this his reward—to turn around at the age of sixty-three and find his sons, who he loved better than his life, one a philandering bum—

HAPPY Mom!

LINDA That's all you are, my baby! *[to BIFF]* And you! What happened to the love you had for him? You were such pals! How you used to talk to him on the phone every night! How lonely he was till he could come home to you!

BIFF All right, Mom. I'll live here in my room, and I'll get a job. I'll keep away from him, that's all.

LINDA No, Biff. You can't stay here and fight all the time.

BIFF He threw me out of this house, remember that.

LINDA Why did he do that? I never knew why.

BIFF Because I know he's a fake and he doesn't like anybody around who knows!

LINDA Why a fake? In what way? What do you mean?

BIFF Just don't lay it all at my feet. It's between me and him—that's all I have to say. I'll chip in from now on. He'll settle for half my pay check.

He'll be all right. I'm going to bed. *[He starts for the stairs.]*

LINDA He won't be all right.

BIFF *[turning on the stairs, furiously]* I hate this city and I'll stay here. Now what do you want?

LINDA He's dying, Biff.

[HAPPY turns quickly to her, shocked.]

BIFF *[after a pause]* Why is he dying?

LINDA He's been trying to kill himself.

BIFF *[with great horror]* How?

LINDA I live from day to day.

BIFF What're you talking about?

LINDA Remember I wrote you that he smashed up the car again? In February?

BIFF Well?

LINDA The insurance inspector came. He said that they have evidence. That all these accidents in the last year—weren't—weren't—accidents.

HAPPY How can they tell that? That's a lie.

LINDA It seems there's a woman . . . [*she takes a breath as*]

{ BIFF [*sharply but contained*] What woman?

{ LINDA [*simultaneously*] . . . and this woman . . .

LINDA What?

BIFF Nothing. Go ahead.

LINDA What did you say?

BIFF Nothing. I just said what woman?

HAPPY What about her?

LINDA Well, it seems she was walking down the road and saw his car. She says that he wasn't driving fast at all, and that he didn't skid. She says he came to that little bridge, and then deliberately smashed into the railing, and it was only the shallowness of the water that saved him.

BIFF Oh, no, he probably just fell asleep again.

LINDA I don't think he fell asleep.

BIFF Why not?

LINDA Last month . . . [*with great difficulty*] Oh, boys, it's so hard to say a thing like this! He's just a big stupid man to you, but I tell you there's more good in him than in many other people. [*She chokes, wipes her eyes.*] I was looking for a fuse. The lights blew out, and I went down the cellar. And behind the fuse box—it happened to fall out—was a length of rubber pipe—just short.

HAPPY No kidding?

LINDA There's a little attachment on the end of it. I knew right away. And sure enough, on the bottom of the water heater there's a new little nipple on the gas pipe.

HAPPY [*angrily*] That—jerk.

BIFF Did you have it taken off?

LINDA I'm—I'm ashamed to. How can I mention it to him? Every day I go down and take away that little rubber pipe. But, when he comes home, I put it back where it was. How can I insult him that way? I don't know what to do. I live from day to day, boys. I tell you, I know every thought in his mind. It sounds so old-fashioned and silly, but I tell you he put his whole life into you and you've turned your backs on him. [*She is bent over in the chair, weeping, her face in her hands.*] Biff, I swear to God! Biff, his life is in your hands!

HAPPY [*to BIFF*] How do you like that damned fool!

BIFF [*kissing her*] All right, pal, all right. It's all settled now. I've been remiss. I know that, Mom. But now I'll stay, and I swear to you, I'll apply myself. [*kneeling in front of her, in a fever of self-reproach*] It's just—you see, Mom, I don't fit in business. Not that I won't try. I'll try, and I'll make good.

HAPPY Sure you will. The trouble with you in business was you never tried to please people.

BIFF I know, I—

HAPPY Like when you worked for Harrison's. Bob Harrison said you were tops, and then you go and do some damn fool thing like whistling whole songs in the elevator like a comedian.

BIFF [*against* HAPPY] So what? I like to whistle sometimes.

HAPPY You don't raise a guy to a responsible job who whistles in the elevator!

LINDA Well, don't argue about it now.

HAPPY Like when you'd go off and swim in the middle of the day instead of taking the line around.

BIFF [*his resentment rising*] Well, don't you run off? You take off sometimes, don't you? On a nice summer day?

HAPPY Yeah, but I cover myself!

LINDA Boys!

HAPPY If I'm going to take a fade the boss can call any number where I'm supposed to be and they'll swear to him that I just left. I'll tell you something that I hate to say, Biff, but in the business world some of them think you're crazy.

BIFF [*angered*] Screw the business world!

HAPPY All right, screw it! Great, but cover yourself!

LINDA Hap, Hap!

BIFF I don't care what they think! They've laughed at Dad for years, and you know why? Because we don't belong in this nuthouse of a city! We should be mixing cement on some open plain, or—or carpenters. A carpenter is allowed to whistle!

[WILLY walks in from the entrance of the house, at left.]

WILLY Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter. [*Pause. They watch him.*] You never grew up. Bernard does not whistle in the elevator, I assure you.

BIFF [*as though to laugh* WILLY out of it] Yeah, but you do, Pop.

WILLY I never in my life whistled in an elevator! And who in the business world thinks I'm crazy?

BIFF I didn't mean it like that, Pop. Now don't make a whole thing out of it, will ya?

WILLY Go back to the West! Be a carpenter, a cowboy, enjoy yourself!

LINDA Willy, he was just saying—

WILLY I heard what he said!

HAPPY [*trying to quiet* WILLY] Hey, Pop, come on now . . .

WILLY [*continuing over* HAPPY's line] They laugh at me, heh? Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's, Boston. Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big Shot!

BIFF All right, Pop.

WILLY Big!

BIFF All right!

WILLY Why do you always insult me?

BIFF I didn't say a word. [*to* LINDA] Did I say a word?

LINDA He didn't say anything, Willy.

WILLY [*going to the doorway of the living-room*] All right, good night, good night.

LINDA Willy, dear, he just decided . . .

WILLY [*to BIFF*] If you get tired hanging around tomorrow, paint the ceiling I put up in the living-room.

BIFF I'm leaving early tomorrow.

HAPPY He's going to see Bill Oliver, Pop.

WILLY [*interestedly*] Oliver? For what?

BIFF [*with reserve, but trying, trying*] He always said he'd stake me. I'd like to go into business, so maybe I can take him up on it.

LINDA Isn't that wonderful?

WILLY Don't interrupt. What's wonderful about it? There's fifty men in the City of New York who'd stake him. [*to BIFF*] Sporting goods?

BIFF I guess so. I know something about it and—

WILLY He knows something about it! You know sporting goods better than Spalding, for God's sake! How much is he giving you?

BIFF I don't know, I didn't even see him yet, but—

WILLY Then what're you talkin' about?

BIFF [*getting angry*] Well, all I said was I'm gonna see him, that's all!

WILLY [*turning away*] Ah, you're counting your chickens again.

BIFF [*starting left for the stairs*] Oh, Jesus, I'm going to sleep!

WILLY [*calling after him*] Don't curse in this house!

BIFF [*turning*] Since when did you get so clean?

HAPPY [*trying to stop them*] Wait a . . .

WILLY Don't use that language to me! I won't have it!

HAPPY [*grabbing BIFF, shouts*] Wait a minute! I got an idea. I got a feasible idea. Come here, Biff, let's talk this over now, let's talk some sense here. When I was down in Florida last time, I thought of a great idea to sell sporting goods. It just came back to me. You and I, Biff—we have a line, the Loman Line. We train a couple of weeks, and put on a couple of exhibitions, see?

WILLY That's an idea!

HAPPY Wait! We form two basketball teams, see? Two water-polo teams. We play each other. It's a million dollars' worth of publicity. Two brothers, see? The Loman Brothers. Displays in the Royal Palms—all the hotels. And banners over the ring and the basketball court: "Loman Brothers." Baby, we could sell sporting goods!

WILLY That is a one-million-dollar idea!

LINDA Marvelous!

BIFF I'm in great shape as far as that's concerned.

HAPPY And the beauty of it is, Biff, it wouldn't be like a business. We'd be out playin' ball again . . .

BIFF [*enthused*] Yeah, that's . . .

WILLY Million-dollar . . .

HAPPY And you wouldn't get fed up with it, Biff. It'd be the family again. There'd be the old honor, and comradeship, and if you wanted to go off for a swim or somethin'—well, you'd do it! Without some smart cooky gettin' up ahead of you!

WILLY Lick the world! You guys together could absolutely lick the civilized world.

BIFF I'll see Oliver tomorrow. Hap, if we could work that out . . .

LINDA Maybe things are beginning to—

WILLY [*wildly enthused, to LINDA*] Stop interrupting! [*to BIFF*] But don't wear sport jacket and slacks when you see Oliver.

BIFF No, I'll—

WILLY A business suit, and talk as little as possible, and don't crack any jokes.

BIFF He did like me. Always liked me.

LINDA He loved you!

WILLY [*to LINDA*] Will you stop! [*to BIFF*] Walk in very serious. You are not applying for a boy's job. Money is to pass. Be quiet, fine, and serious. Everybody likes a kidder, but nobody lends him money.

HAPPY I'll try to get some myself, Biff. I'm sure I can.

WILLY I see great things for you kids, I think your troubles are over. But remember, start big and you'll end big. Ask for fifteen. How much you gonna ask for?

BIFF Gee, I don't know—

WILLY And don't say "Gee." "Gee" is a boy's word. A man walking in for fifteen thousand dollars does not say "Gee!"

BIFF Ten, I think, would be top though.

WILLY Don't be so modest. You always started too low. Walk in with a big laugh. Don't look worried. Start off with a couple of your good stories to lighten things up. It's not what you say, it's how you say it—because personality always wins the day.

LINDA Oliver always thought the highest of him—

WILLY Will you let me talk?

BIFF Don't yell at her, Pop, will ya?

WILLY [*angrily*] I was talking, wasn't I?

BIFF I don't like you yelling at her all the time, and I'm tellin' you, that's all.

WILLY What're you, takin' over this house?

LINDA Willy—

WILLY [*turning on her*] Don't take his side all the time, goddammit!

BIFF [*furiously*] Stop yelling at her!

WILLY [*suddenly pulling on his cheek, beaten down, guilt ridden*] Give my best to Bill Oliver—he may remember me. [*He exits through the living-room doorway.*]

LINDA [*her voice subdued*] What'd you have to start that for? [*BIFF turns away.*] You see how sweet he was as soon as you talked hopefully? [*She goes over to BIFF.*] Come up and say good night to him. Don't let him go to bed that way.

HAPPY Come on, Biff, let's buck him up.

LINDA Please, dear. Just say good night. It takes so little to make him happy. Come. [*She goes through the living-room doorway, calling upstairs from within the living-room*] Your pajamas are hanging in the bathroom, Willy!

HAPPY [*looking toward where LINDA went out*] What a woman! They broke the mold when they made her. You know that, Biff?

BIFF He's off salary. My God, working on commission!

HAPPY Well, let's face it: he's no hot-shot selling man. Except that sometimes, you have to admit, he's a sweet personality.

BIFF [*deciding*] Lend me ten bucks, will ya? I want to buy some new ties.

HAPPY I'll take you to a place I know. Beautiful stuff. Wear one of my striped shirts tomorrow.

BIFF She got gray. Mom got awful old. Gee, I'm gonna go in to Oliver tomorrow and knock him for a—

HAPPY Come on up. Tell that to Dad. Let's give him a whirl. Come on.

BIFF [*steamed up*] You know, with ten thousand bucks, boy!

HAPPY [*as they go into the living-room*] That's the talk, Biff, that's the first time I've heard the old confidence out of you! [*from within the living-room, fading off*] You're gonna live with me, kid, and any babe you want just say the word . . . [*The last lines are hardly heard. They are mounting the stairs to their parents' bedroom.*]

LINDA [*entering her bedroom and addressing WILLY, who is in the bathroom. She is straightening the bed for him.*] Can you do anything about the shower? It drips.

WILLY [*from the bathroom*] All of a sudden everything falls to pieces! Goddam plumbing, oughta be sued, those people. I hardly finished putting it in and the thing . . . [*His words rumble off.*]

LINDA I'm just wondering if Oliver will remember him. You think he might?

WILLY [*coming out of the bathroom in his pajamas*] Remember him? What's the matter with you, you crazy? If he'd've stayed with Oliver he'd be on top by now! Wait'll Oliver gets a look at him. You don't know the average caliber any more. The average young man today—[*he is getting into bed*—is got a caliber of zero. Greatest thing in the world for him was to bum around.

[BIFF and HAPPY enter the bedroom. Slight pause.]

WILLY [*stops short, looking at BIFF*] Glad to hear it, boy.

HAPPY He wanted to say good night to you, sport.

WILLY [*to BIFF*] Yeah. Knock him dead, boy. What'd you want to tell me?

BIFF Just take it easy, Pop. Good night. [*He turns to go.*]

WILLY [*unable to resist*] And if anything falls off the desk while you're talking to him—like a package or something—don't you pick it up. They have office boys for that.

LINDA I'll make a big breakfast—

WILLY Will you let me finish? [*to BIFF*] Tell him you were in the business in the West. Not farm work.

BIFF All right, Dad.

LINDA I think everything—

WILLY [*going right through her speech*] And don't undersell yourself. No less than fifteen thousand dollars.

BIFF [*unable to bear him*] Okay. Good night, Mom. [*He starts moving.*]

WILLY Because you got a greatness in you, Biff, remember that. You got all kinds a greatness . . . [*He lies back, exhausted. BIFF walks out.*]

LINDA [*calling after BIFF*] Sleep well, darling!

HAPPY I'm gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you.

LINDA Go to sleep, dear.

HAPPY [*going*] I just wanted to tell you.

WILLY Keep up the good work. [*HAPPY exits.*] God . . . remember that Ebbets Field⁵ game? The championship of the city?

5. Brooklyn sports stadium.

LINDA Just rest. Should I sing to you?

WILLY Yeah. Sing to me. [LINDA hums a soft lullaby.] When that team came out—he was the tallest, remember?

LINDA Oh, yes. And in gold.

[BIFF enters the darkened kitchen, takes a cigarette, and leaves the house. He comes downstage into a golden pool of light. He smokes, staring at the night.]

WILLY Like a young god. Hercules⁶—something like that. And the sun, the sun all around him. Remember how he waved to me? Right up from the field, with the representatives of three colleges standing by? And the buyers I brought, and the cheers when he came out—Loman, Loman, Loman! God Almighty, he'll be great yet. A star like that, magnificent, can never really fade away!

[The light on WILLY is fading. The gas heater begins to glow through the kitchen wall, near the stairs, a blue flame beneath red coils.]

LINDA [timidly] Willy dear, what has he got against you?

WILLY I'm so tired. Don't talk any more.

[BIFF slowly returns to the kitchen. He stops, stares toward the heater.]

LINDA Will you ask Howard to let you work in New York?

WILLY First thing in the morning. Everything'll be all right.

[BIFF reaches behind the heater and draws out a length of rubber tubing. He is horrified and turns his head toward WILLY's room, still dimly lit, from which the strains of LINDA's desperate but monotonous humming rise.]

WILLY [staring through the window into the moonlight] Gee, look at the moon moving between the buildings!

[BIFF wraps the tubing around his hand and quickly goes up the stairs.]

CURTAIN

Act Two

Music is heard, gay and bright. The curtain rises as the music fades away. WILLY, in shirt sleeves, is sitting at the kitchen table, sipping coffee, his hat in his lap. LINDA is filling his cup when she can.

WILLY Wonderful coffee. Meal in itself.

LINDA Can I make you some eggs?

WILLY No. Take a breath.

LINDA You look so rested, dear.

WILLY I slept like a dead one. First time in months. Imagine, sleeping till ten on a Tuesday morning. Boys left nice and early, heh?

LINDA They were out of here by eight o'clock.

WILLY Good work!

LINDA It was so thrilling to see them leaving together. I can't get over the shaving lotion in this house!

WILLY [smiling] Mmm—

LINDA Biff was very changed this morning. His whole attitude seemed to be hopeful. He couldn't wait to get downtown to see Oliver.

6. In Greek and Roman mythology the son of the chief god (Zeus, Jupiter), famous for his great strength.

WILLY He's heading for a change. There's no question, there simply are certain men that take longer to get—solidified. How did he dress?

LINDA His blue suit. He's so handsome in that suit. He could be a—anything in that suit!

[WILLY gets up from the table. LINDA holds his jacket for him.]

WILLY There's no question, no question at all. Gee, on the way home tonight I'd like to buy some seeds.

LINDA [laughing] That'd be wonderful. But not enough sun gets back there. Nothing'll grow any more.

WILLY You wait, kid, before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens . . .

LINDA You'll do it yet, dear.

[WILLY walks out of his jacket. LINDA follows him.]

WILLY And they'll get married, and come for a weekend. I'd build a little guest house. 'Cause I got so many fine tools, all I'd need would be a little lumber and some peace of mind.

LINDA [joyfully] I sewed the lining . . .

WILLY I could build two guest houses, so they'd both come. Did he decide how much he's going to ask Oliver for?

LINDA [getting him into the jacket] He didn't mention it, but I imagine ten or fifteen thousand. You going to talk to Howard today?

WILLY Yeah. I'll put it to him straight and simple. He'll just have to take me off the road.

LINDA And Willy, don't forget to ask for a little advance, because we've got the insurance premium. It's the grace period now.

WILLY That's a hundred . . . ?

LINDA A hundred and eight, sixty-eight. Because we're a little short again.

WILLY Why are we short?

LINDA Well, you had the motor job on the car . . .

WILLY That goddam Studebaker!

LINDA And you got one more payment on the refrigerator . . .

WILLY But it just broke again!

LINDA Well, it's old, dear.

WILLY I told you we should've bought a well-advertised machine. Charley bought a General Electric and it's twenty years old and it's still good, that son-of-a-bitch.

LINDA But, Willy—

WILLY Whoever heard of a Hastings refrigerator? Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished paying for the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. They time those things. They time them so when you finally paid for them, they're used up.

LINDA [buttoning up his jacket as he unbuttons it] All told, about two hundred dollars would carry us, dear. But that includes the last payment on the mortgage. After this payment, Willy, the house belongs to us.

WILLY It's twenty-five years!

LINDA Biff was nine years old when we bought it.

WILLY Well, that's a great thing. To weather a twenty-five year mortgage is—

LINDA It's an accomplishment.

WILLY All the cement, the lumber, the reconstruction I put in this house! There ain't a crack to be found in it anymore.

LINDA Well, it served its purpose.

WILLY What purpose? Some stranger'll come along, move in, and that's that. If only Biff would take this house, and raise a family . . . [*He starts to go.*] Good-by, I'm late.

LINDA [*suddenly remembering*] Oh, I forgot! You're supposed to meet them for dinner.

WILLY Me?

LINDA At Frank's Chop House on Forty-eighth near Sixth Avenue.

WILLY Is that so! How about you?

LINDA No, just the three of you. They're gonna blow you to a big meal!

WILLY Don't say! Who thought of that?

LINDA Biff came to me this morning, Willy, and he said, "Tell Dad, we want to blow him to a big meal." Be there six o'clock. You and your two boys are going to have dinner.

WILLY Gee whiz! That's really somethin'. I'm gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I'll get an advance, and I'll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I'm gonna do it!

LINDA Oh, that's the spirit, Willy!

WILLY I will never get behind a wheel the rest of my life!

LINDA It's changing, Willy, I can feel it changing!

WILLY Beyond a question. G'by, I'm late. [*He starts to go again.*]

LINDA [*calling after him as she runs to the kitchen table for a handkerchief*]

You got your glasses?

WILLY [*feels for them, then comes back in*] Yeah, yeah, got my glasses.

LINDA [*giving him the handkerchief*] And a handkerchief.

WILLY Yeah, handkerchief.

LINDA And your saccharine?

WILLY Yeah, my saccharine.

LINDA Be careful on the subway stairs.

[*She kisses him, and a silk stocking is seen hanging from her hand. WILLY notices it.*]

WILLY Will you stop mending stockings? At least while I'm in the house. It gets me nervous. I can't tell you. Please.

[*LINDA hides the stocking in her hand as she follows WILLY across the forestage in front of the house.*]

LINDA Remember, Frank's Chop House.

WILLY [*passing the apron*] Maybe beets would grow out there.

LINDA [*laughing*] But you tried so many times.

WILLY Yeah. Well, don't work hard today. [*He disappears around the right corner of the house.*]

LINDA Be careful!

[*As WILLY vanishes, LINDA waves to him. Suddenly the phone rings. She runs across the stage and into the kitchen and lifts it.*]

LINDA Hello? Oh, Biff! I'm so glad you called, I just . . . Yes, sure, I just told him. Yes, he'll be there for dinner at six o'clock, I didn't forget. Listen, I was just dying to tell you. You know that little rubber pipe I told you about? That he connected to the gas heater? I finally decided to go down

the cellar this morning and take it away and destroy it. But it's gone! Imagine? He took it away himself, it isn't there! [*She listens.*] When? Oh, then you took it. Oh—nothing, it's just that I'd hoped he'd taken it away himself. Oh, I'm not worried, darling, because this morning he left in such high spirits, it was like the old days! I'm not afraid any more. Did Mr. Oliver see you? . . . Well, you wait there then. And make a nice impression on him, darling. Just don't perspire too much before you see him. And have a nice time with Dad. He may have big news too! . . . That's right, a New York job. And be sweet to him tonight, dear. Be loving to him. Because he's only a little boat looking for a harbor. [*She is trembling with sorrow and joy.*] Oh, that's wonderful, Biff, you'll save his life. Thanks, darling. Just put your arm around him when he comes into the restaurant. Give him a smile. That's the boy . . . Good-by, dear. . . . You got your comb? . . . That's fine. Good-by, Biff dear.

[*In the middle of her speech, HOWARD WAGNER, thirty-six, wheels in a small typewriter table on which is a wire-recording machine and proceeds to plug it in. This is on the left forestage. Light slowly fades on LINDA as it rises on HOWARD. HOWARD is intent on threading the machine and only glances over his shoulder as WILLY appears.*]

WILLY Pst! Pst!

HOWARD Hello, Willy, come in.

WILLY Like to have a little talk with you, Howard.

HOWARD Sorry to keep you waiting. I'll be with you in a minute.

WILLY What's that, Howard?

HOWARD Didn't you ever see one of these? Wire recorder.

WILLY Oh. Can we talk a minute?

HOWARD Records things. Just got delivery yesterday. Been driving me crazy, the most terrific machine I ever saw in my life. I was up all night with it.

WILLY What do you do with it?

HOWARD I bought it for dictation, but you can do anything with it. Listen to this. I had it home last night. Listen to what I picked up. The first one is my daughter. Get this. [*He flicks the switch and "Roll out the Barrel" is heard being whistled.*] Listen to that kid whistle.

WILLY That is lifelike, isn't it?

HOWARD Seven years old. Get that tone.

WILLY Ts, ts. Like to ask a little favor if you . . .

[*The whistling breaks off, and the voice of HOWARD's daughter is heard.*]

HIS DAUGHTER "Now you, Daddy."

HOWARD She's crazy for me! [*Again the same song is whistled.*] That's me!

Ha! [*He winks.*]

WILLY You're very good!

[*The whistling breaks off again. The machine runs silent for a moment.*]

HOWARD Sh! Get this now, this is my son.

HIS SON "The capital of Alabama is Montgomery; the capital of Arizona is Phoenix; the capital of Arkansas is Little Rock; the capital of California is Sacramento . . ." [*and on, and on*]

HOWARD [*holding up five fingers*] Five years old, Willy!

WILLY He'll make an announcer some day!

HIS SON [*continuing*] “The capital . . .”

HOWARD Get that—alphabetical order! [*The machine breaks off suddenly.*]

Wait a minute. The maid kicked the plug out.

WILLY It certainly is a—

HOWARD Sh, for God’s sake!

HIS SON “It’s nine o’clock, Bulova watch time. So I have to go to sleep.”

WILLY That really is—

HOWARD Wait a minute! The next is my wife.

[*They wait.*]

HOWARD’S VOICE “Go on, say something.” [*pause*] “Well, you gonna talk?”

HIS WIFE “I can’t think of anything.”

HOWARD’S VOICE “Well, talk—it’s turning.”

HIS WIFE [*shyly, beaten*] “Hello.” [*silence*] “Oh, Howard, I can’t talk into this . . .”

HOWARD [*snapping the machine off*] That was my wife.

WILLY That is a wonderful machine. Can we—

HOWARD I tell you, Willy, I’m gonna take my camera, and my handsaw, and all my hobbies, and out they go. This is the most fascinating relaxation I ever found.

WILLY I think I’ll get one myself.

HOWARD Sure, they’re only a hundred and a half. You can’t do without it.

Supposing you wanna hear Jack Benny,⁷ see? But you can’t be at home at that hour. So you tell the maid to turn the radio on when Jack Benny comes on, and this automatically goes on with the radio . . .

WILLY And when you come home you . . .

HOWARD You can come home twelve o’clock, one o’clock, any time you like, and you get yourself a Coke and sit yourself down, throw the switch, and there’s Jack Benny’s program in the middle of the night!

WILLY I’m definitely going to get one. Because lots of time I’m on the road, and I think to myself, what I must be missing on the radio!

HOWARD Don’t you have a radio in the car?

WILLY Well, yeah, but who ever thinks of turning it on?

HOWARD Say, aren’t you supposed to be in Boston?

WILLY That’s what I want to talk to you about, Howard. You got a minute?

[*He draws a chair in from the wing.*]

HOWARD What happened? What’re you doing here?

WILLY Well . . .

HOWARD You didn’t crack up again, did you?

WILLY Oh, no. No . . .

HOWARD Geez, you had me worried there for a minute. What’s the trouble?

WILLY Well, tell you the truth, Howard. I’ve come to the decision that I’d rather not travel any more.

HOWARD Not travel! Well, what’ll you do?

WILLY Remember, Christmas time, when you had the party here? You said you’d try to think of some spot for me here in town.

HOWARD With us?

WILLY Well, sure.

7. Vastly popular radio comedian of the 1930s and 1940s.

HOWARD Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember. Well, I couldn't think of anything for you, Willy.

WILLY I tell ya, Howard. The kids are all grown up, y'know. I don't need much any more. If I could take home—well, sixty-five dollars a week, I could swing it.

HOWARD Yeah, but Willy, see I—

WILLY I tell ya why, Howard. Speaking frankly and between the two of us, y'know—I'm just a little tired.

HOWARD Oh, I could understand that, Willy. But you're a road man, Willy, and we do a road business. We've only got a half-dozen salesmen on the floor here.

WILLY God knows, Howard, I never asked a favor of any man. But I was with the firm when your father used to carry you in here in his arms.

HOWARD I know that, Willy, but—

WILLY Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace.

HOWARD I appreciate that, Willy, but there just is no spot here for you. If I had a spot I'd slam you right in, but I just don't have a single solitary spot.

[He looks for his lighter. WILLY has picked it up and gives it to him. Pause.]

WILLY *[with increasing anger]* Howard, all I need to set my table is fifty dollars a week.

HOWARD But where am I going to put you, kid?

WILLY Look, it isn't a question of whether I can sell merchandise, is it?

HOWARD No, but it's a business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own weight.

WILLY *[desperately]* Just let me tell you a story, Howard—

HOWARD 'Cause you gotta admit, business is business.

WILLY *[angrily]* Business is definitely business, but just listen for a minute. You don't understand this. When I was a boy—eighteen, nineteen—I was already on the road. And there was a question in my mind as to whether selling had a future for me. Because in those days I had a yearning to go to Alaska. See, there were three gold strikes in one month in Alaska, and I felt like going out. Just for the ride, you might say.

HOWARD *[barely interested]* Don't say.

WILLY Oh, yeah, my father lived many years in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We've got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family. I thought I'd go out with my older brother and try to locate him, and maybe settle in the North with the old man. And I was almost decided to go, when I met a salesman in the Parker House. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers—I'll never forget—and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made a living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? when he died—and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in

his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston—when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. [*He stands up. HOWARD has not looked at him.*] In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear—or personality. You see what I mean? They don't know me anymore.

HOWARD [*moving away, toward the right*] That's just the thing, Willy.

WILLY If I had forty dollars a week—that's all I'd need. Forty dollars, Howard.

HOWARD Kid, I can't take blood from a stone, I—

WILLY [*desperation is on him now*] Howard, the year Al Smith⁸ was nominated, your father came to me and—

HOWARD [*starting to go off*] I've got to see some people, kid.

WILLY [*stopping him*] I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit! [*after a pause*] Now pay attention. Your father—in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD [*impatiently*] Now, Willy, you never averaged—

WILLY [*banging his hand on the desk*] I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! And your father came to me—or rather, I was in the office here—it was right over this desk—and he put his hand on my shoulder—

HOWARD [*getting up*] You'll have to excuse me, Willy, I gotta see some people. Pull yourself together. [*going out*] I'll be back in a little while.

[*On HOWARD'S exit, the light on his chair grows very bright and strange.*]

WILLY Pull myself together! What the hell did I say to him? My God, I was yelling at him! How could I! [*WILLY breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it. He approaches this chair, standing across the desk from it.*] Frank, Frank, don't you remember what you told me that time? How you put your hand on my shoulder, and Frank . . . [*He leans on the desk and as he speaks the dead man's name he accidentally switches on the recorder, and instantly*]

HOWARD'S SON “. . . of New York is Albany. The capital of Ohio is Cincinnati, the capital of Rhode Island is . . .” [*The recitation continues.*]

WILLY [*leaping away with fright, shouting*] Ha! Howard! Howard! Howard!

HOWARD [*rushing in*] What happened?

WILLY [*pointing at the machine, which continues nasally, childishly, with the capital cities*] Shut it off! Shut it off!

HOWARD [*pulling the plug out*] Look, Willy . . .

WILLY [*pressing his hands to his eyes*] I gotta get myself some coffee. I'll get some coffee . . .

[*WILLY starts to walk out. HOWARD stops him.*]

8. Democratic candidate for president in 1928.

HOWARD [*rolling up the cord*] Willy, look . . .

WILLY I'll go to Boston.

HOWARD Willy, you can't go to Boston for us.

WILLY Why can't I go?

HOWARD I don't want you to represent us. I've been meaning to tell you for a long time now.

WILLY Howard, are you firing me?

HOWARD I think you need a good long rest, Willy.

WILLY Howard—

HOWARD And when you feel better, come back, and we'll see if we can work something out.

WILLY But I gotta earn money, Howard. I'm in no position to—

HOWARD Where are your sons? Why don't your sons give you a hand?

WILLY They're working on a very big deal.

HOWARD This is no time for false pride, Willy. You go to your sons and you tell them that you're tired. You've got two great boys, haven't you?

WILLY Oh, no question, no question, but in the meantime . . .

HOWARD Then that's that, heh?

WILLY All right, I'll go to Boston tomorrow.

HOWARD No, no.

WILLY I can't throw myself on my sons. I'm not a cripple!

HOWARD Look, kid, I'm busy, I'm busy this morning.

WILLY [*grasping HOWARD's arm*] Howard, you've got to let me go to Boston!

HOWARD [*hard, keeping himself under control*] I've got a line of people to see this morning. Sit down, take five minutes, and pull yourself together, and then go home, will ya? I need the office, Willy. [*He starts to go, turns, remembering the recorder, starts to push off the table holding the recorder.*] Oh, yeah. Whenever you can this week, stop by and drop off the samples. You'll feel better, Willy, and then come back and we'll talk. Pull yourself together, kid, there's people outside.

[*HOWARD exits, pushing the table off left. WILLY stares into space, exhausted. Now the music is heard—BEN's music—first distantly, then closer, closer. As WILLY speaks, BEN enters from the right. He carries valise and umbrella.*]

WILLY Oh, Ben, how did you do it? What is the answer? Did you wind up the Alaska deal already?

BEN Doesn't take much time if you know what you're doing. Just a short business trip. Boarding ship in an hour. Wanted to say good-by.

WILLY Ben, I've got to talk to you.

BEN [*glancing at his watch*] Haven't the time, William.

WILLY [*crossing the apron to BEN*] Ben, nothing's working out. I don't know what to do.

BEN Now, look here, William. I've bought timberland in Alaska and I need a man to look after things for me.

WILLY God, timberland! Me and my boys in those grand outdoors!

BEN You've a new continent at your doorstep, William. Get out of these cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists and you can fight for a fortune up there.

WILLY Yes, yes! Linda, Linda!

[LINDA enters as of old, with the wash.]

LINDA Oh, you're back?

BEN I haven't much time.

WILLY No, wait! Linda, he's got a proposition for me in Alaska.

LINDA But you've got— [to BEN] He's got a beautiful job here.

WILLY But in Alaska, kid, I could—

LINDA You're doing well enough, Willy!

BEN [to LINDA] Enough for what, my dear?

LINDA [*frightened of BEN and angry at him*] Don't say those things to him!

Enough to be happy right here, right now. [to WILLY, while BEN laughs]

Why must everybody conquer the world? You're well liked, and the boys love you, and someday—[to BEN]—why, old man Wagner told him just the other day that if he keeps it up he'll be a member of the firm, didn't he, Willy?

WILLY Sure, sure. I am building something with this firm, Ben, and if a man is building something he must be on the right track, mustn't he?

BEN What are you building? Lay your hand on it. Where is it?

WILLY [*hesitantly*] That's true, Linda, there's nothing.

LINDA Why? [to BEN] There's a man eighty-four years old—

WILLY That's right, Ben, that's right. When I look at that man I say, what is there to worry about?

BEN Bah!

WILLY It's true, Ben. All he has to do is go into any city, pick up the phone, and he's making his living and you know why?

BEN [*picking up his valise*] I've got to go.

WILLY [*holding BEN back*] Look at this boy!

[BIFF, in his high school sweater, enters carrying suitcase. HAPPY carries BIFF's shoulder guards, gold helmet, and football pants.]

WILLY Without a penny to his name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky's the limit, because it's not what you do, Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts! The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! [*He turns to BIFF.*] And that's why when you get out on that field today it's important. Because thousands of people will be rooting for you and loving you. [to BEN, who has again begun to leave] And Ben! when he walks into a business office his name will sound out like a bell and all the doors will open to him! I've seen it, Ben, I've seen it a thousand times! You can't feel it with your hand like timber, but it's there!

BEN Good-by, William.

WILLY Ben, am I right? Don't you think I'm right? I value your advice.

BEN There's a new continent at your doorstep, William. You could walk out rich. Rich! [*He is gone.*]

WILLY We'll do it here, Ben! You hear me? We're gonna do it here!

[*Young BERNARD rushes in. The gay music of the Boys is heard.*]

BERNARD Oh, gee, I was afraid you left already!

WILLY Why? What time is it?

BERNARD It's half-past one!

WILLY Well, come on, everybody! Ebbets Field next stop! Where's the pennants? [*He rushes through the wall-line of the kitchen and out into the living-room.*]

LINDA [*to BIFF*] Did you pack fresh underwear?

BIFF [*who has been limbering up*] I want to go!

BERNARD Biff, I'm carrying your helmet, ain't I?

HAPPY No, I'm carrying the helmet.

BERNARD Oh, Biff, you promised me.

HAPPY I'm carrying the helmet.

BERNARD How am I going to get in the locker room?

LINDA Let him carry the shoulder guards. [*She puts her coat and hat on in the kitchen.*]

BERNARD Can I, Biff? 'Cause I told everybody I'm going to be in the locker room.

HAPPY In Ebbets Field it's the clubhouse.

BERNARD I meant the clubhouse. Biff!

HAPPY Biff!

BIFF [*grandly, after a slight pause*] Let him carry the shoulder guards.

HAPPY [*as he gives BERNARD the shoulder guards*] Stay close to us now. [*WILLY rushes in with the pennants.*]

WILLY [*handing them out*] Everybody wave when Biff comes out on the field. [*HAPPY and BERNARD run off.*] You set now, boy? [*The music has died away.*]

BIFF Ready to go, Pop. Every muscle is ready.

WILLY [*at the edge of the apron*] You realize what this means?

BIFF That's right, Pop.

WILLY [*feeling BIFF's muscles*] You're comin' home this afternoon captain of the All-Scholastic Championship Team of the City of New York.

BIFF I got it, Pop. And remember, pal, when I take off my helmet, that touchdown is for you.

WILLY Let's go! [*He is starting out, with his arm around BIFF, when CHARLEY enters, as of old, in knickers.*] I got no room for you, Charley.

CHARLEY Room? For what?

WILLY In the car.

CHARLEY You goin' for a ride? I wanted to shoot some casino.

WILLY [*furiously*] Casino! [*incredulously*] Don't you realize what today is?

LINDA Oh, he knows, Willy. He's just kidding you.

WILLY That's nothing to kid about!

CHARLEY No, Linda, what's goin' on?

LINDA He's playing in Ebbets Field.

CHARLEY Baseball in this weather?

WILLY Don't talk to him. Come on, come on! [*He is pushing them out.*]

CHARLEY Wait a minute, didn't you hear the news?

WILLY What?

CHARLEY Don't you listen to the radio? Ebbets Field just blew up.

WILLY You go to hell! [*CHARLEY laughs. Pushing them out*] Come on, come on! We're late.

CHARLEY [*as they go*] Knock a homer, Biff, knock a homer!

WILLY [*the last to leave, turning to CHARLEY*] I don't think that was funny, Charley. This is the greatest day of his life.

CHARLEY Willy, when are you going to grow up?

WILLY Yeah, heh? When this game is over, Charley, you'll be laughing out of the other side of your face. They'll be calling him another Red Grange.⁹ Twenty-five thousand a year.

CHARLEY [*kidding*] Is that so?

WILLY Yeah, that's so.

CHARLEY Well, then, I'm sorry, Willy. But tell me something.

WILLY What?

CHARLEY Who is Red Grange?

WILLY Put up your hands. Goddam you, put up your hands!

[CHARLEY, *chuckling*, shakes his head and walks away, around the left corner of the stage. WILLY follows him. The music rises to a mocking frenzy.]

WILLY Who the hell do you think you are, better than everybody else? You don't know everything, you big, ignorant, stupid . . . Put up your hands!

[*Light rises, on the right side of the forestage, on a small table in the reception room of CHARLEY's office. Traffic sounds are heard. BERNARD, now mature, sits whistling to himself. A pair of tennis rackets and an overnight bag are on the floor beside him.*]

WILLY [*offstage*] What are you walking away for? Don't walk away! If you're going to say something say it to my face! I know you laugh at me behind my back. You'll laugh out of the other side of your goddam face after this game. Touchdown! Touchdown! Eighty thousand people! Touchdown! Right between the goal posts.

[BERNARD is a quiet, earnest, but self-assured young man. WILLY's voice is coming from right upstage now. BERNARD lowers his feet off the table and listens. JENNY, his father's secretary, enters.]

JENNY [*distressed*] Say, Bernard, will you go out in the hall?

BERNARD What is that noise? Who is it?

JENNY Mr. Loman. He just got off the elevator.

BERNARD [*getting up*] Who's he arguing with?

JENNY Nobody. There's nobody with him. I can't deal with him any more, and your father gets all upset everytime he comes. I've got a lot of typing to do, and your father's waiting to sign it. Will you see him?

WILLY [*entering*] Touchdown! Touch— [*He sees JENNY.*] Jenny, Jenny, good to see you. How're ya? Workin'? Or still honest?

JENNY Fine. How've you been feeling?

WILLY Not much any more, Jenny. Ha, ha! [*He is surprised to see the rackets.*]

BERNARD Hello, Uncle Willy.

WILLY [*almost shocked*] Bernard! Well, look who's here! [*He comes quickly, guiltily to BERNARD and warmly shakes his hand.*]

BERNARD How are you? Good to see you.

WILLY What are you doing here?

BERNARD Oh, just stopped by to see Pop. Get off my feet till my train leaves. I'm going to Washington in a few minutes.

WILLY Is he in?

9. Harold Edward Grange (1903–1991), all-American halfback at the University of Illinois from 1923 to 1925, who then played professionally for the Chicago Bears.

BERNARD Yes, he's in his office with the accountant. Sit down.

WILLY [*sitting down*] What're you going to do in Washington?

BERNARD Oh, just a case I've got there, Willy.

WILLY That so? [*indicating the rackets*] You going to play tennis there?

BERNARD I'm staying with a friend who's got a court.

WILLY Don't say. His own tennis court. Must be fine people, I bet.

BERNARD They are, very nice. Dad tells me Biff's in town.

WILLY [*with a big smile*] Yeah, Biff's in. Working on a very big deal, Bernard.

BERNARD What's Biff doing?

WILLY Well, he's been doing very big things in the West. But he decided to establish himself here. Very big. We're having dinner. Did I hear your wife had a boy?

BERNARD That's right. Our second.

WILLY Two boys! What do you know!

BERNARD What kind of a deal has Biff got?

WILLY Well, Bill Oliver—very big sporting-goods man—he wants Biff very badly. Called him in from the West. Long distance, *carte blanche*, special deliveries. Your friends have their own private tennis court?

BERNARD You still with the old firm, Willy?

WILLY [*after a pause*] I'm—I'm overjoyed to see how you made the grade, Bernard, overjoyed. It's an encouraging thing to see a young man really—really—Looks very good for Biff—very—[*He breaks off, then*] Bernard—[*He is so full of emotion, he breaks off again.*]

BERNARD What is it, Willy?

WILLY [*small and alone*] What—what's the secret?

BERNARD What secret?

WILLY How—how did you? Why didn't he ever catch on?

BERNARD I wouldn't know that, Willy.

WILLY [*confidentially, desperately*] You were his friend, his boyhood friend. There's something I don't understand about it. His life ended after that Ebbets Field game. From the age of seventeen nothing good ever happened to him.

BERNARD He never trained himself for anything.

WILLY But he did, he did. After high school he took so many correspondence courses. Radio mechanics; television; God knows what, and never made the slightest mark.

BERNARD [*taking off his glasses*] Willy, do you want to talk candidly?

WILLY [*rising, faces BERNARD*] I regard you as a very brilliant man, Bernard. I value your advice.

BERNARD Oh, the hell with the advice, Willy. I couldn't advise you. There's just one thing I've always wanted to ask you. When he was supposed to graduate, and the math teacher flunked him—

WILLY Oh, that son-of-a-bitch ruined his life.

BERNARD Yeah, but, Willy, all he had to do was go to summer school and make up that subject.

WILLY That's right, that's right.

BERNARD Did you tell him not to go to summer school?

WILLY Me? I begged him to go. I ordered him to go!

BERNARD Then why wouldn't he go?

WILLY Why? Why! Bernard, that question has been trailing me like a ghost for the last fifteen years. He flunked the subject, and laid down and died like a hammer hit him!

BERNARD Take it easy, kid.

WILLY Let me talk to you—I got nobody to talk to. Bernard, Bernard, was it my fault? Y’see? It keeps going around in my mind, maybe I did something to him. I got nothing to give him.

BERNARD Don’t take it so hard.

WILLY Why did he lay down? What is the story there? You were his friend!

BERNARD Willy, I remember, it was June, and our grades came out. And he’d flunked math.

WILLY That son-of-a-bitch!

BERNARD No, it wasn’t right then. Biff just got very angry, I remember, and he was ready to enroll in summer school.

WILLY [*surprised*] He was?

BERNARD He wasn’t beaten by it at all. But then, Willy, he disappeared from the block for almost a month. And I got the idea that he’d gone up to New England to see you. Did he have a talk with you then?

[*WILLY stares in silence.*]

BERNARD Willy?

WILLY [*with a strong edge of resentment in his voice*] Yeah, he came to Boston. What about it?

BERNARD Well, just that when he came back—I’ll never forget this, it always mystifies me. Because I’d thought so well of Biff, even though he’d always taken advantage of me. I loved him, Willy, y’know? And he came back after that month and took his sneakers—remember those sneakers with “University of Virginia” printed on them? He was so proud of those, wore them every day. And he took them down in the cellar, and burned them up in the furnace. We had a fist fight. It lasted at least half an hour. Just the two of us, punching each other down the cellar, and crying right through it. I’ve often thought of how strange it was that I knew he’d given up his life. What happened in Boston, Willy?

[*WILLY looks at him as at an intruder.*]

BERNARD I just bring it up because you asked me.

WILLY [*angrily*] Nothing. What do you mean, “What happened?” What’s that got to do with anything?

BERNARD Well, don’t get sore.

WILLY What are you trying to do, blame it on me? If a boy lays down is that my fault?

BERNARD Now, Willy, don’t get—

WILLY Well, don’t—don’t talk to me that way! What does that mean, “What happened?”

[*CHARLEY enters. He is in his vest, and he carries a bottle of bourbon.*]

CHARLEY Hey, you’re going to miss that train. [*He waves the bottle.*]

BERNARD Yeah, I’m going. [*He takes the bottle.*] Thanks, Pop. [*He picks up his rackets and bag.*] Good-by, Willy, and don’t worry about it. You know, “If at first you don’t succeed . . .”

WILLY Yes, I believe in that.

BERNARD But sometimes, Willy, it’s better for a man just to walk away.

WILLY Walk away?

BERNARD That's right.

WILLY But if you can't walk away?

BERNARD [*after a slight pause*] I guess that's when it's tough. [*extending his hand*] Good-by, Willy.

WILLY [*shaking BERNARD's hand*] Good-by, boy.

CHARLEY [*an arm on BERNARD's shoulder*] How do you like this kid? Gonna argue a case in front of the Supreme Court.

BERNARD [*protesting*] Pop!

WILLY [*genuinely shocked, pained, and happy*] No! The Supreme Court!

BERNARD I gotta run. 'By, Dad!

CHARLEY Knock 'em dead, Bernard!

[*BERNARD goes off.*]

WILLY [*as CHARLEY takes out his wallet*] The Supreme Court! And he didn't even mention it!

CHARLEY [*counting out money on the desk*] He don't have to—he's gonna do it.

WILLY And you never told him what to do, did you? You never took any interest in him.

CHARLEY My salvation is that I never took any interest in anything. There's some money—fifty dollars. I got an accountant inside.

WILLY Charley, look . . . [*with difficulty*] I got my insurance to pay. If you can manage it—I need a hundred and ten dollars.

[*CHARLEY doesn't reply for a moment; merely stops moving.*]

WILLY I'd draw it from my bank but Linda would know, and I . . .

CHARLEY Sit down, Willy.

WILLY [*moving toward the chair*] I'm keeping an account of everything, remember. I'll pay every penny back. [*He sits.*]

CHARLEY Now listen to me, Willy.

WILLY I want you to know I appreciate . . .

CHARLEY [*sitting down on the table*] Willy, what're you doin'? What the hell is goin' on in your head?

WILLY Why? I'm simply . . .

CHARLEY I offered you a job. You can make fifty dollars a week. And I won't send you on the road.

WILLY I've got a job.

CHARLEY Without pay? What kind of job is a job without pay? [*He rises.*]

Now, look kid, enough is enough. I'm no genius but I know when I'm being insulted.

WILLY Insulted!

CHARLEY Why don't you want to work for me?

WILLY What's the matter with you? I've got a job.

CHARLEY Then what're you walkin' in here every week for?

WILLY [*getting up*] Well, if you don't want me to walk in here—

CHARLEY I am offering you a job!

WILLY I don't want your goddam job!

CHARLEY When the hell are you going to grow up?

WILLY [*furiously*] You big ignoramus, if you say that to me again I'll rap you one! I don't care how big you are! [*He's ready to fight. Pause.*]

CHARLEY [*kindly, going to him*] How much do you need, Willy?

WILLY Charley, I'm strapped, I'm strapped. I don't know what to do. I was just fired.

CHARLEY Howard fired you?

WILLY That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard.

CHARLEY Willy, when're you gonna realize that them things don't mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can't sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that.

WILLY I've always tried to think otherwise. I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing—

CHARLEY Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan?¹ Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked. Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me, and nobody can say I'm in love with you, but I'll give you a job because—just for the hell of it, put it that way. Now what do you say?

WILLY I—I just can't work for you, Charley.

CHARLEY What're you, jealous of me?

WILLY I can't work for you, that's all, don't ask me why.

CHARLEY [*angered, takes out more bills*] You been jealous of me all your life, you damned fool! Here, pay your insurance. [*He puts the money in WILLY'S hand.*]

WILLY I'm keeping strict accounts.

CHARLEY I've got some work to do. Take care of yourself. And pay your insurance.

WILLY [*moving to the right*] Funny, y'know? After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.

CHARLEY Willy, nobody's worth nothin' dead. [*after a slight pause*] Did you hear what I said?

[*WILLY stands still, dreaming.*]

CHARLEY Willy!

WILLY Apologize to Bernard for me when you see him. I didn't mean to argue with him. He's a fine boy. They're all fine boys, and they'll end up big—all of them. Someday they'll all play tennis together. Wish me luck, Charley. He saw Bill Oliver today.

CHARLEY Good luck.

WILLY [*on the verge of tears*] Charley, you're the only friend I got. Isn't that a remarkable thing? [*He goes out.*]

CHARLEY Jesus!

[*CHARLEY stares after him a moment and follows. All light blacks out. Suddenly raucous music is heard, and a red glow rises behind the screen at right. STANLEY, a young waiter, appears, carrying a table, followed by HAPPY, who is carrying two chairs.*]

STANLEY [*putting the table down*] That's all right, Mr. Loman, I can handle it myself. [*He turns and takes the chairs from HAPPY and places them at the table.*]

HAPPY [*glancing around*] Oh, this is better.

1. John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), American banker and philanthropist famed for his enormous wealth.

STANLEY Sure, in the front there you're in the middle of all kinds a noise. Whenever you got a party. Mr. Loman, you just tell me and I'll put you back here. Y'know, there's a lotta people they don't like it private, because when they go out they like to see a lotta action around them because they're sick and tired to stay in the house by theirself. But I know you, you ain't from Hackensack. You know what I mean?

HAPPY [*sitting down*] So how's it coming, Stanley?

STANLEY Ah, it's a dog life. I only wish during the war they'd a took me in the Army. I coulda been dead by now.

HAPPY My brother's back, Stanley.

STANLEY Oh, he come back, heh? From the Far West.

HAPPY Yeah, big cattle man, my brother, so treat him right. And my father's coming too.

STANLEY Oh, your father too!

HAPPY You got a couple of nice lobsters?

STANLEY Hundred per cent, big.

HAPPY I want them with the claws.

STANLEY Don't worry, I don't give you no mice. [*HAPPY laughs.*] How about some wine? It'll put a head on the meal.

HAPPY No. You remember, Stanley, that recipe I brought you from overseas? With the champagne in it?

STANLEY Oh, yeah, sure. I still got it tacked up yet in the kitchen. But that'll have to cost a buck apiece anyways.

HAPPY That's all right.

STANLEY What'd you, hit a number or somethin'?

HAPPY No, it's a little celebration. My brother is—I think he pulled off a big deal today. I think we're going into business together.

STANLEY Great! That's the best for you. Because a family business, you know what I mean?—that's the best.

HAPPY That's what I think.

STANLEY 'Cause what's the difference? Somebody steals? It's in the family. Know what I mean? [*sotto voce*]² Like this bartender here. The boss is goin' crazy what kinda leak he's got in the cash register. You put it in but it don't come out.

HAPPY [*raising his head*] Sh!

STANLEY What?

HAPPY You notice I wasn't lookin' right or left, was I?

STANLEY No.

HAPPY And my eyes are closed.

STANLEY So what's the—?

HAPPY Strudel's comin'.

STANLEY [*catching on, looks around*] Ah, no, there's no—

[*He breaks off as a furred, lavishly dressed girl enters and sits at the next table. Both follow her with their eyes.*]

STANLEY Geez, how'd ya know?

HAPPY I got radar or something. [*staring directly at her profile*] Ooooooooo . . . Stanley.

STANLEY I think that's for you, Mr. Loman.

2. In an undertone [Italian].

HAPPY Look at that mouth. Oh, God. And the binoculars.

STANLEY Geez, you got a life, Mr. Loman.

HAPPY Wait on her.

STANLEY [*going to the girl's table*] Would you like a menu, ma'am?

GIRL I'm expecting someone, but I'd like a—

HAPPY Why don't you bring her—excuse me, miss, do you mind? I sell champagne, and I'd like you to try my brand. Bring her a champagne, Stanley.

GIRL That's awfully nice of you.

HAPPY Don't mention it. It's all company money. [*He laughs.*]

GIRL That's a charming product to be selling, isn't it?

HAPPY Oh, gets to be like everything else. Selling is selling, y'know.

GIRL I suppose.

HAPPY You don't happen to sell, do you?

GIRL No, I don't sell.

HAPPY Would you object to a compliment from a stranger? You ought to be on a magazine cover.

GIRL [*looking at him a little archly*] I have been.

[*STANLEY comes in with a glass of champagne.*]

HAPPY What'd I say before, Stanley? You see? She's a cover girl.

STANLEY Oh, I could see, I could see.

HAPPY [*to the GIRL*] What magazine?

GIRL Oh, a lot of them. [*She takes the drink.*] Thank you.

HAPPY You know what they say in France, don't you? "Champagne is the drink of the complexion"—Hya, Biff!

[*BIFF has entered and sits with HAPPY.*]

BIFF Hello, kid. Sorry I'm late.

HAPPY I just got here. Uh, Miss—?

GIRL Forsythe.

HAPPY Miss Forsythe, this is my brother.

BIFF Is Dad here?

HAPPY His name is Biff. You might've heard of him. Great football player.

GIRL Really? What team?

HAPPY Are you familiar with football?

GIRL No, I'm afraid I'm not.

HAPPY Biff is quarterback with the New York Giants.

GIRL Well, that's nice, isn't it? [*She drinks.*]

HAPPY Good health.

GIRL I'm happy to meet you.

HAPPY That's my name. Hap. It's really Harold, but at West Point they called me Happy.

GIRL [*now really impressed*] Oh, I see. How do you do? [*She turns her profile.*]

BIFF Isn't Dad coming?

HAPPY You want her?

BIFF Oh, I could never make that.

HAPPY I remember the time that idea would never come into your head. Where's the old confidence, Biff?

BIFF I just saw Oliver—

HAPPY Wait a minute. I've got to see that old confidence again. Do you want her? She's on call.

BIFF Oh, no. [*He turns to look at the GIRL.*]

HAPPY I'm telling you. Watch this. [*turning to the GIRL*] Honey? [*She turns to him.*] Are you busy?

GIRL Well, I am . . . but I could make a phone call.

HAPPY Do that, will you, honey? And see if you can get a friend. We'll be here for a while. Biff is one of the greatest football players in the country.

GIRL [*standing up*] Well, I'm certainly happy to meet you.

HAPPY Come back soon.

GIRL I'll try.

HAPPY Don't try, honey, try hard.

[*The GIRL exits. STANLEY follows, shaking his head in bewildered admiration.*]

HAPPY Isn't that a shame now? A beautiful girl like that? That's why I can't get married. There's not a good woman in a thousand. New York is loaded with them, kid!

BIFF Hap, look—

HAPPY I told you she was on call!

BIFF [*strangely unnerved*] Cut it out, will ya? I want to say something to you.

HAPPY Did you see Oliver?

BIFF I saw him all right. Now look, I want to tell Dad a couple of things and I want you to help me.

HAPPY What? Is he going to back you?

BIFF Are you crazy? You're out of your goddam head, you know that?

HAPPY Why? What happened?

BIFF [*breathlessly*] I did a terrible thing today, Hap. It's been the strangest day I ever went through. I'm all numb, I swear.

HAPPY You mean he wouldn't see you?

BIFF Well, I waited six hours for him, see? All day. Kept sending my name in. Even tried to date his secretary so she'd get me to him, but no soap.

HAPPY Because you're not showin' the old confidence, Biff. He remembered you, didn't he?

BIFF [*stopping HAPPY with a gesture*] Finally, about five o'clock, he comes out. Didn't remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap.

HAPPY Did you tell him my Florida idea?

BIFF He walked away. I saw him for one minute. I got so mad I could've torn the walls down! How the hell did I ever get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I'd been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and—I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been! We've been talking in a dream for fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk.

HAPPY What'd you do?

BIFF [*with great tension and wonder*] Well, he left, see. And the secretary went out. I was all alone in the waiting-room. I don't know what came over me, Hap. The next thing I know I'm in his office—paneled walls, everything. I can't explain it. I—Hap, I took his fountain pen.

HAPPY Geez, did he catch you?

BIFF I ran out. I ran down all eleven flights. I ran and ran and ran.

HAPPY That was an awful dumb—what'd you do that for?

BIFF [*agonized*] I don't know, I just—wanted to take something, I don't know. You gotta help me, Hap, I'm gonna tell Pop.

HAPPY You crazy? What for?

BIFF Hap, he's got to understand that I'm not the man somebody lends that kind of money to. He thinks I've been spiting him all these years and it's eating him up.

HAPPY That's just it. You tell him something nice.

BIFF I can't.

HAPPY Say you got a lunch date with Oliver tomorrow.

BIFF So what do I do tomorrow?

HAPPY You leave the house tomorrow and come back at night and say Oliver is thinking it over. And he thinks it over for a couple of weeks, and gradually it fades away and nobody's the worse.

BIFF But it'll go on forever!

HAPPY Dad is never so happy as when he's looking forward to something!
[*WILLY enters.*]

HAPPY Hello, scout!

WILLY Gee, I haven't been here in years!

[*STANLEY has followed WILLY in and sets a chair for him. STANLEY starts off but HAPPY stops him.*]

HAPPY Stanley!

[*STANLEY stands by, waiting for an order.*]

BIFF [*going to WILLY with guilt, as to an invalid*] Sit down, Pop. You want a drink?

WILLY Sure, I don't mind.

BIFF Let's get a load on.

WILLY You look worried.

BIFF N-no. [*to STANLEY*] Scotch all around. Make it doubles.

STANLEY Doubles, right. [*He goes.*]

WILLY You had a couple already, didn't you?

BIFF Just a couple, yeah.

WILLY Well, what happened, boy? [*nodding affirmatively, with a smile*]
Everything go all right?

BIFF [*takes a breath, then reaches out and grasps WILLY's hand*] Pal . . . [*He is smiling bravely, and WILLY is smiling too.*] I had an experience today.

HAPPY Terrific, Pop.

WILLY That so? What happened?

BIFF [*high, slightly alcoholic, above the earth*] I'm going to tell you everything from first to last. It's been a strange day. [*Silence. He looks around, composes himself as best he can, but his breath keeps breaking the rhythm of his voice.*] I had to wait quite a while for him, and—

WILLY Oliver?

BIFF Yeah, Oliver. All day, as a matter of cold fact. And a lot of—instances—facts, Pop, facts about my life came back to me. Who was it, Pop? Who ever said I was a salesman with Oliver?

WILLY Well, you were.

BIFF No, Dad, I was a shipping clerk.

WILLY But you were practically—

BIFF [*with determination*] Dad, I don't know who said it first, but I was never a salesman for Bill Oliver.

WILLY What're you talking about?

BIFF Let's hold on to the facts tonight, Pop. We're not going to get anywhere bullin' around. I was a shipping clerk.

WILLY [*angrily*] All right, now listen to me—

BIFF Why don't you let me finish?

WILLY I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today.

BIFF [*shocked*] How could you be?

WILLY I was fired, and I'm looking for a little good news to tell your mother, because the woman has waited and the woman has suffered. The gist of it is that I haven't got a story left in my head, Biff. So don't give me a lecture about facts and aspects. I am not interested. Now what've you got to say to me?

[*STANLEY enters with three drinks. They wait until he leaves.*]

WILLY Did you see Oliver?

BIFF Jesus, Dad!

WILLY You mean you didn't go up there?

HAPPY Sure he went up there.

BIFF I did. I—saw him. How could they fire you?

WILLY [*on the edge of his chair*] What kind of a welcome did he give you?

BIFF He won't even let you work on commission?

WILLY I'm out! [*driving*] So tell me, he gave you a warm welcome?

HAPPY Sure, Pop, sure!

BIFF [*driven*] Well, it was kind of—

WILLY I was wondering if he'd remember you. [*to HAPPY*] Imagine, man doesn't see him for ten, twelve years and gives him that kind of a welcome!

HAPPY Damn right!

BIFF [*trying to return to the offensive*] Pop, look—

WILLY You know why he remembered you, don't you? Because you impressed him in those days.

BIFF Let's talk quietly and get this down to the facts, huh?

WILLY [*as though BIFF had been interrupting*] Well, what happened? It's great news, Biff. Did he take you into his office or'd you talk in the waiting-room?

BIFF Well, he came in, see, and—

WILLY [*with a big smile*] What'd he say? Betcha he threw his arm around you.

BIFF Well, he kinda—

WILLY He's a fine man. [*to HAPPY*] Very hard man to see, y'know.

HAPPY [*agreeing*] Oh, I know.

WILLY [*to BIFF*] Is that where you had the drinks?

BIFF Yeah, he gave me a couple of—no, no!

HAPPY [*cutting in*] He told him my Florida idea.

WILLY Don't interrupt. [*to BIFF*] How'd he react to the Florida idea?

BIFF Dad, will you give me a minute to explain?

WILLY I've been waiting for you to explain since I sat down here! What happened? He took you into his office and what?

BIFF Well—I talked. And—he listened, see.

WILLY Famous for the way he listens, y'know. What was his answer?

BIFF His answer was— [*He breaks off, suddenly angry.*] Dad, you're not letting me tell you what I want to tell you!

WILLY [*accusing, angered*] You didn't see him, did you?

BIFF I did see him!

WILLY What'd you insult him or something? You insulted him, didn't you?

BIFF Listen, will you let me out of it, will you just let me out of it!

HAPPY What the hell!

WILLY Tell me what happened!

BIFF [*to HAPPY*] I can't talk to him!

[*A single trumpet note jars the ear. The light of green leaves stains the house, which holds the air of night and a dream. YOUNG BERNARD enters and knocks on the door of the house.*]

YOUNG BERNARD [*frantically*] Mrs. Loman, Mrs. Loman!

HAPPY Tell him what happened!

BIFF [*to HAPPY*] Shut up and leave me alone!

WILLY No, no. You had to go and flunk math!

BIFF What math? What're you talking about?

YOUNG BERNARD Mrs. Loman, Mrs. Loman!

[*LINDA appears in the house, as of old.*]

WILLY [*wildly*] Math, math, math!

BIFF Take it easy, Pop!

YOUNG BERNARD Mrs. Loman!

WILLY [*furiously*] If you hadn't flunked you'd've been set by now!

BIFF Now, look, I'm gonna tell you what happened, and you're going to listen to me.

YOUNG BERNARD Mrs. Loman!

BIFF I waited six hours—

HAPPY What the hell are you saying?

BIFF I kept sending in my name but he wouldn't see me. So finally he . . . [*He continues unheard as light fades low on the restaurant.*]

YOUNG BERNARD Biff flunked math!

LINDA No!

YOUNG BERNARD Birnbaum flunked him! They won't graduate him!

LINDA But they have to. He's gotta go to the university. Where is he? Biff! Biff!

YOUNG BERNARD No, he left. He went to Grand Central.

LINDA Grand—You mean he went to Boston!

YOUNG BERNARD Is Uncle Willy in Boston?

LINDA Oh, maybe Willy can talk to the teacher. Oh, the poor, poor boy!

[*Light on house area snaps out.*]

BIFF [*at the table, now audible, holding up a gold fountain pen*] . . . so I'm washed up with Oliver, you understand? Are you listening to me?

WILLY [*at a loss*] Yeah, sure. If you hadn't flunked—

BIFF Flunked what? What're you talking about?

WILLY Don't blame everything on me! I didn't flunk math—you did! What pen?

HAPPY That was awful dumb, Biff, a pen like that is worth—

WILLY [*seeing the pen for the first time*] You took Oliver's pen?

BIFF [*weakening*] Dad, I just explained it to you.

WILLY You stole Bill Oliver's fountain pen!

BIFF I didn't exactly steal it! That's just what I've been explaining to you!

HAPPY He had it in his hand and just then Oliver walked in, so he got nervous and stuck it in his pocket!

WILLY My God, Biff!

BIFF I never intended to do it, Dad!

OPERATOR'S VOICE Standish Arms, good evening!

WILLY [*shouting*] I'm not in my room!

BIFF [*frightened*] Dad, what's the matter? [*He and HAPPY stand up.*]

OPERATOR Ringing Mr. Loman for you!

WILLY I'm not there, stop it!

BIFF [*horrified, gets down on one knee before WILLY*] Dad, I'll make good,

I'll make good. [*WILLY tries to get to his feet. BIFF holds him down.*] Sit down now.

WILLY No, you're no good, you're no good for anything.

BIFF I am, Dad, I'll find something else, you understand? Now don't worry about anything. [*He holds up WILLY's face.*] Talk to me, Dad.

OPERATOR Mr. Loman does not answer. Shall I page him?

WILLY [*attempting to stand, as though to rush and silence the OPERATOR*]

No, no, no!

HAPPY He'll strike something, Pop.

WILLY No, no . . .

BIFF [*desperately, standing over WILLY*] Pop, listen! Listen to me! I'm telling you something good. Oliver talked to his partner about the Florida idea. You listening? He—he talked to his partner, and he came to me . . .

I'm going to be all right, you hear? Dad, listen to me, he said it was just a question of the amount!

WILLY Then you . . . got it?

HAPPY He's gonna be terrific, Pop!

WILLY [*trying to stand*] Then you got it, haven't you? You got it! You got it!

BIFF [*agonized, holds WILLY down*] No, no. Look, Pop. I'm supposed to have lunch with them tomorrow. I'm just telling you this so you'll know that I can still make an impression, Pop. And I'll make good somewhere, but I can't go tomorrow, see?

WILLY Why not? You simply—

BIFF But the pen, Pop!

WILLY You give it to him and tell him it was an oversight!

HAPPY Sure, have lunch tomorrow!

BIFF I can't say that—

WILLY You were doing a crossword puzzle and accidentally used his pen!

BIFF Listen, kid, I took those balls years ago, now I walk in with his fountain pen? That clinches it, don't you see? I can't face him like that! I'll try elsewhere.

PAGE'S VOICE Paging Mr. Loman!

WILLY Don't you want to be anything?

BIFF Pop, how can I go back?

WILLY You don't want to be anything, is that what's behind it?

BIFF [*now angry at WILLY for not crediting his sympathy*] Don't take it that way! You think it was easy walking into that office after what I'd done to him? A team of horses couldn't have dragged me back to Bill Oliver!

WILLY Then why'd you go?

BIFF Why did I go? Why did I go! Look at you! Look at what's become of you!

[*Off left, THE WOMAN laughs.*]

WILLY Biff, you're going to go to that lunch tomorrow, or—

BIFF I can't go. I've got no appointment!

HAPPY Biff for . . . !

WILLY Are you spiting me?

BIFF Don't take it that way! Goddammit!

WILLY [*strikes BIFF and falters away from the table*] You rotten little louse! Are you spiting me?

THE WOMAN Someone's at the door, Willy!

BIFF I'm no good, can't you see what I am?

HAPPY [*separating them*] Hey, you're in a restaurant! Now cut it out, both of you? [*The girls enter.*] Hello, girls, sit down.

[*THE WOMAN laughs, off left.*]

MISS FORSYTHE I guess we might as well. This is Letta.

THE WOMAN Willy, are you going to wake up?

BIFF [*ignoring WILLY*] How're ya, miss, sit down. What do you drink?

MISS FORSYTHE Letta might not be able to stay long.

LETTA I gotta get up early tomorrow. I got jury duty. I'm so excited! Were you fellows ever on a jury?

BIFF No, but I been in front of them! [*The girls laugh.*] This is my father.

LETTA Isn't he cute? Sit down with us, Pop.

HAPPY Sit him down, Biff!

BIFF [*going to him*] Come on, slugger, drink us under the table. To hell with it! Come on, sit down, pal.

[*On BIFF's last insistence, WILLY is about to sit.*]

THE WOMAN [*now urgently*] Willy, are you going to answer the door!

[*THE WOMAN's call pulls WILLY back. He starts right, befuddled.*]

BIFF Hey, where are you going?

WILLY Open the door.

BIFF The door?

WILLY The washroom . . . the door . . . where's the door?

BIFF [*leading WILLY to the left*] Just go straight down.

[*WILLY moves left.*]

THE WOMAN Willy, Willy, are you going to get up, get up, get up, get up?

[*WILLY exits left.*]

LETTA I think it's sweet you bring your daddy along.

MISS FORSYTHE Oh, he isn't really your father!

BIFF [*at left, turning to her resentfully*] Miss Forsythe, you've just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hard-working, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys.

LETTA That's so sweet.

HAPPY Well, girls, what's the program? We're wasting time. Come on, Biff.

Gather round. Where would you like to go?

BIFF Why don't you do something for him?

HAPPY Me!

BIFF Don't you give a damn for him, Hap?

HAPPY What're you talking about? I'm the one who—

BIFF I sense it, you don't give a good goddam about him. [*He takes the rolled-up hose from his pocket and puts it on the table in front of HAPPY.*]

Look what I found in the cellar, for Christ's sake. How can you bear to let it go on?

HAPPY Me? Who goes away? Who runs off and—

BIFF Yeah, but he doesn't mean anything to you. You could help him—I can't! Don't you understand what I'm talking about? He's going to kill himself, don't you know that?

HAPPY Don't I know it! Me!

BIFF Hap, help him! Jesus . . . help him . . . Help me, help me, I can't bear to look at his face! [*Ready to weep, he hurries out, up right.*]

HAPPY [*starting after him*] Where are you going?

MISS FORSYTHE What's he so mad about?

HAPPY Come on, girls, we'll catch up with him.

MISS FORSYTHE [*as HAPPY pushes her out*] Say, I don't like that temper of his!

HAPPY He's just a little overstrung, he'll be all right!

WILLY [*off left, as THE WOMAN laughs*] Don't answer! Don't answer!

LETTA Don't you want to tell your father—

HAPPY No, that's not my father. He's just a guy. Come on, we'll catch Biff, and, honey, we're going to paint this town! Stanley, where's the check! Hey, Stanley!

[*They exit. STANLEY looks toward left.*]

STANLEY [*calling to HAPPY indignantly*] Mr. Loman! Mr. Loman!

[*STANLEY picks up a chair and follows them off. Knocking is heard off left. THE WOMAN enters, laughing. WILLY follows her. She is in a black slip; he is buttoning his shirt. Raw, sensuous music accompanies their speech.*]

WILLY Will you stop laughing? Will you stop?

THE WOMAN Aren't you going to answer the door? He'll wake the whole hotel.

WILLY I'm not expecting anybody.

THE WOMAN Whyn't you have another drink, honey, and stop being so damn self-centered?

WILLY I'm so lonely.

THE WOMAN You know you ruined me, Willy? From now on, whenever you come to the office, I'll see that you go right through to the buyers. No waiting at my desk any more, Willy. You ruined me.

WILLY That's nice of you to say that.

THE WOMAN Gee, you are self-centered! Why so sad? You are the saddest, self-centeredest soul I ever did see-saw. [*She laughs. He kisses her.*] Come on inside, drummer boy. It's silly to be dressing in the middle of the night. [*As knocking is heard*] Aren't you going to answer the door?

WILLY They're knocking on the wrong door.

THE WOMAN But I felt the knocking. And he heard us talking in here. Maybe the hotel's on fire!

WILLY [*his terror rising*] It's a mistake.

THE WOMAN Then tell them to go away!

WILLY There's nobody there.

THE WOMAN It's getting on my nerves, Willy. There's somebody standing out there and it's getting on my nerves!

WILLY [*pushing her away from him*] All right, stay in the bathroom here, and don't come out. I think there's a law in Massachusetts about it, so don't come out. It may be that new room clerk. He looked very mean. So don't come out. It's a mistake, there's no fire.

[*The knocking is heard again. He takes a few steps away from her, and she vanishes into the wing. The light follows him, and now he is facing YOUNG BIFF, who carries a suitcase. BIFF steps toward him. The music is gone.*]

BIFF Why didn't you answer?

WILLY Biff! What are you doing in Boston?

BIFF Why didn't you answer? I've been knocking for five minutes, I called you on the phone—

WILLY I just heard you. I was in the bathroom and had the door shut. Did anything happen home?

BIFF Dad—I let you down.

WILLY What do you mean?

BIFF Dad . . .

WILLY Biffo, what's this about? [*putting his arm around BIFF*] Come on, let's go downstairs and get you a malted.

BIFF Dad, I flunked math.

WILLY Not for the term?

BIFF The term. I haven't got enough credits to graduate.

WILLY You mean to say Bernard wouldn't give you the answers?

BIFF He did, he tried, but I only got a sixty-one.

WILLY And they wouldn't give you four points?

BIFF Birnbaum refused absolutely. I begged him, Pop, but he won't give me those points. You gotta talk to him before they close the school. Because if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your way, I'm sure he'd come through for me. The class came right before practice, see, and I didn't go enough. Would you talk to him? He'd like you, Pop. You know the way you could talk.

WILLY You're on. We'll drive right back.

BIFF Oh, Dad, good work! I'm sure he'll change for you!

WILLY Go downstairs and tell the clerk I'm checkin' out. Go right down.

BIFF Yes, sir! See, the reason he hates me, Pop—one day he was late for class so I got up at the blackboard and imitated him. I crossed my eyes and talked with a lithp.

WILLY [*laughing*] You did? The kids like it?

BIFF They nearly died laughing!

WILLY Yeah? What'd you do?

BIFF The thquare root of thixthy twee is . . . [*WILLY bursts out laughing; BIFF joins him.*] And in the middle of it he walked in!

[*WILLY laughs and THE WOMAN joins in offstage.*]

WILLY [*without hesitation*] Hurry downstairs and—

BIFF Somebody in there?

WILLY No, that was next door.

[THE WOMAN *laughs offstage.*]

BIFF Somebody got in your bathroom!

WILLY No, it's the next room, there's a party—

THE WOMAN [*enters laughing. She lisps this*] Can I come in? There's something in the bathtub, Willy, and it's moving!

[WILLY *looks at* BIFF, *who is staring open-mouthed and horrified at* THE WOMAN.]

WILLY Ah—you better go back to your room. They must be finished painting by now. They're painting her room so I let her take a shower here. Go back, go back . . . [*He pushes her.*]

THE WOMAN [*resisting*] But I've got to get dressed, Willy, I can't—

WILLY Get out of here! Go back, go back . . . [*suddenly striving for the ordinary*] This is Miss Francis, Biff, she's a buyer. They're painting her room. Go back, Miss Francis, go back . . .

THE WOMAN But my clothes, I can't go out naked in the hall!

WILLY [*pushing her offstage*] Get outa here! Go back, go back!

[BIFF *slowly sits down on his suitcase as the argument continues offstage.*]

THE WOMAN Where's my stockings? You promised me stockings, Willy!

WILLY I have no stockings here!

THE WOMAN You had two boxes of size nine sheers for me, and I want them!

WILLY Here, for God's sake, will you get outa here!

THE WOMAN [*enters holding a box of stockings*] I just hope there's nobody in the hall. That's all I hope. [*to* BIFF] Are you football or baseball?

BIFF Football.

THE WOMAN [*angry, humiliated*] That's me too. G'night. [*She snatches her clothes from* WILLY, *and walks out.*]

WILLY [*after a pause*] Well, better get going. I want to get to the school first thing in the morning. Get my suits out of the closet. I'll get my valise. [*BIFF doesn't move.*] What's the matter? [*BIFF remains motionless, tears falling.*] She's a buyer. Buys for J. H. Simmons. She lives down the hall—they're painting. You don't imagine— [*He breaks off. After a pause*] Now listen, pal, she's just a buyer. She sees merchandise in her room and they have to keep it looking just so . . . [*Pause. Assuming command*] All right, get my suits. [*BIFF doesn't move.*] Now stop crying and do as I say. I gave you an order. Biff, I gave you an order! Is that what you do when I give you an order? How dare you cry! [*putting his arm around* BIFF] Now look, Biff, when you grow up you'll understand about these things. You mustn't—you mustn't overemphasize a thing like this. I'll see Birnbaum first thing in the morning.

BIFF Never mind.

WILLY [*getting down beside* BIFF] Never mind! He's going to give you those points. I'll see to it.

BIFF He wouldn't listen to you.

WILLY He certainly will listen to me. You need those points for the U. of Virginia.

BIFF I'm not going there.

WILLY Heh? If I can't get him to change that mark you'll make it up in summer school. You've got all summer to—

BIFF [*his weeping breaking from him*] Dad . . .

WILLY [*infected by it*] Oh, my boy . . .

BIFF Dad . . .

WILLY She's nothing to me, Biff. I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.

BIFF You—you gave her Mama's stockings! [*His tears break through and he rises to go.*]

WILLY [*grabbing for BIFF*] I gave you an order!

BIFF Don't touch me, you—liar!

WILLY Apologize for that!

BIFF You fake! You phony little fake! You fake! [*Overcome, he turns quickly and weeping fully goes out with his suitcase, WILLY is left on the floor on his knees.*]

WILLY I gave you an order! Biff, come back here or I'll beat you! Come back here! I'll whip you!

[*STANLEY comes quickly in from the right and stands in front of WILLY.*]

WILLY [*shouts at STANLEY*] I gave you an order . . .

STANLEY Hey, let's pick it up, pick it up, Mr. Loman. [*He helps WILLY to his feet.*] Your boys left with the chippies. They said they'll see you home.

[*A second waiter watches some distance away.*]

WILLY But we were supposed to have dinner together.

[*Music is heard, WILLY's theme.*]

STANLEY Can you make it?

WILLY I'll—sure, I can make it. [*suddenly concerned about his clothes*] Do I—I look all right?

STANLEY Sure, you look all right. [*He flicks a speck off WILLY's lapel.*]

WILLY Here—here's a dollar.

STANLEY Oh, your son paid me. It's all right.

WILLY [*putting it in STANLEY's hand*] No, take it. You're a good boy.

STANLEY Oh, no, you don't have to . . .

WILLY Here—here's some more, I don't need it any more. [*after a slight pause*] Tell me—is there a seed store in the neighborhood?

STANLEY Seeds? You mean like to plant?

[*As WILLY turns, STANLEY slips the money back into his jacket pocket.*]

WILLY Yes. Carrots, peas . . .

STANLEY Well, there's hardware stores on Sixth Avenue, but it may be too late now.

WILLY [*anxiously*] Oh, I'd better hurry. I've got to get some seeds. [*He starts off to the right.*] I've got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing's planted. I don't have a thing in the ground.

[*WILLY hurries out as the light goes down. STANLEY moves over to the right after him, watches him off. The other waiter has been staring at WILLY.*]

STANLEY [*to the waiter*] Well, whatta you looking at?

[*The waiter picks up the chairs and moves off right. STANLEY takes the table and follows him. The light fades on this area. There is a long pause, the sound of the flute coming over. The light gradually rises on the kitchen, which is empty. HAPPY appears at the door of the house, followed by BIFF. HAPPY is carrying a large bunch of long-stemmed roses. He enters the kitchen, looks around for LINDA. Not seeing her, he turns to BIFF, who is just outside the house door, and makes a gesture with his hands, indicating "Not here, I guess." He looks into the living-room and freezes. Inside, LINDA, unseen, is seated, WILLY's coat on her lap. She*

rises ominously and quietly and moves toward HAPPY, who backs up into the kitchen, afraid.]

HAPPY Hey, what're you doing up? [*LINDA says nothing but moves toward him implacably.*] Where's Pop? [*He keeps backing to the right, and now LINDA is in full view in the doorway to the living-room.*] Is he sleeping?

LINDA Where were you?

HAPPY [*trying to laugh it off*] We met two girls, Mom, very fine types. Here, we brought you some flowers. [*offering them to her*] Put them in your room, Ma.

[She knocks them to the floor at BIFF's feet. He has now come inside and closed the door behind him. She stares at BIFF, silent.]

HAPPY Now what'd you do that for? Mom, I want you to have some flowers—

LINDA [*cutting HAPPY off, violently to BIFF*] Don't you care whether he lives or dies?

HAPPY [*going to the stairs*] Come upstairs, Biff.

BIFF [*with a flare of disgust, to HAPPY*] Go away from me! [*to LINDA*] What do you mean, lives or dies? Nobody's dying around here, pal.

LINDA Get out of my sight! Get out of here!

BIFF I wanna see the boss.

LINDA You're not going near him!

BIFF Where is he? [*He moves into the living-room and LINDA follows.*]

LINDA [*shouting after BIFF*] You invite him for dinner. He looks forward to it all day—[*BIFF appears in his parents' bedroom, looks around and exits*]—and then you desert him there. There's no stranger you'd do that to!

HAPPY Why? He had a swell time with us. Listen, when I—[*LINDA comes back into the kitchen*]—desert him I hope I don't outlive the day!

LINDA Get out of here!

HAPPY Now look, Mom . . .

LINDA Did you have to go to women tonight? You and your lousy rotten whores!

[BIFF re-enters the kitchen.]

HAPPY Mom, all we did was follow Biff around trying to cheer him up! [*to BIFF*] Boy, what a night you gave me!

LINDA Get out of here, both of you, and don't come back! I don't want you tormenting him any more. Go on now, get your things together! [*to BIFF*] You can sleep in his apartment. [*She starts to pick up the flowers and stops herself.*] Pick up this stuff, I'm not your maid any more. Pick it up, you bum, you!

[HAPPY turns his back to her in refusal. BIFF slowly moves over and gets down on his knees, picking up the flowers.]

LINDA You're a pair of animals! Not one, not another living soul would have had the cruelty to walk out on that man in a restaurant!

BIFF [*not looking at her*] Is that what he said?

LINDA He didn't have to say anything. He was so humiliated he nearly limped when he came in.

HAPPY But, Mom, he had a great time with us—

BIFF [*cutting him off violently*] Shut up!

[Without another word, HAPPY goes upstairs.]

LINDA You! You didn't even go in to see if he was all right!

BIFF [*still on the floor in front of LINDA, the flowers in his hand; with self-loathing*] No. Didn't. Didn't do a damned thing. How do you like that, eh? Left him babbling in a toilet.

LINDA You louse. You . . .

BIFF Now you hit it on the nose! [*He gets up, throws the flowers in the waste-basket.*] The scum of the earth, and you're looking at him!

LINDA Get out of here!

BIFF I gotta talk to the boss, Mom. Where is he?

LINDA You're not going near him. Get out of this house!

BIFF [*with absolute assurance, determination*] No. We're gonna have an abrupt conversation, him and me.

LINDA You're not talking to him!

[*Hammering is heard from outside the house, off right. BIFF turns toward the noise.*]

LINDA [*suddenly pleading*] Will you please leave him alone?

BIFF What's he doing out there?

LINDA He's planting the garden!

BIFF [*quietly*] Now? Oh, my God!

[*BIFF moves outside, LINDA following. The light dies down on them and comes up on the center of the apron as WILLY walks into it. He is carrying a flashlight, a hoe, and a handful of seed packets. He raps the top of the hoe sharply to fix it firmly, and then moves to the left, measuring off the distance with his foot. He holds the flashlight to look at the seed packets, reading off the instructions. He is in the blue of night.*]

WILLY Carrots . . . quarter-inch apart. Rows . . . one-foot rows. [*He measures it off.*] One foot. [*He puts down a package and measures off.*] Beets. [*He puts down another package and measures again.*] Lettuce. [*He reads the package, puts it down.*] One foot— [*He breaks off as BEN appears at the right and moves slowly down to him.*] What a proposition, ts, ts. Terrific, terrific. 'Cause she's suffered, Ben, the woman has suffered. You understand me? A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something. You can't, you can't— [*BEN moves toward him as though to interrupt.*] You gotta consider, now. Don't answer so quick. Remember, it's a guaranteed twenty-thousand-dollar proposition. Now look, Ben, I want you to go through the ins and outs of this thing with me. I've got nobody to talk to, Ben, and the woman has suffered, you hear me?

BEN [*standing still, considering*] What's the proposition?

WILLY It's twenty thousand dollars on the barrelhead. Guaranteed, gilt-edged, you understand?

BEN You don't want to make a fool of yourself. They might not honor the policy.

WILLY How can they dare refuse? Didn't I work like a coolie to meet every premium on the nose? And now they don't pay off! Impossible!

BEN It's called a cowardly thing, William.

WILLY Why? Does it take more guts to stand here the rest of my life ringing up a zero?

BEN [*yielding*] That's a point, William. [*He moves, thinking, turns.*] And twenty thousand—that is something one can feel with the hand, it is there.

WILLY [*now assured, with rising power*] Oh, Ben, that's the whole beauty of it! I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand. Not like—like an appointment! This would not be another damned-fool appointment, Ben, and it changes all the aspects. Because he thinks I'm nothing, see, and so he spites me. But the funeral— [*straightening up*] Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates—that boy will be thunder-struck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey—I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for a shock, that boy!

BEN [*coming down to the edge of the garden*] He'll call you a coward.

WILLY [*suddenly fearful*] No, that would be terrible.

BEN Yes. And a damned fool.

WILLY No, no, he mustn't, I won't have that! [*He is broken and desperate.*]

BEN He'll hate you, William.

[*The gay music of the Boys is heard.*]

WILLY Oh, Ben, how do we get back to all the great times? Used to be so full of light, and comradeship, the sleigh-riding in winter, and the rudeness on his cheeks. And always some kind of good news coming up, always something nice coming up ahead. And never even let me carry the valises in the house, and simonizing, simonizing that little red car! Why, why can't I give him something and not have him hate me?

BEN Let me think about it. [*He glances at his watch.*] I still have a little time. Remarkable proposition, but you've got to be sure you're not making a fool of yourself.

[*BEN drifts off upstage and goes out of sight. BIFF comes down from the left.*]

WILLY [*suddenly conscious of BIFF, turns and looks up at him, then begins picking up the packages of seeds in confusion*] Where the hell is that seed? [*indignantly*] You can't see nothing out here! They boxed in the whole goddam neighborhood!

BIFF There are people all around here. Don't you realize that?

WILLY I'm busy. Don't bother me.

BIFF [*taking the hoe from WILLY*] I'm saying good-by to you, Pop. [*WILLY looks at him, silent, unable to move.*] I'm not coming back any more.

WILLY You're not going to see Oliver tomorrow?

BIFF I've got no appointment, Dad.

WILLY He put his arm around you, and you've got no appointment?

BIFF Pop, get this now, will you? Everytime I've left it's been a fight that sent me out of here. Today I realized something about myself and I tried to explain it to you and I—I think I'm just not smart enough to make any sense out of it for you. To hell with whose fault it is or anything like that. [*He takes WILLY's arm.*] Let's just wrap it up, heh? Come on in, we'll tell Mom. [*He gently tries to pull WILLY to left.*]

WILLY [*frozen, immobile, with guilt in his voice*] No, I don't want to see her.

BIFF Come on! [*He pulls again, and WILLY tries to pull away.*]

WILLY [*highly nervous*] No, no, I don't want to see her.

BIFF [*tries to look into WILLY's face, as if to find the answer there*] Why don't you want to see her?

WILLY [*more harshly now*] Don't bother me, will you?

BIFF What do you mean, you don't want to see her? You don't want them calling you yellow, do you? This isn't your fault; it's me, I'm a bum. Now come inside! [WILLY *strains to get away.*] Did you hear what I said to you?

[WILLY *pulls away and quickly goes by himself into the house. BIFF follows.*]

LINDA [*to WILLY*] Did you plant, dear?

BIFF [*at the door, to LINDA*] All right, we had it out. I'm going and I'm not writing any more.

LINDA [*going to WILLY in the kitchen*] I think that's the best way, dear. 'Cause there's no use drawing it out, you'll just never get along.

[WILLY *doesn't respond.*]

BIFF People ask where I am and what I'm doing, you don't know, and you don't care. That way it'll be off your mind and you can start brightening up again. All right? That clears it, doesn't it? [WILLY *is silent, and BIFF goes to him.*] You gonna wish me luck, scout? [*He extends his hand.*] What do you say?

LINDA Shake his hand, Willy.

WILLY [*turning to her, seething with hurt*] There's no necessity to mention the pen at all, y'know.

BIFF [*gently*] I've got no appointment, Dad.

WILLY [*erupting fiercely*] He put his arm around . . . ?

BIFF Dad, you're never going to see what I am, so what's the use of arguing? If I strike oil I'll send you a check. Meantime forget I'm alive.

WILLY [*to LINDA*] Spite, see?

BIFF Shake hands, Dad.

WILLY Not my hand.

BIFF I was hoping not to go this way.

WILLY Well, this is the way you're going. Good-by.

[BIFF *looks at him a moment, then turns sharply and goes to the stairs.*]

WILLY [*stops him with*] May you rot in hell if you leave this house!

BIFF [*turning*] Exactly what is it that you want from me?

WILLY I want you to know, on the train, in the mountains, in the valleys, wherever you go, that you cut down your life for spite!

BIFF No, no.

WILLY Spite, spite, is the word of your undoing! And when you're down and out, remember what did it. When you're rotting somewhere beside the railroad tracks, remember, and don't you dare blame it on me!

BIFF I'm not blaming it on you!

WILLY I won't take the rap for this, you hear?

[HAPPY *comes down the stairs and stands on the bottom step, watching.*]

BIFF That's just what I'm telling you!

WILLY [*sinking into a chair at the table, with full accusation*] You're trying to put a knife in me—don't think I don't know what you're doing!

BIFF All right, phony! Then let's lay it on the line. [*He whips the rubber tube out of his pocket and puts it on the table.*]

HAPPY You crazy—

LINDA Biff! [*She moves to grab the hose, but BIFF holds it down with his hand.*]

BIFF Leave it there! Don't move it!

WILLY [*not looking at it*] What is that?

BIFF You know goddam well what that is.

WILLY [*caged, wanting to escape*] I never saw that.

BIFF You saw it. The mice didn't bring it into the cellar! What is this supposed to do, make a hero out of you? This supposed to make me sorry for you?

WILLY Never heard of it.

BIFF There'll be no pity for you, you hear it? No pity!

WILLY [*to LINDA*] You hear the spite!

BIFF No, you're going to hear the truth—what you are and what I am!

LINDA Stop it!

WILLY Spite!

HAPPY [*coming down toward BIFF*] You cut it now!

BIFF [*to HAPPY*] The man don't know who we are! The man is gonna know! [*to WILLY*] We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house!

HAPPY We always told the truth!

BIFF [*turning on him*] You big blow, are you the assistant buyer? You're one of the two assistants to the assistant, aren't you?

HAPPY Well, I'm practically—

BIFF You're practically full of it! We all are! And I'm through with it. [*to WILLY*] Now hear this, Willy, this is me.

WILLY I know you!

BIFF You know why I had no address for three months? I stole a suit in Kansas City and I was in jail. [*to LINDA, who is sobbing*] Stop crying. I'm through with it.

[*LINDA turns away from them, her hands covering her face.*]

WILLY I suppose that's my fault!

BIFF I stole myself out of every good job since high school!

WILLY And whose fault is that?

BIFF And I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody! That's whose fault it is!

WILLY I hear that!

LINDA Don't, Biff!

BIFF It's goddam time you heard that! I had to be boss big shot in two weeks, and I'm through with it!

WILLY Then hang yourself! For spite, hang yourself!

BIFF No! Nobody's hanging himself, Willy! I ran down eleven flights with a pen in my hand today. And suddenly I stopped, you hear me? And in the middle of that office building, do you hear this? I stopped in the middle of that building and I saw—the sky. I saw the things that I love in this world. The work and the food and time to sit and smoke. And I looked at the pen and said to myself, what the hell am I grabbing this for? Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am! Why can't I say that, Willy? [*He tries to make WILLY face him, but WILLY pulls away and moves to the left.*]

WILLY [*with hatred, threateningly*] The door of your life is wide open!

BIFF Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

WILLY [*turning on him now in an uncontrolled outburst*] I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

[*BIFF starts for WILLY, but is blocked by HAPPY. In his fury, BIFF seems on the verge of attacking his father.*]

BIFF I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!

WILLY [*directly to BIFF*] You vengeful, spiteful mut!

[*BIFF breaks from HAPPY. WILLY, in fright, starts up the stairs. BIFF grabs him.*]

BIFF [*at the peak of his fury*] Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it any more. I'm just what I am, that's all.

[*BIFF's fury has spent itself, and he breaks down, sobbing, holding on to WILLY, who dumbly fumbles for BIFF's face.*]

WILLY [*astonished*] What're you doing? What're you doing? [*to LINDA*] Why is he crying?

BIFF [*crying, broken*] Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens? [*Struggling to contain himself, he pulls away and moves to the stairs.*] I'll go in the morning. Put him—put him to bed. [*Exhausted, BIFF moves up the stairs to his room.*]

WILLY [*after a long pause, astonished, elevated*] Isn't that—isn't that remarkable? Biff—he likes me!

LINDA He loves you, Willy!

HAPPY [*deeply moved*] Always did, Pop.

WILLY Oh, Biff! [*staring wildly*] He cried! Cried to me. [*He is choking with his love, and now cries out his promise.*] That boy—that boy is going to be magnificent!

[*BEN appears in the light just outside the kitchen.*]

BEN Yes, outstanding, with twenty thousand behind him.

LINDA [*sensing the racing of his mind, fearfully, carefully*] Now come to bed, Willy. It's all settled now.

WILLY [*finding it difficult not to rush out of the house*] Yes, we'll sleep. Come on. Go to sleep, Hap.

BEN And it does take a great kind of a man to crack the jungle.

[*In accents of dread, BEN's idyllic music starts up.*]

HAPPY [*his arm around LINDA*] I'm getting married, Pop, don't forget it. I'm changing everything. I'm gonna run that department before the year is up. You'll see, Mom. [*He kisses her.*]

BEN The jungle is dark but full of diamonds, Willy.

[*WILLY turns, moves, listening to BEN.*]

LINDA Be good. You're both good boys, just act that way, that's all.

HAPPY 'Night, Pop. [*He goes upstairs.*]

LINDA [*to WILLY*] Come, dear.

BEN [*with greater force*] One must go in to fetch a diamond out.

WILLY [*to LINDA, as he moves slowly along the edge of the kitchen, toward the door*] I just want to get settled down, Linda. Let me sit alone for a little.

LINDA [*almost uttering her fear*] I want you upstairs.

WILLY [*taking her in his arms*] In a few minutes, Linda. I couldn't sleep right now. Go on, you look awful tired. [*He kisses her.*]

BEN Not like an appointment at all. A diamond is rough and hard to the touch.

WILLY Go on now. I'll be right up.

LINDA I think this is the only way, Willy.

WILLY Sure, it's the best thing.

BEN Best thing!

WILLY The only way. Everything is gonna be—go on, kid, get to bed. You look so tired.

LINDA Come right up.

WILLY Two minutes.

[LINDA goes into the living-room, then reappears in her bedroom. WILLY moves just outside the kitchen door.]

WILLY Loves me. [*wonderingly*] Always loved me. Isn't that a remarkable thing? Ben, he'll worship me for it!

BEN [*with promise*] It's dark there, but full of diamonds.

WILLY Can you imagine that magnificence with twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?

LINDA [*calling from her room*] Willy! Come up!

WILLY [*calling into the kitchen*] Yes! Yes. Coming! It's very smart, you realize that, don't you, sweetheart? Even Ben sees it. I gotta go, baby. 'By! 'By! [*going over to BEN, almost dancing*] Imagine? When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again!

BEN A perfect proposition all around.

WILLY Did you see how he cried to me? Oh, if I could kiss him, Ben!

BEN Time, William, time!

WILLY Oh, Ben, I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!

BEN [*looking at his watch*] The boat. We'll be late. [*He moves slowly off into the darkness.*]

WILLY [*elegiacally, turning to the house*] Now when you kick off, boy, I want a seventy-yard boot, and get right down the field under the ball, and when you hit, hit low and hit hard, because it's important, boy. [*He swings around and faces the audience.*] There's all kinds of important people in the stands, and the first thing you know . . . [*suddenly realizing he is alone*] Ben! Ben, where do I . . . ? [*He makes a sudden movement of search.*] Ben, how do I . . . ?

LINDA [*calling*] Willy, you coming up?

WILLY [*uttering a gasp of fear, whirling about as if to quiet her*] Sh! [*He turns around as if to find his way; sounds, faces, voices, seem to be swarming in upon him and he flicks at them, crying.*] Sh! Sh! [*Suddenly music, faint and high, stops him. It rises in intensity, almost to an unbearable scream. He goes up and down on his toes, and rushes off around the house.*] Shhh!

LINDA Willy?

[*There is no answer. LINDA waits. BIFF gets up off his bed. He is still in his clothes. HAPPY sits up. BIFF stands listening.*]

LINDA [*with real fear*] Willy, answer me! Willy!

[*There is the sound of a car starting and moving away at full speed.*]

LINDA No!

BIFF [*rushing down the stairs*] Pop!

[*As the car speeds off, the music crashes down in a frenzy of sound, which becomes the soft pulsation of a single cello string. BIFF slowly returns to his bedroom. He and HAPPY gravely don their jackets. LINDA slowly walks out of her room. The music has developed into a dead march. The leaves of day are appearing over everything. CHARLEY and BERNARD somberly dressed, appear and knock on the kitchen door. BIFF and HAPPY slowly descend the stairs to the kitchen as CHARLEY and BERNARD enter. All stop a moment when LINDA, in clothes of mourning, bearing a little bunch of roses, comes through the draped doorway into the kitchen. She goes to CHARLEY and takes his arm. Now all move toward the audience, through the wall-line of the kitchen. At the limit of the apron, LINDA lays down the flowers, kneels, and sits back on her heels. All stare down at the grave.*]

Requiem

CHARLEY It's getting dark, Linda.

[*LINDA doesn't react. She stares at the grave.*]

BIFF How about it, Mom? Better get some rest, heh? They'll be closing the gate soon.

[*LINDA makes no move. Pause.*]

HAPPY [*deeply angered*] He had no right to do that. There was no necessity for it. We would've helped him.

CHARLEY [*grunting*] Hmmmm.

BIFF Come along, Mom.

LINDA Why didn't anybody come?

CHARLEY It was a very nice funeral.

LINDA But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him.

CHARLEY Naa. It's a rough world, Linda. They wouldn't blame him.

LINDA I can't understand it. At this time especially. First time in thirty-five years we were just about free and clear. He only needed a little salary. He was even finished with the dentist.

CHARLEY No man only needs a little salary.

LINDA I can't understand it.

BIFF There were a lot of nice days. When he'd come home from a trip; or on Sundays, making the stoop; finishing the cellar; putting on the new porch; when he built the extra bathroom; and put up the garage. You know something, Charley, there's more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made.

CHARLEY Yeah. He was a happy man with a batch of cement.

LINDA He was so wonderful with his hands.

BIFF He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong.

HAPPY [*almost ready to fight BIFF*] Don't say that!

BIFF He never knew who he was.

CHARLEY [*stopping HAPPY's movement and reply. To BIFF*] Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple

of spots on your hat, and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

BIFF Charley, the man didn't know who he was.

HAPPY [*infuriated*] Don't say that!

BIFF Why don't you come with me, Happy?

HAPPY I'm not licked that easily. I'm staying right in this city, and I'm gonna beat this racket! [*He looks at BIFF, his chin set.*] The Loman Brothers!

BIFF I know who I am, kid.

HAPPY All right, boy. I'm gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It's the only dream you can have—to come out number-one man. He fought it out here, and this is where I'm gonna win it for him.

BIFF [*with a hopeless glance at HAPPY, bends toward his mother*] Let's go, Mom.

LINDA I'll be with you in a minute. Go on, Charley. [*He hesitates.*] I want to, just for a minute. I never had a chance to say good-by.

[*CHARLEY moves away, followed by HAPPY. BIFF remains a slight distance up and left of LINDA. She sits there, summoning herself. The flute begins, not far away, playing behind her speech.*]

LINDA Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. [*A sob rises in her throat.*] We're free and clear. [*Sobbing more fully, released*] We're free. [*BIFF comes slowly toward her.*] We're free . . . We're free . . .

[*BIFF lifts her to her feet and moves out up right with her in his arms. LINDA sobs quietly. BERNARD and CHARLEY come together and follow them, followed by HAPPY. Only the music of the flute is left on the darkening stage as over the house the hard towers of the apartment buildings rise into sharp focus, and*]

CURTAIN

1949

ROBERT LOWELL

1917–1977

In “North Haven,” her poem in memory of Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop translates the birdsong as Lowell seemed to hear it: “repeat, repeat, repeat, revise, revise, revise.” Repeatedly, even obsessively, Lowell returned to certain subjects in his poems. Each return confirmed an existing pattern even as it opened the possibility

for revision. In fact, Lowell's life was full of revision. Descended from Protestant New Englanders, he converted to Catholicism, then fell away from it; he married three times; and he changed his poetic style more than once. In the later part of his career Lowell revised even his published poems and did so repeatedly. "Revision is inspiration," he once said, "no reading of the finished work as exciting as writing-in the last changes." Revision allowed for Lowell's love of stray events, his attraction to the fluidity of life (in this, he resembles Wallace Stevens). But Lowell also wanted to organize life into formal patterns, to locate the random moment in the design of an epic history (his Catholicism can be seen, in part, as an expression of this desire). History offered plot and repetition: just as patterns of his childhood recurred in adult life, the sins of his New England ancestors were reenacted by contemporary America. Lowell's vision of history leaned toward apocalypse, toward the revelation of a prior meaning that the poet agonized to determine, and yet he cherished the freedom of "human chances," with all their indeterminacy. His poems had to accommodate these opposing impulses. Concerning the sequence of poems in *Notebook 1967-1968*, begun as a poetic diary, he said: "Accident threw up the subject and the plot swallowed them—famished for human chances." If Lowell often swallowed up the casual, the random, the ordinary, and the domestic into the forms of his poems, his best plots have a spontaneity whose meanings cannot be fixed.

The burden of family history was substantial for Lowell, whose ancestors included members of Boston's patrician families. His grandfather was a well-known Episcopal minister and head of the fashionable St. Mark's School, which the poet was later to attend. His great-granduncle James Russell Lowell had been a poet and the ambassador to England. The family's light note was provided by the poet Amy Lowell, "big and a scandal, as if Mae West were a cousin." In the context of this history Lowell's father, who fared badly in business after his retirement from service as a naval officer, appeared as a diminished figure.

Lowell's first act of revising family history was to leave New England after two years at Harvard (1935-37) in order to study at Ohio's Kenyon College with John Crowe Ransom, the poet and critic. The move brought him in closer touch with the New Criticism and its predilections for "formal difficult poems," the wit and irony of English Metaphysical writers such as John Donne. He also, through Ransom and the poet Allen Tate, came into contact with (although he never formally joined) the Fugitive movement, whose members were southern agrarians opposed to what they regarded as the corrupting values of northern industrialism.

Two of the acts that most decisively separated Lowell from family history were his conversion to Roman Catholicism (1940) and his resistance to American policies in World War II. Although he tried to enlist in the navy, he refused to be drafted into the army. He opposed the saturation bombing of Hamburg and the Allied policy of unconditional surrender and was as a result sentenced to a year's confinement in New York City's West Street jail. The presiding judge at his hearing admonished him for "marring" his family traditions. In his first book, *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), his Catholicism provided a set of symbols and a distanced platform from which to express his violent antagonism to Protestant mercantile Boston. The stunning, apocalyptic conclusions of these early poems ("the Lord survives the rainbow of his will" or "The blue kingfisher dives on you in fire") render the devastating judgment of the eternal on the fallen history of the individual and the nation.

Alongside these poems drawing on Old Testament anger in *Lord Weary's Castle* were poems, such as "Mr. Edwards and the Spider," that explored from within the nervous intensity that underlay Puritan revivalism. Later dramatic narratives with modern settings, such as "The Mills of the Kavanaghs" and "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid," reveal his psychological interest in and obsession with ruined New England families.

In *Life Studies* (1959) Lowell changed his style dramatically. His subjects became explicitly autobiographical, his language more open and direct. In 1957 he

gave readings in California, where Allen Ginsberg and the other Beats had just made their strongest impact in San Francisco. In contrast to their candid, breezy writing, Lowell felt his own seemed “distant, symbol-ridden, and willfully difficult. . . . I felt my old poems hid what they were really about, and many times offered a stiff, humorless, and even impenetrable surface.” Although more controlled and severe than Beat writers, he was stimulated by Ginsberg’s self-revelations to write more openly than he had about his parents and grandparents, about the mental breakdowns he suffered in the 1950s, and about the difficulties of marriage. (Lowell divorced his first wife, the novelist Jean Stafford, and married the critic Elizabeth Hardwick in 1949.)

Life Studies, by and large, records his ambivalence toward the New England where he resettled after the war, on Boston’s “hardly passionate Marlborough Street.” Revising his stance toward New England and family history, he no longer denounces the city of his fathers as if he were a privileged outsider. In complicated psychological portraits of his childhood and his relation to his parents and his wives, he assumes a portion of the weakness and vulnerability for himself.

In 1960 Lowell left Boston to live in New York City. *For the Union Dead* (1964), the book that followed, continued the autobiographical vein of *Life Studies*. Lowell called it a book about “witheredness . . . lemony, soured and dry, the drouth I had touched with my own hands.” These poems seem more carefully controlled than his earlier *Life Studies*. Often they organize key images from the past into a pattern that illuminates the present. The book includes a number of poems that fuse private and public themes, such as “Fall 1961” and the volume’s title poem.

In 1969 Lowell published *Notebook 1967–1968* and then revised these poems for a second, augmented edition, called simply *Notebook* (1970). In 1973, in a characteristic act, he once more revised, rearranged, and expanded *Notebook*’s poems and published them in two separate books. The more personal poems, recording the breakup of his second marriage and his separation from his wife and daughter, were published as *For Lizzie and Harriet*. Those dealing more with public subjects, past and present, were published as *History*. These two books show Lowell once again engaged with the relations between the random event, or the moment in a personal life, and an epic design. In these unrhymed, loosely blank-verse revisions of the sonnet, Lowell responded to the books he was reading, to the events of his personal life, and to the Vietnam War, of which he was an outspoken critic. “Things I felt or saw, or read were drift in the whirlpool.”

At the same time a new collection of sonnets, *The Dolphin* (1973), appeared, recording his marriage to Lady Caroline Blackwood. (Lowell’s friend the poet Elizabeth Bishop objected to his use of Blackwood’s letters in the volume.) He divided his time between Blackwood’s home in England and periods of teaching writing and literature at Harvard—a familiar pattern for him, in which the old tensions between New England and “elsewhere” were being constantly explored and renewed. His last book, *Day by Day* (1977), records those stresses as well as new marital difficulties. It also contains some of his most powerful poems about his childhood.

For those who cherish the work of the early Lowell, with its manic, rhythmic energy and its enjambed lines building to fierce power, or those who admire the passionate engagement of *Life Studies* or *For the Union Dead*, the poems of his last four books can be disappointing. At times flat and dispirited, they can seem worked up rather than fully imagined. Yet the later Lowell demonstrates his substantial gifts in a quieter mode.

Lowell’s career included an interest in the theater, for which he wrote a version of *Prometheus Bound*, a translation of Racine’s *Phaedra*, and adaptations of Melville and Hawthorne stories gathered as *The Old Glory*. He also translated from modern European poetry and the classics, often freely as “imitations,” which brought important poetic voices into English currency. His *Selected Poems* (his own choices) appeared in

1976. When he died suddenly at the age of sixty, he was the dominant and most honored poet of his generation—not only for his ten volumes of verse but for his broad activity as a man of letters. He took upon himself the role of poet as public figure, sometimes at great personal cost. He was with the group of writers who led Vietnam War protesters against the Pentagon in 1967, where Norman Mailer, a fellow protester, observed that “Lowell gave off at times the unwilling haunted saintliness of a man who was repaying the moral debts of ten generations of ancestors.”

Colloquy in Black Rock¹

Here the jack-hammer jabs into the ocean;
 My heart, you race and stagger and demand
 More blood-gangs for your nigger-brass percussions,
 Till I, the stunned machine of your devotion,
 Clanging upon this cymbal of a hand, 5
 Am rattled screw and footloose. All discussions

End in the mud-flat detritus of death.
 My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud²
 Hungarian workmen give their blood
 For the martyre Stephen,³ who was stoned to death. 10

Black Mud, a name to conjure with: O mud
 For watermelons gutted to the crust,
 Mud for the mole-tide⁴ harbor, mud for mouse,
 Mud for the armored Diesel fishing tubs that thud
 A year and a day⁵ to wind and tide; the dust 15
 Is on this skipping heart that shakes my house,

House of our Savior who was hanged till death.
 My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud
 Stephen the martyre was broken down to blood: 20
 Our ransom is the rubble of his death.
 Christ walks on the black water. In Black Mud
 Darts the kingfisher. On Corpus Christi, heart,
 Over the drum-beat of St. Stephen's choir
 I hear him, *Stupor Mundi*,⁶ and the mud
 Flies from his hunching wings and beak—my heart, 25
 The blue kingfisher dives on you in fire.

1946

1. A section of Bridgeport, Connecticut, where Lowell went to live in 1944 after serving his jail term as a conscientious objector. It had a large Hungarian population.

2. The speaker's name for mud flats near Black Rock.

3. A reference to the wartime blood donations of the workers; the patron saint of Hungary, King Stephen I (977–1038); and St. Stephen Promartyr, the first Christian to be killed for his faith.

4. Special currents produced by a mole (break-water).

5. Perhaps the “year and a day” of Lowell's prison sentence.

6. Marvel of the world. “Kingfisher”: a short-tailed bird that dives for fish; associated in the poem's last line with Christ, the “fisher of men.” “Corpus Christi”: a Catholic feast day, celebrating the transformation of the communion wafer into the body of Christ.

The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket

[For Warren Winslow,¹ *Dead at Sea*]

Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and the beasts of the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.²

I

A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket³—
 The sea was still breaking violently and night
 Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,
 When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light
 Flashed from his matted head and marble feet, 5
 He grappled at the net
 With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:
 The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,
 Its open, staring eyes
 Were lustreless dead-lights⁴ 10
 Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk
 Heavy with sand. We weight the body, close
 Its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came,
 Where the heel-headed dogfish barks its nose
 On Ahab's⁵ void and forehead; and the name 15
 Is blocked in yellow chalk.
 Sailors, who pitch this portent at the sea
 Where dreadnaughts shall confess
 Its hell-bent deity,
 When you are powerless 20
 To sand-bag this Atlantic bulwark, faced
 By the earth-shaker, green, unwearied, chaste
 In his steel scales: ask for no Orphean lute
 To pluck life back.⁶ The guns of the steeled fleet
 Recoil and then repeat 25
 The hoarse salute.

II

Whenever winds are moving and their breath
 Heaves at the roped-in bulwarks of this pier,
 The terns and sea-gulls tremble at your death
 In these home waters. Sailor, can you hear 30
 The Pequod's⁷ sea wings, beating landward, fall
 Headlong and break on our Atlantic wall

1. A cousin of Lowell's who died in the sinking of a naval vessel during World War II.

2. From Genesis 1.26, the account of the creation of humankind.

3. On Nantucket Island.

4. Shutters over portholes to keep out water in a storm. The images in lines 4–11 come from "The Shipwreck," the opening chapter of *Cape Cod*, by Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862).

5. Protagonist of the novel *Moby-Dick*, by Her-

man Melville (1819–1891); he drowns as the culmination of his obsessive hunt for the white whale. Melville uses Ahab's forehead as an emblem of his monomaniac passion.

6. In Greek mythology Orpheus, through his music, tried to win the freedom of his bride, Eurydice, from the Underworld. "Earth-shaker": an epithet for Poseidon, the Greek god of the oceans and of earthquakes.

7. Ahab's ship, destroyed by Moby-Dick.

Off 'Sconset, where the yawing S-boats⁸ splash
 The bellbuoy, with ballooning spinnakers,
 As the entangled, screeching mainsheet clears 35
 The blocks: off Madaket, where lubbers⁹ lash
 The heavy surf and throw their long lead squids
 For blue-fish? Sea-gulls blink their heavy lids
 Seaward. The winds' wings beat upon the stones,
 Cousin, and scream for you and the claws rush 40
 At the sea's throat and wring it in the slush
 Of this old Quaker graveyard where the bones
 Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast
 Bobbing by Ahab's whaleboats in the East.

III

All you recovered from Poseidon died 45
 With you, my cousin, and the harrowed brine
 Is fruitless on the blue beard of the god,
 Stretching beyond us to the castles in Spain,
 Nantucket's westward haven. To Cape Cod
 Guns, cradled on the tide, 50
 Blast the eelgrass about a waterclock
 Of bilge and backwash, roil the salt and sand
 Lashing earth's scaffold, rock
 Our warships in the hand
 Of the great God, where time's contrition blues 55
 Whatever it was these Quaker¹ sailors lost
 In the mad scramble of their lives. They died
 When time was open-eyed,
 Wooden and childish; only bones abide
 There, in the nowhere, where their boats were tossed 60
 Sky-high, where mariners had fabled news
 Of IS,² the whited monster. What it cost
 Them is their secret. In the sperm-whale's slick
 I see the Quakers drown and hear their cry:
 "If God himself had not been on our side, 65
 If God himself had not been on our side,
 When the Atlantic rose against us, why,
 Then it had swallowed us up quick."

IV

This is the end of the whaleroad³ and the whale
 Who spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell 70
 And stirred the troubled waters to whirlpools
 To send the Pequod packing off to hell:
 This is the end of them, three-quarters fools,
 Snatching at straws to sail

8. Type of large racing sailboats. "Yawing": steering wildly in heavy seas.

9. Sailor's term for clumsy crew members.

1. The whaling population of Nantucket included many Quakers.

2. The white whale is here imagined as a force

like the God of Exodus 3.14, who, when asked his name by Moses, replies, "I AM THAT I AM." Also an abbreviation of Iesu Salvator, Latin for Jesus, savior of men.

3. An Anglo-Saxon epithet for the sea.

Seaward and seaward on the turntail whale, 75
 Spouting out blood and water as it rolls,
 Sick as a dog to these Atlantic shoals:
Clamavimus,⁴ O depths. Let the sea-gulls wail

For water, for the deep where the high tide 80
 Mutters to its hurt self, mutters and ebbs.
 Waves wallow in their wash, go out and out,
 Leave only the death-rattle of the crabs,
 The beach increasing, its enormous snout
 Sucking the ocean's side.
 This is the end of running on the waves; 85
 We are poured out like water. Who will dance
 The mast-lashed master of Leviathans
 Up from this field of Quakers in their unstoned graves?

v

When the whale's viscera go and the roll 90
 Of its corruption overruns this world
 Beyond tree-swept Nantucket and Woods Hole⁵
 And Martha's Vineyard, Sailor, will your sword
 Whistle and fall and sink into the fat?
 In the great ash-pit of Jehoshaphat⁶
 The bones cry for the blood of the white whale, 95
 The fat flukes arch and whack about its ears,
 The death-lance churns into the sanctuary, tears
 The gun-blue swingle,⁷ heaving like a flail,
 And hacks the coiling life out: it works and drags
 And rips the sperm-whale's midriff into rags, 100
 Gobbets of blubber spill to wind and weather,
 Sailor, and gulls go round the stoven timbers
 Where the morning stars sing out together
 And thunder shakes the white surf and dismembers
 The red flag hammered in the mast-head.⁸ Hide, 105
 Our steel, Jonas Messias, in Thy side.⁹

VI. OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM¹

There once the penitents took off their shoes
 And then walked barefoot the remaining mile;
 And the small trees, a stream and hedgerows file
 Slowly along the munching English lane, 110
 Like cows to the old shrine, until you lose

4. We have called (Latin), adapting the opening of Psalm 130: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord."

5. On the coast of Massachusetts, near the island of Martha's Vineyard.

6. "The day of judgment. The world, according to some prophets, will end in fire" [Lowell's note]. In Joel 3, the Last Judgment takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

7. Knifelike wooden instrument for beating flax (into fiber for spinning).

8. At the end of *Moby-Dick*, the arm of the American Indian Tashtego appears from the waves and nails Ahab's flag to the sinking mast.

9. Because he emerged alive from the belly of a whale, the prophet Jonah is often linked with the messiah as a figure of salvation.

1. Lowell took these details from E. I. Watkin's *Catholic Art and Culture* (1942), which includes a description of the medieval shrine of the Virgin at Walsingham.

Track of your dragging pain.
 The stream flows down under the druid tree,
 Shiloah's² whirlpools gurgle and make glad
 The castle of God. Sailor, you were glad 115
 And whistled Sion by that stream. But see:

Our Lady, too small for her canopy,
 Sits near the altar. There's no comeliness
 At all or charm in that expressionless
 Face with its heavy eyelids. As before, 120
 This face, for centuries a memory,
*Non est species, neque decor,*³
 Expressionless, expresses God: it goes
 Past castled Sion. She knows what God knows,
 Not Calvary's Cross nor crib at Bethlehem 125
 Now, and the world shall come to Walsingham.

VII

The empty winds are creaking and the oak
 Splatters and splatters on the cenotaph,
 The boughs are trembling and a gaff
 Bobs on the untimely stroke 130
 Of the greased wash exploding on a shoal-bell
 In the old mouth of the Atlantic. It's well;
 Atlantic, you are fouled with the blue sailors,
 Sea-monsters, upward angel, downward fish:
 Unmarried and corroding, spare of flesh 135
 Mart once of supercilious, wing'd clippers,
 Atlantic, where your bell-trap guts its spoil
 You could cut the brackish winds with a knife
 Here in Nantucket, and cast up the time
 When the Lord God formed man from the sea's slime 140
 And breathed into his face the breath of life,
 And blue-lung'd combers lumbered to the kill.
 The Lord survives the rainbow⁴ of His will.

1946

Mr. Edwards and the Spider¹

I saw the spiders marching through the air,
 Swimming from tree to tree that mildewed day
 In latter August when the hay
 Came creaking to the barn. But where

2. The stream that flows past God's Temple on Mount Sion (Isaiah 8.6). In Isaiah 51.11 the redeemed come "singing into Zion."

3. There is no ostentation or elegance (Latin).

4. Alluding to God's covenant with Noah after the Flood. The rainbow symbolized the fact that humanity would never again be destroyed by flood

(Genesis 9.11).

1. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), Puritan preacher and theologian. Lowell quotes his writings throughout. The details of the first stanza come from his youthful essay "Of Insects" ("The Habits of Spiders").

The wind is westerly, 5
 Where gnarled November makes the spiders fly
 Into the apparitions of the sky,
 They purpose nothing but their ease and die
 Urgently beating east to sunrise and the sea;

What are we in the hands of the great God? 10
 It was in vain you set up thorn and briar
 In battle array against the fire
 And treason crackling in your blood;
 For the wild thorns grow tame
 And will do nothing to oppose the flame; 15
 Your lacerations tell the losing game
 You play against a sickness past your cure.
 How will the hands be strong? How will the heart endure?²

A very little thing, a little worm,
 Or hourglass-blazoned spider,³ it is said, 20
 Can kill a tiger. Will the dead
 Hold up his mirror and affirm
 To the four winds the smell
 And flash of his authority? It's well
 If God who holds you to the pit of hell, 25
 Much as one holds a spider, will destroy,
 Baffle and dissipate your soul. As a small boy

On Windsor Marsh,⁴ I saw the spider die
 When thrown into the bowels of fierce fire:
 There's no long struggle, no desire 30
 To get up on its feet and fly—
 It stretches out its feet
 And dies. This is the sinner's last retreat;
 Yes, and no strength exerted on the heat
 Then sinews the abolished will, when sick 35
 And full of burning, it will whistle on a brick.

But who can plumb the sinking of that soul?
 Josiah Hawley,⁵ picture yourself cast
 Into a brick-kiln where the blast
 Fans your quick vitals to a coal— 40
 If measured by a glass,
 How long would it seem burning! Let there pass
 A minute, ten, ten trillion; but the blaze
 Is infinite, eternal: this is death,
 To die and know it. This is the Black Widow, death. 45

1946

2. This stanza draws on Edwards's sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," whose point of departure is Ezekiel 22.14: "Can thine heart endure or can thine hands be strong in the days that I shall deal with thee?" (cf. line 18).
 3. The poisonous black widow spider has, on the

underside of its abdomen, a red marking that resembles an hourglass.

4. East Windsor, Connecticut, Edwards's childhood home.

5. Edwards's uncle, Joseph Hawley.

My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow

1922: the stone porch of my grandfather's summer house

I

"I won't go with you. I want to stay with Grandpa!"
 That's how I threw cold water
 on my Mother and Father's
 watery martini pipe dreams at Sunday dinner.
 . . . Fontainebleau, Mattapoisett, Puget Sound. . . .¹ 5
 Nowhere was anywhere after a summer
 at my Grandfather's farm.
 Diamond-pointed, athirst and Norman,²
 its alley of poplars
 paraded from Grandmother's rose garden 10
 to a scary stand of virgin pine,
 scrub, and paths forever pioneering.

One afternoon in 1922,
 I sat on the stone porch, looking through
 screens as black-grained as drifting coal. 15
Tockytock, tockytock
 clumped our Alpine, Edwardian cuckoo clock,
 slung with strangled, wooden game.
 Our farmer was cementing a root-house³ under the hill.
 One of my hands was cool on a pile 20
 of black earth, the other warm
 on a pile of lime. All about me
 were the works of my Grandfather's hands:
 snapshots of his *Liberty Bell* silver mine;
 his high school at *Stuttgart am Neckar*,⁴ 25
 stogie-brown beams; fools'-gold nuggets;
 octagonal red tiles,
 sweaty with a secret dank, crummy with ant-stale;
 a Rocky Mountain chaise longue,
 its legs, shellacked saplings. 30
 A pastel-pale Huckleberry Finn
 fished with a broom straw in a basin
 hollowed out of a millstone.
 Like my Grandfather, the décor
 was manly, comfortable, 35
 overbearing, disproportioned.

What were those sunflowers? Pumpkins floating shoulder-high?
 It was sunset, Sadie and Nellie
 bearing pitchers of ice-tea,

1. Sound connected to the Pacific Ocean via the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in the Pacific Northwest. "Fontainebleau": rich pastoral suburb of Paris, site of one of the royal châteaux. "Mattapoisett": town in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, first settled in the 1750s.

2. A stage of Romanesque architecture developed in the French province of Normandy.

3. For storing bulbs, root vegetables, etc.

4. City in Germany, on the Neckar River. "*Liberty Bell* silver mine": located near Telluride, Colorado; it boomed in the 1890s.

oranges, lemons, mint, and peppermints, 40
 and the jug of shandygaff,
 which Grandpa made by blending half and half
 yeasty, wheezing homemade sarsaparilla with beer.
 The farm, entitled *Char-de-sa*
 in the Social Register, 45
 was named for my Grandfather's children:
 Charlotte, Devereux, and Sarah.
 No one had died there in my lifetime . . .
 Only Cinder, our Scottie puppy
 paralyzed from gobbling toads. 50
 I sat mixing black earth and lime.

II

I was five and a half.
 My formal pearl gray shorts
 had been worn for three minutes.
 My perfection was the Olympian 55
 poise of my models in the imperishable autumn
 display windows
 of Rogers Peet's boys' store below the State House
 in Boston. Distorting drops of water
 pinpricked my face in the basin's mirror. 60
 I was a stuffed toucan
 with a bibulous, multicolored beak.

III

Up in the air
 by the lakeview window in the billards-room,
 lurid in the doldrums of the sunset hour, 65
 my Great Aunt Sarah
 was learning *Samson and Delilah*.⁵
 She thundered on the keyboard of her dummy piano,
 with gauze curtains like a boudoir table,
 accordionlike yet soundless. 70
 It had been bought to spare the nerves
 of my Grandmother,
 tone-deaf, quick as a cricket,
 now needing a fourth for "Auction,"⁶
 and casting a thirsty eye 75
 on Aunt Sarah, risen like the phoenix
 from her bed of troublesome snacks and Tauchnitz classics.⁷

Forty years earlier,
 twenty, auburn headed,
 grasshopper notes of genius! 80
 Family gossip says Aunt Sarah

5. A piano version of the opera by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921).

6. Auction bridge, a card game.

7. German paperback editions that included standard English and American works (in English).

tilted her archaic Athenian nose
 and jilted an Astor.⁸
 Each morning she practiced
 on the grand piano at Symphony Hall, 85
 deathlike in the off-season summer—
 its naked Greek statues draped with purple
 like the saints in Holy Week. . . .
 On the recital day, she failed to appear.

IV

I picked with a clean finger nail at the blue anchor 90
 on my sailor blouse washed white as a spinnaker.
 What in the world was I wishing?
 . . . A sail-colored horse browsing in the bullrushes . . .
 A fluff of the west wind puffing
 my blouse, kiting me over our seven chimneys, 95
 troubling the waters. . . .
 As small as sapphires were the ponds: *Quittacus*, *Snippituit*,
 and *Assawompses*, halved by “the Island,”
 where my Uncle’s duck blind
 floated in a barrage of smoke-clouds. 100
 Double-barreled shotguns
 stuck out like bundles of baby crow-bars.
 A single sculler in a camouflaged kayak
 was quacking to the decoys. . . .

At the cabin between the waters, 105
 the nearest windows were already boarded.
 Uncle Devereux was closing camp for the winter.
 As if posed for “the engagement photograph,”
 he was wearing his severe
 war-uniform of a volunteer Canadian officer. 110
 Daylight from the doorway riddled his student posters,
 tacked helter-skelter on walls as raw as a boardwalk.
 Mr. Punch,⁹ a water melon in hockey tights,
 was tossing off a decanter of Scotch.
La Belle France in a red, white and blue toga 115
 was accepting the arm of her “protector,”
 the ingenu and porcine Edward VII.¹
 The pre-war music hall belles
 had goose necks, glorious signatures, beauty-moles,
 and coils of hair like rooster tails. 120
 The finest poster was two or three young men in khaki kilts
 being bushwhacked on the veldt²—
 They were almost life-size. . . .

8. A member of the wealthiest family in the United States during the 19th century.

9. A plump cartoon-figure emblem of the English humor magazine *Punch*, founded in 1841.

1. Edward VII (1841–1910), king of England, famous as a ladies’ man, is depicted with his arm

around the female emblem of France in a poster celebrating the Entente Cordiale, a rapprochement between England and France.

2. Open country in South Africa. The Boer War (1899–1902) was fought by the English against the Boers, descendants of Dutch settlers there.

My Uncle was dying at twenty-nine.
 "You are behaving like children," 125
 said my Grandfather,
 when my Uncle and Aunt left their three baby daughters,
 and sailed for Europe on a last honeymoon . . .
 I cowered in terror.
 I wasn't a child at all— 130
 unseen and all-seeing, I was Agrippina³
 in the Golden House of Nero. . . .
 Near me was the white measuring-door
 my Grandfather had penciled with my Uncle's heights.
 In 1911, he had stopped growing at just six feet. 135
 While I sat on the tiles,
 and dug at the anchor on my sailor blouse,
 Uncle Devereux stood behind me.
 He was as brushed as Bayard, our riding horse.
 His face was putty. 140
 His blue coat and white trousers
 grew sharper and straighter.
 His coat was a blue jay's tail,
 his trousers were solid cream from the top of the bottle.
 He was animated, hierarchical, 145
 like a ginger snap man in a clothes-press.
 He was dying of the incurable Hodgkin's disease. . . .
 My hands were warm, then cool, on the piles
 of earth and lime,
 a black pile and a white pile. . . . 150
 Come winter,
 Uncle Devereux would blend to the one color.

1959

Home after Three Months Away¹

Gone now the baby's nurse,
 a lioness who ruled the roost
 and made the Mother cry.
 She used to tie
 gobbets of porkrind² in bowknots of gauze— 5
 three months they hung like soggy toast
 on our eight foot magnolia tree,
 and helped the English sparrows
 weather a Boston winter.

3. Mother of the Roman emperor Nero. Involved in court intrigue and affairs of state, she poisoned her second husband and was later murdered by her son.

1. This poem was written following one of Lowell's hospitalizations at McLean Psychiatric Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts.

2. Small chunks of fried or roasted skin of a pig.

Three months, three months! 10
 Is Richard now himself again?³
 Dimpled with exaltation,
 my daughter holds her levee in the tub.
 Our noses rub,
 each of us pats a stringy lock of hair— 15
 they tell me nothing's gone.
 Though I am forty-one,
 not forty now, the time I put away
 was child's-play. After thirteen weeks
 my child still dabs her cheeks 20
 to start me shaving. When
 we dress her in her sky-blue corduroy,
 she changes to a boy,
 and floats my shaving brush
 and washcloth in the flush. . . . 25
 Dearest, I cannot loiter here
 in lather like a polar bear.

Recuperating, I neither spin nor toil.⁴
 Three stories down below,
 a choreman tends our coffin's length of soil, 30
 and seven horizontal tulips blow.
 Just twelve months ago,
 these flowers were pedigreed
 imported Dutchmen; now no one need
 distinguish them from weed. 35
 Bushed by the late spring snow,
 they cannot meet
 another year's snowballing enervation.

I keep no rank nor station.
 Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small. 40

1958

Memories of West Street and Lepke¹

Only teaching on Tuesdays, book-worming
 in pajamas fresh from the washer each morning,
 I hog a whole house on Boston's
 "hardly passionate Marlborough Street,"²

3. Variation of "Richard's himself again," a line spoken by Richard III before the battle of Bosworth in a 1700 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1591?) by English actor-manager and playwright Colley Cibber (1671–1757).

4. Allusion to Matthew 6.28: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin."

1. In 1943 Lowell was sentenced to a year in New

York City's West Street jail for his refusal to serve in the armed forces. Among the prisoners was Lepke Buchalter, head of the organized crime syndicate Murder Incorporated, who had been convicted of murder.

2. William James's phrase for a street in the elegant Back Bay section of Boston, where Lowell lived in the 1950s.

where even the man 5
 scavenging filth in the back alley trash cans,
 has two children, a beach wagon, a helpmate,
 and is a “young Republican.”
 I have a nine months’ daughter,
 young enough to be my granddaughter. 10
 Like the sun she rises in her flame-flamingo infants’ wear.

These are the tranquilized *Fifties*,
 and I am forty. Ought I to regret my seedtime?
 I was a fire-breathing Catholic C.O.,³
 and made my manic statement, 15
 telling off the state and president, and then
 sat waiting sentence in the bull pen
 beside a Negro boy with curlicues
 of marijuana in his hair.

Given a year. 20
 I walked on the roof of the West Street Jail, a short
 enclosure like my school soccer court,
 and saw the Hudson River once a day
 through sooty clothesline entanglements
 and bleaching khaki tenements. 25
 Strolling, I yammered metaphysics with Abramowitz,
 a jaundice-yellow (“it’s really tan”)
 and fly-weight pacifist,
 so vegetarian,
 he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit. 30
 He tried to convert Bioff and Brown,
 the Hollywood pimps, to his diet.
 Hairy, muscular, suburban,
 wearing chocolate double-breasted suits,
 they blew their tops and beat him black and blue. 35

I was so out of things, I’d never heard
 of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁴
 “Are you a C.O.?” I asked a fellow jailbird.
 “No,” he answered, “I’m a J.W.”
 He taught me the “hospital tuck,”⁵ 40
 and pointed out the T-shirted back
 of *Murder Incorporated’s* Czar Lepke,
 there piling towels on a rack,
 or dawdling off to his little segregated cell full
 of things forbidden the common man: 45
 a portable radio, a dresser, two toy American
 flags tied together with a ribbon of Easter palm.
 Flabby, bald, lobotomized,
 he drifted in a sheepish calm,
 where no agonizing reappraisal 50

3. Conscientious objector (to war).

4. A Christian revivalist sect that strongly opposes war and denies the power of the state in matters

of conscience.

5. The authorized, efficient way of making beds in a hospital.

jarred his concentration on the electric chair—
 hanging like an oasis in his air
 of lost connections. . . .

1959

Skunk Hour

for Elizabeth Bishop

Nautilus Island's¹ hermit
 heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
 her sheep still graze above the sea.
 Her son's a bishop. Her farmer
 is first selectman in our village; 5
 she's in her dotage.

Thirsting for
 the hierarchic privacy
 of Queen Victoria's century,
 she buys up all 10
 the eyesores facing her shore,
 and lets them fall.

The season's ill—
 we've lost our summer millionaire,
 who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean 15
 catalogue.² His nine-knot yawl
 was auctioned off to lobstermen.
 A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy
 decorator brightens his shop for fall; 20
 his fishnet's filled with orange cork,
 orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
 there is no money in his work,
 he'd rather marry.

One dark night, 25
 my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
 I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,
 they lay together, hull to hull,
 where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .
 My mind's not right. 30

A car radio bleats,
 "Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear

1. The poem is set in Castine, Maine, where Lowell had a summer house.

2. From a mail-order house in Maine that pri-

marily sells sporting goods and clothing to the wealthy and upper middle class.

my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
 as if my hand were at its throat. . . .
 I myself am hell;³ 35
 nobody's here—

only skunks, that search
 in the moonlight for a bite to eat.
 They march on their soles up Main Street:
 white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire 40
 under the chalk-dry and spar spire
 of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top
 of our back steps and breathe the rich air—
 a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail. 45
 She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
 of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
 and will not scare.

1959

Night Sweat

Work-table, litter, books and standing lamp,
 plain things, my stalled equipment, the old broom—
 but I am living in a tidied room,
 for ten nights now I've felt the creeping damp
 float over my pajamas' wilted white . . . 5
 Sweet salt embalms me and my head is wet,
 everything streams and tells me this is right;
 my life's fever is soaking in night sweat—
 one life, one writing! But the downward glide
 and bias of existing wrings us dry— 10
 always inside me is the child who died,
 always inside me is his will to die—
 one universe, one body . . . in this urn
 the animal night sweats of the spirit burn.
 Behind me! You! Again I feel the light 15
 lighten my leaded eyelids, while the gray
 skulled horses whinny for the soot of night.
 I dabble in the dapple of the day,
 a heap of wet clothes, seamy, shivering,
 I see my flesh and bedding washed with light, 20
 my child exploding into dynamite,
 my wife . . . your lightness alters everything,
 and tears the black web from the spider's sack,
 as your heart hops and flutters like a hare.
 Poor turtle, tortoise, if I cannot clear 25

3. "Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell" (Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* 4.75).

the surface of these troubled waters here,
absolve me, help me, Dear Heart, as you bear
this world's dead weight and cycle on your back.

1964

For the Union Dead¹

"Relinquant Omnia Servare Rem Publicam."²

The old South Boston Aquarium stands
in a Sahara of snow now. Its broken windows are boarded.
The bronze weathervane cod has lost half its scales.
The airy tanks are dry.

Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass; 5
my hand tingled
to burst the bubbles
drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish.

My hand draws back. I often sigh still 10
for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom
of the fish and reptile. One morning last March,
I pressed against the new barbed and galvanized

fence on the Boston Common. Behind their cage,
yellow dinosaur steamshovels were grunting
as they cropped up tons of mush and grass 15
to gouge their underworld garage.

Parking spaces luxuriate like civic
sandpiles in the heart of Boston.
A girdle of orange, Puritan-pumpkin colored girders
braces the tingling Statehouse, 20

shaking over the excavations, as it faces Colonel Shaw
and his bell-cheeked Negro infantry
on St. Gaudens' shaking Civil War relief,
propped by a plank splint against the garage's earthquake.

Two months after marching through Boston, 25
half the regiment was dead;

1. First published as "Colonel Shaw and the Massachusetts' 54th" in a paperback edition of *Life Studies* (1960). It became the title poem of *For the Union Dead* (1964).

2. Robert Gould Shaw (1837–1863) led the first all-African American regiment in the Union army during the Civil War. He was killed in the attack against Fort Wagner, South Carolina. A bronze relief by the sculptor Augustus Saint-

Gaudens (1848–1897), dedicated in 1897, standing opposite the Massachusetts State House on Boston Common, commemorates the deaths. A Latin inscription on the monument reads *Omnia Relinquit Servare Rem Publicam* ("He leaves all behind to save the Republic"). Lowell's epigraph alters the inscription slightly, changing the third-person singular (*he*) to the third-person plural: "*They* give up everything to save the Republic."

at the dedication
William James³ could almost hear the bronze Negroes breathe.

Their monument sticks like a fishbone
in the city's throat. 30
Its Colonel is as lean
as a compass-needle.

He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,
a greyhound's gentle tautness;
he seems to wince at pleasure, 35
and suffocate for privacy.

He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely,
peculiar power to choose life and die—
when he leads his black soldiers to death,
he cannot bend his back. 40

On a thousand small town New England greens,
the old white churches hold their air
of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags
quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic.

The stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier 45
grow slimmer and younger each year—
wasp-waisted, they doze over muskets
and muse through their sideburns . . .

Shaw's father wanted no monument
except the ditch, 50
where his son's body was thrown⁴
and lost with his "niggers."

The ditch is nearer.
There are no statues for the last war⁵ here;
on Boylston Street,⁶ a commercial photograph 55
shows Hiroshima boiling⁷

over a Mosler Safe, the "Rock of Ages"⁸
that survived the blast. Space is nearer.
When I crouch to my television set,
the drained faces of Negro school-children rise like balloons.⁹ 60

Colonel Shaw
is riding on his bubble,
he waits
for the blessed break.

3. Philosopher and psychologist (1842–1910) who taught at Harvard.

4. By the Confederate soldiers at Fort Wagner.

5. World War II.

6. In Boston, where the poem is set.

7. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on this Japanese city.

8. Biblical reference to an indestructible and supernatural rock, the foundation of an everlasting kingdom. Used as an advertising slogan by Mosler Safes.

9. Probably news photographs connected with contemporary civil rights demonstrations to secure desegregation of schools in the South.

The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
a savage servility
slides by on grease.

65

1960, 1964

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

1917–2000

“If there was ever a born poet,” the writer Alice Walker once said in an interview, “I think it is Brooks.” A passionate sense of language and an often daring use of formal structures are hallmarks of Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry. She used these gifts in a career characterized by dramatic evolution, a career that linked two very different generations of African American poets. “Until 1967,” Brooks said, “my own Blackness did not confront me with a shrill spelling of itself.” She then grouped herself with militant black writers and defined her work as belonging primarily to the African American community. In her earlier work, however, Brooks followed the example of the older writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen among them, who honored the ideal of an integrated society. In that period her work received support largely from white audiences. But Brooks’s changing sense of her commitments should not obscure her persistent, underlying concerns. She never lacked political awareness, and in remarkably versatile poems, both early and late, she wrote about black experience and black rage, with a particular awareness of the complex lives of black women.

Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas; she grew up in Chicago and is closely identified with the energies and problems of its black community. She went to Chicago’s Englewood High School and graduated from Wilson Junior College. Brooks remembered writing poetry from the time she was seven and keeping poetry notebooks from the time she was eleven. She got her education in the moderns—poets such as Pound and Eliot—under the guidance of a rich Chicago socialite, Inez Cunningham Stark, who was a reader for *Poetry* magazine and taught a poetry class at the Southside Community Art Center. Her first book, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), took its title from the name journalists gave to Chicago’s black ghetto. Her poems portrayed the waste and loss that are the inevitable result of what Langston Hughes called the “dream deferred.” With her second book of poems, *Annie Allen* (1949), Brooks became the first African American to receive the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

In *Annie Allen* and in her Bronzeville poems (*Bronzeville Boys and Girls*, 1956, continued the work begun in *A Street in Bronzeville*), Brooks concentrated on portraits of what Hughes called “the ordinary aspects of black life,” stressing the vitality and the often subversive morality of ghetto figures. She portrayed the good girls who want to be bad; the bored children of hardworking, pious mothers; the laments of women, some of them mothers, abandoned by their men. Brooks’s diction was a combination of street talk, the florid biblical speech of black Protestant preachers, and the traditional vocabulary of English and American verse. She wrote vigorous, strongly accented, and strongly rhymed lines with a great deal of alliteration.

She also cultivated traditional lyric forms; for example, she was one of the few modern poets to write extensively in the sonnet form.

A great change in Brooks's life came at Fisk University in 1967 with the Second Black Writers' Conference, in whose charged activist atmosphere she encountered many of the new young black poets. After this, Brooks tested the possibility of writing poetry exclusively for black audiences. She drew closer to militant political groups as a result of conducting poetry workshops for some members of the Blackstone Rangers, a teenage gang in Chicago. In autobiographical writings such as her prose *Report from Part One* (1972), Brooks became more self-conscious about her own potential role as a leader of black feminists. She left her New York publisher to have her work printed by African American publishers, especially the Broadside Press. Brooks's poetry, too, changed, in both its focus and its technique. Her subjects tended to be more explicitly political and to deal with questions of revolutionary violence and issues of African American identity. Stylistically, her work evolved out of the concentrated imagery and narratives of her earlier writing, with its often formal diction, and moved toward an increased use of the energetic, improvisatory rhythms of jazz, the combinations of African chants, and an emphatically spoken language. The resulting poetry constantly revises itself and its sense of the world, open to change but evoking history. "How does one convey the influence Gwendolyn Brooks has had on generations—not only writers but people from all walks of life?" the poet Rita Dove has remarked, remembering how, as a young woman, she was "struck by these poems . . . that weren't afraid to take language and swamp it, twist it, and engage it so that it shimmered and dashed and lingered."

FROM A STREET IN BRONZEVILLE

to David and Keziah Brooks

kitchenette building

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
 Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong
 Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
 Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes 5
 And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
 Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,
 Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
 Anticipate a message, let it begin? 10

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
 Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
 We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

the mother

Abortions will not let you forget.
 You remember the children you got that you did not get,
 The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
 The singers and workers that never handled the air.
 You will never neglect or beat 5
 Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.
 You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
 Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
 You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
 Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye. 10

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim
 killed children.
 I have contracted. I have eased
 My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.
 I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
 Your luck 15
 And your lives from your unfinished reach,
 If I stole your births and your names,
 Your straight baby tears and your games,
 Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
 and your deaths,
 If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths, 20
 Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
 Though why should I whine,
 Whine that the crime was other than mine?—
 Since anyhow you are dead.
 Or rather, or instead, 25
 You were never made.

But that too, I am afraid,
 Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
 You were born, you had body, you died.
 It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried. 30

Believe me, I loved you all.
 Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you
 All.

1945

a song in the front yard

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
 I want a peek at the back
 Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.
 A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now 5
 And maybe down the alley,

To where the charity children play.
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.
They have some wonderful fun. 10
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine
How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.
My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae
Will grow up to be a bad woman.
That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late 15
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate.)

But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
And strut down the streets with paint on my face. 20

1945

the white troops had their orders but the
Negroes looked like men

They had supposed their formula was fixed.
They had obeyed instructions to devise
A type of cold, a type of hooded gaze.
But when the Negroes came they were perplexed.
These Negroes looked like men. Besides, it taxed 5
Time and the temper to remember those
Congenital iniquities that cause
Disfavor of the darkness. Such as boxed
Their feelings properly, complete to tags—
A box for dark men and a box for Other— 10
Would often find the contents had been scrambled.
Or even switched. Who really gave two figs?
Neither the earth nor heaven ever trembled.
And there was nothing startling in the weather.

1945

From The Womanhood

The Children of the Poor

II

What shall I give my children? who are poor,
Who are adjudged the leastwise of the land,
Who are my sweetest lepers, who demand

No velvet and no velvety velour;
 But who have begged me for a brisk contour, 5
 Crying that they are quasi, contraband
 Because unfinished, graven by a hand
 Less than angelic, admirable or sure.
 My hand is stuffed with mode, design, device.
 But I lack access to my proper stone. 10
 And plenitude of plan shall not suffice
 Nor grief nor love shall be enough alone
 To ratify my little halves who bear
 Across an autumn freezing everywhere.

1949

We Real Cool

THE POOL PLAYERS.
 SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We
 Left school. We

Lurk late. We
 Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We 5
 Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
 Die soon.

1960

The Bean Eaters

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.
 Dinner is a casual affair.
 Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,
 Tin flatware.

Two who are Mostly Good. 5
 Two who have lived their day,
 But keep on putting on their clothes
 And putting things away.

And remembering . . .
 Remembering, with twinklings and twinges, 10
 As they lean over the beans in their rented back room that is full of beads
 and receipts and dolls and cloths, tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes.

1960

A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon

From the first it had been like a
Ballad. It had the beat inevitable. It had the blood.
A wildness cut up, and tied in little bunches,
Like the four-line stanzas of the ballads she had never quite
Understood—the ballads they had set her to, in school. 5

Herself: the milk-white maid, the “maid mild”
Of the ballad. Pursued
By the Dark Villain. Rescued by the Fine Prince.
The Happiness-Ever-After.
That was worth anything. 10
It was good to be a “maid mild.”
That made the breath go fast.

Her bacon burned. She
Hastened to hide it in the step-on can, and
Drew more strips from the meat case. The eggs and sour-milk biscuits 15
Did well. She set out a jar
Of her new quince preserve.

. . . But there was a something about the matter of the Dark Villain.
He should have been older, perhaps.
The hacking down of a villain was more fun to think about 20
When his menace possessed undisputed breadth, undisputed height,
And a harsh kind of vice.
And best of all, when his history was cluttered
With the bones of many eaten knights and princesses.

The fun was disturbed, then all but nullified 25
When the Dark Villain was a blackish child
Of fourteen, with eyes still too young to be dirty,
And a mouth too young to have lost every reminder
Of its infant softness.

That boy must have been surprised! For 30
These were grown-ups. Grown-ups were supposed to be wise.
And the Fine Prince—and that other—so tall, so broad, so
Grown! Perhaps the boy had never guessed
That the trouble with grown-ups was that under the magnificent shell of
adulthood, just under,
Waited the baby full of tantrums. 35

It occurred to her that there may have been something
Ridiculous in the picture of the Fine Prince
Rushing (rich with the breadth and height and
Mature solidness whose lack, in the Dark Villain, was impressing her,
Confronting her more and more as this first day after the trial 40
And acquittal wore on) rushing

With his heavy companion to hack down (unhorsed)
 That little foe.
 So much had happened, she could not remember now what that foe had done
 Against her, or if anything had been done. 45
 The one thing in the world that she did know and knew
 With terrifying clarity was that her composition
 Had disintegrated. That, although the pattern prevailed,
 The breaks were everywhere. That she could think
 Of no thread capable of the necessary 50
 Sew-work.

She made the babies sit in their places at the table.
 Then, before calling Him, she hurried
 To the mirror with her comb and lipstick. It was necessary
 To be more beautiful than ever. 55
 The beautiful wife.
 For sometimes she fancied he looked at her as though
 Measuring her. As if he considered, Had she been worth It?

Had *she* been worth the blood, the cramped cries, the little stuttering
 bravado,
 The gradual dulling of those Negro eyes, 60
 The sudden, overwhelming *little-boyiness* in that barn?
 Whatever she might feel or half-feel, the lipstick necessity was something
 apart. He must never conclude
 That she had not been worth It.

He sat down, the Fine Prince, and
 Began buttering a biscuit. He looked at his hands. 65
 He twisted in his chair, he scratched his nose.
 He glanced again, almost secretly, at his hands.
 More papers were in from the North, he mumbled. More meddling
 headlines.
 With their pepper-words, “bestiality,” and “barbarism,” and
 “Shocking.” 70
 The half-sneers he had mastered for the trial worked across
 His sweet and pretty face.

What he'd like to do, he explained, was kill them all.
 The time lost. The unwanted fame.
 Still, it had been fun to show those intruders 75
 A thing or two. To show that snappy-eyed mother,
 That sassy, Northern, brown-black——

Nothing could stop Mississippi.
 He knew that. Big Fella
 Knew that. 80
 And, what was so good, Mississippi knew that.
 Nothing and nothing could stop Mississippi.
 They could send in their petitions, and scar
 Their newspapers with bleeding headlines. Their governors
 Could appeal to Washington. . . . 85

“What I want,” the older baby said, “is ’lasses on my jam.”
 Whereupon the younger baby
 Picked up the molasses pitcher and threw
 The molasses in his brother’s face. Instantly
 The Fine Prince leaned across the table and slapped 90
 The small and smiling criminal.

She did not speak. When the Hand
 Came down and away, and she could look at her child,
 At her baby-child,
 She could think only of blood. 95
 Surely her baby’s cheek
 Had disappeared, and in its place, surely,
 Hung a heaviness, a lengthening red, a red that had no end.
 She shook her head. It was not true, of course.
 It was not true at all. The 100
 Child’s face was as always, the
 Color of the paste in her paste-jar.

She left the table, to the tune of the children’s lamentations, which were
 shriller
 Than ever. She
 Looked out of a window. She said not a word. *That* 105
 Was one of the new Somethings—
 The fear,
 Tying her as with iron.

Suddenly she felt his hands upon her. He had followed her
 To the window. The children were whimpering now. 110
 Such bits of tots. And she, their mother,
 Could not protect them. She looked at her shoulders, still
 Gripped in the claim of his hands. She tried, but could not resist the idea
 That a red ooze was seeping, spreading darkly, thickly, slowly,
 Over her white shoulders, her own shoulders, 115
 And over all of Earth and Mars.

He whispered something to her, did the Fine Prince, something
 About love, something about love and night and intention.

She heard no hoof-beat of the horse and saw no flash of the shining steel.
 He pulled her face around to meet 120
 His, and there it was, close close,
 For the first time in all those days and nights,
 His mouth, wet and red,
 So very, very, very red,
 Closed over hers. 125

Then a sickness heaved within her. The courtroom Coca-Cola,
 The courtroom beer and hate and sweat and drone,
 Pushed like a wall against her. She wanted to bear it.
 But his mouth would not go away and neither would the
 Decapitated exclamation points in that Other Woman’s eyes. 130

She did not scream.
 She stood there.
 But a hatred for him burst into glorious flower,
 And its perfume enclasped them—big,
 Bigger than all magnolias. 135

The last bleak news of the ballad.
 The rest of the rugged music.
 The last quatrain. 1960

The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till¹

after the murder,
 after the burial

Emmett's mother is a pretty-faced thing;
 the tint of pulled taffy.
 She sits in a red room, 5
 drinking black coffee.
 She kisses her killed boy.
 And she is sorry.
 Chaos in windy grays
 through a red prairie. 10
 1960

The Blackstone Rangers¹

I. As Seen by Disciplines²

There they are.
 Thirty at the corner.
 Black, raw, ready.
 Sores in the city
 that do not want to heal. 5

II. The Leaders

Jeff. Gene. Geronimo. And Bop.
 They cancel, cure and curry.
 Hardly the dupes of the downtown thing
 the cold bonbon,
 the rhinestone thing. And hardly 10
 in a hurry.

1. A fourteen-year-old African American boy lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly "leering" at a white woman.

1. A tough Chicago street gang, Blackstone Street is the eastern boundary of Chicago's black ghetto.
 2. I.e., law enforcers.

Hardly Belafonte, King,
 Black Jesus, Stokely, Malcolm X or Rap.³
 Bungled trophies.
 Their country is a Nation on no map. 15

Jeff, Gene, Geronimo and Bop
 in the passionate noon,
 in bewitching night
 are the detailed men, the copious men.
 They curry, cure, 20
 they cancel, cancelled images whose Concerts
 are not divine, vivacious; the different tins
 are intense last entries; pagan argument;
 translations of the night.

The Blackstone bitter bureaus 25
 (bureaucracy is footloose) edit, fuse
 unfashionable damnations and descent;
 and exulting, monstrous hand on monstrous hand,
 construct, strangely, a monstrous pearl or grace.

III. *Gang Girls*

A RANGERETTE

Gang Girls are sweet exotics. 30
 Mary Ann
 uses the nutrients of her orient,
 but sometimes sighs for Cities of blue and jewel
 beyond her Ranger rim of Cottage Grove.⁴
 (Bowery Boys, Disciples, Whip-Birds will 35
 dissolve no margins, stop no savory sanctities.)

Mary is
 a rose in a whiskey glass.

Mary's
 Februaries shudder and are gone. Aprils 40
 fret frankly, lilac hurries on.
 Summer is a hard irregular ridge.
 October looks away.
 And that's the Year!

3. "Belafonte": Harold George Belafonte (b. 1927), Jamaican American musician, actor, and social activist, who popularized the Caribbean musical style and has advocated for civil rights and humanitarian causes throughout his career. "King": Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), Baptist pastor, one of the most prominent civil rights activists of the 1950s and 1960s. He followed a philosophy of nonviolence and led non-violent demonstrations against segregation and injustice. He was also a gifted and eloquent orator on the subject of civil rights. "Black Jesus": one representation of Jesus, generally accepted by the black Christian community in Africa. "Stokely":

Stokely Carmichael (1941–1998), Trinidadian American black activist, leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers. He urged African Americans to form and lead their own organizations and to reject the values and cultural mores of American society. "Malcolm X": born Malcolm Little (1925–1965), also known as Malik El-Shabazz, a Black Muslim minister, a national spokesman for the Nation of Islam, and one of the most prominent black nationalist leaders in the United States. He advocated black pride, economic self-reliance, and identity politics.

4. Street of overcrowded tenements in the ghetto.

Save for her bugle-love. 45
 Save for the bleat of not-obese devotion.
 Save for Somebody Terribly Dying, under
 the philanthropy of robins. Save for her Ranger
 bringing
 an amount of rainbow in a string-drawn bag. 50
 “Where did you get the diamond?” Do not ask:
 but swallow, straight, the spirals of his flask
 and assist him at your zipper; pet his lips
 and help him clutch you.

Love’s another departure. 55
 Will there be any arrivals, confirmations?
 Will there be gleaning?

Mary, the Shakedancer’s child
 from the rooming-flat, pants carefully, peers at
 her laboring lover. . . . 60
 Mary! Mary Ann!
 Settle for sandwiches! settle for stocking caps!
 for sudden blood, aborted carnival,
 the props and niceties of non-loneliness—
 the rhymes of Leaning. 65

1968

To the Diaspora¹

you did not know you were Afrika

When you set out for Afrika
 you did not know you were going.
 Because
 you did not know you were Afrika.
 You did not know the Black continent 5
 that had to be reached
 was you.

I could not have told you then that some sun
 would come,
 somewhere over the road, 10
 would come evoking the diamonds
 of you, the Black continent—
 somewhere over the road.
 You would not have believed my mouth.

When I told you, meeting you somewhere close 15
 to the heat and youth of the road,
 liking my loyalty, liking belief,
 you smiled and you thanked me but very little believed me.

1. People settled far from their ancestral homelands.

Here is some sun. Some.
 Now off into the places rough to reach. 20
 Though dry, though drowsy, all unwillingly a-wobble,
 into the dissonant and dangerous crescendo.
 Your work, that was done, to be done to be done to be done.

1981

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

1921–1995

Patricia Highsmith's career is connected to the most popular entertainments of the late twentieth century. Born in 1921 in Fort Worth, Texas, Highsmith worked in a comic book studio during World War II, writing heroic, jingoistic comic books with titles like "The Destroyer" and "The Fighting Yank." The influences of comics, crime and detective fiction, science fiction, horror, and Hollywood film are all palpable in her work, even as she consistently invoked such canonical European writers as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and André Gide when discussing her primary influences. The premise of one of her most famous novels, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), was inspired by Henry James's great novel *The Ambassadors* (1903), which features a naïve American man sent to retrieve the scion of a wealthy American family who has fallen prey to the seductions of Europe. Highsmith won prizes for detective and crime fiction throughout her life, in both Europe and America, but more traditional literary honors were elusive.

Highsmith's blend of the popular and the highbrow, of the visceral and the intellectual, distinguishes her work and has startled readers for over half a century. She died in 1995, just days before the publication of her thirtieth work of fiction. She had also written, in 1966, a handbook for writing suspense stories, and two additional story collections were published in the years following her death. Because Highsmith deftly combined the suspense plots of genre fiction with knotty philosophical questions and unforgettable characters, her work found a natural outlet in the movies. Her first novel, *Strangers on a Train* (1950), was adapted by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951. Later film adaptations of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (in France in 1960 and in the United States in 1999) and *The Price of Salt* (1952; adapted as *Carol* in 2015) have helped to keep Highsmith's fiction steadily in front of audiences.

Highsmith's most famous work—the five-novel Ripley series that began with *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and ended with *Ripley Under Water* (1991)—dared readers to sympathize with Tom Ripley, murderer of his rich friend, Dickie Greenleaf. Tom impersonates Greenleaf for a time after the murder, eventually taking over Dickie's clothes, possessions, relationships, and trust fund. Inheriting Dickie's money, Tom reverts to his own identity and goes on to lead a life of wealth and intrigue in subsequent novels. Readers found themselves rooting for Tom to succeed as Highsmith skillfully drew on class resentments, the dynamics of homophobia and homoerotic attraction, and the American tradition of the self-made man to craft her unlikely hero. As recent criticism points out, readers could understand Ripley as deviating from a 1950s repressive society, but in his materialism and upper-class strivings, they could also think of him as a model American citizen. Highsmith so identified

with Tom Ripley that she would sign letters “Pat H, alias Ripley,” and said that she often had the feeling that Ripley was writing the novels and she was “merely typing” them.

Murder and eroticism were linked in Highsmith’s mind: “Murder is a kind of making love, a kind of possessing,” she wrote in her journal, reflecting upon a woman she became attracted to while working at Bloomingdale’s. That attraction inspired Highsmith’s other major literary accomplishment: the novel *The Price of Salt*, published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan. The novel is widely regarded as the first lesbian love story with a happy ending. In it, the young protagonist, Therese, a set designer, meets Carol, a beautiful and married older woman. The experienced Carol seduces Therese, Therese subsequently leaves her fiancé, and the two women set out on a road trip, followed by a private detective hired by Carol’s husband. Carol faces the agonizing choice of abandoning Therese or giving up her child in divorce proceedings. Carol eventually chooses Therese, and they live happily together in an apartment in New York City.

In her short fiction, Highsmith explored human relationships with animals, a theme that drives “The Quest for *Blank Claveringi*,” the story reprinted here, in which an aging scientist seeks to crown his life’s work by documenting and then naming after himself a species of giant snails. The story is typical Highsmith in that she was particularly attracted to animals that were not usual human companions. In the 1960s, she kept a collection of over 300 beloved snails, pets she would bring out at dinner parties to slither around the table. In many stories, especially those contained in *The Animal-Lover’s Book of Beastly Murder* (1975), she imagined animals of all kinds taking violent revenge on human beings for acts of abuse. Highsmith’s ability—and willingness—to enter into the minds of creatures operating far from human social norms (whether those creatures were mammal, reptile, human, or otherwise) makes her fiction both daring and strange, reminding us of the work of writers such as Franz Kafka, who famously imagined a man transformed into a dung beetle, or the playwright Eugene Ionesco, who in 1959 staged a play in which the inhabitants of a French town turn into rhinoceroses.

Highsmith moved to Europe permanently in 1963 to be near women who were romantically important to her; her work has been much appreciated there. Late in her life, her fiction reflected the topics of her times—including the Israeli-Arab conflict, fundamentalist Christianity, and the AIDS crisis. She became increasingly and publicly anti-Semitic as she aged, losing some of her public admiration as a consequence. Today her reputation stands on the unique qualities and literary strength of her first two decades as a writer. Her fiction brings news of humanity’s darkest, strangest, and most fundamental elements.

The Quest for *Blank Claveringi*

Avery Clavering, a professor of zoology at a California university, heard of the giant snails of Kuwa in a footnote of a book on molluscs. His sabbatical had been coming up in three months when he read the few lines:

It is said by Matusas Islands natives that snails even larger than this exist on the uninhabited island of Kuwa, twenty-five miles distant from the Matusas. The Matusans claim that these snails have a shell diameter of twenty feet and that they are man-eating. Dr. Wm. J. Stead, now living in the Matusas, visited Kuwa in 1949 without finding any snails at all, but the legend persists.

The item aroused Professor Clavering's interest, because he very much wanted to discover some animal, bird, reptile or even mollusc to which he could give his name. *Something-or-other Claveringi*.¹ The professor was forty-eight. His time, perhaps, was not growing short, but he had achieved no particular renown. The discovery of a new species would win him immortality in his field.

The Matusas, the professor saw on a map, were three small islands arranged like the points of an isosceles triangle not far from Hawaii. He wrote a letter to Dr. Stead and received the following reply, written on an abominable typewriter, so many words pale, he could scarcely read it:

April 8th, 19—

Dear Professor Clavering:

I have long heard of the giant snails of Kuwa, but before you make a trip of such length, I must tell you that the natives here assure me a group of them went about twenty years ago to Kuwa to exterminate these so-called man-eating snails which they imagined could swim the ocean between Kuwa and the Matusas and do some damage to the latter islands. They claim to have killed off the whole community of them except for one old fellow they could not kill. This is typical of native stories—there's always one that got away. I haven't much doubt the snails were no bigger than three feet across and that they were not * * * * (here a word was illegible, due both to the pale ribbon and a squashed insect). You say you read of my effort in 1949 to find the giant snails. What the footnote did not say is that I have made several trips since to find them. I retired to the Matusas, in fact, for that purpose. I now believe the snails to be mere folklore, a figment of the natives' imagination. If I were you, I would not waste time or money on an expedition.

Yours sincerely,
Wm. J. Stead, M.D.

Professor Clavering had the money and the time. He detected a sourness in Dr. Stead's letter. Maybe Dr. Stead had just had bad luck. By post, Professor Clavering hired a thirty-foot sailboat with an auxiliary motor from Hawaii. He wanted to make the trip alone from the Matusas. *Blank Claveringi*. Regardless of the size, the snail was apt to be different from any known snail, because of its isolation—if it existed. He planned to go one month ahead of his wife and to join her and their twenty-year-old daughter Wanda in Hawaii for a more orthodox holiday after he had visited Kuwa. A month would give him plenty of time to find the snail, even if there were only one, to take photographs, and make notes.

It was late June when Professor Clavering, equipped with water tanks, tinned beef, soup and milk, biscuits, writing materials, camera, knife,

1. In scientific naming (called "binomial nomenclature"), each species of animal is given two Latin names, designating first the genus, or group, to which an animal belongs, and, second, the animal's particular species. Species may be named after the person who first records the ani-

mal's existence in modern scientific classification. In this case, the person's name is given a Latin ending. Prof. Clavering does not know the genus to which a giant snail may belong ("*Something-or-other*"), but he plans to name the species after himself, "*Claveringi*."

hatchet, and a Winchester .22² which he hardly knew how to use, set forth from one of the Matusas bound for Kuwa. Dr. Stead, who had been his host for a few days, saw him off. Dr. Stead was seventy-five, he said, but he looked older, due perhaps to the ravages of drink and the apparently aimless life he led now. He had not looked for the giant snail in two years, he said.

"I've given the last third of my life to looking for this snail, you might say," Dr. Stead added. "But that's man's fate, I suppose, the pursuit of the non-existent. Well—good luck to you, Professor Clavering!" He waved his old American straw hat as the *Samantha* left the dock under motor power.

Professor Clavering had made out to Stead that if he did find snails, he would come back at once, get some natives to accompany him, and return to Kuwa with materials to make crates for the snails. Stead had expressed doubt whether he could persuade any natives to accompany him, if the snail or snails were really large. But then, Dr. Stead had been negative about everything pertaining to Professor Clavering's quest. Professor Clavering was glad to get away from him.

After about an hour, Professor Clavering cut the motor and tentatively hoisted some sail. The wind was favorable, but he knew little about sails, and he paid close attention to his compass. At last, Kuwa came into view, a tan hump on a sea of blue. He was quite close before he saw any greenery, and this was only the tops of some trees. Already, he was looking for anything resembling a giant snail, and regretting he had not brought binoculars, but the island was only three miles long and one mile broad. He decided to aim for a small beach. He dropped anchor, two of them, in water so clear he could see the sand under it. He stood for a few minutes on the deck.

The only life he saw was a few birds in the tops of trees, brightly colored, crested birds, making cries he had never heard before. There was no low-lying vegetation whatsoever, none of the grass and reeds that might have been expected on an island such as this—much like the Matusas in soil color—and this augured well of the presence of snails that might have devoured everything green within their reach. It was only a quarter to two. Professor Clavering ate part of a papaya, two boiled eggs, and brewed coffee on his alcohol burner, as he had had nothing to eat since 6 a.m. Then with his hunting knife and hatchet in the belt of his khaki shorts, and his camera around his neck, he lowered himself into the water. The *Samantha* carried no rowboat.

He sank up to his neck, but he could walk on the bottom. He held the camera high. He emerged panting, as he was some twenty pounds overweight. Professor Clavering was to regret every one of those pounds before the day was over, but as he got his breath and looked around him, and felt himself drying off in the warm sunlight, he was happy. He wiped his hatchet and knife with dry sand, then walked inland, alert for the rounded form of a snail's shell, moving or stationary, anywhere. But as snails were more or less nocturnal, he thought any snails might well be sleeping in some cave or crevice with no idea of emerging until nightfall.

He decided to cross the island first, then follow the coast to right or left and circle the island. He had not gone a quarter of a mile, when his heart

2. A small-bore rifle used largely for target shooting and small game.

gave a leap. Ten yards before him, he saw three bent saplings with their top leaves chewed off. The young trees were four inches in diameter at their bases. It would have taken a considerable weight to bend them down, something like a hundred pounds. The professor looked on the trees and the ground for the glaze left by snails, but found none. But rain could have washed it away. A snail whose shell was three feet in diameter would not weigh enough to bend such a tree, so Professor Clavering now hoped for something bigger. He pushed on.

He arrived at the other side of the island. The sea had eaten a notch into the shore, forming a mostly dry gully of a hundred yards' length and a depth of thirty feet. The land here was sandy but moist, and there was, he saw, a little vegetation in the form of patchy grass. But here, the lower branches of all the trees had been divested of their leaves, and so long ago that the branches had dried and fallen off. All this bespoke the presence of land snails. Professor Clavering stooped and looked down into the gully. He saw, just over the edge of his side of the crevice, the pink-tan curve of something that was neither rock nor sand. If it was a snail, it was monstrous. Involuntarily, he took a step backward, scattering pebbles down the gully.

The professor ran round the gully to have a better look. It was a snail, and its shell was about fifteen feet high. He had a view of its left side, the side without the spiral. It resembled a peach-colored sail filled with wind, and the sunlight made nacreous,³ silvery patches gleam and twinkle as the great thing stirred. The little rain of pebbles had aroused it, the professor realized. If the shell was fifteen or eighteen feet in diameter, he reckoned that the snail's body or foot would be something like six yards long when extended. Rooted to the spot, the professor stood, thrilled as much by the (as yet) empty phrase *Blank Claveringi* which throbbed in his head as by the fact he was looking upon something no man had seen before, or at least no scientist. The crate would have to be bigger than he had thought, but the *Samantha* would be capable of taking it on her forward deck.

The snail was backing to pull its head from the narrow part of the gully. The moist body, the color of tea with milk, came into view with the slowness of an enormous snake awakening from slumber. All was silent, except for pebbles dropping from the snail's underside as it lifted its head, except for the professor's constrained breathing. The snail's head, facing inland, rose higher and higher, and its antennae, with which it saw, began to extend. Professor Clavering realized he had disturbed it from its diurnal sleep, and a brief terror caused him to retreat again, sending more pebbles down the slope.

The snail heard this, and slowly turned its enormous head toward him.

The professor felt paralyzed. A gigantic face regarded him, a face with drooping, scalloped cheeks or lips, with antennae six feet long now, the eyes on the ends of them scrutinizing him at his own level and scarcely ten feet away, with the disdain of a Herculean lorgnette,⁴ with the unknown potency of a pair of oversized telescopes. The snail reared so high, it had to arch its

3. Resembling the iridescent coating from which pearls are formed and that lines the inside of shells.

4. Of the size of the Greek hero, Hercules,

renowned for his strength. A lorgnette is a pair of glasses or opera glasses held in front of the eyes by a long side handle.

antennae to keep him in view. Six yards long? It would be more like eight or ten yards. The snail turned itself to move toward him.

Still, the professor did not budge. He knew about snails' teeth, the twenty-odd thousand pairs of them even in a small garden snail, set in comblike structures, the upper front teeth visible, moving up and down constantly just under transparent flesh. A snail of this size, with proportionate teeth, could chew through a tree as quickly as a woodsman's axe, the professor thought. The snail was advancing up the bank with monumental confidence. He had to stand still for a few seconds simply to admire it. *His snail!* The professor opened his camera and took a picture, just as the snail was hauling its shell over the edge of the quarry.

"You are magnificent!" Professor Clavering said in a soft and awestruck voice. Then he took a few steps backward.

It was pleasant to think he could skip nimbly about, comparatively speaking, observing the snail from all angles, while the snail could only creep toward him at what seemed the rate of one yard in ten seconds. The professor thought to watch the snail for an hour or so, then go back to the *Samantha* and write some notes. He would sleep aboard the boat, take some more photographs tomorrow morning, then start under engine power back to the *Matusas*. He trotted for twenty yards, then turned to watch the snail approach.

The snail travelled with its head lifted three feet above the ground, keeping the professor in the focus of its eyes. It was moving faster. Professor Clavering retreated sooner than he intended, and before he could get another picture.

Now Professor Clavering looked around for a mate of the snail. He was rather glad not to see another snail, but he cautioned himself not to rule out the possibility of a mate. It wouldn't be pleasant to be cornered by two snails, yet the idea excited him. Impossible to think of a situation in which he could not escape from two slow, lumbering creatures like the—the what? *Amygdalus Persica* (his mind stuck on peaches, because of the beautiful color of the shell) *Carnivora*⁵ (perhaps) *Claveringi*. That could be improved upon, the professor thought as he walked backward, watching.

A little grove of trees gave him an idea. If he stood in the grove, the snail could not reach him, and he would also have a close view. The professor took a stand amid twelve or fifteen trees, all about twenty feet high. The snail did not slacken its speed, but began to circle the grove, still watching the professor. Finding no opening big enough between two trees, the snail raised its head higher, fifteen feet high, and began to creep up on the trees. Branches cracked, and one tree snapped.

Professor Clavering ducked and retreated. He had a glimpse of a great belly gliding unhurt over a jagged tree trunk, of a circular mouth two feet across, open and showing the still wider upper band of teeth like shark's teeth, munching automatically up and down. The snail cruised gently down over the tree tops, some of which sprang back into position as the snail's weight left them.

Click! went the professor's camera.

5. The genus comprising carnivores, or meat-eaters. "*Amygdalus Persica*": scientific name for the peach tree.

What a sight that had been! Something like a slow hurdle. He imagined entertaining friends with an account of it, substantiated by the photograph, once he got back to California. Old Professor McIlroy of the biology department had laughed at him for spending seven thousand dollars on an effort he predicted would be futile!

Professor Clavering was tiring, so he cut directly for the *Samantha*. He noticed that the snail veered also in a direction that would intercept him, if they kept on at their steady though different speeds, and the professor chuckled and trotted for a bit. The snail also picked up speed, and the professor remembered the wide, upward rippling of the snail's body as it had hurdled the trees. It would be interesting to see how fast the snail could go on a straight course. Such a test would have to wait for America.

He reached the water and saw his beach a few yards away to his right, but no ship was there. He'd made a mistake, he thought, and his beach was on the other side of the island. Then he caught sight of the *Samantha* half a mile out on the ocean, drifting away.

'Damn!' Professor Clavering said aloud. He'd done something wrong with the anchors. Did he dare try to swim to it? The distance frightened him, and it was growing wider every moment.

A rattle of pebbles behind him made him turn. The snail was hardly twenty feet away.

The professor trotted down toward the beach. There was bound to be some slit on the coast, a cave however small, where he could be out of reach of the snail. He wanted to rest for a while. What really annoyed him now was the prospect of a chilly night without blankets or food. The Matusas natives had been right: there was nothing to eat on Kuwa.

Professor Clavering stopped dead, his shoes sliding on sand and pebbles. Before him, not fifty feet away on the beach, was another snail as big as the one following him, and somewhat lighter in colour. Its tail was in the sea, and its muzzle dripped water as it reared itself to get a look at him.

It was this snail, the professor realized, that had chewed through the hemp ropes and let the boat go free. Was there something about new hemp ropes that appealed to snails? This question he put out of his mind for the nonce. He had a snail before and behind him. The professor trotted on along the shore. The only crevice of shelter he was sure existed was the gully on the other side of the island. He forced himself to walk at a moderate pace for a while, to breathe normally, then he sat down and treated himself to a rest.

The first snail was the first to appear, and as it had lost sight of him, it lifted its head and looked slowly to right and left, though without slackening its progress. The professor sat motionless, bare head lowered, hoping the snail would not see him. But he was not that lucky. The snail saw him and altered its course to a straight line for him. Behind it came the second snail—its wife? its husband?—the professor could not tell and there was no way of telling.

Professor Clavering had to leave his resting place. The weight of his hatchet reminded him that he at least had a weapon. A good scare, he thought, a minor wound might discourage them. He knew they were hungry, that their teeth could tear his flesh more easily than they tore trees, and that alive or dead, he would be eaten by these snails if he permitted it to happen. He drew his hatchet and faced them, conscious that he cut a not

very formidable figure with his slight paunch, his pale, skinny legs, his height of five feet seven, about a third the snails' height, but his brows above his glasses were set with a determination to defend his life.

The first snail reared when it was ten feet away. The professor advanced and swung the hatchet at the projecting mantle on the snail's left side. He had not dared get close enough, his aim was inches short, and the weight of the hatchet pulled the professor off balance. He staggered and fell under the raised muzzle, and had just time to roll himself from under the descending mouth before it touched the ground where he had been. Angry now, he circled the snail and swung a blow at the nacreous shell, which turned the blade. The hatchet took an inch-deep chip, but nothing more. The professor swung again, higher this time and in the center of the shell's posterior, trying for the lung valve beneath, but the valve was still higher, he knew, ten feet from the ground, and once more his hatchet took only a chip. The snail began to turn itself to face him.

The professor then confronted the second snail, rushed at it and swung the hatchet, cutting it in the cheek. The hatchet sank up to its wooden handle, and he had to tug to get it out, and then had to run a few yards, as the snail put on speed and reared its head for a biting attack. Glancing back, the professor saw that no liquid (he had not, of course, expected blood) came from the cut in the snail's cheek, and in fact he couldn't see the cut. And the blow had certainly been no discouragement to the snail's advance.

Professor Clavering began to walk at a sensible pace straight for the snails' lair on the other side of the island. By the time he scrambled down the side of the gully, he was winded and his legs hurt. But he saw to his relief that the gully narrowed to a sharp V. Wedged in that, he would be safe. Professor Clavering started into the V, which had an overhanging top rather like a cave, when he saw that what he had taken for some rounded rocks were moving—at least some of them were. They were baby snails! They were larger than good-sized beach balls. And the professor saw, from the way a couple of them were devouring grass blades, that they were hungry.

A snail's head appeared high on his left. The giant parent snail began to descend the gully. A crepitation,⁶ a pair of antennae against the sky on his right, heralded the arrival of the second snail. He had nowhere to turn except the sea, which was not a bad idea, he thought, as these were land snails. The professor waded out and turned left, walking waist-deep in water. It was slow going, and a snail was coming after him. He got closer to the land and ran in thigh-deep water.

The first snail, the darker one, entered the water boldly and crept along in a depth of several inches, showing signs of being willing to go into deeper water when it got abreast of Professor Clavering. The professor hoped the other snail, maybe the mother, had stayed with the young. But it hadn't. It was following along the land, and accelerating. The professor plunged wildly for the shore where he would be able to move faster.

Now, thank goodness, he saw rocks. Great igneous masses of rocks covered a sloping hill down to the sea. There was bound to be a niche, some place there where he could take shelter. The sun was sinking into the ocean,

6. A crackling sound.

it would be dark soon, and there was no moon, he knew. The professor was thirsty. When he reached the rocks, he flung himself like a corpse into a trough made by four or five scratchy boulders, which caused him to lie in a curve. The rocks rose two feet above his body, and the trough was hardly a foot wide. A snail couldn't, he reasoned, stick its head down here and bite him.

The peachy curves of the snails' shells appeared, and one, the second, drew closer.

'I'll strike it with my hatchet if it comes!' the professor swore to himself. 'I'll cut its face to ribbons with my knife!' He was now reconciled to killing both adults, because he could take back a pair of the young ones, and in fact more easily because they were smaller.

The snail seemed to sniff like a dog, though inaudibly, as its muzzle hovered over the professor's hiding place. Then with majestic calm it came down on the rocks between which the professor lay. Its slimy foot covered the aperture and within seconds had blocked out almost all the light.

Professor Clavering drew his hunting knife in anger and panic, and plunged it several times into the snail's soft flesh. The snail seemed not even to wince. A few seconds later, it stopped moving, though the professor knew that it was not only not dead, as the stabs hadn't touched any vital organs, but that it had fastened itself over his trench in the firmest possible way. No slit of light showed. The professor was only grateful that the irregularity of the rocks must afford a supply of air. Now he pressed frantically with his palms against the snail's body, and felt his hands slip and scrape against rock. The firmness of the snail, his inability to budge it, made him feel slightly sick for a moment.

An hour passed. The professor almost slept, but the experience was more like a prolonged hallucination. He dreamed, or feared, that he was being chewed by twenty thousand pairs of teeth into a heap of mince,⁷ which the two giant snails shared with their offspring. To add to his misery, he was cold and hungry. The snail's body gave no warmth, and was even cool.

Some hours later, the professor awoke and saw stars above him. The snail had departed. It was pitch dark. He stood up cautiously, trying not to make a sound, and stepped out of the crevice. He was free! On a sandy stretch of beach a few yards away, Professor Clavering lay down, pressed against a vertical face of rock. Here he slept the remaining hours until dawn.

He awakened just in time, and perhaps not the dawn but a sixth sense had awakened him. The first snail was coming toward him and was only ten feet away. The professor got up on trembling legs, and trotted inland, up a slope. An idea came to him: if he could push a boulder of, say, five hundred pounds—possible with a lever—onto an adult snail in the gully, and smash the spot below which its lung lay, then he could kill it. Otherwise, he could think of no other means at his disposal that could inflict a fatal injury. His gun might, but the gun was on the *Samantha*. He had already estimated that it might be a week, or never, that help would come from the Matusas. The *Samantha* would not necessarily float back to the Matusas, would not necessarily be seen by any other ship for days, and even if it was seen, would it be apparent she was drifting? And if so, would the spotters make a beeline for the Matusas to

7. Ground food, especially meat.

report it? Not necessarily. The professor bent quickly and licked some dew from a leaf. The snails were twenty yards behind him now.

The trouble is, I'm becoming exhausted, he said to himself.

He was even more tired at noon. Only one snail pursued him, but the professor imagined the other resting or eating a tree top, in order to be fresh later. The professor could trot a hundred yards, find a spot to rest in, but he dared not shut his eyes for long, lest he sleep. And he was definitely weak from lack of food.

So the day passed. His idea of dropping a rock down the gully was thwarted by two factors: the second snail was guarding the gully now, at the top of its V, and there was no such rock as he needed within a hundred yards.

When dusk came, the professor could not find the hill where the igneous rocks were. Both snails had him in their sight now. His watch said a quarter to seven. Professor Clavering took a deep breath and faced the fact that he must make an attempt to kill one or both snails before dark. Almost without thinking, or planning—he was too spent for that—he chopped down a slender tree and hacked off its branches. The leaves of these branches were devoured by the two snails five minutes after the branches had fallen to the ground. The professor dragged his tree several yards inland, and sharpened one end of it with the hatchet. It was too heavy a weapon for one hand to wield, but in two hands, it made a kind of battering ram, or giant spear.

At once, Professor Clavering turned and attacked, running with the spear pointed slightly upward. He aimed for the first snail's mouth, but struck too low, and the tree end penetrated about four inches into the snail's chest—or the area below its face. No vital organ here, except the long, straight esophagus, which in these giant snails would be set deeper than four inches. He had nothing for his trouble but lacerated hands. His spear hung for a few seconds in the snail's flesh, then fell out onto the ground. The professor retreated, pulling his hatchet from his belt. The second snail, coming up abreast of the other, paused to chew off a few inches of the tree stump, then joined its mate in giving attention to Professor Clavering. There was something contemptuous, something absolutely assured, about the snails' slow progress toward him, as if they were thinking, "Escape us a hundred, a thousand times, we shall finally reach you and devour every trace of you."

The professor advanced once more, circled the snail he had just hit with the tree spear, and swung his hatchet at the rear of its shell. Desperately, he attacked the same spot with five or six direct hits, for now he had a plan. His hacking operation had to be halted, because the second snail was coming up behind him. Its snout and an antenna even brushed the professor's legs moistly and staggered him, before he could step out of its way. Two more hatchet blows the professor got in, and then he stopped, because his right arm hurt. He had by no means gone through the shell, but he had no strength for more effort with the hatchet. He went back for his spear. His target was a small one, but he ran toward it with desperate purpose.

The blow landed. It even broke through.

The professor's hands were further torn, but he was oblivious of them. His success made him as joyous as if he had killed both his enemies, as if a rescue ship with food, water, and a bed were even then sailing into Kuwa's beach.

The snail was twisting and rearing up with pain.

Professor Clavering ran forward, lifted the drooping spear and pushed it with all his might farther into the snail, pointing it upward to go as close as possible to the lung. Whether the snail died soon or not, it was hors de combat,⁸ the professor saw. And he himself experienced something like physical collapse an instant after seeing the snail's condition. He was quite incapable of taking on the other snail in the same manner, and the other snail was coming after him. The professor tried to walk in a straight line away from both snails, but he weaved with fatigue and faintness. He looked behind him. The unhurt snail was thirty feet away. The wounded snail faced him, but was motionless, half in and half out of its shell, suffering in silence some agony of asphyxiation. Professor Clavering walked on.

Quite by accident, just as it was growing dark, he came upon his field of rocks. Among them he took shelter for the second time. The snail's snout probed the trench in which he lay, but could not quite reach him. Would it not be better to remain in the trench tomorrow, to hope for rain for water? He fell asleep before he could come to any decision.

Again, when the professor awakened at dawn, the snail had departed. His hands throbbed. Their palms were encrusted with dried blood and sand. He thought it wise to go to the sea and wash them in salt water.

The giant snail lay between him and the sea, and at his approach, the snail very slowly began to creep toward him. Professor Clavering made a wobbling detour and continued on his way toward the water. He dipped his hands and moved them rapidly back and forth, at last lifted water to his face, longed to wet his dry mouth, warned himself that he should not, and yielded anyway, spitting out the water almost at once. Land snails hated salt and could be killed by salt crystals. The professor angrily flung handfuls of water at the snail's face. The snail only lifted its head higher, out of the professor's range. Its form was slender now, and it had, oddly, the grace of a horned gazelle, of some animal of the deer family. The snail lowered its snout, and the professor trudged away, but not quickly enough: the snail came down on his shoulder and the suctorial⁹ mouth clamped.

The professor screamed. *My God*, he thought, as a piece of his shirt, a piece of flesh and possibly bone was torn from his left shoulder, *why was I such an ass as to linger?* The snail's weight pushed him under, but it was shallow here, and he struggled to his feet and walked toward the land. Blood streamed hotly down his side. He could not bear to look at his shoulder to see what had happened, and would not have been surprised if his left arm had dropped off in the next instant. The professor walked on aimlessly in shallow water near the land. He was still going faster than the snail.

Then he lifted his eyes to the empty horizon, and saw a dark spot in the water in the mid-distance. He stopped, wondering if it were real or a trick of his eyes: but now he made out the double body of a catamaran,¹ and he thought he saw Dr. Stead's straw hat. They had come from the Matusas!

"Hello!" The professor was shocked at the hoarseness, the feebleness of his voice. Not a chance that he had been heard.

But with hope now, the professor's strength increased. He headed for a little beach—not his beach, a smaller one—and when he got there he stood

8. "Out of action" because of injury in battle (French).

9. Adapted for sucking.
1. A boat with two hulls.

in its center, his good arm raised, and shouted, “Dr. *Stead!* This way!—On the beach!” He could definitely see Dr. Stead’s hat and four dark heads.

There was no answering shout. Professor Clavering could not tell if they had heard him or not. And the accursed snail was only thirty feet away now! He’d lost his hatchet, he realized. And the camera that had been under water with him was now ruined, and so were the two pictures in it. No matter. He would live.

“*Here!*” he shouted, again lifting his arm.

The natives heard this. Suddenly all heads in the catamaran turned to him.

Dr. Stead pointed to him and gesticulated, and dimly Professor Clavering heard the good doctor urging the boatman to make for the shore. He saw Dr. Stead half stand up in the catamaran.

The natives gave a whoop—at first Professor Clavering thought it a whoop of joy, or of recognition, but almost at once a wild swing of the sail, a splash of a couple of oars, told him that the natives were trying to change their course.

Pebbles crackled. The snail was near. And this of course was what the natives had seen—the giant snail.

“*Please—Here!*” the professor screamed. He plunged again into the water. “*Please!*”

Dr. Stead was trying, that the professor could see. But the natives were rowing, paddling with hands even, and their sail was carrying them obliquely away.

The snail made a splash as it entered the sea. To drown or to be eaten alive? the professor wondered. He was waist-deep when he stumbled, waist-deep but head under when the snail crashed down upon him, and he realized as the thousands of pairs of teeth began to gnaw at his back, that his fate was both to drown and to be chewed to death.

1967, 1970

RICHARD WILBUR

b. 1921

Richard Wilbur was born in New York City and grew up in the country in New Jersey. His father was a painter, and his mother came from a family prominent in journalism. He was educated at Amherst College, where Robert Frost was a frequent guest and teacher, and Wilbur’s remarkable gifts as a prosodist often remind us of the older poet. Of the effects of his college years Wilbur says: “Most American poets of my generation were taught to admire the English metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and such contemporary masters of irony as John Crowe Ransom. We were led by our teachers and by the critics whom we read to feel that the most adequate and convincing poetry is that which accommodates mixed feelings,

clashing ideas, and incongruous images.” Nevertheless, over his long and varied career he has written in a wide range of forms, including the dramatic monologue.

After graduation and service in the infantry in Italy and France (1943–45), Wilbur returned to study for an M.A. at Harvard, with a firm notion of what he expected to get out of poetry. “My first poems were written in answer to the inner and outer disorders of the Second World War and they helped me . . . to take ahold of raw events and convert them, provisionally, into experience.” He reasserted the balance of mind against instinct and violence: “The praiseful, graceful soldier / Shouldn’t be fired by his gun.” The poised lyrics in *The Beautiful Changes* (1947), including the lovely title poem of that volume, and *Ceremony* (1950) also reclaimed the value of pleasure, defined as an interplay of intelligence with sensuous enjoyment. Whether looking at a real French landscape, as in “Grasse: The Olive Trees,” or a French landscape painting, as in “Ceremony,” the point was to show the witty shaping power of the mind in nature.

Wilbur prefers strict stanzaic forms and meters; “limitation makes for power: the strength of the genie comes of his being confined in a bottle.” In individual lines and the structure of an entire poem, his emphasis is on a civilized balancing of perceptions. “A World without Objects Is a Sensible Emptiness” begins with the “tall camels of the spirit” but qualifies our views of lonely spiritual impulses. The poem summons us back to find visionary truth grasped through sensual experience. “All shining things need to be shaped and borne.” Wilbur favors what he has called “a spirituality which is not abstracted, not dissociated and world-renouncing,” as is clear from “Love Calls Us to the Things of This World,” a hymn of praise to clothes hanging on a laundry line (“Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry”). “A good part of my work could, I suppose, be understood as a public quarrel with the aesthetics of Edgar Allan Poe”—presumably with Poe’s notion that poetry provided *indefinite* sensations and aspired to the abstract condition of music.

Wilbur was among the first of the younger postwar poets to adopt a style of living and working different from the masters of an earlier generation—from Eliot, an ironic priestlike modernist who lived as a publisher-poet in England, or William Carlos Williams, a doctor in New Jersey, or Wallace Stevens, a remote insurance executive in Connecticut. Wilbur was a teacher-poet and gave frequent readings. Instead of thinking of himself as an alienated artist, he came to characterize himself as a “poet-citizen,” part of what he judged a widening community of poets addressing themselves to an audience increasingly responsive to poetry. Wilbur’s taste for civilized wit and his metrical skill made him an ideal translator of the seventeenth-century satirical comedies of Molière, *The Misanthrope* (1955) and *Tartuffe* (1963). They are frequently staged, as is the musical version of Voltaire’s *Candide* for which Wilbur was one of the collaborating lyricists. Wilbur received the Pulitzer Prize for his volume *Things of This World* (1956) and served as the second poet laureate of the United States in 1987–88. In 1989 he won his second Pulitzer Prize, for his *New and Collected Poems*. Wilbur’s *Collected Poems, 1943–2004* appeared in 2004.

The Beautiful Changes

One wading a Fall meadow finds on all sides
 The Queen Anne’s Lace lying like lilies
 On water; it glides
 So from the walker, it turns
 Dry grass to a lake, as the slightest shade of you
 Valleys my mind in fabulous blue Lucernes.¹

5

1. Lakes having the quality of Switzerland’s Lake Lucerne, known for its beauty.

The beautiful changes as a forest is changed
By a chameleon's tuning his skin to it;
As a mantis, arranged
On a green leaf, grows 10
Into it, makes the leaf leafier, and proves
Any greenness is deeper than anyone knows.

Your hands hold roses always in a way that says
They are not only yours; the beautiful changes
In such kind ways, 15
Wishing ever to sunder
Things and things' selves for a second finding, to lose
For a moment all that it touches back to wonder.

1947

The Death of a Toad

A toad the power mower caught,
Chewed and clipped of a leg, with a hobbling hop has got
To the garden verge, and sanctuaried him
Under the cineraria leaves, in the shade
Of the ashen heartshaped leaves, in a dim, 5
Low, and a final glade.

The rare original heartsblood goes,
Spends on the earthen hide, in the folds and wizenings, flows
In the gutters of the banked and staring eyes. He lies
As still as if he would return to stone, 10
And soundlessly attending, dies
Toward some deep monotone,

Toward misted and ebullient seas
And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.¹
Day dwindles, drowning, and at length is gone 15
In the wide and antique eyes, which still appear
To watch, across the castrate lawn,
The haggard daylight steer.

1950

"A World without Objects Is a Sensible Emptiness"¹

The tall camels of the spirit
Steer for their deserts, passing the last groves loud

1. Archaic for "empires." "Amphibia" refers to "double life" and animals who live on water or land.

1. From "Meditation 65," by the English Meta-

physical poet Thomas Traherne (c. 1638–1674): "Life without objects is sensible emptiness, and that is a greater misery than death or nothing." ("Sensible" = "palpable to the senses.")

With the sawmill shrill of the locust, to the whole honey of the arid
Sun. They are slow, proud,

And move with a stilted stride 5
To the land of sheer horizon, hunting Traherne's
Sensible emptiness, there where the brain's lantern-slide
Revels in vast returns.

O connoisseurs of thirst,
Beasts of my soul who long to learn to drink 10
Of pure mirage, those prosperous islands are accurst
That shimmer on the brink

Of absence; auras, lustres,
And all shinings need to be shaped and borne. 15
Think of those painted saints, capped by the early masters
With bright, jauntily-worn

Aureate plates, or even
Merry-go-round rings. Turn, O turn
From the fine sleights of the sand, from the long empty oven
Where flames in flamings burn 20

Back to the trees arrayed
In bursts of glare, to the halo-dialing run
Of the country creeks, and the hills' bracken tiaras made
Gold in the sunken sun,

Wisely watch for the sight 25
Of the supernova² burgeoning over the barn,
Lampshine blurred in the stream of beasts, the spirit's right
Oasis, light incarnate.

1950

Love Calls Us to the Things of This World

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple
As false dawn. 5
Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.
Now they are rising together in calm swells

2. A scientific term for an exploding star, here associated with the Star of Bethlehem.

Of halcyon¹ feeling, filling whatever they wear 10
 With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying
 The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving
 And staying like white water; and now of a sudden
 They swoon down into so rapt a quiet 15
 That nobody seems to be there.
 The soul shrinks

From all that it is about to remember,
 From the punctual rape of every blessed day,
 And cries, 20
 “Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,
 Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam
 And clear dances done in the sight of heaven.”

Yet, as the sun acknowledges
 With a warm look the world’s hunks and colors, 25
 The soul descends once more in bitter love
 To accept the waking body, saying now
 In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,

“Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
 Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves; 30
 Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,
 And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
 Of dark habits,
 keeping their difficult balance.”

1956

1. Calm, peaceful. The word originated as the name of a mythological bird anciently fabled to breed at about the time of the winter solstice in a

nest floating on the sea, and then to charm the wind and waves so that the sea became especially calm.

JACK KEROUAC

1922–1969

Like many trailblazing writers, Jack Kerouac led a life filled with contradictions. Regarded as a liberator of prose and champion of idiomatic American expression, he did not start learning English until grade school and did not feel comfortable speaking it until he finished high school (his parents were French Canadian, and French was the family’s language at home in Lowell, Massachusetts; his given name was “Jean-Louis”). Having won a football scholarship to Columbia University, he rejected the athletic crowd to join the literary innovators

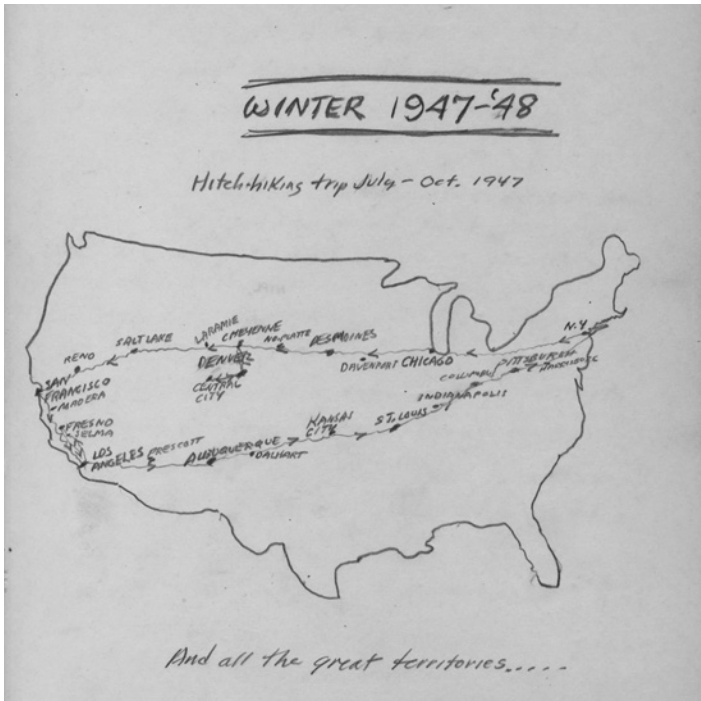
gathering at the college neighborhood's popular West End Bar, among them Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, who would achieve fame as a poet and a novelist, respectively. Not famous himself until the late 1950s, when a wave of interest in the Beat Movement installed him as its unwilling leader, Kerouac rode the crest of the counterculture's growing fascination with Eastern religions, most notably Zen Buddhism, while never rejecting the Catholicism of his childhood. Even adulatory responses to his work risked contradiction. Critics praised his most famous novel, *On the Road* (1957), for its seeming embrace of expansive westward energies reminiscent of America's Manifest Destiny myth, even though the book in fact moves from the West Coast to the East. The final chapter is set in New York City.

Kerouac's ambitions were monumental, but his heavy drinking killed him by age forty-seven. His several marriages, until the last one, ended in annulment, desertion, or divorce. His greatest loyalty as an adult was to his widowed mother, in later years an invalid, for whom he cared until his death. Wartime service in the merchant marine had given Kerouac skills useful during the wanderings that characterized his life; railroad brakeman and forest-fire lookout were among the jobs he took during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Once royalties from *On the Road* could sustain the transient life he preferred, he spent his time visiting friends and writing as inspiration struck. "Home" was a series of addresses in Massachusetts, New York (on Long Island), and Florida, most of them chosen for his mother's convenience.

Kerouac is known for a writing practice he called "spontaneous prose," reminiscent of jazz improvisation in its emphasis on rhythms, inflections, and freewheeling references. A rejection of what he and other Beat writers saw as the overly formal and elite style of the Modernist literary works that then dominated the high-cultural landscape, the practice of spontaneous prose sought to eliminate the gap between thought and word, between experience and voice, between life and art. Asked by his friends Ginsberg and Burroughs in 1953 to explain how he wrote his novel *The Subterraneans* in three days flat, he composed a manifesto called "The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," which he then taped above his desk. (It was published in the *Black Mountain Review* in 1957.) Among its tenets are these: "No time for poetry but exactly what is"; "Remove literary grammatical and syntactical inhibition"; "Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form." He advocated "not 'selectivity' of expression but following free deviation (association) of mind into limitless blow-on-subject seas of thought, swimming in sea of English with no discipline other than rhythms of rhetorical exhalation and expostulated statement, like a fist coming down on a table with each complete utterance, bang!" After his first book, *The Town and the City* (1950), a social novel in a realistic mode, he composed all his novels in the exuberant form of prose he perfected.

"My work comprises one vast book like [Marcel] Proust's except that my remembrances are written on the run instead of afterwards in a sick bed," Kerouac observes at the start of his novel *Big Sur* (1962), comparing his project to the French modernist Proust's seven-volume *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–27). Though Kerouac's canon consists of more than a dozen novels published during his lifetime and others recovered from manuscript and issued after his death, the author had seen them as one grand project, the parts of which he intended to revise, integrate, and present to readers as a single massive narrative. Neither writing nor publishing them in the order in which he had conceived their action, Kerouac did not live long enough to begin his intended synthesis. But he named the project "the Duluoos Legend," from the name of his protagonist in *Big Sur* and other works. Central to the legend is Kerouac's close friendship with legendary counterculture and Beat figure Neal Cassady (fictionalized as Dean Moriarity in *On the Road* and as Cody Pomeray in *Visions of Cody*, 1972). Their relationship had been the motivation for both the author's wanderings and his impulsive, sometimes explosive manner of writing.

On the Road, the first and last chapters of which are reprinted here, was written in 1951, though by then Kerouac had been thinking about writing a road novel for several



Jack Kerouac's hand-drawn map of his travels in the summer and fall of 1947.

years. He composed much of it on a single scroll of typing paper in a three-week rush fueled by wine, coffee, and Benzedrine. In the opening chapter, the Kerouac figure and narrator, Sal Paradise, describes Dean Moriarty's kinetic speech and the foundations of their remarkable friendship. Readers meet "Carlo Marx," based on Allen Ginsberg; "Old Bull Lee" and "Jane," based on William and Jane Burroughs; and "Elmer Hassel," based on Kerouac's friend from his Columbia days, Herbert Huncke. In the book's final chapter, Sal has returned to New York disillusioned after Dean abandoned him in Mexico, where Sal was broke and suffering from a fever. Dean's too-little, too-late show of friendship—traveling cross-country by bus and hitching rides, apparently just to see Sal for a day or two and meet Sal's new girlfriend—confounds Sal. But for Kerouac, Dean's return leads to the book's famous final sentence, honoring Dean as the muse for a new, ecstatic prose.

From On the Road

Part One

I

I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead. With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could

call my life on the road. Before that I'd often dreamed of going West to see the country, always vaguely planning and never taking off. Dean is the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road, when his parents were passing through Salt Lake City in 1926, in a jalopy, on their way to Los Angeles. First reports of him came to me through Chad King, who'd shown me a few letters from him written in a New Mexico reform school. I was tremendously interested in the letters because they so naïvely and sweetly asked Chad to teach him all about Nietzsche¹ and all the wonderful intellectual things that Chad knew. At one point Carlo and I talked about the letters and wondered if we would ever meet the strange Dean Moriarty. This is all far back, when Dean was not the way he is today, when he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery. Then news came that Dean was out of reform school and was coming to New York for the first time; also there was talk that he had just married a girl called Marylou.

One day I was hanging around the campus and Chad and Tim Gray told me Dean was staying in a cold-water pad² in East Harlem, the Spanish Harlem. Dean had arrived the night before, the first time in New York, with his beautiful little sharp chick Marylou; they got off the Greyhound bus at 50th Street and cut around the corner looking for a place to eat and went right in Hector's, and since then Hector's cafeteria has always been a big symbol of New York for Dean. They spent money on beautiful big glazed cakes and creampuffs.

All this time Dean was telling Marylou things like this: "Now, darling, here we are in New York and although I haven't quite told you everything that I was thinking about when we crossed Missouri and especially at the point when we passed the Boonville reformatory which reminded me of my jail problem, it is absolutely necessary now to postpone all those leftover things concerning our personal lovethings and at once begin thinking of specific worklife plans . . ." and so on in the way that he had in those early days.

I went to the cold-water flat with the boys, and Dean came to the door in his shorts. Marylou was jumping off the couch; Dean had dispatched the occupant of the apartment to the kitchen, probably to make coffee, while he preoccupied with his love-problems, for to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on. You saw that in the way he stood bobbing his head, always looking down, nodding, like a young boxer to instructions, to make you think he was listening to every word, throwing in a thousand "Yeses" and "That's rights." My first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry³—trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent—a sideburned hero of the snowy West. In fact he'd just been working on a ranch, Ed Wall's in Colorado, before marrying Marylou and coming East. Marylou was a pretty blonde with immense ringlets of hair like a sea of golden tresses; she sat there on the edge of the couch with her hands hanging in her lap and her smoky blue country eyes fixed in a wide stare because she was in an evil gray New York pad that she'd heard about back West, and waiting like a

1. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher.

2. A cheap apartment with no running hot water.

3. American actor and singer (1907–1998), known for his cowboy roles in popular Westerns.

longbodied emaciated Modigliani⁴ surrealist woman in a serious room. But, outside of being a sweet little girl, she was awfully dumb and capable of doing horrible things. That night we all drank beer and pulled wrists and talked till dawn, and in the morning, while we sat around dumbly smoking butts from ashtrays in the gray light of a gloomy day, Dean got up nervously, paced around, thinking, and decided the thing to do was to have Marylou make breakfast and sweep the floor. “In other words we’ve got to get on the ball, darling, what I’m saying, otherwise it’ll be fluctuating and lack of true knowledge or crystallization of our plans.” Then I went away.

During the following week he confided in Chad King that he absolutely had to learn how to write from him; Chad said I was a writer and he should come to me for advice. Meanwhile Dean had gotten a job in a parking lot, had a fight with Marylou in their Hoboken apartment—God knows why they went there—and she was so mad and so down deep vindictive that she reported to the police some false trumped-up hysterical crazy charge, and Dean had to lam⁵ from Hoboken. So he had no place to live. He came right out to Pater-son, New Jersey, where I was living with my aunt, and one night while I was studying there was a knock on the door, and there was Dean, bowing, shuffling obsequiously in the dark of the hall, and saying, “Hel-lo, you remember me—Dean Moriarty? I’ve come to ask you to show me how to write.”

“And where’s Marylou?” I asked, and Dean said she’d apparently whored a few dollars together and gone back to Denver—“the whore!” So we went out to have a few beers because we couldn’t talk like we wanted to talk in front of my aunt, who sat in the living room reading her paper. She took one look at Dean and decided that he was a madman.

In the bar I told Dean, “Hell, man, I know very well you didn’t come to me only to want to become a writer, and after all what do I really know about it except you’ve got to stick to it with the energy of a benny addict.”⁶ And he said, “Yes, of course, I know exactly what you mean and in fact all those problems have occurred to me, but the thing that I want is the realization of those factors that should one depend on Schopenhauer’s⁷ dichotomy for any inwardly realized . . .” and so on in that way, things I understood not a bit and he himself didn’t. In those days he really didn’t know what he was talking about; that is to say, he was a young jailkid all hung-up on the wonderful possibilities of becoming a real intellectual, and he liked to talk in the tone and using the words, but in a jumbled way, that he had heard from “real intellectuals”—although, mind you, he wasn’t so naïve as that in all other things, and it took him just a few months with Carlo Marx to become completely *in there* with all the terms and jargon. Nonetheless we understood each other on other levels of madness, and I agreed that he could stay at my house till he found a job and furthermore we agreed to go out West sometime. That was the winter of 1947.

One night when Dean ate supper at my house—he already had the parking-lot job in New York—he leaned over my shoulder as I typed rapidly away and said, “Come on man, those girls won’t wait, make it fast.”

4. Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920), modernist Italian painter and sculptor, known for his elongated human forms, lived and worked in Paris after 1906.

5. To escape or live on the run, usually to evade

legal troubles.

6. Benzadrine, a form of amphetamine, typically makes its users hyperactive.

7. Artur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), German Romantic philosopher.

I said, “Hold on just a minute, I’ll be right with you soon as I finish this chapter,” and it was one of the best chapters in the book. Then I dressed and off we flew to New York to meet some girls. As we rode in the bus in the weird phosphorescent void of the Lincoln Tunnel we leaned on each other with fingers waving and yelled and talked excitedly, and I was beginning to get the bug like Dean. He was simply a youth tremendously excited with life, and though he was a con-man, he was only conning because he wanted so much to live and to get involved with people who would otherwise pay no attention to him. He was conning me and I knew it (for room and board and “how-to-write,” etc.), and he knew I knew (this has been the basis of our relationship), but I didn’t care and we got along fine—no pestering, no catering; we tiptoed around each other like heartbreaking new friends. I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me. As far as my work was concerned he said, “Go ahead, everything you do is great.” He watched over my shoulder as I wrote stories, yelling, “Yes! That’s right! Wow! Man!” and “Phew!” and wiped his face with his handkerchief. “Man, wow, there’s so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even *begin* to get it all down and without modified restraints and all hung-up on like literary inhibitions and grammatical fears . . .”

“That’s right, man, now you’re talking.” And a kind of holy lightning I saw flashing from his excitement and his visions, which he described so torrentially that people in buses looked around to see the “overexcited nut.” In the West he’d spent a third of his time in the poolhall, a third in jail, and a third in the public library. They’d seen him rushing eagerly down the winter streets, bareheaded, carrying books to the poolhall, or climbing trees to get into the attics of buddies where he spent days reading or hiding from the law.

We went to New York—I forget what the situation was, two colored girls—there were no girls there; they were supposed to meet him in a diner and didn’t show up. We went to his parking lot where he had a few things to do—change his clothes in the shack in back and spruce up a bit in front of a cracked mirror and so on, and then we took off. And that was the night Dean met Carlo Marx. A tremendous thing happened when Dean met Carlo Marx. Two keen minds that they are, they took to each other at the drop of a hat. Two piercing eyes glanced into two piercing eyes—the holy con-man with the shining mind, and the sorrowful poetic con-man with the dark mind that is Carlo Marx. From that moment on I saw very little of Dean, and I was a little sorry too. Their energies met head-on, I was a lout compared, I couldn’t keep up with them. The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then; it would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American Night. Carlo told him of Old Bull Lee, Elmer Hassel, Jane: Lee in Texas growing weed, Hassel on Riker’s Island, Jane wandering on Times Square in a benzedrine hallucination, with her baby girl in her arms and ending up in Bellevue.⁸ And Dean told Carlo of unknown people in the West like Tommy Snark, the clubfooted poolhall rotation shark and cardplayer and queer saint. He told him of Roy Johnson, Big Ed Dunkel, his boyhood

8. New York City’s Bellevue Hospital Center, America’s oldest public hospital, has a famous psychiatric treatment facility. “Riker’s Island”: island in the East River between Queens and the

Bronx; it is the site of New York City’s main jail complex. “Times Square”: busy hub of Manhattan’s entertainment district.

buddies, his street buddies, his innumerable girls and sex-parties and pornographic pictures, his heroes, heroines, adventures. They rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way they had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank. But then they danced down the streets like dingedodies,⁹ and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!" What did they call such young people in Goethe's¹ Germany? Wanting dearly to learn how to write like Carlo, the first thing you know, Dean was attacking him with a great amorous soul such as only a con-man can have. "Now, Carlo, let *me* speak—here's what *I'm* saying . . ." I didn't see them for about two weeks, during which time they cemented their relationship to fiendish allday-allnight-talk proportions.

Then came spring, the great time of traveling, and everybody in the scattered gang was getting ready to take one trip or another. I was busily at work on my novel and when I came to the halfway mark, after a trip down South with my aunt to visit my brother Rocco, I got ready to travel West for the very first time.

Dean had already left. Carlo and I saw him off at the 34th Street Greyhound station. Upstairs they had a place where you could make pictures for a quarter. Carlo took off his glasses and looked sinister. Dean made a profile shot and looked coyly around. I took a straight picture that made me look like a thirty-year-old Italian who'd kill anybody who said anything against his mother. This picture Carlo and Dean neatly cut down the middle with a razor and saved a half each in their wallets. Dean was wearing a real Western business suit for his big trip back to Denver; he'd finished his first fling in New York. I say fling, but he only worked like a dog in parking lots. The most fantastic parking-lot attendant in the world, he can back a car forty miles an hour into a tight squeeze and stop at the wall, jump out, race among fenders, leap into another car, circle it fifty miles an hour in a narrow space, back swiftly into tight spot, *hump*, snap the car with the emergency so that you see it bounce as he flies out; then clear to the ticket shack, sprinting like a track star, hand a ticket, leap into a newly arrived car before the owner's half out, leap literally under him as he steps out, start the car with the door flapping, and roar off to the next available spot, arc, pop in, brake, out, run; working like that without pause eight hours a night, evening rush hours and after-theater rush hours, in greasy wino pants with a frayed fur-lined jacket and beat² shoes that flap. Now he'd bought a new suit to go back in; blue with pencil stripes, vest and all—eleven dollars on Third Avenue, with a watch and watch chain, and a portable typewriter with which he was going to start writing in a Denver rooming house as soon as he got a job there. We had a farewell meal of franks and beans in a Seventh Avenue Riker's,³ and

9. Kerouac's neologism: a wild, free-spirited person.

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), German Romantic writer of novels, poetry, drama, and memoirs.

2. Worn, beaten-down; Kerouac adopted this

usage of *beat* to describe his postwar generation of disaffected writers, artists, and intellectuals.

3. Popular chain of New York City cafeterias. (The name is unrelated to that of the Riker's Island jail complex.)

then Dean got on the bus that said Chicago and roared off into the night. There went our wrangler. I promised myself to go the same way when spring really bloomed and opened up the land.

And this was really the way that my whole road experience began, and the things that were to come are too fantastic not to tell.

Yes, and it wasn't only because I was a writer and needed new experiences that I wanted to know Dean more, and because my life hanging around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle and was stultified, but because, somehow in spite of our difference in character, he reminded me of some long-lost brother; the sight of his suffering bony face with the long sideburns and his straining muscular sweating neck made me remember my boyhood in those dye-dumps and swim-holes and riversides of Paterson and the Passaic.⁴ His dirty workclothes clung to him so gracefully, as though you couldn't buy a better fit from a custom tailor but only earn it from the Natural Tailor of Natural Joy, as Dean had, in his stresses. And in his excited way of speaking I heard again the voices of old companions and brothers under the bridge, among the motorcycles, along the wash-lined neighborhood and drowsy doorsteps of afternoon where boys played guitars while their older brothers worked in the mills. All my other current friends were "intellectuals"—Chad the Nietzschean anthropologist, Carlo Marx and his nutty surrealist low-voiced serious staring talk, Old Bull Lee and his critical anti-everything drawl—or else they were slinking criminals like Elmer Hassel, with that hip sneer; Jane Lee the same, sprawled on the Oriental cover of her couch, sniffing at the *New Yorker*. But Dean's intelligence was every bit as formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness. And his "criminality" was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he only stole cars for joy rides). Besides, all my New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons, but Dean just raced in society, eager for bread and love; he didn't care one way or the other, "so long's I can get that lil ole gal with that lil sumpin down there tween her legs, boy," and "so long's we can eat, son, y'ear me? I'm hungry, I'm starving, let's eat right now!"—and off we'd rush to eat, whereof, as saith Ecclesiastes,⁵ "It is your portion under the sun."

A western kinsman of the sun, Dean. Although my aunt warned me that he would get me in trouble, I could hear a new call and see a new horizon, and believe it at my young age; and a little bit of trouble or even Dean's eventual rejection of me as a buddy, putting me down, as he would later, on starving sidewalks and sickbeds—what did it matter? I was a young writer and I wanted to take off.

Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me.

4. Paterson is a city in northern New Jersey; the Passaic River runs through the region.

5. One of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible, Ecclesiastes meditates on life's transitory nature.

Part Five

Dean drove from Mexico City and saw Victor again in Gregoria and pushed that old car all the way to Lake Charles, Louisiana, before the rear end finally dropped on the road as he had always known it would. So he wired Inez for airplane fare and flew the rest of the way. When he arrived in New York with the divorce papers in his hands, he and Inez immediately went to Newark and got married; and that night, telling her everything was all right and not to worry, and making logics where there was nothing but inestimable sorrowful sweats, he jumped on a bus and roared off again across the awful continent to San Francisco to rejoin Camille and the two baby girls. So now he was three times married, twice divorced, and living with his second wife.⁶

In the fall I myself started back home from Mexico City and one night just over Laredo border in Dilley, Texas, I was standing on the hot road underneath an arc-lamp with the summer moths smashing into it when I heard the sound of footsteps from the darkness beyond, and lo, a tall old man with flowing white hair came clomping by with a pack on his back, and when he saw me as he passed, he said, "*Go moan for man,*" and clomped on back to his dark. Did this mean that I should at last go on my pilgrimage on foot on the dark roads around America? I struggled and hurried to New York, and one night I was standing in a dark street in Manhattan and called up to the window of a loft where I thought my friends were having a party. But a pretty girl stuck her head out the window and said, "Yes? Who is it?"

"Sal Paradise," I said, and heard his name resound in the sad and empty street.

"Come on up," she called. "I'm making hot chocolate." So I went up and there she was, the girl with the pure and innocent dear eyes that I had always searched for and for so long. We agreed to love each other madly. In the winter we planned to migrate to San Francisco, bringing all our beat furniture and broken belongings with us in a jalopy panel truck. I wrote to Dean and told him. He wrote back a huge letter eighteen thousand words long, all about his young years in Denver, and said he was coming to get me and personally select the old truck himself and drive us home. We had six weeks to save up the money for the truck and began working and counting every cent. And suddenly Dean arrived anyway, five and a half weeks in advance, and nobody had any money to go through with the plan.

I was taking a walk in the middle of the night and came back to my girl to tell her what I thought about during my walk. She stood in the dark little pad with a strange smile. I told her a number of things and suddenly I noticed the hush in the room and looked around and saw a battered book on the radio. I knew it was Dean's high-eternity-in-the-afternoon Proust.⁷ As in a dream I saw him tiptoe in from the dark hall in his stocking feet. He

6. Dean is shuttling between coasts and women. Camille, who lives in San Francisco, is Dean's second wife and mother of his two children; though they are in the process of divorcing, Dean remains attached to her. Inez, who lives in Newark, New Jersey, becomes Dean's third wife. Sal and Dean had last been together in Mexico

City, where Dean had abandoned Sal while Sal was sick.

7. Marcel Proust (1871–1922), French novelist, author of the dreamy, semi-autobiographical seven-volume novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (translated as *Remembrance of Things Past* or *In Search of Lost Time*).

couldn't talk any more. He hopped and laughed, he stuttered and fluttered his hands and said, "Ah—ah—you must listen to hear." We listened, all ears. But he forgot what he wanted to say. "Really listen—ahem. Look, dear Sal—sweet Laura—I've come—I'm gone—but wait—ah yes." And he stared with rocky sorrow into his hands. "Can't talk no more—do you understand that it is—or might be—But listen!" We all listened. He was listening to sounds in the night. "Yes!" he whispered with awe. "But you see—no need to talk any more—and further."

"But why did you come so soon, Dean?"

"Ah," he said, looking at me as if for the first time, "so soon, yes. We—we'll know—that is, I don't know. I came on the railroad pass—caboozes—old hard-bench coaches—Texas—played flute and wooden sweet potato⁸ all the way." He took out his new wooden flute. He played a few squeaky notes on it and jumped up and down in his stocking feet. "See?" he said. "But of course, Sal, I can talk as soon as ever and have many things to say to you in fact with my own little bangtail mind I've been reading and reading this gone⁹ Proust all the way across the country and digging a great number of things I'll never have TIME to tell you about and we STILL haven't talked of Mexico and our parting there in fever—but no need to talk. Absolutely, now, yes?"

"All right, we won't talk." And he started telling the story of what he did in LA on the way over in every possible detail, how he visited a family, had dinner, talked to the father, the sons, the sisters—what they looked like, what they ate, their furnishings, their thoughts, their interests, their very souls; it took him three hours of detailed elucidation, and having concluded this he said, "Ah, but you see what I wanted to REALLY tell you—much later—Arkansas, crossing on train—playing flute—play cards with boys, my dirty deck—won money, blew sweet-potato solo—for sailors. Long long awful trip five days and five nights just to SEE you, Sal."

"What about Camille?"

"Gave permission of course—waiting for me. Camille and I all straight forever-and-ever . . ."

"And Inez?"

"I—I—I want her to come back to Frisco with me live other side of town—don't you think? Don't know why I came." Later he said in a sudden moment of gaping wonder, "Well and yes, of course. I wanted to see your sweet girl and you—glad of you—love you as ever." He stayed in New York three days and hastily made preparations to get back on the train with his railroad passes and again recross the continent, five days and five nights in dusty coaches and hard-bench crummies, and of course we had no money for a truck and couldn't go back with him. With Inez he spent one night explaining and sweating and fighting, and she threw him out. A letter came for him, care of me. I saw it. It was from Camille. "My heart broke when I saw you go across the tracks with your bag. I pray and pray you get back safe. . . . I do want Sal and his friend to come and live on the same street. . . . I know you'll make it but I can't help worrying—now that we've decided everything. . . . Dear Dean, it's the end of the first half of the century. Welcome

8. A kind of ocarina, a hollow wooden wind instrument shaped like a sweet potato.

9. Slang for "great" or "fine."

with love and kisses to spend the other half with us. We all wait for you. [Signed] Camille, Amy, and Little Joanie.” So Dean’s life was settled with his most constant, most embittered, and best-knowing wife Camille, and I thanked God for him.

The last time I saw him it was under sad and strange circumstances. Remi Boncœur had arrived in New York after having gone around the world several times in ships. I wanted him to meet and know Dean. They did meet, but Dean couldn’t talk any more and said nothing, and Remi turned away. Remi had gotten tickets for the Duke Ellington¹ concert at the Metropolitan Opera and insisted Laura and I come with him and his girl. Remi was fat and sad now but still the eager and formal gentleman, and he wanted to do things the *right way*, as he emphasized. So he got his bookie to drive us to the concert in a Cadillac. It was a cold winter night. The Cadillac was parked and ready to go. Dean stood outside the windows with his bag, ready to go to Penn Station and on across the land.

“Good-by, Dean,” I said. “I sure wish I didn’t have to go to the concert.”

“D’you think I can ride to Fortieth Street with you?” he whispered. “Want to be with you as much as possible, m’boy, and besides it’s so durned cold in this here New Yawk . . .” I whispered to Remi. No, he wouldn’t have it, he liked me but he didn’t like my idiot friends. I wasn’t going to start all over again ruining his planned evenings as I had done at Alfred’s in San Francisco in 1947 with Roland Major.

“Absolutely out of the question, Sal!” Poor Remi, he had a special necktie made for this evening; on it was painted a replica of the concert tickets, and the names Sal and Laura and Remi and Vicki, the girl, together with a series of sad jokes and some of his favorite sayings such as “You can’t teach the old maestro a new tune.”

So Dean couldn’t ride uptown with us and the only thing I could do was sit in the back of the Cadillac and wave at him. The bookie at the wheel also wanted nothing to do with Dean. Dean, ragged in a motheaten overcoat he brought specially for the freezing temperatures of the East, walked off alone, and the last I saw of him he rounded the corner of Seventh Avenue, eyes on the street ahead, and bent to it again. Poor little Laura, my baby, to whom I’d told everything about Dean, began almost to cry.

“Oh, we shouldn’t let him go like this. What’ll we do?”

Old Dean’s gone, I thought, and out loud I said, “He’ll be all right.” And off we went to the sad and disinclined concert for which I had no stomach whatever and all the time I was thinking of Dean and how he got back on the train and rode over three thousand miles over that awful land and never knew why he had come anyway, except to see me.

So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars’ll be out, and don’t you know that God is

1. Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899–1974), leading American jazz composer, pianist, and band leader.

Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty.

1957

KURT VONNEGUT

1922–2007

As a counterculture hero of the turbulent 1960s and a best-selling author among readers of popular fiction in the four decades afterward, Kurt Vonnegut was at once more traditional and more complicated than his enthusiasts might believe. To a generation of young people who felt their country had forsaken them, he offered examples of common decency and cultural idealism as basic as a grade-school civics lesson. For a broader readership who felt conventional fiction was inadequate to express the way their lives had been disrupted by the era's radical social changes, he wrote novels structured in more pertinently contemporary terms, bereft of such unifying devices as conclusive characterization and chronologically organized plots. His most famous novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), takes as its organizing incident the Allied firebombing of the German city of Dresden late in World War II, as witnessed by the American prisoner of war Billy Pilgrim. Yet despite its origins in the 1940s, the manner of its telling is much more akin to the writing of Americans of the 1960s, who were coming to terms with the Vietnam War. Like the war in Southeast Asia, *Slaughterhouse-Five* abjured the certainties of an identifiable beginning, middle, and end; both presented a mesmerizing sense of confused, apparently directionless present, with no sense of completion or conclusion. Together, this World War II novel and the later war during which it was written speak for the unsettling nature of the American 1960s; the assassination of presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy figures in the book's concluding chapter. Yet this unconventional structure is paired with the language of American vernacular (much in the manner of Vonnegut's hero, Mark Twain). Where more elevated speech would obscure his point, this author speaks plainly and simply, drawing his words, phrases, and inflections from the American middle class and its common experiences of life.

Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, to a family prominent in business and the arts. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the sensitive, well-read teenager saw his mother's inherited wealth dissipate, his father's career as an architect crumble for lack of work, and his extended family scatter around the country in search of new careers. Service as a World War II infantryman taught him not only how politics reshapes the world but also how science (Vonnegut had been studying biochemistry in college before enlistment) could be used to create effects as destructive to humankind as the Dresden firestorm, which Vonnegut himself endured as a prisoner of war. Working as a publicist for the General Electric Corporation after the war, the author learned firsthand about the strategies for managing the lifestyles



At left, **Dresden in 1945**, following the Allied firebombing. At right, **Senator Robert F. Kennedy** lies mortally wounded by an assassin's bullet on June 4, 1968. These two events bookend Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

of millions. In short, before writing his first story in 1950 Kurt Vonnegut had shared many formative experiences of his generation. Reworking those experiences would yield fictions and a public stance that helped his fellow Americans adjust to a reinvented postwar world.

Vonnegut's advice, like Mark Twain's, would be unapologetically lowbrow. Part of each writer's appeal is that he pokes holes in the pseudo-sophistications of supposedly more serious approaches. In a 1982 lecture, "Fates Worse Than Death," Vonnegut noted that the self-consciously highbrow *New Yorker* magazine had never published his work. Indeed, he wrote his short stories of the 1950s for the immensely more general readership of *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. These stories (collected in 1968 as *Welcome to the Monkey House*) deflate the pretensions of wealth, expertise, and influence with demonstrations of middle-class values and common sense. At the same time Vonnegut was writing novels in formats borrowed from popular subgenres: science fiction dystopia for *Player Piano* (1952), space opera for *The Sirens of Titan* (1959), spy thriller for *Mother Night* (1961), scientific apocalypse and intrigue for *Cat's Cradle* (1963), and prince-and-the-pauper critique of riches for *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965). Each work challenges the technical and thematic conventions of the novel, yet each time within the familiarity of a popular form.

In the middle 1960s, with his family-magazine markets having gone out of business, Vonnegut began writing essays for popular magazines such as *Esquire*, *McCall's*, and the *Ladies Home Journal*. Reviewing *The Random House Dictionary* for the *New York Times Book Review* (October 30, 1966), he contrasted the assignment's linguistic complexity with his own shuffling, hands-in-pockets approach; as lexicographers debated theories like prescriptive versus descriptive standards of language, Vonnegut could just shrug and say that the former, "as nearly as I could tell, was like an honest cop, while descriptive was like a boozed-up war buddy from Mobile, Alabama." In other essays the author's similarly self-effacing humor undermined positions that used intellectual pretensions to support their points. To the overenthusiasts for science fiction who try to include writers like Leo Tolstoy and Franz Kafka in their

brotherhood, he objects that “it is as though I were to claim everybody of note belonged fundamentally to Delta Upsilon, my own lodge, incidentally, whether he knew it or not. Kafka would have made a desperately unhappy D.U.”

With the success of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and the widespread appreciation of his essays and personal appearances, Kurt Vonnegut became much more publically outspoken about major issues. From his new home in New York City (where he moved in 1970 following nearly two decades of writing in obscurity on Cape Cod, Massachusetts) the author wrote novels such as *Galápagos* (1985), *Hocus Pocus* (1990), and *Timequake* (1997), works treating such topics as the evolution and possible devolution of humankind and America’s economic and social role at the end of the twentieth century. Vonnegut’s challenges to the conventions of traditional fiction make him as innovative as any of the literary disruptionists of the postmodern era, yet he trusts in the honesty of plain and accurate statement. His last book was a series of sociopolitical essays collected as *A Man without a Country* (2005). Two years before his death, the author found himself once more embraced by a new young audience seeking an explanation for their era’s woes. Hence his advice in “How to Write with Style,” from his 1981 collection, *Palm Sunday*: “I myself find that I trust my writing most, and others seem to trust it most, when I sound like a person from Indianapolis, which I am.”

From Slaughterhouse-Five

Chapter 1¹

All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true. One guy I knew really *was* shot in Dresden² for taking a teapot that wasn’t his. Another guy I knew really *did* threaten to have his personal enemies killed by hired gunmen after the war. And so on. I’ve changed all the names.

I really *did* go back to Dresden with Guggenheim money³ (God love it) in 1967. It looked a lot like Dayton, Ohio, more open spaces than Dayton has. There must be tons of human bone meal in the ground.

I went back there with an old war buddy, Bernard V. O’Hare, and we made friends with a cab driver, who took us to the slaughterhouse where we had been locked up at night as prisoners of war. His name was Gerhard Müller. He told us that he was a prisoner of the Americans for a while. We asked him how it was to live under Communism, and he said that it was terrible at first, because everybody had to work so hard, and because there wasn’t much shelter or food or clothing. But things were much better now. He had a pleasant little apartment, and his daughter was getting an excellent education. His mother was incinerated in the Dresden fire-storm. So it goes.

He sent O’Hare a postcard at Christmastime, and here is what it said:

1. In conventional terms an autobiographical preface. Vonnegut’s innovation is to format it as indistinguishable from the eight chapters of fictive narrative that follow (in which he identifies himself as a participant three times), before a final chapter that in conventional terms would

be an autobiographical epilogue.

2. City in southeastern Germany destroyed in a bombing raid by the British Royal Air Force on the night of February 13–14, 1945.

3. Fellowship funded by the Guggenheim Foundation, New York City.

“I wish you and your family also as to your friend Merry Christmas and a happy New Year and I hope that we’ll meet again in a world of peace and freedom in the taxi cab if the accident will.”

I like that very much: “If the accident will.”

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time. When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big.

But not many words about Dresden came from my mind then—not enough of them to make a book, anyway. And not many words come now, either, when I have become an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls,⁴ with his sons full grown.

I think of how useless the Dresden part of my memory has been, and yet how tempting Dresden has been to write about, and I am reminded of the famous limerick:

There was a young man from Stamboul,
Who soliloquized thus to his tool:
“You took all my wealth
And you ruined my health,
And now you won’t *pee*, you old fool.”

And I’m reminded, too, of the song that goes:

My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin,
I work in a lumbermill there.
The people I meet when I walk down the street,

They say, “What’s your name?”
And I say,
“My name is Yon Yonson,
I work in Wisconsin . . .”

And so on to infinity.

Over the years, people I’ve met have often asked me what I’m working on, and I’ve usually replied that the main thing was a book about Dresden.

I said that to Harrison Starr,⁵ the movie-maker, one time, and he raised his eyebrows and inquired, “Is it an anti-war book?”

“Yes,” I said. “I guess.”

“You know what I say to people when I hear they’re writing anti-war books?”

“No. What *do* you say, Harrison Starr?”

“I say, ‘Why don’t you write an anti-*glacier* book instead?’”

What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they were as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that, too.

4. Popular brand of cigarettes.

5. American filmmaker (b. 1937).

And, even if wars didn't keep coming like glaciers, there would still be plain old death.

When I was somewhat younger, working on my famous Dresden book, I asked an old war buddy named Bernard V. O'Hare if I could come to see him. He was a district attorney in Pennsylvania. I was a writer on Cape Cod.⁶ We had been privates in the war, infantry scouts. We had never expected to make any money after the war, but we were doing quite well.

I had the Bell Telephone Company find him for me. They are wonderful that way. I have this disease late at night sometimes, involving alcohol and the telephone. I get drunk, and I drive my wife away with a breath like mustard gas and roses. And then, speaking gravely and elegantly into the telephone, I ask the telephone operators to connect me with this friend or that one, from whom I have not heard in years.

I got O'Hare on the line in this way. He is short and I am tall. We were Mutt and Jeff in the war. We were captured together in the war. I told him who I was on the telephone. He had no trouble believing it. He was up. He was reading. Everybody else in his house was asleep.

"Listen—" I said, "I'm writing this book about Dresden. I'd like some help remembering stuff. I wonder if I could come down and see you, and we could drink and talk and remember."

He was unenthusiastic. He said he couldn't remember much. He told me, though, to come ahead.

"I think the climax of the book will be the execution of poor old Edgar Derby," I said. "The irony is *so* great. A whole city gets burned down, and thousands and thousands of people are killed. And then this one American foot soldier is arrested in the ruins for taking a teapot. And he's given a regular trial, and then he's shot by a firing squad."

"Um," said O'Hare.

"Don't you think that's really where the climax should come?"

"I don't know anything about it," he said. "That's your trade, not mine."

As a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations, I had outlined the Dresden story many times. The best outline I ever made, or anyway the prettiest one, was on the back of a roll of wallpaper.

I used my daughter's crayons, a different color for each main character. One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and the other end was the end, and then there was all that middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line, and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. And so on. The destruction of Dresden was represented by a vertical band of orange cross-hatching, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out the other side.

The end, where all the lines stopped, was a beetfield on the Elbe, outside of Halle.⁷ The rain was coming down. The war in Europe had been over for a

6. Peninsula in eastern Massachusetts; Vonnegut's residence from 1952 to 1970.

7. The River Elbe flows through Germany; Halle

is a German city located on the River Saale, a tributary of the Elbe.

couple of weeks. We were formed in ranks, with Russian soldiers guarding us—Englishmen, Americans, Dutchmen, Belgians, Frenchmen, Canadians, South Africans, New Zealanders, Australians, thousands of us about to stop being prisoners of war.

And on the other side of the field were thousands of Russians and Poles and Yugoslavians and so on guarded by American soldiers. An exchange was made there in the rain—one for one. O'Hare and I climbed into the back of an American truck with a lot of others. O'Hare didn't have any souvenirs. Almost everybody else did. I had a ceremonial Luftwaffe⁸ saber, still do. The rabid little American I call Paul Lazzaro in this book had about a quart of diamonds and emeralds and rubies and so on. He had taken these from dead people in the cellars of Dresden. So it goes.

An idiotic Englishman, who had lost all his teeth somewhere, had his souvenir in a canvas bag. The bag was resting on my insteps. He would peek into the bag every now and then, and he would roll his eyes and swivel his scrawny neck, trying to catch people looking covetously at his bag. And he would bounce the bag on my insteps.

I thought this bouncing was accidental. But I was mistaken. He *had* to show somebody what was in the bag, and he had decided he could trust me. He caught my eye, winked, opened the bag. There was a plaster model of the Eiffel Tower in there. It was painted gold. It had a clock in it.

"There's a smashin' thing," he said.

And we were flown to a rest camp in France, where we were fed chocolate malted milkshakes and other rich foods until we were all covered with baby fat. Then we were sent home, and I married a pretty girl who was covered with baby fat, too.

And we had babies.

And they're all grown up now, and I'm an old fart with his memories and his Pall Malls. My name is Yon Yonson, I work in Wisconsin, I work in a lumbermill there.

Sometimes I try to call up old girl friends on the telephone late at night, after my wife has gone to bed. "Operator, I wonder if you could give me the number of a Mrs. So-and-So. I think she lives at such-and-such."

"I'm sorry, sir. There is no such listing."

"Thanks, Operator. Thanks just the same."

And I let the dog out, or I let him in, and we talk some. I let him know I like him, and he lets me know he likes me. He doesn't mind the smell of mustard gas and roses.

"You're all right, Sandy," I'll say to the dog. "You know that, Sandy? You're O.K."

Sometimes I'll turn on the radio and listen to a talk program from Boston or New York. I can't stand recorded music if I've been drinking a good deal.

Sooner or later I go to bed, and my wife asks me what time it is. She always has to know the time. Sometimes I don't know, and I say, "Search *me*."

I think about my education sometimes. I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the Depart-

8. German Air Force.

ment of Anthropology. At that time, they were teaching that there was absolutely no difference between anybody. They may be teaching that still.

Another thing they taught was that nobody was ridiculous or bad or disgusting. Shortly before my father died, he said to me, "You know—you never wrote a story with a villain in it."

I told him that was one of the things I learned in college after the war.

While I was studying to be an anthropologist, I was also working as a police reporter for the famous Chicago City News Bureau for twenty-eight dollars a week. One time they switched me from the night shift to the day shift, so I worked sixteen hours straight. We were supported by all the newspapers in town, and the AP and the UP⁹ and all that. And we would cover the courts and the police stations and the Fire Department and the Coast Guard out on Lake Michigan and all that. We were connected to the institutions that supported us by means of pneumatic tubes which ran under the streets of Chicago.

Reporters would telephone in stories to writers wearing headphones, and the writers would stencil the stories on mimeograph sheets. The stories were mimeographed and stuffed into the brass and velvet cartridges which the pneumatic tubes ate. The very toughest reporters and writers were women who had taken over the jobs of men who'd gone to war.

And the first story I covered I had to dictate over the telephone to one of those beastly girls. It was about a young veteran who had taken a job running an old-fashioned elevator in an office building. The elevator door on the first floor was ornamental iron lace. Iron ivy snaked in and out of the holes. There was an iron twig with two iron lovebirds perched upon it.

This veteran decided to take his car into the basement, and he closed the door and started down, but his wedding ring was caught in all the ornaments. So he was hoisted into the air and the floor of the car went down, dropped out from under him, and the top of the car squashed him. So it goes.

So I phoned this in, and the woman who was going to cut the stencil asked me, "What did his wife say?"

"She doesn't know yet," I said. "It just happened."

"Call her up and get a statement."

"What?"

"Tell her you're Captain Finn of the Police Department. Say you have some sad news. Give her the news, and see what she says."

So I did. She said about what you would expect her to say. There was a baby. And so on.

When I got back to the office, the woman writer asked me, just for her own information, what the squashed guy had looked like when he was squashed.

I told her.

"Did it bother you?" she said. She was eating a Three Musketeers Candy Bar.

"Heck no, Nancy," I said. "I've seen lots worse than that in the war."

Even then I was supposedly writing a book about Dresden. It wasn't a famous air raid back then in America. Not many Americans knew how much worse

9. Associated Press and United Press, rival wire news services subscribed to by various newspapers.

it had been than Hiroshima,¹ for instance. I didn't know that, either. There hadn't been much publicity.

I happened to tell a University of Chicago professor at a cocktail party about the raid as I had seen it, about the book I would write. He was a member of a thing called The Committee on Social Thought.² And he told me about the concentration camps, and about how the Germans had made soap and candles out of the fat of dead Jews and so on.

All I could say was, "I know, I know. I *know*."

World War Two had certainly made everybody very tough. And I became a public relations man for General Electric in Schenectady, New York, and a volunteer fireman in the village of Alplaus, where I bought my first home. My boss there was one of the toughest guys I ever hope to meet. He had been a lieutenant colonel in public relations in Baltimore. While I was in Schenectady he joined the Dutch Reformed Church, which is a very tough church, indeed.

He used to ask me sneeringly sometimes why I hadn't been an officer, as though I'd done something wrong.

My wife and I had lost our baby fat. Those were our scrawny years. We had a lot of scrawny veterans and their scrawny wives for friends. The nicest veterans in Schenectady, I thought, the kindest and funniest ones, the ones who hated war the most, were the ones who'd really fought.

I wrote the Air Force back then, asking for details about the raid on Dresden, who ordered it, how many planes did it, why they did it, what desirable results there had been and so on. I was answered by a man who, like myself, was in public relations. He said that he was sorry, but that the information was top secret still.

I read the letter out loud to my wife, and I said, "Secret? My God—from *whom*?"

We were United World Federalists back then. I don't know what we are now. Telephoners, I guess. We telephone a lot—or *I* do, anyway, late at night.

A couple of weeks after I telephoned my old war buddy, Bernard V. O'Hare, I really *did* go to see him. That must have been in 1964 or so—whatever the last year was for the New York World's Fair.³ *Eheu, fugaces labuntur anni*.⁴ My name is Yon Yonson. There was a young man from Stamboul.

I took two little girls with me, my daughter, Nanny, and her best friend, Allison Mitchell. They had never been off Cape Cod before. When we saw a river, we had to stop so they could stand by it and think about it for a while. They had never seen water in that long and narrow, unsalted form before. The river was the Hudson. There were carp in there and we saw them. They were as big as atomic submarines.

1. City in southwestern Japan destroyed on August 6, 1945, in the first atomic bombing, by the United States Army Air Force.

2. Prestigious interdisciplinary committee that includes the University of Chicago's most eminent professors.

3. The 1964 World's Fair was held at Flushing

Meadows, Queens, New York City, from April 22, 1964, to October 18, 1964, and again from April 21, 1965, to October 17, 1965.

4. Alas, the fleeting years are slipping by (Latin); from Ode 2.14 by the Roman poet Horace (65–8 B.C.E.).

We saw waterfalls, too, streams jumping off cliffs into the valley of the Delaware. There were lots of things to stop and see—and then it was time to go, always time to go. The little girls were wearing white party dresses and black party shoes, so strangers would know at once how nice they were. “Time to go, girls,” I’d say. And we would go.

And the sun went down, and we had supper in an Italian place, and then I knocked on the front door of the beautiful stone house of Bernard V. O’Hare. I was carrying a bottle of Irish whiskey like a dinner bell.

I met his nice wife, Mary, to whom I dedicate this book. I dedicate it to Gerhard Müller, the Dresden taxi driver, too. Mary O’Hare is a trained nurse, which is a lovely thing for a woman to be.

Mary admired the two little girls I’d brought, mixed them in with her own children, sent them all upstairs to play games and watch television. It was only after the children were gone that I sensed that Mary didn’t like me or didn’t like *something* about the night. She was polite but chilly.

“It’s a nice cozy house you have here,” I said, and it really was.

“I’ve fixed up a place where you can talk and not be bothered,” she said.

“Good,” I said, and I imagined two leather chairs near a fire in a paneled room, where two old soldiers could drink and talk. But she took us into the kitchen. She had put two straight-backed chairs at a kitchen table with a white porcelain top. That table top was screaming with reflected light from a two-hundred-watt bulb overhead. Mary had prepared an operating room. She put only one glass on it, which was for me. She explained that O’Hare couldn’t drink the hard stuff since the war.

So we sat down. O’Hare was embarrassed, but he wouldn’t tell me what was wrong. I couldn’t imagine what it was about me that could burn up Mary so. I was a family man. I’d been married only once. I wasn’t a drunk. I hadn’t done her husband any dirt in the war.

She fixed herself a Coca-Cola, made a lot of noise banging the ice-cube tray in the stainless steel sink. Then she went into another part of the house. But she wouldn’t sit still. She was moving all over the house, opening and shutting doors, even moving furniture around to work off anger.

I asked O’Hare what I’d said or done to make her act that way.

“It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t worry about it. It doesn’t have anything to do with you.” That was kind of him. He was lying. It had everything to do with me.

So we tried to ignore Mary and remember the war. I took a couple of belts of the booze I’d brought. We would chuckle or grin sometimes, as though war stories were coming back, but neither one of us could remember anything good. O’Hare remembered one guy who got into a lot of wine in Dresden, before it was bombed, and we had to take him home in a wheelbarrow. It wasn’t much to write a book about. I remembered two Russian soldiers who had looted a clock factory. They had a horse-drawn wagon full of clocks. They were happy and drunk. They were smoking huge cigarettes they had rolled in newspaper.

That was about *it* for memories, and Mary was still making noise. She finally came out in the kitchen again for another Coke. She took another tray of ice cubes from the refrigerator, banged it in the sink, even though there was already plenty of ice out.

Then she turned to me, let me see how angry she was, and that the anger was for me. She had been talking to herself, so what she said was a fragment of a much larger conversation. “You were just *babies* then!” she said.

“What?” I said.

“You were just babies in the war—like the ones upstairs!”

I nodded that this was true. We *had* been foolish virgins in the war, right at the end of childhood.

“But you’re not going to write it that way, are you.” This wasn’t a question. It was an accusation.

“I—I don’t know,” I said.

“Well, *I* know,” she said. “You’ll pretend you were men instead of babies, and you’ll be played in the movies by Frank Sinatra and John Wayne or some of those other glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men. And war will look just wonderful, so we’ll have a lot more of them. And they’ll be fought by babies like the babies upstairs.”

So then I understood. It was war that made her so angry. She didn’t want her babies or anybody else’s babies killed in wars. And she thought wars were partly encouraged by books and movies.

So I held up my right hand and I made her a promise: “Mary,” I said, “I don’t think this book of mine is ever going to be finished. I must have written five thousand pages by now, and thrown them all away. If I ever do finish it, though, I give you my word of honor: there won’t be a part for Frank Sinatra or John Wayne.

“I tell you what,” I said, “I’ll call it ‘The Children’s Crusade.’”

She was my friend after that.

O’Hare and I gave up on remembering, went into the living room, talked about other things. We became curious about the real Children’s Crusade, so O’Hare looked it up in a book he had, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, by Charles Mackay, LL.D.⁵ It was first published in London in 1841.

Mackay had a low opinion of *all* Crusades. The Children’s Crusade struck him as only slightly more sordid than the ten Crusades for grown-ups. O’Hare read this handsome passage out loud:

History in her solemn page informs us that the crusaders were but ignorant and savage men, that their motives were those of bigotry unmitigated, and that their pathway was one of blood and tears. Romance, on the other hand, dilates upon their piety and heroism, and portrays, in her most glowing and impassioned hues, their virtue and magnanimity, the imperishable honor they acquired for themselves, and the great services they rendered to Christianity.

And then O’Hare read this: *Now what was the grand result of all these struggles? Europe expended millions of her treasures, and the blood of two million of her people; and a handful of quarrelsome knights retained possession of Palestine for about one hundred years!*

Mackay told us that the Children’s Crusade started in 1213, when two monks got the idea of raising armies of children in Germany and France,

5. British poet (1814–1889), journalist, and editor (most famously of the *Glasgow Argus* from 1844 to 1848).

and selling them in North Africa as slaves. Thirty thousand children volunteered, thinking they were going to Palestine. *They were no doubt idle and deserted children who generally swarm in great cities, nurtured on vice and daring*, said Mackay, *and ready for anything*.

Pope Innocent the Third⁶ thought they were going to Palestine, too, and he was thrilled. “These children are awake while we are asleep!” he said.

Most of the children were shipped out of Marseilles,⁷ and about half of them drowned in shipwrecks. The other half got to North Africa where they were sold.

Through a misunderstanding, some children reported for duty at Genoa,⁸ where no slave ships were waiting. They were fed and sheltered and questioned kindly by good people there—then given a little money and a lot of advice and sent back home.

“Hooray for the good people of Genoa,” said Mary O’Hare.

I slept that night in one of the children’s bedrooms. O’Hare had put a book for me on the bedside table. It was *Dresden, History, Stage and Gallery*, by Mary Endell.⁹ It was published in 1908, and its introduction began:

It is hoped that this little book will make itself useful. It attempts to give to an English-reading public a bird’s-eye view of how Dresden came to look as it does, architecturally; of how it expanded musically, through the genius of a few men, to its present bloom; and it calls attention to certain permanent landmarks in art that make its Gallery the resort of those seeking lasting impressions.

I read some history further on:

Now, in 1760, Dresden underwent siege by the Prussians.¹ On the fifteenth of July began the cannonade. The Picture-Gallery took fire. Many of the paintings had been transported to the Königstein,² but some were seriously injured by splinters of bombshells,—notably Francia’s “Baptism of Christ.”³ Furthermore, the stately Kreuzkirche⁴ tower, from which the enemy’s movements had been watched day and night, stood in flames. It later succumbed. In sturdy contrast with the pitiful fate of the Kreuzkirche, stood the Frauenkirche,⁵ from the curves of whose stone dome the Prussian bombs rebounded like rain. Friedrich⁶ was obliged finally to give up the siege, because he learned of the fall of Glatz,⁷ the critical point of his new conquests. “We must be off to Silesia, so that we do not lose everything.”

The devastation of Dresden was boundless. When Goethe⁸ as a young student visited the city, he still found sad ruins: “Von der Kuppel der Frauenkirche sah ich diese leidigen Trümmer zwischen die schöne städtische Ordnung hineingesät, da rühmte mir der Küster die Kunst des Baumeisters, welcher Kirche und Kuppel auf einen so unerwünschten Fall schon eingerichtet und

6. Born Lotario dei Conti di Segni (c. 1160–1216); as Pope Innocent III, he organized the Fourth Crusade (which included the Children’s Crusade) in order to capture Muslim-controlled Jerusalem for Christendom.

7. Seaport in southern France.

8. Seaport in northwest Italy.

9. Dates and nationality unknown; writer of the introduction to this book, by the German illustrator Fritz August Gottfried Endell (1873–1955).

1. The Seven Years’ War (1756–63), in which England and Prussia defeated Austria, France, Russia, Sweden, and Saxony.

2. Fortress overlooking the town of the same name, on the Elbe’s left bank.

3. Painting (1509) by the Italian artist Francesco Raibolini (c. 1450–1517).

4. Church of the Cross (German).

5. Church of Our Lady (German).

6. Frederick II (1712–1786), known as the Great, ruler of Prussia (1740–86).

7. German name for the Polish city Klodzko in Lower Silesia, the southwestern region of today’s Poland.

8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), German poet and dramatist.

bombenfest erbaut hatte. Der gute Sakristan deutete mir alsdann auf Ruinen nach allen Seiten und sagte bedenklich lakonisch: Das hat der Feind gethan!”⁹

The two little girls and I crossed the Delaware River where George Washington had crossed it,¹ the next morning. We went to the New York World’s Fair, saw what the past had been like, according to the Ford Motor Car Company and Walt Disney, saw what the future would be like, according to General Motors.

And I asked myself about the present: how wide it was, how deep it was, how much was mine to keep.

I taught creative writing in the famous Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa² for a couple of years after that. I got into some perfectly beautiful trouble, got out of it again. I taught in the afternoons. In the mornings I wrote. I was not to be disturbed. I was working on my famous book about Dresden.

And somewhere in there a nice man named Seymour Lawrence³ gave me a three-book contract, and I said, “O.K., the first of the three will be my famous book about Dresden.”

The friends of Seymour Lawrence call him “Sam.” And I say to Sam now: “Sam—here’s the book.”

It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds.

And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like “*Poo-tee-weet?*”

I have told my sons that they are not under any circumstances to take part in massacres, and that the news of massacres of enemies is not to fill them with satisfaction or glee.

I have also told them not to work for companies which make massacre machinery, and to express contempt for people who think we need machinery like that.

As I’ve said: I recently went back to Dresden with my friend O’Hare. We had a million laughs in Hamburg and West Berlin and East Berlin and Vienna and Salzburg and Helsinki, and in Leningrad, too. It was very good for me, because I saw a lot of authentic backgrounds for made-up stories which I will write later on. One of them will be “Russian Baroque” and another will

9. From the dome of the Church of Our Lady I saw those sad ruins strewn amidst the city’s lovely orderliness; at that point the sacristan praised the skill of the architect, who had seen to it that church and dome would withstand bombing should such an unfortunate situation occur. Then the good sacristan pointed out ruins in all directions and said in a pensive and laconic way: “The enemy did this!” (German).

1. Commanding the Continental Army during the American Revolution, George Washington

(1732–1799) crossed the Delaware River with his troops on December 25, 1776, an event depicted by the German-born American artist Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze (1816–1868) in his painting *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851).

2. Creative writing program founded in 1936; the Famous Writers School of Greenwich, Connecticut, was a mail-order school in the 1960s.

3. American publisher (1926–1994) whose imprint was with the Delacorte Press.

be “No Kissing” and another will be “Dollar Bar” and another will be “If the Accident Will,” and so on.

And so on.

There was a Lufthansa⁴ plane that was supposed to fly from Philadelphia to Boston to Frankfurt. O’Hare was supposed to get on in Philadelphia and I was supposed to get on in Boston, and off we’d go. But Boston was socked in, so the plane flew straight to Frankfurt from Philadelphia. And I became a non-person in the Boston fog, and Lufthansa put me in a limousine with some other non-persons and sent us to a motel for a non-night.

The time would not pass. Somebody was playing with the clocks, and not only with the electric clocks, but the wind-up kind, too. The second hand on my watch would twitch once, and a year would pass, and then it would twitch again.

There was nothing I could do about it. As an Earthling, I had to believe whatever clocks said—and calendars.

I had two books with me, which I’d meant to read on the plane. One was *Words for the Wind*, by Theodore Roethke,⁵ and this is what I found in there:

*I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.*⁶

My other book was Erika Ostrovsky’s *Céline and His Vision*.⁷ Céline was a brave French soldier in the First World War—until his skull was cracked. After that he couldn’t sleep, and there were noises in his head. He became a doctor, and he treated poor people in the daytime, and he wrote grotesque novels all night. No art is possible without a dance with death, he wrote.

The truth is death, he wrote. *I’ve fought nicely against it as long as I could . . . danced with it, festooned it, waltzed it around . . . decorated it with streamers, titillated it . . .*

Time obsessed him. Miss Ostrovsky reminded me of the amazing scene in *Death on the Installment Plan*⁸ where Céline wants to stop the bustling of a street crowd. He screams on paper, *Make them stop . . . don’t let them move anymore at all . . . There, make them freeze . . . once and for all! . . . So that they won’t disappear anymore!*

I looked through the Gideon Bible in my motel room⁹ for tales of great destruction. *The sun was risen upon the Earth when Lot entered into Zo-ar*, I read. *Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of Heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.*

4. German national airline.

5. A 1957 collection by the American poet (1908–1963).

6. From Roethke’s 1953 poem “The Waking” (see p. 40).

7. A 1967 study, by the Austrian-born American critic (b. c. 1927) of modern French literature, of Louis-Ferdinand Destouches (1894–1961), French

novelist writing under the pen name Louis-Ferdinand Céline.

8. Published in 1936.

9. The Gideons are a Christian traveling men’s association established in 1899 and active since 1908 in publishing Bibles and placing them in all hotel and motel rooms.

So it goes.

Those were vile people in both those cities, as is well known. The world was better off without them.

And Lot's wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she *did* look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human.

So she was turned to a pillar of salt. So it goes.

People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to do it anymore. I've finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun. This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt. It begins like this:

Listen:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.

It ends like this:

Poo-tee-weet?

1969

GRACE PALEY

1922–2007

“**A** Conversation with My Father” is not Grace Paley’s only story about a daughter’s visit with an elderly, terminally ill father. Like other repeated situations in her work, such visits enable Paley to explore nontraditional matters through traditional means, such as dialogue. Unlike her contemporaries whose concern with fiction making overshadows the situations their stories would otherwise convey, Paley directs her imaginative explanations to realistic events, in which larger social and moral issues reinforce her literary innovations. Her ability to adapt nontraditional techniques into realistic short stories makes her accessible to a readership otherwise unfriendly to the aesthetic solipsism of self-exploratory fiction (or “meta-fiction” as it has come to be called).

That Paley’s protagonist talks with her father rather than simply writing about him indicates an important characteristic: in such narratives the author wishes not to present a lecture (though figures in her stories sometimes give them) but rather to achieve an understanding through dialogue. This dialectic quality is evident in the stories in her first collection, *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), some of which draw on situations first encountered when adapting to marriage and family life in the difficult circumstances of an army camp. By the time of *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974) Paley had developed her most noteworthy theme, that of women (often single mothers) building satisfactory relationships with the world around them by talking with each other (and sometimes to themselves). The title story from this second collection also shows Paley expanding her language to include an almost poetic phraseology whose facility with metaphors and similes makes much of her narrative action happen directly on the page. Here a father, the same father, is recalled as a child first seeing the American flag, then as a young immigrant taking

advantage of what that symbol represents: “Under its protection and working like a horse, he’d read Dickens, gone to medical school, and shot like a surface-to-air missile right into the middle class.” By making a comparison to current military technology erupt from the sentence’s quaint, almost century-old references, Paley startles her reader and employs a kind of alternative narrative action.

Grace Paley was born in New York City, the child of Russian Jewish immigrants from Ukraine. She attended Hunter College, but graduated from the Merchants and Bankers Business and Secretarial School. Married during college, she had two children and was later divorced, not remarrying until 1972. During the 1950s she became an activist for social issues, first working to close Washington Square (in her Greenwich Village neighborhood) to traffic, later protesting the Vietnam War; in 1978 she was arrested on the White House lawn in a demonstration against nuclear weapons. The success of *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* drew the attention of other writers to her, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s she was a regular participant on literary panels with innovative fictionalists such as Donald Barthelme and William H. Gass. Her third collection, *Later the Same Day* (1985), continued her method of using metafictional techniques for writing otherwise realistic short stories. In the front matter of *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, where a disclaimer about correspondences between fact and fiction would customarily appear, she posted this warning: “Everyone in this book is imagined into life except the father. No matter what story he has to live in, he’s my father, I. Goodside, M.D., artist, and storyteller.”

Paley also published several volumes of poetry; like her short stories, Paley’s poems are marked by their humor, observations of life, and humanity of voice. “Here” is a late, lovely example of her gifts as a poet. In addition, Paley wrote direct social commentary. Especially noteworthy was her essay in the September 1975 issue of *Ms. magazine*, “Other People’s Children,” objecting to the massive and hurried evacuation of South Vietnamese children during the Vietnam War’s last days on the grounds that mothers’ rights and interests were grossly violated.

The text below is from *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974).

A Conversation with My Father

My father is eighty-six years old and in bed. His heart, that bloody motor, is equally old and will not do certain jobs any more. It still floods his head with brainy light. But it won’t let his legs carry the weight of his body around the house. Despite my metaphors, his muscle failure is not due to his old heart, he says, but to a potassium shortage. Sitting on one pillow, leaning on three, he offers last-minute advice and makes a request.

“I would like you to write a simple story just once more,” he says, “the kind de Maupassant wrote, or Chekhov,¹ the kind you used to write. Just recognizable people and then write down what happened to them next.”

I say, “Yes, why not? That’s possible.” I want to please him, though I don’t remember writing that way. I *would* like to try to tell such a story, if he means the kind that begins: “There was a woman . . .” followed by plot, the absolute line between two points which I’ve always despised. Not for literary reasons, but because it takes all hope away. Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life.

1. Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), Russian dramatist and story writer, whose characters often discuss moral nuances at length. Guy de Maupassant

(1850–1893), French author of well-made sentimental stories and novels.

Finally I thought of a story that had been happening for a couple of years right across the street. I wrote it down, then read it aloud. "Pa," I said, "how about this? Do you mean something like this?"

Once in my time there was a woman and she had a son. They lived nicely, in a small apartment in Manhattan. This boy at about fifteen became a junkie, which is not unusual in our neighborhood. In order to maintain her close friendship with him, she became a junkie too. She said it was part of the youth culture, with which she felt very much at home. After a while, for a number of reasons, the boy gave it all up and left the city and his mother in disgust. Hopeless and alone, she grieved. We all visit her.

"O.K., Pa, that's it," I said, "an unadorned and miserable tale."

"But that's not what I mean," my father said. "You misunderstood me on purpose. You know there's a lot more to it. You know that. You left everything out. Turgenev² wouldn't do that. Chekhov wouldn't do that. There are in fact Russian writers you never heard of, you don't have an inkling of, as good as anyone, who can write a plain ordinary story, who would not leave out what you have left out. I object not to facts but to people sitting in trees talking senselessly, voices from who knows where . . ."

"Forget that one, Pa, what have I left out now? In this one?"

"Her looks, for instance."

"Oh. Quite handsome, I think. Yes."

"Her hair?"

"Dark, with heavy braids, as though she were a girl or a foreigner."

"What were her parents like, her stock? That she became such a person. It's interesting, you know."

"From out of town. Professional people. The first to be divorced in their country. How's that? Enough?" I asked.

"With you, it's all a joke," he said. "What about the boy's father? Why didn't you mention him? Who was he? Or was the boy born out of wedlock?"

"Yes," I said. "He was born out of wedlock."

"For God's sake, doesn't anyone in your stories get married? Doesn't anyone have the time to run down to City Hall before they jump into bed?"

"No," I said. "In real life, yes. But in my stories, no."

"Why do you answer me like that?"

"Oh, Pa, this is a simple story about a smart woman who came to N.Y.C. full of interest love trust excitement very up to date, and about her son, what a hard time she had in this world. Married or not, it's of small consequence."

"It is of great consequence," he said.

"O.K.," I said.

"O.K. O.K. yourself," he said, "but listen. I believe you that she's good-looking, but I don't think she was so smart."

"That's true," I said. "Actually that's the trouble with stories. People start out fantastic. You think they are extraordinary, but it turns out as the work goes along, they're just average with a good education. Sometimes the other

2. Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883), Russian novelist noted for his tragic vision.

way around, the person's a kind of dumb innocent, but he outwits you and you can't even think of an ending good enough."

"What do you do then?" he asked. He had been a doctor for a couple of decades and then an artist for a couple of decades and he's still interested in details, craft, technique.

"Well, you just have to let the story lie around till some agreement can be reached between you and the stubborn hero."

"Aren't you talking silly, now?" he asked. "Start again," he said. "It so happens I'm not going out this evening. Tell the story again. See what you can do this time."

"O.K.," I said. "But it's not a five-minute job." Second attempt:

Once, across the street from us, there was a fine handsome woman, our neighbor. She had a son whom she loved because she'd known him since birth (in helpless chubby infancy, and in the wrestling, hugging ages, seven to ten, as well as earlier and later). This boy, when he fell into the fist of adolescence, became a junkie. He was not a hopeless one. He was in fact hopeful, an ideologue and successful converter. With his busy brilliance, he wrote persuasive articles for his high-school newspaper. Seeking a wider audience, using important connections, he drummed into Lower Manhattan newsstand distribution a periodical called *Oh! Golden Horse!*³

In order to keep him from feeling guilty (because guilt is the stony heart of nine tenths of all clinically diagnosed cancers in America today, she said), and because she had always believed in giving bad habits room at home where one could keep an eye on them, she too became a junkie. Her kitchen was famous for a while—a center for intellectual addicts who knew what they were doing. A few felt artistic like Coleridge and others were scientific and revolutionary like Leary.⁴ Although she was often high herself, certain good mothering reflexes remained, and she saw to it that there was lots of orange juice around and honey and milk and vitamin pills. However, she never cooked anything but chili, and that no more than once a week. She explained, when we talked to her, seriously, with neighborly concern, that it was her part in the youth culture and she would rather be with the young, it was an honor, than with her own generation.

One week, while nodding through an Antonioni film,⁵ this boy was severely jabbed by the elbow of a stern and proselytizing girl, sitting beside him. She offered immediate apricots and nuts for his sugar level, spoke to him sharply, and took him home.

She had heard of him and his work and she herself published, edited, and wrote a competitive journal called *Man Does Live By Bread Alone*. In the organic heat of her continuous presence he could not help but become interested once more in his muscles, his arteries, and nerve

3. "Horse" is slang for heroin.

4. Timothy Leary (1920–1996), American psychologist who in the 1960s encouraged experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), English poet who

wrote "Kubla Khan" under the influence of opium.
5. Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–2007), Italian filmmaker known for his intellectual style. The boy could be "nodding" in response to the film or the heroin.

connections. In fact he began to love them, treasure them, praise them with funny little songs in *Man Does Live* . . .

*the fingers of my flesh transcend
my transcendental soul
the tightness in my shoulders end
my teeth have made me whole*

To the mouth of his head (that glory of will and determination) he brought hard apples, nuts, wheat germ, and soybean oil. He said to his old friends, from now on, I guess I'll keep my wits about me. I'm going on the natch. He said he was about to begin a spiritual deep-breathing journey. How about you too, Mom? he asked kindly.

His conversion was so radiant, splendid, that neighborhood kids his age began to say that he had never been a real addict at all, only a journalist along for the smell of the story. The mother tried several times to give up what had become without her son and his friends a lonely habit. This effort only brought it to supportable levels. The boy and his girl took their electronic mimeograph and moved to the bushy edge of another borough. They were very strict. They said they would not see her again until she had been off drugs for sixty days.

At home alone in the evening, weeping, the mother read and reread the seven issues of *Oh! Golden Horse!* They seemed to her as truthful as ever. We often crossed the street to visit and console. But if we mentioned any of our children who were at college or in the hospital or dropouts at home, she would cry out, My baby! My baby! and burst into terrible, face-scarring, time-consuming tears. The End.

First my father was silent, then he said, "Number One: You have a nice sense of humor. Number Two: I see you can't tell a plain story. So don't waste time." Then he said sadly, "Number Three: I suppose that means she was alone, she was left like that, his mother. Alone. Probably sick?"

I said, "Yes."

"Poor woman. Poor girl, to be born in a time of fools to live among fools. The end. The end. You were right to put that down. The end."

I didn't want to argue, but I had to say, "Well, it is not necessarily the end, Pa."

"Yes," he said, "what a tragedy. The end of a person."

"No, Pa," I begged him. "It doesn't have to be. She's only about forty. She could be a hundred different things in this world as time goes on. A teacher or a social worker. An ex-junkie! Sometimes it's better than having a master's in education."

"Jokes," he said. "As a writer that's your main trouble. You don't want to recognize it. Tragedy! Plain tragedy! Historical tragedy! No hope. The end."

"Oh, Pa," I said. "She could change."

"In your own life, too, you have to look it in the face."

He took a couple of nitroglycerin. "Turn to five," he said, pointing to the dial on the oxygen tank. He inserted the tubes into his nostrils and breathed deep. He closed his eyes and said, "No."

I had promised the family to always let him have the last word when arguing, but in this case I had a different responsibility. That woman lives across the street. She's my knowledge and my invention. I'm sorry for her. I'm not going to leave her there in that house crying. (Actually neither would Life, which unlike me has no pity.)

Therefore: She did change. Of course her son never came home again. But right now, she's the receptionist in a storefront community clinic in the East Village.⁶ Most of the customers are young people, some old friends. The head doctor has said to her, "If we only had three people in this clinic with your experiences . . ."

"The doctor said that?" My father took the oxygen tubes out of his nostrils and said, "Jokes. Jokes again."

"No, Pa, it could really happen that way, it's a funny world nowadays."

"No," he said. "Truth first. She will slide back. A person must have character. She does not."

"No, Pa," I said. "That's it. She's got a job. Forget it. She's in that storefront working."

"How long will it be?" he asked. "Tragedy! You too. When will you look it in the face?"

1974

Here

Here I am in the garden laughing
an old woman with heavy breasts
and a nicely mapped face

how did this happen
well that's who I wanted to be 5

at last a woman
in the old style sitting
stout thighs apart under
a big skirt grandchild sliding
on off my lap a pleasant 10
summer perspiration

that's my old man across the yard
he's talking to the meter reader¹
he's telling him the world's sad story
how electricity is oil or uranium 15
and so forth I tell my grandson

6. Immigrant neighborhood east of Greenwich Village in lower Manhattan that in the 1960s became home to an antiestablishment youth counterculture.

1. A utilities worker who reads electric, gas, water, or steam consumption meters and records the volume used.

run over to your grandpa ask him
 to sit beside me for a minute I
 am suddenly exhausted by my desire
 to kiss his sweet explaining lips

20

2000

JAMES DICKEY

1923–1997

James Dickey was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and grew up in one of its suburbs, where he was a high school football star and a self-professed “wild motorcycle rider.” After a year (1942) at Clemson College in South Carolina, he enlisted in the army air force. As a young man he had admired the English Romantic poet Byron, largely for what he symbolized: bold, masculine swagger and a love of martial and sexual adventure. During off-hours from combat missions in the South Pacific, Dickey began to frequent wartime libraries, where he read writers like Herman Melville and James Agee and explored anthologies of modern poetry. After the war, at Vanderbilt University and through the encouragement of one of his professors, Dickey began seriously writing poetry.

His first published poem appeared in *Sewanee Review* while he was still a college senior; his first book of verse, *Into the Stone*, appeared in 1960. From that time Dickey consistently regarded poetry as the center of his career, although he was at different periods an advertising man for Coca-Cola in New York and Atlanta, a college teacher, a training officer for pilots during the Korean War, a best-selling novelist (*Deliverance*, 1970), and a screenwriter (adapting *Deliverance* for Hollywood).

Dickey’s work examines the heroic and sometimes excessive figure of the self in moments of crisis or danger. It shows a desire to ascend beyond the human world, to resist the downward pull of mortality in ways that may remind us of the modern American poet Hart Crane. In the title poem of his volume *Drowning with Others* (1962), for example, the speaker imagines the moment when a man feels “my own wingblades spring,” and finds himself “rising and singing / With my last breath,” free of the “down-soaring dead.” *Helmets* (1964) includes a powerful group of war poems in which Dickey struggles for a vision that will allow him to transcend death. In other earlier work he often explores the instinctual and unconscious aspect of experience and sometimes identifies with totemic animals, as in “The Heaven of Animals,” where he envisions a world in which “Their instincts wholly bloom / And they rise. / The soft eyes open.”

In Dickey’s earlier poems the speaker was primarily an observer, describing as if from outside these states of animal and instinctual grace. The poet tended to write in short lines—three accents or beats per line. With *Buckdancer’s Choice* (1965) Dickey became interested in longer “split lines,” which he used from then on. The line of verse is splintered into phrases, each group of words separated from the next by spaces designed to take the place of punctuation. The purpose is to approximate the way the mind “associates in bursts of words, in jumps.” Instead of being spoken by a distanced observer, the poem is placed within the mind of someone caught in a moment of crisis or excitement.

One of his most central later poems written in the longer line is “Falling,” with its rendering of the consciousness of a stewardess who falls from an airplane into space. Like the earlier “Drowning with Others,” this poem confirms the importance in Dickey’s work of flight, that figure for the self’s transcendence of mortality. In “Falling” he gives us the woman’s “superhuman act” as she drifts above the tiny human world and possesses, for those moments, a godlike vision. Yet even as Dickey’s poem suspends the moment of falling, it admits the pull of gravity that brings the woman closer and closer to the ground and to her death. “Falling” expresses Dickey’s enduring interest in danger and in the immortal longings of the titanic self.

Dickey’s interest in violence and power as subjects is suggested by the apocalyptic title of his 1970 volume *The Eye Beaters, Blood, Victory, Madness, Buckhead and Mercy*, and many of his later poems are designed to administer shocks to the reader’s system. Dickey enjoyed cutting a flamboyant public figure with a reputation for hard drinking and fast motorcycles. He also enjoyed being a publicist for the life of the poet, as if he were a latter-day Byron, sometimes situating himself in a paradoxical cross between serious literary criticism and advertisements for himself. He published the series *Self-Interviews* as well as a penetrating collection of reviews of other poets, *Babel to Byzantium* (1968). In 1966–68 he was consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress, the position later known as poet laureate of the United States.

Drowning with Others

There are moments a man turns from us
Whom we have all known until now.
Upgathered, we watch him grow,
Unshipping his shoulder bones

Like human, everyday wings 5
That he has not ever used,
Releasing his hair from his brain,
A kingfisher’s crest, confused

By the God-tilted light of Heaven.
His deep, window-watching smile 10
Comes closely upon us in waves,
And spreads, and now we are

At last within it, dancing.
Slowly we turn and shine
Upon what is holding us, 15
As under our feet he soars,

Struck dumb as the angel of Eden,¹
In wide, eye-opening rings.
Yet the hand on my shoulder fears
To feel my own wingblades spring, 20

1. Probably the cherub who guards the entrance to the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve have been banished (Genesis 3.24).

To feel me sink slowly away
 In my hair turned loose like a thought
 Of a fisherbird dying in flight.
 If I opened my arms, I could hear

Every shell in the sea find the word 25
 It has tried to put into my mouth.
 Broad flight would become of my dancing,
 And I would obsess the whole sea,

But I keep rising and singing
 With my last breath. Upon my back, 30
 With his hand on my unborn wing,
 A man rests easy as sunlight

Who has kept himself free of the forms
 Of the deaf, down-soaring dead,
 And me laid out and alive 35
 For nothing at all, in his arms.

1962

The Heaven of Animals

Here they are. The soft eyes open.
 If they have lived in a wood
 It is a wood.
 If they have lived on plains
 It is grass rolling 5
 Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,
 Anyway, beyond their knowing.
 Their instincts wholly bloom
 And they rise. 10
 The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,
 Outdoing, desperately
 Outdoing what is required:
 The richest wood, 15
 The deepest field.

For some of these,
 It could not be the place
 It is, without blood.
 These hunt, as they have done, 20
 But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.
 They stalk more silently,

And crouch on the limbs of trees,
 And their descent 25
 Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years
 In a sovereign floating of joy.
 And those that are hunted
 Know this as their life, 30
 Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge
 Of what is in glory above them,
 And to feel no fear,
 But acceptance, compliance. 35
 Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle's center,
 They tremble, they walk
 Under the tree,
 They fall, they are torn, 40
 They rise, they walk again.

1962

Falling

"A 29-year-old stewardess fell . . . to her death tonight when she was swept through an emergency door that suddenly sprang open. . . . The body . . . was found . . . three hours after the accident."

—*New York Times*

The states when they black out and lie there rolling when they turn
 To something transcontinental move by drawing moonlight out of the
 great
 One-sided stone hung off the starboard wingtip some sleeper next to
 An engine is groaning for coffee and there is faintly coming in
 Somewhere the vast beast-whistle of space. In the galley with its racks 5
 Of trays she rummages for a blanket and moves in her slim tailored
 Uniform to pin it over the cry at the top of the door. As though she blew

The door down with a silent blast from her lungs frozen she is black
 Out finding herself with the plane nowhere and her body taking by the
 throat
 The undying cry of the void falling living beginning to be
 something 10
 That no one has ever been and lived through screaming without enough air
 Still neat lipsticked stockings girdled by regulation her hat
 Still on her arms and legs in no world and yet spaced also strangely
 With utter placid rightness on thin air taking her time she holds it
 In many places and now, still thousands of feet from her death she seems 15
 To slow she develops interest she turns in her maneuverable body

To watch it. She is hung high up in the overwhelming middle of things in
 her
 Self in low body-whistling wrapped intensely in all her dark dance-
 weight
 Coming down from a marvelous leap with the delaying, dumfounding
 ease
 Of a dream of being drawn like endless moonlight to the harvest soil 20
 Of a central state of one's country with a great gradual warmth coming
 Over her floating finding more and more breath in what she has been
 using
 For breath as the levels become more human seeing clouds placed
 honestly
 Below her left and right riding slowly toward them she clasps it all
 To her and can hang her hands and feet in it in peculiar ways and 25
 Her eyes opened wide by wind, can open her mouth as wide wider and
 suck
 All the heat from the cornfields can go down on her back with a feeling
 Of stupendous pillows stacked under her and can turn turn as to
 someone
 In bed smile, understood in darkness can go away slant slide
 Off tumbling into the emblem of a bird with its wings half-spread 30
 Or whirl madly on herself in endless gymnastics in the growing
 warmth
 Of wheatfields rising toward the harvest moon. There is time to live
 In superhuman health seeing mortal unreachable lights far down seeing
 An ultimate highway with one late priceless car probing it arriving
 In a square town and off her starboard arm the glitter of water catches 35
 The moon by its own shaken side scaled, roaming silver My God it is
 good
 And evil lying in one after another of all the positions for love
 Making dancing sleeping and now cloud wisps at her no
 Raincoat no matter all small towns brokenly brighter from inside
 Cloud she walks over them like rain bursts out to behold a Greyhound 40
 Bus shooting light through its sides it is the signal to go straight
 Down like a glorious diver then feet first her skirt stripped beautifully
 Up her face in fear-scented cloths her legs deliriously bare then
 Arms out she slow-rolls over steadies out waits for something great
 To take control of her trembles near feathers planes head-down 45
 The quick movements of bird-necks turning her head gold eyes the
 insight-
 eyesight of owls blazing into the hencoops a taste for chicken
 overwhelming
 Her the long-range vision of hawks enlarging all human lights of cars
 Freight trains looped bridges enlarging the moon racing slowly
 Through all the curves of a river all the darks of the midwest blazing 50
 From above. A rabbit in a bush turns white the smothering chickens
 Huddle for over them there is still time for something to live
 With the streaming half-idea of a long stoop a hurtling a fall
 That is controlled that plummets as it wills turns gravity
 Into a new condition, showing its other side like a moon shining 55
 New Powers there is still time to live on a breath made of nothing
 But the whole night time for her to remember to arrange her skirt

Like a diagram of a bat tightly it guides her she has this flying-skin
 Made of garments and there are also those sky-divers on TV sailing
 In sunlight smiling under their goggles swapping batons back and
 forth 60

And He who jumped without a chute and was handed one by a diving
 Buddy. She looks for her grinning companion white teeth nowhere
 She is screaming singing hymns her thin human wings spread out
 From her neat shoulders the air beast-crooning to her warbling
 And she can no longer behold the huge partial form of the world now 65
 She is watching her country lose its evoked master shape watching it lose
 And gain get back its houses and peoples watching it bring up
 Its local lights single homes lamps on barn roofs if she fell
 Into water she might live like a diver cleaving perfect plunge

Into another heavy silver unbreathable slowing saving 70
 Element: there is water there is time to perfect all the fine
 Points of diving feet together toes pointed hands shaped right
 To insert her into water like a needle to come out healthily dripping
 And be handed a Coca-Cola there they are there are the waters
 Of life the moon packed and coiled in a reservoir so let me begin 75
To plane across the night air of Kansas opening my eyes superhumanly
Bright to the damned moon opening the natural wings of my jacket
By Don Loper¹ moving like a hunting owl toward the glitter of water
One cannot just fall just tumble screaming all that time one must use
 It she is now through with all through all clouds damp hair 80
 Straightened the last wisp of fog pulled apart on her face like wool
 revealing

New darks new progressions of headlights along dirt roads from chaos

And night a gradual warming a new-made, inevitable world of one's
 own

Country a great stone of light in its waiting waters hold hold out
 For water: who knows when what correct young woman must take up her
 body 85

And fly and head for the moon-crazed inner eye of midwest imprisoned
 Water stored up for her for years the arms of her jacket slipping
 Air up her sleeves to go all over her? What final things can be said
 Of one who starts out sheerly in her body in the high middle of night
 Air to track down water like a rabbit where it lies like life itself 90
 Off to the right in Kansas? She goes toward the blazing-bare lake
 Her skirts neat her hands and face warmed more and more by the air
 Rising from pastures of beans and under her under chenille bedspreads
 The farm girls are feeling the goddess in them struggle and rise brooding
 On the scratch-shining posts of the bed dreaming of female signs 95
 Of the moon male blood like iron of what is really said by the moan
 Of airliners passing over them at dead of midwest midnight passing
 Over brush fires burning out in silence on little hills and will wake
 To see the woman they should be struggling on the roof-tree to become
 Stars: for her the ground is closer water is nearer she passes 100

1. Hollywood costume and clothing designer (1906–1972).

It then banks turns her sleeves fluttering differently as she rolls
 Out to face the east, where the sun shall come up from wheatfields she
 must

Do something with water fly to it fall in it drink it rise
 From it but there is none left upon earth the clouds have drunk it back
 The plants have sucked it down there are standing toward her only 105
 The common fields of death she comes back from flying to falling
 Returns to a powerful cry the silent scream with which she blew down
 The coupled door of the airliner nearly nearly losing hold
 Of what she has done remembers remembers the shape at the heart
 Of cloud fashionably swirling remembers she still has time to die 110
 Beyond explanation. Let her now take off her hat in summer air the
 coutour

Of cornfields and have enough time to kick off her one remaining
 Shoe with the toes of the other foot to unhook her stockings
 With calm fingers, noting how fatally easy it is to undress in midair
 Near death when the body will assume without effort any position 115
 Except the one that will sustain it enable it to rise live
 Not die nine farms hover close widen eight of them separate, leaving
 One in the middle then the fields of that farm do the same there is no
 Way to back off from her chosen ground but she sheds the jacket
 With its silver sad impotent wings sheds the bat's guiding tailpiece 120
 Of her skirt the lightning-charged clinging of her blouse the intimate
 Inner flying-garment of her slip in which she rides like the holy ghost
 Of a virgin sheds the long windsocks of her stockings absurd
 Brassiere then feels the girdle required by regulations squirming
 Off her: no longer monobuttocked she feels the girdle flutter shake 125
 In her hand and float upward her clothes rising off her ascending
 Into cloud and fights away from her head the last sharp dangerous shoe
 Like a dumb bird and now will drop in SOON now will drop

In like this the greatest thing that ever came to Kansas down from all
 Heights all levels of American breath layered in the lungs from the
 frail 130

Chill of space to the loam where extinction slumbers in corn tassels thickly
 And breathes like rich farmers counting: will come among them after
 Her last superhuman act the last slow careful passing of her hands
 All over her unharmed body desired by every sleeper in his dream:
 Boys finding for the first time their loins filled with heart's blood 135
 Widowed farmers whose hands float under light covers to find themselves
 Arisen at sunrise the splendid position of blood unearthly drawn
 Toward clouds all feel something pass over them as she passes
 Her palms over her long legs her small breasts and deeply between
 Her thighs her hair shot loose from all pins streaming in the wind 140
 Of her body let her come openly trying at the last second to land
 On her back This is it THIS

All those who find her impressed
 In the soft loam gone down driven well into the image of her body
 The furrows for miles flowing in upon her where she lies very deep 145
 In her mortal outline in the earth as it is in cloud can tell nothing
 But that she is there inexplicable unquestionable and remember
 That something broke in them as well and began to live and die more

When they walked for no reason into their fields to where the whole earth
 Caught her interrupted her maiden flight told her how to lie she
 cannot

150

Turn go away cannot move cannot slide off it and assume another
 Position no sky-diver with any grin could save her hold her in his arms
 Plummet with her unfold above her his wedding silks she can no longer
 Mark the rain with whirling women that take the place of a dead wife
 Or the goddess in Norwegian farm girls or all the back-breaking whores 155
 Of Wichita. All the known air above her is not giving up quite one
 Breath it is all gone and yet not dead not anywhere else
 Quite lying still in the field on her back sensing the smells
 Of incessant growth try to lift her a little sight left in the corner
 Of one eye fading seeing something wave lies believing 160
 That she could have made it at the best part of her brief goddess
 State to water gone in headfirst come out smiling invulnerable
 Girl in a bathing-suit ad but she is lying like a sunbather at the last
 Of moonlight half-buried in her impact on the earth not far
 From a railroad trestle a water tank she could see if she could 165
 Raise her head from her modest hole with her clothes beginning
 To come down all over Kansas into bushes on the dewy sixth green
 Of a golf course one shoe her girdle coming down fantastically
 On a clothesline, where it belongs her blouse on a lightning rod:

Lies in the fields in *this* field on her broken back as though on 170
 A cloud she cannot drop through while farmers sleepwalk without
 Their women from houses a walk like falling toward the far waters
 Of life in moonlight toward the dreamed eternal meaning of their farms
 Toward the flowering of the harvest in their hands that tragic cost
 Feels herself go go toward go outward breathes at last fully 175
 Not and tries less once tries tries AH, GOD—

Postmodern Manifestos

The manifesto speaks in the voice of the true believer. But as the selections in this cluster show, manifestos do not always take themselves completely seriously even while—or we might say, especially *because*—they seek to overturn ideas that many hold dear. Whether these are prevailing ideas about art and what it should do, about people and how they might relate to each other, or about the very essence of a human being, sometimes the would-be reformer has to make fun first, just to loosen things up. Ranging, then, from the earnest to the jokey, and always driven by the energy of change, the genre of the literary manifesto is itself a literary form. All the examples of the genre here are written by literary artists experienced in the craft of writing and, for the dramatists, in the craft of creating performances.

In the twentieth century, the manifesto was an especially popular form in the early years (the 1910s and '20s) and in the 1960s and '70s. At each moment, writers felt that the forms of art had become, for one reason or another, constraining. Despite this feeling of constraint, in each case the artistic vanguard believed that existing forms of art contained the ingredients for a new artistic era. Taken together, the pieces gathered here look to four aspects of literary form for the engine of change: the process of *making* that the medium requires; the *conceptual* aspects of the medium; the *social* aspects of the medium; and perhaps most important, the *material* aspects of the medium (which means words and the physical acts and things that may be combined with words—including breathing and moving, staging and props, and, of course, paper). The writers in this cluster suggest how writers might tap into these aspects of their art to create a new vision of what art can be and do.

Feeling stifled under modernist formalism and the mainstream culture of the 1950s, many poets sought a return to the “unstructured places of being” that A. R. Ammons has called poetry’s true source. After several decades in which impersonality and objectivity were the key values in poetry criticism, poets shifted the focus from the poem as artifact (the “well-wrought urn,” in the critic Cleanth Brooks’s phrase) to the poem as open-ended process, an activity, as Ammons suggests, that is like the physical act of walking or, for the poet Charles Olson, that is rooted in the acts of breathing and voicing. The unconscious began to take up a larger place in poetry, and accident and chance became, at times, structuring principles, as we see in some of Ammons’s poems. A similar emphasis on process informed the work of the abstract expressionist painters, avant-garde theater companies, and improvisatory groups of jazz musicians. The jazz trumpeter Charlie “Bird” Parker, known for his kinetic musical explorations, became for many writers a model of artistic activity. When Olson, in his manifesto “Projective Verse,” described poetry as a “transfer of energy” he revealed the implicit physiology underlying this new paradigm; the shift from artifact to process relocated poetry in the body, with its breath, movement, and changes. For some poets and dramatists—like Audre Lorde or Charles Ludlam—a focus on the body as an element of artistic process allowed the artist to explore experiences that had been silenced or made taboo. In many cases tapping into the energy of the body led directly to the erotic, as is clear in Frank O’Hara’s remark that the appeal of poetic measure is like buying a “pair of pants . . . tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you.”

The rejection of traditional form—that “well-wrought urn”—did not mean, however, that form was rejected wholesale in favor of process during this period. The very physicality of process extended to a new awareness of form’s physicality. When Ronald Sukenick says that the novel “must make maximum expressive use of all

elements of the printed page, including the relation of print to blank space," he is resisting the ease of realist fiction that invites the reader to forget that what he or she is reading is made of words. William Gass imagines "concepts" as the specific stuff out of which fiction is made, but treats concepts as a special kind of materiality—a materiality that "stains the fingers" like paint, even while concepts aspire to the abstract purity of mathematics. Richard Foreman seeks to explore the materiality of both objects and bodies on the stage, and similarly rejects the traditional sorts of emotional immersion that drive both plays and novels. He calls for an "engine" for drama that is somehow internal to the material form itself and to the spectator's physical, material, and sensory experience of it.

Art is for other human beings, and it speaks to our human experience of life. This fact drives the charming sociality of O'Hara's "personism"—which began as a joke between friends—and the urgent seriousness of Lorde's desire to make language new so that experience shut out of language could be made visible and sayable between persons. Ludlam's manifesto, like his theatrical practice, looks toward the interaction between audience and performance for that electric energy that can unsettle settled ideas. The manifesto is meant to be *usable*, something that can be activated, its fresh ideas entering the social world through speaking, thinking, writing, breathing bodies as they make and share art.

RONALD SUKENICK

Ronald Sukenick (1932–2004) was an innovative fictionist, beginning with his novel *Up* (1968). As the title of his collection *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (1969) suggests, he viewed critical theory about fiction as just one more story, with neither more nor less credibility than any other work of the imagination. As he argues in the text reprinted here, adapted from a publicity release he prepared for his second novel, *Out* (1973), and collected in his *In Form: Digressions on the Act of Fiction* (1985), fictive narrative is not *about* something but *is* something—not a representation of the world but something added to that world as another object to be encountered. This approach not only stands traditional mimesis on its head but argues that representation in fiction is fundamentally dishonest—a fraudulent totalization that misrepresents reality. What is reality? For Sukenick, in his story collections and novels that reached through the 1980s and 1990s to conclude with the posthumously published *Last Fall* (2005), fiction was above all an activity, a self-conscious act of creating a literary work with no illusions about the nature of its making. All aspects of his career focused on this purpose, including his teaching of creative writing (at the University of Colorado), his encouragement of independent publishing through the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, and his founding of the *American Book Review* in 1977 as an alternative to establishment journalism.

Innovative Fiction / Innovative Criteria

It seems strange to have to talk about innovation in fiction, but the American novel until the end of the sixties was so static that we have not yet fully

understood how parochial and narrow the accepted literary norm for fiction had become.

Properly speaking, there is no such thing as “innovative fiction.” The novel *is* innovation—it is not called the “novel” for nothing. Fiction is the most fluid and changing of literary forms, the one that most immediately reflects the changes in our collective consciousness, and in fact that is one of its great virtues. As soon as fiction gets frozen into one particular model, it loses that responsiveness to our immediate experience that is its hallmark. It becomes literary. It seems to me that this is one of the major factors contributing to the recent decline in the popularity of fiction: people no longer believe in the novel as a medium that gets at the truth of their lives.

The form of fiction that comes down to us through Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Hemingway¹ is no longer adequate to capture our experience. Either the novel will change, or it will die. Today’s money-making novels are those that sell to the movies—in other words, they are essentially written for another medium. No one takes novels seriously until they become movies, which is to say that no one takes novels seriously.

Perhaps I exaggerate slightly, but not much. If we are going to have a wide and serious audience for fiction again we are going to have to re-examine the source of the novel’s power beyond the particular forms of fiction that have become so dull to so many.

And first of all we will have to make a fundamental distinction between fiction and data. The great advantage of fiction over history, journalism, or any other supposedly “factual” kind of writing is that it is an expressive medium. It transmits feeling, energy, excitement. Television can give us the news, but fiction can best express our response to the news. No other medium—especially not film—can so well deal with our strongest and often most intimate responses to the large and small facts of our daily lives. No other medium, in other words, can so well keep track of the reality of our experience. But to do this successfully the novel must continually reinvent itself to remain in touch with the texture of our lives. It must make maximum expressive use of all elements of the printed page, including the relation of print to blank space. It must break through the literary formulas when necessary while at the same time preserving what is essential to fiction: incident, feeling, power, scope, and the sense of consciousness struggling with circumstance.

There is not one new fiction, but many. Novelists today have an unprecedented number of stylistic options, a range of choice involving not so much a struggle of an old form with a new, but an opening out, a broader awareness of the possibilities of the medium. Perhaps the most sensible working definition for what is new in fiction is simply what is not old, what lies outside the literary clichés of the formula of plot, character, and social realism. But this situation also creates problems of judgment: novelty does not guarantee quality, and it becomes crucial to distinguish the superficial from the substantial, regardless of form. To make such distinctions we must go back to the sources of fiction, stripped of inessentials and historical trappings, so that we can recognize the fundamental virtues of the novel though they

1. Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), American novelist and short-story writer. Jane Austen (1775–1817), English novelist. George Eliot, pen name of Mary Ann Evans (1819–1880), English novelist and essayist.

may appear in odd recombinations and unaccustomed forms. New fiction requires new criteria, but such criteria will be rooted in the essentials of the medium: not plot, but ongoing incident; not characterization, but consciousness struggling with circumstance; not social realism, but a sense of situation; and so on. Innovative fiction, when successful by these criteria, is not “experimental” but represents the progressive struggle of art to rescue the truth of our experience.

1974

WILLIAM H. GASS

William H. Gass (b. 1924) earned a Ph.D. in philosophy and taught the subject for his full academic career, beginning at Purdue University and continuing at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Yet his major interests have been literary. His early work, the novel *Omensetter's Luck* (1966) and the story collection *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country* (1968), identified him as a proponent of serious fiction, but it was his novella, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968), and his first book of essays, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (1970, from which the piece reprinted here is taken), that established his credentials as a radical innovator. The novella is as anti-illusionistic as anything Ronald Sukenick might conceive: printed in several different typefaces on four different colors of paper with various graphic devices coursing through the text, including coffee-cup stains and a cascade of footnotes that at one point chase the narrative off the page, it speaks boldly for a fiction that seeks to be nothing more than its own obvious self. In his one other novel, *The Tunnel* (1995), Gass examines historical ideas in a similarly self-conscious manner. His most frequent venues, however, have been books of essays, in which he uses philosophical principles as argumentative support for innovative fiction. Gass's essays, like his literary debates with the realist John Gardner, make eloquent arguments for the worth of such fiction, on ethical and aesthetic grounds.

The Medium of Fiction

It seems a country-headed thing to say: that literature is language, that stories and the places and the people in them¹ are merely made of words as chairs are made of smoothed sticks and sometimes of cloth or metal tubes. Still, we cannot be too simple at the start, since the obvious is often the unobserved. Occasionally we should allow the trite to tease us into thought, for such old friends, the clichés in our life, are the only strangers we can know. It seems incredible, the ease with which we sink through books quite out of sight,² pass clamorous pages into soundless dreams. That novels should be made of words, and merely words, is shocking, really. It's as

1. For the people, see “The Concept of Character in Fiction” [Gass's note; this essay appears later in his collection].

2. This, as well as the comparison with mathe-

tics, is returned to in “In Terms of the Toenail: Fiction and the Figures of Life” [Gass's note; this essay appears later in his collection].

though you had discovered that your wife were made of rubber: the bliss of all those years, the fears . . . from sponge.

Like the mathematician, like the philosopher, the novelist makes things out of concepts. Concepts, consequently, must be his critical concern: not the defects of his person, the crimes on his conscience, other men's morals, or their kindness or cruelty. The painter squeezes space through his pigments. Paint stains his fingers. How can he forget the color he has loaded on his brush or that blank canvas audience before him? Yet the novelist frequently behaves as if his work were all heart, character, and story; he professes to hate abstraction, mathematics, and the pure works of mind. Of course, unlike poetry, and despite its distinguished figures, for a long time now the novel has been an amateur's affair, an open field for anybody's running, and it has drawn the idle, sick, and gossipy, the vaguely artistic—prophets, teachers, muckrakers—all the fanatical explainers, those dreamily scientific, and those anally pedantic.

Paint stains the fingers; the sculptor's hair is white with dust; but concepts have no physical properties; they do not permit smell or reflect light; they do not fill space or contain it; they do not age. "Five" is no wider, older, or fatter than "four"; "apple" isn't sweeter than "quince," rounder than "pear," smoother than "peach." To say, then, that literature is language is to say that literature is made of meanings, concepts, ideas, forms (please yourself with the term), and that these are so static and eternal as to shame the stars.

Like the mathematician. For the novelist to be at all, in any way, like a mathematician is shocking. It's worse than discovering your privates are plastic. Because there's no narration among numbers. It is logically impossible. Time's lacking.

When David Hilbert,³ the great logician, heard that a student had given up mathematics to write novels, he is supposed to have said: "It was just as well; he did not have enough imagination to become a first-rate mathematician."

The yammer of thought, the constant one-after-another of sounds, the shapes of words, the terrible specter of spelling, are each due to this fact that meanings are heavenly bodies which, to our senses, must somehow announce themselves. A word is a concept made flesh, if you like—the eternal presented as noise. When I spell, then, let's say, "avoirdupois,"⁴ I am forming our name for that meaning, but it might, just as well, be written down "dozzo," or still more at length, with the same lack of logic, "typary," "snoddle," or "willmullynull." "Avoirdupois." An unreasonable body. Nonetheless lovely. "Avoirdupois."

There is a fundamental contradiction in our medium.⁵ We work with a marble of flaws. My mind is utterly unlike my body,⁶ and unless you're an angel, so, I am certain, is yours. Poor Descartes⁷ really wrote on the problems of poets: word sense and word sound, math and mechanics, the mind and its body, can they touch? And how, pray God, can they resemble? In the

3. Russian-born German mathematician (1862–1943).

4. Weight measure based on sixteen ounces to a pound.

5. See "Gertrude Stein: Her Escape from Protective Language" [Gass's note; this essay appears later in his collection; Stein (1874–1946) was an American poet and novelist active in France].

6. The contrast which is meant here is not that often alleged to exist between thought and feeling, but that between consciousness and things [Gass's note].

7. René Descartes (1596–1650), French philosopher and mathematician best known for the formulation "Cogito ergo sum," Latin for "I think, therefore I am."

act of love, as in all the arts, the soul should be felt by the tongue and the fingers, felt in the skin. So should our sounds come to color up the surface of our stories like a blush. This adventitious music is the only sensory quality our books can have. As Frost⁸ observed, even the empty sentence has a sound, or rather—I should say—is a series of nervous tensions and resolves. No artist dares neglect his own world's body, for *nothing else*, nothing else about his book is physical.

In the hollow of a jaw, the ear, upon the page, concepts now begin to move: they appear, accelerate, they race, they hesitate a moment, slow, turn, break, join, modify, and it becomes reasonable to speak of the problems of narration for the first time. Truly (that is to say, technically), narration is that part of the art of fiction concerned with the coming on and passing off of words—not the familiar arrangement of words in dry strings like so many shriveled worms, but their formal direction and rapidity. But this is not what's usually meant.

For most people, fiction is history; fiction is history without tables, graphs, dates, imports, edicts, evidence, laws; history without hiatus—intelligible, simple, smooth. Fiction is sociology freed of statistics, politics with no real party in the opposition; it's a world where play money buys you cardboard squares of colored country; a world where everyone is obediently psychological, economic, ethnic, geographical—framed in a keyhole and always nude, each figure fashioned from the latest thing in cello-see-through, so we may observe our hero's guts, too, if we choose: ah, they're blue, and squirming like a tickled river. For truth without effort, thought without rigor, feeling without form, existence without commitment: what will you give? for a wind-up world, a toy life? . . . six bits?⁹ for a book with a thicker skin? . . . six bucks? I am a man, myself, intemperately mild, and though it seems to me as much deserved as it's desired, I have no wish to steeple quires of paper passion up so many sad unelevating rears.

Nay, not *seems*, it is a stubborn, country-headed thing to say: that there are no events but words in fiction. Words mean things. Thus we use them every day: make love, buy bread, and blow up bridges. But the use of language in fiction only mimics its use in life. A sign like GENTS, for instance, tells me where to pee. It conveys information; it produces feelings of glad relief. I use the sign, but I dare not dawdle under it. It might have read MEN or borne a moustache. This kind of sign passes out of consciousness, is extinguished by its use. In literature, however, the sign remains; it sings; and we return to it again and again.

In contrast, the composer's medium is pure; that is, the tones he uses exist for music, and are made by instruments especially designed. Imagine his feelings, then, if he were forced to employ the meaningful noises of every day: bird calls, sirens, screams, alarm bells, whistles, ticks, and human chatter. He could plead all he liked that his music was pure, but we would know that he'd written down sounds from a play unseen, and we would insist that it told a story. Critics would describe the characters (one wears a goatee) and quarrel over their motives, marriages, or mothers, all their dark genes. Although no one wonders, of a painted peach, whether the tree it grew on was watered properly, we are happily witness, week after week, to further

8. Robert Frost (1874–1963), American poet.

9. Slang for seventy-five cents.

examination of Hamlet or Madame Bovary,¹ quite as if they were real. And they are so serious, so learned, so certain—so laughable—these ladies and gentlemen. Ah well, it's merely energy which might otherwise elucidate the Trinity.²

So the novelist makes his book from boards which say LADIES and GENTS. Every scrap has been worn, every item handled; most of the pieces are dented or split. The writer may choose to be heroic—poets often are—he may strive to purify his diction and achieve an exclusively literary language. He may pretend that every syllable he speaks hasn't been spit, sometimes, in someone else's mouth. Such poets scrub, they clean, they smooth, they polish, until we can scarcely recognize their words on the page. "A star glide, a single frantic sullenness, a single financial grass greediness," wrote Gertrude Stein. "*Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés*," wrote Mallarmé.³ Most novelists, however (it is one of the things that make them one), try to turn the tattering to account—incorporate it cleverly—as the painter does when he pastes up a collage of newspaper, tin foil, and postage stamps. He will recognize, for example, that stories are wonderful devices for controlling the speed of the mind, for resting it after hard climbs; they give a reassuring light to a dark place, and help the reader hold, like handsome handles, heavy luggage on long trips.

A dedicated storyteller, though—a true lie-minded man—will serve his history best, and guarantee its popularity, not by imitating nature, since nature's no source of verisimilitude, but by following as closely as he can our simplest, most direct and unaffected forms of daily talk, for we report real things, things which intrigue and worry us, and such resembling gossip in a book allows us to believe in figures and events we cannot see, shall never touch, with an assurance of safety which sets our passions free. He will avoid recording consciousness since consciousness is private—we do not normally "take it down"—and because no one really believes in any other feelings than his own. However, the moment our writer concentrates on sound, the moment he formalizes his sentences, the moment he puts in a figure of speech or turns a phrase, shifts a tense or alters tone, the moment he carries description, or any account, beyond need, he begins to turn his reader's interest away from the world which lies among his words like a beautiful woman among her slaves, and directs him toward the slaves themselves. This illustrates a basic principle: if I describe my peach too perfectly, it's the poem which will make my mouth water . . . while the real peach spoils.

Sculptures take up space and gather dust. Concepts do not. They take up us. They invade us as we read, and they achieve, as our resistance and their forces vary, every conceivable degree of occupation. Imagine a worry or a pain, an obsessive thought, a jealousy or hate so strong it renders you insensible to all else. Then while it lasts, you are that fear, that ache, for consciousness is always smaller than its opportunities, and can contract around a kernel like a shell. A piece of music can drive you out and take your place. The purpose of a literary work is the capture of consciousness, and the consequent creation, in you, of an imagined sensibility, so that while you read you are that patient pool or cataract of concepts which the author has

1. Protagonists, respectively, of Shakespeare's play (1602) and of the novel (1857) by the French writer Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880).

2. Christian conception of a three-person God

(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

3. Every thought is a roll of the dice (French). Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), French poet.

constructed; and though at first it might seem as if the richness of life had been replaced by something less so—senseless noises, abstract meanings, mere shadows of worldly employment—yet the new self with which fine fiction and good poetry should provide you is as wide as the mind is, and musicked deep with feeling. While listening to such symbols sounding, the blind perceive; thought seems to grow a body; and the will is at rest amid that moving like a gull asleep on the sea. Perhaps we'll be forgiven, then, if we fret about our words and continue country-headed. It is not a refusal to please. There's no willfulness, disdain, exile . . . no anger. Because a consciousness electrified by beauty—is that not the aim and emblem and the ending of all finely made love?

Are you afraid?

1970

CHARLES OLSON

Charles Olson (1910–1970) first published “Projective Verse” in a pamphlet, *Poetry New York*, in 1950. Two years earlier he had joined the faculty of North Carolina’s Black Mountain College, where his colleagues included the choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009), the painter Josef Albers (1888–1976), and the poet Robert Creeley (1926–2005), from whom Olson borrowed the statement “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT.” By advocating a set of formal principles based on the breath as a unit of measure, Olson described a new form of poetic measure unfolding on the “open field” of the page. His essay became a manifesto for poets reacting against the strictures of traditional forms.

From Projective Verse

(projectile (percussive (prospective

vs.

The NON-Projective

* * *

I

First, some simplicities that a man learns, if he works in OPEN, or what can also be called COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, stanza, over-all form, what is the “old” base of the non-projective.

(1) the *kinetics* of the thing. A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge. So: how is the poet to accomplish same energy, how is he, what is the process by which a poet gets in, at all points energy at least the equivalent of the energy which propelled him in the first place, yet an

energy which is peculiar to verse alone and which will be, obviously, also different from the energy which the reader, because he is a third term, will take away?

This is the problem which any poet who departs from closed form is specially confronted by. And it involves a whole series of new recognitions. From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself. Thus he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of some several forces just now beginning to be examined. (It is much more, for example, this push, than simply such a one as Pound¹ put, so wisely, to get us started: “the musical phrase,” go by it, boys, rather than by, the metronome.)

(2) is the *principle*, the law which presides conspicuously over such composition, and, when obeyed, is the reason why a projective poem can come into being. It is this: FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT. (Or so it got phrased by one, R. Creeley, and it makes absolute sense to me, with this possible corollary, that right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand.) There it is, brothers, sitting there, for USE.

Now (3) the *process* of the thing, how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished. And I think it can be boiled down to one statement (first pounded into my head by Edward Dahlberg):² ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at *all* points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!

So there we are, fast, there's the dogma. And its excuse, its usability, in practice. Which gets us, it ought to get us, inside the machinery, now, 1950, of how projective verse is made.

If I hammer, if I recall in, and keep calling in, the breath, the breathing as distinguished from the hearing, it is for cause, it is to insist upon a part that breath plays in verse which has not (due, I think, to the smothering of the power of the line by too set a concept of foot) has not been sufficiently observed or practiced, but which has to be if verse is to advance to its proper force and place in the day, now, and ahead. I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear *and* the pressures of his breath.

1950

1. Ezra Pound (1885–1972), American poet and critic, a major figure of the modernist movement

in early 20th-century poetry.

2. American novelist and essayist (1900–1977).

FRANK O'HARA

On August 27, 1959, the poet Frank O'Hara (1926–1966) had a lunchtime conversation with the poet and playwright then known as LeRoi Jones, later as Amiri Baraka (1934–2014). (Selections from the work of both these writers appear elsewhere in this anthology.) It was a heady period of multiplying literary “movements,” and the two decided, as a joke, to invent their own movement. A week later O'Hara wrote “Personism,” which presents “a movement I recently founded and which nobody yet knows about,” and sent it as a letter to Donald Allen (1912–2004), who published it in the anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960* (1960). Allen's anthology, a kind of midcentury avant-garde cultural manifesto, became one of the most influential collections of poetry and poetics published since World War II. O'Hara's contribution retains the original mocking spirit of his lunchtime conversation, but it also offers a lively description of poetry as an address from one person to another. “In all modesty, I confess it may be the death of literature as we know it,” O'Hara jokes, but his effort to loosen poetry from the academic debates about meaning and from an elite idea of “literature,” and to restore it to the immediacy of one person speaking to another, was serious and proved influential.

From Personism: A Manifesto

Everything is in the poems, but at the risk of sounding like the poor wealthy man's Allen Ginsberg¹ I will write to you because I just heard that one of my fellow poets thinks that a poem of mine that can't be got at one reading is because I was confused too. Now, come on. I don't believe in god, so I don't have to make elaborately sounded structures. I hate Vachel Lindsay,² always have, I don't even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff. You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, “Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep.”

That's for the writing poems part. As for their reception, suppose you're in love and someone's mistreating (*mal aimé*)³ you, you don't say, “Hey, you can't hurt me this way, I *care!*” you just let all the different bodies fall where they may, and they always do may after a few months. But that's not why you fell in love in the first place, just to hang onto life, so you have to take your chances and try to avoid being logical. Pain always produces logic, which is very bad for you.

I'm not saying that I don't have practically the most lofty ideas of anyone writing today, but what difference does that make? they're just ideas. The only good thing about it is that when I get lofty enough I've stopped thinking and that's when refreshment arrives.

1. American poet (1926–1997) and member of the Beat generation.

2. American poet (1879–1931) famous for his emphatic use of sound and rhythm.

3. Poorly loved (French). *La Chanson du mal-aimé* (The Song of the Poorly Loved) is a poem by the French Symbolist poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918).

But how can you really care if anybody gets it, or gets what it means, or if it improves them. Improves them for what? for death? Why hurry them along? Too many poets act like a middle-aged mother trying to get her kids to eat too much cooked meat, and potatoes with drippings (tears). I don't give a damn whether they eat or not. Forced feeding leads to excessive thinness (effete). Nobody should experience anything they don't need to, if they don't need poetry bully for them, I like the movies too. And after all, only Whitman and Crane and Williams,⁴ of the American poets, are better than the movies. As for measure and other technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you. There's nothing metaphysical about it. Unless, of course, you flatter yourself into thinking that what you're experiencing is "yearning."

Abstraction in poetry, which Allen recently commented on in *It is*, is intriguing.⁵ I think it appears mostly in the minute particulars where decision is necessary. Abstraction (in poetry, not in painting) involves personal removal by the poet. For instance, the decision involved in the choice between "the nostalgia of the infinite" and "the nostalgia *for* the infinite" defines an attitude towards degree of abstraction. The nostalgia *of* the infinite representing the greater degree of abstraction, removal, and negative capability (as in Keats and Mallarmé).⁶ Personism, a movement which I recently founded and which nobody yet knows about, interests me a great deal, being so totally opposed to this kind of abstract removal that it is verging on a true abstraction for the first time, really, in the history of poetry. Personism is to Wallace Stevens what *la poésie pure* was to Béranger.⁷ Personism has nothing to do with philosophy, it's all art. It does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it! But to give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person. That's part of personism. It was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond). I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born. It's a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents. It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style,⁸ and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages. In all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it. * * *

September 3, 1959

1960

4. Walt Whitman (1819–1892), Hart Crane (1899–1932), and William Carlos Williams (1883–1963).

5. Donald Allen (1912–2004), a poet and the editor of the anthology in which O'Hara's essay appeared, wrote frequently about abstraction in poetry.

6. John Keats (1795–1821), English Romantic poet. Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), French

Symbolist poet and critic.

7. Wallace Stevens (1879–1955), American poet. Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780–1857), French poet and songwriter who became determined to sing for the people.

8. "Lucky Pierre": slang phrase for either a man in a sexual threesome of two women and one man or the middle man in a threesome of sexually entwined men.

RICHARD FOREMAN

Born in New York on June 10, 1937, the experimental director and playwright Richard Foreman graduated from Brown University with a B.A. in 1959 and received an M.F.A. in playwriting from the Yale School of Drama in 1962. He founded his Ontological-Hysteric Theater in 1968 and became a leading writer, practitioner, and theorist of avant-garde theater. In his essay “Foundations for a Theater” (1993), Foreman wrote, “I try to make plays as hard to remember as a vivid dream which, when awake, you know you’ve lived with intensity, yet try as you might you can’t remember.”

For Foreman, drama is about consciousness, about how we experience the present. Inspired by the early twentieth-century writer Gertrude Stein, he crafted plays that, like hers, lack narrative and plot and do not progress from beginning to middle to end. Rather, they constitute a “continuous present” in which audience members experience their own sensory responses to what appears on the stage. Foreman’s plays typically have flat characters who deliver their lines in a slow, clear, unemotional manner. His goal is to startle the spectator into a fresh awareness of his or her own perceiving mind. This “mental awakening” is foundational to Foreman’s theater, and is similar to the modern playwright Bertolt Brecht’s *verfremden-effekt*—“distancing effect.” Rather than losing oneself in the experience of theater, one becomes self-consciously aware of what it is like to experience it.

Foreman’s stage is often replete with objects such as skulls, flowers, globes, mirrors, stuffed animals, crutches, and radios. These objects are most often simply there; some seem to have symbolic significance for the play in progress, others are harder to relate to the action. The objects gesture toward the “ontological” aspect of Foreman’s theater—the aspect that relates to *being*. Like the bodies of the audience and the actors, they are there to be present, and to be experienced, in the shared space and time of the performance. In the brief selection reprinted here, taken from the first part of a three-part manifesto filled with photographs, line drawings, and fragments of text, Foreman sums up his aim for experimental theater. He envisions a new kind of theater that can run without the “fuel” of an audience’s desire, a kind of art that can attain its own unique form of being.

From Ontological-Hysteric Manifesto I

Art is not beauty of description or depth of emotion, it is making a machine, not to do something to audience, but that makes itself run on new fuel. Can this machine run? Most machines (art) run on audience fuel—(Man’s pig-gish desire to be at the center, to be made to feel there is “caringness” built into the world: old art manipulates that, tries to get a response: fuel is DESIRE in that case.

FIND FUEL OTHER THAN DESIRE! Nervous energy? Basic hum of life? vibration?) (Desire kills vibration, gets too crude)

WE MAKE A PERPETUAL MOTION MACHINE¹. (The closer to that ideal the better. Run on less and less fuel . . . that’s the goal of the new art machine.)

1. Machine designed to sustain motion without application of outside force; actual perpetual motion machines have proven impossible to construct.

CHARLES LUDLAM

Charles Ludlam was born April 12, 1943, on Long Island, New York. He studied dramatic literature at Hofstra University, graduating in 1964. Ludlam began to live an openly gay life in college, and his career unfolded in the heart of New York's gay community in the West Village. Ludlam formed his Ridiculous Theatrical Company in Sheridan Square in the West Village in 1967, just a block from the Stonewall Inn—the location of the 1969 “Stonewall riots” that spurred the gay liberation movement. The political fervor of the 1960s and early '70s marks Ludlam's work, though he does not address politics directly in his plays. He preferred to think of his work as “queer theater” rather than an art form representing politicized identities. A prolific writer, Ludlam has been widely published and anthologized. He died of AIDS in 1987, and his obituary was printed on the front page of the *New York Times*, confirming both his influence and his successful integration of the avant-garde into the mainstream.

Ludlam was one of the few in the American avant-garde theater scene interested both in the dramatic “text” and in the traditional aim of moving the audience emotionally. Speaking of the avant-garde, he declared, “I hate minimal art. I hate conceptual art. I am for execution. I am for maximal art. Minimal art is inflationary art: less for your money. . . . Art is for the body. It has a soul but it also has a body.” Usually performed in drag, his “highly charged shenanigans” came to be associated closely with the “camp” aesthetic. He is most famous for his *Camille* (1973), in which he starred in the title role, in drag, *Galas* (1983), inspired by Maria Callas, who is also an inspiration for Frank Bidart's poem “Ellen West,” included in this volume, and *The Mystery of Irma Vep* (1984), inspired by Victorian melodrama.

Aspiring to the “actor-manager” role usually associated with the nineteenth-century British theater industry, Ludlam wrote, directed, and starred in many of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company's plays. Known for his warmth and larger-than-life personality, Ludlam was beloved among his friends and peers in the avant-garde theater world. He would influence a wide variety of queer performance artists—both male and female—including the playwright Tony Kushner, author and director of *Angels in America* (1993). In 1999, Kushner provided the introduction for a collection of Ludlam's plays.

“Ridiculous Theatre, Scourge of Human Folly,” a Ludlam manifesto, is reprinted here in full. Written as a series of axioms in numerical order—suggesting straightforward logic—the manifesto is in fact more farcical than logical. The “instructions for use” highlight the performative nature of the manifesto as a genre: manifestos do not just *say*, they *do*.

Ridiculous Theatre, Scourge of Human Folly

Aim: To get beyond nihilism¹ by revaluing combat.

Axioms to a theatre for ridicule:

1. Total rejection of prevailing beliefs, usually out of a sense that the world is meaningless.

1. You are a living mockery of your own ideals. If not, you have set your ideals too low.
2. The things one takes seriously are one's weaknesses.
3. Just as many people who claim a belief in God disprove it with their every act, so too there are those whose every deed, though they say there is no God, is an act of faith.
4. Evolution is a conscious process.
5. Bathos is that which is intended to be sorrowful but because of the extremity of its expression becomes comic. Pathos is that which is meant to be comic but because of the extremity of its expression becomes sorrowful. Some things which seem to be opposites are actually different degrees of the same thing.
6. The comic hero thrives by his vices. The tragic hero is destroyed by his virtue. Moral paradox is the crux of the drama.
7. The theatre is a humble materialist enterprise which seeks to produce riches of the imagination, not the other way around. The theatre is an event and not an object. Theatre workers need not blush and conceal their desperate struggle to pay the landlords their rents. Theatre without the stink of art.

Instructions for use:

This is farce not Sunday school. Illustrate hedonistic² calculus. Test out a dangerous idea, a theme that threatens to destroy one's whole value system. Treat the material in a madly farcical manner without losing the seriousness of the theme. Show how paradoxes arrest the mind. Scare yourself a bit along the way.

1975

2. Pleasure-seeking.

A. R. AMMONS

Ammons (1926–2001), represented elsewhere in this anthology by a selection of his poems, delivered “A Poem Is a Walk” as a lecture for teachers at the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in April 1967. It was published in 1968 in Cornell University’s literary journal, *Epoch*. By 1964 Ammons had joined the English faculty at Cornell (in Ithaca, New York), where he was a much-loved teacher. His concerns as a poet and as a teacher of poetry are evident in this essay, which provides an account of poetry as an “interior seeking,” its shape unfolding through a process of discovery. In the essay Ammons locates the essential rhythms of poetry in the motions of the body as it moves through the world. A peripatetic writer and theorist, Ammons employs this essay’s principles in his poetry. “A Poem Is a Walk” also connects Ammons to the American Transcendentalist tradition. It recalls the famous essay “Walking” (1862), by Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), in which this activity is figured as inward exploration, and the poems of Robert Frost (1874–1963), many of which are structured as a walk. A similar impulse can be found in such American poets as Robert Creeley, Frank O’Hara, and Jorie Graham.

From A Poem Is a Walk

What justification is there for comparing a poem with a walk rather than with something else? I take the walk to be the externalization of an interior seeking so that the analogy is first of all between the external and the internal. Poets not only do a lot of walking but talk about it in their poems: “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” “Now I out walking,” and “Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day.”¹ There are countless examples, and many of them suggest that both the real and the fictive walk are externalizations of an inward seeking. The walk magnified is the journey, and probably no figure has been used more often than the journey for both the structure and concern of an interior seeking.

How does a poem resemble a walk? First, each makes use of the whole body, involvement is total, both mind and body. You can’t take a walk without feet and legs, without a circulatory system, a guidance and coordinating system, without eyes, ears, desire, will, need: the total person. This observation is important not only for what it includes but for what it rules out: as with a walk, a poem is not simply a mental activity: it has body, rhythm, feeling, sound, and mind, conscious and subconscious. The pace at which a poet walks (and thinks), his natural breath-length, the line he pursues, whether forthright and straight or weaving and meditative, his whole “air,” whether of aimlessness or purpose—all these things and many more figure into the “physiology” of the poem he writes.

A second resemblance is that every walk is unreproducible, as is every poem. Even if you walk exactly the same route each time—as with a sonnet—the events along the route cannot be imagined to be the same from day to day, as the poet’s health, sight, his anticipations, moods, fears, thoughts cannot be the same. There are no two identical sonnets or villanelles. If there were, we would not know how to keep the extra one: it would have no separate existence. If a poem is each time new, then it is necessarily an act of discovery, a chance taken, a chance that may lead to fulfillment or disaster. The poet exposes himself to the risk. All that has been said about poetry, all that he has learned about poetry, is only a partial assurance.

The third resemblance between a poem and a walk is that each turns, one or more times, and eventually returns. It’s conceivable that a poem could rake out and go through incident after incident without ever returning, merely ending in the poet’s return to dust. But most poems and most walks return. I have already quoted the first line from Frost’s “The Wood-Pile.” Now, here are the first three lines:

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,
I paused and said, ‘I will turn back from here.
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see.’

The poet is moving outward seeking the point from which he will turn back. In “The Wood-Pile” there is no return: return is implied. The poet

1. Lines from, respectively, “I Wandered, Lonely as a Cloud” by English poet William Wordsworth, and “Away!” and “The Wood-Pile,” both by American poet Robert Frost.

goes farther and farther into the swamp until he finds by accident the point of illumination with which he closes the poem.

But the turns and returns or implied returns give shape to the walk and to the poem. With the first step, the number of shapes the walk might take is infinite, but then the walk begins to “define” itself as it goes along, though freedom remains total with each step: any tempting side road can be turned into on impulse, or any wild patch of woods can be explored. The pattern of the walk is to come true, is to be recognized, discovered. The pattern, when discovered, may be found to apply to the whole walk, or only a segment of the walk may prove to have contour and therefore suggestion and shape. From previous knowledge of the terrain, inner and outer, the poet may have before the walk an inkling of a possible contour. Taking the walk would then be searching out or confirming, giving actuality to, a previous intuition.

The fourth resemblance has to do with the motion common to poems and walks. The motion may be lumbering, clipped, wavering, tripping, mechanical, dance-like, awkward, staggering, slow, etc. But the motion occurs only in the body of the walker or in the body of the words. It can't be extracted and contemplated. It is nonreproducible and nonlogical. It can't be translated into another body. There is only one way to know it and that is to enter into it.

To summarize, a walk involves the whole person; it is not reproducible: its shape occurs, unfolds: it has a motion characteristic of the walker.

* * *

There is no ideal walk, then, though I haven't taken the time to prove it out completely, except the useless, meaningless walk. Only uselessness is empty enough for the presence of so many uses, and only through uselessness can the ideal walk come into the sum total of its uses. Only uselessness can allow the walk to be totally itself.

I hope you are, now, if you were not before, ready to agree with me that the greatest wrong that can be done a poem is to substitute a known part for an unknown whole and that the choice to be made is the freedom of nothingness: that our experience of poetry is least injured when we accept it as useless, meaningless, and nonrational.

* * * Poetry is a mode of discourse that differs from logical exposition. It is the mode I spoke of earlier, that can reconcile opposites into a “real” world both concrete and universal. Teach that. Teach the distinction.

Second, I would suggest you teach that poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed. Having once experienced the mystery, plenitude, contradiction, and composure of a work of art, we afterward have a built-in resistance to the slogans and propaganda of oversimplification that have often contributed to the destruction of human life. Poetry is a verbal means to a nonverbal source. It is a motion to no-motion, to the still point of contemplation and deep realization. Its knowledges are all negative and, therefore, more positive than any knowledge. Nothing that can be said about it in words is worth saying.

AUDRE LORDE

As a black feminist, lesbian, poet, cancer survivor, and social activist, Audre Lorde (1934–1992) felt compelled to respond to the frequent assertion among activists that writing poetry is a luxury. Her essay “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” originally appeared in *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Female Culture* in 1977 and was reprinted in her well-known collection of essays, *Sister, Outsider* (1989). Lorde argued that, rather than being a luxury, poetry is “a vital necessity” because it creates a language in which to express women’s hopes and dreams. The writing process, as she describes it, gives life and voice to what is unnamed and as yet unthought, and thus overcomes the forces in society that silence women’s experiences. In this sense poetry articulates the vision necessary for social change to occur. Lorde’s life and work reflected her belief that poetry is a form of empowerment and a tool for survival. A selection of her poems can be found elsewhere in this anthology.

From Poetry Is Not a Luxury

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would once have found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy, but the true meaning of “It feels right to me.” We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that catches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives.

1977

1978

DENISE LEVERTOV

1923–1997

Denise Levertov once wrote of her predecessor, the poet H. D.: “She showed a way to penetrate mystery; which means, not to flood darkness with light so that darkness is destroyed, but to *enter into* darkness, mystery, so that it is experienced.” Along with Robert Duncan, Levertov carried out in her own distinctive way H. D.’s tradition of visionary poetry. More grounded than her predecessor in observing the natural world and in appreciating daily life, Levertov connected the concrete to the invisible, as suggested by the image of *The Jacob’s Ladder* (1961), the title of her fifth book. She desired that a poem be “hard as a floor, sound as a bench” but also that it be “mysterious” (“Illustrious Ancestors”), and in her poems ordinary events open into the unknown. The origins of Levertov’s magical sense of the world are not difficult to trace. She was born in England and wrote of her parents: “My mother was descended from the Welsh tailor and mystic Angel Jones of Mold, my father from the noted Hasid, Schneour Zaiman [d. 1831], the ‘Rav of Northern White Russia.’” In “Illustrious Ancestors” Levertov claimed a connection to her forefathers, both mystical and Hasidic: “some line still taut between me and them.” Hasidism, a sect of Judaism that emphasizes the soul’s communion with God rather than formal religious observance and encourages what Levertov called “a wonder at creation,” was an important influence on her father, Paul Philip Levertoff. He had converted to Christianity as a student and later became an Anglican priest, but he retained his interest in Judaism and told Hasidic legends to Levertov and her older sister, Olga, throughout their childhoods. From her mother, Beatrice Spooner-Jones, Levertov learned to look closely at the world around her, and we might say of her work what she said of her mother: “with how much gazing / her life had paid tribute to the world’s body” (“The 90th Year”).

In 1947 Levertov married an American, Mitchell Goodman (they later divorced), and moved to the United States. She described this move as crucial to her development as a poet; it “necessitated the finding of new rhythms in which to write, in accordance with new rhythms of life and speech.” In this discovery of a new idiom the stylistic influence of William Carlos Williams was especially important to her; without it, she said, “I could not have developed from a British Romantic with an almost Victorian background to an American poet of any vitality.” Levertov embraced Williams’s interest in an organic poetic form, growing out of the poet’s relation to her subject, and like Duncan and Robert Creeley, she actively explored the relations between the line and the unit of breath as they control rhythm, melody, and emphasis. But if Levertov became the poet she was by becoming an American poet, her European heritage also enriched her sense of influence. Although her poem “September 1961” acknowledges her link to “the old great ones” (Ezra Pound, Williams, and H. D.), she was as at home with the German lyric poet Rainer Maria Rilke as with the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. And in the United States she discovered the work of the Jewish theologian and philosopher Martin Buber, which renewed her interest “in the Hasidic ideas with which I was dimly acquainted as a child.” Her eclecticism let her move easily between plain and richly descriptive language, between a vivid perception of the “thing itself” and the often radiant mystery that, for Levertov, arose from such seeing.

From 1956 to 1959 Levertov lived with her husband and son in Mexico. They were joined there by her mother, who, after her daughter’s departure, remained in Mexico

for the final eighteen years of her life (she died in 1977). Several moving poems in Levertov's collection *Life in the Forest* (1978), among them "The 90th Year" and "Death in Mexico," address her mother's last years. In the late 1960s the political crisis prompted by the Vietnam War turned Levertov's work more directly to public woes, as reflected in her following four books. Not all the poems in these books explicitly concern political issues ("The Sorrow Dance," for example, contains her sequence in memory of her sister, Olga, one of her finest, most powerful poems); nonetheless, many poems originated in a need for public testimony. Her overtly political poems are not often among her best, however; their very explicitness restricted her distinctive strengths as a poet, which included a feeling for the inexplicable, a language lyrical enough to express wish and desire, and a capacity for playfulness. But it is a mistake to separate too rigidly the political concerns in her work from a larger engagement with the world. As she wrote: "If a degree of intimacy is a condition of lyric expression, surely—at times when events make feelings run high—that intimacy between writer and political belief does exist, and is as intense as other emotions."

The power of Levertov's poems depends on her capacity to balance, however precariously, her two-sided vision, to keep alive both terms of what one critic called her "magical realism." At its best her work seems to spring from experience deep within her, stirred into being by a source beyond herself (as "Caedmon" is suddenly "affrighted" by an angel, or the poet at the age of sixteen dreams deeply, "sunk in the well"). Her finest poems render the inexplicable nature of our ordinary lives and their capacity for unexpected beauty. But Levertov's capacity for pleasure in the world never strays too far from the knowledge that the very landscapes that delight us contain places "that can pull you / down" ("Zeroing In"), as our inner landscapes also contain places "that are bruised forever, that time / never assuages, never."

Levertov published several collections of prose, including *The Poet in the World* (1973), *Light Up the Cave* (1981), and *New and Selected Essays* (1992). In 1987 she published her fifteenth book of poems, *Breathing the Water*. This book contains a long sequence, "The Showings: Lady Julian of Norwich, 1342–1416," which continues the link between Levertov's work and a visionary tradition. She published three subsequent collections: *A Door in the Hive* (1989), *Evening Train* (1992), and *Tesserae* (1995). Levertov taught widely and from 1982 until her death was professor of English at Stanford University, where she was an important teacher for a younger generation of writers.

To the Snake

Green Snake, when I hung you round my neck
 and stroked your cold, pulsing throat
 as you hissed to me, glinting
 arrowy gold scales, and I felt
 the weight of you on my shoulders, 5
 and the whispering silver of your dryness
 sounded close at my ears—
 Green Snake—I swore to my companions that certainly
 you were harmless! But truly
 I had no certainty, and no hope, only desiring 10
 to hold you, for that joy,
 which left
 a long wake of pleasure, as the leaves moved

and you faded into the pattern
 of grass and shadows, and I returned
 smiling and haunted, to a dark morning. 15

1960

The Jacob's Ladder¹

The stairway is not
 a thing of gleaming strands
 a radiant evanescence
 for angels' feet that only glance in their tread, and need not
 touch the stone. 5

It is of stone.
 A rosy stone that takes
 a glowing tone of softness
 only because behind it the sky is a doubtful, a doubting
 night gray. 10

A stairway of sharp
 angles, solidly built.
 One sees that the angels must spring
 down from one step to the next, giving a little
 lift of the wings: 15

and a man climbing
 must scrape his knees, and bring
 the grip of his hands into play. The cut stone
 consoles his groping feet. Wings brush past him.
 The poem ascends. 20

1961

In Mind

There's in my mind a woman
 of innocence, unadorned but

fair-featured, and smelling of
 apples or grass. She wears

a utopian smock or shift, her hair
 is light brown and smooth, and she 5

1. Jacob dreamed of "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28.12).

is kind and very clean without
ostentation—

but she has
no imagination. 10

And there's a
turbulent moon-ridden girl

or old woman, or both,
dressed in opals and rags, feathers

and torn taffeta, 15
who knows strange songs—

but she is not kind.

1964

What Were They Like?

- 1) Did the people of Vietnam
use lanterns of stone?
- 2) Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?
- 3) Were they inclined to quiet laughter? 5
- 4) Did they use bone and ivory,
jade and silver, for ornament?
- 5) Had they an epic poem?
- 6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

- 1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone. 10
It is not remembered whether in gardens
stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
- 2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
but after the children were killed
there were no more buds. 15
- 3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
- 4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
All the bones were charred.
- 5) It is not remembered. Remember,
most were peasants; their life 20
was in rice and bamboo.
When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
maybe fathers told their sons old tales.
When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream. 25
- 6) There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.

It was reported their singing resembled
 the flight of moths in moonlight. 30
 Who can say? It is silent now.

1971

Caedmon¹

All others talked as if
 talk were a dance.
 Clodhopper I, with clumsy feet
 would break the gliding ring.
 Early I learned to 5
 hunch myself
 close by the door:
 then when the talk began
 I'd wipe my
 mouth and wend 10
 unnoticed back to the barn
 to be with the warm beasts,
 dumb among body sounds
 of the simple ones.
 I'd see by a twist 15
 of lit rush² the motes
 of gold moving
 from shadow to shadow
 slow in the wake
 of deep untroubled sighs. 20
 The cows
 munched or stirred or were still. I
 was at home and lonely,
 both in good measure. Until
 the sudden angel affrighted me—light effacing 25
 my feeble beam,
 a forest of torches, feathers of flame, sparks upflying:
 but the cows as before
 were calm, and nothing was burning,
 nothing but I, as that hand of fire 30
 touched my lips and scorched my tongue
 and pulled my voice
 into the ring of the dance.

1987

1. "The story comes, of course, from the Venerable Bede's *History of the English Church and People*, but I first read it as a child in John Richard Green's *History of the English People*, 1855" [Levertov's note]. Caedmon (fl. 658–680) was, according to the story, an illiterate cowherd

employed by a monastery; one night he received a divine call to sing verses in praise of God. He is the earliest known Christian poet in English.

2. The piths of rush plants were used for candlewicks.

JAMES BALDWIN

1924–1987

In the early 1940s, the African American writer James Baldwin was once refused service at a restaurant in New Jersey, and he reacted with anger, finally throwing a water glass at the waitress. He fled, pursued by police. Reflecting later on the experience in his essay “Notes of a Native Son” (1955), Baldwin wrote that he was struck by two facts, “both equally difficult for the imagination to grasp, and one was that I could have been murdered. But the other was that I had been ready to commit murder.” Baldwin’s ability to speak honestly about race in America—in widely read essays as well as in fiction—and to analyze the inner dynamics of race in a way that was both gripping and intellectual made him a key figure in the history of civil rights in America from the 1940s right up to his death in 1987. Though he mainly lived abroad in Paris and other European cities from 1949 onward, his voice was heard back home, distinguished by an emphasis on shared humanity and the possibility of love across racial lines.

Baldwin was brought up in a poor and strictly religious household in Harlem with an authoritarian father—later revealed to be his stepfather—his beloved mother, and eight siblings. His reading began at home, where he read and reread the Bible and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. He attended public schools in New York City alongside black Harlem neighbors and Jewish, Irish, and Eastern European immigrants from other parts of the city. A theater teacher at his middle school introduced him to the writings of Charles Dickens and took him to see Shakespeare plays in the city. He then attended DeWitt Clinton High School, which reached a peak enrollment of twelve thousand students in the 1930s and was reputed to be the largest high school in the world; the photographer Richard Avedon was a classmate. At DeWitt Clinton he met remarkable teachers—including the poet Countee Cullen—who further opened the worlds of literature and intellectual life to the young James. Baldwin briefly became a child preacher at the age of fourteen. When he abandoned preaching he also left the church, but the church never left him. Its message of love, suffering, and redemption in a violent world remained rooted in his imagination; its lyrical cadences, found in scripture, oratory, and ecstatic music, recur as both the themes and the models for his prose.

Starting in the late 1940s, Baldwin published essays on topics ranging from art and literature to history to black life in Harlem, Atlanta, and Paris. His fame grew when he found a voice in fiction, publishing the critically acclaimed realist novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* in 1953, a story about the teenage son of a black preacher in Harlem that hewed closely to his own biography. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was followed by a play, *Amen Corner*, which was staged once in 1955 by the Howard University Players and was not produced again for over a decade. It was published in full in 1968. A second novel, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), departed from the subject of black life in Harlem. Baldwin did not want to be pigeonholed as the new “Negro writer” on the scene. *Giovanni’s Room* was a tragic love story about a white American named David and his relationship with Giovanni, the beautiful and doomed lover he meets in Paris. Written by a black writer through the first-person perspective of a white gay man, and openly sympathetic to the plight of its central characters, *Giovanni’s Room* was both a professionally risky and a beautifully crafted novel. But Baldwin would soon become too indispensable a participant in the evolving civil rights movement to

be dismissed by readers who found gay subject matter offensive. His essays on the experience of being black in the United States and in postwar Europe had already established him as a serious thinker about race. In his notable 1962 essay “Letter from a Region of my Mind,” he analyzed religion’s relationship to race as well as the fraught psychology of black-white relations in America, using terms that explored the sexualized emotional dependency of white America on black inferiority. The *New Yorker* featured the essay, cementing Baldwin’s reputation as the writer who seemed best able to explain black and white America to itself.

Baldwin continued to write fiction and essays throughout his life. In novels and short stories, his preoccupations were remarkably consistent: doomed black and white men, strong but tired black women, jazz or church musicians, preachers and hustlers, brothers and mothers and sons, the experience of racial violence and the lives of expatriates. Having lived a bravely open homosexual life since his teens, Baldwin stood out for his humane representations of masculine gay men and for his candid reflections on love between men of different races.

He ultimately published six novels, two plays, and a collection of short stories. The early novels, including *Another Country* (1962), are regarded as his best. His nonfiction was collected in *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *The Price of the Ticket* (1985), and various other volumes, including *Collected Essays* (1998) and *The Cross of Redemption* (2010).

The stories reprinted here represent high points in his literary oeuvre. In “Going to Meet the Man” (1965), Baldwin dares to write from the perspectives of a white deputy sheriff and his young son and thus to fully engage the horror of lynching. Baldwin shocks the reader with racist language and sexualized violence while showing how easily a young boy becomes complicit with a racist culture. “Sonny’s Blues” (1957) is a classic Baldwin story, imagining music as a source of redemption within the black community, despite the realities of poverty, incarceration, and addiction.

Going to Meet the Man

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he said, trying to laugh, “I guess I’m tired.”

“You’ve been working too hard,” she said. “I keep telling you.”

“Well, goddammit, woman,” he said, “it’s not my fault!” He tried again; he wretchedly failed again. Then he just lay there, silent, angry, and helpless. Excitement filled him like a toothache, but it refused to enter his flesh. He stroked her breast. This was his wife. He could not ask her to do just a little thing for him, just to help him out, just for a little while, the way he could ask a nigger girl to do it. He lay there, and he sighed. The image of a black girl caused a distant excitement in him, like a far-away light; but, again, the excitement was more like pain; instead of forcing him to act, it made action impossible.

“Go to sleep,” she said, gently, “you got a hard day tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” he said, and rolled over on his side, facing her, one hand still on one breast. “Goddamn the niggers. The black stinking coons. You’d think they’d learn. Wouldn’t you think they’d learn? I mean, *wouldn’t* you?”

“They going to be out there tomorrow,” she said, and took his hand away, “get some sleep.”

He lay there, one hand between his legs, staring at the frail sanctuary of his wife. A faint light came from the shutters; the moon was full. Two dogs,

far away, were barking at each other, back and forth, insistently, as though they were agreeing to make an appointment. He heard a car coming north on the road and he half sat up, his hand reaching for his holster, which was on a chair near the bed, on top of his pants. The lights hit the shutters and seemed to travel across the room and then went out. The sound of the car slipped away, he heard it hit gravel, then heard it no more. Some liver-lipped students, probably, heading back to that college—but coming from where? His watch said it was two in the morning. They could be coming from anywhere, from out of state most likely, and they would be at the courthouse tomorrow. The niggers were getting ready. Well, they would be ready, too.

He moaned. He wanted to let whatever was in him out; but it wouldn't come out. Goddamn! he said aloud, and turned again, on his side, away from Grace, staring at the shutters. He was a big, healthy man and he had never had any trouble sleeping. And he wasn't old enough yet to have any trouble getting it up—he was only forty-two. And he was a good man, a God-fearing man, he had tried to do his duty all his life, and he had been a deputy sheriff for several years. Nothing had ever bothered him before, certainly not getting it up. Sometimes, sure, like any other man, he knew that he wanted a little more spice than Grace could give him and he would drive over yonder and pick up a black piece or arrest her, it came to the same thing, but he couldn't do that now, no more. There was no telling what might happen once your ass was in the air. And they were low enough to kill a man then, too, every one of them, or the girl herself might do it, right while she was making believe you made her feel so good. The niggers. What had the good Lord Almighty had in mind when he made the niggers? Well. They were pretty good at that, all right. Damn. Damn. Goddamn.

This wasn't helping him to sleep. He turned again, toward Grace again, and moved close to her warm body. He felt something he had never felt before. He felt that he would like to hold her, hold her, hold her, and be buried in her like a child and never have to get up in the morning again and go downtown to face those faces, good Christ, they were ugly! and never have to enter that jailhouse again and smell that smell and hear that singing; never again feel that filthy, kinky, greasy hair under his hand, never again watch those black breasts leap against the leaping cattle prod, never hear those moans again or watch that blood run down or the fat lips split or the sealed eyes struggle open. They were animals, they were no better than animals, what could be done with people like that? Here they had been in a civilized country for years and they still lived like animals. Their houses were dark, with oil cloth or cardboard in the windows, the smell was enough to make you puke your guts out, and there they sat, a whole tribe, pumping out kids, it looked like, every damn five minutes, and laughing and talking and playing music like they didn't have a care in the world, and he reckoned they didn't, neither, and coming to the door, into the sunlight, just standing there, just looking foolish, not thinking of anything but just getting back to what they were doing, saying, Yes suh, Mr. Jesse. I surely will, Mr. Jesse. Fine weather, Mr. Jesse. Why, I thank you, Mr. Jesse. He had worked for a mail-order house for a while and it had been his job to collect the payments for the stuff they bought. They were too dumb to know that they were being cheated blind, but that was no skin off his ass—he was just supposed to do his job. They would be late—they didn't have the sense to put money aside;

but it was easy to scare them, and he never really had any trouble. Hell, they all liked him, the kids used to smile when he came to the door. He gave them candy, sometimes, or chewing gum, and rubbed their rough bullet heads—maybe the candy should have been poisoned. Those kids were grown now. He had had trouble with one of them today.

“There was this nigger today,” he said; and stopped; his voice sounded peculiar. He touched Grace. “You awake?” he asked. She mumbled something, impatiently, she was probably telling him to go to sleep. It was all right. He knew that he was not alone.

“What a funny time,” he said, “to be thinking about a thing like that—you listening?” She mumbled something again. He rolled over on his back. “This nigger’s one of the ringleaders. We had trouble with him before. We must have had him out there at the work farm three or four times. Well, Big Jim C. and some of the boys really had to whip that nigger’s ass today.” He looked over at Grace; he could not tell whether she was listening or not; and he was afraid to ask again. “They had this line you know, to register”—he laughed, but she did not—“and they wouldn’t stay where Big Jim C. wanted them, no, they had to start blocking traffic all around the courthouse so couldn’t nothing or nobody get through, and Big Jim C. told them to disperse and they wouldn’t move, they just kept up that singing, and Big Jim C. figured that the others would move if this nigger would move, him being the ringleader, but he wouldn’t move and he wouldn’t let the others move, so they had to beat him and a couple of the others and they threw them in the wagon—but I didn’t see this nigger till I got to the jail. They were still singing and I was supposed to make them stop. Well, I couldn’t make them stop for me but I knew he could make them stop. He was lying on the ground jerking and moaning, they had threw him in a cell by himself, and blood was coming out his ears from where Big Jim C. and his boys had whipped him. Wouldn’t you think they’d learn? I put the prod to him and he jerked some more and he kind of screamed—but he didn’t have much voice left. ‘You make them stop that singing,’ I said to him, ‘you hear me? You make them stop that singing.’ He acted like he didn’t hear me and I put it to him again, under his arms, and he just rolled around on the floor and blood started coming from his mouth. He’d pissed his pants already.” He paused. His mouth felt dry and his throat was as rough as sandpaper; as he talked, he began to hurt all over with that peculiar excitement which refused to be released. “You all are going to stop your singing, I said to him, and you are going to stop coming down to the courthouse and disrupting traffic and molesting the people and keeping us from our duties and keeping doctors from getting to sick white women and getting all them Northerners in this town to give our town a bad name—!” As he said this, he kept prodding the boy, sweat pouring from beneath the helmet he had not yet taken off. The boy rolled around in his own dirt and water and blood and tried to scream again as the prod hit his testicles, but the scream did not come out, only a kind of rattle and a moan. He stopped. He was not supposed to kill the nigger. The cell was filled with a terrible odor. The boy was still. “You hear me?” he called. “You had enough?” The singing went on. “You had enough?” His foot leapt out, he had not known it was going to, and caught the boy flush on the jaw. *Jesus*, he thought, *this ain’t no nigger, this is a goddamn bull*, and he screamed again, “You had enough? You going to make them stop that singing now?”

But the boy was out. And now he was shaking worse than the boy had been shaking. He was glad no one could see him. At the same time, he felt very close to a very peculiar, particular joy; something deep in him and deep in his memory was stirred, but whatever was in his memory eluded him. He took off his helmet. He walked to the cell door.

“White man,” said the boy, from the floor, behind him.

He stopped. For some reason, he grabbed his privates.

“You remember Old Julia?”

The boy said, from the floor, with his mouth full of blood, and one eye, barely open, glaring like the eye of a cat in the dark, “My grandmother’s name was Mrs. Julia Blossom. Mrs. Julia Blossom. You going to call our women by their right names yet.—And those kids ain’t going to stop singing. We going to keep on singing until every one of you miserable white mothers go stark raving out of your minds.” Then he closed the one eye; he spat blood; his head fell back against the floor.

He looked down at the boy, whom he had been seeing, off and on, for more than a year, and suddenly remembered him: Old Julia had been one of his mail-order customers, a nice old woman. He had not seen her for years, he supposed that she must be dead.

He had walked into the yard, the boy had been sitting in a swing. He had smiled at the boy, and asked, “Old Julia home?”

The boy looked at him for a long time before he answered. “Don’t no Old Julia live here.”

“This is her house. I know her. She’s lived here for years.”

The boy shook his head. “You might know a Old Julia someplace else, white man. But don’t nobody by that name live here.”

He watched the boy; the boy watched him. The boy certainly wasn’t more than ten. *White man*. He didn’t have time to be fooling around with some crazy kid. He yelled, “Hey! Old Julia!”

But only silence answered him. The expression on the boy’s face did not change. The sun beat down on them both, still and silent; he had the feeling that he had been caught up in a nightmare, a nightmare dreamed by a child; perhaps one of the nightmares he himself had dreamed as a child. It had that feeling—everything familiar, without undergoing any other change, had been subtly and hideously displaced: the trees, the sun, the patches of grass in the yard, the leaning porch and the weary porch steps and the card-board in the windows and the black hole of the door which looked like the entrance to a cave, and the eyes of the pickaninny, all, all, were charged with malevolence. *White man*. He looked at the boy. “She’s gone out?”

The boy said nothing.

“Well,” he said, “tell her I passed by and I’ll pass by next week.” He started to go; he stopped. “You want some chewing gum?”

The boy got down from the swing and started for the house. He said, “I don’t want nothing you got, white man.” He walked into the house and closed the door behind him.

Now the boy looked as though he were dead. Jesse wanted to go over to him and pick him up and pistol whip him until the boy’s head burst open like a melon. He began to tremble with what he believed was rage, sweat, both cold and hot, raced down his body, the singing filled him as though it were a

weird, uncontrollable, monstrous howling rumbling up from the depths of his own belly, he felt an icy fear rise in him and raise him up, and he shouted, he howled, "You lucky we *pump* some white blood into you every once in a while—your women! Here's what I got for all the black bitches in the world—!" Then he was, abruptly, almost too weak to stand; to his bewilderment, his horror, beneath his own fingers, he felt himself violently stiffen—with no warning at all; he dropped his hands and he stared at the boy and he left the cell.

"All that singing they do," he said. "All that singing." He could not remember the first time he had heard it; he had been hearing it all his life. It was the sound with which he was most familiar—though it was also the sound of which he had been least conscious—and it had always contained an obscure comfort. They were singing to God. They were singing for mercy and they hoped to go to heaven, and he had even sometimes felt, when looking into the eyes of some of the old women, a few of the very old men, that they were singing for mercy for his soul, too. Of course he had never thought of their heaven or of what God was, or could be, for them; God was the same for everyone, he supposed, and heaven was where good people went—he supposed. He had never thought much about what it meant to be a good person. He tried to be a good person and treat everybody right: it wasn't his fault if the niggers had taken it into their heads to fight against God and go against the rules laid down in the Bible for everyone to read! Any preacher would tell you that. He was only doing his duty: protecting white people from the niggers and the niggers from themselves. And there were still lots of good niggers around—he had to remember that; they weren't all like that boy this afternoon; and the good niggers must be mighty sad to see what was happening to their people. They would thank him when this was over. In that way they had, the best of them, not quite looking him in the eye, in a low voice, with a little smile: We surely thanks you, Mr. Jesse. From the bottom of our hearts, we thanks you. He smiled. They hadn't all gone crazy. This trouble would pass.—He knew that the young people had changed some of the words to the songs. He had scarcely listened to the words before and he did not listen to them now; but he knew that the words were different; he could hear that much. He did not know if the faces were different, he had never, before this trouble began, watched them as they sang, but he certainly did not like what he saw now. They hated him, and this hatred was blacker than their hearts, blacker than their skins, redder than their blood, and harder, by far, than his club. Each day, each night, he felt worn out, aching, with their smell in his nostrils and filling his lungs, as though he were drowning—drowning in niggers; and it was all to be done again when he awoke. It would never end. It would never end. Perhaps this was what the singing had meant all along. They had not been singing black folks into heaven, they had been singing white folks into hell.

Everyone felt this black suspicion in many ways, but no one knew how to express it. Men much older than he, who had been responsible for law and order much longer than he, were now much quieter than they had been, and the tone of their jokes, in a way that he could not quite put his finger on, had changed. These men were his models, they had been friends to his father, and they had taught him what it meant to be a man. He looked to them for courage now. It wasn't that he didn't know that what he was doing

was right—he knew that, nobody had to tell him that; it was only that he missed the ease of former years. But they didn't have much time to hang out with each other these days. They tended to stay close to their families every free minute because nobody knew what might happen next. Explosions rocked the night of their tranquil town. Each time each man wondered silently if perhaps this time the dynamite had not fallen into the wrong hands. They thought that they knew where all the guns were; but they could not possibly know every move that was made in that secret place where the darkies lived. From time to time it was suggested that they form a posse and search the home of every nigger, but they hadn't done it yet. For one thing, this might have brought the bastards from the North down on their backs; for another, although the niggers were scattered throughout the town—down in the hollow near the railroad tracks, way west near the mills, up on the hill, the well-off ones, and some out near the college—nothing seemed to happen in one part of town without the niggers immediately knowing it in the other. This meant that they could not take them by surprise. They rarely mentioned it, but they *knew* that some of the niggers had guns. It stood to reason, as they said, since, after all, some of them had been in the Army. There were niggers in the Army right now and God knows they wouldn't have had any trouble stealing this half-assed government blind—the whole world was doing it, look at the European countries and all those countries in Africa. They made jokes about it—bitter jokes; and they cursed the government in Washington, which had betrayed them; but they had not yet formed a posse. Now, if their town had been laid out like some towns in the North, where all the niggers lived together in one locality, they could have gone down and set fire to the houses and brought about peace that way. If the niggers had all lived in one place, they could have kept the fire in one place. But the way this town was laid out, the fire could hardly be controlled. It would spread all over town—and the niggers would probably be helping it to spread. Still, from time to time, they spoke of doing it, anyway; so that now there was a real fear among them that somebody might go crazy and light the match.

They rarely mentioned anything not directly related to the war that they were fighting, but this had failed to establish between them the unspoken communication of soldiers during a war. Each man, in the thrilling silence which sped outward from their exchanges, their laughter, and their anecdotes, seemed wrestling, in various degrees of darkness, with a secret which he could not articulate to himself, and which, however directly it related to the war, related yet more surely to his privacy and his past. They could no longer be sure, after all, that they had all done the same things. They had never dreamed that their privacy could contain any element of terror, could threaten, that is, to reveal itself, to the scrutiny of a judgment day, while remaining unreadable and inaccessible to themselves; nor had they dreamed that the past, while certainly refusing to be forgotten, could yet so stubbornly refuse to be remembered. They felt themselves mysteriously set at naught, as no longer entering into the real concerns of other people—while here they were, out-numbered, fighting to save the civilized world. They had thought that people would care—people didn't care; not enough, anyway, to help them. It would have been a help, really, or at least a relief, even to have been forced to surrender. Thus they had lost, probably forever, their old and easy

connection with each other. They were forced to depend on each other more and, at the same time, to trust each other less. Who could tell when one of them might not betray them all, for money, or for the ease of confession? But no one dared imagine what there might be to confess. They were soldiers fighting a war, but their relationship to each other was that of accomplices in a crime. They all had to keep their mouths shut.

I stepped in the river at Jordan.

Out of the darkness of the room, out of nowhere, the line came flying up at him, with the melody and the beat. He turned wordlessly toward his sleeping wife. *I stepped in the river at Jordan.* Where had he heard that song?

“Grace,” he whispered. “You awake?”

She did not answer. If she was awake, she wanted him to sleep. Her breathing was slow and easy, her body slowly rose and fell.

I stepped in the river at Jordan.

The water came to my knees.

He began to sweat. He felt an overwhelming fear, which yet contained a curious and dreadful pleasure.

I stepped in the river at Jordan.

The water came to my waist.

It had been night, as it was now, he was in the car between his mother and his father, sleepy, his head in his mother’s lap, sleepy, and yet full of excitement. The singing came from far away, across the dark fields. There were no lights anywhere. They had said good-bye to all the others and turned off on this dark dirt road. They were almost home.

I stepped in the river at Jordan,

The water came over my head,

I looked way over to the other side,

He was making up my dying bed!

“I guess they singing for him,” his father said, seeming very weary and subdued now. “Even when they’re sad, they sound like they just about to go and tear off a piece.” He yawned and leaned across the boy and slapped his wife lightly on the shoulder, allowing his hand to rest there for a moment. “Don’t they?”

“Don’t talk that way,” she said.

“Well, that’s what we going to do,” he said, “you can make up your mind to that.” He started whistling. “You see? When I begin to feel it, I gets kind of musical, too.”

Oh, Lord! Come on and ease my troubling mind!

He had a black friend, his age, eight, who lived nearby. His name was Otis. They wrestled together in the dirt. Now the thought of Otis made him sick. He began to shiver. His mother put her arm around him.

“He’s tired,” she said.

“We’ll be home soon,” said his father. He began to whistle again.

“We didn’t see Otis this morning,” Jesse said. He did not know why he said this. His voice, in the darkness of the car, sounded small and accusing.

“You haven’t seen Otis for a couple of mornings,” his mother said.

That was true. But he was only concerned about *this* morning.

“No,” said his father, “I reckon Otis’s folks was afraid to let him show himself this morning.”

“But Otis didn’t do nothing!” Now his voice sounded questioning.

"Otis *can't* do nothing," said his father, "he's too little." The car lights picked up their wooden house, which now solemnly approached them, the lights falling around it like yellow dust. Their dog, chained to a tree, began to bark.

"We just want to make sure Otis *don't* do nothing," said his father, and stopped the car. He looked down at Jesse. "And you tell him what your Daddy said, you hear?"

"Yes sir," he said.

His father switched off the lights. The dog moaned and pranced, but they ignored him and went inside. He could not sleep. He lay awake, hearing the night sounds, the dog yawning and moaning outside, the sawing of the crickets, the cry of the owl, dogs barking far away, then no sounds at all, just the heavy, endless buzzing of the night. The darkness pressed on his eyelids like a scratchy blanket. He turned, he turned again. He wanted to call his mother, but he knew his father would not like this. He was terribly afraid. Then he heard his father's voice in the other room, low, with a joke in it; but this did not help him, it frightened him more, he knew what was going to happen. He put his head under the blanket, then pushed his head out again, for fear, staring at the dark window. He heard his mother's moan, his father's sigh; he gritted his teeth. Then their bed began to rock. His father's breathing seemed to fill the world.

That morning, before the sun had gathered all its strength, men and women, some flushed and some pale with excitement, came with news. Jesse's father seemed to know what the news was before the first jalopy stopped in the yard, and he ran out, crying, "They got him, then? They got him?"

The first jalopy held eight people, three men and two women and three children. The children were sitting on the laps of the grown-ups. Jesse knew two of them, the two boys; they shyly and uncomfortably greeted each other. He did not know the girl.

"Yes, they got him," said one of the women, the older one, who wore a wide hat and a fancy, faded blue dress. "They found him early this morning."

"How far had he got?" Jesse's father asked.

"He hadn't got no further than Harkness," one of the men said. "Look like he got lost up there in all them trees—or maybe he just got so scared he couldn't move." They all laughed.

"Yes, and you know it's near a graveyard, too," said the younger woman, and they laughed again.

"Is that where they got him now?" asked Jesse's father.

By this time there were three cars piled behind the first one, with everyone looking excited and shining, and Jesse noticed that they were carrying food. It was like a Fourth of July picnic.

"Yeah, that's where he is," said one of the men, "declare, Jesse, you going to keep us here all day long, answering your damn fool questions. Come on, we ain't got no time to waste."

"Don't bother putting up no food," cried a woman from one of the other cars, "we got enough. Just come on."

"Why, thank you," said Jesse's father, "we be right along, then."

"I better get a sweater for the boy," said his mother, "in case it turns cold."

Jesse watched his mother's thin legs cross the yard. He knew that she also wanted to comb her hair a little and maybe put on a better dress, the dress she wore to church. His father guessed this, too, for he yelled behind her, "Now

don't you go trying to turn yourself into no movie star. You just come on." But he laughed as he said this, and winked at the men; his wife was younger and prettier than most of the other women. He clapped Jesse on the head and started pulling him toward the car. "You all go on," he said, "I'll be right behind you. Jesse, you go tie up that there dog while I get this car started."

The cars sputtered and coughed and shook; the caravan began to move; bright dust filled the air. As soon as he was tied up, the dog began to bark. Jesse's mother came out of the house, carrying a jacket for his father and a sweater for Jesse. She had put a ribbon in her hair and had an old shawl around her shoulders.

"Put these in the car, son," she said, and handed everything to him. She bent down and stroked the dog, looked to see if there was water in his bowl, then went back up the three porch steps and closed the door.

"Come on," said his father, "ain't nothing in there for nobody to steal." He was sitting in the car, which trembled and belched. The last car of the caravan had disappeared but the sound of singing floated behind them.

Jesse got into the car, sitting close to his father, loving the smell of the car, and the trembling, and the bright day, and the sense of going on a great and unexpected journey. His mother got in and closed the door and the car began to move. Not until then did he ask, "Where are we going? Are we going on a picnic?"

He had a feeling that he knew where they were going, but he was not sure.

"That's right," his father said, "we're going on a picnic. You won't ever forget *this* picnic—!"

"Are we," he asked, after a moment, "going to see the bad nigger—the one that knocked down old Miss Standish?"

"Well, I reckon," said his mother, "that we *might* see him."

He started to ask, *Will a lot of niggers be there? Will Otis be there?*—but he did not ask his question, to which, in a strange and uncomfortable way, he already knew the answer. Their friends, in the other cars, stretched up the road as far as he could see; other cars had joined them; there were cars behind them. They were singing. The sun seemed suddenly very hot, and he was at once very happy and a little afraid. He did not quite understand what was happening, and he did not know what to ask—he had no one to ask. He had grown accustomed, for the solution of such mysteries, to go to Otis. He felt that Otis knew everything. But he could not ask Otis about this. Anyway, he had not seen Otis for two days; he had not seen a black face anywhere for more than two days; and he now realized, as they began chugging up the long hill which eventually led to Harkness, that there were no black faces on the road this morning, no black people anywhere. From the houses in which they lived, all along the road, no smoke curled, no life stirred—maybe one or two chickens were to be seen, that was all. There was no one at the windows, no one in the yard, no one sitting on the porches, and the doors were closed. He had come this road many a time and seen women washing in the yard (there were no clothes on the clotheslines), men working in the fields, children playing in the dust; black men passed them on the road other mornings, other days, on foot, or in wagons, sometimes in cars, tipping their hats, smiling, joking, their teeth a solid white against their skin, their eyes as warm as the sun, the blackness of their skin like dull fire against the white or the blue or the grey of their torn clothes. They passed

the nigger church—dead-white, desolate, locked up; and the graveyard, where no one knelt or walked, and he saw no flowers. He wanted to ask, *Where are they? Where are they all?* But he did not dare. As the hill grew steeper, the sun grew colder. He looked at his mother and his father. They looked straight ahead, seeming to be listening to the singing which echoed and echoed in this graveyard silence. They were strangers to him now. They were looking at something he could not see. His father's lips had a strange, cruel curve, he wet his lips from time to time, and swallowed. He was terribly aware of his father's tongue, it was as though he had never seen it before. And his father's body suddenly seemed immense, bigger than a mountain. His eyes, which were grey-green, looked yellow in the sunlight; or at least there was a light in them which he had never seen before. His mother patted her hair and adjusted the ribbon, leaning forward to look into the car mirror. "You look all right," said his father, and laughed. "When that nigger looks at you, he's going to swear he threw his life away for nothing. Wouldn't be surprised if he don't come back to haunt you." And he laughed again.

The singing now slowly began to cease; and he realized that they were nearing their destination. They had reached a straight, narrow, pebbly road, with trees on either side. The sunlight filtered down on them from a great height, as though they were underwater; and the branches of the trees scraped against the cars with a tearing sound. To the right of them, and beneath them, invisible now, lay the town; and to the left, miles of trees which led to the high mountain range which his ancestors had crossed in order to settle in this valley. Now, all was silent, except for the bumping of the tires against the rocky road, the sputtering of motors, and the sound of a crying child. And they seemed to move more slowly. They were beginning to climb again. He watched the cars ahead as they toiled patiently upward, disappearing into the sunlight of the clearing. Presently, he felt their vehicle also rise, heard his father's changed breathing, the sunlight hit his face, the trees moved away from them, and they were there. As their car crossed the clearing, he looked around. There seemed to be millions, there were certainly hundreds of people in the clearing, staring toward something he could not see. There was a fire. He could not see the flames, but he smelled the smoke. Then they were on the other side of the clearing, among the trees again. His father drove off the road and parked the car behind a great many other cars. He looked down at Jesse.

"You all right?" he asked.

"Yes sir," he said.

"Well, come on, then," his father said. He reached over and opened the door on his mother's side. His mother stepped out first. They followed her into the clearing. At first he was aware only of confusion, of his mother and father greeting and being greeted, himself being handled, hugged, and patted, and told how much he had grown. The wind blew the smoke from the fire across the clearing into his eyes and nose. He could not see over the backs of the people in front of him. The sounds of laughing and cursing and wrath—and something else—rolled in waves from the front of the mob to the back. Those in front expressed their delight at what they saw, and this delight rolled backward, wave upon wave, across the clearing, more acrid than the smoke. His father reached down suddenly and sat Jesse on his shoulders.

Now he saw the fire—of twigs and boxes, piled high; flames made pale orange and yellow and thin as a veil under the steadier light of the sun; grey-

blue smoke rolled upward and poured over their heads. Beyond the shifting curtain of fire and smoke, he made out first only a length of gleaming chain, attached to a great limb of the tree; then he saw that this chain bound two black hands together at the wrist, dirty yellow palm facing dirty yellow palm. The smoke poured up; the hands dropped out of sight; a cry went up from the crowd. Then the hands slowly came into view again, pulled upward by the chain. This time he saw the kinky, sweating, bloody head—he had never before seen a head with so much hair on it, hair so black and so tangled that it seemed like another jungle. The head was hanging. He saw the forehead, flat and high, with a kind of arrow of hair in the center, like he had, like his father had; they called it a widow's peak; and the mangled eyebrows, the wide nose, the closed eyes, and the glinting eyelashes and the hanging lips, all streaming with blood and sweat. His hands were straight above his head. All his weight pulled downward from his hands; and he was a big man, a bigger man than his father, and black as an African jungle cat, and naked. Jesse pulled upward; his father's hands held him firmly by the ankles. He wanted to say something, he did not know what, but nothing he said could have been heard, for now the crowd roared again as a man stepped forward and put more wood on the fire. The flames leapt up. He thought he heard the hanging man scream, but he was not sure. Sweat was pouring from the hair in his armpits, poured down his sides, over his chest, into his navel and his groin. He was lowered again; he was raised again. Now Jesse knew that he heard him scream. The head went back, the mouth wide open, blood bubbling from the mouth; the veins of the neck jumped out; Jesse clung to his father's neck in terror as the cry rolled over the crowd. The cry of all the people rose to answer the dying man's cry. He wanted death to come quickly. They wanted to make death wait: and it was they who held death, now, on a leash which they lengthened little by little. *What did he do?* Jesse wondered. *What did the man do? What did he do?*—but he could not ask his father. He was seated on his father's shoulders, but his father was far away. There were two older men, friends of his father's, raising and lowering the chain; everyone, indiscriminately, seemed to be responsible for the fire. There was no hair left on the nigger's privates, and the eyes, now, were wide open, as white as the eyes of a clown or a doll. The smoke now carried a terrible odor across the clearing, the odor of something burning which was both sweet and rotten.

He turned his head a little and saw the field of faces. He watched his mother's face. Her eyes were very bright, her mouth was open: she was more beautiful than he had ever seen her, and more strange. He began to feel a joy he had never felt before. He watched the hanging, gleaming body, the most beautiful and terrible object he had ever seen till then. One of his father's friends reached up and in his hands he held a knife: and Jesse wished that he had been that man. It was a long, bright knife and the sun seemed to catch it, to play with it, to caress it—it was brighter than the fire. And a wave of laughter swept the crowd. Jesse felt his father's hands on his ankles slip and tighten. The man with the knife walked toward the crowd, smiling slightly; as though this were a signal, silence fell; he heard his mother cough. Then the man with the knife walked up to the hanging body. He turned and smiled again. Now there was a silence all over the field. The hanging head looked up. It seemed fully conscious now, as though the fire had burned out terror and pain. The man with the knife took the nigger's privates in his hand, one

hand, still smiling, as though he were weighing them. In the cradle of the one white hand, the nigger's privates seemed as remote as meat being weighed in the scales; but seemed heavier, too, much heavier, and Jesse felt his scrotum tighten; and huge, huge, much bigger than his father's, flaccid, hairless, the largest thing he had ever seen till then, and the blackest. The white hand stretched them, cradled them, caressed them. Then the dying man's eyes looked straight into Jesse's eyes—it could not have been as long as a second, but it seemed longer than a year. Then Jesse screamed, and the crowd screamed as the knife flashed, first up, then down, cutting the dreadful thing away, and the blood came roaring down. Then the crowd rushed forward, tearing at the body with their hands, with knives, with rocks, with stones, howling and cursing. Jesse's head, of its own weight, fell downward toward his father's head. Someone stepped forward and drenched the body with kerosene. Where the man had been, a great sheet of flame appeared. Jesse's father lowered him to the ground.

"Well, I told you," said his father, "you wasn't never going to forget *this* picnic." His father's face was full of sweat, his eyes were very peaceful. At that moment Jesse loved his father more than he had ever loved him. He felt that his father had carried him through a mighty test, had revealed to him a great secret which would be the key to his life forever.

"I reckon," he said. "I reckon."

Jesse's father took him by the hand and, with his mother a little behind them, talking and laughing with the other women, they walked through the crowd, across the clearing. The black body was on the ground, the chain which had held it was being rolled up by one of his father's friends. Whatever the fire had left undone, the hands and the knives and the stones of the people had accomplished. The head was caved in, one eye was torn out, one ear was hanging. But one had to look carefully to realize this, for it was, now, merely, a black charred object on the black, charred ground. He lay spread-eagled with what had been a wound between what had been his legs.

"They going to leave him here, then?" Jesse whispered.

"Yeah," said his father, "they'll come and get him by and by. I reckon we better get over there and get some of that food before it's all gone."

"I reckon," he muttered now to himself, "I reckon." Grace stirred and touched him on the thigh: the moonlight covered her like glory. Something bubbled up in him, his nature again returned to him. He thought of the boy in the cell; he thought of the man in the fire; he thought of the knife and grabbed himself and stroked himself and a terrible sound, something between a high laugh and a howl, came out of him and dragged his sleeping wife up on one elbow. She stared at him in a moonlight which had now grown cold as ice. He thought of the morning and grabbed her, laughing and crying, crying and laughing, and he whispered, as he stroked her, as he took her, "Come on, sugar, I'm going to do you like a nigger, just like a nigger, come on, sugar, and love me just like you'd love a nigger." He thought of the morning as he labored and she moaned, thought of morning as he labored harder than he ever had before, and before his labors had ended, he heard the first cock crow and the dogs begin to bark, and the sound of tires on the gravel road.

Sonny's Blues

I read about it in the paper, in the subway, on my way to work. I read it, and I couldn't believe it, and I read it again. Then perhaps I just stared at it, at the newsprint spelling out his name, spelling out the story. I stared at it in the swinging lights of the subway car, and in the faces and bodies of the people, and in my own face, trapped in the darkness which roared outside.

It was not to be believed and I kept telling myself that, as I walked from the subway station to the high school. And at the same time I couldn't doubt it. I was scared, scared for Sonny. He became real to me again. A great block of ice got settled in my belly and kept melting there slowly all day long, while I taught my classes algebra. It was a special kind of ice. It kept melting, sending trickles of ice water all up and down my veins, but it never got less. Sometimes it hardened and seemed to expand until I felt my guts were going to come spilling out or that I was going to choke or scream. This would always be at a moment when I was remembering some specific thing Sonny had once said or done.

When he was about as old as the boys in my classes his face had been bright and open, there was a lot of copper in it; and he'd had wonderfully direct brown eyes, and great gentleness and privacy. I wondered what he looked like now. He had been picked up, the evening before, in a raid on an apartment downtown, for peddling and using heroin.

I couldn't believe it: but what I mean by that is that I couldn't find any room for it anywhere inside me. I had kept it outside me for a long time. I hadn't wanted to know. I had had suspicions, but I didn't name them, I kept putting them away. I told myself that Sonny was wild, but he wasn't crazy. And he'd always been a good boy, he hadn't ever turned hard or evil or disrespectful, the way kids can, so quick, so quick, especially in Harlem. I didn't want to believe that I'd ever see my brother going down, coming to nothing, all that light in his face gone out, in the condition I'd already seen so many others. Yet it had happened and here I was, talking about algebra to a lot of boys who might, every one of them for all I knew, be popping off needles every time they went to the head.¹ Maybe it did more for them than algebra could.

I was sure that the first time Sonny had ever had horse,² he couldn't have been much older than these boys were now. These boys, now, were living as we'd been living then, they were growing up with a rush and their heads bumped abruptly against the low ceiling of their actual possibilities. They were filled with rage. All they really knew were two darknesses, the darkness of their lives, which was now closing in on them, and the darkness of the movies, which had blinded them to that other darkness, and in which they now, vindictively, dreamed, at once more together than they were at any other time, and more alone.

When the last bell rang, the last class ended, I let out my breath. It seemed I'd been holding it for all that time. My clothes were wet—I may have looked as though I'd been sitting in a steam bath, all dressed up, all afternoon. I sat alone in the classroom a long time. I listened to the boys outside, downstairs,

1. Lavatory.

2. Slang term for heroin.

shouting and cursing and laughing. Their laughter struck me for perhaps the first time. It was not the joyous laughter which—God knows why—one associates with children. It was mocking and insular, its intent was to denigrate. It was disenchanting, and in this, also, lay the authority of their curses. Perhaps I was listening to them because I was thinking about my brother and in them I heard my brother. And myself.

One boy was whistling a tune, at once very complicated and very simple, it seemed to be pouring out of him as though he were a bird, and it sounded very cool and moving through all that harsh, bright air, only just holding its own through all those other sounds.

I stood up and walked over to the window and looked down into the courtyard. It was the beginning of the spring and the sap was rising in the boys. A teacher passed through them every now and again, quickly, as though he or she couldn't wait to get out of that courtyard, to get those boys out of their sight and off their minds. I started collecting my stuff. I thought I'd better get home and talk to Isabel.

The courtyard was almost deserted by the time I got downstairs. I saw this boy standing in the shadow of a doorway, looking just like Sonny. I almost called his name. Then I saw that it wasn't Sonny, but somebody we used to know, a boy from around our block. He'd been Sonny's friend. He'd never been mine, having been too young for me, and, anyway, I'd never liked him. And now, even though he was a grown-up man, he still hung around that block, still spent hours on the street corners, was always high and raggy. I used to run into him from time to time and he'd often work around to asking me for a quarter or fifty cents. He always had some real good excuse, too, and I always gave it to him, I don't know why.

But now, abruptly, I hated him. I couldn't stand the way he looked at me, partly like a dog, partly like a cunning child. I wanted to ask him what the hell he was doing in the school courtyard.

He sort of shuffled over to me, and he said, "I see you got the papers. So you already know about it."

"You mean about Sonny? Yes, I already know about it. How come they didn't get you?"

He grinned. It made him repulsive and it also brought to mind what he'd looked like as a kid. "I wasn't there. I stay away from them people."

"Good for you." I offered him a cigarette and I watched him through the smoke. "You come all the way down here just to tell me about Sonny?"

"That's right." He was sort of shaking his head and his eyes looked strange, as though they were about to cross. The bright sun deadened his damp dark brown skin and it made his eyes look yellow and showed up the dirt in his kinked hair. He smelled funky. I moved a little away from him and I said, "Well, thanks. But I already know about it and I got to get home."

"I'll walk you a little ways," he said. We started walking. There were a couple of kids still loitering in the courtyard and one of them said good-night to me and looked strangely at the boy beside me.

"What're you going to do?" he asked me. "I mean, about Sonny?"

"Look. I haven't seen Sonny for over a year, I'm not sure I'm going to do anything. Anyway, what the hell *can* I do?"

"That's right," he said quickly, "ain't nothing you can do. Can't much help old Sonny no more, I guess."

It was what I was thinking and so it seemed to me he had no right to say it.

"I'm surprised at Sonny, though," he went on—he had a funny way of talking, he looked straight ahead as though he were talking to himself—"I thought Sonny was a smart boy, I thought he was too smart to get hung."³

"I guess he thought so too," I said sharply, "and that's how he got hung. And how about you? You're pretty goddamn smart, I bet."

Then he looked directly at me, just for a minute. "I ain't smart," he said. "If I was smart, I'd have reached for a pistol a long time ago."

"Look. Don't tell *me* your sad story, if it was up to me, I'd give you one." Then I felt guilty—guilty, probably, for never having supposed that the poor bastard *had* a story of his own, much less a sad one, and I asked, quickly, "What's going to happen to him now?"

He didn't answer this. He was off by himself some place. "Funny thing," he said, and from his tone we might have been discussing the quickest way to get to Brooklyn, "when I saw the papers this morning, the first thing I asked myself was if I had anything to do with it. I felt sort of responsible."

I began to listen more carefully. The subway station was on the corner, just before us, and I stopped. He stopped, too. We were in front of a bar and he ducked slightly, peering in, but whoever he was looking for didn't seem to be there. The juke box was blasting away with something black and bouncy and I half watched the barmaid as she danced her way from the juke box to her place behind the bar. And I watched her face as she laughingly responded to something someone said to her, still keeping time to the music. When she smiled one saw the little girl, one sensed the doomed, still-struggling woman beneath the battered face of the semi-whore.

"I never *give* Sonny nothing," the boy said finally, "but a long time ago I come to school high and Sonny asked me how it felt." He paused, I couldn't bear to watch him, I watched the barmaid, and I listened to the music which seemed to be causing the pavement to shake. "I told him it felt great." The music stopped, the barmaid paused and watched the juke box until the music began again. "It did."

All this was carrying me some place I didn't want to go. I certainly didn't want to know how it felt. It filled everything, the people, the houses, the music, the dark, quicksilver barmaid, with menace; and this menace was their reality.

"What's going to happen to him now?" I asked again.

"They'll send him away some place and they'll try to cure him." He shook his head. "Maybe he'll even think he's kicked the habit. Then they'll let him loose"—he gestured, throwing his cigarette into the gutter. "That's all."

"What do you mean, that's *all*?"

But I knew what he meant.

"I *mean*, that's *all*." He turned his head and looked at me, pulling down the corners of his mouth. "Don't you know what I mean?" he asked, softly.

"How the hell *would* I know what you mean?" I almost whispered it, I don't know why.

"That's right," he said to the air, "how would *he* know what I mean?" He turned toward me again, patient and calm, and yet I somehow felt him

3. Become an addict.

shaking, shaking as though he were going to fall apart. I felt that ice in my guts again, the dread I'd felt all afternoon; and again I watched the barmaid, moving about the bar, washing glasses, and singing. "Listen. They'll let him out and then it'll just start all over again. That's what I mean."

"You mean—they'll let him out. And then he'll just start working his way back in again. You mean he'll never kick the habit. Is that what you mean?"

"That's right," he said, cheerfully. "You see what I mean."

"Tell me," I said at last, "why does he want to die? He must want to die, he's killing himself, why does he want to die?"

He looked at me in surprise. He licked his lips. "He don't want to die. He wants to live. Don't nobody want to die, ever."

Then I wanted to ask him—too many things. He could not have answered, or if he had, I could not have borne the answers. I started walking. "Well, I guess it's none of my business."

"It's going to be rough on old Sonny," he said. We reached the subway station. "This is your station?" he asked. I nodded. I took one step down. "Damn!" he said, suddenly. I looked up at him. He grinned again. "Damn it if I didn't leave all my money home. You ain't got a dollar on you, have you? Just for a couple of days, is all."

All at once something inside gave and threatened to come pouring out of me. I didn't hate him anymore. I felt that in another moment I'd start crying like a child.

"Sure," I said. "Don't sweat." I looked in my wallet and didn't have a dollar, I only had a five. "Here," I said. "That hold you?"

He didn't look at it—he didn't want to look at it. A terrible, closed look came over his face, as though he were keeping the number on the bill a secret from him and me. "Thanks," he said, and now he was dying to see me go. "Don't worry about Sonny. Maybe I'll write him or something."

"Sure," I said. "You do that. So long."

"Be seeing you," he said. I went on down the steps.

And I didn't write Sonny or send him anything for a long time. When I finally did, it was just after my little girl died, he wrote me back a letter which made me feel like a bastard.

Here's what he said:

Dear brother,

You don't know how much I needed to hear from you. I wanted to write you many a time but I dug how much I must have hurt you and so I didn't write. But now I feel like a man who's been trying to climb up out of some deep, real deep and funky hole and just saw the sun up there, outside. I got to get outside.

I can't tell you much about how I got here. I mean I don't know how to tell you. I guess I was afraid of something or I was trying to escape from something and you know I have never been very strong in the head (smile). I'm glad Mama and Daddy are dead and can't see what's happened to their son and I swear if I'd known what I was doing I would never have hurt you so, you and a lot of other fine people who were nice to me and who believed in me.

I don't want you to think it had anything to do with me being a musician. It's more than that. Or maybe less than that. I can't get anything straight in my head down here and I try not to think about what's going to happen to me when I get outside again. Sometime I think I'm going to flip and *never* get outside and sometime I think I'll come straight back. I tell you one thing, though, I'd rather blow my brains out than go through this again. But that's what they all say, so they tell me. If I tell you when I'm coming to New York and if you could meet me, I sure would appreciate it. Give my love to Isabel and the kids and I was sure sorry to hear about little Gracie. I wish I could be like Mama and say the Lord's will be done, but I don't know it seems to me that trouble is the one thing that never does get stopped and I don't know what good it does to blame it on the Lord. But maybe it does some good if you believe it.

Your brother,
Sonny

Then I kept in constant touch with him and I sent him whatever I could and I went to meet him when he came back to New York. When I saw him many things I thought I had forgotten came flooding back to me. This was because I had begun, finally, to wonder about Sonny, about the life that Sonny lived inside. This life, whatever it was, had made him older and thinner and it had deepened the distant stillness in which he had always moved. He looked very unlike my baby brother. Yet, when he smiled, when we shook hands, the baby brother I'd never known looked out from the depths of his private life, like an animal waiting to be coaxed into the light.

"How you been keeping?" he asked me.

"All right. And you?"

"Just fine." He was smiling all over his face. "It's good to see you again."

"It's good to see you."

The seven years' difference in our ages lay between us like a chasm: I wondered if these years would ever operate between us as a bridge. I was remembering, and it made it hard to catch my breath, that I had been there when he was born; and I had heard the first words he had ever spoken. When he started to walk, he walked from our mother straight to me. I caught him just before he fell when he took the first steps he ever took in this world.

"How's Isabel?"

"Just fine. She's dying to see you."

"And the boys?"

"They're fine, too. They're anxious to see their uncle."

"Oh, come on. You know they don't remember me."

"Are you kidding? Of course they remember you."

He grinned again. We got into a taxi. We had a lot to say to each other, far too much to know how to begin.

As the taxi began to move, I asked, "You still want to go to India?"

He laughed. "You still remember that. Hell, no. This place is Indian enough for me."

"It used to belong to them,"⁴ I said.

4. Manhattan Island, in the center of New York City, was purchased by Dutch settlers from the Lenape tribe, circa 1626.

And he laughed again. "They damn sure knew what they were doing when they got rid of it."

Years ago, when he was around fourteen, he'd been all hipped on the idea of going to India. He read books about people sitting on rocks, naked, in all kinds of weather, but mostly bad, naturally, and walking barefoot through hot coals and arriving at wisdom. I used to say that it sounded to me as though they were getting away from wisdom as fast as they could. I think he sort of looked down on me for that.

"Do you mind," he asked, "if we have the driver drive alongside the park⁵ on the west side—I haven't seen the city in so long."

"Of course not," I said. I was afraid that I might sound as though I were humoring him, but I hoped he wouldn't take it that way.

So we drove along, between the green of the park and the stony, lifeless elegance of hotels and apartment buildings, toward the vivid, killing streets of our childhood. These streets hadn't changed, though housing projects jutted up out of them now like rocks in the middle of a boiling sea. Most of the houses in which we had grown up had vanished, as had the stores from which we had stolen, the basements in which we had first tried sex, the rooftops from which we had hurled tin cans and bricks. But houses exactly like the houses of our past yet dominated the landscape, boys exactly like the boys we once had been found themselves smothering in these houses, came down into the streets for light and air and found themselves encircled by disaster. Some escaped the trap, most didn't. Those who got out always left something of themselves behind, as some animals amputate a leg and leave it in the trap. It might be said, perhaps, that I had escaped, after all, I was a school teacher; or that Sonny had, he hadn't lived in Harlem for years. Yet, as the cab moved uptown through streets which seemed, with a rush, to darken with dark people, and as I covertly studied Sonny's face, it came to me that what we both were seeking through our separate cab windows was that part of ourselves which had been left behind. It's always at the hour of trouble and confrontation that the missing member aches.

We hit 110th Street and started rolling up Lenox Avenue. And I'd known this avenue all my life, but it seemed to me again, as it had seemed on the day I'd first heard about Sonny's trouble, filled with a hidden menace which was its very breath of life.

"We almost there," said Sonny.

"Almost." We were both too nervous to say anything more.

We live in a housing project. It hasn't been up long. A few days after it was up it seemed uninhabitably new, now, of course, it's already rundown. It looks like a parody of the good, clean, faceless life—God knows the people who live in it do their best to make it a parody. The beat-looking grass lying around isn't enough to make their lives green, the hedges will never hold out the streets, and they know it. The big windows fool no one, they aren't big enough to make space out of no space. They don't bother with the windows, they watch the TV screen instead. The playground is most popular with the children who don't play at jacks, or skip rope, or roller skate, or swing, and they can be found in it after dark. We moved in partly because it's not too far from where I teach, and partly for the kids; but it's really just like the houses

5. Central Park.

in which Sonny and I grew up. The same things happen, they'll have the same things to remember. The moment Sonny and I started into the house I had the feeling that I was simply bringing him back into the danger he had almost died trying to escape.

Sonny has never been talkative. So I don't know why I was sure he'd be dying to talk to me when supper was over the first night. Everything went fine, the oldest boy remembered him, and the youngest boy liked him, and Sonny had remembered to bring something for each of them; and Isabel, who is really much nicer than I am, more open and giving, had gone to a lot of trouble about dinner and was genuinely glad to see him. And she's always been able to tease Sonny in a way that I haven't. It was nice to see her face so vivid again and to hear her laugh and watch her make Sonny laugh. She wasn't, or, anyway, she didn't seem to be, at all uneasy or embarrassed. She chatted as though there were no subject which had to be avoided and she got Sonny past his first, faint stiffness. And thank God she was there, for I was filled with that icy dread again. Everything I did seemed awkward to me, and everything I said sounded freighted with hidden meaning. I was trying to remember everything I'd heard about dope addiction and I couldn't help watching Sonny for signs. I wasn't doing it out of malice. I was trying to find out something about my brother. I was dying to hear him tell me he was safe.

"Safe!" my father grunted, whenever Mama suggested trying to move to a neighborhood which might be safer for children. "Safe, hell! Ain't no place safe for kids, nor nobody."

He always went on like this, but he wasn't, ever, really as bad as he sounded, not even on weekends, when he got drunk. As a matter of fact, he was always on the lookout for "something a little better," but he died before he found it. He died suddenly, during a drunken weekend in the middle of the war, when Sonny was fifteen. He and Sonny hadn't ever got on too well. And this was partly because Sonny was the apple of his father's eye. It was because he loved Sonny so much and was frightened for him, that he was always fighting with him. It doesn't do any good to fight with Sonny. Sonny just moves back, inside himself, where he can't be reached. But the principal reason that they never hit it off is that they were so much alike. Daddy was big and rough and loud-talking, just the opposite of Sonny, but they both had—that same privacy.

Mama tried to tell me something about this, just after Daddy died. I was home on leave from the army.

This was the last time I ever saw my mother alive. Just the same, this picture gets all mixed up in my mind with pictures I had of her when she was younger. The way I always see her is the way she used to be on a Sunday afternoon, say, when the old folks were talking after the big Sunday dinner. I always see her wearing pale blue. She'd be sitting on the sofa. And my father would be sitting in the easy chair, not far from her. And the living room would be full of church folks and relatives. There they sit, in chairs all around the living room, and the night is creeping up outside, but nobody knows it yet. You can see the darkness growing against the windowpanes and you hear the street noises every now and again, or maybe the jangling beat of a tambourine from one of the churches close by, but it's real quiet in the

room. For a moment nobody's talking, but every face looks darkening, like the sky outside. And my mother rocks a little from the waist, and my father's eyes are closed. Everyone is looking at something a child can't see. For a minute they've forgotten the children. Maybe a kid is lying on the rug, half asleep. Maybe somebody's got a kid in his lap and is absent-mindedly stroking the kid's head. Maybe there's a kid, quiet and big-eyed, curled up in a big chair in the corner. The silence, the darkness coming, and the darkness in the faces frightens the child obscurely. He hopes that the hand which strokes his forehead will never stop—will never die. He hopes that there will never come a time when the old folks won't be sitting around the living room, talking about where they've come from, and what they've seen, and what's happened to them and their kinfolk.

But something deep and watchful in the child knows that this is bound to end, is already ending. In a moment someone will get up and turn on the light. Then the old folks will remember the children and they won't talk anymore that day. And when light fills the room, the child is filled with darkness. He knows that every time this happens he's moved just a little closer to that darkness outside. The darkness outside is what the old folks have been talking about. It's what they've come from. It's what they endure. The child knows that they won't talk anymore because if he knows too much about what's happened to *them*, he'll know too much too soon, about what's going to happen to *him*.

The last time I talked to my mother, I remember I was restless. I wanted to get out and see Isabel. We weren't married then and we had a lot to straighten out between us.

There Mama sat, in black, by the window. She was humming an old church song, *Lord, you brought me from a long ways off*. Sonny was out somewhere. Mama kept watching the streets.

"I don't know," she said, "if I'll ever see you again, after you go off from here. But I hope you'll remember the things I tried to teach you."

"Don't talk like that," I said, and smiled. "You'll be here a long time yet."

She smiled, too, but she said nothing. She was quiet for a long time. And I said, "Mama, don't you worry about nothing. I'll be writing all the time, and you be getting the checks. . . ."

"I want to talk to you about your brother," she said, suddenly. "If anything happens to me he ain't going to have nobody to look out for him."

"Mama," I said, "ain't nothing going to happen to you *or* Sonny. Sonny's all right. He's a good boy and he's got good sense."

"It ain't a question of his being a good boy," Mama said, "nor of his having good sense. It ain't only the bad ones, nor yet the dumb ones that gets sucked under." She stopped, looking at me. "Your Daddy once had a brother," she said, and she smiled in a way that made me feel she was in pain. "You didn't never know that, did you?"

"No," I said, "I never knew that," and I watched her face.

"Oh, yes," she said, "your Daddy had a brother." She looked out of the window again. "I know you never saw your Daddy cry. But *I* did—many a time, through all these years."

I asked her, "What happened to his brother? How come nobody's ever talked about him?"

This was the first time I ever saw my mother look old.

“His brother got killed,” she said, “when he was just a little younger than you are now. I knew him. He was a fine boy. He was maybe a little full of the devil, but he didn’t mean nobody no harm.”

Then she stopped and the room was silent, exactly as it had sometimes been on those Sunday afternoons. Mama kept looking out into the streets.

“He used to have a job in the mill,” she said, “and, like all young folks, he just liked to perform on Saturday nights. Saturday nights, him and your father would drift around to different places, go to dances and things like that, or just sit around with people they knew, and your father’s brother would sing, he had a fine voice, and play along with himself on his guitar. Well, this particular Saturday night, him and your father was coming home from some place, and they were both a little drunk and there was a moon that night, it was bright like day. Your father’s brother was feeling kind of good, and he was whistling to himself, and he had his guitar slung over his shoulder. They was coming down a hill and beneath them was a road that turned off from the highway. Well, your father’s brother, being always kind of frisky, decided to run down this hill, and he did, with that guitar banging and clanging behind him, and he ran across the road, and he was making water behind a tree. And your father was sort of amused at him and he was still coming down the hill, kind of slow. Then he heard a car motor and that same minute his brother stepped from behind the tree, into the road, in the moonlight. And he started to cross the road. And your father started to run down the hill, he says he don’t know why. This car was full of white men. They was all drunk, and when they seen your father’s brother they let out a great whoop and holler and they aimed the car straight at him. They was having fun, they just wanted to scare him, the way they do sometimes, you know. But they was drunk. And I guess the boy, being drunk, too, and scared, kind of lost his head. By the time he jumped it was too late. Your father says he heard his brother scream when the car rolled over him, and he heard the wood of that guitar when it give, and he heard them strings go flying, and he heard them white men shouting, and the car kept on a-going and it ain’t stopped till this day. And, time your father got down the hill, his brother weren’t nothing but blood and pulp.”

Tears were gleaming on my mother’s face. There wasn’t anything I could say.

“He never mentioned it,” she said, “because I never let him mention it before you children. Your Daddy was like a crazy man that night and for many a night thereafter. He says he never in his life seen anything as dark as that road after the lights of that car had gone away. Weren’t nothing, weren’t nobody on that road, just your Daddy and his brother and that busted guitar. Oh, yes. Your Daddy never did really get right again. Till the day he died he weren’t sure but that every white man he saw was the man that killed his brother.”

She stopped and took out her handkerchief and dried her eyes and looked at me.

“I ain’t telling you all this,” she said, “to make you scared or bitter or to make you hate nobody. I’m telling you this because you got a brother. And the world ain’t changed.”

I guess I didn’t want to believe this. I guess she saw this in my face. She turned away from me, toward the window again, searching those streets.

"But I praise my Redeemer," she said at last, "that He called your Daddy home before me. I ain't saying it to throw no flowers at myself, but, I declare, it keeps me from feeling too cast down to know I helped your father get safely through this world. Your father always acted like he was the roughest, strongest man on earth. And everybody took him to be like that. But if he hadn't had *me* there—to see his tears!"

She was crying again. Still, I couldn't move. I said, "Lord, Lord, Mama, I didn't know it was like that."

"Oh, honey," she said, "there's a lot that you don't know. But you are going to find it out." She stood up from the window and came over to me. "You got to hold on to your brother," she said, "and don't let him fall, no matter what it looks like is happening to him and no matter how evil you gets with him. You going to be evil with him many a time. But don't you forget what I told you, you hear?"

"I won't forget," I said. "Don't you worry, I won't forget. I won't let nothing happen to Sonny."

My mother smiled as though she were amused at something she saw in my face. Then, "You may not be able to stop nothing from happening. But you got to let him know you's *there*."

Two days later I was married, and then I was gone. And I had a lot of things on my mind and I pretty well forgot my promise to Mama until I got shipped home on a special furlough for her funeral.

And, after the funeral, with just Sonny and me alone in the empty kitchen, I tried to find out something about him.

"What do you want to do?" I asked him.

"I'm going to be a musician," he said.

For he had graduated, in the time I had been away, from dancing to the juke box to finding out who was playing what, and what they were doing with it, and he had bought himself a set of drums.

"You mean, you want to be a drummer?" I somehow had the feeling that being a drummer might be all right for other people but not for my brother Sonny.

"I don't think," he said, looking at me very gravely, "that I'll ever be a good drummer. But I think I can play a piano."

I frowned. I'd never played the role of the older brother quite so seriously before, had scarcely ever, in fact, *asked* Sonny a damn thing. I sensed myself in the presence of something I didn't really know how to handle, didn't understand. So I made my frown a little deeper as I asked: "What kind of musician do you want to be?"

He grinned. "How many kinds do you think there are?"

"Be *serious*," I said.

He laughed, throwing his head back, and then looked at me. "I *am* serious."

"Well, then, for Christ's sake, stop kidding around and answer a serious question. I mean, do you want to be a concert pianist, you want to play classical music and all that, or—or what?" Long before I finished he was laughing again. "For Christ's *sake*, Sonny!"

He sobered, but with difficulty. "I'm sorry. But you sound so—*scared!*" and he was off again.

“Well, you may think it’s funny now, baby, but it’s not going to be so funny when you have to make your living at it, let me tell you *that*.” I was furious because I knew he was laughing at me and I didn’t know why.

“No,” he said, very sober now, and afraid, perhaps, that he’d hurt me, “I don’t want to be a classical pianist. That isn’t what interests me. I mean”—he paused, looking hard at me, as though his eyes would help me to understand, and then gestured helplessly, as though perhaps his hand would help—“I mean, I’ll have a lot of studying to do, and I’ll have to study *everything*, but, I mean, I want to play *with*—jazz musicians.” He stopped. “I want to play jazz,” he said.

Well, the word had never before sounded as heavy, as real, as it sounded that afternoon in Sonny’s mouth. I just looked at him and I was probably frowning a real frown by this time. I simply couldn’t see why on earth he’d want to spend his time hanging around nightclubs, clowning around on bandstands, while people pushed each other around a dance floor. It seemed—beneath him, somehow. I had never thought about it before, had never been forced to, but I suppose I had always put jazz musicians in a class with what Daddy called “good-time people.”

“Are you *serious*?”

“Hell, *yes*, I’m serious.”

He looked more helpless than ever, and annoyed, and deeply hurt.

I suggested, helpfully: “You mean—like Louis Armstrong?”⁶

His face closed as though I’d struck him. “No. I’m not talking about none of that old-time, down-home crap.”

“Well, look, Sonny, I’m sorry, don’t get mad. I just don’t altogether get it, that’s all. Name somebody—you know, a jazz musician you admire.”

“Bird.”

“Who?”

“Bird! Charlie Parker!⁷ Don’t they teach you nothing in the goddamn army?”

I lit a cigarette. I was surprised and then a little amused to discover that I was trembling. “I’ve been out of touch,” I said. “You’ll have to be patient with me. Now. Who’s this Parker character?”

“He’s just one of the greatest jazz musicians alive,” said Sonny, sullenly, his hands in his pockets, his back to me. “Maybe *the* greatest,” he added, bitterly, “that’s probably why *you* never heard of him.”

“All right,” I said, “I’m ignorant. I’m sorry. I’ll go out and buy all the cat’s records right away, all right?”

“It don’t,” said Sonny, with dignity, “make any difference to me. I don’t care what you listen to. Don’t do me no favors.”

I was beginning to realize that I’d never seen him so upset before. With another part of my mind I was thinking that this would probably turn out to be one of those things kids go through and that I shouldn’t make it seem important by pushing it too hard. Still, I didn’t think it would do any harm to ask: “Doesn’t all this take a lot of time? Can you make a living at it?”

He turned back to me and half leaned, half sat, on the kitchen table. “Everything takes time,” he said, “and—well, yes, sure, I can make a living

6. American jazz trumpeter (1901–1971).

7. Charles Christopher Parker Jr. (1920–1955), nicknamed “Yardbird” or simply “Bird,” American

jazz saxophonist credited with inventing the experimental “bebop” style of jazz. He died from the effects of long-term heroin addiction.

at it. But what I don't seem to be able to make you understand is that it's the only thing I want to do."

"Well, Sonny," I said, gently, "you know people can't always do exactly what they *want* to do—"

"No, I don't know that," said Sonny, surprising me. "I think people *ought* to do what they want to do, what else are they alive for?"

"You getting to be a big boy," I said desperately, "it's time you started thinking about your future."

"I'm thinking about my future," said Sonny, grimly. "I think about it all the time."

I gave up. I decided, if he didn't change his mind, that we could always talk about it later. "In the meantime," I said, "you got to finish school." We had already decided that he'd have to move in with Isabel and her folks. I knew this wasn't the ideal arrangement because Isabel's folks are inclined to be dicty⁸ and they hadn't especially wanted Isabel to marry me. But I didn't know what else to do. "And we have to get you fixed up at Isabel's."

There was a long silence. He moved from the kitchen table to the window. "That's a terrible idea. You know it yourself."

"Do you have a *better* idea?"

He just walked up and down the kitchen for a minute. He was as tall as I was. He had started to shave. I suddenly had the feeling that I didn't know him at all.

He stopped at the kitchen table and picked up my cigarettes. Looking at me with a kind of mocking, amused defiance, he put one between his lips. "You mind?"

"You smoking already?"

He lit the cigarette and nodded, watching me through the smoke. "I just wanted to see if I'd have the courage to smoke in front of you." He grinned and blew a great cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "It was easy." He looked at my face. "Come on, now. I bet you was smoking at my age, tell the truth."

I didn't say anything but the truth was on my face, and he laughed. But now there was something very strained in his laugh. "Sure. And I bet that ain't all you was doing."

He was frightening me a little. "Cut the crap," I said. "We already decided that you was going to go and live at Isabel's. Now what's got into you all of a sudden?"

"*You* decided it," he pointed out. "I didn't decide nothing." He stopped in front of me, leaning against the stove, arms loosely folded. "Look, brother. I don't want to stay in Harlem no more, I really don't." He was very earnest. He looked at me, then over toward the kitchen window. There was something in his eyes I'd never seen before, some thoughtfulness, some worry all his own. He rubbed the muscle of one arm. "It's time I was getting out of here."

"Where do you want to go, Sonny?"

"I want to join the army. Or the navy, I don't care. If I say I'm old enough, they'll believe me."

Then I got mad. It was because I was so scared. "You must be crazy. You goddamn fool, what the hell do you want to go and join the *army* for?"

8. Slang for "snobbish."

"I just told you. To get out of Harlem."

"Sonny, you haven't even finished *school*. And if you really want to be a musician, how do you expect to study if you're in the *army*?"

He looked at me, trapped, and in anguish. "There's ways. I might be able to work out some kind of deal. Anyway, I'll have the G.I. Bill⁹ when I come out."

"If you come out." We stared at each other. "Sonny, please. Be reasonable. I know the setup is far from perfect. But we got to do the best we can."

"I ain't learning nothing in school," he said. "Even when I go." He turned away from me and opened the window and threw his cigarette out into the narrow alley. I watched his back. "At least, I ain't learning nothing you'd want me to learn." He slammed the window so hard I thought the glass would fly out, and turned back to me. "And I'm sick of the stink of these garbage cans!"

"Sonny," I said, "I know how you feel. But if you don't finish school now, you're going to be sorry later that you didn't." I grabbed him by the shoulders. "And you only got another year. It ain't so bad. And I'll come back and I swear I'll help you do *whatever* you want to do. Just try to put up with it till I come back. Will you please do that? For me?"

He didn't answer and he wouldn't look at me.

"Sonny. You hear me?"

He pulled away. "I hear you. But you never hear anything *I* say."

I didn't know what to say to that. He looked out of the window and then back at me. "OK," he said, and sighed. "I'll try."

Then I said, trying to cheer him up a little, "They got a piano at Isabel's. You can practice on it."

And as a matter of fact, it did cheer him up for a minute. "That's right," he said to himself. "I forgot that." His face relaxed a little. But the worry, the thoughtfulness, played on it still, the way shadows play on a face which is staring into the fire.

But I thought I'd never hear the end of that piano. At first, Isabel would write me, saying how nice it was that Sonny was so serious about his music and how, as soon as he came in from school, or wherever he had been when he was supposed to be at school, he went straight to that piano and stayed there until suppertime. And, after supper, he went back to that piano and stayed there until everybody went to bed. He was at the piano all day Saturday and all day Sunday. Then he bought a record player and started playing records. He'd play one record over and over again, all day long sometimes, and he'd improvise along with it on the piano. Or he'd play one section of the record, one chord, one change, one progression, then he'd do it on the piano. Then back to the record. Then back to the piano.

Well, I really don't know how they stood it. Isabel finally confessed that it wasn't like living with a person at all, it was like living with sound. And the sound didn't make any sense to her, didn't make any sense to any of them—naturally. They began, in a way, to be afflicted by this presence that was living in their home. It was as though Sonny were some sort of god, or

9. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act (1944), known as the G.I. Bill, provided educational and other benefits to World War II veterans.

monster. He moved in an atmosphere which wasn't like theirs at all. They fed him and he ate, he washed himself, he walked in and out of their door; he certainly wasn't nasty or unpleasant or rude, Sonny isn't any of those things; but it was as though he were all wrapped up in some cloud, some fire, some vision all his own; and there wasn't any way to reach him.

At the same time, he wasn't really a man yet, he was still a child, and they had to watch out for him in all kinds of ways. They certainly couldn't throw him out. Neither did they dare to make a great scene about that piano because even they dimly sensed, as I sensed, from so many thousands of miles away, that Sonny was at that piano playing for his life.

But he hadn't been going to school. One day a letter came from the school board and Isabel's mother got it—there had, apparently, been other letters but Sonny had torn them up. This day, when Sonny came in, Isabel's mother showed him the letter and asked where he'd been spending his time. And she finally got it out of him that he'd been down in Greenwich Village,¹ with musicians and other characters, in a white girl's apartment. And this scared her and she started to scream at him and what came up, once she began—though she denies it to this day—was what sacrifices they were making to give Sonny a decent home and how little he appreciated it.

Sonny didn't play the piano that day. By evening, Isabel's mother had calmed down but then there was the old man to deal with, and Isabel herself. Isabel says she did her best to be calm but she broke down and started crying. She says she just watched Sonny's face. She could tell, by watching him, what was happening with him. And what was happening was that they penetrated his cloud, they had reached him. Even if their fingers had been a thousand times more gentle than human fingers ever are, he could hardly help feeling that they had stripped him naked and were spitting on that nakedness. For he also had to see that his presence, that music, which was life or death to him, had been torture for them and that they had endured it, not at all for his sake, but only for mine. And Sonny couldn't take that. He can take it a little better today than he could then but he's still not very good at it and, frankly, I don't know anybody who is.

The silence of the next few days must have been louder than the sound of all the music ever played since time began. One morning, before she went to work, Isabel was in his room for something and she suddenly realized that all of his records were gone. And she knew for certain that he was gone. And he was. He went as far as the navy would carry him. He finally sent me a postcard from some place in Greece and that was the first I knew that Sonny was still alive. I didn't see him anymore until we were both back in New York and the war had long been over.

He was a man by then, of course, but I wasn't willing to see it. He came by the house from time to time, but we fought almost every time we met. I didn't like the way he carried himself, loose and dreamlike all the time, and I didn't like his friends, and his music seemed to be merely an excuse for the life he led. It sounded just that weird and disordered.

Then we had a fight, a pretty awful fight, and I didn't see him for months. By and by I looked him up, where he was living, in a furnished room in the

1. Neighborhood in Lower Manhattan where artists, musicians, writers, and intellectuals gathered in the mid-20th century.

Village, and I tried to make it up. But there were lots of other people in the room and Sonny just lay on his bed, and he wouldn't come downstairs with me, and he treated these other people as though they were his family and I weren't. So I got mad and then he got mad, and then I told him that he might just as well be dead as live the way he was living. Then he stood up and he told me not to worry about him anymore in life, that he *was* dead as far as I was concerned. Then he pushed me to the door and the other people looked on as though nothing were happening, and he slammed the door behind me. I stood in the hallway, staring at the door. I heard somebody laugh in the room and then the tears came to my eyes. I started down the steps, whistling to keep from crying, I kept whistling to myself, *You going to need me, baby, one of these cold, rainy days.*²

I read about Sonny's trouble in the spring. Little Grace died in the fall. She was a beautiful little girl. But she only lived a little over two years. She died of polio and she suffered. She had a slight fever for a couple of days, but it didn't seem like anything and we just kept her in bed. And we would certainly have called the doctor, but the fever dropped, she seemed to be all right. So we thought it had just been a cold. Then, one day, she was up, playing, Isabel was in the kitchen fixing lunch for the two boys when they'd come in from school, and she heard Grace fall down in the living room. When you have a lot of children you don't always start running when one of them falls, unless they start screaming or something. And, this time, Grace was quiet. Yet, Isabel says that when she heard that *thump* and then that silence, something happened in her to make her afraid. And she ran to the living room and there was little Grace on the floor, all twisted up, and the reason she hadn't screamed was that she couldn't get her breath. And when she did scream, it was the worst sound, Isabel says, that she'd ever heard in all her life, and she still hears it sometimes in her dreams. Isabel will sometimes wake me up with a low, moaning, strangled sound and I have to be quick to awaken her and hold her to me and where Isabel is weeping against me seems a mortal wound.

I think I may have written Sonny the very day that little Grace was buried. I was sitting in the living room in the dark, by myself, and I suddenly thought of Sonny. My trouble made his real.

One Saturday afternoon, when Sonny had been living with us, or, anyway, been in our house, for nearly two weeks, I found myself wandering aimlessly about the living room, drinking from a can of beer, and trying to work up the courage to search Sonny's room. He was out, he was usually out whenever I was home, and Isabel had taken the children to see their grandparents. Suddenly I was standing still in front of the living room window, watching Seventh Avenue. The idea of searching Sonny's room made me still. I scarcely dared to admit to myself what I'd be searching for. I didn't know what I'd do if I found it. Or if I didn't.

On the sidewalk across from me, near the entrance to a barbecue joint, some people were holding an old-fashioned revival meeting. The barbecue cook, wearing a dirty white apron, his conked³ hair reddish and metallic in

2. Possibly based on Bertha "Chippie" Hill's 1928 recording of the song "Some Cold Rainy Day."

3. Chemically straightened.

the pale sun, and a cigarette between his lips, stood in the doorway, watching them. Kids and older people paused in their errands and stood there, along with some older men and a couple of very tough-looking women who watched everything that happened on the avenue, as though they owned it, or were maybe owned by it. Well, they were watching this, too. The revival was being carried on by three sisters in black, and a brother. All they had were their voices and their Bibles and a tambourine. The brother was testifying and while he testified two of the sisters stood together, seeming to say, amen, and the third sister walked around with the tambourine outstretched and a couple of people dropped coins into it. Then the brother's testimony ended and the sister who had been taking up the collection dumped the coins into her palm and transferred them to the pocket of her long black robe. Then she raised both hands, striking the tambourine against the air, and then against one hand, and she started to sing. And the two other sisters and the brother joined in.

It was strange, suddenly, to watch, though I had been seeing these street meetings all my life. So, of course, had everybody else down there. Yet, they paused and watched and listened and I stood still at the window. "*Tis the old ship of Zion,*" they sang, and the sister with the tambourine kept a steady, jangling beat, "*it has rescued many a thousand!*"⁴ Not a soul under the sound of their voices was hearing this song for the first time, not one of them had been rescued. Nor had they seen much in the way of rescue work being done around them. Neither did they especially believe in the holiness of the three sisters and the brother, they knew too much about them, knew where they lived, and how. The woman with the tambourine, whose voice dominated the air, whose face was bright with joy, was divided by very little from the woman who stood watching her, a cigarette between her heavy, chapped lips, her hair a cuckoo's nest, her face scarred and swollen from many beatings, and her black eyes glittering like coal. Perhaps they both knew this, which was why, when, as rarely, they addressed each other, they addressed each other as Sister. As the singing filled the air the watching, listening faces underwent a change, the eyes focusing on something within; the music seemed to soothe a poison out of them; and time seemed, nearly, to fall away from the sullen, belligerent, battered faces, as though they were fleeing back to their first condition, while dreaming of their last. The barbecue cook half shook his head and smiled, and dropped his cigarette and disappeared into his joint. A man fumbled in his pockets for change and stood holding it in his hand impatiently, as though he had just remembered a pressing appointment further up the avenue. He looked furious. Then I saw Sonny, standing on the edge of the crowd. He was carrying a wide, flat notebook with a green cover, and it made him look, from where I was standing, almost like a schoolboy. The coppery sun brought out the copper in his skin, he was very faintly smiling, standing very still. Then the singing stopped, the tambourine turned into a collection plate again. The furious man dropped in his coins and vanished, so did a couple of the women, and Sonny dropped some change in the plate, looking directly at the woman with a little smile. He started across the avenue, toward the house. He has a slow, loping walk, something like the way

4. From the song "The Old Ship of Zion," a 19th-century Christian spiritual.

Harlem hipsters walk, only he's imposed on this his own half-beat. I had never really noticed it before.

I stayed at the window, both relieved and apprehensive. As Sonny disappeared from my sight, they began singing again. And they were still singing when his key turned in the lock.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey, yourself. You want some beer?"

"No. Well, maybe." But he came up to the window and stood beside me, looking out. "What a warm voice," he said.

They were singing *If I could only hear my mother pray again!*⁵

"Yes," I said, "and she can sure beat that tambourine."

"But what a terrible song," he said, and laughed. He dropped his notebook on the sofa and disappeared into the kitchen. "Where's Isabel and the kids?"

"I think they went to see their grandparents. You hungry?"

"No." He came back into the living room with his can of beer. "You want to come some place with me tonight?"

I sensed, I don't know how, that I couldn't possibly say no. "Sure. Where?"

He sat down on the sofa and picked up his notebook and started leafing through it. "I'm going to sit in with some fellows in a joint in the Village."

"You mean, you're going to play, tonight?"

"That's right." He took a swallow of his beer and moved back to the window. He gave me a sidelong look. "If you can stand it."

"I'll try," I said.

He smiled to himself and we both watched as the meeting across the way broke up. The three sisters and the brother, heads bowed, were singing *God be with you till we meet again.*⁶ The faces around them were very quiet. Then the song ended. The small crowd dispersed. We watched the three women and the lone man walk slowly up the avenue.

"When she was singing before," said Sonny, abruptly, "her voice reminded me for a minute of what heroin feels like sometimes—when it's in your veins. It makes you feel sort of warm and cool at the same time. And distant. And—and sure." He sipped his beer, very deliberately not looking at me. I watched his face. "It makes you feel—in control. Sometimes you've got to have that feeling."

"Do you?" I sat down slowly in the easy chair.

"Sometimes." He went to the sofa and picked up his notebook again. "Some people do."

"In order," I asked, "to play?" And my voice was very ugly, full of contempt and anger.

"Well"—he looked at me with great troubled eyes, as though, in fact, he hoped his eyes would tell me things he could never otherwise say—"they *think so*. And *if they think so!*"

"And what do *you* think?" I asked.

He sat on the sofa and put his can of beer on the floor. "I don't know," he said, and I couldn't be sure if he were answering my question or pursuing his

5. Traditional Christian spiritual.

6. Christian spiritual by Jeremiah E. Rankin (1828–1904).

thoughts. His face didn't tell me. "It's not so much to *play*. It's to *stand* it, to be able to make it at all. On any level." He frowned and smiled: "In order to keep from shaking to pieces."

"But these friends of yours," I said, "they seem to shake themselves to pieces pretty goddamn fast."

"Maybe." He played with the notebook. And something told me that I should curb my tongue, that Sonny was doing his best to talk, that I should listen. "But of course you only know the ones that've gone to pieces. Some don't—or at least they haven't *yet* and that's just about all *any* of us can say." He paused. "And then there are some who just live, really, in hell, and they know it and they see what's happening and they go right on. I don't know." He sighed, dropped the notebook, folded his arms. "Some guys, you can tell from the way they play, they on something *all* the time. And you can see that, well, it makes something real for them. But of course," he picked up his beer from the floor and sipped it and put the can down again, "they *want* to, too, you've got to see that. Even some of them that say they don't—*some*, not all."

"And what about you?" I asked—I couldn't help it. "What about you? Do *you* want to?"

He stood up and walked to the window and remained silent for a long time. Then he sighed. "Me," he said. Then: "While I was downstairs before, on my way here, listening to that woman sing, it struck me all of a sudden how much suffering she must have had to go through—to sing like that. It's *repulsive* to think you have to suffer that much."

I said: "But there's no way not to suffer—is there, Sonny?"

"I believe not," he said and smiled, "but that's never stopped anyone from trying." He looked at me. "Has it?" I realized, with this mocking look, that there stood between us, forever, beyond the power of time or forgiveness, the fact that I had held silence—so long!—when he had needed human speech to help him. He turned back to the window. "No, there's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it, to keep on top of it, and to make it seem—well, like *you*. Like you did something, all right, and now you're suffering for it. You know?" I said nothing. "Well you know," he said, impatiently, "why *do* people suffer? Maybe it's better to do something to give it a reason, *any* reason."

"But we just agreed," I said, "that there's no way not to suffer. Isn't it better, then, just to—take it?"

"But nobody just takes it," Sonny cried, "that's what I'm telling you! *Everybody* tries not to. You're just hung up on the *way* some people try—it's not *your* way!"

The hair on my face began to itch, my face felt wet. "That's not true," I said, "that's not true. I don't give a damn what other people do, I don't even care how they suffer. I just care how *you* suffer." And he looked at me. "Please believe me," I said, "I don't want to see you—die—trying not to suffer."

"I won't," he said, flatly, "die trying not to suffer. At least, not any faster than anybody else."

"But there's no need," I said, trying to laugh, "is there? in killing yourself."

I wanted to say more, but I couldn't. I wanted to talk about willpower and how life could be—well, beautiful. I wanted to say that it was all within; but was it? or, rather, wasn't that exactly the trouble? And I wanted to promise

that I would never fail him again. But it would all have sounded—empty words and lies.

So I made the promise to myself and prayed that I would keep it.

“It’s terrible sometimes, inside,” he said, “that’s what’s the trouble. You walk these streets, black and funky and cold, and there’s not really a living ass to talk to, and there’s nothing shaking, and there’s no way of getting it out—that storm inside. You can’t talk it and you can’t make love with it, and when you finally try to get with it and play it, you realize *nobody’s* listening. So *you’ve* got to listen. You got to find a way to listen.”

And then he walked away from the window and sat on the sofa again, as though all the wind had suddenly been knocked out of him. “Sometimes you’ll do *anything* to play, even cut your mother’s throat.” He laughed and looked at me. “Or your brother’s.” Then he sobered. “Or your own.” Then: “Don’t worry. I’m all right now and I think I’ll *be* all right. But I can’t forget—where I’ve been. I don’t mean just the physical place I’ve been, I mean where I’ve *been*. And *what* I’ve been.”

“What have you been, Sonny?” I asked.

He smiled—but sat sideways on the sofa, his elbow resting on the back, his fingers playing with his mouth and chin, not looking at me. “I’ve been something I didn’t recognize, didn’t know I could be. Didn’t know anybody could be.” He stopped, looking inward, looking helplessly young, looking old. “I’m not talking about it now because I feel *guilty* or anything like that—maybe it would be better if I did, I don’t know. Anyway, I can’t really talk about it. Not to you, not to anybody,” and now he turned and faced me. “Sometimes, you know, and it was actually when I was most *out* of the world, I felt that I was in it, that I was *with* it, really, and I could play or I didn’t really have to *play*, it just came out of me, it was there. And I don’t know how I played, thinking about it now, but I know I did awful things, those times, sometimes, to people. Or it wasn’t that I *did* anything to them—it was that they weren’t real.” He picked up the beer can; it was empty; he rolled it between his palms: “And other times—well, I needed a fix, I needed to find a place to lean, I needed to clear a space to *listen*—and I couldn’t find it, and I—went crazy, I did terrible things to *me*, I was terrible *for* me.” He began pressing the beer can between his hands, I watched the metal begin to give. It glittered, as he played with it, like a knife, and I was afraid he would cut himself, but I said nothing. “Oh well. I can never tell you. I was all by myself at the bottom of something, stinking and sweating and crying and shaking, and I smelled it, you know? *my* stink, and I thought I’d die if I couldn’t get away from it and yet, all the same, I knew that everything I was doing was just locking me in with it. And I didn’t know,” he paused, still flattening the beer can, “I didn’t know, I still *don’t* know, something kept telling me that maybe it was good to smell your own stink, but I didn’t think that *that* was what I’d been trying to do—and—who can stand it?” and he abruptly dropped the ruined beer can, looking at me with a small, still smile, and then rose, walking to the window as though it were the lodestone rock.⁷ I watched his face, he watched the avenue. “I couldn’t tell you when Mama died—but the reason I wanted to leave Harlem so bad was to get away from drugs. And then, when I ran away, that’s what I was running from—really. When I came

7. Naturally magnetized rock.

back, nothing had changed, *I* hadn't changed, I was just—older." And he stopped, drumming with his fingers on the windowpane. The sun had vanished, soon darkness would fall. I watched his face. "It can come again," he said, almost as though speaking to himself. Then he turned to me. "It can come again," he repeated. "I just want you to know that."

"All right," I said, at last. "So it can come again. All right."

He smiled, but the smile was sorrowful. "I had to try to tell you," he said. "Yes," I said. "I understand that."

"You're my brother," he said, looking straight at me, and not smiling at all. "Yes," I repeated, "yes. I understand that."

He turned back to the window, looking out. "All that hatred down there," he said, "all that hatred and misery and love. It's a wonder it doesn't blow the avenue apart."

We went to the only nightclub on a short, dark street, downtown. We squeezed through the narrow, chattering, jam-packed bar to the entrance of the big room, where the bandstand was. And we stood there for a moment, for the lights were very dim in this room and we couldn't see. Then, "Hello, boy," said a voice and an enormous black man, much older than Sonny or myself, erupted out of all that atmospheric lighting and put an arm around Sonny's shoulder. "I been sitting right here," he said, "waiting for you."

He had a big voice, too, and heads in the darkness turned toward us.

Sonny grinned and pulled a little away, and said, "Creole, this is my brother. I told you about him."

Creole shook my hand. "I'm glad to meet you, son," he said, and it was clear that he was glad to meet me *there*, for Sonny's sake. And he smiled, "You got a real musician in *your* family," and he took his arm from Sonny's shoulder and slapped him, lightly, affectionately, with the back of his hand.

"Well. Now I've heard it all," said a voice behind us. This was another musician, and a friend of Sonny's, a coal-black, cheerful-looking man, built close to the ground. He immediately began confiding to me, at the top of his lungs, the most terrible things about Sonny, his teeth gleaming like a lighthouse and his laugh coming up out of him like the beginning of an earthquake. And it turned out that everyone at the bar knew Sonny, or almost everyone; some were musicians, working there, or nearby, or not working, some were simply hangers-on, and some were there to hear Sonny play. I was introduced to all of them and they were all very polite to me. Yet, it was clear that, for them, I was only Sonny's brother. Here, I was in Sonny's world. Or, rather: his kingdom. Here, it was not even a question that his veins bore royal blood.

They were going to play soon and Creole installed me, by myself, at a table in a dark corner. Then I watched them, Creole, and the little black man, and Sonny, and the others, while they horsed around, standing just below the bandstand. The light from the bandstand spilled just a little short of them and, watching them laughing and gesturing and moving about, I had the feeling that they, nevertheless, were being most careful not to step into that circle of light too suddenly: that if they moved into the light too suddenly, without thinking, they would perish in flame. Then, while I watched, one of them, the small, black man, moved into the light and crossed the bandstand and started fooling around with his drums. Then—being funny and being,

also, extremely ceremonious—Creole took Sonny by the arm and led him to the piano. A woman's voice called Sonny's name and a few hands started clapping. And Sonny, also being funny and being ceremonious, and so touched, I think, that he could have cried, but neither hiding it nor showing it, riding it like a man, grinned, and put both hands to his heart and bowed from the waist.

Creole then went to the bass fiddle and a lean, very bright-skinned brown man jumped up on the bandstand and picked up his horn. So there they were, and the atmosphere on the bandstand and in the room began to change and tighten. Someone stepped up to the microphone and announced them. Then there were all kinds of murmurs. Some people at the bar shushed others. The waitress ran around, frantically getting in the last orders, guys and chicks got closer to each other, and the lights on the bandstand, on the quartet, turned to a kind of indigo. Then they all looked different there. Creole looked about him for the last time, as though he were making certain that all his chickens were in the coop, and then he—jumped and struck the fiddle. And there they were.

All I know about music is that not many people ever really hear it. And even then, on the rare occasions when something opens within, and the music enters, what we mainly hear, or hear corroborated, are personal, private, vanishing evocations. But the man who creates the music is hearing something else, is dealing with the roar rising from the void and imposing order on it as it hits the air. What is evoked in him, then, is of another order, more terrible because it has no words, and triumphant, too, for that same reason. And his triumph, when he triumphs, is ours. I just watched Sonny's face. His face was troubled, he was working hard, but he wasn't with it. And I had the feeling that, in a way, everyone on the bandstand was waiting for him, both waiting for him and pushing him along. But as I began to watch Creole, I realized that it was Creole who held them all back. He had them on a short rein. Up there, keeping the beat with his whole body, wailing on the fiddle, with his eyes half closed, he was listening to everything, but he was listening to Sonny. He was having a dialogue with Sonny. He wanted Sonny to leave the shoreline and strike out for the deep water. He was Sonny's witness that deep water and drowning were not the same thing—he had been there, and he knew. And he wanted Sonny to know. He was waiting for Sonny to do the things on the keys which would let Creole know that Sonny was in the water.

And, while Creole listened, Sonny moved, deep within, exactly like someone in torment. I had never before thought of how awful the relationship must be between the musician and his instrument. He has to fill it, this instrument, with the breath of life, his own. He has to make it do what he wants it to do. And a piano is just a piano. It's made out of so much wood and wires and little hammers and big ones, and ivory. While there's only so much you can do with it, the only way to find this out is to try; to try and make it do everything.

And Sonny hadn't been near a piano for over a year. And he wasn't on much better terms with his life, not the life that stretched before him now. He and the piano stammered, started one way, got scared, stopped; started another way, panicked, marked time, started again; then seemed to have found a direction, panicked again, got stuck. And the face I saw on Sonny

I'd never seen before. Everything had been burned out of it, and, at the same time, things usually hidden were being burned in, by the fire and fury of the battle which was occurring in him up there.

Yet, watching Creole's face as they neared the end of the first set, I had the feeling that something had happened, something I hadn't heard. Then they finished, there was scattered applause, and then, without an instant's warning, Creole started into something else, it was almost sardonic, it was *Am I Blue*.⁸ And, as though he commanded, Sonny began to play. Something began to happen. And Creole let out the reins. The dry, low, black man said something awful on the drums, Creole answered, and the drums talked back. Then the horn insisted, sweet and high, slightly detached perhaps, and Creole listened, commenting now and then, dry, and driving, beautiful and calm and old. Then they all came together again, and Sonny was part of the family again. I could tell this from his face. He seemed to have found, right there beneath his fingers, a damn brand-new piano. It seemed that he couldn't get over it. Then, for awhile, just being happy with Sonny, they seemed to be agreeing with him that brand-new pianos certainly were a gas.

Then Creole stepped forward to remind them that what they were playing was the blues. He hit something in all of them, he hit something in me, myself, and the music tightened and deepened, apprehension began to beat the air. Creole began to tell us what the blues were all about. They were not about anything very new. He and his boys up there were keeping it new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.

And this tale, according to that face, that body, those strong hands on those strings, has another aspect in every country, and a new depth in every generation. Listen, Creole seemed to be saying, listen. Now these are Sonny's blues. He made the little black man on the drums know it, and the bright, brown man on the horn. Creole wasn't trying any longer to get Sonny in the water. He was wishing him Godspeed. Then he stepped back, very slowly, filling the air with the immense suggestion that Sonny speak for himself.

Then they all gathered around Sonny and Sonny played. Every now and again one of them seemed to say, amen. Sonny's fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others. And Sonny went all the way back, he really began with the spare, flat statement of the opening phrase of the song. Then he began to make it his. It was very beautiful because it wasn't hurried and it was no longer a lament. I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, with what burning we had yet to make it ours, how we could cease lamenting. Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did. Yet, there was no battle in his face now. I heard what he had gone through, and would continue to go through until he came to rest in earth. He had made it his: that long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy. And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever. I saw my

8. Jazz standard by Harry Akst and Grant Clarke (1929).

mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she had walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died. And it brought something else back to me, and carried me past it, I saw my little girl again and felt Isabel's tears again, and I felt my own tears begin to rise. And I was yet aware that this was only a moment, that the world waited outside, as hungry as a tiger, and that trouble stretched above us, longer than the sky.

Then it was over. Creole and Sonny let out their breath, both soaking wet, and grinning. There was a lot of applause and some of it was real. In the dark, the girl came by and I asked her to take drinks to the bandstand. There was a long pause, while they talked up there in the indigo light and after awhile I saw the girl put a Scotch and milk on top of the piano for Sonny. He didn't seem to notice it, but just before they started playing again, he sipped from it and looked toward me, and nodded. Then he put it back on top of the piano. For me, then, as they began to play again, it glowed and shook above my brother's head like the very cup of trembling.⁹

1957

9. See Isaiah 51.22: "Thus saith thy lord the LORD, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the

cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again."

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

1925–1964

Flannery O'Connor, one of the twentieth century's finest short-story writers, was born in Savannah, Georgia; lived with her mother in Milledgeville, Georgia, for much of her life; and died before her fortieth birthday—a victim of lupus, which had also killed her father. Her life and fiction thus tracked a southern orbit, and she was considered an important figure among the southern writers who have grown popular since the 1930s, including novelist William Faulkner, the poet and novelist Robert Penn Warren (included in this volume), and novelists Katherine Ann Porter, Carson McCullers, Harper Lee, and Caroline Gordon (O'Connor's longtime mentor), to name a few. But O'Connor was also one of the early graduates of the Iowa Writers Workshop, completing her M.F.A. degree there in 1947. What she learned at the Workshop about the craft and discipline of story writing informed her practice for the rest of her life. One textbook she encountered there—Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Fiction* (1943)—became, as she said, her "Bible," and, indeed, teachers have often turned to O'Connor's work to illustrate key elements of the short story. Her story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1955) was ultimately included as a model in the 1959 edition of *Understanding Fiction*.

To call a textbook scripture speaks, in O'Connor's case, to the weight of a third influence that shapes her work, alongside southern culture and the literary formalism she learned at Iowa: Roman Catholicism. She sought, as she said, to write "Christian realism," where the ugly, the stubborn, and the sinful take center stage in dramas of

violence and redemption, played out on a small scale to universal consequences. Her stories are often dark comedies; O'Connor's understanding of divine mercy included a generous irony that she turned on villains and heroes alike. She turned that irony on herself, too. As a result of her lupus, O'Connor had to use crutches from 1955 onward; she remarked, apropos of a trip to the healing waters at Lourdes, France, "I had the best-looking crutches in Europe." She refused to indulge either in pity or in self-pity in the face of what she saw as pervasive human imperfection in a fallen world.

O'Connor published two novels, *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). They are weighty with religious symbolism, dense with cultural observation, and ingeniously contrived in the black-humored manner of Nathanael West, her American predecessor in this mode. But her most memorable characters and plots can be found in the stories, which are extremely funny, sometimes unbearably so. O'Connor often leaves readers wondering just what they are laughing at. Upon consideration, the jokes appear dreadful, as with Manley Pointer's treatment of Joy Hopewell's artificial leg in "Good Country People" or Mr. Shiftlet's of his bride in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." A typical Flannery O'Connor story consists at its most vital level of people talking, clucking their clichés about life, death, and the universe. These clichés are captured with beautiful accuracy by an artist who had spent her life listening to them, lovingly and maliciously keeping track until she could put them to use. Early in her life she hoped to be a cartoonist, and there is cartoonlike mastery in her vivid renderings of character through speech and gesture. O'Connor's art lies partly in making it impossible for us merely to scorn the banalities of expression and behavior by which these people get through their lives. Critics have called her a maker of grotesques, a label that like other ones—regionalist, southern lady, or Roman Catholic writer—might have annoyed her if it didn't obviously amuse her, too. She once remarked tartly that "anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic."

Although O'Connor's stories are filled with religious allusions and parodies, they do not preach. One of her best is titled "Revelation," but O'Connor seldom concludes any story with a simple, unambiguous sense of what has been revealed. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," reprinted here, has famously flummoxed readers in this regard ever since its publication. The stories included in this selection are from her collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955).

The Life You Save May Be Your Own

The old woman and her daughter were sitting on their porch when Mr. Shiftlet came up their road for the first time. The old woman slid to the edge of her chair and leaned forward, shading her eyes from the piercing sunset with her hand. The daughter could not see far in front of her and continued to play with her fingers. Although the old woman lived in this desolate spot with only her daughter and she had never seen Mr. Shiftlet before, she could tell, even from a distance, that he was a tramp and no one to be afraid of. His left coat sleeve was folded up to show there was only half an arm in it and his gaunt figure listed slightly to the side as if the breeze were pushing him. He had on a black town suit and a brown felt hat that was turned up in the front and down in the back and he carried a tin tool box by a handle. He came on, at an amble, up her road, his face turned toward the sun which appeared to be balancing itself on the peak of a small mountain.

The old woman didn't change her position until he was almost into her yard; then she rose with one hand fistled on her hip. The daughter, a large girl in a short blue organdy dress, saw him all at once and jumped up and began to stamp and point and make excited speechless sounds.

Mr. Shiftlet stopped just inside the yard and set his box on the ground and tipped his hat at her as if she were not in the least afflicted; then he turned toward the old woman and swung the hat all the way off. He had long black slick hair that hung flat from a part in the middle to beyond the tips of his ears on either side. His face descended in forehead for more than half its length and ended suddenly with his features just balanced over a jutting steel-trap jaw. He seemed to be a young man but he had a look of composed dissatisfaction as if he understood life thoroughly.

"Good evening," the old woman said. She was about the size of a cedar fence post and she had a man's gray hat pulled down low over her head.

The tramp stood looking at her and didn't answer. He turned his back and faced the sunset. He swung both his whole and his short arm up slowly so that they indicated an expanse of sky and his figure formed a crooked cross. The old woman watched him with her arms folded across her chest as if she were the owner of the sun, and the daughter watched, her head thrust forward and her fat helpless hands hanging at the wrists. She had long pink-gold hair and eyes as blue as a peacock's neck.

He held the pose for almost fifty seconds and then he picked up his box and came on to the porch and dropped down on the bottom step. "Lady," he said in a firm nasal voice, "I'd give a fortune to live where I could see me a sun do that every evening."

"Does it every evening," the old woman said and sat back down. The daughter sat down too and watched him with a cautious sly look as if he were a bird that had come up very close. He leaned to one side, rooting in his pants pocket, and in a second he brought out a package of chewing gum and offered her a piece. She took it and unpeeled it and began to chew without taking her eyes off him. He offered the old woman a piece but she only raised her upper lip to indicate she had no teeth.

Mr. Shiftlet's pale sharp glance had already passed over everything in the yard—the pump near the corner of the house and the big fig tree that three or four chickens were preparing to roost in—and had moved to a shed where he saw the square rusted back of an automobile. "You ladies drive?" he asked.

"That car ain't run in fifteen year," the old woman said. "The day my husband died, it quit running."

"Nothing is like it used to be, lady," he said. "The world is almost rotten."

"That's right," the old woman said. "You from around here?"

"Name Tom T. Shiftlet," he murmured, looking at the tires.

"I'm pleased to meet you," the old woman said. "Name Lucynell Crater and daughter Lucynell Crater. What you doing around here, Mr. Shiftlet?"

He judged the car to be about a 1928 or '29 Ford. "Lady," he said, and turned and gave her his full attention, "lemme tell you something. There's one of these doctors in Atlanta that's taken a knife and cut the human heart—the human heart," he repeated, leaning forward, "out of a man's chest and held it in his hand," and he held his hand out, palm up, as if it were slightly weighted with the human heart, "and studied it like it was a day-old chicken, and lady," he said, allowing a long significant pause in which his

head slid forward and his clay-colored eyes brightened, “he don’t know no more about it than you or me.”

“That’s right,” the old woman said.

“Why, if he was to take that knife and cut into every corner of it, he still wouldn’t know no more than you or me. What you want to bet?”

“Nothing,” the old woman said wisely. “Where you come from, Mr. Shiftlet?”

He didn’t answer. He reached into his pocket and brought out a sack of tobacco and a package of cigarette papers and rolled himself a cigarette, expertly with one hand, and attached it in a hanging position to his upper lip. Then he took a box of wooden matches from his pocket and struck one on his shoe. He held the burning match as if he were studying the mystery of flame while it traveled dangerously toward his skin. The daughter began to make loud noises and to point to his hand and shake her finger at him, but when the flame was just before touching him, he leaned down with his hand cupped over it as if he were going to set fire to his nose and lit the cigarette.

He flipped away the dead match and blew a stream of gray into the evening. A sly look came over his face. “Lady,” he said, “nowadays, people’ll do anything anyways. I can tell you my name is Tom T. Shiftlet and I come from Tarwater, Tennessee, but you never have seen me before: how you know I ain’t lying? How you know my name ain’t Aaron Sparks, lady, and I come from Singleberry, Georgia, or how you know it’s not George Speeds and I come from Lucy, Alabama, or how you know I ain’t Thompson Bright from Toolafalls, Mississippi?”

“I don’t know nothing about you,” the old woman muttered, irked.

“Lady,” he said, “people don’t care how they lie. Maybe the best I can tell you is, I’m a man; but listen lady,” he said and paused and made his tone more ominous still, “what is a man?”

The old woman began to gum a seed. “What you carry in that tin box, Mr. Shiftlet?” she asked.

“Tools,” he said, put back. “I’m a carpenter.”

“Well, if you come out here to work, I’ll be able to feed you and give you a place to sleep but I can’t pay. I’ll tell you that before you begin,” she said.

There was no answer at once and no particular expression on his face. He leaned back against the two-by-four that helped support the porch roof. “Lady,” he said slowly, “there’s some men that some things mean more to them than money.” The old woman rocked without comment and the daughter watched the trigger that moved up and down in his neck. He told the old woman then that all most people were interested in was money, but he asked what a man was made for. He asked her if a man was made for money, or what. He asked her what she thought she was made for but she didn’t answer, she only sat rocking and wondered if a one-armed man could put a new roof on her garden house. He asked a lot of questions that she didn’t answer. He told her that he was twenty-eight years old and had lived a varied life. He had been a gospel singer, a foreman on the railroad, an assistant in an undertaking parlor, and he come over the radio for three months with Uncle Roy and his Red Creek Wranglers. He said he had fought and bled in the Arm Service of his country and visited every foreign land and that everywhere he had seen people that didn’t care if they did a thing one way or another. He said he hadn’t been raised thataway.

A fat yellow moon appeared in the branches of the fig tree as if it were going to roost there with the chickens. He said that a man had to escape to the country to see the world whole and that he wished he lived in a desolate place like this where he could see the sun go down every evening like God made it to do.

"Are you married or are you single?" the old woman asked.

There was a long silence. "Lady," he asked finally, "where would you find you an innocent woman today? I wouldn't have any of this trash I could just pick up."

The daughter was leaning very far down, hanging her head almost between her knees watching him through a triangular door she had made in her over-turned hair; and she suddenly fell in a heap on the floor and began to whimper. Mr. Shiftlet straightened her out and helped her get back in the chair.

"Is she your baby girl?" he asked.

"My only," the old woman said "and she's the sweetest girl in the world. I would give her up for nothing on earth. She's smart too. She can sweep the floor, cook, wash, feed the chickens, and hoe. I wouldn't give her up for a casket of jewels."

"No," he said kindly, "don't ever let any man take her away from you."

"Any man come after her," the old woman said, "'ll have to stay around the place."

Mr. Shiftlet's eye in the darkness was focused on a part of the automobile bumper that glittered in the distance. "Lady," he said, jerking his short arm up as if he could point with it to her house and yard and pump, "there ain't a broken thing on this plantation that I couldn't fix for you, one-arm jackleg or not. I'm a man," he said with a sullen dignity, "even if I ain't a whole one. I got," he said, tapping his knuckles on the floor to emphasize the immensity of what he was going to say, "a moral intelligence!" and his face pierced out of the darkness into a shaft of doorlight and he stared at her as if he were astonished himself at this impossible truth.

The old woman was not impressed with the phrase. "I told you you could hang around and work for food," she said, "if you don't mind sleeping in that car yonder."

"Why listen, lady," he said with a grin of delight, "the monks of old slept in their coffins!"

"They wasn't as advanced as we are," the old woman said.

The next morning he began on the roof of the garden house while Lucynell, the daughter, sat on a rock and watched him work. He had not been around a week before the change he had made in the place was apparent. He had patched the front and back steps, built a new hog pen, restored a fence, and taught Lucynell, who was completely deaf and had never said a word in her life, to say the word "bird." The big rosy-faced girl followed him everywhere, saying "Burrtdtdt ddbirrrtdt," and clapping her hands. The old woman watched from a distance, secretly pleased. She was ravenous for a son-in-law.

Mr. Shiftlet slept on the hard narrow back seat of the car with his feet out the side window. He had his razor and a can of water on a crate that served him as a bedside table and he put up a piece of mirror against the back glass and kept his coat neatly on a hanger that he hung over one of the windows.

In the evenings he sat on the steps and talked while the old woman and Lucynell rocked violently in their chairs on either side of him. The old woman's three mountains were black against the dark blue sky and were visited off and on by various planets and by the moon after it had left the chickens. Mr. Shiftlet pointed out that the reason he had improved this plantation was because he had taken a personal interest in it. He said he was even going to make the automobile run.

He had raised the hood and studied the mechanism and he said he could tell that the car had been built in the days when cars were really built. You take now, he said, one man puts in one bolt and another man puts in another bolt and another man puts in another bolt so that it's a man for a bolt. That's why you have to pay so much for a car: you're paying all those men. Now if you didn't have to pay but one man, you could get you a cheaper car and one that had had a personal interest taken in it, and it would be a better car. The old woman agreed with him that this was so.

Mr. Shiftlet said that the trouble with the world was that nobody cared, or stopped and took any trouble. He said he never would have been able to teach Lucynell to say a word if he hadn't cared and stopped long enough.

"Teach her to say something else," the old woman said.

"What you want her to say next?" Mr. Shiftlet asked.

The old woman's smile was broad and toothless and suggestive. "Teach her to say 'sugarpie,'" she said.

Mr. Shiftlet already knew what was on her mind.

The next day he began to tinker with the automobile and that evening he told her that if she would buy a fan belt, he would be able to make the car run.

The old woman said she would give him the money. "You see that girl yonder?" she asked, pointing to Lucynell who was sitting on the floor a foot away, watching him, her eyes blue even in the dark. "If it was ever a man wanted to take her away, I would say, 'No man on earth is going to take that sweet girl of mine away from me!' but if he was to say, 'Lady, I don't want to take her away, I want her right here,' I would say, 'Mister, I don't blame you none. I wouldn't pass up a chance to live in a permanent place and get the sweetest girl in the world myself. You ain't no fool,' I would say."

"How old is she?" Mr. Shiftlet asked casually.

"Fifteen, sixteen," the old woman said. The girl was nearly thirty but because of her innocence it was impossible to guess.

"It would be a good idea to paint it too," Mr. Shiftlet remarked. "You don't want it to rust out."

"We'll see about that later," the old woman said.

The next day he walked into town and returned with the parts he needed and a can of gasoline. Late in the afternoon, terrible noises issued from the shed and the old woman rushed out of the house, thinking Lucynell was somewhere having a fit. Lucynell was sitting on a chicken crate, stamping her feet and screaming, "Burrddttt! bddurrdtttt!" but her fuss was drowned out by the car. With a volley of blasts it emerged from the shed, moving in a fierce and stately way. Mr. Shiftlet was in the driver's seat, sitting very erect. He had an expression of serious modesty on his face as if he had just raised the dead.

That night, rocking on the porch, the old woman began her business, at once. "You want you an innocent woman, don't you," she asked sympathetically. "You don't want none of this trash."

"No'm, I don't," Mr. Shiftlet said.

"One that can't talk," she continued, "can't sass you back or use foul language. That's the kind for you to have. Right there," and she pointed to Lucynell sitting cross-legged in her chair, holding both feet in her hands.

"That's right," he admitted. "She wouldn't give me any trouble."

"Saturday," the old woman said, "you and her and me can drive into town and get married."

Mr. Shiftlet eased his position on the steps.

"I can't get married right now," he said. "Everything you want to do takes money and I ain't got any."

"What you need with money?" she asked.

"It takes money," he said. "Some people'll do anything anyhow these days, but the way I think, I wouldn't marry no woman that I couldn't take on a trip like she was somebody. I mean take her to a hotel and treat her. I wouldn't marry the Duchesser Windsor,"¹ he said firmly, "unless I could take her to a hotel and giver something good to eat."

"I was raised thataway and there ain't a thing I can do about it. My old mother taught me how to do."

"Lucynell don't even know what a hotel is," the old woman muttered. "Listen here, Mr. Shiftlet," she said, sliding forward in her chair, "you'd be getting a permanent house and a deep well and the most innocent girl in the world. You don't need no money. Lemme tell you something: there ain't any place in the world for a poor disabled friendless drifting man."

The ugly words settled in Mr. Shiftlet's head like a group of buzzards in the top of a tree. He didn't answer at once. He rolled himself a cigarette and lit it and then he said in an even voice, "Lady, a man is divided into two parts, body and spirit."

The old woman clamped her gums together.

"A body and a spirit," he repeated. "The body, lady, is like a house: it don't go anywhere; but the spirit, lady, is like a automobile: always on the move, always . . ."

"Listen, Mr. Shiftlet," she said, "my well never goes dry and my house is always warm in the winter and there's no mortgage on a thing about this place. You can go to the courthouse and see for yourself. And yonder under that shed is a fine automobile." She laid the bait carefully. "You can have it painted by Saturday. I'll pay for the paint."

In the darkness, Mr. Shiftlet's smile stretched like a weary snake waking up by a fire. After a second he recalled himself and said, "I'm only saying a man's spirit means more to him than anything else. I would have to take my wife off for the weekend without no regards at all for cost. I got to follow where my spirit says to go."

"I'll give you fifteen dollars for a weekend trip," the old woman said in a crabbed voice. "That's the best I can do."

1. I.e., the Duchess of Windsor, Wallis Warfield Simpson (1896–1986), American-born wife of the British king Edward VIII.

"That wouldn't hardly pay for more than the gas and the hotel," he said. "It wouldn't feed her."

"Seventeen-fifty," the old woman said. "That's all I got so it isn't any use you trying to milk me. You can take a lunch."

Mr. Shiftlet was deeply hurt by the word "milk." He didn't doubt that she had more money sewed up in her mattress but he had already told her he was not interested in her money. "I'll make that do," he said and rose and walked off without treating with her further.

On Saturday the three of them drove into town in the car that the paint had barely dried on and Mr. Shiftlet and Lucynell were married in the Ordinary's office² while the old woman witnessed. As they came out of the courthouse, Mr. Shiftlet began twisting his neck in his collar. He looked morose and bitter as if he had been insulted while someone held him. "That didn't satisfy me none," he said. "That was just something a woman in an office did, nothing but paper work and blood tests. What do they know about my blood? If they was to take my heart and cut it out," he said, "they wouldn't know a thing about me. It didn't satisfy me at all."

"It satisfied the law," the old woman said sharply.

"The law," Mr. Shiftlet said and spit. "It's the law that don't satisfy me."

He had painted the car dark green with a yellow band around it just under the windows. The three of them climbed in the front seat and the old woman said, "Don't Lucynell look pretty? Looks like a baby doll." Lucynell was dressed up in a white dress that her mother had uprooted from a trunk and there was a Panama hat on her head with a bunch of red wooden cherries on the brim. Every now and then her placid expression was changed by a sly isolated little thought like a shoot of green in the desert. "You got a prize!" the old woman said.

Mr. Shiftlet didn't even look at her.

They drove back to the house to let the old woman off and pick up the lunch. When they were ready to leave, she stood staring in the window of the car, with her fingers clenched around the glass. Tears began to seep sideways out of her eyes and ran along the dirty creases in her face. "I ain't ever been parted with her for two days before," she said.

Mr. Shiftlet started the motor.

"And I wouldn't let no man have her but you because I seen you would do right. Good-bye, Sugarbaby," she said, clutching at the sleeve of the white dress. Lucynell looked straight at her and didn't seem to see her there at all. Mr. Shiftlet eased the car forward so that she had to move her hands.

The early afternoon was clear and open and surrounded by pale blue sky. Although the car would go only thirty miles an hour, Mr. Shiftlet imagined a terrific climb and dip and swerve that went entirely to his head so that he forgot his morning bitterness. He had always wanted an automobile but he had never been able to afford one before. He drove very fast because he wanted to make Mobile by nightfall.

Occasionally he stopped his thoughts long enough to look at Lucynell in the seat beside him. She had eaten the lunch as soon as they were out of the yard and now she was pulling the cherries off the hat one by one and throwing them out the window. He became depressed in spite of the car. He had

2. Chambers in which this justice of the peace performs the marriage ceremony.

driven about a hundred miles when he decided that she must be hungry again and at the next small town they came to, he stopped in front of an aluminum-painted eating place called The Hot Spot and took her in and ordered her a plate of ham and grits. The ride had made her sleepy and as soon as she got up on the stool, she rested her head on the counter and shut her eyes. There was no one in The Hot Spot but Mr. Shiftlet and the boy behind the counter, a pale youth with a greasy rag hung over his shoulder. Before he could dish up the food, she was snoring gently.

"Give it to her when she wakes up," Mr. Shiftlet said. "I'll pay for it now."

The boy bent over her and stared at the long pink-gold hair and the half-shut sleeping eyes. Then he looked up and stared at Mr. Shiftlet. "She looks like an angel of Gawd," he murmured.

"Hitchhiker," Mr. Shiftlet explained. "I can't wait. I got to make Tuscaloosa."

The boy bent over again and very carefully touched his finger to a strand of the golden hair and Mr. Shiftlet left.

He was more depressed than ever as he drove on by himself. The late afternoon had grown hot and sultry and the country had flattened out. Deep in the sky a storm was preparing very slowly and without thunder as if it meant to drain every drop of air from the earth before it broke. There were times when Mr. Shiftlet preferred not to be alone. He felt too that a man with a car had a responsibility to others and he kept his eye out for a hitchhiker. Occasionally he saw a sign that warned: "Drive carefully. The life you save may be your own."

The narrow road dropped off on either side into dry fields and here and there a shack or a filling station stood in a clearing. The sun began to set directly in front of the automobile. It was a reddening ball that through his windshield was slightly flat on the bottom and top. He saw a boy in overalls and a gray hat standing on the edge of the road and he slowed the car down and stopped in front of him. The boy didn't have his hand raised to thumb the ride, he was only standing there, but he had a small cardboard suitcase and his hat was set on his head in a way to indicate that he had left somewhere for good. "Son," Mr. Shiftlet said, "I see you want a ride."

The boy didn't say he did or he didn't but he opened the door of the car and got in, and Mr. Shiftlet started driving again. The child held the suitcase on his lap and folded his arms on top of it. He turned his head and looked out the window away from Mr. Shiftlet. Mr. Shiftlet felt oppressed. "Son," he said after a minute, "I got the best old mother in the world so I reckon you only got the second best."

The boy gave him a quick dark glance and then turned his face back out the window.

"It's nothing so sweet," Mr. Shiftlet continued, "as a boy's mother. She taught him his first prayers at her knee, she give him love when no other would, she told him what was right and what wasn't, and she seen that he done the right thing. Son," he said, "I never rued a day in my life like the one I rued when I left that old mother of mine."

The boy shifted in his seat but he didn't look at Mr. Shiftlet. He unfolded his arms and put one hand on the door handle.

"My mother was a angel of Gawd," Mr. Shiftlet said in a very strained voice. "He took her from heaven and giver to me and I left her." His eyes were instantly clouded over with a mist of tears. The car was barely moving.

The boy turned angrily in the seat. "You go to the devil!" he cried. "My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!" and with that he flung the door open and jumped out with his suitcase into the ditch.

Mr. Shiftlet was so shocked that for about a hundred feet he drove along slowly with the door still open. A cloud, the exact color of the boy's hat and shaped like a turnip, had descended over the sun, and another, worse looking, crouched behind the car. Mr. Shiftlet felt that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him. He raised his arm and let it fall again to his breast. "Oh Lord!" he prayed. "Break forth and wash the slime from this earth!"

The turnip continued slowly to descend. After a few minutes there was a guffawing peal of thunder from behind and fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops, crashed over the rear of Mr. Shiftlet's car. Very quickly he stepped on the gas and with his stump sticking out the window he raced the galloping shower into Mobile.

1955

Good Country People

Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, that she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it. She seldom used the other expression because it was not often necessary for her to retract a statement, but when she did, her face came to a complete stop, there was an almost imperceptible movement of her black eyes, during which they seemed to be receding, and then the observer would see that Mrs. Freeman, though she might stand there as real as several grain sacks thrown on top of each other, was no longer there in spirit. As for getting anything across to her when this was the case, Mrs. Hopewell had given it up. She might talk her head off. Mrs. Freeman could never be brought to admit herself wrong on any point. She would stand there and if she could be brought to say anything, it was something like, "Well, I wouldn't of said it was and I wouldn't of said it wasn't," or letting her gaze range over the top kitchen shelf where there was an assortment of dusty bottles, she might remark, "I see you ain't ate many of them figs you put up last summer."

They carried on their important business in the kitchen at breakfast. Every morning Mrs. Hopewell got up at seven o'clock and lit her gas heater and Joy's. Joy was her daughter, a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg. Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated. Joy would get up while her mother was eating and lumber into the bathroom and slam the door, and before long, Mrs. Freeman would arrive at the back door. Joy would hear her mother call, "Come on in," and then they would talk for a while in low voices that were indistinguishable in the bathroom. By the time Joy came in, they had usually finished the weather report and were on one or the other of Mrs. Freeman's daughters, Glynese or Carramae. Joy called them Glycerin and Caramel. Glynese, a

redhead, was eighteen and had many admirers; Carramae, a blonde, was only fifteen but already married and pregnant. She could not keep anything on her stomach. Every morning Mrs. Freeman told Mrs. Hopewell how many times she had vomited since the last report.

Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Glynese and Carramae were two of the finest girls she knew and that Mrs. Freeman was a *lady* and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet. Then she would tell how she had happened to hire the Freemans in the first place and how they were a godsend to her and how she had had them four years. The reason for her keeping them so long was that they were not trash. They were good country people. She had telephoned the man whose name they had given as a reference and he had told her that Mr. Freeman was a good farmer but that his wife was the nosiest woman ever to walk the earth. "She's got to be into everything," the man said. "If she don't get there before the dust settles, you can bet she's dead, that's all. She'll want to know all your business. I can stand him real good," he had said, "but me nor my wife neither could have stood that woman one more minute on this place." That had put Mrs. Hopewell off for a few days.

She had hired them in the end because there were no other applicants but she had made up her mind beforehand exactly how she would handle the woman. Since she was the type who had to be into everything, then, Mrs. Hopewell had decided, she would not only let her be into everything, she would *see to it* that she was into everything—she would give her the responsibility of everything, she would put her in charge. Mrs. Hopewell had no bad qualities of her own but she was able to use other people's in such a constructive way that she never felt the lack. She had hired the Freemans and she had kept them four years.

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell's favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too. She would make these statements, usually at the table, in a tone of gentle insistence as if no one held them but her, and the large hulking Joy, whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from her face, would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it.

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always said so myself." Nothing had been arrived at by anyone that had not first been arrived at by her. She was quicker than Mr. Freeman. When Mrs. Hopewell said to her after they had been on the place a while, "You know, you're the wheel behind the wheel," and winked, Mrs. Freeman had said, "I know it. I've always been quick. It's some that are quicker than others."

"Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said.

"It takes all kinds to make the world."

"I always said it did myself."

The girl was used to this kind of dialogue for breakfast and more of it for dinner; sometimes they had it for supper too. When they had no guest they ate in the kitchen because that was easier. Mrs. Freeman always managed to

arrive at some point during the meal and to watch them finish it. She would stand in the doorway if it were summer but in the winter she would stand with one elbow on top of the refrigerator and look down on them, or she would stand by the gas heater, lifting the back of her skirt slightly. Occasionally she would stand against the wall and roll her head from side to side. At no time was she in any hurry to leave. All this was very trying on Mrs. Hopewell but she was a woman of great patience. She realized that nothing is perfect and that in the Freemans she had good country people and that if, in this day and age, you get good country people, you had better hang onto them.

She had had plenty of experience with trash. Before the Freemans she had averaged one tenant family a year. The wives of these farmers were not the kind you would want to be around you for very long. Mrs. Hopewell, who had divorced her husband long ago, needed someone to walk over the fields with her; and when Joy had to be impressed for these services, her remarks were usually so ugly and her face so glum that Mrs. Hopewell would say, "If you can't come pleasantly, I don't want you at all," to which the girl, standing square and rigid-shouldered with her neck thrust slightly forward, would reply, "If you want me, here I am—LIKE I AM."

Mrs. Hopewell excused this attitude because of the leg (which had been shot off in a hunting accident when Joy was ten). It was hard for Mrs. Hopewell to realize that her child was thirty-two now and that for more than twenty years she had had only one leg. She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times. Her name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had had it legally changed. Mrs. Hopewell was certain that she had thought and thought until she had hit upon the ugliest name in any language. Then she had gone and had the beautiful name, Joy, changed without telling her mother until after she had done it. Her legal name was Hulga.

When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought of the broad blank hull of a battleship. She would not use it. She continued to call her Joy to which the girl responded but in a purely mechanical way.

Hulga had learned to tolerate Mrs. Freeman who saved her from taking walks with her mother. Even Glynese and Carramae were useful when they occupied attention that might otherwise have been directed at her. At first she had thought she could not stand Mrs. Freeman for she had found that it was not possible to be rude to her. Mrs. Freeman would take on strange resentments and for days together she would be sullen but the source of her displeasure was always obscure; a direct attack, a positive leer, blatant ugliness to her face—these never touched her. And without warning one day, she began calling her Hulga.

She did not call her that in front of Mrs. Hopewell who would have been incensed but when she and the girl happened to be out of the house together, she would say something and add the name Hulga to the end of it, and the big spectacled Joy-Hulga would scowl and redden as if her privacy had been intruded upon. She considered the name her personal affair. She had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound and then the full genius of its fitness had struck her. She had a vision of the name working like the ugly

sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called.¹ She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga. However, Mrs. Freeman's relish for using the name only irritated her. It was as if Mrs. Freeman's beady steel-pointed eyes had penetrated far enough behind her face to reach some secret fact. Something about her seemed to fascinate Mrs. Freeman and then one day Hulga realized that it was the artificial leg. Mrs. Freeman had a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children. Of diseases, she preferred the lingering or incurable. Hulga had heard Mrs. Hopewell give her the details of the hunting accident, how the leg had been literally blasted off, how she had never lost consciousness. Mrs. Freeman could listen to it any time as if it had happened an hour ago.

When Hulga stumped into the kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it—Mrs. Hopewell was certain—because it was ugly-sounding), she glanced at them and did not speak. Mrs. Hopewell would be in her red kimono with her hair tied around her head in rags. She would be sitting at the table, finishing her breakfast and Mrs. Freeman would be hanging by her elbow outward from the refrigerator, looking down at the table. Hulga always put her eggs on the stove to boil and then stood over them with her arms folded, and Mrs. Hopewell would look at her—a kind of indirect gaze divided between her and Mrs. Freeman—and would think that if she would only keep herself up a little, she wouldn't be so bad looking. There was nothing wrong with her face that a pleasant expression wouldn't help. Mrs. Hopewell said that people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not.

Whenever she looked at Joy this way, she could not help but feel that it would have been better if the child had not taken the Ph.D. It had certainly not brought her out any and now that she had it, there was no more excuse for her to go to school again. Mrs. Hopewell thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had "gone through." Anyhow, she would not have been strong enough to go again. The doctors had told Mrs. Hopewell that with the best of care, Joy might see forty-five. She had a weak heart. Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about. And Mrs. Hopewell could very well picture her there, looking like a scarecrow and lecturing to more of the same. Here she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She thought this was funny; Mrs. Hopewell thought it was idiotic and showed simply that she was still a child. She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense. It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself—bloated, rude, and squint-eyed. And she said such strange things! To her own mother she had said—without warning, without excuse, standing up in the middle of a meal with her face purple and her mouth half full—"Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God!" she

1. Vulcan was the Greek god of fire, whom Venus, goddess of love, "presumably" obeyed as her consort.

had cried sinking down again and staring at her plate, “Malebranche² was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!” Mrs. Hopewell had no idea to this day what brought that on. She had only made the remark, hoping Joy would take it in, that a smile never hurt anyone.

The girl had taken the Ph.D. in philosophy and this left Mrs. Hopewell at a complete loss. You could say, “My daughter is a nurse,” or “My daughter is a school teacher,” or even, “My daughter is a chemical engineer.” You could not say, “My daughter is a philosopher.” That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans. All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn’t like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity.

One day Mrs. Hopewell had picked up one of the books the girl had just put down and opening it at random, she read, “Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing—how can it be for science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing.” These words had been underlined with a blue pencil and they worked on Mrs. Hopewell like some evil incantation in gibberish. She shut the book quickly and went out of the room as if she were having a chill.

This morning when the girl came in, Mrs. Freeman was on Carramae. “She thrown up four times after supper,” she said, “and was up twict in the night after three o’clock. Yesterday she didn’t do nothing but ramble in the bureau drawer. All she did. Stand up there and see what she could run up on.”

“She’s got to eat,” Mrs. Hopewell muttered, sipping her coffee, while she watched Joy’s back at the stove. She was wondering what the child had said to the Bible salesman. She could not imagine what kind of a conversation she could possibly have had with him.

He was a tall gaunt hatless youth who had called yesterday to sell them a Bible. He had appeared at the door, carrying a large black suitcase that weighted him so heavily on one side that he had to brace himself against the door facing. He seemed on the point of collapse but he said in a cheerful voice, “Good morning, Mrs. Cedars!” and set the suitcase down on the mat. He was not a bad-looking young man though he had on a bright blue suit and yellow socks that were not pulled up far enough. He had prominent face bones and a streak of sticky-looking brown hair falling across his forehead.

“I’m Mrs. Hopewell,” she said.

“Oh!” he said, pretending to look puzzled but with his eyes sparkling, “I saw it said ‘The Cedars’ on the mailbox so I thought you was Mrs. Cedars!” and he burst out in a pleasant laugh. He picked up the satchel and under cover of a pant, he fell forward into her hall. It was rather as if the suitcase had moved first, jerking him after it. “Mrs. Hopewell!” he said and grabbed her hand. “I hope you are well!” and he laughed again and then all at once

2. Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), French philosopher.

his face sobered completely. He paused and gave her a straight earnest look and said, "Lady, I've come to speak of serious things."

"Well, come in," she muttered, none too pleased because her dinner was almost ready. He came into the parlor and sat down on the edge of a straight chair and put the suitcase between his feet and glanced around the room as if he were sizing her up by it. Her silver gleamed on the two sideboards; she decided he had never been in a room as elegant as this.

"Mrs. Hopewell," he began, using her name in a way that sounded almost intimate, "I know you believe in Chrastian service."

"Well yes," she murmured.

"I know," he said and paused, looking very wise with his head cocked on one side, "that you're a good woman. Friends have told me."

Mrs. Hopewell never liked to be taken for a fool. "What are you selling?" she asked.

"Bibles," the young man said and his eye raced around the room before he added, "I see you have no family Bible in your parlor, I see that is the one lack you got!"

Mrs. Hopewell could not say, "My daughter is an atheist and won't let me keep the Bible in the parlor." She said, stiffening slightly, "I keep my Bible by my bedside." This was not the truth. It was in the attic somewhere.

"Lady," he said, "the word of God ought to be in the parlor."

"Well, I think that's a matter of taste," she began. "I think . . ."

"Lady," he said, "for a Chrastian, the word of God ought to be in every room in the house besides in his heart. I know you're a Chrastian because I can see it in every line of your face."

She stood up and said, "Well, young man, I don't want to buy a Bible and I smell my dinner burning."

He didn't get up. He began to twist his hands and looking down at them, he said softly, "Well lady, I'll tell you the truth—not many people want to buy one nowadays and besides, I know I'm real simple. I don't know how to say a thing but to say it. I'm just a country boy." He glanced up into her unfriendly face. "People like you don't like to fool with country people like me!"

"Why!" she cried, "good country people are the salt of the earth! Besides, we all have different ways of doing, it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!"

"You said a mouthful," he said.

"Why, I think there aren't enough good country people in the world!" she said, stirred. "I think that's what's wrong with it!"

His face had brightened. "I didn't inraduce myself," he said. "I'm Manley Pointer from out in the country around Willohobie, not even from a place, just from near a place."

"You wait a minute," she said. "I have to see about my dinner." She went out to the kitchen and found Joy standing near the door where she had been listening.

"Get rid of the salt of the earth," she said, "and let's eat."

Mrs. Hopewell gave her a pained look and turned the heat down under the vegetables. "I can't be rude to anybody," she murmured and went back into the parlor.

He had opened the suitcase and was sitting with a Bible on each knee.

"You might as well put those up," she told him. "I don't want one."

"I appreciate your honesty," he said. "You don't see any more real honest people unless you go way out in the country."

"I know," she said, "real genuine folks!" Through the crack in the door she heard a groan.

"I guess a lot of boys come telling you they're working their way through college," he said, "but I'm not going to tell you that. Somehow," he said, "I don't want to go to college. I want to devote my life to Chrustian service. See," he said, lowering his voice, "I got this heart condition. I may not live long. When you know it's something wrong with you and you may not live long, well then, lady . . ." He paused, with his mouth open, and stared at her.

He and Joy had the same condition! She knew that her eyes were filling with tears but she collected herself quickly and murmured, "Won't you stay for dinner? We'd love to have you!" and was sorry the instant she heard herself say it.

"Yes mam," he said in an abashed voice, "I would sher love to do that!"

Joy had given him one look on being introduced to him and then throughout the meal had not glanced at him again. He had addressed several remarks to her, which she had pretended not to hear. Mrs. Hopewell could not understand deliberate rudeness, although she lived with it, and she felt she had always to overflow with hospitality to make up for Joy's lack of courtesy. She urged him to talk about himself and he did. He said he was the seventh child of twelve and that his father had been crushed under a tree when he himself was eight years old. He had been crushed very badly, in fact, almost cut in two and was practically not recognizable. His mother had got along the best she could by hard working and she had always seen that her children went to Sunday School and that they read the Bible every evening. He was now nineteen years old and he had been selling Bibles for four months. In that time he had sold seventy-seven Bibles and had the promise of two more sales. He wanted to become a missionary because he thought that was the way you could do most for people. "He who loseth his life shall find it," he said simply and he was so sincere, so genuine and earnest that Mrs. Hopewell would not for the world have smiled. He prevented his peas from sliding onto the table by blocking them with a piece of bread which he later cleaned his plate with. She could see Joy observing sidewise how he handled his knife and fork and she saw too that every few minutes, the boy would dart a keen appraising glance at the girl as if he were trying to attract her attention.

After dinner Joy cleared the dishes off the table and disappeared and Mrs. Hopewell was left to talk with him. He told her again about his childhood and his father's accident and about various things that had happened to him. Every five minutes or so she would stifle a yawn. He sat for two hours until finally she told him she must go because she had an appointment in town. He packed his Bibles and thanked her and prepared to leave, but in the doorway he stopped and wrung her hand and said that not on any of his trips had he met a lady as nice as her and he asked if he could come again. She had said she would always be happy to see him.

Joy had been standing in the road, apparently looking at something in the distance, when he came down the steps toward her, bent to the side with his heavy valise. He stopped where she was standing and confronted her directly. Mrs. Hopewell could not hear what he said but she trembled to think what

Joy would say to him. She could see that after a minute Joy said something and that then the boy began to speak again, making an excited gesture with his free hand. After a minute Joy said something else at which the boy began to speak once more. Then to her amazement, Mrs. Hopewell saw the two of them walk off together, toward the gate. Joy had walked all the way to the gate with him and Mrs. Hopewell could not imagine what they had said to each other, and she had not yet dared to ask.

Mrs. Freeman was insisting upon her attention. She had moved from the refrigerator to the heater so that Mrs. Hopewell had to turn and face her in order to seem to be listening. "Glynese gone out with Harvey Hill again last night," she said. "She had this sty."

"Hill," Mrs. Hopewell said absently, "is that the one who works in the garage?"

"Nome, he's the one that goes to chiropracter school," Mrs. Freeman said. "She had this sty. Been had it two days. So she says when he brought her in the other night he says, 'Lemme get rid of that sty for you,' and she says, 'How?' and he says, 'You just lay yourself down across the seat of that car and I'll show you.' So she done it and he popped her neck. Kept on a-popping it several times until she made him quit. This morning," Mrs. Freeman said, "she ain't got no sty. She ain't got no traces of a sty."

"I never heard of that before," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"He ast her to marry him before the Ordinary,"³ Mrs. Freeman went on, "and she told him she wasn't going to be married in no *office*."

"Well, Glynese is a fine girl," Mrs. Hopewell said. "Glynese and Carramae are both fine girls."

"Carramae said when her and Lyman was married Lyman said it sure felt sacred to him. She said he said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars for being married by a preacher."

"How much would he take?" the girl asked from the stove.

"He said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars," Mrs. Freeman repeated.

"Well we all have work to do," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Lyman said it just felt more sacred to him," Mrs. Freeman said. "The doctor wants Carramae to eat prunes. Says instead of medicine. Says them cramps is coming from pressure. You know where I think it is?"

"She'll be better in a few weeks," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"In the tube," Mrs. Freeman said. "Else she wouldn't be as sick as she is."

Hulga had cracked her two eggs into a saucer and was bringing them to the table along with a cup of coffee that she had filled too full. She sat down carefully and began to eat, meaning to keep Mrs. Freeman there by questions if for any reason she showed an inclination to leave. She could perceive her mother's eye on her. The first round-about question would be about the Bible salesman and she did not wish to bring it on. "How did he pop her neck?" she asked.

Mrs. Freeman went into a description of how he had popped her neck. She said he owned a '55 Mercury but that Glynese said she would rather marry a man with only a '36 Plymouth who would be married by a preacher. The girl asked what if he had a '32 Plymouth and Mrs. Freeman said what Glynese had said was a '36 Plymouth.

3. Justice of the peace who performs the marriage ceremony in chambers rather than in public.

Mrs. Hopewell said there were not many girls with Glynese's common sense. She said what she admired in those girls was their common sense. She said that reminded her that they had had a nice visitor yesterday, a young man selling Bibles. "Lord," she said, "he bored me to death but he was so sincere and genuine I couldn't be rude to him. He was just good country people, you know," she said, "—just the salt of the earth."

"I seen him walk up," Mrs. Freeman said, "and then later—I seen him walk off," and Hulga could feel the slight shift in her voice, the slight insinuation, that he had not walked off alone, had he? Her face remained expressionless but the color rose into her neck and she seemed to swallow it down with the next spoonful of egg. Mrs. Freeman was looking at her as if they had a secret together.

"Well, it takes all kinds of people to make the world go 'round," Mrs. Hopewell said. "It's very good we aren't all alike."

"Some people are more alike than others," Mrs. Freeman said.

Hulga got up and stumped, with about twice the noise that was necessary, into her room and locked the door. She was to meet the Bible salesman at ten o'clock at the gate. She had thought about it half the night. She had started thinking of it as a great joke and then she had begun to see profound implications in it. She had lain in bed imagining dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of. Their conversation yesterday had been of this kind.

He had stopped in front of her and had simply stood there. His face was bony and sweaty and bright, with a little pointed nose in the center of it, and his look was different from what it had been at the dinner table. He was gazing at her with open curiosity, with fascination, like a child watching a new fantastic animal at the zoo, and he was breathing as if he had run a great distance to reach her. His gaze seemed somehow familiar but she could not think where she had been regarded with it before. For almost a minute he didn't say anything. Then on what seemed an insuck of breath, he whispered, "You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?"

The girl looked at him stonily. He might have just put this question up for consideration at the meeting of a philosophical association. "Yes," she presently replied as if she had considered it from all angles.

"It must have been mighty small!" he said triumphantly and shook all over with little nervous giggles, getting very red in the face, and subsiding finally into his gaze of complete admiration, while the girl's expression remained exactly the same.

"How old are you?" he asked softly.

She waited some time before she answered. Then in a flat voice she said, "Seventeen."

His smiles came in succession like waves breaking on the surface of a little lake. "I see you got a wooden leg," he said. "I think you're brave. I think you're real sweet."

The girl stood blank and solid and silent.

"Walk to the gate with me," he said. "You're a brave sweet little thing and I liked you the minute I seen you walk in the door."

Hulga began to move forward.

"What's your name?" he asked, smiling down on the top of her head.

"Hulga," she said.

"Hulga," he murmured, "Hulga. Hulga. I never heard of anybody name Hulga before. You're shy, aren't you, Hulga?" he asked.

She nodded, watching his large red hand on the handle of the giant valise.

"I like girls that wear glasses," he said. "I think a lot. I'm not like these people that a serious thought don't ever enter their heads. It's because I may die."

"I may die too," she said suddenly and looked up at him. His eyes were very small and brown, glittering feverishly.

"Listen," he said, "don't you think some people was meant to meet on account of what all they got in common and all? Like they both think serious thoughts and all?" He shifted the valise to his other hand so that the hand nearest her was free. He caught hold of her elbow and shook it a little. "I don't work on Saturday," he said. "I like to walk in the woods and see what Mother Nature is wearing. O'er the hills and far away. Pic-nics and things. Couldn't we go on a pic-nic tomorrow? Say yes, Hulga," he said and gave her a dying look as if he felt his insides about to drop out of him. He had even seemed to sway slightly toward her.

During the night she had imagined that she seduced him. She imagined that the two of them walked on the place until they came to the storage barn beyond the two back fields and there, she imagined, that things came to such a pass that she very easily seduced him and that then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.

She set off for the gate at exactly ten o'clock, escaping without drawing Mrs. Hopewell's attention. She didn't take anything to eat, forgetting that food is usually taken on a picnic. She wore a pair of slacks and a dirty white shirt, and as an afterthought, she had put some Vapex on the collar of it since she did not own any perfume. When she reached the gate no one was there.

She looked up and down the empty highway and had the furious feeling that she had been tricked, that he had only meant to make her walk to the gate after the idea of him. Then suddenly he stood up, very tall, from behind a bush on the opposite embankment. Smiling, he lifted his hat which was new and wide-brimmed. He had not worn it yesterday and she wondered if he had bought it for the occasion. It was toast-colored with a red and white band around it and was slightly too large for him. He stepped from behind the bush still carrying the black valise. He had on the same suit and the same yellow socks sucked down in his shoes from walking. He crossed the highway and said, "I knew you'd come!"

The girl wondered acidly how he had known this. She pointed to the valise and asked, "Why did you bring your Bibles?"

He took her elbow, smiling down on her as if he could not stop. "You can never tell when you'll need the word of God, Hulga," he said. She had a moment in which she doubted that this was actually happening and then they began to climb the embankment. They went down into the pasture toward the woods. The boy walked lightly by her side, bouncing on his toes. The valise did not seem to be heavy today; he even swung it. They crossed half the pasture without saying anything and then, putting his hand

easily on the small of her back, he asked softly, "Where does your wooden leg join on?"

She turned an ugly red and glared at him and for an instant the boy looked abashed. "I didn't mean you no harm," he said. "I only meant you're so brave and all. I guess God takes care of you."

"No," she said, looking forward and walking fast, "I don't even believe in God."

At this he stopped and whistled. "No!" he exclaimed as if he were too astonished to say anything else.

She walked on and in a second he was bouncing at her side, fanning with his hat. "That's very unusual for a girl," he remarked, watching her out of the corner of his eye. When they reached the edge of the wood, he put his hand on her back again and drew her against him without a word and kissed her heavily.

The kiss, which had more pressure than feeling behind it, produced that extra surge of adrenalin in the girl that enables one to carry a packed trunk out of a burning house, but in her, the power went at once to the brain. Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement but with pity. She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind's control. Some people might enjoy drain water if they were told it was vodka. When the boy, looking expectant but uncertain, pushed her gently away, she turned and walked on, saying nothing as if such business, for her, were common enough.

He came along panting at her side, trying to help her when he saw a root that she might trip over. He caught and held back the long swaying blades of thorn vine until she had passed beyond them. She led the way and he came breathing heavily behind her. Then they came out on a sunlit hillside, sloping softly into another one a little smaller. Beyond, they could see the rusted top of the old barn where the extra hay was stored.

The hill was sprinkled with small pink weeds. "Then you ain't saved?" he asked suddenly, stopping.

The girl smiled. It was the first time she had smiled at him at all. "In my economy," she said, "I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God."

Nothing seemed to destroy the boy's look of admiration. He gazed at her now as if the fantastic animal at the zoo had put its paw through the bars and given him a loving poke. She thought he looked as if he wanted to kiss her again and she walked on before he had the chance.

"Ain't there somewheres we can sit down sometime?" he murmured, his voice softening toward the end of the sentence.

"In that barn," she said.

They made for it rapidly as if it might slide away like a train. It was a large two-story barn, cool and dark inside. The boy pointed up the ladder that led into the loft and said, "It's too bad we can't go up there."

"Why can't we?" she asked.

"Yer leg," he said reverently.

The girl gave him a contemptuous look and putting both hands on the ladder, she climbed it while he stood below, apparently awestruck. She pulled

herself expertly through the opening and then looked down at him and said, "Well, come on if you're coming," and he began to climb the ladder, awkwardly bringing the suitcase with him.

"We won't need the Bible," she observed.

"You never can tell," he said, panting. After he had got into the loft, he was a few seconds catching his breath. She had sat down in a pile of straw. A wide sheath of sunlight, filled with dust particles, slanted over her. She lay back against a bale, her face turned away, looking out the front opening of the barn where hay was thrown from a wagon into the loft. The two pink-speckled hillsides lay back against a dark ridge of woods. The sky was cloudless and cold blue. The boy dropped down by her side and put one arm under her and the other over her and began methodically kissing her face, making little noises like a fish. He did not remove his hat but it was pushed far enough back not to interfere. When her glasses got in his way, he took them off of her and slipped them into his pocket.

The girl at first did not return any of the kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and remained there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all the breath out of him. His breath was clear and sweet like a child's and the kisses were sticky like a child's. He mumbled about loving her and about knowing when he first seen her that he loved her, but the mumbling was like the sleepy fretting of a child being put to sleep by his mother. Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings. "You ain't said you loved me none," he whispered finally, pulling back from her. "You got to say that."

She looked away from him off into the hollow sky and then down at a black ridge and then down farther into what appeared to be two green swelling lakes. She didn't realize he had taken her glasses but this landscape could not seem exceptional to her for she seldom paid any close attention to her surroundings.

"You got to say it," he repeated. "You got to say you love me."

She was always careful how she committed herself. "In a sense," she began, "if you use the word loosely, you might say that. But it's not a word I use. I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing."

The boy was frowning. "You got to say it. I said it and you got to say it," he said.

The girl looked at him almost tenderly. "You poor baby," she murmured. "It's just as well you don't understand," and she pulled him by the neck, facedown against her. "We are all damned," she said, "but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation."

The boy's astonished eyes looked blankly through the ends of her hair. "Okay," he almost whined, "but do you love me or don'tcher?"

"Yes," she said and added, "in a sense. But I must tell you something. There mustn't be anything dishonest between us." She lifted his head and looked him in the eye. "I am thirty years old," she said. "I have a number of degrees."

The boy's look was irritated but dogged. "I don't care," he said. "I don't care a thing about what all you done. I just want to know if you love me or don'tcher?" and he caught her to him and wildly planted her face with kisses until she said, "Yes, yes."

"Okay then," he said, letting her go. "Prove it."

She smiled, looking dreamily out on the shifty landscape. She had seduced him without even making up her mind to try. "How?" she asked, feeling that he should be delayed a little.

He leaned over and put his lips to her ear. "Show me where your wooden leg joins on," he whispered.

The girl uttered a sharp little cry and her face instantly drained of color. The obscenity of the suggestion was not what shocked her. As a child she had sometimes been subject to feelings of shame but education had removed the last traces of that as a good surgeon scrapes for cancer; she would no more have felt it over what he was asking than she would have believed in his Bible. But she was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away. "No," she said.

"I know it," he muttered, sitting up. "You're just playing me for a sucker."

"Oh no no!" she cried. "It joins on at the knee. Only at the knee. Why do you want to see it?"

The boy gave her a long penetrating look. "Because," he said, "it's what makes you different. You ain't like anybody else."

She sat staring at him. There was nothing about her face or her round freezing-blue eyes to indicate that this had moved her; but she felt as if her heart had stopped and left her mind to pump her blood. She decided that for the first time in her life she was face to face with real innocence. This boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice, "All right," it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his.

Very gently he began to roll the slack leg up. The artificial limb, in a white sock and brown flat shoe, was bound in a heavy material like canvas and ended in an ugly jointure where it was attached to the stump. The boy's face and his voice were entirely reverent as he uncovered it and said, "Now show me how to take it off and on."

She took it off for him and put it back on again and then he took it off himself, handling it as tenderly as if it were a real one. "See!" he said with a delighted child's face. "Now I can do it myself!"

"Put it back on," she said. She was thinking that she would run away with him and that every night he would take the leg off and every morning put it back on again. "Put it back on," she said.

"Not yet," he murmured, setting it on its foot out of her reach. "Leave it off for a while. You got me instead."

She gave a cry of alarm but he pushed her down and began to kiss her again. Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him. Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good at. Different expressions raced back and forth over her face. Every now and then the boy, his eyes like two steel spikes, would glance behind him where the leg stood. Finally she pushed him off and said, "Put it back on me now."

"Wait," he said. He leaned the other way and pulled the valise toward him and opened it. It had a pale blue spotted lining and there were only two Bibles in it. He took one of these out and opened the cover of it. It was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small

blue box with printing on it. He laid these out in front of her one at a time in an evenly-spaced row, like one presenting offerings at the shrine of a goddess. He put the blue box in her hand. THIS PRODUCT TO BE USED ONLY FOR THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE, she read, and dropped it. The boy was unscrewing the top of the flask. He stopped and pointed, with a smile, to the deck of cards. It was not an ordinary deck but one with an obscene picture on the back of each card. "Take a swig," he said, offering her the bottle first. He held it in front of her, but like one mesmerized, she did not move.

Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. "Aren't you," she murmured, "aren't you just good country people?"

The boy cocked his head. He looked as if he were just beginning to understand that she might be trying to insult him. "Yeah," he said, curling his lip slightly, "but it ain't held me back none. I'm as good as you any day in the week."

"Give me my leg," she said.

He pushed it farther away with his foot. "Come on now, let's begin to have us a good time," he said coaxingly. "We ain't got to know one another good yet."

"Give me my leg!" she screamed and tried to lunge for it but he pushed her down easily.

"What's the matter with you all of a sudden?" he asked, frowning as he screwed the top on the flask and put it quickly back inside the Bible. "You just a while ago said you didn't believe in nothing. I thought you was some girl!"

Her face was almost purple. "You're a Christian!" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian! You're just like them all—say one thing and do another. You're a perfect Christian, you're . . ."

The boy's mouth was set angrily. "I hope you don't think," he said in a lofty indignant tone, "that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going!"

"Give me my leg!" she screeched. He jumped up so quickly that she barely saw him sweep the cards and the blue box into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends. He slammed the lid shut and snatched up the valise and swung it down the hole and then stepped through himself.

When all of him had passed but his head, he turned and regarded her with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things," he said. "One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house I call at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing every since I was born!" and then the toast-colored hat disappeared down the hole and the girl was left, sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight. When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake.

Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, who were in the back pasture, digging up onions, saw him emerge a little later from the woods and head across the

meadow toward the highway. "Why, that looks like that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday," Mrs. Hopewell said, squinting. "He must have been selling them to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple," she said, "but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple."

Mrs. Freeman's gaze drove forward and just touched him before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. "Some can't be that simple," she said. "I know I never could."

1955

A Good Man Is Hard to Find

The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind. Bailey was the son she lived with, her only boy. He was sitting on the edge of his chair at the table, bent over the orange sports section of the *Journal*. "Now look here, Bailey," she said, "see here, read this," and she stood with one hand on her thin hip and the other rattling the newspaper at his bald head. "Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is a loose from the Federal Pen¹ and headed toward Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that a loose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did."

Bailey didn't look up from his reading so she wheeled around then and faced the children's mother, a young woman in slacks, whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green headkerchief that had two points on the top like a rabbit's ears. She was sitting on the sofa, feeding the baby his apricots out of a jar. "The children have been to Florida before," the old lady said. "You all ought to take them somewhere else for a change so they would see different parts of the world and be broad. They never have been to east Tennessee."

The children's mother didn't seem to hear her but the eight-year-old boy, John Wesley, a stocky child with glasses, said, "If you don't want to go to Florida, why dontcha stay at home?" He and the little girl, June Star, were reading the funny papers² on the floor.

"She wouldn't stay at home to be queen for a day,"³ June Star said without raising her yellow head.

"Yes and what would you do if this fellow, The Misfit, caught you?" the grandmother asked.

"I'd smack his face," John Wesley said.

"She wouldn't stay at home for a million bucks," June Star said. "Afraid she'd miss something. She has to go everywhere we go."

1. Federal Penitentiary.

2. Comics.

3. Reference to a long-running radio and then television program, *Queen for a Day*, in which

women competed to tell the most heartbreaking stories of personal hardship in order to be crowned "Queen for a Day" and win valuable prizes.

"All right, Miss," the grandmother said. "Just remember that the next time you want me to curl your hair."

June Star said her hair was naturally curly.

The next morning the grandmother was the first one in the car, ready to go. She had her big black valise that looked like the head of a hippopotamus in one corner, and underneath it she was hiding a basket with Pitty Sing, the cat, in it. She didn't intend for the cat to be left alone in the house for three days because he would miss her too much and she was afraid he might brush against one of the gas burners and accidentally asphyxiate himself. Her son, Bailey, didn't like to arrive at a motel with a cat.

She sat in the middle of the back seat with John Wesley and June Star on either side of her. Bailey and the children's mother and the baby sat in front and they left Atlanta at eight forty-five with the mileage on the car at 55890. The grandmother wrote this down because she thought it would be interesting to say how many miles they had been when they got back. It took them twenty minutes to reach the outskirts of the city.

The old lady settled herself comfortably, removing her white cotton gloves and putting them up with her purse on the shelf in front of the back window. The children's mother still had on slacks and still had her head tied up in a green kerchief, but the grandmother had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print. Her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady.

She said she thought it was going to be a good day for driving, neither too hot nor too cold, and she cautioned Bailey that the speed limit was fifty-five miles an hour and that the patrolmen hid themselves behind billboards and small clumps of trees and sped out after you before you had a chance to slow down. She pointed out interesting details of the scenery: Stone Mountain; the blue granite that in some places came up to both sides of the highway; the brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple; and the various crops that made rows of green lace-work on the ground. The trees were full of silver-white sunlight and the meanest of them sparkled. The children were reading comic magazines and their mother had gone back to sleep.

"Let's go through Georgia fast so we won't have to look at it much," John Wesley said.

"If I were a little boy," said the grandmother, "I wouldn't talk about my native state that way. Tennessee has the mountains and Georgia has the hills."

"Tennessee is just a hillbilly dumping ground," John Wesley said, "and Georgia is a lousy state too."

"You said it," June Star said.

"In my time," said the grandmother, folding her thin veined fingers, "children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then. Oh look at the cute little pickaninny⁴!" she said and pointed to a Negro child standing in the door of a shack.

4. Derogatory term for an African American child.

"Wouldn't that make a picture, now?" she asked and they all turned and looked at the little Negro out of the back window. He waved.

"He didn't have any britches on," June Star said.

"He probably didn't have any," the grandmother explained. "Little niggers in the country don't have things like we do. If I could paint, I'd paint that picture," she said.

The children exchanged comic books.

The grandmother offered to hold the baby and the children's mother passed him over the front seat to her. She set him on her knee and bounced him and told him about the things they were passing. She rolled her eyes and screwed up her mouth and stuck her leathery thin face into his smooth bland one. Occasionally he gave her a faraway smile. They passed a large cotton field with five or six graves fenced in the middle of it, like a small island. "Look at the graveyard!" the grandmother said, pointing it out. "That was the old family burying ground. That belonged to the plantation."

"Where's the plantation?" John Wesley asked.

"Gone with the Wind,"⁵ said the grandmother. "Ha. Ha."

When the children finished all the comic books they had brought, they opened the lunch and ate it. The grandmother ate a peanut butter sandwich and an olive and would not let the children throw the box and the paper napkins out the window. When there was nothing else to do they played a game by choosing a cloud and making the other two guess what shape it suggested. John Wesley took one the shape of a cow and June Star guessed a cow and John Wesley said, no, an automobile, and June Star said he didn't play fair, and they began to slap each other over the grandmother.

The grandmother said she would tell them a story if they would keep quiet. When she told a story, she rolled her eyes and waved her head and was very dramatic. She said once when she was a maiden lady she had been courted by a Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden from Jasper, Georgia. She said he was a very good-looking man and a gentleman and that he brought her a watermelon every Saturday afternoon with his initials cut in it, E. A. T. Well, one Saturday, she said, Mr. Teagarden brought the watermelon and there was nobody at home and he left it on the front porch and returned in his buggy to Jasper, but she never got the watermelon, she said, because a nigger boy ate it when he saw the initials, E. A. T.! This story tickled John Wesley's funny bone and he giggled and giggled but June Star didn't think it was any good. She said she wouldn't marry a man that just brought her a watermelon on Saturday. The grandmother said she would have done well to marry Mr. Teagarden because he was a gentleman and had bought Coca-Cola stock when it first came out and that he had died only a few years ago, a very wealthy man.

They stopped at The Tower for barbecued sandwiches. The Tower was a part stucco and part wood filling station and dance hall set in a clearing outside of Timothy. A fat man named Red Sammy Butts ran it and there were signs stuck here and there on the building and for miles up and down the highway saying, TRY RED SAMMY'S FAMOUS BARBECUE. NONE

5. Margaret Mitchell's 1936 southern romance novel, *Gone with the Wind*, won the Pulitzer Prize and was made into a popular 1939 film starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh.

LIKE FAMOUS RED SAMMY'S! RED SAM! THE FAT BOY WITH THE HAPPY LAUGH! A VETERAN! RED SAMMY'S YOUR MAN!

Red Sammy was lying on the bare ground outside The Tower with his head under a truck while a gray monkey about a foot high, chained to a small chinaberry tree, chattered nearby. The monkey sprang back into the tree and got on the highest limb as soon as he saw the children jump out of the car and run toward him.

Inside, The Tower was a long dark room with a counter at one end and tables at the other and dancing space in the middle. They all sat down at a board table next to the nickelodeon⁶ and Red Sam's wife, a tall burnt-brown woman with hair and eyes lighter than her skin, came and took their order. The children's mother put a dime in the machine and played "The Tennessee Waltz," and the grandmother said that tune always made her want to dance. She asked Bailey if he would like to dance but he only glared at her. He didn't have a naturally sunny disposition like she did and trips made him nervous. The grandmother's brown eyes were very bright. She swayed her head from side to side and pretended she was dancing in her chair. June Star said play something she could tap to so the children's mother put in another dime and played a fast number and June Star stepped out onto the dance floor and did her tap routine.

"Ain't she cute?" Red Sam's wife said, leaning over the counter. "Would you like to come be my little girl?"

"No I certainly wouldn't," June Star said. "I wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks!" and she ran back to the table.

"Ain't she cute?" the woman repeated, stretching her mouth politely.

"Aren't you ashamed?" hissed the grandmother.

Red Sam came in and told his wife to quit lounging on the counter and hurry up with these people's order. His khaki trousers reached just to his hip bones and his stomach hung over them like a sack of meal swaying under his shirt. He came over and sat down at a table nearby and let out a combination sigh and yodel. "You can't win," he said. "You can't win," and he wiped his sweating red face off with a gray handkerchief. "These days you don't know who to trust," he said. "Ain't that the truth?"

"People are certainly not nice like they used to be," said the grandmother.

"Two fellers come in here last week," Red Sammy said, "driving a Chrysler. It was a old beat-up car but it was a good one and these boys looked all right to me. Said they worked at the mill and you know I let them fellers charge⁷ the gas they bought? Now why did I do that?"

"Because you're a good man!" the grandmother said at once.

"Yes'm, I suppose so," Red Sam said as if he were struck with this answer.

His wife brought the orders, carrying the five plates all at once without a tray, two in each hand and one balanced on her arm. "It isn't a soul in this green world of God's that you can trust," she said. "And I don't count nobody out of that, not nobody," she repeated, looking at Red Sammy.

"Did you read about that criminal, The Misfit, that's escaped?" asked the grandmother.

6. Jukebox.

7. To buy with a promise to pay the shopkeeper later.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he didn't attack this place right here," said the woman. "If he hears about it being here, I wouldn't be none surprised to see him. If he hears it's two cent in the cash register, I wouldn't be a tall surprised if he . . ."

"That'll do," Red Sam said. "Go bring these people their Co'-Colas," and the woman went off to get the rest of the order.

"A good man is hard to find," Red Sammy said. "Everything is getting terrible. I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not no more."

He and the grandmother discussed better times. The old lady said that in her opinion Europe was entirely to blame for the way things were now. She said the way Europe acted you would think we were made of money and Red Sam said it was no use talking about it, she was exactly right.⁸ The children ran outside into the white sunlight and looked at the monkey in the lacy chinaberry tree. He was busy catching fleas on himself and biting each one carefully between his teeth as if it were a delicacy.

They drove off again into the hot afternoon. The grandmother took cat naps and woke up every few minutes with her own snoring. Outside of Toombsboro she woke up and recalled an old plantation that she had visited in this neighborhood once when she was a young lady. She said the house had six white columns across the front and that there was an avenue of oaks leading up to it and two little wooden trellis arbors on either side in front where you sat down with your suitor after a stroll in the garden. She recalled exactly which road to turn off to get to it. She knew that Bailey would not be willing to lose any time looking at an old house, but the more she talked about it, the more she wanted to see it once again and find out if the little twin arbors were still standing. "There was a secret panel in this house," she said craftily, not telling the truth but wishing that she were, "and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman⁹ came through but it was never found . . ."

"Hey!" John Wesley said. "Let's go see it! We'll find it! We'll poke all the woodwork and find it! Who lives there? Where do you turn off at? Hey Pop, can't we turn off there?"

"We never have seen a house with a secret panel!" June Star shrieked. "Let's go to the house with the secret panel! Hey Pop, can't we go see the house with the secret panel!"

"It's not far from here, I know," the grandmother said. "It wouldn't take over twenty minutes."

Bailey was looking straight ahead. His jaw was as rigid as a horseshoe. "No," he said.

The children began to yell and scream that they wanted to see the house with the secret panel. John Wesley kicked the back of the front seat and June Star hung over her mother's shoulder and whined desperately into her ear that they never had any fun even on their vacation, that they could never do what THEY wanted to do. The baby began to scream and John

8. Referring to money supplied by the United States for the reconstruction of Europe after World War II.

9. William Tecumseh Sherman (1820–1891),

commander of the Union army that devastated much of Georgia during the American Civil War (1861–65).

Wesley kicked the back of the seat so hard that his father could feel the blows in his kidney.

"All right!" he shouted and drew the car to a stop at the side of the road. "Will you all shut up? Will you all just shut up for one second? If you don't shut up, we won't go anywhere."

"It would be very educational for them," the grandmother murmured.

"All right," Bailey said, "but get this: this is the only time we're going to stop for anything like this. This is the one and only time."

"The dirt road that you have to turn down is about a mile back," the grandmother directed. "I marked it when we passed."

"A dirt road," Bailey groaned.

After they had turned around and were headed toward the dirt road, the grandmother recalled other points about the house, the beautiful glass over the front doorway and the candle-lamp in the hall. John Wesley said that the secret panel was probably in the fireplace.

"You can't go inside this house," Bailey said. "You don't know who lives there."

"While you all talk to the people in front, I'll run around behind and get in a window," John Wesley suggested.

"We'll all stay in the car," his mother said.

They turned onto the dirt road and the car raced roughly along in a swirl of pink dust. The grandmother recalled the times when there were no paved roads and thirty miles was a day's journey. The dirt road was hilly and there were sudden washes in it and sharp curves on dangerous embankments. All at once they would be on a hill, looking down over the blue tops of trees for miles around, then the next minute, they would be in a red depression with the dust-coated trees looking down on them.

"This place had better turn up in a minute," Bailey said, "or I'm going to turn around."

The road looked as if no one had traveled on it in months.

"It's not much farther," the grandmother said and just as she said it, a horrible thought came to her. The thought was so embarrassing that she turned red in the face and her eyes dilated and her feet jumped up, upsetting her valise in the corner. The instant the valise moved, the newspaper top she had over the basket under it rose with a snarl and Pitty Sing, the cat, sprang onto Bailey's shoulder.

The children were thrown to the floor and their mother, clutching the baby, was thrown out the door onto the ground; the old lady was thrown into the front seat. The car turned over once and landed right-side-up in a gulch off the side of the road. Bailey remained in the driver's seat with the cat—gray-striped with a broad white face and an orange nose—clinging to his neck like a caterpillar.

As soon as the children saw they could move their arms and legs, they scrambled out of the car, shouting, "We've had an ACCIDENT!" The grandmother was curled up under the dashboard, hoping she was injured so that Bailey's wrath would not come down on her all at once. The horrible thought she had had before the accident was that the house she had remembered so vividly was not in Georgia but in Tennessee.

Bailey removed the cat from his neck with both hands and flung it out the window against the side of a pine tree. Then he got out of the car and started

looking for the children's mother. She was sitting against the side of the red gutted ditch, holding the screaming baby, but she only had a cut down her face and a broken shoulder. "We've had an ACCIDENT!" the children screamed in a frenzy of delight.

"But nobody's killed," June Star said with disappointment as the grandmother limped out of the car, her hat still pinned to her head but the broken front brim standing up at a jaunty angle and the violet spray hanging off the side. They all sat down in the ditch, except the children, to recover from the shock. They were all shaking.

"Maybe a car will come along," said the children's mother hoarsely.

"I believe I have injured an organ," said the grandmother, pressing her side, but no one answered her. Bailey's teeth were clattering. He had on a yellow sport shirt with bright blue parrots designed in it and his face was as yellow as the shirt. The grandmother decided that she would not mention that the house was in Tennessee.

The road was about ten feet above and they could see only the tops of the trees on the other side of it. Behind the ditch they were sitting in there were more woods, tall and dark and deep. In a few minutes they saw a car, some distance away on top of a hill, coming slowly as if the occupants were watching them. The grandmother stood up and waved both arms dramatically to attract their attention. The car continued to come on slowly, disappeared around a bend and appeared again, moving even slower, on top of the hill they had gone over. It was a big black battered hearse-like automobile. There were three men in it.

It came to a stop just over them and for some minutes, the driver looked down with a steady expressionless gaze to where they were sitting, and didn't speak. Then he turned his head and muttered something to the other two and they got out. One was a fat boy in black trousers and a red sweat shirt with a silver stallion embossed on the front of it. He moved around on the right side of them and stood staring, his mouth partly open in a kind of loose grin. The other had on khaki pants and a blue striped coat and a gray hat pulled down very low, hiding most of his face. He came around slowly on the left side. Neither spoke.

The driver got out of the car and stood by the side of it, looking down at them. He was an older man than the other two. His hair was just beginning to gray and he wore silver-rimmed spectacles that gave him a scholarly look. He had a long creased face and didn't have on any shirt or undershirt. He had on blue jeans that were too tight for him and was holding a black hat and a gun. The two boys also had guns.

"We've had an ACCIDENT!" the children screamed.

The grandmother had the peculiar feeling that the bespectacled man was someone she knew. His face was as familiar to her as if she had known him all her life but she could not recall who he was. He moved away from the car and began to come down the embankment, placing his feet carefully so that he wouldn't slip. He had on tan and white shoes and no socks, and his ankles were red and thin. "Good afternoon," he said. "I see you all had you a little spill."

"We turned over twice!" said the grandmother.

"Oncet," he corrected. "We seen it happen. Try their car and see will it run, Hiram," he said quietly to the boy with the gray hat.

"What you got that gun for?" John Wesley asked. "Whatcha gonna do with that gun?"

"Lady," the man said to the children's mother, "would you mind calling them children to sit down by you? Children make me nervous. I want all you all to sit down right together there where you're at."

"What are you telling US what to do for?" June Star asked.

Behind them the line of woods gaped like a dark open mouth. "Come here," said their mother.

"Look here now," Bailey began suddenly, "we're in a predicament! We're in . . ."

The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. "You're The Misfit!" she said. "I recognized you at once!"

"Yes'm," the man said, smiling slightly as if he were pleased in spite of himself to be known, "but it would have been better for all of you, lady, if you hadn't of reckernized me."

Bailey turned his head sharply and said something to his mother that shocked even the children. The old lady began to cry and The Misfit reddened.

"Lady," he said, "don't you get upset. Sometimes a man says things he don't mean. I don't reckon he meant to talk to you thataway."

"You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?" the grandmother said and removed a clean handkerchief from her cuff and began to slap at her eyes with it.

The Misfit pointed the toe of his shoe into the ground and made a little hole and then covered it up again. "I would hate to have to," he said.

"Listen," the grandmother almost screamed, "I know you're a good man. You don't look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people!"

"Yes mam," he said, "finest people in the world." When he smiled he showed a row of strong white teeth. "God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy's heart was pure gold," he said. The boy with the red sweat shirt had come around behind them and was standing with his gun at his hip. The Misfit squatted down on the ground. "Watch them children, Bobby Lee," he said. "You know they make me nervous." He looked at the six of them huddled together in front of him and he seemed to be embarrassed as if he couldn't think of anything to say. "Ain't a cloud in the sky," he remarked, looking up at it. "Don't see no sun but don't see no cloud neither."

"Yes, it's a beautiful day," said the grandmother. "Listen," she said, "you shouldn't call yourself The Misfit because I know you're a good man at heart. I can just look at you and tell."

"Hush!" Bailey yelled. "Hush! Everybody shut up and let me handle this!" He was squatting in the position of a runner about to sprint forward but he didn't move.

"I pre-chate that, lady," The Misfit said and drew a little circle in the ground with the butt of his gun.

"It'll take a half a hour to fix this here car," Hiram called, looking over the raised hood of it.

"Well, first you and Bobby Lee get him and that little boy to step over yonder with you," The Misfit said, pointing to Bailey and John Wesley. "The boys want to ast you something," he said to Bailey. "Would you mind stepping back in them woods there with them?"

"Listen," Bailey began, "we're in a terrible predicament! Nobody realizes what this is," and his voice cracked. His eyes were as blue and intense as the parrots in his shirt and he remained perfectly still.

The grandmother reached up to adjust her hat brim as if she were going to the woods with him but it came off in her hand. She stood staring at it and after a second she let it fall on the ground. Hiram pulled Bailey up by the arm as if he were assisting an old man. John Wesley caught hold of his father's hand and Bobby Lee followed. They went off toward the woods and just as they reached the dark edge, Bailey turned and supporting himself against a gray naked pine trunk, he shouted, "I'll be back in a minute, Mamma, wait on me!"

"Come back this instant!" his mother shrilled but they all disappeared into the woods.

"Bailey Boy!" the grandmother called in a tragic voice but she found she was looking at The Misfit squatting on the ground in front of her. "I just know you're a good man," she said desperately. "You're not a bit common!"

"Nome, I ain't a good man," The Misfit said after a second as if he had considered her statement carefully, "but I ain't the worst in the world neither. My daddy said I was a different breed of dog from my brothers and sisters. 'You know,' Daddy said, 'it's some that can live their whole life out without asking about it and it's others has to know why it is, and this boy is one of the latters. He's going to be into everything!'" He put on his black hat and looked up suddenly and then away deep into the woods as if he were embarrassed again. "I'm sorry I don't have on a shirt before you ladies," he said, hunching his shoulders slightly. "We buried our clothes that we had on when we escaped and we're just making do until we can get better. We borrowed these from some folks we met," he explained.

"That's perfectly all right," the grandmother said. "Maybe Bailey has an extra shirt in his suitcase."

"I'll look and see terrectly," The Misfit said.

"Where are they taking him?" the children's mother screamed.

"Daddy was a card' himself," The Misfit said. "You couldn't put anything over on him. He never got in trouble with the Authorities though. Just had the knack of handling them."

"You could be honest too if you'd only try," said the grandmother. "Think how wonderful it would be to settle down and live a comfortable life and not have to think about somebody chasing you all the time."

The Misfit kept scratching in the ground with the butt of his gun as if he were thinking about it. "Yes'm, somebody is always after you," he murmured.

The grandmother noticed how thin his shoulder blades were just behind his hat because she was standing up looking down on him. "Do you ever pray?" she asked.

He shook his head. All she saw was the black hat wiggle between his shoulder blades. "Nome," he said.

There was a pistol shot from the woods, followed closely by another. Then silence. The old lady's head jerked around. She could hear the wind move through the tree tops like a long satisfied insuck of breath. "Bailey Boy!" she called.

"I was a gospel singer for a while," The Misfit said. "I been most everything. Been in the arm service, both land and sea, at home and abroad, been twict married, been an undertaker, been with the railroads, plowed Mother Earth, been in a tornado, seen a man burnt alive oncet," and looked up at the children's mother and the little girl who were sitting close together, their faces white and their eyes glassy; "I even seen a woman flogged," he said.

"Pray, pray," the grandmother began, "pray, pray . . ."

"I never was a bad boy that I remember of," The Misfit said in an almost dreamy voice, "but somewheres along the line I done something wrong and got sent to the penitentiary. I was buried alive," and he looked up and held her attention to him by a steady stare.

"That's when you should have started to pray," she said. "What did you do to get sent to the penitentiary that first time?"

"Turn to the right, it was a wall," The Misfit said, looking up again at the cloudless sky. "Turn to the left, it was a wall. Look up it was a ceiling, look down it was a floor. I forget what I done, lady. I set there and set there, trying to remember what it was I done and I ain't recalled it to this day. Oncet in a while, I would think it was coming to me, but it never come."

"Maybe they put you in by mistake," the old lady said vaguely.

"Nome," he said. "It wasn't no mistake. They had the papers on me."

"You must have stolen something," she said.

The Misfit sneered slightly. "Nobody had nothing I wanted," he said. "It was a head-doctor² at the penitentiary said what I had done was kill my daddy but I known that for a lie. My daddy died in nineteen ought nineteen of the epidemic flu and I never had a thing to do with it. He was buried in the Mount Hopewell Baptist churchyard and you can go there and see for yourself."

"If you would pray," the old lady said, "Jesus would help you."

"That's right," The Misfit said.

"Well then, why don't you pray?" she asked trembling with delight suddenly.

"I don't want no hep," he said. "I'm doing all right by myself."

Bobby Lee and Hiram came ambling back from the woods. Bobby Lee was dragging a yellow shirt with bright blue parrots in it.

"Thow me that shirt, Bobby Lee," The Misfit said. The shirt came flying at him and landed on his shoulder and he put it on. The grandmother couldn't name what the shirt reminded her of. "No, lady," The Misfit said while he was buttoning it up, "I found out the crime don't matter. You can do one thing or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it."

The children's mother had begun to make heaving noises as if she couldn't get her breath. "Lady," he asked, "would you and that little girl like to step off yonder with Bobby Lee and Hiram and join your husband?"

"Yes, thank you," the mother said faintly. Her left arm dangled helplessly and she was holding the baby, who had gone to sleep, in the other. "Hep that lady up, Hiram," The Misfit said as she struggled to climb out of the ditch, "and Bobby Lee, you hold onto that little girl's hand."

2. A psychiatrist.

"I don't want to hold hands with him," June Star said. "He reminds me of a pig."

The fat boy blushed and laughed and caught her by the arm and pulled her off into the woods after Hiram and her mother.

Alone with The Misfit, the grandmother found that she had lost her voice. There was not a cloud in the sky nor any sun. There was nothing around her but woods. She wanted to tell him that he must pray. She opened and closed her mouth several times before anything came out. Finally she found herself saying, "Jesus, Jesus," meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing.

"Yes'm," The Misfit said as if he agreed. "Jesus thown everything off balance. It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me. Of course," he said, "they never shown me my papers. That's why I sign myself now. I said long ago, you get you a signature and sign everything you do and keep a copy of it. Then you'll know what you done and you can hold up the crime to the punishment and see do they match and in the end you'll have something to prove you ain't been treated right. I call myself The Misfit," he said, "because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment."

There was a piercing scream from the woods, followed closely by a pistol report. "Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain't punished at all?"

"Jesus!" the old lady cried. "You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!"

"Lady," The Misfit said, looking beyond her far into the woods, "there never was a body that give the undertaker a tip."

There were two more pistol reports and the grandmother raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water and called, "Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!" as if her heart would break.

"Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead."³ The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said and his voice had become almost a snarl.

"Maybe He didn't raise the dead," the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in the ditch with her legs twisted under her.

"I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't," The Misfit said. "I wisht I had of been there," he said, hitting the ground with his fist. "It ain't right I wasn't there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady," he said in a high voice, "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's

3. Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John tells of Jesus bringing a man named Lazarus back to life four days after Lazarus had died.

head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them.

Hiram and Bobby Lee returned from the woods and stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky.

Without his glasses, The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking. "Take her off and throw her where you thrown the others," he said, picking up the cat that was rubbing itself against his leg.

"She was a talker, wasn't she?" Bobby Lee said, sliding down the ditch with a yodel.

"She would of been a good woman," The Misfit said, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

"Some fun!" Bobby Lee said.

"Shut up, Bobby Lee," The Misfit said. "It's no real pleasure in life."

1953

A. R. AMMONS

1926–2001

Archie Randolph Ammons wrote that he "was born big and jaundiced (and ugly) on February 18, 1926, in a farmhouse 4 miles southwest of Whiteville, North Carolina, and 2 miles northwest of New Hope Elementary School and New Hope Baptist Church." It was characteristic of Ammons to be laconic, self-deprecating, unfailingly local, and unfailingly exact. He belonged to the homemade strain of American writers rather than the Europeanized or cosmopolitan breed. His poems are filled with the landscapes in which he lived: North Carolina, the southern coast of New Jersey, and the surroundings of Ithaca, New York, where he was a member of the English department of Cornell University.

Ammons's career did not start out with a traditional literary education. At Wake Forest College in North Carolina he studied mostly science, especially biology and chemistry, and that scientific training strongly colored his poems. In 1951–52, after working briefly as a high school principal in North Carolina, he studied English literature for three semesters at the University of California at Berkeley. When he returned from Berkeley he spent twelve years as an executive for a biological-glass manufacturer in New Jersey.

In 1955, his thirtieth year, Ammons published his first book of poems, *Ommateum*. The title refers to the compound structure of an insect's eye and foreshadows a twofold impulse in Ammons's work. On the one hand he is involved in the minute observation of natural phenomena; on the other hand he is frustrated by the physical

limitations analogous to those of the insects' vision. We see the world as insects do, in small portions and in impulses that take in but do not totally resolve the many images we receive. "Overall is beyond me," Ammons says in "Corsons Inlet," in which the shifting details of shoreline and dunes represent a severe challenge to the poet-observer. There are no straight lines. The contours differ every day, every hour, and they teach the poet the endless adjustments he must make to nature's fluidity.

"A poem is a walk," Ammons said (his essay of that title is excerpted in the "Post-modern Manifestos" cluster of this anthology). His work is characterized by the motion he found everywhere in nature, a motion answered by his mental activity. Both nearsighted and farsighted, he looks closely at vegetation, small animals, the minute shifts of wind and weather and light, yet over and over again seems drawn to the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's visionary aspirations for poetry. "Poetry," Emerson remarked, "was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warnings and attempt to write them down." Much of Ammons's poetry tests this promise to see if it yields a glimpse of supernatural order.

The self in Ammons's poems is a far more modest presence than in the work of many other American writers. Sometimes he is a "surrendered self among unwelcoming forms" (as he writes in the conclusion of "Gravelly Run"); in many other poems he is at home in a universe, both human and natural, whose variety delights him. He is that rare thing, a contemporary poet of praise, one who says "I can find nothing lowly / in the universe" ("Still") and convinces us he speaks the truth.

Ammons began his career writing short lyrics, almost journal entries in an unending career of observation. But the laconic notations—of a landslide, a shift in the shoreline from one day to the next—often bore abstract titles ("Clarity," "Saliences") as if to suggest the connections he felt between concrete experience and speculative thought. Ammons often experimented with poetic form in his effort to make his verse responsive to the engaging but evasive particularity of natural process. This formal inventiveness is part of his work's appeal. "Stop on any word and language gives way: / the blades of reason, unlightened by motion, sink in," he remarks in his "Essay on Poetics." To create *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1965) he typed a book-length day-to-day verse diary on a roll of adding-machine tape. The poem ended when the tape did. This was his first and most flamboyant attempt to turn his verse into something beyond mere gatherings. He then discovered that the long poem was the form best adapted to his continuing dialogue between the specific and the general. The appearance in 1993 of *Garbage*, a National Book Award winner, confirmed Ammons's gift for creating a book-length, immensely readable, moving, and funny poem, structured around a recurring set of images and ideas but full of digressions.

Ammons tended to use the colon—what one critic calls "the most democratic punctuation," suggesting as it does equivalence on both sides. Used in place of the period, it keeps a line from coming to a halt or stopping the flow in which the mind feverishly suggests analogies among its minutely perceived experiences. Many notable examples of Ammons's extended forms are gathered in *The Selected Longer Poems* (1980), although that book does not include his remarkable *Sphere: The Form of a Motion* (1974). A book-length poem with no full stops, 155 sections of four tercets each, it aspires to be what Ammons's predecessor Wallace Stevens called "the poem of the act of the mind." The only unity in *Sphere* is the mind's power to make analogies between the world's constant "diversifications." Ammons was committed to the provisional, the self-revising, and this commitment kept his poetry fresh over a long career. Writing of his sense of the world in "The Dwelling," from *Sumerian Vistas* (1987), Ammons says, "here the plainest / majesty gave us what it could." The same might be said of his wonderfully generous and witty poems, which constitute a distinctive and invaluable legacy for American poetry.

continuous overcast:

the walk liberating, I was released from forms,
 from the perpendiculars,
 straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds 15
 of thought
 into the hues, shadings, rises, flowing bends and blends
 of sight:

 I allow myself eddies of meaning:
 yield to a direction of significance 20
 running
 like a stream through the geography of my work:
 you can find
 in my sayings

 swerves of action 25
 like the inlet's cutting edge:
 there are dunes of motion,
 organizations of grass, white sandy paths of remembrance
 in the overall wandering of mirroring mind:

but Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events 30
 I cannot draw, the ledger I cannot keep, the accounting
 beyond the account:

in nature there are few sharp lines: there are areas of
 primrose
 more or less dispersed; 35
 disorderly orders of bayberry; between the rows
 of dunes,
 irregular swamps of reeds,
 though not reeds alone, but grass, bayberry, yarrow, all . . .
 predominantly reeds: 40

I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries,
 shutting out and shutting in, separating inside
 from outside: I have
 drawn no lines:
 as 45

manifold events of sand
 change the dune's shape that will not be the same shape
 tomorrow,

so I am willing to go along, to accept
 the becoming 50
 thought, to stake off no beginnings or ends, establish
 no walls:

by transitions the land falls from grassy dunes to creek
 to undercreek: but there are no lines, though
 change in that transition is clear 55

as any sharpness: but “sharpness” spread out,
 allowed to occur over a wider range
 than mental lines can keep:

the moon was full last night: today, low tide was low:
 black shoals of mussels exposed to the risk 60
 of air

and, earlier, of sun,
 waved in and out with the waterline, waterline inexact,
 caught always in the event of change:

 a young mottled gull stood free on the shoals 65
 and ate

to vomiting: another gull, squawking possession, cracked a crab,
 picked out the entrails, swallowed the soft-shelled legs, a ruddy
 turnstone¹ running in to snatch leftover bits:

risk is full: every living thing in 70

siege: the demand is life, to keep life: the small
 white blacklegged egret, how beautiful, quietly stalks and spears
 the shallows, darts to shore

 to stab—what? I couldn’t
 see against the black mudflats—a frightened 75
 fiddler crab?

 the news to my left over the dunes and
 reeds and bayberry clumps was

 fall: thousands of tree swallows
 gathering for flight: 80
 an order held

 in constant change: a congregation
 rich with entropy: nevertheless, separable, noticeable
 as one event,

 not chaos: preparations for 85

flight from winter,
 cheet, cheet, cheet, cheet, wings rifling the green clumps,
 beaks

at the bayberries
 a perception full of wind, flight, curve, 90
 sound:

 the possibility of rule as the sum of rulelessness:
 the “field” of action

with moving, incalculable center:

in the smaller view, order tight with shape: 95

blue tiny flowers on a leafless weed: carapace of crab:
 snail shell:

 pulsations of order
 in the bellies of minnows: orders swallowed,

broken down, transferred through membranes 100
 to strengthen larger orders: but in the large view, no

1. A ploverlike migratory bird.

lines or changeless shapes: the working in and out, together
 and against, of millions of events: this,
 so that I make
 no form of
 formlessness: 105

orders as summaries, as outcomes of actions override
 or in some way result, not predictably (seeing me gain
 the top of a dune,
 the swallows 110
 could take flight—some other fields of bayberry
 could enter fall
 berryless) and there is serenity:

 no arranged terror: no forcing of image, plan,
 or thought: 115
 no propaganda, no humbling of reality to precept:

terror pervades but is not arranged, all possibilities
 of escape open: no route shut, except in
 the sudden loss of all routes:

 I see narrow orders, limited tightness, but will 120
 not run to that easy victory:
 still around the loser, wider forces work:
 I will try

 to fasten into order enlarging grasps of disorder, widening
 scope, but enjoying the freedom that 125
 Scope eludes my grasp, that there is no finality of vision,
 that I have perceived nothing completely,
 that tomorrow a new walk is a new walk.

1965

Easter Morning

I have a life that did not become,
 that turned aside and stopped,
 astonished:
 I hold it in me like a pregnancy or
 as on my lap a child 5
 not to grow or grow old but dwell on

it is to his grave I most
 frequently return and return
 to ask what is wrong, what was
 wrong, to see it all by 10
 the light of a different necessity
 but the grave will not heal
 and the child,

stirring, must share my grave
 with me, an old man having
 gotten by on what was left 15

when I go back to my home country in these
 fresh far-away days, it's convenient to visit
 everybody, aunts and uncles, those who used to say,
 look how he's shooting up, and the 20
 trinket aunts who always had a little
 something in their pocketbooks, cinnamon bark
 or a penny or nickel, and uncles who
 were the rumored fathers of cousins
 who whispered of them as of great, if 25
 troubled, presences, and school
 teachers, just about everybody older
 (and some younger) collected in one place
 waiting, particularly, but not for
 me, mother and father there, too, and others 30
 close, close as burrowing
 under skin, all in the graveyard
 assembled, done for, the world they
 used to wield, have trouble and joy
 in, gone 35

the child in me that could not become
 was not ready for others to go,
 to go on into change, blessings and
 horrors, but stands there by the road
 where the mishap occurred, crying out for 40
 help, come and fix this or we
 can't get by, but the great ones who
 were to return, they could not or did
 not hear and went on in a flurry and
 now, I say in the graveyard, here 45
 lies the flurry, now it can't come
 back with help or helpful asides, now
 we all buy the bitter
 incompletions, pick up the knots of
 horror, silently raving, and go on 50
 crashing into empty ends not
 completions, not rondures the fullness
 has come into and spent itself from
 I stand on the stump
 of a child, whether myself 55
 or my little brother who died, and
 yell as far as I can, I cannot leave this place, for
 for me it is the dearest and the worst,
 it is life nearest to life which is
 life lost: it is my place where 60
 I must stand and fail,
 calling attention with tears
 to the branches not lofting

boughs into space, to the barren
 air that holds the world that was my world 65

though the incompletions
 (& completions) burn out
 standing in the flash high-burn
 momentary structure of ash, still it
 is a picture-book, letter-perfect 70

Easter morning: I have been for a
 walk: the wind is tranquil: the brook
 works without flashing in an abundant
 tranquility: the birds are lively with
 voice: I saw something I had 75

never seen before: two great birds,
 maybe eagles, blackwinged, whitenecked
 and -headed, came from the south oaring
 the great wings steadily; they went
 directly over me, high up, and kept on 80

due north: but then one bird,
 the one behind, veered a little to the
 left and the other bird kept on seeming
 not to notice for a minute: the first
 began to circle as if looking for 85

something, coasting, resting its wings
 on the down side of some of the circles:
 the other bird came back and they both
 circled, looking perhaps for a draft;
 they turned a few more times, possibly 90

rising—at least, clearly resting—
 then flew on falling into distance till
 they broke across the local bush and
 trees: it was a sight of bountiful
 majesty and integrity: the having 95

patterns and routes, breaking
 from them to explore other patterns or
 better way to routes, and then the
 return: a dance sacred as the sap in
 the trees, permanent in its descriptions 100

as the ripples round the brook's
 ripplestone: fresh as this particular
 flood of burn breaking across us now
 from the sun.

1981

Singling & Doubling Together

My nature singing in me is your nature singing:
 you have means to veer down, filter through,
 and, coming in,

harden into vines that break back with leaves,
 so that when the wind stirs 5
 I know you are there and I hear you in leafspeech,

though of course back into your heightenings I
 can never follow: you are there beyond
 tracings flesh can take,
 and farther away surrounding and informing the systems, 10
 you are as if nothing, and
 where you are least knowable I celebrate you most

or here most when near dusk the pheasant squawks and
 lofts at a sharp angle to the roost cedar,
 I catch in the angle of that ascent, 15
 in the justness of that event your pheasant nature,
 and when dusk settles, the bushes creak and
 snap in their natures with your creaking

and snapping nature: I catch the impact and turn
 it back: cut the grass and pick up branches 20
 under the elm, rise to the several tenderesses
 and griefs, and you will fail me only as from the still
 of your great high otherness you fail all things,
 somewhere to lift things up, if not those things again:

even you risked all the way into the taking on of shape 25
 and time fail and fail with me, as me,
 and going hence with me know the going hence
 and in the cries of that pain it is you crying and
 you know of it and it is my pain, my tears, my loss—
 what but grace 30

have I to bear in every motion,
 embracing or turning away, staggering or standing still,
 while your settled kingdom sways in the distillations of light
 and plunders down into the darkness with me
 and comes nowhere up again but changed into your 35
 singing nature when I need sing my nature nevermore.

1983

From Garbage

2

garbage has to be the poem of our time because
 garbage is spiritual, believable enough

to get our attention, getting in the way, piling
 up, stinking, turning brooks brownish and

creamy white: what else deflects us from the errors of our illusionary ways, not a temptation 5

to trashlessness, that is too far off, and, anyway, unimaginable, unrealistic: I'm a

hole puncher or hole pluggger: stick a finger in the dame (*dam*, damn, dike), hold back the issue 10

of creativity's floor, the forthcoming, futuristic, the origins feeding trash: down by I-95 in

Florida where flatland's ocean- and gulf-flat, mounds of disposal rise (for if you dug

something up to make room for something to put in, what about the something dug up, as with graves:) 15

the garbage trucks crawl as if in obeisance, as if up ziggurats¹ toward the high places gulls

and garbage keep alive, offerings to the gods of garbage, or retribution, of realistic 20

expectation, the deities of unpleasant necessities: refined, young earthworms,

drowned up in macadam pools by spring rains, moisten out white in a day or so and, round spots,

look like sputum or creamy-rich, broken-up cold clams: if this is not the best poem of the 25

century, can it be about the worst poem of the century: it comes, at least, toward the end,

so a long tracing of bad stuff can swell under its measure: but there on the heights 30

a small smoke wafts the sacrificial bounty day and night to layer the sky brown, shut us

in as into a lidded kettle, the everlasting flame these acres-deep of tendance keep: a

free offering of a crippled plastic chair: a played-out sports outfit: a hill-myna 35

1. The temple towers of the Babylonians, which consisted of a lofty pyramidal structure, built in successive stages, with outside staircases and a religious shrine on top.

print stained with jelly: how to write this
poem, should it be short, a small popping of

duplexes, or long, hunting wide, coming home
late, losing the trail and recovering it: 40

should it act itself out, illustrations,
examples, colors, clothes or intensify

reductively into statement, bones any corpus
would do to surround, or should it be nothing

at all unless it finds itself: the poem,
which is about the pre-socratic idea of the 45

dispositional axis from stone to wind, wind
to stone (with my elaborations, if any)

is complete before it begins, so I needn't
myself hurry into brevity, though a weary reader 50

might briefly be done: the axis will be clear
enough daubed here and there with a little ink

or fined out into every shade and form of its
revelation: this is a scientific poem,

asserting that nature models values, that we
have invented little (copied), reflections of 55

possibilities already here, this where we came
to and how we came: a priestly director behind the

black-chuffing dozer leans the gleanings and
reads the birds, millions of loners circling 60

a common height, alighting to the meaty streaks
and puffy muffins (puffins?): there is a mound,

too, in the poet's mind dead language is hauled
off to and burned down on, the energy held and

shaped into new turns and clusters, the mind
strengthened by what it strengthens: for 65

where but in the very asshole of comedown is
redemption: as where but brought low, where

but in the grief of failure, loss, error do we
discern the savage afflictions that turn us around: 70

where but in the arrangements love crawls us
through, not a thing left in our self-display

unhumiliated, do we find the sweet seed of
new routes; but we are natural: nature, not

we, gave rise to us; we are not, though, though
natural, divorced from higher, finer configurations:

75

tissues and holograms of energy circulate in
us and seek and find representations of themselves

outside us, so that we can participate in
celebrations high and know reaches of feeling

80

and sight and thought that penetrate (really
penetrate) far, far beyond these our wet cells,

right on up past our stories, the planets, moons,
and other bodies locally to the other end of

the pole where matter's forms diffuse and
energy loses all means to express itself except

85

as spirit, there, oh, yes, in the abiding where
mind but nothing else abides, the eternal,

until it turns into another pear or sunfish,
that momentary glint in the fisheye having

90

been there so long, coming and going, it's
eternity's glint: it all wraps back round,

into and out of form, palpable and impalpable,
and in one phase, the one of grief and love,

we know the other, where everlastingness comes to
sway, okay and smooth: the heaven we mostly

95

want, though, is this jet-hoveled hell back,
heaven's daunting asshole: one must write and

rewrite till one writes it right: if I'm in
touch, she said, then I've got an edge: what

100

the hell kind of talk is that: I can't believe
I'm merely an old person: whose mother is dead,

whose father is gone and many of whose
friends and associates have wended away to the

ground, which is only heavy wind, or to ashes, 105
 a lighter breeze: but it was all quite frankly

to be expected and not looked forward to: even
 old trees, I remember some of them, where they

used to stand: pictures taken by some of them:
 and old dogs, specially one imperial black one, 110

quad dogs with their *hierarchies* (another *archie*)²
 one succeeding another, the barking and romping

sliding away like slides from a projector: what
 were they then that are what they are now:

1993

2. The A. R. in Ammons's name stands for Archie Randolph.

JAMES MERRILL

1926–1995

When James Merrill's *First Poems* was published in 1950, he was immediately recognized as one of the most gifted and polished poets of his generation. But not until *Water Street* (1962), his third volume of poems, did Merrill begin to enlist his brilliant technique and sophisticated tone in developing a poetic autobiography. The book takes its title from the street where he lived in the seaside village of Stonington, Connecticut. The opening poem, "An Urban Convalescence," explores his decision to leave New York, which he sees as a distracting city that destroys its past. He portrays his move as a rededication to his past and an attempt through poetry "to make some kind of house / Out of the life lived, out of the love spent."

The metaphor of "home" is an emotional center to which Merrill's writing often returns, as in "The Broken Home," which recalls elements of Merrill's experience as the son of parents who divorced when he was young. He had been born to the second marriage of Charles E. Merrill, financier and founder of the best-known brokerage firm in America. "The Broken Home" shows how memory and writing have the power to reshape boyhood pain and conflict so as to achieve "the unstiffening of the entire story." Such an attitude distinguishes Merrill from his contemporaries (Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath) whose autobiographical impulse expresses itself primarily in the present tense and the use of poems as an urgent journal true to the moment.

As an undergraduate at Amherst College, Merrill had written an honors thesis on the French novelist Marcel Proust (1871–1922). His poetry was clearly affected by Proust's notion that the literary exercise of memory slowly discloses the patterns of

childhood experience that we are destined to relive. Proust showed in his *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27) how such power over chaotic past material is often triggered involuntarily by an object or an episode in the present whose associations reach back into formative childhood encounters. The questions he asked were asked by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the founder of psychoanalysis, as well: What animates certain scenes—and not others—for us? To answer such questions Merrill presents some of his poems from the viewpoint of an observant child. In other poems the poet is explicitly present, at his desk, trying to incorporate into his adult understanding of the contours of his life the pain and freshness of childhood memories. The poems are narrative (one of his early books was called *Short Stories*) as often as lyric, in the hope that dramatic *action* will reveal the meanings with which certain objects have become charged. As Merrill sees it, “You hardly ever need to *state* your feelings. The point is to feel and keep the eyes open. Then what you feel is expressed, is mimed back at you by the scene. A room, a landscape. I’d go a step further. We don’t *know* what we feel until we see it distanced by this kind of translation.”

Merrill traveled extensively and presented landscapes from his travels as ways of exploring alternative or buried states of his own mind, the “translations” of which he speaks. Poems such as “Days of 1964” and “After the Fire” reflect his experiences in Greece, where he spent a portion of each year. They respectively anticipate and comment on *The Fire Screen* (1969), a sequence describing the rising and falling curve of a love affair partly in terms of an initiation into Greece with its power to strip away urban sophistication. The books that followed served as initiations into other psychic territories. Problems of family relationships and the erotic entanglements of homosexual love previously seen on an intimate scale were in *Braving the Elements* (1972) acted out against a wider backdrop: the long landscapes, primitive geological perspectives, and erosions of the American Far West. Here human experience, examined in his earlier work in close-up, is seen as part of a longer process of evolution comprehensible in terms of enduring non-human patterns.

In *Divine Comedies* (which received the Pulitzer Prize in 1977) Merrill began his most ambitious work: two-thirds of it is devoted to “The Book of Ephraim,” a long narrative. It not only recapitulates his career but also attempts to locate individual psychic energies as part of a larger series of nourishing influences: friends living and dead, literary predecessors, scientific theories of the growth of the universe and the mind, the life of other periods and even other universes—all conducted through a set of encounters with the “other world” in séances at the Ouija board. It is a witty and original and assured attempt to take the intimate material of the short lyric that characterized his earlier work and cast it onto an epic scale. The second and third volumes of the trilogy, *Mirabell: Books of Number* and *Scripts for the Pageant*, appeared in 1978 and 1980, respectively; the entire work was collected in 1982 under the title *The Changing Light at Sand-over*. By the time of his death, Merrill had established himself as an American formal master, one whose grace and wit made his remarkable variations on traditional forms seem as easy as casual speech. This mastery is evident in his sequence “Family Week at Oracle Ranch” (from his last book, *A Scattering of Salts*, 1995), where Merrill’s formal daring is matched by an equally remarkable emotional daring. An edition of his *Collected Prose* (2004) further confirmed his stature in American letters.

An Urban Convalescence

Out for a walk, after a week in bed,
 I find them tearing up part of my block
 And, chilled through, dazed and lonely, join the dozen
 In meek attitudes, watching a huge crane
 Fumble luxuriously in the filth of years. 5
 Her jaws dribble rubble. An old man
 Laughs and curses in her brain,
 Bringing to mind the close of *The White Goddess*.¹

As usual in New York, everything is torn down
 Before you have had time to care for it. 10
 Head bowed, at the shrine of noise, let me try to recall
 What building stood here. Was there a building at all?
 I have lived on this same street for a decade.

Wait. Yes. Vaguely a presence rises
 Some five floors high, of shabby stone 15
 —Or am I confusing it with another one
 In another part of town, or of the world?—
 And over its lintel into focus vaguely
 Misted with blood (my eyes are shut)
 A single garland sways, stone fruit, stone leaves, 20
 Which years of grit had etched until it thrust
 Roots down, even into the poor soil of my seeing.
 When did the garland become part of me?
 I ask myself, amused almost,
 Then shiver once from head to toe, 25
 Transfixed by a particular cheap engraving of garlands
 Bought for a few francs long ago,
 All calligraphic tendril and cross-hatched rondure,
 Ten years ago, and crumpled up to stanch
 Boughs dripping, whose white gestures filled a cab, 30
 And thought of neither then nor since.
 Also, to clasp them, the small, red-nailed hand
 Of no one I can place. Wait. No. Her name, her features
 Lie toppled underneath that year's fashions.
 The words she must have spoken, setting her face 35
 To fluttering like a veil, I cannot hear now,
 Let alone understand.

So that I am already on the stair,
 As it were, of where I lived,
 When the whole structure shudders at my tread 40
 And soundlessly collapses, filling
 The air with motes of stone.

1. The book (1948) in which the English poet Robert Graves sets forth the theory that authentic poetry is inspired by a primitive goddess who is both creative and destructive. The crane is her

sacred bird, which through a pun Merrill here associates with the mechanical crane. Its operator seems like a crazed parody poet, committed only to demolition.

Onto the still erect building next door
 Are pressed levels and hues—
 Pocked rose, streaked greens, brown whites. 45
 Who drained the *pousse-café*?²
 Wires and pipes, snapped off at the roots, quiver.

Well, that is what life does. I stare
 A moment longer, so. And presently
 The massive volume of the world 50
 Closes again.

Upon that book I swear
 To abide by what it teaches:
 Gospels of ugliness and waste,
 Of towering voids, of soiled gusts, 55
 Of a shrieking to be faced
 Full into, eyes astream with cold—

With cold?
 All right then. With self-knowledge.

Indoors at last, the pages of *Time* are apt 60
 To open, and the illustrated mayor of New York,
 Given a glimpse of how and where I work,
 To note yet one more house that can be scrapped.

Unwillingly I picture
 My walls weathering in the general view. 65
 It is not even as though the new
 Buildings did very much for architecture.

Suppose they did. The sickness of our time requires
 That these as well be blasted in their prime.
 You would think the simple fact of having lasted 70
 Threatened our cities like mysterious fires.

There are certain phrases which to use in a poem
 Is like rubbing silver with quicksilver. Bright
 But facile, the glamour deadens overnight.
 For instance, how “the sickness of our time” 75

Enhances, then debases, what I feel.
 At my desk I swallow in a glass of water
 No longer cordial, scarcely wet, a pill
 They had told me not to take until much later.

With the result that back into my imagination 80
 The city glides, like cities seen from the air,
 Mere smoke and sparkle to the passenger
 Having in mind another destination

2. An after-dinner drink made up of layers of different-colored cordials.

Which now is not that honey-slow descent
 Of the Champs-Élysées,³ her hand in his, 85
 But the dull need to make some kind of house
 Out of the life lived, out of the love spent.

1962

The Broken Home

Crossing the street,
 I saw the parents and the child
 At their window, gleaming like fruit
 With evening's mild gold leaf.

In a room on the floor below, 5
 Sunless, cooler—a brimming
 Saucer of wax, marbly and dim—
 I have lit what's left of my life.

I have thrown out yesterday's milk
 And opened a book of maxims. 10
 The flame quickens. The word stirs.

Tell me, tongue of fire,
 That you and I are as real
 At least as the people upstairs.

My father, who had flown in World War I, 15
 Might have continued to invest his life
 In cloud banks well above Wall Street and wife.
 But the race was run below, and the point was to win.

Too late now, I make out in his blue gaze
 (Through the smoked glass of being thirty-six) 20
 The soul eclipsed by twin black pupils, sex
 And business; time was money in those days.

Each thirteenth year he married. When he died
 There were already several chilled wives
 In sable orbit—rings, cars, permanent waves. 25
 We'd felt him warming up for a green bride.

He could afford it. He was "in his prime"
 At three score ten. But money was not time.

When my parents were younger this was a popular act:
 A veiled woman would leap from an electric, wine-dark car 30

3. A stylish boulevard in Paris.

To the steps of no matter what—the Senate or the Ritz Bar—
And bodily, at newsreel speed, attack

No matter whom—Al Smith or José Maria Sert
Or Clemenceau¹—veins standing out on her throat
As she yelled *War mongerer! Pig! Give us the vote!*, 35
And would have to be hauled away in her hobble skirt.

What had the man done? Oh, made history.
Her business (he had implied) was giving birth,
Tending the house, mending the socks.

Always that same old story— 40
Father Time and Mother Earth,²
A marriage on the rocks.

One afternoon, red, satyr-thighed
Michael, the Irish setter, head
Passionately lowered, led 45
The child I was to a shut door. Inside,

Blinds beat sun from the bed.
The green-gold room throbbed like a bruise.
Under a sheet, clad in taboos
Lay whom we sought, her hair undone, outspread, 50

And of a blackness found, if ever now, in old
Engravings where the acid bit.
I must have needed to touch it
Or the whiteness—was she dead?
Her eyes flew open, startled strange and cold. 55
The dog slumped to the floor. She reached for me. I fled.

Tonight they have stepped out onto the gravel.
The party is over. It's the fall
Of 1931. They love each other still.

She: Charlie, I can't stand the pace. 60
He: Come on, honey—why, you'll bury us all!

A lead soldier guards my windowsill:
Khaki rifle, uniform, and face.
Something in me grows heavy, silvery, pliable.

How intensely people used to feel! 65
Like metal poured at the close of a proletarian novel,³

1. Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929), premier of France during World War I, visited the United States in 1922. Alfred E. Smith (1873–1944), a governor of New York and in 1928 the Democratic party's nominee for the presidency. Sert (1876–1945), a Spanish painter who in 1930 decorated the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria

Hotel in New York.

2. A reference to Cronus (Greek for "Time"), ruler of the ancient Titans, and to his wife, Rhea, an earth deity known as Mother of the Gods. Because Cronus ate their children as soon as they were born, Rhea plotted his overthrow.

3. Socialist novel that romanticized laborers.

Refined and glowing from the crucible,
 I see those two hearts, I'm afraid,
 Still. Cool here in the graveyard of good and evil,
 They are even so to be honored and obeyed. 70

•
 . . . Obeyed, at least, inversely. Thus
 I rarely buy a newspaper, or vote.
 To do so, I have learned, is to invite
 The tread of a stone guest⁴ within my house.

Shooting this rusted bolt, though, against him, 75
 I trust I am no less time's child than some
 Who on the heath impersonate Poor Tom⁵
 Or on the barricades risk life and limb.

Nor do I try to keep a garden, only
 An avocado in a glass of water— 80
 Roots pallid, gemmed with air. And later,

When the small gilt leaves have grown
 Fleshy and green, I let them die, yes, yes,
 And start another. I am earth's no less.

•
 A child, a red dog roam the corridors, 85
 Still, of the broken home. No sound. The brilliant
 Rag runners halt before wide-open doors.
 My old room! Its wallpaper—cream, medallioned
 With pink and brown—brings back the first nightmares,
 Long summer colds, and Emma, sepia-faced, 90
 Perspiring over broth carried upstairs
 Aswim with golden fats I could not taste.

The real house became a boarding-school.
 Under the ballroom ceiling's allegory
 Someone at last may actually be allowed 95
 To learn something; or, from my window, cool
 With the unstiflement of the entire story,
 Watch a red setter stretch and sink in cloud.

1966

Dead Center

Upon reflection, as I dip my pen
 Tonight, forth ripple messages in code.
 In Now's black waters burn the stars of Then.

4. The *commendatore* in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787) returns as a statue to get his revenge.

5. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Edgar, disowned

by his father, wanders the heath disguised as a madman.

Seen from the embankment, marble men
 Sleep upside down, bat-wise, the sleep bestowed 5
 Upon reflection. As I dip my pen

Thinking how others, deeper into Zen,
 Blew on immediacy until it glowed,
 In Now's black waters burn the stars of Then.

Or else I'm back at Grandmother's. I'm ten, 10
 Dust hides my parents' roadster from the road
 Which dips—*into* reflection, with my pen.

Breath after breath, harsh O's of oxygen—
 Never deciphered, what do they forebode?
 In Now's black waters burn the stars. Ah then 15

Leap, Memory, supreme equestrienne,
 Through hoops of fire, circuits you overload!
 Beyond reflection, as I dip my pen
 In Now's black waters, burn the stars of Then.

1984

Family Week at Oracle Ranch

1 The Brochure

The world outstrips us. In my day,
 Had such a place existed,
 It would have been advertised with photographs
 Of doctors—silver hair, pince-nez—

Above detailed credentials, 5
 Not this wide-angle moonscape, lawns and pool,
 Patients sharing pain like fudge from home—
 As if these were the essentials,

As if a month at what it invites us to think 10
 Is little more than a fat farm for Anorexics,
 Substance Abusers, Love & Relationship Addicts
 Could help *you*, light of my life, when even your shrink . . .

The message, then? That costly folderol,
 Underwear made to order in Vienna,
 Who needs it! Let the soul hang out 15
 At Benetton¹—stone-washed, one size fits all.

1. A chain of clothing stores.

2 *Instead of Complexes*

Simplicities. Just seven words—AFRAID,
HURT, LONELY, etc.—to say it with.
Shades of the first watercolor box
(I “felt blue,” I “saw red”). 20

Also some tips on brushwork. Not to say
“Your silence hurt me,”
Rather, “When you said nothing I felt hurt.”
No blame, that way.

Dysfunctionals like us fail to distinguish 25
Between the two modes at first.
While the connoisseur of feeling throws up his hands:
Used to depicting personal anguish

With a full palette—hues, oils, glazes, thinner—
He stares into these withered wells and feels, 30
Well . . . SAD and ANGRY? Future lavender!
An infant Monet² blinks beneath his skin.

3 *The Counsellors*

They’re in recovery, too, and tell us from what,
And that’s as far as it goes.
Like the sun-priests’ in *The Magic Flute*³ 35
Their ritualized responses serve the plot.

Ken, for example, blond brows knitted: “When
James told the group he worried about dying
Without his lover beside him, I felt SAD.”
Thank you for sharing, Ken, 40

I keep from saying; it would come out snide.
Better to view them as deadpan panels
Storing up sunlight for the woebegone,
Prompting from us lines electrified

By buried switches flipped (after how long!) . . . 45
But speak in private meanwhile? We may not
Until a voice within the temple lifts
Bans yet unfathomed into song.

2. Claude Monet (1840–1926), French impressionist painter.

3. One of the most famous of Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart’s works, *The Magic Flute* is a *singspiel*—
i.e., a combination of songs and dialogue.

4 *Gestalt*⁴

Little Aileen is a gray plush bear
 With button eyes and nose. 50
 Perky in flowered smock and clean white collar,
 She occupies the chair

Across from the middleaged Big Aileen, face hid
 In hands and hands on knees.
 Her sobs break. In great waves it's coming back. 55
 The uncle. What he did.

Little Aileen is her Inner Child
 Who didn't . . . who didn't deserve. . . .
 The horror kissed asleep, round Big Aileen
 Fairytale thorns grow wild. 60

SADNESS and GUILT entitle us to watch
 The survivor compose herself,
 Smoothing the flowered stuff, which has ridden up,
 Over an innocent gray crotch.

5 *Effects of Early "Religious Abuse"*

The great recurrent "sinner" found 65
 In Dostoevsky⁵—twisted mouth,
 Stormlit eyes—before whose irresistible
 Unworthiness the pure in heart bow down . . .

Cockcrow. Back across the frozen Neva
 To samovar and warm, untubercular bed, 70
 Far from the dens of vodka, mucus and semen,
 They dream. I woke, the fever

Dripping insight, a spring thaw.
 You and the others, wrestling with your demons,
 Christs of self-hatred, Livingstones⁶ of pain, 75
 Had drawn the lightning. In a flash I saw

My future: medic at some Armageddon
 Neither side wins. I burned with SHAME for the years
 You'd spent among sufferings uncharted—
 Not even my barren love to rest your head on. 80

4. A configuration or pattern having specific properties that cannot be derived from the sum of its component parts (German); in psychology, the name for a theory that physiological or psychological phenomena do not occur through the summation of individual elements but through gestalts functioning separately or interrelatedly.

5. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881), Russian novelist whose work probes the religious questions of sin and redemption.

6. Those resembling David Livingstone (1813–1873), a Scottish missionary and explorer in Africa who sought the source of the Nile River.

6 *The Panic*

Except that Oracle has maps
 Of all those badlands. Just now, when you lashed out,
 “There’s a lot of disease in this room!”
 And we felt our faith in one another lapse,

Ken had us break the circle and repair 85
 To “a safe place in the room.” Faster than fish
 We scattered—Randy ducking as from a sniper,
 Aileen, wedged in a corner, cradling her bear.

You and I stood flanking the blackboard,
 Words as usual between us, 90
 But backs to the same wall, for solidarity.
 This magical sureness of movement no doubt scored

Points for all concerned, yet the only
 Child each had become trembled for you
 Thundering forth into the corridors, 95
 Decibels measuring how HURT, how LONELY—

7 *Tunnel Vision*

New Age music. “Close your eyes now. You
 Are standing,” says the lecturer on Grief,
 “At a tunnel’s mouth. There’s light at the end.
 The walls, as you walk through 100

Are hung with images: who you loved that year,
 An island holiday, a highschool friend.
 Younger and younger, step by step—
 And suddenly you’re here,

At home. Go in. It’s your whole life ago.” 105
 A pink eye-level sun flows through the hall.
 “Smell the smells. It’s supper time.
 Go to the table.” Years have begun to flow

Unhindered down my face. Why? 110
 Because nobody’s there. The grown-ups? Shadows.
 The meal? A mirror. Reflect upon it. Before
 Reentering the tunnel say goodbye,

8 *Time Recaptured*⁷

Goodbye to childhood, that unhappy haven.
 It’s over, weep your fill. Let go

7. The title evokes Marcel Proust’s novel *Remembrance of Things Past*; the title of the final volume is sometimes translated as *The Past Recaptured*, sometimes as *Time Regained*.

Of the dead dog, the lost toy. Practise grieving 115
 At funerals—anybody’s. Let go even

Of those first ninety seconds missed,
 Fifty-three years ago, of a third-rate opera
 Never revived since then. The GUILT you felt,
 Adding it all the same to your master list! 120

Which is why, this last morning, when I switch
 The FM on, halfway to Oracle,
 And hear the announcer say
 (Invisibly reweaving the dropped stitch),

“We bring you now the Overture 125
 To Ambroise Thomas’s seldom-heard *Mignon*,”⁸
 Joy (word rusty with disuse)
 Flashes up, deserved and pure.

9 *Leading the Blind*

Is this you—smiling helplessly? Pinned to your chest,
 A sign: *Confront Me If I Take Control*. 130
 Plus you must wear (till sundown) a black eyeshade.
 All day you’ve been the littlest, the clumsiest.

We’re seated face to face. Take off your mask,
 Ken says. Now look into each other deeply. Speak,
 As far as you can trust, the words of healing. 135
 Your pardon for my own blindness I ask;

You mine, for all you hid from me. Two old
 Crackpot hearts once more aswim with color,
 Our Higher Power has but to dip his brush—
 Lo and behold! 140

The group approves. The ban lifts. Let me guide you,
 Helpless but voluble, into a dripping music.
 The rainbow brightens with each step. Go on,
 Take a peek. This once, no one will chide you.

10 *The Desert Museum*

—Or, as the fat, nearsighted kid ahead 145
 Construes his ticket, “Wow, Dessert Museum!”
 I leave tomorrow, so you get a pass.
 Safer, both feel, instead

Of checking into the No-Tell Motel,
 To check it out—our brave new dried-out world. 150

8. An opera by French operatic composer Ambroise Thomas (1811–1896).

Exhibits: crystals that for eons glinted
Before the wits did; fossil shells

From when this overlook lay safely drowned;
Whole spiny families repelled by sex,
Whom dying men have drunk from (Randy, frightened, 155
Hugging Little Randy, a red hound). . . .

At length behind a wall of glass, in shade,
The mountain lioness too indolent
To train them upon us unloads her gems
Set in the saddest face Love ever made. 160

11 *The Twofold Message*

(a) You are a brave and special person, (b)
There are far too many people in the world
For this to still matter for very long.
But (Ken goes on) since you obviously

Made the effort to attend Family Week, 165
We hope that we have shown you just how much
You have in common with everybody else.
Not to be “terminally unique”

Will be the consolation you take home.
Remember, Oracle is only the first step 170
In your recovery. The rest is up to you
And the twelve-step program you become

Involved in. An amazing forty per cent
Of our graduates are still clean after two years.
The rest? Well. . . . Given our society, 175
Sobriety is hard to implement.

12 *And If*

And if it were all like the moon?
Full this evening, bewitchingly
Glowing in a dark not yet complete
Above the world, explicit rune 180

Of change. Change is the “feeling” that dilutes
Those seven others to uncertain washes
Of soot and silver, inks unknown in my kit.
Change sends out shoots

Of FEAR and LONELINESS; of GUILT, as well, 185
Towards the old, abandoned patterns;
Of joy eventually, and self-forgiveness—
Colors few of us brought to Oracle . . .

And if the old patterns recur?
 Ask how the co-dependent moon, another night,
 Feels when the light drains wholly from her face.
 Ask what that cold comfort means to her.

190

1995

ALLEN GINSBERG

1926–1997

“Hold back the edges of your gowns, Ladies, we are going through hell.” William Carlos Williams’s introduction to Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956) was probably the most auspicious public welcome from one poet to another since, one hundred years before, the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson had hailed the unknown Walt Whitman in a letter that Whitman used as a preface to the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*. *Howl* combined apocalyptic criticism of the dull, prosperous Eisenhower years with exuberant celebration of an emerging counterculture. It was the best-known and most widely circulated book of poems of its time, and with its appearance Ginsberg became part of the history of publicity as well as the history of poetry. *Howl* and Jack Kerouac’s novel *On the Road* (1957) were the pocket Bibles of the generation whose name Kerouac had coined—“Beat,” with its punning overtones of “beaten down” and “beatified.”

Ginsberg was the son of Louis Ginsberg, a poet and schoolteacher in New Jersey, and of Naomi Ginsberg, a Russian émigré, whose madness and eventual death her son memorialized in “Kaddish” (1959). His official education took place at Columbia University, but for him as for Kerouac the presence of William Burroughs in New York was equally influential. Burroughs (1914–1997), later the author of *Naked Lunch* (1959), one of the most inventive experiments in American prose, was at that time a drug addict about to embark on an expatriate life in Mexico and Tangier. He helped Ginsberg discover modern writers: Kafka, Yeats, Céline, Rimbaud. Ginsberg responded to Burroughs’s liberated kind of life, to his comic-apocalyptic view of American society, and to his bold literary use of autobiography, as when writing about his own experience with addicts and addiction in *Junkie*, whose chapters Ginsberg was reading in manuscript form in 1950.

Ginsberg’s New York career has passed into mythology for a generation of poets and readers. In 1945, his sophomore year, he was expelled from Columbia: he had sketched some obscene drawings and phrases in the dust of his dormitory window to draw the attention of a neglectful cleaning woman to the grimy state of his room. Then, living periodically with Burroughs and Kerouac, he shipped out for short trips as a messman on merchant tankers and worked in addition as a welder, a night porter, and a dishwasher.

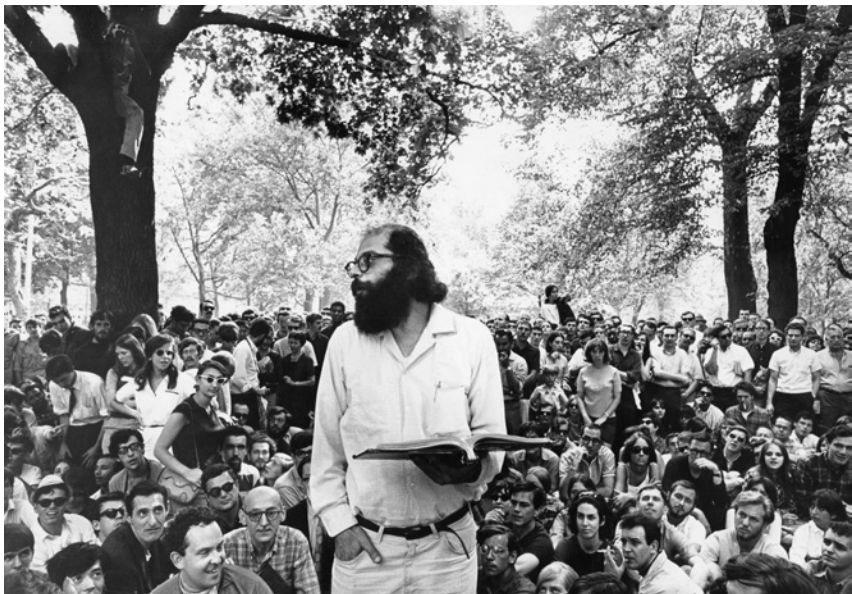
One summer, in a Harlem apartment, Ginsberg underwent what he always represented as the central conversion experience of his life. He had an “auditory vision” of the English poet William Blake reciting his poems: first “Ah! Sunflower,” and then a few minutes later the same oracular voice intoning “The Sick Rose.” It was “like hearing the doom of the whole universe, and at the same time the inevitable

beauty of that doom.” Ginsberg was convinced that the presence of “this big god over all . . . and that the whole purpose of being born was to wake up to Him.”

Ginsberg eventually finished Columbia in 1948 with high grades but under a legal cloud. Herbert Huncke, a colorful but irresponsible addict friend, had been using Ginsberg’s apartment as a storage depot for the goods he stole to support his drug habit. To avoid prosecution as an accomplice, Ginsberg had to plead insanity and spent eight months in the Columbia Psychiatric Institute.

After more odd jobs and considerable success as a market researcher in San Francisco, Ginsberg left the straight, nine-to-five world for good. He was drawn to San Francisco, he said, by its “long honorable . . . tradition of Bohemian—Buddhist—Wobbly [the I.W.W., an early radical labor movement]—mystical—anarchist social involvement.” In the years after 1954 he met San Francisco poets such as Robert Duncan, Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder (who was studying Chinese and Japanese at Berkeley), and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, whose City Lights Bookshop became the publisher of *Howl*. The night Ginsberg read the new poem aloud at the Six Gallery has been called “the birth trauma of the Beat Generation.”

The spontaneity of surface in *Howl* conceals but grows out of Ginsberg’s care and self-consciousness about rhythm and meter. Under the influence of William Carlos Williams, who had befriended him in Paterson after he left the mental hospital, Ginsberg had started carrying around a notebook to record the rhythms of voices around him. Kerouac’s *On the Road* gave him further examples of “frank talk” and, in addition, of an “oceanic” prose “sometimes as sublime as epic line.” Under Kerouac’s influence Ginsberg began the long tumbling lines that were to become his trademark. He carefully explained that all of *Howl and Other Poems* was an experiment in what could be done with the long line, the longer unit of breath that seemed natural for him. “My feeling is for a big long clanky statement,” one that accommodates “not the way you would say it, a thought, but the way you would think it—i.e., we think rapidly,



Ginsberg reading *Howl* in New York City in 1966, nine years after the court ruling finding it of redeeming social value and declaring it not obscene.

in visual images as well as words, and if each successive thought were transcribed in its confusion . . . you get a slightly different prosody than if you were talking slowly.”

Ginsberg learned the long line as well from biblical rhetoric, from the eighteenth-century English poet Christopher Smart, and above all, from Whitman and Blake. His first book pays tribute to both of these latter poets. “A Supermarket in California,” with its movement from exclamations to sad questioning, is Ginsberg’s melancholy reminder of what has become, after a century, of Whitman’s vision of American plenty. In “Sunflower Sutra” he celebrates the battered nobility beneath our industrial “skin of grime.” Ginsberg at his best gives a sense of doom and beauty, whether in the denunciatory impatient prophecies of *Howl* or in the catalog of suffering in “Kaddish.” His disconnected phrases can accumulate as narrative shrieks or, at other moments, can build as a litany of praise.

By the end of the 1960s Ginsberg was widely known and widely traveled. He had conducted publicly his own pursuit of inner peace during a long stay with Buddhist instructors in India and at home served as a kind of guru for many young people disoriented by the Vietnam War. Ginsberg read his poetry and held “office hours” in universities all over America, a presence at everything from “be-ins”—mass outdoor festivals of chanting, costumes, and music—to antiwar protests. He was a gentle and persuasive presence at hearings for many kinds of reform: revision of severe drug laws and laws against homosexuality. Ginsberg had lived for years with the poet Peter Orlovsky and wrote frankly about their relationship. His poems record his drug experiences as well, and “The Change,” written in Japan in 1963, marks his decision to keep away from what he considered the nonhuman domination of drugs and to lay new stress on “living in and inhabiting the human form.”

In *The Fall of America* (1972) Ginsberg created an “epic” that included history and registered the ups and downs of his travels across the United States. These “transit” poems sometimes seem like tape-recorded random lists of sights, sounds, and names, but at their best they give a sense of how far America has fallen, by measuring the provisional and changing world of nuclear America against the traces of nature still visible in our landscape and place-names. With Ginsberg’s death, contemporary American poetry lost one of its most definitive and revolutionary figures. Happily, the poems endure.

Howl

for Carl Solomon¹

I

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving
hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry
fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection² to the
starry dynamo in the machinery of night,

1. Ginsberg met Solomon (1928–1993) while both were patients at the Columbia Psychiatric Institute in 1949 and called him “an intuitive Bronx Dadaist and prose-poet.” Many details in *Howl* come from the “apocryphal history” that Solomon told Ginsberg in 1949. In “More Mis-

haps” (1968) Solomon admits that these adventures were “compounded partly of truth, but for the most [of] raving self-justification, crypto-bohemian boasting . . . effeminate prancing and esoteric aphorisms.”

2. In one sense, a person who can supply drugs.

who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the
 supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of
 cities contemplating jazz,
 who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan³
 angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated, 5
 who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating
 Arkansas and Blake-light⁴ tragedy among the scholars of war,
 who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes
 on the windows of the skull,
 who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in
 wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,
 who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a belt
 of marijuana for New York,
 who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley,⁵ death, or
 purgatoried their torsos night after night 10
 with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and
 endless balls,
 incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind
 leaping toward poles of Canada & Paterson,⁶ illuminating all the
 motionless world of Time between,
 Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine
 drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride
 neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the
 roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan rantings and kind king light
 of mind,
 who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to
 holy Bronx⁷ on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children
 brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered bleak of
 brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo,
 who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's floated out and sat
 through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's,⁸ listening to the
 crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox, 15
 who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue⁹
 to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,
 a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off
 fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon,
 yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and
 anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars,
 whole intellects disorged in total recall for seven days and nights with
 brilliant eyes, meat for the Synagogue cast on the pavement,

3. An English term for a Muslim, commonly used in Western literature until the mid-twentieth century; now considered offensive by many Muslims because it implies that they worship the prophet Mohammed (or Muhammad) in the same way that Christians worship Christ. "The El": the elevated railway in New York City; also a Hebrew word for God.

4. Refers to Ginsberg's apocalyptic vision of the English poet William Blake (1757–1827).

5. A tenement courtyard in New York's East Village; setting of Kerouac's *The Subterraneans* (1958).

6. Ginsberg's hometown; also the town celebrated by William Carlos Williams in his long poem *Paterson* (1946–58).

7. Opposite ends of a New York subway line running from the Battery (the southern tip of Manhattan) to the Bronx Zoo as its northern terminus.

8. New York bar that was a hipster hangout in the 1950s and 1960s. "Bickford's": a line of restaurants and cafeterias in the New York area from the 1920s to the 1960s.

9. New York public hospital to which psychiatric patients may be committed.

who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous
 picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall, 20
 suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines of
 China¹ under junk-withdrawal in Newark's bleak furnished room,
 who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard
 wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,
 who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow
 toward lonesome farms in grandfather night,
 who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross² telepathy and bop kaballah³
 because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas,
 who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels
 who were visionary indian angels, 25
 who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural
 ecstasy,
 who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Oklahoma on the impulse
 of winter midnight streetlight smalltown rain,
 who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or
 soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America
 and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa,
 who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving behind nothing but
 the shadow of dungarees and the lava and ash of poetry scattered in
 fireplace Chicago,
 who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the FBI in beards and
 shorts with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out
 incomprehensible leaflets, 30
 who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco
 haze of Capitalism,
 who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square weeping and
 undressing while the sirens of Los Alamos⁴ wailed them down, and
 wailed down Wall,⁵ and the Staten Island ferry also wailed,
 who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before
 the machinery of other skeletons,
 who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for
 committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and
 intoxication,
 who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof
 waving genitals and manuscripts, 35
 who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and
 screamed with joy,
 who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses
 of Atlantic and Caribbean love,
 who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of
 public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever
 come who may,

1. African and Asian sources of drugs.

2. Spanish visionary and poet (1542–1591), author of *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Plotinus (205–270), visionary Roman philosopher. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), American poet and author of supernatural tales.

3. A mystical tradition of interpreting Hebrew

scripture. "Bop": jazz style of the 1940s.

4. New Mexico center for the development of the atomic bomb. In New York in the 1930s Union Square was a gathering place for radical speakers.

5. Wall Street; but also alludes to the Wailing Wall, a place of public lamentation and prayer in Jerusalem.

who hiccupped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob behind a
 partition in a Turkish Bath when the blonde & naked angel came to
 pierce them with a sword,⁶
 who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate⁷ the one eyed shrew
 of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of the
 womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and
 snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsman's loom, 40
 who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a
 package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued
 along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with
 a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of
 consciousness,
 who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and
 were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the snatch of
 the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake,
 who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen nightcars, N.C.,⁸
 secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver—joy to
 the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner
 backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or
 with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings &
 especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys
 too,
 who faded out in vast sordid movies, were shifted in dreams, woke on a
 sudden Manhattan, and picked themselves up out of basements
 hungover with heartless Tokay⁹ and horrors of Third Avenue iron
 dreams & stumbled to unemployment offices,
 who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks
 waiting for a door in the East River to open to a room full of steamheat
 and opium, 45
 who created great suicidal dramas on the apartment cliff-banks of the
 Hudson under the wartime blue floodlight of the moon & their heads
 shall be crowned with laurel in oblivion,
 who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the crab at the muddy
 bottom of the rivers of Bowery,¹
 who wept at the romance of the streets with their pushcarts full of onions
 and bad music,
 who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the bridge, and rose up to
 build harpsichords in their lofts,
 who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the
 tubercular sky surrounded by orange crates of theology, 50
 who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which
 in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,
 who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming
 of the pure vegetable kingdom,
 who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg,

6. An allusion to *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, a sculpture by Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) based on St. Teresa of Ávila's (1515–1582) distinctly erotic description of a religious vision.

7. In Greek mythology, goddesses who determine a mortal's life by spinning out a length of thread and cutting it at the time of death.

8. Neal Cassady, hip companion of Jack Kerouac and the original Dean Moriarty, one of the leading figures in *On the Road*.

9. A naturally sweet wine made in Hungary.

1. Southern extension of Third Avenue in New York City; traditional haunt of derelicts and alcoholics.

who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside
 of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next
 decade,
 who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and
 were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were
 growing old and cried, 55
 who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue²
 amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron
 regiments of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of
 advertising & the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors, or were
 run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,
 who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked
 away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup
 alleyways & firetrucks, not even one free beer,
 who sang out of their windows in despair, fell out of the subway window,
 jumped in the filthy Passaic,³ leaped on negroes, cried all over the
 street, danced on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed phonograph
 records of nostalgic European 1930's German jazz finished the
 whiskey and threw up groaning into the bloody toilet, moans in their
 ears and the blast of colossal steamwhistles,
 who barreled down the highways of the past journeying to each other's
 hotrod-Golgotha⁴ jail-solitude watch or Birmingham jazz incarnation,
 who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you
 had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity, 60
 who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver &
 waited in vain, who watched over Denver & brooded & loned in
 Denver and finally went away to find out the Time, & now Denver is
 lonesome for her heroes,
 who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's
 salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a
 second,
 who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for impossible criminals
 with golden heads and the charm of reality in their hearts who sang
 sweet blues to Alcatraz,
 who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky Mount to tender
 Buddha or Tangiers to boys or Southern Pacific to the black
 locomotive or Harvard to Narcissus to Woodlawn⁵ to the daisychain or
 grave,
 who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left
 with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury, 65
 who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism⁶ and subsequently
 presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with
 shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding
 instantaneous lobotomy,

2. Center of New York advertising agencies.

3. River flowing past Paterson, New Jersey.

4. The place just outside the walls of Jerusalem where Jesus was believed to have been crucified; also known as Calvary.

5. A cemetery in the Bronx. The Southern Pacific is a railroad company. The references in

this line are to the lives of Kerouac, Cassady, and William Burroughs (an author and fellow Beat).

6. Artistic cult of absurdity (c. 1916–20). "CCNY": City College of New York. This and the following incidents probably derived from the "apocryphal history of my adventures" related by Solomon to Ginsberg.

and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin metrasol electricity
 hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong &
 amnesia,
 who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table,
 resting briefly in catatonia,
 returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and
 fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of
 the East,
 Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's⁷ foetid halls, bickering with the
 echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench
 dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to
 stone as heavy as the moon,
 with mother finally^{*****}, and the last fantastic book flung out of the
 tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 AM and the last
 telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished room
 emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow paper rose
 twisted on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that imaginary,
 nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination—
 ah, Carl,⁸ while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in the
 total animal soup of time—
 and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash
 of the alchemy of the use of the ellipse the catalog the meter & the
 vibrating plane,
 who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images
 juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual
 images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of
 consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens
 Aeterna Deus⁹
 to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before
 you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet
 confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his
 naked and endless head,
 the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down
 here what might be left to say in time come after death,
 and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow
 of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love
 into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani¹ saxophone cry that shivered
 the cities down to the last radio
 with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own
 bodies good to eat a thousand years.

II

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up
 their brains and imagination?

7. Three psychiatric hospitals near New York. Solomon was institutionalized at Pilgrim State and Rockland; Ginsberg's mother, Naomi, was permanently institutionalized at Greystone after years of suffering hallucinations and paranoid attacks. She died there in 1956, the year after *Howl* was written.

8. Solomon.

9. All-Powerful Father, Eternal God (Latin). An

allusion to a phrase used by the French painter Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), in a 1904 letter describing the effects of nature. In an interview, Ginsberg compared his own method of sharply juxtaposed images with Cézanne's foreshortening of perspective in landscape painting.

1. Christ's last words on the Cross: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Aramaic).

Moloch!² Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars!
 Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old
 men weeping in the parks! 80

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental
 Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless
 jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are
 judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned
 governments!

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running
 money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is
 a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose
 skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch
 whose factories dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose
 smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is
 electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius!
 Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose
 name is the Mind! 85

Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream Angels! Crazy in
 Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness
 without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy!
 Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of
 the sky!

Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasuries!
 blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible
 madhouses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!

They broke their backs lifting Moloch to Heaven! Pavements, trees, radios,
 tons! lifting the city to Heaven which exists and is everywhere about
 us!

Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies! gone down the Ameri-
 can river! 90

Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religions! the whole boatload of
 sensitive bullshit!

Breakthroughs! over the river! flips and crucifixions! gone down the flood!
 Highs! Epiphanies! Despairs! Ten years' animal screams and suicides!
 Minds! New loves! Mad generation! down on the rocks of Time!

Real holy laughter in the river! They saw it all! the wild eyes! the holy yells!
 They bade farewell! They jumped off the roof! to solitude! waving!
 carrying flowers! Down to the river! into the street!

III

Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
 where you're madder than I am 95
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where you must feel very strange

2. Ginsberg's own annotation in the facsimile edition of the poem reads: "Moloch": or Molech, the Canaanite fire god, whose worship was marked by

parents' burning their children as proprietary sacrifice. 'And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech' [Leviticus 18:21].⁷

I'm with you in Rockland
 where you imitate the shade of my mother
 I'm with you in Rockland 100
 where you've murdered your twelve secretaries
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where you laugh at this invisible humor
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter 105
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where your condition has become serious and is reported on the radio
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where the faculties of the skull no longer admit the worms of the
 senses
 I'm with you in Rockland 110
 where you drink the tea of the breasts of the spinsters of Utica³
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where you pun on the bodies of your nurses the harpies of the Bronx
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where you scream in a straightjacket that you're losing the game of
 the actual pingpong of the abyss 115
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and
 immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again
 from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void
 I'm with you in Rockland 120
 where you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew
 socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your
 living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where there are twenty five thousand mad comrades all together
 singing the final stanzas of the Internationale⁴ 125
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where we hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets the
 United States that coughs all night and won't let us sleep
 I'm with you in Rockland
 where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls'
 airplanes roaring over the roof they've come to drop angelic bombs
 the hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny
 legions run outside O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal
 war is here O victory forget your underwear we're free
 I'm with you in Rockland 130
 in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway
 across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night
 San Francisco, 1955–56 1956

3. Town in central New York.

4. Former socialist and Communist song; the official Soviet anthem until 1944.

Footnote to Howl

Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy !
 Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Holy !
 The world is holy ! The soul is holy ! The skin is holy ! The nose is holy !
 The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy !
 Everything is holy ! everybody's holy ! everywhere is holy ! everyday is in
 eternity ! Everyman's an angel !
 The bum's as holy as the seraphim ! the madman is holy as you my soul are
 holy !
 The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are
 holy the ecstasy is holy !
 Holy Peter holy Allen holy Solomon holy Lucien holy Kerouac holy Huncke
 holy Burroughs holy Cassady¹ holy the unknown bugged and
 suffering beggars holy the hideous human angels !
 Holy my mother in the insane asylum ! Holy the cocks of the grandfathers
 of Kansas !
 Holy the groaning saxophone ! Holy the bop apocalypse ! Holy the
 jazzbands marijuana hipsters peace & junk & drums !
 Holy the solitudes of skyscrapers and pavements ! Holy the cafeterias filled
 with the millions ! Holy the mysterious rivers of tears under the
 streets !
 Holy the lone juggernaut ! Holy the vast lamb of the middle-class ! Holy the
 crazy shepherds of rebellion ! Who digs Los Angeles IS Los Angeles !¹⁰
 Holy New York Holy San Francisco Holy Peoria & Seattle Holy Paris Holy
 Tangiers Holy Moscow Holy Istanbul !
 Holy time in eternity holy eternity in time holy the clocks in space holy the
 fourth dimension holy the fifth International holy the Angel in
 Moloch !

1955–56

1956, 1959

A Supermarket in California

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman,¹ for I walked down
 the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at
 the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon
 fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

1. All the figures mentioned here are Americans who shared or inspired a literary bohemia of the time. "Peter": Peter Orlovsky (1933–2010), Beat poet and Ginsberg's partner for four decades. "Allen": Ginsberg. "Solomon": Carl Solomon (1928–1993), whom Ginsberg met at the psychiatric hospital where Ginsberg's mother was being treated and to whom Ginsberg dedicated "Howl." "Lucien": Lucien Carr (1923–2005), one of the Beats and Ginsberg's roommate at Columbia University in the 1940s. "Kerouac": Jack Kerouac (1922–1969), novelist and founding figure of the Beat generation. "Huncke": Herbert Huncke

(1915–1996), writer who influenced Ginsberg and who introduced Ginsberg and Kerouac to the term "beat." "Burroughs": William Burroughs (1914–1997), writer, spoken-word performer, and social critic most famous for the novel *Naked Lunch* (1959). "Cassady": Neal Cassady (1926–1968), an icon of the Beat generation and the inspiration for the character Dean Moriarty in Kerouac's best-known work, *On the Road* (1957).
 1. American poet (1819–1892), author of *Leaves of Grass*, against whose homosexuality and vision of American plenty Ginsberg measures himself.

What peaches and what penumbras!² Whole families shopping at night!
Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!—
and you, Garcia Lorca,³ what were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among
the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What
price bananas? Are you my Angel?⁵

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and
followed in my imagination by the store detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting
artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which
way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and
feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to
shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be lonely.¹⁰

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automo-
biles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America
did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a
smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters
of Lethe?⁴

Berkeley, 1955

1956

Sunflower Sutra¹

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and sat down under the
huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over
the box house hills and cry.

Jack Kerouac² sat beside me on a busted rusty iron pole, companion, we
thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed,
surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery.

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sank on top of final
Frisco³ peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those mounts, just
ourselves rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old bums on the riverbank,
tired and wily.

Look at the Sunflower, he said, there was a dead gray shadow against the
sky, big as a man, sitting dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust—

2. Partial shadows.

3. Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), Spanish poet and dramatist and author of “A Poet in New York,” whose work is characterized by surrealist and homoerotic inspiration.

4. Forgetfulness. In Greek mythology, one of the rivers of Hades, the Underworld. Charon was

the boatman who ferried the dead to Hades.

1. Sanskrit for “thread”; the word refers to Brahmin or Buddhist religious texts of ritual instruction.

2. Fellow Beat (1922–1969), author of *On the Road* (1957).

3. San Francisco.

—I rushed up enchanted—it was my first sunflower, memories of
 Blake⁴—my visions—Harlem 5
 and Hells of the Eastern rivers, bridges clanking Joes Greasy Sandwiches,
 dead baby carriages, black treadless tires forgotten and unretreaded,
 the poem of the riverbank, condoms & pots, steel knives, nothing
 stainless, only the dank muck and the razor sharp artifacts passing into
 the past—
 and the gray Sunflower poised against the sunset, crackly bleak and dusty
 with the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye—
 corolla⁵ of bleary spikes pushed down and broken like a battered crown,
 seeds fallen out of its face, soon-to-be-toothless mouth of sunny air,
 sunrays obliterated on its hairy head like a dried wire spiderweb,
 leaves stuck out like arms out of the stem, gestures from the sawdust root,
 broke pieces of plaster fallen out of the black twigs, a dead fly in its
 ear,
 Unholy battered old thing you were, my sunflower O my soul, I loved you
 then! 10
 The grime was no man's grime but death and human locomotives,
 all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad skin, that smog of
 cheek, that eyelid of black mis'ry, that sooty hand or phallus or
 protuberance of artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—modern—all
 that civilization spotting your crazy golden crown—
 and those blear thoughts of death and dusty loveless eyes and ends and
 withered roots below, in the home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber
 dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping
 coughing car, the empty lonely tincans with their rusty tongues alack,
 what more could I name, the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the
 cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out
 of chairs & sphincters of dynamos—all these
 entangled in your mummied roots—and you there standing before me in
 the sunset, all your glory in your form!
 A perfect beauty of a sunflower! a perfect excellent lovely sunflower
 existence! a sweet natural eye to the new hip moon, woke up alive
 and excited grasping in the sunset shadow sunrise golden monthly
 breeze! 15
 How many flies buzzed round you innocent of your grime, while you
 cursed the heavens of the railroad and your flower soul?
 Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you
 look at your skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old
 locomotive? the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and shade of a once
 powerful mad American locomotive?
 You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower!
 And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not!
 So I grabbed up the skeleton thick sunflower and stuck it at my side like a
 scepter, 20
 and deliver my sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul too, and anyone who'll
 listen,

4. In Harlem in 1948 Ginsberg had a hallucinatory revelation in which he heard the English poet William Blake (1757–1827) reciting Blake's

poems "Ah! Sunflower" and "The Sick Rose."
 5. Petals forming the inner envelope of a flower.

—We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own seed & hairy naked accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sitdown vision.

Berkeley, 1955

1956

To Aunt Rose

Aunt Rose—now—might I see you
 with your thin face and buck tooth smile and pain
 of rheumatism—and a long black heavy shoe
 for your bony left leg
 limping down the long hall in Newark on the running carpet 5
 past the black grand piano
 in the day room
 where the parties were
 and I sang Spanish loyalist¹ songs
 in a high squeaky voice 10
 (hysterical) the committee listening
 while you limped around the room
 collected the money—
 Aunt Honey, Uncle Sam, a stranger with a cloth arm
 in his pocket 15
 and huge young bald head
 of Abraham Lincoln Brigade²

—your long sad face
 your tears of sexual frustration
 (what smothered sobs and bony hips 20
 under the pillows of Osborne Terrace)
 —the time I stood on the toilet seat naked
 and you powdered my thighs with Calomine
 against the poison ivy—my tender
 and shamed first black curled hairs 25
 what were you thinking in secret heart then
 knowing me a man already—
 and I an ignorant girl of family silence on the thin pedestal
 of my legs in the bathroom—Museum of Newark.

Aunt Rose 30
 Hitler is dead, Hitler is in Eternity; Hitler is with
 Tamburlane and Emily Brontë³

1. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) many left-wing Americans—among them Ginsberg's relatives in Newark—sympathized with the Spanish loyalists who were resisting Francisco Franco's (1892–1975) efforts to become Fascist dictator of Spain.

2. American volunteers who fought against the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War.

3. English poet and novelist (1818–1848), author of *Wuthering Heights*. Tamburlane was a Mideastern "scourge" and conqueror (hero of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlane*, 1588).

Though I see you walking still, a ghost on Osborne Terrace
 down the long dark hall to the front door
 limping a little with a pinched smile 35
 in what must have been a silken
 flower dress
 welcoming my father, the Poet, on his visit to Newark
 —see you arriving in the living room
 dancing on your crippled leg 40
 and clapping hands his book
 had been accepted by Liveright⁴

Hitler is dead and Liveright's gone out of business
The Attic of the Past and *Everlasting Minute* are out of print
 Uncle Harry sold his last silk stocking 45
 Claire quit interpretive dancing school
 Buba sits a wrinkled monument in Old
 Ladies Home blinking at hew babies

last time I saw you was the hospital
 pale skull protruding under ashen skin 50
 blue veined unconscious girl
 in an oxygen tent
 the war in Spain has ended long ago
 Aunt Rose

Paris, 1958

1961

4. Leading American publisher of the 1920s and 1930s (Liveright is now an imprint of W. W. Norton); published *The Everlasting Minute* (1937),

poems by Allen Ginsberg's father, Louis, whose first book was *The Attic of the Past* (1920).

FRANK O'HARA

1926–1966

After Frank O'Hara's death, the critic Donald Allen gathered O'Hara's *Collected Poems* and was surprised to discover that there were more than five hundred, many not published before. Some had to be retrieved from letters or from scraps of paper in boxes and trunks. O'Hara's poems were often spontaneous acts, revised minimally or not at all, then scattered generously, half forgotten. His work was published not by large commercial presses but by small presses and by art galleries such as Tibor de Nagy. These influential but fugitive paperbacks—*A City Winter* (1952), *Meditations in an Emergency* (1956), *Lunch Poems* (1964), and *Second Avenue* (1960)—included love poems, “letter” poems, “postcards,” and odes, each bearing the mark of its occasion: a birthday, a thank-you, memories of a lunch hour, or simply “Having a Coke with You.” They are filled, like diaries, with the names of Manhattan

streets, writers, artists, restaurants, cafés, and films. O'Hara practiced what he once called, in mockery of pompous poetic manifestos, "personism." The term came to him one day at the office when he was writing a poem for someone he loved. "While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born. . . . It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages." (O'Hara's essay "Personism" is excerpted in the "Postmodern Manifestos" cluster of this anthology.)

O'Hara moved to New York City in 1951. He was born in Baltimore and grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts. He had served in the navy for two years (and been stationed in the South Pacific and Japan), then studied at Harvard, where he majored in music and English. In New York he became involved in the art world, working at different times as an editor and critic for *Art News* and a curator for the Museum of Modern Art. But he was not simply making a living; he was also making a life. In these years abstract expressionism—nonrepresentational painting—flourished, and New York replaced Paris as the art capital of the world. O'Hara met and wrote about painters such as Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Jackson Pollock, then producing their most brilliant work. After 1955, as a special assistant in the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art, O'Hara helped organize important traveling exhibitions that introduced the new American painting to the art world abroad.

As friends, many of these painters (and sculptors) were the occasions for and recipients of O'Hara's poems. Even more important, their way of working served as a model for his own style of writing. As the poet John Ashbery puts it, "The poem [is] the chronicle of the creative act that produces it." At the simplest level this means including the random jumps, distractions, and loose associations involved in writing about a particular moment, and sometimes recording the pauses in the writing of the poem ("And now that I have finished dinner I can continue"). In O'Hara's work the casual is often, unexpectedly, the launching point for the visionary. The offhand chronicle of a lunch-hour walk can suddenly crystallize around a thunderclap memory of three friends, artists who died young: "First / Bunny died, then John Latouche, / then Jackson Pollock. But is the / earth as full as life was full, of them?"

O'Hara was indisputably, for his generation, *the* poet of New York; the city was for him what pastoral or rural worlds were for other writers, a source of refreshment and fantasy. But behind the exultation of O'Hara's cityscapes, a reader can often sense the melancholy that is made explicit in poems such as "A Step Away from Them." Part of the city's allure was that it answered O'Hara's driving need to reach out for friends, events, animation. His eagerness is balanced on "the wilderness wish / of wanting to be everything to everybody everywhere." O'Hara's poetry also displays an understanding of the intersections between the fast-paced energy of urban life and the world of machines.

O'Hara's example of a resonant casualness encouraged other poets—Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler. Loosely known as the "New York school" of poets, they occasionally collaborated on poems, plays, and happenings. O'Hara's bravado was a rallying point for these writers outside the more traditional and historically conscious modernism of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. His poems were like "inspired rambling," open to all levels and areas of experience, expressed in a colloquial tone that could easily shade into surrealistic dream. "I'm too blue, / An elephant takes up his trumpet, / money flutters from the windows of cries." More recently the influence of O'Hara's casual and often comic voice makes itself felt in the work of Billy Collins.

A few days after his fortieth birthday, in 1966, O'Hara was struck down at night by a beach buggy on Fire Island, New York, and died a few hours later. Despite his premature death he enabled a nourishing interaction of painting, writing, dance, and theater.

To the Harbormaster

I wanted to be sure to reach you;
 though my ship was on the way it got caught
 in some moorings. I am always tying up
 and then deciding to depart. In storms and
 at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide
 around my fathomless arms, I am unable
 to understand the forms of my vanity
 or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder¹
 in my hand and the sun sinking. To
 you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage
 of my will. The terrible channels where
 the wind drives me against the brown lips
 of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet
 I trust the sanity of my vessel; and
 if it sinks, it may well be in answer
 to the reasoning of the eternal voices,
 the waves which have kept me from reaching you.

1954?

1957

Why I Am Not a Painter

I am not a painter, I am a poet.
 Why? I think I would rather be
 a painter, but I am not. Well,

 for instance, Mike Goldberg
 is starting a painting. I drop in.
 "Sit down and have a drink" he
 says. I drink; we drink. I look
 up. "You have SARDINES in it."
 "Yes, it needed something there."
 "Oh." I go and the days go by
 and I drop in again. The painting
 is going on, and I go, and the days
 go by. I drop in. The painting is
 finished. "Where's SARDINES?"
 All that's left is just
 letters, "It was too much," Mike says.

 But me? One day I am thinking of
 a color: orange. I write a line

1. Probably a submerged comic reference to *The Polish Rider*, by the Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606–1669). O'Hara said this poem was about his friend the painter Larry Rivers (1923–2002), who expressed a continuing fas-

ination with Rembrandt's painting of a knight on horseback. "Hard alee": a movement toward the lee, or sheltered side, of a sailboat, i.e., away from the wind.

about orange. Pretty soon it is a
 whole page of words, not lines. 20
 Then another page. There should be
 so much more, not of orange, of
 words, of how terrible orange is
 and life. Days go by. It is even in
 prose, I am a real poet. My poem 25
 is finished and I haven't mentioned
 orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call
 it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery
 I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.

1957

A Step Away from Them

It's my lunch hour, so I go
 for a walk among the hum-colored
 cabs. First, down the sidewalk
 where laborers feed their dirty
 glistening torsos sandwiches 5
 and Coca-Cola, with yellow helmets
 on. They protect them from falling
 bricks, I guess. Then onto the
 avenue where skirts are flipping
 above heels and blow up over 10
 grates. The sun is hot, but the
 cabs stir up the air. I look
 at bargains in wristwatches. There
 are cats playing in sawdust.

On 15
 to Times Square, where the sign
 blows smoke over my head,¹ and higher
 the waterfall pours lightly. A
 Negro stands in a doorway with a
 toothpick, languorously agitating. 20
 A blonde chorus girl clicks: he
 smiles and rubs his chin. Everything
 suddenly honks: it is 12:40 of
 a Thursday.

Neon in daylight is a 25
 great pleasure, as Edwin Denby² would
 write, as are light bulbs in daylight.
 I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S
 CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of
 Federico Fellini, è *bell' attrice*.³ 30

1. Famous steam-puffing billboard, advertising cigarettes.

2. Fellow poet (1903–1983) and influential ballet critic.

3. Is [a] beautiful actress (Italian). Masina (1921–1994), Italian film actress, starred in many films by her husband, the Italian filmmaker Fellini (1920–1993), including *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965).

And chocolate malted. A lady in
foxes on such a day puts her poodle
in a cab.

There are several Puerto
Ricans on the avenue today, which
makes it beautiful and warm. First
Bunny died, then John Latouche,
then Jackson Pollock.⁴ But is the
earth as full as life was full, of them?
And one has eaten and one walks,
past the magazines with nudes
and the posters for bullfight and
the Manhattan Storage Warehouse,
which they'll soon tear down. I
used to think they had the Armory
Show⁵ there. 35 40 45

A glass of papaya juice
and back to work. My heart is in my
pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy.⁶

1956

1964

The Day Lady¹ Died

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
three days after Bastille day,² yes
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton³
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
and I don't know the people who will feed me 5

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly new world writing to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days 10

I go on to the bank
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
for Patsy⁴ with drawings by Bonnard although I do 15

4. Abstract expressionist painter (1912–1956), considered the originator of “action” painting. “Bunny”: V. R. Lang (1924–1956), poet and director of The Poet’s Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she produced several of O’Hara’s plays. Latouche (1917–1956), lyricist for several New York musicals, such as *The Golden Apple*. All three were gifted friends of the poet who met tragic deaths.

5. Site in 1913 of the influential and controversial first American showing of European postimpressionist painters.

6. French poet (1899–1960) whose work strongly influenced O’Hara’s writing.

1. Billie Holiday (1915–1959), also known as Lady Day, classic blues and jazz singer.

2. July 14, the French national holiday.

3. Town in eastern Long Island, a summer resort then popular among New York artists.

4. Patsy Southgate, an artist and friend of the poet. “Golden Griffin”: a bookstore that was located close to the Museum of Modern Art. “Verlaine”: Paul Verlaine (1844–1896), French poet.

think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
Brendan Behan's new play or *Le Balcon* or *Les Nègres*
of Genet,⁵ but I don't, I stick with Verlaine
after practically going to sleep with quandariness

and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE 20
Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and
then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it 25
and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron⁶ and everyone and I stopped breathing

1959

1960

A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island

The Sun woke me this morning loud
and clear, saying "Hey! I've been
trying to wake you up for fifteen
minutes. Don't be so rude, you are
only the second poet I've ever chosen 5
to speak to personally
so why
aren't you more attentive? If I could
burn you through the window I would
to wake you up. I can't hang around 10
here all day."
"Sorry, Sun, I stayed
up late last night talking to Hal."

"When I woke up Mayakovsky¹ he was
a lot more prompt" the Sun said 15
petulantly. "Most people are up
already waiting to see if I'm going
to put in an appearance."
I tried
to apologize "I missed you yesterday." 20
"That's better" he said. "I didn't
know you'd come out." "You may be
wondering why I've come so close?"

5. Plays (*The Balcony* and *The Blacks*, both 1955) by the French writer Jean Genet (1910–1986?), whose subjects were often the homosexual world and the lives of the dispossessed. "Bonnard": Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), French painter and printmaker. "Hesiod": early Greek poet (c. 700 B.C.E.) and author of *Works and*

Days, translated by the American poet Richmond Lattimore (1906–1984). Brendan Behan (1923–1964), Irish writer and dramatist.

6. Billie Holiday's accompanist (1926–2002).

1. Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), Russian poet and representative of early-20th-century Futurism.

“Yes” I said beginning to feel hot
wondering if maybe he wasn’t burning me
anyway. 25

“Frankly I wanted to tell you
I like your poetry. I see a lot
on my rounds and you’re okay. You may
not be the greatest thing on earth, but
you’re different. Now, I’ve heard some
say you’re crazy, they being excessively
calm themselves to my mind, and other
crazy poets think that you’re a boring
reactionary. Not me. 30 35

Just keep on
like I do and pay no attention. You’ll
find that people always will complain
about the atmosphere, either too hot
or too cold too bright or too dark, days
too short or too long. 40

If you don’t appear
at all one day they think you’re lazy
or dead. Just keep right on, I like it.

And don’t worry about your lineage
poetic or natural. The Sun shines on
the jungle, you know, on the tundra
the sea, the ghetto. Wherever you were
I knew it and saw you moving. I was waiting
for you to get to work. 45 50

And now that you
are making your own days, so to speak,
even if no one reads you but me
you won’t be depressed. Not
everyone can look up, even at me. It
hurts their eyes.” 55

“Oh Sun, I’m so grateful to you!”

“Thanks and remember I’m watching. It’s
easier for me to speak to you out
here. I don’t have to slide down
between buildings to get your ear.
I know you love Manhattan, but
you ought to look up more often. 60

And
always embrace things, people earth
sky stars, as I do, freely and with
the appropriate sense of space. That
is your inclination, known in the heavens
and you should follow it to hell, if
necessary, which I doubt. 65 70

Maybe we’ll
speak again in Africa, of which I too

am specially fond. Go back to sleep now
 Frank, and I may leave a tiny poem
 in that brain of yours as my farewell.”

75

“Sun, don’t go!” I was awake
 at last. “No, go I must, they’re calling
 me.”

“Who are they?”

Rising he said “Some
 day you’ll know. They’re calling to you
 too.” Darkly he rose, and then I slept.

80

1971

GALWAY KINNELL

1927–2014

In a 1971 interview, Galway Kinnell praised Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself*: “The final action of the poem where Whitman dissolves into the air and into the ground, is for me one of the great moments of self-transcendence in poetry. In one way or another, consciously or not, all poems try to pass beyond the self.” This capacity for self-transcendence is dramatized in Kinnell’s work, where he enters the lives of animals (“The Porcupine,” “The Bear”) and experiences himself as part of the natural world, like the flower he speaks for in “Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock.” “Part of poetry’s usefulness in the world,” he said, “is that it pays some of our huge unpaid tribute to the things and creatures that share the earth with us.” His work moves between a vivid sense of the world’s physical actuality and an equally vivid sense of its dissolution, for mortality is Kinnell’s great theme. It appears in his work both as extinction and as “the flowing away into the universe which we desire.” This theme is worked out at length in his sequence *The Book of Nightmares* (1978).

Kinnell grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, and attended Princeton University, where he and a classmate, W. S. Merwin, sometimes read each other their poems. He wrote continuously, combining his life of poetry with political commitments. In the course of his life, Kinnell was the director of an adult-education program in Chicago, a journalist in Iran, and a field-worker for the Congress of Racial Equality in Louisiana. Later he taught at a large number of colleges and universities.

Kinnell’s experiences working for voter registration in the South in the 1960s made their way into his long poem “The Last River” (*Body Rags*, 1969). Over the years Kinnell frequently wrote poems that united his personal life with the events of the nation. His work includes powerful war poems such as “Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond” and “The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible,” and in “The Past” (1985) he meditates on, and imagines his way into, the consequences of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Elsewhere he suggested that poetry is an alternative to a technological world in which domination of nature represses the knowledge of death. In 1994 his collection *Imperfect Thirst* extended his meditation on mortality into the arena of family history and personal memory. In a moving poem, “Neverland,” on his sister’s confrontation with death’s

agony and mystery, the last words she speaks are, “Now is when the point of the story changes.”

Kinnell’s earliest work, as seen in *What a Kingdom It Was* (1960) and *First Poems 1946–1954* (1970), is formally intricate. The course of his career was a movement to a looser line, a more uncluttered diction. His sense of form arises from what he called the “inner shape” of the poem: “saying in its own music what matters most.” Over the years he came to write poems that maintain musicality and a richness of language while never departing too far from the speaking voice. Kinnell’s attraction to the nonhuman world, which may remind us of Theodore Roethke and Gary Snyder, gives his work a vivid sense of life’s diversity. But he sometimes elevated the instinctual at the expense of a shaping, conscious awareness and wrote as if the very need for poetic form were, in and of itself, repressive. The finest of Kinnell’s poems combine self-transcendence with self-awareness in rhythms that convey a powerful physical energy and an empathetic imagination. His description of Whitman can serve as a description of Kinnell’s best work: “All his feelings for existence, for himself, for his own place, come out in what he says about them. . . . He rescues these things from death and lets them live in his poems and, in turn, they save him from incoherence and silence.”

The Porcupine

1

Fatted
 on herbs, swollen on crabapples,
 puffed up on bast and phloem,¹ ballooned
 on willow flowers, poplar catkins, first
 leaves of aspen and larch, 5
 the porcupine
 drags and bounces his last meal through ice,
 mud, roses and goldenrod, into the stubbly high fields.

2

In character 10
 he resembles us in seven ways:
 he puts his mark on outhouses,
 he alchemizes by moonlight,
 he shits on the run,
 he uses his tail for climbing,
 he chuckles softly to himself when scared, 15
 he’s overcrowded if there’s more than one of him per five acres,
 his eyes have their own inner redness.

3

Digger of
 goings across floors, of hesitations
 at thresholds, of 20
 handprints of dread
 at doorpost or window jamb, he would

1. I.e., on plant tissues.

gouge the world
 empty of us, hack and crater
 it 25
 until it is nothing, if that
 could rinse it of all our sweat and pathos.

Adorer of ax
 handles aflow with grain, of arms
 of Morris chairs,² of hand 30
 crafted objects
 steeped in the juice of fingertips,
 of surfaces wetted down
 with fist grease and elbow oil,
 of clothespins that have 35
 grabbed our body-rags by underarm and crotch . . .

Unimpressed—bored—
 by the whirl of the stars, by *these*
 he's astonished, ultra-
 Rilkean³ angel! 40

for whom the true
 portion of the sweetness of earth
 is one of those bottom-heavy, glittering, saccadic
 bits
 of salt water that splash down 45
 the haunted ravines of a human face.

4

A farmer shot a porcupine three times
 as it dozed on a tree limb. On
 the way down it tore open its belly
 on a broken 50
 branch, hooked its gut,
 and went on falling. On the ground
 it sprang to its feet, and
 paying out gut heaved
 and spartled⁴ through a hundred feet of goldenrod 55
 before
 the abrupt emptiness.

5

The Avesta⁵
 puts porcupine killers

2. Easy chairs.

3. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) wrote in a letter that “the ‘angel’ of [Rilke’s *Duino*] Elegies has nothing to do with the angel of the Christian heaven. . . . The angel of the Elegies is that being which stands for the idea of recogniz-

ing a higher order of reality in invisibility.”

4. Variant of “sprattle,” to sprawl or struggle helplessly.

5. Book of the sacred writings of Zoroastrianism, a Persian religion.

into hell for nine generations, sentencing them 60
 to gnaw out
 each other's hearts for the
 salts of desire.

I roll
 this way and that in the great bed, under 65
 the quilt
 that mimics this country of broken farms and woods,
 the fatty sheath of the man
 melting off,
 the self-stabbing coil 70
 of bristles reversing, blossoming outward—
 a red-eyed, hard-toothed, arrow-stuck urchin
 tossing up mattress feathers,
 pricking the
 woman beside me until she cries. 75

6

In my time I have
 crouched, quills erected,
 Saint
 Sebastian⁶ of the
 scared heart, and been 80
 beat dead with a locust club
 on the bare snout.
 And fallen from high places
 I have fled, have
 jogged 85
 over fields of goldenrod,
 terrified, seeking home,
 and among flowers
 I have come to myself empty, the rope
 strung out behind me 90
 in the fall sun
 suddenly glorified with all my blood.

7

And tonight I think I prowl broken
 skulled or vacant as a
 sucked egg in the wintry meadow, softly chuckling, blank 95
 template of myself, dragging
 a starved belly through the lichflowered acres,
 where
 burdock looses the ark of its seed
 and thistle holds up its lost blooms 100

6. Early Christian saint and martyr (d. 288); he was shot full of arrows by an execution squad and miraculously survived, only to be beaten to death later.

and rosebushes in the wind scrape their dead limbs
for the forced-fire
of roses.

1969

Blackberry Eating

I love to go out in late September
among the fat, overripe, icy, black blackberries
to eat blackberries for breakfast,
the stalks very prickly, a penalty
they earn for knowing the black art 5
of blackberry-making; and as I stand among them
lifting the stalks to my mouth, the ripest berries
fall almost unbidden to my tongue,
as words sometimes do, certain peculiar words
like *strengths* or *squinted*, 10
many-lettered, one-syllabled lumps,
which I squeeze, squinch open, and splurge well
in the silent, startled, icy, black language
of blackberry-eating in late September.

1980

After Making Love We Hear Footsteps

For I can snore like a bullhorn
or play loud music
or sit up talking with any reasonably sober Irishman
and Fergus will only sink deeper
into his dreamless sleep, which goes by all in one flash, 5
but let there be that heavy breathing
or a stifled come-cry anywhere in the house
and he will wrench himself awake
and make for it on the run—as now, we lie together,
after making love, quiet, touching along the length of our bodies, 10
familiar touch of the long-married,
and he appears—in his baseball pajamas, it happens,
the neck opening so small he has to screw them on—
and flops down between us and hugs us and snuggles himself to sleep,
his face gleaming with satisfaction at being this very child. 15

In the half darkness we look at each other
and smile
and touch arms across this little, startlingly muscled body—
this one whom habit of memory propels to the ground of his making,

sleeper only the mortal sounds can sing awake,
 this blessing love gives again into our arms.

20

1980

Cemetery Angels

On these cold days
 they stand over
 our dead, who will
 erupt into flower as soon
 as memory and human shape
 rot out of them, each bent
 forward and with wings
 partly opened as though
 warming itself at a fire.

5

1985

JOHN ASHBERY

b. 1927

John Ashbery has described his writing this way: “I think that any one of my poems might be considered to be a snapshot of whatever is going on in my mind at the time—first of all the desire to write a poem, after that wondering if I’ve left the oven on or thinking about where I must be in the next hour.” Ashbery has developed a style hospitable to quicksilver changes in tone and attention. His work often moves freely between different modes of discourse, between a language of popular culture and commonplace experience and a heightened rhetoric often associated with poetic vision. Ashbery’s poems show an awareness of the various linguistic codes (including clichés and conventional public speech) by which we live and through which we define ourselves. This awareness includes an interest in what he has called “prose voices,” and he has often written in a way that challenges the supposed boundaries between poetry and prose.

Ashbery’s poetry was not always so open to contradictory notions and impulses. His early books rejected the mere surfaces of realism and the momentary in order to get at “remoter areas of consciousness.” The protagonist of “Illustration” (from his first book, *Some Trees*) is a cheerful nun about to leave behind the irrelevancies of the world by leaping from a skyscraper. Her act implies “Much that is beautiful must be discarded / So that we may resemble a taller / impression of ourselves.” To reach the “remoter areas of consciousness,” Ashbery tried various technical experiments. He used highly patterned forms such as the sestina in “Some Trees” and “The Tennis Court Oath” (1962) not with any show of mechanical brilliance but to explore: “I once told somebody that writing a sestina was rather like riding downhill

on a bicycle and having the pedals push your feet. I wanted my feet to be pushed into places they wouldn't normally have taken."

Ashbery was born in Rochester, New York. He attended Deerfield Academy and Harvard, from which he graduated in 1949. He received an M.A. in English from Columbia in 1951. After a preliminary stay in France as a Fulbright scholar, he returned in 1958 for eight years and was art critic for the European edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* and reported the European shows and exhibitions for *Art News* and *Arts International*. He returned to New York in 1965 to be executive editor of *Art News*, a position he held until 1972. He has taught creative writing at Brooklyn College, Bard College, Wesleyan University, and other institutions over his long career.

Ashbery's interest in art played a formative role in his poetry. He is often associated with Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, and Kenneth Koch as part of the "New York school" of poets. The name refers to their common interest in the New York school of abstract painters of the 1940s and 1950s, some of whose techniques they wished to adapt to poetry. These painters avoided realism in order to stress the work of art as a representation of the creative act that produced it—as in the action paintings of Jackson Pollock. Ashbery's long poem *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* gives as much attention to the rapidly changing feelings of the poet in the act of writing his poem as it does to the Renaissance painting that inspired him. The poem moves back and forth between the distracted energies that feed a work of art and the completed composition, which the artist feels as both a triumph and a falsification of complex feelings. Ashbery shares with O'Hara a sense of the colloquial brilliance of daily life in New York and sets this in tension with the concentration and stasis of art.

Ashbery has published prolifically since his first collection, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, appeared in 1975. His important book-length poem, *Flow Chart*, appeared in 1991. His entertaining and provocative *Other Traditions* (2000) is a collection of his Norton Lectures on poetry at Harvard. Ashbery's work, especially his earlier, more highly experimental poems, has become particularly influential for a younger generation identified as "Language" poets, such as Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Michael Palmer, and Susan Howe. They have been attracted to the linguistic playfulness of Ashbery's poetry and to its resistance to being read as a single, personal voice. Exposing and sometimes breaking through the world's dominant uses of language, Ashbery's poems open new possibilities of meaning: "We are all talkers / It is true, but underneath the talk lies / The moving and not wanting to be moved, the loose / Meaning, untidy and simple like the threshing floor" ("Soonest Mended").

Illustration

I

A novice¹ was sitting on a cornice
High over the city. Angels

Combined their prayers with those
Of the police, begging her to come off it.

One lady promised to be her friend.
"I do not want a friend," she said.

5

1. Student in the first stage of instruction to be a nun.

A mother offered her some nylons
Stripped from her very legs. Others brought

Little offerings of fruit and candy,
The blind man all his flowers. If any 10

Could be called successful, these were,
For that the scene should be a ceremony

Was what she wanted. "I desire
Monuments," she said. "I want to move

Figuratively, as waves caress 15
The thoughtless shore. You people I know

Will offer me every good thing
I do not want. But please remember

I died accepting them." With that, the wind
Unpinned her bulky robes, and naked 20

As a roc's² egg, she drifted softly downward
Out of the angels' tenderness and the minds of men.

II

Much that is beautiful must be discarded
So that we may resemble a taller

Impression of ourselves. Moths climb in the flame, 25
Alas, that wish only to be the flame:

They do not lessen our stature.
We twinkle under the weight

Of indiscretions. But how could we tell
That of the truth we know, she was 30

The somber vestment? For that night, rockets sighed
Elegantly over the city, and there was feasting:

There is so much in that moment!
So many attitudes toward that flame,

We might have soared from earth, watching her glide 35
Aloft, in her peplum³ of bright leaves.

But she, of course, was only an effigy
Of indifference, a miracle

2. Legendary bird of prey.

3. In ancient Greece, a drapery about the upper part of the body.

Not meant for us, as the leaves are not
 Winter's because it is the end.

40

1956

Soonest Mended

Barely tolerated, living on the margin
 In our technological society, we were always having to be rescued
 On the brink of destruction, like heroines in *Orlando Furioso*¹
 Before it was time to start all over again.
 There would be thunder in the bushes, a rustling of coils, 5
 And Angelica, in the Ingres painting,² was considering
 The colorful but small monster near her toe, as though wondering
 whether forgetting
 The whole thing might not, in the end, be the only solution.
 And then there always came a time when
 Happy Hooligan³ in his rusted green automobile 10
 Came plowing down the course, just to make sure everything was O.K.,
 Only by that time we were in another chapter and confused
 About how to receive this latest piece of information.
 Was it information? Weren't we rather acting this out
 For someone else's benefit, thoughts in a mind 15
 With room enough and to spare for our little problems (so they began
 to seem),
 Our daily quandary about food and the rent and bills to be paid?
 To reduce all this to a small variant,
 To step free at last, minuscule on the gigantic plateau—
 This was our ambition: to be small and clear and free. 20
 Alas, the summer's energy wanes quickly.
 A moment and it is gone. And no longer
 May we make the necessary arrangements, simple as they are.
 Our star was brighter perhaps when it had water in it.
 Now there is no question even of that, but only 25
 Of holding on to the hard earth so as not to get thrown off,
 With an occasional dream, a vision: a robin flies across
 The upper corner of the window, you brush your hair away
 And cannot quite see, or a wound will flash
 Against the sweet faces of the others, something like: 30
 This is what you wanted to hear, so why
 Did you think of listening to something else? We are all talkers
 It is true, but underneath the talk lies
 The moving and not wanting to be moved, the loose
 Meaning, untidy and simple like a threshing floor.⁴ 35

1. Fantastical epic poem by Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), whose romantic heroine Angelica is constantly being rescued from imminent perils such as monsters and storms at sea.

2. *Roger Delivering Angelica* (1819), a painting based on a scene from Ariosto, by French artist

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867).

3. The good-natured, simple title character of a popular comic strip of the 1920s and 1930s.

4. Used at harvest time to separate the wheat from the chaff, which is to be discarded.

These then were some hazards of the course,
 Yet though we knew the course *was* hazards and nothing else
 It was still a shock when, almost a quarter of a century later,
 The clarity of the rules dawned on you for the first time.
They were the players, and we who had struggled at the game 40
 Were merely spectators, though subject to its vicissitudes
 And moving with it out of the tearful stadium, borne on shoulders,
 at last.
 Night after night this message returns, repeated
 In the flickering bulbs of the sky, raised past us, taken away from us,
 Yet ours over and over until the end that is past truth, 45
 The being of our sentences, in the climate that fostered them,
 Not ours to own, like a book, but to be with, and sometimes
 To be without, alone and desperate.
 But the fantasy makes it ours, a kind of fence-sitting
 Raised to the level of an esthetic ideal. These were moments, years, 50
 Solid with reality, faces, namable events, kisses, heroic acts,
 But like the friendly beginning of a geometrical progression
 Not too reassuring, as though meaning could be cast aside some day
 When it had been outgrown. Better, you said, to stay cowering
 Like this in the early lessons, since the promise of learning 55
 Is a delusion, and I agreed, adding that
 Tomorrow would alter the sense of what had already been learned,
 That the learning process is extended in this way, so that from this
 standpoint
 None of us ever graduates from college,
 For time is an emulsion,⁵ and probably thinking not to grow up 60
 Is the brightest kind of maturity for us, right now at any rate.
 And you see, both of us were right, though nothing
 Has somehow come to nothing; the avatars⁶
 Of our conforming to the rules and living
 Around the home have made—well, in a sense, “good citizens” of us, 65
 Brushing the teeth and all that, and learning to accept
 The charity of the hard moments as they are doled out,
 For this is action, this not being sure, this careless
 Preparing, sowing the seeds crooked in the furrow,
 Making ready to forget, and always coming back 70
 To the mooring of starting out, that day so long ago.

1970

Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror¹

As Parmigianino did it, the right hand
 Bigger than the head, thrust at the viewer
 And swerving easily away, as though to protect

5. A chemical solution in which the particles of one liquid are suspended in another.

6. Incarnations.

1. This self-portrait, by the Italian Mannerist

Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Mazzola, 1503–1540) on a convex piece of poplar wood, hangs in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

What it advertises. A few leaded panes, old beams,
 Fur, pleated muslin, a coral ring run together 5
 In a movement supporting the face, which swims
 Toward and away like the hand
 Except that it is in repose. It is what is
 Sequestered. Vasari² says, “Francesco one day set himself
 To take his own portrait, looking at himself for that purpose 10
 In a convex mirror, such as is used by barbers . . .
 He accordingly caused a ball of wood to be made
 By a turner, and having divided it in half and
 Brought it to the size of the mirror, he set himself
 With great art to copy all that he saw in the glass,” 15
 Chiefly his reflection, of which the portrait
 Is the reflection once removed.
 The glass chose to reflect only what he saw
 Which was enough for his purpose: his image
 Glazed, embalmed, projected at a 180-degree angle. 20
 The time of day or the density of the light
 Adhering to the face keeps it
 Lively and intact in a recurring wave
 Of arrival. The soul establishes itself.
 But how far can it swim out through the eyes 25
 And still return safely to its nest? The surface
 Of the mirror being convex, the distance increases
 Significantly; that is, enough to make the point
 That the soul is a captive, treated humanely, kept
 In suspension, unable to advance much farther 30
 Than your look as it intercepts the picture.
 Pope Clement and his court were “stupefied”
 By it,³ according to Vasari, and promised a commission
 That never materialized. The soul has to stay where it is,
 Even though restless, hearing raindrops at the pane, 35
 The sighing of autumn leaves thrashed by the wind,
 Longing to be free, outside, but it must stay
 Posing in this place. It must move
 As little as possible. This is what the portrait says.
 But there is in that gaze a combination 40
 Of tenderness, amusement and regret, so powerful
 In its restraint that one cannot look for long.
 The secret is too plain. The pity of it smarts,
 Makes hot tears spurt: that the soul is not a soul,
 Has no secret, is small, and it fits 45
 Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention.
 That is the tune but there are no words.
 The words are only speculation
 (From the Latin *speculum*, mirror):
 They seek and cannot find the meaning of the music. 50

2. Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), Italian architect, painter, and art historian whose *Lives of the Most Eminent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* is the principal source of information about those artists.

3. When Parmigianino moved from his native Parma to Rome in 1524, he presented the self-portrait to Pope Clement VII as a credential for papal patronage.

We see only postures of the dream,
 Riders of the motion that swings the face
 Into view under evening skies, with no
 False disarray as proof of authenticity.
 But it is life englobed. 55
 One would like to stick one's hand
 Out of the globe, but its dimension,
 What carries it, will not allow it.
 No doubt it is this, not the reflex
 To hide something, which makes the hand loom large 60
 As it retreats slightly. There is no way
 To build it flat like a section of wall:
 It must join the segment of a circle,
 Roving back to the body of which it seems
 So unlikely a part, to fence in and shore up the face 65
 On which the effort of this condition reads
 Like a pinpoint of a smile, a spark
 Or star one is not sure of having seen
 As darkness resumes. A perverse light whose
 Imperative of subtlety dooms in advance its 70
 Conceit to light up: unimportant but meant.
 Francesco, your hand is big enough
 To wreck the sphere, and too big,
 One would think, to weave delicate meshes
 That only argue its further detention. 75
 (Big, but not coarse, merely on another scale,
 Like a dozing whale on the sea bottom
 In relation to the tiny, self-important ship
 On the surface.) But your eyes proclaim
 That everything is surface. The surface is what's there 80
 And nothing can exist except what's there.
 There are no recesses in the room, only alcoves,
 And the window doesn't matter much, or that
 Sliver of window or mirror on the right, even
 As a gauge of the weather, which in French is 85
Le temps, the word for time, and which
 Follows a course wherein changes are merely
 Features of the whole. The whole is stable within
 Instability, a globe like ours, resting
 On a pedestal of vacuum, a ping-pong ball 90
 Secure on its jet of water.
 And just as there are no words for the surface, that is,
 No words to say what it really is, that it is not
 Superficial but a visible core, then there is
 No way out of the problem of pathos vs. experience. 95
 You will stay on, restive, serene in
 Your gesture which is neither embrace nor warning
 But which holds something of both in pure
 Affirmation that doesn't affirm anything.

The balloon pops, the attention 100
 Turns dully away. Clouds

In the puddle stir up into sawtoothed fragments.
 I think of the friends
 Who came to see me, of what yesterday
 Was like. A peculiar slant 105
 Of memory that intrudes on the dreaming model
 In the silence of the studio as he considers
 Lifting the pencil to the self-portrait.
 How many people came and stayed a certain time,
 Uttered light or dark speech that became part of you 110
 Like light behind windblown fog and sand,
 Filtered and influenced by it, until no part
 Remains that is surely you. Those voices in the dusk
 Have told you all and still the tale goes on
 In the form of memories deposited in irregular 115
 Clumps of crystals. Whose curved hand controls,
 Francesco, the turning seasons and the thoughts
 That peel off and fly away at breathless speeds
 Like the last stubborn leaves ripped
 From wet branches? I see in this only the chaos 120
 Of your round mirror which organizes everything
 Around the polestar⁴ of your eyes which are empty,
 Know nothing, dream but reveal nothing.
 I feel the carousel starting slowly
 And going faster and faster: desk, papers, books, 125
 Photographs of friends, the window and the trees
 Merging in one neutral band that surrounds
 Me on all sides, everywhere I look.
 And I cannot explain the action of leveling,
 Why it should all boil down to one 130
 Uniform substance, a magma⁵ of interiors.
 My guide in these matters is your self,
 Firm, oblique, accepting everything with the same
 Wraith of a smile, and as time speeds up so that it is soon
 Much later, I can know only the straight way out, 135
 The distance between us. Long ago
 The strewn evidence meant something,
 The small accidents and pleasures
 Of the day as it moved gracelessly on,
 A housewife doing chores. Impossible now 140
 To restore those properties in the silver blur that is
 The record of what you accomplished by sitting down
 "With great art to copy all that you saw in the glass"
 So as to perfect and rule out the extraneous
 Forever. In the circle of your intentions certain spars⁶ 145
 Remain that perpetuate the enchantment of self with self:
 Eyebeams, muslin, coral. It doesn't matter
 Because these are things as they are today
 Before one's shadow ever grew
 Out of the field into thoughts of tomorrow. 150

4. The North Star; the center of attraction.

5. Soft mixture of organic or mineral materials.

6. Pieces of lustrous mineral; also, round timbers used to support rigging and sails on a ship or boat.

Tomorrow is easy, but today is uncharted,
 Desolate, reluctant as any landscape
 To yield what are laws of perspective
 After all only to the painter's deep
 Mistrust, a weak instrument though 155
 Necessary. Of course some things
 Are possible, it knows, but it doesn't know
 Which ones. Some day we will try
 To do as many things as are possible
 And perhaps we shall succeed at a handful 160
 Of them, but this will not have anything
 To do with what is promised today, our
 Landscape sweeping out from us to disappear
 On the horizon. Today enough of a cover burnishes
 To keep the supposition of promises together 165
 In one piece of surface, letting one ramble
 Back home from them so that these
 Even stronger possibilities can remain
 Whole without being tested. Actually
 The skin of the bubble-chamber's as tough as 170
 Reptile eggs; everything gets "programmed" there
 In due course: more keeps getting included
 Without adding to the sum, and just as one
 Gets accustomed to a noise that
 Kept one awake but now no longer does, 175
 So the room contains this flow like an hourglass
 Without varying in climate or quality
 (Except perhaps to brighten bleakly and almost
 Invisibly, in a focus sharpening toward death—more
 Of this later). What should be the vacuum of a dream 180
 Becomes continually replete as the source of dreams
 Is being tapped so that this one dream
 May wax, flourish like a cabbage rose,
 Defying sumptuary laws,⁷ leaving us
 To awake and try to begin living in what 185
 Has now become a slum. Sydney Freedberg in his
Parmigianino says of it: "Realism in this portrait
 No longer produces an objective truth, but a *bizarria*⁸ . . .
 However its distortion does not create
 A feeling of disharmony. . . . The forms retain 190
 A strong measure of ideal beauty," because
 Fed by our dreams, so inconsequential until one day
 We notice the hole they left. Now their importance
 If not their meaning is plain. They were to nourish
 A dream which includes them all, as they are 195
 Finally reversed in the accumulating mirror.
 They seemed strange because we couldn't actually see them.
 And we realize this only at a point where they lapse
 Like a wave breaking on a rock, giving up

7. Laws regulating private behavior, in this case mode of dress.

8. Distortion. Sydney J. Freedberg, *Parmigianino: His Works in Painting* (1950).

Its shape in a gesture which expresses that shape. 200
 The forms retain a strong measure of ideal beauty
 As they forage in secret on our idea of distortion.
 Why be unhappy with this arrangement, since
 Dreams prolong us as they are absorbed?
 Something like living occurs, a movement 205
 Out of the dream into its codification.

As I start to forget it
 It presents its stereotype again
 But it is an unfamiliar stereotype, the face
 Riding at anchor, issued from hazards, soon 210
 To accost others, "rather angel than man" (Vasari).
 Perhaps an angel looks like everything
 We have forgotten, I mean forgotten
 Things that don't seem familiar when
 We meet them again, lost beyond telling, 215
 Which were ours once. This would be the point
 Of invading the privacy of this man who
 "Dabbled in alchemy, but whose wish
 Here was not to examine the subtleties of art
 In a detached, scientific spirit: he wished through them 220
 To impart the sense of novelty and amazement to the spectator"
 (Freedberg). Later portraits such as the Uffizi
 "Gentleman," the Borghese "Young Prelate" and
 The Naples "Antea" issue from Mannerist
 Tensions,⁹ but here, as Freedberg points out, 225
 The surprise, the tension are in the concept
 Rather than its realization.
 The consonance of the High Renaissance¹
 Is present, though distorted by the mirror.
 What is novel is the extreme care in rendering 230
 The velleities² of the rounded reflecting surface
 (It is the first mirror portrait),
 So that you could be fooled for a moment
 Before you realize the reflection
 Isn't yours. You feel then like one of those 235
 Hoffmann³ characters who have been deprived
 Of a reflection, except that the whole of me
 Is seen to be supplanted by the strict
 Otherness of the painter in his
 Other room. We have surprised him 240
 At work, but no, he has surprised us
 As he works. The picture is almost finished,
 The surprise almost over, as when one looks out,
 Startled by a snowfall which even now is

9. Mannerism was a style of painting in 16th-century Italy in which proportions or the laws of perspective were distorted to produce effects of tension or disturbance. "Uffizi" and "Borghese": galleries in Florence and Rome, respectively.

1. In Italian painting and architecture, the period

in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in which the harmonious proportions ("consonance") of classical art were emulated and honored.

2. Subtle tendencies.

3. E. T. A. Hoffman (1776–1822), German author known for his tales of the supernatural.

Ending in specks and sparkles of snow. 245
 It happened while you were inside, asleep,
 And there is no reason why you should have
 Been awake for it, except that the day
 Is ending and it will be hard for you
 To get to sleep tonight, at least until late. 250

The shadow of the city injects its own
 Urgency: Rome where Francesco
 Was at work during the Sack:⁴ his inventions
 Amazed the soldiers who burst in on him;
 They decided to spare his life, but he left soon after; 255
 Vienna where the painting is today, where
 I saw it with Pierre in the summer of 1959; New York
 Where I am now, which is a logarithm⁵
 Of other cities. Our landscape
 Is alive with filiations, shuttlings; 260
 Business is carried on by look, gesture,
 Hearsay. It is another life to the city,
 The backing of the looking glass of the
 Unidentified but precisely sketched studio. It wants
 To siphon off the life of the studio, deflate 265
 Its mapped space to enactments, island it.
 That operation has been temporarily stalled
 But something new is on the way, a new preciousity
 In the wind. Can you stand it,
 Francesco? Are you strong enough for it? 270
 This wind brings what it knows not, is
 Self-propelled, blind, has no notion
 Of itself. It is inertia that once
 Acknowledged saps all activity, secret or public:
 Whispers of the word that can't be understood 275
 But can be felt, a chill, a blight
 Moving outward along the capes and peninsulas
 Of your nervures and so to the archipelagoes
 And to the bathed, aired secrecy of the open sea.
 This is its negative side. Its positive side is 280
 Making you notice life and the stresses
 That only seemed to go away, but now,
 As this new mode questions, are seen to be
 Hastening out of style. If they are to become classics
 They must decide which side they are on. 285
 Their reticence has undermined
 The urban scenery, made its ambiguities
 Look willful and tired, the games of an old man.
 What we need now is this unlikely
 Challenger pounding on the gates of an amazed 290

4. In 1527 troops of the Hapsburg emperor Charles V sacked Rome in an assertion of power against Pope Clement VII.

5. Mathematical term referring to the power to which a fixed number (the base) must be raised

to obtain a given number or variable. In Ashbery's work this is less a mathematical concept than an image of the way an apparently fixed concept can multiply or divide into other forms.

Castle. Your argument, Francesco,
 Had begun to grow stale as no answer
 Or answers were forthcoming. If it dissolves now
 Into dust, that only means its time had come
 Some time ago, but look now, and listen: 295
 It may be that another life is stocked there
 In recesses no one knew of; that it,
 Not we, are the change; that we are in fact it
 If we could get back to it, relive some of the way
 It looked, turn our faces to the globe as it sets 300
 And still be coming out all right:
 Nerves normal, breath normal. Since it is a metaphor
 Made to include us, we are a part of it and
 Can live in it as in fact we have done,
 Only leaving our minds bare for questioning 305
 We now see will not take place at random
 But in an orderly way that means to menace
 Nobody—the normal way things are done,
 Like the concentric growing up of days
 Around a life: correctly, if you think about it. 310

A breeze like the turning of a page
 Brings back your face: the moment
 Takes such a big bite out of the haze
 Of pleasant intuition it comes after.
 The locking into place is “death itself,” 315
 As Berg said of a phrase in Mahler’s Ninth,⁶
 Or, to quote Imogen in *Cymbeline*, “There cannot
 Be a pinch in death more sharp than this,”⁷ for,
 Though only exercise or tactic, it carries
 The momentum of a conviction that had been building. 320
 Mere forgetfulness cannot remove it
 Nor wishing bring it back, as long as it remains
 The white precipitate⁸ of its dream
 In the climate of sighs flung across our world,
 A cloth over a birdcage. But it is certain that 325
 What is beautiful seems so only in relation to a specific
 Life, experienced or not, channeled into some form
 Steeped in the nostalgia of a collective past.
 The light sinks today with an enthusiasm
 I have known elsewhere, and known why 330
 It seemed meaningful, that others felt this way
 Years ago. I go on consulting
 This mirror that is no longer mine
 For as much brisk vacancy as is to be
 My portion this time. And the vase is always full 335
 Because there is only just so much room
 And it accommodates everything. The sample

6. Alban Berg (1885–1935), Viennese composer of twelve-tone music, speaking of the Ninth Symphony of his predecessor, the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler (1860–1911).

7. Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* 1.1.131–32.

8. In chemistry, a solid deposit separated from a solution.

One sees is not to be taken as
 Merely that, but as everything as it
 May be imagined outside time—not as a gesture 340
 But as all, in the refined, assimilable state.
 But what is this universe the porch of
 As it veers in and out, back and forth,
 Refusing to surround, us and still the only
 Thing we can see? Love once 345
 Tipped the scales but now is shadowed, invisible,
 Though mysteriously present, around somewhere.
 But we know it cannot be sandwiched
 Between two adjacent moments, that its windings
 Lead nowhere except to further tributaries 350
 And that these empty themselves into a vague
 Sense of something that can never be known
 Even though it seems likely that each of us
 Knows what it is and is capable of
 Communicating it to the other. But the look 355
 Some wear as a sign makes one want to
 Push forward ignoring the apparent
 Naïveté of the attempt, not caring
 That no one is listening, since the light
 Has been lit once and for all in their eyes 360
 And is present, unimpaired, a permanent anomaly,
 Awake and silent. On the surface of it
 There seems no special reason why that light
 Should be focused by love, or why
 The city falling with its beautiful suburbs 365
 Into space always less clear, less defined,
 Should read as the support of its progress,
 The easel upon which the drama unfolded
 To its own satisfaction and to the end
 Of our dreaming, as we had never imagined 370
 It would end, in worn daylight with the painted
 Promise showing through as a gage, a bond.
 This nondescript, never-to-be defined daytime is
 The secret of where it takes place
 And we can no longer return to the various 375
 Conflicting statements gathered, lapses of memory
 Of the principal witnesses. All we know
 Is that we are a little early, that
 Today has that special, lapidary⁹
 Todayness that the sunlight reproduces 380
 Faithfully in casting twig-shadows on blithe
 Sidewalks. No previous day would have been like this.
 I used to think they were all alike,
 That the present always looked the same to everybody
 But this confusion drains away as one 385
 Is always cresting into one's present.
 Yet the "poetic," straw-colored space

9. Gemlike, precisely cut.

Of the long corridor that leads back to the painting,
 Its darkening opposite—is this
 Some figment of “art,” not to be imagined 390
 As real, let alone special? Hasn’t it too its lair
 In the present we are always escaping from
 And falling back into, as the waterwheel of days
 Pursues its uneventful, even serene course?
 I think it is trying to say it is today 395
 And we must get out of it even as the public
 Is pushing through the museum now so as to
 Be out by closing time. You can’t live there.
 The gray glaze of the past attacks all know-how:
 Secrets of wash and finish that took a lifetime 400
 To learn and are reduced to the status of
 Black-and-white illustrations in a book where colorplates
 Are rare. That is, all time
 Reduces to no special time. No one
 Alludes to the change; to do so might 405
 Involve calling attention to oneself
 Which would augment the dread of not getting out
 Before having seen the whole collection
 (Except for the sculptures in the basement:
 They are where they belong). 410
 Our time gets to be veiled, compromised
 By the portrait’s will to endure. It hints at
 Our own, which we were hoping to keep hidden.
 We don’t need paintings or
 Doggerel written by mature poets when 415
 The explosion is so precise, so fine.
 Is there any point even in acknowledging
 The existence of all that? Does it
 Exist? Certainly the leisure to
 Indulge stately pastimes doesn’t, 420
 Any more. Today has no margins, the event arrives
 Flush with its edges, is of the same substance,
 Indistinguishable. “Play” is something else;
 It exists, in a society specifically
 Organized as a demonstration of itself. 425
 There is no other way, and those assholes
 Who would confuse everything with their mirror games
 Which seem to multiply stakes and possibilities, or
 At least confuse issues by means of an investing
 Aura that would corrode the architecture 430
 Of the whole in a haze of suppressed mockery,
 Are beside the point. They are out of the game,
 Which doesn’t exist until they are out of it.
 It seems like a very hostile universe
 But as the principle of each individual thing is 435
 Hostile to, exists at the expense of all the others
 As philosophers have often pointed out, at least
This thing, the mute, undivided present,
 Has the justification of logic, which

In this instance isn't a bad thing 440
 Or wouldn't be, if the way of telling
 Didn't somehow intrude, twisting the end result
 Into a caricature of itself. This always
 Happens, as in the game where
 A whispered phrase passed around the room 445
 Ends up as something completely different.
 It is the principle that makes works of art so unlike
 What the artist intended. Often he finds
 He has omitted the thing he started out to say
 In the first place. Seduced by flowers, 450
 Explicit pleasures, he blames himself (though
 Secretly satisfied with the result), imagining
 He had a say in the matter and exercised
 An option of which he was hardly conscious,
 Unaware that necessity circumvents such resolutions 455
 So as to create something new
 For itself, that there is no other way,
 That the history of creation proceeds according to
 Stringent laws, and that things
 Do get done in this way, but never the things 460
 We set out to accomplish and wanted so desperately
 To see come into being. Parmigianino
 Must have realized this as he worked at his
 Life-obstructing task. One is forced to read
 The perfectly plausible accomplishment of a purpose 465
 Into the smooth, perhaps even bland (but so
 Enigmatic) finish. Is there anything
 To be serious about beyond this otherness
 That gets included in the most ordinary
 Forms of daily activity, changing everything 470
 Slightly and profoundly, and tearing the matter
 Of creation, any creation, not just artistic creation
 Out of our hands, to install it on some monstrous, near
 Peak, too close to ignore, too far
 For one to intervene? This otherness, this 475
 "Not-being-us" is all there is to look at
 In the mirror, though no one can say
 How it came to be this way. A ship
 Flying unknown colors has entered the harbor.
 You are allowing extraneous matters 480
 To break up your day, cloud the focus
 Of the crystal ball. Its scene drifts away
 Like vapor scattered on the wind. The fertile
 Thought-associations that until now came
 So easily, appear no more, or rarely. Their 485
 Colorings are less intense, washed out
 By autumn rains and winds, spoiled, muddied,
 Given back to you because they are worthless.
 Yet we are such creatures of habit that their
 Implications are still around *en permanence*, confusing 490
 Issues. To be serious only about sex

Is perhaps one way, but the sands are hissing
 As they approach the beginning of the big slide
 Into what happened. This past
 Is now here: the painter's 495
 Reflected face, in which we linger, receiving
 Dreams and inspirations on an unassigned
 Frequency, but the hues have turned metallic,
 The curves and edges are not so rich. Each person
 Has one big theory to explain the universe 500
 But it doesn't tell the whole story
 And in the end it is what is outside him
 That matters, to him and especially to us
 Who have been given no help whatever
 In decoding our own man-size quotient and must rely 505
 On second-hand knowledge. Yet I know
 That no one else's taste is going to be
 Any help, and might as well be ignored.
 Once it seemed so perfect—gloss on the fine
 Freckled skin, lips moistened as though about to part 510
 Releasing speech, and the familiar look
 Of clothes and furniture that one forgets.
 This could have been our paradise: exotic
 Refuge within an exhausted world, but that wasn't
 In the cards, because it couldn't have been 515
 The point. Aping naturalness may be the first step
 Toward achieving an inner calm
 But it is the first step only, and often
 Remains a frozen gesture of welcome etched
 On the air materializing behind it, 520
 A convention. And we have really
 No time for these, except to use them
 For kindling. The sooner they are burnt up
 The better for the roles we have to play.
 Therefore I beseech you, withdraw that hand, 525
 Offer it no longer as shield or greeting,
 The shield of a greeting, Francesco:
 There is room for one bullet in the chamber:
 Our looking through the wrong end
 Of the telescope as you fall back at a speed 530
 Faster than that of light to flatten ultimately
 Among the features of the room, an invitation
 Never mailed, the "it was all a dream"
 Syndrome, though the "all" tells tersely
 Enough how it wasn't. Its existence 535
 Was real, though troubled, and the ache
 Of this waking dream can never drown out
 The diagram still sketched on the wind,
 Chosen, meant for me and materialized
 In the disguising radiance of my room. 540
 We have seen the city; it is the gibbous¹

1. Irregularly rounded or convex (for example, the form of the moon between half moon and full moon).

Mirrored eye of an insect. All things happen
 On its balcony and are resumed within,
 But the action is the cold, syrupy flow
 Of a pageant. One feels too confined, 545
 Sifting the April sunlight for clues,
 In the mere stillness of the ease of its
 Parameter.² The hand holds no chalk
 And each part of the whole falls off
 And cannot know it knew, except 550
 Here and there, in cold pockets
 Of remembrance, whispers out of time.

1975

Myrtle

How funny your name would be
 if you could follow it back to where
 the first person thought of saying it,
 naming himself that, or maybe
 some other persons thought of it 5
 and named that person. It would
 be like following a river to its source,
 which would be impossible. Rivers have no source.
 They just automatically appear at a place
 where they get wider, and soon a real 10
 river comes along, with fish and debris,
 regal as you please, and someone
 has already given it a name: St. Benno¹
 (saints are popular for this purpose) or, or
 some other name, the name of his 15
 long-lost girlfriend, who comes
 at long last to impersonate that river,
 on a stage, her voice clanking
 like its bed, her clothing of sand
 and pasted paper, a piece of real technology, 20
 while all along she is thinking, I can
 do what I want to do. But I want to stay here.

1996

2. A constant whose values characterize the variables in a system.

1. St. Benno of Meissen (1010–1106), patron of angling.

W. S. MERWIN

b. 1927

“I started writing hymns for my father almost as soon as I could write at all, illustrating them,” W. S. Merwin has said. “I recall some rather stern little pieces addressed . . . to backsliders, but I can remember too wondering whether there might not be some liberating mode.” William Stanley Merwin’s father was a Presbyterian minister in Union, New Jersey, and Scranton, Pennsylvania, where Merwin grew up. Apart from hymn writing Merwin had almost no acquaintance with poetry until, on a scholarship, he entered Princeton University. There he read verse steadily and began to write with the encouragement of the poet John Berryman and the critic R. P. Blackmur, as well as his classmate, Galway Kinnell. Then Merwin’s extensive study of foreign languages and literatures enabled him to find work as a tutor abroad. He remained, like Ezra Pound, apart from American literary institutions and became a translator of European literature, especially medieval romance and modern Symbolist poetry.

Merwin’s continuing activity as a translator has been a resource and stimulus for his own poetry. In translating two great medieval epics, the French *Song of Roland* (1963) and the Spanish *The Poem of the Cid* (1959), his object was to bring into English a diction “rough, spare, sinewy, rapid” that would transmit the directness and energy of the world of chivalric imagination. His first book, *A Masque for Janus* (1952), includes ballads, songs, and carols—often based on medieval verse forms—the slightly antique diction of which gives an air of simple mystery to poems about love, inner heroism, and death.

In later books Merwin drew his subjects from a more clearly contemporary context. Many of the poems in *The Drunk in the Furnace* (1960) and *The Moving Target* (1963) are about members of his family and memories of his boyhood in Scranton. A further change came with *The Lice* (1967), a volume whose brief, prophetic poems reflect Merwin’s despair at that time: he believed “the future was so bleak that there was no point in writing anything at all”; what happened was that “the poems kind of pushed their way upon me when I wasn’t thinking about writing.” This despair and an accompanying anger are palpable in a poem like “For a Coming Extinction.” In many of these poems and those of volumes immediately following, Merwin tries to reach below the surface of urban American experience but without the benefit of narrative or preestablished metrical forms. He speaks through humble figures, as in “Peasant: His Prayer to the Powers of This World.” Or he uses the most commonplace occurrences as a point of departure for meditation: “Evening, or Daybreak.” His poems quickly become parables, spoken in a voice concerned less with descriptive detail than with archetypal elements: the ways in which each evening prefigures death, each dawn the passing of time.

Of these short poems Merwin says: “What is needed for any particular nebulous unwritten hope that may become a poem is not a manipulable, more or less predictable recurring pattern, but an unduplicatable resonance, something that would be like an echo except that it is repeating no sound.” Hence his unpunctuated lines of varying lengths, which seem a series of related oracular phrases, each corresponding to a breath. The poems frequently use the metaphor of a threshold or door, locating the reader at a moment between life and death or between life and a

visionary afterlife. The poet is stationed at that imagined spot between the past and the present or between the present and the future. In 1973 he prepared *Asian Figures*, a series of adaptations of Asian proverbs, that reflect his continuing interest in compact meditative forms such as rituals and prayers.

Merwin has always been concerned with absence, with what is silent, vanished, invisible, yet real. In many of the poems gathered in his *Selected Poems* (1988) and *The Rain in the Trees* (1988), this concern focuses on forms of life endangered by ecological destruction. Merwin resides primarily in Hawaii, and his book-length narrative poem *The Folding Cliffs* (1998) explores Hawaiian history while gathering together, in his description, “almost all of my interests—interests in nonliterate peoples, in their and our relation to the earth, to the primal sources of things, our relation to the natural world, . . . the destruction of the earth for abstract and greedy reasons.” Merwin’s singular power in both shorter and longer poems is beautifully evident in his collection *The River Sound* (1999). His *Migration: New and Selected Poems* (2005), which gathers work from the 1960s through 2005, received the National Book Award for poetry. *The Shadow of Sirius* (2008) won the Pulitzer Prize, and a two-volume edition of his *Collected Poems* was published by The Library of America in 2013. In 2010 Merwin was appointed the seventeenth Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

The Drunk in the Furnace

For a good decade

The furnace stood in the naked gully, fireless
 And vacant as any hat. Then when it was
 No more to them than a hulking black fossil
 To erode unnoticed with the rest of the junk-hill 5
 By the poisonous creek, and rapidly to be added
 To their ignorance.

They were afterwards astonished

To confirm, one morning, a twist of smoke like a pale
 Resurrection, staggering out of its chewed hole, 10
 And to remark then other tokens that someone,
 Cosily bolted behind the eye-holed iron
 Door of the drafty burner, had there established
 His bad castle.

Where he gets his spirits 15

It’s a mystery. But the stuff keeps him musical:
 Hammer-and-anvilling with poker and bottle
 To his jugged bellows, till the last groaning clang
 As he collapses onto the rioting
 Springs of a litter of car-seats ranged on the grates, 20
 To sleep like an iron pig.

In their tar-paper church

On a text about stoke-holes that are sated never
 Their Reverend lingers. They nod and hate trespassers.
 When the furnace wakes, though, all afternoon 25

Their witless offspring flock like piped rats¹ to its siren
 Crescendo, and agape on the crumbling ridge
 Stand in a row and learn.

1960

For the Anniversary of My Death

Every year without knowing it I have passed the day
 When the last fires will wave to me
 And the silence will set out
 Tireless traveller
 Like the beam of a lightless star 5

Then I will no longer
 Find myself in life as in a strange garment
 Surprised at the earth
 And the love of one woman
 And then shamelessness of men 10
 As today writing after three days of rain
 Hearing the wren sing and the falling cease
 And bowing not knowing to what

1967

For a Coming Extinction

Gray whale
 Now that we are sending you to The End
 That great god
 Tell him
 That we who follow you invented forgiveness 5
 And forgive nothing

I write as though you could understand
 And I could say it
 One must always pretend something
 Among the dying 10
 When you have left the seas nodding on their stalks
 Empty of you

Tell him that we were made
 On another day¹

1. Allusion to the Pied Piper of Hamelin, whose piping lured the rats from the town; when he was not paid, he lured away the children as well.

1. In Genesis 1, God creates humans on the sixth

day and gives them dominion over all other creatures in the world. The animals had been created on the fifth and sixth days.

The bewilderment will diminish like an echo 15
 Winding along your inner mountains
 Unheard by us
 And find its way out
 Leaving behind it the future
 Dead 20
 And ours

When you will not see again
 The whale calves trying the light
 Consider what you will find in the black garden
 And its court 25
 The sea cows the Great Auks the gorillas²
 The irreplaceable hosts ranged countless
 And fore-ordaining as stars
 Our sacrifices
 Join your word to theirs 30
 Tell him
 That it is we who are important

1967

Losing a Language

A breath leaves the sentences and does not come back
 yet the old still remember something that they could say

but they know now that such things are no longer believed
 and the young have fewer words

many of the things the words were about 5
 no longer exist

the noun for standing in mist by a haunted tree
 the verb for I

the children will not repeat
 the phrases their parents speak 10

somebody has persuaded them
 that it is better to say everything differently

so that they can be admired somewhere
 farther and farther away

where nothing that is here is known 15
 we have little to say to each other

2. Animals extinct or endangered. Sea cows are large walruslike animals. The great auks were large flightless sea birds.

we are wrong and dark
in the eyes of the new owners

the radio is incomprehensible
the day is glass 20

when there is a voice at the door it is foreign
everywhere instead of a name there is a lie

nobody has seen it happening
nobody remembers

this is what the words were made
to prophesy 25

here are the extinct feathers
here is the rain we saw

1988

Lament for the Makers¹

I that all through my early days
I remember well was always
the youngest of the company
save for one sister after me

from the time when I was able 5
to walk under the dinner table
and be punished for that promptly
because its leaves could fall on me

father and mother overhead
who they talked with and what they said 10
were mostly clouds that knew already
directions far too old for me

at school I skipped a grade so that
whatever I did after that
each year everyone would be 15
older and hold it up to me

at college many of my friends
were returning veterans

1. The title and stanza form of this poem are taken from the Scots poet William Dunbar (c. 1460–c. 1520), whose “Lament for the Makers” mourns the passing of fellow poets and confesses the poet’s fear of mortality. Merwin’s poem like-

wise commemorates the passing of fellow poets, a number of whom are represented in this anthology and can be found by consulting the index. Only the names of those poets not represented in this volume are annotated here.

equipped with an authority
 I admired and they treated me 20

as the kid some years below them
 so I married half to show them
 and listened with new vanity
 when I heard it said to me

how young I was and what a shock 25
 I was the youngest on the block
 I thought I had it coming to me
 and I believe it mattered to me

and seemed my own and there to stay
 for a while then came the day 30
 I was in another country
 other older friends around me

my youth by then taken for granted
 and found that it had been supplanted
 the notes in some anthology 35
 listed persons born after me

how long had that been going on
 how could I be not quite so young
 and not notice and nobody
 even bother to inform me 40

though my fond hopes were taking longer
 than I had hoped when I was younger
 a phrase that came more frequently
 to suggest itself to me

but the secret was still there 45
 safe in the unprotected air
 that breath that in its own words only
 sang when I was a child to me

and caught me helpless to convey it
 with nothing but the words to say it 50
 though it was those words completely
 and they rang it was clear to me

with a changeless overtone
 I have listened for since then
 hearing that note endlessly 55
 vary every time beyond me

trying to find where it comes from
 and to what words it may come
 and forever after be
 present for the thought kept at me 60

that my mother and every day
 of our lives would slip away
 like the summer and suddenly
 all would have been taken from me

but that presence I had known
 sometimes in words would not be gone
 and if it spoke even once for me
 it would stay there and be me 65

however few might choose those words
 for listening to afterwards
 there I would be awake to see
 a world that looked unchanged to me 70

I suppose that was what I thought
 young as I was then and that note
 sang from the words of somebody
 in my twenties I looked around me 75

to all the poets who were then
 living and whose lines had been
 sustenance and company
 and a light for years to me 80

I found the portraits of their faces
 first in the rows of oval spaces
 in Oscar Williams' *Treasury*²
 so they were settled long before me

and they would always be the same
 in that distance of their fame
 affixed in immortality
 during their lifetimes while around me 85

all was woods seen from a train
 no sooner glimpsed than gone again
 but those immortals constantly
 in some measure reassured me 90

then first there was Dylan Thomas
 from the White Horse³ taken from us
 to the brick wall I woke to see
 for years across the street from me 95

then word of the death of Stevens
 brought a new knowledge of silence

2. Oscar Williams's *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry* (1950), an anthology containing some of the major English and American modernists, featured on its cover oval portraits of the poets represented.

3. Thomas (1914–1953), a Welsh poet, collapsed at the White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village, and subsequently died, after drinking heavily while in New York City to take part in a reading of his play, *Under Milk Wood* (1954).

the nothing but there finally
 the sparrow saying *Be thou me* 100

how long his long auroras had
 played on the darkness overhead
 since I looked up from my Shelley
 and Arrowsmith⁴ first showed him to me

and not long from his death until 105
 Edwin Muir⁵ had fallen still
 that fine bell of the latter day
 not well heard yet it seems to me

Sylvia Plath then took her own
 direction into the unknown 110
 from her last stars and poetry
 in the house a few blocks from me

Williams⁶ a little afterwards
 was carried off by the black rapids
 that flowed through Paterson as he 115
 said and their rushing sound is in me

that was the time that gathered Frost⁷
 into the dark where he was lost
 to us but from too far to see
 his voice keeps coming back to me 120

at the number he had uttered
 to the driver a last word
 then that watchful and most lonely
 wanderer whose words went with me

everywhere Elizabeth 125
 Bishop lay alone in death
 they were leaving the party early
 our elders it came home to me

but the needle moved among us
 taking always by surprise 130
 flicking by too fast to see
 to touch a friend born after me

4. William Arrowsmith (1924–1992), scholar and translator, was a classmate and friend of Merwin's when they were undergraduates at Princeton University. "Be Thou Me" appears in canto VI of "It Must Change," from Wallace Stevens's long poem *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*: "Bethou me, said sparrow, to the crackled blade, / And you, and you, bethou me as you blow, / When in my coppice you behold me be." Stevens (1879–1955) is echoing canto V of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), "Ode to the West Wind":

"Be thou, Spirit Fierce, / My spirit. Be thou me, impetuous one!" Another of Stevens's long poems is titled "The Auroras of Autumn."

5. Scottish poet (1887–1963).

6. William Carlos Williams (1883–1963), American modernist poet whose work includes the long autobiographical poem *Paterson*.

7. Robert Frost (1874–1963), American poet whose works include "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

and James Wright by his darkened river
 heard the night heron pass over
 took his candle down the frosty
 road and disappeared before me 135

Howard Moss⁸ had felt the gnawing
 at his name and found that nothing
 made it better he was funny
 even so about it to me 140

Graves⁹ in his nineties lost the score
 forgot that he had died before
 found his way back innocently
 who once had been a guide to me

Nemerov¹ sadder than his verse 145
 said a new year could not be worse
 then the black flukes of agony
 went down leaving the words with me

Stafford² watched his hand catch the light
 seeing that it was time to write 150
 a memento of their story
 signed and is a plain before me

then the sudden news that Ted
 Roethke had been found floating dead
 in someone's pool at night but he 155
 still rises from his lines for me

and on the rimless wheel in turn
 Eliot³ spun and Jarrell was borne
 off by a car who had loved to see
 the racetrack then there came to me 160

one day the knocking at the garden
 door and the news that Berryman
 from the bridge had leapt who twenty
 years before had quoted to me

the passage where *a jest* wrote Crane 165
*falls from the speechless caravan*⁴
 with a wave to bones and Henry⁵
 and to all that he had told me

8. American poet (1922–1987).

9. Robert Graves (1895–1985), poet and translator whose work includes *The White Goddess* (1944). As a young man Merwin worked for a short time as a tutor for Graves's children.

1. Howard Nemerov (1920–1991), American poet.

2. William Stafford (1914–1993), American poet.

3. T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), Anglo-American modernist poet.

4. Hart Crane (1899–1952), American poet, author of the poetic sequence *The Bridge* (1930), from which the lines in italics are taken.

5. Characters in John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, selections from which appear in this volume.

I dreamed that Auden⁶ sat up in bed
 but I could not catch what he said 170
 by the time he was already
 dead someone next morning told me

and Marianne Moore entered the ark
 Pound⁷ would say no more from the dark 175
 who once had helped to set me free
 I thought of the prose around me

and David Jones⁸ would rest until
 the turn of time under the hill
 but from the sleep of Arthur⁹ he
 wakes an echo that follows me 180

Lowell thought the shadow skyline
 coming toward him was Manhattan
 but it blacked out in the taxi
 once he read his *Notebook* to me

now Jimmy Merrill's voice is heard 185
 like an aria afterward
 and we know he will never be
 old after all who spoke to me

on the cold street that last evening
 of his heart that leapt at finding 190
 some yet unknown poetry
 then waved through the window to me

in that city we were born in
 one by one they have all gone
 out of the time and language we 195
 had in common which have brought me

to this season after them
 the best words did not keep them from
 leaving themselves finally
 as this day is going from me 200

and the clear note they were hearing
 never promised anything
 but the true sound of brevity
 that will go on after me

1996

6. W. H. Auden (1907–1973), Anglo-American poet.

7. Marianne Moore (1887–1972) and Ezra Pound (1885–1972), American modernist poets.

8. Anglo-Welsh artist and poet (1895–1974).

9. The legendary King Arthur, who ruled over the Knights of the Round Table, figures in several of David Jones's poems and essays.

Ceremony after an Amputation

Spirits of the place who were here before I saw it
 to whom I have made such offerings as I have known how to make
 wanting from the first to approach you with recognition
 bringing for your swept ridge trees lining the wind with seedlings
 that have grown now to become these long wings in chorus 5
 where the birds assemble and settle their flying lives
 you have taught me without meaning and have lifted me up
 without talk or promise and again and again reappeared to me
 unmistakable and changing and unpronounceable as a face

dust of the time a day in late spring after the silk of rain 10
 had fallen softly through the night and after the green morning
 the afternoon floating brushed with gold and then the sounds
 of machines erupting across the valley and elbowing up the slopes
 pushing themselves forward to occupy you to be more of you
 who remain the untouched silence through which they are passing 15
 I try to hear you remembering that we are not separate
 to find you who cannot be lost or elsewhere or incomplete

nature of the solitary machine coming into the story
 from the minds that conceived you and the hands that first
 conjured up
 the phantom of you in fine lines on the drawing board 20
 you for whom function is all the good that exists
 you to whom I have come with nothing but purpose
 a purpose of my own as though it was something we shared
 you that were pried from the earth without anyone
 consulting you and were carried off burned beaten metamorphosed 25
 according to plans and lives to which you owed nothing

let us be at peace with each other let peace be what is between us
 and you now single vanished part of my left hand bit of bone
 finger-end index
 who began with me in the dark that was already my mother
 you who touched whatever I could touch of the beginning 30
 and were how I touched and who remembered the sense of it
 when I thought I had forgotten it you in whom it waited
 under your only map of one untrodden mountain
 you who did as well as we could through all the hours at the piano
 and who helped undo the bras and found our way to the treasure 35

and who held the fruit and the pages and knew how to button
 my right cuff and to wash my left ear and had taken in
 heart beats of birds and beloved faces and hair by day and by night
 fur of dogs ears of horses tongues and the latches of doors
 so that I still feel them clearly long after they are gone 40
 and lake water beside the boat one evening of an ancient summer
 and the vibration of a string over which a bow was moving
 as though the sound of the note were still playing
 and the hand of my wife found in the shallows of waking

you who in a flicker of my inattention 45
 signalled to me once only my error telling me
 of the sudden blow from the side so that I looked down
 to see not you any longer but instead a mouth
 full of blood calling after you who had already gone gone
 gone ahead into what I cannot know or reach or touch 50
 leaving in your place only the cloud of pain rising
 into the day filling the light possessing every sound
 becoming the single color and taste and direction

yet as the pain recedes and the moment of it
 you remain with me even in the missing of you 55
 small boat moving before me on the current under the daylight
 whatever you had touched and had known and took with you
 is with me now as you are when you are already there
 unseen part of me reminding me warning me
 pointing to what I cannot see never letting me forget 60
 you are my own speaking only to me going with me
 all the rest of the way telling me what is still here

2000

JAMES WRIGHT

1927–1980

“My name is James A. Wright, and I was born / Twenty-five miles from this
 infected grave, / In Martins Ferry, Ohio, where one slave / To Hazel-Atlas
 Glass became my father”; so James Wright introduced himself in an early poem, “At
 the Executed Murderer’s Grave.” The angry assertiveness in these lines suggests his
 embattled relations with an America he loves and hates. This America is symbol-
 ized for him by the landscape of Ohio, in particular by Martins Ferry, just across
 the Ohio River from Wheeling, West Virginia, the home of Wheeling Steel and of
 the glass factory where his father worked for fifty years. In Wright’s work this land-
 scape is harsh evidence of the way the social world has contaminated a natural
 world infinitely more beautiful and self-restoring. The same social world that destroys
 the landscape also turns its back on those whose lives meet failure or defeat, and
 Wright’s deep knowledge of defeat and his anger at this exclusion lead him to the
 murderer’s grave. It is not simply that Wright sympathizes with social outcasts, but
 rather, as Robert Hass acutely pointed out, “the suffering of other people, particu-
 larly the lost and the derelict, is actually a part of his own emotional life. It is what
 he writes from, not what he writes about.” As a poet who writes out of loss, Wright
 is elegiac, memorializing a vanished beauty and lost hopes. So deep is his sense of
 loss that he will sometimes identify with anyone and anything that is scarred or
 wounded (“I am not a happy man by talent,” he once said. “Sometimes I have been
 very happy, but characteristically I’m a miserable son of a bitch”). Any serious reading
 of his work has to contend with sorting out those poems in which this identification

is unthinking and sentimental, poems where Wright suggests that all forms of suffering and defeat are equal and alike. What remains in some of his best work is a curiously tough-minded tenderness at work in his exploration of despair. He admires, for example, the sumac flourishing in the Ohio landscape, its bark so tough it “will turn aside hatchets and knife blades” (“The Sumac in Ohio”).

When Wright finished high school, he joined the army. In 1948 he left the military to attend Kenyon College in Ohio on the G.I. Bill. (“I applied to several schools in Ohio,” he once said, “and they all said no except Kenyon College. So I went there.”) He was lucky in his teachers; at Kenyon he studied with John Crowe Ransom and, after a Fulbright scholarship to the University of Vienna, he went to the University of Washington, where he studied with the poet Theodore Roethke and also became a close friend of Richard Hugo’s. At Washington he wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on Charles Dickens and received the degree in 1959. Thereafter he became a teacher, first at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (1957–64), and later at Hunter College, New York (1966–80).

From both Ransom and Roethke, Wright learned poetic form. From Ransom in particular he took what he called “the Horatian ideal” of the carefully made, unified poem. Wright would later say that were he to choose a master, he would choose the Latin poet Horace, “who was able to write humorously and kindly in flawless verse.” The Horatian impulse in Wright—restrained, formal, sometimes satirical—helps hold in check a deep-seated romanticism that idealizes nature and the unconscious. His first two books, *The Green Wall* (1957), chosen to appear in the Yale Younger Poets series, and *Saint Judas* (1959), are formal and literary in style although much of their subject matter (the murderer, the lunatic, a deaf child) might be called Romantic. Wright seems in these books closest to Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, and Edwin Arlington Robinson. But in the 1960s, like a great many other American poets, he moved away from traditional forms, explored more open and improvisatory poetic structures, and began to depend heavily on what his fellow poet Robert Bly called “the deep image.” Wright had been translating the work of Spanish poets often associated with surrealism—Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, and Juan Ramón Jiménez—as well as the German Georg Trakl (whom he translated in collaboration with Bly), and he took from them, in part, a reliance on the power of a poetic image to evoke association deep within the unconscious. He followed his volume *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963) with two books, *Shall We Gather at the River* (1968) and *Two Citizens* (1974), in which he began to overwork certain images (“stone,” “dark”), as if repetition were a substitute for clarity. Some of the poems in these books succeed in carrying us into areas of experience that resist the discursive, but the effect of a number of poems is to exclude conscious intelligence, to celebrate “whatever is not mind,” as Robert Hass has pointed out. It is as if Wright responded to the scarred landscape outside (and inside) him by fleeing to an inwardness so deep it could not partake of thought or expression.

But Wright’s love of clarity and form and his ability to see through pretensions (including his own) resurface in *Moments of the Italian Summer* (1976), *To a Blossoming Pear Tree* (1977), and his posthumous last collection, *This Journey* (1982). Restored to a unity of thinking and feeling, many of the poems in these books convey the flawed beauty of the world with a loving and witty tenderness. He often writes with particular feeling about creatures—finches, lizards, hermit crabs—whose liveliness and fragility touch him (in this and other regards his work has been important to the poet Mary Oliver). In “A Finch Sitting Out a Windstorm,” his final portrait of the finch suggests admiration of its stubbornness in the face of loss: “But his face is as battered / As Carmen Basilio’s. / He never listens / To me.”

Though the poems of his final book do not abandon the anger he feels thinking of the ruined landscapes of Ohio, the European setting of many of the poems extends his sense of ruin into a knowledge of how time chips away at all human creation,

with or without the help of men and women. Although he had claimed to be constitutionally unhappy, the poems of *This Journey* suggest that before his death from cancer a deep happiness took him by surprise. We turn to Wright's work for its fierce understanding of defeat, for its blend of American speech rhythms with the formal music of poetry, and for the loveliness he finds in the imperfect and neglected. Accustomed to expect the worst, he had an enduring capacity to be astonished by this loveliness, as in this childhood memory of a trip to the icehouse with his father: "We stood and breathed the rising steam of that amazing winter, and carried away in our wagon the immense fifty-pound diamond, while the old man chipped us each a jagged little chunk and then walked behind us, his hands so calm they were trembling for us, trembling with exquisite care" ("The Ice House").

Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio

In the Shreve High football stadium,
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville,
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood,¹
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes. 5

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home.
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful 10
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

1963

To the Evening Star: Central Minnesota

Under the water tower at the edge of town
A huge Airedale ponders a long ripple
In the grass fields beyond.
Miles off, a whole grove silently
Flies up into the darkness. 5
One light comes on in the sky,
One lamp on the prairie.

Beautiful daylight of the body, your hands carry seashells.
West of this wide plain,
Animals wilder than ours 10
Come down from the green mountains in the darkness.

1. A town south of Martins Ferry, where the Wheeling Steel Works are located. Tiltonsville is a town in easternmost Ohio, north of Martins Ferry.

Now they can see you, they know
The open meadows are safe.

1963

A Blessing

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows 5
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come. 10
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms, 15
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear 20
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

1963

A Centenary Ode: Inscribed to Little Crow, Leader of the Sioux Rebellion in Minnesota, 1862¹

I had nothing to do with it. I was not here.
I was not born.
In 1862, when your hotheads
Raised hell from here to South Dakota,
My own fathers scattered into West Virginia 5
And southern Ohio.
My family fought the Confederacy

1. Under Little Crow a group of Sioux attacked and killed more than eight hundred settlers and soldiers in Minnesota. They were eventually

routed by federal troops. About a month later Little Crow, while foraging for food, was shot by white farmers.

And fought the Union.²
 None of them got killed.
 But for all that, it was not my fathers
 Who murdered you. 10
 Not much.

I don't know
 Where the fathers of Minneapolis finalized
 Your flayed carcass. 15
 Little Crow, true father
 Of my dark America.
 When I close my eyes I lose you among
 Old loneliness.
 My family were a lot of singing drunks and good carpenters. 20
 We had brothers who loved one another no matter what they did.
 And they did plenty.

I think they would have run like hell from your Sioux.
 And when you caught them you all would have run like hell
 From the Confederacy and from the Union 25
 Into the hills and hunted for a few things,
 Some bull-cat under the stones, a gar³ maybe,
 If you were hungry, and if you were happy,
 Sunfish and corn.

If only I knew where to mourn you, 30
 I would surely mourn.

But I don't know.

I did not come here only to grieve
 For my people's defeat.
 The troops of the Union, who won, 35
 Still outnumber us.
 Old Paddy Beck, my great-uncle, is dead
 At the old soldiers' home near Tiffen, Ohio.
 He got away with every last stitch
 Of his uniform, save only 40
 The dress trousers.

Oh all around us,
 The hobo jungles of America grow wild again.
 The pick handles bloom like your skinned spine.
 I don't even know where 45
 My own grave is.

1971

2. During the Civil War members of Wright's family fought on both sides of the conflict.

3. Long pikelike freshwater fish. "Bull-cat": catfish.

With the Shell of a Hermit Crab

*Lugete, O Veneres Cupidinesque*¹
—Catullus

This lovely little life whose toes
Touched the white sand from side to side,
How delicately no one knows,
Crept from his loneliness, and died.

From deep waters long miles away 5
He wandered, looking for his name,
And all he found was you and me,
A quick life and a candle flame.

Today, you happen to be gone. 10
I sit here in the raging hell,
The city of the dead, alone,
Holding a little empty shell.

I peer into his tiny face. 15
It looms too huge for me to bear.
Two blocks away the sea gives place
To river. Both are everywhere.

I reach out and flick out the light. 20
Darkly I touch his fragile scars,
So far away, so delicate,
Stars in a wilderness of stars.

1977

1. Mourn, O Venuses and Cupids (Latin). The opening line of the ancient Roman poet Catullus's "Poem 3," a mock-elegy on the death of his mistress's bird.

PHILIP LEVINE

1928–2015

In one of his poems Philip Levine imagines a former life “as a small, quick fox” who stands “in the pathway shouting and refusing / to budge, feeling the dignity / of the small creature menaced / by the many and larger” (“The Fox”). This self-portrait has Levine’s characteristic humor, but it aptly renders his deep, even stubborn, sympathy with ordinary men and women and his equally stubborn antipathy toward those who look down on ordinary life. Levine shared the faith of his favorite poet, Walt Whitman, in an inclusive, democratic poetry, and, with Whitman, he could boast that he was “one of the roughs.”

Levine was born to a Jewish family in Detroit, Michigan, and began factory work at fourteen, during the war years. He continued to work while he attended Wayne (now Wayne State) University in Detroit and had what he called “a succession of stupid jobs”—working in a bottling corporation, for Cadillac, for Chevrolet Gear and Axle, and for Wyandotte Chemical Company. At one point in his life he also trained as a boxer. In 1957 he received an MFA from the University of Iowa, where the poets John Berryman and Robert Lowell were his teachers. In 1958 he moved to California and taught for many years at California State University at Fresno, where his students included Sherley Ann Williams, David St. John, Luis Omar Salinas, and Gary Soto. In the mid-1960s he went to Spain for the first time and felt “when I looked at the Spanish landscape I was looking at a part of myself. . . . In a year I began to become Catalan in a small way.” He would later edit and translate the work of two Spanish poets, Gloria Fuentes and Jaime Sabines. For many years he taught at New York University.

His fellow poet Galway Kinnell once suggested that Levine “used to hold something back as if for fear poetry would betray him into tenderness. In his recent poems, it has done exactly that.” Although an anger at society energizes many Levine poems—including the title poem of his book *They Feed They Lion* (1972), a response to the 1967 riots in his native Detroit—his twenty-some volumes of poetry demonstrate a wide range of feeling. At heart he is a narrative poet, even in his brief lyrics, like Thomas Hardy or Robert Penn Warren—both of whom he admired. His stories most often tell of loss and remembrance, and Levine’s elegiac strain is one source of his tenderness. Feeling himself in a world where “No One Remembers” (the title of one of his poems), where life is characterized by impermanence, his poems re-create the people, landscapes, and events that make up—as the title of his 1976 collection puts it—*The Names of the Lost*. His books, *What Work Is* (1991), *The Simple Truth* (1994), *The Mercy* (1999), *Breath* (2004), and *News of the World* (2007), show Levine using the full range of his gifts—his narrative skill, his affection and respect for the ordinary person, his acute sense of place—with increasing ambition and rhythmic power.

With its rapid motion between the colloquial and the lyrical, Levine’s best work has a distinctively gritty radiance. A strong, physical sense grounds his powerful nostalgia, giving us a world we can see and touch. Levine called himself a Romantic, and one of the dangers in his work is its tendency to inflate experience. Saving him from such inflation, though, is a lively, subversive, comic sense often directed at himself. His memorable poems are energetic; they vary the stresses of syntax against the short, trimeter line in which he often composes and accumulate power as they move along. But Levine’s lines can sometimes seem arbitrary, as if what we really had was prose broken into pieces. In the work of the poets he most admired, Levine often argued, the failures do not matter—all that matters are the genuine poems. His own best poems rise out of a world we inhabit in common, where the experiences of ordinary life and work are transfused with energy and feeling. On Levine’s appointment as Poet Laureate for 2011–12, he was called a laureate “of the industrial heartland.”

Animals Are Passing from Our Lives

It’s wonderful how I jog
on four honed-down ivory toes
my massive buttocks slipping
like oiled parts with each light step.

I'm to market. I can smell
 the sour, grooved block, I can smell
 the blade that opens the hole
 and the pudgy white fingers 5

that shake out the intestines
 like a hankie. In my dreams
 the snouts drool on the marble,
 suffering children, suffering flies, 10

suffering the consumers
 who won't meet their steady eyes
 for fear they could see. The boy
 who drives me along believes 15

that any moment I'll fall
 on my side and drum my toes
 like a typewriter or squeal
 and shit like a new housewife 20

discovering television,
 or that I'll turn like a beast
 cleverly to hook his teeth
 with my teeth. No. Not this pig.

1968

Detroit Grease Shop Poem

Four bright steel crosses,
 universal joints,¹ plucked
 out of the burlap sack—
 “the heart of the drive train,”
 the book says. Stars 5
 on Lemon's wooden palm,
 stars that must be capped,
 rolled, and anointed,
 that have their orders
 and their commands as he 10
 has his.

Under the blue
 hesitant light another day
 at Automotive
 in the city of dreams. 15
 We're all here to count
 and be counted, Lemon,
 Rosie, Eugene, Luis,
 and me, too young to know

1. Shaft couplings designed to transmit rotation from one shaft to another.

this is for keeps, pinning
 on my apron, rolling up
 my sleeves. 20

The roof leaks
 from yesterday's rain,
 the waters gather above us 25
 waiting for one mistake.
 When a drop falls on Lemon's
 corded arm, he looks at it
 as though it were something
 rare or mysterious 30
 like a drop of water or
 a single lucid meteor
 fallen slowly from
 nowhere and burning on
 his skin like a tear. 35

1972

Starlight

My father stands in the warm evening
 on the porch of my first house.
 I am four years old and growing tired.
 I see his head among the stars,
 the glow of his cigarette, redder 5
 than the summer moon riding
 low over the old neighborhood: We
 are alone, and he asks me if I am happy.
 "Are you happy?" I cannot answer.
 I do not really understand the word, 10
 and the voice, my father's voice, is not
 his voice, but somehow thick and choked,
 a voice I have not heard before, but
 heard often since. He bends and passes
 a thumb beneath each of my eyes. 15
 The cigarette is gone, but I can smell
 the tiredness that hangs on his breath.
 He has found nothing, and he smiles
 and holds my head with both his hands.
 Then he lifts me to his shoulder, 20
 and now I too am there among the stars,
 as tall as he. Are you happy? I say.
 He nods in answer, Yes! oh yes! oh yes!
 And in that new voice he says nothing,
 holding my head tight against his head, 25
 his eyes closed up against the starlight,
 as though those tiny blinking eyes
 of light might find a tall, gaunt child

holding his child against the promises
 of autumn, until the boy slept
 never to waken in that world again. 30

1979

The Simple Truth

I bought a dollar and a half's worth of small red potatoes,
 took them home, boiled them in their jackets
 and ate them for dinner with a little butter and salt.
 Then I walked through the dried fields
 on the edge of town. In middle June the light 5
 hung on in the dark furrows at my feet,
 and in the mountain oaks overhead the birds
 were gathering for the night, the jays and mockers
 squawking back and forth, the finches still darting
 into the dusty light. The woman who sold me 10
 the potatoes was from Poland; she was someone
 out of my childhood in a pink spangled sweater and sunglasses
 praising the perfection of all her fruits and vegetables
 at the road-side stand and urging me to taste
 even the pale, raw sweet corn trucked all the way, 15
 she swore, from New Jersey. "Eat, eat," she said,
 "Even if you don't I'll say you did."

Some things

you know all your life. They are so simple and true
 they must be said without elegance, meter and rhyme, 20
 they must be laid on the table beside the salt shaker,
 the glass of water, the absence of light gathering
 in the shadows of picture frames, they must be
 naked and alone, they must stand for themselves.
 My friend Henri and I arrived at this together in 1965 25
 before I went away, before he began to kill himself,
 and the two of us to betray our love. Can you taste
 what I'm saying? It is onions or potatoes, a pinch
 of simple salt, the wealth of melting butter, it is obvious,
 it stays in the back of your throat like a truth 30
 you never uttered because the time was always wrong,
 it stays there for the rest of your life, unspoken,
 made of that dirt we call earth, the metal we call salt,
 in a form we have no words for, and you live on it.

1996

ANNE SEXTON

1928–1974

Anne Sexton's first book of poems, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), was published at a time when the label "confessional" came to be attached to poems more frankly autobiographical than had been usual in American verse. For Sexton the term is particularly apt. Although she had abandoned the Roman Catholicism into which she was born, her poems enact something analogous to preparing for and receiving religious absolution.

Sexton's confessions were to be made in terms more startling than the traditional Catholic images of her childhood. The purpose of her poems was not to analyze or explain behavior but to make it palpable in all its ferocity of feeling. Poetry "should be a shock to the senses. It should also hurt." This is apparent in both her themes and the ways in which she exhibits her subjects. Sexton writes about sex, illegitimacy, guilt, madness, and suicide. *To Bedlam* portrays her breakdown, her time in a mental hospital, her efforts at reconciliation with her daughter and husband when she returns. Her second book, *All My Pretty Ones* (1962), takes its title from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and refers to the deaths of both her parents within three months of one another. Later books—*Live or Die* (1966), *The Death Notebooks* (1974), and *The Awful Rowing toward God* (1975; posthumous)—act out a debate about suicide and prefigure Sexton's taking of her own life. And yet, as the poet's tender address to her daughter in "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman" suggests, Sexton's work ranges beyond an obsession with death.

Sexton spoke of images as "the heart of poetry. Images come from the unconscious. Imagination and the unconscious are one and the same." Powerful images substantiate the strangeness of feelings and through them the poet attempts to redefine experiences so as to gain understanding, absolution, or revenge. Sexton's poems, poised between, as her titles suggest, life and death or "bedlam and part way back," are efforts at establishing a middle ground of self-assertion, substituting surreal images for the reductive versions of life visible to the exterior eye.

Sexton was born in 1928 in Newton, Massachusetts, and attended Garland Junior College. She came to poetry fairly late—when she was twenty-eight, after seeing the critic I. A. Richards lecturing about the sonnet on television. In the late 1950s she attended poetry workshops in the Boston area, including Robert Lowell's poetry seminars at Boston University. One of her fellow students was Sylvia Plath, whose suicide she commemorated in a poem, "Sylvia's Death." Sexton claimed that she was less influenced by Lowell's *Life Studies* than by W. D. Snodgrass's autobiographical *Heart's Needle* (1959), but certainly Lowell's support and the association with Plath left their mark on her and made it possible for her to publish. Although her career was relatively brief, she received several major literary prizes, including the Pulitzer Prize for *Live or Die* and an American Academy of Arts and Letters traveling fellowship. Her suicide came after a series of mental breakdowns.

The Truth the Dead Know

For My Mother, Born March 1902, Died March 1959
and My Father, Born February 1900, Died June 1959

Gone, I say and walk from church,
refusing the stiff procession to the grave,
letting the dead ride alone in the hearse.
It is June. I am tired of being brave.

We drive to the Cape. I cultivate
myself where the sun gutters from the sky,
where the sea swings in like an iron gate
and we touch. In another country people die.

5

My darling, the wind falls in like stones
from the whitehearted water and when we touch
we enter touch entirely. No one's alone.
Men kill for this, or for as much.

10

And what of the dead? They lie without shoes
in their stone boats. They are more like stone
than the sea would be if it stopped. They refuse
to be blessed, throat, eye and knucklebone.

15

1962

The Starry Night

That does not keep me from having a terrible
need of—shall I say the word—religion.
Then I go out at night to paint the stars.
—Vincent Van Gogh¹
in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die.

5

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

10

1. Dutch painter (1853–1890) who in his thirties committed suicide. This letter to his brother—his only confidant—was written in September 1888. At the time he was painting *Starry Night on the Rhône*.

into that rushing beast of the night,
 sucked up by that great dragon, to split
 from my life with no flag, 15
 no belly,
 no cry.

1962

Sylvia's Death

for Sylvia Plath¹

Oh Sylvia, Sylvia,
 with a dead box of stones and spoons,

 with two children, two meteors
 wandering loose in the tiny playroom,

 with your mouth into the sheet, 5
 into the roofbeam, into the dumb prayer,

 (Sylvia, Sylvia,
 where did you go
 after you wrote me
 from Devonshire 10
 about raising potatoes
 and keeping bees?)

 what did you stand by,
 just how did you lie down into?

 Thief!— 15
 how did you crawl into,

 crawl down alone
 into the death I wanted so badly and for so long,

 the death we said we both outgrew,
 the one we wore on our skinny breasts, 20

 the one we talked of so often each time
 we downed three extra dry martinis in Boston,

 the death that talked of analysts and cures,
 the death that talked like brides with plots,

1. American poet (1932–1963) and friend of Sexton's who committed suicide. Plath was living in England with her children, having separated from her husband, the poet Ted Hughes.

the death we drank to, 25
the motives and then the quiet deed?

(In Boston
the dying
ride in cabs,
yes death again, 30
that ride home
with *our* boy.)

O Sylvia, I remember the sleepy drummer
who beat on our eyes with an old story,

how we wanted to let him come 35
like a sadist or a New York fairy

to do his job,
a necessity, a window in a wall or a crib,

and since that time he waited
under our heart, our cupboard, 40

and I see now that we store him up
year after year, old suicides

and I know at the news of your death,
a terrible taste for it, like salt.

(And me, 45
me too.
And now, Sylvia,
you again
with death again,
that ride home 50
with *our* boy.)

And I say only
with my arms stretched out into that stone place,

what is your death
but an old belonging, 55

a mole that fell out
of one of your poems?

(O friend,
while the moon's bad,
and the king's gone, 60
and the queen's at her wit's end
the bar fly ought to sing!)

O tiny mother,
 you too!
 O funny duchess!
 O blonde thing!

65

February 17, 1963

1966

Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman

My daughter, at eleven
 (almost twelve), is like a garden.

Oh darling! Born in that sweet birthday suit
 and having owned it and known it for so long,
 now you must watch high noon enter—
 noon, that ghost hour. 5
 Oh, funny little girl—this one under a blueberry sky,
 this one! How can I say that I've known
 just what you know and just where you are?

It's not a strange place, this odd home 10
 where your face sits in my hand
 so full of distance,
 so full of its immediate fever.
 The summer has seized you,
 as when, last month in Amalfi,¹ I saw 15
 lemons as large as your desk-side globe—
 that miniature map of the world—
 and I could mention, too,
 the market stalls of mushrooms
 and garlic buds all engorged. 20
 Or I think even of the orchard next door,
 where the berries are done
 and the apples are beginning to swell.
 And once, with our first backyard,
 I remember I planted an acre of yellow beans 25
 we couldn't eat.

*Oh, little girl,
 my stringbean,
 how do you grow?
 You grow this way. 30
 You are too many to eat.*

I hear
 as in a dream
 the conversation of the old wives

1. A seaport town in Campania, Italy.

speaking of *womanhood*. 35
 I remember that I heard nothing myself.
 I was alone.
 I waited like a target.

Let high noon enter— 40
 the hour of the ghosts.
 Once the Romans believed
 that noon was the ghost hour,
 and I can believe it, too,
 under that startling sun,
 and someday they will come to you, 45
 someday, men bare to the waist, young Romans
 at noon where they belong,
 with ladders and hammers
 while no one sleeps.

But before they enter 50
 I will have said,
Your bones are lovely,
 and before their strange hands
 there was always this hand that formed.

Oh, darling, let your body in, 55
 let it tie you in,
 in comfort.
 What I want to say, Linda,
 is that women are born twice.

If I could have watched you grow 60
 as a magical mother might,
 if I could have seen through my magical transparent belly,
 there would have been such ripening within:
 your embryo,
 the seed taking on its own, 65
 life clapping the bedpost,
 bones from the pond,
 thumbs and two mysterious eyes,
 the awfully human head,
 the heart jumping like a puppy, 70
 the important lungs,
 the becoming—
 while it becomes!
 as it does now,
 a world of its own, 75
 a delicate place.

I say hello
 to such shakes and knockings and high jinks,
 such music, such sprouts,
 such dancing-mad-bears of music, 80
 such necessary sugar,
 such goings-on!

Oh, little girl,
 my stringbean,
 how do you grow? 85
 You grow this way.
 You are too many to eat.

What I want to say, Linda,
 is that there is nothing in your body that lies.
 All that is new is telling the truth. 90
 I'm here, that somebody else,
 an old tree in the background.

Darling,
 stand still at your door,
 sure of yourself, a white stone, a good stone— 95
 as exceptional as laughter
 you will strike fire,
 that new thing!

July 14, 1964 1966

*From The Death of the Fathers*¹

2. How We Danced

The night of my cousin's wedding
 I wore blue. 25
 I was nineteen
 and we danced, Father, we orbited.
 We moved like angels washing themselves.
 We moved like two birds on fire.
 Then we moved like the sea in a jar, 30
 slower and slower.
 The orchestra played
 "Oh how we danced on the night we were wed."
 And you waltzed me like a lazy Susan
 and we were dear, 35
 very dear.
 Now that you are laid out,
 useless as a blind dog,
 now that you no longer lurk,
 the song rings in my head. 40
 Pure oxygen was the champagne we drank
 and clicked our glasses, one to one.
 The champagne breathed like a skin diver
 and the glasses were crystal and the bride
 and groom gripped each other in sleep 45
 like nineteen-thirty marathon dancers.

1. Printed here are parts 2 and 3 of a six-part sequence.

Mother was a belle and danced with twenty men.
 You danced with me never saying a word.
 Instead the serpent spoke as you held me close.
 The serpent, that mocker, woke up and pressed against me 50
 like a great god and we bent together
 like two lonely swans.

3. *The Boat*

Father
 (he calls himself
 "old sea dog"), 55
 in his yachting cap
 at the wheel of the Chris-Craft,
 a mahogany speedboat
 named *Go Too III*,
 speeds out past Cuckold's Light² 60
 over the dark brainy blue.
 I in the very back
 with an orange life jacket on.
 I in the dare seat.
 Mother up front. 65
 Her kerchief flapping.
 The waves deep as whales.
 (Whales in fact have been sighted.
 A school two miles out of Boothbay Harbor.)³
 It is bumpy and we are going too fast. 70
 The waves are boulders that we ride upon.
 I am seen and we are riding
 to Pemaquid⁴ or Spain.
 Now the waves are higher;
 they are round buildings. 75
 We start to go through them
 and the boat shudders.
 Father is going faster.
 I am wet.
 I am tumbling on my seat 80
 like a loose kumquat.
 Suddenly
 a wave that we go under.
 Under. Under. Under.
 We are daring the sea. 85
 We have parted it.
 We are scissors.
 Here in the green room
 the dead are very close.
 Here in the pitiless green 90
 where there are no keepsakes
 or cathedrals an angel spoke:

2. A Maine lighthouse.

3. A coastal town in Maine.

4. A coastal village in Maine.

You have no business.
No business here.
 Give me a sign, 95
 cried Father,
 and the sky breaks over us.
 There is air to have.
 There are gulls kissing the boat.
 There is the sun as big as a nose. 100
 And here are the three of us
 dividing our deaths,
 bailing the boat
 and closing out
 the cold wing that has clasped us 105
 this bright August day.
 1972

PHILIP K. DICK

1928–1982

“I am a fictionalizing philosopher, not a novelist,” proclaimed Philip K. (Kindred) Dick, the author of forty-four novels and over a hundred short stories, most of them works of science fiction. He once remarked that his fiction took up two large questions: “What is Human?” and “What is Real?” Dick led a tumultuous life that added to the urgency with which he explored such questions. He struggled for decades with paranoia, mental illness, and drug addiction, and spent the last eight years of his life trying to interpret a mystical experience that occurred on February 3, 1974—“2-3-74” in the shorthand of his most ardent fans. His 1978 novel, *VALIS*, and his extensive journals deal with the revelations of that day. These experiences were informed by his interest in alternative religions and mystical traditions, particularly Gnosticism, and by his reading in the works of Plato and the influential early-twentieth-century psychologist Carl Jung (who coined the concept of the “archetype”—still in use today—a term based on the idea of a collective human unconscious). Dick wrote for those who, like himself, could not or would not, as he put it, “blunt their own intimations about the irrational, mysterious nature of reality.”

Dick was born in Chicago in 1928, and as a small child moved with his divorced mother to Berkeley, California, where he lived for much of his life. Dick’s twin sister, Jane, died of malnourishment eight weeks after birth, a fact that haunted Dick until his own death in 1982. He briefly attended the University of California at Berkeley (he didn’t like his ROTC training, though he enjoyed reading the philosopher David Hume), but never completed college. He was married five times and fathered three children.

Science fiction in lowbrow pulp magazines and (as with Patricia Highsmith) comics attracted the young Philip, and when he was fourteen he tried his hand at writing a science fiction novel. His passion for science fiction met the forces of

history in the 1950s and '60s, when the birth of the atomic age in America, the intensifying Cold War, and the advent of space exploration made futuristic scenarios and apocalyptic violence seem ever closer to the real world. The genre's popularity began to take off in these decades. Dick's success in this niche—in the course of his career he won several Nebula and Hugo awards, the highest honors for science fiction writing—was matched by his growing fame among a wide range of readers. In the early 1970s he was interviewed by *Rolling Stone*, featured in the *New Yorker*, and visited for a night by an admirer named Art Spiegelman (later the author of the graphic narrative *Maus*, excerpted in this volume). His work became important to scholars of postmodernism as well as to a broad swath of the general public, who saw film adaptations of his work in *Blade Runner* (1982), *Total Recall* (1990), *Minority Report* (2002), and *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011), among numerous other films based on his writings.

Dick's stories can read like logic problems. He once pointed out that "Precious Artifact," included here, demonstrated a particular story form that he explained this way: "What appears to be the case is Y but we find out the opposite is true (null-Y). But then that turns out not to be true, so are we back to Y? . . . Either I've invented a whole new logic or, ahem, I'm not playing with a full deck." Whatever his logic, Dick was adept at exploring fundamental longings, and that skill allowed his stories to transcend their heady structures. In them we find characters—and whole cultures—longing for the solace of animals, sex, companionship, social status, the beauty of the natural world, and some semblance of truth.

Precious Artifact

Below the 'copter of Milt Biskle lay newly fertile lands. He had done well with his area of Mars, verdant from his reconstruction of the ancient water-network. Spring, two springs each year, had been brought to this autumn world of sand and hopping toads, a land once made of dried soil cracking with the dust of former times, of a dreary and unwatered waste. Victim of the recent Prox-Terra conflict.

Quite soon the first Terran emigrants would appear, stake their claims, and take over. He could retire. Perhaps he could return to Terra or bring his own family here, receive priority of land-acquisition—as a reconstruct engineer he deserved it. Area Yellow had progressed far faster than the other engineers' sections. And now his reward came.

Reaching forward, Milt Biskle touched the button of his long-range transmitter. "This is Reconstruct Engineer Yellow," he said. "I'd like a psychiatrist. Anyone will do, so long as he's immediately available."

When Milt Biskle entered the office Dr. DeWinter rose and held out his hand. "I've heard," Dr. DeWinter said, "that you, of all the forty-odd reconstruct engineers, have been the most creative. It's no wonder you're tired. Even God had to rest after six days of such work, and you've been at it for years. As I was waiting for you to reach me I received a news memo from Terra that will interest you." He picked the memo up from his desk. "The initial transport of settlers is about to arrive here on Mars . . . and they'll go directly into your area. Congratulations, Mr. Biskle."

Rousing himself Milt Biskle said, "What if I returned to Earth?"

“But if you mean to stake a claim for your family, here—”

Milt Biskle said, “I want you to do something for me. I feel too tired, too—” He gestured. “Or depressed, maybe. Anyhow I’d like you to make arrangements for my gear, including my wug-plant, to be put aboard a transport returning to Terra.”

“Six years of work,” Dr. DeWinter said. “And now you’re abandoning your recompense. Recently I visited Earth and it’s just as you remember—”

“How do you know how I remember it?”

“Rather,” DeWinter corrected himself smoothly, “I should say it’s just as it was. Overcrowded, tiny conapts with seven families to a single cramped kitchen. Autobahns¹ so crowded you can’t make a move until eleven in the morning.”

“For me,” Milt Biskle said, “the overcrowding will be a relief after six years of robot autonomic² equipment.” He had made up his mind. In spite of what he had accomplished here, or perhaps because of it, he intended to go home. Despite the psychiatrist’s arguments.

Dr. DeWinter purred, “What if your wife and children, Milt, are among the passengers of this first transport?” Once more he lifted a document from his neatly arranged desk. He studied the paper, then said, “Biskle, Fay, Mrs. Laura C. June C. Woman and two girl children. Your family?”

“Yes,” Milt Biskle admitted woodenly; he stared straight ahead.

“So you see you can’t head back to Earth. Put on your hair and prepare to meet them at Field Three. And exchange your teeth. You’ve got the stainless steel ones in, at the moment.”

Chagrined, Biskle nodded. Like all Terrans he had lost his hair and teeth from the fallout during the war. For everyday service in his lonely job of reconstructing Yellow Area of Mars he made no use of the expensive wig which he had brought from Terra, and as to the teeth he personally found the steel ones far more comfortable than the natural-color plastic set. It indicated how far he had drifted from social interaction. He felt vaguely guilty; Dr. DeWinter was right.

But he had felt guilty ever since the defeat of the Proxmen. The war had embittered him; it didn’t seem fair that one of the two competing cultures would have to suffer, since the needs of both were legitimate.

Mars itself had been the locus of contention. Both cultures needed it as a colony on which to deposit surplus populations. Thank God Terra had managed to gain tactical mastery during the last year of the war . . . hence it was Terrans such as himself, and not Proxmen, patching up Mars.

“By the way,” Dr. DeWinter said. “I happen to know of your intentions regarding your fellow reconstruct engineers.”

Milt Biskle glanced up swiftly.

“As a matter of fact,” Dr. DeWinter said, “we know they’re at this moment gathering in Red Area to hear your account.” Opening his desk drawer he got out a yo-yo, stood up, and began to operate it expertly doing *walking the dog*.³ “Your panic-stricken speech to the effect that something is wrong, although you can’t seem to say just what it might be.”

1. Highways (German).

2. Autonomous.

3. A yo-yo trick, as is *around the world* (next page).

Watching the yo-yo Biskle said, "That's a toy popular in the Prox system. At least so I read in a homeopape article, once."

"Hmm. I understood it originated in the Philippines." Engrossed, Dr. DeWinter now did *around the world*. He did it well. "I'm taking the liberty of sending a disposition to the reconstruct engineers' gathering, testifying to your mental condition. It will be read aloud—sorry to say."

"I still intend to address the gathering," Biskle said.

"Well, then there's a compromise that occurs to me. Greet your little family when it arrives here on Mars and then we'll arrange a trip to Terra for you. At our expense. And in exchange you'll agree not to address the gathering of reconstruct engineers or burden them in any way with your nebulous forebodings." DeWinter eyed him keenly. "After all, this is a critical moment. The first emigrants are arriving. We don't want trouble; we don't want to make anyone uneasy."

"Would you do me a favor?" Biskle asked. "Show me that you've got a wig on. And that your teeth are false. Just so I can be sure that you're a Terran."

Dr. DeWinter tilted his wig and plucked out his set of false teeth.

"I'll take the offer," Milt Biskle said. "If you'll agree to make certain that my wife obtains the parcel of land I set aside for her."

Nodding, DeWinter tossed him a small white envelope. "Here's your ticket. Round-trip, of course, since you'll be coming back."

I hope so, Biskle thought as he picked up the ticket. But it depends on what I see on Terra. Or rather on what they *let* me see.

He had a feeling they'd let him see very little. In fact as little as Proxmanly possible.

When his ship reached Terra a smartly uniformed guide waited for him. "Mr. Biskle?" Trim and attractive and exceedingly young, she stepped forward alertly. "I'm Mary Ableseth, your Tourplan companion. I'll show you around the planet during your brief stay here." She smiled brightly and very professionally. He was taken aback. "I'll be with you constantly, night and day."

"Night, too?" he managed to say.

"Yes, Mr. Biskle. That's my job. We expect you to be disoriented due to your years of labor on Mars . . . labor we of Terra applaud and honor, as is right." She fell in beside him, steering him toward a parked 'copter. "Where would you like to go first? New York City? Broadway? To the night clubs and theaters and restaurants . . ."

"No, to Central Park. To sit on a bench."

"But there is no more Central Park, Mr. Biskle. It was turned into a parking lot for government employees while you were on Mars."

"I see," Milt Biskle said. "Well, then Portsmouth Square in San Francisco will do." He opened the door of the 'copter.

"That, too, has become a parking lot," Miss Ableseth said, with a sad shake of her long, luminous red hair. "We're so darn overpopulated. Try again, Mr. Biskle; there are a few parks left, one in Kansas, I believe, and *two* in Utah in the south part near St. George."

"This is bad news," Milt said. "May I stop at that amphetamine dispenser and put in my dime? I need a stimulant to cheer me up."

"Certainly," Miss Ableseth said, nodding graciously.

Milt Biskle walked to the spaceport's nearby stimulant dispenser, reached into his pocket, found a dime, and dropped the dime in the slot.

The dime fell completely through the dispenser and bounced onto the pavement.

"Odd," Biskle said, puzzled.

"I think I can explain that," Miss Ableseth said. "That dime of yours is a Martian dime, made for a lighter gravity."

"Hmm," Milt Biskle said, as he retrieved the dime. As Miss Ableseth had predicted, he felt disoriented. He stood by as she put in a dime of her own and obtained the small tube of amphetamine stimulants for him. Certainly her explanation seemed adequate. But—

"It is now eight P.M. local time," Miss Ableseth said. "And I haven't had dinner, although of course you have, aboard your ship. Why not take me to dinner? We can talk over a bottle of Pinot Noir⁴ and you can tell me these vague forebodings which have brought you to Terra, that something dire is wrong and that all your marvelous reconstruct work is pointless. I'd adore to hear about it." She guided him back to the 'copter and the two of them entered, squeezing into the back seat together. Milt Biskle found her to be warm and yielding, decidedly Terran; he became embarrassed and felt his heart pounding in effort-syndrome. It had been some time since he had been this close to a woman.

"Listen," he said, as the automatic circuit of the 'copter caused it to rise from the spaceport parking lot, "I'm married. I've got two children and I came here on business. I'm on Terra to prove that the Proxmen really won and that we few remaining Terrans are slaves of the Prox authorities, laboring for—" He gave up; it was hopeless. Miss Ableseth remained pressed against him.

"You really think," Miss Ableseth said presently, as the 'copter passed above New York City, "that I'm a Prox agent?"

"N-no," Milt Biskle said. "I guess not." It did not seem likely, under the circumstances.

"While you're on Terra," Miss Ableseth said, "why stay in an overcrowded, noisy hotel? Why not stay with me at my conapt in New Jersey? There's plenty of room and you're more than welcome."

"Okay," Biskle agreed, feeling the futility of arguing.

"Good." Miss Ableseth gave an instruction to the 'copter; it turned north. "We'll have dinner there. It'll save money, and at all the decent restaurants there's a two-hour line this time of night, so it's almost impossible to get a table. You've probably forgotten. How wonderful it'll be when half our population can emigrate!"

"Yes," Biskle said tightly. "And they'll like Mars; we've done a good job." He felt a measure of enthusiasm returning to him, a sense of pride in the reconstruct work he and his compatriots had done. "Wait until you see it, Miss Ableseth."

"Call me Mary," Miss Ableseth said, as she arranged her heavy scarlet wig; it had become dislodged during the last few moments in the cramped quarters of the 'copter.

4. A type of red wine.

“Okay,” Biskle said, and, except for a nagging awareness of disloyalty to Fay, he felt a sense of well-being.

“Things happen fast on Terra,” Mary Ableseth said. “Due to the terrible pressure of overpopulation.” She pressed her teeth in place; they, too, had become dislodged.

“So I see,” Milt Biskle agreed, and straightened his own wig and teeth, too. *Could I have been mistaken?* he asked himself. After all he could see the lights of New York below; Terra was decidedly not a depopulated ruin and its civilization was intact.

Or was this all an illusion, imposed on his percept-system by Prox psychiatric techniques unfamiliar to him? It was a fact that his dime had fallen completely through the amphetamine dispenser. Didn’t that indicate something was subtly, terribly wrong?

Perhaps the dispenser hadn’t really been there.

The next day he and Mary Ableseth visited one of the few remaining parks. In the southern part of Utah, near the mountains, the park, although small, was bright green and attractive. Milt Biskle lolled on the grass watching a squirrel progressing toward a tree in wicket-like⁵ leaps, its tail flowing behind it in a gray stream.

“No squirrels on Mars,” Milt Biskle said sleepily.

Wearing a slight sunsuit, Mary Ableseth stretched out on her back, eyes shut. “It’s nice here, Milt. I imagine Mars is like this.” Beyond the park heavy traffic moved along the freeway; the noise reminded Milt of the surf of the Pacific Ocean. It lulled him. All seemed well, and he tossed a peanut to the squirrel. The squirrel veered, wicket-hopped toward the peanut, its intelligent face twitching in response.

As it sat upright, holding the nut, Milt Biskle tossed a second nut off to the right. The squirrel heard it land among the maple leaves; its ears pricked up, and this reminded Milt of a game he once had played with a cat, an old sleepy tom which had belonged to him and his brother in the days before Terra had been so overpopulated, when pets were still legal. He had waited until Pumpkin—the tomat—was almost asleep and then he had tossed a small object into the corner of the room. Pumpkin woke up. His eyes had flown open and his ears had pricked, turned, and he had sat for fifteen minutes listening and watching, brooding as to what had made the noise. It was a harmless way of teasing the old cat, and Milt felt sad, thinking how many years Pumpkin had been dead now, his last legal pet. On Mars, though, pets would be legal again. That cheered him.

In fact on Mars, during his years of reconstruct work, he had possessed a pet. A Martian plant. He had brought it with him to Terra and it now stood on the living-room coffee table in Mary Ableseth’s conapt, its limbs draped rather unhappily. It had not prospered in the unfamiliar Terran climate.

“Strange,” Milt murmured, “that my wug-plant isn’t thriving. I’d have thought in such a moist atmosphere . . .”

“It’s the gravity,” Mary said, eyes still shut, her bosom rising and falling regularly. She was almost asleep. “Too much for it.”

5. In the shape of a curved hoop used in the lawn game of croquet.

Milt regarded the supine form of the woman, remembering Pumpkin under similar circumstances. The hypnogogic moment, between waking and sleeping, when consciousness and unconsciousness became blended . . . reaching, he picked up a pebble.

He tossed the pebble into the leaves near Mary's head.

At once she sat up, eyes open startled, her sunsuit falling from her.

Both her ears pricked up.

"But we Terrans," Milt said, "have lost control of the musculature of our ears, Mary. On even a reflex basis."

"What?" she murmured, blinking in confusion as she retied her sunsuit.

"Our ability to prick up our ears has atrophied," Milt explained. "Unlike the dog and cat. Although to examine us morphologically you wouldn't know because the muscles are still there. So you made an error."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Mary said, with a trace of sullessness. She turned her attention entirely to arranging the bra of her sunsuit, ignoring him.

"Let's go back to the conapt," Milt said, rising to his feet. He no longer felt like lolling in the park, because he could no longer believe in the park. Unreal squirrel, unreal grass . . . was it actually? Would they ever show him the substance beneath the illusion? He doubted it.

The squirrel followed them a short way as they walked to their parked 'copter, then turned its attention to a family of Terrans which included two small boys; the children threw nuts to the squirrel and it scampered in vigorous activity.

"Convincing," Milt said. And it really was.

Mary said, "Too bad you couldn't have seen Dr. DeWinter more, Milt. He could have helped you." Her voice was oddly hard.

"I have no doubt of that," Milt Biskle agreed as they re-entered the parked 'copter.

When they arrived back at Mary's conapt he found his Martian wugplant dead. It had evidently perished of dehydration.

"Don't try to explain this," he said to Mary as the two of them stood gazing down at the parched, dead stalks of the once active plant. "You know what it shows. Terra is supposedly more humid than Mars, even reconstructed Mars at its best. Yet this plant has completely dried out. There's no moisture left on Terra because I suppose the Prox blasts emptied the seas. Right?"

Mary said nothing.

"What I don't understand," Milt said, "is why it's worth it to you people to keep the illusion going. *I've finished my job.*"

After a pause Mary said, "Maybe there're more planets requiring reconstruct work, Milt."

"Your population is that great?"

"I was thinking of Terra. Here," Mary said. "Reconstruct work on it will take generations; all the talent and ability you reconstruct engineers possess will be required." She added, "I'm just following your hypothetical logic, of course."

"So Terra's our next job. That's why you let me come here. In fact I'm going to *stay* here." He realized that, thoroughly and utterly, in a flash of

insight. “I won’t be going back to Mars and I won’t see Fay again. You’re replacing her.” It all made sense.

“Well,” Mary said, with a faint wry smile, “let’s say I’m attempting to.” She stroked his arm. Barefoot, still in her sunsuit, she moved slowly closer and closer to him.

Frightened, he backed away from her. Picking up the dead wug-plant, he numbly carried it to the apt’s disposal chute and dropped the brittle, dry remains in. They vanished at once.

“And now,” Mary said busily, “we’re going to visit the Museum of Modern Art in New York and then, if we have time, the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. They’ve asked me to keep you busy so you don’t start brooding.”

“But I am brooding,” Milt said as he watched her change from her sunsuit to a gray wool knit dress. Nothing can stop that, he said to himself. And you know it now. And as each reconstruct engineer finishes his area it’s going to happen again. I’m just the first.

At least I’m not alone, he realized. And felt somewhat better.

“How do I look?” Mary asked as she put on lipstick before the bedroom mirror.

“Fine,” he said listlessly, and wondered if Mary would meet each reconstruct engineer in turn, become the mistress of each. Not only is she not what she seems, he thought, but I don’t even get to keep her.

It seemed a gratuitous loss, easily avoided.

He was, he realized, beginning to like her. *Mary was alive*, that much was real. Terran or not. At least they had not lost the war to shadows; they had lost to authentic living organisms. He felt somewhat cheered.

“Ready for the Museum of Modern Art?” Mary said briskly, with a smile.

Later, at the Smithsonian, after he had viewed the Spirit of St. Louis and the Wright brothers⁶ incredibly ancient plane—it appeared to be at least a million years old—he caught sight of an exhibit which he had been anticipating.

Saying nothing to Mary—she was absorbed in studying a case of semiprecious stones in their natural uncut state—he slipped off and, a moment later, stood before a glass-walled section entitled

PROX MILITARY OF 2014

Three Prox soldiers stood frozen, their dark muzzles stained and grimy, sidearms ready, in a makeshift shelter composed of the remains of one of their transports. A bloody Prox flag hung drably. This was a defeated enclave of the enemy; these three creatures were about to surrender or be killed.

A group of Terran visitors stood before the exhibit, gawking. Milt Biskle said to the man nearest him, “Convincing, isn’t it?”

“Sure is,” the man, middle-aged, with glasses and gray hair, agreed. “Were you in the war?” he asked Milt, glancing at him.

“I’m in reconstruct,” Milt said. “Yellow Engineer.”

6. Orville (1871–1948) and Wilbur (1867–1912) Wright, brothers and inventors of the first airplane, flown in 1903. “Spirit of St. Louis”: plane

in which airman Charles Lindbergh (1902–1974) made the first transatlantic flight in 1927.

"Oh." The man nodded, impressed. "Boy, these Proxmen look scary. You'd almost expect them to step out of that exhibit and fight us to the death." He grinned. "They put up a good fight before they gave in, those Proxmen; you have to give 'em credit for that."

Beside him the man's gray, taut wife said, "Those guns of theirs make me shiver. It's too realistic." Disapproving, she walked on.

"You're right," Milt Biskle said. "They do look frighteningly real, because of course they are." There was no point in creating an illusion of this sort because the genuine thing lay immediately at hand, readily available. Milt swung himself under the guardrail, reached the transparent glass of the exhibit, raised his foot, and smashed the glass; it burst and rained down with a furious racket of shivering fragments.

As Mary came running, Milt snatched a rifle from one of the frozen Proxmen in the exhibit and turned it toward her.

She halted, breathing rapidly, eyeing him but saying nothing.

"I am willing to work for you," Milt said to her, holding the rifle expertly. "After all, if my own race no longer exists I can hardly reconstruct a colony world for them; even I can see that. But I want to know the truth. Show it to me and I'll go on with my job."

Mary said, "No, Milt, if you knew the truth you wouldn't go on. You'd turn that gun on yourself." She sounded calm, even compassionate, but her eyes were bright and enlarged, wary.

"Then I'll kill you," he said. And, after that, himself.

"Wait." She pondered. "Milt—this is difficult. You know absolutely nothing and yet look how miserable you are. How do you expect to feel when you can see your planet as it is? It's almost too much for me and I'm—" She hesitated.

"Say it."

"I'm just a—" she choked out the word—"a visitor."

"But I am right," he said. "Say it. Admit it."

"You're right, Milt," she sighed.

Two uniformed museum guards appeared, holding pistols. "You okay, Miss Ableseth?"

"For the present," Mary said. She did not take her eyes off Milt and the rifle which he held. "Just wait," she instructed the guards.

"Yes ma'am." The guards waited. No one moved.

Milt said, "Did any Terran women survive?"

After a pause, Mary said, "No, Milt. But we Proxmen are within the same genus, as you well know. We can interbreed. Doesn't that make you feel better?"

"Sure," he said. "A lot better." And he did feel like turning the rifle on himself now, without waiting. It was all he could do to resist the impulse. So he had been right; that thing had not been Fay, there at Field Three on Mars. "Listen," he said to Mary Ableseth, "I want to go back to Mars again. I came here to learn something. I learned it, now I want to go back. Maybe I'll talk to Dr. DeWinter again, maybe he can help me. Any objection to that?"

"No." She seemed to understand how he felt. "After all, you did all your work there. You have a right to return. But eventually you have to begin here on Terra. We can wait a year or so, perhaps even two. But eventually Mars will be filled up and we'll need the room. And it's going to be so much harder

here . . . as you'll discover." She tried to smile but failed; he saw the effort. "I'm sorry, Milt."

"So am I," Milt Biskle said. "Hell, I was sorry when that wug-plant died. I knew the truth then. It wasn't just a guess."

"You'll be interested to know that your fellow reconstruct engineer Red, Cleveland Andre, addressed the meeting in your place. And passed your intimations on to them all, along with his own. They voted to send an official delegate here to Terra to investigate; he's on his way now."

"I'm interested," Milt said. "But it doesn't really matter. It hardly changes things." He put down the rifle. "Can I go back to Mars now?" He felt tired. "Tell Dr. DeWinter I'm coming." Tell him, he thought, to have every psychiatric technique in his repertory ready for me, because it will take a lot. "What about Earth's animals?" he asked. "Did any forms at all survive? How about the dog and the cat?"

Mary glanced at the museum guards; a flicker of communication passed silently between them and then Mary said, "Maybe it's all right after all."

"What's all right?" Milt Biskle said.

"For you to see. Just for a moment. You seem to be standing up to it better than we had expected. In our opinion you *are* entitled to that." She added, "Yes, Milt, the dog and cat survived; they live here among the ruins. Come along and look."

He followed after her, thinking to himself, Wasn't she right the first time? Do I really want to look? Can I stand up to what exists in actuality—what they've felt the need of keeping from me up until now?

At the exit ramp of the museum Mary halted and said, "Go on outside, Milt. I'll stay here. I'll be waiting for you when you come back in."

Haltingly, he descended the ramp.

And saw.

It was, of course, as she had said, ruins. The city had been decapitated, leveled three feet above ground level; the buildings had become hollow squares, without contents, like some infinite arrangements of useless, ancient courtyards. He could not believe that what he saw was *new*, it seemed to him as if these abandoned remnants had always been there, exactly as they were now. And—how long would they remain this way?

To the right an elaborate but small-scale mechanical system had plopped itself down on a debris-filled street. As he watched, it extended a host of pseudopodia which burrowed inquisitively into the nearby foundations. The foundations, steel and cement, were abruptly pulverized; the bare ground, exposed, lay naked and dark brown, seared over from the atomic heat generated by the repair autonomic rig—a construct, Milt Biskle thought, not much different from those I employ on Mars. At least to some meager extent the rig had the task of clearing away the old. He knew from his own reconstruct work on Mars that it would be followed, probably within minutes, by an equally elaborate mechanism which would lay the groundwork for the new structures to come.

And, standing off to one side in the otherwise deserted street, watching this limited clearing-work in progress, two gray, thin figures could be made out. Two hawk-nosed Proxmen with their pale, natural hair arranged in high coils, their earlobes elongated with heavy weights.

The victors, he thought to himself. Experiencing the satisfaction of this spectacle, witnessing the last artifacts of the defeated race being

obliterated. Someday a purely Prox city will rise up here: Prox architecture, streets of the odd, wide Prox pattern, the uniform box-like buildings with their many subsurface levels. And citizens such as these will be treading the ramps, accepting the high-speed runnels⁷ in their daily routines. And what, he thought, about the Terran dogs and cats which now inhabit these ruins, as Mary said? Will even they disappear? Probably not entirely. There will be room for them, perhaps in museums and zoos, as oddities to be gaped at. Survivals of an ecology which no longer obtained. Or even mattered.

And yet—Mary was right. The Proxmen were within the same genus. Even if they did not interbreed with the remaining Terrans, the species as he had known it would go on. And they would interbreed, he thought. His own relationship with Mary was a harbinger. As individuals they were not so far apart. The results might even be good.

The results, he thought as he turned away and started back into the museum, may be a race not quite Prox and not quite Terran; something that is genuinely new may come from the melding. At least we can hope so.

Terra would be rebuilt. He had seen slight but real work in progress with his own eyes. Perhaps the Proxmen lacked the skill that he and his fellow reconstruct engineers possessed . . . but now that Mars was virtually done they could begin here. It was not absolutely hopeless. Not *quite*.

Walking up to Mary he said hoarsely, “Do me a favor. Get me a cat I can take back to Mars with me. I’ve always liked cats. Especially the orange ones with stripes.”

One of the museum guards, after a glance at his companion, said, “We can arrange that, Mr. Biskle. We can get a—cub, is that the word?”

“Kitten, I think,” Mary corrected.

On the trip back to Mars, Milt Biskle sat with the box containing the orange kitten on his lap, working out his plans. In fifteen minutes the ship would land on Mars and Dr. DeWinter—or the thing that posed as Dr. DeWinter anyhow—would be waiting to meet him. And it would be too late. From where he sat he could see the emergency escape hatch with its red warning light. His plans had become focused around the hatch. It was not ideal but it would serve.

In the box the orange kitten reached up a paw and batted at Milt’s hand. He felt the sharp, tiny claws rake across his hand and he absently disengaged his flesh, retreating from the probing reach of the animal. You wouldn’t have liked Mars anyhow, he thought, and rose to his feet.

Carrying the box, he strode swiftly toward the emergency hatch. Before the stewardess could reach him he had thrown open the hatch. He stepped forward and the hatch locked behind him. For an instant he was within the cramped unit, and then he began to twist open the heavy outer door.

“Mr. Biskle!” the stewardess’s voice came, muffled by the door behind him. He heard her fumbling to reach him, opening the door and groping to catch hold of him.

As he twisted open the outer door the kitten within the box under his arm snarled.

You, too? Milt Biskle thought, and paused.

7. Grooves or narrow channels.

Death, the emptiness and utter lack of warmth of 'tween space, seeped around him, filtering past the partly opened outer door. He smelled it and something within him, as in the kitten, retreated by instinct. He paused, holding the box, not trying to push the outer door any farther open, and in that moment the stewardess grabbed him.

"Mr. Biskle," she said with a half-sob, "are you out of your mind? Good God, what are you doing?" She managed to tug the outer door shut, screw the emergency section back into shut position.

"You know exactly what I'm doing," Milt Biskle said as he allowed her to propel him back into the ship and to his seat. And don't think you stopped me, he said to himself. Because it wasn't you. I could have gone ahead and done it. But I decided not to.

He wondered why.

Later, at Field Three on Mars, Dr. DeWinter met him as he had expected.

The two of them walked to the parked 'copter and DeWinter in a worried tone of voice said, "I've just been informed that during the trip—"

"That's right. I attempted suicide. But I changed my mind. Maybe you know why. You're the psychologist, the authority as to what goes on inside us." He entered the 'copter, being careful not to bang the box containing the Terran kitten.

"You're going to go ahead and stake your landparcel with Fay?" Dr. DeWinter asked presently as the 'copter flew above green, wet fields of high-protein wheat. "Even though—you know?"

"Yes." He nodded. After all, there was nothing else for him, as far as he could make out.

"You Terrans." DeWinter shook his head. "Admirable." Now he noticed the box on Milt Biskle's lap. "What's that you have there? A creature from Terra?" He eyed it suspiciously; obviously to him it was a manifestation of an alien form of life. "A rather peculiar-looking organism."

"It's going to keep me company," Milt Biskle said. "While I go on with my work, either building up my private parcel or—" Or helping you Proxmen with Terra, he thought.

"Is that what was called a 'rattlesnake'? I detect the sound of its rattles." Dr. DeWinter edged away.

"It's purring." Milt Biskle stroked the kitten as the autonomic circuit of the 'copter guided it across the dully red Martian sky. Contact with the one familiar life-form, he realized, will keep me sane. It will make it possible for me to go on. He felt grateful. My race may have been defeated and destroyed, but not all Terran creatures have perished. When we reconstruct Terra maybe we can induce the authorities to allow us to set up game preserves. We'll make that part of our task, he told himself, and again he patted the kitten. At least we can hope for that much.

Next to him, Dr. DeWinter was also deep in thought. He appreciated the intricate workmanship, by engineers stationed on the third planet,⁸ which had gone into the simulacrum resting in the box on Milt Biskle's lap. The technical achievement was impressive, even to him, and he saw clearly—as

8. Earth, or Terra.

Milt Biskle of course did not. This artifact, accepted by the Terran as an authentic organism from his familiar past, would provide a pivot by which the man would hang onto his psychic balance.

But what about the other reconstruct engineers? What would carry each of them through and past the moment of discovery as each completed his work and had to—whether he liked it or not—awake?

It would vary from Terran to Terran. A dog for one, a more elaborate simulacrum, possibly that of a nubile human female, for another. In any case, each would be provided with an “exception” to the true state. One essential surviving entity, selected out of what had in fact totally vanished. Research into the past of each engineer would provide the clue, as it had in Biskle’s instance; the cat-simulacrum had been finished weeks before his abrupt, panic-stricken trip home to Terra. For instance, in Andre’s case a parrot-simulacrum was already under construction. It would be done by the time he made *his* trip home.

“I call him Thunder,” Milt Biskle explained.

“Good name,” Dr. DeWinter—as he titled himself these days—said. And thought, A shame we could not have shown him the real situation of Terra. Actually it’s quite interesting that he accepted what he saw, because on some level he must realize that nothing survives a war of the kind we conducted. Obviously he desperately wanted to believe that a remnant, even though no more than rubble, endures. But it’s typical of the Terran mind to fasten onto phantoms. That might help explain their defeat in the conflict; they were simply not realists.

“This cat,” Milt Biskle said, “is going to be a mighty hunter of Martian sneak-mice.”

“Right,” Dr. DeWinter agreed, and thought, *As long as its batteries don’t run down.* He, too, patted the kitten.

A switch closed and the kitten purred louder.

1964

ADRIENNE RICH

1929–2012

A childhood of reading and hearing poems taught Adrienne Rich to love the sound of words; her adult life taught her that poetry must “consciously situate itself amid political conditions.” Over the years she conducted a passionate struggle to honor these parts of herself, in her best poems brilliantly mixing what she called “the poetry of the actual world with the poetry of sound.” Extending a dialogue—between art and politics—that she first discovered in W. B. Yeats, whose poems she read as an undergraduate at Radcliffe, her work addresses with particular power the experiences of women, experiences often omitted from history and

misrepresented in literature. Our culture, she believes, is “split at the root” (to adapt the title of one of her essays); art is separated from politics, and the poet’s identity as a woman is separated from her art. Rich’s work seeks a language that will expose and integrate these divisions in the self and in the world. To do this she wrote “directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman’s body and experience,” for “to take women’s existence seriously as theme and source for art, was something I had been hungering to do, needing to do, all my writing life.”

Rich’s first book was published in the Yale Younger Poets series, a prize particularly important for poets of her generation (others in the series have included James Wright, John Ashbery, and W. S. Merwin). W. H. Auden, the judge for the series in the 1950s, said of Rich’s volume *A Change of World* (1951) that her poems “were neatly and modestly dressed . . . respect their elders, but are not cowed by them and do not tell fibs.” Rich, looking back at that period from the vantage point of 1972, renders a more complicated sense of things. In an influential essay, “When We Dead Awaken,” she recalls this period as one in which the chief models for poetry were men; from those models she first learned her craft. Even in reading the poetry of older women writers she found herself “looking . . . for the same things I found in the poetry of men . . . , to be equal was still confused with sounding the same.” Twenty years and five volumes after *A Change of World* she published *The Will to Change*, taking its title from the opening line of Charles Olson’s *The Kingfishers*: “What does not change / is the will to change.” The shift of emphasis in Rich’s titles signals an important turn in her work—from acceptance of change as a way of the world to an active sense of change as willed or desired.

In 1953 Rich married and in her twenties gave birth to three children within four years—“a radicalizing experience,” she said. It was during this time that Rich experienced most severely that gap between what she calls the “energy of creation” and the “energy of relation. . . . In those early years I always felt the conflict as a failure of love in myself.” In her later work Rich came to identify the source of that conflict not as individual but as social, and in 1976 she published a book of prose, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, in which she contrasts the actual experience of bearing and raising children with the myths fostered by our medical, social, and political institutions.

With her third and fourth books, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) and *Necessities of Life* (1966), Rich began explicitly to treat problems that engaged her throughout her writing life. The title poem of *Snapshots* exposes the gap between literary versions of women’s experience and the day-to-day truths of their lives.

Rich’s poems aim at self-definition, at establishing boundaries of the self, but they also fight off the notion that insights remain solitary and unshared. Many of her poems proceed by means of intimate argument, sometimes with externalized parts of herself, as if to dramatize the way identity forms from the self’s movement beyond fixed boundaries. In some of her most powerful later poems she pushes her imagination to recognize the multiple aspects of the self (“My selves,” she calls them in her poem “Integrity”); in “Transcendental Etude,” she writes: “*I am the lover and the loved, / home and wanderer, she who splits / firewood and she who knocks, a stranger / in the storm.*” In other important later poems she carried out a dialogue with lives similar to and different from her own, as in the generous and powerful title poem of her collection *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991). As she writes in the essay “Blood, Bread, and Poetry,” in her development as a poet she came to feel “more and more urgently the dynamic between poetry as language and poetry as a kind of action, probing, burning, stripping, placing itself in dialogue with others.”

After Rich and her husband moved to New York City in 1966 they became increasingly involved in radical politics, especially in the opposition to the Vietnam War. These concerns are reflected in the poems of *Leaflets* (1969) and *The Will to Change* (1971). Along with new subject matter came equally important changes in style.

Rich's poems throughout the 1960s moved away from formal verse patterns to more jagged utterance. Devices such as sentence fragments, lines of varying length, and irregular spacing to mark off phrases emphasized a voice of greater urgency. With "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" Rich began dating her poems, as if to mark each one as provisional, true to the moment but an instrument of passage, like an entry in a journal in which feelings are subject to continual revision.

In the 1970s Rich dedicated herself increasingly to feminism. Her work as a poet, a prose writer, and a public speaker took on a new unity and intensity. The continuing task was to see herself—as she put it in 1984—as neither "unique nor universal, but a person in history, a woman and not a man, a white and also Jewish inheritor of a particular Western consciousness, from the making of which most women have been excluded." She says in "Planetarium": "I am an instrument in the shape / of a woman trying to translate pulsations / into images for the relief of the body / and the reconstruction of the mind."

Rich's collections of prose—*Of Woman Born; On Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Selected Prose 1966–1978; Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979–1985; What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993); and *Arts of the Possible* (2001)—provide an important context for her poems. In these works she addresses issues of women's education and their literary traditions, Jewish identity, the relations between poetry and politics, and what she has called "the erasure of lesbian existence." As a young woman Rich had been stirred by James Baldwin's comment that "any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety." In many ways her essays, like her poems, track the forces that resist such change and the human conditions that require it. Her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" is an important example of such an examination.

Although Rich's individual poems do not consistently succeed in expressing a political vision without sacrificing "intensity of language," her work is best read as a continuous process. The books have an air of ongoing, pained investigation, almost scientific in intention but with an ardor suggested by their titles: *The Dream of a Common Language* (1977), *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981), *The Fact of a Doorframe* (1984), and *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986). Rich's later books, *Time's Power* (1989), *An Atlas of the Difficult World* (1991), *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991–1995* (1995), *Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995–1998* (1999), *Fox* (2001), and *The School Among the Ruins* (2004), demonstrate an ongoing power of language and deepening poetic vision. *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth* (2007) collects poems from 2004–06. Late in her life, Rich published *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society, 1997–2008*, *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007–2010*, and *Later Poems: Selected and New, 1971–2012*. Reading through her poems we may sometimes wish for more relaxation and playfulness, for a liberating comic sense of self almost never present in her work. What we find, however, is invaluable—a poet whose imagination confronts and resists the harsh necessities of our times and keeps alive a vision of what is possible: "a whole new poetry beginning here" ("Transcendental Etude").

Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law

1

You, once a belle in Shreveport,
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud,
still have your dresses copied from that time,
and play a Chopin prelude

called by Cortot: "*Delicious recollections
float like perfume through the memory.*"¹ 5

Your mind now, moldering like wedding-cake,
heavy with useless experience, rich
with suspicion, rumor, fantasy,
crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge 10
of mere fact. In the prime of your life.

Nervy, glowering, your daughter
wipes the teaspoons, grows another way.

2

Banging the coffee-pot into the sink
she hears the angels chiding, and looks out 15
past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky.
Only a week since They said: *Have no patience.*

The next time it was: *Be insatiable.*
Then: *Save yourself; others you cannot save.*
Sometimes she's let the tapstream scald her arm, 20
a match burn to her thumbnail,

or held her hand above the kettle's snout
right in the woolly steam. They are probably angels,
since nothing hurts her anymore, except
each morning's grit blowing into her eyes. 25

3

A thinking woman sleeps with monsters.²
The beak that grips her, she becomes. And Nature,
that sprung-lidded, still commodious
steamer-trunk of *tempora* and *mores*³
gets stuffed with it all: the mildewed orange-flowers, 30
the female pills, the terrible breasts
of Boadicea⁴ beneath flat foxes' heads and orchids.

Two handsome women, gripped in argument,
each proud, acute, subtle, I hear scream
across the cut glass and majolica 35

1. A remark made by Alfred Cortot (1877–1962), a well-known French pianist, in his *Chopin: 24 Preludes* (1930); he is referring specifically to Chopin's Prelude No. 7, Andantino, A Major.

2. A reference to W. B. Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," a poem about the rape of a maiden by Zeus in the form of a giant bird. The poem ends: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?"

3. Times and customs (Latin), an allusion to the Roman orator Cicero's famous phrase "O Tempora! O Mores!" ("Alas for the degeneracy of our times and the low standard of our morals!").

4. British queen in the time of the Emperor Nero; she led her people in a large, ultimately unsuccessful revolt against Roman rule. "Female pills": remedies for menstrual pain.

like Furies⁵ cornered from their prey:
 The argument *ad feminam*,⁶ all the old knives
 that have rusted in my back, I drive in yours,
*ma semblable, ma soeur!*⁷

4

Knowing themselves too well in one another: 40
 their gifts no pure fruition, but a thorn,
 the prick filed sharp against a hint of scorn . . .
 Reading while waiting
 for the iron to heat,
 writing, *My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun*⁸— 45
 in that Amherst pantry while the jellies boil and scum,
 or, more often,
 iron-eyed and beaked and purposed as a bird,
 dusting everything on the whatnot every day of life.

5

Dulce ridens, dulce loquens,⁹ 50
 she shaves her legs until they gleam
 like petrified mammoth-tusk.

6

When to her lute Corinna sings¹
 neither words nor music are her own;
 only the long hair dipping 55
 over her cheek, only the song
 of silk against her knees
 and these
 adjusted in reflections of an eye.

Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before 60
 an unlocked door, that cage of cages,
 tell us, you bird, you tragical machine—
 is this *fertilisante douleur*?² Pinned down
 by love, for you the only natural action,
 are you edged more keen 65

5. Greek goddesses of vengeance. “Majolica”: a kind of earthenware with a richly colored glaze.

6. Feminine version of the Latin phrase *ad hominem* (literally, “to the man”), referring to an argument directed not to reason but to personal prejudices and emotions.

7. The last line of Charles Baudelaire’s French poem “Au Lecteur” addresses “*Hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable—mon frère!*” (Hypocrite reader, like me, my brother!); Rich here instead addresses “*ma soeur*” (my sister). See also T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” line 76.

8. “*Emily Dickinson, Complete Poems*, ed. T. H. Johnson, 1960, p. 369” [Rich’s note]; this is the poem numbered 754 in the Johnson edition. Amherst, Massachusetts, is the town where Dickinson lived her entire life (1830–1886).

9. Sweetly laughing, sweetly speaking (Latin, from Horace, *Odes*, 22.23–24).

1. First line of a lyric poem by Thomas Campion (1567–1620) about the extent to which a courtier is moved by Corinna’s beautiful music.

2. Fertilizing (or life-giving) sorrow (French).

to prise the secrets of the vault? has Nature shown
her household books to you, daughter-in-law,
that her sons never saw?

7

*"To have in this uncertain world some stay
which cannot be undermined, is
of the utmost consequence."*³ 70

Thus wrote
a woman, partly brave and partly good,
who fought with what she partly understood.
Few men about her would or could do more, 75
hence she was labeled harpy, shrew and whore.

8

"You all die at fifteen," said Diderot,⁴
and turn part legend, part convention.
Still, eyes inaccurately dream
behind closed windows blankening with steam. 80
Deliciously, all that we might have been,
all that we were—fire, tears,
wit, taste, martyred ambition—
stirs like the memory of refused adultery
the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years. 85

9

*Not that it is done well, but
that it is done at all?*⁵ Yes, think
of the odds! or shrug them off forever.
This luxury of the precocious child,
Time's precious chronic invalid,— 90
would we, darlings, resign it if we could?
Our blight has been our sinecure:
mere talent was enough for us—
glitter in fragments and rough drafts.

Sigh no more, ladies. 95

Time is male
and in his cups drinks to the fair.
Bemused by gallantry, we hear
our mediocrities over-praised,
indolence read as abnegation, 100

3. "From Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, London, 1787" [Rich's note]. Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), one of the first feminist thinkers, is best-known for her "Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

4. Denis Diderot (1713–1784), French philosopher, encyclopedist, playwright, and critic. "You all die at fifteen: 'Vous mourez toutes à quinze

ans,' from the *Lettres à Sophie Volland*, quoted by Simone de Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Vol. II, pp. 123–24" [Rich's note].

5. An allusion to Samuel Johnson's remark to James Boswell: "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all" (July 31, 1763).

slattern thought styled intuition,
 every lapse forgiven, our crime
 only to cast too bold a shadow
 or smash the mold straight off.

For that, solitary confinement, 105
 tear gas, attrition shelling.
 Few applicants for that honor.

10

Well,

she's long about her coming, who must be
 more merciless to herself than history. 110
 Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge
 breasted and glancing through the currents,
 taking the light upon her
 at least as beautiful as any boy
 or helicopter,⁶ 115

poised, still coming,
 her fine blades making the air wince

but her cargo
 no promise then:
 delivered 120
 palpable
 ours.

1958–60 1963

"I Am in Danger—Sir—"¹

"Half-cracked" to Higginson,² living,
 afterward famous in garbled versions,
 your hoard of dazzling scraps a battlefield,
 now your old snood

mothballed at Harvard 5
 and you in your variorum monument³

6. "She comes down from the remoteness of ages, from Thebes, from Crete, from Chichén-Itzá; and she is also the totem set deep in the African jungle; she is a helicopter and she is a bird; and there is this, the greatest wonder of all: under her tinted hair the forest murmur becomes a thought, and words issue from her breasts" (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley [New York, 1953], 729). (A translation of the passage from *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Vol. II, 574, cited in French by Rich.)

1. A sentence in a letter from Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911), a critic and editor with whom she opened corre-

spondence in 1862 and to whom she sent some of her poems. She writes: "You think my gait 'spasmodic'—I am in danger—Sir—You think me 'uncontrolled'—I have no Tribunal."

2. In a letter Higginson described Dickinson as "my partially cracked Poetess at Amherst."

3. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1955) is a "variorum" in that it contains all the variant readings in her manuscripts. "Mothballed at Harvard": the Houghton Rare Books Library at Harvard University has a collection of Emily Dickinson manuscripts and memorabilia.

equivocal to the end—
 who are you?

Gardening the day-lily,
 wiping the wine-glass stems, 10
 your thought pulsed on behind
 a forehead battered paper-thin,

you, woman, masculine
 in single-mindedness,
 for whom the word was more 15
 than a symptom—

a condition of being.
 Till the air buzzing with spoiled language
 sang in your ears
 of Perjury 20

and in your half-cracked way you chose
 silence for entertainment,
 chose to have it out at last
 on your own premises.

1964

1966

A Valediction Forbidding Mourning¹

My swirling wants. Your frozen lips.
 The grammar turned and attacked me.
 Themes, written under duress.
 Emptiness of the notations.

They gave me a drug that slowed the healing of wounds. 5

I want you to see this before I leave:
 the experience of repetition as death
 the failure of criticism to locate the pain
 the poster in the bus that said:
my bleeding is under control. 10

A red plant in a cemetery of plastic wreaths.

A last attempt: the language is a dialect called metaphor.
 These images go unglossed: hair, glacier, flashlight.
 When I think of a landscape I am thinking of a time.
 When I talk of taking a trip I mean forever. 15

1. Title of a famous poem by John Donne (1572–1631) in which the English poet forbids his wife to lament his departure for a trip to the Continent.

I could say: those mountains have a meaning
but further than that I could not say.

To do something very common, in my own way.

1970

1971

Diving into the Wreck

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber 5
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau¹ with his
assiduous team 10
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently 15
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it's a piece of maritime floss 20
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light 25
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder 30
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then 35
black I am blacking out and yet

1. Jacques-Yves Cousteau (1910–1997), French underwater explorer and author.

my mask is powerful
 it pumps my blood with power
 the sea is another story
 the sea is not a question of power 40
 I have to learn alone
 to turn my body without force
 in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
 what I came for 45
 among so many who have always
 lived here
 swaying their crenellated fans
 between the reefs
 and besides 50
 you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
 The words are purposes.
 The words are maps.
 I came to see the damage that was done 55
 and the treasures that prevail.
 I stroke the beam of my lamp
 slowly along the flank
 of something more permanent
 than fish or weed 60

the thing I came for:
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck
 the thing itself and not the myth
 the drowned face² always staring
 toward the sun 65
 the evidence of damage
 worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
 the ribs of the disaster
 curving their assertion
 among the tentative haunters. 70

This is the place.
 And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
 streams black, the merman in his armored body
 We circle silently
 about the wreck 75
 we dive into the hold.
 I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
 whose breasts still bear the stress
 whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies 80

2. Referring to the ornamental female figurehead that formed the prow of many old sailing ships.

obscurely inside barrels
 half-wedged and left to rot
 we are the half-destroyed instruments
 that once held to a course
 the water-eaten log 85
 the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
 by cowardice or courage
 the one who find our way
 back to this scene 90
 carrying a knife, a camera
 a book of myths
 in which
 our names do not appear.

1972

1973

Power

Living in the earth-deposits of our history

Today a backhoe divulged out of a crumbling flank of earth
 one bottle amber perfect a hundred-year-old
 cure for fever or melancholy a tonic
 for living on this earth in the winters of this climate 5

Today I was reading about Marie Curie:¹
 she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness
 her body bombarded for years by the element
 she had purified
 It seems she denied to the end 10
 the source of the cataracts on her eyes
 the cracked and suppurating² skin of her finger-ends
 till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil

She died a famous woman denying
 her wounds 15
 denying
 her wounds came from the same source as her power

1974

1978

1. Physical chemist (1867–1934) who with her husband investigated radioactivity and on her own discovered polonium and radium; she

received the Nobel Prize in 1911.

2. Discharging pus.

Transcendental Etude¹

for Michelle Cliff

This August evening I've been driving
 over backroads fringed with queen anne's lace
 my car startling young deer in meadows—one
 gave a hoarse intake of her breath and all
 four fawns sprang after her 5
 into the dark maples.
 Three months from today they'll be fair game
 for the hit-and-run hunters, glorying
 in a weekend's destructive power,
 triggers fingered by drunken gunmen, sometimes 10
 so inept as to leave the shattered animal
 stunned in her blood. But this evening deep in summer
 the deer are still alive and free,
 nibbling apples from early-laden boughs
 so weighted, so englobed 15
 with already yellowing fruit
 they seem eternal, Hesperidean²
 in the clear-tuned, cricket-throbbing air.

Later I stood in the dooryard,
 my nerves singing the immense 20
 fragility of all this sweetness,
 this green world already sentimentalized, photographed,
 advertised to death. Yet, it persists
 stubbornly beyond the fake Vermont
 of antique barnboards glazed into discohèques, 25
 artificial snow, the sick Vermont of children
 conceived in apathy, grown to winters
 of rotgut violence,
 poverty gnashing its teeth like a blind cat at their lives.
 Still, it persists. Turning off onto a dirt road 30
 from the raw cuts bulldozed through a quiet village
 for the tourist run to Canada,
 I've sat on a stone fence above a great, soft, sloping field
 of musing heifers, a farmstead
 slanting its planes calmly in the calm light, 35
 a dead elm raising bleached arms
 above a green so dense with life,
 minute, momentary life—slugs, moles, pheasants, gnats,
 spiders, moths, hummingbirds, groundhogs, butterflies—
 a lifetime is too narrow 40
 to understand it all, beginning with the huge
 rockshelves that underlie all that life.

1. "Etude": a piece of music played for the practice of a point of technique or a composition built on technique but played for its artistic value.

2. I.e., like the golden apples of the tree guarded by the Hesperides, daughters of Atlas, in Greek mythology.

No one ever told us we had to study our lives,
 make of our lives a study, as if learning natural history
 or music, that we should begin 45
 with the simple exercises first
 and slowly go on trying
 the hard ones, practicing till strength
 and accuracy became one with the daring
 to leap into transcendence, take the chance 50
 of breaking down in the wild arpeggio
 or faulting the full sentence of the fugue.³
 —And in fact we can't live like that: we take on
 everything at once before we've even begun
 to read or mark time, we're forced to begin 55
 in the midst of the hardest movement,
 the one already sounding as we are born.
 At most we're allowed a few months
 of simply listening to the simple line
 of a woman's voice singing a child 60
 against her heart. Everything else is too soon,
 too sudden, the wrenching-apart, that woman's heartbeat
 heard ever after from a distance,
 the loss of that ground-note echoing
 whenever we are happy, or in despair. 65

Everything else seems beyond us,
 we aren't ready for it, nothing that was said
 is true for us, caught naked in the argument,
 the counterpoint, trying to sightread
 what our fingers can't keep up with, learn by heart 70
 what we can't even read. And yet
 it is this we were born to. We aren't virtuosi
 or child prodigies, there are no prodigies
 in this realm, only a half-blind, stubborn
 cleaving to the timbre, the tones of what we are 75
 —even when all the texts describe it differently.

And we're not performers, like Liszt,⁴ competing
 against the world for speed and brilliance
 (the 79-year-old pianist said, when I asked her
What makes a virtuoso?—*Competitiveness.*) 80
 The longer I live the more I mistrust
 theatricality, the false glamour cast
 by performance, the more I know its poverty beside
 the truths we are salvaging from
 the splitting-open of our lives. 85
 The woman who sits watching, listening,
 eyes moving in the darkness

3. Musical piece characterized by the interweaving of several voices. "Arpeggio": production of a chord's tones in succession.

4. Franz Liszt (1811–1886), Hungarian composer and pianist noted for his virtuoso performances.

in rehearsing in her body, hearing-out in her blood
 a score touched off in her perhaps
 by some words, a few chords, from the stage: 90
 a tale only she can tell.

But there come times—perhaps this is one of them—
 when we have to take ourselves more seriously or die;
 when we have to pull back from the incantations,
 rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly, 95
 and disenthral ourselves, bestow
 ourselves to silence, or a severer listening, cleansed
 of oratory, formulas, choruses, laments, static
 crowding the wires. We cut the wires,
 find ourselves in free-fall, as if 100
 our true home were the undimensional
 solitudes, the rift
 in the Great Nebula.⁵
 No one who survives to speak
 new language, has avoided this: 105
 the cutting-away of an old force that held her
 rooted to an old ground
 the pitch of utter loneliness
 where she herself and all creation
 seem equally dispersed, weightless, her being a cry 110
 to which no echo comes or can ever come.

But in fact we were always like this,
 rootless, dismembered: knowing it makes the difference.
 Birth stripped our birthright from us,
 tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves 115
 so early on
 and the whole chorus throbbing at our ears
 like midges, told us nothing, nothing
 of origins, nothing we needed
 to know, nothing that could re-member us. 120

Only: that it is unnatural,
 the homesickness for a woman, for ourselves,
 for that acute joy at the shadow her head and arms
 cast on a wall, her heavy or slender
 thighs on which we lay, flesh against flesh, 125
 eyes steady on the face of love; smell of her milk, her sweat,
 terror of her disappearance, all fused in this hunger
 for the element they have called most dangerous, to be
 lifted breathtaken on her breast, to rock within her
 —even if beaten back, stranded against, to apprehend 130
 in a sudden brine-clear thought

5. A nebula is an immense body of rarefied gas or dust in interstellar space. Rich may be referring to the Great Nebula in the Orion constella-

tion or to a body of dark nebulae, usually called the "Great Rift," which in photographs appears to divide the Milky Way.

trembling like the tiny, orbbed, endangered
 egg-sac of a new world:
*This is what she was to me, and this
 is how I can love myself—* 135
as only a woman can love me.

*Homesick for myself, for her—as, after the heatwave
 breaks, the clear tones of the world
 manifest: cloud, bough, wall, insect, the very soul of light:
 homesick as the fluted vault of desire* 140
*articulates itself: I am the lover and the loved,
 home and wanderer, she who splits
 firewood and she who knocks, a stranger
 in the storm, two women, eye to eye*
 measuring each other's spirit, each other's 145
 limitless desire,
 a whole new poetry beginning here.

Vision begins to happen in such a life
 as if a woman quietly walked away
 from the argument and jargon in a room 150
 and sitting down in the kitchen, began turning in her lap
 bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps,
 laying them out absently on the scrubbed boards
 in the lamplight, with small rainbow-colored shells
 sent in cotton-wool from somewhere far away, 155
 and skeins of milkweed from the nearest meadow—
 original domestic silk, the finest findings—
 and the darkblue petal of the petunia,
 and the dry darkbrown lace of seaweed;
 not forgotten either, the shed silver 160
 whisker of the cat,
 the spiral of paper-wasp-nest curling
 beside the finch's yellow feather.
 Such a composition has nothing to do with eternity,
 the striving for greatness, brilliance— 165
 only with the musing of a mind
 one with her body, experienced fingers quietly pushing
 dark against bright, silk against roughness,
 pulling the tenets of a life together
 with no mere will to mastery, 170
 only care for the many-lived, unending
 forms in which she finds herself,
 becoming now the sherd of broken glass
 slicing light in a corner, dangerous
 to flesh, now the plentiful, soft leaf 175
 that wrapped round the throbbing finger, soothes the wound;
 and now the stone foundation, rockshelf further
 forming underneath everything that grows.

Shattered Head

A life hauls itself uphill
 through hoar-mist steaming
 the sun's tongue licking
 leaf upon leaf into stricken liquid
When? When? cry the soothseekers 5
 but time is a bloodshot eye
 seeing its last of beauty its own
 foreclosure
 a bloodshot mind
 finding itself unspeakable 10
 What is the last thought?
Now I will let you know?
 or, *Now I know?*
 (porridge of skull-splinters, brain tissue
 mouth and throat membrane, cranial fluid) 15

Shattered head on the breast
 of a wooded hill
 laid down there endlessly so
 tendrils soaked into matted compost
 become a root 20
 torqued over the faint springhead
 groin whence illegible
 matter leaches: worm-borings, spurts of silt
 volumes of sporic changes
 hair long blown into far follicles 25
 blasted into a chosen place

Revenge on the head (genitals, breast, untouched)
 revenge on the mouth
 packed with its inarticulate confessions
 revenge on the eyes 30
 green-gray and restless
 revenge on the big and searching lips
 the tender tongue
 revenge on the sensual, on the nose the
 carrier of history 35
 revenge on the life devoured
 in another incineration

You can walk by such a place, the earth is made of them
 where the stretched tissue of a field or woods is humid
 with beloved matter 40
 the soothseekers have withdrawn
 you feel no ghost, only a sporic chorus
 when that place utters its worn sigh
 let us have peace

And the shattered head answers back 45
I believed I was loved, I believed I loved,
who did this to us?

1996–97

1999

Five O'Clock, January 2003

Tonight as cargoes of my young
 fellow countrymen and women are being hauled
 into positions aimed at death, positions
 they who did not will it suddenly
 have to assume 5
 I am thinking of Ed Azevedo
 half-awake in recovery
 if he has his arm whole
 and how much pain he must bear
 under the drugs 10
 On cliffs above a beach
 luxuriant in low tide after storms
 littered with driftwood hurled and piled and
 humanly arranged in fantastic
 installations and beyond 15
 silk-blue and onion-silver-skinned
 Jeffers' "most glorious creature on earth"¹
 we passed, greeting, I saw his arm
 bandaged to the elbow
 asked and he told me: It was just 20
 a small cut, nothing, on the hand he'd
 washed in peroxide thinking
 that was it until the pain began
 traveling up his arm
 and then the antibiotics the splint the 25
 numbing drugs the sick sensation
 and this evening at five o'clock the emergency
 surgery and last summer
 the train from Czechoslovakia to Spain
 with his girl, cheap wine, bread and cheese 30
 room with a balcony, ocean like this
 nobody asking for pay in advance
 kindness of foreigners
 in that country, sick sensation now
 needing to sit in his brother's truck again 35
 even the accident on the motorcycle

1. See Robinson Jeffers, "Ninth Anniversary," in *The Wild God of the World: An Anthology of Robinson Jeffers*, ed. Albert Gelpi (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 52: "there

the most glorious / Creature on earth shines in
 the nights or glitters in the suns, / Or feels of its
 stone in the blind fog" [Rich's note].

was nothing like this
 I'll be thinking of you at five
 this evening I said
 afterward you'll feel better, your body 40
 will be clean of this poison
 I didn't say Your war is here
 but could you have believed
 that from a small thing infection
 would crawl through the blood 45
 and the enormous ruffled shine
 of an ocean wouldn't tell you.

2003

2004

Wait

In paradise every
 the desert wind is rising
 third thought
 in hell there are no thoughts
is of earth 5
 sand screams against your government
 issued tent hell's noise
 in your nostrils crawl
 into your ear-shell
 wrap ourself in no-thought 10
 wait no place for the little lyric
 wedding-ring glint the reason why
 on earth
 they never told you

2003

2004

URSULA K. LE GUIN

b. 1929

Gender, social behavior, and art combine in Ursula K. Le Guin's fiction to create model worlds, all with their own systems of organized belief. In doing so this author inquires more broadly and with more depth than is usual in science fiction. Traditionally, science fiction writers have been at their best when dealing with dystopian worlds, projecting alternative visions in which their satiric powers criticize contemporary tendencies gone bad in a nightmare future; utopias within this subgenre are more often declarative statements of what would be good—and therefore less interesting and less engaging as art. Le Guin distinguishes herself by demonstrating a sincere interest in exploring the legitimacy of other styles of existence—not just what they are but how they work. Her utopian creations are tested against all we know not just about physical and mechanical science but about anthropology in general and gender relationships in particular.

Drawing on what she first learned from Alfred L. and Theodora K. Kroeber, her anthropologist father and folklorist/writer mother, Le Guin has produced science fiction that shifts readers' interests from the pageantry of outer-space discovery and battle to the more subtle dimensions of human identity and communication. Foremost is the power of art. In "A Wizard of Earthsea" (1968) the power of naming something brings it into being; a similar creative effect is apparent in "She Unnames Them" (printed here), in which Eve revises Adam's masculine, typifying style by introducing an ethic representative of woman's feelings. Her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) shows a human ethnologist investigating a world in which gender does not shape reality at all. In this society of hermaphrodites who experience sexual distinctions only for a short time during reproduction, such limitations as binary thinking disappear. Yet this is no simple utopia, for the author believes that any reality is a cultural rather than strictly scientific description—and that one description is superior to another only in its functional persuasiveness. Hence even her creatures in *The Left Hand of Darkness* need to overcome the restrictions of their society and develop secure identities capable of sharing love. This same appraisal informs her story "Schrödinger's Cat" (printed here), in which the famous Austrian physicist's great *Gedankenexperiment* (literally "thought experiment," as opposed to a demonstration with physical matter) is examined in terms of its cultural implications, not its scientific truth. A similarly complex understanding of socioeconomics informs the action of "The Dispossessed" (1974), in which a scientist compares visits to an outworn anarchistic utopia with a younger world whose capitalistic versus communistic rivalries are much like our own. Here, as is usual in her work, Le Guin dresses her thought with rich nuances of character and motivated behavior; the intelligence behind her work is always accessible in human terms—sometimes uncomfortably revealing terms, as is apparent in the manner of her narrators in "She Unnames Them" and "Schrödinger's Cat."

Born in Berkeley, California, where her father taught at the University of California, Le Guin was raised in this academic environment before attending Radcliffe College (for an undergraduate degree in French) and Columbia University (for a master's degree in romance languages). Her longtime residence has been in Oregon, and the ecology of the Pacific Northwest figures as an element in her fiction as well as in the amazing amount and variety of her other work. In addition to many novels (often written in trilogies), she has written poetry, essays, children's books,

and ecological statements and has collaborated on photographic and cinematic projects. As a science fictionist she is one of the most highly honored writers in her field, a consistent winner of the subgenre's highest awards, including the Hugo and the Nebula several times.

Both of the following texts are from *The Compass Rose* (1982).

Schrödinger's Cat¹

As things appear to be coming to some sort of climax, I have withdrawn to this place. It is cooler here, and nothing moves fast.

On the way here I met a married couple who were coming apart. She had pretty well gone to pieces, but he seemed, at first glance, quite hearty. While he was telling me that he had no hormones of any kind, she pulled herself together and, by supporting her head in the crook of her right knee and hopping on the toes of the right foot, approached us shouting, "Well what's *wrong* with a person trying to express themselves?" The left leg, the arms, and the trunk, which had remained lying in the heap, twitched and jerked in sympathy. "Great legs," the husband pointed out, looking at the slim ankle. "My wife has great legs."

A cat has arrived, interrupting my narrative. It is a striped yellow tom with white chest and paws. He has long whiskers and yellow eyes. I never noticed before that cats had whiskers above their eyes; is that normal? There is no way to tell. As he has gone to sleep on my knee, I shall proceed.

Where?

Nowhere, evidently. Yet the impulse to narrate remains. Many things are not worth doing, but almost anything is worth telling. In any case, I have a severe congenital case of *Ethica laboris puritanica*,² or Adam's Disease. It is incurable except by total decapitation. I even like to dream when asleep, and to try and recall my dreams: it assures me that I haven't wasted seven or eight hours just lying there. Now here I am, lying, here. Hard at it.

Well, the couple I was telling you about finally broke up. The pieces of him trotted around bouncing and cheeping, like little chicks, but she was finally reduced to nothing but a mass of nerves: rather like fine chicken wire, in fact, but hopelessly tangled.

So I came on, placing one foot carefully in front of the other, and grieving. This grief is with me still. I fear it is part of me, like foot or loin or eye, or may even be myself: for I seem to have no other self, nothing further, nothing that lies outside the borders of grief.

Yet I don't know what I grieve for: my wife? my husband? my children, or myself? I can't remember. Most dreams are forgotten, try as one will to remember. Yet later music strikes the note, and the harmonic rings along the mandolin strings of the mind, and we find tears in our eyes. Some note keeps playing that makes me want to cry; but what for? I am not certain.

1. The Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger (1887–1961) proposed the following thought experiment in 1935: if a cat is sealed in a box such that it will die in the event of a random and unpredictable atomic-level event, then, according to quantum theory, the cat is simultane-

ously alive and dead until the box is opened for inspection.

2. Puritan work ethic (Latin); a trait the narrator sees as a necessary consequence of the biblical expulsion from the Garden of Eden ("Adam's Disease").

The yellow cat, who may have belonged to the couple that broke up, is dreaming. His paws twitch now and then, and once he makes a small, suppressed remark with his mouth shut. I wonder what a cat dreams of, and to whom he was speaking just then. Cats seldom waste words. They are quiet beasts. They keep their counsel, they reflect. They reflect all day, and at night their eyes reflect. Overbred Siamese cats may be as noisy as little dogs, and then people say, "They're talking," but the noise is farther from speech than is the deep silence of the hound or the tabby. All this cat can say is meow, but maybe in his silences he will suggest to me what it is that I have lost, what I am grieving for. I have a feeling that he knows. That's why he came here. Cats look out for Number One.

It was getting awfully hot. I mean, you could touch less and less. The stove burners, for instance. Now I know that stove burners always used to get hot; that was their final cause, they existed in order to get hot. But they began to get hot without having been turned on. Electric units or gas rings, there they'd be when you came into the kitchen for breakfast, all four of them glaring away, the air above them shaking like clear jelly with the heat waves. It did no good to turn them off, because they weren't on in the first place. Besides, the knobs and dials were also hot, uncomfortable to the touch.

Some people tried hard to cool them off. The favorite technique was to turn them on. It worked sometimes, but you could not count on it. Others investigated the phenomenon, tried to get at the root of it, the cause. They were probably the most frightened ones, but man is most human at his most frightened. In the face of the hot stove burners they acted with exemplary coolness. They studied, they observed. They were like the fellow in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,³ has clapped his hands over his face in horror as the devils drag him down to Hell—but only over one eye. The other eye is busy looking. It's all he can do, but he does it. He observes. Indeed, one wonders if Hell would exist, if he did not look at it. However, neither he, nor the people I am talking about, had enough time left to do much about it. And then finally of course there were the people who did not try to do or think anything about it at all.

When the water came out of the cold-water taps hot one morning, however, even people who had blamed it all on the Democrats began to feel a more profound unease. Before long, forks and pencils and wrenches were too hot to handle without gloves; and cars were really terrible. It was like opening the door of an oven going full blast, to open the door of your car. And by then, other people almost scorched your fingers off. A kiss was like a branding iron. Your child's hair flowed along your hand like fire.

Here, as I said, it is cooler; and, as a matter of fact, this animal is cool. A real cool cat. No wonder it's pleasant to pet his fur. Also he moves slowly, at least for the most part, which is all the slowness one can reasonably expect of a cat. He hasn't that frenetic quality most creatures acquired—all they did was ZAP and gone. They lacked presence. I suppose birds always tended to be that way, but even the hummingbird used to halt for a second in the very center of his metabolic frenzy, and hang, still as a hub, present, above the fuchsias—then gone again, but you knew something was there besides

3. Monumental fresco in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel by the Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564).

the blurring brightness. But it got so that even robins and pigeons, the heavy impudent birds, were a blur; and as for swallows, they cracked the sound barrier. You knew of swallows only by the small, curved sonic booms that looped about the eaves of old houses in the evening.

Worms shot like subway trains through the dirt of gardens, among the writhing roots of roses.

You could scarcely lay a hand on children, by then: too fast to catch, too hot to hold. They grew up before your eyes.

But then, maybe that's always been true.

I was interrupted by the cat, who woke and said meow once, then jumped down from my lap and leaned against my legs diligently. This is a cat who knows how to get fed. He also knows how to jump. There was a lazy fluidity to his leap, as if gravity affected him less than it does other creatures. As a matter of fact there were some localised cases, just before I left, of the failure of gravity; but this quality in the cat's leap was something quite else. I am not yet in such a state of confusion that I can be alarmed by grace. Indeed, I found it reassuring. While I was opening a can of sardines, a person arrived.

Hearing the knock, I thought it might be the mailman. I miss mail very much, so I hurried to the door and said, "Is it the mail?"

A voice replied, "Yah!" I opened the door. He came in, almost pushing me aside in his haste. He dumped down an enormous knapsack he had been carrying, straightened up, massaged his shoulders, and said, "Wow!"

"How did you get here?"

He stared at me and repeated, "How?"

At this my thoughts concerning human and animal speech recurred to me, and I decided that this was probably not a man, but a small dog. (Large dogs seldom go yah, wow, how, unless it is appropriate to do so.)

"Come on, fella," I coaxed him. "Come, come on, that's a boy, good doggie!" I opened a can of pork and beans for him at once, for he looked half starved. He ate voraciously, gulping and lapping. When it was gone he said "Wow!" several times. I was just about to scratch him behind the ears when he stiffened, his hackles bristling, and growled deep in his throat. He had noticed the cat.

The cat had noticed him some time before, without interest, and was now sitting on a copy of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*⁴ washing sardine oil off its whiskers.

"Wow!" the dog, whom I had thought of calling Rover, barked. "Wow! Do you know what that is? *That's Schrödinger's cat!*"

"No it's not, not any more; it's my cat," I said, unreasonably offended.

"Oh, well, Schrödinger's dead, of course, but it's his cat. I've seen hundreds of pictures of it. Erwin Schrödinger, the great physicist, you know. Oh, wow! To think of finding it here!"

The cat looked coldly at him for a moment, and began to wash its left shoulder with negligent energy. An almost religious expression had come into Rover's face. "It was meant," he said in a low, impressive tone. "Yah. It was *meant*. It can't be a mere coincidence. It's too improbable. Me, with the box; you, with the cat; to meet—here—now." He looked up at me, his eyes

4. Keyboard music by the German Baroque-era composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750).

shining with happy fervor. "Isn't it wonderful?" he said. "I'll get the box set up right away." And he started to tear open his huge knapsack.

While the cat washed its front paws, Rover unpacked. While the cat washed its tail and belly, regions hard to reach gracefully, Rover put together what he had unpacked, a complex task. When he and the cat finished their operations simultaneously and looked at me, I was impressed. They had come out even, to the very second. Indeed it seemed that something more than chance was involved. I hoped it was not myself.

"What's that?" I asked, pointing to a protuberance on the outside of the box. I did not ask what the box was as it was quite clearly a box.

"The gun," Rover said with excited pride.

"The gun?"

"To shoot the cat."

"To shoot the cat?"

"Or to *not shoot* the cat. Depending on the photon."

"The photon?"

"Yah! It's Schrödinger's great Gedankenexperiment.⁵ You see, there's a little emitter here. At Zero Time, five seconds after the lid of the box is closed, it will emit one photon. The photon will strike a half-silvered mirror. The quantum mechanical probability of the photon passing through the mirror is exactly one half, isn't it? So! If the photon passes through, the trigger will be activated and the gun will fire. If the photon is deflected, the trigger will not be activated and the gun will not fire. Now, you put the cat in. The cat is in the box. You close the lid. You go away! You stay away! What happens?" Rover's eyes were bright.

"The cat gets hungry?"

"The cat gets shot—or not shot," he said, seizing my arm, though not, fortunately, in his teeth. "But the gun is silent, perfectly silent. The box is soundproof. There is no way to know whether or not the cat has been shot, until you lift the lid of the box. There is *no way*! Do you see how central this is to the whole of quantum theory? Before Zero Time the whole system, on the quantum level or on our level, is nice and simple. But after Zero Time the whole system can be represented only by a linear combination of two waves. We cannot predict the behavior of the photon, and thus, once it has behaved, we cannot predict the state of the system it has determined. We cannot predict it! God plays dice with the world!⁶ So it is beautifully demonstrated that if you desire certainty, any certainty, you must create it yourself!"

"How?"

"By lifting the lid of the box, of course," Rover said, looking at me with sudden disappointment, perhaps a touch of suspicion, like a Baptist who finds he has been talking church matters not to another Baptist as he thought, but a Methodist, or even, God forbid, an Episcopalian. "To find out whether the cat is dead or not."

"Do you mean," I said carefully, "that until you lift the lid of the box, the cat has neither been shot nor not been shot?"

"Yah!" Rover said, radiant with relief, welcoming me back to the fold. "Or maybe, you know, both."

5. Thought experiment (German, literal trans.); the intellectual demonstration of a theory, often making use of analogy.

6. The German-born American physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) stated that *God did not* play dice with the universe.

“But why does opening the box and looking reduce the system back to one probability, either live cat or dead cat? Why don’t we get included in the system when we lift the lid of the box?”

There was a pause. “How?” Rover barked, distrustfully.

“Well, we would involve ourselves in the system, you see, the superposition of two waves. There’s no reason why it should only exist *inside* an open box, is there? So when we came to look, there we would be, you and I, both looking at a live cat, and both looking at a dead cat. You see?”

A dark cloud lowered on Rover’s eyes and brow. He barked twice in a subdued, harsh voice, and walked away. With his back turned to me he said in a firm, sad tone, “You must not complicate the issue. It is complicated enough.”

“Are you sure?”

He nodded. Turning, he spoke pleadingly. “Listen. It’s all we have—the box. Truly it is. The box. And the cat. And they’re here. The box, the cat, at last. Put the cat in the box. Will you? Will you let me put the cat in the box?”

“No,” I said, shocked.

“Please. Please. Just for a minute. Just for half a minute! Please let me put the cat in the box!”

“Why?”

“I can’t stand this terrible uncertainty,” he said, and burst into tears.

I stood some while indecisive. Though I felt sorry for the poor son of a bitch, I was about to tell him, gently, No; when a curious thing happened. The cat walked over to the box, sniffed around it, lifted his tail and sprayed a corner to mark his territory, and then lightly, with that marvellous fluid ease, leapt into it. His yellow tail just flicked the edge of the lid as he jumped, and it closed, falling into place with a soft, decisive click.

“The cat is in the box,” I said.

“The cat is in the box,” Rover repeated in a whisper, falling to his knees. “Oh, wow. Oh, wow. Oh, wow.”

There was silence then: deep silence. We both gazed, I afoot, Rover kneeling, at the box. No sound. Nothing happened. Nothing would happen. Nothing would ever happen, until we lifted the lid of the box.

“Like Pandora,”⁷ I said in a weak whisper. I could not quite recall Pandora’s legend. She had let all the plagues and evils out of the box, of course, but there had been something else, too. After all the devils were let loose, something quite different, quite unexpected, had been left. What had it been? Hope? A dead cat? I could not remember.

Impatience welled up in me. I turned on Rover, glaring. He returned the look with expressive brown eyes. You can’t tell me dogs haven’t got souls.

“Just exactly what are you trying to prove?” I demanded.

“That the cat will be dead, or not dead,” he murmured submissively. “Certainty. All I want is certainty. To know for *sure* that God *does* play dice with the world.”

I looked at him for a while with fascinated incredulity. “Whether he does, or doesn’t,” I said, “do you think he’s going to leave you a note about it in the box?” I went to the box, and with a rather dramatic gesture, flung the lid back. Rover staggered up from his knees, gasping, to look. The cat was, of course, not there.

7. In Greek mythology the first mortal woman, who out of curiosity opened a box and released human ills into the world; another version has her losing all human blessings except hope.

Rover neither barked, nor fainted, nor cursed, nor wept. He really took it very well.

“Where is the cat?” he asked at last.

“Where is the box?”

“Here.”

“Where’s here?”

“Here is now.”

“We used to think so,” I said, “but really we should use larger boxes.”

He gazed about him in mute bewilderment, and did not flinch even when the roof of the house was lifted off just like the lid of a box, letting in the unconscionable, inordinate light of the stars. He had just time to breathe, “Oh, wow!”

I have identified the note that keeps sounding. I checked it on the mandolin before the glue melted. It is the note A, the one that drove the composer Schumann mad.⁸ It is a beautiful, clear tone, much clearer now that the stars are visible. I shall miss the cat. I wonder if he found what it was we lost?

1982

She Unnames Them

Most of them accepted namelessness with the perfect indifference with which they had so long accepted and ignored their names. Whales and dolphins, seals and sea otters consented with particular grace and alacrity, sliding into anonymity as into their element. A faction of yaks, however, protested. They said that “yak” sounded right, and that almost everyone who knew they existed called them that. Unlike the ubiquitous creatures such as rats or fleas who had been called by hundreds or thousands of different names since Babel,¹ the yaks could truly say, they said, that they had *a name*. They discussed the matter all summer. The councils of the elderly females finally agreed that though the name might be useful to others, it was so redundant from the yak point of view that they never spoke it themselves, and hence might as well dispense with it. After they presented the argument in this light to their bulls, a full consensus was delayed only by the onset of severe early blizzards. Soon after the beginning of the thaw their agreement was reached and the designation “yak” was returned to the donor.

Among the domestic animals, few horses had cared what anybody called them since the failure of Dean Swift’s² attempt to name them from their own vocabulary. Cattle, sheep, swine, asses, mules, and goats, along with chickens, geese, and turkeys, all agreed enthusiastically to give their names back to the people to whom—as they put it—they belonged.

A couple of problems did come up with pets. The cats of course steadfastly denied ever having had any name other than those self-given, unspoken,

8. The German Romantic composer and pianist Robert Schumann (1810–1856) died from mental stress that included tinnitus, a persistent ringing in the ears.

1. Biblical city where God determined people wouldn’t speak just one language.

2. Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), who in book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) depicts horses who are smarter and more humane than people as a way to mock human pretensions of higher intelligence.

effanineffably personal names which, as the poet named Eliot³ said, they spend long hours daily contemplating—though none of the contemplators has ever admitted that what they contemplate is in fact their name, and some onlookers have wondered if the object of that meditative gaze might not in fact be the Perfect, or Platonic,⁴ Mouse. In any case it is a moot point now. It was with the dogs, and with some parrots, lovebirds, ravens, and mynahs that the trouble arose. These verbally talented individuals insisted that their names were important to them, and flatly refused to part with them. But as soon as they understood that the issue was precisely one of individual choice, and that anybody who wanted to be called Rover, or Froufrou, or Polly, or even Birdie in the personal sense, was perfectly free to do so, not one of them had the least objection to parting with the lower case (or, as regards German creatures, uppercase) generic appellations poodle, parrot, dog, or bird, and all the Linnaean⁵ qualifiers that had trailed along behind them for two hundred years like tin cans tied to a tail.

The insects parted with their names in vast clouds and swarms of ephemeral syllables buzzing and stinging and humming and flitting and crawling and tunneling away.

As for the fish of the sea, their names dispersed from them in silence throughout the oceans like faint, dark blurs of cuttlefish ink, and drifted off on the currents without a trace.

None were left now to unname, and yet how close I felt to them when I saw one of them swim or fly or trot or crawl across my way or over my skin, or stalk me in the night, or go along beside me for a while in the day. They seemed far closer than when their names had stood between myself and them like a clear barrier: so close that my fear of them and their fear of me became one same fear. And the attraction that many of us felt, the desire to smell one another's smells, feel or rub or caress one another's scales or skin or feathers or fur, taste one another's blood or flesh, keep one another warm,—that attraction was now all one with the fear, and the hunter could not be told from the hunted, nor the eater from the food.

This was more or less the effect I had been after. It was somewhat more powerful than I had anticipated, but I could not now, in all conscience, make an exception for myself. I resolutely put anxiety away, went to Adam, and said, "You and your father lent me this—gave it to me, actually. It's been really useful, but it doesn't exactly seem to fit very well lately. But thanks very much! It's really been very useful."

It is hard to give back a gift without sounding peevish or ungrateful, and I did not want to leave him with that impression of me. He was not paying much attention, as it happened, and said only, "Put it down over there, OK?" and went on with what he was doing.

One of my reasons for doing what I did was that talk was getting us nowhere; but all the same I felt a little let down. I had been prepared to defend my decision. And I thought that perhaps when he did notice he might

3. T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), American-born British poet and author of *Old Possum's Practical Book of Cats* (1939).

4. The Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 B.C.E.) posited that perfect archetypal forms underlie the many imperfect manifestations of things in

the real world.

5. Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778) classified plants and animals by using a double Latin name designating genus and species. "Uppercase": in German, all nouns are capitalized.

be upset and want to talk. I put some things away and fiddled around a little, but he continued to do what he was doing and to take no notice of anything else. At last I said, "Well, goodbye, dear. I hope the garden key turns up."

He was fitting parts together, and said without looking around, "OK, fine, dear. When's dinner?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "I'm going now. With the—" I hesitated, and finally said, "With them, you know," and went on. In fact I had only just then realized how hard it would have been to explain myself. I could not chatter away as I used to do, taking it all for granted. My words now must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining.

1982

GARY SNYDER

b. 1930

“I try to hold both history and wildness in my mind, that my poems may approach the true measure of things and stand against the unbalance and ignorance of our time,” Gary Snyder has said. Throughout his life Snyder has sought alternatives to this imbalance. His quest has led him to the natural world, to the study of mythology and the discipline of Eastern religions, and to living oral traditions including those of Native American societies. Snyder understands the work of poetry as recovery and healing. Like the shaman-poet of primitive cultures whose power to “heal disease and resist death” is “acquired from dreams” (as he writes in the essay “Poetry and the Primitive”), he seeks to restore contact with a vital universe in which all things are interdependent. The journey of Snyder’s life and work has taken him back to what he calls “the most archaic values on earth.” His poems are acts of cultural criticism, challenges to the dominant values of the contemporary world.

The American West Coast is Snyder’s native landscape; its forests and mountains have always attracted him, and they inspire many of his poems. He was born in San Francisco, grew up in Washington State, and later moved with his family to Portland, Oregon. In 1947 he entered Reed College, where he studied anthropology and developed a special interest in Native American cultures (Northwest Coast Indian myths and tales inform his second book, *Myths and Tests*, 1960). After doing graduate work in linguistics at Indiana University, he returned to the West, where he became associated with Kenneth Rexroth and Philip Whalen as well as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, all of whom participated in what came to be called the San Francisco Renaissance. In this period Snyder also studied classical Chinese at the University of California at Berkeley and translated some of the Cold Mountain poems of the Zen poet Han-shan. In the mid-1950s Snyder went to Japan, where he resided, except intermittently, until 1968; in Japan he took formal instruction in Buddhism under Zen masters. The various traditions Snyder has studied come together in his varied vision-quest poems.

Snyder's poems, like his life, combine reading and formal study with physical activity; he has worked as a timber scaler, a forest-fire lookout (one of his lookouts inspired "August on Sourdough"), a logger, and a crewman on a tanker in the South Pacific. "My poems follow the rhythms of the physical work I'm doing and the life I'm leading at any given time," he has remarked. The title of his first book, *Riprap* (1959), is a forester's term for, he explains, "a cobble of stone laid on steep slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains." Snyder's poems often follow a trail of ascent or descent, as in "Straight-Creek-Great Burn" from his Pulitzer Prize-winning volume *Turtle Island* (1975). Hiking with friends, he experiences the world as dynamic and flowing (running water and "changing clouds"), but the journey brings the walkers to a still point; they lie "resting on dry fern and / watching." From such a stillness the central image of a Snyder poem often rises, like the birds that "arch and loop," then "settle down." The achievement of stillness in a universe of change is, for Snyder, pivotal. The mind empties itself, the individual ego is erased, and the local place reveals the universal.

If Snyder's poems contain a Zenlike stillness, they also exhibit an appealing energy, one source of which is his love of wildness. Like the Henry David Thoreau of *Walden*, explicitly evoked in sections of *Myths and Texts*, Snyder finds a tonic wildness in the natural world, but unlike Thoreau he is an unabashed celebrant of erotic experience (his earlier poems show that he also knows its destructive possibilities). He renders one of the various faces of Eros in "Beneath My Hand and Eye the Distant Hills. Your Body" (from *The Back Country*, 1968).

Some of Snyder's numerous essays on politics and ecology are included in his influential *Earth House Hold* (1969), *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), and *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (1995). His collections *Axe Handles* (1983), *Left Out in the Rain* (1986), and *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* (1992) confirm that his poems are bound up in the same concerns. *Danger on Peaks* (2004) continues Snyder's explorations of landscape and ecology and also registers the upheavals of change in the earth and in the body, including the world-changing events of September 11, 2001, memorialized in "Falling from a Height, Holding Hands." Although his didactic impulse sometimes leads him to oversimplification, Snyder's political vision remains one strength of his poetry. The potential in this vision for self-importance and over-seriousness is tempered by his sense of humor and the conviction, palpable in his best poems, that his experiences are common and shared. Snyder's poems suggest diverse contexts: his belief in the writer as cultural critic links him to Thoreau and Robert Duncan, his rhythms and strong images recall Ezra Pound, his meticulous attention to the natural world reminds us of Robert Frost and A. R. Ammons. Eclectic yet respectful of ancient traditions, Snyder is an American original who sees his own work as part of a "continual creation," one manifestation of the energy that sustains all life.

Milton¹ by Firelight

*Piute Creek,*² August 1955

"O hell, what do mine eyes
with grief behold?"³
Working with an old
Singlejack miner, who can sense

1. John Milton (1608–1674), major English poet and author of *Paradise Lost*, which retells the biblical story of humanity's Fall from Grace.

2. Part of Yosemite National Park, where Snyder

served as a fire lookout. The Sierra Nevada mountain range includes Yosemite in its span.

3. Satan's words when he first sees Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (*Paradise Lost* 4.358).

The vein and cleavage
 In the very guts of rock, can
 Blast granite, build
 Switchbacks⁴ that last for years
 Under the beat of snow, thaw, mule-hooves.
 What use, Milton, a silly story
 Of our lost general⁵ parents,
 eaters of fruit? 5

The Indian, the chainsaw boy,
 And a string of six mules
 Came riding down to camp
 Hungry for tomatoes and green apples.
 Sleeping in saddle blankets
 Under a bright night-sky
 Han River slantwise by morning.
 Jays squall
 Coffee boils 15

In ten thousand years the Sierras
 Will be dry and dead, home of the scorpion.
 Ice-scratched slabs and bent trees.
 No paradise, no fall,
 Only the weathering land
 The wheeling sky,
 Man, with his Satan
 Scouring the chaos of the mind.
 Oh Hell! 25

Fire down
 Too dark to read, miles from a road
 The bell-mare clangs in the meadow
 That packed dirt for a fill-in
 Scrambling through loose rocks
 On an old trail
 All of a summer's day.⁶ 35

1959

Riprap¹

Lay down these words
 Before your mind like rocks.
 placed solid, by hands
 In choice of place, set
 Before the body of the mind 5

4. Roads ascending a steep incline in a zigzag pattern.

5. I.e., shared by all of humankind.

6. Alludes to an epic simile describing Satan's fall: "From morn / to noon he fell, from noon to dewy

eve, / A summer's day" (*Paradise Lost* 1.742–44).

1. A cobble of stone laid on steep slick rock to make a trail for horses in the mountains [Snyder's note].

in space and time:
 Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall
 riprap of things:
 Cobble of milky way,
 straying planets, 10
 These poems, people,
 lost ponies with
 Dragging saddles—
 and rocky sure-foot trails.
 The worlds like an endless 15
 four-dimensional
 Game of *Go*.²
 ants and pebbles
 In the thin loam, each rock a word
 a creek-washed stone 20
 Granite: ingrained
 with torment of fire and weight
 Crystal and sediment linked hot
 all change, in thoughts,
 As well as things. 25
 1959

August on Sourdough,¹ A Visit from Dick Brewer

You hitched a thousand miles
 north from San Francisco
 Hiked up the mountainside a mile in the air
 The little cabin—one room—
 walled in glass 5
 Meadows and snowfields, hundreds of peaks.
 We lay in our sleeping bags
 talking half the night;
 Wind in the guy-cables this summer mountain rain.
 Next morning I went with you 10
 as far as the cliffs,
 Loaned you my poncho— the rain across the shale—
 You down the snowfield
 flapping in the wind
 Waving a last goodbye half hidden in the clouds 15
 To go on hitching
 clear to New York;
 Me back to my mountain and far, far, west.
 1968

2. An ancient Japanese game played with black and white stones, placed one after the other on a checkered board.

1. Mountain in Washington State, where Snyder worked as a fire-watcher during summer 1953.

Ripples on the Surface

“Ripples on the surface of the water
 were silver salmon passing under—different
 from the sorts of ripples caused by breezes”

A scudding plume on the wave—
 a humpback whale is 5
 breaking out in air up
 gulping herring
 —Nature not a book, but a *performance*, a
 high old culture

Ever-fresh events 10
 scraped out, rubbed out, and used, used, again—
 the braided channels of the rivers
 hidden under fields of grass—

The vast wild.
 the house, alone. 15
 the little house in the wild,
 the wild in the house.

both forgotten.

No nature.

Both together, one big empty house 20

1993

Falling from a Height, Holding Hands

What was *that*?
 storms of flying glass
 & billowing flames

a clear day to the far sky—

better than burning, 5
 hold hands.

We will be
 two peregrines diving

all the way down

2004

DONALD BARTHELME

1931–1989

Born in Philadelphia, where his parents were attending college, Donald Barthelme was raised in Houston, Texas, where his father became a prominent architect. The author's collegiate experience as a reporter for and editor of the student newspaper at the University of Houston influenced his career and his literary style. After army service he returned to Houston and worked on the city newspaper, wrote publicity for the university, edited the school's quarterly magazine of the arts, *Forum*, and directed the Contemporary Arts Museum. During these years Barthelme became fascinated with the mechanical workings of language, from the appearance of type on the page to verbal equivalents for nonverbal popular artifacts. When in 1962 he moved to New York to edit *Location*, a short-lived journal of literature and art, and started writing short stories and parodies for the *New Yorker*, Barthelme began to have a unique impact on literature through his recognition that language, rather than what language represents, could be the subject of fiction.

Lives, his narratives show, are influenced by the quality of language within which they are conducted. In today's world a material culture and a communications medium given to advertising and promotion feed each other in a frenzy of consumption; everything is ingested, nothing is digested, with the result that meaning becomes a casualty of process. Danger exists in letting fine-sounding words and phrases pass without questioning the motives that inform them—something that Barthelme's engineers get away with in "Report" (collected in *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*, 1968) when they propose to work on "realtime online computer-controlled wish evaporation" (a task they believe necessary in "meeting the rising expectations of the world's peoples, which are as you know rising entirely too fast"). Witty and satirical, Barthelme could be especially adept at making sophisticated philosophical points within mundane situations. "Me and Miss Mandible," from his first collection, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964), argues a postmodern understanding of semiotics from a sixth-grade classroom to which an adult has been mysteriously returned to suffer, with all his experience, in the company of twelve-year-olds. What he learns, and wishes he could teach the others now struggling through behavior molded by television and movies, is that "signs are signs, and that some of them are lies."

Barthelme's four novels move in the same direction as his ten volumes of short stories. *Snow White* (1967), like his early fiction, uses a preposterous situation—the fairy tale character living with seven small men in a contemporary Greenwich Village apartment—to show how modern life lacks heroism and romance. *The Dead Father* (1975) is more weighted with psychological issues, principally the power of fatherhood and how that power is absurdly clung to. Here the author began relying less on satirical references to current life and more on narrative statement. In the middle to late 1970s Barthelme's fiction also became more comfortable in describing life as lived without the superimposition of defamiliarizing actions; *Paradise* (1986) reads almost conventionally. Yet as had happened so productively in such early work as "The Balloon" (printed here), Barthelme wondered at existence. At his death he had completed a fanciful romance, *The King* (published posthumously in 1990); in it he recasts the situation of Britain in the early years of World War II, applying literally the Arthurian terms to which commentators of the time liked to allude.

The following text is from *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts* (1968).

The Balloon

The balloon, beginning at a point on Fourteenth Street, the exact location of which I cannot reveal, expanded northward all one night, while people were sleeping, until it reached the Park. There, I stopped it; at dawn the northernmost edges lay over the Plaza,¹ the free-hanging motion was frivolous and gentle. But experiencing a faint irritation at stopping, even to protect the trees, and seeing no reason the balloon should not be allowed to expand upward, over the parts of the city it was already covering, into the “air space” to be found there, I asked the engineers to see to it. This expansion took place throughout the morning, soft imperceptible sighing of gas through the valves. The balloon then covered forty-five blocks north-south and an irregular area east-west, as many as six crosstown blocks on either side of the Avenue² in some places. That was the situation, then.

But it is wrong to speak of “situations,” implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution, some escape of tension; there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there—muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with walnut and soft yellows. A deliberate lack of finish, enhanced by skillful installation, gave the surface a rough, forgotten quality; sliding weights on the inside, carefully adjusted, anchored the great, vari-shaped mass at a number of points. Now we have had a flood of original ideas in all media, works of singular beauty as well as significant milestones in the history of inflation, but at that moment there was only *this balloon*, concrete particular, hanging there.

There were reactions. Some people found the balloon “interesting.” As a response this seemed inadequate to the immensity of the balloon, the suddenness of its appearance over the city; on the other hand, in the absence of hysteria or other societally induced anxiety, it must be judged a calm “mature” one. There was a certain amount of initial argumentation about the “meaning” of the balloon; this subsided, because we have learned not to insist on meanings, and they are rarely even looked for now, except in cases involving the simplest, safest phenomena. It was agreed that since the meaning of the balloon could never be known absolutely, extended discussion was pointless, or at least less purposeful than the activities of those who, for example, hung green and blue paper lanterns from the warm gray underside, in certain streets, or seized the occasion to write messages on the surface, announcing their availability for the performance of unnatural acts, or the availability of acquaintances.

Daring children jumped, especially at those points where the balloon hovered close to a building, so that the gap between balloon and building was a matter of a few inches, or points where the balloon actually made contact, exerting an ever-so-slight pressure against the side of a building, so that balloon and building seemed a unity. The upper surface was so structured that a “landscape” was presented, small valleys as well as slight knolls, or mounds; once atop the balloon, a stroll was possible, or even a trip, from one place to another. There was pleasure in being able to run down an incline, then up

1. Grand Army Plaza, site of the Plaza Hotel (also called the Plaza), at the southeastern corner of Central Park in New York City, approxi-

mately 2.5 miles north of Fourteenth Street, the northern boundary of Greenwich Village.

2. Fifth Avenue.

the opposing slope, both gently graded, or in making a leap from one side to the other. Bouncing was possible, because of the pneumaticity of the surface, and even falling, if that was your wish. That all these varied motions, as well as others, were within one's possibilities, in experiencing the "up" side of the balloon, was extremely exciting for children, accustomed to the city's flat, hard skin. But the purpose of the balloon was not to amuse children.

Too, the number of people, children and adults, who took advantage of the opportunities described was not so large as it might have been: a certain timidity, lack of trust in the balloon, was seen. There was, furthermore, some hostility. Because we had hidden the pumps, which fed helium to the interior, and because the surface was so vast that the authorities could not determine the point of entry—that is, the point at which the gas was injected—a degree of frustration was evidenced by those city officers into whose province such manifestations normally fell. The apparent purposelessness of the balloon was vexing (as was the fact that it was "there" at all). Had we painted, in great letters, "LABORATORY TESTS PROVE" OR "18% MORE EFFECTIVE" on the sides of the balloon, this difficulty would have been circumvented. But I could not bear to do so. On the whole, these officers were remarkably tolerant, considering the dimensions of the anomaly, this tolerance being the result of, first, secret tests conducted by night that convinced them that little or nothing could be done in the way of removing or destroying the balloon, and, secondly, a public warmth that arose (not uncolored by touches of the aforementioned hostility) toward the balloon, from ordinary citizens.

As a single balloon must stand for a lifetime of thinking about balloons, so each citizen expressed, in the attitude he chose, a complex of attitudes. One man might consider that the balloon had to do with the notion *sullied*, as in the sentence *The big balloon sullied the otherwise clear and radiant Manhattan sky*. That is, the balloon was, in this man's view, an imposture, something inferior to the sky that had formerly been there, something interposed between the people and their "sky." But in fact it was January, the sky was dark and ugly; it was not a sky you could look up into, lying on your back in the street, with pleasure, unless pleasure, for you, proceeded from having been threatened, from having been misused. And the underside of the balloon was a pleasure to look up into, we had seen to that, muted grays and browns for the most part, contrasted with walnut and soft, forgotten yellows. And so, while this man was thinking *sullied*, still there was an admixture of pleasurable cognition in his thinking, struggling with the original perception.

Another man, on the other hand, might view the balloon as if it were part of a system of unanticipated rewards, as when one's employer walks in and says, "Here, Henry, take this package of money I have wrapped for you, because we have been doing so well in the business here, and I admire the way you bruise the tulips, without which bruising your department would not be a success, or at least not the success that it is." For this man the balloon might be a brilliantly heroic "muscle and pluck" experience, even if an experience poorly understood.

Another man might say, "Without the example of ——, it is doubtful that —— would exist today in its present form," and find many to agree with him, or to argue with him. Ideas of "bloat" and "float" were introduced, as well as concepts of dream and responsibility. Others engaged in remarkably detailed fantasies having to do with a wish either to lose themselves in

the balloon, or to engorge it. The private character of these wishes, of their origins, deeply buried and unknown, was such that they were not much spoken of; yet there is evidence that they were widespread. It was also argued that what was important was what you felt when you stood under the balloon; some people claimed that they felt sheltered, warmed, as never before, while enemies of the balloon felt, or reported feeling, constrained, a “heavy” feeling.

Critical opinion was divided:

“monstrous pourings”

“harp”

XXXXXXX “certain contrasts with darker portions”

“inner joy”

“large, square corners”

“conservative eclecticism that has so far governed modern balloon design”

::::: “abnormal vigor”

“warm, soft, lazy passages”

“Has unity been sacrificed for a sprawling quality?”

“*Quelle catastrophe!*”

“munching”

People began, in a curious way, to locate themselves in relation to aspects of the balloon: “I’ll be at that place where it dips down into Forty-seventh Street almost to the sidewalk, near the Alamo Chile House,” or, “Why don’t we go stand on top, and take the air, and maybe walk about a bit, where it forms a tight, curving line with the façade of the Gallery of Modern Art—” Marginal intersections offered entrances within a given time duration, as well as “warm, soft, lazy passages” in which . . . But it is wrong to speak of “marginal intersections,” each intersection was crucial, none could be ignored (as if, walking there, you might not find someone capable of turning your attention, in a flash, from old exercises to new exercises, risks and escalations). Each intersection was crucial, meeting of balloon and building, meeting of balloon and man, meeting of balloon and balloon.

It was suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined. Sometimes a bulge, blister, or subsection would carry all the way east to the river on its own initiative, in the manner of an army’s movements on a map, as seen in a headquarters remote from the fighting. Then that part would be, as it were, thrown back again, or would withdraw into new dispositions; the next morning, that part would have made another sortie, or disappeared altogether. This ability of the balloon to shift its shape, to change, was very pleasing, especially to people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired, was not available. The balloon, for the twenty-two days of its existence, offered the possibility, in its randomness, of mislocation of the self, in contradistinction to the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet. The amount of specialized training currently needed, and the conse-

quent desirability of long-term commitments, has been occasioned by the steadily growing importance of complex machinery, in virtually all kinds of operations; as this tendency increases, more and more people will turn, in bewildered inadequacy, to solutions for which the balloon may stand as a prototype, or “rough draft.”

I met you under the balloon, on the occasion of your return from Norway; you asked if it was mine; I said it was. The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual deprivation, but now that your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate. Removal of the balloon was easy; trailer trucks carried away the depleted fabric, which is now stored in West Virginia, awaiting some other time of unhappiness, sometime, perhaps, when we are angry with one another.

1968

TONI MORRISON

b. 1931

The 1993 Nobel Laureate in literature, Toni Morrison is a novelist of great importance in her own right and has been the central figure in putting fiction by and about African American women at the forefront of the late-twentieth-century literary canon. Whereas the legacy of slavery had obscured a usable tradition, and critical stereotypes at times restricted such writers' range, Morrison's fiction serves as a model for reconstructing a culturally empowering past. She joins the great American tradition of self-invention: her example and her editorial work have figured importantly in the careers of other writers, such as Toni Cade Bambara (included in this volume) and Gayl Jones.

Morrison was born in Lorain, Ohio, where much of her fiction is set (a departure from earlier African American narratives typically located in the rural South or urban North). Having earned a B.A. from Howard University with a major in English and a minor in classics, and an M.A. from Cornell University (with a thesis on suicide in the novels of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner), Morrison began a teaching career in 1955 that reached from Texas Southern University back to Howard, where her students included the future activist Stokely Carmichael and the future critic Houston A. Baker Jr. At this time she married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect, with whom she had two children before ending their marriage in 1964. Already writing, she took a job with the publishing firm Random House and eventually settled in New York City, where she worked until 1983. During these same years she held visiting teaching appointments at institutions including Yale University and Bard College.

As a first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is uncommonly mature for its confident use of various narrative voices. Throughout her career Morrison has been dedicated to constructing a practical cultural identity of a race and a gender whose self-images have been obscured or denied by dominating forces, and in *The Bluest Eye* she already shows that narrative strategy is an important element in such construction. A girl's need to be loved generates the novel's action, action that involves displaced

and alienated affections (and eventually incestuous rape); the family's inability to produce a style of existence in which love can be born and thrive leads to just such a devastating fate for Morrison's protagonist. Love is also denied in *Sula* (1974), in which relationships extend in two directions: between contemporaries (*Sula* and her friend Nel) and with previous generations.

With *Song of Solomon* (1977) Morrison seeks a more positive redemption of her characters. Turning away from his parents' loveless marriage, Milkman Dead makes a physical and mental journey to his ancestral roots. Here he discovers a more useful legacy in communal tales about Grandmother and Great-Grandfather, each long dead but infusing the local culture with emotionally sustaining lore. Milkman uses this lore to learn how the spiritual guidance offered by his aunt Pilate eclipses the material concerns of his parents' world.

Allegory becomes an important strategy in *Tar Baby* (1981), drawing on the strong folk culture of Haiti, where two contrasting persons form a troubled relationship based on their distinct searches for and rejections of a heritage. Yet it is in a rebuilding of history, rather than allegory or myth, that Morrison achieved her great strength as a novelist in *Beloved* (1987), the winner of her first major award, the Pulitzer Prize. Set in the middle 1870s, when race relations in America were at their most crucial juncture (slavery having ended and the course of the South's Reconstruction not yet fully determined), this novel shows a mother (Sethe) being haunted and eventually destroyed by the ghost of a daughter (Beloved) whom she had killed eighteen years earlier rather than allow to be taken by a vicious slavemaster. This novel is central to Morrison's canon because it involves so many important themes and techniques, from love and guilt to history's role in clarifying the past's influence on the present, all told in an experimental style of magical realism that draws upon techniques from both oral storytelling and modernist fiction.

Paradise (1988) takes a nineteenth-century utopia and reexamines its ideals in the face of 1970s realities—a reminder of how neither past nor present can be insulated from the other. *Jazz* (1992) finds Morrison modeling her narrative voice on the progression of a jazz solo to demonstrate how improvisation with detail can change the nature of what is expressed. Present and past weave together in her characters' lives as the narrative seeks to understand the jealousies of love and the sometimes macabre manifestations of hatred. *Love* (2003), with its murder, arson, pedophilia, and several rapes punctuating a narrative in which arguments over a legacy dislodge awkward elements of the past, is a reminder of how disturbing Morrison's fiction can be. *A Mercy* (2008) explores the contradictions between American and pastoral ideals, and the realities of Native American extermination and African American slavery. Her most recent novel is *God Help the Child* (2015).

Presently serving as the prestigious Goheen Professor of the Humanities at Princeton University, Morrison has moved easily into the role of spokesperson for literary issues. Together with her Nobel lecture, her essays collected as *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) challenge stereotypes in white critical thinking about black literature. Her short story "Recitatif," written for *Confirmation*, the 1983 anthology edited by Amiri and Amina Baraka, directly addresses the issues of individual and family, past and present, and race and its effacements that motivate the larger sense of her work. A "recitatif" is a vocal performance in which a narrative is not stated but sung. In her work Morrison's voice sings proudly of a past that in the artistic nature of its reconstruction puts all Americans in touch with a more positively usable heritage.

The following text is from *Confirmation*.

Recitatif

My mother danced all night and Roberta's was sick. That's why we were taken to St. Bonny's. People want to put their arms around you when you tell them you were in a shelter, but it really wasn't bad. No big long room with one hundred beds like Bellevue.¹ There were four to a room, and when Roberta and me came, there was a shortage of state kids, so we were the only ones assigned to 406 and could go from bed to bed if we wanted to. And we wanted to, too. We changed beds every night and for the whole four months we were there we never picked one out as our own permanent bed.

It didn't start out that way. The minute I walked in and the Big Bozo introduced us, I got sick to my stomach. It was one thing to be taken out of your own bed early in the morning—it was something else to be stuck in a strange place with a girl from a whole other race. And Mary, that's my mother, she was right. Every now and then she would stop dancing long enough to tell me something important and one of the things she said was that they never washed their hair and they smelled funny. Roberta sure did. Smell funny, I mean. So when the Big Bozo (nobody ever called her Mrs. Itkin, just like nobody ever said St. Bonaventure)—when she said, "Twyla, this is Roberta. Roberta, this is Twyla. Make each other welcome." I said, "My mother won't like you putting me in here."

"Good," said Bozo. "Maybe then she'll come and take you home."

How's that for mean? If Roberta had laughed I would have killed her, but she didn't. She just walked over to the window and stood with her back to us.

"Turn around," said the Bozo. "Don't be rude. Now Twyla. Roberta. When you hear a loud buzzer, that's the call for dinner. Come down to the first floor. Any fights and no movie." And then, just to make sure we knew what we would be missing, "*The Wizard of Oz*."²

Roberta must have thought I meant that my mother would be mad about my being put in the shelter. Not about rooming with her, because as soon as Bozo left she came over to me and said, "Is your mother sick too?"

"No," I said. "She just likes to dance all night."

"Oh," she nodded her head and I liked the way she understood things so fast. So for the moment it didn't matter that we looked like salt and pepper standing there and that's what the other kids called us sometimes. We were eight years old and got F's all the time. Me because I couldn't remember what I read or what the teacher said. And Roberta because she couldn't read at all and didn't even listen to the teacher. She wasn't good at anything except jacks, at which she was a killer: pow scoop pow scoop pow scoop.

We didn't like each other all that much at first, but nobody else wanted to play with us because we weren't real orphans with beautiful dead parents in the sky. We were dumped. Even the New York City Puerto Ricans and the upstate Indians ignored us. All kinds of kids were in there, black ones, white ones, even two Koreans. The food was good, though. At least I thought so. Roberta hated it and left whole pieces of things on her plate: Spam, Salisbury steak—even jello with fruit cocktail in it, and she didn't care if I ate what

1. Bellevue Hospital in New York City is known for its psychiatric ward. St. Bonaventure's offers the services of a youth shelter and school.

2. The 1939 film based on the 1900 children's book by the American writer L. Frank Baum (1856–1919).

she wouldn't. Mary's idea of supper was popcorn and a can of Yoo-Hoo.³ Hot mashed potatoes and two weenies was like Thanksgiving for me.

It really wasn't bad, St. Bonny's. The big girls on the second floor pushed us around now and then. But that was all. They wore lipstick and eyebrow pencil and wobbled their knees while they watched TV. Fifteen, sixteen, even, some of them were. They were put-out girls, scared runaways most of them. Poor little girls who fought their uncles off but looked tough to us, and mean. God did they look mean. The staff tried to keep them separate from the younger children, but sometimes they caught us watching them in the orchard where they played radios and danced with each other. They'd light out after us and pull our hair or twist our arms. We were scared of them, Roberta and me, but neither of us wanted the other one to know it. So we got a good list of dirty names we could shout back when we ran from them through the orchard. I used to dream a lot and almost always the orchard was there. Two acres, four maybe, of these little apple trees. Hundreds of them. Empty and crooked like beggar women when I first came to St. Bonny's but fat with flowers when I left. I don't know why I dreamt about that orchard so much. Nothing really happened there. Nothing all that important, I mean. Just the big girls dancing and playing the radio. Roberta and me watching. Maggie fell down there once. The kitchen woman with legs like parentheses. And the big girls laughed at her. We should have helped her up, I know, but we were scared of those girls with lipstick and eyebrow pencil. Maggie couldn't talk. The kids said she had her tongue cut out, but I think she was just born that way: mute. She was old and sandy-colored and she worked in the kitchen. I don't know if she was nice or not. I just remember her legs like parentheses and how she rocked when she walked. She worked from early in the morning till two o'clock, and if she was late, if she had too much cleaning and didn't get out till two-fifteen or so, she'd cut through the orchard so she wouldn't miss her bus and have to wait another hour. She wore this really stupid little hat—a kid's hat with ear flaps—and she wasn't much taller than we were. A really awful little hat. Even for a mute, it was dumb—dressing like a kid and never saying anything at all.

"But what about if somebody tries to kill her?" I used to wonder about that. "Or what if she wants to cry? Can she cry?"

"Sure," Roberta said. "But just tears. No sounds come out."

"She can't scream?"

"Nope. Nothing."

"Can she hear?"

"I guess."

"Let's call her," I said. And we did.

"Dummy! Dummy!" She never turned her head.

"Bow legs! Bow legs!" Nothing. She just rocked on, the chin straps of her baby-boy hat swaying from side to side. I think we were wrong. I think she could hear and didn't let on. And it shames me even now to think there was somebody in there after all who heard us call her those names and couldn't tell on us.

We got along all right, Roberta and me. Changed beds every night, got F's in civics and communication skills and gym. The Bozo was disappointed in us, she said. Out of 130 of us state cases, 90 were under twelve. Almost

3. A chocolate soft drink.

all were real orphans with beautiful dead parents in the sky. We were the only ones dumped and the only ones with F's in three classes including gym. So we got along—what with her leaving whole pieces of things on her plate and being nice about not asking questions.

I think it was the day before Maggie fell down that we found out our mothers were coming to visit us on the same Sunday. We had been at the shelter twenty-eight days (Roberta twenty-eight and a half) and this was their first visit with us. Our mothers would come at ten o'clock in time for chapel, then lunch with us in the teachers' lounge. I thought if my dancing mother met her sick mother it might be good for her. And Roberta thought her sick mother would get a big bang out of a dancing one. We got excited about it and curled each other's hair. After breakfast we sat on the bed watching the road from the window. Roberta's socks were still wet. She washed them the night before and put them on the radiator to dry. They hadn't, but she put them on anyway because their tops were so pretty—scalloped in pink. Each of us had a purple construction-paper basket that we had made in craft class. Mine had a yellow crayon rabbit on it. Roberta's had eggs with wiggly lines of color. Inside were cellophane grass and just the jelly beans because I'd eaten the two marshmallow eggs they gave us. The Big Bozo came herself to get us. Smiling she told us we looked very nice and to come downstairs. We were so surprised by the smile we'd never seen before, neither of us moved.

"Don't you want to see your mommies?"

I stood up first and spilled the jelly beans all over the floor. Bozo's smile disappeared while we scrambled to get the candy up off the floor and put it back in the grass.

She escorted us downstairs to the first floor, where the other girls were lining up to file into the chapel. A bunch of grown-ups stood to one side. Viewers mostly. The old biddies who wanted servants and the fags who wanted company looking for children they might want to adopt. Once in a while a grandmother. Almost never anybody young or anybody whose face wouldn't scare you in the night. Because if any of the real orphans had young relatives they wouldn't be real orphans. I saw Mary right away. She had on those green slacks I hated and hated even more now because didn't she know we were going to chapel? And that fur jacket with the pocket linings so ripped she had to pull to get her hands out of them. But her face was pretty—like always, and she smiled and waved like she was the little girl looking for her mother—not me.

I walked slowly, trying not to drop the jelly beans and hoping the paper handle would hold. I had to use my last Chiclet because by the time I finished cutting everything out, all the Elmer's was gone. I am left-handed and the scissors never worked for me. It didn't matter, though; I might just as well have chewed the gum. Mary dropped to her knees and grabbed me, mashing the basket, the jelly beans, and the grass into her ratty fur jacket.

"Twyla, baby. Twyla, baby!"

I could have killed her. Already I heard the big girls in the orchard the next time saying, "Twyyyyyyla, baby!" But I couldn't stay mad at Mary while she was smiling and hugging me and smelling of Lady Esther dusting powder. I wanted to stay buried in her fur all day.

To tell the truth I forgot about Roberta. Mary and I got in line for the trapeze into chapel and I was feeling proud because she looked so beautiful even in those ugly green slacks that made her behind stick out. A pretty

mother on earth is better than a beautiful dead one in the sky even if she did leave you all alone to go dancing.

I felt a tap on my shoulder, turned, and saw Roberta smiling. I smiled back, but not too much lest somebody think this visit was the biggest thing that ever happened in my life. Then Roberta said, "Mother, I want you to meet my roommate, Twyla. And that's Twyla's mother."

I looked up it seemed for miles. She was big. Bigger than any man and on her chest was the biggest cross I'd ever seen. I swear it was six inches long each way. And in the crook of her arm was the biggest Bible ever made.

Mary, simple-minded as ever, grinned and tried to yank her hand out of the pocket with the raggedy lining—to shake hands, I guess. Roberta's mother looked down at me and then looked down at Mary too. She didn't say anything, just grabbed Roberta with her Bible-free hand and stepped out of line, walking quickly to the rear of it. Mary was still grinning because she's not too swift when it comes to what's really going on. Then this light bulb goes off in her head and she says "That bitch!" really loud and us almost in the chapel now. Organ music whining; the Bonny Angels singing sweetly. Everybody in the world turned around to look. And Mary would have kept it up—kept calling names if I hadn't squeezed her hand as hard as I could. That helped a little, but she still twitched and crossed and uncrossed her legs all through service. Even groaned a couple of times. Why did I think she would come there and act right? Slacks. No hat like the grandmothers and viewers, and groaning all the while. When we stood for hymns she kept her mouth shut. Wouldn't even look at the words on the page. She actually reached in her purse for a mirror to check her lipstick. All I could think of was that she really needed to be killed. The sermon lasted a year, and I knew the real orphans were looking smug again.

We were supposed to have lunch in the teachers' lounge, but Mary didn't bring anything, so we picked fur and cellophane grass off the mashed jelly beans and ate them. I could have killed her. I sneaked a look at Roberta. Her mother had brought chicken legs and ham sandwiches and oranges and a whole box of chocolate-covered grahams. Roberta drank milk from a thermos while her mother read the Bible to her.

Things are not right. The wrong food is always with the wrong people. Maybe that's why I got into waitress work later—to match up the right people with the right food. Roberta just let those chicken legs sit there, but she did bring a stack of grahams up to me later when the visit was over. I think she was sorry that her mother would not shake my mother's hand. And I liked that and I liked the fact that she didn't say a word about Mary groaning all the way through the service and not bringing any lunch.

Roberta left in May when the apple trees were heavy and white. On her last day we went to the orchard to watch the big girls smoke and dance by the radio. It didn't matter that they said, "Twyyyyyla, baby." We sat on the ground and breathed. Lady Esther. Apple blossoms. I still go soft when I smell one or the other. Roberta was going home. The big cross and the big Bible was coming to get her and she seemed sort of glad and sort of not. I thought I would die in that room of four beds without her and I knew Bozo had plans to move some other dumped kid in there with me. Roberta promised to write every day, which was really sweet of her because she couldn't read a lick so how could she write anybody. I would have drawn pictures and

sent them to her but she never gave me her address. Little by little she faded. Her wet socks with the pink scalloped tops and her big serious-looking eyes—that’s all I could catch when I tried to bring her to mind.

I was working behind the counter at the Howard Johnson’s on the Thruway just before the Kingston exit. Not a bad job. Kind of a long ride from Newburgh,⁴ but okay once I got there. Mine was the second night shift—eleven to seven. Very light until a Greyhound checked in for breakfast around six-thirty. At that hour the sun was all the way clear of the hills behind the restaurant. The place looked better at night—more like shelter—but I loved it when the sun broke in, even if it did show all the cracks in the vinyl and the speckled floor looked dirty no matter what the mop boy did.

It was August and a bus crowd was just unloading. They would stand around a long while: going to the john, and looking at gifts and junk-for-sale machines, reluctant to sit down so soon. Even to eat. I was trying to fill the coffee pots and get them all situated on the electric burners when I saw her. She was sitting in a booth smoking a cigarette with two guys smothered in head and facial hair. Her own hair was so big and wild I could hardly see her face. But the eyes. I would know them anywhere. She had on a powder-blue halter and shorts outfit and earrings the size of bracelets. Talk about lipstick and eyebrow pencil. She made the big girls look like nuns. I couldn’t get off the counter until seven o’clock, but I kept watching the booth in case they got up to leave before that. My replacement was on time for a change, so I counted and stacked my receipts as fast as I could and signed off. I walked over to the booth, smiling and wondering if she would remember me. Or even if she wanted to remember me. Maybe she didn’t want to be reminded of St. Bonny’s or to have anybody know she was ever there. I know I never talked about it to anybody.

I put my hands in my apron pockets and leaned against the back of the booth facing them.

“Roberta? Roberta Fisk?”

She looked up. “Yeah?”

“Twyla.”

She squinted for a second and then said, “Wow.”

“Remember me?”

“Sure. Hey. Wow.”

“It’s been a while,” I said, and gave a smile to the two hairy guys.

“Yeah. Wow. You work here?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I live in Newburgh.”

“Newburgh? No kidding?” She laughed then a private laugh that included the guys but only the guys, and they laughed with her. What could I do but laugh too and wonder why I was standing there with my knees showing out from under that uniform. Without looking I could see the blue and white triangle on my head, my hair shapeless in a net, my ankles thick in white oxfords. Nothing could have been less sheer than my stockings. There was this silence that came down right after I laughed. A silence it was her turn to fill up. With introductions, maybe, to her boyfriends or an invitation to sit down and have a Coke. Instead she lit a cigarette off the one she’d just

4. A city beside the Hudson River, located eighty miles north of New York City.

finished and said, “We’re on our way to the Coast. He’s got an appointment with Hendrix.”⁵ She gestured casually toward the boy next to her.

“Hendrix? Fantastic,” I said. “Really fantastic. What’s she doing now?”

Roberta coughed on her cigarette and the two guys rolled their eyes up at the ceiling.

“Hendrix. Jimi Hendrix, asshole. He’s only the biggest—Oh, wow. Forget it.”

I was dismissed without anyone saying goodbye, so I thought I would do it for her.

“How’s your mother?” I asked. Her grin cracked her whole face. She swallowed. “Fine,” she said. “How’s yours?”

“Pretty as a picture,” I said and turned away. The backs of my knees were damp. Howard Johnson’s really was a dump in the sunlight.

James is as comfortable as a house slipper. He liked my cooking and I liked his big loud family. They have lived in Newburgh all of their lives and talk about it the way people do who have always known a home. His grandmother is a porch swing older than his father and when they talk about streets and avenues and buildings they call them names they no longer have. They still call the A & P⁶ Rico’s because it stands on property once a mom and pop store owned by Mr. Rico. And they call the new community college Town Hall because it once was. My mother-in-law puts up jelly and cucumbers and buys butter wrapped in cloth from a dairy. James and his father talk about fishing and baseball and I can see them all together on the Hudson in a raggedy skiff. Half the population of Newburgh is on welfare now, but to my husband’s family it was still some upstate paradise of a time long past. A time of ice houses and vegetable wagons, coal furnaces and children weeding gardens. When our son was born my mother-in-law gave me the crib blanket that had been hers.

But the town they remembered had changed. Something quick was in the air. Magnificent old houses, so ruined they had become shelter for squatters and rent risks, were bought and renovated. Smart IBM people⁷ moved out of their suburbs back into the city and put shutters up and herb gardens in their backyards. A brochure came in the mail announcing the opening of a Food Emporium. Gourmet food it said—and listed items the rich IBM crowd would want. It was located in a new mall at the edge of town and I drove out to shop there one day—just to see. It was late in June. After the tulips were gone and the Queen Elizabeth roses were open everywhere. I trailed my cart along the aisle tossing in smoked oysters and Robert’s sauce and things I knew would sit in my cupboard for years. Only when I found some Klondike ice cream bars did I feel less guilty about spending James’s fireman’s salary so foolishly. My father-in-law ate them with the same gusto little Joseph did.

Waiting in the check-out line I heard a voice say, “Twyla!”

The classical music piped over the aisles had affected me and the woman leaning toward me was dressed to kill. Diamonds on her hand, a smart white summer dress. “I’m Mrs. Benson,” I said.

5. Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970), African American musician and rock star.

6. Supermarket, part of a national chain once called the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea

Company.

7. High-salaried employees of the International Business Machine Corporation, headquartered in the suburbs north of New York City.

“Ho. Ho. The Big Bozo,” she sang.

For a split second I didn’t know what she was talking about. She had a bunch of asparagus and two cartons of fancy water.

“Roberta!”

“Right.”

“For heaven’s sake. Roberta.”

“You look great,” she said.

“So do you. Where are you? Here? In Newburgh?”

“Yes. Over in Annandale.”

I was opening my mouth to say more when the cashier called my attention to her empty counter.

“Meet you outside.” Roberta pointed her finger and went into the express line.

I placed the groceries and kept myself from glancing around to check Roberta’s progress. I remembered Howard Johnson’s and looking for a chance to speak only to be greeted with a stingy “wow.” But she was waiting for me and her huge hair was sleek now, smooth around a small, nicely shaped head. Shoes, dress, everything lovely and summery and rich. I was dying to know what happened to her, how she got from Jimi Hendrix to Annandale, a neighborhood full of doctors and IBM executives. Easy, I thought. Everything is so easy for them. They think they own the world.

“How long,” I asked her. “How long have you been here?”

“A year. I got married to a man who lives here. And you, you’re married too, right? Benson, you said.”

“Yeah. James Benson.”

“And is he nice?”

“Oh, is he nice?”

“Well, is he?” Roberta’s eyes were steady as though she really meant the question and wanted an answer.

“He’s wonderful, Roberta. Wonderful.”

“So you’re happy.”

“Very.”

“That’s good,” she said and nodded her head. “I always hoped you’d be happy. Any kids? I know you have kids.”

“One. A boy. How about you?”

“Four.”

“Four?”

She laughed. “Step kids. He’s a widower.”

“Oh.”

“Got a minute? Let’s have a coffee.”

I thought about the Klondikes melting and the inconvenience of going all the way to my car and putting the bags in the trunk. Served me right for buying all that stuff I didn’t need. Roberta was ahead of me.

“Put them in my car. It’s right here.”

And then I saw the dark blue limousine.

“You married a Chinaman?”

“No,” she laughed. “He’s the driver.”

“Oh, my. If the Big Bozo could see you now.”

We both giggled. Really giggled. Suddenly, in just a pulse beat, twenty years disappeared and all of it came rushing back. The big girls (whom we called gar girls—Roberta’s misheard word for the evil stone faces described

in a civics class) there dancing in the orchard, the ploppy mashed potatoes, the double weenies, the Spam with pineapple. We went into the coffee shop holding on to one another and I tried to think why we were glad to see each other this time and not before. Once, twelve years ago, we passed like strangers. A black girl and a white girl meeting in a Howard Johnson's on the road and having nothing to say. One in a blue and white triangle waitress hat—the other on her way to see Hendrix. Now we were behaving like sisters separated for much too long. Those four short months were nothing in time. Maybe it was the thing itself. Just being there, together. Two little girls who knew what nobody else in the world knew—how not to ask questions. How to believe what had to be believed. There was politeness in that reluctance and generosity as well. Is your mother sick too? No, she dances all night. Oh—and an understanding nod.

We sat in a booth by the window and fell into recollection like veterans.

“Did you ever learn to read?”

“Watch.” She picked up the menu. “Special of the day. Cream of corn soup. Entrées. Two dots and a wriggly line. Quiche. Chef salad, scallops . . .”

I was laughing and applauding when the waitress came up.

“Remember the Easter baskets?”

“And how we tried to *introduce* them?”

“Your mother with that cross like two telephone poles.”

“And yours with those tight slacks.”

We laughed so loudly heads turned and made the laughter harder to suppress.

“What happened to the Jimi Hendrix date?”

Roberta made a blow-out sound with her lips.

“When he died I thought about you.”

“Oh, you heard about him finally?”

“Finally. Come on, I was a small-town country waitress.”

“And I was a small-town country dropout. God, were we wild. I still don't know how I got out of there alive.”

“But you did.”

“I did. I really did. Now I'm Mrs. Kenneth Norton.”

“Sounds like a mouthful.”

“It is.”

“Servants and all?”

Roberta held up two fingers.

“Ow! What does he do?”

“Computers and stuff. What do I know?”

“I don't remember a hell of a lot from those days, but Lord, St. Bonny's is as clear as daylight. Remember Maggie? The day she fell down and those gar girls laughed at her?”

Roberta looked up from her salad and stared at me. “Maggie didn't fall,” she said.

“Yes, she did. You remember.”

“No, Twyla. They knocked her down. Those girls pushed her down and tore her clothes. In the orchard.”

“I don't—that's not what happened.”

“Sure it is. In the orchard. Remember how scared we were?”

“Wait a minute. I don't remember any of that.”

“And Bozo was fired.”

“You’re crazy. She was there when I left. You left before me.”

“I went back. You weren’t there when they fired Bozo.”

“What?”

“Twice. Once for a year when I was about ten, another for two months when I was fourteen. That’s when I ran away.”

“You ran away from St. Bonny’s?”

“I had to. What do you want? Me dancing in that orchard?”

“Are you sure about Maggie?”

“Of course I’m sure. You’ve blocked it, Twyla. It happened. Those girls had behavior problems, you know.”

“Didn’t they, though. But why can’t I remember the Maggie thing?”

“Believe me. It happened. And we were there.”

“Who did you room with when you went back?” I asked her as if I would know her. The Maggie thing was troubling me.

“Creeps. They tickled themselves in the night.”

My ears were itching and I wanted to go home suddenly. This was all very well but she couldn’t just comb her hair, wash her face and pretend everything was hunky-dory. After the Howard Johnson’s snub. And no apology. Nothing.

“Were you on dope or what that time at Howard Johnson’s?” I tried to make my voice sound friendlier than I felt.

“Maybe, a little. I never did drugs much. Why?”

“I don’t know; you acted sort of like you didn’t want to know me then.”

“Oh, Twyla, you know how it was in those days: black—white. You know how everything was.”

But I didn’t know. I thought it was just the opposite. Busloads of blacks and whites came into Howard Johnson’s together. They roamed together then: students, musicians, lovers, protesters. You got to see everything at Howard Johnson’s and blacks were very friendly with whites in those days. But sitting there with nothing on my plate but two hard tomato wedges wondering about the melting Klondikes it seemed childish remembering the slight. We went to her car, and with the help of the driver, got my stuff into my station wagon.

“We’ll keep in touch this time,” she said.

“Sure,” I said. “Sure. Give me a call.”

“I will,” she said, and then just as I was sliding behind the wheel, she leaned into the window. “By the way. Your mother. Did she ever stop dancing?”

I shook my head. “No. Never.”

Roberta nodded.

“And yours? Did she ever get well?”

She smiled a tiny sad smile. “No. She never did. Look, call me, okay?”

“Okay,” I said, but I knew I wouldn’t. Roberta had messed up my past somehow with that business about Maggie. I wouldn’t forget a thing like that. Would I?

Strife came to us that fall. At least that’s what the paper called it. Strife. Racial strife. The word made me think of a bird—a big shrieking bird out of 1,000,000,000 B.C. Flapping its wings and cawing. Its eye with no lid always bearing down on you. All day it screeched and at night it slept on the

rooftops. It woke you in the morning and from the *Today* show to the eleven o'clock news it kept you an awful company. I couldn't figure it out from one day to the next. I knew I was supposed to feel something strong, but I didn't know what, and James wasn't any help. Joseph was on the list of kids to be transferred from the junior high school to another one at some far-out-of-the-way place and I thought it was a good thing until I heard it was a bad thing. I mean I didn't know. All the schools seemed dumps to me, and the fact that one was nicer looking didn't hold much weight. But the papers were full of it and then the kids began to get jumpy. In August, mind you. Schools weren't even open yet. I thought Joseph might be frightened to go over there, but he didn't seem scared so I forgot about it, until I found myself driving along Hudson Street out there by the school they were trying to integrate and saw a line of women marching. And who do you suppose was in line, big as life, holding a sign in front of her bigger than her mother's cross? MOTHERS HAVE RIGHTS TOO! it said.

I drove on, and then changed my mind. I circled the block, slowed down, and honked my horn.

Roberta looked over and when she saw me she waved. I didn't wave back, but I didn't move either. She handed her sign to another woman and came over to where I was parked.

"Hi."

"What are you doing?"

"Picketing. What's it look like?"

"What for?"

"What do you mean 'What for?' They want to take my kids and send them out of the neighborhood. They don't want to go."

"So what if they go to another school? My boy's being bussed too, and I don't mind. Why should you?"

"It's not about us, Twyla. Me and you. It's about our kids."

"What's more *us* than that?"

"Well, it is a free country."

"Not yet, but it will be."

"What the hell does that mean? I'm not doing anything to you."

"You really think that?"

"I know it."

"I wonder what made me think you were different."

"I wonder what made me think you were different."

"Look at them," I said. "Just look. Who do they think they are? Swarming all over the place like they own it. And now they think they can decide where my child goes to school. Look at them, Roberta. They're Bozos."

Roberta turned around and looked at the women. Almost all of them were standing still now, waiting. Some were even edging toward us. Roberta looked at me out of some refrigerator behind her eyes. "No, they're not. They're just mothers."

"And what am I? Swiss cheese?"

"I used to curl your hair."

"I hated your hands in my hair."

The women were moving. Our faces looked mean to them of course and they looked as though they could not wait to throw themselves in front of a police car, or better yet, into my car and drag me away by my ankles. Now

they surrounded my car and gently, gently began to rock it. I swayed back and forth like a sideways yo-yo. Automatically I reached for Roberta, like the old days in the orchard when they saw us watching them and we had to get out of there, and if one of us fell the other pulled her up and if one of us was caught the other stayed to kick and scratch, and neither would leave the other behind. My arm shot out of the car window but no receiving hand was there. Roberta was looking at me sway from side to side in the car and her face was still. My purse slid from the car seat down under the dashboard. The four policemen who had been drinking Tab⁸ in their car finally got the message and strolled over, forcing their way through the women. Quietly, firmly they spoke. “Okay, ladies. Back in line or off the streets.”

Some of them went away willingly; others had to be urged away from the car doors and the hood. Roberta didn’t move. She was looking steadily at me. I was fumbling to turn on the ignition, which wouldn’t catch because the gearshift was still in drive. The seats of the car were a mess because the swaying had thrown my grocery coupons all over it and my purse was sprawled on the floor.

“Maybe I am different now, Twyla. But you’re not. You’re the same little state kid who kicked a poor old black lady when she was down on the ground. You kicked a black lady and you have the nerve to call me a bigot.”

The coupons were everywhere and the guts of my purse were bunched under the dashboard. What was she saying? Black? Maggie wasn’t black.

“She wasn’t black,” I said.

“Like hell she wasn’t, and you kicked her. We both did. You kicked a black lady who couldn’t even scream.”

“Liar!”

“You’re the liar! Why don’t you just go on home and leave us alone, huh?” She turned away and I skidded away from the curb.

The next morning I went into the garage and cut the side out of the carton our portable TV had come in. It wasn’t nearly big enough, but after a while I had a decent sign: red spray-painted letters on a white background—AND SO DO CHILDREN * * * *. I meant just to go down to the school and tack it up somewhere so those cows on the picket line across the street could see it, but when I got there, some ten or so others had already assembled—protesting the cows across the street. Police permits and everything. I got in line and we strutted in time on our side while Roberta’s group strutted on theirs. That first day we were all dignified, pretending the other side didn’t exist. The second day there was name calling and finger gestures. But that was about all. People changed signs from time to time, but Roberta never did and neither did I. Actually my sign didn’t make sense without Roberta’s. “And so do children what?” one of the women on my side asked me. Have rights, I said, as though it was obvious.

Roberta didn’t acknowledge my presence in any way and I got to thinking maybe she didn’t know I was there. I began to pace myself in the line, jostling people one minute and lagging behind the next, so Roberta and I could reach the end of our respective lines at the same time and there would be a moment in our turn when we would face each other. Still, I couldn’t tell whether she saw me and knew my sign was for her. The next day I went early

8. A diet soda.

before we were scheduled to assemble. I waited until she got there before I exposed my new creation. As soon as she hoisted her *MOTHERS HAVE RIGHTS TOO* I began to wave my new one, which said, *HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?* I know she saw that one, but I had gotten addicted now. My signs got crazier each day, and the women on my side decided that I was a kook. They couldn't make heads or tails out of my brilliant screaming posters.

I brought a painted sign in queenly red with huge black letters that said, *IS YOUR MOTHER WELL?* Roberta took her lunch break and didn't come back for the rest of the day or any day after. Two days later I stopped going too and couldn't have been missed because nobody understood my signs anyway.

It was a nasty six weeks. Classes were suspended and Joseph didn't go to anybody's school until October. The children—everybody's children—soon got bored with that extended vacation they thought was going to be so great. They looked at TV until their eyes flattened. I spent a couple of mornings tutoring my son, as the other mothers said we should. Twice I opened a text from last year that he had never turned in. Twice he yawned in my face. Other mothers organized living room sessions so the kids would keep up. None of the kids could concentrate so they drifted back to *The Price Is Right* and *The Brady Bunch*.⁹ When the school finally opened there were fights once or twice and some sirens roared through the streets every once in a while. There were a lot of photographers from Albany. And just when ABC was about to send up a news crew, the kids settled down like nothing in the world had happened. Joseph hung my *HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?* sign in his bedroom. I don't know what became of *AND SO DO CHILDREN * * * **. I think my father-in-law cleaned some fish on it. He was always puttering around in our garage. Each of his five children lived in Newburgh and he acted as though he had five extra homes.

I couldn't help looking for Roberta when Joseph graduated from high school, but I didn't see her. It didn't trouble me much what she had said to me in the car. I mean the kicking part. I know I didn't do that, I couldn't do that. But I was puzzled by her telling me Maggie was black. When I thought about it I actually couldn't be certain. She wasn't pitch-black, I knew, or I would have remembered that. What I remember was the kiddie hat, and the semicircle legs. I tried to reassure myself about the race thing for a long time until it dawned on me that the truth was already there, and Roberta knew it. I didn't kick her; I didn't join in with the gar girls and kick that lady, but I sure did want to. We watched and never tried to help her and never called for help. Maggie was my dancing mother. Deaf, I thought, and dumb. Nobody inside. Nobody who would hear you if you cried in the night. Nobody who could tell you anything important that you could use. Rocking, dancing, swaying as she walked. And when the gar girls pushed her down, and started roughhousing, I knew she wouldn't scream, couldn't—just like me—and I was glad about that.

We decided not to have a tree, because Christmas would be at my mother-in-law's house, so why have a tree at both places? Joseph was at SUNY New Paltz¹ and we had to economize, we said. But at the last minute, I changed

9. Popular television programs of the 1970s; respectively, a game show and a situation comedy.

1. A campus in the State University of New York system, located 70 miles north of New York City.

my mind. Nothing could be that bad. So I rushed around town looking for a tree, something small but wide. By the time I found a place, it was snowing and very late. I dawdled like it was the most important purchase in the world and the tree man was fed up with me. Finally I chose one and had it tied onto the trunk of the car. I drove away slowly because the sand trucks were not out yet and the streets could be murder at the beginning of a snowfall. Downtown the streets were wide and rather empty except for a cluster of people coming out of the Newburgh Hotel. The one hotel in town that wasn't built out of cardboard and Plexiglas. A party, probably. The men huddled in the snow were dressed in tails and the women had on furs. Shiny things glittered from underneath their coats. It made me tired to look at them. Tired, tired, tired. On the next corner was a small diner with loops and loops of paper bells in the window. I stopped the car and went in. Just for a cup of coffee and twenty minutes of peace before I went home and tried to finish everything before Christmas Eve.

"Twyla?"

There she was. In a silvery evening gown and dark fur coat. A man and another woman were with her, the man fumbling for change to put in the cigarette machine. The woman was humming and tapping on the counter with her fingernails. They all looked a little bit drunk.

"Well. It's you."

"How are you?"

I shrugged. "Pretty good. Frazzled. Christmas and all."

"Regular?" called the woman from the counter.

"Fine," Roberta called back and then, "Wait for me in the car."

She slipped into the booth beside me. "I have to tell you something, Twyla. I made up my mind if I ever saw you again, I'd tell you."

"I'd just as soon not hear anything, Roberta. It doesn't matter now, anyway."

"No," she said. "Not about that."

"Don't be long," said the woman. She carried two regulars to go and the man peeled his cigarette pack as they left.

"It's about St. Bonny's and Maggie."

"Oh, please."

"Listen to me. I really did think she was black. I didn't make that up. I really thought so. But now I can't be sure. I just remember her as old, so old. And because she couldn't talk—well, you know, I thought she was crazy. She'd been brought up in an institution like my mother was and like I thought I would be too. And you were right. We didn't kick her. It was the gar girls. Only them. But, well, I wanted to. I really wanted them to hurt her. I said we did it, too. You and me, but that's not true. And I don't want you to carry that around. It was just that I wanted to do it so bad that day—wanting to is doing it."

Her eyes were watery from the drinks she'd had, I guess. I know it's that way with me. One glass of wine and I start bawling over the littlest thing.

"We were kids, Roberta."

"Yeah. Yeah. I know, just kids."

"Eight."

"Eight."

"And lonely."

“Scared, too.”

She wiped her cheeks with the heel of her hand and smiled. “Well, that’s all I wanted to say.”

I nodded and couldn’t think of any way to fill the silence that went from the diner past the paper bells on out into the snow. It was heavy now. I thought I’d better wait for the sand trucks before starting home.

“Thanks, Roberta.”

“Sure.”

“Did I tell you? My mother, she never did stop dancing.”

“Yes. You told me. And mine, she never got well.” Roberta lifted her hands from the tabletop and covered her face with her palms. When she took them away she really was crying. “Oh shit, Twyla. Shit, shit, shit. What the hell happened to Maggie?”

1983

SYLVIA PLATH

1932–1963

In an introduction to Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel* (1965), published two years after her suicide in London, Robert Lowell wrote: “In these poems . . . Sylvia Plath becomes herself, becomes something imaginary, newly, wildly, and subtly created— . . . one of those super-real, hypnotic great classical heroines.” Lowell had first met Plath in 1958, during her regular visits to his poetry seminar at Boston University, where he remembered her “air of maddening docility.” Later, writing his introduction, he recognized her astonishing creation of a poetic self. The poems of *Ariel* were written at white heat, two or three a day, in the last months of Plath’s life, but there is nothing hurried in their language or structure. When they are taken together with the poems posthumously published in *Crossing the Water* (1971) and *Winter Trees* (1972), a coherent persona emerges: larger than life, operatic in feeling. Although this focus on the self often excludes attention to the larger world, it generates the dynamic energy of her work. Plath appropriates a centrally American tradition, the heroic ego confronting the sublime, but she brilliantly revises this tradition by turning what the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson called the “great and crescive self” into a heroine instead of a hero. Seizing a mythic power, the Plath of the poems transmutes the domestic and the ordinary into the hallucinatory, the utterly strange. Her revision of the romantic ego dramatizes its tendency toward disproportion and excess, and she is fully capable of both using and mocking this heightened sense of self, as she does in her poem “Lady Lazarus.”

Plath’s well-known autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), has nothing of the brilliance of her poems, but it effectively dramatizes the stereotyping of women’s roles in the 1950s and the turmoil of a young woman only partly aware that her gifts and ambitions greatly exceed the options available to her. In the novel Plath uses her experience as a guest editor of a young-women’s magazine (in real life, *Mademoiselle*) and then, in an abrupt shift, presents her heroine’s attempted suicide and hospitalization. Plath herself had suffered a serious breakdown and attempted suicide

between her junior and senior years in college. The popularity of *The Bell Jar* may be one reason why attention to Plath's life has sometimes obscured the accomplishments of her art. While her poems often begin in autobiography, their success depends on Plath's imaginative transformations of experience into myth, as in a number of her poems (such as "Daddy") where the figure of her Prussian father is transformed into an emblem for masculine authority. Otto Plath was an entomologist and the author of a treatise on bumblebees. His death in 1940 from gangrene (the consequence of a diabetic condition he refused to treat), when Plath was eight, was the crucial event of her childhood. After his death her mother, Aurelia, while struggling to support two small children, encouraged her daughter's literary ambitions.

In many ways Plath embodied the bright, young, middle-class woman of the 1950s. She went to Smith College on a scholarship and graduated summa cum laude. On a Fulbright grant she studied in England at Cambridge University, where she met and married the poet Ted Hughes. On the face of it her marriage must have seemed the perfect fate for such a young woman; it combined romance, two poets beginning careers together (Plath's first book, *The Colossus*, appeared in 1960, three years after Hughes's first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain*), and two children (Frieda, born in 1960, and Nicholas, born in 1962), with a country house in Devon, England. In her poems, however, we find the strains of such a life; the work is galvanized by suffering, by a terrible constriction against which she unlooses "The lioness, / The shriek in the bath, / The cloak of holes" ("Purdah"). In articulating a dark vision of domestic life, Plath adopted the license of Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton, a fellow student in Lowell's poetry seminar, to write about "private and taboo subjects."

While still living in Devon, Plath wrote most of the poems that were to make up *Ariel* (by Christmas 1962, she had gathered them in a black binder and arranged them in a careful sequence). The marriage broke up in the summer of 1962, and at the beginning of the new year Plath found herself with two small children, living in a London flat during one of the coldest winters in recent British history. There she began new poems, writing furiously until February 1963, when she took her own life. The *Ariel* collection published by Hughes in 1965 does not follow Plath's intended sequence; it omits what Hughes called "some of the more personally aggressive poems from 1962" and includes the dozen or so poems Plath wrote in the months before her death and that she had envisioned as the beginnings of a third book. Nonetheless, the powerful, angry poems of *Ariel*, mining a limited range of deep feeling, are Plath's best-known work. Fueled by an anger toward her husband and her father, she speaks in these poems as one whose feelings are more than her own; it is as if she were the character in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) who appears suddenly before the novel's heroine and says, "I am a woman's life." Other poems, however, demonstrate her ability to render a wider variety of emotion; they include poems about her children (such as "Morning Song," "Child," and "Parliament Hill Fields") and a number of arresting poems about the natural world. In the vastness of natural processes the Romantic ego finds something as large as itself, and Plath's response to nature is intense, often uncanny. Her poems offer an eccentric vision where (as in "Blackberrying") the appearance of the natural world is never separable from the consciousness of the one who sees it.

For all her courting of excess Plath is a remarkably controlled writer; her lucid stanzas, her clear diction, and her dazzling alterations of sound all display that control. The imaginative intensity of her poems is her own triumphant creation out of the difficult circumstances of her life. She once remarked, "I cannot sympathize with those cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife. . . . I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying . . . with an informed and intelligent mind." The influence of her style, and of the persona she created, continues to be felt in the work of a wide variety of contemporary poets.

Morning Song

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
In a drafty museum, your nakedness 5
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath 10
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square 15

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
Your handful of notes;
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

1961

1966

Lady Lazarus¹

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it—

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,² 5
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin 10
O my enemy.
Do I terrify?—

1. Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus (John 11.1–45).

2. In the Nazi death camps, the victims' skins were sometimes used to make lampshades.

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?
 The sour breath
 Will vanish in a day. 15

Soon, soon the flesh
 The grave cave ate will be
 At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
 I am only thirty. 20
 And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.
 What a trash
 To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments. 25
 The peanut-crunching crowd
 Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot——
 The big strip tease.
 Gentlemen, ladies 30

These are my hands
 My knees.
 I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.
 The first time it happened I was ten. 35
 It was an accident.

The second time I meant
 To last it out and not come back at all.
 I rocked shut

As a seashell. 40
 They had to call and call
 And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying
 Is an art, like everything else.
 I do it exceptionally well. 45

I do it so it feels like hell.
 I do it so it feels real.
 I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
 It's easy enough to do it and stay put. 50
 It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day
 To the same place, the same face, the same brute
 Amused shout:

'A miracle!' 55
 That knocks me out.
 There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
 For the hearing of my heart——
 It really goes. 60

And there is a charge, a very large charge
 For a word or a touch
 Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
 So, so, Herr³ Doktor. 65
 So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,
 I am your valuable,
 The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek. 70
 I turn and burn.
 Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash——
 You poke and stir.
 Flesh, bone, there is nothing there—— 75

A cake of soap,
 A wedding ring,
 A gold filling.⁴

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
 Beware 80
 Beware.

Out of the ash⁵
 I rise with my red hair
 And I eat men like air.

1962

1966

3. Mr. (German).

4. The Nazis used human remains in the making of soap and scavenged corpses for jewelry and gold teeth.

5. An allusion to the phoenix, a mythical bird that dies by fire and is reborn out of its own ashes.

Ariel¹

Stasis in darkness.
 Then the substanceless blue
 Pour of tor² and distances.

God's lioness,
 How one we grow, 5
 Pivot of heels and knees!—The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to
 The brown arc
 Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye 10
 Berries cast dark
 Hooks——

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,
 Shadows.
 Something else 15

Hauls me through air——
 Thighs, hair;
 Flakes from my heels.

White
 Godiva,³ I unpeel—— 20
 Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now I
 Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.
 The child's cry

Melts in the wall. 25
 And I
 Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
 Suicidal, at one with the drive
 Into the red 30

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

1962

1966

1. The spirit of fire and air in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. Ariel was also the name of the horse Plath rode weekly in 1961–62, when she lived in Devon, England.

2. A rocky peak.

3. According to legend, in 1040 Lady Godiva rode naked on horseback through the streets of Coventry to win a remission of feudal obligations and taxes.

Daddy

You do not do, you do not do
 Any more, black shoe
 In which I have lived like a foot
 For thirty years, poor and white,
 Barely daring to breathe or Achoo. 5

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
 You died before I had time—
 Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
 Ghastly statue with one grey toe¹
 Big as a Frisco seal 10

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
 Where it pours bean green over blue
 In the waters of beautiful Nauset.²
 I used to pray to recover you.
 Ach, du.³ 15

In the German tongue, in the Polish town⁴
 Scraped flat by the roller
 Of wars, wars, wars.
 But the name of the town is common.
 My Polack friend 20

Says there are a dozen or two.
 So I never could tell where you
 Put your foot, your root,
 I never could talk to you.
 The tongue stuck in my jaw. 25

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
 Ich,⁵ ich, ich, ich,
 I could hardly speak.
 I thought every German was you.
 And the language obscene 30

An engine, an engine
 Chuffing me off like a Jew.
 A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.⁶
 I began to talk like a Jew.
 I think I may well be a Jew. 35

1. Plath's father's toe turned black from gangrene, a complication of diabetes.

2. Massachusetts beach.

3. Ah, you (German): the first of a series of references to her father's German origins.

4. The poet's father, of German descent, was born in Grabow, Poland.

5. I (German).

6. German concentration camps, where millions of Jews were murdered during World War II.

The snows of the Tyrol,⁷ the clear beer of Vienna
 Are not very pure or true.
 With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck
 And my Taroc⁸ pack and my Taroc pack
 I may be a bit of a Jew. 40

I have always been scared of *you*,
 With your Luftwaffe,⁹ your gobbledygoo.
 And your neat mustache
 And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
 Panzer¹-man, panzer-man, O You—— 45

Not God but a swastika
 So black no sky could squeak through.
 Every woman adores a Fascist,
 The boot in the face, the brute
 Brute heart of a brute like you. 50

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
 In the picture I have of you,
 A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
 But no less a devil for that, no not
 And less the black man who 55

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
 I was ten when they buried you.
 At twenty I tried to die
 And get back, back, back to you.
 I thought even the bones would do. 60

But they pulled me out of the sack,
 And they stuck me together with glue.²
 And then I knew what to do.
 I made a model of you,
 A man in black with a Meinkampf³ look 65

And a love of the rack and the screw.
 And I said I do, I do.
 So daddy, I'm finally through.
 The black telephone's off at the root,
 The voices just can't worm through. 70

If I've killed one man, I've killed two——
 The vampire who said he was you
 And drank my blood for a year,

7. Austrian Alpine region.

8. Variation of Tarot, ancient fortune-telling cards. Gypsies, like Jews, were objects of Nazi genocidal ambition; many died in the concentration camps.

9. The German air force.

1. Armor (German); refers to the German army's tank corps in World War II. Hitler preached the

superiority of the Aryans—people of German stock with blond hair and blue eyes.

2. An allusion to Plath's first suicide attempt.

3. A reference to Hitler's political autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), written and published before his rise to power, in which the future dictator outlined his plans for world conquest.

	Seven years, if you want to know. Daddy, you can lie back now.	75
	There's a stake in your fat black heart And the villagers never liked you. They are dancing and stamping on you. They always <i>knew</i> it was you. Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.	80
1962		1966

Words

	Axes After whose stroke the wood rings, And the echoes! Echoes traveling Off from the centre like horses.	5
	The sap Wells like tears, like the Water striving To re-establish its mirror Over the rock	10
	That drops and turns, A white skull, Eaten by weedy greens. Years later I Encounter them on the road——	15
	Words dry and riderless, The indefatigable hoof-taps. While From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars Govern a life.	20
1963		1966

Blackberrying

	Nobody in the lane, and nothing, nothing but blackberries, Blackberries on either side, though on the right mainly, A blackberry alley, going down in hooks, and a sea Somewhere at the end of it, heaving. Blackberries Big as the ball of my thumb, and dumb as eyes Ebon in the hedges, fat With blue-red juices. These they squander on my fingers.	5
--	---	---

I had not asked for such a blood sisterhood; they must love me.
They accommodate themselves to my milkbottle, flattening their sides.

Overhead go the choughs¹ in black, cacophonous flocks— 10
Bits of burnt paper wheeling in a blown sky.
Theirs is the only voice, protesting, protesting.
I do not think the sea will appear at all.
The high, green meadows are glowing, as if lit from within.
I come to one bush of berries so ripe it is a bush of flies, 15
Hanging their bluegreen bellies and their wing panes in a Chinese screen.
The honey-feast of the berries has stunned them; they believe in heaven.
One more hook, and the berries and bushes end.

The only thing to come now is the sea.
From between two hills a sudden wind funnels at me, 20
Slapping its phantom laundry in my face.
These hills are too green and sweet to have tasted salt.
I follow the sheep path between them. A last hook brings me
To the hills' northern face, and the face is orange rock
That looks out on nothing, nothing but a great space 25
Of white and pewter lights, and a din like silversmiths
Beating and beating at an intractable metal.

1961

1971

Purdah¹

Jade—
Stone of the side,
The agonized

Side of green Adam, I
Smile, cross-legged, 5
Enigmatical,

Shifting my clarities.
So valuable!
How the sun polishes this shoulder!

And should 10
The moon, my
Indefatigable cousin

Rise, with her cancerous pallors,
Dragging trees—
Little bushy polyps,² 15

1. Small, chattering birds of the crow family.
1. Among Muslims and some Hindu sects, seclusion of women from public observation.
2. Animals that have many feet or tentacles, like

octopuses, cuttlefish, and smaller coelenterates; also a general term for tumors that have tentacle-like protrusions.

Little nets,
My visibilities hide.
I gleam like a mirror.

At this facet the bridegroom arrives
Lord of the mirrors! 20
It is himself he guides

In among these silk
Screens, these rustling appurtenances.
I breathe, and the mouth

Veil stirs its curtain 25
My eye
Veil is

A concatenation of rainbows.
I am his.
Even in his 30

Absence, I
Revolve in my
Sheath of impossibles,

Priceless and quiet
Among these parakeets, macaws!³ 35
O chatterers

Attendants of the eyelash!
I shall unloose
One feather, like the peacock.

Attendants of the lip! 40
I shall unloose
One note

Shattering
The chandelier
Of air that all day flies 45

Its crystals
A million ignorants.
Attendants!

Attendants!
And at his next step 50
I shall unloose

3. Two kinds of parrots.

I shall unloose—
 From the small jeweled
 Doll he guards like a heart—

The lioness, 55
 The shriek in the bath,
 The cloak of holes.

1962

1972

The Applicant

First, are you our sort of a person?
 Do you wear
 A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,
 A brace or a hook,
 Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch, 5

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then
 How can we give you a thing?
 Stop crying.
 Open your hand.
 Empty? Empty. Here is a hand 10

To fill it and willing
 To bring teacups and roll away headaches
 And do whatever you tell it.
 Will you marry it?
 It is guaranteed 15

To thumb shut your eyes at the end
 And dissolve of sorrow.
 We make new stock from the salt.
 I notice you are stark naked.
 How about this suit— 20

Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.
 Will you marry it?
 It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof
 Against fire and bombs through the roof.
 Believe me, they'll bury you in it. 25

Now your head, excuse me, is empty.
 I have the ticket for that.
 Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.
 Well, what do you think of *that*?
 Naked as paper to start 30

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,
 In fifty, gold.

A living doll, everywhere you look.
 It can sew, it can cook,
 It can talk, talk, talk. 35

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.
 You have a hole, it's a poultice.
 You have an eye, it's an image.
 My boy, it's your last resort.
 Will you marry it, marry it, marry it. 40

1962

1965

Child

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
 I want to fill it with color and ducks,
 The zoo of the new

Whose names you meditate—
 April snowdrop, Indian pipe, 5
 Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
 Pool in which images
 Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous 10
 Wringing of hands, this dark
 Ceiling without a star.

1963

1972

JOHN UPDIKE

1932–2009

“To transcribe middleness with all its grits, bumps and anonymities, in its fullness of satisfaction and mystery: is it possible . . . or worth doing?” John Updike’s novels and stories give a positive answer to the question he asks in his early memoir, *The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood*; for he is arguably the most significant transcriber, or creator rather, of “middleness” in American writing since William Dean Howells (about whom he has written appreciatively) a century earlier. Falling in love in high school, meeting a college roommate, going to the eye doctor or dentist, eating supper on Sunday night, visiting your mother with your wife and son—these activities

are made to yield up their possibilities to a writer as responsively curious in imagination and delicately precise in his literary expression as Updike showed himself to be.

Born in Shillington, Pennsylvania, John Updike was an only child. He was gifted at drawing and caricature, and after graduating summa cum laude from Harvard in 1954, he spent a year studying art in England, then returned to America and went to work for the *New Yorker*, where his first stories appeared and to which he contributed regularly for five decades. When later in the 1950s he left the magazine, he also left New York City and with his wife and children settled in Ipswich, Massachusetts. There he pursued “his solitary trade as methodically as the dentist practiced his,” resisting the temptations of university teaching as successfully as he did the blandishments of media talk shows. His ample output was achieved through dedicated, steady work; his books are the fruit of patience, leisure, and craft.

Since 1959, when his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*, appeared, Updike published not only many novels and stories but also eight books of poetry, a play, and a vast store of book reviews and other prose writings. He is most admired by some readers as the author of the “Olinger” stories (included in *The Early Stories: 1953–1975*, 2003) about life in an imaginary Pennsylvania town that takes on its colors from the real Shillington of his youth. The heroes of these stories are adolescents straining to break out of their fast-perishing environments, as they grow up and as their small town turns into something else. Updike treats them with a blend of affection and ironic humor that is wonderfully assured in its touch, although his sense of place, of growing up during the Depression and the years of World War II, is always vividly present. Like Howells (whose fine memoir of his youthful days in Ohio, *A Boy's Town*, is an ancestor of Updike's *The Dogwood Tree*), he shows how one's spirit takes on its coloration from the material circumstances—houses, clothes, landscape, food, parents—one is bounded by.

This sense of place, which is also a sense of life, is found in the stories and in the novels, too, although Updike found it harder to invent convincing forms in which to tell longer tales. His most ambitious novel is probably *The Centaur* (1964), memorable for its portrayal of three days of confusion and error in the life of an American high school teacher seen through his son's eyes, but the book is also burdened with an elaborate set of mythical trappings that seem less than inevitable. *Couples* (1968), a novel that gained him a good deal of notoriety as a chronicler of sexual relationships, both marital and adulterous, is jammed with much interesting early-1960s lore about suburban life but seems uncertain whether it is an exercise in realism or a creative fantasy, as does *Marry Me* (1976).

In the four “Rabbit” novels, Updike found his most congenial and engaging subject for longer fiction. In each book he rendered the sense of an era—the 1950s in *Rabbit, Run*; the late 1960s in *Rabbit Redux*; the great gasoline crisis of 1979 in *Rabbit Is Rich*; the end of the Reagan era (and the end of Rabbit) in *Rabbit at Rest* (1990)—through the eyes of a hero who both is and is not like his creator. Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom, ex-high school basketball star, perpetually prey to nostalgia and in love with his own past, lives in a present he can't abide. *Rabbit, Run* shows him trying to escape from his town, his job, his wife, and his child by a series of disastrously sentimental and humanly irresponsible actions; yet Updike makes us feel Rabbit's yearnings even as we judge the painful consequences of yielding to them. Ten years later the fading basketball star has become a fortyish, dispirited printer with a wayward wife and a country that is both landing on the moon and falling to pieces. *Rabbit Redux* is masterly in presenting a small town rotting away from its past certainties; it also attempts to deal with the Vietnam War and the black revolution. *Rabbit Is Rich* is a gentler, sadder chronicling of the hero's settling into grandfatherhood as he draws ever closer to death; while *Rabbit at Rest*, the longest and richest of the four novels, brings him to a moving conclusion. Rabbit's coda is presented in the reflections of his son and illegitimate daughter in “Rabbit Remembered,” collected in *Licks of Love* (2000). In *Roger's Version* (1986) and *S* (1988), Updike

adopted—or permitted his protagonists to adopt—a more broadly, sometimes a harsher, satiric view of contemporary religion, computer technology, feminism, and other forms of “liberation.” Still, for all his virtuosity as a novelist, his best work may be found in the stories and in his short novel *Of the Farm* (1965). In “Separating” (printed here) the boy from “The Happiest I’ve Been” (*The Same Door*, 1959) has grown up, married, and fathered children and is now about to leave them as he moves into divorce. It is a beautiful example of Updike’s careful, poised sense of how things work, a sense that can also be observed in the poem “Dog’s Death” and in his memoir *Self-Consciousness* (1989).

Near the end of “The Dogwood Tree,” he summarized his boyish dream of becoming an artist:

He saw art—between drawing and writing he ignorantly made no distinction—as a method of riding a thin pencil out of Shillington, out of time altogether, into an infinity of unseen and even unborn hearts. He pictured this infinity as radiant. How innocent!

Most writers would name that innocence only to deplore it. Updike maintained instead that, as with the Christian faith he professed, succeeding years gave him no better assumptions with which to replace it. In any case, his fine sense of fact protected him from fashionable extravagances in black humor and experimental narratives, while enabling him to be both a satirist and a celebrator of our social and domestic conditions. In the last decade of his life a fabulative, almost magical atmosphere appeared in some works, as with his 2000 novel, *Gertrude and Claudius*. Yet even here John Updike showed himself to be our era’s most sensitive craftsman of personal and societal manners, as he did in the generational family saga based on spiritual perceptions, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996), in *Villages* (2004), a bildungsroman about a protagonist’s marriages, careers, and communities, and in the sociopolitical challenge of *Terrorist* (2006).

The following text is from the *New Yorker* (June 23, 1975).

Separating

The day was fair. Brilliant. All that June the weather had mocked the Maples’ internal misery with solid sunlight—golden shafts and cascades of green in which their conversations had wormed unseeing, their sad murmuring selves the only stain in Nature. Usually by this time of the year they had acquired tans; but when they met their elder daughter’s plane on her return from a year in England they were almost as pale as she, though Judith was too dazzled by the sunny opulent jumble of her native land to notice. They did not spoil her homecoming by telling her immediately. Wait a few days, let her recover from jet lag, had been one of their formulations, in that string of gray dialogues—over coffee, over cocktails, over Cointreau—that had shaped the strategy of their dissolution, while the earth performed its annual stunt of renewal unnoticed beyond their closed windows. Richard had thought to leave at Easter; Joan had insisted they wait until the four children were at last assembled, with all exams passed and ceremonies attended, and the bauble of summer to console them. So he had drudged away, in love, in dread, repairing screens, getting the mowers sharpened, rolling and patching their new tennis court.

The court, clay, had come through its first winter pitted and windswept bare of redcoat. Years ago the Maples had observed how often, among their

friends, divorce followed a dramatic home improvement, as if the marriage were making one last twitchy effort to live; their own worst crisis had come amid the plaster dust and exposed plumbing of a kitchen renovation. Yet, a summer ago, as canary-yellow bulldozers gaily churned a grassy, daisy-dotted knoll into a muddy plateau, and a crew of pigtailed young men raked and tamped clay into a plane, this transformation did not strike them as ominous, but festive in its impudence; their marriage could rend the earth for fun. The next spring, waking each day at dawn to a sliding sensation as if the bed were being tipped, Richard found the barren tennis court, its net and tapes still rolled in the barn, an environment congruous with his mood of purposeful desolation, and the crumbling of handfuls of clay into cracks and holes (dogs had frolicked on the court in a thaw; rivulets had evolved trenches) an activity suitably elemental and interminable. In his sealed heart he hoped the day would never come.

Now it was here. A Friday. Judith was reacclimated; all four children were assembled, before jobs and camps and visits again scattered them. Joan thought they should be told one by one. Richard was for making an announcement at the table. She said, "I think just making an announcement is a cop-out. They'll start quarrelling and playing to each other instead of focussing. They're each individuals, you know, not just some corporate obstacle to your freedom."

"O.K., O.K. I agree." Joan's plan was exact. That evening, they were giving Judith a belated welcome-home dinner, of lobster and champagne. Then, the party over, they, the two of them, who nineteen years before would push her in a baby carriage along Tenth Street to Washington Square,¹ were to walk her out of the house, to the bridge across the salt creek, and tell her, swearing her to secrecy. Then Richard Jr., who was going directly from work to a rock concert in Boston, would be told, either late when he returned on the train or early Saturday morning before he went off to his job; he was seventeen and employed as one of a golf-course maintenance crew. Then the two younger children, John and Margaret, could, as the morning wore on, be informed.

"Mopped up, as it were," Richard said.

"Do you have any better plan? That leaves you the rest of Saturday to answer any questions, pack, and make your wonderful departure."

"No," he said, meaning he had no better plan, and agreed to hers, though it had an edge of false order, a plea for control in the semblance of its achievement, like Joan's long chore lists and financial accountings and, in the days when he first knew her, her too copious lecture notes. Her plan turned one hurdle for him into four—four knife-sharp walls, each with a sheer blind drop on the other side.

All spring he had been morbidly conscious of insides and outsides, of barriers and partitions. He and Joan stood as a thin barrier between the children and the truth. Each moment was a partition, with the past on one side and the future on the other, a future containing this unthinkable *now*. Beyond four knifelike walls a new life for him waited vaguely. His skull cupped a secret, a white face, a face both frightened and soothing, both strange and known, that he wanted to shield from tears, which he felt all about him,

1. In Greenwich Village, an area in lower Manhattan, New York City.

solid as the sunlight. So haunted, he had become obsessed with battering down the house against his absence, replacing screens and sash cords, hinges and latches—a Houdini² making things snug before his escape.

The lock. He had still to replace a lock on one of the doors of the screened porch. The task, like most such, proved more difficult than he had imagined. The old lock, aluminum frozen by corrosion, had been deliberately rendered obsolete by manufacturers. Three hardware stores had nothing that even approximately matched the mortised hole its removal (surprisingly easy) left. Another hole had to be gouged, with bits too small and saws too big, and the old hole fitted with a block of wood—the chisels dull, the saw rusty, his fingers thick with lack of sleep. The sun poured down, beyond the porch, on a world of neglect. The bushes already needed pruning, the windward side of the house was shedding flakes of paint, rain would get in when he was gone, insects, rot, death. His family, all those he would lose, filtered through the edges of his awareness as he struggled with screw holes, splinters, opaque instructions, minutiae of metal.

Judith sat on the porch, a princess returned from exile. She regaled them with stories of fuel shortages, of bomb scares in the Underground, of Pakistani workmen loudly lusting after her as she walked past on her way to dance school. Joan came and went, in and out of the house, calmer than she should have been, praising his struggles with the lock as if this were one more and not the last of their chain of shared chores. The younger of his sons, John, now at fifteen suddenly, unwittingly handsome, for a few minutes held the rickety screen door while his father clumsily hammered and chiselled, each blow a kind of sob in Richard's ears. His younger daughter, having been at a slumber party, slept on the porch hammock through all the noise—heavy and pink, trusting and forsaken. Time, like the sunlight, continued relentlessly; the sunlight slowly slanted. Today was one of the longest days. The lock clicked, worked. He was through. He had a drink; he drank it on the porch, listening to his daughter. "It was so sweet," she was saying, "during the worst of it, how all the butcher's and bakery shops kept open by candlelight. They're all so plucky and cute. From the papers, things sounded so much worse here—people shooting people in gas lines, and everybody freezing."

Richard asked her, "Do you still want to live in England forever?" *Forever*: the concept, now a reality upon him, pressed and scratched at the back of his throat.

"No," Judith confessed, turning her oval face to him, its eyes still childishly far apart, but the lips set as over something succulent and satisfactory. "I was anxious to come home. I'm an American." She was a woman. They had raised her; he and Joan had endured together to raise her, alone of the four. The others had still some raising left in them. Yet it was the thought of telling Judith—the image of her, their first baby, walking between them arm in arm to the bridge—that broke him. The partition between himself and the tears broke. Richard sat down to the celebratory meal with the back

2. Harry Houdini (1874–1926), American magician and escape artist.

of his throat aching; the champagne, the lobster seemed phases of sunshine; he saw them and tasted them through tears. He blinked, swallowed, croakily joked about hay fever. The tears would not stop leaking through; they came not through a hole that could be plugged but through a permeable spot in a membrane, steadily, purely, endlessly, fruitfully. They became, his tears, a shield for himself against these others—their faces, the fact of their assembly, a last time as innocents, at a table where he sat the last time as head. Tears dropped from his nose as he broke the lobster's back; salt flavored his champagne as he sipped it; the raw clench at the back of his throat was delicious. He could not help himself.

His children tried to ignore his tears. Judith on his right, lit a cigarette, gazed upward in the direction of her too energetic, too sophisticated exhalation; on her other side, John earnestly bent his face to the extraction of the last morsels—legs, tail segments—from the scarlet corpse. Joan, at the opposite end of the table, glanced at him surprised, her reproach displaced by a quick grimace, of forgiveness, or of salute to his superior gift of strategy. Between them, Margaret, no longer called Bean, thirteen and large for her age, gazed from the other side of his pane of tears as if into a shopwindow at something she coveted—at her father, a crystalline heap of splinters and memories. It was not she, however, but John who, in the kitchen, as they cleared the plates and carapaces away, asked Joan the question: “*Why is Daddy crying?*?”

Richard heard the question but not the murmured answer. Then he heard Bean cry, “Oh, no-oh!”—the faintly dramatized exclamation of one who had long expected it.

John returned to the table carrying a bowl of salad. He nodded tersely at his father and his lips shaped the conspiratorial words “She told.”

“Told what?” Richard asked aloud, insanelly.

The boy sat down as if to rebuke his father's distraction with the example of his own good manners and said quietly, “The separation.”

Joan and Margaret returned; the child, in Richard's twisted vision, seemed diminished in size, and relieved, relieved to have had the boogeyman at last proved real. He called out to her—the distances at the table had grown immense—“You knew, you always knew,” but the clenching at the back of his throat prevented him from making sense of it. From afar he heard Joan talking, levelly, sensibly, reciting what they had prepared: it was a separation for the summer, an experiment. She and Daddy both agreed it would be good for them; they needed space and time to think; they liked each other but did not make each other happy enough, somehow.

Judith, imitating her mother's factual tone, but in her youth off-key, too cool, said, “I think it's silly. You should either live together or get divorced.”

Richard's crying, like a wave that has crested and crashed, had become tumultuous; but it was overtopped by another tumult, for John, who had been so reserved, now grew larger and larger at the table. Perhaps his younger sister's being credited with knowing set him off. “Why didn't you *tell* us?” he asked, in a large round voice quite unlike his own. “You should have *told* us you weren't getting along.”

Richard was startled into attempting to force words through his tears. “We *do* get along, that's the trouble, so it doesn't show even to us—”

“That we do not love each other” was the rest of the sentence; he couldn’t finish it.

Joan finished for him, in her style. “And we’ve always, *especially*, loved our children.”

John was not mollified. “What do you care about *us*?” he boomed. “We’re just little things you *had*.” His sisters’ laughing forced a laugh from him, which he turned hard and parodistic: “Ha ha *ha*.” Richard and Joan realized simultaneously that the child was drunk, on Judith’s homecoming champagne. Feeling bound to keep the center of the stage, John took a cigarette from Judith’s pack, poked it into his mouth, let it hang from his lower lip, and squinted like a gangster.

“You’re not little things we had,” Richard called to him. “You’re the whole point. But you’re grown. Or almost.”

The boy was lighting matches. Instead of holding them to his cigarette (for they had never seen him smoke; being “good” had been his way of setting himself apart), he held them to his mother’s face, closer and closer, for her to blow out. Then he lit the whole folder—a hiss and then a torch, held against his mother’s face. Prismed by tears, the flame filled Richard’s vision; he didn’t know how it was extinguished. He heard Margaret say, “Oh stop showing off,” and saw John, in response, break the cigarette in two and put the halves entirely into his mouth and chew, sticking out his tongue to display the shreds to his sister.

Joan talked to him, reasoning—a fountain of reason, unintelligible. “Talked about it for years . . . our children must help us . . . Daddy and I both want . . .” As the boy listened, he carefully wadded a paper napkin into the leaves of his salad, fashioned a ball of paper and lettuce, and popped it into his mouth, looking around the table for the expected laughter. None came. Judith said, “Be mature,” and dismissed a plume of smoke.

Richard got up from this stifling table and led the boy outside. Though the house was in twilight, the outdoors still brimmed with light, the long waste light of high summer. Both laughing, he supervised John’s spitting out the lettuce and paper and tobacco into the pachysandra.³ He took him by the hand—a square gritty hand, but for its softness a man’s. Yet, it held on. They ran together up into the field, past the tennis court. The raw banking left by the bulldozers was dotted with daisies. Past the court and a flat stretch where they used to play family baseball stood a soft green rise glorious in the sun, each weed and species of grass distinct as illumination on parchment. “I’m sorry, so sorry,” Richard cried. “You were the only one who ever tried to help me with all the goddam jobs around this place.”

Sobbing, safe within his tears and the champagne, John explained, “It’s not just the separation, it’s the whole crummy year, I *hate* that school, you can’t make any friends, the history teacher’s a scud.”⁴

They sat on the crest of the rise, shaking and warm from their tears but easier in their voices, and Richard tried to focus on the child’s sad year—the weekdays long with homework, the weekends spent in his room with model airplanes, while his parents murmured down below, nursing their

3. Green, leafy plant, frequently used as ground cover.

4. Dull, disagreeable, objectionable person.

separation. How selfish, how blind, Richard thought; his eyes felt scoured. He told his son, "We'll think about getting you transferred. Life's too short to be miserable."

They had said what they could, but did not want the moment to heal, and talked on, about the school, about the tennis court, whether it would ever again be as good as it had been that first summer. They walked to inspect it and pressed a few more tapes more firmly down. A little stiltedly, perhaps trying to make too much of the moment, to prolong it, Richard led the boy to the spot in the field where the view was best, of the metallic blue river, the emerald marsh, the scattered islands velvet with shadow in the low light, the white bits of beach far away. "See," he said. "It goes on being beautiful. It'll be here tomorrow."

"I know," John answered, impatiently. The moment had closed.

Back in the house, the others had opened some white wine, the champagne being drunk, and still sat at the table, the three females, gossiping. Where Joan sat had become the head. She turned, showing him a tearless face, and asked, "All right?"

"We're fine," he said, resenting it, though relieved, that the party went on without him.

In bed she explained, "I couldn't cry I guess because I cried so much all spring. It really wasn't fair. It's your idea, and you made it look as though I was kicking you out."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I couldn't stop. I wanted to but couldn't."

"You *didn't* want to. You loved it. You were having your way, making a general announcement."

"I love having it over," he admitted. "God, those kids were great. So brave and funny." John, returned to the house, had settled to a model airplane in his room, and kept shouting down to them, "I'm O.K. No sweat." "And the way," Richard went on, cozy in his relief, "they never questioned the reasons we gave. No thought of a third person. Not even Judith."

"That was touching," Joan said.

He gave her a hug. "You were great too. Thank you." Guiltily, he realized he did not feel separated.

"You still have Dickie to do," she told him. These words set before him a black mountain in the darkness; its cold breath, its near weight affected his chest. Of the four children Dickie was most nearly his conscience. Joan did not need to add, "That's one piece of your dirty work I won't do for you."

"I know. I'll do it. You go to sleep."

Within minutes, her breathing slowed, became oblivious and deep. It was quarter to midnight. Dickie's train from the concert would come in at one-fourteen. Richard set the alarm for one. He had slept atrociously for weeks. But whenever he closed his lids some glimpse of the last hours scorched them—Judith exhaling toward the ceiling in a kind of aversion, Bean's mute staring, the sunstruck growth of the field where he and John had rested. The mountain before him moved closer, moved within him; he was huge, momentous. The ache at the back of his throat felt stale. His wife slept as if slain beside him. When, exasperated by his hot lids, his crowded heart, he rose from bed and dressed, she awoke enough to turn over. He told her then, "If I could undo it all, I would."

"Where would you begin?" she asked. There was no place. Giving him courage, she was always giving him courage. He put on shoes without socks in the dark. The children were breathing in their rooms, the downstairs was hollow. In their confusion they had left lights burning. He turned off all but one, the kitchen overhead. The car started. He had hoped it wouldn't. He met only moonlight on the road; it seemed a diaphanous companion, flickering in the leaves along the roadside, haunting his rearview mirror like a pursuer, melting under his headlights. The center of town, not quite deserted, was eerie at this hour. A young cop in uniform kept company with a gang of T-shirted kids on the steps of the bank. Across from the railroad station, several bars kept open. Customers, mostly young, passed in and out of the warm night, savoring summer's novelty. Voices shouted from cars as they passed; an immense conversation seemed in progress. Richard parked and in his weariness put his head on the passenger seat, out of the commotion and wheeling lights. It was as when, in the movies, an assassin grimly carries his mission through the jostle of a carnival—except the movies cannot show the precipitous, palpable slope you cling to within. You cannot climb back down; you can only fall. The synthetic fabric of the car seat, warmed by his cheek, confided to him an ancient, distant scent of vanilla.

A train whistle caused him to lift his head. It was on time; he had hoped it would be late. The slender drawgates descended. The bell of approach tingled happily. The great metal body, horizontally fluted, rocked to a stop, and sleepy teen-agers disembarked, his son among them. Dickie did not show surprise that his father was meeting him at this terrible hour. He sauntered to the car with two friends, both taller than he. He said "Hi" to his father and took the passenger's seat with an exhausted promptness that expressed gratitude. The friends got into the back, and Richard was grateful; a few more minutes' postponement would be won by driving them home.

He asked, "How was the concert?"

"Groovy," one boy said from the back seat.

"It bit," the other said.

"It was O.K.," Dickie said, moderate by nature, so reasonable that in his childhood the unreason of the world had given him headaches, stomach aches, nausea. When the second friend had been dropped off at his dark house, the boy blurted, "Dad, my eyes are killing me with hay fever! I'm out there cutting that mothering grass all day!"

"Do we still have those drops?"

"They didn't do any good last summer."

"They might this." Richard swung a U-turn on the empty street. The drive home took a few minutes. The mountain was here, in his throat. "Richard," he said, and felt the boy, slumped and rubbing his eyes, go tense at his tone, "I didn't come to meet you just to make your life easier. I came because your mother and I have some news for you, and you're a hard man to get ahold of these days. It's sad news."

"That's O.K." The reassurance came out soft, but quick, as if released from the tip of a spring.

Richard had feared that his tears would return and choke him, but the boy's manliness set an example, and his voice issued forth steady and dry. "It's sad news, but it needn't be tragic news, at least for you. It should have

no practical effect on your life, though it's bound to have an emotional effect. You'll work at your job, and go back to school in September. Your mother and I are really proud of what you're making of your life; we don't want that to change at all."

"Yeah," the boy said lightly, on the intake of his breath, holding himself up. They turned the corner; the church they went to loomed like a gutted fort. The home of the woman Richard hoped to marry stood across the green. Her bedroom light burned.

"Your mother and I," he said, "have decided to separate. For the summer. Nothing legal, no divorce yet. We want to see how it feels. For some years now, we haven't been doing enough for each other, making each other as happy as we should be. Have you sensed that?"

"No," the boy said. It was an honest, unemotional answer: true or false in a quiz.

Glad for the factual basis, Richard pursued, even garrulously, the details. His apartment across town, his utter accessibility, the split vacation arrangements, the advantages to the children, the added mobility and variety of the summer. Dickie listened, absorbing. "Do the others know?"

Richard described how they had been told.

"How did they take it?"

"The girls pretty calmly. John flipped out; he shouted and ate a cigarette and made a salad out of his napkin and told us how much he hated school."

His brother chuckled. "He did?"

"Yeah. The school issue was more upsetting for him than Mom and me. He seemed to feel better for having exploded."

"He did?" The repetition was the first sign that he was stunned.

"Yes. Dickie, I want to tell you something. This last hour, waiting for your train to get in, has been about the worst of my life. I hate this. *Hate* it. My father would have died before doing it to me." He felt immensely lighter, saying this. He had dumped the mountain on the boy. They were home. Moving swiftly as a shadow, Dickie was out of the car, through the bright kitchen. Richard called after him, "Want a glass of milk or anything?"

"No thanks."

"Want us to call the course tomorrow and say you're too sick to work?"

"No, that's all right." The answer was faint, delivered at the door to his room; Richard listened for the slam of a tantrum. The door closed normally. The sound was sickening.

Joan had sunk into that first deep trough of sleep and was slow to awake. Richard had to repeat, "I told him."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing much. Could you go say good night to him? Please."

She left their room, without putting on a bathrobe. He sluggishly changed back into his pajamas and walked down the hall. Dickie was already in bed, Joan was sitting beside him, and the boy's bedside clock radio was murmuring music. When she stood, an inexplicable light—the moon?—outlined her body through the nightie. Richard sat on the warm place she had indented on the child's narrow mattress. He asked him, "Do you want the radio on like that?"

"It always is."

"Doesn't it keep you awake? It would me."

“No.”

“Are you sleepy?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. Sure you want to get up and go to work? You’ve had a big night.”

“I want to.”

Away at school this winter he had learned for the first time that you can go short of sleep and live. As an infant he had slept with an immobile, sweating intensity that had alarmed his babysitters. As the children aged, he became the first to go to bed, earlier for a time than his younger brother and sister. Even now, he would go slack in the middle of a television show, his sprawled legs hairy and brown. “O.K. Good boy. Dickie, listen. I love you so much, I never knew how much until now. No matter how this works out, I’ll always be with you. Really.”

Richard bent to kiss an averted face but his son, sinewy, turned and with wet cheeks embraced him and gave him a kiss, on the lips, passionate as a woman’s. In his father’s ear he moaned one word, the crucial, intelligent word: “*Why?*”

Why. It was a whistle of wind in a crack, a knife thrust, a window thrown open on emptiness. The white face was gone, the darkness was featureless. Richard had forgotten why.

1975

PHILIP ROTH

b. 1933

From the moment Philip Roth’s collection of stories *Goodbye, Columbus* won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship for 1959, his career has received the ambiguous reward of much anxious concern from critics, centered on whether he would develop the promise displayed in this first book. Ten years later, with *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Roth became overnight the famous author of a “dirty” bestseller, yet his success only made his critics more uneasy. Was this gifted portrayer of Jewish middle-class life really more interested in scoring points off caricatures than in creating and exploring characters? Did his very facility with words inhibit the exercise of deeper sympathies and more humanly generous purposes?

Roth grew up in Newark, New Jersey, attended the branch of Rutgers University there, graduated from Bucknell University, took an M.A. in English literature at the University of Chicago, then served in the army. Over the years he has taught at a number of universities while receiving many awards and fellowships. Like John Barth, another “university” writer, Roth is an ironic humorist, although the impulse behind his early stories is darker and less playful. *Goodbye, Columbus* is about Jews on the verge of being or already having been assimilated into the larger American culture, and the stories confidently take the measure of their embattled heroes, as in “The Conversion of the Jews” or “Epstein” or the long title story. “Defender of the Faith” (printed here), arguably the best piece in the collection, is distinguished for

the way Roth explores rather than exploits the conflict between personal feelings and religious loyalties as they are felt by Nathan Marx, a U.S. Army sergeant in a Missouri training company near the end of World War II. Throughout *Goodbye, Columbus* the narrator's voice is centrally important: in some stories it is indistinguishable from that of a campus wiseguy; in others it reaches out to a calmer and graver sense of disparities between promises and performance.

Roth's first two novels, *Letting Go* (1962) and *When She Was Good* (1967), markedly extended the territory charted in *Goodbye, Columbus* and showed him eager and equipped to write about people other than Jews. *Letting Go* is conventional in technique and in its subjects—love, marriage, university life—but Roth's easy mastery of the look and feel of places and things is everywhere evident. F. Scott Fitzgerald is the American writer whose presence in these early novels is most strongly felt; in particular, the section from *Letting Go* told in the first person by a graduate student in English betrays its indebtedness to Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*. This Fitzgeraldian atmosphere, with its nostalgic evocation of adolescence and early romantic visions, is even more evident in *When She Was Good*, which is strong in its rendering of middle-American living rooms and kitchens, the flushed atmosphere of late-night 1950s sex in parked cars, or the lyrics of popular songs—bits of remembered trivia that Roth, like his predecessor, has a genius for bringing to life.

The less-than-overwhelming reception of his second novel probably helped Roth move away from relatively sober realism; certainly *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) is a louder and more virtuosic performance than the earlier books. Alexander Portnoy's recollections of early childhood miseries are really a pretext for Roth to perform a succession of clever numbers in the inventive mode of a stand-up comic. Memories of growing up in New Jersey, listening to radio programs, playing softball, ogling girls at the ice-skating rink, or (most sensationally) masturbating in outlandish ways add up to an entertaining narrative that is sometimes crude but more often delicate and precise.

After *Portnoy* Roth moved toward fantasy and further showmanly operations: *Our Gang* (1970) attempted to do for Richard Nixon and his associates what actual events were to do one better; *The Breast* (1971) is a rather unamusing fable about a man's metamorphosis into that object; *The Great American Novel* (1973) threatened to sink under its weight of baseball lore dressed up in tall tales and sick jokes. But in *My Life as a Man* (1974) and *The Professor of Desire* (1977) he returned to matters that have traditionally preoccupied the social novelist and that inform his own best work: marriage, divorce, the family, Jewishness, and psychoanalysis—the pressures of civilization and the resultant individual discontents.

His finest work is to be found in the Zuckerman novels, beginning with *Zuckerman Bound* (1985) and its successor, *The Counterlife* (1987). In these novels Roth created a hero-as-novelist whose experience parallels in important ways that of his creator. A scandalous novel, *Carnovsky*, recalls *Portnoy's Complaint*; a critic named Milton Appel is a stand-in for the real critic Irving Howe, who once subjected Roth's work to hostile criticism. Yet for all the dangers of self-pity or self-absorption such autobiographical reference involves, the novels add up to something much deeper, more comic and touching, than self-advertisement and complaint. Scenes like the death of Zuckerman's father in a Florida hospital and the subsequent return of the son to the vanished Newark where he grew up are moving expressions of the generous purposes and human sympathies we find in Roth's work at its best. And those purposes and sympathies are also evident in his autobiographical writing: in *The Facts* (1988) and especially in *Patrimony* (1991), a poignant memoir of his father.

In the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, Roth has developed his art of impersonation into audacious and sometimes excessive forms. *Operation Shylock* (1993) poses a presumably real Philip Roth who encounters an impostor; *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) recasts his typical protagonist as a puppeteer who manipulates women in much the same way; *American Pastoral* (1997) brings back Nathan

Zuckerman for a high school reunion and the investigation of a “more ordinary” classmate’s life. Zuckerman remains on hand for *I Married a Communist* (1998) and *The Human Stain* (2000), while David Kepesh (who had turned into a female breast in the author’s much earlier fantasy) reappears as a professor who seduces his students in *The Dying Animal* (2001). Further seduction takes place in *Everyman* (2006), although the author’s most disturbing projections are reserved for *The Plot against America* (2004), in which a fictive Charles A. Lindbergh becomes president and initiates repression of American Jews. *Exit Ghost* (2007) has Nathan Zuckerman return to New York City and reencounter characters from previous novels. *Indignation* (2008) sets a young man’s maturation against the looming threat of military service in the Korean War. *The Humbling* (2009) projects Roth’s late-life anxieties as a writer onto the career of an actor in decline. *Nemesis* (2010), his twenty-fourth and, he says, final novel, expands the author’s concerns with human morality (and the role of a God who allows such suffering) to encompass a polio epidemic in the Newark of his childhood. Throughout his work, Roth’s emphasis remains on invention, reminding readers that the writerly self is a virtually inexhaustible resource for the imagination. Nevertheless, in 2012 Roth announced his retirement from writing, saying he had “done my best with what I had.”

The following text is from *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959).

Defender of the Faith

In May of 1945, only a few weeks after the fighting had ended in Europe, I was rotated back to the States, where I spent the remainder of the war with a training company at Camp Crowder, Missouri. We had been racing across Germany so swiftly during the late winter and spring that when I boarded the plane that drizzly morning in Berlin, I couldn’t believe our destination lay to the west. My mind might inform me otherwise, but there was an inertia of the spirit that told me we were flying to a new front where we would disembark and continue our push eastward—eastward until we’d circled the globe, marching through villages along whose twisting, cobbled streets crowds of the enemy would watch us take possession of what up till then they’d considered their own. I had changed enough in two years not to mind the trembling of the old people, the crying of the very young, the uncertain fear in the eyes of the once-arrogant. After two years I had been fortunate enough to develop an infantryman’s heart which, like his feet, at first aches and swells, but finally grows horny enough for him to travel the weirdest paths without feeling a thing.

Captain Paul Barrett was to be my C.O. at Camp Crowder. The day I reported for duty he came out of his office to shake my hand. He was short, gruff, and fiery, and indoors or out he wore his polished helmet liner¹ down on his little eyes. In Europe he had received a battlefield commission and a serious chest wound, and had been returned to the States only a few months before. He spoke easily to me, but was, I thought, unnecessarily abusive towards the troops. At the evening formation, he introduced me.

“Gentlemen,” he called. “Sergeant Thurston, as you know, is no longer with this Company. Your new First Sergeant is Sergeant Nathan Marx here. He is a veteran of the European theater and consequently will take no shit.”

1. Plastic liner worn under a helmet to prevent chafing and bruising.

I sat up late in the orderly room that evening, trying halfheartedly to solve the riddle of duty rosters, personnel forms, and morning reports. The CQ² slept with his mouth open on a mattress on the floor. A trainee stood reading the next day's duty roster, which was posted on the bulletin board directly inside the screen door. It was a warm evening and I could hear the men's radios playing dance music over in the barracks.

The trainee, who I knew had been staring at me whenever I looked groggily into the forms, finally took a step in my direction.

"Hey, Sarge—we having a G.I. party tomorrow night?" A G.I. party is a barracks-cleaning.

"You usually have them on Friday nights?"

"Yes," and then he added mysteriously, "that's the whole thing."

"Then you'll have a G.I. party."

He turned away and I heard him mumbling. His shoulders were moving and I wondered if he was crying.

"What's your name, soldier?" I asked.

He turned, not crying at all. Instead his green-speckled eyes, long and narrow, flashed like fish in the sun. He walked over to me and sat on the edge of my desk.

He reached out a hand. "Sheldon," he said.

"Stand on your own two feet, Sheldon."

Climbing off the desk, he said, "Sheldon Grossbart." He smiled wider at the intimacy into which he'd led me.

"You against cleaning the barracks Friday night, Grossbart? Maybe we shouldn't have G.I. parties—maybe we should get a maid." My tone startled me: I felt like a Charlie McCarthy, with every top sergeant I had ever known as my Edgar Bergen.³

"No, Sergeant." He grew serious, but with a seriousness that seemed only to be the stifling of a smile. "It's just G.I. parties on Friday night, of all nights . . ."

He slipped up to the corner of the desk again—not quite sitting, but not quite standing either. He looked at me with those speckled eyes flashing and then made a gesture with his hand. It was very slight, no more than a rotation back and forth of the wrist, and yet it managed to exclude from our affairs everything else in the orderly room, to make the two of us the center of the world. It seemed, in fact, to exclude everything about the two of us except our hearts. "Sergeant Thurston was one thing," he whispered, an eye flashing to the sleeping CQ, "but we thought with you here, things might be a little different."

"We?"

"The Jewish personnel."

"Why?" I said, harshly.

He hesitated a moment, and then, uncontrollably, his hand went up to his mouth. "I mean . . ." he said.

"What's on your mind?" Whether I was still angry at the "Sheldon" business or something else, I hadn't a chance to tell—but clearly I was angry.

2. Noncommissioned officer in charge of quarters at night or on weekends.

3. A ventriloquist who, with Charlie McCarthy, his dummy, was a popular radio comedian.

“. . . we thought you . . . Marx, you know, like Karl Marx. The Marx brothers. Those guys are all . . . M-A-R-X, isn't that how you spell it, Sergeant?"

"M-A-R-X."

"Fishbein said—" He stopped. "What I mean to say, Sergeant—" His face and neck were red, and his mouth moved but no words came out. In a moment, he raised himself to attention, gazing down at me. It was as though he had suddenly decided he could expect no more sympathy from me than from Thurston, the reason being that I was of Thurston's faith and not his. The young man had managed to confuse himself as to what my faith really was, but I felt no desire to straighten him out. Very simply, I didn't like him.

When I did nothing but return his gaze, he spoke, in an altered tone. "You see, Sergeant," he explained to me, "Friday nights, Jews are supposed to go to services."

"Did Sergeant Thurston tell you you couldn't go to them when there was a G.I. party?"

"No."

"Did he say you had to stay and scrub the floors?"

"No, Sergeant."

"Did the Captain say you had to stay and scrub the floors?"

"That isn't it, Sergeant. It's the other guys in the barracks." He leaned toward me. "They think we're goofing off. But we're not. That's when Jews go to services, Friday night. We have to."

"Then go."

"But the other guys make accusations. They have no right."

"That's not the Army's problem, Grossbart. It's a personal problem you'll have to work out yourself."

"But it's *unfair*."

I got up to leave. "There's nothing I can do about it," I said.

Grossbart stiffened in front of me. "But this is a matter of *religion*, sir."

"Sergeant."

"I mean 'Sergeant,'" he said, almost snarling.

"Look, go see the chaplain. The I.G.⁴ You want to see Captain Barrett, I'll arrange an appointment."

"No, no. I don't want to make trouble, Sergeant. That's the first thing they throw up to you. I just want my rights!"

"Damn it, Grossbart, stop whining. You have your rights. You can stay and scrub floors or you can go to *shul*⁵—"

The smile swam in again. Spittle gleamed at the corners of his mouth. "You mean church, Sergeant."

"I mean *shul*, Grossbart!" I walked past him and outside. Near me I heard the scrunching of a guard's boots on gravel. In the lighted windows of the barracks the young men in T-shirts and fatigue pants were sitting on their bunks, polishing their rifles. Suddenly there was a light rustling behind me. I turned and saw Grossbart's dark frame fleeing back to the barracks, racing to tell his Jewish friends that they were right—that like Karl and Harpo, I was one of them.

4. Inspector general, who, apart from the chaplain, provided the only route by which complaints

could be registered.

5. Synagogue (Yiddish).

The next morning, while chatting with the Captain, I recounted the incident of the previous evening, as if to unburden myself of it. Somehow in the telling it seemed to the Captain that I was not so much explaining Grossbart's position as defending it.

"Marx, I'd fight side by side with a nigger if the fellow proved to me he was a man. I pride myself," the Captain said looking out the window, "that I've got an open mind. Consequently, Sergeant, nobody gets special treatment here, for the good *or* the bad. All a man's got to do is prove himself. A man fires well on the range, I give him a weekend pass. He scores high in PT, he gets a weekend pass. He *earns* it." He turned from the window and pointed a finger at me. "You're a Jewish fellow, am I right, Marx?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I admire you. I admire you because of the ribbons on your chest, not because you had a hem stitched on your dick before you were old enough to even know you had one. I judge a man by what he shows me on the field of battle, Sergeant. It's what he's got *here*," he said, and then, though I expected he would point to his heart, he jerked a thumb towards the buttons straining to hold his blouse across his belly. "Guts," he said.

"Okay, sir, I only wanted to pass on to you how the men felt."

"Mr. Marx, you're going to be old before your time if you worry about how the men feel. Leave that stuff to the Chaplain—pussy, the clap, church picnics with the little girls from Joplin, that's all his business, not yours. Let's us train these fellas to shoot straight. If the Jewish personnel feels the other men are accusing them of goldbricking . . . well, I just don't know. Seems awful funny how suddenly the Lord is calling so loud in Private Grossman's ear he's just got to run to church."

"Synagogue," I said.

"Synagogue is right, Sergeant. I'll write that down for handy reference. Thank you for stopping by."

That evening, a few minutes before the company gathered outside the orderly room for the chow formation, I called the CQ, Corporal Robert LaHill, in to see me. LaHill was a dark burly fellow whose hair curled out of his clothes wherever it could. He carried a glaze in his eyes that made one think of caves and dinosaurs. "LaHill," I said, "when you take the formation, remind the men that they're free to attend church services *whenever* they are held, provided they report to the orderly room before they leave the area."

LaHill didn't flicker; he scratched his wrist, but gave no indication that he'd heard or understood.

"LaHill," I said, "*church*. You remember? Church, priest, Mass, confession . . ."

He curled one lip into a ghastly smile; I took it for a signal that for a second he had flickered back up into the human race.

"Jewish personnel who want to attend services this evening are to fall out in front of the orderly room at 1900." And then I added, "By order of Captain Barrett."

A little while later, as a twilight softer than any I had seen that year dropped over Camp Crowder, I heard LaHill's thick, inflectionless voice outside my window: "Give me your ears, troopers. Toppie says for me to tell

you that at 1900 hours all Jewish personnel is to fall out in front here if they wants to attend the Jewish Mass."

At seven o'clock, I looked out of the orderly-room window and saw three soldiers in starched khakis standing alone on the dusty quadrangle. They looked at their watches, and fidgeted while they whispered back and forth. It was getting darker, and alone on the deserted field they looked tiny. When I walked to the door I heard the noises of the G.I. party coming from the surrounding barracks—bunks being pushed to the wall, faucets pounding water into buckets, brooms whisking at the wooden floors. In the windows big puffs of cloth moved round and round, cleaning the dirt away for Saturday's inspection. I walked outside and the moment my foot hit the ground I thought I heard Grossbart, who was now in the center, call to the other two, "Ten-*hut!*" Or maybe when they all three jumped to attention, I imagined I heard the command.

At my approach, Grossbart stepped forward. "Thank you, sir," he said.

"Sergeant, Grossbart," I reminded him. "You call officers 'Sir.' I'm not an officer. You've been in the Army three weeks—you know that."

He turned his palms out at his sides to indicate that, in truth, he and I lived beyond convention. "Thank you, anyway," he said.

"Yes," the tall boy behind him said. "Thanks a lot."

And the third whispered, "Thank you," but his mouth barely fluttered so that he did not alter by more than a lip's movement, the posture of attention.

"For what?" I said.

Grossbart snorted, happily. "For the announcement before. The Corporal's announcement. It helped. It made it . . ."

"Fancier." It was the tall boy finishing Grossbart's sentence.

Grossbart smiled. "He means formal, sir. Public," he said to me. "Now it won't seem as though we're just taking off, goldbricking, because the work has begun."

"It was by order of Captain Barrett," I said.

"Ahh, but you pull a little weight . . ." Grossbart said. "So we thank you." Then he turned to his companions. "Sergeant Marx, I want you to meet Larry Fishbein."

The tall boy stepped forward and extended his hand. I shook it. "You from New York?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Me too." He had a cadaverous face that collapsed inward from his cheekbone to his jaw, and when he smiled—as he did at the news of our communal attachment—revealed a mouthful of bad teeth. He blinked his eyes a good deal, as though he were fighting back tears. "What borough?" he asked.

I turned to Grossbart. "It's five after seven. What time are services?"

"*Shul*," he smiled, "is in ten minutes. I want you to meet Mickey Halpern. This is Nathan Marx, our Sergeant."

The third boy hopped forward. "Private Michael Halpern." He saluted.

"Salute officers, Halpern." The boy dropped his hand, and in his nervousness checked to see if his shirt pockets were buttoned on the way down.

"Shall I march them over, sir?" Grossbart asked, "or are you coming along?"

From behind Grossbart, Fishbein piped up. "Afterwards they're having refreshments. A Ladies' Auxiliary from St. Louis, the rabbi told us last week."

"The chaplain," whispered Halpern.

"You're welcome to come along," Grossbart said.

To avoid his plea, I looked away, and saw, in the windows of the barracks, a cloud of faces staring out at the four of us.

"Look, hurry out of here, Grossbart."

"Okay, then," he said. He turned to the others. "Double time, *march!*" and they started off, but ten feet away Grossbart spun about, and running backwards he called to me, "Good *shabus*,⁶ sir." And then the three were swallowed into the Missouri dusk.

Even after they'd disappeared over the parade grounds, whose green was now a deep twilight blue, I could hear Grossbart singing the double-time cadence, and as it grew dimmer and dimmer it suddenly touched some deep memory—as did the slant of light—and I was remembering the shrill sounds of a Bronx playground, where years ago, beside the Grand Concourse,⁷ I had played on long spring evenings such as this. Those thin fading sounds . . . It was a pleasant memory for a young man so far from peace and home, and it brought so very many recollections with it that I began to grow exceedingly tender about myself. In fact, I indulged myself to a reverie so strong that I felt within as though a hand had opened and was reaching down inside. It had to reach so very far to touch me. It had to reach past those days in the forests of Belgium and the dying I'd refused to weep over; past the nights in those German farmhouses whose books we'd burned to warm us, and which I couldn't bother to mourn; past those endless stretches when I'd shut off all softness I might feel for my fellows, and managed even to deny myself the posture of a conqueror—the swagger that I, as a Jew, might well have worn as my boots whacked against the rubble of Münster, Braunschweig, and finally Berlin.

But now one night noise, one rumor of home and time past, and memory plunged down through all I had anesthetized and came to what I suddenly remembered to be myself. So it was not altogether curious that in search of more of me I found myself following Grossbart's tracks to Chapel No. 3 where the Jewish services were being held.

I took a seat in the last row, which was empty. Two rows in front sat Grossbart, Fishbein, and Halpern, each holding a little white dixie cup. Fishbein was pouring the contents of his cup into Grossbart's, and Grossbart looked mirthful as the liquid drew a purple arc between his hand and Fishbein's. In the glary yellow light, I saw the chaplain on the pulpit chanting the first line of the responsive reading. Grossbart's prayerbook remained closed on his lap; he swished the cup around. Only Halpern responded in prayer. The fingers of his right hand were spread wide across the cover of the book, and his cap was pulled down low onto his brow so that it was round like a *yarmulke*⁸ rather than long and pointed. From time to time, Grossbart wet his lips at the cup's edge; Fishbein, his long yellow face, a dying light bulb, looked from here to there, leaning forward at the neck to catch sight of the faces down the row, in front—then behind. He saw me

6. Sabbath (Yiddish).

7. Avenue in the Bronx, New York.

8. Skullcap (Yiddish).

and his eyelids beat a tattoo. His elbow slid into Grossbart's side, his neck inclined towards his friend, and then, when the congregation responded, Grossbart's voice was among them. Fishbein looked into his book now too; his lips, however, didn't move.

Finally it was time to drink the wine. The chaplain smiled down at them as Grossbart swigged in one long gulp, Halpern sipped, meditating, and Fishbein faked devotion with an empty cup.

At last the chaplain spoke: "As I look down amongst the congregation—" he grinned at the word, "this night, I see many new faces, and I want to welcome you to Friday night services here at Camp Crowder. I am Major Leo Ben Ezra, your chaplain . . ." Though an American, the chaplain spoke English very deliberately, syllabically almost, as though to communicate, above all, to the lip-readers in the audience. "I have only a few words to say before we adjourn to the refreshment room where the kind ladies of the Temple Sinai, St. Louis, Missouri, have a nice setting for you."

Applause and whistling broke out. After a momentary grin, the chaplain raised his palms to the congregation, his eyes flicking upward a moment, as if to remind the troops where they were and Who Else might be in attendance. In the sudden silence that followed, I thought I heard Grossbart's cackle—"Let the goyim⁹ clean the floors!" Were those the words? I wasn't sure, but Fishbein, grinning, nudged Halpern. Halpern looked dumbly at him, then went back to his prayerbook, which had been occupying him all through the rabbi's talk. One hand tugged at the black kinky hair that stuck out under his cap. His lips moved.

The rabbi continued. "It is about the food that I want to speak to you for a moment. I know, I know, I know," he intoned, wearily, "how in the mouths of most of you the *trafe*¹ food tastes like ashes. I know how you gag, some of you, and how your parents suffer to think of their children eating foods unclean and offensive to the palate. What can I tell you? I can only say close your eyes and swallow as best you can. Eat what you must to live and throw away the rest. I wish I could help more. For those of you who find this impossible, may I ask that you try and try, but then come to see me in private where, if your revulsion is such, we will have to seek aid from those higher up."

A round of chatter rose and subsided; then everyone sang "Ain Kelohano," after all those years I discovered I still knew the words.

Suddenly, the service over, Grossbart was upon me. "Higher up? He means the General?"

"Hey, Shelly," Fishbein interrupted, "he means God." He smacked his face and looked at Halpern. "How high can you go!"

"Shhh!" Grossbart said. "What do you think, Sergeant?"

"I don't know. You better ask the chaplain."

"I'm going to. I'm making an appointment to see him in private. So is Mickey."

Halpern shook his head. "No, no, Sheldon . . ."

"You have rights, Mickey. They can't push us around."

"It's okay. It bothers my mother, not me . . ."

9. Gentiles (Yiddish).

1. Unkosher—unfit to eat (Yiddish).

Grossbart looked at me. “Yesterday he threw up. From the hash. It was all ham and God knows what else.”

“I have a cold—that was why,” Halpern said. He pushed his *yamalkah* back into a cap.

“What about you, Fishbein?” I asked. “You kosher too?”

He flushed, which made the yellow more gray than pink. “A little. But I’ll let it ride. I have a very strong stomach. And I don’t eat a lot anyway . . .” I continued to look at him, and he held up his wrist to re-enforce what he’d just said. His watch was tightened to the last hole and he pointed that out to me. “So I don’t mind.”

“But services are important to you?” I asked him.

He looked at Grossbart. “Sure, sir.”

“Sergeant.”

“Not so much at home,” said Grossbart, coming between us, “but away from home it gives one a sense of his Jewishness.”

“We have to stick together,” Fishbein said.

I started to walk towards the door; Halpern stepped back to make way for me.

“That’s what happened in Germany,” Grossbart was saying, loud enough for me to hear. “They didn’t stick together. They let themselves get pushed around.”

I turned. “Look, Grossbart, this is the Army, not summer camp.”

He smiled. “So?” Halpern tried to sneak off, but Grossbart held his arm. “So?” he said again.

“Grossbart,” I asked, “how old are you?”

“Nineteen.”

“And you?” I said to Fishbein.

“The same. The same month even.”

“And what about him?” I pointed to Halpern, who’d finally made it safely to the door.

“Eighteen,” Grossbart whispered. “But he’s like he can’t tie his shoes or brush his teeth himself. I feel sorry for him.”

“I feel sorry for all of us, Grossbart, but just act like a man. Just don’t overdo it.”

“Overdo what, sir?”

“The sir business. Don’t overdo that,” I said, and I left him standing there. I passed by Halpern but he did not look up. Then I was outside, black surrounded me—but behind I heard Grossbart call, “Hey, Mickey, *liebschen*,² come on back. Refreshments!”

Liebschen! My grandmother’s word for me!

One morning, a week later, while I was working at my desk, Captain Barrett shouted for me to come into his office. When I entered, he had his helmet liner squashed down so that I couldn’t even see his eyes. He was on the phone, and when he spoke to me, he cupped one hand over the mouthpiece.

“Who the fuck is Grossbart?”

“Third platoon, Captain,” I said. “A trainee.”

2. Darling (German).

“What’s all this stink about food? His mother called a goddam congressman about the food . . .” He uncovered the mouthpiece and slid his helmet up so I could see the curl of his bottom eyelash. “Yes, sir,” he said into the phone. “Yes, sir. I’m still here, sir. I’m asking Marx here right now . . .”

He covered the mouthpiece again and looked back to me. “Lightfoot Harry’s on the phone,” he said, between his teeth. “This congressman calls General Lyman who calls Colonel Sousa who calls the Major who calls me. They’re just dying to stick this thing on me. What’s a matter,” he shook the phone at me, “I don’t feed the troops? What the hell is this?”

“Sir, Grossbart is strange . . .” Barrett greeted that with a mockingly indulgent smile. I altered my approach. “Captain, he’s a very orthodox Jew and so he’s only allowed to eat certain foods.”

“He throws up, the congressman said. Every time he eats something his mother says he throws up!”

“He’s accustomed to observing the dietary laws, Captain.”

“So why’s his old lady have to call the White House!”

“Jewish parents, sir, they’re apt to be more protective than you expect. I mean Jews have a very close family life. A boy goes away from home, sometimes the mother is liable to get very upset. Probably the boy *mentioned* something in a letter and his mother misinterpreted.”

“I’d like to punch him one right in the mouth. There’s a goddam war on and he wants a silver platter!”

“I don’t think the boy’s to blame, sir. I’m sure we can straighten it out by just asking him. Jewish parents worry—”

“*All* parents worry, for Christ sake. But they don’t get on their high horse and start pulling strings—”

I interrupted, my voice higher, tighter than before. “The home life, Captain, is so very important . . . but you’re right, it may sometimes get out of hand. It’s a very wonderful thing, Captain, but because it’s so close, this kind of thing—”

He didn’t listen any longer to my attempt to present both myself and Lightfoot Harry with an explanation for the letter. He turned back to the phone. “Sir?” he said. “Sir, Marx here tells me Jews have a tendency to be pushy. He says he thinks he can settle it right here in the Company . . . Yes, sir . . . I *will* call back, sir, soon as I can . . .” He hung up. “Where are the men, Sergeant?”

“On the range.”

With a whack on the top, he crushed his helmet over his eyes, and charged out of his chair. “We’re going for a ride.”

The Captain drove and I sat beside him. It was a hot spring day and under my newly starched fatigues it felt as though my armpits were melting down onto my sides and chest. The roads were dry and by the time we reached the firing range, my teeth felt gritty with dust though my mouth had been shut the whole trip. The Captain slammed the brakes on and told me to get the hell out and find Grossbart.

I found him on his belly, firing wildly at the 500 feet target. Waiting their turns behind him were Halpern and Fishbein. Fishbein, wearing a pair of rimless G.I. glasses I hadn’t seen on him before, gave the appearance of an old peddler who would gladly have sold you the rifle and cartridges that

were slung all over him. I stood back by the ammo boxes, waiting for Grossbart to finish spraying the distant targets. Fishbein straggled back to stand near me.

"Hello, Sergeant Marx."

"How are you?" I mumbled.

"Fine, thank you. Sheldon's really a good shot."

"I didn't notice."

"I'm not so good, but I think I'm getting the hang of it now . . . Sergeant, I don't mean to, you know, ask what I shouldn't . . ." The boy stopped. He was trying to speak intimately but the noise of the shooting necessitated that he shout at me.

"What is it?" I asked. Down the range I saw Captain Barrett standing up in the jeep, scanning the line for me and Grossbart.

"My parents keep asking and asking where we're going. Everybody says the Pacific. I don't care, but my parents . . . If I could relieve their minds I think I could concentrate more on my shooting."

"I don't know where, Fishbein. Try to concentrate anyway."

"Sheldon says you might be able to find out—"

"I don't know a thing, Fishbein. You just take it easy, and don't let Sheldon—"

"I'm taking it easy, Sergeant. It's at home—"

Grossbart had just finished on the line and was dusting his fatigues with one hand. I left Fishbein's sentence in the middle.

"Grossbart, the Captain wants to see you."

He came toward us. His eyes blazed and twinkled. "Hi!"

"Don't point that goddam rifle!"

"I wouldn't shoot you, Sarge." He gave me a smile wide as a pumpkin as he turned the barrel aside.

"Damn you, Grossbart—this is no joke! Follow me."

I walked ahead of him and had the awful suspicion that behind me Grossbart was *marching*, his rifle on his shoulder, as though he were a one-man detachment.

At the jeep he gave the Captain a rifle salute. "Private Sheldon Grossbart, sir."

"At ease, Grossman." The Captain slid over to the empty front seat, and crooking a finger, invited Grossbart closer.

"Bart, sir. Sheldon *Grossbart*. It's a common error." Grossbart nodded to me—I understand, he indicated. I looked away, just as the mess truck pulled up to the range, disgorging a half dozen K.P.'s with rolled-up sleeves. The mess sergeant screamed at them while they set up the chow line equipment.

"Grossbart, your mama wrote some congressman that we don't feed you right. Do you know that?" the Captain said.

"It was my father, sir. He wrote to Representative Franconi that my religion forbids me to eat certain foods."

"What religion is that, Grossbart?"

"Jewish."

"Jewish, *sir*," I said to Grossbart.

"Excuse me, sir. 'Jewish, sir.'"

"What have you been living on?" the Captain asked. "You've been in the Army a month already. You don't look to me like you're falling to pieces."

"I eat because I have to, sir. But Sergeant Marx will testify to the fact that I don't eat one mouthful more than I need to in order to survive."

"Marx," Barrett asked, "is that so?"

"I've never seen Grossbart eat, sir," I said.

"But you heard the rabbi," Grossbart said. "He told us what to do, and I listened."

The Captain looked at me. "Well, Marx?"

"I still don't know what he eats and doesn't eat, sir."

Grossbart raised his rifle, as though to offer it to me. "But, Sergeant—"

"Look, Grossbart, just answer the Captain's questions!" I said sharply.

Barrett smiled at me and I resented it. "All right, Grossbart," he said, "What is it you want? The little piece of paper? You want out?"

"No, sir. Only to be allowed to live as a Jew. And for the others, too."

"What others?"

"Fishbein, sir, and Halpern."

"They don't like the way we serve either?"

"Halpern throws up, sir. I've seen it."

"I thought *you* threw up."

"Just once, sir. I didn't know the sausage was sausage."

"We'll give menus, Grossbart. We'll show training films about the food, so you can identify when we're trying to poison you."

Grossbart did not answer. Out before me, the men had been organized into two long chow lines. At the tail end of one I spotted Fishbein—or rather, his glasses spotted me. They winked sunlight back at me like a friend. Halpern stood next to him, patting inside his collar with a khaki handkerchief. They moved with the line as it began to edge up towards the food. The mess sergeant was still screaming at the K.P.'s, who stood ready to ladle out the food, bewildered. For a moment I was actually terrorized by the thought that somehow the mess sergeant was going to get involved in Grossbart's problem.

"Come over here, Marx," the Captain said to me. "Marx, you're a Jewish fella, am I right?"

I played straight man. "Yes, sir."

"How long you been in the Army? Tell this boy."

"Three years and two months."

"A year in combat, Grossbart. Twelve goddam months in combat all through Europe. I admire this man," the Captain said, snapping a wrist against my chest. But do you hear him peeping about the food? Do you? I want an answer, Grossbart. Yes or no."

"No, sir."

"And why not? He's a Jewish fella."

"Some things are more important to some Jews than other things to other Jews."

Barrett blew up. "Look, Grossbart, Marx here is a good man, a goddam *hero*. When you were sitting on your sweet ass in high school, Sergeant Marx was killing Germans. Who does more for the Jews, you by throwing up over a lousy piece of sausage, a piece of firstcut meat—or Marx by killing those Nazi bastards? If I was a Jew, Grossbart, I'd kiss this man's feet. He's a goddam hero, you know that? And *he* eats what we give him. Why do you have to cause trouble is what I want to know! What is it you're buckin' for, a discharge?"

"No, sir."

"I'm talking to a *wall*! Sergeant, get him out of my way." Barrett pounced over to the driver's seat. "I'm going to see the chaplain!" The engine roared, the jeep spun around, and then, raising a whirl of dust, the Captain was headed back to camp.

For a moment, Grossbart and I stood side by side, watching the jeep. Then he looked at me and said, "I don't want to start trouble. That's the first thing they toss up to us."

When he spoke I saw that his teeth were white and straight, and the sight of them suddenly made me understand that Grossbart actually did have parents: that once upon a time someone had taken little Sheldon to the dentist. He was someone's son. Despite all the talk about his parents, it was hard to believe in Grossbart as a child, an heir—as related by blood to anyone, mother, father, or, above all, to me. This realization led me to another.

"What does your father do, Grossbart?" I asked, as we started to walk back towards the chow line.

"He's a tailor."

"An American?"

"Now, yes. A son in the Army," he said, jokingly.

"And your mother?" I asked.

He winked. "A *ballabusta*³—she practically sleeps with a dustcloth in her hand."

"She's also an immigrant?"

"All she talks is Yiddish, still."

"And your father too?"

"A little English. 'Clean,' 'Press,' 'Take the pants in . . .' That's the extent of it. But they're good to me . . ."

"Then, Grossbart—" I reached out and stopped him. He turned towards me and when our eyes met his seemed to jump back, shiver in their sockets. He looked afraid. "Grossbart, then you were the one who wrote that letter, weren't you?"

It took only a second or two for his eyes to flash happy again. "Yes." He walked on, and I kept pace. "It's what my father *would* have written if he had known how. It was his name, though. *He* signed it. He even mailed it. I sent it home. For the New York postmark."

I was astonished, and he saw it. With complete seriousness, he thrust his right arm in front of me. "Blood is blood, Sergeant," he said, pinching the blue vein in his wrist.

"What the hell *are* you trying to do, Grossbart? I've seen you eat. Do you know that? I told the Captain I don't know what you eat, but I've seen you eat like a hound at chow."

"We work hard, Sergeant. We're in training. For a furnace to work, you've got to feed it coal."

"If you wrote the letter, Grossbart, then why did you say you threw up all the time?"

"I was really talking about Mickey there. But he would never write, Sergeant, though I pleaded with him. He'll waste away to nothing if I don't

3. Good housekeeper (Yiddish).

help. Sergeant, I used my name, my father's name, but it's Mickey and Fish-bein too I'm watching out for."

"You're a regular Messiah,⁴ aren't you?"

We were at the chow line now.

"That's a good one, Sergeant." He smiled. "But who knows? Who can tell? Maybe you're the Messiah . . . a little bit. What Mickey says is the Messiah is a collective idea. He went to Yeshivah,⁵ Mickey, for a while. He says *together* we're the Messiah. Me a little bit, you a little bit . . . You should hear that kid talk, Sergeant, when he gets going."

"Me a little bit, you a little bit. You'd like to believe that, wouldn't you, Grossbart? That makes everything so clean for you."

"It doesn't seem too bad a thing to believe, Sergeant. It only means we should all give a little, is all . . ."

I walked off to eat my rations with the other noncoms.⁶

Two days later a letter addressed to Captain Barrett passed over my desk. It had come through the chain of command—from the office of Congressman Franconi, where it had been received, to General Lyman, to Colonel Sousa, to Major Lamont, to Captain Barrett. I read it over twice while the Captain was at the officers' mess. It was dated May 14th, the day Barrett had spoken with Grossbart on the rifle range.

Dear Congressman:

First let me thank you for your interest in behalf of my son, Private Sheldon Grossbart. Fortunately, I was able to speak with Sheldon on the phone the other night, and I think I've been able to solve our problem. He is, as I mentioned in my last letter, a very religious boy, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could persuade him that the religious thing to do—what God Himself would want Sheldon to do—would be to suffer the pangs of religious remorse for the good of his country and all mankind. It took some doing, Congressman, but finally he saw the light. In fact, what he said (and I wrote down the words on a scratch pad so as never to forget), what he said was, "I guess you're right, Dad. So many millions of my fellow Jews gave up their lives to the enemy, the least I can do is live for a while minus a bit of my heritage so as to help end this struggle and regain for all the children of God dignity and humanity." That, Congressman, would make any father proud.

By the way, Sheldon wanted me to know—and to pass on to you—the name of a soldier who helped him reach this decision: SERGEANT NATHAN MARX. Sergeant Marx is a combat veteran who is Sheldon's First Sergeant. This man has helped Sheldon over some of the first hurdles he's had to face in the Army, and is in part responsible for Sheldon's changing his mind about the dietary laws. I know Sheldon would appreciate any recognition Marx could receive.

Thank you and good luck. I look forward to seeing your name on the next election ballot.

Respectfully,
Samuel E. Grossbart

4. The deliverer who will rule over the people of Israel at the end of time.

5. Jewish institution of learning.

6. Noncommissioned officers.

Attached to the Grossbart communiqué was a communiqué addressed to General Marshall Lyman, the post commander, and signed by Representative Charles E. Franconi of the House of Representatives. The communiqué informed General Lyman that Sergeant Nathan Marx was a credit to the U.S. Army and the Jewish people.

What was Grossbart's motive in recanting? Did he feel he'd gone too far? Was the letter a strategic retreat—a crafty attempt to strengthen what he considered our alliance? Or had he actually changed his mind, via an imaginary dialogue between Grossbart *père* and *fils*?⁷ I was puzzled, but only for a few days—that is, only until I realized that whatever his reasons, he had actually decided to disappear from my life: he was going to allow himself to become just another trainee. I saw him at inspection but he never winked; at chow formations but he never flashed me a sign; on Sundays, with the other trainees, he would sit around watching the noncoms' softball team, for whom I pitched, but not once did he speak an unnecessary or unusual word to me. Fishbein and Halpern retreated from sight too, at Grossbart's command I was sure. Apparently he'd seen that wisdom lay in turning back before he plunged us over into the ugliness of privilege undeserved. Our separation allowed me to forgive him our past encounters, and, finally, to admire him for his good sense.

Meanwhile, free of Grossbart, I grew used to my job and my administrative tasks. I stepped on a scale one day and discovered I had truly become a non-combatant: I had gained seven pounds. I found patience to get past the first three pages of a book. I thought about the future more and more, and wrote letters to girls I'd known before the war—I even got a few answers. I sent away to Columbia for a Law School catalogue. I continued to follow the war in the Pacific, but it was not my war and I read of bombings and battles like a civilian. I thought I could see the end in sight and sometimes at night I dreamed that I was walking on the streets of Manhattan—Broadway, Third Avenue, and 116th Street, where I had lived those three years I'd attended Columbia College. I curled myself around these dreams and I began to be happy.

And then one Saturday when everyone was away and I was alone in the orderly room reading a month-old copy of the *Sporting News*, Grossbart reappeared.

“You a baseball fan, Sergeant?”

I looked up. “How are you?”

“Fine,” Grossbart said. “They're making a soldier out of me.”

“How are Fishbein and Halpern?”

“Coming along,” he said. “We've got no training this afternoon. They're at the movies.”

“How come you're not with them?”

“I wanted to come over and say hello.”

He smiled—a shy, regular-guy smile, as though he and I well knew that our friendship drew its sustenance from unexpected visits, remembered birthdays, and borrowed lawnmowers. At first it offended me, and then the feeling was swallowed by the general uneasiness I felt at the thought that

7. Father and son (French).

everyone on the post was locked away in a dark movie theater and I was here alone with Grossbart. I folded my paper.

“Sergeant,” he said, “I’d like to ask a favor. It is a favor and I’m making no bones about it.”

He stopped, allowing me to refuse him a hearing—which, of course, forced me into a courtesy I did not intend. “Go ahead.”

“Well, actually it’s two favors.”

I said nothing.

“The first one’s about these rumors. Everybody says we’re going to the Pacific.”

“As I told your friend Fishbein, I don’t know. You’ll just have to wait to find out. Like everybody else.”

“You think there’s a chance of any of us going East?”

“Germany,” I said, “maybe.”

“I meant New York.”

“I don’t think so, Grossbart. Offhand.”

“Thanks for the information, Sergeant,” he said.

“It’s not information, Grossbart. Just what I surmise.”

“It certainly would be good to be near home. My parents . . . you know.” He took a step towards the door and then turned back. “Oh the other thing. May I ask the other?”

“What is it?”

“The other thing is—I’ve got relatives in St. Louis and they say they’ll give me a whole Passover dinner if I can get down there. God, Sergeant, that’d mean an awful lot to me.”

I stood up. “No passes during basic, Grossbart.”

“But we’re off from now till Monday morning, Sergeant. I could leave the post and no one would even know.”

“I’d know. You’d know.”

“But that’s all. Just the two of us. Last night I called my aunt and you should have heard her. ‘Come, come,’ she said. ‘I got gefilte fish, *chrain*,⁸ the works!’ Just a day, Sergeant, I’d take the blame if anything happened.”

“The captain isn’t here to sign a pass.”

“You could sign.”

“Look, Grossbart—”

“Sergeant, for two months practically I’ve been eating *trafe* till I want to die.”

“I thought you’d made up your mind to live with it. To be minus a little bit of heritage.”

He pointed a finger at me. “You!” he said. “That wasn’t for you to read!”

“I read it. So what.”

“That letter was addressed to a congressman.”

“Grossbart, don’t feed me any crap. You *wanted* me to read it.”

“Why are you persecuting me, Sergeant?”

“Are you kidding!”

“I’ve run into this before,” he said, “but never from my own!”

“Get out of here, Grossbart! Get the hell out of my sight!”

8. Horseradish, traditionally eaten as part of the Passover meal.

He did not move. "Ashamed, that's what you are. So you take it out on the rest of us. They say Hitler himself was half a Jew. Seeing this, I wouldn't doubt it!"

"What are you trying to do with me, Grossbart? What are you after? You want me to give you special privileges, to change the food, to find out about your orders, to give you weekend passes."

"You even talk like a goy!" Grossbart shook his fist. "Is this a weekend pass I'm asking for? Is a Seder⁹ sacred or not?"

Seder! It suddenly occurred to me that Passover had been celebrated weeks before. I confronted Grossbart with the fact.

"That's right," he said. "Who says no? A month ago, and I was in the field eating hash! And now all I ask is a simple favor—a Jewish boy I thought would understand. My aunt's willing to go out of her way—to make a Seder a month later—" He turned to go, mumbling.

"Come back here!" I called. He stopped and looked at me. "Grossbart, why can't you be like the rest? Why do you have to stick out like a sore thumb? Why do you beg for special treatment?"

"Because I'm a Jew, Sergeant. I *am* different. Better, maybe not. But different."

"This is a war, Grossbart. For the time being *be* the same."

"I refuse."

"What?"

"I refuse. I can't stop being me, that's all there is to it." Tears came to his eyes. "It's a hard thing to be a Jew. But now I see what Mickey says—it's a harder thing to stay one." He raised a hand sadly toward me. "Look at you."

"Stop crying!"

"Stop this, stop that, stop the other thing! You stop, Sergeant. Stop closing your heart to your own!" And wiping his face with his sleeve, he ran out the door. "The least we can do for one another . . . the least . . ."

An hour later I saw Grossbart headed across the field. He wore a pair of starched khakis and carried only a little leather ditty bag. I went to the door and from the outside felt the heat of the day. It was quiet—not a soul in sight except over by the mess hall four K.P.'s sitting round a pan, sloped forward from the waists, gabbing and peeling potatoes in the sun.

"Grossbart!" I called.

He looked toward me and continued walking.

"Grossbart, get over here!"

He turned and stepped into his long shadow. Finally he stood before me.

"Where are you going?" I said.

"St. Louis. I don't care."

"You'll get caught without a pass."

"So I'll get caught without a pass."

"You'll go to the stockade."

"I'm in the stockade." He made an about-face and headed off.

I let him go only a step: "Come back here," I said, and he followed me into the office, where I typed out a pass and signed the Captain's name and my own initials after it.

9. Ceremonial dinner on the first evening of Passover.

He took the pass from me and then, a moment later, he reached out and grabbed my hand. "Sergeant, you don't know how much this means to me."

"Okay. Don't get in any trouble."

"I wish I could show you how much this means to me."

"Don't do me any favors. Don't write any more congressmen for citations." Amazingly, he smiled. "You're right. I won't. But let me do something."

"Bring me a piece of that gefilte fish. Just get out of here."

"I will! With a slice of carrot and a little horseradish. I won't forget."

"All right. Just show your pass at the gate. And don't tell *anybody*."

"I won't. It's a month late, but a good Yom Tov¹ to you."

"Good Yom Tov, Grossbart," I said.

"You're a good Jew, Sergeant. You like to think you have a hard heart, but underneath you're a fine decent man. I mean that."

Those last three words touched me more than any words from Grossbart's mouth had the right to. "All right, Grossbart. Now call me 'sir' and get the hell out of here."

He ran out the door and was gone. I felt very pleased with myself—it was a great relief to stop fighting Grossbart. And it had cost me nothing. Barrett would never find out, and if he did, I could manage to invent some excuse. For a while I sat at my desk, comfortable in my decision. Then the screen door flew back and Grossbart burst in again. "Sergeant!" he said. Behind him I saw Fishbein and Halpern, both in starched khakis, both carrying ditty bags exactly like Grossbart's.

"Sergeant, I caught Mickey and Larry coming out of the movies. I almost missed them."

"Grossbart, did I say tell no one?"

"But my aunt said I could bring friends. That I should, in fact."

"I'm the Sergeant, Grossbart—not your aunt!"

Grossbart looked at me in disbelief; he pulled Halpern up by his sleeve. "Mickey, tell the Sergeant what this would mean to you."

"Grossbart, for God's sake, spare us—"

"Tell him what you told me, Mickey. How much it would mean."

Halpern looked at me and, shrugging his shoulders, made his admission. "A lot."

Fishbein stepped forward without prompting. "This would mean a great deal to me and my parents, Sergeant Marx."

"No!" I shouted.

Grossbart was shaking his head. "Sergeant, I could see you denying me, but how you can deny Mickey, a Yeshivah boy, that's beyond me."

"I'm not denying Mickey anything. You just pushed a little too hard, Grossbart. *You* denied him."

"I'll give him my pass, then," Grossbart said. "I'll give him my aunt's address and a little note. At least let him go."

In a second he had crammed the pass into Halpern's pants' pocket. Halpern looked at me, Fishbein too. Grossbart was at the door, pushing it open. "Mickey, bring me a piece of gefilte fish at least." And then he was outside again.

1. Holiday (Yiddish).

The three of us looked at one another and then I said, “Halpern, hand that pass over.”

He took it from his pocket and gave it to me. Fishbein had now moved to the doorway, where he lingered. He stood there with his mouth slightly open and then pointed to himself. “And me?” he asked.

His utter ridiculousness exhausted me. I slumped down in my seat and I felt pulses knocking at the back of my eyes. “Fishbein,” I said, “you understand I’m not trying to deny you anything, don’t you? If it was my Army I’d serve gefilte fish in the mess hall. I’d sell kugel² in the PX, honest to God.”

Halpern smiled.

“You understand, don’t you, Halpern?”

“Yes, Sergeant.”

“And you, Fishbein? I don’t want enemies. I’m just like you—I want to serve my time and go home. I miss the same things you miss.”

“Then, Sergeant,” Fishbein interrupted, “Why don’t you come too?”

“Where?”

“To St. Louis. To Shelley’s aunt. We’ll have a regular Seder. Play hide-the-matzah.” He gave a broad, black-toothed smile.

I saw Grossbart in the doorway again, on the other side of the screen.

“Pssst!” He waved a piece of paper. “Mickey, here’s the address. Tell her I couldn’t get away.”

Halpern did not move. He looked at me and I saw the shrug moving up his arms into his shoulders again. I took the cover off my typewriter and made out passes for him and Fishbein. “Go,” I said, “the three of you.”

I thought Halpern was going to kiss my hand.

That afternoon, in a bar in Joplin, I drank beer and listened with half an ear to the Cardinal game. I tried to look squarely at what I’d become involved in, and began to wonder if perhaps the struggle with Grossbart wasn’t as much my fault as his. What was I that I had to *muster* generous feelings? Who was I to have been feeling so grudging, so tight-hearted? After all, I wasn’t being asked to move the world. Had I a right, then, or a reason, to clamp down on Grossbart, when that meant clamping down on Halpern, too? And Fishbein, that ugly agreeable soul, wouldn’t he suffer in the bargain also? Out of the many recollections that had tumbled over me these past few days, I heard from some childhood moment my grandmother’s voice: “What are you making a *tsimas*?”³ It was what she would ask my mother when, say, I had cut myself with a knife and her daughter was busy bawling me out. I would need a hug and a kiss and my mother would moralize! But my grandmother knew—mercy overrides justice. I should have known it, too. Who was Nathan Marx to be such a pennypincher with kindness? Surely, I thought, the Messiah himself—if he should ever come—won’t niggle over nickels and dimes. God willing, he’ll hug and kiss.

The next day, while we were playing softball over on the Parade Grounds, I decided to ask Bob Wright, who was noncom in charge over at Classification and Assignment, where he thought our trainees would be sent when their cycle ended in two weeks. I asked casually, between innings, and he

2. Baked pudding of noodles or potatoes.

3. Fuss (Yiddish, literal trans.); here a side dish made of mixed cooked vegetables and fruit.

said, "They're pushing them all into the Pacific. Shulman cut the orders on your boys the other day."

The news shocked me, as though I were father to Halpern, Fishbein, and Grossbart.

That night I was just sliding into sleep when someone tapped on the door.

"What is it?"

"Sheldon."

He opened the door and came in. For a moment I felt his presence without being able to see him. "How was it?" I asked, as though to the darkness.

He popped into sight before me. "Great, Sergeant." I felt my springs sag; Grossbart was sitting on the edge of the bed. I sat up.

"How about you?" he asked. "Have a nice weekend?"

"Yes."

He took a deep paternal breath. "The others went to sleep . . ." We sat silently for a while, as a homey feeling invaded my ugly little cubicle: the door was locked, the cat out, the children safely in bed.

"Sergeant, can I tell you something? Personal?"

I did not answer and he seemed to know why. "Not about me. About Mickey. Sergeant, I never felt for anybody like I feel for him. Last night I heard Mickey in the bed next to me. He was crying so, it could have broken your heart. Real sobs."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"I had to talk to him to stop him. He held my hand, Sergeant—he wouldn't let it go. He was almost hysterical. He kept saying if he only knew where we were going. Even if he knew it *was* the Pacific, that would be better than nothing. Just to know."

Long ago, someone had taught Grossbart the sad law that only lies can get the truth. Not that I couldn't believe in Halpern's crying—his eyes *always* seemed red-rimmed. But, fact or not, it became a lie when Grossbart uttered it. He was entirely strategic. But then—it came with the force of indictment—so was I! There are strategies of aggression, but there are strategies of retreat, as well. And so, recognizing that I myself, had not been without craft and guile, I told him what I knew. "It is the Pacific."

He let out a small gasp, which was not a lie. "I'll tell him. I wish it was otherwise."

"So do I."

He jumped on my words. "You mean you think you could do something? A change maybe?"

"No, I couldn't do a thing."

"Don't you know anybody over at C & A?"

"Grossbart, there's nothing I can do. If your orders are for the Pacific then it's the Pacific."

"But Mickey."

"Mickey, you, me—everybody, Grossbart. There's nothing to be done. Maybe the war'll end before you go. Pray for a miracle."

"But—"

"Good night, Grossbart." I settled back, and was relieved to feel the springs upbend again as Grossbart rose to leave. I could see him clearly

now; his jaw had dropped and he looked like a dazed prizefighter. I noticed for the first time a little paper bag in his hand.

"Grossbart"—I smiled—"my gift?"

"Oh, yes, Sergeant. Here, from all of us." He handed me the bag. "It's egg roll."

"Egg roll?" I accepted the bag and felt a damp grease spot on the bottom. I opened it, sure that Grossbart was joking.

"We thought you'd probably like it. You know, Chinese egg roll. We thought you'd probably have a taste for—"

"Your aunt served egg roll?"

"She wasn't home."

"Grossbart, she invited you. You told me she invited you and your friends."

"I know. I just reread the letter. *Next week.*"

I got out of bed and walked to the window. It was black as far off as I could see. "Grossbart," I said. But I was not calling him.

"What?"

"What are you, Grossbart? Honest to God, what are you?"

I think it was the first time I'd asked him a question for which he didn't have an immediate answer.

"How can you do this to people?" I asked.

"Sergeant, the day away did us all a world of good. Fishbein, you should see him, he *loves* Chinese food."

"But the Seder," I said.

"We took second best, Sergeant."

Rage came charging at me. I didn't sidestep—I grabbed it, pulled it in, hugged it to my chest.

"Grossbart, you're a liar! You're a schemer and a crook! You've got no respect for anything! Nothing at all! Not for me, for the truth, not even for poor Halpern! You use us all—"

"Sergeant, Sergeant, I feel for Mickey, honest to God, I do. I *love* Mickey. I try—"

"You try! You feel!" I lurched towards him and grabbed his shirt front. I shook him furiously. "Grossbart, get out. Get out and stay the hell away from me! Because if I see you, I'll make your life miserable. *You understand that?*"

"Yes."

I let him free, and when he walked from the room I wanted to spit on the floor where he had stood. I couldn't stop the fury from rising in my heart. It engulfed me, owned me, till it seemed I could only rid myself of it with tears or an act of violence. I snatched from the bed the bag Grossbart had given me and with all my strength threw it out the window. And the next morning, as the men policed the area around the barracks, I heard a great cry go up from one of the trainees who'd been anticipating only his morning handful of cigarette butts and candy wrappers. "Egg roll!" he shouted. "Holy Christ, Chinese goddam egg roll!"

A week later, when I read the orders that had come down from C & A, I couldn't believe my eyes. Every single trainee was to be shipped to Camp Stoneham, California, and from there to the Pacific. Every trainee but one: Private Sheldon Grossbart was to be sent to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. I

read the mimeographed sheet several times. Dee, Farrell, Fishbein, Fuselli, Fylypowycz, Glinicki, Gromke, Gucwa, Halpern, Hardy, Helebrandt . . . right down to Anton Zygadlo, all were to be headed West before the month was out. All except Grossbart. He had pulled a string and I wasn't it.

I lifted the phone and called C & A.

The voice on the other end said smartly, "Corporal Shulman, sir."

"Let me speak to Sergeant Wright."

"Who is this calling, sir?"

"Sergeant Marx."

And to my surprise, the voice said, "*Oh.*" Then: "Just a minute, Sergeant."

Shulman's *oh* stayed with me while I waited for Wright to come to the phone. Why *oh*? Who was Shulman? And then, so simply, I knew I'd discovered the string Grossbart had pulled. In fact, I could hear Grossbart the day he'd discovered Shulman, in the PX, or the bowling alley, or maybe even at services. "Glad to meet you. Where you from? Bronx? Me too. Do you know so-and-so? And so-and-so? Me too! You work at C & A? Really? Hey, how's chances of getting East? Could you do something? Change something? Swindle, cheat, lie? We gotta help each other, you know . . . if the Jews in Germany . . ."

At the other end Bob Wright answered. "How are you, Nate? How's the pitching arm?"

"Good. Bob, I wonder if you could do me a favor." I heard clearly my own words and they so reminded me of Grossbart that I dropped more easily than I could have imagined into what I had planned. "This may sound crazy, Bob, but I got a kid here on orders to Monmouth who wants them changed. He had a brother killed in Europe and he's hot to go to the Pacific. Says he'd feel like a coward if he wound up stateside. I don't know, Bob, can anything be done? Put somebody else in the Monmouth slot?"

"Who?" he asked cagily.

"Anybody. First guy on the alphabet. I don't care. The kid just asked if something could be done."

"What's his name?"

"Grossbart, Sheldon."

Wright didn't answer.

"Yeah," I said, "he's a Jewish kid, so he thought I could help him out. You know."

"I guess I can do something," he finally said. "The Major hasn't been around here for weeks—TDY⁴ to the golf course. I'll try, Nate that's all I can say."

"I'd appreciate it, Bob. See you Sunday," and I hung up, perspiring.

And the following day the corrected orders appeared: Fishbein, Fuselli, Fylypowycz, Glinicki, Grossbart, Gucwa, Halpern, Hardy . . . Lucky Private Harley Alton was to go to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, where for some reason or other, they wanted an enlisted man with infantry training.

After chow that night I stopped back at the orderly room to straighten out the guard duty roster. Grossbart was waiting for me. He spoke first.

"You son of a bitch!"

4. Temporary Duty, an army orders term used ironically here.

I sat down at my desk and while he glared down at me I began to make the necessary alterations in the duty roster.

"What do you have against me?" he cried. "Against my family? Would it kill you for me to be near my father, God knows how many months he has left to him."

"Why?"

"His heart," Grossbart said. "He hasn't had enough troubles in a lifetime, you've got to add to them. I curse the day I ever met you, Marx! Shulman told me what happened over there. There's no limit to your anti-Semitism, is there! The damage you've done here isn't enough. You have to make a special phone call! You really want me dead!"

I made the last few notations in the duty roster and got up to leave. "Good night, Grossbart."

"You owe me an explanation!" He stood in my path.

"Sheldon, you're the one who owes explanations."

He scowled. "To *you*?"

"To me, I think so, yes. Mostly to Fishbein and Halpern."

"That's right, twist things around. I owe nobody nothing, I've done all I could do for them. Now I think I've got the right to watch out for myself."

"For each other we have to learn to watch out, Sheldon. You told me yourself."

"You call this watching out for me, what you did?"

"No. For all of us."

I pushed him aside and started for the door. I heard his furious breathing behind me, and it sounded like steam rushing from the engine of his terrible strength.

"You'll be all right," I said from the door. And, I thought, so would Fishbein and Halpern be all right, even in the Pacific, if only Grossbart could continue to see in the obsequiousness of the one, the soft spirituality of the other, some profit for himself.

I stood outside the orderly room, and I heard Grossbart weeping behind me. Over in the barracks, in the lighted windows, I could see the boys in their T-shirts sitting on their bunks talking about their orders, as they'd been doing for the past two days. With a kind of quiet nervousness, they polished shoes, shined belt buckles, squared away underwear, trying as best they could to accept their fate. Behind me, Grossbart swallowed hard, accepting his. And then, resisting with all my will an impulse to turn and seek pardon for my vindictiveness, I accepted my own.

AMIRI BARAKA (LEROI JONES)

1934–2014

When in 1967 LeRoi Jones assumed the Bantuized Muslim name Amiri Baraka (meaning Prince, a Blessed One), he was undergoing one of several changes in his progression as a maker of literature. Born Everett Leroy Jones, he was the child of middle-class African American parents in Newark, New Jersey, where his scholastic abilities took him to the best schools available; as Baraka recalls in his autobiography, his classmates were more often white suburbanites than inner-city children of his own race. He restyled his name as “LeRoi” during his undergraduate years at Howard University (a traditionally African American institution), to which he had transferred from the mostly white campus of Rutgers University (where he had won a scholarship). After leaving Howard in 1954 and serving in the U.S. Air Force, from which he was discharged for unapproved political activities, Jones moved to New York City’s Greenwich Village and became prominent on the avant-garde poetry scene. His friends were white innovators—Gilbert Sorrentino, Diane DiPrima, and Frank O’Hara among them—with whom he worked on the magazine *Kulchur* in addition to editing and publishing his own journal, *Yugen*. Married to Hettie Cohen, he began an interracial family and wrote record reviews for mainstream jazz magazines.

Jones was well established in the more intellectually elite quarters of New York’s world of poetry, art, and music. Yet as racial tensions mounted, with the assassination of Medgar Evers, fatal church bombings in Alabama, and the murder of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi, Jones’s life underwent major changes as well. In 1965, following the assassination of Malcolm X, he left his wife and children and moved to Harlem, where as a newly declared black cultural nationalist he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater, dedicated to taking socially militant drama directly to the people it represented.

Poetry as a vehicle of popular encouragement remained central to Baraka’s belief. He may well have agreed with the judge who once convicted him of incitement to riot that his poems could motivate people to act (whether such influence or intent had been proven in legal form is another matter, and his incitement conviction was later overturned on appeal). As opposed to his very first work, which conveyed a personal anguish for which the poet projected no political solution (“I am inside someone / who hates me, I look / out from his eyes”) and whose collective title conveys little hope other than in the act of expression (*Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*, 1961), his later work is replete with exhortations, capitalized imperatives for action, and chantlike repetitions designed to arouse a fury for action and then direct it toward the achievement of specific social goals. Much like his drama, this poetry is overtly presentational, declaring what the reader needs to think about and then providing the stimulus to act. Yet all the while the personal nature of Baraka stands behind it, making clear that a deep and complex imagination has been brought to bear on the issues. The range and intensity of Baraka’s poetry is evident in his 1995 collection, *Transbluency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961–1995)*. His 2004 collection, *Somebody Blew Up America & Other Poems*, contains Baraka’s controversial poem of the same name, written after 9/11, during a period in which he was New Jersey’s poet laureate. After the poem’s publication, public outcry became so great that the governor of New Jersey took action to abolish the position.

Although Baraka sued, the United States Court of Appeals eventually ruled that state officials were immune from such lawsuits. Baraka never feared controversy; he remained an influence for many younger writers both as a major poet and as a cultural and political leader.

Beginning in the 1980s Baraka taught in the African Studies Department at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. In addition to poetry and drama, he continued to write essays on social subjects and on jazz.

An Agony. As Now.

I am inside someone
 who hates me. I look
 out from his eyes. Smell
 what fouled tunes come in
 to his breath. Love his
 wretched women. 5

Slits in the metal, for sun. Where
 my eyes sit turning, at the cool air
 the glance of light, or hard flesh
 rubbed against me, a woman, a man,
 without shadow, or voice, or meaning. 10

This is the enclosure (flesh,
 where innocence is a weapon. An
 abstraction. Touch. (Not mine,
 Or yours, if you are the soul I had
 and abandoned when I was blind and had
 my enemies carry me as a dead man
 (if he is beautiful, or pitied). 15

It can be pain. (As now, as all his
 flesh hurts me.) It can be that. Or
 pain. As when she ran from me into
 that forest. 20

Or pain, the mind
 silver spiraled whirled against the
 sun, higher than even old men thought
 God would be. Or pain. And the other. The
 yes. (Inside his books, his fingers. They
 are withered yellow flowers and were never
 beautiful.) The yes. You will, lost soul, say
 'beauty.' Beauty, practiced, as the tree. The
 slow river. A white sun in its wet sentences. 30

Or, the cold men in their gale. Ecstasy. Flesh
 or soul. The yes. (Their robes blown. Their bowls
 empty. They chant at my heels, not at yours.) Flesh
 or soul, as corrupt. Where the answer moves too quickly.
 Where the God is a self, after all.) 35

Cold air blown through narrow blind eyes. Flesh,
white hot metal. Glows as the day with its sun.
It is a human love, I live inside. A bony skeleton
you recognize as words or simple feeling. 40

But it has no feeling. As the metal, is hot, it is not,
given to love.

It burns the thing
inside it. And that thing
screams. 45

1964

A Poem for Willie Best¹

I

The face sings, alone
at the top
 of the body. All
flesh, all song, aligned. For hell
is silent, at those cracked lips 5
flakes of skin and mind
twist and whistle softly
as they fall.

 It was your own death
you saw. Your own face, stiff 10
and raw. This
without sound, or
movement. Sweet afton,² the
dead beggar bleeds
yet. His blood, for a time 15
alive, and huddled in a door
way, struggling to sing. Rain
washes it into cracks. Pits
whose bottoms are famous. Whose sides
are innocent broadcasts 20
of another life.

II

At this point, neither
front nor back. A point, the
dimensionless line. The top
of a head, seen from Christ's 25
heaven, stripped of history
or desire.

1. Willie Best was a negro character actor whose Hollywood name was Sleep'n'eat [Baraka's note].

2. "Flow Gently Sweet Afton," a poem by the

Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759–1796), refers to the river Afton in Ayrshire, Scotland.

Fixed, perpendicular
 to shadow. (Even speech, vertical,
 leaves no trace. Born in to death 30
 held fast to it, where
 the lover spreads his arms, the line
 he makes to threaten Gods with history.
 The fingers stretch to emptiness. At
 each point, after flesh, even light 35
 is speculation. But an end, his end,
 failing a beginning.

2

A cross. The gesture, symbol, line
 arms held stiff, nailed stiff, with
 no sign, of what gave them strength. 40
 The point, become a line, a cross, or
 the man, and his material, driven in
 the ground. If the head rolls back
 and the mouth opens, screamed into
 existence, there will be perhaps 45
 only the slightest hint of movement
 a smear; no help will come. No one
 will turn to that station again.

III

At a cross roads, sits the
 player. No drum, no umbrella, even 50
 though it's raining. Again, and we
 are somehow less miserable because
 here is a hero, used to being wet.
 One road is where you are standing now
 (reading this, the other, crosses then 55
 rushes into a wood.

5 lbs neckbones.
 5 lbs hog innards.
 10 bottles cheap wine.

(the contents 60

of a paper bag, also shoes, with holes
 for the big toe, and several rusted
 knives. This is a literature, of
 symbols. And it is his gift, as the
 bag is. 65

(The contents
 again, holy saviours,

300 men on horseback
 75 bibles
 the quietness 70

of a field. A rich
 man, though wet through
 by the rain.

I said,
 47 howitzers³ 75
 7 polished horse jaws
 a few trees being waved
 softly back under
 the black night
 All this should be 80
 invested.

IV

Where
 ever,
 he has gone. Who ever
 mourns 85
 or sits silent
 to remember

There is nothing of pity
 here. Nothing
 of sympathy. 90

V

This is the dance of the raised
 leg. Of the hand on the knee
 quickly.
 As a dance it punishes
 speech. 'The house burned. The
 old man killed.' 95
 As a dance it
 is obscure.

VI

This is the song
 of the highest C. 100
 The falsetto. An elegance
 that punishes silence. This is the song
 of the toes pointed inward, the arms swung, the
 hips, moved, for fucking, slow, from side
 to side. He is quoted 105
 saying, "My father was
 never a jockey,
 but
 he did teach me
 how to ride." 110

3. Short, relatively light cannons for the high-angle firing of shells at a low velocity.

VII

The balance.

(Rushed in, swarmed of dark, cloaks,
and only red lights pushed a message
to the street. Rub.

This is the lady,

115

I saw you with.

This is your mother.

This is the lady I wanted
some how to sleep with.

As a dance, or
our elegant song. Sun red and grown
from trees, fences, mud roads in dried out
river beds. This is for me, with no God
but what is given. Give me

120

Something more

125

than what is here. I must tell you
my body hurts.

The balance.

Can you hear? Here
I am again. Your boy, dynamite. Can
you hear? My soul is moved. The soul
you gave me. I say, my soul, and it
is moved. That soul
you gave me.

130

Yes, I'm sure
this is the lady. You
slept with her. Witness, your boy,
here, dynamite. Hear?

135

I mean

can you?

140

The balance.

He was tired of losing. (And
his walking buddies tired
of walking.

Bent slightly,
at the waist. Left hand low, to flick
quick showy jabs ala Sugar.⁴ The right
cocked, to complete,

145

any combination.

He was
tired of losing, but he was fighting
a big dumb "farmer."

150

Such a blue bright
afternoon, and only a few hundred yards
from the beach. He said, I'm tired
of losing.

155

"I got ta cut'cha."

4. Sugar Ray Robinson (1921–1989), American boxer.

VIII

A renegade
 behind the mask. And even
 the mask, a renegade
 disguise. Black skin
 and hanging lip. 160

Lazy
 Frightened
 Thieving
 Very potent sexually
 Scars
 Generally inferior

(but natural

rhythms. 170

His head is
 at the window. The only
 part
 that sings.
 (The word he used 175

(we are passing St. Mark's place⁵
 and those crazy jews who fuck)

to provoke

in neon, still usefull
 in the rain, 180

to provoke

some meaning, where before
 there was only hell. I said
 silence, at his huddled blood.

It is an obscene invention. 185

A white sticky discharge.

"Jism," in white chalk

on the back of Angel's garage.

Red jackets with the head of
 Hobbes⁶ staring into space. "Jasm" 190

the name the leader took, had it

stenciled on his chest.

And he sits

wet at the crossroads, remembering distinctly
 each weightless face that eases by. (Sun at
 the back door, and that hideous mindless grin. 195

(Hear?

1964

5. Street in New York City's East Village.

6. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), English philosopher who believed a "social contract" was nec-

essary between rulers and the ruled. Here he represents the Western, white, materialist tradition.

Will They Cry When You're Gone, You Bet

You leave dead friends in
 a desert. But they've deserted
 you, and them-
 selves, and are leaving
 themselves, 5
 in the foot paths
 of madmen and saints
 enough sense to get away
 from the dryness and uselessness
 of such relaxation, dying in the dry 10
 light, sand packed in their mouths
 eyes burning, white women serenade them
 in mystic deviousness, which is another
 way of saying they're seeing things, which
 are not really there, except for them, 15
 never to find an oasis, even bitter water
 which we get used to, is better than
 white drifting fairies, muses, singing
 to us, in calm tones, about how it is better to die
 etcetera, than go off from them, how it is better to 20
 lie in the cruel sun with your eyes turning to dunes
 than leave them alone in that white heat.

1969

N. SCOTT MOMADAY

b. 1934

“In a certain sense,” writes N. Scott Momaday in the nonfiction collection *The Man Made of Words* (1997), “we are all made of words; . . . our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives.” Since the publication of his Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Momaday’s writing has crossed boundaries of language, form, and genre, thereby creating for Momaday, through will and imagination, an American Indian identity in words.

Navarre Scott Momaday was born at the Kiowa and Comanche Indian Hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma, the only child of Al Momaday, a Kiowa, and Natachee Scott, who was part Cherokee. He spent most of his early years in New Mexico and Arizona, moving in 1946 to Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico’s Rio Grande Valley. There his parents, both artists and teachers, took jobs at a small day school. Growing up on reservations, including those of the Navajo and the Apache, Momaday experienced the rhythms of traditional tribal life, but saw, too, the changes wrought by

postwar material culture, and their human costs—the alcoholism, unemployment, and personal disintegration that mark the life of Abel, the returning veteran in *House Made of Dawn*. Early on, Momaday's mother instilled in him the value of a bicultural education that would open the future without closing off his native heritage. Momaday attended reservation, public, and mission schools, then graduated from military high school in Virginia and the University of New Mexico. He received his Ph.D. in 1963 from Stanford University, where his mentor in American and English literature was the poet and critic Yvor Winters. Since then his teaching career has taken him to Santa Barbara, Berkeley, the University of Moscow, Stanford, and the University of Arizona.

What some scholars call the “Native American Renaissance” is usually said to have begun with the publication of *House Made of Dawn* in 1968 and its being awarded the Pulitzer Prize the following year. And, indeed, from 1968 to the present Native American writers have published a substantial body of fine poetry, fiction, and autobiography, gaining considerable notice in the United States and abroad. Over the decades since the publication of *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday himself has published a second novel, *The Ancient Child* (1989), as well as several volumes of poems, short stories, memoirs, and critical works. His deliberate engagement with a variety of forms—oral and written poetry, prose fiction and nonfiction, autobiography, legend, history, photography, painting (all “forms of discovery,” in Winters's words)—has helped him lay claim to his Kiowa past.

Momaday's idea of the past as a journey is consciously expressed in *The Journey of Tai-me*, which offers his translations of the Kiowa myths he learned as a child from his grandmother, Aho. This work relates the story of the Sun Dance—a ceremony for spiritual guidance and power performed by many Plains Indian groups—to his revelatory memory of journeying to Oklahoma to see the sacred Tai-me bundle: “I became more keenly aware of myself as someone who had walked through time and in whose blood there is something inestimably old and undying. It was as if I had remembered something that happened two hundred years ago. I meant then to seek after the source of my memory and myself.” In *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) Momaday undertakes this search, collecting, with his father as translator, Kiowa tales and myths and clustering them with brief, loose historical commentaries and personal family stories. What seem to be fragments come together in a complex structure—twenty-four “quintessential novels,” divided into three sections, framed by poems and prose pieces—that follow the Kiowa from emergence through maturity to decline as a Plains Indian culture. Central to *Rainy Mountain* and to all of Momaday's writing is the land—the focal point of memory, the defining place for Kiowa culture. The same rootedness that defines Momaday's ancestors gives his work its conjuring power, a power that comes from distilling in words and pictures, as Momaday writes, “the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.”

From The Way to Rainy Mountain

Headwaters

Noon in the intermountain plain:
 There is scant telling of the marsh—
 A log, hollow and weather-stained,
 An insect at the mouth, and moss—
 Yet waters rise against the roots,
 Stand brimming to the stalks. What moves?

What moves on this archaic force
Was wild and welling at the source.

Introduction

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas,¹ it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil's edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but *one* hill or *one* tree or *one* man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

I returned to Rainy Mountain in July. My grandmother had died in the spring, and I wanted to be at her grave. She had lived to be very old and at last infirm. Her only living daughter was with her when she died, and I was told that in death her face was that of a child.

I like to think of her as a child. When she was born, the Kiowas were living the last great moment of their history. For more than a hundred years they had controlled the open range from the Smoky Hill River to the Red, from the headwaters of the Canadian to the fork of the Arkansas and Cimarron. In alliance with the Comanches, they had ruled the whole of the southern Plains. War was their sacred business, and they were among the finest horsemen the world has ever known. But warfare for the Kiowas was preeminently a matter of disposition rather than of survival, and they never understood the grim, unrelenting advance of the U.S. Cavalry. When at last, divided and ill-provisioned, they were driven onto the Staked Plains in the cold rains of autumn, they fell into panic. In Palo Duro Canyon² they abandoned their crucial stores to pillage and had nothing then but their lives. In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill³ and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum. My grandmother was spared the humiliation of those high gray walls by eight or ten years, but she must have known from birth the affliction of defeat, the dark brooding of old warriors.

Her name was Aho, and she belonged to the last culture to evolve in North America. Her forebears came down from the high country in western Montana nearly three centuries ago. They were a mountain people, a mysterious tribe of hunters whose language has never been positively classified

1. The Kiowa were a nomadic hunting and gathering people of the Southern Plains.

2. On the Staked Plains, or the Texas Panhandle, that part of the state jutting north between

New Mexico and Oklahoma.

3. U.S. Cavalry fort in Oklahoma and site of the Kiowa-Comanche Agency.

in any major group. In the late seventeenth century they began a long migration to the south and east. It was a journey toward the dawn, and it led to a golden age. Along the way the Kiowas were befriended by the Crows, who gave them the culture and religion of the Plains. They acquired horses, and their ancient nomadic spirit was suddenly free of the ground. They acquired Tai-me,⁴ the sacred Sun Dance doll, from that moment the object and symbol of their worship, and so shared in the divinity of the sun. Not least, they acquired the sense of destiny, therefore courage and pride. When they entered upon the southern Plains they had been transformed. No longer were they slaves to the simple necessity of survival; they were a lordly and dangerous society of fighters and thieves, hunters and priests of the sun. According to their origin myth, they entered the world through a hollow log. From one point of view, their migration was the fruit of an old prophecy, for indeed they emerged from a sunless world.

Although my grandmother lived out her long life in the shadow of Rainy Mountain, the immense landscape of the continental interior lay like memory in her blood. She could tell of the Crows, whom she had never seen, and of the Black Hills, where she had never been. I wanted to see in reality what she had seen more perfectly in the mind's eye, and traveled fifteen hundred miles to begin my pilgrimage.

Yellowstone, it seemed to me, was the top of the world, a region of deep lakes and dark timber, canyons and waterfalls. But, beautiful as it is, one might have the sense of confinement there. The skyline in all directions is close at hand, the high wall of the woods and deep cleavages of shade. There is a perfect freedom in the mountains, but it belongs to the eagle and the elk, the badger and the bear. The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind in the wilderness.

Descending eastward, the highland meadows are a stairway to the plain. In July the inland slope of the Rockies is luxuriant with flax and buckwheat, stonecrop and larkspur. The earth unfolds and the limit of the land recedes. Clusters of trees, and animals grazing far in the distance, cause the vision to reach away and wonder to build upon the mind. The sun follows a longer course in the day, and the sky is immense beyond all comparison. The great billowing clouds that sail upon it are shadows that move upon the grain like water, dividing light. Farther down, in the land of the Crows and Blackfeet, the plain is yellow. Sweet clover takes hold of the hills and bends upon itself to cover and seal the soil. There the Kiowas paused on their way; they had come to the place where they must change their lives. The sun is at home on the plains. Precisely there does it have the certain character of a god. When the Kiowas came to the land of the Crows, they could see the dark lees of the hills at dawn across the Bighorn River, the profusion of light on the grain shelves, the oldest deity ranging after the solstices. Not yet would they veer southward to the caldron of the land that lay below; they must wean their blood from the northern winter and hold the mountains a while longer in their view. They bore Tai-me in procession to the east.

A dark mist lay over the Black Hills, and the land was like iron. At the top of a ridge I caught sight of Devil's Tower upthrust against the gray sky as if

4. The sacred being who aids the Kiowa in times of trouble; this being is embodied in the holy doll central to Kiowa ritual.

in the birth of time the core of the earth had broken through its crust and the motion of the world was begun. There are things in nature that engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil's Tower is one of them. Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock. My grandmother said:

Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws, and his body was covered with fur. Directly there was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified; they ran, and the bear after them. They came to the stump of a great tree, and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were just beyond its reach. It reared against the tree and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper.

From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky. Whatever they were in the mountains, they could be no more. However tenuous their well-being, however much they had suffered and would suffer again, they had found a way out of the wilderness.

My grandmother had a reverence for the sun, a holy regard that now is all but gone out of mankind. There was a wariness in her, and an ancient awe. She was a Christian in her later years, but she had come a long way about, and she never forgot her birthright. As a child she had been to the Sun Dances; she had taken part in those annual rites, and by them she had learned the restoration of her people in the presence of Tai-me. She was about seven when the last Kiowa Sun Dance was held in 1887 on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek. The buffalo were gone. In order to consummate the ancient sacrifice—to impale the head of a buffalo bull upon the medicine tree—a delegation of old men journeyed into Texas, there to beg and barter for an animal from the Goodnight herd. She was ten when the Kiowas came together for the last time as a living Sun Dance culture. They could find no buffalo; they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree. Before the dance could begin, a company of soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe. Forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith,⁵ having seen the wild herds slaughtered and left to rot upon the ground, the Kiowas backed away forever from the medicine tree. That was July 20, 1890, at the great bend of the Washita. My grandmother was there. Without bitterness, and for as long as she lived, she bore a vision of deicide.

Now that I can have her only in memory, I see my grandmother in the several postures that were peculiar to her: standing at the wood stove on a winter morning and turning meat in a great iron skillet; sitting at the south window, bent above her beadwork, and afterwards, when her vision failed, looking down for a long time into the fold of her hands; going out upon a cane, very slowly as she did when the weight of age came upon her; praying. I remember her most often at prayer. She made long, rambling prayers out of suffering and hope, having seen many things. I was never sure that I had the right to hear, so exclusive were they of all mere custom and company.

5. From the 1880s on, the U.S. government sought to ban all "heathenish" practices among Native American peoples in a continuing effort to Christianize and "civilize" them.

The last time I saw her she prayed standing by the side of her bed at night, naked to the waist, the light of a kerosene lamp moving upon her dark skin. Her long, black hair, always drawn and braided in the day, lay upon her shoulders and against her breasts like a shawl. I do not speak Kiowa, and I never understood her prayers, but there was something inherently sad in the sound, some merest hesitation upon the syllables of sorrow. She began in a high and descending pitch, exhausting her breath to silence; then again and again—and always the same intensity of effort, of something that is, and is not, like urgency in the human voice. Transported so in the dancing light among the shadows of her room, she seemed beyond the reach of time. But that was illusion; I think I knew then that I should not see her again.

Houses are like sentinels in the plain, old keepers of the weather watch. There, in a very little while, wood takes on the appearance of great age. All colors wear soon away in the wind and rain, and then the wood is burned gray and the grain appears and the nails turn red with rust. The windowpanes are black and opaque; you imagine there is nothing within, and indeed there are many ghosts, bones given up to the land. They stand here and there against the sky, and you approach them for a longer time than you expect. They belong in the distance; it is their domain.

Once there was a lot of sound in my grandmother's house, a lot of coming and going, feasting and talk. The summers there were full of excitement and reunion. The Kiowas are a summer people; they abide the cold and keep to themselves, but when the season turns and the land becomes warm and vital they cannot hold still; an old love of going returns upon them. The aged visitors who came to my grandmother's house when I was a child were made of lean and leather, and they bore themselves upright. They wore great black hats and bright ample shirts that shook in the wind. They rubbed fat upon their hair and wound their braids with strips of colored cloth. Some of them painted their faces and carried the scars of old and cherished enmities. They were an old council of warlords, come to remind and be reminded of who they were. Their wives and daughters served them well. The women might indulge themselves; gossip was at once the mark and compensation of their servitude. They made loud and elaborate talk among themselves, full of jest and gesture, fright and false alarm. They went abroad in fringed and flowered shawls, bright beadwork and German silver. They were at home in the kitchen, and they prepared meals that were banquets.

There were frequent prayer meetings, and great nocturnal feasts. When I was a child I played with my cousins outside, where the lamplight fell upon the ground and the singing of the old people rose up around us and carried away into the darkness. There were a lot of good things to eat, a lot of laughter and surprise. And afterwards, when the quiet returned, I lay down with my grandmother and could hear the frogs away by the river and feel the motion of the air.

Now there is a funeral silence in the rooms, the endless wake of some final word. The walls have closed in upon my grandmother's house. When I returned to it in mourning, I saw for the first time in my life how small it was. It was late at night, and there was a white moon, nearly full. I sat for a long time on the stone steps by the kitchen door. From there I could see out across the land; I could see the long row of trees by the creek, the low light upon the rolling plains, and the stars of the Big Dipper. Once I looked at

the moon and caught sight of a strange thing. A cricket had perched upon the handrail, only a few inches away from me. My line of vision was such that the creature filled the moon like a fossil. It had gone there, I thought, to live and die, for there, of all places, was its small definition made whole and eternal. A warm wind rose up and purled like the longing within me.

The next morning I awoke at dawn and went out on the dirt road to Rainy Mountain. It was already hot, and the grasshoppers began to fill the air. Still, it was early in the morning, and the birds sang out of the shadows. The long yellow grass on the mountain shone in the bright light, and a scissortail hied above the land. There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother's grave. Here and there on the dark stones were ancestral names. Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away.

IV

They lived at first in the mountains. They did not yet know of Tai-me, but this is what they knew: There was a man and his wife. They had a beautiful child, a little girl whom they would not allow to go out of their sight. But one day a friend of the family came and asked if she might take the child outside to play. The mother guessed that would be all right, but she told the friend to leave the child in its cradle and to place the cradle in a tree. While the child was in the tree, a redbird came among the branches. It was not like any bird that you have seen; it was very beautiful, and it did not fly away. It kept still upon a limb, close to the child. After a while the child got out of its cradle and began to climb after the redbird. And at the same time the tree began to grow taller, and the child was borne up into the sky. She was then a woman, and she found herself in a strange place. Instead of a redbird, there was a young man standing before her. The man spoke to her and said: "I have been watching you for a long time, and I knew that I would find a way to bring you here. I have brought you here to be my wife." The woman looked all around; she saw that he was the only living man there. She saw that he was the sun.

There the land itself ascends into the sky. These mountains lie at the top of the continent, and they cast a long rain shadow on the sea of grasses to the east. They arise out of the last North American wilderness, and they have wilderness names: Wasatch, Bitterroot, Bighorn, Wind River.

I have walked in a mountain meadow bright with Indian paintbrush, lupine, and wild buckwheat, and I have seen high in the branches of a lodgepole pine the male pine grosbeak, round and rose-colored, its dark, striped wings nearly invisible in the soft, mottled light. And the uppermost branches of the tree seemed very slowly to ride across the blue sky.

XIII

If an arrow is well made, it will have tooth marks upon it. That is how you know. The Kiowas made fine arrows and straightened them in their teeth. Then they drew them to the bow to see if they were straight. Once there was a man and his wife. They were alone at night in their tipi. By the light of the fire the man was making arrows. After a while he caught sight of something. There was a small opening in the tipi where two hides were sewn together. Someone was there on the outside, looking in. The man went on with his work, but he said to his wife: "Someone is standing outside. Do not be afraid. Let us talk easily, as of ordinary things." He took up an arrow and straightened it in his teeth; then, as it was right for him to do, he drew it to the bow and took aim, first in this direction and then in that. And all the while he was talking, as if to his wife. But this is how he spoke: "I know that you are there on the outside, for I can feel your eyes upon me. If you are a Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak your name." But there was no answer, and the man went on in the same way, pointing the arrow all around. At last his aim fell upon the place where his enemy stood, and he let go of the string. The arrow went straight to the enemy's heart.

XVII

Bad women are thrown away. Once there was a handsome young man. He was wild and reckless, and the chief talked to the wind about him. After that, the man went hunting. A great whirlwind passed by, and he was blind. The Kiowas have no need

The old men were the best arrow-makers, for they could bring time and patience to their craft. The young men—the fighters and hunters—were willing to pay a high price for arrows that were well made.

When my father was a boy, an old man used to come to Mammedaty's⁶ house and pay his respects. He was a lean old man in braids and was impressive in his age and bearing. His name was Cheney, and he was an arrowmaker. Every morning, my father tells me, Cheney would paint his wrinkled face, go out, and pray aloud to the rising sun. In my mind I can see that man as if he were there now. I like to watch him as he makes his prayer. I know where he stands and where his voice goes on the rolling grasses and where the sun comes up on the land. There, at dawn, you can feel the silence. It is cold and clear and deep like water. It takes hold of you and will not let you go.

In the Kiowa calendars⁷ there is graphic proof that the lives of women were hard, whether they were "bad women" or not. Only the captives, who were slaves, held lower status. During the Sun Dance of 1843, a man stabbed his wife in

6. Momaday's paternal grandfather.

7. The Kiowa recorded their history in pictures that functioned as calendars.

of a blind man; they left him alone with his wife and child. The winter was coming on and food was scarce. In four days the man's wife grew tired of caring for him. A herd of buffalo came near, and the man knew the sound. He asked his wife to hand him a bow and an arrow. "You must tell me," he said, "when the buffalo are directly in front of me." And in that way he killed a bull, but his wife said that he had missed. He asked for another arrow and killed another bull, but again his wife said that he had missed. Now the man was a hunter, and he knew the sound an arrow makes when it strikes home, but he said nothing. Then his wife helped herself to the meat and ran away with her child. The man was blind; he ate grass and kept himself alive. In seven days a band of Kiowas found him and took him to their camp. There in the firelight a woman was telling a story. She told of how her husband had been killed by enemy warriors. The blind man listened, and he knew her voice. That was a bad woman. At sunrise they threw her away.

XXIV

East of my grandmother's house, south of the pecan grove, there is buried a woman in a beautiful dress. Mammedaty used to know where she is buried, but now no one knows. If you stand on the front porch of the house and look eastward towards Carnegie, you know that the woman is buried somewhere within the range of your vision. But her grave is unmarked. She was buried in a cabinet, and she wore a beautiful dress.

the breast because she accepted Chief Dohasan's invitation to ride with him in the ceremonial procession. And in the winter of 1851–52, Big Bow stole the wife of a man who was away on a raiding expedition. He brought her to his father's camp and made her wait outside in the bitter cold while he went in to collect his things. But his father knew what was going on, and he held Big Bow and would not let him go. The woman was made to wait in the snow until her feet were frozen.

Mammedaty's grandmother, Kau-au-ointy,⁸ was a Mexican captive, taken from her homeland when she was a child of eight or ten years. I never knew her, but I have been to her grave at Rainy Mountain.

KAU-AU-OINTY

BORN 1834

DIED 1929

AT REST

She raised a lot of eyebrows, they say, for she would not play the part of a Kiowa woman. From slavery she rose up to become a figure in the tribe. She owned a great herd of cattle, and she could ride as well as any man. She had blue eyes.

Aho's high moccasins are made of softest, cream-colored skins. On each instep there is a bright disc of beadwork—an eight-pointed star, red and pale blue on a white field—and there are bands of beadwork at the soles and ankles. The flaps of the leggings are wide and richly ornamented with blue and red and green and white and lavender beads.

East of my grandmother's house the sun rises out of the plain. Once in his

8. Momaday's great-great-grandmother.

How beautiful it was! It was one of those fine buckskin dresses, and it was decorated with elk's teeth and beadwork. That dress is still there, under the ground.

life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.

Epilogue

During the first hours after midnight on the morning of November 13, 1833, it seemed that the world was coming to an end. Suddenly the stillness of the night was broken; there were brilliant flashes of light in the sky, light of such intensity that people were awakened by it. With the speed and density of a driving rain, stars were falling in the universe. Some were brighter than Venus; one was said to be as large as the moon.

That most brilliant shower of Leonid meteors⁹ has a special place in the memory of the Kiowa people. It is among the earliest entries in the Kiowa calendars, and it marks the beginning as it were of the historical period in the tribal mind. In the preceding year Tai-me had been stolen by a band of Osages, and although it was later returned, the loss was an almost unimaginable tragedy; and in 1837 the Kiowas made the first of their treaties¹ with the United States. The falling stars seemed to image the sudden and violent disintegration of an old order.

But indeed the golden age of the Kiowas had been short-lived, ninety or a hundred years, say, from about 1740. The culture would persist for a while in decline, until about 1875, but then it would be gone, and there would be very little material evidence that it had ever been. Yet it is within the reach of memory still, though tenuously now, and moreover it is even defined in a remarkably rich and living verbal tradition which demands to be preserved for its own sake. The living memory and the verbal tradition which transcends it were brought together for me once and for all in the person of Ko-sahn.

A hundred-year-old woman came to my grandmother's house one afternoon in July. Aho was dead; Mammedaty had died before I was born. There were very few Kiowas left who could remember the Sun Dances; Ko-sahn was one of them; she was a grown woman when my grandparents came into the world. Her body was twisted and her face deeply lined with age. Her thin white hair was held in place by a cap of black netting, though she wore braids as well, and she had but one eye. She was dressed in the manner of a Kiowa matron, a dark, full-cut dress that reached nearly to the ankles, full, flowing sleeves, and

9. Annual meteor shower that appears to emanate from the constellation Leo; the Leonid shower of 1833 was spectacular to observers in

North America east of the Rocky Mountains.

1. This treaty provided for settlers' passage through Kiowa and Comanche lands.

a wide, apron-like sash. She sat on a bench in the arbor so concentrated in her great age that she seemed extraordinarily small. She was quiet for a time—she might almost have been asleep—and then she began to speak and to sing. She spoke of many things, and once she spoke of the Sun Dance:

My sisters and I were very young; that was a long time ago. Early one morning they came to wake us up. They had brought a great buffalo in from the plain. Everyone went out to see and to pray. We heard a great many voices. One man said that the lodge was almost ready. We were told to go there, and someone gave me a piece of cloth. It was very beautiful. Then I asked what I ought to do with it, and they said that I must tie it to the Tai-me tree. There were other pieces of cloth on the tree, and so I put mine there as well.

When the lodge frame was finished, a woman—sometimes a man—began to sing. It was like this:

*Everything is ready.
Now the four societies must go out.
They must go out and get the leaves,
the branches for the lodge.*

And when the branches were tied in place, again there was singing:

*Let the boys go out.
Come on, boys, now we must get the earth.*

The boys began to shout. Now they were not just ordinary boys, not all of them; they were those for whom prayers had been made, and they were dressed in different ways. There was an old, old woman. She had something on her back. The boys went out to see. The old woman had a bag full of earth on her back. It was a certain kind of sandy earth. That is what they must have in the lodge. The dancers must dance upon the sandy earth. The old woman held a digging tool in her hand. She turned towards the south and pointed with her lips. It was like a kiss, and she began to sing:

*We have brought the earth.
Now it is time to play;
As old as I am, I still have the feeling of play.*

That was the beginning of the Sun Dance. The dancers treated themselves with buffalo medicine, and slowly they began to take their steps. . . . And all the people were around, and they wore splendid things—beautiful buckskin and beads. The chiefs wore necklaces, and their pendants shone like the sun. There were many people, and oh, it was beautiful! That was the beginning of the Sun Dance. It was all for Tai-me, you know, and it was a long time ago.

It was—all of this and more—a quest, a going forth upon the way to Rainy Mountain. Probably Ko-sahn too is dead now. At times, in the quiet of evening, I think she must have wondered, dreaming, who she was. Was she become in her sleep that old purveyor of the sacred earth, perhaps, that ancient one who, old as she was, still had the feeling of play? And in her mind, at times, did she see the falling stars?

Rainy Mountain Cemetery

Most is your name the name of this dark stone.
 Deranged in death, the mind to be inheres
 Forever in the nominal unknown,
 The wake of nothing audible he hears
 Who listens here and now to hear your name. 5

The early sun, red as a hunter's moon,
 Runs in the plain. The mountain burns and shines;
 And silence is the long approach of noon
 Upon the shadow that your name defines—
 And death this cold, black density of stone. 10

1969

AUDRE LORDE
 1934–1992

Audre Lorde's poetry wages what she called "a war against the tyrannies of silence"; it articulates what has been passed over out of fear or discomfort, what has been kept hidden and secret. Reading her we feel the violence inherent in breaking a silence, perhaps most often as she probes the experience of anger—the anger of black toward white or white toward black, a woman's anger at men and other women, and men's anger toward women. "My Black woman's anger," she wrote in her collection of essays, *Sister Outsider*, "is a molten pond at the core of me, my most fiercely guarded secret." Having admitted this secret into her poems, Lorde transforms our expectations of what is a fit subject for the lyric. Her work is often deliberately disturbing, the powerful voice of the poem cutting through denial, politeness, and fear. In developing this voice Lorde drew on African resources, especially the matriarchal mythology and history of West Africa. Her seventh book, *The Black Unicorn* (1978), reflects the time she spent in Africa studying, in particular, Yoruba mythology and reclaiming her connection to the rich African cultures. The African presence is evident in one of her last books, *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986), as well. Lorde's work suggests that she always connected poetry to the speaking voice, but her study of African materials deepened her connection to oral traditions (like the chant or the call) and taught her the power of voice to cut across time and place. From African writers, she said, she learned that "we live in accordance with, in a kind of correspondence with, the rest of the world as a whole." A powerful voice informed by personal and cultural history creates the possibility, for Lorde, of bridging the differences her work does not seek to erase. "It is not difference that immobilizes us," she wrote, "but silence."

Her work celebrates difference and confounds it. In Adrienne Rich's words, Lorde wrote "as a Black woman, a mother, a daughter, a Lesbian, a feminist, a visionary." Her poem "Coal" affirms an *I* that is "the total black, being spoken / from the earth's inside." This total blackness was, for her, also associated with Eros and with creativity; she celebrated this source as what she called "woman's place of power within each of us," which is "neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient; and it is deep." Her best

work calls on the deepest places of her own life—on the pain she experienced, on her rage (her second book, in 1972, was titled *Cables to Rage*), on her longing and desire. One of the silences her poems broke concerns love between women, and she wrote a number of poems that are erotic, precise, and true to both the power and delicacy of feeling. Unafraid of anger, she was also capable of tenderness; this is perhaps most clear not only in her love poems but in poems that address a younger generation.

Lorde was born in New York City and lived in New York almost all her life. Her parents were West Indian, and her mother was light skinned. “I grew up in a genuine confusion / between grass and weeds and flowers / and what colored meant,” Lorde wrote in her poem “Outside.” Part of that confusion was the conflict represented by her father’s blackness and her mother’s desire for whiteness (in “Black Mother Woman” Lorde speaks of the mother as “split with deceitful longings”). Lorde’s understanding of identity forged out of conflict began for her, then, in her own family history with its legacy of “conflicting rebellions” (“Black Mother Woman”). In 1961 she received a B.A. from Hunter College and later a Master’s of Library Science from Columbia University. The following year she married and the marriage produced a daughter and a son (she divorced in 1970). In 1968 she became poet-in-residence for a year at Tougaloo College in Mississippi, her first experience in the American South. Thereafter she knew her work to be that of a writer and teacher; she taught at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City and, from 1981, was professor of English at Hunter College. In the last years of her life Lorde traveled extensively, not only to Africa but to Australia (where she met with aborigine women) and Germany. During her last years she lived much of the time in St. Croix.

“I have come to believe over and over again,” Lorde said, “that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.” (Her essay “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” [1977] makes the case for poetry’s essential speaking of what is otherwise unnamed and unthought. A selection from this essay appears in the “Postmodern Manifestos” cluster of this anthology.) The drive toward expression made Lorde a prolific writer and led her to compose several prose works in which she shared experiences often restricted to privacy: *The Cancer Journals* (1980), an account of her struggle with breast cancer, and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), a “biomythography” of her growing up and her emergent lesbian identity. The urgency Lorde felt to make experience “verbal and shared,” however, sometimes overrode a distinction crucial to her work: that between poetry and rhetoric. She preserved this distinction in her best work by listening and responding to other voices in herself and in the world around her. With their combination of pain, anger, and tenderness, her finest poems are poetry as illumination, poetry in which, as she said, “we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless, formless, about to be birthed, but already felt.”

Coal

I
 is the total black, being spoken
 from the earth’s inside.
 There are many kinds of open
 how a diamond comes into a knot of flame
 how sound comes into a word, coloured
 by who pays what for speaking.

5

Some words are open like a diamond
 on glass windows

singing out within the passing crash of sun 10
 Then there are words like stapled wagers
 in a perforated book,—buy and sign and tear apart—
 and come whatever wills all chances
 the stub remains
 an ill-pulled tooth with a ragged edge. 15
 Some words live in my throat
 breeding like adders. Others know sun
 seeking like gypsies over my tongue
 to explode through my lips
 like young sparrows bursting from shell. 20
 Some words
 bedevil me.

Love is a word, another kind of open.
 As the diamond comes into a knot of flame
 I am Black because I come from the earth's inside 25
 now take my word for jewel in the open light.

1968

The Woman Thing

The hunters are back from beating the winter's face
 in search of a challenge or task
 in search of food
 making fresh tracks for their children's hunger
 they do not watch the sun 5
 they cannot wear its heat for a sign
 of triumph or freedom;
 The hunters are treading heavily homeward
 through snow that is marked
 with their own bloody footprints. 10
 emptyhanded, the hunters return
 snow-maddened, sustained by their rages.

In the night after food they may seek
 young girls for their amusement. But now
 the hunters are coming 15
 and the unbaked girls flee from their angers.
 All this day I have craved
 food for my child's hunger
 Emptyhanded the hunters come shouting
 injustices drip from their mouths 20
 like stale snow melted in sunlight.

Meanwhile
 the woman thing my mother taught me
 bakes off its covering of snow
 like a rising blackening sun. 25

1968

Black Mother Woman

I cannot recall you gentle
 yet through your heavy love
 I have become
 an image of your once delicate flesh
 split with deceitful longings. 5

When strangers come and compliment me
 your aged spirit takes a bow
 jingling with pride
 but once you hid that secret
 in the center of furies 10
 hanging me
 with deep breasts and wiry hair
 with your own split flesh
 and long suffering eyes
 buried in myths of little worth. 15

But I have peeled away your anger
 down to the core of love
 and look mother
 I Am
 a dark temple where your true spirit rises 20
 beautiful
 and tough as chestnut
 stanchion¹ against your nightmare of weakness
 and if my eyes conceal
 a squadron of conflicting rebellions 25
 I learned from you
 to define myself
 through your denials.

1971

1. Upright bar or post (for supporting, e.g., a railing).

MARY OLIVER

b. 1935

“[O]f course / loss is the great lesson,” Mary Oliver writes in her poem “Poppies.” “But also I say this: that light / is an invitation to happiness / and that happiness, when it’s done right / is a kind of holiness.” What we experience first and most intensely in Mary Oliver’s poetry is the earthly delight that constitutes her vision of happiness and holiness. That delight is founded in the world of

the alligator, the deer, the bear, the black oak, the trumpet vine, the wild mushroom. This variegated natural world is precisely recorded in Oliver's poetry, from her first book, *No Voyage and Other Poems* (1963), to her collection of prose, poems, and prose poems, *Winter Hours* (2000). But a river of loss runs underground in her poems, whose deeper currents are sometimes an unspoken source propelling the poet out into the natural world; that world restores her to herself; its vitality and beauty open her heart. Yet in Oliver's best work the natural world does more than restore or console; it also teaches the "great lesson" of loving and letting go.

Oliver was born in Maple Heights, Ohio, and attended Vassar College. She lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and Bennington, Vermont; not surprisingly, the New England landscape is as central to her work as it is to Robert Frost's. But perhaps the poet she most closely resembles is James Wright (also born in Ohio), to whose memory her Pulitzer Prize-winning *American Primitive* (1983) is dedicated; she shares Wright's capacity for wonder, as well as his movement away from a social world into a natural one. Digging for mussels or spotting bear in the Truro Woods (in poems from *Twelve Moons*, 1979), watching humpback whales or blue herons on the ponds (in *American Primitive*), observing the hummingbird (in *New and Selected Poems*, 1992), Oliver endows her regional landscape with the spaciousness and depth the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau gave to Walden Pond. Indeed, the very title of *American Primitive* suggests her self-conscious participation in an American impulse toward something primary and primal in the self and in the world.

One of the pleasures of reading Oliver's work is the education it provides about plants and animals in its detailed and knowledgeable observation—as when, for example, in "Skunk Cabbage" (*American Primitive*) she sees the "turnip-hearted skunk cabbage / slinging its bunched leaves up / through the chilly mud." The power and precision of her descriptions make it seem that, in lines from her "Alligator Poem" (*New and Selected Poems*), we "saw the world as if for a second time, / the way it really is." But Oliver's poems are as much about transformation as about observation, for in her work—as in "Alligator Poem"—the secret life of the world seems to open itself, for a moment, to human apprehension, transforming the world and the self. For Oliver the natural world casts a spell of amazement over poet and reader (this amazement—the stance of wonder at what is—is frequently registered by Oliver's use of the interrogative). Those moments when she is "washed and washed / in the river / of earthly delight" ("Poppies") restore the poet to her faith in the world that made her. These rapturous antidotes heal night's pain, mitigate loneliness, turn the heaviness of "the great bones of my life" ("Spring Azures") into wings. They are also the antidote to psychic pain, and to a social world with which Mary Oliver's poems want little to do. That world occasionally intrudes into Oliver's poems in the form of disturbing figures, like the woman in the airport restroom in "Singapore," the disfigured boy in "Acid," or, more ominously and persistently, the father who "knocks / wildly at the door" in "A Visitor." These figures unsettle the poet's solitude and threaten a vision of happiness and holiness sometimes too easily affirmed in her work. Though such human and social intrusions are intermittent in Oliver's poems, they seem to gesture toward injuries this poet keeps hidden.

There is such naturalness to Oliver's poems that we may fail to notice their craft. Oliver's language stays close to the spoken American idiom but infuses it with music, and creates, through verbal design, images of startling vividness (in "Alligator Poem" the birds "shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away"). In a poetry so attentive to detail, where line breaks focus our attention on particulars—"the line is the device upon which the poem spins itself into being," she has said—there is also extraordinary power. Oliver builds her stanzas so they interlock, one into another, and the reader is pulled through a series of perceptions into the poet's insight. In certain poems the movement of her lines across the page rhythmically enacts the reaching forward and pulling back of the poet's walks into the landscape. Of course, making the

design of a poem seem as natural as the hummingbird pausing at the trumpet vine is one sign of how gifted a poet Oliver is.

Her *New and Selected Poems* won the National Book Award in 1992 and includes work from six previous books. She has published prolifically throughout her career, with over a dozen books since 1992, including several essay collections and handbooks on writing.

The Black Snake

When the black snake
flashed onto the morning road,
and the truck could not swerve—
death, that is how it happens.

Now he lies looped and useless 5
as an old bicycle tire.
I stop the car
and carry him into the bushes.

He is as cool and gleaming 10
as a braided whip, he is as beautiful and quiet
as a dead brother.
I leave him under the leaves

and drive on, thinking
about *death*: its suddenness,
its terrible weight, 15
its certain coming. Yet under

reason burns a brighter fire, which the bones
have always preferred.
It is the story of endless good fortune.
It says to oblivion: not me! 20

It is the light at the center of every cell.
It is what sent the snake coiling and flowing forward
happily all spring through the green leaves before
he came to the road.

1979

In Blackwater Woods

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light, 5
 are giving off the rich
 fragrance of cinnamon
 and fulfillment,

the long tapers 10
 of cattails
 are bursting and floating away over
 the blue shoulders

of the ponds,
 and every pond,
 no matter what its 15
 name is, is

nameless now.
 Every year
 everything
 I have ever learned 20

in my lifetime
 leads back to this: the fires
 and the black river of loss
 whose other side

is salvation, 25
 whose meaning
 none of us will ever know.
 To live in this world

you must be able
 to do three things: 30
 to love what is mortal;
 to hold it

against your bones knowing
 your own life depends on it;
 and, when the time comes to let it go, 35
 to let it go.

1983

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body
 love what it loves. 5
 Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.
 Meanwhile the sun and the dear pebbles of the rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees, 10
 the mountains and the rivers.
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination, 15
 calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
 over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.

1986

Poppies

The poppies send up their
 orange flares; swaying
 in the wind, their congregations
 are a levitation

of bright dust, of thin 5
 and lacy leaves.
 There isn't a place
 in this world that doesn't

sooner or later drown
 in the indigos of darkness, 10
 but now, for a while,
 the roughage

shines like a miracle
 as it floats above everything
 with its yellow hair. 15
 Of course nothing stops the cold,

black, curved blade
 from hooking forward—
 of course
 loss is the great lesson. 20

But also I say this: that light
 is an invitation
 to happiness,
 and that happiness,

when it's done right, 25
 is a kind of holiness,
 palpable and redemptive.
 Inside the bright fields,

touched by their rough and spongy gold,
 I am washed and washed 30
 in the river
 of earthly delight—

and what are you going to do—
 what can you do
 about it— 35
 deep, blue night?

1991–92

1992

Hummingbird Pauses at the Trumpet Vine

Who doesn't love
 roses, and who
 doesn't love the lilies
 of the black ponds

floating like flocks 5
 of tiny swans,
 and of course the flaming
 trumpet vine

where the hummingbird comes
 like a small green angel, to soak 10
 his dark tongue
 in happiness—

and who doesn't want
 to live with the brisk
 motor of his heart 15
 singing

like a Schubert,¹
 and his eyes
 working and working like those days of rapture,
 by van Gogh,² in Arles? 20

Look! for most of the world
 is waiting
 or remembering—
 most of the world is time

when we're not here, 25
 not born yet, or died—
 a slow fire
 under the earth with all

1. Franz Schubert (1797–1828), Austrian composer and proponent of musical Romanticism.

2. Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), Dutch Post-

impressionist painter who produced much of his best-known work in Arles in the south of France.

our dumb wild blind cousins
 who also 30
 can't even remember anymore
 their own happiness—

Look! and then we will be
 like the pale cool
 stones, that last almost 35
 forever.

1991–92

1992

Alligator Poem

I knelt down
 at the edge of the water,
 and if the white birds standing
 in the tops of the trees whistled any warning
 I didn't understand, 5
 I drank up to the very moment it came
 crashing toward me,
 its tail flailing
 like a bundle of swords,
 slashing the grass, 10
 and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
 gaping,
 and rimmed with teeth—
 and that's how I almost died
 of foolishness 15
 in beautiful Florida.
 But I didn't.
 I leaped aside, and fell,
 and it streamed past me, crushing everything in its path
 as it swept down to the water 20
 and threw itself in,
 and, in the end,
 this isn't a poem about foolishness
 but about how I rose from the ground
 and saw the world as if for the second time, 25
 the way it really is.
 The water, that circle of shattered glass,
 healed itself with a slow whisper
 and lay back
 with the back-lit light of polished steel, 30
 and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,
 shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away,
 while, for a keepsake, and to steady myself,
 I reached out,
 I picked the wild flowers from the grass around me— 35
 blue stars

and blood-red trumpets
 on long green stems—
 for hours in my trembling hands they glittered
 like fire.

40

1992

LUCILLE CLIFTON

1936–2010

Lucille Clifton seemed able to lift the poem off the page and return it to the air we breathe. Like the work of Langston Hughes or William Carlos Williams, her poems allow us to hear the language of our daily lives as poetry and to experience the poetry in our ordinary lives. Although a closer look reveals the subtle craft of her poems (for example, the slant rhymes and the carefully paced repetitions), they appear deceptively simple. Their frankness and directness close the distance between poet and reader, especially when these poems are read aloud. Clifton emphasized the informality in her work through the lowercase letters she preferred and through her frequent omission of titles. The language of her poems reflects her identity; “I am a black woman poet,” she said, “and I sound like one.” Grounded in realistic details, her poems do not shy away from what is harsh and painful, including incest, suicide, mental illness, and the effects of poverty and racism. But while Clifton’s anger fueled many poems, her imagination found beauty and humor in unexpected places; indeed, she seemed able to make poetry out of anything. In this she resembles the African American quilters who rework the materials of ordinary experience into distinctive and compelling designs. Indeed, she titled one of her books *Quilting* (1991) and borrowed its section headings from the names of traditional quilt patterns.

Born in Depew, New York, to a father who worked in the steel mills and a mother who was a launderer and a homemaker (and who wrote poems but burned them), Clifton was the first person in her family to attend college. “I had a very regular life, the life of a poor black person,” Clifton once said; but her background and her gifts sometimes made her feel that “there is no planet stranger / than the one I’m from” (“note, passed to superman”). At sixteen she began her studies at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and she later attended Fredonia State Teachers College in New York State. She went on to work as a claims clerk in the New York State Division of Employment (1958–60) and as a literature assistant at the Office of Education in Washington (1960–71). Clifton never formally studied creative writing, but she wrote poems and thought of herself as a poet from a young age. However, her work did not receive public recognition until she was in her thirties. In 1969 she sent a poem to the poet Robert Hayden at the National Endowment for the Arts. Hayden had left the NEA, but his successor, Carolyn Kizer, read the work and submitted it to the YW-YMHA Poetry Center Discovery Award competition in New York City. Clifton won the competition and at the award ceremony, after she read her poems, an editor from Random House in the audience offered to publish her first book, *Good Times* (1969). *Good Times* appeared when she was thirty-three, a wife and mother with six children under the age of eleven. During these years her

method of composition followed those writers, many of them women, who compose lines of poetry in the mind until there is time to write them down.

Clifton came from a line of African American storytellers extending from her great-grandmother, Caroline Donald, who was born in Dahomey, Africa, sold into slavery, and taken to America. Clifton's memoir, *Generations* (1976), chronicles the history of her family, including the genealogy and the tradition of strong women passed down to Clifton through her father's stories. In much of her work, Clifton consciously sought to recover an African American past that has too often been omitted from standard histories and to retell history from previously unacknowledged points of view.

In a poem beginning "the light that came to Lucille Clifton," a voice from "the non-dead past" speaks this message to her: "You might as well open the door, my child / for truth is furiously knocking." Throughout her long and productive career as a poet, and as a writer of memoirs and children's books, she transmitted the voices of a living past. Like Toni Morrison's fiction, Clifton's poems are full of ghosts: her mother and father, her unborn children, her ancestors, and sometimes mythical and biblical figures. These presences in her work bear witness to a legacy of pain, wisdom, and survival. As a writer brave enough to open the door to the truths of her life and her world, Clifton possessed a "gift of understanding" that put her in touch with the suffering of the "holy lost" ("Wild Blessing"), but the spiritual dimension of her work also reveals the possibility of joy and transformation, evident in "blessing the boats."

Clifton's books include *Good News about the Earth* (1972) and *Two-Headed Woman* (1980), which received the University of Massachusetts Juniper Prize. Both of these volumes were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Subsequent collections include *Next* (1987), *The Book of Light* (1993), *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems 1988–2000* (2000), *Mercy* (2004), and *Voices* (2008). Clifton's work for children includes *The Black BCs* (1970), *The Times They Used to Be* (1974), and an award-winning series of books featuring events in the life of Everett Anderson, a young black boy. In 1999 she was elected a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She served as poet laureate for the State of Maryland and as distinguished professor of humanities at St. Mary's College in Maryland.

miss rosie

when i watch you
 wrapped up like garbage
 sitting, surrounded by the smell
 of too old potato peels
 or 5
 when i watch you
 in your old man's shoes
 with the little toe cut out
 sitting, waiting for your mind
 like next week's grocery 10
 i say
 when i watch you
 you wet brown bag of a woman
 who used to be the best looking gal in georgia
 used to be called the Georgia Rose 15
 i stand up

through your destruction
i stand up

1969

1987

the lost baby poem

the time i dropped your almost body down
down to meet the waters under the city
and run one with the sewage to the sea
what did i know about waters rushing back
what did i know about drowning 5
or being drowned

you would have been born into winter
in the year of the disconnected gas
and no car we would have made the thin
walk over genesee hill¹ into the canada wind 10
to watch you slip like ice into strangers' hands
you would have fallen naked as snow into winter
if you were here i could tell you these
and some other things

if i am ever less than a mountain 15
for your definite brothers and sisters
let the rivers pour over my head
let the sea take me for a spiller
of seas let black men call me stranger
always for your never named sake 20

1972

homage to my hips

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they don't fit into little
petty places, these hips. 5
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do. 10
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top! 15

1980

1. Genesee County is in western New York State.

wild blessings

licked in the palm of my hand
 by an uninvited woman, so i have held
 in that hand the hand of a man who
 emptied into his daughter, the hand
 of a girl who threw herself 5
 from a tenement window, the trembling
 junkie hand of a priest, of a boy who
 shattered across viet nam
 someone resembling his mother,
 and more, and more. 10
 do not ask me to thank the tongue
 that circled my fingers
 or pride myself on the attentions
 of the holy lost.
 i am grateful for many blessings 15
 but the gift of understanding,
 the wild one, maybe not.

1991

wishes for sons

i wish them cramps.
 i wish them a strange town
 and the last tampon.
 i wish them no 7–11.

i wish them one week early 5
 and wearing a white skirt.
 i wish them one week late.

later i wish them hot flashes
 and clots like you
 wouldn't believe. let the 10
 flashes come when they
 meet someone special.
 let the clots come
 when they want to.

let them think they have accepted 15
 arrogance in the universe,
 then bring them to gynecologists
 not unlike themselves.

1991

blessing the boats

*(at St. Mary's)*¹

may the tide
 that is entering even now
 the lip of our understanding
 carry you out
 beyond the face of fear 5
 may you kiss
 the wind then turn from it
 certain that it will
 love your back may you
 open your eyes to water 10
 water waving forever
 and may you in your innocence
 sail through this to that

1991

the mississippi river empties into the gulf

and the gulf enters the sea and so forth,
 none of them emptying anything,
 all of them carrying yesterday
 forever on their white tipped backs,
 all of them dragging forward tomorrow. 5
 it is the great circulation
 of the earth's body, like the blood
 of the gods, this river in which the past
 is always flowing, every water
 is the same water coming round. 10
 everyday someone is standing on the edge
 of this river, staring into time,
 whispering mistakenly:
 only here, only now.

1996

moonchild¹

whatever slid into my mother's room that
 late June night, tapping her great belly,

1. A county in southern Maryland that is a tide-water peninsula bordered by the Chesapeake Bay and three rivers: the Patuxent, the Potomac, and the Wicomico. It is also the location of St. Mary's College, where Clifton taught.

1. *Moonchild* (1917), a novel by the English occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), involves a magical war between practitioners of white magic and practitioners of black magic over an unborn child.

summoned me out roundheaded and unsmiling.
 is this the moon, my father used to grin,
 cradling me? it was the moon 5
 but nobody knew it then.

the moon understands dark places.
 the moon has secrets of her own.
 she holds what light she can.

we girls were ten years old and giggling 10
 in our hand-me-downs, we wanted breasts,
 pretended that we had them, tissued
 our undershirts, jay Johnson is teaching
 me to french kiss, ella bragged, who
 is teaching you? how do you say; my father? 15

the moon is queen of everything.
 she rules the oceans, rivers, rain.
 when I am asked whose tears these are
 I always blame the moon.

2000

[oh antic god]

oh antic God
 return to me
 my mother in her thirties¹
 leaned across the front porch
 the huge pillow of her breasts 5
 pressing against the rail
 summoning me in for bed.

I am almost the dead woman's age times two.

I can barely recall her song
 the scent of her hands 10
 though her wild hair scratches my dreams
 at night. return to me, oh Lord of then
 and now, my mother's calling,
 her young voice humming my name.

2004

1. Thelma Moore Sayles, Clifton's mother, died at age forty-four.

DON DELILLO

b. 1936

Don DeLillo's best-known novels evoke twentieth- and twenty-first-century American culture and global history on its grandest scale. Encompassing big-league sports, atomic bombs, space exploration, the 9/11 attacks, international business, environmental disasters, huge art installations, and glittering supermarkets, his sixteen novels have captured the preoccupations of his times. Not historical novels in the traditional sense, DeLillo's works allow readers to hear how people of all ages speak, think, and experience the world as massive forces bear down upon them. He observes modern experience with an eye that is both critical and loving. Touched always with humor that makes the reader see cultural absurdities in a new light, his attention to the human dimensions of mass culture has made his work popular since his breakthrough novel, *White Noise*, was published in 1985.

"The future belongs to crowds." The narrator of *Mao II* makes this prophecy on the heels of a prologue describing the mass wedding of 13,000 followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon in Yankee Stadium. This kind of spectacle appears frequently in DeLillo's work. His millennial novel, *Underworld* (1998), begins with one of his best-known crowd scenes, set at the Polo Grounds baseball stadium in New York: it is 1951, the famous playoff game between two New York City teams, the Giants and the Dodgers. In the stands we find power brokers and celebrities and thousands of ordinary New Yorkers. In *Libra* (1988), DeLillo conjures up the mass of humanity lining the presidential motorcade route in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963, a scene the reader experiences through the eyes of President Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald.

DeLillo's crowds reflect the vibrant city where the author has lived throughout his life. "New York made me," he once declared. "There's a sensibility, a sense of humor, an approach, a sort of dark approach to things that's part New York, and maybe part growing up Catholic, and that . . . shapes my work far more than anything I read." Born in New York City in 1936 and raised in a tight-knit Southern Italian neighborhood in the Bronx, DeLillo attended Catholic schools, graduating from Fordham University in the late fifties. In Catholic ritual, and in the modern art and jazz he discovered in the city in the sixties, he found his most enduring preoccupations as a writer of fiction.

For all their fascination with crowds, DeLillo's novels are grounded in the lives of their characters. In any DeLillo crowd scene, the reader will find individuals the novel will follow closely. *Underworld*, DeLillo's most massive novel, follows Cotter, a black child from the projects, as he jumps the stiles to see the Giants-Dodgers play-off game. The boy later escapes from the stands with the game-winning homerun ball off Bobby Thompson's bat, and the ball becomes a precious object that carries characters' stories and American history along with it to the start of the new century five decades later. Through such characters, DeLillo ushers readers into the place where recorded history gives way to the novelist's imagination. Shuttling between mass culture and the private lives contained in crowds, DeLillo's fiction diagrams the machinery of transcendence: How does an immigrant or outcast become an American? How does a soldier decide to assassinate a president? How does a believer connect to the cosmos? How does a wildly diverse city become a human community? And how do the decisions of individuals add up to History?

DeLillo is renowned for understanding how media of all kinds penetrate deep into modern life. That wisdom has resonated steadily with readers as the Internet age dawned and flourished over the course of his writing career. His characters strive for authentic human connection within the flow of advertising, television, film, radio, gossip, misinformation, and mass hysteria that swirls around their living rooms, bedrooms, cars, and kitchen tables. Children have a special role in countering these forces. In *The Names* (1982), a child writes mystical stories filled with misspellings. His estranged parents and their friends make the plot run—the novel follows a cult that is methodically committing murders in small villages along the Mediterranean coast of Greece—but the novel's transcendent passages come from the boy's pen. Through him DeLillo presents an innocent, authentic, and nonviolent mysticism that counters the cult's murderous rituals. A toddler in *White Noise* gradually gives up words in favor of more-visceral forms of human communication—he cries steadily for twenty-four hours and then stops. These strange speakers, or nonspeakers, draw others beyond ordinary language to a deeper experience of the human condition.

The form and style of DeLillo's novels reflect his shifts in scale from the crowd to the individual, from panoramic scenes to family bedrooms. His epic novels are built from multiple individual stories that braid together into a broad view of an era, a nation, or even the whole globe. Within each story DeLillo's fine-tuned ear for dialogue allows the reader to hear the very words through which his characters put their lives together. As the digital age took hold in the early twenty-first century, even his early novels seemed both prophetic and redemptive to contemporary readers looking to find coherent stories that could hold their own within the torrent of words and pictures flowing over us every day.

When *White Noise* was published, DeLillo was considered a practitioner of the "paranoid school" of American fiction: part of a group of writers, including Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, William Gaddis, and Richard Powers, whose novels represented massive institutions or conspiracies in which characters could not hope to shape their own lives. The novel's funny, satirical picture of fragmented American family life in a leafy suburb seemed to capture what was "postmodern" in middle-class life—the way television seemed to generate reality, the encompassing aura of consumer culture, the morphing domestic scene shaped by divorce, remarriage, international careers, and blended families. DeLillo's dark humor cast a critical light on middle-class achievements—the main character of *White Noise* is a failing professor of "Hitler Studies" who, try as he might, cannot learn German. But for all the novel's satire and fragmentation, classic moments of transcendence and community emerge from *White Noise*. Such elements return in all of DeLillo's major novels and set him apart from his paranoid peers, putting him ultimately closer to a school of religiously inflected American novelists that would include secular Jewish writers, American Catholic novelists, and those Protestant writers who reserve a place for mysticism and grace.

DeLillo has garnered several major prizes in his long career, starting with the National Book Award for *White Noise*, later followed by the Jerusalem Prize and the William Dean Howells Medal for *Underworld*. In 2013 he was awarded the first Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction, which honors "strong, unique, enduring voices that—throughout long, consistently accomplished careers—have told us something about the American experience." Receiving news of the award, DeLillo said that his "first thoughts were of my mother and father, who came to this country the hard way, as young people confronting a new language and culture." The prize, he said, "is the culmination of their efforts and a tribute to their memory."

In the selection from *White Noise* that follows, the main character, Professor Jack Gladney, and his family have been evacuated from their home, joining the mass of humanity converging upon a school gym to shelter from an environmental disaster

that the media have dubbed the “Airborne Toxic Event.” Arriving at the gym in the family car, Gladney, his wife, Babette, and their four children are suddenly thrown out of their suburban security. Each must find a place in the unfolding American spectacle.

From White Noise

Part II: Airborne Toxic Event

Small crowds collected around certain men. Here were the sources of information and rumor. One person worked in a chemical plant, another had overheard a remark, a third was related to a clerk in a state agency. True, false, and other kinds of news radiated through the dormitory from these dense clusters.

It was said that we would be allowed to go home first thing in the morning; that the government was engaged in a cover-up; that a helicopter had entered the toxic cloud and never reappeared; that the dogs had arrived from New Mexico, parachuting into a meadow in a daring night drop; that the town of Farmington would be uninhabitable for forty years.

Remarks existed in a state of permanent flotation. No one thing was either more or less plausible than any other thing. As people jolted out of reality, we were released from the need to distinguish.

Some families chose to sleep in their cars, others were forced to do so because there was no room for them in the seven or eight buildings on the grounds. We were in a large barracks, one of three such buildings at the camp, and with the generator now working we were fairly comfortable. The Red Cross had provided cots, portable heaters, sandwiches and coffee. There were kerosene lamps to supplement the existing overhead lights. Many people had radios, extra food to share with others, blankets, beach chairs, extra clothing. The place was crowded, still quite cold, but the sight of nurses and volunteer workers made us feel the children were safe, and the presence of other stranded souls, young women with infants, old and infirm people, gave us a certain staunchness and will, a selfless bent that was pronounced enough to function as a common identity. This large gray area, dank and bare and lost to history just a couple of hours ago, was an oddly agreeable place right now, filled with an eagerness of community and voice.

Seekers of news moved from one cluster of people to another, tending to linger at the larger groups. In this way I moved slowly through the barracks. There were nine evacuation centers, I learned, including this one and the Kung Fu Palace. Iron City had not been emptied out; nor had most of the other towns in the area. It was said that the governor was on his way from the capitol in an executive helicopter. It would probably set down in a bean field outside a deserted town, allowing the governor to emerge, square-jawed and confident, in a bush jacket, within camera range, for ten or fifteen seconds, as a demonstration of his imperishability.

What a surprise it was to ease my way between people at the outer edges of one of the largest clusters and discover that my own son was at the center of things, speaking in his new-found voice, his tone of enthusiasm for runaway calamity. He was talking about the airborne toxic event in a technical

way, although his voice all but sang with prophetic disclosure. He pronounced the name itself, Nyodene Derivative,¹ with an unseemly relish, taking morbid delight in the very sound. People listened attentively to this adolescent boy in a field jacket and cap, with binoculars strapped around his neck and an Instamatic² fastened to his belt. No doubt his listeners were influenced by his age. He would be truthful and earnest, serving no special interest; he would have an awareness of the environment; his knowledge of chemistry would be fresh and up-to-date.

I heard him say, "The stuff they sprayed on the big spill at the train yard was probably soda ash. But it was a case of too little too late. My guess is they'll get some crop dusters up in the air at daybreak and bombard the toxic cloud with lots more soda ash, which could break it up and scatter it into a million harmless puffs. Soda ash is the common name for sodium carbonate, which is used in the manufacture of glass, ceramics, detergents, and soaps. It's also what they use to make bicarbonate of soda, something a lot of you have probably guzzled after a night on the town."

People moved in closer, impressed by the boy's knowledgeability and wit. It was remarkable to hear him speak so easily to a crowd of strangers. Was he finding himself, learning how to determine his worth from the reactions of others? Was it possible that out of the turmoil and surge of this dreadful event he would learn to make his way in the world?

"What you're probably all wondering is what exactly is this Nyodene D. we keep hearing about? A good question. We studied it in school, we saw movies of rats having convulsions and so on. So, okay, it's basically simple. Nyodene D. is a whole bunch of things thrown together that are byproducts of the manufacture of insecticide. The original stuff kills roaches, the byproducts kill everything left over. A little joke our teacher made."

He snapped his fingers, let his left leg swing a bit.

"In powder form it's colorless, odorless, and very dangerous, except no one seems to know exactly what it causes in humans or in the offspring of humans. They tested for years and either they don't know for sure or they know and aren't saying. Some things are too awful to publicize."

He arched his brows and began to twitch comically, his tongue lolling in a corner of his mouth. I was astonished to hear people laugh.

"Once it seeps into the soil, it has a life span of forty years. This is longer than a lot of people. After five years you'll notice various kinds of fungi appearing between your regular windows and storm windows as well as in your clothes and food. After ten years your screens will turn rusty and begin to pit and rot. Siding will warp. There will be glass breakage and trauma to pets. After twenty years you'll probably have to seal yourself in the attic and just wait and see. I guess there's a lesson in all this. Get to know your chemicals."

I didn't want him to see me there. It would make him self-conscious, remind him of his former life as a gloomy and fugitive boy. Let him bloom, if that's what he was doing, in the name of mischance, dread, and random disaster. So I slipped away, passing a man who wore snow boots wrapped in

1. Fictional toxic substance; elsewhere in the novel it is referred to as "Nyodene D." and is said to be "packed with chlorides, benzines, phenols,

hydrocarbons."

2. Inexpensive and popular point-and-shoot camera made by Kodak between 1963 and 1988.

plastic, and headed for the far end of the barracks, where we'd earlier made camp.

We were next to a black family of Jehovah's Witnesses.³ A man and woman with a boy about twelve. Father and son were handing out tracts to people nearby and seemed to have no trouble finding willing recipients and listeners.

The woman said to Babette, "Isn't this something?"

"Nothing surprises me anymore," Babette said.

"Isn't that the truth?"

"What would surprise me would be if there were no surprises."

"That sounds about right."

"Or if there were little bitty surprises. That would be a surprise. Instead of things like this."

"God Jehovah's got a bigger surprise in store than this," the woman said.

"God Jehovah?"

"That's the one."

Steffie and Wilder were asleep in one of the cots. Denise sat at the other end engrossed in the *Physicians' Desk Reference*. Several air mattresses were stacked against the wall. There was a long line at the emergency telephone, people calling relatives or trying to reach the switchboard at one or another radio call-in show. The radios here were tuned mainly to just such shows. Babette sat in a camp chair, going through a canvas bag full of snack thins and other provisions. I noticed jars and cartons that had been sitting in the refrigerator or cabinet for months.

"I thought this would be a good time to cut down on fatty things," she said.

"Why now especially?"

"This is a time for discipline, mental toughness. We're practically at the edge."

"I think it's interesting that you regard a possible disaster for yourself, your family, and thousands of other people as an opportunity to cut down on fatty foods."

"You take discipline where you can find it," she said. "If I don't eat my yogurt now, I may as well stop buying the stuff forever. Except I think I'll skip the wheat germ."

The brand name was foreign-looking. I picked up the jar of wheat germ and examined the label closely.

"It's German," I told her. "Eat it."

There were people in pajamas and slippers. A man with a rifle slung over his shoulder. Kids crawling into sleeping bags. Babette gestured, wanting me to lean closer.

"Let's keep the radio turned off," she whispered. "So the girls can't hear. They haven't gotten beyond *déjà vu*. I want to keep it that way."

"What if the symptoms are real?"

"How could they be real?"

"Why couldn't they be real?"

3. Christian denomination founded in America by Charles Taze Russell in the 1870s. Practitioners are known for their door-to-door evangelism and belief that the end of the world is near.

"They get them only when they're broadcast," she whispered.

"Did Steffie hear about *déjà vu* on the radio?"

"She must have."

"How do you know? Were you with her when it was broadcast?"

"I'm not sure."

"Think hard."

"I can't remember."

"Do you remember telling her what *déjà vu* means?"

She spooned some yogurt out of the carton, seemed to pause, deep in thought.

"This happened before," she said finally.

"What happened before?"

"Eating yogurt, sitting here, talking about *déjà vu*."

"I don't want to hear this."

"The yogurt was on my spoon. I saw it in a flash. The whole experience. Natural, whole-milk, low-fat."

The yogurt was still on the spoon. I watched her put the spoon to her mouth, thoughtfully, trying to measure the action against the illusion of a matching original. From my squatting position I motioned her to lean closer.

"Heinrich seems to be coming out of his shell," I whispered.

"Where is he? I haven't seen him."

"See that knot of people? He's right in the middle. He's telling them what he knows about the toxic event."

"What does he know?"

"Quite a lot, it turns out."

"Why didn't he tell us?" she whispered.

"He's probably tired of us. He doesn't think it's worth his while to be funny and charming in front of his family. That's the way sons are. We represent the wrong kind of challenge."

"Funny and charming?"

"I guess he had it in him all the while. It was a question of finding the right time to exercise his gifts."

She moved closer, our heads almost touching.

"Don't you think you ought to go over there?" she said. "Let him see you in the crowd. Show him that his father is present at his big moment."

"He'll only get upset if he sees me in the crowd."

"Why?"

"I'm his father."

"So if you go over there, you'll ruin things by embarrassing him and cramping his style because of the father-son thing. And if you don't go over, he'll never know you saw him in his big moment and he'll think he has to behave in your presence the way he's always behaved, sort of peevishly and defensive, instead of in this new, delightful, and expansive manner."

"It's a double bind."

"What if I went over?" she whispered.

"He'll think I sent you."

"Would that be so awful?"

"He thinks I use you to get him to do what I want."

"There may be some truth in that, Jack. But then what are stepparents for if they can't be used in little skirmishes between blood relatives?"

I moved still closer, lowered my voice even more.

"Just a Life Saver,"⁴ I said.

"What?"

"Just some saliva that you didn't know what to do with."

"It was a Life Saver," she whispered, making an O with her thumb and index finger.

"Give me one."

"It was the last one."

"What flavor—*quick*."

"Cherry."

I puckered my lips and made little sucking sounds. The black man with the tracts came over and squatted next to me. We engaged in an earnest and prolonged handshake. He studied me openly, giving the impression that he had traveled this rugged distance, uprooting his family, not to escape the chemical event but to find the one person who would understand what he had to say.

"It's happening everywhere, isn't it?"

"More or less," I said.

"And what's the government doing about it?"

"Nothing."

"You said it, I didn't. There's only one word in the language to describe what's being done and you found it exactly. I'm not surprised at all. But when you think about it, what *can* they do? Because what is coming is definitely coming. No government in the world is big enough to stop it. Does a man like yourself know the size of India's standing army?"

"One million."

"I didn't say it, you did. One million soldiers and they can't stop it. Do you know who's got the biggest standing army in the world?"

"It's either China or Russia, although the Vietnamese ought to be mentioned."

"Tell me this," he said. "Can the Vietnamese stop it?"

"No."

"It's here, isn't it? People feel it. We know in our bones. God's kingdom is coming."

He was a rangy man with sparse hair and a gap between his two front teeth. He squatted easily, seemed loose-jointed and comfortable. I realized he was wearing a suit and tie with running shoes.

"Are these great days?" he said.

I studied his face, trying to find a clue to the right answer.

"Do you feel it coming? Is it on the way? Do you *want* it to come?"

He bounced on his toes as he spoke.

"Wars, famines, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions. It's all beginning to jell. In your own words, is there anything that can stop it from coming once it picks up momentum?"

"No."

"You said it, I didn't. Floods, tornados, epidemics of strange new diseases. Is it a sign? Is it the truth? Are you ready?"

4. Jack had caught Babette taking an experimental pill meant to cure the fear of death; she claimed she was swallowing a Life Saver candy or saliva. Jack also wants a supply of these pills.

"Do people really feel it in their bones?" I said.

"Good news travels fast."

"Do people talk about it? On your door-to-door visits, do you get the impression they want it?"

"It's not do they want it. It's where do I go to sign up. It's get me out of here right now. People ask, 'Is there seasonal change in God's kingdom?' They ask, 'Are there bridge tolls and returnable bottles?' In other words I'm saying they're getting right down to it."

"You feel it's a ground swell."

"A sudden gathering. Exactly put. I took one look and I knew. This is a man who understands."

"Earthquakes are not up, statistically."

He gave me a condescending smile. I felt it was richly deserved, although I wasn't sure why. Maybe it was prissy to be quoting statistics in the face of powerful beliefs, fears, desires.

"How do you plan to spend your resurrection?" he said, as though asking about a long weekend coming up.

"We all get one?"

"You're either among the wicked or among the saved. The wicked get to rot as they walk down the street. They get to feel their own eyes slide out of their sockets. You'll know them by their stickiness and lost parts. People tracking slime of their own making. All the flashiness of Armageddon is in the rotting. The saved know each other by their neatness and reserve. He doesn't have showy ways is how you know a saved person."

He was a serious man, he was matter-of-fact and practical, down to his running shoes. I wondered about his eerie self-assurance, his freedom from doubt. Is this the point of Armageddon? No ambiguity, no more doubt. He was ready to run into the next world. He was forcing the next world to seep into my consciousness, stupendous events that seemed matter-of-fact to him, self-evident, reasonable, imminent, true. I did not feel Armageddon in my bones but I worried about all those people who did, who were ready for it, wishing hard, making phone calls and bank withdrawals. If enough people want it to happen, will it happen? How many people are enough people? Why are we talking to each other from this aboriginal crouch?

He handed me a pamphlet called "Twenty Common Mistakes About the End of the World." I struggled out of the squatting posture, feeling dizziness and back-pain. At the front of the hall a woman was saying something about exposure to toxic agents. Her small voice was almost lost in the shuffling roar of the barracks, the kind of low-level rumble that humans routinely make in large enclosed places. Denise had put down her reference work and was giving me a hard-eyed look. It was the look she usually saved for her father and his latest loss of foothold.

"What's wrong?" I said to her.

"Didn't you hear what the voice said?"

"Exposure."

"That's right," she said sharply.

"What's that got to do with us?"

"Not us," she said. "You."

"Why me?"

"Aren't you the one who got out of the car to fill the gas tank?"

“Where was the airborne event when I did that?”

“Just ahead of us. Don’t you remember? You got back in the car and we went a little ways and then there it was in all those lights.”

“You’re saying when I got out of the car, the cloud may have been close enough to rain all over me.”

“It’s not your fault,” she said impatiently, “but you were practically right in it for about two and a half minutes.”

I made my way up front. Two lines were forming. A to M and N to Z. At the end of each line was a folding table with a microcomputer on it. Technicians milled about, men and women with lapel badges and color-coded armbands. I stood behind the life-jacket-wearing family. They looked bright, happy, and well-drilled. The thick orange vests did not seem especially out of place even though we were on more or less dry land, well above sea level, many miles from the nearest ominous body of water. Stark upheavals bring out every sort of quaint aberration by the very suddenness of their coming. Dashes of color and idiosyncrasy marked the scene from beginning to end.

The lines were not long. When I reached the A-to-M desk, the man seated there typed out data on his keyboard. My name, age, medical history, so on. He was a gaunt young man who seemed suspicious of conversation that strayed outside certain unspecified guidelines. Over the left sleeve on his khaki jacket he wore a green armband bearing the word SIMUVAC.

I related the circumstances of my presumed exposure.

“How long were you out there?”

“Two and a half minutes,” I said. “Is that considered long or short?”

“Anything that puts you in contact with actual emissions means we have a situation.”

“Why didn’t the drifting cloud disperse in all that wind and rain?”

“This is not your everyday cirrus. This is a high-definition event. It is packed with dense concentrations of byproduct. You could almost toss a hook in there and tow it out to sea, which I’m exaggerating to make a point.”

“What about people in the car? I had to open the door to get out and get back in.”

“There are known degrees of exposure. I’d say their situation is they’re minimal risks. It’s the two and a half minutes standing right in it that makes me wince. Actual skin and orifice contact. This is Nyodene D. A whole new generation of toxic waste. What we call state of the art. One part per million million can send a rat into a permanent state.”

He regarded me with the grimly superior air of a combat veteran. Obviously he didn’t think much of people whose complacent and overprotected lives did not allow for encounters with brain-dead rats. I wanted this man on my side. He had access to data. I was prepared to be servile and fawning if it would keep him from dropping casually shattering remarks about my degree of exposure and chances for survival.

“That’s quite an armband you’ve got there. What does SIMUVAC mean? Sounds important.”

“Short for simulated evacuation. A new state program they’re still battling over funds for.”

“But this evacuation isn’t simulated. It’s real.”

“We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model.”

"A form of practice? Are you saying you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?"

"We took it right into the streets."

"How is it going?" I said.

"The insertion curve isn't as smooth as we would like. There's a probability excess. Plus which we don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation. In other words we're forced to take our victims as we find them. We didn't get a jump on computer traffic. Suddenly it just spilled out, three-dimensionally, all over the landscape. You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. There's a lot of polishing we still have to do. But that's what this exercise is all about."

"What about the computers? Is that real data you're running through the system or is it just practice stuff?"

"You watch," he said.

He spent a fair amount of time tapping on the keys and then studying coded responses on the data screen—a considerably longer time, it seemed to me, than he'd devoted to the people who'd preceded me in line. In fact I began to feel that others were watching me. I stood with my arms folded, trying to create a picture of an impassive man, someone in line at a hardware store waiting for the girl at the register to ring up his heavy-duty rope. It seemed the only way to neutralize events, to counteract the passage of computerized dots that registered my life and death. Look at no one, reveal nothing, remain still. The genius of the primitive mind is that it can render human helplessness in noble and beautiful ways.

"You're generating big numbers," he said, peering at the screen.

"I was out there only two and a half minutes. That's how many seconds?"

"It's not just you were out there so many seconds. It's your whole data profile. I tapped into your history. I'm getting bracketed numbers with pulsing stars."

"What does that mean?"

"You'd rather not know."

He made a silencing gesture as if something of particular morbid interest was appearing on the screen. I wondered what he meant when he said he'd tapped into my history. Where was it located exactly? Some state or federal agency, some insurance company or credit firm or medical clearinghouse? What history was he referring to? I'd told him some basic things. Height, weight, childhood diseases. What else did he know? Did he know about my wives, my involvement with Hitler, my dreams and fears?⁵

He had a skinny neck and jug-handle ears to go with his starved skull—the innocent prewar look of a rural murderer.

"Am I going to die?"

"Not as such," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Not in so many words."

"How many words does it take?"

"It's not a question of words. It's a question of years. We'll know more in fifteen years. In the meantime we definitely have a situation."

5. Jack has been married five times to four different women; his academic field is called Hitler Studies.

“What will we know in fifteen years?”

“If you’re still alive at the time, we’ll know that much more than we do now. Nyodene D. has a life span of thirty years. You’ll have made it halfway through.”

“I thought it was forty years.”

“Forty years in the soil. Thirty years in the human body.”

“So, to outlive this substance, I will have to make it into my eighties. Then I can begin to relax.”

“Knowing what we know at this time.”

“But the general consensus seems to be that we don’t know enough at this time to be sure of anything.”

“Let me answer like so. If I was a rat I wouldn’t want to be anywhere within a two hundred mile radius of the airborne event.”

“What if you were a human?”

He looked at me carefully. I stood with my arms folded, staring over his head toward the front door of the barracks. To look at him would be to declare my vulnerability.

“I wouldn’t worry about what I can’t see or feel,” he said. “I’d go ahead and live my life. Get married, settle down, have kids. There’s no reason you can’t do these things, knowing what we know.”

“But you said we have a situation.”

“I didn’t say it. The computer did. The whole system says it. It’s what we call a massive data-base tally. Gladney, J. A. K. I punch in the name, the substance, the exposure time and then I tap into your computer history. Your genetics, your personals, your medicals, your psychologicals, your police-and-hospitals. It comes back pulsing stars. This doesn’t mean anything is going to happen to you as such, at least not today or tomorrow. It just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that.”

“And this massive so-called tally is not a simulation despite that armband you’re wearing. It is real.”

“It is real,” he said.

I stood absolutely still. If they thought I was already dead, they might be inclined to leave me alone. I think I felt as I would if a doctor had held an X-ray to the light showing a star-shaped hole at the center of one of my vital organs. Death has entered. It is inside you. You are said to be dying and yet are separate from the dying, can ponder it at your leisure, literally see on the X-ray photograph or computer screen the horrible alien logic of it all. It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying.

I wanted my academic gown⁶ and dark glasses.

When I got back to the other end of the barracks, the three younger children were asleep, Heinrich was making notations on a road map and Babette was seated some distance away with Old Man Treadwell and a number of other blind people. She was reading to them from a small and brightly colored stack of supermarket tabloids.

6. The ceremonial robe whose color and style indicates the level, subject, and often the place, of the wearer’s education; the robes are worn by scholars during commencement and other ritual occasions.

I needed a distraction. I found a camp chair and set it near the wall behind Babette. There were four blind people, a nurse and three sighted people arranged in a semicircle facing the reader. Others occasionally paused to listen to an item or two, then moved on. Babette employed her storytelling voice, the same sincere and lilting tone she used when she read fairy tales to Wilder or erotic passages to her husband in their brass bed high above the headlong traffic hum.

She reported a front-page story. "Life After Death Guaranteed with Bonus Coupons." Then turned to the designated page.

"Scientists at Princeton's famed Institute for Advanced Studies have stunned the world by presenting absolute and undeniable proof of life after death. A researcher at the world-renowned Institute has used hypnosis to induce hundreds of people to recall their previous-life experiences as pyramid-builders, exchange students, and extraterrestrials."

Babette changed her voice to do dialogue.

"'In the last year alone,' declares reincarnation hypnotist Ling Ti Wan, 'I have helped hundreds to regress to previous lives under hypnosis. One of my most amazing subjects was a woman who was able to recall her life as a hunter-gatherer in the Mesolithic era ten thousand years ago. It was remarkable to hear this tiny senior citizen in polyester slacks describe her life as a hulking male chieftain whose band inhabited a peat bog and hunted wild boar with primitive bow and arrow. She was able to identify features of that era which only a trained archaeologist could know about. She even spoke several phrases in the language of that day, a tongue remarkably similar to modern-day German.'"

Babette's voice resumed its tone of straight narration.

"Dr. Shiv Chatterjee, fitness guru and high-energy physicist, recently stunned a live TV audience by relating the well-documented case of two women, unknown to each other, who came to him for regression in the same week, only to discover that they had been twin sisters in the lost city of Atlantis fifty thousand years ago. Both women describe the city, before its mysterious and catastrophic plunge into the sea, as a clean and well-run municipality where you could walk safely almost any time of day or night. Today they are food stylists for NASA.⁷

"Even more startling is the case of five-year-old Patti Weaver who has made convincing claims to Dr. Chatterjee that in her previous-life experience she was the secret KGB⁸ assassin responsible for the unsolved murders of famed personalities Howard Hughes, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley. Known in international espionage circles as 'the Viper' for the deadly and untraceable venom he injected into the balls of the feet of his celebrity victims, the assassin died in a fiery Moscow helicopter crash just hours before little Patti Weaver was born in Popular Mechanics, Iowa. She not only has the same bodily markings as the Viper but seems to have a remarkable knack for picking up Russian words and phrases.

"'I regressed this subject at least a dozen times,' says Dr. Chatterjee. 'I used the toughest professional techniques to get her to contradict herself.

7. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the government agency responsible for space exploration.

8. Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB)

or "Committee for State Security," the Soviet Union's secretive national spy and security agency, in operation from the 1950s through the 1980s.

But her story is remarkably consistent. It is a tale of the good that can come from evil.' Says little Patti, 'At the moment of my death as the Viper, I saw a glowing circle of light. It seemed to welcome me, to beckon. It was a warm spiritual experience. I just walked right toward it. I was not sad at all.'"

Babette did the voices of Dr. Chatterjee and Patti Weaver. Her Chatterjee was a warm and mellow Indian-accented English, with clipped phrasing. She did Patti as a child-hero in a contemporary movie, the only person on screen who is unawed by mysterious throbbing phenomena.

"In a further startling development it was revealed by little Patti that the three supercelebrities were murdered for the same astonishing reason. Each of them at the time of his or her death was in secret possession of the Holy Shroud of Turin,⁹ famed for its sacred curative powers. Entertainers Elvis and Marilyn were drink-and-drug nightmare victims and secretly hoped to restore spiritual and bodily calm to their lives by actually drying themselves with the Holy Shroud after pore-cleansing sessions in the sauna. Multifaceted billionaire Howard Hughes suffered from stop-action blink syndrome, a bizarre condition which prevented his eyes from reopening for hours after a simple blink, and he obviously hoped to utilize the amazing power of the Shroud until the Viper intervened with a swift injection of phantom venom. Patti Weaver has further revealed under hypnosis that the KGB has long sought possession of the Shroud of Turin on behalf of the rapidly aging and pain-racked members of the Politburo, the famed executive committee of the Communist Party. Possession of the Shroud is said to be the real motive behind the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II at the Vatican—an attempt that failed only because the Viper had already died in a horror helicopter crash and been reborn as a freckle-faced girl in Iowa.

"The no-risk bonus coupon below gives you guaranteed access to dozens of documented cases of life after death, everlasting life, previous-life experiences, posthumous life in outer space, transmigration of souls, and personalized resurrection through stream-of-consciousness computer techniques."

I studied the faces in the semicircle. No one seemed amazed by this account. Old Man Treadwell lit a cigarette, impatient with his own trembling hand, forced to shake out the flame before it burned him. There was no interest shown in discussion, The story occupied some recess of passive belief. There it was, familiar and comforting in its own strange way, a set of statements no less real than our daily quota of observable household fact. Even Babette in her tone of voice betrayed no sign of skepticism or condescension. Surely I was in no position to feel superior to these elderly listeners, blind or sighted. Little Patti's walk toward the warm welcoming glow found me in a weakened and receptive state. I wanted to believe at least this part of the tale.

Babette read an ad. The Stanford Linear Accelerator 3-Day Particle-Smashing Diet.

She picked up another tabloid. The cover story concerned the country's leading psychics and their predictions for the coming year. She read the items slowly.

9. A linen cloth, bearing the likeness of the front and back of a man's face and body marked with the wounds of crucifixion, that is believed

by some to be the cloth that wrapped the body of Jesus following his death on the cross.

“Squadrons of UFOs will invade Disney World and Cape Canaveral.¹ In a startling twist, the attack will be revealed as a demonstration of the folly of war, leading to a nuclear test-ban treaty between the U.S. and Russia.

“The ghost of Elvis Presley will be seen taking lonely walks at dawn around Graceland, his musical mansion.

“A Japanese consortium will buy Air Force One² and turn it into a luxury flying condominium with midair refueling privileges and air-to-surface missile capability.

“Bigfoot will appear dramatically at a campsite in the rugged and scenic Pacific Northwest. The hairy, upright man-beast, who stands eight feet tall and may be evolution’s missing link, will gently welcome tourists to gather around him, revealing himself to be an apostle of peace.

“UFOs will raise the lost city of Atlantis from its watery grave in the Caribbean by telekinetic means and the help of powerful cables with properties not known in earthlike materials. The result will be a ‘city of peace’ where money and passports are totally unknown.

“The spirit of Lyndon B. Johnson³ will contact CBS executives to arrange an interview on live TV in order to defend itself against charges made in recent books.

“Beatle assassin Mark David Chapman⁴ will legally change his name to John Lennon and begin a new career as a rock lyricist from his prison cell on murderer’s row.

“Members of an air-crash cult will hijack a jumbo jet and crash it into the White House in an act of blind devotion to their mysterious and reclusive leader, known only as Uncle Bob. The President and First Lady will miraculously survive with minor cuts, according to close friends of the couple.

“Dead multibillionaire Howard Hughes will mysteriously appear in the sky over Las Vegas.

“Wonder drugs mass-produced aboard UFO pharmaceutical labs in the weightless environment of space will lead to cures for anxiety, obesity, and mood swings.

“From beyond the grave, dead living legend John Wayne will communicate telepathically with President Reagan⁵ to help frame U.S. foreign policy. Mellowed by death, the strapping actor will advocate a hopeful policy of peace and love.

“Sixties superkiller Charles Manson will break out of prison and terrorize the California countryside for weeks before negotiating a surrender on live TV in the offices of International Creative Management.⁶

“Earth’s only satellite, the moon, will explode on a humid night in July, playing havoc with tides and raining dirt and debris over much of our

1. Cape Canaveral, Florida; location of the John F. Kennedy Space Center.

2. The plane that carries the president of the United States.

3. Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973), 36th president of the United States (1963–69).

4. Mark David Chapman shot and killed the musician John Lennon, founding member of the Beatles, outside Lennon’s apartment in New York City on December 8, 1980.

5. Ronald Reagan (1911–2004), 40th president of the United States (1981–89). He had been a well-

known film and television actor from the 1930s to the late ‘60s. John Wayne (1907–1979), American movie actor famed for his roles in Westerns.

6. A talent agency with offices in Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., and London. “Manson”: Charles Manson (b. 1934), leader of the Manson Family, a cult he founded in California in the late 1960s. Manson was convicted in 1971 of conspiracy to murder seven people; these and other murders were carried out on his orders by members of his cult.

planet. But UFO cleanup crews will help avert a worldwide disaster, signaling an era of peace and harmony.”

I watched the audience. Folded arms, heads slightly tilted. The predictions did not seem reckless to them. They were content to exchange brief and unrelated remarks, as during a break for a commercial on TV. The tabloid future, with its mechanism of a hopeful twist to apocalyptic events, was perhaps not so very remote from our own immediate experience. Look at us, I thought. Forced out of our homes, sent streaming into the bitter night, pursued by a toxic cloud, crammed together in makeshift quarters, ambiguously death-sentenced. We’d become part of the public stuff of media disaster. The small audience of the old and blind recognized the predictions of the psychics as events so near to happening that they had to be shaped in advance to our needs and wishes. Out of some persistent sense of large-scale ruin, we kept inventing hope.

Babette read an ad for diet sunglasses. The old people listened with interest. I went back to our area. I wanted to be near the children, watch them sleep. Watching children sleep makes me feel devout, part of a spiritual system. It is the closest I can come to God. If there is a secular equivalent of standing in a great spired cathedral with marble pillars and streams of mystical light slanting through two-tier Gothic windows, it would be watching children in their little bedrooms fast asleep. Girls especially.

Most of the lights were out now. The barracks roar had subsided. People were settling in. Heinrich was still awake, sitting on the floor, fully dressed, his back to the wall, reading a Red Cross resuscitation manual. He was not, in any case, a child whose lustrous slumber brought me peace. A restless, teeth-grinding, and erratic sleeper, the boy sometimes fell from his bed, to be found in a fetal bundle by early light, shivering on the hardwood floor.

“They seem to have things under control,” I said.

“Who?”

“Whoever’s in charge out there.”

“Who’s in charge?”

“Never mind.”

“It’s like we’ve been flung back in time,” he said. “Here we are in the Stone Age, knowing all these great things after centuries of progress but what can we do to make life easier for the Stone Agers? Can we make a refrigerator? Can we even explain how it works? What is electricity? What is light? We experience these things every day of our lives but what good does it do if we find ourselves hurled back in time and we can’t even tell people the basic principles much less actually make something that would improve conditions. Name one thing you could make. Could you make a simple wooden match that you could strike on a rock to make a flame? We think we’re so great and modern. Moon landings, artificial hearts. But what if you were hurled into a time warp and came face to face with the ancient Greeks. The Greeks invented trigonometry. They did autopsies and dissections. What could you tell an ancient Greek that he couldn’t say, ‘Big deal.’ Could you tell him about the atom? Atom is a Greek word. The Greeks knew that the major events in the universe can’t be seen by the eye of man. It’s waves, it’s rays, it’s particles.”

“We’re doing all right.”

“We’re sitting in this huge moldy room. It’s like we’re flung back.”

"We have heat, we have light."

"These are Stone Age things. They had heat and light. They had fire. They rubbed flints together and made sparks. Could you rub flints together? Would you know a flint if you saw one? If a Stoner Ager asked you what a nucleotide is, could you tell him? How do we make carbon paper?⁷ What is glass? If you came awake tomorrow in the Middle Ages and there was an epidemic raging, what could you do to stop it, knowing what you know about the progress of medicines and diseases? Here it is practically the twenty-first century and you've read hundreds of books and magazines and seen a hundred TV shows about science and medicine. Could you tell those people one little crucial thing that might save a million and a half lives?"

"Boil your water, I'd tell them."

"Sure. What about 'Wash behind your ears.' That's about as good."

"I still think we're doing fairly well. There was no warning. We have food, we have radios."

"What is a radio? What is the principle of a radio? Go ahead, explain. You're sitting in the middle of this circle of people. They use pebble tools. They eat grubs. Explain a radio."

"There's no mystery. Powerful transmitters send signals. They travel through the air, to be picked up by receivers."

"They travel through the air. What, like birds? Why not tell them magic? They travel through the air in magic waves. What is a nucleotide? You don't know, do you? Yet these are the building blocks of life. What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second of every day. But nobody actually knows anything."

"You know something. You know about Nyodene D. I saw you with those people."

"That was a one-time freak," he told me.

He went back to his reading. I decided to get some air. Outside there were several groups of people standing around fires in fifty-five-gallon drums. A man sold soft drinks and sandwiches from an open-sided vehicle. Parked nearby were school buses, motorcycles, smallish vans called ambulettes. I walked around a while. There were people asleep in cars, others pitching tents. Beams of light swung slowly through the woods, searching out sounds, calm voices calling. I walked past a carload of prostitutes from Iron City. The interior light was on, the faces occupied the windows. They resembled the checkout women at the supermarket, blondish, double-chinned, resigned. A man leaned against the front door on the driver's side, speaking through a small opening in the window, his breath showing white. A radio said: "Hog futures⁸ have declined in sympathy, adding bearishness to that market."

I realized the man talking to the prostitutes was Murray Jay Siskind. I walked over there, waited for him to finish his sentence before addressing him. He took off his right glove to shake my hand. The car window went up.

"I thought you were in New York for the term break."

7. A special kind of paper coated on one side with solid ink, used for making copies of documents produced on a typewriter.

8. Financial contract in which the price of a cer-

tain good (hogs) is agreed upon today, with the sale taking place in the future at the agreed-upon price. Profits depend upon what happens to the good's value between contract and sale.

"I came back early to look at car-crash movies. Alfonso arranged a week of screenings to help me prepare for my seminar. I was on the airport bus heading in from Iron City when sirens started blowing. The driver didn't have much choice but to follow the traffic out here."

"Where are you spending the night?"

"The whole bus was assigned to one of the outbuildings. I heard a rumor about painted women and came out to investigate. One of them is dressed in leopard loungewear under her coat. She showed me. Another one says she has a snap-off crotch. What do you think she means by that? I'm a little worried, though, about all these outbreaks of life-style diseases. I carry a reinforced ribbed condom at all times. One size fits all. But I have a feeling it's not much protection against the intelligence and adaptability of the modern virus."

"The women don't seem busy," I said.

"I don't think this is the kind of disaster that leads to sexual abandon. One or two fellows might come skulking out eventually but there won't be an orgiastic horde, not tonight anyway."

"I guess people need time to go through certain stages."

"It's obvious," he said.

I told him I'd spent two and a half minutes exposed to the toxic cloud. Then I summarized the interview I'd had with the SIMUVAC man.

"That little breath of Nyodene has planted a death in my body. It is now official, according to the computer. I've got death inside me. It's just a question of whether or not I can outlive it. It has a life span of its own. Thirty years. Even if it doesn't kill me in a direct way, it will probably outlive me in my own body. I could die in a plane crash and the Nyodene D. would be thriving as my remains were laid to rest."

"This is the nature of modern death," Murray said. "It has a life independent of us. It is growing in prestige and dimension. It has a sweep it never had before. We study it objectively. We can predict its appearance, trace its path in the body. We can take cross-section pictures of it, tape its tremors and waves. We've never been so close to it, so familiar with its habits and attitudes. We know it intimately. But it continues to grow, to acquire breadth and scope, new outlets, new passages and means. The more we learn, the more it grows. Is this some law of physics? Every advance in knowledge and technique is matched by a new kind of death, a new strain. Death adapts, like a viral agent. Is it a law of nature? Or some private superstition of mine? I sense that the dead are closer to us than ever. I sense that we inhabit the same air as the dead. Remember Lao Tse.⁹ There is no difference between the quick and the dead. They are one channel of vitality.' He said this six hundred years before Christ. It is true once again, perhaps more true than ever."

He placed his hands on my shoulders and looked sadly into my face. He told me in the simplest words how sorry he was about what had happened. He talked to me about the likelihood of a computer error. Computers make mistakes, he said. Carpet static can cause a mistake. Some lint or hair in the circuits. He didn't believe this and neither did I. But he spoke convincingly, his eyes filled with spontaneous emotion, a broad and profound feeling.

9. Chinese Taoist poet and philosopher (571–531 B.C.E.).

I felt oddly rewarded. His compassion was equal to the occasion, an impressive pity and grief. The bad news was almost worth it.

"Ever since I was in my twenties, I've had the fear, the dread. Now it's been realized. I feel enmeshed, I feel deeply involved. It's no wonder they call this thing the airborne toxic event. It's an event all right. It marks the end of uneventful things. This is just the beginning. Wait and see."

A talk-show host said: "You are on the air." The fires burned in the oil drums. The sandwich vendor closed down his van.

"Any episodes of *déjà vu* in your group?"

"Wife and daughter," I said.

"There's a theory about *déjà vu*."

"I don't want to hear it."

"Why do we think these things happened before? Simple. They did happen before, in our minds, as visions of the future. Because these are precognitions, we can't fit the material into our system of consciousness as it is now structured. This is basically supernatural stuff. We're seeing into the future but haven't learned how to process the experience. So it stays hidden until the precognition comes true, until we come face to face with the event. Now we are free to remember it, to experience it as familiar material."

"Why are so many people having these episodes now?"

"Because death is in the air," he said gently. "It is liberating suppressed material. It is getting us closer to things we haven't learned about ourselves. Most of us have probably seen our own death but haven't known how to make the material surface. Maybe when we die, the first thing we'll say is, 'I know this feeling. I was here before.'"

He put his hands back on my shoulders, studied me with renewed and touching sadness. We heard the prostitutes call out to someone.

"I'd like to lose interest in myself," I told Murray. "Is there any chance of that happening?"

"None. Better men have tried."

"I guess you're right."

"It's obvious."

"I wish there was something I could do. I wish I could out-think the problem."

"Work harder on your Hitler," he said.

I looked at him. How much did he know?

The car window opened a crack. One of the women said to Murray, "All right, I'll do it for twenty-five."

"Have you checked with your representative?" he said.

She rolled down the window to peer at him. She had the opaque look of a hair-curlered woman on the evening news whose house had been buried in mud.

"You know who I mean," Murray said. "The fellow who sees to your emotional needs in return for one hundred percent of your earnings. The fellow you depend on to beat you up when you're bad."

"Bobby? He's in Iron City, keeping out of the cloud. He doesn't like to expose himself unless it's absolutely necessary."

The women laughed, six heads bobbing. It was insider's laughter, a little overdone, meant to identify them as people bound together in ways not easily appreciated by the rest of us.

A second window opened half an inch, a bright mouth appeared. "The type pimp Bobby is, he likes to use his mind."

A second round of laughter. We weren't sure whether it was at Bobby's expense, or ours, or theirs. The windows went up.

"It's none of my business," I said, "but what is it she's willing to do with you for twenty-five dollars?"

"The Heimlich maneuver."¹

I studied the part of his face that lay between the touring cap and beard. He seemed deep in thought, gazing at the car. The windows were fogged, the women's heads capped in cigarette smoke.

"Of course we'd have to find a vertical space," he said absently.

"You don't really expect her to lodge a chunk of food in her windpipe."

He looked at me, half startled. "What? No, no, that won't be necessary. As long as she makes gagging and choking sounds. As long as she sighs deeply when I jolt the pelvis. As long as she collapses helplessly backward into my life-saving embrace."

He took off his glove to shake my hand. Then he went over to the car to work out details with the woman in question. I watched him knock on the rear door. After a moment it opened and he squeezed into the back seat. I walked over to one of the oil drums. Three men and a woman stood around the fire, passing rumors back and forth.

Three of the live deer at the Kung Fu Palace were dead. The governor was dead, his pilot and co-pilot seriously injured after a crash landing in a shopping mall. Two of the men at the switching yard were dead, tiny acid burns visible in their Mylex suits. Packs of German shepherds, the Nyodene-sniffing dogs, had shed their parachutes and were being set loose in the affected communities. There was a rash of UFO sightings in the area. There was widespread looting by men in plastic sheets. Two looters were dead. Six National Guardsmen were dead, killed in a fire that broke out after a racial incident. There were reports of miscarriages, babies born prematurely. There were sightings of additional billowing clouds.

The people who relayed these pieces of unverified information did so with a certain respectful dread, bouncing on their toes in the cold, arms crossed on their chests. They were fearful that the stories might be true but at the same time impressed by the dramatic character of things. The toxic event had released a spirit of imagination. People spun tales, others listened spellbound. There was a growing respect for the vivid rumor, the most chilling tale. We were no closer to believing or disbelieving a given story than we had been earlier. But there was a greater appreciation now. We began to marvel at our own ability to manufacture awe.

German shepherds. That was the reassuring news I took inside with me. The sturdy body, dense and darkish coat, fierce head, long lapping tongue. I pictured them prowling the empty streets, heavy-gaited, alert. Able to hear sounds we couldn't hear, able to sense changes in the flow of information. I saw them in our house, snouting into closets, tall ears pointed, a smell about them of heat and fur and stored power.

In the barracks almost everyone was sleeping. I made my way along a dim wall. The massed bodies lay in heavy rest, seeming to emit a single nasal

1. First-aid technique for dislodging an obstruction from the windpipe of someone who is choking.

sigh. Figures stirred; a wide-eyed Asian child watched me step among a dozen clustered sleeping bags. Colored lights skipped past my right ear. I heard a toilet flush.

Babette was curled on an air mattress, covered in her coat. My son slept sitting in a chair like some boozed commuter, head rolling on his chest. I carried a camp chair over to the cot where the younger children were. Then I sat there, leaning forward, to watch them sleep.

A random tumble of heads and dangled limbs. In those soft warm faces was a quality of trust so absolute and pure that I did not want to think it might be misplaced. There must be something, somewhere, large and grand and redoubtable enough to justify this shining reliance and implicit belief. A feeling of desperate piety swept over me. It was cosmic in nature, full of yearnings and reachings. It spoke of vast distances, awesome but subtle forces. These sleeping children were like figures in an ad for the Rosicrucians,² drawing a powerful beam of light from somewhere off the page. Steffie turned slightly, then muttered something in her sleep. It seemed important that I know what it was. In my current state, bearing the death impression of the Nyodene cloud, I was ready to search anywhere for signs and hints, intimations of odd comfort. I pulled my chair up closer. Her face in pouchy sleep might have been a structure designed solely to protect the eyes, those great, large and apprehensive things, prone to color phases and a darting alertness, to a perception of distress in others. I sat there watching her. Moments later she spoke again. Distinct syllables this time, not some dreamy murmur—but a language not quite of this world. I struggled to understand. I was convinced she was saying something, fitting together units of stable meaning. I watched her face, waited. Ten minutes passed. She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.

Toyota Celica.

A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform.³ It made me feel that something hovered. But how could this be? A simple brand name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence.

I depend on my children for that.

I sat a while longer, watching Denise, watching Wilder, feeling selfless and spiritually large. There was an empty air mattress on the floor but I wanted to

2. Originally a secretive anti-Catholic philosophical society, founded in Germany in the 17th century. Modern branches of the Rosicrucians, both Christian and Masonic, continue to

propound secret knowledge and to recruit followers.

3. System of writing used in ancient Mesopotamia, with characters pressed into clay tablets.

share Babette's and eased myself next to her body, a dreaming mound. Her hands, feet, and face were drawn under the sheltering coat; only a burst of hair remained. I fell at once into marine oblivion, a deep-dwelling crablike consciousness, silent and dreamless.

1985

RUDOLFO ANAYA

b. 1937

Llano is a Spanish adjective meaning “plain, simple, even, smooth, level”; as a noun, its feminine form (*llana*) indicates a “mason’s trowel,” while the masculine, *llano*, signifies an area of plain, flat ground. On the eastern *llanos* of New Mexico, in the village of Pastura, Rudolfo Anaya was born. This high, arid, windy landscape figures in much of Anaya’s fiction, suggesting the way that nature’s trowel works incessantly to level out human effort. As a Hispanic American, the author can trace his ancestry back through four centuries of activity in this region. As critic Margarite Fernández Olmos notes, Anaya’s parents’ backgrounds combined both sides of the region’s rural life: his mother’s family were farmers growing crops and raising pigs, sheep, and cows in the Puerto de Luna valley, while his father was a free-ranging vaquero, a cowboy whose family tradition was to work with cattle herds in the open rather than settling the land. After Anaya’s father was killed in an accident, his mother married another vaquero, who helped raise his stepson with an understanding of both farming and ranching lifestyles. When still a small child, Anaya moved with his family to the town of Santa Rosa, New Mexico—“the social hub of the surrounding rural communities,” as Olmos describes it, where on busy Highway 66 Anaya could witness the transcontinental link between East Coast and West Coast cultures. Yet the nearby Pecos River and its opportunities for hunting and fishing let the author grow up in close proximity to nature, an experience he would appreciate for its spiritual dimensions. By age fifteen he and his family joined the urban migration that had begun in the years following World War II and moved to a *barrio* (Hispanic neighborhood) in Albuquerque. Here he learned the ways of big cities, another influence on his subsequent fiction. But an accident more typical of rural life directed his interests to literature: while diving into an irrigation ditch that he and his friends were using as a swimming hole, Anaya fractured two vertebrae in his neck and spent much of his seventeenth year recovering in a world of books and meditation. After a false start in business school he became an English major at the University of New Mexico, where he began writing fiction (for himself) and went on to earn M.A. degrees in English and in counseling, and then found work as a high school teacher and guidance counselor.

Bless Me, Ultima (1972) was Anaya’s first novel, published to acclaim within the just-emerging network of the Chicano arts movement that would eventually include recognition of such writers as Rolando Hinojosa, Estella Portillo, Bernice Zamora, and Ricardo Sánchez. As a result of the book’s success Anaya was appointed to a professorship at the University of New Mexico, where he taught until achieving emeritus status in 1993. In the novel, *Ultima* is a practitioner of folk-healing arts developed by women; she serves as mentor to the boy Antonio, who in the coming-

of-age tradition of the *bildungsroman* (think *David Copperfield*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *The Magic Mountain*) must make the choices that will define his adult life. In Antonio's case these conflicts reflect the alternatives of Anaya's boyhood: farming one's land or wandering as a vaquero, taking one's cultural lead from the Hispanic or the Anglo, and sorting out the gender biases in competing systems of religious belief. *Heart of Aztlán* (1976) and *Tortuga* (1979) complete what critics describe as a trilogy of Chicano novels, as the narrative action shifts from the countryside to the city and then to the experiences of a teenager recovering from a paralyzing accident. In all three works the author blends the modern with the ancient, the formalities of culture with folklorish roots, and the plainly discursive with the richly allegorical, producing narratives that proceed on many different levels all at one time.

"Dos," the second chapter of *Bless Me, Ultima*, displays Anaya's characteristic literary techniques, including the mix of Hispanic and Anglo references that helps create the Chicano experience—a condition of living in the borderland area that until 1848 was part of Mexico and that today retains many aspects of Mexican culture, including both Hispanic and Indian elements. In recent years his writing has expanded from autobiography to a more general social vision of Chicano life. *Alburquque* (1992)—the title reflects the original spelling of the city's name—follows the quest of a young boxer who must look beyond his adoptive family to find his roots. With *Zia Summer* (1995) Anaya writes a full-fledged detective novel, introducing a private eye named Sonny Baca, who seeks the murderer of a prominent politician's wife by sorting through the type of social and ethnic issues the author had treated previously in a more personal manner.

Other Sonny Baca novels have followed, all of them reminders of how far "Albuquerque," the largest city in New Mexico, has come from its days as a frontier outpost (while retaining its mix of Spanish, Native American, and mestizo cultures).

The following text is from *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972).

From Bless Me, Ultima

Dos¹

Ultima slipped easily into the routine of our daily life. The first day she put on her apron and helped my mother with breakfast, later she swept the house and then helped my mother wash our clothes in the old washing machine they pulled outside where it was cooler under the shade of the young elm trees. It was as if she had always been here. My mother was very happy because now she had someone to talk to and she didn't have to wait until Sunday when her women friends from the town came up the dusty path to sit in the sala² and visit.

Deborah and Theresa were happy because Ultima did many of the household chores they normally did, and they had more time to spend in the attic and cut out an interminable train of paper dolls which they dressed, gave names to, and most miraculously, made talk.

My father was also pleased. Now he had one more person to tell his dream to. My father's dream was to gather his sons around him and move westward to the land of the setting sun, to the vineyards of California. But the war had taken his three sons and it had made him bitter. He often got

1. Two (Spanish).

2. Living room (Spanish).

drunk on Saturday afternoons and then he would rave against old age, he would rage against the town on the opposite side of the river which drained a man of his freedom, and he would cry because the war had ruined his dream. It was very sad to see my father cry, but I understood it, because sometimes a man has to cry. Even if he is a man.

And I was happy with Ultima. We walked together in the llano³ and along the river banks to gather herbs and roots for her medicines. She taught me the names of plants and flowers, of trees and bushes, of birds and animals; but most important, I learned from her that there was a beauty in the time of day and in the time of night, and that there was peace in the river and in the hills. She taught me to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time. My soul grew under her careful guidance.

I had been afraid of the awful *presence* of the river, which was the soul of the river, but through her I learned that my spirit shared in the spirit of all things. But the innocence which our isolation sheltered could not last forever, and the affairs of the town began to reach across our bridge and enter my life. Ultima's owl gave the warning that the time of peace on our hill was drawing to an end.

It was Saturday night. My mother had laid out our clean clothes for Sunday mass, and we had gone to bed early because we always went to early mass. The house was quiet, and I was in the mist of some dream when I heard the owl cry its warning. I was up instantly, looking through the small window at the dark figure that ran madly towards the house. He hurled himself at the door and began pounding.

"¡Márez!" he shouted, "¡Márez! ¡Ándale, hombre!"⁴

I was frightened, but I recognized the voice. It was Jasón's father.

"¡Un momento!" I heard my father call. He fumbled with the farol.⁵

"¡Ándale, hombre, ándale!" Chávez cried pitifully, "mataron a mi hermano—"⁶

"Ya vengo—"⁷ My father opened the door and the frightened man burst in. In the kitchen I heard my mother moan, "Ave María Purísima, mis hijos—"⁸ She had not heard Chávez' last words, and so she assumed the aviso⁹ was one that brought bad news about her sons.

"Chávez, ¿qué pasa?"¹ My father held the trembling man.

"¡Mi hermano, mi hermano!" Chávez sobbed, "He has killed my brother!"

"¿Pero qué dices, hombre?"² my father exclaimed. He pulled Chávez into the hall and held up the farol. The light cast by the farol revealed the wild, frightened eyes of Chávez.

"¡Gabriel!" my mother cried and came forward, but my father pushed her back. He did not want her to see the monstrous mask of fear on the man's face.

"It is not our sons, it is something in town—get him some water."

"Lo mató, lo mató—"³ Chávez repeated.

3. Plain (Spanish).

4. Come on, man (Spanish).

5. Lantern (Spanish). "Un momento": Just a minute (Spanish).

6. They killed my brother (Spanish).

7. I'm coming now (Spanish).

8. Hail Virgin Mary, my sons (Spanish).

9. Warning (Spanish).

1. Chávez, what's happening? (Spanish).

2. But what are you saying, man? (Spanish).

3. He killed him, he killed him (Spanish).

“Get hold of yourself, hombre, tell me what has happened!” My father shook Chávez and the man’s sobbing subsided. He took the glass of water and drank, then he could talk.

“Reynaldo has just brought the news, my brother is dead,” he sighed and slumped against the wall. Chávez’ brother was the sheriff of the town. The man would have fallen if my father had not held him up.

“¡Madre de Dios!⁴ Who? How?”

“¡Lupito!” Chávez cried out. His face corded with thick veins. For the first time his left arm came up and I saw the rifle he held.

“Jesús, María y José,”⁵ my mother prayed.

My father groaned and slumped against the wall. “Ay que Lupito,” he shook his head, “the war⁶ made him crazy—”

Chávez regained part of his composure. “Get your rifle, we must go to the bridge—”

“The bridge?”

“Reynaldo said to meet him there—The crazy bastard has taken to the river—”

My father nodded silently. He went to the bedroom and returned with his coat. While he loaded his rifle in the kitchen Chávez related what he knew.

“My brother had just finished his rounds,” he gasped, “he was at the bus depot cafe, having coffee, sitting without a care in the world—and the bastard came up to where he sat and without warning shot him in the head—” His body shook as he retold the story.

“Perhaps it is better if you wait here, hombre,” my father said with consolation.

“No!” Chávez shouted. “I must go. He was my brother!”

My father nodded. I saw him stand beside Chávez and put his arm around his shoulders. Now he too was armed. I had only seen him shoot the rifle when we slaughtered pigs in the fall. Now they were going armed for a man.

“Gabriel, be careful,” my mother called as my father and Chávez slipped out into the dark.

“Sí,”⁷ I heard him answer, then the screen door banged. “Keep the doors locked—” My mother went to the door and shut the latch. We never locked our doors, but tonight there was something strange and fearful in the air.

Perhaps this is what drew me out into the night to follow my father and Chávez down to the bridge, or perhaps it was some concern I had for my father. I do not know. I waited until my mother was in the sala then dressed and slipped downstairs. I glanced down the hall and saw candlelight flickering from the sala. That room was never entered unless there were Sunday visitors, or unless my mother took us in to pray novenas and rosaries for my brothers at war. I knew she was kneeling at her altar now, praying. I knew she would pray until my father returned.

I slipped out the kitchen door and into the night. It was cool. I sniffed the air, there was a tinge of autumn in it. I ran up the goat path until I caught sight of two dark shadows ahead of me. Chávez and my father.

4. Mother of God (Spanish).

5. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (Spanish).

6. World War II. “Ay que Lupito”: Oh, that Lupito

(Spanish).

7. Yes (Spanish).

We passed Fío's dark house and then the tall juniper tree that stood where the hill sloped down to the bridge. Even from this distance I could hear the commotion on the bridge. As we neared the bridge I was afraid of being discovered as I had no reason for being there. My father would be very angry. To escape detection I cut to the right and was swallowed up by the dark brush of the river. I pushed through the dense bosque⁸ until I came to the bank of the river. From where I stood I could look up into the flooding beams of light that were pointed down by the excited men. I could hear them giving frenzied, shouted instructions. I looked to my left where the bridge started and saw my father and Chávez running towards the excitement at the center of the bridge.

My eyes were now accustomed to the dark, but it was a glint of light that made me turn and look at a clump of bullrushes in the sweeping water of the river just a few yards away. What I saw made my blood run cold. Crouched in the reeds and half submerged in the muddy waters lay the figure of Lupito, the man who had killed the sheriff. The glint of light was from the pistol he held in his hand.

It was frightening enough to come upon him so suddenly, but as I dropped to my knees in fright I must have uttered a cry because he turned and looked directly at me. At that same moment a beam of light found him and illuminated a face twisted with madness. I do not know if he saw me, or if the light cut off his vision, but I saw his bitter, contorted grin. As long as I live I will never forget those wild eyes, like the eyes of a trapped, savage animal.

At the same time someone shouted from the bridge, "There!" Then all the lights found the crouched figure. He jumped and I saw him as clear as if it were daylight.

"Ayeeeeeee!" He screamed a blood curdling cry that echoed down the river. The men on the bridge didn't know what to do. They stood transfixed, looking down at the mad man waving the pistol in the air. "Ayeeeeeeeee!" He cried again. It was a cry of rage and pain, and it made my soul sick. The cry of a tormented man had come to the peaceful green mystery of my river, and the great *presence* of the river watched from the shadows and deep recesses, as I watched from where I crouched at the bank.

"Japanese sol'jer, Japanese sol'jer!" he cried, "I am wounded. Come help me—" he called to the men on the bridge. The rising mist of the river swirled in the beams of spotlights. It was like a horrible nightmare.

Suddenly he leaped up and ran splashing through the water towards me. The lights followed him. He grew bigger, I heard his panting, the water his feet kicked up splashed on my face, and I thought he would run over me. Then as quickly as he had sprinted in my direction he turned and disappeared again into the dark clumps of reeds in the river. The lights moved in all directions, but they couldn't find him. Some of the lights swept over me and I trembled with fear that I would be found out, or worse, that I would be mistaken for Lupito and shot.

"The crazy bastard got away!" someone shouted on the bridge.

"Ayeeeeeee!" the scream sounded again. It was a cry that I did not understand, and I am sure the men on the bridge did not either. The man they

8. Wood, forest (Spanish).

hunted had slipped away from human understanding; he had become a wild animal, and they were afraid.

"Damn!" I heard them cursing themselves. Then a car with a siren and flashing red light came on the bridge. It was Vigil, the state policeman who patrolled our town.

"Chávez is dead!" I heard him shout. "He never had a chance. His brains blown out—" There was silence.

"We have to kill him!" Jasón's father shouted. His voice was full of anger, rage and desperation.

"I have to deputize you—" Vigil started to say.

"The hell with deputizing!" Chávez shouted. "He killed my brother! ¡Está loco!"⁹ The men agreed with their silence.

"Have you spotted him?" Vigil asked.

"Just now we saw him, but we lost him—"

"He's down there," someone added.

"He is an animal! He has to be shot!" Chávez cried out.

"¡Sí!" the men agreed.

"Now wait a moment—" It was my father who spoke. I do not know what he said because of the shouting. In the meantime I searched the dark of the river for Lupito. I finally saw him. He was about forty feet away, crouched in the reeds as before. The muddy waters of the river lapped and gurgled savagely around him. Before the night had been only cool, now it turned cold and I shivered. I was torn between a fear that made my body tremble, and a desire to help the poor man. But I could not move, I could only watch like a chained spectator.

"Márez is right!" I heard a booming voice on the bridge. In the lights I could make out the figure of Narciso. There was only one man that big and with that voice in town. I knew that Narciso was one of the old people from Las Pasturas, and that he was a good friend to my father. I knew they often drank together on Saturdays, and once or twice he had been to our house.

"¡Por Dios, hombres!"¹ he shouted, "let us act like men! That is not an animal down there, that is a man. Lupito. You all know Lupito. You know that the war made him sick—" But the men would not listen to Narciso. I guess it was because he was the town drunk, and they said he never did anything useful.

"Go back to your drinking and leave this job to men," one of them jeered at him.

"He killed the sheriff in cold blood," another added. I knew that the sheriff had been greatly admired.

"I am not drinking," Narciso persisted, "it is you men who are drunk for blood. You have lost your reason—"

"Reason!" Chávez countered. "What reason did he have for killing my brother. You know," he addressed the men, "my brother did no one harm. Tonight a mad animal crawled behind him and took his life. You call that reason! That animal has to be destroyed!"

"¡Sí! ¡Sí!" the men shouted in unison.

"At least let us try to talk to him," Narciso begged. I knew that it was hard for a man of the llano to beg.

9. He's crazy (Spanish).

1. By God, men (Spanish).

“Yes,” Vigil added, “perhaps he will give himself up—”

“Do you think he’ll listen to talk!” Chávez jumped forward. “He’s down there, and he still has the pistol that killed my brother! Go down and talk to him!” I could see Chávez shouting in Vigil’s face, and Vigil said nothing. Chávez laughed. “This is the only talk he will understand—” he turned and fired over the railing of the bridge. His shots roared then whined away down the river. I could hear the bullets make splashing noises in the water.

“Wait!” Narciso shouted. He took Chávez’ rifle and with one hand held it up. Chávez struggled against him but Narciso was too big and strong. “I will talk to him,” Narciso said. He pushed Chávez back. “I understand your sorrow Chávez,” he said, “but one killing is enough for tonight—” The men must have been impressed by his sincerity because they stood back and waited.

Narciso leaned over the concrete railing and shouted down into the darkness. “Hey Lupito! It is me, Narciso. It is me, hombre, your compadre. Listen my friend, a very bad business has happened tonight, but if we act like men we can settle it—Let me come down and talk to you, Lupito. Let me help you—”

I looked at Lupito. He had been watching the action on the bridge, but now as Narciso talked to him I saw his head slump on his chest. He seemed to be thinking. I prayed that he would listen to Narciso and that the angry and frustrated men on the bridge would not commit mortal sin. The night was very quiet. The men on the bridge awaited an answer. Only the lapping water of the river made a sound.

“¡Amigo!”² Narciso shouted, “You know I am your friend, I want to help you, hombre—” He laughed softly. “Hey, Lupito, you remember just a few years ago, before you went to the war, you remember the first time you came into the Eight Ball to gamble a little. Remember how I taught you how Juan Botas marked the aces with a little tobacco juice, and he thought you were green, but you beat him!” He laughed again. “Those were good times, Lupito, before the war came. Now we have this bad business to settle. But we are friends who will help you—”

I saw Lupito’s tense body shake. A low, sad mournful cry tore itself from his throat and mixed into the lapping sound of the waters of the river. His head shook slowly, and I guess he must have been thinking and fighting between surrendering or remaining free, and hunted. Then like a coiled spring he jumped up, his pistol aimed straight up. There was a flash of fire and the loud report of the pistol. But he had not fired at Narciso or at any of the men on the bridge! The spotlights found him.

“There’s your answer!” Chávez shouted.

“He’s firing! He’s firing!” Another voice shouted. “He’s crazy!”

Lupito’s pistol sounded again. Still he was not aiming at the men on the bridge. He was shooting to draw their fire!

“Shoot! Shoot!” someone on the bridge called.

“No, no,” I whispered through clenched lips. But it was too late for anything. The frightened men responded by aiming their rifles over the side of the bridge. One single shot sounded then a barrage followed it like the roar of a canon, like the rumble of thunder in a summer thunderstorm.

2. Friend (Spanish).

Many shots found their mark. I saw Lupito lifted off his feet and hurled backward by the bullets. But he got up and ran limping and crying towards the bank where I lay.

“Bless me—” I thought he cried, and the second volley of shots from the bridge sounded, but this time they sounded like a great whirling of wings, like pigeons swirling to roost on the church top. He fell forward then clawed and crawled out of the holy water of the river onto the bank in front of me. I wanted to reach out and help him, but I was frozen by my fear. He looked up at me and his face was bathed in water and flowing, hot blood, but it was also dark and peaceful as it slumped into the sand of the riverbank. He made a strange gurgling sound in his throat, then he was still. Up on the bridge a great shout went up. The men were already running to the end of the bridge to come down and claim the man whose dead hands dug into the soft, wet sand in front of me.

I turned and ran. The dark shadows of the river enveloped me as I raced for the safety of home. Branches whipped at my face and cut it, and vines and tree trunks caught at my feet and tripped me. In my headlong rush I disturbed sleeping birds and their shrill cries and slapping wings hit at my face. The horror of darkness had never been so complete as it was for me that night.

I had started praying to myself from the moment I heard the first shot and I never stopped praying until I reached home. Over and over through my mind ran the words of the Act of Contrition. I had not yet been to catechism nor had I made my first holy communion, but my mother had taught me the Act of Contrition. It was to be said after one made his confession to the priest, and as the last prayer before death.

Did God listen? Would he hear? Had he seen my father on the bridge? And where was Lupito’s soul winging to, or was it washing down the river to the fertile valley of my uncles’ farms?

A priest could have saved Lupito. Oh why did my mother dream for me to be a priest! How would I ever wash away the stain of blood from the sweet waters of my river! I think at that time I began to cry because as I left the river brush and headed up the hills I heard my sobs for the first time.

It was also then that I heard the owl. Between my gasps for air and my sobs I stopped and listened for its song. My heart was pounding and my lungs hurt, but a calmness had come over the moonlit night when I heard the hooting of Ultima’s owl. I stood still for a long time. I realized that the owl had been with me throughout the night. It had watched over all that had happened on the bridge. Suddenly the terrible, dark fear that had possessed me was gone.

I looked at the house that my father and my brothers had built on the juniper-patched hill; it was quiet and peaceful in the blue night. The sky sparkled with a million stars and the Virgin’s horned moon, the moon of my mother’s people, the moon of the Lunas.³ My mother would be praying for the soul of Lupito.

Again the owl sang, Ultima’s spirit bathed me with its strong resolution. I turned and looked across the river. Some lights shone in the town. In the

3. “Lunas”: moons. “Virgin”: Virgin Mary.

moonlight I could make out the tower of the church, the school house top, and way beyond the glistening of the town's water tank. I heard the soft wail of a siren and I knew the men would be pulling Lupito from the river.

The river's brown waters would be stained with blood, forever and ever and ever . . .

In the autumn I would have to go to the school in the town, and in a few years I would go to catechism lessons in the church. I shivered. My body began to hurt from the beating it had taken from the brush of the river. But what hurt more was that I had witnessed for the first time the death of a man.

My father did not like the town or its way. When we had first moved from Las Pasturas we had lived in a rented house in the town. But every evening after work he had looked across the river to these barren, empty hills, and finally he had bought a couple of acres and began building our house. Everyone told him he was crazy, that the rocky, wild hill could sustain no life, and my mother was more than upset. She wanted to buy along the river where the land was fertile and there was water for the plants and trees. But my father won the fight to be close to his llano, because truthfully our hill was the beginning of the llano, from here it stretched away as far as the eye could see, to Las Pasturas and beyond.

The men of the town had murdered Lupito. But he had murdered the sheriff. They said the war had made him crazy. The prayers for Lupito mixed into prayers for my brothers. So many different thoughts raced through my mind that I felt dizzy, and very weary and sick. I ran the last of the way and slipped quietly into the house. I groped for the stair railing in the dark and felt a warm hand take mine. Startled, I looked up into Ultima's brown, wrinkled face.

"You knew!" I whispered. I understood that she did not want my mother to hear.

"Sí," she replied.

"And the owl—" I gasped. My mind searched for answers, but my body was so tired that my knees buckled and I fell forward. As small and thin as Ultima was she had the strength to lift me in her arms and carry me into her room. She placed me on her bed and then by the light of a small, flickering candle she mixed one of her herbs in a tin cup, held it over the flame to warm, then gave it to me to drink.

"They killed Lupito," I said as I gulped the medicine.

"I know," she nodded. She prepared a new potion and with this she washed the cuts on my face and feet.

"Will he go to hell?" I asked.

"That is not for us to say, Antonio. The war-sickness was not taken out of him, he did not know what he was doing—"

"And the men on the bridge, my father!"

"Men will do what they must do," she answered. She sat on the bed by my side. Her voice was soothing, and the drink she had given me made me sleepy. The wild, frightening excitement in my body began to die.

"The ways of men are strange, and hard to learn," I heard her say.

"Will I learn them?" I asked. I felt the weight on my eyelids.

"You will learn much, you will see much," I heard her far-away voice. I felt a blanket cover me. I felt safe in the warm sweetness of the room. Outside the owl sang its dark questioning to the night, and I slept.

But even into my deep sleep my dreams came. In my dream I saw my three brothers. I saw them as I remembered them before they went away to war, which seemed so very long ago. They stood by the house that we rented in town and they looked across the river at the hills of the llano.

Father says that the town steals our freedom; he says that we must build a castle across the river, on the lonely hill of the mockingbirds. I think it was León who spoke first, he was the eldest, and his voice always had a sad note to it. But in the dark mist of the dream I could not be sure.

His heart has been heavy since we came to the town, the second figure spoke, his forefathers were men of the sea, the Márez people, they were conquistadores, men whose freedom was unbounded.

It was Andrew who said that! It was Andrew! I was sure because his voice was husky like his thick and sturdy body.

Father says the freedom of the wild horse is in the Márez blood, and his gaze is always westward. His fathers before him were vaqueros,⁴ and so he expects us to be men of the llano. I was sure the third voice belonged to Eugene.

I longed to touch them. I was hungry for their company. Instead I spoke.

We must all gather around our father, I heard myself say. His dream is to ride westward in search of new adventure. He builds highways that stretch into the sun, and we must travel that road with him.

My brothers frowned. You are a Luna, they chanted in unison, you are to be a farmer-priest for mother!

The doves came to drink in the still pooh of the river and their cry was mournful in the darkness of my dream.

My brothers laughed. You are but a baby, Tony, you are our mother's dream. Stay and sleep to the doves cou-rou while we cross the mighty River of the Carp to build our father's castle in the hills.

I must go! I cried to the three dark figures. I must lift the muddy waters of the river in blessing to our new home!

Along the river the tormented cry of a lonely goddess filled the valley. The winding wail made the blood of men run cold.

It is la llorona,⁵ my brothers cried in fear, the old witch who cries along the river banks and seeks the blood of boys and men to drink!

La llorona seeks the soul of Antoniooooooooo . . .

It is the soul of Lupito, they cried in fear, doomed to wander the river at night because the waters washed his soul away!

Lupito seeks his blessinggggggggg . . .

It is neither! I shouted. I swung the dark robe of the priest over my shoulders then lifted my hands in the air. The mist swirled around me and sparks flew when I spoke. It is the presence of the river!

Save us, my brothers cried and cowered at my words.

I spoke to the presence of the river and it allowed my brothers to cross with their carpenter tools to build our castle on the hill.

Behind us I heard my mother moan and cry because with each turning of the sun her son was growing old . . .

1972

4. Cowboys (Spanish).

5. A ghost (Spanish); in Chicana/o and Mexican lore, a spurned mistress who drowned her

children and was fated to eternally seek their recovery.

THOMAS PYNCHON

b. 1937

Thomas Pynchon has remained the most private of contemporary American writers, without so much as a photograph of him in circulation. A few facts are known: born on Long Island, graduated from Cornell University—where he was a student in Vladimir Nabokov’s European literature course—in the late 1950s, served a term in the navy, and now lives—it is said—in southern (or is it northern?) California. He appeared twice as a character with a paper bag over his head on the cartoon comedy show *The Simpsons*, in 2004, voicing himself. Beyond that, silence, which has been broken only by eight strange and distinctive novels, plus a few short stories.

“Entropy,” one of Pynchon’s first publications (1960), is printed here as an introduction to his work. Its thematics of an elusive order within radical disorder anticipates his first novel, *V.* (1963), particularly in its reference to modern physics. That complex novel cannot be understood by reference to convenient fictional signposts. Although it showed an indebtedness to Faulkner and Joyce (an indebtedness shared by most serious American novelists), Pynchon’s style was already wholly his own. In writing that was by turns labyrinthine, eloquent, and colloquial, he showed a particular fondness for imitating and parodying various styles. But instead of disparaging or minimizing their subjects, these imitations and parodies radiated a generous exuberance that extended to the many characters who inhabit *V.* and whose individual paranoidias—Pynchon’s word to characterize attempts to make connections between events—propel them into unbelievably complicated and absurd plots. The interest of *V.* was largely in the inventiveness with which Pynchon developed those plots, which might involve anything from diplomatic spy stories in nineteenth-century Africa to the bombing of Malta during World War II to the surgical reconstruction of a young woman’s nose to a hunt for alligators in New York City sewers.

The comic talent shown in various New York episodes from *V.* was also evident in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966). This short, perfectly controlled novel teases us and itself with questions about the meaning of our American heritage, as embodied in the form of the mysterious legacy left to its heroine, Oedipa Maas. (The jokey yet portentous name exemplifies Pynchon’s way of playing at “significance.”) What is the connection between this legacy and the mysterious alternative to the U.S. Postal System on which Oedipa believes she has stumbled? Is there a secret network of alienated citizens carrying on their lives outside the ordinary systems and institutions of American life? Or is it all Oedipa’s delusion, her private paranoia? These questions are considered through a style that continually surprises and unsettles us, though it is less discontinuous than *V.*’s. In Pynchon’s world everything serious has its silly aspects (inspired by the Marx Brothers and countless other comic acts), while bits of trivia and foolery are suddenly elevated, through the style, into objects of sublime contemplation—as at the novel’s end, when Oedipa thinks of “squatters” who “slept in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even, daring, spent the night up some pole in a lineman’s tent like caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages.” Often Pynchon’s sentences enact the daring freedom he admires, in contrast to the institutions of a technological society.

Pynchon's longest and most daring and exhaustive effort came with the publication, in 1973, of *Gravity's Rainbow*. This encyclopedic fantasy operates through brilliant improvisations, tall tales, obscene parables, and burlesque stage routines, all of which work together into a story of supersonic capabilities and annihilative retributions. A huge cast of characters, each with a crazy name and a plot to unravel, is located all over the map, but mainly in World War II London and in postwar Germany. As the four main and the countless subsidiary plots take shape, characters—and the reader—attempt to “read” the messages flickering, the dumb intent to communicate, in the most casual as well as the most portentous sign. Pynchon's knowingness and fascination with popular culture are overwhelmingly evident in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as is his preoccupation with the lore of theoretical science, of obscure historical tales, and of contemporary comic books. No one denies the formidably encyclopedic nature of this astonishing effort; the question is, as Warner Berthoff has asked, whether that effort may not also be “encyclopedically monotonous and static.” More readers begin *Gravity's Rainbow* than finish it.

After 1973, except for the publication in 1984 of some of his early stories (in *Slow Learner*), all was silent on the Pynchon front until *Vineland* appeared in 1990, followed by *Mason & Dixon* in 1997 and *Against the Day* in 2006. *Vineland* is wonderful on the California terrain and has much freewheeling and funny inventiveness; at other times Pynchon seems to be flogging his material and repeating himself. *Mason & Dixon*, about the plotters of the line that would differentiate the American North and South, is written in the manner of his more ambitious works, a massive “mega-novel” that by its very excesses of character, plot, and references to history (arcane and otherwise) seeks to overwhelm the reader with its display of authority. *Against the Day* (2006) and *Inherent Vice* (2009) have more conventional subjects—family-revenge drama and crime solving, respectively—yet the author still dotes on fantastic inventions and overwritten prose. *Bleeding Edge* (2013) was a National Book Award finalist; it is a detective story set in New York City in the early days of the Internet and during the months prior to the attacks of September 11. Although there is still no consensus on his stature as an enduring American writer, there is general recognition of the quirky, uncanny exactitude of his imagination, evident across his oeuvre. Pynchon's theatrical spellbindings as a man of metaphor, and his feats of association (in Robert Frost's phrase), are employed on subjects—like the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*—that were thought to be beyond words. For daring, wit, and exuberance, no contemporary writer excels him.

The following text is from *Slow Learner* (1984).

Entropy

Boris has just given me a summary of his views. He is a weather prophet. The weather will continue bad, he says. There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of a change anywhere. . . . We must get into step, a lockstep toward the prison of death. There is no escape. The weather will not change.

—*Tropic of Cancer*¹

Downstairs, Meatball Mulligan's lease-breaking party was moving into its 40th hour. On the kitchen floor, amid a litter of empty champagne fifths, were Sandor Rojas and three friends, playing spit in the ocean and staying

1. Novel (1934) by the American writer Henry Miller (1891–1980).

awake on Heidseck² and benzedrine pills. In the living room Duke, Vincent, Krinkles and Paco sat crouched over a 15-inch speaker which had been bolted into the top of a wastepaper basket, listening to 27 watts' worth of *The Heroes' Gate at Kiev*.³ They all wore hornrimmed sunglasses and rapt expressions, and smoked funny-looking cigarettes which contained not, as you might expect, tobacco, but an adulterated form of *cannabis sativa*.⁴ This group was the Duke di Angelis quartet. They recorded for a local label called Tambú and had to their credit one 10' LP entitled *Songs of Outer Space*. From time to time one of them would flick the ashes from his cigarette into the speaker cone to watch them dance around. Meatball himself was sleeping over by the window, holding an empty magnum to his chest as if it were a teddy bear. Several government girls, who worked for people like the State Department and NSA, had passed out on couches, chairs and in one case the bathroom sink.

This was in early February of '57 and back then there were a lot of American expatriates around Washington, D.C., who would talk, every time they met you, about how someday they were going to go over to Europe for real but right now it seemed they were working for the government. Everyone saw a fine irony in this. They would stage, for instance, polyglot parties where the newcomer was sort of ignored if he couldn't carry on simultaneous conversations in three or four languages. They would haunt Armenian delicatessens for weeks at a stretch and invite you over for bulghour and lamb in tiny kitchens whose walls were covered with bullfight posters. They would have affairs with sultry girls from Andalucía or the Midi⁵ who studied economics at Georgetown. Their Dôme was a collegiate Rathskeller out on Wisconsin Avenue called the Old Heidelberg and they had to settle for cherry blossoms instead of lime trees when spring came, but in its lethargic way their life provided, as they said, kicks.

At the moment, Meatball's party seemed to be gathering its second wind. Outside there was rain. Rain splatted against the tar paper on the roof and was fractured into a fine spray off the noses, eyebrows and lips of wooden gargoyles under the eaves, and ran like drool down the windowpanes. The day before, it had snowed and the day before that there had been winds of gale force and before that the sun had made the city glitter bright as April, though the calendar read early February. It is a curious season in Washington, this false spring. Somewhere in it are Lincoln's Birthday and the Chinese New Year, and a forlornness in the streets because cherry blossoms are weeks away still and, as Sarah Vaughan has put it, spring will be a little late this year. Generally crowds like the one which would gather in the Old Heidelberg on weekday afternoons to drink Würtzburger and to sing Lili Marlene (not to mention The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi) are inevitably and incorrigibly Romantic. And as every good Romantic knows, the soul (*spiritus, ruach, pneuma*)⁶ is nothing, substantially, but air; it is only natural that warping in the atmosphere should be recapitulated in those who breathe it. So that over and above the public components—holidays, tour-

2. A very dry champagne. "Spit in the ocean": a form of poker.

3. Music by the Russian composer Modest Musorgsky (1839–1881) from his *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

4. Marijuana.

5. Regions of Spain and France, respectively.

6. "Soul" (and also "breath") in, respectively, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek.



The Gerry Mulligan Quartet premiered in Los Angeles in 1952 with Mulligan on baritone saxophone, Chet Baker on trumpet, Bob Whitlock on bass, and Chico Hamilton on drums. There was no pianist, an innovation for small ensemble jazz, leaving harmonic silences for the other instruments to fill.

ist attractions—there are private meanderings, linked to the climate as if this spell were a *stretto* passage in the year's fugue: haphazard weather, aimless loves, unpredicted commitments: months one can easily spend *in fugue*, because oddly enough, later on, winds, rains, passions of February and March are never remembered in that city, it is as if they had never been.

The last bass notes of *The Heroes' Gate* boomed up through the floor and woke Callisto from an uneasy sleep. The first thing he became aware of was a small bird he had been holding gently between his hands, against his body. He turned his head sidewise on the pillow to smile down at it, at its blue hunched-down head and sick, lidded eyes, wondering how many more nights he would have to give it warmth before it was well again. He had been holding the bird like that for three days: it was the only way he knew to restore its health. Next to him the girl stirred and whimpered, her arm thrown across her face. Mingled with the sounds of the rain came the first tentative, querulous morning voices of the other birds, hidden in philodendrons and small fan palms: patches of scarlet, yellow and blue laced through this Rousseau-like⁷ fantasy, this hothouse jungle it had taken him seven years to weave together. Hermetically sealed, it was a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the vagaries of the weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder. Through trial-and-error Callisto had perfected its ecological balance, with the help of the girl its artistic harmony, so that the swaying of its plant life, the stirrings of its birds and human inhabitants

7. Henri Rousseau (1844–1910), French primitive painter of exotic landscapes.

were all as integral as the rhythms of a perfectly-executed mobile. He and the girl could no longer, of course, be omitted from that sanctuary; they had become necessary to its unity. What they needed from outside was delivered. They did not go out.

"Is he all right," she whispered. She lay like a tawny question mark facing him, her eyes suddenly huge and dark and blinking slowly. Callisto ran a finger beneath the feathers at the base of the bird's neck; caressed it gently. "He's going to be well, I think. See: he hears his friends beginning to wake up." The girl had heard the rain and the birds even before she was fully awake. Her name was Aubade: she was part French and part Anamese, and she lived on her own curious and lonely planet, where the clouds and the odor of poincianas, the bitterness of wine and the accidental fingers at the small of her back or feathery against her breasts came to her reduced inevitably to the terms of sound: of music which emerged at intervals from a howling darkness of discordancy. "Aubade," he said, "go see." Obedient, she arose; padded to the window, pulled aside the drapes and after a moment said: "It is 37. Still 37." Callisto frowned. "Since Tuesday, then," he said. "No change." Henry Adams,⁸ three generations before his own, had stared aghast at Power; Callisto found himself now in much the same state over Thermodynamics, the inner life of that power, realizing like his predecessor that the Virgin and the dynamo stand as much for love as for power; that the two are indeed identical; and that love therefore not only makes the world go round but also makes the boccie ball spin, the nebula precess. It was this latter or sidereal element which disturbed him. The cosmologists had predicted an eventual heat-death for the universe (something like Limbo: form and motion abolished, heat-energy identical at every point in it); the meteorologists, day-to-day, staved it off by contradicting with a reassuring array of varied temperatures.

But for three days now, despite the changeful weather, the mercury had stayed at 37 degrees Fahrenheit. Leery at omens of apocalypse, Callisto shifted beneath the covers. His fingers pressed the bird more firmly, as if needing some pulsing or suffering assurance of an early break in the temperature.

It was that last cymbal crash that did it. Meatball was hurled wincing into consciousness as the synchronized wagging of heads over the wastebasket stopped. The final hiss remained for an instant in the room, then melted into the whisper of rain outside. "Aarrgghh," announced Meatball in the silence, looking at the empty magnum. Krinkles, in slow motion, turned, smiled and held out a cigarette. "Tea time, man," he said. "No, no," said Meatball. "How many times I got to tell you guys. Not at my place. You ought to know, Washington is lousy with Feds." Krinkles looked wistful. "Jeez, Meatball," he said, "you don't want to do nothing no more." "Hair of dog," said Meatball. "Only hope. Any juice left?" He began to crawl toward the kitchen. "No champagne, I don't think," Duke said. "Case of tequila behind the icebox." They put on an Earl Bostic⁹ side. Meatball paused at the kitchen door, glowering at Sandor Rojas. "Lemons," he said after some thought. He crawled to the refrigerator and got out three lemons and some cubes, found

8. American historian and man of letters (1838–1918) whose writings explore the nature of power, cultural figurations of which ranged from

the Virgin Mary to the modern dynamo engine.
9. American jazz musician (1913–1965) who also recorded rhythm-and-blues material.

the tequila and set about restoring order to his nervous system. He drew blood once cutting the lemons and had to use two hands squeezing them and his foot to crack the ice tray but after about ten minutes he found himself, through some miracle, beaming down into a monster tequila sour. “That looks yummy,” Sandor Rojas said. “How about you make me one.” Meatball blinked at him. “*Kitchi lofass a shegithe*,”¹ he replied automatically, and wandered away into the bathroom. “I say,” he called out a moment later to no one in particular. “I say, there seems to be a girl or something sleeping in the sink.” He took her by the shoulders and shook. “Wha,” she said. “You don’t look too comfortable,” Meatball said. “Well,” she agreed. She stumbled to the shower, turned on the cold water and sat down crosslegged in the spray. “That’s better,” she smiled.

“Meatball,” Sandor Rojas yelled from the kitchen. “Somebody is trying to come in the window. A burglar, I think. A second-story man.” “What are you worrying about,” Meatball said. “We’re on the third floor.” He loped back into the kitchen. A shaggy weebegone figure stood out on the fire escape, raking his fingernails down the windowpane. Meatball opened the window. “Saul,” he said.

“Sort of wet out,” Saul said. He climbed in, dripping. “You heard, I guess.”

“Miriam left you,” Meatball said, “or something, is all I heard.”

There was a sudden flurry of knocking at the front door. “Do come in,” Sandor Rojas called. The door opened and there were three coeds from George Washington, all of whom were majoring in philosophy. They were each holding a gallon of Chianti. Sandor leaped up and dashed into the living room. “We heard there was a party,” one blonde said. “Young blood,” Sandor shouted. He was an ex-Hungarian freedom fighter who had easily the worst chronic case of what certain critics of the middle class have called Don Giovannism in the District of Columbia. *Purchè porti la gonnella, voi sapete quel che fa.*² Like Pavlov’s dog; a contralto voice or a whiff of Arpège and Sandor would begin to salivate. Meatball regarded the trio bleakly as they filed into the kitchen; he shrugged. “Put the wine in the icebox,” he said, “and good morning.”

Aubade’s neck made a golden bow as she bent over the sheets of foolscap, scribbling away in the green murk of the room. “As a young man at Princeton,” Callisto was dictating, nestling the bird against the gray hairs of his chest, “Callisto had learned a mnemonic device for remembering the Laws of Thermodynamics: you can’t win, things are going to get worse before they get better, who says they’re going to get better. At the age of 54, confronted with Gibbs³ notion of the universe, he suddenly realized that undergraduate cant had been oracle, after all. That spindly maze of equations became, for him, a vision of ultimate, cosmic heat-death. He had known all along, of course, that nothing but a theoretical engine or system ever runs at 100% efficiency; and about the theorem of Clausius, which states that the entropy of an isolated system always continually increases. It was not,

1. Little horse prick in your asshole (Hungarian).

2. As long as she wears a skirt, you know what he does (Italian); from Lorenzo da Ponte’s libretto to Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni* (1787).

3. Josiah Willard Gibbs (1839–1903), American physicist and chemist, a founder of statistical mechanics.

however, until Gibbs and Boltzmann⁴ brought to this principle the methods of statistical mechanics that the horrible significance of it all dawned on him: only then did he realize that the isolated system—galaxy, engine, human being, culture, whatever—must evolve spontaneously toward the Condition of the More Probable. He was forced, therefore, in the sad dying fall of middle age, to a radical reëvaluation of everything he had learned up to then; all the cities and seasons and casual passions of his days had now to be looked at in a new and elusive light. He did not know if he was equal to the task. He was aware of the dangers of the reductive fallacy and, he hoped, strong enough not to drift into the graceful decadence of an enervated fatalism. His had always been a vigorous, Italian sort of pessimism: like Machiavelli, he allowed the forces of *virtù* and *fortuna*⁵ to be about 50/50; but the equations now introduced a random factor which pushed the odds to some unutterable and indeterminate ratio which he found himself afraid to calculate.” Around him loomed vague hothouse shapes; the pitifully small heart fluttered against his own. Counterpointed against his words the girl heard the chatter of birds and fitful car honkings scattered along the wet morning and Earl Bostic’s alto rising in occasional wild peaks through the floor. The architectonic purity of her world was constantly threatened by such hints of anarchy: gaps and excrescences and skew lines, and a shifting or tilting of planes to which she had continually to readjust lest the whole structure shiver into a disarray of discrete and meaningless signals. Callisto had described the process once as a kind of “feedback”: she crawled into dreams each night with a sense of exhaustion, and a desperate resolve never to relax that vigilance. Even in the brief periods when Callisto made love to her, soaring above the bowing of taut nerves in haphazard double-stops would be the one singing string of her determination.

“Nevertheless,” continued Callisto, “he found in entropy or the measure of disorganization for a closed system an adequate metaphor to apply to certain phenomena in his own world. He saw, for example, the younger generation responding to Madison Avenue with the same spleen his own had once reserved for Wall Street: and in American ‘consumerism’ discovered a similar tendency from the least to the most probable, from differentiation to sameness, from ordered individuality to a kind of chaos. He found himself, in short, restating Gibbs’ prediction in social terms, and envisioned a heat-death for his culture in which ideas, like heat-energy, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy; and intellectual motion would, accordingly, cease.” He glanced up suddenly. “Check it now,” he said. Again she rose and peered out at the thermometer. “37,” she said. “The rain has stopped.” He bent his head quickly and held his lips against a quivering wing. “Then it will change soon,” he said, trying to keep his voice firm.

Sitting on the stove Saul was like any big rag doll that a kid has been taking out some incomprehensible rage on. “What happened,” Meatball said. “If you feel like talking, I mean.”

“Of course I feel like talking,” Saul said. “One thing I did, I slugged her.”

4. Ludwig Boltzmann (1844–1906), Austrian physicist who studied how atoms determine visual properties of matter. Rudolf Clausius (1822–1888), German physicist, developer of the

science of thermodynamics.

5. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Florentine statesman and writer on government, contrasted virtuous behavior (*virtù*) with good luck (*fortuna*).

“Discipline must be maintained.”

“Ha, ha. I wish you’d been there. Oh Meatball, it was a lovely fight. She ended up throwing a *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics* at me, only it missed and went through the window, and when the glass broke I reckon something in her broke too. She stormed out of the house crying, out in the rain. No raincoat or anything.”

“She’ll be back.”

“No.”

“Well!” Soon Meatball said: “It was something earthshattering, no doubt. Like who is better, Sal Mineo or Ricky Nelson.”⁶

“What it was about,” Saul said, “was communication theory. Which of course makes it very hilarious.”

“I don’t know anything about communication theory.”

“Neither does my wife. Come right down to it, who does? That’s the joke.”

When Meatball saw the kind of smile Saul had on his face he said: “Maybe you would like tequila or something.”

“No. I mean, I’m sorry. It’s a field you can go off the deep end in, is all. You get where you’re watching all the time for security cops: behind bushes, around corners. MUFFET is top secret.”

“Wha.”

“Multi-unit factorial field electronic tabulator.”

“You were fighting about that.”

“Miriam has been reading science fiction again. That and *Scientific American*. It seems she is, as we say, bugged at this idea of computers acting like people. I made the mistake of saying you can just as well turn that around, and talk about human behavior like a program fed into an IBM machine.”

“Why not,” Meatball said.

“Indeed, why not. In fact it is sort of crucial to communication, not to mention information theory. Only when I said that she hit the roof. Up went the balloon. And I can’t figure out *why*. If anybody should know why, I should. I refuse to believe the government is wasting taxpayers’ money on me, when it has so many bigger and better things to waste it on.”

Meatball made a moue. “Maybe she thought you were acting like a cold, dehumanized amoral scientist type.”

“My god,” Saul flung up an arm. “Dehumanized. How much more human can I get? I worry, Meatball, I do. There are Europeans wandering around North Africa these days with their tongues torn out of their heads because those tongues have spoken the wrong words. Only the Europeans thought they were the right words.”

“Language barrier,” Meatball suggested.

Saul jumped down off the stove. “That,” he said, angry, “is a good candidate for sick joke of the year. No, ace, it is *not* a barrier. If it is anything it’s a kind of leakage. Tell a girl: ‘I love you.’ No trouble with two-thirds of that, it’s a closed circuit. Just you and she. But that nasty four-letter word in the middle, *that’s* the one you have to look out for. Ambiguity. Redundance. Irrelevance, even. Leakage. All this is noise. Noise screws up your signal, makes for disorganization in the circuit.”

6. Contemporary figures from film and television who were icons of bad and good teenage behavior, respectively.

Meatball shuffled around. “Well, now, Saul,” he muttered, “you’re sort of, I don’t know, expecting a lot from people. I mean, you know. What it is is, most of the things we say, I guess, are mostly noise.”

“Ha! Half of what you just said, for example.”

“Well, you do it too.”

“I know.” Saul smiled grimly. “It’s a bitch, ain’t it.”

“I bet that’s what keeps divorce lawyers in business. Whoops.”

“Oh I’m not sensitive. Besides,” frowning, “you’re right. You find I think that most ‘successful’ marriages—Miriam and me, up to last night—are sort of founded on compromises. You never run at top efficiency, usually all you have is a minimum basis for a workable thing. I believe the phrase is Togetherness.”

“Aarrgghh.”

“Exactly. You find that one a bit noisy, don’t you. But the noise content is different for each of us because you’re a bachelor and I’m not. Or wasn’t. The hell with it.”

“Well sure,” Meatball said, trying to be helpful, “you were using different words. By ‘human being’ you meant something that you can look at like it was a computer. It helps you think better on the job or something. But Miriam meant something entirely—”

“The hell with it.”

Meatball fell silent. “I’ll take that drink,” Saul said after a while.

The card game had been abandoned and Sandor’s friends were slowly getting wasted on tequila. On the living room couch, one of the coeds and Krinkles were engaged in amorous conversation. “No,” Krinkles was saying, “no, I can’t put Dave *down*. In fact I give Dave a lot of credit, man. Especially considering his accident and all.” The girl’s smile faded. “How terrible,” she said. “What accident?” “Hadn’t you heard?” Krinkles said. “When Dave was in the army, just a private E-2, they sent him down to Oak Ridge on special duty. Something to do with the Manhattan Project.⁷ He was handling hot stuff one day and got an overdose of radiation. So now he’s got to wear lead gloves all the time.” She shook her head sympathetically. “What an awful break for a piano player.”

Meatball had abandoned Saul to a bottle of tequila and was about to go to sleep in a closet when the front door flew open and the place was invaded by five enlisted personnel of the U.S. Navy, all in varying stages of abomination. “This is the place,” shouted a fat, pimply seaman apprentice who had lost his white hat. “This here is the hoorhouse that chief was telling us about.” A stringy-looking 3rd class boatswain’s mate pushed him aside and cased the living room. “You’re right, Slab,” he said. “But it don’t look like much, even for Stateside. I seen better tail in Naples, Italy.” “How much, hey,” boomed a large seaman with adenoids, who was holding a Mason jar full of white lightning. “Oh, my god,” said Meatball.

Outside the temperature remained constant at 37 degrees Fahrenheit. In the hothouse Aubade stood absently caressing the branches of a young mimosa, hearing a motif of sap-rising, the rough and unresolved anticipatory theme of those fragile pink blossoms which, it is said, insure fertility.

7. The research program that developed the atomic bomb for use at the end of World War II.

That music rose in a tangled tracery: arabesques of order competing fugally with the improvised discords of the party downstairs, which peaked sometimes in cusps and ogees of noise. That precious signal-to-noise ratio, whose delicate balance required every calorie of her strength, seesawed inside the small tenuous skull as she watched Callisto, sheltering the bird. Callisto was trying to confront any idea of the heat-death now, as he nuzzled the feathery lump in his hands. He sought correspondences. Sade, of course. And Temple Drake, gaunt and hopeless in her little park in Paris, at the end of *Sanctuary*.⁸ Final equilibrium. *Nightwood*.⁹ And the tango. Any tango, but more than any perhaps the sad sick dance in Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*.¹ He thought back: what had tango music been for them after the war, what meanings had he missed in all the stately coupled automatons in the *cafés'-dansants*,² or in the metronomes which had ticked behind the eyes of his own partners? Not even the clean constant winds of Switzerland could cure the *grippe espagnole*.³ Stravinsky had had it, they all had had it. And how many musicians were left after Passchendaele, after the Marne?⁴ It came down in this case to seven: violin, double-bass. Clarinet, bassoon. Cornet, trombone. Tympani. Almost as if any tiny troupe of saltimbanques had set about conveying the same information as a full pit-orchestra. There was hardly a full complement left in Europe. Yet with violin and tympani Stravinsky had managed to communicate in that tango the same exhaustion, the same airlessness one saw in the slicked-down youths who were trying to imitate Vernon Castle, and in their mistresses, who simply did not care. *Ma maîtresse*.⁵ Celeste. Returning to Nice after the second war he had found that café replaced by a perfume shop which catered to American tourists. And no secret vestige of her in the cobblestones or in the old pension next door; no perfume to match her breath heavy with the sweet Spanish wine she always drank. And so instead he had purchased a Henry Miller novel and left for Paris,⁶ and read the book on the train so that when he arrived he had been given at least a little forewarning. And saw that Celeste and the others and even Temple Drake were not all that had changed. "Aubade," he said, "my head aches." The sound of his voice generated in the girl an answering scrap of melody. Her movement toward the kitchen, the towel, the cold water, and his eyes following her formed a weird and intricate canon; as she placed the compress on his forehead his sigh of gratitude seemed to signal a new subject, another series of modulations.

"No," Meatball was still saying, "no, I'm afraid not. This is not a house of ill repute. I'm sorry, really I am." Slab was adamant. "But the chief said," he kept repeating. The seaman offered to swap the moonshine for a good piece. Meatball looked around frantically, as if seeking assistance. In the middle of the room, the Duke di Angelis quartet were engaged in a historic

8. Sexually notorious novel published in 1931 by the American writer William Faulkner (1897–1962).

9. Novel published in 1936 by the American expatriate writer Djuna Barnes (1892–1982).

1. "The Story of the Soldier" (French), a 1918 work by the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971).

2. Café dancers (French).

3. Spanish flu (French).

4. Battle sites in World War I noted for their extremely high casualties.

5. My mistress (French).

6. Miller was famous for his overtly sexual novels written in Paris during the 1930s.

moment. Vincent was seated and the others standing: they were going through the motions of a group having a session, only without instruments. "I say," Meatball said. Duke moved his head a few times, smiled faintly, lit a cigarette, and eventually caught sight of Meatball. "Quiet, man," he whispered. Vincent began to fling his arms around, his fists clenched; then, abruptly, was still, then repeated the performance. This went on for a few minutes while Meatball sipped his drink moodily. The navy had withdrawn to the kitchen. Finally at some invisible signal the group stopped tapping their feet and Duke grinned and said, "At least we ended together."

Meatball glared at him. "I say," he said. "I have this new conception, man," Duke said. "You remember your namesake. You remember Gerry."

"No," said Meatball. "I'll remember April, if that's any help."

"As a matter of fact," Duke said, "it was Love for Sale. Which shows how much you know. The point is, it was Mulligan, Chet Baker⁷ and that crew, way back then, out yonder. You dig?"

"Baritone sax," Meatball said. "Something about a baritone sax."

"But no piano, man. No guitar. Or accordion. You know what that means."

"Not exactly," Meatball said.

"Well first let me just say, that I am no Mingus, no John Lewis.⁸ Theory was never my strong point. I mean things like reading were always difficult for me and all—"

"I know," Meatball said drily. "You got your card taken away because you changed key on Happy Birthday at a Kiwanis Club picnic."

"Rotarian. But it occurred to me, in one of these flashes of insight, that if that first quartet of Mulligan's had no piano, it could only mean one thing."

"No chords," said Paco, the baby-faced bass.

"What he is trying to say," Duke said, "is no root chords. Nothing to listen to while you blow a horizontal line. What one does in such a case is, one *thinks* the roots."

A horrified awareness was dawning on Meatball. "And the next logical extension," he said.

"Is to think everything," Duke announced with simple dignity. "Roots, line, everything."

Meatball looked at Duke, awed. "But," he said.

"Well," Duke said modestly, "there are a few bugs to work out."

"But," Meatball said.

"Just listen," Duke said. "You'll catch on." And off they went again into orbit, presumably somewhere around the asteroid belt. After a while Krinkles made an embouchure and started moving his fingers and Duke clapped his hand to his forehead. "Oaf!" he roared. "The new head we're using, you remember, I wrote last night?" "Sure," Krinkles said, "the new head. I come in on the bridge. All your heads I come in then." "Right," Duke said. "So why—" "Wha," said Krinkles, "16 bars, I wait, I come in—" "16?" Duke said. "No. No, Krinkles. Eight you waited. You want me to sing it? A ciga-

7. In 1952 the American jazz musicians Gerry Mulligan (1927–1996) and Chet Baker (1929–1988) became famous for their revolutionary pianoless quartet.

8. Charles Mingus (1922–1979) and John Lewis (1920–2001), American jazz musicians noted for their compositions.

rette that bears a lipstick's traces, an airline ticket to romantic places." Krinkles scratched his head. "These Foolish Things, you mean." "Yes," Duke said, "yes, Krinkles. Bravo." "Not I'll Remember April," Krinkles said. "*Minghe morte*,"⁹ said Duke. "I *figured* we were playing it a little slow," Krinkles said. Meatball chuckled. "Back to the old drawing board," he said. "No, man," Duke said, "back to the airless void." And they took off again, only it seemed Paco was playing in G sharp while the rest were in E flat, so they had to start all over.

In the kitchen two of the girls from George Washington and the sailors were singing Let's All Go Down and Piss on the Forrestal.¹ There was a two-handed, bilingual *morra*² game on over by the icebox. Saul had filled several paper bags with water and was sitting on the fire escape, dropping them on passersby in the street. A fat government girl in a Bennington sweatshirt, recently engaged to an ensign attached to the Forrestal, came charging into the kitchen, head lowered, and butted Slab in the stomach. Figuring this was as good an excuse for a fight as any, Slab's buddies piled in. The *morra* players were nose-to-nose, screaming *trois*, *sette* at the tops of their lungs. From the shower the girl Meatball had taken out of the sink announced that she was drowning. She had apparently sat on the drain and the water was now up to her neck. The noise in Meatball's apartment had reached a sustained, ungodly crescendo.

Meatball stood and watched, scratching his stomach lazily. The way he figured, there were only about two ways he could cope: (a) lock himself in the closet and maybe eventually they would all go away, or (b) try to calm everybody down, one by one. (a) was certainly the more attractive alternative. But then he started thinking about that closet. It was dark and stuffy and he would be alone. He did not feature being alone. And then this crew off the good ship Lollipop³ or whatever it was might take it upon themselves to kick down the closet door, for a lark. And if that happened he would be, at the very least, embarrassed. The other way was more a pain in the neck, but probably better in the long run.

So he decided to try and keep his lease-breaking party from deteriorating into total chaos: he gave wine to the sailors and separated the *morra* players; he introduced the fat government girl to Sandor Rojas, who would keep her out of trouble; he helped the girl in the shower to dry off and get into bed; he had another talk with Saul; he called a repairman for the refrigerator, which someone had discovered was on the blink. This is what he did until nightfall, when most of the revellers had passed out and the party trembled on the threshold of its third day.

Upstairs Callisto, helpless in the past, did not feel the faint rhythm inside the bird begin to slacken and fail. Aubade was by the window, wandering the ashes of her own lovely world; the temperature held steady, the sky had become a uniform darkening gray. Then something from downstairs—a girl's scream, an overturned chair, a glass dropped on the floor, he would never know what exactly—pierced that private time-warp and he became

9. Dead prick (Italian).

1. Aircraft carrier in the U.S. Navy.

2. Finger game originally played by Italians. The commands are numbers; below, three (*trois*,

French) and seven (*sette*, Italian).

3. The subject of film and song popularized in the 1930s by the American child actress Shirley Temple (1928–2014).

aware of the faltering, the constriction of muscles, the tiny tossings of the bird's head; and his own pulse began to pound more fiercely, as if trying to compensate. "Aubade," he called weakly, "he's dying." The girl, flowing and rapt, crossed the hothouse to gaze down at Callisto's hands. The two remained like that, poised, for one minute, and two, while the heartbeat ticked a graceful diminuendo down at last into stillness. Callisto raised his head slowly. "I held him," he protested, impotent with the wonder of it, "to give him the warmth of my body. Almost as if I were communicating life to him, or a sense of life. What has happened? Has the transfer of heat ceased to work? Is there no more . . ." He did not finish.

"I was just at the window," she said. He sank back, terrified. She stood a moment more, irresolute; she had sensed his obsession long ago, realized somehow that that constant 37 was now decisive. Suddenly then, as if seeing the single and unavoidable conclusion to all this she moved swiftly to the window before Callisto could speak; tore away the drapes and smashed out the glass with two exquisite hands which came away bleeding and glistening with splinters; and turned to face the man on the bed and wait with him until the moment of equilibrium was reached, when 37 degrees Fahrenheit should prevail both outside and inside, and forever, and the hovering, curious dominant of their separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion.

1984

RAYMOND CARVER

1938–1988

Minimal fiction; designer fiction; even "dirty fiction," a phrase the British magazine *Granta* used to characterize the new style of American writing that was supposedly polluting the realistic short story with unconventional, unrealistic techniques—these terms were tossed around by critics of an abruptly new style of work that at times seemed to dominate the 1980s. Popularized by Bobbie Ann Mason, Ann Beattie, Frederick Barthelme, and Barry Hannah as well, its chief practitioner was a master of fine arts graduate from the University of Iowa's Writers Workshop, Raymond Carver, whose collections *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), and *Cathedral* (1983) set the most imitated style of their generation. Moved to put some order to these many definitions, writer John Barth—whose nonrealistic, innovative work had helped characterize the writing of the decades before—coined the term Post-Alcoholic Blue-Collar Minimalist Hyperrealism to describe the school Carver may have inadvertently founded. A recovering alcoholic, Carver had worked as a janitor, sawmill hand, delivery person, and sales representative, suggesting the profile Barth had in mind. But more pertinent to the style of his fiction was his training at Iowa and teaching in creative writing programs at universities around the country.

By the time of his death, his became the most accepted style in such academic programs and in the literary magazines they generated.

This style's success is important. With conventions of literary realism having been challenged and theorists questioning all such previously stable assumptions, readers of Barth, Donald Barthelme, Kurt Vonnegut, and other such experimenters may have felt that simple realism was no longer an up-to-date way in which to write. Raymond Carver proved that it was, and that previous challenges to realistic tradition had only made it all the more effective, especially when those challenges are incorporated in the new style. Carver's patient narration does not strive for a reader's suspension of disbelief. Rather, as in the introduction of the bizarre situation experienced in "Cathedral" (printed here), its plain, even flat statement presents matter unadorned by devices meant to persuade or convince. So a blind man wants to learn what the architecture of a cathedral suggests? Here it is, Carver's story says: what you see is what there is; take it or leave it; if you are blind, he will help you feel your way through, but never as a direction to meaning, only to an apprehension of the facts. Carver's characters are usually working-class people somewhat down on their luck. Often, alcohol figures in their lives, less as a stimulant than as a further depressant. Totally unexceptional, their failures, like their hopes, are small, even puny. But from such stripped-down essentials the author is able to write in a plain, simple manner, sticking to the absolute minimum so that no one can accuse him of trying to create illusions.

Much was made of Raymond Carver's alcoholism and recovery. He made no apologies for his hard, sometimes abusive life, the rigors of which contributed to ill health and an early death. His stories and poems have the same quiet toughness to them, not flamboyant in confrontation with life's meanness but dedicated to holding on against time's slowly destructive friction with a grittiness all their own.

The following text is from *Cathedral* (1983).

Cathedral

This blind man, an old friend of my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night. His wife had died. So he was visiting the dead wife's relatives in Connecticut. He called my wife from his in-laws'. Arrangements were made. He would come by train, a five-hour trip, and my wife would meet him at the station. She hadn't seen him since she worked for him one summer in Seattle ten years ago. But she and the blind man had kept in touch. They made tapes and mailed them back and forth. I wasn't enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed. Sometimes they were led by seeing-eye dogs. A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to.

That summer in Seattle she had needed a job. She didn't have any money. The man she was going to marry at the end of the summer was in officers' training school. He didn't have any money, either. But she was in love with the guy, and he was in love with her, etc. She'd seen something in the paper: HELP WANTED—*Reading to Blind Man*, and a telephone number. She phoned and went over, was hired on the spot. She'd worked with this blind man all summer. She read stuff to him, case studies, reports, that sort of thing. She helped him organize his little office in the county social-service

department. They'd become good friends, my wife and the blind man. How do I know these things? She told me. And she told me something else. On her last day in the office, the blind man asked if he could touch her face. She agreed to this. She told me he touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose—even her neck! She never forgot it. She even tried to write a poem about it. She was always trying to write a poem. She wrote a poem or two every year, usually after something really important had happened to her.

When we first started going out together, she showed me the poem. In the poem, she recalled his fingers and the way they had moved around over her face. In the poem, she talked about what she had felt at the time, about what went through her mind when the blind man touched her nose and lips. I can remember I didn't think much of the poem. Of course, I didn't tell her that. Maybe I just don't understand poetry. I admit it's not the first thing I reach for when I pick up something to read.

Anyway, this man who'd first enjoyed her favors, the officer-to-be, he'd been her childhood sweetheart. So okay. I'm saying that at the end of the summer she let the blind man run his hands over her face, said goodbye to him, married her childhood etc., who was now a commissioned officer, and she moved away from Seattle. But they'd kept in touch, she and the blind man. She made the first contact after a year or so. She called him up one night from an Air Force base in Alabama. She wanted to talk. They talked. He asked her to send him a tape and tell him about her life. She did this. She sent the tape. On the tape, she told the blind man about her husband and about their life together in the military. She told the blind man she loved her husband but she didn't like it where they lived and she didn't like it that he was a part of the military-industrial thing. She told the blind man she'd written a poem and he was in it. She told him that she was writing a poem about what it was like to be an Air Force officer's wife. The poem wasn't finished yet. She was still writing it. The blind man made a tape. He sent her the tape. She made a tape. This went on for years. My wife's officer was posted to one base and then another. She sent tapes from Moody AFB,¹ McGuire, McConnell, and finally Travis, near Sacramento, where one night she got to feeling lonely and cut off from people she kept losing in that moving-around life. She got to feeling she couldn't go it another step. She went in and swallowed all the pills and capsules in the medicine chest and washed them down with a bottle of gin. Then she got into a hot bath and passed out.

But instead of dying, she got sick. She threw up. Her officer—why should he have a name? he was the childhood sweetheart, and what more does he want?—came home from somewhere, found her, and called the ambulance. In time, she put it all on a tape and sent the tape to the blind man. Over the years, she put all kinds of stuff on tapes and sent the tapes off lickety-split. Next to writing a poem every year, I think it was her chief means of recreation. On one tape, she told the blind man she'd decided to live away from her officer for a time. On another tape, she told him about her divorce. She and I began going out, and of course she told her blind man about it. She told him everything, or so it seemed to me. Once she asked me if I'd like to

1. Air force base. Names of other air force bases follow.

hear the latest tape from the blind man. This was a year ago. I was on the tape, she said. So I said okay, I'd listen to it. I got us drinks and we settled down in the living room. We made ready to listen. First she inserted the tape into the player and adjusted a couple of dials. Then she pushed a lever. The tape squeaked and someone began to talk in this loud voice. She lowered the volume. After a few minutes of harmless chitchat, I heard my own name in the mouth of this stranger, this blind man I didn't even know! And then this: "From all you've said about him, I can only conclude—" But we were interrupted, a knock at the door, something, and we didn't ever get back to the tape. Maybe it was just as well. I'd heard all I wanted to.

Now this same blind man was coming to sleep in my house.

"Maybe I could take him bowling," I said to my wife. She was at the draining board doing scalloped potatoes. She put down the knife she was using and turned around.

"If you love me," she said, "you can do this for me. If you don't love me, okay. But if you had a friend, any friend, and the friend came to visit, I'd make him feel comfortable." She wiped her hands with the dish towel.

"I don't have any blind friends," I said.

"You don't have *any* friends," she said. "Period. Besides," she said, "god-dam it, his wife's just died! Don't you understand that? The man's lost his wife!"

I didn't answer. She'd told me a little about the blind man's wife. Her name was Beulah. Beulah! That's a name for a colored woman.

"Was his wife a Negro?" I asked.

"Are you crazy?" my wife said. "Have you just flipped or something?" She picked up a potato. I saw it hit the floor, then roll under the stove. "What's wrong with you?" she said. "Are you drunk?"

"I'm just asking," I said.

Right then my wife filled me in with more detail than I cared to know. I made a drink and sat at the kitchen table to listen. Pieces of the story began to fall into place.

Beulah had gone to work for the blind man the summer after my wife had stopped working for him. Pretty soon Beulah and the blind man had themselves a church wedding. It was a little wedding—who'd want to go to such a wedding in the first place?—just the two of them, plus the minister and the minister's wife. But it was a church wedding just the same. It was what Beulah had wanted, he'd said. But even then Beulah must have been carrying the cancer in her glands. After they had been inseparable for eight years—my wife's word, *inseparable*—Beulah's health went into a rapid decline. She died in a Seattle hospital room, the blind man sitting beside the bed and holding on to her hand. They'd married, lived and worked together, slept together—had sex, sure—and then the blind man had to bury her. All this without his having ever seen what the goddamned woman looked like. It was beyond my understanding. Hearing this, I felt sorry for the blind man for a little bit. And then I found myself thinking what a pitiful life this woman must have led. Imagine a woman who could never see herself as she was seen in the eyes of her loved one. A woman who could go on day after day and never receive the smallest compliment from her beloved. A woman whose husband could never read the expression on her face, be it misery or something better. Someone who could wear makeup or

not—what difference to him? She could, if she wanted, wear green eyeshadow around one eye, a straight pin in her nostril, yellow slacks and purple shoes, no matter. And then to slip off into death, the blind man's hand on her hand, his blind eyes streaming tears—I'm imagining now—her last thought maybe this: that he never even knew what she looked like, and she on an express to the grave. Robert was left with a small insurance policy and half of a twenty-peso Mexican coin. The other half of the coin went into the box with her. Pathetic.

So when the time rolled around, my wife went to the depot to pick him up. With nothing to do but wait—sure, I blamed him for that—I was having a drink and watching the TV when I heard the car pull into the drive. I got up from the sofa with my drink and went to the window to have a look.

I saw my wife laughing as she parked the car. I saw her get out of the car and shut the door. She was still wearing a smile. Just amazing. She went around to the other side of the car to where the blind man was already starting to get out. This blind man, feature this, he was wearing a full beard! A beard on a blind man! Too much, I say. The blind man reached into the back seat and dragged out a suitcase. My wife took his arm, shut the car door, and, talking all the way, moved him down the drive and then up the steps to the front porch. I turned off the TV. I finished my drink, rinsed the glass, dried my hands. Then I went to the door.

My wife said, "I want you to meet Robert. Robert, this is my husband. I've told you all about him." She was beaming. She had this blind man by his coat sleeve.

The blind man let go of his suitcase and up came his hand.

I took it. He squeezed hard, held my hand, and then he let it go.

"I feel like we've already met," he boomed.

"Likewise," I said. I didn't know what else to say. Then I said, "Welcome. I've heard a lot about you." We began to move then, a little group, from the porch into the living room, my wife guiding him by the arm. The blind man was carrying his suitcase in his other hand. My wife said things like, "To your left here, Robert. That's right. Now watch it, there's a chair. That's it. Sit down right here. This is the sofa. We just bought this sofa two weeks ago."

I started to say something about the old sofa. I'd liked that old sofa. But I didn't say anything. Then I wanted to say something else, small-talk, about the scenic ride along the Hudson. How going *to* New York, you should sit on the right-hand side of the train, and coming *from* New York, the left-hand side.

"Did you have a good train ride?" I said. "Which side of the train did you sit on, by the way?"

"What a question, which side!" my wife said. "What's it matter which side?" she said.

"I just asked," I said.

"Right side," the blind man said. "I hadn't been on a train in nearly forty years. Not since I was a kid. With my folks. That's been a long time. I'd nearly forgotten the sensation. I have winter in my beard now," he said. "So I've been told, anyway. Do I look distinguished, my dear?" the blind man said to my wife.

"You look distinguished, Robert," she said. "Robert," she said. "Robert, it's just so good to see you."

My wife finally took her eyes off the blind man and looked at me. I had the feeling she didn't like what she saw. I shrugged.

I've never met, or personally known, anyone who was blind. This blind man was late forties, a heavy-set, balding man with stooped shoulders, as if he carried a great weight there. He wore brown slacks, brown shoes, a light-brown shirt, a tie, a sports coat. Spiffy. He also had this full beard. But he didn't use a cane and he didn't wear dark glasses. I'd always thought dark glasses were a must for the blind. Fact was, I wished he had a pair. At first glance, his eyes looked like anyone else's eyes. But if you looked close, there was something different about them. Too much white in the iris, for one thing, and the pupils seemed to move around in the sockets without his knowing it or being able to stop it. Creepy. As I stared at his face, I saw the left pupil turn in toward his nose while the other made an effort to keep in one place. But it was only an effort, for that eye was on the roam without his knowing it or wanting it to be.

I said, "Let me get you a drink. What's your pleasure? We have a little of everything. It's one of our pastimes."

"Bub, I'm a Scotch man myself," he said fast enough in this big voice.

"Right," I said. Bub! "Sure you are. I knew it."

He let his fingers touch his suitcase, which was sitting alongside the sofa. He was taking his bearings. I didn't blame him for that.

"I'll move that up to your room," my wife said.

"No, that's fine," the blind man said loudly. "It can go up when I go up."

"A little water with the Scotch?" I said.

"Very little," he said.

"I knew it," I said.

He said, "Just a tad. The Irish actor, Barry Fitzgerald?² I'm like that fellow. When I drink water, Fitzgerald said, I drink water. When I drink whiskey, I drink whiskey." My wife laughed. The blind man brought his hand up under his beard. He lifted his beard slowly and let it drop.

I did the drinks, three big glasses of Scotch with a splash of water in each. Then we made ourselves comfortable and talked about Robert's travels. First the long flight from the West Coast to Connecticut, we covered that. Then from Connecticut up here by train. We had another drink concerning that leg of the trip.

I remembered having read somewhere that the blind didn't smoke because, as speculation had it, they couldn't see the smoke they exhaled. I thought I knew that much and that much only about blind people. But this blind man smoked his cigarette down to the nubbin and then lit another one. This blind man filled his ashtray and my wife emptied it.

When we sat down at the table for dinner, we had another drink. My wife heaped Robert's plate with cube steak, scalloped potatoes, green beans. I buttered him up two slices of bread. I said, "Here's bread and butter for you." I swallowed some of my drink. "Now let us pray," I said, and the blind man lowered his head. My wife looked at me, her mouth agape. "Pray the phone won't ring and the food doesn't get cold," I said.

2. Noted for his stock characterizations of Irish figures (often priests) in American films of the 1940s and 1950s.

We dug in. We ate everything there was to eat on the table. We ate like there was no tomorrow. We didn't talk. We ate. We scarfed. We grazed that table. We were into serious eating. The blind man had right away located his foods, he knew just where everything was on his plate. I watched with admiration as he used his knife and fork on the meat. He'd cut two pieces of meat, fork the meat into his mouth, and then go all out for the scalloped potatoes, the beans next, and then he'd tear off a hunk of buttered bread and eat that. He'd follow this up with a big drink of milk. It didn't seem to bother him to use his fingers once in a while, either.

We finished everything, including half a strawberry pie. For a few moments, we sat as if stunned. Sweat beaded on our faces. Finally, we got up from the table and left the dirty plates. We didn't look back. We took ourselves into the living room and sank into our places again. Robert and my wife sat on the sofa. I took the big chair. We had us two or three more drinks while they talked about the major things that had come to pass for them in the past ten years. For the most part, I just listened. Now and then I joined in. I didn't want him to think I'd left the room, and I didn't want her to think I was feeling left out. They talked of things that had happened to them—to them!—these past ten years. I waited in vain to hear my name on my wife's sweet lips: "And then my dear husband came into my life"—something like that. But I heard nothing of the sort. More talk of Robert. Robert had done a little of everything, it seemed, a regular blind jack-of-all-trades. But most recently he and his wife had had an Amway³ distributorship, from which, I gathered, they'd earned their living, such as it was. The blind man was also a ham radio operator. He talked in his loud voice about conversations he'd had with fellow operators in Guam, in the Philippines, in Alaska, and even in Tahiti. He said he'd have a lot of friends there if he ever wanted to go visit those places. From time to time, he'd turn his blind face toward me, put his hand under his beard, ask me something. How long had I been in my present position? (Three years.) Did I like my work? (I didn't.) Was I going to stay with it? (What were the options?) Finally, when I thought he was beginning to run down, I got up and turned on the TV.

My wife looked at me with irritation. She was heading toward a boil. Then she looked at the blind man and said, "Robert, do you have a TV?"

The blind man said, "My dear, I have two TVs. I have a color set and a black-and-white thing, an old relic. It's funny, but if I turn the TV on, and I'm always turning it on, I turn on the color set. It's funny, don't you think?"

I didn't know what to say to that. I had absolutely nothing to say to that. No opinion. So I watched the news program and tried to listen to what the announcer was saying.

"This is a color TV," the blind man said. "Don't ask me how, but I can tell."
"We traded up a while ago," I said.

The blind man had another taste of his drink. He lifted his beard, sniffed it, and let it fall. He leaned forward on the sofa. He positioned his ashtray on the coffee table, then put the lighter to his cigarette. He leaned back on the sofa and crossed his legs at the ankles.

3. A retail sales business operated by selling directly to consumers in their homes.

My wife covered her mouth, and then she yawned. She stretched. She said, "I think I'll go upstairs and put on my robe. I think I'll change into something else. Robert, you make yourself comfortable," she said.

"I'm comfortable," the blind man said.

"I want you to feel comfortable in this house," she said.

"I am comfortable," the blind man said.

After she'd left the room, he and I listened to the weather report and then to the sports roundup. By that time, she'd been gone so long I didn't know if she was going to come back. I thought she might have gone to bed. I wished she'd come back downstairs. I didn't want to be left alone with a blind man. I asked him if he wanted another drink, and he said sure. Then I asked if he wanted to smoke some dope with me. I said I'd just rolled a number. I hadn't, but I planned to do so in about two shakes.

"I'll try some with you," he said.

"Damn right," I said. "That's the stuff."

I got our drinks and sat down on the sofa with him. Then I rolled us two fat numbers. I lit one and passed it. I brought it to his fingers. He took it and inhaled.

"Hold it as long as you can," I said. I could tell he didn't know the first thing.

My wife came back downstairs wearing her pink robe and her pink slippers.

"What do I smell?" she said.

"We thought we'd have us some cannabis," I said.

My wife gave me a savage look. Then she looked at the blind man and said, "Robert, I didn't know you smoked."

He said, "I do now, my dear. There's a first time for everything. But I don't feel anything yet."

"This stuff is pretty mellow," I said. "This stuff is mild. It's dope you can reason with," I said. "It doesn't mess you up."

"Not much it doesn't, bub," he said, and laughed.

My wife sat on the sofa between the blind man and me. I passed her the number. She took it and toked and then passed it back to me. "Which way is this going?" she said. Then she said, "I shouldn't be smoking this. I can hardly keep my eyes open as it is. That dinner did me in. I shouldn't have eaten so much."

"It was the strawberry pie," the blind man said. "That's what did it," he said, and he laughed his big laugh. Then he shook his head.

"There's more strawberry pie," I said.

"Do you want some more, Robert?" my wife said.

"Maybe in a little while," he said.

We gave our attention to the TV. My wife yawned again. She said, "Your bed is made up when you feel like going to bed, Robert. I know you must have had a long day. When you're ready to go to bed, say so." She pulled his arm. "Robert?"

He came to and said, "I've had a real nice time. This beats tapes, doesn't it?"

I said, "Coming at you," and I put the number between his fingers. He inhaled, held the smoke, and then let it go. It was like he'd been doing it since he was nine years old.

"Thanks, bub," he said. "But I think this is all for me. I think I'm beginning to feel it," he said. He held the burning roach out for my wife.

"Same here," she said. "Ditto. Me, too." She took the roach and passed it to me. "I may just sit here for a while between you two guys with my eyes closed. But don't let me bother you, okay? Either one of you. If it bothers you, say so. Otherwise, I may just sit here with my eyes closed until you're ready to go to bed," she said. "Your bed's made up, Robert, when you're ready. It's right next to our room at the top of the stairs. We'll show you up when you're ready. You wake me up now, you guys, if I fall asleep." She said that and then she closed her eyes and went to sleep.

The news program ended. I got up and changed the channel. I sat back down on the sofa. I wished my wife hadn't pooped out. Her head lay across the back of the sofa, her mouth open. She'd turned so that her robe had slipped away from her legs, exposing a juicy thigh. I reached to draw her robe back over her, and it was then that I glanced at the blind man. What the hell! I flipped the robe open again.

"You say when you want some strawberry pie," I said.

"I will," he said.

I said, "Are you tired? Do you want me to take you up to your bed? Are you ready to hit the hay?"

"Not yet," he said. "No, I'll stay up with you, bub. If that's all right. I'll stay up until you're ready to turn in. We haven't had a chance to talk. Know what I mean? I feel like me and her monopolized the evening." He lifted his beard and he let it fall. He picked up his cigarettes and his lighter.

"That's all right," I said. Then I said, "I'm glad for the company."

And I guess I was. Every night I smoked dope and stayed up as long as I could before I fell asleep. My wife and I hardly ever went to bed at the same time. When I did go to sleep, I had these dreams. Sometimes I'd wake up from one of them, my heart going crazy.

Something about the church and the Middle Ages was on the TV. Not your run-of-the-mill TV fare. I wanted to watch something else. I turned to the other channels. But there was nothing on them, either. So I turned back to the first channel and apologized.

"Bub, it's all right," the blind man said. "It's fine with me. Whatever you want to watch is okay. I'm always learning something. Learning never ends. It won't hurt me to learn something tonight. I got ears," he said.

We didn't say anything for a time. He was leaning forward with his head turned at me, his right ear aimed in the direction of the set. Very disconcerting. Now and then his eyelids drooped and then they snapped open again. Now and then he put his fingers into his beard and tugged, like he was thinking about something he was hearing on the television.

On the screen, a group of men wearing cowls was being set upon and tormented by men dressed in skeleton costumes and men dressed as devils. The men dressed as devils wore devil masks, horns, and long tails. This pageant was part of a procession. The Englishman who was narrating the thing said it took place in Spain once a year. I tried to explain to the blind man what was happening.

"Skeletons," he said. "I know about skeletons," he said, and he nodded.

The TV showed this one cathedral. Then there was a long, slow look at another one. Finally, the picture switched to the famous one in Paris, with its flying buttresses and its spires reaching up to the clouds. The camera pulled away to show the whole of the cathedral rising above the skyline.

There were times when the Englishman who was telling the thing would shut up, would simply let the camera move around over the cathedrals. Or else the camera would tour the countryside, men in fields walking behind oxen. I waited as long as I could. Then I felt I had to say something. I said, "They're showing the outside of this cathedral now. Gargoyles. Little statues carved to look like monsters. Now I guess they're in Italy. Yeah, they're in Italy. There's paintings on the walls of this one church."

"Are those fresco paintings, bub?" he asked, and he sipped from his drink.

I reached for my glass. But it was empty. I tried to remember what I could remember. "You're asking me are those frescoes?" I said. "That's a good question. I don't know."

The camera moved to a cathedral outside Lisbon. The differences in the Portuguese cathedral compared with the French and Italian were not that great. But they were there. Mostly the interior stuff. Then something occurred to me, and I said, "Something has occurred to me. Do you have any idea what a cathedral is? What they look like, that is? Do you follow me? If somebody says cathedral to you, do you have any notion what they're talking about? Do you know the difference between that and a Baptist church, say?"

He let the smoke dribble from his mouth. "I know they took hundreds of workers fifty or a hundred years to build," he said. "I just heard the man say that, of course. I know generations of the same families worked on a cathedral. I heard him say that, too. The men who began their life's work on them, they never lived to see the completion of their work. In that wise, bub, they're no different from the rest of us, right?" He laughed. Then his eyelids drooped again. His head nodded. He seemed to be snoozing. Maybe he was imagining himself in Portugal. The TV was showing another cathedral now. This one was in Germany. The Englishman's voice droned on. "Cathedrals," the blind man said. He sat up and rolled his head back and forth. "If you want the truth, bub, that's about all I know. What I just said. What I heard him say. But maybe you could describe one to me? I wish you'd do it. I'd like that. If you want to know, I really don't have a good idea."

I stared hard at the shot of the cathedral on the TV. How could I even begin to describe it? But say my life depended on it. Say my life was being threatened by an insane guy who said I had to do it or else.

I stared some more at the cathedral before the picture flipped off into the countryside. There was no use. I turned to the blind man and said, "To begin with, they're very tall." I was looking around the room for clues. "They reach way up. Up and up. Toward the sky. They're so big, some of them, they have to have these supports. To help hold them up, so to speak. These supports are called buttresses. They remind me of viaducts, for some reason. But maybe you don't know viaducts, either? Sometimes the cathedrals have devils and such carved into the front. Sometimes lords and ladies. Don't ask me why this is," I said.

He was nodding. The whole upper part of his body seemed to be moving back and forth.

"I'm not doing so good, am I?" I said.

He stopped nodding and leaned forward on the edge of the sofa. As he listened to me, he was running his fingers through his beard. I wasn't getting through to him, I could see that. But he waited for me to go on just the same. He nodded, like he was trying to encourage me. I tried to think what else to say. "They're really big," I said. "They're massive. They're built of stone. Marble, too, sometimes. In those olden days, when they built cathedrals, men wanted to be close to God. In those olden days, God was an important part of everyone's life. You could tell this from their cathedral-building. I'm sorry," I said, "but it looks like that's the best I can do for you. I'm just no good at it."

"That's all right, bub," the blind man said. "Hey, listen. I hope you don't mind my asking you. Can I ask you something? Let me ask you a simple question, yes or no. I'm just curious and there's no offense. You're my host. But let me ask if you are in any way religious? You don't mind my asking?"

I shook my head. He couldn't see that, though. A wink is the same as a nod to a blind man. "I guess I don't believe in it. In anything. Sometimes it's hard. You know what I'm saying?"

"Sure, I do," he said.

"Right," I said.

The Englishman was still holding forth. My wife sighed in her sleep. She drew a long breath and went on with her sleeping.

"You'll have to forgive me," I said. "But I can't tell you what a cathedral looks like. It just isn't in me to do it. I can't do any more than I've done."

The blind man sat very still, his head down, as he listened to me.

I said, "The truth is, cathedrals don't mean anything special to me. Nothing. Cathedrals. They're something to look at on late-night TV. That's all they are."

It was then that the blind man cleared his throat. He brought something up. He took a handkerchief from his back pocket. Then he said, "I get it, bub. It's okay. It happens. Don't worry about it," he said. "Hey, listen to me. Will you do me a favor? I got an idea. Why don't you find us some heavy paper? And a pen. We'll do something. We'll draw one together. Get us a pen and some heavy paper. Go on, bub, get the stuff," he said.

So I went upstairs. My legs felt like they didn't have any strength in them. They felt like they did after I'd done some running. In my wife's room, I looked around. I found some ballpoints in a little basket on her table. And then I tried to think where to look for the kind of paper he was talking about.

Downstairs, in the kitchen, I found a shopping bag with onion skins in the bottom of the bag. I emptied the bag and shook it. I brought it into the living room and sat down with it near his legs. I moved some things, smoothed the wrinkles from the bag, spread it out on the coffee table.

The blind man got down from the sofa and sat next to me on the carpet. He ran his fingers over the paper. He went up and down the sides of the paper. The edges, even the edges. He fingered the corners.

"All right," he said. "All right, let's do her."

He found my hand, the hand with the pen. He closed his hand over my hand. "Go ahead, bub, draw," he said. "Draw. You'll see. I'll follow along

with you. It'll be okay. Just begin now like I'm telling you. You'll see. Draw," the blind man said.

So I began. First I drew a box that looked like a house. It could have been the house I lived in. Then I put a roof on it. At either end of the roof, I drew spires. Crazy.

"Swell," he said. "Terrific. You're doing fine," he said. "Never thought anything like this could happen in your lifetime, did you, bub? Well, it's a strange life, we all know that. Go on now. Keep it up."

I put in windows with arches. I drew flying buttresses. I hung great doors. I couldn't stop. The TV station went off the air. I put down the pen and closed and opened my fingers. The blind man felt around over the paper. He moved the tips of his fingers over the paper, all over what I had drawn, and he nodded.

"Doing fine," the blind man said.

I took up the pen again, and he found my hand. I kept at it. I'm no artist. But I kept drawing just the same.

My wife opened up her eyes and gazed at us. She sat up on the sofa, her robe hanging open. She said, "What are you doing? Tell me, I want to know."

I didn't answer her.

The blind man said, "We're drawing a cathedral. Me and him are working on it. Press hard," he said to me. "That's right. That's good," he said. "Sure. You got it, bub. I can tell. You didn't think you could. But you can, can't you? You're cooking with gas now. You know what I'm saying? We're going to really have us something here in a minute. How's the old arm?" he said. "Put some people in there now. What's a cathedral without people?"

My wife said, "What's going on? Robert, what are you doing? What's going on?"

"It's all right," he said to her. "Close your eyes now," the blind man said to me.

I did it. I closed them just like he said.

"Are they closed?" he said. "Don't fudge."

"They're closed," I said.

"Keep them that way," he said. He said, "Don't stop now. Draw."

So we kept on with it. His fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper. It was like nothing else in my life up to now.

Then he said, "I think that's it. I think you got it," he said. "Take a look. What do you think?"

But I had my eyes closed. I thought I'd keep them that way for a little longer. I thought it was something I ought to do.

"Well?" he said. "Are you looking?"

My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything.

"It's really something," I said.

ISHMAEL REED

b. 1938

Ishmael Reed's love-hate affair with American popular culture has led him to both literary successes and entanglements with sociocultural obstacles. On the positive side his appreciation of America's cultural riches, including such American-born art forms as jazz, rhythm and blues, detective novels, comic books, and the rich blend of all the world's cultures and their unique vernaculars, has enabled him to champion a truly native literature apart from the standards imposed (in a colonial manner) from European culture. Perhaps partly in recognition of this versatility, Reed was awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellowship. Negatively, his unbounded sense of satire has managed to offend almost every interest group in the profession of literature, from feminists to creative-writing-program teachers of poetry. In the chapter from his novel *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974) printed here, Reed humorously critiques a presumed ally, someone who teaches African American literature. The text being taught, Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), is one of the most important novels in American literature. Yet Reed objects to the stereotyping that this very success makes possible. So too for his character Minnie the Moocher from this same novel. The satire is especially cutting in naming the novel's chief feminist after a figure in bandleader Cab Calloway's song from the 1940s, an era of popular culture heavy with now-abhorrent sexual caricatures; it is effective, however, because of the way Reed shows how people like Minnie cooperate with their own oppression by maintaining forces of exclusion. It is to Reed's credit that he uses history and folklore to subvert such exclusionary processes, just as his novel employs figures from classic radio comedy such as Amos and Andy and their friend Kingfish to undermine ideas that, when stated by others, pass for the logic of a black bourgeoisie.

Reed draws a good picture of himself in the biographical note to his second novel, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969):

Ishmael Reed was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on February 22, 1938. Chattanooga built a monument to every Confederate soldier killed in the Civil War, so Ishmael Reed spent his early years bumping into stone. He grew up in Buffalo, New York, where "polack" is scribbled on the bust of Chopin in Humboldt Park.

Ishmael Reed attended the University of Buffalo and left after receiving rude phone calls from an anti-Gnostic bursar. At 20 he was stranded in North Platte, Nebraska. Buffalo Bill once had a drink there. He has taught American fiction at the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Washington at Seattle.

He startled the scientific community by making his home in New York City. Ishmael Reed has been buffaloeed by many aspects of American society, which makes him uniquely qualified to write about the West.

Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down is indeed about the West, but a West in which a band of cowboy rustlers is confronted by the pope in a helicopter. Similar absurdities and anachronisms distinguish Reed's other novels, including the Egyptology and Haitian Voodoo of *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), in which West Indian religion is employed for its imaginative resources, and the Civil War slave narrative of *Flight to*

Canada (1976). Subsequent novels lampoon contemporary politics, including political correctness; notable among these are *Reckless Eyeballing* (1986), *Japanese by Spring* (1993), and *Juice!* (2011).

Most of Ishmael Reed's literary methods are evident in *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*. Hoodoo is present in the folklore practices of Papa LaBas and his Solid Gumbo Works, an enterprise that, much like this native religion, draws on the spiritual nature of life, especially in contrast to the materialism of its rivals, Louisiana Red and the Moochers. It is set in a Berkeley, California, rife with early 1970s turbulence, including a university curriculum destabilized by an intellectual who, in the chapter printed here, dreams he has become the character Mary Dalton in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, a novel in which a rich, young white woman is inadvertently killed by her family's physically intimidating black chauffeur, Bigger Thomas. Sexual, racial, intellectual, and religious issues are thrown together in a mixed bag of popular references, all of which Reed shakes up and displays in fresh new postures. Like all good satirists, he exposes his subjects' weaknesses by emphasizing problems in their own terms.

Reed's poetry is an even more direct introduction to his general literary activity, for here is seen the blending of popular forms from many different cultures that to him constitutes truly American expression. His "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," presented as a poem, is in fact a program for what Reed would write himself and help others publish (via his *Yardbird Reader* series of books and anthologies produced with the Before Columbus Foundation). His message is that a rich culture, an original culture, exists within the very forms that older European standards disallow as lowbrow. He catalogs a wide range of popular entertainment figures and devises a poetic language that employs the power of expression so evident in the rhythms of such music. His editing and anthologizing and small-press productions have called on the resources not just of African Americans but of Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, white Americans of various ethnic backgrounds, and Native Americans, a blending of influences into non-Eurocentric aesthetic forms that is unique to America.

From The Last Days of Louisiana Red

Chapter 36

[MARY DALTON'S DREAM]

He was a blonde. He lay in the bed, tossing and turning. His room. What was that odor? The pungent odor of middle-class perfume making the air misty. He didn't feel right. His hair. What on earth was the matter with his hair? It was long and was covering the pillow. The pillows? They had a flower print and were pink. Pink? He rose in his bed and his breasts jiggled. BREASTS? THE BREASTS?? He looked back into the mirror next to the bed and his mouth made a black hollow hole of horror. "O MY GOD. MY GOD." He was a woman. You know what he said next, don't you, reader? He's from New York and so . . . you guessed it! "Kafka.¹ Pure Kafka," he said. A feeling crept over him. Tingly. What could he do? He felt like screaming, but he couldn't scream. Was that someone coming down the hall? He ran and jumped back into the bed, pulled the covers up to his neck

1. Franz Kafka (1883–1924), Austrian-Czech author of *The Metamorphosis*, in which the protagonist awakes to find himself turned into a giant insect.

and pretended to be asleep. Someone was coming down the hall. They stood for a moment outside in the hall. And then the knob slowly turned. Someone was now in the room; a dark foreboding shadow crept to the foot of the bed. A giant colored man—an Olmec-headed² giant wearing a chauffeur's cap. Max started to really scream this time.

"Please, Ms. Dalton,³ you will wake the whole house," the figure says. *Look at that white bitch laying there. Sloppy drunk. Probably wants some peter too. That's all they think about anyway. I'll fuck her into a cunt energy crisis she mess with me. That's probably what she wont. Been hittin on me all night. Probably pretending to be drunk. Wonts to see how far I go. I know Jan ain't gettin any. One simple dude. Tried to give me that old PROGRESSIVE LABOR⁴ line. Who don't know that? Who don't know that old simple ass mutherfuckin bullshit? Them mens was working at the Ford plant. Had some good jobs too. Then here come this Progressive Labor bullshit and them niggers lost they job after it was over. Ha! When is this bitch going to go to sleep? I wont to take that dark blue Buick with steel spoke wheels over to the South Side. Man, will them mo'fugs be mad when they see. Think I'm a pimp. Then I'll go up to the counter and roll out my 75 dollars. Man, they think I'm one of them pimps. Then I go get me some rangs. Lots of them. Have them all shining on my fingers. Shining. Justa shining. Gee. Bet I could have me plenty ol stankin bitches. Commisstee. That shit ain't nothing but some bunk. Roosia. Shhhhhhit. Started to bust that mo'fug Jan right in the mouf. Must be a sissy. . . .* The door opens and in comes a woman tapping a cane. *Ahhhh-shiit. Here come that other old crazy white woman down the hall. Look like Ms. Mary trying to say something. I better do something quick.*

Max finally realized the situation. He made a futile effort to move his lips. "Bigggg. Bigggggg." Meanwhile the cane tapping comes closer to the door. Bigger picks up the pillow and starts towards Mary Dalton when—

Max wakes up from the nightmare.

There was some bammng at the door real rough. Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam, Bam! Max leaped out of his dream and rushed to the door. Who could this be bammng at his door this time of night? The woman, trembling, rushed into the room.

"What do you want? I told you to never come here."

She wriggled out of her raincoat, then nervously wrung out a match after lighting a cigarette. She plopped down in a chair and drew her breath. It was Lisa, stripped of her Nanny's rags, sharp, voluptuous.

"It's LaBas. He called. He wants to talk about Ed's killing. Suppose he starts to ask me a lot of questions? You know I can't stand up under a lot of questions."

"You fool. You come here for that? I told you never to contact me here on this assignment."

"Look, you've only been here for a few years. I've been here more than ten, ever since his wife Ruby left. I've worked on that household and put my conjure all over the place. Then they sent you in to begin this organization

2. Large-headed statues were a cultural characteristic of the Olmec, pre-Aztec Indian peoples of what is now Tabasco and Veracruz in Mexico.
3. The character murdered by Bigger Thomas in

Native Son (1940), a novel by the American writer Richard Wright (1908–1960).

4. A Marxist magazine and political party active in the United States beginning in the 1930s.

to add to Ed's problems. Just as I had worked hard to prepare Minnie to do that. We've done enough damage to that family. When will it end?"

"It will end when Solid Gumbo Works has folded."

"I can't wait any longer. Since Wolf was killed, she's brought those Moochers into the household. I have to shuffle about like Hattie McDaniel⁵ to take care of their needs. They write slogans all over the walls and sleep on stained mattresses. They leave rings in the bathtub. They've been up all night with the mimeograph machine, trying to free Kingfish and Andy."⁶

"Yes, I know," Max said. "I wrote the copy."

"I have to fix breakfast and clean up their mess. You know how Moochers are, never clean up after themselves, always expect someone else to do their cleaning for them. I told you not to draw the girl into that organization. I was doing O.K. All I needed was some more time."

"You were taking too long. Besides, the Moochers provided us with the numbers to wear down Solid Gumbo Works."

"Well, I still maintain that if it had been left to me, I would have put her on Ed. I never did go along with his killing."

"It was necessary. You know that. If we hadn't butchered him that night, he would have discovered the cure for heroin addiction. That was the industrial secret you passed on to me; the papers of his you Xeroxed. We had to do it. If he had found a legitimate cure, our quack operation would have shut down: the southern mailhouse empire we built would shut down. Heroin, jukeboxes, our black record company in the east, The House of Cocaine. Everybody would have been asking for Ed's Gumbo. Wasn't it enough that he found a cure for cancer?"

"You thought you'd gotten rid of that threat when you killed that Chinese acupuncturist, but Ed found different means."

"You always respected him a bit, didn't you?"

"He was a man. Ed was a hard-working man. Sometimes I wanted to tell him who I was, where I was from, and what was wrong with me. That I had been sent into his house to train his child to drive him crazy."

"You can't quit. I received orders from Louisiana Red that we have one more job. You think you have problems. Do you think I like posing as a visiting lecturer at the University of California at Berkeley? The way the women in the English Department office whisper about my lack of potency and sometimes refuse to file for my office post box."

"Do you think that I enjoy it when they refuse to mimeograph copies of lecture notes for my students? Why, this campus reminds me of the set of *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*.⁷ If Louisiana Red hadn't promised me this one-million-dollar retirement money, I never would have taken care of this assignment. I was doing all right with my New York industrial spy firm. But you, you have to stay until it's over. They have you where they want you."

5. An actress known for portraying African American maids in American films of the 1930s and 1940s, including *Gone with the Wind* (1939), for which she won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

6. African American characters in the *Amos 'n' Andy* radio and television comedy show of the 1930s, '40s, and '50s.

7. Popular American film of the 1950s.

"I'm leaving."

Max pulls out a sheet of paper from a desk drawer. "You know that Louisiana Red doesn't play. They will get to you through your police record. You are a fugitive from justice, you know, you bag woman. (Reads) 'Real name: The Hammerhead Shark.' The title you picked up in that caper when you hit a man on the head with a hammer, put a hex on a congressman, double-crossed Jack Johnson, stabbed Martin Luther King, brought charges against Father Divine, brought down Sam Cooke in a blaze of gunfire and bad-mouthed Joe Louis.⁸ They know your penchant for Coon-Can and about your scar too. Not only are the law enforcement bureaus after you, but you know the consequences of crossing the Louisiana Red Corporation."

"I'm not frightened any more. I've sent a message to the Red Rooster and told him that I want out, Max."

"I've thought about leaving myself."

"You have? Why, Max, we can leave together, go to Reno; why, I can get a job as a waitress, you can deal blackjack."

"But they'll follow us."

"Not if we move fast enough."

"Maybe we ought to. You know how I missed you during those long days. When you couldn't be with me in my arms. How we had to limit ourselves to meeting every other Thursday, your day off. There must be thousands of us all over the country, meeting like this out of public view."

"Yes, my dearest, the American underground of Desire, the name of the first American slaver; we know each other on the street and recognize each other's signals. How we pay subscriptions to our propaganda organs which convince the public that it's only the Jim Brown and Racquel Welch⁹ bedroom scene that's the problem. We rule America, all of it, my Nanny and me. The 'Every Other Thursday Society.' Yes, I want to leave, Lisa. My cover is getting to me."

"I don't understand."

"That book I'm doing—the one on Richard Wright's book." He rushes to the bar, makes a drink and gulps it down. Then he slams the empty glass on the bar. "It's getting to me. I'm having these dreams. Just before you knocked on the door, I had one. I was the murder victim and this big brute was coming towards me with a pillow."

"That dream will come true if you won't move over to the wall."

The startled couple turned around to see the gunman standing in the doorway.

"Son of a bitch. So you were going to take it on the lam and leave me stranded now that the assignment has heated up."

"T, take it easy, have a drink."

"No thanks, I'm not thirsty. Here I have been playing the fool for these past years, helping you set up Ed Yellings, and now you are going to drop me. Years of swallowing my pride and acting like a kookie rookie when all

8. Popular figures from African American culture. Johnson (1878–1946), first black heavyweight champion of the world. King (1929–1968), civil rights leader. Father Divine, born George Baker (1877–1965), American religious leader.

Cooke (1935–1964), popular singer. Louis (1914–1981), world heavyweight boxing champion.

9. Then current film stars, respectively African American and white.

along you two were carrying on. I'm finished with this assignment. I feel sick about what has happened to Minnie. She wants more power now than Marie Laveau,¹ and you two did it to her. I'm going to call the Director of Louisiana Red Corporation, the Red Rooster, and tell him everything I know about you two. You see, it's all over. That's what I came up here to tell you about."

"What's all over?" Lisa says. "You don't make sense."

"About an hour ago Minnie busted George Kingfish Stevens and Andy Brown out of jail and then commandeered an airplane after miraculously evading San Francisco security, which was as tight as a drum. You don't have anything else to use against Solid Gumbo Works because Minnie has been shot."

"Shot," both Lisa and Max exclaim.

"Yes, she was shot by a passenger. The poor child was rushed to a New York hospital. It sickens me, my part in this whole thing."

He walks over to the telephone and dials.

"Hello, operator, give me Louisiana Red Corporation in New Orleans, person to person to the Red Rooster, the number is area code 504—" but before he could say anything Max lunged for him and with incredible strength wrestled him to the floor. The gun went off, killing T Feeler.

"Max, let's get out of here. We really must go now."

Max slowly looked up from where he knelt over the corpse. "Who you callin Max, bitch? I'll whip you into bad health."

"Max, what's the matter with you? Why are you talking that way?"

"I'm gone fix you good. Killing you won't count. Not even the best critics will notice it. I'm going to kill you." He walks towards her. She screams.

"Max! Stop!"

"Max? Who Max? I'm Bigger," Max growls.

1974

Neo-HooDoo Manifesto¹

Neo-HooDoo is a "Lost American Church" updated. Neo-HooDoo is the music of James Brown² without the lyrics and ads for Black Capitalism. Neo-HooDoo is the 8 basic dances of 19-century New Orleans' *Place Congo*—the Calinda the Bamboula the Chacta the Babouille the Conjaille the Juba the Congo and the VooDoo—modernized into the Philly Dog, the Hully Gully, the Funky Chicken, the Popcorn, the Boogaloo and the dance of great American choreographer Buddy Bradley.

Neo-HooDoos would rather "shake that thing" than be stiff and erect. (There were more people performing a Neo-HooDoo sacred dance, the Boogaloo, at Woodstock than chanting Hare Krishna . . . Hare Hare!) All

1. Quasi-legendary hoodoo priestess in old New Orleans.

1. From *Conjure: Selected Poems, 1963–1970*

(1972).

2. African American rhythm-and-blues singer and bandleader (1933–2006).

so-called “Store Front Churches” and “Rock Festivals”³ receive their matrix in the Hoodoo rites of Marie Laveau⁴ conducted at New Orleans’ Lake Pontchartrain, and Bayou St. John in the 1880’s. The power of Hoodoo challenged the stability of civil authority in New Orleans and was driven underground where to this day it flourishes in the Black ghettos throughout the country. That’s why in Ralph Ellison’s⁵ modern novel *Invisible Man* New Orleans is described as “The Home of Mystery.” “Everybody from New Orleans got that thing,” Louis Armstrong⁶ said once.

Hoodoo is the strange and beautiful “fits” the Black slave Tituba gave the children of Salem.⁷ (Notice the arm waving ecstatic females seemingly possessed at the “Pentecostal,” “Baptist,” and “Rock Festivals,” [all fronts for Neo-Hoodoo]). The reason that Hoodoo isn’t given the credit it deserves in influencing American Culture is because the students of that culture both “overground” and “underground” are uptight closet Jeho-vah revisionists. They would assert the American and East Indian and Chinese thing before they would the Black thing. Their spiritual leaders Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot⁸ hated Africa and “Darkies.” In Theodore Roszak’s book *The Making of a Counter Culture*⁹—there is barely any mention of the Black influence on this culture even though its members dress like Blacks talk like Blacks walk like Blacks, gesture like Blacks wear Afros and indulge in Black music and dance (Neo-Hoodoo).

Neo-Hoodoo is sexual, sensual and digs the old “heathen” good good loving. An early American Hoodoo song says:

*Now lady I ain't no mill man
Just the mill man's son
But I can do your grinding
till the mill man comes*

Which doesn’t mean that women are treated as “sexual toys” in Neo-Hoodoo or as one slick Jeho-vah Revisionist recently said, “victims of a raging hormone imbalance.” Neo-Hoodoo claims many women philosophers and theoreticians which is more than ugh religions Christianity and its offspring Islam can claim. When our theoretician Zora Neale Hurston¹ asked a *Mambo* (a female priestess in the Haitian Voodoo) a definition of Voodoo the Mambo lifted her skirts and exhibited her Erzulie Seal, her Isis seal. Neo-Hoodoo identifies with Julia Jackson² who stripped Hoodoo of its oppressive Catholic layer—Julia Jackson said when asked the origin of the amulets and talismans in her studio, “I make all my own stuff. It saves money and it’s as good. People who has to buy their stuff ain’t using their heads.”

3. Massively attended concerts, often outdoors, popular in the 1960s and 1970s; Woodstock was the major one. “Store Front Churches”: small churches with improvised sites in neighborhood shops.

4. See n. 1, p. 759.

5. African American writer (1914–1994).

6. American jazz musician and vocalist (1900–1971).

7. A town in Massachusetts that was the site of

witchcraft hysteria in 1692.

8. Pound (1885–1972) and Eliot (1888–1965) were modernist American and Anglo-American poets, respectively.

9. A 1969 study of contemporary young people’s revolt against establishment codes and traditions.

1. American fiction writer, poet, and folklorist (1891–1960).

2. Prominent hoodoo practitioner in New Orleans in the 1940s.

Neo-HooDoo is not a church for egotripping—it takes its “organization” from Haitian VooDoo of which Milo Rigaud wrote:

Unlike other established religions, there is no hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, or a pope in VooDoo. Each oum'phor is a law unto itself, following the traditions of VooDoo but modifying and changing the ceremonies and rituals in various ways. Secrets of VooDoo.

Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest. You can bring your own creative ideas to Neo-HooDoo. Charlie “Yardbird (Thoth)” Parker³ is an example of the Neo-HooDoo artist as an innovator and improviser.

In Neo-HooDoo, Christ the landlord deity (“render unto Caesar”) is on probation. This includes “The Black Christ” and “The Hippie Christ.” Neo-HooDoo tells Christ to get lost. (Judas Iscariot holds an honorary degree from Neo-HooDoo.)

Whereas at the center of Christianity lies the graveyard the organ-drone and the cross, the center of Neo-HooDoo is the drum the anhk and the Dance. So Fine, Barefootin, Heard it Through the Grapevine,⁴ are all Neo-HooDoos.

Neo-HooDoo has “seen a lot of things in this old world.”

Neo-HooDoo borrows from Ancient Egyptians (ritual accessories of Ancient Egypt are still sold in the House of Candles and Talismans on Stanton Street in New York, the Botanical Gardens in East Harlem, and Min and Mom on Haight Street in San Francisco, examples of underground centers found in ghettos throughout America).

Neo-HooDoo borrows from Haiti Africa and South America. Neo-HooDoo comes in all styles and moods. Louis Jordon Nellie Lutchter John Lee Hooker Ma Rainey Dinah Washington the Temptations Ike and Tina Turner Aretha Franklin Muddy Waters Otis Redding Sly and the Family Stone B. B. King Junior Wells Bessie Smith Jelly Roll Morton Ray Charles Jimi Hendrix Buddy Miles the 5th Dimension the Chambers Brothers Etta James and acolytes Creedence Clearwater Revival the Flaming Embers Procol Harum are all Neo-HooDoos. Neo-HooDoo never turns down pork. In fact Neo-HooDoo is the Bar-B-Cue of Amerika. The Neo-HooDoo cuisine is Geechee Gree Gree Verta Mae's *Vibration Cooking*.⁵ (Ortiz Walton's Neo-HooDoo Jass Band performs at the Native Son Restaurant in Berkeley, California. Joe Overstreet's⁶ Neo-HooDoo exhibit will happen at the Berkeley Gallery Sept. 1, 1970 in Berkeley.)

3. American jazz musician (1920–1955), pioneer of the bebop style of modern jazz.

4. Popular rock 'n' roll and rhythm-and-blues songs that inspired new dances.

5. This paragraph lists a mélange of contempo-

rary popular musicians and musical groups from a wide range of musical styles, including the blues, jazz, rock 'n' roll, and Motown.

6. American painter (b. 1934)

Neo-HooDoo ain't Negritude.⁷ Neo-HooDoo never been to France. Neo-HooDoo is "your Mama" as Larry Neal⁸ said. Neo-HooDoos Little Richard and Chuck Berry nearly succeeded in converting the Beatles.⁹ When the Beatles said they were more popular than Christ they seemed astonished at the resulting outcry. This is because although they could feebly through amplification and technological sham "mimic" (as if Little Richard and Chuck Berry were Loa [Spirits] practicing ventriloquism on their "Horses") the Beatles failed to realize that they were conjuring the music and ritual (although imitation) of a Forgotten Faith, a traditional enemy of Christianity which Christianity the Cop Religion has had to drive underground each time they meet. Neo-HooDoo now demands a rematch, the referees were bribed and the adversary had resin on his gloves.

The Vatican Forbids Jazz Masses in Italy

Rome, Aug. 6 (UPI)—*The Vatican today barred jazz and popular music from masses in Italian churches and forbade young Roman Catholics to change prayers or readings used on Sundays and holy days.*

It said such changes in worship were "eccentric and arbitrary."

A Vatican document distributed to all Italian bishops did not refer to similar experimental masses elsewhere in the world, although Pope Paul VI and other high-ranking churchmen are known to dislike the growing tendency to deviate from the accepted form of the mass.

Some Italian churches have permitted jazz masses played by combos while youthful worshipers sang such songs as "We Shall Overcome."

Church leaders two years ago rebuked priests who permitted such experiments. The New York Times, August 7, 1970.

Africa is the home of the Ioa (Spirits) of Neo-HooDoo although we are building our own American "pantheon." Thousands of "Spirits" (Ka) who would laugh at Jeho-vah's fury concerning "false idols" (translated everybody else's religion) or "fetishes." Moses, Jeho-vah's messenger and zombie swiped the secrets of VooDoo from old Jethro but nevertheless ended up with a curse. (Warning, many White "Black delineators" who practiced HooDoo VooDoo for gain and did not "feed" the Black Spirits of HooDoo ended up tragically. Bix Beiderbecke and Irene Castle (who exploited Black Dance in the 1920s and relished in dressing up as a Nun) are examples of this tragic tendency.

Moses had a near heart attack when he saw his sons dancing nude before the Black Bull God Apis. They were dancing to a "heathen sound" that Moses had "heard before in Egypt" (probably a mixture of Sun Ra and Jimmy Reed¹ played in the nightclub district of ancient Egypt's "The Domain of Osiris"—named after the god who enjoyed the fancy footwork of the pigmies).

7. A 20th-century literary school of poetry written in French by African authors.

8. Music critic, theoretician of African American literature, and anthologist (1937–1981).

9. British rock group of the 1960s. Little Richard (b. 1932) and Chuck Berry (b. 1926), African

American rock 'n' rollers who had a formative influence on the Beatles.

1. Blues musician (1925–1976) from the 1950s. Sun Ra (1914–1993), avant-garde jazz musician of the 1950s.

The continuing war between Moses and his “Sons” was recently acted out in Chicago in the guise of an American “trial.”

I have called Jeho-vah (most likely Set the Egyptian Sat-on [a pun on the fiend’s penalty] Satan) somewhere “a party-poofer and hater of dance.” Neo-HooDoo is detectives of the metaphysical about to make a pinch. We have issued warrants for a god arrest. If Jeho-vah reveals his real name he will be released on his own recognizance de-horned and put out to pasture.

A dangerous paranoid pain-in-the-neck a CopGod from the git-go, Jeho-vah was the successful law and order candidate in the mythological relay of the 4th century A.D. Jeho-vah is the God of punishment. The H-Bomb is a typical Jeho-vah “miracle.” Jeho-vah is why we are in Vietnam.² He told Moses to go out and “subdue” the world.

There has never been in history another such culture as the Western civilization—a culture which has practiced the belief that the physical and social environment of man is subject to rational manipulation and that history is subject to the will and action of man; whereas central to the traditional cultures of the rivals of Western civilization, those of Africa and Asia, is a belief that it is environment that dominates man. The Politics of Hysteria, Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff.

“Political leaders” are merely altar boys from Jeho-vah. While the targets of some “revolutionaries” are laundramats and candy stores, Neo-HooDoo targets are TV the museums the symphony halls and churches art music and literature departments in Christianizing (education I think they call it!) universities which propogate the Art of Jeho-vah—much Byzantine Middle Ages Renaissance painting of Jeho-vah’s “500 years of civilization” as Nixon³ put it are Jeho-vah propaganda. Many White revolutionaries can only get together with 3rd world people on the most mundane ‘political’ level because they are of Jeho-vah’s party and don’t know it. How much Black music do so-called revolutionary underground radio stations play. On the other hand how much Bach?⁴

Neo-HooDoo is Black Red (Black Hawk an American Indian was an early philosopher of the HooDoo Church) and occasionally White (Made-moiselle Charlotte is a Haitian Loa [Spirit]).

Neo-HooDoo is a litany seeking its text
 Neo-HooDoo is a Dance and Music closing in on its words
 Neo-HooDoo is a Church finding its lyrics
 Cecil Brown Al Young Calvin Hernton

2. The war in Vietnam was being waged at the time this essay was written. In 1965 then president Lyndon Johnson delivered a famous speech, “Why We Are in Vietnam.”

3. Richard Nixon (1913–1994) was president

of the United States at the time this essay was written.

4. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German organist and composer.

David Henderson Steven Cannon Quincy Troupe
 Ted Joans Victor Cruz N. H. Pritchard Ishmael Reed
 Lennox Raphael Sarah Fabio Ron Welburn⁵ are Neo-
 Hoodoo's "Manhattan Project"⁶ of writing . . .

A Neo-Hoodoo celebration will involve the dance music
 and poetry of Neo-Hoodoo and whatever ideas the
 participating artists might add. A Neo-Hoodoo seal
 is the Face of an Old American Train.
 Neo-Hoodoo signs are everywhere!
 Neo-Hoodoo is the Now Locomotive swinging
 up the Tracks of the American Soul.

Almost 100 years ago Hoodoo was forced to say
 Goodbye to America. Now Hoodoo is
 back as Neo-Hoodoo
You can't keep a good church down!

1972

5. These lines list contemporary multicultural writers.

6. The research program that developed the atomic bomb for use at the end of World War II.

CHARLES SIMIC

b. 1938

Charles Simic came to the United States from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, at the age of sixteen. When in 2007 he was named as poet laureate of the United States for the coming year, he responded that he was "especially touched and honored to be selected because I am an immigrant boy who didn't speak English until I was fifteen." His earliest childhood memories are of bombs dropping, people disappearing, and buildings in ruins. "My own home movie begins with the German bombing of Belgrade on April 6, 1941," he has said, "when a bomb hit the building across the street. I flew out of my bed all the way across the room. I was three years old and more astonished than I actually was frightened by the flames that rose everywhere." The unpredictability of Simic's poetry, with its feeling for the bizarre and irrational quality of ordinary things, may have originated in his childhood. During the German occupation of Yugoslavia a civil war broke out among the partisans; before long the communist Marshal Tito emerged as the Yugoslav leader. In 1944 the American and British forces bombed German-occupied Belgrade, where the Simics continued to live. After the war Tito established a repressive communist regime: "People were being arrested left and right. Everybody was afraid. In school there was indoctrination," Simic writes in his memoir *A Fly in the Soup* (2000). During those years Simic, his mother, and his brother spent time in refugee camps and prisons; they were finally able to leave Yugoslavia for Paris in 1953. A year later they immigrated to the United States, where his father was already living. "After what we had been through," he writes, "the wildest lies seemed plausible and the poems that I was going to write had to take that into account."

Simic's poetry is often full of mysterious fragments, as if some unspecified force has detonated both the larger, cohesive structure of the world and the narrative of the poem. At the same time Simic's stanzas function as regulating and balancing structures in tension with what is incomprehensible and often absurd. This tension, along with Simic's deadpan tone, renders the comic and the frightening qualities of a world where truth and justice are "The Famous No-Shows" and existence is a cosmic joke. It is not surprising that Simic admires the early film comedian Buster Keaton (1895–1966) for his "serenity in the face of chaos." The joke in Simic's poems is also a form of black humor, born of a historical dread that Simic attributes to life in the twentieth century. Menace permeates the ordinary and domestic moments in Simic's poems. In "A Book Full of Pictures" a child is reading, a father studying, a mother knitting, but the quiet of the poem is disturbing. A "black raincoat / in the upstairs bedroom" sways from the ceiling. The declarative statements of the poem, like the click of the knitting needles, seem designed to fend off violence within and without the scene.

Simic's years in a Yugoslavia that monitored dissent through a secret police taught him the brutal consequences of a politically repressive conformity, and he has always been attracted to irreverence and unpredictability. As a young man he lived in New York and was drawn to surrealist poetry and to the wild flights of twentieth-century Latin American verse. Impatient with what he saw as the academic conservatism of poetry in the 1950s and early 1960s, he wrote verse that celebrated surreal and associative leaps (exemplified by the "controlled anarchy" of the jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who is depicted in Faith Ringgold's painting *Sonny's Quilt*, reproduced in the color insert in this anthology) and untamable erotic impulses. His work since that period continues to celebrate irreverence and humor. Along with such outward wildness, Simic's poetry is full of secrets, and the presence of something hidden frequently disturbs or haunts a Simic poem. Often the poems read like enigmatic disclosures in the form of riddles or jokes. He loves metaphysical speculation and can suggest philosophical questions through the most particular and even ordinary things, such as a fork or a glove; he has said that he practices "a kind of bedroom and kitchen metaphysics."

Among Simic's many books are *Selected Poems 1963–1983* (1985, revised and expanded 1990), *The Book of Gods and Devils* (1990), *Hotel Insomnia* (1992), *Walking the Black Cat* (1996), *Jackstraws* (1999), *Night Picnic* (2001), *The Voice at 3:00 A.M.: Selected Late and New Poems* (2003), *My Noiseless Entourage* (2005), *That Little Something* (2008), and *The Monster Loves the Labyrinth* (2008). *Master of Disguises* (2010) shows Simic at the height of his powers. His *New and Selected Poems, 1962–2012* appeared in 2013 and he has continued to publish since. In addition he has edited and translated the work of Eastern European poets such as Vasko Popa and Tomaz Salamun. His collections of essays and memoirs include *The Uncertain Certainty* (1985), *Wonderful Words Silent Truth* (1990), and *A Fly in the Soup* (2000). Simic has described his work as a kind of "nonsense made up of fiction, autobiography, the essay, poetry, and, of course, the joke." With their mixture of the comic and the terrible and with their surreal storytelling power, Simic's poems haunt the mind long after one has read them.

Fork

This strange thing must have crept
 Right out of hell.
 It resembles a bird's foot
 Worn around the cannibal's neck.

As you hold it in your hand, 5
 As you stab with it into a piece of meat,
 It is possible to imagine the rest of the bird:
 Its head which like your fist
 Is large, bald, beakless and blind.

1971

Prodigy

I grew up bent over
 a chessboard.

I loved the word *endgame*.¹

All my cousins looked worried.

It was a small house 5
 near a Roman graveyard.
 Planes and tanks
 shook its windowpanes.

A retired professor of astronomy
 taught me how to play. 10

That must have been in 1944.

In the set we were using,
 the paint had almost chipped off
 the black pieces.

The white King was missing 15
 and had to be substituted for.

I'm told but do not believe
 that that summer I witnessed
 men hung from telephone poles.

I remember my mother 20
 blindfolding me a lot.
 She had a way of tucking my head
 suddenly under her overcoat.

In chess, too, the professor told me,
 the masters play blindfolded, 25
 the great ones on several boards
 at the same time.

1980

1. Late stage of a chess game after the major reduction of forces.

A Book Full of Pictures

Father studied theology through the mail
 And this was exam time.
 Mother knitted. I sat quietly with a book
 Full of pictures. Night fell.
 My hands grew cold touching the faces
 Of dead kings and queens. 5

There was a black raincoat
 in the upstairs bedroom
 Swaying from the ceiling,
 But what was it doing there? 10
 Mother's long needles made quick crosses.
 They were black
 Like the inside of my head just then.

The pages I turned sounded like wings.
 "The soul is a bird," he once said. 15
 In my book full of pictures
 A battle raged: lances and swords
 Made a kind of wintry forest
 With my heart spiked and bleeding in its branches.

1992

Arriving Celebrities

Tragedy and Comedy
 Stepping out of a limousine
 In ritzy furs;
 Diminutive skirts,
 Blowing kisses 5
 Left and right.

Bedlam of adoring fans,
 Pushing and squeezing,
 Hollering for a glimpse,
 When—all of a sudden! 10
 A hush.
 An all-inclusive clam-up.

Is someone, I inquired
 Of my neighbors,
 Already lying knifed 15
 On the dance floor
 Mouthing the name
 We are all straining to overhear?

The towering bodyguards
 With shaved heads
 And mirror-tinted shades,
 Don't hear me right,
 Or will not deign
 To grant my presence.

20

1999

MICHAEL S. HARPER

1938–2016

“I’ve been listening to music all my life,” Michael S. Harper once said, and his first book of poems, *Dear John, Dear Coltrane* (1970), took its title from his poem to the great American jazz saxophonist. Recalling Coltrane’s life in his prose piece “Don’t They Speak Jazz,” Harper told this story: “Trane was searching for a particular tone on his horn; he had what we thought was a perfect embouchure, but his teeth hurt constantly, so he searched for the soft reed which would ease the pain. After searching for a year, each session killing his chops, he gave it up completely; there was no easy way to get that sound: play through the pain to a *love supreme*.” Playing through the pain is a part of what Harper brought to his poetry. Like the great blues singers and jazz musicians, his work celebrates life as song, especially as tragic song, full of losses and griefs, but song nevertheless. Sometimes the pain Harper sings through is personal, like the death of one of his sons in “Deathwatch” (he and his wife lost two of their infant sons shortly after birth); sometimes the pain belongs to family history (as in “Grandfather”). Sometimes it is the pain of history more generally, its violence and oppression.

History was Harper’s second love as a poet, following right behind music. His poem to Coltrane, while dependent on the techniques of jazz and the blues, reflects Harper’s concern with an imaginative recovery of history, especially black history, in an America where (as he once put it) the “amnesia level” is high. “I think the important thing about Americans is that they’re not very good historians,” Harper has said. “And Americans are really bad historians when it comes to moral ideas because they can’t keep them in their heads very long.” For Harper, to be a poet was to be a good historian; history identifies and inscribes moral issues that continue to engage us in the present. In college, Harper recalled, he read William Carlos Williams’s *In the American Grain* (1925), in which Williams announces that “History for us begins with murder and enslavement, not with discovery.” Like Williams, Harper wanted to bring his personal imagination in contact with an American history (black and white) essentially tragic, tragic because, he said, “so many possibilities exist and there’s been so much waste.” This tragic sense informs Harper’s work perhaps most clearly in his volume *Nightmare Begins Responsibility* (1975)—the title is a variation on one of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats’s epigraphs—where a personal sense of loss is never separable from the sufferings of black history or of human history more generally. *Honorable Amendments* appeared in 1995, and *Songlines in Michaeltree: New and Collected Poems* was published in 2000.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Harper remembered a childhood in which “my parents weren’t rich, but they had a good record collection.” He grew up hearing the blues and jazz, but also reading the work of Langston Hughes and, later, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, and his poetic technique owed something to his literary as well as to his musical sensibility. An additional resource was a family tradition of oral storytelling (“My people were good storytellers,” he has said), out of which some of his poems have grown. In fact, the jazz techniques of variation on a theme, of improvisation around an existing form, recall traditions of oral storytelling and both the jazz and oral traditions that influenced the formal experiments of an Ellison or a Baldwin. After high school Harper earned a B.A. and an M.A. at what is now California State University, Los Angeles, then went to the University of Iowa for an MFA. His travels abroad, first to Mexico and Europe and later (1977) to South Africa, intensified his historical sense both of his own family roots and of their connection with racial history. From 1970 until his death in 2016, Harper taught at Brown University, where he was a professor of English and director of the writing program.

“Most great art is finally testamental,” Harper wrote; “its technical brilliance never shadows the content of the song.” Harper wrote poems to remember and to witness, but at times the urgency of the content overpowered his form and his language could not sustain the urgency the poem asserted. This may be the cost for a poet whose engagement with moral issues, whose deep historical sense, and whose rhythmic inventiveness enabled him to create powerful and moving poems. His finest work possesses what he admired in Coltrane: “the energy and passion with which he approached his instrument and music,” resembling the energy it takes “to break oppressive conditions, oppressive musical structures, and oppressive societal structures.” Harper’s inclusive sense of history let him write (in “Blue Ruth: America”) that “*history is your own heartbeat*,” but also let him hear his own heart beat in time with those who lived in other times, other places. Responsible to memory, Harper also shared the affirmative impulse found in the blues: “The blues say ‘Yes’ to life no matter what it is. That doesn’t mean you’re going to survive it. But it means you’re going to say yes to it.”

Dear John, Dear Coltrane¹

a love supreme, a love supreme
a love supreme, a love supreme

Sex fingers toes
in the marketplace
near your father’s church
in Hamlet, North Carolina²—
witness to this love 5
in this calm fallow
of these minds,
there is no substitute for pain:
genitals gone or going,
seed burned out, 10
you tuck the roots in the earth,
turn back, and move

1. John Coltrane (1926–1967), avant-garde jazz musician. The epigraph is a phrase chanted at the beginning of his four-part composition *A*

Love Supreme.
2. Coltrane’s birthplace.

by river through the swamps,
singing: *a love supreme, a love supreme*;
what does it all mean? 15

Loss, so great each black
woman expects your failure
in mute change, the seed gone.
You plod up into the electric city—
your song now crystal and 20
the blues. You pick up the horn
with some will and blow
into the freezing night:
a love supreme, a love supreme—

Dawn comes and you cook 25
up the thick sin 'tween
impotence and death, fuel
the tenor sax cannibal
heart, genitals and sweat
that makes you clean— 30
a love supreme, a love supreme—

Why you so black?
cause I am
why you so funky?
cause I am 35
why you so black?
cause I am
why you so sweet?
cause I am
why you so black? 40
cause I am
a love supreme, a love supreme:

So sick
you couldn't play *Naima*,³
so flat we ached 45
for song you'd concealed
with your own blood,
your diseased liver gave
out its purity,
the inflated heart 50
pumps out, the tenor⁴ kiss,
tenor love:
a love supreme, a love supreme—
a love supreme, a love supreme—

1970

3. One of Coltrane's most famous songs named for his wife.

4. Perhaps an allusion to the tenor saxophone, Coltrane's instrument.

American History

for John Callahan

Those four black girls blown up
in that Alabama church¹
remind me of five hundred
middle passage blacks,²
in a net, under water 5
in Charleston harbor
so redcoats³ wouldn't find them.
Can't find what you can't see
can you?

1970

Martin's Blues¹

He came apart in the open,
the slow motion cameras
falling quickly
neither alive nor kicking;
stone blind dead 5
on the balcony
that old melody
etched his black lips
in a pruned echo:
We shall overcome 10
some day—²
Yes we did!
Yes we did!

1971

"Bird Lives": Charles Parker¹ in St. Louis

Last on legs, last on sax,
last in Indian wars, last on *smack*,
Bird is specious, *Bird* is alive,

1. On September 15, 1963, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was bombed by white racists as a reprisal against civil rights demonstrations.

2. Captured and en route from Africa (along the "Middle Passage," the usual route for slave ships) to be sold as slaves.

3. I.e., British soldiers.

1. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968), American civil rights leader, was assassinated on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee.

2. Line from "we shall overcome," a hymn that became an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

1. American jazz musician (1920–1955), known as "Bird"; he was a heroin (smack) addict.

horn, unplayable, before, after,
 right now: it's heroin time: 5
smack, in the melody a trip;
smack, in the Mississippi;
smack, in the drug merchant trap;
smack, in St. Louis, Missouri.

We knew you were through— 10
 trying to get out of town,
 unpaid bills, connections
 unmet, unwanted, unasked,
Bird's in the last arc
 of his own light: *blow Bird!* 15
 And you did—
 screaming, screaming, baby,
 for life, after it, around it,
 screaming for life, *blow Bird!*

What is the meaning of music? 20
 What is the meaning of war?
 What is the meaning of oppression?
Blow Bird! Ripped up and down
 into the interior of life, the pain,
Bird, the embraceable you,² 25
 how many brothers gone,
smacked out: blues and racism,
 the hardest, longest penis
 in the Mississippi urinal:
Blow Bird! 30

Taught more musicians, then forgot,
 space loose, fouling the melodies,
 the marching songs, the fine white
 geese from the plantations,
 syrup in this pork barrel, 35
 Kansas City, the even teeth
 of the mafia, the big band:
Blow Bird! Inside out Charlie's
 guts, *Blow Bird!* get yourself killed.

In the first wave, the musicians, 40
 out there, alone, in the first wave;
 everywhere you went, Massey Hall,
 Sweden, New Rochelle, *Birdland*,
 nameless bird, Blue Note, Carnegie,³
 tuxedo junction, out of nowhere, 45

2. Title of a 1928 song by George and Ira Gershwin; Parker recorded a memorable version in 1947.

3. Among the places where Parker performed were Massey Concert Hall in Toronto, Canada; Malmo, Sweden; New Rochelle, New York; Bird-

land, the landmark New York City jazz club named after him; the Blue Note, another New York City jazz club; and Carnegie Hall, the famous New York City concert hall.

confirmation, confirmation, confirmation:
Bird Lives! Bird Lives! and you do:
 Dead—

1972

Nightmare Begins Responsibility¹

I place these numbed wrists to the pane
 watching white uniforms whisk over
 him in the tube-kept
 prison
 fear what they will do in experiment 5
 watch my gloved stickshifting gasolined hands
 breathe *boxcar-information-please* infirmery tubes
 distrusting white-pink mending paperthin
 silkened end hairs, distrusting tubes
 shrunk in his *trunk-skincapped* 10
 shaven head, in thighs
distrusting-white-hands-picking-baboon-light
 on this son who will not make his second night
 of this wardstrewn intensive airpocket
 where his father's asthmatic 15
 hymns of *night-train*, train done gone
 his mother can only know that he has flown
 up into essential calm unseen corridor
 going boxscarred home, *mamaborn, sweetsonchild*
gonedowntown into *researchtestingwarehousebatteryacid* 20
mama-son-done-gone / me telling her 'nother
 train tonight, no music, no breathstroked
 heartbeat in my infinite distrust of them:

and of my distrusting self
white-doctor-who-breathed-for-him-all-night 25
 say it for two sons gone,
 say nightmare, say it loud
 panebreaking heartmadness:
 nightmare begins responsibility.

1975

1. Cf. the title of a book by American poet Delmore Schwartz, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (1938); Schwartz took the title from a line in

the Irish poet William Butler Yeats's "Responsibilities" (1913).

TONI CADE BAMBARA

1939–1995

“Her writing is woven, aware of its music, its overlapping waves of scenic action, so clearly on its way,” Toni Morrison wrote about editing the work of her friend Toni Cade Bambara, “like a magnet collecting details in its wake, each of which is essential to the final effect.” In her preface to the posthumous collection of fiction, essays, and conversations *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions* (1996), Morrison describes Bambara as an “ever vocal woman,” and the remarkable presence of a living voice distinguishes the stories collected in *Gorilla, My Love* (1972) and *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive* (1977), as well as Bambara’s novels, *The Salt Eaters* (1981) and the posthumously published *Those Bones Are Not My Child* (1999).

Born and raised in New York City, Bambara was as much a social activist as a writer. She worked in organizations dedicated to the most practical day-to-day benefits for minority city dwellers and also traveled to Cuba and Vietnam to lobby for reformed national politics. She spent the last fifteen years of her professional life working on television documentaries, including *The Bombing of Orange Avenue* (about the Philadelphia police department’s deadly assault on the MOVE organization). Yet she will be remembered for her short stories, particularly the first-person narratives of her women storytellers about their experiences in the black community. Her protagonists are activists in their societies, societies that in their flux demand creative readjustment at every stage. Such is the dynamic of “Medley” (printed here), in which a culture’s music indexes the pace and rhythms of its social existence. As in this story, Bambara’s plots are always moving, existing in a state of being “on their way” toward an imperatively stated conclusion, as Toni Morrison has said of this writer’s prose style.

As her novel *The Salt Eaters* shows, Bambara was sensitive to the role storytelling plays in healthy communities. Here, when an activist is frustrated over divisiveness in the people she wishes to help, a traditional healer comes to the rescue with her tales of folk values. Life is change, Bambara understood; the fluid nature of language teaches that no stable, secure place exists beyond the voice’s constant ability to reinvent itself. Hence Bambara meant to be of service in editing *Tales and Stories of Black Folks* (1971), an anthology that provides ample evidence for how African Americans not only created folk legends but adapted European and African materials to their own uniquely American ends. In this writer’s fiction readers can see the same process taking place, a joyful embrace of voice as the most personal statement possible in a world dependent on self-invention for survival.

The following text is from *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive* (1977).

Medley

I could tell the minute I got in the door and dropped my bag, I wasn’t staying. Dishes piled sky-high in the sink looking like some circus act. Glasses all ghostly on the counter. Busted tea bags, curling canteloupe rinds, white cartons from the Chinamen, green sacks from the deli, and that damn dog creeping up on me for me to wrassle his head or kick him in the ribs one.

No, I definitely wasn't staying. Couldn't even figure why I'd come. But picked my way to the hallway anyway till the laundry-stuffed pillowcases stopped me. Larry's bass blocking the view to the bedroom.

"That you, Sweet Pea?"

"No, man, ain't me at all," I say, working my way back to the suitcase and shoving that damn dog out the way. "See ya round," I holler, the door slamming behind me, cutting off the words abrupt.

Quite naturally sitting cross-legged at the club, I embroider a little on the homecoming tale, what with an audience of two crazy women and a fresh bottle of Jack Daniels.¹ Got so I could actually see shonuff toadstools growing in the sink. Canteloupe seeds sprouting in the muck. A goddamn compost heap breeding near the stove, garbage gardens on the grill.

"Sweet Pea, you oughta hush, cause you can't possibly keep on lying so," Pot Limit's screaming, tears popping from her eyes. "Lawd hold my legs, cause this liar bout to kill me off."

"Never mind about Larry's housekeeping, girl," Sylvia's soothing me, sloshing perfectly good bourbon all over the table. "You can come and stay with me till your house comes through. It'll be like old times at Aunt Merriam's."

I ease back into the booth to wait for the next set. The drummer's fooling with the equipment, tapping the mikes, hoping he's watched, so I watch him. But feeling worried in my mind about Larry, cause I've been through days like that myself. Cold cream caked on my face from the day before, hair matted, bathrobe funky, not a clean pair of drawers to my name. Even the emergency ones, the draggy cotton numbers stuffed way in the back of the drawer under the scented paper gone. And no clean silverware in the box and the last of the paper cups gone too. Icebox empty cept for a rock of cheese and the lone water jug that ain't even half full that's how anyhow the thing's gone on. And not a clue as to the next step. But then Pot Limit'll come bammng on the door to say So-and-so's in town and can she have the card table for a game. Or Sylvia'll send a funny card inviting herself to dinner and even giving me the menu. Then I zoom through that house like a manic work brigade till me and the place ready for white-glove inspection. But what if some somebody or other don't intervene for Larry, I'm thinking.

The drummer's messin round on the cymbals, head cocked to the side, rings sparkling. The other dudes are stepping out from behind the curtain. The piano man playing with the wah-wah doing splashy, breathy science fiction stuff. Sylvia checking me out to make sure I ain't too blue. Blue got hold to me, but I lean foward out of the shadows and babble something about how off the bourbon tastes these days. Hate worryin Sylvia, who is the kind of friend who bleeds at the eyes with your pain. I drain my glass and hum along with the opening riff of the guitar and I keep my eyes strictly off the bass player, whoever he is.

Larry Landers looked more like a bass player than ole Mingus² himself. Got these long arms that drape down over the bass like they were grown

1. Jack Daniel's brand of Tennessee bourbon whisky.

2. Charles Mingus (1922–1979), African American jazz bassist, band leader, and composer.

special for that purpose. Fine, strong hands with long fingers and muscular knuckles, the dimples deep black at the joints. His calluses so other-colored and hard, looked like Larry had swiped his grandmother's tarnished thimbles to play with. He'd move in on that bass like he was going to hump it or something, slide up behind it as he lifted it from the rug, all slinky. He'd become one with the wood. Head dipped down sideways bobbing out the rhythm, feet tapping, legs jiggling, he'd look good. Thing about it, though, ole Larry couldn't play for shit. Couldn't never find the right placement for the notes. Never plucking with enough strength, despite the perfectly capable hands. Either you didn't hear him at all or what you heard was off. The man couldn't play for nuthin is what I'm saying. But Larry Landers was baad in the shower, though.

He'd soap me up and down with them great, fine hands, doing a deep bass walking in the back of his mouth. And I'd just have to sing, though I can't sing to save my life. But we'd have one hellafyin musical time in the shower, lemme tell you. "Green Dolphin Street"³ never sounded like nuthin till Larry bopped out them changes and actually made me sound good. On "My Funny Valentine"⁴ he'd do a whizzing sounding bow thing that made his throat vibrate real sexy and I'd cutesy up the introduction, which is, come to think of it, my favorite part. But the main number when the hot water started running out was "I Feel Like Making Love." That was usually the wind up of our repertoire cause you can imagine what that song can do to you in the shower and all.

Got so we spent a helluva lotta time in the shower. Just as well, cause didn't nobody call Larry for gigs. He a nice man, considerate, generous, baad in the shower, and good taste in music. But he just wasn't nobody's bass player. Knew all the stances, though, the postures, the facial expressions, had the choreography down. And right in the middle of supper he'd get some Ron Carter⁵ thing going in his head and hop up from the table to go get the bass. Haul that sucker right in the kitchen and do a number in dumb show, all the playing in his throat, the acting with his hands. But that ain't nuthin. I mean that can't get it. I can impersonate Betty Carter⁶ if it comes to that. The arms crooked just so, the fingers popping, the body working, the cap and all, the teeth, authentic. But I got sense enough to know I ain't nobody's singer. Actually, I am a mother, though I'm only just now getting it together. And too, I'm an A-I manicurist.

Me and my cousin Sinbad come North working our show in cathouses at first. Set up a salon right smack in the middle of Miz Maybry's Saturday traffic. But that wasn't no kind of life to be bringing my daughter into. So I parked her at a boarding school till I could make some other kind of life. Wasn't no kind of life for Sinbad either, so we quit.

Our first shop was a three-chair affair on Austin. Had a student barber who could do anything—blow-outs, do's, corn rows, weird cuts, afros, press and curl, whatever you wanted. Plus he din't gab you to death. And he always brought his sides and didn't blast em neither. He went on to New York and

3. That is, "On Green Dolphin Street," a 1947 song that has become a modern jazz classic.

4. Popular 1937 song by Richard Rodgers and

Lorenz Hart that has become a jazz standard.

5. Contemporary jazz bassist (b. 1937).

6. Contemporary jazz singer (1929–1998).

opened his own shop. Was a bootblack too then, an old dude named James Noughton, had a crooked back and worked at the post office at night, and knew everything about everything, read all the time.

“Whatcha want to know about Marcus Garvey,⁷ Sweet Pea?”

If it wasn't Garvey, it was the rackets or the trucking industry or the flora and fauna of Greenland or the planets or how the special effects in the disaster movies were done. One Saturday I asked him to tell me about the war, cause my nephew'd been drafted and it all seemed so wrong to me, our men over there in Nam fighting folks who fighting for the same things we are, to get that blood-sucker off our backs.

Well, what I say that for. Old dude gave us a deep knee bend, straight up eight-credit dissertation on World Wars I and II—the archduke getting offed, Africa cut up like so much cake, Churchill and his cigars, Gabriel Heatter on the radio, Hitler at the Olympics igging Owens, Red Cross doing Bloods dirty refusing donuts and bandages, A. Philip Randolph scaring the white folks to death, Mary McLeod Bethune⁸ at the White House, Liberty Bond drives, the Russian front, frostbite of the feet, the Jew stiffes, the gypsies no one mourned . . . the whole johnson. Talked straight through the day, Miz Mary's fish dinner growing cold on the radiator, his one and only customer walking off with one dull shoe. Fell out exhausted, his shoe rag limp in his lap, one arm draped over the left foot platform, the other clutching his heart. Took Sinbad and our cousin Pepper to get the old man home. I stayed with him all night with the ice pack and a fifth of Old Crow.⁹ He liked to die.

After while trade picked up and with a better class of folk too. Then me and Sinbad moved to North and Gaylord and called the shop Chez Sinbad. No more winos stumbling in or deadbeats wasting my time talking raunchy shit. The paperboy, the numbers man, the dudes with classier hot stuff coming in on Tuesday mornings only. We did up the place nice. Light globes from a New Orleans warehouse, Sinbad likes to lie. Brown-and-black-and-silver-striped wallpaper. Lots of mirrors and hanging plants. Them old barber chairs spruced up and called antiques and damn if someone didn't buy one off us for eight hundred, cracked me up.

I cut my schedule down to ten hours in the shop so I could do private sessions with the gamblers and other business men and women who don't like sitting around the shop even though it's comfy, specially my part. Got me a cigar showcase with a marble top for serving coffee in clear glass mugs with heatproof handles too. My ten hours in the shop are spent leisurely. And my twenty hours out are making me a mint. Takes dust to be a mother, don't you know.

It was a perfect schedule once Larry Landers came into my life. He part-timed at a record shop and bartended at Topp's on the days and nights I worked at the shops. That gave us most of Monday and Wednesdays to listen to sides and hit the clubs. Gave me Fridays all to myself to study in the

7. American black nationalist leader (1887–1940).

8. American educator and founder of the National Council of Negro Women (1875–1955). Chancellor Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), representing Germany as host of the 1936 Olympic

Games, refused to honor the African American track and field star Jessie Owens (1913–1980), who had won four gold medals. Randolph (1889–1979), American labor leader and organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

9. A common brand of whiskey.

library and wade through them college bulletins and get to the museum and generally chart out a routine for when Debbie and me are a team. Sundays I always drive to Delaware to see her, and Larry detours to D.C. to see his sons. My bankbook started telling me I was soon going to be a full-time mama again and a college girl to boot, if I can ever talk myself into doing a school thing again, old as I am.

Life with Larry was cool. Not just cause he wouldn't hear about me going halves on the bills. But cause he was an easy man to be easy with. He liked talking softly and listening to music. And he liked having folks over for dinner and cards. Larry a real nice man and I liked him a lot. And I liked his friend Hector, who lived in the back of the apartment. Ole moon-face Hector went to school with Larry years ago and is some kind of kin. And they once failed in the funeral business together and I guess those stories of them times kinda keep them friends.

The time they had to put Larry's brother away is their best story, Hector's story really, since Larry got to play a little grief music round the edges. They decided to pass up a church service, since Bam was such a treacherous desperado wouldn't nobody want to preach over his body and wouldn't nobody want to come to hear no lies about the dearly departed untimely ripped or cut down or whatever. So Hector and Larry set up some kind of pop stand awning right at the gravesite, expecting close blood only. But seems the whole town turned out to make sure ole evil, hell-raising Bam was truly dead. Dudes straight from the barber chair, the striped ponchos blowing like wings, fuzz and foam on they face and all, lumbering up the hill to the hole taking bets and talking shit, relating how Ole Crazy Bam had shot up the town, shot up the jail, shot up the hospital pursuing some bootlegger who'd come up one keg short of the order. Women from all around come to demand the lid be lifted so they could check for themselves and be sure that Bam was stone cold. No matter how I tried I couldn't think of nobody bad enough to think on when they told the story of the man I'd never met.

Larry and Hector so bent over laughing bout the funeral, I couldn't hardly put the events in proper sequence. But I could surely picture some neighbor lady calling on Larry and Bam's mama reporting how the whole town had turned out for the burying. And the mama snatching up the first black thing she could find to wrap around herself and make an appearance. No use passing up a scene like that. And Larry prancing round the kitchen being his mama. And I'm too stunned to laugh, not at somebody's mama, and somebody's brother dead. But him and Hector laughing to beat the band and I can't help myself.

Thing about it, though, the funeral business stories are Hector's stories and he's not what you'd call a good storyteller. He never gives you the names, so you got all these he's and she's floating around. And he don't believe in giving details, so you got to scramble to paint your own pictures. Toward the end of that particular tale of Bam, all I could picture was the townspeople driving a stake through the dead man's heart, then hurling that coffin into the hole right quick. There was also something in that story about the civil rights workers wanting to make a case cause a white cop had cut Bam down. But looked like Hector didn't have a hold to that part of the story, so I just don't know.

Stories are not Hector's long suit. But he is an absolute artist on windows. Ole Moon-Face can wash some windows and make you cry about it too. Makes these smooth little turns out there on that little bitty sill just like he wasn't four stories up without a belt. I'd park myself at the breakfast counter and thread the new curtains on the rods while Hector mixed up the vinegar solution real chef-like. Wring out the rags just so, scrunch up the newspapers into soft wads that make you think of cat's paws. Hector was a cat himself out there on the sill, making these marvelous circles in the glass, rubbing the hardhead spots with a strip of steel wool he had pinned to his overalls.

Hector offered to do my car once. But I put a stop to that after that first time. My windshield so clear and sparkling felt like I was in an accident and heading over the hood, no glass there. But it was a pleasure to have coffee and watch Hector. After while, though, Larry started hinting that the apartment wasn't big enough for four. I agreed, thinking he meant Earl had to go. Come to find Larry meant Hector, which was a real drag. I love to be around people who do whatever it is they do with style and care.

Larry's dog's named Earl P. Jessup Bowers, if you can get ready for that. And I should mention straightaway that I do not like dogs one bit, which is why I was glad when Larry said somebody had to go. Cats are bad enough. Horses are a total drag. By the age of nine I was fed up with all that noble horse this and noble horse that. They got good PR,¹ horses. But I really can't use em. Was a fire once when I was little and some dumb horse almost burnt my daddy up messin around, twisting, snorting, broncing, rearing up, doing everything but comin on out the barn like even the chickens had sense enough to do. I told my daddy to let that horse's ass burn. Horses be as dumb as cows. Cows just don't have good press agents at all.

I used to like cows when I was real little and needed to hug me something bigger than a goldfish. But don't let it rain, the dumbbells'll fall right in a ditch and you break a plow and shout yourself hoarse trying to get them fools to come up out the ditch. Chipmunks I don't mind when I'm at the breakfast counter with my tea and they're on their side of the glass doing Disney things in the yard. Blue jays are law-and-order birds, thoroughly despicable. And there's one prize fool in my Aunt Merriam's yard I will one day surely kill. He tries to "whip whip whippoorwill" like the Indians do in the Fort This or That movies when they're signaling to each other closing in on George Montgomery but don't never get around to wiping that sucker out. But dogs are one of my favorite hatreds. All the time woofing, bolting down their food, slopping water on the newly waxed linoleum, messin with you when you trying to read, chewin on the slippers.

Earl P. Jessup Bowers was an especial drag. But I could put up with Earl when Hector was around. Once Hector was gone and them windows got cloudy and gritty, I was through. Kicked that dog every chance I got. And after thinking what it meant, how the deal went down, place too small for four and it was Hector not Earl—I started moving up my calendar so I could get out of there. I ain't the kind of lady to press no ultimatum on no man. Like "Choose, me or the dog." That's unattractive. Kicking Hector out was too. An insult to me, once I got to thinking on it. Especially since I had carefully explained from jump street to Larry that I got one item on my

1. Public relations; here suggesting a good image, good reputation.

agenda, making a home for me and my kid. So if anybody should've been given walking papers, should've been me.

Anyway. One day Moody comes waltzing into Chez Sinbad's and tips his hat. He glances at his nails and glances at me. And I figure here is my house in a green corduroy suit. Pot Limit had just read my cards and the jack of diamonds kept coming up on my resource side. Sylvia and me put our heads together and figure it got to be some gambler or hustler who wants his nails done. What other jacks do I know to make my fortune? I'm so positive about Moody, I whip out a postcard from the drawer where I keep the emeries and write my daughter to start packing.

"How much you make a day, Miss Lady?"

"Thursdays are always good for fifty," I lie.

He hands me fifty and glances over at Sinbad, who nods that it's cool. "I'd like my nails done at four-thirty. My place."

"Got a customer at that time, Mr. Moody, and I like to stay reliable. How bout five-twenty?"

He smiles a slow smile and glances at Sinbad, who nods again, everything's cool. "Fine," he says. "And do you think you can manage a shave without cutting a person's throat?"

"Mr. Moody, I don't know you well enough to have just cause. And none of your friends have gotten to me yet with that particular proposition. Can't say what I'm prepared to do in the future, but for now I can surely shave you real careful-like."

Moody smiles again, then turns to Sinbad, who says it's cool and he'll give me the address. This look-nod dialogue burns my ass. That's like when you take a dude to lunch and pay the check and the waiter's standing there with *your* money in his paws asking *the dude* was everything all right and later for *you*. Shit. But I take down Moody's address and let the rest roll off me like so much steaming lava. I start packing up my little alligator case—buffer, batteries, clippers, emeries, massager, sifter, arrowroot and cornstarch, clear sealer, magnifying glass, and my own mixture of green and purple pigments.

"Five-twenty ain't five-twenty-one, is it, Miss Lady?"

"Not in my book," I say, swinging my appointment book around so he can see how full it is and how neatly the times are printed in. Course I always fill in phony names case some creep starts pressing me for a session.

For six Thursdays running and two Monday nights, I'm at Moody's bending over them nails with a miner's light strapped to my forehead, the magnifying glass in its stand, nicking just enough of the nails at the sides, tinting just enough with the color so he can mark them cards as he shuffles. Takes an hour to do it proper. Then I sift my talc concoction and brush his hands till they're smooth. Them cards move around so fast in his hands, he can actually tell me he's about to deal from the bottom in the next three moves and I miss it and I'm not new to this. I been a gambler's manicurist for more years than I care to mention. Ten times he'll cut and each time the same fifteen cards in the top cut and each time in exactly the same order. Incredible.

Now, I've known hands. My first husband, for instance. To see them hands work their show in the grandstands, at a circus, in a parade, the parimutuels—

artistry in action. We met on the train. As a matter of fact, he was trying to burgle my bag. Some story to tell the grandchildren, hunh? I had to get him straight about robbing from folks. I don't play that. Ya gonna steal, hell, steal back some of them millions we got in escrow is my opinion. We spent three good years on the circuit. Then credit cards moved in. Then choke-and-grab muggers killed the whole tradition. He was reduced to a mere shell of his former self, as they say, and took to putting them hands on me. I try not to think on when things went sour. Try not to think about them big slapping hands, only of them working hands. Moody's working hands were something like that, but even better. So I'm impressed and he's impressed. And he pays me fifty and tips me fifty and shuts up when I shave him and keeps his hands off my lovely person.

I'm so excited counting up my bread, moving up the calendar, making impulsive calls to Delaware and the two of us squealing over the wire like a coupla fools, that what Larry got to say about all these goings-on just rolls off my back like so much molten lead.

"Well, who be up there while he got his head in your lap and you squeezing his goddamn blackheads?"

"I don't squeeze his goddamn blackheads, Larry, on account of he don't have no goddamn blackheads. I give him a shave, a steam, and an egg-white face mask. And when I'm through, his face is as smooth as his hands."

"I'll bet," Larry says. That makes me mad cause I expect some kind of respect for my work, which is better than just good.

"And he doesn't have his head in my lap. He's got a whole barbershop set up on his solarium."

"His what?" Larry squinting at me, raising the wooden spoon he stirring the spaghetti with, and I raise the knife I'm chopping the onions with. Thing about it, though, he don't laugh. It's funny as hell to me, but Larry got no sense of humor sometimes, which is too bad cause he's a lotta fun when he's laughing and joking.

"It's not a bedroom. He's got this screened-in sun porch where he raises African violets and—"

"Please, Sweet Pea. Why don't you quit? You think I'm dumb?"

"I'm serious. I'm serious and I'm mad cause I ain't got no reason to lie to you whatever was going on, Larry." He turns back to the pot and I continue working on the sauce and I'm pissed off cause this is silly. "He sits in the barber chair and I shave him and give him a manicure."

"What else you be giving him? A man don't be paying a good-looking woman to come to his house and all and don't—"

"Larry, if you had the dough and felt like it, wouldn't you pay Pot Limit to come read your cards? And couldn't you keep your hands to yourself and she a good-looking woman? And couldn't you see yourself paying Sylvia to come and cook for you and no funny stuff, and she's one of the best-looking women in town?"

Larry cooled out fast. My next shot was to bring up the fact that he was insulting my work. Do I go around saying the women who pass up Bill the bartender and come to him are after his joint? No, cause I respect the fact that Larry Landers mixes the best piña coladas this side of Barbados. And he's flashy with the blender and the glasses and the whole show. He's good and I respect that. But he cooled out so fast I didn't have to bring it up. I

don't believe in overkill, besides I like to keep some things in reserve. He cooled out so fast I realized he wasn't really jealous. He was just going through one of them obligatory male numbers, all symbolic, no depth.

Like the time this dude came into the shop to talk some trash and Sinbad got his ass on his shoulders, talking about the dude showed no respect for him cause for all he knew I could be Sinbad's woman. And me arguing that since that ain't the case, what's the deal? I mean why get hot over what if if what if ain't. Men are crazy. Now there is Sinbad, my blood cousin who grew up right in the same house like a brother damn near, putting me through simple-ass changes like that. Who's got time for grand opera and comic strips, I'm trying to make a life for me and my kid. But men are like that. Gorillas, if you know what I mean.

Like at Topp's sometimes. I'll drop in to have a drink with Larry when he's on the bar and then I leave. And maybe some dude'll take it in his head to walk me to the car. That's cool. I lay it out right quick that me and Larry are a we and then we take it from there, just two people gassing in the summer breeze and that's just fine. But don't let some other dude holler over something like "Hey, man, can you handle all that? Why don't you step aside, junior, and let a man . . ." and blah-de-da-de-dah. They can be the best of friends or total strangers just kidding around, but right away they two gorillas pounding on their chest, pounding on their chest and talking over my head, yelling over the tops of cars just like I'm not a person with some say-so in the matter. It's a man-to-man ritual that ain't got nothing to do with me. So I just get in my car and take off and leave them to get it on if they've a mind to. They got it.

But if one of the gorillas is a relative, or a friend of mine, or a nice kinda man I got in mind for one of my friends, I will stick around long enough to shout em down and point out that they are some ugly gorillas and are showing no respect for me and therefore owe me an apology. But if they don't fit into one of them categories, I figure it ain't my place to try to develop them so they can make the leap from gorilla to human. If their own mamas and daddies didn't care whether they turned out to be amoebas or catfish or whatever, it ain't my weight. I got my own weight. I'm a mother. So they got it.

Like I use to tell my daughter's daddy, the key to getting along and living with other folks is to keep clear whose weight is whose. His drinking, for instance, was not my weight. And him waking me up in the night for them long, rambling, ninety-proof monologues bout how the whole world's made up of victims, rescuers, and executioners and I'm the dirty bitch cause I ain't rescuing him fast enough to suit him. Then got so I was the executioner, to hear him tell it. I don't say nuthin cause my philosophy of life and death is this—I'll go when the wagon comes, but I ain't going out behind somebody else's shit. I arranged my priorities long ago when I jumped into my woman stride. Some things I'll go off on. Some things I'll hold my silence and wait it out. Some things I just bump off, cause the best solution to some problems is to just abandon them.

But I struggled with Mac, Debbie's daddy. Talked to his family, his church, AA, hid the bottles, threatened the liquor man, left a good job to play nurse, mistress, kitten, buddy. But then he stopped calling me Dahlin and started calling me Mama. I don't play that. I'm my daughter's mama. So

I split. Did my best to sweeten them last few months, but I'd been leaving for a long time.

The silliest thing about all of Larry's grumblings back then was Moody had no eyes for me and vice versa. I just like the money. And I like watching him mess around with the cards. He's exquisite, dazzling, stunning shuffling, cutting, marking, dealing from the bottom, the middle, the near top. I ain't never seen nothing like it, and I seen a whole lot. The thing that made me mad, though, and made me know Larry Landers wasn't ready to deal with no woman full grown was the way he kept bringing it up, always talking about what he figured was on Moody's mind, like what's on my mind don't count. So I finally did have to use up my reserves and point out to Larry that he was insulting my work and that I would never dream of accusing him of not being a good bartender, of just being another pretty face, like they say.

"You can't tell me he don't have eyes," he kept saying.

"What about my eyes? Don't my eyes count?" I gave it up after a couple tries. All I know is, Moody wasn't even thinking about me. I was impressed with his work and needed the trade and vice versa.

One time, for instance, I was doing his hands on the solarium and thought I saw a glint of metal up under his jacket. I rearranged myself in the chair so I could work my elbow in there to see if he was carrying heat. I thought I was being cool about it.

"How bout keeping your tits on your side of the table, Miss Lady."

I would rather he think anything but that. I would rather he think I was clumsy in my work even. "Wasn't about tits, Moody. I was just trying to see if you had a holster on and was too lazy to ask."

"Would have expected you too. You a straight-up, direct kind of person." He opened his jacket away with the heel of his hand, being careful with his nails. I liked that.

"It's not about you," he said quietly, jerking his chin in the direction of the revolver. "Had to transport some money today and forgot to take it off. Sorry."

I gave myself two demerits. One for the tits, the other for setting up a situation where he wound up telling me something about his comings and goings. I'm too old to be making mistakes like that. So I apologized. Then gave myself two stars. He had a good opinion of me and my work. I did an extra-fine job on his hands that day.

Then the house happened. I had been reading the rental ads and For Sale columns for months and looking at some awful, tacky places. Then one Monday me and Sylvia lucked up on this cute little white-brick job up on a hill away from the street. Lots of light and enough room and not too much yard to kill me off. I paid my money down and rushed them papers through. Got back to Larry's place all excited and found him with his mouth all poked out.

Half grumbling, half proposing, he hinted around that we all should live at his place like a family. Only he didn't quite lay it out plain in case of rejection. And I'll tell you something, I wouldn't want to be no man. Must be hard on the heart always having to get out there, setting yourself up to be possibly shot down, approaching the lady, calling, the invitation, the rap. I don't think I could handle it myself unless everybody was just straight up at all times from day one till the end. I didn't answer Larry's nonproposed proposal cause it didn't come clear to me till after dinner. So I just let my silence carry

whatever meaning it will. Ain't nuthin too much changed from the first day he came to get me from my Aunt Merriam's place. My agenda is still to make a home for my girl. Marriage just ain't one of the things on my mind no more, not after two. Got no regrets or bad feelings about them husbands neither. Like the poem says, when you're handed a lemon, make lemonade, honey, make lemonade. That's Gwen Brooks'² motto, that's mine too. You get a lemon, well, just make lemonade.

"Going on the road next week," Moody announces one day through the steam towel. "Like you to travel with me, keep my hands in shape. Keep the women off my neck. Check the dudes at my back. Ain't asking you to carry heat or money or put yourself in no danger. But I could use your help." He pauses and I ease my buns into the chair, staring at the steam curling from the towel.

"Wicked schedule though—Mobile, Birmingham, Sarasota Springs, Jacksonville, then Puerto Rico and back. Can pay you two thousand and expenses. You're good, Miss Lady. You're good and you got good sense. And while I don't believe in nothing but my skill and chance, I gotta say you've brought me luck. You a lucky lady, Miss Lady."

He raises his hands and cracks his knuckles and it's like the talking towel has eyes as well cause damn if he ain't checking his cuticles.

"I'll call you later, Moody," I manage to say, mind reeling. With two thousand I can get my stuff out of storage, and buy Debbie a real nice bedroom set, pay tuition at the college too and start my three-credit-at-a-time grind.

Course I never dreamed the week would be so unnerving, exhausting, constantly on my feet, serving drinks, woofing sisters, trying to distract dudes, keeping track of fifty-leven umpteen goings on. Did have to carry the heat on three occasions and had to do a helluva lotta driving. Plus was most of the time holed up in the hotel room close to the phone. I had pictured myself lazying on the beach in Florida dreaming up cruises around the world with two matching steamer trunks with the drawers and hangers and stuff. I'd pictured traipsing through the casinos in Puerto Rico ordering chicken salad and coffee liqueur and tipping the croupiers with blue chips. Shit no. Was work. And I sure as hell learned how Moody got his name. Got so we didn't even speak, but I kept those hands in shape and his face smooth and placid. And whether he won, lost, broke even, or got wiped out, I don't even know. He gave me my money and took off for New Orleans. That trip liked to kill me.

"You never did say nothing interesting about Moody," Pot Limit says insinuatingly, swinging her legs in from the aisle cause ain't nobody there to snatch so she might as well sit comfortable.

"Yeah, she thought she'd put us off the trail with a rip-roaring tale about Larry's housekeeping."

They slapping five and hunching each other and making a whole lotta noise, spilling Jack Daniels on my turquoise T-straps from Puerto Rico.

"Come on, fess up, Sweet Pea," they crooning. "Did you give him some?"

"Ahhh, yawl bitches are tiresome, you know that?"

"Naaw, naaw," say Sylvia, grabbing my arm. "You can tell us. We wantta know all about the trip, specially the nights." She winks at Pot Limit.

2. Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000), American poet, novelist, and autobiographer.

“Tell us about this Moody man and his wonderful hands one more time, cept we want to hear how the hands feel on the flesh, honey.” Pot Limit doing a bump and grind in the chair that almost makes me join in the fun, except I’m worried in my mind about Larry Landers.

Just then the piano player comes by and leans over Sylvia, blowing in her ear. And me and Pot Limit mimic the confectionary goings-on. And just as well, cause there’s nothin to tell about Moody. It wasn’t a movie after all. And in real life the good-looking gambler’s got cards on his mind. Just like I got my child on my mind. Onliest thing to say about the trip is I’m five pounds lighter, not a shade darker, but two thousand closer toward my goal.

“Ease up,” Sylvia says, interrupting the piano player to fuss over me. Then the drummer comes by and eases in on Pot Limit. And I ease back into the shadows of the booth to think Larry over.

I’m staring at the entrance half expecting Larry to come into Topps, but it’s not his night. Then too, the thing is ended if I’d only know it. Larry the kind of man you’re either living with him or you’re out. I for one would’ve liked us to continue, me and Debbie in our place, him and Earl at his. But he got so grumpy the time I said that, I sure wasn’t gonna bring it up again. Got grumpy in the shower too, got so he didn’t want to wash my back.

But that last night fore I left for Birmingham, we had us one crazy musical time in the shower. I kept trying to lure him into “Maiden Voyage,” which I really can’t do without back-up, cause I can’t sing all them changes. After while he come out from behind his sulk and did a Jon Lucien³ combination on vocal and bass, alternating the sections, eight bars of singing words, eight bars of singing bass. It was baad. Then he insisted on doing “I Love You More Today Than Yesterday.” And we like to break our arches, stomping out the beat against the shower mat.

The bathroom was all steamy and we had the curtains open so we could see the plants and watch the candles burning. I had bought us a big fat cake of sandalwood soap and it was matching them candles scent for scent. Must’ve been two o’clock in the morning and looked like the hot water would last forever and ever and ever. Larry finally let go of the love songs, which were making me feel kinda funny cause I thought it was understood that I was splitting, just like he’d always made it clear either I was there or nowhere.

Then we hit on a tune I don’t even know the name of cept I like to scat and do my thing Larry calls Swahili wailing. He laid down the most intricate weaving, walking, bopping, strutting bottom to my singing I ever heard. It inspired me. Took that melody and went right on out that shower, them candles bout used up, the fatty soap long since abandoned in the dish, our bodies barely visible in the steamed-up mirrors walling his bathroom. Took that melody right on out the room and out of doors and somewhere out this world. Larry changing instruments fast as I’m changing moods, colors. Took an alto solo and gave me a rest, worked an intro up on the piano playing the chords across my back, drove me all up into the high register while he weaved in and out around my head on a flute sounding like them chilly pipes of the Andes.⁴ And I was Yma Sumac⁵ for one minute there, up there breathing some rare

3. Caribbean-born American jazz vocalist and musician (1942–2007).

4. Mountain range in South America. “Chilly pipes”: i.e., panpipes, common in Chilean folk

music.

5. Peruvian singer (1922–2008) popular with American audiences in the 1950s.

air and losing my mind, I was so high on just sheer music. Music and water, the healthiest things in the world. And that hot water pounding like it was part of the group with a union card and all. And I could tell that if that bass could've fit in the tub, Larry would've dragged that bad boy in there and played the hell out of them soggy strings once and for all.

I dipped way down and reached way back for snatches of Jelly Roll Morton's "Deep Creek Blues"⁶ and Larry so painful, so stinging on the bass, could make you cry. Then I'm racing fast through Bessie and all the other Smith singers, Mildred Bailey, Billie and imitators, Betty Roche, Nat King Cole vintage 46, a little Joe Carroll, King Pleasure, some Babs.⁷ Found myself pulling lines out of songs I don't even like, but ransacked songs just for the meaningful lines or two cause I realized we were doing more than just making music together, and it had to be said just how things stood.

Then I was off again and lost Larry somewhere down there doing scales, sound like. And he went back to that first supporting line that had drove me up into the Andes. And he stayed there waiting for me to return and do some more Swahili wailing. But I was elsewhere and liked it out there and ignored the fact that he was aiming for a wind-up of "I Love You More Today Than Yesterday." I sang myself out till all I could ever have left in life was "Brown Baby" to sing to my little girl. Larry stayed on the ground with the same supporting line, and the hot water started getting funny and I knew my time was up. So I came crashing down, jarring the song out of shape, diving back into the melody line and somehow, not even knowing what song each other was doing, we finished up together just as the water turned cold.

1977

6. Dixieland jazz classic of the 1920s.

7. Blues and jazz musicians of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

FRANK BIDART

b. 1939

Frank Bidart's poems make disembodied human voices into fully-fleshed characters. Influenced by the dramatic monologues of the early-twentieth-century poet Robert Frost, Bidart tells of hearing a character's voice in his head as he writes, a voice that becomes more and more real on the typed page until, he says, "something very odd happens: the 'being' of the poem suddenly becomes the poem on paper, and no longer the 'voice' in my head. The poem on paper suddenly seems a truer embodiment of the poem's voice. . . . I've learned to trust this when it happens—at that point, the entire process is finished." Bidart's finished poems are distinctive on the page: white space, indentations, line breaks, parentheses, block capitals, and dramatic punctuation sculpt the tone and cadence of the voice, rendering it dynamic to both eye and ear.

Often working in longer verse forms inspired by Walt Whitman's capacious poetry from the nineteenth century, Bidart invites all manner of people and cul-

tural artifacts into his poems. Mythology, translations of poets such as Ovid, Catullus, and Dante, bits of pop culture, and pornography all find a place; he once made a poem out of quotations from the actor Heath Ledger. The best-known poem from his first collection, *Golden State* (1973), is “Herbert White,” whose narrator is a necrophiliac and murderer of young girls. (In 2010 the poem was adapted into a short film by actor and director James Franco, who is friendly with Bidart.) To date, he is the author of nine books of poetry, and since 1972 has taught in the English department at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. He is the editor of Robert Lowell’s selected poems. Though his own poetry was seen as unconventional when he began, his work’s significance has been widely recognized over time. *Desire* (1997) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award; it received the 1998 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt Prize from the Library of Congress. He was awarded the Bollingen Prize in 2007. *Metaphysical Dog* (2013) won the National Books Critics Circle Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award.

Bidart was raised in a Roman Catholic family in Bakersfield, California. In the words of the poet and critic Dan Chaisson, his “father was a potato farmer who dreamed of being a cowboy. His mother considered herself a great, undiscovered beauty.” He attended graduate school in English at Harvard, where he became acquainted with Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop (both poets are in this volume). While Lowell and many other poets turned to autobiographical, “confessional” writing, Bidart’s poems stood out. They sounded like confessional poems, but the confessors were characters that embodied, as Bidart says, the “anti-self”—“someone who is all the things that one is not.” In poetry, he has said, one might confront “one’s shadow.” He has been known as a gay poet since the publication of his second book, *The Book of the Body* (1977), and while his work is included in anthologies of gay writers, he has said that he does not write for a particular audience in this regard. “The mystery of art, if you get it right,” he says, is that “the specific is felt as universal.”

Bidart’s poetry examines the tensions between body and mind, desire and disgust, guilt and aspiration. The poem included here, “Ellen West,” takes up these themes through the voice of an anorexic woman. It is one of Bidart’s best-known works, important enough to his own vision that he later wrote a poem about its composition called “Writing ‘Ellen West.’” The character speaking is based on a real woman of the same name, born in 1888, whose case Bidart studied in an undergraduate psychology class. Bidart himself had been “heavier before I began graduate school, and I had always hated it.” Fifteen years later, he returned to West, exploring the idea that the body is somehow at odds with the mind. Between body and mind, the poem seems to ask, where do we locate the voice that speaks and sings?

Ellen West

I love sweets,—
 heaven
would be dying on a bed of vanilla ice cream . . .

But my true self
is thin, all profile

and effortless gestures, the sort of blond

elegant girl whose
 body is the image of her soul.

—My doctors tell me I must give up
 this ideal; 10
 but I
 WILL NOT . . . cannot.

Only to my husband I'm not simply a "case."

But he is a fool. He married
 meat, and thought it was a wife. 15

• • •

Why am I a girl?

I ask my doctors, and they tell me they
 don't know, that it is just "given."

But it has such
 implications—; 20
 and sometimes,
 I even feel like a girl.

• • •

Now, at the beginning of Ellen's thirty-second year, her physical condi-
 tion has deteriorated still further. Her use of laxatives increases beyond 25
 measure. Every evening she takes sixty to seventy tablets of a laxative,
 with the result that she suffers tortured vomiting at night and violent
 diarrhea by day, often accompanied by a weakness of the heart. She
 has thinned down to a skeleton, and weighs only 92 pounds.

• • •

About five years ago, I was in a restaurant,
 eating alone 30
 with a book. I was
 not married, and often did that . . .

—I'd turn down
 dinner invitations, so I could eat alone;

I'd allow myself two pieces of bread, with 35
 butter, at the beginning, and three scoops of
 vanilla ice cream, at the end,—

 sitting there alone

with a book, both in the book
 and out of it, waited on, idly 40
 watching people,—

when an attractive young man
and woman, both elegantly dressed,
sat next to me.

She was beautiful—; 45

with sharp, clear features, a good
bone structure—;

if she took her make-up off
in front of you, rubbing cold cream
again and again across her skin, she still would be
beautiful— 50

more beautiful.

And he,—

I couldn't remember when I had seen a man
so attractive. I didn't know why. He was almost 55

a male version

of her,—

I had the sudden, mad notion that I
wanted to be his lover . . .

—Were they married? 60

were *they* lovers?

They didn't wear wedding rings.

Their behavior was circumspect. They discussed
politics. They didn't touch . . .

—How could I discover? 65

Then, when the first course
arrived, I noticed the way

each held his fork out for the other

to taste what he had ordered . . .

They did this 70
again and again, with pleased looks, indulgent
smiles, for each course,

more than once for *each* dish—;
much too much for just friends . . .

—Their behavior somehow sickened me; 75

the way each *gladly*
put the *food* the other had offered *into his mouth*—;

I knew what they were. I knew they slept together.

An immense depression came over me . . .

—I knew I could never
with such ease allow another to put food into my mouth: 80

happily *myself* put food into another's mouth—;

I knew that to become a wife I would have to give up my ideal.

• • •

Even as a child,
I saw that the “natural” process of aging 85

is for one's middle to thicken—
one's skin to blotch;

as happened to my mother.
And her mother.

I loathed “Nature.” 90

At twelve, pancakes
became the most terrible thought there is . . .

I shall *defeat* “Nature.”

In the hospital, when they
weigh me, I wear weights secretly sewn into my belt. 95

• • •

January 16. The patient is allowed to eat in her room, but comes readily with her husband to afternoon coffee. Previously she had stoutly resisted this on the ground that she did not really eat but devoured like a wild animal. This she demonstrated with utmost realism . . . Her physical examination showed nothing striking. Salivary glands are markedly enlarged on both sides. 100

January 21. Has been reading *Faust*¹ again. In her diary, writes that art is the “mutual permeation” of the “world of the body” and the “world of the spirit.” Says that her own poems are “hospital poems . . . weak—without skill or perseverance; only managing to beat their wings softly.” 105

February 8. Agitation, quickly subsided again. Has attached herself to an elegant, very thin female patient. Homo-erotic component strikingly evident.

February 15. Vexation, and torment. Says that her mind forces her always to think of eating. Feels herself degraded by this. Has entirely, for the first time in years, stopped writing poetry. 110

• • •

1. *Faust* (1808), a play by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), tells the story of a man who sells his soul to the devil in return for knowledge.

also began to change: at first, it simply diminished
in volume, in size,

then the top notes became
shrill, unreliable—at last,
usually not there at all . . .

150

—No one knows *why*. Perhaps her mind,
ravenous, still insatiable, sensed

that to struggle with the *shreds* of a voice

must make her artistry subtler, more refined,
more capable of expressing humiliation,
rage, betrayal . . .

155

—Perhaps the opposite. Perhaps her spirit
loathed the unending struggle

to *embody* itself, to *manifest* itself, on a stage whose

mechanics, and suffocating customs,
seemed expressly designed to annihilate spirit . . .

160

—I know that in *Tosca*, in the second act,
when, humiliated, hounded by Scarpia,⁴
she sang *Vissi d'arte*

—“I lived for art”—

165

and in torment, bewilderment, at the end she asks,
with a voice reaching

harrowingly for the notes,

“Art has *repaid* me LIKE THIS?”

I felt I was watching

170

autobiography—

an art; skill;

virtuosity

miles distant from the usual soprano’s
athleticism,—

175

the usual musician’s dream
of virtuosity *without* content . . .

—I wonder what she feels, now,
listening to her recordings.

For they have already, within a few years,
begun to date . . .

180

4. In *Tosca*, the Roman Chief of Police, Scarpia, offers to spare the life of the singer Tosca’s lover—whose execution Scarpia has ordered—if she will sleep with him.

This wish seems now as much a “given” of my existence

as the intolerable 220
 fact that I am dark-complexioned; big-boned;
 and once weighed
 one hundred and sixty-five pounds . . .

—But then I think, *No*. That’s too simple,—

without a body, who can 225
know himself at all?

Only by
 acting; choosing; rejecting; have I
 made myself—
 discovered who and what *Ellen* can be . . . 230

—But then again I think, *NO*. This *I* is anterior

to name; gender; action;
 fashion;
 MATTER ITSELF,—

. . . trying to stop my hunger with FOOD 235
 is like trying to appease thirst
 with ink.

• • •

March 30. Result of the consultation: Both gentlemen agree completely with my prognosis and doubt any therapeutic usefulness of commitment⁵ even more emphatically than I. All three of us are 240
 agreed that it is not a case of obsessional neurosis and not one of
 manic-depressive psychosis, and that no definitely reliable therapy is
 possible. We therefore resolved to give in to the patient’s demand for
 discharge.

• • •

The train-ride yesterday 245
 was far *worse* than I expected . . .

In our compartment
 were ordinary people: a student;
 a woman; her child;—
 they had ordinary bodies, pleasant faces; 250
 but I thought
 I was surrounded by creatures
 with the pathetic, desperate

5. That is, voluntary or involuntary confinement in an inpatient mental health facility.

He looked away.

—I got up to leave the compartment, then
saw his face,—

his eyes
were red;

and I saw

295

—*I'm sure I saw*—

disappointment.

• • •

On the third day of being home she is as if transformed. At breakfast she eats butter and sugar, at noon she eats so much that—for the first time in thirteen years!—she is satisfied by her food and gets really full. At afternoon coffee she eats chocolate creams and Easter eggs. She takes a walk with her husband, reads poems, listens to recordings, is in a positively festive mood, and all heaviness seems to have fallen away from her. She writes letters, the last one a letter to the fellow patient here to whom she had become so attached. In the evening she takes a lethal dose of poison, and on the following morning she is dead. “She looked as she had never looked in life—calm and happy and peaceful.”

300

305

• • •

Dearest.—I remember how
at eighteen,

310

on hikes with friends, when
they rested, sitting down to joke or talk,

I circled
around them, afraid to hike ahead alone,

315

yet afraid to rest
when I was not yet truly thin.

You and, yes, my husband,—
you and he

have by degrees drawn me within the circle;
forced me to sit down at last on the ground.

320

I am grateful.

But something in me *refuses* it.

—How eager I have been
to compromise, to kill this *refuser*,

325

but each compromise, each attempt
to poison an ideal
which often seemed to *me* sterile and unreal,

heightens my hunger.

I am crippled. I disappoint you.

330

Will you greet with anger, or
happiness,

the news which might well reach you
before this letter?

Your *Ellen*.

335

1977

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

b. 1940

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in Stockton, California, to Chinese immigrant parents. Before they emigrated from China, Kingston's father had been a schoolteacher and a poet; her mother had been a rural doctor in a profession consisting almost entirely of men. In America they took on quite different identities: her father, at times unemployed, worked in a gambling house and a laundry; her mother raised six children, of whom Kingston was the eldest.

Kingston graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, studying there in the turbulent middle sixties. Her debut as a writer was auspicious: in 1976, an unknown, she published her first and most widely read book, *The Woman Warrior*, and was catapulted to literary fame. Subtitled "Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts," it combines autobiographical fact with legends, especially Asian ones, to make a distinct imaginative creation. Reviews of the book, almost universally laudatory, emphasized its poetic and lyric beauty. *The Woman Warrior* is about the cultural conflicts Chinese Americans must confront. Still, what remains in the mind is its quality of vivid particularity, as for example at the beginning of "Shaman," the book's third section:

Once in a long while, four times so far for me, my mother brings out the metal tube that holds her medical diploma. On the tube are gold circles crossed with seven red lines each—"joy" ideographs in abstract. There are also little flowers that look like gears for a gold machine. . . . When I open it the smell of China flies out, a thousand-year-old bat flying heavy-handed out of the Chinese caverns where bats are as white as dust, a smell that comes from long ago, far back in my brain.

Although *The Woman Warrior* received the National Book Critics' Circle award for general nonfiction, there is nothing "general" in the richness of its language.

The importance of storytelling to Kingston's enterprise in *The Woman Warrior* and its successor, *China Men* (1980), cannot be overemphasized. In an interview with Bill Moyers on public television, Kingston said that her attempt was to push the account toward "form" by giving it a "redemptive" meaning, making it a "beautiful" story rather than a sordid one. As is typically the case with her practice as a writer, her effort is to mediate between present and past: "I think that my stories have a constant breaking in and out of the present and past. So the reader might be walking along very well in the present, but the past breaks through and changes and enlightens the present and vice versa."

Kingston had originally conceived of *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* as one long book, but decided to preserve an overall division by gender: *Warrior* is about her female antecedents; while *China Men*, which won the 1980 National Book Award for nonfiction, deals with her relation to her father and complements that relation by providing epic-like biographies of earlier male forebears, especially those Chinese who came to America and worked on building the railroads. In a final section she writes about her brother who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War. As she discusses in the interview with Moyers, her father annotated both of these memoir-meditations, carrying further the conversation between the generations.

Tripmaster Monkey (1989), presented more deliberately as a novel, is an exercise as excessive as the young fifth-generation American hero, Wittman Ah Sing, who is portrayed there. Subtitled "His Fake Book," the novel is an extended, picaresque account of Wittman's adventures as an aspiring playwright who imagines himself to be an incarnation of the legendary Monkey King—a trickster hero said to have brought the Buddha's teaching to China. Combining magic, realism, and black humor, *Tripmaster Monkey* is about a young man's search for a community in America. Although Kingston's myth-laden narratives have been called "exotic," she dislikes the word, since she has dedicated her art to exploring what it means to be a human being in American society. In fact, she thinks of her books as more American than Chinese, sees the American poet William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain* as a true prose predecessor, and probably would be happy to think of the hero of *Tripmaster Monkey* as a later, different version of Huck Finn (in Mark Twain's novel) or Augie March (in Saul Bellow's). As the critic Jennie Wang explains in even larger dimensions, Kingston's Wittman Ah Sing, "the maker/magician . . . conceived in the mind's fancy of a metafictionist," joins in his multiculturalism American and postmodern ambitions.

In 2011 Kingston celebrated her sixty-fifth birthday by publishing a memoir, *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*. Written in verse form, this work engages issues of aging as the writer recalls incidents in her marriage, her career, and her involvement with social causes. She considers imaginative elements as well, including the ultimate fate of her *Woman Warrior* and the experiences of her protagonist in *Tripmaster Monkey* in a projected visit to China.

The following text is from *The Woman Warrior* (1976).

From The Woman Warrior

No Name Woman

"You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born.

"In 1924 just a few days after our village celebrated seventeen hurry-up weddings—to make sure that every young man who went 'out on the road'

would responsibly come home—your father and his brothers and your grandfather and his brothers and your aunt's new husband sailed for America, the Gold Mountain. It was your grandfather's last trip. Those lucky enough to get contracts waved good-bye from the decks. They fed and guarded the stow-aways and helped them off in Cuba, New York, Bali, Hawaii. 'We'll meet in California next year,' they said. All of them sent money home.

"I remember looking at your aunt one day when she and I were dressing; I had not noticed before that she had such a protruding melon of a stomach. But I did not think, 'She's pregnant,' until she began to look like other pregnant women, her shirt pulling and the white tops of her black pants showing. She could not have been pregnant, you see, because her husband had been gone for years. No one said anything. We did not discuss it. In early summer she was ready to have the child, long after the time when it could have been possible.

"The village had also been counting. On the night the baby was to be born the villagers raided our house. Some were crying. Like a great saw, teeth strung with lights, files of people walked zigzag across our land, tearing the rice. Their lanterns doubled in the disturbed black water, which drained away through the broken bunds.¹ As the villagers closed in, we could see that some of them, probably men and women we knew well, wore white masks. The people with long hair hung it over their faces. Women with short hair made it stand up on end. Some had tied white bands around their foreheads, arms, and legs.

"At first they threw mud and rocks at the house. Then they threw eggs and began slaughtering our stock. We could hear the animals scream their deaths—the roosters, the pigs, a last great roar from the ox. Familiar wild heads flared in our night windows; the villagers encircled us. Some of the faces stopped to peer at us, their eyes rushing like searchlights. The hands flattened against the panes, framed heads, and left red prints.

"The villagers broke in the front and the back doors at the same time, even though we had not locked the doors against them. Their knives dripped with the blood of our animals. They smeared blood on the doors and walls. One woman swung a chicken, whose throat she had slit, splattering blood in red arcs about her. We stood together in the middle of our house, in the family hall with the pictures and tables of the ancestors around us, and looked straight ahead.

"At that time the house had only two wings. When the men came back, we would build two more to enclose our courtyard and a third one to begin a second courtyard. The villagers pushed through both wings, even your grandparents' rooms, to find your aunt's, which was also mine until the men returned. From this room a new wing for one of the younger families would grow. They ripped up her clothes and shoes and broke her combs, grinding them underfoot. They tore her work from the loom. They scattered the cooking fire and rolled the new weaving in it. We could hear them in the kitchen breaking our bowls and banging the pots. They overturned the great waist-high earthenware jugs; duck eggs, pickled fruits, vegetables burst out and mixed in acrid torrents. The old woman from the next field swept a broom

1. Embankments built to enclose rice paddies and control the flow of irrigation water.

through the air and loosed the spirits-of-the-broom over our heads. ‘Pig,’ ‘Ghost,’ ‘Pig,’ they sobbed and scolded while they ruined our house.

“When they left, they took sugar and oranges to bless themselves. They cut pieces from the dead animals. Some of them took bowls that were not broken and clothes that were not torn. Afterward we swept up the rice and sewed it back up into sacks. But the smells from the spilled preserves lasted. Your aunt gave birth in the pigsty that night. The next morning when I went for the water, I found her and the baby plugging up the family well.

“Don’t let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful.”

Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tested our strength to establish realities. Those in the emigrant generations who could not reassert brute survival died young and far from home. Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America.

The immigrants confused the gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names. They must try to confuse their offspring as well, who, I suppose, threaten them in similar ways—always trying to get things straight, always trying to name the unspeakable. The Chinese I know hide their names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence.

Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?

If I want to learn what clothes my aunt wore, whether flashy or ordinary, I would have to begin. “Remember Father’s drowned-in-the-well sister?” I cannot ask that. My mother has told me once and for all the useful parts. She will add nothing unless powered by Necessity, a riverbank that guides her life. She plants vegetable gardens rather than lawns, she carries the odd-shaped tomatoes home from the fields and eats food left for the gods.

Whenever we did frivolous things, we used up energy, we flew high kites. We children came up off the ground over the melting cones our parents brought home from work and the American movie on New Year’s Day—*Oh, You Beautiful Doll* with Betty Grable one year, and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* with John Wayne another year. After the one carnival ride each, we paid in guilt; our tired father counted his change on the dark walk home.

Adultery is extravagance. Could people who hatch their own chicks and eat the embryos and the heads for delicacies and boil the feet in vinegar for party food, leaving only the gravel, eating even the gizzard lining—could such people engender a prodigal aunt? To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was a waste enough. My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. I wonder whether he masked himself when he joined the raid on her family.

Perhaps she had encountered him in the fields or on the mountain where the daughters-in-law collected fuel. Or perhaps he first noticed her in the marketplace. He was not a stranger because the village housed no strangers. She had to have dealings with him other than sex. Perhaps he worked an adjoining field, or he sold her the cloth for the dress she sewed and wore. His demand must have surprised, then terrified her. She obeyed him; she always did as she was told.

When the family found a young man in the next village to be her husband, she had stood tractably beside the best rooster, his proxy,² and promised before they met that she would be his forever. She was lucky that he was her age and she would be the first wife, an advantage secure now. The night she first saw him, he had sex with her. Then he left for America. She had almost forgotten what he looked like. When she tried to envision him, she only saw the black and white face in the group photograph the men had had taken before leaving.

The other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed. "If you tell your family, I'll beat you. I'll kill you. Be here again next week." No one talked sex, ever. And she might have separated the rapes from the rest of living if only she did not have to buy her oil from him or gather wood in the same forest. I want her fear to have lasted just as long as rape lasted so that the fear could have been contained. No drawnout fear. But women at sex hazarded birth and hence lifetimes. The fear did not stop but permeated everywhere. She told the man, "I think I'm pregnant." He organized the raid against her.

On nights when my mother and father talked about their life back home, sometimes they mentioned an "outcast table" whose business they still seemed to be settling, their voices tight. In a commensal tradition,³ where food is precious, the powerful older people made wrongdoers eat alone. Instead of letting them start separate new lives like the Japanese, who could become samurais and geishas,⁴ the Chinese family, faces averted but eyes glowering sideways, hung on to the offenders and fed them leftovers. My aunt must have lived in the same house as my parents and eaten at an outcast table. My mother spoke about the raid as if she had seen it, when she and my aunt, a daughter-in-law to a different household, should not have been living together at all. Daughters-in-law lived with their husbands' parents, not their own; a synonym for marriage in Chinese is "taking a daughter-in-law." Her husband's parents could have sold her, mortgaged her, stoned her. But they had sent her back to her own mother and father, a mysterious act hinting at disgraces not told me. Perhaps they had thrown her out to deflect the avengers.

She was the only daughter; her four brothers went with her father, husband, and uncles "out on the road" and for some years became western men. When the goods were divided among the family, three of the brothers took land, and the youngest, my father, chose an education. After my grandparents gave their daughter away to her husband's family, they had dispensed all the adventure and all the property. They expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians,

2. Someone or something that has the power to substitute or act for another.

3. A tradition in which people eat together at the

same table.

4. In Japanese society, women trained to entertain men. "Samurai": the Japanese warrior elite.

could fumble without detection. The heavy, deep-rooted women were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning. But the rare urge west had fixed upon our family, and so my aunt crossed boundaries not delineated in space.

The work of preservation demands that the feelings playing about in one's guts not be turned into action. Just watch their passing like cherry blossoms. But perhaps my aunt, my forerunner, caught in a slow life, let dreams grow and fade and after some months or years went toward what persisted. Fear at the enormities of the forbidden kept her desires delicate, wire and bone. She looked at a man because she liked the way the hair was tucked behind his ears, or she liked the question-mark line of a long torso curving at the shoulder and straight at the hip. For warm eyes or a soft voice or a slow walk—that's all—a few hairs, a line, a brightness, a sound, a pace, she gave up family. She offered us up for a charm that vanished with tiredness, a pigtail that didn't toss when the wind died. Why, the wrong lighting could erase the dearest thing about him.

It could very well have been, however, that my aunt did not take subtle enjoyment of her friend, but, a wild woman, kept rollicking company. Imagining her free with sex doesn't fit, though. I don't know any women like that, or men either. Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help.

To sustain her being in love, she often worked at herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him, changing them frequently in order to hit on the right combination. She wanted him to look back.

On a farm near the sea, a woman who tended her appearance reaped a reputation for eccentricity. All the married women blunt-cut their hair in flaps about their ears or pulled it back in tight buns. No nonsense. Neither style blew easily into heart-catching tangles. And at their weddings they displayed themselves in their long hair for the last time. "It brushed the backs of my knees," my mother tells me. "It was braided, and even so, it brushed the backs of my knees."

At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob. A bun could have been contrived to escape into black streamers blowing in the wind or in quiet wisps about her face, but only the older women in our picture album wear buns. She brushed her hair back from her forehead, tucking the flaps behind her ears. She looped a piece of thread, knotted into a circle between her index fingers and thumbs, and ran the double strand across her forehead. When she closed her fingers as if she were making a pair of shadow geese bite, the string twisted together catching the little hairs. Then she pulled the thread away from her skin, ripping the hair out neatly, her eyes watering from the needles of pain. Opening her fingers, she cleaned the thread, then rolled it along her hairline and the tops of her eyebrows. My mother did the same to me and my sisters and herself. I used to believe that the expression "caught by the short hairs" meant a captive held with a depilatory string. It especially hurt at the temples, but my mother said we were lucky we didn't have to have our feet bound when we were seven. Sisters used to sit on their beds and cry together, she said, as their mothers or their slave removed the bandages for a few minutes each night

and let the blood gush back into their veins. I hope that the man my aunt loved appreciated a smooth brow, that he wasn't just a tits-and-ass man.

Once my aunt found a freckle on her chin, at a spot that the almanac said predestined her for unhappiness. She dug it out with a hot needle and washed the wound with peroxide.

More attention to her looks than these pullings of hairs and pickings at spots would have caused gossip among the villagers. They owned work clothes and good clothes, and they wore good clothes for feasting the new seasons. But since a woman combing her hair hexes beginnings, my aunt rarely found an occasion to look her best. Women looked like great sea snails—the corded wood, babies, and laundry they carried were the whorls on their backs. The Chinese did not admire a bent back; goddesses and warriors stood straight. Still there must have been a marvelous freeing of beauty when a worker laid down her burden and stretched and arched.

Such commonplace loveliness, however, was not enough for my aunt. She dreamed of a lover for the fifteen days of New Year's, the time for families to exchange visits, money, and food. She plied her secret comb. And sure enough she cursed the year, the family, the village, and herself.

Even as her hair lured her imminent lover, many other men looked at her. Uncles, cousins, nephews, brothers would have looked, too, had they been home between journeys. Perhaps they had already been restraining their curiosity, and they left, fearful that their glances, like a field of nesting birds, might be startled and caught. Poverty hurt, and that was their first reason for leaving. But another, final reason for leaving the crowded house was the never-said.

She may have been unusually beloved, the precious only daughter, spoiled and mirror gazing because of the affection the family lavished on her. When her husband left, they welcomed the chance to take her back from the in-laws; she could live like the little daughter for just a while longer. There are stories that my grandfather was different from other people, "crazy ever since the little Jap bayoneted him in the head." He used to put his naked penis on the dinner table, laughing. And one day he brought home a baby girl, wrapped up inside his brown western-style greatcoat.⁵ He had traded one of his sons, probably my father, the youngest, for her. My grandmother made him trade back. When he finally got a daughter of his own, he doted on her. They must have all loved her, except perhaps my father, the only brother who never went back to China, having once been traded for a girl.

Brothers and sisters, newly men and women, had to efface their sexual color and present plain miens. Disturbing hair and eyes, a smile like no other, threatened the ideal of five generations living under one roof. To focus blurs, people shouted face to face and yelled from room to room. The immigrants I know have loud voices, unmodulated to American tones even after years away from the village where they called their friendships out across the fields. I have not been able to stop my mother's screams in public libraries or over telephones. Walking erect (knees straight, toes pointed forward, not pigeon-toed, which is Chinese-feminine) and speaking in an inaudible voice, I have tried to turn myself American-feminine. Chinese

5. A heavy overcoat.

communication was loud, public. Only sick people had to whisper. But at the dinner table, where the family members came nearest one another, no one could talk, not the outcasts nor any eaters. Every word that falls from the mouth is a coin lost. Silently they gave and accepted food with both hands. A preoccupied child who took his bowl with one hand got a sideways glare. A complete moment of total attention is due everyone alike. Children and lovers have no singularity here, but my aunt used a secret voice, a separate attentiveness.

She kept the man's name to herself throughout her labor and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent birth.

He may have been somebody in her own household, but intercourse with a man outside the family would have been no less abhorrent. All the village were kinsmen, and the titles shouted in loud country voices never let kinship be forgotten. Any man within visiting distance would have been neutralized as a lover—"brother," "younger brother," "older brother"—one hundred and fifteen relationship titles. Parents researched birth charts probably not so much to assure good fortune as to circumvent incest in a population that has but one hundred surnames. Everybody has eight million relatives. How useless then sexual mannerisms, how dangerous.

As if it came from an atavism⁶ deeper than fear, I used to add "brother" silently to boys' names. It hexed the boys, who would or would not ask me to dance, and made them less scary and as familiar and deserving of benevolence as girls.

But, of course, I hexed myself also—no dates. I should have stood up, both arms waving, and shouted out across libraries, "Hey, you! Love me back." I had no idea, though, how to make attraction selective, how to control its direction and magnitude. If I made myself American-pretty so that the five or six Chinese boys in the class fell in love with me, everyone else—the Caucasian, Negro, and Japanese boys—would too. Sisterliness, dignified and honorable, made much more sense.

Attraction eludes control so stubbornly that whole societies designed to organize relationships among people cannot keep order, not even when they bind people to one another from childhood and raise them together. Among the very poor and the wealthy, brothers married their adopted sisters, like doves. Our family allowed some romance, paying adult brides' prices and providing dowries so that their sons and daughters could marry strangers. Marriage promises to turn strangers into friendly relatives—a nation of siblings.

In the village structure, spirits shimmered among the live creatures, balanced and held in equilibrium by time and land. But one human being flaring up into violence could open up a black hole; a maelstrom⁷ that pulled in the sky. The frightened villagers, who depended on one another to maintain the real, went to my aunt to show her a personal, physical representation of the break she had made in the "roundness." Misallying couples snapped off the future, which was to be embodied in true offspring. The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them.

6. A trait with origins further back than the preceding generation; a throwback.

7. A powerful, violent whirlpool.

If my aunt had betrayed the family at a time of large grain yields and peace, when many boys were born, and wings were being built on many houses, perhaps she might have escaped such severe punishment. But the men—hungry, greedy, tired of planting in dry soil—had been forced to leave the village in order to send food-money home. There were ghost plagues, bandit plagues, wars with the Japanese, floods. My Chinese brother and sister had died of an unknown sickness. Adultery, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the village needed food.

The round moon cakes and round doorways, the round tables of graduated size that fit one roundness inside another, round windows and rice bowls—these talismans had lost their power to warn this family of the law: a family must be whole, faithfully keeping the descent line by having sons to feed the old and the dead, who in turn look after the family. The villagers came to show my aunt and her lover in hiding a broken house. The villagers were speeding up the circling of events because she was too shortsighted to see that her infidelity had already harmed the village, that waves of consequences would return unpredictably, sometimes in disguise, as now, to hurt her. This roundness had to be made coin-sized so that she would see its circumference: punish her at the birth of her baby. Awaken her to the inexorable. People who refused fatalism because they could invent small resources insisted on culpability. Deny accidents and wrest fault from the stars.

After the villagers left, their lanterns now scattering in various directions toward home, the family broke their silence and cursed her. “Aiaa, we’re going to die. Death is coming. Death is coming. Look what you’ve done. You’ve killed us. Ghost! Dead ghost! Ghost! You’ve never been born.” She ran out into the fields, far enough from the house so that she could no longer hear their voices, and pressed herself against the earth, her own land no more. When she felt the birth coming, she thought that she had been hurt. Her body seized together. “They’ve hurt me too much,” she thought. “This is gall, and it will kill me.” With forehead and knees against the earth, her body convulsed and then relaxed. She turned on her back, lay on the ground. The black well of sky and stars went out and out and out forever; her body and her complexity seemed to disappear. She was one of the stars, a bright dot in blackness, without home, without a companion, in eternal cold and silence. An agoraphobia⁸ rose in her, speeding higher and higher, bigger and bigger; she would not be able to contain it; there would be no end to fear.

Flayed, unprotected against space, she felt pain return, focusing her body. This pain chilled her—a cold, steady kind of surface pain. Inside, spasmodically, the other pain, the pain of the child, heated her. For hours she lay on the ground, alternately body and space. Sometimes a vision of normal comfort obliterated reality: she saw the family in the evening gambling at the dinner table, the young people massaging their elder’s backs. She saw them congratulating one another, high joy on the mornings the rice shoots came up. When these pictures burst, the stars drew yet further apart. Black space opened.

She got to her feet to fight better and remembered that old-fashioned women gave birth in their pigsties to fool the jealous, pain-dealing gods, who

8. An abnormal fear of open space.

do not snatch piglets. Before the next spasms could stop her, she ran to the pigsty, each step a rushing out into emptiness. She climbed over the fence and knelt in the dirt. It was good to have a fence enclosing her, a tribal person alone.

Laboring, this woman who had carried her child as a foreign growth that sickened her every day, expelled it at last. She reached down to touch the hot, wet, moving mass, surely smaller than anything human, and could feel that it was human after all—fingers, toes, nails, nose. She pulled it up on to her belly, and it lay curled there, but in the air, feet precisely tucked one under the other. She opened her loose shirt and buttoned the child inside. After resting, it squirmed and thrashed and she pushed it up to her breast. It turned its head this way and that until it found her nipple. There, it made little snuffling noises. She clenched her teeth at its preciousness, lovely as a young calf, a piglet, a little dog.

She may have gone to the pigsty as a last act of responsibility: she would protect this child as she had protected its father. It would look after her soul, leaving supplies on her grave. But how would this tiny child without family find her grave when there would be no marker for her anywhere, neither in the earth nor the family hall? No one would give her a family hall name. She had taken the child with her into the wastes. At its birth the two of them had felt the same raw pain of separation, a wound that only the family pressing tight could close. A child with no descent line would not soften her life but only trail after her, ghostlike, begging her to give it purpose. At dawn the villagers on their way to the fields would stand around the fence and look.

Full of milk, the little ghost slept. When it awoke, she hardened her breasts against the milk that crying loosens. Toward morning she picked up the baby and walked to the well.

Carrying the baby to the well shows loving. Otherwise abandon it. Turn its face into the mud. Mothers who love their children take them along. It was probably a girl; there is some hope of forgiveness for boys.

“Don’t tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born.” I have believed that sex was unspeakable and words so strong and fathers so frail that “aunt” would do my father mysterious harm. I have thought that my family, having settled among immigrants who had also been their neighbors in the ancestral land, needed to clean their name, and a wrong word would incite the kinspeople even here. But there is more to this silence: they want me to participate in her punishment. And I have.

In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details nor said my aunt’s name; I do not know it. People who can comfort the dead can also chase after them to hurt them further—a reverse ancestor worship. The real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family’s deliberately forgetting her. Her betrayal so maddened them, they saw to it that she would suffer forever, even after death. Always hungry, always needing, she would have to beg food from other ghosts, snatch and steal it from those whose living descendants give them gifts. She would have to fight the ghosts massed at crossroads for the buns a few thoughtful citizens leave to decoy her away from village and home so that the ancestral spirits could

feast unharassed. At peace, they could act like gods, not ghosts, their descent lines providing them with paper suits and dresses, spirit money, paper houses, paper automobiles, chicken, meat, and rice⁹ into eternity—essences delivered up in smoke and flames, steam and incense rising from each rice bowl. In an attempt to make the Chinese care for people outside the family, Chairman Mao¹ encourages us now to give our paper replicas to the spirits of outstanding soldiers and workers, no matter whose ancestors they may be. My aunt remains forever hungry. Goods are not distributed evenly among the dead.

My aunt haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her, though not origami-ed into houses and clothes. I do not think she always means me well. I am telling on her, and she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water. The Chinese are always very frightened of the drowned one, whose weeping ghost, wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute.

1976

9. Traditionally, offerings left at the graves of ancestors.

1. Mao Zedong (1893–1976), head of the Chi-

nese Communist Party and leader of China from 1949 to 1976.

ROBERT PINSKY

b. 1940

A poet, critic, and translator, Robert Pinsky is a remarkable and influential figure in contemporary poetry. His appointment in 1997 for a two-year term as the ninth poet laureate of the United States (among his predecessors in this position were Rita Dove, Robert Penn Warren, and Richard Wilbur, also represented in this anthology) confirmed the range and ambition of his work. In his first collection of poetry, *Sadness and Happiness* (1975), Pinsky staked out a territory neglected by most image-dominated American poetry in the 1970s: the discursiveness that poetry shares with prose and speech, including declaration, statement, and abstract definition. A year later, his influential book of criticism, *The Situation of Poetry* (1976), argued for a poetry with the prose virtues of “Clarity, Flexibility, Efficiency, and Cohesiveness.” In Pinsky’s hands this “drab, unglamorous group” of virtues produced the winning and pleasurable poems of his first book and two following collections: *An Explanation of America* (1980) and *History of My Heart* (1984). Like William Carlos Williams and Elizabeth Bishop before him, Pinsky endows his poems with the casualness of prose inflections; the result is a wonderfully sociable body of poetry, with a relaxed and familiar sense of middle-class life. Here are poems of tennis and psychiatrists, baseball and daughters in school, high school dances, movies, “the small-town main street” (“History of My Heart”).

But Pinsky’s emphasis on the explanatory and the domestic can obscure his ambition and his formal virtuosity. The long title poem of *An Explanation of America* bespeaks his desire to bring together domestic life (the poem is addressed to his

daughter) and the nation, to unite private feeling with “general Happiness and Safety.” The poems of *History of My Heart* call on the personal memories at work in his first book but also introduce another sort of music, more mysterious and—what other word?—poetic. The publication of *The Want Bone* in 1990 and a book of new and collected poems, *The Figured Wheel*, in 1996, further demonstrated that the language of Pinsky’s best poems is ordinary and yet also transcendent. If one of his strengths is the way he makes poetry a conversation about ideas, increasingly he also summons the power of poetry to sing what is “impossible to say.” Pinsky’s formal virtuosity lies in his ability to marry variations on traditional poetic rhythms (like the pentameter line at work in “The Want Bone,” “At Pleasure Bay,” and “Shirt”) with American speech rhythms. This ability to shape a poetic line close to ordinary rhythms of speech and prose, and thus to render and deepen the everyday, connects him to Frank Bidart and James McMichael, two contemporary poets he admires. Pinsky is also an American master of the half or slant rhyme (like “twice” and “police” in “At Pleasure Bay” and the alliterative echo, like “bell” and “blue” in “The Want Bone,” which gives his work a sense of both formal music and relaxation; there is the repeated echo of sound within and between stanzas, without the closure of full rhyme. The sensuousness of poetry, Pinsky remarks in his collection of essays *Poetry and the World* (1988), gives “elegance and significance to the sounds that breath makes vibrating in the mouth and throat.” In “The Want Bone” (the dried jawbone of a shark, which he saw on a friend’s mantle) he renders the sound vibrating in “this scalded toothless harp” as song: “my food my parent my child I want you my own / My flower my fin my life my lightness my O.” Reading these lines we might easily forget that this poet has argued for poetry’s discursive qualities. At the same time Pinsky’s work continues to include what is sometimes excluded from American poetry, such as explanation or back-slapping ethnic jokes (in “Impossible to Tell” from *The Figured Wheel*).

Pinsky grew up in what he has called a “nominally orthodox” Jewish family in Long Branch, New Jersey. He later attended Rutgers and then Stanford University (where he studied with Yvor Winters). Though he lived in California for several years and now teaches in the graduate writing program at Boston University, Long Branch is Pinsky’s middle America, despite its location at the ocean’s edge (“bounded on three sides by similar places / and on one side by vast, uncouth houses / A glum boardwalk and, / as we say, the beach”). In Long Branch are his childhood memories and streets, as well as his sense of ethnic experience. With its fading boardwalk and movie houses, it also exemplifies an American popular culture for which Pinsky has unabashed appreciation. “At Pleasure Bay” (from *The Want Bone*), included here, beautifully commingles childhood memory and a sense of place with a feeling for the larger historical forces shaping the lives of local inhabitants. Though it is unlike Pinsky to move too far afield from everyday life, “At Pleasure Bay” and poems like it reveal the ways that Pinsky’s vision extends beyond the personal and local into a deeper past and (in the poem’s closing vision) future. The same process of enlarging a sense of community and connection while not straying too far from daily experience unfolds in “Shirt,” which works its own variations on the pentameter line and is beautifully shaped by Pinsky’s trademark half rhymes, here working within a single line as well as between lines.

The pleasures of Pinsky’s poetry are also literary; he is unabashed in his references to literary antecedents but in no sense narrowly academic. Instead his work acknowledges and celebrates the way literature shapes his (and our) sense of life and experience, as well as his (and our) use of language. Pinsky’s poetry is so distinctively American in its diction and subjects that his important work as a translator can come as a surprise. Among the poets he has translated are Czeslaw Milosz (the two worked together on the translations) and Paul Célan. In 1994 Pinsky published *The Inferno of Dante*, recipient of the Academy of American Poets translation award, in which his

formal gifts allowed him to re-create an American version of Dante's interlocked rhyme scheme, the *terza rima*. In a review of this translation in the *New York Times*, Edward Hirsch described the effect of Pinsky's stanzas as "moving through a series of interpenetrating rooms . . . or going down a set of winding stairs." While his sense of literary tradition is deep and wide-ranging, Pinsky is also engaged with new possibilities for literature created by computer technology. In 1985, in collaboration with computer programmers, he created an interactive text adventure game, *Mind-wheel*, and he has served as the poetry editor of the weekly online magazine *Slate*. Computer software and poetry, Pinsky has said, "share a great human myth or trope, an image that could be called the secret passage: the discovery of large manifold channels through a small, ordinary-looking or all but invisible aperture. . . . This passage to vast complexities is what writing through the machine might become."

The Figured Wheel

The figured wheel rolls through shopping malls and prisons,
 Over farms, small and immense, and the rotten little downtowns.
 Covered with symbols, it mills everything alive and grinds
 The remains of the dead in the cemeteries, in unmarked graves and oceans.

Sluiced by salt water and fresh, by pure and contaminated rivers, 5
 By snow and sand, it separates and recombines all droplets and grains,
 Even the infinite sub-atomic particles crushed under the illustrated,
 Varying treads of its wide circumferential track.

Spraying flecks of tar and molten rock it rumbles
 Through the Antarctic station of American sailors and technicians, 10
 And shakes the floors and windows of whorehouses for diggers and
 smelters
 From Bethany, Pennsylvania to a practically nameless, semi-penal New
 Town

In the mineral-rich tundra of the Soviet northernmost settlements.
 Artists illuminate it with pictures and incised mottoes
 Taken from the Ten Thousand Stories and the Register of True Dramas. 15
 They hang it with colored ribbons and with bells of many pitches.

With paints and chisels and moving lights they record
 On its rotating surface the elegant and terrifying doings
 Of the inhabitants of the Hundred Pantheons of major Gods
 Disposed in iconographic stations at hub, spoke and concentric bands, 20

And also the grotesque demi-Gods, Hopi gargoyles and Ibo dryads.¹
 They cover it with wind-chimes and electronic instruments
 That vibrate as it rolls to make an all-but-unthinkable music,
 So that the wheel hums and rings as it turns through the births of stars

1. Woodland spirits. "Ibo": a West African tribe, many of whose members were sent as slaves to America.

And through the dead-world of bomb, fireblast and fallout 25
 Where only a few doomed races of insects fumble in the smoking grasses.
 It is Jesus oblivious to hurt turning to give words to the unrighteous,
 And is also Gogol's² feeding pig that without knowing it eats a baby chick

And goes on feeding. It is the empty armor of My Cid,³ clattering 30
 Into the arrows of the credulous unbelievers, a metal suit
 Like the lost astronaut revolving with his useless umbilicus
 Through the cold streams, neither energy nor matter, that agitate

The cold, cyclical dark, turning and returning.
 Even in the scorched and frozen world of the dead after the holocaust
 The wheel as it turns goes on accreting ornaments. 35
 Scientists and artists festoon it from the grave with brilliant

Toys and messages, jokes and zodiacs, tragedies conceived
 From among the dreams of the unemployed and the pampered,
 The listless and the tortured. It is hung with devices
 By dead masters who have survived by reducing themselves magically 40

To tiny organisms, to wisps of matter, crumbs of soil,
 Bits of dry skin, microscopic flakes, which is why they are called "great,"
 In their humility that goes on celebrating the turning
 Of the wheel as it rolls unrelentingly over

A cow plodding through car-traffic on a street in *Iasi*,⁴ 45
 And over the haunts of Robert Pinsky's mother and father
 And wife and children and his sweet self
 Which he hereby unwillingly and inexpertly gives up, because it is

There, figured and pre-figured in the nothing-transfiguring wheel.

1984

The Street

Streaked and fretted with effort, the thick
 Vine of the world, red nervelets
 Coiled at its tips.

All roads lead from it. All night
 Wainwrights and upholsterers work finishing 5
 The wheeled coffin

Of the dead favorite of the Emperor,
 The child's corpse propped seated
 On brocade, with yellow

2. Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), Russian novelist, short-story writer, and playwright.

3. The Castillian epic *Poem of the Cid* (c. 1140)

celebrates the legendary Spanish hero, the Cid.

4. City in Moldavia, Romania.

Oiled curls, kohl on the stiff lids. 10
 Slaves throw petals on the roadway
 For the cortege, white

Languid flowers shooting from dark
 Blisters on the vine, ramifying
 Into streets. On mine, 15

Rockwell Avenue, it was embarrassing:
 Trouble—fights, the police, sickness—
 Seemed never to come

For anyone when they were fully dressed.
 It was always underwear or dirty pyjamas,
 Unseemly stretches 20

Of skin showing through a torn housecoat.
 Once a stranger drove off in a car
 With somebody's wife,

And he ran after them in his undershirt 25
 And threw his shoe at the car. It bounced
 Into the street

Harmlessly, and we carried it back to him;
 But the man had too much dignity
 To put it back on, 30

So he held it and stood crying in the street:
 "He's breaking up my home," he said,
 "The son of a bitch

Bastard is breaking up my home." The street
 Rose undulant in pavement-breaking coils 35
 And the man rode it,

Still holding his shoe and stiffly upright
 Like a trick rider in the circus parade
 That came down the street

Each August. As the powerful dragonlike 40
 Hump swelled he rose cursing and ready
 To throw his shoe—woven

Angular as a twig into the fabulous
 Rug or brocade with crowns and camels,
 Leopards and rosettes, 45

All riding the vegetable wave of the street
 From the John Flock Mortuary Home
 Down to the river.

It was a small place, and off the center,
 But so much a place to itself, I felt
 Like a young prince 50

Or aspirant squire. I knew that *Ivanhoe*¹
 Was about race. The Saxons were Jews,
 Or even Coloreds,

With their low-ceilinged, unbelievably
 Sour-smelling houses down by the docks. 55
 Everything was written

Or woven, ivory and pink and emerald—
 Nothing was too ugly or petty or terrible
 To be weighed in the immense 60

Silver scales of the dead: the looming
 Balances set right onto the live, dangerous
 Gray bark of the street.

1984

The Want Bone

The tongue of the waves tolled in the earth's bell.
 Blue rippled and soaked in the fire of blue.
 The dried mouthbones of a shark in the hot swale
 Gaped on nothing but sand on either side.

The bone tasted of nothing and smelled of nothing, 5
 A scalded toothless harp, uncrushed, unstrung.
 The joined arcs made the shape of birth and craving
 And the welded-open shape kept mouthing O.

Ossified cords held the corners together
 In groined spirals pleated like a summer dress. 10
 But where was the limber grin, the gash of pleasure?
 Infinitesimal mouths bore it away,

The beach scrubbed and etched and pickled it clean.
 But O I love you it sings, my little my country
 My food my parent my child I want you my own 15
 My flower my fin my life my lightness my O.

1990

1. The title and hero of Sir Walter Scott's romance novel (1819), set in 12th-century England, in which the hero wins the Saxon princess Rowena and champions a Jewish woman, Rebecca.

Shirt

The back, the yoke, the yardage. Lapped seams,¹
 The nearly invisible stitches along the collar
 Turned in a sweatshop by Koreans or Malaysians

Gossiping over tea and noodles on their break
 Or talking money or politics while one fitted 5
 This armpiece with its overseam to the band

Of cuff I button at my wrist. The presser, the cutter,
 The wringer, the mangle. The needle, the union,
 The treadle, the bobbin. The code. The infamous blaze

At the Triangle Factory² in nineteen-eleven 10
 One hundred and forty-six died in the flames
 On the ninth floor, no hydrants, no fire escapes—

The witness in a building across the street
 Who watched how a young man helped a girl to step
 up to the windowsill, then held her out 15

Away from the masonry wall and let her drop.
 And then another. As if he were helping them up
 To enter a streetcar, and not eternity.

A third before he dropped her put her arms
 Around his neck and kissed him. Then he held 20
 Her into space, and dropped her. Almost at once

He stepped to the sill himself, his jacket flared
 And fluttered up from his shirt as he came down,
 Air filling up the legs of his gray trousers—

Like Hart Crane's Bedlamite,³ "shrill shirt ballooning." 25
 Wonderful how the pattern matches perfectly
 Across the placket and over the twin bar-tacked

Corners of both pockets, like a strict rhyme
 Or a major chord. Prints, plaids, checks,
 Houndstooth, Tattersall, Madras. The clan tartans 30

1. Overlapping seams used to join fabric in interfacings to make them less bulky.

2. In 1911 the Triangle shirtwaist factory in New York City was the scene of a notorious fire in which 146 women who worked in the factory jumped to their deaths to escape the flames. This event marked the beginning of rigorous

efforts to enforce workplace safety.

3. A reference to lines from the opening section ("To Brooklyn Bridge") of the American poet Hart Crane's sequence *The Bridge* (1930): "Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft / A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets." A bedlamite is an inmate of a hospital for the mentally ill.

Invented by mill-owners inspired by the hoax of Ossian,⁴
 To control their savage Scottish workers, tamed
 By a fabricated heraldry: MacGregor,

Bailey, MacMartin. The kilt, devised for workers
 To wear among the dusty clattering looms. 35
 Weavers, carders, spinners. The loader,

The docker, the navy.⁵ The planter, the picker, the sorter
 Sweating at her machine in a litter of cotton
 As slaves in calico headrags sweated in fields:

George Herbert,⁶ your descendant is a Black 40
 Lady in South Carolina, her name is Irma
 And she inspected my shirt. Its color and fit

And feel and its clean smell have satisfied
 Both her and me. We have culled its cost and quality
 Down to the buttons of simulated bone, 45

The buttonholes, the sizing, the facing, the characters
 Printed in black on neckband and tail. The shape,
 The label, the labor, the color, the shade. The shirt.

1990

At Pleasure Bay

In the willows along the river at Pleasure Bay
 A catbird singing, never the same phrase twice.
 Here under the pines a little off the road
 In 1927 the Chief of Police
 And Mrs. W. killed themselves together, 5
 Sitting in a roadster. Ancient unshaken pilings
 And underwater chunks of still-mortared brick
 In shapes like bits of puzzle strew the bottom
 Where the landing was for Price's Hotel and Theater.
 And here's where boats blew two blasts for the keeper 10
 To shunt the iron swing-bridge. He leaned on the gears
 Like a skipper in the hut that housed the works
 And the bridge moaned and turned on its middle pier
 To let them through. In the middle of the summer
 Two or three cars might wait for the iron trusswork 15
 Winching aside, with maybe a child to notice
 A name on the stern in black-and-gold on white,

4. In 1760 James Macpherson published *Poems of Ossian*, which falsely claimed to be a translation of a text by the 3rd-century Irish hero of that name.

5. An unskilled laborer, especially one engaged in excavating or construction.

6. English poet (1593–1633).

Sandpiper, Patsy Ann, Do Not Disturb,
The Idler. If a boat was running whiskey,
 The bridge clanged shut behind it as it passed 20
 And opened up again for the Coast Guard cutter
 Slowly as a sundial, and always jammed halfway.
 The roadbed whole, but opened like a switch,
 The river pulling and coursing between the piers.
 Never the same phrase twice, the catbird filling 25
 The humid August evening near the inlet
 With borrowed music that he melds and changes.
 Dragonflies and sandflies, frogs in the rushes, two bodies
 Not moving in the open car among the pines,
 A sliver of story. The tenor at Price's Hotel, 30
 In clown costume, unfurls the sorrow gathered
 In ruffles at his throat and cuffs, high quavers
 That hold like splashes of light on the dark water,
 The aria's closing phrases, changed and fading.
 And after a gap of quiet, cheers and applause 35
 Audible in the houses across the river,
 Some in the audience weeping as if they had melted
 Inside the music. Never the same. In Berlin
 The daughter of an English lord, in love
 With Adolf Hitler, whom she has met. She is taking 40
 Possession of the apartment of a couple,
 Elderly well-off Jews. They survive the war
 To settle here in the Bay, the old lady
 Teaches piano, but the whole world swivels
 And gapes at their feet as the girl and a high-up Nazi 45
 Examine the furniture, the glass, the pictures,
 The elegant story that was theirs and now
 Is a part of hers. A few months later the English
 Enter the war and she shoots herself in a park,
 An addled, upper-class girl, her life that passes 50
 Into the lives of others or into a place.
 The taking of lives—the Chief and Mrs. W.
 Took theirs to stay together, as local ghosts.
 Last flurries of kisses, the revolver's barrel,
 Shivers of a story that a child might hear 55
 And half remember, voices in the rushes,
 A singing in the willows. From across the river,
 Faint quavers of music, the same phrase twice and again,
 Ranging and building. Over the high new bridge
 The flashing of traffic homeward from the racetrack, 60
 With one boat chugging under the arches, outward
 Unnoticed through Pleasure Bay to the open sea.
 Here's where the people stood to watch the theater
 Burn on the water. All that night the fireboats
 Kept playing their spouts of water into the blaze. 65
 In the morning, smoking pilasters and beams.
 Black smell of char for weeks, the ruin already
 Soaking back into the river. After you die
 You hover near the ceiling above your body

And watch the mourners awhile. A few days more 70
 You float above the heads of the ones you knew
 And watch them through a twilight. As it grows darker
 You wander off and find your way to the river
 And wade across. On the other side, night air,
 Willows, the smell of the river, and a mass 75
 Of sleeping bodies all along the bank,
 A kind of singing from among the rushes
 Calling you further forward in the dark.
 You lie down and embrace one body, the limbs
 Heavy with sleep reach eagerly up around you 80
 And you make love until your soul brims up
 And burns free out of you and shifts and spills
 Down over into that other body, and you
 Forget the life you had and begin again
 On the same crossing—maybe as a child who passes 85
 Through the same place. But never the same way twice.
 Here in the daylight, the catbird in the willows,
 The new café, with a terrace and a landing,
 Frogs in the cattails where the swing-bridge was—
 Here's where you might have slipped across the water 90
 When you were only a presence, at Pleasure Bay.

1990

SIMON J. ORTIZ

b. 1941

In his poem “A Designated National Park,” Simon J. Ortiz tells of visiting Montezuma Castle in Verde Valley, Arizona, where he experiences as present in himself the life of the people there: “Hear / in my cave, sacred song. / Morning feeling, sacred song. / We shall plant today.” His connection to that landscape, however, is complicated by the fact that it is now a “DESIGNATED FEDERAL RECREATION FEE AREA”: “This morning / I have to buy a permit to get back home.” Ortiz’s treatment of Verde Valley is characteristic of the way he inhabits a conflicted landscape. He was born and raised in the Acoma Pueblo Community in Albuquerque, New Mexico. One meaning of the name *Acoma* is “the place that always was,” and in this sense it transcends the poet’s place of origin and represents for him the Native American way of life. Ortiz continually returns to this abiding sense of origin after traveling great distances from it. Often his poems enact a journey, and as Joseph Bruhac reminds us, in American Indian cultures the theme of traveling implicitly recalls the “tragic epic movements of Native American nations.” Many of Ortiz’s poems dramatize his disorientation as he moves within an America where Indian names are reduced to billboard signs, where rivers burn from industrial wastes and construction fills up the spaces of the earth. His sense of contemporary life, especially its absurdities, is acute.

But the America he travels conceals within it an older landscape animated by spirit, where the earth is alive with “wind visions” and “The Mountains dream / about pine brothers and friends” (“Vision Shadows”); to travel it is to seek “the center of the center” (“Between Albuquerque and Santa Fe”), the place where the spirits enter the world. Asked in an interview, “Why do you write?” Ortiz once responded, “Because Indians always tell a story. . . . The only way to continue is to tell a story and there is no other way. Your children will not survive unless you tell something about them—how they were born, how they came to this certain place, how they continued.” Tellingly, Ortiz chose to reprint these comments at the beginning of his collection *A Good Journey* (1977). The stories his poems narrate are evidence that the Native American way of life is continuous, despite all the forces that attempt to eradicate it. But his work also tells of the painful costs that come with survival.

After receiving his early education at a Bureau of Indian Affairs school on the Acoma Reservation, Ortiz later attended the University of New Mexico and the University of Iowa. He has since taught at San Diego State University and the University of New Mexico. “I never decided to become a poet,” Ortiz has said, suggesting that his relatives transmitted to him the power of words. “An old-man relative with a humpback used to come to our home when I was a child, and he would carry me on his back. He told me stories. . . . That contact must have contributed the language of myself.” His father, a stonemason, carpenter, and woodcarver, would talk and sing as he worked. In “A Story of How a Wall Stands,” he remembers his father saying “Underneath / what looks like loose stone, / there is stone woven together.” This sense of underlying connection is true of Ortiz’s poetry as well, often at its finest when revealing how a moment or event fits into the ongoing cycles celebrated by ritual. His best poems are sometimes surprising in the way the apparently loose details suddenly blaze into an arrangement. Characteristically, this happens through powerful repetitions culminating in the last movements of a poem, a technique that depends on rereading. Ortiz’s collection *Going for Rain* appeared in 1976; its poems sometimes show a writer whose strong feelings have not yet found a distinctive language or rhythm. His next book, *The Good Journey*, is more assured and its range significantly broader. His work also includes *From Sand Creek*, which won the 1982 Pushcart Prize, as well as *A Poem Is a Journey* (1981) and an edition that collects earlier volumes together with new work, *Woven Stone* (1992). *After and Before the Lightning* was published in 1994; his short stories were collected in *Men on the Moon* (1999). Ortiz’s mission—continuance and preservation—sometimes allows a didactic impulse to shape his work too rigidly. But his finest poems have a richness of experience and a vital, imaginative sense of the earth that refuses any single conceptual or moral frame.

A recurring image in several Ortiz poems is the “Wisconsin horse” he once saw standing “within a fence // silent in the hot afternoon” while one mile away new construction was going on: “I tell the horse, / ‘That’s America building something’” (“The Wisconsin Horse”). The spirit of the horse, restrained by the chainlink fence and threatened by the approaching construction, suggests Ortiz’s sense of constriction in the VA hospitals (his experience in one of these prompted his sequence *Poems from the Veterans Hospital*), as well as in small-town bars, in the Salvation Army store, or in the boundaries of the designated National Parks. Something threatens to break loose in these poems; feelings precariously held in check shake the formal structures. Other poems, like “Earth and Rain, the Plants & Sun,” have the freedom and buoyancy of the hawk’s flight; the words move in a space that seems immense. Instead of explosive anger or despair, the tone of the poem is close to song or prayer. What is so moving in Ortiz’s work is that these voices are both his; together they suggest the fracture of identity and the possibility of reintegration.

Sunlight falls
 through cloud curtains,
 a straight bright shaft. 20

It falls,
 it falls,
 down
 to earth,
 a green plant. 25

Today, the Katzina¹ come.
 The dancing prayers.

Many times, the Katzina.
 The dancing prayers. 30
 It shall not end,
 son, it will not end,
 this love.

Again and again,
 the earth is new again. 35
 They come, listen, listen.
 Hold on to your mother's hand.
 They come

O great joy, they come.
 The plants with bells. 40
 The stones with voices.
 Listen, son, hold my hand.

1977

Vision Shadows

Wind visions are honest.
 Eagles clearly soar
 to the craggy peaks
 of the mind.
 The mind is full 5
 of sunprayer
 and childlaughter.

The Mountains dream
 about pine brothers and friends,
 the mystic realm of boulders 10

1. Or Kachina; spirits of the invisible life forces of the Pueblo Indians of North America. The Kachinas are impersonated by elaborately costumed masked men and boys of the tribes who

visit Pueblo villages the first half of the year. Although not worshiped as gods, Kachinas are greatly revered; one of their main purposes is to bring rain for the spring crops.

which shelter
 rabbits, squirrels, wrens.
 They believe in the power.
 They also believe
 in quick eagle death. 15

The eagle loops
 into the wind power.
 He can see a million miles
 and more because of it.

All believe things 20
 of origin and solitude.

But what has happened
 (I hear strange news from Wyoming
 of thallium sulphate. Ranchers
 bearing arms in helicopters.¹) 25
to these visions?
 I hear foreign tremors.
 Breath comes thin and shredded.
 I hear the scabs of strange deaths
 falling off. 30

Snake hurries through the grass.
 Coyote is befuddled by his own tricks.
 And Bear whimpers pain into the wind.

Poisonous fumes cross our sacred paths.
 The wind is still. 35
 O Blue Sky, O Mountain, O Spirit, O
 what has stopped?

Eagles tumble dumbly into shadows
 that swallow them with dull thuds.
 The sage can't breathe. 40
 Jackrabbit is lonely and alone
 with eagle gone.

It is painful, aiiee, without visions
 to soothe dry whimpers
 or repair the flight of eagle, our own brother. 45

1977

1. In 1971 the owner of Wyoming's largest sheep ranch was found to have hired a helicopter in order to shoot bald eagles, which he claimed were preying on his lambs. He was later found to

be responsible for the deaths of more than 700 eagles by aerial shooting and by poisoning with thallium sulphate, a chemical used as rat poison.

From Poems from the Veterans Hospital

Travelling

A man has been in the VAH Library all day long,
looking at the maps, the atlas, and the globe,
finding places.

Acapulco, the Bay of Bengal,
Antarctica, Madagascar, Rome, Luxembourg,
places. 5

He writes their names on a letter pad, hurries
to another source, asks the librarian for a book
but it is out and he looks hurt and then he rushes
back to the globe, turns it a few times and finds 10
Yokohama and then the Aleutian Islands.

Later on, he studies Cape Cod for a moment,
a faraway glee on his face, in his eyes.
He is Gauguin, he is Coyote,¹ he is who he is,
travelling the known and unknown places, 15
travelling, travelling.

1977

From From Sand Creek

At the Salvation Army
a clerk
caught me
wandering
among old spoons 5
and knives,
sweaters and shoes.

I couldn't have stolen anything;
my life was stolen already.

In protest though, 10
I should have stolen.
My life. My life.

She caught me;
Carson¹ caught Indians,

1. The trickster figure in southwestern and other Native American tales. The French painter Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) left his home in France for Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands.

1. Christopher ("Kit") Carson (1809–1868), trapper, scout, Indian agent, and soldier, was hired by the government to help control the Navajo. Beginning in 1863 he waged a brutal economic war

against the tribe, marching through the heart of their territory to destroy their crops, orchards, and livestock. In 1864 most Navajo surrendered to Carson, who forced nearly 8,000 Navajo men, women, and children to take what came to be called the "Long Walk" of 300 miles from Arizona to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where they remained in disease-ridden confinement until 1868.

secured them with his lies. 15
Bound them with his belief.

After winter,
our own lives fled.

I reassured her
what she believed. 20
Bought a sweater.

And fled.

I should have stolen.
My life. My life.

1981

BILLY COLLINS

b. 1941

The voice in a Billy Collins poem is so intimate and immediate that we feel we are in the same room with the poet. Collins imagines poet and reader sitting together at a breakfast table: “I will lean forward, / elbows on the table, / with something to tell you / and you will look up, as always, / your spoon dripping with milk, ready to listen” (“A Portrait of the Reader with a Bowl of Cereal”). The colloquial voice in his poems charms us with its air of spontaneous expression, its modesty, its humor. If some of his poems coast on charm alone, Collins’s best work takes us on a surprising ride: its strange and unexpected associations deepen the familiar into the mysterious or make the mysterious familiar.

Describing the structures of his poetry, Collins says, “We are attempting, all the time, to create a logical, rational path through the day. To the left and right there are an amazing set of distractions that we can’t afford to follow. But the poet is willing to stop anywhere.” His poems often proceed as accounts of a day and its distractions, as in “Tuesday, June 4, 1991.” At the same time the formal shapeliness of Collins’s work endows ordinary activity with a strange and pleasing formality and turns it, line by measured line and stanza by stanza, into a ritual including both the pleasures and the pathos of life. These poems present a humorous self-awareness about the speaker’s dramatizing and obsessive love of distraction—anything, no matter how insignificant, can carry off his attention—and one thing that is so welcome about Collins’s poems is that they are funny. Only on later readings do we realize that they are also sad. When he looks over the edges of domestic life there is blankness; unlike the work of a Jorie Graham or a Charles Wright, a Collins poem evokes no metaphysical structures that might sustain this fragile world. Yet (in the Irish poet William Butler Yeats’s phrase) Collins loves “what vanishes”—the day in June, the good meal, even one’s memories. This knowledge of how things large and small disappear is a great equalizer. The humor in Collins’s poetry puts this equalizing principle to work; he deflates the grandiose and subjects large statements of

truth to the test of the particular. Collins's titles, imaginative and playful, suggest the way he alights on small, usually trivial instances in which life's strangeness and mystery flash out: "Weighing the Dog," "I Chop Some Parsley While Listening to Art Blakey's Version of 'Three Blind Mice.'" Other titles signal the way he grounds the improbable within the everyday: "Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes," "Shoveling Snow with Buddha."

Collins's collections of poems include *Questions about Angels* (1977), *The Art of Drowning* (1995), *Picnic, Lightning* (1998), *Sailing Alone Around the World: New and Selected Poems* (2001), *Nine Horses* (2003), *The Trouble with Poetry and Other Poems* (2005), *Ballistics* (2008), *Horoscopes for the Dead* (2011), and *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems* (2013). He served as poet laureate of the United States from 2001 to 2003. Born in New York City (in a hospital where, as he likes to note, William Carlos Williams worked as a pediatric resident), Collins teaches at Lehman College of the City University. Walking the city streets animates him and inflects some of his poems in a way that recalls the work of Frank O'Hara, with whom Collins shares an idiomatic American voice, colloquial and understated, shaped by jazz and the blues. Collins's work often plays with the melody of a pentameter line as a jazz musician plays on and off the melody of a song; the pentameter is an undertone from which a more idiosyncratic rhythm moves around and away. While the rhythms of Collins's poetry often enforce a slowing-down, a tender lingering over everyday life, their breezy tone and quick humor seem to suggest that nothing too serious is going on. It is as if Collins were fending off the large, prophetic claims made by visionary poets (early in his career he earned a Ph.D. at the University of California at Riverside, specializing in the Romantic period), even as some of his poems are riffs on the Romantic tradition. Such Collins poems as "Keats's Handwriting" and "Lines Composed Over Three Thousand Miles from Tintern Abbey" deflate the romantic sublime and substitute for it a vision self-deprecating and humorous. Thus when we hear nightingales in a Collins poem, they're a group singing on the gospel radio station ("Sunday Morning with the Sensational Nightingales").

Collins's modest claims for poetry and the fact that his work is so appealing and accessible can lead us to underestimate the necessity and reward of rereading him. The best of his poems open up a moment like a series of nested boxes; if we read too quickly, we miss the pleasure and surprise of intricate connections and deepening discoveries. A Collins poem has a spontaneity that yields immediate pleasure, but only when we listen again more attentively do we recognize the art that makes itself look easy.

Forgetfulness

The name of the author is the first to go
followed obediently by the title, the plot,
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel
which suddenly becomes one you have never read, never even heard of,

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye,
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,

5

10

something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen. 15

It has floated away down a dark mythological river
whose name begins with an *L* as far as you can recall,¹
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night 20
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.

1991

Osso Buco¹

I love the sound of the bone against the plate
and the fortress-like look of it
lying before me in a moat of risotto,²
the meat soft as the leg of an angel
who has lived a purely airborne existence. 5
And best of all, the secret marrow,
the invaded privacy of the animal
prized out with a knife and swallowed down
with cold, exhilarating wine.

I am swaying now in the hour after dinner, 10
a citizen tilted back on his chair,
a creature with a full stomach—
something you don't hear much about in poetry,
that sanctuary of hunger and deprivation.
You know: the driving rain, the boots by the door, 15
small birds searching for berries in winter.

But tonight, the lion of contentment
has placed a warm, heavy paw on my chest,
and I can only close my eyes and listen
to the drums of woe throbbing in the distance 20
and the sound of my wife's laughter
on the telephone in the next room,
the woman who cooked the savory osso buco,
who pointed to show the butcher the ones she wanted.

1. In Greek mythology, Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Hades.

1. An Italian dish made with veal shanks.
2. An Italian rice dish.

She who talks to her faraway friend 25
 while I linger here at the table
 with a hot, companionable cup of tea,
 feeling like one of the friendly natives,
 a reliable guide, maybe even the chief's favorite son.

Somewhere, a man is crawling up a rocky hillside 30
 on bleeding knees and palms, an Irish penitent
 carrying the stone of the world in his stomach;
 and elsewhere people of all nations stare
 at one another across a long, empty table.

But here, the candles give off their warm glow, 35
 the same light that Shakespeare and Izaak Walton³ wrote by,
 the light that lit and shadowed the faces of history.
 Only now it plays on the blue plates,
 the crumpled napkins, the crossed knife and fork.

In a while, one of us will go up to bed 40
 and the other one will follow.
 Then we will slip below the surface of the night
 into miles of water, drifting down and down
 to the dark, soundless bottom
 until the weight of dreams pulls us lower still, 45
 below the shale and layered rock,
 beneath the strata of hunger and pleasure,
 into the broken bones of the earth itself,
 into the marrow of the only place we know.

1995

Tuesday, June 4, 1991

By the time I get myself out of bed, my wife has left
 the house to take her botany final and the painter
 has arrived in his van and is already painting
 the columns of the front porch white and the decking gray.

It is early June, a breezy and sun-riddled Tuesday 5
 that would quickly be forgotten were it not for my
 writing these few things down as I sit here empty-headed
 at the typewriter with a cup of coffee, light and sweet.

I feel like the secretary to the morning whose only
 responsibility is to take down its bright, airy dictation 10
 until it's time to go to lunch with the other girls,
 all of us ordering the cottage cheese with half a pear.

3. English writer (1593–1683), author of *The Compleat Angler*, a treatise on fishing and a picture of peace and simple virtues; it is among the most republished books in English literature.

This is what stenographers do in courtrooms, too,
 alert at their miniature machines taking down every word.
 When there is a silence they sit still as I do, waiting
 and listening, fingers resting lightly on the keys. 15

This is also what Samuel Pepys¹ did, jotting down in
 private ciphers minor events that would have otherwise
 slipped into the dark amnesiac waters of the Thames.
 His vigilance finally paid off when London caught fire 20

as mine does when the painter comes in for coffee
 and says how much he likes this slow vocal rendition
 of “You Don’t Know What Love Is”² and I figure I will
 make him a tape when he goes back to his brushes and pails.

Under the music I can hear the rush of cars and trucks 25
 on the highway and every so often the new kitten, Felix,
 hops into my lap and watches my fingers drumming out
 a running record of this particular June Tuesday

as it unrolls before my eyes, a long intricate carpet
 that I am walking on slowly with my head bowed 30
 knowing that it is leading me to the quiet shrine
 of the afternoon and the melancholy candles of evening.

If I look up, I see out the window the white stars
 of clematis climbing a ladder of strings, a woodpile,
 a stack of faded bricks, a small green garden of herbs, 35
 things you would expect to find outside a window,

all written down now and placed in the setting
 of a stanza as unalterably as they are seated
 in their chairs in the ontological³ rooms of the world.
 Yes, this is the kind of job I could succeed in, 40

an unpaid but contented amanuensis⁴ whose hands
 are two birds fluttering on the lettered keys,
 whose eyes see sunlight splashing through the leaves,
 and the bright pink asterisks of honeysuckle

and the piano at the other end of this room with 45
 its small vase of faded flowers and its empty bench.
 So convinced am I that I have found my vocation,
 tomorrow I will begin my chronicling earlier, at dawn,

a time when hangmen and farmers are up and doing,
 when men holding pistols stand in a field back to back. 50

1. English writer (1633–1703), known primarily for his diaries.

2. A song from the jazz repertoire, written by Gene de Paul in 1941.

3. Having to do with the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being.

4. One employed to write from dictation or to copy manuscripts.

It is the time the ancients imagined in robes, as Eos
 or Aurora,⁵ who would leave her sleeping husband in bed,
 not to take her botany final, but to pull the sun,
 her brother, over the horizon's brilliant rim,
 her four-horse chariot aimed at the zenith of the sky, 55
 But tomorrow, dawn will come the way I picture her,
 barefoot and disheveled, standing outside my window
 in one of the fragile cotton dresses of the poor.
 She will look in at me with her thin arms extended,
 offering a handful of birdsong and a small cup of light. 60

1995

I Chop Some Parsley While Listening to Art Blakey's¹ Version of "Three Blind Mice"

And I start wondering how they came to be blind.
 If it was congenital, they could be brothers and sisters,
 and I think of the poor mother
 brooding over her sightless young triplets.

Or was it a common accident, all three caught 5
 in a searing explosion, a fireworks perhaps?
 If not,
 if each came to his or her blindness separately,
 how did they ever manage to find one another?
 Would it not be difficult for a blind mouse 10
 to locate even one fellow mouse with vision
 let alone two other blind ones?

And how, in their tiny darkness,
 could they possibly have run after a farmer's wife
 or anyone else's wife for that matter? 15
 Not to mention why.

Just so she could cut off their tails
 with a carving knife, is the cynic's answer,
 but the thought of them without eyes
 and now without tails to trail through the moist grass 20

or slip around the corner of a baseboard
 has the cynic who always lounges within me
 up off his couch and at the window
 trying to hide the rising softness that he feels.

5. The Greek and Roman goddesses of dawn.

1. Jazz drummer and bandleader (1919–1990).



Art Blakey on the drums.

By now I am on to dicing an onion
 which might account for the wet stinging
 in my own eyes, though Freddie Hubbard's
 mournful trumpet on "Blue Moon,"

25

which happens to be the next cut,²
 cannot be said to be making matters any better.

30

1998

The Night House

Every day the body works in the fields of the world
 mending a stone wall
 or swinging a sickle through the tall grass—
 the grass of civics, the grass of money—
 and every night the body curls around itself
 and listens for the soft bells of sleep.

5

But the heart is restless and rises
 from the body in the middle of the night,

2. The next song (or "cut" on a vinyl record) on *Three Blind Mice, Vol. 1*, a 1962 live recording by Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, which included Freddie Hubbard (1938–2008).

leaves the trapezoidal bedroom
 with its thick, pictureless walls 10
 to sit by herself at the kitchen table
 and heat some milk in a pan.

And the mind gets up too, puts on a robe
 and goes downstairs, lights a cigarette,
 and opens a book on engineering. 15
 Even the conscience awakens
 and roams from room to room in the dark,
 darting away from every mirror like a strange fish.

And the soul is up on the roof
 in her nightdress, straddling the ridge, 20
 singing a song about the wildness of the sea
 until the first rip of pink appears in the sky.
 Then, they all will return to the sleeping body
 the way a flock of birds settles back into a tree,

resuming their daily colloquy, 25
 talking to each other or themselves
 even through the heat of the long afternoons.
 Which is why the body—that house of voices—
 sometimes puts down its metal tongs, its needle, or its pen
 to stare into the distance, 30

to listen to all its names being called
 before bending again to its labor.

1998

Litany

*You are the bread and the knife,
 The crystal goblet and the wine.*

Jacques Crickillon

You are the bread and the knife,
 the crystal goblet and the wine.
 You are the dew on the morning grass,
 and the burning wheel of the sun.
 You are the white apron of the baker 5
 and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
 the plums on the counter,
 or the house of cards.
 And you are certainly not the pine-scented air. 10
 There is no way you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,
 maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,

but you are not even close
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk. 15

And a quick look in the mirror will show
that you are neither the boots in the corner
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world, 20
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,
the evening paper blowing down an alley,
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees 25
and the blind woman's teacup.
But don't worry, I am not the bread and the knife.
You are still the bread and the knife.
You will always be the bread and the knife,
not to mention the crystal goblet and—somehow—the wine. 30

2002

Sonnet

All we need is fourteen lines,¹ well, thirteen now,
and after this one just a dozen
to launch a little ship on love's storm-tossed seas,
then only ten more left like rows of beans.
How easily it goes unless you get Elizabethan² 5
and insist the iambic³ bongos must be played
and rhymes positioned at the ends of lines,
one for every station of the cross.
But hang on here while we make the turn⁴
into the final six where all will be resolved, 10
where longing and heartache will find an end,
where Laura will tell Petrarch⁵ to put down his pen,
take off those crazy medieval tights,
blow out the lights, and come at last to bed.

2001

1. The line count typical of a sonnet.

2. A sonnet composed of three quatrains and a terminal couplet, in iambic pentameter, with the rhyme pattern *abab cdcd efef gg* (also called Shakespearean).

3. A metrical foot consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable.

4. In an Elizabethan sonnet, the turn is typically

the ninth line, often marked by a change in tone or mood.

5. The sight of a woman named "Laura" spurred Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374), an Italian scholar, poet, and Renaissance humanist, to write a collection mostly of sonnets entitled *II Canzoniere*.

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

1942–2004

The term “Chicano” was originally pejorative, used on both sides of the border to identify Mexican Americans of the lowest social class. Just as the once demeaning label “black” was appropriated and revalued by African Americans during the civil rights, black power, and black arts movements of the 1960s, so “Chicano” was embraced by Hispanic activists as a badge of pride, especially among university students and farm workers. By 1987, when the first edition of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* appeared, two more politically sensitive terms had been added to the sociocultural lexicon: “Chicana,” specifically identifying Mexican American women, particularly in light of their announced aims and the general interests of the Chicano movement, and “mestiza,” describing Chicana women who are especially concerned with a heritage that is both Chicana and Native American. Together with Cherríe Moraga, her coeditor on *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), Anzaldúa emerged as a pioneer in both the writing and the study of Chicana literature.

The daughter of ranchers in Jesus Maria of the Valley, Texas, Anzaldúa labored as a migrant fieldworker before earning a B.A. from Pan American University (1969) and an M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin (1973); she did further graduate study at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She taught creative writing, Chicano studies, and feminist studies at major universities from Texas to California. She published the novel *La Prieta* (Spanish for “the dark one,” 1997), other anthologies, and a series of children’s books, the most notable of which—*Prietita and the Ghost Woman / Prietita y La Llorona* (1996)—introduces young readers to an important figure in Chicana culture.

La Llorona is one of the three principal representations of women in Mexican culture: *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, a vision of the Virgin Mary who appeared to an Indian, Juan Diego, in 1531 on a hillside outside Mexico City that was sacred to the worship of Tonantzín, the Indian “Mother of Heaven”; *La Chingada*, incorrectly translated as “The Raped One” but whom Anzaldúa insists be accurately identified as “The Fucked One,” the deposed Aztec princess (also known as La Malinche, Doña Marina, and Malintzín Tenepal) who served the Spanish military leader Hernan Cortés as translator and lover during his consolidation of colonial power between 1519 and 1522; and *La Llorona*, “The Woman Who Cries,” a spurned mistress of Mexican legend who drowned her children and was fated to eternally seek their recovery. Each of these representations metaphorically controls a certain distinct realm of possibility for Chicanas. At the core of Anzaldúa’s work is the belief that because metaphors structure the way we think, the metaphorical influences of these types of women must be reshaped so that Chicanas can escape the binary constraint of being judged as either a virgin or a whore (and nothing else). *Borderlands/La Frontera* is Anzaldúa’s most comprehensive effort toward that restructuring.

Although written mainly in English, the personal essays and narrative poem printed here reflect another key part of Anzaldúa’s art: not only did she wish to write in Spanish from time to time but she did not always translate that Spanish into English. When she did not provide such a translation in a piece primarily in English, she wanted to speak directly to those who either could not or chose not to

communicate in English. This practice, much like her blending of fiction, poetry, social commentary, and personal memoir, helps create the narrative richness that characterizes her work.

The following texts are from the second edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999).

La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness

*Por la mujer de mi raza
hablará el espíritu.¹*

José Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged *una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color—la primera raza síntesis del globo*. He called it a cosmic race, *la raza cósmica*, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world.² Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan,³ and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly “crossing over,” this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands.

Una lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of Borders

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.

The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza*'s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness.

In a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec⁴ word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another. Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition, the *mestiza* faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?

El choque de un alma atrapado entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada. Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between

1. “This is my own ‘take off’ on Jose Vasconcelos’ idea. José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica: Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana* (México: Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones, 1961)” [Anzaldúa’s note]. José Vasconcelos (1882–1959) was a Mexican philosopher.

2. Vasconcelos [Anzaldúa’s note].

3. Nazi misnomer for Caucasians of non-Jewish descent.

4. A precolonial people of Mexico with a highly developed civilization.

two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference⁵ causes *un choque*, a cultural collision.

Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance.

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle⁶ eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.

A Tolerance for Ambiguity

These numerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking,⁷ characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has

5. Arthur Koestler [(1905–1983), Hungarian-born writer active in Germany and Britain] termed this term “bisociation.” Albert Rothenberg, *The Creative Process in Art, Science, and Other Fields* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 12 [Anzaldúa's note].

6. Female and male, respectively; a binarism in traditional Mexican culture.

7. In part, I derive my definitions for “convergent” and “divergent” thinking from Rothenberg, 12–13 [Anzaldúa's note].

a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.

She can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence. I'm not sure exactly how. The work takes place underground—subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs. That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.

En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the *mestiza*. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness.

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.

La encrucijada / The Crossroads

A chicken is being sacrificed
 at a crossroads, a simple mound of earth
 a mud shrine for *Eshu*,
*Yoruba*⁸ god of indeterminacy,
 who blesses her choice of path.
 She begins her journey.

Su cuerpo es una hocacalle. *La mestiza* has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads.

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-

8. Large ethnic group of southwest Nigeria and southeast Benin, in Africa.

Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.

We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward. *Nuestra alma el trabajo*, the opus, the great alchemical work; spiritual *mestizaje*, a "morphogenesis,"⁹ an inevitable unfolding. We have become the quickening serpent movement.

Indigenous like corn, like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn—a female seed-bearing organ—the *mestiza* is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads.

*Lavando y remojando el maíz en agua de cal, despojando el pellejo. Moliendo, mixteando, amasando, haciendo tortillas de masa.*¹ She steeps the corn in lime, it swells, softens. With stone roller on *metate*, she grinds the corn, then grinds again. She kneads and moulds the dough, pats the round balls into *tortillas*.

We are the porous rock in the stone *metate*
squatting on the ground.
We are the rolling pin, *el maíz y agua*,
la masa harina. Somos el amasijo.
Somos lo molido en el metate.
We are the *comal* sizzling hot,
the hot *tortilla*, the hungry mouth.
We are the coarse rock.
We are the grinding motion,
the mixed potion, *somos el molcajete*.
We are the pestle, the *comino, ajo, pimienta*,
We are the *chile colorado*,
the green shoot that cracks the rock.
We will abide.

9. "To borrow from chemist Ilya Prigogine's theory of 'dissipative structures.' Prigogine discovered that substances interact not in predictable ways as it was taught in science, but in different and fluctuating ways to produce new and more complex structures, a kind of birth he called 'morphogenesis,' which created unpredictable innovations. Harold Gilliam, 'Searching for a New World View,' *This World* (January, 1981), 23" [Anzaldúa's note]. Ilya Prigogine (1917–

2003), Russian-born Belgian physical chemist active in the United States.

1. *Tortillas de masa harina*: corn tortillas are of two types, the smooth uniform ones made in a tortilla press and usually bought at a tortilla factory or supermarket, and *gorditas*, made by mixing *masa* with lard or shortening or butter (my mother sometimes puts in bits of bacon or chicharones [Anzaldúa's note]).

El camino de la mestiza / The Mestiza Way

Caught between the sudden contraction, the breath sucked in and the endless space, the brown woman stands still, looks at the sky. She decides to go down, digging her way along the roots of trees. Sifting through the bones, she shakes them to see if there is any marrow in them. Then, touching the dirt to her forehead, to her tongue, she takes a few bones, leaves the rest in their burial place.

She goes through her backpack, keeps her journal and address book, throws away the muni-bart metromaps. The coins are heavy and they go next, then the greenbacks flutter through the air. She keeps her knife, can opener and eyebrow pencil. She puts bones, pieces of bark, *hierbas*, eagle feather, snakeskin, tape recorder, the rattle and drum in her pack and she sets out to become the complete *tolteca*.²

Her first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*. Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back—which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo?

Pero es difícil differentiating between *lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto*. She puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of. *Luego bota lo que no vale, los desmientos, los desencuentos, el embrutecimiento. Aguarda el juicio, bondo y enraizado, de la gente antigua*. This step is a conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nahual*, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small “I” into the total Self. *Se hace moldeadora de su alma. Según la concepción que tiene de sí misma, así será.*

Que no se nos olviden los hombres

“Tú no sirves pa'nada—
you're good for nothing.
Eres pura vieja.”

“You're nothing but a woman” means you are defective. Its opposite is to be *un macho*. The modern meaning of the word “machismo,” as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention. For men like my father, being “macho” meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love. Today's macho has doubts about his ability to feed and protect his family. His “machismo” is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance.

2. Female member of the ancient Toltec group of Nahuatl Indians who lived in Mexico before the Aztecs. “Muni-bart metromaps”: maps of

the public-transit systems of the Bay Area in California.

The Anglo, feeling inadequate and inferior and powerless, displaces or transfers these feelings to the Chicano by shaming him. In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation. Around Latinos he suffers from a sense of language inadequacy and its accompanying discomfort; with Native Americans he suffers from a racial amnesia which ignores our common blood, and from guilt because the Spanish part of him took their land and oppressed them. He has an excessive compensatory hubris when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame.

The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them. Coexisting with his sexist behavior is a love for the mother which takes precedence over that of all others. Devoted son, macho pig. To wash down the shame of his acts, of his very being, and to handle the brute in the mirror, he takes to the bottle, the snort, the needle, and the fist.

Though we “understand” the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it. From the men of our race, we demand the admission/acknowledgment/disclosure/testimony that they wound us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power. We need them to say they will begin to eliminate their hurtful put-down ways. But more than the words, we demand acts. We say to them: We will develop equal power with you and those who have shamed us.

It is imperative that *mestizas* support each other in changing the sexist elements in the Mexican-Indian culture. As long as woman is put down, the Indian and the Black in all of us is put down. The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one. As long as *los hombres* think they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*, as long as to be a *vieja* is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing of our psyches. We're halfway there—we have such love of the Mother, the good mother. The first step is to unlearn the *puta/virgen* dichotomy and to see *Coatloapeuh-Coatlicue* in the Mother, *Guadalupe*.³

Tenderness, a sign of vulnerability, is so feared that it is showered on women with verbal abuse and blows. Men, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles. Women at least have had the guts to break out of bondage. Only gay men have had the courage to expose themselves to the woman inside them and to challenge the current masculinity. I've encountered a few scattered and isolated gentle straight men, the beginnings of a new breed, but they are confused, and entangled with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate. We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement.

Lumping the males who deviate from the general norm with man, the oppressor, is a gross injustice. *Asombra pensar que nos hemos quedado en ese pozo oscuro donde el mundo encierra a las lesbianas. Asombra pensar que hemos,*

3. The Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico. In matriarchal Olmec culture Coatl was a figuration of the sacred womb from which all

things were born and to which they returned. Coatlicue is the Meso-American serpent that is half male, half female.

como feministas y lesbianas, cerrado nuestros corazones a los hombres, a nuestros hermanos los jotos, desheredados y marginales como nosotros. Being the supreme crossers of cultures, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian, Native American, Latino, and with the queer in Italy, Australia and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. Our role is to link people with each other—the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with whites with extraterrestrials. It is to transfer ideas and information from one culture to another. Colored homosexuals have more knowledge of other cultures; have always been at the forefront (although sometimes in the closet) of all liberation struggles in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds. Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer. People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying.

The *mestizo* and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls.

Somos una gente

*Hay tantísimas fronteras
que dividen a la gente,
pero por cada frontera
existe también un puente.*

—Gina Valdés⁴

Divided Loyalties. Many women and men of color do not want to have any dealings with white people. It takes too much time and energy to explain to the downwardly mobile, white middle-class women that it's okay for us to want to own "possessions," never having had any nice furniture on our dirt floors or "luxuries" like washing machines. Many feel that whites should help their own people rid themselves of race hatred and fear first. I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator. I think we need to allow whites to be our allies. Through our literature, art, *corridos*, and folktales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain *Navajos* or the Chicano farmworkers or *los Nicaragüenses*⁵ they won't turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances. They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead.

Individually, but also as a racial entity, we need to voice our needs. We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience

4. Gina Valdés, *Puentes y Fronteras: Coplas Chicanas* (Los Angeles, CA: Castle Lithograph, 1982), 2 [Anzaldúa's note].

5. Nicaraguans; here a reference to the Sandinista government, which was opposed covertly by the United States in the 1980s. "Big Mountain

Navajos": Dineh people of Big Mountain, Arizona, forcibly removed in a land dispute with energy companies in 1997. "Farmworkers": members of the United Farm Workers, a union founded in 1962.

because it makes you feel guilty—you'd rather forget your brutish acts. To say you've split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the "negative" parts onto us. (Where there is persecution of minorities, there is shadow projection. Where there is violence and war, there is repression of shadow.) To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelgänger⁶ in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intracultural split will heal. And finally, tell us what you need from us.

By Your True Faces We Will Know You

I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't.

The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered—we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves. The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history. Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people.

Before the Chicano and the undocumented worker and the Mexican from the other side can come together, before the Chicano can have unity with Native Americans and other groups, we need to know the history of their struggle and they need to know ours. Our mothers, our sisters and brothers, the guys who hang out on street corners, the children in the playgrounds, each of us must know our Indian lineage, our *afro-mestizaje*, our history of resistance.

To the immigrant *mexicano* and the recent arrivals we must teach our history. The 80 million *mexicanos* and the Latinos from Central and South America must know of our struggles. Each one of us must know basic facts about Nicaragua, Chile and the rest of Latin America. The Latinoist movement (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and other Spanish-speaking people working together to combat racial discrimination in the marketplace) is good but it is not enough. Other than a common culture we will have nothing to hold us together. We need to meet on a broader communal ground.

The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn

6. Literally, "double-goer" (German); an alter ego or the ghost of a living person.

come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

El día de la Chicana

I will not be shamed again
Nor will I shame myself.

I am possessed by a vision: that we Chicanas and Chicanos have taken back or uncovered our true faces, our dignity and self-respect. It's a validation vision.

Seeing the Chicana anew in light of her history, I seek an exoneration, a seeing through the fictions of white supremacy, a seeing of ourselves in our true guises and not as the false racial personality that has been given to us and that we have given to ourselves. I seek our woman's face, our true features, the positive and the negative seen clearly, free of the tainted biases of male dominance. I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question.

Estamos viviendo en la noche de la Raza, un tiempo cuando el trabajo se hace a lo quieto, en lo oscuro. El día cuando aceptamos tal y como somos y para donde vamos y porque—ese día será el día de la Raza. Yo tengo el compromiso de expresar mi visión, mi sensibilidad, mi percepción de la revalidación de la gente mexicana, su mérito, estimación, honra, aprecio, y validez.

On December 2nd when my sun goes into my first house, I celebrate *el día de la Chicana y el Chicano*: On that day I clean my altars, light my *Coatlalopeuh* candle, burn sage and copal,⁷ take *el baño para espantar basura*; sweep my house. On that day I bare my soul, make myself vulnerable to friends and family by expressing my feelings. On that day I affirm who we are.

On that day I look inside our conflicts and our basic introverted racial temperament. I identify our needs, voice them. I acknowledge that the self and the race have been wounded. I recognize the need to take care of our personhood, of our racial self. On that day I gather the splintered and disowned parts of *la gente mexicana* and hold them in my arms. *Todas las partes de nosotros valen.*

On that day I say, “Yes, all you people wound us when you reject us. Rejection strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame. It is our innate identity you find wanting. We are ashamed that we need your good opinion, that we need your acceptance. We can no longer camouflage our needs, can no longer let defenses and fences sprout around us. We can no longer withdraw. To rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves. We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic. Let's try it our way, the *mestiza* way, the Chicana way, the woman way.”

7. Amber fossilized resin from tropical trees.

On that day, I search for our essential dignity as a people, a people with a sense of purpose—to belong and contribute to something greater than our *pueblo*. On that day I seek to recover and reshape my spiritual identity. *¡Ánimate! Raza, a celebrar el día de la Chicana.*

El retorno

All movements are accomplished in six stages,
and the seventh brings return.

—I Ching⁸

*Tanto tiempo sin verte casa mía,
mi cuna, mi bondo nido de la huerta.*

—“Soledad”⁹

I stand at the river, watch the curving, twisting serpent, a serpent nailed to the fence where the mouth of the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf.

I have come back. *Tanto dolor me costó el alejamiento.* I shade my eyes and look up. The bone beak of a hawk slowly circling over me, checking me out as potential carrion. In its wake a little bird flickering its wings, swimming sporadically like a fish. In the distance the expressway and the slough of traffic like an irritated sow. The sudden pull in my gut, *la tierra, los aguaceros.* My land, *el viento soplando la arena, el lagartijo debajo de un nopalito.* *Me acuerdo como era antes. Una región desértica de vasta llanuras, costeras de baja altura, de escasa lluvia, de chaparrales formados por mesquites y buizaches.* If I look real hard I can almost see the Spanish fathers who were called “the cavalry of Christ” enter this valley riding their *burros*, see the clash of cultures commence.

Tierra natal. This is home, the small towns in the Valley, *los pueblitos* with chicken pens and goats picketed to mesquite shrubs. *En las colonias* on the other side of the tracks, junk cars line the front yards of hot pink and lavender-trimmed houses—Chicano architecture we call it, self-consciously. I have missed the TV shows where hosts speak in half and half, and where awards are given in the category of Tex-Mex music. I have missed the Mexican cemeteries blooming with artificial flowers, the fields of aloe vera and red pepper, rows of sugar cane, of corn hanging on the stalks, the cloud of *polvareda* in the dirt roads behind a speeding pickup truck, *el sabor de tamales de rez y venado* I have missed *la yegua colorada* gnawing the wooden gate of her stall, the smell of horse flesh from Carito’s corrals. *Hecho menos las noches calientes sin aire, noches de linternas y lechuzas* making holes in the night.

I still feel the old despair when I look at the unpainted, dilapidated, scrap lumber houses consisting mostly of corrugated aluminum. Some of the poorest people in the U.S. live in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and arid and semiarid land of irrigated farming, intense sunlight and heat, citrus groves next to chaparral and cactus. I walk through the elementary school

8. “Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. Cary F. Baynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 98” [Anzaldúa’s note]. A central text of Confucianism dating from

the first millennium B.C.E.

9. *Soledad* is sung by the group Haciendo Punto en Otro Son [Anzaldúa’s note].

I attended so long ago, that remained segregated until recently. I remember how the white teachers used to punish us for being Mexican.

How I love this tragic valley of South Texas, as Ricardo Sánchez calls it; this borderland between the Nueces and the Rio Grande.¹ This land has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy,² and the U.S. again. It has survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage.

Today I see the Valley still struggling to survive. Whether it does or not, it will never be as I remember it. The borderlands depression that was set off by the 1982 peso devaluation in Mexico resulted in the closure of hundreds of Valley businesses. Many people lost their homes, cars, land. Prior to 1982, U.S. store owners thrived on retail sales to Mexicans who came across the border for groceries and clothes and appliances. While goods on the U.S. side have become 10, 100, 1000 times more expensive for Mexican buyers, goods on the Mexican side have become 10, 100, 1000 times cheaper for Americans. Because the Valley is heavily dependent on agriculture and Mexican retail trade, it has the highest unemployment rates along the entire border region; it is the Valley that has been hardest hit.³

“It’s been a bad year for corn,” my brother, Nune, says. As he talks, I remember my father scanning the sky for a rain that would end the drought, looking up into the sky, day after day, while the corn withered on its stalk. My father has been dead for 29 years, having worked himself to death. The life span of a Mexican farm laborer is 56—he lived to be 38. It shocks me that I am older than he. I, too, search the sky for rain. Like the ancients, I worship the rain god and the maize goddess, but unlike my father I have recovered their names. Now for rain (irrigation) one offers not a sacrifice of blood, but of money.

“Farming is in a bad way,” my brother says. “Two to three thousand small and big farmers went bankrupt in this country last year. Six years ago the price of corn was \$8.00 per hundred pounds,” he goes on. “This year it is \$3.90 per hundred pounds.” And, I think to myself, after taking inflation into account, not planting anything puts you ahead.

I walk out to the back yard, stare at *los rosales de mamá*. She wants me to help her prune the rose bushes, dig out the carpet grass that is choking them. *Mamagrande Ramona también tenía rosales*. Here every Mexican grows flowers. If they don’t have a piece of dirt, they use car tires, jars, cans, shoe boxes. Roses are the Mexican’s favorite flower. I think, how symbolic—thorns and all.

Yes, the Chicano and Chicana have always taken care of growing things and the land. Again I see the four of us kids getting off the school bus, changing into our work clothes, walking into the field with Papi and Mami, all six

1. Rivers in southern Texas. Sánchez (1941–1995), Chicano poet, educator, and activist.

2. I.e., the Confederate States of America, made up of eleven southern states (including Texas) that seceded from the Union at the start of the U.S. Civil War (1861–65). After it won independence from Mexico (1836) and before it was admitted as a state to the United States (1845), Texas was a republic.

3. Out of the twenty-two border counties in the

four border states, Hidalgo County (named for Father Hidalgo who was shot in 1810 after instigating Mexico’s revolt against Spanish rule under the banner of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*) is the most poverty-stricken county in the nation as well as the largest home base (along with Imperial in California) for migrant farmworkers. It was here I was born and raised. I am amazed that both it and I have survived [Anzaldúa’s note].

of us bending to the ground. Below our feet, under the earth lie the watermelon seeds. We cover them with paper plates, putting *terremotes* on top of the plates to keep them from being blown away by the wind. The paper plates keep the freeze away. Next day or the next, we remove the plates, bare the tiny green shoots to the elements. They survive and grow, give fruit hundreds of times the size of the seed. We water them and hoe them. We harvest them. The vines dry, rot, are plowed under. Growth, death, decay, birth. The soil prepared again and again, impregnated, worked on. A constant changing of forms, *renacimientos de la tierra madre*.

This land was Mexican once
was Indian always
and is.
And will be again.

1987

How to Tame a Wild Tongue

“We’re going to have to control your tongue,” the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. “I can’t cap that tooth yet, you’re still draining,” he says.

“We’re going to have to do something about your tongue,” I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. “I’ve never seen anything as strong or as stubborn,” he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?

“Who is to say that robbing a people of
its language is less violent than war?”
—Ray Gwyn Smith¹

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. “If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong.”

“I want you to speak English. *Pa’hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un ‘accent,’*” my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents.

1. Ray Gwyn Smith [(b. 1944), Welsh painter and art educator active in the United States], *Moorland Is Cold Country*, unpublished book [Anzaldúa’s note].

Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua*. Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

Overcoming the Tradition of Silence

*Ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro.
Peleando con nuestra propia sombra
el silencio nos sepulta.*

En boca cerrada no entran moscas. “Flies don't enter a closed mouth” is a saying I kept hearing when I was a child. *Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, *hablar pa' atrás*, *repelar*. *Hocicona*, *repelona*, *chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women—I've never heard them applied to men.

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word “*nosotras*,” I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

And our tongues have become
dry the wilderness has
dried out our tongues and
we have forgotten speech.

—Irena Klepfisz²

Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia*.

Oyé como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera

Quien tiene boca se equivoca.

—Mexican saying

“*Pocho*,³ cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language,” I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución*, *enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje*. *Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.

2. Irena Klepfisz [(b. 1941), North American critic], “*Di rayce aheym / The Journey Home*,” in *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz, eds. (Montpelier, VT: Sinister Wisdom Books, 1986), 49 [Anzaldúa's note].

3. An anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English. Anzaldúa offers a definition later in this selection.

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*)

My “home” tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6 and 7 being closest to my heart. From school, the media and job situations, I’ve picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Locha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I’ve picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From *los recién llegados*, Mexican immigrants, and *braceros*, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I’ll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley,⁴ I picked up Chicano Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom; younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts and older relatives.

With Chicanas from *Nuevo México* or *Arizona* I will speak Chicano Spanish a little, but often they don’t understand what I’m saying. With most California Chicanas I speak entirely in English (unless I forget). When I first moved to San Francisco, I’d rattle off something in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana *tejana* that I can talk freely.

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or *pochismos*. The *pocho* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English.⁵ Tex-

4. I.e., of the Rio Grande in southern Texas, bordering Mexico.

5. R. C. Ortega, *Dialectología Del Barrio*, trans.

Hortencia S. Alwan (Los Angeles, CA: R. C. Ortega Publisher & Bookseller, 1977), 132 [Anzaldúa’s note].

Mex, or Spanglish, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother Nune and with Chicano *tejano* contemporaries I speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up *Pachuco*. *Pachuco* (the language of the zoot suiters) is a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. *Ruca* means girl or woman, *vato* means guy or dude, *chale* means no, *simón* means yes, *churo* is sure, talk is *periquiar*, *piginear* means petting, *que gacho* means how nerdy, *ponte águila* means watch out, death is called *la pelona*. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the *Pachuco* tongue.

Chicano Spanish

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as *maíz* / *maiz*, *cohete* / *cuete*. We leave out certain consonants when they appear between vowels: *lado/lao*, *mojado/mojao*. Chicanos from South Texas pronounced *f* as *j* as in *jue* (*fue*). Chicanos use “archaisms,” words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say *semos*, *truje*, *haiga*, *ansina*, and *náiden*. We retain the “archaic” *j*, as in *jalar*, that derives from an earlier *h*, (the French *halar* or the Germanic *halon* which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. (Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majority of the Spanish colonizers in Mexico and the Southwest came from Extremadura—Hernán Cortés was one of them—and Andalucía.⁶ Andalusians pronounce *ll* like a *y*, and their *d*'s tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: *tirado* becomes *tirao*. They brought *el lenguaje popular, dialectos y regionalismos*.)⁷

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift *ll* to *y* and *z* to *s*.⁸ We leave out initial syllables, saying *tar* for *estar*, *toy* for *estoy*; *hora* for *ahora* (*cubanos* and *puertorriqueños* also leave out initial letters of some words.) We also leave out the final syllable such as *pa* for *para*. The intervocalic *y*, the *ll* as in *tortilla*, *ella*, *botella*, gets replaced by *tortia* or *tortiya*, *ea*, *botea*. We add an additional syllable at the beginning of certain words: *atocar* for *tocar*, *agastar* for *gastar*. Sometimes we'll say *lavaste las vacijas*, other times *lavates* (substituting the *ates* verb endings for the *aste*).

We use anglicisms, words borrowed from English: *bola* from ball, *carpeta* from carpet, *máquina de lavar* (instead of *lavadora*) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end

6. Region in southern Spain. Extremadura is a city in central Spain. Cortés (1485–1547), Spanish soldier and explorer who conquered the Aztecs and claimed Mexico for Spain.

7. Eduardo Hernández-Chávez, Andrew D. Cohen, and Anthony F. Beltramo, *El Lenguaje de*

los Chicanos: Regional and Social Characteristics of Language Used by Mexican Americans (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975), 39 [Anzaldúa's note].

8. Hernández-Chávez, xvii [Anzaldúa's note].

of an English word such as *cooki* for cook, *watchar* for watch, *parkiar* for park, and *rapiar* for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English.

We don't use the word *vosotros/as* or its accompanying verb form. We don't say *claro* (to mean yes), *imagínate*, or *me emociona*, unless we picked up Spanish from Latinas, out of a book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

Linguistic Terrorism

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out. Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. *Pena*. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a first language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with *mexicanas y latinas* we'll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're *agringadas* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the "real" Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes because French is considered more "cultured." But for a language to remain alive it must be used.⁹

9. Irena Klepfisz, "Secular Jewish Identity: Yidishkayt in America," in *The Tribe of Dina*, Kaye/Kantrowitz, eds., 43 [Anzaldúa's note].

By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

My fingers
move sly against your palm
Like women everywhere, we speak in code. . . .

—Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz¹

"Vistas," corridos, y comida: My Native Tongue

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was *City of Night* by John Rechy² a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I read *I Am Joaquín*³ I was surprised to see a bilingual book by a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in—the Thursday night special of \$1.00 a carload—that gave me a sense of belonging. "*Vámonos a las vistas*," my mother would call out and we'd all—grandmother, brothers, sister and cousins—squeeze into the car. We'd wolf down cheese and bologna white bread sandwiches while watching Pedro Infante in melodramatic tear-jerkers like *Nosotros los pobres*,⁴

1. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Sign," in *We Speak in Code: Poems and Other Writings* (Pittsburgh, PA: Motherroot Publications, Inc., 1980), 85 [Anzaldúa's note].

2. American novelist (b. 1931). The book was published in 1963.

3. Rodolfo Gonzales [(1928–2005), Chicano novelist], *I Am Joaquín Yo Soy Joaquín* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1972). It was first published in 1967 [Anzaldúa's note].

4. A 1947 film. Infante (1917–1957), Mexican film actor and singer.

the first “real” Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing *Cuando los hijos se van*⁵ and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing-type “westerns” of Jorge Negrete and Miguel Aceves Mejía.⁶ When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn’t go to Mexican movies, or *bailes* or tune their radios to *bolero*, *rancherita*, and *corrido* music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was *norteño* music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or *cantina* (bar) music. I grew up listening to *conjuntos*, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, *bajo sexto*,⁷ drums and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez⁸ was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when *corridos*—songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands—reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local *cantinas* and wafted in through my bedroom window.

Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas / Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The *corridos* are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa’s song, “*La cucaracha*,” is the most famous one. *Corridos* of John F. Kennedy⁹ and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza,¹ one of the great border *corrido* singers who was called *la Gloria de Tejas*. Her “*El tango negre*,” sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The everpresent *corridos* narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as entertaining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural mythmakers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn’t stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied

5. A 1941 film.

6. Mexican singer and film actor (1916–2006). Negrete (1911–1953), Mexican singing actor.

7. Twelve-string guitar tuned one octave lower than normal.

8. Mexican American musicians. Esteban Jordán (1939–2010). José María De Leon Hernández (b.

1940), Leonardo “Flaco” Jiménez (b. 1939).

9. Thirty-fifth U.S. president (1917–1963), assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Villa (ca. 1877–1923), born Doroteo Arango, Mexican revolutionary leader.

1. Mexican American singer, songwriter, and musician (1916–2007).

to my identity, to my homeland. Woodsmoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodsmoke perfuming my grandmother's clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the reek of cordite. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy *menudo*² *chile colorado* making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbecuing *fajitas* in the backyard. Even now and 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork and venison with *chile*. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* I would be eating if I were home.

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?"

"Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside."

—Kaufman³

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don't say *nosotros los americanos*, o *nosotros los españoles*, o *nosotros los hispanos*. We say *nosotros los mexicanos* (by *mexicanos* we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent,⁴ but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres.

(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.)

—Mexican saying

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?" te dirá, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer "*soy mexicana*" and at others will say "*soy Chicana*" o "*soy tejana*." But I identified as "*Raza*" before I ever identified as "*mexicana*" or "*Chicana*."

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70 to 80 percent Indian.⁵ We call ourselves Hispanic⁶ or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere

2. Mexican soup made of simmered tripe, onion, garlic, chili, and hominy.

3. Gershen Kaufman [(b. 1943), American psychologist], *Shame: The Power of Caring* (Cambridge: Schenkman Books, Inc. 1980), 68. This book was instrumental in my understanding of shame [from Anzaldúa's note].

4. Respectively, male and female cultural figurations.

5. John R. Chávez [(b. 1949), American scholar

and educator], *The Lost Land: The Chicano Images of the Southwest* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 88–90 [from Anzaldúa's note].

6. "Hispanic" is derived from *Hispanis* (*España*, a name given to the Iberian Peninsula in ancient times when it was a part of the Roman Empire) and is a term designated by the U.S. government to make it easier to handle us on paper [Anzaldúa's note].

and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American⁷ to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun “American” than the adjective “Mexican” (and when copping out).

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don’t totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez⁸ and the farmworkers united and *I Am Joaquín* was published and *la Raza Unida* party⁹ was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul—we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, *tenemos que hacerla lucha. ¿Quién está protegiendo los ranchos de mi gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la fisura entre la india y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, sí, el Chicano que anda como un ladrón en su propia casa.*¹

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we’ve kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano* culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they’ve created, lie bleached. *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild, *nosotros los mexicanos* Chicanos will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain.

1987

7. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the Mexican-American in 1848 [Anzaldúa’s note].

8. Chicano union organizer (1927–1993).

9. Known in America as the United Farm Workers; founded in 1962.

1. Anglos, in order to alleviate their guilt for dispossessing the Chicano, stressed the Spanish

part of us and perpetrated the myth of the Spanish Southwest. We have accepted the fiction that we are Hispanic, that is Spanish, in order to accommodate ourselves to the dominant culture and its abhorrence of Indians. Chávez, 88–91 [Anzaldúa’s note].

El sonavabitché

(for Aishe Berger)

Car flowing down a lava of highway
 just happened to glance out the window
 in time to see brown faces bent backs
 like prehistoric boulders in a field
 so common a sight no one
 notices 5
 blood rushes to my face
 twelve years I'd sat on the memory
 the anger scorching me
 my throat so tight I can
 barely get the words out. 10

I got to the farm
 in time to hear the shots
 ricochet off barn,
 spit into the sand, 15
 in time to see tall men in uniforms
 thumping fists on doors
 metallic voices yelling Halt!
 their hawk eyes constantly shifting.

When I hear the words, "*Corran muchachos*"¹ 20
 I run back to the car, ducking,
 see the glistening faces, arms outflung,
 of the *mexicanos* running headlong
 through the fields
 kicking up clouds of dirt 25

see them reach the tree line
 foliage opening, swishing closed behind them.
 I hear the tussling of bodies, grunts, panting
 squeak of leather squawk of walkie-talkies
 sun reflecting off gunbarrels 30
 the world a blinding light
 a great buzzing in my ears
 my knees like aspens in the wind.
 I see that wide cavernous look of the hunted
 the look of hares 35
 thick limp blue-black hair
 The bare heads humbly bent
 of those who do not speak
 the ember in their eyes extinguished.

I lean on the shanty wall of that migrant camp 40
 north of Muncie, Indiana.
 Wets, a voice says.

1. Run boys [Anzaldúa's note].

I turn to see a Chicano pushing
the head of his *muchachita*²
back into the *naguas*³ of the mother 45
a tin plate face down on the floor
tortillas scattered around them.
His other hand signals me over.
He too is from *el valle de Tejas*⁴
I had been his kid's teacher. 50
I'd come to get the grower
to fill up the sewage ditch near the huts
saying it wouldn't do for the children
to play in it.
Smoke from a cooking fire and 55
shirtless *niños* gather around us.

*Mojados*⁵ he says again,
leaning on his chipped Chevy station wagon
Been here two weeks
about a dozen of them. 60
The *sonavabitch* works them
from sunup to dark—15 hours sometimes.
*Como mulas los trabaja*⁶
*no saben como hacer la perra.*⁷
Last Sunday they asked for a day off 65
wanted to pray and rest,
write letters to their *familias*.
*¿Y sabes lo que hizo el sonavabitch?*⁸
He turns away and spits.
Says he has to hold back half their wages 70
that they'd eaten the other half:
sack of beans, sack of rice, sack of flour.
*Frijoleros sí lo son*⁹ but no way
could they have eaten that many *frijoles*.
I nod. 75

*Como le dije, son doce*¹—started out 13
five days packed in the back of a pickup
boarded up tight
fast cross-country run no stops
except to change drivers, to gas up 80
no food they pissed into their shoes—
those that had *guaraches*²
slept slumped against each other
*sabe Dios*³ where they shit.
One smothered to death on the way here 85

2. Little girl [Anzaldúa's note].

3. Skirt [Anzaldúa's note].

4. Rio Grande Valley in Texas [Anzaldúa's note].

5. Wetbacks, undocumented workers, illegal immigrants from Mexico and parts south [Anzaldúa's note].

6. He works them like mules [Anzaldúa's note].

7. They don't know how to make the work easier

for themselves [Anzaldúa's note].

8. And you know what the son of a bitch did? [Anzaldúa's note].

9. Bean eaters they are [Anzaldúa's note].

1. Like I told you, they're 12 [Anzaldúa's note].

2. Sandals [Anzaldúa's note].

3. God knows [Anzaldúa's note].

Miss, you should've seen them when they
 stumbled out.
 First thing the *sonavabitch* did was clamp
 a handkerchief over his nose
 then ordered them stripped 90
 hosed them down himself
 in front of everybody.
 They hobbled about
 learning to walk all over again.
*Flacos con caras de viejos*⁴
*aunque la mita' eran jóvenes.*⁵ 95

*Como le estaba diciendo*⁶
 today was payday.
 You saw them, *la migra*⁷ came busting in
 waving their *pinche pistolas*.⁸ 100
 Said someone made a call,
 what you call it? Anonymous.
 Guess who? That *sonavabitch*, who else?
 Done this three times since we've been coming here
Sepa Dios how many times in between. 105
Wets, free labor, *esclavos*.⁹
Pobres hijos de la Chingada.¹
 This the last time we work for him
 no matter how *fregados*² we are
 he said, shaking his head, 110
 spitting at the ground.
Vámonos, mujer, empaca el mugrero.³

He hands me a cup of coffee,
 half of it sugar, half of it milk
 my throat so dry I even down the dregs. 115
 It has to be done.
 Stealing myself
 I take that walk to the big house.

Finally the big man lets me in.
 How about a drink? I shake my head. 120
 He looks me over, opens his eyes wide
 and smiles, says how sorry he is immigration⁴
 is getting so tough
 a poor Mexican can't make a living
 and they sure do need the work. 125
 My throat so thick the words stick.

4. Skinny with old faces [Anzaldúa's note].

5. Though half were youths [Anzaldúa's note].

6. As I was telling you [Anzaldúa's note].

7. Slang for immigration officials [Anzaldúa's note].

8. Guns [Anzaldúa's note].

9. Slaves [Anzaldúa's note].

1. "Poor sons of the fucked one" [Anzaldúa's note]. *La Chingada* is the preferred Chicana term for *La Malinche* or *Malintzin*, the deposed

Aztec princess who served Hernan Cortés as translator and became his lover during the Spanish Conquest of Mexico (1519–22).

2. Poor, beaten, downtrodden, in need [Anzaldúa's note].

3. Let's go, woman, pack our junk [Anzaldúa's note].

4. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

He studies me, then says,
 Well, what can I do you for?
 I want two weeks wages
 including two Saturdays and Sundays, 130
 minimum wage, 15 hours a day.
 I'm more startled than he.
 Whoa there, sinorita,
 wets work for whatever you give them
 the season hasn't been good. 135
 Besides most are halfway to Mexico by now.
 Two weeks wages, I say,
 the words swelling in my throat.

Miss uh what did you say your name was?
 I fumble for my card. 140
 You can't do this,
 I haven't broken no law,
 his lidded eyes darken, I step back.
 I'm leaving in two minutes and I want cash
 the whole amount right here in my purse 145
 when I walk out.
 No hoarseness, no trembling.
 It startled both of us.

You want me telling every single one
 of your neighbors what you've been doing 150
 all these years? The mayor, too?
 Maybe make a call to Washington?
 Slitted eyes studied the card again.
 They had no cards, no papers.
 I'd seen it over and over. 155
 Work them, then turn them in before paying them.

Well, now, he was saying,
 I know we can work something out,
 a sweet young thang like yourself.
 Cash, I said. I didn't know anyone in D.C. 160
 now I didn't have to.
 You want to keep it for yourself?
 That it? His eyes were pin pricks.
 Sweat money, Mister, blood money,
 not my sweat, but same blood. 165
 Yeah, but who's to say you won't abscond with it?
 If I ever hear that you got illegals on your land
 even a single one, I'm going to come here
 in broad daylight and have you
 hung by your balls. 170
 He walks slowly to his desk.
 Knees shaking, I count every bill
 taking my time.

SHARON OLDS

b. 1942

Like Whitman, Sharon Olds celebrates the body and writes about it without shame. And like Whitman, her candor arouses a mixed response among contemporary readers. Some find Olds's poems, with their close observations about sexuality, family life, and family pathology, disturbingly graphic, while many others find them moving and brave. Nonetheless, her second book, *The Dead and the Living* (1984), won the National Book Award and has gone on to become one of the best-selling volumes in contemporary poetry. The fact that Olds is a woman who writes about desire and sexual pleasure, or who describes her father's genitals ("My Father Speaks to Me from the Dead"), may intensify reader response. We are far more accustomed to male writers exploring the sexual and bodily terrain. In her poems Olds lays out the domestic territory of erotic life, which extends to motherhood, daughterhood, and the body's life of sensation. She is unabashed about the ways in which pleasure can be entangled with pain, especially in her numerous poems about parents and parental cruelty. In "I Go Back to May 1937" the speaker warns younger versions of her parents, about to get married, "you are going to do things / you cannot imagine you would ever do, / you are going to do bad things to children."

Olds's examination of intimate subjects has a distinctive quality of fascination and even tenderness. As she writes in "Little Things": "I am doing something I learned early to do, I am / paying attention to the small beauties, / whatever I have—as if it were our duty / to find things to love, to bind ourselves to this world." These lines articulate a central strategy in Olds's work: paying attention to what otherwise might be overlooked, finding beauty in surprising places. They also provide an example of how carefully her poems are shaped. Working from the base of an iambic pentameter line, Olds fashions a freer, more conversational style and binds the lines together with a series of subtle rhymes, or half rhymes, several of them internal to the line ("do/beauties/duty"; "find/bind"). Olds has a particular gift for metaphor that transfigures the ordinary without forsaking its ordinariness. Metaphor renders the "small beauties" she discovers even in embarrassing or painful experience: applying spermicide to a slippery diaphragm ("I'd decorate it / like a cake" in "Adolescence") or imagining the parents as paper dolls from which she "strikes sparks" ("I go Back to May 1937"), or seeing the navel as "thistle / seed fossil" ("My Father Speaks to Me from the Dead"). Because so many of Olds's poems focus on intimate experience, it is perhaps too easy to assume that the work is simply autobiographical or confessional (a description Olds herself rejects; she calls the work "apparently very personal"). The candor in these poems is an imaginative creation; it is not make-believe but, in the critic Elaine Scarry's phrase, "made-real."

Sharon Olds grew up in Berkeley, California, and attended Stanford University, then earned her Ph.D. at Columbia. She published her first book of poems, *Satan Says* (1980), when she was thirty-seven years old. Since then she has published numerous additional volumes besides *The Dead and the Living*, among them *The Gold Cell* (1987), *The Father* (1992), *Blood, Tin, Straw* (1999), and *Strike Sparks: Selected Poems 1980–2002* (2002). In 1984 she started a poetry workshop at Goldwater Hospital for the severely disabled on Roosevelt Island, and since 1992 has taught in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at NYU.

Sex Without Love

How do they do it, the ones who make love
 without love? Formal as dancers,
 gliding over each other like ice-skaters
 over the ice, fingers hooked
 inside each other's bodies, faces 5
 red as steak, wine, wet as the
 children at birth whose mothers are going to
 give them away. How do they come to the
 come to the come to the God come to the
 still waters, and not love 10
 the one who came there with them, heat
 rising slowly as steam off their joined
 skin? I guess they are the true religious,
 the purists, the pros, the ones who will not
 accept a false Messiah, love the 15
 priest instead of the God. They do not
 mistake the partner for their own pleasure,
 they are like great runners: they know they are alone
 with the road surface, the cold, the wind,
 the fit of their shoes, their overall cardio-
 vascular health—just factors, like the other 20
 in the bed, and not their truth, which is
 the single body alone in the universe
 against its own best time.

1984

I Go Back to May 1937

I see them standing at the formal gates of their colleges,
 I see my father strolling out
 under the ochre sandstone arch, the
 red tiles glinting like bent
 plates of blood behind his head, I 5
 see my mother with a few light books at her hip
 standing at the pillar made of tiny bricks,
 the wrought-iron gate still open behind her, its
 sword-tips aglow in the May air,
 they are about to graduate, they are about to get married, 10
 they are kids, they are dumb, all they know is they are
 innocent, they would never hurt anybody.
 I want to go up to them and say Stop,
 don't do it—she's the wrong woman,
 he's the wrong man, you are going to do things 15
 you cannot imagine you would ever do,
 you are going to do bad things to children,
 you are going to suffer in ways you have not heard of,
 you are going to want to die. I want to go

up to them there in the late May sunlight and say it, 20
 her hungry pretty face turning to me,
 her pitiful beautiful untouched body,
 his arrogant handsome face turning to me,
 his pitiful beautiful untouched body,
 but I don't do it I want to live. I 25
 take them up like the male and female
 paper dolls and bang them together
 at the hips, like chips of flint, as if to
 strike sparks from them, I say
 Do what you are going to do, and I will tell about it. 30

1987

Little Things

After she's gone to camp, in the early
 evening I clear our girl's breakfast dishes
 from the rosewood table, and find a dinky
 crystallized pool of maple syrup, the
 grains standing there, round, in the night, I 5
 rub it with my fingertip
 as if I could read it, this raised dot of
 amber sugar, and this time,
 when I think of my father, I wonder why
 I think of my father, of the Vulcan¹ blood-red 10
 glass in his hand, or his black hair gleaming like a
 broken-open coal. I think I learned
 to love the little things about him
 because of all the big things
 I could not love, no one could, it would be wrong to. 15
 So when I fix on this image of resin,
 or sweep together with the heel of my hand a
 pile of my son's sunburn peels like
 insect wings, where I peeled his back the night before camp,
 I am doing something I learned early to do, I am 20
 paying attention to small beauties,
 whatever I have—as if it were our duty
 to find things to love, to bind ourselves to this world.

1987

My Father Speaks to Me from the Dead

I seem to have woken up in a pot-shed,
 on clay, on shards, the glitter paths
 of slugs kiss-crossing my body. I don't know
 where to start, with this grime on me.

1. The ancient Roman mythological god of fire and metal working.

I take the spider glue-net, plug 5
 of the dead, out of my mouth, let's see
 if where I have been I can do this.
 I love your feet. I love your knees,
 I love your our my legs, they are so
 long because they are yours and mine 10
 both. I love your—what can I call it,
 between your legs, we never named it, the
 glint and purity of its curls. I love
 your rear end, I changed you once,
 washed the detritus off your tiny 15
 bottom, with my finger rubbed
 the oil on you; when I touched your little
 anus I crossed wires with God for a moment.
 I never hated your shit—that was
 your mother. I love your navel, thistle 20
 seed fossil, even though
 it's her print on you. Of course I love
 your breasts—did you see me looking up
 from within your daughter's face, as she nursed?
 I love your bony shoulders and you know I 25
 love your hair, thick and live
 as earth. And I never hated your face,
 I hated its eruptions. You know what I love?
 I love your brain, its halves and silvery
 folds, like a woman's labia. 30
 I love in you
 even what comes
 from deep in your mother—your heart, that hard worker,
 and your womb, it is a heaven to me,
 I lie on its gentle hills and gaze up 35
 at its rosy vault.
 I have been in a body without breath,
 I have been in the morgue, in fire, in the slagged
 chimney, in the air over the earth,
 and buried in the earth, and pulled down 40
 into the ocean—where I have been
 I understand this life, I am matter,
 your father, I made you, when I say now that I love you
 I mean look down at your hand, move it,
 that action is matter's love, for human 45
 love go elsewhere.

1992

Adolescence

When I think of my adolescence, I think
 of the bathroom of that seedy hotel
 in San Francisco, where my boyfriend would take me.
 I had never seen a bathroom like that—

no curtains, no towels, no mirror, just 5
 a sink green with grime and a toilet
 yellow and rust-colored—like something in a science experiment,
 growing the plague in bowls.
 Sex was still a crime, then,
 I'd sign out of my college dorm 10
 to a false destination, sign into
 the flophouse under a false name,
 go down the hall to the one bathroom
 and lock myself in. And I could not learn to get that
 diaphragm in, I'd decorate it 15
 like a cake, with glistening spermicide,
 and lean over, and it would leap from my fingers
 and sail, into a corner, to land
 in a concave depression like a rat's nest,
 I'd bend and pluck it out and wash it 20
 and wash it down to that fragile dome,
 I'd frost it again till it was shimmering
 and bend it into its tensile arc and it would
 fly through the air, rim humming
 like Saturn's ring,¹ I would bow down and crawl to retrieve it. 25
 When I think of being eighteen,
 that's what I see, that brimmed disc
 floating through the air and descending, I see myself
 kneeling and reaching, reaching for my own life.

1996

The Talkers

All week, we talked. We talked
 in the morning on the porch, when I combed my hair
 and flung the comb-hair out into the air,
 it floated down the slope, toward the valley.
 We talked while walking to the car, talked 5
 over its mild, belled roof,
 while opening the doors, then ducked down
 and there we were, bent toward the interior, talking.
 Meeting, in the middle of the day,
 the first thing when we saw each other 10
 we opened our mouths. All day,
 we sang to each other the level music
 of spoken language. Even while we ate
 we did not pause, I'd speak to him through
 the broken body of the butter cookie, 15
 gently spraying him with crumbs. We talked
 and walked, we leaned against the opposite sides of the
 car and talked in the parking lot

1. Also the name of a contraceptive vaginal ring.

until everyone else had driven off, we clung to its
 dark cold raft and started a new subject. 20
 We did not talk about his wife, much,
 or my husband, but to everything else
 we turned the workings of our lips and tongues
 —up to our necks in the hot tub, or
 walking up the steep road, 25
 stepping into the hot dust as if
 down into the ions of a wing, and on the
 sand, next to each other, as we turned
 the turns that upon each other would be the
 turnings of joy—even under 30
 water there trailed from our mouths the delicate
 chains of our sentences. But mostly at night, and
 far into the night, we talked until we
 dropped, as if, stopping for an instant, we might
 move right toward each other. Today, 35
 he said he felt he could talk to me forever,
 it must be the way the angels live,
 sitting across from each other, deep
 in the bliss of their shared spirit. My God,
 they are not going to touch each other. 40

1999

SAM SHEPARD

b. 1943

Assessing Sam Shepard's importance, the critic Richard Gilman finds the key in his fascination with rootlessness. In this quality are his works' greatest difficulties and their deepest appeal, a dramaturgy famous for what Gilman describes as "the frantic efforts of so many of his characters to make themselves felt, often by violence (or cartoon violence—blows without injuries, bullets without death: dream or make-believe, something filmed), of the great strand in his work of the ego run wild, of the craving for altered states of being and the power to transcend physical or moral limitations." Whether monologues or dialogues, his actors' lines are more than contributions to plot and action—they are "outcries of characters craving to be known."

Because of his success as an actor in a score of major motion pictures, including *The Right Stuff* (1983), *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and *Black Hawk Down* (2002), Shepard is one of America's most recognizable contemporary dramatists. His image is a strongly self-created one, as he transformed himself from Samuel Shepard Rogers III (called "Steve" at home, the son of career-military parents who later became ranchers in rural California) into Sam Shepard, underground rock musician and experimental Off-Broadway playwright. Doing this meant abandoning studies he had begun at an agricultural college and giving up work as a horseman and ranch hand. Arriving in New York City as a nineteen-year-old, he found work as a waiter at The Village Gate, Greenwich

Village's top jazz club at the time, where he met musicians, actors and actresses, and most helpfully Ralph Cook, founder and director of Theater Genesis (whose company included actress O-Lan Johnson, later to be Shepard's wife). His one-act plays were first presented by the Theater Genesis ensemble at St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery in 1964, beginning a prolific Off-Broadway career that would win him eleven Obie awards. By 1979 he had won a Pulitzer Prize as well (for his three-act play *Buried Child*). Also a short-story writer and essayist, Shepard was invited by the German filmmaker Wim Wenders to adapt some of this nontheatrical material for the motion picture *Paris, Texas*, which won the Palm d'Or award when it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 1984. By then his marriage with O-Lan Johnson had ended; a long-term relationship with the film actress Jessica Lange followed. *Far North* (1988) displays Shepard's skills as a cinematic director, and his playwriting career has continued with such works as *Eyes for Consuela* (1998), *The Late Henry Moss* (2002), and *The God of Hell* (2004).

True West (1980) finds Shepard expanding his dramaturgy from the one-act vignette to a more conventional running time, channeling his earlier penchant for symbolic abstraction into the suggestions (if not always the practicalities) of realism. As in many of his plays the American West, past and present, shares attention with family concerns, as an undercurrent of violence sets the deliberately uneasy tone. In a style that draws from the works of Samuel Beckett and Edward Albee, *True West* is starkly minimal, putting just four characters in a single set, here a familiar kitchen-dinette scene. The play's general aura is what Shepard scholars have called "frontier gothic," in which themes from the American West of pioneer days (independence, isolation, a climate of physical violence) appear in contemporary life, especially within familial and social relationships.

The text is from *Seven Plays* (1981).

True West

CHARACTERS

AUSTIN: *early thirties, light blue sports shirt, light tan cardigan sweater, clean blue jeans, white tennis shoes*

LEE: *his older brother, early forties, filthy white t-shirt, tattered brown overcoat covered with dust, dark blue baggy suit pants from the Salvation Army, pink suede belt, pointed black forties dress shoes scuffed up, holes in the soles, no socks, no hat, long pronounced sideburns, "Gene Vincent" hairdo,¹ two days' growth of beard, bad teeth*

SAUL KIMMER: *late forties, Hollywood producer, pink and white flower print sports shirt, white sports coat with matching polyester slacks, black and white loafers*

MOM: *early sixties, mother of the brothers, small woman, conservative white skirt and matching jacket, red shoulder bag, two pieces of matching red luggage*

True West was first performed at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco on July 10, 1980. The director was Robert Woodruff, and the cast was as follows:

AUSTIN	Peter Coyote
LEE	Jim Haynie
SAUL KIMMER	Tom Dahlgren
MOM	Carol McElheney

1. Pompadour style favored by some American rock 'n' roll musicians of the late 1950s.

SCENE: *All nine scenes take place on the same set; a kitchen and adjoining alcove of an older home in a Southern California suburb, about 40 miles east of Los Angeles. The kitchen takes up most of the playing area to stage left. The kitchen consists of a sink, upstage center, surrounded by counter space, a wall telephone, cupboards, and a small window just above it bordered by neat yellow curtains. Stage left of sink is a stove. Stage right, a refrigerator. The alcove adjoins the kitchen to stage right. There is no wall division or door to the alcove. It is open and easily accessible from the kitchen and defined only by the objects in it: a small round glass breakfast table mounted on white iron legs, two matching white iron chairs set across from each other. The two exterior walls of the alcove which prescribe a corner in the upstage right are composed of many small windows, beginning from a solid wall about three feet high and extending to the ceiling. The windows look out to bushes and citrus trees. The alcove is filled with all sorts of house plants in various pots, mostly Boston ferns hanging in planters at different levels. The floor of the alcove is composed of green synthetic grass.*

All entrances and exits are made stage left from the kitchen. There is no door. The actors simply go off and come onto the playing area.

NOTE ON SET AND COSTUME: *The set should be constructed realistically with no attempt to distort its dimensions, shapes, objects, or colors. No objects should be introduced which might draw special attention to themselves other than the props demanded by the script. If a stylistic "concept" is grafted onto the set design it will only serve to confuse the evolution of the characters' situation, which is the most important focus of the play.*

Likewise, the costumes should be exactly representative of who the characters are and not added onto for the sake of making a point to the audience.

NOTE ON SOUND: *The Coyote of Southern California has a distinct yapping, dog-like bark, similar to a Hyena. This yapping grows more intense and maniacal as the pack grows in numbers, which is usually the case when they lure and kill pets from suburban yards. The sense of growing frenzy in the pack should be felt in the background, particularly in Scenes 7 and 8. In any case, these Coyotes never make the long, mournful, solitary howl of the Hollywood stereotype.*

The sound of Crickets can speak for itself.

These sounds should also be treated realistically even though they sometimes grow in volume and numbers.

Act One

SCENE 1

Night. Sound of crickets in dark. Candlelight appears in alcove, illuminating AUSTIN, seated at glass table hunched over a writing notebook, pen in hand, cigarette burning in ashtray, cup of coffee, typewriter on table, stacks of paper, candle burning on table.

Soft moonlight fills kitchen illuminating LEE, beer in hand, six-pack on counter behind him. He's leaning against the sink, mildly drunk; takes a slug of beer.

LEE So, Mom took off for Alaska, huh?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE Sorta' left you in charge.

AUSTIN Well, she knew I was coming down here so she offered me the place.

LEE You keepin' the plants watered?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE Keepin' the sink clean? She don't like even a single tea leaf in the sink ya' know.

AUSTIN [*trying to concentrate on writing*] Yeah, I know.
[*Pause.*]

LEE She gonna' be up there a long time?

AUSTIN I don't know.

LEE Kinda' nice for you, huh? Whole place to yourself.

AUSTIN Yeah, it's great.

LEE Ya' got crickets anyway. Tons a' crickets out there. [*looks around kitchen*] Ya' got groceries? Coffee?

AUSTIN [*looking up from writing*] What?

LEE You got coffee?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE At's good, [*short pause*] Real coffee? From the bean?

AUSTIN Yeah. You want some?

LEE Naw. I brought some uh—[*motions to beer*]

AUSTIN Help yourself to whatever's—[*motions to refrigerator*]

LEE I will. Don't worry about me. I'm not the one to worry about. I mean I can uh—[*pause*] You always work by candlelight?

AUSTIN No—uh—Not always.

LEE Just sometimes?

AUSTIN [*puts pen down, rubs his eyes*] Yeah. Sometimes it's soothing.

LEE Isn't that what the old guys did?

AUSTIN What old guys?

LEE The Forefathers.² You know.

AUSTIN Forefathers?

LEE Isn't that what they did? Candlelight burning into the night? Cabins in the wilderness.

AUSTIN [*rubs hand through his hair*] I suppose.

LEE I'm not botherin' you am I? I mean I don't wanna break into yer uh—concentration or nothin'.

AUSTIN No, it's all right.

LEE That's good. I mean I realize that yer line a' work demands a lotta' concentration.

AUSTIN It's okay.

LEE You probably think that I'm not fully able to comprehend somethin' like that, huh?

AUSTIN Like what?

LEE That stuff yer doin'. That art. You know. Whatever you call it.

AUSTIN It's just a little research.

LEE You may not know it but I did a little art myself once.

AUSTIN You did?

LEE Yeah! I did some a' that. I fooled around with it. No future in it.

AUSTIN What'd you do?

LEE Never mind what I did! Just never mind about that. [*pause*] It was ahead of its time.

2. Common term for the founders of the United States.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN So, you went out to see the old man, huh?

LEE Yeah, I seen him.

AUSTIN How's he doing?

LEE Same. He's doin' just about the same.

AUSTIN I was down there too, you know.

LEE What d'ya' want, an award? You want some kinda' medal? You were down there. He told me all about you.

AUSTIN What'd he say?

LEE He told me. Don't worry.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN Well—

LEE You don't have to say nothin'.

AUSTIN I wasn't.

LEE Yeah, you were gonna' make somethin' up. Somethin' brilliant.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN You going to be down here very long, Lee?

LEE Might be. Depends on a few things.

AUSTIN You got some friends down here?

LEE [laughs] I know a few people. Yeah.

AUSTIN Well, you can stay here as long as I'm here.

LEE I don't need your permission do I?

AUSTIN No.

LEE I mean she's my mother too, right?

AUSTIN Right.

LEE She might've just as easily asked me to take care of her place as you.

AUSTIN That's right.

LEE I mean I know how to water plants.

[Long pause.]

AUSTIN So you don't know how long you'll be staying then?

LEE Depends mostly on houses, ya' know.

AUSTIN Houses?

LEE Yeah. Houses. Electric devices. Stuff like that. I gotta' make a little tour first.

[Short pause.]

AUSTIN Lee, why don't you just try another neighborhood, all right?

LEE [laughs.] What's a' matter with this neighborhood? This is a great neighborhood. Lush. Good class a' people. Not many dogs.

AUSTIN Well, our uh—Our mother just happens to live here. That's all.

LEE Nobody's gonna' know. All they know is somethin's missing. That's all. She'll never even hear about it. Nobody's gonna' know.

AUSTIN You're going to get picked up if you start walking around here at night.

LEE Me? I'm gonna' git picked up? What about you? You stick out like a sore thumb. Look at you. You think yer regular lookin'?

AUSTIN I've got too much to deal with here to be worrying about—

LEE Yer not gonna' have to worry about me! I've been doin' all right without you. I haven't been anywhere near you for five years! Now isn't that true?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE So you don't have to worry about me. I'm a free agent.

AUSTIN All right.

LEE Now all I wanna' do is borrow yer car.

AUSTIN No!

LEE Just fer a day. One day.

AUSTIN No!

LEE I won't take it outside a twenty mile radius. I promise ya'. You can check the speedometer.

AUSTIN You're not borrowing my car! That's all there is to it.

[Pause.]

LEE Then I'll just take the damn thing.

AUSTIN Lee, look—I don't want any trouble, all right?

LEE That's a dumb line. That is a dumb fuckin' line. You git paid fer dreamin' up a line like that?

AUSTIN Look, I can give you some money if you need money.

[LEE suddenly lunges at AUSTIN, grabs him violently by the shirt and shakes him with tremendous power.]

LEE Don't you say that to me! Don't you ever say that to me! [*just as suddenly he turns him loose, pushes him away and backs off*] You may be able to git away with that with the Old Man. Git him tanked up for a week! Buy him off with yer Hollywood blood money, but not me! I can git my own money my own way. Big money!

AUSTIN I was just making an offer.

LEE Yeah, well keep it to yourself!

[Long pause.]

Those are the most monotonous fuckin' crickets I ever heard in my life.

AUSTIN I kinda' like the sound.

LEE Yeah. Supposed to be able to tell the temperature by the number a' pulses. You believe that?

AUSTIN The temperature?

LEE Yeah. The air. How hot it is.

AUSTIN How do you do that?

LEE I don't know. Some woman told me that. She was a Botanist. So I believed her.

AUSTIN Where'd you meet her?

LEE What?

AUSTIN The woman Botanist?

LEE I met her on the desert. I been spendin' a lotta' time on the desert.

AUSTIN What were you doing out there?

LEE [*pause, stares in space*] I forgit. Had me a Pit Bull there for a while but I lost him.

AUSTIN Pit Bull?

LEE Fightin' dog. Damn I made some good money off that little dog. Real good money.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN You could come up north with me, you know.

LEE What's up there?

AUSTIN My family.

LEE Oh, that's right, you got the wife and kiddies now don't ya'. The house, the car, the whole slam. That's right.

AUSTIN You could spend a couple days. See how you like it. I've got an extra room.

LEE Too cold up there.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN You want to sleep for a while?

LEE [pause, stares at AUSTIN] I don't sleep.

[Lights to black.]

SCENE 2

Morning. AUSTIN is watering plants with a vaporizer, LEE sits at glass table in alcove drinking beer.

LEE I never realized the old lady was so security-minded.

AUSTIN How do you mean?

LEE Made a little tour this morning. She's got locks on everything. Locks and double-locks and chain locks and—What's she got that's so valuable?

AUSTIN Antiques I guess. I don't know.

LEE Antiques? Brought everything with her from the old place, huh. Just the same crap we always had around. Plates and spoons.

AUSTIN I guess they have personal value to her.

LEE Personal value. Yeah. Just a lotta' junk. Most of it's phony anyway. Idaho decals. Now who in the hell wants to eat offa' plate with the State of Idaho starin' ya' in the face. Every time ya' take a bite ya' get to see a little bit more.

AUSTIN Well it must mean something to her or she wouldn't save it.

LEE Yeah, well personally I don't wann' be invaded by Idaho when I'm eatin'. When I'm eatin' I'm home. Ya' know what I'm sayin'? I'm not driftin', I'm home. I don't need my thoughts swept off to Idaho. I don't need that!

[Pause.]

AUSTIN Did you go out last night?

LEE Why?

AUSTIN I thought I heard you go out.

LEE Yeah, I went out. What about it?

AUSTIN Just wondered.

LEE Damn coyotes kept me awake.

AUSTIN Oh yeah, I heard them. They must've killed somebody's dog or something.

LEE Yappin' their fool heads off. They don't yap like that on the desert. They howl. These are city coyotes here.

AUSTIN Well, you don't sleep anyway do you?

[Pause, LEE stares at him.]

LEE You're pretty smart aren't ya?

AUSTIN How do you mean?

LEE I mean you never had any more on the ball than I did. But here you are gettin' invited into prominent people's houses. Sittin' around talkin' like you know somethin'.

AUSTIN They're not so prominent.

LEE They're a helluva' lot more prominent than the houses I get invited into.

AUSTIN Well you invite yourself.

LEE That's right. I do. In fact I probably got a wider range a' choices than you do, come to think of it.

AUSTIN I wouldn't doubt it.

LEE In fact I been inside some pretty classy places in my time. And I never even went to an Ivy League school either.

AUSTIN You want some breakfast or something?

LEE Breakfast?

AUSTIN Yeah. Don't you eat breakfast?

LEE Look, don't worry about me pal. I can take care a' myself. You just go ahead as though I wasn't even here, all right?

[AUSTIN goes into kitchen, makes coffee.]

AUSTIN Where'd you walk to last night?

[Pause.]

LEE I went up in the foothills there. Up in the San Gabriels.³ Heat was drivin' me crazy.

AUSTIN Well, wasn't it hot out on the desert?

LEE Different kinda' heat. Out there it's clean. Cools off at night. There's a nice little breeze.

AUSTIN Where were you, the Mojave?

LEE Yeah. The Mojave. That's right.

AUSTIN I haven't been out there in years.

LEE Out past Needles there.

AUSTIN Oh yeah.

LEE Up here it's different. This country's real different.

AUSTIN Well, it's been built up.

LEE Built up? Wiped out is more like it. I don't even hardly recognize it.

AUSTIN Yeah. Foothills are the same though, aren't they?

LEE Pretty much. It's funny goin' up in there. The smells and everything. Used to catch snakes up there, remember?

AUSTIN You caught snakes.

LEE Yeah. And you'd pretend you were Geronimo or some damn thing. You used to go right out to lunch.

AUSTIN I enjoyed my imagination.

LEE That what you call it? Looks like yer still enjoyin' it.

AUSTIN So you just wandered around up there, huh?

LEE Yeah. With a purpose.

AUSTIN See any houses?

[Pause.]

LEE Couple. Couple a' real nice ones. One of 'em didn't even have a dog. Walked right up and stuck my head in the window. Not a peep. Just a sweet kinda' surburban silence.

AUSTIN What kind of a place was it?

LEE Like a paradise. Kinda' place that sorta' kills ya' inside. Warm yellow lights. Mexican tile all around. Copper pots hangin' over the stove. Ya' know like they got in the magazines. Blonde people movin' in and outa'

3. Mountains between Los Angeles and the Mojave Desert in Southern California; the Mojave Desert stretches from this mountain barrier east of Los Angeles to Arizona and Nevada;

Needles, mentioned below, is a city in California on the Colorado River in the Mojave Valley, which straddles the California-Arizona border.

the rooms, talkin' to each other. [*pause*] Kinda' place you wish you sorta' grew up in, ya' know.

AUSTIN That's the kind of place you wish you'd grown up in?

LEE Yeah, why not?

AUSTIN I thought you hated that kind of stuff.

LEE Yeah, well you never knew too much about me did ya'?
[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN Why'd you go out to the desert in the first place?

LEE I was on my way to see the old man.

AUSTIN You mean you just passed through there?

LEE Yeah. That's right. Three months of passin' through.

AUSTIN Three months?

LEE Somethin' like that. Maybe more. Why?

AUSTIN You lived on the Mojave for three months?

LEE Yeah. What'sa' matter with that?

AUSTIN By yourself?

LEE Mostly. Had a couple a' visitors. Had that dog for a while.

AUSTIN Didn't you miss people?

LEE [*laughs*] People?

AUSTIN Yeah. I mean I go crazy if I have to spend three nights in a motel by myself.

LEE Yer not in a motel now.

AUSTIN No, I know. But sometimes I have to stay in motels.

LEE Well, they got people in motels don't they?

AUSTIN Strangers.

LEE Yer friendly aren't ya'? Aren't you the friendly type?
[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN I'm going to have somebody coming by here later, Lee.

LEE Ah! Lady friend?

AUSTIN No, a producer.

LEE Aha! What's he produce?

AUSTIN Film. Movies. You know.

LEE Oh, movies. Motion Pictures! A Big Wig huh?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE What's he comin' by here for?

AUSTIN We have to talk about a project.

LEE Whadya' mean, "a project"? What's "a project"?

AUSTIN A script.

LEE Oh. That's what yer doin' with all these papers?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE Well, what's the project about?

AUSTIN We're uh—it's a period piece.

LEE What's "a period piece"?

AUSTIN Look, it doesn't matter. The main thing is we need to discuss this alone. I mean—

LEE Oh, I get it. You want me outa' the picture.

AUSTIN Not exactly. I just need to be alone with him for a couple of hours. So we can talk.

LEE Yer afraid I'll embarrass ya' huh?

AUSTIN I'm not afraid you'll embarrass me!

LEE Well, I tell ya' what—Why don't you just gimme the keys to yer car and I'll be back here around six o'clock or so. That give ya' enough time?

AUSTIN I'm not loaning you my car, Lee.

LEE You want me to just git lost huh? Take a hike? Is that it? Pound the pavement for a few hours while you bullshit yer way into a million bucks.

AUSTIN Look, it's going to be hard enough for me to face this character on my own without—

LEE You don't know this guy?

AUSTIN No I don't know—He's a producer. I mean I've been meeting with him for months but you never get to know a producer.

LEE Yer tryin' to hustle him? Is that it?

AUSTIN I'm not trying to hustle him! I'm trying to work out a deal! It's not easy.

LEE What kinda' deal?

AUSTIN Convince him it's a worthwhile story.

LEE He's not convinced? How come he's comin' over here if he's not convinced? I'll convince him for ya'.

AUSTIN You don't understand the way things work down here.

LEE How do things work down here?

[Pause.]

AUSTIN Look, if I loan you my car will you have it back here by six?

LEE On the button. With a full tank a' gas.

AUSTIN [*digging in his pocket for keys*] Forget about the gas.

LEE Hey, these days gas is gold, old buddy.

[AUSTIN *hands the keys to LEE.*]

You remember that car I used to loan you?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE Forty Ford. Flathead.⁴

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE Sucker hauled ass didn't it?

AUSTIN Lee, it's not that I don't want to loan you my car—

LEE You are loanin' me yer car.

[LEE *gives AUSTIN a pat on the shoulder, pause.*]

AUSTIN I know. I just wish—

LEE What? You wish what?

AUSTIN I don't know. I wish I wasn't—I wish I didn't have to be doing business down here. I'd like to just spend some time with you.

LEE I thought it was "Art" you were doin'.

[LEE *moves across kitchen toward exit, tosses keys in his hand.*]

AUSTIN Try to get it back here by six, okay?

LEE No sweat. Hey, ya' know, if that uh—story of yours doesn't go over with the guy—tell him I got a couple a' "projects" he might be interested in. Real commercial. Full a' suspense. True-to-life stuff.

[LEE *exits, AUSTIN stares after LEE then turns, goes to papers at table, leafs through pages, lights fade to black.*]

4. Type of internal combustion engine, here used in a 1940 Ford automobile, at this time popular as a hotrod.

SCENE 3

Afternoon. Alcove, SAUL KIMMER and AUSTIN seated across from each other at table.

SAUL Well, to tell you the truth Austin, I have never felt so confident about a project in quite a long time.

AUSTIN Well, that's good to hear, Saul.

SAUL I am absolutely convinced we can get this thing off the ground. I mean we'll have to make a sale to television and that means getting a major star. Somebody bankable. But I think we can do it. I really do.

AUSTIN Don't you think we need a first draft before we approach a star?

SAUL No, no, not at all. I don't think it's necessary. Maybe a brief synopsis. I don't want you to touch the typewriter until we have some seed money.

AUSTIN That's fine with me.

SAUL I mean it's a great story. Just the story alone. You've really managed to capture something this time.

AUSTIN I'm glad you like it, Saul.

[LEE enters abruptly into kitchen carrying a stolen television set, short pause.]

LEE Aw shit, I'm sorry about that. I am really sorry Austin.

AUSTIN [*standing*] That's all right.

LEE [*moving toward them*] I mean I thought it was way past six already. You said to have it back here by six.

AUSTIN We were just finishing up. [*to Saul*]. This is my, uh—brother, Lee.

SAUL [*standing*] Oh, I'm very happy to meet you.

[LEE sets T.V. on sink counter, shakes hands with SAUL.]

LEE I can't tell ya' how happy I am to meet you sir.

SAUL Saul Kimmer.

LEE Mr. Kipper.

SAUL Kimmer.

AUSTIN Lee's been living out on the desert and he just uh—

SAUL Oh, that's terrific! [*to LEE*] Palm Springs?⁵

LEE Yeah. Yeah, right. Right around in that area. Near uh—Bob Hope⁶ Drive there.

SAUL Oh I love it out there. I just love it. The air is wonderful.

LEE Yeah. Sure is. Healthy.

SAUL And the golf. I don't know if you play golf, but the golf is just about the best.

LEE I play a lotta' golf.

SAUL Is that right?

LEE Yeah. In fact I was hoping I'd run into somebody out here who played a little golf. I've been lookin' for a partner.

SAUL Well, I uh—

AUSTIN Lee's just down for a visit while our mother's in Alaska.

5. City in south-central California where streets are named for stars in the Hollywood entertain-

ment industry.
6. American film comedian (1903–2003).

SAUL Oh, your mother's in Alaska?

AUSTIN Yes. She went up there on a little vacation. This is her place.

SAUL I see. Well isn't that something. Alaska.

LEE What kinda' handicap do ya' have, Mr. Kimmer?

SAUL Oh I'm just a Sunday duffer really. You know.

LEE That's good 'cause I haven't swung a club in months.

SAUL Well we ought to get together sometime and have a little game.

Austin, do you play?

[SAUL mimes a Johnny Carson golf swing for AUSTIN.]

AUSTIN No. I don't uh—I've watched it on TV.

LEE [to SAUL] How 'bout tomorrow morning? Bright and early. We could get out there and put in eighteen holes before breakfast.

SAUL Well, I've got uh—I have several appointments—

LEE No, I mean real early. Crack a' dawn. While the dew's still thick on the fairway.

SAUL Sounds really great.

LEE Austin could be our caddie.

SAUL Now that's an idea. [laughs]

AUSTIN I don't know the first thing about golf.

LEE There's nothin' to it. Isn't that right, Saul? He'd pick it up in fifteen minutes.

SAUL Sure. Doesn't take long. 'Course you have to play for years to find your true form. [chuckles]

LEE [to AUSTIN] We'll give ya' a quick run-down on the club faces. The irons, the woods. Show ya' a couple pointers on the basic swing. Might even let ya' hit the ball a couple times. Whadya' think, Saul?

SAUL Why not. I think it'd be great. I haven't had any exercise in weeks.

LEE 'At's the spirit! We'll have a little orange juice right afterwards.

[Pause.]

SAUL Orange juice?

LEE Yeah! Vitamin C! Nothin' like a shot a' orange juice after a round a' golf. Hot shower. Snappin' towels at each others' privates. Real sense a' fraternity.

SAUL [smiles at AUSTIN] Well, you make it sound very inviting, I must say. It really does sound great.

LEE Then it's a date.

SAUL Well, I'll call the country club and see if I can arrange something.

LEE Great! Boy, I sure am sorry that I busted in on ya' all in the middle of yer meeting.

SAUL Oh that's quite all right. We were just about finished anyway.

LEE I can wait out in the other room if you want.

SAUL No really—

LEE Just got Austin's color TV back from the shop. I can watch a little amateur boxing now.

[LEE and AUSTIN exchange looks.]

SAUL Oh—Yes.

LEE You don't fool around in Television, do you Saul?

SAUL Uh—I have in the past. Produced some TV Specials. Network stuff. But it's mainly features now.

LEE That's where the big money is, huh?

SAUL Yes. That's right.

AUSTIN Why don't I call you tomorrow, Saul and we'll get together. We can have lunch or something.

SAUL That'd be terrific.

LEE Right after the golf.

[*Pause.*]

SAUL What?

LEE You can have lunch right after the golf.

SAUL Oh, right.

LEE Austin was tellin' me that yer interested in stories.

SAUL Well, we develop certain projects that we feel have commercial potential.

LEE What kinda' stuff do ya' go in for?

SAUL Oh, the usual. You know. Good love interest. Lots of action. [*chuckles at AUSTIN*]

LEE Westerns?

SAUL Sometimes.

AUSTIN I'll give you a ring, Saul.

[*AUSTIN tries to move SAUL across the kitchen but LEE blocks their way.*]

LEE I got a Western that'd knock yer lights out.

SAUL Oh really?

LEE Yeah. Contemporary Western. Based on a true story. 'Course I'm not a writer like my brother here. I'm not a man of the pen.

SAUL Well—

LEE I mean I can tell ya' a story off the tongue but I can't put it down on paper. That don't make any difference though does it?

SAUL No, not really.

LEE I mean plenty a' guys have stories don't they? True-life stories. Musta' been a lotta' movies made from real life.

SAUL Yes. I suppose so.

LEE I haven't seen a good Western since "Lonely Are the Brave."⁷ You remember that movie?

SAUL No, I'm afraid I—

LEE Kirk Douglas. Helluva' movie. You remember that movie, Austin?

AUSTIN Yes.

LEE [*to SAUL*] The man dies for the love of a horse.

SAUL Is that right.

LEE Yeah. Ya' hear the horse screamin' at the end of it. Rain's comin' down. Horse is screamin'. Then there's a shot. BLAM! Just a single shot like that. Then nothin' but the sound of rain. And Kirk Douglas is ridin' in the ambulance. Ridin' away from the scene of the accident. And when he hears that shot he knows that his horse has died. He knows. And you see his eyes. And his eyes die. Right inside his face. And then his eyes close. And you know that he's died too. You know that Kirk Douglas has died from the death of his horse.

SAUL [*eyes AUSTIN nervously*] Well, it sounds like a great movie. I'm sorry I missed it.

7. Film (1962) directed by David Miller, starring the American film actor Kirk Douglas (b. 1916).

LEE Yeah, you shouldn't a' missed that one.

SAUL I'll have to try to catch it some time. Arrange a screening or something. Well, Austin, I'll have to hit the freeway before rush hour.

AUSTIN [*ushers him toward exit*] It's good seeing you, Saul.

[AUSTIN and SAUL shake hands.]

LEE So ya' think there's room for a real Western these days? A true-to-life Western?

SAUL Well, I don't see why not. Why don't you uh—tell the story to Austin and have him write a little outline.

LEE You'd take a look at it then?

SAUL Yes. Sure. I'll give it a read-through. Always eager for new material.
[*smiles at AUSTIN*]

LEE That's great! You'd really read it then huh?

SAUL It would just be my opinion of course.

LEE That's all I want. Just an opinion. I happen to think it has a lotta' possibilities.

SAUL Well, it was great meeting you and I'll—

[SAUL and LEE shake.]

LEE I'll call you tomorrow about the golf.

SAUL Oh. Yes, right.

LEE Austin's got your number, right?

SAUL Yes.

LEE So long Saul. [*gives SAUL a pat on the back*]

[SAUL exits, AUSTIN turns to LEE, looks at T.V. then back to LEE.]

AUSTIN Give me the keys.

[AUSTIN extends his hand toward LEE, LEE doesn't move, just stares at AUSTIN, smiles, lights to black.]

SCENE 4

Night. Coyotes in distance, fade, sound of typewriter in dark, crickets, candle-light in alcove, dim light in kitchen, lights reveal AUSTIN at glass table typing, LEE sits across from him, foot on table, drinking beer and whiskey, the T.V. is still on sink counter, AUSTIN types for a while, then stops.

LEE All right, now read it back to me.

AUSTIN I'm not reading it back to you, Lee. You can read it when we're finished. I can't spend all night on this.

LEE You got better things to do?

AUSTIN Let's just go ahead. Now what happens when he leaves Texas?

LEE Is he ready to leave Texas yet? I didn't know we were that far along. He's not ready to leave Texas.

AUSTIN He's right at the border.

LEE [*sitting up*] No, see this is one a' the crucial parts. Right here. [*taps paper with beer can*] We can't rush through this. He's not right at the border. He's a good fifty miles from the border. A lot can happen in fifty miles.

AUSTIN It's only an outline. We're not writing an entire script now.

LEE Well ya' can't leave things out even if it is an outline. It's one a' the most important parts. Ya' can't go leavin' it out.

AUSTIN Okay, okay. Let's just—get it done.

LEE All right. Now. He's in the truck and he's got his horse trailer and his horse.

AUSTIN We've already established that.

LEE And he sees this other guy comin' up behind him in another truck. And that truck is pullin' a gooseneck.

AUSTIN What's a gooseneck?

LEE Cattle trailer. You know the kind with a gooseneck, goes right down in the bed a' the pick-up.

AUSTIN Oh. All right. [*types*]

LEE It's important.

AUSTIN Okay. I got it.

LEE All these details are important.

[*AUSTIN types as they talk.*]

AUSTIN I've got it.

LEE And this other guy's got his horse all saddled up in the back a' the gooseneck.

AUSTIN Right.

LEE So both these guys have got their horses right along with 'em, see.

AUSTIN I understand.

LEE Then this first guy suddenly realizes two things.

AUSTIN The guy in front?

LEE Right. The guy in front realizes two things almost at the same time. Simultaneous.

AUSTIN What were the two things?

LEE Number one, he realizes that the guy behind him is the husband of the woman he's been—

[*LEE makes gesture of screwing by pumping his arm.*]

AUSTIN [*sees LEE's gesture*] Oh. Yeah.

LEE And number two, he realizes he's in the middle of Tornado Country.

AUSTIN What's "Tornado Country"?

LEE Panhandle.⁸

AUSTIN Panhandle?

LEE Sweetwater.⁹ Around in that area. Nothin'. Nowhere. And number three—

AUSTIN I thought there was only two.

LEE There's three. There's a third unforeseen realization.

AUSTIN And what's that?

LEE That he's runnin' outa' gas.

AUSTIN [*stops typing*] Come on, Lee.

[*AUSTIN gets up, moves to kitchen, gets a glass of water.*]

LEE Whadya' mean, "come on"? That's what it is. Write it down! He's runnin' outa' gas.

AUSTIN It's too—

LEE What? It's too what? It's too real! That's what ya' mean isn't it? It's too much like real life!

8. Northern extension of Texas or western extension of Oklahoma.

9. City at the southern extreme of the Texas Panhandle.

AUSTIN It's not like real life! It's not enough like real life. Things don't happen like that.

LEE What! Men don't fuck other men's women?

AUSTIN Yes. But they don't end up chasing each other across the Panhandle. Through "Tornado Country."

LEE They do in this movie!

AUSTIN And they don't have horses conveniently along with them when they run out of gas! And they don't run out of gas either!

LEE These guys run outa' gas! This is my story and one a' these guys runs outa' gas!

AUSTIN It's just a dumb excuse to get them into a chase scene. It's contrived.

LEE It is a chase scene! It's already a chase scene. They been chasin' each other fer days.

AUSTIN So now they're supposed to abandon their trucks, climb on their horses and chase each other into the mountains?

LEE [*standing suddenly*] There aren't any mountains in the Panhandle! It's flat!

[*LEE turns violently toward windows in alcove and throws beer can at them.*]

LEE Goddamn these crickets! [*yells at crickets*] Shut up out there! [*pause, turns back toward table*] This place is like a fuckin' rest home here. How're you supposed to think!

AUSTIN You wanna' take a break?

LEE No, I don't wanna' take a break! I wanna' get this done! This is my last chance to get this done.

AUSTIN [*moves back into alcove*] All right. Take it easy.

LEE I'm gonna' be leavin' this area. I don't have time to mess around here.

AUSTIN Where are you going?

LEE Never mind where I'm goin'! That's got nothin' to do with you. I just gotta' get this done. I'm not like you. Hangin' around bein' a parasite offa' other fools. I gotta' do this thing and get out.

[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN A parasite? Me?

LEE Yeah, you!

AUSTIN After you break into people's houses and take their televisions?

LEE They don't need their televisions! I'm doin' them a service.

AUSTIN Give me back my keys, Lee.

LEE Not until you write this thing! You're gonna' write this outline thing for me or that car's gonna' wind up in Arizona with a different paint job.

AUSTIN You think you can force me to write this? I was doing you a favor.

LEE Git off yer high horse will ya'! Favor! Big favor. Handin' down favors from the mountain top.

AUSTIN Let's just write it, okay? Let's sit down and not get upset and see if we can just get through this.

[*AUSTIN sits at typewriter.*]

[*Long pause.*]

LEE Yer not gonna' even show it to him, are ya'?

AUSTIN What?

LEE This outline. You got no intention of showin' it to him. Yer just doin' this 'cause yer afraid a' me.

AUSTIN You can show it to him yourself.

LEE I will, boy! I'm gonna' read it to him on the golf course.

AUSTIN And I'm not afraid of you either.

LEE Then how come yer doin' it?

AUSTIN [*pause*] So I can get my keys back.

[*Pause as LEE takes keys out of his pocket slowly and throws them on table, long pause, AUSTIN stares at keys.*]

LEE There. Now you got yer keys back.

[*AUSTIN looks up at LEE but doesn't take keys.*]

LEE Go ahead. There's yer keys.

[*AUSTIN slowly takes keys off table and puts them back in his own pocket.*]

Now what're you gonna' do? Kick me out?

AUSTIN I'm not going to kick you out, Lee.

LEE You couldn't kick me out, boy.

AUSTIN I know.

LEE So you can't even consider that one. [*pause*] You could call the police. That'd be the obvious thing.

AUSTIN You're my brother.

LEE That don't mean a thing. You go down to the L.A. Police Department there and ask them what kinda' people kill each other the most. What do you think they'd say?

AUSTIN Who said anything about killing?

LEE Family people. Brothers. Brothers-in-law. Cousins. Real American-type people. They kill each other in the heat mostly. In the Smog-Alerts. In the Brush Fire Season. Right about this time a' year.

AUSTIN This isn't the same.

LEE Oh no? What makes it different?

AUSTIN We're not insane. We're not driven to acts of violence like that. Not over a dumb movie script. Now sit down.

[*Long pause, LEE considers which way to go with it.*]

LEE Maybe not. [*he sits back down at table across from AUSTIN*] Maybe you're right. Maybe we're too intelligent, huh? [*pause*] We got our heads on our shoulders. One of us has even got a Ivy League diploma. Now that means somethin' don't it? Doesn't that mean somethin'?

AUSTIN Look, I'll write this thing for you, Lee. I don't mind writing it. I just don't want to get all worked up about it. It's not worth it. Now, come on. Let's just get through it, okay?

LEE Nah. I think there's easier money. Lotsa' places I could pick up thousands. Maybe millions. I don't need this shit. I could go up to Sacramento Valley and steal me a diesel. Ten thousand a week dismantling one a' those suckers. Ten thousand a week!

[*LEE opens another beer, puts his foot back up on table.*]

AUSTIN No, really, look, I'll write it out for you. I think it's a great idea.

LEE Nah, you got yer own work to do. I don't wanna' interfere with yer life.

AUSTIN I mean it'd be really fantastic if you could sell this. Turn it into a movie. I mean it.

[Pause.]

LEE Ya' think so huh?

AUSTIN Absolutely. You could really turn your life around, you know. Change things.

LEE I could get me a house maybe.

AUSTIN Sure you could get a house. You could get a whole ranch if you wanted to.

LEE [laughs] A ranch? I could get a ranch?

AUSTIN 'Course you could. You know what a screenplay sells for these days?

LEE No. What's it sell for?

AUSTIN A lot. A whole lot of money.

LEE Thousands?

AUSTIN Yeah. Thousands.

LEE Millions?

AUSTIN Well—

LEE We could get the old man outa' hock then.

AUSTIN Maybe.

LEE Maybe? Whadya' mean, maybe?

AUSTIN I mean it might take more than money.

LEE You were just tellin' me it'd change my whole life around. Why wouldn't it change his?

AUSTIN He's different.

LEE Oh, he's of a different ilk huh?

AUSTIN He's not gonna' change. Let's leave the old man out of it.

LEE That's right. He's not gonna' change but I will. I'll just turn myself right inside out. I could be just like you then, huh? Sittin' around dreamin' stuff up. Gettin' paid to dream. Ridin' back and forth on the freeway just dreamin' my fool head off.

AUSTIN It's not all that easy.

LEE It's not, huh?

AUSTIN No. There's a lot of work involved.

LEE What's the toughest part? Deciding whether to jog or play tennis?

[Long pause.]

AUSTIN Well, look. You can stay here—do whatever you want to. Borrow the car. Come in and out. Doesn't matter to me. It's not my house. I'll help you write this thing or—not. Just let me know what you want. You tell me.

LEE Oh. So now suddenly you're at my service. Is that it?

AUSTIN What do you want to do Lee?

[Long pause, LEE stares at him then turns and dreams at windows.]

LEE I tell ya' what I'd do if I still had that dog. Ya' wanna' know what I'd do?

AUSTIN What?

LEE Head out to Ventura. Cook up a little match. God that little dog could bear down. Lota' money in dog fightin'. Big money.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN Why don't we try to see this through, Lee. Just for the hell of it. Maybe you've really got something here. What do you think?

[Pause, LEE considers.]

LEE Maybe so. No harm in tryin' I guess. You think it's such a hot idea. Besides, I always wondered what'd be like to be you.

AUSTIN You did?

LEE Yeah, sure. I used to picture you walkin' around some campus with yer arms fulla' books. Blondes chasin' after ya'.

AUSTIN Blondes? That's funny.

LEE What's funny about it?

AUSTIN Because I always used to picture you somewhere.

LEE Where'd you picture me?

AUSTIN Oh, I don't know. Different places. Adventures. You were always on some adventure.

LEE Yeah.

AUSTIN And I used to say to myself, "Lee's got the right idea. He's out there in the world and here I am. What am I doing?"

LEE Well you were settin' yourself up for somethin'.

AUSTIN I guess.

LEE We better get started on this thing then.

AUSTIN Okay.

[AUSTIN sits up at typewriter, puts new paper in.]

LEE Oh. Can I get the keys back before I forget?

[AUSTIN hesitates.]

You said I could borrow the car if I wanted, right? Isn't that what you said?

AUSTIN Yeah. Right.

[AUSTIN takes keys out of his pocket, sets them on table, LEE takes keys slowly, plays with them in his hand.]

LEE I could get a ranch, huh?

AUSTIN Yeah. We have to write it first though.

LEE Okay. Let's write it.

[Lights start dimming slowly to end of scene as AUSTIN types, LEE speaks.]

So they take off after each other straight into an endless black prairie. The sun is just comin' down and they can feel the night on their backs. What they don't know is that each one of 'em is afraid, see. Each one separately thinks that he's the only one that's afraid. And they keep ridin' like that straight into the night. Not knowing. And the one who's chasin' doesn't know where the other one is taking him. And the one who's being chased doesn't know where he's going.

[Lights to black, typing stops in the dark, crickets fade.]

Act Two

SCENE 5

Morning. LEE at the table in alcove with a set of golf clubs in a fancy leather bag,

AUSTIN at sink washing a few dishes.

AUSTIN He really liked it, huh?

LEE He wouldn't a' gave me these clubs if he didn't like it.

AUSTIN He gave you the clubs?

LEE Yeah. I told ya' he gave me the clubs. The bag too.

AUSTIN I thought he just loaned them to you.

LEE He said it was part a' the advance. A little gift like. Gesture of his good faith.

AUSTIN He's giving you an advance?

LEE Now what's so amazing about that? I told ya' it was a good story. You even said it was a good story.

AUSTIN Well that is really incredible Lee. You know how many guys spend their whole lives down here trying to break into this business? Just trying to get in the door?

LEE [*pulling clubs out of bag, testing them*] I got no idea. How many?
[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN How much of an advance is he giving you?

LEE Plenty. We were talkin' big money out there. Ninth hole is where I sealed the deal.

AUSTIN He made a firm commitment?

LEE Absolutely.

AUSTIN Well, I know Saul and he doesn't fool around when he says he likes something.

LEE I thought you said you didn't know him.

AUSTIN Well, I'm familiar with his tastes.

LEE I let him get two up on me goin' into the back nine. He was sure he had me cold. You shoulda' seen his face when I pulled out the old pitching wedge and plopped it pin-high, two feet from the cup. He 'bout shit his pants. "Where'd a guy like you ever learn how to play golf like that?" he says.

[*LEE laughs, AUSTIN stares at him.*]

AUSTIN 'Course there's no contract yet. Nothing's final until it's on paper.

LEE It's final, all right. There's no way he's gonna' back out of it now. We gambled for it.

AUSTIN Saul, gambled?

LEE Yeah, sure. I mean he liked the outline already so he wasn't risking that much. I just guaranteed it with my short game.

[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN Well, we should celebrate or something. I think Mom left a bottle of champagne in the refrigerator. We should have a little toast.

[*AUSTIN gets glasses from cupboard, goes to refrigerator, pulls out bottle of champagne.*]

LEE You shouldn't oughta' take her champagne, Austin. She's gonna' miss that.

AUSTIN Oh, she's not going to mind. She'd be glad we put it to good use. I'll get her another bottle. Besides, it's perfect for the occasion.

[*Pause.*]

LEE Yer gonna' get a nice fee fer writin' the script a' course. Straight fee.
[*AUSTIN stops, stares at LEE, puts glasses and bottle on table, pause.*]

AUSTIN I'm writing the script?

LEE That's what he said. Said we couldn't hire a better screenwriter in the whole town.

AUSTIN But I'm already working on a script. I've got my own project. I don't have time to write two scripts.

LEE No, he said he was gonna' drop that other one.

[Pause.]

AUSTIN What? You mean mine? He's going to drop mine and do yours instead?

LEE [Smiles] Now look, Austin, it's jest beginner's luck ya' know. I mean I sank a fifty foot putt for this deal. No hard feelings.

[AUSTIN goes to phone on wall, grabs it, starts dialing.] He's not gonna' be in, Austin. Told me he wouldn't be in 'till late this afternoon.

AUSTIN [stays on phone, dialing, listens] I can't believe this. I just can't believe it. Are you sure he said that? Why would he drop mine?

LEE That's what he told me.

AUSTIN He can't do that without telling me first. Without talking to me at least. He wouldn't just make a decision like that without talking to me!

LEE Well I was kinda' surprised myself. But he was real enthusiastic about my story.

[AUSTIN hangs up phone violently, paces.]

AUSTIN What'd he say! Tell me everything he said!

LEE I been tellin' ya'! He said he liked the story a whole lot. It was the first authentic Western to come along in a decade.

AUSTIN He liked that story! Your story?

LEE Yeah! What's so surprisin' about that?

AUSTIN It's stupid! It's the dumbest story I ever heard in my life.

LEE Hey, hold on! That's my story yer talkin' about!

AUSTIN It's a bullshit story! It's idiotic. Two lamebrains chasing each other across Texas! Are you kidding? Who do you think's going to go see a film like that?

LEE It's not a film! It's a movie. There's a big difference. That's somethin' Saul told me.

AUSTIN Oh he did, huh?

LEE Yeah, he said, "In this business we make movies, American movies. Leave the films to the French."

AUSTIN So you got real intimate with old Saul huh? He started pouring forth his vast knowledge of Cinema.

LEE I think he liked me a lot, to tell ya' the truth. I think he felt I was somebody he could confide in.

AUSTIN What'd you do, beat him up or something?

LEE [stands fast] Hey, I've about had it with the insults buddy! You think yer the only one in the brain department here? Yer the only one that can sit around and cook things up? There's other people got ideas too, ya' know!

AUSTIN You must've done something. Threatened him or something. Now what'd you do Lee?

LEE I convinced him!

[LEE makes sudden menacing lunge toward AUSTIN, wielding golf club above his head, stops himself, frozen moment, long pause, LEE lowers club.]

AUSTIN Oh, Jesus. You didn't hurt him did you?

[Long silence, LEE sits back down at table.]

Lee! Did you hurt him?

LEE I didn't do nothin' to him! He liked my story. Pure and simple. He said it was the best story he's come across in a long, long time.

AUSTIN That's what he told me about my story! That's the same thing he said to me.

LEE Well, he musta' been lyin'. He musta' been lyin' to one of us anyway.

AUSTIN You can't come into this town and start pushing people around. They're gonna' put you away!

LEE I never pushed anybody around! I beat him fair and square. [*pause*] They can't touch me anyway. They can't put a finger on me. I'm gone. I can come in through the window and go out through the door. They never knew what hit 'em. You, yer stuck. Yer the one that's stuck. Not me. So don't be warnin' me what to do in this town.

[*Pause, AUSTIN crosses to table, sits at typewriter, rests.*]

AUSTIN Lee, come on, level with me will you? It doesn't make any sense that suddenly he'd throw my idea out the window. I've been talking to him for months. I've got too much at stake. Everything's riding on this project.

LEE What's yer idea?

AUSTIN It's just a simple love story.

LEE What kinda' love story?

AUSTIN [*stands, crosses into kitchen*] I'm not telling you!

LEE Ha! 'Fraid I'll steal it huh? Competition's gettin' kinda' close to home isn't it?

AUSTIN Where did Saul say he was going?

LEE He was gonna' take my story to a couple studios.

AUSTIN That's *my* outline you know! I wrote that outline! You've got no right to be peddling it around.

LEE You weren't ready to take credit for it last night.

AUSTIN Give me my keys!

LEE What?

AUSTIN The keys! I want my keys back!

LEE Where you goin'?

AUSTIN Just give me my keys! I gotta' take a drive. I gotta' get out of here for a while.

LEE Where you gonna' go, Austin?

AUSTIN [*pause*] I might just drive out to the desert for a while. I gotta' think.

LEE You can think here just as good. This is the perfect setup for thinkin'. We got some writin' to do here, boy. Now let's just have us a little toast. Relax. We're partners now.

[*LEE pops the cork of the champagne bottle, pours two drinks as the lights fade to black.*]

SCENE 6

Afternoon. LEE and SAUL in kitchen, AUSTIN in alcove.

LEE Now you tell him. You tell him, Mr. Kipper.

SAUL Kimmer.

LEE Kimmer. You tell him what you told me. He don't believe me.

AUSTIN I don't want to hear it.

SAUL It's really not a big issue, Austin. I was simply amazed by your brother's story and—

AUSTIN Amazed? You lost a bet! You gambled with my material!

SAUL That's really beside the point, Austin. I'm ready to go all the way with your brother's story. I think it has a great deal of merit.

AUSTIN I don't want to hear about it, okay? Go tell it to the executives! Tell it to somebody who's going to turn it into a package deal or something. A TV. series. Don't tell it to me.

SAUL But I want to continue with your project too, Austin. It's not as though we can't do both. We're big enough for that aren't we?

AUSTIN "We"? I can't do both! I don't know about "we."

LEE [to SAUL] See, what'd I tell ya'. He's totally unsympathetic.

SAUL Austin, there's no point in our going to another screenwriter for this. It just doesn't make sense. You're brothers. You know each other. There's a familiarity with the material that just wouldn't be possible otherwise.

AUSTIN There's no familiarity with the material! None! I don't know what "Tornado Country" is. I don't know what a "gooseneck" is. And I don't want to know! [pointing to LEE] He's a hustler! He's a bigger hustler than you are! If you can't see that, then—

LEE [to AUSTIN] Hey, now hold on. I didn't have to bring this bone back to you, boy. I persuaded Saul here that you were the right man for the job. You don't have to go throwin' up favors in my face.

AUSTIN Favors! I'm the one who wrote the fuckin' outline! You can't even spell.

SAUL [to AUSTIN] Your brother told me about the situation with your father.
[Pause.]

AUSTIN What? [looks at LEE]

SAUL That's right. Now we have a clear-cut deal here, Austin. We have big studio money standing behind this thing. Just on the basis of your outline.

AUSTIN [to SAUL] What'd he tell you about my father?

SAUL Well—that he's destitute. He needs money.

LEE That's right. He does.

[AUSTIN shakes his head, stares at them both.]

AUSTIN [to LEE] And this little assignment is supposed to go toward the old man? A charity project? Is that what this is? Did you cook this up on the ninth green too?

SAUL It's a big slice, Austin.

AUSTIN [to LEE] I gave him money! I already gave him money. You know that. He drank it all up!

LEE This is a different deal here.

SAUL We can set up a trust for your father. A large sum of money. It can be doled out to him in parcels so he can't misuse it.

AUSTIN Yeah, and who's doing the doling?

SAUL Your brother volunteered.

[AUSTIN laughs.]

LEE That's right. I'll make sure he uses it for groceries.

AUSTIN [to SAUL] I'm not doing this script! I'm not writing this crap for you or anybody else. You can't blackmail me into it. You can't threaten me into it. There's no way I'm doing it. So just give it up. Both of you.

[Long pause.]

SAUL Well, that's it then. I mean this is an easy three hundred grand. Just for a first draft. It's incredible, Austin. We've got three different studios all trying to cut each other's throats to get this material. In one morning. That's how hot it is.

AUSTIN Yeah, well you can afford to give me a percentage on the outline then. And you better get the genius here an agent before he gets burned.

LEE Saul's gonna' be my agent. Isn't that right, Saul?

SAUL That's right, [to AUSTIN] Your brother has really got something, Austin. I've been around too long not to recognize it. Raw talent.

AUSTIN He's got a lotta' balls is what he's got. He's taking you right down the river.

SAUL Three hundred thousand, Austin. Just for a first draft. Now you've never been offered that kind of money before.

AUSTIN I'm not writing it.

[Pause.]

SAUL I see. Well—

LEE We'll just go to another writer then. Right, Saul? Just hire us somebody with some enthusiasm. Somebody who can recognize the value of a good story.

SAUL I'm sorry about this, Austin.

AUSTIN Yeah.

SAUL I mean I was hoping we could continue both things but now I don't see how it's possible.

AUSTIN So you're dropping my idea altogether. Is that it? Just trade horses in midstream? After all these months of meetings.

SAUL I wish there was another way.

AUSTIN I've got everything riding on this, Saul. You know that. It's my only shot. If this falls through—

SAUL I have to go with what my instincts tell me—

AUSTIN Your instincts!

SAUL My gut reaction.

AUSTIN You lost! That's your gut reaction. You lost a gamble. Now you're trying to tell me you like his story? How could you possibly fall for that story? It's as phony as Hoppalong Cassidy.¹ What do you see in it? I'm curious.

SAUL It has the ring of truth, Austin.

AUSTIN [Laughs] Truth?

LEE It is true.

SAUL Something about the real West.

AUSTIN Why? Because it's got horses? Because it's got grown men acting like little boys?

SAUL Something about the land. Your brother is speaking from experience.

AUSTIN So am I!

SAUL But nobody's interested in love these days, Austin. Let's face it.

LEE That's right.

1. Popular television Western in the early 1950s, based on the central character from motion pictures, mostly serials, produced between 1935 and 1948.

AUSTIN [*to SAUL*] He's been camped out on the desert for three months. Talking to cactus. What's he know about what people wanna' see on the screen! I drive on the freeway every day. I swallow the smog. I watch the news in color. I shop in the Safeway.² I'm the one who's in touch! Not him!

SAUL I have to go now, Austin.

[*SAUL starts to leave.*]

AUSTIN There's no such thing as the West anymore! It's a dead issue! It's dried up, Saul, and so are you.

[*SAUL stops and turns to AUSTIN.*]

SAUL Maybe you're right. But I have to take the gamble, don't I?

AUSTIN You're a fool to do this, Saul.

SAUL I've always gone on my hunches. Always. And I've never been wrong.
[*to LEE*] I'll talk to you tomorrow, Lee.

LEE All right, Mr. Kimmer.

SAUL Maybe we could have some lunch.

LEE Fine with me. [*smiles at AUSTIN*]

SAUL I'll give you a ring.

[*SAUL exits, lights to black as brothers look at each other from a distance.*]

SCENE 7

Night. Coyotes, crickets, sound of typewriter in dark, candlelight up on LEE at typewriter struggling to type with one finger system, AUSTIN sits sprawled out on kitchen floor with whiskey bottle, drunk.

AUSTIN [*singing, from floor*]

“Red sails in the sunset
Way out on the blue
Please carry my loved one
Home safely to me

Red sails in the sunset—”³

LEE [*slams fist on table*] Hey! Knock it off will ya! I'm tryin' to concentrate here.

AUSTIN [*laughs*] You're tryin' to concentrate?

LEE Yeah. That's right.

AUSTIN Now you're tryin' to concentrate.

LEE Between you, the coyotes and the crickets a thought don't have much of a chance.

AUSTIN “Between me, the coyotes and the crickets.” What a great title.

LEE I don't need a title! I need a thought.

AUSTIN [*laughs*] A thought! Here's a thought for ya'—

LEE I'm not askin' fer yer thoughts! I got my own. I can do this thing on my own.

AUSTIN You're going to write an entire script on your own?

LEE That's right.

[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN Here's a thought. Saul Kimmer—

2. Major grocery store chain, mainly in California and throughout the West and Midwest.

3. From “Red Sails in the Sunset,” American song

by Hugh Williams and Jimmy Kennedy published in 1935 and popularly revived in 1951 by Nat King Cole.

LEE Shut up will ya'!

AUSTIN He thinks we're the same person.

LEE Don't get cute.

AUSTIN He does! He's lost his mind. Poor old Saul. [*giggles*] Thinks we're one and the same.

LEE Why don't you ease up on that champagne.

AUSTIN [*holding up bottle*] This isn't champagne anymore. We went through the champagne a long time ago. This is serious stuff. The days of champagne are long gone.

LEE Well, go outside and drink it.

AUSTIN I'm enjoying your company, Lee. For the first time since your arrival I am finally enjoying your company. And now you want me to go outside and drink alone?

LEE That's right.

[*LEE reads through paper in typewriter, makes an erasure.*]

AUSTIN You think you'll make more progress if you're alone? You might drive yourself crazy.

LEE I could have this thing done in a night if I had a little silence.

AUSTIN Well you'd still have the crickets to contend with. The coyotes. The sounds of the Police Helicopters prowling above the neighborhood. Slashing their searchlights down through the streets. Hunting for the likes of you.

LEE I'm a screenwriter now! I'm legitimate.

AUSTIN [*laughing*] A screenwriter!

LEE That's right. I'm on salary. That's more'n I can say for you. I got an advance coming.

AUSTIN This is true. This is very true. An advance. [*pause*] Well, maybe I oughta' go out and try my hand at your trade. Since you're doing so good at mine.

LEE Ha!

[*LEE attempts to type some more but gets the ribbon tangled up, starts trying to re-thread it as they continue talking.*]

AUSTIN Well why not? You don't think I've got what it takes to sneak into people's houses and steal their T.V.s?

LEE You couldn't steal a toaster without losin' yer lunch.

[*AUSTIN stands with a struggle, supports himself by the sink.*]

AUSTIN You don't think I could sneak into somebody's house and steal a toaster?

LEE Go take a shower or somethin' will ya!

[*LEE gets more tangled up with the typewriter ribbon, pulling it out of the machine as though it was fishing line.*]

AUSTIN You really don't think I could steal a crumby toaster? How much you wanna' bet I can't steal a toaster! How much? Go ahead! You're a gambler aren't you? Tell me how much yer willing to put on the line. Some part of your big advance? Oh, you haven't got that yet have you. I forgot.

LEE All right. I'll bet you your car that you can't steal a toaster without gettin' busted.

AUSTIN You already got my car!

LEE Okay, your house then.

AUSTIN What're you gonna' give me! I'm not talkin' about my house and my car, I'm talkin' about what are you gonna' give me. You don't have nothin' to give me.

LEE I'll give you—shared screen credit. How 'bout that? I'll have it put in the contract that this was written by the both of us.

AUSTIN I don't want my name on that piece of shit! I want something of value. You got anything of value? You got any tidbits from the desert? Any Rattlesnake bones? I'm not a greedy man. Any little personal treasure will suffice.

LEE I'm gonna' just kick yer ass out in a minute.

AUSTIN Oh, so now you're gonna' kick me out! Now I'm the intruder. I'm the one who's invading your precious privacy.

LEE I'm trying to do some screenwriting here!!

[LEE stands, picks up typewriter, slams it down hard on table, pause, silence except for crickets.]

AUSTIN Well, you got everything you need. You got plenty a' coffee? Groceries. You got a car. A contract. [pause] Might need a new typewriter ribbon but other than that you're pretty well fixed. I'll just leave ya' alone for a while.

[AUSTIN tries to steady himself to leave, LEE makes a move toward him.]

LEE Where you goin'?

AUSTIN Don't worry about me. I'm not the one to worry about.

[AUSTIN weaves toward exit, stops.]

LEE What're you gonna' do? Just go wander out into the night?

AUSTIN I'm gonna' make a little tour.

LEE Why don't ya' just go to bed for Christ's sake. Yer makin' me sick.

AUSTIN I can take care a' myself. Don't worry about me.

[AUSTIN weaves badly in another attempt to exit, he crashes to the floor, LEE goes to him but remains standing.]

LEE You want me to call your wife for ya' or something?

AUSTIN [from floor] My wife?

LEE Yeah. I mean maybe she can help ya' out. Talk to ya' or somethin'.

AUSTIN [struggles to stand again] She's five hundred miles away. North. North of here. Up in the North country where things are calm. I don't need any help. I'm gonna' go outside and I'm gonna' steal a toaster. I'm gonna' steal some other stuff too. I might even commit bigger crimes. Bigger than you ever dreamed of. Crimes beyond the imagination!

[AUSTIN manages to get himself vertical, tries to head for exit again.]

LEE Just hang on a minute, Austin.

AUSTIN Why? What for? You don't need my help, right? You got a handle on the project. Besides, I'm lookin' forward to the smell of the night. The bushes. Orange blossoms. Dust in the driveways. Rain bird sprinklers. Lights in people's houses. You're right about the lights, Lee. Everybody else is livin' the life. Indoors. Safe. This is a Paradise down here. You know that? We're livin' in a Paradise. We've forgotten about that.

LEE You sound just like the old man now.

AUSTIN Yeah, well we all sound alike when we're sloshed. We just sorta' echo each other.

LEE Maybe if we could work on this together we could bring him back out here. Get him settled down some place.

[AUSTIN *turns violently toward LEE, takes a swing at him, misses and crashes to the floor again, LEE stays standing.*]

AUSTIN I don't want him out here! I've had it with him! I went all the way out there! I went out of my way. I gave him money and all he did was play Al Jolson⁴ records and spit at me! I gave him money!

[*Pause.*]

LEE Just help me a little with the characters, all right? You know how to do it, Austin.

AUSTIN [*on floor, laughs*] The characters!

LEE Yeah. You know. The way they talk and stuff. I can hear it in my head but I can't get it down on paper.

AUSTIN What characters?

LEE The guys. The guys in the story.

AUSTIN Those aren't characters.

LEE Whatever you call 'em then. I need to write somethin' out.

AUSTIN Those are illusions of characters.

LEE I don't give a damn what ya' call 'em! You know what I'm talkin' about!

AUSTIN Those are fantasies of a long lost boyhood.

LEE I gotta' write somethin' out on paper!!

[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN What for? Saul's gonna' get you a fancy screenwriter isn't he?

LEE I wanna' do it myself!

AUSTIN Then do it! Yer on your own now, old buddy. You bulldogged yer way into contention. Now you gotta' carry it through.

LEE I will but I need some advice. Just a couple a' things. Come on, Austin. Just help me get 'em talkin' right. It won't take much.

AUSTIN Oh, now you're having a little doubt huh? What happened? The pressure's on, boy. This is it. You gotta' come up with it now. You don't come up with a winner on your first time out they just cut your head off. They don't give you a second chance ya' know.

LEE I got a good story! I know it's a good story. I just need a little help is all.

AUSTIN Not from me. Not from yer little old brother. I'm retired.

LEE You could save this thing for me, Austin. I'd give ya' half the money.

I would. I only need half anyway. With this kinda' money I could be a long time down the road. I'd never bother ya' again. I promise. You'd never even see me again.

AUSTIN [*still on floor*] You'd disappear?

LEE I would for sure.

AUSTIN Where would you disappear to?

LEE That don't matter. I got plenty a' places.

AUSTIN Nobody can disappear. The old man tried that. Look where it got him. He lost his teeth.

LEE He never had any money.

AUSTIN I don't mean that. I mean his teeth! His real teeth. First he lost his real teeth, then he lost his false teeth. You never knew that did ya'?

He never confided in you.

LEE Nah, I never knew that.

4. American popular singer (1886–1950), depicted in blackface makeup on his record covers and in films; a purveyor of songs in the minstrel manner.

AUSTIN You wanna' drink?

[AUSTIN offers bottle to LEE, LEE takes it, sits down on kitchen floor with AUSTIN, they share the bottle.]

Yeah, he lost his real teeth one at a time. Woke up every morning with another tooth lying on the mattress. Finally, he decides he's gotta' get 'em all pulled out but he doesn't have any money. Middle of Arizona with no money and no insurance and every morning another tooth is lying on the mattress. [takes a drink] So what does he do?

LEE I dunno'. I never knew about that.

AUSTIN He begs the government. G.I. Bill⁵ or some damn thing. Some pension plan he remembers in the back of his head. And they send him out the money.

LEE They did?

[They keep trading the bottle between them, taking drinks.]

AUSTIN Yeah. They send him the money but it's not enough money. Costs a lot to have all yer teeth yanked. They charge by the individual tooth, ya' know. I mean one tooth isn't equal to another tooth. Some are more expensive. Like the big ones in the back—

LEE So what happened?

AUSTIN So he locates a Mexican dentist in Juarez⁶ who'll do the whole thing for a song. And he takes off hitchhiking to the border.

LEE Hitchhiking?

AUSTIN Yeah. So how long you think it takes him to get to the border? A man his age.

LEE I dunno.

AUSTIN Eight days it takes him. Eight days in the rain and the sun and every day he's droppin' teeth on the blacktop and nobody'll pick him up 'cause his mouth's full a' blood.

[Pause, they drink.]

So finally he stumbles into the dentist. Dentist takes all his money and all his teeth. And there he is, in Mexico, with his gums sewed up and his pockets empty.

[Long silence, AUSTIN drinks.]

LEE That's it?

AUSTIN Then I go out to see him, see. I go out there and I take him out for a nice Chinese dinner. But he doesn't eat. All he wants to do is drink Martinis outa' plastic cups. And he takes his teeth out and lays 'em on the table 'cause he can't stand the feel of 'em. And we ask the waitress for one a' those doggie bags to take the Chop Suey home in. So he drops his teeth in the doggie bag along with the Chop Suey. And then we go out to hit all the bars up and down the highway. Says he wants to introduce me to all his buddies. And in one a' those bars, in one a' those bars up and down the highway, he left that doggie bag with his teeth laying in the Chop Suey.

LEE You never found it?

AUSTIN We went back but we never did find it. [pause] Now that's a true story. True to life.

[They drink as lights fade to black.]

5. Post-World War II legislation according housing and educational benefits to military veterans.

6. Mexican city immediately across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas.

SCENE 8

Very early morning, between night and day. No crickets, coyotes yapping feverishly in distance before light comes up, a small fire blazes up in the dark from alcove area, sound of LEE smashing typewriter with a golf club, lights coming up, LEE seen smashing typewriter methodically then dropping pages of his script into a burning bowl set on the floor of alcove, flames leap up, AUSTIN has a whole bunch of stolen toasters lined up on the sink counter along with LEE's stolen T.V., the toasters are of a wide variety of models, mostly chrome, AUSTIN goes up and down the line of toasters, breathing on them and polishing them with a dish towel, both men are drunk, empty whiskey bottles and beer cans litter floor of kitchen, they share a half empty bottle on one of the chairs in the alcove, LEE keeps periodically taking deliberate ax-chops at the typewriter using a nine-iron as AUSTIN speaks, all of their mother's house plants are dead and drooping.

AUSTIN [*polishing toasters*] There's gonna' be a general lack of toast in the neighborhood this morning. Many, many unhappy, bewildered breakfast faces. I guess it's best not to even think of the victims. Not to even entertain it. Is that the right psychology?

LEE [*pause*] What?

AUSTIN Is that the correct criminal psychology? Not to think of the victims?

LEE What victims?

[*LEE takes another swipe at typewriter with nine-iron, adds pages to the fire.*]

AUSTIN The victims of crime. Of breaking and entering. I mean is it a prerequisite for a criminal not to have a conscience?

LEE Ask a criminal.

[*Pause, LEE stares at AUSTIN.*]

What're you gonna' do with all those toasters? That's the dumbest thing I ever saw in my life.

AUSTIN I've got hundreds of dollars worth of household appliances here. You may not realize that.

LEE Yeah, and how many hundreds of dollars did you walk right past?

AUSTIN It was toasters you challenged me to. Only toasters. I ignored every other temptation.

LEE I never challenged you! That's no challenge. Anybody can steal a toaster.

[*LEE smashes typewriter again.*]

AUSTIN You don't have to take it out on my typewriter ya' know. It's not the machine's fault that you can't write. It's a sin to do that to a good machine.

LEE A sin?

AUSTIN When you consider all the writers who never even had a machine. Who would have given an eyeball for a good typewriter. Any typewriter.

[*LEE smashes typewriter again.*]

AUSTIN [*polishing toaster*] All the ones who wrote on matchbook covers. Paper bags. Toilet paper. Who had their writing destroyed by their jailers. Who persisted beyond all odds. Those writers would find it hard to understand your actions.

[LEE comes down on typewriter with one final crushing blow of the nine-iron then collapses in one of the chairs, takes a drink from bottle, pause.]

AUSTIN [after pause] Not to mention demolishing a perfectly good golf club. What about all the struggling golfers? What about Lee Trevino?⁷ What do you think he would've said when he was batting balls around with broomsticks at the age of nine. Impoverished.

[Pause.]

LEE What time is it anyway?

AUSTIN No idea. Time stands still when you're havin' fun.

LEE Is it too late to call a woman? You know any women?

AUSTIN I'm a married man.

LEE I mean a local woman.

[AUSTIN looks out at light through window above sink.]

AUSTIN It's either too late or too early. You're the nature enthusiast. Can't you tell the time by the light in the sky? Orient yourself around the North Star or something?

LEE I can't tell anything.

AUSTIN Maybe you need a little breakfast. Some toast! How 'bout some toast?

[AUSTIN goes to cupboard, pulls out loaf of bread and starts dropping slices into every toaster, LEE stays sitting, drinks, watches AUSTIN.]

LEE I don't need toast. I need a woman.

AUSTIN A woman isn't the answer. Never was.

LEE I'm not talkin' about permanent. I'm talkin' about temporary.

AUSTIN [putting toast in toasters] We'll just test the merits of these little demons. See which brands have a tendency to burn. See which one can produce a perfectly golden piece of fluffy toast.

LEE How much gas you got in yer car?

AUSTIN I haven't driven my car for days now. So I haven't had an opportunity to look at the gas gauge.

LEE Take a guess. You think there's enough to get me to Bakersfield?⁸

AUSTIN Bakersfield? What's in Bakersfield?

LEE Just never mind what's in Bakersfield! You think there's enough god-damn gas in the car!

AUSTIN Sure.

LEE Sure. You could care less, right. Let me run outa' gas on the Grapevine.⁹ You could give a shit.

AUSTIN I'd say there was enough gas to get you just about anywhere, Lee. With your determination and guts.

LEE What the hell time is it anyway?

[LEE pulls out his wallet, starts going through dozens of small pieces of paper with phone numbers written on them, drops some on the floor, drops others in the fire.]

AUSTIN Very early. This is the time of morning when the coyotes kill people's cocker spaniels. Did you hear them? That's what they were doing out there. Luring innocent pets away from their homes.

7. American golf champion (b. 1939).

8. City in Kern County, California, about 115 miles north-northwest of Los Angeles.

9. Steep, winding section of the Ridge Route, the highway linking Los Angeles and Bakersfield.

LEE [*searching through his papers*] What's the area code for Bakersfield? You know?

AUSTIN You could always call the operator.

LEE I can't stand that voice they give ya'.

AUSTIN What voice?

LEE That voice that warns you that if you'd only tried harder to find the number in the phone book you wouldn't have to be calling the operator to begin with.

[LEE gets up, holding a slip of paper from his wallet, stumbles toward phone on wall, yanks receiver, starts dialing.]

AUSTIN Well I don't understand why you'd want to talk to anybody else anyway. I mean you can talk to me. I'm your brother.

LEE [*dialing*] I wanna' talk to a woman. I haven't heard a woman's voice in a long time.

AUSTIN Not since the Botanist?

LEE What?

AUSTIN Nothing. [*starts singing as he tends toast*]

"Red sails in the sunset
Way out on the blue
Please carry my loved one
Home safely to me"

LEE Hey, knock it off will ya'! This is long distance here.

AUSTIN Bakersfield?

LEE Yeah, Bakersfield. It's Kern County.

AUSTIN Well, what County are *we* in?

LEE You better get yourself a 7-Up, boy.

AUSTIN One County's as good as another.

[AUSTIN hums "Red Sails" softly as LEE talks on phone.]

LEE [*to phone*] Yeah, operator look—first off I wanna' know the area code for Bakersfield. Right. Bakersfield! Okay. Good. Now I wanna' know if you can help me track somebody down. [*pause*] No, no I mean a phone number. Just a phone number. Okay. [*holds a piece of paper up and reads it*] Okay, the name is Melly Ferguson. Melly. [*pause*] I dunno'. Melly. Maybe. Yeah. Maybe Melanie. Yeah. Melanie Ferguson. Okay. [*pause*] What? I can't hear ya' so good. Sounds like yer under the ocean. [*pause*] You got ten Melanie Fergusons? How could that be? Ten Melanie Fergusons in Bakersfield? Well gimme all of 'em then. [*pause*] What d'ya' mean? Gimme all ten Melanie Fergusons! That's right. Just a second. [*to AUSTIN*] Gimme a pen.

AUSTIN I don't have a pen.

LEE Gimme a pencil then!

AUSTIN I don't have a pencil.

LEE [*to phone*] Just a second, operator. [*to AUSTIN*] Yer a writer and ya' don't have a pen or a pencil!

AUSTIN I'm not a writer. You're a writer.

LEE I'm on the phone here! Get me a pen or a pencil.

AUSTIN I gotta' watch the toast.

LEE [*to phone*] Hang on a second, operator.

[LEE lets the phone drop then starts pulling all the drawers in the kitchen out on the floor and dumping the contents, searching for a pencil, AUSTIN watches him casually.]

LEE [*crashing through drawers, throwing contents around kitchen*] This is the last time I try to live with people, boy! I can't believe it. Here I am! Here I am again in a desperate situation! This would never happen out on the desert. I would never be in this kinda' situation out on the desert. Isn't there a pen or a pencil in this house! Who lives in this house anyway!

AUSTIN Our mother.

LEE How come she don't have a pen or a pencil! She's a social person isn't she? Doesn't she have to make shopping lists? She's gotta' have a pencil. [*finds a pencil*] Aaha! [*he rushes back to phone, picks up receiver*] All right operator. Operator? Hey! Operator! Goddamnit!

[*LEE rips the phone off the wall and throws it down, goes back to chair and falls into it, drinks, long pause.*]

AUSTIN She hung up?

LEE Yeah, she hung up. I knew she was gonna' hang up. I could hear it in her voice.

[*LEE starts going through his slips of paper again.*]

AUSTIN Well, you're probably better off staying here with me anyway. I'll take care of you.

LEE I don't need takin' care of! Not by you anyway.

AUSTIN Toast is almost ready.

[*AUSTIN starts buttering all the toast as it pops up.*]

LEE I don't want any toast!

[*Long pause.*]

AUSTIN You gotta' eat something. Can't just drink. How long have we been drinking, anyway?

LEE [*looking through slips of paper*] Maybe it was Fresno.¹ What's the area code for Fresno? How could I have lost that number! She was beautiful.

[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN Why don't you just forget about that, Lee. Forget about the woman.

LEE She had green eyes. You know what green eyes do to me?

AUSTIN I know but you're not gonna' get it on with her now anyway. It's dawn already. She's in Bakersfield for Christ's sake.

[*Long pause, LEE considers the situation.*]

LEE Yeah, [*looks at windows*] It's dawn?

AUSTIN Let's just have some toast and—

LEE What is this bullshit with the toast anyway! You make it sound like salvation or something. I don't want any goddamn toast! How many times I gotta' tell ya'! [*LEE gets up, crosses upstage to windows in alcove, looks out, AUSTIN butters toast*]

AUSTIN Well it is like salvation sort of. I mean the smell. I love the smell of toast. And the sun's coming up. It makes me feel like anything's possible. Ya' know?

LEE [*back to AUSTIN, facing windows upstage*] So go to church why don't ya'.

AUSTIN Like a beginning. I love beginnings.

LEE Oh yeah. I've always been kinda' partial to endings myself.

AUSTIN What if I come with you, Lee?

LEE [*pause as LEE turns toward AUSTIN*] What?

AUSTIN What if I come with you out to the desert?

LEE Are you kiddin'?

1. City in central California.

AUSTIN No. I'd just like to see what it's like.

LEE You wouldn't last a day out there pal.

AUSTIN That's what you said about the toasters. You said I couldn't steal a toaster either.

LEE A toaster's got nothin' to do with the desert.

AUSTIN I could make it, Lee. I'm not that helpless. I can cook.

LEE Cook?

AUSTIN I can.

LEE So what! You can cook. Toast.

AUSTIN I can make fires. I know how to get fresh water from condensation.

[AUSTIN stacks buttered toast up in a tall stack on plate.]

[LEE slams table.]

LEE It's not somethin' you learn out of a Boy Scout handbook!

AUSTIN Well how do you learn it then! How're you supposed to learn it!

[Pause.]

LEE Ya' just learn it, that's all. Ya' learn it 'cause ya' have to learn it. You don't *have* to learn it.

AUSTIN You could teach me.

LEE [stands] What're you, crazy or somethin'? You went to college. Here, you are down here, rollin' in bucks. Floatin' up and down in elevators. And you wanna' learn how to live on the desert!

AUSTIN I do, Lee. I really do. There's nothin' down here for me. There never was. When we were kids here it was different. There was a life here then. But now—I keep comin' down here thinkin' it's the fifties or somethin'. I keep finding myself getting off the freeway at familiar landmarks that turn out to be unfamiliar. On the way to appointments. Wandering down streets I thought I recognized that turn out to be replicas of streets I remember. Streets I misremember. Streets I can't tell if I lived on or saw in a postcard. Fields that don't even exist anymore.

LEE There's no point cryin' about that now.

AUSTIN There's nothin' real down here, Lee! Least of all me!

LEE Well I can't save you from that!

AUSTIN You can let me come with you.

LEE No dice, pal.

AUSTIN You could let me come with you, Lee!

LEE Hey, do you actually think I chose to live out in the middle a' nowhere? Do ya'? Ya' think it's some kinda' philosophical decision I took or somethin'? I'm livin' out there 'cause I can't make it here! And yer bitchin' to me about all yer success!

AUSTIN I'd cash it all in in a second. That's the truth.

LEE [Pause, shakes his head] I can't believe this.

AUSTIN Let me go with you.

LEE Stop sayin' that will ya'! Yer worse than a dog.

[AUSTIN offers out the plate of neatly stacked toast to LEE.]

AUSTIN You want some toast?

[LEE suddenly explodes and knocks the plate out of AUSTIN's hand, toast goes flying, long frozen moment where it appears LEE might go all the way this time when AUSTIN breaks it by slowly lowering himself to his knees and begins gathering the scattered toast from the floor and stacking

it back on the plate, LEE begins to circle AUSTIN in a slow, predatory way, crushing pieces of toast in his wake, no words for a while, AUSTIN keeps gathering toast, even the crushed pieces.]

LEE Tell ya' what I'll do, little brother. I might just consider makin' you a deal. Little trade, [AUSTIN continues gathering toast as LEE circles him through this] You write me up this screenplay thing just like I tell ya'. I mean you can use all yer usual tricks and stuff. Yer fancy language. Yer artistic hocus pocus. But ya' gotta' write everything like I say. Every move. Every time they run outa' gas, they run outa' gas. Every time they wanna' jump on a horse, they do just that. If they wanna' stay in Texas, by God they'll stay in Texas! [Keeps circling] And you finish the whole thing up for me. Top to bottom. And you put my name on it. And I own all the rights. And every dime goes in my pocket. You do that and I'll sure enough take ya' with me to the desert, [LEE stops, pause, looks down at AUSTIN] How's that sound?

[Pause as AUSTIN stands slowly holding plate of demolished toast, their faces are very close, pause.]

AUSTIN It's a deal.

[LEE stares straight into AUSTIN's eyes, then he slowly takes a piece of toast off the plate, raises it to his mouth and takes a huge crushing bite never taking his eyes off AUSTIN's, as LEE crunches into the toast the lights black out.]

SCENE 9

Middy. No sound, blazing heat, the stage is ravaged; bottles, toasters, smashed typewriter, ripped out telephone, etc. All the debris from previous scene is now starkly visible in intense yellow light, the effect should be like a desert junkyard at high noon, the coolness of the preceding scenes is totally obliterated. AUSTIN is seated at table in alcove, shirt open, pouring with sweat, hunched over a writing notebook, scribbling notes desperately with a ballpoint pen. LEE with no shirt, beer in hand, sweat pouring down his chest, is walking a slow circle around the table, picking his way through the objects, sometimes kicking them aside.

LEE *[as he walks]* All right, read it back to me. Read it back to me!

AUSTIN *[scribbling at top speed]* Just a second.

LEE Come on, come on! Just read what ya' got.

AUSTIN I can't keep up! It's not the same as if I had a typewriter.

LEE Just read what we got so far. Forget about the rest.

AUSTIN All right. Let's see—okay—*[wipes sweat from his face, reads as LEE circles]* Luke says uh—

LEE Luke?

AUSTIN Yeah.

LEE His name's Luke? All right, all right—we can change the names later. What's he say? Come on, come on.

AUSTIN He says uh—*[reading]* "I told ya' you were a fool to follow me in here. I know this prairie like the back a' my hand."

LEE No, no, no! That's not what I said. I never said that.

AUSTIN That's what I wrote.

LEE It's not what I said. I never said "like the back a' my hand." That's stupid. That's one a' those—whadya' call it? Whadya' call that?

AUSTIN What?

LEE Whadya' call it when somethin's been said a thousand times before.

Whadya' call that?

AUSTIN Um—a cliché?

LEE Yeah. That's right. Cliché. That's what that is. A cliché. "The back a' my hand." That's stupid.

AUSTIN That's what you said.

LEE I never said that! And even if I did, that's where yer supposed to come in. That's where yer supposed to change it to somethin' better.

AUSTIN Well how am I supposed to do that and write down what you say at the same time?

LEE Ya'just do, that's all! You hear a stupid line you change it. That's yer job.

AUSTIN All right, [*makes more notes*]

LEE What're you changin' it to?

AUSTIN I'm not changing it. I'm just trying to catch up.

LEE Well change it! We gotta' change that, we can't leave that in there like that. ". . . the back a' my hand." That's dumb.

AUSTIN [*stops writing, sits back*] All right.

LEE [*spacing*] So what'll we change it to?

AUSTIN Um—How 'bout—"I'm on intimate terms with this prairie."

LEE [*to himself considering line as he walks*] "I'm on intimate terms with this prairie." Intimate terms, intimate terms. Intimate—that means like uh—sexual right?

AUSTIN Well—yeah—or—

LEE He's on sexual terms with the prairie? How dya' figure that?

AUSTIN Well it doesn't necessarily have to mean sexual.

LEE What's it mean then?

AUSTIN It means uh—close—personal—

LEE All right. How's it sound? Put it into the uh—the line there. Read it back. Let's see how it sounds. [*to himself*]. "Intimate terms."

AUSTIN [*scribbles in notebook*] Okay. It'd go something like this: [*reads*] "I told ya' you were a fool to follow me in here. I'm on intimate terms with this prairie."

LEE That's good. I like that. That's real good.

AUSTIN You do?

LEE Yeah. Don't you?

AUSTIN Sure.

LEE Sounds original now. "Intimate terms." That's good. Okay. Now we're cookin! That has a real ring to it.

[*AUSTIN makes more notes, LEE walks around, pours beer on his arms and rubs it over his chest feeling good about the new progress, as he does this MOM enters unobtrusively down left with her luggage, she stops and stares at the scene still holding luggage as the two men continue, unaware of her presence, AUSTIN absorbed in his writing, LEE cooling himself off with beer.*]

LEE [*continues*] "He's on intimate terms with this prairie." Sounds real mysterious and kinda' threatening at the same time.

AUSTIN [*writing rapidly*] Good.

LEE Now—[LEE turns and suddenly sees MOM, he stares at her for a while, she stares back, AUSTIN keeps writing feverishly, not noticing, LEE walks slowly over to MOM and takes a closer look, long pause.]

LEE Mom?

[AUSTIN looks up suddenly from his writing, sees MOM, stands quickly, long pause, MOM surveys the damage.]

AUSTIN Mom. What're you doing back?

MOM I'm back.

LEE Here, lemme take those for ya.

[LEE sets beer on counter then takes both her bags but doesn't know where to set them down in the sea of junk so he just keeps holding them.]

AUSTIN I wasn't expecting you back so soon. I thought uh—How was Alaska?

MOM Fine.

LEE See any igloos?

MOM No. Just glaciers.

AUSTIN Cold huh?

MOM What?

AUSTIN It must've been cold up there?

MOM Not really.

LEE Musta' been colder than this here. I mean we're havin' a real scorcher here.

MOM Oh? [she looks at damage]

LEE Yeah. Must be in the hundreds.

AUSTIN You wanna' take your coat off, Mom?

MOM No. [pause, she surveys space] What happened in here?

AUSTIN Oh um—Me and Lee were just sort of celebrating and uh—

MOM Celebrating?

AUSTIN Yeah. Uh—Lee sold a screenplay. A story, I mean.

MOM Lee did?

AUSTIN Yeah.

MOM Not you?

AUSTIN No. Him.

MOM [to LEE] You sold a screenplay?

LEE Yeah. That's right. We're just sorta' finishing it up right now. That's what we're doing here.

AUSTIN Me and Lee are going out to the desert to live.

MOM You and Lee?

AUSTIN Yeah. I'm taking off with Lee.

MOM [she looks back and forth at each of them, pause] You gonna go live with your father?

AUSTIN No. We're going to a different desert Mom.

MOM I see. Well, you'll probably wind up on the same desert sooner or later. What're all these toasters doing here?

AUSTIN Well—we had kind of a contest.

MOM Contest?

LEE Yeah.

AUSTIN Lee won.

MOM Did you win a lot of money, Lee?

LEE Well not yet. It's comin' in any day now.

MOM [to LEE] What happened to your shirt?

LEE Oh. I was sweatin' like a pig and I took it off.

[AUSTIN *grabs LEE's shirt off the table and tosses it to him, LEE sets down suitcases and puts his shirt on.*]

MOM Well it's one hell of a mess in here isn't it?

AUSTIN Yeah, I'll clean it up for you, Mom. I just didn't know you were coming back so soon.

MOM I didn't either.

AUSTIN What happened?

MOM Nothing. I just started missing all my plants.

[*She notices dead plants.*]

AUSTIN Oh.

MOM Oh, they're all dead aren't they, [*she crosses toward them, examines them closely*] You didn't get a chance to water I guess.

AUSTIN I was doing it and then Lee came and—

LEE Yeah I just distracted him a whole lot here, Mom. It's not his fault.

[*Pause, as MOM stares at plants.*]

MOM Oh well, one less thing to take care of I guess, [*turns toward brothers*] Oh, that reminds me—You boys will probably never guess who's in town. Try and guess.

[*Long pause, brothers stare at her.*]

AUSTIN Whadya' mean, Mom?

MOM Take a guess. Somebody very important has come to town. I read it, coming down on the Greyhound.

LEE Somebody very important?

MOM See if you can guess. You'll never guess.

AUSTIN Mom—we're trying to uh—[*points to writing pad*]

MOM Picasso.¹ [*pause*] Picasso's in town. Isn't that incredible? Right now.

[*Pause.*]

AUSTIN Picasso's dead, Mom.

MOM No, he's not dead. He's visiting the museum. I read it on the bus.

We have to go down there and see him.

AUSTIN Mom—

MOM This is the chance of a lifetime. Can you imagine? We could all go down and meet him. All three of us.

LEE Uh—I don't think I'm really up fer meetin' anybody right now. I'm uh—What's his name?

MOM Picasso! Picasso! You've never heard of Picasso? Austin, you've heard of Picasso.

AUSTIN Mom, we're not going to have time.

MOM It won't take long. We'll just hop in the car and go down there. An opportunity like this doesn't come along every day.

AUSTIN We're gonna' be leavin' here, Mom!

[*Pause.*]

MOM Oh.

LEE Yeah.

[*Pause.*]

1. Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Spanish-born modernist painter.

MOM You're both leaving?

LEE [*looks at AUSTIN*] Well we were thinkin' about that before but now I—

AUSTIN No, we are! We're both leaving. We've got it all planned.

MOM [*to AUSTIN*] Well you can't leave. You have a family.

AUSTIN I'm leaving. I'm getting out of here.

LEE [*to MOM*] I don't really think Austin's cut out for the desert do you?

MOM No. He's not.

AUSTIN I'm going with you, Lee!

MOM He's too thin.

LEE Yeah, he'd just burn up out there.

AUSTIN [*to LEE*] We just gotta' finish this screenplay and then we're gonna' take off. That's the plan. That's what you said. Come on, let's get back to work, Lee.

LEE I can't work under these conditions here. It's too hot.

AUSTIN Then we'll do it on the desert.

LEE Don't be tellin' me what we're gonna do!

MOM Don't shout in the house.

LEE We're just gonna' have to postpone the whole deal.

AUSTIN I can't postpone it! It's gone past postponing! I'm doing everything you said. I'm writing down exactly what you tell me.

LEE Yeah, but you were right all along see. It is a dumb story. "Two lame-brains chasin' each other across Texas." That's what you said, right?

AUSTIN I never said that.

[*LEE sneers in AUSTIN's face then turns to MOM.*]

LEE I'm gonna' just borrow some a' your antiques, Mom. You don't mind do ya'? Just a few plates and things. Silverware.

[*LEE starts going through all the cupboards in kitchen pulling out plates and stacking them on counter as MOM and AUSTIN watch.*]

MOM You don't have any utensils on the desert?

LEE Nah, I'm fresh out.

AUSTIN [*to LEE*] What're you doing?

MOM Well some of those are very old. Bone China.

LEE I'm tired of eatin' outa' my bare hands, ya' know. It's not civilized.

AUSTIN [*to LEE*] What're you doing? We made a deal!

MOM Couldn't you borrow the plastic ones instead? I have plenty of plastic ones.

LEE [*as he stacks plates*] It's not the same. Plastic's not the same at all. What I need is somethin' authentic. Somethin' to keep me in touch. It's easy to get outa' touch out there. Don't worry I'll get 'em back to ya'.

[*AUSTIN rushes up to LEE, grabs him by shoulders.*]

AUSTIN You can't just drop the whole thing, Lee!

[*LEE turns, pushes AUSTIN in the chest knocking him backwards into the alcove, MOM watches numbly, LEE returns to collecting the plates, silverware, etc.*]

MOM You boys shouldn't fight in the house. Go outside and fight.

LEE I'm not fightin'. I'm leavin'.

MOM There's been enough damage done already.

LEE [*his back to AUSTIN and MOM, stacking dishes on counter*] I'm clearin' outa' here once and for all. All this town does is drive a man insane. Look what it's done to Austin there. I'm not lettin' that happen to me.

Sell myself down the river. No sir. I'd rather be a hundred miles from nowhere than let that happen to me.

[During this AUSTIN has picked up the ripped-out phone from the floor and wrapped the cord tightly around both his hands, he lunges at LEE whose back is still to him, wraps the cord around LEE's neck, plants a foot in LEE's back and pulls back on the cord, tightening it, LEE chokes desperately, can't speak and can't reach AUSTIN with his arms, AUSTIN keeps applying pressure on LEE's back with his foot, bending him into the sink, MOM watches.]

AUSTIN *[tightening cord]* You're not goin' anywhere! You're not takin' anything with you. You're not takin' my car! You're not takin' the dishes! You're not takin' anything! You're stayin' right here!

MOM You'll have to stop fighting in the house. There's plenty of room outside to fight. You've got the whole outdoors to fight in.

[LEE tries to tear himself away, he crashes across the stage like an enraged bull dragging AUSTIN with him, he snorts and bellows but AUSTIN hangs on and manages to keep clear of LEE's attempts to grab him, they crash into the table, to the floor, LEE is face down thrashing wildly and choking, AUSTIN pulls cord tighter, stands with one foot planted on LEE's back and the cord stretched taut.]

AUSTIN *[holding cord]* Gimme back my keys, Lee! Take the keys out! Take 'em out!

[LEE desperately tries to dig in his pockets, searching for the car keys, MOM moves closer.]

MOM *[calmly to AUSTIN.]* You're not killing him are you?

AUSTIN I don't know. I don't know if I'm killing him. I'm stopping him. That's all. I'm just stopping him.

[LEE thrashes but AUSTIN is relentless.]

MOM You oughta' let him breathe a little bit.

AUSTIN Throw the keys out, Lee!

[LEE finally gets keys out and throws them on floor but out of AUSTIN's reach, AUSTIN keeps pressure on cord, pulling LEE's neck back, LEE gets one hand to the cord but can't relieve the pressure.]

Reach me those keys would ya', Mom.

MOM *[not moving]* Why are you doing this to him?

AUSTIN Reach me the keys!

MOM Not until you stop choking him.

AUSTIN I can't stop choking him! He'll kill me if I stop choking him!

MOM He won't kill you. He's your brother.

AUSTIN Just get me the keys would ya'!

[Pause MOM picks keys up off floor, hands them to AUSTIN.]

AUSTIN *[to MOM]* Thanks.

MOM Will you let him go now?

AUSTIN I don't know. He's not gonna' let me get outa' here.

MOM Well you can't kill him.

AUSTIN I can kill him! I can easily kill him. Right now. Right here. All I gotta' do is just tighten up. See? *[he tightens cord, LEE thrashes wildly, AUSTIN releases pressure a little, maintaining control]* Ya' see that?

MOM That's a savage thing to do.

AUSTIN Yeah well don't tell me I can't kill him because I can. I can just twist. I can just keep twisting. *[AUSTIN twists the cord tighter, LEE weakens, his breathing changes to a short rasp]*

MOM Austin!

[AUSTIN relieves pressure, LEE breathes easier but AUSTIN keeps him under control.]

AUSTIN [eyes on LEE, holding cord] I'm goin' to the desert. There's nothing stopping me. I'm going by myself to the desert.

[MOM moving toward her luggage.]

MOM Well, I'm going to go check into a motel. I can't stand this anymore.

AUSTIN Don't go yet!

[MOM pauses.]

MOM I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless.

AUSTIN I'll get everything fixed up for you, Mom. I promise. Just stay for a while.

MOM [picking up luggage] You're going to the desert.

AUSTIN Just wait!

[LEE thrashes, AUSTIN subdues him, MOM watches holding luggage, pause.]

MOM It was the worst feeling being up there. In Alaska. Staring out a window. I never felt so desperate before. That's why when I saw that article on Picasso I thought—

AUSTIN Stay here, Mom. This is where you live.

[She looks around the stage.]

MOM I don't recognize it at all.

[She exits with luggage, AUSTIN makes a move toward her but LEE starts to struggle and AUSTIN subdues him again with cord, pause.]

AUSTIN [holding cord] Lee? I'll make ya' a deal. You let me get outa' here.

Just let me get to my car. All right, Lee? Gimme a little headstart and I'll turn you loose. Just gimme a little headstart. All right?

[LEE makes no response, AUSTIN slowly releases tension cord, still nothing from LEE.]

AUSTIN Lee?

[LEE is motionless, AUSTIN very slowly begins to stand, still keeping a tenuous hold on the cord and his eyes riveted to LEE for any sign of movement, AUSTIN slowly drops the cord and stands, he stares down at LEE who appears to be dead.]

AUSTIN [whispers] Lee?

[Pause, AUSTIN considers, looks toward exit, back to LEE, then makes a small movement as if to leave. Instantly LEE is on his feet and moves toward exit, blocking AUSTIN's escape. They square off to each other, keeping a distance between them. Pause, a single coyote heard in distance, lights fade softly into moonlight, the figures of the brothers now appear to be caught in a vast desert-like landscape, they are very still but watchful for the next move, lights go slowly to black as the after-image of the brothers pulses in the dark, coyote fades.]

LOUISE GLÜCK

b. 1943

“I was born to a vocation: / to bear witness / to the great mysteries,” Louise Glück writes in “Parados.” Apparently, she took the vocation of poet seriously from a young age. As a child, asked by a friend’s mother to recite a poem she had written for an assignment, Glück readily complied: “My special triumph with this poem,” she recounts in her essay “The Education of the Poet,” “had involved a metrical inversion in the last line (not that I called it that), an omission of the final rhyme: to my ear it was exhilarating, a kind of explosion of form.” The friend’s mother congratulated her: “‘a very good poem,’ she said, ‘right until the last line,’ which she then proceeded to rearrange aloud into the order I had explicitly intended to violate. ‘You see,’ she told me, ‘all that was missing was that last rhyme.’ I was furious” (*Proofs and Theories*, 1994). In part this portrait of a superior, knowing child anticipates the oracular, prophetic tone we sometimes hear in Glück’s work. As with the declaration “I was born to a vocation,” the poet seems elevated from the ordinary world and set apart by her knowledge. At the same time Glück’s childhood memory suggests what she has elsewhere called “the mandarin in my nature which would have to be checked,” which is to say, her exceptional intelligence had to be schooled in common experience; she had to learn to identify with rather than to separate herself from others. The lesson of such schooling, enacted in some of Glück’s best poems, such as the sequence “October,” is this: what makes the poet exceptional is her ability to render the representative experience she also recognizes as her own.

Glück’s work illuminates with particular power the mysteries of those utterly common experiences, pain and loss. The title of Glück’s first collection of poetry, *Firstborn* (1968), refers to two firstborn children: a sister who died as an infant before Glück was born, and the poet herself, the older of two surviving sisters. “I have always been, in one way or another, obsessed with sisters, the dead and the living both,” she writes in “Death and Absences.” Glück saw herself as the dead sister’s substitute; at the same time, she says, “I took on the guilty responsibility of the survivor.” Although in her early volumes—*Firstborn*, *The House on Marshland* (1975), *Descending Figure* (1980), and *The Triumph of Achilles* (1985)—the traces of autobiography are distanced and mythic, much of Glück’s work revisits the lost sister and explores the poet’s feelings of grief and insufficiency. Few contemporary poets have registered so powerfully the self’s compulsive efforts, inevitably failing, to become invulnerable to loss and absence, though her mythic transformations of biography can be compared to the work of Sylvia Plath and the early Stanley Kunitz, and her articulation of pain has an affinity with the poems of Frank Bidart.

Nevertheless, Glück has always refused any easy equation of art with personal experience (one of her essays is titled “Against Sincerity”), and it is therefore striking that in an essay on her education as a poet she gives a remarkably acute account of her struggle with anorexia, which came to a crisis when she was sixteen. This struggle, she writes, was shaped by a terror of “incompleteness and ravenous need” and by the concomitant desire to appear “completely free of all forms of dependency, to appear complete, self-contained.” She was saved from dying, she believes, by psychoanalysis (“analysis taught me to think”) and by her experience at the School of General Studies at Columbia, which she entered at eighteen. Her teachers, Leonie Adams and Stanley Kunitz, provided her work with “the steady application of scrutiny.” Glück’s poetry demonstrates that she took the lesson of this scrutiny and trained it on herself

and her world. The intensity of perception in her poems—whether of an infant son, a father’s gesture of good-bye, or her own childhood portrait—can be startling.

Her poetry is often impatient with the transitory and hungry for the unchanging—the “blue and permanent” water of “The Drowned Children,” the eternal world that stands in implicit contrast to earthly loss and change (the blighted tomato plants in “Vespers”). In this regard she shares the “religious mind” she describes in her essay on T. S. Eliot, the mind that craves “what is final, immutable” and “cannot sustain itself on matter and process.” But the impulse of “repulsion” toward the physical world F. R. Leavis once noted in Eliot is countered in Glück by an engagement with complex family relations and with the beauty of the natural world. Her collection *The Wild Iris* (1992), a series of flower poems spoken to and by a divinity, expresses the longing for what is eternal and an arresting sense of the earth’s transient loveliness. In *The Meadowlands* (1996) the warring parties in an unraveling marriage (they are modeled on characters in the *Odyssey*) are depicted in wickedly comic tones.

Glück has sought to vary her stylistic habits and preoccupations from one book to another (“Each book I’ve written has culminated in a conscious diagnostic act, a swearing off”). Clearly the child exulting in a metrical inversion anticipates Glück’s lifelong attention to and experiment with form. While her work provides some haunting and resonant images, the resources of syntax generate much of her poems’ power. Glück’s sentences are muscles of perception, capable of complex extension and retraction, at times unwinding in a stanza to bring together opposing forces or experiences (like authority and woundedness, or the timeless and the transient). Her work moves, in varying degrees from poem to poem, between syntactical control and giving way (what she has called “abandon”). Sometimes her complex sentences spill forward from one clause into another, but line breaks or the beginning of a new sentence midline interrupt this motion, giving her work the consistent sense of something incomplete, clipped off, unsaid (she shares this quality with her predecessors George Oppen and Emily Dickinson). At other times, as in parts of her sequence “October,” Glück’s equation of the sentence with the line (“It does me no good; violence has changed me”) has an authoritative tone and declarative control simultaneously undermined by the way one sentence is laid against another without transition or copula. Characteristically for this poet, the pressure of what is unsaid fills the spaces between sentences, between lines, and between stanzas. The distinctive voice we hear in Glück—part oracle, part acute observer, part hapless participant in the rush of feeling and experience—often arises from the way her poems (like certain of Dickinson’s) move between statement and mystery, between words and silences. Her response to the events of September 11, 2001, in “October,” displays all of these qualities.

Glück teaches at Boston University and at Yale University. She received the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for *The Wild Iris* and the PEN Award for her indispensable collection of essays on poetic vocation, *Proofs and Theories* (1994). More recent volumes include *Vita Nova* (1999), *The Seven Ages* (2001), *Averno* (2006), *A Village Life* (2009) and *Faithful and Virtuous Night* (2014). Her *Poems, 1962–2012* appeared in 2013. Glück received the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 2001.

The Drowned Children

You see, they have no judgment.
 So it is natural that they should drown,
 first the ice taking them in
 and then, all winter, their wool scarves
 floating behind them as they sink
 until at last they are quiet.
 And the pond lifts them in its manifold dark arms.

But death must come to them differently,
 so close to the beginning. 10
 As though they had always been
 blind and weightless. Therefore
 the rest is dreamed, the lamp,
 the good white cloth that covered the table,
 their bodies.

And yet they hear the names they used 15
 like lures slipping over the pond:
What are you waiting for
come home, come home, lost
in the waters, blue and permanent.

1980

*From Descending Figure*¹

2 The Sick Child

—Rijksmuseum²

A small child
 is ill, has wakened.
 It is winter, past midnight 20
 in Antwerp.³ Above a wooden chest,
 the stars shine.
 And the child
 relaxes in her mother's arms.
 The mother does not sleep; 25
 she stares
 fixedly into the bright museum.
 By spring the child will die.
 Then it is wrong, wrong
 to hold her— 30
 Let her be alone,
 without memory, as the others wake
 terrified, scraping the dark
 paint from their faces.

3 For My Sister

Far away my sister is moving in her crib. 35
 The dead ones are like that,
 always the last to quiet.

Because, however long they lie in the earth,
 they will not learn to speak

1. Printed here are parts 2 and 3 of the three-part sequence.

2. The national museum of the Netherlands, in

Amsterdam.

3. A city in Belgium.

but remain uncertainly pressing against the wooden bars, 40
 so small the leaves hold them down.

Now, if she had a voice,
 the cries of hunger would be beginning.
 I should go to her;
 perhaps if I sang very softly, 45
 her skin so white,
 her head covered with black feathers. . . .

1980

Appearances

When we were children, my parents had our portraits painted,
 then hung them side by side, over the mantel,
 where we couldn't fight.
 I'm the dark one, the older one. My sister's blond,
 the one who looks angry because she can't talk. 5

It never bothered me, not talking.
 That hasn't changed much. My sister's still blond, not different
 from the portrait. Except we're adults now, we've been analyzed:
 we understand our expressions.

My mother tried to love us equally, 10
 dressed us in the same dresses; she wanted us
 perceived as sisters.
 That's what she wanted from the portraits:
 you need to see them hanging together, facing one another—
 separated, they don't make the same statement. 15
 You wouldn't know what the eyes were fixed on;
 they'd seem to be staring into space.

This was the summer we went to Paris, the summer I was seven.
 Every morning, we went to the convent.
 Every afternoon, we sat still, having the portraits painted, 20
 wearing green cotton dresses, the square neck marked with a ruffle.
 Monsieur Davanzo added the flesh tones: my sister's ruddy; mine, faintly
 bluish.
 To amuse us, Madame Davanzo hung cherries over our ears.

It was something I was good at: sitting still, not moving.
 I did it to be good, to please my mother, to distract her from the child that
 died. 25
 I wanted to be child enough. I'm still the same,
 like a toy that can stop and go, but not change direction.

Anyone can love a dead child, love an absence.
 My mother's strong; she doesn't do what's easy.

She's like her mother: she believes in family, in order. 30
 She doesn't change her house, just freshens the paint occasionally.
 Sometimes something breaks, gets thrown away, but that's all.
 She likes to sit there, on the blue couch, looking up at her daughters,
 at the two who lived. She can't remember how it really was,
 how anytime she ministered to one child, loved that child, 35
 she damaged the other. You could say
 she's like an artist with a dream, a vision.
 Without that, she'd have been torn apart.
 We were like the portraits, always together: you had to shut out one child
 to see the other. 40
 That's why only the painter noticed: a face already so controlled, so
 withdrawn,
 and too obedient, the clear eyes saying
If you want me to be a nun, I'll be a nun.

1990

Vespers¹

In your extended absence, you permit me
 use of earth, anticipating
 some return on investment. I must report
 failure in my assignment, principally
 regarding the tomato plants. 5
 I think I should not be encouraged to grow
 tomatoes. Or, if I am, you should withhold
 the heavy rains, the cold nights that come
 so often here, while other regions get
 twelve weeks of summer. All this 10
 belongs to you: on the other hand,
 I planted the seeds, I watched the first shoots
 like wings tearing the soil, and it was my heart
 broken by the blight, the black spot so quickly
 multiplying in the rows. I doubt 15
 you have a heart, in our understanding of
 that term. You who do not discriminate
 between the dead and the living, who are, in consequence,
 immune to foreshadowing, you may not know
 how much terror we bear, the spotted leaf, 20
 the red leaves of the maple falling
 even in August, in early darkness: I am responsible
 for these vines.

1992

1. Evening prayers. Also, the sixth and next to last of the canonical hours, whose office of prayer services is said before nightfall in, e.g., a Roman Catholic monastery.

October

1

Is it winter again, is it cold again,
 didn't Frank just slip on the ice,
 didn't he heal, weren't the spring seeds planted

didn't the night end,
 didn't the melting ice
 flood the narrow gutters 5

wasn't my body
 rescued, wasn't it safe

didn't the scar form, invisible
 above the injury 10

terror and cold,
 didn't they just end, wasn't the back garden
 harrowed and planted—

I remember how the earth felt, red and dense,
 in stiff rows, weren't the seeds planted,
 didn't vines climb the south wall 15

I can't hear your voice
 for the wind's cries, whistling over the bare ground

I no longer care
 what sound it makes 20

when was I silenced, when did it first seem
 pointless to describe that sound

what it sounds like can't change what it is—

didn't the night end, wasn't the earth
 safe when it was planted 25

didn't we plant the seeds,
 weren't we necessary to the earth,

the vines, were they harvested?

2

Summer after summer has ended,
 balm after violence: 30
 it does me no good
 to be good to me now;
 violence has changed me.

Daybreak. The low hills shine
ochre and fire, even the fields shine. 35
I know what I see; sun that could be
the August sun, returning
everything that was taken away—

You hear this voice? This is my mind's voice;
you can't touch my body now. 40
It has changed once, it has hardened,
don't ask it to respond again.

A day like a day in summer.
Exceptionally still. The long shadows of the maples
nearly mauve on the gravel paths. 45
And in the evening, warmth. Night like a night in summer.

It does me no good; violence has changed me.
My body has grown cold like the stripped fields;
now there is only my mind, cautious and wary,
with the sense it is being tested. 50

Once more, the sun rises as it rose in summer;
bounty, balm after violence.
Balm after the leaves have changed, after the fields
have been harvested and turned.

Tell me this is the future,
I won't believe you. 55
Tell me I'm living,
I won't believe you.

3

Snow had fallen. I remember
music from an open window. 60

Come to me, said the world.
This is not to say
it spoke in exact sentences
but that I perceived beauty in this manner.

Sunrise. A film of moisture
on each living thing. Pools of cold light
formed in the gutters. 65

I stood
at the doorway,
ridiculous as it now seems. 70

What others found in art,
I found in nature. What others found

in human love, I found in nature.
Very simple. But there was no voice there.

Winter was over. In the thawed dirt, 75
bits of green were showing.

Come to me, said the world. I was standing
in my wool coat at a kind of bright portal—
I can finally say 80
long ago; it gives me considerable pleasure. Beauty
the healer, the teacher—

death cannot harm me
more than you have harmed me,
my beloved life.

4

The light has changed; 85
middle C¹ is tuned darker now.
And the songs of morning sound over-rehearsed.

This is the light of autumn, not the light of spring.
The light of autumn: *you will not be spared*.

The songs have changed; the unspeakable 90
has entered them.

This is the light of autumn, not the light that says
I am reborn.

Not the spring dawn: *I strained, I suffered, I was delivered*.
This is the present, an allegory of waste. 95

So much has changed. And still, you are fortunate:
the ideal burns in you like a fever.
Or not like a fever, like a second heart.

The songs have changed, but really they are still quite beautiful.
They have been concentrated in a smaller space, the space of the mind. 100
They are dark, now, with desolation and anguish.

And yet the notes recur. They hover oddly
in anticipation of silence.
The ear gets used to them.
The eye gets used to them. 105
The eye gets used to disappearances.

1. A tone represented by the note "C," located on the grand staff between the bass and treble clefs, the middle of the piano keyboard; the piano key used as a reference for all other notes.

You will not be spared, nor will what you love be spared.

A wind has come and gone, taking apart the mind;
it has left in its wake a strange lucidity.

How privileged you are, to be still passionately
clinging to what you love; 110
the forfeit of hope has not destroyed you.

*Maestoso, doloroso:*²

This is the light of autumn; it has turned on us.
Surely it is a privilege to approach the end 115
still believing in something.

5

It is true there is not enough beauty in the world.
It is also true that I am not competent to restore it.
Neither is there candor, and here I may be of some use.

I am 120
at work, though I am silent.

The bland

misery of the world
bounds us on either side, an alley

lined with trees, we are 125

companions here, not speaking,
each with his own thoughts;

behind the trees, iron
gates of private houses,
the shuttered rooms 130

somehow deserted, abandoned,

as though it were the artist's
duty to create
hope, but out of what? what?

the word itself 135
false, a device to refute
perception—At the intersection,

2. Italian musical terms, directing the play of the music to have grand, dignified, majestic phrasing, and to carry a sorrowful, melancholy, plaintive tone.

ornamental lights of the season.

I was young here. Riding
the subway with my small book
as though to defend myself against 140

this same world:

you are not alone,
the poem said,
in the dark tunnel. 145

6

The brightness of the day becomes
the brightness of the night;
the fire becomes the mirror.

My friend the earth is bitter; I think
sunlight has failed her. 150
Bitter or weary, it is hard to say.

Between herself and the sun,
something has ended.
She wants, now, to be left alone;
I think we must give up 155
turning to her for affirmation.

Above the fields,
above the roofs of the village houses,
the brilliance that made all life possible
becomes the cold stars. 160

Lie still and watch:
they give nothing but ask nothing.

From within the earth's
bitter disgrace, coldness and barrenness

my friend the moon rises: 165
she is beautiful tonight, but when is she not beautiful?

ALICE WALKER

b. 1944

Of the two daughters at odds over family heirlooms in the story “Everyday Use” (included here), Alice Walker resembles each one. Like the burned Maggie, she spent a childhood even more limited than her family’s rural poverty dictated, for as a little girl she was shot in the eye with a BB gun; the disfigurement plagued her until it was corrected during her college years. Like Dee, she was able to attend college—first Spelman College and then Sarah Lawrence College on a scholarship—and acquire urban sophistication from the North. Many of Walker’s characters become adept in the new cultural language of the Black Arts and black power movements to which the author contributed as a young writer—and all of them are subjected to the same dismay Dee’s mother feels at having to rule against this daughter’s wishes. Like the mother, therefore, Walker is given to seeing both sides of a situation; and when it comes to choosing between her characters’ opposing positions, she tends to be critical of her own personality first and extremely sparing in her judgment of others.

From her native Eatonton, Georgia, Walker gained an understanding of the rural South. In her essay “Beyond the Peacock,” Walker evaluates both the older white writer Flannery O’Connor, who lived in nearby Milledgeville, and the perspectives from which readers see the region and its heritage. Visitors to O’Connor’s home, for example, often romanticize the house’s handmade bricks; Walker points out that the slaves who made those bricks surely suffered in the process. As the educated child of sharecroppers, Walker can critically reexamine the myths in and around O’Connor’s life while doing justice to the complexity of O’Connor’s work.

After college Walker returned to the South, first to work in the civil rights movement against segregation and then to teach at Jackson State College in Mississippi. Her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), follows its protagonist through three generations of domestic experience. In *Meridian* (1976), Walker presents fragmentary recollections of the 1960s among characters trying to make sense of their recent past. This novel reflects many of the topics treated in the author’s short-story collection, *In Love & Trouble* (1973), in which a range of African American women almost always have unhappy relationships with men. Walker’s third novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), makes her strongest narrative statement, formulated from what she calls a “womanist” (as opposed to strictly feminist) perspective. This approach draws on the black folk expression “womanish,” which in a mother-to-daughter context signifies a call to adult, mature, responsible (and courageous) behavior. Such behavior benefits women and men and is necessary, Walker argues, for the survival of all African Americans by keeping creativity alive. The plot and the style of *The Color Purple* show how this happens, as the young black woman Celie draws on her sister’s letters (written from Africa) for her own letters to God. Though Celie’s life by any other terms could be considered disastrous (including rape, incest, and the killing of her babies by her father, and both physical and psychological abuse by her husband), her actions and her ability to express herself give her status as an individual. To everyone who will listen, Celie says: “I am here.”

Walker has continued to publish novels, short stories, poetry, and essays. In *The Same River Twice* (1996) she writes about how the filming of *The Color Purple* challenged and changed her life. As a sociocultural critic she has examined the atrocity of female genital mutilation in parts of Africa, also incorporating her conclusions in her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and as a literary critic she has spoken

for a richer and more complete understanding of Zora Neale Hurston, whose employment of folk materials in narrative anticipates Walker's. Throughout her career she has spoken about the need for strength from African American women, and her writing seeks workable models for such strength.

The following text is from *In Love & Trouble* (1973).

Everyday Use

For Your Grandmama

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house.

Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners, homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.

You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.

But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.

“How do I look, Mama?” Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she’s there, almost hidden by the door.

“Come out into the yard,” I say.

Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to them? That is the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground.

Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She’s a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie’s arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don’t you do a dance around the ashes? I’d wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.

I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised the money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks’ habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn’t necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she’d made from an old suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off the temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was.

I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don’t ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can’t see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passed her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face) and then I’ll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better at a man’s job. I used to love to milk till I was hooked in the side in ’49. Cows are soothing and slow and don’t bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.

I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends. Maggie and I thought about this and Maggie asked me, "Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?"

She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them.

When she was courting Jimmy T she didn't have much time to pay to us, but turned all her faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a cheap city girl from a family of ignorant flashy people. She hardly had time to recompose herself.

When she comes I will meet—but there they are!

Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. "Come back here," I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhhnnh," is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhhnnh."

Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhhnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtails that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

"Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!" she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning and he follows up with "Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!" He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.

"Don't get up," says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind

me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through motions with Maggie's hand. Maggie's hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don't know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

"Well," I say. "Dee."

"No, Mama," she says. "Not 'Dee,' Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!"

"What happened to 'Dee'?" I wanted to know.

"She's dead," Wangero said. "I couldn't bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me."

"You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie," I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her "Big Dee" after Dee was born.

"But who was *she* named after?" asked Wangero.

"I guess after Grandma Dee," I said.

"And who was she named after?" asked Wangero.

"Her mother," I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. "That's about as far back as I can trace it," I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

"Well," said Asalamalakim, "there you are."

"Uhhnnh," I heard Maggie say.

"There I was not," I said, "before 'Dicie' cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?"

He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car.¹ Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

"How do you pronounce this name?" I asked.

"You don't have to call me by it if you don't want to," said Wangero.

"Why shouldn't I?" I asked. "If that's what you want us to call you, we'll call you."

"I know it might sound awkward at first," said Wangero.

"I'll get used to it," I said. "Ream it out again."

Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three times he told me to just call him Hakim-a-barber. I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn't really think he was, so I didn't ask.

"You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road," I said. They said "Asalamalakim" when they met you, too, but they didn't shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of the herd the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight.

Hakim-a-barber said, "I accept some of their doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not my style." (They didn't tell me, and I didn't ask, whether Wangero (Dee) had really gone and married him.)

1. Popular model of Ford automobile introduced in 1928.

We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else. She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs.

"Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

"This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"

"Yes," I said.

"Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."

"Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash."

"Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate over the churn, "and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher."

When she finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

"Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?"

I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

"Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."

"No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."

"That'll make them last better," I said.

"That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

"Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

"Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

"The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

She gasped like a bee had stung her.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

"I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

"But they're *priceless!*" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

"She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is these quilts, *these* quilts!"

"Well," I said, stumped. "What would *you* do with them?"

"Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts.

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

"She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work.

When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open.

"Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee.

But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber.

"You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know.

"Your heritage," she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's

really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it."

She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin.

Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

1973

AUGUST WILSON

1945–2005

In a preface to a collection of three August Wilson plays, their creator noted that "writing a play is for me like walking down the landscape of the self, unattended, unadorned, exploring what D. H. Lawrence called 'the dark forest of the soul.'" The evident sincerity, even solemnity, of this pronouncement indicates the heroic intensity with which Wilson conceived his artistic mission. That mission was nothing less than to provide a collective history of African American experience in the twentieth century. By centering his plays in different decades, Wilson hoped to use them as chronicles on an epic scale of the conflicts, joys, and sufferings of black people—"Put them all together and you have a history," he said about his plays. His first successful one, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), is set in 1920s Chicago and deals with black jazz musicians, their relations with one another and between themselves and their white employers. *Fences* (1985), its successor, is set in Pittsburgh in 1957, where the tensions of a black family play themselves out in various disruptions on a smaller but no less intense scale than would be ushered in, the following decade, by what Wilson calls (referring to the civil rights activism of those years) "the hot winds of change." Subsequent plays explored other decades, but most of them are situated in Wilson's native Pittsburgh in a black section called the Hill.

Wilson dropped out of school in ninth grade and, therefore, conducted his own education, reading widely—especially African American writers—and being particularly touched by Ralph Ellison and Langston Hughes. He founded a community theater called Black Horizon on the Hill and later began to write plays for another black theater in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was *Ma Rainey* that drew the attention of the director of Yale's Repertory Theater, Lloyd Richards, who produced it at Yale, then took it to Broadway. Richards henceforth became the director of Wilson's plays, first through staged readings at the Playwright's Conference, then through performances in New Haven and on Broadway. Wilson has written that one night in 1965 (he was twenty years old) he put on a Bessie Smith record and discovered the blues: at that moment, "the universe stuttered and everything fell to a new place." Like Bessie Smith, *Ma Rainey* was a legendary African American singer, often regarded as the mother of the blues, and Wilson's play, set in a recording studio where the white producers and the black musicians are waiting for *Ma* to show up, explores

tensions of race and sexuality. Like all his plays, it unfolds leisurely through characters who do little more than talk to each other. But out of this talk is eventually generated a moment of violent action, in the case of *Ma Rainey* the fatal stabbing of one of the musicians by his enraged cohort.

In response to the criticism that his plays are “talky,” Wilson pointed out that an oral culture is central to the people he writes about, thus “the talk is the whole point.” Most certainly, the talk is liveliest in Wilson’s work when it is laced with humor and with the animus one character displays toward another. At times, in dramatizing a number of competing voices raised in harmony or disharmony, Wilson achieved something like an operatic feel to the conversation as the voices—imbued with the rhythms and language of black culture and black music—play against each other in satisfying orchestration (George Bernard Shaw was a master of such operatic effects).

Speaking of *Ma Rainey* and *Fences*, Wilson said that he was concerned in them with the idea of missed possibilities: “Music and sports were the traditional inroads for blacks,” and for the protagonist in each play, “even those inroads fail.” The hero of *Fences*, perhaps Wilson’s most engaging though least experimental play, is Troy Maxson whose color denied him a career in Major League Baseball (in Troy’s prime as a player, baseball was still segregated). His stubborn dramatization of himself as a man who missed out on greatness puts him in conflict with both his wife and his son Cory, since Troy tries to repress Cory’s potential career as a football star, believing that things haven’t improved for black athletes. At certain moments in the play Troy rises to expressive arias in praise of himself as a heroic loser:

Woman . . . I do the best I can do. I come in here every Friday. I carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard. You all line up at the door with your hands out. I give you the lint from my pockets. I give you my sweat and blood. I ain’t got no tears. I don’t spend them. We go upstairs in that room at night . . . and I fall down on you and try to blast a hole into forever. I get up Monday morning . . . find my lunch on the table. I go out. Make my way. Find my strength to carry me through the next Friday.

One understands why *Fences* has been compared with Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. Both plays risk sentimentality in their underlining of the hero’s plangent complaints, but at their best those complaints have idiomatic force and resonate with a true voice of feeling.

Wilson went on to write probably his most ambitious and difficult play, *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, in which the occupants of a Pittsburgh boardinghouse in 1911 rehearse their individual histories, mainly stories of migrating from the South to the North. The most eloquently dark of these stories is that of Herald Loomis, who spent seven years in bondage to the bounty hunter Joe Turner. *Joe Turner* is usually called Wilson’s most “poetic” drama, and the critic Frank Rich accurately pointed out that it was a “mixture of the well-made naturalistic boardinghouse drama and the mystical, non-Western theater of ritual and metaphor.” The play is about secrets, about the tension between what can be expressed in words and what lies beyond them, inexpressible. In any case, the persistent presence of the vernacular, of folktales and dream visions, takes *Joe Turner* into a different realm from the naturalism of *Fences*. In Wilson’s later plays he continued to experiment with this realm and to challenge his audience and his critics.

Fences¹

CHARACTERS

TROY MAXSON

JIM BONO, TROY's friend

ROSE, TROY's wife

LYONS, TROY's oldest son by previous marriage

GABRIEL, TROY's brother

CORY, TROY and ROSE's son

RAYNELL, TROY's daughter

Setting

The setting is the yard which fronts the only entrance to the MAXSON household, an ancient two-story brick house set back off a small alley in a big-city neighborhood. The entrance to the house is gained by two or three steps leading to a wooden porch badly in need of paint.

A relatively recent addition to the house and running its full width, the porch lacks congruence. It is a sturdy porch with a flat roof. One or two chairs of dubious value sit at one end where the kitchen window opens onto the porch. An old-fashioned icebox stands silent guard at the opposite end.

The yard is a small dirt yard, partially fenced, except for the last scene, with a wooden sawhorse, a pile of lumber, and other fence-building equipment set off to the side. Opposite is a tree from which hangs a ball made of rags. A baseball bat leans against the tree. Two oil drums serve as garbage receptacles and sit near the house at right to complete the setting.

The Play

Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprang on the city with tenacious claws and an honest and solid dream. The city devoured them. They swelled its belly until it burst into a thousand furnaces and sewing machines, a thousand butcher shops and bakers' ovens, a thousand churches and hospitals and funeral parlors and money-lenders. The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true.

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They came from places called the Carolinas and the Virginias, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. They came strong, eager, searching. The city rejected them and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar-paper. They collected rags and wood. They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes, and in quiet desperation and vengeful pride, they stole, and lived in pursuit of their own dream. That they could breathe free, finally, and stand to meet life with the force of dignity and whatever eloquence the heart could call upon.

By 1957, the hard-won victories of the European immigrants had solidified the industrial might of America. War had been confronted and won with new energies that used loyalty and patriotism as its fuel. Life was rich, full, and flourishing. The Milwaukee Braves won the World Series, and the hot winds of

1. The text is from the 4th printing of the NAL edition of the play (1994).

change that would make the sixties a turbulent, racing, dangerous, and provocative decade had not yet begun to blow full.

Act I

SCENE I

It is 1957. TROY and BONO enter the yard, engaged in conversation. TROY is fifty-three years old, a large man with thick, heavy hands; it is this largeness that he strives to fill out and make an accommodation with. Together with his blackness, his largeness informs his sensibilities and the choices he has made in his life.

Of the two men, BONO is obviously the follower. His commitment to their friendship of thirty-odd years is rooted in his admiration of TROY's honesty, capacity for hard work, and his strength, which BONO seeks to emulate.

It is Friday night, payday, and the one night of the week the two men engage in a ritual of talk and drink. TROY is usually the most talkative and at times he can be crude and almost vulgar, though he is capable of rising to profound heights of expression. The men carry lunch buckets and wear or carry burlap aprons and are dressed in clothes suitable to their jobs as garbage collectors.

BONO Troy, you ought to stop that lying!

TROY I ain't lying! The nigger had a watermelon this big. [*He indicates with his hands.*] Talking about . . . "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" I liked to fell out! "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" . . . And it sitting there big as life.

BONO What did Mr. Rand say?

TROY Ain't said nothing. Figure if the nigger too dumb to know he carrying a watermelon, he wasn't gonna get much sense out of him. Trying to hide that great big old watermelon under his coat. Afraid to let the white man see him carry it home.

BONO I'm like you . . . I ain't got no time for them kind of people.

TROY Now what he look like getting mad cause he see the man from the union talking to Mr. Rand?

BONO He come to me talking about . . . "Maxson gonna get us fired." I told him to get away from me with that. He walked away from me calling you a troublemaker. What Mr. Rand say?

TROY Ain't said nothing. He told me to go down the Commissioner's office next Friday. They called me down there to see them.

BONO Well, as long as you got your complaint filed, they can't fire you. That's what one of them white fellows tell me.

TROY I ain't worried about them firing me. They gonna fire me cause I asked a question? That's all I did. I went to Mr. Rand and asked him, "Why? Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting?" Told him, "what's the matter, don't I count? You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck. That ain't no paper job! Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all whites driving and the colored lifting?" He told me "take it to the union." Well, hell, that's what I done! Now they wanna come up with this pack of lies.

BONO I told Brownie if the man come and ask him any questions . . . just tell the truth! It ain't nothing but something they done trumped up on you cause you filed a complaint on them.

TROY Brownie don't understand nothing. All I want them to do is change the job description. Give everybody a chance to drive the truck. Brownie can't see that. He ain't got that much sense.

BONO How you figure he be making out with that gal be up at Taylors' all the time . . . that Alberta gal?

TROY Same as you and me. Getting just as much as we is. Which is to say nothing.

BONO It is, huh? I figure you doing a little better than me . . . and I ain't saying what I'm doing.

TROY Aw, nigger, look here . . . I know you. If you had got anywhere near that gal, twenty minutes later you be looking to tell somebody. And the first one you gonna tell . . . that you gonna want to brag to . . . is gonna be me.

BONO I ain't saying that. I see where you be eyeing her.

TROY I eye all the women. I don't miss nothing. Don't never let nobody tell you Troy Maxson don't eye the women.

BONO You been doing more than eyeing her. You done bought her a drink or two.

TROY Hell yeah, I bought her a drink! What that mean? I bought you one, too. What that mean cause I buy her a drink? I'm just being polite.

BONO It's alright to buy her one drink. That's what you call being polite. But when you wanna be buying two or three . . . that's what you call eyeing her.

TROY Look here, as long as you known me . . . you ever known me to chase after women?

BONO Hell yeah! Long as I done known you. You forgetting I knew you when.

TROY Naw, I'm talking about since I been married to Rose?

BONO Oh, not since you been married to Rose. Now, that's the truth, there. I can say that.

TROY Alright then! Case closed.

BONO I see you be walking up around Alberta's house. You supposed to be at Taylors' and you be walking around there.

TROY What you watching where I'm walking for? I ain't watching after you.

BONO I seen you walking around there more than once.

TROY Hell, you liable to see me walking anywhere! That don't mean nothing cause you see me walking around there.

BONO Where she come from anyway? She just kinda showed up one day.

TROY Tallahassee. You can look at her and tell she one of them Florida gals. They got some big healthy women down there. Grow them right up out the ground. Got a little bit of Indian in her. Most of them niggers down in Florida got some Indian in them.

BONO I don't know about that Indian part. But she damn sure big and healthy. Woman wear some big stockings. Got them great big old legs and hips as wide as the Mississippi River.

TROY Legs don't mean nothing. You don't do nothing but push them out of the way. But them hips cushion the ride!

BONO Troy, you ain't got no sense.

TROY It's the truth! Like you riding on Goodyears!

[ROSE enters from the house. She is ten years younger than TROY, her devotion to him stems from her recognition of the possibilities of her life without him: a succession of abusive men and their babies, a life of partying and running the streets, the Church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration. She recognizes TROY's spirit as a fine and illuminating one and she either ignores or forgives his faults, only some of which she recognizes. Though she doesn't drink, her presence is an integral part of the Friday night rituals. She alternates between the porch and the kitchen, where supper preparations are under way.]

ROSE What you all out here getting into?

TROY What you worried about what we getting into for? This is men talk, woman.

ROSE What I care what you all talking about? Bono, you gonna stay for supper?

BONO No, I thank you, Rose. But Lucille say she cooking up a pot of pigfeet.

TROY Pigfeet! Hell, I'm going home with you! Might even stay the night if you got some pigfeet. You got something in there to top them pigfeet, Rose?

ROSE I'm cooking up some chicken. I got some chicken and collard greens.

TROY Well, go on back in the house and let me and Bono finish what we was talking about. This is men talk. I got some talk for you later. You know what kind of talk I mean. You go on and powder it up.

ROSE Troy Maxson, don't you start that now!

TROY [*puts his arm around her*] Aw, woman . . . come here. Look here, Bono . . . when I met this woman . . . I got out that place, say, "Hitch up my pony, saddle up my mare . . . there's a woman out there for me somewhere. I looked here. Looked there. Saw Rose and latched on to her." I latched on to her and told her—I'm gonna tell you the truth—I told her, "Baby, I don't wanna marry, I just wanna be your man." Rose told me . . . tell him what you told me, Rose.

ROSE I told him if he wasn't the marrying kind, then move out the way so the marrying kind could find me.

TROY That's what she told me. "Nigger, you in my way. You blocking the view! Move out the way so I can find me a husband." I thought it over two or three days. Come back—

ROSE Ain't no two or three days nothing. You was back the same night.

TROY Come back, told her . . . "Okay, baby . . . but I'm gonna buy me a banty rooster and put him out there in the backyard . . . and when he see a stranger come, he'll flap his wings and crow . . ." Look here, Bono, I could watch the front door by myself . . . it was that back door I was worried about.

ROSE Troy, you ought not talk like that. Troy ain't doing nothing but telling a lie.

TROY Only thing is . . . when we first got married . . . forget the rooster . . . we ain't had no yard!

BONO I hear you tell it. Me and Lucille was staying down there on Logan Street. Had two rooms with the outhouse in the back. I ain't mind the outhouse none. But when that goddamn wind blow through there in the winter . . . that's what I'm talking about! To this day I wonder why in

the hell I ever stayed down there for six long years. But see, I didn't know I could do no better. I thought only white folks had inside toilets and things.

ROSE There's a lot of people don't know they can do no better than they doing now. That's just something you got to learn. A lot of folks still shop at Bella's.

TROY Ain't nothing wrong with shopping at Bella's. She got fresh food.

ROSE I ain't said nothing about if she got fresh food. I'm talking about what she charge. She charge ten cents more than the A&P.

TROY The A&P ain't never done nothing for me. I spends my money where I'm treated right. I go down to Bella, say, "I need a loaf of bread, I'll pay you on Friday." She give it to me. What sense that make when I got money to go and spend it somewhere else and ignore the person who done right by me? That ain't in the Bible.

ROSE We ain't talking about what's in the Bible. What sense it make to shop there when she overcharge?

TROY You shop where you want to. I'll do my shopping where the people been good to me.

ROSE Well, I don't think it's right for her to overcharge. That's all I was saying.

BONO Look here . . . I got to get on. Lucille going be raising all kind of hell.

TROY Where you going, nigger? We ain't finished this pint. Come here, finish this pint.

BONO Well, hell, I am . . . if you ever turn the bottle loose.

TROY [*hands him the bottle*] The only thing I say about the A&P is I'm glad Cory got that job down there. Help him take care of his school clothes and things. Gabe done moved out and things getting tight around here. He got that job. . . . He can start to look out for himself.

ROSE Cory done went and got recruited by a college football team.

TROY I told that boy about that football stuff. The white man ain't gonna let him get nowhere with that football. I told him when he first come to me with it. Now you come telling me he done went and got more tied up in it. He ought to go and get recruited in how to fix cars or something where he can make a living.

ROSE He ain't talking about making no living playing football. It's just something the boys in school do. They gonna send a recruiter by to talk to you. He'll tell you he ain't talking about making no living playing football. It's a honor to be recruited.

TROY It ain't gonna get him nowhere. Bono'll tell you that.

BONO If he be like you in the sports . . . he's gonna be alright. Ain't but two men ever played baseball as good as you. That's Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson. Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than you.

TROY What it ever get me? Ain't got a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of.

ROSE Times have changed since you was playing baseball, Troy. That was before the war. Times have changed a lot since then.

TROY How in hell they done changed?

ROSE They got lots of colored boys playing ball now. Baseball and football.

BONO You right about that, Rose. Times have changed, Troy. You just come along too early.

TROY There ought not never have been no time called too early! Now you take that fellow . . . what's that fellow they had playing right field for the Yankees back then? You know who I'm talking about, Bono. Used to play right field for the Yankees?

ROSE Selkirk?

TROY Selkirk! That's it! Man batting .269, understand? .269. What kind of sense that make? I was hitting .432 with thirty-seven home runs! Man batting .269 and playing right field for the Yankees! I saw Josh Gibson's daughter yesterday. She walking around with raggedy shoes on her feet. Now I bet you Selkirk's daughter ain't walking around with raggedy shoes on her feet. I bet you that!

ROSE They got a lot of colored baseball players now. Jackie Robinson was the first. Folks had to wait for Jackie Robinson.

TROY I done seen a hundred niggers play baseball better than Jackie Robinson. Hell, I know some teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make! What you talking about Jackie Robinson. Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody. I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play. Don't care what color you were. Come telling me I come along too early. If you could play . . . then they ought to have let you play. [TROY takes a long drink from the bottle.]

ROSE You gonna drink yourself to death. You don't need to be drinking like that.

TROY Death ain't nothing. I done seen him. Done wrassled with him. You can't tell me nothing about death. Death ain't nothing but a fastball on the outside corner. And you know what I'll do to that! Lookee here, Bono . . . am I lying? You get one of them fastballs, about waist high, over the outside corner of the plate where you can get the meat of the bat on it . . . and good god! You can kiss it goodbye. Now, am I lying?

BONO Naw, you telling the truth there. I seen you do it.

TROY If I'm lying . . . that 450 feet worth of lying! [Pause.] That's all death is to me. A fastball on the outside corner.

ROSE I don't know why you want to get on talking about death.

TROY Ain't nothing wrong with talking about death. That's part of life. Everybody gonna die. You gonna die, I'm gonna die. Bono's gonna die. Hell, we all gonna die.

ROSE But you ain't got to talk about it. I don't like to talk about it.

TROY You the one brought it up. Me and Bono was talking about baseball . . . you tell me I'm gonna drink myself to death. Ain't that right, Bono? You know I don't drink this but one night out of the week. That's Friday night. I'm gonna drink just enough to where I can handle it. Then I cuts it loose. I leave it alone. So don't you worry about me drinking myself to death. 'Cause I ain't worried about Death. I done seen him. I done wrestled with him. Look here, Bono . . . I looked up one day and Death was marching straight at me. Like Soldiers on Parade! The Army of Death marching straight at me. The middle of July, 1941. It got real cold just like it be winter. It seem like Death himself reached out and touched me on the shoulder. He touch me just like I touch you. I got cold as ice and Death standing there grinning at me.

ROSE Troy, why don't you hush that talk.

TROY I say . . . "What you want, Mr. Death? You be wanting me? You done brought your army to be getting me?" I looked him dead in the eye. I wasn't fearing nothing. I was ready to tangle. Just like I'm ready to tangle now. The Bible say be ever vigilant. That's why I don't get but so drunk. I got to keep watch.

ROSE Troy was right down there in Mercy Hospital. You remember he had pneumonia? Laying there with a fever talking plumb out of his head.

TROY Death standing there staring at me . . . carrying that sickle in his hand. Finally he say, "You want bound over for another year?" See, just like that . . . "You want bound over for another year?" I told him, "Bound over hell! Let's settle this now!" It seem like he kinda fell back when I said that, and all the cold went out of me. I reached down and grabbed that sickle and threw it just as far as I could throw it . . . and me and him commenced to wrestling. We wrestled for three days and three nights. I can't say where I found the strength from. Every time it seemed like he was gonna get the best of me, I'd reach way down deep inside myself and find the strength to do him one better.

ROSE Every time Troy tell that story he find different ways to tell it. Different things to make up about it.

TROY I ain't making up nothing. I'm telling you the facts of what happened. I wrestled with Death for three days and three nights and I'm standing here to tell you about it. *[Pause.]* Alright. At the end of the third night we done weakened each other to where we can't hardly move. Death stood up, throwed on his robe . . . had him a white robe with a hood on it. He throwed on that robe and went off to look for his sickle. Say, "I'll be back." Just like that. "I'll be back." I told him, say, "Yeah, but . . . you gonna have to find me!" I wasn't no fool. I wasn't going looking for him. Death ain't nothing to play with. And I know he's gonna get me. I know I got to join his army . . . his camp followers. But as long as I keep my strength and see him coming . . . as long as I keep up my vigilance . . . he's gonna have to fight to get me. I ain't going easy.

BONO Well, look here, since you got to keep up your vigilance . . . let me have the bottle.

TROY Aw hell, I shouldn't have told you that part. I should have left out that part.

ROSE Troy be talking that stuff and half the time don't even know what he be talking about.

TROY Bono know me better than that.

BONO That's right. I know you. I know you got some Uncle Remus² in your blood. You got more stories than the devil got sinners.

TROY Aw hell, I done seen him too! Done talked with the devil.

ROSE Troy, don't nobody wanna be hearing all that stuff.

[LYONS enters the yard from the street. Thirty-four years old, TROY's son by a previous marriage, he sports a neatly trimmed goatee, sport coat, white shirt, tieless and buttoned at the collar. Though he fancies himself

2. Old slave and folk philosopher whose proverbs and stories were recorded by Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908).

a musician, he is more caught up in the rituals and "idea" of being a musician than in the actual practice of the music. He has come to borrow money from TROY, and while he knows he will be successful, he is uncertain as to what extent his lifestyle will be held up to scrutiny and ridicule.]

LYONS Hey, Pop.

TROY What you come "Hey, Popping" me for?

LYONS How you doing, Rose? [*He kisses her.*] Mr. Bono, how you doing?

BONO Hey, Lyons . . . how you been?

TROY He must have been doing alright. I ain't seen him around here last week.

ROSE Troy, leave your boy alone. He come by to see you and you wanna start all that nonsense.

TROY I ain't bothering Lyons. [*Offers him the bottle.*] Here . . . get you a drink. We got an understanding. I know why he come by to see me and he know I know.

LYONS Come on, Pop . . . I just stopped by to say hi . . . see how you was doing.

TROY You ain't stopped by yesterday.

ROSE You gonna stay for supper, Lyons? I got some chicken cooking in the oven.

LYONS No, Rose . . . thanks. I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd stop by for a minute.

TROY You was in the neighborhood alright, nigger. You telling the truth there. You was in the neighborhood cause it's my payday.

LYONS Well, hell, since you mentioned it . . . let me have ten dollars.

TROY I'll be damned! I'll die and go to hell and play blackjack with the devil before I give you ten dollars.

BONO That's what I wanna know about . . . that devil you done seen.

LYONS What . . . Pop done seen the devil? You too much, Pops.

TROY Yeah, I done seen him. Talked to him too!

ROSE You ain't seen no devil. I done told you that man ain't had nothing to do with the devil. Anything you can't understand, you want to call it the devil.

TROY Look here, Bono . . . I went down to see Hertzberger about some furniture. Got three rooms for two-ninety-eight. That what it say on the radio. "Three rooms . . . two-ninety-eight." Even made up a little song about it. Go down there . . . man tell me I can't get no credit. I'm working every day and can't get no credit. What to do? I got an empty house with some raggedy furniture in it. Cory ain't got no bed. He's sleeping on a pile of rags on the floor. Working every day and can't get no credit. Come back here—Rose'll tell you—madder than hell. Sit down . . . try to figure what I'm gonna do. Come a knock on the door. Ain't been living here but three days. Who know I'm here? Open the door . . . devil standing there bigger than life. White fellow . . . got on good clothes and everything. Standing there with a clipboard in his hand. I ain't had to say nothing. First words come out of his mouth was . . . "I understand you need some furniture and can't get no credit." I liked to fell over. He say "I'll give you all the credit you want, but you got to pay the interest on it." I told him, "Give me three rooms worth and charge whatever you

want.” Next day a truck pulled up here and two men unloaded them three rooms. Man what drove the truck give me a book. Say send ten dollars, first of every month to the address in the book and everything will be alright. Say if I miss a payment the devil was coming back and it’ll be hell to pay. That was fifteen years ago. To this day . . . the first of the month I send my ten dollars, Rose’ll tell you.

ROSE Troy lying.

TROY I ain’t never seen that man since. Now you tell me who else that could have been but the devil? I ain’t sold my soul or nothing like that, you understand. Naw, I wouldn’t have truck with the devil about nothing like that. I got my furniture and pays my ten dollars the first of the month just like clockwork.

BONO How long you say you been paying this ten dollars a month?

TROY Fifteen years!

BONO Hell, ain’t you finished paying for it yet? How much the man done charged you.

TROY Aw hell, I done paid for it. I done paid for it ten times over! The fact is I’m scared to stop paying it.

ROSE Troy lying. We got that furniture from Mr. Glickman. He ain’t paying no ten dollars a month to nobody.

TROY Aw hell, woman. Bono know I ain’t that big a fool.

LYONS I was just getting ready to say . . . I know where there’s a bridge for sale.

TROY Look here, I’ll tell you this . . . it don’t matter to me if he was the devil. It don’t matter if the devil give credit. Somebody has got to give it.

ROSE It ought to matter. You going around talking about having truck with the devil . . . God’s the one you gonna have to answer to. He’s the one gonna be at the Judgment.

LYONS Yeah, well, look here, Pop . . . let me have that ten dollars. I’ll give it back to you. Bonnie got a job working at the hospital.

TROY What I tell you, Bono? The only time I see this nigger is when he wants something. That’s the only time I see him.

LYONS Come on, Pop, Mr. Bono don’t want to hear all that. Let me have the ten dollars. I told you Bonnie working.

TROY What that mean to me? “Bonnie working.” I don’t care if she working. Go ask her for the ten dollars if she working. Talking about “Bonnie working.” Why ain’t you working?

LYONS Aw, Pop, you know I can’t find no decent job. Where am I gonna get a job at? You know I can’t get no job.

TROY I told you I know some people down there. I can get you on the rubbish if you want to work. I told you that the last time you came by here asking me for something.

LYONS Naw, Pop . . . thanks. That ain’t for me. I don’t wanna be carrying nobody’s rubbish. I don’t wanna be punching nobody’s time clock.

TROY What’s the matter, you too good to carry people’s rubbish? Where you think that ten dollars you talking about come from? I’m just supposed to haul people’s rubbish and give my money to you cause you too lazy to work. You too lazy to work and wanna know why you ain’t got what I got.

ROSE What hospital Bonnie working at? Mercy?

LYONS She’s down at Passavant working in the laundry.

TROY I ain't got nothing as it is. I give you that ten dollars and I got to eat beans the rest of the week. Naw . . . you ain't getting no ten dollars here.

LYONS You ain't got to be eating no beans. I don't know why you wanna say that.

TROY I ain't got no extra money. Gabe done moved over to Miss Pearl's paying her the rent and things done got tight around here. I can't afford to be giving you every payday.

LYONS I ain't asked you to give me nothing. I asked you to loan me ten dollars. I know you got ten dollars.

TROY Yeah, I got it. You know why I got it? Cause I don't throw my money away out there in the streets. You living the fast life . . . wanna be a musician . . . running around in them clubs and things . . . then, you learn to take care of yourself. You ain't gonna find me going and asking nobody for nothing. I done spent too many years without.

LYONS You and me is two different people, Pop.

TROY I done learned my mistake and learned to do what's right by it. You still trying to get something for nothing. Life don't owe you nothing. You owe it to yourself. Ask Bono. He'll tell you I'm right.

LYONS You got your way of dealing with the world . . . I got mine. The only thing that matters to me is the music.

TROY Yeah, I can see that! It don't matter how you gonna eat . . . where your next dollar is coming from. You telling the truth there.

LYONS I know I got to eat. But I got to live too. I need something that gonna help me to get out of the bed in the morning. Make me feel like I belong in the world. I don't bother nobody. I just stay with my music cause that's the only way I can find to live in the world. Otherwise there ain't no telling what I might do. Now I don't come criticizing you and how you live. I just come by to ask you for ten dollars. I don't wanna hear all that about how I live.

TROY Boy, your mama did a hell of a job raising you.

LYONS You can't change me, Pop. I'm thirty-four years old. If you wanted to change me, you should have been there when I was growing up. I come by to see you . . . ask for ten dollars and you want to talk about how I was raised. You don't know nothing about how I was raised.

ROSE Let the boy have ten dollars, Troy.

TROY [*to LYONS*] What the hell you looking at me for? I ain't got no ten dollars. You know what I do with my money. [*to ROSE.*] Give him ten dollars if you want him to have it.

ROSE I will. Just as soon as you turn it loose.

TROY [*handing ROSE the money*] There it is. Seventy-six dollars and forty-two cents. You see this, Bono? Now, I ain't gonna get but six of that back.

ROSE You ought to stop telling that lie. Here, Lyons. [*She hands him the money.*]

LYONS Thanks, Rose. Look . . . I got to run . . . I'll see you later.

TROY Wait a minute. You gonna say, "thanks, Rose" and ain't gonna look to see where she got that ten dollars from? See how they do me, Bono?

LYONS I know she got it from you, Pop. Thanks. I'll give it back to you.

TROY There he go telling another lie. Time I see that ten dollars . . . he'll be owing me thirty more.

LYONS See you, Mr. Bono.

BONO Take care, Lyons!

LYONS Thanks, Pop. I'll see you again. [LYONS exits the yard.]

TROY I don't know why he don't go and get him a decent job and take care of that woman he got.

BONO He'll be alright, Troy. The boy is still young.

TROY The *boy* is thirty-four years old.

ROSE Let's not get off into all that.

BONO Look here . . . I got to be going. I got to be getting on. Lucille gonna be waiting.

TROY [*puts his arm around ROSE*] See this woman, Bono? I love this woman. I love this woman so much it hurts. I love her so much . . . I done run out of ways of loving her. So I got to go back to basics. Don't you come by my house Monday morning talking about time to go to work . . . 'cause I'm still gonna be stroking!

ROSE Troy! Stop it now!

BONO I ain't paying him no mind, Rose. That ain't nothing but gin-talk. Go on, Troy. I'll see you Monday.

TROY Don't you come by my house, nigger! I done told you what I'm gonna be doing.

[*The lights go down to black.*]

SCENE 2

The lights come up on ROSE hanging up clothes. She hums and sings softly to herself. It is the following morning.

[ROSE sings]

Jesus, be a fence all around me every day

Jesus, I want you to protect me as I travel on my way.

Jesus, be a fence all around me every day.

[TROY enters from the house.]

[ROSE (continued)]

Jesus, I want you to protect me

As I travel on my way.

[*To TROY*]

'Morning. You ready for breakfast? I can fix it soon as I finish hanging up these clothes?

TROY I got the coffee on. That'll be alright. I'll just drink some of that this morning.

ROSE That 651 hit yesterday. That's the second time this month. Miss Pearl hit for a dollar . . . seem like those that need the least always get lucky. Poor folks can't get nothing.

TROY Them numbers don't know nobody. I don't know why you fool with them. You and Lyons both.

ROSE It's something to do.

TROY You ain't doing nothing but throwing your money away.

ROSE Troy, you know I don't play foolishly. I just play a nickel here and a nickel there.

TROY That's two nickels you done thrown away.

ROSE Now I hit sometimes . . . that makes up for it. It always comes in handy when I do hit. I don't hear you complaining then.

TROY I ain't complaining now. I just say it's foolish. Trying to guess out of six hundred ways which way the number gonna come. If I had all the money niggers, these Negroes, throw away on numbers for one week—just one week—I'd be a rich man.

ROSE Well, you wishing and calling it foolish ain't gonna stop folks from playing numbers. That's one thing for sure. Besides . . . some good things come from playing numbers. Look where Pope done bought him that restaurant off of numbers.

TROY I can't stand niggers like that. Man ain't had two dimes to rub together. He walking around with his shoes all run over bumming money for cigarettes. Alright. Got lucky there and hit the numbers . . .

ROSE Troy, I know all about it.

TROY Had good sense, I'll say that for him. He ain't throwed his money away. I seen niggers hit the numbers and go through two thousand dollars in four days. Man brought him that restaurant down there . . . fixed it up real nice . . . and then didn't want nobody to come in it! A Negro go in there and can't get no kind of service. I seen a white fellow come in there and order a bowl of stew. Pope picked all the meat out the pot for him. Man ain't had nothing but a bowl of meat! Negro come behind him and ain't got nothing but the potatoes and carrots. Talking about what numbers do for people, you picked a wrong example. Ain't done nothing but make a worser fool out of him than he was before.

ROSE Troy, you ought to stop worrying about what happened at work yesterday.

TROY I ain't worried. Just told me to be down there at the Commissioner's office on Friday. Everybody think they gonna fire me. I ain't worried about them firing me. You ain't got to worry about that [*Pause.*] Where's Cory? Cory in the house? [*Calls*] Cory?

ROSE He gone out.

TROY Out, huh? He gone out 'cause he know I want him to help me with this fence. I know how he is. That boy scared of work.

[GABRIEL enters. He comes halfway down the alley and, hearing TROY's voice, stops.]

TROY [*continues*] He ain't done a lick of work in his life.

ROSE He had to go to football practice. Coach wanted them to get in a little extra practice before the season start.

TROY I got his practice . . . running out of here before he get his chores done.

ROSE Troy, what is wrong with you this morning? Don't nothing set right with you. Go on back in there and go to bed . . . get up on the other side.

TROY Why something got to be wrong with me? I ain't said nothing wrong with me.

ROSE You got something to say about everything. First it's the numbers . . . then it's the way the man runs his restaurant . . . then you done got on Cory. What's it gonna be next? Take a look up there and see if the weather suits you . . . or is it gonna be how you gonna put up the fence with the clothes hanging in the yard.

TROY You hit the nail on the head then.

ROSE I know you like I know the back of my hand. Go on in there and get you some coffee . . . see if that straighten you up. 'Cause you ain't right this morning.

[TROY starts into the house and sees GABRIEL. GABRIEL starts singing. TROY's brother, he is seven years younger than TROY. Injured in World War II, he has a metal plate in his head. He carries an old trumpet tied around his waist and believes with every fiber of his being that he is the Archangel Gabriel. He carries a chipped basket with an assortment of discarded fruits and vegetables he has picked up in the strip district and which he attempts to sell.]

[GABRIEL singing.]

Yes ma'am, I got plums
You ask me how I sell them
Oh ten cents apiece
Three for a quarter
Come and buy now
'Cause I'm here today
And tomorrow I'll be gone

[GABRIEL enters.]

GABRIEL Hey, Rose!

ROSE How you doing, Gabe?

GABRIEL There's Troy . . . Hey, Troy!

TROY Hey, Gabe. [Exit into kitchen.]

ROSE [to GABRIEL] What you got there?

GABRIEL You know what I got, Rose. I got fruits and vegetables.

ROSE [looking in basket] Where's all these plums you talking about?

GABRIEL I ain't got no plums today, Rose. I was just singing that. Have some tomorrow. Put me in a big order for plums. Have enough plums tomorrow for St. Peter and everybody. [TROY re-enters from kitchen, crosses to steps. To ROSE.] Troy's mad at me.

TROY I ain't mad at you. What I got to be mad at you about? You ain't done nothing to me.

GABRIEL I just moved over to Miss Pearl's to keep out from in your way. I ain't mean no harm by it.

TROY Who said anything about that? I ain't said anything about that.

GABRIEL You ain't mad at me, is you?

TROY Naw . . . I ain't mad at you, Gabe. If I was mad at you I'd tell you about it.

GABRIEL Got me two rooms. In the basement. Got my own door too. Wanna see my key? [He holds up a key.] That's my own key! Ain't nobody else got a key like that. That's my key! My two rooms!

TROY Well, that's good, Gabe. You got your own key . . . that's good.

ROSE You hungry, Gabe? I was just fixing to cook Troy his breakfast.

GABRIEL I'll take some biscuits. You got some biscuits? Did you know when I was in heaven . . . every morning me and St. Peter would sit down by the gate and eat some big fat biscuits? Oh, yeah! We had us a good time. We'd sit there and eat us them biscuits and then St. Peter would go off to sleep and tell me to wake him up when it's time to open the gates for the judgment.

ROSE Well, come on . . . I'll make up a batch of biscuits. [ROSE *exits into the house.*]

GABRIEL Troy . . . St. Peter got your name in the book. I seen it. It say . . . Troy Maxson. I say . . . I know him! He got the same name like what I got. That's my brother!

TROY How many times you gonna tell me that, Gabe?

GABRIEL Ain't got my name in the book. Don't have to have my name. I done died and went to heaven. He got your name though. One morning St. Peter was looking at his book . . . marking it up for the judgment . . . and he let me see your name. Got it in there under M. Got Rose's name . . . I ain't seen it like I seen yours . . . but I know it's in there. He got a great big book. Got everybody's name what was ever been born. That's what he told me. But I seen your name. Seen it with my own eyes.

TROY Go on in the house there. Rose going to fix you something to eat.

GABRIEL Oh, I ain't hungry. I done had breakfast with Aunt Jemimah. She come by and cooked me up a whole mess of flapjacks. Remember how we used to eat them flapjacks?

TROY Go on in the house and get you something to eat now.

GABRIEL I got to go sell my plums. I done sold some tomatoes. Got me two quarters. Wanna see? [*He shows TROY his quarters.*] I'm gonna save them and buy me a new horn so St. Peter can hear me when it's time to open the gates. [GABRIEL *stops suddenly. Listens.*] Hear that? That's the hell-hounds. I got to chase them out of here. Go on get out of here! Get out!

[GABRIEL *exits singing.*]

Better get ready for the judgment

Better get ready for the judgment

My lord is coming down

[ROSE *enters from the house.*]

TROY He gone off somewhere.

GABRIEL [*offstage*]

Better get ready for the judgment

Better get ready for the judgment morning

Better get ready for the judgment

My God is coming down.

ROSE He ain't eating right. Miss Pearl say she can't get him to eat nothing.

TROY What you want me to do about it, Rose? I done did everything I can for the man. I can't make him get well. Man got half his head blown away . . . what you expect?

ROSE Seem like something ought to be done to help him.

TROY Man don't bother nobody. He just mixed up from that metal plate he got in his head. Ain't no sense for him to go back into the hospital.

ROSE Least he be eating right. They can help him take care of himself.

TROY Don't nobody wanna be locked up, Rose. What you wanna lock him up for? Man go over there and fight the war . . . messin' around with them Japs, get half his head blown off . . . and they give him a lousy three thousand dollars. And I had to swoop down on that.

ROSE Is you fixing to go into that again?

TROY That's the only way I got a roof over my head . . . cause of that metal plate.

ROSE Ain't no sense you blaming yourself for nothing. Gabe wasn't in no condition to manage that money. You done what was right by him. Can't nobody say you ain't done what was right by him. Look how long you took care of him . . . till he wanted to have his own place and moved over there with Miss Pearl.

TROY That ain't what I'm saying, woman! I'm just stating the facts. If my brother didn't have that metal plate in his head . . . I wouldn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of. And I'm fifty-three years old. Now see if you can understand that! [TROY gets up from the porch and starts to exit the yard.]

ROSE Where you going off to? You been running out of here every Saturday for weeks. I thought you was gonna work on this fence?

TROY I'm gonna walk down to Taylors'. Listen to the ball game. I'll be back in a bit. I'll work on it when I get back.
[He exits the yard. The lights go to black.]

SCENE 3

The lights come up on the yard. It is four hours later. ROSE is taking down the clothes from the line. CORY enters carrying his football equipment.

ROSE Your daddy liked to had a fit with you running out of here this morning without doing your chores.

CORY I told you I had to go to practice.

ROSE He say you were supposed to help him with this fence.

CORY He been saying that the last four or five Saturdays, and then he don't never do nothing, but go down to Taylors'. Did you tell him about the recruiter?

ROSE Yeah, I told him.

CORY What he say?

ROSE He ain't said nothing too much. You get in there and get started on your chores before he gets back. Go on and scrub down them steps before he gets back here hollering and carrying on.

CORY I'm hungry. What you got to eat, Mama?

ROSE Go on and get started on your chores. I got some meat loaf in there. Go on and make you a sandwich . . . and don't leave no mess in there. [CORY exits into the house. ROSE continues to take down the clothes. TROY enters the yard and sneaks up and grabs her from behind.] Troy! Go on, now. You liked to scared me to death. What was the score of the game? Lucille had me on the phone and I couldn't keep up with it.

TROY What I care about the game? Come here, woman. [He tries to kiss her.]

ROSE I thought you went down Taylors' to listen to the game. Go on, Troy! You supposed to be putting up this fence.

TROY [attempting to kiss her again] I'll put it up when I finish with what is at hand.

ROSE Go on, Troy. I ain't studying you.

TROY [chasing after her] I'm studying you . . . fixing to do my homework!

ROSE Troy, you better leave me alone.

TROY Where's Cory? That boy brought his butt home yet?

ROSE He's in the house doing his chores.

TROY *[calling]* Cory! Get your butt out here, boy! *[ROSE exits into the house with the laundry. TROY goes over to the pile of wood, picks up a board, and starts sawing. CORY enters from the house.]* You just now coming in here from leaving this morning?

CORY Yeah, I had to go to football practice.

TROY Yeah, what?

CORY Yessir.

TROY I ain't but two seconds off you noway. The garbage sitting in there overflowing . . . you ain't done none of your chores . . . and you come in here talking about, "Yeah."

CORY I was just getting ready to do my chores now, Pop . . .

TROY Your first chore is to help me with this fence on Saturday. Everything else come after that. Now get that saw and cut them boards.

[CORY takes the saw and begins cutting the boards. TROY continues working. There is a long pause.]

CORY Hey, Pop . . . why don't you buy a TV?

TROY What I want with a TV? What I want one of them for?

CORY Everybody got one. Earl, Ba Bra . . . Jesse!

TROY I ain't asked you who had one. I say what I want with one?

CORY So you can watch it. They got lots of things on TV. Baseball games and everything. We could watch the World Series.

TROY Yeah . . . and how much this TV cost?

CORY I don't know. They got them on sale for around two hundred dollars.

TROY Two hundred dollars, huh?

CORY That ain't that much, Pop.

TROY Naw, it's just two hundred dollars. See that roof you got over your head at night? Let me tell you something about that roof. It's been over ten years since that roof was last tarred. See now . . . the snow come this winter and sit up there on that roof like it is . . . and it's gonna seep inside. It's just gonna be a little bit . . . ain't gonna hardly notice it. Then the next thing you know, it's gonna be leaking all over the house. Then the wood rot from all that water and you gonna need a whole new roof. Now, how much you think it cost to get that roof tarred?

CORY I don't know.

TROY Two hundred and sixty-four dollars . . . cash money. While you thinking about a TV, I got to be thinking about the roof . . . and whatever else go wrong around here. Now if you had two hundred dollars, what would you do . . . fix the roof or buy a TV?

CORY I'd buy a TV. Then when the roof started to leak . . . when it needed fixing . . . I'd fix it.

TROY Where you gonna get the money from? You done spent it for a TV. You gonna sit up and watch the water run all over your brand new TV.

CORY Aw, Pop. You got money. I know you do.

TROY Where I got it at, huh?

CORY You got it in the bank.

TROY You wanna see my bankbook? You wanna see that seventy-three dollars and twenty-two cents I got sitting up in there.

CORY You ain't got to pay for it all at one time. You can put a down payment on it and carry it on home with you.

TROY Not me. I ain't gonna owe nobody nothing if I can help it. Miss a payment and they come and snatch it right out your house. Then what you got? Now, soon as I get two hundred dollars clear, then I'll buy a TV. Right now, as soon as I get two hundred and sixty-four dollars, I'm gonna have this roof tarred.

CORY Aw . . . Pop!

TROY You go on and get you two hundred dollars and buy one if ya want it. I got better things to do with my money.

CORY I can't get no two hundred dollars. I ain't never seen two hundred dollars.

TROY I'll tell you what . . . you get you a hundred dollars and I'll put the other hundred with it.

CORY Alright, I'm gonna show you.

TROY You gonna show me how you can cut them boards right now.

[CORY begins to cut the boards. There is a long pause.]

CORY The Pirates won today. That makes five in a row.

TROY I ain't thinking about the Pirates. Got an all-white team. Got that boy . . . that Puerto Rican boy . . . Clemente. Don't even half-play him. That boy could be something if they give him a chance. Play him one day and sit him on the bench the next.

CORY He gets a lot of chances to play.

TROY I'm talking about playing regular. Playing every day so you can get your timing. That's what I'm talking about.

CORY They got some white guys on the team that don't play every day. You can't play everybody at the same time.

TROY If they got a white fellow sitting on the bench . . . you can bet your last dollar he can't play! The colored guy got to be twice as good before he get on the team. That's why I don't want you to get all tied up in them sports. Man on the team and what it get him? They got colored on the team and don't use them. Same as not having them. All them teams the same.

CORY The Braves got Hank Aaron and Wes Covington. Hank Aaron hit two home runs today. That makes forty-three.

TROY Hank Aaron ain't nobody. That's what you supposed to do. That's how you supposed to play the game. Ain't nothing to it. It's just a matter of timing . . . getting the right follow-through. Hell, I can hit forty-three home runs right now!

CORY Not off no major-league pitching, you couldn't.

TROY We had better pitching in the Negro leagues. I hit seven home runs off of Satchel Paige. You can't get no better than that!

CORY Sandy Koufax. He's leading the league in strikeouts.

TROY I ain't thinking of no Sandy Koufax.

CORY You got Warren Spahn and Lew Burdette. I bet you couldn't hit no home runs off of Warren Spahn.

TROY I'm through with it now. You go on and cut them boards. [Pause.] Your mama tells me you got recruited by a college football team? Is that right?

CORY Yeah. Coach Zellman say the recruiter gonna be coming by to talk to you. Get you to sign the permission papers.

TROY I thought you supposed to be working down there at the A&P. Ain't you suppose to be working down there after school?

CORY Mr. Stawicki say he gonna hold my job for me until after the football season. Say starting next week I can work weekends.

TROY I thought we had an understanding about this football stuff? You suppose to keep up with your chores and hold that job down at the A&P. Ain't been around here all day on a Saturday. Ain't none of your chores done . . . and now you telling me you done quit your job.

CORY I'm gonna be working weekends.

TROY You damn right you are! And ain't no need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing nothing.

CORY Hey, Pop . . . you can't do that. He's coming all the way from North Carolina.

TROY I don't care where he coming from. The white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway. You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you can have something can't nobody take away from you. You go on and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling people's garbage.

CORY I get good grades, Pop. That's why the recruiter wants to talk with you. You got to keep up your grades to get recruited. This way I'll be going to college. I'll get a chance . . .

TROY First, you gonna get your butt down there to the A&P and get your job back.

CORY Mr. Stawicki done already hired somebody else 'cause I told him I was playing football.

TROY You a bigger fool than I thought . . . to let somebody take away your job so you can play some football. Where you gonna get your money to take out your girlfriend and whatnot? What kind of foolishness is that to let somebody take away your job?

CORY I'm still gonna be working weekends.

TROY Naw . . . naw. You getting your butt out of here and finding you another job.

CORY Come on, Pop! I got to practice. I can't work after school and play football too. The team needs me. That's what Coach Zellman say . . .

TROY I don't care what nobody else say. I'm the boss . . . you understand? I'm the boss around here. I do the only saying what counts.

CORY Come on, Pop!

TROY I asked you . . . Did you understand?

CORY Yeah . . .

TROY What!

CORY Yessir.

TROY You go down there to that A&P and see if you can get your job back. If you can't do both . . . then you quit the football team. You've got to take the crookeds with the straights.

CORY Yessir. *[Pause.]* Can I ask you a question?

TROY What the hell you wanna ask me? Mr. Stawicki the one you got the questions for.

CORY How come you ain't never liked me?

TROY Liked you? Who the hell say I got to like you? What law is there say I got to like you? Wanna stand up in my face and ask a damn fool-ass question like that. Talking about liking somebody. Come here, boy, when

I talk to you. [CORY comes over to where TROY is working. He stands slouched over and TROY shoves him on his shoulder.] Straighten up, goddammit! I asked you a question . . . what law is there say I got to like you?

CORY None.

TROY Well, alright then! Don't you eat every day? [Pause.] Answer me when I talk to you! Don't you eat every day?

CORY Yeah.

TROY Nigger, as long as you in my house, you put that sir on the end of it when you talk to me!

CORY Yes . . . sir.

TROY You eat every day.

CORY Yessir!

TROY Got a roof over your head.

CORY Yessir!

TROY Got clothes on your back.

CORY Yessir.

TROY Why you think that is?

CORY 'Cause of you.

TROY Aw, hell I know it's 'cause of me . . . but why do you think that is?

CORY [*hesitant*] 'Cause you like me.

TROY Like you? I go out of here every morning . . . bust my butt . . . putting up with them crackers every day . . . 'cause I like you? You about the biggest fool I ever saw. [Pause.] It's my job. It's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house . . . sleep you behind on my bedclothes . . . fill you belly up with my food . . . cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not 'cause I like you! 'Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you! Let's get this straight right here . . . before it go along any further . . . I ain't got to like you. Mr. Rand don't give me my money come payday 'cause he likes me. He gives me 'cause he owe me. I done give you everything I had to give you. I gave you your life! Me and your mama worked that out between us. And liking your black ass wasn't part of the bargain. Don't you try and go through life worrying about if somebody like you or not. You best be making sure they doing right by you. You understand what I'm saying, boy?

CORY Yessir.

TROY Then get the hell out of my face, and get on down to that A&P.
[ROSE has been standing behind the screen door for much of the scene. She enters as CORY exits.]

ROSE Why don't you let the boy go ahead and play football, Troy? Ain't no harm in that. He's just trying to be like you with the sports.

TROY I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far away from my life as he can get. You the only decent thing that ever happened to me. I wish him that. But I don't wish him a thing else from my life. I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn't getting involved in no sports. Not after what they did to me in the sports.

ROSE Troy, why don't you admit you was too old to play in the major leagues? For once . . . why don't you admit that?

TROY What do you mean too old? Don't come telling me I was too old. I just wasn't the right color. Hell, I'm fifty-three years old and I can do better than Selkirk's .269 right now!

ROSE How's was you gonna play ball when you were over forty? Sometimes I can't get no sense out of you.

TROY I got good sense, woman. I got sense enough not to let my boy get hurt over playing no sports. You been mothering that boy too much. Worried about if people like him.

ROSE Everything that boy do . . . he do for you. He wants you to say "Good job, son." That's all.

TROY Rose, I ain't got time for that. He's alive. He's healthy. He's got to make his own way. I made mine. Ain't nobody gonna hold his hand when he get out there in that world.

ROSE Times have changed from when you was young, Troy. People change. The world's changing around you and you can't even see it.

TROY [*slow, methodical*] Woman . . . I do the best I can do. I come in here every Friday. I carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard. You all line up at the door with your hands out. I give you the lint from my pockets. I give you my sweat and my blood. I ain't got no tears. I done spent them. We go upstairs in that room at night . . . and I fall down on you and try to blast a hole into forever. I get up Monday morning . . . find my lunch on the table. I go out. Make my way. Find my strength to carry me through to the next Friday. [*Pause.*] That's all I got, Rose. That's all I got to give. I can't give nothing else.

[TROY exits into the house. The lights go down to black.]

SCENE 4

It is Friday. Two weeks later. CORY starts out of the house with his football equipment. The phone rings.

CORY [*calling*] I got it! [*He answers the phone and stands in the screen door talking.*] Hello? Hey, Jesse. Naw . . . I was just getting ready to leave now.

ROSE [*calling*] Cory!

CORY I told you, man, them spikes is all tore up. You can use them if you want, but they ain't no good. Earl got some spikes.

ROSE [*calling*] Cory!

CORY [*calling to ROSE*] Mam? I'm talking to Jesse. [*Into phone.*] When she say that? [*Pause.*] Aw, you lying, man. I'm gonna tell her you said that.

ROSE [*calling*] Cory, don't you go nowhere!

CORY I got to go to the game, Ma! [*Into the phone.*] Yeah, hey, look, I'll talk to you later. Yeah, I'll meet you over Earl's house. Later. Bye, Ma!

[CORY exits the house and starts out the yard.]

ROSE Cory, where you going off to? You got that stuff all pulled out and thrown all over your room.

CORY [*in the yard*] I was looking for my spikes. Jesse wanted to borrow my spikes.

ROSE Get up there and get that cleaned up before your daddy gets back in here.

CORY I got to go to the game! I'll clean it up *when I get back.* [CORY exits.]

ROSE That's all he need to do is see that room all messed up.

[ROSE exits into the house. TROY and BONO enter the yard. TROY is dressed in clothes other than his work clothes.]

BONO He told him the same thing he told you. Take it to the union.

TROY Brownie ain't got that much sense. Man wasn't thinking about nothing. He wait until I confront them on it . . . then he wanna come crying seniority. [*Calls.*] Hey, Rose!

BONO I wish I could have seen Mr. Rand's face when he told you.

TROY He couldn't get it out of his mouth! Liked to bit his tongue! When they called me down there to the Commissioner's office . . . he thought they was gonna fire me. Like everybody else.

BONO I didn't think they was gonna fire you. I thought they was gonna put you on the warning paper.

TROY Hey, Rose! [*To BONO.*] Yeah, Mr. Rand like to bit his tongue. [*TROY breaks the seal on the bottle, takes a drink, and hands it to BONO.*]

BONO I see you ran right down to Taylors' and told that Alberta gal.

TROY [*calling*] Hey Rose! [*To BONO*] I told everybody. Hey Rose! I went down there to cash my check.

ROSE [*entering from the house*] Hush all that hollering, man! I know you out here. What they say down there at the Commissioner's office?

TROY You supposed to come when I call you, woman. Bono'll tell you that. [*To BONO.*] Don't Lucille come when you call her?

ROSE Man, hush your mouth. I ain't no dog . . . talk about "come when you call me."

TROY [*puts his arm around ROSE*] You hear this, Bono? I had me an old dog used to get uppity like that. You say, "C'mere, Blue!" . . . and he just lay there and look at you. End up getting a stick and chasing him away trying to make him come.

ROSE I ain't studying you and your dog. I remember you used to sing that old song.

TROY [*He sings.*] Hear it ring! Hear it ring! I had a dog his name was Blue.

ROSE Don't nobody wanna hear you sing that old song.

TROY [*sings*] You know Blue was mighty true.

ROSE Used to have Cory running around here singing that song.

BONO Hell, I remember that song myself.

TROY [*sings*]

You know Blue was a good old dog.

Blue treed a possum in a hollow log.

That was my daddy's song. My daddy made up that song.

ROSE I don't care who made it up. Don't nobody wanna hear you sing it.

TROY [*makes a song like calling a dog*] Come here, woman.

ROSE You come in here carrying on, I reckon they ain't fired you. What they say down there at the Commissioner's office?

TROY Look here, Rose . . . Mr. Rand called me into his office today when I got back from talking to them people down there . . . it come from up top . . . he called me in and told me they was making me a driver.

ROSE Troy, you kidding!

TROY No I ain't. Ask Bono.

ROSE Well, that's great, Troy. Now you don't have to hassle them people no more.

[*LYONS enters from the street.*]

TROY Aw hell, I wasn't looking to see you today. I thought you was in jail. Got it all over the front page of the *Courier* about them raiding Sefus' place . . . where you be hanging out with all them thugs.

LYONS Hey, Pop . . . that ain't got nothing to do with me. I don't go down there gambling. I go down there to sit in with the band. I ain't got nothing to do with the gambling part. They got some good music down there.

TROY They got some rogues . . . is what they got.

LYONS How you been, Mr. Bono? Hi, Rose.

BONO I see where you playing down at the Crawford Grill tonight.

ROSE How come you ain't brought Bonnie like I told you. You should have brought Bonnie with you, she ain't been over in a month of Sundays.

LYONS I was just in the neighborhood . . . thought I'd stop by.

TROY Here he come . . .

BONO Your daddy got a promotion on the rubbish. He's gonna be the first colored driver. Ain't got to do nothing but sit up there and read the paper like them white fellows.

LYONS Hey, Pop . . . if you knew how to read you'd be alright.

BONO Naw . . . naw . . . you mean if the nigger knew how to *drive* he'd be all right. Been fighting with them people about driving and ain't even got a license. Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license?

TROY Driving ain't nothing. All you do is point the truck where you want it to go. Driving ain't nothing.

BONO Do Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license? That's what I'm talking about. I ain't asked if driving was easy. I asked if Mr. Rand know you ain't got no driver's license.

TROY He ain't got to know. The man ain't got to know my business. Time he find out, I have two or three driver's licenses.

LYONS [*going into his pocket*] Say, look here, Pop . . .

TROY I knew it was coming. Didn't I tell you, Bono? I know what kind of "Look here, Pop" that was. The nigger fixing to ask me for some money. It's Friday night. It's my payday. All them rogues down there on the avenue . . . the ones that ain't in jail . . . and Lyons is hopping in his shoes to get down there with them.

LYONS See, Pop . . . if you give somebody else a chance to talk sometime, you'd see that I was fixing to pay you back your ten dollars like I told you. Here . . . I told you I'd pay you when Bonnie got paid.

TROY Naw . . . you go ahead and keep that ten dollars. Put it in the bank. The next time you feel like you wanna come by here and ask me for something . . . you go on down there and get that.

LYONS Here's your ten dollars, Pop. I told you I don't want you to give me nothing. I just wanted to borrow ten dollars.

TROY Naw . . . go on and keep that for the next time you want to ask me.

LYONS Come on, Pop . . . here go your ten dollars.

ROSE Why don't you go on and let the boy pay you back, Troy?

LYONS Here you go, Rose. If you don't take it I'm gonna have to hear about it for the next six months. [*He hands her the money.*]

ROSE You can hand yours over here too, Troy.

TROY You see this, Bono. You see how they do me.

BONO Yeah, Lucille do me the same way.

[*GABRIEL is heard singing offstage. He enters.*]

GABRIEL Better get ready for the Judgment! Better get ready for . . . Hey! . . . Hey! . . . There's Troy's boy!

LYONS How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL Lyons . . . the King of the Jungle! Rose . . . hey, Rose. Got a flower for you. [*He takes a rose from his pocket.*] Picked it myself. That's the same rose like you is!

ROSE That's right nice of you, Gabe.

LYONS What you been doing, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL Oh, I been chasing hellhounds and waiting on the time to tell St. Peter to open the gates.

LYONS You been chasing hellhounds, huh? Well . . . you doing the right thing, Uncle Gabe. Somebody got to chase them.

GABRIEL Oh, yeah . . . I know it. The devil's strong. The devil ain't no pushover. Hellhounds snipping at everybody's heels. But I got my trumpet waiting on the judgment time.

LYONS Waiting on the Battle of Armageddon, huh?

GABRIEL Ain't gonna be too much of a battle when God get to waving that Judgment sword. But the peoples gonna have a hell of a time trying to get into heaven if them gates ain't open.

LYONS [*putting his arm around GABRIEL*] You hear this, Pop. Uncle Gabe, you alright!

GABRIEL [*laughing with LYONS*] Lyons! King of the Jungle.

ROSE You gonna stay for supper, Gabe. Want me to fix you a plate?

GABRIEL I'll take a sandwich, Rose. Don't want no plate. Just wanna eat with my hands. I'll take a sandwich.

ROSE How about you, Lyons? You staying? Got some short ribs cooking.

LYONS Naw, I won't eat nothing till after we finished playing. [*Pause.*] You ought to come down and listen to me play, Pop.

TROY I don't like that Chinese music. All that noise.

ROSE Go on in the house and wash up, Gabe . . . I'll fix you a sandwich.

GABRIEL [*to LYONS, as he exits*] Troy's mad at me.

LYONS What you mad at Uncle Gabe for, Pop.

ROSE He thinks Troy's mad at him 'cause he moved over to Miss Pearl's.

TROY I ain't mad at the man. He can live where he want to live at.

LYONS What he move over there for? Miss Pearl don't like nobody.

ROSE She don't mind him none. She treats him real nice. She just don't allow all that singing.

TROY She don't mind that rent he be paying . . . that's what she don't mind.

ROSE Troy, I ain't going through that with you no more. He's over there cause he want to have his own place. He can come and go as he please.

TROY Hell, he could come and go as he please here. I wasn't stopping him. I ain't put no rules on him.

ROSE It ain't the same thing, Troy. And you know it. [*GABRIEL comes to the door.*] Now, that's the last I wanna hear about that. I don't wanna hear nothing else about Gabe and Miss Pearl. And next week . . .

GABRIEL I'm ready for my sandwich, Rose.

ROSE And next week . . . when that recruiter come from that school . . . I want you to sign that paper and go on and let Cory play football. Then that'll be the last I have to hear about that.

TROY [*to ROSE as she exits into the house*] I ain't thinking about Cory nothing.

LYONS What . . . Cory got recruited? What school he going to?

TROY That boy walking around here smelling his piss . . . thinking he's grown. Thinking he's gonna do what he want, irrespective of what I say. Look here, Bono . . . I left the Commissioner's office and went down to the A&P . . . that boy ain't working down there. He lying to me. Telling me he got his job back . . . telling me he working weekends . . . telling me he working after school . . . Mr. Stawicki tell me he ain't working down there at all!

LYONS Cory just growing up. He's just busting at the seams trying to fill out your shoes.

TROY I don't care what he's doing. When he get to the point where he wanna disobey me . . . then it's time for him to move on. Bono'll tell you that. I bet he ain't never disobeyed his daddy without paying the consequences.

BONO I ain't never had a chance. My daddy came on through . . . but I ain't never knew him to see him . . . or what he had on his mind or where he went. Just moving on through. Searching out the New Land. That's what the old folks used to call it. See a fellow moving around from place to place . . . woman to woman . . . called it searching out the New Land. I can't say if he ever found it. I come along, didn't want no kids. Didn't know if I was gonna be in one place long enough to fix on them right as their daddy. I figured I was going searching too. As it turned out I been hooked up with Lucille near about as long as your daddy been with Rose. Going on sixteen years.

TROY Sometimes I wish I hadn't known my daddy. My daddy ain't cared nothing about no kids. A kid to him wasn't nothing. All he wanted was for you to learn how to walk so he could start you to working. When it come time for eating . . . he ate first. If there was anything left over, that's what you got. Man would sit down and eat two chickens and give you the wing.

LYONS You ought to stop that, Pop. Everybody feed their kids. No matter how hard times is . . . everybody care about their kids. Make sure they have something to eat.

TROY The only thing my daddy cared about was getting them bales of cotton in to Mr. Lubin. That's the only thing that mattered to him. Sometimes I used to wonder why he was living. Wonder why the devil hadn't come and got him. "Get them bales of cotton in to Mr. Lubin" and find out he owe him money . . .

LYONS He should have just went on and left when he saw he couldn't get nowhere. That's what I would have done.

TROY How he gonna leave with eleven kids? And where he gonna go? He ain't knew how to do nothing but farm. No, he was trapped and I think he knew it. But I'll say this for him . . . he felt a responsibility toward us. Maybe he ain't treated us the way I felt he should have . . . but without that responsibility he could have walked off and left us . . . made his own way.

BONO A lot of them did. Back in those days what you talking about . . . they walk out their front door and just take on down one road or another and keep on walking.

LYONS There you go! That's what I'm talking about.

BONO Just keep on walking till you come to something else. Ain't you never heard of nobody having the walking blues? Well, that's what you call it when you just take off like that.

TROY My daddy ain't had them walking blues! What you talking about? He stayed right there with his family. But he was just as evil as he could be. My mama couldn't stand him. Couldn't stand that evilness. She run off when I was about eight. She sneaked off one night after he had gone to sleep. Told me she was coming back for me. I ain't never seen her no more. All his women run off and left him. He wasn't good for nobody. When my turn come to head out, I was fourteen and got to sniffing around Joe Canewell's daughter. Had us an old mule we called Greyboy. My daddy sent me out to do some plowing and I tied up Greyboy and went to fooling around with Joe Canewell's daughter. We done found us a nice little spot, got real cozy with each other. She about thirteen and we done figured we was grown anyway . . . so we down there enjoying ourselves . . . ain't thinking about nothing. We didn't know Greyboy had got loose and wandered back to the house and my daddy was looking for me. We down there by the creek enjoying ourselves when my daddy come up on us. Surprised us. He had them leather straps off the mule and commenced to whupping me like there was no tomorrow. I jumped up, mad and embarrassed. I was scared of my daddy. When he commenced to whupping on me . . . quite naturally I run to get out of the way. *[Pause.]* Now I thought he was mad cause I ain't done my work. But I see where he was chasing me off so he could have the gal for himself. When I see what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy. Right there is where I become a man . . . at fourteen years of age. *[Pause.]* Now it was my turn to run him off. I picked up them same reins that he had used on me. I picked up them reins and commenced to whupping on him. The gal jumped up and run off . . . and when my daddy turned to face me, I could see why the devil had never come to get him . . . cause he was the devil himself. I don't know what happened. When I woke up, I was laying right there by the creek, and Blue . . . this old dog we had . . . was licking my face. I thought I was blind. I couldn't see nothing. Both my eyes were swollen shut. I layed there and cried. I didn't know what I was gonna do. The only thing I knew was the time had come for me to leave my daddy's house. And right there the world suddenly got big. And it was a long time before I could cut it down to where I could handle it. Part of that cutting down was when I got to the place where I could feel him kicking in my blood and knew that the only thing that separated us was the matter of a few years.

[GABRIEL enters from the house with a sandwich.]

LYONS What you got there, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL Got me a ham sandwich. Rose gave me a ham sandwich.

TROY I don't know what happened to him. I done lost touch with everybody except Gabriel. But I hope he's dead. I hope he found some peace.

LYONS That's a heavy story, Pop. I didn't know you left home when you was fourteen.

TROY And didn't know nothing. The only part of the world I knew was the forty-two acres of Mr. Lubin's land. That's all I knew about life.

LYONS Fourteen's kinda young to be out on your own. [*Phone rings.*] I don't even think I was ready to be out on my own at fourteen. I don't know what I would have done.

TROY I got up from the creek and walked on down to Mobile. I was through with farming. Figured I could do better in the city. So I walked the two hundred miles to Mobile.

LYONS Wait a minute . . . you ain't walked no two hundred miles, Pop. Ain't nobody gonna walk no two hundred miles. You talking about some walking there.

BONO That's the only way you got anywhere back in them days.

LYONS Shhh. Damn if I wouldn't have hitched a ride with somebody!

TROY Who you gonna hitch it with? They ain't had no cars and things like they got now. We talking about 1918.

ROSE [*entering*] What you all out here getting into?

TROY [*to ROSE*] I'm telling Lyons how good he got it. He don't know nothing about this I'm talking.

ROSE Lyons, that was Bonnie on the phone. She say you supposed to pick her up.

LYONS Yeah, okay, Rose.

TROY I walked on down to Mobile and hitched up with some of them fellows that was heading this way. Got up here and found out . . . not only couldn't you get a job . . . you couldn't find no place to live. I thought I was in freedom. Shhh. Colored folks living down there on the riverbanks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for themselves. Right down there under the Brady Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper. Messed around there and went from bad to worse. Started stealing. First it was food. Then I figured, hell, if I steal money I can buy me some food. Buy me some shoes too! One thing led to another. Met your mama. I was young and anxious to be a man. Met your mama and had you. What I do that for? Now I got to worry about feeding you and her. Got to steal three times as much. Went out one day looking for somebody to rob . . . that's what I was, a robber. I'll tell you the truth. I'm ashamed of it today. But it's the truth. Went to rob this fellow . . . pulled out my knife . . . and he pulled out a gun. Shot me in the chest. It felt just like somebody had taken a hot branding iron and laid it on me. When he shot me I jumped at him with my knife. They tell me I killed him and they put me in the penitentiary and locked me up for fifteen years. That's where I met Bono. That's where I learned how to play baseball. Got out that place and your mama had taken you and went on to make life without me. Fifteen years was a long time for her to wait. But that fifteen years cured me of that robbing stuff. Rose'll tell you. She asked me when I met her if I had gotten all that foolishness out of my system. And I told her, "Baby, it's you and baseball all what count with me." You hear me, Bono? I meant it too. She say, "Which one comes first?" I told her, "Baby, there ain't no doubt it's baseball . . . but you stick and get old with me and we'll both outlive this baseball." Am I right, Rose? And it's true.

ROSE Man, hush your mouth. You ain't said no such thing. Talking about, "Baby, you know you'll always be number one with me." That's what you was talking.

TROY You hear that, Bono? That's why I love her.

BONO Rose'll keep you straight. You get off the track, she'll straighten you up.

ROSE Lyons, you better get on up and get Bonnie. She waiting on you.

LYONS [*gets up to go*] Hey, Pop, why don't you come down to the Grill and hear me play?

TROY I ain't going down there. I'm too old to be sitting around in them clubs.

BONO You got to be good to play down at the Grill.

LYONS Come on, Pop . . .

TROY I got to get up in the morning.

LYONS You ain't got to stay long.

TROY Naw, I'm gonna get my supper and go on to bed.

LYONS Well, I got to go. I'll see you again.

TROY Don't you come around my house on my payday!

ROSE Pick up the phone and let somebody know you coming. And bring Bonnie with you. You know I'm always glad to see her.

LYONS Yeah, I'll do that, Rose. You take care now. See you, Pop. See you, Mr. Bono. See you, Uncle Gabe.

GABRIEL Lyons! King of the Jungle!

[LYONS *exits*.]

TROY Is supper ready, woman? Me and you got some business to take care of. I'm gonna tear it up too!

ROSE Troy, I done told you now!

TROY [*puts his arm around BONO*] Aw hell, woman . . . this is Bono. Bono like family. I done known this nigger since . . . how long I done know you?

BONO It's been a long time.

TROY I done known this nigger since Skippy was a pup. Me and him done been through some times.

BONO You sure right about that.

TROY Hell, I done know him longer than I known you. And we still standing shoulder to shoulder. Hey, look here, Bono . . . a man can't ask for no more than that. [*Drinks to him*.] I love you, nigger.

BONO Hell, I love you too . . . but I got to get home see my woman. You got yours in hand. I got to go get mine.

[BONO *starts to exit as CORY enters the yard, dressed in his football uniform. He gives TROY a hard, uncompromising look*.]

CORY What you do that for, Pop? [*He throws his helmet down in the direction of TROY*.]

ROSE What's the matter? Cory . . . what's the matter?

CORY Papa done went up to the school and told Coach Zellman I can't play football no more. Wouldn't even let me play the game. Told him to tell the recruiter not to come.

ROSE Troy . . .

TROY What you Troying me for. Yeah, I did it. And the boy know why I did it.

CORY Why you wanna do that to me? That was the one chance I had.

ROSE Ain't nothing wrong with Cory playing football, Troy.

TROY The boy lied to me. I told the nigger if he wanna play football . . . to keep up his chores and hold down that job at the A&P. That was the conditions. Stopped down there to see Mr. Stawicki . . .

CORY I can't work after school during the football season, Pop! I tried to tell you that Mr. Stawicki's holding my job for me. You don't never want to listen to nobody. And then you wanna go and do this to me!

TROY I ain't done nothing to you. You done it to yourself.

CORY Just cause you didn't have a chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all.

TROY Come here.

ROSE Troy . . .

[CORY reluctantly crosses over to TROY.]

TROY Alright! See. You done made a mistake.

CORY I didn't even do nothing!

TROY I'm gonna tell you what your mistake was. See . . . you swung at the ball and didn't hit it. That's strike one. See, you in the batter's box now. You swung and you missed. That's strike one. Don't you strike out!
[Lights fade to black.]

Act 2

SCENE 1

The following morning. CORY is at the tree hitting the ball with the bat. He tries to mimic TROY, but his swing is awkward, less sure. ROSE enters from the house.

ROSE Cory, I want you to help me with this cupboard.

CORY I ain't quitting the team. I don't care what Poppa say.

ROSE I'll talk to him when he gets back. He had to go see about your Uncle Gabe. The police done arrested him. Say he was disturbing the peace. He'll be back directly. Come on in here and help me clean out the top of this cupboard. [CORY exits into the house. ROSE sees TROY and BONO coming down the alley.] Troy . . . what they say down there?

TROY Ain't said nothing. I give them fifty dollars and they let him go. I'll talk to you about it. Where's Cory?

ROSE He's in there helping me clean out these cupboards.

TROY Tell him to get his butt out here.

[TROY and BONO go over to the pile of wood. BONO picks up the saw and begins sawing.]

TROY [to BONO] All they want is the money. That makes six or seven times I done went down there and got him. See me coming they stick out their hands.

BONO Yeah, I know what you mean. That's all they care about . . . that money. They don't care about what's right. [Pause.] Nigger, why you got to go and get some hard wood? You ain't doing nothing but building a little old fence. Get you some soft pine wood. That's all you need.

TROY I know what I'm doing. This is outside wood. You put pine wood inside the house. Pine wood is inside wood. This here is outside wood. Now you tell me where the fence is gonna be?

BONO You don't need this wood. You can put it up with pine wood and it'll stand as long as you gonna be here looking at it.

TROY How you know how long I'm gonna be here, nigger? Hell, I might just live forever. Live longer than old man Horsely.

BONO That's what Magee used to say.

TROY Magee's a damn fool. Now you tell me who you ever heard of gonna pull their own teeth with a pair of rusty pliers?

BONO The old folks . . . my granddaddy used to pull his teeth with pliers. They ain't had no dentists for the colored folks back then.

TROY Get clean pliers! You understand? Clean pliers! Sterilize them! Besides we ain't living back then. All Magee had to do was walk over to Doc Goldblums.

BONO I see where you and that Tallahassee gal . . . that Alberta . . . I see where you all done got tight.

TROY What you mean "got tight"?

BONO I see where you be laughing and joking with her all the time.

TROY I laughs and jokes with all of them, Bono. You know me.

BONO That ain't the kind of laughing and joking I'm talking about.
[CORY enters from the house.]

CORY How you doing, Mr. Bono?

TROY Cory? Get that saw from Bono and cut some wood. He talking about the wood's too hard to cut. Stand back there, Jim, and let that young boy show you how it's done.

BONO He's sure welcome to it. [CORY takes the saw and begins to cut the wood.] Whew-e-e Look at that. Big old strong boy. Look like Joe Louis.³ Hell, must be getting old the way I'm watching that boy whip through that wood.

CORY I don't see why Mama want a fence around the yard nowadays.

TROY Damn if I know either. What the hell she keeping out with it? She ain't got nothing nobody want.

BONO Some people build fences to keep people out . . . and other people build fences to keep people in. Rose wants to hold on to you all. She loves you.

TROY Hell, nigger, I don't need nobody to tell me my wife loves me, Cory . . . go on in the house and see if you can find that other saw.

CORY Where's it at?

TROY I said find it! Look for it till you find it! [CORY exits into the house.] What's that supposed to mean? Wanna keep us in?

BONO Troy . . . I done known you seem like damn near my whole life. You and Rose both. I done know both of you all for a long time. I remember when you met Rose. When you was hitting them baseball out the park. A lot of them old gals was after you then. You had the pick of the litter. When you picked Rose, I was happy for you. That was the first time I knew you had any sense. I said . . . My man Troy knows what he's doing . . . I'm gonna follow this nigger . . . he might take me somewhere. I been following you too. I done learned a whole heap of things about life watching you. I done learned how to tell where the shit lies. How to tell it from the alfalfa. You done learned me a lot of things. You showed me how to not make the same mistakes . . . to take life as it comes along and keep putting one foot in front of the other. [Pause.] Rose a good woman, Troy.

3. Boxer (1914–1981), heavyweight champion from 1937 to 1949.

TROY Hell, nigger, I know she a good woman. I been married to her for eighteen years. What you got on your mind, Bono?

BONO I just say she a good woman. Just like I say anything. I ain't got to have nothing on my mind.

TROY You just gonna say she a good woman and leave it hanging out there like that? Why you telling me she a good woman?

BONO She loves you, Troy. Rose loves you.

TROY You saying I don't measure up. That's what you trying to say. I don't measure up 'cause I'm seeing this other gal. I know what you trying to say.

BONO I know what Rose means to you, Troy. I'm just trying to say I don't want to see you mess up.

TROY Yeah, I appreciate that, Bono. If you was messing around on Lucille I'd be telling you the same thing.

BONO Well, that's all I got to say. I just say that because I love you both.

TROY Hell, you know me . . . I wasn't out there looking for nothing. You can't find a better woman than Rose. I know that. But seems like this woman just stuck onto me where I can't shake her loose. I done wrestled with it, tried to throw her off me . . . but she just stuck on tighter. Now she's stuck on for good.

BONO You's in control . . . that's what you tell me all the time. You responsible for what you do.

TROY I ain't ducking the responsibility of it. As long as it sets right in my heart . . . then I'm okay. Cause that's all I listen to. It'll tell me right from wrong every time. And I ain't talking about doing Rose no bad turn. I love Rose. She done carried me a long ways and I love and respect her for that.

BONO I know you do. That's why I don't want to see you hurt her. But what you gonna do when she find out? What you got then? If you try and juggle both of them . . . sooner or later you gonna drop one of them. That's common sense.

TROY Yeah, I hear what you saying, Bono. I been trying to figure a way to work it out.

BONO Work it out right, Troy. I don't want to be getting all up between you and Rose's business . . . but work it so it come out right.

TROY Aw hell, I get all up between you and Lucille's business. When you gonna get that woman that refrigerator she been wanting? Don't tell me you ain't got no money now. I know who your banker is. Mellon don't need that money bad as Lucille want that refrigerator. I'll tell you that.

BONO Tell you what I'll do . . . when you finish building this fence for Rose . . . I'll buy Lucille that refrigerator.

TROY You done stuck your foot in your mouth now! [TROY *grabs up a board and begins to saw.* BONO *starts to walk out the yard.*] Hey, nigger . . . where you going?

BONO I'm going home. I know you don't expect me to help you now. I'm protecting my money. I wanna see you put that fence up by yourself. That's what I want to see. You'll be here another six months without me.

TROY Nigger, you ain't right.

BONO When it comes to my money . . . I'm right as fireworks on the Fourth of July.

TROY Alright, we gonna see now. You better get out your bankbook.

[BONO *exits, and* TROY *continues to work.* ROSE *enters from the house.*]

ROSE What they say down there? What's happening with Gabe?

TROY I went down there and got him out. Cost me fifty dollars. Say he was disturbing the peace. Judge set up a hearing for him in three weeks. Say to show cause why he shouldn't be re-committed.

ROSE What was he doing that cause them to arrest him?

TROY Some kids was teasing him and he run them off home. Say he was howling and carrying on. Some folks seen him and called the police. That's all it was.

ROSE Well, what's you say? What'd you tell the judge?

TROY Told him I'd look after him. It didn't make no sense to recommit the man. He stuck out his big greasy palm and told me to give him fifty dollars and take him on home.

ROSE Where's he at now? Where'd he go off to?

TROY He's gone on about his business. He don't need nobody to hold his hand.

ROSE Well, I don't know. Seem like that would be the best place for him if they did put him into the hospital. I know what you're gonna say. But that's what I think would be best.

TROY The man done had his life ruined fighting for what? And they wanna take and lock him up. Let him be free. He don't bother nobody.

ROSE Well, everybody got their own way of looking at it I guess. Come on and get your lunch. I got a bowl of lima beans and some cornbread in the oven. Come on get something to eat. Ain't no sense you fretting over Gabe. [ROSE turns to go into the house.]

TROY Rose . . . got something to tell you.

ROSE Well, come on . . . wait till I get this food on the table.

TROY Rose! [She stops and turns around.] I don't know how to say this. [Pause.] I can't explain it none. It just sort of grows on you till it gets out of hand. It starts out like a little bush . . . and the next thing you know it's a whole forest.

ROSE Troy . . . what are you talking about?

TROY I'm talking, woman, let me talk. I'm trying to find a way to tell you . . . I'm gonna be a daddy. I'm gonna be somebody's daddy.

ROSE Troy . . . you're not telling me this? You're gonna be . . . what?

TROY Rose . . . now . . . see . . .

ROSE You telling me you gonna be somebody's daddy? You telling your wife this?

[GABRIEL enters from the street. He carries a rose in his hand.]

GABRIEL Hey, Troy! Hey, Rose!

ROSE I have to wait eighteen years to hear something like this.

GABRIEL Hey, Rose . . . I got a flower for you. [He hands it to her.] That's a rose. Same rose like you is.

ROSE Thanks, Gabe.

GABRIEL Troy, you ain't mad at me is you? Them bad mens come and put me away. You ain't mad at me is you?

TROY Naw, Gabe, I ain't mad at you.

ROSE Eighteen years and you wanna come with this.

GABRIEL [takes a quarter out of his pocket] See what I got? Got a brand new quarter.

TROY Rose . . . it's just . . .

ROSE Ain't nothing you can say, Troy. Ain't no way of explaining that.

GABRIEL Fellow that give me this quarter had a whole mess of them. I'm gonna keep this quarter till it stop shining.

ROSE Gabe, go on in the house there. I got some watermelon in the frigidaire. Go on and get you a piece.

GABRIEL Say, Rose . . . you know I was chasing hellhounds and them bad mens come and get me and take me away. Troy helped me. He come down there and told them they better let me go before he beat them up. Yeah, he did!

ROSE You go on and get you a piece of watermelon, Gabe. Them bad mens is gone now.

GABRIEL Okay, Rose . . . gonna get me some watermelon. The kind with the stripes on it. [GABRIEL exits into the house.]

ROSE Why, Troy? Why? After all these years to come dragging this in to me now. It don't make no sense at your age. I could have expected this ten or fifteen years ago, but not now.

TROY Age ain't got nothing to do with it, Rose.

ROSE I done tried to be everything a wife should be. Everything a wife could be. Been married eighteen years and I got to live to see the day you tell me you been seeing another woman and done fathered a child by her. And you know I ain't never wanted no half nothing in my family. My whole family is half. Everybody got different fathers and mothers . . . my two sisters and my brother. Can't hardly tell who's who. Can't never sit down and talk about Papa and Mama. It's your papa and your mama and my papa and my mama . . .

TROY Rose . . . stop it now.

ROSE I ain't never wanted that for none of my children. And now you wanna drag your behind in here and tell me something like this.

TROY You ought to know. It's time for you to know.

ROSE Well, I don't want to know, goddamn it!

TROY I can't just make it go away. It's done now. I can't wish the circumstance of the thing away.

ROSE And you don't want to either. Maybe you want to wish me and my boy away. Maybe that's what you want? Well, you can't wish us away. I've got eighteen years of my life invested in you. You ought to have stayed upstairs in my bed where you belong.

TROY Rose . . . now listen to me . . . we can get a handle on this thing. We can talk this out . . . come to an understanding.

ROSE All of a sudden it's "we." Where was "we" at when you was down there rolling around with some godforsaken woman? "We" should have come to an understanding before you started making a damn fool of yourself. You're a day late and a dollar short when it comes to an understanding with me.

TROY It's just . . . She gives me a different idea . . . a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems . . . be a different man. I ain't got to wonder how I'm gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain't never been.

ROSE What I want to know . . . is do you plan to continue seeing her? That's all you can say to me.

TROY I can sit up in her house and laugh. Do you understand what I'm saying. I can laugh out loud . . . and it feels good. It reaches all the way down to the bottom of my shoes. *[Pause.]* Rose, I can't give that up.

ROSE Maybe you ought to go on and stay down there with her . . . if she a better woman than me.

TROY It ain't about nobody being a better woman or nothing. Rose, you ain't the blame. A man couldn't ask for no woman to be a better wife than you've been. I'm responsible for it. I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself.

ROSE What the hell was I there for? That was my job, not somebody else's.

TROY Rose, I done tried all my life to live decent . . . to live a clean . . . hard . . . useful life. I tried to be a good husband to you. In every way I knew how. Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don't know. But . . . you born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely . . . always looking for the curve-ball on the inside corner. You can't afford to let none get past you. You can't afford a call strike. If you going down . . . you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you. What you gonna do. I fooled them, Rose. I bunted. When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job . . . I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me. I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job. I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home.

ROSE You should have stayed in my bed, Troy.

TROY Then, when I saw that gal . . . she firmed up my backbone. And I got to thinking that if I tried . . . I just might be able to steal second. Do you understand after eighteen years I wanted to steal second.

ROSE You should have held me tight. You should have grabbed me and held on.

TROY I stood on first base for eighteen years and I thought . . . well, god-damn it . . . go on for it!

ROSE We're not talking about baseball! We're talking about you going off to lay in bed with another woman . . . and then bring it home to me. That's what we're talking about. We ain't talking about no baseball.

TROY Rose, you're not listening to me. I'm trying the best I can to explain it to you. It's not easy for me to admit that I been standing in the same place for eighteen years.

ROSE I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too. I gave eighteen years of my life to stand in the same spot with you. Don't you think I ever wanted other things? Don't you think I had dreams and hopes? What about my life? What about me? Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? That I wanted to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities? That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good? You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams . . . and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom. But I

held on to you, Troy. I held you tighter. You was my husband. I owed you everything I had. Every part of me I could find to give you. And upstairs in that room . . . with the darkness falling in on me . . . I gave everything I had to try and erase the doubt that you wasn't the finest man in the world. And wherever you was going . . . I wanted to be there with you. 'Cause you was my husband. 'Cause that's the only way I was gonna survive as your wife. You always talking about what you give . . . and what you don't have to give. But you take too. You take . . . and don't even know nobody's giving!

[ROSE turns to exit into the house; TROY grabs her arm.]

TROY You say I take and don't give!

ROSE Troy! You're hurting me!

TROY You say I take and don't give!

ROSE Troy . . . you're hurting my arm! Let go!

TROY I done give you everything I got. Don't you tell that lie on me.

ROSE Troy!

TROY Don't you tell that lie on me!

[CORY enters from the house.]

CORY Mama!

ROSE Troy, you're hurting me.

TROY Don't you tell me about no taking and giving.

[CORY comes up behind TROY and grabs him. TROY, surprised, is thrown off balance just as CORY throws a glancing blow that catches him on the chest and knocks him down. TROY is stunned, as is CORY.]

ROSE Troy. Troy. No! [TROY gets to his feet and starts at CORY.] Troy no. Please! Troy!

[ROSE pulls on TROY to hold him back. TROY stops himself.]

TROY [to CORY] Alright. That's strike two. You stay away from around me, boy. Don't you strike out. You living with a full count.⁴ Don't you strike out.

[TROY exits out the yard as the lights go down.]

SCENE 2

It is six months later, early afternoon. TROY enters from the house and starts to exit the yard. ROSE enters from the house.

ROSE Troy, I want to talk to you.

TROY All of a sudden, after all this time, you want to talk to me, huh? You ain't wanted to talk to me for months. You ain't wanted to talk to me last night. You ain't wanted no part of me then. What you wanna talk to me about now?

ROSE Tomorrow's Friday.

TROY I know what day tomorrow is. You think I don't know tomorrow's Friday? My whole life I ain't done nothing but look to see Friday coming and you got to tell me it's Friday.

ROSE I want to know if you're coming home.

TROY I always come home, Rose. You know that. There ain't never been a night I ain't come home.

4. In baseball, a count of three balls and two strikes; one more ball will result in a walk; one more strike will put the batter out.

ROSE That ain't what I mean . . . and you know it. I want to know if you're coming straight home after work.

TROY I figure I'd cash my check . . . hang out at Taylors' with the boys . . . maybe play a game of checkers . . .

ROSE Troy, I can't live like this. I won't live like this. You livin' on borrowed time with me. It's been going on six months now you ain't been coming home.

TROY I be here every night. Every night of the year. That's 365 days.

ROSE I want you to come home tomorrow after work.

TROY Rose . . . I don't mess up my pay. You know that now. I take my pay and I give it to you. I don't have no money but what you give me back. I just want to have a little time to myself . . . a little time to enjoy life.

ROSE What about me? When's my time to enjoy life?

TROY I don't know what to tell you, Rose. I'm doing the best I can.

ROSE You ain't been home from work but time enough to change your clothes and run out . . . and you wanna call that the best you can do?

TROY I'm going over to the hospital to see Alberta. She went into the hospital this afternoon. Look like she might have the baby early. I won't be gone long.

ROSE Well, you ought to know. They went over to Miss Pearl's and got Gabe today. She said you told them to go ahead and lock him up.

TROY I ain't said no such thing. Whoever told you that telling a lie. Pearl ain't doing nothing but telling a big fat lie.

ROSE She ain't had to tell me. I read it on the papers.

TROY I ain't told them nothing of the kind.

ROSE I saw it right there on the papers.

TROY What it say, huh?

ROSE It said you told them to take him.

TROY Then they screwed that up, just the way they screw up everything. I ain't worried about what they got on the paper.

ROSE Say the government send part of his check to the hospital and the other part to you.

TROY I ain't got nothing to do with that if that's the way it works. I ain't made up the rules about how it work.

ROSE You did Gabe just like you did Cory. You wouldn't sign the paper for Cory . . . but you signed for Gabe. You signed that paper.

[*The telephone is heard ringing inside the house.*]

TROY I told you I ain't signed nothing, woman! The only thing I signed was the release form. Hell, I can't read, I don't know what they had on the paper! I ain't signed nothing about sending Gabe away.

ROSE I said send him to the hospital . . . you said let him be free . . . now you done went down there and signed him to the hospital for half his money. You went back on yourself, Troy. You gonna have to answer for that.

TROY See now . . . you been over there talking to Miss Pearl. She done got mad cause she ain't getting Gabe's rent money. That's all it is. She's liable to say anything.

ROSE Troy, I seen where you signed the paper.

TROY You ain't seen nothing I signed. What she doing got papers on my brother anyway? Miss Pearl telling a big fat lie. And I'm gonna tell her

about it too! You ain't seen nothing I signed. Say . . . you ain't seen nothing I signed.

[ROSE exits into the house to answer the telephone. Presently she returns.]

ROSE Troy . . . that was the hospital. Alberta had the baby.

TROY What she have? What is it?

ROSE It's a girl.

TROY I better get on down to the hospital to see her.

ROSE Troy . . .

TROY Rose . . . I got to go see her now. That's only right . . . what's the matter . . . the baby's alright, ain't it?

ROSE Alberta died having the baby.

TROY Died . . . you say she's dead? Alberta's dead?

ROSE They said they done all they could. They couldn't do nothing for her.

TROY The baby? How's the baby?

ROSE They say it's healthy. I wonder who's gonna bury her.

TROY She had family, Rose. She wasn't living in the world by herself.

ROSE I know she wasn't living in the world by herself.

TROY Next thing you gonna want to know if she had any insurance.

ROSE Troy, you ain't got to talk like that.

TROY That's the first thing that jumped out your mouth. "Who's gonna bury her?" Like I'm fixing to take on that task for myself.

ROSE I am your wife. Don't push me away.

TROY I ain't pushing nobody away. Just give me some space. That's all. Just give me some room to breathe.

[ROSE exits into the house. TROY walks about the yard.]

TROY [*with a quiet rage that threatens to consume him*] Alright . . . Mr. Death. See now . . . I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. See? I'm gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the other side. See? You stay over there until you're ready for me. Then you come on. Bring your army. Bring your sickle. Bring your wrestling clothes. I ain't gonna fall down on my vigilance this time. You ain't gonna sneak up on me no more. When you ready for me . . . when the top of your list say Troy Maxson . . . that's when you come around here. You come up and knock on the front door. Ain't nobody else got nothing to do with this. This is between you and me. Man to man. You stay on the other side of that fence until you ready for me. Then you come up and knock on the front door. Anytime you want. I'll be ready for you.

[*The lights go down to black.*]

SCENE 3

The lights come up on the porch. It is late evening three days later. ROSE sits listening to the ball game waiting for TROY. The final out of the game is made and ROSE switches off the radio. TROY enters the yard carrying an infant wrapped in blankets. He stands back from the house and calls.

[*ROSE enters and stands on the porch. There is a long, awkward silence, the weight of which grows heavier with each passing second.*]

TROY Rose . . . I'm standing here with my daughter in my arms. She ain't but a wee bittie little old thing. She don't know nothing about grownups' business. She innocent . . . and she ain't got no mama.

ROSE What you telling me for, Troy? [*She turns and exits into the house.*]

TROY Well . . . I guess we'll just sit out here on the porch. [*He sits down on the porch. There is an awkward indelicateness about the way he handles the baby. His largeness engulfs and seems to swallow it. He speaks loud enough for ROSE to hear.*] A man's got to do what's right for him. I ain't sorry for nothing I done. It felt right in my heart. [*To the baby.*] What you smiling at? Your daddy's a big man. Got these great big old hands. But sometimes he's scared. And right now your daddy's scared cause we sitting out here and ain't got no home. Oh, I been homeless before. I ain't had no little baby with me. But I been homeless. You just be out on the road by your lonesome and you see one of them trains coming and you just kinda go like this . . .

[*He sings as a lullaby.*]

Please, Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line

Please, Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line

I ain't got no ticket please let me ride the blinds

[*ROSE enters from the house. TROY hearing her steps behind him, stands and faces her.*]

She's my daughter, Rose. My own flesh and blood. I can't deny her no more than I can deny them boys. [*Pause.*] You and them boys is my family. You and them and this child is all I got in the world. So I guess what I'm saying is . . . I'd appreciate it if you'd help me take care of her.

ROSE Okay, Troy . . . you're right. I'll take care of your baby for you . . . cause . . . like you say . . . she's innocent . . . and you can't visit the sins of the father upon the child. A motherless child has got a hard time. [*She takes the baby from him.*] From right now . . . this child got a mother. But you a womanless man.

[*ROSE turns and exits into the house with the baby. Lights go down to black.*]

SCENE 4

It is two months later. LYONS enters from the street. He knocks on the door and calls.

LYONS Hey, Rose! [*Pause.*] Rose!

ROSE [*from inside the house*] Stop that yelling. You gonna wake up Raynell. I just got her to sleep.

LYONS I just stopped by to pay Papa this twenty dollars I owe him. Where's Papa at?

ROSE He should be here in a minute. I'm getting ready to go down to the church. Sit down and wait on him.

LYONS I got to go pick up Bonnie over her mother's house.

ROSE Well, sit it down there on the table. He'll get it.

LYONS [*enters the house and sets the money on the table*] Tell Papa I said thanks. I'll see you again.

ROSE Alright, Lyons. We'll see you.

[*LYONS starts to exit as CORY enters.*]

CORY Hey, Lyons.

LYONS What's happening, Cory. Say man, I'm sorry I missed your graduation. You know I had a gig and couldn't get away. Otherwise, I would have been there. So what you doing?

CORY I'm trying to find a job.

LYONS Yeah, I know how that go, man. It's rough out here. Jobs are scarce.

CORY Yeah, I know.

LYONS Look here, I got to run. Talk to Papa . . . he know some people. He'll be able to help get you a job. Talk to him . . . see what he say.

CORY Yeah . . . alright, Lyons.

LYONS You take care. I'll talk to you soon. We'll find some time to talk.

[LYONS exits the yard. CORY wanders over to the tree, picks up the bat and assumes a batting stance. He studies an imaginary pitcher and swings. Dissatisfied with the result, he tries again. TROY enters. They eye each other for a beat. CORY puts the bat down and exits the yard. TROY starts into the house as ROSE exits with RAYNELL. She is carrying a cake.]

TROY I'm coming in and everybody's going out.

ROSE I'm taking this cake down to the church for the bakesale. Lyons was by to see you. He stopped by to pay you your twenty dollars. It's laying in there on the table.

TROY [*going into his pocket*] Well . . . here go this money.

ROSE Put it in there on the table, Troy. I'll get it.

TROY What time you coming back?

ROSE Ain't no use in you studying me. It don't matter what time I come back.

TROY I just asked you a question, woman. What's the matter . . . can't I ask you a question?

ROSE Troy, I don't want to go into it. Your dinner's in there on the stove. All you got to do is heat it up. And don't you be eating the rest of them cakes in there. I'm coming back for them. We having a bakesale at the church tomorrow.

[ROSE exits the yard. TROY sits down on the steps, takes a pint bottle from his pocket, opens it, and drinks. He begins to sing.]

[TROY]

Hear it ring! Hear it ring!
 Had an old dog his name was Blue
 You know Blue was mighty true
 You know Blue as a good old dog
 Blue trees a possum in a hollow log
 You know from that he was a good old dog

[BONO enters the yard.]

BONO Hey, Troy.

TROY Hey, what's happening, Bono?

BONO I just thought I'd stop by to see you.

TROY What you stop by and see me for? You ain't stopped by in a month of Sundays. Hell, I must owe you money or something.

BONO Since you got your promotion I can't keep up with you. Used to see you everyday. Now I don't even know what route you working.

TROY They keep switching me around. Got me out in Greentree now . . . hauling white folks' garbage.

BONO Greentree, huh? You lucky, at least you ain't got to be lifting them barrels. Damn if they ain't getting heavier. I'm gonna put in my two years and call it quits.

TROY I'm thinking about retiring myself. How's Lucille?

BONO You got it easy. You can *drive* for another five years.

TROY It ain't the same, Bono. It ain't like working the back of the truck. Ain't got nobody to talk to . . . feel like you working by yourself. Naw, I'm thinking about retiring. How's Lucille?

BONO She alright. Her arthritis get to acting up on her sometime. Saw Rose on my way in. She going down to the church, huh?

TROY Yeah, she took up going down there. All them preachers looking for somebody to fatten their pockets. [*Pause.*] Got some gin here.

BONO Naw, thanks. I just stopped by to say hello.

TROY Hell, nigger . . . you can take a drink. I ain't never known you to say no to a drink. You ain't got to work tomorrow.

BONO I just stopped by. I'm fixing to go over to Skinner's. We got us a domino game going over his house every Friday.

TROY Nigger, you can't play no dominoes. I used to whup you four games out of five.

BONO Well, that learned me. I'm getting better.

TROY Yeah? Well, that's alright.

BONO Look here . . . I got to be getting on. Stop by sometime, huh?

TROY Yeah, I'll do that, Bono. Lucille told Rose you bought her a new refrigerator.

BONO Yeah, Rose told Lucille you had finally built your fence . . . so I figured we'd call it even.

TROY I knew you would.

BONO Yeah . . . okay. I'll be talking to you.

TROY Yeah, take care, Bono. Good to see you. I'm gonna stop over.

BONO Yeah. Okay, Troy.

[*BONO exits. TROY drinks from the bottle.*]

TROY

Old Blue died and I dig his grave
 Let him down with a golden chain
 Every night when I hear old Blue bark
 I know Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark.
 Hear it ring! Hear it ring!

[*CORY enters the yard. They eye each other for a beat. TROY is sitting in the middle of the steps. CORY walks over.*]

CORY I got to get by.

TROY Say what? What's you say?

CORY You in my way. I got to get by.

TROY You got to get by where? This is my house. Bought and paid for. In full. Took me fifteen years. And if you wanna go in my house and I'm sitting on the steps . . . you say excuse me. Like your mama taught you.

CORY Come on, Pop . . . I got to get by.

[*CORY starts to maneuver his way past TROY. TROY grabs his leg and shoves him back.*]

TROY You just gonna walk over top of me?

CORY I live here too!

TROY [*advancing toward him*] You just gonna walk over top of me in my own house?

CORY I ain't scared of you.

TROY I ain't asked if you was scared of me. I asked you if you was fixing to walk over top of me in my own house? That's the question. You ain't gonna say excuse me? You just gonna walk over top of me?

CORY If you wanna put it like that.

TROY How else am I gonna put it?

CORY I was walking by you to go into the house 'cause you sitting on the steps drunk, singing to yourself. You can put it like that.

TROY Without saying excuse me?? [*CORY doesn't respond.*] I asked you a question. Without saying excuse me??

CORY I ain't got to say excuse me to you. You don't count around here no more.

TROY Oh, I see . . . I don't count around here no more. You ain't got to say excuse me to your daddy. All of a sudden you done got so grown that your daddy don't count around here no more . . . Around here in his own house and yard that he done paid for with the sweat of his brow. You done got so grown to where you gonna take over. You gonna take over my house. Is that right? You gonna wear my pants. You gonna go in there and stretch out on my bed. You ain't got to say excuse me cause I don't count around here no more. Is that right?

CORY That's right. You always talking this dumb stuff. Now, why don't you just get out my way.

TROY I guess you got someplace to sleep and something to put in your belly. You got that, huh? You got that? That's what you need. You got that, huh?

CORY You don't know what I got. You ain't got to worry about what I got.

TROY You right! You one hundred percent right! I done spent the last seventeen years worrying about what you got. Now it's your turn, see? I'll tell you what you do. You grown . . . we done established that. You a man. Now, let's see you act like one. Turn your behind around and walk out this yard. And when you get out there in the alley . . . you can forget about this house. See? 'Cause this is my house. You go on and be a man and get your own house. You can forget about this. 'Cause this is mine. You go on and get yours 'cause I'm through with doing for you.

CORY You talking about what you did for me . . . what'd you ever give me?

TROY Them feet and bones! That pumping heart nigger! I give you more than anybody else is ever gonna give you.

CORY You ain't never gave me nothing! You ain't never done nothing but hold me back. Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try and make me scared of you. I used to tremble every time you called my name. Every time I heard your footsteps in the house. Wondering all the time . . . what's Papa gonna say if I do this? . . . What's he gonna say if I do that? . . . what's Papa gonna say if I turn on the radio? And Mama, too . . . she tries . . . but she's scared of you.

TROY You leave your mama out of this. She ain't got nothing to do with this.

CORY I don't know how she stand you . . . after what you did to her.

- TROY I told you to leave your mama out of this! [*He advances toward CORY.*]
- CORY What you gonna do . . . give me a whupping? You can't whup me no more. You're too old. You just an old man.
- TROY [*shoves him on his shoulder*] Nigger! That's what you are. You just another nigger on the street to me!
- CORY You crazy! You know that?
- TROY Go on now! You got the devil in you. Get on away from me!
- CORY You just a crazy old man . . . talking about I got the devil in me.
- TROY Yeah, I'm crazy! If you don't get on the other side of that yard . . . I'm gonna show you how crazy I am! Go on . . . get the hell out of my yard.
- CORY It ain't your yard. You took Uncle Gabe's money he got from the army to buy this house and then you put him out.
- TROY [*TROY advances on CORY.*] Get your black ass out of my yard!
[*TROY's advance backs CORY up against the tree. CORY grabs up the bat.*]
- CORY I ain't going nowhere! Come on . . . put me out! I ain't scared of you.
- TROY That's my bat!
- CORY Come on!
- TROY Put my bat down!
- CORY Come on, put me out. [*CORY swings at TROY, who backs across the yard.*] What's the matter? You so bad . . . put me out!
[*TROY advances toward CORY.*]
- CORY [*backing up*] Come on! Come on!
- TROY You're gonna have to use it! You wanna draw that bat back on me . . . you're gonna have to use it.
- CORY Come on! . . . Come on!
[*CORY swings the bat at TROY a second time. He misses. TROY continues to advance toward him.*]
- TROY You're gonna have to kill me! You wanna draw that bat back on me. You're gonna have to kill me.
[*CORY, backed up against the tree, can go no farther. TROY taunts him. He sticks out his head and offers him a target.*]
- Come on! Come on!
[*CORY is unable to swing the bat. TROY grabs it.*]
- TROY Then I'll show you.
[*CORY and TROY struggle over the bat. The struggle is fierce and fully engaged. TROY ultimately is the stronger, and takes the bat from CORY and stands over him ready to swing. He stops himself.*]
- Go on and get away from around my house.
[*CORY, stung by his defeat, picks himself up, walks slowly out of the yard and up the alley.*]
- CORY Tell Mama I'll be back for my things.
- TROY They'll be on the other side of that fence.
[*CORY exits.*]
- TROY I can't taste nothing. Helluljah! I can't taste nothing no more. [*TROY assumes a batting posture and begins to taunt Death, the fastball in the outside corner.*] Come on! It's between you and me now! Come on! Anytime you want! Come on! I be ready for you . . . but I ain't gonna be easy.
[*The lights go down on the scene.*]

SCENE 5

The time is 1965. The lights come up in the yard. It is the morning of TROY's funeral. A funeral plaque with a light hangs beside the door. There is a small garden plot off to the side. There is noise and activity in the house as ROSE, LYONS and BONO have gathered. The door opens and RAYNELL, seven years old, enters dressed in a flannel nightgown. She crosses to the garden and pokes around with a stick. ROSE calls from the house.

ROSE Raynell!

RAYNELL Mam?

ROSE What you doing out there?

RAYNELL Nothing.

[ROSE comes to the door.]

ROSE Girl, get in here and get dressed. What you doing?

RAYNELL Seeing if my garden grew.

ROSE I told you it ain't gonna grow overnight. You got to wait.

RAYNELL It don't look like it never gonna grow. Dag!

ROSE I told you a watched pot never boils. Get in here and get dressed.

RAYNELL This ain't even no pot, Mama.

ROSE You just have to give it a chance. It'll grow. Now you come on and do what I told you. We got to be getting ready. This ain't no morning to be playing around. You hear me?

RAYNELL Yes, mam.

[ROSE exits into the house. RAYNELL continues to poke at her garden with a stick. CORY enters. He is dressed in a Marine corporal's uniform, and carries a duffel bag. His posture is that of a military man, and his speech has a clipped sternness.]

CORY [to RAYNELL] Hi. [Pause.] I bet your name is Raynell.

RAYNELL Uh huh.

CORY Is your mama home?

[RAYNELL runs up on the porch and calls through the screendoor.]

RAYNELL Mama . . . there's some man out here. Mama?

[ROSE comes to the door.]

ROSE Cory? Lord have mercy! Look here, you all! [ROSE and CORY embrace in a tearful reunion as BONO and LYONS enter from the house dressed in funeral clothes.]

BONO Aw, looka here . . .

ROSE Done got all grown up!

CORY Don't cry, Mama. What you crying about?

ROSE I'm just so glad you made it.

CORY Hey Lyons. How you doing, Mr. Bono.

[LYON goes to embrace CORY.]

LYONS Look at you, man. Look at you. Don't he look good, Rose. Got them Corporal stripes.

ROSE What took you so long?

CORY You know how the Marines are, Mama. They got to get all their paperwork straight before they let you do anything.

ROSE Well, I'm sure glad you made it. They let Lyons come. Your Uncle Gabe's still in the hospital. They don't know if they gonna let him out or not. I just talked to them a little while ago.

LYONS A Corporal in the United States Marines.

BONO Your daddy knew you had it in you. He used to tell me all the time.

LYONS Don't he look good, Mr. Bono?

BONO Yeah, he remind me of Troy when I first met him. [*Pause.*] Say, Rose, Lucille's down at the church with the choir. I'm gonna go down and get the pallbearers lined up. I'll be back to get you all.

ROSE Thanks, Jim.

CORY See you, Mr. Bono.

LYONS [*With his arm around RAYNELL*] Cory . . . look at Raynell. Ain't she precious? She gonna break a whole lot of hearts.

ROSE Raynell, come and say hello to your brother. This is your brother, Cory. You remember Cory.

RAYNELL No, Mam.

CORY She don't remember me, Mama.

ROSE Well, we talk about you. She heard us talk about you. [*To RAYNELL.*] This is your brother, Cory. Come on and say hello.

RAYNELL Hi.

CORY Hi. So you're Raynell. Mama told me a lot about you.

ROSE You all come on into the house and let me fix you some breakfast. Keep up your strength.

CORY I ain't hungry, Mama.

LYONS You can fix me something, Rose. I'll be in there in a minute.

ROSE Cory, you sure you don't want nothing. I know they ain't feeding you right.

CORY No, Mama . . . thanks. I don't feel like eating. I'll get something later.

ROSE Raynell . . . get on upstairs and get that dress on like I told you. [*ROSE and RAYNELL exit into the house.*]

LYONS So . . . I hear you thinking about getting married.

CORY Yeah, I done found the right one, Lyons. It's about time.

LYONS Me and Bonnie been split up about four years now. About the time Papa retired. I guess she just got tired of all them changes I was putting her through. [*Pause.*] I always knew you was gonna make something out yourself. Your head was always in the right direction. So . . . you gonna stay in . . . make it a career . . . put in your twenty years?

CORY I don't know. I got six already, I think that's enough.

LYONS Stick with Uncle Sam and retire early. Ain't nothing out here. I guess Rose told you what happened with me. They got me down the workhouse. I thought I was being slick cashing other people's checks.

CORY How much time you doing?

LYONS They give me three years. I got that beat now. I ain't got but nine more months. It ain't so bad. You learn to deal with it like anything else. You got to take the crooked with the straights. That's what Papa used to say. He used to say that when he struck out. I seen him strike out three times in a row . . . and the next time up he hit the ball over the grandstand. Right out there in Homestead Field. He wasn't satisfied hitting in the seats . . . he want to hit it over everything! After the game he had two hundred people standing around waiting to shake his hand. You got to take the crooked with the straights. Yeah, Papa was something else.

CORY You still playing?

LYONS Cory . . . you know I'm gonna do that. There's some fellows down there we got us a band . . . we gonna try and stay together when we get out . . . but yeah, I'm still playing. It still helps me to get out of bed in the morning. As long as it do that I'm gonna be right there playing and trying to make some sense out of it.

ROSE [*calling*] Lyons, I got these eggs in the pan.

LYONS Let me go on and get these eggs, man. Get ready to go bury Papa. [*Pause.*] How you doing? You doing alright?

[CORY *nods*. LYONS *touches him on the shoulder and they share a moment of silent grief*. LYONS *exits into the house*. CORY *wanders about the yard*. RAYNELL *enters*.]

RAYNELL Hi.

CORY Hi.

RAYNELL Did you used to sleep in my room?

CORY Yeah . . . that used to be my room.

RAYNELL That's what Papa call it. "Cory's room." It got your football in the closet.

[ROSE *comes to the door*.]

ROSE Raynell, get in there and get them good shoes on.

RAYNELL Mama, can't I wear these. Them other one hurt my feet.

ROSE Well, they just gonna have to hurt your feet for a while. You ain't said they hurt your feet when you went down to the store and got them.

RAYNELL They didn't hurt then. My feet done got bigger.

ROSE Don't you give me no backtalk now. You get in there and get them shoes on. [RAYNELL *exits into the house*.] Ain't too much changed. He still got that piece of rag tied to that tree. He was out here swinging that bat. I was just ready to go back in the house. He swung that bat and then he just fell over. Seem like he swung it and stood there with this grin on his face . . . and then he just fell over. They carried him on down to the hospital, but I knew there wasn't no need . . . why don't you come on in the house?

CORY Mama . . . I got something to tell you. I don't know how to tell you this . . . but I've got to tell you . . . I'm not going to Papa's funeral.

ROSE Boy, hush your mouth. That's your daddy you talking about. I don't want hear that kind of talk this morning. I done raised you to come to this? You standing there all healthy and grown talking about you ain't going to your daddy's funeral?

CORY Mama . . . listen . . .

ROSE I don't want to hear it, Cory. You just get that thought out of your head.

CORY I can't drag Papa with me everywhere I go. I've got to say no to him. One time in my life I've got to say no.

ROSE Don't nobody have to listen to nothing like that. I know you and your daddy ain't seen eye to eye, but I ain't got to listen to that kind of talk this morning. Whatever was between you and your daddy . . . the time has come to put it aside. Just take it and set it over there on the shelf and forget about it. Disrespecting your daddy ain't gonna make you a man, Cory. You got to find a way to come to that on your own. Not going to your daddy's funeral ain't gonna make you a man.

CORY The whole time I was growing up . . . living in his house . . . Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere. It weighed on you and sunk into your flesh. It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn't tell which one was you anymore. That shadow digging in your flesh. Trying to crawl in. Trying to live through you. Everywhere I looked, Troy Maxson was staring back at me . . . hiding under the bed . . . in the closet. I'm just saying I've got to find a way to get rid of that shadow, Mama.

ROSE You just like him. You got him in you good.

CORY Don't tell me that, Mama.

ROSE You Troy Maxson all over again.

CORY I don't want to be Troy Maxson. I want to be me.

ROSE You can't be nobody but who you are, Cory. That shadow wasn't nothing but you growing into yourself. You either got to grow into it or cut it down to fit you. But that's all you got to make life with. That's all you got to measure yourself against that world out there. Your daddy wanted you to be everything he wasn't . . . and at the same time he tried to make you into everything he was. I don't know if he was right or wrong . . . but I do know he meant to do more good than he meant to do harm. He wasn't always right. Sometimes when he touched he bruised. And sometimes when he took me in his arms he cut. When I first met your daddy I thought . . . Here is a man I can lay down with and make a baby. That's the first thing I thought when I seen him. I was thirty years old and had done seen my share of men. But when he walked up to me and said, "I can dance a waltz that'll make you dizzy," I thought, Rose Lee, here is a man that you can open yourself up to and be filled to bursting. Here is a man that can fill all them empty spaces you been tipping around the edges of. One of them empty spaces was being somebody's mother. I married your daddy and settled down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed. When your daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room for me. For my part in the matter. But at that time I wanted that. I wanted a house that I could sing in. And that's what your daddy gave me. I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine. I did that. I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that. But that's what life offered me in the way of being a woman, and I took it. I grabbed hold of it with both hands. By the time Raynell came into the house, me and your daddy had done lost touch with one another. I didn't want to make my blessing off of nobody's misfortune . . . but I took on to Raynell like she was all them babies I had wanted and never had. [*The phone rings.*] Like I'd been blessed to relive a part of my life. And if the Lord see fit to keep up my strength . . . I'm gonna do her just like your daddy did you . . . I'm gonna give her the best of what's in me.

RAYNELL [*entering, still with her old shoes*] Mama . . . Reverend Tollivier on the phone.

[*ROSE exits into the house.*]

RAYNELL Hi.

CORY Hi.

RAYNELL You in the Army or the Marines?

CORY Marines.

RAYNELL Papa said it was the Army. Did you know Blue?

CORY Blue? Who's Blue?

RAYNELL Papa's dog what he sing about all the time.

[CORY *singing.*]

Hear it ring! hear it ring!

I had a dog his name was Blue

You know Blue was mighty true

You know Blue was a good old dog

Blue treed a possum in a hollow log

You know from that he was a good old dog.

Hear it ring! Hear it ring!

[RAYNELL *joins in singing.*]

[CORY *and* RAYNELL]

Blue treed a possum out on a limb

Blue looked at me and I looked at him

Grabbed that possum and put him in a sack

Blue stayed there till I came back

Old Blue's feets was big and round

Never allowed a possum to touch the ground.

Old Blue died and I dug his grave

I dug his grave with a silver spade

Let him down with a golden chain

And every night I call his name

Go on Blue, you good dog you

Go on Blue, you good dog you

[RAYNELL]

Blue laid down and died like a man

Blue laid down and died . . .

[BOTH]

Blue laid down and died like a man

Now he's treeing possums in the Promised Land

I'm gonna tell you this to let you know

Blue's gone where the good dogs go

When I hear old Blue bark

When I heard old Blue bark

Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark

Blue treed a possum in Noah's Ark.

[ROSE *comes to the screen door.*]

ROSE Cory, we gonna be ready to go in a minute.

CORY [*to* RAYNELL] You go on in the house and change them shoes like

Mama told you so we can go to papa's funeral.

RAYNELL Okay, I'll be right back.

[RAYNELL *exits into the house. CORY gets up and crosses over to the tree.*

ROSE *stands in the screen door watching him. GABRIEL enters from the alley.*]

GABRIEL [*calling*] Hey, Rose!

ROSE Gabe?

GABRIEL I'm here, Rose. Hey Rose, I'm here!

[ROSE enters from the house.]

ROSE Lord . . . Look here, Lyons!

LYONS See, I told you, Rose . . . I told you they'd let him come.

CORY How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

LYONS How you doing, Uncle Gabe?

GABRIEL Hey, Rose. It's time. It's time to tell St. Peter to open the gates. Troy, you ready? You ready, Troy. I'm gonna tell St. Peter to open the gates. You get ready now.

[GABRIEL, with great fanfare, braces himself to blow. The trumpet is without a mouthpiece. He puts the end of it into his mouth and blows with great force, like a man who has been waiting some twenty-odd years for this single moment. No sound comes out of the trumpet. He braces himself and blows again with the same result. A third time he blows. There is a weight of impossible description that falls away and leaves him bare and exposed to a frightful realization. It is a trauma that a sane and normal mind would be unable to withstand. He begins to dance. A slow, strange dance, eerie and life-giving. A dance of atavistic signature and ritual. LYONS attempts to embrace him. GABRIEL pushes LYONS away. He begins to howl in what is an attempt at song, or perhaps a song turning back into itself in an attempt at speech. He finishes his dance and the gates of heaven stand open as wide as God's closet.]

That's the way that go!

[BLACKOUT.]

ANNIE DILLARD

b. 1945

Annie Dillard was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; was educated at Hollins College, Virginia; and has taught creative writing at Western Washington University and Wesleyan University. She has lived in the Blue Ridge Mountains of the Appalachian chain and among the Cascades of the Pacific Northwest; it is the solitude and close attention to nature and one's own thoughts prompted by rural life in these regions that motivate her writing, which among her generation is stylistically unique. She is deeply meditative, even spiritual, yet she can express herself in a swinging rhythm that sweeps up poetic insight and religious references with the same joyful ease of describing nature at play. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) follows the progress of the seasons as the author lives a quiet, closely observant life in the seclusion of Virginia's Roanoke Valley. Nature is studied, but so are books of a widely ranging theological, philosophical, and scientific nature. The author's subject is nothing less than cosmic, a search for understanding how beauty and violence form necessary parts of the world as we know it. Nature, like human life, is generously productive and violently destructive, equally inclusive and isolative. These tensions reinforce the thoughts Dillard examines: her own, and also those of writers who have formed our intellectual heritage. In this way her work resembles that of the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*, particularly in its appreciation of nature's cyclic patterns. More like Thoreau's friend

Ralph Waldo Emerson, however, Dillard directs her thoughts to metaphysical ends, joining a tradition reaching back to Puritan poetry and sermons. “Seeing,” excerpted here, helps establish a rhythm important to all of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, that of paging through nature as though it is a book while reading commentaries by critics as though they are signs of nature. As the critic Wendy Lesser noted about the author’s essay “For the Time Being” (1999), Dillard excels with “the conjunction of seemingly disparate facts that eventually add up to a complex whole.”

Elsewhere in Dillard’s canon are lighter subjects, such as the status of the contemporary novel (*Living by Fiction*, 1982) and accounts of picturesque travel (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*, 1982). The author has written about meeting Chinese writers, reminisced about her childhood, and studied her writing processes. In 1992 she published *The Living*, a historical novel set in the Pacific Northwest that is as much about the landscape as about its inhabitants. A second novel, *The Maytrees* (2007), is very much a product of a writerly mind, in which the progress of a long marriage allows ample time for meditation. As the critic Ihab Hassan has said of Dillard’s *Holy the Firm* (1977): “Her language is as textured as her perception, an Orphic poetry with terrors small and near at hand; her path is that of the solitary wanderer, in the wilderness of the Cascades or Blue Ridge Mountains, living in a rough cabin to ‘study hard things.’”

The following text is from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974).

From *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Seeing

When I was six or seven years old, growing up in Pittsburgh, I used to take a precious penny of my own and hide it for someone else to find. It was a curious compulsion; sadly, I’ve never been seized by it since. For some reason I always “hid” the penny along the same stretch of sidewalk up the street. I would cradle it at the roots of a sycamore, say, or in a hole left by a chipped-off piece of sidewalk. Then I would take a piece of chalk, and, starting at either end of the block, draw huge arrows leading up to the penny from both directions. After I learned to write I labeled the arrows: SURPRISE AHEAD or MONEY THIS WAY. I was greatly excited, during all this arrow-drawing, at the thought of the first lucky passer-by who would receive in this way, regardless of merit, a free gift from the universe. But I never lurked about. I would go straight home and not give the matter another thought, until, some months later, I would be gripped again by the impulse to hide another penny.

It is still the first week in January, and I’ve got great plans. I’ve been thinking about seeing. There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises. The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside from a generous hand. But—and this is the point—who gets excited by a mere penny? If you follow one arrow, if you crouch motionless on a bank to watch a tremulous ripple thrill on the water and are rewarded by the sight of a muskrat kit paddling from its den, will you count that sight a chip of copper only, and go your rueful way? It is dire poverty indeed when a man is so malnourished and fatigued that he won’t stoop to pick up a penny. But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted

in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days. It is that simple. What you see is what you get.

I used to be able to see flying insects in the air. I'd look ahead and see, not the row of hemlocks across the road, but the air in front of it. My eyes would focus along that column of air, picking out flying insects. But I lost interest, I guess, for I dropped the habit. Now I can see birds. Probably some people can look at the grass at their feet and discover all the crawling creatures. I would like to know grasses and sedges—and care. Then my least journey into the world would be a field trip, a series of happy recognitions. Thoreau,¹ in an expansive mood, exulted, "What a rich book might be made about buds, including, perhaps, sprouts!" It would be nice to think so. I cherish mental images I have of three perfectly happy people. One collects stones. Another—an Englishman, say—watches clouds. The third lives on a coast and collects drops of seawater which he examines microscopically and mounts. But I don't see what the specialist sees, and so I cut myself off, not only from the total picture, but from the various forms of happiness.

Unfortunately, nature is very much a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't affair. A fish flashes, then dissolves in the water before my eyes like so much salt. Deer apparently ascend bodily into heaven; the brightest oriole fades into leaves. These disappearances stun me into stillness and concentration; they say of nature that it conceals with a grand nonchalance, and they say of vision that it is a deliberate gift, the revelation of a dancer who for my eyes only flings away her seven veils. For nature does reveal as well as conceal: now-you-don't-see-it, now-you-do. For a week last September migrating red-winged blackbirds were feeding heavily down by the creek at the back of the house. One day I went out to investigate the racket; I walked up to a tree, an Osage orange,² and a hundred birds flew away. They simply materialized out of the tree. I saw a tree, then a whisk of color, then a tree again. I walked closer and another hundred blackbirds took flight. Not a branch, not a twig budged: the birds were apparently weightless as well as invisible. Or, it was as if the leaves of the Osage orange had been freed from a spell in the form of red-winged blackbirds; they flew from the tree, caught my eye in the sky, and vanished. When I looked again at the tree the leaves had reassembled as if nothing had happened. Finally I walked directly to the trunk of the tree and a final hundred, the real diehards, appeared, spread, and vanished. How could so many hide in the tree without my seeing them? The Osage orange, unruffled, looked just as it had looked from the house, when three hundred red-winged blackbirds cried from its crown. I looked downstream where they flew, and they were gone. Searching, I couldn't spot one. I wandered downstream to force them to play their hand, but they'd crossed the creek and scattered. One show to a customer. These appearances catch at my throat; they are the free gifts, the bright coppers at the roots of trees.

It's all a matter of keeping my eyes open. Nature is like one of those line drawings of a tree that are puzzles for children: Can you find hidden in the

1. Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), American writer and naturalist associated with the Transcendentalist movement.

2. Hardwood tree of the mulberry family, sometimes called the mock orange.

leaves a duck, a house, a boy, a bucket, a zebra, and a boot? Specialists can find the most incredibly well-hidden things. A book I read when I was young recommended an easy way to find caterpillars to rear: you simply find some fresh caterpillar droppings, look up, and there's your caterpillar. More recently an author advised me to set my mind at ease about those piles of cut stems on the ground in grassy fields. Field mice make them; they cut the grass down by degrees to reach the seeds at the head. It seems that when the grass is tightly packed, as in a field of ripe grain, the blade won't topple at a single cut through the stem; instead, the cut stem simply drops vertically, held in the crush of grain. The mouse severs the bottom again and again, the stem keeps dropping an inch at a time, and finally the head is low enough for the mouse to reach the seeds. Meanwhile, the mouse is positively littering the field with its little piles of cut stems into which, presumably, the author of the book is constantly stumbling.

If I can't see these minutiae, I still try to keep my eyes open. I'm always on the lookout for antlion traps in sandy soil, monarch pupae near milkweed, skipper larvae in locust leaves. These things are utterly common, and I've not seen one. I bang on hollow trees near water, but so far no flying squirrels have appeared. In flat country I watch every sunset in hopes of seeing the green ray. The green ray is a seldom-seen streak of light that rises from the sun like a spurting fountain at the moment of sunset; it throbs into the sky for two seconds and disappears. One more reason to keep my eyes open. A photography professor at the University of Florida just happened to see a bird die in mid-flight; it jerked, died, dropped, and smashed on the ground. I squint at the wind because I read Stewart Edward White.³ "I have always maintained that if you looked closely enough you could see the wind—the dim, hardly-made-out, fine débris fleeing high in the air." White was an excellent observer, and devoted an entire chapter of *The Mountains*⁴ to the subject of seeing deer: "As soon as you can forget the naturally obvious and construct an artificial obvious, then you too will see deer."

But the artificial obvious is hard to see. My eyes account for less than one percent of the weight of my head; I'm bony and dense; I see what I expect. I once spent a full three minutes looking at a bullfrog that was so unexpectedly large I couldn't see it even though a dozen enthusiastic campers were shouting directions. Finally I asked, "What color am I looking for?" and a fellow said, "Green." When at last I picked out the frog, I saw what painters are up against: the thing wasn't green at all, but the color of wet hickory bark.

The lover can see, and the knowledgeable. I visited an aunt and uncle at a quarter-horse ranch in Cody, Wyoming.⁵ I couldn't do much of anything useful, but I could, I thought, draw. So, as we all sat around the kitchen table after supper, I produced a sheet of paper and drew a horse. "That's one lame horse," my aunt volunteered. The rest of the family joined in: "Only place to saddle that one is his neck"; "Looks like we better shoot the poor thing, on account of those terrible growths." Meekly, I slid the pencil and paper down the table. Everyone in that family, including my three young cousins, could draw a horse. Beautifully. When the paper came back

3. American spiritualist writer (1873–1946).

4. Published in 1904.

5. City in the northwestern section of the state.

"Quarter horse": type of small horse bred for strength, speed, and endurance.

it looked as though five shining, real quarter horses had been corralled by mistake with a papier-mâché moose; the real horses seemed to gaze at the monster with a steady, puzzled air. I stay away from horses now, but I can do a creditable goldfish. The point is that I just don't know what the lover knows; I just can't see the artificial obvious that those in the know construct. The herpetologist asks the native, "Are there snakes in that ravine?" "Nosir." And the herpetologist comes home with, yessir, three bags full. Are there butterflies on that mountain? Are the bluets in bloom, are there arrowheads here, or fossil shells in the shale?

Peeping through my keyhole I see within the range of only about thirty percent of the light that comes from the sun; the rest is infrared and some little ultraviolet, perfectly apparent to many animals, but invisible to me. A nightmare network of ganglia, charged and firing without my knowledge, cuts and splices what I do see, editing it for my brain. Donald E. Carr⁶ points out that the sense impressions of one-celled animals are *not* edited for the brain: "This is philosophically interesting in a rather mournful way, since it means that only the simplest animals perceive the universe as it is."

A fog that won't burn away drifts and flows across my field of vision. When you see fog move against a backdrop of deep pines, you don't see the fog itself, but streaks of clearness floating across the air in dark shreds. So I see only tatters of clearness through a pervading obscurity. I can't distinguish the fog from the overcast sky; I can't be sure if the light is direct or reflected. Everywhere darkness and the presence of the unseen appalls. We estimate now that only one atom dances alone in every cubic meter of intergalactic space. I blink and squint. What planet or power yanks Halley's Comet⁷ out of orbit? We haven't seen that force yet; it's a question of distance, density, and the pallor of reflected light. We rock, cradled in the swaddling band of darkness. Even the simple darkness of night whispers suggestions to the mind. Last summer, in August, I stayed at the creek too late.

Where Tinker Creek flows under the sycamore log bridge to the tear-shaped island, it is slow and shallow, fringed thinly in cattail marsh. At this spot an astonishing bloom of life supports vast breeding populations of insects, fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals. On windless summer evenings I stalk along the creek bank or straddle the sycamore log in absolute stillness, watching for muskrats. The night I stayed too late I was hunched on the log staring spellbound at spreading, reflected stains of lilac on the water. A cloud in the sky suddenly lighted as if turned on by a switch; its reflection just as suddenly materialized on the water upstream, flat and floating, so that I couldn't see the creek bottom, or life in the water under the cloud. Downstream, away from the cloud on the water, water turtles smooth as beans were gliding down with the current in a series of easy, weightless push-offs, as men bound on the moon. I didn't know whether to trace the progress of one turtle I was sure of, risking sticking my face in one of the bridge's spider webs made invisible by the gathering dark, or take a chance on seeing the carp, or scan the mudbank in hope of seeing a muskrat, or

6. American environmentalist and writer (1903–1986).

7. Observed by the English astronomer Edmond

Halley (1656–1742), who predicted that its orbit would return the comet to earthly view every seventy-six years.

follow the last of the swallows who caught at my heart and trailed it after them like streamers as they appeared from directly below, under the log, flying upstream with their tails forked, so fast.

But shadows spread, and deepened, and stayed. After thousands of years we're still strangers to darkness, fearful aliens in an enemy camp with our arms crossed over our chests. I stirred. A land turtle on the bank, startled, hissed the air from its lungs and withdrew into its shell. An uneasy pink here, an unfathomable blue there, gave great suggestion of lurking beings. Things were going on. I couldn't see whether that sere rustle I heard was a distant rattlesnake, slit-eyed, or a nearby sparrow kicking in the dry flood debris slung at the foot of a willow. Tremendous action roiled the water everywhere I looked, big action, inexplicable. A tremor welled up beside a gaping muskrat burrow in the bank and I caught my breath, but no muskrat appeared. The ripples continued to fan upstream with a steady, powerful thrust. Night was knitting over my face an eyeless mask, and I still sat transfixed. A distant airplane, a delta wing out of nightmare, made a gliding shadow on the creek's bottom that looked like a stingray cruising upstream. At once a black fin slit the pink cloud on the water, shearing it in two. The two halves merged together and seemed to dissolve before my eyes. Darkness pooled in the cleft of the creek and rose, as water collects in a well. Untamed, dreaming lights flickered over the sky. I saw hints of hulking underwater shadows, two pale splashes out of the water, and round ripples rolling close together from a blackened center.

At last I stared upstream where only the deepest violet remained of the cloud, a cloud so high its underbelly still glowed feeble color reflected from a hidden sky lighted in turn by a sun halfway to China. And out of that violet, a sudden enormous black body arced over the water. I saw only a cylindrical sleekness. Head and tail, if there was a head and tail, were both submerged in cloud. I saw only one ebony fling, a headlong dive to darkness; then the waters closed, and the lights went out.

I walked home in a shivering daze, up hill and down. Later I lay open-mouthed in bed, my arms flung wide at my sides to steady the whirling darkness. At this latitude I'm spinning 836 miles an hour round the earth's axis; I often fancy I feel my sweeping fall as a breakneck arc like the dive of dolphins, and the hollow rushing of wind raises hair on my neck and the side of my face. In orbit around the sun I'm moving 64,800 miles an hour. The solar system as a whole, like a merry-go-round unhinged, spins, bobs, and blinks at the speed of 43,200 miles an hour along a course set east of Hercules.⁸ Someone has piped, and we are dancing a tarantella until the sweat pours. I open my eyes and I see dark, muscled forms curl out of water, with flapping gills and flattened eyes. I close my eyes and I see stars, deep stars giving way to deeper stars, deeper stars bowing to deepest stars at the crown of an infinite cone.

"Still," wrote van Gogh⁹ in a letter, "a great deal of light falls on everything." If we are blinded by darkness, we are also blinded by light. When too much light falls on everything, a special terror results. Peter Freuchen¹

8. A large northern constellation, named after the Greek and Roman god.

9. Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Dutch Post-

impressionist painter.

1. Danish writer, explorer, and authority on Greenland (1886–1957).

describes the notorious kayak sickness to which Greenland Eskimos are prone. "The Greenland fjords are peculiar for the spells of completely quiet weather, when there is not enough wind to blow out a match and the water is like a sheet of glass. The kayak hunter must sit in his boat without stirring a finger so as not to scare the shy seals away. . . . The sun, low in the sky, sends a glare into his eyes, and the landscape around moves into the realm of the unreal. The reflex from the mirrorlike water hypnotizes him, he seems to be unable to move, and all of a sudden it is as if he were floating in a bottomless void, sinking, sinking, and sinking. . . . Horror-stricken, he tries to stir, to cry out, but he cannot, he is completely paralyzed, he just falls and falls." Some hunters are especially cursed with this panic, and bring ruin and sometimes starvation to their families.

Sometimes here in Virginia at sunset low clouds on the southern or northern horizon are completely invisible in the lighted sky. I only know one is there because I can see its reflection in still water. The first time I discovered this mystery I looked from cloud to no-cloud in bewilderment, checking my bearings over and over, thinking maybe the ark of the covenant² was just passing by south of Dead Man Mountain. Only much later did I read the explanation: polarized light from the sky is very much weakened by reflection, but the light in clouds isn't polarized. So invisible clouds pass among visible clouds, till all slide over the mountains; so a greater light extinguishes a lesser as though it didn't exist.

In the great meteor shower of August, the Perseid, I wail all day for the shooting stars I miss. They're out there showering down, committing harakiri in a flame of fatal attraction, and hissing perhaps at last into the ocean. But at dawn what looks like a blue dome clamps down over me like a lid on a pot. The stars and planets could smash and I'd never know. Only a piece of ashen moon occasionally climbs up or down the inside of the dome, and our local star without surcease explodes on our heads. We have really only that one light, one source for all power, and yet we must turn away from it by universal decree. Nobody here on the planet seems aware of this strange, powerful taboo, that we all walk about carefully averting our faces, this way and that, lest our eyes be blasted forever.

Darkness appalls and light dazzles; the scrap of visible light that doesn't hurt my eyes hurts my brain. What I see sets me swaying. Size and distance and the sudden swelling of meanings confuse me, bowl me over. I straddle the sycamore log bridge over Tinker Creek in the summer. I look at the lighted creek bottom: snail tracks tunnel the mud in quavering curves. A crayfish jerks, but by the time I absorb what has happened, he's gone in a billowing smokescreen of silt. I look at the water: minnows and shiners. If I'm thinking minnows, a carp will fill my brain till I scream. I look at the water's surface: skaters, bubbles, and leaves sliding down. Suddenly, my own face, reflected, startles me witless. Those snails have been tracking my face! Finally, with a shuddering wrench of the will, I see clouds, cirrus clouds. I'm dizzy, I fall in. This looking business is risky.

Once I stood on a humped rock on nearby Purgatory Mountain, watching through binoculars the great autumn hawk migration below, until I

2. In ancient Israel a chest containing two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, seen as a symbol of God's presence.

discovered that I was in danger of joining the hawks on a vertical migration of my own. I was used to binoculars, but not, apparently, to balancing on humped rocks while looking through them. I staggered. Everything advanced and receded by turns; the world was full of unexplained foreshortenings and depths. A distant huge tan object, a hawk the size of an elephant, turned out to be the browned bough of a nearby loblolly pine. I followed a sharp-shinned hawk against a featureless sky, rotating my head unawares as it flew, and when I lowered the glass a glimpse of my own looming shoulder sent me staggering. What prevents the men on Palomar³ from falling, voiceless and blinded, from their tiny, vaulted chairs?

I reel in confusion; I don't understand what I see. With the naked eye I can see two million light-years to the Andromeda galaxy. Often I slop some creek water in a jar and when I get home I dump it in a white china bowl. After the silt settles I return and see tracings of minute snails on the bottom, a planarian or two winding round the rim of water, roundworms shimmying frantically, and finally, when my eyes have adjusted to these dimensions, amoebae. At first the amoebae look like muscae volitantes, those curled moving spots you seem to see in your eyes when you stare at a distant wall. Then I see the amoebae as drops of water congealed, bluish, translucent, like chips of sky in the bowl. At length I choose one individual and give myself over to its idea of an evening. I see it dribble a grainy foot before it on its wet, unfathomable way. Do its unedited sense impressions include the fierce focus of my eyes? Shall I take it outside and show it Andromeda, and blow its little endoplasm? I stir the water with a finger, in case it's running out of oxygen. Maybe I should get a tropical aquarium with motorized bubblers and lights, and keep this one for a pet. Yes, it would tell its fissioned descendants, the universe is two feet by five, and if you listen closely you can hear the buzzing music of the spheres.

Oh, it's mysterious lamplit evenings, here in the galaxy, one after the other. It's one of those nights when I wander from window to window, looking for a sign. But I can't see. Terror and a beauty insoluble are a ribbon of blue woven into the fringes of garments of things both great and small. No culture explains, no bivouac offers real haven or rest. But it could be that we are not seeing something. Galileo⁴ thought comets were an optical illusion. This is fertile ground: since we are certain that they're not, we can look at what our scientists have been saying with fresh hope. What if there are *really* gleaming, castellated cities hung upside-down over the desert sand? What limpid lakes and cool date palms have our caravans always passed untried? Until, one by one, by the blindest of leaps, we light on the road to these places, we must stumble in darkness and hunger. I turn from the window. I'm blind as a bat, sensing only from every direction the echo of my own thin cries.

I chanced on a wonderful book by Marius von Senden, called *Space and Sight*.⁵ When Western surgeons discovered how to perform safe cataract

3. I.e., in the Palomar Observatory, on Palomar Mountain, in San Diego County, California.

4. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Italian astronomer and physicist.

5. Written by the 20th-century German physician and published in German in 1932 (English translation, 1960).

operations, they ranged across Europe and America operating on dozens of men and women of all ages who had been blinded by cataracts since birth. Von Senden collected accounts of such cases; the histories are fascinating. Many doctors had tested their patients' sense perceptions and ideas of space both before and after the operations. The vast majority of patients, of both sexes and all ages, had, in von Senden's opinion, no idea of space whatsoever. Form, distance, and size were so many meaningless syllables. A patient "had no idea of depth, confusing it with roundness." Before the operation a doctor would give a blind patient a cube and a sphere; the patient would tongue it or feel it with his hands, and name it correctly. After the operation the doctor would show the same objects to the patient without letting him touch them; now he had no clue whatsoever what he was seeing. One patient called lemonade "square" because it pricked on his tongue as a square shape pricked on the touch of his hands. Of another postoperative patient, the doctor writes, "I have found in her no notion of size, for example, not even within the narrow limits which she might have encompassed with the aid of touch. Thus when I asked her to show me how big her mother was, she did not stretch out her hands, but set her two index-fingers a few inches apart." Other doctors reported their patients' own statements to similar effect. "The room he was in . . . he knew to be but part of the house, yet he could not conceive that the whole house could look bigger"; "Those who are blind from birth . . . have no real conception of height or distance. A house that is a mile away is thought of as nearby, but requiring the taking of a lot of steps. . . . The elevator that whizzes him up and down gives no more sense of vertical distance than does the train of horizontal."

For the newly sighted, vision is pure sensation unencumbered by meaning: "The girl went through the experience that we all go through and forget, the moment we are born. She saw, but it did not mean anything but a lot of different kinds of brightness." Again, "I asked the patient what he could see; he answered that he saw an extensive field of light, in which everything appeared dull, confused, and in motion. He could not distinguish objects." Another patient saw "nothing but a confusion of forms and colours." When a newly sighted girl saw photographs and paintings, she asked, "'Why do they put those dark marks all over them?' 'Those aren't dark marks,' her mother explained, 'those are shadows. That is one of the ways the eye knows that things have shape. If it were not for shadows many things would look flat.' 'Well, that's how things do look,' Joan answered. 'Everything looks flat with dark patches.'"

But it is the patients' concepts of space that are most revealing. One patient, according to his doctor, "practiced his vision in a strange fashion; thus he takes off one of his boots, throws it some way off in front of him, and then attempts to gauge the distance at which it lies; he takes a few steps towards the boot and tries to grasp it; on failing to reach it, he moves on a step or two and gropes for the boot until he finally gets hold of it." "But even at this stage, after three weeks' experience of seeing," von Senden goes on, "'space,' as he conceives it, ends with visual space, i.e. with colour-patches that happen to bound his view. He does not yet have the notion that a larger object (a chair) can mask a smaller one (a dog), or that the latter can still be present even though it is not directly seen."

In general the newly sighted see the world as a dazzle of color-patches. They are pleased by the sensation of color, and learn quickly to name the colors, but the rest of seeing is tormentingly difficult. Soon after his operation a patient “generally bumps into one of these colour-patches and observes them to be substantial, since they resist him as tactual objects do. In walking about it also strikes him—or can if he pays attention—that he is continually passing in between the colours he sees, that he can go past a visual object, that a part of it then steadily disappears from view; and that in spite of this, however he twists and turns—whether entering the room from the door, for example, or returning back to it—he always has a visual space in front of him. Thus he gradually comes to realize that there is also a space behind him, which he does not see.”

The mental effort involved in these reasonings proves overwhelming for many patients. It oppresses them to realize, if they ever do at all, the tremendous size of the world, which they had previously conceived of as something touchingly manageable. It oppresses them to realize that they have been visible to people all along, perhaps unattractively so, without their knowledge or consent. A disheartening number of them refuse to use their new vision, continuing to go over objects with their tongues, and lapsing into apathy and despair. “The child can see, but will not make use of his sight. Only when pressed can he with difficulty be brought to look at objects in his neighbourhood; but more than a foot away it is impossible to bestir him to the necessary effort.” Of a twenty-one-year-old girl, the doctor relates, “Her unfortunate father, who had hoped for so much from this operation, wrote that his daughter carefully shuts her eyes whenever she wishes to go about the house, especially when she comes to a staircase, and that she is never happier or more at ease than when, by closing her eyelids, she relapses into her former state of total blindness.” A fifteen-year-old boy, who was also in love with a girl at the asylum for the blind, finally blurted out, “No, really, I can’t stand it any more; I want to be sent back to the asylum again. If things aren’t altered, I’ll tear my eyes out.”

Some do learn to see, especially the young ones. But it changes their lives. One doctor comments on “the rapid and complete loss of that striking and wonderful serenity which is characteristic only of those who have never yet seen.” A blind man who learns to see is ashamed of his old habits. He dresses up, grooms himself, and tries to make a good impression. While he was blind he was indifferent to objects unless they were edible; now, “a sifting of values sets in . . . his thoughts and wishes are mightily stirred and some few of the patients are thereby led into dissimulation, envy, theft and fraud.”

On the other hand, many newly sighted people speak well of the world, and teach us how dull is our own vision. To one patient, a human hand, unrecognized, is “something bright and then holes.” Shown a bunch of grapes, a boy calls out, “It is dark, blue and shiny. . . . It isn’t smooth, it has bumps and hollows.” A little girl visits a garden. “She is greatly astonished, and can scarcely be persuaded to answer, stands speechless in front of the tree, which she only names on taking hold of it, and then as ‘the tree with the lights in it.’” Some delight in their sight and give themselves over to the visual world. Of a patient just after her bandages were removed, her doctor writes, “The first things to attract her attention were her own hands; she looked at them very closely, moved them repeatedly to and fro, bent and

stretched the fingers, and seemed greatly astonished at the sight.” One girl was eager to tell her blind friend that “men do not really look like trees at all,” and astounded to discover that her every visitor had an utterly different face. Finally, a twenty-two-old girl was dazzled by the world’s brightness and kept her eyes shut for two weeks. When at the end of that time she opened her eyes again, she did not recognize any objects, but, “the more she now directed her gaze upon everything about her, the more it could be seen how an expression of gratification and astonishment overspread her features; she repeatedly exclaimed: ‘Oh God! How beautiful!’”

I saw color-patches for weeks after I read this wonderful book. It was summer; the peaches were ripe in the valley orchards. When I woke in the morning, color-patches wrapped round my eyes, intricately, leaving not one unfilled spot. All day long I walked among shifting color-patches that parted before me like the Red Sea and closed again in silence, transfigured, wherever I looked back. Some patches swelled and loomed, while others vanished utterly, and dark marks flitted at random over the whole dazzling sweep. But I couldn’t sustain the illusion of flatness. I’ve been around for too long. Form is condemned to an eternal danse macabre with meaning; I couldn’t unpeach the peaches. Nor can I remember ever having seen without understanding; the color-patches of infancy are lost. My brain then must have been smooth as any balloon. I’m told I reached for the moon; many babies do. But the color-patches of infancy swelled as meaning filled them; they arrayed themselves in solemn ranks down distance which unrolled and stretched before me like a plain. The moon rocketed away. I live now in a world of shadows that shape and distance color, a world where space makes a kind of terrible sense. What gnosticism is this, and what physics? The fluttering patch I saw in my nursery window—silver and green and shape-shifting blue—is gone; a row of Lombardy poplars takes its place, mute, across the distant lawn. That humming oblong creature pale as light that stole along the walls of my room at night, stretching exhilaratingly around the corners, is gone, too, gone the night I ate of the bittersweet fruit, put two and two together and puckered forever my brain. Martin Buber⁶ tells this tale: “Rabbi Mendel once boasted to his teacher Rabbi Elimelekh that evenings he saw the angel who rolls away the light before the darkness, and mornings the angel who rolls away the darkness before the light. ‘Yes,’ said Rabbi Elimelekh, ‘in my youth I saw that too. Later on you don’t see these things any more.’”

Why didn’t someone hand those newly sighted people paints and brushes from the start, when they still didn’t know what anything was? Then maybe we all could see color-patches too, the world unraveled from reason, Eden before Adam gave names. The scales would drop from my eyes; I’d see trees like men walking; I’d run down the road against all orders, hallooing and leaping.

Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won’t see it. It is, as

6. Austrian-born Jewish philosopher (1878–1965) active in Germany and Israel.

Ruskin⁷ says, “not merely unnoticed, but in the full, clear sense of the word, unseen.” My eyes alone can’t solve analogy tests using figures, the ones which show, with increasing elaborations, a big square, then a small square in a big square, then a big triangle, and expect me to find a small triangle in a big triangle. I have to say the words, describe what I’m seeing. If Tinker Mountain erupted, I’d be likely to notice. But if I want to notice the lesser cataclysms of valley life, I have to maintain in my head a running description of the present. It’s not that I’m observant; it’s just that I talk too much. Otherwise, especially in a strange place, I’ll never know what’s happening. Like a blind man at the ball game, I need a radio.

When I see this way I analyze and pry. I hurl over logs and roll away stones; I study the bank a square foot at a time, probing and tilting my head. Some days when a mist covers the mountains, when the muskrats won’t show and the microscope’s mirror shatters, I want to climb up the blank blue dome as a man would storm the inside of a circus tent, wildly, dangling, and with a steel knife claw a rent in the top, peep, and, if I must, fall.

But there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied. The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera. When I walk with a camera I walk from shot to shot, reading the light on a calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment’s light prints on my own silver gut. When I see this second way I am above all an unscrupulous observer.

It was sunny one evening last summer at Tinker Creek; the sun was low in the sky, upstream. I was sitting on the sycamore log bridge with the sunset at my back, watching the shiners the size of minnows who were feeding over the muddy sand in skittery schools. Again and again, one fish, then another, turned for a split second across the current and flash! the sun shot out from its silver side. I couldn’t watch for it. It was always just happening somewhere else, and it drew my vision just as it disappeared: flash, like a sudden dazzle of the thinnest blade, a sparking over a dun and olive ground at chance intervals from every direction. Then I noticed white specks, some sort of pale petals, small, floating from under my feet on the creek’s surface, very slow and steady. So I blurred my eyes and gazed towards the brim of my hat and saw a new world. I saw the pale white circles roll up, roll up, like the world’s turning, mute and perfect, and I saw the linear flashes, gleaming silver, like stars being born at random down a rolling scroll of time. Something broke and something opened. I filled up like a new wineskin. I breathed an air like light; I saw a light like water. I was the lip of a fountain the creek filled forever; I was ether, the leaf in the zephyr; I was flesh-flake, feather, bone.

When I see this way I see truly. As Thoreau says, I return to my senses. I am the man who watches the baseball game in silence in an empty stadium. I see the game purely; I’m abstracted and dazed. When it’s all over and the white-suited players lope off the green field to their shadowed dug-outs, I leap to my feet; I cheer and cheer.

7. John Ruskin (1819–1900), English art critic and social observer.

But I can't go out and try to see this way. I'll fail, I'll go mad. All I can do is try to gag the commentator, to hush the noise of useless interior babble that keeps me from seeing just as surely as a newspaper dangled before my eyes. The effort is really a discipline requiring a lifetime of dedicated struggle; it marks the literature of saints and monks of every order East and West, under every rule and no rule, discalced and shod. The world's spiritual geniuses seem to discover universally that the mind's muddy river, this ceaseless flow of trivia and trash, cannot be dammed, and that trying to dam it is a waste of effort that might lead to madness. Instead you must allow the muddy river to flow unheeded in the dim channels of consciousness; you raise your sights; you look along it, mildly, acknowledging its presence without interest and gazing beyond it into the realm of the real where subjects and objects act and rest purely, without utterance. "Launch into the deep," says Jacques Ellul,⁸ "and you shall see."

The secret of seeing is, then, the pearl of great price. If I thought he could teach me to find it and keep it forever I would stagger barefoot across a hundred deserts after any lunatic at all. But although the pearl may be found, it may not be sought. The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise. I return from one walk knowing where the killdeer nests in the field by the creek and the hour the laurel blooms. I return from the same walk a day later scarcely knowing my own name. Litanies hum in my ears; my tongue flaps in my mouth Ailinoi, alleluia!⁹ I cannot cause light; the most I can do is try to put myself in the path of its beam. It is possible, in deep space, to sail on solar wind. Light, be it particle or wave, has force: you rig a giant sail and go. The secret of seeing is to sail on solar wind. Hone and spread your spirit till you yourself are a sail, whetted, translucent, broadside to the merest puff.

When her doctor took her bandages off and led her into the garden, the girl who was no longer blind saw "the tree with the lights in it." It was for this tree I searched through the peach orchards of summer, in the forests of fall and down winter and spring for years. Then one day I was walking along Tinker Creek thinking of nothing at all and I saw the tree with the lights in it. I saw the backyard cedar where the mourning doves roost charged and transfigured, each cell buzzing with flame. I stood on the grass with the lights in it, grass that was wholly fire, utterly focused and utterly dreamed. It was less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance. The flood of fire abated, but I'm still spending the power. Gradually the lights went out in the cedar, the colors died, the cells unflamed and disappeared. I was still ringing. I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until at that moment I was lifted and struck. I have since only very rarely seen the tree with the lights in it. The vision comes and goes, mostly goes, but I live for it, for the moment when the mountains open and a new light roars in spate through the crack, and the mountains slam.

1974

8. French sociologist, theologian, historian, philosopher, and critic of technology (1912–1994).

9. In Greek a representation of a woeful, plaintive dirge.

LYDIA DAVIS

b. 1947

Sharp-eyed, funny, unforgiving, and intensely preoccupied with words, Lydia Davis writes about characters who see, and say, uncomfortable things about ordinary life. Her stories are renowned for their brevity, often just a paragraph or a few pages. Much of Davis's fiction is about a world containing brute objects and people who seem as inscrutable as objects to the stories' narrators—they have their own private thoughts that are impossible for the narrator to know. The mystery of what other people are thinking causes the typical Davis narrator to doubt and obsess, especially over relationships. Davis reflects that “the only mind you have complete access to is your own. That's the mind you can study and work with and enjoy.” Her stories thus sometimes read like autobiography, but it would be more accurate to say that they take readers into the life of the modern mind. About feelings—such as happiness, or grief, or boredom—Davis is both curious and suspicious. Once they are put into words, can they still be felt? Do our words for emotions ever succeed in containing them, or honoring them? Plot and setting are pared away in Davis's stories so that the focus on mind and feeling can deepen, though something always “happens,” even when no events occur. “We are more aware of the great precariousness and the possible brevity of our lives than we were in the past,” Davis has said in explaining her preference for short forms. “Perhaps we express not only more despair but also more urgency in some of our literature now, this urgency also being expressed as brevity itself.” Her stories can feel like poems, and her collections are sometimes shelved in the poetry sections of bookstores.

Davis's storytelling practice is rooted in the traditions of English and French literature. She has published ten story collections, one novel, five works of translation (from the French), and an extended essay on translation. Her versions of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (2003) and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (2010) were published to critical acclaim and commercial success. Each of these great French novels centers on what characters think as they go through life experiencing love and tragedy. Though their formal scale is so much larger than Davis's very short stories, these works are powerful influences on her fiction. Translation has made Davis profoundly aware of words and of their provenance. “I value the fact that English has two parallel vocabularies—the Germanic vocabulary and the Latinate vocabulary,” she explains. “For example, we have the word *undersea*, and then we have *submarine*. Or *underground* and *subterranean*, *all-powerful* and *omnipotent*. So we can shift registers. . . . In a passage of plain Anglo-Saxon, you can throw in one Latinate word, unexpectedly, to great effect.”

Her attention to craft as a writer parallels her professional commitment to teaching. She has held appointments at Bard College and SUNY Albany and is currently Lillian Vernon Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at New York University. Her writing has won major literary prizes, including the 2013 Man Booker International Prize, and she has garnered prestigious fellowships—a Guggenheim and a MacArthur “genius grant” among them.

In “Break It Down,” reprinted here, the narrator assesses the loss of a relationship by literally counting up its costs—in money. In this and the other selections included here, speakers try to pin down the large meaning of small things. “Letter to a Parlor” showcases Davis's laserlike attention to vocabulary and emotion. Flaubert dedicated himself to finding *le mot juste*—“the right word”—for everything he

wanted to express. Davis's wit and humor, on display throughout her fiction, offer wry laughter and *le mot juste* as consolations in what she sees as an absurd and baffling existence.

Break It Down

He's sitting there staring at a piece of paper in front of him. He's trying to break it down. He says:

I'm breaking it all down. The ticket was \$600 and then after that there was more for the hotel and food and so on, for just ten days. Say \$80 a day, no, more like \$100 a day. And we made love, say, once a day on the average. That's \$100 a shot. And each time it lasted maybe two or three hours so that would be anywhere from \$33 to \$50 an hour, which is expensive.

Though of course that wasn't all that went on, because we were together almost all day long. She would keep looking at me and every time she looked at me it was worth something, and she smiled at me and didn't stop talking and singing, something I said, she would sail into it, a snatch, for me, she would be gone from me a little ways but smiling too, and tell me jokes, and I loved it but didn't exactly know what to do about it and just smiled back at her and felt slow next to her, just not quick enough. So she talked and touched me on the shoulder and the arm, she kept touching and stayed close to me. You're with each other all day long and it keeps happening, the touches and smiles, and it adds up, it builds up, and you know where you'll be that night, you're talking and every now and then you think about it, no, you don't think, you just feel it as a kind of destination, what's coming up after you leave wherever you are all evening, and you're happy about it and you're planning it all, not in your head, really, somewhere inside your body, or all through your body, it's all mounting up and coming together so that when you get in bed you can't help it, it's a real performance, it all pours out, but slowly, you go easy until you can't anymore, or you hold back the whole time, you hold back and touch the edges of everything, you edge around until you have to plunge in and finish it off, and when you're finished, you're too weak to stand but after a while you have to go to the bathroom and you stand, your legs are trembling, you hold on to the door frames, there's a little light coming in through the window, you can see your way in and out, but you can't really see the bed.

So it's not really \$100 a shot because it goes on all day, from the start when you wake up and feel her body next to you, and you don't miss a thing, not a thing of what's next to you, her arm, her leg, her shoulder, her face, that good skin, I have felt other good skin, but this skin is just the edge of something else, and you're going to start going, and no matter how much you crawl all over each other it won't be enough, and when your hunger dies down a little then you think how much you love her and that starts you off again, and her face, you look over at her face and can't believe how you got there and how lucky and it's still all a surprise and it never stops, even after it's over, it never stops being a surprise.

It's more like you have a good sixteen or eighteen hours a day of this going on, even when you're not with her it's going on, it's good to be away because

it's going to be so good to go back to her, so it's still here, and you can't go off and look at some old street or some old painting without still feeling it in your body and a few things that happened the day before that don't mean much by themselves or wouldn't mean much if you weren't having this thing together, but you can't forget and it's all inside you all the time, so that's more like, say, sixteen into a hundred would be \$6 an hour, which isn't too much.

And then it really keeps going on while you're asleep, though you're probably dreaming about something else, a building, maybe, I kept dreaming, every night, almost, about this building, because I would spend a lot of every morning in this old stone building and when I closed my eyes I would see these cool spaces and have this peace inside me, I would see the bricks of the floor and the stone arches and the space, the emptiness between, like a kind of dark frame around what I could see beyond, a garden, and this space was like stone too because of the coolness of it and the gray shadow, that kind of luminous shade, that was glowing with the light of the sun falling beyond the arches, and there was also the great height of the ceiling, all this was in my mind all the time though I didn't know it until I closed my eyes, I'm asleep and I'm not dreaming about her but she's lying next to me and I wake up enough times in the night to remember she's there, and notice, say, once she was lying on her back but now she's curled around me, I look at her closed eyes, I want to kiss her eyelids, I want to feel that soft skin under my lips, but I don't want to disturb her, I don't want to see her frown as though in her sleep she has forgotten who I am and feels just that something is bothering her and so I just look at her and hold on to it all, these times when I'm watching over her sleep and she's next to me and isn't away from me the way she will be later, I want to stay awake all night just to go on feeling that, but I can't, I fall asleep again, though I'm sleeping lightly, still trying to hold on to it.

But it isn't over when it ends, it goes on after it's all over, she's still inside you like a sweet liquor, you are filled with her, everything about her has kind of bled into you, her smell, her voice, the way her body moves, it's all inside you, at least for a while after, then you begin to lose it, and I'm beginning to lose it, you're afraid of how weak you are, that you can't get her all back into you again and now the whole thing is going out of your body and it's more in your mind than your body, the pictures come to you one by one and you look at them, some of them last longer than others, you were together in a very white clean place, a coffeehouse, having breakfast together, and the place is so white that against it you can see her clearly, her blue eyes, her smile, the colors of her clothes, even the print of the newspaper she's reading when she's not looking up at you, the light brown and red and gold of her hair when she's got her head down reading, the brown coffee, the brown rolls, all against that white table and those white plates and silver urns and silver knives and spoons, and against that quiet of the sleepy people in that room sitting alone at their tables with just some chinking and clattering of spoons and cups in saucers and some hushed voices her voice now and then rising and falling. The pictures come to you and you have to hope they won't lose their life too fast and dry up though you know they will and that you'll also forget some of what happened, because already you're turning up little things that you nearly forgot.

We were in bed and she asked me, Do I seem fat to you? and I was surprised because she didn't seem to worry about herself at all in that way and I guess I was reading into it that she did worry about herself so I answered what I was thinking and said stupidly that she had a very beautiful body, that her body was perfect, and I really meant it as an answer, but she said kind of sharply, That's not what I asked, and so I had to try to answer her again, exactly what she had asked.

And once she lay over against me late in the night and she started talking, her breath in my ear, and she just went on and on, and talked faster and faster, she couldn't stop, and I loved it, I just felt that all that life in her was running into me too, I had so little life in me, her life, her fire, was coming into me, in that hot breath in my ear, and I just wanted her to go on talking forever right there next to me, and I would go on living, like that, I would be able to go on living, but without her I don't know.

Then you forget some of it all, maybe most of it all, almost all of it, in the end, and you work hard at remembering everything now so you won't ever forget, but you can kill it too even by thinking about it too much, though you can't help thinking about it nearly all the time.

And then when the pictures start to go you start asking some questions, just little questions, that sit in your mind without any answers, like why did she have the light on when you came in to bed one night, but it was off the next, but she had it on the night after that and she had it off the last night, why, and other questions, little questions that nag at you like that.

And finally the pictures go and these dry little questions just sit there without any answers and you're left with this large heavy pain in you that you try to numb by reading, or you try to ease it by getting out into public places where there will be people around you, but no matter how good you are at pushing that pain away, just when you think you're going to be all right for a while, that you're safe, you're kind of holding it off with all your strength and you're staying in some little bare numb spot of ground, then suddenly it will all come back, you'll hear a noise, maybe it's a cat crying or a baby, or something else like her cry, you hear it and make that connection in a part of you you have no control over and the pain comes back so hard that you're afraid, afraid of how you're falling back into it again and you wonder, no, you're terrified to ask how you're ever going to climb out of it.

And so it's not only every hour of the day while it's happening, but it's really for hours and hours every day after that, for weeks, though less and less, so that you could work out the ratio if you wanted, maybe after six weeks you're only thinking about it an hour or so in the day altogether, a few minutes here and there spread over, or a few minutes here and there and half an hour before you go to sleep, or sometimes it all comes back and you stay awake with it half the night.

So when you add up all that, you've only spent maybe \$3 an hour on it.

If you have to figure in the bad times too, I don't know. There weren't any bad times with her, though maybe there was one bad time, when I told her I loved her. I couldn't help it, this was the first time this had happened with her, now I was half falling in love with her or maybe completely if she had let me but she couldn't or I couldn't completely because it was all going to be so short and other things too, and so I told her, and didn't know of any way to tell her first that she didn't have to feel this was a burden, the fact

that I loved her, or that she didn't have to feel the same about me, or say the same back, that it was just that I had to tell her, that's all, because it was bursting inside me, and saying it wouldn't even begin to take care of what I was feeling, really I couldn't say anything of what I was feeling because there was so much, words couldn't handle it, and making love only made it worse because then I wanted words badly but they were no good, no good at all, but I told her anyway, I was lying on top of her and her hands were up by her head and my hands were on hers and our fingers were locked and there was a little light on her face from the window but I couldn't really see her and I was afraid to say it but I had to say it because I wanted her to know, it was the last night, I had to tell her then or I'd never have another chance, I just said, Before you go to sleep, I have to tell you before you go to sleep that I love you, and immediately, right away after, she said, I love you too, and it sounded to me as if she didn't mean it, a little flat, but then it usually sounds a little flat when someone says, I love you too, because they're just saying it back even if they do mean it, and the problem is that I'll never know if she meant it, or maybe someday she'll tell me whether she meant it or not, but there's no way to know now, and I'm sorry I did that, it was a trap I didn't mean to put her in, I can see it was a trap, because if she hadn't said anything at all I know that would have hurt too, as though she were taking something from me and just accepting it and not giving anything back, so she really had to, even just to be kind to me, she had to say it, and I don't really know now if she meant it.

Another bad time, or it wasn't exactly bad, but it wasn't easy either, was when I had to leave, the time was coming, and I was beginning to tremble and feel empty, nothing in the middle of me, nothing inside, and nothing to hold me up on my legs, and then it came, everything was ready, and I had to go, and so it was just a kiss, a quick one, as though we were afraid of what might happen after a kiss, and she was almost wild then, she reached up to a hook by the door and took an old shirt, a green and blue shirt from the hook, and put it in my arms, for me to take away, the soft cloth was full of her smell, and then we stood there close together looking at a piece of paper she had in her hand and I didn't lose any of it, I was holding it tight, that last minute or two, because this was it, we'd come to the end of it, things always change, so this was really it, over.

Maybe it works out all right, maybe you haven't lost for doing it, I don't know, no, really, sometimes when you think of it you feel like a prince really, you feel just like a king, and then other times you're afraid, you're afraid, not all the time but now and then, of what it's going to do to you, and it's hard to know what to do with it now.

Walking away I looked back once and the door was still open, I could see her standing far back in the dark of the room, I could only really see her white face still looking out at me, and her white arms.

I guess you get to a point where you look at that pain as if it were there in front of you three feet away lying in a box, an open box, in a window somewhere. It's hard and cold, like a bar of metal. You just look at it there and say, All right, I'll take it, I'll buy it. That's what it is. Because you know all about it before you even go into this thing. You know the pain is part of the whole thing. And it isn't that you can say afterwards the pleasure was greater than the pain and that's why you would do it again. That has nothing to do with it.

You can't measure it, because the pain comes after and it lasts longer. So the question really is, Why doesn't that pain make you say, I won't do it again? When the pain is so bad that you have to say that, but you don't.

So I'm just thinking about it, how you can go in with \$600, more like \$1,000, and how you can come out with an old shirt.

1986

The Outing

An outburst of anger near the road, a refusal to speak on the path, a silence in the pine woods, a silence across the old railroad bridge, an attempt to be friendly in the water, a refusal to end the argument on the flat stones, a cry of anger on the steep bank of dirt, a weeping among the bushes.

1995

Happiest Moment

If you ask her what is a favorite story she has written, she will hesitate for a long time and then say it may be this story that she read in a book once: an English-language teacher in China asked his Chinese student to say what was the happiest moment in his life. The student hesitated for a long time. At last he smiled with embarrassment and said that his wife had once gone to Beijing and eaten duck there, and she often told him about it, and he would have to say the happiest moment of his life was her trip, and the eating of the duck.

2001

Letter to a Funeral Parlor

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you to object to the word *cremains*, which was used by your representative when he met with my mother and me two days after my father's death.

We had no objection to your representative, personally, who was respectful and friendly and dealt with us in a sensitive way. He did not try to sell us an expensive urn, for instance.

What startled and disturbed us was the word *cremains*. You in the business must have invented this word and you are used to it. We the public do not hear it very often. We don't lose a close friend or a family member very many times in our life, and years pass in between, if we are lucky. Even less often do we have to discuss what is to be done with a family member or close friend after their death.

We noticed that before the death of my father you and your representative used the words *loved one* to refer to him. That was comfortable for us, even if the ways in which we loved him were complicated.

Then we were sitting there in our chairs in the living room trying not to weep in front of your representative, who was opposite us on the sofa, and we were very tired first from sitting up with my father, and then from worrying about whether he was comfortable as he was dying, and then from worrying about where he might be now that he was dead, and your representative referred to him as “the cremains.”

At first we did not even know what he meant. Then, when we realized, we were frankly upset. *Cremains* sounds like something invented as a milk substitute in coffee, like *Cremora*, or *Coffee-mate*. Or it sounds like some kind of a chipped beef dish.

As one who works with words for a living, I must say that any invented word, like *Porta Potti* or *pooper-scooper*, has a cheerful or even jovial ring to it that I don't think you really intended when you invented the word *cremains*. In fact, my father himself, who was a professor of English and is now being called *the cremains*, would have pointed out to you the alliteration in *Porta Potti* and the rhyme in *pooper-scooper*. Then he would have told you that *cremains* falls into the same category as *brunch* and is known as a portmanteau word.¹

There is nothing wrong with inventing words, especially in a business. But a grieving family is not prepared for this one. We are not even used to our loved one being gone. You could very well continue to employ the term *ashes*. We are used to it from the Bible, and are even comforted by it. We would not misunderstand. We would know that these ashes are not like the ashes in a fireplace.

Yours sincerely,

2001

1. A word blending the sounds and combining the meanings of two others.

ANN BEATTIE

b. 1947

If one writer has been held responsible for chronicling the fortunes of young people from the American 1960s as they grew up, got married and divorced, worked at different jobs, and went to the same parties, Ann Beattie, who graduated from high school in 1965, is that writer; indeed, she has picked up some of the mythical reputation that adheres to the film *The Big Chill* (1983) as somehow “representative” in its representation of late-sixties idealism and conviction gone flat or sour. Yet to stress Beattie's importance as portraitist of a generation may be to do her a disservice, since she is above all else a *fiction* writer, often a comic one, with an unrepresentative, even

idiosyncratic, style. Her stories and novels should be taken not merely as vehicles for displaying social attitudes and manners, but as mannerist compositions that need to be both looked at and listened to. Her style is too pronounced, too carefully contrived, to be treated as a transparent medium through which “reality” is given us directly.

On its surface her life has been relatively uneventful, from growing up in a middle-class suburb of Washington, D.C. (she was “an artsy little thing . . . painting pictures, writing,” as she put it), taking her undergraduate degree at American University, then going on to graduate study for a time at the University of Connecticut. She soon began to send stories to the *New Yorker* and after the usual spate of rejections had one accepted, then others. By her mid-twenties she was contributing regularly to that most sought-after magazine, and in 1976, on the verge of her thirtieth birthday, she brought out simultaneously a collection of her stories, *Distortions*, and her first novel, *Chilly Scenes of Winter*.

The stories—some of them more experimental in style than her more recent work—are about transient, usually unsatisfactory relationships between people, married and single, male and female. Her characters’ work provides them with little pleasure or fulfillment; almost anything threatens to become “just a job.” What these people do best, and incessantly, is talk to each other about themselves, how they feel about their lives. In fact such talk is the essential ingredient in her fiction. As one of her more severe critics, Joseph Epstein, has pointed out, Beattie strives for not “development of character, accounts of motivation or moral resolution” but rather “states of feeling.” In stories from her second collection, *Secrets and Surprises* (1978), such as “A Reasonable Man,” “Lawn Party,” and “Weekend,” feelings are talked around, hinted at, never quite said, but are the only “things” that happen in the story. In “Weekend” (printed here) the force of that happening is cumulative and disturbing.

Like many fiction writers, Beattie acknowledges the influence of Hemingway (“I sound like someone talking in *The Sun Also Rises*,” says a character in “The Lawn Party”), but her kinship with him is especially strong in that each uses language, exchanges between characters, to suggest—by all that is left unsaid in the spare, often dull sentences, the platitudinous conversations—that something interesting lies behind those words, that conversation. Hemingway manages in his best stories to make us feel the presence of something powerful behind the conventional words. Beattie’s characters, decades later, yearn for there to be something real or interesting behind their banal words, but her work’s poignancy lies in the hint that, as the characters themselves half guess, there may be nothing much behind them at all. Something important got lost, back there in the sixties.

Of her novels the most ambitious is *Falling in Place* (1980), which spreads the usual urban and suburban anomie over the usual Beattie cast of dispirited seekers after a better-than-usual day. But the book comes to life when it focuses on a fifteen-year-old girl, whose favorite characterizing response to things is “Suck-O,” and her younger brother, a compulsive eater who loves violent comics but little else. This twosome, who could give the most obnoxious of Flannery O’Connor’s fictional children a run for their money, is observed with satiric verve, and the book includes a number of brilliant parts. Beattie is essentially a writer of scenes rather than a contriver of extended sequences, just as the people she writes about can deal with life only—and just barely—a moment at a time.

The following text is from *Secrets and Surprises* (1978).

Weekend

On Saturday morning Lenore is up before the others. She carries her baby into the living room and puts him in George’s favorite chair, which tilts

because its back legs are missing, and covers him with a blanket. Then she lights a fire in the fireplace, putting fresh logs on a few embers that are still glowing from the night before. She sits down on the floor beside the chair and checks the baby, who has already gone back to sleep—a good thing, because there are guests in the house. George, the man she lives with, is very hospitable and impetuous; he extends invitations whenever old friends call, urging them to come spend the weekend. Most of the callers are his former students—he used to be an English professor—and when they come it seems to make things much worse. It makes *him* much worse, because he falls into smoking too much and drinking and not eating, and then his ulcer bothers him. When the guests leave, when the weekend is over, she has to cook bland food: applesauce, oatmeal, puddings. And his drinking does not taper off easily anymore; in the past he would stop cold when the guests left, but lately he only tapers down from Scotch to wine, and drinks wine well into the week—a lot of wine, perhaps a whole bottle with his meal—until his stomach is much worse. He is hard to live with. Once when a former student, a woman named Ruth, visited them—a lover, she suspected—she overheard George talking to her in his study, where he had taken her to see a photograph of their house before he began repairing it. George had told Ruth that she, Lenore, stayed with him because she was simple. It hurt her badly, made her actually dizzy with surprise and shame, and since then, no matter who the guests are, she never feels quite at ease on the weekends. In the past she enjoyed some of the things she and George did with their guests, but since overhearing what he said to Ruth she feels that all their visitors have been secretly told the same thing about her. To her, though, George is usually kind. But she is sure that is the reason he has not married her, and when he recently remarked on their daughter's intelligence (she is five years old, a girl named Maria) she found that she could no longer respond with simple pride; now she feels spite as well, feels that Maria exists as proof of her own good genes. She has begun to expect perfection of the child. She knows this is wrong, and she has tried hard not to communicate her anxiety to Maria, who is already, as her kindergarten teacher says, “untypical.”

At first Lenore loved George because he was untypical, although after she had moved in with him and lived with him for a while she began to see that he was not exceptional but a variation on a type. She is proud of observing that, and she harbors the discovery—her silent response to his low opinion of her. She does not know why he found her attractive—in the beginning he did—because she does not resemble the pretty, articulate young women he likes to invite, with their lovers or girl friends, to their house for the weekend. None of these young women have husbands; when they bring a man with them at all they bring a lover, and they seem happy not to be married. Lenore, too, is happy to be single—not out of conviction that marriage is wrong but because she knows that it would be wrong to be married to George if he thinks she is simple. She thought at first to confront him with what she had overheard, to demand an explanation. But he can weasel out of any corner. At best, she can mildly fluster him, and later he will only blame it on Scotch. Of course she might ask why he has all these women come to visit, why he devotes so little time to her or the children. To that he would say that it was the quality of the time they spent together that mattered, not the quantity. He has already said that, in fact,

without being asked. He says things over and over so that she will accept them as truths. And eventually she does. She does not like to think long and hard, and when there is an answer—even his answer—it is usually easier to accept it and go on with things. She goes on with what she has always done: tending the house and the children and George, when he needs her. She likes to bake and she collects art postcards. She is proud of their house, which was bought cheaply and improved by George when he was still interested in that kind of work, and she is happy to have visitors come there, even if she does not admire them or even like them.

Except for teaching a night course in photography at a junior college once a week, George has not worked since he left the university two years ago, after he was denied tenure. She cannot really tell if he is unhappy working so little, because he keeps busy in other ways. He listens to classical music in the morning, slowly sipping herbal teas, and on fair afternoons he lies outdoors in the sun, no matter how cold the day. He takes photographs, and walks alone in the woods. He does errands for her if they need to be done. Sometimes at night he goes to the library or goes to visit friends; he tells her that these people often ask her to come too, but he says she would not like them. This is true—she would not like them. Recently he has done some late-night cooking. He has always kept a journal, and he is a great letter writer. An aunt left him most of her estate, ten thousand dollars, and said in her will that he was the only one who really cared, who took the time, again and again, to write. He had not seen his aunt for five years before she died, but he wrote regularly. Sometimes Lenore finds notes that he has left for her. Once, on the refrigerator, there was a long note suggesting clever Christmas presents for her family that he had thought of while she was out. Last week he scotch-taped a slip of paper to a casserole dish that contained leftover veal stew, saying “This was delicious.” He does not compliment her verbally, but he likes to let her know that he is pleased.

A few nights ago—the same night they got a call from Julie and Sarah, saying they were coming for a visit—she told him that she wished he would talk more, that he would confide in her.

“Confide what?” he said.

“You always take that attitude,” she said. “You pretend that you have no thoughts. Why does there have to be so much silence?”

“I’m not a professor anymore,” he said. “I don’t have to spend every minute *thinking*.”

But he loves to talk to the young women. He will talk to them on the phone for as much as an hour; he walks with them through the woods for most of the day when they visit. The lovers the young women bring with them always seem to fall behind; they give up and return to the house to sit and talk to her, or to help with the preparation of the meal, or to play with the children. The young woman and George come back refreshed, ready for another round of conversation at dinner.

A few weeks ago one of the young men said to her, “Why do you let it go on?” They had been talking lightly before that—about the weather, the children—and then, in the kitchen, where he was sitting shelling peas, he put his head on the table and said, barely audibly, “Why do you let it go on?” He did not raise his head, and she stared at him, thinking that she must have imagined his speaking. She was surprised—surprised to have heard it,

and surprised that he had said nothing after that, which made her doubt that he had spoken.

“Why do I let what go on?” she said.

There was a long silence. “Whatever this sick game is, I don’t want to get involved in it,” he said at last. “It was none of my business to ask. I understand that you don’t want to talk about it.”

“But it’s really cold out there,” she said. “What could happen when it’s freezing out?”

He shook his head, the way George did, to indicate that she was beyond understanding. But she wasn’t stupid, and she knew what might be going on. She had said the right thing, had been on the right track, but she had to say what she felt, which was that nothing very serious could be happening at that moment because they were walking in the woods. There wasn’t even a barn on the property. She knew perfectly well that they were talking.

When George and the young woman had come back, he fixed hot apple juice, into which he trickled rum. Lenore was pleasant, because she was sure of what had not happened; the young man was not, because he did not think as she did. Still at the kitchen table, he ran his thumb across a pea pod as though it were a knife.

This weekend Sarah and Julie are visiting. They came on Friday evening. Sarah was one of George’s students—the one who led the fight to have him rehired. She does not look like a troublemaker; she is pale and pretty, with freckles on her cheeks. She talks too much about the past, and this upsets him, disrupts the peace he has made with himself. She tells him that they fired him because he was “in touch” with everything, that they were afraid of him because he was so in touch. The more she tells him the more he remembers, and then it is necessary for Sarah to say the same things again and again; once she reminds him, he seems to need reassurance—needs to have her voice, to hear her bitterness against the members of the tenure committee. By evening they will both be drunk. Sarah will seem both agitating and consoling, Lenore and Julie and the children will be upstairs, in bed. Lenore suspects that she will not be the only one awake listening to them. She thinks that in spite of Julie’s glazed look she is really very attentive. The night before, when they were all sitting around the fireplace talking, Sarah made a gesture and almost upset her wineglass, but Julie reached for it and stopped it from toppling over. George and Sarah were talking so energetically that they did not notice. Lenore’s eyes met Julie’s as Julie’s hand shot out. Lenore feels that she is like Julie: Julie’s face doesn’t betray emotion, even when she is interested, even when she cares deeply. Being the same kind of person, Lenore can recognize this.

Before Sarah and Julie arrived Friday evening, Lenore asked George if Sarah was his lover.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he said. “You think every student is my lover? Is Julie my lover?”

She said, “That wasn’t what I said.”

“Well, if you’re going to be preposterous, go ahead and say that,” he said. “If you think about it long enough, it would make a lot of sense, wouldn’t it?”

He would not answer her question about Sarah. He kept throwing Julie’s name into it. Some other woman might then think that he was protesting

too strongly—that Julie really was his lover. She thought no such thing. She also stopped suspecting Sarah, because he wanted that, and it was her habit to oblige him.

He is twenty-one years older than Lenore. On his last birthday he was fifty-five. His daughter from his first marriage (his *only* marriage; she keeps reminding herself that they are not married, because it often seems that they might as well be) sent him an Irish country hat. The present made him irritable. He kept putting it on and pulling it down hard on his head. “She wants to make me a laughable old man,” he said. “She wants me to put this on and go around like a fool.” He wore the hat all morning, complaining about it, frightening the children. Eventually, to calm him, she said, “She intended *nothing*.” She said it with finality, her tone so insistent that he listened to her. But having lost his reason for bitterness, he said, “Just because you don’t think doesn’t mean others don’t think.” Is he getting old? She does not want to think of him getting old. In spite of his ulcer, his body is hard. He is tall and handsome, with a thick mustache and a thin black goatee, and there is very little gray in his kinky black hair. He dresses in tight-fitting blue jeans and black turtleneck sweaters in the winter, and old white shirts with the sleeves rolled up in the summer. He pretends not to care about his looks, but he does. He shaves carefully, scraping slowly down each side of his goatee. He orders his soft leather shoes from a store in California. After taking one of his long walks—even if he does it twice a day—he invariably takes a shower. He always looks refreshed, and very rarely admits any insecurity. A few times, at night in bed, he has asked, “Am I still the man of your dreams?” And when she says yes he always laughs, turning it into a joke, as if he didn’t care. She knows he does. He pretends to have no feeling for clothing, but actually he cares so strongly about his turtlenecks and shirts (a few are Italian silk) and shoes that he will have no others. She has noticed that the young women who visit are always vain. When Sarah arrived, she was wearing a beautiful silk scarf, pale as conch shells.

Sitting on the floor on Saturday morning, Lenore watches the fire she has just lit. The baby, tucked in George’s chair, smiles in his sleep, and Lenore thinks what a good companion he would be if only he were an adult. She gets up and goes into the kitchen and tears open a package of yeast and dissolves it, with sugar and salt, in hot water, slushing her fingers through it and shivering because it is so cold in the kitchen. She will bake bread for dinner—there is always a big meal in the early evening when they have guests. But what will she do for the rest of the day? George told the girls the night before that on Saturday they would walk in the woods, but she does not really enjoy hiking, and George will be irritated because of the discussion the night before, and she does not want to aggravate him. “You are unwilling to challenge anyone,” her brother wrote her in a letter that came a few days ago. He has written her for years—all the years she has been with George—asking when she is going to end the relationship. She rarely writes back because she knows that her answers sound too simple. She has a comfortable house. She cooks. She keeps busy and she loves her two children. “It seems unkind to say *but*,” her brother writes, “but . . .” It is true; she likes simple things. Her brother, who is a lawyer in Cambridge, cannot understand that.

Lenore rubs her hand down the side of her face and says good morning to Julie and Sarah, who have come downstairs. Sarah does not want orange juice; she already looks refreshed and ready for the day. Lenore pours a glass for Julie. George calls from the hallway, “Ready to roll?” Lenore is surprised that he wants to leave so early. She goes into the living room. George is wearing a denim jacket, his hands in the pockets.

“Morning,” he says to Lenore. “You’re not up for a hike, are you?”

Lenore looks at him, but does not answer. As she stands there, Sarah walks around her and joins George in the hallway and he holds the door open for her. “Let’s walk to the store and get Hershey bars to give us energy for a long hike,” George says to Sarah. They are gone. Lenore finds Julie still in the kitchen, waiting for the water to boil. Julie says that she had a bad night and she is happy not to be going with George and Sarah. Lenore fixes tea for them. Maria sits next to her on the sofa, sipping orange juice. The baby likes company, but Maria is a very private child; she would rather that she and her mother were always alone. She has given up being possessive about her father. Now she gets out a cardboard box and takes out her mother’s collection of postcards, which she arranges on the floor in careful groups. Whenever she looks up, Julie smiles nervously at her; Maria does not smile, and Lenore doesn’t prod her. Lenore goes into the kitchen to punch down the bread, and Maria follows. Maria has recently gotten over chicken pox, and there is a small new scar in the center of her forehead. Instead of looking at Maria’s blue eyes, Lenore lately has found herself focusing on the imperfection.

As Lenore is stretching the loaves onto the cornmeal-covered baking sheet, she hears the rain start. It hits hard on the garage roof.

After a few minutes Julie comes into the kitchen. “They’re caught in this downpour,” Julie says. “If Sarah had left the car keys, I could go get them.”

“Take my car and pick them up,” Lenore says, pointing with her elbow to the keys hanging on a nail near the door.

“But I don’t know where the store is.”

“You must have passed it driving to our house last night. Just go out of the driveway and turn right. It’s along the main road.”

Julie gets her purple sweater and takes the car keys. “I’ll be right back,” she says.

Lenore can sense that she is glad to escape from the house, that she is happy the rain began.

In the living room Lenore turns the pages of a magazine, and Maria mutters a refrain of “Blue, blue, dark blue, green blue,” noticing the color every time it appears. Lenore sips her tea. She puts a Michael Hurley record on George’s stereo. Michael Hurley is good rainy-day music. George has hundreds of records. His students used to love to paw through them. Cleverly, he has never made any attempt to keep up with what is currently popular. Everything is jazz or eclectic: Michael Hurley, Keith Jarrett, Ry Cooder.¹

Julie comes back. “I couldn’t find them,” she says. She looks as if she expects to be punished.

Lenore is surprised. She is about to say something like “You certainly didn’t look very hard, did you?” but she catches Julie’s eye. She looks young and afraid, and perhaps even a little crazy.

1. Musical performers; respectively, folk, jazz, and roots rock.

“Well, we tried,” Lenore says.

Julie stands in front of the fire, with her back to Lenore. Lenore knows she is thinking that she is dense—that she does not recognize the implications.

“They might have walked through the woods instead of along the road,” Lenore says. “That’s possible.”

“But they would have gone out to the road to thumb when the rain began, wouldn’t they?”

Perhaps she misunderstood what Julie was thinking. Perhaps it has never occurred to Julie until now what might be going on.

“Maybe they got lost,” Julie says. “Maybe something happened to them.”

“Nothing happened to them,” Lenore says. Julie turns around and Lenore catches that small point of light in her eye again. “Maybe they took shelter under a tree,” she says. “Maybe they’re screwing. How should I know?”

It is not a word Lenore often uses. She usually tries not to think about that at all, but she can sense that Julie is very upset.

“Really?” Julie says. “Don’t you care, Mrs. Anderson?”

Lenore is amused. There’s a switch. All the students call her husband George and her Lenore; now one of them wants to think there’s a real adult here to explain all this to her.

“What am I going to do?” Lenore says. She shrugs.

Julie does not answer.

“Would you like me to pour you tea?” Lenore asks.

“Yes,” Julie says. “Please.”

George and Sarah return in the middle of the afternoon. George says that they decided to go on a spree to the big city—it is really a small town he is talking about, but calling it the big city gives him an opportunity to speak ironically. They sat in a restaurant bar, waiting for the rain to stop, George says, and then they thumbed a ride home. “But I’m completely sober,” George says, turning for the first time to Sarah. “What about you?” He is all smiles. Sarah lets him down. She looks embarrassed. Her eyes meet Lenore’s quickly, and jump to Julie. The two girls stare at each other, and Lenore, left with only George to look at, looks at the fire and then gets up to pile on another log.

Gradually it becomes clear that they are trapped together by the rain. Maria undresses her paper doll and deliberately rips a feather off its hat. Then she takes the pieces to Lenore, almost in tears. The baby cries, and Lenore takes him off the sofa, where he has been sleeping under his yellow blanket, and props him in the space between her legs as she leans back on her elbows to watch the fire. It’s her fire, and she has the excuse of presiding over it.

“How’s my boy?” George says. The baby looks, and looks away.

It gets dark early, because of the rain. At four-thirty George uncorks a bottle of Beaujolais and brings it into the living room, with four glasses pressed against his chest with his free arm. Julie rises nervously to extract the glasses, thanking him too profusely for the wine. She gives a glass to Sarah without looking at her.

They sit in a semicircle in front of the fire and drink the wine. Julie leafs through magazines—*New Times*, *National Geographic*—and Sarah holds a

small white dish painted with gray-green leaves that she has taken from the coffee table; the dish contains a few shells and some acorn caps, a polished stone or two, and Sarah lets these objects run through her fingers. There are several such dishes in the house, assembled by George. He and Lenore gathered the shells long ago, the first time they went away together, at a beach in North Carolina. But the acorn caps, the shiny turquoise and amethyst stones—those are there, she knows, because George likes the effect they have on visitors; it is an expected unconventionality, really. He has also acquired a few small framed pictures, which he points out to guests who are more important than worshipful students—tiny oil paintings of fruit, prints with small details from the unicorn tapestries. He pretends to like small, elegant things. Actually, when they visit museums in New York he goes first to El Grecos and big Mark Rothko canvases. She could never get him to admit that what he said or did was sometimes false. Once, long ago, when he asked if he was still the man of her dreams, she said, “We don’t get along well anymore.” “Don’t talk about it,” he said—no denial, no protest. At best, she could say things and get away with them; she could never get him to continue such a conversation.

At the dinner table, lit with white candles burning in empty wine bottles, they eat off his grandmother’s small flowery plates. Lenore looks out a window and sees, very faintly in the dark, their huge oak tree. The rain has stopped. A few stars have come out, and there are glints on the wet branches. The oak tree grows very close to the window. George loved it when her brother once suggested that some of the bushes and trees should be pruned away from the house so it would not always be so dark inside; it gave him a chance to rave about the beauty of nature, to say that he would never tamper with it. “It’s like a tomb in here all day,” her brother had said. Since moving here, George has learned the names of almost all the things growing on the land: he can point out abelia bushes, spirea, laurels. He subscribes to *National Geographic* (although she rarely sees him looking at it). He is at last in touch, he says, being in the country puts him in touch. He is saying it now to Sarah, who has put down her ivory-handled fork to listen to him. He gets up to change the record. Side two of the Telemann² record begins softly.

Sarah is still very much on guard with Lenore; she makes polite conversation with her quickly when George is out of the room. “You people are so wonderful,” she says. “I wish my parents could be like you.”

“George would be pleased to hear that,” Lenore says, lifting a small piece of pasta to her lips.

When George is seated again, Sarah, anxious to please, tells him, “If only my father could be like you.”

“Your father,” George says. “I won’t have that analogy.” He says it pleasantly, but barely disguises his dismay at the comparison.

“I mean, he cares about nothing but business,” the girl stumbles on.

The music, in contrast, grows lovelier.

Lenore goes into the kitchen to get the salad and hears George say, “I simply won’t let you girls leave. Nobody leaves on a Saturday.”

2. Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767), German composer.

There are polite protests, there are compliments to Lenore on the meal—there is too much talk. Lenore has trouble caring about what’s going on. The food is warm and delicious. She pours more wine and lets them talk.

“Godard, yes, I know . . . panning that row of honking cars *so* slowly, that long line of cars stretching on and on.”³

She has picked up the end of George’s conversation. His arm slowly waves out over the table, indicating the line of motionless cars in the movie.

“That’s a lovely plant,” Julie says to Lenore.

“It’s Peruvian ivy,” Lenore says. She smiles. She is supposed to smile. She will not offer to hack shoots off her plant for these girls.

Sarah asks for a Dylan record when the Telemann finishes playing. White wax drips onto the wood table. George waits for it to solidify slightly, then scrapes up the little circles and with thumb and index finger flicks them gently toward Sarah. He explains (although she asked for no particular Dylan record) that he has only Dylan before he went electric. And “Planet Waves”—“because it’s so romantic. That’s silly of me, but true.”⁴ Sarah smiles at him. Julie smiles at Lenore. Julie is being polite, taking her cues from Sarah, really not understanding what’s going on. Lenore does not smile back. She has done enough to put them at ease. She is tired now, brought down by the music, a full stomach, and again the sounds of rain outside. For dessert there is homemade vanilla ice cream, made by George, with small black vanilla-bean flecks in it. He is still drinking wine, though; another bottle has been opened. He sips wine and then taps his spoon on his ice cream, looking at Sarah. Sarah smiles, letting them all see the smile, then sucks the ice cream off her spoon. Julie is missing more and more of what’s going on. Lenore watches as Julie strokes her hand absently on her napkin. She is wearing a thin silver choker and—Lenore notices for the first time—a thin silver ring on the third finger of her hand.

“It’s just terrible about Anna,” George says, finishing his wine, his ice cream melting, looking at no one in particular, although Sarah was the one who brought up Anna the night before, when they had been in the house only a short time—Anna dead, hit by a car, hardly an accident at all. Anna was also a student of his. The driver of the car was drunk, but for some reason charges were not pressed. (Sarah and George have talked about this before, but Lenore blocks it out. What can she do about it? She met Anna once: a beautiful girl, with tiny, childlike hands, her hair thin and curly—wary, as beautiful people are wary.) Now the driver has been flipping out, Julie says, and calling Anna’s parents, wanting to talk to them to find out why it has happened.

The baby begins to cry. Lenore goes upstairs, pulls up more covers, talks to him for a minute. He settles for this. She goes downstairs. The wine must have affected her more than she realizes; otherwise, why is she counting the number of steps?

3. A famous scene from Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Weekend* (1969).

4. The American singer, musician, and com-

poser Bob Dylan (b. 1941) combined electric rock with acoustic folk in 1965. He released the *Planet Waves* album in 1974.

In the candlelit dining room, Julie sits alone at the table. The girl has been left alone again; George and Sarah took the umbrellas, decided to go for a walk in the rain.

It is eight o'clock. Since helping Lenore load the dishes into the dishwasher, when she said what a beautiful house Lenore had, Julie has said very little. Lenore is tired, and does not want to make conversation. They sit in the living room and drink wine.

"Sarah is my best friend," Julie says. She seems apologetic about it. "I was so out of it when I came back to college. I was in Italy, with my husband, and suddenly I was back in the States. I couldn't make friends. But Sarah wasn't like the other people. She cared enough to be nice to me."

"How long have you been friends?"

"For two years. She's really the best friend I've ever had. We understand things—we don't always have to talk about them."

"Like her relationship with George," Lenore says.

Too direct. Too unexpected. Julie has no answer.

"You act as if you're to blame," Lenore says.

"I feel strange because you're such a nice lady."

A nice lady! What an odd way to speak. Has she been reading Henry James? Lenore has never known what to think of herself, but she certainly thinks of herself as being more complicated than a "lady."

"Why do you look that way?" Julie asks. "You *are* nice. I think you've been very nice to us. You've given up your whole weekend."

"I always give up my weekends. Weekends are the only time we socialize, really. In a way, it's good to have something to do."

"But to have it turn out like this . . ." Julie says. "I think I feel so strange because when my own marriage broke up I didn't even suspect. I mean, I couldn't act the way you do, anyway, but I—"

"For all I know, nothing's going on," Lenore says. "For all I know, your friend is flattering herself, and George is trying to make me jealous." She puts two more logs on the fire. When these are gone, she will either have to walk to the woodshed or give up and go to bed. "Is there something . . . *major* going on?" she asks.

Julie is sitting on the rug, by the fire, twirling her hair with her finger. "I didn't know it when I came out here," she says. "Sarah's put me in a very awkward position."

"But do you know how far it has gone?" Lenore asks, genuinely curious now.

"No," Julie says.

No way to know if she's telling the truth. Would Julie speak the truth to a lady? Probably not.

"Anyway," Lenore says with a shrug, "I don't want to think about it all the time."

"I'd never have the courage to live with a man and not marry," Julie says. "I mean, I wish I had, that we hadn't gotten married, but I just don't have that kind of . . . I'm not secure enough."

"You have to live somewhere," Lenore says.

Julie is looking at her as if she does not believe that she is sincere. Am I? Lenore wonders. She has lived with George for six years, and sometimes

she thinks she has caught his way of playing games, along with his colds, his bad moods.

"I'll show you something," Lenore says. She gets up, and Julie follows. Lenore puts on the light in George's study, and they walk through it to a bathroom he has converted to a darkroom. Under a table, in a box behind another box, there is a stack of pictures. Lenore takes them out and hands them to Julie. They are pictures that Lenore found in his darkroom last summer; they were left out by mistake, no doubt, and she found them when she went in with some contact prints he had left in their bedroom. They are high-contrast photographs of George's face. In all of them he looks very serious and very sad; in some of them his eyes seem to be narrowed in pain. In one, his mouth is open. It is an excellent photograph of a man in agony, a man about to scream.

"What are they?" Julie whispers.

"Pictures he took of himself," Lenore says. She shrugs. "So I stay," she says.

Julie nods. Lenore nods, taking the pictures back. Lenore has not thought until this minute that this may be why she stays. In fact, it is not the only reason. It is just a very demonstrable, impressive reason. When she first saw the pictures, her own face had become as distorted as George's. She had simply not known what to do. She had been frightened and ashamed. Finally she put them in an empty box, and put the box behind another box. She did not even want him to see the horrible pictures again. She does not know if he has ever found them, pushed back against the wall in that other box. As George says, there can be too much communication between people.

Later, Sarah and George come back to the house. It is still raining. It turns out that they took a bottle of brandy with them, and they are both drenched and drunk. He holds Sarah's finger with one of his. Sarah, seeing Lenore, lets his finger go. But then he turns—they have not even said hello yet—and grabs her up, spins her around, stumbling into the living room, and says, "I am in love."

Julie and Lenore watch them in silence.

"See no evil," George says, gesturing with the empty brandy bottle to Julie. "Hear no evil," George says, pointing to Lenore. He hugs Sarah closer. "I speak no evil. I speak the truth. I am in love!"

Sarah squirms away from him, runs from the room and up the stairs in the dark.

George looks blankly after her, then sinks to the floor and smiles. He is going to pass it off as a joke. Julie looks at him in horror, and from upstairs Sarah can be heard sobbing. Her crying awakens the baby.

"Excuse me," Lenore says. She climbs the stairs and goes into her son's room, and picks him up. She talks gently to him, soothing him with lies. He is too sleepy to be alarmed for long. In a few minutes he is asleep again, and she puts him back in his crib. In the next room Sarah is crying more quietly now. Her crying is so awful that Lenore almost joins in, but instead she pats her son. She stands in the dark by the crib and then at last goes out and down the hallway to her bedroom. She takes off her clothes and gets into the cold bed. She concentrates on breathing normally. With the door closed and Sarah's door closed, she can hardly hear her. Someone taps lightly on her door.

"Mrs. Anderson," Julie whispers. "Is this your room?"

"Yes," Lenore says. She does not ask her in.

"We're going to leave. I'm going to get Sarah and leave. I didn't want to just walk out without saying anything."

Lenore just cannot think how to respond. It was really very kind of Julie to say something. She is very close to tears, so she says nothing.

"Okay," Julie says, to reassure herself. "Good night. We're going."

There is no more crying. Footsteps. Miraculously, the baby does not wake up again, and Maria has slept through all of it. She has always slept well. Lenore herself sleeps worse and worse, and she knows that George walks much of the night, most nights. She hasn't said anything about it. If he thinks she's simple, what good would her simple wisdom do him?

The oak tree scrapes against the window in the wind and rain. Here on the second floor, under the roof, the tinny tapping is very loud. If Sarah and Julie say anything to George before they leave, she doesn't hear them. She hears the car start, then die out. It starts again—she is praying for the car to go—and after conking out once more it rolls slowly away, crunching gravel. The bed is no warmer; she shivers. She tries hard to fall asleep. The effort keeps her awake. She squints her eyes in concentration instead of closing them. The only sound in the house is the electric clock, humming by her bed. It is not even midnight.

She gets up, and without turning on the light, walks downstairs. George is still in the living room. The fire is nothing but ashes and glowing bits of wood. It is as cold there as it was in the bed.

"That damn bitch," George says. "I should have known she was a stupid little girl."

"You went too far," Lenore says. "I'm the only one you can go too far with."

"Damn it," he says and pokes the fire. A few sparks shoot up. "Damn it," he repeats under his breath.

His sweater is still wet. His shoes are muddy and ruined. Sitting on the floor by the fire, his hair matted down on his head, he looks ugly, older, unfamiliar.

She thinks of another time, when it was warm. They were walking on the beach together, shortly after they met, gathering shells. Little waves were rolling in. The sun went behind the clouds and there was a momentary illusion that the clouds were still and the sun was racing ahead of them. "Catch me," he said, breaking away from her. They had been talking quietly, gathering shells. She was so surprised at him for breaking away that she ran with all her energy and did catch him, putting her hand out and taking hold of the band of his swimming trunks as he veered into the water. If she hadn't stopped him, would he really have run far out into the water, until she couldn't follow anymore? He turned on her, just as abruptly as he had run away, and grabbed her and hugged her hard, lifted her high. She had clung to him, held him close. He had tried the same thing when he came back from the walk with Sarah, and it hadn't worked.

"I wouldn't care if their car went off the road," he says bitterly.

"Don't say that," she says.

They sit in silence, listening to the rain. She slides over closer to him, puts her hand on his shoulder and leans her head there, as if he could protect her from the awful things he has wished into being.

1978

DAVID MAMET

b. 1947

One of the American poet Wallace Stevens's more arresting titles for a poem is "Men Made Out of Words"; the most original American playwright to emerge in the 1970s, David Mamet, is so in large part because his plays and screenplays are insistently and wholly made of the words that men, and sometimes women, speak to—more often mutter or hurl at—each other. Consider the following exchange, from Mamet's 1982 play *Glengarry Glen Ross*, between two real-estate salesmen who are entertaining the notion of breaking into their firm's offices and stealing the list of leads—names of desirable sales prospects—to sell their dubious properties and further their careers. George Aaronow asks Dave Moss whether he has "talked to" a prospective buyer of the leads:

MOSS No. What do you mean? Have I talked to him about *this*? [Pause.]
 AARONOW Yes. I mean are you actually *talking* about this, or are we just . . .
 MOSS No, we're just . . .
 AARONOW We're just "*talking*" about it.
 MOSS We're just *speaking* about it. [Pause.] As an *idea*.
 AARONOW As an idea.
 MOSS Yes.
 AARONOW We're not actually *talking* about it.
 MOSS No.
 AARONOW Talking about it as a . . .
 MOSS *No*.
 AARONOW As a *robbery*.
 MOSS As a "robbery"? No.

This example typifies the way Mamet's characters do and don't communicate. In a program note to *Glengarry Glen Ross*, the drama critic John Lahr referred to what he called the "hilarious brutal sludge of [Mamet's] characters' speech," and in this outrageous attempt by Moss and Aaronow to distinguish between *talking* and *speaking* we see the playwright expertly deploying such sludge. Another critic has directed attention to Mamet's notion of the unreliability of language as demonstrated through his characters' "intoxicating mixture of evasions, pleadings, brow-beatings, stonewalling, and spiel." It is the reader's (viewer's, actor's) challenge to navigate this mixture, and the voyage is usually not easy.

Mamet grew up on the Jewish south side of Chicago; attended a private school; worked in several theatrical groups (he was a busboy at Chicago's Second City, an improvisational cabaret where, among others, the comedians Mike Nichols and Elaine May appeared); and attended Goddard College, an experimental college in

Vermont. At Goddard he wrote his first play and also took a break from his studies to attend New York City's Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre. There, he was strongly influenced by the Stanislavsky method of acting and its exercises in concentration. The Method, as it is called, was important to him as a writer, he said later, for the way it showed him how "the language we use, its rhythm, actually determines the way we behave, more than the other way around"—an indication of where viewers and readers of his plays and screenplays should direct their primary attention. After graduating from Goddard in 1969, Mamet taught acting and writing at Marlboro College and at Goddard, then in 1972 moved back to Chicago and worked in a variety of nontheatrical environments such as the real-estate agency that provided the material for *Glengarry Glen Ross*. By this time his short plays *Lakeboat* and *The Duck Variations* had been performed at Marlboro and Goddard. Then in 1974 his *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, a fast-paced, irreverent excursion into the sexual fantasies and behavior of four people, won an award for the best new Chicago play. Two years later it played in New York, along with *The Duck Variations*, and won an Obie award. When in 1977 his *American Buffalo* won the New York Drama Critics award, Mamet was an established figure.

American Buffalo is a two-act play with just three characters: Don, who runs a small-time resale junk store; Bobby, a one-time drug addict whom Don tries to take care of; and Teach, a friend of Don's, who together with the others attempts (incompetently) to steal a coin collection, one item of which is a presumably valuable buffalo nickel. Everything goes awry, and the play's curve is a rising verbal aggression, especially in the speeches of Teach, that culminates in real violence. But, to employ a phrase of Robert Frost's, Mamet's "organized violence upon language" holds us, often painfully, through the two acts. "Calm down," Don says at one point, to which Teach replies, "I am calm, I'm just upset"—a response that perfectly describes the uneasy combination of attempted verbal control and patent verbal and emotional disorder.

Critics have said that *American Buffalo*, like Mamet's work generally, critiques American society and that Mamet is deeply pessimistic about the dreadful state of economic, social, and human relationships in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This is to some extent true; Mamet has said that "what I write about is what I think is missing from our society. And that's communication on a basic level." Yet that missing communication is exactly what motivates our interest in the plays. We do not, that is, use the plays' language as a springboard into concern about America and what it lacks; rather we find exhilarating Mamet's skillful manipulation of the "sludge" of character speech, well seasoned with self-loathing and mutual mistrust, so as to produce vivid entertainment. To say, as the writer of a book on Mamet has said, that "in spite of their callousness and selfishness" his characters "engage and retain our sympathy" is to put it backward. For in fact the brilliant rendering of callousness and selfishness, of failed communication, manipulation, and the basic venality of people is precisely what makes his work so compelling. In its refusal to present characters with sympathetic inner lives, Mamet's art is, in one way, as callous as those characters. But the inventive and surprising dramatic actions (glimpsed latterly in *Oleanna*, his 1992 play about sexual harassment), woven out of an American idiom resourcefully employed, are sensitive indeed.

The following text is that published in 1984.

Glengarry Glen Ross

THE CHARACTERS

WILLIAMSON, BAYLEN, ROMA, LINGK LEVENE, MOSS, AARONOW
Men in their early forties. Men in their fifties.

THE SCENE

*The three scenes of Act One take place in a Chinese restaurant.
Act Two takes place in a real estate office.*

ALWAYS BE CLOSING.
Practical Sales Maxim

Act 1

SCENE 1

A booth at a Chinese restaurant, WILLIAMSON and LEVENE are seated at the booth.

LEVENE John . . . John . . . John. Okay. John. John. Look: [*Pause.*] The Glengarry Highland's leads, you're sending Roma out. Fine. He's a good man. We know what he is. He's fine. All I'm saying, you look at the *board*, he's throwing . . . wait, wait, wait, he's throwing them *away*, he's throwing the leads away. All that I'm saying, that you're wasting leads. I don't want to tell you your *job*. All that I'm saying, things get *set*, I know they do, you get a certain *mindset*. . . . A guy gets a reputation. We know how this . . . all I'm saying, put a *closer* on the job. There's more than one man for the . . . Put a . . . wait a second, put a *proven man out* . . . and you watch, now *wait* a second—and you watch your *dollar* volumes. . . . You start closing them for *fifty* 'stead of *twenty-five* . . . you put a *closer* on the . . .

WILLIAMSON Shelly, you blew the last . . .

LEVENE No. John. No. Let's wait, let's back up here, I did . . . will you please? Wait a second. Please. I didn't "blow" them. No. I didn't "blow" them. No. One kicked *out*, one I closed . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . you didn't close . . .

LEVENE I, if you'd *listen* to me. Please. I *closed* the cocksucker. His *ex*, John, his *ex*, I didn't know he was married . . . he, the *judge* invalidated the . . .

WILLIAMSON Shelly . . .

LEVENE . . . and what is that, John? What? Bad *luck*. That's all it is. I pray in your *life* you will never find it runs in streaks. That's what it does, that's all it's doing. Streaks. I pray it misses you. That's all I want to say.

WILLIAMSON [*Pause.*] What about the other two?

LEVENE What two?

WILLIAMSON Four. You had four leads. One kicked out, one the *judge*, you say . . .

LEVENE . . . you want to see the court records? John? Eh? You want to go down . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . no . . .

LEVENE . . . do you want to go downtown . . . ?

WILLIAMSON . . . no . . .

LEVENE . . . then . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . I only . . .

LEVENE . . . then what is this “you say” shit, what is that? [Pause.] What is that . . . ?

WILLIAMSON All that I’m saying . . .

LEVENE What is this “you say”? A deal kicks out . . . I got to *eat. Shit*, Williamson, *shit*. You . . . Moss . . . Roma . . . look at the *sheets* . . . look at the *sheets*. Nineteen *eighty*, *eighty-one* . . . *eighty-two* . . . six months of *eighty-two* . . . who’s there? Who’s up there?

WILLIAMSON Roma.

LEVENE Under him?

WILLIAMSON Moss.

LEVENE Bullshit. John. Bullshit. April, September 1981. It’s *me*. It isn’t *fucking* Moss. Due respect, he’s an *order* taker, John. He *talks*, he talks a good game, look at the *board*, and *it’s me*, John, it’s me . . .

WILLIAMSON Not lately it isn’t.

LEVENE Lately kiss my ass lately. That isn’t how you build an org . . . talk, talk to Murray. Talk to Mitch. When we were on Peterson, who paid for his fucking *car*? You talk to him. The *Seville* . . . ? He came in, “You bought that for me Shelly.” Out of *what*? *Cold calling. Nothing. Sixty-five*, when we were there, with Glen Ross Farms? You call ‘em downtown. What was that? *Luck*? That was “luck”? *Bullshit*, John. You’re burning my ass, I can’t get a fucking *lead* . . . you think that was luck. My stats for those years? *Bullshit* . . . over that period of time . . . ? *Bullshit*. It wasn’t luck. It was *skill*. You want to throw that away, John . . . ? You want to throw that away?

WILLIAMSON It isn’t me . . .

LEVENE . . . it isn’t you . . . ? Who is it? Who is this I’m talking to? I need the *leads* . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . after the thirtieth . . .

LEVENE *Bullshit* the thirtieth, I don’t get on the board the thirtieth, they’re going to can my ass. I need the leads. I need them now. Or I’m gone, and you’re going to miss me, John, I swear to you.

WILLIAMSON Murray . . .

LEVENE . . . you *talk* to Murray . . .

WILLIAMSON I have. And my job is to marshal those leads . . .

LEVENE Marshal the leads . . . marshal the leads? What the fuck, what bus did *you* get off of, we’re here to fucking *sell*. *Fuck* marshaling the leads. What the fuck talk is that? What the fuck talk is that? Where did you learn that? In school? [Pause.] That’s “talk,” my friend, that’s “talk.” Our job is to *sell*. I’m the *man* to sell. I’m getting garbage. [Pause.] You’re giving it to me, and what I’m saying is it’s *fucked*.

WILLIAMSON You’re saying that I’m fucked.

LEVENE Yes. [Pause.] I am. I’m sorry to antagonize you.

WILLIAMSON Let me . . .

LEVENE . . . and I’m going to get bounced and you’re . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . let me . . . are you listening to me . . . ?

LEVENE Yes.

WILLIAMSON Let me tell you something, Shelly. I do what I'm hired to do. I'm . . . wait a second. I'm *hired* to watch the leads. I'm given . . . hold on, I'm given a *policy*. My job is to *do that*. What I'm *told*. That's it. You, wait a second, *anybody* falls below a certain mark I'm not *permitted* to give them the premium leads.

LEVENE Then how do they come up above that mark? With *dreck*¹ . . . ? That's *nonsense*. Explain this to me. 'Cause it's a waste, and it's a stupid waste. I want to tell you something . . .

WILLIAMSON You know what those leads cost?

LEVENE The premium leads. Yes. I know what they cost. John. Because I, I generated the dollar revenue sufficient to *buy* them. Nineteen senny-nine, you know what I made? Senny-nine? Ninety-six thousand dollars. John? For *Murray* . . . For *Mitch* . . . look at the sheets . . .

WILLIAMSON Murray said . . .

LEVENE *Fuck* him. *Fuck* Murray. John? You know? You tell him I said so. What does *he* fucking know? He's going to have a "sales" contest . . . you know what our sales contest used to be? *Money*. A *fortune*. Money lying on the ground. Murray? When was the last time *he* went out on a sit? Sales contest? It's *laughable*. It's cold out there now, John. It's tight. Money is *tight*. This ain't sixty-five. It ain't. It just ain't. See? See? Now, I'm a good *man*—but I need a . . .

WILLIAMSON Murray said . . .

LEVENE John. John . . .

WILLIAMSON Will you please wait a second. Shelly. Please. Murray told me: the hot leads . . .

LEVENE . . . ah, *fuck* this . . .

WILLIAMSON The . . . Shelly? [*Pause*.] The hot leads are assigned according to the board. During the contest. *Period*. Anyone who beats fifty per . . .

LEVENE That's fucked. That's fucked. You don't look at the fucking *percentage*. You look at the *gross*.

WILLIAMSON Either way. You're out.

LEVENE I'm out.

WILLIAMSON Yes.

LEVENE I'll tell you why I'm out. I'm *out*, you're giving me toilet paper. John. I've *seen* those leads. I saw them when I was at Homestead, we pitched those cocksuckers Rio Rancho nineteen sixty-nine they wouldn't buy. They couldn't buy a fucking *toaster*. They're *broke*, John. They're cold. They're deadbeats, you can't judge on that. Even so. Even so. Alright. Fine. Fine. Even so. I go in, FOUR FUCKING LEADS they got their money in a *sock*. They're fucking Polacks, John. Four leads. I close two. *Two*. Fifty per . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . they kicked out.

LEVENE They *all* kick out. You run in *streaks*, pal. *Streaks*. I'm . . . I'm . . . don't look at the *board*, look at *me*. Shelly Levene. *Anyone*. Ask them on

1. Shit (Yiddish).

Western. Ask Getz at Homestead. Go ask Jerry Graff. You know who I am . . . I NEED A SHOT. I got to get on the fucking board. Ask them. Ask them. Ask them who ever picked up a check I was flush. Moss, Jerry Graff, Mitch himself . . . Those guys *lived* on the business I brought in. They *lived* on it . . . and so did Murray, John. You were here you'd of benefited from it too. And now I'm saying this. Do I want charity? Do I want *pity*? I want *sits*. I want leads don't come right out of a *phone book*. Give me a lead hotter than that, I'll go in and close it. Give me a chance. That's all I want. I'm going to *get* up on that fucking board and all I want is a chance. It's a *streak* and I'm going to turn it around. [Pause.] I need your help. [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON I can't do it, Shelly. [Pause.]

LEVENE Why?

WILLIAMSON The leads are assigned randomly . . .

LEVENE *Bullshit, bullshit*, you assign them. . . . What are you *telling* me?

WILLIAMSON . . . apart from the top men on the contest board.

LEVENE Then put me on the board.

WILLIAMSON You start closing again, you'll *be* on the board.

LEVENE I can't close these leads, John. No one can. It's a joke. John, look, just give me a hot lead. Just give me two of the premium leads. As a "test," alright? As a "test" and I promise you . . .

WILLIAMSON I can't do it, Shel. [Pause.]

LEVENE I'll give you ten percent. [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON Of what?

LEVENE Of my end what I close.

WILLIAMSON And what if you don't close.

LEVENE I *will* close.

WILLIAMSON What if you *don't* close . . . ?

LEVENE I *will* close.

WILLIAMSON What if you *don't*? Then I'm *fucked*. You see . . . ? Then it's *my* job. That's what I'm *telling* you.

LEVENE I *will* close. John, John, ten percent. I can get hot. You *know* that . . .

WILLIAMSON Not lately you can't . . .

LEVENE Fuck that. That's defeatist. Fuck that. Fuck it. . . . Get on my side. *Go* with me. Let's *do* something. You want to run this office, *run* it.

WILLIAMSON Twenty percent. [Pause.]

LEVENE Alright.

WILLIAMSON And fifty bucks a lead.

LEVENE John. [Pause.] Listen. I want to talk to you. Permit me to do this a second. I'm older than you. A man acquires a reputation. On the street. What he does when he's *up*, what he does otherwise. . . . I said "ten," you said "no." You said "twenty." I said "fine," I'm not going to fuck with you, how can I beat that, you tell me? . . . Okay. Okay. We'll . . . Okay. Fine. We'll . . . Alright, twenty percent, and fifty bucks a lead. That's fine. For now. That's fine. A month or two we'll talk. A month from now. Next month. After the thirtieth. [Pause.] We'll talk.

WILLIAMSON What are we going to say?

LEVENE No. You're right. That's for later. We'll talk in a month. What have you got? I want two sits. Tonight.

WILLIAMSON I'm not sure I have two.

LEVENE I saw the board. You've got *four* . . .

WILLIAMSON [*Snaps*] I've got *Roma*. Then I've got Moss . . .

LEVENE *Bullshit*. They ain't been in the office yet. Give 'em some stiff.

We have a deal or not? Eh? Two sits. The Des Plaines.² Both of 'em, six and ten, you can do it . . . six and ten . . . eight and eleven, I don't give a shit, you set 'em up? Alright? The two sits in Des Plaines.

WILLIAMSON Alright.

LEVENE Good. Now we're talking. [*Pause.*]

WILLIAMSON A hundred bucks. [*Pause.*]

LEVENE Now? [*Pause.*] Now?

WILLIAMSON Now. [*Pause.*] Yes . . . When?

LEVENE Ah, *shit*, John. [*Pause.*]

WILLIAMSON I wish I could.

LEVENE You fucking asshole. [*Pause.*] I haven't got it. [*Pause.*] I haven't got it, John. [*Pause.*] I'll pay you tomorrow. [*Pause.*] I'm coming in here with the sales, I'll pay you *tomorrow*. [*Pause.*] I haven't got it, when I pay, the *gas* . . . I get back the hotel, I'll bring it in tomorrow.

WILLIAMSON Can't do it.

LEVENE I'll give you thirty on them now, I'll bring the rest tomorrow. I've got it at the hotel. [*Pause.*] John? [*Pause.*] We do that, for chrissake?

WILLIAMSON No.

LEVENE I'm asking you. As a favor to me? [*Pause.*] John. [*Long pause.*] John: my *daughter* . . .

WILLIAMSON I can't do it, Shelly.

LEVENE Well, I want to tell you something, fella, wasn't long I could pick up the phone, call *Murray* and I'd have your job. You know that? Not too *long* ago. For what? For *nothing*. "Mur, this new kid burns my ass." "Shelly, he's out." You're gone before I'm back from lunch. I bought him a trip to Bermuda once . . .

WILLIAMSON I have to go . . . [*Gets up.*]

LEVENE Wait. Alright. Fine. [*Starts going in pocket for money.*] The one. Give me the lead. Give me the one lead. The best one you have.

WILLIAMSON I can't split them. [*Pause.*]

LEVENE Why?

WILLIAMSON Because I say so.

LEVENE [*Pause.*] Is that it? Is that *it*? You want to do business that way . . . ?

[*WILLIAMSON gets up, leaves money on the table.*]

LEVENE You want to do business that way . . . ? Alright. Alright. Alright. Alright. What is there on the other list . . . ?

WILLIAMSON You want something off the B list?

LEVENE *Yeah*. Yeah.

WILLIAMSON Is that what you're saying?

LEVENE That's what I'm saying. Yeah. [*Pause.*] I'd like something off the other list. Which, very least, that I'm entitled to. If I'm still *working* here, which for the moment I guess that I am. [*Pause.*] What? I'm sorry I spoke harshly to you.

2. A community to the immediate northwest of Chicago.

WILLIAMSON That's alright.

LEVENE The deal still stands, our other thing.

[WILLIAMSON *shrugs*. *Starts out of the booth*.]

LEVENE Good. Mmm. I, you know, I left my wallet back at the hotel.

SCENE 2

A booth at the restaurant, MOSS and AARONOW seated. After the meal.

MOSS Polacks and deadbeats.

AARONOW . . . Polacks . . .

MOSS Deadbeats *all*.

AARONOW . . . they hold on to their money . . .

MOSS All of 'em. They, *hey*: it happens to us all.

AARONOW Where am I going to work?

MOSS You have to cheer up, George, you aren't out yet.

AARONOW I'm not?

MOSS You missed a fucking sale. Big deal. A deadbeat Polack. Big deal.

How you going to sell 'em in the *first* place . . . ? Your mistake, you shoun'a took the lead.

AARONOW I had to.

MOSS You had to, yeah. Why?

AARONOW To get on the . . .

MOSS To get on the board. Yeah. How you goan'a get on the board sell'n a Polack? And I'll tell you, I'll tell you what *else*. You listening? I'll tell you what else: don't ever try to sell an Indian.

AARONOW I'd never try to sell an Indian.

MOSS You get those names come up, you ever get 'em, "Patel"?

AARONOW Mmm . . .

MOSS You ever get 'em?

AARONOW Well, I think I had one once.

MOSS You did?

AARONOW I . . . I don't know.

MOSS You had one you'd know it. *Patel*. They keep coming up. I don't know. They like to talk to salesmen. [*Pause*.] They're *lonely*, something. [*Pause*.] They like to feel *superior*, I don't know. Never bought a fucking thing. You're sitting down "The Rio Rancho *this*, the blah blah blah," "The Mountain View—" "Oh yes. My brother told me that. . . ." They got a grapevine. Fuckin' Indians, George. Not my cup of tea. Speaking of which I want to tell you something: [*Pause*] I never got a cup of tea with them. You see them in the restaurants. A supercilious race. What is this *look* on their face all the time? I don't know. [*Pause*.] I don't know. Their broads all look like they just got fucked with a dead *cat*, I don't know. [*Pause*.] I don't know. I don't like it. Christ . . .

AARONOW What?

MOSS The whole fuckin' thing . . . The pressure's just too great. You're ab . . . you're absolu . . . they're too important. All of them. You go in the door. I . . . "I got to *close* this fucker, or I don't eat lunch," "or I don't win the *Cadillac*. . . ." We fuckin' work too hard. You work too hard. We all, I remember when we were at Platt . . . huh? Glen Ross Farms . . . *didn't* we sell a bunch of that . . . ?

AARONOW They came in and they, you know . . .

MOSS Well, they fucked it up.

AARONOW They did.

MOSS They killed the goose.

AARONOW They did.

MOSS And now . . .

AARONOW We're stuck with *this* . . .

MOSS We're stuck with *this* fucking shit . . .

AARONOW . . . *this* shit . . .

MOSS It's too . . .

AARONOW It is.

MOSS Eh?

AARONOW It's too . . .

MOSS You get a bad month, all of a . . .

AARONOW You're on this . . .

MOSS All of, they got you on this "board . . ."

AARONOW I, I . . . I . . .

MOSS Some *contest* board . . .

AARONOW I . . .

MOSS It's not right.

AARONOW It's not.

MOSS No. [Pause.]

AARONOW And it's not right to the *customers*.

MOSS I know it's not. I'll tell you, you got, you know, you got . . . what did I learn as a kid on Western? Don't sell a guy one car. Sell him *five* cars over fifteen years.

AARONOW That's right?

MOSS Eh . . . ?

AARONOW That's right?

MOSS Goddamn right, that's right. Guys come on: "Oh, the blah blah blah, I know what I'll do: I'll go in and rob everyone blind and go to Argentina cause nobody ever *thought* of this before."

AARONOW . . . that's right . . .

MOSS Eh?

AARONOW No. That's absolutely right.

MOSS And so they kill the goose. I, I, I'll . . . and a fuckin' *man*, worked all his *life* has got to . . .

AARONOW . . . that's right . . .

MOSS . . . cower in his boots . . .

AARONOW [*simultaneously with "boots"*] Shoes, boots, yes . . .

MOSS For some fuckin' "Sell ten thousand and you win the steak knives . . ."

AARONOW For some *sales* pro . . .

MOSS . . . sales promotion, "You *lose*, then we fire your . . ." No. It's *medieval* . . . it's wrong. "Or we're going to fire your ass." It's wrong.

AARONOW Yes.

MOSS Yes, it is. And you know who's responsible?

AARONOW Who?

MOSS You know who it is. It's Mitch. And Murray. 'Cause it doesn't have to be this way.

AARONOW No.

MOSS Look at Jerry Graff. He's *clean*, he's doing business for *himself*, he's got his, that *list* of his with the *nurses* . . . see? You see? That's *thinking*.

Why take ten percent? A ten percent comm . . . why are we giving the rest away? What are we giving ninety per . . . for *nothing*. For some jerk sit in the office tell you "Get out there and close." "Go win the Cadillac."

Graff. He goes out and *buys*. He pays top dollar for the . . . you see?

AARONOW Yes.

MOSS That's *thinking*. Now, he's got the leads, he goes in business for *himself*. He's . . . that's what I . . . that's *thinking*! "Who? Who's got a steady *job*, a couple bucks nobody's touched, who?"

AARONOW Nurses.

MOSS So Graff buys a fucking list of nurses, one grand—if he paid two I'll eat my hat—four, five thousand nurses, and he's going *wild* . . .

AARONOW He is?

MOSS He's doing *very* well.

AARONOW I heard that they were running cold.

MOSS The nurses?

AARONOW Yes.

MOSS You hear a *lot* of things. . . . He's doing very well. He's doing *very* well.

AARONOW With River Oaks?

MOSS River Oaks, Brook Farms. *All* of that shit. Somebody told me, you know what he's clearing *himself*? Fourteen, fifteen grand a *week*.

AARONOW Himself?

MOSS That's what I'm *saying*. Why? The *leads*. He's got the good leads . . . what are we, we're sitting in the shit here. Why? We have to go to *them* to *get* them. Huh. Ninety percent our sale, we're *paying* to the *office* for the *leads*.

AARONOW The leads, the overhead, the telephones, there's *lots* of things.

MOSS What do you need? A *telephone*, some broad to say "Good morning," nothing . . . nothing . . .

AARONOW No, it's not that simple, Dave . . .

MOSS Yes. It *is*. It *is* simple, and you know what the hard part is?

AARONOW What?

MOSS Starting up.

AARONOW What hard part?

MOSS Of doing the thing. The dif . . . the difference. Between me and Jerry Graff. Going to business for yourself. The hard part is . . . you know what it is?

AARONOW What?

MOSS Just the *act*.

AARONOW What act?

MOSS To say "I'm going on my own." 'Cause what you do, George, let me tell you what you do: you find yourself in *thrall* to someone else. And we *enslave* ourselves. To *please*. To win some fucking *toaster* . . . to . . . to . . . and the guy who got there first made *up* those . . .

AARONOW That's right . . .

MOSS He made *up* those rules, and we're working for *him*.

AARONOW That's the truth . . .

MOSS That's the *God's* truth. And it gets me depressed. I *swear* that it does. At MY AGE. To see a goddamn: "Somebody wins the Cadillac this month. P.S. Two guys get fucked."

AARONOW *Huh.*

MOSS You don't *ax* your sales force.

AARONOW No.

MOSS You . . .

AARONOW You . . .

MOSS You *build* it!

AARONOW That's what I . . .

MOSS You fucking *build* it! Men come . . .

AARONOW Men come *work* for you . . .

MOSS . . . you're absolutely right.

AARONOW They . . .

MOSS They have . . .

AARONOW When they . . .

MOSS Look look look look, when they *build* your business, then you can't fucking turn around, *enslave* them, treat them like *children*, fuck them up the ass, leave them to fend for themselves . . . no. [Pause.] No. [Pause.] You're absolutely right, and I want to tell you something.

AARONOW What?

MOSS I want to tell you what somebody should do.

AARONOW What?

MOSS Someone should stand up and strike *back*.

AARONOW What do you mean?

MOSS *Somebody* . . .

AARONOW Yes . . . ?

MOSS Should do something to *them*.

AARONOW What?

MOSS Something. To pay them back. [Pause.] Someone, someone should hurt them. Murray and Mitch.

AARONOW Someone should hurt them.

MOSS Yes.

AARONOW [Pause.] How?

MOSS How? Do something to hurt them. Where they live.

AARONOW What? [Pause.]

MOSS Someone should rob the office.

AARONOW *Huh.*

MOSS That's what I'm *saying*. We were, if we were that kind of guys, to knock it off, and *trash* the joint, it looks like robbery, and *take* the fuckin' leads out of the files . . . go to Jerry Graff. [Long pause.]

AARONOW What could somebody get for them?

MOSS What could we *get* for them? I don't know. Buck a *throw* . . . buck-a-half a throw . . . I don't know. . . . Hey, who knows what they're worth, what do they *pay* for them? All told . . . must be, I'd . . . three bucks a throw . . . I don't know.

AARONOW How many leads have we got?

MOSS The *Glengarry* . . . the premium leads . . . ? I'd say we got five thousand. Five. Five thousand leads.

AARONOW And you're saying a fella could take and sell these leads to Jerry Graff.

MOSS Yes.

AARONOW How do you know he'd buy them?

MOSS Graff? Because I worked for him.

AARONOW You haven't talked to him.

MOSS No. What do you mean? Have I talked to him about *this*? [Pause.]

AARONOW Yes. I mean are you actually *talking* about this, or are we just . . .

MOSS No, we're just . . .

AARONOW We're just "*talking*" about it.

MOSS We're just *speaking* about it. [Pause.] As an *idea*.

AARONOW As an idea.

MOSS Yes.

AARONOW We're not actually *talking* about it.

MOSS No.

AARONOW Talking about it as a . . .

MOSS No.

AARONOW As a *robbery*.

MOSS As a "robbery"?! No.

AARONOW *Well*. Well . . .

MOSS *Hey*. [Pause.]

AARONOW So all this, um, you didn't, actually, you didn't actually go talk to Graff.

MOSS Not actually, no. [Pause.]

AARONOW You didn't?

MOSS No. Not actually.

AARONOW Did you?

MOSS What did I say?

AARONOW What did you say?

MOSS Yes. [Pause.] I said, "Not actually." The fuck *you* care, George? We're just *talking* . . .

AARONOW We are?

MOSS Yes. [Pause.]

AARONOW Because, because, you know, it's a *crime*.

MOSS That's right. It's a crime. It is a crime. It's also very safe.

AARONOW You're actually *talking* about this?

MOSS That's right. [Pause.]

AARONOW You're going to steal the leads?

MOSS Have I said that? [Pause.]

AARONOW Are you? [Pause.]

MOSS Did I say that?

AARONOW Did you talk to Graff?

MOSS Is that what I said?

AARONOW What did he say?

MOSS What did he say? He'd *buy* them. [Pause.]

AARONOW You're going to steal the leads and sell the leads to him? [Pause.]

MOSS Yes.

AARONOW What will he pay?

MOSS A buck a shot.

AARONOW For five thousand?

MOSS However they are, that's the deal. A buck a throw. Five thousand dollars. Split it half and half.

AARONOW You're saying "me."

MOSS Yes. [Pause.] Twenty-five hundred apiece. One night's work, and the job with Graff. Working the premium leads. [Pause.]

AARONOW A job with Graff.

MOSS Is that what I said?

AARONOW He'd give me a job.

MOSS He would take you on. Yes. [Pause.]

AARONOW Is that the truth?

MOSS Yes. It is, George. [Pause.] Yes. It's a big decision. [Pause.] And it's a big reward. [Pause.] It's a big reward. For one night's work. [Pause.] But it's got to be tonight.

AARONOW What?

MOSS What? What? The *leads*.

AARONOW You have to steal the leads tonight?

MOSS That's *right*, the guys are moving them downtown. After the thirtieth. Murray and Mitch. After the contest.

AARONOW You're, you're saying so you have to go in there tonight and . . .

MOSS *You* . . .

AARONOW I'm sorry?

MOSS *You*. [Pause.]

AARONOW Me?

MOSS *You* have to go in. [Pause.] *You* have to get the leads. [Pause.]

AARONOW I do?

MOSS Yes.

AARONOW I . . .

MOSS It's not something for nothing, George, I took you in on this, you have to go. That's your thing. I've made the deal with Graff. I can't go. I can't go in, I've spoken on this too much. I've got a big mouth. [Pause.] "The fucking leads" et cetera, blah blah blah ". . . the fucking tight ass company . . ."

AARONOW They'll know when you go over to Graff . . .

MOSS What will they know? That I stole the leads? I *didn't* steal the leads, I'm going to the *movies* tonight with a friend, and then I'm going to the Como Inn. Why did I go to Graff? I got a better deal. *Period*. Let 'em prove something. They can't prove anything that's not the case. [Pause.]

AARONOW *Dave*.

MOSS Yes.

AARONOW You want me to break into the office tonight and steal the leads?

MOSS Yes. [Pause.]

AARONOW No.

MOSS Oh, yes, George.

AARONOW What does that mean?

MOSS Listen to this. I have an alibi, I'm going to the Como Inn, why?
 Why? The place gets robbed, they're going to come looking for *me*.
 Why? Because I probably did it. Are you going to turn me in? [*Pause.*]
 George? Are you going to turn me in?
 AARONOW What if you don't get caught?
 MOSS They come to you, you going to turn me in?
 AARONOW Why would they come to me?
 MOSS They're going to come to *everyone*.
 AARONOW Why would I *do* it?
 MOSS You wouldn't, George, that's why I'm talking to you. Answer me.
 They come to you. You going to turn me in?
 AARONOW No.
 MOSS Are you sure?
 AARONOW Yes. I'm sure.
 MOSS Then listen to this: I have to get those leads tonight. That's something I have to do. If I'm not at the *movies* . . . if I'm not eating over at the inn . . . If you don't do this, then *I* have to come in here . . .
 AARONOW . . . you don't have to come in . . .
 MOSS . . . and *rob* the place . . .
 AARONOW . . . I thought that we were only talking . . .
 MOSS . . . they *take* me, then. They're going to ask me who were my accomplices.
 AARONOW *Me*?
 MOSS Absolutely.
 AARONOW That's ridiculous.
 MOSS Well, to the law, you're an accessory. Before the fact.
 AARONOW I didn't ask to be.
 MOSS Then tough luck, George, because you are.
 AARONOW Why? *Why*, because you only *told* me about it?
 MOSS That's right.
 AARONOW Why are you doing this to me, Dave. Why are you talking this way to me? I don't understand. Why are you doing this at *all* . . . ?
 MOSS That's none of your fucking business . . .
 AARONOW Well, well, well, *talk* to me, we sat down to eat *dinner*, and here I'm a *criminal* . . .
 MOSS You *went* for it.
 AARONOW In the abstract . . .
 MOSS So I'm making it concrete.
 AARONOW Why?
 MOSS Why? Why *you* going to give me five grand?
 AARONOW Do you need five grand?
 MOSS Is that what I just said?
 AARONOW You need money? Is that the . . .
 MOSS Hey, hey, let's just keep it simple, what I need is not the . . . what do *you* need . . . ?
 AARONOW What is the five grand? [*Pause.*] What is the, you said that we were going to *split* five . . .
 MOSS I lied. [*Pause.*] Alright? My end is *my* business. Your end's twenty-five. In or out. You tell me, you're out you take the consequences.
 AARONOW I do?

MOSS Yes. [Pause.]

AARONOW And why is that?

MOSS Because you listened.

SCENE 3

The restaurant. ROMA is seated alone at the booth. LINGK is at the booth next to him. ROMA is talking to him.

ROMA . . . all train compartments smell vaguely of shit. It gets so you don't mind it. That's the worst thing that I can confess. You know how long it took me to get there? A long time. When you *die* you're going to regret the things you don't do. You think you're *queer* . . . ? I'm going to tell you something: we're *all* queer. You think that you're a *thief*? So *what*? You get befuddled by a middle-class morality . . . ? Get *shut* of it. Shut it out. You cheated on your wife . . . ? You *did* it, *live* with it. [Pause.] You fuck little girls, so *be* it. There's an absolute morality? *May be*. And *then* what? If you *think* there is, then *be* that thing. Bad people go to hell? I don't *think* so. If you think that, act that way. A hell exists on earth? Yes. I won't live in it. That's *me*. You ever take a dump made you feel you'd just slept for twelve hours . . . ?

LINGK Did I . . . ?

ROMA Yes.

LINGK I don't know.

ROMA Or a *piss* . . . ? A great meal fades in reflection. Everything else gains. You know why? 'Cause it's only food. This shit we eat, it keeps us going. But it's only food. The great fucks that you may have had. What do you remember about them?

LINGK What do I . . . ?

ROMA Yes.

LINGK Mmmm . . .

ROMA I don't know. For *me*, I'm saying, what it is, it's probably not the orgasm. Some broads, forearms on your neck, something her *eyes* did. There was a *sound* she made . . . or, me, lying, in the, I'll tell you: me lying in bed; the next day she brought me café au lait. She gives me a cigarette, my balls feel like concrete. Eh? What I'm saying, what is our life? [Pause.] It's looking forward or it's looking back. And that's our life. That's *it*. Where is the *moment*? [Pause.] And what is it that we're afraid of? Loss. What else? [Pause.] The *bank* closes. We get *sick*, my wife died on a plane, the stock market collapsed . . . the house burnt down . . . what of these happen . . . ? None of 'em. We worry anyway. What does this mean? I'm not *secure*. How can I be secure? [Pause.] Through amassing wealth beyond all measure? No. And what's beyond all measure? That's a sickness. That's a trap. There is no measure. Only greed. How can we act? The right way, we would say, to deal with this: "There is a one-in-a-million chance that so and so will happen. . . . *Fuck* it, it won't happen to *me*. . . ." No. We know that's not the right way I think. [Pause.] We say the *correct* way to deal with this is "There is a one-in-so-and-so chance this will happen . . . God *protect* me. I am powerless, let it not happen to me. . . ." But no to *that*. I say. There's something else. What is it? "If it happens, AS IT MAY for that is not within our powers,

I will *deal* with it, just as I do *today* with what draws my concern today." I say *this* is how we must act. I do those things which seem correct to me *today*. I trust myself. And if security concerns me, I do that which *today* I think will make me secure. And every day I *do* that, when that day *arrives* that I need a reserve, (a) odds are that I have it, and (b) the *true* reserve that I have is the strength that I have of *acting each day* without fear. [Pause.] According to the dictates of my mind. [Pause.] Stocks, bonds, objects of art, real estate. Now: what are they? [Pause.] An opportunity. To what? To make money? Perhaps. To *lose* money? Perhaps. To "indulge" and to "learn" about ourselves? Perhaps. *So fucking what?* What *isn't*? They're an *opportunity*. That's all. They're an *event*. A guy comes up to you, you make a call, you send in a brochure, it doesn't matter, "There're these *properties* I'd like for you to see." What does it mean? What you *want* it to mean. [Pause.] Money? [Pause.] If that's what it signifies to you. Security? [Pause.] Comfort? [Pause.] All it is is THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO YOU. [Pause.] That's all it is. How are they different? [Pause.] Some poor newly married guy gets run down by a cab. Some *busboy* wins the lottery. [Pause.] All it is, it's a carnival. What's special . . . what *draws* us? [Pause.] We're all different. [Pause.] We're not the same. [Pause.] We are not the same. [Pause.] Hmmm. [Pause. Sighs.] It's been a long day. [Pause.] What are you drinking?

LINGK Gimlet.

ROMA Well, let's have a couple more. My name is Richard Roma, what's yours?

LINGK Lingk. James Lingk.

ROMA James. I'm glad to meet you. [They shake hands.] I'm glad to meet you, James. [Pause.] I want to show you something. [Pause.] It might mean *nothing* to you . . . and it might not. I don't know. I don't know anymore. [Pause. He takes out a small map and spreads it on a table.] What is that? Florida. Glengarry Highlands. Florida. "Florida. *Bullshit.*" And maybe that's true; and that's what *I* said: but look *here*: what is this? This is a piece of land. Listen to what I'm going to tell you now.

Act 2

The real estate office. Ransacked. A broken plate-glass window boarded up, glass all over the floor. AARONOW and WILLIAMSON standing around, smoking.

[Pause.]

AARONOW People used to say that there are numbers of such magnitude that multiplying them by two made no difference. [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON Who used to say that?

AARONOW In school. [Pause.]

[BAYLEN, a detective, comes out of the inner office.]

BAYLEN Alright . . . ? [ROMA enters from the street.]

ROMA *Williamson* . . . *Williamson*, they stole the *contracts* . . . ?

BAYLEN Excuse me, sir . . .

ROMA Did they get my contracts?

WILLIAMSON They got . . .

BAYLEN Excuse me, fella.

ROMA . . . did they . . .

BAYLEN Would you excuse us, please . . . ?

ROMA Don't *fuck* with me, fella. I'm talking about a fuckin' Cadillac car that you owe me . . .

WILLIAMSON They didn't get your contract. I filed it before I left.

ROMA They didn't get my contracts?

WILLIAMSON They—excuse me . . . [*He goes back into inner room with the DETECTIVE.*]

ROMA Oh, *fuck*. *Fuck*. [*He starts kicking the desk.*] FUCK FUCK FUCK! WILLIAMSON!!! WILLIAMSON!!! [*Goes to the door WILLIAMSON went into, tries the door; it's locked.*] OPEN THE FUCKING . . . WILLIAMSON . . .

BAYLEN [*coming out*] Who are you? [*WILLIAMSON comes out.*]

WILLIAMSON They didn't get the contracts.

ROMA Did they . . .

WILLIAMSON They got, listen to me . . .

ROMA Th . . .

WILLIAMSON Listen to me: They got *some* of them.

ROMA Some of them . . .

BAYLEN Who told you . . . ?

ROMA Who told me wh . . . ? You've got a fuckin', you've . . . a . . . who is this . . . ? You've got a board-up on the window. . . *Moss* told me.

BAYLEN [*Looking back toward the inner office.*] *Moss* . . . Who told him?

ROMA How the fuck do *I* know? [*To WILLIAMSON*] *What* . . . *talk* to me.

WILLIAMSON They took *some* of the con . . .

ROMA . . . some of the contracts . . . *Lingk*. *James Lingk*. I closed . . .

WILLIAMSON You closed him yesterday.

ROMA *Yes*.

WILLIAMSON It went down. I filed it.

ROMA You did?

WILLIAMSON *Yes*.

ROMA Then I'm over the fucking top and you owe me a Cadillac.

WILLIAMSON I . . .

ROMA And I don't want any fucking shit and I don't give a shit, *Lingk* puts me over the top, you filed it, that's fine, any other shit kicks out *you* go back. You . . . *you* reclose it, 'cause I *closed* it and you . . . you owe me the car.

BAYLEN Would you excuse us, please.

AARONOW I, um, and may . . . maybe they're in . . . they're in . . . you should, *John*, if we're ins . . .

WILLIAMSON I'm sure that we're insured, *George* . . . [*Going back inside.*]

ROMA *Fuck* insured. You owe me a car.

BAYLEN [*Stepping back into the inner room*] Please don't leave. I'm going to talk to you. What's your name?

ROMA Are you talking to me? [*Pause.*]

BAYLEN *Yes*. [*Pause.*]

ROMA My name is *Richard Roma*.

[*BAYLEN goes back into the inner room.*]

AARONOW I, you know, they should be insured.

ROMA What do *you* care . . . ?

AARONOW Then, you know, they wouldn't be so ups . . .

ROMA Yeah. That's swell. Yes. You're right. [Pause.] How are you?

AARONOW I'm fine. You mean the *board*? You mean the *board* . . . ?

ROMA I don't . . . yes. Okay, the board.

AARONOW I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm fucked on the board. *You*. You see how . . .

I . . . [Pause.] I can't . . . my mind must be in other places. 'Cause I can't do any . . .

ROMA *What?* You can't do any *what?* [Pause.]

AARONOW I can't close 'em.

ROMA Well, they're old. I saw the shit that they were giving you.

AARONOW Yes.

ROMA Huh?

AARONOW Yes. They are old.

ROMA They're ancient.

AARONOW Clear . . .

ROMA Clear Meadows. That shit's dead. [Pause.]

AARONOW It is dead.

ROMA It's a waste of time.

AARONOW Yes. [Long pause.] I'm no fucking good.

ROMA That's . . .

AARONOW Everything I . . . *you* know . . .

ROMA That's not . . . Fuck that shit, George. You're a, *hey*, you had a bad month. You're a good man, George.

AARONOW I am?

ROMA You hit a bad streak. We've all . . . look at this: fifteen units Mountain View, the fucking things get stole.

AARONOW He said he filed . . .

ROMA He filed half of them, he filed the *big* one. All the little ones, I have, I have to go back and . . . ah, *fuck*, I got to go out like a fucking schmuck hat in my hand and reclose the . . . [Pause.] I mean, talk about a bad streak. That would sap *anyone's* self confi . . . I got to go out and reclose all my . . . Where's the phones?

AARONOW They stole . . .

ROMA They stole the . . .

AARONOW What. What kind of outfit are we running where . . . where anyone . . .

ROMA [To *himself*] They stole the phones.

AARONOW Where criminals can come in here . . . they take the . . .

ROMA They stole the phones. They stole the leads. They're . . . *Christ*. [Pause.] What am I going to do this month? Oh, *shit* . . . [Starts for the door.]

AARONOW You think they're going to catch . . . where are you going?

ROMA Down the street.

WILLIAMSON [Sticking his head out of the door] Where are you going?

ROMA To the restaura . . . what do you fucking . . . ?

WILLIAMSON Aren't you going out today?

ROMA With what? [Pause.] With what, John, they took the leads . . .

WILLIAMSON I have the stuff from last year's . . .

ROMA Oh. Oh. Oh, your “nostalgia” file, that’s fine. No. Swell. ‘Cause I don’t have to . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . you want to go out today . . . ?

ROMA ‘Cause I don’t have to *eat* this month. No. Okay. *Give ’em to me . . .*
 [To himself] Fucking Mitch and Murray going to shit a br . . . what am I going to *do* all . . . [WILLIAMSON starts back into the office. He is accosted by AARONOW.]

AARONOW Were the leads . . .

ROMA . . . what am I going to *do* all month . . . ?

AARONOW Were the leads insured?

WILLIAMSON I don’t know, George, why?

AARONOW ‘Cause, you know, ‘cause they weren’t, I know that Mitch and Murray uh . . . [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON What?

AARONOW That they’re going to be upset.

WILLIAMSON That’s right. [Going back into his office. Pause. To ROMA]

You want to go out today . . . ?

[Pause. WILLIAMSON returns to his office.]

AARONOW He said we’re all going to have to go talk to the guy.

ROMA What?

AARONOW He said we . . .

ROMA To the cop?

AARONOW Yeah.

ROMA Yeah. That’s swell. *Another* waste of time.

AARONOW A waste of time? Why?

ROMA *Why?* ‘Cause they aren’t going to find the guy.

AARONOW The cops?

ROMA Yes. The cops. No.

AARONOW They aren’t?

ROMA No.

AARONOW Why don’t you think so?

ROMA Why? Because they’re *stupid*. “Where were you last night . . .”

AARONOW Where were you?

ROMA Where was I?

AARONOW Yes.

ROMA I was at home, where were *you*?

AARONOW At home.

ROMA *See* . . . ? Were you the guy who broke in?

AARONOW Was I?

ROMA Yes.

AARONOW No.

ROMA Then don’t sweat it, George, you know why?

AARONOW No.

ROMA You have nothing to hide.

AARONOW [Pause.] When I talk to the police, I get nervous.

ROMA Yeah. You know who doesn’t?

AARONOW No, who?

ROMA Thieves.

AARONOW Why?

ROMA They’re inured to it.

AARONOW You think so?

ROMA Yes. [Pause.]

AARONOW But what should I *tell* them?

ROMA The truth, George. Always tell the truth. It's the easiest thing to remember. [WILLIAMSON *comes out of the office with leads*. ROMA *takes one, reads it.*]

ROMA *Patel?* Ravidam *Patel?* How am I going to make a living on these deadbeat *wogs?* Where did you get this, from the *morgue?*

WILLIAMSON If you don't want it, give it back.

ROMA I don't "want" it, if you catch my drift.

WILLIAMSON I'm giving you *three* leads. You . . .

ROMA What's the fucking point in *any* case . . . ? What's the *point*. I got to argue with *you*, I got to knock heads with the *cops*, I'm busting my *balls*, sell your *dirt* to fucking *deadbeats* money in the *mattress*, I come back you can't even manage to keep the contracts safe, I have to go back and close them *again*. . . . What the fuck am I wasting my time, fuck this shit. I'm going out and reclose last week's . . .

WILLIAMSON The word from Murray is: leave them alone. If we need a new signature he'll go out himself, he'll be the *president*, just come *in*, from out of *town* . . .

ROMA Okay, okay, okay, gimme this shit. Fine. [Takes the leads.]

WILLIAMSON Now, I'm giving you three . . .

ROMA Three? I count *two*.

WILLIAMSON Three.

ROMA *Patel?* Fuck *you*. Fuckin' *Shiva* handed him a million dollars, told him "sign the deal," he wouldn't sign. And Vishnu, too. Into the bargain. Fuck *that*, John. You know your business, I know mine. Your business is being an *asshole*, and I find out whose fucking *cousin* you are, I'm going to go to him and figure out a way to have your *ass* . . . fuck you—I'll wait for the new leads. [SHELLY LEVENE *enters.*]

LEVENE Get the *chalk*. Get the *chalk* . . . get the *chalk!* I closed 'em! I closed the cocksucker. Get the chalk and put me on the *board*. I'm going to Hawaii! Put me on the Cadillac board, Williamson! Pick up the fuckin' chalk. Eight units. Mountain View . . .

ROMA You sold eight Mountain View?

LEVENE You bet your ass. Who wants to go to lunch? Who wants to go to lunch? I'm buying. [Slaps contract down on WILLIAMSON'S desk.] Eighty-two fucking grand. And twelve grand in commission. John. [Pause.] On fucking deadbeat magazine subscription leads.

WILLIAMSON Who?

LEVENE [Pointing to contract.] Read it. Bruce and Harriett Nyborg. [Looking around.] What happened here?

AARONOW Fuck. I had them on River Glen. [LEVENE looks around.]

LEVENE What happened?

WILLIAMSON Somebody broke in.

ROMA Eight units?

LEVENE That's right.

ROMA *Shelly* . . . !

LEVENE Hey, big fucking deal. Broke a bad streak . . .

AARONOW *Shelly*, the Machine, Levene.

LEVENE You . . .

AARONOW That's great.

LEVENE Thank you, George. [BAYLEN sticks his head out of the room; calls in, "Aaronow." AARONOW goes into the side room.]

LEVENE Williamson, get on the phone, call Mitch . . .

ROMA They took the phones . . .

LEVENE They . . .

BAYLEN *Aaronow* . . .

ROMA They took the typewriters, they took the leads, they took the *cash*, they took the *contracts* . . .

LEVENE Wh . . . wh . . . Wha . . . ?

AARONOW We had a robbery. [Goes into the inner room.]

LEVENE [Pause.] When?

ROMA Last night, this morning. [Pause.]

LEVENE They took the leads?

ROMA Mmm. [MOSS comes out of the interrogation.]

MOSS Fuckin' asshole.

ROMA What, they beat you with a rubber bat?

MOSS Cop couldn't find his dick two hands and a map. Anyone talks to this guy's an *asshole* . . .

ROMA You going to turn State's?

MOSS Fuck you, Ricky. I ain't going out today. I'm going home. I'm going home because nothing's *accomplished* here. . . . Anyone *talks to this guy is* . . .

ROMA Guess what the Machine did?

MOSS Fuck the Machine.

ROMA Mountain View. Eight units.

MOSS Fuckin' cop's got no right talk to me that way. I didn't rob the place . . .

ROMA You hear what I said?

MOSS Yeah. He closed a deal.

ROMA Eight units. Mountain View.

MOSS [To LEVENE] You did that?

LEVENE Yeah. [Pause.]

MOSS Fuck you.

ROMA Guess who?

MOSS When . . .

LEVENE Just now.

ROMA Guess who?

MOSS You just this morning . . .

ROMA Harriet and blah blah Nyborg.

MOSS You did that?

LEVENE Eighty-two thousand dollars. [Pause.]

MOSS Those fuckin' *deadbeats* . . .

LEVENE My ass. I told 'em. [To ROMA] Listen to this: I said . . .

MOSS Hey, I don't want to hear your fucking war stories . . .

ROMA Fuck *you*, Dave . . .

LEVENE "You have to believe in yourself. . . . you"—look—"alright . . . ?"

MOSS [To WILLIAMSON] Give me some leads. I'm going out . . . I'm getting out of . . .

LEVENE “. . . you have to believe in yourself . . .”

MOSS Na, fuck the leads, I’m going home.

LEVENE “Bruce, Harriett . . . Fuck *me*, believe in yourself . . .”

ROMA We haven’t got a lead . . .

MOSS Why not?

ROMA They took ’em . . .

MOSS Hey, they’re fuckin’ garbage any case. . . . This whole goddamn . . .

LEVENE “. . . You look around, you say, ‘This one has so-and-so, and I have nothing . . .’”

MOSS *Shit.*

LEVENE “‘Why? Why don’t I get the opportunities . . . ?’”

MOSS And did they steal the contracts . . . ?

ROMA Fuck *you* care . . . ?

LEVENE “I want to tell you something, Harriett . . .”

MOSS . . . the fuck is *that* supposed to mean . . . ?

LEVENE Will you shut up, I’m telling you this . . . [AARONOW *sticks his head out.*]

AARONOW Can we get some coffee . . . ?

MOSS How ya doing? [*Pause.*]

AARONOW Fine.

MOSS Uh-huh.

AARONOW If anyone’s going, I could use some coffee.

LEVENE “You *do* get the . . .” [*To ROMA*] Huh? Huh?

MOSS *Fuck* is that supposed to mean?

LEVENE “You *do* get the opportunity. . . . You *get* them. As I do, as *anyone* does . . .”

MOSS Ricky? . . . That I don’t care they stole the contracts? [*Pause.*]

LEVENE I got ’em in the kitchen. I’m eating her crumb cake.

MOSS What does that mean?

ROMA It *means*, Dave, you haven’t closed a good one in a month, none of my business, you want to push me to answer you. [*Pause.*] And so you haven’t got a contract to get stolen or so forth.

MOSS You have a mean streak in you, Ricky, you know that . . . ?

LEVENE Rick. Let me tell you. Wait, we’re in the . . .

MOSS Shut the fuck up. [*Pause.*] Ricky. You have a mean streak in you. . . . [*To LEVENE*] And what the fuck are *you* babbling about . . . ? [*To ROMA*] Bring that shit up. Of my volume. You were on a bad one and I brought it up to *you* you’d harbor it. [*Pause.*] You’d harbor it a long long while. And you’d be right.

ROMA Who said “Fuck the Machine”?

MOSS “*Fuck the Machine*”? “*Fuck the Machine*”? What is this. *Courtesy* class . . . ? You’re *fucked*, Rick—are you fucking *nuts*? You’re hot, so you think you’re the *ruler* of this place . . . ?! You want to . . .

LEVENE Dave . . .

MOSS . . . Shut up. Decide who should be dealt with how? Is that the thing? I come into the fuckin’ office today, I get humiliated by some jagoff cop. I get accused of . . . I get this *shit* thrown in my face by you, you genuine shit, because you’re top name on the board . . .

ROMA Is that what I did? Dave? I humiliated you? My *God* . . . I’m sorry . . .

MOSS Sittin' on top of the *world*, sittin' on top of the *world*, everything's fucking *peachfuzz* . . .

ROMA Oh, and I don't get a moment to spare for a bust-out *humanitarian* down on his luck lately. Fuck *you*, Dave, you know you got a big *mouth*, and *you* make a close the whole *place* stinks with your *farts* for a week. "How much you just ingested," what a big *man* you are, "Hey, let me buy you a pack of gum. I'll show you how to *chew* it." Your *pal* closes, all that comes out of your mouth is *bile*, how fucked *up* you are . . .

MOSS *Who's* my pal . . . ? And what are you, Ricky, huh, what are you, Bishop *Sheean*? Who the fuck are *you*, Mr. Slick . . . ? What are you, friend to the *workingman*? Big deal. Fuck *you*, you got the memory a fuckin' *fly*. I never liked you.

ROMA What is this, your farewell speech?

MOSS I'm going home.

ROMA Your farewell to the troops?

MOSS I'm not going home. I'm going to Wisconsin.

ROMA Have a good trip.

MOSS [*Simultaneously with "trip"*] And fuck *you*. Fuck the *lot* of you. Fuck *you all*. [MOSS *exits*. Pause.]

ROMA [*To LEVENE*] You were saying? [Pause.] Come on. Come on, you got them in the kitchen, you got the stats spread out, you're in your shirt-sleeves, you can *smell* it. Huh? Snap out of it, you're eating her *crumb* cake. [Pause.]

LEVENE I'm eating her *crumb* cake . . .

ROMA How was it . . . ?

LEVENE From the store.

ROMA Fuck *her* . . .

LEVENE "What we have to do is *admit* to ourself that we see that opportunity . . . and *take* it. [Pause.] And that's it." And we *sit* there. [Pause.] I got the pen out . . .

ROMA "Always be closing . . ."

LEVENE That's what I'm *saying*. The *old* ways. The *old* ways . . . convert the motherfucker . . . *sell* him . . . *sell* him . . . *make him sign the check*. [Pause.] The . . . Bruce, Harriett . . . the kitchen, blah: they got their money in *government* bonds. . . . I say *fuck* it, we're going to go the whole route. I plat it out eight units. Eighty-two grand. I tell them. "This is now. This is that *thing* that you've been dreaming of, you're going to find that suitcase on the train, the guy comes in the door, the bag that's full of money. This is it, *Harriett* . . ."

ROMA [*Reflectively*] Harriett . . .

LEVENE *Bruce* . . . "I don't want to fuck *around* with you. I don't want to go *round* this, and *pussyfoot* around the thing, you have to look back on this. I do, too. I came here to do good for you and me. For *both* of us. Why take an interim position? *The only arrangement I'll accept* is full investment. Period. The whole eight units. I know that you're saying 'be safe,' I know what you're saying. I know if I left you to yourselves, you'd say 'come back tomorrow,' and when I walked out that door, you'd make a cup of *coffee* . . . you'd sit *down* . . . and you'd think 'let's be safe . . .' and not to disappoint me you'd go *one* unit or maybe two, because you'd

become scared because you'd met *possibility*. But this won't do, and that's not the subject. . . ." Listen to this, I actually said this. "That's not the subject of our *evening* together." Now I handed them the pen. I held it in my hand. I turned the contract, eight units eighty-two grand. "Now I want you to sign." [Pause.] I sat there. Five minutes. Then, I sat there, Ricky, *twenty-two minutes* by the kitchen clock. [Pause.] Twenty-two minutes by the kitchen clock. Not a *word*, not a *motion*. What am I thinking? "My arm's getting tired?" *No*. I *did* it. I *did* it. Like in the *old* days, Ricky. Like I was taught . . . Like, like, like I *used* to do . . . I did it.

ROMA Like you taught me . . .

LEVENE Bullshit, you're . . . No. That's raw . . . well, if I *did*, then I'm *glad* I did. I, *well*. I locked on them. All on them, nothing on me. All my thoughts are on them. I'm holding the last thought that I spoke: "Now is the time." [Pause.] They signed, Ricky. It was *great*. It was fucking great. It was like they wilted all at once. No *gesture* . . . nothing. Like together. They, I swear to God, they both kind of *imperceptibly slumped*. And he reaches and takes the pen and signs, he passes it to her, she signs. It was so fucking solemn. I just let it sit. I nod like this. I nod again. I grasp his hands. I shake his hands. I grasp *her* hands. I nod at her like this. "Bruce . . . Harriett . . ." I'm beaming at them. I'm nodding like this. I point back in the living room, back to the sideboard. [Pause.] *I didn't fucking know there was a sideboard there!!* He goes back, he brings us a drink. Little shot glasses. A pattern in 'em. And we toast. In silence. [Pause.]

ROMA That was a great sale, Shelly. [Pause.]

LEVENE Ah, fuck. Leads! Leads! Williamson! [WILLIAMSON *sticks his head out of the office.*] Send me *out!* Send me *out!*

WILLIAMSON The leads are coming.

LEVENE *Get 'em to me!*

WILLIAMSON I talked to Murray and Mitch an hour ago. They're coming in, you understand they're a bit *upset* over this morning's . . .

LEVENE Did you tell 'em my sale?

WILLIAMSON How could I tell 'em your sale? Eh? I don't have a tel . . . I'll tell 'em your sale when they bring in the leads. Alright? Shelly. Alright? We had a little . . . You closed a deal. You made a good sale. Fine.

LEVENE It's better than a good sale. It's a . . .

WILLIAMSON Look: I have a lot of things on my mind, they're coming in, alright, they're very upset, I'm trying to make some *sense* . . .

LEVENE All that I'm *telling* you: that one thing you can tell them it's a remarkable sale.

WILLIAMSON The only thing remarkable is who you made it to.

LEVENE What does *that* fucking mean?

WILLIAMSON That if the sale sticks, it will be a miracle.

LEVENE Why should the sale not stick? Hey, *fuck* you. That's what I'm saying. You have no idea of your job. A man's his job and you're *fucked* at yours. You hear what I'm saying to you? Your "end of month board . . ." You can't run an office. I don't care. You don't know what it *is*, you don't have the *sense*, you don't have the *balls*. You ever been on a sit? *Ever?* Has this cocksucker ever been . . . you ever sit down with a cust . . .

WILLIAMSON I were you, I'd calm down, Shelly.

LEVENE *Would you? Would you . . . ? Or you're gonna what, fire me?*

WILLIAMSON *It's not impossible.*

LEVENE *On an eighty-thousand dollar day? And it ain't even noon.*

ROMA *You closed 'em today?*

LEVENE *Yes. I did. This morning. [To WILLIAMSON] What I'm saying to you: things can change. You see? This is where you fuck up, because this is something you don't know. You can't look down the road. And see what's coming. Might be someone else, John. It might be someone new, eh? Someone new. And you can't look back. 'Cause you don't know history. You ask them. When we were at Rio Rancho, who was top man? A month . . . ? Two months . . . ? Eight months in twelve for three years in a row. You know what that means? You know what that means? Is that luck? Is that some, some, some purloined leads? That's skill. That's talent, that's, that's . . .*

ROMA *. . . yes . . .*

LEVENE *. . . and you don't remember. 'Cause you weren't around. That's cold calling. Walk up to the door. I don't even know their name. I'm selling something they don't even want. You talk about soft sell . . . before we had a name for it . . . before we called it anything, we did it.*

ROMA *That's right, Shel.*

LEVENE *And, and, and, I did it. And I put a kid through school. She . . . and Cold calling, fella. Door to door. But you don't know. You don't know. You never heard of a streak. You never heard of "marshaling your sales force. . . ." What are you, you're a secretary, John. Fuck you. That's my message to you. Fuck you and kiss my ass. You don't like it, I'll go talk to Jerry Graff. Period. Fuck you. Put me on the board. And I want three worthwhile leads today and I don't want any bullshit about them and I want 'em close together 'cause I'm going to hit them all today. That's all I have to say to you.*

ROMA *He's right, Williamson. [WILLIAMSON goes into a side office. Pause.]*

LEVENE *It's not right. I'm sorry, and I'll tell you who's to blame is Mitch and Murray. [ROMA sees something outside the window.]*

ROMA [*Sotto*] *Oh, Christ.*

LEVENE *The hell with him. We'll go to lunch, the leads won't be up for . . .*

ROMA *You're a client. I just sold you five waterfront Glengarry Farms. I rub my head, throw me the cue "Kenilworth."³*

LEVENE *What is it?*

ROMA *Kenilw . . . [LINGK enters the office.]*

ROMA [*To LEVENE*] *I own the property, my mother owns the property, I put her into it. I'm going to show you on the plats. You look when you get home A-3 through A-14 and 26 through 30. You take your time and if you still feel.*

LEVENE *No, Mr. Roma. I don't need the time, I've made a lot of investments in the last . . .*

LINGK *I've got to talk to you.*

3. A community just north of Chicago.

ROMA [*Looking up*] Jim! What are you doing here? Jim Lingk, D. Ray Morton . . .

LEVENE Glad to meet you.

ROMA I just put Jim into Black Creek . . . are you acquainted with . . .

LEVENE No . . . Black Creek. Yes. In *Florida*?

ROMA Yes.

LEVENE I wanted to *spea*k with you about . . .

ROMA Well, we'll do that this weekend.

LEVENE My *wife* told me to look into . . .

ROMA *Beautiful*. Beautiful rolling land. I was telling Jim and Jinny, Ray, I want to tell you something. [*To LEVENE*] You, Ray, you eat in a lot of restaurants. I know you do. . . . [*To LINGK*] Mr. Morton's with American Express . . . he's . . . [*To LEVENE*] I can tell Jim what you do . . . ?

LEVENE Sure.

ROMA Ray is director of all European sales and services for American Ex . . . [*To LEVENE*] But I'm saying you haven't had a *meal* until you've tasted . . . I was at the Lingks' last . . . as a matter of fact, what was that service feature you were talking about . . . ?

LEVENE Which . . .

ROMA "Home Cooking" . . . what did you call it, you said it . . . it was a tag phrase that you had . . .

LEVENE Uh . . .

ROMA Home . . .

LEVENE Home cooking . . .

ROMA The monthly interview . . . ?

LEVENE Oh! For the *magazine* . . .

ROMA Yes. Is this something that I can talk ab . . .

LEVENE Well, it isn't coming *out* until the February iss . . . *sure*. Sure, go ahead, Ricky.

ROMA You're sure?

LEVENE [*nods*] Go ahead.

ROMA Well, Ray was eating at one of his company's men's home in France . . . the man's French, isn't he?

LEVENE No, his *wife* is.

ROMA Ah. Ah, his wife is. Ray: what *time* do you have . . . ?

LEVENE Twelve-fifteen.

ROMA Oh! My God . . . I've got to get you on the *plane*!

LEVENE Didn't I say I was taking the two o' . . .

ROMA No. You said the one. That's why you said we couldn't talk till Kenilworth.

LEVENE Oh, my God, you're right! I'm on the one. . . . [*Getting up.*] Well, let's *scoot* . . .

LINGK I've got to talk to you . . .

ROMA I've got to get Ray to O'Hare⁴ . . . [*To LEVENE*] Come on, let's hustle. . . . [*Over his shoulder*] John! Call American Express in *Pittsburgh* for Mr. Morton, will you, tell them he's on the one o'clock. [*To LINGK*] I'll see you. . . . Christ, I'm sorry you came all the way in. . . . I'm running Ray

4. Chicago's major airport.

over to O'Hare. . . . You wait here, I'll . . . no. [To LEVENE] I'm meeting your man at the bank. . . . [To LINGK] I wish you'd phoned. . . . I'll tell you, wait: are you and Jinny going to be home tonight? [Rubs forehead.]

LINGK I . . .

LEVENE Rick.

ROMA What?

LEVENE *Kenilworth* . . . ?

ROMA I'm sorry . . . ?

LEVENE *Kenilworth*.

ROMA Oh, God . . . Oh, God . . . [ROMA takes LINGK aside, sotto] Jim, excuse me. . . . Ray, I told you, who he is is *the* senior vice-president American Express. His family owns 32 per. . . . Over the past years I've sold him . . . I can't tell you the dollar amount, but *quite* a lot of land. I promised five *weeks* ago that I'd go to the wife's birthday party in Kenilworth tonight. [Sighs.] I *have* to go. You understand. They treat me like a member of the family, so I have to go. It's funny, you know, you get a picture of the Corporation-Type Company Man, all business . . . this man, *no*. We'll go out to his home sometime. Let's see. [He checks his datebook.] Tomorrow. No. Tomorrow, I'm in L.A. . . . *Monday* . . . I'll take you to lunch, where would you like to go?

LINGK My wife . . . [ROMA rubs his head.]

LEVENE [Standing in the door.] Rick . . . ?

ROMA I'm sorry, Jim. I can't talk now. I'll call you tonight . . . I'm sorry. I'm coming, Ray. [Starts for the door.]

LINGK My wife said I have to cancel the deal.

ROMA It's a common reaction, Jim. I'll tell you what it is, and I know that that's why you married her. One of the reasons is *prudence*. It's a sizable investment. One thinks *twice* . . . it's also something *women* have. It's just a reaction to the size of the investment. *Monday*, if you'd invite me for dinner again . . . [To LEVENE] This woman can *cook* . . .

LEVENE [Simultaneously] I'm sure she can . . .

ROMA [To LINGK] We're going to talk. I'm going to *tell* you something. Because [Sotto] there's something about your acreage I want you to know. I can't talk about it now. I really shouldn't. And, in fact, by *law*, I . . . [Shrugs, resigned.] The man next to you, he bought his lot at forty-two, he phoned to say that he'd *already* had an offer . . . [ROMA rubs his head.]

LEVENE Rick . . . ?

ROMA I'm coming, Ray . . . what a day! I'll call you this evening, Jim. I'm sorry you had to come in . . . Monday, lunch.

LINGK My wife . . .

LEVENE Rick, we really have to go.

LINGK My wife . . .

ROMA Monday.

LINGK She called the consumer . . . the attorney, I don't know. The attorney gen . . . they said we have three days . . .

ROMA *Who* did she call?

LINGK I don't know, the attorney gen . . . the . . . some consumer office, umm . . .

ROMA Why did she do *that*, Jim?

LINGK I don't know. [*Pause.*] They said we have three days. [*Pause.*] They said we have three days.

ROMA Three days.

LINGK To . . . you know. [*Pause.*]

ROMA No, I don't know. *Tell* me.

LINGK To change our minds.

ROMA Of *course* you have three days. [*Pause.*]

LINGK So we can't talk *Monday*. [*Pause.*]

ROMA Jim, Jim, you saw my book . . . I *can't*, you saw my book . . .

LINGK But we have to *before* Monday. To get our money ba . . .

ROMA Three *business* days. They mean three *business* days.

LINGK Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

ROMA I don't understand.

LINGK That's what they are. Three business . . . if I wait till Monday, my time limit runs out.

ROMA You don't count Saturday.

LINGK I'm not.

ROMA No, I'm saying you don't include Saturday . . . in your three days. It's not a *business* day.

LINGK But I'm not *counting* it. [*Pause.*] Wednesday. Thursday. Friday. So it would have elapsed.

ROMA What would have elapsed?

LINGK If we wait till Mon . . .

ROMA When did you write the check?

LINGK Yest . . .

ROMA What was yesterday?

LINGK Tuesday.

ROMA And when was that check cashed?

LINGK I don't know.

ROMA What was the *earliest* it could have been cashed? [*Pause.*]

LINGK I don't know.

ROMA *Today*. [*Pause.*] *Today*. Which, in any case, it was not, as there were a couple of points on the agreement I wanted to go over with you in any case.

LINGK The check wasn't cashed?

ROMA I just called downtown, and it's on their desk.

LEVENE Rick . . .

ROMA One moment, I'll be right with you. [*To LINGK*] In fact, a . . . *one* point, which I spoke to you of which [*Looks around.*] I can't talk to you about here, [*DETECTIVE puts his head out of the doorway.*]

BAYLEN Levene!!!

LINGK I, I . . .

ROMA Listen to me, the *statute* it's for your protection. I have no complaints with that, in fact, I was a member of the board when we *drafted* it, so quite the *opposite*. It *says* that you can change your mind three working days from the time the deal is closed.

BAYLEN Levene!

ROMA Which, wait a second, which is not until the check is cashed.

BAYLEN Levene!! [*AARONOW comes out of the DETECTIVE's office.*]

AARONOW I'm *through*, with *this* fucking meshugaas.⁵ No one should talk to a man that way. How are you *talking* to me that . . . ?

BAYLEN Levene! [WILLIAMSON *puts his head out of the office.*]

AARONOW . . . how can you *talk* to me that . . . that . . .

LEVENE [To ROMA] Rick, I'm going to flag a cab.

AARONOW I didn't rob . . . [WILLIAMSON *sees LEVENE.*]

WILLIAMSON Shelly: get in the office.

AARONOW I didn't . . . why should I . . . "Where were you last . . ." Is anybody listening to me . . . ? Where's Moss . . . ? Where . . . ?

BAYLEN Levene? [To WILLIAMSON] Is this Lev . . . [BAYLEN *accosts LINGK.*]

LEVENE [Taking BAYLEN *into the office*] Ah. Ah. Perhaps I can advise you on that . . . [To ROMA *and LINGK, as he exits*] Excuse us, will you . . . ?

AARONOW [Simultaneous with LEVENE's *speech above*] . . . Come in here . . . I *work* here, I don't come in here to be *mistreated* . . .

WILLIAMSON Go to *lunch*, will you . . .

AARONOW I want to *work* today, that's why I came . . .

WILLIAMSON The leads come in, I'll let . . .

AARONOW . . . that's why I came in. I thought I . . .

WILLIAMSON Just go to lunch.

AARONOW I don't *want* to go to lunch.

WILLIAMSON Go to lunch, George.

AARONOW Where does he get off to talk that way to a working man? It's not . . .

WILLIAMSON [Buttonholes him] Will you take it outside, we have people trying to do *business* here . . .

AARONOW That's what, that's what, that's what I was trying to do. [Pause.] That's why I came *in* . . . I meet *gestapo* tac . . .

WILLIAMSON [Going back into his office] Excuse me . . .

AARONOW I meet *gestapo* tactics . . . I meet *gestapo* tactics. . . That's not right. . . No man has the right to . . . "Call an attorney," that means you're guilty . . . you're under sus . . . "Co . . .," he says, "cooperate" or we'll go downtown. *That's* not . . . as long as I've . . .

WILLIAMSON [Bursting out of his office] Will you get out of here. Will you get *out* of here. Will you. I'm trying to run an *office* here. Will you go to lunch? Go to lunch. Will you go to lunch? [Retreats into office.]

ROMA [To AARONOW] Will you excuse . . .

AARONOW Where did Moss . . . ? I . . .

ROMA Will you excuse us please?

AARONOW Uh, uh, did he go to the restaurant? [Pause.] I . . . I . . . [Exits.]

ROMA I'm *very* sorry, Jimmy. I apologize to you.

LINGK It's not me, it's my wife.

ROMA [Pause.] What is?

LINGK I told you.

ROMA Tell me again.

LINGK What's going on here?

ROMA Tell me again. Your wife.

LINGK I told you.

5. Crazyiness (Yiddish).

ROMA You tell me again.

LINGK She wants her money back.

ROMA We're going to speak to her.

LINGK No. She told me "right now."

ROMA We'll speak to her, Jim . . .

LINGK She won't listen. [DETECTIVE *sticks his head out.*]

BAYLEN *Roma.*

LINGK She told me if not, I have to call the State's attorney.

ROMA No, no. That's just something she "said." We don't have to do that.

LINGK She told me I *have* to.

ROMA No, Jim.

LINGK I *do*. If I don't get my *money* back . . . [WILLIAMSON *points out ROMA to BAYLEN.*]

BAYLEN *Roma!* [*To ROMA*] I'm talking to you . . .

ROMA I've . . . look. [*Generally*] Will someone get this guy off my back.

BAYLEN You have a problem?

ROMA Yes, I have a problem. Yes, I *do*, my fr . . . It's not me that ripped the joint off, I'm doing *business*. I'll be with you in a *while*. You got it . . . ? [*Looks back. LINGK is heading for the door.*] Where are you going?

LINGK I'm . . .

ROMA Where are you going . . . ? This is *me*. . . . This is Ricky, Jim. Jim, anything you *want*, you *want* it, you *have* it. You understand? This is *me*. Something *upset* you. Sit down, now sit down. You tell me what it is. [*Pause.*] Am I going to help you fix it? You're goddamned right I am. Sit down. Tell you something . . . ? *Sometimes* we need someone from *outside*. It's . . . no, sit down. . . . Now *talk* to me.

LINGK I can't negotiate.

ROMA What does that mean?

LINGK That . . .

ROMA . . . what, what, *say* it. Say it to me . . .

LINGK I . . .

ROMA What . . . ?

LINGK I . . .

ROMA What . . . ? Say the words.

LINGK I don't have the *power*. [*Pause.*] I said it.

ROMA What power?

LINGK The power to negotiate.

ROMA To negotiate what? [*Pause.*] To negotiate what?

LINGK *This*.

ROMA What, "this"? [*Pause.*]

LINGK The deal.

ROMA The "deal," *forget* the deal. *Forget* the deal, you've got something on your mind, Jim, what is it?

LINGK [*rising*] I *can't talk to you*, you met my wife, I . . . [*Pause.*]

ROMA What? [*Pause.*] What? [*Pause.*] What, Jim: I tell you what, let's get out of here . . . let's go get a drink.

LINGK She told me not to talk to you.

ROMA Let's . . . no one's going to know, let's go around the *corner* and we'll get a drink.

LINGK She told me I had to get back the check or call the State's att . . .

ROMA *Forget the deal, Jimmy. [Pause.] Forget the deal . . . you know me. The deal's dead. Am I talking about the deal? That's over. Please. Let's talk about you. Come on. [Pause. ROMA rises and starts walking toward the front door.] Come on. [Pause.] Come on, Jim. [Pause.] I want to tell you something. Your life is your own. You have a contract with your wife. You have certain things you do jointly, you have a bond there . . . and there are other things. Those things are yours. You needn't feel ashamed, you needn't feel that you're being untrue . . . or that she would abandon you if you knew. This is your life. [Pause.] Yes. Now I want to talk to you because you're obviously upset and that concerns me. Now let's go. Right now. [LINGK gets up and they start for the door.]*

BAYLEN [*Sticks his head out of the door*] Roma . . .

LINGK . . . and . . . and . . . [*Pause.*]

ROMA What?

LINGK And the check is . . .

ROMA What did I *tell* you? [*Pause.*] What did I say about the three days . . . ?

BAYLEN Roma, would you, I'd like to get some lunch . . .

ROMA I'm talking with Mr. Lingk. If you please, I'll be back in. [*Checks watch.*] I'll be back in a while. . . . I told you, check with Mr. Williamson.

BAYLEN The people downtown said . . .

ROMA You call them again. Mr. Williamson . . . !

WILLIAMSON Yes.

ROMA Mr. Lingk and I are going to . . .

WILLIAMSON Yes. Please. Please. [*To LINGK*] The police [*Shrugs.*] can be . . .

LINGK What are the police doing?

ROMA It's nothing.

LINGK What are the *police* doing here . . . ?

WILLIAMSON We had a slight burglary last night.

ROMA It was nothing . . . I was assuring Mr. Lingk . . .

WILLIAMSON Mr. Lingk. James Lingk. Your contract went out. Nothing to . . .

ROMA John . . .

WILLIAMSON Your contract went out to the bank.

LINGK You cashed the check?

WILLIAMSON We . . .

ROMA . . . Mr. Williamson . . .

WILLIAMSON Your check was cashed yesterday afternoon. And we're completely insured, as you know, in *any* case. [*Pause.*]

LINGK [*To ROMA*] You cashed the check?

ROMA Not to my knowledge, no . . .

WILLIAMSON I'm sure we can . . .

LINGK Oh, . . . [*Starts out the door.*] Don't follow me. . . . Oh, [*Pause. To*

ROMA] I know I've let you down. I'm sorry. For . . . Forgive . . . for . . . I don't know anymore. [*Pause.*] Forgive me. [*LINGK exits. Pause.*]

ROMA [*To WILLIAMSON*] You stupid fucking cunt. You, Williamson . . . I'm talking to *you*, shithead . . . You just cost me *six thousand dollars*. [*Pause.*] Six thousand dollars. And one Cadillac. That's right. What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it, asshole. You

fucking *shit*. Where did you learn your *trade*. You stupid fucking *cunt*. You *idiot*. Whoever told you you could work with *men*?

BAYLEN Could I . . .

ROMA I'm going to have your *job*, shithead. I'm going *downtown* and talk to Mitch and Murray, and I'm going to Lemkin. I don't care *whose* nephew you are, who you know, whose dick you're sucking on. You're going *out*, I swear to you, you're going . . .

BAYLEN Hey, fella, let's get this done . . .

ROMA Anyone in this office lives on their *wits* . . . [To BAYLEN] I'm going to be with you in a second. [To WILLIAMSON] What you're hired for is to *help* us—does that seem clear to you? To *help* us. *Not* to fuck us up . . . to help *men* who are going *out* there to try to earn a *living*. You *fairly*. You company man . . . I'll tell you something else. I hope you knocked the joint off, I can tell our friend here something might help him catch you. [Starts into the room.] You want to learn the first rule you'd know if you ever spent a day in your life . . . you never open your mouth till you know what the shot is. [Pause.] You fucking *child* . . . [ROMA goes to the inner room.]

LEVENE You *are* a shithead, Williamson . . . [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON Mmm.

LEVENE You can't think on your feet you should keep your mouth closed. [Pause.] You hear me? I'm *talking* to you. Do you hear me . . . ?

WILLIAMSON Yes. [Pause.] I hear you.

LEVENE You can't learn that in an office. Eh? He's right. You have to learn it on the streets. You can't *buy* that. You have to *live* it.

WILLIAMSON Mmm.

LEVENE Yes. Mmm. Yes. *Precisely. Precisely.* 'Cause your partner *depends* on it. [Pause.] I'm *talking* to you, I'm trying to tell you something.

WILLIAMSON You are?

LEVENE Yes, I am.

WILLIAMSON What are you trying to tell me?

LEVENE What Roma's trying to tell you. What I told you yesterday. Why you don't belong in this business.

WILLIAMSON Why I don't . . .

LEVENE You listen to me, someday you might say, "Hey . . ." No, fuck that, you just listen what I'm going to say: your partner *depends* on you. Your partner . . . a man who's your "partner" *depends* on you . . . you have to go *with* him and *for* him . . . or you're shit, you're *shit*, you *can't exist alone* . . .

WILLIAMSON [Brushing past him] Excuse me . . .

LEVENE . . . excuse you, *nothing*, you be as cold as you want, but you just fucked a good man out of six thousand dollars and his goddamn bonus 'cause you didn't know the *shot*, you can do that and you aren't man enough that it gets you, then I don't know what, if you can't take *something* from that . . . [Blocking his way] you're *scum*, you're fucking whitebread. You be as cold as you want. A *child* would know it, he's right. [Pause.] You're going to make something up, be sure it will *help* or keep your mouth closed. [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON Mmm. [LEVENE lifts up his arm.]

LEVENE Now I'm done with you. [Pause.]

WILLIAMSON How do you know I made it up?

LEVENE [*Pause.*] What?

WILLIAMSON How do you know I made it up?

LEVENE What are you talking about?

WILLIAMSON You said, "You don't make something up unless it's for sure to help." [*Pause.*] How did you know that I made it up?

LEVENE What are you talking about?

WILLIAMSON I told the customer that his contracts had gone to the bank.

LEVENE Well, hadn't it?

WILLIAMSON No. [*Pause.*] It hadn't.

LEVENE Don't *fuck* with me, John, don't *fuck* with me . . . what are you saying?

WILLIAMSON Well, I'm saying this, Shel: usually I take the contracts to the bank. Last night I didn't. How did you know that? One night in a year I left a contract on my desk. Nobody knew that but *you*. Now how did you know that? [*Pause.*] You want to talk to me, you want to talk to someone *else* . . . because this is *my* job. This is my job on the line, and you are going to *talk* to me. Now how did you know that contract was on my desk?

LEVENE You're so full of shit.

WILLIAMSON You robbed the office.

LEVENE [*Laughs*] Sure! I robbed the office. Sure.

WILLIAMSON What'd you do with the leads? [*Pause. Points to the DETECTIVE'S room.*] You want to go in there? I tell him what I know, he's going to dig up *something* . . . You got an alibi last night? You better have one. What did you do with the leads? If you tell me what you did with the leads, we can talk.

LEVENE I don't know what you are saying.

WILLIAMSON If you tell me where the leads are, I won't turn you in. If you *don't*, I am going to tell the cop you stole them, Mitch and Murray will see that you go to jail. Believe me they will. Now, what did you do with the leads? I'm walking in that door—you have five seconds to tell me: or you are going to jail.

LEVENE I . . .

WILLIAMSON I don't care. You understand? *Where are the leads?* [*Pause.*] Alright. [*WILLIAMSON goes to open the office door.*]

LEVENE I sold them to Jerry Graff.

WILLIAMSON How much did you get for them? [*Pause.*] How much did you get for them?

LEVENE Five thousand. I kept half.

WILLIAMSON Who kept the other half? [*Pause.*]

LEVENE Do I have to tell you? [*Pause. WILLIAMSON starts to open the door.*] Moss.

WILLIAMSON *That* was easy, *wasn't* it? [*Pause.*]

LEVENE I . . . I'm sure he got more than the five, actually.

WILLIAMSON Uh-huh?

LEVENE He told me my share was twenty-five.

WILLIAMSON Mmm.

LEVENE Okay: I . . . look: I'm going to make it worth your while. I am. I turned this thing around. I closed the *old* stuff, I can do it again. *I'm* the

one's going to close 'em. *I am! I am!* 'Cause I turned this thing a . . . I can do *that*, can do *anyth* . . . last night. I'm going to tell you, I was ready to Do the Dutch. Moss gets me, "Do this, we'll get well . . ." Why not. Big fuckin' deal. I'm halfway hoping to get caught. To put me out of my . . . [Pause.] But it *taught* me something. What it taught me, that you've got to get *out* there. Big deal. So I wasn't cut out to be a thief. I was cut out to be a salesman. And now I'm back, and I got my *balls* back . . . and, you know, John, you have the *advantage* on me now. Whatever it takes to make it right, we'll make it right. We're going to make it right.

WILLIAMSON I want to tell you something, Shelly. You have a big mouth. [Pause.]

LEVENE What?

WILLIAMSON You've got a big mouth, and now I'm going to show you an even bigger one. [Starts toward the DETECTIVE'S door.]

LEVENE Where are you going, John? . . . you can't do that, you don't want to do that . . . hold, hold on . . . hold on . . . wait . . . wait . . . [Starts splitting money.] Look, twelve, twenty, two, twen . . . twenty-five hundred, it's . . . take it. [Pause.] Take it all . . . [Pause.] Take it!

WILLIAMSON No, I don't think so, Shel.

LEVENE I . . .

WILLIAMSON No, I think I don't want your money. I think you fucked up my office. And I think you're going away.

LEVENE I . . . what? Are you, are you, that's why you, I'm going to . . . [Thrusting money at him.] Here, here, I'm going to *make* this office . . . I'm going to be back there Number One . . . Hey, hey, hey! This is only the beginning . . . List . . . list . . . listen. Listen. Just one moment. List . . . here's what . . . here's what we're going to do. Twenty percent. I'm going to give you twenty percent of my sales. . . . [Pause.] Twenty percent. [Pause.] For as long as I am with the firm. [Pause.] Fifty percent. [Pause.] You're going to be my partner. [Pause.] Fifty percent. Of all my sales.

WILLIAMSON What sales?

LEVENE What sales . . . ? I just *closed* eighty-two grand. . . . Are you fuckin' . . . I'm *back* . . . I'm *back*, this is only the beginning.

WILLIAMSON Only the beginning . . .

LEVENE Abso . . .

WILLIAMSON Where have you been, Shelly? Bruce and Harriett Nyborg. Do you want to see the *memos* . . . ? They're nuts . . . they used to call in every week. When I was with Webb. And we were selling Arizona . . . they're nuts . . . did you see how they were *living*? How can you delude yours . . .

LEVENE I've got the check . . .

WILLIAMSON Forget it. Frame it. It's worthless. [Pause.]

LEVENE The check's no good?

WILLIAMSON You stick around I'll pull the memo for you. [Starts for the door.] I'm busy now . . .

LEVENE Their check's no good. They're nuts . . . ?

WILLIAMSON I called them when we had the lead . . . four months ago. [Pause.] The people are insane. They just like talking to salesmen. [WILLIAMSON starts for the door.]

LEVENE Don't.

WILLIAMSON I'm sorry.

LEVENE *Why?*

WILLIAMSON Because I don't like you.

LEVENE John: John: . . . my *daughter* . . .

WILLIAMSON Fuck you. [ROMA *comes out of the DETECTIVE'S door. WILLIAMSON goes in.*]

ROMA [To BAYLEN] Asshole . . . [To LEVENE] Guy couldn't find his fuckin' couch the *living room* . . . Ah, . . . what a day, what a day . . . I haven't even had a cup of *coffee* . . . Jagoff John opens his mouth he blows my Cadillac. . . . [Sighs.] I swear . . . it's not a world of men . . . it's not a world of men, Machine . . . it's a world of clock watchers, bureaucrats, officeholders . . . what it is, it's a fucked-up world . . . there's no adventure *to it*. [Pause.] Dying breed. Yes it is. [Pause.] We are the members of a dying breed. That's . . . that's . . . that's why we have to stick together. Shel: I want to talk to you. I've wanted to talk to you for some time. For a long time, actually. I said, "The Machine, there's a man I would work with. There's a man . . ." You know? I never said a thing. I should have, don't know why I didn't. And that shit you were slinging on my guy today was *so good* . . . it . . . it was, and, excuse me, 'cause it isn't even my place to say it. It was admirable . . . it was the old stuff. Hey, I've been on a hot streak, so *what?* There's things that I could learn from you. You eat today?

LEVENE Me.

ROMA Yeah.

LEVENE Mm.

ROMA Well, you want to swing by the Chinks, watch me eat, we'll talk?

LEVENE I think I'd better stay here for a while.

[BAYLEN *sticks his head out of the room*]

BAYLEN Mr. *Levene* . . . ?

ROMA You're done, come down and let's . . .

BAYLEN Would you come in here, please?

ROMA And let's put this together. Okay? Shel? Say okay. [Pause.]

LEVENE [Softly, to himself] Huh.

BAYLEN Mr. *Levene*, I think we have to talk.

ROMA I'm going to the Chinks. You're done, come down, we're going to smoke a cigarette.

LEVENE I . . .

BAYLEN [Comes over] . . . Get in the room.

ROMA Hey, hey, hey, *easy friend*, That's the "Machine." That is Shelly "The Machine" Lev . . .

BAYLEN Get in the goddamn room, [BAYLEN *starts manhandling LEVENE into the room.*]

LEVENE Ricky, I . . .

ROMA Okay, okay, I'll be at the resta . . .

LEVENE Ricky . . .

BAYLEN "Ricky" can't help you, pal.

LEVENE . . . I only want to . . .

BAYLEN Yeah. What do you want? You want to *what?* [He pushes LEVENE into the room, closes the door behind him. Pause.]

ROMA Williamson: listen to me: when the *leads* come in . . . listen to me: when the *leads* come in I want my top two off the list. For *me*. My usual two. Anything you give *Levene* . . .

WILLIAMSON . . . I wouldn't worry about it.

ROMA Well I'm *going* to worry about it, and so are you, so shut up and *listen*. [Pause.] I GET HIS ACTION. My stuff is *mine*, whatever *he* gets for himself, I'm taking half. You put me in with him. [AARONOW enters.]

AARONOW Did they . . . ?

ROMA You understand?

AARONOW Did they catch . . . ?

ROMA Do you understand? My stuff is mine, his stuff is ours. I'm taking half of his commissions—now, *you* work it out.

WILLIAMSON Mmm.

AARONOW Did they find the guy who broke into the office yet?

ROMA No. *I* don't know. [Pause.]

AARONOW Did the leads come in yet?

ROMA No.

AARONOW [Settling into a desk chair] Oh, god, I hate this job.

ROMA [Simultaneous with "job," exiting the office] I'll be at the restaurant.

1984

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA

b. 1947

The excavation of lost names is one of the driving impulses of Yusef Komunyakaa's work. His poems recover and reanimate figures from history such as the African American elevator operator, Thomas McKeller, who appears in a stunning portrait by John Singer Sargent ("Nude Study"). In researching the portrait, Komunyakaa learned that it had been "unearthed in Sargent's studio after his death" and that "McKeller's image had been cannibalized to depict [the ancient Greek and Roman god] Apollo and a bas-relief of [the ancient Greek poet and musician] Arion—other heads and lines grafted onto his classical physique." Komunyakaa's work continually questions and revises both the cultural contradictions projected onto the black body and the erasure of black presence from history and culture. Significantly, he adopted the lost surname of a Trinidadian grandfather who came to the United States as a child, "smuggled in like a sack of papaya / On a banana boat." As the poet recounts in "Mismatched Shoes," his grandfather's "true name" disappeared in the process of assimilation. After his death his grandson "slipped into his skin" and took back the name "Komunyakaa," in what the poet calls "an affirmation of my heritage and its ambiguity."

Komunyakaa was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana, seventy miles northeast of New Orleans. Bogalusa means "Magic City" (a phrase that became the title of his 1992 collection of poems), and a lush, semitropical landscape informs many of his poems. But as the oldest of six children, and as the son of a carpenter who could write only

his name, Komunyakaa grew up in an impoverished neighborhood and experienced a racial inequity that coexisted with natural beauty. At a young age, he has said, he decided that “imagination could serve as a choice of weapons.”

Because the military seemed to offer a way into a larger world, Komunyakaa enlisted in the army and was sent to Vietnam, where he served as a war correspondent and editor of the military newspaper, writing accounts of what he witnessed in combat. For his work he was awarded the Bronze Star. While in Vietnam he carried with him several anthologies of poetry, but only after his military service ended did he begin to write poems, studying at the University of Colorado and then at the University of California at Irvine, where his teachers included Charles Wright and C. K. Williams. In 1984, fourteen years after his tour of duty ended, Komunyakaa began to write poems about his war experience. From his father he had learned to build and renovate houses; as he works, he has said, he keeps a pad of paper close by. While renovating a house in New Orleans he began to write down images and lines about Vietnam and so began the first in what became a series of poems about his Vietnam experience. These were collected in *Dien Cai Dau* (1988), whose title (meaning “crazy”) is a Vietnamese phrase used to describe American soldiers. In one of these poems, “Facing It,” he sees his own “clouded reflection” in the “black granite” of the Vietnam War Memorial designed by Maya Lin, an image of which appears in the color insert of this anthology.

To write about his surreal wartime experiences Komunyakaa drew on the work of surrealists like the French poet and critic André Breton. Komunyakaa shares with these writers and artists an emphasis on the image as linked to the unconscious, and his poems often work through a series of short lines whose quick, associative images bypass logic. A surrealist impulse to distort the familiar and juxtapose beauty and violence appears in Komunyakaa’s Vietnam poems and in the racial and erotic tensions of poems like “Jasmine” (from *The Pleasure Dome*, 2001). An emphasis on the dreamlike, irrational, and fantastic was already apparent in his first two books, *Copacetic* (1984) and *I Apologize for the Eyes in My Head* (1986), both of which also reflect the musical influences of his native Louisiana.

Growing up so close to New Orleans brought Komunyakaa in early contact with jazz and the blues. The title of his first book, *Copacetic*, is a term adapted by jazz musicians from the African American tap dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson; in jazz it refers to especially pleasing and mellow music. Like Langston Hughes, Komunyakaa explores throughout his work the power of music—blues, jazz, and poetry—to address and, in part, to heal the pain of living in a racially divided society. The rapid energy of poems like “Facing It” and “Slam, Dunk, & Hook” belong to what the poet calls a “felt and lived syncopation,” a rhythm of shifting beats that bears the influence of musicians like Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and Miles Davis. Komunyakaa also works in tighter formal structures, whose exactness and precision suggest the careful measuring and fitting of carpentry. The quatrains of *Talking Dirty to the Gods* (2000) and the three-line stanzas of *Taboo* (2004) provide what the poet calls “an illusion of control” over volatile and complicated social and psychic material. They reflect Komunyakaa’s preferred poetic strategy of “insinuation and nuance.” Although his work often looks unflinchingly at what otherwise is hidden or denied, the social, racial, or erotic context of a poem often emerges in details or images, rather than in direct description. *Warhorses* (2008) continues this poet’s ongoing investigation of war and violence.

Komunyakaa coedited with J. A. Sascha Feinstein a two-volume collection, *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* (1991) and *Second Set* (1996), and has also been extensively involved in collaborations with jazz musicians and vocalists. His poetry has received numerous awards, among them both the Pulitzer Prize and the Kingsley Tuft Poetry Award for *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems 1977–1989* (1994). He is a professor in the Council of Humanities and Creative Writing Program at Princeton University.

Facing It

My black face fades,
 hiding inside the black granite.
 I said I wouldn't
 dammit: No tears.
 I'm stone. I'm flesh. 5
 My clouded reflection eyes me
 like a bird of prey, the profile of night
 slanted against morning. I turn
 this way—the stone lets me go.
 I turn that way—I'm inside 10
 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial¹
 again, depending on the light
 to make a difference.
 I go down the 58,022 names,
 half-expecting to find 15
 my own in letters like smoke.
 I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
 I see the booby trap's white flash.
 Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
 but when she walks away 20
 the names stay on the wall.
 Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
 wings cutting across my stare.
 The sky. A plane in the sky.
 A white vet's image floats 25
 closer to me, then his pale eyes
 look through mine. I'm a window.
 He's lost his right arm
 inside the stone. In the black mirror
 a woman's trying to erase names: 30
 No, she's brushing a boy's hair.
 1988

My Father's Love Letters

On Fridays he'd open a can of Jax¹
 After coming home from the mill,
 & ask me to write a letter to my mother
 Who sent postcards of desert flowers
 Taller than men. He would beg, 5
 Promising to never beat her
 Again. Somehow I was happy

1. An image of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., designed by the architect Maya Lin and dedicated in 1982, appears in the

color insert of this anthology.

1. A beer originally brewed in New Orleans, Louisiana.

She had gone, & sometimes wanted
 To slip in a reminder, how Mary Lou
 Williams' "Polka Dots & Moonbeams"² 10
 Never made the swelling go down.
 His carpenter's apron always bulged
 With old nails, a claw hammer
 Looped at his side & extension cords
 Coiled around his feet. 15
 Words rolled from under the pressure
 Of my ballpoint: Love,
 Baby, Honey, Please.
 We sat in the quiet brutality
 Of voltage meters & pipe threaders, 20
 Lost between sentences . . .
 The gleam of a five-pound wedge
 On the concrete floor
 Pulled a sunset
 Through the doorway of his toolshed. 25
 I wondered if she laughed
 & held them over a gas burner.
 My father could only sign
 His name, but he'd look at blueprints
 & say how many bricks 30
 Formed each wall. This man,
 Who stole roses & hyacinth
 For his yard, would stand there
 With eyes closed & fists balled,
 Laboring over a simple word, almost 35
 Redeemed by what he tried to say.

1992

Slam, Dunk, & Hook

Fast breaks. Lay ups. With Mercury's
 Insignia¹ on our sneakers,
 We outmaneuvered to footwork
 Of bad angels. Nothing but a hot
 Swish of strings like silk 5
 Ten feet out. In the roundhouse
 Labyrinth our bodies
 Created, we could almost
 Last forever, poised in midair
 Like storybook sea monsters. 10
 A high note hung there

2. The American jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams (1910–1981) performed with and composed for many of the great jazz artists of the 1940s and 1950s. The song "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" (1940) was composed by Jimmy

Van Heusen (1913–1990) and Johnny Burke (1908–1964).

1. Mercury, the messenger of the ancient Greek gods, is depicted wearing winged sandals.

A long second. Off
 The rim. We'd corkscrew
 Up & dunk balls that exploded
 The skullcap of hope & good 15
 Intention. Lanky, all hands
 & feet . . . sprung rhythm.²
 We were metaphysical when girls
 Cheered on the sidelines.
 Tangled up in a falling, 20
 Muscles were a bright motor
 Double-flashing to the metal hoop
 Nailed to our oak.
 When Sonny Boy's mama died
 He played nonstop all day, so hard 25
 Our backboard splintered.
 Glistening with sweat,
 We rolled the ball off
 Our fingertips. Trouble
 Was there slapping a blackjack³ 30
 Against an open palm.
 Dribble, drive to the inside,
 & glide like a sparrow hawk.⁴
 Lay ups. Fast breaks.
 We had moves we didn't know 35
 We had. Our bodies spun
 On swivels of bone & faith,
 Through a lyric slipknot
 Of joy, & we knew we were
 Beautiful & dangerous. 40
 1992

From Song for My Father

[Sometimes you could be]

Sometimes you could be
 That man on a red bicycle,
 With me on the handlebars,
 Just rolling along a country road
 On the edge of July, honeysuckle 5
 Lit with mosquito hawks.¹
 We rode from under the shady
 Overhang, back into sunlight.
 The day bounced off car hoods

2. "Sprung rhythm" is a term used by the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) to describe a poetic meter with a variable rather than fixed number of syllables in each poetic foot.

3. A small leather-covered bludgeon.

4. One of the best-known, handsomest, and smallest North American hawks.

1. In the American South, a term for dragonflies, which eat mosquitos and other small insects.

As the heat & stinking exhaust
 Brushed against us like a dragon's
 Roar, nudging the bike with a tremor,
 But you steered us through the flowering
 Dogwood like a thread of blood.

1993

When Dusk Weighs Daybreak

I want Catullus¹
 In every line, a barb
 The sun plays for good
 Luck. I need to know if iron

Tastes like laudanum²
 Or a woman. I already sense
 What sleeps in the same flesh,
 Ariadne & her half brother³

Caught in the other's dream.
 I want each question to fit me
 Like a shiny hook, a lure
 In the gullet. What it is

To look & know how much muscle
 It takes to lift a green slab.
 I need a Son House blues⁴
 To wear out my tongue.

2000

Jasmine

I sit beside two women, kitty-corner
 to the stage, as Elvin's¹ sticks blur
 the club into a blue fantasia.
 I thought my body had forgotten the Deep
 South, how I'd cross the street
 if a woman like these two walked
 towards me, as if a cat traversed

1. Gaius Valerius Catullus (c. 86–c. 54 B.C.E.), Roman poet who wittily expressed love and hate in some of the finest lyric poetry of his time.

2. An opium-based painkiller.

3. In Greek mythology Ariadne was the daughter of Pasiphaë and the Cretan king, Minos. She fell in love with the Athenian hero Theseus and helped him escape the Labyrinth after he slew

her half-brother, the Minotaur, a beast half bull and half man.

4. Eddie James House Jr. (1902–1988), better known as "Son," American blues singer and guitarist regarded as an epitome of the Delta blues tradition.

1. Elvin Jones (1927–2004), American jazz drummer and bandleader.

my path beneath the evening star.
 Which one is wearing jasmine?
 If my grandmothers saw me now 10
 they'd say, Boy, the devil never sleeps.
 My mind is lost among November
 cotton flowers, a soft rain on my face
 as Richard Davis² plucks the fat notes
 of chance on his upright 15
 leaning into the future.
 The blonde, the brunette—
 which one is scented with jasmine?
 I can hear Duke in the right hand
 & Basie in the left³ 20
 as the young piano player
 nudges us into the past.
 The trumpet's almost kissed
 by enough pain. Give him a few more years,
 a few more ghosts to embrace—Clifford's⁴ 25
 shadow on the edge of the stage.
 The sign says, *No Talking*.
 Elvin's guardian angel lingers
 at the top of the stairs,
 counting each drop of sweat 30
 paid in tribute. The blonde
 has her eyes closed, & the brunette
 is looking at me. Our bodies
 sway to each riff, the jasmine
 rising from a valley somewhere 35
 in Egypt, a white moon
 opening countless false mouths
 of laughter. The midnight
 gatherers are boys & girls
 with the headlights of trucks 40
 aimed at their backs, because
 their small hands refuse to wound
 the knowing scent hidden in each bloom.

2001

Nude Study¹

Someone lightly brushed the penis
 alive. Belief is almost
 flesh. Wings beat,

2. American bassist (b. 1930) known for his jazz sessions in an all-star small group at New York City's Village Vanguard under the rubric "Jazz for a Sunday Afternoon."

3. Duke Ellington (1899–1974), American pianist and bandleader who was also one of the greatest jazz composers. Count Basie (1904–1984), American jazz pianist and bandleader.

4. Clifford Brown (1930–1956), American jazz trumpeter noted for his graceful technique.

1. *Nude Study of Thomas E. McKeller* (1917–20?), a portrait by the American painter John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. McKeller was an African American elevator operator. The portrait was found in Sargent's studio after his death.

dust trying to breathe, as if the figure
 might rise from the oils
 & flee the dead 5

artist's studio. For years
 this piece of work was there
 like a golden struggle

shadowing Thomas McKeller, a black
 elevator operator at the Boston
 Copley Plaza Hotel, a friend 10

of John Singer Sargent—hidden
 among sketches & drawings, a model
 for Apollo & a bas-relief 15

of Arion.² So much taken
 for granted & denied, only
 grace & mutability

can complete this face belonging
 to Greek bodies castrated
 with a veil of dust. 20

2004

2. Ancient Greek poet and musician. "Apollo": the sun god in ancient Greek and Roman mythology.

LESLIE MARMON SILKO

b. 1948

Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Leslie Marmon Silko was raised in Old Laguna, a village fifty miles west of Albuquerque. The Spaniards had founded a mission there early in the eighteenth century, but Old Laguna had been formed centuries earlier by cattle-keeping Pueblos who successfully repelled raids on them by the Navajos and the Apaches. Writing of the unchanging character of Pueblo religious practices over the centuries, the historian Joe S. Sando notes that "the tradition of religious beliefs permeates every aspect of the people's life; it determines man's relation with the natural world and with his fellow man. Its basic concern is continuity of a harmonious relationship with the world in which man lives."

Silko's work addresses such matters. Her own heritage is complicated in that her great-grandfather Robert Marmon was white, whereas her mother was a mixed-blood Plains Indian who kept her daughter on the traditional cradle board during her first year of infancy. (Her ancestry also includes some Mexican blood.) Silko has made this heritage a source of strength. She writes: "I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed-blooded

person; what it is to grow up neither white nor fully traditional Indian." At the same time she insists that "what I know is Laguna. This place I am from is everything I am as a writer and human being." An active child, Silko had a horse of her own by age eight, and by thirteen she owned a rifle, with which she took part in deer hunts. Commuting to Albuquerque, she attended Catholic schools, earned a B.A. at the University of New Mexico, then began law school under a special program for Native Americans, though she soon gave it up to become a writer and teacher.

Her first published story, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" (1969), came out of a writing assignment in college. She had heard, in Laguna, of an old man who died in a sheep camp and was given a traditional native burial—a fact resented by the Catholic priest who was not called in. The story she wrote about this situation, published in the *New Mexico Quarterly*, put her on the road to success as a writer. In 1974 a selection of her poems was published in the volume *Laguna Woman*, and in 1977 her novel *Ceremony* brought her recognition as a leading voice among Native American writers. *Ceremony* shows the dark aspects of modern American Indian life, focusing on a World War II veteran who is in acute physical and emotional straits as the novel begins, but who manages to survive by reestablishing contact with his native roots. Silko has insisted that the book is not just or even mainly about characters: "This novel is essentially about the powers inherent in the process of storytelling. . . . The chanting or telling of ancient stories to effect certain cures or protect from illness and harm has always been a part of the Pueblo's curing ceremonies." So this story of a family represents an attempt "to search for a ceremony to deal with despair"—the despair that has led to the "suicide, the alcoholism, and the violence which occur in so many Indian communities today."

Thus a strong moral connection exists between Silko's purely aesthetic delight in the writing of a story and the therapeutic, functional uses she hopes the story will play in the Native American community. In *Ceremony*, the aptly titled 1981 collection *Storyteller* (which also contains poems and photographs), and her epic 1991 novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko's prose is an expressive, active presence, sympathetically creating landscape as well as animals and human beings. Plants assume narrative status in her third novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), which looks back to late-nineteenth-century events to underscore a basic theme: that myth and history do not coincide.

The following text is from *Storyteller* (1981).

Lullaby

The sun had gone down but the snow in the wind gave off its own light. It came in thick tufts like new wool—washed before the weaver spins it. Ayah reached out for it like her own babies had, and she smiled when she remembered how she had laughed at them. She was an old woman now, and her life had become memories. She sat down with her back against the wide cottonwood tree, feeling the rough bark on her back bones; she faced east and listened to the wind and snow sing a high-pitched Yeibechei¹ song. Out of the wind she felt warmer, and she could watch the wide fluffy snow fill in her tracks, steadily, until the direction she had come from was gone. By the light of the snow she could see the dark outline of the big arroyo² a few feet away. She was sitting on the edge of Cebolleta Creek, where in the spring-time the thin cows would graze on grass already chewed flat to the ground.

1. Navajo dance.

2. Gully carved by water.

In the wide deep creek bed where only a trickle of water flowed in the summer, the skinny cows would wander, looking for new grass along winding paths splashed with manure.

Ayah pulled the old Army blanket over her head like a shawl. Jimmie's blanket—the one he had sent to her. That was a long time ago and the green wool was faded, and it was unraveling on the edges. She did not want to think about Jimmie. So she thought about the weaving and the way her mother had done it. On the wall wooden loom set into the sand under a tamarack tree for shade. She could see it clearly. She had been only a little girl when her grandma gave her the wooden combs to pull the twigs and burrs from the raw, freshly washed wool. And while she combed the wool, her grandma sat beside her, spinning a silvery strand of yarn around the smooth cedar spindle. Her mother worked at the loom with yarns dyed bright yellow and red and gold. She watched them dye the yarn in boiling black pots full of bee-weed petals, juniper berries, and sage. The blankets her mother made were soft and woven so tight that rain rolled off them like birds' feathers. Ayah remembered sleeping warm on cold windy nights, wrapped in her mother's blankets on the hogan's³ sandy floor.

The snow drifted now, with the northwest wind hurling it in gusts. It drifted up around her black overshoes—old ones with little metal buckles. She smiled at the snow which was trying to cover her little by little. She could remember when they had no black rubber overshoes; only the high buckskin leggings that they wrapped over their elkhide moccasins. If the snow was dry or frozen, a person could walk all day and not get wet; and in the evenings the beams of the ceiling would hang with lengths of pale buckskin leggings, drying out slowly.

She felt peaceful remembering. She didn't feel cold any more. Jimmie's blanket seemed warmer than it had ever been. And she could remember the morning he was born. She could remember whispering to her mother, who was sleeping on the other side of the hogan, to tell her it was time now. She did not want to wake the others. The second time she called to her, her mother stood up and pulled on her shoes; she knew. They walked to the old stone hogan together, Ayah walking a step behind her mother. She waited alone, learning the rhythms of the pains while her mother went to call the old woman to help them. The morning was already warm even before dawn and Ayah smelled the bee flowers blooming and the young willow growing at the springs. She could remember that so clearly, but his birth merged into the births of the other children and to her it became all the same birth. They named him for the summer morning and in English they called him Jimmie.

It wasn't like Jimmie died. He just never came back, and one day a dark blue sedan with white writing on its doors pulled up in front of the boxcar shack where the rancher let the Indians live. A man in a khaki uniform trimmed in gold gave them a yellow piece of paper and told them that Jimmie was dead. He said the Army would try to get the body back and then it would be shipped to them; but it wasn't likely because the helicopter had burned after it crashed. All of this was told to Chato because he could understand English. She stood inside the doorway holding the baby while

3. Navajo dwelling usually made of logs and mud.

Chato listened. Chato spoke English like a white man and he spoke Spanish too. He was taller than the white man and he stood straighter too. Chato didn't explain why; he just told the military man they could keep the body if they found it. The white man looked bewildered; he nodded his head and he left. Then Chato looked at her and shook his head, and then he told her, "Jimmie isn't coming home anymore," and when he spoke, he used the words to speak of the dead. She didn't cry then, but she hurt inside with anger. And she mourned him as the years passed, when a horse fell with Chato and broke his leg, and the white rancher told them he wouldn't pay Chato until he could work again. She mourned Jimmie because he would have worked for his father then; he would have saddled the big bay horse and ridden the fence lines each day, with wire cutters and heavy gloves, fixing the breaks in the barbed wire and putting the stray cattle back inside again.

She mourned him after the white doctors came to take Danny and Ella away. She was at the shack alone that day they came. It was back in the days before they hired Navajo women to go with them as interpreters. She recognized one of the doctors. She had seen him at the children's clinic at Cañoncito about a month ago. They were wearing khaki uniforms and they waved papers at her and a black ball-point pen, trying to make her understand their English words. She was frightened by the way they looked at the children, like the lizard watches the fly. Danny was swinging on the tire swing on the elm tree behind the rancher's house, and Ella was toddling around the front door, dragging the broomstick horse Chato made for her. Ayah could see they wanted her to sign the papers, and Chato had taught her to sign her name. It was something she was proud of. She only wanted them to go, and to take their eyes away from her children.

She took the pen from the man without looking at his face and she signed the papers in three different places he pointed to. She stared at the ground by their feet and waited for them to leave. But they stood there and began to point and gesture at the children. Danny stopped swinging. Ayah could see his fear. She moved suddenly and grabbed Ella into her arms; the child squirmed, trying to get back to her toys. Ayah ran with the baby toward Danny; she screamed for him to run and then she grabbed him around his chest and carried him too. She ran south into the foothills of juniper trees and black lava rock. Behind her she heard the doctors running, but they had been taken by surprise, and as the hills became steeper and the cholla cactus were thicker, they stopped. When she reached the top of the hill, she stopped to listen in case they were circling around her. But in a few minutes she heard a car engine start and they drove away. The children had been too surprised to cry while she ran with them. Danny was shaking and Ella's little fingers were gripping Ayah's blouse.

She stayed up in the hills for the rest of the day, sitting on a black lava boulder in the sunshine where she could see for miles all around her. The sky was light blue and cloudless, and it was warm for late April. The sun warmth relaxed her and took the fear and anger away. She lay back on the rock and watched the sky. It seemed to her that she could walk into the sky, stepping through clouds endlessly. Danny played with little pebbles and stones, pretending they were birds eggs and then little rabbits. Ella sat at her feet and dropped fistfuls of dirt into the breeze, watching the dust and particles of sand intently. Ayah watched a hawk soar high above them, dark

wings gliding; hunting or only watching, she did not know. The hawk was patient and he circled all afternoon before he disappeared around the high volcanic peak the Mexicans called Guadalupe.

Late in the afternoon, Ayah looked down at the gray boxcar shack with the paint all peeled from the wood; the stove pipe on the roof was rusted and crooked. The fire she had built that morning in the oil drum stove had burned out. Ella was asleep in her lap now and Danny sat close to her, complaining that he was hungry; he asked when they would go to the house. "We will stay up here until your father comes," she told him, "because those white men were chasing us." The boy remembered then and he nodded at her silently.

If Jimmie had been there he could have read those papers and explained to her what they said. Ayah would have known then, never to sign them. The doctors came back the next day and they brought a BIA⁴ policeman with them. They told Chato they had her signature and that was all they needed. Except for the kids. She listened to Chato sullenly; she hated him when he told her it was the old woman who died in the winter, spitting blood; it was her old grandma who had given the children this disease. "They don't spit blood," she said coldly. "The whites lie." She held Ella and Danny close to her, ready to run to the hills again. "I want a medicine man first," she said to Chato, not looking at him. He shook his head. "It's too late now. The policeman is with them. You signed the paper." His voice was gentle.

It was worse than if they had died: to lose the children and to know that somewhere, in a place called Colorado, in a place full of sick and dying strangers, her children were without her. There had been babies that died soon after they were born, and one that died before he could walk. She had carried them herself, up to the boulders and great pieces of the cliff that long ago crashed down from Long Mesa; she laid them in the crevices of sandstone and buried them in fine brown sand with round quartz pebbles that washed down the hills in the rain. She had endured it because they had been with her. But she could not bear this pain. She did not sleep for a long time after they took her children. She stayed on the hill where they had fled the first time, and she slept rolled up in the blanket Jimmie had sent her. She carried the pain in her belly and it was fed by everything she saw: the blue sky of their last day together and the dust and pebbles they played with; the swing in the elm tree and broomstick horse choked life from her. The pain filled her stomach and there was no room for food or for her lungs to fill with air. The air and the food would have been theirs.

She hated Chato, not because he let the policeman and doctors put the screaming children in the government car, but because he had taught her to sign her name. Because it was like the old ones always told her about learning their language or any of their ways: it endangered you. She slept alone on the hill until the middle of November when the first snows came. Then she made a bed for herself where the children had slept. She did not lie down beside Chato again until many years later, when he was sick and shivering and only her body could keep him warm. The illness came after the white rancher told Chato he was too old to work for him anymore, and Chato and his old woman should be out of the shack by the next afternoon

4. Bureau of Indian Affairs, an agency of the U.S. government charged with assisting the tribal authorities of reservations.

because the rancher had hired new people to work there. That had satisfied her. To see how the white man repaid Chato's years of loyalty and work. All of Chato's fine-sounding English talk didn't change things.

It snowed steadily and the luminous light from the snow gradually diminished into the darkness. Somewhere in Cebolleta a dog barked and other village dogs joined with it. Ayah looked in the direction she had come, from the bar where Chato was buying the wine. Sometimes he told her to go on ahead and wait; and then he never came. And when she finally went back looking for him, she would find him passed out at the bottom of the wooden steps to Azzie's Bar. All the wine would be gone and most of the money too, from the pale blue check that came to them once a month in a government envelope. It was then that she would look at his face and his hands, scarred by ropes and the barbed wire of all those years, and she would think, this man is a stranger; for forty years she had smiled at him and cooked his food, but he remained a stranger. She stood up again, with the snow almost to her knees, and she walked back to find Chato.

It was hard to walk in the deep snow and she felt the air burn in her lungs. She stopped a short distance from the bar to rest and readjust the blanket. But this time he wasn't waiting for her on the bottom step with his old Stetson hat pulled down and his shoulders hunched up in his long wool overcoat.

She was careful not to slip on the wooden steps. When she pushed the door open, warm air and cigarette smoke hit her face. She looked around slowly and deliberately, in every corner, in every dark place that the old man might find to sleep. The bar owner didn't like Indians in there, especially Navajos, but he let Chato come in because he could talk Spanish like he was one of them. The men at the bar stared at her, and the bartender saw that she left the door open wide. Snowflakes were flying inside like moths and melting into a puddle on the oiled wood floor. He motioned to her to close the door, but she did not see him. She held herself straight and walked across the room slowly, searching the room with every step. The snow in her hair melted and she could feel it on her forehead. At the far corner of the room, she saw red flames at the mica window of the old stove door; she looked behind the stove just to make sure. The bar got quiet except for the Spanish polka music playing on the jukebox. She stood by the stove and shook the snow from her blanket and held it near the stove to dry. The wet wool smell reminded her of new-born goats in early March, brought inside to warm near the fire. She felt calm.

In past years they would have told her to get out. But her hair was white now and her face was wrinkled. They looked at her like she was a spider crawling slowly across the room. They were afraid; she could feel the fear. She looked at their faces steadily. They reminded her of the first time the white people brought her children back to her that winter. Danny had been shy and hid behind the thin white woman who brought them. And the baby had not known her until Ayah took her into her arms, and then Ella had nuzzled close to her as she had when she was nursing. The blonde woman was nervous and kept looking at a dainty gold watch on her wrist. She sat on the bench near the small window and watched the dark snow clouds gather around the mountains; she was worrying about the unpaved road. She was frightened by what she saw inside too: the strips of venison drying on a rope across the ceiling and the children jabbering excitedly in a language she did not know. So they stayed

for only a few hours. Ayah watched the government car disappear down the road and she knew they were already being weaned from these lava hills and from this sky. The last time they came was in early June, and Ella stared at her the way the men in the bar were now staring. Ayah did not try to pick her up; she smiled at her instead and spoke cheerfully to Danny. When he tried to answer her, he could not seem to remember and he spoke English words with the Navajo. But he gave her a scrap of paper that he had found somewhere and carried in his pocket; it was folded in half, and he shyly looked up at her and said it was a bird. She asked Chato if they were home for good this time. He spoke to the white woman and she shook her head. "How much longer?" he asked, and she said she didn't know; but Chato saw how she stared at the box-car shack. Ayah turned away then. She did not say good-bye.

She felt satisfied that the men in the bar feared her. Maybe it was her face and the way she held her mouth with teeth clenched tight, like there was nothing anyone could do to her now. She walked north down the road, searching for the old man. She did this because she had the blanket, and there would be no place for him except with her and the blanket in the old adobe barn near the arroyo. They always slept there when they came to Cebolleta. If the money and the wine were gone, she would be relieved because then they could go home again; back to the old hogan with a dirt roof and rock walls where she herself had been born. And the next day the old man could go back to the few sheep they still had, to follow along behind them, guiding them, into dry sandy arroyos where sparse grass grew. She knew he did not like walking behind old ewes when for so many years he rode big quarter horses and worked with cattle. But she wasn't sorry for him; he should have known all along what would happen.

There had not been enough rain for their garden in five years; and that was when Chato finally hitched a ride into the town and brought back brown boxes of rice and sugar and big tin cans of welfare peaches. After that, at the first of the month they went to Cebolleta to ask the postmaster for the check; and then Chato would go to the bar and cash it. They did this as they planted the garden every May, not because anything would survive the summer dust, but because it was time to do this. The journey passed the days that smelled silent and dry like the caves above the canyon with yellow painted buffaloes on their walls.

He was walking along the pavement when she found him. He did not stop or turn around when he heard her behind him. She walked beside him and she noticed how slowly he moved now. He smelled strongly of woodsmoke and urine. Lately he had been forgetting. Sometimes he called her by his sister's name and she had been gone for a long time. Once she had found him wandering on the road to the white man's ranch, and she asked him why he was going that way; he laughed at her and said, "You know they can't run that ranch without me," and he walked on determined, limping on the leg that had been crushed many years before. Now he looked at her curiously, as if for the first time, but he kept shuffling along, moving slowly along the side of the highway. His gray hair had grown long and spread out on the shoulders of the long overcoat. He wore the old felt hat pulled down over his ears. His boots were worn out at the toes and he had stuffed pieces

of an old red shirt in the holes. The rags made his feet look like little animals up to their ears in snow. She laughed at his feet; the snow muffled the sound of her laugh. He stopped and looked at her again. The wind had quit blowing and the snow was falling straight down; the southeast sky was beginning to clear and Ayah could see a star.

"Let's rest awhile," she said to him. They walked away from the road and up the slope to the giant boulders that had tumbled down from the red sandrock mesa throughout the centuries of rainstorms and earth tremors. In a place where the boulders shut out the wind, they sat down with their backs against the rock. She offered half of the blanket to him and they sat wrapped together.

The storm passed swiftly. The clouds moved east. They were massive and full, crowding together across the sky. She watched them with the feeling of horses—steely blue-gray horses startled across the sky. The powerful haunches pushed into the distances and the tail hairs streamed white mist behind them. The sky cleared. Ayah saw that there was nothing between her and the stars. The light was crystalline. There was no shimmer, no distortion through earth haze. She breathed the clarity of the night sky; she smelled the purity of the half moon and the stars. He was lying on his side with his knees pulled up near his belly for warmth. His eyes were closed now, and in the light from the stars and the moon, he looked young again.

She could see it descend out of the night sky: an icy stillness from the edge of the thin moon. She recognized the freezing. It came gradually, sinking snowflake by snowflake until the crust was heavy and deep. It had the strength of the stars in Orion, and its journey was endless. Ayah knew that with the wine he would sleep. He would not feel it. She tucked the blanket around him, remembering how it was when Ella had been with her; and she felt the rush so big inside her heart for the babies. And she sang the only song she knew to sing for babies. She could not remember if she had ever sung it to her children, but she knew that her grandmother had sung it and her mother had sung it:

*The earth is your mother,
she holds you.
The sky is your father,
he protects you.
Sleep,
sleep.
Rainbow is your sister,
she loves you.
The winds are your brothers,
they sing to you.
Sleep,
sleep.
We are together always
We are together always
There never was a time
when this
was not so.*

ART SPIEGELMAN

b. 1948

Comic panels have existed since the end of the nineteenth century, beginning with Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* in 1895. By the 1920s panels had evolved into strips—George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* was the most famous—and by the end of the 1930s these strips had grown into comic books, most successfully with the *Superman* series produced by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster. It would take the cultural transformations of the 1960s, however, for this trend of interweaving visual elements with an expanding sense of narrative to achieve literary form. As opposed to simple entertainment, literature involves, on a genuinely cultural level, both expression and reflection, comprising the beliefs and practices of a people. In the 1960s, as long-established beliefs and practices were challenged and to some extent changed, comic-book art found itself uniquely positioned as an underground form ready to disrupt a traditional, more conservative order.

How underground comics became graphic novels is apparent from Art Spiegelman's career. A college dropout, Spiegelman found his first work in the most elemental form of cartoon humor, the illustrations for cards and stickers packaged with bubblegum and marketed as Wacky Packages and Garbage Pail Kids, a basely satirical form of 1960s counterculture created in the New York design studios of Topps and other novelty companies. When in 1970 Spiegelman moved from New York to San Francisco, his work progressed from novelty to subversion—of the comic-strip form and of larger cultural themes. Cartoonist R. Crumb had recently developed *Zap Comix* as a way of replacing convention with creation, both in the way comics were drawn and in the subjects they treated. Spiegelman's affinity was with the second wave of this movement, including the Zippy comics drawn by Bill Griffin, in which sequential art pushed common limits to be boldly experimental. Here older practices were turned against themselves, with action breaking out of frames, narratives interrogating themselves, and characters challenging all standards of social acceptability.

Spiegelman's return to New York prompted the key development in his work and emergence as a graphic novelist. Married to the artist and designer Françoise Mouly in 1977 and beginning a family, Spiegelman paid new attention to his father's stories about the signal event in the elder Spiegelmans' lives, the Holocaust. As Polish Jews who had been persecuted and imprisoned at Auschwitz, where their first son died, the Spiegelmans had emigrated first to Sweden (where Art was born three years after the war's end) and then to the United States, settling in the Rego Park neighborhood of Queens, New York City, and becoming naturalized American citizens. His parents' cultural transformation was greater than any Spiegelman had experienced in the 1960s, and he sought the artistic tools to represent it. In 1978 Will Eisner had taken comic books to a new level of expression by arguing theological matters in *A Contract with God*—the type of work that could be sold in bookstores rather than just on newsstands. But by applying his cartoonist's serial-narrative skills to his father's experiences, Spiegelman gave the graphic novel literary importance.

Maus I (1986) and *Maus II* (1991) are complex creations, enfolding not just the father's tale but also his act of telling it, both of which are measured by the son's reception. Their handling of the Holocaust, a subject of countless previous treatments and certain to endure as one of humanity's major stories, as a cartoon adds great imaginative dimension. Thanks to a suggestive set of references, with Jews as mice (victims of prey), Germans as cats (predators of mice), French as frogs (a

reminder of the self-conscious vulgarity of older comic strips), and Poles as pigs (a dietary contrast with Jews, but also a calculated insult), graphic representation gives new facets to a familiar story. Cartooning by nature involves a great amount of artistic license. Parameters of taste are much more elastic than those for fiction, poetry, and all but the most performative of drama, while the form's roots in popular culture continue to show despite the bleachings of high taste.

Even in becoming a countercultural icon, Spiegelman has maintained a sense of humor about himself. No matter how serious his subject matter (including his 2004 treatment of the 9/11 attacks, *In the Shadow of No Towers*), the cartoonist is always the fall guy, enduring his father's occasional impatience and the terrors of life. In this sense Spiegelman's mature works echo the sentiments of his first publications, *The Complete Mr. Infinity* (1970) and *The Viper Vicar of Vice, Villany, and Vickedness* (1972), both expressive of the 1960s counterculture and older comic-book tradition that a new generation of readers would accept as illustrative of their own sensibilities.

The following text is from *Maus I and II* (1997).

From Maus

C H A P T E R S I X











GO THROUGH THE COURTYARD TO THE SHED IN THE BACK. I'LL BRING YOU SOME FOOD.



THANK GOD THERE ARE STILL SOME KIND PEOPLE LEFT. I THOUGHT—

A JEWESS!



THERE'S A JEWESS IN THE COURTYARD! POLICE!

AN OLD WITCH RECOGNIZED ANJA FROM HER WINDOW.



HURRY!

WE RAN FAST TO THE SHED AND HID IN THE STRAW.



IT'S OKAY FOR NOW...



I DON'T THINK ANYONE HEARD HER... SHE'S A LITTLE SENILE ANYWAY.



BUT YOU MUST LOOK FOR A BETTER PLACE TO STAY. SOMEONE HERE IS BOUND TO RECOGNIZE YOU!



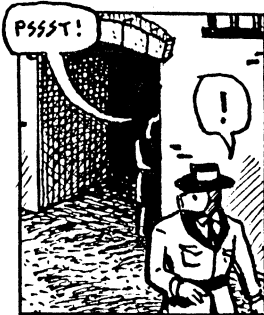
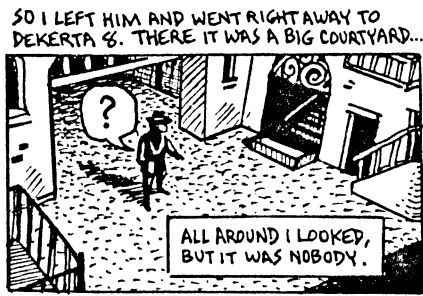
IT'S ALMOST MORNING. WAIT HERE. I'M GOING OUT TO SCOUT AROUND.

B-BE CAREFUL.



I WALKED, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO GO.

AND I HEARD SOON IT WAS SOMEBODY FOLLOWING BEHIND ME.







AND SO WE CAME THERE TO LIVE WITH KAWKA'S COW.

IT'S ALMOST DAWN - WHEN MRS KAWKA COMES TO MILK HER COW, SHE'LL BRING YOU SOME COFFEE.

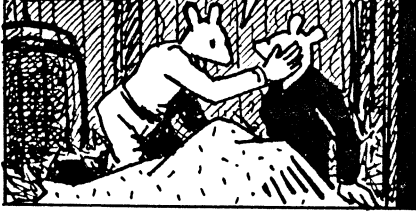


WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO DEKERTA.

DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE AGAIN. I'M TERRIFIED WHILE YOU'RE GONE.



DON'T WORRY, ANJA. I'LL BE SAFE. IF I DIDN'T GO OUT WE WOULDN'T HAVE FOOD...WE WOULDN'T HAVE THIS PLACE!!



AND WE'VE GOT TO FIND A WARMER PLACE FOR THE WINTER...AWAY FROM SOSNOWIEC IF POSSIBLE...



I-I'LL BE OKAY. COME BACK QUICK.



I TRAVELED OFTEN WITH THE STREETCAR TO TOWN.



IT WAS TWO CARS. ONE WAS ONLY GERMANS AND OFFICIALS. THE SECOND, IT WAS ONLY THE POLES.

ALWAYS I WENT STRAIGHT IN THE OFFICIAL CAR...



HEIL HITLER.



THE GERMANS PAID NO ATTENTION OF ME... IN THE POLISH CAR THEY COULD SMELL IF A POLISH JEW CAME IN.

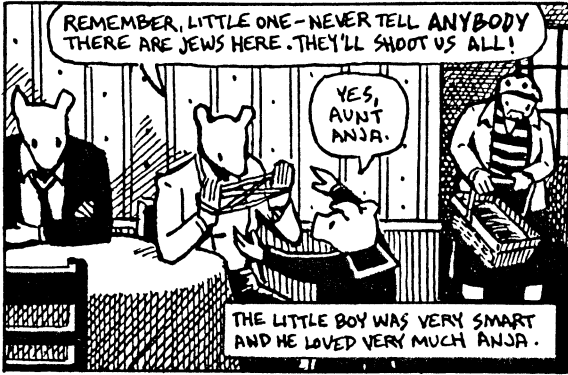
AT THE BLACK MARKET I SAW SEVERAL TIMES A NICE WOMAN, WHAT I MADE A LITTLE FRIENDS WITH HER ...



THE NEXT EVENING SHE CAME WITH HER 7-YEARS-OLD BOY TO KAWKA'S FARMHOUSE ...



WE HAD HERE A LITTLE COMFORTABLE...WE HAD WHERE TO SIT.



IN HIS SCHOOL THE BOY WAS VERY BAD IN GERMAN. SO ANJA TUTORED TO HIM.



AND SOON HE CAME OUT WITH VERY GOOD GRADES.

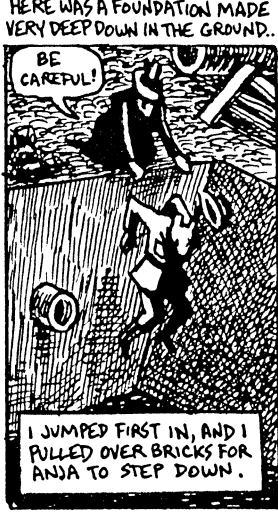


BUT IT WAS A FEW THINGS HERE NOT SO GOOD... HER HOME WAS VERY SMALL AND IT WAS ON THE GROUND FLOOR...



STILL, EVERYTHING HERE WAS FINE, UNTIL ONE SATURDAY MOTONOWA RAN VERY EARLY BACK FROM HER BLACK MARKET WORK...

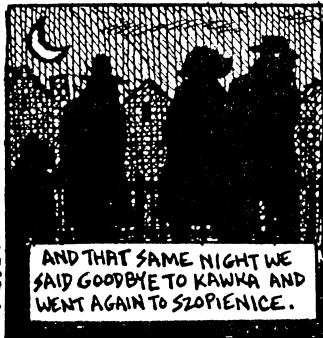
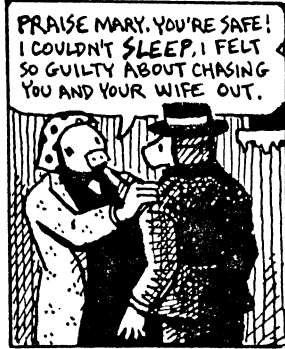




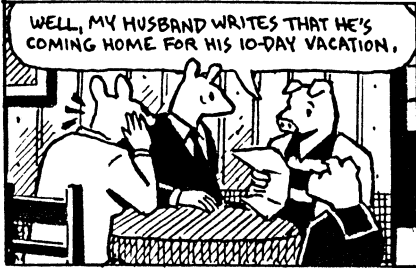




SO... I WENT NEXT DAY TO DEKERTA STREET TO BUY FOOD...



AFTER WE WERE BACK ONLY A SHORT TIME...



AT NIGHT WE COULD MOVE AROUND A LITTLE, BUT IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE DOWN THERE..



THOSE AREN'T RATS. THEY'RE VERY SMALL. ONE RAN OVER MY HAND BEFORE. THEY'RE JUST MICE!



BUT, THEN, MOTONOWA STOPPED TO COME DOWN.

IT'S BEEN 3 DAYS SINCE SHE BROUGHT ANY FOOD.

HERE...HAVE ANOTHER CANDY...

I HAD STILL CANDIES I ORGANIZED ON DEKERTA. ONLY THIS WE HAD TO EAT.

ALSO, HERE WE HAD NO PLACE WHERE TO WASH, SO ANJA GOT ON ALL HER SKIN A TERRIBLE RASH.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WORSE- THE HUNGER OR THE ITCHING.

DON'T SCRATCH! IT ONLY- SHH!

CLIK

THE DOOR.

I'M SORRY I COULDN'T GET DOWN BEFORE-MY HUSBAND IS GETTING SUSPICIOUS.

HE ASKED WHY I GO TO THE CELLAR SO OFTEN. HE EVEN ASKED IF I WAS HIDING JEWS HERE! ...HE WAS JOKING, BUT STILL...

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT HERE?

THERE ARE RATS, GIANT RATS! THEY'RE HORRIBLE!

WELL- YOU'RE BETTER OFF WITH THE RATS THAN WITH THE GESTAPO... AT LEAST THE RATS WON'T KILL YOU!

MMM...

AND SHE WAS RIGHT. WE WERE HAPPY EVEN TO HAVE THESE CONDITIONS.

AFTER THE TEN DAYS HER HUSBAND LEFT, AND SHE TOOK US BACK.

IT'S GOOD TO BE "HOME," EH, VLADEK?

IT'S A LOT NICER THAN THAT CELLAR.

BUT I DIDN'T FEEL SAFE HERE. IT WAS TOO MANY WAYS SOMEBODY COULD FIND US OUT. I WANTED TO GO BETTER TO HUNGARY.

SO, WHEN IT CAME THURSDAY, I WENT IN THE DIRECTION TO TAKE A STREETCAR TO SEE KAWKA IN SOSNOWIEC.



THEY RAN SCREAMING HOME.



I APPROACHED OVER TO THEM...



SO I CAME OUT WELL FROM THIS...



JOY HARJO

b. 1951

Joy Harjo was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to a mother of mixed Cherokee, French, and Irish blood. She has described her father's family, members of the Creek (also known as Muscogee) tribe, as "rebels and speakers," among them a Baptist minister (Harjo's paternal grandfather), two painters (her grandmother and aunt), and a great-great-grandfather who in 1832 led a Creek rebellion against their forced removal from Alabama into Oklahoma. As the critic Laura Coltelli has pointed out, the work of many contemporary Native American writers (a large number of whom are of mixed blood) enacts a quest to reenvision identity by confronting the historical, cultural, and political realities that shape lives experienced between different worlds. Drawing on a family tradition of powerful speaking, Harjo participates in a search to reimagine and repair painful fractures in contemporary experience: between past and present, between person and landscape, and between parts of the self. Thus traveling is a mythic activity in her poems, enacting this search for community and historical connectedness. As in the work of James Welch, Simon J. Ortiz, and Leslie Marmon Silko, the theme of traveling in Harjo's poems resonates with the historical displacements and migrations of native peoples (especially the forced removal of the Creeks). She has called herself the wanderer in her family, and her poems often map her journeys, whether on foot, by car, or in a plane. Perhaps Harjo thinks of herself as the family wanderer because she left Oklahoma to attend high school at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico ("in a way it saved my life," she has said). Since receiving a B.A. from the University of New Mexico in 1976 and an MFA from the University of Iowa, she has taught at the Institute of American Indian Arts, Arizona State University, the University of Colorado, the University of Arizona, and the University of New Mexico.

Harjo's vision of the interrelatedness of all things is common to Native American storytelling. The ethic that emerges from this worldview stresses reciprocity between people and various sources of power, including tradition and the natural world. Harjo's poems bring together mythic, feminist, and cultural perspectives and also unite contemporary urban experience with Native American myth and legend. In her collection *She Had Some Horses* (1983) this integration seeks to assuage the loneliness and desperation of those on the margin who populate much of the volume: a woman raising her mixed-blood children alone, a friend who threatens suicide, a woman who threatens to drop from a thirteenth-story window. The collection *In Mad Love and War* (1990) exhibits anger at the separations caused by dispossession and violence, as in an elegy for Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, a young Micmac woman shot dead on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Poems such as this recall the passion for social justice in the works of James Wright, Audre Lorde, and Leslie Marmon Silko; indeed, the spirit of Harjo's rebel great-great-grandfather is never far from her work.

Harjo has been a leading figure in the adaptation of oral traditions into written forms, consciously using the written word in her poems in a way that duplicates certain oral and ceremonial techniques. Her poems extensively and emphatically use repetition, of both words and units of thought, as mnemonic and structuring devices. For example, her poem "When the World As We Knew It Ended," written in response to the events of September 11, 2001, begins a series of stanzas with the repetition and variation of "We saw it," "We heard it," "We knew it. . . ." Reflecting the understanding that Native American tradition is not fixed but evolves and changes, Harjo

she dreamed, there is the white bear
 moving down from the north, motioning her paws
 like a long arctic night, that kind
 of circle and the whole world balanced in
 between carved of ebony and ice

oh so hard

the clear black nights
 like her daughter's eyes, and the white
 bear moon, cupped like an ivory rocking
 cradle, tipping back it could go
 either way
 all darkness
 is open to all light.

1983

Summer Night

The moon is nearly full,
 the humid air sweet like melon.
 Flowers that have cupped the sun all day
 dream of iridescent wings
 under the long dark sleep. Children's invisible voices call out
 in the glimmering moonlight. Their parents play worn-out records
 of the cumbia.¹ Behind the screen door
 their soft laughter swells
 into the rhythm of a smooth guitar. I watch the world shimmer
 inside this globe of a summer night,
 listen to the wobble of her
 spin and dive. It happens all the time, waiting for you
 to come home.
 There is an ache that begins
 in the sound of an old blues song.
 It becomes a house where all the lights have gone out
 but one.
 And it burns and burns
 until there is only the blue smoke of dawn
 and everyone is sleeping in someone's arms
 even the flowers
 even the sound of a thousand silences.
 And the arms of night
 in the arms of day.
 Everyone except me.

1. A Latin American dance.

What I had seen there were no words for except in the sacred language of the most holy recounting, so when I ran back to the village, drenched in salt, how could I explain the water jar left empty by the river to my mother who deciphered my burning lips as shame? 30

My imagination swallowed me like a mica sky, but I had seen the water monster in the fight of lightning storms, breaking trees, stirring up killing winds, and had lost my favorite brother to a spear of the sacred flame, so certainly I would know my beloved if he were hidden in the blushing skin of the suddenly vulnerable. 35

I was taken with a fever and nothing cured it until I dreamed my fiery body dipped in the river where it fed into the lake. My father carried me as if I were newborn, as if he were presenting me once more to the world, and when he dipped me I was quenched, pronounced healed. 40

My parents immediately made plans to marry me to an important man who was years older but would provide me with everything I needed to survive in this world, a world I could no longer perceive, as I had been blinded with a ring of water when I was most in need of a drink by a snake who was not a snake, and how did he know my absolute secrets, those created at the brink of acquired language? 45

When I disappeared it was in a storm that destroyed the houses of my relatives; my baby sister was found sucking on her hand in the crook of an oak. 50

And though it may have appeared otherwise, I did not go willingly. That night I had seen my face strung on the shell belt of my ancestors, and I was standing next to a man who could not look me in the eye.

The oldest woman in the tribe wanted to remember me as a symbol in the story of a girl who disobeyed, who gave in to her desires before marriage and was destroyed by the monster disguised as the seductive warrior. 55

Others saw the car I was driving as it drove into the lake early one morning, the time the carriers of tradition wake up, before the sun or the approach of woodpeckers, and found the emptied six-pack on the sandy shores of the lake. 60

The power of the victim is a power that will always be reckoned with, one way or the other. When the proverbial sixteen-year-old woman walked down to the lake within her were all sixteen-year-old women who had questioned their power from time immemorial. 65

Her imagination was larger than the small frame house at the north edge of town, with the broken cars surrounding it like a necklace of futility, larger than the town itself leaning into the lake. Nothing could stop it, just as no one could stop the bearing-down thunderheads as they gathered overhead in the war of opposites. 70

Years later when she walked out of the lake and headed for town, no one recognized her, or themselves, in the drench of fire and rain. The water-snake was a story no one told anymore. They'd entered a drought that no one recognized as drought, the convenience store a signal of temporary amnesia. 75

I had gone out to get bread, eggs and the newspaper before breakfast and hurried the cashier for my change as the crazy woman walked in, for I could not see myself as I had abandoned her some twenty years ago in a blue windbreaker at the edge of the man-made lake as everyone dove naked and drunk off the sheer cliff, as if we had nothing to live for, not then or ever. 80

It was beginning to rain in Oklahoma, the rain that would flood the world.²

1994

When the World As We Knew It Ended—

We were dreaming on an occupied island at the farthest edge of a trembling nation when it went down.

Two towers rose up from the east island of commerce and touched the sky. Men walked on the moon. Oil was sucked dry by two brothers. Then it went down. Swallowed by a fire dragon, by oil and fear. Eaten whole. 5

It was coming.

We had been watching since the eve of the missionaries in their long and solemn clothes, to see what would happen. 10

We saw it from the kitchen window over the sink as we made coffee, cooked rice and potatoes, enough for an army.

We saw it all, as we changed diapers and fed the babies. We saw it, through the branches of the knowledgeable tree 15

2. Embedded in Muscogee tribal memory is the creature known as the tie snake, a huge monster who lives in waterways and will do what he can to take us with him. He represents the power of the underworld.

He is still present today in the lakes and rivers of Oklahoma and Alabama, a force we reckon with despite the proliferation of inventions that keep us from ourselves [Harjo's note].

through the snags of stars, through
 the sun and storms from our knees 20
 as we bathed and washed
 the floors.

The conference of the birds warned us, as they flew over
 destroyers in the harbor, parked there since the first takeover.
 It was by their song and talk we knew when to rise 25
 when to look out the window
 to the commotion going on—
 the magnetic field thrown off by grief.

We heard it.
 The racket in every corner of the world. As 30
 the hunger for war rose up in those who would steal to be president
 to be king or emperor, to own the trees, stones, and everything
 else that moved about the earth, inside the earth
 and above it.

We knew it was coming, tasted the winds who gathered intelligence 35
 from each leaf and flower, from every mountain, sea
 and desert, from every prayer and song all over this tiny universe
 floating in the skies of infinite
 being.

And then it was over, this world we had grown to love 40
 for its sweet grasses, for the many-colored horses
 and fishes, for the shimmering possibilities
 while dreaming.

But then there were the seeds to plant and the babies 45
 who needed milk and comforting, and someone
 picked up a guitar or ukelele from the rubble
 and began to sing about the light flutter
 the kick beneath the skin of the earth
 we felt there, beneath us

a warm animal 50
 a song being born between the legs of her,
 a poem.

EDWARD P. JONES

b. 1951

Whole worlds thrive in the imagination of Edward P. Jones, worlds he has shared with readers in short stories, an epic novel, and the recurring themes and characters that connect all his writing into a coherent vision. At the end of his 2003 Pulitzer Prize–winning novel, *The Known World*, a former slave named Alice is revealed as an artist: her huge, three-dimensional tapestry of the plantation where she was in bondage reconstructs its entire world from above, with all human beings, living and dead, standing in their accustomed places. Jones's stories create such tapestries, many of them—including the story reprinted here—mapped onto the precise geography of Washington, D.C., where Jones was born in 1950 and where he has spent most of his life.

Jones's first short-story collection, *Lost in the City* (1992), brought the black community of Northwest D.C. into vivid relief. The stories introduce readers to characters who struggle to make a living and maintain love of all sorts against conditions of poverty and despair. Unflinching in his view of that environment, Jones projects profound compassion for his creations. Born into these conditions himself, to a mother who could not read or write and an alcoholic father who abandoned them, Jones and his family moved eighteen times by the time he turned eighteen, fleeing the threat of “set out”—eviction—notices for falling behind on rent. Jones was educated at local public schools and won a scholarship to the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, ultimately earning an MFA at the University of Virginia. *Lost in the City* won him the PEN/Hemingway Award and the Lannan Foundation award, launching his career on a high note.

But nothing prepared the literary world for the novel that appeared in 2003. Jones had been working during the preceding decade for a trade journal called *Tax Notes*, first as a proofreader and then as a writer. As he tells the story, during this time he had the idea of writing a novel about a black slaveowner. Intimidated by the demand for accuracy in historical fiction, he held off writing, checking out dozens of books on antebellum life from the library (few of which he read). All the while, he was composing the novel in his head. Jones's agent at the time reports that in meetings with his client during those seemingly fallow years it became clear that Jones had memorized whole swaths of prose.

Jones took a vacation from his job in 2001, wrote the first few pages of his novel, and then was laid off several months later. With this new free time, the rest of the words finally found their way to the page. He solved the problem of the many history books he had checked out (and ignored) by inventing the historical documents he needed, punctuating the novel's multiple narrative strands with seemingly real census reports, government documents, letters, and inventories. Three months after the writing began, his 400+page magnum opus, *The Known World*, was finished. Upon its provocative premise—that a black man can deceive himself into becoming a “benevolent” slaveowner—Jones builds dozens of characters, a sweeping fictional setting, and heartbreaking tragedies, experimentally mixing a godlike narrative presence that sees both past and future with lavish “factual” detail grounding the story in its moment.

A remarkable feature of Jones's work is that characters, their descendants, and the objects they make reappear across various stories. An elaborately carved walking

stick, for instance, made by a talented free black craftsman named Augustus in *The Known World*, reappears in the hands of a character in a story set over a hundred years later, in the collection *All Aunt Hagar's Children* (2006). These woven details make the tapestry of Jones's work palpable to his devoted readers.

"The First Day" evokes the pain and hope of a young girl taking her first steps into school, a journey that pulls her away from her illiterate mother and echoes Jones's own life journey into reading, writing, and literature.

The First Day

In an otherwise unremarkable September morning, long before I learned to be ashamed of my mother, she takes my hand and we set off down New Jersey Avenue to begin my very first day of school. I am wearing a checkered-like blue-and-green cotton dress, and scattered about these colors are bits of yellow and white and brown. My mother has uncharacteristically spent nearly an hour on my hair that morning, plaiting and replaiting so that now my scalp tingles. Whenever I turn my head quickly, my nose fills with the faint smell of Dixie Peach hair grease. The smell is somehow a soothing one now and I will reach for it time and time again before the morning ends. All the plaits, each with a blue barrette near the tip and each twisted into an uncommon sturdiness, will last until I go to bed that night, something that has never happened before. My stomach is full of milk and oatmeal sweetened with brown sugar. Like everything else I have on, my pale green slip and underwear are new, the underwear having come three to a plastic package with a little girl on the front who appears to be dancing. Behind my ears, my mother, to stop my whining, has dabbed the stingiest bit of her gardenia perfume, the last present my father gave her before he disappeared into memory. Because I cannot smell it, I have only her word that the perfume is there. I am also wearing yellow socks trimmed with thin lines of black and white around the tops. My shoes are my greatest joy, black patent-leather miracles, and when one is nicked at the toe later that morning in class, my heart will break.

I am carrying a pencil, a pencil sharpener, and a small ten-cent tablet with a black-and-white speckled cover. My mother does not believe that a girl in kindergarten needs such things, so I am taking them only because of my insistent whining and because they are presents from our neighbors, Mary Keith and Blondelle Harris. Miss Mary and Miss Blondelle are watching my two younger sisters until my mother returns. The women are as precious to me as my mother and sisters. Out playing one day, I have overheard an older child, speaking to another child, call Miss Mary and Miss Blondelle a word that is brand-new to me. This is my mother: When I say the word in fun to one of my sisters, my mother slaps me across the mouth and the word is lost for years and years.

All the way down New Jersey Avenue, the sidewalks are teeming with children. In my neighborhood, I have many friends, but I see none of them as my mother and I walk. We cross New York Avenue, we cross Pierce Street, and we cross L and K, and still I see no one who knows my name. At I Street,

between New Jersey Avenue and Third Street, we enter Seaton Elementary School, a timeworn, sad-faced building across the street from my mother's church, Mt. Carmel Baptist.

Just inside the front door, women out of the advertisements in *Ebony*¹ are greeting other parents and children. The woman who greets us has pearls thick as jumbo marbles that come down almost to her navel, and she acts as if she had known me all my life, touching my shoulder, cupping her hand under my chin. She is enveloped in a perfume that I only know is not gardenia. When, in answer to her question, my mother tells her that we live at 1227 New Jersey Avenue, the woman first seems to be picturing in her head where we live. Then she shakes her head and says that we are at the wrong school, that we should be at Walker-Jones.

My mother shakes her head vigorously. "I want her to go here," my mother says. "If I'da wanted her someplace else, I'da took her there." The woman continues to act as if she has known me all my life, but she tells my mother that we live beyond the area that Seaton serves. My mother is not convinced and for several more minutes she questions the woman about why I cannot attend Seaton. For as many Sundays as I can remember, perhaps even Sundays when I was in her womb, my mother has pointed across I Street to Seaton as we come and go to Mt. Carmel. "You gonna go there and learn about the whole world." But one of the guardians of that place is saying no, and no again. I am learning this about my mother: The higher up on the scale of respectability a person is—and teachers are rather high up in her eyes—the less she is liable to let them push her around. But finally, I see in her eyes the closing gate, and she takes my hand and we leave the building. On the steps, she stops as people move past us on either side.

"Mama, I can't go to school?"

She says nothing at first, then takes my hand again and we are down the steps quickly and nearing New Jersey Avenue before I can blink. This is my mother: She says, "One monkey don't stop no show."

Walker-Jones is a larger, newer school and I immediately like it because of that. But it is not across the street from my mother's church, her rock, one of her connections to God, and I sense her doubts as she absently rubs her thumb over the back of her hand. We find our way to the crowded auditorium where gray metal chairs are set up in the middle of the room. Along the wall to the left are tables and other chairs. Every chair seems occupied by a child or adult. Somewhere in the room a child is crying, a cry that rises above the buzz-talk of so many people. Strewn about the floor are dozens and dozens of pieces of white paper, and people are walking over them without any thought of picking them up. And seeing this lack of concern, I am all of a sudden afraid.

"Is this where they register for school?" my mother asks a woman at one of the tables.

The woman looks up slowly as if she has heard this question once too often. She nods. She is tiny, almost as small as the girl standing beside her.

1. General interest magazine founded in 1945, focusing on African American life and often featuring black elites in entertainment, business, and politics.

The woman's hair is set in a mass of curlers and all of those curlers are made of paper money, here a dollar bill, there a five-dollar bill. The girl's hair is arrayed in curls, but some of them are beginning to droop and this makes me happy. On the table beside the woman's pocketbook is a large notebook, worthy of someone in high school, and looking at me looking at the notebook, the girl places her hand possessively on it. In her other hand she holds several pencils with thick crowns of additional erasers.

"These the forms you gotta use?" my mother asks the woman, picking up a few pieces of the paper from the table. "Is this what you have to fill out?"

The woman tells her yes, but that she need fill out only one.

"I see," my mother says, looking about the room. Then: "Would you help me with this form? That is, if you don't mind."

The woman asks my mother what she means.

"This form. Would you mind helpin me fill it out?"

The woman still seems not to understand.

"I can't read it. I don't know how to read or write, and I'm askin you to help me." My mother looks at me, then looks away. I know almost all of her looks, but this one is brand-new to me. "Would you help me, then?"

The woman says Why sure, and suddenly she appears happier, so much more satisfied with everything. She finishes the form for her daughter and my mother and I step aside to wait for her. We find two chairs nearby and sit. My mother is now diseased, according to the girl's eyes, and until the moment her mother takes her and the form to the front of the auditorium, the girl never stops looking at my mother. I stare back at her. "Don't stare," my mother says to me. "You know better than that."

Another woman out of the *Ebony* ads takes the woman's child away. Now, the woman says upon returning, let's see what we can do for you two.

My mother answers the questions the woman reads off the form. They start with my last name, and then on to the first and middle names. This is school, I think. This is going to school. My mother slowly enunciates each word of my name. This is my mother: As the questions go on, she takes from her pocketbook document after document, as if they will support my right to attend school, as if she has been saving them up for just this moment. Indeed, she takes out more papers than I have ever seen her do in other places: my birth certificate, my baptismal record, a doctor's letter concerning my bout with chicken pox, rent receipts, records of immunization, a letter about our public assistance payments, even her marriage license—every single paper that has anything even remotely to do with my five-year-old life. Few of the papers are needed here, but it does not matter and my mother continues to pull out the documents with the purposefulness of a magician pulling out a long string of scarves. She has learned that money is the beginning and end of everything in this world, and when the woman finishes, my mother offers her fifty cents, and the woman accepts it without hesitation. My mother and I are just about the last parent and child in the room.

My mother presents the form to a woman sitting in front of the stage, and the woman looks at it and writes something on a white card, which she gives to my mother. Before long, the woman who has taken the girl with the drooping curls appears from behind us, speaks to the sitting woman, and introduces herself to my mother and me. She's to be my teacher, she tells my mother. My mother stares.

We go into the hall, where my mother kneels down to me. Her lips are quivering. "I'll be back to pick you up at twelve o'clock. I don't want you to go nowhere. You just wait right here. And listen to every word she say." I touch her lips and press them together. It is an old, old game between us. She puts my hand down at my side, which is not part of the game. She stands and looks a second at the teacher, then she turns and walks away. I see where she has darned one of her socks the night before. Her shoes make loud sounds in the hall. She passes through the doors and I can still hear the loud sounds of her shoes. And even when the teacher turns me toward the classrooms and I hear what must be the singing and talking of all the children in the world, I can still hear my mother's footsteps above it all.

1992

RITA DOVE

b. 1952

What she has called the "friction" between the beauty of a poetic form and a difficult or painful subject appeals to Rita Dove. Her own formal control and discipline create a beautiful design and a haunting music in "Parsley," a poem based on a murderous event: in 1957 the dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, ordered twenty thousand black Haitians killed because they could not pronounce the letter "r" in *perejil*, the Spanish word for parsley. What compels Dove in this poem is the way a "single, beautiful word" has the power of life and death. More astonishing is that she writes from the perspectives of both the Haitians in the cane fields and General Trujillo in his palace. When asked in an interview about her capacity to imagine Trujillo, Dove responded, "I frankly don't believe anyone who says they've never felt any evil, that they cannot understand that process of evil. It was important to me to try to understand that arbitrary quality of his cruelty. . . . Making us get into his head may shock us all into seeing what the human being is capable of, because if we can go that far into his head, we're halfway there ourselves." An ability to enter into different points of view in a single poem is characteristic of Dove's disinterested imagination. Her method is to avoid commentary, to let the imagined person or object, the suggestive detail, speak for itself. Often her work suggests what the English poet John Keats called "negative capability," the gift of the poet to become what he or she is not.

Born in Akron, Dove attended Miami University of Ohio and, after her graduation, studied modern European literature as a Fulbright/Hays fellow at the University of Tübingen in Germany. When she returned from Europe she earned an MFA at the University of Iowa (in 1977). Later she taught creative writing at Arizona State University before joining the University of Virginia, where she is now Commonwealth Professor of English. Since her Fulbright year she has repeatedly chosen to live abroad, in Ireland, Israel, France, and especially Germany. Her travel in Europe and elsewhere suggests part of the imperative she feels as a poet: to range widely through fields of experience, to cross boundaries of space as well as time. Her first

book, *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), is notable for its intense poems about adolescence; her second book, *Museum* (1983), dramatically extends the range of her work. “When I started *Museum*,” she has said, “I was in Europe, and I had a way of looking back on America and distancing myself from my experience.” As well as for several fine poems about her father (a subject that may also have needed distance), the book is remarkable for the way distance allowed Dove to move out of her immediate experience, freed her to imagine widely different lives.

As if to show that it is also possible to travel widely while staying at home, Dove’s *Thomas and Beulah* (1986) is an extended sequence based on her grandparents’ lives. Her continuing fascination with imagining different perspectives on the same event is evident in this sequence. Dove has described the book’s origins this way:

My grandmother had told me a story that had happened to my grandfather when he was young, coming up on a riverboat to Akron, Ohio, my hometown. But that was all I had, basically. And the story so fascinated me that I tried to write about it. I started off writing stories about my grandfather and soon, because I ran out of real fact, in order to keep going, I made up facts for this character, Thomas. . . . Then this poem “Dusting” appeared, really out of nowhere. I didn’t realize this was Thomas’s wife saying, “I want to talk. And you can’t do his side without my side. . . .”

This is the story, in part, of a marriage and of a black couple’s life in the industrial Midwest in the period from 1900 to 1960. Thomas’s point of view controls the poems of the book’s first section, while the second part imagines his wife’s. The larger framework of the sequence links family history to social history. Thomas’s journey from the rural South to the industrial city of Akron (where he finds employment in the Goodyear Zeppelin factory until the Depression puts him out of work) is part of the larger social movement of African Americans from the South into Northern industrial cities in the first part of the twentieth century. The individual lyrics of Dove’s sequence create and sustain the story through distinct and often ordinary moments in which each life is vividly portrayed. It is part of Dove’s gift that she can render the apparently unimportant moments that inform a life and set them against a background of larger historical forces, as do Robert Hayden in *Elegies for Paradise Valley* and Robert Lowell in *Notebook*.

Many of the figures in Dove’s poems are displaced, on the border between different worlds: for example, Thomas and Beulah, and the biracial violin prodigy, George Bridgetower (1780–1860), who is the focus of her volume *Sonata Mulattica* (2009). The experience of displacement, of what she has called living in “two different worlds, seeing things with double vision,” consistently compels this poet’s imagination. It takes both detachment and control to maintain (and to live with) such doubleness. This may be why Dove’s rich sense of language and her love of sound are joined to a disciplined formal sense. The forms of her poems often hold in place difficult or ambiguous feelings and keep the expression of feeling understated. While restraint is one strength of Dove’s poems, her work can sometimes seem austere. Such careful control recalls Elizabeth Bishop’s early work, also highly controlled and even, at times, guarded. As Bishop grew to relax her restraints, to open into an extraordinary expressiveness, so Dove’s career shows a similar growth. Her collections *Grace Notes* (1989), *Mother Love* (1995), and *American Smooth* (2004) suggest just such a relaxing of the poet’s guard, while *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (2000) demonstrates an ongoing ability to unite social conscience with a transformative sense of language and form. With each book she asks something more from herself, and she has now become one of our indispensable poets. Dove was poet laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995.

Geometry

I prove a theorem and the house expands:
 the windows jerk free to hover near the ceiling,
 the ceiling floats away with a sigh.

As the walls clear themselves of everything
 but transparency, the scent of carnations
 leaves with them. I am out in the open 5

and above the windows have hinged into butterflies,
 sunlight glinting where they've intersected.
 They are going to some point true and unproven.

1980

Adolescence—I

In water-heavy nights behind grandmother's porch
 We knelt in the tickling grasses and whispered:
 Linda's face hung before us, pale as a pecan,
 And it grew wise as she said:
 "A boy's lips are soft,
 As soft as baby's skin." 5

The air closed over her words.
 A firefly whirred near my ear, and in the distance
 I could hear streetlamps ping
 Into miniature suns
 Against a feathery sky. 10

1980

Adolescence—II

Although it is night, I sit in the bathroom, waiting.
 Sweat prickles behind my knees, the baby-breasts are alert.
 Venetian blinds slice up the moon; the tiles quiver in pale strips.

Then they come, the three seal men with eyes as round
 As dinner plates and eyelashes like sharpened tines. 5
 They bring the scent of licorice. One sits in the washbowl,

One on the bathtub edge; one leans against the door.
 "Can you feel it yet?" they whisper.
 I don't know what to say, again. They chuckle,

Patting their sleek bodies with their hands. 10
 “Well, maybe next time.” And they rise,
 Glittering like pools of ink under moonlight,

And vanish. I clutch at the ragged holes
 They leave behind, here at the edge of darkness. 15
 Night rests like a ball of fur on my tongue.

1980

Adolescence—III

With Dad gone, Mom and I worked
 The dusky rows of tomatoes.
 As they glowed orange in sunlight
 And rotted in shadow, I too
 Grew orange and softer, swelling out 5
 Starched cotton slips.

The texture of twilight made me think of
 Lengths of Dotted Swiss. In my room
 I wrapped scarred knees in dresses
 That once went to big-band dances; 10
 I baptized my earlobes with rosewater.
 Along the window-sill, the lipstick stubs
 Glittered in their steel shells.

Looking out at the rows of clay
 And chicken manure, I dreamed how it would happen: 15
 He would meet me by the blue spruce,
 A carnation over his heart, saying,
 “I have come for you, Madam;
 I have loved you in my dreams.”
 At his touch, the scabs would fall away. 20
 Over his shoulder, I see my father coming toward us:
 He carries his tears in a bowl,
 And blood hangs in the pine-soaked air.

1980

Parsley¹1. *The Cane² Fields*

There is a parrot imitating spring
in the palace, its feathers parsley green.
Out of the swamp the cane appears

to haunt us, and we cut it down. El General
searches for a word; he is all the world 5
there is. Like a parrot imitating spring,

we lie down screaming as rain punches through
and we come up green. We cannot speak an R—
out of the swamp, the cane appears

and then the mountain we call in whispers *Katalina*.³ 10
The children gnaw their teeth to arrowheads.
There is a parrot imitating spring.

El General has found his word: *perejil*.
Who says it, lives. He laughs, teeth shining
out of the swamp. The cane appears 15

in our dreams, lashed by wind and streaming.
And we lie down. For every drop of blood
there is a parrot imitating spring.
Out of the swamp the cane appears.

2. *The Palace*

The word the general's chosen is parsley. 20
It is fall, when thoughts turn
to love and death; the general thinks
of his mother, how she died in the fall
and he planted her walking cane at the grave
and it flowered, each spring stolidly forming 25
four-star blossoms. The general

pulls on his boots, he stomps to
her room in the palace, the one without
curtains, the one with a parrot
in a brass ring. As he paces he wonders 30
Who can I kill today. And for a moment
the little knot of screams
is still. The parrot, who has traveled

1. On October 2, 1937, Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961), dictator of the Dominican Republic, ordered 20,000 blacks killed because they could not pronounce the letter “r” in *perejil*, the Spanish

word for parsley [Dove’s note].

2. I.e., sugar cane.

3. Katarina (because “we cannot speak an R”).

all the way from Australia in an ivory
 cage, is, coy as a widow, practising
 spring. Ever since the morning
 his mother collapsed in the kitchen
 while baking skull-shaped candies
 for the Day of the Dead,⁴ the general
 has hated sweets. He orders pastries
 brought up for the bird; they arrive

dusted with sugar on a bed of lace.
 The knot in his throat starts to twitch;
 he sees his boots the first day in battle
 splashed with mud and urine
 as a soldier falls at his feet amazed—
 how stupid he looked!—at the sound
 of artillery. *I never thought it would sing*
 the soldier said, and died. Now

the general sees the fields of sugar
 cane, lashed by rain and streaming.
 He sees his mother's smile, the teeth
 gnawed to arrowheads. He hears
 the Haitians sing without R's
 as they swing the great machetes:
Katalina, they sing, *Katalina*,

*mi madre, mi amor en muerte.*⁵ God knows
 his mother was no stupid woman; she
 could roll an R like a queen. Even
 a parrot can roll an R! In the bare room
 the bright feathers arch in a parody
 of greenery, as the last pale crumbs
 disappear under the blackened tongue. Someone

calls out his name in a voice
 so like his mother's, a startled tear
 splashes the tip of his right boot.
My mother, my love in death.
 The general remembers the tiny green sprigs
 men of his village wore in their capes
 to honor the birth of a son. He will
 order many, this time, to be killed

for a single, beautiful word.

1983

4. All Soul's Day, November 2. An Aztec festival for the spirits of the dead that coincides with the Catholic calendar. In Latin America and the Caribbean, people move in processions to cemeteries, bearing candles, flowers, and food, all of

which may be shaped to resemble symbols of death, such as skulls or coffins.

5. I.e., *mi madre, mi amor en muerte*—"my mother, my love in death."

*FROM THOMAS AND BEULAH*¹

The Event

Ever since they'd left the Tennessee ridge
with nothing to boast of
but good looks and a mandolin,

the two Negroes leaning
on the rail of a riverboat
were inseparable: Lem plucked 5

to Thomas' silver falsetto.
But the night was hot and they were drunk.
They spat where the wheel

churned mud and moonlight, 10
they called to the tarantulas
down among the bananas

to come out and dance.
You're so fine and mighty; let's see
what you can do, said Thomas, pointing 15

to a tree-capped island.
Lem stripped, spoke easy: *Them's chestnuts,*
I believe. Dove

quick as a gasp. Thomas, dry
on deck, saw the green crown shake 20
as the island slipped

under, dissolved
in the thickening stream.
At his feet

a stinking circle of rags, 25
the half-shell mandolin.
Where the wheel turned the water

gently shirred.²

1986

1. The story in this sequence of poems begins with Thomas as he makes his way north to Akron, Ohio. He loses his best friend, who, on a drunken dare from Thomas, drowns, leaving his mandolin behind. Thomas carries the mandolin with him and eventually hangs it on his parlor wall. He and Beulah marry when he is twenty-four and she is twenty; they have four daughters. Thomas works at the Goodyear Zeppelin factory (a zeppelin is a

cylindrical airship kept aloft by hydrogen). The Depression puts him out of work, so he sweeps offices for a living until Goodyear rehires him at the advent of World War II. Beulah works in a dress shop and later makes hats. Thomas dies at sixty-three from his second heart attack; Beulah dies six years later.

2. Drawn together (like folds of cloth).

The Zeppelin Factory

The zeppelin factory
 needed workers, all right—
 but, standing in the cage
 of the whale's belly, sparks
 flying off the joints 5
 and noise thundering,
 Thomas wanted to sit
 right down and cry.

That spring the third
 largest airship was dubbed 10
 the biggest joke
 in town, though they all
 turned out for the launch.
 Wind caught,
 "The Akron" floated 15
 out of control,

three men in tow—
 one dropped
 to safety, one
 hung on but the third, 20
 muscles and adrenalin
 failing, fell
 clawing
 six hundred feet.

Thomas at night 25
 in the vacant lot:
Here I am, intact
 and faint-hearted.

Thomas hiding
 his heart with his hat 30
 at the football game, eyeing
 the Goodyear blimp overhead:
Big boy I know
you're in there.

1986

Dusting

Every day a wilderness—no
 shade in sight. Beulah¹

1. Hebrew for "married one" or "possessed." In the Bible it refers to the Promised Land.

patient among knickknacks,
 the solarium a rage
 of light, a grainstorm 5
 as her gray cloth brings
 dark wood to life.

Under her hand scrolls
 and crests gleam
 darker still. What 10
 was his name, that
 silly boy at the fair with
 the rifle booth? And his kiss and
 the clear bowl with one bright
 fish, rippling 15
 wound!

Not Michael—
 something finer. Each dust
 stroke a deep breath and
 the canary in bloom. 20
 Wavery memory: home
 from a dance, the front door
 blown open and the parlor
 in snow, she rushed
 the bowl to the stove, watched 25
 as the locket of ice
 dissolved and he
 swam free.

That was years before
 Father gave her up 30
 with her name, years before
 her name grew to mean
 Promise, then
 Desert-in-Peace.
 Long before the shadow and 35
 sun's accomplice, the tree.

Maurice. 1986

Poem in Which I Refuse Contemplation

A letter from my mother was waiting:
 read in standing, one a.m.,
 just arrived at my German mother-in-law

six hours from Paris by car.
 Our daughter hops on Oma's bed, 5
 happy to be back in a language

she knows. *Hello, all! Your postcard
came on the nineth*—familiar misspelled
words, exclamations. I wish my body

wouldn't cramp and leak; I want to—
as my daughter says, pretending to be
"Papa"—pull on boots and go for a long walk

10

alone. *Your cousin Ronnie in D.C.—
remember him?—he was the one
a few months younger than you—*

15

*was strangulated at some chili joint,
your Aunt May is beside herself!*
Mom slaps to the garden which is

*producing—onions, swiss chard,
lettuce, lettuce, lettuce, turnip greens and more lettuce
so far! The roses are flourishing.*

20

Haven't I always hated gardening? And German,
with its patient, grunting building blocks,
and for that matter, English, too,

Americanese's chewy twang? *Raccoons
have taken up residence
we were ten in the crawl space*

25

but I can't feel his hand *who knows*
anymore *how we'll get them out?*
I'm still standing. Bags to unpack.

30

That's all for now. Take care.

1989

Missing

I am the daughter who went out with the girls,
never checked back in and nothing marked my "last
known whereabouts," not a single glistening petal.

Horror is partial; it keeps you going. A lost
child is a fact hardening around its absence,
a knot in the breast purring *Touch, and I will*

5

come true. I was "returned," I watched her
watch as I babbled *It could have been worse. . . .*
Who can tell
what penetrates? Pity is the brutal

10

discipline. Now I understand she can never
die, just as nothing can bring me back—

I am the one who comes and goes;
I am the footfall that hovers.

1995

Rosa¹

How she sat there,
the time right inside a place
so wrong it was ready.

That trim name with
its dream of a bench
to rest on. Her sensible coat.

5

Doing nothing was the doing:
the clean flame of her gaze
carved by a camera flash.

How she stood up
when they bent down to retrieve
her purse. That courtesy.

10

2000

Fox Trot Fridays

Thank the stars there's a day
each week to tuck in

the grief, lift your pearls, and
stride brush stride

quick-quick with a
heel-ball-toe. Smooth

5

as Nat King Cole's¹
slow satin smile,

1. Rosa Parks (1913–2005). From a series of poems titled *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*. On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks, an African American seamstress and secretary of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was arrested and taken to jail for refusing to yield her

seat on a bus to a white passenger. Her arrest prompted a boycott of the city bus system and inspired the civil rights movement in the late 1950s and the 1960s.

1. Popular African American jazz singer, songwriter, and pianist (1919–1965).

easy as taking
one day at a time: 10

one man and
one woman,

rib to rib,
with no heartbreak in sight—

just the sweep of Paradise
and the space of a song 15

to count all the wonders in it.

2004

AMY TAN

b. 1952

Born in Oakland, California, to parents who had only recently immigrated from China, Amy Tan emerged as a novelist just when American readers were focusing on multiculturalism, mother-daughter relations, and contrasts between old-country and new-world generations—three important factors in Tan’s own experience. Her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), addresses precisely these issues, drawing its energy from the transitional forces at work on its characters’ multiple cultures. Four sets of mothers and daughters feature in the book, and each pair’s story is a personal narrative that juxtaposes different perspectives and radically different values. The daughters find their mothers’ values alien and threatening, for example, until they learn to understand what their mothers are saying and grasp how a new generation’s life can draw meaning from that of the old. Hence the novel delivers a series of conversations, the dynamics of which express the vital nature of each person.

The historical events behind *The Joy Luck Club* inform the pasts of many Chinese families whose older members immigrated to the United States soon after World War II. From missionary activities going back to the nineteenth century to a wartime alliance with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government (which was even then being challenged by the Communist forces of Mao Zedong), American interests were involved with China. In China Amy Tan’s father, John, worked as a Chinese citizen for the United States Information Service, and in the turbulence leading up to Mao’s victory in 1949 he left for a career with the Baptist ministry in the United States. Her mother’s early life was less kind, fraught with atrocities involving concubinage (the fate of Amy’s grandmother, who eventually killed herself), orphanhood, and an arranged marriage that ended in divorce. After emigrating from China to the United States, she met John Tan and began the marriage that produced two sons plus a daughter who resisted assimilation into the more superficial and materialistic aspects of American culture.

Amy Tan's American childhood took an international turn at age fifteen, when following her father's and older brother's deaths her mother moved the remainder of the family to Switzerland. After graduation Tan returned to the San Francisco Bay Area for college and graduate school, earning a B.A. in English and an M.A. in linguistics. Marriage followed, and some uncompleted doctoral studies led to work as a language-development specialist for disabled children and then as a medical writer. Wanting an outlet from the demands of her professional schedule, she began writing fiction, becoming an immediate success with stories that were later incorporated into *The Joy Luck Club*. In this novel and in a second, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), Tan addressed the daughterly relationship that gave her not only material for fruitful complaint but also grounds for reconciliation, based on her better understanding of her mother's past, a story she had turned a deaf ear to as a rebellious teenager. Sections of this second novel, for example, move back and forth between the mother's narrative and the daughter's, each character fully endowed with a persuasive voice that defines the nature of her being, different as the two experiences are.

Tan has since published other novels and two works for children. She moved toward lighthearted satire in her 2005 novel, *Saving Fish from Drowning*, a chronicle of the adventures and misadventures of some second-generation Chinese Americans who have embarked on a trip to discover the art and culture of ancient China and ancient Burma.

"Two Kinds" first appeared as a short story in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The following text is from *The Joy Luck Club* (1989).

From The Joy Luck Club

Two Kinds

My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You could become instantly famous.

"Of course you can be prodigy, too," my mother told me when I was nine. "You can be best anything. What does Auntie Lindo know? Her daughter, she is only best tricky."

America was where all my mother's hopes lay. She had come here in 1949 after losing everything in China:¹ her mother and father, her family home, her first husband, and two daughters, twin baby girls. But she never looked back with regret. There were so many ways for things to get better.

We didn't immediately pick the right kind of prodigy. At first my mother thought I could be a Chinese Shirley Temple.² We'd watch Shirley's old movies on TV as though they were training films. My mother would poke my arm and say, "*Ni kan*"—You watch. And I would see Shirley tapping her feet, or singing a sailor song, or pursing her lips into a very round O while saying, "Oh my goodness."

"*Ni kan*," said my mother as Shirley's eyes flooded with tears. "You already know how. Don't need talent for crying!"

1. The People's Republic of China was proclaimed on October 10, 1949, as the climactic act of the Chinese Communist Revolution. The Nationalist

government then relocated to the island of Taiwan.

2. American film actress (1928–2014), a child star.

Soon after my mother got this idea about Shirley Temple, she took me to a beauty training school in the Mission district³ and put me in the hands of a student who could barely hold the scissors without shaking. Instead of getting big fat curls, I emerged with an uneven mass of crinkly black fuzz. My mother dragged me off to the bathroom and tried to wet down my hair.

“You look like Negro Chinese,” she lamented, as if I had done this on purpose.

The instructor of the beauty training school had to lop off these soggy clumps to make my hair even again. “Peter Pan⁴ is very popular these days,” the instructor assured my mother. I now had hair the length of a boy’s, with straight-across bangs that hung at a slant two inches above my eyebrows. I liked the haircut and it made me actually look forward to my future fame.

In fact, in the beginning, I was just as excited as my mother, maybe even more so. I pictured this prodigy part of me as many different images, trying each one on for size. I was a dainty ballerina girl standing by the curtains, waiting to hear the right music that would send me floating on my tiptoes. I was like the Christ child lifted out of the straw manger, crying with holy indignity. I was Cinderella⁵ stepping from her pumpkin carriage with sparkly cartoon music filling the air.

In all of my imaginings, I was filled with a sense that I would soon become *perfect*. My mother and father would adore me. I would be beyond reproach. I would never feel the need to sulk for anything.

But sometimes the prodigy in me became impatient. “If you don’t hurry up and get me out of here, I’m disappearing for good,” it warned. “And then you’ll always be nothing.”

Every night after dinner, my mother and I would sit at the Formica⁶ kitchen table. She would present new tests, taking her examples from stories of amazing children she had read in *Ripley’s Believe It or Not*, or *Good Housekeeping*, *Reader’s Digest*,⁷ and a dozen other magazines she kept in a pile in our bathroom. My mother got these magazines from people whose houses she cleaned. And since she cleaned many houses each week, we had a great assortment. She would look through them all, searching for stories about remarkable children.

The first night she brought out a story about a three-year-old boy who knew the capitals of all the states and even most of the European countries. A teacher was quoted as saying the little boy could also pronounce the names of the foreign cities correctly.

“What’s the capital of Finland?” my mother asked me, looking at the magazine story.

All I knew was the capital of California, because Sacramento was the name of the street we lived on in Chinatown. “Nairobi!” I guessed, saying

3. Multicultural neighborhood in San Francisco.

4. Children’s play (1904) by the Scottish playwright and novelist James M. Barrie (1860–1937), basis for a feature cartoon and Broadway musical in the 1950s, in which the protagonist (a boy) wears his hair in a pixelike cut soon favored by many American girls.

5. Stepsister-turned-princess in a Walt Disney animated musical (1950) based on a folktale dating from 16th-century Europe.

6. Trademark for a laminated-plastic kitchen-countertop covering popular in the 1950s.

7. Popular middle-class American magazines of the era.

the most foreign word I could think of. She checked to see if that was possibly one way to pronounce “Helsinki”⁸ before showing me the answer.

The tests got harder—multiplying numbers in my head, finding the queen of hearts in a deck of cards, trying to stand on my head without using my hands, predicting the daily temperatures in Los Angeles, New York, and London.

One night I had to look at a page from the Bible for three minutes and then report everything I could remember. “Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance and⁹ . . . that’s all I remember, Ma,” I said.

And after seeing my mother’s disappointed face once again, something inside of me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations. Before going to bed that night, I looked in the mirror above the bathroom sink and when I saw only my face staring back—and that it would always be this ordinary face—I began to cry. Such a sad, ugly girl! I made high-pitched noises like a crazed animal, trying to scratch out the face in the mirror.

And then I saw what seemed to be the prodigy side of me—because I had never seen that face before. I looked at my reflection, blinking so I could see more clearly. The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful. This girl and I were the same. I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won’ts. I won’t let her change me, I promised myself. I won’t be what I’m not.

So now on nights when my mother presented her tests, I performed listlessly, my head propped on one arm. I pretended to be bored. And I was. I got so bored I started counting the bellows of the foghorns out on the bay¹ while my mother drilled me in other areas. The sound was comforting and reminded me of the cow jumping over the moon.² And the next day, I played a game with myself, seeing if my mother would give up on me before eight bellows. After a while I usually counted only one, maybe two bellows at most. At last she was beginning to give up hope.

Two or three months had gone by without any mention of my being a prodigy again. And then one day my mother was watching *The Ed Sullivan Show*³ on TV. The TV was old and the sound kept shorting out. Every time my mother got halfway up from the sofa to adjust the set, the sound would go back on and Ed would be talking. As soon as she sat down, Ed would go silent again. She got up, the TV broke into loud piano music. She sat down. Silence. Up and down, back and forth, quiet and loud. It was like a stiff embraceless dance between her and the TV set. Finally she stood by the set with her hand on the sound dial.

She seemed entranced by the music, a little frenzied piano piece with this mesmerizing quality, sort of quick passages and then teasing lilting ones before it returned to the quick playful parts.

8. Capital of Finland, in northern Europe. “Chinatown”: ethnic Chinese neighborhood in San Francisco. “Nairobi”: capital of Kenya, in Africa.
9. 2 Chronicles 17:5: “Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand, and all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat; and he had great riches and honor.”

1. San Francisco Bay.

2. A Mother Goose rhyme.

3. Longest-running variety series (1948–71) in American television history, hosted by New York newspaper society and entertainment columnist Ed Sullivan (1902–1974).

“*Ni kan,*” my mother said, calling me over with hurried hand gestures, “Look here.”

I could see why my mother was fascinated by the music. It was being pounded out by a little Chinese girl, about nine years old, with a Peter Pan haircut. The girl had the sauciness of a Shirley Temple. She was proudly modest like a proper Chinese child. And she also did this fancy sweep of a curtsy, so that the fluffy skirt of her white dress cascaded slowly to the floor like the petals of a large carnation.

In spite of these warning signs, I wasn’t worried. Our family had no piano and we couldn’t afford to buy one, let alone reams of sheet music and piano lessons. So I could be generous in my comments when my mother bad-mouthed the little girl on TV.

“Play note right, but doesn’t sound good! No singing sound,” complained my mother.

“What are you picking on her for?” I said carelessly. “She’s pretty good. Maybe she’s not the best, but she’s trying hard.” I knew almost immediately I would be sorry I said that.

“Just like you,” she said. “Not the best. Because you not trying.” She gave a little huff as she let go of the sound dial and sat down on the sofa.

The little Chinese girl sat down also to play an encore of “Anitra’s Dance” by Grieg.⁴ I remember the song, because later on I had to learn how to play it.

Three days after watching *The Ed Sullivan Show*, my mother told me what my schedule would be for piano lessons and piano practice. She had talked to Mr. Chong, who lived on the first floor of our apartment building. Mr. Chong was a retired piano teacher and my mother had traded housecleaning services for weekly lessons and a piano for me to practice on every day, two hours a day, from four until six.

When my mother told me this, I felt as though I had been sent to hell. I whined and then kicked my foot a little when I couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Why don’t you like me the way I am? I’m *not* a genius! I can’t play the piano. And even if I could, I wouldn’t go on TV if you paid me a million dollars!” I cried.

My mother slapped me. “Who ask you be genius?” she shouted. “Only ask you be your best. For you sake. You think I want you be genius? Hnnh! What for! Who ask you!”

“So ungrateful,” I heard her mutter in Chinese. “If she had as much talent as she has temper, she would be famous now.”

Mr. Chong, whom I secretly nicknamed Old Chong, was very strange, always tapping his fingers to the silent music of an invisible orchestra. He looked ancient in my eyes. He had lost most of the hair on top of his head and he wore thick glasses and had eyes that always looked tired and sleepy. But he must have been younger than I thought, since he lived with his mother and was not yet married.

I met Old Lady Chong once and that was enough. She had this peculiar smell like a baby that had done something in its pants. And her fingers felt like a dead person’s, like an old peach I once found in the back of the refrigerator; the skin just slid off the meat when I picked it up.

4. From the *Peer Gynt Suite* (1874–75), by the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (1843–1907).

I soon found out why Old Chong had retired from teaching piano. He was deaf. “Like Beethoven!”⁵ he shouted to me. “We’re both listening only in our head!” And he would start to conduct his frantic silent sonatas.

Our lessons went like this. He would open the book and point to different things, explaining their purpose: “Key! Treble! Bass! No sharps or flats! So this is C major! Listen now and play after me!”

And then he would play the C scale a few times, a simple chord, and then, as if inspired by an old, unreachable itch, he gradually added more notes and running trills and a pounding bass until the music was really something quite grand.

I would play after him, the simple scale, the simple chord, and then I just played some nonsense that sounded like a cat running up and down on top of garbage cans. Old Chong smiled and applauded and then said, “Very good! But now you must learn to keep time!”

So that’s how I discovered that Old Chong’s eyes were too slow to keep up with the wrong notes I was playing. He went through the motions in half-time. To help me keep rhythm, he stood behind me, pushing down on my right shoulder for every beat. He balanced pennies on top of my wrists so I would keep them still as I slowly played scales and arpeggios. He had me curve my hand around an apple and keep that shape when playing chords. He marched stiffly to show me how to make each finger dance up and down, staccato like an obedient little soldier.

He taught me all these things, and that was how I also learned I could be lazy and get away with mistakes, lots of mistakes. If I hit the wrong notes because I hadn’t practiced enough, I never corrected myself. I just kept playing in rhythm. And Old Chong kept conducting his own private reverie.

So maybe I never really gave myself a fair chance. I did pick up the basics pretty quickly, and I might have become a good pianist at that young age. But I was so determined not to try, not to be anybody different that I learned to play only the most ear-splitting preludes, the most discordant hymns.

Over the next year, I practiced like this, dutifully in my own way. And then one day I heard my mother and her friend Lindo Jong both talking in a loud bragging tone of voice so others could hear. It was after church, and I was leaning against the brick wall wearing a dress with stiff white petticoats. Auntie Lindo’s daughter, Waverly, who was about my age, was standing farther down the wall about five feet away. We had grown up together and shared all the closeness of two sisters squabbling over crayons and dolls. In other words, for the most part, we hated each other. I thought she was snotty. Waverly Jong had gained a certain amount of fame as “Chinatown’s Littlest Chinese Chess Champion.”

“She bring home too many trophy,” lamented Auntie Lindo that Sunday. “All day she play chess. All day I have no time do nothing but dust off her winnings.” She threw a scolding look at Waverly, who pretended not to see her.

“You lucky you don’t have this problem,” said Auntie Lindo with a sigh to my mother.

5. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), German composer who began losing his hearing in 1801 and was totally deaf by 1817, yet who continued to compose monumental works.

And my mother squared her shoulders and bragged: “Our problem worse than yours. If we ask Jing-mei wash dish, she hear nothing but music. It’s like you can’t stop this natural talent.”

And right then, I was determined to put a stop to her foolish pride.

A few weeks later, Old Chong and my mother conspired to have me play in a talent show which would be held in the church hall. By then, my parents had saved up enough to buy me a secondhand piano, a black Wurlitzer⁶ spinet with a scarred bench. It was the showpiece of our living room.

For the talent show, I was to play a piece called “Pleading Child” from Schumann’s *Scenes from Childhood*.⁷ It was a simple, moody piece that sounded more difficult than it was. I was supposed to memorize the whole thing, playing the repeat parts twice to make the piece sound longer. But I dawdled over it, playing a few bars and then cheating, looking up to see what notes followed. I never really listened to what I was playing. I daydreamed about being somewhere else, about being someone else.

The part I liked to practice best was the fancy curtsy: right foot out, touch the rose on the carpet with a pointed foot, sweep to the side, left leg bends, look up and smile.

My parents invited all the couples from the Joy Luck Club⁸ to witness my debut. Auntie Lindo and Uncle Tin were there. Waverly and her two older brothers had also come. The first two rows were filled with children both younger and older than I was. The littlest ones got to go first. They recited simple nursery rhymes, squawked out tunes on miniature violins, twirled Hula Hoops;⁹ pranced in pink ballet tutus, and when they bowed or curtsied, the audience would sigh in unison, “Awww,” and then clap enthusiastically.

When my turn came, I was very confident. I remember my childish excitement. It was as if I knew, without a doubt, that the prodigy side of me really did exist. I had no fear whatsoever, no nervousness. I remember thinking to myself, This is it! This is it! I looked out over the audience, at my mother’s blank face, my father’s yawn, Auntie Lindo’s stiff-lipped smile, Waverly’s sulky expression. I had on a white dress layered with sheets of lace, and a pink bow in my Peter Pan haircut. As I sat down I envisioned people jumping to their feet and Ed Sullivan rushing up to introduce me to everyone on TV.

And I started to play. It was so beautiful. I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that at first I didn’t worry how I would sound. So it was a surprise to me when I hit the first wrong note and I realized something didn’t sound quite right. And then I hit another and another followed that. A chill started at the top of my head and began to trickle down. Yet I couldn’t stop playing, as though my hands were bewitched. I kept thinking my fingers would adjust themselves back, like a train switching to the right track. I played this strange jumble through two repeats, the sour notes staying with me all the way to the end.

6. The Wurlitzer Company, manufacturer of pianos, organs, and jukeboxes.

7. That is, *Kinderszenen* (1838), a set of piano pieces by the German composer Robert Alexander Schumann (1810–1856).

8. In Tan’s novel, a four-member club formed to play mah-jongg (a table game popular in its present form since 1920) and continued as a social unit.

9. Exercise toy popular as a novelty item in the 1950s.

When I stood up, I discovered my legs were shaking. Maybe I had just been nervous and the audience, like Old Chong, had seen me go through the right motions and had not heard anything wrong at all. I swept my right foot out, went down on my knee, looked up and smiled. The room was quiet, except for Old Chong, who was beaming and shouting, “Bravo! Bravo! Well done!” But then I saw my mother’s face, her stricken face. The audience clapped weakly, and as I walked back to my chair, with my whole face quivering as I tried not to cry, I heard a little boy whisper loudly to his mother, “That was awful,” and the mother whispered back, “Well, she certainly tried.”

And now I realized how many people were in the audience, the whole world it seemed. I was aware of eyes burning into my back. I felt the shame of my mother and father as they sat stiffly throughout the rest of the show.

We could have escaped during intermission. Pride and some strange sense of honor must have anchored my parents to their chairs. And so we watched it all: the eighteen-year-old boy with a fake mustache who did a magic show and juggled flaming hoops while riding a unicycle. The breasted girl with white makeup who sang from *Madama Butterfly*¹ and got honorable mention. And the eleven-year-old boy who won first prize playing a tricky violin song that sounded like a busy bee.

After the show, the Hsus, the Jongs, and the St. Clairs from the Joy Luck Club came up to my mother and father.

“Lots of talented kids,” Auntie Lindo said vaguely, smiling broadly.

“That was somethin’ else,” said my father, and I wondered if he was referring to me in a humorous way, or whether he even remembered what I had done.

Waverly looked at me and shrugged her shoulders. “You aren’t a genius like me,” she said matter-of-factly. And if I hadn’t felt so bad, I would have pulled her braids and punched her stomach.

But my mother’s expression was what devastated me: a quiet, blank look that said she had lost everything. I felt the same way, and it seemed as if everybody were now coming up, like gawkers at the scene of an accident, to see what parts were actually missing. When we got on the bus to go home, my father was humming the busy-bee tune and my mother was silent. I kept thinking she wanted to wait until we got home before shouting at me. But when my father unlocked the door to our apartment, my mother walked in and then went to the back, into the bedroom. No accusations. No blame. And in a way, I felt disappointed. I had been waiting for her to start shouting, so I could shout back and cry and blame her for all my misery.

I assumed my talent-show fiasco meant I never had to play the piano again. But two days later, after school, my mother came out of the kitchen and saw me watching TV.

“Four clock,” she reminded me as if it were any other day. I was stunned, as though she were asking me to go through the talent-show torture again. I wedged myself more tightly in front of the TV.

“Turn off TV,” she called from the kitchen five minutes later.

1. Opera (1904), set in Japan, by the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924).

I didn't budge. And then I decided. I didn't have to do what my mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China. I had listened to her before and look what happened. She was the stupid one.

She came out from the kitchen and stood in the arched entryway of the living room. "Four clock," she said once again, louder.

"I'm not going to play anymore," I said nonchalantly. "Why should I? I'm not a genius."

She walked over and stood in front of the TV. I saw her chest was heaving up and down in an angry way.

"No!" I said, and I now felt stronger, as if my true self had finally emerged. So this was what had been inside me all along.

"No! I won't!" I screamed.

She yanked me by the arm, pulled me off the floor, snapped off the TV. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me toward the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up and onto the hard bench. I was sobbing by now, looking at her bitterly. Her chest was heaving even more and her mouth was open, smiling crazily as if she were pleased I was crying.

"You want me to be someone that I'm not!" I sobbed. "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!"

"Only two kinds of daughters," she shouted in Chinese. "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!"

"Then I wish I wasn't your daughter. I wish you weren't my mother," I shouted. As I said these things I got scared. It felt like worms and toads and slimy things crawling out of my chest, but it also felt good, as if this awful side of me had surfaced, at last.

"Too late change this," said my mother shrilly.

And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point. I wanted to see it spill over. And that's when I remembered the babies she had lost in China, the ones we never talked about. "Then I wish I'd never been born!" I shouted. "I wish I were dead! Like them."

It was as if I had said the magic words. *Alakazam!*²—and her face went blank, her mouth closed, her arms went slack, and she backed out of the room, stunned, as if she were blowing away like a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, lifeless.

It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn't get straight As. I didn't become class president. I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college.

For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me.

And for all those years, we never talked about the disaster at the recital or my terrible accusations afterward at the piano bench. All that remained unchecked, like a betrayal that was now unspeakable. So I never found a way to ask her why she had hoped for something so large that failure was inevitable.

2. A magical incantation (slang).

And even worse, I never asked her what frightened me the most: Why had she given up hope?

For after our struggle at the piano, she never mentioned my playing again. The lessons stopped. The lid to the piano was closed, shutting out the dust, my misery, and her dreams.

So she surprised me. A few years ago, she offered to give me the piano, for my thirtieth birthday. I had not played in all those years. I saw the offer as a sign of forgiveness, a tremendous burden removed.

"Are you sure?" I asked shyly. "I mean, won't you and Dad miss it?"

"No, this your piano," she said firmly. "Always your piano. You only one can play."

"Well, I probably can't play anymore," I said. "It's been years."

"You pick up fast," said my mother, as if she knew this was certain. "You have natural talent. You could be genius if you want to."

"No I couldn't."

"You just not trying," said my mother. And she was neither angry nor sad. She said it as if to announce a fact that could never be disproved. "Take it," she said.

But I didn't at first. It was enough that she had offered it to me. And after that, every time I saw it in my parents' living room, standing in front of the bay windows, it made me feel proud, as if it were a shiny trophy I had won back.

Last week I sent a tuner over to my parents' apartment and had the piano reconditioned, for purely sentimental reasons. My mother had died a few months before and I had been getting things in order for my father, a little bit at a time. I put the jewelry in special silk pouches. The sweaters she had knitted in yellow, pink, bright orange—all the colors I hated—I put those in mothproof boxes. I found some old Chinese silk dresses, the kind with little slits up the sides. I rubbed the old silk against my skin, then wrapped them in tissue and decided to take them home with me.

After I had the piano tuned, I opened the lid and touched the keys. It sounded even richer than I remembered. Really, it was a very good piano. Inside the bench were the same exercise notes with handwritten scales, the same secondhand music books with their covers held together with yellow tape.

I opened up the Schumann book to the dark little piece I had played at the recital. It was on the left-hand side of the page, "Pleading Child." It looked more difficult than I remembered. I played a few bars, surprised at how easily the notes came back to me.

And for the first time, or so it seemed, I noticed the piece on the right-hand side. It was called "Perfectly Contented." I tried to play this one as well. It had a lighter melody but the same flowing rhythm and turned out to be quite easy. "Pleading Child" was shorter but slower; "Perfectly Contented" was longer, but faster. And after I played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song.

SANDRA CISNEROS

b. 1954

Sandra Cisneros began writing at age ten, much like the young Chicana narrator of *The House on Mango Street* (1984), the volume of interrelated vignettes from a child's perspective that brought Cisneros her first major attention. In brief, sharply drawn segments, the narrator, Esperanza, conveys the ambience of growing up in Chicago's Mexican American community. The social bond of this neighborhood eases the contrast between Esperanza's nurturing family and the more hostile forces of poverty and racism. Cisneros cultivates a sense of warmth and naive humor for her protagonists, qualities that are evident in introductory parts to *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), a short-story collection that also focuses on young women facing hostile forces. Without sentimentalizing or idealizing her narrator's perspective, Cisneros presents glimpses of a world full of adult challenges and multicultural complexities. Sex is a topic in all Cisneros's work, including her poetry collected as *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987) and *Loose Woman* (1994)—sometimes gentle and even silly, other times brutally assaultive. What remains constant is the author's view that by romanticizing sexual relations women cooperate with a male view that can be oppressive, even physically destructive. As has been said of the protagonist of her 2002 novel, *Caramelo*, Cisneros is "caught between here and there." Yet "here" and "there" are not as dichotomous as young versus old, female versus male, or Mexico versus the United States. Instead, the flow of experience between these poles yields her work's subject: people finding their own lifestyles in the space between fixed boundaries. Because this intervening space is so rich in creative potential, Cisneros can balance unhappiness with humor and find personal victories where others might see social defeat.

Born in Chicago, the child of a Mexican father and a Mexican American mother, Cisneros spent parts of her childhood in Texas and Mexico as well. Her Catholic-school background led to a B.A. degree from Chicago's Loyola University, after which she earned a graduate degree in creative writing from the University of Iowa's Writers Workshop. Teaching in San Antonio, Texas, she used her position as a writer and an educator to champion Chicana feminism, especially as this movement combines cultural issues with women's concerns. In raising controversy by having her house painted very brightly, she openly questioned monocultural "historical districts" and "community covenants." *Whose history?* Cisneros asked. *Which* community sets standards? (Through research she established that her decorating style was in accordance with her home's background and that the standards used to dispute her choice were arbitrary.) A dissatisfaction with the politics of publishing has made her an advocate of small-press dissemination. Most of all, as in the story reprinted here, she is eager to show the rich dynamics of characters existing in the blend of Mexican and American cultures that begins with speaking two languages and extends to almost every aspect of life. Spanish words, Mexican holidays, ethnic foods, and localized religious practices punctuate her narratives; her characters have a facility with cultural play that reflects the bilingual and bicultural life shared by millions of Mexican Americans.

The following text is from *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991).

Woman Hollering Creek

The day Don Serafín gave Juan Pedro Martínez Sánchez permission to take Cleófilas Enriqueta DeLeón Hernández as his bride, across her father's threshold, over several miles of dirt road and several miles of paved, over one border and beyond to a town *en el otro lado*—on the other side—already did he divine the morning his daughter would raise her hand over her eyes, look south, and dream of returning to the chores that never ended, six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old man's complaints.

He had said, after all, in the hubbub of parting: I am your father, I will never abandon you. He *had* said that, hadn't he, when he hugged and then let her go. But at the moment Cleófilas was busy looking for Chela, her maid of honor, to fulfill their bouquet conspiracy. She would not remember her father's parting words until later. *I am your father, I will never abandon you.*

Only now as a mother did she remember. Now, when she and Juan Pedrito sat by the creek's edge. How when a man and a woman love each other, sometimes that love sours. But a parent's love for a child, a child's for its parents, is another thing entirely.

This is what Cleófilas thought evenings when Juan Pedro did not come home, and she lay on her side of the bed listening to the hollow roar of the interstate, a distant dog barking, the pecan trees rustling like ladies in stiff petticoats—*shh-shh-shh, shh-shh-shh*—soothing her to sleep.

In the town where she grew up, there isn't very much to do except accompany the aunts and godmothers to the house of one or the other to play cards. Or walk to the cinema to see this week's film again, speckled and with one hair quivering annoyingly on the screen. Or to the center of town to order a milk shake that will appear in a day and a half as a pimple on her backside. Or to the girlfriend's house to watch the latest *telenovela*¹ episode and try to copy the way the women comb their hair, wear their makeup.

But what Cleófilas has been waiting for, has been whispering and sighing and giggling for, has been anticipating since she was old enough to lean against the window displays of gauze and butterflies and lace, is passion. Not the kind on the cover of the *¡Alarma!*² magazines, mind you, where the lover is photographed with the bloody fork she used to salvage her good name. But passion in its purest crystalline essence. The kind the books and songs and *telenovelas* describe when one finds, finally, the great love of one's life, and does whatever one can, must do, at whatever the cost.

Tú o Nadie. "You or No One." The title of the current favorite *telenovela*. The beautiful Lucía Méndez having to put up with all kinds of hardships of the heart, separation and betrayal, and loving, always loving no matter what, because *that* is the most important thing, and did you see Lucía Méndez on the Bayer aspirin commercials—wasn't she lovely? Does she dye her hair do you think? Cleófilas is going to go to the *farmacia*³ and buy a hair rinse; her girlfriend Chela will apply it—it's not that difficult at all.

1. Serialized TV melodrama (Spanish).

2. Graphic, sensationalistic Mexican magazine

published since 1963.

3. Pharmacy, drugstore (Spanish).

Because you didn't watch last night's episode when Lucía confessed she loved him more than anyone in her life. In her life! And she sings the song "You or No One" in the beginning and end of the show. *Tú o Nadie*. Somehow one ought to live one's life like that, don't you think? You or no one. Because to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow. In the end.

Seguín. She had liked the sound of it. Far away and lovely. Not like *Monclova*. *Coahuila*.⁴ Ugly.

Seguín, Tejas. A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money. She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Méndez. And have a lovely house, and wouldn't Chela be jealous.

And yes, they will drive all the way to Laredo⁵ to get her wedding dress. That's what they say. Because Juan Pedro wants to get married right away, without a long engagement since he can't take off too much time from work. He has a very important position in Seguín with, with . . . a beer company, I think. Or was it tires? Yes, he has to be back. So they will get married in the spring when he can take off work, and then they will drive off in his new pickup—did you see it?—to their new home in Seguín. Well, not exactly new, but they're going to repaint the house. You know newlyweds. New paint and new furniture. Why not? He can afford it. And later on add maybe a room or two for the children. May they be blessed with many.

Well, you'll see. Cleófilas has always been so good with her sewing machine. A little *rrrr, rrrr, rrrr* of the machine and ¡*zas!* Miracles. She's always been so clever, that girl. Poor thing. And without even a mama to advise her on things like her wedding night. Well, may God help her. What with a father with a head like a burro, and those six clumsy brothers. Well, what do you think! Yes, I'm going to the wedding. Of course! The dress I want to wear just needs to be altered a teensy bit to bring it up to date. See, I saw a new style last night that I thought would suit me. Did you watch last night's episode of *The Rich Also Cry*?⁶ Well, did you notice the dress the mother was wearing?

La Gritona.⁷ Such a funny name for such a lovely *arroyo*.⁸ But that's what they called the creek that ran behind the house. Though no one could say whether the woman had hollered from anger or pain. The natives only knew the *arroyo* one crossed on the way to San Antonio, and then once again on the way back, was called Woman Hollering, a name no one from these parts questioned, little less understood. *Pues, allá de los indios, quién sabe*⁹—who knows, the townspeople shrugged, because it was of no concern to their lives how this trickle of water received its curious name.

"What do you want to know for?" Trini the laundromat attendant asked in the same gruff Spanish she always used whenever she gave Cleófilas change or yelled at her for something. First for putting too much soap in the machines. Later, for sitting on a washer. And still later, after Juan Pedrito was born, for not understanding that in this country you cannot let your baby

4. Respectively a town and state in Mexico, the latter bordering Texas. "Seguín": city in Guadalupe County, south-central Texas.

5. City in southwestern Texas, on the Mexican border.

6. First global soap opera (production beginning

in Mexico in 1979), exported to Russia, China, the United States, and other countries.

7. The Shouter, Yeller, Hollerer (Spanish).

8. Stream (Spanish).

9. Well, beyond the Indians, who knows (Spanish).

walk around with no diaper and his pee-pee hanging out, it wasn't nice, ¿entiendes? Pues.¹

How could Cleófilas explain to a woman like this why the name Woman Hollering fascinated her. Well, there was no sense talking to Trini.

On the other hand there were the neighbor ladies, one on either side of the house they rented near the *arroyo*. The woman Soledad on the left, the woman Dolores on the right.

The neighbor lady Soledad liked to call herself a widow, though how she came to be one was a mystery. Her husband had either died, or run away with an ice-house² floozie, or simply gone out for cigarettes one afternoon and never came back. It was hard to say which since Soledad, as a rule, didn't mention him.

In the other house lived *la señora*³ Dolores, kind and very sweet, but her house smelled too much of incense and candles from the altars that burned continuously in memory of two sons who had died in the last war and one husband who had died shortly after from grief. The neighbor lady Dolores divided her time between the memory of these men and her garden, famous for its sunflowers—so tall they had to be supported with broom handles and old boards; red red cockscombs, fringed and bleeding a thick menstrual color; and, especially, roses whose sad scent reminded Cleófilas of the dead. Each Sunday *la señora* Dolores clipped the most beautiful of these flowers and arranged them on three modest headstones at the Seguin cemetery.

The neighbor ladies, Soledad, Dolores, they might've known once the name of the *arroyo* before it turned English but they did not know now. They were too busy remembering the men who had left through either choice or circumstance and would never come back.

Pain or rage, Cleófilas wondered when she drove over the bridge the first time as a newlywed and Juan Pedro had pointed it out. *La Gritona*, he had said, and she had laughed. Such a funny name for a creek so pretty and full of happily ever after.

The first time she had been so surprised she didn't cry out or try to defend herself. She had always said she would strike back if a man, any man, were to strike her.

But when the moment came, and he slapped her once, and then again, and again; until the lip split and bled an orchid of blood, she didn't fight back, she didn't break into tears, she didn't run away as she imagined she might when she saw such things in the *telenovelas*.

In her own home her parents had never raised a hand to each other or to their children. Although she admitted she may have been brought up a little leniently as an only daughter—*la consentida*,⁴ the princess—there were some things she would never tolerate. Ever.

Instead, when it happened the first time, when they were barely man and wife, she had been so stunned, it left her speechless, motionless, numb. She had done nothing but reach up to the heat on her mouth and stare at the blood on her hand as if even then she didn't understand.

1. Do you understand? Well (Spanish).

2. Tavern.

3. The lady (Spanish).

4. The spoiled one (Spanish).

She could think of nothing to say, said nothing. Just stroked the dark curls of the man who wept and would weep like a child, his tears of repentance and shame, this time and each.

The men at the ice house. From what she can tell, from the times during her first year when still a newlywed she is invited and accompanies her husband, sits mute beside their conversation, waits and sips a beer until it grows warm, twists a paper napkin into a knot, then another into a fan, one into a rose, nods her head, smiles, yawns, politely grins, laughs at the appropriate moments, leans against her husband's sleeve, tugs at his elbow, and finally becomes good at predicting where the talk will lead, from this Cleófilas concludes each is nightly trying to find the truth lying at the bottom of the bottle like a gold doubloon on the sea floor.

They want to tell each other what they want to tell themselves. But what is bumping like a helium balloon at the ceiling of the brain never finds its way out. It bubbles and rises, it gurgles in the throat, it rolls across the surface of the tongue, and erupts from the lips—a belch.

If they are lucky, there are tears at the end of the long night. At any given moment, the fists try to speak. They are dogs chasing their own tails before lying down to sleep, trying to find a way, a route, an out, and—finally—get some peace.

In the morning sometimes before he opens his eyes. Or after they have finished loving. Or at times when he is simply across from her at the table putting pieces of food into his mouth and chewing. Cleófilas thinks, This is the man I have waited my whole life for.

Not that he isn't a good man. She has to remind herself why she loves him when she changes the baby's Pampers, or when she mops the bathroom floor, or tries to make the curtains for the doorways without doors, or whiten the linen. Or wonder a little when he kicks the refrigerator and says he hates this shitty house and is going out where he won't be bothered with the baby's howling and her suspicious questions, and her requests to fix this and this and this because if she had any brains in her head she'd realize he's been up before the rooster earning his living to pay for the food in her belly and the roof over her head and would have to wake up again early the next day so why can't you just leave me in peace, woman.

He is not very tall, no, and he doesn't look like the men on the *telenovelas*. His face still scarred from acne. And he has a bit of a belly from all the beer he drinks. Well, he's always been husky.

This man who farts and belches and snores as well as laughs and kisses and holds her. Somehow this husband whose whiskers she finds each morning in the sink, whose shoes she must air each evening on the porch, this husband who cuts his fingernails in public, laughs loudly, curses like a man, and demands each course of dinner be served on a separate plate like at his mother's, as soon as he gets home, on time or late, and who doesn't care at all for music or *telenovelas* or romance or roses or the moon floating pearly over the *arroyo*, or through the bedroom window for that matter, shut the blinds and go back to sleep, this man, this father, this rival, this keeper, this lord, this master, this husband till kingdom come.

A doubt. Slender as a hair. A washed cup set back on the shelf wrong-side-up. Her lipstick, and body talc, and hairbrush all arranged in the bathroom a different way.

No. Her imagination. The house the same as always. Nothing.

Coming home from the hospital with her new son, her husband. Something comforting in discovering her house slippers beneath the bed, the faded housecoat where she left it on the bathroom hook. Her pillow. Their bed.

Sweet sweet homecoming. Sweet as the scent of face powder in the air, jasmine, sticky liquor.

Smudged fingerprint on the door. Crushed cigarette in a glass. Wrinkle in the brain crumpling to a crease.

Sometimes she thinks of her father's house. But how could she go back there? What a disgrace. What would the neighbors say? Coming home like that with one baby on her hip and one in the oven. Where's your husband?

The town of gossips. The town of dust and despair. Which she has traded for this town of gossips. This town of dust, despair. Houses farther apart perhaps, though no more privacy because of it. No leafy *zócalo*⁵ in the center of the town, though the murmur of talk is clear enough all the same. No huddled whispering on the church steps each Sunday. Because here the whispering begins at sunset at the ice house instead.

This town with its silly pride for a bronze pecan the size of a baby carriage in front of the city hall. TV repair shop, drugstore, hardware, dry cleaner's, chiropractor's, liquor store, bail bonds, empty storefront, and nothing, nothing, nothing of interest. Nothing one could walk to, at any rate. Because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home. Or you drive. If you're rich enough to own, allowed to drive, your own car.

There is no place to go. Unless one counts the neighbor ladies. Soledad on one side, Dolores on the other. Or the creek.

Don't go out there after dark, *mi'jita*.⁶ Stay near the house. *No es bueno para la salud*.⁷ Mala suerte. Bad luck. *Mal aire*.⁸ You'll get sick and the baby too. You'll catch a fright wandering about in the dark, and then you'll see how right we were.

The stream sometimes only a muddy puddle in the summer, though now in the springtime, because of the rains, a good-size alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own, all day and all night calling in its high, silver voice. Is it La Llorona,⁹ the weeping woman? La Llorona, who drowned her own children. Perhaps La Llorona is the one they named the creek after, she thinks, remembering all the stories she learned as a child.

La Llorona calling to her. She is sure of it. Cleófilas sets the baby's Donald Duck blanket on the grass. Listens. The day sky turning to night. The baby pulling up fistfuls of grass and laughing. La Llorona. Wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness under the trees.

5. Town square (Spanish).

6. My daughter (Spanish).

7. It's not good for one's health (Spanish).

8. Bad air (Spanish).

9. The Woman Who Cries (Spanish), a spurned mistress of Mexican legend who drowned her children and was fated to eternally seek their recovery.

What she needs is . . . and made a gesture as if to yank a woman's buttocks to his groin. Maximiliano, the foul-smelling fool from across the road, said this and set the men laughing, but Cleófilas just muttered. *Grosera*,¹ and went on washing dishes.

She knew he said it not because it was true, but more because it was he who needed to sleep with a woman, instead of drinking each night at the ice house and stumbling home alone.

Maximiliano who was said to have killed his wife in an ice-house brawl when she came at him with a mop. I had to shoot, he had said—she was armed.

Their laughter outside the kitchen window. Her husband's, his friends'. Manolo, Beto, Efraín, el Perico.² Maximiliano.

Was Cleófilas just exaggerating as her husband always said? It seemed the newspapers were full of such stories. This woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-worker. Always. The same grisly news in the pages of the dailies. She dunked a glass under the soapy water for a moment—shivered.

He had thrown a book. Hers. From across the room. A hot welt across the cheek. She could forgive that. But what stung more was the fact it was *her* book, a love story by Corín Tellado,³ what she loved most now that she lived in the U.S., without a television set, without the *telenovelas*.

Except now and again when her husband was away and she could manage it, the few episodes glimpsed at the neighbor lady Soledad's house because Dolores didn't care for that sort of thing, though Soledad was often kind enough to retell what had happened on what episode of *María de Nadie*,⁴ the poor Argentine country girl who had the ill fortune of falling in love with the beautiful son of the Arrocha family, the very family she worked for, whose roof she slept under and whose floors she vacuumed, while in that same house, with the dust brooms and floor cleaners as witnesses, the square-jawed Juan Carlos Arrocha had uttered words of love, I love you, María, listen to me, *mi querida*,⁵ but it was she who had to say No, no, we are not of the same class, and remind him it was not his place nor hers to fall in love, while all the while her heart was breaking, can you imagine.

Cleófilas thought her life would have to be like that, like a *telenovela*, only now the episodes got sadder and sadder. And there were no commercials in between for comic relief. And no happy ending in sight. She thought this when she sat with the baby out by the creek behind the house. Celófilas de . . . ? But somehow she would have to change her name to Topazio, or Yesenia, Cristal, Adriana, Stefania, Andrea, something more poetic than Cleófilas. Everything happened to women with names like jewels. But what happened to a Cleófilas? Nothing. But a crack in the face.

1. Vulgar, crude (Spanish).

2. The Parakeet (Spanish).

3. Pseudonym of María del Socorro Tellado López (1927–2009), Spanish novelist.

4. *María of No One* (Spanish), television series produced in Argentina.

5. My dear (Spanish).

Because the doctor has said so. She has to go. To make sure the new baby is all right, so there won't be any problems when he's born, and the appointment card says next Tuesday. Could he please take her. And that's all.

No, she won't mention it. She promises. If the doctor asks she can say she fell down the front steps or slipped when she was out in the backyard, slipped out back, she could tell him that. She has to go back next Tuesday, Juan Pedro, please, for the new baby. For their child.

She could write to her father and ask maybe for money, just a loan, for the new baby's medical expenses. Well then if he'd rather she didn't. All right, she won't. Please don't anymore. Please don't. She knows it's difficult saving money with all the bills they have, but how else are they going to get out of debt with the truck payments? And after the rent and the food and the electricity and the gas and the water and the who-knows-what, well, there's hardly anything left. But please, at least for the doctor visit. She won't ask for anything else. She has to. Why is she so anxious? Because.

Because she is going to make sure the baby is not turned around backward this time to split her down the center. Yes. Next Tuesday at five-thirty. I'll have Juan Pedrito dressed and ready. But those are the only shoes he has. I'll polish them, and we'll be ready. As soon as you come from work. We won't make you ashamed.

Felice? It's me, Graciela.

No, I can't talk louder. I'm at work.

Look, I need kind of a favor. There's a patient, a lady here who's got a problem.

Well, wait a minute. Are you listening to me or what?

I can't talk real loud 'cause her husband's in the next room.

Well, would you just listen?

I was going to do this sonogram on her—she's pregnant, right?—and she just starts crying on me. *Híjole*,⁶ Felice! This poor lady's got black-and-blue marks all over. I'm not kidding.

From her husband. Who else? Another one of those brides from across the border. And her family's all in Mexico.

Shit. You think they're going to help her? Give me a break. This lady doesn't even speak English. She hasn't been allowed to call home or write or nothing. That's why I'm calling you.

She needs a ride.

Not to Mexico, you goof. Just to the Greyhound.⁷ In San Anto.

No, just a ride. She's got her own money. All you'd have to do is drop her off in San Antonio on your way home. Come on, Felice. Please? If we don't help her, who will? I'd drive her myself, but she needs to be on that bus before her husband gets home from work. What do you say?

I don't know. Wait.

Right away, tomorrow even.

Well, if tomorrow's no good for you . . .

It's a date, Felice. Thursday. At the Cash N Carry⁸ off I-10. Noon. She'll be ready.

Oh, and her name's Cleófilas.

6. Shoot! or Gee! (Spanish).

7. Long-distance bus line.

8. Retail store.

I don't know. One of those Mexican saints, I guess. A martyr or something.

Cleófilas. C-L-E-O-F-I-L-A-S. Cle. O. Fi. Las. Write it down.

Thanks, Felice. When her kid's born she'll have to name her after us, right?

Yeah, you got it. A regular soap opera sometimes. *Qué vida, comadre. Bueno*⁹ bye.

All morning that flutter of half-fear, half-doubt. At any moment Juan Pedro might appear in the doorway. On the street. At the Cash N Carry. Like in the dreams she dreamed.

There was that to think about, yes, until the woman in the pickup drove up. Then there wasn't time to think about anything but the pickup pointed toward San Antonio. Put your bags in the back and get in.

But when they drove across the *arroyo*, the driver opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi. Which startled not only Cleófilas, but Juan Pedrito as well.

Pues,¹ look how cute. I scared you two, right? Sorry. Should've warned you. Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler. She said this in a Spanish pocked with English and laughed. Did you ever notice, Felice continued, how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin. She was laughing again.

That's why I like the name of that *arroyo*. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right?

Everything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Cleófilas. The fact that she drove a pickup. A pickup, mind you, but when Cleófilas asked if it was her husband's, she said she didn't have a husband. The pickup was hers. She herself had chosen it. She herself was paying for it.

I used to have a Pontiac Sunbird.² But those cars are for *viejas*.³ Pussy cars. Now this here is a *real* car.

What kind of talk was that coming from a woman? Cleófilas thought. But then again, Felice was like no woman she'd ever met. Can you imagine, when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy, she would say later to her father and brothers. Just like that. Who would've thought?

Who would've? Pain or rage, perhaps, but not a hoot like the one Felice had just let go. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, Felice had said.

Then Felice began laughing again, but it wasn't Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water.

9. What a life, girlfriend, well (Spanish).

1. Well (Spanish).

2. Compact American automobile.

3. Old ladies (Spanish).

LOUISE ERDRICH

b. 1954

Louise Erdrich grew up in the small town of Wahpeton, North Dakota, on the Minnesota border. Her mother was French Chippewa, her maternal grandmother was tribal chairman on the Turtle Mountain Reservation, and both of her parents worked in the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in Wahpeton. She wrote stories as a child, encouraged by her father, who paid her a nickel for each one, but Erdrich's growing up was not marked by a special awareness of her Chippewa background. She has said that she never thought about "what was Native American and what wasn't. . . . There wasn't a political climate at the time about Indian rights." The eldest of seven children, she "grew up just taking it all in as something that was part of me."

In 1972 she entered Dartmouth College, participating in a Native American studies program run by Michael Dorris—himself part American Indian and a writer—whom eventually she would marry (a relationship ending with their separation and his suicide in 1997). In her undergraduate years she won prizes for poetry and fiction and worked at a variety of jobs, such as teaching poetry in prisons, editing a Boston Indian Council newspaper, and flag-signaling on a construction site. After deciding on a career as a writer, she earned an MFA degree at Johns Hopkins, for which degree she submitted a number of poems—later to appear in her collection *Jacklight* (1984)—and part of a novel. There followed the usual sending out of poems and stories, the rejection slips, eventually the acceptances.

Her first novel, *Love Medicine*, which won the National Book Critics Circle award for 1984, began as a short story. Collaborating with her husband, she not only expanded the story but planned the resulting novel as the first of a tetralogy, ranging over different periods of time and focusing on the lives of two Chippewa families. Her interest in the interaction of quirky, passionate, complex individuals—Native American, mixed blood, German American, or Anglo—lies at the center of her fiction.

Successive chapters of *Love Medicine* jump from 1981 to 1934 to 1948, each chapter told through a particular character's point of view (sometimes we see the same event from succeeding points of view). But each individual chapter is more a discrete whole than is the case with a traditional novel, a technique Erdrich uses in many of her novels, including *Tracks* (1988), the second chapter of which was published as the story "Fleur" (printed here). Like many of Erdrich's narratives, *Tracks* draws context from High Plains Dakotas town life, where Anglo and Native American cultures meet (if not mix).

Erdrich's style is easy, offhand, quietly unostentatious, but her language often has an unpredictability and sense of surprise, as in the first paragraph of "The Red Convertible," whose protagonist, Lyman Lamartine, tells us:

I was the first one to drive a convertible on my reservation. And of course, it was red, a red Olds. I owned that car along with my brother Henry Junior. We owned it together until his boots filled with water on a windy night and he bought out my share. Now Henry owns the whole car, and his younger brother (that's myself) Lyman walks everywhere he goes.

Such clarity and directness are only part of the story, however, since her style also calls upon lyric resources, notable in the following sentence from her second novel,

The Beet Queen: “After the miraculous sheets of black ice came the floods, stranding boards and snaky knots of debris high in the branches, leaving brown leeches to dry like raisins on the sidewalks when the water receded, and leaving the smell of river mud, a rotten sweetness, in the backyards and gutters.”

Native American oral expression does not distinguish between prose and poetry, and like many Native American writers Erdrich works in several forms. “I began as a poet, writing poetry,” she has said. “I began to tell stories in poems.” The lyrical descriptions in her fiction resemble the language of her poems, and the characterizations and narratives in her poetry resemble those of her fiction. Her most recent poetry collection, *Original Fire* (2003), presents new poems together with work from two earlier collections, *Jacklight* and *Baptism of Desire* (1989). Among the previously published poems are “The Butcher’s Wife,” which has close affinities in setting and character to her novels, and “The Potchikoo Stories,” a group of prose poems about the mythical Potchikoo’s life and afterlife. “Grief,” a new poem, suggests the traditions of imagist poetry. But in the end such generic distinctions run counter to Erdrich’s fusion of storytelling modes.

Like her fiction, Erdrich’s poetry sometimes offers realistic accounts of small-town life and sometimes retells mythical stories. “I was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move” exemplifies her lyrical description and her mythical imagination. Many of the poems also reflect Erdrich’s awareness of the historical and ongoing devastations of Native American life, what she calls in the poem “Dear John Wayne” “the history that brought us all here.” Whatever forms her storytelling takes, its linguistic resources and mixture of grief, humor, anger, and tenderness deepen our understanding of the complexities of experience.

Dear John Wayne¹

August and the drive-in picture is packed.
 We lounge on the hood of the Pontiac
 surrounded by the slow-burning spirals they sell
 at the window, to vanquish the hordes of mosquitoes.
 Nothing works. They break through the smoke screen for blood. 5

Always the lookout spots the Indians first,
 spread north to south, barring progress.
 The Sioux or some other Plains bunch²
 in spectacular columns, ICBM missiles,³
 feathers bristling in the meaningful sunset. 10

The drum breaks. There will be no parlance.
 Only the arrows whining, a death-cloud of nerves
 swarming down on the settlers
 who die beautifully, tumbling like dust weeds
 into the history that brought us all here 15
 together: this wide screen beneath the sign of the bear.

1. American movie actor (1907–1979) who embodied the image of the strong, taciturn cowboy or soldier, and who in many ways personified the dominant American values of his era. He died of cancer.

2. The Sioux (Lakota) are a North American Plains Indian people.

3. Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, developed starting in 1971.

The sky fills, acres of blue squint and eye
 that the crowd cheers. His face moves over us,
 a thick cloud of vengeance, pitted
 like the land that was once flesh. Each rut, 20
 each scar makes a promise: *It is*
not over, this fight, not as long as you resist.

Everything we see belongs to us.

A few laughing Indians fall over the hood
 slipping in the hot spilled butter. 25
The eye sees a lot, John, but the heart is so blind.
Death makes us owners of nothing.
 He smiles, a horizon of teeth
 the credits reel over, and then the white fields

again blowing in the true-to-life dark. 30
 The dark films over everything.
 We get into the car
 scratching our mosquito bites, speechless and small
 as people are when the movie is done.
 We are back in our skins. 35

How can we help but keep hearing his voice,
 the flip side of the sound track, still playing:
Come on, boys, we got them
where we want them, drunk, running.
They'll give us what we want, what we need. 40
 Even his disease was the idea of taking everything.
 Those cells, burning, doubling, splitting out of their skins.

1984

I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move

We watched from the house
 as the river grew, helpless
 and terrible in its unfamiliar body.
 Wrestling everything into it,
 the water wrapped around trees 5
 until their life-hold was broken.
 They went down, one by one,
 and the river dragged off their covering.

Nests of the herons, roots washed to bones,
 snags of soaked bark on the shoreline: 10
 a whole forest pulled through the teeth
 of the spillway. Trees surfacing
 singly, where the river poured off
 into arteries for fields below the reservation.

When at last it was over, the long removal, 15
 they had all become the same dry wood.
 We walked among them, the branches
 whitening in the raw sun.
 Above us drifted herons,
 alone, hoarse-voiced, broken, 20
 settling their beaks among the hollows.

Grandpa said, *These are the ghosts of the tree people,*
moving above us, unable to take their rest.

Sometimes now, we dream our way back to the heron dance.
 Their long wings are bending the air 25
 into circles through which they fall.
 They rise again in shifting wheels.
 How long must we live in the broken figures
 their necks make, narrowing the sky.

1984

Grief

Sometimes you have to take your own hand
 as though you were a lost child
 and bring yourself stumbling
 home over twisted ice.

Whiteness drifts over your house. 5
 A page of warm light
 falls steady from the open door.

Here is your bed, folded open.
 Lie down, lie down, let the blue snow cover you.

2003

Fleur¹

The first time she drowned in the cold and glassy waters of Lake Turcot, Fleur Pillager was only a girl. Two men saw the boat tip, saw her struggle in the waves. They rowed over to the place she went down, and jumped in. When they dragged her over the gunwales, she was cold to the touch and stiff, so they slapped her face, shook her by the heels, worked her arms back and forth, and pounded her back until she coughed up lake water. She shivered all over like a dog, then took a breath. But it wasn't long afterward that

1. First published in *Esquire* magazine, August 1986.

those two men disappeared. The first wandered off and the other, Jean Hat, got himself run over by a cart.

It went to show, my grandma said. It figured to her, all right. By saving Fleur Pillager, those two men had lost themselves.

The next time she fell in the lake, Fleur Pillager was twenty years old and no one touched her. She washed onshore, her skin a dull dead gray, but when George Many Women bent to look closer, he saw her chest move. Then her eyes spun open, sharp black riprock, and she looked at him. "You'll take my place," she hissed. Everybody scattered and left her there, so no one knows how she dragged herself home. Soon after that we noticed Many Women changed, grew afraid, wouldn't leave his house, and would not be forced to go near water. For his caution, he lived until the day that his sons brought him a new tin bathtub. Then the first time he used the tub he slipped, got knocked out, and breathed water while his wife stood in the other room frying breakfast.

Men stayed clear of Fleur Pillager after the second drowning. Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the waterman, the monster, wanted her for himself. He's a devil, that one, love-hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur.

Our mothers warn us that we'll think he's handsome, for he appears with green eyes, copper skin, a mouth tender as a child's. But if you fall into his arms, he sprouts horns, fangs, claws, fins. His feet are joined as one and his skin, brass scales, rings to the touch. You're fascinated, cannot move. He casts a shell necklace at your feet, weeps gleaming chips that harden into mica on your breasts. He holds you under. Then he takes the body of a lion or a fat brown worm. He's made of gold. He's made of beach moss. He's a thing of dry foam, a thing of death by drowning, the death a Chippewa cannot survive.

Unless you are Fleur Pillager. We all knew she couldn't swim. After the first time, we thought she'd never go back to Lake Turcot. We thought she'd keep to herself, live quiet, stop killing men off by drowning in the lake. After the first time, we thought she'd keep the good ways. But then, after the second drowning, we knew that we were dealing with something much more serious. She was haywire, out of control. She messed with evil, laughed at the old women's advice, and dressed like a man. She got herself into some half-forgotten medicine, studied ways we shouldn't talk about. Some say she kept the finger of a child in her pocket and a powder of unborn rabbits in a leather thong around her neck. She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We know for sure because the next morning, in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. By day her silence and the wide grin she threw to bring down our guard made us frightened. Some thought that Fleur Pillager should be driven off the reservation, but not a single person who spoke like this had the nerve. And finally, when people were just about to get together and throw her out, she left on her own and didn't come back all summer. That's what this story is about.

During that summer, when she lived a few miles south in Argus, things happened. She almost destroyed that town.

When she got down to Argus in the year of 1920, it was just a small grid of six streets on either side of the railroad depot. There were two elevators, one central, the other a few miles west. Two stores competed for the trade of the three hundred citizens, and three churches quarreled with one another for their souls. There was a frame building for Lutherans, a heavy brick one for Episcopalians, and a long narrow shingled Catholic church. This last had a tall slender steeple, twice as high as any building or tree.

No doubt, across the low, flat wheat, watching from the road as she came near Argus on foot, Fleur saw that steeple rise, a shadow thin as a needle. Maybe in that raw space it drew her the way a lone tree draws lightning. Maybe, in the end, the Catholics are to blame. For if she hadn't seen that sign of pride, that slim prayer, that marker, maybe she would have kept walking.

But Fleur Pillager turned, and the first place she went once she came into town was to the back door of the priest's residence attached to the landmark church. She didn't go there for a handout, although she got that, but to ask for work. She got that too, or the town got her. It's hard to tell which came out worse, her or the men or the town, although the upshot of it all was that Fleur lived.

The four men who worked at the butcher's had carved up about a thousand carcasses between them, maybe half of that steers and the other half pigs, sheep, and game animals like deer, elk, and bear. That's not even mentioning the chickens, which were beyond counting. Pete Kozka owned the place, and employed Lily Veddar, Tor Grunewald, and my stepfather, Dutch James, who had brought my mother down from the reservation the year before she disappointed him by dying. Dutch took me out of school to take her place. I kept house half the time and worked the other in the butcher shop, sweeping floors, putting sawdust down, running a hambone across the street to a customer's bean pot or a package of sausage to the corner. I was a good one to have around because until they needed me, I was invisible. I blended into the stained brown walls, a skinny, big-nosed girl with staring eyes. Because I could fade into a corner or squeeze beneath a shelf, I knew everything, what the men said when no one was around, and what they did to Fleur.

Kozka's Meats served farmers for a fifty-mile area, both to slaughter, for it had a stock pen and chute, and to cure the meat by smoking it or spicing it in sausage. The storage locker was a marvel, made of many thicknesses of brick, earth insulation, and Minnesota timber, lined inside with sawdust and vast blocks of ice cut from Lake Turcot, hauled down from home each winter by horse and sledge.

A ramshackle board building, part slaughterhouse, part store, was fixed to the low, thick square of the lockers. That's where Fleur worked. Kozka hired her for her strength. She could lift a haunch or carry a pole of sausages without stumbling, and she soon learned cutting from Pete's wife, a string-thin blonde who chain-smoked and handled the razor-edged knives with nerveless precision, slicing close to her stained fingers. Fleur and Fritzie Kozka worked afternoons, wrapping their cuts in paper, and Fleur hauled the packages to the lockers. The meat was left outside the heavy

oak doors that were only opened at 5:00 each afternoon, before the men ate supper.

Sometimes Dutch, Tor, and Lily stayed at the lockers, and when they did I stayed too, cleaned floors, restoked the fires in the front smokehouses, while the men sat around the squat cast-iron stove spearing slats of herring onto hardtack bread. They played long games of poker or cribbage on a board made from the planed end of a salt crate. They talked and I listened, although there wasn't much to hear since almost nothing ever happened in Argus. Tor was married, Dutch had lost my mother, and Lily read circulars. They mainly discussed about the auctions to come, equipment, or women.

Every so often, Pete Kozka came out front to make a whist, leaving Fritzie to smoke cigarettes and fry raised doughnuts in the back room. He sat and played a few rounds but kept his thoughts to himself. Fritzie did not tolerate him talking behind her back, and the one book he read was the New Testament. If he said something, it concerned weather or a surplus of sheep stomachs, a ham that smoked green or the markets for corn and wheat. He had a good-luck talisman, the opal-white lens of a cow's eye. Playing cards, he rubbed it between his fingers. That soft sound and the slap of cards was about the only conversation.

Fleur finally gave them a subject.

Her cheeks were wide and flat, her hands large, chapped, muscular. Fleur's shoulders were broad as beams, her hips fishlike, slippery, narrow. An old green dress clung to her waist, worn thin where she sat. Her braids were thick like the tails of animals, and swung against her when she moved, deliberately, slowly in her work, held in and half-tamed, but only half. I could tell, but the others never saw. They never looked into her sly brown eyes or noticed her teeth, strong and sharp and very white. Her legs were bare, and since she padded in beadworked moccasins they never saw that her fifth toes were missing. They never knew she'd drowned. They were blinded, they were stupid, they only saw her in the flesh.

And yet it wasn't just that she was a Chippewa, or even that she was a woman, it wasn't that she was good-looking or even that she was alone that made their brains hum. It was how she played cards.

Women didn't usually play with men, so the evening that Fleur drew a chair to the men's table without being so much as asked, there was a shock of surprise.

"What's this," said Lily. He was fat, with a snake's cold pale eyes and precious skin, smooth and lily-white, which is how he got his name. Lily had a dog, a stumpy mean little bull of a thing with a belly drum-tight from eating pork rinds. The dog liked to play cards just like Lily, and straddled his barrel thighs through games of stud, rum poker, vingt-un.² The dog snapped at Fleur's arm that first night, but cringed back, its snarl frozen, when she took her place.

"I thought," she said, her voice soft and stroking, "you might deal me in."

There was a space between the heavy bin of spiced flour and the wall where I just fit. I hunkered down there, kept my eyes open, saw her black hair swing over the chair, her feet solid on the wood floor. I couldn't see up on the

2. Twenty-one (French); a card game.

table where the cards slapped down, so after they were deep in their game I raised myself up in the shadows, and crouched on a sill of wood.

I watched Fleur's hands stack and ruffle, divide the cards, spill them to each player in a blur, rake them up and shuffle again. Tor, short and scrappy, shut one eye and squinted the other at Fleur. Dutch screwed his lips around a wet cigar.

"Gotta see a man," he mumbled, getting up to go out back to the privy. The others broke, put their cards down, and Fleur sat alone in the lamp-light that glowed in a sheen across the push of her breasts. I watched her closely, then she paid me a beam of notice for the first time. She turned, looked straight at me, and grinned the white wolf grin a Pillager turns on its victims, except that she wasn't after me.

"Pauline there," she said. "How much money you got?"

We had all been paid for the week that day. Eight cents was in my pocket.

"Stake me," she said, holding out her long fingers. I put the coins in her palm and then I melted back to nothing, part of the walls and tables. It was a long time before I understood that the men would not have seen me no matter what I did, how I moved. I wasn't anything like Fleur. My dress hung loose and my back was already curved, an old woman's. Work had roughened me, reading made my eyes sore, caring for my mother before she died had hardened my face. I was not much to look at, so they never saw me.

When the men came back and sat around the table, they had drawn together. They shot each other small glances, stuck their tongues in their cheeks, burst out laughing at odd moments, to rattle Fleur. But she never minded. They played their vingt-un, staying even as Fleur slowly gained. Those pennies I had given her drew nickels and attracted dimes until there was a small pile in front of her.

Then she hooked them with five card draw, nothing wild. She dealt, discarded, drew, and then she sighed and her cards gave a little shiver. Tor's eye gleamed, and Dutch straightened in his seat.

"I'll pay to see that hand," said Lily Veddar.

Fleur showed, and she had nothing there, nothing at all.

Tor's thin smile cracked open, and he threw his hand in too.

"Well, we know one thing," he said, leaning back in his chair, "the squaw can't bluff."

With that I lowered myself into a mound of swept sawdust and slept. I woke up during the night, but none of them had moved yet, so I couldn't either. Still later, the men must have gone out again, or Fritzie come out to break the game, because I was lifted, soothed, cradled in a woman's arms and rocked so quiet that I kept my eyes shut while Fleur rolled me into a closet of grimy ledgers, oiled paper, balls of string, and thick files that fit beneath me like a mattress.

The game went on after work the next evening. I got my eight cents back five times over, and Fleur kept the rest of the dollar she'd won for a stake. This time they didn't play so late, but they played regular, and then kept going at it night after night. They played poker now, or variations, for one week straight, and each time Fleur won exactly one dollar, no more and no less, too consistent for luck.

By this time, Lily and the other men were so lit with suspense that they got Pete to join the game with them. They concentrated, the fat dog sitting

tense in Lily Veddar's lap, Tor suspicious, Dutch stroking his huge square brow, Pete steady. It wasn't that Fleur won that hooked them in so, because she lost hands too. It was rather that she never had a freak hand or even anything above a straight. She only took on her low cards, which didn't sit right. By chance, Fleur should have gotten a full or a flush by now. The irritating thing was she beat with pairs and never bluffed, because she couldn't, and still she ended each night with exactly one dollar. Lily couldn't believe, first of all, that a woman could be smart enough to play cards, but even if she was, that she would then be stupid enough to cheat for a dollar a night. By day I watched him turn the problem over, his hard white face dull, small fingers probing at his knuckles, until he finally thought he had Fleur figured as a bit-time player, caution her game. Raising the stakes would throw her.

More than anything now, he wanted Fleur to come away with something but a dollar. Two bits less or ten more, the sum didn't matter, just so he broke her streak.

Night after night she played, won her dollar, and left to stay in a place that just Fritzie and I knew about. Fleur bathed in the slaughtering tub, then slept in the unused brick smokehouse behind the lockers, a windowless place tarred on the inside with scorched fats. When I brushed against her skin I noticed that she smelled of the walls, rich and woody, slightly burnt. Since that night she put me in the closet I was no longer afraid of her, but followed her close, stayed with her, became her moving shadow that the men never noticed, the shadow that could have saved her.

August, the month that bears fruit, closed around the shop, and Pete and Fritzie left for Minnesota to escape the heat. Night by night, running, Fleur had won thirty dollars, and only Pete's presence had kept Lily at bay. But Pete was gone now, and one payday, with the heat so bad no one could move but Fleur, the men sat and played and waited while she finished work. The cards sweat, limp in their fingers, the table was slick with grease, and even the walls were warm to the touch. The air was motionless. Fleur was in the next room boiling heads.

Her green dress, drenched, wrapped her like a transparent sheet. A skin of lakeweed. Black snarls of veining clung to her arms. Her braids were loose, half unraveled, tied behind her neck in a thick loop. She stood in steam, turning skulls through a vat with a wooden paddle. When scraps boiled to the surface, she bent with a round tin sieve and scooped them out. She'd filled two dishpans.

"Ain't that enough now?" called Lily. "We're waiting." The stump of a dog trembled in his lap, alive with rage. It never smelled me or noticed me above Fleur's smoky skin. The air was heavy in my corner, and pressed me down. Fleur sat with them.

"Now what do you say?" Lily asked the dog. It barked. That was the signal for the real game to start.

"Let's up the ante," said Lily, who had been stalking this night all month. He had a roll of money in his pocket. Fleur had five bills in her dress. The men had each saved their full pay.

"Ante a dollar then," said Fleur, and pitched hers in. She lost, but they let her scrape along, cent by cent. And then she won some. She played unevenly, as if chance were all she had. She reeled them in. The game went on. The

dog was stiff now, poised on Lily's knees, a ball of vicious muscle with its yellow eyes slit in concentration. It gave advice, seemed to sniff the lay of Fleur's cards, twitched and nudged. Fleur was up, then down, saved by a scratch. Tor dealt seven cards, three down. The pot grew, round by round, until it held all the money. Nobody folded. Then it all rode on one last card and they went silent. Fleur picked hers up and drew a long breath. The heat lowered like a bell. Her card shook, but she stayed in.

Lily smiled and took the dog's head tenderly between his palms.

"Say Fatso," he said, crooning the words. "You reckon that girl's bluffing?"

The dog whined and Lily laughed. "Me too," he said, "let's show." He swept his bills and coins into the pot and then they turned their cards over.

Lily looked once, looked again, then he squeezed the dog like a fist of dough and slammed it on the table.

Fleur threw out her arms and drew the money over, grinning that same wolf grin that she'd used on me, the grin that had them. She jammed the bills in her dress, scooped the coins up in waxed white paper that she tied with string.

"Let's go another round," said Lily, his voice choked with burrs. But Fleur opened her mouth and yawned, then walked out back to gather slops for the one big hog that was waiting in the stock pen to be killed.

The men sat still as rocks, their hands spread on the oiled wood table. Dutch had chewed his cigar to damp shreds, Tor's eye was dull. Lily's gaze was the only one to follow Fleur. I didn't move. I felt them gathering, saw my stepfather's veins, the ones in his forehead that stood out in anger. The dog rolled off the table and curled in a knot below the counter, where none of the men could touch it.

Lily rose and stepped out back to the closet of ledgers where Pete kept his private stock. He brought back a bottle, uncorked and tipped it between his fingers. The lump in his throat moved, then he passed it on. They drank, quickly felt the whiskey's fire, and planned with their eyes things they couldn't say aloud.

When they left, I followed. I hid out back in the clutter of broken boards and chicken crates beside the stock pen, where they waited. Fleur could not be seen at first, and then the moon broke and showed her, slipping cautiously along the rough board chute with a bucket in her hand. Her hair fell, wild and coarse, to her waist, and her dress was a floating patch in the dark. She made a pig-calling sound, rang the tin pail lightly against the wood, froze suspiciously. But too late. In the sound of the ring Lily moved, fat and nimble, stepped right behind Fleur and put out his creamy hands. At his first touch, she whirled and doused him with the bucket of sour slops. He pushed her against the big fence and the package of coins split, went clinking and jumping, winked against the wood. Fleur rolled over once and vanished into the yard.

The moon fell behind a curtain of ragged clouds, and Lily followed into the dark muck. But he tripped, pitched over the huge flank of the pig, who lay mired to the snout, heavily snoring. I sprang out of the weeds and climbed the side of the pen, stuck like glue. I saw the sow rise to her neat, knobby knees, gain her balance and sway, curious, as Lily stumbled forward. Fleur had backed into the angle of rough wood just beyond, and when Lily

tried to jostle past, the sow tipped up on her hind legs and struck, quick and hard as a snake. She plunged her head into Lily's thick side and snatched a mouthful of his shirt. She lunged again, caught him lower, so that he grunted in pained surprise. He seemed to ponder, breathing deep. Then he launched his huge body in a swimmer's dive.

The sow screamed as his body smacked over hers. She rolled, striking out with her knife-sharp hooves, and Lily gathered himself upon her, took her foot-long face by the ears and scraped her snout and cheeks against the trestles of the pen. He hurled the sow's tight skull against an iron post, but instead of knocking her dead, he merely woke her from her dream.

She reared, shrieked, drew him with her so that they posed standing upright. They bowed jerkily to each other, as if to begin. Then his arms swung and flailed. She sank her black fangs into his shoulder, clasping him, dancing him forward and backward through the pen. Their steps picked up pace, went wild. The two dipped as one, box-stepped, tripped one another. She ran her split foot through his hair. He grabbed her kinked tail. They went down and came up, the same shape and then the same color until the men couldn't tell one from the other in that light and Fleur was able to launch herself over the gates, swing down, hit gravel.

The men saw, yelled, and chased her at a dead run to the smokehouse. And Lily too, once the sow gave up in disgust and freed him. That is where I should have gone to Fleur, saved her, thrown myself on Dutch. But I went stiff with fear and couldn't unlatch myself from the trestles or move at all. I closed my eyes and put my head in my arms, tried to hide, so there is nothing to describe but what I couldn't block out, Fleur's hoarse breath, so loud it filled me, her cry in the old language, and my name repeated over and over among the words.

The heat was still dense the next morning when I came back to work. Fleur was gone but the men were there, slack-faced, hung over. Lily was paler and softer than ever, as if his flesh had steamed on his bones. They smoked, took pulls off a bottle. It wasn't noon yet. I worked awhile, waiting shop and sharpening steel. But I was sick, I was smothered, I was sweating so hard that my hands slipped on the knives, and I wiped my fingers clean of the greasy touch of the customers' coins. Lily opened his mouth and roared once, not in anger. There was no meaning to the sound. His boxer dog, sprawled limp beside his foot, never lifted its head. Nor did the other men.

They didn't notice when I stepped outside, hoping for a clear breath. And then I forgot them because I knew that we were all balanced, ready to tip, to fly, to be crushed as soon as the weather broke. The sky was so low that I felt the weight of it like a yoke. Clouds hung down, witch teats, a tornado's green-brown cones, and as I watched one flicked out and became a delicate probing thumb. Even as I picked up my heels and ran back inside, the wind blew suddenly, cold, and then came rain.

Inside, the men had disappeared already and the whole place was trembling as if a huge hand was pinched at the rafters, shaking it. I ran straight through, screaming for Dutch or for any of them, and then I stopped at the heavy doors of the lockers, where they had surely taken shelter. I stood there a moment. Everything went still. Then I heard a cry building in the

wind, faint at first, a whistle and then a shrill scream that tore through the walls and gathered around me, spoke plain so I understood that I should move, put my arms out, and slam down the great iron bar that fit across the hasp and lock.

Outside, the wind was stronger, like a hand held against me. I struggled forward. The bushes tossed, the awnings flapped off storefronts, the rails of porches rattled. The odd cloud became a fat snout that nosed along the earth and sniffled, jabbed, picked at things, sucked them up, blew them apart, rooted around as if it was following a certain scent, then stopped behind me at the butcher shop and bored down like a drill.

I went flying, landed somewhere in a ball. When I opened my eyes and looked, stranger things were happening.

A herd of cattle flew through the air like giant birds, dropping dung, their mouths opened in stunned bellows. A candle, still lighted, blew past, and tables, napkins, garden tools, a whole school of drifting eyeglasses, jackets on hangers, hams, a checkerboard, a lampshade, and at last the sow from behind the lockers, on the run, her hooves a blur, set free, swooping, diving, screaming as everything in Argus fell apart and got turned upside down, smashed, and thoroughly wrecked.

Days passed before the town went looking for the men. They were bachelors, after all, except for Tor, whose wife had suffered a blow to the head that made her forgetful. Everyone was occupied with digging out, in high relief because even though the Catholic steeple had been torn off like a peaked cap and sent across five fields, those huddled in the cellar were unhurt. Walls had fallen, windows were demolished, but the stores were intact and so were the bankers and shop owners who had taken refuge in their safes or beneath their cash registers. It was a fair-minded disaster, no one could be said to have suffered much more than the next, at least not until Pete and Fritzie came home.

Of all the businesses in Argus, Kozka's Meats had suffered worst. The boards of the front building had been split to kindling, piled in a huge pyramid, and the shop equipment was blasted far and wide. Pete paced off the distance the iron bathtub had been flung—a hundred feet. The glass candy case went fifty, and landed without so much as a cracked pane. There were other surprises as well, for the back rooms where Fritzie and Pete lived were undisturbed. Fritzie said the dust still coated her china figures, and upon her kitchen table, in the ashtray, perched the last cigarette she'd put out in haste. She lit and finished it, looking through the window. From there, she could see that the old smokehouse Fleur had slept in was crushed to a reddish sand and the stockpens were completely torn apart, the rails stacked helter-skelter. Fritzie asked for Fleur. People shrugged. Then she asked about the others and, suddenly, the town understood that three men were missing.

There was a rally of help, a gathering of shovels and volunteers. We passed boards from hand to hand, stacked them, uncovered what lay beneath the pile of jagged splinters. The lockers, full of meat that was Pete and Fritzie's investment, slowly came into sight, still intact. When enough room was made for a man to stand on the roof, there were calls, a general urge to hack through and see what lay below. But Fritzie shouted that she wouldn't allow

it because the meat would spoil. And so the work continued, board by board, until at last the heavy oak doors of the freezer were revealed and people pressed to the entry. Everyone wanted to be the first, but since it was my stepfather lost, I was let go in when Pete and Fritzie wedged through into the sudden icy air.

Pete scraped a match on his boot, lit the lamp Fritzie held, and then the three of us stood still in its circle. Light glared off the skinned and hanging carcasses, the crates of wrapped sausages, the bright and cloudy blocks of lake ice, pure as winter. The cold bit into us, pleasant at first, then numbing. We must have stood there a couple of minutes before we saw the men, or more rightly, the humps of fur, the iced and shaggy hides they wore, the bear-skins they had taken down and wrapped about themselves. We stepped closer and Fritzie tilted the lantern beneath the flaps of fur into their faces. The dog was there, perched among them, heavy as a doorstop. The three had hunched around a barrel where the game was still laid out, and a dead lantern and an empty bottle too. But they had thrown down their last hands and hunkered tight, clutching one another, knuckles raw from beating at the door they had also attacked with hooks. Frost stars gleamed off their eyelashes and the stubble of their beards. Their faces were set in concentration, mouths open as if to speak some careful thought, some agreement they'd come to in each other's arms.

Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, which in the Pillagers were strong and knotted, big, spidery, and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown, the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person.

In my dreams, I look straight back at Fleur, at the men. I am no longer the watcher on the dark sill, the skinny girl.

The blood draws us back, as if it runs through a vein of earth. I've come home and, except for talking to my cousins, live a quiet life. Fleur lives quiet too, down on Lake Turcot with her boat. Some say she's married to the waterman, Misshepeshu, or that she's living in shame with white men or windigos, or that she's killed them all. I'm about the only one here who ever goes to visit her. Last winter, I went to help out in her cabin when she bore the child, whose green eyes and skin the color of an old penny made more talk, as no one could decide if the child was mixed blood or what, fathered in a smokehouse, or by a man with brass scales, or by the lake. The girl is bold, smiling in her sleep, as if she knows what people wonder, as if she hears the old men talk, turning the story over. It comes up different every time and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don't know anything.

LI-YOUNG LEE

b. 1957

In his poem “Persimmons” Li-Young Lee remembers his father saying, “Some things never leave a person.” Many of the poems in Lee’s books—*Rose* (1986), *The City in Which I Love You* (1990), *Book of My Nights* (2001), and *Behind My Eyes* (2008)—testify to a sense of the past, especially his father’s past, that never leaves Lee. The father in Lee’s poems is personal and mythic; he instructs the poet-son in “the art of memory.” Lee’s father, born in China, served as a personal physician to Mao Zedong. He later was jailed for nineteen months, a political prisoner of the Indonesian dictator Sukarno. Lee was born in Jakarta, Indonesia. In 1959 the family fled Indonesia and traveled to Hong Kong, Macao, and Japan, finally arriving in America, where Lee’s father became a Presbyterian minister in a small town in western Pennsylvania. Many of Lee’s poems seek to remember and understand his father’s life and to come to terms with Lee’s differences from that powerful figure.

Lee’s work reminds us about the ancient connections between memory and poetry. In his work memory is often sweet; it draws the poet to the past even when, as in “Eating Alone,” that sweetness is as dizzying as the juice of a rotten pear in which a hornet spins. But memory can also be a burden, and its pull is countered in Lee’s work by a sensuous apprehension of the present. As in his poem “This Room and Everything in It,” the erotic immediacy of the moment can disrupt any effort to fix that moment in the orders of memory. Everywhere in Lee’s work is the evidence of hearing, taste, smell, and touch as well as sight. If the poet’s bodily presence in the world recalls his great American precursor Walt Whitman, Lee’s fluid motion between the physical world and the domain of memory, dream, or vision also carries out Whitman’s visionary strain and links Lee to the work of Theodore Roethke, James Wright, and Denise Levertov, among others. The intensity of Lee’s poems, however, is often leavened by a subtle and winning humor and playfulness; such qualities are especially valuable in a poet at times too easily seduced by beauty.

Lee studied at the University of Pittsburgh (where one of his teachers was the poet Gerald Stern), the University of Arizona, and the State University of New York College at Brockport. He has since taught at various universities. In 1995 he published a prose memoir, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*. His prose, like his poetry, is characterized by his deep sense of connection between an individual life and a powerful past, mediated by his ability to move between plain speech and a lushness evocative of biblical language.

The Gift

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he’d removed
the iron sliver I thought I’d die from.

5

I can’t remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well

of dark water, a prayer.
 And I recall his hands,
 two measures of tenderness 10
 he laid against my face,
 the flames of discipline
 he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
 you would have thought you saw a man 15
 planting something in a boy's palm,
 a silver tear, a tiny flame.
 Had you followed that boy
 you would have arrived here,
 where I bend over my wife's right hand. 20

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
 so carefully she feels no pain.
 Watch as I lift the splinter out.
 I was seven when my father
 took my hand like this, 25
 and I did not hold that shard
 between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
 christen it Little Assassin,
 Ore Going Deep for My Heart. 30
 And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
 I did what a child does
 when he's given something to keep.
 I kissed my father. 35

1986

Persimmons

In sixth grade Mrs. Walker
 slapped the back of my head
 and made me stand in the corner
 for not knowing the difference
 between *persimmon* and *precision*. 5
 How to choose

persimmons. This is precision.
 Ripe ones are soft and brown-spotted.
 Sniff the bottoms. The sweet one
 will be fragrant. How to eat: 10
 put the knife away, lay down newspaper.
 Peel the skin tenderly, not to tear the meat.
 Chew the skin, suck it,
 and swallow. Now, eat
 the meat of the fruit, 15

so sweet,
all of it, to the heart.

Donna undresses, her stomach is white.
In the yard, dewy and shivering
with crickets, we lie naked, 20
face-up, face-down.
I teach her Chinese.
Crickets: *chiu chiu*. Dew: I've forgotten.
Naked: I've forgotten.
Ni, wo: you and me. 25
I part her legs,
remember to tell her
she is beautiful as the moon.

Other words
that got me into trouble were 30
fight and *fright*, *wren* and *yarn*.
Fight was what I did when I was frightened,
fright was what I felt when I was fighting.
Wrens are small, plain birds,
yarn is what one knits with. 35
Wrens are soft as yarn.
My mother made birds out of yarn.
I loved to watch her tie the stuff;
a bird, a rabbit, a wee man.

Mrs. Walker brought a persimmon to class 40
and cut it up
so everyone could taste
a *Chinese apple*. Knowing
it wasn't ripe or sweet, I didn't eat
but I watched the other faces. 45

My mother said every persimmon has a sun
inside, something golden, glowing,
warm as my face.

Once, in the cellar, I found two wrapped in newspaper,
forgotten and not yet ripe. 50
I took them and set both on my bedroom windowsill,
where each morning a cardinal
sang, *The sun, the sun*.

Finally understanding
he was going blind, 55
my father sat up all one night
waiting for a song, a ghost.
I gave him the persimmons,
swelled, heavy as sadness,
and sweet as love. 60

This year, in the muddy lighting
of my parents' cellar, I rummage, looking
for something I lost.
My father sits on the tired, wooden stairs,
black cane between his knees, 65
hand over hand, gripping the handle.

He's so happy that I've come home.
I ask how his eyes are, a stupid question.
All gone, he answers.

Under some blankets, I find a box. 70
Inside the box I find three scrolls.
I sit beside him and untie
three paintings by my father:
Hibiscus leaf and a white flower.
Two cats preening. 75
Two persimmons, so full they want to drop from the cloth.

He raises both hands to touch the cloth,
asks, *Which is this?*

This is persimmons, Father.

Oh, the feel of the wolftail on the silk, 80
the strength, the tense
precision in the wrist.
I painted them hundreds of times
eyes closed. These I painted blind.
Some things never leave a person: 85
scent of the hair of one you love,
the texture of persimmons,
in your palm, the ripe weight.

1986

Eating Alone

I've pulled the last of the year's young onions.
The garden is bare now. The ground is cold,
brown and old. What is left of the day flames
in the maples at the corner of my
eye. I turn, a cardinal vanishes. 5
By the cellar door, I wash the onions,
then drink from the icy metal spigot.

Once, years back, I walked beside my father
among the windfall pears. I can't recall
our words. We may have strolled in silence. But 10
I still see him bend, that way—left hand braced
on knee, creaky—to lift and hold to my

eye a rotten pear. In it, a hornet
spun crazily, glazed in slow, glistening juice.

It was my father I saw this morning 15
waving to me from the trees. I almost
called to him, until I came close enough
to see the shovel, leaning where I had
left it, in the flickering, deep green shade.

White rice steaming, almost done. Sweet green peas 20
fried in onions. Shrimp braised in sesame
oil and garlic. And my own loneliness.
What more could I, a young man, want.

1986

Eating Together

In the steamer is the trout
seasoned with slivers of ginger,
two sprigs of green onion, and sesame oil.
We shall eat it with rice for lunch,
brothers, sister, my mother who will 5
taste the sweetest meat of the head,
holding it between her fingers
deftly, the way my father did
weeks ago. Then he lay down
to sleep like a snow-covered road 10
winding through pines older than him,
without any travelers, and lonely for no one.

1986

This Room and Everything in It

Lie still now
while I prepare For my future,
certain hard days ahead,
when I'll need what I know so clearly this moment.

I am making use 5
of the one thing I learned
of all the things my father tried to teach me:
the art of memory.

I am letting this room
and everything in it 10
stand for my ideas about love
and its difficulties.

I'll let your love-cries,
 those spacious notes
 of a moment ago, 15
 stand for distance.

Your scent,
 that scent
 of spice and a wound,
 I'll let stand for mystery. 20

Your sunken belly
 is the daily cup
 of milk I drank
 as a boy before morning prayer.

The sun on the face 25
 of the wall
 is God, the face
 I can't see, my soul,

and so on, each thing
 standing for a separate idea, 30
 and those ideas forming the constellation
 of my greater idea.

And one day, when I need
 to tell myself something intelligent
 about love, 35

I'll close my eyes
 and recall this room and everything in it:
 My body is estrangement.
 This desire, perfection. 40
 Your closed eyes my extinction.

Now I've forgotten my
 idea. The book
 on the windowsill, riffled by wind . . .
 the even-numbered pages are
 the past, the odd- 45
 numbered pages, the future.

The sun is
 God, your body is milk . . .

useless, useless . . .
 your cries are song, my body's not me . . . 50
 no good . . . my idea

has evaporated . . . your hair is time, your thighs are song . . .
 it had something to do
 with death . . . it had something
 to do with love. 55

Nativity

In the dark, a child might ask, *What is the world?*
 just to hear his sister
 promise, *An unfinished wing of heaven,*
 just to hear his brother say,
A house inside a house, 5
 but most of all to bear his mother answer,
One more song, then you go to sleep.

How could anyone in that bed guess
 the question finds its beginning 10
 in the answer long growing
 inside the one who asked, that restless boy,
 the night's darling?

Later, a man lying awake,
 he might ask it again,
 just to hear the silence 15
 charge him, *This night*
arching over your sleepless wondering,

this night, the near ground
every reaching-out-to overreaches,

just to remind himself 20
 out of what little earth and duration,
 out of what immense good-bye,

each must make a safe place of his heart,
 before so strange and wild a guest
 as God approaches. 25

Creative Nonfiction

In what is known today as “creative nonfiction,” writers report on the world without the pretense of journalistic objectivity or the imperatives of timeliness associated with traditional “news.” The novelist David Foster Wallace described his own forays into the genre as a process of “peeling back my skull. You know, welcome to my mind for twenty pages, see through my eyes.” “Creative nonfiction” is a relatively new term—it first appeared officially in 1983 as a category for creative writing fellowships in the National Endowment of the Arts—but examples of the form appear much earlier in American literature. If Thoreau and Emerson were publishing their essays today, much of their work would probably be called creative nonfiction. Indeed, travel and nature writing have long been a part of American literature. The term is fluid, suggesting a hybrid that involves facts, research, and information while using the forms and strategies of fiction, poetry, film, drama, biography, autobiography, and even philosophy.

The term is closely allied with what was, in the 1970s, called “the New Journalism” (the writer Tom Wolfe published a combined manifesto and anthology with that title in 1973), in which, instead of simply reporting an event, the writer reports on himself or herself within the event, either as a participant or as an observer (or both). Examples of the “the New Journalism” include Wolfe’s *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1965), Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1966), Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* (1968), Joan Didion’s *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972), and Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* (1977). The New Journalism was intended by its practitioners to reflect critically on both the novel and journalism. Wolfe, for instance, insisted (as had others since the early twentieth century) that the novel was a dead end. Disconnected from reality, it did not have the relevance that nonfiction might have. The novelist Philip Roth echoed that thought in fiction: in *The Ghost Writer* (1979) he has his protagonist, a writer alter-ego named Nathan Zuckerman, lament, “If only I could invent as presumptuously as real life! If one day I could just *approach* the originality and excitement of what actually goes on!” For many writers, the upheavals of the 1960s—including the civil rights movement, the hippie counterculture, the Cold War, and the war in Vietnam—seemed to exceed what any individual could imagine and demanded an expressive mode that could match the “originality and excitement” of history itself. Wolfe turned to the language of the Beat writers, which he brought to his descriptions of the counterculture. Didion looked to the spare prose of Hemingway, certain that “the seemingly insignificant things that most of us spend our days noticing are really significant, have meaning, and tell us something.”

For Capote and Mailer, the novel remained a force to be reckoned with, and they plundered its resources to narrate real dramas. In *Armies of the Night*, which was subtitled “History as a Novel / The Novel as History,” Mailer begins by invoking a traditional journalistic account of the 1967 anti-Vietnam War march on the Pentagon, but soon dismisses it: “Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened,” he declares. The “novel” that follows presents Mailer as a character, alongside the poets Robert Lowell and Mitchell Goodman, radical activist Jerry Rubin, and other literary and political celebrities, whose escapades make reportage into absurdist modern comedy. Capote, too, found the novel a better tool for telling the story of a quadruple murder in *In Cold Blood*. Novels have always been able to present complex characters and mixed motives, and to show characters evolving over time. Capote’s epic account of a real crime draws on that tradition

in representing an incident of spectacular violence as well as the psychological and cultural vortex from which it was born.

The New Journalism called into question the traditional objectivity of reporting, addressing—and reveling in—what the physicist Werner Heisenberg called “the uncertainty principle” (a theory the novelist Thomas Pynchon frequently invokes in his work), which asserts that the observer’s presence alters the phenomenon being observed. Like all movements, the one that rode under this banner came to an end. By 1975 writers were already asking, in print, “Whatever Happened to the New Journalism?” and by 1981 the writer Joe Nocera declared it dead—its credibility killed, he argued, by Hunter S. Thompson. And in the surest sign of the movement’s end, its name has lately been resurrected, in Robert S. Boynton’s anthology, as *The New New Journalism* (2005). What remained of the New Journalism, once “creative nonfiction” arose to replace it in the early 1980s, was the focus on narrative drive, inventive language, distinctive voice, and personal observation. Creative nonfiction is open in its aim of merging literary technique with fidelity to fact.

As with all hybrids, the distinctions between it and other forms are slippery. Among the selections here, Thompson and Didion represent the New Journalism, demonstrating how style shapes copious concrete detail into forms that ask readers to reflect on the significance of facts. Today, most memoirs, personal essays, long-form features, and environmental writing are considered to be creative nonfiction, but the writers in this cluster provide especially innovative examples of these forms. Edwidge Danticat mingles autobiography, political analysis, and biography. The environmental writings of Edward Abbey and Barry Lopez combine carefully observed, factual description of landscapes and natural creatures with an equal focus on the writer’s feelings and reflections. Wallace’s essay on the Maine Lobster Festival grounds itself in entertaining, feature-style magazine reportage but ends with rigorous intellectual inquiry more common to philosophy or science. It is easy to understand why many examples of the form slip back and forth between a variety of categories: among the selections here, Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl” appeared in a book collection advertised as “Stories,” and it was featured under the rubric of “Fiction” when it was first published in the *New Yorker*; but many critics and reviewers have since called the work a prose poem or an autobiography.

The term “Creative Nonfiction” is fully at ease with such slippage and happily embraces work that mixes elements of many different genres; whatever the mixture, it’s the quality of writing and the use of various techniques that establish the work as “creative.” In the twenty-first century, hybridity is a significant cultural modality, and much of contemporary writing is self-consciously hybrid. Mixing poetry and essay, personal reflection and journalism, reportage and critique, nature writing and myth, or inventing other combinations, some of the most vital American writing is now, and always has been, creative nonfiction.

EDWARD ABBEY

A prolific writer, Edward Abbey (1927–1989) was the author of many novels but he is most famous for his personal essays, which have become classics of environmental writing. Born and raised in Pennsylvania, he went west in his teens, and late in the 1950s he worked at Arches National Monument (now Arches National Park) near Moab in eastern Utah, as a seasonal ranger. In the spirit of Thoreau’s residence at Walden Pond and Gary Snyder’s summers as a fire lookout in Washington State’s

North Cascades, Abbey said he sought solitude in an effort to “confront, immediately and directly if possible, the bare bones of existence.” His most famous book, *Desert Solitaire* (1968), came out of his journals from this period; the book is a compilation of description, natural history, tall tales, and polemical environmentalism.

One of the most gripping chapters in *Desert Solitaire* focuses on Abbey’s time in Havasu, at the base of the Grand Canyon. As he tells it, during a stop at the Grand Canyon with friends en route to Los Angeles he decided on the spur of the moment to descend to the canyon floor (“fourteen miles by trail”) to take a look at Havasu Canyon in Arizona, the homeland of the Havasupai Native people. Five weeks later, he emerged to find that his friends had sensibly gone on without him. During the weeks he spent there, Abbey camped and explored the surrounding landscape alone. The selection here focuses on one such day of exploration, when, looking for a shortcut back to his camp, he made a series of potentially fatal decisions.

Havasu

Most of my wandering in the desert I’ve done alone. Not so much from choice as from necessity—I generally prefer to go into places where no one else wants to go. I find that in contemplating the natural world my pleasure is greater if there are not too many others contemplating it with me, at the same time. However, there are special hazards in traveling alone. Your chances of dying, in case of sickness or accident, are much improved, simply because there is no one around to go for help.

Exploring a side canyon off Havasu Canyon¹ one day, I was unable to resist the temptation to climb up out of it onto what corresponds in that region to the Tonto Bench.² Late in the afternoon I realized that I would not have enough time to get back to my camp before dark, unless I could find a much shorter route than the one by which I had come. I looked for a shortcut.

Nearby was another little side canyon which appeared to lead down into Havasu Canyon. It was a steep, shadowy, extremely narrow defile with the usual meandering course and overhanging walls; from where I stood, near its head, I could not tell if the route was feasible all the way down to the floor of the main canyon. I had no rope with me—only my walking stick. But I was hungry and thirsty, as always. I started down.

For a while everything went well. The floor of the little canyon began as a bed of dry sand, scattered with rocks. Farther down a few boulders were wedged between the walls; I climbed over and under them. Then the canyon took on the slickrock³ character—smooth, sheer, slippery sandstone carved by erosion into a series of scoops and potholes which got bigger as I descended. In some of these basins there was a little water left over from the last flood, warm and fetid water under an oily-looking scum, condensed by prolonged evaporation to a sort of broth, rich in dead and dying organisms. My canteen was empty and I was very thirsty but I felt that I could wait.

1. A canyon with waterfall, forming a side branch of the Grand Canyon, that was once the home of a prehistoric people and has been occupied by the Havasupai, “people of the blue-green waters,” for the last 800 years.
 2. The long, narrow strip of relatively level land

located in the Grand Canyon, separating the inner gorge from the upper canyon and following the course of the Colorado River.
 3. A term used in the Southwest to refer to smooth, consolidated, and hardened sand dunes.

I came to a lip on the canyon floor which overhung by twelve feet the largest so far of these stagnant pools. On each side rose the canyon walls, roughly perpendicular. There was no way to continue except by dropping into the pool. I hesitated. Beyond this point there could hardly be any returning, yet the main canyon was still not visible below. Obviously the only sensible thing to do was to turn back. I edged over the lip of stone and dropped feet first into the water.

Deeper than I expected. The warm, thick fluid came up and closed over my head as my feet touched the muck at the bottom. I had to swim to the farther side. And here I found myself on the verge of another drop-off, with one more huge bowl of green soup below.

This drop-off was about the same height as the one before, but not overhanging. It resembled a children's playground slide, concave and S-curved, only steeper, wider, with a vertical pitch in the middle. It did not lead directly into the water but ended in a series of steplike ledges above the pool. Beyond the pool lay another edge, another drop-off into an unknown depth. Again I paused, and for a much longer time. But I no longer had the option of turning around and going back. I eased myself into the chute⁴ and let go of everything—except my faithful stick.

I hit rock bottom hard, but without any physical injury. I swam the stinking pond dog-paddle⁵ style, pushing the heavy scum away from my face, and crawled out on the far side to see what my fate was going to be.

Fatal. Death by starvation, slow and tedious. For I was looking straight down an overhanging cliff to a rubble pile of broken rocks eighty feet below.

After the first wave of utter panic had passed I began to try to think. First of all I was not going to die immediately, unless another flash flood came down the gorge; there was the pond of stagnant water on hand to save me from thirst and a man can live, they say, for thirty days or more without food. My sun-bleached bones, dramatically sprawled at the bottom of the chasm, would provide the diversion of the picturesque for future wanderers—if any man ever came this way again.

My second thought was to scream for help, although I knew very well there could be no other human being within miles. I even tried it but the sound of that anxious shout, cut short in the dead air within the canyon walls, was so inhuman, so detached as it seemed from myself, that it terrified me and I didn't attempt it again.

I thought of tearing my clothes into strips and plaiting a rope. But what was I wearing?—boots, socks, a pair of old and ragged blue jeans, a flimsy T-shirt, an ancient and rotten sombrero⁶ of straw. Not a chance of weaving such a wardrobe into a rope eighty feet long, or even twenty feet long.

How about a signal fire? There was nothing to burn but my clothes; not a tree, not a shrub, not even a weed grew in this stony cul-de-sac. Even if I burned my clothing the chances of the smoke being seen by some Hualapai Indian⁷ high on the south rim were very small; and if he did see the smoke, what then? He'd shrug his shoulders, sigh, and take another pull from his

4. A waterfall or steep descent in a river.

5. A simple swimming style, often used by children.

6. A broad-brimmed hat common in Spain and

Spanish America.

7. "People of the tall pine," the Hualapai are a Native American people living along the pine-clad southern side of the Grand Canyon.

Tokay⁸ bottle. Furthermore, without clothes, the sun would soon bake me to death.

There was only one thing I could do. I had a tiny notebook in my hip pocket and a stub of pencil. When these dried out I could at least record my final thoughts. I would have plenty of time to write not only my epitaph but my own elegy.⁹

But not yet.

There were a few loose stones scattered about the edge of the pool. Taking the biggest first, I swam with it back to the foot of the slickrock chute and placed it there. One by one I brought the others and made a shaky little pile about two feet high leaning against the chute. Hopeless, of course, but there was nothing else to do. I stood on the top of the pile and stretched upward, straining my arms to their utmost limit and groped with fingers and fingernails for a hold on something firm. There was nothing. I crept back down. I began to cry. It was easy. All alone, I didn't have to be brave.

Through the tears I noticed my old walking stick lying nearby. I took it and stood it on the most solid stone in the pile, behind the two topmost stones. I took off my boots, tied them together and hung them around my neck, on my back. I got up on the little pile again and lifted one leg and set my big toe on the top of the stick. This could never work. Slowly and painfully, leaning as much of my weight as I could against the sandstone slide, I applied more and more pressure to the stick, pushing my body upward until I was again stretched out full length above it. Again I felt about for a fingerhold. There was none. The chute was smooth as polished marble.

No, not quite that smooth. This was sandstone, soft and porous, not marble, and between it and my wet body and wet clothing a certain friction was created. In addition, the stick had enabled me to reach a higher section of the S-curved chute, where the angle was more favorable. I discovered that I could move upward, inch by inch, through adhesion and with the help of the leveling tendency of the curve. I gave an extra little push with my big toe—the stones collapsed below, the stick clattered down—and crawled rather like a snail or slug, oozing slime, up over the rounded summit of the slide.

The next obstacle, the overhanging spout twelve feet above a deep plunge pool, looked impossible. It *was* impossible, but with the blind faith of despair I slogged into the water and swam underneath the drop-off and floundered around for a while, scrabbling at the slippery rock until my nerves and tiring muscles convinced my numbed brain that *this was not the way*. I swam back to solid ground and lay down to rest and die in comfort.

Far above I could see the sky, an irregular strip of blue between the dark, hard-edged canyon walls that seemed to lean toward each other as they towered above me. Across that narrow opening a small white cloud was passing, so lovely and precious and delicate and forever inaccessible that it broke the heart and made me weep like a woman, like a child. In all my life I had never seen anything so beautiful.

The walls that rose on either side of the drop-off were literally perpendicular. Eroded by weathering, however, and not by the corrasion¹ of rush-

8. Tokay is a sweet wine, often cheaply available.
9. An epitaph is a short text inscribed on a tombstone, honoring a deceased person; an elegy is a mournful poem, especially a funeral song or a

lament for the dead.

1. The wearing away of rock by the constant flow of water.

ing floodwater, they had a rough surface, chipped, broken, cracked. Where the walls joined the face of the overhang they formed almost a square corner, with a number of minute crevices and inch-wide shelves on either side. It might, after all, be possible. What did I have to lose?

When I had regained some measure of nerve and steadiness I got up off my back and tried the wall beside the pond, clinging to the rock with bare toes and fingertips and inching my way crabwise toward the corner. The watersoaked, heavy boots dangling from my neck, swinging back and forth with my every movement, threw me off balance and I fell into the pool. I swam out to the bank, unslung the boots and threw them up over the drop-off, out of sight. They'd be there if I ever needed them again. Once more I attached myself to the wall, tenderly, sensitively, like a limpet,² and very slowly, very cautiously, worked my way into the corner. Here I was able to climb upward, a few centimeters at a time, by bracing myself against the opposite sides and finding sufficient niches for fingers and toes. As I neared the top and the overhang became noticeable I prepared for a slip, planning to push myself away from the rock so as to fall into the center of the pool where the water was deepest. But it wasn't necessary. Somehow, with a skill and tenacity I could never have found in myself under ordinary circumstances, I managed to creep straight up that gloomy cliff and over the brink of the drop-off and into the flower of safety. My boots were floating under the surface of the little puddle above. As I poured the stinking water out of them and pulled them on and laced them up I discovered myself bawling again for the third time in three hours, the hot delicious tears of victory. And up above the clouds replied—thunder.

I emerged from that treacherous little canyon at sundown, with an enormous fire in the western sky and lightning overhead. Through sweet twilight and the sudden dazzling flare of lightning a I hiked back along the Tonto Bench, bellowing the *Ode to Joy*.³ Long before I reached the place where I could descend safely to the main canyon and my camp, however, darkness set in, the clouds opened their bays and the rain poured down. I took shelter under a ledge in a shallow cave about three feet high—hardly room to sit up in. Others had been here before: the dusty floor of the little hole was littered with the droppings of birds, rats, jackrabbits, and coyotes. There were also a few long gray pieces of scat with a curious twist at one tip—cougar? I didn't care. I had some matches with me, sealed in paraffin (the prudent explorer); I scraped together the handiest twigs and animal droppings and built a little fire and waited for the rain to stop.

It didn't stop. The rain came down for hours in alternate waves of storm and drizzle and I very soon had burnt up all the fuel within reach. No matter. I stretched out in the coyote den, pillowed my head on my arm and suffered through the long long night, wet, cold, aching, hungry, wretched, dreaming claustrophobic nightmares. It was one of the happiest nights of my life.

1968

2. Common name for numerous kinds of salt-water and freshwater snails.

3. A famous theme in the final movement of German composer and pianist Ludwig van

Beethoven's (1770–1827) Ninth Symphony (1824), based on a text by the German poet Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805).

BARRY LOPEZ

Barry Lopez's "The Raven" is a difficult piece of writing to categorize. In its specific attention to details of the desert landscape and creatures, it belongs to the genre of nature writing for which Lopez (b. 1945) is so well known (for example, his award-winning books *Arctic Dreams*, 1986, and *Of Wolves and Men*, 2004). But like much of Lopez's writing, "The Raven" is clearly not a simple factual description of ravens. Embedded in the piece are what we might call "raven tales"—fables or stories about the life and behaviors of a bird whose symbolic importance in indigenous cultures is widespread. And, in fact, the book in which this piece first appeared, *Desert Notes: Reflections in the Eye of a Raven* (1976), bore the subtitle "Short Stories." But as Lopez himself has pointed out, "the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, though logical and even useful, is not as important as the distinction between an authentic and inauthentic story." "The Raven" is an authentic story about the desert landscape and its inhabitants and, equally important, a story that creates in the writer and the reader an authentic sense of wonder. In its presentation of a natural world deeply connected to myth and storytelling there are clear affinities between this piece and the work of Native American writers like Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie.

Lopez is an intimate observer of the landscape he writes about in "The Raven." He grew up in rural Southern California and as a child spent time in the Mojave Desert. His interest in the relationships between landscapes and human culture has taken him on travels to both remote and populated parts of the world.

The Raven

I am going to have to start at the other end by telling you this: there are no crows in the desert. What appear to be crows are ravens. You must examine the crow, however, before you can understand the raven. To forget the crow completely, as some have tried to do, would be like trying to understand the one who stayed without talking to the one who left. It is important to make note of who has left the desert.

To begin with, the crow does nothing alone. He cannot abide silence and he is prone to stealing things, twigs and bits of straw, from the nests of his neighbors. It is a game with him. He enjoys tricks. If he cannot make up his mind the crow will take two or three wives, but this is not a game. The crow is very accommodating and he admires compulsiveness.

Crows will live in street trees in the residential areas of great cities. They will walk at night on the roofs of parked cars and peck at the grit; they will scrape the pinpoints of their talons across the steel and, with their necks outthrust, watch for frightened children listening in their beds.

Put all this to the raven: he will open his mouth as if to say something. Then he will look the other way and say nothing. Later, when you have forgotten, he will tell you he admires the crow.

The raven is larger than the crow and has a beard of black feathers at his throat. He is careful to kill only what he needs. Crows, on the other hand, will search out the great horned owl, kick and punch him awake, and then,

for roosting too close to their nests, they will kill him. They will come out of the sky on a fat, hot afternoon and slam into the head of a dozing rabbit and go away laughing. They will tear out a whole row of planted corn and eat only a few kernels. They will defecate on scarecrows and go home and sleep with 200,000 of their friends in an atmosphere of congratulation. Again, it is only a game; this should not be taken to mean that they are evil.

There is however this: when too many crows come together on a roost there is a lot of shoving and noise and a white film begins to descend over the crows' eyes and they go blind. They fall from their perches and lie on the ground and starve to death. When confronted with this information, crows will look past you and warn you vacantly that it is easy to be misled.

The crow flies like a pigeon. The raven flies like a hawk. He is seen only at a great distance and then not very clearly. This is true of the crow too, but if you are very clever you can trap the crow. The only way to be sure what you have seen is a raven is to follow him until he dies of old age, and then examine the body.

Once there were many crows in the desert. I am told it was like this: you could sit back in the rocks and watch a pack of crows working over the carcass of a coyote. Some would eat, the others would try to squeeze out the vultures. The raven would never be seen. He would be at a distance, alone, perhaps eating a scorpion.

There was, at this time, a small alkaline water hole at the desert's edge. Its waters were bitter. No one but crows would drink there, although they drank sparingly, just one or two sips at a time. One day a raven warned someone about the dangers of drinking the bitter water and was overheard by a crow. When word of this passed among the crows they felt insulted. They jeered and raised insulting gestures to the ravens. They bullied each other into drinking the alkaline water until they had drunk the hole dry and gone blind.

The crows flew into canyon walls and dove straight into the ground at forty miles an hour and broke their necks. The worst of it was their cart-wheeling across the desert floor, stiff wings outstretched, beaks agape, white eyes ballooning, surprising rattlesnakes hidden under sage bushes out of the noonday sun. The snakes awoke, struck and held. The wheeling birds strewed them across the desert like sprung traps.

When all the crows were finally dead, the desert bacteria and fungi bored into them, burrowed through bone and muscle, through aqueous humor¹ and feathers until they had reduced the stiff limbs of soft black to blue dust.

After that, there were no more crows in the desert. The few who watched from a distance took it as a sign and moved away.

Finally there is this: one morning four ravens sat at the edge of the desert waiting for the sun to rise. They had been there all night and the dew was like beads of quicksilver on their wings. Their eyes were closed and they were as still as the cracks in the desert floor.

The wind came off the snow-capped peaks to the north and ruffled their breath feathers. Their talons arched in the white earth and they smoothed

1. The thick watery substance filling the space in the eyeball between the lens and the cornea.

their wings with sleek, dark bills. At first light their bodies swelled and their eyes flashed purple. When the dew dried on their wings they lifted off from the desert floor and flew away in four directions. Crows would never have had the patience for this.

If you want to know more about the raven: bury yourself in the desert so that you have a commanding view of the high basalt² cliffs where he lives. Let only your eyes protrude. Do not blink—the movement will alert the raven to your continued presence. Wait until a generation of ravens has passed away. Of the new generation there will be at least one bird who will find you. He will see your eyes staring up out of the desert floor. The raven is cautious, but he is thorough. He will sense your peaceful intentions. Let him have the first word. Be careful: he will tell you he knows nothing.

If you do not have the time for this, scour the weathered desert shacks for some sign of the raven's body. Look under old mattresses and beneath loose floorboards. Look behind the walls. Sooner or later you will find a severed foot. It will be his and it will be well preserved.

Take it out in the sunlight and examine it closely. Notice that there are three fingers that face forward, and a fourth, the longest and like a thumb, that faces to the rear. The instrument will be black but no longer shiny, the back of it sheathed in armor plate and the underside padded like a wolf's foot.

At the end of each digit you will find a black, curved talon. You will see that the talons are not as sharp as you might have suspected. They are made to grasp and hold fast, not to puncture. They are more like the jaws of a trap than a fistful of ice picks. The subtle difference serves the raven well in the desert. He can weather a storm on a barren juniper limb; he can pick up and examine the crow's eye without breaking it.

1976

2. A common volcanic rock, usually fine-grained due to the rapid cooling of lava.

JAMAICA KINCAID

Jamaica Kincaid was born on the island of Antigua in the West Indies in 1949; at seventeen she felt she had to “rescue herself” from an oppressive cultural and family situation and came to New York as an *au pair* (she calls herself “a servant”). Writing, she has said, was for her “a matter of saving my life.” In 1973 she changed her birth name of Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson to Jamaica Kincaid, because, she said, her family disapproved of her writing. After she left Antigua she did not see her mother again for twenty years. When she began a career as a writer she became a regular contributor to the *New Yorker* magazine. Her first book, *Annie John* (1983), is an autobiographical coming-of-age novel, as is *Lucy* (1990), a fictional version of her coming to New York. Her other work includes a book about Antigua (*A Small Place*, 1988), a memoir (*My Brother*, 1998), two books on gardening (one of her passions), and the stylistically innovative novel *See Now Then* (2013).

“Girl,” which first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1978, is one all-but-uninterrupted sentence in which a West Indian mother instructs her daughter on how to be the “proper” young woman she is certain her daughter is not. Although the daughter

twice tries to interject, she's unable to change what is essentially monologue into dialogue. Kincaid has said that the voice in the story is "my mother's voice exactly over many years" and that, as a child, "a powerless person," she spoke infrequently. Like the other pieces collected in *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), "Girl" resists classification. Its implicit narrative makes it story; its strong rhythm and vivid images make it poetry. Simultaneously, like an essay it documents issues of gender and power. And, like much of this writer's work, it is rooted in autobiography. "I am so happy to write that I don't care what you call it," she has said. The mother/daughter relationship in "Girl" is one of Kincaid's earliest explorations of her ongoing and self-proclaimed "obsessive theme" as a writer: "the relationship between the powerful and the powerless."

Girl

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk barehead in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters¹ in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum² on it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish³ overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna⁴ in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat⁵ boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; *but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school*; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a buttonhole for the button you have just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you iron your father's khaki pants so that they don't have a crease; this is how you grow okra⁶—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen,⁷ make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for

1. A Caribbean dish made from fried calabaza, or West Indian pumpkin.

2. A naturally occurring, viscous resin found in the woody parts of plants.

3. A popular West Indian dish of dried and salted codfish sautéed with spices.

4. A calypso-like music characterized by a call-and-response format; it was used as a form of folk communication to spread gossip and other

local news across the islands of the British West Indies in the early 20th century.

5. Regarding an individual who lives by stealing from ships or warehouses near wharves.

6. Vegetable thought to be of African origin, grown in tropical and warm temperate climates, often cooked in soups and stews or served raw.

7. The edible, starchy, tuberous root of taro, a tropical plant.

breakfast; this is how to behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something; don't throw stones at blackbirds; because it might not be a blackbird at all; this is how to make a bread pudding;⁸ this is how to make doukona;⁹ this is how to make pepper pot;¹ this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child; this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like, and that way something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up; this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so that it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

1978, 1983

8. A dessert made from leftover bread.

9. A Caribbean pudding made from plantain and wrapped in a plantain leaf.

1. A Caribbean meat stew, strongly flavored with cinnamon, hot peppers, and cassareep, a special sauce made from the cassava root.

HUNTER S. THOMPSON

Hunter Stockton Thompson (1937–2005) was born in Louisville, Kentucky. He was a gifted student in literature, but misbehavior at the end of his senior year of high school earned him thirty days in juvenile detention, which prevented his graduation. Joining the air force as a way of getting out of town led to more trouble but also introduced him to the pleasures of life in the Caribbean, where he found work as a newspaper reporter. From there he moved on to feature journalism for such new countercultural magazines as *Scanlan's*, *Ramparts*, and *Rolling Stone*. Early attempts at fiction proved unpublishable until much later in his career, which he fashioned as an extreme style of literary journalism, his method focusing more on the observer's reaction to events than on events themselves (and using the techniques of fiction, such as characterization, imagery, and symbolism, to express those reactions). His most famous books remain his earliest ones: *Hell's Angels* (1967), covering a year he spent riding with this motorcycle gang; *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), an account of his failure to cover a dirt-bike race and a narcotics-law-enforcement convention; and *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* (1973), collecting his presidential campaign reporting as a correspondent for *Rolling Stone*. A self-styled Doctor of Gonzo Journalism, Thompson continued to publish personal reporting about the excesses of American culture until his death from a self-inflicted gunshot.

From Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

The Circus-Circus¹ is what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war. This is the Sixth Reich.² The ground floor is full of gambling tables, like all the other casinos . . . but the place is about four stories high, in the style of a circus tent, and all manner of strange County-Fair/Polish Carnival madness is going on up in this space. Right above the gambling tables the Forty Flying Carazito Brothers are doing a high-wire trapeze act, along with four muzzled Wolverines and the Six Nymphet Sisters from San Diego . . . so you're down on the main floor playing blackjack, and the stakes are getting high when suddenly you chance to look up, and there, right smack above your head is a half-naked fourteen-year-old girl being chased through the air by a snarling wolverine, which is suddenly locked in a death battle with two silver-painted Polacks who come swinging down from opposite balconies and meet in mid-air on the wolverine's neck . . . both Polacks seize the animal as they fall straight down towards the crap tables—but they bounce off the net; they separate and spring back up towards the roof in three different directions, and just as they're about to fall again they are grabbed out of the air by three Korean Kittens and trapezed off to one of the balconies.

This madness goes on and on, but nobody seems to notice. The gambling action runs twenty-four hours a day on the main floor, and the circus never ends. Meanwhile, on all the upstairs balconies, the customers are being hustled by every conceivable kind of bizarre shuck. All kinds of funhouse-type booths. Shoot the pasties off the nipples of a ten-foot bull-dyke and win a cotton-candy goat. Stand in front of this fantastic machine, my friend, and for just 99¢ your likeness will appear, two hundred feet tall, on a screen above downtown Las Vegas. Ninety-nine cents more for a voice message. "Say whatever you want, fella. They'll hear you, don't worry about that. Remember you'll be two hundred feet tall."

Jesus Christ. I could see myself lying in bed in the Mint Hotel, half-asleep and staring idly out the window, when suddenly a vicious nazi drunkard appears two hundred feet tall in the midnight sky, screaming gibberish at the world: "*Woodstock Über Alles!*"³

We will close the drapes tonight. A thing like that could send a drug person careening around the room like a ping-pong ball. Hallucinations are bad enough. But after a while you learn to cope with things like seeing your dead grandmother crawling up your leg with a knife in her teeth. Most acid fanciers can handle this sort of thing.

But *nobody* can handle that other trip—the possibility that any freak with \$1.98 can walk into the Circus-Circus and suddenly appear in the sky over downtown Las Vegas twelve times the size of God, howling anything that

1. Casino and entertainment center that opened in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 1968.

2. The Nazi government in Germany (1933–45) declared itself the Third Reich ("Empire"); there were no Fourth and Fifth Reichs.

3. Woodstock Above All (German); a play on the German National Anthem ("*Das Lied der*

Deutschen," popularly known as "*Deutschland, Deutschland, Über Alles*"), with a reference to Woodstock, the rock festival held August 15–17, 1969, outside Bethel, an area southwest of Woodstock, New York, an event considered the high point of 1960s counterculture.

comes into his head. No, this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs. Reality itself is too twisted.

1971

JOAN DIDION

Joan Didion's collection of essays on the 1960s counterculture, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), made her famous and established her as a practitioner of "the New Journalism." Her second essay collection, *The White Album* (1979), mixes autobiography with analyses of cultural events in Los Angeles in the 1960s (the book's title refers to the Beatles' 1968 double album which had no graphics or text on the cover other than the band's name). These widely influential books confirmed Didion's reputation as a shrewd and edgy cultural observer and literary stylist. She has also published several novels, including *Play It As It Lays* (1970) and *Democracy* (1984).

A native Californian, Didion (b. 1934) moved to New York as a young woman, where she worked for *Vogue* magazine and, in 1964, married the novelist John Gregory Dunne. In the mid-1960s they moved to Los Angeles, where they spent the next twenty years. Didion and Dunne collaborated on several screenplays and became a glamorous couple whose talents were sought after in Hollywood. In the 1980s they moved back to New York, where Didion continued her work as a screenwriter, novelist, and nonfiction author. *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) is Didion's account of the year following her husband's sudden death from cardiac arrest. Two months before its publication, the couple's daughter, Quintana Roo, whom they adopted in 1966, also died. In the memoir, Didion turned her steely-eyed gaze on herself, using all the tools at her disposal to offer an unsparing description of grief. "We tell stories in order to live," *The White Album* begins; over a quarter century later, Didion remained true to those words.

In this excerpt from the title essay of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Didion presents the chaotic scene of "happenings" in 1960s San Francisco—spontaneous public performances meant to provoke thought and reaction. She penetrates the lives of those who drift through the transient crowds near Golden Gate Park. Coolly noting such details as blackface performers and little children taking LSD, Didion plays journalistic neutrality against what she views as the excesses of the counterculture.

From *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

Janis Joplin is singing with Big Brother in the Panhandle and almost everybody is high and it is a pretty nice Sunday afternoon between three and six o'clock, which the activists say are the three hours of the week when something is most likely to happen in the Haight-Ashbury, and who turns up but Peter Berg.¹ He is with his wife and six or seven other people, along with

1. American actor, playwright, and activist (1937–2011), cofounder of the Diggers, a radical community action and street theater group operating in San Francisco from 1967 until 1968,

and a member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a street theater group founded in 1959. "Janis Joplin": rock star (1943–1970) and lead singer of Big Brother and the Holding Company,



San Francisco Mime Troupe performing in Golden Gate Park.

Chester Anderson's associate The Connection,² and the first peculiar thing is, they're in blackface.

I mention to Max and Sharon³ that some members of the Mime Troupe seem to be in blackface.

"It's street theater," Sharon assures me. "It's supposed to be really groovy."

The Mime Troupers get a little closer, and there are some other peculiar things about them. For one thing they are tapping people on the head with dime-store plastic nightsticks, and for another they are wearing signs on their backs. "HOW MANY TIMES YOU BEEN RAPED, YOU LOVE FREAKS?" and "WHO STOLE CHUCK BERRY'S⁴ MUSIC?," things like that. Then they are distributing communication company fliers which say:

& this summer thousands of un-white un-suburban boppers are going to want to know why you've given up what they can't get & how you get away with it & how come you not a faggot⁵ with hair so long & they want haight street one way or the other. IF YOU DON'T KNOW, BY AUGUST HAIGHT STREET WILL BE A CEMETERY.

Max reads the flier and stands up. "I'm getting bad vibes," he says, and he and Sharon leave.

I have to stay around because I'm looking for Otto so I walk over to where the Mime Troupers have formed a circle around a Negro. Peter Berg is saying if anybody asks that this is street theater, and I figure the curtain is up because what they are doing right now is jabbing the Negro with the nightsticks. They jab, and they bare their teeth, and they rock on the balls of their feet and they wait.

a band formed in San Francisco in 1965; "Panh-handle": park in San Francisco adjacent to Golden Gate Park; "Haight-Ashbury": San Francisco neighborhood where hippies and thousands of others attracted to the counterculture movement gathered during the 1967 "Summer of Love."

2. Nickname for Claude Hayward, who along with writer and editor Chester Anderson (1932–1991), cofounded the Communications Company (ComCo), which made mimeographed posters for the Diggers, the San Francisco Mime

Troupe, and others.

3. Max, Sharon, Otto, Susan, Don, Sue Ann, and others mentioned by first name are people Didion met in San Francisco as she reported on the counterculture.

4. Charles Edward Anderson "Chuck" Berry (b. 1926), African American singer, guitarist, and songwriter who pioneered rock and roll in the mid-twentieth century.

5. Derogatory term for homosexual. "Boppers": slang for fans or players of bebop-style jazz.

"I'm beginning to get annoyed here," the Negro says. "I'm gonna get mad."

By now there are several Negroes around, reading the signs and watching.

"Just beginning to get annoyed, are you?" one of the Mime Troupers says. "Don't you think it's about time?"

"Nobody *stole* Chuck Berry's music, man," says another Negro who has been studying the signs. "Chuck Berry's music belongs to *everybody*."

"Yeh?" a girl in blackface says. "Everybody *who*?"

"Why," he says, confused. "Everybody. In America."

"In *America*," the blackface girl shrieks. "Listen to him talk about *America*."

"Listen," he says helplessly. "Listen here."

"What'd *America* ever do for you?" the girl in blackface jeers. "White kids here, they can sit in the Park all summer long, listening to the music they stole, because their bigshot parents keep sending them money. Who ever sends you money?"

"Listen," the Negro says, his voice rising. "You're gonna start something here, this isn't right—"

"You tell us what's right, black boy," the girl says.

The youngest member of the blackface group, an earnest tall kid about nineteen, twenty, is hanging back at the edge of the scene. I offer him an apple and ask what is going on. "Well," he says, "I'm new at this, I'm just beginning to study it, but you see the capitalists are taking over the District, and that's what Peter—well, ask Peter."

I did not ask Peter. It went on for a while. But on that particular Sunday between three and six o'clock everyone was too high and the weather was too good and the Hunter's Point⁶ gangs who usually come in between three and six on Sunday afternoon had come in on Saturday instead, and nothing started. While I waited for Otto I asked a little girl I knew slightly what she had thought of it. "It's something groovy they call street theater," she said. I said I had wondered if it might not have political overtones. She was seventeen years old and she worked it around in her mind awhile and finally she remembered a couple of words from somewhere. "Maybe it's some John Birch⁷ thing," she said.

When I finally find Otto he says "I got something at my place that'll blow your mind," and when we get there I see a child on the living-room floor, wearing a reefer coat,⁸ reading a comic book. She keeps licking her lips in concentration and the only off thing about her is that she's wearing white lipstick.

"Five years old," Otto says. "On acid."⁹

The five-year-old's name is Susan, and she tells me she is in High Kindergarten. She lives with her mother and some other people, just got over the measles, wants a bicycle for Christmas, and particularly likes Coca-Cola,

6. African American neighborhood in southeast San Francisco.

7. Anticomunist activist group that opposed the civil rights movement.

8. Short, double-breasted jacket, typically worn by sailors in the navy.

9. Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), a powerful hallucinogenic drug.

ice cream, Marty in the Jefferson Airplane, Bob in the Grateful Dead,¹ and the beach. She remembers going to the beach once a long time ago, and wishes she had taken a bucket. For a year now her mother has given her both acid and peyote.² Susan describes it as getting stoned.

I start to ask if any of the other children in High Kindergarten get stoned, but I falter at the key words.

“She means do the other kids in your class turn on, *get stoned*,” says the friend of her mother’s who brought her to Otto’s.

“Only Sally and Anne,” Susan says.

“What about Lia?” her mother’s friend prompts.

“Lia,” Susan says, “is not in High Kindergarten.”

Sue Ann’s three-year-old Michael started a fire this morning before anyone was up, but Don got it out before much damage was done. Michael burned his arm though, which is probably why Sue Ann was so jumpy when she happened to see him chewing on an electric cord. “You’ll fry like rice,” she screamed. The only people around were Don and one of Sue Ann’s macrobiotic friends and somebody who was on his way to a commune in the Santa Lucias, and they didn’t notice Sue Ann screaming at Michael because they were in the kitchen trying to retrieve some very good Moroccan hash³ which had dropped down through a floorboard damaged in the fire.

1967

1. Bob Weir (b. 1947), guitarist for the Grateful Dead, rock band. “Marty”: Martin Balin (b. 1942), founder and co-lead singer of the rock band Jefferson Airplane. Both bands were formed in San Francisco in 1965.

2. Small cactus used as a drug for its psychoactive properties. Historically used by Native

Americans for spiritual purposes.

3. Abbreviated term for hashish, a drug in the cannabis family. “Macrobiotic”: following a diet of unprocessed foods based on Taoist principles of balancing life forces of yin and yang. “Santa Lucias”: mountain range along the central coast of California.

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

Known both for his fiction—particularly his epic novels *Infinite Jest* (1996) and the posthumously published *The Pale King* (2011)—and for his exuberant nonfiction, Wallace represents a maximal style in both genres. Wallace was the son of Midwestern academics, his father a philosophy professor and his mother an English teacher. He grew up in Illinois and was educated at Amherst College, where he majored in philosophy and English, and where he started to study creative writing. He graduated from the MFA program in fiction at the University of Arizona in 1987; eleven years later *Infinite Jest* earned him a MacArthur Foundation “genius grant,” which freed him from teaching for a time.

Wallace’s intense approach to writing was distinguished by extended research projects—notably on the pornography industry for the essay “Adult World” and on the Internal Revenue Service for *The Pale King*—and a style that was by turns sincere and satirical, self-conscious and arrogant, intellectual and lowbrow. Plagued by manic depression and addiction throughout his adult life, Wallace committed

suicide in 2008, inspiring an outpouring of regret and appreciation, as well as a serious biography and a posthumously assembled version of *The Pale King*, which he had been working on when he died. In his nonfiction, Wallace took up a wide array of subjects, from television to politics to tennis, with a verve and curiosity that made a mark on this swiftly evolving genre.

Wallace's appetite for arcane facts and attraction to American kitsch combine with his inward-looking attention to consciousness in this selection from one of his most widely admired essays, "Consider the Lobster." His assignment for *Gourmet* magazine was to report on the 2004 Maine Lobster Festival. Always fascinated by the experience of psychic pain and the ethics of inflicting pain on others, Wallace adopts a relentlessly questioning style that bars readers from simply consuming his description of the lobster's anatomy and passively accepting the ways cooks kill them.

From Consider the Lobster

There happen to be two main criteria that most ethicists agree on for determining whether a living creature has the capacity to suffer and so has genuine interests that it may or may not be our moral duty to consider.¹ One is how much of the neurological hardware required for pain-experience the animal comes equipped with—nociceptors, prostaglandins, neuronal opioid receptors, etc. The other criterion is whether the animal demonstrates behavior associated with pain. And it takes a lot of intellectual gymnastics and behaviorist² hairsplitting not to see struggling, thrashing, and lid-clattering as just such pain-behavior. According to marine zoologists, it usually takes lobsters between 35 and 45 seconds to die in boiling water. (No source I could find talks about how long it takes them to die in superheated steam; one rather hopes it's faster.)

There are, of course, other ways to kill your lobster on-site and so achieve maximum freshness. Some cooks' practice is to drive a sharp heavy knife point-first into a spot just above the midpoint between the lobster's eye-stalks (more or less where the Third Eye³ is in human foreheads). This is alleged either to kill the lobster instantly or to render it insensate, and is said at least to eliminate some of the cowardice involved in throwing a creature into boiling water and then fleeing the room. As far as I can tell from talking to proponents of the knife-in-head method, the idea is that it's more violent but ultimately more merciful, plus that a willingness to exert personal agency and accept responsibility for stabbing the lobster's head honors the lobster somehow and entitles one to eat it (there's often a vague sort

1. "Interests" basically means strong and legitimate preferences, which obviously require some degree of consciousness, responsiveness to stimuli, etc. See, for instance, the utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer, whose 1974 *Animal Liberation* is more or less the bible of the modern animal-rights movement:

It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a schoolboy. A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any

difference to its welfare. A mouse, on the other hand, does have an interest in not being kicked along the road, because it will suffer if it is [Wallace's note].

2. Adherent of the theory that psychology is best understood by studying the external behavior of individuals.

3. The spiritual inner eye associated with Hindu tradition, represented as an eye or triangle set between the brows, in the middle of the forehead.

of Native American spirituality-of-the-hunt flavor to pro-knife arguments). But the problem with the knife method is basic biology: Lobsters' nervous systems operate off not one but several ganglia, a.k.a. nerve bundles, which are sort of wired in series and distributed all along the lobster's underside, from stem to stern. And disabling only the frontal ganglion does not normally result in quick death or unconsciousness.

Another alternative is to put the lobster in cold saltwater and then very slowly bring it up to a full boil. Cooks who advocate this method are going on the analogy to a frog, which can supposedly be kept from jumping out of a boiling pot by heating the water incrementally. In order to save a lot of research-summarizing, I'll simply assure you that the analogy between frogs and lobsters turns out not to hold—plus, if the kettle's water isn't aerated seawater, the immersed lobster suffers from slow suffocation, although usually not decisive enough suffocation to keep it from still thrashing and clattering when the water gets hot enough to kill it. In fact, lobsters boiled incrementally often display a whole bonus set of gruesome, convulsionlike reactions that you don't see in regular boiling.

Ultimately, the only certain virtues of the home-lobotomy⁴ and slow-heating methods are comparative, because there are even worse/crueler ways people prepare lobster. Time-thrifty cooks sometimes microwave them alive (usually after poking several vent-holes in the carapace, which is a precaution most shellfish-microwavers learn about the hard way). Live dismemberment, on the other hand, is big in Europe—some chefs cut the lobster in half before cooking; others like to tear off the claws and tail and toss only these parts into the pot.

And there's more unhappy news respecting suffering-criterion number one. Lobsters don't have much in the way of eyesight or hearing, but they do have an exquisite tactile sense, one facilitated by hundreds of thousands of tiny hairs that protrude through their carapace. "Thus it is," in the words of T. M. Prudden's industry classic *About Lobster*, "that although encased in what seems a solid, impenetrable armor, the lobster can receive stimuli and impressions from without as readily as if it possessed a soft and delicate skin." And lobsters do have nociceptors,⁵ as well as invertebrate versions of the prostaglandins and major neurotransmitters via which our own brains register pain.

Lobsters do not, on the other hand, appear to have the equipment for making or absorbing natural opioids like endorphins and enkephalins, which are what more advanced nervous systems use to try to handle intense pain. From this fact, though, one could conclude either that lobsters are maybe even *more* vulnerable to pain, since they lack mammalian nervous systems' built-in analgesia,⁶ or, instead, that the absence of natural opioids implies an absence of the really intense pain-sensations that natural opioids are designed to mitigate. I for one can detect a marked upswing in mood as I contemplate this latter possibility. It could be that their lack of endorphin/enkephalin hardware means that lobsters' raw subjective experience of pain is so radically different from mammals' that it may not even

4. Surgery to sever nerves in the prefrontal lobe of the brain.

5. This is the neurological term for special pain-receptors that are "sensitive to potentially damaging extremes of temperature, to mechanical

forces, and to chemical substances which are released when body tissues are damaged" [Wallace's note].

6. Ability to block pain.

deserve the term “pain.” Perhaps lobsters are more like those frontal-lobotomy patients one reads about who report experiencing pain in a totally different way than you and I. These patients evidently do feel physical pain, neurologically speaking, but don’t dislike it—though neither do they like it; it’s more that they feel it but don’t feel anything *about* it—the point being that the pain is not distressing to them or something they want to get away from. Maybe lobsters, who are also without frontal lobes, are detached from the neurological-registration-of-injury-or-hazard we call pain in just the same way. There is, after all, a difference between (1) pain as a purely neurological event, and (2) actual suffering, which seems crucially to involve an emotional component, an awareness of pain as unpleasant, as something to fear/dislike/want to avoid.

Still, after all the abstract intellection, there remain the facts of the frantically clanking lid, the pathetic clinging to the edge of the pot. Standing at the stove, it is hard to deny in any meaningful way that this is a living creature experiencing pain and wishing to avoid/escape the painful experience. To my lay mind, the lobster’s behavior in the kettle appears to be the expression of a *preference*, and it may well be that an ability to form preferences is the decisive criterion for real suffering.⁷ The logic of this (preference → suffering) relation may be easiest to see in the negative case. If you cut certain kinds of worms in half, the halves will often keep crawling around and going about their vermiform⁸ business as if nothing had happened. When we assert, based on their post-op behavior, that these worms appear not to be suffering, what we’re really saying is that there’s no sign the worms know anything bad has happened or would *prefer* not to have gotten cut in half.

Lobsters, though, are known to exhibit preferences. Experiments have shown that they can detect changes of only a degree or two in water temperature; one reason for their complex migratory cycles (which can often cover 100-plus miles a year) is to pursue the temperatures they like best.⁹ And, as mentioned, they’re bottom-dwellers and do not like bright light—if a tank of food-lobsters is out in the sunlight or a store’s fluorescence, the lobsters will always congregate in whatever part is darkest. Fairly solitary in the ocean, they also clearly dislike the crowding that’s part of their captivity in

7. “Preference” is maybe roughly synonymous with “interests,” but it is a better term for our purposes because it’s less abstractly philosophical—“preference” seems more personal, and it’s the whole idea of a living creature’s personal experience that’s at issue [Wallace’s note].

8. Having the form of a worm.

9. Of course, the most common sort of counterargument here would begin by objecting that “like best” is really just a metaphor, and a misleadingly anthropomorphic one at that. The counterarguer would posit that the lobster seeks to maintain a certain optimal ambient temperature out of nothing but unconscious instinct (with a similar explanation for the low-light affinities upcoming in the main text). The thrust of such a counterargument will be that the lobster’s thrashings and clankings in the kettle express not unpreferred pain but involuntary reflexes, like your leg shooting out when the doctor hits your knee. Be advised that there are professional scientists, including many researchers who use animals in

experiments, who hold to the view that nonhuman creatures have no real feelings at all, merely “behaviors.” Be further advised that this view has a long history that goes all the way back to Descartes, although its modern support comes mostly from behaviorist psychology.

To these what-looks-like-pain-is-really-just-reflexes counterarguments, however, there happen to be all sorts of scientific and pro-animal rights counter-counterarguments. And then further attempted rebuttals and redirects, and so on. Suffice it to say that both the scientific and the philosophical arguments on either side of the animal-suffering issue are involved, abstruse, technical, often informed by self-interest or ideology, and in the end so totally inconclusive that as a practical matter, in the kitchen or restaurant, it all still seems to come down to individual conscience, going with (no pun) your gut [Wallace’s note].

tanks, since (as also mentioned) one reason why lobsters' claws are banded on capture is to keep them from attacking one another under the stress of close-quarter storage.

In any event, at the MLF,¹ standing by the bubbling tanks outside the World's Largest Lobster Cooker, watching the fresh-caught lobsters pile over one another, wave their hobbled claws impotently, huddle in the rear corners, or scabble frantically back from the glass as you approach, it is difficult not to sense that they're unhappy, or frightened, even if it's some rudimentary version of these feelings . . . and, again, why does rudimentariness even enter into it? Why is a primitive, inarticulate form of suffering less urgent or uncomfortable for the person who's helping to inflict it by paying for the food it results in? I'm not trying to give you a PETA-like screed here—at least I don't think so. I'm trying, rather, to work out and articulate some of the troubling questions that arise amid all the laughter and saltation² and community pride of the Maine Lobster Festival. The truth is that if you, the festival attendee, permit yourself to think that lobsters can suffer and would rather not, the MLF begins to take on the aspect of something like a Roman circus or medieval torture-fest.

Does that comparison seem a bit much? If so, exactly why? Or what about this one: Is it possible that future generations will regard our present agribusiness and eating practices in much the same way we now view Nero's entertainments or Mengele's³ experiments? My own initial reaction is that such a comparison is hysterical, extreme—and yet the reason it seems extreme to me appears to be that I believe animals are less morally important than human beings;⁴ and when it comes to defending such a belief, even to myself, I have to acknowledge that (a) I have an obvious selfish interest in this belief, since I like to eat certain kinds of animals and want to be able to keep doing it, and (b) I haven't succeeded in working out any sort of personal ethical system in which the belief is truly defensible instead of just selfishly convenient.

Given this article's venue and my own lack of culinary sophistication, I'm curious about whether the reader can identify with any of these reactions and acknowledgments and discomforts. I'm also concerned not to come off as shrill or preachy when what I really am is more like confused. For those *Gourmet* readers who enjoy well-prepared and -presented meals involving beef, veal, lamb, pork, chicken, lobster, etc.: Do you think much about the (possible) moral status and (probable) suffering of the animals involved? If you do, what ethical convictions have you worked out that permit you not just to eat but to savor and enjoy flesh-based viands (since of course refined *enjoyment*, rather than mere ingestion, is the whole point of gastronomy⁵)?

1. Maine Lobster Festival.

2. The two relevant meanings are dancing, and spurting forth of blood, both obsolete. "PETA": People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, an animal-rights activist group.

3. Josef Mengele (1911–1979), German Schutzstaffel (SS) officer and physician who conducted medical experiments on prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland during World War II. "Nero": famously violent Roman emperor (37–68 C.E.), ruling from 54 to 68 C.E.

4. Meaning *a lot* less important, apparently, since the moral comparison here is not the value of one human's life vs. the value of one animal's life, but rather the value of one animal's life vs. the value of one human's taste for a particular kind of protein. Even the most diehard carnivore will acknowledge that it's possible to live and eat well without consuming animals [Wallace's note].

5. The art of choosing, preparing, and eating fine food.

If, on the other hand, you'll have no truck with confusions or convictions and regard stuff like the previous paragraph as just so much fatuous navel-gazing, what makes it feel truly okay, inside, to just dismiss the whole thing out of hand? That is, is your refusal to think about any of this the product of actual thought, or is it just that you don't want to think about it? And if the latter, then why not? Do you ever think, even idly, about the possible reasons for your reluctance to think about it? I am not trying to bait anyone here—I'm genuinely curious. After all, isn't being extra aware and attentive and thoughtful about one's food and its overall context part of what distinguishes a real gourmet? Or is all the gourmet's extra attention and sensibility just supposed to be sensuous? Is it really all just a matter of taste and presentation?

These last few queries, though, while sincere, obviously involve much larger and more abstract questions about the connections (if any) between aesthetics and morality—about what the adjective in a phrase like “The Magazine of Good Living”⁶ is really supposed to mean—and these questions lead straightaway into such deep and treacherous waters that it's probably best to stop the public discussion right here. There are limits to what even interested persons can ask of each other.

2004

6. *Gourmet* magazine's slogan.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, in 1969. Her novels *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *The Farming of Bones* (1998), as well as her collection of stories, *Krik? Krak!* (1995—the title comes from a Haitian chant), draw on her experiences as a Haitian American. Danticat was two years old when her father left Haiti to make a better life for the family in the United States; two years later, her mother left to join him. For the next eight years Danticat and her brother remained in Haiti under the care of their uncle Joseph, a Baptist minister who founded his own church and school in Port-au-Prince. She then emigrated to the United States to be reunited with her parents. In 2004, after violence destroyed her uncle's church and put his life in jeopardy, Joseph entered the United States asking for temporary asylum but was detained in Miami by Department of Homeland Security officials suspicious of his plea. During questioning, Joseph collapsed but was refused treatment at the time. The next day he was taken to a Florida hospital where he died. In October 2007 Danticat testified on this issue before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship Refuges, Border Security, and International Law. Like many creative nonfiction writers, Danticat uses personal narrative to illuminate larger issues: the political and economic situation in Haiti, the challenges facing immigrants to the United States, and the need to reform the practices of immigration detainee medical care.

Brother, I'm Dying is a memoir partly of the writer's childhood in Haiti and, more particularly, of the interconnected lives of her uncle and father, who, after leaving Haiti, ran a car-service business in New York and died from pulmonary fibrosis soon after his brother's death. When the adult Danticat, now pregnant with her

first child, listens to her gravely ill father respond to the question “Have you enjoyed your life?” by speaking of his children and family, she recalls living as a child with her uncle when the family would regularly receive letters from her father in the United States. This selection captures Danticat’s exploration of what words can and cannot say, a question at the heart of this writer’s work.

From Brother, I’m Dying

Listening to my father, I remembered a time when I used to dream of smuggling him words. I was eight years old and Bob and I were living in Haiti with his oldest brother, my uncle Joseph, and his wife. And since they didn’t have a telephone at home—few Haitian families did then—and access to the call centers was costly, we had no choice but to write letters. Every other month, my father would mail a half-page, three-paragraph missive addressed to my uncle. Scribbled in his minuscule scrawl, sometimes on plain white paper, other times on lined, hole-punched notebook pages still showing bits of fringe from the spiral binding, my father’s letters were composed in stilted French,¹ with the first paragraph offering news of his and my mother’s health, the second detailing how to spend the money they had wired for food, lodging, and school expenses for Bob and myself, the third section concluding abruptly after reassuring us that we’d be hearing from him again before long.

Later I would discover in a first-year college composition class that his letters had been written in a diamond sequence, the Aristotelian *Poetics*² correspondence, requiring an opening greeting, a middle detail or request, and a brief farewell at the end. The letter-writing process had been such an agonizing chore for my father, one that he’d hurried through while assembling our survival money, that this specific epistolary formula, which he followed unconsciously, had offered him a comforting way of disciplining his emotions.

“I was no writer,” he later told me. “What I wanted to tell you and your brother was too big for any piece of paper and a small envelope.”

Whatever restraint my father showed in his letters was easily compensated for by Uncle Joseph’s reactions to them. First there was the public reading in my uncle’s sparsely furnished pink living room, in front of Tante³ Denise, Bob and me. This was done so there would be no misunderstanding as to how the money my parents sent for me and my brother would be spent. Usually my uncle would read the letters out loud, pausing now and then to ask my help with my father’s penmanship, a kindness, I thought, a way to include me a step further. It soon became obvious, however, that my father’s handwriting was as clear to me as my own, so I eventually acquired the job of deciphering his letters.

Along with this task came a few minutes of preparation for the reading and thus a few intimate moments with my father’s letters, not only the words and phrases, which did not vary greatly from month to month, but the vow-

1. That is, the formal French taught in Haitian schools, rather than the vernacular Creole of everyday life.

2. The earliest surviving work of dramatic and

literary theory, written by Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), which analyzes poetry in terms of its essential elements.

3. Aunt (French).

els and syllables, their tilts and slants, which did. Because he wrote so little, I would try to guess his thoughts and moods from the dotting of his *i*'s and the crossing of his *t*'s, from whether there were actual periods at the ends of his sentences or just faint dots where the tip of his pen had simply landed. Did commas split his streamlined phrases, or were they staccato,⁴ like someone speaking too rapidly, out of breath?

For the family readings, I recited my father's letters in a monotone, honoring what I interpreted as a secret between us, that the impersonal style of his letters was due as much to his lack of faith in words and their ability to accurately reproduce his emotions as to his caution with Bob's and my feelings, avoiding too-happy news that might add to the anguish of separation, too-sad news that might worry us, and any hint of judgment or disapproval for my aunt and uncle, which they could have interpreted as suggestions that they were mistreating us. The dispassionate letters were his way of avoiding a minefield, one he could have set off from a distance without being able to comfort the victims.

Given all this anxiety, I'm amazed my father wrote at all. The regularity, the consistency of his correspondence now feels like an act of valor. In contrast, my replies, though less routine—Uncle Joseph did most of the writing—were both painstakingly upbeat and suppliant. In my letters, I bragged about my good grades and requested, as a reward for them, an American doll at Christmas, a typewriter or sewing machine for my birthday, a pair of “real” gold earrings for Easter. But the things I truly wanted I was afraid to ask for, like when I would finally see him and my mother again. However, since my uncle read and corrected all my letters for faulty grammar and spelling, I wrote for his eyes more than my father's, hoping that even after the vigorous editing, my father would still decode the longing in my childish cursive slopes and arches, which were so much like his own.

The words that both my father and I wanted to exchange we never did. These letters were not approved, in his case by him, in my case by my uncle. No matter what the reason, we have always been equally paralyzed by the fear of breaking each other's heart. This is why I could never ask the question Bob did. I also could never tell my father that I'd learned from the doctor that he was dying. Even when they mattered less, there were things he and I were too afraid to say.

2007

4. A form of musical articulation, signifying unconnected notes, short and detached.

GEORGE SAUNDERS

b. 1958

Few writers in the second half of the twentieth century have probed the commercial culture of America with the insight and wit of George Saunders. Saunders's ear tunes to the jargon of business management, the platitudes of marketing, the clichés of popular psychology, and the euphemisms that blind people to violence of all kinds. Within the distilled form of the short story, Saunders creates characters partially trapped in these ways of speaking—and thinking—who struggle to bend their language to more moral or soulful human ends.

Saunders's early life was suffused with the varieties of language so often on display in the stories. His father was in the Air Force, stationed in Amarillo, Texas, when Saunders was born in 1958. The family later moved to Chicago, where his father worked in the insurance and coal businesses, then bought a Chicken Unlimited franchise where the young Saunders worked in high school alongside his mother and sisters. Saunders tells how his father “would bring home books like Machiavelli's *The Prince* or Michael Harrington's *The Other Side of America* or *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair, and he would just leave them on my bed, saying, ‘I think you should take a look at this.’”

Saunders became a writer relatively late in life. He graduated from the Chicago School of Mines and worked in the Sumatran oil fields after college. Stationed at a remote jungle camp, he started reading seriously. After falling sick from swimming in a polluted river, he returned to the United States and took a variety of odd jobs, including, as he says, “doorman, roofer, convenience store clerk” and “knuckle-puller” in a slaughterhouse. Quoting the British Marxist critic Terry Eagleton, Saunders says he came to understand “capitalism as a benign-looking thing that . . . ‘plunders the sensuality of the body.’” The sense that modern labor renders people less than human pervades Saunders's work, though he is also a comic writer.

Comic writing, for Saunders, does not always mean funny writing. He has said that “comic, for me, means that there is always a shortfall between what we think of ourselves and what we are. . . . Maybe the most clearly we ever see reality is when it boots us in the ass.” He cites the work of Steve Martin, Monty Python, the Marx Brothers, and Dr. Seuss (alongside many literary sources) as influences on his writing. He became a student, and, less than a decade later, in 1996, a professor at the MFA program at Syracuse University. In 2006, he was awarded both Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships—the latter known as the “genius grant.” He has published four short-story collections, a book of essays titled *The Braindead Megaphone* (2007), an illustrated fable, a children's book, and nonfiction articles for *GQ*, the *New Yorker*, and other publications on topics ranging from the “Minute Men” on the Mexican border to theme hotels in Dubai to a homeless tent city in Fresno, California, where he lived for a time while doing research.

In the story reprinted here, one of his most admired, Saunders meditates on the issues of racism and war in American history, as the Civil War is repackaged as contemporary entertainment but becomes, finally and inescapably, real. His weak hero struggles to find both words and actions to match the persistent nudge of human compassion that prompts him to resist these American legacies.

CivilWarLand in Bad Decline

Whenever a potential big investor comes for the tour the first thing I do is take him to the transplanted Erie Canal Lock.¹ We've got a good ninety feet of actual Canal out there and a well-researched dioramic of a coolie² campsite. Were our faces ever red when we found out it was actually the Irish who built the Canal. We've got no budget to correct, so every fifteen minutes or so a device in the bunkhouse gives off the approximate aroma of an Oriental meal.

Today my possible Historical Reconstruction Associate is Mr. Haberstrom, founder of Burn'n' Learn. Burn'n' Learn is national. Their gimmick is a fully stocked library on the premises and as you tan you call out the name of any book you want to these high-school girls on roller skates. As we walk up the trail he's wearing a sweatsuit and smoking a cigar and I tell him I admire his acumen. I tell him some men are dreamers and others are doers. He asks which am I and I say let's face it, I'm basically the guy who leads the dreamers up the trail to view the Canal Segment. He likes that. He says I have a good head on my shoulders. He touches my arm and says he's hot to spend some reflective moments at the Canal because his great-grandfather was a barge guider way back when who got killed by a donkey. When we reach the clearing he gets all emotional and bolts off through the gambling plaster Chinese. Not to be crass but I sense an impending sizable contribution.

When I come up behind him however I see that once again the gangs have been at it with their spray cans, all over my Lock. Haberstrom takes a nice long look. Then he pokes me with the spitty end of his cigar and says not with his money I don't, and storms back down the trail.

I stand there alone a few minutes. The last thing I need is some fat guy's spit on my tie. I think about quitting. Then I think about my last degrading batch of résumés. Two hundred send-outs and no nibbles. My feeling is that prospective employers are put off by the fact that I was a lowly Verisimilitude Inspector for nine years with no promotions. I think of my car payment. I think of how much Marcus and Howie love the little playhouse I'm still paying off. Once again I decide to eat my pride and sit tight.

So I wipe off my tie with a leaf and start down to break the Haberstrom news to Mr. Alsuga.

Mr. A's another self-made man. He cashed in on his love of history by conceptualizing CivilWarLand in his spare time. He started out with just a settler's shack and one Union costume and now has considerable influence in Rotary.³

His office is in City Hall. He agrees that the gangs are getting out of hand. Last month they wounded three Visitors and killed a dray horse.⁴ Several of them encircled and made fun of Mrs. Dugan in her settler outfit

1. Completed in 1825, the Erie Canal runs from the Hudson River in the east to Lake Erie in the west; 35 locks manage water flow between stretches of water at different elevations, allowing two-way traffic.

2. Derogatory term for Asian laborers who came

to the United States in the nineteenth century.

3. Founded in 1905, Rotary International is a service organization and social club operating in communities in the United States and around the world.

4. Horse bred to pull heavy loads.

as she was taking her fresh-baked bread over to the simulated Towne Meeting. No way they're paying admission, so they're either tunneling in or coming in over the retaining wall.

Mr. Alsuga believes the solution to the gang problem is Teen Groups. I tell him that's basically what a gang is, a Teen Group. But he says how can it be a Teen Group without an adult mentor with a special skill, like whittling? Mr. Alsuga whittles. Once he gave an Old Tyme Skills Seminar on it in the Blacksmith Shoppe. It was poorly attended. All he got was two widowers and a chess-club type no gang would have wanted anyway. And myself. I attended. Evelyn called me a bootlicker, but I attended. She called me a bootlicker, and I told her she'd better bear in mind which side of the bread her butter was on. She said whichever side it was on it wasn't enough to shake a stick at. She's always denigrating my paystub. I came home from the Seminar with this kind of whittled duck. She threw it away the next day because she said she thought it was an acorn. It looked nothing like an acorn. As far as I'm concerned she threw it away out of spite. It made me livid and twice that night I had to step into a closet and perform my Hatred Abatement Breathing.

But that's neither here nor there.

Mr. Alsuga pulls out the summer stats. We're in the worst attendance decline in ten years. If it gets any worse, staff is going to be let go in droves. He gives me a meaningful look. I know full well I'm not one of his key players. Then he asks who we have that might be willing to fight fire with fire.

I say: I could research it.

He says: Why don't you research it?

So I go research it.

Sylvia Loomis is the queen of info. It's in her personality. She enjoys digging up dirt on people. She calls herself an S&M buff in training. She's still too meek to go whole hog, so when she parties at the Make Me Club on Airport Road she limits herself to walking around talking mean while wearing kiddie handcuffs. But she's good at what she does, which is Security. It was Sylvia who identified the part-timer systematically crapping in the planters in the Gift Acquisition Center and Sylvia who figured out it was Phil in Grounds leaving obscene messages for the Teen Belles on Message-Minder. She has access to all records. I ask can she identify current employees with a history of violence. She says she can if I buy her lunch.

We decide to eat in-Park. We go over to Nate's Saloon. Sylvia says don't spread it around but two of the nine cancan girls are knocked up. Then she pulls out her folder and says that according to her review of the data, we have a pretty tame bunch on our hands. The best she can do is Ned Quinn. His records indicate that while in high school he once burned down a storage shed. I almost die laughing. Quinn's an Adjunct Thespian and a world-class worry-wart. I can't count the times I've come upon him in Costuming, dwelling on the gory details of his Dread Disease Rider.⁵ He's a failed actor who won't stop trying. He says this is the only job he could find that would allow him to continue to develop his craft. Because he's ugly as sin he spe-

5. A clause added to a contract or agreement.

cializes in roles that require masks, such as Humpty-Dumpty during Mother Goose Days.

I report back to Mr. Alsuga and he says Quinn may not be much but he's all we've got. Quinn's dirt-poor with six kids and Mr. A says that's a plus, as we'll need someone between a rock and a hard place. What he suggests we do is equip the Desperate Patrol with live ammo and put Quinn in charge. The Desperate Patrol limps along under floodlights as the night's crowning event. We've costumed them to resemble troops who've been in the field too long. We used actual Gettysburg⁶ photos. The climax of the Patrol is a re-enacted partial rebellion, quelled by a rousing speech. After the speech the boys take off their hats and put their arms around each other and sing "I Was Born Under a Wandering Star."⁷ Then there's fireworks and the Parade of Old-Fashioned Conveyance. Then we clear the place out and go home.

"Why not confab with Quinn?" Mr. A says. "Get his input and feelings." "I was going to say that," I say.

I look up the Thespian Center's SpeedDial extension and a few minutes later Quinn's bounding up the steps in the Wounded Grizzly suit.

"Desperate Patrol?" Mr. A says as Quinn sits down. "Any interest on your part?"

"Love it," Quinn says. "Excellent." He's been trying to get on Desperate Patrol for years. It's considered the pinnacle by the Thespians because of the wealth of speaking parts. He's so excited he's shifting around in his seat and getting some of his paw blood on Mr. A's nice cane chair.

"The gangs in our park are a damn blight," Mr. A says. "I'm talking about meeting force with force. Something in it for you? Oh yes."

"I'd like to see Quinn give the rousing speech myself," I say.

"Societal order," Mr. A says. "Sustaining the lifeblood of this goddamned park we've all put so much of our hearts into."

"He's not just free-associating," I say.

"I'm not sure I get it," Quinn says.

"What I'm suggesting is live ammo in your weapon only," Mr. A says. "Fire at your discretion. You see an unsavory intruder, you shoot at his feet. Just give him a scare. Nobody gets hurt. An additional two bills a week is what I'm talking."

"I'm an actor," Quinn says.

"Quinn's got kids," I say. "He knows the value of a buck."

"This is acting of the highest stripe," Mr. A says. "Act like a mercenary."

"Go for it on a trial basis," I say.

"I'm not sure I get it," Quinn says. "But jeez, that's good money."

"Superfantastic," says Mr. A.

Next evening Mr. A and I go over the Verisimilitude Irregularities List. We've been having some heated discussions about our bird-species percentages. Mr. Grayson, Staff Ornithologist, has recently recalculated and estimates that to accurately approximate the 1865 bird population we'll need to eliminate a couple hundred orioles or so. He suggests using air guns or

6. The Battle of Gettysburg (July 1–3, 1863), fought between the Union and Confederate armies, caused the highest casualties of any battle in the Civil War.

7. Song by Alan J. Lerner and Frederick Loewe from the musical comedy *Paint Your Wagon*, which premiered on Broadway in 1951.

poison. Mr. A says that, in his eyes, in fiscally troubled times, an ornithologist is a luxury, and this may be the perfect time to send Grayson packing. I like Grayson. He went way overboard on Howie's baseball candy. But I've got me and mine to think of. So I call Grayson in. Mr. A says did you botch the initial calculation or were you privy to new info. Mr. Grayson admits it was a botch. Mr. A sends him out into the hall and we confab.

"You'll do the telling," Mr. A says. "I'm getting too old for cruelty."

He takes his walking stick and beeper and says he'll be in the Great Forest if I need him.

I call Grayson back in and let him go, and hand him Kleenexes and fend off a few blows and almost before I know it he's reeling out the door and I go grab a pita.

Is this the life I envisioned for myself? My God no. I wanted to be a high jumper. But I have two of the sweetest children ever born. I go in at night and look at them in their fairly expensive sleepers and think: There are a couple of kids who don't need to worry about freezing to death or being cast out to the wolves. You should see their little eyes light up when I bring home a treat. They may not know the value of a dollar, but it's my intention to see that they never need to.

I'm filling out Grayson's Employee Retrospective when I hear gunshots from the perimeter. I run out and there's Quinn and a few of his men tied to the cannon. The gang guys took Quinn's pants and put some tiny notches in his penis with their knives. I free Quinn and tell him to get over to the Infirmary to guard against infection. He's absolutely shaking and can hardly walk, so I wrap him up in a Confederate flag and call over a hay cart and load him in a Confederate flag and call over a hay cart and load him in.

When I tell Mr. A he says: Garbage in, garbage out, and that we were idiots for expecting a milquetoast⁸ to save our rears.

We decide to leave the police out of it because of the possible bad PR. So we give Quinn the rest of the week off and promise to let him play Grant now and then, and that's that.

When Visitors first come in there's this cornball part where they sit in this kind of spaceship and supposedly get blasted into space and travel faster than the speed of light and end up in 1865. The unit's dated. The helmets we distribute look like bowls and all the paint's peeling off. I've argued and argued that we need to update. But in the midst of a budget crunch one can't necessarily hang the moon. When the tape of space sounds is over and the walls stop shaking, we pass out the period costumes. We try not to offend anyone, liability law being what it is. We distribute the slave and Native American roles equitably among racial groups. Anyone is free to request a different identity at any time. In spite of our precautions, there's a Herlicher in every crowd. He's the guy who sued us last fall for making him hangman. He claimed that for weeks afterwards he had nightmares and because he wasn't getting enough sleep botched a big contract by sending an important government buyer a load of torn pool liners. Big deal, is my feeling. But he's suing us for fifty grand for emotional stress because the buyer ridiculed him

8. Weak and timid person.

in front of his co-workers. Whenever he comes in we make him sheriff but he won't back down an inch.

Mr. A calls me into his office and says he's got bad news and bad news, and which do I want first. I say the bad news. First off, he says, the gangs have spraypainted a picture of Quinn's notched penis on the side of the Everly Mansion. Second, last Friday's simulated frontier hunt has got us in hot water, because apparently some of the beef we toughen up to resemble buffalo meat was tainted, and the story's going in the Sunday supplement. And finally, the verdict's come in on the Herlicher case and we owe that goofball a hundred grand instead of fifty because the pinko⁹ judge empathized.

I wait for him to say I'm fired but instead he breaks down in tears. I pat his back and mix him a drink. He says why don't I join him. So I join him.

"It doesn't look good," he says, "for men like you and I."

"No it doesn't," I say.

"All I wanted to do," he says, "was to give the public a meaningful perspective on a historical niche I've always found personally fascinating."

"I know what you mean," I say.

At eleven the phone rings. It's Maurer in Refuse Control calling to say that the gangs have set fire to the Anglican Church. That structure cost upwards of ninety thousand to transport from Clydesville and refurbish. We can see the flames from Mr. A's window.

"Oh Christ!" Mr. A says. "If I could kill those kids I would kill those kids. One shouldn't desecrate the dream of another individual in the fashion in which they have mine."

"I know it," I say.

We drink and drink and finally he falls asleep on his office couch.

On the way to my car I keep an eye out for the ghostly McKinnon family. Back in the actual 1860s all this land was theirs. Their homestead's long gone but our records indicate that it was located near present-day Information Hoedown. They probably never saw this many buildings in their entire lives. They don't realize we're chronically slumming, they just think the valley's prospering. Something bad must have happened to them because their spirits are always wandering around at night looking dismayed.

Tonight I find the Mrs. doing wash by the creek. She sees me coming and asks if she can buy my boots. Machine stitching amazes her. I ask how are the girls. She says Maribeth has been sad because no appropriate boy ever died in the valley so she's doomed to loneliness forever. Maribeth is a homely sincere girl who glides around mooning and pining and reading bad poetry chapbooks. Whenever we keep the Park open late for high-school parties, she's in her glory. There was one kid who was able to see her and even got a crush on her, but when he finally tried to kiss her near Hostelry¹ and found out she was spectral it just about killed him. I slipped him a fifty and told him to keep it under wraps. As far as I know he's still in therapy. I realize I should have come forward but they probably would have nut-hutted me, and then where would my family be?

9. Slang for a communist sympathizer.

1. Inn.

The Mrs. says what Maribeth needs is choir practice followed by a nice quilting bee. In better times I would have taken the quilting-bee idea and run with it. But now there's no budget. That's basically how I finally moved up from Verisimilitude Inspector to Special Assistant, by lifting ideas from the McKinnons. The Mrs. likes me because after she taught me a few obscure 1800s ballads and I parlayed them into Individual Achievement Awards, I bought her a Rubik's Cube. To her, colored plastic is like something from Venus. The Mr. has kind of warned me away from her a couple of times. He doesn't trust me. He thinks the Rubik's Cube is the devil's work. I've brought him lighters and *Playboys* and once I even dragged out Howie's little synth² and the mobile battery pak. I set the synth for carillon and played it from behind a bush. I could tell he was tickled, but he stonewalled. It's too bad I can't make an inroad because he was at Antietam³ and could be a gold mine of war info. He came back from the war and a year later died in his cornfield, which is now Parking. So he spends most of his time out there calling the cars Beelzebubs⁴ and kicking their tires.

Tonight he's walking silently up and down the rows. I get out to my KCar⁵ and think oh jeez, I've locked the keys in. The Mr. sits down at the base of the A3 lightpole and asks did I see the fire and do I realize it was divine retribution for my slovenly moral state. I say thank you very much. No way I'm telling him about the gangs. He can barely handle the concept of women wearing trousers. Finally I give up on prying the window down and go call Evelyn for the spare set. While I wait for her I sit on the hood and watch the stars. The Mr. watches them too. He says there are fewer than when he was a boy. He says that even the heavens have fallen into disrepair. I think about explaining smog to him but then Evelyn pulls up.

She's wearing her bathrobe and as soon as she gets out starts with the lip. Howie and Marcus are asleep in the back. The Mr. says it's part and parcel of my fallen state that I allow a woman to speak to me in such a tone. He suggests I throttle her and lock her in the woodshed. Meanwhile she's going on and on so much about my irresponsibility that the kids are waking up. I want to get out before the gangs come swooping down on us. The Parking Area's easy pickings. She calls me a thoughtless oaf and sticks me in the gut with the car keys.

Marcus wakes up all groggy and says: Hey, our daddy.

Evelyn says: Yes, unfortunately he is.

Just after lunch next day a guy shows up at Personnel looking so completely Civil War they immediately hire him and send him out to sit on the porch of the old Kriegal place with a butter churn. His name's Samuel and he doesn't say a word going through Costuming and at the end of the day leaves on a bike. I do the normal clandestine New Employee Observation

2. Synthesizer; electronic keyboard. "*Playboy*": popular adult magazine founded in 1953. "Rubik's Cube": puzzle toy made popular in the 1980s.

3. The Battle of Antietam, in Maryland (September 17, 1862) ended the first Confederate invasion into the North. This was the bloodiest

one-day battle in American history; the Union victory led to Abraham Lincoln's preliminary issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

4. Devils.

5. Inexpensive sedan manufactured by the Chrysler Corporation, 1981-95.

from the O'Toole gazebo and I like what I see. He seems to have a passable knowledge of how to pretend to churn butter. At one point he makes the mistake of departing from the list of Then-Current Events to discuss the World Series with a Visitor, but my feeling is, we can work with that. All in all he presents a positive and convincing appearance, and I say so in my review.

Sylvia runs her routine check on him and calls me at home that night and says boy do we have a hot prospect on our hands if fucking with the gangs is still on our agenda. She talks like that. I've got her on speakerphone in the rec room and Marcus starts running around the room saying fuck. Evelyn stands there with her arms crossed, giving me a drop-dead look. I wave her off and she flips me the bird.

Sylvia's federal sources indicate that Samuel got kicked out of Vietnam⁶ for participating in a bloodbath. Sylvia claims this is oxymoronic. She sounds excited. She suggests I take a nice long look at his marksmanship scores. She says his special combat course listing goes on for pages.

I call Mr. A and he says it sounds like Sam's our man. I express reservations at arming an alleged war criminal and giving him free rein in a family-oriented facility. Mr. A says if we don't get our act together there won't be any family-oriented facility left in a month. Revenues have hit rock bottom and his investors are frothing at the mouth. There's talk of outright closure and liquidation of assets.

He says: Now get off your indefensible high horse and give me Sam's home phone.

So I get off my indefensible high horse and give him Sam's home phone.

Thursday after we've armed Samuel and sent him and the Patrol out, I stop by the Worship Center to check on the Foley baptism. Baptisms are an excellent revenue source. We charge three hundred dollars to rent the Center, which is the former lodge of the Siala utopian free-love community. We trucked it in from downstate, a redbrick building with a nice gold dome. In the old days if one of the Sialians was overeating to the exclusion of others or excessively masturbating, he or she would be publicly dressed down for hours on end in the lodge. Now we put up white draperies and pipe in Stephen Foster⁷ and provide at no charge a list of preachers of various denominations.

The Foleys are an overweight crew. The room's full of crying sincere large people wishing the best for a baby. It makes me remember our own sweet beaners in their little frocks. I sit down near the wood-burning heater in the Invalid area and see that Justin in Prep has forgotten to remove the mannequin elderly couple clutching rosaries. Hopefully the Foleys won't notice and withhold payment.

The priest dips the baby's head into the fake marble basin and the door flies open and in comes a racially mixed gang. They stroll up the aisle tousling hair and requisition a Foley niece, a cute redhead of about sixteen.

6. That is, the American phase of the war in Vietnam (1955–75).

7. Stephen Collins Foster (1826–1864), American songwriter, famous for patriotic standards

such as "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Oh! Susanna" as well as songs used in black-face minstrel shows.

Her dad stands up and gets a blackjack in the head. One of the gang guys pushes her down the aisle with his hands on her breasts. As she passes she looks right at me. The gang guy spits on my shoe and I make my face neutral so he won't get hacked off and drag me into it.

The door slams and the Foleys sit there stunned. Then the baby starts crying and everyone runs shouting outside in time to see the gang dragging the niece into the woods. I panic. I try to think of where the nearest pay phone is. I'm weighing the efficiency of running to Administration and making the call from my cubicle when six fast shots come from the woods. Several of the oldest Foleys assume the worst and drop weeping to their knees in the churchyard.

I don't know the first thing about counseling survivors, so I run for Mr. A.

He's drinking and watching his bigscreen. I tell him what happened and he jumps up and calls the police. Then he says let's go do whatever little we can for these poor people who entrusted us with their sacred family occasion only to have us drop the ball by failing to adequately protect them.

When we get back to the churchyard the Foleys are kicking and upbraiding six gang corpses. Samuel's having a glass of punch with the niece. The niece's dad is hanging all over Sam trying to confirm his daughter's virginity. Sam says it wasn't even close and goes on and on about the precision of his scope.

Then we hear sirens.

Sam says: I'm going into the woods.

Mr. A says: We never saw you, big guy.

The niece's dad says: Bless you, sir.

Sam says: Adios.

Mr. A stands on the hitching post and makes a little speech, the gist of which is, let's blame another gang for killing these dirtbags so Sam can get on with his important work.

The Foleys agree.

The police arrive and we all lie like rugs.

The word spreads on Sam and the gangs leave us alone. For two months the Park is quiet and revenues start upscaling. Then some high-school kid pulls a butter knife on Fred Moore and steals a handful of penny candy from the General Store. As per specs, Fred alerts Mr. A of a Revenue-Impacting Event. Mr. A calls Security and we perform Exit Sealage. We look everywhere, but the kid's gone. Mr. A says what the hell, Unseal, it's just candy, profit loss is minimal. Sam hears the Unseal Tone on the PA and comes out of the woods all mad with his face painted and says that once the word gets out we've gone soft the gangs will be back in a heartbeat. I ask since when do gangs use butter knives. Sam says a properly trained individual can kill a wild boar with a butter knife. Mr. A gives me a look and says why don't we let Sam run this aspect of the operation since he possesses the necessary expertise. Then Mr. A offers to buy him lunch and Sam says no, he'll eat raw weeds and berries as usual.

I go back to my Verisimilitude Evaluation on the Cimarron Brothel. Everything looks super. As per my recommendations they've replaced the young attractive simulated whores with uglier women with a little less on the ball. We were able to move the ex-simulated whores over to the Sweete

Shoppes, so everybody's happy, especially the new simulated whores, who were for the most part middle-aged women we lured away from fast-food places via superior wages.

When I've finished the Evaluation I go back to my office for lunch. I step inside and turn on the fake oil lamp and there's a damn human hand on my chair, holding a note. All around the hand there's penny candy. The note says: Sir, another pig disciplined who won't mess with us anymore and also I need more ammo. It's signed: Samuel the Rectifier.

I call Mr. A and he says Jesus. Then he tells me to bury the hand in the marsh behind Refreshments. I say shouldn't we call the police. He says we let it pass when it was six dead kids, why should we start getting moralistic now over one stinking hand?

I say: But sir, he killed a high-schooler for stealing candy.

He says: That so-called high-schooler threatened Fred Moore, a valued old friend of mine, with a knife.

A butter knife, I say.

He asks if I've seen the droves of unemployed huddled in front of Personnel every morning.

I ask if that's a threat and he says no, it's a reasonable future prognostication.

"What's done is done," he says. "We're in this together. If I take the fall on this, you'll eat the wienie as well. Let's just put this sordid ugliness behind us and get on with the business of providing an enjoyable living for those we love."

I hang up and sit looking at the hand. There's a class ring on it.

Finally I knock it into a garbage sack with my phone and go out to the marsh.

As I'm digging, Mr. McKinnon glides up. He gets down on his knees and starts sniffing the sack. He starts talking about bloody wagon wheels and a boy he once saw sitting in a creek slapping the water with his own severed arm. He tells how the dead looked with rain on their faces and of hearing lunatic singing from all corners of the field of battle and of king-sized rodents gorging themselves on the entrails of his friends.

It occurs to me that the Mr.'s a loon.

I dig down a couple feet and drop the hand in. Then I backfill and get out of there fast. I look over my shoulder and he's rocking back and forth over the hole mumbling to himself.

As I pass a sewer cover the Mrs. rises out of it. Seeing the Mr. enthralled by blood she starts shrieking and howling to beat the band. When she finally calms down she comes to rest in a tree branch. Tears run down her see-through cheeks. She says there's been a horrid violent seed in him since he came home from the war. She says she can see they're going to have to go away. Then she blasts over my head elongate and glowing and full of grief and my hat gets sucked off.

All night I have bad dreams about severed hands. In one I'm eating chili and a hand comes out of my bowl and gives me the thumbs-down. I wake up with a tingling wrist. Evelyn says if I insist on sleeping uneasily would I mind doing it on the couch, since she has a family to care for during the day and this requires a certain amount of rest. I think about confessing to her but then I realize if I do she'll nail me.

The nights when she'd fall asleep with her cheek on my thigh are certainly long past.

I lie there awhile watching her make angry faces in her sleep. Then I go for a walk. As usual Mr. Ebershom's practicing figure-skating moves in his foyer. I sit down by our subdivision's fake creek and think. First of all, burying a hand isn't murder. It doesn't say anywhere thou shalt not bury some guy's hand. By the time I got involved the kid was dead. Where his hand ended up is inconsequential.

Then I think: What am I saying? I did a horrible thing. Even as I sit here I'm an accomplice and an obstructor of justice.

But then I see myself in the penitentiary and the boys waking up scared in the night without me, and right then and there with my feet in the creek I decide to stay clammed up forever and take my lumps in the afterlife.

Halloween's special in the Park. Our brochure says: Lose Yourself in Eerie Autumnal Splendor. We spray cobwebs around the Structures and dress up Staff in ghoul costumes and hand out period-authentic treats. We hide holograph generators in the woods and project images of famous Americans as ghosts. It's always a confusing time for the McKinnons. Last year the Mr. got in a head-to-head with the image of Jefferson Davis.⁸ He stood there in the woods yelling at it for hours while the Mrs. and the girls begged him to come away. Finally I had to cut power to the unit.

I drive home at lunch and pick the boys up for trick-or-treating. Marcus is a rancher and Howie's an accountant. He's wearing thick fake lips and carrying a ledger. The Park's the only safe place to trick-or-treat anymore. Last year some wacko in a complex near our house laced his Snickers with a virus. I drove by the school and they were CPRing this little girl in a canary suit. So forget it.

I take them around to the various Structures and they pick up their share of saltwater taffy and hard tasteless frontier candy and wooden whistles and toy soldiers made of soap.

Then just as we start across the Timeless Green a mob of teens bursts out of the Feinstejn Memorial Conifer Grove.

"Gangs!" I yell to the boys. "Get down!"

I hear a shot and look up and there's Samuel standing on a stump at tree line. Thank God, I think. He lets loose another round and one of the teens drops. Marcus is down beside me whimpering with his nose in my armpit. Howie's always been the slow one. He stands there with his mouth open, one hand in his plastic pumpkin. A second teen drops. Then Howie drops and his pumpkin goes flying.

I crawl over and beg him to be okay. He says there's no pain. I check him over and check him over and all that's wrong is his ledger's been shot. I'm so relieved I kiss him on the mouth and he yells at me to quit.

Samuel drops a third teen, then runs yipping into the woods.

The ambulance shows up and the paramedics load up the wounded teens. They're all still alive and one's saying a rosary. I take the boys to City Hall and confront Mr. A. I tell him I'm turning Sam in. He asks if I've gone daft

8. Davis (1808–1889) was president of the Confederate States of America during the Civil War.

and suggests I try putting food on the table from a jail cell while convicts stand in line waiting to have their way with my rear.

At this point I send the boys out to the foyer.

"He shot Howie," I say. "I want him put away."

"He shot Howie's ledger," Mr. A says. "He shot Howie's ledger in the process of saving Howie's life. But whatever. Let's not mince hairs. If Sam gets put away, we get put away. Does that sound to you like a desirable experience?"

"No," I say.

"What I'm primarily saying," he says, "is that this is a time for knowledge assimilation, not backstabbing. We learned a lesson, you and I. We personally grew. Gratitude for this growth is an appropriate response. Gratitude, and being careful never to make the same mistake twice."

He gets out a Bible and says let's swear on it that we'll never hire a crazed maniac to perform an important security function again. Then the phone rings. Sylvia's cross-referenced today's Admissions data and found that the teens weren't a gang at all but a bird-watching group who made the mistake of being male and adolescent and wandering too far off the trail.

"Ouch," Mr. A says. "This could be a serious negative."

In the foyer the kids are trying to get the loaches in the corporate tank to eat bits of Styrofoam. I phone Evelyn and tell her what happened and she calls me a butcher. She wants to know how on earth I could bring the boys to the Park knowing what I knew. She says she doesn't see how I'm going to live with myself in light of how much they trusted and loved me and how badly I let them down by leaving their fates to chance.

I say I'm sorry and she seems to be thinking. Then she tells me just get them home without putting them in further jeopardy, assuming that's within the scope of my mental powers.

At home she puts them in the tub and sends me out for pizza. I opt for Melvin's Pasta Lair. Melvin's a religious zealot who during the Depression worked five jobs at once. Sometimes I tell him my troubles and he says I should stop whining and count my blessings. Tonight I tell him I feel I should take some responsibility for eliminating the Samuel problem but I'm hesitant because of the discrepancy in our relative experience in violence. He says you mean you're scared. I say not scared, just aware of the likelihood of the possibility of failure. He gives me a look. I say it must have been great to grow up when men were men. He says men have always been what they are now, namely incapable of coping with life without the intervention of God the Almighty. Then in the oven behind him my pizza starts smoking and he says case in point.

He makes me another and urges me to get in touch with my Lord personally. I tell him I will. I always tell him I will.

When I get home they're gone.

Evelyn's note says: I could never forgive you for putting our sons at risk. Goodbye forever, you passive flake. Don't try to find us. I've told the kids you sent us away in order to marry a floozy.

Like an idiot I run out to the street. Mrs. Schmidt is prodding her automatic sprinkler system with a rake, trying to detect leaks in advance. She asks how I am and I tell her not now. I sit on the lawn. The stars are very

near. The phone rings. I run inside prepared to grovel, but it's only Mr. A. He says come down to the Park immediately because he's got big horrific news.

When I get there he's sitting in his office half-crooked. He tells me we're unemployed. The investors have gotten wind of the bird-watcher shootings and withdrawn all support. The Park is no more. I tell him about Evelyn and the kids. He says that's the least of his worries because he's got crushing debt. He asks if I have any savings he could have. I say no. He says that just for the record and my own personal development, he's always found me dull and has kept me around primarily for my yes-man capabilities and because sometimes I'm so cautious I'm a hoot.

Then he says: Look, get your ass out, I'm torching this shithole for insurance purposes.

I want to hit or at least insult him, but I need this week's pay to find my kids. So I jog off through the Park. In front of Information Hoedown I see the McKinnons cavorting. I get closer and see that they're not cavorting at all, they've inadvertently wandered too close to their actual death site and are being compelled to act out again and again the last minutes of their lives. The girls are lying side by side on the ground and the Mr. is whacking at them with an invisible scythe. The Mrs. is belly-up with one arm flailing in what must have been the parlor. The shrieking is mind-boggling. When he's killed everyone the Mr. walks out to his former field and mimes blowing out his brains. Then he gets up and starts over. It goes on and on, through five cycles. Finally he sits down in the dirt and starts weeping. The Mrs. and the girls backpedal away. He gets up and follows them, pitifully trying to explain.

Behind us the Visitor Center erupts in flames.

The McKinnons go off down the hill, passing through bushes and trees. He's shouting for forgiveness. He's shouting that he's just a man. He's shouting that hatred and war made him nuts. I start running down the hill agreeing with him. The Mrs. gives me a look and puts her hands over Maribeth's ears. We're all running. The Mrs. starts screaming about the feel of the scythe as it opened her up. The girls bemoan their unborn kids. We make quite a group. Since I'm still alive I keep clipping trees with my shoulders and falling down.

At the bottom of the hill they pass through the retaining wall and I run into it. I wake up on my back in the culvert. Blood's running out of my ears and a transparent boy's kneeling over me. I can tell he's no McKinnon because he's wearing sweatpants.

"Get up now," he says in a gentle voice. "Fire's coming."

"No," I say. "I'm through. I'm done living."

"I don't think so," he says. "You've got amends to make."

"I screwed up," I say. "I did bad things."

"No joke," he says, and holds up his stump.

I roll over into the culvert muck and he grabs me by the collar and sits me up.

"I steal four jawbreakers and a Slim Jim and your friend kills and mutilates me?" he says.

"He wasn't my friend," I say.

"He wasn't your enemy," the kid says.

Then he cocks his head. Through his clear skull I see Sam coming out of the woods. The kid cowers behind me. Even dead he's scared of Sam. He's so scared he blasts straight up in the air shrieking and vanishes over the retaining wall.

Sam comes for me with a hunting knife.

"Don't take this too personal," he says, "but you've got to go. You know a few things I don't want broadcast."

I'm madly framing calming words in my head as he drives the knife in. I can't believe it. Never again to see my kids? Never again to sleep and wake to their liquid high voices and sweet breaths?

Sweet Evelyn, I think, I should have loved you better.

Possessing perfect knowledge I hover above him as he hacks me to bits. I see his rough childhood. I see his mother doing something horrid to him with a broomstick. I see the hate in his heart and the people he has yet to kill before pneumonia gets him at eighty-three. I see the dead kid's mom unable to sleep, pounding her fists against her face in grief at the moment I was burying her son's hand. I see the pain I've caused. I see the man I could have been, and the man I was, and then everything is bright and new and keen with love and I sweep through Sam's body, trying to change him, trying so hard, and feeling only hate and hate, solid as stone.

1996

SHERMAN ALEXIE

b. 1966

Except for one great-grandparent, Sherman Alexie's lineage is entirely Native American: Coeur d'Alene on his father's side; Colville, Flathead, and Spokane on his mother's. The cities of Coeur d'Alene (Idaho) and Spokane (Washington) mark the interior northwest corner of the contiguous forty-eight states, the place where Alexie's poetry, fiction, and cinematic work is sometimes set. Yet his interest in Native American culture ranges widely, to include other tribes such as the Navajo and regions throughout the West and Southwest. Raised on the Spokane reservation at Wellpinit, Washington, Alexie thrived in the cultural immersion that secondary education at Reardan High School, some distance from home, provided—especially the popular culture that would later infuse his work. Hence both words in the designation "Native American" figure prominently in how he sees himself as a writer.

Equal doses of trouble and humor characterize Alexie's work. Having survived hydrocephalus (a cerebrospinal abnormality) as a child and alcoholism as a young adult, he drew on his college experience as an undergraduate at Gonzaga University in Spokane and Washington State University in Pullman to find a literary voice, inspired by writers as diverse as John Steinbeck and the Native American poets included by Joseph Bruchac in the anthology *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back* (1983). In 1992 he published his own first work, *The Business of Fancydancing: Stories and Poems*, with one of America's most prominent small presses, Hanging Loose (Brooklyn, New York).

When *The Business of Fancydancing* was published, a review in the *New York Times* called Alexie “one of the major lyric voices of our time.” “I was a twenty-five-year-old Spokane Indian guy working as a secretary at a high school exchange program,” he has written. “I thought ‘Great! Where do I go from here?’”

Alexie has continued telling stories through poetry, fiction, and screenwriting. *Reservation Blues* (1994) was his first novel, followed by *Indian Killer* in 1996. *Flight* (2007) shows the influence of Kurt Vonnegut, from its device of time travel to its reinvention of history from a comparative point of view. Presented broadly, even comically, his stories often draw on simple incidents, as in the story reprinted here. His storytelling offers a tragicomic vision of contemporary Native American life, notably in his National Book Award–winning novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), in the stories of his several collections, and in his several volumes of poetry. College educated and street-smart (“I’m a rez kid who’s gone urban”), irreverent and also dead serious, Alexie resembles the trickster figure of Crow in his poem “Crow Testament.”

Alexie’s poems have a furious energy. Although some of his work, like the villanelle “Sister Fire, Brother Smoke,” takes traditional forms, most of his poems are open and improvisational, frequently and effectively using repetition and parallelism. The title of Alexie’s 2000 collection, *One Stick Song*, offers an apt image for his work; it refers to a gambling game in which sticks function like chips. When down to one stick, he explains, “You’re desperate,” and a “One Stick Song” is “a desperate celebration, a desperate attempt to save yourself, putting everything you have into one song.” The best of Alexie’s poems, like “The Exaggeration of Despair,” make facing up to grief and anger an act of survival. The intensity of this effort is especially evident when he reads from or recites his work. A brilliant performer, sliding between humor, anger, and pain, he makes a poetry reading a dynamic event. It is no wonder that his interest in performance has extended to stand-up comedy as well.

Popular audiences know Alexie from the 2002 film he wrote and directed, *The Business of Fancydancing*, and especially his 1998 film *Smoke Signals*, a major Hollywood production he scripted from material in his story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993). These stories and the movies drawn from them cover a broad range of contemporary Native American experience. As one of his characters says, Native Americans have “a way of surviving. But it’s almost like Indians can easily survive the big stuff. Mass murder, loss of language and land rights. It’s the small things that hurt the most. The white waitress who wouldn’t take an order, Tonto, the Washington Redskins.” “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” (reprinted here) is typical of both the collection’s and the movie’s sometimes raucous blending of the sentimental and the ridiculous. Family structures have been set askew by the imposition of a Reservation system, a system all the more confining in the social conditions of current times. Can tribal structures ameliorate these problems? In this story and elsewhere, Alexie’s answers vary from comic to tragic.

The text of the story is from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993).

At Navajo Monument Valley Tribal School

*from the photograph
by Skeet McAuley*

the football field rises
to meet the mesa. Indian boys
gallop across the grass, against



Navajo Monument Valley playing field, where “the football field rises / to meet the mesa.” Photograph by Skeet McAuley.

the beginning of their body.
On those Saturday afternoons, 5
unbroken horses gather to watch

their sons growing larger
in the small parts of the world.
Everyone is the quarterback.

There is no thin man in a big hat 10
writing down all the names
in two columns: winners and losers.

This is the eternal football game,
Indians versus Indians. All the Skins 15
in the wooden bleachers fancydancing,

stomping red dust straight down
into nothing. Before the game is over,
the eighth-grade girls’ track team

comes running, circling the field,
their thin and brown legs echoing 20
wild horses, wild horses, wild horses.

1992

Pawn Shop

I walk into the bar, after being gone for a while, and it’s empty. The
Bartender tells me all the Indians are gone, do I know where they went?
I tell him I don’t know, and I don’t know, so he gives me a beer just for

being Indian, small favors, and I wonder where all the Skins disappeared to, and after a while, I leave, searching the streets, searching storefronts, 5
 until I walk into a pawn shop, find a single heart beating under glass, and I know who it used to belong to, I know all of them.

1992

Sister Fire, Brother Smoke

Have I become an accomplished liar,
 a man who believes in his inventions?
 When I see my sister in every fire,

is it me who sets her in those pyres
 and burns her repeatedly? Should I mention 5
 I may have become an accomplished liar,

a man who was absent when his sister died,
 but still feeds those flames in the present tense?
 When I see my sister in every fire,

am I seeing the shadow that survived her
 conflagration? Because of my obsession 10
 have I become an accomplished liar,

who strikes a match, then creates a choir
 of burning matches, with the intention
 of seeing my sister in every fire? 15

Is she the whisper of ash floating high
 above me? I offer these charred questions.
 Have I become an accomplished liar
 if I see my sister in every fire?

1996

From Tourists

3. *Marilyn Monroe*¹

drives herself to the reservation. Tired and cold,
 she asks the Indian women for help.
 Marilyn cannot explain what she needs
 but the Indian women notice the needle tracks
 on her arms and lead her to the sweat lodge 5
 where every woman, young and old, disrobes

1. American actress and sex symbol (1926–1962).

and leaves her clothes behind
 when she enters the dark of the lodge.
 Marilyn's prayers may or may not be answered here
 but they are kept sacred by Indian women. 10
 Cold water is splashed on hot rocks
 and steam fills the lodge. There is no place like this.
 At first, Marilyn is self-conscious, aware
 of her body and face, the tremendous heat, her thirst,
 and the brown bodies circled around her. 15
 But the Indian women do not stare. It is dark
 inside the lodge. The hot rocks glow red
 and the songs begin. Marilyn has never heard
 these songs before, but she soon sings along.
 Marilyn is not Indian, Marilyn will never be Indian 20
 but the Indian women sing about her courage.
 The Indian women sing for her health.
 The Indian women sing for Marilyn.
 Finally, she is no more naked than anyone else.

1996

The Exaggeration of Despair

I open the door

(this Indian girl writes that her brother tried to hang himself
 with a belt just two weeks after her other brother did hang himself

and this Indian man tells us that, back in boarding school,
 five priests took him into a back room and raped him repeatedly 5

and this homeless Indian woman begs for quarters, and when I ask
 her about her tribe, she says she's horny and bends over in front of me

and this homeless Indian man is the uncle of an Indian man
 who writes for a large metropolitan newspaper, and so now I know them
 both

and this Indian child cries when he sits to eat at our table 10
 because he had never known his own family to sit at the same table

and this Indian woman was born to an Indian woman
 who sold her for a six-pack and a carton of cigarettes

and this Indian poet shivers beneath the freeway
 and begs for enough quarters to buy pencil and paper 15

and this fancydancer passes out at the powwow
 and wakes up naked, with no memory of the evening, all of his regalia
 gone)

I open the door

(and this is my sister, who waits years for a dead eagle from the Park
Service, receives it
and stores it with our cousins, who then tell her it has disappeared 20

though the feathers reappear in the regalia of another cousin
who is dancing for the very first time

and this is my father, whose own father died on Okinawa,¹ shot
by a Japanese soldier who must have looked so much like him

and this is my father, whose mother died of tuberculosis 25
not long after he was born, and so my father must hear coughing ghosts

and this is my grandmother who saw, before the white men came,
three ravens with white necks, and knew our God was going to change)

I open the door
and invite the wind inside. 30

1996

Crow Testament¹

1

Cain lifts Crow, that heavy black bird
and strikes down Abel.²

Damn, says Crow, I guess
this is just the beginning.

2

The white man, disguised 5
as a falcon, swoops in
and yet again steals a salmon
from Crow's talons.

Damn, says Crow, if I could swim
I would have fled this country years ago. 10

1. Japanese island, site of a major battle during World War II.

1. Crow, like Raven, is a trickster figure in many

Native American cultures.

2. In Genesis, Cain kills his brother, Abel. They are the sons of Adam and Eve.

3

The Crow God as depicted
in all of the reliable Crow bibles
looks exactly like a Crow.

Damn, says Crow, this makes it
so much easier to worship myself. 15

4

Among the ashes of Jericho,³
Crow sacrifices his firstborn son.

Damn, says Crow, a million nests
are soaked with blood.

5

When Crows fight Crows 20
the sky fills with beaks and talons.

Damn, says Crow, it's raining feathers.

6

Crow flies around the reservation
and collects empty beer bottles

but they are so heavy 25
he can carry only one at a time.

So, one by one, he returns them
but gets only five cents a bottle.

Damn, says Crow, redemption 30
is not easy.

7

Crow rides a pale horse
into a crowded powwow
but none of the Indians panic.

Damn, says Crow, I guess 35
they already live near the end of the world.

2000

3. This biblical city, famous for its great walls, was the first town attacked by the Israelites under Joshua, after they crossed the Jordan River.

This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona

Just after Victor lost his job at the BIA,¹ he also found out that his father had died of a heart attack in Phoenix, Arizona. Victor hadn't seen his father in a few years, only talked to him on the telephone once or twice, but there still was a genetic pain, which was soon to be pain as real and immediate as a broken bone.

Victor didn't have any money. Who does have money on a reservation, except the cigarette and fireworks salespeople? His father had a savings account waiting to be claimed, but Victor needed to find a way to get to Phoenix. Victor's mother was just as poor as he was, and the rest of his family didn't have any use at all for him. So Victor called the Tribal Council.

"Listen," Victor said. "My father just died. I need some money to get to Phoenix to make arrangements."

"Now, Victor," the council said. "You know we're having a difficult time financially."

"But I thought the council had special funds set aside for stuff like this."

"Now, Victor, we do have some money available for the proper return of tribal members' bodies. But I don't think we have enough to bring your father all the way back from Phoenix."

"Well," Victor said. "It ain't going to cost all that much. He had to be cremated. Things were kind of ugly. He died of a heart attack in his trailer and nobody found him for a week. It was really hot, too. You get the picture."

"Now, Victor, we're sorry for your loss and the circumstances. But we can really only afford to give you one hundred dollars."

"That's not even enough for a plane ticket."

"Well, you might consider driving down to Phoenix."

"I don't have a car. Besides, I was going to drive my father's pickup back up here."

"Now, Victor," the council said. "We're sure there is somebody who could drive you to Phoenix. Or is there somebody who could lend you the rest of the money?"

"You know there ain't nobody around with that kind of money."

"Well, we're sorry, Victor, but that's the best we can do."

Victor accepted the Tribal Council's offer. What else could he do? So he signed the proper papers, picked up his check, and walked over to the Trading Post to cash it.

While Victor stood in line, he watched Thomas Builds-the-Fire standing near the magazine rack, talking to himself. Like he always did. Thomas was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to. That's like being a dentist in a town where everybody has false teeth.

Victor and Thomas Builds-the-Fire were the same age, had grown up and played in the dirt together. Ever since Victor could remember, it was Thomas who always had something to say.

Once, when they were seven years old, when Victor's father still lived with the family, Thomas closed his eyes and told Victor this story: "Your father's

1. Bureau of Indian Affairs, an agency of the U.S. government that assists tribal officials in the administration of Indian reservations.

heart is weak. He is afraid of his own family. He is afraid of you. Late at night he sits in the dark. Watches the television until there's nothing but that white noise. Sometimes he feels like he wants to buy a motorcycle and ride away. He wants to run and hide. He doesn't want to be found."

Thomas Builds-the-Fire had known that Victor's father was going to leave, knew it before anyone. Now Victor stood in the Trading Post with a one-hundred-dollar check in his hand, wondering if Thomas knew that Victor's father was dead, if he knew what was going to happen next.

Just then Thomas looked at Victor, smiled, and walked over to him.

"Victor, I'm sorry about your father," Thomas said.

"How did you know about it?" Victor asked.

"I heard it on the wind. I heard it from the birds. I felt it in the sunlight. Also, your mother was just in here crying."

"Oh," Victor said and looked around the Trading Post. All the other Indians stared, surprised that Victor was even talking to Thomas. Nobody talked to Thomas anymore because he told the same damn stories over and over again. Victor was embarrassed, but he thought that Thomas might be able to help him. Victor felt a sudden need for tradition.

"I can lend you the money you need," Thomas said suddenly. "But you have to take me with you."

"I can't take your money," Victor said. "I mean, I haven't hardly talked to you in years. We're not really friends anymore."

"I didn't say we were friends. I said you had to take me with you."

"Let me think about it."

Victor went home with his one hundred dollars and sat at the kitchen table. He held his head in his hands and thought about Thomas Builds-the-Fire, remembered little details, tears and scars, the bicycle they shared for a summer, so many stories.

Thomas Builds-the-Fire sat on the bicycle, waited in Victor's yard. He was ten years old and skinny. His hair was dirty because it was the Fourth of July.

"Victor," Thomas yelled. "Hurry up. We're going to miss the fireworks."

After a few minutes, Victor ran out of his house, jumped the porch railing, and landed gracefully on the sidewalk.

"And the judges award him a 9.95, the highest score of the summer," Thomas said, clapped, laughed.

"That was perfect, cousin," Victor said. "And it's my turn to ride the bike."

Thomas gave up the bike and they headed for the fair grounds. It was nearly dark and the fireworks were about to start.

"You know," Thomas said. "It's strange how us Indians celebrate the Fourth of July. It ain't like it was *our* independence everybody was fighting for."

"You think about things too much," Victor said. "It's just supposed to be fun. Maybe Junior will be there."

"Which Junior? Everybody on this reservation is named Junior."

And they both laughed.

The fireworks were small, hardly more than a few bottle rockets and a fountain. But it was enough for two Indian boys. Years later, they would need much more.

Afterwards, sitting in the dark, fighting off mosquitoes, Victor turned to Thomas Builds-the-Fire.

“Hey,” Victor said. “Tell me a story.”

Thomas closed his eyes and told this story: “There were these two Indian boys who wanted to be warriors. But it was too late to be warriors in the old way. All the horses were gone. So the two Indian boys stole a car and drove to the city. They parked the stolen car in front of the police station and then hitchhiked back home to the reservation. When they got back, all their friends cheered and their parents’ eyes shone with pride. *You were very brave*, everybody said to the two Indian boys. *Very brave.*”

“Ya-hey,”² Victor said. “That’s a good one. I wish I could be a warrior.”

“Me, too,” Thomas said.

They went home together in the dark, Thomas on the bike now, Victor on foot. They walked through shadows and light from streetlamps.

“We’ve come a long ways,” Thomas said. “We have outdoor lighting.”

“All I need is the stars,” Victor said. “And besides, you still think about things too much.”

They separated then, each headed for home, both laughing all the way.

Victor sat at his kitchen table. He counted his one hundred dollars again and again. He knew he needed more to make it to Phoenix and back. He knew he needed Thomas Builds-the-Fire. So he put his money in his wallet and opened the front door to find Thomas on the porch.

“Ya-hey, Victor,” Thomas said. “I knew you’d call me.”

Thomas walked into the living room and sat down on Victor’s favorite chair.

“I’ve got some money saved up,” Thomas said. “It’s enough to get us down there, but you have to get us back.”

“I’ve got this hundred dollars,” Victor said. “And my dad had a savings account I’m going to claim.”

“How much in your dad’s account?”

“Enough. A few hundred.”

“Sounds good. When we leaving?”

When they were fifteen and had long since stopped being friends, Victor and Thomas got into a fistfight. That is, Victor was really drunk and beat Thomas up for no reason at all. All the other Indian boys stood around and watched it happen. Junior was there and so were Lester, Seymour, and a lot of others. The beating might have gone on until Thomas was dead if Norma Many Horses hadn’t come along and stopped it.

“Hey, you boys,” Norma yelled and jumped out of her car. “Leave him alone.”

If it had been someone else, even another man, the Indian boys would’ve just ignored the warnings. But Norma was a warrior. She was powerful. She could have picked up any two of the boys and smashed their skulls together. But worse than that, she would have dragged them all over to some tipi and made them listen to some elder tell a dusty old story.

The Indian boys scattered, and Norma walked over to Thomas and picked him up.

2. Invented reservation slang for “yes” or “hello.”

“Hey, little man, are you okay?” she asked.

Thomas gave her a thumbs up.

“Why they always picking on you?”

Thomas shook his head, closed his eyes, but no stories came to him, no words or music. He just wanted to go home, to lie in his bed and let his dreams tell his stories for him.

Thomas Builds-the-Fire and Victor sat next to each other in the airplane, coach section. A tiny white woman had the window seat. She was busy twisting her body into pretzels. She was flexible.

“I have to ask,” Thomas said, and Victor closed his eyes in embarrassment.

“Don’t,” Victor said.

“Excuse me, miss,” Thomas asked. “Are you a gymnast or something?”

“There’s no something about it,” she said. “I was first alternate on the 1980 Olympic team.”

“Really?” Thomas asked.

“Really.”

“I mean, you used to be a world-class athlete?” Thomas asked.

“My husband still thinks I am.”

Thomas Builds-the-Fire smiled. She was a mental gymnast, too. She pulled her leg straight up against her body so that she could’ve kissed her kneecap.

“I wish I could do that,” Thomas said.

Victor was ready to jump out of the plane. Thomas, that crazy Indian storyteller with ratty old braids and broken teeth, was flirting with a beautiful Olympic gymnast. Nobody back home on the reservation would ever believe it.

“Well,” the gymnast said. “It’s easy. Try it.”

Thomas grabbed at his leg and tried to pull it up into the same position as the gymnast. He couldn’t even come close, which made Victor and the gymnast laugh.

“Hey,” she asked. “You two are Indian, right?”

“Full-blood,” Victor said.

“Not me,” Thomas said “I’m half magician on my mother’s side and half clown on my father’s.”

They all laughed.

“What are your names?” she asked.

“Victor and Thomas.”

“Mine is Cathy. Pleased to meet you all.”

The three of them talked for the duration of the flight. Cathy the gymnast complained about the government, how they screwed the 1980 Olympic team by boycotting.³

“Sounds like you all got a lot in common with Indians,” Thomas said.

Nobody laughed.

After the plane landed in Phoenix and they had all found their way to the terminal, Cathy the gymnast smiled and waved good-bye.

“She was really nice,” Thomas said.

“Yeah, but everybody talks to everybody on airplanes,” Victor said. “It’s too bad we can’t always be that way.”

3. The United States boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics, held in Moscow, to protest the Soviet Union’s 1979 invasion of Afghanistan.

"You always used to tell me I think too much," Thomas said. "Now it sounds like you do."

"Maybe I caught it from you."

"Yeah."

Thomas and Victor rode in a taxi to the trailer where Victor's father died.

"Listen," Victor said as they stopped in front of the trailer. "I never told you I was sorry for beating you up that time."

"Oh, it was nothing. We were just kids and you were drunk."

"Yeah, but I'm still sorry."

"That's all right."

Victor paid for the taxi and the two of them stood in the hot Phoenix summer. They could smell the trailer.

"This ain't going to be nice," Victor said. "You don't have to go in."

"You're going to need help."

Victor walked to the front door and opened it. The stink rolled out and made them both gag. Victor's father had lain in that trailer for a week in hundred-degree temperatures before anyone found him. And the only reason anyone found him was because of the smell. They needed dental records to identify him. That's exactly what the coroner said. They needed dental records.

"Oh, man," Victor said. "I don't know if I can do this."

"Well, then don't."

"But there might be something valuable in there."

"I thought his money was in the bank."

"It is. I was talking about pictures and letters and stuff like that."

"Oh," Thomas said as he held his breath and followed Victor into the trailer.

When Victor was twelve, he stepped into an underground wasp nest. His foot was caught in the hole, and no matter how hard he struggled, Victor couldn't pull free. He might have died there, stung a thousand times, if Thomas Builds-the-Fire had not come by.

"Run," Thomas yelled and pulled Victor's foot from the hole. They ran then, hard as they ever had, faster than Billy Mills, faster than Jim Thorpe,⁴ faster than the wasps could fly.

Victor and Thomas ran until they couldn't breathe, ran until it was cold and dark outside, ran until they were lost and it took hours to find their way home. All the way back, Victor counted his stings.

"Seven," Victor said. "My lucky number."

Victor didn't find much to keep in the trailer. Only a photo album and a stereo. Everything else had that smell stuck in it or was useless anyway.

"I guess this is all," Victor said. "It ain't much."

4. William Mervin "Billy" Mills (b. 1938), Native American (Ogalala Lakota) Gold Medalist for the United States at the 1964 Olympics, where he won the 10,000 meter run in a stunning upset of the favorite, Australian Ron Clarke, a feat celebrated in the 1984 film *Running Brave*. James Francis "Jim" Thorpe (1888–1953), American athlete of Native American, Irish, and French descent, Gold Medalist for the United States at

the 1912 Olympics, where he won the decathlon and the pentathlon, only to be stripped of his awards in 1913 because of his status as a professional (he had played semi-pro baseball); he subsequently played professional baseball and football, and at the time of his death was hailed as the greatest athlete of the first half of the twentieth century.

“Better than nothing,” Thomas said.

“Yeah, and I do have the pickup.”

“Yeah,” Thomas said. “It’s in good shape.”

“Dad was good about that stuff.”

“Yeah, I remember your dad.”

“Really?” Victor asked. “What do you remember?”

Thomas Builds-the-Fire closed his eyes and told this story: “I remember when I had this dream that told me to go to Spokane, to stand by the Falls in the middle of the city and wait for a sign. I knew I had to go there but I didn’t have a car. Didn’t have a license. I was only thirteen. So I walked all the way, took me all day, and I finally made it to the Falls. I stood there for an hour waiting. Then your dad came walking up. *What the hell are you doing here?* he asked me. I said, *Waiting for a vision.* Then your father said, *All you’re going to get here is mugged.* So he drove me over to Denny’s, bought me dinner, and then drove me home to the reservation. For a long time I was mad because I thought my dreams had lied to me. But they didn’t. Your dad was my vision. *Take care of each other* is what my dreams were saying. *Take care of each other.*”

Victor was quiet for a long time. He searched his mind for memories of his father, found the good ones, found a few bad ones, added it all up, and smiled.

“My father never told me about finding you in Spokane,” Victor said.

“He said he wouldn’t tell anybody. Didn’t want me to get in trouble. But he said I had to watch out for you as part of the deal.”

“Really?”

“Really. Your father said you would need the help. He was right.”

“That’s why you came down here with me, isn’t it?” Victor asked.

“I came because of your father.”

Victor and Thomas climbed into the pickup, drove over to the bank, and claimed the three hundred dollars in the savings account.

Thomas Builds-the-Fire could fly.

Once, he jumped off the roof of the tribal school and flapped his arms like a crazy eagle. And he flew. For a second, he hovered, suspended above all the other Indian boys who were too smart or too scared to jump.

“He’s flying,” Junior yelled, and Seymour was busy looking for the trick wires or mirrors. But it was real. As real as the dirt when Thomas lost altitude and crashed to the ground.

He broke his arm in two places.

“He broke his wing,” Victor chanted, and the other Indian boys joined in, made it a tribal song.

“He broke his wing, he broke his wing, he broke his wing,” all the Indian boys chanted as they ran off, flapping their wings, wishing they could fly, too. They hated Thomas for his courage, his brief moment as a bird. Everybody has dreams about flying. Thomas flew.

One of his dreams came true for just a second, just enough to make it real.

Victor’s father, his ashes, fit in one wooden box with enough left over to fill a cardboard box.

“He always was a big man,” Thomas said.

Victor carried part of his father and Thomas carried the rest out to the pickup. They set him down carefully behind the seats, put a cowboy hat on

the wooden box and a Dodgers cap on the cardboard box. That's the way it was supposed to be.

"Ready to head back home," Victor asked.

"It's going to be a long drive."

"Yeah, take a couple days, maybe."

"We can take turns," Thomas said.

"Okay," Victor said, but they didn't take turns. Victor drove for sixteen hours straight north, made it halfway up Nevada toward home before he finally pulled over.

"Hey, Thomas," Victor said. "You got to drive for a while."

"Okay."

Thomas Builds-the-Fire slid behind the wheel and started off down the road. All through Nevada, Thomas and Victor had been amazed at the lack of animal life, at the absence of water, of movement.

"Where is everything?" Victor had asked more than once.

Now when Thomas was finally driving they saw the first animal, maybe the only animal in Nevada. It was a long-eared jackrabbit.

"Look," Victor yelled. "It's alive."

Thomas and Victor were busy congratulating themselves on their discovery when the jackrabbit darted out into the road and under the wheels of the pickup.

"Stop the goddamn car," Victor yelled, and Thomas did stop, backed the pickup to the dead jackrabbit.

"Oh, man, he's dead," Victor said as he looked at the squashed animal.

"Really dead."

"The only thing alive in this whole state and we just killed it."

"I don't know," Thomas said. "I think it was suicide."

Victor looked around the desert, sniffed the air, felt the emptiness and loneliness, and nodded his head.

"Yeah," Victor said. "It had to be suicide."

"I can't believe this," Thomas said. "You drive for a thousand miles and there ain't even any bugs smashed on the windshield. I drive for ten seconds and kill the only living thing in Nevada."

"Yeah," Victor said. "Maybe I should drive."

"Maybe you should."

Thomas Builds-the-Fire walked through the corridors of the tribal school by himself. Nobody wanted to be anywhere near him because of all those stories. Story after story.

Thomas closed his eyes and this story came to him: "We are all given one thing by which our lives are measured, one determination. Mine are the stories which can change or not change the world. It doesn't matter which as long as I continue to tell the stories. My father, he died on Okinawa⁵ in World War II, died fighting for this country, which had tried to kill him for

5. Largest of Japan's Ryukyu Islands in the Western Pacific Ocean, site in 1945 of a crucial American victory near the end of World War II that had preceded from the victory on Iwo Jima in the Japanese Volcano Islands chain, where Ira Hayes

(1923–1955), a Native American (Pima) achieved fame among the Marines raising the U.S. flag atop Mount Suribachi on February 23, 1945; "The Ballad of Ira Hayes" (by Peter LaFarge) was popularized by Bob Dylan in the 1960s as a folk song.

years. My mother, she died giving birth to me, died while I was still inside her. She pushed me out into the world with her last breath. I have no brothers or sisters. I have only my stories which came to me before I even had the words to speak. I learned a thousand stories before I took my first thousand steps. They are all I have. It's all I can do."

Thomas Builds-the-Fire told his stories to all those who would stop and listen. He kept telling them long after people had stopped listening.

Victor and Thomas made it back to the reservation just as the sun was rising. It was the beginning of a new day on earth, but the same old shit on the reservation.

"Good morning," Thomas said.

"Good morning."

The tribe was waking up, ready for work, eating breakfast, reading the newspaper, just like everybody else does. Willene LeBret was out in her garden wearing a bathrobe. She waved when Thomas and Victor drove by.

"Crazy Indians made it," she said to herself and went back to her roses.

Victor stopped the pickup in front of Thomas Builds-the-Fire's HUD⁶ house. They both yawned, stretched a little, shook dust from their bodies.

"I'm tired," Victor said.

"Of everything," Thomas added.

They both searched for words to end the journey. Victor needed to thank Thomas for his help, for the money, and make the promise to pay it all back.

"Don't worry about the money," Thomas said. "It don't make any difference anyhow."

"Probably not, enit?"⁷

"Nope."

Victor knew that Thomas would remain the crazy storyteller who talked to dogs and cars, who listened to the wind and pine trees. Victor knew that he couldn't really be friends with Thomas, even after all that had happened. It was cruel but it was real. As real as the ashes, as Victor's father, sitting behind the seats.

"I know how it is," Thomas said. "I know you ain't going to treat me any better than you did before. I know your friends would give you too much shit about it."

Victor was ashamed of himself. Whatever happened to the tribal ties, the sense of community? The only real thing he shared with anybody was a bottle and broken dreams. He owed Thomas something, anything.

"Listen," Victor said and handed Thomas the cardboard box which contained half of his father. "I want you to have this."

Thomas took the ashes and smiled, closed his eyes, and told this story: "I'm going to travel to Spokane Falls one last time and toss these ashes into the water. And your father will rise like a salmon, leap over the bridge, over me, and find his way home. It will be beautiful. His teeth will shine like silver, like a rainbow. He will rise, Victor, he will rise."

Victor smiled.

6. Department of Housing and Urban Development, part of the U.S. government.

7. That is, "isn't it?"

"I was planning on doing the same thing with my half," Victor said. "But I didn't imagine my father looking anything like a salmon. I thought it'd be like cleaning the attic or something. Like letting things go after they've stopped having any use."

"Nothing stops, cousin," Thomas said. "Nothing stops."

Thomas Builds-the-Fire got out of the pickup and walked up his driveway. Victor started the pickup and began the drive home.

"Wait," Thomas yelled suddenly from his porch. "I just got to ask one favor."

Victor stopped the pickup, leaned out the window, and shouted back. "What do you want?"

"Just one time when I'm telling a story somewhere, why don't you stop and listen?" Thomas asked.

"Just once?"

"Just once."

Victor waved his arms to let Thomas know that the deal was good. It was a fair trade, and that was all Victor had ever wanted from his whole life. So Victor drove his father's pickup toward home while Thomas went into his house, closed the door behind him, and heard a new story come to him in the silence afterwards.

1993

Survivorman

Here's a fact: Some people want to live more
Than others do. Some can withstand any horror

While others will easily surrender
To thirst, hunger, and extremes of weather.

In Utah, one man carried another
Man on his back like a conjoined brother

5

And crossed twenty-five miles of desert
To safety. Can you imagine the hurt?

Do you think you could be that good and strong?
Yes, yes, you think, but you're probably wrong.

10

2009

NATASHA TRETHERWEY

b. 1966

Natasha Trethewey has been a significant voice in American poetry since the 1990s. As a young poet she was part of the Dark Room Collective in the 1990s, a group of Boston-based poets of African descent that began meeting first to establish a reading series, later becoming a tightly knit group that toured, read, and shared work together. The group included the poet Kevin Young and several others who went on to have distinguished careers. Trethewey, for her part, won the Pulitzer Prize for her 2006 collection, *Native Guard*, a recognition that significantly broadened the audience for her work, and she was named poet laureate of the United States in 2012.

What new and loyal readers of Trethewey's work find, from collection to collection, is a poet exquisitely attuned to medium: not only the rich medium of poetic language that marries emotion, narrative, and sound, but also multiple visual media. Her 2002 collection, *Bellocq's Ophelia*, contained a series of poems meditating on the photographs of E. J. Bellocq, who made portraits of multiracial women—often called “octo-rooms” and “quadrooms” in the nineteenth century—working in the brothels of New Orleans in 1912. *Thrall*, her 2012 collection, probes the so-called *Casta* paintings—eighteenth-century Spanish canvases focused on the representation of skin color. The paintings set out to catalog in aesthetic terms the racial mixtures of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade—white-skinned Spanish fathers in silk and lace posing with African or Native women and the children of these unions. In lyrics scattered throughout her collections, Trethewey engages photographs and visual environments ranging from family snapshots to museum exhibits. Choosing images at once beautiful and ethically disturbing, Trethewey translates vision—which renders its objects just that, *objects*—into voice. We hear the voices of Bellocq's models, who tell their stories beyond the photograph's frame. We hear the voice of a thinking narrator, who has us see the sumptuous tableaux of mixed races for what they are: the output of a racist hierarchy of beauty, power, sex, and history. And we hear the voice of an autobiographical speaker, a biracial woman addressing, mourning, accusing, and questioning by turns her white father and her black mother.

In Natasha Trethewey's hands poetry is a live wire to the past. In *Native Guard*, she brings readers into the consciousness of a private in the Louisiana Native Guard, a corps of black Union soldiers who guarded Confederate prisoners and died in battle on Trethewey's home ground in southern Mississippi. Alongside that history, Trethewey places a series of elegies for her mother, who was murdered at the hands of an abusive lover when Trethewey was in her twenties. In the most heartbreaking of these elegies, “Graveyard Blues,” the familiar themes and rhymes of the blues allow the speaker to remember the act of burying her mother. It is a searing memory somehow comforted by the blues, a form that embodies the pain of generations of Americans of African descent. In the poem we feel both the blues' general sadness and the specific sharp fact of this speaker's story. *Thrall*, too, crosses the personal with the historical: meditations on the speaker's own biracial heritage entwine with the poems about the *Casta* paintings. Trethewey's poetry has a purchase on American life that is formally flexible, rich in aesthetic resources, keyed to the flow of the continent's violent history. That historical perspective has informed Trethewey's prose writing as well. Moved in the aftermath of Hurricane



The poets of the Dark Room Collective (1996). From left: Natasha Trethewey, Kevin Young, Major Jackson, Nehassaiu deGannes, Thomas Sayers Ellis, Sharan Strange, Adisa Vera Beatty.

Katrina to return to her native town of Gulfport, Mississippi, she offers a complicated and very human understanding of natural disaster and its aftermath there, laying out the relationship between poverty, race, and landscape in Mississippi since the experience of Hurricane Camille in the late 1960s.

To date, Trethewey has written four collections of poetry and one book of prose. Since 2001 she has been based in Atlanta, where she was raised, and where she is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of English and Creative Writing at Emory University. Her perch in academia is fitting, given her erudition, the evidence of which we see especially in her historical poetry. But she is still very much a poet of the people. As poet laureate, Trethewey reinstated the great but lapsed tradition of the poet laureate's "office hours"—time she set aside each week in the Library of Congress to talk about poetry with anyone who wished to come by. In her second year as laureate, her main project was to work with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) on a series of films about the meaning and role of poetry in our ordinary lives today.

In keeping with such priorities, readers will find her poetry accessible, humane, and democratic—but it is not therefore safe or easy. Trethewey shows how our practice of art and our conception of beauty have been complicit with racist violence. She shows us how the human body and voice are unmade—and perhaps, ultimately, remade—under the weight of history.

Vignette

—*from a photograph*
*by E. J. Bellocq, circa 1912*¹

They pose the portrait outside
 the brothel—Bellocq's black scrim,
 a chair for her to sit on. She wears
 white, a rhinestone choker, fur,
 her dark crown of hair—an elegant image, 5
 one she might send to her mother.
 Perhaps the others crowd in behind
 Bellocq, awaiting their turns, tremors
 of laughter in their white throats.
 Maybe Bellocq chats, just a little, 10
 to put her at ease while he waits
 for the right moment, a look on her face
 to keep in a gilded frame, the ornate box
 he'll put her in. Suppose he tells her
 about a circus coming to town—monkeys 15
 and organ music, the high trapeze—but then

she's no longer listening; she's forgotten
 he's there. Instead she must be thinking
 of her childhood wonder at seeing
 the contortionist in a sideshow—how 20
 he could make himself small, fit
 into cramped spaces, his lungs
 barely expanding with each tiny breath.
 She thinks of her own shallow breath—
 her back straining the stays of a bustier, 25
 the weight of a body pressing her down.
 Picture her face now as she realizes
 that it must have been harder every year,
 that the contortionist, too, must have ached
 each night in his tent. This is how 30
 Bellocq takes her, her brow furrowed
 as she looks out to the left, past all of them.
 Imagine her a moment later—after
 the flash, blinded—stepping out
 of the frame, wide-eyed, into her life. 35

2002

1. John Ernest Joseph Bellocq (1873–1949), American photographer.

Graveyard Blues

It rained the whole time we were laying her down;
 Rained from church to grave when we put her down.
 The suck of mud at our feet was a hollow sound.

When the preacher called out I held up my hand;
 When he called for a witness I raised my hand 5
Death stops the body's work, the soul's a journeyman.

The sun came out when I turned to walk away,
 Glared down on me as I turned and walked away—
 My back to my mother, leaving her where she lay.

The road going home was pocked with holes, 10
 That home-going road's always full of holes;
 Though we slow down, time's wheel still rolls.

I wander now among names of the dead:
 My mother's name, stone pillow for my head.

2006

Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971

Why the rough edge of beauty? Why
 the tired face of a woman, suffering,
 made luminous by the camera's eye?

Or the storm that drives us inside
 for days, power lines down, food rotting 5
 in the refrigerator, while outside

the landscape glistens beneath a glaze
 of ice? Why remember anything
 but the wonder of those few days,

the iced trees, each leaf in its glassy case? 10
 The picture we took that first morning,
 the front yard a beautiful, strange place—

why on the back has someone made a list
 of our names, the date, the event: nothing
 of what's inside—mother, stepfather's fist? 15

2006

Native Guard¹

*If this war is to be forgotten, I ask in the name of all things
sacred what shall men remember?*

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS

November 1862

Truth be told, I do not want to forget
anything of my former life: the landscape's
song of bondage—dirge in the river's throat
where it churns into the Gulf, wind in trees
choked with vines. I thought to carry with me 5
want of freedom though I had been freed,
remembrance not constant recollection.
Yes: I was born a slave, at harvest time,
in the Parish of Ascension; I've reached
thirty-three with history of one younger 10
inscribed upon my back. I now use ink
to keep record, a closed book, not the lure
of memory—flawed, changeful—that dulls the lash
for the master, sharpens it for the slave.

December 1862

For the slave, having a master sharpens 15
the bend into work, the way the sergeant
moves us now to perfect battalion drill,
dress parade. Still, we're called supply units—
not infantry—and so we dig trenches,
haul burdens for the army no less heavy 20
than before. I heard the colonel call it
nigger work. Half rations make our work
familiar still. We take those things we need
from the Confederates' abandoned homes:
salt, sugar, even this journal, near full 25
with someone else's words, overlapped now,
crosshatched beneath mine. On every page,
his story intersecting with my own.

1. Epigraph from "Address at the Grave of the Unknown Dead" by Frederick Douglass, Arlington, Virginia, May 30, 1871; quoted in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* by David Blight. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2001.

The first regiments of the Louisiana Native Guards were mustered into service in September, October, and November of 1862—the 1st Regiment thus becoming the first officially sanctioned regiment of black soldiers in the Union Army, and the 2nd and 3rd made up of men who had been slaves only months before enlisting. During the war, the fort at Ship Island, Mississippi, called Fort Massachusetts, was maintained as a prison

for Confederate soldiers—military convicts and prisoners of war—manned by the 2nd Regiment. Among the 2nd Regiment's officers was Francis E. Dumas—the son of a white Creole father and a mulatto mother—who had inherited slaves when his father died. Although Louisiana law prohibited him from manumitting these slaves, when he joined the Union Army, Dumas freed them and encouraged those men of age to join the Native Guards. (From *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War* by James G. Hollandsworth. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995.) [Trethewey's note.]

January 1863²

O how history intersects—my own
 berth upon a ship called the *Northern Star* 30
 and I'm delivered into a new life,
 Fort Massachusetts: a great irony—
 both path and destination of freedom
 I'd not dared to travel. Here, now, I walk
 ankle-deep in sand, fly-bitten, nearly 35
 smothered by heat, and yet I can look out
 upon the Gulf and see the surf breaking,
 tossing the ships, the great gunboats bobbing
 on the water. And are we not the same,
 slaves in the hands of the master, destiny? 40
 —night sky red with the promise of fortune,
 dawn pink as new flesh: healing, unfettered.

January 1863

Today, dawn red as warning. Unfettered
 supplies, stacked on the beach at our landing,
 washed away in the storm that rose too fast, 45
 caught us unprepared. Later, as we worked,
 I joined in the low singing someone raised
 to pace us, and felt a bond in labor
 I had not known. It was then a dark man
 removed his shirt, revealed the scars, crosshatched 50
 like the lines in this journal, on his back.
 It was he who remarked at how the ropes
 cracked like whips on the sand, made us take note
 of the wild dance of a tent loosed by wind.
 We watched and learned. Like any shrewd master, 55
 we know now to tie down what we will keep.

February 1863

We know it is our duty now to keep
 white men as prisoners—rebel soldiers,
 would-be masters. We're all bondsmen here, each
 to the other. Freedom has gotten them 60
 captivity. For us, a conscription
 we have chosen—jailors to those who still
 would have us slaves. They are cautious, dreading
 the sight of us. Some neither read nor write,
 are laid too low and have few words to send 65
 but those I give them. Still, they are wary
 of a negro writing, taking down letters.

2. The Union ship *Northern Star* transported seven companies of the 2nd Louisiana Native Guards to Fort Massachusetts, Ship Island, on January 12, 1863. The lines “. . . I can look out / upon the Gulf and see the surf breaking. / tossing the ships, the great gunboats bobbing / on the water. And are we not the same, / slaves in the

hands of the master, destiny?” are borrowed, in slightly different form, from *Thank God My Regiment an African One: The Civil War Diary of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels*, edited by C. P. Weaver. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998. [Tretthewey's note.]

X binds them to the page³—a mute symbol
like the cross on a grave. I suspect they fear
I'll listen, put something else down in ink. 70

March 1863

I listen, put down in ink what I know
they labor to say between silences
too big for words: worry for beloveds—
My Dearest, how are you getting along—
what has become of their small plots of land 75
did you harvest enough food to put by?
They long for the comfort of former lives—
I see you as you were, waving goodbye.
Some send photographs—a likeness in case
the body can't return. Others dictate 80
harsh facts of this war: *The hot air carries*
the stench of limbs, rotten in the bone pit.
Flies swarm—a black cloud. We hunger, grow weak.
*When men die, we eat their share of hardtack.*⁴

April 1863⁵

When men die, we eat their share of hardtack 85
trying not to recall their hollow sockets,
the worm-stitch of their cheeks. Today we buried
the last of our dead from Pascagoula,
and those who died retreating to our ship—
white sailors in blue firing upon us 90
as if we were the enemy. I'd thought
the fighting over, then watched a man fall
beside me, knees-first as in prayer, then
another, his arms outstretched as if borne
upon the cross. Smoke that rose from each gun 95
seemed a soul departing. The Colonel said:
an unfortunate incident; said:
their names shall deck the page of history.

June 1863⁶

Some names shall deck the page of history
as it is written on stone. Some will not. 100

3. Illiterate prisoners would sign letters written on their behalf with an "X."

4. A durable cracker of flour, water, and salt.

5. On April 9, 1863, 180 black men and their officers went onto the mainland to meet Confederate troops near Pascagoula, Mississippi. After the skirmish, as the black troops were retreating (having been outnumbered by the Confederates), white Union troops on board the gunboat *Jackson* fired directly at them and not at oncoming Confederates. Several black soldiers were killed or wounded. The phrases *an unfortunate*

incident and *their names shall deck the page of history* are also from *Thank God My Regiment an African One: The Civil War Diary of Colonel Nathan W. Daniels*. [Trethewey's note.]

6. During the battle of Port Hudson in May 1863, General Nathaniel P. Banks requested a truce to locate the wounded Union soldiers and bury the dead. His troops, however, ignored the area where the Native Guards had fought, leaving those men unclaimed. When Colonel Shelby, a Confederate officer, asked permission to bury the putrefying bodies in front of his lines, Banks

Yesterday, word came of colored troops, dead
 on the battlefield at Port Hudson; how
 General Banks was heard to say *I have*
no dead there, and left them, unclaimed. Last night,
 I dreamt their eyes still open—dim, clouded 105
 as the eyes of fish washed ashore, yet fixed—
 staring back at me. Still, more come today
 eager to enlist. Their bodies—haggard
 faces, gaunt limbs—bring news of the mainland.
 Starved, they suffer like our prisoners. Dying, 110
 they plead for what we do not have to give.
 Death makes equals of us all: a fair master.

August 1864

Dumas was a fair master to us all.
 He taught me to read and write: I was a man-
 servant, if not a man. At my work, 115
 I studied natural things—all manner
 of plants, birds I draw now in my book: wren,
 willet, egret, loon. Tending the gardens,
 I thought only to study live things, thought
 never to know so much about the dead. 120
 Now I tend Ship Island graves, mounds like dunes
 that shift and disappear. I record names,
 send home simple notes, not much more than how
 and when—an official duty. I'm told
 it's best to spare most detail, but I know 125
 there are things which must be accounted for.

1865⁷

These are things which must be accounted for:
 slaughter under the white flag of surrender—
 black massacre at Fort Pillow; our new name,
 the Corps d'Afrique—words that take the *native* 130
 from our claim; mossbacks⁸ and freedmen—exiles
 in their own homeland; the diseased, the maimed,
 every lost limb, and what remains: phantom
 ache, memory haunting an empty sleeve;
 the hog-eaten at Gettysburg, unmarked 135
 in their graves; all the dead letters, unanswered;

refused, saying that he had no dead in that area. (From *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War*.) [Trethewey's note.]

7. In April 1864, Confederate troops attacked Fort Pillow, a Union garrison fifty miles north of Memphis. One correspondent, in a dispatch to the *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, reported that, after gaining control of the fort, the Confederates disregarded several individual attempts by the black troops to surrender, and “an indiscrim-

inate slaughter followed” in which Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest purportedly ordered the black troops “shot down like dogs.” (From “The Fort Pillow Massacre: Assessing the Evidence,” by John Cimprich, in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African-American Troops in the Civil War Era*, edited by John David Smith. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.) [Trethewey's note.]

8. Men who hid to avoid conscription into the Confederate army.

untold stories of those that time will render
 mute. Beneath battlefields, green again,
 the dead molder—a scaffolding of bone
 we tread upon, forgetting. Truth be told.

140

2006

Miracle of the Black Leg

*Pictorial representations of the physician-saints Cosmas and
 Damian and the myth of the miracle transplant—black donor,
 white recipient—date back to the mid-fourteenth century,
 appearing much later than written versions of the story.*

1.

Always, the dark body hewn asunder; always
 one man is healed, his sick limb replaced,
 placed in the other man's grave: the white leg
 buried beside the corpse or attached as if
 it were always there. If not for the dark appendage
 you might miss the story beneath this story—
 what remains each time the myth changes: how,
 in one version, the doctors harvest the leg
 from a man, four days dead, in his tomb at the church
 of a martyr, or—in another—desecrate a body
 fresh in the graveyard at Saint Peter in Chains:¹
there was buried just today an Ethiopian.
 Even now, it stays with us: when we mean to uncover
 the truth, we dig, say *unearth*.

2.

Emblematic in paint, a signifier of the body's lacuna,
 the black leg is at once a grafted narrative,
 a redacted line of text, and in this scene a dark stocking
 pulled above the knee. Here the patient is sleeping,
 his head at rest in his hand. Beatific, he looks as if
 he'll wake from a dream. On the floor
 beside the bed, a dead *Moor*—hands crossed at the groin,
 the swapped limb white and rotting, fused in place.
 And in the corner, a question: poised as if to speak
 the syntax of sloughing, a snake's curved form.
 It emerges from the mouth of a boy like a tongue—slippery
 and rooted in the body as knowledge. For centuries
 this is how the myth repeats: the miracle—in words
 or wood or paint—is a record of thought.

1. Roman Catholic church and basilica in Rome; among the relics preserved there are chains said to have bound Saint Peter when he was held captive in Jerusalem.

3.

See how the story changes: in one painting
 the *Ethiop* is merely a body, featureless in a coffin, 30
 so black he has no face. In another, the patient—
 at the top of the frame—seems to writhe in pain,
 the black leg grafted to his thigh. Below him
 a mirror of suffering: the *blackamoor*—
 his body a fragment—arched across the doctor's lap 35
 as if dying from his wound. If not immanence,
 the soul's bright anchor—blood passed from one
 to the other—what knowledge haunts each body,
 what history, what phantom ache? One man always
 low, in a grave or on the ground, the other 40
 up high, closer to heaven; one man always diseased,
 the other a body in service, plundered.

4.

Both men are alive in Villoldo's carving.²
 In twinned relief, they hold the same posture,
 the same pained face, each man reaching to touch 45
 his left leg. The black man, on the floor,
 holds his stump. Above him, the doctor restrains
 the patient's arm as if to prevent him touching
 the dark amendment of flesh. How not to see it—
 the men bound one to the other, symbiotic— 50
 one man rendered expendable, the other worthy
 of this sacrifice? In version after version, even
 when the *Ethiopian* isn't there, the leg is a stand-in,
 a black modifier against the white body,
 a *piece cut off*—as in the origin of the word *comma*: 55
 caesura in a story that's still being written.

2012

2. "Miracle of the Black Leg" (1547), by Spanish sculptor Isidro de Villoldo (1500–1556).

JHUMPA LAHIRI

b. 1967

When Jhumpa Lahiri writes, her setting is quite literally the world—focused sometimes here and sometimes there, but always with global implications. This orientation is a factor of her times. Unlike children of earlier immigrant generations, Lahiri did not face the pressures of assimilating into an American society apart from and in some cases above other cultures. Instead, international trade, travel, and

communications have made global culture a practical reality. In “Sexy,” one of Lahiri’s most wide-ranging yet intimate stories, her protagonist listens to a sad tale about a friend’s “cousin’s husband.” The bad news, “a wife’s worst nightmare,” is being conveyed in Boston, where the friends live, but it involves a flight from Delhi to Montreal stopping at Heathrow Airport outside London. Four locations in two hemispheres an ocean and a continent apart indicate the world that people with family backgrounds in India share when they become Americans. Geographical barriers become much more easily manageable thanks to cell phones and e-mail. Education, employment, friendships, and romantic relationships span the world. Films from India are viewed with American pop songs in mind and Chinese cuisine in the stomach, all, flavorful as they are, seeming as natural as the lives being lived among such givens.

The flavor of Lahiri’s fiction defies categorization, other than being dependent on no single national ingredient. A visit to Boston’s Mapparium (a giant globe viewed from inside) or Museum of Fine Arts is less a field trip through region and history than a comfortable part of her characters’ way of living, a reminder of the larger culture they share.

The author’s Bengali parents parted from their large extended family when they moved from Kolkata to London, where Lahiri was born. Following a normal progression in the former British Commonwealth, Lahiri’s parents then relocated to the United States, where they worked as educators in Rhode Island while she studied at Barnard College and Boston University, concentrating on literature and creative writing and ending with a Ph.D. Her first stories reflect how much of her family’s past had to be conveyed to her via storytelling, such as in “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine,” where a ten-year-old in America learns about political troubles in India from a visiting family friend. To the youngster, it sounds exotic, but no more so than the situation experienced by a pair of Indian newlyweds, in “This Blessed House,” who are alternately intrigued and mystified by fundamentalist Christian curios left behind by the previous tenants of their new home. Much of Lahiri’s short fiction, first collected in *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and extended in *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), involves discoveries of this nature, in which she is particularly adept at portraying the learning process of someone acting without monocultural constraint. The curiosity of children or young adults is a hallmark of her style.

In 2003, having married, become a mother, and settled in the Park Slope area of Brooklyn, New York, a neighborhood popular with writers, Lahiri published her novel *The Namesake*. Like her earlier work, it contrasts cultural assimilation with curiosity about the values, beliefs, and practices of a preceding generation. But here a certain amount of anger and confusion come into play, as the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, is uncomfortable with how the private first name his parents have used for him at home has become his public name as well, all without his understanding its personal (much less literary) significance. Lahiri had been saddled with “Jhumpa” as a first name by her teachers, who found it easier to pronounce than her other two given names, either of which would have been more appropriate for formal use. But while Lahiri’s enforced assimilation didn’t bother her, Ganguli’s does, although much of his discomfort is comic, such as when he assumes that a sociologist’s anagrammatical reference to “ABCDS” means not “multiculturals” but “American-born confused deshi” (India countrymen). In fact, Ganguli doesn’t even know what “deshi” properly means, just that his parents customarily refer to India as “desh.” He “never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India.” Other contrasts, such as arranged marriages versus modern ones, are handled with more gravity in this novel, and two fraught marriages structure Lahiri’s ambitious 2013 novel, *The Lowland*.

The following text is from *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999).

Sexy

It was a wife's worst nightmare. After nine years of marriage, Laxmi told Miranda, her cousin's husband had fallen in love with another woman. He sat next to her on a plane, on a flight from Delhi to Montreal, and instead of flying home to his wife and son, he got off with the woman at Heathrow.¹ He called his wife, and told her he'd had a conversation that had changed his life, and that he needed time to figure things out. Laxmi's cousin had taken to her bed.

"Not that I blame her," Laxmi said. She reached for the Hot Mix she munched throughout the day, which looked to Miranda like dusty orange cereal. "Imagine. An English girl, half his age." Laxmi was only a few years older than Miranda, but she was already married, and kept a photo of herself and her husband, seated on a white stone bench in front of the Taj Mahal,² tacked to the inside of her cubicle, which was next to Miranda's. Laxmi had been on the phone for at least an hour, trying to calm her cousin down. No one noticed; they worked for a public radio station,³ in the fundraising department, and were surrounded by people who spent all day on the phone, soliciting pledges.

"I feel worst for the boy," Laxmi added. "He's been at home for days. My cousin said she can't even take him to school."

"It sounds awful," Miranda said. Normally Laxmi's phone conversations—mainly to her husband, about what to cook for dinner—distracted Miranda as she typed letters, asking members of the radio station to increase their annual pledge in exchange for a tote bag or an umbrella. She could hear Laxmi clearly, her sentences peppered every now and then with an Indian word, through the laminated wall between their desks. But that afternoon Miranda hadn't been listening. She'd been on the phone herself, with Dev, deciding where to meet later that evening.

"Then again, a few days at home won't hurt him." Laxmi ate some more Hot Mix, then put it away in a drawer. "He's something of a genius. He has a Punjabi mother and a Bengali⁴ father, and because he learns French and English at school he already speaks four languages. I think he skipped two grades."

Dev was Bengali, too. At first Miranda thought it was a religion. But then he pointed it out to her, a place in India called Bengal, in a map printed in an issue of *The Economist*.⁵ He had brought the magazine specially to her apartment, for she did not own an atlas, or any other books with maps in them. He'd pointed to the city where he'd been born, and another city where his father had been born. One of the cities had a box around it, intended to attract the reader's eye. When Miranda asked what the box indicated, Dev rolled up the magazine, and said, "Nothing you'll ever need to worry about," and he tapped her playfully on the head.

Before leaving her apartment he'd tossed the magazine in the garbage, along with the ends of the three cigarettes he always smoked in the course of his visits. But after she watched his car disappear down Commonwealth Avenue,⁶ back to his house in the suburbs, where he lived with his wife, Miranda

1. International airport near London.

2. Muslim mausoleum near Agra, India, built on a monumental scale in the mid-17th century by Emperor Shah Jahan for his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

3. Noncommercial, listener-supported, often oriented toward arts and culture in its broadcasting.

4. Punjab, state in northern India; Bengal, former province of India, now a region that includes Bengal State and East Bengal, the latter part of Bangladesh.

5. Weekly British magazine of news and commentary.

6. Major thoroughfare in Boston.

retrieved it, and brushed the ashes off the cover, and rolled it in the opposite direction to get it to lie flat. She got into bed, still ruffled from their love-making, and studied the borders of Bengal. There was a bay below and mountains above. The map was connected to an article about something called the Gramin Bank.⁷ She turned the page, hoping for a photograph of the city where Dev was born, but all she found were graphs and grids. Still, she stared at them, thinking the whole while about Dev, about how only fifteen minutes ago he'd propped her feet on top of his shoulders, and pressed her knees to her chest, and told her that he couldn't get enough of her.

She'd met him a week ago, at Filene's.⁸ She was there on her lunch break, buying discounted pantyhose in the Basement. Afterward she took the escalator to the main part of the store, to the cosmetics department, where soaps and creams were displayed like jewels, and eye shadows and powders shimmered like butterflies pinned behind protective glass. Though Miranda had never bought anything other than a lipstick, she liked walking through the cramped, confined maze, which was familiar to her in a way the rest of Boston still was not. She liked negotiating her way past the women planted at every turn, who sprayed cards with perfume and waved them in the air; sometimes she would find a card days afterward, folded in her coat pocket, and the rich aroma, still faintly preserved, would warm her as she waited on cold mornings for the T.⁹

That day, stopping to smell one of the more pleasing cards, Miranda noticed a man standing at one of the counters. He held a slip of paper covered in a precise, feminine hand. A saleswoman took one look at the paper and began to open drawers. She produced an oblong cake of soap in a black case, a hydrating mask, a vial of cell renewal drops, and two tubes of face cream. The man was tanned, with black hair that was visible on his knuckles. He wore a flamingo pink shirt, a navy blue suit, a camel overcoat with gleaming leather buttons. In order to pay he had taken off pigskin gloves. Crisp bills emerged from a burgundy wallet. He didn't wear a wedding ring.

"What can I get you, honey?" the saleswoman asked Miranda. She looked over the tops of her tortoiseshell glasses, assessing Miranda's complexion.

Miranda didn't know what she wanted. All she knew was that she didn't want the man to walk away. He seemed to be lingering, waiting, along with the saleswoman, for her to say something. She stared at some bottles, some short, others tall, arranged on an oval tray, like a family posing for a photograph.

"A cream," Miranda said eventually.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

The saleswoman nodded, opening a frosted bottle. "This may seem a bit heavier than what you're used to, but I'd start now. All your wrinkles are going to form by twenty-five. After that they just start showing."

While the saleswoman dabbed the cream on Miranda's face, the man stood and watched. While Miranda was told the proper way to apply it, in swift upward strokes beginning at the base of her throat, he spun the

7. Properly the Grameen Bank, which provides credit to the poorest classes in rural Bangladesh as a means of fighting poverty and promoting social economic development.

8. A department store. Filene's Basement, downstairs, was a renowned discount store.

9. Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), Boston's subway system.

lipstick carousel. He pressed a pump that dispensed cellulite gel and massaged it into the back of his ungloved hand. He opened a jar, leaned over, and drew so close that a drop of cream flecked his nose.

Miranda smiled, but her mouth was obscured by a large brush that the saleswoman was sweeping over her face. "This is blusher Number Two," the woman said. "Gives you some color."

Miranda nodded, glancing at her reflection in one of the angled mirrors that lined the counter. She had silver eyes and skin as pale as paper, and the contrast with her hair, as dark and glossy as an espresso bean, caused people to describe her as striking, if not pretty. She had a narrow, egg-shaped head that rose to a prominent point. Her features, too, were narrow, with nostrils so slim that they appeared to have been pinched with a clothespin. Now her face glowed, rosy at the cheeks, smoky below the brow bone. Her lips glistened.

The man was glancing in a mirror, too, quickly wiping the cream from his nose. Miranda wondered where he was from. She thought he might be Spanish, or Lebanese. When he opened another jar, and said, to no one in particular, "This one smells like pineapple," she detected only the hint of an accent.

"Anything else for you today?" the saleswoman asked, accepting Miranda's credit card.

"No thanks."

The woman wrapped the cream in several layers of red tissue. "You'll be very happy with this product." Miranda's hand was unsteady as she signed the receipt. The man hadn't budged.

"I threw in a sample of our new eye gel," the saleswoman added, handing Miranda a small shopping bag. She looked at Miranda's credit card before sliding it across the counter. "Bye-bye, Miranda."

Miranda began walking. At first she sped up. Then, noticing the doors that led to Downtown Crossing,¹ she slowed down.

"Part of your name is Indian," the man said, pacing his steps with hers.

She stopped, as did he, at a circular table piled with sweaters, flanked with pinecones and velvet bows. "Miranda?"

"Mira. I have an aunt named Mira."

His name was Dev. He worked in an investment bank back that way he said, tilting his head in the direction of South Station.² He was the first man with a mustache, Miranda decided, she found handsome.

They walked together toward Park Street station,³ past the kiosks that sold cheap belts and handbags. A fierce January wind spoiled the part in her hair. As she fished for a token in her coat pocket, her eyes fell to his shopping bag. "And those are for her?"

"Who?"

"Your Aunt Mira."

"They're for my wife." He uttered the words slowly, holding Miranda's gaze. "She's going to India for a few weeks." He rolled his eyes. "She's addicted to this stuff."

Somehow, without the wife there, it didn't seem so wrong. At first Miranda and Dev spent every night together, almost. He explained that he couldn't

1. Major interchange of MTA subway lines.

2. MTA commuter hub for lines from the south

suburbs.

3. MTA stop in the business district.

spend the whole night at her place, because his wife called every day at six in the morning, from India, where it was four in the afternoon. And so he left her apartment at two, three, often as late as four in the morning, driving back to his house in the suburbs. During the day he called her every hour, it seemed, from work, or from his cell phone. Once he learned Miranda's schedule he left her a message each evening at five-thirty, when she was on the T coming back to her apartment, just so, he said, she could hear his voice as soon as she walked through the door. "I'm thinking about you," he'd say on the tape. "I can't wait to see you." He told her he liked spending time in her apartment, with its kitchen counter no wider than a breadbox, and scratchy floors that sloped, and a buzzer in the lobby that always made a slightly embarrassing sound when he pressed it. He said he admired her for moving to Boston, where she knew no one, instead of remaining in Michigan, where she'd grown up and gone to college. When Miranda told him it was nothing to admire, that she'd moved to Boston precisely for that reason, he shook his head. "I know what it's like to be lonely," he said, suddenly serious, and at that moment Miranda felt that he understood her—understood how she felt some nights on the T, after seeing a movie on her own, or going to a bookstore to read magazines, or having drinks with Laxmi, who always had to meet her husband at Alewife station⁴ in an hour or two. In less serious moments Dev said he liked that her legs were longer than her torso, something he'd observed the first time she walked across a room naked. "You're the first," he told her, admiring her from the bed. "The first woman I've known with legs this long."

Dev was the first to tell her that. Unlike the boys she dated in college, who were simply taller, heavier versions of the ones she dated in high school, Dev was the first always to pay for things, and hold doors open, and reach across a table in a restaurant to kiss her hand. He was the first to bring her a bouquet of flowers so immense she'd had to split it up into all six of her drinking glasses, and the first to whisper her name again and again when they made love. Within days of meeting him, when she was at work, Miranda began to wish that there were a picture of her and Dev tacked to the inside of her cubicle, like the one of Laxmi and her husband in front of the Taj Mahal. She didn't tell Laxmi about Dev. She didn't tell anyone. Part of her wanted to tell Laxmi, if only because Laxmi was Indian, too. But Laxmi was always on the phone with her cousin these days, who was still in bed, whose husband was still in London, and whose son still wasn't going to school. "You must eat something," Laxmi would urge. "You mustn't lose your health." When she wasn't speaking to her cousin, she spoke to her husband, shorter conversations, in which she ended up arguing about whether to have chicken or lamb for dinner. "I'm sorry," Miranda heard her apologize at one point. "This whole thing just makes me a little paranoid."

Miranda and Dev didn't argue. They went to movies at the Nickelodeon and kissed the whole time. They ate pulled pork and cornbread in Davis Square,⁵ a paper napkin tucked like a cravat into the collar of Dev's shirt. They sipped sangria at the bar of a Spanish restaurant, a grinning pig's head presiding over their conversation. They went to the MFA⁶ and picked

4. MTA stop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, across the Charles River from Boston.

5. MTA stop near Tufts University in a formerly

working-class, now upscale neighborhood.

6. Museum of Fine Arts (Boston).

out a poster of water lilies for her bedroom. One Saturday, following an afternoon concert at Symphony Hall, he showed her his favorite place in the city, the Mapparium⁷ at the Christian Science center, where they stood inside a room made of glowing stained-glass panels, which was shaped like the inside of a globe, but looked like the outside of one. In the middle of the room was a transparent bridge, so that they felt as if they were standing in the center of the world. Dev pointed to India, which was red, and far more detailed than the map in *The Economist*. He explained that many of the countries, like Siam and Italian Somaliland,⁸ no longer existed in the same way; the names had changed by now. The ocean, as blue as a peacock's breast, appeared in two shades, depending on the depth of the water. He showed her the deepest spot on earth, seven miles deep, above the Mariana Islands.⁹ They peered over the bridge and saw the Antarctic archipelago¹ at their feet, craned their necks and saw a giant metal star overhead. As Dev spoke, his voice bounced wildly off the glass, sometimes loud, sometimes soft, sometimes seeming to land in Miranda's chest, sometimes eluding her ear altogether. When a group of tourists walked onto the bridge, she could hear them clearing their throats, as if through microphones. Dev explained that it was because of the acoustics.

Miranda found London, where Laxmi's cousin's husband was, with the woman he'd met on the plane. She wondered which of the cities in India Dev's wife was in. The farthest Miranda had ever been was to the Bahamas once when she was a child. She searched but couldn't find it on the glass panels. When the tourists left and she and Dev were alone again, he told her to stand at one end of the bridge. Even though they were thirty feet apart, Dev said, they'd be able to hear each other whisper.

"I don't believe you," Miranda said. It was the first time she'd spoken since they'd entered. She felt as if speakers were embedded in her ears.

"Go ahead," he urged, walking backward to his end of the bridge. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Say something." She watched his lips forming the words; at the same time she heard them so clearly that she felt them under her skin, under her winter coat, so near and full of warmth that she felt herself go hot.

"Hi," she whispered, unsure of what else to say.

"You're sexy," he whispered back.

At work the following week, Laxmi told Miranda that it wasn't the first time her cousin's husband had had an affair. "She's decided to let him come to his senses," Laxmi said one evening as they were getting ready to leave the office. "She says it's for the boy. She's willing to forgive him for the boy." Miranda waited as Laxmi shut off her computer. "He'll come crawling back, and she'll let him," Laxmi said, shaking her head. "Not me. If my husband so much as looked at another woman I'd change the locks." She studied the picture tacked to her cubicle. Laxmi's husband had his arm draped over her shoulder, his knees leaning in toward her on the bench. She turned to Miranda. "Wouldn't you?"

7. Large walk-through globe that maps the earth as stars and planets would be seen in a planetarium.

8. Presently Thailand and Somalia.

9. Island chain in the western Pacific Ocean.

1. Group of islands northwest of the Antarctic Peninsula.

She nodded. Dev's wife was coming back from India the next day. That afternoon he'd called Miranda at work, to say he had to go to the airport to pick her up. He promised he'd call as soon as he could.

"What's the Taj Mahal like?" she asked Laxmi.

"The most romantic spot on earth." Laxmi's face brightened at the memory. "An everlasting monument to love."

While Dev was at the airport, Miranda went to Filene's Basement to buy herself things she thought a mistress should have. She found a pair of black high heels with buckles smaller than a baby's teeth. She found a satin slip with scalloped edges and a knee-length silk robe. Instead of the pantyhose she normally wore to work, she found sheer stockings with a seam. She searched through piles and wandered through racks, pressing back hanger after hanger, until she found a cocktail dress made of a slinky silvery material that matched her eyes, with little chains for straps. As she shopped she thought about Dev, and about what he'd told her in the Mapparium. It was the first time a man had called her sexy, and when she closed her eyes she could still feel his whisper drifting through her body, under her skin. In the fitting room, which was just one big room with mirrors on the walls, she found a spot next to an older woman with a shiny face and coarse frosted hair. The woman stood barefoot in her underwear, pulling the black net of a body stocking taut between her fingers.

"Always check for snags," the woman advised.

Miranda pulled out the satin slip with scalloped edges. She held it to her chest.

The woman nodded with approval. "Oh yes."

"And this?" She held up the silver cocktail dress.

"Absolutely," the woman said. "He'll want to rip it right off you."

Miranda pictured the two of them at a restaurant in the South End² they'd been to, where Dev had ordered foie gras and a soup made with champagne and raspberries. She pictured herself in the cocktail dress, and Dev in one of his suits, kissing her hand across the table. Only the next time Dev came to visit her, on a Sunday afternoon several days since the last time they'd seen each other, he was in gym clothes. After his wife came back, that was his excuse: on Sundays he drove into Boston and went running along the Charles. The first Sunday she opened the door in the knee-length robe, but Dev didn't even notice it; he carried her over to the bed, wearing sweatpants and sneakers, and entered her without a word. Later, she slipped on the robe when she walked across the room to get him a saucer for his cigarette ashes, but he complained that she was depriving him of the sight of her long legs, and demanded that she remove it. So the next Sunday she didn't bother. She wore jeans. She kept the lingerie at the back of a drawer, behind her socks and everyday underwear. The silver cocktail dress hung in her closet, the tag dangling from the seam. Often, in the morning, the dress would be in a heap on the floor; the chain straps always slipped off the metal hanger.

Still, Miranda looked forward to Sundays. In the mornings she went to a deli and bought a baguette and little containers of things Dev liked to eat,

2. Trendy Boston neighborhood.

like pickled herring, and potato salad, and tortes of pesto and mascarpone cheese. They ate in bed, picking up the herring with their fingers and ripping the baguette with their hands. Dev told her stories about his childhood, when he would come home from school and drink mango juice served to him on a tray, and then play cricket by a lake, dressed all in white. He told her about how, at eighteen, he'd been sent to a college in upstate New York during something called the Emergency,³ and about how it took him years to be able to follow American accents in movies, in spite of the fact that he'd had an English-medium education. As he talked he smoked three cigarettes, crushing them in a saucer by the side of her bed. Sometimes he asked her questions, like how many lovers she'd had (three) and how old she'd been the first time (nineteen). After lunch they made love, on sheets covered with crumbs, and then Dev took a nap for twelve minutes. Miranda had never known an adult who took naps, but Dev said it was something he'd grown up doing in India, where it was so hot that people didn't leave their homes until the sun went down. "Plus it allows us to sleep together," he murmured mischievously, curving his arm like a big bracelet around her body.

Only Miranda never slept. She watched the clock on her bedside table, or pressed her face against Dev's fingers, intertwined with hers, each with its half-dozen hairs at the knuckle. After six minutes she turned to face him, sighing and stretching, to test if he was really sleeping. He always was. His ribs were visible through his skin as he breathed, and yet he was beginning to develop a paunch. He complained about the hair on his shoulders, but Miranda thought him perfect, and refused to imagine him any other way.

At the end of twelve minutes Dev would open his eyes as if he'd been awake all along, smiling at her, full of a contentment she wished she felt herself. "The best twelve minutes of the week." He'd sigh, running a hand along the backs of her calves. Then he'd spring out of bed, pulling on his sweatpants and lacing up his sneakers. He would go to the bathroom and brush his teeth with his index finger, something he told her all Indians knew how to do, to get rid of the smoke in his mouth. When she kissed him good-bye she smelled herself sometimes in his hair. But she knew that his excuse, that he'd spent the afternoon jogging, allowed him to take a shower when he got home, first thing.

Apart from Laxmi and Dev, the only Indians whom Miranda had known were a family in the neighborhood where she'd grown up, named the Dixits. Much to the amusement of the neighborhood children, including Miranda, but not including the Dixit children, Mr. Dixit would jog each evening along the flat winding streets of their development in his everyday shirt and trousers, his only concession to athletic apparel a pair of cheap Keds. Every weekend, the family—mother, father, two boys, and a girl—piled into their car and went away, to where nobody knew. The fathers complained that Mr. Dixit did not fertilize his lawn properly, did not rake his leaves on time, and agreed that the Dixits' house, the only one with vinyl siding, detracted from the neighborhood's charm. The mothers never invited Mrs. Dixit to join them around the Armstrongs' swimming pool. Waiting for the school bus

3. State of internal emergency declared in 1975 by Indira Gandhi (1917–1984), prime minister of India, that allowed her to rule by decree until 1977, when she was defeated in an election.

with the Dixit children standing to one side, the other children would say “The Dixits dig shit,” under their breath, and then burst into laughter.

One year, all the neighborhood children were invited to the birthday party of the Dixit girl. Miranda remembered a heavy aroma of incense and onions in the house, and a pile of shoes heaped by the front door. But most of all she remembered a piece of fabric, about the size of a pillowcase, which hung from a wooden dowel at the bottom of the stairs. It was a painting of a naked woman with a red face shaped like a knight’s shield. She had enormous white eyes that tilted toward her temples, and mere dots for pupils. Two circles, with the same dots at their centers, indicated her breasts. In one hand she brandished a dagger. With one foot she crushed a struggling man on the ground. Around her body was a necklace composed of bleeding heads, strung together like a popcorn chain. She stuck her tongue out at Miranda.

“It is the goddess Kali,”⁴ Mrs. Dixit explained brightly, shifting the dowel slightly in order to straighten the image. Mrs. Dixit’s hands were painted with henna, an intricate pattern of zigzags and stars. “Come please, time for cake.”

Miranda, then nine years old, had been too frightened to eat the cake. For months afterward she’d been too frightened even to walk on the same side of the street as the Dixits’ house, which she had to pass twice daily, once to get to the bus stop, and once again to come home. For a while she even held her breath until she reached the next lawn, just as she did when the school bus passed a cemetery.

It shamed her now. Now, when she and Dev made love, Miranda closed her eyes and saw deserts and elephants, and marble pavilions floating on lakes beneath a full moon. One Saturday, having nothing else to do, she walked all the way to Central Square,⁵ to an Indian restaurant, and ordered a plate of tandoori chicken. As she ate she tried to memorize phrases printed at the bottom of the menu, for things like “delicious” and “water” and “check, please.” The phrases didn’t stick in her mind, and so she began to stop from time to time in the foreign-language section of a bookstore in Kenmore Square,⁶ where she studied the Bengali alphabet in the Teach Yourself series. Once she went so far as to try to transcribe the Indian part of her name, “Mira,” into her Filofax,⁷ her hand moving in unfamiliar directions, stopping and turning and picking up her pen when she least expected to. Following the arrows in the book, she drew a bar from left to right from which the letters hung; one looked more like a number than a letter, another looked like a triangle on its side. It had taken her several tries to get the letters of her name to resemble the sample letters in the book, and even then she wasn’t sure if she’d written Mira or Mara. It was a scribble to her, but somewhere in the world, she realized with a shock, it meant something.

During the week it wasn’t so bad. Work kept her busy, and she and Laxmi had begun having lunch together at a new Indian restaurant around the corner, during which Laxmi reported the latest status of her cousin’s marriage. Sometimes Miranda tried to change the topic; it made her feel the way

4. Hindu goddess of destruction.

5. In Cambridge.

6. In Boston.

7. Loose-leaf personal organizer, manufactured by the Filofax Company in England.

she once felt in college, when she and her boyfriend at the time had walked away from a crowded house of pancakes without paying for their food, just to see if they could get away with it. But Laxmi spoke of nothing else. “If I were her I’d fly straight to London and shoot them both,” she announced one day. She snapped a papadum in half and dipped it into chutney.⁸ “I don’t know how she can just wait this way.”

Miranda knew how to wait. In the evenings she sat at her dining table and coated her nails with clear nail polish, and ate salad straight from the salad bowl, and watched television, and waited for Sunday. Saturdays were the worst because by Saturday it seemed that Sunday would never come. One Saturday when Dev called, late at night, she heard people laughing and talking in the background, so many that she asked him if he was at a concert hall. But he was only calling from his house in the suburbs. “I can’t hear you that well,” he said. “We have guests. Miss me?” She looked at the television screen, a sitcom that she’d muted with the remote control when the phone rang. She pictured him whispering into his cell phone, in a room upstairs, a hand on the doorknob, the hallway filled with guests. “Miranda, do you miss me?” he asked again. She told him that she did.

The next day, when Dev came to visit, Miranda asked him what his wife looked like. She was nervous to ask, waiting until he’d smoked the last of his cigarettes, crushing it with a firm twist into the saucer. She wondered if they’d quarrel. But Dev wasn’t surprised by the question. He told her, spreading some smoked whitefish on a cracker, that his wife resembled an actress in Bombay named Madhuri Dixit.⁹

For an instant Miranda’s heart stopped. But no, the Dixit girl had been named something else, something that began with P. Still, she wondered if the actress and the Dixit girl were related. She’d been plain, wearing her hair in two braids all through high school.

A few days later Miranda went to an Indian grocery in Central Square which also rented videos. The door opened to a complicated tinkling of bells. It was dinnertime, and she was the only customer. A video was playing on a television hooked up in a corner of the store: a row of young women in harem pants were thrusting their hips in synchrony on a beach.

“Can I help you?” the man standing at the cash register asked. He was eating a samosa,¹ dipping it into some dark brown sauce on a paper plate. Below the glass counter at his waist were trays of more plump samosas, and what looked like pale, diamond-shaped pieces of fudge covered with foil, and some bright orange pastries floating in syrup. “You like some video?”

Miranda opened up her Filofax, where she had written “Mottery Dixit.” She looked up at the videos on the shelves behind the counter. She saw women wearing skirts that sat low on the hips and tops that tied like bandannas between their breasts. Some leaned back against a stone wall, or a tree. They were beautiful, the way the women dancing on the beach were beautiful, with kohl-rimmed eyes and long black hair. She knew then that Madhuri Dixit was beautiful, too.

8. Thick, sweet, spicy sauce used as a condiment.
“Papadum”: crisp lentil wafer.

9. Indian film actress (b. 1967) renowned for her

beauty.

1. Deep-fried turnover filled with vegetables or ground meat.

"We have subtitled versions, miss," the man continued. He wiped his fingertips quickly on his shirt and pulled out three titles.

"No," Miranda said. "Thank you, no." She wandered through the store, studying shelves lined with unlabeled packets and tins. The freezer case was stuffed with bags of pita bread and vegetables she didn't recognize. The only thing she recognized was a rack lined with bags and bags of the Hot Mix that Laxmi was always eating. She thought about buying some for Laxmi, then hesitated, wondering how to explain what she'd been doing in an Indian grocery.

"Very spicy," the man said, shaking his head, his eyes traveling across Miranda's body. "Too spicy for you."

By February, Laxmi's cousin's husband still hadn't come to his senses. He had returned to Montreal, argued bitterly with his wife for two weeks, packed two suitcases, and flown back to London. He wanted a divorce.

Miranda sat in her cubicle and listened as Laxmi kept telling her cousin that there were better men in the world, just waiting to come out of the woodwork. The next day the cousin said she and her son were going to her parents' house in California, to try to recuperate. Laxmi convinced her to arrange a weekend layover in Boston. "A quick change of place will do you good," Laxmi insisted gently, "besides which, I haven't seen you in years."

Miranda stared at her own phone, wishing Dev would call. It had been four days since their last conversation. She heard Laxmi dialing directory assistance, asking for the number of a beauty salon. "Something soothing," Laxmi requested. She scheduled massages, facials, manicures, and pedicures. Then she reserved a table for lunch at the Four Seasons. In her determination to cheer up her cousin, Laxmi had forgotten about the boy. She rapped her knuckles on the laminated wall.

"Are you busy Saturday?"

The boy was thin. He wore a yellow knapsack strapped across his back, gray herringbone trousers, a red V-necked sweater, and black leather shoes. His hair was cut in a thick fringe over his eyes, which had dark circles under them. They were the first thing Miranda noticed. They made him look haggard, as if he smoked a great deal and slept very little, in spite of the fact that he was only seven years old. He clasped a large sketch pad with a spiral binding. His name was Rohin.

"Ask me a capital," he said, staring up at Miranda.

She stared back at him. It was eight-thirty on a Saturday morning. She took a sip of coffee. "A what?"

"It's a game he's been playing," Laxmi's cousin explained. She was thin like her son, with a long face and the same dark circles under her eyes. A rust-colored coat hung heavy on her shoulders. Her black hair, with a few strands of gray at the temples, was pulled back like a ballerina's. "You ask him a country and he tells you the capital."

"You should have heard him in the car," Laxmi said. "He's already memorized all of Europe."

"It's not a game," Rohin said. "I'm having a competition with a boy at school. We're competing to memorize all the capitals. I'm going to beat him."

Miranda nodded. "Okay. What's the capital of India?"

“That’s no good.” He marched away, his arms swinging like a toy soldier. Then he marched back to Laxmi’s cousin and tugged at a pocket of her overcoat. “Ask me a hard one.”

“Senegal,” she said.

“Dakar!” Rohin exclaimed triumphantly, and began running in larger and larger circles. Eventually he ran into the kitchen. Miranda could hear him opening and closing the fridge.

“Rohin, don’t touch without asking,” Laxmi’s cousin called out wearily. She managed a smile for Miranda. “Don’t worry, he’ll fall asleep in a few hours. And thanks for watching him.”

“Back at three,” Laxmi said, disappearing with her cousin down the hallway. “We’re double-parked.”

Miranda fastened the chain on the door. She went to the kitchen to find Rohin, but he was now in the living room, at the dining table, kneeling on one of the director’s chairs. He unzipped his knapsack, pushed Miranda’s basket of manicure supplies to one side of the table, and spread his crayons over the surface. Miranda stood over his shoulder. She watched as he gripped a blue crayon and drew the outline of an airplane.

“It’s lovely,” she said. When he didn’t reply, she went to the kitchen to pour herself more coffee.

“Some for me, please,” Rohin called out.

She returned to the living room. “Some what?”

“Some coffee. There’s enough in the pot. I saw.”

She walked over to the table and sat opposite him. At times he nearly stood up to reach for a new crayon. He barely made a dent in the director’s chair.

“You’re too young for coffee.”

Rohin leaned over the sketch pad, so that his tiny chest and shoulders almost touched it, his head tilted to one side. “The stewardess let me have coffee,” he said. “She made it with milk and lots of sugar.” He straightened, revealing a woman’s face beside the plane, with long wavy hair and eyes like asterisks. “Her hair was more shiny,” he decided, adding, “My father met a pretty woman on a plane, too.” He looked at Miranda. His face darkened as he watched her sip. “Can’t I have just a little coffee? Please?”

She wondered, in spite of his composed, brooding expression, if he were the type to throw a tantrum. She imagined his kicking her with his leather shoes, screaming for coffee, screaming and crying until his mother and Laxmi came back to fetch him. She went to the kitchen and prepared a cup for him as he’d requested. She selected a mug she didn’t care for, in case he dropped it.

“Thank you,” he said when she put it on the table. He took short sips, holding the mug securely with both hands.

Miranda sat with him while he drew, but when she attempted to put a coat of clear polish on her nails he protested. Instead he pulled out a paper-back world almanac from his knapsack and asked her to quiz him. The countries were arranged by continent, six to a page, with the capitals in boldface, followed by a short entry on the population, government, and other statistics. Miranda turned to a page in the Africa section and went down the list.

“Mali,” she asked him.

“Bamako,” he replied instantly.

“Malawi.”

“Lilongwe.”

She remembered looking at Africa in the Mapparium. She remembered the fat part of it was green.

“Go on,” Rohin said.

“Mauritania.”

“Nouakchott.”

“Mauritius.”

He paused, squeezed his eyes shut, then opened them, defeated. “I can’t remember.”

“Port Louis,” she told him.

“Port Louis.” He began to say it again and again, like a chant under his breath.

When they reached the last of the countries in Africa, Rohin said he wanted to watch cartoons, telling Miranda to watch them with him. When the cartoons ended, he followed her to the kitchen, and stood by her side as she made more coffee. He didn’t follow her when she went to the bathroom a few minutes later, but when she opened the door she was startled to find him standing outside.

“Do you need to go?”

He shook his head but walked into the bathroom anyway. He put the cover of the toilet down, climbed on top of it, and surveyed the narrow glass shelf over the sink which held Miranda’s toothbrush and makeup.

“What’s this for?” he asked, picking up the sample of eye gel she’d gotten the day she met Dev.

“Puffiness.”

“What’s puffiness?”

“Here,” she explained, pointing.

“After you’ve been crying?”

“I guess so.”

Rohin opened the tube and smelled it. He squeezed a drop of it onto a finger, then rubbed it on his hand. “It stings.” He inspected the back of his hand closely, as if expecting it to change color. “My mother has puffiness. She says it’s a cold, but really she cries, sometimes for hours. Sometimes straight through dinner. Sometimes she cries so hard her eyes puff up like bullfrogs.”

Miranda wondered if she ought to feed him. In the kitchen she discovered a bag of rice cakes and some lettuce. She offered to go out, to buy something from the deli, but Rohin said he wasn’t very hungry, and accepted one of the rice cakes. “You eat one too,” he said. They sat at the table, the rice cakes between them. He turned to a fresh page in his sketch pad. “You draw.”

She selected a blue crayon. “What should I draw?”

He thought for a moment. “I know,” he said. He asked her to draw things in the living room: the sofa, the director’s chairs, the television, the telephone. “This way I can memorize it.”

“Memorize what?”

“Our day together.” He reached for another rice cake.

“Why do you want to memorize it?”

“Because we’re never going to see each other, ever again.”

The precision of the phrase startled her. She looked at him, feeling slightly depressed. Rohin didn't look depressed. He tapped the page. "Go on."

And so she drew the items as best as she could—the sofa, the director's chairs, the television, the telephone. He sidled up to her, so close that it was sometimes difficult to see what she was doing. He put his small brown hand over hers. "Now me."

She handed him the crayon.

He shook his head. "No, now draw me."

"I can't," she said. "It won't look like you."

The brooding look began to spread across Rohin's face again, just as it had when she'd refused him coffee. "Please?"

She drew his face, outlining his head and the thick fringe of hair. He sat perfectly still, with a formal, melancholy expression, his gaze fixed to one side. Miranda wished she could draw a good likeness. Her hand moved in conjunction with her eyes, in unknown ways, just as it had that day in the bookstore when she'd transcribed her name in Bengali letters. It looked nothing like him. She was in the middle of drawing his nose when he wriggled away from the table.

"I'm bored," he announced, heading toward her bedroom. She heard him opening the door, opening the drawers of her bureau and closing them.

When she joined him he was inside the closet. After a moment he emerged, his hair disheveled, holding the silver cocktail dress. "This was on the floor."

"It falls off the hanger."

Rohin looked at the dress and then at Miranda's body. "Put it on."

"Excuse me?"

"Put it on."

There was no reason to put it on. Apart from in the fitting room at Filene's she had never worn it, and as long as she was with Dev she knew she never would. She knew they would never go to restaurants, where he would reach across a table and kiss her hand. They would meet in her apartment, on Sundays, he in his sweatpants, she in her jeans. She took the dress from Rohin and shook it out, even though the slinky fabric never wrinkled. She reached into the closet for a free hanger.

"Please put it on," Rohin asked, suddenly standing behind her. He pressed his face against her, clasping her waist with both his thin arms. "Please?"

"All right," she said, surprised by the strength of his grip.

He smiled, satisfied, and sat on the edge of her bed.

"You have to wait out there," she said, pointing to the door. "I'll come out when I'm ready."

"But my mother always takes her clothes off in front of me."

"She does?"

Rohin nodded. "She doesn't even pick them up afterward. She leaves them all on the floor by the bed, all tangled."

"One day she slept in my room," he continued. "She said it felt better than her bed, now that my father's gone."

"I'm not your mother," Miranda said, lifting him by the armpits off her bed. When he refused to stand, she picked him up. He was heavier than she expected, and he clung to her, his legs wrapped firmly around her hips, his head resting against her chest. She set him down in the hallway and shut

the door. As an extra precaution she fastened the latch. She changed into the dress, glancing into the full-length mirror nailed to the back of the door. Her ankle socks looked silly, and so she opened a drawer and found the stockings. She searched through the back of the closet and slipped on the high heels with the tiny buckles. The chain straps of the dress were as light as paper clips against her collarbone. It was a bit loose on her. She could not zip it herself.

Rohin began knocking. "May I come in now?"

She opened the door. Rohin was holding his almanac in his hands, muttering something under his breath. His eyes opened wide at the sight of her. "I need help with the zipper," she said. She sat on the edge of the bed.

Rohin fastened the zipper to the top, and then Miranda stood up and twirled. Rohin put down the almanac. "You're sexy," he declared.

"What did you say?"

"You're sexy."

Miranda sat down again. Though she knew it meant nothing, her heart skipped a beat. Rohin probably referred to all women as sexy. He'd probably heard the word on television, or seen it on the cover of a magazine. She remembered the day in the Mapparium, standing across the bridge from Dev. At the time she thought she knew what his words meant. At the time they'd made sense.

Miranda folded her arms across her chest and looked Rohin in the eyes. "Tell me something."

He was silent.

"What does it mean?"

"What?"

"That word. 'Sexy.' What does it mean?"

He looked down, suddenly shy. "I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"It's a secret." He pressed his lips together, so hard that a bit of them went white.

"Tell me the secret. I want to know."

Rohin sat on the bed beside Miranda and began to kick the edge of the mattress with the backs of his shoes. He giggled nervously, his thin body flinching as if it were being tickled.

"Tell me," Miranda demanded. She leaned over and gripped his ankles, holding his feet still.

Rohin looked at her, his eyes like slits. He struggled to kick the mattress again, but Miranda pressed against him. He fell back on the bed, his back straight as a board. He cupped his hands around his mouth, and then he whispered, "It means loving someone you don't know."

Miranda felt Rohin's words under her skin, the same way she'd felt Dev's. But instead of going hot she felt numb. It reminded her of the way she'd felt at the Indian grocery, the moment she knew, without even looking at a picture, that Madhuri Dixit, whom Dev's wife resembled, was beautiful.

"That's what my father did," Rohin continued. "He sat next to someone he didn't know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother."

He took off his shoes and placed them side by side on the floor. Then he peeled back the comforter and crawled into Miranda's bed with the almanac. A minute later the book dropped from his hands, and he closed his eyes. Miranda watched him sleep, the comforter rising and falling as he

breathed. He didn't wake up after twelve minutes like Dev, or even twenty. He didn't open his eyes as she stepped out of the silver cocktail dress and back into her jeans, and put the high-heeled shoes in the back of the closet, and rolled up the stockings and put them back in her drawer.

When she had put everything away she sat on the bed. She leaned toward him, close enough to see some white powder from the rice cakes stuck to the corners of his mouth, and picked up the almanac. As she turned the pages she imagined the quarrels Rohin had overheard in his house in Montreal. "Is she pretty?" his mother would have asked his father, wearing the same bathrobe she'd worn for weeks, her own pretty face turning spiteful. "Is she sexy?" His father would deny it at first, try to change the subject. "Tell me," Rohin's mother would shriek, "tell me if she's sexy." In the end his father would admit that she was, and his mother would cry and cry, in a bed surrounded by a tangle of clothes, her eyes puffing up like bullfrogs. "How could you," she'd ask, sobbing, "how could you love a woman you don't even know?"

As Miranda imagined the scene she began to cry a little herself. In the Mapparium that day, all the countries had seemed close enough to touch, and Dev's voice had bounced wildly off the glass. From across the bridge, thirty feet away, his words had reached her ears, so near and full of warmth that they'd drifted for days under her skin. Miranda cried harder, unable to stop. But Rohin still slept. She guessed that he was used to it now, to the sound of a woman crying.

On Sunday, Dev called to tell Miranda he was on his way. "I'm almost ready. I'll be there at two."

She was watching a cooking show on television. A woman pointed to a row of apples, explaining which were best for baking. "You shouldn't come today." "Why not?"

"I have a cold," she lied. It wasn't far from the truth; crying had left her congested. "I've been in bed all morning."

"You do sound stuffed up." There was a pause. "Do you need anything?"

"I'm all set."

"Drink lots of fluids."

"Dev?"

"Yes, Miranda?"

"Do you remember that day we went to the Mapparium?"

"Of course."

"Do you remember how we whispered to each other?"

"I remember," Dev whispered playfully.

"Do you remember what you said?"

There was a pause. "'Let's go back to your place.'" He laughed quietly. "Next Sunday, then?"

The day before, as she'd cried, Miranda had believed she would never forget anything—not even the way her name looked written in Bengali. She'd fallen asleep beside Rohin and when she woke up he was drawing an airplane on the copy of *The Economist* she'd saved, hidden under the bed. "Who's Devajit Mitra?" he had asked, looking at the address label.

Miranda pictured Dev, in his sweatpants and sneakers, laughing into the phone. In a moment he'd join his wife downstairs, and tell her he wasn't going jogging. He'd pulled a muscle while stretching, he'd say, settling down

to read the paper. In spite of herself, she longed for him. She would see him one more Sunday, she decided, perhaps two. Then she would tell him the things she had known all along: that it wasn't fair to her, or to his wife, that they both deserved better, that there was no point in it dragging on.

But the next Sunday it snowed, so much so that Dev couldn't tell his wife he was going running along the Charles. The Sunday after that, the snow had melted, but Miranda made plans to go to the movies with Laxmi, and when she told Dev this over the phone, he didn't ask her to cancel them. The third Sunday she got up early and went out for a walk. It was cold but sunny, and so she walked all the way down Commonwealth Avenue, past the restaurants where Dev had kissed her, and then she walked all the way to the Christian Science center. The Mapparium was closed, but she bought a cup of coffee nearby and sat on one of the benches in the plaza outside the church, gazing at its giant pillars and its massive dome, and at the clear-blue sky spread over the city.

1999

JUNOT DÍAZ

b. 1968

The people of two neighborhoods inspire most of Junot Díaz's fiction: those living in Villa Juana, a district of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, and others residing in the London Terrace area of Palin, New Jersey. Born on the last day of 1968, Díaz lived in Villa Juana for his first five years, a time when his father was away working in the United States. Just before his fifth birthday he joined his father in New Jersey. Becoming an American did not mark a division in his life, nor would it as a source for his writing. Instead, Díaz appreciates the rich duality of any immigrant's experience. Narratives set in the Dominican Republic show characters ever mindful of what is happening among their relations on the North American mainland, and the young people in his New Jersey stories speak an English heavily laced with Dominican slang and live in a manner still marked by their Caribbean heritage. Not so much people of two worlds, Díaz's characters are creatures of a new world fashioned by fluid migrations and ultimately shaped by their own ingenuity.

The stories collected in *Drown* (1996) show the influence of two authors whose work Díaz read in college, Sandra Cisneros and Toni Morrison. Majoring in English at Kean College and Rutgers University, Díaz profited from a "living-and-learning" residence hall program that provided an immersion in both creative writing and literary studies. From Cisneros's fiction he learned how a neighborhood, such as the one she depicted in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), can be as vital and vibrant a creation as any character—how the neighborhood itself can be a character in the writer's imagination, a technique Díaz would later develop in his own manner. Morrison's novels popular during Díaz's undergraduate years (1988–92) are especially strong in privileging the novelist as creator of an otherwise unwritten minority history, a theme the younger writer would extend to the immigrant's experience of living in two worlds, neither of which conform to dominant cultural models. At the

same time Díaz was paying for his education by working numerous part-time jobs that he recalls as roles customarily reserved for adult Latinos recently arrived in the United States, such as in the service industries (washing dishes, delivering pool tables) and in a steel plant. An MFA in creative writing from Cornell University followed in 1995, by which time Díaz had published many of the stories collected in *Drown*, including several in such prestigious venues as the *New Yorker* and the *Paris Review*. Díaz lives in New York City, where he remains active in the Dominican community; at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology he teaches creative writing in the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies.

The fact that Díaz's novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), appeared eleven years after *Drown* is indicative of his painstaking writing method. A winner of both the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Critics Circle Award for the best novel of 2007, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* presents a character who fulfills Díaz's professed goal of challenging "the type of protagonist that many of the young male Latino writers I knew were writing," as the author told Meghan O'Rourke of *Slate* in the wake of his awards. In a similar discussion with Jaime Perales Contreras of the bilingual *Literal* magazine, Díaz explained that his title character's name was prompted by a young Mexican literature student's pronunciation of Oscar Wilde's name. "Spanglish" is the slang term for such colorful mixtures of Spanish and English, and as a poetry of sorts it contributes to the texture and rhythm of Díaz's narration. As O'Rourke puts it, his fiction "is propelled by its attention to the energetic hybridity of American life," stretching from the questions of identity and inclusion dealt with in the stories of *Drown* to the complexities of a multicultural boyhood depicted in the novel. Throughout Díaz's work "authority" is an ever-present concern, from the memories of Oscar Wao's family suffering under the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic to the contested nature of various narrative accounts with which young Oscar struggles in his American high school.

The following text is the title story from the 1996 collection *Drown*.

Drown

My mother tells me Beto's home, waits for me to say something, but I keep watching the TV. Only when she's in bed do I put on my jacket and swing through the neighborhood to see. He's a pato¹ now but two years ago we were friends and he would walk into the apartment without knocking, his heavy voice rousing my mother from the Spanish of her room and drawing me up from the basement, a voice that crackled and made you think of uncles or grandfathers.

We were raging then, crazy the way we stole, broke windows, the way we pissed on people's steps and then challenged them to come out and stop us. Beto was leaving for college at the end of the summer and was delirious from the thought of it—he hated everything about the neighborhood, the break-apart buildings, the little strips of grass, the piles of garbage around the cans, and the dump, especially the dump.

I don't know how you can do it, he said to me. I would just find me a job anywhere and go.

Yeah, I said. I wasn't like him. I had another year to go in high school, no promises elsewhere.

1. Dominican slang (pejorative) for a gay man (literally, "duck" in Spanish).

Days we spent in the mall or out in the parking lot playing stickball, but nights were what we waited for. The heat in the apartments was like something heavy that had come inside to die. Families arranged on their porches, the glow from their TVs washing blue against the brick. From my family apartment you could smell the pear trees that had been planted years ago, four to a court, probably to save us all from asphyxiation. Nothing moved fast, even the daylight was slow to fade, but as soon as night settled Beto and I headed down to the community center and sprang the fence into the pool. We were never alone, every kid with legs was there. We lunged from the boards and swam out of the deep end, wrestling and farting around. At around midnight abuelas,² with their night hair swirled around spiky rollers, shouted at us from their apartment windows. ¡Sinvergüenzas!³ Go home!

I pass his apartment but the windows are dark; I put my ear to the busted-up door and hear only the familiar hum of the air conditioner. I haven't decided yet if I'll talk to him. I can go back to my dinner and two years will become three.

Even from four blocks off I can hear the racket from the pool—radios too—and wonder if we were ever that loud. Little has changed, not the stink of chlorine, not the bottles exploding against the lifeguard station. I hook my fingers through the plastic-coated hurricane fence. Something tells me that he will be here; I hop the fence, feeling stupid when I sprawl on the dandelions and the grass.

Nice one, somebody calls out.

Fuck me, I say. I'm not the oldest motherfucker in the place, but it's close. I take off my shirt and my shoes and then knife in. Many of the kids here are younger brothers of the people I used to go to school with. Two of them swim past, black and Latino, and they pause when they see me, recognizing the guy who sells them their shitty dope. The crackheads have their own man, Lucero, and some other guy who drives in from Paterson,⁴ the only full-time commuter in the area.

The water feels good. Starting at the deep end I glide over the slick-tiled bottom without kicking up a spume or making a splash. Sometimes another swimmer churns past me, more a disturbance of water than a body. I can still go far without coming up. While everything above is loud and bright, everything below is whispers. And always the risk of coming up to find the cops stabbing their searchlights out across the water. And then everyone running, wet feet slapping against the concrete, yelling, Fuck you, officers, you puto sucios,⁵ fuck you.

When I'm tired I wade through to the shallow end, past some kid who's kissing his girlfriend, watching me as though I'm going to try to cut in, and I sit near the sign that runs the pool during the day. *No Horseplay, No Running, No Defecating, No Urinating, No Expectorating*. At the bottom someone has scrawled in *No Whites, No Fat Chiks* and someone else has provided the missing *c*. I laugh. Beto hadn't known what expectorating meant though he was the one leaving for college. I told him, spitting a greener by the side of the pool.

Shit, he said. Where did you learn that?

2. Grandmothers (Spanish).

3. Shameless, brazen ones (Spanish).

4. City in northern New Jersey.

5. Dirty whores (Spanish).

I shrugged.

Tell me. He hated when I knew something he didn't. He put his hands on my shoulders and pushed me under. He was wearing a cross and cutoff jeans. He was stronger than me and held me down until water flooded my nose and throat. Even then I didn't tell him; he thought I didn't read, not even dictionaries.

We live alone. My mother has enough for the rent and groceries and I cover the phone bill, sometimes the cable. She's so quiet that most of the time I'm startled to find her in the apartment. I'll enter a room and she'll stir, detaching herself from the cracking plaster walls, from the stained cabinets, and fright will pass through me like a wire. She has discovered the secret to silence: pouring café without a splash, walking between rooms as if gliding on a cushion of felt, crying without a sound. You have traveled to the East and learned many secret things, I've told her. You're like a shadow warrior.

And you're like a crazy, she says. Like a big crazy.

When I come in she's still awake, her hands picking clots of lint from her skirt. I put a towel down on the sofa and we watch television together. We settle on the Spanish-language news: drama for her, violence for me. Today a child has survived a seven-story fall, busting nothing but his diaper. The hysterical baby-sitter, about three hundred pounds of her, is head-butting the microphone.

It's a goddamn miraclevilla,⁶ she cries.

My mother asks me if I found Beto. I tell her that I didn't look.

That's too bad. He was telling me that he might be starting at a school for business.

So what?

She's never understood why we don't speak anymore. I've tried to explain, all wise-like, that everything changes, but she thinks that sort of saying is only around so you can prove it wrong.

He asked me what you were doing.

What did you say?

I told him you were fine.

You should have told him I moved.

And what if he ran into you?

I'm not allowed to visit my mother?

She notices the tightening of my arms. You should be more like me and your father.

Can't you see I'm watching television?

I was angry at him, wasn't I? But now we can talk to each other.

Am I watching television here or what?

Saturdays she asks me to take her to the mall. As a son I feel I owe her that much, even though neither of us has a car and we have to walk two miles through redneck territory to catch the M15.⁷

Before we head out she drags us through the apartment to make sure the windows are locked. She can't reach the latches so she has me test them.

6. Slang term for "miraculous" in "Spanglish," an amalgamation of Spanish and English as spoken in some Hispanic communities.

7. Bus route in the New Brunswick area of New Jersey.

With the air conditioner on we never open windows but I go through the routine anyway. Putting my hand on the latch is not enough—she wants to hear it rattle. This place just isn't safe, she tells me. Lorena got lazy and look what they did to her. They punched her and kept her locked up in her place. Those morenos⁸ ate all her food and even made phone calls. Phone calls!

That's why we don't have long-distance, I tell her but she shakes her head. That's not funny, she says.

She doesn't go out much, so when she does it's a big deal. She dresses up, even puts on makeup. Which is why I don't give her lip about taking her to the mall even though I usually make a fortune on Saturdays, selling to those kids going down to Belmar or out to Spruce Run.

I recognize like half the kids on the bus. I keep my head buried in my cap, praying that nobody tries to score. She watches the traffic, her hands somewhere inside her purse, doesn't say a word.

When we arrive at the mall I give her fifty dollars. Buy something, I say, hating the image I have of her, picking through the sale bins, wrinkling everything. Back in the day, my father would give her a hundred dollars at the end of each summer for my new clothes and she would take nearly a week to spend it, even though it never amounted to more than a couple of t-shirts and two pairs of jeans. She folds the bills into a square. I'll see you at three, she says.

I wander through the stores, staying in sight of the cashiers so they won't have reason to follow me. The circuit I make has not changed since my looting days. Bookstore, record store, comic-book shop, Macy's. Me and Beto used to steal like mad from these places, two, three hundred dollars of shit in an outing. Our system was simple—we walked into a store with a shopping bag and came out loaded. Back then security wasn't tight. The only trick was in the exit. We stopped right at the entrance of the store and checked out some worthless piece of junk to stop people from getting suspicious. What do you think? we asked each other. Would she like it? Both of us had seen bad shoplifters at work. All grab and run, nothing smooth about them. Not us. We idled out of the stores slow, like a fat seventies car. At this, Beto was the best. He even talked to mall security, asked them for directions, his bag all loaded up, and me, standing ten feet away, shitting my pants. When he finished he smiled, swinging his shopping bag up to hit me.

You got to stop that messing around, I told him. I'm not going to jail for bullshit like that.

You don't go to jail for shoplifting. They just turn you over to your old man. I don't know about you, but my pops hits like a motherfucker.

He laughed. You know my dad. He flexed his hands. The nigger's got arthritis.

My mother never suspected, even when my clothes couldn't all fit in my closet, but my father wasn't that easy. He knew what things cost and knew that I didn't have a regular job.

You're going to get caught, he told me one day. Just you wait. When you do I'll show them everything you've taken and then they'll throw your stupid ass away like a bad piece of meat.

8. Dark-skinned persons (Spanish).

He was a charmer, my pop, a real asshole, but he was right. Nobody can stay smooth forever, especially kids like us. One day at the bookstore, we didn't even hide the drops. Four issues of the same *Playboy* for kicks, enough audio books to start our own library. No last-minute juke either. The lady who stepped in front of us didn't look old, even with her white hair. Her silk shirt was half unbuttoned and a silver horn necklace sat on the freckled top of her chest. I'm sorry fellows, but I have to check your bag, she said. I kept moving, and looked back all annoyed, like she was asking us for a quarter or something. Beto got polite and stopped. No problem, he said, slamming the heavy bag into her face. She hit the cold tile with a squawk, her palms slapping the ground. There you go, Beto said.

Security found us across from the bus stop, under a Jeep Cherokee. A bus had come and gone, both of us too scared to take it, imagining a plainclothes waiting to clap the cuffs on. I remember that when the rent-a-cop tapped his nightstick against the fender and said, You little shits better come out here real slow, I started to cry. Beto didn't say a word, his face stretched out and gray, his hand squeezing mine, the bones in our fingers pressing together.

Nights I drink with Alex and Danny. The Malibou Bar is no good, just wash-outs and the *sucias*⁹ we can con into joining us. We drink too much, roar at each other and make the skinny bartender move closer to the phone. On the wall hangs a cork dartboard and a Brunswick Gold Crown¹ blocks the bathroom, its bumpers squashed, the felt pulled like old skin.

When the bar begins to shake back and forth like a rumba, I call it a night and go home, through the fields that surround the apartments. In the distance you can see the Raritan,² as shiny as an earthworm, the same river my homeboy goes to school on. The dump has long since shut down, and grass has spread over it like a sickly fuzz, and from where I stand, my right hand directing a colorless stream of piss downward, the landfill might be the top of a blond head, square and old.

In the mornings I run. My mother is already up, dressing for her housecleaning job. She says nothing to me, would rather point to the *mangu*³ she has prepared than speak.

I run three miles easily, could have pushed a fourth if I were in the mood. I keep an eye out for the recruiter who prowls around our neighborhood in his dark K-car.⁴ We've spoken before. He was out of uniform and called me over, jovial, and I thought I was helping some white dude with directions. Would you mind if I asked you a question?

No.

Do you have a job?

Not right now.

Would you like one? A real career, more than you'll get around here?

I remember stepping back. Depends on what it is, I said.

Son, I know somebody who's hiring. It's the United States government.

Well. Sorry, but I ain't Army material.

9. Sluts (Spanish).

1. Pool table.

2. River in New Jersey.

3. Dominican dish made from plantains with

butter, salt, pepper, and water.

4. A Chrysler Corporation automobile popular as a fleet vehicle.

That's exactly what I used to think, he said, his ten piggy fingers buried in his carpeted steering wheel. But now I have a house, a car, a gun and a wife. Discipline. Loyalty. Can you say that you have those things? Even one?

He's a southerner, red-haired, his drawl so out of place that the people around here laugh just hearing him. I take to the bushes when I see his car on the road. These days my guts feel loose and cold and I want to be away from here. He won't have to show me his Desert Eagle⁵ or flash the photos of the skinny Filipino girls sucking dick. He'll only have to smile and name the places and I'll listen.

When I reach the apartment, I lean against my door, waiting for my heart to slow, for the pain to lose its edge. I hear my mother's voice, a whisper from the kitchen. She sounds hurt or nervous, maybe both. At first I'm terrified that Beto's inside with her but then I look and see the phone cord, swinging lazily. She's talking to my father, something she knows I disapprove of. He's in Florida now, a sad guy who calls her and begs for money. He swears that if she moves down there he'll leave the woman he's living with. These are lies, I've told her, but she still calls him. His words coil inside of her, wrecking her sleep for days. She opens the refrigerator door slightly so that the whir of the compressor masks their conversation. I walk in on her and hang up the phone. That's enough, I say.

She's startled, her hand squeezing the loose folds of her neck. That was him, she says quietly.

On school days Beto and I chilled at the stop together but as soon as that bus came over the Parkwood hill I got to thinking about how I was failing gym and screwing up math and how I hated every single living teacher on the planet.

I'll see *you* in the p.m., I said.

He was already standing on line. I just stood back and grinned, my hands in my pockets. With our bus drivers you didn't have to hide. Two of them didn't give a rat fuck and the third one, the Brazilian preacher, was too busy talking Bible to notice anything but the traffic in front of him.

Being truant without a car was no easy job but I managed. I watched a lot of TV and when it got boring I trooped down to the mall or the Sayreville library, where you could watch old documentaries for free. I always came back to the neighborhood late, so the bus wouldn't pass me on Ernston and nobody could yell Asshole! out the windows. Beto would usually be home or down by the swings, but other times he wouldn't be around at all. Out visiting other neighborhoods. He knew a lot of folks I didn't—a messed-up black kid from Madison Park, two brothers who were into that N.Y. club scene, who spent money on platform shoes and leather backpacks. I'd leave a message with his parents and then watch some more TV. The next day he'd be out at the bus stop, too busy smoking a cigarette to say much about the day before.

You need to learn how to walk the world, he told me. There's a lot out there.

5. A semi-automatic military pistol.

Some nights me and the boys drive to New Brunswick. A nice city, the Raritan so low and silty that you don't have to be Jesus to walk over it. We hit the Melody and the Roxy, stare at the college girls. We drink a lot and then spin out onto the dance floor. None of the chicas⁶ ever dance with us, but a glance or a touch can keep us talking shit for hours.

Once the clubs close we go to the Franklin Diner, gorge ourselves on pancakes, and then, after we've smoked our pack, head home. Danny passes out in the back seat and Alex cranks the window down to keep the wind in his eyes. He's fallen asleep in the past, wrecked two cars before this one. The streets have been picked clean of students and townies and we blow through every light, red or green. At the Old Bridge Turnpike we pass the fag bar, which never seems to close. Patos are all over the parking lot, drinking and talking.

Sometimes Alex will stop by the side of the road and say, Excuse me. When somebody comes over from the bar he'll point his plastic pistol at them, just to see if they'll run or shit their pants. Tonight he just puts his head out the window. Fuck you! he shouts and then settles back in his seat, laughing.

That's original, I say.

He puts his head out the window again. Eat me, then!

Yeah, Danny mumbles from the back. Eat me.

Twice. That's it.

The first time was at the end of that summer. We had just come back from the pool and were watching a porn video at his parents' apartment. His father was a nut for these tapes, ordering them from wholesalers in California and Grand Rapids. Beto used to tell me how his pop would watch them in the middle of the day, not caring a lick about his moms, who spent the time in the kitchen, taking hours to cook a pot of rice and gandules.⁷ Beto would sit down with his pop and neither of them would say a word, except to laugh when somebody caught it in the eye or the face.

We were an hour into the new movie, some vaina⁸ that looked like it had been filmed in the apartment next door, when he reached into my shorts. What the fuck are you doing? I asked, but he didn't stop. His hand was dry. I kept my eyes on the television, too scared to watch. I came right away, smearing the plastic sofa covers. My legs started shaking and suddenly I wanted out. He didn't say anything to me as I left, just sat there watching the screen.

The next day he called and when I heard his voice I was cool but I wouldn't go to the mall or anywhere else. My mother sensed that something was wrong and pestered me about it, but I told her to leave me the fuck alone, and my pops, who was home on a visit, stirred himself from the couch to slap me down. Mostly I stayed in the basement, terrified that I would end up abnormal, a fucking pato, but he was my best friend and back then that mattered to me more than anything. This alone got me out of the apartment and over to the pool that night. He was already there, his body pale and flabby under the water. Hey, he said. I was beginning to worry about you.

Nothing to worry about, I said.

6. Girls (Spanish).

7. Pigeon peas (Spanish).

8. Dominican slang for "stuff" (Spanish).

We swam and didn't talk much and later we watched a Skytop crew pull a bikini top from a girl stupid enough to hang out alone. Give it, she said, covering herself, but these kids howled, holding it up over her head, the shiny laces flopping just out of reach. When they began to pluck at her arms, she walked away, leaving them to try the top on over their flat pecs.

He put his hand on my shoulder, my pulse a code under his palm. Let's go, he said. Unless of course you're not feeling good.

I'm feeling fine, I said.

Since his parents worked nights we pretty much owned the place until six the next morning. We sat in front of his television, in our towels, his hands bracing against my abdomen and thighs. I'll stop if you want, he said and I didn't respond. After I was done, he laid his head in my lap. I wasn't asleep or awake, but caught somewhere in between, rocked slowly back and forth the way surf holds junk against the shore, rolling it over and over. In three weeks he was leaving. Nobody can touch me, he kept saying. We'd visited the school and I'd seen how beautiful the campus was, with all the students drifting from dorm to class. I thought of how in high school our teachers loved to crowd us into their lounge every time a space shuttle took off from Florida. One teacher, whose family had two grammar schools named after it, compared us to the shuttles. A few of you are going to make it. Those are the orbiters. But the majority of you are just going to burn out. Going nowhere. He dropped his hand onto his desk. I could already see myself losing altitude, fading, the earth spread out beneath me, hard and bright.

I had my eyes closed and the television was on and when the hallway door crashed open, he jumped up and I nearly cut my dick off struggling with my shorts. It's just the neighbor, he said, laughing. He was laughing, but I was saying, Fuck this, and getting my clothes on.

I believe I see him in his father's bottomed-out Cadillac, heading towards the turnpike, but I can't be sure. He's probably back in school already. I deal close to home, trooping up and down the same dead-end street where the kids drink and smoke. These punks joke with me, pat me down for taps, sometimes too hard. Now that strip malls line Route 9, a lot of folks have part-time jobs; the kids stand around smoking in their aprons, name tags dangling heavily from pockets.

When I get home, my sneakers are filthy so I take an old toothbrush to their soles, scraping the crap into the tub. My mother has thrown open the windows and propped open the door. It's cool enough, she explains. She has prepared dinner—rice and beans, fried cheese, tostones.⁹ Look what I bought, she says, showing me two blue t-shirts. They were two for one so I bought you one. Try it on.

It fits tight but I don't mind. She cranks up the television. A movie dubbed into Spanish, a classic, one that everyone knows. The actors throw themselves around, passionate, but their words are plain and deliberate. It's hard to imagine anybody going through life this way. I pull out the plug of bills from my pockets. She takes it from me, her fingers soothing the creases. A man who treats his plata¹ like this doesn't deserve to spend it, she says.

9. Flattened fried plantains, a side dish in the Dominican Republic.

1. Slang term for money (literally, "silver" in Spanish).

We watch the movie and the two hours together makes us friendly. She puts her hand on mine. Near the end of the film, just as our heroes are about to fall apart under a hail of bullets, she takes off her glasses and kneads her temples, the light of the television flickering across her face. She watches another minute and then her chin lists to her chest. Almost immediately her eyelashes begin to tremble, a quiet semaphore. She is dreaming, dreaming of Boca Raton, of strolling under the jacarandas² with my father. You can't be anywhere forever, was what Beto used to say, what he said to me the day I went to see him off. He handed me a gift, a book, and after he was gone I threw it away, didn't even bother to open it and read what he'd written.

I let her sleep until the end of the movie and when I wake her she shakes her head, grimacing. You better check those windows, she says. I promise her I will.

1996

2. Flowering trees native to the tropics.

TRACY K. SMITH

b. 1972

Tracy K. Smith's poetry is marked by wonder and joy. Smith was born in 1972, the daughter of an engineer (her father) who worked on the Hubble Space Telescope, which was launched in 1990 and is able to look at the universe from a position outside the distortions of Earth's atmosphere. This connection inspires her Pulitzer Prize-winning volume, *Life on Mars* (2011), her third book of poetry. Alive with the idea of a universe suddenly visible in all its star-strewn glory, the poems weave together the perspectives of child, teenager, daughter, and adult poet, embracing the multiple ways humans have looked towards space, from David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust songs to popular science-fiction films to the Hubble's massive mirrors. The question "what do you believe in?" guides Smith's poetry here and throughout her oeuvre. *Life on Mars* was written in the aftermath of her father's death and during her first pregnancy. Raised by a beloved and devoutly Christian mother, Smith has said that the proximity of birth and death made questions about God and the after-life especially urgent in this collection.

Even when they are reflecting on cosmic questions, Smith's poems often ground themselves in the body—dancing, loving, eating, singing, and traveling. Her first book, *The Body's Question* (2003), contains a cluster of poems that question and celebrate human physicality. The title poem is partly an elegy for Smith's mother, Kathryn. The third section, "Joy," recounts the last days of her mother's life and the first days afterward. "I know you are deciding," Smith writes, apostrophizing her mother, "That the body's a question." In the title poem of Smith's second collection, *Duende* (2007)—the word *duende* can be roughly translated as a compelling artistic power or charm—the speaker watches dancers whose art staves off want. Longing to join them, the speaker hesitates: "I hate to do it here. / To set myself heavily beside them / Not now that they've proven / The body a myth, a parable / for what not even language / moves quickly enough to name."

Smith has said that, next to her parents, her education has most profoundly shaped her poetic vision and practice. A student of Irish poet Seamus Heaney at Harvard, and of American poet Lucie Brock-Broido at Harvard and at Columbia University's MFA program, Smith says that in their poetry workshops "the world began to make a different kind of sense." While at Harvard, Smith also interned at the Dark Room Collective, which ran a reading series for African American writers in Boston (members of the Collective have included Natasha Trethewey, also in this volume). Smith's memoir, *Ordinary Light* (2015), recounts the longer story of her formation as a writer, from her childhood in Northern California through her mother's death just after Smith finished college.

In addition to poems from *Life on Mars*, the selections here include two inspired by a trip to Mexico when Smith was experiencing writer's block. She has said that her immersion in Spanish language and Mexican culture "sent me back into English with a new sense of what to listen for, and a new sense of my own capacity as an expressive being." The "Gospel" poems are based on Smith's realization that the Gospels in the Bible are different ways of telling the same story about Jesus; Smith's "gospels" tell multiple versions of a story about suffering and migration. The appeal of Smith's poetry rests in her ability to revisit ancient stories—about the universe and human existence—in a voice that brings with it her generation's experiences and cultural touchstones.

Thirst

The old man they called Bagre¹
 Who welcomed us with food
 And rice-paper cigarettes
 At the table outside his cabin
 Was the one who told the soldiers 5
 To sit down. They were drunk.
 They'd seen the plates on our car
 From the road and came to where
 You and I and Bagre and his son
 Sat laughing. I must have been 10
 Drunk myself to laugh so hard
 At what I didn't understand.

It was night by then. We smoked
 To keep off the mosquitoes.
 There was fish to eat—nothing but fish 15
 Bagre and the other men caught.
 The two little girls I'd played with
 Were asleep in their hammocks.
 Even Genny and Manuel,
 Who rode with us and waited 20
 While we hurried out of our clothes
 And into those waves the color
 Of atmosphere.

Before the soldiers sat down,
 They stood there, chests ballooned. 25

1. Spanish for "catfish."

When we showed them our papers,
 They wanted something else.
 One of them touched the back of my leg.
 With your eyes, you told me
 To come beside you. There were guns 30
 Slung over their shoulders
 Like tall sticks. They stroked them
 Absently with their fingers.

Their leader was called Jorge.
 I addressed him in the familiar.² 35
 I gave him a half-empty bottle
 Of what we were drinking.
 When it was empty, I offered to fill it
 With water from the cooler.
 He took a sip, spat it out 40
 And called you by your name.
 I didn't want to see you
 Climb onto that jeep of theirs—so tall
 And broad it seemed they'd ridden in
 On elephants yoked shoulder to shoulder, 45
 Flank to flank.

Maybe this is a story
 About the old man they called Bagre.
 The one with the crooked legs
 That refused to run. 50
 Maybe this is a story about being too old
 To be afraid, and too young not to fear
 Authority, and abuse it, and call it
 By its name, and call it a liar.
 Or maybe it's a story about the fish. 55
 The ones hanging on branches
 To dry, and the ones swimming
 With eyes that would not shut
 In water that entered them
 And became them 60
 And kept them from thirst.

2003

Gospel: Juan

We crossed the border
 Hours before dawn
 Through a hole
 Dug under a fence.

2. Grammatical mode of informal address in Spanish.

We crossed 5
 Dressed as soldiers,
 Faces painted
 Mud green.

The *coyotes*¹
 That promised 10
 We'd make it, gave us
 A straw broom

To drag behind,
 Erasing our tracks.
 They gave us meat 15
 Drugged for the dogs.

Farther off,
 There were engines,
 Voices, a light
 That swept the ground. 20

We crossed
 On our bellies.
 I wonder
 If we'll ever stand up.

2003

Gospel: Jesús

I'd like to smash a goblet in my fist.
 Instead, I watch my hands baptize each piece,
 making piles of the things I have watched myself
 make new.
 I watch my hands 5
 until I am watching out from my hands—
 now in air, now water, each element
 a shadow of the other.

2003

From "My God, It's Full of Stars"¹

3

Perhaps the great error is believing we're alone,
 That the others have come and gone—a momentary blip—

1. Smugglers who take people across borders illegally for a fee.

1. From the novel *2001: A Space Odyssey*, by Arthur C. Clark: the protagonist's final words as he enters a gateway to a new part of the universe.

The novel was adapted in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film of the same title; the quotation was used to open the 1984 sequel *2010: The Year We Made Contact* (directed by Peter Hyams).

When all along, space might be choc-full of traffic,
 Bursting at the seams with energy we neither feel
 Nor see, flush against us, living, dying, deciding, 5
 Setting solid feet down on planets everywhere,
 Bowing to the great stars that command, pitching stones
 At whatever are their moons. They live wondering
 If they are the only ones, knowing only the wish to know,
 And the great black distance they—we—flicker in. 10

Maybe the dead know, their eyes widening at last,
 Seeing the high beams of a million galaxies flick
 At twilight. Hearing the engines flare, the horns
 Not letting up, the frenzy of being. I want it to be
 One notch below bedlam, like a radio without a dial. 15
 Wide open, so everything floods in at once.
 And sealed tight, so nothing escapes. Not even time,
 Which should curl in on itself and loop around like smoke.
 So that I might be sitting now beside my father
 As he raises a lit match to the bowl of his pipe 20
 For the first time in the winter of 1959.

2011

The Universe: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

The first track still almost swings. High hat and snare, even
 A few bars of sax the stratosphere will singe-out soon enough.

Synthesized strings. Then something like cellophane
 Breaking in as if snagged to a shoe. Crinkle and drag. White noise,

Black noise. What must be voices bob up, then drop, like metal shavings 5
 In molasses. So much for us. So much for the flags we bored

Into planets dry as chalk, for the tin cans¹ we filled with fire.
 And rode like cowboys into all we tried to tame. Listen:

The dark we've only ever imagined now audible, thrumming,
 Marbled with static like gristly meat. A chorus of engines churns. 10

Silence taunts: a dare. Everything that disappears
 Disappears as if returning somewhere.

2011

1. "Tin can": reference to the rock musician David Bowie's 1969 song "Space Oddity": "Here am I floating in my tin can, far above the moon."

Selected Bibliographies

Reference Works and Histories

Jennifer Ashton's *Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945* (2013) and John Duvall's *Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945* (2011) collect general essays well suited to introducing students and teachers to the broad contours of the period. Excellent treatment of the period up to the end of the twentieth century can be found in vol. 7 ("Prose Writing, 1940–1990"; 1999) and 8 ("Poetry and Criticism, 1940–1995"; 1996) of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Sacvan Bercovitch, general editor). The vast *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, under the supervision of Matthew J. Bruccoli, the Scribners *American Writers* series, edited by Jay Parini, and vol. 2 of David Perkins's *History of Modern Poetry* (1976) offer wide coverage of specific authors. A more general history appears in Robert von Hallberg's *American Poetry and Culture 1945–1980* (1985). An indispensable reference guide for poetry is *Contemporary Poets*, 7th ed. (2000), edited by Thomas Riggs. Specific areas are treated by editors Darryl Dickson-Carr's *The Columbia Guide to Contemporary African American Fiction* (2005), editor Eric Cheyfitz's *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States since 1945* (2006), and José F. Aranda Jr.'s *When We Arrive: A New Literary History of Mexican America* (2003). Gershun Avilez's chapter on the Black Arts movement and other essays in *The Cambridge Companion to American Civil Rights Literature* (2015) are especially useful for contextualizing American writing in the 1950s and '60s; Steven Conner's *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (2004) provides a guide to other cultural and aesthetic contexts of the period. Lawrence Jackson's *The Indignant Generation* (2011) gives the best fine-grained literary and social history of black writing between 1940 and 1960. Histories of specific movements in poetry are explored in Michael Palmer's *The San Francisco Renaissance* (1991) and David Lehmann's *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (1998). Useful introductory series are the Modern Language Association's *Approaches to Teaching . . .* series, the University of South Carolina Press's *Understanding . . .* volumes, the University Press of Mississippi's *Conversations with . . .*, the *Critical Essays* books from G. K. Hall Publishers, the Greenwood Press *Critical Response* series, the *Cambridge Companion* series, and the *Modern Critical Views* collections edited by Harold Bloom. The University

of Michigan's Poets on Poetry series offers volumes in which poets comment on their own and others' work.

Criticism

Criticism on the fiction, poetry, and drama of the second half of the twentieth century has reached a critical mass such that few critics or particular works can be said to dominate the discussion. Rather, excellent criticism—both monographs and articles—can be found on a range of topics and writers, much of which is flagged in bibliographies for the individual authors below. That said, a few works stand out for their broad arguments taking in a crowd of writers and artists working the period, representing a strong reading of what American literary production in the second half of the twentieth century, and in the opening decade of the twenty-first century, has accomplished artistically and culturally.

The study of poetics has remained important throughout the last several decades, and can generate a broad perspective through which to read and teach the poetry in this volume. Influential studies of contemporary poetics by Marjorie Perloff include *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), *Radical Artifice: Writing in the Age of Media* (1991), and *21st-Century Modernism: The New Poetics* (2001). Jennifer Ashton's *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (2006), and Charles Altieri's *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After* (2006) share Perloff's theoretically sophisticated understanding of the period's writing. Anthony Reed's highly theoretical *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (2014) discusses contemporary poetics and experiment in relation to the distinct position of black and Caribbean writers; while his focus is not on writers included in this volume, his way of reading black poetics is essential alongside arguments such as Perloff's and Altieri's. (His prose, like theirs, is suited to the theoretically intrepid reader.) Timothy Yu's edited volume, *Nests and Strangers: On Asian American Women Poets* (2015) and Yu's monograph, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965* (2009) effectively bring together theoretical and cultural-studies approaches. Gillian White's *Lyric Shame: The 'Lyric' Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (2014) joins a more recent body of criticism about lyric as a genre, a turn best captured in Virginia Jackson's and Yopie Prins's edited volume, *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (2014). Jahan Ramazani's monographs on poetry's transnational context and on poetry's relationship to prayer, song, news, and other genres open up fruitful new ways of connecting poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with the large context of human expression, even though his work is not exclusively about contemporary or American poetry.

The tradition of the poet-critic lives on in American letters today, and several works in this vein are particularly worthy of mention. In *Close Calls with Nonsense: Reading New Poetry* (2009), Stephen Burt opens difficult contemporary poetry (including Ashbery, Ammons, Berryman, Bidart,

Gunn, and others) to readers. The poet and critic Elizabeth Alexander writes about black poets of the late twentieth century in *Power and Possibility: Essays, Reviews, and Interviews* (2007); poet Kevin Young reflects on black poetics more generally in *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (2012). On lyric, the poet Allen Grossman and Mark Halliday's *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and Writers* (1992) is more theoretical but generative and accessible nevertheless. The history of thinking about poetry may also be traced through statements on poetics by both poets and critics: *Poetics of the New American Poetry* (1973), edited by Donald Allen, was groundbreaking, and *Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2004), edited by Dana Gioia, David Mason, and Meg Schoerke, gathers statements on poetics from throughout the period.

Among the vibrant criticism on American fiction, Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* (2009) has been widely influential, documenting the rise and significance of the writing program since the 1930s. The book examines a host of writers in its capacious arguments about craft, multiculturalism, the university, and middlebrow reading. Mark Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (2015) sets a wide array of midcentury American writers and critics in the philosophical and political context of a mid-century sense of cultural "crisis." Min Hyoung Song's *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* sets discussions of fiction by many American writers of East Asian or South Asian descent in a broad context of Asian American writing in the late twentieth century. His appendix, "Contemporary Asian American Literature 101," is indispensable as a resource, listing over a hundred works of contemporary literature by Asian American authors across genres of fiction, poetry, life writing, comics, and creative nonfiction. Loren Glass's *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review, and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (2013) gives a detailed history of the literary environment of experiment and resistance to censorship in the 1960s through the story of Grove Press, influential publisher of many of the avant-garde American and European writers of the day. Dean Rader, in *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (2011), reads literature, film and visual art that puts Native authors such as Harjo, Silko, Erdrich, and Alexie in a broader aesthetic context. George Cotkin's *Feast of Excess: A Cultural History of the New Sensibility* (2016) documents the literary counterculture across genres in chronologically arranged chapters on an array of writers and artists from the early fifties through the early seventies, including short chapters on six authors in this volume. Broad overviews of drama in the period can be found in Sanford Sternlich's *A Reader's Guide to Modern American Drama* (2002), Thomas S. Hirschak's *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1969–2000* (2001), Christopher Bigsby's *Contemporary American Playwrights* (1999), and Herbert Blau's *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of the Theater, 1976–2000* (2002).

American literary studies in the last decade has attempted to see American literature in a global and transnational context. This trend can be felt in many of the more recent critical works mentioned here, but a fine introduction to the central issues can be found in the collection *Globalizing*

American Studies (2010), edited by Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. A more reflective treatment about the contemporary situation of American literature among global readers can be found in Caroline Levander's thought-provoking *Where Is American Literature?* (2013).

While teachers and students of literature naturally focus on the written word, the period covered by this volume inspires many to consider the broader media landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as they seek to understand the literature of the time. A quartet of books provides a fine overview of the issues addressed by media studies, including insights from the rejuvenated field of the history of the book. These critical works do not refer to specific writers in this volume, but they abound in big, interesting ideas that will enliven consideration of the anthology's texts for teachers and students so inclined. See Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (2008), Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (2008), Robert Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present and Future* (2010), and Alan Liu, *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* (2004). Liu and Darnton, widely admired critics of Romantic poetry and eighteenth-century French literature, respectively, are particularly helpful in thinking about literature's relationship to new forms of media. David Shields's provocative book, *Reality Hunger* (2010), offers a version of a manifesto for a wide range of work by creative nonfiction writers.

Many studies of American literature since 1945 have been motivated by the social and identity movements of the period and seek to document these in and through the history of American writing. Two important studies from a feminist perspective are Nancy J. Peterson's *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crisis of Historical Memory* (2001) and Linda S. Kauffman's *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (1998). A feminist approach to the study of poetry can be found in *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets and Their Readers* (1996), edited by Margaret Dickie and Thomas Travisano. Multiculturalism concerns Martha J. Cutter in *Lost and Found in Translation: Contemporary Ethnic American Writing and the Politics of Language Diversity* (2005), Paula M. L. Moya in *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (2002), Robert Jackson in *Seeking the Region in American Literature and Culture* (2005). Multiculturalism in poetry is the subject of Satya Mohanty's *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, and Multicultural Politics* (1997). African American writing is the focus in Bernard W. Bell's *The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches* (2004), Cheryl A. Wall's *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition* (2005), Suzanne W. Jones's *Race Mixing: Southern Fiction since the Sixties* (2004). *African American Theater: A Cultural Companion* (2008) by Gloria Dickerson covers its subject in a narrative manner. African American poetry is examined in Joanne Gabbin's *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry* (1999) and Alden Lynn Nielsen's *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (1992). Chicano/a work is treated by Charles M. Tatum in *Chicano Popular Culture* (2001), Mary Pat Brady in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency*

of *Space* (2002), Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak in *Postmodern Vernaculars: Chicana Literature and Postmodern Rhetoric* (2005), Tey Diana Rebolledo in *The Chronicles of Panchita Villa and Other Guerrilleras* (2005), Ramon Saldívar in *Chicano Narrative* (1990), and Ellie D. Hernandez in *Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature and Culture* (2009). Deborah L. Madsen's *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature* (2000) examines the work of women poets.

Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits (2006), edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim et al., includes essays covering issues from immigration to feminism and globalism. Xiaojing Zhou studies Asian American poetry in *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry* (2006). Arnold Krupat's *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002) looks beyond nationalism, indigenism, and cosmopolitanism to gauge Native American literature's importance to the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West. Catherine Rainwater's *Dreams of Fiery Stars: The Transformation of Native American Fiction* (1999) offers strong artistic analysis. John Lloyd Purdy's *Writing Indian, Native Conversations* (2009) combines criticism and interviews. Kenneth Lincoln's *Sing with the Heart of a Bear: Fusions of Native and American Poetry, 1890–1999* (1999) stresses poetry's flexible and adaptable nature rather than its conformity to rigid ethnic and literary categories. Robin Riley First's *The Heart Is a Drum: Continuance and Resistance in American Indian Poetry* (2000) provides cultural and historical readings of a wide range of poems.

Especially useful for understanding how and why contemporary writers produce their work is the critical interview. Larry McCaffery, with various coeditors, has produced a series of extensive dialogues with important authors of the past four decades: *Anything Can Happen* (1983), *Alive and Writing* (1987), *Across the Wounded Galaxies* (1990), and *Some Other Frequency* (1996). Individual bibliographies below routinely mention interview sources one may consult.

An increasing amount of high-quality material can be found online, including websites that offer audio versions of writers reading from their work. The Academy of American Poets' poets.org; the Poetry Foundation's poetryfoundation.org; and Penn Sound's website (writing.upenn.edu/pennsound) are the best general sites for poetry and including poems, biography, and troves of recordings and other resources. Over the years the *Paris Review* has conducted a series of interviews under the rubrics "Writers at Work" and "The Art of Fiction"; these include some of the most important writers of this period and are now available in full, and without cost, on the *Paris Review* website. The Internet Public Library offers "Native American Authors" at www.ipl.org/div/natam/. Post45.org offers a small stream of free access, curated critical essays, reviews, and occasional writer interviews on American literature and culture in the period.

AMERICAN LITERATURE SINCE 1945

Edward Abbey

A prolific writer, Abbey published numerous nonfiction works of environmental writing as well as eight novels. His most significant works remain *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (1968; nonfiction) and his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), which has become, for some environmentalists, a sort of handbook for protest tactics. An anthology, *The Best of Edward Abbey*, appeared in 1988. His poetry is collected in *Earth Apples: The Poetry of Edward Abbey* (1994). Two volumes with selections from Abbey's journals are *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness: Notes from a Secret Journal* (1989) and *Confessions of a Barbarian: Selections from the Journals of Edward Abbey, 1951–1989* (1995). His selected letters can be found in *Postcards from Ed: Dispatches and Salvos from an American Iconoclast* (2006). *Edward Abbey: A Voice in the Wilderness* (1993), produced and directed by Eric Temple, is a documentary film about Abbey's life.

Among the critical discussions of Abbey's work are Anne Ronald's *The New West of Edward Abbey* (1982), John Cooley's edited collection, *Earthly Words: Essays on Contemporary American Nature and Environmental Writers* (1994), James I. McClintock's *Nature's Kindred Spirits: Aldo Leopold, Joseph Wood Krutch, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, and Gary Snyder* (1994), Peter Quigley's *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words* (1998), and John M. Cahalan's important biography, *Edward Abbey: A Life* (2001).

Sherman Alexie

Alexie's novels are *Reservation Blues* (1995), *Indian Killer* (1996), *Flight: A Novel* (2007) and, for young adult readers, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007; his best-known book) and *Radioactive Love Song* (2009). *Blasphemy: New and Selected Stories* (2013) offers a selection of his best stories from several previous collections alongside new ones. The stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) were adapted as a film script for *Smoke Signals* in 1998. He both wrote and directed the movie *The Business of Fancydancing* (2000). He has published eleven poetry collections to date, beginning with *The Business of Fancydancing* (1992); his most recent is *Face* (2009).

Daniel Grassian provides critical analysis in *Understanding Sherman Alexie* (2005); an array of critical perspectives on his major works can be found in *Sherman Alexie: A Collection of Critical Essays* (2012), edited by Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush.

A. R. Ammons

Collections of Ammons's poetry include *A. R. Ammons: Selected Poems* (2006), *Collected Poems 1951–1971* (reissued in 2001), *Really Short Poems of A. R. Ammons* (1991), and *Selected Longer Poems* (1980). A collection of Ammons's essays and interviews, *Set in Motion*, appeared in 1996. A selection of his unpublished poems appeared in a special Ammons issue of *Chicago Review* (Summer/Autumn, 2012), alongside critical essays, an interview, historical materials, and an exhaustive bibliography of his work.

Critical discussions of his work can also be found in Helen Vendler's *The Music of What Happens* (1988), Robert Kirsch's edited *Critical Essays on A. R. Ammons* (1997), Steven P. Schneider's edited *Complexities of Motion: New Essays on A. R. Ammons' Long Poems* (1999), and Roger Gilbert and David Borak's edited *Considering the Radiance: Essays on the Poetry of A. R. Ammons* (2005).

Rudolfo Anaya

Anaya's best-known work is the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), but he has written many novels, ranging from autobiographical narratives to detective fiction, all centering on the hybrid Anglo-Mexican-Native cultures of New Mexico. He has also written several volumes of poetry, short stories, and young adult fiction.

Margarite Fernández Olmos provides a comprehensive study in *Rudolfo A. Anaya: A Critical Companion* (1999). Cesar A. Gonzalez has prepared *A Sense of Place: Rudolfo A. Anaya, An Annotated Bio-Bibliography* (1999). The author's crime novels are studied by Ralph C. Rodriguez in *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicano Identity* (2005).

Gloria Anzaldúa

Borderlands/La Frontera (1987), excerpted in this volume, includes memoir, historical analysis, and narrative poetry. Anzaldúa wrote in multiple genres throughout her career, authoring several novels for adults and for young readers, essays both autobiographical and theoretical, and short fiction. An influential cultural critic and feminist thinker, she edited *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Coras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990), and (with Cherie Moraga) coedited the landmark collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by adical Women of Color* (1981). In 2002 she coedited, with AnaLouise Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for*

Transformation. After Anzaldúa's death, AnaLouise Keating edited *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009), which includes previously unpublished writing and offers a well-chosen selection of the author's work across the several genres in which she wrote.

Anzaldúa's oeuvre is studied by Deborah L. Madsen in *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature* (2000), Sonia Sandivár-Hull in *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Politics and Literature* (2000), Paula M. L. Moya in *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (2002), Catrióna Rueda Esquibel in *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* (2006), and AnaLouise Keating in *Extremundos / Between Worlds* (2008).

John Ashbery

Ashbery's most discussed collections are *Some Trees* (1956; his first) and *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975). *Notes From the Air* (2007) is a selection of his later poems, and Ashbery is now represented in the Library of America series by *John Ashbery: Collected Poems 1956–87* (2008). Ashbery's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures on Poetry appear in *Other Traditions* (2000), and he has also published *Selected Prose* (2004).

Among useful critical essays are David Kalstone's *Five Temperaments* (1977) and John Shoptaw's book-length study of Ashbery's poetry, *On the Outside Looking Out* (1994). David K. Kermani's *John Ashbery: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (1975) is indispensable and amusing. See also *Beyond Amazement: New Essays on John Ashbery* (1980), edited by David Lehman, Charles Altieri's *Postmodernisms Now* (1998), John Emil Vincent's *John Ashbery and You: His Later Books* (2007). Ben Hickman's *John Ashbery and English Poetry* (2012) revises the critical tendency to read Ashbery as exclusively an American or a postmodern poet, showing his work's connections to canonical English poets such as Donne, Marvell, Clare, Wordsworth, and Auden. Jesse Zuba's chapter on *Some Trees* in *The First Book: Twentieth-Century Poetic Careers in America* (2016) examines how Ashbery's poetry first found its audience. Michael Clune's brilliant essay on Ashbery, "Whatever Charms Is Alien: John Ashbery's Everything" (*Criticism*, summer 2008) offers a way to think about the difficulty of reading Ashbery by relating it to science fiction.

James Baldwin

Baldwin published novels, short stories, essays, and plays throughout his career, but is best known for the early novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and for his politically

charged essays, especially *The Fire Next Time* (1963). His literary critical essay on Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949) is widely taught. His prose has been gathered in three Library of America volumes: *Early Novels and Stories* (1998), *Later Novels* (2015), and *Collected Essays* (1998, edited by Toni Morrison). Baldwin's nonfiction has been also been gathered as *Collected Essays* (1998) and *The Cross of Redemption* (2010).

Critical and popular interest in Baldwin has blossomed since the turn of the century. The first biography, James Campbell's *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (1991), is now supplemented by Magdalena J. Zaborowska's *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* (2009); by Herb Boyd's *Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin* (2008), which tells the story of Baldwin's life through his relationships with other Harlem writers of his time, including Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, and Countee Cullen; by Hilton Als's exceptional essay about Baldwin for the *New Yorker*, "The Enemy Within: The Making and Unmaking of James Baldwin" (February 16, 1998); and by stand-alone biographical essays included in the many recent collections of critical essays on his work. Criticism has embraced various topics in Baldwin's work, including his religious themes, gay life and queer sexuality, transnational contexts, and his interest in performance and drama. Selected criticism would include: Lynn Orilla Scott's *James Baldwin's Later Fiction: Witness to the Journey* (2002), Clarence E. Hardy III's *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture* (2003). D. Quentin Miller's edited collection of essays, *Reviewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen* (2000), D. Quentin Miller, "A Criminal Power": *James Baldwin and the Law* (2012); *James Baldwin: America and Beyond* (2012), edited by Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz (an exceptional collection of essays by major writers and critics), and *James Baldwin Now* (1999), edited by Dwight McBride. Several works on Baldwin by critic Douglas Field include *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin* (2010), edited by Field, which lays out the state of what might be called "Baldwin Studies"; Field's introduction to Baldwin, *James Baldwin* (2011); and his recent analytical and historical essays on Baldwin in *All Those Strangers: The Art and Lives of James Baldwin* (2015). Consuela Francis, *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin, 1963–2010* (2014) reveals the changing understanding of Baldwin's work over the course of his career and beyond. The most recent overview of the field, useful for teaching, is *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (2015).

Toni Cade Bambara

Bambara's novel *The Salt Eaters* was published in 1980 and won the American Book award as well as other prizes and remains her best-known work. Bambara wrote two collections of short stories, and, in the 1970s and 1980s, numerous screenplays, including an adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Tar Baby* (1984) and a treatment of writer Zora Neale Hurston, *Zora* (1971). She edited the anthologies *The Black Woman* (1970), *Tales and Stories for Black Folks* (1971, for children), and (with Leah Wise) *Southern Black Utterances Today* (1975). *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, and Conversations* (1996) is a posthumous collection of Bambara's later work, edited by Toni Morrison. Thabiti Lewis's edited collection of interviews, *Conversations with Toni Cade Bambara* (2012) gives a comprehensive sense of her connections to other writers from the late 1960s onward, and an overview of her perspectives on literary history, writers of color, feminism, and politics (she was an unapologetic Marxist).

A Joyous Revolt (2014), by Linda Janet Holmes, is the first comprehensive biography, complemented by Holmes and Cheryl A. Wall's edited collection on Bambara's legacy and influence, *Savoring the Salt* (2007), which includes essays by poets, scholars, writers, activists, and filmmakers to whom her work was important. Critical analyses of Bambara's work are found in Philip Page's *Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African American Fiction* (1999), Elliott Butler-Evans's *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker* (1989), and Robert H. Catalotti's *The Songs Became the Stories: The Music in African American Fiction 1970–2005* (2007).

Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)

In addition to his poetry and plays, Baraka authored four books on music: *Blues People* (1963), *Black Music* (1968), and *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues* (1987), and *Digging: The Afro-American Soul of American Classical Music* (2009). His essays are collected in *Home* (1966), *Raise Race Rays Raze* (1971), and *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka / LeRoi Jones* (1979). Baraka edited three important anthologies: *The Moderns* (1963), *Black Fire* (1968, with Larry Neal), and *Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women* (1983), with Amina Baraka. In 1984 he published *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka*.

Early but still useful studies are *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (1976) by Kimberly W. Benston and *Amiri Baraka / LeRoi Jones: The*

Quest for a "Populist Modernism" (1978) by Werner Sollors. William J. Harris has written *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic* (1985) and edited *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader* (1991), supplying introductory literary history and a bibliography. Ross Posnock's *Color and Culture* (1998) locates the author's thought in the context of other writers and thinkers of color. On the relationship between Baraka's art and politics, see Jerry Gafio Watt's *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (2001), Komozí Woodard's *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, and Harry J. Elam's *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (1997). *Amiri Baraka and Edward Dorn: The Collected Letters* (2013) documents the extraordinary interracial epistolary friendship between these two avant-garde poets from the end of the 1950s to the middle of the 1960s. In the wake of Baraka's death in January of 2014, the journal *Callaloo* (Summer, 2014) published a cluster of essays on Baraka's legacy, as did the journal *Transition* (no. 114, 2014). Biography can be gleaned from these sources and his autobiography, and may be complemented by the memoir from Baraka's first wife, Hettie Cohen, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990).

Donald Barthelme

While best known as a writer of short stories, Barthelme wrote four novels, a children's book, and *Sam's Bar* (1987), which provides a narrative for adult cartoons by Seymour Chwast. Kim Hertinger edited *The Teachings of Don B.: Satires, Parodies, Fables, Illustrated Stories, and Plays of Donald Barthelme* (1992), many of which were omitted from Barthelme's own collections, and *Not Knowing: The Essays and Interviews of Donald Barthelme* (1997).

Stanley Trachtenberg's *Understanding Donald Barthelme* (1990) is a sound introduction, while Maurice Couturier and Régis Durand's *Donald Barthelme* (1982) offers a superb explanation of Barthelme's literary theory. Jerome Klinkowitz examines the author's entire canon in *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* (1991) and provides a primary and secondary bibliography. *Critical Essays on Donald Barthelme* (1992), edited by Richard Patteson, offers a variety of readings of his work. Tracey Daugherty's *Hiding Man: A Biography of Donald Barthelme* (2009) is historically comprehensive and critically acute.

Ann Beattie

Beattie's novels and story collections are supplemented by her writing on the visual arts. She wrote a critical study of the painter Alex Katz (1987) and collaborated with the pho-

tographer Bob Adelman on *Americana* (1992). Her *Spectacles* (1985) is for children. Barbara Ann Schapiro studies Beattie's fiction in the company of work by John Updike and Toni Morrison in *Literature and the Representational Self* (1994). A broad sampling of critical opinion distinguishes Jaye Berman Montessor's *The Critical Reaction to Ann Beattie* (1993). Beattie's interviews are collected in *Conversations with Ann Beattie* (2007), edited by Dawn Trouard.

Saul Bellow

Bellow was the author of fourteen novels and novellas starting with *Dangling Man* (1944), ending with *Ravelstein* (2000). His short stories appear in three collections; these are joined by an additional story in the comprehensive *Collected Stories* (2001). A play, *The Last Analysis*, was produced in New York in 1964 and published the following year. *To Jerusalem and Back* (1976) is a personal account of his activities in Israel. *It All Adds Up* (1994) draws on Bellow's essays dating back to 1948. In 2010 Bellow's *Letters* appeared, edited by Benjamin Taylor. Selected interviews from 1953 to 1991 are collected in *Conversations with Saul Bellow* (1995; edited by Gloria Cronin and Ben Siegel).

James Atlas's *Bellow: A Biography* (2000) is exhaustive yet critically focused. Malcolm Bradbury provides the best concise introduction to this author's major work in *Saul Bellow* (1982), while in *Saul Bellow: Drumlin Woodchuck* (1980) fellow writer Mark Harris offers an insightful portrait of Bellow as a professional figure. John J. Clayton's *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man* (1979) celebrates the author's stressfully tested humanism, while Ellen Pifer's *Saul Bellow: Against the Grain* (1990) argues for his culturally atypical belief in the transcendent soul, as does M. A. Quayum's *Saul Bellow and American Transcendentalism* (2004). Gender is Gloria L. Cronin's focus in *A Room of His Own: In Search of the Feminine in the Novels of Saul Bellow* (2001). In *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision* (1984) Daniel Fuchs examines manuscripts and letters to establish Bellow's Dostoyevskian engagement with issues of character. Julia Eichelberger sums up his work in *Prophets of Recognition* (1999). The essays in *A Political Companion to Saul Bellow* (2013; edited by Gloria Cronin and Lee Trepanier) consider political themes in Bellow's work and present Bellow as a political thinker as he evolved from Trotskyism to neo-conservatism over the decades of his career. Bellow figures importantly in Mark Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (2015), as a writer focused on “the crisis of man” and as

the one-time housemate of Ralph Ellison.

John Berryman

Berryman's *Collected Poems: 1937–1971* appeared in 1991; *John Berryman: Selected Poems*, in 2004. Berryman's critical biography, *Stephen Crane*, appeared in 1950, and a collection of his short fiction and literary essays was issued under the title *The Freedom of the Poet* (1976). Berryman's unfinished novel about his alcoholism, *Recovery*, appeared in 1973. *Berryman's Shakespeare: Essays, Letters, and Other Writings by John Berryman* (2001, edited by John Haffenden) presents a substantial selection of work from Berryman's unfinished critical and biographical project on Shakespeare.

Valuable critical introductions to Berryman's poetry can be found in Helen Vendler's *The Given and the Made* (1995) and Thomas Travisano's *Midcentury Quartet* (1999). Paul Mariani's *Dream Song: The Life of John Berryman* (1996) and Eileen Simpson's *Poets in Their Youth* (1982) are useful biographical studies. Tom Rogers's *God of Rescue: John Berryman and Christianity* (2010) documents Berryman's lifelong engagement with religion.

Frank Bidart

Frank Bidart has published nine volumes of poetry; the first three are collected in *In the Western Night: Collected Poems, 1965–1990* (1990). Criticism of Bidart's work does not abound: the only collection of critical essays available to date is *On Frank Bidart: Fastening the Voice to the Page* (2007) edited by Liam Rector and Tree Swenson. Two stand-alone articles are worth finding: Langdon Hammer's “Frank Bidart and the Tone of Contemporary Poetry” in *Southwest Review* 87.1 (2002), and Dan Chiasson's “Presence: Frank Bidart” in *Raritan* 20.4 (2001). Useful interviews with the poet include “Frank Bidart—An Interview (with Mark Halliday),” *Ploughshares* 9.1 (1983), and “An Interview with Frank Bidart,” Andrew Rathmann, Danielle Allen, and Frank Bidart, *Chicago Review* 47.3 (Fall 2001).

Elizabeth Bishop

Bishop's poems are available in *The Complete Poems 1927–1979* (1983). *The Collected Prose* (1984) includes memoirs and stories, especially the memory-based story “In the Village,” invaluable for a reading of her poems. A remarkable selection of Bishop's correspondence, *One Art* (1994), was edited by her friend and publisher, Robert Giroux, and *Words in the Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (2008), edited by Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, documents one of the

great literary friendships in twentieth-century poetry. Her correspondence with editors at the *New Yorker*, offering a glimpse into the contemporary publishing world, is collected in *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker* (2011). Reproductions of Bishop's watercolor paintings appear in *Exchanging Hats* (1996). Alice Quinn edited *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments* (2006). Bishop also translated from the Portuguese *The Diary of Helena Morley* (1957, 1977, 1991), an enchanting memoir of provincial life in Brazil.

Critical study of Bishop has been steady and robust in the last twenty years, showing no sign of abatement. Useful critical essays on Bishop appear in Seamus Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry* (1995), Lorrie Glodensohn's *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry* (1992), and David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet* (1989). *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art*, edited by Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil P. Estess (1983), includes two interviews as well as essays. A provocative essay on Bishop appears in Adrienne Rich's *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (1986). The novelist Colm Tóibín offers a personal view of Bishop's writing and its meaning for his own life and work in *On Elizabeth Bishop* (2015). Among the most valuable of the many critical studies are Brett C. Miller's important biography, *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (1993); *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender* (1993), a collection of essays edited by Marilyn Lombardi; *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop* (1996), edited by George Monteiro; and Thomas Travisano's *Midcentury Quartet* (1999). Candace MacMahon's *Elizabeth Bishop: A Bibliography* (1980) is indispensable. A dual biography of Bishop and the Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares, Bishop's romantic partner from 1951 to 1967, can be found in Carmen Oliviera's *Rare and Commonplace Flowers: The Story of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares* (2003); the book was a best seller in Brazil, where the couple met and made their home, and it offers invaluable Brazilian context for the poems Bishop wrote during these years. Peggy Samuels's *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art* (2010) documents the relationship between Bishop's poetry and her involvement with the museum world of the 1930s and '40s. *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop* (2014), edited by Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis, gives a fine overview of critical issues and resources. *Elizabeth Bishop in the Twenty-First Century: Reading the New Editions* (2012), edited by Angus Cleghorn, Bethany Hicok, and Thomas Travisano, collects critical essays that take into account recent developments in archival studies of Bishop's work. These developments

are reflected in the 2011 editions of her poetry and prose published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, in celebration of the centenary of her birth.

Gwendolyn Brooks

Brooks wrote twelve stand-alone collections of poetry, starting with *A Street in Bronzeville* in 1945. Many of these poems are collected in *Selected Poems* (1999), *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks* (2005), and the *Gwendolyn Brooks CD Poetry Collection* (2005). She also wrote two prose autobiographies, *Report from Part One* (1972) and *Report from Part Two* (1996).

Other useful biographical material appears in *A Life Distilled*, edited by M. K. Mootry and others, and George E. Kent's *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* (1990). Valuable discussions of Brooks's poetry appear in *Black Women Writers (1950–1980)*, edited by Mari Evans (1984). Stephen Wright's *On Gwendolyn Brooks: Reliant Contemplation* (1996), Harold Bloom's *Gwendolyn Brooks* (2000), and Martha E. Rhynes's *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poet from Chicago* (2003) are recent critical studies. An interview with Brooks appears in Janet Mullaney's *Truth-tellers of the Times: Interviews with Contemporary Women Poets* (1998). Brooks and Gloria Jean Wade Gayles published *Conversations with Gwendolyn Brooks* (2002). Passages on Brooks in Lawrence Jackson's magisterial account of African American literary culture at midcentury, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934–1960*, place Brooks in the context of her times.

Raymond Carver

Principal collections of Carver's extensive short fiction are *Put Yourself in My Shoes* (1974), *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), *Furious Seasons* (1977), *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), *The Pheasant* (1982), *Cathedral* (1983), and *Where I'm Calling From* (1988). *Fires* (1983) is a sampling of essays, poems, and narratives. Carver's uncollected work has been edited by William L. Stull as *No Heroics, Please* (1991), expanded as *Call If You Need Me* (2000). The Library of America's *Collected Stories* (2009), edited by William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll, includes drafts of stories before changes were introduced by his long-time editor, Gordon Lish. A fine introduction to the controversies surrounding Lish's extensive editing of Carver's fiction can be found in "Rough Crossings: The Cutting of Raymond Carver," the *New Yorker*, December 24, 2007, by Simon Armitage, available online through the *New Yorker's* web archives. Throughout his career Carver published poetry as well, the

bulk of which appears in several volumes from *Near Klamath* (1968) to *A New Path to the Waterfall* (1989); *All of Us* (1998) collects all his poems.

Arthur M. Saltzman's *Understanding Raymond Carver* (1988) looks beyond the author's apparent realism, as does Randolph Runyon's *Reading Raymond Carver* (1992). Carver's return to traditionalism is celebrated by Kirk Nessel in *The Stories of Raymond Carver* (1995). Editors Sandra Lee Kleppe and Robert Miltner present a wide variety of critical commentaries in *New Paths to Raymond Carver* (2008). Sam Halpert sifts through comments by Carver's associates in *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography* (1995). The standard biography is *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life* (2009) by Carol Sklenicka. Important interviews with Carver are collected in *Conversations with Raymond Carver* (1990), edited by Marshall Bruce Genry and William L. Stull.

John Cheever

Cheever's seven volumes of short stories, which appeared between 1943 and 1973, are assembled in *The Stories of John Cheever* (1978); *The Uncollected Stories of John Cheever* appeared posthumously in 1988. Two Library of America volumes of his work, both edited by Blake Bailey, collect the complete novels and "collected stories and other writings." *The Letters of John Cheever*, edited by his son, Benjamin Cheever, was published in 1988. *The Journals of John Cheever* (1991) was edited by Robert Gottlieb.

Biographies include Scott Donaldson's *John Cheever* (1988) and Blake Bailey's well-researched and engaging *Cheever: A Life* (2009). *Home before Dark* (1984), by his daughter, Susan Cheever, is a personal memoir. Francis J. Bosha has edited *The Critical Response to John Cheever* (1994). Samuel Chase Coale provides an overview in *John Cheever* (1977), while George W. Hunt explores religious dimensions in *John Cheever: The Hobgoblin Company of Love* (1983). The stories are given close study by James Eugene O'Hara in *John Cheever: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1989) and in *John Cheever* (2004), Harold Bloom's edited collection of criticism in the Chelsea House series "Bloom's Major Short Story Writers."

Sandra Cisneros

The House on Mango Street (1984) has been described as both interrelated short stories and a novel, whereas *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) collects more evidently independent short stories. *Caramello* (2002) is an epic novel telling a multigenerational family story that entwines with major developments of

twentieth-century American history. Cisneros has published two major collections of poetry, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987) and *Loose Woman* (1994). Her *Hairs/Pelitos* (1994), written in English and accompanied by a Spanish text translated by Liliana Valenzuela, and *Have You Seen Marie?* (2012), illustrated by Ester Hernández, are narratives for children.

Recent studies on late-twentieth-century fiction show Cisneros's importance to creative writing programs and the later evolution of the Chicano literature movements; see sections on Cisneros in Mark McGurl, *The Program Era* (2009) and John Alba Cutler, *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* (2015). Jean Wyatt's *Risking Difference* (2004) focuses on *Women Hollering Creek*, as do the essays edited by Cecilia Donahue in *Sandra Cisneros's Women Hollering Creek* (2010). Ramón Saldivar discusses Cisneros's fiction in *Chicano Narrative* (1990), as do Tey Diana Rebolledo in *Women Singing in the Snow* (1995) and Sonia Saldivar-Hull in *Feminism on the Border* (2000). *Class Definitions: On the Lives and Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston, Sandra Cisneros, and Dorothy Allison* (2008), by Michelle M. Tokarczyk, provides a comparative perspective. *Border Crossings and Beyond: The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros* by Carmen Hydée Rivera (2009) combines critical and biographical approaches. An extensive dialogue with her appears in *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World* (1992), edited by Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock.

Lucille Clifton

Clifton's poetry is now gathered in *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton, 1965–2010* (2012), edited by Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser. Her memoir, *Generations* (1976), provides a valuable context for her work. Clifton published over twenty books for children during the course of her career. Critical discussions of her work include Hilary Holiday's *Wild Blessings: The Poetry of Lucille Clifton* (2004). Mary Jane Lupton has published *Lucille Clifton: Her Life and Letters* (2006).

Billy Collins

Among the many collections of Collins's poetry it is useful to begin with his two volumes of selected poems: *Sailing Alone Around the World: New and Selected Poems* (2001), and *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems* (2013). *The Best Cigarette* (1997), an audiobook, provides a chance to hear Collins reading thirty-three of his poems. He selected and introduced the anthologies *Poetry 180: A*

Turning Back to Poetry (2003) and *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Everyday Life* (2005). One can find more occasional prose by Collins (anthology introductions, forewords, etc.) and interviews than criticism of his work, attesting to his popularity among a wide audience of readers and, perhaps, the relative simplicity of his poetry, which seems not to cry out for explication. Nevertheless, some critical discussion of Collins's work can be found in David Baker's *Heresy and the Ideal: On Contemporary Poetry* (2000).

Edwidge Danticat

Danticat has published both fiction and non-fiction. Her nonfiction works include *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (2002) and *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007). She also edited *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* (2003). Her fiction includes *Krik? Krak!* (1996), *The Farming of Bones* (1998), and *The Dew Breaker* (1994), as well as the young adult novels *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), *Behind the Mountains* (2002), and *Anacaona: Golden Flower, Haiti, 1490* (2005). A video, audio, and print transcript of her 2011 interview on Democracy Now, "The Immigrant Artist at Work," can be found on the program's website www.democracynow.org.

Critical discussion of Danticat's work can be found in Meredith M. Gadsby's *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* (2006). *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide* (2010), edited by Martin Munro, offers an appreciative collection of analytic, biographical, contextual, and reflective essays (these last by writers who know or have been influenced by Danticat), and includes interview materials.

Lydia Davis

Davis's story collections through 2009 are compiled in *The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* (2009); she has published additional collections since. Her translations include Maurice Blanchot's *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays* (1981); Michel Leiris, *The Rules of the Game: Scratches* (1997); Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (2004); Vivant Denon, *No Tomorrow* (2009); and Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (2010). Davis's stand-alone essay on translation was written for the Center for Writers and Translators: *Proust, Blanchot, and a Women in Red* (2007).

A useful critical introduction can be found in Kasia Boddy, "Lydia Davis" in *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story* (2004), edited by Blanche H. Gelfant and Lawrence Graver. Marjorie Perloff discusses Davis's experimentalism in "Fiction as Language Game:

The Hermeneutic Parables of Lydia Davis and Maxine Chernoff" in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction* (2014). James Wood's essay on the occasion of the publication of the *Collected Stories* gives an excellent introduction to the author and an overview of Davis's work to that point: "Songs of Myself," the *New Yorker* (October 19, 2009).

Don DeLillo

In addition to his many novels, DeLillo has written several plays and occasional essays. Of particular interest among the latter is "In the Ruins of the Future, Reflections on Terror, Loss, and Time in the Shadow of September 11," published in *Harper's*, December 2001. DeLillo's interviews are gathered in *Conversations with Don DeLillo*, edited by Thomas DePietro (2005).

Overviews useful for teaching *White Noise* include *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (2007; edited by John N. Duvall); the short reader's guide, *White Noise* (2003) by Leonard Orr; *Approaches to Teaching DeLillo's White Noise* (2007), edited by John Duvall and Tim Engles; *New Essays on White Noise* (1991), edited by Frank Lentricchia; and *White Noise: Text and Criticism* (1998), edited by Mark Osteen. Significant monograph studies on DeLillo include Mark Osteen's *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (2000); David Cowart's *DeLillo's Physics of Language* (revised edition, 2003); and Peter Boxall's *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (2004). Religion has been a dominant topic of critical interest: see Jesse Kavadlo, *Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief* (2004); John McClure's *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2010); Amy Hungerford's *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (2010), which discusses DeLillo's Catholicism; Mark C. Taylor, *Rewiring the Real: In Conversation with William Gaddis, Richard Powers, Mark Danielewski, and Don DeLillo* (2013). Two excellent and well-maintained free websites offer updated bibliographies and myriad other materials; see "DeLillo's America" and the website of the Don DeLillo Society.

Junot Díaz

Drown (1996) collects Díaz's short stories; his two novels to date are *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012).

Jacquelyn Loss studies Díaz's fiction in *Latino and Latina Writers* (2003), edited by Alan West-Durán, as do Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez in *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of a Post-Sixties Literature*

(2007). Díaz's cultural context is examined by Lucia Suarez in *The Tears of Hispaniola: Haitian and Dominican Diaspora Memory* (2006). Díaz is an exceptionally sharp critic himself, and has granted many interviews; these are essential reading alongside his fiction. Online searches will easily turn up material suitable for teaching. Of particular interest are his interviews with Edwidge Danticat, available online and also print in *BOMB: The Author Interviews* (2014), edited by Betsy Sussler, and with Taryne Jade Taylor in *Paradoxa* 26 ("A Singular Dislocation: An Interview with Junot Díaz," "SF Now").

Philip K. Dick

Dick is the author of dozens of novels and over a hundred short stories. His most widely read novel is *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968).

The definitive biography is Lawrence Sutin's *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* (2005). Eric Link's *Understanding Philip K. Dick* (2010) gives a critical overview; a focused in-depth study can be found in Umberto Rossi, *The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Ontologically Uncertain Novels* (2011). Useful essays that set Dick's work in a larger context include N. Katherine Hayles's chapter on Dick in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999); Frederic Jameson's two essays on Dick in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005); and Erik Davis's discussion of Dick in *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic, and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (2015).

James Dickey

Dickey's poetry is available in individual collections, in several volumes of selected poems, and, recently, in *The Complete Poems of James Dickey* (2013), edited by Ward Briggs, with a foreword by Richard Howard. Dickey's literary criticism and autobiographical collections include *The Suspect in Poetry* (1964), *Babel to Byzantium* (1968), *Self-Interviews* (1970), *Sorties: Journals and New Essays* (1971), and *The Poet Turns on Himself* (1982). A *James Dickey Reader*, edited by Henry Hart, appeared in 1999, offering a curated collection of these materials. His novels *Deliverance* and *Alnilam* were published in 1970 and 1987, respectively.

Gordon Van Ness edited *The One Voice of James Dickey: His Letters and Life, 1942–1969* (2003). *Elements: Novels of James Dickey* (2002), by Casey Claybough, traces the evolution of Dickey's novels, including an examination of unpublished screenplays, manuscript materials, and notes. *The Imagination as Glory* (1984), edited by Bruce Weigl and T. R.

Hummer, Robert Kirschten's *Struggling for Wings: The Art of James Dickey* (1997), and Henry Hart's *James Dickey: The World as Lie* (2000) offer critical perspectives on his work. *Reading, Learning, Teaching James Dickey* (2008), by William B. Thesing, Dickey's long-time colleague at the University of South Carolina, is a helpful guide to Dickey's life and the themes of his poetry, aimed at classroom use. Thesing has also edited, with Theda Wrede, *The Way We Read James Dickey: Critical Approaches for the Twenty-First Century* (2011). *The Ecological Poetics of James Dickey* (2013) explores Dickey's interest in landscape and nature through the lenses of philosophy, psychology and religion.

Joan Didion

Didion's long and varied career as a writer includes works of both fiction and nonfiction as well as multiple screenplays. Among her nonfiction volumes it is helpful to start with *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live: Collected Nonfiction* (2006) and *Vintage Didion* (2004). Her creative nonfiction memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, appeared in 2005. Two interviews with Didion have appeared in the *Paris Review*, one in 1978; a second, "The Art of Nonfiction" (2006), is available online at www.parisreview.org.

Critical discussion of Didion's work can be found in James N. Still's "The Minimal Self: Joan Didion's Journalism of Survival" in *Literary Selves: Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction* (1993), Doug Underwood's *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700–2000* (2008), and Steven Belletto and Daniel Grausam's edited collection, *American Literature in an Age of Cold War: A Critical Reassessment* (2012). A general introduction to her work can be found in *Reading Joan Didion* (2009), by Lynn Marie Houston and William Lombardi. *The Last Love Song* (2015), by Tracy Daugherty, is the first full-length biography of Didion.

Annie Dillard

Dillard's nonfiction ranges from autobiography and meditations on nature and philosophy to literary criticism and essays about writing and writers.

Nancy C. Parrish provides a critical biography in *Lee Smith, Annie Dillard, and the Hollins Group* (1998), setting Dillard in the institutional context of Hollins, a southern women's college, among a distinguished group of women writers who emerge from the college in the mid-sixties. Dillard figures importantly in Lawrence Buell's field-defining book, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1996), and in most subsequent

surveys of American eco-critical writing. Still useful for its insights on Dillard's first major books is Sandra Humble Johnson's *The Space Between: Literary Epiphany in the Works of Annie Dillard* (1982). Dillard's position in literary history is assessed by Sue Yore in *The Mystic Way in Postmodernity* (2009). Colleen Warren argues for a theological understanding of Dillard's work in *Annie Dillard and the Word Made Flesh: An Incarnational Theory of Language* (2010); in general, essays on Dillard's connection to religion and mysticism have established a trend in recent treatments of her work.

Rita Dove

Dove has published eight volumes of poetry; a collection of fiction, *Fifth Sunday* (1985); a novel, *Through the Ivory Gate* (1992); plays; and a valuable collection of essays, *The Poet's World* (1995). *Conversations with Rita Dove*, edited by Earl G. Ingersol, appeared in 2003.

Therese Steffen's critical study *Crossing Color: Transcultural Space and Place in Rita Dove's Poetry, Fiction, and Drama* appeared in 2001; Malin Pereira's *Rita Dove's Cosmopolitanism*, in 2003, places Dove in the context of the aftermath of the Black Arts movement; and Pat Righelato's *Understanding Rita Dove* (2006) offers an overview of her whole body of work.

Ralph Ellison

In his lifetime Ellison published three books: a novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), and two volumes of essays, *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). The latter materials are combined with other nonfiction in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (1995), edited by John F. Callahan with a preface by Saul Bellow. Fragments of his novel in progress are noted in the bibliography to Mark Busby's *Ralph Ellison* (1991) in the Twayne United States Authors series; *Flying Home and Other Stories* (1997) gathers thirteen short stories written between 1937 and 1954, six of which were previously unpublished. In 1999 Callahan, as Ellison's literary executor, drew on manuscripts to assemble *Juneteenth* as a post-humous novel, a fuller version of which is presented by Callahan and editor Adam Bradley as *Three Days Before the Shooting . . .* (2010). Robert G. O'Meally edited *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings* (2001). *Trading Twelves: The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray*, edited by Murray and Callahan, appeared in 2000.

In the last decade several major critics have turned their attention to Ellison. Tracking their footnotes will provide readers with citations for earlier works of criticism. Ross

Posnock's edited volume, *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison* (2006), provides an overview of the texts and the scholarship. Arnold Rampersand's *Ralph Ellison* (2007) is a comprehensive biography. The author's lifelong growth is measured by Adam Bradley in *Ralph Ellison in Progress* (2010). Timothy Parrish's *Ralph Ellison and the Genius of America* (2012) argues against the version of Ellison Rampersand presents, recasting Ellison as an intellectual whose thinking drove the civil rights movement and intersected with that of figures such as Philip Roth; the historian of slavery, C. Vann Woodward; Martin Luther King Jr.; and novelist and poet, Robert Penn Warren. Lawrence Jackson's *Ralph Ellison: The Emergence of Genius* (2002) is a biography that emphasizes Ellison's connection to the political Left in the 1930s and '40s; Kenneth Warren's *So Black and So Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (2003) reads Ellison as a writer of his times.

Political interests shape Barbara Foley's *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man* (2010) and the critical essays collected by Lucas E. Morel in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope* (2004); music focuses Horace A. Porter's *Jazz Country: Ralph Ellison in America* (2001). *Ulysses in Black* (2008) by Patrice D. Rankin considers Ellison's debts to the classics. Lena Hill's *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition* (2014), based on extensive archival and biographical research, argues for the centrality of Ellison's interest in and practice of the visual arts.

Louise Erdrich

Erdrich is best known for her novels but she has also published several poetry collections, short stories, children's books, and two memoirs, *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* (1995), her account of becoming a mother, and *Birds and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (2003).

Approaches to Teaching the Works of Louise Erdrich (2004), edited by Greg Sarris, Connie A. Jacobs, and James R. Giles, provides a fine pedagogical overview. Erdrich's fiction is set more extensively in the Native American tradition by Louis Owens in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), in the essays edited by Allan Chavkin in *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* (1999), and in *Studies in the Literary Achievement of Louise Erdrich, Native American Writer: Fifteen Critical Essays* (2008), edited by Brajesh Sawhney. Interview material can be found in *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris* (1994), edited by Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin. Peter G. Beidler and Gay Barton provide a general

overview in *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* (2006).

Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg's poetry is gathered in *Collected Poems, 1947–1980* (1984), *White Shroud: Poems, 1980–1985* (1986), and *Death and Fame: Poems 1993–1997* (1999). His individual volumes, with the exception of *Empty Mirror* (1961), have been issued in the now unmistakable City Lights paperbacks. *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays, 1952–1995* (2000) is a useful complement to the poetry, as are the many published selections from his journals and letters. Particularly helpful are his lively interviews: *Composed on the Tongue: Literary Conversations 1967–1977* (1980), edited by Donald Allen, and *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews, 1958–1996* (2001), edited by David Carter. Notable among the published letters are *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters* (2011), which includes both sides of this very early correspondence, brilliantly edited by Bill Morgan and David Stanford; and *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder* (2008), edited by Bill Morgan. Ginsberg's photography can be found in *Photographs: Allen Ginsberg* (1991), among other collections.

Jane Kramer's *Allen Ginsberg in America* (1969) is a brilliant documentary piece on Ginsberg in the 1960s. Biographies include Michael Schumacher's *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (1997); Graham Caveney's *Screaming with Joy* (2001); and Bill Morgan's *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg* (2007). Connections to religion are explored in Amy Hungerford's *Postmodern Belief* (2011), John Lardas's *The Bop Apocalypse* (2001) and in Tony Trigillio's *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* (2007). On Ginsberg and race, see the first chapter of Timothy Yu's *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (2009). On *Howl* and its aftermath, see *The Poem That Changed America: Howl Fifty Years Later* (2006), edited by Jason Shinder.

Louise Glück

Poems 1962–2012 (2013) is the best omnibus edition of Glück's work, compiling the poetry collections in the original order they appeared. Glück's collection of essays, *Proofs and Theories* (1994), is an indispensable companion to her work, both for its discussions of poetic vocation and for its description of the autobiographical contexts of specific poems.

Critical discussion of Glück's poetry can be found in Upton Lee's *The Muse of Abandonment* (1998), Joanne Diehl's edited volume, *On*

Louise Glück: Change What You See (2005), and Daniel Morris's *The Poetry of Louise Glück: A Thematic Introduction* (2006). Helen Vendler's collection of essays on poetry, *Soul Says* (1995), includes commentary-reviews of Glück's work. Elizabeth Dodd's *The Veiled Mirror and The Woman Poet: H. D., Louise Bogan, Elizabeth Bishop, and Louise Glück* (1992) contains a chapter on Glück. Jesse Zuba's chapter on Glück's poetry in *The First Book: Twentieth-Century Poetic Careers in America* (2016) examines how the idea of the poet's first book informs her poetics throughout her career.

Joy Harjo

Harjo's selected poems, *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1975–2001* (2002), is a good introduction to her large body of work. In *Secrets from the Center of the World* (1989), she wrote the text to accompany Steven Strom's photographs of the southwestern landscape. Her memoir is *Crazy Brave: A Memoir* (2013). She has also edited an anthology of Native American women's writing, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writing of North America* (1997). Two collections of interviews are especially helpful: *Soul Talk, Song Language: Conversations with Joy Harjo* (2011), edited by Tanaya Winder; and Laura Coltelli's edited collection, *The Spiral of Memory* (1990). Commentary on the contexts of Harjo's work appears in Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), Norma Wilson's *The Nature of Native American Poetry* (2001), and Dean Rader's *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (2011).

Michael S. Harper

Harper's poetry collections have been gathered in *Songlines in Michaeltree: New and Collected Poems* (2001) and selected in the much slimmer volume *Selected Poems* (2005), which may serve as a good introduction to his work. With Anthony Walton, Harper edited *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep: An Anthology of Poetry by African Americans Since 1945* (1994) and *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry* (2000); with Robert Stepto, he edited a collection of African American literature, art, and scholarship, *Chants of Saints* (1976).

A conversation about Harper's work can be found in Joanne Gabbin's edited *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry* (1999). The *Worcester Review* (35.1/2) published a special issue on Harper's work, titled "Michael Harper: Sacred Geometries" (2014).

Robert Hayden

Hayden's *Collected Poems* appeared in 1985; his *Collected Prose* appeared the previous year. Both were edited by Frederick Glaysher. Fred M. Fetrow's *Robert Hayden* (1984) is a critical study of Hayden's work. Essays on Hayden's work appear in *Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry* (2003), edited by Robert Chrisman and Laurence Goldstein; and in Harold Bloom's edited volume *Robert Hayden* (2005).

Patricia Highsmith

Highsmith wrote twenty-two novels, and published nine collections of short stories. Readers may begin with *Patricia Highsmith: Selected Novels and Short Stories* (2010) and *Uncollected Short Stories* (2002). She discusses craft in *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction* (1966).

There are two Highsmith biographies: *Beautiful Shadow: A Life of Patricia Highsmith* (2004), by Andrew Wilson, and *The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life and Serious Art of Patricia Highsmith* (2009), by Joan Schenkar. A useful reader's guide is Russell Harrison, *Patricia Highsmith* (1997). Fiona Peters give a psychoanalytic reading in *Anxiety and Evil in the Work of Patricia Highsmith* (2011). Readers can find an open-access cluster of essays in the online journal *Post45*, "On Patricia Highsmith" (2012) edited by Tom Perrin and Mary Esteve, with contributions from Mark Seltzer, Mary Esteve, and Michael Trask. The following critics place Highsmith in a larger context: Michael Trask, in *Camp Sites* (2013); Leonard Cassuto, in *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality* (2009); Marco Abel, in *Violent Affect: Cinema, Literature, and Critique* (2007); and George Haggerty, in *Queer Gothic* (2006).

Randall Jarrell

Jarrell's *Complete Poems* was published in 1969, and a *Selected Poems* appeared in 1991. A selection of Jarrell's brilliant critical essays is available in *No Other Book* (1999), edited by Brad Leithauser. His novel satirizing American academic life, *Pictures from an Institution*, appeared in 1954. *Randall Jarrell's Book of Stories*, an anthology of Jarrell's favorite stories and narrative poems, was published in 1958 with a substantial introductory essay by Jarrell, and republished by the *New York Review of Books* in 2002. Steven Burt and Hannah Brooks-Motl edited Jarrell's writings and lectures on the poet W. H. Auden in *Randall Jarrell on W. H. Auden* (2005), which includes worthwhile essays by the writer Adam Gopnick and by Burt that frame the history and significance of Jarrell's engagement with Auden.

Some of the most valuable commentary on Jarrell's life and work is to be found in a memorial volume of essays edited by Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor, and Robert Penn Warren, *Randall Jarrell, 1914–1965* (1967). William Pritchard's fine *Randall Jarrell: A Literary Life* (1990) illumines Jarrell's life and work, as does Mary Randall's *Remembering Randall* (1999). Critical discussion of Jarrell's work appears in Thomas Travisano's *Midcentury Quartet* (1999). Stephen Burt's *Randall Jarrell and His Age* (2002) examines the poet's entire oeuvre, including previously undiscovered essays and poems.

Jack Kerouac

Kerouac published numerous novels, poetry collections, and works of nonfiction; his most famous novel is *On the Road* (1957). Kerouac also recorded his poetry for a number of LPs many of which have been re-released in newer media and are widely available. In 2004, Douglas Brinkley edited *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac, 1947–1954*, and in 2007, Howard Cunnell restored and edited an important first draft of *On the Road*, *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (2007).

John Tytell's *Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation* (1983) situates Kerouac in his historical and critical context, as do Raj Chandarlapaty's *The Beat Generation and Counterculture* (2009) and Ann Charters and Samuel Charters's *Brother-Souls* (2010). Stylistic analyses of Kerouac are undertaken in Regina Weinrich's *The Spontaneous Prose of Jack Kerouac* (1987), Michael Hrebieniak's *Action Writing: Jack Kerouac's Wild Form* (2006), and Tim Hunt's *The Textuality of Soulwork* (2014). Kerouac's friend Carolyn Cassady has written a memoir, *Off the Road* (1990), as has Edie Kerouac-Parker, *You'll Be Okay: My Life with Jack Kerouac* (2007). Among many biographies, the best include Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee's excellent *Jack's Book: Jack Kerouac in the Lives and Words of His Friends* (1978), Tom Clark's *Jack Kerouac* (1984), Gerald Nicosia's *Memory Babe* (1983), Ann Charters's *Jack Kerouac* (1987), and Jorge García-Robles's *At the End of the Road: Jack Kerouac in Mexico* (2014). Kerouac's papers are housed in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

Edward P. Jones

Jones has published two short-story collections and one epic novel, *The Known World*. His work has been discussed in a couple of dozen critical articles available through major library search engines. His interviews provide the best companion to the fiction: see Maryemma Graham, "An Interview with Edward P.

Jones," in *African American Review* 42.3/4 (2008); Lawrence P. Jackson, "An Interview with Edward P. Jones," *African American Review* 34.1 (2000); Angela Elam, "To Make a Story: An Interview with Edward P. Jones," in *New Letters* 74.1 (2007/8). His excellent interview with Terry Gross of National Public Radio's "Fresh Air" (November 11, 2003) can be found online.

Maxine Hong Kingston

Beginning with *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and as recently as *Fifth Book of Peace* (2003), Maxine Hong Kingston has blended together elements of memoir and fiction. Her early works were first received as autobiography, though Kingston scholars now recognize important fictive elements. *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) is her most obvious novel. Essays Kingston wrote in 1978 appear as *Hawai'i One Summer* (1999). *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life* (2011) is an autobiography that uses poetry to address the author's concerns about aging. Shirley Geok-lin Lim edited *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's "The Woman Warrior"* (1991); also helpful is Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (1987). More cognizant of fiction's role in Kingston's writing is *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Joy Kogawa* (1993) by King-Kok Cheung and *Writing Tricksters* (1997) by Jeanne Rosier Smith. Kingston is discussed in Christopher Lee's *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian-American Literature* (2012).

Jamaica Kincaid

Kincaid is the author of five novels, a collection of short stories, *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), and many works of autobiographical nonfiction and reportage, much of which was originally published in the *New Yorker*. Her essay, "On Seeing England for the First Time" (originally published in *Transition* magazine in 1991) was selected by Susan Sontag for *The Best American Essays* (1992).

Critical discussion of Kincaid's work includes Moira Ferguson's *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body* (1994), Lisa Paravisini-Gebert's *Jamaica Kincaid: A Critical Companion* (1999), Justin D. Edwards's *Understanding Jamaica Kincaid* (2007), and Mary Ellen Snodgrass's *Jamaica Kincaid: A Literary Companion* (2008). *My Brother* (1997), Kincaid's nonfictional account of her brother's AIDS diagnosis and death, plays a significant role in Katherine Stanton's *Cosmopolitan Fictions: Ethics, Politics, and Global Change in the Works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Jamaica Kincaid, and J. M. Coetzee*.

Galway Kinnell

Kinnell wrote more than twenty books of poetry, from *What a Kingdom Was* (1960) to *Strong Is Your Hold* (2006). His book-length poem *The Book of Nightmares* (1971) is rarely anthologized but marks a significant contribution to poetry of the Vietnam era. Kinnell's *Selected Poems* (1980) won both a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award; *New Selected Poems* (2001) focuses on Kinnell's poetry of the 1960s and '70s. Selections from interviews with Kinnell were published in *Walking Down the Stairs* (1978).

Critical works on Kinnell include Lee Zimmerman's *Intricate and Simple Things: The Poetry of Galway Kinnell* (1987); *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The Wages of Dying* (1987), edited by Howard Nelson; *Critical Essays on Galway Kinnell* (1996), edited by Nancy Tuten; and Katarzyna Malecka's *Death in the Works of Galway Kinnell* (2008).

Yusef Komunyakaa

Komunyakaa's first poetry collection was *Dedications and Other Dark Horses* (1977); his most recent is *The Emperor of Water Clocks* (2015). With Martha Collins he has translated Nguyen Quang Thieu's *The Insomnia of Fire* (1992). With Sascha Feinstein he has edited two volumes of jazz poetry. In 2000 he published *Blue Notes: Essays, Interviews, and Commentaries*. He wrote a verse play of *Gilgamesh* (2006), which he produced as a stage adaptation with Chad Garcia.

Critical discussions of his work include Angela M. Salas's *Flashback Through the Heart: The Poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa* (2004). His work is set into a broader context by Wai Chee Dimock, "Gilgamesh's Planetary Turns" in *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru (2015) and by Stephen Burt, "Comrades, Be Not in Mourning: Twenty-First-Century Free Verse," in *New Literary History of America*, edited by Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (2009).

Jhumpa Lahiri

Lahiri's collections of stories are *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008); her novels are *The Namesake* (2003) and *The Lowland* (2013). *In Other Words*, a collection of her autobiographical essays, originally written in Italian and translated by Ann Goldstein, appeared in 2016.

Criticism of her fiction is found in *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits* (2006), edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim et al., and in *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writers* (2007), edited by Rocío G. Davis and Sue-Im Lee. In the context

of theoretical arguments about neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism, Susan Koshy has published two articles about Lahiri: "Neoliberal Family Matters," *American Literary History* 25.2 (2013): 36, and "Minority Cosmopolitanism," *PMLA* 126.3 (2011): 592–609. Min Song sets Lahiri's work in the context of a generation of Asian American writers born after 1965 in *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* (2013).

Li-Young Lee

Lee is the author of four books of poetry and a memoir, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* (1995). Gerald Stern's foreword to the collection *Rose* (1986) provides useful biographical material on Lee. *Breaking the Alabaster Jar: Conversations with Li-Young Lee* (2006) is a collection of interviews, edited by Earl G. Ingersoll. Other interviews with Lee appear in *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers* (2000), edited by King-Kok Cheung and *Poetry in Person: Twenty-Five Years of Conversation with America's Poets* (2010), edited by Alexander Neubauer.

Critical studies of Lee's verse can be found in Steven G. Yao's *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (2010) and Dorothy J. Wang's *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (2014).

Ursula K. Le Guin

Le Guin is the author of twenty-two novels, beginning with *Rocannon's World* (1966) and ending with *Lavinia* (2008). Her short stories appear in eleven collections; these are joined by *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), which presents a novella and new short stories. She has also authored fifteen books for children, ten poetry collections, two plays, four works of translation, and several volumes of nonfiction, including *The Language of Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1979, 1989) and *Cheek by Jowl: Talks and Essays on How Fantasy Matters* (2009). *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin* (1990) by Elizabeth Cummins Cogell is a good introduction; more critically sophisticated are James Bittner's *Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin* (1984) and Bernard Selinger's *Le Guin and Identity in Contemporary Fiction* (1988). Two recent essays on Le Guin can be found in *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (2014), edited by Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson.

Denise Levertov

Levertov was a prolific poet, with more than twenty volumes of poetry from *Double Image* (1946) to *The Great Unknowing: Last Poems* (1999). *Making Peace* (2005) is a posthumous collection of Levertov's poems, edited by

Peggy Rosenthal, and *The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov* was published in 2013. *The Poet in the World* (1973), *Light Up the Cave* (1981), and *Tesserae: Memories and Suppositions* (1995) include essays on Levertov's own work, autobiographical fragments, reviews of other poets, and some theoretical essays. Levertov's *New and Selected Essays* appeared in 1992. *The Letters of Denise Levertov and William Carlos Williams* (1998), *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov* (2004), and *Conversations with Denise Levertov*, a 1998 collection of interviews, mark important contributions to the study of Levertov's life and work.

The most authoritative biography of Levertov is Donna Krolik Hollenberg's *A Poet's Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov* (2013), and critical studies include *Critical Essays on Denise Levertov* (1991), edited by Linda Wagner-Martin, Audrey T. Rogers' *Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Engagement* (1993), Linda Arbaugh's *Poetics of the Feminine* (1994) and *Denise Levertov: New Perspectives* (2000), edited by Anne Little and Susie Paul.

Philip Levine

Levine's *New Selected Poems* (1991) gathers work from many of his volumes of poetry. A memoir, *The Bread to Time: Toward an Autobiography*, appeared in 1994. His translations from the Spanish are available in *Tarumba: The Selected Poems of Jaime Sabines* (with Ernest Trejo, 1979) and *Off the Map: Selected Writings of Gloria Fuertes* (with Ada Long, 1984). A collection of Levine's interviews, *Don't Ask*, appeared in 1981. Another collection of essays and interviews, *So Ask*, appeared in 2002.

Christopher Buckley's *On the Poetry of Philip Levine* appeared in 1991, and Edward Hirsch's "The Visionary Poetics of Philip Levine and Charles Wright" appears in *The Columbia History of American Poetry* (1993). David St. John's *Where Angels Come Toward Us* (1995) contains discussion of Levine's work. *Coming Close: Forty Essays on Philip Levine* (2013), edited by Mari L'Esperance and Tomas Q. Morin, is a collection of tributes from Levine's students and fellow writers.

Barry Lopez

Lopez is a prolific writer and has published numerous works of fiction and nonfiction; as is the case with many creative nonfiction writers, his work often combines these genres. Teachers might well begin with Lopez's interviews, many of which can be found in William Tydeman's *Conversations with Barry Lopez: Walking the Path of Imagination* (2013), and Mike Newell's *No Bottom: In Conversation with Barry Lopez* (2008).

Critical discussions of Lopez can also be found in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century "ecocriticism"; he is discussed in the context of a whole body of environmental writing in many of the essays in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996) and in Lawrence Buell's important book, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and the Environment in the U. S. and Beyond* (2001). See also Scot Slovic's *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, and Barry Lopez* (1992) and William H. Rueckert's essay, "Barry Lopez and the Search for a Dignified and Honorable Relationship with Nature," in *Earthly Words: Essays on Contemporary American Nature and Environmental Writers*, edited by John Cooley (1994).

Audre Lorde

The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde (2000) brings together Lorde's poetry, while a collection of Lorde's essays and speeches, *Sister Outsider* (1984), provides a powerful context for reading her work. Her autobiographical writing includes *The Cancer Journals* (1980) and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982). A useful interview with Lorde appears in *Women Writers at Work* (1998), edited by George Plimpton.

Critical studies of Lorde's work appear in Mari Evans's edited *Black Women Writers* (1984) and Cassie Steele's *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and the Poetry of Witness* (2000). Cheryl Clark's "After Mecca": *Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement* (2005) and Kelly Lynch Reames's *Women and Race in Contemporary U.S. Writing: From Faulkner to Morrison* (2009) situate Lorde within American literary history, while Catherine A. John's *Clear Word and Third Sight* (2003) considers Lorde within the context of diasporic writing.

Robert Lowell

Lowell published numerous books of verse, and he adapted works by Aeschylus, Racine, Hawthorne, and Melville for the stage. His *Collected Prose* (1987) is an indispensable companion to the poetry and contains valuable essays on the work of other writers. An edition of Lowell's letters, edited by Saskia Hamilton, appeared in 2005, and *Words in the Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (2008), edited by Saskia Hamilton and Thomas Travisano, documents one of the great literary friendships in twentieth-century poetry.

Useful early critical works on Lowell are Stephen Yenser's *Circle to Circle* (1975) and Steven Axelrod's *Robert Lowell: Life and Art*

(1978). *Robert Lowell: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1968), edited by Thomas Parkinson, includes an important interview with the poet, and *The Critical Response to Robert Lowell* (1999), edited by Steven Axelrod, provides an overview of criticism on the work. Thomas Travisano's *Midcentury Quartet* (1999), Nick Halpern's *Everyday and Prophetic* (2003), and Helen Vendler's *Last Looks, Last Books* (2010) all contain chapters on Lowell that situate him in the midcentury American poetic tradition. Paula Hayes studies Lowell's style in *Robert Lowell and the Confessional Voice* (2013). Ian Hamilton's biography, *Robert Lowell*, appeared in 1982.

Bernard Malamud

Malamud published eight novels and four short-story collections. Robert Giroux has also edited Malamud's unfinished novel and a number of short fictions in *The People and Uncollected Stories* (1990), together with *The Complete Stories* (1997). Alan Cheuse and Nicholas Delbanco edited his essays in *Talking Horse: Bernard Malamud on Life and Work* (1996).

A comprehensive overview of Malamud's works and their place in the American tradition is provided by Edward A. Abramson in *Bernard Malamud Revisited* (1993). Sanford Pinsker's *Jewish-American Fiction, 1917–1987* (1992) examines the author's specifically Jewish-American contribution. Critical essays are collected in Leslie A. Field and Joyce W. Field's edited *Bernard Malamud* (1975), Joel Salzberg's edited *Critical Essays on Bernard Malamud* (1987), and Evelyn Avery's edited *The Magic Worlds of Bernard Malamud* (2001). Janice Malamud has written *My Father Is a Book: A Memoir of Bernard Malamud* (2006), and Philip Davis has authored a comprehensive biography, *Bernard Malamud: A Writer's Life* (2007). Rita N. Kosofsky has compiled *Bernard Malamud: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1991).

David Mamet

Mamet has written numerous plays and screenplays and has directed multiple films. He has also written nonfiction prose, including political critique and Torah commentary, and novels and novellas as well. In 1998 Mamet published *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama*.

C. W. E. Bigsby's *David Mamet* (1985) is an excellent introduction. Critical studies of Mamet's style include Michael Stephens's *The Dramaturgy of Style* (1986), which considers Mamet's use of voice, and Bruce Barton's *Imagination in Transition* (2005), which considers Mamet's move to film. Criticism, bibliographies, and interviews about *Glengarry Glen*

Ross are available in Leslie Kane's edited *David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross: Text and Performance* (1996), and Kane gives a biographical reading of Mamet in *Weasels and Wisemen: Education, Ethics, and Ethnicity in David Mamet* (1999). Ira Nadel provides a biography in *David Mamet: A Life in the Theatre* (2008).

James Merrill

An edition of Merrill's *Collected Poems* (2001), edited by J. D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, gathers the collected poems, with the exception of his book-length epic *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1982). *Collected Novels and Plays* (2002) and *Collected Prose* (2004) present Merrill's fiction, drama, and nonfiction. Langdon Hammer's *James Merrill: Life and Art* (2015) is the major biography. Useful critical essays on Merrill appear in David Kalstone's *Five Temperaments* (1977), David Lehman and Charles Berger's edited *James Merrill: Essays in Criticism* (1983), and Guy Rotella's edited *Critical Essays on James Merrill* (1996). Stephen Yenser's book-length study of Merrill's work, *The Consuming Myth* (1987), remains invaluable. Recent critical work includes Timothy Materer's *James Merrill's Apocalypse* (2000), Reena Sastri's *James Merrill: Knowing Innocence* (2007), and Helen Vendler's *Last Looks, Last Books* (2010).

W. S. Merwin

Merwin's *Collected Poems* appeared in a two-volume Library of America edition in 2013, while *The Miner's Pale Children* (1970) is an important example of Merwin's prose. Merwin has also published the autobiographical prose collections *Unframed Original* (1982) and *Summer Doorways* (2005), while *Regions of Memory* (1987) combines memoir and commentary on the work of poetry. In addition, Merwin has published numerous translations from a variety of languages, many of which can be found in his *Selected Translations 1948–2010* (2013). *Conversations with W. S. Merwin*, a collection of interviews edited by Michael Wutz and Hal Crimmel, appeared in 2015.

Critical essays on Merwin's work are gathered in *W. S. Merwin: Essays on the Poetry* (1987), edited by Cary Nelson and Ed Folsom. Book-length studies of Merwin's poetry include Edward J. Brunner's *Poetry as Labor and as Privilege* (1991) and H. L. Hicks's *W. S. Merwin* (1997). Jane Frazier's *From Origin to Ecology: Nature and the Poetry of W. S. Merwin* (1999) and Leonard M. Scigaj's *Sustainable Poetry* (1999) examine Merwin's nature poetry.

Arthur Miller

Miller's early plays are brought together in *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (1957), which

also includes a lengthy and useful introduction by Miller. Later dramas are available in *Collected Plays, 1957–1981* (1981), *Collected Plays 1944–1961* (2006), and individual volumes. Miller also wrote many nonfiction pieces, as well as radio plays, screenplays, short stories, and the novel *Focus* (1945). *Echoes Down the Corridor: Collected Essays, 1944–2000* appeared in 2000. Miller published *Salesman in Beijing*, an account of the production of *Death of a Salesman* in China, in 1984, and an autobiography, *Timebends: A Life*, in 1987.

Martin Gottfried's *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work* (2003) is the major biography, while Enoch Brater's biography *Arthur Miller: A Playwright's Life and Works* (2004) provides useful performance histories for Miller's plays. The best recent analysis of Miller's work is found in Christopher Bigsby's *Arthur Miller, 1915–1962* (2010), supplemented by Bigsby's *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* (2005) and his edited *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* (1997). Also helpful are the essays in Steven R. Centola's edited *The Achievement of Arthur Miller: New Essays* (1995). *Death of a Salesman* is analyzed in-depth in Brenda Murphy's *Miller: Death of a Salesman* (1995), Matthew C. Rodan e's *Approaches to Teaching Miller's Death of a Salesman* (1995), Eric J. Sterling's edited *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman* (2008), and Peter L. Hays's *Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman* (2008). Jeffrey D. Mason treats Miller in the context of American political history in *Stone Tower: The Political Theater of Arthur Miller* (2008).

N. Scott Momaday

Momaday has published a number of novels, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn* (1968), numerous memoirs and essay collections, and multiple volumes of poetry. *Three Plays: The Indolent Boys, Children of the Sun, and The Moon in Two Windows* appeared in 2007. Momaday has also written books for children, edited editions of other writers, and written the commentary for photographer David Muench's *Colorado: Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring* (1973).

Kenneth Lincoln's *Native American Renaissance* (1985) locates Momaday at the beginning of a renaissance in Native American literature, while book-length studies of Momaday include Matthias Schubnell's *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background* (1985) and Jim Charles's *Reading, Learning, and Teaching N. Scott Momaday* (2007). Valuable interviews with Momaday include Joseph Bruchac's "The Magic of Words: An Interview with N. Scott Momaday" in Bruchac's edited *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets* (1987)

and Louis Owens's "N. Scott Momaday" in *This Is about Vision: Interviews with Southwestern Writers* (1990), edited by William Balassi, John F. Crawford, and Annie O. Eysturoy. Arnold Krupat's *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (1989) compares Momaday's autobiographical writing with Leslie Marmon Silko's, while Sean Kicummah Teuton's *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the Native American Novel* (2008) explores place and embodiment in Momaday's work. *House Made of Dawn* is analyzed in depth in Susan Scarberry-Garcia's *Landmarks of Healing: A Study of "House Made of Dawn"* (1990), Louis Owens's *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), and Scott B. Vickers's *Native American Identities* (1998). Phyllis S. Morgan's *N. Scott Momaday: An Annotated Bio-Bibliography* (2010) provides a biography of Momaday and a comprehensive bibliography of critical works about Momaday.

Toni Morrison

Morrison has published eleven novels, from *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to *God Help the Child* (2015), and three books for children. Her plays are *Dreaming Emmett* (1986), *Desdemona* (2011), and a libretto, *Margaret Garner* (2005). Morrison has written and edited a number of critical works, including the seminal *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) and *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (editor, 1992). Her *Nobel Lecture in Literature* was published in 1994.

General book-length studies include Trudier Harris's *Fictions and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991), John N. Duvall's *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison* (2000), and Linda Wagner-Martin's *Toni Morrison: A Literary Life* (2015), which covers Morrison's first ten novels and emphasizes her role as a public intellectual. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. A. Appiah have edited the useful *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993). Victoria Burrows's *Whiteness and Trauma* (2004) and Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2010) address trauma and race in Morrison's work, while La Vinia Delois Jennings's *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa* (2008) and K. Zauditu-Salassie's *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2009) examine the Africanist presence in Morrison's novels. Gender in Morrison's fiction is analyzed in Andrea Reilly's *Toni Morrison and Motherhood* (2004) and Susan Neal Mayberry's *Can't Love What I Criticize: The Masculine and Morrison* (2007), while religion in Morrison's fiction is

treated in John A. McClure's *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2007) and Amy Hungerford's *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (2010).

Flannery O'Connor

O'Connor's novels and stories are collected in a volume in the Library of America series edited by Sally Fitzgerald (1988), while her letters are collected in *The Habit of Being: The Letters of Flannery O'Connor* (1979). *The Presence of Grace, and Other Book Reviews* (1983) collects some of her critical prose, as does *Mystery and Manners* (1969), edited by Sally Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald. *A Prayer Journal* (2013), edited by W.A. Sessions, reproduces O'Connor's journal from 1946 to 1947.

Jan W. Cash provides a biography in *Flannery O'Connor: A Life* (2003), as does Brad Gooch in *Flannery* (2009). Critical overviews include Richard Giannone's *Flannery O'Connor, Hermit Novelist* (2000), Sarah Gordon's *Flannery O'Connor: The Obedient Imagination* (2000), and *Flannery O'Connor's Radical Reality* (2006), edited by Jan Nordby Grettund and Karl-Heinz Westarp. Studies of religion in O'Connor's fiction include Lorine M. Gertz's *Flannery O'Connor, Literary Theologian* (2000), Susan Grigley's *Flannery O'Connor's Sacramental Art* (2004), and Jordan Cofer's *The Gospel According to Flannery O'Connor* (2014). Donald E. Hardy explores embodiment in *The Body in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction* (2007), while Jon Lance Bacon situates O'Connor in American history in *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* (1993). *Flannery O'Connor: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1981) was compiled by David Farmer, and *Flannery O'Connor: The Contemporary Reviews* (2009), edited by R. Neil Scott, Irwin H. Streight, and M. Thomas Inge, collects contemporaneous reviews of O'Connor's fiction. A chapter in Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* (2009) reads some of her early stories and discusses the importance of her time at the Iowa Writer's Workshop.

Frank O'Hara

Frank O'Hara was the author of seven books of poetry, the most influential of which were *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957) and *Lunch Poems* (1964). *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* was first published in 1971, and his art criticism can be found in *Art Chronicles 1954–1966* (1975) and *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara on American Art* (1999). O'Hara also wrote autobiographical fragments, literary manifestos, and plays, some of which are collected in *Selected Poems* (2008), edited by Mark Ford.

Brad Gooch's *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (1993) remains the definitive biography of the poet. David Lehman's *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (1998) provides valuable contexts for O'Hara's work. An informative critical study is Marjorie Perloff's *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters* (1977), and noteworthy readings of O'Hara's personal poems can be found in Michael W. Clune's *American Literature and the Free Market, 1945–2000* (2010) and Oren Izenberg's *Being Numerous: Poetry and the Ground of Social Life* (2011).

Sharon Olds

Olds's recent poetry collections are *One Secret Thing* (2008) and *Stag's Leap* (2012), while *Strike Sparks: Selected Poems 1980–2002* (2004) brings together work from her previous volumes. Her Judith Stonach Memorial Lecture on the Teaching of Poetry, *What Does an Elegy Do?*, was published in book form in 2010. Informative interviews with Olds appear in the online journal *Salon* (1999), in Alan Fox's edited *Rattle Conversations: Interviews with Contemporary American Poets* (2008), and in Betsy Sussler's edited *BOMB: The Author Interviews* (2014). Alicia Ostriker discusses Olds's erotic discourse in *Dancing at the Devil's Party: Essays on Poetry, Politics, and the Erotic* (2000).

Mary Oliver

Volumes 1 (2004) and 2 (2005) of *New and Selected Poems* contain selections from Oliver's volumes of poetry between 1963 and 2005, and Oliver has published a number of poetry collections since. Oliver has written two guides to poetry, *A Poetry Handbook* (1994) and *Rules for the Dance* (1998), and a collection of mixed nonfiction and poetry, *Long Life: Essays and Other Writings* (2004). J. Scott Bryson's edited *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002) and Bryson and Roger Thompson's edited *Twentieth-Century American Nature Poets* (2008) each contain a chapter on Oliver's nature poetry.

Simon J. Ortiz

Ortiz has published numerous volumes of poetry and short stories, and he has also edited two collections, *These Hearts, These Poems* (1984) and *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing* (1998).

A discussion of Ortiz's poetry appears in Kenneth Lincoln's seminal *Native American Renaissance* (1983) and in Lucy Maddox's "Native American Poetry" in *The Columbia History of American Poetry* (1993), while David King Dunaway and Sara Spurgeon's edited

Writing the Southwest (2003) contains a biography of Ortiz. Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior use Ortiz as their launching point in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006), to which Ortiz contributed the Forward. Susan Berry Brill de Ramírez and Evelina Zuni Lucero's edited *Simon J. Ortiz: A Poetic Legacy of Indigenous Continuance* (2009) collects recent critical essays on Ortiz.

Grace Paley

The Collected Stories (1994) draw on Paley's three major volumes of short fiction. Other stories and poems appear (with paintings by Vera B. Williams) in *Long Walks and Intimate Talks* (1991). *Begin Again: Collected Poems* (2000) brings together the work from two early volumes of Paley's poetry. *Just As I Thought* (1998) collects Paley's essays. With Robert Nichols she published *Here and Somewhere Else: Stories and Poems* (2007). *Fidelity* (2008) was her last volume of poetry. *Conversations with Grace Paley* (2007) collects Paley's interviews.

The three major studies of Paley's fiction are *Grace Paley's Life Stories: A Literary Biography* (1993) by Judith Arcana, *Grace Paley: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1990) by Neil D. Isaacs, and *Grace Paley: Illuminating the Dark Lives* (1990) by Jacqueline Taylor.

Robert Pinsky

Pinsky's *The Figured Wheel: New and Collected Poems 1966–1996* (1996) gathers work from four collections, as well as presenting new poems and selections from his translations. He has published two book-length translations, the prize-winning *The Inferno of Dante: A New Verse Translation* (1994) and, together with Robert Hass, a translation of the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz's *The Separate Notebook* (1984). He retells the story of King David from the Bible in *The Life of David* (2005). Pinsky's two volumes of criticism, *The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Traditions* (1975) and *Poetry and the World* (1988), illuminate his work as well as that of the writers he discusses. He is also the author of *The Sounds of Poetry* (1998), *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry* (2002), and *Singing School: Learning to Write (and Read) Poetry by Studying with the Masters* (2013). Pinsky edited the collection *America's Favorite Poems* (1999).

Discussion of Pinsky's work can also be found in Robert Archambeau's *Laureates and Heretics: Six Careers in American Poetry: Yvor Winters, Robert Pinsky, James McMichael, Robert Hass, John Matthias, John Peck* (2010).

Sylvia Plath

Plath's books of poetry have been gathered in *Plath's Collected Poems*, edited by Ted Hughes (1983). Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar*, was first published in England in 1963; her short fiction and other prose writing was collected posthumously by Hughes in *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (1977). Plath's mother, Aurelia Schober Plath, edited the useful *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950–63* (1975). Karen Kukil edited *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath, 1950–1962* (2000).

Among the biographical and critical studies of Plath's work are Judith Kroll's *Chapters in a Mythology* (1976), Anne Stevenson's *Bitter Fame: The Undiscovered Life of Sylvia Plath* (1988), Jacqueline Rose's *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (1993), and Heather Clark's *The Grief of Influence: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (2011). Amy Hungerford's *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (2003) discusses the meaning of and responses to Plath's Holocaust imagery. In *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011), Maggie Nelson situates Plath's poetry in a lineage of violent and transgressive art in the twentieth century, emphasizing the ethical core of her work. *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, edited by Jo Gill, appeared in 2006.

Thomas Pynchon

Pynchon has published nine novels, from *V.* (1963) to *Bleeding Edge* (2013). *Slow Learner* (1984) collects early stories.

Book-length studies of Pynchon's early novels are Thomas H. Schaub's *Pynchon, The Voice of Ambiguity* (1981), David Seed's *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (1988), and Alan N. Brownlie's *Thomas Pynchon's Narratives: Subjectivity and the Problems of Knowing* (2000). Newer critical essays are collected by Niran Abbas in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from The Margins* (2003) and Ian D. Copestake in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon* (2003). David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (2012) and Joanna Freer's *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (2014) situate Pynchon in postwar history. The fiction's relationship to contemporary religious thought is explored by John A. McClure in *Partial Faiths: Postmodern Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2007); C. Namwali Serpell considers Pynchon's ambiguity in *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (2014); and Mark Greif sets his work among mid-twentieth-century writers considering the "crisis of man" in *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973* (2015).

Ishmael Reed

Reed has published ten novels, from *The Free-Lance Pallbearers* (1967) to *Juice!* (2011), and six collections of poetry, including *New and Collected Poems* (2006). Reed's plays are collected in *Ishmael Reed, The Plays* (2009). Reed has published ten essay collections, a libretto called *Gethsemane Park* (1998), and two travelogues. He has edited numerous anthologies, including *The Before Columbus Foundation Fiction and Poetry Anthology* (1991).

Jay Boyer's booklet *Ishmael Reed* (1993) is a good introduction, while Patrick McGee's *Ishmael Reed and the Ends of Race* (1997) focuses on gender and race. Jerome Klinkowitz studies Reed's polemics in *Literary Subversions* (1985), while Reginald Martin takes a more theoretical approach in *Ishmael Reed and the New Black Aesthetic Critics* (1987). Pierre-Damien Mvuyekure explores Reed's spiritualism and innovations in *The "Dark Heathenism" of the American Novelist Ismael Reed: African Voodoo as American Literary Hoodoo* (2007), as does Glenda Carpio in *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery* (2008). Elizabeth A. Settle and Thomas A. Settle have compiled *Ishmael Reed: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1982), useful for locating the early critical response.

Adrienne Rich

The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems 1950–2001 (2002) collects five decades of Rich's poetry. Her last volume of poetry was *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007–2010* (2010). Several valuable collections gather Rich's essays, lectures, and speeches: *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1979), *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (1986), *What Is Found There?: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993), *Arts of the Possible* (2001), *Poetry and Commitment: An Essay* (2007), and *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society* (2009). Rich is also the author of an important study, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976).

Valuable critical essays and an interview appear in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry* (1975), edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi. Other studies are *Reading Adrienne Rich* (1984), edited by Jane Roberta Cooper; Paula Bennett's *My Life, a Loaded Gun: Female Creativity and Feminist Poetics* (1986); Margaret Dickie's *Stein, Bishop, & Rich: Lyrics of Love, War, & Place* (1997); Molly McQuade's *By Herself: Women Reclaim Poetry* (2000); "Catch If You Can Your Country's Moment": *Recovery and Regeneration in the Poetry of Adrienne Rich* (2007), edited by William S. Waddell; and Sylvia Henneberg's *The*

Creative Crone: Aging and the Poetry of May Sarton and Adrienne Rich (2010).

Theodore Roethke

The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke was published in 1966. *Dirty Dinkey and Other Creatures: Poems for Children*, edited by B. Roethke and Stephen Lushington, appeared in 1973. Useful comments on poetic tradition and his own poetic practice are to be found in several collections of Roethke's prose: *On the Poet and His Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke* (1965), edited by Ralph J. Mills Jr.; *Straw for the Fire: From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke, 1948–63* (1972), edited by David Wagoner; and *The Selected Letters of Theodore Roethke* (1970), edited by Mills.

Among the useful studies of Roethke's work are *Theodore Roethke: Essays on the Poetry* (1965), edited by Arnold Stein, and Laurence Lieberman's *Beyond the Muse of Memory: Essays on Contemporary Poets* (1995). Allan Seager's *The Glass House* (1968) contains useful biographical material.

Philip Roth

Roth is the author of twenty-seven novels and novellas, beginning with *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and concluding with *Nemesis* (2010). *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988) and *Patrimony* (1991) are Roth's memoirs. *Reading Myself and Others* (1975) and *Shop Talk* (2001) collect essays and interviews.

Philip Roth (1982) by Hermione Lee is an excellent introduction, as is *Understanding Philip Roth* (1990) by Murray Baumgarten and Barbara Gottfried. *Philip Roth and the Jews* (1996) by Alan Cooper considers religious and cultural dimensions of the author's work. The broad sweep of Roth's career is covered by Mark Shechner in *Up Society's Ass, Copper: Reading Philip Roth* (2003), Deborah Shostak in *Philip Roth—Countertexts, Counterlives* (2004), and David Brauner in *Philip Roth* (2007). Elaine B. Safer's *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth* (2006) discusses his experiments in narrative, while Ross Posnock handles controversy in *Philip Roth's Rude Truth* (2005). David Gooblar's *The Major Phases of Philip Roth* (2011) and Patrick Hayes's *Philip Roth: Fiction and Power* (2014) evaluate the full scope of Roth's career. Claudia Roth Pierpont's biography *A Writer and His Books* (2013) situates Roth's fiction in his personal history.

George Saunders

In addition to his several short-story collections, Saunders has published an illustrated fable, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* (2005), and a book for children, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip* (2006). His essays are

an excellent accompaniment to the fiction; see the collection *The Braindead Megaphone* (2007). Readers may also be interested in his published commencement speech: *Congratulations, by the way: Some Thoughts on Kindness* (2014). He has collaborated on two stage adaptations of stories, "Jon" and "CommComm," with playwright Seth Bockley.

Very little criticism exists to date; two articles in mainstream academic journals are David Rando, "George Saunders and the Postmodern Working Class," in *Contemporary Literature* 53.3 (2012); and Sarah Pogell, "'The Verisimilitude Inspector': George Saunders as the New Baudrillard?" *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52.4 (2011).

Anne Sexton

Sexton authored eight volumes of poetry starting with *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) and ending with *The Awful Rowing toward God* (1975). *Complete Poems* appeared in 1981. Diane Wood Middlebrook's biography, *Anne Sexton* (1991), and Sexton's *A Self-Portrait in Letters* (1977) give useful biographical material. Important interviews and critical essays are to be found in J. D. McClatchy's *Anne Sexton: The Artist and Her Critics* (1978) and Diane Hume George's *Sexton: Selected Criticism* (1988). An interview with Sexton appears in *Women Writers at Work* (1998), edited by George Plimpton.

Sam Shepard

Shepard is the author of thirty-eight plays, starting with *Cowboys* (1964) and ending with *Ages of the Moon* (2009). His short stories and other nondramatic writings appear in five collections.

The aesthetics of Shepard's playwriting and its surrealist influences are analyzed by Emma Creedon in *Sam Shepard and the Aesthetics of Performance* (2015). James A. Crank conducts a wide-ranging study of Shepard's theatrical work in *Understanding Sam Shepard* (2012). Shepard's place in theatrical history is assessed by Robert J. Andreach in *Creating the Self in the Contemporary American Theatre* (1998). Also helpful are Doris Auerbach's *Sam Shepard, Arthur Kopit, and the Off Broadway Theater* (1982), Stephen J. Bottoms's *The Theatre of Sam Shepard: States of Crisis* (1998), Laura Graham's *Sam Shepard: Theme, Image, and the Director* (1995), Lynda Hart's *Sam Shepard's Metaphorical Stages* (1987), and Ron Mottram's *Inner Landscapes: The Theater of Sam Shepard* (1984).

Leslie Marmon Silko

Silko has written three novels, six collections of stories and poetry, and a Kindle Singles novella called *Oceanstory* (2011). *Yellow*

Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit (1996) collects Silko's essays on contemporary Native American life. *The Turquoise Ledge* (2010) is Silko's memoir. *Lullaby*, coauthored with Frank Chin, was dramatically adapted and produced in San Francisco in 1976. *Delicacy and Strength of Lace*, a collection of letters between Silko and the poet James Wright, edited by Anne Wright, was published in 1985, while Ellen L. Arnold edited *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko* in 2000. Silko's work also appeared in *Yellow Woman* (1993), edited by Melody Graulich.

Introductions to Silko's work are Per Seyersted's *Leslie Marmon Silko* (1980), Melody Graulich's edited *Yellow Woman: Leslie Marmon Silko* (1993), and Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson's edited *Leslie Marmon Silko* (1999). Catherine Rainwater's *Dreams of Fiery Stars* (1999), Sean Kicummah Teuton's *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (2008), and Mishuana Goeman's *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (2013) situate Silko within Native American literary culture. Rosemary A. King's *Border Influences from the Mexican War to the Present* (2001) and Claudia Sadowsky-Smith's *Border Fictions* (2008) locate Silko in the history of America's borderlands.

Charles Simic

New and Selected Poems: 1962–2012 (2013) gathers much of the work from Simic's numerous collections of poetry. He has also published several volumes of essays and memoirs and is a prolific translator of Serbian poetry into English.

Critical discussions of Simic's poetry can be found in Bruce Weigl's *Charles Simic: Essays on the Poetry* (1996), Peter Stitt's *Uncertainty and Plenitude: Five Contemporary Poets* (1997), and Anthony Hecht's *Melodies Unheard* (2003).

Tracy K. Smith

In addition to her three collections of poetry, Smith has published *Ordinary Light: A Memoir* (2015). Her interview with Charles Henry Rowell, "'Something We Need': An Interview with Tracy K. Smith," was published in *Calaloo* 27.4 (2004).

Gary Snyder

Snyder's many volumes of poetry have been published by several different presses, often with duplication of poems. *Riprap*, originally published in 1959, is most easily obtained in *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems* (1965, 1991). Snyder has also published important prose collections dealing with ecology, such as *Earth House Hold* (1969) and *A Place in*

Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds (1995). A useful gathering of Snyder's prose and poetry appears in *The Gary Snyder Reader* (1999). *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks 1964–1979*, edited by William Scott McLean, appeared in 1980. Another essay collection, *Back on Fire*, appeared in 2007.

Helpful critical discussion of Snyder's work can be found in Patrick Murphy's *A Place for Wayfaring: The Poetry and Prose of Gary Snyder* (2000); Timothy Gray's *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community* (2006); Paige Tovey's *Transatlantic Eco-Romanticism of Gary Snyder* (2013); and *Sense of the Whole: Reading Gary Snyder's Mountains and Rivers without End* (2015), edited by Mark Gonnerman.

Art Spiegelman

Spiegelman's most important books include the two parts of *Maus, a Survivor's Tale*, published in 1986 and 1991, and *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004). *Be a Nose* (2009) excerpts Spiegelman's sketchbooks, while *MetaMaus* (2011) contains background material about *Maus*. *Breakdowns* (2008) and *Co-Mix* (2013) anthologize Spiegelman's shorter works. *MetaMaus* (2011) provides source materials, interview, and background about the making of *Maus*.

Joseph Witek locates Spiegelman's importance in the evolution of underground comics and the graphic novel in *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (1989), as do Charles Hatfield in *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (2005) and Hillary Chute in *Disaster Drawn* (2016). Amy Hungerford's chapter on *Maus*, "Surviving Rego Park," in *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (2003) discusses the relationship between history and identity in Spiegelman's work. Alan Rosen analyzes *Maus* in *Sounds of Defiance: The Holocaust, Multilingualism, and the Problem of English* (2005), as do contributors to Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester's *A Comic Studies Reader* (2009). Kristiaan Versluys analyzes Spiegelman's response to 9/11 in *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (2009), while Nicole Stamtant considers Spiegelman as an American memoirist in *Serial Memoir: Archiving American Lives* (2014).

Amy Tan

Tan has published six novels, from *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) to *The Valley of Amazement* (2013), and two children's books, *The Moon Lady* (1992) and *Sagua, the Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994). *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings* (2003) is nonfiction. Critical

overviews of Tan and her work are found in E. D. Huntley's *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion* (1998) and Amy Ling's *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990). James Nagel studies *The Joy Luck Club* in *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle* (2001), as does Magali Cornier Michael in *New Visions of Community in Contemporary American Fiction* (2006). Mary Jane Hurst locates Tan within American quests for identity in *Language, Gender, and Community in Late-Twentieth-Century Fiction* (2011).

Natasha Trethewey

In addition to her several poetry collections, Trethewey has published a book of nonfiction, *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2010). *Conversations with Natasha Trethewey* (2013), edited by Joan Wylie, gathers useful interviews. Two of Trethewey's essays, "On Whitman, Civil War Memory, and My South," in Ivy Wilson's edited collection *Whitman Noir: Black America and the Good Gray Poet* (2014), and "Why I Write," in *South Central Review* 31.1 (2014) may be of special interest to teachers. *The Southern Quarterly* 54.4 (2013), collects critical essays in a special issue on Trethewey's work in honor of her naming as U.S. poet laureate.

John Updike

Updike authored twenty-three novels including the popular *Rabbit* tetralogy: *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990). His two-volume *Collected Stories* was published in 2013. Updike's early poems are gathered in *Collected Poems 1953–1993* (1993), while *Americana: and Other Poems* (2001) and *Endpoint and Other Poems* (2009) are later works. Fourteen collections of criticism and four children's books round out his oeuvre.

Donald J. Greiner's thorough examination of the early canon appears in his *John Updike's Novels* (1984) and *The Other John Updike: Poems/Short Stories/Prose/Plays* (1981). Longer views are taken by James A. Schiff in *John Updike Revisited* (1998) and by William Pritchard in *Updike: America's Man of Letters* (2000). *Conversations with John Updike* (1993), edited by James Plath, collects thirty-two interviews with the writer between 1959 and 1993. Jack De Bellis has prepared *The John Updike Encyclopedia* (2007) and, with Michael Broomfield, *John Updike: A Bibliography* (2007). In 2006, Stacey Olster edited *The Cambridge Companion to John Updike*, and Adam Begley provides a compendious chronicle of the author's life in *Updike* (2014). Updike's papers have been deposited in the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

Kurt Vonnegut

Vonnegut was the author of fourteen novels. His short stories are collected in *Canary in a Cat House* (1961), *Welcome to the Monkey House* (1968), and *Bagombo Snuff Box* (1999). His essays fill four volumes: *Wampeters, Foma & Granfaloon* (1974), *Palm Sunday* (1981), *Fates Worse Than Death* (1991), and *A Man Without a Country* (2005). *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (1971) is a play, while *Between Time and Timbuktu* (1972) is a television script, prefaced by Vonnegut, drawing on his fiction. *Sun/Moon/Star* (1980), with illustrations by Ivan Chermayeff, is a book for children. *God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian* (1999) collects Vonnegut's radio satires; *Like Shaking Hands with God* (1999) is his dialogue with social activist Lee Stringer. Noncanonical rejected stories from the early 1950s have been published posthumously as *Armageddon in Retrospect* (2008), *Look at the Birdie* (2009), and *While Mortals Sleep* (2010).

Jerome Klinkowitz surveys Vonnegut's career in *The Vonnegut Effect* (2004), studies his essays in *Vonnegut in Fact* (1998), and undertakes cultural analysis in *Kurt Vonnegut's America* (2009). Specific theses are argued by Leonard Mustazza in *Forever Pursuing Genesis: The Myth of Eden in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (1990), Leonard Broer in *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (1989, revised 1994), and Todd Davis in *Kurt Vonnegut's Crusade* (2006), Lawrence R. Broer in *Vonnegut and Hemingway: Writers at War* (2011), and Robert T. Talley in *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography* (2011). Broad samples of criticism are made by editor David Simmons in *New Critical Essays on Kurt Vonnegut* (2009) and by editor Leonard Mustazza in *The Critical Response to Kurt Vonnegut* (1994), while Vonnegut's later work (including his public spokespersonship) are examined in *The Vonnegut Chronicles* (1996), edited by Peter J. Reed and Marc Leeds. Loree Rackstraw's *Love As Always, Kurt* (2009) is a memoir. Asa B. Pieratt Jr., Julie Huffman-Klinkowitz, and Jerome Klinkowitz have compiled *Kurt Vonnegut: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (1987).

Alice Walker

Walker has published seven novels, including *The Color Purple* (1982), three short-story collections, and eight collections of poetry. Her *Collected Poems* appeared in 2005. Walker's literary essays are collected in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), *Living by the Word* (1988), and *Anything We Love Can Be Saved* (2000). She has also written *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (1987, with Pratibha Parmar), *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting*

For (2006), and *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel* (2010). Her children's books include an illustrated *To Hell with Dying* (1988), *Finding the Green Stone* (1991), and a biography, *Langston Hughes, American Poet* (1974). Rudolph P. Byrd has edited a collection of interviews, *The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker* (2010).

Evelyn C. White's *Alice Walker: A Life* (2004) is a comprehensive biography. Good samplings of scholarship on Walker are offered by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K. Anthony Appiah's edited *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (1993) and Lillie P. Howard's edited *Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston: The Common Bond* (1993). *Alice Walker* (2011) is Maria Lauret's book-length study, while Melanie L. Harris's *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics* (2010) analyzes Walker's politics of "womanism."

Robert Penn Warren

Warren wrote numerous books of poetry, fiction, and criticism. An edition of Warren's *Collected Poems*, edited by John Burt, appeared in 1998, and Burt has also edited a volume of Warren's *Selected Poems* (2001). Warren's best-known novels are *All the King's Men* (1946) and *World Enough and Time* (1950). His Thomas Jefferson Lectures, *Democracy and Poetry*, appeared in 1975. Also available is a collection of interviews, *Robert Penn Warren Talking* (1980), edited by Floyd Watkins and John Tiers.

Early critical studies of Warren's poetry are Victor Strandberg's *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren* (1977), Calvin Bedient's *In the Heart's Last Kingdom* (1986), and James H. Justus's *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren* (1981). More recent critical studies include Lesa Carnes Corrigan's *Poem of Pure Imagination: Robert Penn Warren and the Romantic Tradition* (1999), David Madden's edited *The Legacy of Robert Penn Warren* (2000), and James A. Grimshaw Jr.'s *Understanding Robert Penn Warren* (2001). Warren's literary criticism is treated in Michael Kreyling's *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998) and Charlotte H. Beck's *Robert Penn Warren: Critic* (2006).

Eudora Welty

Welty was the author of five novels, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Optimist's Daughter* (1972), and one novella, *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942). The *Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (1980) was followed by two more collections of short stories and one collection of autobiographical essays, *One Writer's Beginnings* (1984). Among Welty's many

volumes of nonfiction prose are *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (1978), and *A Writer's Eye: Collected Book Reviews* (1994).

Biographies of Welty include Ann Waldron's *Eudora: A Writer's Life* (1998) and Suzanne Marrs's *Eudora Welty: A Biography* (2005). Critical introductions to Welty's fiction are available in Marrs's *One Writer's Imagination: The Fiction of Eudora Welty* (2002), Gail Mortimer's *Daughter of the Swan: Love and Knowledge in Eudora Welty's Fiction* (1994), Jan Nordby Gretlund's *Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place* (1994), and Ruth D. Weston's *Gothic Traditions and Narrative Techniques in the Fiction of Eudora Welty* (1994). The collection of essays *Eudora Welty and Politics: Did the Writer Crusade?* (2001), edited by Suzanne Marrs and Harriet Pollack, seeks to revise the critical consensus that Welty avoided political and historical engagement in her writing and photography.

Richard Wilbur

Wilbur's recent poetry collections are *Anterooms* (2010) and *The Nutcracker* (2012), while *Collected Poems 1943–2004* (2004) gathers work from his earlier volumes. He has also published the prose collections *Responses* (1976) and *The Catbird's Song* (1997), and he has translated Molière, Corneille, and Racine from the French. A collection of interviews, *Conversations with Richard Wilbur*, edited by William Butts, appeared in 1990.

Critical discussion of Wilbur's work can be found in Wendy Salinger's edited *Richard Wilbur's Creation* (1983), John B. Hougens's *Ecstasy Within Discipline: The Poetry of Richard Wilbur* (1995), and Anthony Hecht's *Melodies Unheard* (2003). Scott Knickerbocker discusses Wilbur's nature poetry in *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, and Nature of Language* (2012).

Tennessee Williams

Most of Williams's plays are collected in the seven-volume *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* (1971–81). Some later dramas are available in separate editions; a few others are still to be published. Other writings include a novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950); his short-story collections are brought together in *Collected Stories* (1986), edited by Gore Vidal; a volume of screenplays, *Stopped Rocking* (1984); and poems collected as *In the Winter of Cities* (1964) and *Androgyne, Mon Amour* (1977). *Where I Live: Selected Essays*, edited by Christine R. Day and Bob Woods, appeared in 1978. *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Volume I, 1920–1945* (2000) was edited by Albert J. Devlin and Nancy M. Tischler. Margaret Bradham Thornton has edited Williams's *Notebooks* (2007).

John Lahr's *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh* (2014) is the best biographical account. Williams's own *Memoirs* (1975) is interestingly revelatory but is not a reliable biographical guide. Judith J. Thompson provides a Jungian analysis of the plays and identifies structural patterns in *Tennessee Williams' Plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol* (1987, rev. 2002). Time relationships are explored by Patricia Schroeder in *The Presence of the Past in Modern American Drama* (1989). Williams's homosexuality functions in a complex way in his writing, as demonstrated by Michael Paller's *Gentlemen Callers: Tennessee Williams; Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Drama* (2005) and Michael S. D. Hopper's *Sexual Politics in the Work of Tennessee Williams* (2012). The difficult aesthetics of Williams's late plays are examined by Annette Saddik in *Tennessee Williams's Theatre of Excess: The Strange, the Crazy, The Queer* (2015). Williams's female characters are analyzed by James Grissom in *Follies of God: Tennessee Williams and the Women of the Fog* (2015). Brenda Murphy edited *Tennessee Williams: Critical Insights* (2010); Philip G. Kolin edited *Tennessee Williams: A Guide to Research and Performance* (1998); Matthew C. Rodané prepared *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams*.

August Wilson

Wilson is the author of ten plays, starting with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1985) and ending

with *Radio Golf* (2005). *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1985), *Fences* (1985), *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986) have been collected with a preface by Wilson (*Three Plays*, 1991).

Temporality is examined by Harry J. Elam Jr. in *Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson* (2006). Christopher Bigsby edited *The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson* (2007). Alan Nadel edited *August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle* (2010). Mary Bogumil's *Understanding August Wilson* (2011) is a wide-ranging study of his work.

James Wright

Above the River: The Complete Poems (1992) collects the work in Wright's individual volumes of poetry, while an edition of his *Collected Prose*, edited by Anne Wright, was published in 1983. His letters appear in *A Wild Perfection: The Selected Letters of James Wright* (2008) and *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace: Letters Between Leslie Marmon Silko and James Wright* (2009), both edited by Anne Wright. Some of Wright's translations from the Spanish and German are available in *Twenty Poems of Georg Trakl* (1963), *Twenty Poems of Cesar Vallejo* (1964), and *Twenty Poems of Pablo Neruda* (with Robert Bly, 1968).

Dave Smith's edited *The Pure Clear Word: Essays on the Poetry of James Wright* (1982) and Peter Stitt and Frank Graziano's edited *James Wright: The Heart of the Light* (1990) collect critical essays on Wright. Laurence Lieberman's *Beyond the Muse of Memory* (1995) contains a good critical discussion of Wright.

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1945 to the Present



Autumn Rhythm (Number 30), Jackson Pollock, 1950

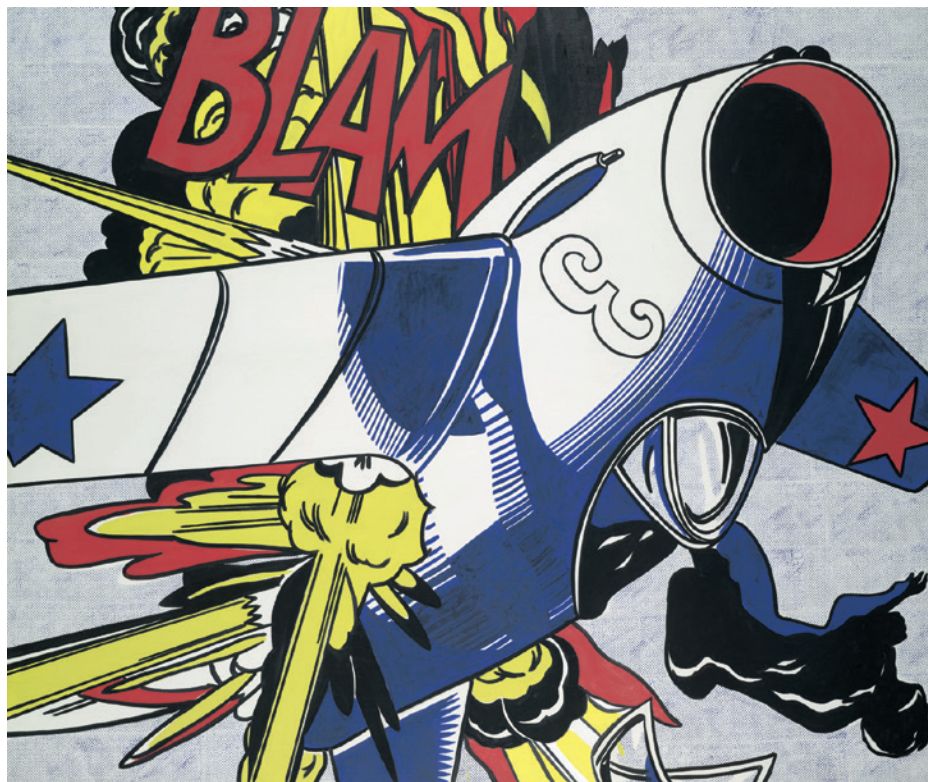
With Abstract Expressionism, the style of post–World War II American painting that had international impact, the canvas became less a surface upon which to represent than an arena in which to act. Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) was the most noteworthy of the so-called action painters. One of his favorite methods, working above a canvas stretched on the ground, dancing over and around it, dripping and swirling paint, was dramatic enough to be captured in photographs and film documentaries.



James Baldwin,
September 13, 1955, Carl Van Vechten

This portrait is one of a series that Van Vechten took of Baldwin using different backdrops, drapes, and lighting. The photographer captured many of the era's writers and artists in rich color images, working in the medium from 1939 until his death in 1964. This image juxtaposes Baldwin's thoughtful expression—he gazes to his left at something outside the frame—with the images of stylized white women on the poster behind him, whose gazes are similarly distant. All three faces are contemplative, even while they become subjects for the viewer's own contemplation. Baldwin commented throughout his life on what he called his “ugliness” and doodled fashionable white women's faces like those behind him on the backs of his earliest manuscripts. Even while he unpacked the racist norms of beauty in his writing, he thus remained in some ways

fascinated by those norms. Van Vechten, revealing Baldwin's classically symmetrical features and rich skin tones in contrast—and parallel—to the faces behind him, offered a different view—a view of Baldwin's beauty.



Blam, Roy Lichtenstein, 1962

Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) helped to launch the Pop Art movement. Lichtenstein used bold outlines, vivid colors, and the technique of Benday dots, popular in commercial printing, to simulate with painting the process of mechanical reproduction. This aesthetic clearly defied the expressionist practices of abstract painters like Jackson Pollock. The cartoon style of *Blam* (in fact, Lichtenstein took this image from a comic book) and its onomatopoeic lettering are typical of Lichtenstein's work. The literally explosive image—a fighter plane being blown apart in the air—also suggests the way in which Pop Art sought to explode boundaries between an original and a copy, a unique image and one that is reproduced, and between high and low culture more generally. Fiction writers like Donald Barthelme, poets like John Ashbery, and comic book artists like Art Spiegelman are all indebted in different ways to Pop Art.

Estate, Robert Rauschenberg, 1963

Few artworks reflect the social and aesthetic nature of their times as boldly as the combines and assemblages of Robert Rauschenberg (b. 1925). Self-consciousness about his medium combines with sociopolitical awareness in works that address both concerns and make them the viewers' own.

Estate employs brushwork, silk-screening, photography, and photocopying to interrogate its audience as well as itself. Most important, every image in this collage remains recognizable, even as the expressive manner of combination (including several brushstrokes and color actions worthy of Abstract Expressionism) emphasizes the artist's creative act.



Campbell's Soup 1 (Tomato),
Andy Warhol, 1968

For the Pop artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987), an object as banal as a Campbell's soup can could evoke the spirit of the American 1960s. While both representational and abstract painting had conventionally been dedicated to matters of great importance, whether in the subject portrayed or in the activity of putting paint to canvas, Warhol's soup can undercut the premises of both styles while commenting on the materialism underlying the business of producing and selling art. Creativity was now a matter of selection, in this case of lavishing the artist's considerable talent and technique on (and commanding a high price for) such an everyday object. From this decade onward, literary artists would find success by doing much the same thing.

*Earthrise and Lunar Horizon
from Apollo 8, 1968*

The photo of “Earthrise” over the lunar horizon was taken by the Apollo 8 crew, astronauts Frank Borman (b. 1928), James Lovell (b. 1928), and William Anders (b. 1933), who were the first humans to leave Earth’s orbit, entering into lunar orbit on Christmas Eve, 1968. The photograph showed the Earth for the first time as it appears from deep space. The philosopher Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition* (1958), anticipated the significance of this image when she wrote that a shift from seeing men and women as earthbound creatures to seeing them as dwellers of the universe would be a radical change in understanding the human condition, as revolutionary as the invention of the telescope.



The American Indian
Fritz Scholder, 1970

The American Indian by Fritz Scholder (1937–2005), a Luiseño Indian, belongs to a series of paintings that blew open the doors of “acceptable” Indian imagery and undermined clichés and stereotypes of the stoic “noble savage.” Rather than traditional Indian regalia, the figure wears a judicial robe fashioned from the American flag, as if to suggest that only being wrapped in the symbol of the colonists will certify him as “American.” But the whitened face and skeletal rendering of the figure’s mouth suggest what colonization cost him. The single feather in his hair, the necklace, and the tomahawk may suggest how the expectations of tourists also shape his depiction.

Untitled, Cindy Sherman, 1981

This photograph by the artist Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) is number 96 of her “Centerfold” series (1981). Like Sherman’s earlier, black-and-white “Film Stills,” this series consists of “self-portraits” in which the artist explores representations of women by dressing in a variety of costumes and adopting a variety of poses. Sherman’s role as both photographer and subject reverses the traditional power of the male gaze, and here she examines and subverts the objectified images of women displayed in magazine centerfolds. Rather than signaling availability, this cropped, color-saturated photograph is enigmatic. Sherman’s girlish clothing, evoking the 1950s, conceals more than it reveals, and she holds in her hand a largely unreadable scrap torn from a newspaper. Her gaze, vacant and interior, is also unreadable. Her distinctly unrevealing sweater and the flush on her face become part of the color pattern—oranges and browns forming a series of grids and checks—rather than erotic signs.



Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Maya Lin, 1982

Located on the mall in Washington, D.C., the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a 246-foot-long, v-shaped sunken wall of black granite. It is engraved with more than fifty-eight thousand names of those who died in the Vietnam conflict. The names are listed in chronological order, and to locate a particular name a visitor walks along the wall searching for it. The polished surface of the granite reflects the sky, the surrounding landscape, and the visitor. Considerable controversy attended the design, by the Chinese American architect Maya Lin (b. 1959), some objecting to its abstraction in place of the realistic statuary of most war memorials, and some finding it too somber. Lin has said she wanted a structure that would carve out a space for the public display of grief and loss, and the memorial has a powerful elegiac quality. Dedicated on Veterans Day, 1982, it has become the most widely visited monument in Washington.





Sonny's Quilt, Faith Ringgold, 1986

In *Sonny's Quilt*, an acrylic painting on canvas with a pieced fabric border, Faith Ringgold (b. 1930) unites two African American art forms: jazz and the quilt. This quilt depicts the jazz saxophonist Theodore Walter "Sonny" Rollins poised high on an imagined intersection of the Williamsburg Bridge, which runs across the quilt, and the Brooklyn Bridge, which recedes into the visual field of the quilt below him. Ringgold's depiction of the two bridges evokes the iconic status of the Brooklyn Bridge in American painting, photography, and literature, while honoring the fact that Rollins chose the Williamsburg Bridge as his favored place to practice.



After "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, *the Prologue*, Jeff Wall, 2000

Ralph Ellison's masterwork, the novel *Invisible Man*, has inspired several prominent photographers to enter its imaginative world. In the introduction to this volume, readers will find an image from Gordon Parks's photo essay on the novel, which appeared in *Life* magazine in 1952, a series that included an image based, like the one above, on the novel's famous scene of the unnamed protagonist in his basement apartment, flooded with the light of over a thousand bulbs. While Parks's photograph is abstract in composition, Jeff Wall creates an elaborately staged but naturalistic space for his version of the scene, directing attention away from the symbolic significance of the bulbs—the sense that no amount of light can make the protagonist socially visible as a human being. Instead, his back is turned to the viewer, and he is dwarfed by the textured clutter of his space.



*World Trade Center
Burning*, Peter Morgan,
September 11, 2001

“A screaming comes across the sky.” This opening sentence of Thomas Pynchon’s 1973 novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* had for decades impressed readers with the terrors of modern warfare, in which military technologies at the far edge of human inventiveness were turned against people at home. That Pynchon’s scene was London, under attack from German V-2 rockets near the end of World War II, may have allayed readers’ most personal fears. Yet on September 11, 2001, another such screaming awoke not just the United States but the whole world to the reality that wholesale destruction was an ever-present possibility. After half a century of Cold War rhetoric that had made such catastrophes unthinkable, the

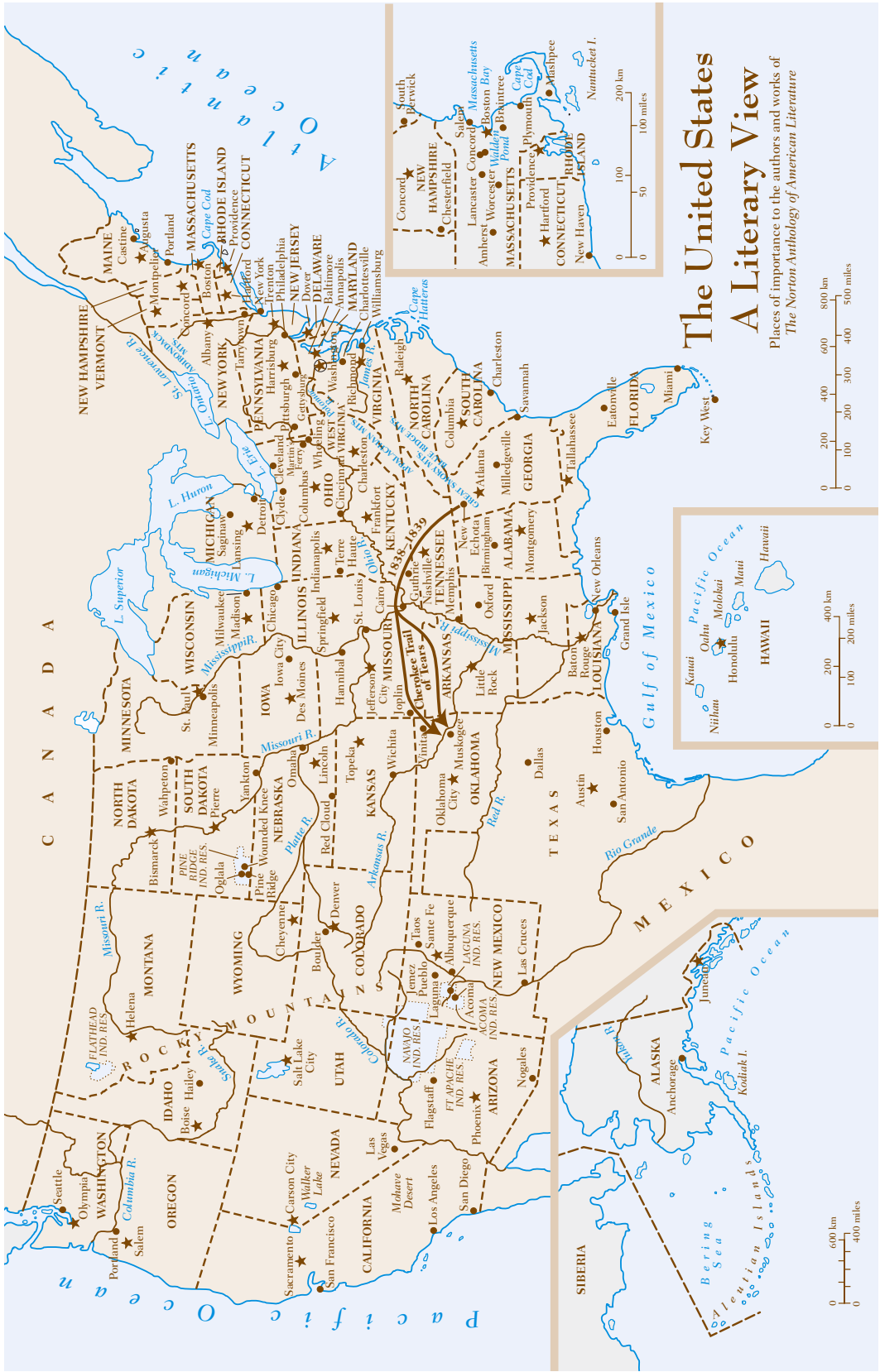
unthinkable happened. Two jet airliners were crashed into the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center in an event witnessed within minutes by television viewers all over the Earth. By the time the buildings collapsed, the whole world was watching. What in normal terms might be a line in a novel or a scene in a movie was now most horribly real.



Screenshot from *The Silent History*, by Eli Horowitz, Kevin Moffett, and Matthew Derby, with app design by Russell Quinn, 2012

The Silent History, the first novel built fully into a mobile app, was released in daily installments to subscribers in 2012 and was thereafter sold as a complete novel through the Apple App Store. A paper version was published in 2014. In the original app format, parts of the novel called “Field Reports” are available only in specific geographic locations tracked by a mobile device’s GPS. Horowitz’s vision was to create a novel you could “explore” in a physical sense, blending the imaginative world of the story with the reader’s presence in real-world locations. *The Silent History* demonstrates how formal innovations in contemporary literature arise as

traditional story-telling genres, such as the novel, migrate into ever-changing electronic media.



The United States A Literary View

Places of importance to the authors and works of
The Norton Anthology of American Literature

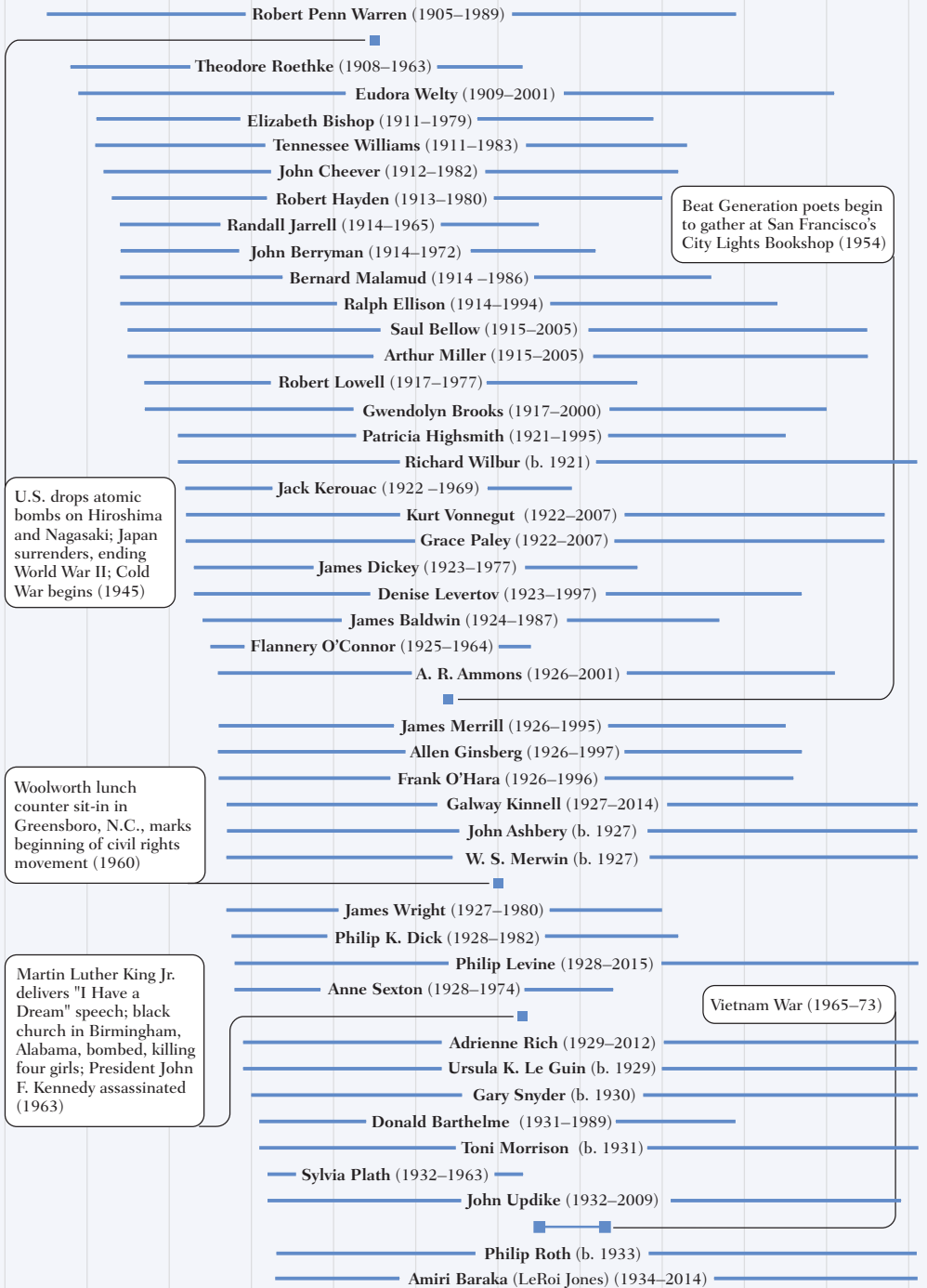
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American Literature since 1945

1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010



Beat Generation poets begin to gather at San Francisco's City Lights Bookshop (1954)

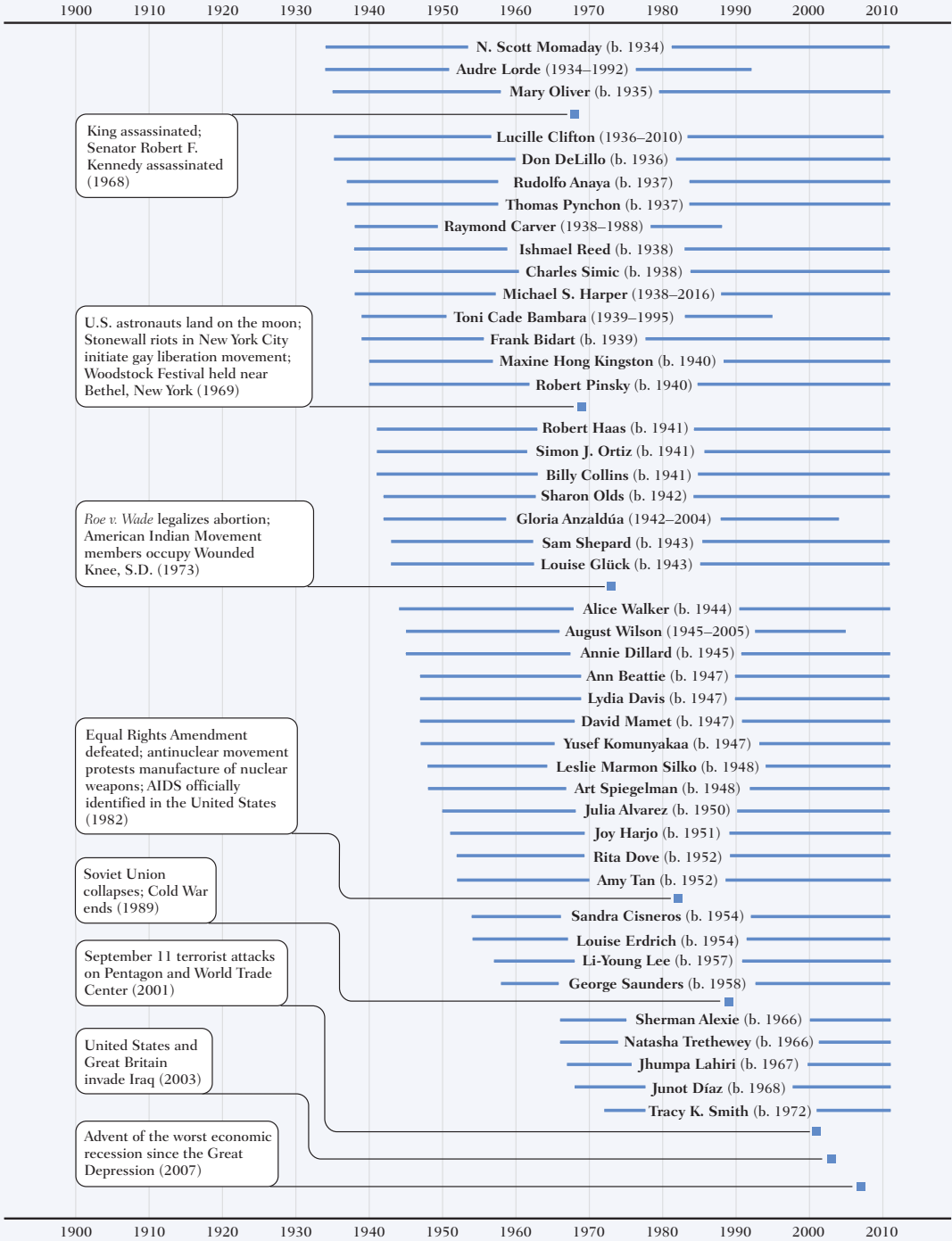
U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Japan surrenders, ending World War II; Cold War begins (1945)

Woolworth lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro, N.C., marks beginning of civil rights movement (1960)

Martin Luther King Jr. delivers "I Have a Dream" speech; black church in Birmingham, Alabama, bombed, killing four girls; President John F. Kennedy assassinated (1963)

Vietnam War (1965–73)

1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010



Additional Selections

from

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Shorter Ninth Edition

KATE CHOPIN

1850–1904

At the 'Cadian Ball¹

Bobinôt, that big, brown, good-natured Bobinôt, had no intention of going to the ball, even though he knew Calixta would be there. For what came of those balls but heartache, and a sickening disinclination for work the whole week through, till Saturday night came again and his tortures began afresh? Why could he not love Ozéina, who would marry him tomorrow; or Fronie, or any one of a dozen others, rather than that little Spanish vixen? Calixta's slender foot had never touched Cuban soil; but her mother's had, and the Spanish was in her blood all the same. For that reason the prairie people forgave her much that they would not have overlooked in their own daughters or sisters.

Her eyes,—Bobinôt thought of her eyes, and weakened,—the bluest, the drowsiest, most tantalizing that ever looked into a man's; he thought of her flaxen hair that kinked worse than a mulatto's close to her head; that broad, smiling mouth and tiptilted nose, that full figure; that voice like a rich contralto song, with cadences in it that must have been taught by Satan, for there was no one else to teach her tricks on that 'Cadian prairie. Bobinôt thought of them all as he plowed his rows of cane.

There had even been a breath of scandal whispered about her a year ago, when she went to Assumption,²—but why talk of it? No one did now. “C'est Espagnol, ça,”³ most of them said with lenient shoulder-shrugs. “Bon chien tient de race,”⁴ the old men mumbled over their pipes, stirred by recollections. Nothing was made of it, except that Fronie threw it up to Calixta when the two quarreled and fought on the church steps after mass one Sunday, about a lover. Calixta swore roundly in fine 'Cadian French and with true Spanish spirit, and slapped Fronie's face. Fronie had slapped her back; “Tiens, cocotte, va!”⁵ “Espèce de lionèse; prends ça, et ça!”⁶ till the curé himself was obliged to hasten and make peace between them. Bobinôt thought of it all, and would not go to the ball.

But in the afternoon, over at Friedheimer's store, where he was buying a trace-chain,⁷ he heard some one say that Alcée Laballière would be there. Then wild horses could not have kept him away. He knew how it would be—or rather he did not know how it would be—if the handsome young planter came over to the ball as he sometimes did. If Alcée happened to be in a serious mood, he might only go to the card-room and play a round or two; or he might stand out on the galleries talking crops and politics with the old

1. First published in *Two Tales* (October 1892); first published in book form in *Bayou Folk* (1894), the source of the text printed here.

2. I.e., Assumption Parish, Louisiana.
3. That's a Spaniard for you (French).

4. Just like her mother (French).

5. Listen, you flirt, get out of here! (French).

6. You bitch; take that and that! (French).

7. Equipment used to harness horses.

people. But there was no telling. A drink or two could put the devil in his head,—that was what Bobinôt said to himself, as he wiped the sweat from his brow with his red bandanna; a gleam from Calixta's eyes, a flash of her ankle, a twirl of her skirts could do the same. Yes, Bobinôt would go to the ball.

That was the year Alcée Laballière put nine hundred acres in rice. It was putting a good deal of money into the ground, but the returns promised to be glorious. Old Madame Laballière, sailing about the spacious galleries in her white *volante*,⁸ figured it all out in her head. Clarisse, her goddaughter, helped her a little, and together they built more air-castles than enough. Alcée worked like a mule that time; and if he did not kill himself, it was because his constitution was an iron one. It was an every-day affair for him to come in from the field well-nigh exhausted, and wet to the waist. He did not mind if there were visitors; he left them to his mother and Clarisse. There were often guests: young men and women who came up from the city, which was but a few hours away, to visit his beautiful kinswoman. She was worth going a good deal farther than that to see. Dainty as a lily; hardy as a sunflower; slim, tall, graceful, like one of the reeds that grew in the marsh. Cold and kind and cruel by turn, and everything that was aggravating to Alcée.

He would have liked to sweep the place of those visitors, often. Of the men, above all, with their ways and their manners; their swaying of fans like women, and dandling about hammocks. He could have pitched them over the levee into the river, if it hadn't meant murder. That was Alcée. But he must have been crazy the day he came in from the rice-field, and, toil-stained as he was, clasped Clarisse by the arms and panted a volley of hot, blistering love-words into her face. No man had ever spoken love to her like that.

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed, looking him full in the eyes, without a quiver. Alcée's hands dropped and his glance wavered before the chill of her calm, clear her eyes.

"*Par exemple!*"⁹ she muttered disdainfully, as she turned from him, deftly adjusting the careful toilet that he had so brutally disarranged.

That happened a day or two before the cyclone came that cut into the rice like fine steel. It was an awful thing, coming so swiftly, without a moment's warning in which to light a holy candle or set a piece of blessed palm burning. Old Madame wept openly and said her beads, just as her son Didier, the New Orleans one, would have done. If such a thing had happened to Alphonse, the Laballière planting cotton up in Natchitoches,¹ he would have raved and stormed like a second cyclone, and made his surroundings unbearable for a day or two. But Alcée took the misfortune differently. He looked ill and gray after it, and said nothing. His speechlessness was frightful. Clarisse's heart melted with tenderness; but when she offered her soft, purring words of condolence, he accepted them with mute indifference. Then she and her *nénaine*² wept afresh in each other's arms.

A night or two later, when Clarisse went to her window to kneel there in the moonlight and say her prayers before retiring, she saw that Bruce, Alcée's negro servant, had led his master's saddle-horse noiselessly along the edge of

8. A flowing garment.

9. For example (French, literal trans.); here, "Get a hold of yourself!"

1. Parish in northwest Louisiana.

2. Female attendant, in this case his mother.

the sword that bordered the gravel-path, and stood holding him near by. Presently, she heard Alcée quit his room, which was beneath her own, and traverse the lower portico. As he emerged from the shadow and crossed the strip of moonlight, she perceived that he carried a pair of well-filled saddle-bags which he at once flung across the animal's back. He then lost no time in mounting, and after a brief exchange of words with Bruce, went cantering away, taking no precaution to avoid the noisy gravel as the negro had done.

Clarisse had never suspected that it might be Alcée's custom to sally forth from the plantation secretly, and at such an hour; for it was nearly midnight. And had it not been for the telltale saddle-bags, she would only have crept to bed, to wonder, to fret and dream unpleasant dreams. But her impatience and anxiety would not be held in check. Hastily unbolting the shutters of her door that opened upon the gallery, she stepped outside and called softly to the old negro.

"Gre't Peter! Miss Clarisse. I was n' sho it was a ghos' o' w'at, stan'in' up dah, plumb in de night, dataway."

He mounted halfway up the long, broad flight of stairs. She was standing at the top.

"Bruce, w'ere has Monsieur Alcée gone?" she asked.

"W'y, he gone 'bout he business, I reckon," replied Bruce, striving to be non-committal at the outset.

"W'ere has Monsieour Alcée gone?" she reiterated, stamping her bare foot. "I won't stan' any nonsense or any lies; mine, Bruce."

"I don' ric'lic ez I eva tole you lie yit, Miss Clarisse. Mista Alcée, he all broke up, sho."

"Were—has—he gone? Ah, Sainte Vierge! faut de la patience! butor, va!"³

"W'en I was in he room, a-breshin' off he clo'es to-day," the darkey began, settling himself against the stair-rail, "he look dat speechless an' down, I say, 'you 'pear to me like some pussun w'at gwine have a spell o' sickness, Mista Alcée.' He say, 'You reckon?' 'I dat he git up, go look hisse'f stiddy in de glass. Den he go to de chimbly an' jerk up de quinine bottle an' po' a gre't hoss-dose on to he han'. An' he swalla dat mess in a wink, an' wash hit down wid a big dram o' w'iskey w'at he keep in he room, against he come all soppin' wet outen de fiel'.

"He 'lows, 'No, I ain' gwine be sick, Bruce.' Den he square off. He say, 'I kin mak out to stan' up an' gi' an' take wid any man I knows, lessen hit's John L. Sulvun.⁴ But w'en God A'mighty an' a 'oman jines fo'ces agin me, dat's one too many fur me.' I tell 'im, 'Jis so, whils' I 'se makin' out to bresh a spot off w'at ain' dah, on he coat colla. I tell 'im, 'You wants li'le res', suh.' He say, 'No, I wants li'le fling; dat w'at I wants; an' I gwine git it. Pitch me a fis'ful o' clo'es in dem 'ar saddle-bags.' Dat w'at he say. Don't you bodda, missy. He jis' gone a-caperin' yonda to de Cajun ball. Uh—uh—de skeeters is fair' a-swarmin' like bees roun' yo' foots!"

The mosquitoes were indeed attacking Clarisse's white feet savagely. She had unconsciously been alternately rubbing one foot over the other during the darkey's recital.

3. Ah, Blessed Virgin! Give me patience! Lout, get out of here! (French).

4. American heavyweight boxing champion (1855–1918).

"The 'Cadian ball," she repeated contemptuously. "Humph! *Par exemple!*⁵ Nice conduc' for a Laballière. An' he needs a saddle-bag, fill' with clothes, to go to the 'Cadian ball!"

"Oh, Miss Clarisse; you go on to bed, chile; git yo' soun' sleep. He 'low he come back in couple weeks o' so. I kiarn be repeatin' lot o' truck w'at young mans say, out heah face o' young gal."

Clarisse said no more, but turned and abruptly reentered the house.

"You done talk too much wid yo' mouf a'ready, you ole fool nigga, you," muttered Bruce to himself as he walked away.

Alcée reached the ball very late, of course—too late for the chicken gumbo which had been served at midnight.

The big, low-ceiled room—they called it a hall—was packed with men and women dancing to the music of three fiddles. There were broad galleries all around it. There was a room at one side where sober-faced men were playing cards. Another, in which babies were sleeping, was called *le parc aux petits*.⁶ Any one who is white may go to a 'Cadian ball, but he must pay for his lemonade, his coffee and chicken gumbo. And he must behave himself like a 'Cadian. Grosbœuf was giving this ball. He had been giving them since he was a young man, and he was a middle-aged one, now. In that time he could recall but one disturbance, and that was caused by American railroaders, who were not in touch with their surroundings and had no business there. "Ces maudits gens du raiderode,"⁷ Grosbœuf called them.

Alcée Laballière's presence at the ball caused a flutter even among the men, who could not but admire his "nerve" after such misfortune befalling him. To be sure, they knew the Laballières were rich—that there were resources East, and more again in the city. But they felt it took a *brave homme*⁸ to stand a blow like that philosophically. One old gentleman, who was in the habit of reading a Paris newspaper and knew things, chuckled gleefully to everybody that Alcée's conduct was altogether *chic, mais chic*. That he had more *panache*⁹ than Boulanger. Well, perhaps he had.

But what he did not show outwardly was that he was in a mood for ugly things to-night. Poor Bobinôt alone felt it vaguely. He discerned a gleam of it in Alcée's handsome eyes, as the young planter stood in the doorway, looking with rather feverish glance upon the assembly, while he laughed and talked with a 'Cadian farmer who was beside him.

Bobinôt himself was dull-looking and clumsy. Most of the men were. But the young women were very beautiful. The eyes that glanced into Alcée's as they passed him were big, dark, soft as those of the young heifers standing out in the cool prairie grass.

But the belle was Calixta. Her white dress was not nearly so handsome or well made as Fronie's (she and Fronie had quite forgotten the battle on the church steps, and were friends again), nor were her slippers so stylish as those of Ozéina; and she fanned herself with a handkerchief, since she had broken her red fan at the last ball, and her aunts and uncles were not willing to give her another. But all the men agreed she was at her best to-night. Such animation! and abandon! such flashes of wit!

5. Here, "Quite an example!"

6. Playroom (French).

7. Those cursed railroad people (French).

8. Sturdy fellow (French).

9. Style.

“Hé, Bobinôt! Mais w’at’s the matta? W’at you standin’ *planté là*¹ like ole Ma’ame Tina’s cow in the bog, you!”

That was good. That was an excellent thrust at Bobinôt, who had forgotten the figure² of the dance with his mind bent on other things, and it started a clamor of laughter at his expense. He joined good-naturedly. It was better to receive even such notice as that from Calixta than none at all. But Madame Suzonne, sitting in a corner, whispered to her neighbor that if Ozéina were to conduct herself in a like manner, she should immediately be taken out to the mule-cart and driven home. The women did not always approve of Calixta.

Now and then were short lulls in the dance, when couples flocked out upon the galleries for a brief respite and fresh air. The moon had gone down pale in the west, and in the east was yet no promise of day. After such an interval, when the dancers again assembled to resume the interrupted quadrille, Calixta was not among them.

She was sitting upon a bench out in the shadow, with Alcée beside her. They were acting like fools. He had attempted to take a little gold ring from her finger; just for the fun of it, for there was nothing he could have done with the ring but replace it again. But she clinched her hand tight. He pretended that it was a very difficult matter to open it. Then he kept the hand in his. They seemed to forget about it. He played with her earring, a thin crescent of gold hanging from her small brown ear. He caught a wisp of the kinky hair that had escaped its fastening, and rubbed the ends of it against his shaven cheek.

“You know, last year in Assumption, Calixta?” They belonged to the younger generation, so preferred to speak English.

“Don’t come say Assumption to me, M’sieur Alcée. I done yeard Assumption till I’m plumb sick.”

“Yes, I know. The idiots! Because you were in Assumption, and I happened to go to Assumption, they must have it that we went together. But it was nice—*hein*,³ Calixta?—in Assumption?”

They saw Bobinôt emerge from the hall and stand a moment outside the lighted doorway, peering uneasily and searchingly into the darkness. He did not see them, and went slowly back.

“There is Bobinôt looking for you. You are going to set poor Bobinôt crazy. You’ll marry him some day; *hein*, Calixta?”

“I don’t say no, me,” she replied, striving to withdraw her hand, which he held more firmly for the attempt.

“But come, Calixta; you know you said you would go back to Assumption, just to spite them.”

“No, I neva said that, me. You mus’ dreamt that.”

“Oh, I thought you did. You know I’m going down to the city.”

“W’en?”

“To-night.”

“Betta make has’e, then; it’s mos’ day.”

“Well, to-morrow’ll do.”

“W’at you goin’ do, yonda?”

“I don’t know. Drown myself in the lake, maybe; unless you go down there to visit your uncle.”

1. Rooted there (French).

2. The pattern of steps.

3. Huh.

Calixta's senses were reeling; and they well-nigh left her when she felt Alcée's lips brush her ear like the touch of a rose.

"Mista Alcée! Is dat Mista Alcée?" the thick voice of a negro was asking; he stood on the ground, holding to the banister-rails near which the couple sat.

"W'at do you want now?" cried Alcée impatiently. "Can't I have a moment of peace?"

"I ben huntin' you high an' low, suh," answered the man. "Dey—dey some one in de road, onda de mulbare-tree, want see you a minute."

"I wouldn't go out to the road to see the Angel Gabriel. And if you come back here with any more talk, I'll have to break your neck." The negro turned mumbling away.

Alcée and Calixta laughed softly about it. Her boisterousness was all gone. They talked low, and laughed softly, as lovers do.

"Alcée! Alcée Laballière!"

It was not the negro's voice this time; but one that went through Alcée's body like an electric shock, bringing him to his feet.

Clarisse was standing there in her riding-habit, where the negro had stood. For an instant confusion reigned in Alcée's thoughts, as with one who awakes suddenly from a dream. But he felt that something of serious import had brought his cousin to the ball in the dead of night.

"W'at does this mean, Clarisse?" he asked.

"It means something has happen' at home. You mus' come."

"Happened to maman?" he questioned, in alarm.

"No: nénaine is well, and asleep. It is something else. Not to frighten you. But you mus' come. Come with me, Alcée."

There was no need for the imploring note. He would have followed the voice anywhere.

She had now recognized the girl sitting back on the bench.

"Ah, c'est vous, Calixta? Comment ça va, mon enfant?"⁴

"Tcha va b'en; et vous, mam'zèlle?"⁵

Alcée swung himself over the low rail and started to follow Clarisse, without a word, without a glance back at the girl. He had forgotten he was leaving her there. But Clarisse whispered something to him, and he turned back to say "Good-night, Calixta," and offer his hand to press through the railing. She pretended not to see it.

"How come that? You settin' yere by yo'se'f, Calixta?" It was Bobinôt who had found her there alone. The dancers had not yet come out. She looked ghastly in the faint, gray light struggling out of the east.

"Yes, that's me. Go yonda in the *parc aux petits* an' ask Aunt Olisse fu' my hat. She knows w'ere 't is. I want to go home, me."

"How you came?"

"I come afoot, with the Cateaus. But I'm goin' now. I ent goin' wait fu' 'em. I'm plumb wo' out, me."

"Kin I go with you, Calixta?"

"I don' care."

They went together across the open prairie and along the edge of the fields, stumbling in the uncertain light. He told her to lift her dress that was getting

4. Ah, is it you, Calixta? How's it going my little one? (French).

5. Everything's fine; and with you, Miss? (French).

wet and bedraggled; for she was pulling at the weeds and grasses with her hands.

"I don't care; it's got to go in the tub, anyway. You been sayin' all along you want to marry me, Bobinôt. Well, if you want, yet, I don' care, me."

The glow of a sudden and overwhelming happiness shone out in the brown, rugged face of the young Acadian. He could not speak, for very joy. It choked him.

"Oh well, if you don' want," snapped Calixta, flippantly, pretending to be piqued at his silence.

"*Bon Dieu!*⁶ You know that makes me crazy, w'at you sayin'. You mean that, Calixta? You ent goin' turn roun' agin?"

"I neva tole you that much *yet*, Bobinôt. I mean that. *Tiens,*"⁷ and she held out her hand in the business-like manner of a man who clinches a bargain with a hand-clasp. Bobinôt grew bold with happiness and asked Calixta to kiss him. She turned her face, that was almost ugly after the night's dissipation, and looked steadily into his.

"I don' want to kiss you, Bobinôt," she said, turning away again, "not today. Some other time. *Bonté divine!*⁸ ent you satisfy, *yet!*"

"Oh, I'm satisfy, Calixta," he said.

Riding through a patch of wood, Clarisse's saddle became ungirted, and she and Alcée dismounted to readjust it.

For the twentieth time he asked her what had happened at home.

"But, Clarisse, w'at is it? Is it a misfortune?"

"Ah Dieu sait!⁹ It's only something that happen' to me."

"To you!"

"I saw you go away las' night, Alcée, with those saddle-bags," she said, haltingly, striving to arrange something about the saddle, "an' I made Bruce tell me. He said you had gone to the ball, an' wouldn' be home for weeks an' weeks. I thought, Alcée—maybe you were going to—to Assumption. I got wild. An' then I knew if you didn't come back, *now*, tonight, I couldn't stan' it,—again."

She had her face hidden in her arm that she was resting against the saddle when she said that.

He began to wonder if this meant love. But she had to tell him so, before he believed it. And when she told him, he thought the face of the Universe was changed—just like Bobinôt. Was it last week the cyclone had well-nigh ruined him? The cyclone seemed a huge joke, now. It was he, then, who, an hour ago was kissing little Calixta's ear and whispering nonsense into it. Calixta was like a myth, now. The one, only, great reality in the world was Clarisse standing before him, telling him that she loved him.

In the distance they heard the rapid discharge of pistol-shots; but it did not disturb them. They knew it was only the negro musicians who had gone into the yard to fire their pistols into the air, as the custom is, and to announce "*le bal est fini.*"¹¹

1892, 1894

6. Good God! (French).

7. Well (French).

8. Goodness gracious! (French).

9. God knows! (French).

1. The Ball is over (Fren).

WILLA CATHER
1873–1947

Neighbour Rosicky

I

When Doctor Burleigh told neighbour Rosicky he had a bad heart, Rosicky protested.

“So? No, I guess my heart was always pretty good. I got a little asthma, maybe. Just a awful short breath when I was pitchin’ hay last summer, dat’s all.”

“Well, now, Rosicky, if you know more about it than I do, what did you come to me for? It’s your heart that makes you short of breath, I tell you. You’re sixty-five years old, and you’ve always worked hard, and your heart’s tired. You’ve got to be careful from now on, and you can’t do heavy work any more. You’ve got five boys at home to do it for you.”

The old farmer looked up at the Doctor with a gleam of amusement in his queer triangular-shaped eyes. His eyes were large and lively, but the lids were caught up in the middle in a curious way, so that they formed a triangle. He did not look like a sick man. His brown face was creased but not wrinkled, he had a ruddy colour in his smooth-shaven cheeks and in his lips, under his long brown moustache. His hair was thin and ragged around his ears, but very little grey. His forehead, naturally high and crossed by deep parallel lines, now ran all the way up to his pointed crown. Rosicky’s face had the habit of looking interested,—suggested a contented disposition and a reflective quality that was gay rather than grave. This gave him a certain detachment, the easy manner of an onlooker and observer.

“Well, I guess you ain’t got no pills fur a bad heart, Doctor Ed. I guess the only thing is fur me to git me a new one.”

Doctor Burleigh swung round in his desk-chair and frowned at the old farmer.

“I think if I were you I’d take a little care of the old one, Rosicky.”

Rosicky shrugged. “Maybe I don’t know how. I expect you mean fur me not to drink my coffee no more.”

“I wouldn’t, in your place. But you’ll do as you choose about that. I’ve never yet been able to separate a Bohemian¹ from his coffee or his pipe. I’ve quit trying. But the sure thing is you’ve got to cut out farm work. You can feed the stock and do chores about the barn, but you can’t do anything in the fields that makes you short of breath.”

“How about shelling corn?”

“Of course not!”

Rosicky considered with puckered brows.

1. Native of Bohemia, in the Czech Republic.

"I can't make my heart go no longer'n it wants to, can I, Doctor Ed?"

"I think it's good for five or six years yet, maybe more, if you'll take the strain off it. Sit around the house and help Mary. If I had a good wife like yours, I'd want to stay around the house."

His patient chuckled. "It ain't no place fur a man. I don't like no old man hanging round the kitchen too much. An' my wife, she's a awful hard worker her own self."

"That's it; you can help her a little. My Lord, Rosicky, you are one of the few men I know who has a family he can get some comfort out of; happy dispositions, never quarrel among themselves, and they treat you right. I want to see you live a few years and enjoy them."

"Oh, they're good kids, all right," Rosicky assented.

The Doctor wrote him a prescription and asked him how his oldest son, Rudolph, who had married in the spring, was getting on. Rudolph had struck out for himself, on rented land. "And how's Polly? I was afraid Mary mightn't like an American daughter-in-law, but it seems to be working out all right."

"Yes, she's a fine girl. Dat widder woman bring her daughters up very nice. Polly got lots of spunk, an' she got some style, too. Da's nice, for young folks to have some style." Rosicky inclined his head gallantly. His voice and his twinkly smile were an affectionate compliment to his daughter-in-law.

"It looks like a storm, and you'd better be getting home before it comes. In town in the car?" Doctor Burleigh rose.

"No, I'm in de wagon. When you got five boys, you ain't got much chance to ride round in de Ford. I ain't much for cars, noway."

"Well, it's a good road out to your place; but I don't want you bumping around in a wagon much. And never again on a hay-rake, remember!"

Rosicky placed the Doctor's fee delicately behind the desk-telephone, looking the other way, as if this were an absent-minded gesture. He put on his plush cap and his corduroy jacket with a sheepskin collar, and went out.

The Doctor picked up his stethoscope and frowned at it as if he were seriously annoyed with the instrument. He wished it had been telling tales about some other man's heart, some old man who didn't look the Doctor in the eye so knowingly, or hold out such a warm brown hand when he said good-bye. Doctor Burleigh had been a poor boy in the country before he went away to medical school; he had known Rosicky almost ever since he could remember, and he had a deep affection for Mrs. Rosicky.

Only last winter he had had such a good breakfast at Rosicky's, and that when he needed it. He had been out all night on a long, hard confinement case at Tom Marshall's—a big rich farm where there was plenty of stock and plenty of feed and a great deal of expensive farm machinery of the newest model, and no comfort whatever. The woman had too many children and too much work, and she was no manager. When the baby was born at last, and handed over to the assisting neighbour woman, and the mother was properly attended to, Burleigh refused any breakfast in that slovenly house, and drove his buggy—the snow was too deep for a car—eight miles to Anton Rosicky's place. He didn't know another farm-house where a man could get such a warm welcome, and such good strong coffee with rich cream. No wonder the old chap didn't want to give up his coffee!

He had driven in just when the boys had come back from the barn and were washing up for breakfast. The long table, covered with a bright oilcloth, was set out with dishes waiting for them, and the warm kitchen was full of the smell of coffee and hot biscuit and sausage. Five big handsome boys, running from twenty to twelve, all with what Burleigh called natural good manners—they hadn't a bit of the painful self-consciousness he himself had to struggle with when he was a lad. One ran to put his horse away, another helped him off with his fur coat and hung it up, and Josephine, the youngest child and the only daughter, quickly set another place under her mother's direction.

With Mary, to feed creatures was the natural expression of affection—her chickens, the calves, her big hungry boys. It was a rare pleasure to feed a young man whom she seldom saw and of whom she was as proud as if he belonged to her. Some country housekeepers would have stopped to spread a white cloth over the oilcloth, to change the thick cups and plates for their best china, and the wooden-handled knives for plated ones. But not Mary.

"You must take us as you find us, Doctor Ed. I'd be glad to put out my good things for you if you was expected, but I'm glad to get you any way at all."

He knew she was glad—she threw back her head and spoke out as if she were announcing him to the whole prairie. Rosicky hadn't said anything at all; he merely smiled his twinkling smile, put some more coal on the fire, and went into his own room to pour the Doctor a little drink in a medicine glass. When they were all seated, he watched his wife's face from his end of the table and spoke to her in Czech. Then, with the instinct of politeness which seldom failed him, he turned to the doctor and said slyly: "I was just tellin' her not to ask you no questions about Mrs. Marshall till you eat some breakfast. My wife, she's terrible fur to ask questions."

The boys laughed, and so did Mary. She watched the Doctor devour her biscuit and sausage, too much excited to eat anything herself. She drank her coffee and sat taking in everything about her visitor. She had known him when he was a poor country boy, and was boastfully proud of his success, always saying: "What do people go to Omaha for, to see a doctor, when we got the best one in the State right here?" If Mary liked people at all, she felt physical pleasure in the sight of them, personal exultation in any good fortune that came to them. Burleigh didn't know many women like that, but he knew she was like that.

When his hunger was satisfied, he did, of course, have to tell them about Mrs. Marshall, and he noticed what a friendly interest the boys took in the matter.

Rudolph, the oldest one (he was still living at home then), said: "The last time I was over there, she was lifting them big heavy milk-cans, and I knew she oughtn't to be doing it."

"Yes, Rudolph told me about that when he come home, and I said it wasn't right," Mary put in warmly. "It was all right for me to do them things up to the last, for I was terrible strong, but that woman's weakly. And do you think she'll be able to nurse it, Ed?" She sometimes forgot to give him the title she was so proud of. "And to think of your being up all night and then not able to get a decent breakfast! I don't know what's the matter with such people."

"Why, Mother," said one of the boys, "if Doctor Ed had got breakfast there, we wouldn't have him here. So you ought to be glad."

"He knows I'm glad to have him, John, any time. But I'm sorry for that poor woman, how bad she'll feel the Doctor had to go away in the cold without his breakfast."

"I wish I had been in practice when these were getting born." The Doctor looked down the row of close-clipped heads. "I missed some good breakfasts by not being."

The boys began to laugh at their mother because she flushed so red, but she stood her ground and threw up her head. "I don't care, you wouldn't have got away from this house without breakfast. No doctor ever did. I'd have had something ready fixed that Anton could warm up for you."

The boys laughed harder than ever, and exclaimed at her: "I'll bet you would!" "She would, that!"

"Father, did you get breakfast for the Doctor when we were born?"

"Yes, and he used to bring me my breakfast, too, mighty nice. I was always awful hungry!" Mary admitted with a guilty laugh.

While the boys were getting the Doctor's horse, he went to the window to examine the house plants. "What do you do to your geraniums to keep them blooming all winter, Mary? I never pass this house that from the road I don't see your windows full of flowers."

She snapped off a dark red one, and a ruffled new green leaf, and put them in his buttonhole. "There, that looks better. You look too solemn for a young man, Ed. Why don't you git married? I'm worried about you. Settin' at breakfast, I looked at you real hard, and I seen you've got some grey hairs already."

"Oh, yes! They're coming. Maybe they'd come faster if I married."

"Don't talk so. You'll ruin your health eating at the hotel. I could send your wife a nice loaf of nut bread, if you only had one. I don't like to see a young man getting grey. I'll tell you something, Ed; you make some strong black tea and keep it handy in a bowl, and every morning just brush it into your hair, an' it'll keep the grey from showin' much. That's the way I do!"

Sometimes the Doctor heard the gossipers in the drug-store wondering why Rosicky didn't get on faster. He was industrious, and so were his boys, but they were rather free and easy, weren't pushers, and they didn't always show good judgment. They were comfortable, they were out of debt, but they didn't get much ahead. Maybe, Doctor Burleigh reflected, people as generous and warm-hearted and affectionate as the Rosickys never got ahead much; maybe you couldn't enjoy your life and put it into the bank, too.

II

When Rosicky left Doctor Burleigh's office, he went into the farm-implement store to light his pipe and put on his glasses and read over the list Mary had given him. Then he went into the general merchandise place next door and stood about until the pretty girl with the plucked eyebrows, who always waited on him, was free. Those eyebrows, two thin India-ink strokes, amused him, because he remembered how they used to be. Rosicky always prolonged

his shopping by a little joking; the girl knew the old fellow admired her, and she liked to chaff with him.

"Seems to me about every other week you buy ticking, Mr. Rosicky, and always the best quality," she remarked as she measured off the heavy bolt with red stripes.

"You see, my wife is always makin' goose-fedder pillows, an' de thin stuff don't hold in dem little down-fedders."

"You must have lots of pillows at your home."

"Sure. She makes quilts of dem, too. We sleeps easy. Now she's makin' a fedder quilt for my son's wife. You know Polly, that married my Rudolph. How much my bill, Miss Pearl?"

"Eight eighty-five."

"Chust make it nine, and put in some candy fur de women."

"As usual. I never did see a man buy so much candy for his wife. First thing you know, she'll be getting too fat."

"I'd like that. I ain't much fur all dem slim women like what de style is now."

"That's one for me, I suppose, Mr. Bohunk!"² Pearl sniffed and elevated her India-ink strokes.

When Rosicky went out to his wagon, it was beginning to snow,—the first snow of the season, and he was glad to see it. He rattled out of town and along the highway through a wonderfully rich stretch of country, the finest farms in the county. He admired this High Prairie, as it was called, and always liked to drive through it. His own place lay in a rougher territory, where there was some clay in the soil and it was not so productive. When he bought his land, he hadn't the money to buy on High Prairie; so he told his boys, when they grumbled, that if their land hadn't some clay in it, they wouldn't own it at all. All the same, he enjoyed looking at these fine farms, as he enjoyed looking at a prize bull.

After he had gone eight miles, he came to the graveyard, which lay just at the edge of his own hay-land. There he stopped his horses and sat still on his wagon seat, looking about at the snowfall. Over yonder on the hill he could see his own house, crouching low, with the clump of orchard behind and the windmill before, and all down the gentle hill-slope the rows of pale gold cornstalks stood out against the white field. The snow was falling over the cornfield and the pasture and the hay-land, steadily, with very little wind—a nice dry snow. The graveyard had only a light wire fence about it and was all overgrown with long red grass. The fine snow, settling into this red grass and upon the few little evergreens and the headstones, looked very pretty.

It was a nice graveyard, Rosicky reflected, sort of snug and homelike, not cramped or mournful,—a big sweep all round it. A man could lie down in the long grass and see the complete arch of the sky over him, hear the wagons go by; in summer the mowing-machine rattled right up to the wire fence. And it was so near home. Over there across the cornstalks his own roof and windmill looked so good to him that he promised himself to mind the Doctor and take care of himself. He was awful fond of his place, he admitted. He wasn't anxious to leave it. And it was a comfort to think that he would never have to go farther than the edge of his own hayfield. The snow, falling over his barn-

2. Bohemian (slang); here used affectionately.

yard and the graveyard, seemed to draw things together like. And they were all old neighbours in the graveyard, most of them friends; there was nothing to feel awkward or embarrassed about. Embarrassment was the most disagreeable feeling Rosicky knew. He didn't often have it,—only with certain people whom he didn't understand at all.

Well, it was a nice snowstorm; a fine sight to see the snow falling so quietly and graciously over so much open country. On his cap and shoulders, on the horses' backs and manes, light, delicate, mysterious it fell; and with it a dry cool fragrance was released into the air. It meant rest for vegetation and men and beasts, for the ground itself; a season of long nights for sleep, leisurely breakfasts, peace by the fire. This and much more went through Rosicky's mind, but he merely told himself that winter was coming, clucked to his horses, and drove on.

When he reached home, John, the youngest boy, ran out to put away his team for him, and he met Mary coming up from the outside cellar with her apron full of carrots. They went into the house together. On the table, covered with oilcloth figured with clusters of blue grapes, a place was set, and he smelled hot coffee-cake of some kind. Anton never lunched in town; he thought that extravagant, and anyhow he didn't like the food. So Mary always had something ready for him when he got home.

After he was settled in his chair, stirring his coffee in a big cup, Mary took out of the oven a pan of *kolache*³ stuffed with apricots, examined them anxiously to see whether they had got too dry, put them beside his plate, and then sat down opposite him.

Rosicky asked her in Czech if she wasn't going to have any coffee.

She replied in English, as being somehow the right language for transacting business: "Now what did Doctor Ed say, Anton? You tell me just what."

"He said I was to tell you some compliments, but I forgot 'em." Rosicky's eyes twinkled.

"About you, I mean. What did he say about your asthma?"

"He says I ain't got no asthma." Rosicky took one of the little rolls in his broad brown fingers. The thickened nail of his right thumb told the story of his past.

"Well, what is the matter? And don't try to put me off."

"He don't say nothing much, only I'm a little older, and my heart ain't so good like it used to be."

Mary started and brushed her hair back from her temples with both hands as if she were a little out of her mind. From the way she glared, she might have been in a rage with him.

"He says there's something the matter with your heart? Doctor Ed says so?"

"Now don't yell at me like I was a hog in de garden, Mary. You know I always did like to hear a woman talk soft. He didn't say anything de matter wid my heart, only it ain't so young like it used to be, an' he tell me not to pitch hay or run de corn-sheller."

Mary wanted to jump up, but she sat still. She admired the way he never under any circumstances raised his voice or spoke roughly. He was city-bred, and she was country-bred; she often said she wanted her boys to have their papa's nice ways.

3. Or kolacky, a sweet bun with fruit filling.

“You never have no pain there, do you? It’s your breathing and your stomach that’s been wrong. I wouldn’t believe nobody but Doctor Ed about it. I guess I’ll go see him myself. Didn’t he give you no advice?”

“Chust to take it easy like, an’ stay round de house dis winter. I guess you got some carpenter work for me to do. I kin make some new shelves for you, and I want dis long time to build a closet in de boys’ room and make dem two little fellers keep dere clo’es hung up.”

Rosicky drank his coffee from time to time, while he considered. His moustache was of the soft long variety and came down over his mouth like the teeth of a buggy-rake over a bundle of hay. Each time he put down his cup, he ran his blue handkerchief over his lips. When he took a drink of water, he managed very neatly with the back of his hand.

Mary sat watching him intently, trying to find any change in his face. It is hard to see anyone who has become like your own body to you. Yes, his hair had got thin, and his high forehead had deep lines running from left to right. But his neck, always clean-shaved except in the busiest seasons, was not loose or baggy. It was burned a dark reddish brown, and there were deep creases in it, but it looked firm and full of blood. His cheeks had a good colour. On either side of his mouth there was a half-moon down the length of his cheek, not wrinkles, but two lines that had come there from his habitual expression. He was shorter and broader than when she married him; his back had grown broad and curved, a good deal like the shell on an old turtle, and his arms and legs were short.

He was fifteen years older than Mary, but she had hardly ever thought about it before. He was her man, and the kind of man she liked. She was rough, and he was gentle—city-bred, as she always said. They had been shipmates on a rough voyage and had stood by each other in trying times. Life had gone well with them because, at bottom, they had the same ideas about life. They agreed, without discussion, as to what was most important and what was secondary. They didn’t often exchange opinions, even in Czech—it was as if they had thought the same thought together. A good deal had to be sacrificed and thrown overboard in a hard life like theirs, and they had never disagreed as to the things that could go. It had been a hard life, and a soft life, too. There wasn’t anything brutal in the short, broad-backed man with the three-cornered eyes and the forehead that went on to the top of his skull. He was a city man, a gentle man, and though he had married a rough farm girl, he had never touched her without gentleness.

They had been at one accord not to hurry through life, not to be always skimping and saving. They saw their neighbours buy more land and feed more stock than they did, without discontent. Once when the creamery agent came to the Rosickys to persuade them to sell him their cream, he told them how much money the Fasslers, their nearest neighbours, had made on their cream last year.

“Yes,” said Mary, “and look at them Fassler children! Pale, pinched little things, they look like skimmed milk. I had rather put some colour into my children’s faces than put money into the bank.”

The agent shrugged and turned to Anton.

“I guess we’ll do like she says,” said Rosicky.

III

Mary very soon got into town to see Doctor Ed, and then she had a talk with her boys and set a guard over Rosicky. Even John, the youngest, had his father on his mind. If Rosicky went to throw hay down from the loft, one of the boys ran up the ladder and took the fork from him. He sometimes complained that though he was getting to be an old man, he wasn't an old woman yet.

That winter he stayed in the house in the afternoons and carpentered, or sat in the chair between the window full of plants and the wooden bench where the two pails of drinking-water stood. This spot was called "Father's corner," though it was not a corner at all. He had a shelf there, where he kept his Bohemian papers and his pipes and tobacco, and his shears and needles and thread and tailor's thimble. Having been a tailor in his youth, he couldn't bear to see a woman patching at his clothes, or at the boys'. He liked tailoring, and always patched all the overalls and jackets and work shirts. Occasionally he made over a pair of pants one of the older boys had outgrown, for the little fellow.

While he sewed, he let his mind run back over his life. He had a good deal to remember, really; life in three countries. The only part of his youth he didn't like to remember was the two years he had spent in London, in Cheapside, working for a German tailor who was wretchedly poor. Those days, when he was nearly always hungry, when his clothes were dropping off him for dirt, and the sound of a strange language kept him in continual bewilderment, had left a sore spot in his mind that wouldn't bear touching.

He was twenty when he landed at Castle Garden in New York, and he had a protector who got him work in a tailor shop in Vesey Street, down near the Washington Market. He looked upon that part of his life as very happy. He became a good workman, he was industrious, and his wages were increased from time to time. He minded his own business and envied nobody's good fortune. He went to night school and learned to read English. He often did overtime work and was well paid for it, but somehow he never saved anything. He couldn't refuse a loan to a friend, and he was self-indulgent. He liked a good dinner, and a little went for beer, a little for tobacco; a good deal went to the girls. He often stood through an opera on Saturday nights; he could get standing-room for a dollar. Those were the great days of opera in New York, and it gave a fellow something to think about for the rest of the week. Rosicky had a quick ear, and a childish love of all the stage splendour; the scenery, the costumes, the ballet. He usually went with a chum, and after the performance they had beer and maybe some oysters somewhere. It was a fine life; for the first five years or so it satisfied him completely. He was never hungry or cold or dirty, and everything amused him: a fire, a dog fight, a parade, a storm, a ferry ride. He thought New York the finest, richest, friendliest city in the world.

Moreover, he had what he called a happy home life. Very near the tailor shop was a small furniture-factory, where an old Austrian, Loeffler, employed a few skilled men and made unusual furniture, most of it to order, for the rich German housewives uptown. The top floor of Loeffler's five-storey factory was a loft, where he kept his choice lumber and stored the old pieces of furniture left on his hands. One of the young workmen he

employed was a Czech, and he and Rosicky became fast friends. They persuaded Loeffler to let them have a sleeping-room in one corner of the loft. They bought good beds and bedding and had their pick of the furniture kept up there. The loft was low-pitched, but light and airy, full of windows, and good-smelling by reason of the fine lumber put up there to season. Old Loeffler used to go down to the docks and buy wood from South America and the East from the sea captains. The young men were as foolish about their house as a bridal pair. Zichec, the young cabinet-maker, devised every sort of convenience, and Rosicky kept their clothes in order. At night and on Sundays, when the quiver of machinery underneath was still, it was the quietest place in the world, and on summer nights all the sea winds blew in. Zichec often practised on his flute in the evening. They were both fond of music and went to the opera together. Rosicky thought he wanted to live like that for ever.

But as the years passed, all alike, he began to get a little restless. When spring came round, he would begin to feel fretted, and he got to drinking. He was likely to drink too much of a Saturday night. On Sunday he was languid and heavy, getting over his spree. On Monday he plunged into work again. So he never had time to figure out what ailed him, although he knew something did. When the grass turned green in Park Place, and the lilac hedge at the back of Trinity churchyard put out its blossoms, he was tormented by a longing to run away. That was why he drank too much; to get a temporary illusion of freedom and wide horizons.

Rosicky, the old Rosicky, could remember as if it were yesterday the day when the young Rosicky found out what was the matter with him. It was on a Fourth of July afternoon, and he was sitting in Park Place in the sun. The lower part of New York was empty. Wall Street, Liberty Street, Broadway, all empty. So much stone and asphalt with nothing going on, so many empty windows. The emptiness was intense, like the stillness in a great factory when the machinery stops and the belts and bands cease running. It was too great a change, it took all the strength out of one. Those blank buildings, without the stream of life pouring through them, were like empty jails. It struck young Rosicky that this was the trouble with big cities; they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground. You lived in an unnatural world, like the fish in an aquarium, who were probably much more comfortable than they ever were in the sea.

On that very day he began to think seriously about the articles he had read in the Bohemian papers, describing prosperous Czech farming communities in the West. He believed he would like to go out there as a farm hand; it was hardly possible that he could ever have land of his own. His people had always been workmen, his father and grandfather had worked in shops. His mother's parents had lived in the country, but they rented their farm and had a hard time to get along. Nobody in his family had ever owned any land,—that belonged to a different station of life altogether. Anton's mother died when he was little, and he was sent into the country to her parents. He stayed with them until he was twelve, and formed those ties with the earth and the farm animals and growing things which are never made at all unless they are made early. After his grandfather died, he went back to live with his father and stepmother, but she was very hard on him, and his father helped him to get passage to London.

After that Fourth of July day in Park Place, the desire to return to the country never left him. To work on another man's farm would be all he asked; to see the sun rise and set and to plant things and watch them grow. He was a very simple man. He was like a tree that has not many roots, but one tap-root that goes down deep. He subscribed for a Bohemian paper printed in Chicago, then for one printed in Omaha. His mind got farther and farther west. He began to save a little money to buy his liberty. When he was thirty-five, there was a great meeting in New York of Bohemian athletic societies, and Rosicky left the tailor shop and went home with the Omaha delegates to try his fortune in another part of the world.

IV

Perhaps the fact that his own youth was well over before he began to have a family was one reason why Rosicky was so fond of his boys. He had almost a grandfather's indulgence for them. He had never had to worry about any of them—except, just now, a little about Rudolph.

On Saturday night the boys always piled into the Ford, took little Josephine, and went to town to the moving-picture show. One Saturday morning they were talking at the breakfast table about starting early that evening, so that they would have an hour or so to see the Christmas things in the stores before the show began. Rosicky looked down the table.

"I hope you boys ain't disappointed, but I want you to let me have de car tonight. Maybe some of you can go in with de neighbours."

Their faces fell. They worked hard all week, and they were still like children. A new jack-knife or a box of candy pleased the older ones as much as the little fellow.

"If you and mother are going to town," Frank said, "maybe you could take a couple of us along with you, anyway."

"No, I want to take de car down to Rudolph's, and let him an' Polly go in to de show. She don't git into town enough, an' I'm afraid she's gettin' lonesome, an' he can't afford no car yet."

That settled it. The boys were a good deal dashed. Their father took another piece of apple-cake and went on: "Maybe next Saturday night de two little fellers can go along wid dem."

"Oh, is Rudolph going to have the car every Saturday night?"

Rosicky did not reply at once; then he began to speak seriously: "Listen, boys; Polly ain't lookin' so good. I don't like to see nobody lookin' sad. It comes hard fur a town girl to be a farmer's wife. I don't want no trouble to start in Rudolph's family. When it starts, it ain't so easy to stop. An American girl don't git used to our ways all at once. I like to tell Polly she and Rudolph can have the car every Saturday night till after New Year's, if it's all right with you boys."

"Sure, it's all right, papa," Mary cut in. "And it's good you thought about that. Town girls is used to more than country girls. I lay awake nights, scared she'll make Rudolph discontented with the farm."

The boys put as good a face on it as they could. They surely looked forward to their Saturday nights in town. That evening Rosicky drove the car the half-mile down to Rudolph's new, bare little house.

Polly was in a short-sleeved gingham dress, clearing away the supper dishes. She was a trim, slim little thing, with blue eyes and shingled yellow

hair, and her eyebrows were reduced to a mere brush-stroke, like Miss Pearl's.

"Good-evening, Mr. Rosicky. Rudolph's at the barn, I guess." She never called him father, or Mary mother. She was sensitive about having married a foreigner. She never in the world would have done it if Rudolph hadn't been such a handsome, persuasive fellow and such a gallant lover. He had graduated in her class in the high school in town, and their friendship began in the ninth grade.

Rosicky went in, though he wasn't exactly asked. "My boys ain't goin' to town tonight, an' I brought de car over fur you two to go in to de picture show."

Polly, carrying dishes to the sink, looked over her shoulder at him. "Thank you. But I'm late with my work tonight, and pretty tired. Maybe Rudolph would like to go in with you."

"Oh, I don't go to de shows! I'm too old-fashioned. You won't feel so tired after you ride in de air a ways. It's a nice clear night, an' it ain't cold. You go an' fix yourself up, Polly, an' I'll wash de dishes an' leave everything nice fur you."

Polly blushed and tossed her bob. "I couldn't let you do that, Mr. Rosicky, I wouldn't think of it."

Rosicky said nothing. He found a bib apron on a nail behind the kitchen door. He slipped it over his head and then took Polly by her two elbows and pushed her gently toward the door of her own room. "I washed up de kitchen many times for my wife, when de babies was sick or somethin'. You go an' make yourself look nice. I like you to look prettier'n any of dem town girls when you go in. De young folks must have some fun, an' I'm goin' to look out fur you, Polly."

That kind, reassuring grip on her elbows, the old man's funny bright eyes, made Polly want to drop her head on his shoulder for a second. She restrained herself, but she lingered in his grasp at the door of her room, murmuring tearfully: "You always lived in the city when you were young, didn't you? Don't you ever get lonesome out here?"

As she turned round to him, her hand fell naturally into his, and he stood holding it and smiling into her face with his peculiar, knowing, indulgent smile without a shadow of reproach in it. "Dem big cities is all right fur de rich, but dey is terrible hard fur de poor."

"I don't know. Sometimes I think I'd like to take a chance. You lived in New York, didn't you?"

"An' London. Da's bigger still. I learned my trade dere. Here's Rudolph comin', you better hurry."

"Will you tell me about London some time?"

"Maybe. Only I ain't no talker, Polly. Run an' dress yourself up."

The bedroom door closed behind her, and Rudolph came in from the outside, looking anxious. He had seen the car and was sorry any of his family should come just then. Supper hadn't been a very pleasant occasion. Halting in the doorway, he saw his father in a kitchen apron, carrying dishes to the sink. He flushed crimson and something flashed in his eye. Rosicky held up a warning finger.

"I brought de car over fur you an' Polly to go to de picture show, an' I made her let me finish here so you won't be late. You go put on a clean shirt, quick!"

"But don't the boys want the car, Father?"

"Not tonight dey don't." Rosicky fumbled under his apron and found his pants pocket. He took out a silver dollar and said in a hurried whisper: "You go an' buy dat girl some ice cream an' candy tonight, like you was courtin'. She's awful good friends wid me."

Rudolph was very short of cash, but he took the money as if it hurt him. There had been a crop failure all over the country. He had more than once been sorry he'd married this year.

In a few minutes the young people came out, looking clean and a little stiff. Rosicky hurried them off, and then he took his own time with the dishes. He scoured the pots and pans and put away the milk and swept the kitchen. He put some coal in the stove and shut off the draughts, so the place would be warm for them when they got home late at night. Then he sat down and had a pipe and listened to the clock tick.

Generally speaking, marrying an American girl was certainly a risk. A Czech should marry a Czech. It was lucky that Polly was the daughter of a poor widow woman; Rudolph was proud, and if she had a prosperous family to throw up at him, they could never make it go. Polly was one of four sisters, and they all worked; one was book-keeper in the bank, one taught music, and Polly and her younger sister had been clerks, like Miss Pearl. All four of them were musical, had pretty voices, and sang in the Methodist choir, which the eldest sister directed.

Polly missed the sociability of a store position. She missed the choir, and the company of her sisters. She didn't dislike housework, but she disliked so much of it. Rosicky was a little anxious about this pair. He was afraid Polly would grow so discontented that Rudy would quit the farm and take a factory job in Omaha. He had worked for a winter up there, two years ago, to get money to marry on. He had done very well, and they would always take him back at the stockyards. But to Rosicky that meant the end of everything for his son. To be a landless man was to be a wage-earner, a slave, all your life; to have nothing, to be nothing.

Rosicky thought he would come over and do a little carpentering for Polly after the New Year. He guessed she needed jollying. Rudolph was a serious sort of chap, serious in love and serious about his work.

Rosicky shook out his pipe and walked home across the fields. Ahead of him the lamplight shone from his kitchen windows. Suppose he were still in a tailor shop on Vesey Street, with a bunch of pale, narrow-chested sons working on machines, all coming home tired and sullen to eat supper in a kitchen that was a parlour also; with another crowded, angry family quarrelling just across the dumb-waiter shaft, and squeaking pulleys at the windows where dirty washings hung on dirty lines above a court full of old brooms and mops and ash-cans . . .

He stopped by the windmill to look up at the frosty winter stars and draw a long breath before he went inside. That kitchen with the shining windows was dear to him; but the sleeping fields and bright stars and the noble darkness were dearer still.

V

On the day before Christmas the weather set in very cold; no snow, but a bitter, biting wind that whistled and sang over the flat land and lashed one's

face like fine wires. There was baking going on in the Rosicky kitchen all day, and Rosicky sat inside, making over a coat that Albert had outgrown into an overcoat for John. Mary had a big red geranium in bloom for Christmas, and a row of Jerusalem cherry trees, full of berries. It was the first year she had ever grown these; Doctor Ed brought her the seeds from Omaha when he went to some medical convention. They reminded Rosicky of plants he had seen in England; and all afternoon, as he stitched, he sat thinking about those two years in London, which his mind usually shrank from even after all this while.

He was a lad of eighteen when he dropped down into London, with no money and no connexions except the address of a cousin who was supposed to be working at a confectioner's. When he went to the pastry shop, however, he found that the cousin had gone to America. Anton tramped the streets for several days, sleeping in doorways and on the Embankment, until he was in utter despair. He knew no English, and the sound of the strange language all about him confused him. By chance he met a poor German tailor who had learned his trade in Vienna, and could speak a little Czech. This tailor, Lifschnitz, kept a repair shop in a Cheapside basement, underneath a cobbler. He didn't much need an apprentice, but he was sorry for the boy and took him in for no wages but his keep and what he could pick up. The pickings were supposed to be coppers given you when you took work home to a customer. But most of the customers called for their clothes themselves, and the coppers that came Anton's way were very few. He had, however, a place to sleep. The tailor's family lived upstairs in three rooms; a kitchen, a bedroom, where Lifschnitz and his wife and five children slept, and a living-room. Two corners of this living room were curtained off for lodgers; in one Rosicky slept on an old horsehair sofa, with a feather quilt to wrap himself in. The other corner was rented to a wretched, dirty boy, who was studying the violin. He actually practised there. Rosicky was dirty, too. There was no way to be anything else. Mrs. Lifschnitz got the water she cooked and washed with from a pump in a brick court, four flights down. There were bugs in the place, and multitudes of fleas, though the poor woman did the best she could. Rosicky knew she often went empty to give another potato or a spoonful of dripping to the two hungry, sad-eyed boys who lodged with her. He used to think he would never get out of there, never get a clean shirt to his back again. What would he do, he wondered, when his clothes actually dropped to pieces and the worn cloth wouldn't hold patches any longer?

It was still early when the old farmer put aside his sewing and his recollections. The sky had been a dark grey all day, with not a gleam of sun, and the light failed at four o'clock. He went to shave and change his shirt while the turkey was roasting. Rudolph and Polly were coming over for supper.

After supper they sat round in the kitchen, and the younger boys were saying how sorry they were it hadn't snowed. Everybody was sorry. They wanted a deep snow that would lie long and keep the wheat warm, and leave the ground soaked when it melted.

"Yes, sir!" Rudolph broke out fiercely; "if we have another dry year like last year, there's going to be hard times in this country."

Rosicky filled his pipe. "You boys don't know what hard times is. You don't owe nobody, you got plenty to eat an' keep warm, an' plenty water to keep clean. When you got them, you can't have it very hard."

Rudolph frowned, opened and shut his big right hand, and dropped it clenched upon his knee. "I've got to have a good deal more than that, father, or I'll quit this farming gamble. I can always make good wages railroading, or at the packing house, and be sure of my money."

"Maybe so," his father answered dryly.

Mary, who had just come in from the pantry and was wiping her hands on the roller towel, thought Rudy and his father were getting too serious. She brought her darning-basket and sat down in the middle of the group.

"I ain't much afraid of hard times, Rudy," she said heartily. "We've had a plenty, but we've always come through. Your father wouldn't never take nothing very hard, not even hard times. I got a mind to tell you a story on him. Maybe you boys can't hardly remember the year we had that terrible hot wind, that burned everything up on the Fourth of July? All the corn an' the gardens. An' that was in the days when we didn't have alfalfa yet,—I guess it wasn't invented.

"Well, that very day your father was out cultivatin' corn, and I was here in the kitchen makin' plum preserves. We had bushels of plums that year. I noticed it was terrible hot, but it's always hot in the kitchen when you're preservin', an' I was too busy with my plums to mind. Anton come in from the field about three o'clock, an' I asked him what was the matter.

"Nothin'," he says, 'but it's pretty hot an' I think I won't work no more to-day.' He stood round for a few minutes, an' then he says: 'Ain't you near through? I want you should git up a nice supper for us tonight. It's Fourth of July.'

"I told him to git along, that I was right in the middle of preservin', but the plums would taste good on hot biscuit. 'I'm goin' to have fried chicken, too,' he says, and he went off an' killed a couple. You three oldest boys was little fellers, playin' round outside, real hot an' sweaty, an' your father took you to the horse tank down by the windmill an' took off your clothes an' put you in. Them two box-elder trees were little then, but they made shade over the tank. Then he took off all his own clothes, an' got in with you. While he was playin' in the water with you, the Methodist preacher drove into our place to say how all the neighbours was goin' to meet at the schoolhouse that night, to pray for rain. He drove right to the windmill, of course, and there was your father and you three with no clothes on. I was in the kitchen door, an' I had to laugh, for the preacher acted like he ain't never seen a naked man before. He surely was embarrassed, an' your father couldn't git to his clothes; they was all hangin' up on the windmill to let the sweat dry out of 'em. So he laid in the tank where he was, an' put one of you boys on top of him to cover him up a little, an' talked to the preacher.

"When you got through playin' in the water, he put clean clothes on you and a clean shirt on himself, an' by that time I'd begun to get supper. He says: 'It's too hot in here to eat comfortable. Let's have a picnic in the orchard. We'll eat our supper behind the mulberry hedge, under them linden trees.'

"So he carried our supper down, an' a bottle of my wild-grape wine, an' everything tasted good, I can tell you. The wind got cooler as the sun was

goin' down, and it turned out pleasant, only I noticed how the leaves was curled up on the linden trees. That made me think, an' I asked your father if that hot wind all day hadn't been terrible hard on the gardens an' the corn.

"'Corn,' he says, 'there ain't no corn.'

"'What you talkin' about?' I said. 'Ain't we got forty acres?'

"'We ain't got an ear,' he says, 'nor nobody else ain't got none. All the corn in this country was cooked by three o'clock today, like you'd roasted it in an oven.'

"'You mean you won't get no crop at all?' I asked him. I couldn't believe it, after he'd worked so hard.

"'No crop this year,' he says. 'That's why we're havin' a picnic. We might as well enjoy what we got.'

"An' that's how your father behaved, when all the neighbours was so discouraged they couldn't look you in the face. An' we enjoyed ourselves that year, poor as we was, an' our neighbours wasn't a bit better off for bein' miserable. Some of 'em grieved till they got poor digestions and couldn't relish what they did have."

The younger boys said they thought their father had the best of it. But Rudolph was thinking that, all the same, the neighbours had managed to get ahead more, in the fifteen years since that time. There must be something wrong about his father's way of doing things. He wished he knew what was going on in the back of Polly's mind. He knew she liked his father, but he knew, too, that she was afraid of something. When his mother sent over coffee-cake or prune tarts or a loaf of fresh bread, Polly seemed to regard them with a certain suspicion. When she observed to him that his brothers had nice manners, her tone implied that it was remarkable they should have. With his mother she was stiff and on her guard. Mary's hearty frankness and gusts of good humour irritated her. Polly was afraid of being unusual or conspicuous in any way, of being 'ordinary' as she said!

When Mary had finished her story, Rosicky laid aside his pipe.

"You boys like me to tell you about some of dem hard times I been through in London?" Warmly encouraged, he sat rubbing his forehead along the deep creases. It was bothersome to tell a long story in English (he nearly always talked to the boys in Czech), but he wanted Polly to hear this one.

"Well, you know about dat tailor shop I worked in in London? I had one Christmas dere I ain't never forgot. Times was awful bad before Christmas; de boss ain't got much work, an' have it awful hard to pay his rent. It ain't so much fun, bein' poor in a big city like London, I'll say! All de windows is full of good t'ings to eat, an' all de pushcarts in de streets is full, an' you smell 'em all de time, an' you ain't got no money—not a damn bit. I didn't mind de cold so much, though I didn't have no overcoat, chust a short jacket I'd out-grown so it wouldn't meet on me, an' my hands was chapped raw. But I always had a good appetite, like you all know, an' de sight of dem pork pies in de windows was awful fur me!

"Day before Christmas was terrible foggy dat year, an' dat fog gits into your bones and makes you all damp like. Mrs. Lifschnitz didn't give us nothin' but a little bread an' drippin' for supper, because she was savin' to try for to give us a good dinner on Christmas Day. After supper de boss say I go an' enjoy myself, so I went into de streets to listen to de Christmas singers. Dey sing old songs an' make very nice music, an' I run round after dem

a good ways, till I got awful hungry. I t'ink maybe if I go home, I can sleep till morning an' forgit my belly.

"I went into my corner real quiet, and roll up in my fudder quilt. But I ain't got my head down, till I smell somet'ing good. Seem like it git stronger an' stronger, an' I can't git to sleep noway. I can't understand dat smell. Dere was a gas light in a hall across de court, dat always shine in at my window a little. I got up an' look round. I got a little wooden box in my corner fur a stool, 'cause I ain't got no chair. I picks up dat box, and under it dere is a roast goose on a platter! I can't believe my eyes. I carry it to de window where de light comes in, an' touch it and smell it to find out, an' den I taste it to be sure. I say, I will eat chust one little bite of dat goose, so I can go to sleep, and to-morrow I won't eat none at all. But I tell you, boys, when I stop, one half of dat goose was gone!"

The narrator bowed his head, and the boys shouted. But little Josephine slipped behind his chair and kissed him on the neck beneath his ear.

"Poor little Papa, I don't want him to be hungry!"

"Da's long ago, child. I ain't never been hungry since I had your mudder to cook fur me."

"Go on and tell us the rest, please," said Polly.

"Well, when I come to realize what I done, of course, I felt terrible. I felt better in de stomach, but very bad in de heart. I set on my bed wid dat platter on my knees, an' it all come to me; how hard dat poor woman save to buy dat goose, and how she get some neighbour to cook it dat got more fire, an' how she put it in my corner to keep it away from dem hungry children. Dere was a old carpet hung up to shut my corner off, an' de children wasn't allowed to go in dere. An' I know she put it in my corner because she trust me more'n she did de violin boy. I can't stand it to face her after I spoil de Christmas. So I put on my shoes and go out into de city. I tell myself I better throw myself in de river; but I guess I ain't dat kind of a boy.

"It was after twelve o'clock, an' terrible cold, an' I start out to walk about London all night. I walk along de river awhile, but dey was lots of drunks all along; men, and women too. I chust move along to keep away from de police. I git onto de Strand, an' den over to New Oxford Street, where dere was a big German restaurant on de ground floor, wid big windows all fixed up fine, an' I could see de people havin' parties inside. While I was lookin' in, two men and two ladies come out, laughin' and talkin' and feelin' happy about all dey been eatin' an' drinkin', and dey was speakin' Czech—not like de Austrians, but like de home folks talk it.

"I guess I went crazy, an' I done what I ain't never done before nor since. I went right up to dem gay people an' begun to beg dem: 'Fellow countrymen, for God's sake give me money enough to buy a goose!'

"Dey laugh, of course, but de ladies speak awful kind to me, an' dey take me back into de restaurant and give me hot coffee and cakes, an' make me tell all about how I happened to come to London, an' what I was doin' dere. Dey take my name and where I work down on paper, an' both of dem ladies give me ten shillings.

"De big market at Covent Garden⁴ ain't very far away, an' by dat, time it was open. I go dere an buy a big goose an' some pork pies, an' potatoes and

4. Square in London, site of a famous flower and vegetable market and of the Covent Garden opera house.

onions, an' cakes an' oranges fur de children—all I could carry! When I git home, everybody is still asleep. I pile all I bought on de kitchen table, an' go in an' lay down on my bed, an I ain't waken up till I hear dat woman scream when she come out into her kitchen. My goodness, but she was surprise! She laugh an' cry at de same time, an' hug me and waken all de children. She ain't stop fur no breakfast; she git de Christmas dinner ready dat morning, and we all sit down an' eat all we can hold. I ain't never seen dat violin boy have all he can hold before.

"Two-three days after dat, de two men come to hunt me up, an' dey ask my boss, and he give me a good report an' tell dem I was a steady boy all right. One of dem Bohemians was very smart an' run a Bohemian newspaper in New York, an' de odder was a rich man, in de importing business, an' dey been travelling togedder. Dey told me how t'ings was easier in New York, an' offered to pay my passage when dey was goin' home soon on a boat. My boss say to me: 'You go. You ain't got no chance here, an' I like to see you git ahead, fur you always been a good boy to my woman, and fur dat fine Christmas dinner you give us all.' An' da's how I got to New York."

That night when Rudolph and Polly, arm in arm, were running home across the fields with the bitter wind at their backs, his heart leaped for joy when she said she thought they might have his family come over for supper on New Year's Eve. "Let's get up a nice supper, and not let your mother help at all; make her be company for once."

"That would be lovely of you, Polly," he said humbly. He was a very simple, modest boy, and he, too, felt vaguely that Polly and her sisters were more experienced and worldly than his people.

The winter turned out badly for farmers. It was bitterly cold, and after the first light snows before Christmas there was no snow at all—and no rain. March was as bitter as February. On those days when the wind fairly punished the country, Rosicky sat by his window. In the fall he and the boys had put in a big wheat planting, and now the seed had frozen in the ground. All that land would have to be ploughed up and planted over again, planted in corn. It had happened before, but he was younger then, and he never worried about what had to be. He was sure of himself and of Mary; he knew they could bear what they had to bear, that they would always pull through somehow. But he was not so sure about the young ones, and he felt troubled because Rudolph and Polly were having such a hard start.

Sitting beside his flowering window while the panes rattled and the wind blew in under the door, Rosicky gave himself to reflection as he had not done since those Sundays in the loft of the furniture factory in New York, long ago. Then he was trying to find what he wanted in life for himself; now he was trying to find what he wanted for his boys, and why it was he so hungered to feel sure they would be here, working this very land, after he was gone.

They would have to work hard on the farm, and probably they would never do much more than make a living. But if he could think of them as staying here on the land, he wouldn't have to fear any great unkindness for them. Hardships, certainly; it was a hardship to have the wheat freeze in the ground when seed was so high; and to have to sell your stock because you had no feed. But there would be other years when everything came along right, and you caught up. And what you had was your own. You didn't have to choose between bosses and strikers, and go wrong either way. You didn't

have to do with dishonest and cruel people. They were the only things in his experience he had found terrifying and horrible: the look in the eyes of a dishonest and crafty man, of a scheming and rapacious woman.

In the country, if you had a mean neighbour, you could keep off his land and make him keep off yours. But in the city, all the foulness and misery and brutality of your neighbours was part of your life. The worst things he had come upon in his journey through the world were human,—depraved and poisonous specimens of man. To this day he could recall certain terrible faces in the London streets. There were mean people everywhere, to be sure, even in their own country town here. But they weren't tempered, hardened, sharpened, like the treacherous people in cities who live by grinding or cheating or poisoning their fellow-men. He had helped to bury two of his fellow-workmen in the tailoring trade, and he was distrustful of the organized industries that see one out of the world in big cities. Here, if you were sick, you had Doctor Ed to look after you; and if you died, fat Mr. Haycock, the kindest man in the world, buried you.

It seemed to Rosicky that for good, honest boys like his, the worst they could do on the farm was better than the best they would be likely to do in the city. If he'd had a mean boy, now, one who was crooked and sharp and tried to put anything over on his brothers, then town would be the place for him. But he had no such boy. As for Rudolph, the discontented one, he would give the shirt off his back to anyone who touched his heart. What Rosicky really hoped for his boys was that they could get through the world without ever knowing much about the cruelty of human beings. "Their mother and me ain't prepared them for that," he sometimes said to himself.

These thoughts brought him back to a grateful consideration of his own case. What an escape he had had, to be sure! He, too, in his time, had had to take money for repair work from the hand of a hungry child who let it go so wistfully; because it was money due his boss. And now, in all these years, he had never had to take a cent from anyone in bitter need—never had to look at the face of a woman become like a wolf's from struggle and famine. When he thought of these things, Rosicky would put on his cap and jacket and slip down to the barn and give his work-horses a little extra oats, letting them eat it out of his hand in their slobbery fashion. It was his way of expressing what he felt, and made him chuckle with pleasure.

The spring came warm, with blue skies,—but dry, dry as bone. The boys began ploughing up the wheat-fields to plant them over in corn. Rosicky would stand at the fence corner and watch them, and the earth was so dry it blew up in clouds of brown dust that hid the horses and the sulky plough and the driver. It was a bad outlook.

The big alfalfa-field that lay between the home place and Rudolph's came up green, but Rosicky was worried because during that open windy winter a great many Russian thistle plants had blown in there and lodged. He kept asking the boys to rake them out; he was afraid their seed would root and "take the alfalfa." Rudolph said that was nonsense. The boys were working so hard planting corn, their father felt he couldn't insist about the thistles, but he set great store by that big alfalfa-field. It was a feed you could depend on,—and there was some deeper reason, vague, but strong. The peculiar green of that clover woke early memories in old Rosicky, went back to some-

thing in his childhood in the old world. When he was a little boy, he had played in fields of that strong blue-green colour.

One morning, when Rudolph had gone to town in the car, leaving a work-team idle in his barn, Rosicky went over to his son's place, put the horses to the buggy-rake, and set about quietly taking up those thistles. He behaved with guilty caution, and rather enjoyed stealing a march on Doctor Ed, who was just then taking his first vacation in seven years of practice and was attending a clinic in Chicago. Rosicky got the thistles raked up, but did not stop to burn them. That would take some time, and his breath was pretty short, so he thought he had better get the horses back to the barn.

He got them into the barn and to their stalls, but the pain had come on so sharp in his chest that he didn't try to take the harness off. He started for the house, bending lower with every step. The cramp in his chest was shutting him up like a jack-knife. When he reached the windmill, he swayed and caught at the ladder. He saw Polly coming down the hill, running with the swiftness of a slim greyhound. In a flash she had her shoulder under his armpit.

"Lean on me, Father, hard! Don't be afraid. We can get to the house all right."

Somehow they did, though Rosicky became blind with pain; he could keep on his legs, but he couldn't steer his course. The next thing he was conscious of was lying on Polly's bed, and Polly bending over him wringing out bath-towels in hot water and putting them on his chest. She stopped only to throw coal into the stove, and she kept the tea-kettle and the black pot going. She put these hot applications on him for nearly an hour, she told him afterwards, and all that time he was drawn up stiff and blue, with the sweat pouring off him.

As the pain gradually loosed its grip, the stiffness went out of his jaws, the black circles round his eyes disappeared, and a little of his natural colour came back. When his daughter-in-law buttoned his shirt over his chest at last, he sighed.

"Da's fine, de way I feel now, Polly. It was a awful bad spell, an' I was so sorry it all come on you like it did."

Polly was flushed and excited. "Is the pain really gone? Can I leave you long enough to telephone over to your place?"

Rosicky's eyelids fluttered. "Don't telephone, Polly. It ain't no use to scare my wife. It's nice and quiet here, an' if I ain't too much trouble to you, just let me lay still till I feel like myself. I ain't got no pain now. It's nice here."

Polly bent over him and wiped the moisture from his face. "Oh, I'm so glad it's over!" she broke out impulsively. "It just broke my heart to see you suffer so, Father."

Rosicky motioned her to sit down on the chair where the tea-kettle had been, and looked up at her with that lively affectionate gleam in his eyes. "You was awful good to me, I won't never forgit dat. I hate it to be sick on you like dis. Down at de barn I say to myself, dat young girl ain't had much experience in sickness, I don't want to scare her, an' maybe she's got a baby comin' or somet'ing."

Polly took his hand. He was looking at her so intently and affectionately and confidingly; his eyes seemed to caress her face, to regard it with plea-

sure. She frowned with her funny streaks of eyebrows, and then smiled back at him.

"I guess maybe there is something of that kind going to happen. But I haven't told anyone yet, not my mother or Rudolph. You'll be the first to know."

His hand pressed hers. She noticed that it was warm again. The twinkle in his yellow-brown eyes seemed to come nearer.

"I like mighty well to see dat little child, Polly," was all he said. Then he closed his eyes and lay half-smiling. But Polly sat still, thinking hard. She had a sudden feeling that nobody in the world, not her mother, not Rudolph, or anyone, really loved her as much as old Rosicky did. It perplexed her. She sat frowning and trying to puzzle it out. It was as if Rosicky had a special gift for loving people, something that was like an ear for music or an eye for colour. It was quiet, unobtrusive; it was merely there. You saw it in his eyes,—perhaps that was why they were merry. You felt it in his hands, too. After he dropped off to sleep, she sat holding his warm, broad, flexible brown hand. She had never seen another in the least like it. She wondered if it wasn't a kind of gypsy hand, it was so alive and quick and light in its communications,—very strange in a farmer. Nearly all the farmers she knew had huge lumps of fists, like mauls, or they were knotty and bony and uncomfortable-looking, with stiff fingers. But Rosicky's was like quicksilver, flexible, muscular, about the colour of a pale cigar, with deep, deep creases across the palm. It wasn't nervous, it wasn't a stupid lump; it was a warm brown human hand, with some cleverness in it, a great deal of generosity, and something else which Polly could only call "gypsy-like"—something nimble and lively and sure, in the way that animals are.

Polly remembered that hour long afterwards; it had been like an awakening to her. It seemed to her that she had never learned so much about life from anything as from old Rosicky's hand. It brought her to herself; it communicated some direct and untranslatable message.

When she heard Rudolph coming in the car, she ran out to meet him.

"Oh, Rudy, your father's been awful sick! He raked up those thistles he's been worrying about, and afterward he could hardly get to the house. He suffered so I was afraid he was going to die."

Rudolph jumped to the ground. "Where is he now?"

"On the bed. He's asleep. I was terribly scared, because, you know, I'm so fond of your father." She slipped her arm through his and they went into the house. That afternoon they took Rosicky home and put him to bed, though he protested that he was quite well again.

The next morning he got up and dressed and sat down to breakfast with his family. He told Mary that his coffee tasted better than usual to him, and he warned the boys not to bear any tales to Doctor Ed when he got home. After breakfast he sat down by his window to do some patching and asked Mary to thread several needles for him before she went to feed her chickens,—her eyes were better than his, and her hands steadier. He lit his pipe and took up John's overalls. Mary had been watching him anxiously all morning, and as she went out of the door with her bucket of scraps, she saw that he was smiling. He was thinking, indeed, about Polly, and how he might never have known what a tender heart she had if he hadn't got sick over there. Girls

nowadays didn't wear their heart on their sleeve. But now he knew Polly would make a fine woman after the foolishness wore off. Either a woman had that sweetness at her heart or she hadn't. You couldn't always tell by the look of them; but if they had that, everything came out right in the end.

After he had taken a few stitches, the cramp began in his chest, like yesterday. He put his pipe cautiously down on the window-sill and bent over to ease the pull. No use,—he had better try to get to his bed if he could. He rose and groped his way across the familiar floor, which was rising and falling like the deck of a ship. At the door he fell. When Mary came in, she found him lying there, and the moment she touched him she knew that he was gone.

Doctor Ed was away when Rosicky died, and for the first few weeks after he got home he was harddriven. Every day he said to himself that he must get out to see that family that had lost their father. One soft, warm moonlight night in early summer he started for the farm. His mind was on other things, and not until his road ran by the graveyard did he realize that Rosicky wasn't over there on the hill where the red lamplight shone, but here, in the moonlight. He stopped his car, shut off the engine, and sat there for a while.

A sudden hush had fallen on his soul. Everything here seemed strangely moving and significant, though signifying what, he did not know. Close by the wire fence stood Rosicky's mowing-machine, where one of the boys had been cutting hay that afternoon; his own work-horses had been going up and down there. The new-cut hay perfumed all the night air. The moonlight silvered the long, billowy grass that grew over the graves and hid the fence; the few little evergreens stood out black in it, like shadows in a pool. The sky was very blue and soft, the stars rather faint because the moon was full.

For the first time it struck Doctor Ed that this was really a beautiful graveyard. He thought of city cemeteries; acres of shrubbery and heavy stone, so arranged and lonely and unlike anything in the living world. Cities of the dead, indeed; cities of the forgotten, of the "put away." But this was open and free, this little square of long grass which the wind for ever stirred. Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many-coloured fields running on until they met that sky. The horses worked here in summer; the neighbours passed on their way to town; and over yonder, in the cornfield, Rosicky's own cattle would be eating fodder as winter came on. Nothing could be more undeath-like than this place; nothing could be more right for a man who had helped to do the work of great cities and had always longed for the open country and had got to it at last. Rosicky's life seemed to him complete and beautiful.

1928, 1932

LANGSTON HUGHES
1902-1967

Democracy

Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land. 5

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread. 10

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.
I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you. 15
20

1949